

# САКРАЛЬНІ ТЕКСТИ СХОДУ

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## THANATOLOGICAL MYTH IN ANCIENT EGYPT AND ANCIENT IRANIAN WORLD: SOME PARALLELS<sup>1</sup>

In the basis of the funerary rites there is the system of the mythological representations of the afterlife and the archetype mythologems which create the ideological model for practical ritual actions. It regulates the relation of the society to a death phenomenon on ideological and ritual levels. In the majority of known mythological systems of archaic societies the Thanatological myth acts in a role of such a model.

This myth explains the origin of death and that's why it belongs to a number of Etiological narrations. In the centre the so-called Thanatological myth is found – the myth about appearing of death, the first mortal and resurrected – the mythical hero who has overcome death and “opened” the landscapes of the Other world for the mortals.

In Ancient Egypt the Osirian myth used to make the basic Thanatological legend<sup>2</sup>. This narration has several stages – the death of Osiris from Seth's hand; his “resurrection” with Isis' magic spells help and a triumph of Truth (Eg. *mꜣ.t*) – the return of the Egypt's throne to Horus. This is a well-known theme<sup>3</sup>. The ternary vertical of the Universe – the Sky, the Earth, and Duat – was fixed from this moment. Every deceased was to be turned into “Osiris” putting the hope for the existence beyond the grave into the mystery of repeating of the “first ritual” [Assmann 2003, 29ff].

Despite the fact that several Egyptian mythologems are sometimes postulated as “unique”<sup>4</sup>, a similar scheme of the Thanatological myth is found out in other Ancient Orient cultures, particularly, in the Iranian world<sup>5</sup>.

An Indo-Iranian myth about the first mortal hero<sup>6</sup>, the Lord of the Underworld – Indian Yama (*Rigveda* X, 10–14; X, 129) [Ригведа 1999, 418–419] (Sansk. *Yamá* – “twin”) / Iranian Yima (Av. *Yima* [Bartholomae 1904, 1300–1301] cf. *yōma-* – “twin” [Bartholomae 1904, 1291–1292]), is put as a basis here<sup>7</sup>. The final of the myth contains the element of victory of the descendant over the murderer, and the restoration of cosmic and social balance.

The Avestan tradition, “Scythian genealogical legend” and “Shahnameh” materials give a chance to recreate the Iranian model of a Thanatological myth<sup>8</sup>. Thus, this tradition duplicates this cycle at two stages:

### First stage

The “Golden Age” of the reign of the mythical hero – Yima<sup>9</sup> / ? / Dzhamshid (*Yasna* 9, 4–5 (*Hom Yasht*); *Yasht*, 9, 9–10; 17, 30–31; 19, 31–33; *Videvdat* 2, 5; *Menog-i hrad*, XXVII, 25) ends with his death from the Dragon – Azhi-Dahaka (Av. *aži-dahāka-*) / ? / Zahhaka<sup>10</sup> (*Yasht*, 19, 46; *Bundahishn*, 31, 5), the vengeance for the Yima's death by Thraetaona (Av. *θraētaona*) / Targitaos (?) / Feridun and the renewing of justice (*Yasna*, 9, 7–8; *Yasht*, 5, 34; 14, 40; 17, 34; 19, 37; *Menog-i hrad*, XXVII, 38–39).

### Text examples:

(*Yasna* 9, 5) “In the reign of brave Yima was there neither cold nor heat, there was neither age nor death, nor envy demon-made. Like teenagers walked the two forth, son and father, in their stature and their form, so long as Yima, son of Vivanghvant ruled, he of the many herds!” (translated by L.H. Mills) [Mills 1887, 233].

(*Yasht*, 19, 46) “For which the Good Spirit and the Evil One did struggle with one another: for that Glory that cannot be forcibly seized they flung each of them their darts most swift.

The Good Spirit flung a dart, and so did Vohu-Mano, and Asha-Vahishta and Atar, the son of Ahura Mazda.

The Evil Spirit flung a dart, and so did Akem-Mano, and Aeshma of the wounding spear and Azhi Dahaka and Spityura, he who sawed Yima in twain” (translated by J. Darmsteter) [Darmsteter 1898, 297].

(*Bundahishn*, 31, 5) “Spitur was he who, with Dahak [Zohak], cut up Yim [Jamshed]...” (translated by E.W. West) [West 1880, 131] (cf.: **fig. 1** [Куртис 2005, 45]).

(*Yasht* 14, 40) “Him rode the gallant Thraetaona, who smote Azhi Dahaka, the three-mouthed, the three-headed, the six-eyed, who had a thousand senses; that most powerful, fiendish Druj, that demon, baleful to the world, the strongest Druj that Angra Mainyu created against the material world, to destroy the world of the good principle” (translated by J. Darmsteter) [Darmsteter 1898, 242].

### **Second stage**

The reign of a dragon fighter (Thraetaona / Targitaos (?) / Feridun) and division of the kingdom between his three sons (? / Lipoxais, Arpoxais, Kolaxais / Tur, Selm, Iredzh). Thus, Scythia went to the youngest Kolaxais and to the youngest Iredzh Iran is passed. Murder of the youngest brother (Iredzh) of jealousy by elder ones, Tur and Selm (**fig. 2**) [Чунакова 2004, 223]. The vengeance for the death of Iredzh by his successor Manuchehr, repeated and final restoration of justice (*Herod.*, Hist., IV, 5–7; *Bundahishn*, 74, 103; *Denkard*, VII, IX; *Menog-i Hrad*, XXI, 24–26; XXVII, 41–43; “*Shahnameh*”, 2321–4610).

### Text examples:

(*Herod.*, Hist., IV, 5, 2–4) “Such (it is said) was Targitaos’ lineage; and he had three sons: Lipoxais, Arpoxais, and Colaxais, youngest of the three. In the time of their rule (so the story goes) there fell down from the sky into Scythia certain implements, all of gold, namely, a plough, a yoke, a sword<sup>11</sup>, and a flask. The eldest of them, seeing this, came near with intent to take them; but the gold began to burn as he came, and he ceased from his essay; then the second approached, and the gold did again as before. When these two had been driven away by the burning of the gold, last came the youngest brother, and the burning was quenched at his approach; so he took the gold to his own house. At this his elder brothers saw how matters stood, and made over the whole royal power to the youngest” [Herodotus 1928, 203, 205].

(*Menog-i Hrad*, XXI, 24–26) “(24) For it is clearly declared by the pure revelation, (25) that the origin of the estrangement (aniranih) of the Arumans, and even the Turanians, from the Iranians, was owing to that malice which was generated by them through the slaughter of Airik; (26) as it always adheres until the renovation” (translated by E.W. West) [West 1885, 52].

(*Menog-i Hrad*, XXVII, 41–43) And the advantage from Manuschiar was this, that, in revenge for Airik, who was his grandfather, Salm and Tuj were kept back by him from disturbing the world (translated by E.W. West) [West 1885, 61].

This model had prevalence on the broad lands of the Eurasian steppe among the Irano-phone nomads. For the first stage of this myth the role of Yima and Azhi-Dahaka is deduced hypothetically, and the image of Thraetaona corresponds with the Scythian Targitaos (the scenes on the comb from Hajmanova Mohyla (**fig. 3a–b**) [Вертиченко 2010, 91, 98, *рис. 2*; Яковенко 1985, 452, *табл. 22*]<sup>12</sup> and duplicated images on *gorytos* on the pectoral from Tovsta Mohyla (**fig. 4a**) [Reeder 2001, 328]). The similarity to “the second stage” of the Iranian Thanatological myth is found in the “Scythian genealogical legend” about three sons of Targitaos and destiny of the youngest of them, Kolaxais<sup>13</sup>.

The motive of the Kolaxais death reconstructed by E.A. Grantovsky and D.S. Raevsky [Грантовский 1960; Раевский 2006, 38–41, 214; Бессонова 1983, 17–24], belongs to the

following cycle of Iranian myth (murdering of Iredzh). It has found display in the “genealogical legend” (see: *Herod.*, Hist., IV, 5–7; *Val. Flacc.*, VI, 48–68)<sup>14</sup>, as it was stated by M. Molé and D.S. Raevsky. As resemblance to the Iranian narration of the death of the youngest son (Iredzh) acts, the killing of Kolaxais as a result of a conspiracy of Lipoxais and Arpoxais in the “Scythian version” of the myth. Representation of this myth can be found on a number of toreutics from Scythian barrows (D.S. Raevsky) because “the monuments depict the cultic myths” [Лелеков, Раевский 1988, 218; cf.: 220; Тульпе 2012, 137ff].

First of all, the moment of conspiracy of the elder brothers against the younger. We can name the scenes of a so-called “sworn brotherhood” or oath contract: a golden plaque from Kul-Oba (**fig. 5a**), Sachnovka golden plate (**fig. 5b**), Solooha (**fig. 5c**) and Berdyansk barrow (**fig. 5d**).

Secondly, the scenes of a struggle of two warriors against the third (the golden comb from Solooha (**fig. 6**)) or two warriors combat (golden plaques from Chmyreva Mohyla, and a plate from Hermesov barrow (**fig. 7a**)). Other analogy can be found in the compositions on the “vorvorka-cone” from the Romanovich collection (copy from the Hermitage, Saint-Petersburg) (**fig. 7b**).

The scene of a struggle of two brothers one of which perishes can be a variation of the same myth. Such a theme is also known in Egyptian tradition and has been mirrored in the “Story of Horus and Seth litigation” (P. Chester Beatty I)<sup>15</sup> and Inpu and Bata conflict in the “Tale of Two Brothers” (P. d’Orbiney)<sup>16</sup>. Given narration is connected with the archaic divine Twins cult.

Presence of echoes of this invariant of the myth testifies the presence of such a cult in the nomadic environment. Lucianus «informs about Scythian divine brothers “Korakois”, geniuses and patrons of friendship» which Greeks identified with Orestos (Ὀρέστης) and Pildos (Πυλάδης) (*Luc.*, *Tox.*, 7).

A.I. Ivanchik suggests that the term for a nomination of brothers as Κοράκοι at Lucianus text can be a dialect form of the Κολάξιας name [Иванчик 2004, 88]. It is possible to admit that the original version of myth could contain the description of heroic deed of three brothers led by Kolaxais. Κοράκοι could be a general nomination of brothers based on the name of a leader. This idea corresponds with the data of sources concerning military feats of the sons of the Scythos (Σκύθης) (*Diod.*, Hist., II, 43,4). In Scythian tradition brothers Pal (Πάλος) and Nap (Νάπη) are known (probably, they are shown on the pectoral from Tovsta Mohyla (**fig. 4**)). They were ancestors of two Scythian tribes – *paleus* (Πάλους) and *napeus* (Νάπας) (*Ibidem*, II, 43, 3–4). According to Plinius the tribe of napeus “has been annihilated by paleus” (*Plin.*, NH, VI, 50). In this message the Iranian plot about the revenge of Manuchehr to Tur and Selm, murderers of Iredzh, is guessed.

Summing up, it is necessary to come out with the assumption that could cause similarity of the Egyptian and Iranian versions of Thanathological myths. Probably, their two-stages can be connected with process of an ideological substantiation of forming the centralized state and the royal power. Early written tradition in both cultures could fix the certain transitive moment of laying of a new, heroic or epic in its nature, variant on the archaic myth.

The “second stage” of this myth legalized the royal power. In Egypt the role of the divine founders of the royal power is carried out by a link of Osiris and Horus. In the Iranian tradition this function is executed by Iredzh and Manuchehr, and in the Scythian version – by Kolaxais and his successors.

**ILLUSTRATIONS**



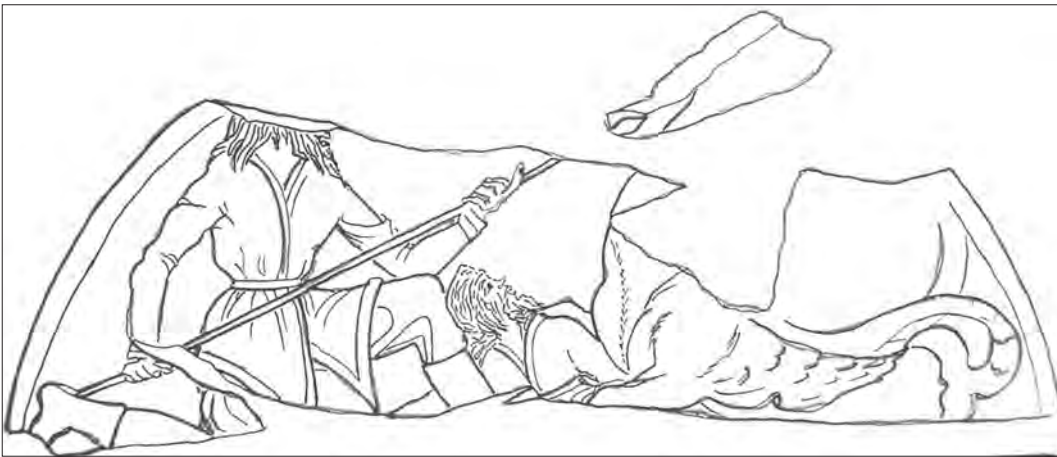
Fig. 1. Murdering of Dzhamsid before Azhi-Dahaka (miniature, "Shahnameh", manuscript from the British Museum)



Fig. 2. Murdering of Iredzh by Tur (miniature, "Shahnameh", manuscript from the Russian National Library, Saint-Petersburg)



a



b

Fig. 3. The comb from Hajmanova Mohyla



Fig. 4, 4a. The central scene on the golden pectoral from Tovsta Mohyla



a



b



c



d

Fig. 5. Scythian scenes of a so-called “sworn brotherhood”:  
*a* – golden plaque from *Kul-Oba*; *b* – image on the *Sachnovka*;  
*c* – golden plaque from *Soloha*; *d* – golden plaque from *Berdyansk barrow*



Fig. 6. Golden comb from *Soloha barrow* with a battle scene



Fig. 7. Battle scenes:  
*a* – golden plate from *Hermesov barrow*;  
*b* – copy of the cone from *Romanovich collection*

**ADDITION**

| Scythian Thanatological Myth (“First stage”)<br>(Reconstruction)   |  |   |   |
|--|--|---|---|
| CONTENT OF THE MYTH  | SOURCES  | POSSIBLE PICTORIAL (ART) REPRESENTATION   | RITUAL / RELIGIOUS REPRESENTATION   |
| Death of Yima (?) from dragon monster (Azhi-Dahaka (?))  |  | The comb from Hajmanova Mohyla ( <b>fig. 3a-b</b> ); plaques of <i>gorytos</i> from Archangel’ska Sloboda barrow (?); images on <i>gorytos</i> on the pectoral from Tovsta Mohyla ( <b>fig. 4a</b> ); pendants from the Novosil’kivsky barrow   |   |
| Vengeance for the death of Yima by Targitaos (?) and victory over Azhi-Dahaka (?) and other monsters of the primordial chaos | <i>Herod.</i> , IV, 8; <i>Strabo</i> , XI, II, 10; IG № 1293 | The comb from Hajmanova Mohyla ( <b>fig. 3a-b</b> ); roofings from Slonovs’ka Blyznitsa and Krasnokutsk barrow; paintings in the burial vault № 9 of Neapolis Scythian necropolis; plaque from Durovsky barrows; medallions from Feodosia and Hersonesos; plaque of the <i>gorytos</i> from Soboleva Mohyla | Reproduction of the mythical events during the annual New Year religious festival (?) |

| <b>Scythian Thanatological Myth</b> (“Second stage”)<br><i>(Reconstruction)</i>  |                                   |   |   |
|--|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| <p>The eldest brothers of Kolaxais, Lipoxais and Arpoxais, grudged against him for his royal preference, decided to kill him (conspiracy)</p>          |                                   | <p>“Sworn brotherhood” or oath contract scenes: plaques from Kul-Oba (<b>fig. 5a</b>), Sachnovka golden plate (<b>fig. 5b</b>), Solooha (<b>fig. 5c</b>) and Berdyansk barrows (<b>fig. 5d</b>)</p>   |   |
| <p>Lipoxais and Arpoxais come to grips with Kolaxais, killed him and usurped his Royal power</p>   | <p><i>Val. Fl.</i>, VI, 638ff</p> | <p>The comb from Solooha (<b>fig. 6</b>); plaques from Chmyreva Mohyla; plate from Hermesov barrow (<b>fig. 7a</b>); “vorvorka-cone” from Romanovich collection (<b>fig. 7b</b>); “helmet” from Perederieva Mohyla; painting of the sarcophagus from the barrow № 9 near Harbuzivka (?)</p> | <p>Ritual killing (sacrifice) of the “temporary king” after some time from the annual New Year religious festival</p> |
| <p>Kolaxais “soul” arrived on horseback to the Goddess of the Underworld</p>   |                                   | <p>Drinking horn from Merdjary, kanfaros from Ekaterinodar, Bosporian tomb stelaes; carpet from the Pazyryk barrow № 5; painting of the so-called Anphesterias burial vault in Panticapeos</p>  |   |
| <p>The Goddess of the Underworld (“the Goddess with mirror”) treats the “soul” of Kolaxais with the beverage of Immortality</p>                        |                                   | <p>Sachnovka plate, plate from Karagodeuashh</p>  |   |
| <p>The “soul” of Kolaxais gets the drinking horn with the beverage of Immortality</p>  |                                   | <p>Plaques from the barrow near Akstyutensy and Kul-Oba</p>   |   |
| <p>The “soul” of Kolaxais<br/>a) drinks the beverage of Immortality<br/>b) “reborns” into the form of a young man and initiates to the Underworld.</p> |                                   | <p>a) Plaques from the Kul-Oba, Oguz, Nosaki, Chortomlyk, Tatchenak, 1<sup>st</sup> Verhniy Rogachik, Mordvinovsky and Meletopolsky barrows.<br/>b) Plaques from the IV chamber of Chertomlyk; Sakchnovka plate.</p>  | <p>Part of the rituals during the New Year festival and part of the funeral rites.</p>                                |
| <p>Offsprings of Kolaxais vengeance for his death and restore the <i>paralatos</i> (“<i>paleus</i>”) royal family power in Scythia.</p>                | <p><i>Plin.</i>, NH, VI, 50</p>   |   |   |



- <sup>1</sup> The paper is based on the report for the International Colloque “L’Égypte et ses voisins moyen-orientaux (3000 av. – 1000 ap. n.e.)”, Orléans, Musée des Beaux-Arts. 30. August – 02. September 2010.
- <sup>2</sup> See, for example: [Brandon 1961, 317–335; 1966, 217–228; Griffiths 1980; Assmann 2003].
- <sup>3</sup> See in details: [Griffiths 1960; 1980].
- <sup>4</sup> See for example: [Франкфорт... 1984, 45ff].
- <sup>5</sup> For general remarks in Indo-European and Indo-Iranian contexts see: [Lincoln 1977, 247–264; Davies 1999; Ara 2008].
- <sup>6</sup> See in details: [Christensen 1917–1934].
- <sup>7</sup> The newest researches see: [Yama/Yima 2012].
- <sup>8</sup> See also: [Вертієнко 2009, 32–34].
- <sup>9</sup> For specific of representation of Yima as first mortal in Iranian tradition see in details: [Kellens 1988, 329–334; Ara 2008, 191ff; Крюкова 2009, 24–25].
- <sup>10</sup> See: [Desai 1940, 49–52].
- <sup>11</sup> Literary *σάγαις* – “a single edged axe”.
- <sup>12</sup> Photo and drawing from personal archive of Dr. Eleonora V. Yakovenko, published with the permission of Dr. E.E. Chernenko (Chernihiv), daughter of the scholar.
- <sup>13</sup> See (with bibliography): [Ivanchik 1999, 141–192].
- <sup>14</sup> That are versions “Г–І” and “ВФ” by D.S. Raevsky classification [Раевский 2006, 42, 60, табл. I, 63, табл. II].
- <sup>15</sup> For Horus and Seth conflict in the Pyramid texts see: [Tobin 1993, 93–110], other details: [Griffiths 1960, *passim*].
- <sup>16</sup> Translation see: [Сказки 1979, 87ff; 108ff; Клоустон 2009, 92–99, 100–110 (comments)].

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