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## PHYSICAL AND AFTERLIFE WORLD IN RELIGIOUS DOCTRINE OF AVESTA

**Abstract:** The article discusses the genesis of Zoroastrian funeral rites representing the religious-philosophic consciousness of the peoples in Central Asia.

**Key words:** Avesta, Zoroastrianism, Khoresm, Margiana, Bactria, Iran, bone repositories, ossuaries, subterranean vaults and space, ground burial constructions, kata, dahma, naus, pahsa, kesyaka, brick, the Mazdayasnians, Fravashi.

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### Introduction

The history of the study of Zoroastrianism and the Avesta is very long and contradictory. In many studies, sources and materials, conjectures and assumptions rather than scientific arguments prevailed. Therefore, we considered the only correct principle, that is the reliance on the opinion of archaeologists who open up more and more information about the religious and philosophical consciousness of the Zoroastrians.

Death is an extraordinary phenomenon that destroys the visible and hidden from the eyes, dreams and reality, which makes us think about the fate of a person in this world and the afterlife, therefore, it was always treated with reverence and responsibility. For millennia, various methods of burial have evolved in Central Asia, corresponding to the formation and development of various religious ritual rites, which formed the pyramidal system of religious consciousness.

The ancient funeral rites found in Central Asia clarified not only many aspects of the Zoroastrian religion, but also made it possible to clarify the time of the origin and determine the nature of the social, religious, philosophical consciousness of the people of Central Asia.

On the territory of Central Asia and adjacent regions, archaeologists have discovered various types of funerary structures. For example, “a burial with a secondary burial was widely used in Khorezm, Margiana, Bactria and in some districts of Parthian Iran. On the other hand, the bone repositories were also different: ossuaries in Khorezm and Margiana; subterranean vaults in Iran; ground burial constructions in Bactria. An adjacent zone, Margiana, is also revealed, where there are two types of bone storages: ossuaries and ground burial structures. Apparently, this region accumulated in itself two streams of influences: one from Khorezm, the other from Bactria” [1.42].

It is necessary to emphasize the fact that, contrary to the assertions of many prominent orientalists who consider Iran to be the birthplace of Zoroastrianism, hundreds of ossuaries have been found in Central Asia, while they have turned out to be singular in Iran.

Among the scientists who studied the funeral rites, the reasoning and conclusions of V.V. Barthold are original and thoughtful, based on the analysis and comparison of various ossuaries. He pointed to three types of Zoroastrian funerary structures (*kata*, *dahma*

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and *naus*), of which “*dahma*” and “*naus*” were *ostodons* (bone repositories).

V.V. Bartold noted that the ossuaries, decorated with ornaments, figures and images, were not found anywhere except Turkestan. Consequently, “the bones of the dead were a subject of greater concern in Turkestan than other Zoroastrians” [2.206-213].

K.A. Inostrantsev, based on the analysis of Videvat, cited the varieties of the funeral ritual: 1) *kata* - a small building where the corpse was placed; 2) *dahma* - a place where predators gnawed a corpse; 3) a bone repository (*ostodon*), where cleaned bones were stored. At the same time, he admitted that among the Zoroastrians, the cleansing of the bones of the dead could have occurred without the participation of animals. Moreover, he does not exclude that the bones could be digested, cleaned, and then placed in boxes [3.170].

In the research of K.A. Inostrantsev, the essential point is that he emphasized the inconsistency of the funeral customs of the Achaemenids with the instructions of the Avesta. This idea is important for us in two aspects: firstly, it shows the antiquity of this type of burial and, secondly, neither the prevalence, nor the survival of this rite were introduced to Iran from outside.

As a result of research by Russian scientists in the twentieth century, two points of view were formed regarding burial: a) the funeral rite of Sogd and Bactria is much older than the rituals that existed in Sasanid Mazdaism; b) Zoroastrian cults and rituals of Central Asia and Iran have certain differences.

According to K.A. Inostrantsev and Yu.A. Rapoport, in the Zoroastrian literature the *ostodon*, could be called the bone repositories in the form of vessels. However, the virtually complete absence of the latter in Iranian archaeological materials itself indicates that some structures were called *ostodons* here. Based on the study of archaeological materials Yu.A. Rapoport concludes that “the method of storing bones in Iran and Central Asia remained different even when the rest of the funeral ritual was apparently the same. The difference is primarily in the fact that the Central Asian ossuaries could be moved, while in Iran they were crypts and rock niches” [4.18].

Through the efforts of scientists from Central Asia and Russia, it was proved that one of the controversial issues - the burial of bones - is a rite associated mainly with Zoroastrianism. This point of view was reinforced by the inscriptions on the ossuaries discovered in Khorezm.

Regardless of the form in which the burial rite took place, in all cases in religious consciousness contact with the deceased remained the main issue. This contact was made through various ceremonies and rites, most importantly, people believed in the reincarnation of the soul of the deceased into an animal or plant.

Most of the Zoroastrian representations, in a transformed and modernized form, now exist among the peoples of Central Asia. According to these ideas, many characteristics of the character and abilities of people are associated with those of their ancestors.

Such analogies and the peculiar existence of the “rudiments” of ancient beliefs can be found in our days. Even in the 21st century, similar rituals associated with the cult of the skull (mainly a ram or goat) still exist among many peoples of Central Asia in an altered form. For example, in the village of Khumsan of the Bostanlyk district of Tashkent region, there is a custom according to which, in connection with various events (happy or sad), cattle are sacrificed, which, when cut into pieces, are distributed to neighbors; or relatives and neighbors are invited for a meal. At the same time, the cleaned and cooked skull of the sacrificial animal is presented to the oldest person among the guests, and after his blessing, the meal begins. Although the skull cult today does not bear its original content, having lost the meaning of an idol, it has become a ritual of moral worship and respect. For example, in the village of Khumsan, a ram or a goat in sacred places is sacrificed to this day. Animistic ideas that the souls of the deceased continue to exist in an incorporeal form and at times visit the living in the guise of butterflies or appear in a dream are also inherent in the residents of the village of Khumsan. People who saw in a dream a dead mother or father, husband or wife, child or another close person, necessarily perform the sacrifice of a ram, goat, chicken, to calm their own souls as well as the souls of the dead.

According to many scientists, magic is a phenomenon that unites the consciousness of ancient and modern people and at the same time separates them. Both ancient magic and modern forms of its manifestation are an imaginary effect on supernatural forces, the realization of supernatural phenomena.

In modern conditions, magic is widespread among folk healers. For example, Uzbeks go to the healers to get rid of the evil eye, confident that the healer is able to expel the magical power of “Kinn” that hit a person. The ritual consists in the fact that the healer, sorceress read prayers over a bowl with ashes and lament “Chik”, “Chik”, that is, “Come out”, “Come out” and “Go away”. It is believed that a person who has a “bad eye” can stop the horse galloping, chop a stone, stupefy another person, etc.

All these ups and downs of spiritual development of the world and the expansion of human’s connection with the surrounding reality gave rise to various forms of primitive beliefs. For example, fetishization, both of separate objects, and various spirits. Some fetishes contributed to health while being beneficial, others were harmful.

The female images in the statuary church storages are very close to the images of Fravashi - the powerful spirits of the deceased righteous that are

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found in the Avesta. They are silently sitting female creatures, stately "highly belted", "wide-bottomed". As indicated in the Avesta, fravashi within ten days of pre-Christmas period, visiting family settlement, requiring the descendants of a sacrifice offering. Didn't Beruni mean exactly this when he wrote that during the last five days of the 12th month of the year and the following five days the Khorezmians brought food to the Naous for the spirits of the dead [ 5.258 ] .

V.A. Livshits, having decoded some inscriptions on the ossuaries of the Tok-Kala necropolis, came to the conclusion that the word "Fravarti" is also found in the Khorezmian nauses [6.14] .

From the earliest times, in southern Khorezm, a burial place in a sagan-sarcophagus made of pahsa, kesyak, and brick was widespread. There were collective crypts ("houses for the dead"). There were and are currently "nigrik" or "chubkori" based on a wooden frame. In the vicinity of Khazarasp, the third type of crypt is widespread - "gumbaz" (dome) or "kush gumbaz" (domed ceiling). Another type of a land crypt is called "sandyk" (chest, box). The latter method is the most common in the whole Khorezm.

The main achievement of Uzbek archaeologists is that on the basis of a long and thorough study of archaeological sites of Central Asia, they discovered various forms of the Zoroastrian funeral rite that existed at different times.

According to E.V. Rtveldze placement of bones in special constructions (nausa) refers to the II - I centuries AD, but, if in Khorezm, Margian and Sogd, cleaned bones were placed in ossuaries, then in Bactria they were placed in multi-room nauses [7.113] .

Thus, archaeologists have discovered various forms and methods of burial in Central Asia, in particular in Khorezm, testifying to the multilayer nature of the Zoroastrian beliefs. First of all, these are various methods of burial: putting up corpses for animals and birds, decaying corpses, cremation of corpses, using sarcophagi and ossuaries (bone repositories), special vessels made of ceramics, stone, unfired clay, pottery kilns for burning with combustion chambers, various household vessels - korchags, khums and jugs, statuary, "box" forms of ossuaries, soil burial grounds; Zoroastrians used such funeral constructions as kata, dahma, uzdana, naus, etc. All of these methods and forms of burial found in the customs of the Khorezm burial indicate that these rituals continued to be practiced for many centuries, varying in accordance with tradition and the characteristics of socio-historical conditions.

Some ceremonies and rituals that have been preserved in modern Parsis' traditions give an idea of the religious consciousness of the Zoroastrians. The followers of Ahur Mazda - the creator of all that is bright, pure, useful, good and wise, life itself reject darkness, evil, unclean, harmful, disease, death - the

works of Angra Mainyu. Therefore, everything connected with death and a corpse itself is considered unclean. The corpse should not come into contact with either the ground, or with running water, or with fire, or with a person. To get rid of the corpse, special towers were built - dahms, where special people brought corpses to be eaten by birds of prey. According to the canons of Zoroastrianism, the carriers of the dead were considered unclean, therefore, "Let these carriers of corpses sit three steps away from the dead. Let the Mazdayasnians collect urine so that the carriers of the bodies washed their hair and body" [8.99] .

The work of washers of corpses exists among the peoples of Central Asia till nowadays. In every village, in every makhalla there is a special person who is invited to clean a corpse. If such a person is not found, then close relatives or children of the deceased perform this rite before burial of the corpse.

Zoroastrian traditions continue to exist in folklore, fairy tales, the epos of many Central Asian peoples. Such demons as pari, ajina, devas, etc. mentioned in Videvdat still occupy a certain place in consciousness. As I. Dzhabbarov and G. Dresvyanskaya correctly remarked: "The origins of such traditions should be sought in the more ancient strata of the Dzorostrian era". [9.60] For example, the image of the deva in the Zoroastrian pantheon of gods occupied a central place: the deva appears either in the form of an evil dragon of enormous size and with unbridled power, then as a servant, following the instructions of the owner, then as a tornado, destroying all life in its path, etc.

There are a lot of legends, stories about the physical and spiritual strength of the deva among the people. For example, according to legend, many ancient cities and fortresses of Khorezm (Chilpyk, Khazarasp, Kyat) were built by devas. By the way, Kyat (a hillfort near Shavat) is still called the "Devsolgan", that is, "Built by the deva".

According to ethnographic data, mourning of the dead, accompanied by scratching of faces, has been preserved among some modern Khorezmians, and also takes place in the village of Khumsan, Bostanlyk district of Tashkent region.

The imaginary connection between the living and the dead in the Avesta is interpreted as an ordinary, natural phenomenon. Fravashi (spirits of the dead) visit their homes during the Hamaspatmaedai (March 10-12), stay there (in this world) for ten days and nights, talking with relatives. "Who will praise us, who will worship us, who will sing us, who with meat and clothes in his hands ... whose name is worthy of respect, who is worthy of sacrifice, to whom this gift will be granted, he will have endless food ... Let it be here, there is a herd and people in the animal house, let there be a fast horse and a strong chariot, let there be a man with eloquence, who made a sacrifice to God

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with meat in his hands and clothes, with the name of Asha Nasa mentioned” [8.333-334] .

The negative attitude towards the cemetery also originates from Zoroastrian traditions; visiting the cemetery so far causes a feeling of fear, especially at night, no one dares to visit the cemetery at this time of day. For the Zoroastrians believed that the cemetery is the abode of the devils of the demons of evil and death.

According to the beliefs of the Central Asian peoples, genies are found not only in cemeteries, but also in caves, ruins of houses, sairs, thickets, under trees (walnuts, mulberries, jida, perennial plane trees, poplar, etc.). You can not stay close to these places and under the listed trees for a long time, because a person can get sick from exposure and attractive games of genies.

At the same time, in Islam, the cemetery where an outstanding personality (saint) is buried is a place of healing from various ailments. Such a contradiction, characteristic of the consciousness of the modern Uzbeks, indicates that "the peoples of Central Asia have deep ideas about the Zoroastrian doctrine of the sacred impurity of all the dead" [9.63] .

Zoroastrians used such funerary constructions as kata, dahma, uzdana, naus, etc. All of these methods and forms of burial found in the customs of the Khorezm burial indicate that these rituals continued to be practiced for many centuries, varying in accordance with tradition and the characteristics of socio-historical conditions.

Zoroastrians highly esteemed water, earth, air and the sun, that is, everything that supports life, and believed in their magical power. In the Avesta, the most important law is "Sowing good and strong grains in the ground", to love the land as they like a girl, to fertilize it with seeds, to make her a mother who brings a rich harvest. For the happiness of people depends on agriculture, and careful work allows you to make the land fertile, and fertility, in turn, is a sign of human happiness and prosperity of the earth. In this sense, the earth and people are the personification of the living, bright and pure spirit of Ahur Mazda.

Such a natural-historical evolution of nature, society and a human being is reflected in the consciousness of people over time, forming, ultimately, a dualistic worldview. The presence in many places and parts of the Avesta of mythological representations and images inherent in the primitive

communal culture associated with totemic and animistic representations, along with representations of a later worldview (inherent in the period of the clan community, the slave-owning period), indicates that dualism is not the result of only a reflection of the nature that surrounded the tribes, but a certain stage in the formation and development of the abstract thinking of human beings in general.

Such a wide range of deification of nature and the cultivation of supernatural forces capable of creating and destroying, paved the way for polytheistic consciousness. The process of transition to polytheism took many millennia until the human community established a systematic religious and philosophical view of the world.

However, religious and philosophical consciousness was found, and the socio-historical practice of people did not take place in a hermetically sealed vessel, but in an ever-changing natural-social space, which had open borders. Therefore, many primitive religious beliefs and later emerging philosophical ideas, as well as customs, rituals, mythology, freely penetrated into the orbit of the spiritual dimensions of each other.

That is why myths, legends of a fairy tale and polytheistic deities wander from people to people, which is more inherent in both the Iranian peoples and the peoples of Central Asia. Therefore, it is difficult to find the origins and time of the appearance of a particular myth, custom, common among peoples living in a large territory.

This happened with Zoroastrianism and the Avesta. If the time and place of the birth of Zoroastrianism to the present day remains the subject of controversy, discussion and speculation, then the fixing of the Avesta in writing is established within the historical and chronological limits of the era of the Achaemenids and Sassanids in Iran.

A study of the genesis of Zoroastrianism and its holy book of the Avesta suggests that as the role and significance of the new religious system strengthened, early cults not only faded into the background, but became elements of this system, persisting in the minds of people in the form of superstitions. Thus, the early religious and philosophical ideas were transformed and included in the new system of religious consciousness, combining the old and the new, traditional and modern.

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