

# The Sakhnivka Plate: Scythian Iconography in the Imaging of Eschatological Concepts

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**Abstract.** This paper proposes the reconstruction of the Scythian eschatological concepts on the basis of semantics of the Sakhnivka plate composition (4<sup>th</sup> century BC, Museum of Historical Treasures of Ukraine, branch of the National Museum of History of Ukraine). Taking into account the ritual detour of the sacral center from left to right in the Indo-Iranian tradition, the plate plots show a consecutive visual statement of the episodes of the myth of Kolaxais' destiny. The culmination scene of the plate includes three figures. The half-turned and full-face iconography of the Goddess shows her belonging to two figures, on her both sides: to a meeting of the bearded Scythian king on the right and a scene with a young Scythian on the left (an image of the young, "regenerated" king / Kolaxais). Only the last figure has a in caftan wrapped from right to left, i.e. the clasp of the "living person" (as opposed to other figures) that confirms his special status of 'reborn'. Accordingly, scenes show the important episodes of the Scythian eschatological representations connected with posthumous fate, basis for the ideology of funerary rites.

**Keywords:** Scythians; Eschatological Myth; Iconography; Sakhnivka Plate.

## [es] La placa Sakhnivka: iconografía escita en las imágenes de Conceptos escatológicos

**Resumen.** Este artículo propone la reconstrucción de los conceptos escatológicos escitas sobre la base de la semántica de la composición de la Placa de Sakhnivka (siglo IV aC, Museo de Tesoros Históricos de Ucrania, rama del Museo Nacional de Historia de Ucrania). Teniendo en cuenta el desvío ritual del centro sacro de izquierda a derecha en la tradición indo-iraní, las gráficas de las placas muestran una declaración visual consecutiva de los episodios del mito del destino de Kolaxais. La escena culminante del plato incluye tres figuras. La iconografía de la Diosa medio vuelta y de rostro completo muestra su pertenencia a dos figuras, a ambos lados: una reunión del rey escita barbudo, a la derecha y una escena con un joven escita a la izquierda (una imagen del rey joven, "regenerado" / Kolaxais). Solo la última figura tiene un caftán envuelto de derecha a izquierda, es decir, el broche de la «persona viva» (a diferencia de otras figuras) que confirma su condición especial de «renacido». En consecuencia, las escenas muestran los episodios importantes de las representaciones escatológicas escita vinculadas al destino póstumo, base de la ideología de los ritos funerarios.

**Palabras clave:** Escitas; mito escatológico; Iconografía; Placa Sakhnivka.

**Summary.** 1. Introduction. 2. Scythian Eschatological Myth on the Sakhnivka Plate. 2.1 Scene 1: "Oath Contract". 2.2 Scene 2: "The Death of Kolaxais". 2.3. Scene 3: "Cup-bearers". 2.4. Scene 4: "Scythian Musician". 2.5. Scene 5: "The Image of Resurrection". 3. Conclusions. 4. Written sources and bibliographical references.

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Cette remarquable pièce a un caractère plus archaïque, plus barbare tout au moins, que les vases de Nikopol et de Koul-Oba. La composition en est plus naïve et plus em-barrassée. Il est peu probable que ce soit l'oeuvre d'un orfèvre grec. Mais les person-nages représentés ont le même type physique et le même costume que ceux qui figu-rant sur les autres documents scythes. [...] La feuille d'or de Sakhnovka semble, pour-tant, réunir toutes les garanties désirables d'authenticité et mérite de sortir de l'ombre où on l'a trop longtemps laissée<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Alexandre Miller and Adrien de Mortillet, "Sur un bandeau en or avec figures Scythes découvert dans un kourgan de la Russie Méridionale", *L'Homme Préhistorique* 9 (1904): 283-284.

## 1. Introduction

The plot structure of the front attire decorations on the Scythian gold plate from Sakhnivka (4<sup>th</sup> century BC)<sup>3</sup> is still unique, both contextually and in the number of anthropomorphic images in its content (Figs. 1-3)<sup>4</sup>. This plate was an element of the Scythian female headdress. It was discovered in 1901 by V. Geze in the barrow 2 near the village Sakhnivka (Cherkasy district, Ukraine)<sup>5</sup> and now is kept in the Museum of Historical Treasures of Ukraine, branch of the National Museum of History of Ukraine (Kyiv).

The historiography of the plate studies demonstrates the existence of several directions in understanding its

contents. As usual, the context related to the theme of a certain form of religious-magical celebration is seen in the composition:

- Initiation of the king to the goddess or investiture<sup>6</sup>.
- Initiation to the deity through tasting of sacrificial food<sup>7</sup>.
- Sacred marriage of the king with the goddess Tabiti<sup>8</sup>.
- Banquet-sacrifice as a part of the cult of Argimpasa<sup>9</sup>.
- Ritual divination<sup>10</sup>.



Figure 1. *Sakhnivka gold plate*, 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, MHTU inv. no. DM-1639.  
Source: © Dmytro Klochko.



Figure 2. *Sakhnivka gold plate*. Source: Miller and de Mortillet, "Sur un bandeau", 279, fig. 132.

<sup>3</sup> Size: 365 mm × 98 mm, weight: 64, 58 g; fineness: 750.

<sup>4</sup> See also: Lyudmila Klochko, "Cholovichi golovni ubory na zemlyakh Skifii", in *Epokha rannego zheleza. Sbornik nauchnykh trudov k 60-letiyu S. A. Skorogo* (Kiev-Poltava: IA NANU, 2009), 175, fig. 3, 2; Svetlana Bessonova, *Religioznye predstavleniya skifov* (Kiev: Naukova Dumka, 1983), 101, fig. 25; *Zoloto stepu. Arkheolohiya Ukrainy* (Kyiv-Schlezvig: IA NANU, 1991), 378, 379.

<sup>5</sup> Miller and de Mortillet, "Sur un bandeau...", 283-284; Svetlana Bessonova and Dmytro Rayevsky, "Zolota plastyna iz Sakhnivky," *Arheologia* 21 (1977): 41.

<sup>6</sup> Mikhail Rostovtsev, "Predstavleniye o monarkhicheskoy vlasti v Skifii i na Bospore", *Izvestiya arkheologicheskoy komissii* 49 (1913), 13.

<sup>7</sup> Mikhail Artamonov, "Antropomorfnyye bozhestva v religii skifov", *Arheologicheskyy sbornik Gosudarstvennogo Ermitazha* 2 (1961), 61-62.

<sup>8</sup> Dmitry Raevsky, *Mir skifskoy kul'tury* (Moscow: Yazyki slavyanskikh kul'tur, 2006), 145; Gennady Kurochkin, "Boginya s zerkalom i geroy s sekiroy (k probleme antropomorfizatsii skifskogo iskusstva)", in *Skifiya i Bospor. Materialy konferentsii pamyati akademika M. I. Rostovtseva* (Novocherkassk: Institut Arkheologii RAN, Leningradskoye Otdeleniye; Muzei Istorii Donskogo Kazachestva, 1993), 71-72; Sergei Yatsenko, "O sarmato-alanskom syuzhete rospisi v Pantikapeyskom 'sklepe Anfesteriya'", *Vestnik drevney istorii* 3 (1995), 190-191.

<sup>9</sup> Bessonova, *Religioznye predstavleniya*, 106; Klochko, "Cholovichi golovni ubory", 68-70.

<sup>10</sup> Nadezhda Onayko, "O sakhnovskoy plastine", *Sovetskaya arkheologia* 3 (1984); cf. Bessonova and Raevsky, "Zolota plastyna", 41.



Figure 3. *Sakhnivka gold plate*. Source: Hanna Vertiienko, “*Stsena ‘ofiruvannya barana’*,” 80, fig. 2a.

- Military victory festival associated with the cults of Argimpasa and Ares<sup>11</sup>.
- Rituals of sacrifice associated with the strengthening of royal power<sup>12</sup>.
- The composition contains a set of independent and unrelated scenes<sup>13</sup>.

The review of interpretations shows that there are two main directions in the understanding of semantics of the plate, where the first is the idea of *investiture* and the second is the *feast-sacrifice* images. However, there are other original interpretations of its scenes as ritual divination and the military festival. Taking into account the accumulated experience of interpretations, we have a reliable basis for further study of the semantics of this composition, which will be considered in the paper.

Considering the existing contradictions in its interpretations, I want to offer some cases for a *mythological* character of this object and the sequence of “reading” its scenes. The technical completion of the plate from the original vessel is doubtful<sup>14</sup>, but it cannot deny the arguments of the researchers as to the round circular reading of the plate scenes<sup>15</sup>. From my point of view, it is perspective and logically by the specific nature of the object that is an unlocked circle. For this reason I tend to view the composition plot not in linear<sup>16</sup>, but in *circular projection* that removes the “absurdity” of the scenes directness<sup>17</sup>, and will bring closer to the understanding of its content.

## 2. Scythian Eschatological Myth on the Sakhnivka Plate

A common procedure of “reading” the plate scenes from the “central” (the Goddess with the mirror and the Scythian king in front of her), in the case of the recognition of the mythological context, should be reconsidered. The scene with the Goddess could not be the first. On the contrary, it is logical to assume it takes the last, but at the same time, the most important and culminating one. Then the direction of reading the scenes on this plate could be from the right to the left. This direction is to the Goddess and to her the majority of the figures are turned (6 out of 10). That is the opposite direction of the sun circulation, which is confirmed by the ancient Indian texts, where the *pradakṣiṇā* and *apasavya* represent the opposite directions of circulation within the ritual sanctuary round. The first is the direction according to the sun circulation, and the second is the direction opposite the sun circulation, with the latter being directly associated with the funeral rites (*śrāddha*)<sup>18</sup>. The direction opposite to the sun circulation is the characteristic for the horseracing during funeral ceremonies in various Indo-European peoples<sup>19</sup>. For the Iranian nations still characteristic is the system of spatial orientation of the ritual center, which is marked and actualized by circular bypass from the right to the left<sup>20</sup>. Based on the funeral context of the object, its reading requires a direction opposite to the circulation of the sun. From my point of view, the plate has five semantically related consecutive scenes (Fig. 4).

<sup>11</sup> Maryna Rusyaeva, “Interpretatsiya izobrazheniy na sakhnovskoy plastine”, in *Zhrechestvo i shamanizm v skifskuyu epokhu. Materialy mezhdunarodnoy konferentsii* (Saint Petersburg: Gosudarstvennyi Ermitazh, 1996), 159-161; Rusyaeva, “Interpretatsiya zobrazen’ na zolotiy plastiny z Sakhnivky”, *Arheologia* 1 (1997): 46-56.

<sup>12</sup> Christian Ellinghaus, “Das Golddiadem aus dem Sachnovka-Kurgan: Ex oriente lux?”, *Zur graeco-skythischen Kunst. Archäologisches Kolloquium Münster 24-26 November, 1995*, ed. Klaus Stähler (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1997), 37-48.

<sup>13</sup> Valentina Ryabova, “Povernennya do Sakhnivs’koyi diademy”, in *Muzeyni chytannya. Materialy naukovoyi konferentsiyi Muzeiu istorichnykh koshtovnostey Ukrainy - filialu Natsional’noho muzeiu istoriyi Ukrainy, 17-18 hrudnya 1996 r* (Kyiv: MIKU, 1998), 23-25.

<sup>14</sup> Onayko, “O sakhnovskoy”; Rusyaeva, “Interpretatsiya izobrazheniy”; Rusyaeva, “Interpretatsiya zobrazen’”; Ryabova, “Povernennya do Sakhnivs’koyi”.

<sup>15</sup> Bessonova and Raevsky, “Zolota plastyna”, 47.

<sup>16</sup> Onayko, “O sakhnovskoy plastine”; Rusyaeva, “Interpretatsiya izobrazheniy”; Rusyaeva, “Interpretatsiya zobrazen’”.

<sup>17</sup> Bessonova and Raevsky, “Zolota plastyna”, 47.

<sup>18</sup> See in details: Ramasare Prasad, transl., *The Śrāddha: The Hindu Book of the Dead (A Treatise on the Śrāddha Ceremonies)* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1995); Gian Filippi, *Mṛtyu: Concept of Death in Indian Tradition: Transformation of the Body and Funeral Rites* (New Delhi: D. K. Printworld, 1996); Marcelle Saindon, *Cérémonies funéraires et post-funéraires en Inde: la tradition derrière les rites* (Sainte Foy-Paris: Les Presses de l’Université Laval and L’Harmattan, 2000); Lubomír Ondračka, “Śrāddha”, in *Hinduism and Tribal Religions, Encyclopedia of Indian Religions*, eds. Pankaj Jain, Rita Sherma and Madhu Khanna (Dordrecht: Springer, 2020), 1-4.

<sup>19</sup> Felix Balonov, “Kolesnichnyye ristaniya kak forma pogrebal’nogo zhertvoprinosheniya”, in *Zhertvoprinosheniye: Ritual v kul’ture i iskusstve ot drevnosti do nashikh dney* (Moscow: Yazyki russkoy kul’tury, 2000), 194-198.

<sup>20</sup> Victoria Kryukova, “Tadzhikskiy svadebnyy obryad kak vosproizvedeniye drevneyshogo indoiranskogo mifa i ritual”, in *Lavrovskiy sbornik. Materialy Sredneaziatsko-Kavkazskikh issledovaniy. Etnologiya, istoriya, arkheologiya, kul’turologiya (2006-2007)* (Saint Petersburg: MAE RAN, 2007), 188.



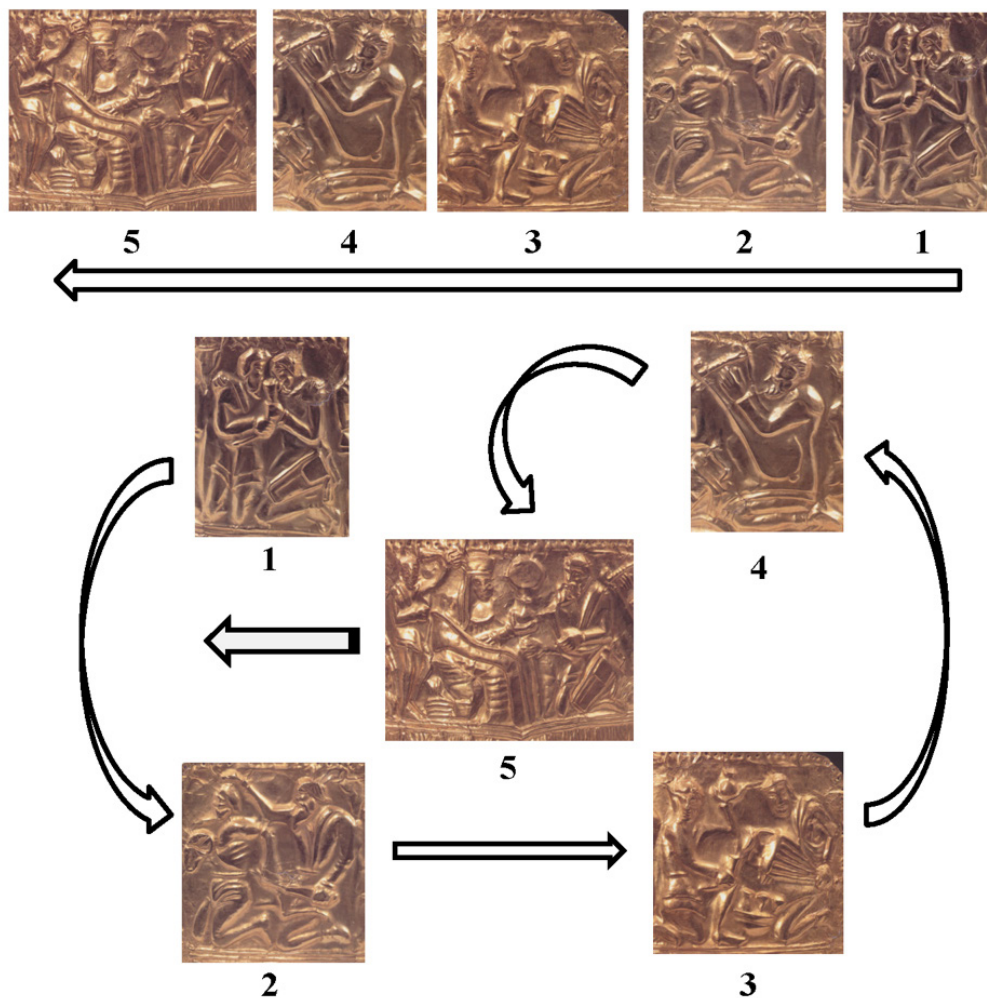


Figure 4. The scenes on the Sakhnivka gold plate and the way of its "reading". Source: Hanna Vertiienko.

## 2.1. Scene 1: "Oath Contract"

Under the proposed idea, the beginning of "reading" the plate scenes will be the "brothers" (so-called "sworn brotherhood" or "oath contract"), i.e. the Scythians-conspirators, Lipoxais and Arpoxais, the brothers of Kolaxais<sup>21</sup>, which is quite logical from the point of view of events development in the Iranian eschatological myth<sup>22</sup>. At the same time, the plot reconstruction of the same myth could occur within ritual ceremonies during the Scythian annual festival<sup>23</sup>. One may note that the *gorytos* of one of the so called "brothers" (the second lack this element representation), has no bow. In accordance with the so-called "Hellenic version" of the myth, only the youngest son, Skiff (resp. Kolaxais), managed to pull the father's bow which became his property, that

ensured his highest royal status<sup>24</sup>. Instead, the Scythian in front of the Goddess has a bow in his *gorytos*.

## 2.2. Scene 2: "The Death of Kolaxais"

Accordingly, the next episode will be the conspiracy fulfillment, represented by the man murder scene<sup>25</sup>, under which, it is possible to understand the death of Kolaxais. In the ritual aspect, it corresponded to the sacrifice of substituent king ("king-priest"), who was elected during the annual festival and who was associated with the ritual of sleeping near gold gifts or the sacrifice that would substitute this death<sup>26</sup>. The presence of the head of sheep image, common in Iran and the Middle East sacrificial

<sup>21</sup> Hdt. IV. 5.

<sup>22</sup> The moment of conspiracy of the elder brothers against the youngest ("oath contract") could be represented on the gold plaques from Kul-Oba, Solokha, and Berdyansk barrow. See in details: Hanna Vertiienko, "Thanatological Myth Recorded on Scythian Antiquities and in Avestan Literature", in *Archaeological and Linguistic research: Materials of the Humboldt-Conference (Simferopol - Yalta, 20-23 September, 2012)* (Kyiv: IA NANU, 2014), 125.

<sup>23</sup> Hdt. IV. 7; Hanna Vertiienko, "Skifs'ka 'novorichna misteriya' ta yiyi pizni reministsentsiyi", *Visnyk Kyivs'koho natsional'noho universytetu imeni Tarasa Shevchenka* 110 (2012): 13-15.

<sup>24</sup> Hdt. IV. 10.

<sup>25</sup> Miller and de Mortillet, "Sur un bandeau", 282; Rusyaeva, "Interpretatsiya izobrazheniy", 160; Rusyaeva, "Interpretatsiya zobrazhen", 52.

<sup>26</sup> Hdt. IV. 7. 2. Although from the Herodotus reports it is unknown when the execution of this deputy took place during the year, most likely it took place six months after the festival, similar to ancient festivals of *Anfesterias*, *Kronias*, *Saturnalias*, and *Mihragān*, Iranian holiday of autumn equinox (Alberto Cantera, "Miθra and the Sun: the Role of Miθra in the Arrangement of the Avestan Liturgical Calendar", in *fērā amāštā spəntā gāθā gōruuāin. Homenaje a Helmut Humbach en su 95º aniversario*, eds. Alberto Cantera and Juanjo Ferrer-Losilla (Girona: Sociedad de Estudios Iranios y Turanios, 2017), 35-39.

animal<sup>27</sup>, possibly shows the scene of double sacrifice a man and a sheep as victims. At the same time, this plate scene can get another interpretation. In the Iranian ritual symbolism and iconography, including the Scythian, a royal *farnah*<sup>28</sup> symbolized the image of the ram, in particular his horns or his head<sup>29</sup>. The man who was sacrificed and near whom the head of ram was shown on the level of his breast, is (or was) a carrier *farnah*, that best correlates with the figure of Kolaxais<sup>30</sup>. Thus, the scene could be

<sup>27</sup> This “doubling” obviously is nonrandom and reinforces the importance of sacrifices, and the ram has acted as a substitute of actual human sacrifice. For the relationship of death and slaughter of sheep see: Gleb Snesev, *Relikty domusul'manskikh verovaniy i obryadov u uzbekov Khorezma* (Moscow: Nauka, 1969), 115; Ludwig Chibirov, *Traditsionnaya dukhovnaya kul'tura osetin* (Moscow: Nauka, 2008), 185. The latter phenomenon of animal or subject sacrifices as substituent of man's, is widely known in the Indo-Iranian world (see Victoria Kryukova, “Drevneyshiy indoiranskiy ritual i traditsionnaya kul'tura iranskikh narodov”, in *Chetvertye Torchinovskiy cheniya. Filosofiya, religiya i kul'tura stran Vostoka: Materialy nauchnoy konferentsii, Sankt-Peterburg, 7-10 fevralya 2007 g.* (Saint Petersburg: Izd-vo Sankt-Peterburgskogo Universiteta, 2007), 28-36). Nevertheless, it is necessary to indicate such Iranian-Asia Minor cult rituals of Anahita, Cybele and Mithras as *Criobolium* and *Taurobolium* where initiation to a large female deity and rebirth occurs through the blood of the sacrificial sheep. Characteristically, in the iconography of similar scenes in eastern religious art, on the right there was initiation of Indian catfish to a deity (Mithras) by means of water and on the left the “rebirth” of followers through the blood of sheep (Rostovtsev, “Predstavleniye o monarkhicheskoy”, 52), which coincides with the iconographical construction of the Sakhnivka plate (for polysemantics of the sheep image in the Iranian world see: Boris Litvinsky, *Kangyuysko-sarmatskiy farn*. (*K istoriko-kul'turnym svyazam plemen yuzhnoy Rossii i Sredney Azii*) (Dushanbe: Donish, 1968), 11, 95-98; Felix Gutnov, “Iz religii skifov: Farn. Ritual'nyye chashi”, in *Antichnaya tsivilizatsiya i varvarskiy mir. (Materialy 6-go arheologicheskogo seminar)* (Krasnodar: Krasnodarskaya gosudarstvennaya akademiya kul'tury, 1998), 19-20.

<sup>28</sup> That is Av. *x'arənah-*; OPers. *farnah-*; Phl. *xwarrah-*. See in details: Christian Bartholomae, *Altiranisches Wörterbuch* (Strassburg: Verlag von Karl J. Trübner, 1904), 1870-1873; Harold Bailey, *Zoroastrian Problems in the Ninth-Century Books. Ratanbai Katrak Lectures* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1943), 1-77; Wolfgang Lentz, “Yima and Khvarena in the Avestan Gathas”, in *Logust's Leg. Studies in honour of S. H. Taqilzadeh* (London: Percy Lind, Humphries & Co, 1962), 131-134; Prod Octor Skjærvø, “Farnah-: mot mede en vieux-perse?”, *Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique de Paris* 78 (1983): 241-259; Klaus Jacobs, “Das Chvarnach - Zum Stand der Forschung”, *Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft* 119 (1987): 215-248; Pierre Lecoq, “Le mot farnah- et les Scythes”, *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 131, no. 4 (1987): 671-682; Almut Hintze, *Der Zamyād-Yašt: Edition, Übersetzung, Kommentar* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1994), 15-33; Alexander Lubotsky, “Avestan *x'arənah-*: the etymology and concept”, in *Sprache und Kultur. Akten der X. Fachtagung der Indogermanischen Gesellschaft Innsbruck*, ed. Wolfgang Meid (Innsbruck: Institut für Sprachwissenschaft der Universität Innsbruck, 1998), 479-488; Alexander Lubotsky, “Scythian elements in Old Iranian”, in *Indo-Iranian Languages and Peoples*, ed. Nicholas Sims-Williams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 191-195.

<sup>29</sup> Ester Ishtvanovich, “Dannyye po religioznym predstavleniyam sarmatov Karpatskogo basseyna”, in *Sarmaty i Skifiya. Sbornik nauchnykh dokladov III Mezhdunarodnoy konferentsii “Problemy sarmatskoy arheologii i istorii”* (Azov: Izd-vo YuNTs RAN, 1997), 116-125; Igor Schaub, *Mif, kul't, ritual v Severnom Prichernomor'ye VII-IV vv. do n. e.* (Sankt Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Sankt-Peterburgskogo universiteta, 2007), 123-130.

<sup>30</sup> Important feature of asymmetric location of the plate center was indicated by O. Oliynyk, where, according to her opinion, “superfluous” is the extreme left figure with the sacrificial sheep (Oliynyk, “Zobrazheniya skifs'koho muzykanta na sakhnivskiy plastyni”, *Arheologia* 4 (2003), 45-46, fig. 4). According to the Pahlavi texts, with the help of *Farrāh* (which may take the zoomorphic form of sheep) Viraz (his soul) successfully passes the *Chinvad*-bridge, that means Farr takes the soul across this place (Olga Chunakova, *Pekhleviyskiy slovar' zoroastriyskikh terminov, mificheskikh personazhey i mifologicheskikh simvolov* (Moscow: Vostochnaya literatura RAN, 2004), 228-230, 256-257).

interpreted as an image of the Kolaxais's death. Consequence of this, I assume two-level semantics of the scene: the ritual sense is the image of sacrifice and the mythological is the Kolaxais's murder. Probably, the “breaking” of the plate in this place (the “gap of space”) demonstrates the image of death as a symbolic transition of Kolaxais' soul to the realm of Afterworld. Transition itself remains beyond our vision. The image of the ram's head (*farnah*) last before the “breaking” is also not accidental: there are analogies in the Iranian ideas about this animal as a *psy-chopomp* (for example, *Ardā Wīrāz-nāmag* II, 3.10). In my point of view, the following plots on the plate show the events that take place in the Afterworld.

### 2.3. Scene 3: “Cup-bearers”

The continuation of the myth events is the scene where two Scythians (“cup-bearers”) fill a rounded bowl and *rhyton* with some liquid from the *amphorae*. Later these two vessels appear in the hands of the Goddess and the Scythian, which might indicate that the cup-bearers had filled it for them (the principle of narration)<sup>31</sup>, and confirm the direction of scenes sequence from the right to the left. Between the figure with the *amphorae* and the cup-bearer with the *rhyton* and the bowl there is *louterion* (?) where there are three vessels.

In connection with this plot, a parallel in the image of the goddess of the Nart epos, whose name is missing or taboo (“the woman”, “good woman”), who meets the hero of Soslan (similar to Scythian Kolaxais)<sup>32</sup> in the Land of the Dead, seating on a gold chair is of special interest. She saves him from starvation, giving him food from a gold woven basket, while putting exactly *three* pieces on the *fynh*-table<sup>33</sup>, the food quantity does not decrease.

Thus, the ground for the three vessels in *louterion* probably had a direct bearing on the funeral notions, and in the case of Sakhnivka plate, it indicated that the shown events took place in the Other world, but the real placement of corresponding utensils, *rhytons*, vessels or their sets (three units) in the Scythian burial mounds is a ritual reflection of this idea. The drink, the cup-bearers fill the vessels with for the Goddess and the Scythian king is likely to be the drink of immortality. This liquid is called *amrita* (Ved. *amṛta* ‘Immortal’) in the Indian tradition, where it also serves as the embodiment of immortality and vitality, and *amərətāt* (or Av. *an-aoša-*; Phl. *anōš* ‘Immortal’) in the Iranian tradition.

### 2.4. Scene 4: “Scythian Musician”

Next scene is represented by a single figure of Scythian, playing a stringed musical instrument, allowably Scythian chordophones<sup>34</sup>. His presence on the Sakhnivka plate

<sup>31</sup> Oliynyk, “Zobrazheniya skifs'koho”, 50.

<sup>32</sup> Yatsenko, “O sarmato-alanskom svyazhete”, 191.

<sup>33</sup> *Narty. Osetinskiy geroicheskiy epos*, Pref. Vasilii Abaev, 2 (Moscow: Nauka, 1989), 158-159. Here magical importance was presented by number three, which is the equivalent of a plurality.

<sup>34</sup> For typological definition of this string instrument, its ethnic and cultural identity and semantic load in the context of the plate see: Oliynyk, “Zobrazheniya skifs'koho muzykanta”, 40-54.

is perceived as a “music accompaniment”, usually associating it with the celebrations: banquet-sacrifice, annual ritual wedding of the king and goddess Tabiti or victory celebration<sup>35</sup>. However, one should focus on the importance of those actions (or their imitation) in the funeral rites, by means of which the “resurrection” of the deceased was ensured, as well as fixing the boundaries between the world of the living and the world of the dead. Besides, if the “burial ritual governs the relationships of living not only with the dead, but also with the Death”, then these actions are a kind of “counterweight” to death, and not just a magic act, aimed at her exile<sup>36</sup>.

However, O. Oliynyk proposed to consider the musician as an independent motive that is essential for the disclosure of the composition contents by analogy with the solitary figure of musician on the painting, crypt 9 of the eastern necropolis of Neapolis the Scythian<sup>37</sup>. Nevertheless, it is possible to give another image of Scythian musician. The gold belt plaques from the barrow 1 near Aksyutintsy village have image of a bearded Scythian which has the *gorytos* with a bow on the left side<sup>38</sup>. He sits on a chair and holds *rhyton* in the left hand, and in the right hand he has an object in which I tend to recognize as a musical instrument. According to D. Raevsky, these plaques are connected with Sakhnivka plate in the technique of performance<sup>39</sup>.

In the context of music representation on Sakhnivka plate, interesting is the role of the instrument in the Iranian world, especially *fandyr* (*duadastanon fandyr*) in Ossetian culture. The mythical origin of *fandyr* in Nart epic is associated with the idea of death, funeral and memorial traditions, as well as the idea of rebirth (the narration “The Black Fox of the Narts”), suggesting eschatological semantics for the music image on the plate. Interestingly, the Hindukush Kafirs gates, set in front of the burial place, are often decorated with the image of a musical instrument, that, according to K. Inostrantsev, was to “entertain the deceased hero”, but, in my opinion, the semantics of these images could belong to the above described field<sup>40</sup>.

## 2.5. Scene 5: “The Image of Resurrection”

The culmination scene of the plate includes three figures. The half-turned and full-face iconography of the Goddess shows her attitude to persons on her both sides:

to a meeting of the bearded Scythian king who is shown turned to the left, standing on his knees in front of her and a young Scythian turned to the right. The bearded Scythian has the *gorytos* with a bow on the left side, and in the left hand he holds *rhyton*<sup>41</sup>, and leans on some kind of weapon (staff, scepter, ax, sword or whip)<sup>42</sup> with his right one. L. Ermolenko suggested that the hero's posture on the plate, where he leans on the weapon, is a ritual “pose of adoration”. On the other hand, the weapon stuck in the ground, in the cult sense has sacred meaning and symbolizes the center of the world, *axis mundi*<sup>43</sup>. There is an opinion that it is an ancient Iranian religious and magical tradition, which flourished in the epic narrations of various nomadic peoples (Huns, Avars, and ancient Hungarians)<sup>44</sup>. With the abilities of different interpretations of this phenomenon, I believe that the weapon, stuck in the burial ground, linking space areas and opened the so-called passage (portal) between worlds for the soul of the deceased, “facilitating” the transition. Moreover, on the similar plaques from the Kul-Oba and Patinioti barrows<sup>45</sup> and there is a full face representation of the bearded Scythian, who has a *gorytos* on the left side, in his right hand he has a *rhyton* and he leans on the weapon with his left hand, most likely on an whip, which reflects a close analogy to the image of the Sakhnivka plate.

The Goddess on the Sakhnivka plate has a mirror in her left hand and a spherical bowl in her right one. The main function of a mirror is the ability to display objects in front of it, due to their quality to reflect the world around it in the “reverse” form, acting as a portal, a passage between this and the Other world<sup>46</sup>. In my view, these factors explain the presence of mirror in the Goddess's hand on the Sakhnivka frieze.

The contents of the plot on the gold plaques, where the Goddess sits with the mirror and in front of her there is the “young” Scythian (Kul-Oba type) (Fig. 5), is related to that of Sakhnivka plate. Scholars were offered different interpretations of it. M. Rostovtsev offered some parallel in Hittite reliefs and interpreted them as a unification act between the Goddess and the king. But after the analysis of the later objects, he was inclined to un-

<sup>35</sup> See in detail: Hanna Vertiienko, “Zobrazhennyya skifs'koyi tanatolohichnoyi mifolohemy na Sakhnivs'kiy plastyni”, *Shidnij svit* 3 (2010): 72-73.

<sup>36</sup> Albert Bayburin and Georgy Levinton, “Pokhorony i svad'ba”, in *Issledovaniya v oblasti balto-slavyanskoy dukhovnoy kul'tury (pogrebal'nyy obryad)* (Moscow: Nauka, 1990), 91, n. 22.

<sup>37</sup> Oliynyk, “Zobrazhennyya skifs'koho muzykanta”, 46; Bessonova and Raevsky, “Zolota plastyna”, 43. In the story “The Black Fox of the Narts” the singing of the hero Bolat-Hamys on *fandyr* accompanies the magical resurrection in the tomb of the dead beautiful woman from Avaria (*Narty*, 442; Vertiienko, “Zobrazhennyya skifs'koyi tanatolohichnoyi”, 74-76).

<sup>38</sup> Rostovtsev, “Predstavleniye”, 8, fig. 3; Evgeny Chernenko, *Skifskiyе luchniki* (Kiev: Naukova Dumka, 1981), 112, fig. 79.

<sup>39</sup> Raevsky, *Mir*, 451, 538, n. 38.

<sup>40</sup> Konstantin Inostrantsev, “K istorii do-musul'manskoy kul'tury Sredney Azii”, *Zapiski Vostochnogo otdeleniya Russkogo arkhеologicheskogo Obshchestva* 24 (1917): 3.

<sup>41</sup> The presence of *rhytons* in Scythian burials and their images on Scythian stone stelae undoubtedly testify the cultic role of these vessels in the burial practice, at least since 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. In addition, *rhyton* (horn-vessel) was a common attribute of the heroized deceased and chthonic deities in Greece, Thrace and the North Caucasus (Bessonova, *Religioznyye predstavleniya*, 104).

<sup>42</sup> See in detail: Valerii Nikonov, “Kul't boyevykh toporov u drevnikh iranyazychnykh narodov: skify Severnogo Prichernomor'ya”, in *Academic Oriental Studies in Russia and the Near Abroad Countries (2007-2015): Archaeology, History, Culture*, eds Valerii Nikonov and Vadim Alyokhin (Saint Petersburg: Contrast Ltd. 2015), 414.

<sup>43</sup> Lyudmila Ermolenko, “Motiv votknutogo v zemlyu oruzhiya v geroicheskoy epose i izobrazitel'nykh pamyatnikakh”, in *Izobrazitel'nyye pamyatniki: stil', epokha, kompozitsii. Materialy tematicheskoy nauchnoy konferentsii. Sankt-Peterburg, 1-4 dekabrnya 2004 g.* (Saint-Petersburg: Kafedra arkhеologii, 2004), 38.

<sup>44</sup> Yakob Mackay, “Drevneiranskiy obychay ‘podnosheniya chashi’ i ego svyazi”, in *Sarmaty i Skifiya. Sbornik nauchnykh dokladov III mezhdunarodnoy konferentsii ‘Problemy sarmatskoy arkhеologii i istorii’* (Azov: Izd-vo YuNTs RAN, 1997), 147-148; Ermolenko, “Motiv votknutogo v zemlyu oruzhiya”, 36-37.

<sup>45</sup> Rostovtsev, “Predstavleniye”, table 2, 6.

<sup>46</sup> Yuri Levin, “Zerkalo kak potentsial'nyy semanticheskii ob'yekt”, *Trudy po znakovym sistemam* 22 (1988): 11.



derstand this act as giving power to the king<sup>47</sup>. B. Grakov offered to interpret plaques as a rite of involvement into power and a sign of deity patronage<sup>48</sup>. However, due to the specific purpose of the plaques as a part of the burial clothes and the existence of such a plot on the Bosphorus gravestones of the pre-Roman time, M. Artamonov prefers understanding it as a sacred union of the dead with the Goddess of the Afterworld<sup>49</sup>.

According to the hypothesis proposed by G. Widengren, based on the Zoroastrian ideas, the abovementioned Scythian plaques of the so-called Kul-Oba type represent an action, where the Great Goddess gives personal immortality for the soul of the king (“an act of communion, obviously after his death”)<sup>50</sup>. After Zoroastrian written sources the immortality was given for deceased with drinking a special drink and eating a special food (“spring butter”), these actions were turning him into eternal fifteen-year-old<sup>51</sup> in the afterlife (Yasna 9.5; Hadokht Nask 2.9; Videvdat 19.30). On the gold plaques of the Kul-Oba type in front of the Goddess with a mirror<sup>52</sup> we find the same image of the soul of the deceased as on the Sakhnivka plate. Thus, the images of these plaques occupy a certain intermediate position in the chronology of communion with the Goddess in the Afterworld. This is a kind of condensed mythological metaphor of the eschatological concept that is shown in an expanded visual form on the Sakhnivka plate.

However, unlike the other scenes, the Sakhnivka plate depicts the Scythian king not as a young man (i.e. resurrected / renewed soul), but as a mature man with a grown beard. Moreover, the king is armed. D. Raevsky considered this fact to be a significant argument in favor of “marriage” and not “eschatological” interpretation of the plate plot, and thus understood the plaques scenes as a motif of “sacred marriage” of the king and the goddess Tabiti<sup>53</sup>. Some other researchers tried to combine different views, noting that the Indo-Iranians rite of “contemplation in the mirror” and taking special drink are equally the characteristic for the funerary rites and for the sacred marriage, which explains their presence in the burial accessories with the reference to the idea of rebirth<sup>54</sup>.



Figure 5. *The gold plaque with the image of Goddess with a mirror and the “young” Scythian with a rhyton in front of her. Kul-Oba barrow, Eastern Crimea, 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, 350 mm × 370 mm. Source: Paul Du Brux, *Sobraniye sochineniy*, vol. 2 (Saint Petersburg: Editions Kolo, 2010), 119, fig. 276.*

It is significant that the mirror of the Goddess is represented in the same vertical plane at the center of the Sakhnivka plate together with the Scythian king’s weapon that has identical semantics of “portal”, the shortest sacred path to the Underworld. On the same lines there is the bowl, shown in the right hand of the Goddess, which should contain an imaginary drink of immortality that she gave to the deceased king for his rebirth. One may conclude that concentrated on one axis in the center of the plate are three powerful symbols: the weapon (or the whip), stuck on the ground by the Scythian king, the mirror and the bowl with the immortality drink from the Goddess. In mythological terms, the arrangement of Sakhnivka plate symbolizes, according to D. Raevsky, an act of the “sacred marriage” of the Scythian king with the Goddess, which was ritually recreated during the “annual festival” in the form of a sacred sleep near gold gifts outdoors<sup>55</sup>. The “model” for this ritual was the myth about the “first king” Kolaxais. The main argument in favor of his thoughts, D. Raevsky considers ethnographically documented facts of mirrors usage during wedding ceremonies in Indo-Iranian tradition<sup>56</sup>. This hypothesis was supported by other scholars. At the same time, there are quite serious arguments in favor of the eschatological interpretation of this plate arrangement, because all known attributes in the scenes of unification of the “Goddess and the King”, given the Sakhnivka plates plot, are involved in the context of the burial accessories. If the motif of the “sacred marriage” was related only to the royal circle of notions and rituals, as indicated by D. Raevsky, then all the sights with this plot should have been a purely royal attributes that is a kind of a ‘marker’ of the appropriate

<sup>47</sup> Rostovtsev, “Predstavleniye”, 6-7.

<sup>48</sup> Boris Grakov, *Skify* (Moscow: MGU, 1971), 83.

<sup>49</sup> Artamonov, “Antropomorfnyye bozhestva”, 64-65.

<sup>50</sup> Geo Widengren, “Eschatology, Iran”, in *Encyclopedia of World Art IV* (New York-Toronto-London: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 808.

<sup>51</sup> The fifteen years was perceived as an ideal age in Iranian tradition. This was the age of the people who lived during the reign of the mythical Yima, king of the realm of the dead (Yasna 9.5). The fifteen years is also the age of Zoroastrian initiation into a full member of the community. According to the Great Bundahish (19.1), the Dream was created by Ormazd in the form of a “young man at the age of fifteen”. This indicates that the dream was supposed to be thought as a temporary death. The incarnations of some Iranian deities are known to be at the age of fifteen: Tishtria (Yasht 8.13) and Verethragna (Yasht 14.17).

<sup>52</sup> Her image can be compared with the Iranian goddess Daena, who meets the souls of the deceased near the *cinuatō pārētū* – “the Bridge/Ford of the Accountant”, where the souls are judged and then sent up to Paradise or down to Hell (see in detail: Anna Vertiienko, “Obraz Daeny v obshcheiranskoy retrospektive”, in *Ladoga v kontekste istorii i arheologii Severnoy Evrazii. Sbornik statey, posvyashchënnyy pamyati Dmitriya Alekseyevicha Machinskogo* (Saint Petersburg: Nestor-Istoria, 2014), 39-51.

<sup>53</sup> Raevsky, *Mir*, 124.

<sup>54</sup> Bessonova, *Religioznyye predstavleniya*, 104; Kurochkin, “Boginya s zerkalom”, 70-74.

<sup>55</sup> Raevsky, *Mir*, 145.

<sup>56</sup> Raevsky, 122-137.

social status. According to the archaeological data, all the things, containing this scene, really come from the Scythian burial mounds of a higher society stratum. It means, that at least part of the items is probably related to the royal burials. Thus I can make a preliminary assumption that preferably this plot belongs to the cycle of the funeral notion, although is not necessarily associated with the image of the king. The latter can be explained by the tendency, characteristic for the archaic societies with the community cult organization, to prohibit (taboo) representation of the ordinary people directly in front of the deities, only the kings or the chiefs. They act as extraordinary and plenipotentary representatives of the group and have the corresponding sacred status of mediators between the higher, the terrestrial and the chthonic worlds.

It should be emphasized that the idea of the “sacred marriage”, according to D. Raevsky, displayed on the scene with the Goddess with the mirror and the king, at the same time, does not contradict the eschatological context, as the scientist underlined it. On the contrary, the marriage and the funeral rites demonstrate substantial identity of their semantics<sup>57</sup>, where the metaphor of death-wedding is due to be transferred to the burial ritual of the wedding terminology, and the funeral is assimilated to the mournful wedding<sup>58</sup>. Therefore, if one agrees with the understanding of the funeral as the initiated, “conditional” wedding, then one can explain the presence of the wedding items in the funeral rites. The ternary structure in the Ossetian wedding ceremony that includes semantic phase of “preparation”, “transition” and “consolidation of the new status”, which we also see in the funeral, confirms the existence of the identity between them on the structural level<sup>59</sup>. Thus, in the mythological context, the “central” arrangement of Sakhnivka plate may reflect the “sacred marriage” of the Hero and the Goddess, but in the Underworld is also seen as the attraction to her and obtaining immortality. This motif is typical for the Middle Eastern religious and mythological doctrine, according to which the marriage of the king/hero with the Goddess guarantees him immortality.

The role of the mirror in the Iranian tradition has a wider meaning than just in the wedding rites. As a magical tool, it is used in various important occasions: before travelling<sup>60</sup> (here, a set of ritual things partly repeats the set that accompanies the marriage)<sup>61</sup>; before buying a house<sup>62</sup>; a mirror is placed on the festive table *Haft-sin* during the holiday of *Nowruz*<sup>63</sup>. Tajiks put mirror to the cradle under the head of the newly born baby (mag-

ic-protective function)<sup>64</sup>. Thus, the mirror is one of the objects of “the universal set” for various Iranian rituals of the life cycle, but one can see certain regularity - the mirror appears in the ceremonies that begin the transition to a new human condition (social, territorial, vital), that is, it represents the idea of renewal.

The last figure in the culmination scene of Sakhnivka plate is an image of a young (beardless) Scythian behind the Goddess's throne. He is holding an object in his left hand raised above him. This person is on a smaller scale and “does not bear an impact on the interpretation of the scene”<sup>65</sup>. He is usually treated as a servant with a large fan, the servant performs “fetish function” driving away evil spirits with his fan which forms the newlyweds during the wedding ceremony<sup>66</sup>, or a dancer with bells, less probably with a *rhyton*<sup>67</sup>. Nevertheless, this young character deserves much more attention. Firstly, the person behind the Goddess is the only figure, who is not standing on his knee. Secondly, he is in a close proximity to the Goddess that indicates his extreme importance. Thirdly, this young completes a series of scenes of composition, given our order of their sequence. To clarify the role of him, one has to figure out what the object he is holding in his left hand. The figure is shown in a standing position, while copying the upper part did not completely fit into a ratio of height of a gold plate that is why the object was not clearly shown. However, in my opinion, we have a reason to believe that it is the *rhyton* in his left hand. Its horizontal position is proving that the *rhyton* is empty. Such assumption clearly emphasizes the eschatological significance of the scene and directly continues the previous plot with the bearded Scythian king in front of the Goddess with a mirror. Assuming eschatological interpretation of the scenes that take place in the Afterlife the latter figure is the same king (Kolaxais), but after he had taken the drink of immortality, derived from the Goddess.

The meeting of Kolaxais with the Goddess in the Afterlife clearly symbolizes the rebirth and his belonging to the Underworld and conforms to a solar essence of Kolaxais as well as to the notion cycle about the gods, associated with their fate to dying and restoration of nature. Osiris, Dionysus, Adonis were represented in the same way. They, as well as the others are closely associated with the idea of fertility, which was of the paramount importance in the seasonal New Year's festivals in archaic cultures. In the mythological context, the solar Kolaxais “revival” is the culmination of the eschatological myth that in any culture represents the eschatological model for the funeral rites ideology.

On all plaques of Kul-Oba type the Goddess is depicted in the side view<sup>68</sup>. The plaque from the Chorotomlyk chamber IV<sup>69</sup>, the plate of Karahodeuashkh<sup>70</sup>, as

<sup>57</sup> Bayburyn and Levinton, “Pokhorony i svad'ba”, 64-99; Novik Elena, *Obryad i fol'klor v sibirskom shamanizme: Opyt sopostavleniya struktur* (Moscow: Vostochnaya literatura RAN, 2004), 190.

<sup>58</sup> Olga Sedakova, *Poetika obryada. Pogrebal'naya obryadnost' vostochnykh i yuzhnykh slavyan* (Moscow: Indrik, 2004), 140-141.

<sup>59</sup> Dzerassa Dzlieva, “Svadebnyy fol'klor v tsikle obryadov osetinskoj svad'by: ‘Сафайы рæхыз’ - ‘Мыдыкъус’ - ‘Хызысæн’”, in *Lavrovskiy sbornik. Materialy Sredneaziatsko-Kavkazskikh issledovaniy. Etnologiya, istoriya, arkhologiya, kul'turologiya (2006-2007)* (Sankt-Petersburg, 2007), 189-191; Novik, *Obryad i fol'klor*, 182.

<sup>60</sup> Khedayat Sadek, *Neyrangistan* (transl. and ed. Nikolai A. Kislyakov), *Peredneaziatskiy etnograficheskiy sbornik 1* (Moscow: Izd-vo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1958), 272.

<sup>61</sup> Sadek, *Neyrangistan*, 263.

<sup>62</sup> Sadek, 295.

<sup>63</sup> Sadek, 316.

<sup>64</sup> Khakim Mukhitdinov, “Statuetki zhenskogo bozhestva s zerkalom iz Saksonokhura”, *Sovetskaya etnografia* 5 (1973): 105.

<sup>65</sup> Bessonova and Raevsky, “Zolota plastyna”, 47.

<sup>66</sup> Raevsky, *Mir*, 144.

<sup>67</sup> Rusyaeva, “Interpretatsiya zobrazen”, 50; Oliynyk, “Zobrazhennyya skifs'koho muzykanta”, 47.

<sup>68</sup> Vertiienko, “Obraz Daeny”, 46-47.

<sup>69</sup> Rostovtsev, “Predstavleniye”, 13.

<sup>70</sup> Rostovtsev, 10-11; Andrei Alekseev, *Zoloto skifskikh tsarey v sobranii Ermitazha* (Saint Petersburg: Iz-vo Gosudarstvennogo Ermitazha, 2012), 234-235.



well as the scenes with the Goddess and the rider (for instance, the Merdzhany *rhyton*)<sup>71</sup> portray the female deity *en face*. The Goddess's posture, seen on a half quarter, is available only on Sakhnivka plate<sup>72</sup>. In my view, this iconography is explained by the fact that the solitary figure of the Goddess here refers simultaneously to the both scenes: 1) the bearded Scythian king meeting (deceased / Kolaxais image) on the right of Goddess, and 2) the image depicting already involved young Scythian ("regenerated" Kolaxais) on the left of deity.

Furthermore, attention can be drawn to one more moment. Plaques of Kul-Oba type, as well as the central arrangements of Sakhnivka plate, portray *heroes* on the right of the Goddess. The same can be said about the scenes where the rider is approaching the Goddess. This arrangement can be explained by the spatial characteristics of the Underworld and the way to it. One may give an analogy to the scene - the image on the gold plaques from the chamber IV of Chortomlyk mound where the male person, again a young is holding an object, presumably a *rhyton*, is shown on the left of the Goddess (*en face*)<sup>73</sup>. But the Sakhnivka plate plot with Scythian young man, standing on the left of the Goddess, is not unique and has at least one parallel among synchronous creations of the Scythian toreutics. Thus, the central scene of Sakhnivka plate combines the elements of the two iconographic types: with the *hero* on the right and on the left.

The same semantic motive of the pictorial program is found on the stele from the "Senior" Trekhbratny barrow (4<sup>th</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BC, Eastern Crimea). Proceeding from the features of scenes stratification, the images on this stele can be interpreted as containing two existential plans which recreate consecutive phases of the eschatological myth. The forefront represents the meeting of the Goddess (or a dead woman associated with her) in *naiskos* with the rider (the heroized dead man). The second shows the young man in a *quadriga* that is, perhaps, the image of the reborn soul of the dead as on Sakhnivka plate, or the recreation of the funeral races motive<sup>74</sup>.

There is a necessity to give a number of subsidiary arguments in favor of my interpretation of the final scene as eschatological. The place of the plate discovery is worth attention. It was the hole (hiding place?) for a stem in the south-eastern corner of the burial chamber<sup>75</sup>. It means it was placed in the direction, associated with the idea of rebirth and life, opposite to the Underworld and death.

Besides, S. Yatsenko noticed that in the Scythian anthropomorphic images on the toreutics there are special external features of death condition that are used to mark those who have died or are to die according to the scene's plot. This is either an ornament representation of rings on the wide trousers or the opposite coat clasp not from the right to the left, as it is done by people alive, but from the left to the right<sup>76</sup>. On the scenes of Sakhnivka plate, available for identification, all the figures, except one, have "the clasp of the dead" such as the Scythian with a knife in the scene of sacrifice, the cupbearer with the *amphorae*, and, most importantly, the bearded Scythian king. In my opinion, the young Scythian on the left of the Goddess has the opposite clasp that represents the change of his status.

The recreation of the similar plots on the carving in Alan crypt 1 on Kryvaya River can serve as one more disclosing proof in the meaning of the Sakhnivka plate. The former was found in the Kuban' region and dates back to the 10<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. These motives in a crypt are located on the western and northern walls, i.e. those that best correspond to the localization of the Underworld<sup>77</sup>. The fact of representing these motives in medieval nomad's crypts demonstrates their explicit attitude towards the sphere of notions about the posthumous fate.

### 3. Conclusions

Further reconstruction the mythem of "death-rebirth" is possible by analyzing the semantics of a number of works of visual compositions on the Scythian toreutics from 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, especially Sakhnivka plate which, in my opinion, have an eschatological context. The scenes on this plate, when viewed in a circle from right to left, show sequence deployment of the myth of supernatural fate of the first Scythian mortal (Kolaxais). The iconography of the Goddess on the plate in half-turn posture and her head shown *en face* demonstrates that she refers simultaneously to two connected scenes: meeting of the Scythian-king and the scene with the young Scythian (revived Kolaxais). Nevertheless, only the young Scythian is drawn in caftan wrapped from right to left, i.e. the clasp of the "living person" (as opposed to other figures), which represents his sacred status of "reborn". Semantic analogies to this scene are probably represented on other works of toreutics and the tombstone relief from the "Senior" Trekhbratny barrow. The composition similar to Sakhnivka plate is recreated on the carving of the Alan crypt dating back to 10<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. The fact that the plots have appeared already in the Christian time indicates the vitality of these ideas among Iranian speaking peoples and confirms its belonging to the central and key component of eschatological beliefs.

<sup>71</sup> Valentina Mordvintseva and Mikhail Treister, *Proizvedeniya toreutiki i yuvelirnogo iskusstva v Severnom Prichernomor'ye. 2 v. do n. e. - 2 v. n. e.* (Simferopol-Bonn: IA NANU, 2007), 6, tab. 3 (B23.1).

<sup>72</sup> On the Bosphorus gravestones of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD the Goddess has a similar posture (Elena Savostina, "K simvolike izobrazheniya luka na Bospore", *Sovetskaya arkheologia* 5 (1983): 45-46; Treister, "Oruzhiye sarmatskogo tipa na Bospore v I-II vv. n. e.", *Drevnosti Bospora* 14 (2010): 489-490; Patric-Alexander Kreuz, *Die Grabreliefs aus dem Bosphoranischen Reich* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 1012, Abb. 90 (Kat. 826); 1013, Abb. 91 (Kat. 828); Abb. 92 (Kat. 830); 1036, Abb. 137 (Kat. 1066); 1038, Abb. 142 (Kat. 1086)).

<sup>73</sup> Rostovtsev, "Predstavleniye o monarkhicheskoy vlasti", 11.

<sup>74</sup> Hanna Vertiienko, "The Temporal Pattern on the Funerary Relief from the 'Senior' Trekhbratnyi Barrow", in *Exploring Art and Literature: Interpretations, Perspectives and Influences*, ed. Fahd Mohammed Taleb Saeed Alolaqi (New York: Nova Publishers, 2018), 1-16.

<sup>75</sup> Bessonova and Raevsky, "Zolota plastyna", 39-40.

<sup>76</sup> Sergei Yatsenko, "Epicheskiy syuzhet iranoyazychnykh kochevnikov v drevnostyakh stepnoy Evrazii", *Vestnik drevney istorii* 4 (2000): 94-95, n. 38; Yatsenko, *Kostyum Drevney Evrazii (iranoyazychnyye narody)* (Moscow: Vostochnaya literatura RAN, 2006), 65, n. 42.

<sup>77</sup> Vladimir Kuznetsov, "Srednevekovyye dol'menoobraznyye sklepy Verkhnego Prikuban'ya", *Kratkie soobsheniya Instituta arkheologii RAN* 85 (1961): 106-117; Okhonko Nikolai, "Izobrazheniya na stenakh grobnitsy s reki Krivoy (Prikuban'ye)", *Sovetskaya arkheologia* 2 (1983): 78-90, fig. 2, 3; Yatsenko, "O sarmato-alanskom syuzhete", 190, fig. 1, 2.

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