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CAN THE SCYTHIAN BATTLE-AXE BE A WEAPON OF THE *MÄNNERBUND*?

Key words: Scythians, battle-axe, *Männerbund*, Solokha, *gorytos*, images.

Since the middle of the 20th century, the institution of the so-called *Männerbund* has also been studied in the ancient Indian and Iranian traditions in the contrast between such *juvenile male gangs* and the adult age group [1; 2 p. 38–49]. Probably the scenes of confrontation between young and mature warriors in the works of Scythian toreutics should be interpreted from this point of view. Such a scene is represented on the silver gilt cover of a *gorytos* from the Solokha mound (4th c. BC, Zaporizhya district, Ukraine) [3, c. 73–75 (кат. 53)] (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. A battle scene on the cover of a *gorytos* from the Solokha mound
(after 4, c. 249, рис. 10)

The fact that one young warrior (the last left figure) was depicted half-naked and with the battle-axe in his right hand and a wicker shield on his left one may indicate his belonging to a youth military alliance. The members of these unions tried to distinguish themselves with maximum courage and bravery in battle, apparently neglecting even protective armour. Here I also can recall that in the Avestan Yasht 14, which belongs to the sphere of warrior cults and is dedicated to the deity of victory Verethragna, an ancient Indo-Iranian apotropaic ritual is presented, which was intended to protect the body of a warrior. This ritual was analysed in depth by V. Sadovski [5, p. 157–162]. Let us suppose that such a magical ritual virtually “enabled” the young warrior to fight without protective armour (like Germanic and Scandinavian berserker warriors [6; 7; 8]), which may be inherent in Scythian warrior practices. Probably, a young warrior of the same status, armed with only a small single-bladed axe, was depicted on a silver gilded bowl from the mound No. 3 of the “Chastye Kurgany” Group.



Fig. 2. The image of a young Scythian leaning on an axe on a bowl from the barrow No. 3 of the “Chastye Kurgany” Group (after 9, c. 246)

The scene with him and an aged Scythian, who gives him a bow, could be interpreted as an initiation of a young man to higher warrior status. The axe, in this case, is the first weapon of the young warrior which he has already got in the time of his participation in the youth gang. It should be noted that before the 4th century BC such *Männerbund* plots could be transmitted through the semantic code of animal style.

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УДК 94(31)

DOI <https://doi.org/10.36059/978-966-397-414-9-5>

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ОТКУДУ ЄСТЬ ПОШЛА ЯПОНСЬКА ЗЕМЛЯ...

Ключові слова: Во / Ва, династійні історії, Жибень, історія Сходу, Китай, Ніхон / Ніппон, Стародавній Схід, сходознавство, Цзицзун, Японія.

Японське історіописання не повідомляє, коли, як і за яких обставин Японія стала “Країною Вранішнього Сонця” *Ніхон / Ніппон* (日本). Залишається звертатись до китайських династійних “нормативних історій”