

Path to the Realm of the Dead: Vedic Trita

(Veda section)

This paper explores various aspects of the Vedic mythology related to death, the journey to the netherworld, and the process of dying and returning from the world of the dead. Its focus is on such a seemingly unrelated to death and afterlife mythological character as Vedic Trita/Trita Āptya, who is mentioned in different hymns of the Ṛgveda, Atharvaveda and in later texts (Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa and Mahābhārata). The author compares and contrasts the Ṛgvedic myth with materials from Atharvaveda, Mahābhārata, and Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa as well as with a series of Iranian, Old Slavic, and Baltic myths and burial rituals. By using the comparative approach, an attempt is made to reconstruct an older myth, which we find some traces of in the Ṛgveda, and to clarify the mythological role of Trita Aptya for the Vedic Aryans and his relation to death and the netherworld.

The mythological motif of a path to the netherworld (the world of the dead or ancestors), e.g. crossing the waters, going over fire, ascending a tree, descending into a well, etc., is isolated and investigated in combination with the motif of a mythological character who undertakes a journey to the netherworld, completes it, and returns back to the world of the living.