

Projeto de Estudos Judaico-Helenísticos - PEJ

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**"HESIODIC REMINISCENCES IN ZOROASTRIAN-
HELLENISTIC APOCALYPSES"**

SCHOOL FOR ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES, UNIVERSIDADE DE LONDRES -
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Sources used

- * Hesiod, *Works and Days*.
- * Indian texts.
- * Persian apocalyptic material (especially the *Zand i Wahman Yasn*).
- * Lactantius' texts referring to the *Oracle of Hystaspes*, especially the *Divine Institutions*.



Main problems posed regarding the mythical complex

- * 1. Common PIE background
- * 2. Borrowing of sources in Zoroastrian-Hellenistic texts
- * 3. Parting of ways between Hesiod and other kinds of Indo-European eschatological sources



Main thesis defended in this presentation

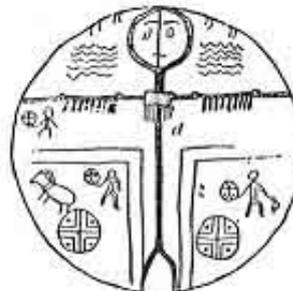
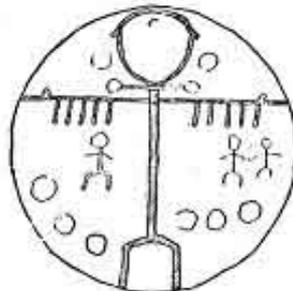
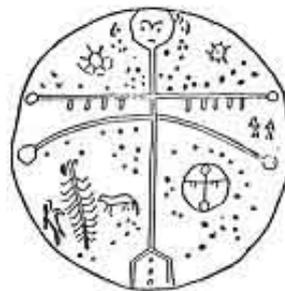
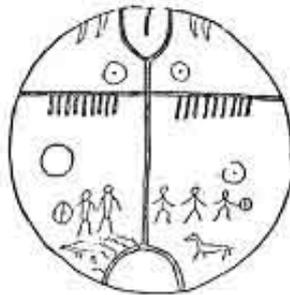
* The Iranian idea of the perfection of the world does not have a parallel in Greek sources - only the idea of the succession of good to bad ages, characterized by metals of deteriorating qualities from gold to iron has a parallel.

* The concept of a sequence of ages characterized either by metals (Greek, Iranian) or by colours (Hindu tradition) is inherited from a common Indo-European period.

* A Shamanistic origin of the *yugas* concept is suggested by the pictures on drums showing the “primordial man” / “cosmic tree” complex (either Indo-European or, perhaps, Turkic).



Examples of Shamanistic drum-art related to the cosmic tree and ages of man



**Table 1 - “Iron Age” vs. type of evil**

<i>Works and Days</i> passage	Specific type of evil
177	Tiredness with work
176	Sadness during the day
177	Death at night ¹
178	Problems thrown to men by gods
181	Newborn looking like old men
182	Father and son in conflict
182	Son and father in conflict ²
183	Guest and host in conflict
184	Comrades in conflict
184	Siblings in conflict (hate)
185	Men dishonouring old parents
186	Men using harsh wording with their parents
187	Hardened hearts
187	Impiety towards the gods
188	Not repaying parents’ the toils of raising
189	Might is right ³
189	Wars and ransacking among cities
190-191	Despise for the trustworthy
190-191	Despise for the good
190-191	Despise for the just
191-192	Praise of the evil-doer

¹ Again the triad “death” - “black colour” - “iron (age)”, a constant throughout Indian, Iranian and Hesiodic versions of the myth.

² These two cannot be dealt as one and the same issue - the first one implies a somewhat more serious disorder, since respect of parents regarding their own sons was not an issue at the time; the second one implies a more “conventional” pattern of “world turned upside down”, since children should obey their parents at any given time.

³ The last three themes are also present in Polybius’ *Histories* 6, while discussing the origins of politically organized societies: he claims that it lies in the ingratitude of sons towards their parents (who realize that there must be another form of solidarity among men besides family ties), and the subsequent rule of the strong in the constitutional forms of government.



191-192	Praise of violence
192	Might is right (=189 above)
192	Lack of respect
193-194	Wicked hurting the worthy through lies
193-194	Wicked hurting the worthy through false oaths
195	Envy
196	Gossip
198	Pleasure in evil-doing
197-198	Generalized shamelessness
200-201	Bitterness on what the gods have left to men
201	Impotence against evil

Table 2

ZWY passage	Specific type of evil
ZWY 1.1	Wrath (linked to dishevelled hair)
ZWY 3.15-18	Riches without children
ZWY 3.23 (“Gold Age”)	Demons fleeing to a “dark” region ⁴
ZWY 3.24 (“Silver Age”)	Demons separated from men
ZWY 3.25 (“Copper Age”)	Consolidation of “orthodoxy” ⁵
ZWY 3.26 (“Bronze Age”)	End of “heterodoxy”
ZWY 3.27 (“Lead Age”)	Destruction of “the wicked <i>Akandgar-i Kilisyakih</i> ”; new flight of Ahriman and the devils towards “darkness” ⁶
ZWY 3.28 (“Steel Age”)	End of the heterodoxy (Mazdak)
ZWY 3.29 (“Mixed Iron”)	Wrath (again linked to dishevelled hair)

⁴ This could be associated to the netherworld but also to the colour of the night in *Works*, 177, and to the colour of iron in the *yugas* and in Hesiod.

⁵ Which implies obviously a risk of deviation from it, referred to twice in other ZWY passages.

⁶ See note 35 above.

Table 3

Lactantius' DI 7	Hesiod, <i>Works and Days</i> , 176-201 ("Iron Age")
7.14 - Announcement of the last age of a weary world	177; 181
7.15 - Decrease of righteousness	187
Impiety	
Avarice	
Lust	192
Good men prey to bad	190-191; 192; 193-194
Good men harassed by all sides	
Wicked are rich	NO PARALLEL ⁷
Good men calumniated	193-194
Good men in need	NO PARALLEL
Justice confounded	193-194
No law	189; 193-194
Gains only by violent means	189; 192
Boldness and violence all around	
No faith	187
No peace	189
No kindness	187
No shame	197-198
No truth	182-184
No security	
No government	NO PARALLEL
No rest from evils	201
All earth in turmoil	189
Wars everywhere	189
Nations at arms	189
Endless conflicts	
(After that, the woes refer more specifically to Rome and fit into a sort of "sibylline pattern")	
DI 7.16 - Cities destroyed	189
Death of inhabitants given in detail ⁸	NO PARALLEL
DI 7.17 - Righteousness cast out	190-191
Innocence hated	

⁷ The theme is not mentioned in the "Iron Age" itself, but Hesiod's lengthy complaints about Perses (*Works*, 212 onwards) are hardly placed randomly after the description of an age where brethren hurt one another, the just suffer etc. The same holds for following items in Lactantius' description of perverted judges, outlaws and the likes.

⁸ These are, in Lactantius DI 7.16, respectively by fire (*ekpyrosis*), sword (wars), earthquakes, water (Flood), disease and famine. Life has become overall unpleasant because of these natural disturbances - but again these evils fit more into the catalogue of woes typical of sibyllina, especially of the last four books of the SibOr and have no parallel, in the form they appear in DI 7.16, in Hesiod's "Iron Age".

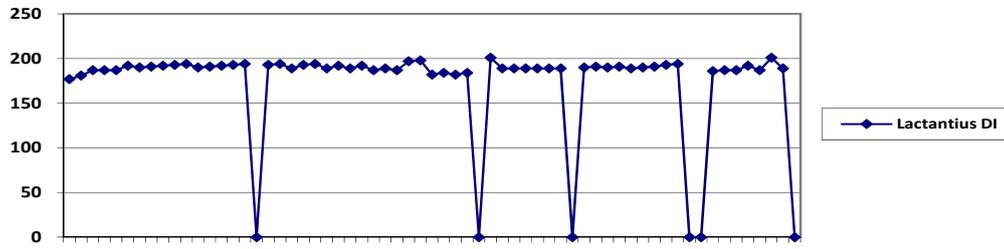


Wicked prey indiscriminately	189; 190-191
No law	193-194
No order	NO PARALLEL
No military discipline	NO PARALLEL
No respect for age	186; 187
No piety	187; 192
No pity for women and children	187
All things “mixed” and confounded	201
Universal robbery	189
Isolation of the righteous	NO PARALLEL
DI 7.21 - Weighting of sins by God	ESCHATOLOGICAL SECTION; WITH PERSIAN PARALLELS BUT NOT IN HESIOD ⁹
Scorching with fire	
Innocent will not perish by fire	

⁹ Some passages in the ZWY display parallels to both Lactantius and Hesiod, but are, interestingly, out of the sections on the ages of the world in chapters 1 and 3: these are passages dealing with the works of righteous being calumniated (ZWY 4.37); false oaths (4.38); injustice (4.60); constant falsehood (4.39); impiety (4.40); shamelessness (4.62); “might is right”, related to *xešm* (4.61). The earth gets darkened - in a sense, like iron and death are also dark: *gēhan nizm ud tom ud tārīgīh* (6.4); fathers stand against their sons (6.11 - this passage includes perils to property).



Table 4





Conclusion

* Lactantius', for all his deficiencies regarding Scripture, may be a very important link to understand how the "ages of the world" mythical complex spread and was consumed in Late Antiquity. His text is not fragmentary; his sequence of woes according to our exam in tables 3 and 4 (and taking into account the previous discussion on the PIE origin of the myth of the primeval man et.al.) could suggest something like the scheme below for the development of the myth check Table 5 in the handout.

