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Of Many Souls of Man: Comparative Studies on the Concepts of a Soul(s) in Different Cultures¹

ABSTRACT

Throughout the history many different concepts concerning afterlife have been developed. Especially the spiritual forms that are leaving the body after the death of a person. The term “soul” is not very precise in that context and this paper is trying to explain definitions of a “soul” based on the variety of examples from history of human beliefs. It is obvious that simple and single definition cannot be formulated for all different kinds of religions but the classification of at least some elements would be very helpful for studying the matter further. The source material taken into consideration include Siberian shamanism, ancient Egyptian religion, Mesopotamian and Anatolian concepts, as well as the Chinese and the Maya beliefs.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

Ancient religions, Egypt, Bible, soul

Soul – problems of definition and meaning

The concept of a single soul is deeply rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition and this is the reason why such terminology is used in comparative religion studies. The reason why I am mentioning it in the beginning is also an explanation given for the title of the whole paper. If we look into the greatest,

¹ This study is based on the subject I was teaching in the Department of Comparative Religion, Comenius University in Bratislava during my research stay in the frame of National Scholarship Program of the Slovak Republic (winter semester 2015/2016).

many volumes long, English language source called “Century Dictionary” which was completed in the end of 19th century – following definition is present there for a “soul:” “A substantial entity believed to be that in each person which lives, feels, thinks and wills.”² All the other dictionaries suggest more or less similar explanation with one thing in common – that the “soul” is of a singular number. Even more in the source quoted above there is a statement that “it is also commonly believed that soul has no parts.”³ Both concepts are not so common and in contradiction to what we can read they were accepted by minority of cultures as will be shown later. Also the exact meaning of the word which is in use now in Christian context have completely different origins – as for example in Germanic and Slavic groups of languages.⁴ For the first one (including English) it may come from Proto-Germanic root: **saiwaz* – “from the lake.” The lake or sea was a stopping place of the souls before birth or after death in northern European beliefs so reconstructed meaning would be: “coming from or belonging to the sea.”⁵ The pan-Slavic word for “soul” – *duša* (*duše* in Czech) has connection to Proto-Indo-European root which also is an origin for the word for “smoke:” *dim* (or *dym*) also peculiar to this whole language group.⁶ Taking into consideration both this information and data from the languages which preserved some terms closely related to the meaning of reconstructed Proto-Indo-European root the definition may be: “something air-like (breath) or smoke-like (when visible) that resides inside human body and can leave it.”⁷

² *Soul*, eds. W. D. Whitney, B. E. Smith, [in:] *The Century Dictionary*, 1889–1909, digitalized version, [online:] <http://www.global-language.com/century> [accessed: 25.03.2017].

³ *Ibidem*, p. 5781.

⁴ I have discussed the problem of definition of soul and its original meaning in Germanic and Slavic languages in the paper: Ł. Byrski, *The Problem of Cultural and Religious Knowledge in Translating Ancient Texts*, [in:] *Translating Cultures: Thematic Edition of Collected Works in 4 Volumes (Kulture u prevodu: tematski zbornik u 4 knjige)*, vol. 1, eds. A. Vraneš, Lj. Marković, Beograd 2016, pp. 143–154.

⁵ D. Harper, *Soul*, [in:] *Online Etymology Dictionary*, 2001–2015, [online:] <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=soul> [accessed: 25.03.2017].

⁶ *An Etymological Dictionary of the Proto-Indo-European Language. A Revised Edition of Julius Pokorny's "Indogermanisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch"*, eds. G. Starostin, A. Lubotsky, 2007, pp. 711, 725, [online:] <https://marciorenato.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/pokorny-julius-proto-indo-european-etymological-dictionary.pdf> [accessed: 25.03.2017].

⁷ See Slovak and Czech word for: “bladder” (or “air chamber”) and Polish term for an old type of cloth iron: “iron with a soul”.

Siberian cultures⁸

In contradiction to the definition presented above in Siberian cultures not only everyone have several souls but also these souls are made from few different elements each responsible for other functions during life and after the death of a person. In south-Siberian Shors culture four types of souls are specified: *tyn* – responsible for breathing, *kut* – responsible for health, *sürün-eze* – earthly soul that stay on earth for some time after death as a kind of ghost and can disturb the relatives of the deceased and *üzüt* – soul that travels to the underworld after death of the body.⁹ According to Yakuts there are only two types of souls: *kut* – connected with earthly realm and possessing the ability to change into *üor* – a ghoulish being harming people after the death and *sür* – heavenly immortal soul. *Kut* can be divided into three further elements: *buor kut* – “earthly soul” circling around the person, *salgyn kut* – “air soul” living inside human body and leaving it only during sleep and *ije kut* – “mother soul” staying always in the body until its death.¹⁰ Similar patterns can be found in western, central and far north parts of Siberia. Evenks (Tunguz) believe that each person has three souls: bodily soul – *bejen*, “shadow” – *hanian* and the third – heavenly soul which is called either *los* or *main*. The first one stay always in the body but the last one is residing in a kind of paradise near ancestral river. As observed on Siberian examples some of the souls can die so also common understanding of a “soul” as something immortal does not apply here. Both *bejen* and *los/main* are mortal, only *hanian* which can separate from the body during life of person can survive the death but changed into other form called *omi*. This is only temporary state as *omi* have to escape as a bird from the Spirit of the Underworld who wants to kidnap it. Later this soul come back to earth to the woman’s womb to start a new life.¹¹ Interesting beliefs are those of Kets who think that both people and animals have souls. The difference however is in numbers – people have seven souls and animals just one. The most important soul is known as *ulbej* and it possesses the ability to separate from the body – it is imagined as unseen but material miniature form of the person floating around the body. *Ulbej* could return to the realm of living

⁸ This part of the study enlists examples taken from M. Koško’s book *Mitologia ludów Syberii* which shows differences in the beliefs from that region in the best way for the purposes of this study.

⁹ M. M. Koško, *Mitologia ludów Syberii*, Warszawa 1990, pp. 113–114.

¹⁰ Ibidem, pp. 115–116.

¹¹ Ibidem, pp. 116–117.

announced in the dreams of a family members of the deceased. It returns to the special figure made for this purpose called *dangols*.¹² Selkups say either person can have soul or not. In that other case it means very short life. Soul is divided into two parts: *kejty* – “breath” and *tika* – “shadow” both of which vanish with the death of a body. According to Selkups the soul is given to everyone by an old woman name Ylyntyl Kota who holds two books: “The Book of Heavenly Son Ič” and “Dark Book of Death” and the life expectancy depends on in which book the soul was written by her.¹³ In the language of Nenets (Samoyeds) there is no precise term for “soul,” there are however few elements that form something similar. These elements are: “breath,” “shadow” and sometimes “blood.” Nganasans on the contrary believe that each person have many souls and most important are: *battiu* – “breath,” *sejmy* – “eyes,” *dije* – “brain,” *sa* – “heart,” *kam* – “blood” and *sedangka* – “shadow.” The last one can change into evil ghouls called *barusi* which thrives on organs of a living person.¹⁴ Mentioning of this elements and types of soul will be important for later comparisons.

Table 1: Soul beliefs in Siberian cultures - comparison

	culture	number of souls	names of souls	meaning	number of parts	names of parts of souls	meaning	nature of soul (mortal, immortal or changing into something)
1	Shors	4 souls	<i>tyn</i>	“breath”			responsible for breathing, mortal	
			<i>kut</i>				responsible for health, mortal	
			<i>sürün-eze</i>				can change into ghost/ghoul, mortal	
			<i>üzüt</i>				immortal (go to the underworld and can return back to earth)	

¹² Ibidem, pp. 119.

¹³ Ibidem, pp. 121–123; These “books” are believed to be written on a stone.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 124.

2	Yakuts	2 souls	<i>kut</i>	3 parts (<i>kut</i>)	<i>buor kut</i>	"earthly soul"	earthly soul (<i>kut</i> can change into <i>üor</i> = ghou)	
					<i>salgyn kut</i>	"air soul"		
			<i>sür</i>		<i>ije kut</i>	"mother soul"	<i>sür</i> is immortal (heavenly soul)	
3	Evenks	3 souls	<i>bejen</i>	"bodily soul"			connected with the body, mortal	
			<i>hanian</i>	"shadow"	immortal, can leave the body during live, change into temporary form <i>omi</i> and then into bird and come back to earth to woman's womb and is reborn			
			<i>los or main</i>	"soul"	resides in paradise far from the body but die with it			
4	Kets	7 souls (people), 1 soul (animals)	<i>ulbej</i> other names unknown	<i>ulbej</i> can leave the body, but should stay nearby, can communicate through dreams, can come back and live inside figure called <i>dangols</i>				
5	Selkups	1 complex soul or none	<i>ilsat</i>	"this by which we live", also "sun ray"	2 parts	<i>kejty</i>	"breath"	die with body
						<i>(ilsat) tika</i>	"(living) shadow"	die with body
6	Nenets	1 complex soul			3 elements	"breath"	go to underworld or is eaten by evil spirit	
						"shadow"	no data	
						"blood"	go to underworld	
7	Nganasans	many souls (6 most important souls)	<i>battiu</i>	"breath"	<i>battiu</i> leave the body as first, sometimes follow different path than other souls, is sent back to earth to body of a woman giving birth			
			<i>sejmy</i>	"eyes"	follow <i>battiu</i> to the underworld			
			<i>dije</i>	"brain"				

		<i>sa</i>	"heart"	
		<i>kam</i>	"blood"	
		<i>sedangka</i>	"shadow"	follow <i>battiu</i> to the underworld, can change into <i>barusi</i> – vampire eating the organs of the living

Based on: M. M. Koško, *Mitologia ludów Syberii*, Warszawa 1990, pp. 113-125.

Ancient Egyptian beliefs

In ancient Egypt one of the most sophisticated and complex concepts of anthropology was created in which basically nine elements or parts of human being co-existed and were responsible for specific functions. They are enlisted in many different configurations and orders and some scholars specify less than nine elements. Kazimierz Michałowski has given attention to the importance of number nine for the ancient Egyptians which is multiplicity of three and the latter is connected for example to triads of gods.¹⁵ Kazimierz Banek and Wiesław Bator also mention the same elements but sometimes with not exactly the same interpretations of their functions.¹⁶ They are: (1) *akh* ("shiny form"), (2) *ba* ("soul"), (3) *ka* ("spiritual personality"), (4) *ran* ("name"), (5) *ib / hati* ("heart"), (6) *sheut / khaibut* ("shadow"), (7) *sekhem* ("potency"), (8) *sahu* ("actual spiritual body") and finally (9) *khat / djet / sat* ("physical body")¹⁷. François Dumas narrows this number to five: "physical body," *ka*, *ba*, *akh*, "shadow" and Andrzej Ćwiek divide them into two categories: "(physical) body" including *djet* ("body") and "heart," and "spiritual aspects" to which he counts five elements: *ka*, *ba*, *akh*, "shadow" and "name."¹⁸ As we discuss here only elements that can be considered as "soul" I will omit explanation of "physical body." Those parts of the human being that are not enlisted by all scholars are not so well understood and presenting all the interpretations would exceed the frames of this paper.¹⁹

¹⁵ K. Michałowski, *Nie tylko piramidy... Sztuka dawnego Egiptu*, Warszawa 1974, p. 105.

¹⁶ W. Bator, *Religia starożytnego Egiptu. Perspektywa religioznawcza*, Kraków 2012, p. 235.

¹⁷ The elements here are enlisted in a fixed order chosen by me according to their nature.

¹⁸ F. Dumas, *Od Narmera do Kleopatry: Cywilizacja starożytnego Egiptu*, tłum. I. Zawadzka, Warszawa 1973, p. 208; A. Ćwiek, *Hieroglify egipskie. Mowa bogów*, Poznań 2015, pp. 183–187.

¹⁹ One of the possible interpretations can be found in: W. Bator, op. cit., pp. 226–236.

Dumas and Ćwiek select in their works the most comparable elements to what is defined as “soul” here.

Ka is a life force created in the beginning of the world and given by the creator god Atum to all that is alive.²⁰ Because every living being possess the *ka* the Egyptians understood practices that later Greeks interpreted as “magic” as *ḥk3* (*heka* or *hike*) – “manipulations of the other being(s)’s *kas*.” Some beings could have more than one *ka* – like the sun god Ra, who was “the owner” of 14 *kas*: power, strength, creative will, stability, nobility, magical intelligence, radiance, consciousness, taste, eyesight, hearing, abundance, nourishment, life and burial durability.²¹ As can be observed here the *kas* were some special personal abilities that anyone could possess but it was only possible for gods to have them all. Hieroglyphic representation of *ka* (*k3*) consist of two arms raised upwards. It can be understood as: “spirit;” “spiritual body;” “protective god” also sometimes was interpreted as a “spiritual double” but homophone of this sign bear also the meaning “bull” and – in plural form – as *kau*: “ancestors.”²² This part of human – in opposition to *ba* – is responsible for all the unconscious actions of the living being and keeping the body in good condition. *Ka* unlike *ba* cannot survive without being fed even after person’s death so burial offerings of food and drinks in the tomb are mostly addressed to *ka*. If it is not fed it can harm living members of the family causing depressions, bad luck and sickness – in other words energetic vampirism.²³

In hieroglyphs and iconography *ba* (*b3*) is shown as a black stork or bird with human head. It could exist without physical body and act in the realm of the living. In plural form – *bau* – means: „power,” „strenght.”²⁴ Other beings also have *bas* and again gods possess more than one. According to beliefs it is an element responsible for life choices that when in the body of living resides in the heart (*ib*).²⁵ It can be observed during life as an internal voice or conscience. This is probably one of the reasons of the special treatment of heart during mummification process. *Ba* is sometimes depicted as drinking water from the pond so it is not relying on offering from the living relatives only.²⁶

²⁰ A. Ćwiek, op. cit., p. 184; W. Bator, op. cit., p. 232.

²¹ A. Ćwiek, op. cit., p. 185; G. Rachet, *Słownik cywilizacji egipskiej*, tłum. J. Śliwa, Katowice 2006, p. 146.

²² Ibidem.

²³ W. Bator, op. cit., pp. 232–233.

²⁴ G. Rachet, op. cit., p. 88.

²⁵ According to Egyptian beliefs heart was an organ responsible for thinking. In other words “heart” was nothing else than “mind”.

²⁶ See: G. Rachet, op. cit., p. 88.

The meaning of the word *akh* (ꜣḫ) was something similar to “shiny” and in hieroglyphs it was represented by the bird ibis with tuft. The same hieroglyph was also a root of the verb: „successful” / „effective” / „glorious.”²⁷ *Akhs* of the deceased people were identified with stars what is connected with the meaning “shiny.”²⁸ It could be communicated by the living and therefore “letters to the dead” issued by ancient Egyptians were addressed to it. It was possible for *akh* to give answers in dreams of living persons. The expression: “to join with his *akh*” suggested to some scholars that it was probably residing outside the body also because it belong to the heavenly sphere²⁹. According to another interpretation the *akh* was an immortal perfect being created through joining of *ka* and *ba* after the death which was done thanks to special rituals called *sakh* – “to transform into an *akh*.”³⁰

“Shadow” is still something that is not fully understand by the egyptologists. Much more can be said about “name.” *Ran* or *ren* was specific Egyptian concept because it not only meant “name” *per se*. In general it was an essence of individual qualities of a person.³¹ But there are two aspects of this term. On the one hand there is a “secret name” given to a newborn child by the seven Hathors. The act of giving “secret name” was actually the gift of life. Only named objects exist and can be animated. This name was supposed to remain unknown. Whoever obtain knowledge of somebody’s “secret name” would take control over him and his *ka* (see: term *heka* above) as Isis did with the sun god Ra in the myth. But this was also used by Egyptians in more “practical” way – they equipped their dead with “cheat sheets” hidden in the mummy’s bandages and containing the names of guardians of the underworld.

On the other hand there was something that I call “public name” which is to some extent opposite concept. This kind of name not only was supposed to be known but also speaking it maintained the deceased in the afterlife. Because of that names were often recorded in written form and the worst kind of punishment for the dead was to scratch off all of his names so no one could speak it. It was so called *damnatio memoriae* often practiced on

²⁷ Ibidem; A. Ćwiek, op. cit., p. 186.

²⁸ W. Bator, op. cit., p. 227.

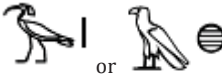
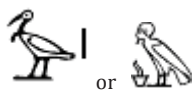




²⁹ G. Rachtel, op. cit., p. 88.

³⁰ O. Goelet Jr., *A Commentary*, [in:] *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Book of Going Forth by Day – The Complete Papyrus of Ani*, ed. E. von Dassow, San Francisco 2008, p. 143; A. Ćwiek, op. cit., p. 186.

³¹ See: Ł. Byrski, *Dusza uwieczniona w kamieniu – znaczenie imienia w wierzeniach staroegipskich*, „Maska. Magazyn Antropologiczno-Społeczno-Kulturowy” 2012, nr 16, pp. 18–29.




political enemies or heretic king Akhenaten. It could be done also in the worst way possible that Egyptians could imagined by changing the name. It is known at least one case of the latter punishment applied on people accused of assassination attempt on pharaoh Ramesses III. In the trial documents we can read names such as: *Mesedsure* – “Ra-Hates-Him,” *Binemwese* – “Wicked-in-Thebes” or *Penhuybin* – “This-Evil-Huy.”³² Also the prince, son of pharaoh, has his name changed to *Pentewere*, bearing the *OTHER* name.³³

Table 2: Ancient Egyptian anthropology

Sphere	No.	Name of the element	Meaning	Hieroglyph
Guiding elements ("souls")	1.	<i>akh</i>	"shiny form"	
	2.	<i>ba</i>	"soul"	
	3.	<i>ka</i>	"spiritual personality"	
Mediating elements ("energies")	4.	<i>ran</i>	"name"	
	5.	<i>ib / hati</i>	"heart"	
	6.	<i>sheut / khaibut</i>	"shadow"	

³² J. H. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, vol. 4, Chicago 1906, p. 212, § 421.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 218, § 447.

Executive elements ("bodies")	7.	<i>sekhem</i>	"potency"	
	8.	<i>sahu</i>	"actual spiritual body"	
	9.	<i>khat / djet / sat</i>	"physical body"	

Based on: W. Bator, *Religia starożytnego Egiptu. Perspektywa religioznawcza*, Kraków 2012, pp. 226–236.

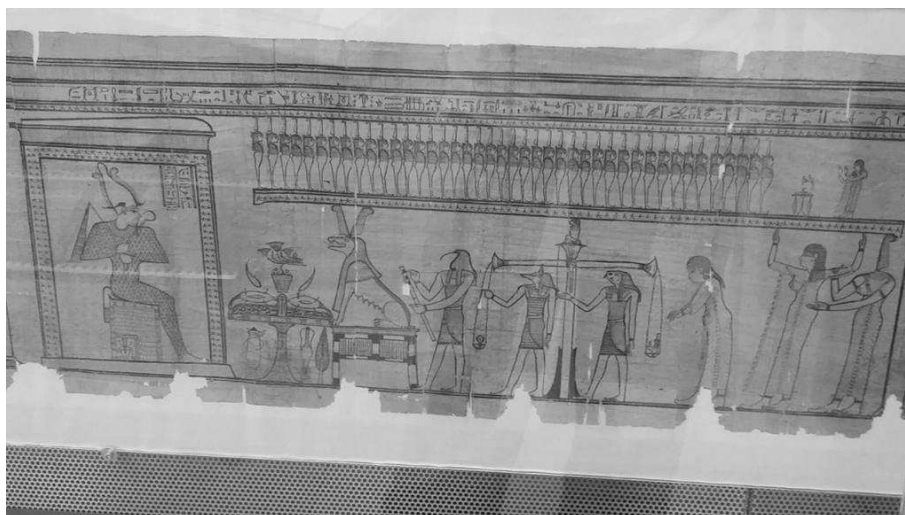


Photo 1: Osiris Tribunal, fragment of the Book of the Dead
(Papyruseum der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek, Vienna)

Photo – Ł. Byrski

Chinese beliefs

According to Chinese beliefs there are two types of "souls" or rather vital entities that resides within each person. They are called the *hún* (魂): "luminous soul," "celestial soul," "Yang soul," "spiritual soul" and *pò* (魄): "earth-

ly soul,” “Yin soul,” “vegetative/animal soul.”³⁴ The first one ascends to the Heavens after death and become *shén* (神): “ancestral spirit,” “deity,” the other – stay in the grave together with the body and change into *guǐ* (鬼): “ghost” or “demon.”³⁵ When the death is sudden they stay among humans to do evil things. *Hún* is first to leave the body as it is believed that it is lighter.³⁶ For *hún* ancestor shrines are built and for *pò* elaborate funerary rituals and sacrifices are made so it would stay in the grave and did not disturb the living.³⁷ *Hún* is a personal soul possessing the ability of recognizing the living relatives, caring for them and bless them as ancestral spirit *shén* so long as it is provided with proper sacrifice. Otherwise it can steal the offering for other souls and can harm its family becoming *guǐ* as well.³⁸ Such *guǐ* can later be helpful for its family but not to others for whom it is a demon.³⁹ *Pò* which is an animal soul cannot recognize anyone and is doing harm to everyone when the body does not receive proper burial and all the rites are not fulfilled. *Guǐ* is usually characterized as a wandering souls of people who died far from their family home in some remote parts of the world and have not been granted with appropriate burials.⁴⁰ What is worth mentioning is that *guǐ* cast no shadow which means that the latter is separate part of a living person and in fact there are stories about man who was scared to death by his own “shadow.”⁴¹ *Yǐng* (影) or “shadow” therefore should be considered also as something soul-like in Chinese beliefs. The number of souls was not limited to 2 as these were only their types. During Later Han Dynasty it was believed that there are “three *hún* and seven *pò*” (*sanhunqipo*; 三魂七魄). The Chinese also thought that when body is sleeping the “souls” are leaving it and therefore when they are not inside it then sickness will occur and if they are not returning for longer time – finally death.⁴² Usually *hún* were believed to separate from body during sleep and that their journeys during that time became dreams of a person.⁴³

³⁴ F. Baldrian-Hussein, *Hun and po 魂•魄 Yang soul(s) and Yin soul(s); celestial soul(s) and earthly soul(s)*, [in:] *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, ed. F. Pregadio, London–New York 2008, p. 406.

³⁵ K. Miura, *Gui (鬼) spirit; demon; ghost*, [in:] *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, op. cit., p. 458.

³⁶ E. L. Shaughnessy, *Chiny: życie, legendy i sztuka*, tłum. T. Jurewicz, Warszawa 2005, p. 94.

³⁷ F. Baldrian-Hussein, op. cit., p. 407.

³⁸ W. Eberhard, *A Dictionary of Chinese Symbols. Hidden Symbols in Chinese Life and Thought*, trans. G. L. Campbell, London–New York 2006, pp. 334–335.

³⁹ See: *ibidem*, p. 338.

⁴⁰ See: *ibidem*, p. 151.

⁴¹ See: *ibidem*, p. 325.

⁴² F. Baldrian-Hussein, op. cit., p. 408.

⁴³ E. L. Shaughnessy, op. cit., p. 94.



Photo 2: Chinese grave figures of soldiers, Sui and Tang dynasty 581-907 C.E.
(Narodni Museum – Naprstkovo muzeum asijských, afrických
a amerických kultur, Prague), Photo – Ł. Byrski

Beliefs in the Maya area

About Classic Period Maya views on the problem of the soul there is not much information. We have evidence for a belief in some sort of “soul” from the hieroglyphic inscriptions that use the term *sak-nik-nal* as an expression for death. It is usually interpreted as “white flower soul” (or “white flower breath”).⁴⁴ This kind of soul was given during birth and left the dying body to travel through underworld.⁴⁵ Lowland Chol Maya were keeping the practice of burying the dead under the house floors to safeguard both their remains and souls. The reason for that was to allow souls of the dead entering the body of the newborn members of the family.⁴⁶ According to Tzotzil Ma-

⁴⁴ J. Guernsey Kappelman, *Carved in Stone. The Cosmological Narratives of Late Pre-classic Izapan-Style Monuments from the Pacific Slope*, [in:] *Heart of Creation: The Mesoamerican World and the Legacy of Linda Schele*, ed. A. Stone, Tuscaloosa-London 2002, p. 78.

⁴⁵ M. Eberl, *Śmierć i koncepcje duszy*, [in:] *Majowie. Niezwykła cywilizacja*, red. N. Grube, Warszawa 2011, pp. 312, 314.

⁴⁶ J. Thompson, *Ethnology of the Mayas of Southern and Central British Honduras*, “Field Museum of Natural History, Anthropological Series” 1930, Vol. 17, No. 2, p. 82; S. D. Gillespie, *Body and Soul among the Maya: Keeping the Spirits in Place*, “Archeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association” 2002, Vol. 11, Issue Supplement 1, Special Issue: The Place and Space of Death, p. 71.

ya the ancestral gods kept souls in the “pool” or “supply” and they were eventually returned back to earth to another body. This concept called *k'ex* or *k'exel* (“exchange,” “trade,” “substitution” or “succession”) is often present in beliefs of different Maya groups.⁴⁷ *K'ex* as an exchange of soul with the ancestor was sometimes physically done by giving the name of the grandparent to a child which is possible reason for repetition of king's names in hieroglyphic texts from Palenque and Yaxchilan.⁴⁸ The soul which is subject of the *k'ex* is called *ch'ulel* – “body soul” and is believed to be divided further into 13 parts and located in heart and blood but there is also *chanul* – “animal spirit companion” that share life outcome with each person.⁴⁹ The third type of soul among Tzeltal and Tzotzil Maya is *ora* – “destiny” which takes the form of burning candle in the sky and if it goes out both other souls die.⁵⁰ *Ch'ulel* is leaving the body during sleep and may not return.⁵¹ There was also an entity – a spiritual alter ego called *way* – which existed next to a living being but shared experiences with it. For example when someone's *way* was injured that person would have the same injury and the same thing applied to sicknesses or death⁵². They had the shape of an animal (be that mammal, reptile or insect) and in lowland Maya languages the term *way* also have meaning related to “sleep” or “transformation.”⁵³ Mam Maya of Santiago Chimaltenango believe in *naab'l* – soul-like entity connected to the particular place (“ancestral soul”) and *aanma* which is more like Christian soul and similarly Tzeltal Maya in Cancuc kne also 2 types of souls: *ch'ulel* residing in heart and mountains and body-external *lab*.⁵⁴ As can be seen on those examples Maya beliefs are quite diverse in this matter which is not very helpful for reconstruction of the pre-conquest religion but the word *ch'ulel* has possible association in the hieroglyphic writing with the glyph *ch'ul/k'ul* or *ch'ujul/k'ujul*.⁵⁵

⁴⁷ See: *ibidem*.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 72.

⁴⁹ S. Z. Hinojosa, *In This Body: Kaqchikel Maya and the Grounding of Spirit*, Albuquerque 2015, p. 5.

⁵⁰ L. King, *Learning through the Soul: Concepts Relating to Learning and Knowledge in the Mayan Cultures of Mexico*, “International Review of Education / Internationale Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft / Revue Internationale de l'Education” 1999, Vol. 45, No. 3/4, Learning, Knowledge and Cultural Context, p. 368.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 368.

⁵² M. Eberl, *op. cit.*, p. 313.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, pp. 312–314.

⁵⁴ S. Z. Hinojosa, *op. cit.*, pp. 5–6.

⁵⁵ J. Montgomery, P. Mathews, Ch. Helmke, *Dictionary of Maya Hieroglyphs*, Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc (FAMSI), 2002–2007, [online] <http://www.famsi.org/mayawriting/dictionary/montgomery/> [accessed: 30.03.2017].



Photo 3: Yaxchilan, Lintel 15 – Lady Wak Tuun of the Ik' polity – wife of Bird Jaguar IV invoking the Vision Serpent in a bloodletting rite (British Museum, London), Photo – Ł. Byrski

Ancient Middle East (Mesopotamia, Palestine, Greece, Anatolia)

The last part of this overview of the concepts will describe how inhabitants of the ancient Middle East saw the afterlife and in what way their ideas were different from Egyptian beliefs. First of all we should start with the Sumerian culture. In Sumer there was only one soul called *gidim* – in Akkadian language translated as *etemmu* – which was provided with very sad existence in the underworld known sometimes simply as Kur (“land”) or Kurnugi – “the land of no return:” the dirty dark place covered with dust where everyone eat leftovers and litters and drink musty water and where their bodies are “eaten by worms like an old garment.” This description is known from the Sumerian poem: “Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Netherworld” which was later incorporated as tablet XII to Akkadian “Epic of Gilgamesh” where *gidim* of Enkidu tells Gilgamesh about the underworld. These “souls” or rather “shadows” required offerings called *kispu* from the living consisting of food, drink and oil. In the case when *gidim* were neglected they became demons and were harmful to people.⁵⁶ The only ones who lead happy

⁵⁶ J. Black, A. Green, *Słownik mitologii Mezopotamii*, tłum. A. Reiche, Katowice 2006, pp. 75, 237.

existence in “the land of no return” were children that have been born dead. In the worst position were people who died in the fire and thus lost their body or unburied in the desert – they could not have *gidim* at all. As observed here for Mesopotamians burial was a matter of great importance as well as having many children who can later give offerings to the dead ancestors and that is the reason why (according to beliefs) people with more heirs had slightly better conditions in the afterlife.⁵⁷

Sumerian-Akkadian underworld is very similar to what we can find in early Judaism, where it is called Sheol which means simply “pit” or “grave.” In the Old Testament there are several passages describing this place as dark and inactive where all dead persons go with no difference of how they lived before. Residents of Sheol are *rephaim* (“shadows”) who have no personality or strength. They could be contacted but as they are mere shadows of living people with no personality it is forbidden to do so (1 Book of Samuel 28,7; Book of Leviticus 20,6.27; Book of Deuteronomy 18,10b-11).⁵⁸ In Hebrew language there are 2 terms concerning soul: *nephesh* – “breath of life” and *ruakh* – which is understood as the gift from God. They were translated into Greek as *psyche* and *pneuma* respectively but the whole concept of soul is understood as psychophysiological unity unlike to the Greek dualism.

Not far from Mesopotamian beliefs were also early Greek ideas of afterlife as we can read in “Odyssey.” There we can find dialogue between Odysseus and the ghost of Achilles where the latter comment: “Say not a word [...], in death’s favour; I would rather be a paid servant in a poor man’s house and be above ground than king of kings among the dead.”⁵⁹ It seems that in this early period of Greek culture all the dead met the same fate but the word *psyche* for soul already appears in “Odyssey.”

The Hittites also believed in the soul that is separate from the body and which survives after the death of a person. Its name in Hittite language is *ištanza(n)* and possibly means “something that remains” but this explanation is not secure.⁶⁰ The evidence for the concept of afterlife in Anatolian cultures – both Hittite and Luwian – is a few inscriptions suggesting that: 1) soul is put into the body at birth by the gods, 2) it was believed that when someone is ill the soul is leaving the body, 3) the soul can and should return

⁵⁷ Ibidem, p. 237.

⁵⁸ Although Witch of Endor summon the “shadow” of prophet Samuel for the king Saul (1 Book of Samuel 28,7).

⁵⁹ Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. S. Butler, Book XI, pp. 488–491 [online:] <http://classics.mit.edu/Homer/odyssey.11.xi.html> [accessed: 31.03.2017].

⁶⁰ H. C. Melchert, *Remarks on the Kuttamuwa Inscription*, “Kubaba” 2010, No. 1, p. 6.

to the gods when life will end, 4) life itself is a great journey of the soul.⁶¹ The word for soul is not known for Luwian and possibly it is represented in hieroglyphs by logogram thought to represent the “vase” before but now is known to be “heart” instead.⁶²

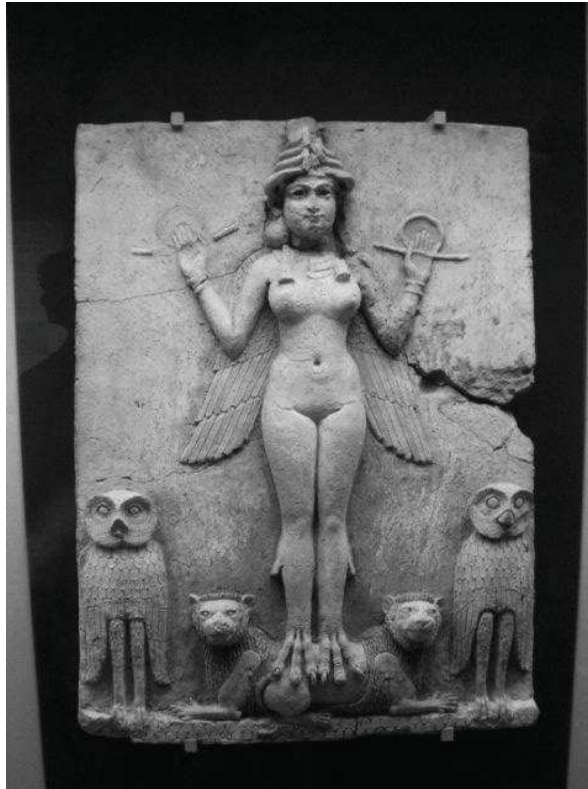


Photo 4: Queen of the Night, probably Ereshkigal – Sumerian goddess of the Underworld (British Museum, London), Photo – Ł. Byrski

Conclusions

After careful analysis of the collected data now is evident that only minority of cultures developed the concept of singular soul. In case of Siberian cultures when this situation occurs – it concern “souls” of more complex morphology made from several elements. In fact there is only one cultural circle

⁶¹ Ibidem, p. 7.

⁶² Ibidem, p. 8.

where single soul originates according to these materials – ancient Middle East. From the Mesopotamian cultures (Sumerian and Akkadian), through Syro-Palestine and Greece, there is common idea of the underworld and afterlife especially in the earlier periods. Part of this picture was singular spirit or shadow that is miserable leftover of a living person. Greek philosophers later developed the idea dividing soul into elements of different functions and connecting them with some organs as their residence. But eventually there was dualism between terms *pneuma* (“spirit”) and *psyche* (“soul”) – the body and the mind/personality. In Greek translations of the Bible both words are used as counterpart for *nephesh* and *ruakh* but in Hebrew concepts there are no real distinction between them as Judaism consider soul as psychophysiological unity – a singular soul without any elements or parts. Other Indo-Europeans also believed in singular soul – as discussed in this study cases of Hittites and Luwians. Western view on the soul is rooted in both traditions: Hellenic and Judeo-Christian and from this cultures definitions of soul as we know them are formulated (singular soul without any elements and parts but using local names for souls out of their original context).

I have specified three elements or types of “souls” that appear most often. They are: “shadow” – which is present in most Siberian cultures that were part of this study but also in Egypt and China; “heart/blood” – shared by some Siberian cultures with Egyptian and Maya; and “breath” – appearing in Greek, Hebrew and Siberian cultures. In most cases “souls” were mortal and either died with the body or could die because of other factors later, however there was usually one of many elements or “souls” believed to be immortal. In beliefs of few Siberian groups of people, as well as in Maya and Egyptian religions one of the “soul” was not residing in the body (body-external soul). During lifetime some of these spiritual elements could also travel outside the body especially when it was sleeping (Yakuts, Evenks, Kets, Selkups, Chinese, Maya, Anatolian) and their absence was considered the cause of illness and finally death (Shors, Kets, Selkups, Chinese, Maya, Anatolian). Through the dreams the dead could sometimes communicate with the living as is the case with Kets and Egyptian cultures. Some changed their form into evil demon/ghoul/vampire harmful to people, eating their organs from inside or causing sickness, bad mood and bad luck (Siberian, Chinese, Egyptian, Mesopotamian) and some became friendly ancestral spirits (Chinese, Maya) or were changed into temporary intermediary form to be able to come back to earth and reincarnate (Evenks, Kets, Nganasans, Maya).

Table 3: Soul beliefs - comparison

No	Culture	Number of souls	Elements of souls		
			"shadow"	"heart" or "blood"	"breath" or "air"
1.	Shors	4 souls			+
2.	Yakuts	2 souls, 1 of souls divided into 3 parts			+
3.	Evenks	3 souls	+		
4.	Kets	7 souls (people), 1 soul (animals)			
5.	Selkups	1 complex soul or none	+		+
6.	Nenets	1 complex soul, 3 elements	+	+	+
7.	Nganasans	many souls (6 most important souls)	+	+	+
8.	Egyptian	3 souls (9 elements of human being)	+	+	
9.	Chinese	2 type of souls, also other elements	+		
10.	Maya	2 or 3 souls, 1 of souls divided into 13 elements		+	
11.	Mesopotamian	1 soul	+		
12.	Hebrew	1 soul, different names	+		+
13.	Greek	1 soul, later 2 or more elements	+		+
14.	Anatolian	1 soul			

Source: Own work.

Characteristics of souls						
one of souls not reside inside body or not completely	mortal souls	immortal soul	possibility of leaving the body during life and in sleep	death or sickness caused by the absence of soul	communicate through dreams	can change into other form after death of the body or reincarnate
	+	+		+		+
+	+	+	+			+
+	+	+	+			+
+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	+		+	+		
	+					
		+				+
+	+	+			+	+
	+	+				+
+	+	+	+	+		+
		+				
	+	+				
		+	+	+		

O WIELU DUSZACH CZŁOWIEKA:
STUDIA PORÓWNAWCZE NAD KONCEPCJAMI DUSZ(Y) W RÓŻNYCH KULTURACH

STRESZCZENIE

W historii rozwinęło się wiele różnych koncepcji na temat życia pośmiertnego, szczególnie dotyczących duchowych form opuszczających ciało wraz ze śmiercią jednostki. Termin „dusza” nie jest w tym kontekście precyzyjny, w związku z czym artykuł ten stanowi próbę wytłumaczenia definicji „duszy” na podstawie różnorodnych przykładów z historii ludzkich wierzeń. Jedna prosta definicja nie może zostać sformułowana dla różnych religii, ale klasyfikacja przynajmniej niektórych elementów będzie bardzo pomocna w dalszym zgłębianiu tej problematyki. Materiały źródłowe, które były brane pod uwagę, pochodzą przede wszystkim z następujących systemów wierzeń: szamanizmu syberyjskiego, religii starożytnego Egiptu, Mezopotamii, Anatolii, a także Chin i Majów.

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starożytne religie, Egipt, Biblia, dusza

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