Mithraism

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Mithraic mysteries

Double-faced Mithraic relief. Rome, 2nd to 3rd century AD (Louvre Museum)

The **Mithraic Mysteries** were a mystery religion practised in the Roman Empire from about the 1st to 4th centuries AD. The name of the Persian god Mithra, adapted into Greek as **Mithras**, was linked to a new and distinctive imagery. Writers of the Roman Empire period referred to this mystery religion by phrases which can be anglicized as **Mysteries of Mithras** or **Mysteries of the Persians**;[][1] modern historians refer to it as **Mithraism**,[] or sometimes **Roman Mithraism**.[2][] The mysteries were popular in the Roman military.[]

Worshippers of Mithras had a complex system of seven grades of initiation, with ritual meals. Initiates called themselves *syndexioi*, those "united by the handshake".[3] They met in underground temples (called mithraea), which survive in large numbers. The cult appears to have had its centre in Rome.[4]

Numerous archeological finds, including meeting places, monuments, and artifacts, have contributed to modern knowledge about Mithraism throughout the Roman Empire.[5] The iconic scenes of Mithras show him being born from a rock, slaughtering a bull, and sharing a banquet with the god Sol (the Sun). About 420 sites have yielded materials related to the cult. Among the items found are about 1000 inscriptions, 700 examples of the bull-killing scene (tauroctony), and about 400 other monuments.[6] It has been estimated that there would have been at least 680-690 Mithraea in Rome.[] No written narratives or theology from the religion survive, with limited information to be derived from the inscriptions, and only brief or passing references in Greek and Latin literature. Interpretation of the physical evidence remains problematic and contested.[7]

The Romans themselves regarded the mysteries as having Persian or Zoroastrian sources. Since the early 1970s, however, the dominant scholarship has noted dissimilarities between Persian Mithra-worship and the Roman Mithraic mysteries, and the mysteries of Mithras are now generally seen as a distinct product of the Roman Imperial religious world.[] In this context, Mithraism has sometimes been viewed as a rival of early Christianity.[]

The name Mithras

Bas-relief of the tauroctony of the Mithraic mysteries, Metz, France.

The name Mithras (Latin, equivalent to Greek "Μίθρας",[8]) is a form of Mithra, the name of an Old Persian god.[9][10] (This point has been understood by Mithras scholars since the days of Franz Cumont.[11]) An early example of the Greek form of the name is in a 4th century BC work by Xenophon, the Cyropaedia, which is a biography of the Persian king Cyrus the Great.[12]

The exact form of a Latin or classical Greek word varies due to the grammatical process of declension. There is archeological evidence that in Latin worshippers wrote the nominative form of the god's name as "Mithras". However, in Porphyry's Greek text *De Abstinentia* («Περὶ ἀποχῆς ἐμψύχων»), there is a reference to the now-lost histories of the Mithraic mysteries by Euboulus and Pallas, the wording of which suggests that these authors treated the name "Mithra" as an indeclinable foreign word.[13]

Related deity-names in other languages include

- Sanskrit Mitra (मित्रः), the name of a god praised in the Rig Veda.[14][15][] In Sanskrit, "mitra" means "friend" or "friendship".[]
- the form *mi-it-ra-*, found in an inscribed peace treaty between the Hittites and the kingdom of Mitanni, from about 1400 BC.[][16]

Iranian "Mithra" and Sanskrit "Mitra" are believed to come from an Indo-Iranian word mitra meaning "contract, agreement, covenant".[17]

Modern historians have different conceptions about whether these names refer to the same god or not. John R. Hinnells has written of Mitra/Mithra/Mithras as a single deity worshipped in several different religions.[18] On the other hand, David Ulansey considers the bull-slaying Mithras to be a new god who began to be worshipped in the 1st century BC, and to whom an old name was applied.[19]

Mary Boyce, a researcher of ancient Iranian religions, writes that even though Roman Empire Mithraism seems to have had less Iranian content than historians used to think, still "as the name Mithras alone shows, this content was of some importance."[]

Iconography

Much about the cult of Mithras is only known from reliefs and sculptures. There have been many attempts to interpret this material.

Mithras-worship in the Roman Empire was characterized by images of the god slaughtering a bull. Other images of Mithras are found in the Roman temples, for instance Mithras banqueting with Sol, and depictions of the birth of Mithras from a rock. But the image of bull-slaying (tauroctony) is always in the central niche.[20] Textual sources for a reconstruction of the theology behind this iconography are very rare.[21] (See section Interpretations of the bull-slaying scene below.)

Relief of Mithras as bull-slayer from Neuenheim near Heidelberg, framed by scenes from Mithras' life

The practice of depicting the god slaying a bull seems to be specific to Roman Mithraism. According to David Ulansey, this is "perhaps the most important example" of evident difference between Iranian and Roman traditions: "... there is no evidence that the Iranian god Mithra ever had anything to do with killing a bull."[22]

The bull-slaying scene

In every Mithraeum the centrepiece was a representation of Mithras killing a sacred bull; the so-called tauroctony.[23]

The image may be a relief, or free-standing, and side details may be present or omitted. The centre-piece is Mithras clothed in Anatolian costume and wearing a Phrygian cap; who is kneeling on the exhausted[24] bull, holding it by the nostrils[24] with his left hand, and stabbing it with his right. As he does so, he looks over his shoulder towards the figure of Sol. A dog and a snake reach up towards the blood. A scorpion seizes the bull's genitals. A raven is flying around or is sitting on the bull. Three corns of wheat are seen coming out from the bull's tail, sometimes from the wound. The bull was often white. The god is sitting on the bull in an unnatural way with his right leg constraining the bull's hoof and the left leg is bent and resting on the bull's back or flank.[25] The two torch-bearers are on either side, dressed like Mithras, Cautes with his torch pointing up and Cautopates with his torch pointing down.[26][27] Sometimes Cautes and Cautopates carry shepherds' crooks instead of torches.[28]

Tauroctony from the Kunsthistorisches Museum

The event takes place in a cavern, into which Mithras has carried the bull, after having hunted it, ridden it and overwhelmed its strength.[29] Sometimes the cavern is surrounded by a circle, on which the twelve signs of the zodiac appear. Outside the cavern, top left, is Sol the sun, with his flaming crown, often driving a quadriga. A ray of light often reaches down to touch Mithras. Top right is Luna, with her crescent moon, who may be depicted driving a biga.[30]

In some depictions, the central tauroctony is framed by a series of subsidiary scenes to the left, top and right, illustrating events in the Mithras narrative; Mithras being

born from the rock, the water miracle, the hunting and riding of the bull, meeting Sol who kneels to him, shaking hands with Sol and sharing a meal of bull-parts with him, and ascending to the heavens in a chariot.[30] In some instances, as is the case in the stucco icon at Santa Prisca mithraeum, the god is shown heroically nude.[] Some of these reliefs were constructed so that they could be turned on an axis. On the back side was another, more elaborate feasting scene. This indicates that the bull killing scene was used in the first part of the celebration, then the relief was turned, and the second scene was used in the second part of the celebration.[31] Besides the main cult icon, a number of mithraea had several secondary tauroctonies, and some small, portable versions, probably meant for private devotion have also been found.[32]

The banquet

The second most important scene after the tauroctony in Mithraic art is the so-called banquet scene.[33] The banquet scene features Mithras and the Sun god banqueting on the hide of the slaughtered bull.[33] On the specific banquet scene on the Fiano Romano relief, one of the torchbearers points a caduceus towards the base of an altar, where flames appear to spring up. Robert Turcan has argued that since the caduceus is an attribute of Mercury, and in mythology Mercury is depicted as a psychopomp, the eliciting of flames in this scene is referring to the dispatch of human souls and expressing the Mithraic doctrine on this matter.[34] Turcan also connects this event to the tauroctony: the blood of the slain bull has soaked the ground at the base of the altar, and from the blood the souls are elicited in flames by the caduceus.[34]

Birth from a rock

Above: Mithras rising from the rockWikipedia:Citing sources

Right: Mithras born from the rock (marble, 180–192 AD), from the area of S. Stefano Rotondo, Rome

Mithras is depicted as being born from a rock. He is shown as emerging from a rock, already in his youth, with a dagger in one hand and a torch in the other. He is nude, is wearing a Phrygian cap and is holding his legs together.[]

However, there are variations and sometimes he is shown as coming out of the rock as a child and in one instance he has a globe in one hand, sometimes a thunderbolt is seen. There are also depictions in which flames are shooting from the rock and also from Mithras' phrygian cap. One statue had its base perforated so that it could serve as a fountain and the base of another has the mask of the water god. Sometimes he also has other weapons like bows and arrows and there are also animals like dog, serpent, dolphin, eagle, some other birds, a lion, crocodile, lobster and snail around. On some reliefs, there is a bearded figure identified as Oceanus, the water god, and on some there are the four wind gods. In these reliefs, the four elements could be invoked together. Sometimes Victoria, Luna, Sol and Saturn also seem to play a role. Saturn particularly appears to hand over the dagger to Mithras so that he could perform his mighty deeds.[]

In some depictions Cautes and Cautopates are also present and sometimes they become shepherds.[35]

On some occasions, an amphora is seen, and a few instances show variations like an egg birth or a tree birth. Some interpretations show that the birth of Mithras was celebrated by lighting torches or candles.[][36]

Drawing of the leontocephaline found at the mithraeum of C. Valerius Heracles and sons, dedicated 190 AD at Ostia Antica, Italy (CIMRM 312)

Lion-headed figure

One of the most characteristic features of the Mysteries is the naked lion-headed (*leontocephaline*) figure often found in Mithraic temples. He is entwined by a serpent, with the snake's head often resting on the lion's head. The lion's mouth is often open, giving a horrifying impression. He is usually represented having four wings, two keys (sometimes a single key) and a scepter in his hand. Sometimes the figure is standing on a globe inscribed with a diagonal cross. In the figure shown here, the four wings carry the symbols of the four seasons and a thunderbolt is engraved on the breast. At the base of the statue are the hammer and tongs of Vulcan, the cock and the wand of Mercury. A more scarcely represented variant of the figure with a human head is also found.[37][38]

Although animal-headed figures are prevalent in contemporary Egyptian and Gnostic mythological representations, an exact parallel to the Mithraic *leontocephaline* figure is not found.[37]

The name of the figure has been deciphered from dedicatory inscriptions to be Arimanius (though the archeological evidence is not very strong), which is nominally the equivalent of Ahriman, a demon figure in the Zoroastrian pantheon. Arimanius is known from inscriptions to have been a god in the Mithraic cult (CIMRM 222 from Ostia, 369 from Rome, 1773 and 1775 from Pannonia).[39]

While some scholars identify the lion-man as Aion (Zurvan, or Kronos) others assert that it is Ahriman.[40] There is also speculation that the figure is the Gnostic demiurge, (Ariel) Ialdabaoth.[41] Although the exact identity of the lion-headed figure is debated by scholars, it is largely agreed that the god is associated with time and seasonal change.[42]

Rituals and worship

According to M.J.Vermaseren, the Mithraic New Year and the birthday of Mithras was on December 25.[][43] However, Beck disagrees strongly.[44] Clauss states: "the Mithraic Mysteries had no public ceremonies of its own. The festival of *natalis Invicti* [Birth of the Unconquerable (Sun)], held on 25 December, was a general festival of the Sun, and by no means specific to the Mysteries of Mithras."[45] Mithraic initiates were required to swear an oath of

secrecy and dedication,[46] and some grade rituals involved the recital of a catechism, wherein the initiate was asked a series of questions pertaining to the initiation symbolism and had to reply with specific answers. An example of such a catechism, apparently pertaining to the Leo grade, was discovered in a fragmentary Egyptian papyrus (P.Berolinensis 21196),[46][47] and reads:

> ... *He will say: 'Where ... ?* ... he is/(you are?) there (then/thereupon?) at a loss?' Say: ... Say: 'Night'. He will say: 'Where ... ?' ... Say: 'All things ...' (He will say): '... you are called ... ?' Say: 'Because of the summery ...' ... having become ... he/it has the fiery ... (He will say): '... did you receive/inherit?' Say: 'In a pit'. He will say: 'Where is your ...?... (Say): '...(in the...) Leonteion.' He will say: 'Will you gird?' The (heavenly?) ...(Say): '... death'. He will say: 'Why, having girded yourself, ...?' '... this (has?) four tassels. Very sharp and ... '... much'. He will say: ...? (Say: '... because of/through?) hot and cold'. He will say: ...? (Say): '... red ... linen'. He will say: 'Why?' Say: '... red border; the linen, however, ...' (He will say): '... has been wrapped?' Say: 'The savior's ...' He will say: 'Who is the father?' Say: 'The one who (begets?) everything ...' (He will say): '('How ?)... did you become a Leo?' Say: 'By the ... of the father'. ... Say: 'Drink and food'. He will say '...?' '... in the seven-...

Almost no Mithraic scripture or first-hand account of its highly secret rituals survives;[21] with the exception of the aforementioned oath and catechism, and the document known as the Mithras Liturgy, from 4th century Egypt, whose status as a Mithraist text has been questioned by scholars including Franz Cumont.[48][49] The walls of Mithraea were commonly whitewashed, and where this survives it tends to carry extensive repositories of graffiti; and these, together with inscriptions on Mithraic monuments, form the main source for Mithraic texts.[50]

Nevertheless, it is clear from the archeology of numerous Mithraea that most rituals were associated with feasting – as eating utensils and food residues are almost invariably found. These tend to include both animal bones and also very large quantities of fruit residues.[51] The presence of large amounts of cherry-stones in particular would tend to confirm mid-summer (late June, early July) as a season especially associated with Mithraic festivities. The Virunum *album*, in the form of an inscribed bronze plaque, records a Mithraic festival of commemoration as taking place on 26 June 184. Beck argues that religious celebrations on this date are indicative of special significance being given to the Summer solstice; but equally it may well be noted that, in northern and central Europe, reclining on a masonry plinth in an unheated cave was likely to be a predominantly summertime activity.[*citation needed*] For their feasts, Mithraic initiates reclined on stone benches arranged along the longer sides of the Mithraeum – typically there might be room for 15–30 diners, but very rarely many more than 40 men.[52] Counterpart dining rooms, or *triclinia* were to be found above ground in the precincts of almost any temple or religious sanctuary in the Roman empire, and such rooms were commonly used for their regular feasts by Roman 'clubs', or collegia. Mithraic feasts probably performed a very similar function for Mithraists as the collegia did for those entitled to join them; indeed, since qualification for Roman collegia tended to be restricted to particular families, localities or traditional trades, Mithraism may have functioned in part as providing clubs for the unclubbed.[53] However, the size of the Mithraeum is not necessarily an indication of the size of the congregation.[]

Each Mithraeum had several altars at the further end, underneath the representation of the tauroctony; and also commonly contained considerable numbers of subsidiary altars, both in the main Mithraeum chamber, and in the ante-chamber or narthex.[54] These altars, which are of the standard Roman pattern, each carry a named dedicatory inscription from a particular initiate, who dedicated the altar to Mithras "in fulfillment of his vow", in gratitude for favours received. Burned residues of animal entrails are commonly found on the main altars indicating regular sacrificial use. However, Mithraea do not commonly appear to have been provided with facilities for ritual slaughter of sacrificial animals (a highly specialised function in Roman religion), and it may be presumed that a Mithraeum would have made arrangements for this service to be provided for them in co-operation with the professional *victimarius*[55] of the civic cult. Prayers were addressed to the Sun three times a day and Sunday was especially sacred.[56]

It is doubtful whether Mithraism had a monolithic and internally consistent doctrine.[57] It may have varied from location to location.[58] However, the iconography is relatively coherent.[30] It had no predominant sanctuary or cultic centre; and, although each Mithraeum had its own officers and functionaries, there was no central supervisory authority. In some Mithraea, such as that at Dura Europos wall paintings depict prophets carrying scrolls,[59] but no named Mithraic sages are known, nor does any reference give the title of any Mithraic scripture or teaching. It is known that intitates could transfer with their grades from one Mithraeum to another.[60]

The Mithraeum

Temples of Mithras are sunk below ground, windowless, and very distinctive. In cities, the basement of an apartment block might be converted; elsewhere they might be excavated and vaulted over, or converted from a natural cave. Mithraic temples are common in the empire; although unevenly distributed, with considerable numbers found in Rome, Ostia, Numidia, Dalmatia, Britain and along the Rhine/Danube frontier; while being somewhat less common in Greece, Egypt, and Syria.[61] According to Walter Burkert, the secret character of Mithriac rituals meant that Mithraism could only be practiced within a Mithraeum.[62] Some new finds at Tienen show evidence of large scale feasting and the mystery religion may not have been as secretive as was generally believed.[]

A mithraeum found in the ruins of Ostia Antica, Italy.

For the most part, Mithraea tend to be small, externally undistinguished, and cheaply constructed; the cult generally preferring to create a new centre rather than expand an existing one. The Mithraeum represented the cave in which Mithras carried and then killed the bull; and where stone vaulting could not be afforded, the effect would be imitated with lath and plaster. They are commonly located close to springs or streams; fresh water appears to have been required for some Mithraic rituals, and a basin is often incorporated into the structure.[63] There is usually a narthex or ante-chamber at the entrance, and often other ancillary rooms for storage and the preparation of food. The extant mithraea present us with actual physical remains of the architectural structures of the sacred spaces of the Mithraic cult. Mithraeum is a modern coinage and mithraists referred to their sacred structures as speleum or antrum (cave), crypta (underground hallway or corridor), fanum (sacred or holy place), or even templum (a temple or a sacred space).[64]

In their basic form, Mithraea were entirely different from the temples and shrines of other cults. In standard pattern Roman religious precincts, the temple building functioned as a house for the god; who was intended to be able to view through the opened doors and columnar portico, sacrificial worship being offered on an altar set in an open courtyard; potentially accessible not only to initiates of the cult, but also to *colitores* or non-initiated worshippers.[65] Mithraea were the antithesis of this.[66]

Degrees of initiation

In the Suda under the entry "Mithras", it states that "no one was permitted to be initiated into them (the mysteries of Mithras), until he should show himself holy and steadfast by undergoing several graduated tests."[67] Gregory Nazianzen refers to the "tests in the mysteries of Mithras".[68]

There were seven grades of initiation into the mysteries of Mithras, which are listed by St. Jerome.[69] Manfred Clauss states that the number of grades, seven, must be connected to the planets. A mosaic in the Ostia Mithraeum of Felicissimus depicts these grades, with heraldic emblems that are connected either to the grades or are just symbols of the planets. The grades also have an inscription besides them commending each grade into the protection of the different planetary gods.[70] In ascending order of importance the initiatory grades were:[71]

Grade	Symbols	Planet/tutelary deity
Corax, Corux or Corvex (raven or crow)	beaker, *caduceus*	Mercury
Nymphus, Nymphobus (Bridesman)	lamp, hand bell, veil, circlet or diadem	Venus
Miles (soldier)	pouch, helmet, lance, drum, belt, breastplate	Mars
Leo (lion)	*batillum*, *sistrum*, laurel wreath, thunderbolts	Jupiter
Perses (Persian)	*akinakes*, Phrygian cap, sickle, sickle moon and stars, sling pouch	Luna
Heliodromus (sun-runner)	torch, images of the sun god, Helios whip, robes	Sol
Pater (father)	*patera*, Mitre, shepherd's staff, garnet or ruby ring, chasuble or cape, elaborate robes jewel encrusted with metallic threads	Saturn

- **'Note:** In the table above, the article or picture links to the religious titles or impedimenta are merely illustrative approximations because, being an orally transmitted mystery cult, few reliable historical references have survived. However, similar contemporary artefacts have been identified and at the Mithraeum of Felicissimus at Ostia Antica, a 2nd-century mosaic does depict several Mithraic implements and symbols.

Spade, sistrum, lightning bolt

Sword, crescent moon, star, sickle

Torch, crown, whip

Patera, rod, Phrygian cap, sickle

Elsewhere, as at Dura Europos Mithraic graffiti survive giving membership lists, in which initiates of a Mithraeum are named with their Mithraic grades. At Virunum, the membership list or *album sacratorum* was maintained as an inscribed plaque, updated year by year as new members were initiated. By cross-referencing these lists it is sometimes possible to track initiates from one Mithraeum to another; and also speculatively to identify Mithraic initiates with persons on other contemporary lists - such as military service rolls, of lists of devotees of non-Mithraic religious sanctuaries. Names of initiates are also found in the dedication inscriptions of altars and other cult objects. Clauss noted in 1990 that overall, only about 14% of Mithriac names inscribed before 250 identify the initiates grade - and hence questioned that the traditional view that all initiates belonged to one of the seven grades.[72] Clauss argues that the grades represented a distinct class of priests, *sacerdotes*. Gordon maintains the former theory of Merkelbach and others, especially noting such examples as Dura where all names are associated with a Mithraic grade. Some scholars maintain that practice may have differed over time, or from one Mithraea to another.

The highest grade, *pater*, is far the most common found on dedications and inscriptions - and it would appear not to have been unusual for a Mithraeum to have several persons with this grade. The form *pater patrum* (father of fathers) is often found, which appears to indicate the *pater* with primary status. There are several examples of persons, commonly those of higher social status, joining a Mithraeum with the status *pater* - especially in Rome during the 'pagan revival' of the 4th century. It has been suggested that some Mithraea may have awarded honorary *pater* status to sympathetic dignitaries.[73]

The initiate into each grade appears to have required to undertake a specific ordeal or test,[74] involving exposure to heat, cold or threatened peril. An 'ordeal pit', dating to the early 3rd century, has been identified in the Mithraeum at Carrawburgh. Accounts of the cruelty of the emperor Commodus describes his amusing himself by enacting Mithriac initiation ordeals in homicidal form. By the later 3rd century, the enacted trials appear to have been abated in rigor, as 'ordeal pits' were floored over.

Admission into the community was completed with a handshake with the *pater*, just as Mithras and Sol shook hands. The initiates were thus referred to as *syndexioi*, those "united by the handshake". The term is used in an inscription by Proficentius[3] and derided by Firmicus Maternus in *De errore profanarum religionum*,[75] a 4th century Christian work attacking paganism.[76] In ancient Iran, taking the right hand was the traditional way of concluding a treaty or signifying some solemn understanding between two parties.[77]

Ritual re-enactments

Activities of the most prominent deities in Mithraic scenes, Sol and Mithras, were imitated in rituals by the two most senior officers in the cult's hierarchy, the *Pater* and the *Heliodromus*.[78] The initiates held a sacramental banquet, replicating the feast of Mithras and Sol.[78]

Reliefs on a cup found in Mainz,[][79] appear to depict a Mithraic initiation. On the cup, the initiate is depicted as led into a location where a *Pater* would be seated in the guise of Mithras with a drawn bow. Accompanying the initiate is a mystagogue, who explains the symbolism and theology to the initiate. The Rite is thought to re-enact what has come to be called the 'Water Miracle', in which Mithras fires a bolt into a rock, and from the rock now spouts water.

Reconstruction of a mithraeum with a mosaic depicting the grades of initiation.

Roger Beck has hypothesized a third processional Mithraic ritual, based on the Mainz cup and Porphyrys. This so-called Procession of the Sun-Runner features the *Heliodromus*, escorted by two figures representing Cautes and Cautopates (see below) and preceded by an initiate of the grade *Miles* leading a ritual enactment of the solar journey around the mithraeum, which was intended to represent the cosmos.[80]

Consequently it has been argued that most Mithraic rituals involved a re-enactment by the initiates of episodes in the Mithras narrative,[81] a narrative whose main elements were; birth from the rock, striking water from stone with an arrow shot, the killing of the bull, Sol's submission to Mithras, Mithras and Sol feasting on the bull, the ascent of Mithras to heaven in a chariot. A noticeable feature of this narrative (and of its regular depiction in surviving sets of relief carvings) is the complete absence of female personages.[82]

Membership

Due to the complete absence of women in membership lists, it is generally believed that the cult was for men only.[83][84] The ancient scholar Porphyry seems to refer to female mithraists, but the early 20th century historian A.S. Geden writes that this may be due to a misunderstanding. According to Geden, while the participation of women in the ritual was not unknown in the Eastern cults, the predominant military influence in Mithraism seems to render it unlikely in this instance.[] It has recently been suggested by David Jonathan that "women were involved

with Mithraic groups in at least some locations of the empire."[85] Soldiers were strongly represented amongst Mithraists; and also merchants, customs officials and minor bureaucrats. Few, if any, initiates came from leading aristocratic or senatorial families until the 'pagan revival' of the mid 4th century; but there were always considerable numbers of freedmen and slaves.[86]

Ethics

Clauss suggests that a statement by Porphyry, that people initiated into the Lion grade must keep their hands pure from everything that brings pain and harm and is impure, means that moral demands were made upon members of congregations.[87] A passage in the *Caesares* of Julian the Apostate refers to "commandments of Mithras".[88] Tertullian, in his treatise 'On the Military Crown' records that Mithraists in the army were officially excused from wearing celebratory coronets; on the basis that the Mithraic initiation ritual included refusing a proffered crown, because "their only crown was Mithras".[89]

History and development

Mithras before the Mysteries

According to the archaeologist Maarten Vermaseren, 1st century BC evidence from Commagene demonstrates the "reverence paid to Mithras" but does not refer to "the mysteries".[90] In the colossal statuary erected by King Antiochus I (69–34 BC) at Mount Nemrut, Mithras is shown beardless, wearing a Phrygian cap,[4][] and was originally seated on a throne alongside other deities and the king himself.[91] On the back of the thrones there is an inscription in Greek, which includes the name Apollo Mithras Helios in the genitive case (Ἀπόλλωνος Μίθρου Ἡλίου).[92] Vermaseren also reports about a Mithras cult in 3rd; century BC. Fayum.[93] R. D. Barnett has argued that the royal seal of King Saussatar of Mitanni from *c*. 1450 BC. depicts a tauroctonous Mithras.[94]

Mithras-Helios, in Phrygian cap with solar rays, with Antiochus I of Commagene. (Mt Nemrut, first century BC)

Beginnings of Roman Mithraism

The origins and spread of the Mysteries have been intensely debated among scholars and there are radically differing views on these issues.[95] According to Clauss mysteries of Mithras were not practiced until the 1st century AD.[] According to Ulansey, the earliest evidence for the Mithraic mysteries places their appearance in the middle of the 1st century BC: the historian Plutarch says that in 67 BC the pirates of Cilicia (a province on the southeastern coast of Asia Minor) were practicing "secret rites" of Mithras.[96] However, according to Daniels, whether any of this relates to the origins of the mysteries is unclear.[97] The unique underground temples or Mithraea appear suddenly in the archaeology in the last quarter of the 1st century AD.[98]

Earliest archaeology

Inscriptions and monuments related to the Mithraic Mysteries are catalogued in a two volume work by Maarten J. Vermaseren, the *Corpus Inscriptionum et Monumentorum Religionis Mithriacae* (or CIMRM).[99] The earliest monument showing Mithras slaying the bull is thought to be CIMRM 593, found in Rome. There is no date, but the inscription tells us that it was dedicated by a certain Alcimus, steward of T. Claudius Livianus. Vermaseren and Gordon believe that this Livianus is a certain Livianus who was commander of the Praetorian guard in 101 AD, which would give an earliest date of 98-99 AD.[100]

Five small terracotta plaques of a figure holding a knife over a bull have been excavated near Kerch in the Crimea, dated by Beskow and Clauss to the second half of the 1st century BC,[101] and by Beck to 50 BC-50 AD. These may be the earliest tauroctonies, if they are accepted to be a depiction of Mithras.[102] The bull-slaying figure wears a Phrygian cap, but is described by Beck and Beskow as otherwise unlike standard depictions of the tauroctony. Another reason for not connecting these artifacts with the Mithraic Mysteries is that the first of these plaques was found in a woman's tomb.[103]

Votive altar from Alba Iulia in present-day Romania, dedicated to *Invicto Mythrae* in fulfillment of a vow *(votum)*

An altar or block from near SS. Pietro e Marcellino on the Esquiline in Rome was inscribed with a bilingual inscription by an Imperial freedman named T. Flavius Hyginus, probably between 80-100 AD. It is dedicated to *Sol Invictus Mithras*.[104]

CIMRM 2268 is a broken base or altar from Novae/Steklen in Moesia Inferior, dated 100 AD, showing Cautes and Cautopates.

Other early archaeology includes the Greek inscription from Venosia by Sagaris *actor* probably from 100–150 AD; the Sidon *cippus* dedicated by Theodotus priest of Mithras to Asclepius, 140-141 AD; and the earliest military inscription, by C. Sacidius Barbarus, centurion of XV Apollinaris, from the bank of the Danube at Carnuntum, probably before 114 AD.[105]

According to C.M.Daniels, the Carnuntum inscription is the earliest Mithraic dedication from the Danube region, which along with Italy is one of the two regions where Mithraism first struck root.[106] The earliest dateable Mithraeum outside Rome dates from 148 AD.[107] The Mithraeum at Caesarea Maritima is the only one in Palestine and the date is inferred.[108]

Earliest cult locations

According to Roger Beck, the attested locations of the Roman cult in the earliest phase (c. 80–120 AD) are as follows:[109]

Mithraea datable from pottery

- Nida/Heddemheim III (Germania Sup.)
- Mogontiacum (Germania Sup.)
- Pons Aeni (Noricum)
- Caesarea (Judaea)

Datable dedications

- Nida/Heddernheim I (Germania Sup.) (CIMRM 1091/2, 1098)
- Carnuntum III (Pannonia Sup.) (CIMRM 1718)
- Novae (Moesia Inf.) (CIMRM 2268/9)

- Oescus (Moesia Inf.)(CIMRM 2250)
- Rome(CIMRM 362, 593/4)

Classical literature about Mithras and the Mysteries

According to Boyce, the earliest literary references to the mysteries are by the Latin poet Statius, about 80 AD, and Plutarch (c. 100 AD).[110]

Mithras and the Bull: This fresco from the mithraeum at Marino, Italy (third century) shows the *tauroctony* and the celestial lining of Mithras' cape.

Statius

The Thebaid (c.80 AD[]) an epic poem by Statius, pictures Mithras in a cave, wrestling with something that has horns.[111] The context is a prayer to the god Phoebus.[112] The cave is described as *persei*, which in this context is usually translated "Persian", however according to the translator J.H.Mozley it literally means "Persean", referring to Perses the son of Persius and Andromeda;[] this Perses being the ancestor of the Persians according to Greek legend.[113]

Plutarch

The Greek biographer Plutarch (46 - 127 AD) says that "secret mysteries... of Mithras" were practiced by the pirates of Cilicia, the coastal province in the southeast of Anatolia, who were active in the 1st century BC: "They likewise offered strange sacrifices; those of Olympus I mean; and they celebrated certain secret mysteries, among which those of Mithras continue to this day, being originally instituted by them."[114] He mentions that the pirates were especially active during the Mithridatic wars (between the Roman Republic and King Mithridates VI of Pontus) in which they supported the king.[114] The association between Mithridates and the pirates is also mentioned by the ancient historian Appian.[115] The 4th century commentary on Vergil by Servius says that Pompey settled some of these pirates in Calabria in southern Italy.[116]

Dio Cassius

The historian Dio Cassius (2nd to 3rd century AD) tells how the name of Mithras was spoken during the state visit to Rome of Tiridates I of Armenia, during the reign of Nero. (Tiridates was the son of Vonones II of Parthia, and his coronation by Nero in 66 AD confirmed the end of a war between Parthia and Rome.) Dio Cassius writes that Tiridates, as he was about to receive his crown, told the Roman emperor that he revered him "as Mithras".[117] Roger Beck thinks it possible that this episode contributed to the emergence of Mithraism as a popular religion in Rome.[118]

Porphyry

Mosaic (1st century) depicting Mithras emerging from his cave and flanked by Cautes and Cautopates (Walters Art Museum)

The philosopher Porphyry (3rd-4th century AD) gives an account of the origins of the Mysteries in his work *De antro nympharum* (The Cave of the Nymphs).[119] Citing Eubulus as his source, Porphyry writes that the original temple of Mithras was a natural cave, containing fountains, which Zoroaster found in the mountains of Persia. To Zoroaster, this cave was an image of the whole world, so he consecrated it to Mithras, the creator of the world. Later in the same work, Porphyry links Mithras and the bull with planets and star-signs: Mithras himself is associated with the sign of Aries and the planet Mars, while the bull is associated with Venus.[120]

Porphyry is writing close to the demise of the cult, and Robert Turcan has challenged the idea that Porphyry's statements about Mithraism are accurate. His case is that far from representing what Mithraists believed, they are merely representations by the Neoplatonists of what it suited them in the late 4th century to read into the mysteries.[121] However, Merkelbach and Beck believe that Porphyry's work "is in fact thoroughly coloured with the doctrines of the Mysteries."[122] Beck holds that classical scholars have neglected Porphyry's evidence and have taken an unnecessarily skeptical view of Porphyry.[123] According to Beck, Porphyry's *De antro* is the only clear text from antiquity which tells us about the intent of the Mithriac Mysteries and how that intent was realized.[124] David Ulansey finds it important that Porphyry "confirms... that astral conceptions played an important role in Mithraism."[125]

Mithras Liturgy

In later antiquity, the Greek name of Mithras (Μίθρας) occurs in the text known as the Mithras Liturgy, part of the Paris Great Magical Papyrus (Paris Bibliotheque Nationale Suppl. gr. 574); here Mithras is given the epithet "the great god", and is identified with the sun god Helios.[126][127] There have been different views among scholars as to whether this text is an expression of Mithraism as such. Franz Cumont argued that it isn't;[128] Marvin Meyer thinks it is;[] while Hans Dieter Betz sees it as a synthesis of Greek, Egyptian, and Mithraic traditions.[129][130]

Modern debate about origins

Cumont's hypothesis: from Persian state religion

Augustan-era intaglio depicting a tauroctony (Walters Art Museum)

Scholarship on Mithras begins with Franz Cumont, who published a two volume collection of source texts and images of monuments in French in 1894–1900, *Textes et monuments figurés relatifs aux mystères de Mithra* [French: "Texts and Illustrated Monuments Relating to the Mysteries of Mithra"].[131] An English translation of part of this work was published in 1903, with the title *The Mysteries of Mithra*.[132] Cumont's hypothesis, as the author summarizes it in the first 32 pages of his book, was that the Roman religion was "the Roman form of Mazdaism",[133] the Persian state religion, disseminated from the East. He identified the ancient Aryan deity who appears in Persian literature as Mithras with the Hindu god Mitra of the

Vedic hymns.[] According to Cumont, the god Mithra came to Rome "accompanied by a large representation of the Mazdean Pantheon".[134] Cumont considers that while the tradition "underwent some modification in the Occident... the alterations that it suffered were largely superficial".[135]

Criticisms and reassessments of Cumont

Cumont's theories came in for severe criticism from John R. Hinnells and R.L. Gordon at the First International Congress of Mithraic Studies held in 1971.[136] John Hinnells was unwilling to reject entirely the idea of Iranian origin,[137] but wrote: "we must now conclude that his reconstruction simply will not stand. It receives no support from the Iranian material and is in fact in conflict with the ideas of that tradition as they are represented in the extant texts. Above all, it is a theoretical reconstruction which does not accord with the actual Roman iconography."[138] He discussed Cumont's reconstruction of the bull-slaying scene and stated "that the portrayal of Mithras given by Cumont is not merely unsupported by Iranian texts but is actually in serious conflict with known Iranian theology."[139] Another paper by R. L. Gordon argued that Cumont severely distorted the available evidence by forcing the material to conform to his predetermined model of Zoroastrian origins. Gordon suggested that the theory of Persian origins was completely invalid and that the Mithraic mysteries in the West was an entirely new creation.[140]

A similar view has been expressed by Luther H. Martin:"Apart from the name of the god himself, in other words, Mithraism seems to have developed largely in and is, therefore, best understood from the context of Roman culture."[141]

However, according to Hopfe, "All theories of the origin of Mithraism acknowledge a connection, however vague, to the Mithra/Mitra figure of ancient Aryan religion."[] Reporting on the Second International Congress of Mithraic Studies, 1975, Ugo Bianchi says that although he welcomes "the tendency to question in historical terms the relations between Eastern and Western Mithraism," it "should not mean obliterating what was clear to the Romans themselves, that Mithras was a 'Persian' (in wider perspective: an Indo-Iranian) god."[142]

Boyce states that "no satisfactory evidence has yet been adduced to show that, before Zoroaster, the concept of a supreme god existed among the Iranians, or that among them Mithra - or any other divinity - ever enjoyed a separate cult of his or her own outside either their ancient or their Zoroastrian pantheons."[143] However, she also says that although recent studies have minimized the Iranizing aspects of the self-consciously Persian religion "at least in the form which it attained under the Roman empire", the name Mithras is enough to show "that this aspect is of some importance". She also says that "the Persian affiliation of the Mysteries is acknowledged in the earliest literary references to them."[]

Beck tells us that since the 1970s scholars have generally rejected Cumont, but adds that recent theories about how Zoroastrianism was during the period BC now makes some new form of Cumont's east-west transfer possible.[144] He says that

> "...an indubitable residuum of things Persian in the Mysteries and a better knowledge of what constituted actual Mazdaism have allowed modern scholars to postulate for Roman Mithraism a continuing Iranian theology. This indeed is the main line of Mithraic scholarship, the Cumontian model which subsequent scholars accept, modify, or reject. For the transmission of Iranian doctrine from East to West, Cumont postulated a plausible, if hypothetical, intermediary: the Magusaeans of the Iranian diaspora in Anatolia. More problematic, and never properly addressed by Cumont or his successors, is how real-life Roman Mithraists subsequently maintained a quite complex and sophisticated Iranian theology behind an occidental facade. Other than the images at Dura of the two 'magi' with scrolls, there is no direct and explicit evidence for the carriers of such doctrines....Up to a point, Cumont's Iranian paradigm, especially in Turcan's modified form, is certainly plausible."[145][146][147]

He also says that "the old Cumontian model of formation in, and diffusion from, Anatolia...is by no means dead—nor should it be."[148]

Modern theories

Beck theorizes that the cult was created in Rome, by a single founder who had some knowledge of both Greek and Oriental religion, but suggests that some of the ideas used may have passed through the Hellenistic kingdoms. He observes that "Mithras — moreover, a Mithras who was identified with the Greek Sun god Helios" was among the gods of the syncretic Graeco-Armenian-Iranian royal cult at Nemrut founded by Antiochus I of Commagene in the mid 1st century BC.[] Michael Speidel associates Mithras with the Sun god Orion.[149] While proposing the theory, Beck says that his scenario may be regarded as Cumontian in two ways. Firstly, because it looks again at Anatolia and Anatolians, and more importantly, because it hews back to the methodology first used by Cumont.[150]

Bas-relief depicting the tauroctony. Mithras is depicted looking to Sol Invictus as he slays the bull. Sol and Luna appear at the top of the relief.

Merkelbach suggests that its mysteries were essentially created by a particular person or persons[151] and created in a specific place, the city of Rome, by someone from an eastern province or border state who knew the Iranian myths in detail, which he wove into his new grades of initiation; but that he must have been Greek and Greek-speaking because he incorporated elements of Greek Platonism into it. The myths, he suggests, were probably created in the milieu of the imperial bureaucracy, and for its members.[152] Clauss tends to agree. Beck calls this "the most likely scenario" and states "Till now, Mithraism has generally been treated as if it somehow evolved Topsy-like from its Iranian precursor – a most implausible scenario once it is stated explicitly."[153]

Archaeologist Lewis M. Hopfe notes that there are only three Mithraea in Roman Syria, in contrast to further west. He writes: "Archaeology indicates that Roman Mithraism had its epicenter in Rome... the fully developed religion known as Mithraism seems to have begun in Rome and been carried to Syria by soldiers and merchants."[4]

Taking a different view from other modern scholars, Ulansey argues that the Mithraic mysteries began in the Greco-Roman world as a religious response to the discovery by the Greek astronomer Hipparchus of the astronomical phenomenon of the precession of the equinoxes – a discovery that amounted to discovering that the entire cosmos was moving in a hitherto unknown way. This new cosmic motion, he suggests, was seen by the founders of Mithraism as indicating the existence of a powerful new god capable of shifting the cosmic spheres and thereby controlling the universe.[154]

However, A. D. H. Bivar, L. A. Campbell and G. Widengren have variously argued that Roman Mithraism represents a continuation of some form of Iranian Mithra worship.[155]

According to Antonia Tripolitis, Roman Mithraism originated in Vedic India and picked up many features of the cultures which it encountered in its westward journey.[156]

Later history

The first important expansion of the mysteries in the Empire seems to have happened quite quickly, late in the reign of Antoninus Pius and under Marcus Aurelius. By this time all the key elements of the mysteries were in place.[157]

Museo archeologico (Mithraism reached the apogee of its popularity during the 2nd and 3rd centuries, spreading at an "astonishing" rate at the same period when Sol Invictus became part of the state.[158] At this period a certain Pallas devoted a monograph to Mithras, and a little later Euboulus wrote a *History of Mithras*, although both works are now lost.[159] According to the 4th century Historia Augusta, the emperor Commodus participated in its mysteries[160] but it never became one of the state cults.[161]

Sol Invictus from the Archaeological Museum of Milan

The end of Roman Mithraism

It is difficult to trace when the cult of Mithras came to an end. Beck states that "Quite early in the [fourth] century the religion was as good as dead throughout the empire."[162] Inscriptions from the 4th century are few. Clauss states that inscriptions show Mithras as one of the cults listed on inscriptions by Roman senators who had not converted to Christianity, as part of the "pagan revival" among the elite.[163] Ulansey holds that "Mithraism declined with the rise to power of Christianity, until the beginning of the fifth century, when Christianity became strong enough to exterminate by force rival religions such as Mithraism."[164] According to Speidel, Christians fought fiercely with this feared enemy and suppressed it during the 4th century. Some Mithraic sanctuaries were destroyed and religion was no longer a matter of personal choice.[165] According to Luther H. Martin, Roman Mithraism came to an end with the anti-pagan decrees of the Christian emperor Theodosius during the last decade of the 4th century.[166]

At some of the mithraeums which have been found below churches, for example the Santa Prisca mithraeum and the San Clemente mithraeum, the ground plan of the church above was made in a way to symbolize Christianity's domination of Mithraism.[] According to Mark Humphries, the deliberate concealment of Mithraic cult objects in some areas suggests that precautions were being taken against Christian attacks. However, in areas like the Rhine frontier, purely religious considerations cannot explain the end of Mithraism and barbarian invasions may also have played a role.[]

There is virtually no evidence for the continuance of the cult of Mithras into the 5th century. In particular large numbers of votive coins deposited by worshippers have been recovered at the Mithraeum at Pons Sarravi (Sarrebourg) in Gallia Belgica, in a series that runs from Gallienus (253-68) to Theodosius I (379-395). These were scattered over the floor when the Mithraeum was destroyed, as Christians apparently regarded the coins as polluted; and they therefore provide reliable dates for the functioning of the Mithraeum.[167] It cannot be shown that any Mithraeum continued in use in the 5th century. The coin series in all Mithraea end at the end of the 4th century at the latest. The cult disappeared earlier than that of Isis. Isis was still remembered in the middle ages as a pagan deity, but Mithras was already forgotten in late antiquity.[168]

Cumont stated in his book that Mithraism may have survived in certain remote cantons of the Alps and Vosges into the 5th century.[169]

Interpretations of the bull-slaying scene

Unusual tauroctony at the Brukenthal National Museum

According to Franz Cumont, the imagery of the tauroctony was a Graeco-Roman representation of an event in Zoroastrian cosmogony described in a 9th century AD Zoroastrian text, the Bundahishn. In this text the evil spirit Ahriman (not Mithras) slays the primordial creature Gavaevodata which is represented as a bovine.[170] Cumont held that a version of the myth must have existed in which Mithras, not Ahriman, killed the bovine. But according to Hinnells, no such variant of the myth is known, and that this is merely speculation: "In no known Iranian text [either Zoroastrian or otherwise] does Mithra slay a bull"[171]

David Ulansey finds astronomical evidence from the mithraeum itself.[172] He reminds us that the Platonic writer Porphyry wrote in the 3rd century AD that the cave-like temple Mithraea depicted "an image of the world"[173] and that Zoroaster consecrated a cave resembling the world fabricated by Mithras[119] The ceiling of the Caesarea Maritima Mithraeum retains traces of blue paint, which may mean the ceiling was painted to depict the sky and the stars.[174]

Beck has given the following celestial anatomy of the Tauroctony:[175]

Component of Tauroctony	Celestial Counterpart
Bull	*Taurus*
Dog	*Canis Minor*, *Canis Major*
Snake	*Hydra*, *Serpens*, *Draco*
Raven	*Corvus*
Scorpion	*Scorpius*
Wheat's ear (on bull's tail)	*Spica*
Twins Cautes and Cautopates	*Gemini*
Lion	*Leo*
Crater	*Crater*
Sol	*Sun*
Luna	*Moon*
Cave	*Universe*

Several celestial identities for the Tauroctonous Mithras (TM) himself have been proposed. Beck summarizes them in the table below.[176]

Scholar	Identification
Bausani, A. (1979)	TM associated with Leo, in that the tauroctony is a type of the ancient lion-bull (Leo-Taurus) combat motif.
Beck, R.L. (1994)	TM = Sun in Leo
Insler, S. (1978)	bull-killing = heliacal setting of Taurus
Jacobs, B. (1999)	bull-killing = heliacal setting of Taurus
North, J.D. (1990)	TM = Betelgeuse (Alpha Orionis) setting, his knife = Triangulum setting, his mantle = Capella (Alpha Aurigae) setting.
Rutgers, A.J. (1970)	TM = Sun, Bull = Moon
Sandelin, K.-G. (1988)	TM = Auriga
Speidel, M.P. (1980)	TM = Orion
Ulansey, D. (1989)	TM = Perseus
Weiss, M. (1994, 1998)	TM = the Night Sky

Ulansey has proposed that Mithras seems to have been derived from the constellation of Perseus, which is positioned just above Taurus in the night sky. He sees iconographic and mythological parallels between the two figures: both are young heroes, carry a dagger and wear a Phrygian cap. He also mentions the similarity of the image of Perseus killing the Gorgon and the tauroctony, both figures being associated with underground caverns and both having connections to Persia as further evidence.[177]

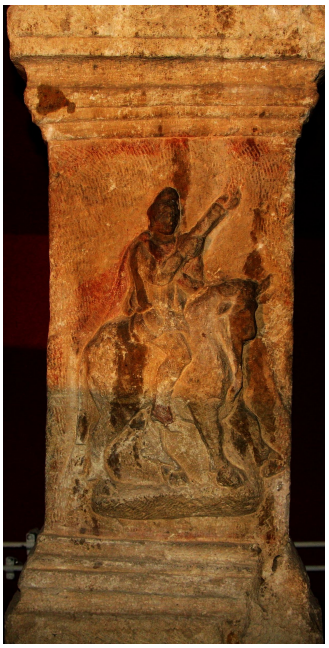
Sol and Mithras banqueting with Luna and the twin divinities Cautes and Cautopates, his attendants (side B of a double-sided Roman marble relief, 2nd or 3rd century AD)

Michael Speidel associates Mithras with the constellation of Orion because of the proximity to Taurus, and the consistent nature of the depiction of the figure as having wide shoulders, a garment flared at the hem, and narrowed at the waist with a belt, thus taking on the form of the constellation.[149]

Beck has criticized Speidel and Ulansey of adherence to a literal cartographic logic, describing their theories as a "will-o'-the-wisp" which "lured them down a false trail."[178] He argues that a literal reading of the tauroctony as a star chart raises two major problems: it is difficult to find a constellation counterpart for Mithras himself (despite efforts by Speidel and Ulansey) and that unlike in a star chart, each feature of the tauroctony might have more than a single counterpart. Rather than seeing Mithras as a constellation, Beck argues that Mithras is the prime traveller on the celestial stage (represented by the other symbols of the scene), the Unconquered Sun moving through the constellations.[178] But again, Meyer holds that the Mithras Liturgy reflects the world of Mithraism and may be a confirmation for Ulansey's theory of Mithras being held responsible for the precession of equinoxes.[179]

Mithras and other gods

The cult of Mithras was part of the syncretic nature of ancient Roman religion. Almost all Mithraea contain statues dedicated to gods of other cults, and it is common to find inscriptions dedicated to Mithras in other sanctuaries, especially those of Jupiter Dolichenus.[180] Mithraism was not an alternative to Rome's other traditional religions, but was one of many forms of religious practice; and many Mithraic initiates can also be found participating in the civic religion, and as initiates of other mystery cults.[181]



Mithras riding bull

Mithraism and Christianity

Early Christian apologists noted similarities between Mithraic and Christian rituals, but nonetheless took an extremely negative view of Mithraism: they interpreted Mithraic rituals as evil copies of Christian ones.[][182] For instance, Tertullian wrote that as a prelude to the Mithraic initiation ceremony, the initiate was given a ritual bath and at the end of the ceremony, received a mark on the forehead. He described these rites as a diabolical counterfeit of the baptism and chrismation of Christians.[183] Justin Martyr contrasted Mithraic initiation communion with the Eucharist:[184]

> Wherefore also the evil demons in mimicry have handed down that the same thing should be done in the Mysteries of Mithras. For that bread and a cup of water are in these mysteries set before the initiate with certain speeches you either know or can learn.[185]

Marvin Meyer comments that "early Christianity ... in general, resembles Mithraism in a number of respects – enough to make Christian apologists scramble to invent creative theological explanations to account for the similarities."[186]

Ernest Renan suggested in 1882 that, under different circumstances, Mithraism might have risen to the prominence of modern-day Christianity. Renan wrote: "if the growth of Christianity had been arrested by some mortal malady, the world would have been Mithraic…"[187][188] However, this theory has since been contested: Leonard Boyle wrote in 1987 that "too much ... has been made of the 'threat' of Mithraism to Christianity,"[189] pointing out that there are only fifty known mithraea in the entire city of Rome. J. A. Ezquerra holds that since the two religions did not share similar aims, there was never any real threat of Mithraism taking over the Roman world.[190]

According to Mary Boyce, Mithraism was a potent enemy for Christianity in the West, though she is skeptical about its hold in the East.[][191][192] Filippo Coarelli (1979) has tabulated forty actual or possible Mithraea and estimated that Rome would have had "not less than 680–690" mithraea.[] Lewis M. Hopfe states that more than 400 Mithraic sites have been found. These sites are spread all over the Roman empire from places as far as Dura Europas in the east, and England in the west. He too says that Mithraism may have been a rival of Christianity.[] David Ulansey thinks Renan's statement "somewhat exaggerated",[] but does consider Mithraism "one of Christianity's major competitors in the Roman Empire".[] Ulansey sees study of Mithraism as important for understanding "the cultural matrix out of which the Christian religion came to birth".[]

On the basis of his astronomical interpretation of Mithraism, Ulansey argues for a "profound kinship between Mithraism and Christianity", in that Mithras, like Jesus Christ, was considered to be "a being from beyond the universe".[] Ulansey suggests that these two figures, Mithras and Jesus, "are to some extent both manifestations of a single deep longing in the human spirit".[]

References

[1] Origen, Contra Celsus, Book 6 (http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/04166.htm), Chapter 22. "After this, Celsus, desiring to exhibit his learning in his treatise against us, quotes also certain Persian mysteries, where he says: 'These things are obscurely hinted at in the accounts of the Persians, and especially in the mysteries of Mithras, which are celebrated among them...' " Chapter 24 "After the instance borrowed from the Mithraic mysteries, Celsus declares that he who would investigate the Christian mysteries, along with the aforesaid Persian, will, on comparing the two together, and on unveiling the rites of the Christians, see in this way the difference between them."

[3] M. Clauss, *The Roman cult of Mithras*, p. 42: "That the hand-shaken might make their vows joyfully forever"

[4] Lewis M. Hopfe, "Archaeological indications on the origins of Roman Mithraism", in Lewis M. Hopfe (ed). *Uncovering ancient stones: essays in memory of H. Neil Richardson*, Eisenbrauns (1994), pp. 147-158. p. 156: "Beyond these three Mithraea [in Syria and Palestine], there are only a handful of objects from Syria that may be identified with Mithraism. Archaeological evidence of Mithraism in Syria is therefore in marked contrast to the abundance of Mithraea and materials that have been located in the rest of the Roman Empire. Both the frequency and the quality of Mithraic materials is greater in the rest of the empire. Even on the western frontier in Britain, archaeology has produced rich Mithraic materials, such as those found at Walbrook.

If one accepts Cumont's theory that Mithraism began in Iran, moved west through Babylon to Asia Minor, and then to Rome, one would expect that the cult left its traces in those locations. Instead, archaeology indicates that Roman Mithraism had its epicenter in Rome. Wherever its ultimate place of origin may have been, the fully developed religion known as Mithraism seems to have begun in Rome and been carried to Syria by soldiers and merchants. None of the Mithraic materials or temples in Roman Syria except the Commagene sculpture bears any date earlier than the late first or early second century. [*footnote in cited text:* 30. Mithras, identified with a Phrygian cap and the nimbus about his head, is depicted in colossal statuary erected by King Antiochus I of Commagene, 69-34 B.C.. (see Vermaseren, *CIMRM* 1.53-56). However, there are no other literary or archaeological evidences to indicate that the religion of Mithras as it was known among the Romans in the second to fourth centuries A.D. was practiced in Commagene]. While little can be proved from silence, it seems that the relative lack of archaeological evidence from Roman Syria would argue against the traditional theories for the origins of Mithraism."

[8] Charlton T. Lewis, Charles Short. A Latin Dictionary (http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0059:entry=Mithras)

[12] Xenophon, Cyropaedia 7.5.53. Cited in Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon (http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0057:entry=*mi/qras)

[13] . p. 160: "The usual western nominative form of Mithras' name in the mysteries ended in -s, as we can see from the one authentic dedication in the nominative, recut over a dedication to Sarapis (463, Terme de Caracalla), and from occasional grammatical errors such as deo inviato Metras (1443). But it is probable that Euboulus and Pallas at least used the name Mithra as an indeclinable (ap. Porphyry, *De abstinentia* II.56 and IV.16)."

[14] E.g. in Rig Veda 3, Hymn 59 (http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/rigveda/rv03059.htm)

[16] pp. 301-317.

[17] (accessed April 2011)

[21] Clauss, M. *The Roman cult of Mithras*, p. xxi: "we possess virtually no theological statements either by Mithraists themselves or by other writers."

[23] David Ulansey, *The origins of the Mithraic mysteries*, p. 6 (http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=25_SOWldSUUC&pg=PA6&dq=cumont+tauroctony&ei=ZzTPSrbSLo3WygSpt_ywBg#v=onepage&q=cumont tauroctony&f=false): "Although the iconography of the cult varied a great deal from temple to temple, there is one element of the cult's iconography which was present in essentially the same form in every mithraeum and which, moreover, was clearly of the utmost importance to the cult's ideology; namely the so-called tauroctony, or bull-slaying scene, in which the god Mithras, accompanied by a series of other figures, is depicted in the act of killing the bull."

[24] Clauss, M., *The Roman cult of Mithras*, p.77.

[26] Clauss, M. *The Roman cult of Mithras*, p.98-9. An image search for "tauroctony" will show many examples of the variations.

[28] J. R. Hinnells, "The Iconography of Cautes and Cautopates: the Data," Journal of Mithraic Studies 1, 1976, pp. 36-67. See also William W. Malandra, Cautes and Cautopates (http://www.iranica.com/newsite/index.isc?Article=http://www.iranica.com/newsite/articles/unicode/v5f1/v5f1a033.html) Encyclopedia Iranica article

[29] Clauss, M., *The Roman cult of Mithras*, p.74.

[30] L'Ecole Initiative: Alison Griffith, 1996. "Mithraism" (http://www2.evansville.edu/ecoleweb/articles/mithraism.html)

[33] Beck, Roger, "In the Place of the Lion: Mithras in the Tauroctony" in *Beck on Mithraism: collected works with new essays" (2004), p. 286-287].*

[34] , p. 27-28.

[36] Commodian, *Instructiones* 1.13: "The unconquered one was born from a rock, if he is regarded as a god." See also image of "Mithras petra genetrix Terme" inset above.

[37] von Gall, Hubertus, "The Lion-headed and the Human-headed God in the Mithraic Mysteries," in Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin ed. *Études mithriaques*, 1978, pp. 511
[38] Cumont Franz, The Mysteries of Mithras, pp 105 (http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/mom/mom07.htm)
[39] Jackson, Howard M., "The Meaning and Function of the Leontocephaline in Roman Mithraism" in *Numen*, Vol. 32, Fasc. 1 (Jul., 1985), pp. 17-45
[42] Beck, R, *Beck on Mithraism*, pp. 194
[44] , p. 299, n. 12.
[45] Clauss, Manfred. *Mithras: Kult und Mysterien*. München: Beck, 1990, p. 70.
[46] http://www.novaroma.org/nr/Sodalitas_Graeciae_%28Nova_Roma%29/Religion_from_the_Papyri/Mithraism
[47] (http://books.google.ca/books?ei=n_chUNOsOYT86gG_iICgCw&id=GonXAAAAMAAJ&dq=mithraic+catechism&q=catechism#search_anchor) William M. Brashear, *A Mithraic Catechism from Egypt*
[49] Meyer, Marvin W. (1976) The "Mithras Liturgy" (http://www.hermetic.com/pgm/mithras-liturgy.html).
[51] Clauss, M., *The Roman cult of Mithras*, p.115.
[52] Clauss, M., *The Roman cult of Mithras*, p.43.
[54] Clauss, M., *The Roman cult of Mithras*, p.49.
[55] Price S & Kearns E, *Oxford Dictionary of Classical Myth and Religion*, p.568.
[57] , p.87.
[58] "Beck on Mithraism", p. 16
[59] plate 25
[60] Clauss, M., *The Roman cult of Mithras*, p.139.
[61] Clauss, M., *The Roman cult of Mithras*, pages 26 and 27.
[63] Clauss, M., *The Roman cult of Mithras*, p.73.
[65] Price S & Kearns E, *Oxford Dictionary of Classical Myth and Religion*, p.493.
[66] Price S & Kearns E, *Oxford Dictionary of Classical Myth and Religion*, p.355.
[67] Clauss, *The Roman cult of Mithras*, p.102. The Suda reference given is 3: 394, M 1045 Adler.
[68] Clauss, *The Roman cult of Mithras*, p.102. The Gregory reference given is to *Oratio* 4. 70.
[69] Jerome, *Letters* 107, ch. 2 (http://www.ccel.org/fathers/NPNF2-06/letters/lette107.htm) (To Laeta)
[70] M.Clauss, *The Roman cult of Mithras*, p.132-133
[71] M.Clauss, *The Roman cult of Mithras*, p.133-138
[73] http://www.uhu.es/ejms/Papers/Volume1Papers/ABGMS.DOC
[74] Clauss, M., *The Roman cult of Mithras*, p.103.
[75] M. Clauss, *The Roman cult of Mithras*, p. 105: "the followers of Mithras were the 'initiates of the theft of the bull, united by the handshake of the illustrious father." (*Err. prof. relig.* 5.2)
[76] Catholic Encyclopedia, Patrick J. Healy, 1909 Edition (http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06080a.htm)
[78] "Beck on Mithraism", pp. 288-289
[79] (http://www.uni-koeln.de/phil-fak/ifa/zpe/downloads/1995/108pdf/108001.pdf)
[80] in , p. 257
[81] Clauss, *The Roman cult of Mithras*, p.62-101.
[82] Clauss, *The Roman cult of Mithras*, p.33.
[85] , at p. 121.
[86] Clauss, *The Roman cult of Mithras*, p.39.
[87] Clauss, M., *The Roman cult of Mithras*, p.144-145: "Justin's charge does at least make clear that Mithraic commandments did exist."
[88] Clauss, M., *The Roman cult of Mithras*, p.144, referencing *Caesares* 336C in the translation of W.C.Wright. Hermes addresses Julian: "As for you ..., I have granted you to know Mithras the Father. Keep his commandments, thus securing for yourself an anchor-cable and safe mooring all through your life, and, when you must leave the world, having every confidence that the god who guides you will be kindly disposed."
[89] Tertullian, *De Corona Militis*, 15.3
[97] C.M.Daniels, "The role of the Roman army in the spread and practice of Mithraism" in John R. Hinnells (ed) *Mithraic Studies: proceedings of the first International congress of Mithraic Studies* Manchester university press (1975), vol. 2, p. 250: "Traditionally there are two geographical regions where Mithraism first struck root in the Roman empire: Italy and the Danube. Italy I propose to omit, as the subject needs considerable discussion, and the introduction of the cult there, as witnessed by its early dedicators, seems not to have been military. Before we turn to the Danube, however, there is one early event (rather than geographical location) which should perhaps be mentioned briefly in passing. This is the supposed arrival of the cult in Italy as a result of Pompey the Great's defeat of the Cilician pirates, who practised 'strange sacrifices of their own ... and celebrated certain secret rites, amongst which those of Mithra continue to the present time, having been first instituted by them'. Suffice it to say that there is neither archaeological nor allied evidence for the arrival of Mithraism in the West at that time, nor is there any ancient literary reference, either contemporary or later. If anything, Plutarch's mention carefully omits making the point that the cult was introduced into Italy at that time or by the pirates."
[98] Beck, R., "The Mysteries of Mithras: A New Account of their Genesis", Journal of Roman Studies, 1998, 115-128. p. 118.
[100] . Online here (http://www.hums.canterbury.ac.nz/clas/ejms/out_of_print/JMSv2n2/JMSv2n2Gordon.pdf).

[101] Beskow, Per, *The routes of early Mithraism*, in *Études mithriaques* Ed.Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin. p.14: "Another possible piece of evidence is offered by five terracotta plaques with a tauroctone, found in Crimea and taken into the records of Mithraic monuments by Cumont and Vermaseren. If they are Mithraic, they are certainly the oldest known representations of Mithras tauroctone; the somewhat varying dates given by Russian archaeologists will set the beginning of the first century C.E. as a terminus ad quem, which is also said to have been confirmed by the stratigraphic conditions." Note 20 gives the publication as W. Blawatsky / G. Kolchelenko, *Le culte de Mithra sur la cote spetentrionale de la Mer Noire*, Leiden 1966, p.14f.

[102] ...the area [the Crimea] is of interest mainly because of the terracotta plaques from Kerch (five, of which two are in CIMRM as nos 11 and 12). These show a bull-killing figure and their probable date (second half of first-century BC to first half of first AD) would make them the earliest tauroctonies -- if it is Mithras that they portray. Their iconography is significantly different from that of the standard tauroctony (e.g. in the Attis-like exposure of the god's genitals). Roger Beck, *Mithraism since Franz Cumont*, *Aufsteig und Niedergang der romischen Welt* II 17.4 (1984), p. 2019 (http://books.google.co.in/books?id=wFceDNFgVowC&lpg=PR5&dq=beck "mithraism since franz cumont"& pg=PA2018#v=onepage&q&f=true)

[103] Beskow, Per, *The routes of early Mithraism*, in *Études mithriaques* Ed.Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin. p.15: "The plaques are typical Bosporan terracottas... At the same time it must be admitted that the plaques have some strange features which make it debateable if this is really Mithra(s). Most striking is the fact that his genitals are visible as they are in the iconography of Attis, which is accentuated by a high anaxyrides. Instead of the tunic and flowing cloak he wears a kind of jacket, buttoned over the breast with only one button, perhaps the attempt of a not so skillful artist to depict a cloak. The bull is small and has a hump and the tauroctone does not plunge his knife into the flank of the bull but holds it lifted. The nudity gives it the character of a fertility god and if we want to connect it directly with the Mithraic mysteries it is indeed embarrassing that the first one of these plaques was found in a woman's tomb." Clauss, p.156: "He is grasping one of the bull's horns with his left hand, and wrenching back its head; the right arm is raised to deliver the death-blow. So far, this god must be Mithras. But in sharp contrast with the usual representations, he is dressed in a jacket-like garment, fastened at the chest with a brooch, which leaves his genitals exposed - the iconography typical of Attis."

[104] . Online here (http://www.hums.canterbury.ac.nz/clas/ejms/out_of_print/JMSv2n2/JMSv2n2Gordon.pdf) CIMRM 362 a , b = el l, VI 732 = Moretti, lGUR I 179: "Soli | Invicto Mithrae | T . Flavius Aug. lib. Hyginus | Ephebianus | d . d." - but the Greek title is just "`Hliwi Mithrai". The name "Flavius" for an imperial freedman dates it between 70-136 AD. The Greek section refers to a *pater* of the cult named Lollius Rufus, evidence of the existence of the rank system at this early date.

[105] p. 150.

[106] C. M. Daniels, "The Roman army and the spread of Mithraism" in John R. Hinnels, *Mithraic Studies: Proceedings of the First International Congress of Mithraic Studies*, vol. 2, 1975, Manchester UP, pp.249-274. "The considerable movement [of civil servants and military] throughout the empire was of great importance to Mithraism, and even with the very fragmentary and inadequate evidence that we have it is clear that the movement of troops was a major factor in the spread of the cult. Traditionally there are two geographical regions where Mithraism first struck root: Italy and the Danube. Italy I propose to omit, as the subject needs considerable discussion, and the introduction of the cult there, as witnessed by its early dedicators, seems not to have been military. Before we turn to the Danube, however, there is one early event (rather than geographical location) which should perhaps be mentioned briefly in passing. This is the supposed arrival of the cult in Italy as a result of Pompey the Great's defeat of Cilician pirates, who practiced 'strange sacrifices of their own... and celebrated certain secret rites, amongst which those of Mithras continue to the present time, have been first instituted by them'. (ref Plutarch, "Pompey" 24-25) Suffice it to say that there is neither archaeological nor allied evidence for the arrival of Mithraism in the west at that time, nor is there any ancient literary reference, either contemporary or later. If anything, Plutarch's mention carefully omits making the point that the cult was introduced into Italy at that time or by the pirates. Turning to the Danube, the earliest dedication from that region is an altar to Mitrhe (sic) set up by C. Sacidus Barbarus, a centurion of XV Appolinaris, stationed at the time at Carnuntum in Pannonia (Deutsch-Altenburg, Austria). The movements of this legion are particularly informative." The article then goes on to say that XV Appolinaris was originally based at Carnuntum, but between 62-71 transferred to the east, first in the Armenian campaign, and then to put down the Jewish uprising. Then 71- 86 back in Carnuntum, then 86-105 intermittently in the Dacian wars, then 105-114 back in Carnuntum, and finally moved to Cappadocia in 114.

[107] C. M. Daniels, "The Roman army and the spread of Mithraism" in John R. Hinnels, *Mithraic Studies: Proceedings of the First International Congress of Mithraic Studies*, vol. 2, 1975, Manchester UP, p. 263. The first dateable Mithraeum outside italy is from Böckingen on the Neckar, where a centurion of the legion VIII Augustus dedicated two altars, one to Mithras and the other (dated 148) to Apollo.

[108] Lewis M. Hopfe, "Archaeological indications on the origins of Roman Mithraism", in Lewis M. Hopfe (ed). *Uncovering ancient stones: essays in memory of H. Neil Richardson*, Eisenbrauns (1994), pp. 147-158. p.153: "At present this is the only Mithraeum known in Roman Palestine." p. 154: "It is difficult to assign an exact date to the founding of the Caesarea Maritima Mithraeum. No dedicatory plaques have been discovered that might aid in the dating. The lamps found with the *taurectone* medallion are from the end of the first century to the late third century A.D. Other pottery and coins from the vault are also from this era. Therefore it is speculated that this Mithraeum developed toward the end of the first century and remained active until the late third century. This matches the dates assigned to the Dura-Europos and the Sidon Mithraea."

[109] "Beck on Mithraism", pp. 34–35. Online here (http://books.google.com/books?id=SIYTfTYrs1UC&pg=PA34&dq="The+attested+ locations+of+the+cult+in+the+earliest+phase+(c.+80-120)+are+as+follows"&ei=sqXZSpaGJ4qOywTtltiuDg#v=onepage&q="The attested locations of the cult in the earliest phase (c.80-120) are as follows"&f=false).

[111] Statius: Thebaid 1.719 to 720 J.H.Mozey's translation at Classical E-Text (http://www.theoi.com/Text/StatiusThebaid1.html) Latin text at The Latin Library (http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/statius/theb1.shtml)

[112] The prayer begins at Statius Thebaid 1.696 J.H.Mozey's translation at Classical E-Text (http://www.theoi.com/Text/StatiusThebaid1.html) Latin text at The Latin Library (http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/statius/theb1.shtml)

[114] (*Life of Pompey* 24 (http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Lives/Pompey*.html#24), referring to events c. 68 BC).

[115] App. *Mith* 14.92 cited in

[116] E.D.Francis "Plutarch's Mithraic pirates". Appendix to Franz Cummont "The Dura Mithraeum". In the book: John R. Hinnells *Mithraic Studies: Proceedings of the first international congress*. Manchester University Press 1975. Vol 1, p 207 to 210. (reference to Servius is in a lengthy footnote to page 208) Google books link (http://books.google.com.au/books?id=xRy8AAAAIAAJ&pg=PA208&lpg=PA208&dq=Servius+Plutarch+Cumont&source=bl&ots=R-tI_0EgWM&sig=se32Ai4mli-BqJTlzaIwTt1YemA&hl=en&ei=GOtfTeOOLYnIuAPo48zgAg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CCEQ6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=Servius Plutarch Cumont&f=false)

[117] Dio Cassius 63.5.2

[119] Porphyry, De antro nympharum (http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/porphyry_cave_of_nymphs_02_translation.htm) 2: "For, as Eubulus says, Zoroaster was the first who consecrated in the neighbouring mountains of Persia, a spontaneously produced cave, florid, and having fountains, in honour of Mithra, the maker and father of all things; |12 a cave, according to Zoroaster, bearing a resemblance of the world, which was fabricated by Mithra. But the things contained in the cavern being arranged according to commensurate intervals, were symbols of the mundane elements and climates."

[120] Porphyry, De antro nympharum (http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/porphyry_cave_of_nymphs_02_translation.htm) 11: "Hence, a place near to the equinoctial circle was assigned to Mithra as an appropriate seat. And on this account he bears the sword of Aries, which is a martial sign. He is likewise carried in the Bull, which is the sign of Venus. For Mithra. as well as the Bull, is the Demiurgus and lord of generation."

[121] Turcan, Robert, *Mithras Platonicus*, Leiden, 1975, via Beck, R. *Merkelbach's Mithras* p. 301-2.

[122] Beck, R. *Merkelbach's Mithras* p. 308 n. 37.

[126] (The reference is at line 482 of the *Great Magical Papyrus of Paris*. The Mithras Liturgy comprises lines 475 - 834 of the Papyrus.)

[127] See the Greek text with German translation in Albrecht Dieterich, Eine Mithrasliturgie, 2nd edition, pp 1-2 (http://www.archive.org/stream/einemithraslitur00dietuoft#page/2/mode/2up)

[128] *The "Mithras Liturgy":Text, Translation and Commentary* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003). p.12

[129] *The "Mithras Liturgy":Text, Translation and Commentary* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003)

[130] Richard Gordon, "Probably Not Mithras", *The Classical Review* Vol. 55, No. 1 (March 2005) pp. 99-100.

[131] Cumont, Franz (1894-1900). *Textes et monuments figurés relatifs aux mystères de Mithra*. Brussels: H. Lamertin.

[132] Cumont, Franz (1903). *The Mysteries of Mithra*. Translated by Thomas J. McCormack. Chicago: Open Court. Accessible online at Internet Sacred Text Archive: The Mysteries of Mithra Index (http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/mom/index.htm) (accessed Feb 13, 2011)

[133] Beck, R. "Merkelbach's Mithras" in *Phoenix* 41.3 (1987) p. 298.

[134] Cumont, Franz (1903). *The Mysteries of Mithra*. p 107. (http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/mom/mom07.htm) (accessed Feb 13, 2011)

[135] Cumont, Franz (1903). *The Mysteries of Mithra*. p 104. (http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/mom/mom07.htm) (accessed Feb 13, 2011)

[137] John R. Hinnells, "Reflections on the bull-slaying scene" in *Mithraic studies*, vol. 2, p. 303-4 (http://books.google.com/books?id=eBy8AAAAIAAJ&lpg=PP1&dq=mithraic studies&pg=PA303#v=onepage&q=Since Cumont's reconstruction &f=false): "Nevertheless we would not be justified in swinging to the opposite extreme from Cumont and Campbell and denying all connection between Mithraism and Iran."

[138] John R. Hinnells, "Reflections on the bull-slaying scene" in *Mithraic studies*, vol. 2, p. 303-4 (http://books.google.com/books?id=eBy8AAAAIAAJ&lpg=PP1&dq=mithraic studies&pg=PA303#v=onepage&q=Since Cumont's reconstruction &f=false): "Since Cumont's reconstruction of the theology underlying the reliefs in terms of the Zoroastrian myth of creation depends upon the symbolic expression of the conflict of good and evil, we must now conclude that his reconstruction simply will not stand. It receives no support from the Iranian material and is in fact in conflict with the ideas of that tradition as they are represented in the extant texts. Above all, it is a theoretical reconstruction which does not accord with the actual Roman iconography. What, then, do the reliefs depict? And how can we proceed in any study of Mithraism? I would accept with R. Gordon that Mithraic scholars must in future start with the Roman evidence, not by outlining Zoroastrian myths and then making the Roman iconography fit that scheme. ... Unless we discover Euboulus' history of Mithraism we are never likely to have conclusive proof for any theory. Perhaps all that can be hoped for is a theory which is in accordance with the evidence and commends itself by (mere) plausibility."

[139] John R. Hinnells, "Reflections on the bull-slaying scene" in *Mithraic studies*, vol. 2, p. 292: "Indeed, one can go further and say that the portrayal of Mithras given by Cumont is not merely unsupported by Iranian texts but is actually in serious conflict with known Iranian theology. Cumont reconstructs a primordial life of the god on earth, but such a concept is unthinkable in terms of known, specifically Zoroastrian, Iranian thought where the gods never, and apparently never could, live on earth. To interpret Roman Mithraism in terms of Zoroastrian thought and to argue for an earthly life of the god is to combine irreconcilables. If it is believed that Mithras had a primordial life on earth, then the concept of the god has changed so fundamentally that the Iranian background has become virtually irrelevant."

[140] R.L.Gordon, "Franz Cumont and the doctrines of Mithraism" in John R. Hinnells, *Mithraic studies*, vol. 1, p. 215 f

[141] in , p. xiv.

[143] pp. 243,n.18

[144] , p. 28 (http://books.google.com/books?id=SIYTfTYrs1UC&lpg=PP1&dq=beck on mithraism&pg=PA28#v=onepage&q=generally agreed that Cumont's master narrative of east-west transfer is unsustainable&f=false): "Since the 1970s scholars of western Mithraism have

generally agreed that Cumont's master narrative of east-west transfer is unsustainable;" although he adds that "recent trends in the scholarship on Iranian religion, by modifying the picture of that religion prior to the birth of the western mysteries, now render a revised Cumontian scenario of east-west transfer and continuities now viable."

[149] Michael P. Speidel, *Mithras-Orion: Greek Hero and Roman Army God*, Brill Academic Publishers (August 1997), ISBN 90-04-06055-3

[151] Beck, R., 2002: "Discontinuity's weaker form of argument postulates re-invention among and for the denizens of the Roman empire (or certain sections thereof), but re-invention by a person or persons of some familiarity with Iranian religion in a form current on its western margins in the first century AD. Merkelbach (1984: pp. 75-77), expanding on a suggestion of M.P. Nilsson, proposes such a founder from eastern Anatolia, working in court circles in Rome. So does Beck 1998, with special focus on the dynasty of Commagene (see above). Jakobs 1999 proposes a similar scenario."

[152] Reinhold Merkelbach, *Mithras*, Konigstein, 1984, ch. 75-7

[153] Beck, R., "Merkelbach's Mithras", p. 304, 306.

[154] Ulansey, D., *The origins of the Mithraic mysteries", p. 77f.*

[157] . pp.150-151: "The first important expansion of the mysteries in the Empire seems to have occurred relatively rapidly late in the reign of Antoninus Pius and under Marcus Aurelius (9) . By that date, it is clear, the mysteries were fully institutionalised and capable of relatively stereotyped self-reproduction through the medium of an agreed, and highly complex, symbolic system reduced in iconography and architecture to a readable set of 'signs'. Yet we have good reason to believe that the establishment of at least some of those signs is to be dated at least as early as the Flavian period or in the very earliest years of the second century. Beyond that we cannot go..."

[158] Beck, R., *Merkelbach's Mithras*, p.299; Clauss, R., *The Roman cult of Mithras*, p. 25: "... the astonishing spread of the cult in the later second and early third centuries AD ... This extraordinary expansion, documented by the archaeological monuments..."

[159] Clauss, R., *The Roman cult of Mithras*, p. 25, referring to Porphyry, *De Abstinentia*, 2.56 and 4.16.3 (for Pallas) and *De antro nympharum* 6 (for Euboulus and his history).

[160] pp. IX.6: *Sacra Mithriaca homicidio vero polluit, cum illic aliquid ad speciem timoris vel dici vel fingi soleat* "He desecrated the rites of Mithras with actual murder, although it was customary in them merely to say or pretend something that would produce an impression of terror".

[161] Clauss, M., *The Roman cult of Mithras*, p. 24: "The cult of Mithras never became one of those supported by the state with public funds, and was never admitted to the official list of festivals celebrated by the state and army - at any rate as far as the latter is known to us from the *Feriale Duranum*, the religious calendar of the units at Dura-Europos in Coele Syria;" [where there was a Mithraeum] "the same is true of all the other mystery cults too." He adds that at the individual level, various individuals did hold roles both in the state cults and the priesthood of Mithras.

[162] Beck, R., *Merkelbach's Mithras*, p. 299.

[163] Clauss, M., *The Roman cult of Mithras*, p. 29-30: "Mithras also found a place in the 'pagan revival' that occurred, particularly in the western empire, in the latter half of the fourth century AD. For a brief period, especially in Rome, the cult enjoyed, along with others, a last efflorescence, for which we have evidence from among the highest circles of the senatorial order. One of these senators was Rufius Caeionius Sabinus, who in 377 dedicated an altar" to a long list of gods including Mithras.

[167] Clauss, M., *The Roman cult of Mithras*, pp. 31-32.

[168] Clauss, M., *The Roman cult of Mithras*, p.171.

[169] pp. 206 (http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/mom/mom09.htm): "A few clandestine conventicles may, with stubborn persistence, have been held in the subterranean retreats of the palaces. The cult of the Persian god possibly existed as late as the fifth century in certain remote cantons of the Alps and the Vosges. For example, devotion to the Mithraic rites long persisted in the tribe of the Anauni, masters of a flourishing valley, of which a narrow defile closed the mouth." This is unreferenced; but the French text in *Textes et monuments figurés relatifs aux mystères de Mithra* tom. 1, p. 348 has a footnote.

[170] The Greater [Bundahishn] IV.19-20 (http://www.avesta.org/mp/grb1.htm#chap4): "19. He let loose Greed, Needfulness, [Pestilence,] Disease, Hunger, Illness, Vice and Lethargy on the body of , Gav' and Gayomard. 20. Before his coming to the 'Gav', Ohrmazd gave the healing Cannabis, which is what one calls 'banj', to the' Gav' to eat, and rubbed it before her eyes, so that her discomfort, owing to smiting, [sin] and injury, might decrease; she immediately became feeble and ill, her milk dried up, and she passed away."

[171] , p. 291

[172] (1991 revised edition)

[173] Porphyry, *De Antro nympharum* (http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/porphyry_cave_of_nymphs_02_translation.htm) 10: "Since, however, a cavern is an image and symbol of the world..."

[174] Lewis M. Hopfe, "Archaeological indications on the origins of Roman Mithraism", in Lewis M. Hopfe (ed). *Uncovering ancient stones: essays in memory of H. Neil Richardson*, Eisenbrauns (1994), pp. 147-158, p.154

[175] Beck, Roger, "Astral Symbolism in the Tauroctony: A statistical demonstration of the Extreme Improbability of Unintended Coincidence in the Selection of Elements in the Composition" in *Beck on Mithraism: collected works with new essays" (2004), p. 257.*

[176] Beck, Roger, "The Rise and Fall of Astral Identifications of the Tauroctonous Mithras" in *Beck on Mithraism: collected works with new essays" (2004), p. 236.*

[177] Ulansey, D., *The origins of the Mithraic mysteries", p. 25-39.*

[178] Beck, Roger, "In the place of the lion: Mithras in the tauroctony" in *Beck on Mithraism: collected works with new essays" (2004), p. 270-276* (http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=SIYTfTYrs1UC&pg=PA276&dq=ulansey+mithras+sol+luna&ei=IDHPSs-HNJPuygS3xdiGBg#v=onepage&q=ulansey mithras sol luna&f=false).

[180] Clauss, M., *The Roman cult of Mithras*, p.158.

[184] Fritz Graf, "Baptism and Graeco-Roman Mystery Cults," in "Rituals of Purification, Rituals of Initiation," in *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism: Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity* (Walter de Gruyter, 2011), p. 105.

[187] Renan, E., *Marc-Aurele et la fin du monde antique*. Paris, 1882, p. 579 (http://books.google.com/books?id=B8AaAAAAYAAJ&dq=renan+Marc-Aurele+et+la+fin+du+monde+antique&jtp=579): "On peut dire que, si le christianisme eût été arrêté dans sa croissance par quelque maladie mortelle, le monde eût été mithriaste."

[189] Leonard Boyle, *A short guide to St. Clement's, Rome* (Rome: Collegio San Clemente, 1987), p. 71

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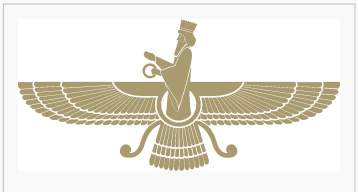
- A gallery of monuments and inscriptions (http://www.tertullian.org/rpearse/mithras/display.php?page=selected_monuments)

Mithra

Part of a series on

Zoroastrianism



The *Faravahar*, believed to be a depiction of a *fravashi*

Primary topics

- Ahura Mazda
- Zarathustra
- *aša* (asha) / *arta*

Angels and demons

- Amesha Spentas · Yazatas
- Ahuras · Daevas
- Angra Mainyu

Scripture and worship

- Avesta
- Gathas · Yasna
- Vendidad · Visperad
- Yashts · Khordeh Avesta
- Ab-Zohr
- The Ahuna Vairya Invocation
- Fire Temples

Accounts and legends

- Dēnkard · Bundahišn
- Book of Arda Viraf
- Book of Jamasp
- Story of Sanjan

History and culture

- Zurvanism
- Calendar · Festivals
- Marriage
- Eschatology

Adherents

- Zoroastrians in Iran
- Parsis · Iranis
- • • •
- Persecution of Zoroastrians

Zoroastrianism portal

Mithra (Mithras or Mica (Michael) Avestan: *Miθpa* Old Persian, Mica) is the Zoroastrian divinity (*yazata*) of covenant and oath. In addition to being the divinity of contracts, Mithra is also a judicial figure, an all-seeing protector of Truth, and the guardian of cattle, the harvest and of The Waters.

The term *Mithra* is from the Avestan language. In Middle Iranian languages (Middle Persian, Parthian etc.), *Mithra* became *Mehr*, *Myhr* etc., from which Modern Persian مهر *Mehr*, Pashto لمر *Lmar*, Waziri ميڑ *Myer* and Armenian *Mihr*/*Mher* ultimately derive.

The Romans attributed their Mithraic Mysteries to Persian or Zoroastrian sources relating to Mithra. However, since the early 1970s the dominant scholarship has noted dissimilarities, and those mysteries are now qualified as a distinct Roman product.[1]

Etymology

Together with the Vedic common noun *mitra*, the Avestan common noun *miθra* derives from proto-Indo-Iranian **mitra*, from the root *mi-* "to bind", with the "tool suffix" *-tra-* "causing to." Thus, etymologically *mitra*/*miθra* means "that which causes binding", preserved in the Avestan word for "covenant, contract, oath". [*citation needed*]

On Elamite tablets of the time of Darius, offerings are five times recorded for Mica-Baga—where Mica was Old Persian for Mithras (cf Hebrew, Micah!)—and on one occasion these offerings coincided with offerings to Ahuramazda. Later, Artaxerxes III, invoked “Ahuramazda and Mithras Baga”. In the compound, Mithras-Baga, Varuna, under the title Baga, began as an equal partner, but because Baga was understood to mean simply God, and was not used liturgically, Varuna was forgotten as a separate entity, and the compound was understood as Mithras-God (cf Hebrew, Michael!).

In scripture

Mithra is described in the Zoroastrian Avesta scriptures as, "Mithra of wide pastures, of the thousand ears, and of the myriad eyes,"(Yasna 1:3),[2] "the lofty, and the everlasting...the province ruler,"(Yasna 1:11),[2] "the Yazad (divinity) of the spoken name"(Yasna 3:5),[2] and "the holy,"(Yasna 3:13)[2]

The Khorda Avesta (Book of Common Prayer) also refer to Mithra in the Litany to the Sun, "Homage to Mithra of wide cattle pastures,"(Khwarshed Niyayesh 5),[3] "Whose word is true, who is of the assembly, Who has a thousand ears, the well-shaped one, Who has ten thousand eyes, the exalted one, Who has wide knowledge, the helpful one, Who sleeps not, the ever wakeful. We sacrifice to Mithra, The lord of all countries, Whom Ahura Mazda created the most glorious, Of the supernatural yazads. So may there come to us for aid, Both Mithra and Ahura, the two exalted ones,"(Khwarshed Niyayesh 6-7),[3] "I shall sacrifice to his mace, well aimed against the skulls of the Daevas,"(Khwarshed Niyayesh 15).[3] Some recent theories have claimed Mithra represents the sun itself, but the Khorda Avesta refers to the sun as a separate entity as well as the moon with which the sun has "the best of friendships,"(Khwarshed Niyayesh 15)[3]

Like most other divinities, Mithra is not mentioned by name in the Gathas, the oldest texts of Zoroastrianism and generally attributed to Zoroaster himself. Mithra also does not appear by name in the *Yasna Haptanghaiti*, a seven-verse section of the Yasna liturgy that is linguistically as old as the Gathas. The lack of Mithra's presence in these texts was once a cause of some consternation amongst Iranists. An often repeated speculation of the first half of the 20th century was that the lack of any mention (i.e., Zoroaster's silence) of Mithra in these texts implied that Zoroaster had rejected Mithra. This *ex silentio* speculation is no longer followed. Building on that speculation was another series of speculations that postulated that the reason why Zoroaster did not mention Mithra was because the latter was the supreme god of a bloodthirsty group of *daeva*-worshipers that Zoroaster condemned. However, "no satisfactory evidence has yet been adduced to show that, before Zoroaster, the concept of a supreme god existed among the Iranians, or that among them Mithra – or any other divinity – ever enjoyed a separate cult of his or her own outside either their ancient or their Zoroastrian pantheons."[4]

As a member of the ahuric triad, a feature that only Ahura Mazda and Ahura Berezaiti (Apam Napat) also have, Mithra is an exalted figure. As the divinity of contract, Mithra is undeceivable, infallible, eternally watchful, and never-resting. Mithra is additionally the protector of cattle, and his stock epithet is "of wide pastures." He is guardian

of the waters and ensures that those pastures receive enough of it.

Together with Rashnu "Justice" and Sraosha "Obedience", Mithra is one of the three judges at the Chinvat bridge, the "bridge of separation" that all souls must cross. Unlike Sraosha, Mithra is not however a psychopomp. Should the good thoughts, words and deeds outweigh the bad, Sraosha alone conveys the soul across the bridge.

The Avestan hymn to Mithra (*Yasht* 10) is the longest, and one of the best preserved, of the *Yasht*s.

In Christianity

Mithras or Mica (Michael), a Persian then Roman Sun God

Mithras is a Greek form of the name of an Indo-European god, Mithra or Mitra (Old Persian, Mica). Roman writers believed that Mithraism came from Persia and that Mithraic iconography represented Persian mythology. Mithraism was once called the **Mysteries of Mithras** or **Mysteries of the Persians**;[][5].

In Rome, Mithras was a sun god, and, in Persia, he was a god of the morning sun. The Roman Mithras killed the Primeval Bull, mirroring the death of a Primeval Bull in the Persian religion.

The Roman Mithras wore a Phrygian cap. Phrygia was in the Persian empire for 200 years. Modern scholars have traced Mithras in Persian, Mittanian and Indian mythology. The Mitanni gave us the first written reference to Mithras in a treaty with the Hittites. These and much more suggest a continuity of belief from India to Rome in a myth of a sun god killing a bull

In tradition

In the Zoroastrian calendar, the sixteenth day of the month and the seventh month of the year are dedicated to, and under the protection of, Mithra. (The Iranian civil calendar of 1925 adopted Zoroastrian month-names, and as such also has the seventh month of the year named 'Mihr'). The position of the sixteenth day and seventh month reflects the Mithra's rank in the hierarchy of the divinities; the sixteenth day and seventh month are respectively the first day of the second half of the month and the first month of the second half of the year. The day on which the day-name and month-name dedications intersect is (like all other such intersections) dedicated to the divinity of that day/month, and is celebrated with a *Jashan* (from Avestan *Yasna*, "worship") in honor of that divinity. In the case of Mithra this was *Jashan-e Mihragan*, or just Mihragan in short.

Investiture of Sassanid emperor Ardashir I or II (3rd century CE bas-relief at Taq-e Bostan, Iran. On the left stands the *yazata* Mithra with raised *barsom*, sanctifying the investiture.

While Mithra is not the divinity of the Sun in Zoroastrian scripture (or in Indian scripture either), this being the role of Hvare.khshaeta (literally "radiant Sun", whence also Middle Persian *Khorshed* for the Sun), in Zoroastrian/Iranian tradition, Mithra became the divinity of the Sun. How, when or why this occurred is uncertain, but is commonly attributed to a conflation with Babylonian Shamash, who – in addition to being a Sun god – was a judicial figure like

Mithra. In the Hellenistic era (i.e., in Seleucid and Parthian times), Mithra also seems to have been conflated with Apollo, who – like Mithra – was an all-seeing divinity of the truth.

Royal names incorporating Mithra's (e.g., "Mithradates") appear in the dynasties of Parthia, Armenia, and in Anatolia, in Pontus and Cappadocia.

In Manichaeism

Persian and Parthian-speaking Manichaeans used the name of Mithra current in their time (*Mihryazd*, q.e. Mithra-yazata) for two different Manichaean angels.

1. The first, called *Mihryazd* by the Persians, was the "The Living Spirit" (Aramaic *rūḥā ḥayyā*), a savior-figure who rescues the "First Man" from the demonic Darkness into which he had plunged.
2. The second, known as *Mihr* or *Mihr yazd* among the Parthians, is "The Messenger" (Aramaic *īzgaddā*), likewise a savior figure, but one concerned with setting up the structures to liberate the Light lost when the First Man had been defeated.

German academic Werner Sundermann has asserted that the Manicheans adopted the name Mithra to designate one of their own deities. Sundermann determined that the Zoroastrian Mithra, which in Middle Persian is *Mihr* (in Russian "Mir" = world), is not a variant of the Parthian and Sogdian *Mytr* or *Mytrg*; though sharing linguistic roots with the name Mithra, those names denote Maitreya.

In Parthian and Sogdian however Mihr was taken as the sun and consequently identified as the Third Messenger. This Third Messenger was the helper and redeemer of mankind, and identified with another Zoroastrian divinity *Narisaf* (derived from Pahlavi *Narsēh* from Avestan *Nairyō.saŋhō*, meaning 'potent utterance', the name of a yazata).[] Citing Boyce,[6] Sundermann remarks, "It was among the Parthian Manicheans that Mithra as a sun god surpassed the importance of Narisaf as the common Iranian image of the Third Messenger; among the Parthians the dominance of Mithra was such that his identification with the Third Messenger led to cultic emphasis on the Mithraic traits in the Manichaean god."[7]

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[3] http://www.avesta.org/ka/niyayesh.htm

[4] .

[5] Origen, Contra Celsus, Book 6 (http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/04166.htm), Chapter 22. "After this, Celsus, desiring to exhibit his learning in his treatise against us, quotes also certain Persian mysteries, where he says: 'These things are obscurely hinted at in the accounts of the Persians, and especially in the mysteries of Mithras, which are celebrated among them...' " Chapter 24 "After the instance borrowed from the Mithraic mysteries, Celsus declares that he who would investigate the Christian mysteries, along with the aforesaid Persian, will, on comparing the two together, and on unveiling the rites of the Christians, see in this way the difference between them."

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Mithraeum

A **Mithraeum** (or the plural Mithraea) is a place of worship for the followers of the mystery religion of Mithraism.

A mithraeum found in the ruins of Ostia Antica, Italy

The Mithraeum was either an adapted natural cave or cavern, or a building imitating a cave. When possible, the Mithraeum was constructed within or below an existing building, such as the Mithraeum found beneath Basilica of San Clemente in Rome. While a majority of Mithraea are underground, some feature open holes in the ceiling to allow some light in, perhaps to relate to the connection of the universe and the passing of time. The site of a Mithraeum may also be identified by its singular entrance or vestibule, which stands opposite from an apse-shaped wall in which a pedestal altar at the back stood, often in a recess. Also its "cave", called the *Spelaeum* or *Spelunca*, with raised benches along the side walls for the ritual meal. Many mithraea that follow this basic plan are scattered over much of the Roman Empire's former territory, particularly where the legions were stationed along the frontiers (such as Britain). Others may be recognized by their characteristic layout, even though converted as crypts beneath Christian churches.

How a modern history theme park imagines a mithraeum: Museum Orientalis in the Netherlands

From the structure of the Mithraea it is possible to surmise that worshippers would have gathered for a common meal along the reclining couches lining the walls.

> *Finally, the ubiquity of the Mithraeums' distinctive banqueting benches implies the ubiquity of the cult meal as the* liturgie ordinaire.[1]

The Mithraeum primarily functioned as an area for initiation, in which the soul descends and exits. The Mithraeum itself was arranged as an "image of the universe". It is noticed by some researchers that this movement, especially in the context of mithraic iconography (see below), seems to stem from the neoplatonic concept that the "running"

of the sun from solstice to solstice is a parallel for the movement of the soul through the universe, from pre-existence, into the body, and then beyond the physical body into an afterlife.

> *Similarly, the Persians call the place a cave where they introduce an initiate to the Mysteries, revealing to him the path by which souls descend and go back again. For Eubulus tells us that Zoroaster was the first to dedicate a natural cave in honour of Mithras, the creator and father of all… this cave bore for him the image of the cosmos which Mithras had created, and the things which the cave contained, by their proportionate arrangement, provided him with symbols of the elements and climates of the cosmos* [trans. Arethusa edition][1]

Most Mithraea can be dated between 100 B.C. and 300 A.D., mostly in the Roman Empire.

Finds from a mithraeum in Stockstadt, Germany

A mithraeum found in the German city of Saarbrücken

Notable mithraea

France

- Angers
- Biesheim
- Mackwiller
- Sarrebourg
- Strasbourg (district of Kœnigshoffen)

Germany

- Cologne
- Dieburg/Darmstadt
- Frankfurt-Heddernheim
- Freiburg im Breisgau, mithraeum relics from Riegel displayed in Freiburg museum
- Gimmeldingen, *Mithras-Heiligtum* Gimmeldingen Sehenswertes (German language) [2]
- Güglingen
- Hanau
- Heidelberg, Kurpfälzisches Museum
- Königsbrunn (near Augsburg)
- Mainz, Consecration Altars of the Mithraeum Mogontiacum
- Neuss (Legionslager Castra Novaesia)
- Osterburken
- Riegel am Kaiserstuhl[3] (near Freiburg im Breisgau)
- Saalburg
- Saarbrücken
- Schwarzerden
- Wiesloch

Hungary

- Aquincum Mithraeum (of Victorinus). Remains open within Aquincum Archaeological Park.
- Savaria Mithraeum.
- Fertorakos Mithraeum.

Israel

- Caesarea Maritima, City of Herods.
- Old Caesarea Roman Mithraeum.

Italy

- In the city of Rome:
  - Mithraeum of the Circus Maximus. Remains open by appointment.
  - Barberini Mithraeum. remains open by appointment.
  - Mithraeum of San Clemente, under the basilica of San Clemente. Remains visible in archaeological museum.
  - Mithraeum of the Baths of Caracalla. Remains open by appointment.
  - Castra Peregrinorum mithraeum, under the church of Santo Stefano Rotondo. Remains open by appointment.
  - Mithraeum under the Santa Prisca basilica. Remains open by appointment.
- In Campania:
  - Mithraeum of Santa Maria Capua Vetere
  - Mithraeum of Naples

Romania

- A reconstructed Mithraeum in the Brukenthal Museum's Lapidarium, with some of the items unearthed at Apulum (Alba Iulia).

Spain

- Roman Ville of Fuente Álamo's Mithraeum (Puente Genil).

Switzerland

- Martigny (ancient *Octodurus*) - a reconstructed Mithraeum [4]

Syria

- Duro-Europos - Transported to and rebuilt at Yale University's Gallery of Fine Arts.

United Kingdom

- Caernarfon Mithraeum, Wales.
- Carrawburgh, Hadrian's Wall, England. Remains open.
- London Mithraeum, England. Remains open.

External links

- List of mithraea [5] from Mithraeum.eu

[1] [Ritual, Myth, Doctrine, and Initiation in the Mysteries of Mithras: New Evidence from a Cult Vessel Roger Beck The Journal of Roman Studies , Vol. 90, (2000), pp. 145-180 Published by: Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies Article Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/300205], additional text],

[2] http://www.gimmeldingen.de/?q=node/6

[3] http://www.kaiserstuhl.eu/Orte/Riegel/mithras-kult.htm

[4] http://www.martigny.ch/pagetype.cfm?page=pages/en/culture_archeologie.cfm&sousmenuId=32&section=5

[5] http://www.mithraeum.eu/monumentae.php?tid=1

CIMRM

Corpus Inscriptionum et Monumentorum Religionis Mithriacae (or *CIMRM*) is a two volume collection of inscriptions and monuments relating primarily to the Mithraic Mysteries. It was compiled by Maarten Jozef Vermaseren and published at the Hague by Martinus Nijhoff, 1956, 1960 in 2 vols. Publication was sponsored by the Royal Flemish Academy and the Netherlands Organization for Pure Research.[1] It is based on an earlier 1947 work of the same title that began as an entry in a competition organized by the Department of Fine Arts and Literature of the Flemish Academy.[2]

It is viewed as "an undiscriminating work",[3] with "unpredictable topographic zig-zagging",[4] but it remains indispensable[5] for its access to the great bulk of the archaeological evidence. Although now 53 years old, no updated corpora have been published since Vermaseren's, and *CIMRM* thus remains the standard reference catalog of inscriptions and monuments of the Mithraic Mysteries.[6]

References

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[2] Vermaseren 1956, p. vii.
[3] Daniels 1975, p. 249.
[4] Gordon 1994, p. 460.
[5] Gordon 1994, p. 459, n. 2.
[6] Clauss 2000, p. xix.

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External links

- Proposed addition of the *Electronic Journal of Mithraic Studies* (EJMS) (http://www.hums.canterbury.ac.nz/clas/ejms/cimrm.htm)
- Selected monuments (http://www.roger-pearse.com/mithras/display.php?page=selected_monuments)

Mithras Liturgy

The "**Mithras Liturgy**" is a text from the Great Magical Papyrus of Paris, part of the Greek Magical Papyri,[1] numbered *PGM* IV.475-834.[2] The modern name by which the text is known originated in 1903 with Albrecht Dieterich, its first translator,[3][4] based on the invocation of Helios Mithras (Ἥλιος Μίθρας) as the god who will provide the initiate with a revelation of immortality.[5] The text is generally considered a product of the religious syncretism characteristic of the Hellenistic and Roman Imperial era, as were the Mithraic mysteries themselves.[6] Some scholars have argued that it has no direct connection to particular Mithraic ritual.[7] Others consider it an authentic reflection of Mithraic liturgy,[8] or view it as Mithraic material reworked for the syncretic tradition of magic and esotericism.[9]

The codex containing the text was acquired by the Bibliothèque Nationale in 1857.[10] It is thought to date to the early 4th century AD, though Dieterich proposed a date of composition as early as 100–150 AD.[11] Its likely provenance in Egypt, where evidence of Mithraic cult is rare, presents a major obstacle to regarding it an authentic liturgy.[12]

Structure

Marvin Meyer divides the Mithras Liturgy into two sections:[13] Lines 475–750 are a liturgy for the mystic ascent of the soul through seven stages, and 751–834 provide instructions on how to enact the liturgy.

The text begins by invoking Providence *(Pronoia)* and Psyche ("Soul") or in other readings Tyche.[14] The speaker of the invocation announces that he is writing down the mysteries to offer instruction and not for gain, and that he seeks a revelation of the universe and immortality guided by an *archangelos* (ἀρχάγγελος, "high messenger") of Helios Mithras (lines 475–485).

Ascent

The ascent through seven grades is viewed by Meyer as representing Mithraic initiation, but it also bears a more general resemblance to the ascent of the initiate in theurgy, with parallels in fragments from the Chaldaean Oracles.[15]

1. Four Elements

The speaker invokes the four classical primordial elements, punctuated by *voces magicae*, magical sounds, in the following sequence:

- PPP SSS PHR[E], a popping and hissing sound characteristic of incantations
- *pneuma* (wind, breath, spirit)
- MMM
- fire
- ĒY ĒIA EĒ
- water
- ŌŌŌ AAA EEE
- earth
- YĒ YŌĒ

These elements he refers to as "first origin of my origin" from which his "complete body" is made. He identifies himself by name, and by the name of his mother. The soul's encounter with the four elements is rehearsed as both generation and regeneration (lines 485–537).[16]

2. Lower powers of air

At this level (lines 537–585), the revelation-seeker is supposed to breathe deeply and feel himself lifted up, as if in midair, hearing and seeing nothing of mortal beings on earth. He is promised to see instead the divine order of the "visible gods" rising and setting. Ritual silence is prescribed, followed by another sequence of hissing, popping, and thirteen magic words: "Then you will see the gods looking graciously upon you and no longer rushing at you, but rather going about in their own order of affairs." After a shocking crash of thunder, another admonition of silence, and a magic incantation, the disk of the sun is to open and issue five-pointed stars. The eyes are to be closed for the following prayer.

3. Aion and powers

In this prayer (lines 585–628), the speaker again names himself and his mother, followed by an extensive list of translatable epithets such as "Light-maker" and "Fire-driver" interspersed with magic names. These are "planetary guardians of the gates of heaven".[17] Among the invocations are Aion and Iao. An extensive series of vowels are pronounced "with fire and spirit." After thunder and a feeling of physical agitation, another series of magic words elicits a vision of Helios.

4. Helios

Helios is described as "a youthful god, beautiful in appearance, with fiery hair, and in a white tunic and a scarlet cloak, and wearing a fiery crown." He is to be given the "fire greeting" (lines 628–657), and asked for protection while kissing phylacteries.

5. Seven *Tychai*

The celestial doors are thrown open to reveal seven virgins dressed in linen and with faces of asps, an element identified as Egyptian. They carry golden wands, and are to be hailed individually (lines 657–672).

6. Seven Pole-Lords

Next to come forth are the seven Pole-Lords, wearing linen loincloths and with faces of bulls. They have seven gold diadems, and are also to be hailed individually by name. These have powers of thunder, lightning, and earthquakes, as well as the capacity to grant physical health, good eyesight and hearing, and calmness (lines 673–692). The two groups of seven, female and male, are both depicted in an Egyptian manner and represent the "region of the fixed stars."[18]

7. Highest god

In the midst of lightning and tremors of the earth, the highest god appears, youthful and bright in appearance, wearing a white tunic, a golden crown, and trousers. He holds the shoulder of a bull in what seems to be an astronomical reference (lines 696–724). His eyes project lightning bolts, and stars issue from his body. The instructions are to "make a long bellowing sound, straining your belly, that you may excite the five senses; bellow long until out of breath, and again kiss the phylacteries."

The encounter with the highest god is intended to result in divine revelation and *apathanatismos*, a technical term for the temporary achieving of a state of immortality.[19]

Enactment and use

LInes 751–834 are instructions on how to enact the liturgy. The practitioner is warned not to misuse the *mysterion* (lines 724–834), and is given instructions on the preparation of magical accoutrements: a sun scarab ointment (751–778), the herb *kentritis* (778–792), and the protective phylacteries for the ritual (813–819). The section also offers some additional information and incantations.[20]

Magic context

In Book IV of the Greek Magical Papyri in which the "Mithras Liturgy" occurs, lines 1-25 are a spell calling on Egyptian and Jewish powers in order to obtain information. Lines 1127-64 are a spell for exorcising a demon, using Coptic words of Christian origin,[*citation needed*] with instructions for preparing an amulet. Lines 1716-1870 are headed "Sword of Dardanos" and is a love spell.

The Mithras Liturgy shares several elements found widely in magic as practiced in the Greco-Roman world, which drew on or claimed the authority of Egyptian religion and magic. These include the preparation of amulets and ointments, the timing of rituals based on astronomical phenomena or horoscopes, and the manipulation of breath and speech. Vocalizations include popping and hissing sounds for onomatopoeia, variations on the sequence of Greek vowels, glossolalia, and words that are untranslatable but seem to derive from or are intended to sound like Egyptian, Hebrew and other languages.[21]

The Mithras Liturgy is the only text in Betz's collection of the *Greek Magical Papyri* that involves a request for immortality. It is an example of the difficulties in distinguishing between the categories of "magic" and "religion" in the ancient world.[22]

Questions of Mithraic content

The name "the Mithras liturgy" was given to it by Dieterich, who dedicated the edition to Franz Cumont. But Cumont could not see the text as being Mithraic in origin. Gee believes that its origins should be sought in this context, while Hans Dieter Betz thinks rather of a wandering philosophical origin.[23]

Classicist Johan C. Thom notes that opinions regarding the context of the text differ, for example, Mithraism or another mystery cult, ancient magic, the Egyptian cult regarding the dead, or theurgy.[24] Mithraic scholars such as Cumont, Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, Martin P. Nilsson, and Walter Burkert do not identify the text as a Mithraic liturgy.[25] Cumont argued that the text lacked Mithraic eschatology, the Mithraic doctrine of the passage of the soul through the seven planetary spheres, and Mithras as a guide in the ascension.[26]

Betz believes that the Mithras Liturgy is a product at the meeting-point of Greek, Egyptian, and Mithraic traditions, finally identifying the central 'ascent' section as a product of early Hermeticism,[27] a view endorsed by Richard Gordon.[28]

Marvin Meyer is certain that the text has connections to Mithraism and believes that it "contributes a great deal to the study of magic, miracle, and ritual in religions in antiquity and late antiquity, including Christianity, and the stories of miracles attributed to Jesus and others may profitably be studied with texts like the Mithras Liturgy at hand."[29]

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[2] Greek text with German translation in Albrecht Dieterich, Eine Mithrasliturgie, 2nd edition, pp 1-2 (http://www.archive.org/stream/einemithraslitur00dietuoft#page/2/mode/2up)

[3] Albrecht Dieterich, Eine Mithrasliturgie (http://www.archive.org/details/einemithraslitur00dietuoft), Leipzig: Teubner, 2nd enlarged edn. 1910

[4] Jaime Alvar Ezquerra, "Mithraism and Magic," in *Magical Practice in the Latin West: Papers from the International Conference Held at the University of Zaragoza, 30 Sept. – 1st Oct. 2005* (Brill, 2010), p. 522.

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[6] Hans Dieter Betz, "Magic and Mystery in the Greek Magical Papyri," in *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 252.

[7] Ezquerra, "Mithraism and Magic," pp. 523–522, notes that Franz Cumont and Richard Reitzenstein immediately rejected the claim that the text was an authentic Mithraic liturgy; Ezquerra, who emphasizes the magical nature of the text, is among the 21st-century scholars who concur.

[8] Marvin Meyer, "The 'Mithras Liturgy' as Mystery and Magic," in *Mystery and Secrecy in the Nag Hammadi Collection and Other Ancient Literature: Ideas and Practices* (Brill, 2012), p. 447ff.

[9] Hans Dieter Betz, *The "Mithras Liturgy": Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Mohr Siebeck, 2005), p. 37 *et passim*.

[10] Paris Bibliothèque Nationale Suppl. gr. 574.

[12] Ezquerra, "Mithraism and Magic," p. 532.

[13] Marvin W. Meyer, *The Ancient Mysteries: A Sourcebook of Sacred Texts* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), p. 212. Ezquerra, "Mithraism and Magic," p. 525, follows the same structural outline while rejecting the identification of the text as Mithraic.

[14] Hans Dieter Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation* (University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 48, note 79.

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[28] Richard Gordon, "Probably Not Mithras", *The Classical Review* Vol. 55, No. 1 (March 2005) pp. 99-100.

Further reading

S. Eitrem, *Les Papyrus magiques grecs de Paris* (1923).

External links

- Marvin Meyer, The Mithras Liturgy (http://hermetic.com/pgm/mithras-liturgy.html) - English translation.

Zoroastrianism

Part of a series on

Zoroastrianism

The *Faravahar*, believed to be a depiction of a *fravashi*

Primary topics

- Ahura Mazda
- Zarathustra
- *aša* (asha) / *arta*

Angels and demons

- Amesha Spentas · Yazatas
- Ahuras · Daevas
- Angra Mainyu

Scripture and worship

- Avesta
- Gathas · Yasna
- Vendidad · Visperad
- Yashts · Khordeh Avesta
- Ab-Zohr
- The Ahuna Vairya Invocation
- Fire Temples

Accounts and legends

- Dēnkard · Bundahišn
- Book of Arda Viraf
- Book of Jamasp
- Story of Sanjan

History and culture

- Zurvanism
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Zoroastrianism portal

Zoroastrianism /ˌzɒroʊˈæstriənɪzəm/, also called **Mazdaism** and **Magianism**, is an ancient Iranian religion and a religious philosophy. Once the state religion of Ancient Iran, at present, the number of Zoroastrians worldwide is estimated at between 145,000 and 210,000.

In the eastern part of ancient Persia over a thousand years BCE a religious philosopher called Zoroaster simplified the pantheon of early Iranian gods[1] into two opposing forces: Ahura Mazda (Illuminating Wisdom) and Angra Mainyu (Destructive Spirit) which were in conflict.

Zoroastrian ideas led to a formal religion bearing his name by about the 6th century BCE and have influenced other later religions including Judaism, Gnosticism, Christianity and Islam.[2]

Philosophy

In Zoroastrianism, the creator Ahura Mazda is all good, and no evil originates from him. Thus, in Zoroastrianism good and evil have distinct sources, with evil (*druj*) trying to destroy the creation of Mazda (*asha*), and good trying to sustain it. While Ahura Mazda is not immanent in the world, his creation is represented by the Amesha Spentas and the host of other Yazatas, through whom the works of God are evident to humanity, and through whom worship of Mazda is ultimately directed. The most important texts of the religion are those of the Avesta, of which a significant portion has been lost, and mostly only the liturgies of which have survived. The lost portions are known of only through references and brief quotations in the later works, primarily from the 9th to 11th centuries.

In some form, it served as the national or state religion of a significant portion of the Iranian people for many centuries. The religion first dwindled when the Achaemenid Empire was invaded by Alexander the Great, after which it collapsed and disintegrated[3] and it was further gradually marginalized by Islam from the 7th century onwards with the decline of the Sassanid Empire.[4] The political power of the pre-Islamic Iranian dynasties lent Zoroastrianism immense prestige in ancient times, and some of its leading doctrines were adopted by other religious systems. It has no major theological divisions (the only significant schism is based on calendar differences), but it is not uniform. Modern-era influences have a significant impact on individual and local beliefs, practices, values and vocabulary, sometimes merging with tradition and in other cases displacing it. By one estimate, there are between 124,000 and 190,000 Zoroastrians worldwide.[5]

Terminology

The *Oxford English Dictionary* attests use of the term *Zoroastrianism* in 1874 in Archibald Sayce's *Principles of Comparative Philology*.[6] The first surviving reference to Zoroaster in Engish scholarship is attributed to Thomas Browne (1605–1682), who briefly refers to the prophet in his 1643 *Religio Medici*.[7] The *Oxford English Dictionary* records 1743 (Warburton, *Pope's Essay*) as the earliest reference to Zoroaster. However, his image is identified in Raphael's "School of Athens" by Giorgio Vasari in 1550, so knowledge of his philosophy had evidently percolated into the Italian Renaissance.

The term *Mazdaism* /ˈmæzdəˌɪzəm/ is a typical 19th century construct, taking *Mazda-* from the name Ahura Mazda and adding the suffix *-ism* to suggest a belief system. The March 2001 draft edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* also records an alternate form, *Mazdeism*, perhaps derived from the French *Mazdéisme*, which first appeared in 1871. The Zoroastrian name of the religion is *Mazdayasna*, which combines *Mazda-* with the Avestan language word *yasna*, meaning "worship, devotion".

In English, an adherent of the faith commonly refers to himself or herself as a Zoroastrian or as a Zarathustrian. An older, but still widespread expression is *Behdin*, meaning "follower of *Daena*", for which "Good Religion" is one translation. In the Zoroastrian liturgy, the term *Behdin* is also used as a title for an individual who has been formally inducted into the religion in a *Navjote* ceremony.

Distinguishing characteristics

Basic beliefs

Zoroastrians believe that there is one universal god, Ahura Mazda, with two attributes: Ahura meaning *Being* and Mazda meaning *Mind* in the Avestan language. Zoroaster keeps the two attributes separate as two different concepts in most of the Gathas and also consciously uses a masculine word for one concept and a feminine for the other, as if to distract from an anthropomorphization of his divinity. Some Zoroastrians claim Ahura Mazda as the uncreated Creator to whom all worship is ultimately directed, thereby formulating a panentheistic faith with a transcendent divinity, widely believed to have influenced the theology of the Ismaeli branch of Islam.[8] Other Zoroastrian scholars argue that since Zoroastrer's divinity covers both being and mind as immanent entities, it is better described as a belief in an immanent self-creating universe with consciousness as its special attribute, thereby putting Zoroastranism in the pantheistic fold where it can be easily traced to its shared origin with Indian Brahmanism. In any case, Ahura Mazda's creation—evident is widely agreed as *asha*, truth and order—is the antithesis of chaos, which is evident as *druj*, falsehood and disorder. The resulting conflict involves the entire universe, including humanity, which has an active role to play in the conflict.[8]

The religion states that active participation in life through good deeds is necessary to ensure happiness and to keep chaos at bay. This active participation is a central element in Zoroaster's concept of free will, and Zoroastrianism rejects all forms of monasticism. Ahura Mazda will ultimately prevail over the evil Angra Mainyu or Ahriman, at which point the universe will undergo a cosmic renovation and time will end. In the final renovation, all of creation—even the souls of the dead that were initially banished to "darkness"—will be reunited in Ahura Mazda, returning to life in the undead form. At the end of time, a savior-figure (a Saoshyant) will bring about a final renovation of the world (*frashokereti*), in which the dead will be revived.[8]

In Zoroastrian tradition, the "chaotic" is represented by Angra Mainyu (also referred to as "Ahriman"), the "Destructive Principle", while the benevolent is represented through Ahura Mazda's Spenta Mainyu, the instrument or "Bounteous Principle" of the act of creation. It is through Spenta Mainyu that transcendental Ahura Mazda is immanent in humankind, and through which the Creator interacts with the world. According to Zoroastrian cosmology, in articulating the Ahuna Vairya formula, Ahura Mazda made His ultimate triumph evident to Angra Mainyu. As expressions and aspects of Creation, Ahura Mazda emanated the Amesha Spentas ("Bounteous Immortals"), that are each the hypostasis and representative of one aspect of that Creation. These Amesha Spenta are in turn assisted by a league of lesser principles, the Yazatas, each "Worthy of Worship" and each again a hypostasis of a moral or physical aspect of creation.

Other characteristics

In Zoroastrianism, water (*apo*, *aban*) and fire (*atar*, *adar*) are agents of ritual purity, and the associated purification ceremonies are considered the basis of ritual life. In Zoroastrian cosmogony, water and fire are respectively the second and last primordial elements to have been created, and scripture considers fire to have its origin in the waters. Both water and fire are considered life-sustaining, and both water and fire are represented within the precinct of a fire temple. Zoroastrians usually pray in the presence of some form of fire (which can be considered evident in any source of light), and the culminating rite of the principle act of worship constitutes a "strengthening of the waters". Fire is considered a medium through which spiritual insight and wisdom is gained, and water is considered the source of that wisdom.

While the Parsees in India have traditionally been opposed to proselytizing, probably for historical reasons, and even considered it a crime for which the culprit may face expulsion,[9] Iranian Zoroastrians have never been opposed to conversion, and the practice has been endorsed by the Council of Mobeds of Tehran. While the Iranian authorities do not permit proselytizing within Iran, Iranian Zoroastrians in exile have actively encouraged missionary activities, with The Zarathushtrian Assembly in Los Angeles and the International Zoroastrian Centre in Paris as two

prominent centres. As in many other faiths, Zoroastrians are encouraged to marry others of the same faith, but this is not a requirement.

In Zoroastrian tradition, life is a temporary state in which a mortal is expected to actively participate in the continuing battle between truth and falsehood. Prior to being born, the *urvan* (soul) of an individual is still united with its *fravashi* (guardian spirit), and which have existed since Mazda created the universe. During life, the *fravashi* acts as a guardian and protector. On the fourth day after death, the soul is reunited with its *fravashi*, in which the experiences of life in the material world are collected for the continuing battle in the spiritual world. For the most part, Zoroastrianism does not have a notion of reincarnation, at least not until the final renovation of the world. Followers of Ilm-e-Kshnoom in India believe in reincarnation and practice vegetarianism, two principles unknown to Orthodox Zoroastrianism.[10]

In Zoroastrian scripture and tradition, a corpse is a host for decay, i.e., of *druj*. Consequently, scripture enjoins the safe disposal of the dead in a manner such that a corpse does not pollute the good creation. These injunctions are the doctrinal basis of the fast-fading traditional practice of ritual exposure, most commonly identified with the so-called Towers of Silence for which there is no standard technical term in either scripture or tradition. Ritual exposure is only practiced by Zoroastrian communities of the Indian subcontinent, where it is not illegal, but where alternative disposal methods are sought after diclofenac poisoning has led to the virtual extinction of scavenger birds. Other Zoroastrian communities either cremate their dead, or bury them in graves that are cased with lime mortar.

History

Origins

Zoroastrianism emerged out of a common prehistoric Indo-Iranian religious system dating back to the early 2nd millennium BCE.[11] According to Zoroastrian tradition, Zoroaster was a reformer who exalted the deity of Wisdom, Ahura Mazda, to the status of Supreme Being and Creator, while demoting various other deities and rejecting certain rituals.

Classical antiquity

Farvahar. Persepolis, Iran.

Although older, Zoroastrianism only enters recorded history in the mid-5th century BCE. Herodotus' *The Histories* (completed *c.* 440 BCE) includes a description of Greater Iranian society with what may be recognizably Zoroastrian features, including exposure of the dead.

The Histories is a primary source of information on the early period of the Achaemenid era (648–330 BCE), in particular with respect to the role of the Magi. According to Herodotus i.101, the Magi were the sixth tribe of the Medians (until the unification of the Persian empire under Cyrus the Great, all Iranians were referred to as "Mede" or "Mada" by the peoples of the Ancient World), who appear to have been the priestly caste of the Mesopotamian-influenced branch of Zoroastrianism today known as Zurvanism, and who wielded considerable influence at the courts of the Median emperors.

Following the unification of the Median and Persian empires in 550 BCE, Cyrus the Great and, later, his son Cambyses II curtailed the powers of the Magi after they had attempted to sow dissent following their loss of influence. In 522 BCE, the Magi revolted and set up a rival claimant to the throne. The usurper, pretending to be Cyrus' younger son Smerdis, took power shortly thereafter.[12] Owing to the despotic rule of Cambyses and his long absence in Egypt, "the whole people, Persians, Medes and all the other nations" acknowledged the usurper,

especially as he granted a remission of taxes for three years (Herodotus iii. 68).

The Behistun Inscription, Iran.

According to the Behistun Inscription, pseudo-Smerdis ruled for seven months before being overthrown by Darius I in 521 BCE. The "Magi", though persecuted, continued to exist. A year following the death of the first pseudo-Smerdis (named Gaumata), a second pseudo-Smerdis (named Vahyazdāta) attempted a coup. The coup, though initially successful, failed.

Whether Cyrus II was a Zoroastrian is subject to debate. It did, however, influence him to the extent that it became the non-imposing religion of his empire, and its beliefs later allowed Cyrus to free the Jews and allow them to return to Judea when the emperor took Babylon in 539 BCE. Darius I was a devotee of Ahura Mazda, as attested to several times in the Behistun inscription. However, whether he was a follower of Zoroaster has not been conclusively established, since devotion to Ahura Mazda was (at the time) not necessarily an indication of an adherence to Zoroaster's teaching.

Darius I and later Achaemenid emperors, though acknowledging their devotion to Ahura Mazda in inscriptions, appear to have permitted religions to coexist. Nonetheless, it was during the Achaemenid period that Zoroastrianism gained momentum. A number of the Zoroastrian texts that today are part of the greater compendium of the Avesta have been attributed to that period. It was also during the later Achaemenid era that many of the divinities and divine concepts of proto-Indo-Iranian religion(s) were incorporated in Zoroastrianism, in particular those to whom the days of the month of the Zoroastrian calendar are dedicated. This calendar is still used today, a fact that is attributed to the Achaemenid period. Additionally, the divinities, or yazatas, are present-day Zoroastrian angels (Dhalla, 1938).

Almost nothing is known of the status of Zoroastrianism under the Seleucids and Parthians, who ruled over Persia following Alexander the Great's invasion in 330 BCE. According to later Zoroastrian legend (*Denkard* and the *Book of Arda Viraf*), many sacred texts were lost when Alexander's troops invaded Persepolis and subsequently destroyed the royal library there. Diodorus Siculus's *Bibliotheca historica*, which was completed *c.* 60 BCE, appears to substantiate this Zoroastrian legend (Diod. 17.72.2–17.72.6). According to one archaeological examination, the ruins of the palace of Xerxes bear traces of having been burned (Stolze, 1882). Whether a vast collection of (semi-)religious texts "written on parchment in gold ink", as suggested by the *Denkard*, actually existed remains a matter of speculation, but is unlikely. Given that many of the *Denkard*s statements-as-fact have since been refuted among scholars, the tale of the library is widely accepted to be fictional (Kellens, 2002)

Late antiquity

When the Sassanid dynasty came into power in 228 CE, they aggressively promoted the Zurvanite form of Zoroastrianism and, in some cases, persecuted Christians.[13] When the Sassanids captured territory, they often built fire temples there to promote their religion. After Constantine, the Sassanids were suspicious of Christians, not least because of their perceived ties to the Christian Roman Empire. As such the Persian Church (the Church of the East) officially broke with Roman Christianity, and was tolerated and even sometimes favored by the Sassanids.

A form of Zoroastrianism was also prominent in the pre-Christian Caucasus region (especially modern-day Azerbaijan). During the periods of their suzerainty over the Caucasus, the Sassanids made attempts to promote the religion there as well.

Well before the 6th century CE, Zoroastrianism had spread to northern China via the Silk Road, gaining official status in a number of Chinese states.[*citation needed*] Remains of Zoroastrian temples have been found in Kaifeng and Zhenjiang. By the 13th century, the religion had faded from prominence in China. However, Zoroastrianism (as well as later Manicheism) may still have influenced elements of Buddhism, especially in terms of light symbolism.[*citation needed*]

Middle Ages

A scene from the Hamzanama where Hamza ibn ‘Abd al-Muttalib Burns Zarthust’s Chest and Shatters the Urn with his Ashes

In the 7th century, and over the course of at least 16 years (several decades in the case of some provinces), the Sassanid Empire was overthrown by the Arabs. Although the administration of the state was rapidly Islamicized and subsumed under the Umayyad Caliphate, "there was little serious pressure" exerted on newly subjected people to adopt Islam.[14] Islamic jurists considered only Muslims to be perfectly moral, and "unbelievers might as well be left to their iniquities, so long as these did not vex their overlords."[15]

There were also practical considerations: "because of their sheer numbers, the conquered Zoroastrians had to be treated as *dhimmis* (despite doubts [of the validity of this identification] that persisted down the centuries),"[15] which made them eligible for protection. Thus, in the main, once the conquest was over and "local terms were agreed on", the Arab governors protected the local populations in exchange for tribute.[15] The Arabs adopted the Sassanid tax-system, both the land-tax levied on land owners and the poll-tax levied on individuals.[15] This is called *jizya*, a tax levied on non-Muslims living in Muslim Caliphates (i.e., the *dhimmi*s). In time, this poll-tax came to be used as a means to humble the non-Muslims, and a number of laws and restrictions evolved to emphasize their inferior status. Under the early orthodox caliphs, as long as the non-Muslims paid their taxes and adhered to the *dhimmi* laws, administrators were enjoined to leave non-Muslims "in their religion and their land." (Caliph Abu Bakr, qtd. in Boyce 1979, p. 146).

Thus, though subject to a new leadership and harassed, once the horrors of conquest were over, the Zoroastrians were able to continue in their former ways. There was, however, a slow but steady social and economic pressure to convert.[16][17] The nobility and city-dwellers were the first to convert, with Islam more slowly being accepted among the peasantry and landed gentry.[18] "Power and worldly-advantage" now lay with followers of Islam, and although the "official policy was one of aloof contempt, there were individual Muslims eager to proselytize and ready to use all sorts of means to do so."[19]

In time, a tradition evolved by which Islam was made to appear as a partly Iranian religion. One example of this was a legend that Husayn, son the fourth caliph Ali and grandson of Islam's prophet Muhammad, had married a captive Sassanid princess named Shahrbanu. This "wholly fictitious figure"[20] was said to have borne Husayn a son, the historical fourth Shi'a imam, who claimed that the caliphate rightly belonged to him and his descendants, and that the Umayyads had wrongfully wrested it from him. The alleged descent from the Sassanid house counterbalanced the Arab nationalism of the Umayyads, and the Iranian national association with a Zoroastrian past was disarmed. Thus, according to scholar Mary Boyce, "it was no longer the Zoroastrians alone who stood for patriotism and loyalty to the past."[20] The "damning indictment" that becoming Muslim was equivalent to becoming Un-Iranian only remained an idiom in Zoroastrian texts.[20]

With Iranian (especially Persian) support, the Abbasids overthrew the Umayyads in 750, and in the subsequent caliphate government—that nominally lasted until 1258—Muslim Iranians received marked favor in the new government, both in Iran and at the capital in Baghdad. This mitigated the antagonism between Arabs and Iranians, but sharpened the distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims. The Abbasids zealously persecuted heretics, and although this was directed mainly at Muslim sectarians, it also created a harsher climate for non-Muslims.[21] Although the Abbasids were deadly foes of Zoroastrianism, the brand of Islam they propagated throughout Iran became in turn ever more "Zoroastrianized", making it easier for Iranians to embrace Islam.

The 9th century was the last in which Zoroastrians had the means to engage in creative work on a great scale, and the 9th century has come to define the great number of Zoroastrian texts that were composed or re-written during the 8th to 10th centuries (excluding copying and lesser amendments, which continue for some time thereafter). All of these works are in the Middle Persian dialect of that period (free of Arabic words), and written in the difficult Pahlavi script (hence the adoption of the term "Pahlavi" as the name of the variant of the language, and of the genre, of those Zoroastrian books). If read aloud, these books would still have been intelligible to the laity. Many of these texts are responses to the tribulations of the time, and all of them include exhortations to stand fast in their religious beliefs. Some, such as the "Denkard", are doctrinal defenses of the religion, while others are explanations of theological aspects (such as the Bundahishn's) or practical aspects (e.g., explanation of rituals) of it. About sixty such works are known to have existed, of which some are known only from references to them in other works.[*citation needed*]

Two decrees in particular encouraged the transition to a preponderantly Islamic society.[*citation needed*] The first edict, adapted from an Arsacid and Sassanid one (but in those to the advantage of Zoroastrians), was that only a Muslim could own Muslim slaves or indentured servants. Thus, a bonded individual owned by a Zoroastrian could automatically become a freeman by converting to Islam. The other edict was that if one male member of a Zoroastrian family converted to Islam, he instantly inherited all its property.

Under Abbasid rule, Muslim Iranians (who by then were in the majority) increasingly found ways to taunt Zoroastrians, and distressing them became a popular sport. For example, in the 9th century, a deeply venerated cypress tree in Khorasan (which Parthian-era legend supposed had been planted by Zoroaster himself) was felled for the construction of a palace in Baghdad, 2,000 miles (3,200 km) away. In the 10th century, on the day that a Tower of Silence had been completed at much trouble and expense, a Muslim official contrived to get up onto it, and to call the *adhan* (the Muslim call to prayer) from its walls. This was made a pretext to annex the building.[22] Another popular means to distress Zoroastrians was to maltreat dogs, as these animals are sacred in Zoroastrianism. Such baiting, which was to continue down the centuries, was indulged in by all; not only by high officials, but by the general uneducated population as well.

Despite these economic and social incentives to convert, Zoroastrianism remained strong in some regions, particularly in those furthest away from the Caliphate capital at Baghdad. In Bukhara (in present-day Uzbekistan), resistance to Islam required the 9th century Arab commander Qutaiba to convert his province four times. The first three times the citizens reverted to their old religion. Finally, the governor made their religion "difficult for them in every way", turned the local fire temple into a mosque, and encouraged the local population to attend Friday prayers by paying each attendee two dirhams.[19] The cities where Arab governors resided were particularly vulnerable to such pressures, and in these cases the Zoroastrians were left with no choice but to either conform or migrate to regions that had a more amicable administration.[19]

Among these migrations were those to cities in (or on the margins of) the great salt deserts, in particular to Yazd and Kerman, which remain centers of Iranian Zoroastrianism to this day. Yazd became the seat of the Iranian high priests during Mongol Il-Khanate rule, when the "best hope for survival [for a non-Muslim] was to be inconspicuous."[23] Crucial to the present-day survival of Zoroastrianism was a migration from the northeastern Iranian town of "Sanjan in south-western Khorasan",[24] to Gujarat, in western India. The descendants of that group are today known as the *Parsis*—"as the Gujaratis, from long tradition, called anyone from Iran"[24]—who today represent the larger of the two groups of Zoroastrians.

The Zoroastrian Achaemenid Empire at its greatest extent was the largest ancient empire in recorded history at 8.0 million km^2 (480 BCE).[25]

Also in Khorasan in the northeastern Iran, a 10th century Iranian nobleman brought together four Zoroastrian priests to transcribe a Sassanid-era Middle Persian work titled *Book of the Lord* (*Khwaday Namag*) from Pahlavi script into Arabic script. This transcription, which remained in Middle Persian prose (an Arabic version, by al-Muqaffa, also exists), was completed in 957 and subsequently became the basis for Firdausi's *Book of Kings*. It became enormously popular among both Zoroastrians and Muslims, and also served to propagate the Sassanid justification for overthrowing the Arsacids (i.e., that the Sassanids had restored the faith to its "orthodox" form after the Hellenistic Arsacids had allowed Zoroastrianism to become corrupt).

The struggle between Zoroastrianism and Islam declined in the 10th and 11th centuries, as, by then, most of the countryWikipedia:Avoid weasel words was Islamic. Local Iranian dynasties, "all vigorously Muslim,"[24] had emerged as largely independent vassals of the Caliphs. In the 16th century, in one of the early letters between Iranian Zoroastrians and their co-religionists in India, the priests of Yazd lamented that "no period [in human history], not even that of Alexander, had been more grievous or troublesome for the faithful than 'this millennium of the demon of Wrath'."[26]

Relation to other religions and cultures

The Achaemenid Empire in the 5th century BCE consisted of the largest empire in history by percentage of world population.[27]

Most scholars believe[28] that key concepts of Zoroastrian eschatology and demonology influenced the Abrahamic religions.[29][30] On the other hand, Zoroastrianism itself inherited ideas from other belief systems and, like other "practiced" religions, accommodates some degree of syncretism.[31]

Many traits of Zoroastrianism can be traced back to the culture and beliefs of the prehistorical Indo-Iranian period, that is, to the time before the migrations that led to the Indians and Iranians becoming distinct peoples. Zoroastrianism consequently shares elements with the historical Vedic religion that also has its origins in that era. An example is the relation of the Zoroastrian word *Ahura* (Ahura Mazda) and the Vedic word *Asura* (meaning demon). They are therefore thoughtWikipedia:Avoid weasel words to have descended from a common Proto-Indo-Iranian religion. However, Zoroastrianism was also strongly affected by the later culture of the Iranian Heroic Age (1500 BCE onwards), an influence to which the Indic religions were not subject. Moreover, the other culture groups that the respective peoples came to interact with were different, for instance in 6th–4th century BCE Western Iran with Fertile Crescent culture, with each side absorbing ideas from the other. Such inter-cultural influences notwithstanding, Zoroastrian "scripture" is essentially a product of (Indo-) Iranian culture, and representing the oldest and largest corpus pre-Islamic Iranian ideology—is consideredWikipedia:Avoid weasel words a reflection of that culture. Then, together with the Vedas, which represent the oldest texts of the Indian branch of Indo-Iranian culture, it is possible to reconstruct some facets of prototypical Indo-Iranian beliefs. Since these two groups of sources also represent the oldest non-fragmentary evidence of Indo-European languages, the

analysis of them also motivated attempts to characterize an even earlier Proto-Indo-European religion, and in turn influenced various unifying hypotheses like those of Carl Gustav Jung or James George Frazer[*citation needed*]. Although these unifying notions deeply influenced the modernists of the late 19th and early 20th century, they have not fared well under the scrutiny of more recent interdisciplinary peer review. The study of pre-Islamic Iran has itself undergone a radical change in direction since the 1950s, and the field is today disinclined to speculation.

Zoroastrianism is often compared with the Manichaeism, which is nominally an Iranian religion but has its origins in the Middle-Eastern Gnosticism. Superficially, such a comparison may be apt, as both are uncompromisingly dualistic, and Manichaeism nominally adopted many of the Yazatas for its own pantheon. Gherardo Gnoli, in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, says that "we can assert that Manichaeism has its roots in the Iranian religious tradition and that its relationship to Mazdaism, or Zoroastrianism, is more or less like that of Christianity to Judaism".[32] As religious types, they are, however, quite different:[33] Manichaeism equated evil with matter and good with spirit, and was therefore particularly suitable as a doctrinal basis for every form of asceticism and many forms of mysticism. Zoroastrianism, on the other hand, rejects every form of asceticism, has no dualism of matter and spirit (only of good and evil), and sees the spiritual world as not very different from the natural one, and the word "paradise" (via Latin and Greek from Avestan *pairi.daeza*, literally "stone-bounded enclosure") applies equally to both. Manichaeism's basic doctrine was that the world and all corporeal bodies were constructed from the substance of Satan, an idea that is fundamentally at odds with the Zoroastrian notion of a world that was created by God and that is all good, and any corruption of it is an effect of the bad. From what may be inferred from many Manichean texts and a few Zoroastrian sources, the adherents of the two religions (or at least their respective priesthoods) despised each other intensely.

Many aspects of Zoroastrianism are present in the culture and mythologies of the peoples of the Greater Iran, not least because Zoroastrianism was a dominant influence on the people of the cultural continent for a thousand years. Even after the rise of Islam and the loss of direct influence, Zoroastrianism remained part of the cultural heritage of the Iranian language-speaking world, in part as festivals and customs, but also because Ferdowsi incorporated a number of the figures and stories from the Avesta in his epic *Shāhnāme*, which in turn is pivotal to Iranian identity.

Zoroastrianism is a tradition that has influenced the lives of its adherents for generations. It combines cosmogonic dualism and escathological monotheism. Zoroastrianism proclaims a movement through time from dualism to monotheism.[34]

Religious text

Avestan

The Avesta is the religious book of Zoroastrians that contains a collection of sacred texts. The history of the Avesta is found in many Pahlavi texts. According to tradition, Ahura Mazda created the twenty-one nasks which Zoroaster brought to Vishtaspa. Here, two copies were created, one which was put in the house of archives, and the other put in the Imperial treasury. During Alexander's conquest of Persia, the Avesta was burned, and the scientific sections that the Greeks could use were dispersed among themselves. Under the reign of King Valax of the Arsacis Dynasty, an attempt was made to restore the Avesta. During the Sassanid Empire, Ardeshir ordered Tansar, his high priest, to finish the work that King Valax had started. Shapur I sent priests to locate the scientific text portions of the Avesta that were in the possession of the Greeks. Under Shapur II, Arderbad Mahrespandand revised the canon to ensure its orthodox character, while under Khosrow I, the Avesta was translated into Pahlavi.

The compilation of these ancient texts was successfully established underneath the Mazdean priesthood and the Sassanian emperors. Only a fraction of the texts survive today. The later manuscripts all date from this millennium, the latest being from 1288, 590 years after the fall of the Sassanian Empire. The texts that remain today are the Gathas, Yasna, Visperad and the Vendidad. Along with these texts is the communal household prayer book called the Khordeh Avesta, which contains the Yashts and the Siroza. The rest of the materials from the Avesta are called

"Avestan fragments".[35]

Middle Persian/Pahlavi

Middle Persian and Pahlavi works created in the 9th and 10th century contain many religious Zoroastrian books, as most of the writers and copyists were part of the Zoroastrian clergy. The most significant and important books of this era include the Denkard, Bundahishn, Menog-i Khrad, Selections of Zadspram, Jamasp Namag, Epistles of Manucher, Rivayats, Dadestan-i-Denig, and Arda Viraf Namag. All Middle Persian texts written on Zoroastrianism during this time period are considered secondary works on the religion, and not scripture. Nonetheless, these texts have a strong influence on the religion.

The Prophet Zoroaster

Zoroastrianism was founded by the Prophet Zoroaster (or Zarathustra) in ancient Iran. The precise date of the founding of Zoroastrianism is uncertain. An approximate date of 1500–1200 BCE has been established through archaeological evidence and linguistic comparisons with the Hindu text Rig Veda. However there is no way of knowing exactly when Zoroaster lived, as he lived in what, to his people, were prehistoric times.[36] Depending on different approaches, it is thought that he lived some time between 1700 BCE[37] to 500 BCE.[38] Zoroaster was born in either Northeast Iran or Southwest Afghanistan. He was born into a Bronze Age culture with a polytheistic religion, which included animal sacrifice[39] and the ritual use of intoxicants. This religion was quite similar to the early forms of Hinduism in India. The name *Zoroaster* is a Greek rendering of the name *Zarathustra*. He is known as *Zartosht* and *Zardosht* in Persian and *Zaratosht* in Gujarati. Zoroaster's birth and early life are little documented. What is known is recorded in the Gathas—the core of the Avesta, which contains hymns thought to be composed by Zoroaster himself. Born into the Spitama clan, he worked as a priest. He had a wife, three sons, and three daughters. Zoroaster rejected the religion of the Bronze Age Iranians, with their many gods and oppressive class structure, in which the Karvis and Karapans (princes and priests) controlled the ordinary people. He also opposed animal sacrifices and the use of the hallucinogenic Haoma plant (possibly a species of ephedra) in rituals, but held the rooster as a "symbol of light"[40] and associated the cock with "good against evil"[41] because of his heraldic actions.

The vision of Zoroaster

According to Zoroastrian belief, when Zoroaster was 30 years old, he went into the Daiti river to draw water for a Haoma ceremony; when he emerged, he received a vision of Vohu Manah. After this, Vohu Manah took him to the other six Amesha Spentas, where he received the completion of his vision.[42] This vision radically transformed his view of the world, and he tried to teach this view to others. Zoroaster believed in one creator God, teaching that only one God was worthy of worship. Furthermore, some of the deities of the old religion, the *Daevas* (*Devas* in Sanskrit), appeared to delight in war and strife. Zoroaster said that these were evil spirits and were workers of Angra Mainyu, God's adversary.

Zoroaster's ideas did not take off quickly, and, at first, he only had one convert: his cousin Maidhyoimanha.[43] The local religious authorities opposed his ideas. They felt their own faiths, power, and particularly their rituals, were threatened because Zoroaster taught against over-ritualising religious ceremonies. Many ordinary people did not like Zoroaster's downgrading of the Daevas to evil spirits. After 12 years, Zoroaster left his home to find somewhere more open to new ideas. He found such a place in the country of King Vishtaspa (in Bactria). The King and his queen, Hutosa, heard Zoroaster debating with the religious leaders of his land, and decided to accept Zoroaster's ideas and make them the official religion of their kingdom. Zoroaster died in his late 70s. Very little is known of the time between Zoroaster and the Achaemenian period, except that, during this period, Zoroastrianism spread to Western Iran. By the time of the founding of the Achaemenid Empire, Zoroastrianism was already a well-established religion.

Principal beliefs

In Zoroastrianism, Ahura Mazda is the beginning and the end, the creator of everything that can and cannot be seen, the Eternal, the Pure and the only Truth. In the Gathas, the most sacred texts of Zoroastrianism thought to have been composed by Zoroaster himself, the prophet acknowledged devotion to no other divinity besides Ahura Mazda.

Faravahar (or Ferohar), one of the primary symbols of Zoroastrianism, believed to be the depiction of a *Fravashi* (guardian spirit)

Daena (*din* in modern Persian) is the eternal Law, whose order was revealed to humanity through the *Mathra-Spenta* ("Holy Words"). *Daena* has been used to mean religion, faith, law, and even as a translation for the Hindu and Buddhist term Dharma. The latter is often interpreted as "duty" but can also mean social order, right conduct, or virtue. The metaphor of the "path" of *Daena* is represented in Zoroastrianism by the muslin undershirt *Sudra*, the "Good/Holy Path", and the 72-thread *Kushti* girdle, the "Pathfinder".

Daena should not be confused with the fundamental principle *asha* (Vedic *rta*), the equitable law of the universe, which governed the life of the ancient Indo-Iranians. For these, *asha* was the course of everything observable—the motion of the planets and astral bodies; the progression of the seasons; and the pattern of daily nomadic herdsman life, governed by regular metronomic events such as sunrise and sunset. All physical creation (*geti*) was thus determined to run according to a master plan—inherent to Ahura Mazda—and violations of the order (*druj*) were violations against creation, and thus violations against Ahura Mazda. This concept of *asha* versus the *druj* should not be confused with the good-versus-evil battle evident in western religions, for although both forms of opposition express moral conflict, the *asha* versus *druj* concept is more systemic and less personal, representing, for instance, chaos (that opposes order); or "uncreation", evident as natural decay (that opposes creation); or more simply "the lie" (that opposes truth and righteousness). Moreover, in his role as the one uncreated creator of all, Ahura Mazda is not the creator of *druj*, which is "nothing", anti-creation, and thus (likewise) uncreated. Thus, in Zoroaster's revelation, Ahura Mazda was perceived to be the creator of only the good (Yasna 31.4), the "supreme benevolent providence" (Yasna 43.11), that will ultimately triumph (Yasna 48.1).

A *Parsi* Wedding, 1905

In this schema of *asha* versus *druj*, mortal beings (both humans and animals) play a critical role, for they too are created. Here, in their lives, they are active participants in the conflict, and it is their *duty* to defend order, which would decay without counter*action*. Throughout the Gathas, Zoroaster emphasizes deeds and actions, and accordingly asceticism is frowned upon in Zoroastrianism. In later Zoroastrianism, this was explained as fleeing from the experiences of life, which was the very purpose that the *urvan* (most commonly translated as the "soul") was sent into the mortal world to collect. The avoidance of any aspect of life, which includes the avoidance of the pleasures of life, is a shirking of the responsibility and duty to oneself, one's *urvan*, and one's family and social obligations.

Central to Zoroastrianism is the emphasis on moral choice, to choose the responsibility and duty for which one is in the mortal world, or to give up this duty and so facilitate the work of *druj*. Similarly, predestination is rejected in Zoroastrian teaching. Humans bear responsibility for all situations they are in, and in the way they act toward one another. Reward, punishment, happiness, and grief all depend on how individuals live their lives.[]

In Zoroastrianism, good transpires for those who do righteous deeds. Those who do evil have themselves to blame for their ruin. Zoroastrian morality is then to be summed up in the simple phrase, "good thoughts, good words, good deeds" (*Humata*, *Hukhta*, *Hvarshta* in Avestan), for it is through these that *asha* is maintained and *druj* is kept in

check.

Through accumulation, several other beliefs were introduced to the religion that, in some instances, supersede those expressed in the Gathas. In the late 19th century, the moral and immoral forces came to be represented by *Spenta Mainyu* and its antithesis *Angra Mainyu*, the "good spirit" and "evil spirit" emanations of Ahura Mazda, respectively. Although the names are old, this opposition is a modern Western-influenced development popularized by Martin Haug in the 1880s, and was, in effect, a realignment of the precepts of Zurvanism (Zurvanite Zoroastrianism), which had invented a *third* deity, *Zurvan*, to explain a mention of twinship (*Yasna* 30.3) between the moral and immoral. Although Zurvanism had died out by the 10th century, the critical question of the "twin brothers" mentioned in *Yasna* 30.3 remained, and Haug's explanation provided a convenient defence against Christian missionaries, who disparaged the Parsis for their "dualism". Haug's concept was subsequently disseminated as a Parsi interpretation, thus corroborating Haug's theory, and the idea became so popular that it is now almost universally accepted as doctrine.[*citation needed*]

Achaemenid era (648–330 BCE) Zoroastrianism developed the abstract concepts of heaven and hell, as well as personal and final judgment, all of which are only alluded to in the Gathas. *Yasna* 19, which has only survived in a Sassanid era ([–650 CE] *Zend* commentary on the *Ahuna Vairya* invocation), prescribes a Path to Judgment known as the *Chinvat Peretum* or *Chinvat bridge* (*cf:* As-Sirāt in Islam), which all souls had to cross, and judgment (over thoughts, words, and deeds performed during a lifetime) was passed as they were doing so. However, the Zoroastrian personal judgment is not final. At the end of time, when evil is finally defeated, all souls will be ultimately reunited with their Fravashi. Thus, Zoroastrianism can be said to be a universalist religion with respect to salvation.

In addition, and strongly influenced by Babylonian and Akkadian practices, the Achaemenids popularized shrines and temples, hitherto alien forms of worship. In the wake of Achaemenid expansion, shrines were constructed throughout the empire and particularly influenced the role of Mithra, Aredvi Sura Anahita, Verethregna and Tishtrya, all of which, in addition to their original (proto-)Indo-Iranian functions, now also received Perso-Babylonian functions.

Creation of the universe

According to the Zoroastrian story of creation, Ahura Mazda existed in light in goodness above, while Angra Mainyu existed in darkness and ignorance below. They have existed independently of each other for all time, and manifest contrary substances. Ahura Mazda first created seven abstract heavenly beings called *Amesha Spentas*, who support him and represent beneficent aspects, along with numerous *yazads*, lesser beings worthy of worship. He then created the universe itself in order to ensnare evil. Ahura Mazda created the floating, egg-shaped universe in two parts: first the spiritual (*menog*) and 3,000 years later, the physical (*getig*). Ahura Mazda then created Gayomard, the archetypical perfect man, and the first bull.[]

While Ahura Mazda created the universe and mankind, Angra Mainyu, whose instinct is to destroy, miscreated demons, evil *yazads*, and noxious creatures (*khrafstar*) such as snakes, ants, and flies. Angra Mainyu created an opposite, evil being for each good being, except for humans, which he found he could not match. Angra Mainyu invaded the universe through the base of the sky, inflicting Gayomard and the bull with suffering and death. However, the evil forces were trapped in the universe and could not retreat. The dying primordial man and bull emitted seeds. From the bull's seed grew all beneficial plants and animals of the world, and from the man's seed grew a plant whose leaves became the first human couple. Man thus struggles in a two-fold universe trapped with evil. The evils of this physical world are not products of an inherent weakness, but are the fault of Angra Mainyu's assault on creation. This assault turned the perfectly flat, peaceful, and ever day-lit world into a mountainous, violent place that is half night.[]

Renovation and judgment

Zoroastrianism also includes beliefs about the renovation of the world and individual judgment (cf. general and particular judgment), including the resurrection of the dead.

Individual judgment at death is by the Bridge of Judgment, which each human must cross, facing a spiritual judgment. Humans' actions under their free will determine the outcome. One is either greeted at the bridge by a beautiful, sweet-smelling maiden or by an ugly, foul-smelling old woman. The maiden leads the dead safely across the bridge to the Amesha Spenta Good Mind, who carries the dead to paradise. The old woman leads the dead down a bridge that narrows until the departed falls off into the abyss of hell.[]

Zoroastrian hell is reformative; punishments fit the crimes, and souls do not rest in eternal damnation. Hell contains foul smells and evil food, and souls are packed tightly together although they believe they are in total isolation.[]

In Zoroastrian eschatology, a 3,000-year struggle between good and evil will be fought, punctuated by evil's final assault. During the final assault, the sun and moon will darken and mankind will lose its reverence for religion, family, and elders. The world will fall into winter, and Angra Mainyu's most fearsome miscreant, Azi Dahaka, will break free and terrorize the world.[]

The final savior of the world, Saoshyant, will be born to a virgin impregnated by the seed of Zoroaster while bathing in a lake. Saoshyant will raise the dead – including those in both heaven and hell – for final judgment, returning the wicked to hell to be purged of bodily sin. Next, all will wade through a river of molten metal in which the righteous will not burn. Heavenly forces will ultimately triumph over evil, rendering it forever impotent. Saoshyant and Ahura Mazda will offer a bull as a final sacrifice for all time, and all men will become immortal. Mountains will again flatten and valleys will rise; heaven will descend to the moon, and the earth will rise to meet them both.[]

Man requires two judgments because there are as many aspects to his being: spiritual (*menog*) and physical (*getig*).[]

Head covering

The Zarathushtri also practice traditional head covering ritual similar to that of Judaism (probably predating it). It is vital to the practice, and according to Dr. Hoshang Bhadha,

> A Zarathustri is enjoined to cover his head at all times. It is one of the basic disciplines for a Zarathustri. If you have ever look at the pictures of Zarathustris from the past, you will recognize them simply because they were wearing cap or turban covering their head. If you read the description of Parsees from the past... it is emphatically described that whether a child, female or male they all had their head(s) covered. It is unfortunate that our own community people laugh on us for wearing cap, which is the foundation of all our religion practices. Needless to say, today a Zarathustri wearing cap will get strange glances; he/she will evoke giggles and some people even consider them as one belonging to the Stone Age. However, such reactions are seldom seen when a Zarathustri will observe a Muslim or Jew demonstrating their practice of covering head during and out of their prayer area. It is a common sight to see a Zarathustri coming out from the Agiary with one hand over his head, not as a respect but to prepare himself/ herself to remove the cap/scarf before he/she reaches the main gate. Some people feel embarrassed to wear in public whereas some remove it to protect their hairstyle. My dear Zarathustris, wearing cap is not imposed upon us but it is a remedy to protect oneself from destructive thought process[es]...

[44]

Adherents

The Zoroastrian Atash Behram of Yazd, Iran.

India is considered to be home to the largest Zoroastrian population in the world. When the Islamic armies, under the first Caliphs, invaded Persia, those locals who were unwilling to convert to Islam sought refuge, first in the mountains of Northern Iran, then the regions of Yazd and its surrounding villages. Later, in the ninth century CE, a group sought refuge in the western coastal region of India, and also scattered to other regions of the world. In recent years, the United States has become a significant destination of Zoroastrian populations, holding the second largest population of Zoroastrians after India.

Small Zoroastrian communities may be found all over the world, with a continuing concentration in Western India, Central Iran, and Southern Pakistan. Zoroastrians of the diaspora are primarily located in Great Britain and the former British colonies—in particular Canada and Australia. Zoroastrian communities comprised two main groups of people: those of South Asian Zoroastrian background known as Parsis (or Parsees), and those of Central Asian background.

Iran and Central Asia

Communities exist in Tehran, as well as in Yazd, Kerman and Kermanshah, where many still speak an Iranian language distinct from the usual Persian. They call their language Dari (not to be confused with the Dari of Afghanistan). Their language is also called *Gabri* or *Bahdinan* (also the name of a modern Kurdish dialect), literally "of the Good Religion". Sometimes their language is named for the cities in which it is spoken, such as *Yazdi* or *Kermani*. Iranian Zoroastrians were historically called *Gabr*s, originally without a pejorative connotation but in the present-day derogatorily applied to all non-Muslims.

There is some interest among Iranians, as well as people in various Central Asian countries such as Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, in their ancient Zoroastrian heritage; some people in these countries take notice of their Zoroastrian pastWikipedia:Avoid weasel words. At the request of the government of Tajikistan, UNESCO declared 2003 a year to celebrate the "3000th anniversary of Zoroastrian culture", with special events throughout the world.

In South Asia

Following the fall of the Sassanid Empire in 651 CE, many Zoroastrians migrated. Among them were several groups who ventured to Gujarat on the western shores of the Indian subcontinent, where they finally settled. The descendants of those refugees are today known as the Parsis. The year of arrival on the subcontinent cannot be precisely established, and Parsi legend and tradition assigns various dates to the event.

In the Indian subcontinent, these Zoroastrians enjoyed tolerance and even admiration from other religious communities.[*citation needed*] From the 19th century onward, the Parsis gained a reputation for their education and widespread influence in all aspects of society, partly due to the divisive strategy of British colonialism, which favored certain minorities. Parsis are stereotypically viewed as among the most Anglicised and "Westernised" of the various minority groups.[*citation needed*] They have also played an instrumental role in the economic development of the region over many decades; several of the best-known business conglomerates of India are run by Parsi-Zoroastrians, including Tata, Godrej, and Wadia families.

Parsi *Navjote* ceremony (rites of admission into the Zoroastrian faith)

Demographics

In 2004, the number of Zoroastrians worldwide was estimated at between 145,000 and 210,000.[] India's 2001 Census found 69,601 Parsi Zoroastrians. In Pakistan, they number 5,000, mostly living in Karachi; they have been reinforced in recent years with a number of Zoroastrian refugees from Iran. North America is thought to be home to 18,000–25,000 Zoroastrians of both South Asian and Iranian background. A further 3,500 live in Australia (mainly in Sydney). Iran's figures of Zoroastrians have ranged widely; the last census (1974) before the revolution of 1979 revealed 21,400 Zoroastrians.

Some 10,000 adherents remain in the Central Asian regions that were once considered the traditional stronghold of Zoroastrianism, i.e., Bactria (see also Balkh), which is in Northern Afghanistan; Sogdiana; Margiana; and other areas close to Zoroaster's homeland.

In the Indian census of 2001, the Parsis numbered 69,601, representing about 0.006% of the total population of India, with a concentration in and around the city of Mumbai. Due to a low birth rate and high rate of emigration, demographic trends project that by 2020 the Parsis will number only about 23,000 or 0.002% of the total population of India. The Parsis would then cease to be called a community and will be labeled a "tribe". By 2008, the birth-to-death ratio was 1:5; 200 births per year to 1,000 deaths.[]

In Iran, emigration, out-marriage and low birth rates are likewise leading to a decline in the Zoroastrian population, which is currently estimated at under 20,000.[45]

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[3] Hoschander, Jacob. "The Book of Esther in the Light of History: Chapter IV", The Jewish Quarterly Review, New Series, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Jul., 1919), pp. 87–88

[4] Hourani, p. 87.

[6] Oxford English Dictionary

[7] Browne, T. (1643) "Religio Medici"

[10] Boyce 2007, p. 205.

[11] Foltz 2004, pp. 4–16

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[25] Vasseghi, Sheda (http://www.persepolis3d.com/data_developers/biography_vasseghi.htm), " The other Iran story: Re-engineering the nation's cultural DNA (http://www.worldtribune.com/worldtribune/WTARC/2009/me_iran0794_10_12.asp)", *Breaking... WorldTribune.com* World Tribune News, (12 October 2009).

[26] .

[27] While estimates for the Achaemenid Empire range from 10–80+ million, most prefer 50 million. Prevas (2009, p. 14) estimates 10 million 1 (http://books.google.com/books?id=1S-Q-6jDZ7AC&pg=PA14&dq=persian+empire+million+square+miles&lr=#v=onepage&q=persian empire million square miles&f=false). Langer (2001, p. 40) estimates around 16 million 2 (http://books.google.com/books?id=MziRd4ddZz4C&pg=PA40&dq=persian+empire+million+people&lr=#v=onepage&q=persian empire million people&f=false). McEvedy and Jones (2001, p. 50) estimates 17 million 3 (http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/worldhis.html). Strauss (2004, p. 37) estimates about 20 million 4 (http://books.google.com/books?id=nQFtMcD5dOsC&printsec=frontcover&dq=battle+of+salamis+strauss&lr=). Ward (2009, p. 16) estimates at 20 million 5 (http://books.google.com/books?id=8eUTLaaVOOQC&pg=PA16&dq=persian+empire+million+square+miles&lr=#v=onepage&q=persian empire million square miles&f=false). Aperghis (2007, p. 311) estimates 32 million 6 (http://books.google.com/books?id=uug6VvJrxVYC&pg=RA11-PT139&dq=20-25+million+persian+empire). Scheidel (2009, p. 99) estimates 35 million 7 (http://books.google.com/books?id=6vnkts2rOJUC&pg=PA99&dq=scheidel+35+million+2009&lr=). Zeinert (1996, p. 32) estimates 40 million 8 (http://books.google.com/books?id=JgNlG_AI7bkC&pg=PA32&dq=persian+empire+million+people&lr=#v=onepage&q=persian empire million people&f=false). Rawlinson and Schauffler (1898, p. 270) estimates possibly 50 million 9 (http://books.google.com/books?id=_NpJAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA270&dq=persian+empire+50+million+people&lr=#v=onepage&q=&f=false). Astor (1899, p. 56) estimates almost 50 million 10 (http://books.google.com/books?id=DNwaAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA56&dq=persian+empire+million+square+miles&lr=#v=onepage&q=persian empire million square miles&f=false). Lissner (1961, p. 111) estimates probably 50 million 11 (http://books.google.com/books?lr=&id=GQJIAAAAMAAJ&dq=Darius+twenty+million+people&q=fifty+million+people). Milns (1968, p. 51) estimates some 50 million 12 (http://books.google.com/books?lr=&id=aEobAAAAYAAJ&dq=persian+empire+50+million+people&q=fifty+million+people). Hershlag (1980, p. 140) estimates nearly 50 million 13 (http://books.google.com/books?id=awoVAAAAIAAJ&pg=PA140&dq=persian+empire+50+million+people&lr=#v=onepage&q=persian empire 50 million people&f=false). Yarshater (1996, p. 47) estimates by 50 million 14 (http://books.google.com/books?lr=&id=KKkUAQAAIAAJ&dq=persian+empire+50+million+people&q=50+million+people). Daniel (2001, p. 41) estimates at 50 million 15 (http://books.google.com/books?id=AzqbYf9Q_2UC&pg=PA41&dq=persian+empire+million+people&lr=#v=onepage&q=persian empire million people&f=false). Meyer and Andreades (2004, p. 58) estimates to 50 million 16 (http://books.google.com/books?id=Uwn9d01zMvAC&pg=PA58&dq=meyer+50+million+persian+empire&lr=). Pollack (2004, p. 7) estimates about 50 million 17 (http://books.google.com/books?id=VtISTfUL-NAC&pg=PA7&dq=persian+empire+50+million+people&lr=#v=onepage&q=persian empire 50 million people&f=false). Jones (2004, p. 8) estimates over 50 million 18 (http://books.google.com/books?id=75ueY2rqTYMC&pg=PA8&dq=persian+empire+million+square+miles&lr=#v=onepage&q=persian empire million square miles&f=false). Safire (2007, p. 627) estimates in 50 million 19 (http://books.google.com/books?id=-BIGv9vIoqcC&pg=PA627&dq=persian+empire+million+square+miles&lr=#v=onepage&q=persian empire million square miles&f=false). Dougherty (2009, p. 6) estimates about 70 million 20 (http://books.google.com/books?id=Hm_ZXXj-Lh0C&pg=PT5&dq=70+million+persian+empire#PPT5,M1). Richard (2008, p. 34) estimates nearly 70 million 21 (http://books.google.com/books?id=toJI-Z_WAC0C&pg=PA34&dq=persian+empire+million+square+miles&lr=#v=onepage&q=persian empire million square miles&f=false). Mitchell (2004, p. 16) estimates over 70 million 22 (http://books.google.com/books?id=JqeIpyQM9OcC&pg=PA16&dq=70+million+persian+empire&lr=). Hanson (2001, p. 32) estimates almost 75 million 23 (http://books.google.com/

books?id=6p5mAAAAMAAJ&dq=70+million+persian+empire&q=70+million+&pgis=1). West (1913, p. 85) estimates about 75 million 24 (http://books.google.com/books?id=RWYAAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA85&dq=persian+empire+million+people&lr=#v=onepage&q=persian empire million people&f=false). Zenos (1889, p. 2) estimates exactly 75 million 25 (http://books.google.com/books?id=EzABAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA1&dq=persian+empire+population&lr=). Cowley (1999 and 2001, p. 17) estimates possibly 80 million 26 (http://books.google.com/books?id=l6JmAAAAMAAJ&dq=what+if?&q=70+million&pgis=1). Cook (1904, p. 277) estimates exactly 80 million 27 (http://books.google.com/books?id=258XAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA277&dq=persian+empire+million+square+miles&lr=#v=onepage&q=persian empire million square miles&f=false).

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[31] e.g., .

[32] Contrast with Henning's observations: Henning, W.B., *The Book of Giants*, BSOAS, Vol. XI, Part 1, 1943, pp. 52-74: *"It is noteworthy that Mani, who was brought up and spent most of his life in a province of the Persian empire, and whose mother belonged to a famous Parthian family, did not make any use of the Iranian mythological tradition. There can no longer be any doubt that the Iranian names of Sām, Narīmān, etc., that appear in the Persian and Sogdian versions of the Book of the Giants, did not figure in the original edition, written by Mani in the Syriac language."*

[33] .

[35] Bromiley 1995, p. 124.

[36] Boyce (1979), p. 17

[37] Boyce (1979), p. 2

[38] Verlag (2008), p. 80

[39] Boyce (1979), p. 26

[40] The Heretic's Feast: A History of Vegetarianism By Colin Spencer - May 15, 1995 page 60

[41] The Heretic's Feast: A History of Vegetarianism By Colin Spencer - May 15, 1995 - page 60

[42] Boyce (1979), p. 19

[43] Boyce (1979), pp. 30–31

[44] Hoshang, Dr. Bhadha. http://tenets.zoroastrianism.com/topi33.html

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External links

- Zoroastrianism (http://www.dmoz.org/Society/Religion_and_Spirituality/Zoroastrianism/) at the Open Directory Project
  (includes a list of Zoroastrian organizations)

Bundahishn

Part of a series on

Zoroastrianism

The *Faravahar*, believed to be a depiction of a *fravashi*

Primary topics

- Ahura Mazda
- Zarathustra
- *aša* (asha) / *arta*

Angels and demons

- Amesha Spentas · Yazatas
- Ahuras · Daevas
- Angra Mainyu

Scripture and worship

- Avesta
- Gathas · Yasna
- Vendidad · Visperad
- Yashts · Khordeh Avesta
- Ab-Zohr
- The Ahuna Vairya Invocation
- Fire Temples

Accounts and legends

- Dēnkard · Bundahišn
- Book of Arda Viraf
- Book of Jamasp
- Story of Sanjan

History and culture

- Zurvanism
- Calendar · Festivals
- Marriage
- Eschatology

Adherents

- Zoroastrians in Iran
- Parsis · Iranis
- • • •
- Persecution of Zoroastrians

Zoroastrianism portal

BundahishnWikipedia:Manual_of_Style/Pronunciation, meaning "Primal Creation", is the name traditionally given to an encyclopædiaic collections of Zoroastrian cosmogony and cosmology written in Book Pahlavi.[1] The original name of the work is not known.

Although the Bundahishn draws on the Avesta and develops ideas alluded to in those texts, it is not itself scripture. The content reflects Zoroastrian scripture, which in turn reflects both ancient Zoroastrian and pre-Zoroastrian beliefs. In some cases, the text alludes to contingencies of post-7th century Islamic Iran, and yet in other cases (e.g. in the idea that the moon is further away than the stars) reiterates scripture even though science had by then determined otherwise.

Structure

The traditionally given name seems to be an adoption of the sixth word from the first sentence of the younger of the two recensions.[2] The older of the two recensions has a different first line, and the first translation of that version adopted the name *Zand-Ākāsīh*, meaning "Zand-knowing", from the first two words of its first sentence.

Most of the chapters of the compendium date to the 8th and 9th centuries, roughly contemporary with the oldest portions of the *Denkard*, which is another significant text of the "Pahlavi" (i.e. Zoroastrian Middle Persian) collection. The later chapters are several centuries younger than the oldest ones. The oldest existing copy dates to the mid-16th century.

The *Bundahishn* survives in two recensions. A shorter was found in India, and is thus known as the *Lesser-*, or *Indian Bundahishn*. A copy of this version was brought to Europe by Abraham Anquetil-Duperron in 1762. A longer version was brought to India from Iran by T.D. Anklesaria around 1870, and is thus known as the *Greater-* or *Iranian Bundahishn* or just *Bundahishn*. The greater recension (the name of which is abbreviated *GBd* or just *Bd*) is about twice as long as the lesser (abbreviated *IBd*).

The two recensions derive from different manuscript traditions, and in the portions available in both sources, vary (slightly) in content. The greater recension is also the older of the two, and was dated by West to around 1540. The lesser recension dates from about 1734.

Traditionally, chapter-verse pointers are in Arabic numerals for the lesser recension, and Roman numerals for the greater recension. The two series' are not synchronous since the lesser recension was analyzed (by Duperrron in 1771) before the extent of the greater recension was known. The chapter order is also different.

Content

The *Bundahishn* is the concise view of the Zoroastrianism's creation myth, and of the first battles of the forces of Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu for the hegemony of the world. According to the text, in the first 3,000 years of the cosmic year, Ahura Mazda created the Fravashis and conceived the idea of his would-be creation. He used the insensible and motionless Void as a weapon against Angra Mainyu, and at the end of that period, Angra Mainyu was forced to submission and fell into a stupor for the next 3,000 years. Taking advantage of Angra Mainyu's absence, Ahura Mazda created the Amesha Spentas (Bounteous Immortals), representing the primordial elements of the material world, and permeated his kingdom with *Ard* (Asha), "Truth" in order to prevent Angra Mainyu from destroying it. The Bundahishn finally recounts the creation of the primordial bovine, Ewagdad (Avestan Gavaevodata), and Gayomard (Avestan Gayomaretan), the primordial human.

Following MacKenzie,[2] the following chapter names in quotation marks reflect the original titles. Those without quotation marks are summaries of chapters that have no title. The chapter/section numbering scheme is based on that of B.T. Anklesaria[3] for the greater recension, and that of West[4] for the lesser recension. The chapter numbers for the greater recension are in the first column and in Roman numerals, and the chapter numbers for the lesser recension are in the second column, and are noted in Arabic numerals and in parenthesis.

I.	(1)	The primal creation of Ohrmazd and the onslaught of the Evil Spirit.
I A.	n/a	"On the material creation of the creatures."
II.	(2)	"On the fashioning forth of the lights."
III.	n/a	"On the reason for the creation of the creatures, for doing battle."
IV.	(3)	"On the running of the Adversary against the creatures."
IV A.	(4)	The death of the Sole-created Bovine.
V.	(5)	"On the opposition of the two Spirits."
V A.	n/a	"On the horoscope of the world, how it happened."
V B.	n/a	The planets.
VI.	n/a	"On the doing battle of the creations of the world against the Evil Spirit."
VI A.	(6)	"The first battle the Spirit of the Sky did with the Evil Spirit."
VI B	(7)	"The second battle the Water did."
VI C.	(8)	"The third battle the Earth did."
VI D.	(9)	"The fourth battle the Plant did."
VI E.	(10)	"The fifth battle the Sole-created Ox did."
VI F.	n/a	"The sixth battle Gayōmard did."
VI G.	n/a	"The seventh battle the Fire did."
VI H.	n/a	"The 8th battle the fixed stars did."
VI I.	n/a	"The 9th battle the spiritual gods did with the Evil Spirit."
VI J.	n/a	"The 10th battle the stars unaffected by the Mixing did."
VII.	n/a	"On the form of those creations."
VIII.	(11)	"On the nature of the lands."
IX.	(12)	"On the nature of the mountains."
X.	(13)	"On the nature of the seas."
XI.	(20)	"On the nature of the rivers."
XI A.	(20)	"On particular rivers."
XI B.	(21)	The seventeen kinds of "water" (of liquid).
XI C.	(21)	The dissatisfaction of the Arang, Marv, and Helmand rivers.
XII.	(22)	"On the nature of the lakes."
XIII.	(14)	"On the nature of the 5 kinds of animal."
XIV.	(15)	"On the nature of men."
XIV A.	n/a	"On the nature of women."
XIV B.	(23)	On negroes.
XV.	(16)	"On the nature of births of all kinds."
XV A.	(16)	Other kinds of reproduction.
XVI.	(27)	"On the nature of plants."
XVI A.	(27)	On flowers.
XVII.	(24)	"On the chieftains of men and animals and every single thing."
XVII A.	n/a	On the inequality of beings.

XVIII.	(17)	"On the nature of fire."
XIX.	n/a	"On the nature of sleep."
XIX A.	n/a	The independence of earth, water, and plants from effort and rest.
XX.	n/a	On sounds.
XXI.	n/a	"On the nature of wind, cloud, and rain."
XXII.	n/a	"On the nature of the noxious creatures."
XXIII.	n/a	"On the nature of the species of wolf."
XXIV.	(18-19)	"On various things, in what manner they were created and the opposition which befell them." XXIV. A-C. (18) The Gōkarn tree, the Wās ī Paṇčāsadwarān (fish), the Tree of many seeds. XXIV. D-U. (19) The three-legged ass, the ox Haδayāš, the bird Čamroš, the bird Karšift, the bird Ašōzušt, the utility of other beasts and birds, the white falcon, the Kāskēn bird, the vulture, dogs, the fox, the weasel, the rat, the hedgehog, the beaver, the eagle, the Arab horse, the cock.
XXV.	(25)	"On the religious year."
XXVI.	n/a	"On the great activity of the spiritual gods."
XXVII.	(28)	"On the evil-doing of Ahreman and the demons."
XXVIII.	n/a	"On the body of men as the measure of the world (microcosm)."
XXIX.	(29)	"On the chieftainship of the continents."
XXX.	n/a	"On the Činwad bridge and the souls of the departed."
XXXI.	n/a	"On particular lands of Ērānšahr, the abode of the Kays."
XXXII.	n/a	"On the abodes which the Kays made with splendor, which are called wonders and marvels."
XXXIII.	n/a	"On the afflictions which befell Ērānšahr in each millennium."
XXXIV.	(30)	"On the resurrection of the dead and the Final Body."
XXXV.	(31-32)	"On the stock and the offspring of the Kays."
XXXV A.	(33)	"The family of the Mobads."
XXXVI.	(34)	"On the years of the heroes in the time of 12,000 years."

Zoroastrian astronomy

Excerpt from Chapter 2:- On the formation of the luminaries.

1. Ohrmazd produced illumination between the sky and the earth, the constellation stars and those also not of the constellations, then the moon, and afterwards the sun, as I shall relate.

2. First he produced the celestial sphere, and the constellation stars are assigned to it by him; especially these twelve whose names are Varak (the Lamb), Tora (the Bull), Do-patkar (the Two-figures or Gemini), Kalachang (the Crab), Sher (the Lion), Khushak (Virgo), Tarazhuk (the Balance), Gazdum (the Scorpion), Nimasp (the Centaur or Sagittarius), Vahik (Capricorn), Dul (the Water-pot), and Mahik (the Fish);

3. which, from their original creation, were divided into the twenty-eight subdivisions of the astronomers, of which the names are Padevar, Pesh-Parviz, Parviz, Paha, Avesar, Beshn, Rakhvad, Taraha, Avra, Nahn, Miyan, Avdem, Mashaha, Spur, Husru, Srob, Nur, Gel, Garafsha Varant, Gau, Goi, Muru, Bunda, Kahtsar, Vaht, Miyan, Kaht.

4. And all his original creations, residing in the world, are committed to them; so that when the destroyer arrives they overcome the adversary and their own persecution, and the creatures are saved from those adversities.

5. As a specimen of a warlike army, which is destined for battle, they have ordained every single constellation of those 6480 thousand small stars as assistance; and among those constellations four chieftains, appointed on the four sides, are leaders.

6. On the recommendation of those chieftains the many unnumbered stars are specially assigned to the various quarters and various places, as the united strength and appointed power of those constellations.

7. As it is said that Tishtar is the chieftain of the east, Sataves the chieftain of the west, Vanand the chieftain of the south, and Haptoring the chieftain of the north.

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[1] M. Hale, *Pahlavi*, in "The Ancient Languages of Asia and the Americas", Published by Cambridge University Press, 2008, ISBN 0-521-68494-3, p. 123.

[2] .

[3] .

[4] .

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- An edition of the Pahlavi text from 1908 (http://archive.org/details/pahlavaitextser00fundgoog), edited by Ervad Tahmuras Dinshaji Anklesaria

External links

- The Bundahishn (HTML format) (http://wisdomlib.org/zoroastrianism/book/the-bundahishn/index.html)

Mithras in comparison with other belief systems

This is an article on Mithraism in Comparative Mythology and Comparative Theology. See Mithraic Mysteries for the main article.

The Roman cult of Mithras had connections with other pagan deities. Popular writers sometimes suggest links with Christianity also.

General remarks

Syncretism was a feature of Roman paganism, and the cult of Mithras was part of this. Almost all Mithraea contain statues dedicated to gods of other cults, and it is common to find inscriptions dedicated to Mithras in other sanctuaries, especially those of Jupiter Dolichenus.[1] Mithraism was not an alternative to other pagan religions, but rather a particular way of practising pagan worship; and many Mithraic initiates can also be found worshipping in the civic religion, and as initiates of other mystery cults.[2]

Comparisons with contemporary Roman gods

Phanes

Orphic speculation influenced the cult of Mithras at times.[3] In Orphism, Phanes emerged from the world egg at the beginning of time, bringing the universe into existence.

There is some literary evidence of the syncretism of Mithras and Phanes. A list of the eight elements of creation appears in Zenobius and Theon of Smyrna; most of the elements are the same, but in Zenobius the seventh element is 'Mithras', in Theon it is 'Phanes'.[4]

A Greek inscription on a statue base from a Mithraeum in Rome reads "to Deus Sol Mithras Phanes". A relief from Vercovium (Housesteads) on Hadrian's Wall shows Mithras emerging from the cosmic egg, which is represented both as such and by the shape of the zodiacal ring.[5] Ulansey adds:

> "The identification between Mithras and Phanes indicated by CIMRM 860 is also explicitly attested by an inscription found in Rome dedicated to 'Zeus-Helios-Mithras-Phanes' and another inscription dedicated to 'Helios-Mithras-Phanes'."[6]

Another syncretistic relief is in Modena. This shows Phanes coming from an egg with flames shooting out around him, surrounded by the twelve signs of the zodiac, in an image very similar to that at Newcastle.[7] Further references also exist.[8]

Sol Invictus

Mithras is given the title "deus sol invictus" (unconquered sun god) in several inscriptions. The vagueness of the term *invictus* means that it was widely used. Mithraism never became a state cult, however, unlike the official late Roman Sol Invictus cult.[9]

Jupiter Dolichenus

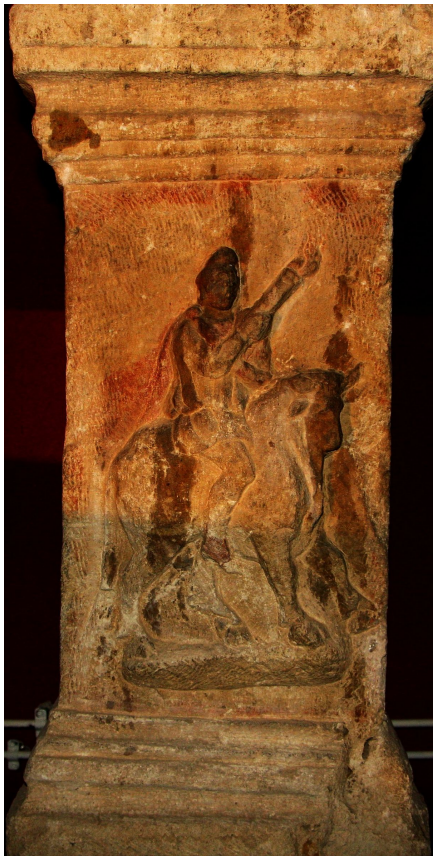
The Mithraea at Carnuntum appear to have been constructed in close association with contemporary temple of Jupiter Dolichenus,[10] and there seem to have been considerable similarities between the two cults; both being mystery cults with secret liturgies, both being popular in the military, and having similar names for their officials and intitiates. Two large Mithrea have been discovered in Doliche itself (modern Gaziantep in Turkey), which have been proposed as being unusually early.

Helios/Sol

Although Mithras himself is *Sol Invictus*, the Unconquered Sun, he and Sol appear in several scenes as separate persons, with the banquet scene being the most prominent example.[11] Other scenes feature Mithras ascending behind Sol in the latter's chariot, the deities shaking hands and the two gods at an altar with pieces of meat on a spit or spits.[11] One peculiar scene shows Sol kneeling before Mithras, who holds an object, interpreted either as a Persian cap or the haunch of the bull, in his hand.[11]

Mithraism and Christianity

The idea of a relationship between early Christianity and Mithraism is based on a remark in the 2nd century Christian writer Justin Martyr, who accused the Mithraists of diabolically imitating the Christian communion rite.[12] Based upon this, Ernest Renan in 1882 set forth a vivid depiction of two rival religions: "if the growth of Christianity had been arrested by some mortal malady, the world would have been Mithraic,"[13] Edwin M. Yamauchi, comments on Renan's work which, "published nearly 150 years ago, has no value as a source. He [Renan] knew very little about Mithraism..."[14]



Mithras riding bull

Other scholars, among them Ronald Nash[15] and Edwin Yamauchi,[16] have suggested a different interpretation of Mithraism's relationship to Christianity. Yamauchi, pointing out that most of the textual evidence for Mithraist doctrine was written after the New Testament was in broad circulation, posits that it is more likely that Mithraism borrowed from Christianity than the other way around.

The philosopher Celsus in the second century provides some evidence that Ophite gnostic ideas were influencing the mysteries of Mithras.[17]

"Virgin Birth"

It is sometimes said that the birth of Mithras was a virgin birth, like that of Jesus. But no ancient source gives such a birth myth for Mithras. In *Mithraic Studies* it is stated that Mithras was born as an adult from solid rock, "wearing his Phrygian cap, issues forth from the rocky mass. As yet only his bare torso is visible. In each hand he raises aloft a lighted torch and, as an unusual detail, red flames shoot out all around him from the petra genetrix."[18]

David Ulansey speculates that this was a belief derived from the Perseus' myths which held he was born from an underground cavern.[19]

The 25th of December

It is often stated that Mithras was thought to have been born on December 25. But Beck states that this is not the case. In fact he calls this assertion 'that hoariest of "facts"'. He continues: "In truth, the only evidence for it is the celebration of the birthday of Invictus on that date in Calendar of Philocalus. 'Invictus' is of course Sol Invictus, Aurelian's sun god. It does not follow that a different, earlier, and unofficial sun god, Sol Invictus Mithras, was necessarily or even probably, born on that day too."[20]

Unusually amongst Roman mystery cults, the mysteries of Mithras had no 'public' face; worship of Mithras was confined to initiates, and they could only undertake such worship in the secrecy of the Mithraeum [21] Clauss states;

"the Mithraic Mysteries had no public ceremonies of its own. The festival of *natalis Invicti* [Birth of the Unconquerable (Sun)], held on 25 December, was a general festival of the Sun, and by no means specific to the Mysteries of Mithras.".[22]

Steven Hijmans has discussed in detail the question of whether the general "natalis Invicti" festival was related to Christmas but does not give Mithras as a possible source.[23]

Salvation

A painted text on the wall of the St. Prisca Mithraeum (c A.D. 200)[24] in Rome contains the words: *et nos servasti (?) . . . sanguine fuso* (*and you have saved us ... in the shed blood*). The meaning of this is unclear, although presumably refers to the bull killed by Mithras, as no other source refers to a Mithraic salvation. However the *servasti* is only a conjecture.[25] According to Robert Turcan,[26] Mithraic salvation had little to do with the other-worldly destiny of individual souls, but was on the Zoroastrian pattern of man's participation in the cosmic struggle of the good creation against the forces of evil.[27]

Symbolism of Water

Monuments in the Danube area depict Mithras firing a bow at a rock in the presence of the torch-bearers, apparently to encourage water to come forth. [28] Clauss states that, after the ritual meal, this offers 'the clearest parallel with Christianity'.[29]

"Sign of the Cross"

Tertullian states that followers of Mithras were marked on their forehead in an unspecified manner.[30] There is no indication that this is a cross, or a branding, or a tattoo, or a permanent mark of any kind.[31] The symbol of a circle with a diagonal cross inscribed within it is commonly found in Mithraea, especially in association with the Leontocephaline figure.

Mithraic motifs and medieval Christian art

From the end of the 18th century some authors have suggested that some elements in medieval Christian art reflect images found in Mithraic reliefs.[32] Franz Cumont was among these, although he studied each motif in isolation rather than the combination of several elements and whether they were combined in Christian art in the same way.[33] Cumont said that after the triumph of the church over paganism, artists continued to make use of stock images originally devised for Mithras in order to depict the new and unfamiliar stories of the bible. The "stranglehold of the workshop" meant that the first Christian artworks were heavily based on pagan art, and "a few alterations in costume and attitude transformed a pagan scene into a Christian picture".[34]

A series of scholars have since discussed possible similarities with Mithraic reliefs in medieval Romanesque art.[35] Vermaseren stated that the only certain example of such influence was an image of Elijah drawn up to heaven in a chariot drawn by fiery horses.[36] Deman stated that to compare isolated elements was not useful, and that combinations should be studied. He also pointed out that a similarity of image does not tell us whether this implies an ideological influence, or merely a tradition of craftmanship. He then gave a list of medieval reliefs that parallel Mithraic images, but refused to draw conclusions from this, as these would be subjective.[37]

Mithraea re-used in Christian worship

Several of the best preserved Mithraea, especially those in Rome such as at San Clemente and Santa Prisca, are now to be found underneath Christian churches. It has been suggested that these might indicate a tendency for Christians to adopt Mithraea for Christian worship, in a similar manner to the undoubted conversion into churches of temples and shrines of civic paganism, such as the Pantheon. However, in these Roman instances, the Mithraeum appears to have been filled with rubble prior to the erection of a church over the top; and hence cannot be considered demonstrable examples of deliberate re-use. A study of early Christian churches in Britain concluded that, if anything, the evidence there suggested a tendency to avoid locating churches on the sites of former Mithraea.[38]

On the other hand, there is at least one known example of a Mithraic carved relief being re-used on a Christian church; in the early 11th Century tower added to the church of St Peter at Gowts in Lincoln, England. A much-weathered Mithraic lion-headed figure carrying keys, (presumably from a ruined Mithraeum in Roman Lincoln) was incorporated into the church tower, apparently in the mistaken belief that it was an ancient representation of the Apostle Peter.[39] Elsewhere, as in one of the Mithraea in Doliche, there are instances where the tauroctony of a cave Mithraeum has been replaced by a cross, which suggests later use as a church; but again the date of re-use cannot be determined, and hence it is by no means certain how far the Christian occupiers were aware of their cave's Mithraic past.

References

[1] Clauss, M., *The Roman cult of Mithras*, p.158.

[3] Clauss, M., *The Roman cult of Mithras*, p. 70

[4] Zenobius *Proverbia* 5.78 (in Corpus paroemiographorum Graecorum (http://books.google.com/books?id=0zABAAAAMAAJ) vol. 1, p.151) (Clauss, p.70 n.84). Theon of Smyrna gives the same list but substitutes Phanes. See Albert de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi: Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin literature*, p.309 on this; quoted on Pearse, Roger Zenobius on Mithras (http://www.roger-pearse.com/weblog/?p=2656) and Who is Theon of Smyrna? (http://www.roger-pearse.com/weblog/?p=2661).

[5] Clauss, M. *The Roman cult of Mithras*, p. 70, photo p.71. The relief (Vermaseren 860) is now at the University of Newcastle.

[6] Ulansey, David, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries*, pp.120-1. Excerpts here (http://www.mithraism.org/cgi-bin/display.cgi?file=origins.txt&part=4&total=8).

[7] Vermaseren, M., *The miraculous birth of Mithras*, p.287 n.10. The relief is in the Estense Museum in Modena, Italy. See also F. Cumont, "Mithra et l'Orphisme", RHR CIX, 1934, 63 ff; M. P. Nilsson, "The Syncretistic Relief at Modena", Symb. Osi. XXIV, 1945, 1 ff.

[8] Vermaseren 695: marble relief from Mutina or Rome; V 475: Greek inscription from Rome, dedication by a Father and priest to Zeus-Helios-Mithras-Phanes

[9] Clauss, M., *The Roman cult of Mithras*, p.23-4. "Invictus" became a standard part of imperial titulature under Commodus, adopted from *Hercules Invictus*, but had been used for Mithras well before then.

[10] Clauss, M., *The Roman cult of Mithras*, p.44.

[11] Beck, Roger, "In the Place of the Lion: Mithras in the Tauroctony" in *Beck on Mithraism: collected works with new essays" (2004), p. 286-287].*

[12] Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, ch. 66 (http://www.tertullian.org/fathers2/ANF-01/anf01-46.htm#P3935_744654): "For the apostles, in the memoirs composed by them, which are called Gospels, have thus delivered unto us what was enjoined upon them; that Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, said, "This do ye in remembrance of Me, this is My body; "and that, after the same manner, having taken the cup and given thanks, He said, "This is My blood; "and gave it to them alone. Which the wicked devils have imitated in the mysteries of Mithras, commanding the same thing to be done. For, that bread and a cup of water are placed with certain incantations in the mystic rites of one who is being initiated, you either know or can learn."

[13] Renan, E., *Marc-Aurele et la fin du monde antique*. Paris, 1882, p. 579 (http://books.google.com/books?id=B8AaAAAAYAAJ&dq=renan+Marc-Aurele+et+la+fin+du+monde+antique&jtp=579)

[14] Edwin M. Yamauchi cited in Lee Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007, p.175

[15] Ronald Nash, "Mystery Religions of the Near East," *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics,* 1999.

[16] Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Easter: Myth, Hallucination, or History?" March 29, 1974.

[17] Clauss, M. *The Roman Cult of Mithras*, p.17, referencing Origen, *Contra Celsum* book 6, cc.22-24 where a ladder of seven steps is described, similar to one used by the Ophites. Clauss states that the borrowing was by the Mithraists, but nothing in *Contra Celsum* seems to say so.

[18] Mithraic Studies: Proceedings of the First International Congress of Mithraic Studies. Manchester U. Press, 1975, p. 173

[19] Ulansey, David. The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries: Cosmology and Salvation in the Ancient World. New York: Oxford U. Press, 1989

[20] , p. 299, n. 12.

[22] Clauss, Manfred. *Mithras: Kult und Mysterien*. München: Beck, 1990, p. 70."... erwähnenswert wäre dass das Mithras-Kult keine öffentlichen Zeremonien kannte. Das Fest der natalis Invicti, der 25. Dezember, war ein allgemeines Sonnenfest und somit keineswegs auf die Mithras-Mysterien beschränkt. Es gab also im Mithras-Kult nichts vergleichbares zu den großen Feiern und Festlichkeiten anderer Kulte ..."

[24] http://www.hums.canterbury.ac.nz/clas/ejms/out_of_print/JMSv2n1/JMSv2n1Roll.pdf

[25] Panciera, *Il materiale epigrafico dallo scavo del mitreo di S. Stefano Rotondo*, in: *Mysteria Mithrae* (conference 1978 published 1979).

[26] Turcan, Robert, "Salut Mithriaque et soteriologie neoplatonicienne," *La soteriologiea dei culti orientali nell'impero romano*,eds. U. Bianchi and M. J. Vermaseren, Leiden 1982. pp. 103-105

[27] Beck, Roger, *Merkelbach's Mithras*, p.301-2

[28] Clauss, M. *The Roman Cult of Mithras*, p.71-2: "The theme of the water-miracle is elaborated mainly in the Rhine-Danube area. Mithras is usually represented sitting on a stone and aiming a flexed bow at a rockface, in front of which there kneels a figure. Another figure sometimes grasps Mithras' knees in supplication, or stands behind him with his hand on his shoulder. The scene is particularly striking on the large altar from Poetovio I ... Mithras here is aiming his bow at a rockface, from which water will shortly gush forth - a person is standing in front of it ready to catch the water in his cupped hands. ... We may note that the figures who are generally shown taking part in this scene with Mithras are clothed just like the god. They must be the torch-bearers, present here just as they are at the rock-birth and the killing of the bull. This scene can thus be connected with one of the lines in the mithraeum under S. Prisca in Rome, which is addressed to a spring enclosed in the rock: 'You who have fed the twin brothers with nectar'.8 6 The spring is Mithras; the twins to whom he has given heavenly nourishment are the torch-bearers."

[29] Clauss, M. *The Roman Cult of Mithras*, p.72 continues: "Apart from the cult-meal, the water-miracle offers the clearest parallel with Christianity, spreading through the Empire at the same period as the mysteries of Mithras. The thinking that underlies these features of each cult is naturally rooted in the same traditions. The water-miracle is one of the wide-spread myths that originate from regions plagued by drought, and where the prosperity of humans and nature depends upon rain. Each in his own manner, Mithras and Christ embody water, initially as a concrete necessity, and then, very soon, as a symbol. Christ is referred to in the New Testament as the water of life. Many Christian sarcophagi depict the miracle of Moses striking the rock with his staff and causing water to flow (Exodus 17.3-6), as a symbol of immortality."

[30] Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum* 40: "if my memory still serves me, Mithra there, (in the kingdom of Satan,) sets his marks on the foreheads of his soldiers; celebrates also the oblation of bread, and introduces an image of a resurrection, and before a sword wreathes a crown."

[31] Per Beskow, "Branding in the Mysteries of Mithras?", in *Mysteria Mithrae*, ed. Ugo Bianchi (Leyden 1979), 487-501. He describes the entire idea as a "scholarly myth". See also FAQ (http://www.hums.canterbury.ac.nz/clas/ejms/faq.htm) by Dr. Richard Gordon.

[32] pp. 507–17. p.507

[33] pp. 507–17. p.508

[34] pp. 227–8.

[35] pp. 507–17. p.509

[36] pp. 104–6.

[37] pp. 507–17. p.510

Mitra (Vedic)

*This article is about the Vedic deity **Mitra**. For other divinities with related names, see the general article Mitra.*

Mitra	
morning sun, the oath, loyalty and friendship	
Devanagari	मित्र
Sanskrit Transliteration	mitrá

Mitra (Sanskrit *Mitrá*) is an important divinity of Indic culture, and the patron divinity of honesty, friendship, contracts and meetings. He is a figure of the Rigveda, distinguished by a relationship to Varuna, the protector of ṛtá.

There may be some relation with the Zoroastrian divinity Mithra (Miθra), possibly decending from a Proto-Indo-Iranian **mitra*, "contract" or "binder". While Mitra and Mithra share many characteristics, they developed independently and should not be equated with one another. Mitra and Mithra should also not be confused with Roman Mithras, who – although nominally inheriting his name from Indo-Iranian Mithra – is a product of Roman thought. Also pre-Islamic Arabia considered such an equivalent deity known as Al-lāt one of the three daughters of the deity Allah of pagan Arabia.

Etymology

The Indo-Iranian word **mitra-m* means "covenant, contract, oath, or treaty", and only later on, "friend" (retaining the original neuter gender, mitram). The second sense tends to be emphasized in later sources, the first sense in the Veda and in Iranian. The word is derived from a root *mi-* "to fix, to bind" (Indo-European **Hmei*), with the "tool suffix" *-tra-* (compare *man-tra-*), a contract is thus described as a "means of binding."[1]

In the Vedas

Vedic Mitra is the patron divinity of contracts and meetings. He is a prominent deity of the Rigveda distinguished by a relationship to Varuna, the protector of ṛtá. Together with Varuna, he counted among the chief Adityas, a group of deities with social functions. They are the supreme keepers of order and gods of the law. The next two in importance are Aryaman (who guards guest friendship and bridal exchange) and Bhaga (share in bounty, good luck).

Varuna and Mitra are the gods of the oath and tribal contracts, often twinned as **Mitra–Varuna** (a dvandva compound). In the Vedic hymns, Mitra is often invoked together with Varuna, as **Mitra-Varuna**. In some of their aspects, Varuna is lord of the cosmic rhythm of the celestial spheres, while Mitra brings forth the light at dawn, which was covered by Varuna. Mitra together with Varuna is the most prominent deity and the chief of the Adityas in the Rigveda. Though being Asuras, Mitra and Varuna are also addressed as devas in Rigveda (e.g., RV 7.60.12), and in the only hymn dedicated to Mitra, he is referred to as a deva (*mitrasya...devasya*) in RV 3.59.6.

The pairing with Varuna, a god unknown in Iranian religion, is very strong already in the Rigveda, which has few hymns where Mitra is mentioned without Varuna. RV 3.59 is the only hymn dedicated to Mitra exclusively, where he is lauded as a god following ṛta, order and stability and of observances (2b, *vrata*), the sustainer of mankind (6a), said also of Indra in 3.37.4c) and of all gods (8c, *devān vishvān*).

> 3.59.1 *Mitra, when speaking, stirreth men to labour: Mitra sustaineth both the earth and heaven.*
>
> *Mitra beholdeth men with eyes that close not. To Mitra bring, with holy oil, oblation.* (trans. Griffith)

Rigvedic hymns to Mitra-Varuna are RV 1.136, 137, 151-153, RV 5.62-72, RV 6.67, RV 7.60-66, RV 8.25 and RV 10.132.

Where Mitra appears not paired with Varuna, it is often for the purpose of comparison, where other gods are lauded as being "like Mitra", without the hymn being addressed to Mitra himself (Indra 1.129.10, 10.22.1-2 etc.; Agni 1.38.13 etc.; Soma 1.91.3; Vishnu 1.156.1).

In the late Vedic Shatapatha Brahmana, Mitra-varuna is analyzed as "the Counsel and the Power" — Mitra being the priesthood (Purohita), Varuna the royal power (Rājān). As Joseph Campbell remarked, "Both are said to have a thousand eyes. Both are active foreground aspects of the light or solar force at play in time. Both renew the world by their deed."

Role in Daily Worship of the Hindus

Reflecting his status as a solar deity, Mitra has long been worshipped in the sunrise prayers of the Hindus. The morning *upasthaana* prayer, recited to the risen sun after contemplation on the sacred Gayatri mantra, is a collection of Rig Veda verses addressing Mitra.

References

[1] M. Mayrhofer, Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindoarischen, Heidelberg 1986-2000, Vol. II, 354 sq).

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London Mithraeum

The **Temple of Mithras, Walbrook** is a Roman temple whose ruins were discovered in Walbrook, a street in the City of London, during rebuilding work in 1954. It is perhaps the most famous of all twentieth-century Roman discoveries in the City of London.

The present-day location of the temple foundations.

Excavation and artefacts

The site was excavated by W. F. Grimes, director of the Museum of London in 1954.[1] The temple, initially hoped to have been an early Christian church, was built in the mid-3rd century[2] and dedicated to Mithras or perhaps jointly to several deities popular among Roman soldiers. Then it was rededicated, probably to Bacchus, in the early fourth century. Found within the temple, where they had been carefully buried at the time of its rededication, were finely detailed third-century white marble likenesses of Minerva, Mercury the guide of the souls of the dead, and the syncretic gods Mithras and Serapis, imported from Italy. There were several coarser locally-made clay figurines of Venus, combing her hair. The artefacts recovered were put on display in the Museum of London.

Among the sculptures the archaeologists found was a head of Mithras himself, recognizable from his Phrygian cap. The base of the head is tapered to fit a torso, which was not preserved.

Head of Serapis found in the 1954 excavations.

In 1889, artefacts were found in Walbrook; they probably came from the Mithraeum, though it was not identified at the time (Merrifield 1965, p. 179). One of these was a marble relief, 0.53 m, of Mithras in the act of killing the astral bull, the Tauroctony that was as central to Mithraism as the Crucifixion is to Christianity. On it Mithras is accompanied by the two small figures of the torch-bearing celestial twins of Light and Darkness, Cautes and Cautopates, within the cosmic annual wheel of the zodiac. At the top left, outside the wheel, Sol–Helios ascends the heavens in his *biga*; at top right Luna descends in her chariot. The heads of two wind-gods, Boreas and Zephyros, are in the bottom corners. It bears the inscription

VLPIVS SILVANVS EMERITVS LEG II AVG VOTVM SOLVIT FACTVS ARAVSIONE

which may be translated "Ulpius Silvanus, veteran soldier of the Second Augustan Legion, in fulfillment of a vow, makes this altar [as the result of] a vision" [3] or "Ulpius Silvanus, veteran of the Second Legion Augusta, fulfilled his vow having become (a Mithraist) at Orange" [University of Edinburgh, Classics Department, teaching collection] (Collingwood and Wright 1965, No. 3). Nearby were buried heads of the Roman goddess Minerva and a finely detailed bearded head of Serapis, Jupiter-like in his features but securely recognizable by the grain-basket, the *modius*, upon his head, a token of resurrection.

An inscription dateable AD 307–310 at the site

PRO SALVTE D N CCCC ET NOB CAES DEO MITHRAE ET SOLI INVICTO AB ORIENTE AD OCCIDENTEM

may be translated "For the Salvation of our lords the four emperors and the noble Caesar, and to the god Mithras, the Invincible Sun from the east to the west" (Collingwood and Wright 1965, no. 4).[4]

Location and relocation

The Roman temple, when it was originally built, would have stood on the east bank of the now covered-over River Walbrook, a key freshwater source in Roman Londinium. Nearby, in its former streambed, a small square hammered lead sheet was found, on which an enemy of someone named Martia Martina had inscribed her name *backwards* and thrown the token into the stream, in a traditional Celtic way of reaching the gods that has preserved metal tokens in rivers throughout Celtic Europe, from the swords at La Tène to Roman times. (Compare wishing well.)

Due to the necessity of building over the site, the whole site was uprooted and moved down the road to Temple Court, Queen Victoria Street, London EC4, where the remains of the temple foundations have been reassembled for display to the public.

Though the present location is at grade, the original Mithraeum was built partly underground, recalling the cave of Mithras where the Mithraic epiphany took place.

The temple foundations are very close to other important sites in the city of London including the historic London Stone, the Bank of England and London Wall.

An interim report on the excavation included in W.F. Grimes, *The Excavation of Roman and Mediaeval London* (1968) was superseded by John Shepherd, *The Temple of Mithras, Walbrook* (an English Heritage monograph) (1998).

It was intended that in 2009 the Temple would be relocated to its original location beside the ancient Walbrook River, as part of the demolition of Bucklersbury House, and the creation of the new Walbrook Square

development,[5] designed by Foster and Partners (See: Legal & General Launches Walbrook Square [6]). However, redesigns and disputes between freeholders Legal and General and Metrovacesa, who had agreed to buy the project, resulted in the Walbrook Square project being put on hold in October 2008, when Bovis Lend Lease removed their project team.[7] Metrovacesa left the project in August 2009.[8] As of May 2010, the Mithraeum remained *in situ* at Temple Court,[9] though in the same month there was talk of reviving the Walbrook Square project.[10] The Walbrook Square project has since been purchased by Bloomberg which has announced intent to restore the Mithraeum to its original site.

Notes

[1] W.F. Grimes, in *The Illustrated London News*, 2, 9, and 16 October 1954.

[2] It was dated to the mid-second century in Maarten J. Vermaseren, "The New Mithraic Temple in London" *Numen* **2**.1/2 (January 1955), pp. 139-145.

[3] http://www.roman-britain.org/places/londinium.htm

[6] http://www.fosterandpartners.com/News/235/Default.aspx

[9] Site visit, 29 May 2010.

[10] http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/fb331862-5f7a-11df-a670-00144feab49a.html

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- The Grimes' London Archive (http://www.eng-h.gov.uk/ArchRev/rev95_6/grimes.htm)
- Roman Britain: Londinivm Avgvsta (http://www.roman-britain.org/places/londinium.htm)
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Coordinates: 51°30′47″N 0°05′25″W51.51306°N 0.09028°W

Santo Stefano Rotondo

Basilica of St. Stephen in the Round on the Celian Hill Basilica di Santo Stefano al Monte Celio (Italian) Basilica S. Stephani in Coelio Monte (Latin)	
 Santo Stefano Rotondo in a painting of Ettore Roesler Franz in the 19th century.	
Basic information	
Location	Italy Rome, Italy
Geographic coordinates	41°53′04″N 12°29′48″E41.88444°N 12.49667°E [1]Coordinates: 41°53′04″N 12°29′48″E41.88444°N 12.49667°E [1]
Affiliation	Roman Catholic
Year consecrated	ca. 470
Ecclesiastical or organizational status	Minor basilica, Titular, Rectory church, National church in Rome of Hungary
Leadership	Friedrich Wetter
Website	Official Website [2]
Architectural description	
Architectural type	Church
Architectural style	Roman
Direction of façade	N
Specifications	
Length	80 metres (260 ft)
Width	45 metres (148 ft)
Width (nave)	20 metres (66 ft)

The **Basilica of St. Stephen in the Round on the Celian Hill** (Italian: *Basilica di Santo Stefano al Monte Celio*, Latin: *Basilica S. Stephani in Coelio Monte*) is an ancient basilica and titular church in Rome, Italy. Commonly named Santo Stefano Rotondo, the church is the National church in Rome of Hungary dedicated to Saint Stephen and Saint Stephen of Hungary. The minor basilica is also the rectory church of the Pontifical Collegium Germanicum et Hungaricum.

View of the interior of the church

The Cardinal Priest or titular S. Stephano is Friedrich Wetter.

History

Santo Stefano Rotondo is the most ancient example of a centrally planned church in Rome.

The earliest church was consecrated by Pope Simplicius between 468 and 483. It was dedicated to the protomartyr Saint Stephen, whose body had been discovered a few decades before in the Holy Land, and brought to Rome. The church was the first in Rome to have a circular plan, inspired by the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.[*citation needed*] Santo Stefano was probably financed by the wealthy Valerius family, whose estates covered large parts of the Caelian Hill. Their villa stood nearby, on the site of the present-day Hospital of San Giovanni - Addolorata. St Melania the Elder, a member of the family, was a frequent pilgrim to Jerusalem and died there, so the family had connections to the Holy Land.

The church was originally commissioned by Pope Leo I (440-461), with the date confirmed by ancient coins and by dendrochronology, which places the wood used in the beams of the roof to around 455 AD, but was not consecrated until after his death. The original church had three concentric ambulatories flanked by 22 Ionic columns, surrounding the central circular space surmounted by a tambour (22 m high and 22 m wide). There were 22 windows in the tambour but most of them were walled up in the 15th century restoration. The central ambulatory had a diameter of 42 meters, and the outer one a diameter of 66 meters. Four side chapels extended from the middle ambulatory to the outer ambulatory, forming a Greek cross.

The church was embellished by Pope John I and Pope Felix IV in the 6th century with mosaics and colored marble. The church was restored in 1139-1143 by Pope Innocent II, who abandoned the outer ambulatory, and three of the four side chapels. He also had three transversal arches added to support the dome, enclosed the columns of the central ambulatory with brick to form the new outer wall, and walled up 14 of the windows in the drum.

In the Middle Ages, Santo Stefano Rotondo was in the charge of the Canons of San Giovanni in Laterano, but as time went on it fell unto disrepair. In the middle of the 15th century Flavio Biondo praised the marble columns, marble covered walls and cosmatesque works-of-art of the church, but he added that unfortunately "nowadays Santo Stefano Rotondo has no roof". Blondus claimed that the church was built on the remains of an ancient Temple of Faunus. Excavations in 1969 to 1975 revealed that the building was actually never converted from a pagan temple but was always a church, erected under Constantine I in the first half of the 4th century.

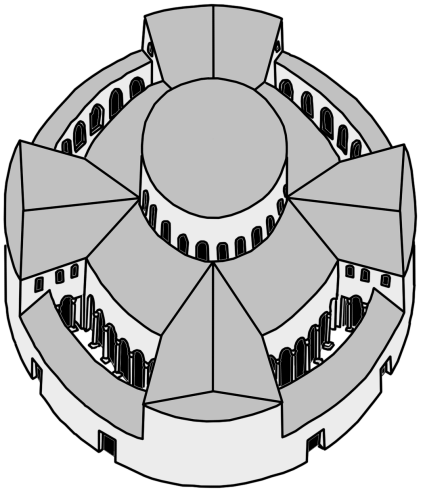
In 1454, Pope Nicholas V entrusted the ruined church to the Pauline Fathers, the only Catholic Order founded by Hungarians. This is the reason why Santo Stefano Rotondo later became the unofficial church of the Hungarians in Rome. The church was restored by Bernardo Rossellino, it is presumed under the guidance of Leon Battista Alberti.

In 1579, the Hungarian Jesuits followed the Pauline Fathers. The *Collegium Hungaricum*, established here by István Arator that year, was soon merged with the *Collegium Germanicum* in 1580, which became the Collegium Germanicum et Hungaricum, because very few Hungarian students were able to travel to Rome from the Turkish-occupied Kingdom of Hungary.

The Cardinal Priest of the *Titulus S. Stephani in Coelio Monte* has been Friedrich Wetter since 1985. His predecessor József Mindszenty was famous as the persecuted Catholic leader of Hungary under the Communist dictatorship.

Exterior

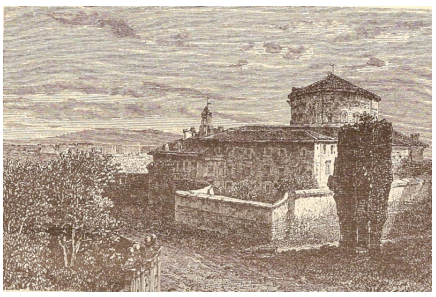
Although the inside is circular, the exterior is on a cruciform plan.



Reconstruction of the appearance of the church in the 5th century.

Interior

The walls of the church are decorated with numerous frescoes, including those of Niccolò Circignani (Niccolò Pomarancio) and Antonio Tempesta portraying 34 scenes of martyrdom, commissioned by Gregory XIII in the 16th century. Each painting has a *titulus* or inscription explaining the scene and giving the name of the emperor who ordered the execution, as well as a quotation from the Bible. The paintings, naturalistic depictions of torture and execution, are somewhat morbid, if not gruesome.



Santo Stefano Rotondo in a late 19th century print.

Works of art

The altar was made by the Florentine artist Bernardo Rossellino in the 15th century. The painting in the apse shows Christ between two martyrs. The mosaic and marble decoration is from the period 523-530. One mosaic shows the martyrs St Primus and St Felicianus flanking a crux gemmata (jewelled cross).

There is a tablet recording the burial here of the Irish king Donnchad mac Briain, son of Brian Bóruma and King of Munster, who died in Rome in 1064.

An ancient chair of Pope Gregory the Great from around 580 AD is preserved here.

The *Chapel of Ss. Primo e Feliciano* has very interesting and rare mosaics from the 7th century. The chapel was built by Pope Theodore I who brought here the relics of the martyrs Primus and Felician and buried them (together with the remains of his father).

Hungarian Chapel

Unlike nationals of other European nations, Hungarians lacked a national church in Rome, because the old Santo Stefano degli Ungheresi in the Vatican was pulled down to make way for the sacristy of the St Peter's Basilica in 1778. As a compensation for the loss of the ancient church, Pope Pius VI built a Hungarian chapel in Santo Stefano Rotondo according to the plans of Pietro Camporesi.

The *Hungarian chapel* is dedicated to King Stephen I of Hungary, *Szent István*, the canonized first king of the Magyars. The feast of St Stephen is held on 20 August. Hungarian pilgrims frequently visit the place.

Hungarian experts took part in the ongoing restoration and archeological exploration of the church during the 20th century together with German and Italian colleagues. Notable Hungarian visitors were Vilmos Fraknói, Frigyes Riedl, and László Cs. Szabó, who all wrote about the history and importance of Santo Stefano.

Recent archeological explorations revealed the late-antique floor of the church in the chapel. The floor is composed of coloured marble slabs and was restored in 2006 by an international team led by Zsuzsanna Wierdl.

The frescoes of the chapel were painted in 1776 but older strata of paintings were recently discovered under them.

Burials

Archdeacon János Lászai, canon of Gyulafehérvár, was buried in the Santo Stefano Rotondo in 1523. Lászai left Hungary and moved to Rome where he became a papal confessor. His burial monument is an interesting example of Renaissance funeral sculpture. The inscription says: "Roma est patria omnium" (Rome is everybody's fatherland).

Mithraeum

Under the church there is a 2nd-century mithraeum, related to the presence of the barracks of Roman soldiers in the neighbourhood. The cult of Mithras was especially popular among soldiers. The remains of Castra Peregrinorum, the barracks of the *peregrini*, officials detached for special service to the capital from the provincial armies, were found right under Santo Stefano Rotondo. The mithraeum belonged to Castra Peregrinorum but it was probably also attended by the soldiers of Cohors V Vigilum, whose barracks stood nearby on the other side of Via della Navicella.

The mithraeum is currently being excavated. The remains of the Roman military barracks (from the Severan Age) and the mithraeum under the church remain closed to the public. A coloured marble bas-relief, "Mithras slaying the bull" from the 3rd century is today in Museo Nazionale Romano.

List of Cardinal Priests of the church

The titulus *S. Stephani in Coelio Monte* was cited for the first time in the Roman synod of 499.

- Marcello (499)
- Benedetto (993)
- Crescenzio (1015)
- Sasso de Anagni (1116–1131)
- Martino Cybo (1132–1142)
- Raniero (1143–1144)
- Villano Gaetani (1144–1146)
- Gerardo (1151–1158)
- Gero (1172), pseudocardinal of the Antipope Calixtus III
- Vibiano (1175–1184)
- Giovanni di Salerno (1190–1208)
- Robert of Courçon (*or* de Corzon, *or* Cursonus) (1212–1219)
- Michel Du Bec-Crespin (1312–1318)
- Pierre Le Tessier (1320–1325)
- Fulvio Giulio della Corgna (1557–1562)
- Girolamo da Correggio (1562–1568)
- Diego Espinosa (1568–1572)
- Zaccaria Delfino (1578–1579)
- Matteo Contarelli (1584–1585)
- Federico Cornaro (1586–1590)
- Antonio Maria Sauli (1591–1603)
- Giacomo Sannesio (1604–1621)
- Lucio Sanseverino (1621–1623)
- Bernardino Spada (1627–1642)
- John de Lugo (1644)
- Giovanni Giacomo Panciroli (1644–1651)
- Marcello Santacroce Publicola (1652–1674)
- Bernardino Rocci (1675–1680)

- Pierre de Montemart (1327–1335)
- Guillaume d'Aure, O.S.B. (1339–1353)
- Élie de Saint-Irier (*or* Saint Yrieux) (1356–1363)
- Guillaume d'Aigrefeuille le Jeune (1367–1401)
- Gugilemo d'Altavilla (1384–1389)
- Angelo Cino (*or* Ghini Malpighi) (1408–1412)
- Pierre Ravat (*or* Rabat) (1408–1417), pseudocardinal of the Antipope Benedict XIII
- Pierre of Foix, (1417–1431)
- Jean Carrier (1423-c. 1429), pseudocardinal of the Antipope Benedict XIII
- *Vacant* (1431–1440)
- Renault de Chartres (*or* Renaud) (1440–1444)
- Jean d'Arces (1444–1449), pseudocardinal of the Antipope Felix V
- Jean Rolin (1448–1483)
- Giovanni Giacomo Sclafenati (1483–1484); *in commendam* (1484–1497)
- *Vacant* (1497–1503)
- Jaime Casanova (1503–1504)
- Antonio Pallavicini Gentili (*or* Antoniotto), *in commendam* (1504–1505)
- Antonio Trivulzio l'Ancien (1505–1507)
- Melchior von Meckau (1507–1509)
- François Guillaume de Castelnau-Clermont-Ludève (1509–1523)
- Bernardo Clesio (1530–1539)
- David Beaton (1539–1546)
- Giovanni Morone (1549–1553)
- Pope Pius IV (1553–1557)
- Raimondo Capizucchi (1681–1687)
- Francesco Bonvisi (1689–1700)
- Giovanni Battista Tolomei (1712–1726)
- Giovanni Battista Salerno (1726–1729)
- Camillo Cybo (1729–1731)
- Antonio Saverio Gentili (1731–1747)
- Filippo Maria Monti (1747–1754)
- Fabrizio Serbelloni (1754–1763)
- Pietro Paolo Conti (1763–1770)
- Lodovico Calini (1771–1782)
- *Vacant* (1782–1786)
- Niccolò Colonna di Stigliano (1786–1796)
- Étienne Hubert de Cambacérès (1805–1818)
- *Vacant* (1818–1834)
- Francesco Tiberi (1834–1839)
- *Vacant* (1839–1845)
- Fabio Maria Asquini (1845–1877)
- Manuel García Gil (1877–1881)
- Paul Melchers (1885–1895)
- Sylvester Sembratovych (1896–1898)
- Jakob Missia (1899–1902)
- Lev Skrbenský Hríšte (1902–1938)
- *Vacant* (1938–1946)
- József Mindszenty (1946–1975)
- *Vacant* (1975–1985)
- Friedrich Wetter (1985-incumbent)

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- H. Brandenburg und J. Pál (edd), *Santo Stefano Rotondo in Roma. Archeologia, storia dell'arte, restauro. Archäologie, Bauforschung, Geschichte. Akten der internationalen Tagung (Rom 1996)* (Wiesbaden, 2000).

External links

- Santo Stefano Rotondo al Celio [3], by Chris Nyborg.
- Photos of the discovered Roman floor [4], with Hungarian text only
- Official Homepage of the Church [5]

References

[1] http://toolserver.org/~geohack/geohack.php?pagename=Santo_Stefano_Rotondo&params=41_53_04_N_12_29_48_E_region:IT-RM_type:landmark
[2] http://www.vicariatusurbis.org/Ente.asp?ID=955
[3] http://romanchurches.wikia.com/wiki/Santo_Stefano_Rotondo_al_Celio
[4] http://www.koh.hu/index.php?_mp=hirek&_amp=santo&_url=hirek.php
[5] http://www.santo-stefano-rotondo.it

Mitra

Mitra (Proto-Indo-Iranian, nominative ***Mitras***) was an important Indo-Iranian divinity. Following the prehistoric cultural split of Indo-Aryan and Iranian cultures, names descended from **mitra* were used for the following religious entities:

- Mitra (Vedic) (Sanskrit Mitrá-, Mitráḥ), a deity who appears frequently in the ancient Sanskrit text of the Rigveda
- Mithra (Avestan Miθra-, Miθrō), a yazata mentioned in the Zoroastrian sacred scripture of the Avesta, whose New Persian equivalent is *Mīhr / Mehr* (مِهر)
- Maitreya, a bodhisattva who in the Buddhist tradition is to appear on Earth, achieve complete enlightenment, and teach the pure Dharma
- Mithras, the principal figure of the Greco-Roman religion of Mithraism
- Mitra (surname), an Indian family name and surname found mostly amongst Bengalis.

Etymology

Both Vedic Mitra and Avestan Mithra derive from an Indo-Iranian common noun **mitra-*, generally reconstructed to have meant "covenant, treaty, agreement, promise." This meaning is preserved in Avestan *miθra* "covenant." In Sanskrit and modern Indo-Aryan languages, *mitra* means "friend," one of the aspects of binding[1] and alliance

The Indo-Iranian reconstruction is attributed[2] to Christian Bartholomae,[3] and was subsequently refined by A. Meillet (1907), who suggested derivation from the Proto-Indo-European root **mei* "to exchange."

A suggested alternative derivation was **meh* "to measure" (Gray 1929). Pokorny (IEW 1959) refined Meillet's **mei* as "to bind." Combining the root **mei* with the "tool suffix" *-tra-* "that which [causes] ..." (also found in *man-tra-*, "that which causes to think"), then literally means "that which binds," and thus "covenant, treaty, agreement, promise, oath" etc. Pokorny's interpretation also supports "to fasten, strengthen", which may be found in Latin *moenia* "city wall, fortification", and in an antonymic form, Old English *(ge)maere* "border, boundary-post".

Meillet and Pokorny's "contract" did however have its detractors. Lentz (1964, 1970) refused to accept abstract "contract" for so exalted a divinity and preferred the more religious "piety." Because present-day Sanskrit *mitra* means "friend," and New Persian *mihr* means "love" or "friendship," Gonda (1972, 1973) insisted on a Vedic meaning of "friend, friendship," not "contract".

Meillet's analysis also "rectified earlier interpretations"[2] that suggested that the Indo-Iranian common noun **mitra-* had anything to do with the light or the sun. When H. Lommel suggested[4] that such an association was implied in the Younger Avesta (>6th c. BCE), that too was conclusively dismissed.[5] Today, it is certain that "(al)though Miθra is closely associated with the sun in the Avesta, he is not the sun" and "Vedic Mitra is not either."[2]

Old Persian *Mitra* or *Miθ^{r}a* - both only attested in a handful of 4th century BCE inscriptions of Artaxerxes II and III - "is generally admitted [to be] a borrowing from the Avesta,"[6] the genuine Old Persian form being reconstructed as **Miça*. (Kent initially suggested Sanskrit[] but later[6] changed his mind). Middle Iranian *myhr* (Parthian, also in living Armenian usage) and *mihr* (Middle Persian), derive from Avestan *Mithra*.

Greek/Latin "Mithras," the focal deity of the Greco-Roman cult of Mithraism is the nominative form of vocative Mithra. In contrast to the original Avestan meaning of "contract" or "covenant" (and still evident in post-Sassanid Middle Persian texts), the Greco-Roman Mithraists probably thought the name meant "mediator." In Plutarch's first century discussion of dualistic theologies, *Isis and Osiris* (46.7) the Greek historiographer provides the following explanation of the name in his summary of the Zoroastrian religion: Mithra is a *meson* ("in the middle") between "the good Horomazdes and the evil Aremanius [...] and this is why the *Pérsai* call the Mediator Mithra". Zaehner[7] attributes this false etymology to a role that Mithra (and the sun!) played in the now extinct branch of Zoroastrianism known as Zurvanism.

Indic Mitra

Vedic Mitra is a prominent deity of the Rigveda distinguished by a relationship to Varuna, the protector of *rta*. Together with Varuna, he counted among the Adityas, a group of solar deities, also in later Vedic texts. Vedic Mitra is the patron divinity of honesty, friendship, contracts and meetings.

The first extant record of Indo-Aryan[8] Mitra, in the form *mi-it-ra-*, is in the inscribed peace treaty of c. 1400 BC between Hittites and the Hurrian kingdom of the Mitanni in the area southeast of Lake Van in Asia Minor. There Mitra appears together with four other Indo-Aryan divinities as witnesses and keepers of the pact.

Iranian Mithra

In Zoroastrianism, Mithra is a member of the trinity of *ahuras*, protectors of *asha/arta*, "truth" or "[that which is] right". Mithra's standard appellation is "of wide pastures" suggesting omnipresence. Mithra is "truth-speaking, ... with a thousand ears, ... with ten thousand eyes, high, with full knowledge, strong, sleepless, and ever awake." (*Yasht* 10.7). As preserver of covenants, Mithra is also protector and keeper of all aspects of interpersonal relationships, such as friendship and love.

Related to his position as protector of truth, Mithra is a judge (*ratu*), ensuring that individuals who break promises or are not righteous (*artavan*) are not admitted to paradise. As also in Indo-Iranian tradition, Mithra is associated with (the divinity of) the sun but originally distinct from it. Mithra is closely associated with the feminine yazata Aredvi Sura Anahita, the hypostasis of knowledge.

Mithra in Commagene

There is a deity Mithra mentioned on monuments in Commagene. According to the archaeologist Maarten Vermaseren, 1st century BC evidence from Commagene demonstrates the "reverence paid to Mithras" but does not refer to "the mysteries".[9] In the colossal statuary erected by King Antiochus I (69–34 BC) at Mount Nemrut, Mithras is shown beardless, wearing a Phrygian cap,[10][] and was originally seated on a throne alongside other deities and the king himself.[11] On the back of the thrones there is an inscription in Greek, which includes the name Apollo Mithras Helios in the genitive case (Ἀπόλλωνος Μίθρου Ἡλίου).[12] Vermaseren also reports about a Mithras cult in 3rd; century BC. Fayum.[13] R. D. Barnett has argued that the royal seal of King Saussatar of Mitanni from *c*. 1450 BC. depicts a tauroctonous Mithras.[14]

Mithras-Helios, in Phrygian cap with solar rays, with Antiochus I of Commagene. (Mt Nemrut, first century BC)

Buddhist Maitreya

Maitreya is sometimes represented seated on a throne Western-style, and venerated both in Mahāyāna and non-Mahāyāna Buddhism. Some have speculated that inspiration for Maitreya may have come from the ancient Indo-Iranian deity Mithra. The primary comparison between the two characters appears to be the similarity of their names. According to a book entitled *The Religion of the Iranian Peoples*, "No one who has studied the Zoroastrian doctrine of the Saoshyants or the coming saviour-prophets can fail to see their resemblance to the future Maitreya.[15]

Paul Williams claims that some Zoroastrian ideas like Saoshyant influenced the beliefs about Maitreya, such as "expectations of a heavenly helper, the need to opt for positive righteousness, the future millennium, and universal salvation". Possible objections are that these characteristics are not unique to Zoroastrianism, nor are they necessarily characteristic of the belief in Maitreya.

Graeco-Roman Mithras

The name Mithra was adopted by the Greeks and Romans as *Mithras*, chief figure in the mystery religion of Mithraism. At first identified with the Sun-god Helios by the Greeks, the syncretic Mithra-Helios was transformed into the figure Mithras during the 2nd century BC, probably at Pergamon. This new cult was taken to Rome around the 1st century BC and was dispersed throughout the Roman Empire. Popular among the Roman military, Mithraism was spread as far north as Hadrian's Wall and the Germanic Limes.

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Maitreya

Maitreya Buddha	
 Bodhisattva Maitreya from the 2nd Century Gandharan Art Period	
Sanskrit:	मैत्रेय (Maitreya)
Pāli	Metteyya
Burmese:	[ʔəmḭmèdją̀]
Chinese:	彌勒菩薩 (Mílè Púsa)
Japanese:	弥勒菩薩 (Miroku Bosatsu)
Korean:	미륵보살 (Mireuk Bosal)
Mongolian:	; Майдар, Асралт; Mayidari, Asaraltu
Shan:	
Sinhala:	මෛත්‍රී බුදුන් (Maithree Budun)
Thai:	พระศรีอริยเมตไตรย (Phra Sri Araya Mettrai)
Tibetan:	
Vietnamese:	Di-lặc (Bồ Tát)
Information	
Venerated by:	Theravada, Mahayana, Vajrayana
Attributes:	Great Benevolence
Preceded By:	Gautama Buddha

	Portal:Buddhism

Maitreya (Sanskrit), **Metteyya** (Pāli), or **Jampa** (Tibetan), is foretold as a future Buddha of this world in Buddhist eschatology. In some Buddhist literature, such as the Amitabha Sutra and the Lotus Sutra, he is referred to as *Ajita* Bodhisattva.

Maitreya is a bodhisattva who in the Buddhist tradition is to appear on Earth, achieve complete enlightenment, and teach the pure dharma. According to scriptures, Maitreya will be a successor of the historic Śākyamuni Buddha. The prophecy of the arrival of Maitreya references a time when the Dharma will have been forgotten on Jambudvipa. It is found in the canonical literature of all Buddhist sects (Theravāda, Mahāyāna, Vajrayāna), and is accepted by most Buddhists as a statement about an event that will take place when the Dharma will have been forgotten on Earth.

Origins

The name *Maitreya* (*Metteyya* in Pāli) is derived from the Sanskrit word *maitrī* (Pāli: *mettā*) meaning "loving-kindness", which is in turn derived from the noun *mitra* (Pāli: *mitta*) in the sense of "friend".

Metteyya is mentioned in the Cakavatti (Sihanada) Sutta (Digha Nikaya 26) of the Pali Canon. He appears in no other sutta in the Pali Canon, and this has cast doubt as to the sutta's authenticity. Most of the Buddha's sermons are presented as having been presented in answer to a question, or in some other appropriate context, but this sutta has a beginning and ending in which the Buddha is talking to monks about something totally different. This leads Gombrich to conclude that either the whole sutta is apocryphal, or that it has at least been tampered with.[1]

The Bodhisattva Maitreya (water bottle on left thigh), art of Mathura, 2nd century AD.

Maitreya is sometimes represented seated on a throne Western-style, and venerated both in Mahāyāna and non-Mahāyāna Buddhism. Some have speculated that inspiration for Maitreya may have come from the ancient Indo-Iranian deity Mithra. The primary comparison between the two characters appears to be the similarity of their names. According to a book entitled *The Religion of the Iranian Peoples*, "No one who has studied the Zoroastrian doctrine of the Saoshyants or the coming saviour-prophets can fail to see their resemblance to the future Maitreya.[2]

Paul Williams claims that some Zoroastrian ideas like Saoshyant influenced the beliefs about Maitreya, such as "expectations of a heavenly helper, the need to opt for positive righteousness, the future millennium, and universal salvation". Possible objections are that these characteristics are not unique to Zoroastrianism, nor are they necessarily characteristic of the belief in Maitreya.

It is also possible that Maitreya Buddha originated with the Hindu Kalki, and that its similarities with the Iranian Mithra have to do with their common Indo-Iranian origin.

In the Greco-Buddhist art of Gandhara, in the first centuries CE in northern India, Maitreya was the most popular figure to be represented, together with the Buddha Śākyamuni. In China, in the 4th–6th Centuries "Buddhist artisans used the names Shakyamuni and Maitreya interchangeably... indicating both that the distinction between the two had not yet been drawn and that their respective iconographies had not yet been firmly set"[3] An example is the stone sculpture found in the Qingzhou cache dedicated to Maitreya in 529 CE as recorded in the inscription (currently in the Qingzhou Museum, Shandong). The cult of Maitreya apparently developed around the same time of that of Amitābha, as early as the 3rd century CE.

Characteristics

One mention of the prophecy of Maitreya is in the Sanskrit text, the *Maitreyavyākaraṇa* (The Prophecy of Maitreya). It implies that he is a teacher of meditative trance sadhana and states that gods, men and other beings:

> will lose their doubts, and the torrents of their cravings will be cut off: free from all misery they will manage to cross the ocean of becoming; and, as a result of Maitreya's teachings, they will lead a holy life. No longer will they regard anything as their own, they will have no possession, no gold or silver, no home, no relatives! But they will lead the holy life of oneness under Maitreya's guidance. They will have torn the net of the passions, they will manage to enter into trances, and theirs will be an abundance of joy and happiness, for they will lead a holy life under Maitreya's guidance. (Trans. in Conze 1959:241)

A 9th century CE Srivijayan art bronze Maitreya from South Sumatra, a stupa adorn his crown.

General description

Maitreya is typically pictured seated, with either both feet on the ground or crossed at the ankles, on a throne, waiting for his time. He is dressed in the clothes of either a Bhiksu or Indian royalty. As a bodhisattva, he would usually be standing and dressed in jewels. Usually he wears a small stupa in his headdress that represents the stupa of the Buddha Sakyamuni's relics to help him identify it when his turn comes to lay claim to his succession, and can be holding a dharmachakra resting on a lotus. A khata is always tied around his waist as a girdle.

In the Greco-Buddhist art of Gandhara, in the first centuries CE in northern India, Maitreya is represented as a Central Asian or northern Indian nobleman, holding a "water phial" (Sanskrit: *Kumbha*) in his left hand. Sometimes this is a "wisdom urn" (Sanskrit: *Bumpa*). He is flanked by his two acolytes, the brothers Asanga and Vasubandhu.

Maitreya-samiti was an extensive Buddhist play in Pre-Islamic Central Asia[4][5] The Maitreyavyakarana (in Sataka form) in Central Asia and Anagatavamsa in South India also mentioned him.[6][7]

Some Buddhists wished to stay with him after death.[8][9] I-kuan Tao have different descriptions of him.[10][11]

Maitreya's Tuṣita Heaven

The future Buddha Maitreya, Gandhara, 3rd century CE.

Maitreya currently resides in the *Tuṣita* Heaven (Pāli: *Tusita*), said to be reachable through meditation. Śākyamuni Buddha also lived here before he was born into the world as all bodhisattvas live in the Tuṣita Heaven before they descend to the human realm to become Buddhas. Although all bodhisattvas are destined to become Buddhas, the concept of a bodhisattva differs greatly in Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism. In Theravada Buddhism, a bodhisattva is one who is striving for full enlightenment (Arahantship in Pali), whereas in Mahayana Buddhism, a bodhisattva is one who has already reached a very advanced state of grace or enlightenment but holds back from entering nirvana so that he may help others.

In Mahayana Buddhism, once Maitreya becomes a Buddha, he will rule over the Ketumati Pure Land, an earthly paradise sometimes associated with the Indian city of Varanasi (also known as Benares) in Uttar Pradesh. In Mahayana Buddhism, Buddhas preside over a Pure Land (the Buddha Amitabha presides over the Sukhavati Pure Land, more popularly known as the Western Paradise).[12]

In Theravadin Buddhism, Buddhas are born as unenlightened humans, and are not rulers of any paradise or pure land. Maitreya's arising would be no different to the arising of Shakyamuni Buddha, as he achieved full-enlightenment as a human being, and passed away into parinibbana when the conditions were ripe for his final passing. Orthodox Theravadin doctrine has much less emphasis on deities and Bodhisattvas, and do not view Bodhisattvas to be in an unachievable state.

Activity of Maitreya in the current age

In Mahayana schools, Maitreya is traditionally said to have revealed the Five Treatises of Maitreya through Asanga. These important texts are the basis of the Yogachara tradition and constitute the majority of the Third Turning of the Wheel of Dharma.

Future coming of Maitreya

32 metre (110 ft) statue of Maitreya Buddha in Nubra Valley, Ladakh, India, facing down the Shyok River towards Pakistan.

Maitreya will be the fifth Buddha of the present *kalpa*Wikipedia:Please clarify (aeon) and his arrival will occur after the teachings (dharma) of the Buddha are no longer practiced.

His coming is characterized by a number of physical events. The oceans are predicted to decrease in size, allowing Maitreya to traverse them freely. Maitreya will then reintroduce "true" *dharma* to world.

His arrival signifies the end of the middle time, the time between the fourth Buddha, Gautama Buddha, and the fifth Buddha, Maitreya, which is viewed as a low point of human existence. According to the *Cakkavatti Sutta: The Wheel-turning Emperor* [13], Digha Nikaya 26 of the Sutta Pitaka of the Pāli Canon), Maitreya Buddha will be born in a time when humans will live to an age of eighty thousand years, in the city of Ketumatī (present Benares), whose king will be the Cakkavattī Sankha. Sankha will live in the palace where once dwelt King Mahāpanadā, but later he will give the palace away and will himself become a follower of Maitreya Buddha.[14]

The scriptures say that Maitreya will attain *bodhi* in seven days (which is the minimum period), by virtue of his many lives of preparation for Buddhahood (similar to those reported in the Jataka stories of Shakyamuni Buddha).

At this time a notable teaching he will start giving is that of the ten non-virtuous deeds (killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, divisive speech, abusive speech, idle speech, covetousness, harmful intent and wrong views) and the ten virtuous deeds (the abandonment of: killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, divisive speech, abusive speech, idle speech, covetousness, harmful intent and wrong views).

The Arya Maitreya Mandala, founded by Lama Anagarika Govinda is based on the idea of the future coming of Maitreya.

Nichiren Buddhism and Maitreya as metaphor

Statue of Maitreya Buddha at Wat Intharawihan, Bangkok

According to the Lotus Sutra of Nichiren Buddhism, each person possesses the potential to reveal an innate Buddha nature during their own lifetime, a concept which may appear to contradict the concept of Buddha as savior or messiah.

Although Maitreya is a significant figure in the Lotus Sutra, the explanation of Nichiren is that Maitreya is a metaphor of stewardship and aid for the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, as written in the Lotus Sutra:

> Moreover...all the bodhisattvas, Bodhisattva Maitreya....will guard and protect the votaries of the Lotus Sutra, so one may indeed rest assured.[15]

In much of his writing, Nichiren mentions the traditional Buddhist views on Maitreya but explains that the propagation of the Eternal Dharma of the Lotus Sutra was entrusted by Shakyamuni to the Bodhisattvas of earth

> The Buddha did not entrust these five characters to Maitreya, Medicine King, or the others of their group. Instead he summoned forth the bodhisattvas....from the great earth of Tranquil Light and transferred the five characters to them.[16]

Thus, each individual can embody the character of the Maitreya because he is a metaphor for compassion:

> The name Maitreya means 'Compassionate One' and designates the Votaries of the Lotus Sutra.[17]

Non-Buddhist views

Part of a series on

Buddhism

- **Outline**
- **Buddhism portal**

The concept of Maitreya was elaborated within Theosophy during the last few decades of the 19th century. However the Theosophical Maitreya was explained, and developed, differently than the original Buddhist concept. In Theosophical texts Maitreya has multiple aspects signifying not just the future Buddha, but similar concepts from other religious or spiritual traditions.[18]

In early 20th century, leading Theosophists became convinced that an appearance of the Maitreya as a so-called *World Teacher* was imminent. A South Indian boy, Jiddu Krishnamurti, was thought to be destined as the "vehicle" of the soon-to-manifest Maitreya; however the manifestation did not happen as predicted, and did not fulfil Theosophists' expectations.[19]

Since the growth of the Theosophical movement in the 19th century, and influenced by Theosophy's articulations on the Maitreya, non-Buddhist religious and spiritual movements have adopted and reinterpreted the concept in their doctrines. Share International, which equates Maitreya with the prophesied figures of multiple religious traditions, claims that he is already present in the world, but is preparing to make an open declaration of his presence in the near

future. They claim that he is here to inspire mankind to create a new era based on sharing and justice.[20]

In the beginning of the 1930s, the Ascended Master Teachings placed Maitreya in the "Office of World Teacher" until 1956, when he was described as moving on to the "Office of Planetary Buddha" and "Cosmic Christ" in their concept of a Spiritual Hierarchy.

Some Muslim scholars who studied Buddhist texts believe that Maitreya is "Rahmatu lil-'alameen" (Mercy for The Worlds), which is the name for the prophet Muhammad as it is said in the Qur'an.[21] According to the research on the book *Antim Buddha - Maitreya* scholars have surmised that Maitreya Buddha is Muhammad.[22] After examining the Buddhist texts researchers concluded that Muhammad had been the last and final awakened Buddha to come into existence long after the current teachings.[23]

The 19th century, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, is believed in by the members of the Ahmadiyya Community (the faith he brought) as fulfilling expectations regarding the Maitreya Buddha.[24]

Bahá'ís believe that Bahá'u'lláh is the fulfillment of the prophecy of appearance of Maitreya.[][] Bahá'ís believe that the prophecy that Maitreya will usher in a new society of tolerance and love has been fulfilled by Bahá'u'lláh's teachings on world peace.[]

Maitreya claimants

Close-up of a statue depicting Maitreya at the Thikse Monastery in Ladakh, India. Depictions of Maitreya vary among Buddhist sects.

Since his death, the Chinese monk Budai (Hotei) has been popularly regarded as an incarnation of the bodhisattva Maitreya. His depiction as the *Laughing Buddha* continues to be very popular in East Asian culture.Wikipedia:Disputed statement

While a number of persons have proclaimed themselves to be Maitreya over the years following the Buddha's parinirvana, none have been officially recognized by the sangha and Buddhists. A particular difficulty faced by any would-be claimant to Maitreya's title is the fact that the Buddha is considered to have made a number of fairly specific predictions regarding the circumstances that would occur prior to Maitreya's coming; such as that the teachings of the Buddha would be completely forgotten, and all of the remaining relics of Sakyamuni Buddha would be gathered in Bodh Gaya and cremated.Wikipedia:Disputed statement

The following list is just a small selection of those people who claimed or claim to be the incarnation of Maitreya. Many have either used the Maitreya incarnation claim to form a new Buddhist sect or have used the name of Maitreya to form a new religious movement or cult.

- Gung Ye, a Korean warlord and king of short-lived state of Taebong during the 10th century, claimed himself as living incarnation of Maitreya and ordered his subjects to worship him. His claim was widely rejected by most Buddhist monks and later he was dethroned and killed by his own servants.
- In 613 the monk Xiang Haiming claimed himself Maitreya and adopted imperial title.[25]
- In 690 *Empress Wu* inaugurated the Second Zhou dynasty, proclaimed herself an incarnation of the future Buddha Maitreya, and made Luoyang the "holy capital." In 693 she replaced the compulsory Dao De Jing in the curriculum temporarily with her own *Rules for Officials*.[26]
- Lu Zhong Yi, the 17th patriarch of I-Kuan Tao, claimed to be an incarnation of Maitreya.

- L. Ron Hubbard, founder of the belief systems Dianetics and Scientology, suggested he was "Metteya" (Maitreya) in the 1955 poem *Hymn of Asia*. Numerous editors and followers of Hubbard claim that in the book's preface, specific physical characteristics said to be outlined—in unnamed Sanskrit sources—as properties of the coming Maitreya; properties which Hubbard's appearance supposedly aligned with.
- Adi Da was suggested by his devotees to be Maitreya: *"an All-Surpassing God-Man yet to come -- a final Avatar, the ultimate Messiah, a consumate Prophet or Enlightened Sage, a Spiritual Deliverer who will appear in the 'late-time', the 'dark' epoch when humanity is lost, apparently cut off from Wisdom, Truth and God. Buddhists call that Expected One 'Maitreya'."* [27]
- Raël's Maitreya claims [28] center on the content of the *Agama Sutra* (Japanese: *Agon Sutra*),[29] supposedly a very ancient text written by Buddha himself, but which has been deemphasized or forgotten by the majority of Buddhist cultures.[30] Raël has claimed directly to people attending Asia Raëlian Church seminars, that someone born in France, a country which is often symbolized by the cock (or rooster), west of the Orient, meets the criteria of the Maitreya. Rael himself claims to be this individual.[31]

Seated Maitreya, Korean, 4-5th century CE. Guimet Museum.

The monk Budai as an incarnation of Maitreya.

Maitreya sects in China

Part of a series on

Eschatology

Pre-Maitreyan Buddhist messianic rebellions

Southern and Northern Dynasties

- 515: The *Mahayana Rebellion*. In the late summer of that year, the renegade monk Faqing 法慶 married a nun and formed a sect in the Northern Wei province of Jizhou 冀州 (in the southern part of today's Hebei province) with the assistance of a local aristocrat named Li Guibo 李歸伯. The sect was named the *Mahayana* ("The Great Vehicle", in reference to Mahayana Buddhism), and Li Guibo was given the titles of *Tenth-stage Bodhisattva*, *Commander of the Demon-vanquishing Army*, and *King who Pacifies the Land of Han by Faqing*.

  Using drugs to send its members into a killing frenzy, and promoting them to Tenth-Stage Bodhisattva as soon as they killed ten enemies, the Mahayana sect seized a prefecture and murdered all the government officials in it. Their slogan was "*A **new Buddha** has entered the world; eradicate the demons of the former age*", and they would kill all monks and nuns in the monasteries that they captured, also burning all the sutras and icons. After defeating a government army and growing to a size of over 50,000, the rebel army was finally crushed by another government army of 100,000. Faqing, his wife, and tens of thousands of his followers were beheaded, and Li Guibo was also captured later and publicly executed in the capital city Luoyang.

  The Fozu Tongji (Comprehensive Records of the Buddha), a chronicle of Buddhist history written by the monk Zhipan in 1269, also contains an account of the Mahayana Rebellion, but with significant deviations from the original account, such as dating the rebellion to 528 rather than 515.[32]
- 516: The *Moonlight Child Rebellion*. Toward the end of that year, another sect was discovered by local authorities in Yanling. A man named Fa Quan and his associates were claiming that an eight-year-old child Liu Jinghui was a Bodhisattva called the *Moonlight Child* (yueguang tongzi pusa; 月光童子菩萨), and that he could transform into a snake or a pheasant. They were arrested and sentenced to death on suspicion of seditious intent, but Jinghui had his sentence commuted to banishment on account of his youth and ignorance.[32]
- 517: Early in the spring of that year, surviving remnants of the Mahayana rebels regrouped and mounted a sudden attack on the capital of Yingzhou province, which lay just northwest of their original base in Bohai prefecture. They were repelled only after a pitched battle with an army of slaves and attendants led by Yuwen Yan, the son of the provincial governor, and nothing more is known of their fate.[32]

Although a "new Buddha" was mentioned, these rebellions are not considered "Maitreyan" by modern scholars.[32] However, they would be a later influence on the rebel religious leaders that made such claims. Therefore, it is important to mention these rebellions in this context.

Maitreyan rebellions

Sui Dynasty

- 610: On the first day of the Chinese New Year, dozens of rebels dressed in white, burning incense and holding flowers proclaimed their leader as Maitreya Buddha and charged into the imperial palace through one of its gates, killing all the guards before they were themselves killed by troops led by an imperial prince. A massive investigation in the capital (Chang'an) implicated over a thousand families.[32]
- 613: A skilled magician named Song Zixian claimed to be Maitreya in Tang County (northwest of Yingzhou), and allegedly could transform into the form of Buddha and make his room emit a glow every night. He hung a mirror in a hall that could display an image of what a devotee would be reincarnated as: a snake, a beast or a human being. Nearly a thousand "from near and far" joined his sect every day, and he plotted to first hold a Buddhist vegetarian banquet, or *wuzhe fohui*, and then attack the emperor who was then touring Yingzhou. The plot was leaked, and Song was arrested and executed, along with over a thousand families of his followers.[32]
- 613: The monk Xiang Haiming claimed to be Maitreya in Fufeng prefecture (western Shaanxi) and led a rebellion. The elite of the Chang'an area hailed him as *dasheng*, or holy man, because they had auspicious dreams after following him, and his army swelled to several tens of thousands before he was defeated by government troops.[32]

Tang Dynasty

- 710: Wang Huaigu declared, "*The Shakyamuni Buddha has declined; a new Buddha is about to appear. The House of Li is ending, and the House of Liu is about to rise*".[25]

Song Dynasty

- 1047: Army officer Wang Ze led a revolt of Buddhists expecting Maitreya; they took over the city of Beizhou in Hebei before they were crushed.[33] The Song Dynasty government declared Maitreya Sects to be "heresies and unsanctioned religions". Tens of thousands of Maitreya Sect followers were killed.[34]

Yuan and Ming Dynasty

- 1351: The *Red Turban Rebellion* (a.ka. *The First White Lotus Rebellion*). Han Shantong (韓山童), leader of the White Lotus Society, and Army Commander Liu Futong (劉福通) rebelled against the Mongol masters of the Yuan Dynasty. Shantong's anti-Mongol slogan was "*The empire is in utter chaos. Maitreya Buddha has incarnated, and the Manichaean King of Light has appeared in this world.*"[25]
- In 1355, Han Shantong's son, Han Lin'er (韓林兒), was proclaimed "Emperor of the Great [Latter] Song" (大宋, referring to the dead Song Dynasty) (1355-1368?) by Liu Futong. Liu Futong claimed Han Lin'er was a direct descendent of the Zhao royal family who ruled the Song Dynasty. After Liu Futong's death, Zhu Yuanzhang took up command of the Red Turban Rebellion and later assassinated Han Lin'er to become Emperor Hongwu of the Ming Dynasty. (See History)

  According to Beijing University,[35]

> The leader of White Lotus sect, Han Shantong called himself *Ming Wang* (明王 - "King of Brightness"), while his son, Han Lin'er called himself *Xiao Ming Wang* (小明王 - "Small King of Brightness"), both names reflecting the sect's beliefs. Zhu Yuanzhang had been a member of the White lotus Sect, and admitted to have been a branch of the White Lotus rebel army (being at one time vice-marshal of Xiao Ming Wang). When Zhu Yuanzhang took power, he chose the dynastic name "Ming".

This suggests that the Ming Dynasty was named after the White Lotus figures of the "Big and Little Bright Kings".

Post-Maitreyan rebellions

Qing Dynasty

- 1796: The *White Lotus Rebellion* (a.k.a. *The Second White Lotus Rebellion*). It broke out among impoverished settlers in the mountainous region that separates Sichuan province from Hubei and Shaanxi provinces. It apparently began as a White Lotus Society protest against heavy taxes imposed by Manchu rulers of the Qing Dynasty.[36]

  The Yi He Tuan (義和團), often called in English the "Society of Harmonious Fists" was a 19th century martial-sect inspired in part by the White Lotus Society. Members of the "Harmonious Fists" became known as "Boxers" in the west because they practiced Chinese martial arts.

- 1899: The *Boxer Rebellion* (義和團之亂). Chinese rebellion from November 1899 to September 7, 1901 against foreign influence in such areas as trade, politics, religion and technology that occurred in China during the final years of the Qing Dynasty. By August 1900, over 230 foreigners, tens of thousands of Chinese Christians, an unknown number of rebels, their sympathizers and other innocent bystanders had been killed in the chaos. The uprising crumbled on August 14, 1900 when 20,000 foreign troops entered the Chinese capital, Peking (Beijing).

Albeit not in the name of Maitreya, both rebellions were perpetrated solely or in part by the White Lotus Society, a rebellious Maitreya sect.

Alternative persona

There was a sage of the same name in the epic Mahabharata. His lineage is unknown. He came to the court of Hastinapura to advise Duryodhana to restore the kingdom of the Pandavas, a little while after the sons of Pandu had gone into exile, having been defeated at dice.

However, Duryodhana didn't even bother to listen to the sage, and showed his disrespect all too plainly. Incensed, the sage cursed him and said, "Fourteen years hence, you shall be destroyed in battle by the Pandavas, along with your kinsmen and all that you hold dear. Bheema shall dispatch you to the abode of Yama, by breaking your thighs with the mace." Some hold that the curse of this sage played a major part in encompassing the destruction of the Kauravas.[37]

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