

The Sun and the Moon on the Plaques of Mithras

Dominique J. Persoons

ABSTRACT

The representations of Mithras are the object of a true fascination by the historians and the researchers. The challenge is serious, since there are almost no documents on this religion, except indirect testimonies. However, it was more important than Christianity for 4 centuries. Its installation in Rome seems to be contemporary with Christianity and linked to the person of Flavius Josephus. Many academic theories have tried to make Mithraism an anti-Roman oriental religion, but this hypothesis seems paradoxical, since it was practised by the army of Rome and its high officials. Others see in the stars a universal religion with a cosmic salvation, a novelty for the time, but one wonders why it was elitist and masculine. Others see, in the Sun/Moon opposition, the challenge between the East and the West of the Empire, but does this opposition of two luminaries date from the century of Augustus? Finally, others have seen in the sacrifice of the bull a Stoic philosophy. But can a philosophy become a religion with Mysteries?

Keywords: Chiasmus, Dualism, Hell, Metempsychosis, Mithras, Moon, Plato, Son, Soul, Stoicism.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The religion of Mithras was ignored for a long time because it was systematically destroyed in the 5th century AD. It represents an authentic hinge between oriental mysticism and Greco-Roman rationalism. The Roman Mithraism is probably a political creation intended to find in the Empire a modern common religion, with political aim. Its rigorous study, and the great efforts made by archaeologists over the last century, have made it possible to discover a humanistic and happy religion, which teaches us a lot about the way the Romans conceived death.

II. THE FIRST MITHRAS

Pythagoras, mathematician and thinker of the 6th century, introduced in Greece the theory of Indian origin of the transmigration of souls: the soul of a deceased person is incorruptible and reincarnates in a succession of different bodies. Under the influence of Indian thought, the distinction between the soul and the body was prepared in pre-Socratic Greece: one part is immortal, and makes it similar to the divine, and the other mortal part is a perishable body. In his description of the demiurge, Plato was very probably influenced by Eastern thought too (Bipin Shah, 2007). So that Persian esotericism influenced Greece and Judea as early as the 6th and 5th centuries BC. More precisely, the Pharisees learned about the cult of Mithra from the Persian magi. They brought this cult back to Judea at the time (in the 6th century B.C.) where the god El was identified with Yahweh. As a result, El Yahweh was the husband of the goddess Asherah (Wikipedia, 2023). The Jewish discovered monotheism by that time. Just what the Greeks made with Alexander the Great. Plato considered only one demiurge to create the Universe.

The god Mithra (Miθra in Avestic) was a god worshipped during antiquity among Iranian-speaking peoples, derived from an Indo-Iranian deity. Mithra was a secondary god, guarantor of contracts, with solar aspects and master of the daytime sky. In the second century BC, the cult of Hellenized Mithra served King Mithridates I of the Bosphorus to federate the Eastern Roman Empire against Western Rome (111 BC). This king has been compared to Hannibal for his hatred of Rome and his anti-Roman culture. Athens supported him against Rome. He promoted the religion of Mithra, which became anti-Roman, monotheistic, and dedicated to the Sun God, the cult of Ahura Mazda. Mithridate did not claim openly of Mithra in front of the Greeks, but under the name of Apollo, this unique god invoked the Sun, guarantor of justice and an Eastern esoteric religion. Mithridate was defeated by Pompey in 66 BC, but the cult of the Hellenized Persian Mithra was installed in the Eastern Empire from 90 BC. In Turkey,

on the plateau of Mount Nemrut, there are statues of Mithra associated with King Antiochus, 1st century BC. It is associated with Apollo and Helios. Cicero wrote to his friend Rufus in 54 B.C. that he was a follower of the cult of *Chrestos* (the righteous), that is to say of Mithras, half a century before the birth of Jesus. On March 15, 44 B.C., after the assassination of Caesar, the conspirators marched in Rome and brandished pikes topped with Phrygian caps while shouting "*Chrestos*". They claim to be followers of the cult of Mithras.

The worship of Christ was universal at this early date... but the worship of Chrestos -the Good Principle- had preceded it by many centuries, and even survived the general adoption of Christianity, as shown on monuments still in existence (Kuhn, 2020, p. 163).

III. THE STRANGE HISTORY OF THE MITHRAS OF ROME

A. *Flavius Josephus*

Flavius Josephus, the chronicler of Marcus Aurelius, was a Romanized Pharisaic Jew, and therefore considered a reformer. He recounted the existence of a certain Yeshua (Jesus) who had been hanged from a tree by the Pharisee priest Aristobulus some decades earlier. It is believed that Jesus Christ was an Essene Jew, an Orientalizing mystical sect. This Yeshua was said to have challenged the authority of the priests in the Jerusalem temple. Josephus would have used this tragic story to serve as an example for the new Eastern theology that was gaining prominence in Rome, and at the same time to modernize the traditional Jewish religion (Barbiero, 2011). He put forward Yeshua, killed by the conservative Jews, which pleased the Roman authorities, and put forward the new universal "religious philosophy" of Mithras. He thus participated in the creation of a Roman ideology inspired by Persian Mithra, but strongly modified for the use of the Jews, the first Christians, and off course the Romans. No textual references are available on this Roman Mithraism. It is certain that it was very different from the Vedic-Avesta-Mitanni texts. Flavius Josephus therefore linked Mithraism (present in Rome since one century) and the new Christianity. He recruited his Pharisee friend Paul of Tarsus (the Christian writer) to create a purely Roman Christianity, very different from the Judean Christianity represented by Peter and John (whose Apocalypse has been preserved and is anti-Roman).

B. *Creation of a New Religion*

It seems that Josephus would have seized this opportunity to influence the Roman emperors who were very upset with Judea, Syria and Cilicia. He conceived to present this new Jewish-mithraic religion as universal, and it seems to have been listened to. Perhaps, he infiltrated this esoteric religion into a secret obedience to control the Roman state apparatus. This is how the cult of the "new Mithras" was born, transformed by Flavius Josephus in the 60s AD (Barberio, 2011). This monotheist cult thus became a consensual vehicle under the name of "*sol-Invictus*", the unconquered Sun. There is virtually no difference between the cult of *Sol Invictus*, Mithraism and early Christianity, writes Shah Bipin (Bipin, 2007). Atwill (2005) believes that the Romans used Jesus for five centuries as "If the Gospels achieved only the replacement of the militaristic messianic movement with a pacifistic one, they would have been one of the most successful pieces of propaganda in history" (Atwill, 2005, p. 11). The activities of this vanguard church were centralized by the Romans and propagated in the occupied territories, especially in the East of the Empire.

C. *Greek Philosophy*

Both Mithras and Yeshua were Cynic or Stoic religions, with a final sacrifice. The god Mithras girdled the body of the animal, leading to its symbolic death (Turcan, 1981). This image was no longer an offering to an ancient god (individual), but a universal symbol (Cumont, 1929). Thus, Mithraic iconography places this salutary action in a cosmic space, and the cave is surmounted by a zodiacal arch (scientific reference). The blood of the beast revives the vitality of the Earth and the animal species (the dog, the snake, the scorpion). A Mithraic relief in the Berlin Museum shows the goddess Earth (Demeter) who, with her basket of fruit, also benefits from the regenerating blood.

IV. DUALISM, INDIAN ORIGIN

A. *Western Tradition*

What characterizes the Western tradition of thought compared to the Chinese, Indian or African tradition is the dualism it establishes between the body and the soul (Dastur, 2006). There is a specifically Western way of relating to the body. The terms soma and psyche will designate the couple formed by the body and the soul. The most famous of the Cynics is Diogenes of Sinope, a contemporary of Plato and Aristotle. He believed that self-control (over the mind) was the only way to happiness

(Onfray, 1990). Stoicism appeared a century later and advocates ataraxia, the absence of internal disorder, to say self-authority (over the body), i.e. a materialist puritanism.

But Plato added a typically Greek concept: the mind. The mind is between the Psuche and the soma, it corresponds to what we call today the “psychology” which is between the Soul and the body. Thumos is the seat of voluntary conscious acts and the Epithumia is the seat of involuntary unconscious desires. The Nous is the seat of the intellect, of thinking ideas (Dastur, 2006). This opposition between mind and soul, opens up a world where rational thought reigns and where man is defined as belonging both to animality through his body and to reason through his mind. This transition from a mythical to a logical universe took place in Ancient Greece. The beginning of the Life of Porphyry opens with the shame of the body: he attacks in particular two essential dogmas that involve the body, namely the incarnation and the resurrection:

On the other hand, even if a Hellene were light-minded enough to believe that the gods dwell inside statues, he would have much purer ideas than one who believes that the Divine entered the womb of the Virgin Mary, that he became an embryo, and that after his birth he was swaddled, full of the blood of the chorion, bile, and elements even more unseemly than these (Benoit, 1947, p. 552).

B. Chiasmus χ

According to Plato, the Soul of the World is the universal force that directs the World, both physical and metaphysical. It was split into two strips lengthwise and these strips were attached to each other in the form of a Chi (Timaeus 36a). They were then curved in such a way as to meet at the opposite end and form two concentric circles (Fig. 1). The outer circle is that of the Same, and the inner circle is that of the Other... so that the sphere of the World surrounds the sphere of the universe. Hurtado (2018, p. 210) writes that in the statement from Plato's Timaeus, Ἐχίασεν αὐτόν ἐν τῷ παντί (He placed him across the universe), the verb Ἐχίασεν suggests a Chi form.

(...) And the gods placed the two divine circles of the human soul in that spherical body of man which we now call the head, and which is in us our most divine part and the master of all the others. Constituted before the body, the immortal soul possesses psychic control over it (Plato, Timaeus, 34 c).

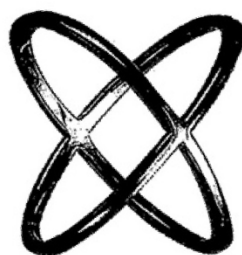


Fig. 1. The “X” form refers to the 2 parts of the universal and human Souls.

Plato distinguishes below the neck and the head, *Thumos* located in the thorax and assimilated to the Sun. The other, the desiring soul, and unconscious, *Epithumia*, was placed in the belly, and was assimilated to the Moon. So that the human soul included two opposite parts as the Soul of the World, and these two parts had a shape of “X”. The representation of the human soul thus integrated the shape of the “X” following expressly Plato. The bas-reliefs of Mithras lend themselves very well to the drawing of an “X” according to Timaeus, 34c.

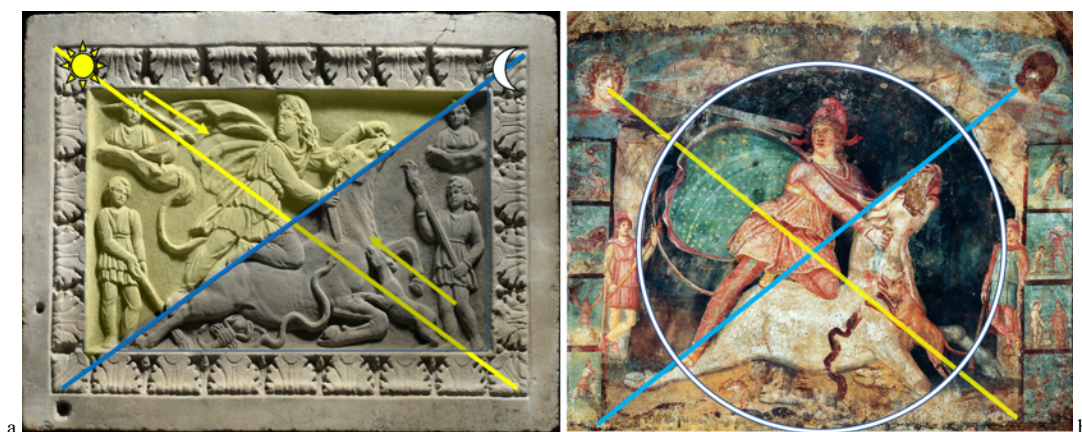


Fig. 2. a) Mithras plaque (in the 2016 Sotheby's catalog). The Taurus divides the sculpture into a bright solar part and a mysterious, dark lunar part. The Taurus represents the dark Moon. The Sun and the Dog refer to Mithras. The chiasmus is demonstrated easily. b) Mithraeum of Marino (Italy), first century. AD. The bull is exactly in the *Epithumia* Moon line. The cave determines a circle that includes Mithras and his bull: they form a single entity, with a celestial part and a terrestrial ground.

It is no coincidence that the Sun and the Moon are found on the plaques of the newest religion of Mithras: the two luminaries represent the two parts of the human mind. The line of the Moon determines a dark triangle which contains the bull (lower *Epithumia*). In contrast, the upper triangle is bright and contains Mithras (upper *Thumos*). As the fresco of Marino suggests, Mithras and his bull form an entity, under the celestial vault, that is to say the body-soul entity. These two lines meet on the couple Mithras-Taurus, as they meet in the soul of men. Mithraists had an extremely optimistic view of the world and did not worry about their individual salvation, since through bullfighting they are already saved (Fig. 3a). It would seem that, like the Stoics, they see the world as a perpetual beginning (Jardin, 2021).

V. DOUBLE NATURE OF THE SOUL ITSELF, METEMPSYCHOSIS

A. Plato and the Soul

We know the developments that Plato devotes to the body as the tomb or prison of the soul. The body, related to becoming and subject to death, constitutes an obstacle to the elevation of the soul or to its access to the “intelligible place”. The mind which is related to what is unconscious (*Epithumia*) and conscious (*Thumos*) finds itself in some way hindered, which prevents it from reaching the intelligible sphere. Porphyry claiming Plotinus (Pigler, 2002), does not hesitate to take up the “separation” between the intelligible and the sensitive, the soul and the body, Spirit and matter, the supralunar and the sublunar.

The Moon also, as presiding over generation was called “bee”, especially because the Moon is also called “bull” and Taurus represents the exaltation of the Moon while bees are born from bulls; and one also names “born of bulls” the souls which go towards the generation and “stealer of bulls” the god who understands the secrets of the generation” Porphyry wrote (Blomart, 1994, p. 429).

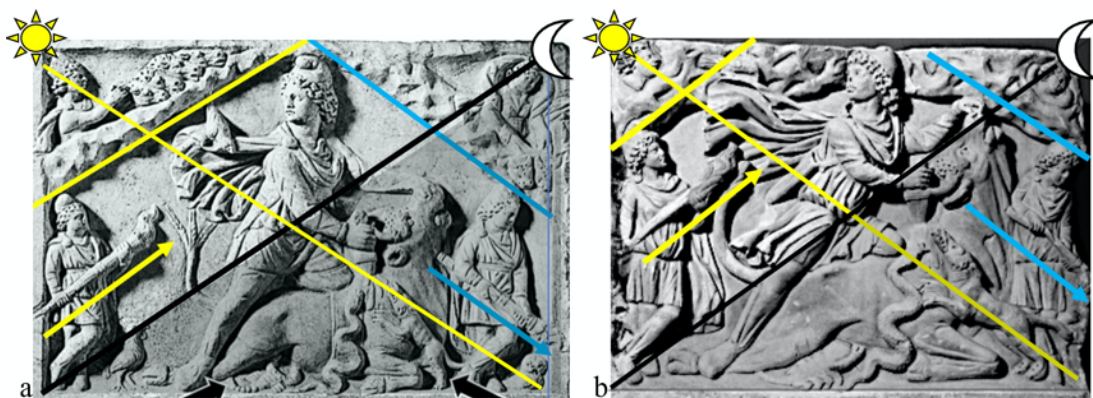


Fig. 3. a) Roman Relief of Mithras circa 2d century A.D. Private U.S. collector. Cautes indicates the soul that ascends to Heaven (supralunar), and Cautopathes shows the soul that descends to Earth for reincarnation (infralunar). This would explain why Cautopathes looks sad. He assigns a soul to remain in the shadow of the Earth (*Umbra*). Mithras preferred shadows when Christians sent souls to Hell; b) Mithras in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts: same design.

All men hold a soul of divine origin which escapes from their body when they die, to possibly join the world of the gods. They can go up and down and finally reincarnate (metempsychosis) on Earth. Thus, Mithras is a solar god intimately linked to the purifying bull. The soul of the bull that migrates to the Creator is the soul that leaves the deceased body. Finally, the rising and descending souls of which the Neoplatonists speak are here represented allegorically.

B. The Drama of Metempsychosis

Descending souls are symbolized by the Moon, Hesperus (evening god), and the bull that descend to Earth. “*Umbra*” means the souls left on Earth waiting for reincarnation (see above), meaning “shadow” in Latin. This is the dark side of the picture. The descending souls are under the influence of the bull, on the right. Rising souls are probably represented by the rising chariot of the Sun. The blue line represents the descending souls, and the yellow line represents the ascending souls joining the Sun. These two axes form the basis of the belief in Mithras. On the steles, the servants Cautes and Cautopathes each carry a lighted torch. One can wonder if these torches do not indicate the journey of the soul, either downwards (return to the Earth) or upwards (accession to the world of the gods). There would not be a rising and a falling day here, but the fate of the soul.

Ancient accounts of the suffering of souls are numerous. In general, the Greek philosophical world, except for the sceptics and the epicureans, professed theological beliefs about the survival of the soul, which the terms reincarnation, metempsychosis, or transmigration cover quite well.

But, several quotations mention the pain, even the terror, that they inspired. These texts, often obscured by contemporary critics, cast a gloomy eye, to say the least, on the idea of survival that ensures a kind of “immortality” for the soul. Numerous significant stories attest to this fear and the will to tame it. “I flew away from the unbearable cycle of pain, I soared on my swift feet towards the desired crown”. These words, engraved on a 5th century B.C. Orphic flap, discovered in a burial site in Thourioi, southern Italy, glorifies the return of the initiate to a blissful life with the gods, that is, a life free from the burden of reincarnation. The papyrus of Dervéni - a text that has come down to us in fragmentary form where the allusions to the future life originate from Orphico-Pythagorean sources - mentions the souls, but without referring to their journey. The soul would be subjected to a process of *anabasis* (ascent) and *catabasis* (descent to the lowest level), a more or less disturbing journey (Decharneux & Viltanioti, 2012). This account is deeply influenced by the Platonic themes of the wandering of the soul and of incarnation. Apollonius of Tyana, a Pythagorean philosopher of the 1st century AD, insisted several times on the pain of the incarnation (Grimal, 2010).

Dechameux *et al.* (2012) provide an important analysis of the passage from reincarnation (down) to resurrection (up) during Antiquity. In opposition to the doctrines supporting the thesis of reincarnation, a theory appeared in late antiquity according to which, at the end of a single life, the human being would escape the cycles of incarnations by resurrecting. This belief gave rise to a hope that is different from the way we look at these theories today. It is necessary to revisit the idea of resurrection by showing its innovative and attractive character, for the more modest social circles (Decharneux & Viltanioti, 2012). This innovation would undoubtedly be found inscribed on the Mithraic steles, clearly marking the separation between the solar (supralunar) path that leads to resurrection and the infralunar path towards the *Umbra* that leads to metempsychosis and suffering reincarnation. That's why the Moon would look so sad, and Cautopathes too.

C. Resurrection: A Wonderful Prospect

The torch-bearers (Fig. 4b) are found on the sides of the Mithras bas-reliefs. The torch-bearer Cautes raises his torch towards the sun and is associated with the dog, Mithras' friend (sun). The torch-bearer Cautopates points his torch towards the ground and is associated with the serpent, the friend of the bull (moon). The white marble relief of Vatican Museum, Museum Chiaramonti (Fig. 4c), is very similar to a small relief located in the Richmond Museum Virginia USA (Fig. 3d). These two plaques show a graceful Mithra, under a vault decorated with 6 illuminated altars, and under his feet, the ground contains 7 other altars. The two torch-bearers point to the *umbra*, downwards. None of them raise their torch towards the Sun, which seems strange. This kind of illustration is probably very pious. It emphasizes the importance of religious practice in the mithraeums (altars). Why do the torch-bearers both point to the ground, i.e. the shadow? Inversely, the first relief (Fig. 3a) shows two torch-bearers pointing to the sun, Heaven and resurrection, which seems to be a positive message (many believers would be saved), but paradoxical indeed. In this case, there is no reference to religious practice.

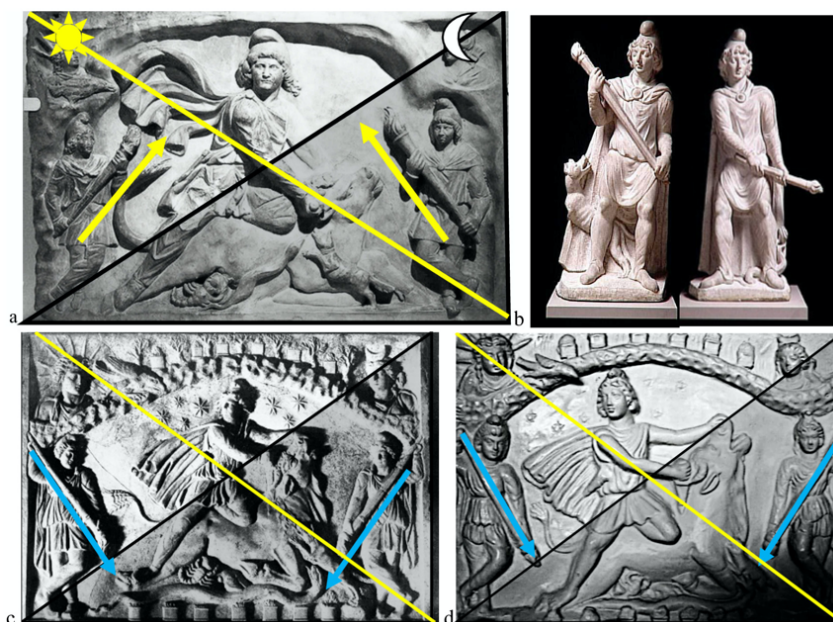


Fig. 4. a) Mithras plaque from the Ontario Museum, Canada; b) Cautes and Cautopates, the twin torch-bearers, from Sidon, Libanon c) White marble relief, found on the Esquiline near S. Lucia in Selc e. Vatican Museum, Chiaramonti d) small relief located in the Richmond Museum, Virginia USA. On the top of the cave, there are seven trees in a row with six burning altars between them. At the entrance of the cave, below the serpent, seven burning altars, the outermost of which are round in contradistinction to the others.

D. The Two Paths of The Soul

These two representations a) and c) have opposite meanings, how can this be explained? Is there a path of the souls that would be saved in Fig. 4a, and condemned in Fig. 4c and 4d? Tertullian (Christian) said that Mithras promises a “semblance of resurrection”. Here, unfortunately, the absence of a source leaves the researcher to hypothesis and speculation. But, resurrection means something opposite to metempsychosis, according to Robert Turcan (Jardin, 2021). Following the oriental mind, eternal life really existed for the righteous souls, and was called “resurrection”. According to Fig. 3a, the resurrection would be linked to Cautes who points his torch towards the sun. Consequently, Fig. 3c and 3d do not have torches directed towards the sun, therefore do not propose a resurrection. But they do insist on purification as shown by the altars at the top and bottom of the image.

It remains to explain the presence of the stars which surround Mithras, sometimes abundantly, like in Fig. 4c or 4d. In these cases, aren't the stelae more fatalistic, signifying submission to the cosmic order? For Origen (Christian) this seems obvious: “For us, far from attributing the flood and the conflagration to the cycles and periodic returns of the stars, we give them as their cause the overflow of vice, destroyed by the deluge or the conflagration” (Culianu, p. 304). The Christian religion attributed the cataclysms, not to the stars, but to men themselves. The religion of Mithras did not, and was possibly less guilt-inducing, and seemed to link the cycles of earthly catastrophes to the cycles of the Universe, as Plato pointed out, with his “Soul of the World” (Culianu, 2020). One could understand that the Mithraic plaques on Fig. 4c and 4d were more guilt-inducing (close to Christianity) when the plaque Fig. 4a was more euphoric (Platonic). In accordance with classical Mithraism, the periodic cataclysms which destroy the world was linked to the cosmic cycle, in an answer of Calcidius to the commentary of the passage of the Timee, (Waszink, 2020):

What movement and what design is not supposed to bring ruin and dissolution to the world, but rather recreation and, as it were, a new vitality placed under the auspices of the new movement; I do not know whether in certain regions of the earth there will be any loss from innovation.

Porphyry attributed to Pythagoras the idea that beings are born and reborn according to certain periodic cycles. There is indeed a relation between resurrection and cosmic cycles: “The fact of sympathizing with this body and not that one is due to the previous life itself, or to the revolution of the universe which leads the similar to the similar” (Culianu, 2020, p.303). Mithraism would thus have been more a philosophy than a religion (Fig. 4a) but became a religion in certain mithraeums (Fig. 4b and 4c).

E. Sun and Moon: East versus West?

Another explanation for the Sun-Moon opposition is political. Mithras taming the bull is the star in the constellation of Leo, where it exalts its torrid heat. His victim, the bull, represents the Moon and, in the final verse of the opening song of Thebaid, the two names “*cornua Mithram*” underline the two terms of an antinomy (Bouché-Leclercq, 1899). The star is shown in a close-up front view, showing his right hand, next to Luna who, seen in profile, humbly bends her head (and the brightness of a flame lit behind the rays should accentuate the contrast): *Sol Oriens* opposed to *Luna Occidens*, as on the two side medallions of the Arch of Constantine (Agnosi, 2018). Also mentions a system imputing to the Sun the management of Asia and to the Moon that of Europe. Where *Sol Inuictus* is tauroctone, the supremacy of the Levant over the Sunset, which Mithridates aspired to, is thus affirmed. It is the orientation of the Tauroctone on the paintings or the reliefs, with the Moon on the right of the scene. One was persuaded, reports Tacitus, “that in this time precisely the East would prevail, and that men left Judea would become the Masters of the world” (Tac., H, V, 13, 2).

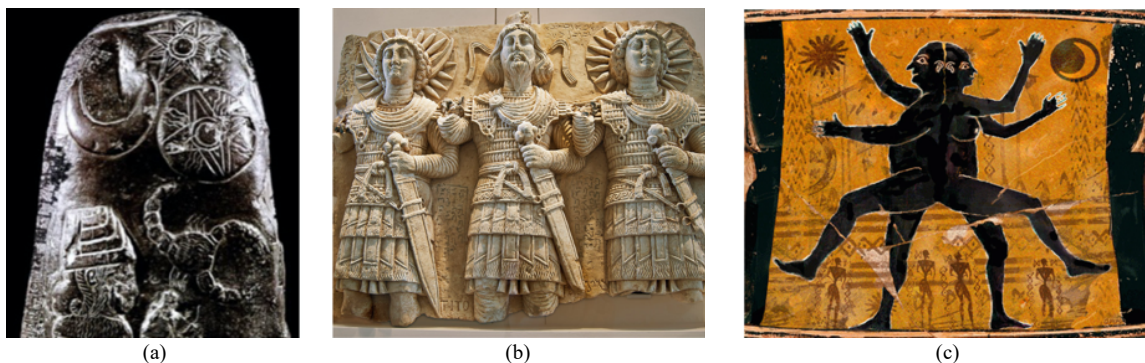


Fig. 5. a) Kuduru of Hammurabi 1792-1750 BC.; b) Stele of Palmyra; c) Myth of the androgyne banquet of Plato.

The Kuru of Hammurabi of the 18th century B.C. shows the Sun on the right and the Moon on the left, with the principal goddess Ishtar Venus in the centre, dominating the King. In the 1st century AD., Bâal, Malakbêl Sun god and Aglibôl Moon god, at Palmyra in Syria. The god Aglibôl does not smile. 500 years before, Greek pottery shows Plato's hermaphrodite. The god has disappeared, it is only the double psychological Man. The Sun is on the left and the Moon on the right. Semitic languages are read from right to left, and Greek is read from left to right, so the precedence is reversed. The symbol of the Sun and Moon is as old as Babylonia. The presence of the two luminaries are found as well on the stele of Jupiter Dolichenus (Balty & Merlat, 1961). This other religion from Syria presented the gods of the Roman pantheon in an oriental way, but still framed by the two luminaries.

This crossing of the influence of the Moon and the Sun on the god Mithras was a revolution, because it showed for the first time the psychology of human beings, both *Thumos* and *Epithumia*, with rational and irrational feelings. In Rome, Mithras brought the first representation of the "Self". This psychological dualism is the invention of the West, even if the premises existed since the Babylonian time. The plates of Mithras thus brought to the Roman soldiers and the civil servants of the State a modern and responsible vision of themselves. Certainly, the Bull was also considered as "what is foreign" and "must be dominated", which explains the success within the army. But the lunar animal clearly marked the separation between the supra-lunar (optimistic) and the infralunar (pessimistic), which is revolutionary. The infralunar world was called "*Umbra*" by the Romans, the domain of "wandering souls". This astral dualism allowed to give a new hope to the believers, who could leave the world of the Manes, the chthonian deities, and hope to reach the eternal life near the solar god.

The Mithriasts lived therefore the fear of the reincarnation, and the hope of the resurrection as in other religions as Orphism, for several centuries. St. Paul of Tharsus wrote: "Christ is resurrected and dies no more; death has no power over him. For his death was a death to sin once and for all, and his life is a life for God (Rom. 6, 8-10)". This can be understood as the hope of escaping traditional reincarnation, like this ex-voto: "I flew away from the unbearable cycle of pain, I soared on my swift feet towards the desired crown". These words, engraved on a 5th century B.C. Orphic flap, discovered in a burial site in Thourioi, southern Italy, glorify the return of the initiate to a blissful life with the gods (see above).

F. A Modern Religion

This religion of Mithras was thus international and ultra-modern since the first century BC. and his success in Athens and Ionia.

- By some sides, it remained oriental (bull, Moon, Sun, scorpion, snake, stars) and allegorical.
- In other respects, it was already European: progressive humanization of the bull (anthropomorphism), influence of the stars on the heart of the god Mithras, separation of the stars and the god by an earthly vault, and psychology visible on the two luminaries.
- In another sense, it was revolutionary. The resurrection of the soul by the god Mithras would have predate the resurrection of Jesus. It brought great relief to believers.
- All these features showed the reign of the planets (science), and their influence on the god and his bull, as well as the personification of the Taurus. The Persian and Indian myth thus became a Western philosophy in 5 centuries time. The belief in the divine nature of man probably marked the end of antiquity and the beginning of the modern era. The religion of Mithras (but also Cybele, Orpheus, and Isis) served as a vehicle for this revolution in mentalities, from Persia to the confines of the Roman Empire.

VI. THE BULL

A. The Soul of the Bull

The migration of the soul from the bull is part of the legend of Mithras. Amédée Louis Gasquet, reported in 1899, in his "essay on the cult of Mithras":

But this bull is the first of living beings, the first organized and animated matter. Under these repeated blows, the bull loses weight, wastes away and dies. From each of its members spring various kinds of beneficial seeds and plants, from its seed are born animals useful to man. What remains is carried into the sphere of the Moon and purified by the light of the star. The soul of the bull escapes in its turn; she stands before the Creator, and with a voice as loud as that of ten thousand men, she cries: To whom have you entrusted the empire of creatures, now that evil is ravaging the Earth and the plants are without water? Where is the man of whom you told me: I will create him to speak the word of help? (Gasquet, 1899).

Note that the Berlin stele perhaps shows the soul leaving the body through the mouth. It takes up the Egyptian ritual of opening the mouth, which will be token by the Romanesque art until today.

In the beliefs of Mithras, the soul is immortal. During birth, it descends from the sky through the planets, accumulating impurities there. The earthly passage is a test where the soul can get rid of these impurities by practising a life of asceticism and wisdom.



Fig. 6. a) Detail of the bull from the stele of Mithras in the Neues Museum in Berlin, Roman stele from the 2nd century AD. b) Ritual of opening the mouth, Book of the Dead, 2,500 BC. c) the ascent of the soul of Saint Martin, Master of San Lázaro, Museum of Fine Arts of Valencia circa 1540, (Spain) d) soul leaving the body, modern manga.

After earthly death, the forces of evil and good fight over the soul. If it is sufficiently pure, the way to the kingdom of light is open to it. The soul which is pure enough, can rise towards the Light, towards the Sun which is on the left of the picture. The torch-bearer Cautes raises his flame upwards. If the soul is not pure enough, it must go towards the shadow of the bull and the Moon. It will then undergo metempsychosis and live in another body. The torch-bearer Cautopates will point his torch downwards.

B. Mithras and the Taurus More and More Human

Over the centuries, the resemblance between Mithras and his bull is accentuated. Why this anthropomorphism? Probably to unify the god and his animal, which would form only one. In these very human forms, the bull has its mouth open and reveals its tongue or its soul. If Mithras and the bull are one, Mithras cannot sacrifice himself except to commit suicide. So the knife should be seen as a symbolic tool. It would be the spur that stimulates and dominates the body to escape its grip and rise towards totality (Stoic philosophy). The relationship to the body of Christianity appears more radical with an exacerbation of the blood that flows, and the complete unification between body and soul (ultra-Stoic philosophy) until the final sacrifice of the body of Jesus himself (murder).

The bull would be the body and the soul (soma and Epithumia). What place would be left for Mithras? According to Plato: "Man is composed of a soul, a spirit, and a body. The soul and the spirit coexist in the body. The spirit is what man really is, what he is conscious of being. The soul dwells in the head and is divine. The body is the dwelling place of the spirit in the physical world (Lorenz, 2009).

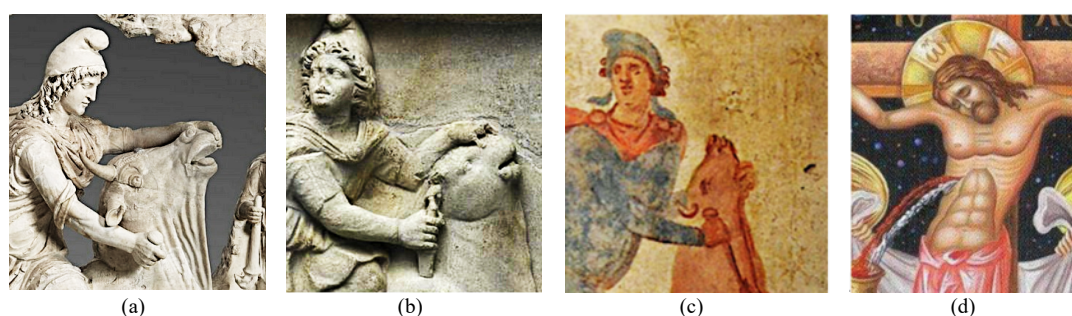


Fig. 7. a) Mithraic plaque, le Louvre Lens, France, b) Mithras, MR 820, Louvre Paris, France c) Sacrifice of Mithras, fresco, 2nd century AD., Rome, Barberini Palace, Italy d) Christ crucifixion by Papathanasopoulos (2019).

Mithras would therefore be the Spirit (*Noûs* and *Thumos*), son of the Sun god and whose soul is inspired by the Moon goddess, as Jesus would be the Spirit, son of the Father (Sun) and of the Holy Spirit (Moon). An inscription in the mithraeum of Santa Prisca in Rome reads: "And you save us by shedding eternal blood". If it is a question of the bull sacrificed to save and regenerate the world by his blood and not of God himself through the person of Jesus, the sentence previously quoted seems to be marked by Christianity. This is at least what Marcel Simon deduced in *Mysteria Mitrae* article (Simon, 1972).

C. Survival: An Old Question

The Roman man firmly believed that he would not die entirely (*"non omnis moriar"*, Horace wrote), because his desire was to survive in the memory of the living, more particularly of his family who will maintain the memory of his deeds. Funerary inscriptions testify to the belief in a posthumous life. While the body of the deceased is reduced to dust or ashes, his spirit moves like a shadow, with which the living are able to establish a relationship and exchange as with the living. Even more than this meditation on death, it is indeed the desire to survive in the memory of the living that appears as the most original and common attitude of Roman man. *Umbra* is what remains after the death of the one we loved, when his body is decomposed or reduced to ashes. The *Umbra* is this mysterious force that precise rites fix and lock up in the grave, otherwise, it would wander forever: "We placed Lollius on the side of this road so that passers-by would say to him: Hello Lollius!" (Meslin, 2011).

VII. THE SURVIVAL OF THE SUN-MOON COUPLE FROM GREECE TO THE MODERN ERA

The Sun-Moon pair has a powerful psychological meaning. It prefigures our own knowledge about conscious and unconscious thoughts, described by Freud (1915) and Jung (1916). The terms "anima" and "animus" are also used by Jung. The soul will remain tripartite according to Plato for nearly 2,500 years. Jesus became *Noûs* leads *Thumos* the solar ardor, and *Epithumia* the lunar intuitions, which both became today's cardinal virtues.

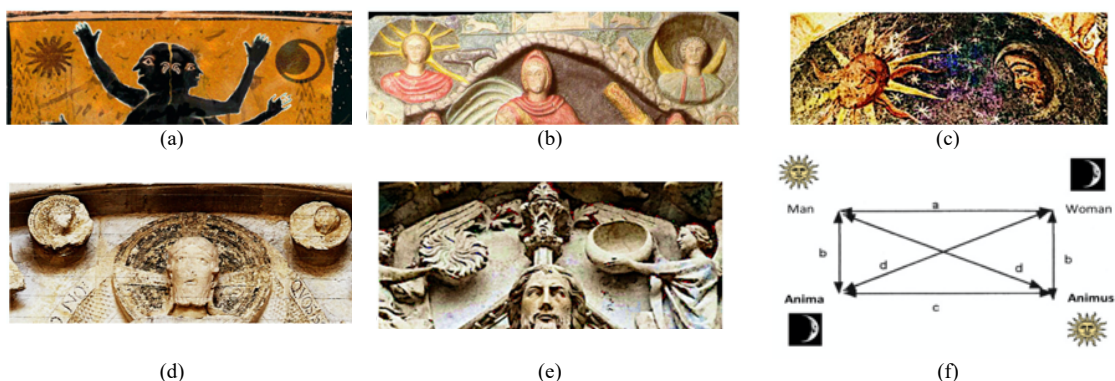


Fig. 8. a) Greek pottery 5th century BE, b) Mithras mithraeum Sterzing south Tyrol c) 11th century Romanesque Cathedral san Martiño de Mondoñedo, Spain d) 12th century Romanesque Autun Basilic, France e) 13th century Gothic Bourge Cathedral, France f) *Anima* and *Animus* in men and women, according to Jung. Here again a crossing of two forces evokes Plato's chiasmus (Persoons, 2022, p. 15).

VIII. CONCLUSION

Geometric bas-reliefs were once the centrepiece of a Mithraeum, providing all the expected iconographic elements for a small congregation devoted to this mystery cult. The scene represented the struggles between light and dark, good and evil, life and death, the cosmological victory of the Sun over the Moon and the astrological journey of the soul after enlightenment. The invention of the Mithraic philosophy is the solar monotheism of Indian and Persian origin, the opposition between the psychology of the Moon and the Sun. It consists in the apology of Stoicism and human will, the survival of the soul in the heavens or in the body of other beings, but also the importance of regenerating the Earth by our efforts, and above all the destiny of the souls that ascend to Heaven or descend to Earth. There is not really a Hell as with the Christians, but a metempsychosis. Many things can still be discovered by looking closely at the plates of the god Mithras.

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