Geometry of a Mithras Slab: Philosophical Consequences

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ABSTRACT

The analysis of the golden Mithras' bas-relief in the Museum of the Baths of Diocletian in Rome confirms the Platonic Chiasma. The scene admits two diagonals starting from each corner. One passes through the sun and the other through the moon. The sun god is also shown with an object in his left hand, which may be a soul or a sacred heart. This would confirm that the slab shows the opposition between metempsychosis (lunar) and resurrection (solar). The analysis of the Barberini fresco is of great interest. It shows that the Platonic Chiasma falls exactly within the celestial gates of Capricorn and Cancer. The solar line is superimposed on a line already present on the fresco. Finally, sacred geometry helps to explain some strange-looking reliefs from the Danube region.

Keywords: Metempsychosis, Mithras, Moon, Plato.

1. Introduction

The religion of Mithras had a long existence (about 2,000 years in a very active way) from Persia to Rome. It was still practised sporadically in Iran at the beginning of the 20th century. It introduced the notion of soul survival, metempsychosis and resurrection, like other Persian religions. In Europe, however, it was enriched by Platonic thought and later by Stoic ethics.

2. Western Tradition

2.1. Dualism

The Hellenisation of Persia and northern India after the conquest of Alexander the Great undoubt-
edly favoured the introduction of the cult of Mithras into Greece in the 2nd century BC (Mithridate Dynasty). This was helped by the links between Mazdaism and the Greek Gnostic “mystery” movement (Prat, 2002). The idea of the soul rising from the Archons to dominate the material world came from Avestic texts and was already known to Plato and Philo (Ménard, 1968).

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 advocated 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 “psychology,” which is between the Soul and the body. Thumos is the seat of voluntary conscious acts, and Epithumia is the seat of involuntary unconscious desires. The Noûs is the seat of the intellect, of thinking ideas (Dastur, 2006).

More radically, in the 1960s, Reynold Merckelbach viewed this cult as “pure Platonism in Persian dress”, essentially a calque on Plato’s Timaeus, complete with a psychic ascent to heaven modelled on the myth of the Phaedrus. Even more, Martin Nilsson suggested in 1950 that the Roman Mithras cult was the invention of an unknown religious genius. He was someone active in the imperial household in...
Rome and knew something about Persian religion (Gordon, 2016). This hypothesis of a purely Roman, monotheistic, and scientific religion has the advantage of being logical since it corresponds to the golden age of the Roman Empire.

In Porphyry's book “Cave of the Nymphs”, duality is seen as natural:

“Thus, too, some parts of the world are situated on the left, but others on the right hand; and night is opposed to day. On this account, also, harmony consists of and proceeds through contraries. Plato also says that there are two openings, one of which affords a passage to souls ascending to the heavens, but the other to souls descending to the earth. And according to theologists, the Sun and Moon are the gates of souls, which ascend through the Sun, and descend through the Moon.” (Porphyry, ca 234-ca 305, 1917).

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, as cited in Persoons, 2023).

2.2. Chiasma 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 (near), the inner circle is that of the Other (far), 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, χιασεν αυτόν ἐν τῷ παντί (He placed him across the universe), the verb χιασεν suggests a Chi form.

“The shape X itself that results from the affixing [of the two strips] has the highest degree of appropriateness to the universe and to the soul.” (Proclus, 2008, p. 233)

The World-Soul of Plato became the object of extraordinarily complex and far-reaching speculations in subsequent Platonic and other Greek philosophies, but it always retained its role as the boundary of the cosmos and the mediator between the cosmos and the realm beyond (Ulansay, 2003). But Plato went on to develop his research on the human soul, which also included two opposing forces in the image of the World Soul. The representation of the human soul also integrated the shape of the “X,” expressly following Plato’s cosmic theory. It is no surprise that the bas-reliefs of Mithras lend themselves very well to the drawing of an “X,” according to Timaeus, 34c:

“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, 34c)

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 the body-soul entity. These two lines meet on the couple
Fig. 1. A. Mithras plaque (in the 2016 Sotheby's catalogue). 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 chiasma is demonstrated easily. Panel 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 constitute a single entity, with a celestial part and a terrestrial ground.

Fig. 2. Panel a. Mithras plaque, Metropolitan Museum. Panel b. Bourges Cathedral; main Tympanum (1324 AD).

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 were already saved (Fig. 3a). It would seem that, like the Stoics, they see the world as a perpetual beginning (Jardin, 2021).

From this, we can conclude that the sun and moon acquired psychological content from Plato onwards. Platonic dualism is based not only on the balance of cosmic forces but also on the psychological nature of the human species, made up of men and women with opposing astral natures. The presence of the sun and moon on Mithras’ reliefs demonstrates this psychological content. The sun and moon can be found on the tympanums of Christian churches up until the 14th century AD. The two luminaries surround Jesus Christ, just as they surround Mithras.

3. Sacred Geometry

3.1. Pythagoras

Pythagoras was not only a mathematician; he was, above all, the theorist of a mystical religious doctrine based on the symbolism of numbers and esoteric science. He was the founder of a “School of Mysteries” where the principles of harmony, the migration of souls, purification through abstinence from all pleasures, strict vegetarianism and such strange prohibitions as the ban on beans were taught.

This sect, which was established in Crotone, did not confine itself to the religious sphere; it defended an aristocratic system. This displeased the inhabitants of the Ionian city, and the followers were massacred. It would explain why esotericism became secret.

“Any long square or double square must have a Pythagorean rectangle of dimensions $3 \times 4 \times 5$. In a long square of $1$ (Light) over $2$ (Sun and Moon), we reproduce a harmonic relationship. In this way, the Geometry of the Number opens the door to the intelligible, the phenomenal, which goes beyond the apparent sensible by means of proportions, vibrations, analogies and correspondences. If we are to believe the ancestral methods of creating and founding sacred buildings, the long square would be a synthetic image of the sun-earth plane, a projection table of Heaven on Earth.” (Amberlain, 1991; Rawles, 2007, p. 156)

In any case, the figure of Pythagoras (Fig. 4) with his mythical triangles, the straight, the equilateral, and the isosceles (the letter delta representing the “cosmic birth” was an inexhaustible source of
speculation, especially among the alchemists). Newton himself had an almost metaphysical admiration for the Pythagoreans, whom he saw as an important source of the “prisca sapientia”, the ancient wisdom that God is said to have originally given to mankind and which could be found in encrypted writings known as hermetics.

“Pythagoras thought that a Soul is spread and acting through all nature, and from this Soul our souls have been detached.” (Cicero, De Nat. Deorum, I)

“As for the soul, they say that it is a harmony because harmony is a choice and a combination of opposites, and the body is formed of opposites.” (Aristotle, De Anima, 4, 408)

With the sapiential diagrams, Gnostics sought to complete the design that philosophy had set itself from its origins. For if philosophy aspired to teach human beings to regulate their thoughts by means of reason, the diagrams taught them to cultivate the broadest fields of their imagination and affectivity. The instrument for this consists in the internalization of geometrical places and of figures which, placed in these places, represent spiritual powers. Through the conversion of the mind into a celestial community and encyclopaedia, the human being prepares himself for self-knowledge for the recognition of his original divine condition (Gomez de Liano, 2018).

4. The Question of the Presence of Zodiacal Signs

The presence of zodiac signs on certain reliefs of Mithras was raised as an enthusiasm in the 1990s by Beck and Alnay, then Ulansay (Ulansay, 2003). However, not all the reliefs include references to the constellations, so that it is possible to distinguish 3 types of representation of Mithras:

1. Representations of tauroctony with a Platonic X and psychological dualism,
2. Representations of tauroctony with reference to the signs of the zodiac,
3. Representations with no zodiac sign nor Platonic X.

5. Tauroctony with a Platonic X and Psychological Dualism

5.1. Platonic Mithraism

Mithraism emphasizes a god who devotes himself to all animal and plant creation, which is threatened by darkness, drought, and death. Mithras embodies the valour and active vitality that saves life, originally created to counter the powers of evil, enemies of the light. In the prologue of the Gospel of John, which was read at the end of each mass, there is this fundamental theme of the conflict between darkness and light, which could have the same heredity as the Mithraic imagery of the “Invincible Sun” (Aranjo, 1994).

The Universe was devastated by the son of Helios, Phaestos, who drove the Sun’s chariot dangerously and killed himself, which caused the cataclysm of the Universe. Mithras had to restore it (Bricault et al., 2021). Despite the victory of the Light, the evil spirit continues to endanger the cosmos by threatening it with drought and thirst. Then, a saviour God appears: Mithras. He is thus the Reason, the wisdom of the cosmos. He imposes Stoic wisdom on the world. It seems obvious that the Romans themselves understood this legend, in the second degree, as a representation of the instability of Nature and the destiny of Man. However, one can be surprised by the lack of research in the field of geometrical (tangible) representation of this religion. In Stoic philosophy, the scientific character derives from the interweaving and ordering of theories within physics, morality, and logic. These three spheres constitute a systematic totality, the Stoic philosophy. We can expect graphic representations impregnated with a sort of Stoic scientism.
5.2. Study of a Roman Bas-Relief: Santo Stefano Rotondo

The bas-relief of Mithras with the bull is preserved in the Museum of the Baths of Diocletian in Rome. Archaeological excavations were conducted from 1973 to 1975 under the early Christian Basilica of Santo Stefano Rotondo on the Caelian hill in Rome. Today, this important collection is displayed in the “Museo Nazionale Romano, Terme di Diocleziano” in Rome. The church was built in the 5th century in the area formerly occupied by a “Castra Peregrinorum”, which hosted one of the best-preserved Mithras cult places. Many pieces were discovered. The above slab was brightly coloured and, to this day, has indeed kept generous traces of the original polychromy. This category of artworks is very interested in a polychrome context and in terms of its conservation. This bas-relief is also characterized by an extensive presence of gold. In addition to the face and the cap of Mithras, as well as the cuff and some parts of the knife, traces of gold were also visible in small areas on the background and within the folds of the dress. Mithras’ garments are often red, the bull is white, and Cautopates wears clothes filled with brighter colours than Cautopates (and this could be a direct reference to their opposite meaning in the Mithraic cult) (Magrini et al., 2019).

This is a Roman representation and, therefore, the most symbolic and philosophical, as it was intended for a literate Roman public. It differs from the more primary representations found in the ancient garrisons on the borders of the Empire. The first impression is that this slab is messy and disordered. The upper left part is overloaded, Mithras does not seem to be in the middle of the picture, the Sun is in the upper left, and the lower Moon is not really in the right corner; finally, a gap in the upper right part is only filled by a drawing of a star. The Sun god carries something precious in his left hand. The two luminaries frame the god and give the meaning of the work. The religion of Mithras was thus Platonic, a belonging shared by the mystery religions, even if it contains a doctrine inspired by stoicism (rationalism), probably grafted by Roman influence.

The axis of the Sun passes exactly through the face of the Sun (golden), his left hand, the torso of Mithras (golden), the blade of the knife (golden) and the head of the dog, as usual. The Sun god steers his quadriga with his right hand and seems to hold a precious stone in his left hand (soul?). His quadriga moves forward in the cloak of Mithras. The axis of the Moon starts from the upper right corner. It intersects, a little lower, the head of the Moon (white) on its chariot, passes through the horn of the bull (white) and ends on the right foot of Mithras. A star painted above the Moon is in the luminous triangle of the Sun (supra-lunar). Mithras rides the bull and looks back. His face is golden. He wears a very elaborate and refined cape, all impregnated with gold. It floats up to the sun. The raven looks at him. Cautopates, on the far left, raises his torch and stands in front of a mass that rises towards the sky. He looks up with a dignified and serene air. At his feet is a rooster. This left side faces upwards, towards the Sun. It is colourful and full of grandiose details. Cautopates, on the far right, looks down like the Moon’s chariot descending and moving away. The bearer of the low torch seems dejected and looks towards the exit of the slab. He has lost. At his feet, an owl, a symbol of the shadow. The relief is crushed. It is not surprising that the torchbearers have a double action and influence on the soul: Jean-Baptiste Gourinat writes that the Stoics said the soul is a body because it gives life to the human body, and only a body can act on another body. They say that this body is a breath. This breath is a mixture of fire (Sun) and air (Pneuma-Moon) because they are active elements capable of giving form and life to living beings. Thus, the role of the two torchbearers was that one turned towards fire and the other towards the shadow of night (Gourinat, 2017).

The bull is exactly on the line of the Moon. Its central place leaves doubt about the nature of the original sacrifice since the victim is also of divine nature and embodies the Spirit. In the actual sacrifices, the bull was a kind of immolated god and was never considered a victim offered to a god. Thus, the primordial bull was a god, which again shows that the Taurus is of the same nature as Mithras. This reinforces the idea of a Mithras-bull entity (see Fig. 2b; Masoneria del Mundo, 2018). The star above the Moon evokes the Chaldean magi: the Gospel of Matthew quotes: “And behold, the star which they had seen at its rising went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was” (St. Matthew: Chapter 2, verses 1 to 16.) It is also known that an Armenian astrologer, Tiridates, travelled to Rome in 66 AD to tell Nero that he had seen in the stars that the Emperor was a God (Dumigron, 2023). A very old tradition circulated among the Magi of Mazda. It was predicted that a sacred Saviour was to be born in a cave and that this little child would be the visible presence of Mithras (Gasquet, 1899b).

In his study “Histoire de la Religion et de la Philosophie Zoroastriennes”, Paul du Breuil recalls that in Iran, astrological Magi gathered each year on a mountain to watch for three days for the Star of the great king. He writes:

“Indeed, the theme of shepherds recognizing or collecting a royal child is peculiar to Iranian legend, and the image of the Saviour’s birth in a cave belonged to the Parthian legends of the Saoschian-Mithra, including the myth of the virginal fertilization of the Mother. Parallel to the Apocalypse of Hystape, a
Zoroastrian prophecy about the birth of the royal Parthian ideology circulated among the Magusaeans.”
(Du Breuil, 1978, p. 127; Hultgård, 1988)

The star in the sky seems to guide the solar chart and passes over the Moon. It reinforces here the Persian legend.

5.3. Tauroctony with a Platonic X in Tor Cervara

The Great Mithras Relief from Rome, Tor Cervara, was dated between the end of the 2nd century AD and the beginning of the 3rd century AD (see Figs. 5 and 6). The relief was found in 1964 at Tor Cervara during an operation to clear the area of war remnants, and the shattering of the artefact into over fifty pieces was probably due to an explosion. The relief can be seen at the Museum of the Baths of Diocletian in Rome. In this sculpture, the Platonic chiasma is obvious. This bas-relief again shows the sun and the moon in opposition in each upper corner. The line of the moon follows the body of the bull and the leg of Mithras to the lower left corner. The line of the sun passes by the universal globe, the raven, Mithras’ knife, and his dog. A careful look reveals that the sun god carries a globe in his left hand, just behind the horse’s head. Here again, it would evoke the World Soul, which each human being dreams of reaching following the yellow line. This World Soul evokes the sacred heart of Jesus.

Mithras’ imagery provides us with information about the nature of the god. There are non-astronomical elements relating to the journey of souls (Will, 1990). The Platonic X-axes would be proof of this. It would be possible to place bees on them, in accordance with the work of Porphyry and Virgil. They symbolize the renewal of nature, perfection after death, the soul separated from the body, heavenly food and mystical thought. This notion is Pythagorean and Stoic, and the passage through death is a “purifying” act (Baudou, 2017).

Pliny reports the use of hives made of specular stone (a type of glass) in order to watch the work of the bees in the hive (Pliny XI, 4–23). Bees were born from the carcass of an ox. According to Virgil, this image evoked the earthly forces (ox) that had to die for the spirit to rise, the bees (Virgil, 29 BC). The authors extolled the virtues of bees and the vices of wasps (such as laziness and irritability). Bees were considered to be virgins, sterile and unable to reproduce, except the queen, whose sex was unknown and who was called the “king”. Greeks used virginity to designate larvae, namely νύμφη (nymph), which means both a deity of nature and a young bride, as well as for the alveolus called θάλαμος, which designates the nuptial chamber. Thus, bees were an image of virginity, chastity, and purity, like the conjugal virtues (Varron, Book III, 1–16). These virtues were also those of the priestesses in the service of the goddesses; indeed, didn’t the Greeks name the priestesses of Demeter at Eleusis by the name of μέλισσα, i.e., “bees”? The Pythia was sometimes called the Bee of Delphi. Jupiter was also linked to bees since they came to feed him when he was a child, raised by nymphs in a cave. When we talk about bees and honey in mythological terms, we generally think of the food of the gods (Virgil, 29 BC). On the Mithras’ reliefs in Tor Cervara and Santo Rotondo, Sol Invictus is shown holding a globe or round object (soul?) in his left hand. This is a classic image, even outside the cult of Mithras, like in the Catholic religion.

Fig. 5. The tauroctony bas-relief of the Museum of the Baths of Dioecletian: figure of an “X”, Sun and Moon lines according to Plato’s chiasma. The Sun holds something sacred in his left hand. Even if the Moon is lower than usual, the blue line crosses his head exactly and the whole body of the bull. The bees represent the souls (cf, Porphyry, ca 234-ca 305, 1917).
Fig. 6. Panel a. Relief dated around 250 AD from the Tor Cervara in Rome, a bomb site excavated in 1964. Here again, a Platonic geometry of the bas-relief reveals a rigorous philosophical arrangement. Panel b. The sun god carries a ball in his left hand. Panel c. Slab Santo Stefano Rotondo, idem. Panel d. Sacred heart of Jesus by the Italian artist Pompeo Batoni.

5.4. Santa Maria Capua: A Psychological Content

The Mithraeum at Capua is, in many respects, one of the most important sanctuaries of Mithras in Rome (see Fig. 7). It is decorated with fascinating and original paintings by a number of artists, many of them being unique in their kind. The most interesting, however, are the ones on a number of the front panels of the side benches, which revealed a large part of the initiation rites for the first time. Discovered at the end of September 1922 in one of the criptoportici near the Capitol of the Roman City and close to the Church of S. Erasmo in Capitolio. The siting of this speleum in the vico Caserna indicates how the god Mithras was able to penetrate into the very surroundings of the official State-cult. It seems
probable that he had already done so at the beginning of the 2nd century AD; the Mithraeum itself was not destroyed but filled up with rubbish in order to make it inaccessible. The entrance opens on a criptoportici, which served as a vestibulum and has about the same proportions as the adjacent cult-room. On either side of the central aisle, which was covered with marble, are the benches (Vermaseren, 1957).

At the bottom left, Oceanus is bearded. He was depicted as a kind-hearted old man who lived in the deep waters (https://mythologica.fr/grec/ocean.htm). Bottom right, the goddess Terra. She is the equivalent of the Greek earth goddess Gaia. She represents the ground we walk on. So, we see at the bottom, on the left, the god of the deep, and on the right, the goddess of the ground. They would symbolize Epithymia (the so-called mysterious unconscious feelings assimilated to Luna) and Thumos (the so-called solar rational and pragmatic thinking). This opposition between depth of feeling and earthly realism is again a purely Platonic dualistic division. The presence of the god Oceanus confirms the diving of the soul towards the depths, that is to say, the descent towards the bottom of the elements, which is exactly the meaning of the catabasis. The impure soul descends to earth to be reincarnated. On the right side, the goddess Terra represents the solid feelings that lead through the faithful dog and the raven messenger to the unconquered god Sol, that is, the eternal life of the soul at the table of the gods. This is in accordance with Macrobius’ precise description. However, we see here that the zodiac is not present. Nevertheless, the meaning of this religious fresco remains faithful to the god Mithras. On the contrary, the lower gods, Oceanus and Terra, represent the underworld. In modern terms, the expression “depth psychology” described by Sigmund Freud is perfectly suited (Pages, 2018).

6. Tauroctony with Zodiacal Signs

6.1. Barberini Mithraeum: The Influence of the Zodiacal Gates

The Barberini Mithraeum was discovered by chance in 1936 in a basement of the Palazzina Savorgnan di Brazzà, in the garden behind Palazzo Barberini, and is one of the best-preserved places dedicated to the god Mithras in Rome (see Figs. 8 and 9). The small underground building dates from the 3rd century, even though it is situated inside earlier structures dating from the 2nd century AD. It consists of a long rectangular room (about 11 metres × 6) covered by a barrel vault with complex fresco decoration. On the back wall, ten small squares arranged around the signs of the zodiac tell the story and the gestures of the god, accompanied by the personifications of the Sun and the Moon. In the centre, Mithras slaying the bull, whose tail seems to end in three ears. The god is dressed in a green tunica and in a red cloak, on which seven stars have been represented. Seven more stars are visible in the field behind him. The dog and the serpent with their heads near the blood of the wound; the scorpion in the usual place; the raven is perched on the vaulted arch of the grotto. On either side, the torch bearer is in red Eastern attire. Their red Phrygian caps with a green point have two hanging ribbons, like Mithras’ cap. Above this main scene, an arch in which the twelve signs of the zodiac have been represented: Aries-Taurus-Gemini-Cancer-Leo-Virgo-Libra-Scorpio-Centaurus-Capricornus-Aquarius-Pisces. In the centre, on a globe, is a standing, naked figure entwined by a serpent, which lays its head on the god’s lion’s head (Aion). Above the zodiac, a second arch with seven altars alternating with trees. A light ray from Sol passes exactly through the torch of Cautes and the sign of Capricorn—winter solstice and, more importantly, “gates of the immortals”—before reaching Mithras. Since Sol is almost invariably to the left of Mithras, to achieve this effect, the artist had to set up the zodiac counterclockwise, contrary to almost all the other known Mithraic reliefs, including the arch zodiac around the cult niche in the same Mithraeum. This confirms that the arrangement was deliberate:

“So it seems that the axis Cancer-Capricorn was in most cases intentionally aligned with Mithras. The fact that Cancer was for the Mithraists the sign of the soul entrance at birth as narrated by Porphyry appears therefore confirmed in these reliefs.” (Amendola, 2018, p. 25)

In Porphyry’s “Cave of the Nymphs”, is it written:

“Theologists therefore assert, that these two gates are Cancer and Capricorn; but Plato calls them entrances. And of these, theologists say, that Cancer is the gate through which souls descend; but Capricorn that through which they ascend. Cancer is indeed northern, and adapted to descent; but Capricorn is southern, and adapted to ascent (note 12). The northern parts, likewise, pertain to souls descending into generation... Taurus Mithras is the author of the world [Capricorn] and the master of generation [Cancer]. He is situated on the circle of the equinox. ... But Pluto in the Gorgias by tubs intends to signify souls, some of which are malefic, but others beneficent; and some which are rational, but others irrational.” (Porphyry, ca 234-ca 305, 1917)

In his article “Mithras and Zodiac”, Luca Amendola specified that Cautes was placed on the winter solstice (solar side) and Cauipates on the summer solstice (descending lunar side) (Amendola, 2018).
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Fig. 8. Barberini fresco: Luca Amendola (Amendola, 2018) mentions the line through Capricorn and the flame of Cautes to Mithras, which corresponds with the yellow line. It also passes through the dog. This line is that of the ascending days; it is a rising line (“gates of the immortals” that passes through the Capricorn to Sol Invictus god). The blue line passes through the moon, Cancer, above the bull and represents the descending days. We find here on the right a dark triangle with Cautopatès, which is that of the reincarnation, and a clear triangle on the left, with Cautès, which indicates the line of the resurrection.

Fig. 9. Panel a. Two lines go from the sun, through the Capricorn to Mithras cap (red). Panel b. the ascending yellow line passes exactly through the Capricorn gate (precisely along the existing line). Panel c. the descending Moon line passes exactly through the Cancer gate. Those two Platonic lines seem to fit perfectly into the design of this fresco.

The fact that Cancer was a sign of childhood, of genesis, was already noted by Merkelback or Beck (see the black arrow; Beck, 1979).

Amendola (2018) quotes:

“At the summer solstice the sun is in Cancer, so summer solstice = north = Cancer. So, finally, summer solstice = north = Cancer = genesis = coldness = torch down = Cautopates. And, vice versa, winter solstice = south = Capricorn = apogenesis = heat = torch up = Cautes. Also, since north is on the right of the sun seen as a charioteer heading towards sunset, i.e., west, Cautopates is on Mithras’ right and Cautes on his left.” (Amendola, 2018, p. 27)

This learned statement is confirmed by the two Platonic diagonals we have found. The blue axis (of the moon) is thus called “summer solstice” (descending days) and represents genesis or re-creation. It can, therefore, very well represent reincarnation and maintenance on Earth. The alignment with Cancer is favourable to descent. This solstice is in the North, therefore, on the side of Cautopates. The yellow axis is called “winter solstice” (ascending days) and represents the empire of the sun, the apogenesis (anabasis, see further). This solstice is in the south and passes through the alignment with Capricorn, the warmer days and the rising torch of Cautes. This axis represents the ascent of souls to heaven, i.e., resurrection. So, the two diagonals are exactly in line with Luca Amendola’s description. But thanks to the graphic analysis, we can specify that the “southern meridian”, that of the rising sun
and the ascending days, is that of the resurrection. This makes sense to this “gate of the immortals”, linked to Capricorn (see the black arrow). This is the way to resurrection. Note that the arrangement of the Zodiac has been made upside down to allow the alignment of the resurrection line (yellow) with Capricorn and the blue line (reincarnation) with Cancer. This proves that the signs of the zodiac must serve the Platonic message and not the other way around. This inversion was already quoted by Porphyry in his “Cave of the Nymphs” (Beck, 1979):

“Plato also mentions two openings: Through one we go up to heaven, through the other we go down to earth, and theologians have made the sun and the moon the doors of souls; through the door of the sun they go up, through those of the moon they go down. These are also the two barrels. One contains the evils that Jupiter gives; the other the goods.” (Le Lay, 1989, p. 21; Porphyry, ca 234-ca 305, 1917)

The sign of Cancer is designated as one of the portals of the sun in Macrobius’ Commentary on the Dream of Scipio. As the fourth-century author explains, it is at the two tropical signs – Cancer and Capricorn – that the Milky Way crosses the zodiac. Macrobius mentions natural philosophers who named them thus on account of solstices on either side of the ecliptic, which retrace the course of the sun, stopping it from further progress. He further claims, according to Homer and Pythagoras (Lemcool, 2019, p. 80):

“Souls are believed to pass through these portals when going from the sky to the earth and returning from the earth to the sky. For this reason one is called the portal of men and the other the portal of gods: Cancer is the portal of men, because through it, descent is made to the infernal regions; Capricorn is the portal of gods, because through it, souls return to their rightful abode of immortality, to be reckoned among the gods.” (Macrobius, Commentary, I, XII, 4.)

Porphyry also wrote about the entrances:

“And of these, theologists say, that Cancer is the gate through which souls descend; but Capricorn that through which they ascend. Cancer is indeed northern, and adapted to descent; but Capricorn is southern, and adapted to ascent. The northern parts, likewise, pertain to souls descending into generation. And the gates of the cavern which are turned to the north are rightly said to be pervious to the descent of men; but the southern gates are not the path of the gods, but of souls ascending to the gods. On this account, the poet does not say that they are the paths of the gods, but of immortals; this appellation being also common to our souls, which are per se, or essentially, immortal.” (Lemcool, 2019, p. 81)

At the top of the zodiacal vault, a universal globe recalls the soul of the World. It is surmounted by the god Aion (see Fig. 18d). Plato agreed with the believers in the religion of Orpheus that there was a relationship between the behaviour of men in this world and their fate after death. He postulates the immortality of the soul, pointing out that this belief is set out in ancient and sacred texts; he also attributes it to priests and priestesses who know sacred things and how to explain them. This same belief is expressed in several Orphic testimonies (Persoons, 2022).

The coincidence of Platonic ideas and Orphic doctrines on this point is significant since belief in the immortality of the soul was a rarity in the Greek world. Of course, Homer and other authors refer to souls in Hades, which means that, in a way, they do not die, but this is a ghostly existence. On the contrary, the adjective θανατοβεβηλωμένας, which is usually applied to the gods, must mean something more than the dark presence of the ψυγμα in Hades, as described by Homer. Plato cannot accept that there is a moral responsibility anterior to the person and, even less, that a mere ritual manifestation is sufficient to free the person from the inherited fault (Bernabé, 2007).

It is still debated whether the doctrine of transmigration has an Orphic or Pythagorean origin. The notion of the transmigration of the soul would, therefore, have appeared in Pythagorean circles as a logical consequence of their belief in the immortality of the soul. Such an idea was part of the Pythagoreans’ overall vision of the cosmos, in which the cosmos as a whole was seen as a universal community governed by order and harmony. In the beginning, metempsychosis would not have been considered a punishment, nor would there have been the slightest moral derivation linking the purity of the soul to its salvation. It is the soul alone that must face up to the moral consequences of its own conduct, for this is a responsibility that falls to it alone throughout each of its lives. The Papyrus of Derveni, an Orphic text from the fourth century BC, speaks of “terrible trials in Hades”. Plato, in turn, echoes the punishments with which the Orphic imagination threatened the uninitiated: that of freezing in the mud and that of carrying water through a sieve with a hole in it to a pierced jar.

According to Plato, once a soul has fallen, it has to wait ten thousand years before it can once again return to the divine, supra-celestial world from which it came. Throughout this period, souls are reincarnated in lives that are all the better for it. Plato would have readily accepted that the soul, subjected to a process of purification over the course of several lives, improves until it reaches the most complete form of this progress. This supposes that the life of the philospher was conceived as a last stay on earth before reaching a final deliverance. It is easy to see now why, when he speaks of the Orphic doctrine in Meno 81b, he does not quote the Orphics themselves, but another famous author, also skilled in the art of transposition (though less recognized as such), Pindar, who lived precisely
during the previous existence, or worse, if they had lived unjustly. Pindar, for his part, maintains that Persephone accepted “in the ninth year” the release of the souls from the punishment inflicted on them in expiation for the former pain caused to the goddess; it was, therefore, from this moment that they could return to the sun.

6.2. Osterburken German Relief: North Mithraism

In his paper “Cosmic Order, Nature, and Personal Well-Being in the Roman Cult of Mithras,” Richard Gordon considered the Roman cult of Mithras as a pluralistic, de-centred “mystagogic” enterprise (see Fig. 10). It even offered “salvation,” which was a philosophical novelty:

“A very basic interest in cosmic order, namely the regularity of the daily cycle of light followed by darkness, is present on virtually all Mithraic reliefs of the bull-killing scene, in the form of a representation of Helios/Sol at the top left, and of Selene/Luna at top right, thus implicitly invoking the apparent east-west movement of the two luminaries. Far less common, and indeed virtually confined to rather elaborate, and therefore expensive, pieces, are representations in an arc above the main scene.” (Gordon, 2016, p. 109)

Classical astrology includes the signs of the zodiac from left to right, from Aries to Pisces, showing the solar nature of Mithras.

The zodiac is assembled from the constellations through which the sun seems to pass on its annual journey. It is also possible to show that the bull-killing is part of a zodiacal cycle. This is intended to show the ideal cosmic setting for this sacrifice. A few of the Mithraic temples had even greater astronomical knowledge. One example is the zodiacal diagram on the ceiling of the temple on the island of Ponza (in the Bay of Naples), which contains images of the Big and Little Dipper and Draco, thus focusing attention on the north-polar region. The relief from Housestead’s Mithraeum on Hadrian’s Wall divides the zodiac into two sections: on the left, from Cancer to Aquarius, and on the right, from Leo to Capricorn, which constitutes an incomprehensible order. You have to read the zodiac in terms of solar houses (on the right) and lunar houses (on the left) and thus combine the planets and signs into a single drawing, which is really convoluted. But this complexity is understandable because Mithras was a “mystery” religion. The Neoplatonic narrative is, above all, the soul’s journey through the cosmos and the justification of human destiny (the reincarnation of the soul) through a general explanation of the cosmos that produces souls (generation) and takes them up again (resurrection). There are at least three motifs in the iconography on which such speculations could have been hung: the supply of inexhaustible nectar by Mithras (mystical thought), the migration of human souls (bees and honey), and the explanation of the metaphysical cosmos (zodiac).

![Fig. 10. In Osterburken (Karlsruhe), the Cancer gateway is the way to the sun, and the Capricorn gateway is the way to the Moon-genesis, which seems paradoxical. Cautopates and the dog are in line with the sun. The torch of Cautopates indicates the line of reincarnation-metempsychosis. The Moon is sad and moves to the right.](image-url)
This relief of Mithras is Germanic, and his mithraeum was, therefore, frequented by Roman soldiers. The zodiac is arranged in the opposite direction to the Roman fresco at Barberini. The curvature of the vault is calculated so that the two Platonic X axes pass through the Cancer and Capricorn doors. The sun is at the top left, and the moon is at the top right. This arrangement places the Cancer window opposite the sun and the Capricorn window opposite the moon. This is strange since souls would reach the resurrection by passing through Cancer, which is the door through which souls descend. It is not in accordance with the philosophical data of Porphyry and even Plato. The only explanation is that the legions did not know philosophy and, therefore, the relationship between the signs of the zodiac and the path of the souls. The only things that are true are the Platonic X shape and the place of the sun and moon. These two messages were enough to believe in Mithras.

6.3. Trier Relief: A Curious Composition with Hidden Elements

Turcan (1981) believes that Celsus and, later, Porphyry, were the proponents of a theory of the “Great Year,” which would make a period in the fulfilment of the destiny of souls coincide with the return of the “planets” to the positions they occupied when the world was created (Luciani, 1982). Perhaps present in Porphyry, the idea of solidarity between metempsychosis and the cosmic cycles in the sense we have specified above is completely lacking in Celsus. Celsus speaks only of the periodic cataclysms that destroy the world or part of it, relating them to the cycles of the sidereal revolution. But he draws attention to the dangers of Christians misinterpreting these Greek or eastern theories of cosmology:

“For having misunderstood these doctrines, it came to them (the Christians) the idea that after cycles of long durations, and returns and conjunctions of stars take place confabulations and deluges, and that after the last flood at the time of Deucalion, the periodic return according to the alternation of the universe requires a conflagration. Hence, the erroneous opinion which makes them say: God is going to descend as an executioner armed with iron” (Cels. IV 11, 5–12) And Origen replies: “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 flood or the conflagration.” (Cels. IV 12, 13–16)

Plato’s influence in the Greco-Roman world was considerable. His almost prophetic stance is underestimated. At the 1979 conference on soteriology in the Roman Empire, Jean Pépin made the following statement:

“To return to this formula- which fascinates me somewhat- Plato was considered as a “Moses” who speaks Attis... How can we understand this formula? Plato occupies the same place in Greek culture as Moses did in Hebrew culture. Moses already spoke Greek, in the Septuagint, but a bad Greek, whereas Plato spoke a refined Greek.” (Pépin, 1982, p. 254)

This Mithraic relief from Trier cannot simply be interpreted as “Mithras makes the stars turn” (see Fig. 11). Logically, a Platonic component must be added, as the Moon and the Sun are above the scene. It is possible to draw two lines in the shape of a Chiasma. They give a completely different meaning: the sun line starts from the dog, bottom right, passes through the globe, the axis of Mithras’ right arm, and ends at the sun. The axis of the Moon starts from the Corax (raven) and passes through the torso of Mithras, his head, and the Moon. The two axes intersect at the heart of Mithras. Above Mithras, the sign of Cancer is the door to generation (metempsychosis). The ascending cycle (pale blue), therefore, begins above Mithras and continues until Boreas, the god of the icy wind. The descending cycle (pale yellow) is the cycle of the Eternals. The yellow arrow passes into Gemini, and the souls ascend to the sun. Thus, Mithras directs both the stars and the souls. On his heart, the blue and yellow lines cross, and moon. These two messages were enough to believe in Mithras.

6.4. Dual but Non-Platonic Zodiacal Bas-Relief

The large bas-relief of Hedderheim is made of a reddish sandstone (see Fig. 12). The relief is sculpted on two sides, and it is revolving because it has a pivot at the top and a socket at the bottom. It was found in 1861 and is kept in the Great Ducal Museum of Antiquities at Karlsruhe. Hedderheim’s relief is one of the finest examples of the Nordic Mithras religion. It bears this origin with the presence of the 4 winds found on Mithraic plates from England to Dacia. This relief is square with four winds opposite each other, two by two: two bearded winds and two hairless winds. Two cold winds and two hot winds. They also represent the temperaments of the inhabitants, i.e., their psychology. We remain in a world that oscillates between the fate of the stars (Cosmos) and individual psychology. Mithras acts on both.

Astrologically, the arrangement of the celestial vault is in the right direction, so the Cancer and Capricorn gates are reversed. However, the vault is misaligned because the entrance to the cold zone is through Sagittarius, which is not a sacred entrance. The explanation is obviously unknown.
Fig. 11. The Relief of Trier. This represents the summer solstice. A Platonic influence due to the two luminaries is visible. Mithras is precisely on the axis of the moon, and his gaze is in the direction of the sun. At the bottom, the dog is in line with the sun, and the raven is in line with the moon (white arrows). There is 1/2 zodiac around cancer, the gateway to regeneration and descent to Earth. Mithras seems to be turning the stars, but he is aligned with the moon and looking at the sun. The god designates which soul ascends towards the sun and which descends towards the Earth. He is the only judge.

The four winds are Boreas, the north wind, i.e., winter, in the upper right-hand corner facing Euros; the east wind, in the lower left-hand corner; and Zephyr, the south wind, in the upper left-hand corner facing Notos, the west wind. Winter is opposite to autumn (bearded), and spring is opposite to summer (hairless). A similar arrangement reversed left/right, can be seen on the bronze of Griogetio (Szony) in Budapest. Plato already explained the character of people by the wind they faced (Kühn, 1994).

7. MITHRAS STELAE WITHOUT ZODIAC AND MORE COMPLEX THEOLOGY

7.1. The Mysterious Messenger on the Dracu Slab

The Danubian provinces represent one of the largest macro-units within the Roman Empire, with a large and rich heritage of Roman material evidence. Although the notion itself is a modern 18th-century creation, this region represents a unique area where the dominant, pre-Roman cultures (Celtic, Illyrian, Hellenistic, Thracian) were interconnected within the new administrative, economic and cultural units of Roman cities, provinces and extra-provincial networks. Csaba Szabó presented a book on the cult of Mithras in Dacia and neighbouring regions (Szabó, 2022). Remarkable bas-reliefs show a particular form of worship, especially the appearance of a “messenger” above Caute’s right shoulder in the direction of the Sun (see Fig. 14). The character seems to come out of the bull’s mouth and climb up to the sky. Although the graphic is not strictly Platonic, the axis of the sun passes through Cautes and the messenger. Who is he? He could be a child representing the soul climbing up to the sun (represented as a bee, according to Porphyry). But he also can be Saturn, who represents the entrance to Heaven and the trip to the Sky. Usually, the flame of Cautes’ torch is close to the bull’s mouth and is found in many bas-reliefs. This image can be compared to some illuminations of the Middle Ages. For example, the images from the manuscript “brevi d’amor” were made in Béziers in Aquitaine, France, in the 14th century AD. This south-west region was the territory of Eleanor and managed by the English. The bas-relief shows the soul coming out of the bull, like a child from the mouth of a dying man.
Fig. 12. Hedderheim’s Tauroctony: The bust of autumn on the left bottom corner, Winter on the right upper corner, Summer on the left upper corner, and Spring on the right bottom corner. The doors of the zodiac are out of place.

The figure riding on top of the bull is the messenger or the soul itself with a child’s body (see Fig. 13). For Romanesque Christians, a child also represented the soul. For the followers of Mithras, the messenger was perhaps Saturn, the god who corresponds to the winter solstice and who is the gateway to the sun (growing days). Saturn was a pale and quite human god. He could be a conductor of souls to the sun.

Given the similarity of Christian myths and Mithraic slabs, one may ask: Were some particular mysterious myths in the life of Jesus (Gospels and Epistles) represented in Romanesque and Gothic illuminations? None can be found. But Mithras has. Therefore, the Mithraic myths probably continued to influence the Christian imagination in the Middle Ages. This would only be possible because of

Fig. 13. The Dragus (Dracu, Romania) relief is of another type. It no longer shows a cellar but a temple. The frontispiece reveals the sun in the middle and the moon on the right. It is no longer a Platonic chiasma but an isosceles triangle described by Pythagoras and much used by esoteric societies. The isosceles triangle represents the “cosmic birth”. It can be found on the Pfaffenhofen relief, too. The solar line passes through the hand of Cautès, a child, in front of the bull’s mouth and the Sun. Many pictures from the Romanesque period in Europe showed the soul of the deceased as a child coming out of his mouth.
the existence of a dual Catholic religion. One is an official and rational religion based on the Roman Canon, and another is a secret and mysterious religion practised in crypts and chapels of miraculous springs (Hubert, 1967). This obscure part of the Catholic religion has been called the religion of “miraculous springs” or the “cult of springs or apparitions”, to say popular fervour for relics or black virgins.

This popular form of Catholicism in the Middle Ages was undoubtedly very much inspired by Mithraism.

“On the contrary, it is clear why the six thousand sacred springs of Gaul, only became holy springs at a later date. The ancient gods or fairies who inhabited them remained fearful and dreaded for a long time. . . . For an example, a terrible fire ravaged the city of Paris in 586 AD. On this occasion, Bishop Gregory of Tours noted with melancholy that in the past (i.e., in the time of the pagans) the city had been consecrated, and this consecration protected it against fires and snakes. But recently, when the sewer of the bridge was cleaned, a bronze dormouse and a bronze snake were found in it, and no precaution was taken to keep them there. Since then, snakes have multiplied in the city and the city has not been spared from fires.” (Hubert, 1967, p. 573)

This mysterious religion of springs and crypts was called the religion of the “Black Virgins”. These statues have been given an oriental (Egyptian?) origin. This secret religion was considered exogenous and fought against by the Catholic hierarchy.

7.2. Mithras from Alba Julia in Romania

The relief from Alba Julia (Fig. 15) is divided into three parts by two horizontal rims. In the centre, Mithras is in the usual dress and attitude of a bull-killer. The bull wears a belt. The dog with the collar, the serpent, the scorpion, the raven and the torchbearers in Oriental dress and cross-legged. Cautes holds a burning torch in his right hand and another in his left hand. Cautopates holds the torch downwards, and he holds the bull’s tail, which ends in three corn-ears, with his left hand. Behind Cautopates are the scenes of Mithras riding the bull and of Mithras taurophorus. Behind is a lion clasping a crater. Above this scene is the representation of Mithras’ rock birth. The god holds a knife in his raised right hand. On his left is a representation of a reclining god in a beard, who is only partly dressed in a cloak. He holds a curved object (scythe) in his right hand.

The upper right figure is supposed to be Saturn asleep according to the Terullian CIMRM 1935–1936. Saturn is the point of passage for souls ascending into the heavens to reach the most distant planet. It is also said that Saturn is intoxicated by honey, without specifying whether Saturn eats souls. On the other hand, Porphyry specifies that bees are born from oxen, which means that souls leave the body (of a dead bull). Cautes is holding two torches. The right-hand one is in front of the animal’s snout and seems to be collecting the soul as it leaves. The torch held in his left hand indicates the ascent towards the moon, which is the trajectory of the souls after the death of the body. The bull’s mouth is open, releasing the soul as it separates from the body; it begins its transmutation, first towards the moon, which collects all the souls of the dead. She then judges them and either sends them back to Earth, where they find Cautopates, who directs them to the ground to be reincarnated. Or she judges them to be perfect and sends them to Mithras, who directs them to the sun.
7.3. The Relief of Sibiu in Romania

The relief of Sibiu (Fig. 16) is divided into three parts by horizontal rims. In the centre, Mithras slaying the bull, which wears a belt. The dog, snake, and scorpion. The raven perches on the god's cloak. Below the cloak, an indistinct object. Both torch-bearers are in Oriental dress and cross-legged. Cautopates possibly holds a scorpion in his left hand. Cautes, on the right, holds a burning torch upwards in front of the bull's face with both hands. The bull keeps his mouth open, tong out and looking upwards in the direction of the torch.

This slab is of the same philosophical nature (Fig. 16). Cautes is particularly concerned with the soul coming out of the bull's mouth. The scene clearly shows the torch standing in front of the bull's mouth. In this relief, the Sun is on the left, and the Moon is on the right. Here again, Cautes' torch is at the foot of Saturn (red star), asleep just above him. The bee soul is destined to travel as far as possible in
the heavens. But here is the explanation very clear. Saturn is at the foot of the moon, so Saturn is in charge of the celestial peregrination towards the moon.

On the Sibiu relief, the solar axis passes through the raven, Mithras, his knife, his dog and the Cautès foot at the bottom. The lunar axis starts with the moon, Saturn in a reclining position, the bull, Mithras’ leg and Cautopates’ foot. The scene is, therefore, very psychological and clear. The soul is born from the dead bull, in accordance with Roman and Greek custom. It leaves the Bull through its mouth, ascends towards the sky via Saturn and arrives at the Moon, which is responsible for generation. The moon then sends her back to Earth to be reincarnated. The perfect soul ascends towards heaven but then follows an ascent towards the unconquered sun to be resurrected eternally and remain in heaven with the stars (Milky Way).

The 7 burning altars above Mithras could represent the 7 nearby planets but also Plato’s sphere of fire (Persoons, 2023).

8. Consequences of the Geometrical Organization

8.1. The Torch-Bearers Do Not Only Symbolize Day and Night

Christopher Gérard writes that Cautès carries the raised torch, that he represents the ascending Sun, the hot season and the summer solstice. The rooster and the solar bust are sometimes joined to him. Cautopates carries the lowered torch; he represents the descending sun, the cold season, and the winter solstice. The owl and the lunar bust are sometimes joined to him. Between Sunrise and Sunset, between Cautès and Cautopatès, Mithras the Mediator stares at Sol Invictus, his gaze ardent and even pathetic, in the purest Hellenistic and orientalist tradition (Gerard, 1994).

We think we should demonstrate here that the bearer Cautès represents the ascent of the soul, maybe to the left hand of the Sun god, i.e., the resurrection. Cautopates expresses his spite under the fleeing Moon by descending towards the shadow. This is the desecration of the soul towards the empire of the Manes, the Umbra, the disturbing reincarnation. Day and night are thus used symbolically, but they represent the existential anguish of the Romans concerning the future of their own soul.

8.2. The Main Point of the Cult of Mithras is Not An Oriental Esotericism Nor An Initiatory Sect

The distinctive feature of the mysteries, apart from syncretism, the notion of individual salvation granted by a saviour God, universalism, is their esoteric character. The neophyte takes an oath (“sacramentum”) and undergoes initiation, preceded by fasting and purification. During his entry into the community of mystics (those who know), the “hieros logos”, the sacred story, the original, and founding myth in its two interpretations, the esoteric and the exoteric, is revealed to him. The ritual involves an “imitatio dei”, a killing of the old man with resurrection, a spiritual rebirth: the initiate is twice-born. The secret is fundamental in this context, and it has been well-kept: we do not possess any complete first-hand text on Mithraic initiation. Initiatory religion “with cyclic temporality and pantheistic sensibility” (Aranjo, 1994). According to Aranjo, the central point of Mithraism is the magical sacrifice in a cave symbolizing the cosmos, the passage of the seasons, and the passage of the spring equinox (21 March in the solar calendar).

However, a scrupulous study of this slab seems to show that the main point is the body-soul entity, according to Plato, with the Stoic mark on the body: Mithras on the bull. The god “psuchè” rides the body “soma” and symbolically puts it to death. This is the submission ataraxia, with the soul flying away from the body, as the Berlin plaque seems to show (Fig. 5a). It thus leaves the bull and starts its peregrination, either to the right or to the left. The psychic breath, according to the Stoics, is composed of air and fire and animates the body, which would otherwise be a compound of inert matter. The interaction of soul and body is a replica of the harmony of reason and will of the divine principle immanent in the world (Pneuma) (Haese, 2017).

8.3. The Stoic Side of Mithraism

The Stoics start from the fundamental intuition of Pneuma (breath, spirit). This is a corporeal and not a “materialist” vision: the Stoics distinguish between matter, which is passive and inert, and the body, which results from the effect of the active and dynamic breath on matter. J. -B. Gourinat specifies: “The Stoics extend this psychological conception to the whole of reality, of which they thus form a pneumatic and dynamic image of its totality” (Gourinat, 2017, pp. 19–20). This is exactly demonstrated in the crossing of the two oblique lines on Mithras’s knife. Thus, in Stoic philosophy, metaphysical dualism is overcome. Nature, threatened by the evil spirit, is regenerated, saved by a God mandated by cosmic forces: the blood of the bull, comparable to the Pneuma of the Stoics, to the divine life that irrigates everything, fertilizes the earth (Assale, 2009).
8.4. The Sun

On the plaque of the mithraeum of Santo Stefano Rotondo (Fig. 17a), the sun god was found holding a small round object in his left hand. This seems to have some importance. Indeed, the Sol invictus is not only the Sun mounted on his chariot. He also holds the Universe in his hand, i.e., the cosmic Order. This cosmic god was found in other religions, among Christians, as we shall show. This gives the Mithraic religion a universal dimension. Can we consider other examples of Sol Invictus wearing a sphere in his left hand? The Pompeii fresco is important to understand the Mithraic symbolism. The god Apollo seems to have descended from his chariot. He holds a globe in his left hand. His smooth, blue globe contains a Platonic chiasma (cf. Fig. 1) (Artifex in Opere, 2022). It doesn’t represent the Earth, but the cosmos with the World Soul. Apollo the Unconquered is said to carry the cosmic Order. The same figure exists on Hammath Tiberias late Synagogue (Fig. 17b). The solar god Apollo is also represented on this mosaic of the 4th century AD and holds a globe marked with two perpendicular bands. In this respect, the writings of St. Justin the Martyr, who died in the 2nd century AD, are of primary importance. The Christian Saint Justin wrote in 156 AD:

“Jesus was imprinted in the Universe in the form of an X... Plato deals with the soul of the World and explains that it was split into two strips lengthwise and that these strips were attached to each other, criss-crossed in the middle in the shape of χ [chiasma]. They were then curved to meet in the opposite direction and to form two concentric circles so that the soul of the World surrounds the sphere of the Universe... Thus, the Son of God bodily extends to the dimensions of the Universe and this extension is done in a way that evokes the crucifixion [+] and not in the form of an X as claimed by Plato. The Son of God was imprinted crossed in the universe (χιασέν αυτών ἐν τῷ παντὶ)... Plato also perceived the existence of the Spirit.” (Hurtado, 2018, p. 429; Prieur, 1998).

However, this Christian theologian Justin lived at the height of the cult of Mithras. This shows that the world Soul in the form of Chi was accepted by everyone. It seems logical to find it on the bas-reliefs of Mithra, as well as Roman frescos and Christians mosaics.

The “Vatican Ptolemy” is a Byzantine manuscript table dated in the 750s. The sun in the centre is shown with a chariot and a blue globe in his left hand. Benjamin W. Anderson states:

“The central figure on the Sun table can rightly be described as a representation of the imperial function in all its cosmic scope. Thus, the tension between the timeless cosmic law and the specificity of a given year is reflected in the whole solar table.” (Anderson, 2012, p. 111)

This shows that even in the 8th century AD, the sun was still represented as Apollo, who symbolized the cosmic law marked by the Platonic philosophy.

Fig. 17c shows Cautes, from Nuits St Georges (France) mithraeum, who appears as the guardian of a crowned globe as Apollo. In all likelihood, this is also the world Soul. He leads the individual souls to reach the heaven of the gods. The Lion-headed god with the key and globe, another Mithraic figure, also stands on a globe with Platonic Chiasma (Fig. 17d). But the Soul of the world was not reserved for mystery religions. The entire Roman Empire had adopted it. Coins from the Republic to the end of the Empire (Fig. 18) feature globes marked with the Platonic X, proving that this vision of the universe was accepted by everyone. At the end of Timaeus, Plato proclaims that the living Cosmos (which he said had the shape of an X) is a visible, discernible god.

“This world of ours has received and teems with living things, mortal and immortal. A visible living thing containing visible ones, perceptible god, image of the intelligible Living Thing... Our one heaven, indeed the only one of its kind, has come to be.” (Plato, Timaeus, 30 D).

Fig. 17. Panel a. In the Pompeii fresco, Helios-Apollo, haloed and crowned with seven rays, holds a blue globe (cosmos) marked with the Platonic chiasma. Panel b. the Hammath Tiberias: Late Synagogues. Panel c. More astonishing is this Cautes at the entrance of the mithraeum of Nuits St Georges, with a crowned globe at his feet. Panel d. Aion, Lion-headed god with key and globe, white marble relief, Rome, Villa Albani.
Fig. 18. Plato’s X on Roman coins. Panel a. Denarius of Antoninus the Pious, with Italia enthroned on a celestial sphere with intersecting lines (RIC III #98a). Panel b. Coin of Marcus Aurelius, with Providentia pointing to the celestial sphere with intersecting lines (RIC III (Pius) #446). Panel c. Coin of Macrinus, with Providentia pointing to the cosmic orb with intersecting lines (RIC IV Pt 2 #80) (Latura, 2012). Panel d. Denarius of Domitian, 88-96. Panel e. Domitia. (Wife of Domitian). Silver denarius (3.51 gm). Rome, 82-83 AD. British Museum: After the death of his child (c. 77-81), Domitian had him depicted as a young Jupiter sitting on a cosmic globe, with his hands raised towards seven stars.

Plato described a sort of life inside the cosmos, with powers and movements of the stars. But did the Ancients really affirm being fascinated by the zodiac and horoscope, as Beck and Ulansey claimed (Uulansay, 2003)? It is not sure. Plato described two movements inside the cosmos: that of the planets that circulate from east to west and that of the Milky Way and the constellations (Zodiac), which circulate from west to east. He concluded that the universe was the result of two opposing forces. The notion of “forces”, a mysterious concept, had been described by Pythagoras. Plato never talked about the celestial equator nor mathematical calculation and geometric projection. In his Contra Celsus, Origen reports the words of Celsus, the pagan author of the work against the Christians that Origen sets out to refute. In trying to show that Christians did not invent anything, Celsus compares the doctrine of souls in the Bible with Plato and with the Mithraic one:

“These things are obscurely hinted at in the accounts of the Persians, and especially in the mysteries of Mithras, which are celebrated among them. For in the latter there is a representation of the two heavenly revolutions, of the movement of the fixed stars, and of that which take place among the planets, and of the passage of the soul through these. The representation is of the following nature: there is a ladder with lofty gates, and on the top of it an eighth gate.” (Amendola, 2018, p. 26).

Consequently, according to George Latura (Latura, 2012), the Roman people probably didn’t believe in the constellations as the manifestation of the demurge itself. The religion of the twelve signs of the zodiac has probably never existed.

The Roman scientist Manilius wrote an account of “the art of astrology” in the time of Emperor Augustus. At the beginning of his esoteric work, Manilius insists on the following points (Latura, 2012): He describes two visible circles that intersect in the heavens. One is the path of the planets, and the other is the Milky Way. World Soul doesn’t mean more. Plato claimed to be a Pythagorean, and he considered that truth resulted from the balance of opposite forces, like the shrouds of ships. Hence, his political conceptions, but also his explanation of the human soul, result from the balance between Epithumia and Thumos. So, the cosmos was the result of two opposing movements, that of the nearby planets and that of the distant Milky Way, and this higher magic explained the individual magic of human souls and destinies. This is the meaning of the letter X, which is composed of two branches crossed in their centre but opposed.

9. THE DRAMA OF METEMPSYCHOSIS

9.1. Reincarnation is Anxious

Descending souls are symbolized by the Moon, Hesperus (evening god), and the bull that descends to Earth (see Fig. 19). “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 plaques, the servants Cautes and Cautopates 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 (Decharneux & Viltanioti, 2012). These texts, often obscured
Persoons

Fig. 19. Mithras’ slab from Tiny Mithraeum at Via S. Giovanni Lanza, Esquiline Hill, Rome (Source: [Photograph of Tiny Mithraeum]). In 1883, during works to clean up the Esquiline Hill district at Via S. Giovanni Lanza, behind the church of St. Martino ai Monti, the remains of some houses from late antiquity were discovered. In the 4th century, it was turned into a tiny Mithraeum. This slab particularly shows the deep sadness of the moon, i.e., the distress facing the return of the soul to earth and the difficult reincarnation in another body. It should be noted that the sun and the moon are under the celestial vault, in other words, inside the human world. This completes the demonstration of their psychological character; this could show a convergence with Christianity.

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 were engraved in the 5th century BC. 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 Derveni (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).

Carratelli (2003) insists particularly on the texts in which Mnemosyne—\(\text{Mn̲e̲m̲o̲s̲y̲n̲e̲} \)—the mother of the Muses, plays a major role: it is she, and only she, who allows the initiate to escape the cycle of rebirths and to attain the knowledge of his celestial origin. Only those who resort to philosophy (which, as the Pythagoreans teach, is placed under the patronage of Mnemosyne) or to initiation into the Mysteries escape the cycle of rebirths. (Carratelli, 2003). The catabasis and the anabasis are phases of the orphic myth. This descent into the underworld and then this ascent seems to have succeeded each other naturally. Indeed, according to Mircea Eliade: “Generation, death, and regeneration have been understood as the three moments of the same mystery [...] between these moments, one cannot settle down somewhere [...] the movement, the regeneration always continue.” (Creton, 2005, p. 27).

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, 1958).

Baudouin Decharneux provides an important analysis of the passage from reincarnation (down) to resurrection (up) during antiquity. A theory from Persia appeared in late antiquity in opposition to the doctrines supporting the thesis of reincarnation. According to it, 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 different from how 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 bas-reliefs, 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.

Radcliffe G. Edmonds III, quote in their podcast about the “seizure of the moon” in mithraic theology:

“In the Great Paris Magical Papyrus the spells that invoke the power of the moon reinforce the idea that, in the cosmology of the redactor who compiled the papyrus, the moon was a dangerous and hostile entity, who might be coerced or deceived into directing her violence at others. Such a power is distinguished...
by the redactor from the other cosmic ruler, to whom prayers are addressed in several spells in the papyrus: the sun . . . The power of genesis is a necessary part of the cosmic order and the moon serves as a helpful intermediary for those seeking contact from the material world to the realms above. In the Mithras Liturgy, by contrast, the ambivalent position of the moon as intermediary in other cosmologies is interpreted in a more negative sense, since this ruler of genesis must be absent for the apogenetic ritual to succeed.” (Edmonds, 2019, p. 325).

There is, however, one aspect of the transmigration theory: when a soul has fallen, it has to wait before it has the opportunity to return to the divine, supra-celestial world from which it came. Throughout this period, souls had to reincarnate into various lives that were all the better for having lived rightly during their previous existence. Otherwise, they were reincarnated into worse lives if they had lived unjustly. Pindar maintained that Persephone gave a delay of “nine years” before the souls were freed, which seems very generous. It was from this release that they could hope to return to the “above” sun. Pindar asserted that those who had kept their souls pure “three times in each place” during three successive lives on Earth and three more in Hades gained the privilege of accessing, by “the way of Zeus”, the Island of the Blessed. Plato shared the idea that there was a correlation between the behaviour of men here on earth and their fate after death (Cousin, 2013).

Louis Gasquet (1899a) argued that the Mithraic dogma of the catabasis and anabasis of souls can be explained by combining the information we have from Celsus, Porphyry and Macrobius. The astronomical symbols in the cave represented the vault of heaven and the twofold celestial revolution, that of the fixed stars and that of the planets; the former, abodes of light and splendour; the latter, reserved for the evolution of souls (see Fig. 20). At the two extremities of the sky are the two Tropics, Cancer and Capricorn. These are the two gates, one of the gods, the other of men, so called because from one descend souls enamoured of mortal bodies, and through the other, they ascend to their place of origin. Cancer is assigned to the Moon, the source of generation and preserver of life for all ancient theologians; Capricorn to Saturn, the most distant and remote of the planets. From Cancer to Capricorn, and from Capricorn to Cancer, the twelve signs or constellations are distributed and staggered. As for Mithras, he sits between the two equinoxes.

“But it is not suddenly and abruptly that, from its perfect “incorporability”, it comes to take on a body of perishable mud. The fall is graduated. Celsus represented it as a ladder or a staircase, with seven stopping points, whereas many doors open. These gates are those of the planets. As the soul descends from one to another, it loses its original purity and experiences successive alterations in its perfection. It swells and becomes saturated with sidereal substance; each sphere coats it with an ethereal envelope, more and more sensitive; it experiences as many deaths as it crosses worlds, until finally, from fall to fall, it reaches the one called “the world of life.” (Gasquet, 1899a, p. 542).

At the same time, each planet endows it with the faculties necessary for its earthly existence: Saturn gives it reasoning and calculation; Jupiter active energy; Mars passionate ardour; the Sun imagination and feeling; Venus desire; Mercury hermeneutics or the ability to express oneself; the Moon the ability to grow and develop, for the last of the divine qualities is the first of ours. In the anabasis, the soul follows a reverse route from planet to planet, becomes lighter, and is stripped of its bodily components until it once again becomes similar to its original spiritual condition.

Symbolically, the sacrificial bull represents the creature, the being that is matter, subject to physical and moral evil. It is the wet, earthly principle that Aristotle opposes to the fiery, celestial principle, represented by the Lion of the spiritual. The Stoics taught that the soul can only be purified and saved by the absolute and voluntary immolation of the being of flesh and sin within us. This is how the sacrifice of the bull ensures salvation; this is the immolation to which Mithras invites his followers.

Fig. 20. Schematic representation of the astronomical signs, from Gordon (2016) in the Sette Sfere mithraeum.
9.2. Resurrection as a Marvellous Alternative

Attilio Mastrocinque points out that the Roman people did not have mystery cults. Rome did not have a system of mysteries of the type of the Eleusinian mysteries. They only had secret cults, such as that of the “Bona Dea”. In Greece, on the other hand, many cities had civic mysteries, which concerned all citizens by “giving them special hopes for the life hereafter and guaranteeing the salvation of the city itself” (Mastrocinque, 2008, p. 115; Pignat, 1989). The cult of Mithras thus brought this to Roman society.

Tertullian (Christian Theologian) said that Mithras “promises a semblance of resurrection” (Casaux, 2010, p. 180). Here, unfortunately, the absence of a direct source leaves the researcher to hypothesise and speculate. From the Persians, resurrection passed to the Jews, who seem to have adopted it only with repugnance. The Pharisees and Essenes had accepted it, but the Sadducees, that is, the conservative aristocracy, rejected it. For the Mazdeans and Mithraists, as for the Chaldeans, it is said that men would become luminous and like the Sun (Gasquet, 1899b; Kuhn, 2020). 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”. The resurrection would be linked to Cautes, who points his torch towards the Sun (Turcan, 2007).

The fundamental originality of Mithraism should be its theological dualism, a rigorous dualism with ethical and demanding consequences unsuspected in the Roman world. It gives human existence a new dimension, a purpose to life and even beyond, an encouragement with a promise of hope. According to other traditions, the human soul can return to heaven, from where it descended at the time of earthly birth. Leuenberger wrote: According to Mithras, the doctrine of merit is in full operation; everything depends on man saving himself (Leuenberger, 2019). According to Porphyry:

“For this reason, the poet does not say: the path of the gods, but of the immortals, an expression which is also appropriate to souls which by themselves or by essence are immortal.” (Leuenberger, 2019, p. 28)

The soul can also enter into an eternal and luminous bliss, but under certain conditions:

“At the start of the journey to heaven, the traveller who leaves the earth must pass through a judgement before reaching a bridge shining with light (the Cinvat bridge): if he deserves heaven, he will pass over the bridge without difficulty; but if he does not deserve it, the bridge will appear thinner than a hair, and he will fall into the abyss of hell.” (St. Paul of Tarsus, Rom. 2:7–8, 14–16)

Because of the fear of reincarnation, the Mithriasts lived the hope of the resurrection as other religions, such as Orphism. 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)”. These resurrections could 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, glorifies the return of the initiate to a blissful life with the gods (see above).

9.3. This Dualism of the Soul Was a Major Question in the Roma Empire

“From the third-century-CE Platonic philosopher, Porphyry, we learn that the midsummer solstice was regarded as the point of entry for souls from heaven into this world, a process called genesis. Its opposite, apogenesis, the return of souls to heaven, occurred at the midwinter solstice. Midway between the solstices lie the equinoxes, which were regarded as the points of cosmic balance, where the lord of genesis took his seat to oversee the processes of genesis and apogenesis.” (Hannah, 2013, p. 2)

Correspondence between the Mithraic grades and celestial representations are presented in Fig. 21:

1. Corax (raven). Mercury  
2. Nymphus (bridegroom). Venus  
3. Miles (soldier). Mars  
4. Leo (lion). Jupiter  
5. Perses (Persian). Moon  
6. Heliodromus (Sun-runner) Sun  
7. Pater (father). Saturn

A semiological examination of the graphic representations found in the mithraeum at Sette Sfere suggests that an assembly of 1st-century AD Roman Mithraists was organised as follows:

1. The first grade, the raven, occupied the place of the Cancer gate, the soul's entry into genesis, its return to Earth for reincarnation. This was the hardest grade.
2. Then, the Nymphus of grade 2 was responsible for the entry of pure souls into transformation through the Capricorn gate.
3. The third grade, the Soldier, was responsible for the (re)incarnation of impure souls on Earth.
4. The fourth grade, the Lion, was responsible for the liberation of resurrected souls.
5. The fifth grade, the Persian, judged the impure souls, which was done by the Moon, and sent them back to Earth.
6. The sixth grade, not present on the columns, was the one who followed the souls towards the Sun, i.e., the representative of Mithras, the Venerable Master of the Assemblies.
7. As for the seventh grade, the Father, he occupied the first post of the southern column, that of Saturn. He was said to be a “bee-eater”, but he was also the wisest of men as he entered Capricorn in preparation for his resurrection. He was therefore the “past grand master”, the most honourable title.

The temple of Sette Sfere gives an idea of the layout of a mithraeum: the two columns of followers had a particular esoteric meaning. The column of the Moon contained the exit from genesis in Sagittarius, which was the earthly reincarnation (punishment), a bit like our hell, except that it was not definitive. But the souls entered also the Apogenesis in Capricorn and completed their purification. The column of the Sun (northern) included entrance of souls onto Earth through the door in Cancer, to undergo genesis, i.e., reincarnation (sad), their installation in all earthly beings, sometimes terrifying. It was also the exit to heaven through Gemini, and the migration to the gods.

It is remarkable to note that the genesis (Moon) side was at the entrance to the mithraeum and that the apogenesis side was on the side of Mithra and the two luminaries. In Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris, and in almost all gothic cathedrals, the west side was also occupied by the Virgin Mary, who faced the Father, Son and Spirit on the east side (see Fig. 22). This is already present in the mithraeums. The entrance through the moon signified the passage from the human to the divine sun. The motto of the Knights Templar, who financed the construction of almost every cathedral, was: “Notre-Dame was the beginning of our religion, and in her, and in her honor, God willing, will be the end of our religion”.

The north column of the Sette Sfere mithraeum shows Cautapates with his torch down. Figs. 10, 12, 15 and 16 show that the torchbearer is pointing the blue line into the deep underworld. Cautopates therefore refers to the souls that descend, and not just at night. Cautés is on the noon column. In Figs. 5–8, he raises his torch, indicating upward migration. He therefore designates the ascent of souls (apogenesis) and not only the rising day. Therefore, northern column was the “entry for souls from heaven into this world”. The southern column was the “the return of souls to heaven” (Hannah, 2013). In the Christian Church, the “Stations of the Cross” first appeared in Jerusalem in the 4th century A.D. when Mithraism began to decline. By the end of the 4th century, pilgrims began to celebrate Christ’s
Passion on Maundy Thursday (Easter) by walking the Via Dolorosa to Golgotha. “We walk to the city, singing hymns”, recounts Egeria in 380 A.D., a woman from Galicia, Spain, who has come to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Her account is the oldest to date. She describes the procession as it moves from church to church (McClure & Feltoe, 1919). The route varies in length and number of stages. In Byzantine times, the number of stations varied from 7 to 18. In the Catholic churches, stations of the Cross can turn clockwise, but also counter-clockwise. In this case, they start at the beginning of the left-hand bay, sometimes in the choir.

There is a resemblance to the twelve-step journey of the soul found in the mithraeums, from entry into decadence in the sign of Cancer, to resurrection in the sign of Gemini. Easter corresponds to the death of Jesus, in the sign of Aries, the first zodiacal sign, the vernal equinox. It symbolizes drive, virility, courage, energy and independence. Its element is fire. In contrast, the spring equinox is Libra. When it enters this sign, the Sun is at the midpoint of the astronomical year. It represents balance, justice and measure. Its element is air. (Kunth & Zarka, 2005).

The Orthodox also make a path with 12 Gospel passages (see Fig. 23): the ceremony is called the “Office of the 12 Gospels” at Easter (April): n° 1: The Last Supper: the last meal Jesus Christ had on Holy Thursday with his twelve apostles (Jn 13:31–18:1). n° 3: Jesus is condemned by Caiaphas, the high priest, and Peter’s denial (Mt 25:57–75). n° 6: Jesus carries his cross to Golgotha (Mk. 15, 16–32). n° 9: Christ dies on the cross (Jn. 19, 25–37). n° 12: The priests place a guard in front of Christ’s tomb (Mt. 27, 62–66).

If the end of Christ’s stay takes place at Easter, in April, it occurs at the spring equinox in the sign of Aries. The beginning of the Passion therefore takes place at station 1, the sign of Taurus. Condemnation, at station 3, corresponds to Cancer, the summer solstice. Jesus carries his cross at
station 6, the autumn equinox. He dies at station 9, the winter solstice (Capricorn). He enters the cycle of resurrection. Finally, his tomb is guarded by a guard (Ascension), ending the soul cycle in Aries, spring equinox. The Orthodox religion has the appearance of a religion of equinoxes (6 and 12). But Jesus’ condemnation and death occurred on the summer and winter solstices.

Christianity also turns out to be a religion of the Zodiac, of the 2 solstices and 2 equinoxes. The two most important stations, the condemnation and death of Jesus, occur at stations 3 and 9, Cancer and Capricorn, which represent the entry into the cycle of death (Cancer) and the entry into eternal life (Capricorn). The two equinoxes represent autumn (Jesus’ martyrdom) and the empty tomb (Jesus’ resurrected body).

10. Conclusion

Geometric relics 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 of the apology of Stoicism and human will, the survival of the soul in the heavens or in the body of other beings. But it also apologizes for 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. The resurrection of the soul, thanks to the sacrifice of the body, is part of the Mithraic myth, like other mystery religions (Orphism).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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