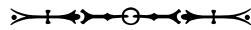


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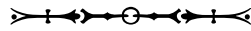
VOLUME 88 NUMBER 2 2010

THE MITHRAIC MYSTERIES

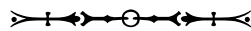
Each issue of the *Rosicrucian Digest* provides members and all interested readers with a compendium of materials regarding the ongoing flow of the Rosicrucian Timeline. The articles, historical excerpts, art, and literature included in this *Digest* span the ages, and are not only interesting in themselves, but also seek to provide a lasting reference shelf to stimulate continuing study of all of those factors which make up Rosicrucian history and thought. Therefore, we present classical background, historical development, and modern reflections on each of our subjects, using the many forms of primary sources, reflective commentaries, the arts, creative fiction, and poetry.



This magazine is dedicated to all the women and men throughout the ages who have contributed to and perpetuated the wisdom of the Rosicrucian, Western esoteric, tradition.



May we ever be worthy of the light with which we have been entrusted.



Once thought to be exclusively an imported Persian religion, the Mithraic Mysteries are now understood to be closely associated with astronomical phenomena, and well integrated into Roman society. The Mysteries appealed to the emerging desire to be united to the source of all being, and to rise above fate which—it was believed—entangled both the classical deities and humanity. The search for the meaning of the Mithraic Mysteries continues to intrigue and inspire us today.

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THE RISE AND FALL OF THE MITHRAIC MYSTERIES

V. L. Stephens, M.A.

Who was Mithras and what are the Mithraic Mysteries? Because of the Roman penchant for incorporating “foreign” ideas, Mithras was surely not a purely Roman creation. The name of Mithras most likely derives from the Indo-Iranian noun, *mitra*, that which binds, as in a covenant.¹ The term, “mysteries,” does not necessarily imply that a new religion is mysterious: It implies that its members are formally initiated. The term “mystery” derives from the Greek *mysterion*, or secret rites. There was little written about the Mithraic Mysteries. It is only through the inferences drawn from the

cave or cave-like *Mithraeum* and the generally present *Tauroctony* and other images, the initiations, and the primary participants that we can make any conclusions. In addition, while, “the modern term ‘religion’ seems to be incorrect in a Roman setting,”² to participate in a mystery religion implies a binding obligation, a duty, and honor. Duty and honor were paramount in Roman civilization although adherence to any one religion was not necessary. Mithraism itself, “...was neither static nor homogeneous... just as Christianity varied from one region of the Roman Empire to the other, so too did Mithraism.”³



The Mithraeum and Tauroctony

The celebrations of the Mithraic Mysteries were held in Mithraea (Mithraic temples) found throughout the Roman Empire at military outposts in Germany, France, Spain, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. All Mithraea share certain common characteristics. They are all in or built and decorated to represent caves, they are all longer than they are wide with stone benches on either side, and they all depict the Tauroctony, or scene of Mithras slaying the bull, at a prominent altar. Included are the figure of Mithras wearing a Phrygian hat and a cloak, the bull (often with its tail in, or depicting, ears of wheat), the dog and snake appearing to ingest the blood of the slain bull, the scorpion biting at the bull's genitals, and the Sun, Moon, and stars above or under Mithras's cloak. Often there is a raven perched on the bull's back, two torchbearers on either side representing light and dark, one with the torch up (Cautes) and one with torch down (Cautopates), and a goblet.

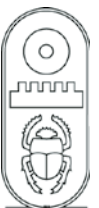
The actual origins, rites, and rituals of the Mithraic Mysteries are relatively unknown. Plutarch, in his *Life of Pompey*, tells a story that implies Mithras was an import from the Cilician pirates, who were plundering cities on the coast, around 67 BCE.⁴ The wealthy joined the pirates as professional thieves to obtain places of honor for the satisfaction of their ambitions.⁵ Porphyry, in his *On the Cave of the Nymphs*, talks of the cave (grotto) as a symbol of the cosmos with souls coming into being and then ascending into the immortal realm.⁶ The cave also served as a symbol of all unseen powers since they are dark to our eyes and the essence of the powers is, including those of the Primary Mover, invisible.

David Ulansey, in *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries*,⁷ hypothesizes that these



Frontispiece of the Rudolphine Tables by Johannes Kepler (1571–1630). Left to right are Hipparchus, Copernicus, Tycho Brahe, and Ptolemy. Photo by Steve Nicklas, NOAA Central Library.

objects represent a set of constellations, e.g., Taurus (bull), Scorpio (scorpion), Corvus (raven), Crater (goblet), Hydra (snake), Canis Major or Minor (dog), and that Mithras himself is represented by the constellation Perseus. The interpretations of what these symbols represent and why these constellations are used, and not the zodiacal constellations, have been a subject of debate. The answer lies in the different view between the ecliptic (the zodiac) and the celestial equator. Plato described these two celestial circles as forming a cross. He also believed that the Creator endowed these two circles with uniform, permanent, and unchangeable motion,⁸ a philosophical and scientific concept believed throughout the ancient world until the second century BCE, when Hipparchus of Nicaea witnessed a nova in the constellation Scorpio.



Discovery of the Axial Precession

Hipparchus had already begun to notice the longitudinal shift in the star Spica in the Virgo constellation by comparing his observations with those of Timocharis of Alexandria (third century BCE) and ancient Babylonian astronomical observations.⁹ He concluded that the heavens were moving westward along the ecliptic at the rate of approximately one degree (or less) each century. He decided to prepare a new star chart measuring the position of each star according to latitude, i.e. the distance north or south of the celestial equator, and longitude, the angular distance east or west of a particular point. This action created the first star chart with gridlines still in use today. As Hipparchus prepared his star chart, he began to notice, utilizing the older observations with his own, a pivoting east/west change in the position of the north celestial pole star, an observation that takes decades to ascertain. This precession of the vernal equinox is now known as the axial precession. He calculated that a complete cycle occurred approximately every 26,700 years. Today this complete cycle is referred to as the Great Year of approximately 25,800 years,

taking approximately 2,150 years for the precession through each of the twelve thirty-degree signs of the tropical (seasonal) zodiac.¹⁰ Plato's idea of the uniform, permanent, and unchangeable universal cross of the Creator had changed.

Today we refer to this axial precession in reference to the Ages of Humanity, from the Golden Age of Leo and the birth of the Orphic Phanes, through the silver age of Cancer and the Great Mother goddess, to the present Age of Pisces (see Table 1: The Ages of Humanity from 10,500 BCE¹¹). The speed of axial precession changes over time, however, depending on Earth's rotation, and it is currently speeding up (the precessional speed is increasing which decreases the cycle period).¹² The Vernal Equinox during the four-century advent of Mithraism was in the constellation of Aries, the Ram, moving to the Age of Pisces, the Fish. During the period of the Mithraic Mysteries, the constellation Perseus stood just above Pisces, Aries, and Taurus. In astrological thought, Perseus represents the third decanate of Aries (ruled by Mars) indicating a sub-ruler Jupiter, the primary ritual god of the Romans. Perseus, or for our purposes, Mithras, is seen to be at



The Pleiades (M45, The Seven Sisters) open cluster - infrared image from NASA's Spitzer Space Telescope. Approximately 5,200 years ago, the Spring Equinox was near the bright star Aldebaran, while the Fall Equinox was near the star Antares. At that time, the Pleiades were almost on the equator. Also, the most visible stars in every constellation in the tauroctony were near the Equator. Recalling such an arrangement would have had great interest for Mithraists. Photo by John Stauffer. NASA / JPL-Caltech.

TABLE 1: THE AGES OF HUMANITY FROM 10,500 BCE¹³

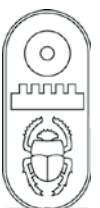
<i>Constellation of Equinox</i>	<i>Approximate Year Began</i>	<i>Approximate Year End(s)</i>	<i>Name of Age</i>	<i>Events</i>
Leo, the Lion (Sun)	10,500 BCE (Beginning of Holocene period)	8350 BCE	The Golden Age, Ruled by Cronus or the Orphic Phanes	Stabilization of planetary climate. Global warming, sea levels rise
Cancer, the Crab (Moon)	8350 BCE	6200 BCE	The Age of the Great Mother, the Silver Age, Zeus	The Mother Goddess, Neolithic revolution, domestication of animals and agriculture
Gemini, the Twins (Mercury)	6200 BCE	4050 BCE	The Age of Communication and Trade, Heroic Age	Writing developed, trade began, wheeled transportation, the pantheon of deities
Taurus, the Bull (Venus)	4050 BCE	1900 BCE	The Age of Structure and Eternity, The Bronze Age	The Pyramids, copper and tin smelted (bronze), papyrus scrolls, the Ankh, bull deity in Egypt and Crete
Aries, the Ram (Mars)	1900 BCE	250 CE	The Age of War, Iron Age	Akhnaton's monotheism, Persian Mithraism, Courage, initiative, war, and adventure. Romans as "Sons of Mars," iron swords
Pisces, the Fish (Jupiter)	250 CE	2400 CE	The Middle Ages, The Modern World	New religions, the rise of Christianity, and Islam
Aquarius, the Water-Bearer (Saturn)	2400 CE	4550 CE	The New Age	Unknown

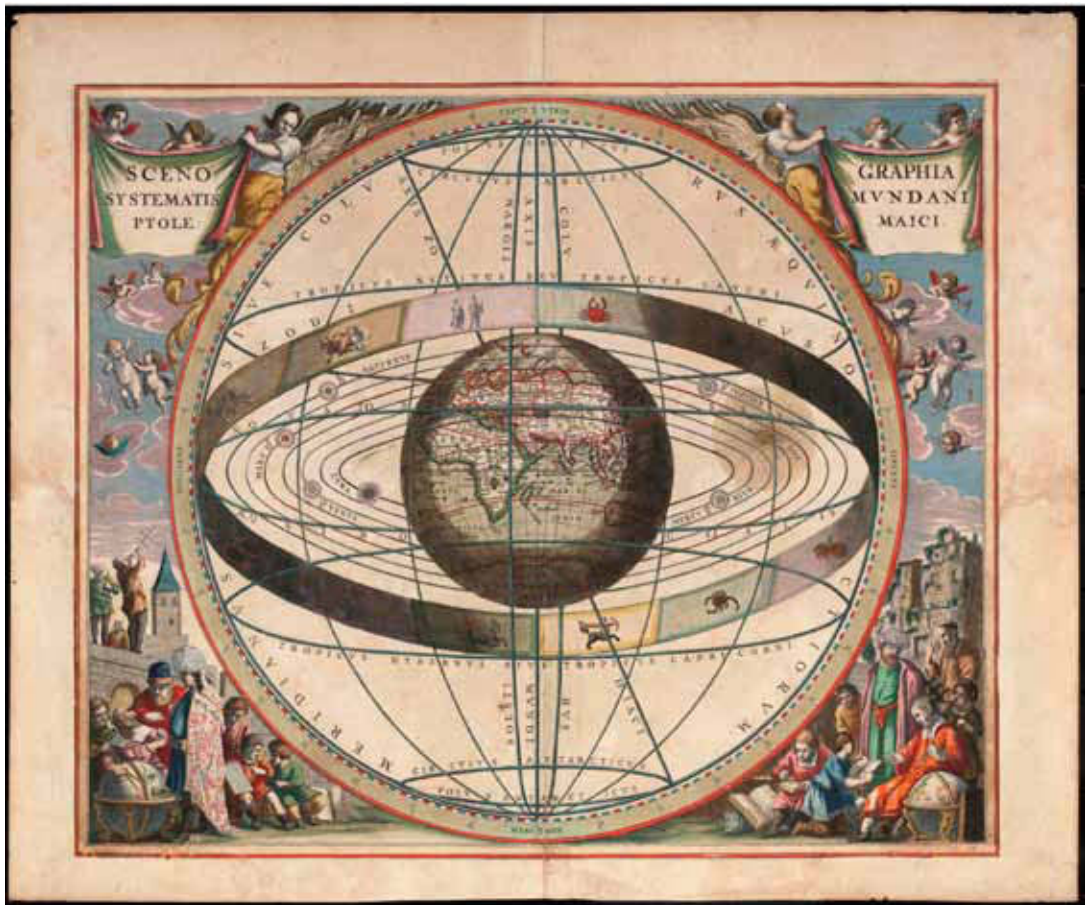
the center of the precession and, hence, became the Primary Celestial Mover.

When the Mithraic Mysteries were born, astronomy and astrological beliefs permeated Mediterranean religious thought, and astrology was becoming an art of synthesis, just as the mystery religions of Rome were becoming syncretistic. Probably because of the discovery by Hipparchus, Julius Caesar reformed the Roman calendar in 46 BCE, with consultation from Sosignes of Alexandria,

to approximate to the tropical year. Before this adjustment, an official date that was recorded as happening in January was actually falling in mid-autumn.¹⁴

Sometime near the end of the first century Claudius Ptolemy was born. Ptolemy was born a Roman citizen of Egypt and was a member of Alexandria's Greek society. He became a leading scientist publishing a variety of treatises. The most well-known down to the present day are the extensive amalgamation of





Andreas Cellarius and Johannes van Loon, *Harmonia macrocosmica*, 1660–61. Chart showing signs of the zodiac and the solar system with world at the center, following the Ptolemaic System.

astronomical knowledge, the *Almagest*, the *Geography*, and the astrological synthesis of the *Quadripartitum*, or *Tetrabiblos*.

Astrology and astronomy had wide influence in the Greco-Roman period. The stars and planets were the immortal deities, as they had been for millennia. With the discovery of the axial precession, a new god had appeared possessing a world-shaking power to move the heavens themselves. This all-powerful god, Mithras, the Sol Invictus, had control over the cosmos and therefore would automatically have power over the astrological forces determining life on Earth. Mithras's control of the Universe meant that, with the appropriate homage, he possessed the ability to guarantee the soul a safe journey through the celestial spheres after death, something on the

minds of all Roman soldiers. Discovering the precession of the equinoxes meant knowing how to ascend through the newly identified layout of the cosmos.

The Roman Military

The Marian Reform (named for Gaius Marius) in 107 BCE eventually transformed the Roman Republic into the Roman Empire.¹⁵ Marius proposed a restructuring of the organization of the soldiers in the Roman armies. The armies had consisted of landowners only, who had to bring their own horses and armaments. The theory was that landowners would be more apt to defend their own homes. Marius wanted to change the army to include state-paid, state-armed, and state-trained legions of professional soldiers from the landless, i.e.

the *capite censi*. The Marian Reform was a strategy to strengthen Rome in response to the threat from the Germanic Cimbri and Teutonic tribes.

Eventually, as the Empire settled into the *Pax Romana*, a period coinciding with the Mithraic Mysteries, the consolidation of the military took place and moderation in the expansion of the Empire became the goal. Mercenaries from other lands were hired to guard the far-flung borders. However, martial concerns had to be addressed because war with one power or another was a way of life for the Romans. This “Roman peace” was not intended to end war; it was intended to create an atmosphere of non-resistance.

Stoicism was a predominant philosophy during this period. In stoicism, self-control and the strength to endure misfortune were important human attributes, especially for the military. It has been suggested that the Mithraic initiations involved three ordeals to be endured: heat, cold, and hunger. Roman stoics sought to live in harmony with that which was out of their control, i.e. a non-resistance to the will of the universal mover. For the Roman soldier this was personified by Mithras/Perseus. Soldiers sought a respite from the worries of constant warfare. Because most Mithraea could only hold thirty to forty people, the seven-step Mithraic initiation process may have been very selective. The Mithraic mysteries sought to provide the means for the highly trained, duty-bound officers to envision the opportunities for salvation. The cave-like Mithraea were built to represent the cosmos where their salvation could be found through the theurgy of the Mithraic Mysteries.

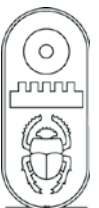
Initiation into the Mithraic Mysteries

During the fourth century CE, St. Jerome, the Roman Catholic patron saint

of translators, librarians, and encyclopedists, listed the seven grades of initiation into the Roman Mithraic Mysteries (see Table 2, Mithraic Initiation). Initiation is a form of sympathetic magic and has long been an aspect of religion with ritual objects designed to affect the environment of people through correspondences. At the end of their initiation, the initiates of Mithras would shake hands with the *Pater*, the highest-ranking member, and meals were held as a sacramental feast in honor of Mithras, the Sol Invictus, the unconquered sun.

Almost from the beginning, initiation into the mysteries seems to have been limited to males¹⁶ and was popular among the military (as suggested by the Mithraea at military sites). Mithraism promised knowledge that was hidden from outsiders. It is known that the Roman society typically was not particularly spiritual, but Romans were ritualists and formalists to the core. As in all hierarchies (from the Greek for the leaders of sacred rites), the members were above, below, or on the same level as other members. A hierarchy is a system of order, something very important in the Roman world.

The Romans celebrated the seven-day Saturnalia during the time many believe to be the birth of Mithras, near December 23. Saturnalia was introduced around 217 BCE, in the hopes of building morale after the Roman military defeat by the Carthaginians at Lake Trasimene.¹⁷ It was a time to “eat, drink, and be merry,” a breaking of their system of order, a reversal of roles between masters and slaves, and a holiday for the Roman soldiers. The ropes that bound the statue of Saturn in Rome for the rest of the year, were removed; and everyone wore the *pileus*, a conical, brimless, felt hat, also known as the liberty cap or Phrygian cap,¹⁸ the symbol of the highest level of Mithraic initiation.



It is possible that the feasts and initiations into the Mithraic mysteries occurred at different times during the year, however, perhaps they began in the mid-spring after the heliacal setting of Taurus (the slaying of the bull) when the Sun was moving to its hottest. The Tauroctony symbolized the "...final death of winter, symbolized by the bull, and the approach of summer."¹⁹ All members progressed through the first four ranks representing spiritual progress. Not everyone proceeded to the three higher ranks.

Some possible meanings of the symbols in the initiations can be gleaned from a reading of the currently available literature on the Mysteries. Those who had completed the first initiation, the Raven, were the servers at the ritual meals. The Raven symbolizes the rational rising of the spirit in service. The Nymphus of the second initiation symbolizes subservience in the ritual marriage of the initiate to Mithras. During the third initiation, the Soldier was presented with a crown balanced on a sword, which he must refuse stating that Mithras is his crown. This symbolizes that although he wishes to attain glory for himself he will

sacrifice his physical power to Mithras. The final initiation into the lesser mysteries of Mithras was that of Adept. The symbol of the Lion represented the stoic concept of the Demiurge, where the Soldier will become the "Good Leader," or Ariomanus, through trial by fire. This will allow him to help those below him in reaching salvation.

Those who advanced into the greater mysteries became Perses with the harpe dagger as its symbol. Perseus removed Medusa's head with the mythological harpe dagger, an adamantine sword, borrowed from Hermes. Every year in August, we can view the Perseid meteor showers that appear to be coming from Perseus's sword as he stands on the white road of the Milky Way. This symbolizes the rescuer reborn from the ashes. The sixth initiation brought the soldier to Heliodromus, or Sun-courier, where he stood with Mithras, the Sol Invictus as the Sun and Mithras moved in their course. The final initiation was symbolized by the curved knife and Phrygian cap and was that of the Pater, the matured, disciplined father, who could show the way to freedom and liberty from fear of the cycle of life and death.

TABLE 2: MITHRAIC INITIATION

<i>Grade of Initiation</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Symbol</i>	<i>Associated Planet</i>	<i>Associated Constellation</i>
<i>Lesser Mysteries</i>				
1	Corax	The Crow	Mercury	Corax, the Raven
2	Nymphus	Male Bride	Venus	Taurus, the Bull
3	Miles	Soldier	Mars	Aries, the Sword
4	Adept	Lion	Jupiter	Leo, the Lion
<i>Greater Mysteries</i>				
5	Perses	The Harpe Dagger	Moon	
6	Heliodromus	Sun-courier	Sun	
7	Pater	Curved knife, Phrygian Cap	Saturn	

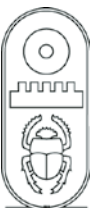


Mithraic relief with the Tauroctony scene. Monumental Cemetery, Pisa. Photo © 2010 by LoneWolf 1976 / Wikimedia Commons.

The Apparent Demise of the Mithraic Mysteries

Roman religion in general was not based on any central belief, but on a mixture of varied rituals and traditions that had been assembled over the years from a number of sources: “To the Romans, religion was less a spiritual experience than a contractual relationship between mankind and the forces which were believed to control people’s existence and well-being.”²⁰ One of the most important aspects of Roman religion was the synthesis of whatever mystery religion, god or goddess, or idea that arrived in Rome. It remains difficult to know what the Mithraic Mysteries included but the evidence suggests that they had incorporated many of the mystery religions of antiquity and personages from throughout their Empire. The Romans created a religion around the secret knowledge of a god that granted salvation from their fate as embodied in the stars and planets.

During the first four centuries CE, many changes were taking place in the Roman Empire that would mark the apparent demise of the Mithraic Mysteries. The first century experienced the ministry of Jesus and rise of the Christian religion. The second century saw the end of the Pax Romana, the building of Hadrian’s Wall in Britain and Ptolemy’s astronomical and astrological *Almagest* and *Tetrabiblos*. With the advent of the “Crisis in the third century,”²¹ the Roman Empire was beset by civil war, foreign invasion, the plague, and economic depression. Clement of Alexandria was developing a Christian Platonism and the Romanized Egyptian stoic, Plotinus, established Neo-Platonism proclaiming that Aristotle and Plato were of the same mind, the same *nous*. In the fourth century, Constantine became the first Christian Roman Emperor. The first Council of Nicaea was held in 325 CE, establishing a consensus of concepts for state establishment of the Christian Church. Theodosius I banned all pagan religions from the Empire by 395 CE,



including the Mithraic Mysteries, and Christianity became the official state religion of the Roman Empire.

In *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries*, David Ulansey states, “The Mithraic mysteries ended as a religion of soldiers, based on an ideology of power and hierarchy.”²² What then was the spiritual truth that created Mithras, the last god of the mystery religions? What made him worthy of homage? During Medieval times, Anselm of Canterbury believed that truth was rightness perceptible only to the mind, the ontological argument for the Supreme Being. According to Ralph M. Lewis, “The first principle of truth [is] personal assurance and confidence...”²³ The primordial tradition that brought the concept of space and time, the mysteries of the cycle of life and death, including the traditions brought forward in the now darkened Mithraic Mysteries, remains alive in our religions, philosophies, mysticism, and in our sciences.



Emperor Constantine and the Council of Nicaea burning Arian books. Drawing on vellum, ca. 825 in the Capitolare Library, Vercelli, a compendium of canon law produced in northern Italy.

ENDNOTES

¹ Hans-Peter Schmidt, “Mithra i: Mithra in Old Indian and Mithra in Old Iranian,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (New York: Columbia University, 2006). Available at <http://www.iranica.com/articles/mithra-i>.

² Clive Hewett, “Roman Religion: An Introduction,” (The Roman Military Research Society, 2010). Available at <http://www.romanarmy.net/relintro.htm>.

³ Pvdens. “Mithras Sol Invictus—An Initiate’s Guide,” (The Roman Military Research Society, 2008). Available at <http://www.romanarmy.net/mithras.htm>.

⁴ Plutarch, “Pompey,” *Lives* (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), vol 2, 88.

⁵ Ibid. “So that now there embarked with these pirates men of wealth and noble birth and superior abilities, as if it had been a natural occupation to gain distinction in.”

⁶ Porphyry, “On the Cave of the Nymphs” (*De antro nympharum*) in *The Ancient Mysteries: A Sourcebook of Sacred Texts*, ed. Marvin W. Meyer

(Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 210–11.

⁷ David Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries: Cosmology and Salvation in the Ancient World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

⁸ Plato, *Timaeus and Critias* (New York: Penguin Books, 1979), 49. “He then took the fabric and cut it down the middle into two strips, which he placed crosswise at their middle points to form a shape like the letter X; he then bent the ends round in a circle and fastened them to each other opposite the point at which the strips crossed, to make two circles, one inner and one outer. And he endowed them with uniform motion in the same place, and named the movement of the outer circle after the nature of the Same, of the inner after the nature of the Different.”

⁹ “Hipparchus.” *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Chicago: William Benton, 1957).

¹⁰ “Precession” in *Astronomy Encyclopedia*, ed. Sir Patrick Moore (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 218–19.

¹¹ The Holocene Period from around 10,500 BCE is the geological epic that includes the present. It is the period of civilization when the climate changes began to stabilize and became more regional.

¹² A.L. Berger, “Obliquity and precession for the last 5 million years.” *Astronomy and Astrophysics*, 51 (1976): 127.

¹³ There are approximately 2,150 years between the ages. Although the Aquarian Age is believed to have already begun, or will be beginning soon, by using the 10,500 BCE generally agreed upon

start date of the Holocene period the Aquarian Age does not begin until 2400 CE. The beginning and ending of the “Ages of Humanity” is highly controversial.

¹⁴ “Julian calendar” in *Astronomy Encyclopedia*, ed. Sir Patrick Moore (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 210.

¹⁵ Plutarch, “Caius Marius,” *Lives* (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), vol 1, 549–584.

¹⁶ David Jonathan, “The Exclusion of Women in the Mithraic Mysteries: Ancient or Modern?” *Numen* 47(2), (2000): 121–141. There is some evidence that women were not altogether or dogmatically excluded from the Mithraic Mysteries.

¹⁷ Shawn Landis, “The Roman Saturnalia,” (Suite 101.com, November 20, 2007). Available at http://roman-history.suite101.com/article.cfm/the_roman_saturnalia.

¹⁸ James Yates, “Pileus,” *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, ed. William Smith (London: John Murray, 1875).

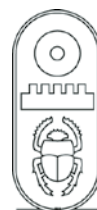
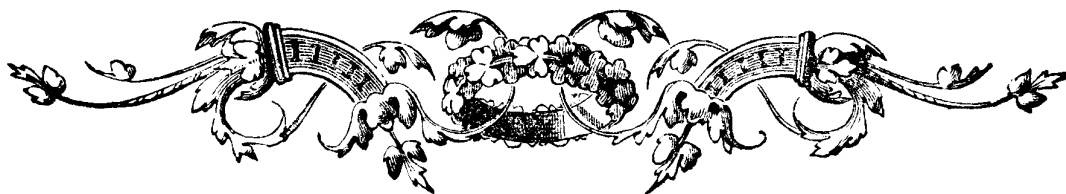
¹⁹ Ulansey, 20.

²⁰ “Roman Religion,” *Illustrated History of the Roman Empire*, <http://www.roman-empire.net/religion/religion.html>.

²¹ Kelley L. Ross, “Crisis of the Third Century,” *Rome And Romania, 27 BC–1453 AD*, <http://www.friesian.com/romania.htm#crisis-1>.

²² Ulansey, 125.

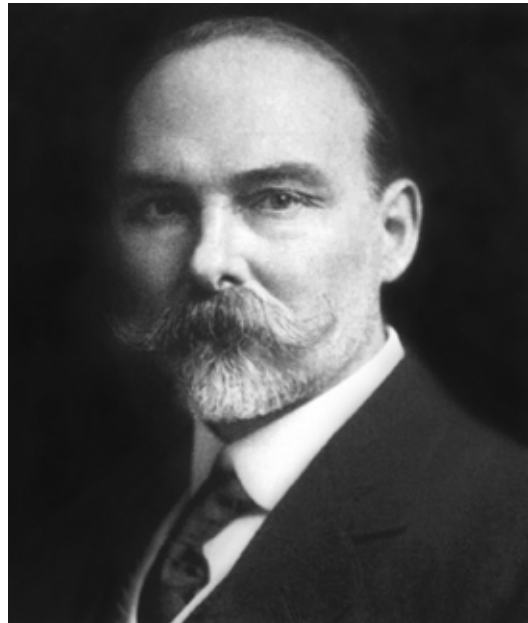
²³ Lewis, Ralph M., “Truth, What is it?”



SELECTIONS FROM A MITHRAIC RITUAL

G. R. S. Mead

One of the pioneering esoteric scholars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, G.R.S. Mead (1863–1933), brought to wider attention many ancient materials, including this Ritual which some scholars dismiss, and others cautiously believe retains some Mithraic elements. In this selection adapted for modern readers, from his booklet in the series *Echoes from the Gnosis*, Mead first discusses the provenance and some of the characteristics of the Ritual. Following are a few passages from the Ritual itself.



G.R.S. Mead (1863–1933). Photo by Elliott & Fry, 1916.

Preamble

The last little volume gave the reader a brief outline of what is known of the cult of Mithra and the spread of the Mithraic Mysteries in the Western world. We have now to deal with a Mithraic Ritual of the most instructive and intensely interesting character, which introduces us to the innermost rite of the carefully guarded secrets of the Mithraica.

This Ritual is all the more precious in that our knowledge of the Liturgies of the ancient Pagan cults of the West is of the scantiest nature. A few fragments only remain, mostly in the form of hymns.... Dieterich calls it a Liturgy; but a Liturgy is a service in which several take part, whereas it is plain that our Ritual was a secret and solemn inner rite for one person only. The credit of unearthing it

from the obscurity in which it was buried, and of conclusively demonstrating its parentage, is due to Dieterich; for though Cumont in his great work quotes several passages from the unrevised text, he does so only to reject it as a genuine Mithraic document.¹

It is dug out of the chaos of the great Paris Magic Papyrus 574 (*Supplement grec de la Bibliotheque nationale*), the date of which is fixed with every probability as the earliest years of the fourth century CE. The original text of the Ritual has, however, been plainly worked over by a school of Egyptian magicians, who inserted most of the now unintelligible words and names, and vowel-combinations and permutations, of their theurgic language, which were known in Egypt as “words of power.”

It is exceedingly probable, therefore, that we have in this Ritual of initiation certain theurgic practices of Egyptian tradition combined with the traditional Mithraic invocations done into Greek. As to the chanting of the vowels, it is of interest to learn from Demetrius, *On Interpretation*, that:

In Egypt, the priests hymn the gods by means of the seven vowels, chanting them in order; instead of the pipe and lute the musical chanting of these letters is heard. So that if you were to take away this accompaniment you would simply remove the whole melody and music of the utterance (*logos*).²

The statement of Nicomachus of Gerasa the “musician” and mystic (second century CE), is still clearer; for he not only tells us about the vowels and consonants, but also of certain other “unarticulated” sounds which were used by the theurgists... In speaking of the vowels or “sounding letters”—each of the seven spheres being said to give forth a different vowel or nature-tone—Nicomachus informs us that these root-sounds in nature are combined with certain material elements, as they are in spoken speech with the consonants; but “just as the soul with the body, and music with the lyre-strings, the one produces living creatures and the other musical modes and tunes, so do those root-sounds give birth to certain energetic and initiatory powers of divine operations....³

As we have said, the Ritual before us is not of the nature of a church or temple service; on the contrary, it contains directions for a solitary sacrament, in which the whole effort of the celebrant is to stir into activity, and bring into conscious operation, his own hidden nature or the root-substance of his being. It is a *yoga*-rite (*unio mystica*), or act for

union, in which the physical breath, the etheric currents, and the psychic auræ, or life-breaths, or *prana's*, work together with the inbreathing of the Great Breath, or Holy Spirit, or Atomic Energy.

Excerpts from *The Ritual*:

The Father's Prayer:

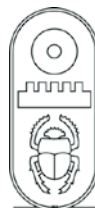
O Providence, O Fortune, bestow on me Thy Grace—imparting these the Mysteries a Father only may hand on, and that, too, to a Son alone—his Immortality—an initiate, worthy of this our Craft, with which Sun Mithras, the Great God, commanded me to be endowed by His Archangel; so that I, Eagle, as I am, by mine own self alone, may soar to Heaven, and contemplate all things.

The Invocatory Utterance

O Primal Origin of my origination; Thou Primal Substance of my substance; First Breath of breath, the breath that is in me; First Fire, God-given for the Blending of the blendings in me, First Fire of fire in me; First Water of my water, the water in me; Primal Earth-essence of the earthy essence in me; Thou Perfect Body of me—son of my N. father and N. my mother—fashioned by Honoured Arm and Incorruptible Right Hand, in World that's lightless, yet radiant with Light, in World that's soulless, yet filled full of Soul!

Utterances

Silence! Silence! Silence! The Symbol of the Living God beyond Decay. O Silence! Silence! I am a Star, whose Course is as your Course, shining anew from out the depth!



ēö · öēö · iöö · öē · ēö · ēö ·
 öēö · iöö · öēē · öēē · ööē · iē ·
 öö · öö · öē · iēö · öē · ööē · iēöē ·
 iēö · eē · iö · öē · iöē · öēö · eö ·
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 · öö · öē · eöēia · ääēä · ēēē ·
 eēē · eēē · iēö · ēö · öēö · öēö ·
 eüö · öē · eiö · öö · öē · öē · öē · ee
 · ooouiöē!

Draw nigh, O Lord!

Hail Guardians of the Pivot, ye,
 sacred sturdy Youths, who all at
 once, revolve the spinning Axis of
 Heaven's Circle, ye who let loose
 the thunder and the lightning, and
 earthquake-shocks and thunder-
 bolts upon the hosts of impious
 folk, but who bestow on me, who
 pious am and worshipper of God,
 good-health, and soundness of my
 frame in every Part, and Proper
 stretch of hearing and of sight,
 and calm, in the now Present
 good-hours of this day, O mighty
 Ruling Lords and Gods of me!

Hail Lord, Thou Master of the
 Water! Hail, Founder of the Earth!
 Hail, Prince of Breath!

O Lord, being born again, I Pass
 away in being made Great, and,
 having been made Great, I die.

Being born from out the state of
 birth-and-death that giveth birth
 to mortal lives, I now, set free,
 pass to the state transcending
 birth, as Thou hast established it,
 according as Thou hast ordained
 and made, the Mystery.⁴



ENDNOTES

¹ However, Marvin W. Meyers includes this “Mithraic Liturgy” in his 1987 Sourcebook and affirms its Mithraic aspects: “The so-called Mithras Liturgy is one of the most interesting and perplexing of texts concerning the worship of Mithras in late antiquity....[It] manifests a syncretistic piety that makes use of astrology and magic in order to provide a liturgical spell for the ecstatic ascent of the soul to god. Although we cannot agree with Albrecht Dieterich that the Mithras Liturgy preserves the highest sacrament of Mithraic initiation, the text does contain several clearly Mithraic themes.” Marvin W. Meyers, *The Ancient Mysteries: A Sourcebook* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 211–212.

² Demetrius of Phaleron, *De Elocutione* Ch 71, Ed. Ludwig Radermacher (Leipzig: Tübner, 1901), 20.

³ Nichomachus of Gerasa (ca. 60–120). In Mead’s notes, he cites this as “Nichomachus c. 6,” however the specific reference has not been found by subsequent editors.

⁴ The complete text of Mead’s Preamble, his translation of the full ritual, and his commentary may be found at <http://hermetic.com/pgm/mithraic.html>.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INDICATIONS ON THE ORIGINS OF ROMAN MITHRAISM

Lewis M. Hopfe, Ph.D.¹

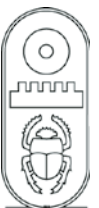
Reprinted by permission of Eisenbrauns Publishers from pp. 147–156 of *Uncovering Ancient Stones*, edited by Lewis M. Hopfe, 1994.

Between the end of the first century CE and the last part of the fourth century a mystery religion called Mithraism was extremely popular among soldiers, merchants, and civil administrators in the Roman Empire. Today more than four hundred locations of Mithraic worship have been identified in every area of the Roman Empire. Mithraea have been found as far west as England and as far east as Dura-Europas. Between the second and fourth centuries CE, Mithraism may have vied with Christianity for domination of the Roman world.²

Evidence for Mithraism comes from several sources. It is mentioned in early Christian writings.³ The Christians' view of this rival religion is extremely negative, because they regarded it as a demonic mockery of their own faith. One also learns of Mithraism from brief statements in classical Greek and Roman authors.⁴ These rare literary sources are of little help in understanding the beliefs and practices of Mithraism. Apparently, Mithraism was truly a "mystery" religion in that its devotees never committed its rituals or theology to writing. If the tenets of Mithraism ever



Tauroctony scene. Second to third century Roman marble monument. This (obverse) face of the monument depicts a tauroctony scene, Mithras slaying the bull in a cave, above which in the upper corners Sol (top left) and Luna (top right) emerge. Luna has a crescent behind her shoulders. Around Sol's head is a crown of twelve rays, plus another that darts out in the direction of Mithras. Also in the upper left is a raven. The dog, serpent, and scorpion are set at their standard positions. The tail of the bull ends in ears of wheat. Photo © 2008 by Marie-Lan Nguyen / Wikimedia Commons.



were written down, no evidence of such writings has so far come to light.

By far the greatest evidences for Mithraism are found in its many remaining places of worship. Throughout the Roman Empire Mithraists worshiped in underground rooms. The typical Mithraeum was built in a rectangular form, with benches installed along each wall. Along the back wall was the *taurectone*, the central image of the cult, which depicted Mithras slaying the sacred bull. An altar was often placed in front of the taurectone. The ceilings of the Mithraea were frequently painted blue, with stars representing the heavens. Sometimes the walls of these meeting places were decorated with frescoes that showed scenes from the story of Mithras or moments in the initiatory rites. Some Mithraea have adjoining side rooms for instruction or other rituals. A Mithraeum in Ostia has mosaic floors portraying symbols of the various grades of the Mithraic orders.⁵ In addition, Mithraea often contain plaques of dedication revealing the names of the Mithraists who worshiped at these locations and, because they are dated, the periods during which the shrine was in use. From these paintings, statues, mosaics, and dedication plaques it is possible to draw only an outline of the religion of Mithraism.

The Origins of Mithraism

The question of the origin of Mithraism has intrigued scholars for many years. Franz Cumont, one of the greatest students of Mithraism, theorized that the roots of the Roman mystery religion were in ancient Iran.⁶ He identified the ancient Aryan deity who appears in Persian literature as Mithra with the Hindu god Mitra of the Vedic hymns. Mithra/Mitra was a solar deity. With the coming of Zoroastrianism to Persia in the

sixth century BCE, Mithra was demoted to a minor rank among the angels that served the supreme Zoroastrian god Ahura Mazda. The Magi, who were Zoroastrian priests, carried the message of Mithra first to Babylon and then into Asia Minor as they established religious colonies. After the collapse of the Persian Empire in the fourth century BCE and the dominance of the Hellenistic rulers, the Magi continued to worship Mithra. In the religious and philosophical ferment of Asia Minor in the first and second centuries BCE, Mithraism began to take its distinctive shape. Cumont pointed to the use of the name Mithradates among the rulers of Asia Minor during that era and statuary showing them receiving power from Mithras as evidence for Mithraism's crystallization in this place and time. He admitted that the precise location and time of the development of Mithraism is uncertain. However, by the first century CE, Cumont believed that Mithraism had developed its distinctive theology and rituals. Cumont accepted Plutarch's statement that the pirates of Cilicia were devotees of Mithras.⁷ It was believed that these pirates acquainted the Romans with Mithraism. For many years, Cumont's theory of the origin of Mithraism was widely accepted.⁸

In 1971 at the First International Congress of Mithraic Studies, John Hinnells, the organizer of the Congress and editor of the two-volume collection of papers presented there, challenged Cumont's position on the Iranian origin of Mithraism.⁹ Hinnells attacked Cumont's interpretation of the Mithraic symbols and his identification of them with elements in Iranian religion. At the same conference, R. L. Gordon also attacked the theory of Iranian origin.¹⁰ Both scholars accused Cumont of



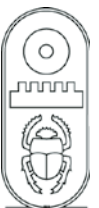
Tauroctony scene bas-relief found in Aquileia. Collection of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Photo © 2010 by CristianChirita / Wikimedia Commons.

circular thinking. According to Hinnells and Gordon, Cumont believed that Roman Mithraism developed from Iranian religion, found Iranian parallels to the symbols of Mithraism, and then used these parallels to prove the Iranian foundations for Mithraism.

Even though Hinnells and Gordon effectively destroyed Cumont's theory, neither offered an alternative hypothesis. Hinnells believed that Mithraism still had a basic Iranian origin, though his belief was not based upon Cumont's theories. Gordon frankly admitted ignorance of the true source of Mithraism and postulated that no one will ever know its origins.

Recently, another theory of the origin of Mithraism has been set forth by David Ulansey.¹¹ Ulansey theorizes that Mithraism arose in the city of Tarsus in Asia Minor.

He believes it was devised and propagated by a group of Stoic philosophers who thought they had discovered astronomical evidence to prove the existence of a new and powerful god. They identified this god with Perseus, one of the hero gods of Tarsus. Since the constellation of Perseus was directly above the constellation of Taurus the bull, the philosophers believed that Perseus dominated the bull. This new religion became popular with the Cilician pirates who had close ties to the intellectual circles of Tarsus and who were interested in astral religion. They changed the name of the hero god from Perseus to Mithra in honor of Mithridates VI Eupator, the last of the dynasty of rulers of Pontus before Roman rule. It was this group of pirate-sailors who gave Mithraism its form and spread the religion to the Roman world.



All theories of the origin of Mithraism acknowledge a connection, however vague, to the Mithra/Mitra figure of ancient Aryan religion. They all point to Persian influence in Asia Minor during the Hellenistic era and to the religious ferment of that period. All see the city of Tarsus as a starting point of Roman Mithraism. Plutarch's single statement about the Cilician pirates carries enormous weight, and as a result, all theorists accept them as the missionaries who carried the new religion to Rome.

The theories of the origin of Mithraism from Cumont to Ulansey remain only theories. Because of a dearth of literary evidence, we cannot be certain that Mithraism developed in a certain place or a certain time. However, the weight of scholarly opinion has clearly moved away from the long-held theory that Mithraism began in Persia and moved westward across Babylon, Syria, Asia Minor, and into Rome.

Archaeological evidence is the strongest source of information about Mithraism. The remains of hundreds of Mithraic worship sites, the sculpting and painting of those sites, and the dedicatory plaques reveal a religion widespread across the Roman Empire from the second through the fourth centuries CE. Current archaeological evidence may bear out the critics of Cumont's theory of the origin of Mithraism. If, as Cumont believed, Mithraism began as an Iranian cult and then moved west into Syria and on to Rome, one might expect to find well-established cult centers in Roman Syria. An examination of a map showing the locations of Mithraic centers in the Roman empire reveals that this is not so. While Mithraic materials have been found throughout the empire, the heaviest concentration is located in central Italy

and northern Germany. East and west of these centers, archaeological evidence grows thinner. In Asia Minor Mithraic sites are relatively rare. They are even scarcer in Roman Syria. At the present only three Mithraea and a scattering of Mithraic artifacts have been located in Roman Syria.

The Mithraea of Roman Syria

Within the geographical dimensions of Roman Syria only three Mithraea have been discovered and excavated. They are located at Dura-Europas on the far eastern border of Roman Syria, at Sidon on the Mediterranean coast of Phoenicia, and at Caesarea Maritima on the Mediterranean coast of Roman Palestine.¹²

Dura-Europas is located on the extreme eastern border of Roman Syria on the banks of the Euphrates River. The city was established by Seleucid rulers about 300 BCE to protect trade routes. Roman occupation of the city began in 164 CE and continued until 256, when it was conquered by the Sassanians.

During the ninety years of Roman occupation, Dura-Europas was apparently inhabited by diverse religious populations. Archaeological excavations carried on in the 1920s and 1930s revealed a Christian chapel, a Jewish synagogue and a Mithraeum. The results of these excavations were thoroughly published,¹³ and as a result, students of Syrian Mithraism know more about the Dura-Europas Mithraeum than any other site.

The Dura-Europas Mithraeum was apparently begun in the late second century CE. Its first phase was probably a small room in a private home. Unlike other Mithraea, which were built underground to simulate Mithras's actions in the sacred cave, the Dura-Europas Mithraeum was

above ground. Certain details were added to make it appear to be a cave. The furniture and arrangement of this Mithraeum are fairly typical of the period. It contained two carved reliefs of Mithras killing the sacred bull (*taurectone*), benches ran the length of the room, there were two altars, and the Mithraeum contained two dedicatory plaques naming Roman military leaders among its patrons.

In the early third century CE, the Dura-Europas Mithraeum was apparently destroyed and rebuilt. The second phase was larger and more elaborate than the first. Dedications in this phase reveal that the rebuilding was done during the reign of Septimius Severus. The revised and enlarged Mithraeum probably indicates a larger Mithraic community in this outpost city. This phase is distinguished by a series of drawings illustrating aspects of the life of Mithras and the life of the worshipping community. Some aspects of these drawings are truly unique in Mithraism.¹⁴

In the middle third century, the Dura-Europas Mithraeum was again enlarged. The altar area was raised, additional rooms were built, and new paintings were added. This may indicate further growth in the popularity of the religion in this region.

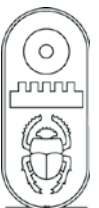
Dura-Europas was conquered by the Sassanians in 256 CE, driving the Roman army and influence from this eastern frontier of the empire. The Mithraeum was destroyed, and Mithraic worship apparently came to an end. The Sassanians, who were Zoroastrian, had no use for a Roman Mithraeum.

A second center of Mithraic worship that has been excavated in Roman Syria is found in the ancient city of Sidon. Sidon was located on the Mediterranean coast of Roman Syria approximately halfway between Tyre on the south and Berytus (modern Beirut) on the north.

A Mithraeum was excavated in Sidon in the late nineteenth century. The results of the excavation of this site were reported by the journalist E. Durighello and repeated by S. Reinach.¹⁵ Generally, students of Mithraism are dissatisfied with these reports, feeling that they are incomplete.¹⁶ After the completion of the excavation, the site was covered and no further excavation was possible. Today all that remains of



Tauroctony Scene, second century CE. Fresco and bas-relief from the Mithraeum at Dura-Europas.





Dedicatory Stele to Mithras by Ulbius Gaianus, a civil servant of the postal service (*praefectus vehiculorum*). Second century CE. Collection of the Archaeological Museum in Milan. Photo © 2008 by Giovanni Dall'Orto / Wikimedia Commons.

the Sidon Mithraeum are eleven pieces of sculpture now housed in the Louvre.

With only limited archaeological materials available it has been difficult to assign a date to the Sidon Mithraeum. Several dedicatory plaques from the building give the name of Fl. Gerontios and the year 500. If normal standards of Roman Syrian chronology are applied, the date of the building of the Mithraeum would have been approximately 188 CE. Ernest Will disputes this chronology and places the dedication in the late fourth century CE.¹⁷ The earlier date for the building of this Mithraeum would be more in keeping with the Mithraea at Dura-Europas and Caesarea Maritima.

The extant pieces of sculpture from the Sidon Mithraeum include a bas-relief of the taurectone, including the twelve signs of the zodiac; a statue of the taurectone; a statue of Mithras carrying a sacred bull;

a statue of a winged, lion-headed figure with a set of keys; four statues of the companions of Mithras, usually identified as Cautes and Cautopates; a statue of the triple-headed earth goddess, Hekate; and two statues of Venus.

The most recently discovered Mithraeum in Roman Syria was found during the excavation of Caesarea Maritima in 1973.¹⁸ Caesarea Maritima is located on the Mediterranean coast of Roman Palestine.¹⁹ The city was built on an essentially virgin location between 22 and 10 BCE by Herod the Great.²⁰ It was named for and dedicated to his sponsor, Augustus Caesar. Among the many unique features of this city was a huge artificial harbor. Since Palestine had so few natural ports on the Mediterranean coastline, Caesarea Maritima became the natural location for the disembarkation of Roman troops and administrators during the troubled first and second centuries CE.

Soon after its dedication Caesarea Maritima became the political capital of Palestine. It remained one of the leading cities of Syria until long after its conquest by the Muslims in 640 CE.

Because of its location and massive remains, Caesarea Maritima has long been the site of archaeological activity. During the 1973 season, the joint Expedition to Caesarea uncovered an underground vaulted room in the sand dunes just off the Mediterranean coast. Although this large room lacked the massive statuary and dramatic paintings that are frequently associated with Mithraea, and although there are no known literary references to Mithraism at Caesarea Maritima, sufficient evidence was found to identify it as a site of Mithraic worship. At the present, this is the only Mithraeum known in Roman Palestine.

Excavation of the room revealed the typical participants' benches running along either side. At the east end of the vault was a small, almost square stone, which was identified as the base for an

altar. Beside the altar stone was found a collection of Roman-era lamps and a small, circular, engraved marble piece. This medallion was inscribed with the taurectone image and three small scenes from the life of Mithras. On the walls of the vault were the faint remains of frescoes that may have depicted scenes from initiatory rituals. The ceiling showed slight traces of blue paint. During its days as an active Mithraeum, the entire ceiling may have been painted to represent the sky and the stars.²¹

It is difficult to assign an exact date to the founding and life of the Caesarea Maritima Mithraeum. No dedicatory plaques have been discovered that might aid in the dating. The lamps found with the taurectone medallion are from the end of the first to the late third century CE. Other pottery and coins from the vault are also from this era. Therefore, it is speculated that this Mithraeum was developed toward the end of the first century and remained active until the late third century.²² This matches the dates assigned to the Dura-Europas and the Sidon Mithraea.

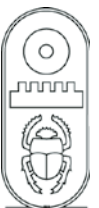


Mithras and the Bull, second century fresco from the Temple of Mithras, Marino, Italy.

Mithraic Articles from Roman Syria

In addition to the fully developed Mithraea of Dura-Europas, Sidon, and Caesarea Maritima, a few articles of Mithraic worship have been discovered in the area of Roman Syria.

A rectangular relief of the taurectone was found in northeastern Syria at Arsha-wa-Qibar in 1932.²³ Though the engraving of the relief is not clear, most of the elements of the taurectone can be identified. These include the bull, Mithras,





Asclepius, god of medicine. Second century CE Roman copy of a Greek original of the early fourth century BCE, restored in the eighteenth century. Photo © 2006 by Marie-Lan Nguyen / Wikimedia Commons.

the snake, the dog, the raven, Sol and Luna, and Cautes and Cautopates. The relief contains no inscription, and it is impossible to assign a date or to connect it to a Mithraeum.

Sahin, located in northern Syria, has yielded a Greek inscription that seems to be a dedicatory plaque to Mithras. Some letters on this plaque are missing, and its

meaning is not absolutely clear. However, the best guess connects it to the worship of Mithras.²⁴ It appears to have been written in the early third century CE.

Two Mithraic reliefs were found in the ruins of the temple of Dusares at Secia located southwest of Sidon.²⁵ Both of these rectangular reliefs are carved from basalt and appear to be the work of the same sculptor. Both show the taurectone scene with all its figures. In the first only Cautes is present,²⁶ while in the second both Cautes and Cautopates are visible. Cumont suggested that at some point Mithras had become identified with Dusares, “the Arab Dionysus”²⁷ and speculates that the temple of Dusares contained these taurectone reliefs.

The Aleppo museum contains a relief showing the head of Mithras. The exact source of this relief is not known, but it was probably found on the Mediterranean coast between Lattakieh and Tartous. Though the relief is badly worn, it shows the head of Mithras with its typical curls, Phrygian cap, and nimbus. This head may have been carved in the first half of the second century CE.²⁸

A cippus found at Sidon bears an inscription in Greek that is a dedication to the god Asclepius by Theodotos, *hiereus* of Mithras.²⁹ The cippus may have been a gravestone. This inscription is dated 140–141 CE and is therefore the earliest reference to Mithras from Roman times in Syria.

A knife found at Niha in central Lebanon was apparently connected to Mithraism.³⁰ Its handle is elaborately carved and includes the head of a bull. It also contains the heads of a lion, a bear, a snake, a scorpion, as well as a krater, a Phrygian cap, and two busts. Because several of these items are a part of the

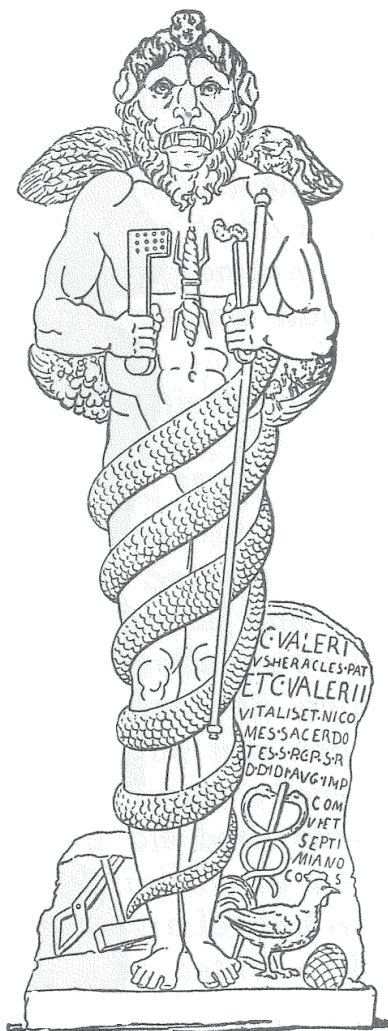
taurectone, it is believed that this knife may have been connected to Mithraism in this region. The knife bears no indication of date or place of origin.

In the late nineteenth century, the British Museum received a small bronze lion-headed figure from Beirut. The object is approximately three inches long and has a human body and wings. There is some indication that once there may have been a snake attached to the body. Even though the object was not found with other Mithraic materials, it is assumed to be an image of Kronos.³¹ Barnett speculates that the figure may have belonged to the Sidon Mithraeum.³²

Conclusion

In the brief survey presented in this paper it is clear that the number and quality of Mithraic materials uncovered in Roman Syria is extremely limited. Only three Mithraea have been excavated in the region. The Dura-Europas Mithraeum on the eastern frontier of the empire was apparently a full temple, the equal of any. It has been fully excavated and fully reported. The Sidon Mithraeum remains something of a mystery because of the incomplete reports of its excavation. The Caesarea Maritima Mithraeum was apparently poor in its furnishings and relatively small. In addition, time and the atmosphere have deteriorated many of the frescoes that might have told a more complete story at this site. Beyond these three Mithraea, there are only a handful of objects from Syria that may be identified with Mithraism.

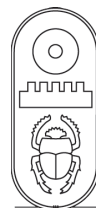
Archaeological evidence of Mithraism in Syria is therefore in marked contrast to the abundance of Mithraea and materials that have been located in the rest of the Roman Empire. Both the frequency and the quality of Mithraic materials are



Mithraic Kronos or Zervan Arkana, deity of endless time in Zoroastrian religion. Dedicated 190 CE by C. Valerius Heracles and his sons. Mithraeum of Ostia. Image in Franz Cumont, *The Mysteries of Mithra* (1902).

greater in the rest of the empire. Even on the western frontier in Britain, archaeology has produced rich Mithraic materials, such as those found at Walbrook.

If one accepts Cumont's theory that Mithraism began in Iran, moved west through Babylon to Asia Minor, and then to Rome, one would expect that the religion left its traces in those locations. Instead, archaeology indicates that Roman Mithraism had its epicenter in Rome. Wherever its ultimate place of origin may have been, the fully developed religion known as Mithraism seems to



have begun in Rome and been carried to Syria by soldiers and merchants. None of the Mithraic materials or temples in Roman Syria except the Commagene sculpture bears any date earlier than the late first or early second century.³³ While little can be proved from silence, it seems that the relative lack of archaeological evidence from Roman Syria would argue against the traditional theories for the origins of Mithraism.

ENDNOTES

¹ The publisher thanks Prof. Gary Lease, who read the proofs of Dr. Hopfe's article.

² The French historian Ernest Renan stated that if Christianity had not developed, the world would have become Mithraic. Ernest Renan, *Marc-Aurele et la fin du monde antique* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1923), 579.

³ See Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum*, 40 and Jerome, Epistle 107 *Ad Laetam*.

⁴ The Emperor Julian made brief reference to his devotion to Mithras (Helios) in *Oration 4, Hymn to King Helios Dedicated to Sallust*.

⁵ Samuel Leuchili, ed., *Mithraism in Ostia* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967).

⁶ Franz Cumont, *Textes et Monuments Figures Relatifs aux Mystères de Mithra* (Brussels: H. Lamertin, 1896–99).

⁷ Plutarch, *Life of Pompey* 24:5.

⁸ Essentially the same theory of the origin and development of Mithraism is expressed by A. D. Nock, *Conversion* (1933; reprinted Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1988), 41ff.

⁹ John Hinnells, "Reflections on the Bull-Slaying Scene," *Mithraic Studies* (ed. John Hinnells) (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975), Vol 2, 290–313.

¹⁰ R. L. Gordon, "Franz Cumont and the Doctrines of Mithraism," *Mithraic Studies* (ed. John Hinnells; Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975), vol. 1, 215–48.

¹¹ David Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries: Cosmology and Salvation in the Ancient World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

¹² For a more complete description of the Mithraea and the Mithraic materials discussed here, see L. M. Hopfe, "Mithraism in Syria," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* part 2/18/4, 2214–35.

¹³ M. I. Rostovtzeff, *Das Mithraeum von Dura* (Regensburg: Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Römische Abteilung 49, 1934), 180–207; M. I. Rostovtzeff, et al., *The Excavations at Dura-Europos: Preliminary Report of the Seventh and Eighth Seasons of Work* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939).

¹⁴ For a more complete discussion of these drawings, see Franz Cumont, "The Dura Mithraeum," *Mithraic Studies* (ed. John Hinnells) (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975), vol 1, 151–214.

¹⁵ E. Durighello, [no title], originally published in *Le Bosphore Egyptien*, August 19 1887; reprinted in *Revue Archeologique* (1888) part 1, 91–93; and subsequently reprinted with a brief critical introduction in Salomon Reinach, "Sidon," *Chroniques d'Orient 1* (Paris: Didot, 1891), 434–46.

¹⁶ M. J. Vermaseren, *Corpus Inscriptionum et Monumentorum Religionis Mithraicae* (CIMRM). 2 volumes (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1956–60) 1.73; Israel Roll, "The Mysteries of Mithras in the Roman Orient: The Problem of Origin," *Journal of Mithraic Studies* 2 (1977), note 8.

¹⁷ Ernest Will, "La date du Mithraeum de Sidon," *Syria* 27 (1950): 261–69.

¹⁸ See L. M. Hopfe and G. Lease, "The Caesarea Mithraeum: A Preliminary Announcement," *Biblical Archaeologist* 38(1) (1975): 2–10; R. Bull, "A Mithraic Medallion from Caesarea," *Israel Exploration Journal* 24 (1974): 187–90; J. A. Blakely, *The Joint Expedition to Caesarea Maritima, Excavation Reports: The Pottery and Dating of Vault 1: Horreum, Mithraeum, and Later Uses* (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen, 1987).

¹⁹ This city is known as “Caesarea Maritima” to distinguish it from the other Caesarean of Roman Syria.

²⁰ The construction and magnificent features of Caesarea Maritima are described by Josephus (see *Antiquities* 15.9.6).

²¹ For a more complete description of the furnishings of the Caesarea Maritima Mithraeum, see Hopfe and Lease, “Caesarea Mithraeum,” and Bull, “A Mithraic Medallion from Caesarea.”

²² For the most detailed development of the Caesarea Maritima Mithraeum, see Blakely, *Joint Expedition*, 150.

²³ Vermaseren, *Corpus Inscriptionum et Monumentorum Religionis Mithraicae* (CIMRM), Mon. 71, cf. Plate 5; cf. note 15 above.

²⁴ The Mithraic reading of this inscription has been challenged by R. Mouterde, *Melanges de l'Universite Saint Joseph* 31 (1954): 334.

²⁵ Ernest Will, “Nouveaux Monuments Sacres de la Syrie Romaine,” *Syria* 29 (1952): 67–93.

²⁶ Vermaseren, *Corpus Inscriptionum et Monumentorum Religionis Mithraicae* (CIMRM), Mon. 88.

²⁷ F. Cumont, “The Dura Mithraeum,” in *Mithraic Studies* (ed. John R. Hinnells) (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975), vol 1, 160.

²⁸ See Will, “Nouveaux Monuments,” 67.

²⁹ M. Dunand, “Le Temple d'Echmoun a Sidon,” *Bulletin du Musee de Beyrouth* 26 (1973): 27–44.

³⁰ H. Seyrig, “Un Couteau de Sacrifice,” *Iraq* 36 (1974): 229–30.

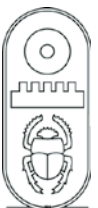
³¹ R. D. Barnett, “A Mithraic Figure from Beirut,” *Mithraic Studies* (ed. John R. Hinnells) (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975), 466–69.

³² *Ibid.*, 466.

³³ Mithras, identified with a Phrygian cap and the nimbus about his head, is depicted in colossal statuary erected by King Antiochus I of Commagene, 69–34 BCE (see Vermaseren, CIMRM 1.53–56). However, there are no other literary or archaeological evidences to indicate that the cult of Mithras as it was known among the Romans in the second to fourth centuries CE was practiced in Commagene.



Mithraism was truly a “mystery” religion in that its devotees never committed its rituals or theology to writing. If the tenets of Mithraism ever were written down, no evidence of such writings has so far come to light. By far the greatest evidences for Mithraism are found in its many remaining places of worship. Throughout the Roman Empire Mithraists worshiped in underground rooms. The typical Mithraeum was built in a rectangular form, with benches installed along each wall. Along the back wall was the *taurectone*, the central image of the cult, which depicted Mithras slaying the sacred bull.



THE PRECESSION OF THE EQUINOXES: AN INTRODUCTION

The Staff of the Rosicrucian Research Library

David Ulansey, Ph.D., and others propose that the followers of the Mithraic Mysteries worshipped a god who was powerful enough to adjust the positions of the stars, referring to the shift caused by the precession of the equinoxes. Due to the wobble of Earth, the stars that are visible from Earth move .014 degrees west to east each year, or through one constellation in approximately 2,156 years. The iconography of the Mithraic Temples consistently show Mithras—who is associated with Perseus—slaying the bull. Ulansey writes,

This image signified the god's tremendous power, which enabled him to end the Age of the Bull by moving the entire universe in such a way that the spring equinox moved out of the constellation Taurus...the other constellations lying on the celestial equator were then added to show that the god had power not only over the position of the equinoxes but over the position of the entire equator as well.¹

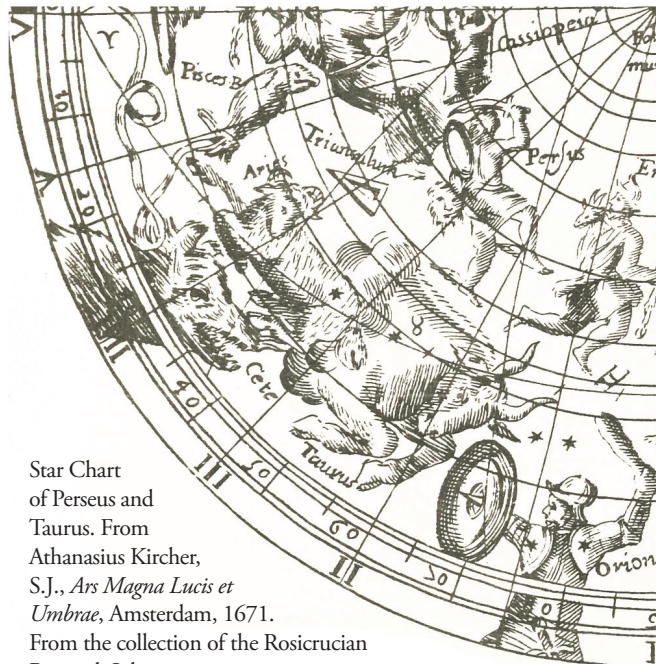
Precession of Earth's Axis

Forces associated with the rotation of Earth cause the planet to be slightly oblate, displaying a bulge at the equator. The Moon's gravity primarily, and to a lesser degree the Sun's gravity, act on Earth's oblateness to move

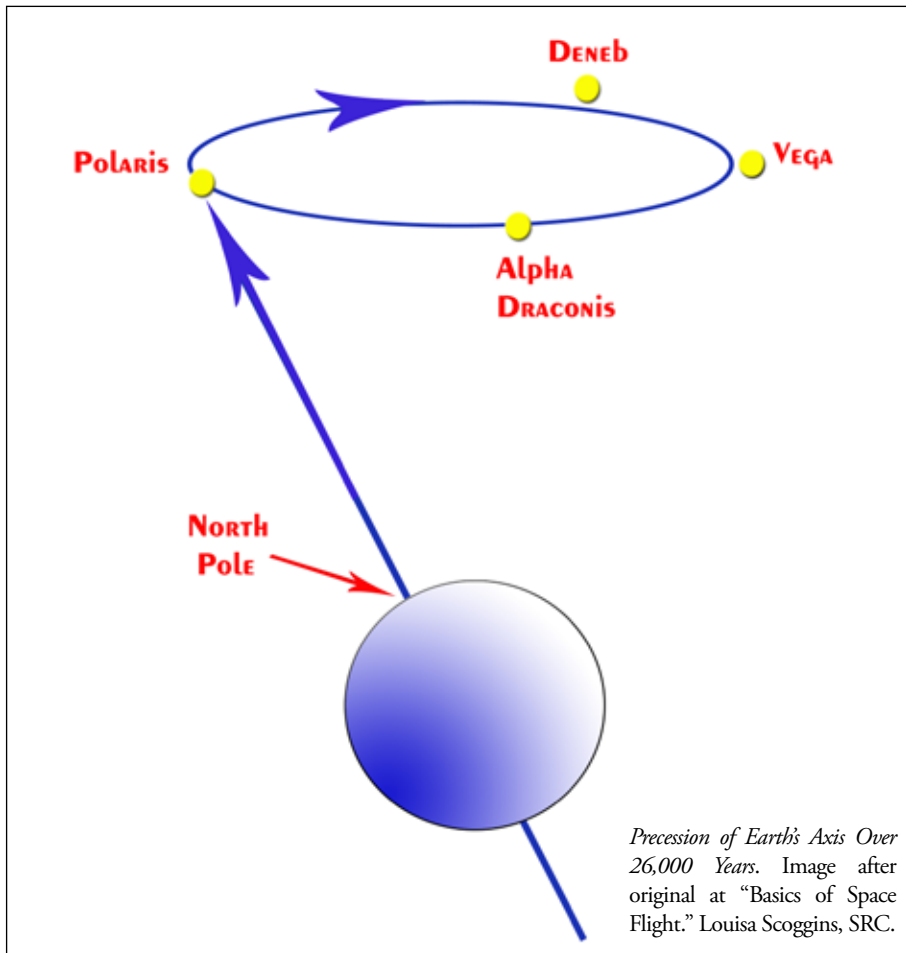
the axis perpendicular to the plane of Earth's orbit. However, due to gyroscopic action, Earth's poles do not "right themselves" to a position perpendicular to the orbital plane. Instead, they precess at 90 degrees to the force applied. This *precession* causes the axis of Earth to describe a circle having a 23.4 degree radius relative to a fixed point in space over about 26,000 years, a slow wobble reminiscent of the axis of a spinning top swinging around before it falls over.

Precession of Earth's Axis Over 26,000 Years

Because of the precession of the poles over 26,000 years, all the stars, and other celestial objects, appear to shift west to east at the rate of .014 degrees each year (360 degrees in 26,000 years). This apparent motion is the main reason for astronomers



Star Chart of Perseus and Taurus. From Athanasius Kircher, S.J., *Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae*, Amsterdam, 1671. From the collection of the Rosicrucian Research Library.



as well as spacecraft operators to refer to a common epoch such as J2000.0.

At the present time in Earth's 26,000 year precession cycle, a bright star happens to be very close, less than a degree, from the north celestial pole. This star is called Polaris, or the North Star.

Stars do have their own real motion, called *proper motion*. In our vicinity of the galaxy, only a few bright stars exhibit a large enough proper motion to measure over the course of a human lifetime, so their motion does not generally enter into spacecraft navigation. Because of their immense distance, stars can be treated as though they are references fixed in space. (Some stars at the center of our galaxy, though, display tremendous proper motion

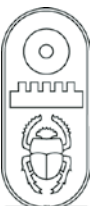
speeds as they orbit close to the massive black hole² located there.)³

ENDNOTES

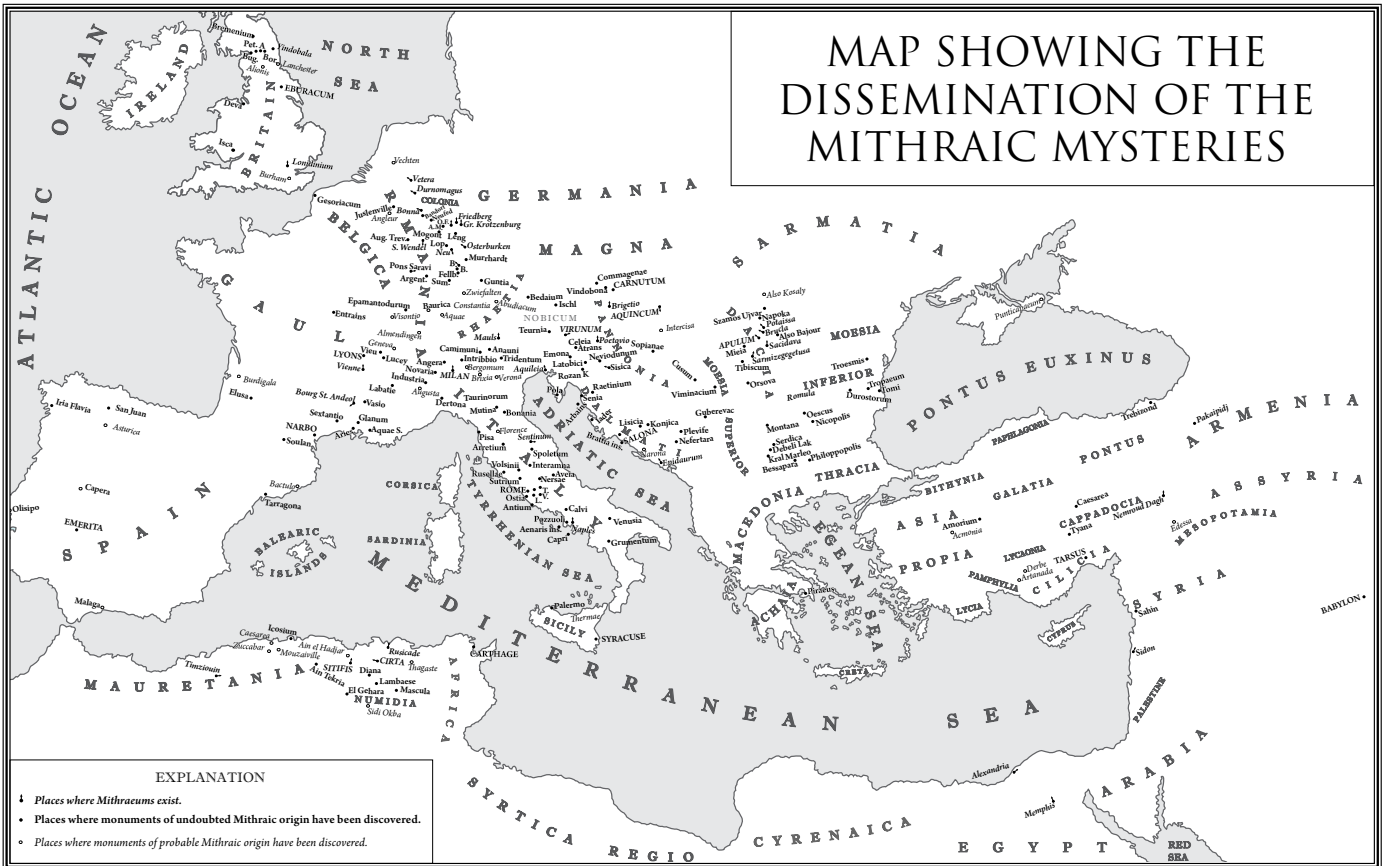
¹ David Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries: Cosmology and Salvation in the Ancient World* (New York: Oxford, 1989), 93–94.

² See Max Planck Institute for Extraterrestrial Physics, "Galactic Research Center," Max Planck Institute for Extraterrestrial Physics, <http://www.mpe.mpg.de/ir/GC/index.php>.

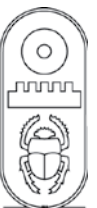
³ Text from the NASA, Jet Propulsion Laboratory, California Institute of Technology, "Basics of Space Flight," Section 1, Chapter 2, NASA, Jet Propulsion Laboratory, California Institute of Technology, <http://www2.jpl.nasa.gov/basics/bsf2-1.php>.



MAP SHOWING THE DISSEMINATION OF THE MITHRAIC MYSTERIES



Location of Mithraea from Franz Cumont, *The Mysteries of Mithra* (1902).



THE SUCCESSION OF WORLD AGES

Jane B. Sellers

From *The Death of Gods in Ancient Egypt* © 1992, 2007 by Jane Sellers

Taking up the challenge laid down in Hamlet's Mill to find archaeoastronomical origins for many of humanity's myths, Jane Sellers undertook to discover the correlations between the astronomical knowledge of the ancient Egyptians and their mythic structures. In this selection, she discusses the precession of the equinoxes, vital to the understanding of the Mithraic Mysteries. Hipparchus may have rediscovered this astronomical phenomenon, however, it is clear that the Egyptians were aware of it centuries before.

At the moment of the Spring Equinox the heavens are never in quite the same position they were in the year before, since there is a very slight annual lag of about 50 seconds, which in the course of 72 years amounts to 1 degree (50 seconds x 72 years = 3,600 seconds = 60 minutes = 1 degree) and in 2,160 years amounts to 30 degrees, which is one "sign" of the zodiac.

— Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Oriental Mythology*.

Joseph Campbell, mythologist and author of such works as *Power of Myth*, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, and the four volume series, *The Masks of God*, has explained the results of the precessional wobble on the risings of zodiacal stars in the above way and his explanation may be helpful in visualizing this slow but steady effect.¹

The division of the zodiac into 12 equal parts of 30 degrees each is believed to have

been the product of a long development, for it is not until the fourth century BC that we find the first use of signs for these segments. But certainly by 700 BC, in a Babylonian text known as *MUL.APIN* the path of the sun was divided into 4 parts with the sun spending three months in each. Since the months were usually reckoned to have 30 days, it easily followed that the monthly segments of the zodiac would be each assigned 30 "degrees."

Antiquity of the Zodiac

Many astronomers harbor a belief that the division of the sun's path into twelve equal segments far predated this text. Charles A. Whitney, Professor of Astronomy at Harvard, in *Whitney's Starfinder, 1986–89* writes, "Three thousand years ago and perhaps longer—astronomers chose the sun signs according to the corresponding zodiacal constellations, and they set Aries at the spring equinox."²



Dominique Vivant, The Zodiac from the Temple of Hathor in Dendera. Original ca. 50 BCE. From *Description de l'Égypte* (1809) engraved during the Napoleonic expedition to Egypt.

At some date then, the 360 degree circuit was divided into 30 degrees, each with a sign that corresponded roughly with a zodiacal constellation. This division was a necessity for astrology, and spread throughout the ancient world.

There is, however, one difference to be understood; the Babylonian division of the zodiac was sidereal and differed from the later Greek system in that the addresses of the signs had a fixed position with respect to the stars. In the Babylonian system the sign of Aries stayed connected with the constellation Aries.

Equinoxes and Solstices

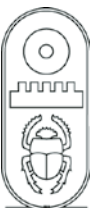
The Greeks introduced the tropical division of the zodiac, which defines the signs by means of the equinoxes and solstices. The equinox point in the spring is called the first point of Aries, and although Pisces now stands at the equinox point, the sign is still Aries. An individual born at the end of March comes into this world when Pisces rises with the sun, yet tropical astrologers are able to ignore the precessional shift and assign him a sun-sign of Aries. The difference now between the signs and constellations should be obvious.

Early astronomer-astrologers believed that every 2,160 years, because the sun rose in a new 30-degree segment of the zodiac at the vernal equinox, we would see a complete change in the world order. It is this idea that inspired the twentieth century song that proclaims, “This is the Dawning of the Age of Aquarius.” The 2,160 figure comes from taking the seventy-two year period that it takes for a 1-degree precessional lag at the horizon of a heliacal rising star and multiplying it by 30 degrees—(Indeed, although a tad off, Otto Neugebauer calls this value for the precessional change “the constant of precession”).³



Kneeling Hapi, Ptolemaic dynasty, ca. 332–30 BCE. On the Dendera Zodiac—and during the Greco-Roman period of Egypt in general—the Nile god Hapi was identified with Aquarius, the sign of the next precessional age. From the collection of the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum.

Sidereally of course, the claim of a “New Age” is a bit premature. Although now at the boundary of two signs, the sun, at the time of the vernal equinox will not cease to rise in the stars of Pisces (where it has risen since about AD 300)⁴ until approximately AD 2700. At that time it will rise in the constellation Aquarius and the sidereal “New Age” will finally be experienced.



However, at a simpler time, before sophisticated understandings of the workings of the sky, the idea of the ending of a world age seems to have been intricately tied to special numbers; numbers believed to reveal the true workings of the universe.

So again, multiply the number 2,160, the number of years assigned for the length of a World Age, by the twelve zodiacal areas that the sun appears in and you will have their Great Year of 25,920. The sun has gone a distance of 12 times the 30 degrees of one sign, equaling a complete circle of 360 degrees. (Although today, we know that 25,920 is a tad incorrect: astronomers usually round out the time to 25,800 years.)

During this complete cycle, the stars of summer at one time will be seen as the stars of winter. Another result, due to the change in the declination of stars, would be the differing terrestrial latitudes at which certain star groups could be seen. During the centuries of the rule of Pharaohs, the Southern Cross was seen in the skies of Egypt (and of any other location of that same latitude, such as southern Florida) and disappeared about AD 700.

The clockwise circle traced out on the sky by the wobble of the earth's axis has a total angle of 47 degrees and it can easily be seen that our pole star, Polaris, will not remain the pole star forever. In 13,000 years Polaris will be 47 degrees from



King Esarhaddon of Assyria and his mother Naqi'a-Zakutu in the temple of Marduk. Bronze relief commemorating the restoration of Babylon by Esarhaddon, ca. 681–669 BCE. Photo © 2006 by Marie-Lan Nguyen / Wikimedia Commons.

the celestial pole, its location now, and other stars will have taken their turns at occupying this point in space. (In 14,000 years the bright star Vega will occupy this position.) Twenty-six thousand years from now, the earth's axis will once again point to the present pole star. Polaris too, will have experienced the Eternal Return.

These are the words of the Babylonian mythic hero, Marduk:

When I stood up from my seat and let the flood break in, then the judgment of Earth and Heavens went out of joint...The gods, which trembled, the stars of heaven—their position changed, and I did not bring them back.⁵

The Importance of Precession

Speculations from those working in astronomy, and also in the relatively new field of archaeoastronomy, that many myths originated in observations of the results of the precessional movement, have fallen for the most part on deaf ears. Astronomers often complain of the frustration that comes from realizing that archeologists too often are completely unaware that the North Star is not fixed forever, as indeed, neither are the so-called “fixed” stars.

Precession affects not only the zodiacal star groups, but indeed, the whole star field. The star charts in general use at the present time are predicated on the positions in the year 1950, and in the year 2000 this too, will be superseded by a new chart. Astronomers will call this “Epoch 2000,” and use the term of epoch differently than how we use it here, where it is used interchangeably with the term “Age.” [Ed Note: The text was first written in 1992.]

Archeologists, by and large, lack an understanding of the precession, and this affects their conclusions concerning ancient myths, ancient gods, and ancient temple alignments. Philologists, too, ignore the accusation that certain problems are not going to be solved as long as they imagine that familiarity with grammar replaces the scientific knowledge of astronomy. For astronomers, precession is a well established fact; those working in the field of ancient man have a responsibility to attain an understanding of it.

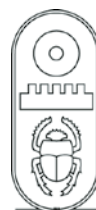
Dr. E.C. Krupp, Director of the Griffith Observatory in Los Angeles, has commented that “whether the Egyptians were fully aware of precession is one thing; that they responded to its effect is another.”⁶ Investigations along this line, however, have been directed at

establishing alignments on important stars in different epochs. As far I can determine, no one has thoroughly searched the texts and the artwork to determine its effect upon their religion. We do know that man came to believe that this great cycle could affect human life as a whole; even that this inexplicable motion determined a succession of world ages, ultimately culminating in a return to the beginning.

It must be realized that it may not have been a difficult task to predict the number of years needed for the stars to return to the same place in the heavens. Once the lag was perceived, if it could be measured, finding the total number of years in a “Great Year” would have been merely a matter of simple mathematical computation. But could the lag have been measured with any degree of accuracy?

Ancient man was not limited in his ability to observe this lag. Nor, as we will see [ed: in subsequent chapters of *The Death of Gods in Ancient Egypt*], does he seem to have been limited in his ability to predict it, and to compute the expected time of the “Eternal Return.”

Balder lay dead on his funeral pyre, which would soon be in flames. But Odin had whispered a secret word to him. “You would feel better if you could find out what the magic word was, I think.” says High to King Gylfi....“Nobody knows or ever will know for certain except two people, Odin and Balder. But your own experience must have told you that nothing disappears, nothing is ever entirely destroyed, it only changes.... According to the prophecies the earth will rise again fresh and green out of the sea and the Aesir will rise to a new Asgard and meet like old friends.”⁷





W.G. Collingwood, *Odin's Last Words to Baldr*. The god Odin whispers in the ear of the dead Baldr, lying in the boat. From *The Elder or Poetic Edda*, 1908.

ENDNOTES

¹ Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of Gods: Oriental Mythology* (New York: Penguin, 1972), 117.

² Charles A. Whitney, *Whitney's Star Finder, 1986-1989* (New York: Knopf, 1985), 35.

³ Otto Neugebauer, "The Alleged Babylonian Discovery of the Precession of the Equinoxes," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 70(1) (1985): 1-8.

⁴ The advent of Pisces in the sun on the Equinox date was seen as a portent by early Christians who

used the sign of the Fish as an acronym for Christ.

⁵ Giorgio Santillana and Hertha von Dechend, *Hamlet's Mill* (Boston: Gambit, 1969), 325.

⁶ E.C. Krupp, *In Search of Ancient Astronomies* (New York: Doubleday, 1979), 218-19. He contends that "the calendar and system of decans argue for a certain level of sophistication and observational expertise," while admitting that "comprehensive knowledge of precession seems incompatible with the descriptive non-mathematical picture of astronomy that is the natural conclusion of Neugebauer's and Parker's meticulous analysis of Egyptian astronomical texts."

⁷ Brian Branston, *Gods and Heroes from Viking Mythology* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982), 149.

THE IMAGE OF THE BULL: A TRANSCULTURAL EXPLORATION FROM PALEOLITHIC CAVES TO THE MITHRAIC MYSTERIES

Antonietta Francini M.D., SRC and Benefactor Taciturnus, FRC

It is well known that the image of the bull is prominent in the Mithraic Mysteries. However, the actual role of this image is widely misunderstood, and even inverted in the popular imagination, encouraged by decades of confused pedagogy.¹ In order to gain a wider perspective, it will be useful to survey several aspects of the image of the bull in ancient myths and spiritualities, before we return to clarify his place in the Mithraic Mysteries.

Most Ancient Evidence of Cultic activity

Human interest in bulls is of very long standing. Many Paleolithic European caves such as Lascaux contain paintings of the Aurochs, an ancestor of modern bulls and cattle, averaging 1.98 meters tall (6 ½ feet tall) and 997.90 kilograms (2,200 pounds). It is reasonable to assume that they or their life force were held to possess magical qualities. They survived into the Iron Age in Anatolia and the Near East and were venerated as sacred animals.² The earliest evidence for a bull cult is at Neolithic Çatal Höyük in modern day Turkey.

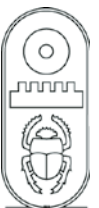
Yin and Yang

Conflict and Harmony are two fundamental aspects of the human social condition. Chinese Wisdom calls them pure yang or pure yin. Neither one can be sustained alone for long as the Natural



Laozi Riding an Ox. Hanging scroll, light color on paper. Middle Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) National Palace Museum, China.

Laws demand cooperation between them and not opposition. There must always be some yin in the yang and some yang in the yin. Although these two fundamental principles exist within the Natural Law, there is no reason that conflict must continue to be expressed as physical



violence, war, psychological oppression, etc. The Law of the Triangle need not be one of physical or violent conflict, rather, it can fruitfully fulfill the mystic poet's dictum: "Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence,"³ on the level of a constructive dialectic conducted in the marketplace of ideas.

Across human history these two fundamental aspects of life have been often symbolically represented in different societies by the human relationship with the "bull." In the case of the peaceful, agricultural environment the bull is helpful, tamed, and may be a symbol of the victory of the owner over the lower instincts. On the contrary, in a warrior society the male hero is the killer of the bull that is perhaps identified with some evil enemy that must be destroyed.

The "bull," whether lunar as in Mesopotamia and Egypt or solar as in India, is the subject of various other cultural and religious incarnations, as well as modern mentions in new age cultures. The sacred bull survives in our day in the constellation of Taurus.

Taoism

Among the peaceful bulls of ancient times we have the bull, water buffalo, or ox on which the great Sage Laozi, the founder of Taoism, rides. Tetragram 46 of the Tao Te Ching says:

When the Tao prevails in the world, they send back their swift horses to draw the dung-carts. When the Tao is disregarded in the world, the war-horses breed in the border lands.⁴

In other words, when harmony is lost, strife follows. According to legend, Laozi became tired of the tumult and



Shiva and Parvati Riding on the White Bull Nandi. Prang Song Phi Nong, Thailand. Photo © 2009 Dominique Dalbiez / Wikimedia Commons.

conflict of civilization and chose to ride away on a water buffalo, peaceful bull, or ox to seek peace.

Shiva and Nandi in the Hindu Tradition

In the Shaiva tradition of Hinduism, the Great Shiva is depicted as an auspicious divinity and rides his white bull Nandi, also known as Nandin, Shiva's mount.⁵ Shiva's association with cattle is reflected in his name Pashupati, translated as "lord of cattle"⁶ and as "lord of animals."⁷ This is particularly used as an epithet of Rudra, an ancient Vedic god often considered to be the name of Shiva in the Vedas.⁸

The guardian of Shiva is Nandi (the white bull), whose statue can often be seen watching over the main shrine. The bull is said to embody sexual energy and fertility. Riding on his back, Shiva is in control of these impulses.

Nandi the Bull is a complex and very ancient deity. Some of his aspects include:

1. *“Nandi as a separate god can be traced back to Indus Valley Civilization, a deity much like Shiva, also known as Pashupati, the keeper of herds. Krishna himself took the form of a bull as no one else in the Universe can bear Shiva.*
2. *Vehicle of Shiva.*
3. *Gate keeper of Shiva’s abode. It is important to seek the blessings of Nandi before proceeding to worship Lord Shiva.*
4. *Chief in Shiva’s army.*
5. *A Guru of Saivism.*
6. *From the yogic perspective, Nandi is the mind dedicated to Lord Shiva, the Absolute. In other words, to understand and absorb Light, the ‘experience and the wisdom’ is Nandi which is the Guru within.”⁹*

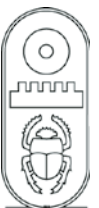
In this imagery, the Bull is seen to represent not only power and force, but also inner enlightenment.

The Ten Bulls of Zen Buddhism

In Mahāyāna and Zen Buddhism, the bull or ox is a frequently used metaphor to represent the common person, or the True Self, or even Enlightenment.¹⁰ In the twelfth century, the Chinese Zen master

Kuōan Shiyuān created a series of ten drawings, “The Ten Bulls” perhaps meant to show a Zen Buddhist conception of the ten stages experienced by a Bodhisattva. These are:

1. *“In Search of the Bull (aimless searching, only the sound of cicadas)*
2. *Discovery of the Footprints (a path to follow)*
3. *Perceiving the Bull (but only its rear, not its head)*
4. *Catching the Bull (a great struggle, the bull repeatedly escapes, discipline required)*
5. *Taming the Bull (less straying, less discipline, bull becomes gentle and obedient)*
6. *Riding the Bull Home (great joy)*
7. *The Bull Transcended (once home, the bull is forgotten, discipline’s whip is idle; stillness)*
8. *Both Bull and Self Transcended (all forgotten and empty)*
9. *Reaching the Source (unconcerned with or without; the sound of cicadas)*
10. *Return to Society (crowded marketplace; spreading enlightenment by mingling with humankind)”¹¹*



They have become a popular theme for art and literature, and were popularized in the west in 1957 with the publication of *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones: A Collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings*.¹²

Zoroaster: Mythos and Sacrifice

Moving westward, considerable confusion exists concerning the role of the bull in Mazdaism, commonly known as Zoroastrianism. In mythic terms, the spirit of evil, Ahriman is said to have slain the Cosmic Bull after destroying life on Earth, intending to finally destroy creation. Instead, the substance of the Cosmic Bull fell into creation, repopulating the manifested world that Ahriman had attempted to obliterate. There is also mention of a second slaying at the end of time which will bring immortality to humanity.¹³

These instances are mythic, and in each, the bull sacrificed seems to represent the Divine, whose manifestation is released through the sacrifice. The

concept of Divine self-sacrifice is widespread in world mythic structures, including Christ and Odin. Many of the suggestions about bull sacrifice stem from the earlier theories of the Persian origins of Mithraism, which are now modified in scholarly opinion. Modern scholarship finds no evidence whatsoever of bull slaying by the Persian deity Mitra in any Iranian text.¹⁴ The Iranian Mitra shares a common linguistic root with the Vedic god Mitra, however the two are not normally equated.¹⁵

With regard to actual ritual sacrifice of bulls and other animals, Zoroaster himself is known to have railed against the cruel sacrifices of beasts. Yet these sacrifices continued in Mazdaism. Some interpreters claim that the Prophet was protesting against inhumane ways of sacrificing animals, and the too frequent practice of sacrifice which depopulated the herds.¹⁶ On the other hand, Pythagoras is said to have studied under Zoroaster,¹⁷ and Pythagorean



Tenshō Shūbun (1414–1463), *Riding Home*, one of a series of ten images, generally known in English as the Ox-herding (or Bull-herding) pictures. They are said to be copies of originals, now lost, traditionally attributed to Kakuan, a twelfth century Chinese Zen Master. Museum of Shokoku-ji Temple Kyoto, Japan.

vegetarianism is well known. A ninth century writing clearly sides with this latter theory:

They hold this also: Be plant eaters (*urwar xwarishn*) (i.e vegetarian), O you, people, so that you may live long. Keep away from the body of cattle (*tan i gospand*), and deeply reckon that Ohrmazd, the Lord, has created plants in great number for helping cattle (and humans).¹⁸

The debate shows no signs of resolution, and while modern day Zoroastrians are very ecologically conscious,¹⁹ vegetarianism is not mandatory.

Gilgamesh, the Reluctant Bull-Slayer

Turning further westward, in the Near East, the adventures of Gilgamesh involve the Bull of Heaven, in one of the oldest surviving stories of humanity. *The Epic of Gilgamesh* probably began as Sumerian legends and poems about the culture-hero Gilgamesh, King of Uruk in Mesopotamia (ca. twenty-seventh century BCE). Later, they would be preserved in a lengthy poem in Akkadian. The best preserved version we have today is from the collection of Ashurbanipal, King of Assyria, in the seventh century BCE.²⁰

During the course of the epic, the King Gilgamesh and his alter-ego, Enkidu have many adventures seeking eternal life and the world of the deities. For our purposes here, the salient passages have to do with their encounter with the Bull of Heaven, presumably represented by the constellation Taurus.

The goddess Ishtar becomes infatuated with Gilgamesh. However, he rejects her advances. Infuriated and in a frenzy, she demands that a Bull of Heaven be created to ravish Uruk. Gilgamesh tries to avoid

the struggle, pleading instead for peace and agricultural plenty. Nevertheless, the deities fear Ishtar's wrath, and her wish is granted. The bull descends and wreaks havoc, drinking the rivers dry and pillaging the land and people.

In response, Gilgamesh and Enkidu are forced to defend their people and kingdom, and do battle with the bull, slaying it and restoring the land. In this story we have the very first example of the hero who had good intentions, but was forced to restrain and overcome the Bull of Heaven. The creature was acting as an agent of destruction, under the control of another.

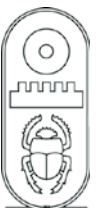
The Apis Bull: Incarnation of Divinity

In Pharaonic Egypt, the Apis Bull held a remarkable place in the religious life of the people. The customs surrounding the Apis Bull seem to go back at least as far as the Second Dynasty (2890 to 2686 BCE) according to Manetho. The Apis Bull should have the following white marks: a triangle on the forehead, a vulture wing outlined on its back, a crescent moon shape on its right flank; and additionally, under the tongue a scarab mark, and double hairs on its tail.²¹

During life, the bull was the incarnation of Ptah, god of Memphis. When sacrificed, he became Osorapis, that is, Osiris-Apis, in the same way that humans were assimilated to Osiris. As Osorapis, the bull was equated with Serapis, a Hellenistic syncretic deity. In fact, this may have been the origin of the god Serapis. The Apis Bull was the most important of the sacred animals of Egypt.²²

Minoan Civilization and the Minotaur

The bull also figured prominently in the religion of ancient Crete. The myth of the Cretan Labyrinth and the Minotaur, set in the Heroic Age before written



history, must be a pale recollection of an earlier bull-cult. The Minotaur, the half-bull, half-human creature appears to have embodied the alter-ego of Minos, who after his death, would become a judge in Hades. Significantly, Minos was the offspring of the love between virgin Europa in cow-form and Zeus in the shape of a bull.

Minos required that seven Athenian youths and seven maidens, drawn by lots, be sent every ninth year (some accounts say every year) to be devoured by the Minotaur. When the third sacrifice approached, Theseus volunteered to slay the monster and was successful in his effort.²³

In the Bronze Age (twenty-seventh century to fifteenth century BCE), Minoan culture had a flourishing bull-cult, which may have seeded the idea for the later Greek myth of Theseus and the Minotaur.

The Minoan religion was almost exclusively goddess centered, and among its best documented practices were the Bull Leaping Ceremonies, the *taurokathapsia*. There is evidence that these rituals

also took place among the Hittites in Anatolia, along the Eastern coast of the Mediterranean, in Bactria (modern day Turkmenistan, northern Afghanistan and Iran, southern Uzbekistan, and western Tajikistan), and in the Indus Valley.

Bull Leaping is usually considered to be an athletic or religious ritual connected with bull worship:²⁴ “When the leaper grasps the bull’s horns, the bull will violently jerk its head upwards giving the leaper the momentum necessary to perform somersaults and other acrobatic tricks or stunts.”²⁵

An important feature of Minoan civilization on Crete, Bull Leaping reflected the bull-worship common to many Mediterranean societies of the time. The palace of Knossos is filled with representations of the bull, indicating its importance to this civilization.²⁶

Bulls and Cattle in other parts the World

Humans have always been fascinated by bulls, in sometimes violent and cruel ways, as the controversial modern practices



A rare mummified Apis Bull head. Nineteenth Dynasty (ca. 1283–1185 BCE). From the collection of the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum.



The Bull Leaping Fresco, found on the east side of the palace at Knossos, Crete. Dated either seventeenth–fifteenth centuries BCE or ca. 1425 BCE.

of bullfighting (*tauromachy*)²⁷ and the Running of the Bulls (*encierro*)²⁸ attest:

The bull is another animal with a dualistic nature that appears in many myths. It can represent both tremendous energy and power or frightening strength.... Among Native Americans who traditionally lived by hunting buffalo, myths describe the buffalo's fertility and generosity. The buffalo controls love affairs and determines how many children a woman will bear.²⁹

Among the Maasai of eastern Africa, cattle in general represent wealth,³⁰ and the bull is an important part of this process. For the South African Bushmen, the bull is a symbol of the sky god, especially for rain.³¹

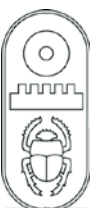
“In Celtic mythology, the bull was a sign of good fortune and fertility.”³² An

important Celtic deity type is the *Tarvos Trigaranus*, a bull with three cranes, depicted on reliefs on the cathedrals at Trier and at Notre-Dame. In Irish literature, the Brown Bull of Cooley is a primary actor in the epic *The Cattle-Raid of Cooley*.³³

The Mithraic Bull and Cosmic Union

The society of Rome as it transitioned from a Republic to an Empire (end of the first century BCE to early fourth century CE) was typically a warrior culture, perhaps one of the most formidable in history. Rome, even as a Republic, had long gloried in the spectacle of gladiatorial games in which both humans and animals were killed for the enjoyment of nobility and commoners alike.

It is unsurprising therefore, to find that one of the popular religious practices of such a society involved bull sacrifice.



Indeed this was the case, however, those who sacrificed bulls over the heads of initiates, bathing them in the blood of the bull, were not the adepts of the Mithraic Mysteries. Rather, this was the practice in the cult of the Magna Mater, the Great Mother—the goddess Cybele. She had been worshiped probably since the Bronze Age in Anatolia; however the Romans added a new, cruel twist to her rites from the second to the fourth centuries: the *taurobolium* (bull-sacrifice).³⁴

The confusion comes from the fact that the ubiquitous icon of Mithraism is the scene of the *tauroctony*: the mythic slaying of the bull by Mithras. No bulls were ever sacrificed in Mithraeums, nor was animal slaughter the basis of any Mithraic tenet.

The adepts of the Mithraic Mysteries had learned their lessons well from the Orphic Mysteries. The myths of the deities cannot be taken literally: the rapes, murders, and wars of the deities described in the myths would be scandalous for humans to commit, let alone Divinities.³⁵ The adherents of the Mithraic Mysteries, just as the Orphics, knew that these were symbolic stories meant to reveal deeper truths about the self, and about the nature of the cosmos.

From our survey of world myths of the bull, we know that the bull frequently represents tremendous power, often put at the service of another. In many cultures the bull has also represented Divine attributes, or a Divine

figure, or even the cosmos. The symbolic sacrifice of the Cosmic Bull in some myths represents the act of creation or the restoration of creation. This constellation of archetypes is represented in the pivotal Mithraic scene of the tauroctony.

Following the theories of Dr. David Ulansey and others,³⁶ the rediscovery of the Precession of the Equinoxes³⁷ by Hipparchus (190–120 BCE) facilitated the realization that there was a power greater than not only fate and the deities, but greater than the whole cosmos. The slaughtering of the bull was a symbolic action for the ending of the Taurean Age and the beginning of the Age of Aries approximately two thousand years before the Mithraic Mysteries began. This change of ages was happening again at the time of the height of the Mithraic Mysteries, the transition from the Age of Aries to the Piscean Age.³⁸

The power great enough to do this, symbolically seizing the whole cosmos represented by the bull, and reorienting all of reality, was the power the practitioners



Mithras slaying the bull. Marble, Roman artwork, second century CE, Rome. Collection of the British Museum. Photo © 2007 Marie-Lan Nguyen / Wikimedia Commons.

of the Mithraic Mysteries sought union with. They named this power Mithras, the Deity above all Deities. The name was foreign, mysterious, not from the familiar classical Pantheon, perhaps from Persia, perhaps for this very reason.

For the initiates of the Mithraic Mysteries, this was the ultimate union with the source of all, which a much later adept of the Primordial Tradition would call “that than which, nothing greater can be conceived.”³⁹ In today’s world, thanks to Membrane-theory physics,⁴⁰ we now know that we live in one universe of a much greater multiverse.

The Cosmic Communion we seek is the same as that sought and achieved in the Mithraic Mysteries. We seek to realize our identification and union with the one source of all, not just of our planet, of our galaxy, even of our universe, but the source of everything that is on all planes, and times, and all dimensions, on all cosmic strings and membranes. Riding on the noble bull, we will find our way to the realization of this union as did the initiates of old.

ENDNOTES

¹ For decades, students have been taught at university and secondary levels that the Mithraic Mysteries involved slaughtering an actual bull over the heads of initiates so that they would be “bathed in the blood of the Bull.” As history shows, this is completely untrue. Private conversation with Rosicrucian Research Librarian Steven Armstrong, April 11, 2010.

² A. Tikhonov, “Bos Primigenius” in *International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources Red List of Threatened Species*, 2008.

Available at <http://www.iucnredlist.org/apps/redlist/details/136721/0>.

³ William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790), Plate 3, <http://www.gailgastfield.com/mhh/mhh.html>.

⁴ Tao Te Ching, 46. *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol 39 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1891), 2, 88–89, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/tao/taote.htm>.

⁵ For a discussion of the evolution of the bull Nandi as Shiva’s mount, see: Mahadev Chakravarti, *The Concept of Rudra-Śiva Through The Ages* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994), 99–105. For a discussion of the names Nandi and Nandin see: Margaret Stutley, *The Illustrated Dictionary of Hindu Iconography*. (Munshiram: Manoharlal, 2003), 98.

⁶ Ram Karan Sharma, *Śivasahasranāmāstakam: Eight Collections of Hymns Containing One Thousand and Eight Names of Śiva* (Delhi: Nag Publishers, 1996), 291.

⁷ Stella Kramrisch, *The Presence of Śiva* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 479.

⁸ Axel Michaels, *Hinduism: Past and Present* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004), 216.

⁹ “Nandi,” in Anna Dhallapiccola, *Dictionary of Hindu Lore and Legend* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2002). Summarized at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nandi_\(bull\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nandi_(bull)).

¹⁰ Paul Reps and Nyogen Senzaki, *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones: A Collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings* (Boston: Shambhala, 1994). Text and images from the book available at <http://www.iloveulove.com/spirituality/buddhist/tenbulls.htm>. Summarized at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ten_Bulls.

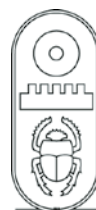
¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ See R.C. Zaehner, *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1961), 127–129.

¹⁴ John R. Hinnels, “Reflections on the Bull-Slaying Scene,” *Mithraic Studies: Proceedings of the First International Conference on Mithraic Studies Vol 2* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975), 290–312.

¹⁵ Hans-Peter Schmidt, “Mithra i: Mithra in Old Indian and Mithra in Old Iranian,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (New York: Columbia University, 2006).



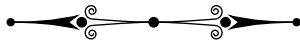
- Available at <http://www.iranica.com/articles/mithra-i>. See also Christian Bartholomae, *Altiranisches Wörterbuch* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1904, repr. Strassburg: Trübner, 1979), at column 1183.
- ¹⁶ R.C. Zaehner, *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism*, 84–88.
- ¹⁷ See Porphyry, *Life of Pythagoras* 12, Alexander Polyhistor on Clement's *Stromata* 1.15, Diodorus of Eritrea, Aristoxenus on Hippolitus 6.32.2.
- ¹⁸ Atrupat-e Emetan, *Denkard* 6, cited in Pallan R. Ichaporla, "Vegetarianism in Zoroastrian Teachings," <http://tenets.zoroastrianism.com/vege33.html>.
- ¹⁹ Farhang Mehr, *The Zoroastrian Tradition* (Rockport MA: Element Books, 1991), 61–63.
- ²⁰ See Andrew R. George, Andrew R., ed, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
- ²¹ "Apis," *Britannica Encyclopedia*, eleventh edition (New York: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1911), vol 2, 168.
- ²² *Ibid.*
- ²³ J. E. Zimmerman, "Androgeus," *Dictionary of Classical Mythology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964); H. J. Rose, *A Handbook of Greek Mythology* (New York: Dutton, 1959), 265. See also Plutarch, *Theseus*, 15–19; Diodorus Siculus *Historical Library* 1. 16, 4. 61; 3. 1,15.
- ²⁴ See Nannó Marinatos, *Minoan Religion: Ritual, Image, and Symbol*. Studies in Comparative Religion (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1993); *The Export Significance of Minoan Bull-Leaping Scenes, Egypt and the Levant*, *International Journal for Egyptian Archaeology and Related Disciplines* 4 (1994): 89–93; J. Younger, *Bronze Age Representations of Aegean Bull-Games*, *Aegaeum* 12 (1995): 507–46.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*
- ²⁶ See C. Michael Hogan, "Knossos Fieldnotes," *Modern Antiquarian* (2007), <http://www.themodernantiquarian.com/site/10854/knossos.html#fieldnotes>.
- ²⁷ "Bullfighting," *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2009. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/84444/bullfighting>.
- ²⁸ "Running of the Bulls" *Sanfermin Guide*, 2007, <http://www.sanfermin.com/old/2006/guia.php?lang=eng>.
- ²⁹ "Animals in Mythology," *Myth Encyclopedia*, <http://www.mythencyclopedia.com/Am-Ar/Animals-in-Mythology.html>.
- ³⁰ *Cattle, Cow, Bull & Calf*, http://www.khandro.net/animal_cow_bull.htm.
- ³¹ Sigrid Schmidt, "The Rain Bull of the South African Bushmen," *African Studies* 38, No. 2, (1979): 201–224.
- ³² "Animals in Mythology," *Myth Encyclopedia*, <http://www.mythencyclopedia.com/Am-Ar/Animals-in-Mythology.html>.
- ³³ See *Táin Bó Cúailnge (The Cattle-Raid of Cooley)*, Thomas Kinsella, trans. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).
- ³⁴ Jeremy B. Rutter, "The Three Phases of the Taurobolium" *Phoenix* 22.3 (Autumn 1968): 226–249.
- ³⁵ G.R.S. Mead, "The Theology of Orpheus," *Rosicrucian Digest* 87 No. 1 (2008): 4–8, http://www.rosicrucian.org/publications/digest/digest1_2008/02_GRS_Mead_The_Theology_of_Orpheus/ONLINE_02_Mead.pdf.
- ³⁶ David Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries: Cosmology and Salvation in the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). See also <http://www.well.com/~davidu/mithras.html>.
- ³⁷ "Precession of the Equinox," Western Washington University Planetarium, http://www.wvu.edu/depts/skywise/a101_precession.html.
- ³⁸ Terry MacKinnell, *A New Look at the Old Ages*, National Council for Geocosmic Research Inc., *NCGR Member Newsletter*, (June–July 2002): 10.
- ³⁹ Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), used this expression to represent his "ontological argument" for the existence of the Divine.
- ⁴⁰ See Brian Greene, *The Elegant Universe* (New York: Random House, 2000) and *The Fabric of the Cosmos* (New York: Random House, 2004).

RECOVERY: THE ART OF PARADIGM SHIFTS

Denise Breton and Christopher Largent

From *The Paradigm Conspiracy: Why Our Social Systems Violate Human Potential—And How We Can Change Them* by Denise Breton and Christopher Largent. Copyright © 1996 by Hazelden Foundation. Reprinted by permission of Hazelden Foundation, Center City MN.

In the history of Mithraic scholarship, the paradigm of Mithras's Persian origins taught by Franz Cumont, which is highly disputed today, was so firmly entrenched that it wasn't until almost thirty years after his death that scholars began to openly reassess the evidence and present alternative conclusions. To do so while Cumont was alive would have been very risky professionally. Paradigms can be very difficult to dislodge, as Denise Breton and Christopher Largent discuss in this introduction to their work on changing paradigms in life and society.



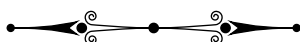
It's time for us to join the line
of your madmen, all chained together.

Time to be totally free, and
estranged....

To set fire to structures
and run out in the street.
Time to ferment. How else
can we leave the world-vat
and go to the lip?

We must die to become
true human beings.

—Rumi¹



The Global Crisis of Addictions: Caught in Deadly Processes

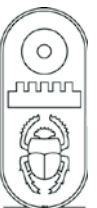
Recovery: it's not just for "addicts" anymore. It's not even just for persons, not when addictive processes permeate every social system we've got, from schools to churches to workplaces to governments. We're up to our ears in addict-making processes, and we can't take two steps out of bed without running into them.

Substance addictions. Substance addictions—alcohol, drugs, nicotine, food, caffeine—are just the surface, the outward and visible



Substance addictions—alcohol, drugs, nicotine, food, caffeine—are just the surface, the outward and visible ways addictive processes come get us. Photo by Renee Comet / Wikimedia Commons, from the National Cancer Institute.

ways addictive processes come get us. And they do get us. Drugs, alcohol, and tobacco constitute the world's biggest economic empire. Only the weapons industry rivals it. Journalist James Mills writes in *The Underground Empire*:



The inhabitants of Earth spend more money on illegal drugs than they spend on food. More than they spend on housing, clothes, education, medical care, or any other product or service. The international narcotics industry is the largest growth industry in the world. Its annual revenues exceed half a trillion dollars, three times the value of all United States currency in circulation, more than the gross national products of all but a half dozen major industrialized nations.²

That's just illegal drugs. How about the money involved in dependence on prescribed drugs, alcohol, and nicotine? It seems we can't afford not to be substance dependent; our economies certainly are.

Process addictions. Next in the line of killers are process addictions, the ones society applauds: addiction to working, winning, high stress, fast-track jobs, perfectionism, relationships, making money, spending and debting, gaining power, getting fame or notoriety, living out family dramas, or—brace yourself—shopping. Sex can

be another process addiction, but it's not one society looks kindly on, however much advertising promotes insatiable and manipulative sex as the solution to life's challenges.³ Gambling is an old addiction which, with all the state lotteries, is coming back now with a vengeance, especially among young people.

Even the most lauded activities—religion, scientific study, academic inquiry, and government service—may take on classic addictive patterns. Religion turns into obsession. Scientific study turns into dogma, as if collecting enough facts will make up for a narrow worldview. Academic inquiry becomes an in-your-head addiction—quibbling esoterica with rabid acrimony, fiddling while Rome burns. As for government service, it's power addiction from the bureaucrats who throw around their paper-pushing weight to the big-timers who become brokers for corporate conglomerates.

Process addictions are every bit as deadly as substance addictions, because they underlie substance addictions—as well as just about every social and global



Giovanni di Paolo, *The Expulsion from Paradise*, ca. 1445. A flat Earth is at the center of the cosmos, surrounded by the orbits of the other heavenly bodies, with the Zodiac on the outermost ring. From the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

ill we've got. They're the invisible killers, the ones we don't suspect, but the ones that made *millionaire* Ivan Boesky raid savings and loans to become a *billionaire*, leaving in his wake thousands who saw their life savings disappear. As Boesky was later to admit, "It's a sickness I have in the face of which I am helpless." Nor was Boesky alone in his sickness. Since the eighties, we've witnessed an army of greed-addicted corporate raiders, who made the jobs and pension funds of millions vanish overnight.⁴



Humanity on the Moon. "We have the knowledge and technology...Why can't our social, economic, and environmental problems be solved?" Photo from NASA.

Process addictions aren't limited to movers and shakers though. Ordinary folks following the right diet and the right exercise program are dropping dead at age thirty-five from workaholicism, relationship addiction, anxiety, and stress.

If all these substance and process addictions don't afflict us, they nonetheless affect us. While addictions to drugs, food, alcohol, sex, or work hit us one by one, addictions to money,⁵ control, divisiveness, status, and official-think oppress us together. We can't have power addicts running the world and not experience the consequences. Even when we try to claim it's business or government as usual, we find ourselves suffering from global plagues made invisible by their familiarity.

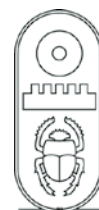
But a familiar plague is no less deadly. As Anne Wilson Schaefer points out, a deadly virus is a deadly virus, even if the entire population has it. Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) holds that addiction is a "progressive,

fatal disease." Schaefer believes—and we agree—that this is true, no matter what form the addiction takes.⁶ Our lungs may give out from tar and nicotine, or our hearts may give out from stress. We may die from the greed that destroys the environment or from a nuclear chain reaction set off by someone's power play. Addiction—substance or process, acted out privately or on the world stage—is a fatal illness that we ignore at our peril.

Not that this is news. We can't read the papers or watch TV without wondering, what on earth is going on? We have the knowledge and technology. We have the resources, human and natural. We even have the desire. Why can't our social, economic, and environmental problems be solved? Why do we live from crisis to crisis?

Addict-Making Systems

Neither substance nor process addictions are limited to one race, sex, economic class, region, or occupation. Rich and poor,



conservative and liberal, male and female, Hispanic, European, African, Asian, and Native Americans share the same disease.

When something so deadly cuts across society, we have to look at what we share: our social systems. In her 1987 groundbreaking book *When Society Becomes an Addict*, Anne Wilson Schaeff suggests family dynamics, school rules, workplace policies and practices, corporate hierarchies, government workings, media messages, as well as cultural and religious belief structures all operate in ways that set us up to behave addictively. In fact, society itself, Schaeff writes, “is an addictive system.”⁷

That’s a strong statement, yet the more we understand addiction, the more it seems like an understatement. Award-winning teacher John Taylor Gatto, for instance, pulls no punches about the messages schools send through their structure:

I began to realize that the bells and the confinement, the crazy sequences, the age-segregation, the lack of privacy, the constant surveillance, and all the rest of the national curriculum of schooling were designed exactly as if someone had set out to *prevent* children from learning how to think and act, to coax them into addiction and dependent behavior.⁸

In *When Money Is the Drug*, counselor and writer Donna Boundy sketches a similarly addict-making picture for corporations. The level of thinking distortion that takes over people in these systems is astonishing:

For money-accumulators, huge sums take on an unreal quality, become distorted. One commodities trader reportedly flew into a rage when he got his monthly bonus check,

stormed into his boss’s office, threw the check on the floor, and spat on it. The check was for \$2.1 million, but he thought it wasn’t enough. Even J. Paul Getty once admitted, “I’ve never felt rich—in the oil business others were all much richer than I was.”

Even corporations sometimes behave as if their thinking has become distorted. While the Wall Street firm of Drexel Burnham Lambert was nearing bankruptcy, some executives still received million-dollar bonuses every month. In fact, as the firm’s condition worsened, the bonuses grew larger. Less than a month before the firm filed bankruptcy, one executive received a bonus of \$16.6 million. The company itself was acting like an addict, denying and defying reality.⁹

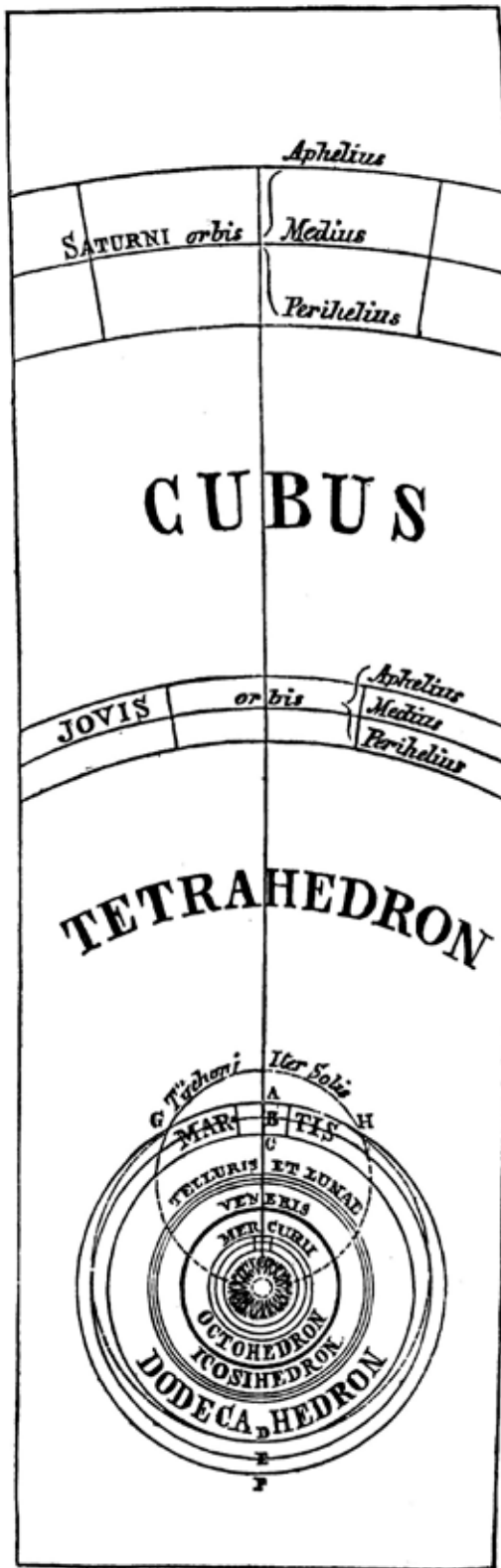
THE PARADIGM CONSPIRACY

What’s going on? Why are systems betraying their service to us? Instead of performing their rightful functions of educating (schools), nurturing (families), promoting public good (governments), managing the shared household (businesses), and inspiring us to find and fulfill our life’s purpose (religious institutions), they’re abusing us and turning us into people we never wanted to be. Why?

Enter “Paradigms”

Back in 1962—so long ago John Kennedy was still alive—historian and philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn gave an analysis of how systems change (or don’t) in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* that rocked the intellectual world. He wasn’t talking about addictive systems but about the system of scientific research, which has its own brand of obsessive-compulsive behavior.

Introducing the term “paradigm,” Kuhn said that scientists operate from



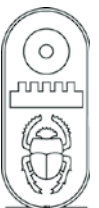
Johannes Kepler, *The Orbits of the Planets from Harmonice Mundi* (The Science of the Harmony of the World), 1619. The Copernican Revolution, continued by Kepler, was one of Thomas Kuhn's primary examples of the difficulties of overcoming paradigms. From the collection of the Rosicrucian Research Library.

mental models—paradigms—that shape everything they think, feel, and do. How scientists perceive and interpret experience is shaped by their internal structure of beliefs and concepts—their paradigm. If something is wrong, the paradigm is the place to look to find out why.

To raise paradigm issues is to reflect on the ideas or concepts we're using as our map of reality—our worldview, life perspective, philosophy, or mental model. Whatever we call it, it's powerful stuff. To look at our paradigm is to look at the blueprint we're using to build our worlds.¹⁰

How do paradigms start? They usually begin with some exemplary model—"Newtonian science" or "Einsteinian relativity"—that weaves together theories, standards, and methods in a way that makes better sense than anything else. To share a paradigm is to share a commitment to rules that define how a scientist acts and reacts. No part of scientific activity is outside the reach of the paradigm's influence. It's as if scientists' energies get poured through the paradigm's mold, and whatever comes out is stamped by that all-encompassing model.

In the decades since Kuhn's paradigm concept was introduced, it has been applied to every discipline, from the arts to business. And rightly so. We experience our lives the way we do because of the paradigms we carry around. In computer terms, paradigms function like the central operating system of consciousness—the supra-program that transforms undefined perceptions into something we call our experience. They give us the mental tools to make sense of life and survive in it. We may not be able to summarize our paradigm in ten words or less, but our every thought is paradigm connected, even paradigm created.



Development within a paradigm

Given the power of paradigms, two kinds of development follow. The first occurs within the paradigm's frame-work. The second chucks the paradigm and forges a new one.

"Normal science," as Kuhn calls it, is the first kind of development. Practitioners operate within their mental model and pursue its implications to the nth degree. Working inside the prevailing paradigm is the secure, accepted, and well-rewarded way to do science.

In fact, the paradigm gets so comfortable that scientists forget that it's there; it becomes functionally invisible. The way they see things is just the way things are. For them, there is no paradigm between their ideas and reality.

Applied to life, the normal-science phase is business as usual, families as usual, politics, churches, schools, and professions as usual. When we're ticking away within a paradigm's framework, the norm is well defined, and we conform. Coping skills mean finding ways to fit into the norm, whether it's healthy or not. In fact, "healthy" is whatever the paradigm says it is. Becoming healthy means adjusting to the paradigm's definition.



"Applied to life, the normal-science phase is business as usual, families as usual, politics, churches, schools, and professions as usual.... Coping skills mean finding ways to fit into the norm, whether it's healthy or not."

Paradigm Shifts

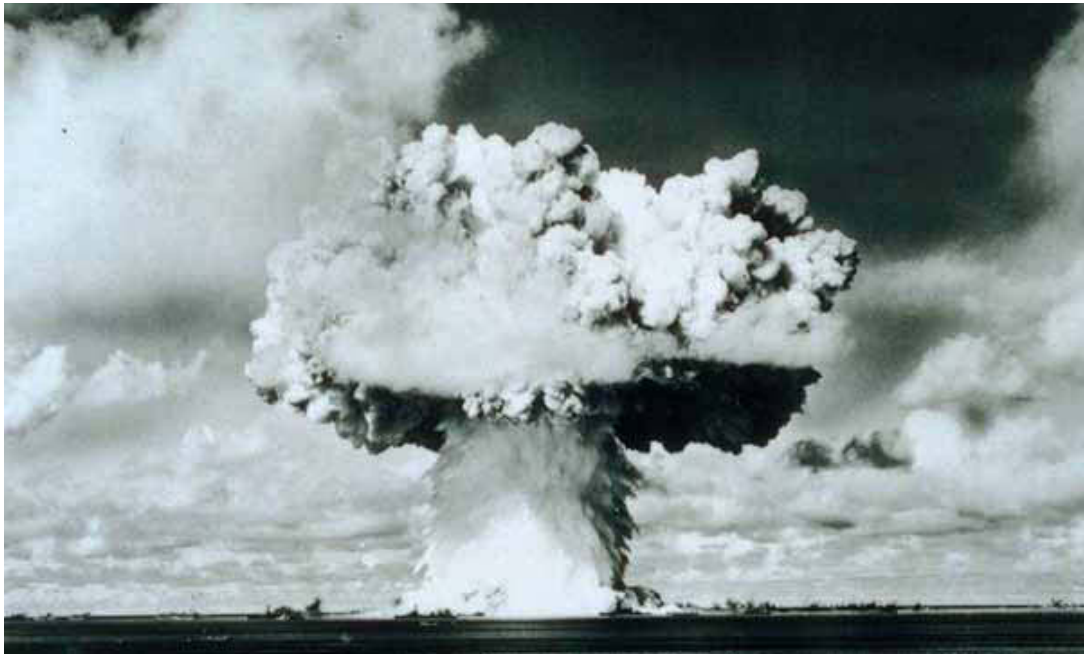
The revolutionary development comes when the paradigm reaches a crisis. It doesn't solve problems the way it once did. Anomalies—things that the paradigm can't explain—start accumulating. Paradigm health starts making us sick. More and more, the paradigm doesn't work. That's when scientists are challenged to shift paradigms by moving into a phase Kuhn calls "extraordinary science."

But "extraordinary science" isn't easy. In language suited to academia, Kuhn describes how scientists essentially freak out. Everything they ever learned is called into question. During the revolutions in physics early in this century, even Einstein, no slouch in forward thinking, wrote, "It was as if the ground had been pulled out from under one, with no firm foundation to be seen anywhere, upon which one could have built."¹¹

The more the paradigm fails to do its job, the more old-paradigm scientists try to make it work. The paradigm is ripe for a revolution, but because they've forgotten that they even have a paradigm, scientists conclude instead that their world is falling apart. Solutions—alternative ways of doing science—don't exist. As far as they're concerned, they've explored all the possibilities, and the only options they see don't help. They're too paradigm-bound to notice that they're stumbling over the limits of their own models.

The Paradigm Cause of Soul-Abusive Systems

"Extraordinary science" describes the situation we face today. We're not experiencing paradigm norms as healthy, either personally or globally. The blueprint for our families, schools, businesses, and governments isn't working. It's causing our shared social



“‘Extraordinary science’ describes the situation we face today. We’re not experiencing paradigm norms as healthy, either personally or globally. The blueprint for our families, schools, businesses, and governments isn’t working. It’s causing our shared social systems to function abusively and to make us sick as a result.”

systems to function abusively and to make us sick as a result. Happy people and healthy systems don’t turn addictive, life-destroying substances into the biggest growth industry on the planet.

We’d think changing a paradigm that’s not working would be easy, but it’s not. As Kuhn observed, the paradigm cause of crises remains invisible to old-paradigm practitioners. We don’t need a new paradigm, they believe, we just need to make the one we have work better. Nothing is wrong with our social systems, since that would call the underlying paradigm into question. Instead, when things don’t work, something must be wrong with us.

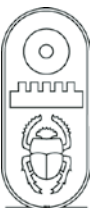
Blame certain people and label them as the troublemakers. We need more discipline, more restraints, “old-paradigm experts advise [us],” more tests and tougher grading systems, more hard-nosed business management practices, more God-fearing, sex-repressing piety, and more laws with stricter enforcement.

In other words, according to the prevailing paradigm, coming down hard on people isn’t abuse. It’s how we create healthy families, schools, businesses, governments, and churches, because it rids us of the sinful, ignorant, or otherwise unruly souls that muck up the social machinery. If things don’t work, the solution is to take away more rights, stifle more creativity, intimidate more people, build more prisons, and bring back the death penalty. More fear keeps people in line.

This paradigm touches every part of our lives—but invisibly. We don’t realize that the paradigm is there, which means we don’t recognize its role in creating our social institutions. As long as the paradigm remains hidden, we don’t see what’s causing system-wide suffering, which means we can’t stop it.

The Paradigm of Control and Power-Over

What kind of paradigm requires that we blame individuals, intimidate,





“Physician Larry Dossey describes the soul as ‘some aspect of our selves that is infinite, beyond the limits of space and time.’ It’s our direct link to reality.”

punish them in order to keep our social systems “healthy”? Like a complex tapestry, the paradigm has many threads, but the overall pattern has to do with control: Who has power over whom, and how is a power-over relation maintained?¹² Riane Eisler, in her pioneering work *The Chalice and the Blade* calls this the “dominator model,” contrasting it with the “partnership way.” Domination is the paradigm’s driving issue, and for a reason: in this worldview, top-down control is necessary for social order.

According to the power-over model—what we refer to as the control paradigm—if somebody doesn’t control us, our social systems will fall into chaos. Archaeologist John Romer notes, for instance, that the Roman Emperor Diocletian, in an attempt to hold “a ramshackle empire” together, “made a state where animals, land, and people were all tightly organized and controlled; one writer complained that there were more tax collectors than tax payers.”¹³ Like Diocletian, authorities of today believe that nothing would work if we each did our own thing. To have order, we must do what the authorities tell us to do.

Soul: The Big Threat

Now come the threads: to be controlled, we have to be unplugged from competing sources of control. The major threat to external control is our internal guidance system—our souls.

A clear definition of “soul” isn’t easy to come by, since it’s not an object we can measure or photograph. But “inner identity” or the “core of who we are” are good places to start. Soul refers to our deep presence. It’s our inner connectedness to whatever we take to be Being, God, the One, the whole, or the ground of creation (to paraphrase theologian Paul Tillich). Physician Larry Dossey describes the soul as “some aspect of our selves that is infinite, beyond the limits of space and time.”¹⁴ It’s our direct link to reality.

This whole-connected core is the source of our talents and the well-spring of creativity. It’s also what gives us the conviction that our lives have meaning. When we live from our souls, we feel alive and vital, and we take seriously the idea that we’re here for a purpose.

To us, our souls are our best friends and most trusted guides. But to the control paradigm, they're the enemy that has to be removed in order for external control to work. Only when we're sufficiently disconnected from our inner compass will we follow outer demands.

“Get Rid of the Troublemakers”

For fear of chaos, social systems adopt the control paradigm and run with it. Through all sorts of institutionalized policies, we get the message that we're unacceptable as we are, but that if we surrender ourselves to the social system (the family, school, business, profession, or religion), we'll become acceptable. Our souls are sloppy and unmanageable troublemakers; they clog the system's efficient workings, and we're better off without them.



“In extraordinary science, we let everything go into flux. Yet nothing conspires to change our world so completely as doing precisely that.”

This isn't reality talking; it's a paradigm, an old one. Maybe sometime in the dim, dark recesses of human evolution a control-based paradigm may have served the species (we're skeptical about that), but it's not serving us now. The more power-over systems zap our inner lives, the less social order we have. It's a paradigm in crisis, and it's creating neither personal nor global health.

Two Paradigm Conspiracies

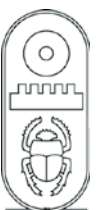
As long as the paradigm remains invisible, we're stuck. The prevailing model stymies change. Every time we try to move in a new direction, the old paradigm kicks in and intimidates us into doing the same old, soul-diminishing stuff.

That's the first paradigm conspiracy, the one that blocks our best efforts to confront crises and change.

But one paradigm conspiracy deserves another—the leap into “extraordinary science.” True, paradigm shifts are full of uncertainties, trials and errors, hiccups and false starts, not to mention soul-searching forays into the unknown. We never know if we've come up with the “right” paradigm or even if there is such a thing. In extraordinary science, we let everything go into flux. Yet nothing conspires to change our world so completely as doing precisely that.

The most conspiratorial part of a paradigm shift is that it lies within the power of each of us to do it. Paradigms aren't Godzilla monsters; they're ideas. Their power comes from our shared commitment to them. The minute one person starts to explore alternative models, the paradigm no longer holds the same power.

As Marilyn Ferguson explained in *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, the word *conspiracy*



comes from *conspirare*, which means “to breathe together.” A new cultural paradigm begins with each person stepping out of the old and daring to breathe something new. The “movers and shakers” are powerless to prevent a paradigm shift once we together breathe a paradigm revolution into being.

Making the Shift: By Death or By Recovery?

Paradigm shifts are scary precisely because we don't know what's next. Control-paradigm authorities claim that soul-guided worlds aren't possible—that they degenerate into anarchy. Challenging this cultural belief involves a leap of faith. Our souls are what the old paradigm systematically pushed out of our lives, and we're not sure what it means to get them back or how our lives together would work if we did.

Given all these uncertainties, how are we ever going to make the paradigm shift that's needed? Are we stuck with the old model?

Plan A: Death

Kuhn believed that paradigms permeate our consciousness so thoroughly that the only way to get rid of them is for old-paradigm practitioners to die off. Kuhn wasn't recommending drastic measures; as a historian he was just describing what happens.

We can appreciate his observation, especially when we run head-on into



Senior Zadith consults the Alchemical Tables of Hermes. From *Aurora Consurgens*, late fourteenth century. From the collection of the Zurich central library. “It’s a healing process for people committed to inner transformation. The reason it works is that it invites people to experience their personal paradigm in crisis and then to embark on the journey of ‘extraordinary science’—to evolve their own new models.”

control-paradigm types in power-over positions. But as a method, it lacks practicality, particularly if you buy the notion of reincarnation, e.g., what if Hitler was Caligula or Genghis Khan reborn? A power addict's death may not be the long-term solution it seems. If that's Plan A, what's Plan B?

Plan B: Recovery

In a way, Alcoholics Anonymous agrees with Kuhn. Addict-making paradigms lead to death. Either we let a paradigm die, or we die under the addictive model. One way or another, as the apostle Paul

said, “I die daily,” or as Jelaluddin Rumi (1207–1273 CE), the great Sufi mystic, sage, and poet, observed, “We must die to become true human beings.”

But what kind of death will it be? Physical death is one way to experience a paradigm shift. Dying to a deadening paradigm is another.

For decades, AA—joined now by a host of programs focusing on specific addiction—has pioneered recovery through support groups and a Twelve Step process with a better track record than any other treatment program. It’s not a crutch for losers; it’s a healing process for people committed to inner transformation. The reason it works is that it invites people to experience their personal paradigm in crisis and then to embark on the journey of “extraordinary science”—to evolve their own new models.

The Limits of Micro Recovery

But there’s a snag with doing recovery on the personal level alone. How can we get healthy when our systems are sick? In paradigm language, how can we make the paradigm revolution that our souls require as long as our cultural paradigm conspires to sabotage our shift?

As it is, our social systems reward soul-negating habits—those that blast our innate worth, creativity, and spirituality—and penalize people who put inner-directedness first. To take a common example, salaried employees who work on weekends get top performance ratings, while those who choose to spend that time with their families or, heaven forbid, to “have a life” are evaluated as mediocre by comparison. They’re not “going the extra mile” for the company, which means their choice not to be workaholics costs them career advancement.

As long as social systems operate on a control paradigm, they reinforce habits that put soul needs last, because that’s how we’re controllable. Those who are “hungry enough” rise to the top; those less insatiable stay down in the ranks, though their battered self-esteem often leads to addiction as well.

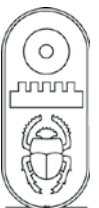
No matter how committed we are to making a personal paradigm shift, how can we do it if our shared systems don’t come with us? Sick paradigms make sick institutions that make sick people—and then reward us for not noticing how sick we’ve become.

One Nazi doctor, for example, spoke of his relationship to the system and the overpowering “authority of the regime,” especially when he contemplated getting out. We’ve heard the same message, whether the system was a family, a church, a nonprofit, or a corporation:

“The whole system radiated that authority. Like it or not, I was part of it.... I had no choice. I was in this web—this network of authority.... If you talk to people [in general terms about possibly leaving], they would say, you have to stay wherever you are... where you are needed. Don’t disturb the organization.”¹⁵

Getting to the Paradigm Cause of Social Illness

AA’s response to the dilemma between personal recovery and social illness has been to conceive of recovery as a lifelong process—a point on which it’s been criticized, as if AA labels people as lifelong addicts. But who’s being chronic here? People do their best to break out of addictive habits. It’s the social systems that resist, because the control paradigm hiding in the shadows won’t allow system-wide transformation to occur.





Cologne Cathedral in Germany amidst the rubble of World War II: “One Nazi doctor, for example, spoke of his relationship to the system and the overpowering ‘authority of the regime,’ especially when he contemplated getting out.” Image from the US Army Signal Corps.

Micro recovery is undoubtedly where paradigm revolution starts. Exploring our own internalized habits of self-abuse is how we understand abusive processes and trace them to their origins. Getting to the root of these patterns, we question the paradigm behind them and move away from it.

But even if every traumatized person on Earth were in a recovery program, global addiction still would not stop. The social systems requiring us to behave in soul-disconnected ways must also change. And no matter how hard we try to change social systems, they won't budge until we tackle the belief structures, rules, methods, and goals—the paradigm—that require “soul loss,” as shamanic traditions call it, to create a “healthy” society.

Micro without macro recovery is where most recovery people are these

days. We're dealing with original-family as well as self-esteem issues, which means we're challenging the power-over, soul-be-damned messages we got while growing up. We're doing our best to make a personal paradigm shift and to honor our souls in ways that were never modeled for us.

But as if this personal work isn't hard enough, we're living in systems that persist in the soul-excising model. Personal recovery can feel like one step forward and two steps back because, as we reconnect with our souls, we feel the soul-demeaning messages coming from institutions that much more intensely. Messages that, for instance, constantly measure our worth according to dollars, sales, deals, commissions, productivity but never in terms of fairness, compassion, responsibility, honesty, or integrity grind away at us. In control-paradigm systems, we're not human

beings on quests for meaning; we're money-making, job-doing machines.

It's time all the wisdom gained from wrestling with personal abuse is focused on the root of the problem: addictive social systems and the control paradigm behind them. Recovery won't bring wholeness until it percolates down to the paradigm level, because recovery is nothing less than the art of making a paradigm shift.

As Kuhn observed, such a shift is revolutionary not to a piece of life but to all of it. The social system piece can't sit this one out.¹⁶

ENDNOTES

¹ John Moyne and Coleman Barks, trans., *I Am You* (Athens, GA: Maypop Books, 1994), 101.

² James Mills, *The Underground Empire: Where Crime and Governments Embrace* (New York: Doubleday, 1986). His figures being over ten years old, we can only imagine what they may be now. Statistics on this global empire are hard to come by, many estimates being filed away in secret and classified government documents (see p. 7).

³ Patrick Carnes has pioneered the understanding of sexual addiction, which has a wide spectrum of manifestations. See *Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction* (Center City, MN: Hazelden, 1992) and *Contrary to Love: Helping the Sexual Addict* (Center City, MN: Hazelden, 1989).

⁴ In *When Corporations Rule the World*, David C. Korten reports: "Nearly 2,000 cases have been identified in which the new owners [corporate raiders] have virtually stolen a total of \$21 billion of what they often declare to be 'excess' funding from company pension accounts to apply to debt repayment" (West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, 1995), 209.

⁵See Donna Boundy's excellent analysis of this in *When Money Is the Drug: The Compulsion for Credit, Cash, and Chronic Debt* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993).

⁶ Anne Wilson Schaef, *When Society Becomes an Addict* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1987), 18–19.

⁷ Schaef, *When Society Becomes an Addict*, 4.

⁸John Taylor Gatto, *Dumbing Us Down: The Hidden Curriculum of Compulsory Schooling* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1992), xii.

⁹ Donna Boundy, *When Money Is the Drug: The Compulsion for Credit, Cash, and Chronic Debt* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 57.

¹⁰ For instance, in his 1995 social critique *Opposing the System*, Charles Reich suggests that "the System" presents us with a paradigm through the use of images: the "free market," the "private sector," the "welfare mother," the "predatory criminal." Reich maintains that, "an entire ideology can be rendered as a series of pictures making up a comprehensive map of reality. Constantly repeated without rebuttal or dissent, these pictures and the map [paradigm] they form set the parameters of debate and imagination." Charles Reich, *Opposing the System* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1995), 154.

¹¹ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Second ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 83.

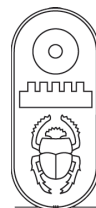
¹² Riane Eisler's books, *The Chalice and the Blade* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1988) and (with David Loye) *The Partnership Way* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1990) contrast the dominator model with the partnership model, suggesting as we do that the former makes humans suffer, while the latter, both historically and culturally, allows humans to thrive.

¹³ John Romer, *Testament* (New York: Henry Holt, 1988), 203, 205.

¹⁴ Hal Zina Bennet, ed., *Larry Dossey in Conversation with Michael Toms* (Lower Lake, CA: Aslan Publishing/ New Dimensions Books, 1994), 48.

¹⁵ Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books/ HarperCollins, 1986), 106.

¹⁶ *The Paradigm Conspiracy* is available at <http://astore.amazon.com/wwwrosicrucia-20/detail/1568382081>.





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