

Mithras

MYSTERIES AND INITIATION REDISCOVERED

A report on the book by the same title
by D. Jason Cooper

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In as much as there has been a great deal of speculation over the years regarding the origins of a great many of the various spiritual traditions, it is not the intent of this author to presume to advance a “new” theory as to the circumstances where anything which has its first cause in antiquity did or did not begin. It is however my intent to present this paper, not to encourage a debate of the merits of one philosophy, mystery, or religion over another, but rather to show a wonderful continuation of traditions, teachings and beliefs as they have come down to us from the mists of antiquity. In so doing it is my hope that we who would style ourselves as scholars and students of history and the royal art may come to the conclusion of the wise king himself who said, truly, there is nothing new under the sun.

In this paper I review but one title, a book written by D. Jason Cooper, on the subject of Mithraism, a subject on which few books have been written and little is known about. Mr. Cooper draws on other works and authors, which will be quoted in the following account to lend the sense of corroboration of similar authors and historic texts. His work clearly draws comparisons, both in similarity and contradiction, between Christianity and Freemasonry. It is my hope that we look at the subject for ourselves. Much has been written over the years about the origin of modern Freemasonry, and it has been almost entirely speculative. Likewise, much has been said about the early and formative years of the religions of the Abrahamic faith. Often we hear words thrown about such as “mystery religion” and hear the term “Mithraism” being mentioned without any sort of qualifying remarks given to WHY or HOW it relates to the subject at hand.

It does not bear repeating what others have said, speculated, or what you or I may believe personally. We of all people ought to know where our personal practices and rituals and beliefs lead us. It is not for this author to expose, denounce, advocate, or hypothesize on ANY body of men, whatever may be their creed or ritual. This report is to present information accumulated by an author much more knowledgeable than I, and to let you, the audience and reader alike, draw your own conclusions and lessons as you see fit.

Let me begin with the first words from the introduction, which launch the book in a way I can only aspire to:

“His worship has lasted over 3,500 years and continues to this day. For almost 500 years his religion vied with Christianity for domination of Rome and through that the whole of Western Civilization. In ancient times he found followers in the Indian, Persian and Roman empires, and as far north as the Russian steppes.known as Mitra to the Indians, Mithra to the Iranis and Zarathustrians and Mithras to the Romans, this god is the oldest of all living deities.”

Who was this god, who were his followers, what were their beliefs and rituals and most importantly, how do they relate to us today? The name Mitra, Mithra, and Mithras all derive from the Indo-European root, “mihr”, which translates BOTH as “friend” and “contract”. “Mihr” itself derives from “mei”, which is an Indo-European word meaning “exchange”. When the Aryan tribes swept down from the steppes, they brought their gods with them, and some time between 2000 and 1500 BCE, these tribes entered India and Iran, bringing one deity in particular, Mitra. The Mitanni, one branch of the same tribes who established their own Middle Eastern empire, named their empire after him, and give us the first written reference to Mitra in a treaty between them and the Hittites. This treaty was signed around 1375 BCE, and calls on divine witnesses to affirm its terms. The Hittites called on the sun god, and the Mitanni, Mitra.

Mitra was the “lord of the contract”, a title which he is frequently referred to as. A god who is the enforcer of the contract must be able to see and hear all. The stars became his eyes and by this was called “the god of 10,000 eyes”. Whenever his worshippers called on him, whether in a whisper or a shout, he heard all. Naturally god must be able to make his will known to mankind, and this was done by the ordeal of fire.

Our primary source about the Indian deity Mitra is the Rg Veda, one of the Hindu Scriptures, written down about 1500 BCE but possibly originally composed some 300 years earlier. Originally Mitra was an important Vedic deity, but after the reformation, he was gradually replaced as Shiva, Vishnu, and Brahma gained prominence. In Vedic references Mitra is primarily referred to in conjunction with Varuna, his partner (an important aspect in Hindu deities is their consort or partner). The majority mention them together much more than singularly. Mitra is linked to the color red, morning and day, earth, fire and the right hand side. Varuna was associated with water, heaven, night and evening, and the left hand side. Varuna had the ordeal of water. Together the 2 encompass the whole universe in its totality. Mitra’s eye is the sun, and so prayers to him were addressed at sunrise. And while Mitra often punishes transgressors with sickness, especially leprosy, he is not a “terrible god”. He is, in fact the first divinity credited with recognition and rewarding of true penance and forgiveness. Other aspects of the Aryan tribal god were carried over to the Indian tradition, such as his association with cattle, who he was the patron of, as well as “wide pastures”, and cattle were sacrificed to him. To his devotees, he bestowed gifts and rewards, large herds, male children, wide pastures, and beautiful women. In all three traditions (the Irani, Indian, Roman), Mithra is a chariot-driving god, and had bulls sacrificed to him. He was invoked to preserve the sanctity of the contract, and such contracts were sometimes concluded in front of fires so that Mithra could bear witness to them.

There is an interesting myth associated with how Mitra become associated with the Soma plant, which in Indian religion was crushed and the juices were mixed with cow’s milk, and produced an altered state. The “averted of death” as the plant was called, was referred to being sacrificed in its crushing and use in the ceremonial drink.

Mithra was a moral god, judge of contracts between nations as well as individuals. In this he differed from many functions and personalities of deities of this early time as well as now, where a god is more of a national deity. Mithra is a supranational deity, whose primary responsibility is to the “rightness of the action”, and whose honor is tied to the honor of the contract, even when the contract is made with one who is certain to break it.

Mitra drives a chariot of war which he sets out in to fight evil, and it is drawn by four horses. He has two companions in this fight, Sraosha (obedience to the law or feudal obligations) and Rashnu (Truest, the lord of the ordeal). With him too is Verethraghna, or Victory, who can take the form of a boar, the wind, or a golden horned bull.

Cooper cites the importance of Mithra to the Persians, whose mention of the deity are prominent in the work of Zarathustra. He says:

“Zarathustra is the most important person in the recorded history of religion, bar none. The first man to promulgate a divinely revealed religion, he influenced the religions of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Mahayana Buddhism, Manicheism, and the pagan Norse myths. Over half the world has accepted a significant portion of his precepts under the guise of one or another of these faiths.” (pg. 7)

(I would go even further in this in saying that the ENTIRE WORLD has been effected by these principles, but here I digress and interject my own opinions between those of the author.)

In the Avesta, the Zarathustrian holy book, there is a Yast, or hymn, where the supreme deity of the good, Ahura Mazda (or “wise lord”) tells the prophet that when he created Mithra, he made him as worthy of worship as himself. This distinction is given no other Amenta Spenta or Yazata. There is of course the duality of the nature of Mitra-Varuna and Mithra-Apam-Nepar, who were associated with Fire and Water. (Here we might suppose we see something of a mystical triune nature of the divine entity. But again, this is my own conjecture.)

Mithra is a pacifier of lands in turmoil and a supporter of governmental authority, but opposes governments who are oppressive to the people. He is the judge of kings, supporting those who keep their word, and toppling those who do not. (can we not here draw a similar lesson learned from the life and times of the perjured last king of Judah, Zedekiah?)

Mithra is a more developed image of the god than the ethereal Mitra. There is actually a relief of the Iranian deity, (while to date we have no such image of the Indian). Reconstruction shows him shaking hands with King Antiochus. (again, a “contract” being represented by an image of two individuals taking each other by the right hand?) Here it is essential to note the clothing and iconography of the god: he wears the Phrygian cap, Persian trousers, and a cape. His hat is speckled with stars and rays of light emerge from his head much like a halo, and he wears a choke collar of a serpent. This image we will find in Rome.

In our understanding of the god and his rituals and beliefs and his adepts, we must reach across the cultures and decipher the remaining evidence. For the Indian Mitra and the Iranian Mithra, we have to rely almost wholly on texts, the Rig Veda and the Yasts, or Hymns of the Zarathustrian holy book, the Avesta, and the inscriptions of kings like Darius the Great. From the nomadic Aryan tribes, we have only anthropological evidence and reconstruction from linguistic drifts. From the

Roman perspective, we have almost NO written evidence. Almost all of it comes from archaeological excavations, some graffiti on temple walls, inscriptions on votive offerings, and some explanations of surviving murals. There is some evidence from contemporary writers, such as the Christian writer Tertullian and pagan author, Porphyry. Otherwise, no book remains from Roman Mithraism. This is akin to trying to understand Christianity with nothing more than the Old Testament and medieval cathedrals to go by. A difficult endeavor indeed!

However, we do have a great archaeological record: murals, temples and their floor plans, statues, alters, mosaics. But still no book. This has led some to conclude that there WASN'T any sacred writings associated with the Roman Mithraism, that there were no secrets, no teachings, no theology, just an excuse for a club to get together for drunken parties and feasting (as though there were some shortage of that in ancient Roman life). Others, particularly later Christian writers whose works centered on discrediting and attempting to obliterate Mithraism, claimed that the religion COPIED Christian traditions like the Eucharist, though this ritual, complete with round loaves of bread marked with a cross and wine, predate the Christian era by centuries. But first we must answer the first and most obvious question: how did the religion come to the Roman world? After all, the Persian and Roman Empires were perpetual enemies.

The answer to this question comes to us from two Roman historians, Plutarch in the first Century CE and Appian of the second: the soldiers of Mithridates Eupator taught the initiation secrets to the Cilician pirates, whom Pompey defeated in 67 BCE, and settled in Greece. In so doing, the mysteries of Mithras were brought to the west. The Cilician pirates as we know from Plutarch's "Fall of the Roman Republic: Six Lives by Plutarch" and translated by Rex Warner, were more than what is commonly associated with the word "pirates". They were a nation unto themselves, with armies, cities, a navy, and all the infrastructure associated with it. Indeed, they were more akin to privateers who formed a naval auxiliary to Mithridates, who fought the Romans on land, while the Cilicians fought them at sea. As they grew stronger, the pirates attracted men of wealth, military skill, and nobility. When Pompey finally defeated them, he resettled them in Greece, which would seem strange if these men were mere cutthroats and brigands, "enemies of all mankind" as pirates in the early 18th century would be referred to. After their relocation, these seafaring men continued their maritime professions, which included travel between the Persian and Roman Empires, which continued even during the conflicts which took place. Cilicia of course encompassed most of modern Turkey, and had two major cities, Tarsus (as in Paul of) and Tyana (as in Apolonius of). These towns will become of special interest to us in the history of philosophy and mysteries and religious devotion later.

There being no real reason to doubt the explanations of these first hand accounts, or at least, accounts written by individuals less removed from the incidents than we ourselves are, and the common sense of it all, shows a rational explanation for how the Mithraism of the Persian came to the Roman world. It also helps to explain why a certain type of individual was attracted to the cult.

The roman image of the god is as a young man, probably no older than his early thirties. He wears a Phrygian cap with the forward folding top, Persian trousers, a billowing cloak with the underside decorated with eight pointed stars and attached by a brooch on the right shoulder. His characteristic pose is holding down a bull, one hand holding the horn or muzzle, a knee in the back. With the other hand he is about to or has already, plunged a dagger into the bull's shoulder. He is usually portrayed with two companions, miniature versions of himself, Cautes and Cautopates, his torch bearers, one holding a torch aloft and the other pointing downward. The act of sacrificing the bull is central to the entire religion of Mithraism, and the scene appears in every temple to the god in the

Roman Empire. (may we here speculate that ALL the religious connotations of the so-called “bull slaying cults” of the ancient world had their origin in the hazy past from whence we see the religion of Mithras coming as but one expression? It is possible, of course, or the reverse may hold true, that there is a common archetype of sacrificing a strong animal like the bull, that holds true for all the ancients, from the Egyptians and Greeks. Remember the Israelites built a golden calf when they believed the Hebrew god had abandoned them, symbolizing that at least SOME of them were familiar with the religion of Egypt, where the bull cult was firmly established.)

When Rome fell, it might very well have been under the sway of any number of OTHER religious sects, cults, mysteries, or philosophies besides Christianity. All of which had a following at the time. The cult of Sol Invictus, the Gnostics, the Christians, Buddhists, Dionysus Zagreus, the religion of Isis, the cult of the Emperor—all were being preached, worshipped, practiced, discussed, and revered along with the mystery of Mithraism. Rome was not destined to become Christian by default, and closer examination of the historical record shows this. Indeed after Constantine allowed it, and then established it as the official religion of the Empire, its survival was no more guaranteed then than it is today. Let us then examine some of the circumstances of the times, beginning with a look at WHO worshipped Mithras.

If we judge by the inscriptions found on a number of votive offerings, we can surmise that the majority of Mithrasians were soldiers. Often of high rank, which is common because the wealthier have more money to devote than the average person. But he was not ONLY a soldier’s god, for merchants, bureaucrats, customs officials, provincial legates, governors and nobility joined. Emperor Trajan and Commodus were initiated into the Mysteries of Mithras. Some homes had a room dedicated to the god. Even slaves and freedmen (or ex-slaves) were members. However, it seems to have excluded women. There are a few inscriptions that contain women’s names, but they are NEVER given a degree of initiation or title of an official post. Surviving murals show only men. There were faiths though that accepted only men (the cult of Bona Dea) or only women (the cults of Cybele and Attis). There was an interaction between the religion of Isis and Cybele and Mithraism, so perhaps the women and children of members worshipped at those temples while the men were at the Mithraeum.

Mithraism not only included slaves but what would be called today “ethnic minorities”. While Christianity admitted females, until the 6th century it was largely confined to, as the author puts it, “Greek-speaking orientals” (pg. 18).

Was Mithraism a small and elite group, an exclusive club, or was it a mass and proselytizing movement? Was it somewhere in between? We have no written evidence as to how members saw themselves. Were they members of a revolutionary movement advocating radical changes and, as Christians of later times would, the overthrow of the state, or were they a conservative organization that believed in the status quo? We may never know for sure, but we can infer some conclusions:

- it has been said by some authors that Mithraism could never have been a mass movement like Christianity was in the twilight of the Roman empire. The archaeologically surviving temples were ALWAYS small, holding at most on average of ten to twenty individuals. And the spiritual and moral demands placed on members were strict.

- other authors have made the claim that Mithraism wasn’t even a religion at all, but, instead a *thiasos*, a religious association, to use the term employed by Burkert in Ancient Mystery Cults. To him Mithraism offered little more than a social club with religious trappings, perhaps similar to the Knights of Columbus or the early Masonic lodges.

First, we have no idea HOW MANY temples there were, TOTAL, of Mithras, in the Roman empire. There have been over 100 sites in the city of Rome alone, although some undoubtedly were completely obliterated or, in some cases such as the one under the church of St. Prisca in Rome, built over, a common practice as Christianity moved into and replaced traditional indigenous religions. So we really cannot say with absolute certainty that there were NO “mega temples”, as it were. This would be akin to making a statement in the year 4000 to the effect that, since the archaeologically surviving Masonic lodges and temples are all small and in small towns, that masonry never had a large following. But we know that it DID at one or more points in time in history, and looking at the large temples in Dayton and Springfield, that much is clear to us. But what if a militant enemy came along dedicated to our extermination, more fervent than the Anti-Masonic Party in the early 19th century? One that didn’t hesitate to use MURDER along with lies, to destroy what it hated? They surely would tear down and take over those large and beautiful temples for their own purposes. Perhaps this happened to Mithras’ temples also, maybe there was a larger law that stated subordinate temples had to be smaller than the central one, or a district headquarters was to be the center and all outlying temples were supposed to be a certain size. In the absence of documentation this of course is only speculation, but it makes one wonder how things MIGHT be seen.

In Peter Arnott’s book, Introduction to the Roman World, he states that Mithraism and Christianity were different from the other religions of the Empire, less spectacular and more intellectual. If Christianity could become a mass movement religion, could Mithraism? There is no reason to believe that membership was NECESSARILY small. There were seven “degrees”, each with an astrological association, and the idea of a universal Sabbath is a uniquely Judeo-Christian-Islamic institution. So it would be a mistake to say that ALL the members congregated on a single specific day. Another point that the murals of the Sacred Meal show us is that not all of the various degrees are depicted. For instance, no degree of Raven (or Coraxes/Ravens) is ever shown SEATED. Sometimes the Lions (or Leos/Lions) are shown seated, sometimes standing. And while the food being served seems to be cooked, with only a few exceptions, the temples had no cooking facilities. Where did it come from, and who was bringing it? In any case we can deduce that the temple was never meant to hold the entire membership at one time. Mr. Cooper believes that the whole membership was around 250,000, excluding the women and children, worshipping in the temples of Cybele and/or Isis, which factoring in this number, he believes the number to have been around 625,000 members in the Roman Empire. Of course, this too is all highly speculative.

Of course we cannot forget that the path of Mithraism was no debauched lifestyle at all. The initiations achieved legendary reputations for severity (though we may not know whether this was actual or mere rumor, akin to the “riding the goat” stories about masonry that are more humor than reality, or the stories of cannibalism that attended the early Christians because of the communion ritual). Many members were abstinent from sex, and in divorce prone Rome, members were only allowed one marriage. Members were required to surrender all honors and recognition to their god, and further more they were required to maintain a high standard of honesty and truth in business, and to be fearless and brave. Certainly this wasn’t a lifestyle that everyone felt compelled to accept. No doubt there were members much like some in our lodges who, being sworn to truth and brotherly love, turn out to be vile and perjured serpents, but we may safely assume, I think, that they will always be the exception which proves the rule of the prevalence of virtue for the majority of the membership of any organization that holds itself to a higher standard.

We don’t know how members joined-were they approached to join (and if so, how and why) or were they required to ask to join similar in our theme “to be one ask one”. We don’t know what

they were told about the religion in advance, or what sort of requirements a member had to meet to gain admission. We also do not know if there was a limit on the number of members in each degree, per temple. We DO know that the temples were kept small, and that the members referred to each other as *frater* (brother) and they were led by a *pater* (father). And we know they organized themselves into seven distinct degrees. We can infer that there were of necessity more lower ranking members than there were higher, and that the Pater was an indispensable member of the temple and the community, no doubt it's leader, much like the Christian priest in the parish. We have accounts mentioning the Pater of a temple dying and a replacement being sent from a considerable distance to replace him, which we can assume means there was but one Pater to a temple, and there was a structured hierarchy which could be contacted to arrange such a transfer, and supervise the activities of the individual temple. We also may reckon that the Mithras theology required a full time job of being a member of the clergy. The state offered nothing in maintaining the cult, it was entirely self-sustaining, dependent on the generosity of its members for donations or tithes, votive offerings, gifts, etc.

We know that a Pater was chosen, and not by his own temple, it seems. There was a means where a Pater was chosen according to law by his fellow initiates, ("pater nominus" by "consacranei syndexi") and in addition to this title there was also a title of Pater Sacrorum (father of the sacred [ceremonies]) and the Pater Patrum (father of fathers). This last title was the "de decum primus pater patrum", indicating the Pater Sacrorum was chosen from and/or by, a council of ten.

Cooper draws comparisons between four other traditions which he intends to show draw heavily on mysticism and occult traditions: Christianity, the Knights Templar, Freemasonry, and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. He says that they are not identical or even really similar, but lists their character and ritualism so as to give a comparison to Mithraism. Of course as we know it, all four of these organizations post-date Mithras, though they all had some similarities.

The Golden Dawn was a philosophical and mystical order founded in 1888, and had as its members some of the most prominent names in occult circles. Although it had at most perhaps three hundred members, it is worthwhile to note the similarities between it and Mithraism. Cooper signifies that similarity most by the use of what he refers to as "correspondences", where the various elements of colors, numbers, geometric figures, mantras, and so forth are linked with the spiritual, physical and iconographic world. For instance aggression is connected to Mars, the color red, number five, the five pointed star, etc. The Mithrasian religious degrees were tied to particular planets, constellations and religious or moral principles (valor, purity, honor, etc.).

Here is an important note for ALL mystical societies. As Cooper says on page 31, "there was much that could be revealed without giving away anything at all. A prospective Mithrasian could be told "we are a mystery religion", "our teachings demand high moral standards of our followers", "ours is a god of light who battles against the darkness", "we teach a special form of astrology". Isn't this very similar to our own teachings? We have lessons on morality, god, familial and civic duty, none of which are exclusive to Freemasonry, nor it is assumed that one who joins would be particularly deficient in those characteristics. But the degrees of the lodge bring them all together, and teach a much deeper symbolism which takes years to absorb and digest.

The Golden Dawn did not rest on a martial tradition, though some tried to make it thus. The Mithrasian's role of guardians brings them closer to the Knights Templar. Here it is not to discuss whether the Templars had any special beliefs or teachings, but to show a different connection. Both groups were widely recognized by the communities in which they lived, while members of the

Golden Dawn tried to make their very existence a secret, making them indeed a “secret society” from the world at large. The Mithrasian had to shun honors that otherwise would be his reward, likewise the Templars were known for vows of poverty, chastity, and other monastic disciplines such as prayer, fasting, plain, unadorned clothes, silence, etc., at a time when gluttony, irreligion, boasting, riches, rapine and debauchery were virtually the birthright of the knightly profession. Physical hardship and discipline were expected of both, and the rituals of initiation for Mithras were very physically demanding. Both offered up their sword and shields to the service of their respective deities, and we know at least one Pater was martyred by the Christians in Rome from his body being found in a vandalized temple, chained to the altar. Being of a military nature, we can assume that they saw themselves as an elite group, defenders, guardians, exclusive and above the common folk of their time. There is no denying the similarities between Mithraism and the Knights of the Temple, but unlike Mithraism, the Templars were not “an initiatory body”, they had ranks of knight and sergeant but most of the similarities are of an administrative nature.

Many comparisons have been made between the Mithrasians and Freemasons. Exclusively for men, keeping their traditions and rituals secret from the outside world, advocating high moral standards, both were initiatory bodies with degrees and esoteric teachings that had strong attractions for members of the military and merchant class. Freemasonry does not claim to be a religion, but only enhances its members understanding of their particular tradition, so membership is not excluding membership in your particular faith. In Mithraism there are murals that show the establishment’s religion through icons of Oceanus, Saturn, Jupiter, the gods of Rome, but they are separate from the life and actions of Mithras. So both Masonry and Mithraism are presented as something unique and distinct while still being a part of the current society in which they reside. Many complain about the secrecy of Masonic lodges, and lead to all manner of wildly speculative and inaccurate claims about impropriety. Were these same kinds of accusations the undoing of Mithraism, in a way they almost were of masonry after the Morgan incident?

Cooper accurately says (pg 36) that “the world was not predestined to be Christian”, and points out that even with centuries of cultural, military and economic dominance, it is still far from being “on top”, so to speak. It is not the largest or fastest growing religion, and it has not come to power through conversion alone like Buddhism in southeast Asia. It has only succeeded when a central figure like a king or warlord has converted (for whatever reason) and then the religion had his military backing to try to wipe out the other established traditional religions. And even in spite of that these other traditions have not been totally eliminated. But even so, many historians make a great many assumptions about religious conflict, including that any religion that differs from Christianity is at a great disadvantage and bound to fail because of those dissimilarities. But religion, like all things, adapts, and Christianity today is not the Christianity of the early church. If we see similarities between Mithraism and Christianity NOW, they were doubly so in the beginning of the common era.

Until the 4th century, Christianity marketed itself as a mystery religion. There were many similarities between the two and shared parallels, and contemporary writers mention them as similar and rival creeds, not antagonistic doctrines. Some Christian writers responded to this by saying that Mithraism copied Christian sacraments, though Mithraism had been established in Roman traditions over a century before Jesus was born. Failing in that argument, they claimed that the devil had anticipated the new religion and had introduced these rituals to lead people astray, a claim made against religions of Isis and Buddha, and still repeated today. Such conjecture is for the individual to make in his own time as to the validity of the intruding claims of ownership of ritualism and doctrine. However, the similarities between the two were very apparent at the beginning. Where

small wafers and sips of wine are used now, then Christian communion was observed with full loaves and jugs of wine, which was the Sacred Meal of Mithraism. And in keeping with the nature of a hierarchy of initiation, new converts would be sent from the church before the mass of Catuchemas where the bread and wine were turned into the body and blood of Christ. As lower level initiates, they were held unworthy of observing the miracle, as it were, of the transformation. The churches of the early Christian were small, like the temples of Mithras, and the Mithraic temple at St. Prisca was adjacent to the church of St. Prisca, and identical in size. By contrast Christianity admitted females, which some have given as reason for its outstripping other religions in a quest for dominance of the Roman Era. However, once the church became mainstream, women were quickly placed in a very secondary role. This may hold a pattern for all revolutionary and subversive groups, who are willing to accept all who are willing to aid its purposes and fight on its behalf, but once its goals of revolution are achieved, its membership is “purged”. It then becomes the establishment and there must be an “undesirable” or “heretical” faction to continue to fight. Gregor Strasser and Leon Trotsky are classic examples of this post-triumphant infighting.

So why did Christianity become Number One, and not Mithraism? We cannot forget the conditions of the Roman Empire at the time when it became the dominant religion. Rome was crumbling, corrupt and decadent from within and attacked from without. Mithraism called on Valor, courage and loyalty, a higher moral life and character, at a time when such traits were in short supply. Cooper says (pg 39) “what Christianity *did* do was offer an easier path.Mithraism seems to have believed in salvation through upright action and moral beneficence. Christianity preached faith. It promised the murderer, the rapist, and the lecher they could all enter heaven if only they believed. It was not a religion for the courageous or the stalwart, but for the desperate. And Rome was crowded with the desperate in the first four centuries of this era. Christianity’s triumph came when the western half of the Empire was already collapsing. In the ensuing disarray, high moral standards and virtue did not stand many in good stead. Mithraism sought to save the world of Rome. To this end it applied knowledge and expertise, seeking to purify traditions, and force a stricter moral code on a crumbling society. Christianity by contrast rejected the world of Rome. It did not consider Rome worthy of preservation. It aspired to a different, a heavenly city. Mithraism could not survive the double blow of the collapse of Rome and the rise of the Christian church.”

This then may (or may not) sum up the conflict. Certainly there were other factors too complex to sum up in two paragraphs, or even a whole book. But we see that Mithraism was of the establishment, the “old order”, which was perhaps inevitably doomed to fail. Recent archaeological evidence and research has suggested that the Emperor Nero was entirely accurate in blaming the great conflagration of Rome on the Christians, who believed in an approaching “end of days”, which would be ushered in by the burning of the great whore of Babylon that they saw Rome as. Can there, I ask you, be much of a contest between a corrupt establishment entirely given over to vice and corruption, sloth and overindulgence, when it is confronted by a militant and fanatical zeal that will have its members burn even their own homes, and rejoice in their own death? We see martyrdom glorified in the middle east, and see the great lengths a fanatical, absolutist ideology will carry its adherents. In this regard, I believe perhaps it WAS inevitable that Rome was doomed to collapse, and the newest Abrahamic faith assert its dominance for a time. This is only my opinion.

Where did the Mithrasians worship? A temple of Mithras is known as a “Mithraeum”, plural of Mithraea, which means a place of Mithras. Throughout the Roman Empire, the general layout of a Mithraeum is consistent to confirm its identity by its floor plan alone. They were built underground, and they were small, narrow buildings, with a high bench on either side for the members to recline during the sacred meal. They were oriented due East and West, with the

entrance being at the western end. At the eastern end was a nave holding the altar (one or maybe more) and the all important icon of the bull slaying scene, the central image of the religion. In addition there were niches for statues, murals, relief carvings, etc., which varied from building to building. It may be that we are prejudiced by the only surviving structures, because after persecution, perhaps the only buildings that survived were underground, "secret vaults" that were hidden from prying eyes, while larger structures above ground were destroyed sooner. However this seems not to be the case, for instance the London Mithraeum maintained this pattern, even though it was built above ground (the only known instance of a Mithraeum built above instead of below ground) and there was no space limitations or other restraining factors to necessitate it. So we can surmise that there was a universal reason for this pattern. The benches which lined both sides of the chamber-the North and South walls-called "praesepia" or "cribs", were used by the members to recline on during the sacred meal, not to sit or kneel on. Mithraea were often decorated with pumice to give the appearance of a cave, and period references use the terms "speleum", "specus", and "spelunca", all of which refer to caves. Another word used was "crypta". The cave symbolized the cosmos, and the vault may have taken on a ritual significance of a miniature of the whole universe. Sometimes holes were made in the ceiling to allow the light of certain stars to shine through on certain days, and sometimes gemstones were mounted on the ceilings. By building underground, the entrance of light could be controlled and used in the ceremonies much in the same way a stained glass window or a series of light switches controls various lights in a room. The small size of the Mithraeum almost certainly prevents the circumambulations of the Zarathustrian religion which Mithraism was descended, so we see processions and two person rituals, which are illustrated in murals, along with rituals performed while stationary, including the challenging of the candidate, communion, and the sacred meal, all of which are depicted.

One of the most widely used statues is the so-called "lion headed god", which is referred to by some scholars as an actual image of a deity, such as the god of infinite time, Aion who is referred to in Persian literature as Zervan. Others have said it represents the gorgon Medusa, or even as a symbolic representation of Mithras' ability to overcome his enemies. However Cooper disagrees with this belief on what he refers to as "occult" grounds, saying that none of these authors and scholars are involved with mysticism. It does seem obvious that there must be some connection between the degree of Leo (lion) and an image of a man with lion symbolism. First, not ALL of the images have lion heads. North of the Alps, and in the Danube region, NO lion headed figure has ever been found. However some key traits remain: an image of a lion, often times placed over the heart. The figure stands on a globe, often with two bands around it. In either hand he holds a key, there is a serpent coiling around the body. Either two or four wings sprout from his back, or sometimes from his hips and lower back. He may hold a staff. Over his heart there may be a thunderbolt instead of a lion's head. As all initiatory organizations have an adepts degree, the Leo degree represents this level of achievement in Mithraism. At this point, the student is supposed to have mastered and internalized the lessons of the group.

Other statues are found in context with Mithraism: Serapis, the triple goddess Hecate, Venus, Saturn, and others. This indicates that the Mithraists saw themselves as a continuation of ancient mythology and the previous religious traditions. However there ARE of course statues that are specifically Mithraic: the sun god, Mithras, and his torch bearers. Mithras has been depicted as riding on horseback, slaying the bull, and being born of stone. In one statue from Rome, Mithras is seen emerging from a pine cone instead of a rock.

The numerous murals depict the different degrees, Mithras as an archer in the sacred hunt, Sol and

Mithras at the sacred meal, and the battles between Jupiter and the Titans. There are several depictions from the second century c.e., which show Cupid and Psyche, which may have a correlation with The Golden Ass by Lucius Apuleius. One particularly interesting find is a marble relief of three equilateral triangles set concentrically. Within the central triangle is a crescent moon on its back. This may have been some kind of degree badge for the fifth degree of Perses, which was attributed to the moon.

Like all religions, there are smaller talismans and personalized emblems for individuals to wear, or use in personal rituals and ceremonies. Many of them depict the bull slaying scene which was central to the religion. Since these were of necessity small, they often exclude some of the lesser details of the scene. Some add new symbols to the scene, such as one that has arrows and palm leaves of victory, and a Greek cross in a rayed sun.

The Christian writer Tertullian derogatively called the temples of Mithras “camps of darkness”. However, there is abundant evidence to the contrary. In the Aventine Mithraeum it appears as many as sixteen oil lamps could be used at once—a large amount of light for any room so small.

So we come to the all important question: what were the beliefs of Mithraism?

Imagery of Mithraism often shows the Milky Way as a ladder for the ascension of souls, and the proper place for Mithras, according to Plutarch (quoted in Michael P. Speidel’s Mithras-Orion: Greek Hero and Roman Army God) is “in the middle”, the equator, for he is the judge of men’s souls. The tropic of Cancer is the Northern gateway through which souls enter the world, and the southern tropic of Capricorn is that through which they leave. This indicates a belief in reincarnation and the immortality of the soul. More on that later.

To really know the religion, we must understand what Cooper has titled “The Icon in the East”, the most integral symbol of Mithraism. More wholly encompassing the mythology, tradition and mysticism of the religion than those symbols of religions more common to us today, such as the six-pointed “Star of David”, the Crucifixion scene, or the Crescent Moon of Islam, this image is absolutely central to the whole religion. Modern writers call it the Tauroctony, Greek for “bull slaying scene”, but it is more. Its illustration was the central focus of every Mithraeum, whether it was a mural, mosaic, or statues in bronze and stone. There is a variation in styles of Tauroctony, much as there are variations in the Christian cross. But the central meaning is there. Its central image is Mithras stabbing a bull, in the neck near the shoulder. He always stands over the bull, and the thrust of the blade is not an act of defense or desperation, but only delivered to an already subdued animal. The animal is never seen standing, and Mithras always deals the fatal blow in the same location, always with his right hand, always with his left knee in it’s back. At odds with the classical depiction of epic and heroic acts, Mithras looks AWAY from his deed, a theme noticed by David Ulansey in his book, The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries: Cosmology and Salvation in the Ancient World, where he notes the precedent in depictions of Perseus who cannot look directly at the Gorgon, or Prometheus who looks away from the eagle. Mithras has a sorrowful look on his face, so it may be that the act is undesired by him, or he may be looking to some other point, for instance the Raven and rays. The bull’s wound bleeds profusely, sometimes the wound is sprouting wheat sheaves. Sometimes the wound is blood, but the tail has become a wheat sheaf. Mithras’ right foot holding down the hoof is a regular enough feature to be meaningful. There is a scorpion gripping the bull’s testicles and a small dog in front of the bull, lapping up the blood. A lion, a mixing bowl, and snake are other consistent images, but their depiction and position varies more so than the previously mentioned ones. The image of the lion and the bowl are the most varied of the

three, for while they may be excluded altogether, and the snake is sometimes seen without the bowl and lion (though always present), they are never shown alone, that is, a lion without a bowl, or vice versa. In any case, the lion is always male, and the bowl is always two-handled, a mixing bowl. These latter two images are shown much smaller, in some cases the lion is smaller than the dog. There are two miniature versions of Mithras, on his right and left. They wear the same garb and facial expressions as the god. They are his torchbearers, Cautes pointing his torch up, Cautopates pointing his down. There are some variations in the depictions of these two as well, holding the torch with one hand or two, standing or cross-legged. While they are not ALWAYS included in the image, and do not always have their legs crossed, there IS however a consistency when they DO have their legs crossed: Cautes has his left leg over right. Cautopates has the right over left. This is a consistent feature. Another consistent theme is the depictions of Sol and Luna, whenever both are portrayed, they are depicted in the same position/form. If Sol is depicted as only a bust, so is Luna, and if one rides a chariot, so does the other. The background of Mithras' actions is usually a cloud or a cave, depicting the universe as the cave and the cloud as the limits of that universe. In Plato's Republic this duality is said to represent the human life as being contained, but not limited, and capable of liberation. Sometimes there are trees behind Cautes, they are trees in spring, behind Cautopates, they tend to be trees in autumn. Frequently the signs of the zodiac are present in the scene as well.

Cooper says of the mysteries that were taught by the Mithrasians this: "it takes more than a pretty pattern tied to a series of stories to sustain the development of a religion. To function as a religious symbol, the Tauroctony had to be tied to an eschatological myth: something showing the struggle between good and evil; something to stir the deepest parts of the human soul. Nothing less would have sustained so many people for over half a millennium". (pg. 68) This may be debated. Certainly there were Mithrasians who died in the face of the persecutions they faced. Perhaps we may never know every detail of the individuals who refused to be caught up in the tide of the new religion originating in Judea, but we do well to remember our Masonic brethren who were tortured and killed by the Inquisition, even up into the 1700s, for their beliefs. Certainly belief and ritual is a powerful thing indeed! There is no denying the connection between the various degrees, their astrological signs, and the ritual objects associated with those same degrees. And if we draw the correlation between our own degrees and the symbols and objects associated with them, we can easily understand the inclusion of the astrological signs that were so much a part of the ancient world in their understanding of their universe. There seems to be a regionalism in Mithraism, for instance in the Germanic areas, there is an absence of the degree system that we see South of the Alps, in Rome and Ostia. This leads one to conclude that while the icon of the Tauroctony is universal, the degree system is not, so therefore the icon predates the degrees, which are a logical extent of the development of a philosophy, in a way that the Doctrine of the Trinity developed over centuries, or the Holy Royal Arch became the perfection of the Master Mason Degree.

So why did Mithras slay the bull? We get a clue from an inscription in the Mithraeum at Santa Prisca: "and us have you saved by shedding the eternity-giving blood". So there was an element of a "Salvationist" religion in the scene, that draws heavily on the Hellenistic ideas of the time for salvation for all mankind. This ideal has persisted to this day, and like some of the factions that arose during the Protestant Reformation, this led to a seeming split in the doctrinality of Mithraism, for North of the Danube, the theme seems to be more focused on an individual's personal realization of an advanced consciousness, like Satori or the "coming to Christ" which are familiar in Chan Buddhism and modern Evangelical movements, and in the Southern areas, the focus was more toward the actions of the individual, such as honorable business dealings, courage in battle, truth in word, and monogamy in marriage, if not outright celibacy. Cooper makes note of the fact that these

same geographical divides persisted into the time of the Great Schism of the Catholic Church with its focus on “works” and the protestants focus being toward “faith”.

At this point in the book, from page 77 through page 111, there are many illustrations from the archaeological record of the religion, including drawings of various temples, and images from museums and contemporary murals depicting the degrees, the Tauroctony, and various other fascinating illustrations.

The Mithrasian religion was divided into 7 degrees, classes, or grades, depending on how one prefers to refer to them. They were as follows:

1. Corax, or Raven
2. Nymphus, or Bride
3. Miles, or Soldier
4. Leo, or Lion
5. Perses, or Persian
6. Heliodromus, or, Messenger of the Sun, or, Sun-Runner
7. Pater, or Father

Various inscriptions and Christian authors have this order, and it seems to have been standardized throughout the southern half of the Empire. The best illustration is a mosaic from Ostia, in the form of a ladder.

So each degree has a name, a planet (zodiac sign) and a ritual object. They are as follows:

Raven.
Mercury
Raven, Caduceus, Cup

Bride.
Venus
Veil, Lamp, Mirror

Soldier
Mars
Lance, Helmet, Kitbag

Lion
Jupiter
Fire shovel, Sistrum, Thunderbolt

Persian
Moon
Crescent moon and star, Sickle, Hooked Sword

Sun-Messenger
Sun
Torch, Whip, Nimbus

Father
Saturn
Staff and ring, Persian cap, Curved sword

Several things of importance emerge, first is that each degree has items which can be 1., carried, 2., worn. Second, the symbols of four of the degrees have some connection with the importance of the head. The three degrees NOT with an emblem worn on the head have objects LINKED directly TO the head. Third, the ceremonial items carried by the members represent their physical duties, which were linked to a moral lesson of the respective degree, and the individuals duty to the world at large. Fourthly, there is a factor that all degrees have an object that is elongated, usually with a handle, to carry at one end.

The depth to which Cooper explores the degrees of Mithraism are very profound and go beyond the scope of this report, however there are some points worth mentioning.

In the first degree of CORAX, the lesson is humility, where the members having been initiated, serve the higher degree members at the Sacred Meal. We know they were connected with the planet Mercury for several reasons, first from an inscription at St. Prisca (as well as the mosaic at Ostia) which says “Nama Coracibus tutela Mercurii”, or “Holy Raven of Mercury’s tutelage”. The object which was associated with the Raven was Mercury’s Staff, the caduceus, a staff with two snakes wrapped around it. The Coraxes had to serve the higher level members, they had to change who they were as individuals so they can advance and grow. The raven was a scavenger, of ideas, and he most likely acted in the same capacity at the sacred meal, because while the Leos were the full participants in the ritual of the meal, no doubt the lesser members consumed some of the food as they went along.

The NYMPHUS, or Bride, was the second degree of the mystery. The word “nymphus” means not only “bride” but ALSO “secret”. From this we can see that the lesson of the Bride degree was to discover internal secrets. For this degree, the subject of illumination is all important. The candidate “unveils” the inner mysteries of the self, and carries a lamp, to bring to light the deeper recesses of the soul. The planet associated with the degree is the third most brilliant planetary body in the heavens, Venus. The Nymphus also carries a mirror, an object even now associated with magical and self-contemplative iconography and symbolism. In some cases the Nymphuses appear to have formed a sacred or ceremonial choir or chorus, such as at Dura-Europas as many as sixteen are shown in one relief, which is unusual for a depiction of any degrees except Corax or Leo.

The degree of MILES or Soldier, is not really a surprising one considering that soldiers comprised such a large number of the membership. The Miles is a regular soldier, not an officer. Likewise the connection to the planet Mars should not be surprising either, given the connection. Mithra, in his Iranian version, was a god of battle. He was victorious over “The Lie”, both in practice and in the spiritual pursuit. The Christian author Tertullian describes the initiation into this degree in some detail in De Corona, when he says that the candidate was offered a wreath on a sword, which would be placed on his head. However he had to refuse the honor, and say that Mithras alone was his wreath. There was a mark placed on the forehead as well, and Cooper says he believes this came after the refusal of the wreath and was the sign of the cross that marked the circular loaves used in the Sacred Meal. The Miles possibly served as the Tilers in lodge, as guardians against outside intrusion. This may have been a purely symbolic office, since we don’t have any historical

accounts of Christians killing the outer guards to gain admission, but this may merely be an oversight or lack of evidence.

LEO, or Lion, is the fourth, or “adept” degree. Here is where the candidate learns the central core beliefs, rituals, and becomes a full participant in the activities of the organization. The concept of an adept is central to any initiatory body, because it gives that groups concept of the ideal and realized man. In Christianity it is the angel, and in Mithrasian religion, it is the lion headed statue. The fire shovel, the thunderbolt of Jupiter and the sistrum, or sacred rattle are all tied to the Alchemical element of Fire. The Leo washed his hands with honey, instead of olive oil; in several Greco-Roman myths, a mortal becomes deity by being rubbed with ambrosia and then being placed in fire, which consumed the physical and left the pure essence of the spirit. The liquid form of ambrosia was nectar, and nectar and ambrosia were both closely linked with honey. There are several graffiti inscriptions in the Aventine Mithraeum, that attest to the fire element in the degree: “accept, holy father, the incense bearing lions” and “we offer through thee incense, through thee we are ourselves consumed”.

Many Mithraea show paintings of Saturn handing the thunderbolt over to Jupiter, indicating the transfer of rulership to the latter god. The sistrum or rattle is usually used in the religion of Isis, and the two religions had a shared bond. Its use might have been in several ways, maybe with the Nymphus choir, during the rituals, or as a symbolic “working tool”, for instance to awaken the soul, to spread the sound of the light of Mithras to the outside world, or maybe something entirely different. The moral lesson for the Leo was Honesty, not as an abstract guide to behavior in the way that passes for honesty in the world today, but as a burning passionate energy. The Leo held two keys, one to heaven and one to earth, which would be later used by the Popes in a different form. The snake seen coiled around the body has long been an ancient symbol of wisdom and the lion has been an emblem of strength and courage. The Leo almost certainly had some spiritual or metaphysical powers, graffiti indicating that Leos were supposed to have possessed the power of longevity, in a way that the Taoist adepts were said to have, has been found. It may be that the descriptions of Mithrasians prowess and ability to undergo physical privation and pain were connected to the spiritual discipline of the degree, similar to the way a Shaolin monk would have been reported to be able to perform extraordinary physical feats.

The degree of PERSES is one of those past the adept degree and has some surprising aspects to it. First, the name itself translates literally “Persian”, who were the mortal enemies of the Roman Empire. D. Cooper compares this to an American organization such as a church or political party in the 1950s having a leadership or administrative position called “Soviet” (pg. 131). This may refer to Perses, son of Perseus, thought to be the founder of the Persian race. If this is the case however it leaves more questions than answers. Also, the Perses degree is tied to the moon, which in other traditions is tied to the first degree as the planets are linked to degrees in order of their discovery and so, distance from the earth. All three of the top three degrees have a purpose of being administrative as well as especially developed individual powers and abilities. This might be synonymous with the Roman consecration of a temple to the trinity of Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva as One. This concept was taken from the Etruscans, who preceded the Romans. The path between Moon-Sun-Saturn may also refer to the symbolism of the three degrees, the Moon is closest and Saturn is furthest, but the Sun-Runner travels between the two, as a messenger. The sickle was a reference to the label applied to the Perses as the “keeper of the fruits” (pg. 132), and may also be a connection to the job of treasurer. The eight rayed star is usually seen on the underside of Mithras’ cloak. In the world at the time, bees, bulls and the moon were all connected: the bees were believed to come from the hides of dead bulls, and they themselves represented the souls of people yet to be born. In birth, your soul would pass through the portal of the Tropic of Cancer, whose

zodiac sign was ruled by the moon. The sword with a hook is called a “harpe”, and is the weapon Perseus used to decapitate Medusa, the gorgon.

The HELIODROMUS was also an administrative position who would take over the Pater’s duties in his absence. While the Perses wore a gray tunic, the Heliodromus wears a red garment with a yellow belt in an illustration from St. Prisca, stands holding a blue globe and greeting a Pater. In the allegory of the Sacred Meal, the Heliodromus takes the place of the sun-god, and is his representative in this plane of being just as the Pater takes the role of Mithras. His objects were the whip Sol used to drive his chariot, the torch, and the nimbus or rayed halo around Sol’s head. There seems to be only ONE Heliodromus per Mithraeum, and while Mithras replaces Sol in the new religion, Sol is not defeated or banished, and his image is second in depiction only to that of Mithras and the scene of the bull being killed.

Finally comes the PATER, or Father of the religion, and central to the life and activities of the temple. His title is separated, the Pater Sacrorum as the Father of the Sacred, and the Pater Patrum, or Father of Fathers. There were other moral and practical names used: Pientissimus, (Most Pious), Defensor, (Defender), and Dignissimus, or Dignified. Another title has been found which refers to what might be a preliminary role to that of being a full Father, which was Autopatros.

There is some inscriptions at Rome of another grouping, “Chryfii” or “Cryfii”, meaning “hidden ones”. Some believe it refers to the Nymphus degree, with the use of the veil, but it seems to have come late in the time of the religion, so it might refer to children who were not yet ready for initiation, or to other members. The inscription says only that two Paters initiated multiple individuals into several degrees of “Osterderunt Cryfios” and “Tradiderunt Chryfios”. Since it is about at this time that the Christians began persecution of the religion under Constantine, it may be that these individuals were going to be part of an underground resistance, similar to the way the Christian church survived for several centuries.

The rituals of Mithras were:

- The Sacred Meal
- Initiation
- Progression through the degrees
- &c.,

Cooper believes that the Sacred Meal took two forms, a short and a full form (pg. 140). Or, a full meal and a communion. In the full meal, it included meat, fruit, bread and wine. The communion included only bread and wine. The full meal perhaps was only for the Leos and higher degreed members, with the exception of the Coraxes as waiters. And it might be that the communion was for ALL the membership to participate in. The communion, judging from the murals, included wine and small loaves of bread or wafers marked with a cross. Judging from trash pits around the temples, beef, pork, mutton, and fowl were consumed in large quantities. There is a possibility that the ceremony only happened once a month, most likely on the sixteenth, because in the Persian calendar, this day was sacred to Mithra, and this may very well have carried over into the Roman world. Justin and Tertullian, both Christian authors, admit that Mithraism used bread and water in their rituals and accused them of being a “devilish imitation” of the Eucharist, so we have both archaeological as well as contemporary written sources documenting the nature of the ceremony. Of course we know WHICH came first, but that does not exclude these accounts by members of a later religion from being a valuable reference for the historian.

The initiation of a man into Mithraism was represented as luridly by some contemporary Christian writers as Masonry is today by others. Some of these fantastic ordeals were listed as:

- a fifty day fast
- twenty days of being left in snow
- submersion in water for several days
- being placed in a fire

These incredible accounts come to us by way of writers from the sixth to eighth century, which was well after Christendom had come to power and Mithraism's decline. However, more contemporary authors give a somewhat more plausible description. For instance, in Tertullian's Apology, he says that anyone seeking admission to Mithraism had to undergo a period of instruction before he was presented to the Pater, and upon acceptance, was initiated. According to another (pg. 144), he was bound with chicken guts and blindfolded, and had to either jump or be thrown over a ditch filled with water. A man called a "Liberator" then approached with a sword and cut the ties. At some time an oath was administered to protect the secrets of the order. The Mithraeum at Capua shows scenes of initiation. In them, an individual wearing a white tunic with red trim, which was later used by the Golden Dawn, pushes the candidate, who is naked, forward by the shoulders. In another scene, the candidate is kneeling on one knee, his hands behind him, still blindfolded. A sword is next to the candidate, and one of the participants in the ceremony holds his hands behind the initiate's head. In the final mural of the series, the candidate is shown with his hands in the Osiris position, with the ritualist holding his hands in that position from behind. In front of him is a Pater pointing a sword at what is most likely a loaf of bread. A ninth century writer, Suidas, says that if an individual could not pass the tests of initiation, he was refused membership into the order.

The only surviving working tools which have survived are the fire shovels of the Leo degree. These are finely wrought items with signs of the zodiac and other symbols on them. However there must have been others which have not survived or have yet to be discovered. We know that as individuals progressed through the degrees, each degree was accompanied with an investiture of various working tools.

Some of the highlights of the various degrees include:

Vermaseren (in Mithras, pg. 143) speculates that during the degree of Nymphus, the temple would be brightly lit, to signify the transition from darkness to light, as it were.

During the Miles degree, the candidate was offered a wreath placed on his head, which he had to refuse and declare that Mithras alone was his victory and he would not in the future wear a wreath. This refusal may refer to Caesar's refusal of the crown of Rome, and the sword and wreath is similar to the Ace of Swords in the Tarot cards. The Miles had to refuse to accept public as well as private honors, so this symbolism was carried over to public as well as religious life.

The Leo degree corresponds roughly to the Adeptus Minor degree in the Golden Dawn and the Royal Arch degree of Masonry, the culmination, the Perfection. Illustrations show Leos wearing either red cloaks or white with red trim. Porphyry says the candidate was "baptized by fire", perhaps in accordance with the belief prevalent in the ancient world that the world would end in a conflagration, which was also a belief among the Zarathustrians. The candidate would be placed in a confined place and subjected to alternatives of heat and cold, then symbolically raised from the dead. The belief that the world will end in fire preceded by frigid winters is similar to the Norse belief in the Age of Ragnarok.

During the dedication of a new Mithraeum, or the refurnishing of the same, there was the sacrificing of animals, and that they seem to have observed the Festival of Pales, a female deity in the traditional Roman religion, held on April 21st. This was the Palila and the night before, sheep were ritually purified, and on the day of the statue of the goddess was sprinkled with milk, and prayers for blessing and forgiveness were made, afterwards individuals leaped over a fire and purified themselves with water. These all have similarities to Hindu and Zoroaster traditions of worship, and are appropriate for a religion that believes in a past flood and future world fire.

Besides the birth of Mithras, they celebrated the Equinoxes, though we do not know in exactly what manner. These you will remember are the longest and shortest days of the year, marked by the days of St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist to our calendar. As far as Mithras birth, this miracle happened on December 25, the day of the winter solstice on the old calendar, which now is the 22. This no doubt has a special reference to numbers and astronomical calculations, because a secret name of Mithras was Meitras, which in Greek equates to 365. He was born from a rock, with a divine fire and light surrounding his emergence. There are shepherds, sometimes with sheep and goats but not cattle. They are attracted by the fire, and a messenger, either Mercury or Saturn, points them to the event. They arrive at the moment of complete or almost complete birth, and in some depictions, assist by drawing him out by his arms. Sometimes Saturn, sometimes Oceanus, sometimes both, are present, but they do not take an active role, they merely observe.

Besides this, there is another miracle, where Mithras, as an archer god, fires an arrow into a mountain or rock and a spring erupts from the point of impact. This scene is usually shown with other scenes.

The scene of The Great Hunt is one that is very popular in the Germanic areas, in them Mithras rides a horse, with or without a bow and arrows. He usually is hunting a deer or stag of some kind, and sometimes the antlers have crescent moons at the tips of the antlers. Sometimes his hunting companions are a lion, snake and dog.

The slaying of the bull happens in a cave, but before that it is captured and bodily carried to a building represented by a triangular roof and two pillars in the form of trees at the front of the building blocking his escape. This is from a depiction in Dieberg, which also shows three gods which are too worn and faded for positive identification.

Mithras, Sol, and Luna. Mithras is sometimes called "Mithras Deus Sol Invictus", or "Mithras the invincible sun-god", and this shows a relation between Sol, the Sun, and the natural connection the sun has with the moon, or Luna. In the Germanic areas, Sol is depicted as having been defeated by Mithras. In Rome, the succession is shown as a pact or transfer between the two gods. This is in keeping with the myth of Jupiter and Saturn, where Jupiter castrates his father. In Mithraism, Jupiter hands Saturn the lightning bolts with an altar present, so the transfer is one of agreement. Whether this agreement came about because of a struggle or natural progression is unclear. And even though Sol is succeeded by Mithras, he is not gone from the world. He is still the sun. Saturn is sometimes shown in a contemplative pose, perhaps he is remembering his era, or maybe he is regretting something. Either way, there remains a clear 1-2-3 relation. First came Saturn, then came Sol, now this age is ruled by Mithras.

At the Sacred Meal Sol hands Mithras a cluster of grapes, perhaps as the key to wine-making. Of course wine became symbolic of the blood of the bull, which may have been sacrificed on orders from Sol, as the Tauroctony seems to indicate. So then the use of wine as a substitute for the blood

may be a direct sacramental instruction from the sun, as in “do this in remembrance of this sacrifice”.

And what of that sacrifice? Afterwards Mithras ascends into heaven, either in or with, Sol’s chariot, or in the German regions by going towards the oceans of space, there to rule and preside over the lives of mankind for all time.

So what have we learned? We have an ancient religion that believed in a miraculous birth, in a sacrifice for our salvation, an ascension into heaven, an initiation of candidates and progression through seven degrees, the fourth being the adepts degree. We have symbolic tools and implements being assigned to the degree, along with spiritual and mystical symbolism. We have members being exhorted to be good men and true in their lives and actions. We see there was a special communion using bread and wine which represented the flesh and blood of the sacrifice for our salvation. We know the members were persecuted by the establishment’s new religion, though they had helped to guarantee the survival of that society. We know the symbols and illustrations were copied by a later religion, whose mythology and rituals mirrored the traditions which pre-dated it by thousands of years. We know that the devotees met in buildings that went from East to West, and the Holy area was in the East. We see that the priest was called the father of his community. And we see that the members of this religion came from all walks of life, the high, the low, the rich, and the poor, and worldly wealth and status did not transfer to the temple, where members were called brother. The degrees represented certain incidents that happened in mythological time, and taught moral lessons. Food and drink were an integral part of the communal activities of the temple. Trials and challenges were a part of the teaching of the organization and its rituals. And we see that members were martyred for their loyalty to their god and beliefs.

WHAT, I ask you, have we learned? Clearly we can look at the presentation of the archaeological record and speculate on the meanings of various details. However I think that we can draw several conclusions for our own time. If one of us were to travel back in time 2,000 years and tell an individual from the Classical Time that one day Mithraism and the classical gods of antiquity would be a footnote to history, unknown except to a few scholars, and that the religion of a Jewish carpenter’s death and resurrection for the salvation of the world would hold military, political, and religious dominance for centuries to come, you probably would not be believed. If you also said that the mighty Roman and Persian Empires would be swept away in only a few hundred years and the empire of the church would dominate Europe for a thousand years, you probably would not be believed. After all, Rome was the original “thousand year empire”, and everybody just knew that the life and times of their gods were historical fact. Little could they have known that their rich and powerful regime would one day be history and the world at large refer to their religious certainties as “myths”, as though they were somehow a product of an ignorant and unenlightened age. But every age has its myths. Not to say that a story cannot be BOTH myth and historical fact, or that by being a myth it is somehow irrelevant to us. And in many ways the mythos of Mithraism has come down to us from the past and not been wiped out or forgotten, as the destroyers wanted, but transformed and changed in a way that has meant that, while most of us no longer commemorate the sacrifice of a bull for our salvation, the symbolism and teachings of that religion have survived through the last two millennia that saw the world ruled by a religion and political force that was known as “The Dark Ages”. If anything, we learn the value and indeed the necessity of change. Humans are adaptable, we have survived and the dinosaurs didn’t. Being rigid, inflexible and clinging to old ways without contemplation as to their relevance is a sure way to guarantee that we too will go the way of antiquity. What if someone from the future were to stand among us, right here, tonight, and tell us of the world in another 2000 years? What would he have to say about our

current government, religion, and fraternal associations? Would we listen? What lesson would we learn? Would we believe that we too may be headed toward a new Dark Ages of depravity and barbarism?

Some ancient religions believed in the struggle between light and darkness. And that in the end, light would prevail. Mithras was a god of light. And after all these years, buried by the sands of time, the devastations of war and the barbaric forces of ignorant fanaticism, this little bit of our past is once again seeing the light of the inquisitive eye.

This report has been meant to summarize the work of another writer, and hypothesize on a few theories of his, as well as my own. I would encourage each of you to locate a copy of the book and read it for yourself. I hope it will be as educational and informative to you as it was to me. This subject was until recently, almost unknown to me. The learning is there for those who will seek, and then find. It is up to the individual to decide whether he will seek, and having sought, whether he will accept what he finds. To you alone is that decision, and that quest. I must go. Farewell, and good luck.