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of “the Waters”, and hence associated with fertility, purity, healing and wisdom. Benedictions of Mehr and Anahita are so interconnected in Iran that they may not easily be distinguished and has been evolved in Zoroastrian and Islamic cultures. For more information, see Javadi, 2013; 43-50; Javadi, 2008; 23-30; and Javadi, 2007; 12-22.

3. Interview with Javadi, 2017; www.nazar.ac.ir

4. See Tabrizi, 2005; “Yald” entry.

5. Մշույն in Armenian; pronounced as arryut.

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Fig. 6. Mithraism temple, Mohammad abad Borazjan, Iran. source: <https://blog.safarme.com>

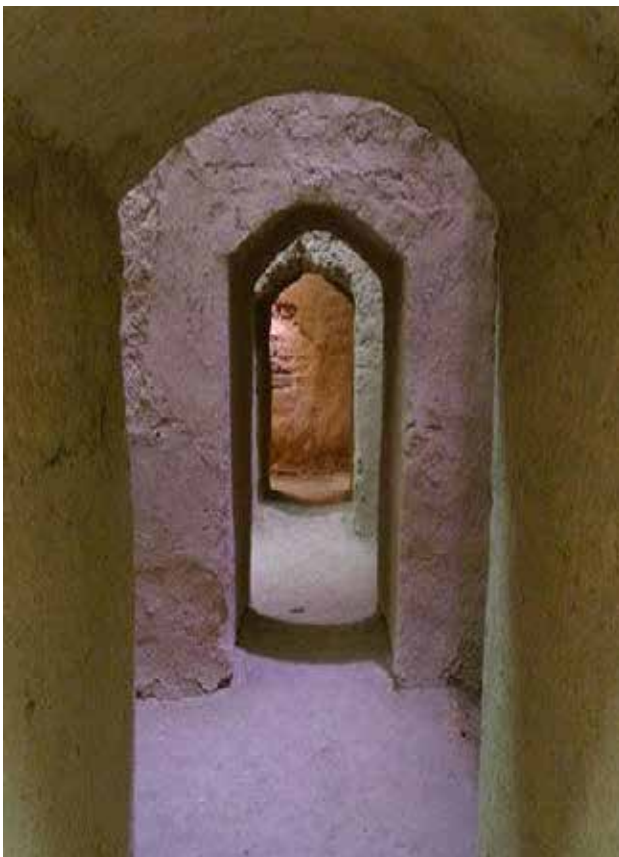


Fig.7. Noushijan fire temple (60 km of Hamedan and 20 km of Malayer); ((24.March.2018-//blog.safarme.com

### Endnote

\* The paper is extracted from Dr. Nikouei thesis.

1. He typically brought the ancient Rome history and religion lacking an individualized character into a mythical content through using traditions of ancient India. For instance, he claims that reporting of earlier Roman kings and wars was not enough. The documents report Indo-European and other Roman tribes' worldview and mythological evolutions, which have been presented in the form of history. His studies are particularly concentrated around the theory of "trifunctional deities", which was more maintained by the discovery of the Mitani inscription (in 1907) belonging to 1400 B.C. The inscription contained four deities relevant to the ancient India. The four gods in the theory of "trifunctional deities" are Mitra-Varuna for the first function; Indra for the second; and Nasātya for the third functions. The first function deities with sacred, ruling, and sovereignty functions consist of two distinct dimensions: Varuna is characterized as magical and avenger ruler; while, Mitra enjoys human peaceful personality. For the second function, Indra is the worrier powerful who has founded young men's association and the associated rituals, which have survived up to the present according to Dumezil. It is ruled by the first function. Deities of the third are of productivity, herding, farming and crafts mostly embrace the public (Sattari, 2013).

2. Water-related lotus, mother-of-pearl, and dolphin are considered symbols of Anahita venerated as the divinity



Fig. 4. Sevanakvank monastery in Armenia. Source: [www.kojaro.com](http://www.kojaro.com).



Fig. 5. Takht-e Soleymān, Mithraism temple in the age of Parthian; two sacred elements of mountain and spring can be seen. Source: [karnaval.ir](http://karnaval.ir).

1976: 194) implying the immense popularity of Mitra among Armenians (Nourizad, 1997: 249).

### Conclusion

Religions have been consistently interacting; Armenian beliefs in the ancient times have

largely inspired by Persian emperor. Comparing Mitra in Iran and Armenia, it is concluded that the majority of Armenian mythology and public beliefs before Christianity were largely influenced by Iranian mythology such that ancient beliefs transformation is clearly seen in the new religion (Figs.1-7).



Fig. 1. Tatev Monastery in Armenia, which has been initially of Mithraism temples turning into church after Christianity. Many of Mithraism temples can be seen around Armenia, which have been desolated or become monasteries. Source: [www.kojaro.com](http://www.kojaro.com).



Fig. 2. Geghard Monastery in Armenia. Source: [www.kojaro.com](http://www.kojaro.com).



Fig. 3. Sanahin monastery complex interior in Armenia looks like Mithraism altars. Source: [www.kojaro.com](http://www.kojaro.com).

### Mitra in Armenia

'Mihir' named after Persian Mehr refers to Indo-Iranian Mitra implying companion, benevolent, and covenant). Mihir, in Armenian deities, is the breed of Aramazd and the oldest god of sun and heavenly light for Armenians. He was named as 'Hephestos', god of forging and fire, within the Hellenistic period, whom Temple of Garni has been granted. According to Greek texts, Armenians sacrificed horses for Helios, god of sun, in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. (Russell, 1987: 262). Strabo describes that Satrap of Armenia sent 20000 breeding Nisaions to the achaemenid kings at Mihir celebrations (Widen Greyden, 1998: 320). Mitra-Mihir worshipping has been extended to Anatolia including Hayk since the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C after Roman domination. Mihir adoration in west was significantly different from its Persian adoration. Western Mihir veneration relied upon Mitra's characteristics in terms of solar order, warfare, godsend following bull sacrificing, as well as practices for mankind salvation. All these characteristics, according to David of Sassoun, have been witnessed in the Armenian Mithraism, too. According to western narrations, Mitra, named as rock-born deity, was born from a rock in front of the eyes of shepherds. Although, Armenian mythology did not mention to the rock-born deity; it refers to the Mihir imprisonment in Agravakar (known as Mehri Dur). He believes that Mehri Dur opens once a year; then, the shepherd enters in and sees Mehr. They have an idea that Mehr will come out of the cave at the end of the world to separate innocents from sinners. In David of Sassoun, the great Mehr kills the black bull; however, the lion killing was more underscored. The great Mehr slaughters the lion on the way to Sason; then, Sason is filled with abundant blessings. The lion's nickname given to the Mehr is truly maintained when Mihir is seen with a lion head in western reliefs.

According to David of Sassoun, Armenian Mitra has followed both the covenant and promises of Iranian Mitra and military characteristics of western Mitra. Like Persian kings who had been imprisoned for a while in the cave to get the sacred power of Mehr, Armenian Mehr was also imprisoned for a while to be prepared to return to the world of justice. As seen in the aforementioned, Armenian Mihir, as a linking chain, shared characteristics of both Persian and Western Mithraism (Hartoniyan, 2001: 38-41).

Mithraism has also influenced Armenian old calendar in which the eighth day of each month was named Mihir; and moreover, the 7<sup>th</sup> month in the old calendar, the present February, is also called Mehekan. Mehian, the public name of sacred places in Armenia, is also associated to the Mihir (Nourizade, 2005: 78-79). One of the rocks donated to the Mehr in the city of 'Van' is known as Mehri Dur; dedicated altars and temples to the Persian Mehr are also called Mehri Dur, where were inextinguishably lighted based on the public beliefs. Like Persian, Armenians also probably held Mehekan ceremony. Today, on the 14<sup>th</sup> February-'Février', 'tearan andaraj' is also celebrated at churches. In the archeological excavations of Garni, Armenia, prior USSR collapse, Mithraism temple has been found, which was built in the age of Tiridates I of Parthia (63-80) (kerovpian, 1973: 122-123). Mitra had large temples in Armenia. There is located a beautiful temple in Bagayarych dedicated to Mitra, which has been traditionally used up to the year 300 (Agathangelos, 1976: 790). Bagayarych has been originated from a Persian word 'Bagyavsh' meaning god worshipping. It reveals that Mitra, known as 'Bagh' in Armenia, was perfectly venerated. Garni, which is an Armenian monument, is another Mithraism temples referred as 'Mhyan' in Armenian word (Agathangelos,

226). Mitra drives a carriage pulled by four immortal horses in gold horseshoes. According to Zoroastrianism, Mitra is described as a great, immense multifaceted goddess whom the deepest respect and tribute have been attributed up to the present. People swear by Mitra; it also shed light on legal issues such that he was called for forums and courts (Booth, 1996: 582). Mitra supports the truth and peace; judges the soul after death; and is a powerful, vigorous warrior with a metal spear, gold armor, and firm strong shoulders defeating demon gods (Gershevich, 1959: 121).

According to the 10<sup>th</sup> Yasht, dedicated to Mitra, it is lord of wide pastures, god of covenants, deity of warriors, and goddess of crack of dawn rising over Alborz Mountain. It brings rain and descends abundance of blessing. Mitra owns many gossipers in service, and a chariot riding by Ashi headed with 'vrtra-g'han' (god of triumph) as a hog. He is a fair judge that may never be deceived; he worships 'Haoma' in Alborz Mountain (Hera) and helps and heals those asking for the help. He is armed with thunderbolt that even deters 'Angre Mino'. Mitra is surrounded by 'Sraosa' and 'Rasnu' on the right and left, respectively enclosed with waters, vegetation, and pious souls. He rides white horses dealing with those violating the treaties. Mitra is worshiped following three self-purification nights and days (Gaiman, 2002: 59).

Extant evidences of Persian Mithraism demonstrate that it was the tradition of mysteries. Mithraism differs from other ancient religions as it was not inherited; rather, all devotees were opting to autonomously and actively volunteer on the contrary to the general traditional religions in which the faith is inherited to the offspring just as they were born in this family i.e. child automatic presupposed sharing of religion in the parents' religion (Beck, 1996: 176-185).

Mysterious Mithraism is conceived by its architecture. In Rome, Mithraism temples have

been built underground where the sunlight was shed from a skylight to the house of worship. The ritual venue was referred cave in Mithraism; in case where natural caves were not available, an underground room was being decorated looking like a natural cave. Unlike all religious traditions, Mithraism temples could not be distinguished such that no salient architecture and aesthetic or magnificent elements have been applied (White, 1990: 47-59). The simple and naturalistic Mithraism temples reveal that mysticism has been truly observed in this religion and probably most neighbors in the vicinity of Mithraism temples have no idea of nearby shrines.

In Mithraism, everyone may not deserve to worship; rather, it required some mysteries and secrets. Mitra is the only deity in Avesta whose prayers may be rejected because they were wrongly appealing to. In other word, unlike other gods and goddesses who take the rituals easy, Mithraism do really cares for sacrifice and the sacrifice identity. It seems that as if Mithraism is also sensitive to the worship practice punishing those going astray. Mitra, in Mehr Yasht, asks 'who well worships? Who considers the wrong as worship? (MehrYasht: Paragraph 108). It is also asserted that poor the novice and hasty man whom an illiterate Zout (the great men of Zoroastrian) and an uncultured ignorant holding a branch to held Mithraism ceremony. This man is humbling and humiliating Ahura Mazda, Mitra, and other companion deities (MehrYasht, Paragraphs 138 and 139). Aside from the severity of precise practices indicating the presence of a highly prioritized and monopolized class of mysticism priests, Mithraism is mainly consistent with the tradition of Zoroastrianism. According to Avesta, Mitra is praised with the words of wisdom and magic like Ahura Mazda (MehrYasht, Paragraph 6).

to mention that there has found no relief or statue of Mitra's birth with the aforementioned characteristics in Iran. The only extant relief of Mehr is located in Taq-e Bostan, Kermanshah in the crowning scene of Ardeshir from Ahura Mazda where Mehr is standing on a water lily holding a branch and wearing a crown of a light. Some believe that Nahid, mother of Mitra, has been impregnated by Zoroaster. It is also stated that the semen has been kept inside a water lily in Hamoun Lake. That is why images are sometimes pictured on a water lily or lotus. Mehr symbols are specifically tied to water like insemination of virgo and mother-of-pearl in the water such that Mithraism imagine that as Mitra has born from mother-of-pearl and or as Zoroaster semen has been kept in the water inside the lotus; hence, lotus is closely connected to the Mithraism. Lotus and mother-of-pearl are the two primary symbols of Mithraism; while, according to the extant figures and statues in Mithraism temples, the best suitable symbol for keeping the semen in the water was Dolphin. Dolphin, like mammals, nurtures the baby with milk in the water; so, it can also care for the well-being of Mitra in the water. Some also surmise that Mitra was born in the fire rather than water, which is consistent with Iranian conceptualization of fire as Mitra is the god of justice and decision, it is closely linked to the fire<sup>2</sup> (Rostampour, 2003: 100).

The birth and life story of Mehr and Anahita has been differently narrated. However, certainly, both are correlated to the water and its associated elements, which may not be easily separated<sup>3</sup>. In addition to how Mehr was born, it is also important to consider when he was born. The birth of Mehr is an astronomical event happened in the one longest night of year named as Yalda with a history of several millennia in Iranian tradition. December 21 has the shortest day and the longest night over the year; but, soon after Yalda, days get gradually longer and nights shorter. Thus, this is called the night of Yalda implying the birth of invincible sun or Mehr. According to Borhan-e Ghate, the term Yalda is

defined as a "Syriac word inferring Arabic birth at the first night of winter and the last of fall; it is the longest night of the year known as deadly inauspicious and ominous"<sup>4</sup>. Birouni writes "month of 'Dey' and also known as 'Khormah'. The first day is called 'Khoraam Rooz' (blooming day); both the day and the month are named after the great god, Hormozd..." (Birouni, 1942: 256). All the aforementioned indicate that the night of Yalda and the day of Digan are firmly connected to the Mehr; hence, it overcomes darkness and obscurity. This is the day of Mehr, which has been highly respected before Iranian. Further, the greatest ceremony belonged to the birthday ceremony of Mehr that was the beginning of the New Year (Razi, 1992: 541).

In Mithraism, Mehr is the universe creator who has created the world. Mithraism has survived from the times of Fereydoun, where the more justice needed the less judgment. According to Ferdowsi, the devils and demons that were previously common in Iran have been eliminated by Mithraism. Mithraism is also characterized with happy life, well-being, and efficiency. For this productivity, it is desirable to honestly and truly try to attain a well, salubrious livelihood. As Europeans also assert that Mithraism must pass seven steps to achieve the wise man status through abundant temptations and struggles such that all followers were not able or not deserve to reach to the high levels. The seven steps in Iranian culture resemble the seven tasks of Rostam and seven towns of love after Attar of Nishapur (Joneidi, 1983: 13).

### **Mehr (Mitra) in Iran**

Mehr along with 'Varuna' (meaning the truth) has been asked for by the combined word 'Mitra Varuna' (Bahar, 1997: 17). It was so honored among Iranians that its name came after Hormoz, the great god, and Anahita (Hinnells, 1996: 119). Mitra is the freedom and redemption deity often descends to bestow the salvation and bounty upon people through killing a bull or leading the nation (Bahar, 2002:



The myth is born by the thought, imagination, and primary knowledge of ancient human and unveils mankind ideals, which have been revived within the history. Mythological narrations are regarded as true stories as they return to the reality following a consistent logic. Sometimes the myth apparently narrates historical events; but, what important in such narratives is not their historical authenticity rather the concept lies in the description of concepts, for the believers, such as human views to the self, the universe, and the creator.

The myth is a response to human inability to deal with helplessness; his weakness to fulfill the dreams; and his fears of unexpected events, where the imaginary power will do its best. Therefore, goddesses are created in this way; and then, they became the princes and gladiators; or on the contrary, a mythological creature is born from a historical personage or a public hero such that all features of an extraordinary existence are assigned to him and gradually the hero would lose the normal human character (Amoozegar, 1995: 4-5).

The mythological studies aim to purpose of mythology is to recognize human primary knowledge and to interpret how it configures the universe people's mental attempts to understand the realities about the universe. phenomena. Myth is the primitive people mental conduct to achieve the truth of everything that might explain the connection of mythology to the philosophy and its surviving over years and years. That is why it is said that mythology has been tightly woven to the philosophy and reflection, and has survived. The secret to its durability resides in its penetration in the realm of mankind mind, reflection, and language. Georges Dumézil, the leading French mythologist, presented the theory of "ideology of three actions (functions)". In such investigation, the gods and gladiators, as well as other affiliated issues and traditions were not individual elements anymore; rather, they were constituted a structure each with particular function. He has completely rebuilt ancient Rome

culture and religion (Sattari, 2013: 10-35)<sup>1</sup>.

"Mehr" is an Indo-Iranian term originating from "Mitre" or "Mithra". According to Avesta, "Mithra", "Mitr" in Pahlavi, Mitra is known as an ancient Iranian divinity referred as Mehr and Mitra in the modern Persian. According to Dehkhoda, the term Mehr implies love, affection, justice, friendship, and covenant; it is also referred as friendship, affection, and Aryan deity. Mehr is the late form of Mitra in Old Persian meaning Sun (Moein, 1974). It is worth to notify that ancient Iranians highly valued the sun; while god of sun, Hur, has not enjoyed a precious status. Therefore, praising sun was indeed paying tribute to the Mehr or Mithra (Christensen, 1999: 102). Sun was assigned the highest sacredness not merely because of being a sun; rather, it stemmed from the glory of sun and Mehr is the god of light. The association between sun and Mitra is well interpreted as Mitra is not the very sun; rather, it is the light and illumination taking darkness away to bring life and happiness to the earth and to fertilize the nature through its warmth and enlightenment. Further, it also exiles darkness devils causing the propagation of sin, disobedience, impurity, and drought in the earth (Coman, 2004: 25).

In the religious literature, sun and Mitra are distinctly differentiated. Ahura Mazda governs, in the endless realm, at a distance from the sun as far as from the sun to Earth. Demon exists in the realm of absolute darkness and Mitra is located between (Ibid: 30). In Avesta, four white horses pull the gold wheel carriage meaning that many events may take place once the god is lighted in the rise.

### **Birth of Mehr (Mitra)**

An intrinsic mystical influence has expelled Mehr out from the inside of rocks into the external world. The naked Mitra is wearing a Phrygian cap or liberty cap holding a dagger and a torch. He is the light descent born from the heart of a rock. A rock was pregnant and gave birth to Mitra (Razi, 2002: 296). It is necessary

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## Comparative Studying of Iranian and Armenian Myths Focused on Mitra\*

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### Abstract

Iran and Armenia have enjoyed widespread political, historical, and cultural relations over millennial. Armenia came under the rule of Iranian emperor since the Medes; from then they were politically, culturally, and religiously touched bounded. The religious effect of Iranian on Armenian was sustained up to the middle third-century by Gregory the Illuminator until Armenian turned into Christianity. Considering that Iranians and Armenians considering the Iranians and Armenians geographical proximity are siblings and regarding the geographical proximity, it seems that the two nations were mutually interacting in different areas including religions and beliefs. Therefore, the purpose of the present research is to study the status of “Mitra” in the ancient Iranian and Armenian beliefs and to analyze the effect of Iranian Mithraism on Mithraism tendency in Armenia prior Christianity.

**Keywords:** *Mitra, Armenia, Iran, religious beliefs.*

**Research hypothesis:** the majority of Armenian ancient mythologies, prior Christianity, were influenced by Iranian mythology including Mitra.

### Introduction

Mythology is a component of cultural anthropology, which scrutinizes and acquires basic rules of human behavioral forms and makes every effort to offer a general justification of this sociocultural phenomenon (Rezaei, 2004: 15). Reviewing the

study of dead or alive mythical characters dead or alive mythical collections mythology serves the cultural anthropology and gives help to the politics, social sciences, and economics, history, ancient geography, archeology, psychology, and studies related to the theology, as well as history of philosophy. Accordingly, it not only relies on mythological documents, but also knowledge of history, archeology, sociology, psychology (especially psychoanalysis), linguistics, natural sciences, theology and philosophy (Warner, 2010: 15).



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