

## Endnote

\*.The present article is based on the “New theories of theHistory and Mythology of Mithraism and its Evolution in the East and West” workshop which has been held by the author's lecture in 2018 at Nazar Research Center.

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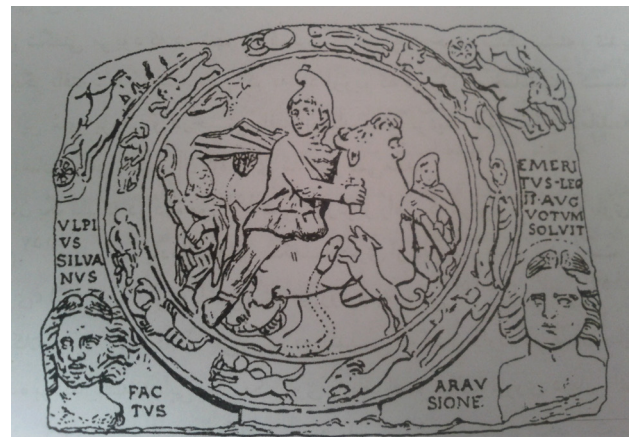


Mithraism is distinguished in term of culture differences; signs of Mithraism still remained in Iran and throughout the world. Traces of Mithra in Iran dates back to the mythological and historical periods; and then, up to the Islamic period. Mithraism has been prevalent in the ancient world

such that it largely influenced our human life. Classic literature and poetry, art and architecture, culture and Persian folkloric culture, as well as Christian culture are enriched with signs of Mithraism and Mehr. Mithraism is associated with astrology, which is observed as constellations in most European reliefs (Fig. 6).



The impress of the constellation in the church.  
Source: <https://www.pinterest.com>



The image of constellation and the twelve astrological signs on the church and Mithraeum. Source: Mercelbach, 2008.

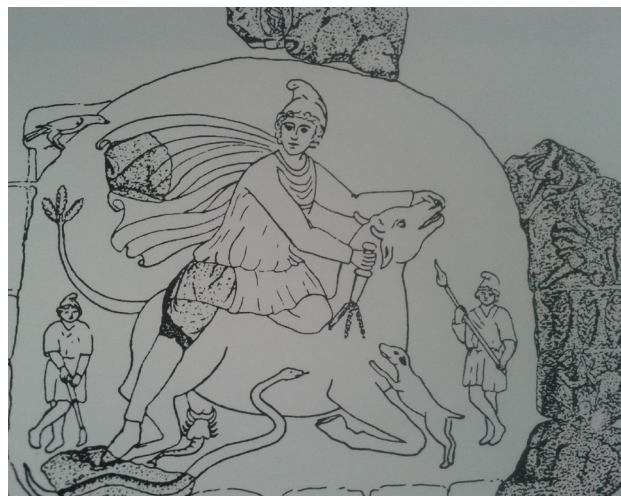


The image of constellation and the twelve astrological signs on the church and Mithraeum. Source: Mercelbach, 2008.

Fig. 6. Constellations in the church and the altar.



Scorpion, the sacred sign on the glass. Source: [https:// commons. wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org).



Serpent and scorpion, the sacred animals along with Mithra at the sacred cattle slaughtering scene. Source: Vermaseren, 2005.



Sassanid sign with scorpion. Source: [https:// www.pinterest.com](https://www.pinterest.com).



The combination of woman and scorpion in Egyptian statue. Source: Balkhandshambhala. [blogspot.com](http://blogspot.com).



Scorpion in jewelry ring. Source: The author's archive.

Fig. 5. Scorpion, holy sign.



## Mithraism symbols

### • Rooster

symbolizes Soroush. It is the sun or Mehr courier promising end of darkness and beginning of day at the light and brightness. Later, it is assigned as the courier of Ahura Mazda. Up to the present, the rooster brought the message of day ending the dark night.

### • Dog

it is a sacred animal in Zoroastrianism; the flock guardian, protecting human life; a loyal and beneficial animal. The Father wears in red and drinks the whole glass of wine (Humad).

As observed in Hafez, Pir-e Moghan, Mey and Meykade, Mogh bache, light spring, and Kharabat (Khor Abad- the sun temple) have been originated from this culture.

### • Serpent

it is a holy creature symbolizing fertility and reproduction. The term Marestan means the place of health that later turned into Bimarestan (Hospital). In old times, people were called Mar Khoo (meaning

the evil-conducted) and Fereshte khoo (angle-conducted). Serpents did not disturb people; rather, the serpent was the sign of life. In the past, people did not kill domestic serpents; rather, they were known as the home and family protector.

### • Scorpion

It has been seen as a sacred existence at all Mithraeums and the holy cattle slaughtering scene. An image of scorpion has been found in Lorestan excavation; scorpion was the goddess and wife of the great god in the Ancient Egypt. The scorpion goddess was worshipped in Lorestan. In Iranian religions, scorpion was pure, absolute and non-devilish. According to the Babylon, Shemash, god of sun, was protected by god of scorpion. Scorpion symbolized god of war, a warrior, and a sacred (Fig. 5).

## Conclusion

Mithraism was common among Indo-Iranian Aryans and penetrated into Roman Empire through Parthian and Sassanid periods. However, western and eastern



Fig.4. Symbolic defeating of the cattle by lion. The lion (Mithra) scarified the cattle, and promised the end of winter and beginning of the spring through a non-hostile war. Source: <https://de.wikipedia.org>.

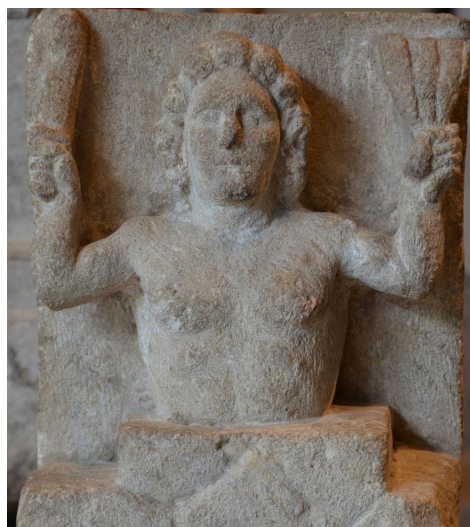


Fig. 2. Mithra is born from a stone carrying a sword and torch. Source: <http://www.tertullian.org>.

#### • Persian Stage

In Persian upbringing method, the children must have been honest and truthful, so teaching honesty, horseback riding and shooting were common from their childhood. Then later, after several steps, the wayfarer was allowed to wear the Phrygian cap symbolized with a crescent or sickle.

The courier of the sun stage: Like sun, he looks everything from an eye-bird view in which no race, nationality, position, and status, etc. was important. Sun is highly honored as many Africans who



Fig.3. Mitra with a hat and a Dorshkamy-Sol god of the sun with a halo of light. Source: Vermaseren, 2005.

followed Mithraism (Fig. 3).

Senior, elderly or father stage: At the last stage, the wayfarer finally approaches the master ranking (or Murad status) and benefits several disciples who are incontestable submissive. Then, the Pir (elderly) drinks the whole wine (Hume) - referring to the seven line glass stated in Hafez poems.

At the last step and final stage, Kharabat, the mentor and Pir reaches to a level of recognition and self-awareness that he is enabled to guide and lead people. As stated in Hafez, the sun temple or Kharabat and Khor Abad:

“I can see the light of God in the party of real lovers”

A relief of the holy cattle slaughtering is often seen at the east of Mithraeum where Mehr is surrounded by two guards (Mehr ban) standing at the sides. One is the courier god (Soroush) and the other is god of justice (Rashan) weighing human crimes and sins at the doomsday beside Alborz Mountain. Mehr symbolizes the justice balance. Mithra has ascended to the heaven once it was served with the nation leadership and justice message; then, like the Jesus, at the judgment day, it will descend for the followers' intercession (Fig. 4).





Parthian Sector. Source: Forumprod. com.



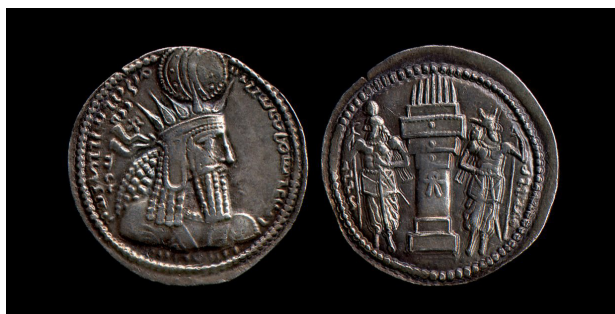
The Mithra and the Freedom statue. Source: Pinterest.com.



Roman coins, Mithra with the sun crown. Source: Vermaseren, 2005.



Sassanid coin, the king crown with light beams. Source: Avarzamani & Sarfaraz, 2004.



Sassanid coin signed with the crescent, star, and the sun. Source: Avarzamani & Sarfaraz, 2004.



Parthian Part II. Source: Ancientresource.com.



Fig. 1. Signs of place of Mithraism.

however, Mithraism outweighed. Signs of Mithraism largely influenced Parthian coins, architecture, and the ornaments in Persia and the great Khorasan.

MehrKhoda was an Aryan-Iranian god penetrated into Africa and Rome Empire; then, it had become common around the world. The most honors in Parthian period were given to the Mithraism. In the war between Orod and Roman, Orod and his son were killed and many Romans were captivated. After many years, Roman captives whom had been sent back due to disability became Mithraism messengers in the west. Rome Empire had been demolished by Parthian Orod. Greek coinage named as Philhellene i.e. fond of light and supportive of Mehr reveals Mithraism impression on Greek coins.

### Sassanid Period

The Sassanid had a central government in which Zoroastrianism became the official religion from the middle of the reign. However, Mithraism traces can be seen in the Sassanid works. Mithra and Anahita, gods of the sun and moon were present during the whole Sassanid period, manifested in the period art and culture. Relief of Mithra in Taq-e Bostan has remained from the Sassanid era. In addition, Mithraism symbols can be also seen in the Sassanid coins including 1. The moon (symbolizing Anahita), 2. The sun (symbolizing Mehr), and 3. The Hawk wing (symbolizing god of war and fire).

Mithraism has been widespread in Rome during Parthian and Sassanid periods. Mehr had been greatly honored among Romans as supporter of true troops and warriors; hence, Mithraeum or several temples have been established throughout Roman Empire so that around five centuries ago Mithraism has been announced as Roman official and royal religion (Fig.1).

### Mithraism and European Mehr

Mehr was a male and a fighter god, carrying a

sword or dagger. According to the European reliefs in Mithraeums, Mehr was born from stones: a lightening appeared from collision of two rocks in the darkness and Mehr has appeared from the emitted light. Mithra has been given birth along with light and brightness (Fig. 2).

Mehr sacrifices the holy bull and the universe is fertilized by its blood. According to Roman mythology, there is a wrestling match between Mehr and sun in the sky, the defeated sun became his disciple. In fact, sun and Mehr are not the same, but there is a closely tied relationship between the sun and Mehr like a typical Unity of Being.

### Following Mithraism can occur in seven stages

#### • The crow stage

which brings the sun message to the Mehr.

#### • Candidate

**stage:** he was unknown, Mithraism candidate wore mask and reflected. He was characterized with silence.

#### • Soldier stage

The one who arrives at this stage must be a true warrior fighting for his home, humanity, and morality. He is committed to two main duties. He must pass several steps of insomnia, hunger, warm and cold weather to approach this stage so that he is physically prepared to wear the Mehr Crown.

#### • Lion stage

At this stage the warrior shows off his physical fitness, and his ability to withstand hardships as a strong powerful lion; in addition, he is morally characterized with good traits to be called a brave lion. He covered the face with a lion mask or stigmatized with a lion stamp. The warriors at this stage are called Shir Mard or Shir Zan (brave men and women). The term whelp in the scouting, which was common in old schools stemmed from this tradition.

### **Medes period**

According to the evidences, Aryan Mithraism Iranians and Magi -Zoroastrian priests- came from great urbanist tribes. Zoroaster, the prophet, was also initially a Magi who reformed Mithraism, came to a new religion, and then came to the prophet. Zoroaster made Ahura Mazda, god of wisdom, as the major religion and banned some Mithraism traditions.

In the age of Medes, there has been built a place in Malayer County named as Noushijan Tappe (the immortal place). Fire prayer in Noushijan Tappe, which is known as fireplace dates back to the Mithraism. Mithra symbolized the light, the sun and brightness; so, this holy fire has been also honored and worshiped in Zoroastrianism as the issue of light and darkness, victory of the good over the evil or victory of light over darkness has been the fundamental basics of the Zoroastrianism. Signs of Magi and sacred fire guards have remained in many temples.

### **Achaemenid Period**

Zoroaster appeared around 600 B.C while Mehr had been being worshipped. Mehregan or Persian Festival of Autumn was held; the king and courtiers wore red garments and celebrated Mithraism traditions like drinking the sacred wine. Achaemenid originally worshiped fire outdoor as signs of outdoor fire worshipping can be clearly seen in Naqsh-e Rostam and Pasargadae. It appears that Cyrus I offspring followed Mithraism; while, Darius and later Achaemenid kings followed Zoroastrianism as several other gods have been clearly referred in the Darius inscription. Signs of Mithraism and asking for the help of Mehr can be clearly seen in Ardeshir inscription in which Mehr had been asked to help for construction and these are signs of Mithraism and asking for help from God.

### **Mithraism**

Mithraism is a tradition enriched with abundant signs and symbols and a religion associated with astrology. God was featured in celestial, elemental, animal, and vegetation symbols not excluding Mehr. Mehr celestially symbolized a handsome gracious young; he symbolized the sun (heaven symbol), the sun flower (vegetation sign) and a lion (animal sign). Its metal sign was gold and its color was red. Mithra has appeared in red cape in European reliefs. Later, Blessed Virgin, the Mary, and the Jesus came into red capes. The red color, originating from its history in Mithraism, has been largely valued in Christian art and culture. Christian art and culture greatly valued the red color stemming from its history in Mithraism so that Christian priests wear red for some ceremonies. Accordingly, golden color, as well as gold and other golden metals are evidently observed in Christian art and architecture. Lion, symbol of power, authority, reign and splendor originating from Mithraism has penetrated into Christianity. In ancient Iran, even up to the Qajar and Pahlavi periods, the lion symbolized power and glory so that the flag emblem of Iran featured a lion and sun. During Islamic Periods, Imam Ali had been nicknamed as 'lion of god' and he had been pictured with a sword (Zulfiqar: Sun) and a lion.

### **Parthian period**

The Parthian feudalism had been accompanied with freedom of religion. Mithridates I of Parthia implies that Mithraism among Parthian race; like the name of Khodadad in Islamic religion, names and nicknames introduce their religion. However, Parthian followed Mithraism; it was not the official religion as each county was ruled by a governor following its own religion and people were free to follow other religions. Zoroastrianism and Mithraism coexisted in this federal government;



From then, Ahura Mazda was worshiped as the god of wisdom and the almighty god.

“In the name of God, who has given soul and wisdom to human and whom there is not a greater subject to think of” (A poem by Ferdowsi)

The first god (Mehr or Mithra) has been created by Ahura Mazda who degraded from god's position to the greatest god of Ahura Mazda once the Zoroaster appeared. Ahura Mazda in reply to the Zoroaster question of “who is Mehr?” says, “I have created the Mehr; he mirrors me my”. Thus, Mehr has been taken away from god position. Even some part of the Avesta, called Yasht- Mehr Yasht- is dedicated to the praise of Mehr.

### **Mehr characteristics**

Mehr is characterized with the god of light, sun and covenant; supporter of real warriors, and god of truth fighting with the lie demon; protector of the family, and the judge of the doomsday.

Mehr in the mythological era

There has been known two dynasties of Kayanian and Pishdadian in the history of mythology. This history consists of two parts of myth and reality.

Some of Pishdadians followed Mithraism and defeated demons. Demons were not wild cannibals; rather, they had their own culture. In the mythological history of Iran, the demon is not a negative evil existence; instead, demons are imaged as a family of gods whom the new religion rejected. They gradually turned into a half man-half animal creature in the myths symbolizing the evil, malevolence, and corruption. Ferdowsi has collected some documents about Mehr that were close to the reality.

For instance, the story of Fereydoun and Zahhak: Fereydoun rose up against Zahhak killing people, and captured him in the Damavand Mountain. In ancient Iran each day of month was named after an angle name; and there was a celebration once the name of month and day coincided. The sixteen

of ‘Mehr’, Mehrgan Ceremony, was assigned to the Mehr, god of light and life. A ceremony was also held when the angle name and month agreed. There was a weekly celebration, too. It is evident that ancient Iranians highly valued celebration, happiness and joyfulness. Even Darius praising Ahura Mazda in his inscription says, “Great admire to the Ahura Mazda who has created joyance and jubilation as it is the life impetus”. There would be no motivation if there was no jubilation. Iranians celebrated sixteenth of Mehr as Mehregan, known as Persian Festival of Autumn; in this day Zahhak had been seized by Fereydoun.

Mithraism, dating back to the Aryans, was common among various tribes for over several centuries. Due to bad weather conditions, Aryan races were forced to migrate. Hence, Mithraism has been divided into two groups: the first group immigrated to India and the second resettled in Iran.

Mehr was honored in Rigveda, the Indian collection, along with other gods. In that period, Indians worshiped two great gods who were the earth and heaven almighty rulers: 1. Mehr (god of day) and 2. Varouna (god of night).

Religious disagreements emerged once Aryan arrived in Iran. The myth period with religious wars like war of Rostam with demons evidently uncovers religious disagreements and discrepancies. According to Shahnameh, Rosatm was a Mithraism devotee defeating demons i.e. other gods.

Historical period

According to the recorded history, historical period is referred to Medes, Achaemenid, Parthian and Sassanid.

At this period, the most prominent Mithraism document may date back to the 4th B.C. found in the Cuneiform tablet in Bogazkoy around the current Istanbul where kings of Mitanni and Hittites signed a peace pact in which they witnessed Mehr not to break the promise.

Persian translation of this paper entitled:

آیین مهر در اسطوره و تاریخ و سیر تحول آن در شرق و غرب  
is also published in this issue of journal.

## History and Mythology of Mithraism and its Evolution in the East and West\*

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### Abstract

The Aryan God, great Mehr, symbolizing the light and sunshine, the real warriors helper, and god of covenant and promise was highly respected in Iran and India such that it was worshiped along other Indian gods.

After the advent of Zoroaster, Mithra, goddess of sun, had been assigned to the assistant of Ahura Mazda and survived along with Anahita, divinity of waters and god of fertility. In Islamic period, Mithraism has been transformed in to a new tradition and culture as it can be currently seen. Mithraism has penetrated into the West during Parthian and Sassanid eras so that it has been known as the official religion of Roman Empire for almost 5 centuries. Accordingly, it also greatly influenced the Christian culture and art.

### Keywords

*Mithraism, Myth, History, East, West.*

### Introduction

Mithraism originates from long time ago when Aryans migrated to India and Iran. Iranians greatly valued Ahura Mazda- Zoroastrianism, Mithra, and god of truth, light, and covenant, god of prosperity and judge of the doomsday for over long centuries. According to the Zoroaster, Iranian prophet, Ahura Mazda has been known as the sole god and creator of the world. It was the highest spirit worshiped by Zoroastrians. Accordingly, Mehr was also highly valued in the history of Iranian mythology so that most Mithraism traditions have survived through Zoroastrianism.

Mithraism also continued over historic periods

among people of Medes, Achaemenid, Parthian and Sassanid, and even local Iranian dynasties. Overtime, Mithraism has undergone some transformations from Iran to the Roman Empire and finally adapted to the Roman Empire without disregarding ethical maxims. Mithra, the supporter god of warriors for centuries, came to the forefront of Roman theism. In the middle of the third century A.C, Mithraism has been established in the Roman Empire, Anatolia, Armenia, Iran, and North of Africa; and consequently, has been evolved in the form of a comprehensive universal religion. Zoroaster has appeared in the 6 century B.C. and brought some changes to the Ahura Mazda religion.