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The Origins and Identity of Roman Mithraism

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THE ORIGINS AND IDENTITY OF ROMAN MITHRAISM

by

Charles R. Hill

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THE ORIGINS AND IDENTITY OF ROMAN MITHRAISM

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This thesis is a reassessment of scholarship concerning the origins of the cult mysteries of Mithraism in its Roman form during the Imperial Period. While much has been published in the debate over the cult's true origins, we are still left without a satisfactory answer. The present work is an attempt to reconcile some of the arguments posed in the 19th and early 20th centuries with those of the later 20th and 21st centuries, focusing mostly on the cult's art and iconography in Mithraea, the central spaces of Mithraic worship. First will be a summary of scholarly opinion on the cult's origins and possible explanations for the cult's later variations, followed by a section in which the typical aspects of Mithraic spaces are established by region, to the extent that is possible. Next will be a chapter in which specific sites in various regions of the Empire are discussed in more detail, focusing on the dichotomy between the typical form of a Mithraeum in that region and those aspects which point to variations between Mithraic groups in different settings. Additionally, divergences in artistic representation between spaces of civilian and military versions of the cult will be considered, as it is argued that the distinction between these groups of worshippers is responsible for the development of alternative aspects of the mysteries closer to the Roman core versus on the periphery of the Empire. It is concluded that Mithraism, while consistent in many ways across the Roman world and widely variable in others, was not exempt from the processes of Roman religious syncretism, and is in fact one of the strongest examples attesting to its

efficacy. While this view is not new to the study of Mithraism, most recent scholars have preferred to describe the cult as either relatively uniform across time and space, or as entirely disjointed, to the extent that it should not be considered as a single cult tradition.

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Introduction

The Roman mysteries of Mithras emerged around the time of the establishment of the Roman Empire and persisted for several centuries, until their decline and disappearance in the fourth century of the Common Era. The Mithraic cult, its worshippers, and its activities have long been shrouded in mystery, as insider accounts of the mysteries and cult practices simply do not exist. There is an abundance of archaeological material extant today, however, which has been associated with the cult, found across the Roman Imperial world, from as far east as modern Iran to as far west as England and parts of Spain. Mithraic sites also dot the northern coast of Africa, and appear along the Nile, standing opposite sites along Roman frontiers in Germany and Eastern Europe. Despite the number of sites available for study, however, there has been considerable disagreement from the beginning of modern Mithraic scholarship in the late 19th century to today as to the cult's origins and its true identity. Did Mithraism descend directly from the Indo-Iranian Avestan, Mazdean, and Zoroastrian traditions, or is the connection between these and Roman Mithraism limited to the name of the central deity himself? To what extent was the cult distinctly Roman, and to what extent did it permeate or defer to local traditions as it expanded across the Imperial world? In this thesis, I seek not necessarily to provide new answers to all of these questions, but to mediate between schools of thought which are highly polarized on the issue of the cult's origins and unique identity as a part of the Roman religious tradition. I will begin with a historiography in which I detail the most prominent arguments in the debate over time. Following this will be a section in which I establish those characteristics most typical of the cult's iconography and artistic program in different regions. I will then describe in greater detail certain sites within those regions, focusing both on the commonalities

between sites and on those things which render each site unique. Finally, I will conclude with an evaluation of the evidence from these particular sites, in an effort to demonstrate that Roman Mithraism is both exceptional and unique among religions adopted by the Romans, and also one of the single best examples of the syncretistic processes that defined Roman religious tradition throughout history. I will demonstrate that, while Mithraism deserves its designation as a mystery cult in every possible sense of the phrase, there is still much we can say about the religion, and an immense deal that we might learn from its study.

Chapter One

Historiography

Mithraism, the adopted cult of the Roman Empire, often evokes ideas of mysterious and shadowy worship of a violent and powerful Eastern god by groups of men in subterranean chambers, hunched over offerings of food and drink. Throughout the 20th century, scholarship on Mithraism has mostly perpetuated this vision of the cult.

Mithraism was originally assumed to be a highly exotic religion with an origin far outside the Roman Imperial world both chronologically and geographically, with few scholars arguing against the earliest opinions that the cult was always primarily Indo-Iranian, and somewhat antithetical to the values of Roman civilization. However more recently some debates have also emerged concerning the single-sex exclusive nature of the religion, with some scholars arguing that the depiction of female deities alongside Mithras and other Zoroastrian figures in Mithraea, along with the recording of female benefactors of sanctuaries, are evidence of mixed-gender worship. Alongside this re-examination of Mithraism as a male-exclusive cult has arisen scholarly skepticism about the rejection of all aspects of the feminine by Mithraic worshippers. Given the supposed Eastern origin of Mithraism and the god Mithras himself, it would be highly unlikely that Roman men never considered the ramifications of worshipping a deity who dressed in a clearly Eastern (and therefore inherently feminine) fashion. Indeed, the Eastern and the feminine often seem to have been inseparable in the minds of ancient Mediterranean peoples such as the Greeks and then later the Romans. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the treatment of the feminine principle in establishing the degree of “Roman-ness” of any adopted religion. In this historiography, I seek to provide a concise summary of the ways

in which a few key scholars have addressed the debate over the Eastern origins of Mithraism in the Roman world, and to situate my own ideas within the context of that particular debate. To begin, I will address some of the most often-cited ancient written sources which mention the cult, although I will temper this with cautions about the validity of those writers in particular, given their interactions with the cult. Then I will summarize the 19th century and early 20th century scholarship on Mithraism which established it as Indo-Iranian in origin from the start, and later examine some of the bold counter arguments which emerged nearly 70 years later that sought to scrap all notion of Roman Mithraism's actual ties to Indo-Iranian religions. This debate represents an interesting intersection between the disciplines, and requires some thought concerning the extent to which art represents or belies the circumstances of the real world.

Primary sources for any ancient mystery cult can be difficult to evaluate, but this is especially true for the case of Roman Mithraism. First and foremost there is the issue of the name Mithras, which appears in myriad forms across a wide array of languages hundreds of years before Roman Mithraism came about. Fortunately early Mithraic scholars went to great lengths to track down whatever mentions of Mithras or his worshippers could be found in texts of ancient Europe and Asia Minor.¹ However any reader of the ancient sources should be cautioned against assuming that the appearance of the name Mithras is sufficient evidence to argue that the source in question is concerned with what we now call Roman Mithraism. Especially in sources from the first centuries

¹ Alfred Geden, *Select Passages Illustrating Mithraism*. MacMillan, 1925. Geden's work is drawn from an earlier Cumont volume in which untranslated passages were compiled and commentaries were given in French. Geden provides English translations of the original passages and provides some of his own commentary. Geden's work is an excellent starting point for the interested reader, but Cumont's 1896 *Textes et Monuments Figures Relatifs aux Mysteres de Mithra* provides a fuller list of ancient mentions, for those who can read French.

BCE and CE it can be exceedingly difficult to distinguish between the Mithras of the Roman mysteries and Mithras of the Avestan and Mazdean traditions. In fact it was likely thanks to such confusion that the earliest modern Mithraic scholars of the 19th century so readily accepted a strong direct link between Mithras in Indo-Iranian traditions and Mithras in the Roman mystery cult.

Sometime in the first century CE, Plutarch described Mithras as a mediator between the two opposing forces of light (named Horomazes) and darkness (named Areimanius) in Persian religion, following the traditions set forth by Zoroaster 5000 years before the Trojan War.² It is fairly clear at this point that Plutarch is still describing Mithras within the context of traditions foreign to the Roman religious program, as he names Horomazes (sometimes Ahura-Mazda) and Areimanius (sometimes Ahriman), two figures who were likely not carried over into the Roman mysteries to any large extent.³ Plutarch also mentions Mithras by name in a few other works, but most of these appearances are passing mentions or invocations of the god by name only. In *De Fluviiis*, however, we find the story of Mithras impregnating a living rock in order to produce a son, and it is supposed that the god did so out of his contempt for women and the feminine.⁴ While this account of the god would certainly fit with the notion that only men worshipped him in the Roman world and shunned the influence of the feminine, it is also difficult to reconcile with imagery from Roman Mithraic spaces, as more often it is Mithras himself who appears being born from the living rock rather than impregnating it

² Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride* 46. trans. Geden 28-30.

³ This negatively anticipates the arguments set forth by Franz Cumont slightly, but the prevailing scholarly opinion today is that references to Ahura-Mazda and Ahriman within the Roman version of the cult are simply not to be found. Geden also notes in his commentary on this passage that Plutarch's sources for this description of Persian traditions are hazy at best.

⁴ Plutarch, *De Fluviiis* 23. trans. Geden 30.

to create a son. Thus this may be an aspect of earlier Persian tradition that was adopted by Roman Mithraists and altered slightly to fit with Roman Mithras' identity as a miraculously born savior deity.

More significant than early and unclear mentions of Mithras are those found in Porphyry and Tertullian's writing. These are the authors most often cited in modern debates over the identity and practices of Roman Mithraism, and therefore the most important to evaluate and understand. I will return to some of the passages mentioned here in my description of the debate over women and their participation in the Roman version of the Mithraic mysteries, as they form the ancient literary basis for much of the argument.

Tertullian, writing in the late second and early third centuries, described a number of the practices of Mithraic worshippers, stating that they would be proffered a crown during an initiation ceremony, and expected to reject the crown in a symbolic gesture, showing that the only crown they accepted was the presence of Mithras himself.⁵ It is also implied that this practice was meant to be a mockery of Christian martyrdom, and Tertullian certainly implied elsewhere that certain Mithraic rites were shams of Christian sacraments, stating that the devil used these to deceive the worshippers of Mithras, as he "marks his own soldiers with the sign of Mithra on their foreheads, commemorates an offering of bread, introduces a mock resurrection, and with the sword opens the way to the crown."⁶ Thus it is clear that Tertullian was decidedly not interested in the truth of the Mithraic rituals, and rather more in denigrating their rites and beliefs as bastardizations of Christianity. It is therefore difficult to trust anything he claims to know about the

⁵ Tertullian, *De Corona* 15. trans. Geden 43.

⁶ Tertullian, *De Prescriptione Hereticorum* 40. trans. Geden 44.

mysteries. However another, much shorter passage appears later in this paper as a justification for the tentative identification of a site in North Africa as Mithraic when there is little evidence to confirm that. A short passage in which Tertullian stated that, “The lions of Mithra are represented as types of an eager and impetuous nature.”⁷ has been used, controversially, to identify sites as Mithraic based on the presence of lion imagery, even in the absence of any other evidence.⁸ Overall, then, it is difficult to put much confidence in Tertullian as a viable source for information on the values or practices of Roman Mithraists.

Porphyry, on the other hand, seems to have written much more objectively about Mithraism, spending much more time establishing the historical context for their rites and beliefs than on denouncing their activities. In *De Antro Nympharum*, Porphyry connects the worship of Mithras to the consecrations made by Zoroaster, although unlike Plutarch’s Zoroaster, Porphyry insists that Mithras was the central deity in this new religion, rather than the mediator between light and dark that Plutarch described.⁹ In addition to this, Porphyry also claims that Zoroaster was responsible for the Mithraic habit of worshipping in natural or constructed cave-like spaces.¹⁰ However, more importantly, it is in Porphyry that we find one of the most controversial passages about Mithraic practice with his claim that, “the mystics who take part in the actual rites are called lions, the women hyenas, the servants crows, and of the fathers... for these bear the names of eagles and hawks.”¹¹ This passage has been debated hotly in more recent

⁷ Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*. 1.13. trans. Geden 43.

⁸ It is to this passage that David refers later in arguing that the site in Oea, North Africa is Mithraic.

⁹ Porphyry, *De Antro Nympharum* 5-6. trans. Geden 47-48.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Porphyry, *De Abstinencia* 4.16. trans. Geden 50.

years, as it appears to provide evidence for women's participation in the actual Mithraic rites. It has been pointed out that the text is corrupted near the word "hyenas," and that it may also be the word "lionesses."¹² However it is not clear that either of these translations of the word would point confidently to women's involvement in the cult. Therefore while Porphyry is less hostile to Mithraism than Tertullian, it is not clear that he understood the cult overly well either. The vast majority of other ancient sources mentioning Mithras or the Roman mysteries followed Tertullian's lead, as many of them were also Christians and therefore hostile to the cult. Thus we see that, in the absence of insider accounts of the cult's traditions and practices, ancient texts on the mysteries are largely unsatisfactory, and require a healthy amount of skepticism in their treatment.¹³

Some of the earliest modern published work on Mithraism and its associated archaeological remains and imagery came about near the end of the 19th century thanks to Franz Cumont, a Belgian archaeologist and historian. Cumont visited and participated in the excavations of a great number of Mithraea, and synthesized many of his notions concerning the cult based on his observations of single sites and their interactions with one another. In particular, Cumont argued in a matter-of-fact way that Mithraism in the Mediterranean was inextricably linked to the Mazdean, Avestan, and Zoroastrian traditions of the Persians and their ancestors. Additionally, he was one of the first scholars to argue for the gender-exclusivity of the cult based on his observations of iconography and inscriptions related to the cult's spaces and monuments. While many of

¹² See notes 46 & 50 for more on the specifics of this debate.

¹³ In addition to those discussed here, see the following later authors:

Justin Martyr, *Apology* 1.66; *Dial. c. Tryph.* 70 and 78.

Firminus Maternus, *De Errore Profanarum Religionum* chapters 4 and 20.

Jerome, *Ep. CVII. ad Laetam*; *Adv. Jovinianum* 1.7 and 2.14; *Comm. in Amos*, 5.9-10.

Cumont's ideas have persisted in more recent scholarship on Mithraism, E.D. Francis notes in a preface to his translation of one of Cumont's articles that, "In his quest for coherent synthesis, however, Cumont sometimes pressed his conclusions beyond the available evidence, and what many *epigone* have on occasion taken to represent an unassailable judgement may rest on little more than an imaginative interpretation of unusually problematic data."¹⁴ This is unsurprising, given that Cumont was working almost entirely from archaeological, non-textual evidence, with little to no other prior scholarship to cite. In reality, it may not have been Cumont's data which was problematic, but his use and interpretation of that data in an attempt to answer questions which it simply could not be stretched to answer. Additionally, a dearth of textual primary sources for Mithraism and the activities of its worshippers meant that Cumont was working from an already incomplete, purely archaeological/visual record in order to answer questions about intangible aspects of the religion, including issues of gender, foreignness, and interaction with other adopted cults.

It is evident that even by the middle of the 20th century, this early Mithraic scholarship, along with Mithraic art in general, was due for a re-evaluation, taking into account numerous discoveries made in the intervening years. Despite the acknowledged faults in Cumont's research, however, Francis also notes that, "Although his essay is necessarily a work as much of synthesis as of original research, Cumont provides a valuable commentary on the iconography of the decoration and the liturgical implications of the graffiti."¹⁵ In this commentary of iconography on the Dura Mithraeum, Cumont

¹⁴ E. D. Francis, Editor's Preface to Franz Cumont, "The Dura Mithraeum." in *Mithraic Studies*. ed. John R. Hinnels: Manchester, 1975. 151.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 153.

states quite clearly that, “it is certain that members of the female sex were never admitted into the service of the soldiers’ god. In no Mithraeum do we find any mention of a woman serving as priestess, initiate or even as a donor.”¹⁶ Having stated this, Cumont makes no other mention of the feminine or female involvement in the cult of Mithras. This is unsurprising, as gender studies related to most religions of the ancient world were hardly in the forefront of scholarly concern until later in the 20th century, and certainly not when it came to Mithraism, most widely accepted to be male exclusive. Whereas a re-evaluation of evidence for gender inclusivity of other supposedly single-sex (likely women-only) cults may have been justified by the primarily male body of scholars, Cumont simply did not write in such a way that there seemed to be any need to question his conception of male-centric Mithraism. In this way, early scholarship on Roman adopted religions seems to have hewn fairly close to Roman senatorial opinions on mystery religions; secretive cults only open to women needed to be investigated and brought into the light, but there was no need to treat secretive all-male cults in the same way.

Indeed, Cumont did not concern himself much at all with the gender of Mithraic worshippers, although his ideas set the precedent for much later scholarly assumption that all Roman Mithraic adherents were men. In much the same way, Cumont’s ideas concerning the origins of Mithras himself and the many symbols found extant in Mithraea around the Roman world paved the way for many later Mithraic researchers up until the 1970s to presume that Roman Mithraism had strong ties to Indo-Iranian and Zoroastrian traditions. As David Ulansey noted in 1989, it was not until the First

¹⁶ Franz Cumont, “The Dura Mithraeum.” Ed. and trans. E.D. Francis. *Mithraic Studies*. ed. John R. Hinnels: Manchester, 1975. 199.

International Congress of Mithraic Studies in 1971 that Cumont's ideas faced radical rebuttal, though he had had to defend some of his more tenuous claims earlier in the 20th century from skeptical researchers.¹⁷ Ulansey states that, "From that moment on, it could no longer be assumed that Roman Mithraism originated in Iran."¹⁸ Thus it is apparent that 1971 was one of the major turning points in the history of Mithraic scholarship, and the first time Cumont's venerable body of work was re-evaluated wholesale.

Before this rejection of Cumont's ideas, however, several other scholars produced impressive volumes following his template for the study of Mithraic origins. Also interested in the connections between Roman Mithraism and Zoroastrian traditions, Leroy A. Campbell, a religious historian publishing in the 1960s and 70s, discussed much of the iconography of various scenes found in Mithraic structures. In his 1968 book, Campbell examines at great length the various aspects of the god Mithras, and the relation of those aspects to various divine figures in Mediterranean and near-Eastern religious traditions. Campbell classified various pictorial representations of aspects of the god Mithras, including different types of the *tauroctony* scene in which Mithras appeared in the act of slaying a bull, often accompanied by a number of animal familiars who engage with him and with the sacrificial bull in various ways (see Fig. 1 for example). Not only was Campbell's work heavily invested in language and Mithraic relations to predecessor Indo-European traditions, but it was also heavily reliant upon images of Mithraic scenes as well. Despite some of the criticisms already leveled against Cumont's readiness to connect Roman Mithraism to earlier Indo-European divinities, Campbell had

¹⁷ David Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries*. Oxford, 1989. 9-10.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 12. Ulansey also notes here that no alternative theories were immediately proposed to explain the origins of Roman Mithraism, leaving somewhat of an intellectual vacuum in a field which had until then been relatively stable.

the advantage not only of having Cumont's work to draw upon, but several decades' worth of additional discoveries concerning Mithraic imagery following Cumont's death in order to argue his case more soundly. It is important to include Campbell's work in any discussion of the development of Mithraic scholarship, as his efforts to prop up Cumont's idea of a Mithraic-Zoroastrian connection came about just prior to the conference at which many of Cumont's notions came under attack for having been based on evidence too circumstantial to take seriously. For both Cumont and Campbell, then, it was vital to prove a strong connection between Roman Mithraism and Zoroastrianism, likely in an effort to explain some of the exotic aspects of the cult, such as Mithras' Phrygian accoutrements, the appearance of a number of different helper figures in various *tauroctony* scenes, and the depiction of other Eastern (or simply non-Roman) figures alongside Mithras in some Mithraea.

Campbell, while not primarily concerned with aspects of the feminine in Mithraism (and certainly not concerned with the actual gender or sex of Mithraic worshippers), does address the symbolic interaction of the feminine and the masculine in *tauroctony* scenes. Essentially, Campbell promotes the idea that the snake helper which appears in most *tauroctony* scenes might be a representation of the feminine, interested in capturing some of the generative powers from the blood of the bull, a bi-sexual entity, once they have been released by the actions of the masculine figure, Mithras himself.¹⁹ Rather than describing the interaction between the binaries of the masculine and feminine, Campbell was simply interested in the active figures of the scene, regardless of their gender associations, though it is inevitable that the masculine gets more attention,

¹⁹ Leroy Campbell, *Mithraic Iconography and Ideology*. Brill, 1968. 21 and 248-9.

simply because it is more prevalent in a *tauroctony*. Indeed, Campbell seems to have been drawn in by Cumont's notion of dualism between good and evil represented by the various helper figures present in *tauroctony* scenes, although Ulansey notes that these were ideas which soon came under fire during the 1971 break from Cumont's traditional arguments.²⁰ Campbell's volume is vast and extraordinarily rich, including discussions not only of Roman Mithraic sites, iconography, and inscriptions, but also of Indo-Iranian, Avestan, Mazdean, and Zoroastrian sites and passages in which he saw likely sources of inspiration for the later Western Mithraic traditions.

It would be impossible to consider all of Campbell's evidence within the scope of a thesis such as mine, but it is mostly to Campbell's work here that I will refer in establishing the norms of Roman Mithraic sites (to the extent that this is possible), simply because this volume is one of the most comprehensive collections of evidence available to a modern Mithraic scholar, regardless of one's opinions on his connection between Mithraism and Eastern traditions. It is also important to acknowledge Campbell's vital recognition, somewhat more advanced than Cumont's, that Mithraism was by no means a uniform tradition, either in the Roman world or in its various manifestations throughout the rest of the Mediterranean and the Middle East.²¹ While this may seem obvious, given the breadth of evidence provided in Campbell's volume, not all scholars working in the later 20th and early 21st centuries acknowledge this properly, leading to a somewhat distorted picture of Mithraic practice in the Roman Imperial world. While Campbell certainly espouses the same ideas as Cumont in regards to Western Mithraism's origins in

²⁰ Ulansey, *Origins*, 10-11.

²¹ Campbell, *Mithraic Iconography*, 4.

the East, his work is a careful consideration of the variability in Mithraic sites of the Roman Imperial world nonetheless.

Writing in response to Cumont's early works, in which he established many of his most fundamental theories concerning Mithraism, R. L. Gordon, a social/cultural historian, argued in the 1970s that Cumont's works represented an attempt to force Roman Mithraism to fit with incompatible doctrine from its Zoroastrian origins. But he also cautioned against scrapping Cumont's ideas entirely, stating that, "Criticism of Cumont is only a preliminary to the elaboration of an alternative view of Western Mithraism which is content to accept the fact that we do not possess a great deal of the information about the cult which was positively demanded by Cumont's conception of his task."²² This being said, Gordon then addressed problems in Cumont's assumption of Roman Mithraic direct doctrinal descent from Zoroastrian origins, but does not exactly offer satisfactory alternative explanations for the origins of Mithraism, leaving the connection between Indo-Iranian Mithras and Roman Mithras somewhat unclear in the wake of his dismissal of Cumont's ideas. As noted by Ulansey, Gordon was one of the first scholars, along with John Hinnells, to abandon the Cumontian template and begin to look very critically at the evidence hitherto presented for Roman Mithraism's strong ties to Indo-Iranian traditions.

Gordon revisited Mithraism frequently in later publications, and in 2000 he published a translation of *The Roman Cult of Mithras: The God and His Mysteries*, originally published in 1990 by the German historian Manfred Clauss. Focused not only on images, but on archaeological remains as well, Clauss wrote what is now widely

²² R. L. Gordon, "Cumont and the doctrines of Mithraism." *Mithraic Studies*. Ed. John R. Hinnells: Manchester, 1975. 220-1.

considered to be one of the best and clearest overviews of Mithraism as a whole in the Roman world. Perhaps most importantly, Clauss is aware of the variable nature of cult worship in the Roman Imperial world, and cautions his reader early in the text, stating, “it is unsatisfactory to speak of the mysteries of Mithras as a unified religion. To do so makes things simpler, but it also gives a false impression.”²³ Indeed it is important to recognize this, especially when considering arguments concerning the earliest origins and forms of Roman Mithraism. In addition to getting at the source of the Mithraic mysteries, the existence of varied Mithraic traditions and practices would have had other effects on worshippers. Turning to one of the other more persistent debates within Mithraic scholarship, even if regional variations of the cult allowed for the inclusion of women and/or feminine imagery in Mithraea, it would be a great stretch to promote those deviations as evidence of gender inclusion in Mithraism more broadly. And if it is possible that something long thought to be one of the core tenets of Mithraic practice was not universally true, then it would certainly be naïve to dismiss any lingering Eastern Mithraic practices within the Roman world as pure invention or misinterpretation of evidence. But looking at Roman Mithraism more generally, Clauss stated that, “no direct continuity, either of a general kind or in specific details, can be demonstrated between the Perso-Hellenistic worship of Mitra and the Roman mysteries of Mithras.”²⁴ This sounds, then, like a final rejection of Cumont and Campbell’s ideas of Roman Mithraism’s direct descent from Iranian traditions, and for the most part recent scholarship has viewed this debate as settled. As a result, much of Mithraic scholarship has now become concerned

²³ Manfred Clauss, *The Roman Cult of Mithras: The God and His Mysteries*. Trans. Richard Gordon: Routledge, 2001. 16.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

more with the idea of gender-exclusivity in the Roman tradition of Mithraism alone. If the Roman version of the cult is truly distinct from any previous Eastern traditions, are its attitudes towards the feminine also unique? In many other cases, Roman society proved to be overall hostile to feminine or anti-masculine aspects of other adopted cults. Was this the case with Mithraism? Or did the presence of such an aggressively masculine central figure such as Mithras allow for the subtle inclusion of the feminine symbols in a tradition which was otherwise exclusively male? These are questions I have considered in past writing, and ones which cannot fully be answered until it is understood more clearly whether Roman Mithraism is indeed distinctly Roman, or descended more directly from Indo-European traditions. Not only, then, are the early ideas of Cumont at stake when we consider Mithraism's origins, but many other questions about Mithraism necessitate a more confident answer as to the identity of Western Mithraic worshippers, and their understanding of their own cult's origins.

However, there have been some other recent efforts to explain the origins and identity of Roman Mithraism by scholars whose stated goals were to reevaluate Western Mithraism through the examination and synthesis of evidence ignored or overlooked in many other texts on the cult. In 1980, Michael Speidel broke from the tradition of trying to reconcile Mithraism with any Indo-Iranian predecessor traditions, and instead made an argument that Roman Mithraism came about as descendant of a Greek cosmological religion. He rejected Cumont's ideas that Roman Mithraism retained strong ties to Iranian traditions, saying, "The opposite is true. Mithraism is originally and substantially a Greek religion with only a few Iranian elements."²⁵ The author continues on to claim that a

²⁵ Michael P. Speidel, *Mithras-Orion: Greek Hero and Roman Army God*. Brill, 1980. 2.

number of previously overlooked ancient sources can be reconciled neatly with Mithraic imagery and art to demonstrate a connection between the constellations surrounding that of Orion and the story of Mithras.²⁶ Speidel accurately points out that the central *tauroctony* scene is the most persistent indicator of Mithraic activity at any site, but claims that the fields which have traditionally been employed to explain the scene have proven incapable of generating a comprehensive narrative. The author rejects the idea that Iranian religious literature, Greek and Roman art, and astral and seasonal symbolism could ever fully explain the mysteries of the *tauroctony*, and suggests the inclusion of Greek and Roman astronomy in Mithraic scholars' toolkits in order to decipher the true meaning of the bull-slaying iconography.²⁷ Importantly, Speidel notes that his is not the first attempt to expound upon the celestial origins of the mysteries, acknowledging the very early attempt by K.B. Stark in 1868 to do the same.²⁸ However Stark's ideas were quickly swept aside by Cumont's, and largely forgotten for a number of decades.

Speidel cites the written work of Porphyry at length in arguing for Mithras' connection with Orion, although he is somewhat vague on certain details, leaving some doubt as to whether the passages cited pertain to Mithras or Orion originally. The author does, however, propose a tidy explanation for the absence of any textual connection between the names of Mithras and Orion in the ancient world, speculating that, "The reason may be that within the cult to call Mithras Orion would have meant to deprive the god of his true name, while outside the cult there was a certain reluctance to reveal religious secrets."²⁹ While this is certainly not beyond the realm of possibility,

²⁶ Ibid., 3.

²⁷ Ibid., 5.

²⁸ Ibid., 6.

²⁹ Ibid., 26.

considering the Roman practice of syncretizing various adopted gods together with their own native deities, the issue is somewhat confused by something else the author mentions, as he asserts that depictions of the hero Orion slaying the bull with a sword are more typical of the Roman period than the Greek.³⁰ Therefore it would be difficult to argue for a truly Greek origin of the Orion-Mithras cult, if it were only a Roman reimagining of the hero Orion to which Mithras would later be connected. However Speidel pushes the Orion connection in the origins of Mithraic imagery, arguing that the snake and scorpion often seen in the *tauroctony*, lapping at the bull's bodily fluids as it is slain, are not Mazdaean figures representing evil, but are neutral or benevolent figures drawn from Greek constellations.³¹ Therefore this author is contending that the Roman practice of syncretization is relatively simple, and not capable of drawing influence from more than one or two different cults in order to form a new one. Overall this seems far too simplified, and I will argue later that it is far more likely that the predecessor traditions contributing to what we now label Roman Mithraism were many.

Similarly to Speidel, David Ulansey argues for a cosmological origin of the stories and images of Mithraism, although he connects Mithras not with the great hunter Orion, but with the Greek hero Perseus. In the introductory section of his monograph, Ulansey notes appropriately that the most advantageous thing for modern Mithraic scholars is the persistence of the *tauroctony* at Mithraic sites.³² However Ulansey also preliminarily dismisses the Cumontian interpretation of some of these symbols such as the dog and snake as evidence of the Iranian dualistic struggle between agents of good

³⁰ Ibid., 25.

³¹ Ibid., 29.

³² Ulansey, *Origins*, 6.

and evil, pointing out that scholars have long argued for a certain amount of indifference in the attitudes of these figures.³³ Like Speidel, Ulansey also refers to Stark's early ideas concerning Mithraism's connection to the stars, though he does not see as much incompatibility between these ideas and Cumont's as Speidel suggested.³⁴ It is important to note here that Ulansey carries on to reject directly Speidel's connection between Orion and Mithras, as he points out that not all the equatorial constellations are represented in the *tauroctony*, and there is therefore no reason to force a connection between Orion and Mithras simply because of his proximity to other constellations appearing in the scenes of Mithras fighting and slaying the bull.³⁵ Rather, Ulansey argues there is a much more sensible template for Mithras already evident in the sky near the Taurus constellation, bearing many of the symbolic attributes of Mithras, perfectly ready to be syncretized. The author points out that the constellation of Perseus, wearing a Phrygian cap and holding a dagger, is a much tidier parallel to Mithras than Orion, not only because of his accoutrements, but also as Perseus appears in the night sky above Taurus (Fig. 2), whereas Orion is problematically separate from the bull.³⁶ Ulansey even pushes the connection further, arguing that the mythological connection of the hero Perseus and the nation of Persia is further proof of compatibility with Mithras, who is almost always depicted in Oriental garb.³⁷ Additionally, the author even claims that a connection with the hero Perseus might offer some explanation of the typical portrayal of Mithras looking away from the bull as he kills it, as he sees a parallel with Perseus averting his eyes from

³³ Ibid., 10-11.

³⁴ Ibid., 15-16.

³⁵ Ibid., 22-23.

³⁶ Ibid., 26-27.

³⁷ Ibid., 29.

the Gorgon Medusa as he fights her.³⁸ Finally, and more importantly for my own purposes, Ulansey identifies another piece of evidence for the Mithras-Perseus connection. Citing Plutarch's assertion that Mithraism originated with the pirates of Cilicia in the first century BCE, Ulansey reinforces the idea that Perseus, the mythological founder of Tarsus, would naturally appear in later cult as the adapted and transformed deity Mithras.³⁹ The only explanation Ulansey offers as to the process by which Perseus would then have been transformed into Mithras and given the Iranian name is somewhat unsatisfying, as it involves a tenuous connection between King Mithridates VI of Pontus and his namesake. While it is true that Mithridates translates literally as "given by Mithras,"⁴⁰ it seems quite a leap to say that the pirates would have taken Mithridates' namesake as the new name for Perseus, so many generations removed from the first appearance of the name Mithridates. Of course, this does not disqualify the argument entirely, but it would be too bold to assert that this was the only factor in the creation of the name Mithras for the god of the Cilician pirates.

Whereas many of the scholars I have discussed up to now focused primarily on iconography and archaeological remains in investigating the origins and spread of Roman Mithraism, Roger Beck sought in a 1998 article to reexamine the question of who would have been responsible for the cult's proliferation in the first and second centuries CE. Beck responsibly stresses the hypothetical nature of his creation of a founding group for the cult, but notes the importance of the questions which might be raised and answered in

³⁸ Ibid., 31. Ulansey also continues on the next few pages to press this connection, arguing that there is a remarkable similarity between certain depictions of Gorgons and those of the Lion-headed figure often found in Mithraea.

³⁹ Ibid., 43.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 89-90.

attempting to deduce the identity of the first adherents of a recognizably Roman version of Mithras.⁴¹ The author summarizes and acknowledges many of the theoretical origins of Mithraism which I have described above, but states that his own explanations are most easily reconciled with some of Cumont's ideas on Mithraic origins in Anatolia.⁴² In fact, one of Beck's criteria in identifying the earliest adherents of Mithras in the Roman world is a familiarity with both Iranian religious traditions and Western astrological studies.⁴³ Not only does this fit nicely with Cumont's insistence on a strong Indo-Iranian vein within Roman Mithraism, but it also leaves considerable room to argue that Ulansey's idea of an origin amongst the Cilician pirates is tenable. Some difficulties remain, however, as Beck points out the problem of apparently contemporaneous development of the cult in fairly far-flung corners of the empire, usurping some earlier scholarly notions that the cult only reached as far east as Dura-Europos after developing in the Western parts of the Roman world.⁴⁴ Finally, Beck reveals his candidate for the founders of Roman Mithraism as the soldiers and civilians of the Commagenian dynasty in the first century CE, claiming that this would explain its quick transmission, as Commagenian troops would have had significant contact with members of the Roman military during this period.⁴⁵ This account of the cult's origins is particularly interesting as it does not entirely reject the camps of any of the scholars I have mentioned previously in this historiography, but instead seeks to reconcile and update many of the strongest arguments from the 19th and 20th centuries.

⁴¹ Roger Beck, "The Mysteries of Mithras: A New Account of Their Genesis." *The Journal of Roman Studies* 88 (1998): 117.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 116.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 121-122.

It would be foolish, in a summary of Mithraic scholarship, not to mention the other popular debate related to the Roman mysteries of Mithras. The idea that the cult was exclusively open to male worshippers has been around from the very beginning of modern Mithraic research, and has largely remained unchallenged. While many early Mithraic scholars were not particularly concerned with the gender-exclusivity of Mithraic worship, they all laid substantial groundwork for later scholars interested in the conflict between the masculine and the feminine in all aspects of Roman Mithraism. Some scholars argued that an exclusively male cult would have demonized or otherwise shunned all aspects of the feminine in order to bolster male worshippers' masculine self-assurance, but I think this would be naïve at best. Given the Roman capacity for collective memory and deference to the *mos maiorum*, it would be highly unlikely that a Roman male would not immediately recognize the often Phrygian dress of the god Mithras as something Eastern, and therefore something less than completely masculine. It would also be difficult to argue with any degree of success that any cult of the Roman imperial world could successfully exclude all aspects of either the masculine or feminine. While Mithras himself was sometimes shown to have literally been born of the living rock, this does not itself preclude feminine involvement in his origin, as the Romans, borrowing from the Greek tradition, would likely have seen the earth or living rock as a feminine entity. Additionally, the bull, though typically associated with male deities in Greco-Roman tradition, would likely have been seen as a representation of the feminine, or at least of the not-masculine. Given the tradition of portraying male gods triumphing over wild beasts as a representation of West triumphing over East, male triumphing over female, and civilization triumphing over nature, the bull would certainly have been seen

to stand for all of these things to the average Roman viewer. While settling the debate over gender-exclusivity and tensions in Western Mithraism does not bear directly on my endeavor to identify the origins and foundational practices of the cult, questions of East vs. West in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean will always be entangled with issues of masculinity and femininity. Therefore, gender and its treatment in cult iconography will help to answer some questions as to the cult's origins, and vice-versa.

The strongest voices in the debate over gender-exclusivity in Roman Mithraism have come to the fore only in the 21st century, most notably in the debate between Jonathan David and Alison Griffith. David, writing in 2000, seems to believe his is the first serious attempt to argue against the entrenched position of all previous Mithraic scholarship, that women were indeed excluded from the mysteries of Mithras. Unfortunately, he seems to have fallen into the same trap as some of the first Mithraic scholars, such as Cumont, in that he stretched a small amount of unsubstantiated evidence far past the point of relevance. However, in light of the boldness of David's claim, it is vital to focus at greatest length in this historiography on his arguments, and the subsequent categorical response to those arguments published by Griffith in 2006. I will first lay out David's arguments, and then report Griffith's response to each of his major points in the following section.

In his article from 2000, David sets out to overthrow the 19th and 20th century notion that Mithraism excluded women entirely, promising to draw upon epigraphic, iconographic, and textual primary source evidence to demonstrate that, "the theory of universal female exclusion from Mithraism is untenable."⁴⁶ While this claim would fit

⁴⁶ Jonathan David, "The Exclusion of Women in the Mithraic Mysteries: Ancient or Modern?" *Numen* 47 (2000): 121.

comfortably within the traditions of Mithraic scholarship if framed as Clauss recommends Mithraism be viewed (as a sum of many diverse local Mithraic traditions rather than a rigid and uniform tradition to which the congregations of all Mithraea adhered), David does not make it abundantly clear that his intent is to argue for the inclusion of women as a local variation, and instead sets out as if to suggest that women were included in the rites everywhere. As his foundational piece of evidence, David cites a passage from Porphyry in which animal names are given to the different grades of Mithraic initiation and participation. Despite the possibility that the passage in question is both corrupt and inconsistent in various manuscripts, David argues that Porphyry's designation of women as either hyenas or lionesses refers specifically to women involved with Mithraism, even going so far as to say that Gordon's rejection of this notion is inconsequential.⁴⁷ David's then turns to archaeological evidence with the description of a pair of sarcophagi from Oea, North Africa, which he argues are rife with Mithraic imagery similar to that found in a Mithraeum in Rome, where a figurine of a woman also appears.⁴⁸ The author continues on to reference accounts of Mithraic rites given by Tertullian, arguing that any amount of inconsistency with the established Mithraic tradition found outside of North Africa is reason enough to give credibility to Tertullian's otherwise accounts.⁴⁹ In the following section, David proposes a reevaluation of previous scholarly identification of the animals associated with the Mithraic grades of initiation, asserting that in some cases the significance of those animals has been misconstrued. Finally, despite his bold statements earlier in the article, David summarizes his arguments

⁴⁷ Ibid., 124-125.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 125-126.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 126-127. David notes that Tertullian is mostly concerned with North Africa in his writings, and sees this as suggestive of a distinct regional sect of Mithraism in which women were involved as members.

and concludes with a recognition that the small amount of evidence from which he has constructed his arguments is not necessarily indicative of widespread feminine participation in the Mithraic tradition. It is therefore possible to conclude that David's arguments are not overall as incompatible with traditional Mithraic scholarship as he made them out to be, but it is nevertheless true that he was reacting directly to a number of Mithraic scholars and their traditional views, working from a rather limited body of evidence, which does not bear out his conclusions, or at least does not discredit the traditional notion that Mithraism was generally gender-exclusive.

Alison Griffith responded most directly to David's article, systematically addressing each of his arguments. In fact, Griffith acknowledged she was not the first to respond to David's work, saying, "The conclusion that none of this evidence is unequivocally Mithraic is hardly new; the aim is to put the debate to rest."⁵⁰ But Griffith also sets out to find some middle ground between the vision of Mithraism as hostile to all things feminine and the Mithraism which welcomed the feminine as a balance to the masculine. First, however, she sets about by organizing her counterargument to many of David's assertions.

Beginning with texts, Griffith reminds us that both the works of Tertullian and Porphyry cited by David are highly contentious, and/or likely not without significant bias against Mithraism. Griffith notes that Tertullian's account of Mithraic rites and participation was likely influenced by the fact that Tertullian was writing to denigrate non-Christian religions, and that the "lioness" mentioned by Porphyry is more likely to have been "hyena," as the manuscripts have been corrupted, and both words end similarly

⁵⁰ Alison Griffith, "Completing the Picture: Women and the Female Principle in the Mithraic Cult." *Numen* 53 (2006): 48.

in Greek.⁵¹ Given that the existence of a lioness grade of initiation in Mithraism depends almost entirely upon this likely corruption, the closeness of the words is frustrating. But Griffith quickly moves on to address the connection of the Oea tomb and the S. Prisca Mithraeum in Rome as set forth by David, pointing out that the two sites are not nearly so contemporary as David argued, and that an earlier scholar's comparison of similar figures appearing in both places was at first tentative, but later abandoned by the very same scholar.⁵² Overall, Griffith concludes that the Oea site is not definitively Mithraic, meaning that any attempt at forced association between archaeological remains there and in the Roman Mithraeum would be detrimental to our understanding both of Mithraic art and symbolism, and to our understanding of burials in Roman North Africa. Griffith carries on to state that the appearance of female heads or figures in certain Mithraea is easily attributable to later vandalism or the intentional filling in of Mithraic spaces in the late fourth century CE.⁵³ Given that Mithraism had largely disappeared or been stamped out by early Christians by this time, it is troublesome to attribute the appearance of female figures in Mithraea solely to the activities of Mithraic worshippers or dedicators. On the topic of dedicatory inscriptions, Griffith says, "A number of dedications to Mithras by women have been cited in support of the idea of women's participation in the cult, but none can be unquestionably shown to be both a dedication to Mithras and by a woman."⁵⁴ Griffith notes that there are a few cases in which it is impossible to entirely disprove a connection between a woman dedicator and a Mithraic inscription, but asserts

⁵¹ Ibid., 51-52.

⁵² Ibid., 53-54. Griffith notes that the S. Prisca depictions date to the early 3rd century, and the Oea sarcophagi and associated paintings date to the late 3rd or even 4th century. Additionally, Vermaseren's lack of confidence in his comparison of figures from the two locations was glossed over in David's writing.

⁵³ Ibid., 57.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

that even in these cases, there is significant lack in clarity of the inscriptions, as abbreviations frequently obfuscate the meaning of what would be the most vital passages.⁵⁵ Finally, Griffith acknowledges the potential for communication between the highest grades of Mithraic initiation with the highest grades of female initiation in cults such as those of the Magna Mater, but again concludes that the evidence is simply not substantial enough to found a solid argument upon, and dismisses all notions that such communication would signify a high-ranking women's grade in Mithraism.⁵⁶

Following her reassessment of David's evidence, Griffith tackles the idea of the feminine principle in Mithraism, as many scholars did in the 20th century. However, like those scholars, she does so without much consideration of how the feminine principle connected to real women, choosing instead to view the feminine as the abstract binary to the masculine principle apparent in Mithraic imagery. As much of her discussion of imagery is heavily iconographic in nature, and not entirely distinct from earlier scholars' considerations of the same imagery, it does not need to be discussed at length.

Interestingly, however, Griffith does argue against the notion of Mithraism being a religion designed to suppress the feminine completely, as promoted by Gordon and others, concluding that the religion simply dealt more in gender ambiguities than in absolutes.⁵⁷ Thus, Griffith's vision of Mithraism is that of a religion in which the genders are inextricably intertwined, rather than in direct competition with one another.

While it may not be possible to assign art-historical methods to all of the Mithraic scholars in this paper, given that their work is situated more often in the disciplines of

⁵⁵ Ibid., 57-62.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 62-65.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 75-77.

archaeology, history, classics, and religion, the disciplines do at least share enough vocabulary that I can here make a brief attempt at defining their methodologies. For the most part, Mithraic scholars have been limited to semiotic approaches to the religion, as the vast majority of evidence is in the form of painting and sculpture found in Mithraea. Iconographical studies have borne the study of Mithraism aloft, and have inspired much scholarly debate from the 19th century to the present, but focus on iconography has also left a great many questions unanswered. Scholars such as Cumont and Campbell especially employed formalist methodologies in their attempt to reconcile Roman Mithraic imagery and tradition with what they argued were predecessor traditions in Persian territories. For the most part, gender in Roman Mithraism has been viewed from a structuralist perspective, with the scholarly consensus being that the feminine was not only present, but essential to Mithraism and the Mithraic worldview. Despite a general lack of overt concern over the question of women's involvement in the cult's activities throughout the 19th and early 20th century, scholars have recently revisited the question. Working more as social historians, Gordon, David, and Griffith again tried the case of women's participation in Roman Mithraism, but the conclusion was that, as originally argued by earlier scholars, women most likely did not participate in the cult. Overall these seem to be the approaches most prevalent in the history of Mithraic scholarship.

While the study of Roman Mithraism has been interdisciplinary from its very beginnings, limitations stemming from the nature of available evidence have long frustrated scholarly attempts at making definitive, unimpeachable statements about the nature of the shadowy cult. From its origins in the late 19th century, modern Mithraic scholarship has been rife with disagreement on even the most fundamental aspects of the

cult, including questions of its origins, its membership, and its overall position within the broader Roman religious structure. As a result of the evidence for the cult being largely epigraphic and archaeological, scholarly opinions have undergone constant re-evaluation as more Mithraea and Mithraic art have appeared in excavations across Europe and the Mediterranean. Nevertheless, certain ideas espoused by the earliest scholars of Mithraism have persisted, not always as a result of the preponderance of evidence which would support their conclusions, but more often due to a dearth of evidence required to refute their ideas. In reality, much is yet to be discovered about Mithraism, and much has yet to be proven more concretely. Certainly, questions about the origin of distinctly Roman or Western Mithraic practices and traditions abound. If the cult is descended from Greek cosmological traditions, then where do the Iranian names associated with the cult originate? If Mithraism is indeed strongly Iranian even in the most Western parts of the Roman Empire, would Mithraic adherents have recognized the dualistic iconography in their sanctuaries symbolizing the struggles between good and evil, or would their understanding have been lessened by physical separation from the cult's homeland? The most measured suggestion which can be offered as far as the cult's origins is that they were myriad. As such it is important to acknowledge the differences in Mithraic sites and iconography across the Roman world not as obstructive to our goal of understanding the truest origins of the cult, but vital pieces of evidence for the richness and versatility of the Roman religious syncretistic machine.

Chapter Two

Attributes of a Typical Mithraeum

In order to understand the extent to which regional variation is reflected in the tangible remnants of Mithraic worship in the archaeological record, it is first necessary to establish a checklist of what might be expected in a Mithraic space. What were the physical structures themselves like? Where were they located relative to surrounding structures or landscape features? What imagery and iconography appeared in the sacred spaces? What figures appeared most often or most prominently in the cult's iconographical record? All of these questions are important not only in allowing modern scholars to identify Mithraic spaces with a greater degree of certainty (especially important as there have been some fierce debates over the identification of some sites as Mithraic), but also in focusing in more closely on deviations from the norm, or differences between Mithraic sites. While it would certainly be impossible to establish an absolutely perfect set of criteria to which all Mithraea would adhere, due simply to the sheer number which existed in the ancient Mediterranean, it should at least be possible to identify those factors which point most strongly towards Mithraic activity. Additionally, it would be folly to claim that the appearance of auxiliary figures atypical in the cult's iconography at any site should be grounds for excluding it from a catalogue of Mithraic sites. Not only would this reflect a fundamental misunderstanding of Roman religion's versatility and adaptability, but it would also wrongly assume that all Mithraea across the Roman world were in fact frequented only by Italian Romans. The depiction of local deities is, if anything, evidence of the extent to which a religion has been successfully syncretized into the Roman religious program.

Indeed, the differences between sites across the Roman world are the very key to unlocking many of the cult's secrets, as written ancient sources hardly suffice even in providing a complete picture of the cult and its activities in any one corner of the empire, and therefore could hardly be interrogated for information on the cult's regional variations. As such, in this section of my thesis I will refer to Leroy Campbell's *Mithraic Iconography and Ideology*⁵⁸ extensively, as I believe his work to be one of the most accessible and concise efforts to catalogue and establish typologies for various aspects of Mithraism and Mithraic structures, iconography, and resulting practical differences across the Roman world. In addition, Campbell's volume represents an important moment in the history of Mithraic scholarship, as he was a proponent of Cumont's ideas of links between Western Mithraism and earlier Iranian religious traditions. His volume was published only a few years before the first conference at which many of Cumont's ideas were first rejected wholesale, meaning that most of the evidence which was used to discredit Cumont's ideas already existed at the time Campbell's work was published. Therefore, this can be read as a work not written in any haste to rebut any new ideas, but a carefully compiled and well-organized investigation into the shadowy world of Mithraic beliefs, via a great many different sites and cult scenes.

Campbell creates a number of typologies and distinctions which are invaluable in answering many of the questions I raise in the introduction of this chapter, though he focuses primarily on the iconography of Mithraic sites, rather than on questions of the orientation or location of Mithraea. As I am writing this thesis from an art-historical perspective, it makes a great deal of sense to follow Campbell's iconographical study in

⁵⁸ Leroy Campbell, *Mithraic Iconography and Ideology*. Brill, 1968.

determining differences in cult practice and setting between regions. The study of the iconography in various *tauroctony* scenes from Mithraea across the Roman world is not only one of the easiest starting points in investigating the cult, but also necessary, as this scene is the most consistent link between Mithraic sites, and by far the best possible determining factor when the identity of a site is in question. However Campbell does not focus only on variations of the *tauroctony* and figures within that scene, but also on other scenes and figures typically (but importantly, not always) found in Mithraic spaces. The author also helpfully attempts to divide certain variations in iconographical programs by the regions in which they appear, and even by their chronological period, pointing out which figures seem to have been later additions, or additions found only in certain areas, perhaps in deference to local traditions. In the following, I will summarize the evidence in the hope that I might begin to construct a clearer picture of a “typical” Mithraeum in a number of regions, in anticipation of my description of specific representative sites in a later section.

First, Campbell summarizes one of his own previous publications in which he created a typology of *tauroctony* types, mostly divided by the media or physical ways in which the scene was created, rather than by the iconography of the scene itself. These types may be summarized as follows (see Figs. 3-8): Type I is mostly constrained to a single rectangular field containing all elements of the scene and does not seem to be regionally bound. In type II, a stele with a single field is used, most often in Thrace, and later examples include a frieze on the base. Type III, most often found in the Danube, is a stack of three horizontal fields, with the *tauroctony* set in the largest middle section. Type IV is noted to be a synthesis of types II and III, found in Dacia, with the registers on a

stele. Type V from Dalmatia and Pannonia has a circular field containing the *tauroctony* scene, although Campbell notes that this type later merged with many of the other types. Type VI utilizes a rectangular field like type I, but includes the depiction of an architectural cave, arch, or vaulted construction, and is noted to be most common in the provinces of Middle Europe. Type VII is mostly a development on VI, including symbols on the border of the *tauroctony* which are not necessarily related to the scene itself. Finally, type VIII is yet another development on type VII, with smaller series of images on either side of the *tauroctony* scene, originating in Northern Italy and spreading to the Rhineland.⁵⁹ Thus it is already clear that certain habits or modes of depiction in Mithraic spaces were regionally bound. However, it is also true that a difference in the medium used to create the *tauroctony* scene is not quite sufficient evidence to argue for the highly variable nature of the cult across space and time.

Campbell also offers a brief summary of the subtypes he observes in the many *tauroctony* scenes he discusses, all of which are based around the actual depictions of the bull and its interaction with the god Mithras in the moment of the struggle and killing. He identifies five subtypes, many of which are again predictable by region. In the somewhat rare subtype A, found primarily in Southeast Europe in conjunction with subtype B, Mithras is shown kneeling on the back of a relatively small bull, which is depicted with its legs tucked under its body (Fig 9). Subtype B is noted to be a Greco-Roman development of A, in which Mithras appears more in profile astride a bull which is shown prostrated rather than with folded legs. From the Hellenistic East we get subtype C, which emphasizes Mithras' line of sight towards the sun as he sits atop a bull struggling

⁵⁹ Campbell, *Mithraic Iconography*. 1-2.

to regain its footing. This subtype is noted for its emphasis on the snake and scorpion in the scene, and is the most widely preserved of the subtypes. Subtype D is similar to A, but depicts Mithras with one or both feet on the ground, holding on to a bull much more in motion than the other subtypes, typically shown still on its back legs, but being forced to kneel at its front as Mithras arrests its motion. Finally, the more typically German subtype E (Fig. 10) depicts Mithras riding a bull in motion, and is sometimes synthesized with subtype D.⁶⁰ While these differences may at first seem minor, it should be kept in mind that groups with differing interests may have wanted to depict their cult's central deity in various ways. While civilian worshippers may have been content to show Mithras either as pious in the act of sacrificing a subdued or weakened bull, it would hardly be surprising to think that an image of a virile and powerful god astride an equally powerful animal in the middle of performing a feat of incredible strength would appeal more to soldiers in a camp on the frontiers of the empire. Not only could an image such as this serve as a model to which such soldiers might aspire, but it would also likely serve to allay some doubts or fears about contact with non-Roman enemies, reminding those soldiers of the natural order (in the Roman worldview), in which civilization and the masculine triumphed over wilderness, animals, and the effeminacy of non-Romans.

In addition to the figures of the bull and Mithras himself, variations in the other actors included in the *tauroctony* scene might hold clues as to differences in the cult's emphasis in separate regions. Campbell discusses the multiple Mithraic "helpers" which appear in regionally specific *tauroctony* types, and delves into the different things they symbolized. In doing so, he focuses also on the myriad ways in which all these figures

⁶⁰ Ibid., 2-3.

interact, not only with one another, but also with the figures of the bull and the god himself. The author discusses four helpers in particular: the dog, the snake, the raven, and the scorpion. It is important to consider the role of these figures in Mithraea across the Roman world, and to understand their time and place of origin, as many carry different connotations and represent potentially conflicting principles, depending upon whence they originated. Were all of these animals indeed meant to be assistants or benevolent creatures in the *tauroctony* scenes in which they appeared? Did they represent conflicting principles in conflict with one another, mirroring the struggle between Mithras and the bull? And perhaps most importantly, were these creatures Eastern in origin, or were they Roman additions inserted to bolster the narrative used to promote the cult's central values and beliefs? Campbell answers many of these questions, and it is important to bear in mind that he does disagree with Cumont on some counts, as I will note later as each assistant is discussed individually.

Perhaps the most immediately noticeable figure in a *tauroctony* other than Mithras or the bull, the dog may have been one of the earliest additions to simpler scenes of the bull-slaying, often appearing to lap at the blood being spilled from the bull.⁶¹ Campbell notes a number of different things which could be represented by the presence of the dog as well as its actions, including the appearance of dogs as hunting companions alongside Mithras in other Mithraic scenes, connections to sacrificial and/or burial rites of other ancient Mediterranean cultures, and even a parallel to the story of Cambyses II of Persia who slew the Apis bull and left its body to be eaten by a dog.⁶² However given the fact that Cambyses' slaying of the Apis bull was a misdeed rather than a heroic or

⁶¹ Ibid., 12.

⁶² Ibid., 13.

generative feat, it seems unlikely that the cult would have looked to this as a model for the inclusion of a dog in the *tauroctony*. Perhaps most likely is the appearance of the dog as a friendly companion to Mithras, as the god is accompanied by hounds in other cult imagery as he hunts. But Campbell also notes that the appearance of a three-headed Cerberus-like dog in a Mithraic space might serve as evidence of some connection to the Iranian deity Ahriman, whose roles were quite similar to underworld deities of the Greco-Roman traditions.⁶³ Thus it should be apparent that, although the dog might have been one of the earliest additions to the Mithraic iconographic program, it is not the most lucrative figure from which we might attempt to extract information on the origins of the cult. Indeed, it is only when considered alongside other symbolic animals of the bull-slaying scenes that we might begin to assemble a more cohesive idea of its exact role and relation to Mithras himself.

After the dog, the snake is the next most noticeable of the minor figures in a *tauroctony* scene. Given the negative connotations attached to serpents in the more modern worldview, it is not entirely surprising that the snake was at first seen as an opponent of Mithras in early Mithraic scholarship. However Campbell quickly dispels this notion, rejecting Cumont's idea that the serpent appeared as an agent of Ahriman to oppose Mithras and his faithful companion the dog.⁶⁴ Instead, it is noted that in many traditions the serpent was a representation either overtly of life and its generation, given its many associations with fertility and rebirth, or with the constants of the known world, due to its association with mother/earth goddess figures.⁶⁵ This would make sense, as one

⁶³ Ibid., 15.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 17.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 16-17. It is worth noting that, while mother goddess and fertility figures are sometimes associated with later Mithraic sites such as Dieburg and Carrawburgh, there has been no serious scholarly push to

of the appeals of Mithraism as a cult may have been promises of extended life or rebirth, symbolized neatly by the snake, capable of shedding its skin and appearing to renew its life at will. Additionally, this would fit neatly with the story told by the snake's position in the *tauroctony*, as the author notes that it is often seen lapping either at the semen flowing out of the dying bull, or like the dog, tasting the blood of the bull.⁶⁶ In either case, the incorporation of the bull's vital fluids into another living thing would point to an interest in rebirth or regeneration, possibly demonstrating some compatibility with traditional Iranian beliefs concerning the cycles of life, death, and rebirth.⁶⁷ Finally, recalling the extent to which early Christianity and Mithraism competed with one another, it would hardly be surprising if the representation of snakes and serpents as vile or deceptive in the Christian tradition were in fact an attempt to discredit pagan traditions in which snakes featured heavily, including Mithraism.

While the raven is less engaged with the bull and other animals in its appearances in *tauroctony* scenes, it was perhaps used as a symbol of Mithras' virility, related to bird incarnations of other Indo-Iranian deities, or perhaps inserted as a symbol of Mithras' connection to the sky and his potency as a dutifully generative sun deity.⁶⁸ In either case, the raven does not engage as actively with the other actors in the scenes, and therefore does not demand as much consideration in Campbell's work as the other animals. It should also be noted that there is likely not as much opportunity for confusion in the

support Campbell's speculations that the serpent in earlier Mithraic imagery indicated links to fertility deities.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 15.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 18-19.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 24-25. This also seems to be speculation on Campbell's part, but is worth bearing in mind later when considering the difference between military and civilian Mithraea.

symbolism of a bird as there is in that of a snake, as birds have not accrued nearly the negative stigma as that of the snake in later traditional worldviews.

Similar to the serpent, the scorpion is another animal which was originally considered by Cumont to be hostile to Mithras and other benevolent actors in the *tauroctony*. However Campbell states outright that this notion is flawed, and that the scorpion was hardly, as Cumont suggested, poised to thwart the generative powers of the bull's testicles and semen, but was rather itself associated with production and fertility.⁶⁹ Rather than the Iranian symbol of antagonism that Cumont might have suggested the scorpion represented, it was more likely a benevolent agent with another origin. In fact Campbell continues to state directly that, "It is quite clear that the scorpion motive in Mithraic iconography, as well as in that of Mercury, was derived from a Semitic or Anatolian tradition rather than from an Iranian,"⁷⁰ therefore denying any likelihood that the scorpion could have been a particularly Persian symbol in origin. Given the fact that the scorpion appears more frequently in Italian and Middle European *tauroctony* scenes, and not at all in sites as far East as Dura-Europos,⁷¹ this more Western, non-Iranian origin makes a great deal of sense. In fact, this would be another testament to the efficacy of the Roman syncretistic tradition, drawing other more traditional symbols from the religion at its source in the East, and picking up symbols to add to the cult as it is carried further West to arrive in Italy.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 26.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 27. While some of Campbell's statements about the symbolism of these animal assistants in *tauroctony* scenes was speculative, later scholars such as, Speidel (1980): 5-6, and Ulansey (1989): 15, identify the animals simply as products of the zodiac and cosmological arrangements that informed Mithraic art and iconography.

⁷¹ Ibid., 25. Speidel (1980): 5 also references a monument in Sidon in which a scorpion wraps around the scene and also interacts with those within the scene.

The final element of the *tauroctony* which varied significantly across numerous Mithraea was the inclusion or absence of a cave in the scene. While the origin of many elements of the bull-slaying scene may be difficult to locate definitively, Campbell casts no such aspersions on the motif of the cave, saying “Moreover the cave imagery was essential to the performance of the mystery rites which, though falsely attributed to Zoroaster, had their origin in Iranian religion.”⁷² Despite this, however, Campbell also notes that depictions of the cave in *tauroctony* scenes of Roman Mithraea appear to have originated in Rome and spread only later to more Eastern sites in Syria.⁷³ The author describes the cave types as follows: The naturalistic type (Fig. 11), appearing mostly in Italy, Sicily, and Middle Europe, likely spread from a source in Rome. The artificial cave type, depicted as a shallow cut made into a cliff face, is most typical of Middle Europe, North Africa, and Southeast Europe. Less regionally bound, the architectural cave (Fig. 8) appeared in Middle Europe, Germany, Syria, and even South Russia.⁷⁴ While Campbell allows for the possibility that the depiction of caves originated in Anatolia and spread only later to Italy and out from there, he does not espouse this idea himself, content with the idea that the naturalistic cave found in Italian Mithraea was likely the earliest appearance of the addition to the scene.⁷⁵ In any case, it is apparent that the reality of the cave motif’s origin runs counter to the idea that all elements of Roman Mithraism were direct adoptions from the East only later carried west to be synthesized into the Western version of the cult.

⁷² Ibid., 7.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 7-8.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 8.

Finally, although he does not focus on the orientation of the Mithraic structures themselves, Campbell does detail the variable orientations of elements such as the *tauroctony* scenes within the structures, and the cultural and practical implications of the directions most common in distinct regions. This is an important distinction, as the author notes that there are at least a few instances in which the orientation of the main cult scene did not match up completely with the orientation of the Mithraeum itself, especially in the case of some rock cave or cliff structures. He asserts, addressing the example of a cave Mithraeum, that, “This instance warns us that the actual orientation of a Mithraeum, governed by physical necessities, might differ from the symbolic orientation within.”⁷⁶ It is noted that in the case of natural caves or similar rock structures, the most a founder of a new Mithraeum could do was either accept the space available and modify it, or reject it altogether.⁷⁷ Even in cities, where cult structures would have been constructed architecturally rather than carved out of the living rock, available space, privacy, and proximity to any number of other structures would have limited the cult’s options. Campbell also observes that deference to other religious guidelines within cities could have similarly restricted the erection of a Mithraeum in the direction and layout desired.⁷⁸ However the cult demonstrated some versatility, often arranging elements such as the zodiac, grades of initiation, and the main scene of the bull-slaying in whatever way desired within the space allotted.

Campbell carefully types and categorizes the orientations of different Mithraea, dividing the sites into four categories based on the orientation of the main axis of activity

⁷⁶ Ibid., 50.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

within the shrines, sidestepping the confusion of the structures' external orientations. His general conclusion is that the Mithraea he examined fell into 4 different groups: those facing approximately East (Group 1), those oriented between South East and South West (Group 2), a third group (3) arranged between North East and North West, and finally a group (4) in which the axes aligned approximately West.⁷⁹ At last, these divisions begin to impose some structure on the myriad different divisions and classifications Campbell has made by iconography, type of relief, etc. in earlier sections of his work. He summarizes the findings of the compiled information with

An examination of the available data on each of these Mithraea leads to the following generalizations: a) Those oriented toward the east have their origin at a comparatively early date; that is, in the second century, and they are also under fairly strong Greek influence from the Hellenized East. b) Those oriented toward the south, if not later in origin, are under a stronger Latin or north European influence. c) Those oriented toward the north or northeast are under stronger Iranian or Semitic influence. d) The comparatively few definitely oriented toward the west are strongly Graeco-Iranian and tend to emphasize the Mithraic grades in their pictorial symbolism.⁸⁰

In addition to this, Campbell generalizes the locations of the differently oriented Mithraea, observing that Group 1 structures are most typically in Italy and Middle Europe, those of Group 2 are either found in Rome, Ostia, or western Europe, and sites of Groups 3 and 4 are largely similar in location, distributed across Italy and Middle or Southeastern Europe.⁸¹ Thus, we are finally able to begin synthesizing the vast amount of

⁷⁹ Ibid., 52.

⁸⁰ Ibid. Campbell is not arguing here that the orientation of a Mithraeum alone is indicative of the influences acting on the site, but is generalizing that these are the influences which coincide most often with each orientation, based on analyses of the types and subtypes of the *tauroctony* scenes within.

⁸¹ Ibid., 54.

information presented into what we might expect from Mithraea in various regions of the Roman world.

Here I will attempt to compile the information Campbell presented into a tentative list of features of Mithraea in distinct regions of the Roman world, progressing from East to West. For this, all of my reference will be to the same lists provided in Campbell's book, as he compiles his classifications into one table.⁸² In the easternmost sites identified as Roman Mithraea, in Syria and near Iran, we would expect Mithraea likely facing north or northeast, with rectangular scenes of the *tauroctony*, either by themselves or accompanied by additional painted pictures on either side, depicting Mithras either astride or leaning against a larger, more active bull, rather than a prostrated, smaller bull. Any caves depicted in the cult relief would most likely be architectural, and only at sites of relatively later dates. The animal assistants may be present, most likely the dog and the snake if any, and again only at later sites. In addition to the figures within the *tauroctony*, there might appear paintings or reliefs depicting other exploits or stories of the god Mithras, although I will return to these in a later section as I address sites more specifically.

In Italian Mithraea, we find the most variety within a region, but this is most likely because of the sheer number of Mithraic sites actually extant in Italy versus some of the other less-excavated regions of the Roman imperial world (Map 1). While there is likely to be at least one example of every type, subtype, and composition of *tauroctony*, every orientation, etc., there are still some patterns which emerge when looking at the evidence presented. In Italy we would most likely see naturalistic caves represented in

⁸² Ibid., 51-53.

scenes of the *tauroctony*, especially at earlier sites here than in any other region, with some later additions of artificial and architectural types. Additionally, there is a large degree of variability in the depiction of the animal helpers within this region, again obfuscating any attempt to pinpoint their origins definitively. For the most part, the Mithraea of the region Campbell identifies as Middle Europe follow the same patterns as those of Italy itself, likely due to its proximity to Italy and the Adriatic Sea.

In northwestern European and British Mithraea, we are most likely to find Mithraea oriented in a southern direction, an orientation otherwise found only in Ostia or Rome. Unfortunately Campbell omits data on the *tauroctony* scenes of British Mithraea, but it should be noted the cult scenes found in Germany are mainly the more developed and complex types, and nearly all of them depict Mithras fighting a much more active and dynamic bull, rather than simply sacrificing a subdued animal. It is my own observation that this holds with an even larger pattern of the scene's depiction across the entire Roman world.

While *tauroctony* scenes with smaller, less active bulls are much more common in and around Rome, Ostia, and Italy, the sites further removed from Rome itself along frontiers in Germany, the area of the Danube, and in Asia more often have depictions of the bull as an active and threatening figure. In other words, it appears that there is a difference between scenes of Mithras piously sacrificing a smaller, more domesticated bull, and scenes of Mithras hunting, subduing, and dispatching a wilder, more aggressive creature. While there are no definite regional divisions between types of Mithraea which preclude any type of cult scene composure absolutely, there very well may have been differences in interest or motivation for joining the cult amongst members of different

class or occupation. In settled and more stable areas of the Roman world, such as in Rome or the other Italian Roman cities, more members of the cult would likely have been civilians, interested more in the fraternity and camaraderie offered to initiates of the mysteries, and thus more content with a depiction of Mithras carrying out his orthopractic sacrificial and generative duties, spilling the bull's vital fluids to release its energies into the world. In contrast, to military members of the mysteries worshipping on the more turbulent frontiers in camp or garrison Mithraea, the narrative of Mithras slaying a wild bull would have been galvanizing, bearing in mind the numerous cultural implications of civilization triumphing over the wild, masculine over feminine, and, in particular, Romans over everyone else.

Of course, it is impossible to generate one single mold into which every Mithraeum in a given region would fit. Instead, it must be conceded that all aspects of Mithraic practice, iconography, building habits, etc. were distributed based on factors not necessarily relating to one another. Campbell sagely acknowledged the wide variation within Roman Mithraism early in his text, stating

The present work should demonstrate to the careful reader that Mithraism as a world religion was not completely uniform in its selection or use of art forms, nor was it more uniform in its cosmology, theology or rites. On the contrary, there were different viewpoints and emphases as well as different uses of symbols in different parts of the Roman World and even in different Mithraea in the same city or in the same Mithraeum at different periods.⁸³

⁸³ Ibid., 4.

This is important to keep in mind in conducting any research on Mithraism, as the variations in Mithraic practice and remnants are impossible to cut apart and organize neatly, but bleed into one another uncontrollably. However this chapter hopefully demonstrates that it is nevertheless possible to track differences in some aspects of the cult across time and space, in order that we might interrogate individual sites within the regions described, and make informed observations about their adherence to, or deviation from, regional norms. As I have asserted before, it would be a great discredit to the power of Roman syncretism if we expressed disbelief in an adopted cult's ability to, in turn, adopt symbols and habits from other local traditions following its own incorporation into the Roman religious machine.

Chapter Three

Survey of Specific Mithraea

Having established that Mithraism and its associated spaces were variable between regions of the Roman world, it is invaluable to look at representative examples of Mithraic sites from different areas to see if they fit with the attributes we might expect from a particular region. This is important not only in evaluating the differences introduced to cult imagery through local traditions, but also in tracking the spread and proliferation of certain icons in the cult's program across regions. In other words, to what extent was the imagery of the cult determined by local tradition and custom via local adherents of the cult, versus broader trends in the cult transferred between sites by travelling members of the military. Given that the number of worshippers actually able to participate in cult activities at any given Mithraeum was limited simply by the size of the shrine, it seems not only possible, but likely, that there may have been Mithraic shrines of very different character set up next door to one another, some being frequented by the native peoples of the area, and others set up by soldiers hailing from far removed corners of the empire.

In this section I will focus on a handful of sites from various regions, starting in the east with Syria, and moving west to the Italian peninsula (focusing particularly on Rome and Ostia), north to Germania, and finally to the most western Mithraea in Britannia. The sites chosen will not all be contemporaneous, but this will allow me not only to comment on differences in the cult between regions, but also on the timeline of developments within the cult more broadly, and their spread across the empire. Where possible I refer to reports on specific sites for objective information and site plans, but in

some cases it is necessary to refer to texts in which considerable degrees of opinion and interpretation also appear. I aim to offer first the facts of the sites, and only afterwards comment on the significance of each to the arguments I have detailed previously. It is important to bear in mind, however, that no site report can provide the objective truth of a site's original layout and functions, and therefore I can only synthesize what information and evidence was deemed to be worth including in the original plans and reports.

Dura-Europos

Perhaps one of the most compelling examples of regional uniqueness, the Mithraeum at Dura-Europos in Syria likely existed in three phases, first as a room in a private dwelling in the latter half of the second century CE, then as an improved and enlarged shrine in the beginning of the third century, and finally as a further expanded space near the middle of the third century, before the Persian overrun of the city in 256 CE.⁸⁴ While the remaining structure of the Mithraeum no longer stands in Dura-Europos, the niche of the cult now stands reconstructed in the Gallery of Fine Arts at Yale University. Although the three phases of use at the site might make it difficult to determine what was added to the Mithraeum at different periods, Cumont reported that only changes of the second and third phases would have appeared to excavators, as the first phase was largely erased in expansions carried out in the third century.⁸⁵ We may also be certain that no modifications were made to the space later in the third century, as the sanctuary itself was buried or filled in in 255 CE, in anticipation of a Persian attack

⁸⁴ M.I. Rostovtzeff, "The Mithraeum of Dura-Europos on the Euphrates." *Bulletin of the Associates in Fine Arts at Yale University* 9 (1939): 9.

⁸⁵ Franz Cumont, "The Dura Mithraeum." Ed. and trans. E.D. Francis. *Mithraic Studies*. ed. John R. Hinnels: Manchester, 1975. 199.

on the city.⁸⁶ Therefore this Mithraeum is an interesting intersection of phases of the cult, likely containing elements of an earlier, more personal version of the cult from when it existed in a private home, situated within a space modified many decades later. Cumont and Rostovtzeff both agree on the dates 168 CE and 170 CE for the dedications of two different *tauroctony* reliefs by Palmyrene commanders in the first phase of the Mithraeum, both of which survive today, as a result of their incorporation into the later phases of the Mithraeum.⁸⁷ Cumont reports that the Mithraeum as first excavated is largely typical of a Mithraic structure in its general layout, with a center aisle, flanking benches, and a cult niche on the western end (Fig. 12). However it is also noted that unlike some other Mithraea, the floor was above ground level, and the central aisle terminated in seven steps leading up to the elevated niche containing the *tauroctony* reliefs.⁸⁸ Therefore it is worth noting at this time that the orientation of the entire Mithraeum must have been east or northeast, given the reliefs' position at the western end of the space. Cumont also notes that the niche was likely set into a cradle vault, and that the ceiling of the cella was likely concave and made of mudbricks and plaster.⁸⁹ It is noted that, in the absence of any springs or near the Mithraeum, a number of wide-mouth basins and jars set in the floor of the structure at various points likely supplied the water used in the shrine.⁹⁰ Finally, Cumont mentions a few pits in which animal bones were found, although there is some confusion as to whether these pits were part of the structure

⁸⁶ Rostovtzeff (1939): 9.

⁸⁷ Rostovtzeff, 8 and Cumont, 161-2. Cumont notes that the cult therefore may have arrived in Dura with the Palmyrene archers serving in the Roman military during Lucius Verus's campaign in 165 CE.

⁸⁸ Cumont (1975): 163.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 163-4.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 164.

itself as a Mithraeum, or whether these were a result of fill in and around the shrine after its use was discontinued.⁹¹

Most importantly, Cumont describes at length the images found in the shrine itself, both in the *tauroctony* niche and along the walls and the borders of the niche. First, there is the case of the double depiction of the cult's central bull-slaying narrative. As mentioned before, these are attributed to the dedications by Ethpeni (or Ethpani) in 168 CE and Zenobius (or Zenobios) in 170 CE, both of these being commanders of Palmyrene archery units.⁹² It is not unlikely that these surviving reliefs were simply reused and incorporated into the niche of the rebuilt Mithraeum, but it is somewhat strange that two reliefs of the *tauroctony* might appear together, one on top of the other.

It is remarkable that the Zenobius relief (Fig. 8) appears to contain depictions of figures not associated with the cult of Mithras itself. Cumont simply identifies these as Zenobius himself alongside various other members of his family.⁹³ This would hardly be remarkable in Roman religious spaces more generally, as donor portraits often appeared in shrines and sanctuaries. Indeed they also appeared frequently in Mithraea, along with the myriad inscriptions one would expect to find in the cases of sponsorship and dedication of new shrines. However even a cursory observation of the plethora of *tauroctony* scenes extant today will reveal that the depiction of figures directly alongside Mithras other than his torchbearer attendants, Cautes and Cautopates, and other deities and zodiacal companions is exceedingly uncommon.⁹⁴ While it would be less surprising

⁹¹ Ibid., 165.

⁹² See note 87.

⁹³ Cumont (1975): 167.

⁹⁴ In his *Corpus Inscriptionum et Monumentorum Religionis Mithriacae*, Vermaseren published the images of well over 100 *tauroctony* scenes from Mithraea all across the Roman world. The Zenobius relief is the only one in which figures other than Cautes, Cautopates, or other deities are present within the actual *tauroctony*.

to find these portraits in smaller panels bordering the main scene of the bull-slaying, the figures actually stand directly in front of the bull, and nearly touch it, as if they are witnesses of the sacrifice themselves. Nearby stands the typical canine companion of the god, leaping as it usually does towards the wound on the bull's neck, while the raven appears almost perched on Mithras's flapping robe. It is difficult to see the snake or the scorpion in the scene, and Cumont reports that neither are present, although the editor of his piece notes that the snake is, or at least once was, included in the relief.⁹⁵ Finally, it is noted that this relief still bears traces of the brilliant colors with which it would originally have been adorned.⁹⁶ Of course, this is another detail that is nearly impossible to detect simply from the black-and-white photographs available.

The smaller Ethpani *tauroctony* is a more typical Mithraic scene, showing Mithras alone with many of the animal attendants expected (Fig. 13). In this relief, Mithras is shown with his knee behind the bull's shoulder, forcing it to the ground. The raven flies behind his head, the hound is shown leaping at the bull's neck, and an outline appears between the bull's leg and the dog's body, suggesting that a snake was later chiseled off.⁹⁷ Next to the raven is a moon crescent, while on the other side a depiction of the sun appears almost in front of the bull's nose. As Cumont notes, this relief was also brightly colored, and potentially decorated with four small glass or ceramic discs in the border of the scene.⁹⁸ Finally, it should be mentioned that, different from the Greek inscription

⁹⁵ Ibid., 168. Conflicting reports muddle the issue here, and in many available photographs it is nearly impossible to be certain, but Francis asserts that the snake did indeed appear in both scenes, although it was later chiseled off of the smaller Ethpani relief, and is simply difficult to see in the Zenobios relief, due to its position.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 167.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 168. See note 95.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 166.

found on the Zenobios *tauroctony*, the inscription on the Ethpani relief is Palmyrene.⁹⁹ Therefore it is clear that the worshippers at this Mithraeum were culturally diverse.

In addition to the main cult reliefs in the Dura Mithraeum, it is worth mentioning a number of paintings also found within. While Cumont records and describes a great number of the scenes, I focus here only on a handful, and mostly on those still best preserved as the Mithraeum stands today at Yale. The scenes in question are also those noted to be most atypical of representations of the deity in spaces associated with the cult, as it remains true that the differences between sites are likely to be the most lucrative sources of information. A number of scenes dealing with the cosmogony of Mithras and the god's other heroic deeds appear, but many, as Cumont notes, are well attested in other Mithraea.¹⁰⁰ There is a Semitic name which Cumont attaches to the creation of the paintings in this Mithraeum, and he asserts that this is evidence that a local member of the Mithraeum executed the pieces.¹⁰¹ In any case, it is now necessary to turn to the two most unique painted scenes from the Mithraeum.

First, and perhaps most exciting for Cumont, are two painted magi (Fig. 14) who appear on the piers flanking the niche in which the two *tauroctony* reliefs are mounted. For Cumont, these figures are unmistakable. He states:

If we seek to identify these two seated Magi in more detail the names which first come to mind are those of Zoroaster, who instituted the mysteries, and Osthanes, most famous among his disciples and characteristically associated with him in the West. This painting, certainly prior to 256 A.C., would then represent the earliest known portrait of Zoroaster, although this fact obviously cannot guarantee the

⁹⁹ Ibid., 162.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 170-82.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 169-70. Francis takes issue with the assertion that this name is concrete evidence of a local's work, and instead espouses the idea that this was simply a native Syrian artist rather than a native of Dura, and that he may have traveled within the military to other garrisons along the frontiers of the Roman Empire, lending some possible explanation to the similarities between the later Dura paintings and those of Mithraea along the Rhine and Danube frontiers, especially in Germany.

validity of the likeness. The reformer of Mazdeism is here shown holding a book, for he is the mythical legislator of Iran and the supposed author of its sacred literature.¹⁰²

Given Cumont's zeal in connecting all other aspects of Mithraism and its iconography with Indo-Iranian traditions, it is hardly surprising that we are presented with this identification of two distinctly Eastern figures. However Cumont also acknowledges in his notes that these figures are dressed not in the garb of magi or priests, but in the robes of Palmyrene aristocrats.¹⁰³ Therefore it is somewhat more difficult to be comfortable with this tenuous connection to Zoroastrian tradition, especially in light of the fact that there are other Palmyrene influences in the space, meaning it is much more sensible to acknowledge this as simply another product of the identity of the Mithraeum's sponsors. Cumont even states that these look like portraits of real individuals, with considerable emphasis on lines of the cheek and throat.¹⁰⁴ Again, this would lend more weight to the idea that these were indeed portraits of benefactors of the Mithraeum or perhaps local officials more than it would cement any connection to Zoroaster and Oshanes.

In addition to the two figures flanking the cult niche, Cumont reports with great excitement the scenes of Mithras hunting various animals, some of which still survive with the transplanted cult niche at Yale. The deity is depicted astride a horse in pursuit of a number of animals, including several stags of some variety, a lion, and what is identified as a boar in the bottom right corner (Fig. 15). Underneath his galloping horse appears a snake, likely acting in its usual role as one of the god's assistants.¹⁰⁵ While at

¹⁰² Ibid., 184.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 183. It is also noted that Mithraic priests in other places, including the Italian peninsula, would likely have worn Eastern costumes.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 187.

first glance it seems as though all of the animals in front of the horse are being driven forward and hunted, not all of them have yet been struck by arrows, leaving some possibility that the lion in this scene is in fact one of Mithras's companions, acting as a hunting dog.¹⁰⁶ This is contrasted with a scene on the opposite wall, in which the lion takes the place of the snake running below the god's horse, while a wild lion and several gazelles flee before him, having already been struck by his arrows.¹⁰⁷ Cumont offers a number of explanations for the reason we find Mithras portrayed thusly, drawing parallels between these frescoes and a number of scenes from Germania in which Mithras appears either on horseback or as an archer.¹⁰⁸ Unsurprisingly, we are also reminded that the Avestan figure Mithra, conflated with other deities in the Avestan tradition, is frequently associated with various feats of archery, and is often depicted with a bow in hand.¹⁰⁹ There is also the possibility that this depiction was an attempt to situate Mithras within the popular Iranian tradition of royal hunting scenes.¹¹⁰ But perhaps the simplest explanation is that, much like the frontier soldiers to whom scenes of Mithras dominating and slaying a violent bull appealed, the Palmyrene archers garrisoned in Dura-Europos would have enjoyed a depiction of their cult deity excelling in the same military skills.¹¹¹ Whatever the case may be, I will return to these ideas later when I discuss Mithraea of the Rhine and Danube regions.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 188. It should be noted, however, that Cumont does not make the connection, suggested by Francis in an earlier note, that these similar portrayals were a result of veterans' movements along the frontiers of the Empire, carrying with them different conceptions of how the god might be portrayed.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 189-89.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 192.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

Ostia and Rome

Unlike at Dura-Europos, where there was only one Mithraeum to which a great deal of attention was devoted, in Ostia and Rome, there stood a great number of Mithraea, many of which likely remain undiscovered, or which were dismantled and incorporated into other structures. As such I will focus not on a single Mithraeum as at Dura-Europos, which has received much scholarly attention as a single site, but on a number of different shrines. This will also serve to demonstrate the variety of the Mithraea themselves, and help to dispel the notion that all Mithraic sites in a given region would be identical. Yet again, it is not by focusing on the similarities that we might learn more about the cult, but by emphasizing the differences. I will refer not only to a publication on Mithraism more generally, but also to Vermaseren's excellent *Corpus Inscriptionum et Monumentorum Religionis Mithriacae*, which will appear in notes as *CIMRM*, followed by the entry number, as he records individual sites, monuments, and inscriptions each with its own individual catalogue number.

Despite my repeated insistence that differences between Mithraea are most key in investigating the iconography and identity of the cult, it is still true that in some regions Mithraic sites shared a great many things in common. For instance, in Ostia it is noted that most, if not all Mithraea discovered were set up in buildings which already existed.¹¹² In addition, many of the Ostian Mithraea are noted to be similar in size, with only a few falling outside the average dimensions of 30-40x13-18 feet (9-12x4-5.5

¹¹² Dennis Groh, "The Ostian Mithraeum." *Mithraism in Ostia*. Ed. Samuel Laeuchli: Northwestern University Press, 1967. 17. In this volume only 14 Mithraea are considered and used as a representative body, spanning 150 years of development of the cult in Ostia, from the earliest Mithraeum in 160 CE to the latest, ca. 250-300 CE.

meters).¹¹³ While this is likely simply due to the fact that the Mithraea were being constructed within buildings already subject to the city's building plan, spaces of these dimensions would have allowed for the typical rectangular shrine layout, with a central long axis progressing from the rear of the Mithraeum towards the front, where the cult image and center of cult activities would have been. While the wall paintings of Dura-Europos would have provided supplementary narrative to worshippers there, mosaics lining the floors of many of the Ostia Mithraea may have done the same, or may have dictated the seating positions of differently graded initiates of the cult. Vermaseren reports the seven grades found in the mosaics (Fig. 16) at the Mithraeum of Felicissimus as follows:

5) A small vase between a raven (l) and *caduceus* (r) (Corax-Mercurius); 6) Radiate diadem in the form of a crescent; underneath it a lamp (Nymphus-Venus); 7) Helmet; above it a lance. Military bag (Miles-Mars); 8) Lightning, *sistrum* and fire spade (Leo-Jupiter); 9) *Falx*; crescent and underneath it a star and another *falx* of a different type (Perses-Luna); 10) Crown with seven rays and with bands; torch (l) and whip (r) (Heliodromus-Sol); 11) *Falx*, Phrygian cap, staff, *patera* (Pater-Saturnus).¹¹⁴

These grades would have been laid in ascending order with Corax-Mercurius being the lowest, closest to the entrance, and Pater-Saturnus the highest, and therefore the closest to the location of the altar and the *tauroctony* scene at the front of the Mithraeum. Nearly all the Mithraea at Ostia would have had benches on both opposite sides of the long axis, many running the full length of the room, although not in all cases.¹¹⁵ Thus we can begin to imagine how Mithraic worshippers would have moved through and appreciated the spaces and the images within.

¹¹³ Ibid., 10.

¹¹⁴ Vermaseren, *CIMRM* 299. The numbers are off as the entry also describes other numbered mosaic images unrelated to the ascending grades.

¹¹⁵ Groh, "The Ostian Mithraeum." 11-13.

It is also from Ostia that we get some sense of how worshippers of Mithras divided themselves into small groups in light of the fact that there were many of them, and many structures of their cult scattered across the city. In the same volume on Ostian Mithraism cited before, John Schreiber argues that, at least in Ostia, “The proliferation of Mithraea suggests two things: first, that Mithraic communities preferred to remain relatively small, and additional sanctuaries were added as the number of adherents grew; and second, that each sanctuary drew its adherents from a more or less compact area in its immediate vicinity.”¹¹⁶ In fact this is much the same way in which other scholars have traditionally explained the existence of vast numbers of relatively small Mithraea in areas of the cult’s popularity, rather than fewer and larger shrines. Schreiber also notes that a chronology of the Mithraea in Ostia reveals an interesting pattern, as he suggests there may be some significance to the cult’s earliest appearance in the city in the quarter also containing a temenos dedicated to Attis and the Magna Mater.¹¹⁷ Especially considering the number of scholars who argue for Western/Roman Mithraism’s emergence out of various parts of Asia Minor, this is worth remembering.

It should be apparent, from what I have written thus far, that scholarship and reports on Mithraea in Ostia are not nearly so concerned with the scenes of the *tauroctony* themselves as with discussions of the other decorations and features of the shrines, due perhaps in part to the lack of certainty in some cases about where in Ostia the recovered reliefs and statues originated. And indeed it is from the mosaics of Ostia that

¹¹⁶ John Schreiber, “The Environment of Ostian Mithraism.” *Mithraism in Ostia*. Ed. Samuel Laeuchli: Northwestern University Press, 1967. 33.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

we get the clearest representations of the Mithraic grades of initiation and their arrangement relative to one another.

In Rome, a number of Mithraea survived below later buildings, and many fortunately retain their associated artwork, most importantly various depictions of the *tauroctony*. Vermaseren describes many in great detail in his volume. Beneath the Basilica di San Clemente a Mithraeum was discovered in 1867, possibly dating to the later second century, in which was found a Mithraeum of relatively standard layout, with benches down both sides of a long axis, leading up to a cult niche at the end of the aisle (Fig. 17).¹¹⁸ While it is not clear if there was a representation of the bull-slaying in the niche of this Mithraeum, there was an altar bearing reliefs on four sides, found in pieces both within the space of the shrine and directly outside (Fig. 18).¹¹⁹ It is apparent from looking at the *tauroctony* on one side of this altar that it is arranged in the same way one would expect a wall-mounted relief of the scene to be arranged. All of the animal companions of the god are present, with the dog and snake both paying attention to the wound on the bull's neck, the scorpion underneath the bull, and the raven drawing Mithras's attention from behind. This bull is not one of the wilder, more active types, but prostrated, with Mithras kneeling on its back as he sacrifices it. Many other Mithraea in Rome, though constrained by their buildings and surroundings, hew very closely to the same type, and those *tauroctony* scenes which survived were largely very similar.

Germany

¹¹⁸ Vermaseren, *CIMRM* 338.

¹¹⁹ *CIMRM* 339.

It is important to consider the Mithraic monuments of Germany, not only because of their position very near the frontiers of the Empire and likely military nature, but especially because sites like Dieburg and Osterburken informed some of Cumont's early arguments about the nature of Mithras as a syncretized deity, due to the comparisons he drew between Mithras's depictions on horseback at those sites and the hunting scenes of Mithras at Dura-Europos. Vermaseren records the Mithraic reliefs found at these sites in great detail, lending considerable insight into the aspects of the deity emphasized by the worshippers in the area, and revealing the complexity of the relief panels in comparison to those found in Mithraic sites elsewhere.

In 1926, a Mithraeum was excavated in Dieburg, and Vermaseren notes that it is largely typical of a Mithraic layout, with two benches flanking a central aisle running along the long axis of the space, and likely dates to sometime before 260 CE.¹²⁰ Most remarkably, instead of a central cult relief depicting Mithras in the act of slaying the bull, here there is a double-sided relief in which the *tauroctony* is not included. While the god is depicted interacting with the bull (either carrying it or walking towards it with knife in hand) in smaller scenes bordering the main relief, the actual slaying of the bull is not represented.¹²¹ The central image of what has been deemed the front panel (Fig. 19) of the stone is instead a hunting scene, in which Mithras appears on horseback amidst a group of hunting hounds, in pursuit of an animal that might be a long-eared hare.¹²²

While the prey animals of the scene are not so numerous as in the hunting fresco at Dura-

¹²⁰ *CIMRM* 1246. It is important to remember that this date would make the Dieburg Mithraeum very close to contemporaneous with the shrine at Dura-Europos.

¹²¹ *CIMRM* 1247. This entry contains a full description of the various border scenes, both on the front and back of the relief tablet.

¹²² *Ibid.*

Europos, the god himself is still shown in much the same way, with a billowing cloak, atop a rampant horse, and accompanied by several animal helpers. The alternative quarry he pursues is likely just a product of region, as a scene of hunting lions would likely have seemed quite foreign to those worshippers actually from the region of Dieburg, and perhaps even to those soldiers who had been garrisoned there for a long period, or who had never visited lands in which lions were more common. On the reverse side of this relief panel a nude figure identified as Helios or Sol descends from a throne in front of a building, while Mithras stands off to his side, possibly conflated in this representation with Phaeton, one of the companions of the solar deity in many traditions (Fig. 20).¹²³ While it is possible that this Mithraeum at one point contained a central *tauroctony* in the cult niche, one does not survive today, making it possible that this double-sided relief panel was instead the focus of the cult activity in the space. Given the shrine's relatively late date, this might be strong evidence for the cult's later vulnerability to syncretism as it settled into the local traditions of those on the frontiers of the Empire.

Elsewhere in Germany, however, there were representations of Mithras actually in the act of slaying the bull. In Osterburken, for instance, a large relief panel (Fig. 10) was found in what was thought to be a Mithraeum, although the space was not fully excavated due to the danger of flooding.¹²⁴ The relief itself contains many of the same scenes found on the panel from Dieburg, showing Mithras in various stages of engagement with the bull, being dragged behind it, but also carrying it in other scenes.¹²⁵ Interestingly, many

¹²³ Ibid., Vermaseren notes here as well that Mithras was indeed conflated with Phaeton in other Mithraic imagery, given his interactions with Helios-Sol in some stories and images, and the traditions surrounding Phaeton's connection to the sun god.

¹²⁴ *CIMRM* 1291.

¹²⁵ *CIMRM* 1292.

scenes appear similar to those in Dieburg, as Mithras is shown interacting with a number of different deities here as well, not only limited to Helios-Sol, Apollo, Jupiter, and Saturn, but including a number of female deities as well, including Juno, Minerva, Proserpina, and even Diana.¹²⁶ While the depiction of this many deities not directly related to a cult's traditions is not unheard of in Roman religion, it is at least unique within Mithraism, as Mithras is most commonly the only god, or one of very few, depicted in the cult's spaces. Although Vermaseren does not indicate a date for this Mithraeum, based on the complexity of the relief and the inclusion of all of the animal assistants in the *tauroctony*, along with the comparability of the auxiliary scenes with those of the Dieburg Mithraeum, we might also speculate that this relief dates to sometime in the third century. This chronology would also potentially explain the myriad deities also appearing with Mithras, as with the Dieburg relief, with the more matured cult of Mithras becoming more and more vulnerable to syncretism with local traditions given its separation both chronologically and geographically from some of the earliest cult sites on the Italian peninsula. Additionally, it should be noted that in the *tauroctony* central to this complex panel of reliefs, a lion appears alongside the dog and snake, although it is in a relaxed pose, not rising towards the bull's wound as the other animals do. The scorpion appears in its usual place near the bull's testicles. Although the lion's presence does not fly in the face of the idea that soldiers moving along frontiers carried with them new images to associate with Mithras, it does somewhat muddle the issue of the direction of transfer of these images.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

Britain

Also on the borders of the Roman world, the Mithraeum at Carrawburgh along Hadrian's Wall in Britain provides another glimpse into the cult's activities further from the epicenter of Roman Italy. While not as far removed from Rome as a shrine standing in Dura-Europos, the Carrawburgh Mithraeum represents an interesting case, as it sits further northwest than many other sites associated with the cult, separating it not only from Rome itself, but also from its supposed places of origin in Asia Minor or Iran. This being the case, we might expect to find in such a remote location some of the most dramatic departures from typical cult activity and iconography of all known Mithraea. However it is also worth considering that the method of the cult's transmission to Britain likely had a great impact upon the aspects of the cult most emphasized in Carrawburgh. In any case, a report published in 1951 on the excavations of the Mithraeum at Carrawburgh offers great insight into the various phases of the mystery cult's activities at the military camp.¹²⁷

Richmond and Gillam begin by noting that the freestanding Mithraeum, built along the natural contour of a hill rather than set into its side, does not seem to have been oriented in any particular direction.¹²⁸ While not the most remarkable aspect of the shrine's construction, it is worth bearing in mind that many Mithraea do seem to have been oriented intentionally in one direction or another (at least internally), although there are other cases in which circumstances of the surrounding area were the only factors dictating the orientation of the cult's structures. Additionally, the fact that the structure does not seem to have been set deeply into the hillside suggests that the maintenance of a

¹²⁷ I. A. Richmond and J. P. Gillam, *The Temple of Mithras at Carrawburgh*. Newcastle, 1951.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

cave-like atmosphere was not of the utmost importance to those worshipping here. In any case, the authors describe three main phases of the Mithraeum. The earliest phase of the structure was noted to be among the smallest Mithraea ever excavated, comparable in size to the first phase of the Dura Mithraeum, likely with room for only a dozen worshippers to occupy the space at once, indicating that the cult likely had only limited membership when it was first established.¹²⁹ Dating of this first phase is unclear, though the authors note that the first of three sub-phases of the second Mithraeum at the site likely dated to around 222 CE, meaning the first Mithraeum might have been constructed in the later part of the second century.¹³⁰ The temple's second phase is noted to have doubled the size of the shrine, with the extension of the central aisle, and the addition of an apse on the end of the structure opposite the door, which is assumed to have hosted the cult's central *tauroctony* scene, although this does not survive.¹³¹ A pair of statues, likely depicting Mithras's torchbearers Cautes and Cautopates, was located at the start of the benches flanking the central aisle of the shrine, and likely remained in that location throughout the other sub-phases of Mithraeum II, which were likely simpler internal modifications of the space rather than complete reconstructions of the building.¹³² The authors estimate the destruction of Mithraeum II around 297 CE, and cite fire as the likely method of the space's destruction, although they do not speculate at motive or culprit of the conflagration.¹³³ The final phase of the shrine, Mithraeum III, was built at a higher level, directly on top of the older Mithraea, and reused some elements of the older

¹²⁹ Ibid., 8-9.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 28. The authors also note earlier (12) that a coin depicting Antoninus Pius was found in the context of the Mithraeum's second overall phase, although this does not provide any more confident date for the first phase.

¹³¹ Ibid., 9-10.

¹³² Ibid., 14.

¹³³ Ibid., 27-28.

space, including the statues of Cautes and Cautopates, although these are noted to have been moved to new positions following some repairs.¹³⁴ Additionally, a seated Mother-goddess figurine is reported to have been found in the anteroom of this building, though it is appropriately noted that it is unclear whether this was the first appearance of the goddess in the Mithraeum.¹³⁵ A number of later third century coins appear in this phase of the building, although the authors record an absence of Constantinian coins, suggesting the building's abandonment sometime in the early fourth century.¹³⁶

Thus it is clear that Mithraea across the Roman world are all recognizable as spaces related to the cult. However the differences between Mithraea abound, thus muddying the waters of scholarship on the mysteries for over a century. While the examples chosen in this chapter can by no means be said to be representative of the religion in its entirety, they at least exemplify some of the things unique to Mithraea within their regions. In the present work, it would not be feasible to delve into the myriad variations on the Mithraic space not yet mentioned, and therefore these examples must stand on their own for examination. This being the case, the reader is yet cautioned against the notion that so few examples might fully encapsulate even the state of the cult within a region. These sites were chosen as much to highlight the variable nature of the cult and its presence in the archaeological record as to make statements about the cult more broadly. Additionally, the following section will be as much an assessment of Roman religion and its immense versatility as it is an inquiry into what information we

¹³⁴ Ibid., 29-32.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 30. It is also noted that a similar Mother-goddess figure appeared in the Mithraeum at Dieburg.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 34-35.

might glean from these sites about the cult's development stretched across space and time.

Chapter Four

Assessment of Evidence

Having summarized the arguments and debates of the past century and a half of Mithraic scholarship, established the aspects most typical of a Mithraeum's central iconography, and having looked at a handful of sites from across the Roman Empire in greater detail, it is at last time to reconcile a great deal of information. Were early scholarly ideas concerning the cult's direct doctrinal descent from Iranian traditions correct, or did a lack of evidence lead earlier scholars such as Cumont and Rostovtzeff to posit flawed or presumptuous theories about a religion shrouded even in antiquity in uncertainty and speculation? What criticisms of Cumontian Mithraism hold up under scrutiny, and which are due the same amount of skepticism they espoused? Given the picture constructed of an average Mithraic space in my chapter on Campbell's work, what might we construe from the examination of the geographically disparate sites discussed in the previous chapter? In this chapter I set out not only to reconcile some of the ideas of early and later Mithraic scholarship through the mediating influence of works such as Campbell's and Vermaseren's, but also to draw attention to those aspects of the cult which might be illuminated by the similarities and differences between the Mithraea mentioned in this thesis.

First of all, it is important to test the various sites chosen for this thesis against the list of aspects most typical of a region, as established in the chapter on Campbell's work. I will therefore move, as I did in synthesizing the most typical aspects of a region's Mithraic spaces, from east to west. While the previous section was devoted more to the facts of the spaces as reflected in the archaeological record, I will in this chapter pause

briefly on each to address the possible significance of its unique characteristics, put forth both by those publishing originally on the sites, but also promoting my own observations, in order to answer the following questions: Were Mithraic spaces on the frontiers of the Empire reflective of watered-down Mithraic traditions? What does the variability of Mithraic sites across the Roman world tell us about the “Roman-ness” of the cult? What might we deduce about the identity of the worshippers within these spaces based on the archaeological record? And finally, what led to the differences visible between Mithraea closer to the Roman core and those found in the further-flung outposts of the Empire’s periphery?

At Dura Europos we find a Mithraeum remarkable in a number of different ways. First and foremost, it is likely that the niche in the final phase of the Mithraeum held two reliefs of the *tauroctony* scene, rather than the one found in most Mithraea. While the smaller Ethpani relief (Fig. 13) is fairly typical of the *tauroctony* we would expect to find in the cult niche, bearing its Palmyrene inscription beneath a scene of Mithras sacrificing the bull and accompanied by the snake, dog, and raven, this relief is greatly overshadowed by the Zenobios relief (Fig. 8), both in size and in complexity. The Zenobios relief also depicts the cult deity in the middle of the bull sacrifice alongside the dog and snake, but includes a number of other figures within the scene of the sacrifice, possibly Zenobios himself and his sons or grandsons.¹³⁷ Given that Cautes, Cautopates, and symbols or faces of Sol and Luna are typically the only other anthropomorphic figures depicted as present for the killing of the bull, this is remarkable. While it would be tempting to say that this represents a significant breach in the cult’s standards for

¹³⁷ Cumont (1975): 167.

iconographic depiction of the *tauroctony*, it may simply have been a product of one-upmanship between the two Palmyrene commanders, given their proximity in date.¹³⁸ Alternatively, the appearance of the donor and his family alongside the god might be reflective of a certain proud attitude persistent among the shrine's benefactors, which might be reconciled with the notion that the two magi (Fig. 14) painted on the piers framing the cult niche were in fact depictions of wealthy Palmyrene benefactors of the later phase Mithraeum, rather than depictions of the legendary Mithraic founders Zoroaster and Osthanes. Additionally, this explanation might mesh rather well with the idea that the painted scene in which Mithras appears as a mounted archer hunting animals (Fig. 15) is an appeal by the local worshippers to the tradition of Iranian royal hunting scenes.¹³⁹ However Mithras' appearance as an equestrian bowman may just as easily have been an appeal to the archers stationed in the city, and an attempt to align themselves visually with a certain aspect or remarkable feat of the deity.¹⁴⁰ While it is also possible, as Cumont suggested, that this equestrian representation was evidence of the transmission of cult imagery from the Mithraea of Germany and Western Europe, the lack of definite chronology of the German shrines makes it difficult to determine in which direction the mounted hunting imagery would actually have been moving. Overall, the Dura Mithraeum and its imagery seem to show some remarkable examples of deference to local tradition, or to the demands of wealthy local benefactors, but otherwise do not deviate drastically from the typical aspects of a Mithraeum.

¹³⁸ Rostovtzeff, 8 and Cumont, 161-2. Both scholars agreed on the dates of 168 for the dedication by Ethpani and 170 for that of Zenobios. It is worth noting, again, that Zenobios' relief is the only one of more than 100 *tauroctony* scenes published in Vermaseren's *CIMRM* that appears to include figures other than Mithras, his torchbearers, and Sol and Luna as witnesses to the actual animal sacrifice.

¹³⁹ Cumont (1975): 192.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

Scholarship on the Mithraea of Ostia, while not nearly so concerned with depictions of the cult's central scene (most likely due to the overwhelming number of extant *tauroctony* scenes from across Roman Italy) still offers some insight into the cult's character in the city, and potentially into the cult's identity and origins more broadly. It is worth noting that the majority of Ostia's Mithraea were similar in size, and all established within existing structures, arranged as much as they could be along the typical central axis terminating in a cult niche, flanked by benches upon which the initiates would have sat.¹⁴¹ Most significant in Ostian Mithraea are the floor mosaics of the mysteries' grades of initiation, such as those found in the Mithraeum of Felicissimus (Fig. 16), as well as a rather tidy pattern of expansion across the city, noted by Schreiber as having a number of different implications. First, the distribution of shrines across Ostia likely reflects the secretive and relatively exclusive nature of the mysteries, as Mithraea only seem to have been added in places relatively distant from one another, suggesting that different congregations preferred to remain segregated from one another.¹⁴² In addition, Schreiber questions the significance of the proximity of the cult's earliest shrines within the city to spaces associated with Attis and the Magna Mater.¹⁴³ Not only does the idea of a connection between the Magna Mater and Mithras fit with Cumont and other scholars' ideas of Mithraism's origins in Asia Minor, but it would also somewhat explain the cult's later compatibility with mother-goddess figures in places like Dieburg and Carrawburgh.

In the German Mithraea of Osterburken and Dieburg we find both challenges to traditional Mithraic iconography, and also similarities pointing to potential connections to

¹⁴¹ Groh, "The Ostian Mithraeum." 17.

¹⁴² Schreiber, "The Environment of Ostian Mithraism." 33.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 38.

Mithraic communities elsewhere. While it is remarkable that we do not find a relief actually depicting the *tauroctony* in the Dieburg Mithraeum, it is impossible to say that such a relief never existed in the first place. It is possible that the adherents of the cult in this region were simply not interested in the traditional narrative of the *tauroctony*, either as a result of prior familiarity with the story, or in deference to religious traditions of the region, in which gods on horseback were not uncommon.¹⁴⁴ It is particularly remarkable that the Dieburg relief panel (Figs. 19 & 20) on which Mithras is depicted hunting small game is double sided, with a crowded rear side of the panel on which appear a great many scenes of the god's exploits and interactions with other deities. Among these divine figures appear a handful of female and distinctly Roman deities. While this may reflect the cult's permeability to other traditions further from the Roman center, it may also be a product of its relative maturity at a later stage of development, as it truly hit its syncretistic stride within the Roman religious machine. Again it is worth noting that the Osterburken relief (Fig. 10) features a wilder bull with which Mithras struggles, rather than a more subdued bull prostrated on the ground simply waiting to be sacrificed. This could very well be an appeal to the more aggressive nature of military Mithraic cultists, as opposed to the scenes found closer to the more stable areas of the Empire, such as in Rome or Ostia, where the majority of worshippers would much more likely be civil servants, freedmen, or other non-aristocratic citizens to whom scenes of orthopractic sacrifice would appeal more. Finally, the appearance of a lion within the *tauroctony* scene is somewhat strange, as this is not typically one of Mithras's helpers, though it is

¹⁴⁴ Cumont (1975): 188. Cumont even pushed the idea of a conflation between Mithras and the Germanic deity Wotan, although Francis notes that this idea gained little traction, and was overshadowed by the potential transfer of equestrian imagery from Mithraea in the East.

also unclear exactly what the lion is doing in the scene. Whereas Francis suggested that Cumont had overlooked the possibility of transfer of hunting and equestrian images from Germany into Mithraea in the East,¹⁴⁵ the presence of this lion along with the hunting scene in Dieburg seem to suggest that transfer of imagery instead may have worked the other way, with veterans from more Eastern frontiers carrying both ideas into Germany. Especially given a lion's appearance as a hunting companion in one of the Dura-Europos paintings (Fig. 15), it would be unsurprising if this were the visual precedent for the lion's presence as an ally to the god elsewhere. While lion imagery is not uncommon in Mithraea outside these regions, and is also found in cult spaces in Ostia and Rome, it is at least worth bearing this possible connection in mind, although much more definite chronologies for the sites would be required to prove this direction of iconographic transfer.

Along one of the most remote frontiers of the Roman world, the Mithraeum at Carrawburgh lends us considerable insight into the cult's growth in popularity over time, and also offers an example of gradual discontinuation of cult activity, rather than a dramatic event putting an end to cult activities, as may have been the case at Dura-Europos and Dieburg.¹⁴⁶ While any *tauroctony* used at the Carrawburgh site is absent, statues of both Cautes and Cautopates were found in the final phase of the Mithraeum, and excavators also found several other bases in the structure's earlier phases, upon which the same statues likely stood.¹⁴⁷ While Cautes and Cautopates frequently appear

¹⁴⁵ See note 131, as Francis raises this in his notes on the posthumous Cumont work from 1975.

¹⁴⁶ Rostovtzeff (1939): 9. It is supposed that the Dura Mithraeum was filled in and used as a part of a fortification wall against a Persian attack in 255 CE, while Cumont and Vermaseren share the opinion that the Dieburg Mithraeum was abandoned after German attacks in 260 CE. (*CIMRM* 1246)

¹⁴⁷ Richmond and Gillam (1951): 29-32.

alongside Mithras in *tauroctony* scenes as his torchbearers, these statues may have escaped later destruction or looting simply because of their distance from the main altar and niche, or because their identities were less readily apparent to those not familiar with the cult. The Carrawburgh Mother-goddess statue found in the anteroom of the final phase of the Mithraeum might be evidence of cult ideas transferred from Dieburg, where a similar deity was portrayed, given that the Dieburg shrine dates to the middle of the third century, and the third Carrawburgh shrine dates to the very end of the century and beginning of the fourth. However it is also possible that this is unrelated, as earth mother deities are among the oldest and most common in Europe and the Mediterranean, and also among the most difficult to identify due to their abundance. Again it must be remembered that Mithras appears near to Attis and the Magna Mater very early in the second century in Ostia, meaning that association with a fertility goddess would not have been unique to frontier cult communities, and may have been one of the oldest aspects of the religion.

Finally, as mentioned before, the Carrawburgh Mithraeum seems to be a case of a site which fell gradually into disuse and decay as the popularity of the cult waned in the fourth century, rather than a case in which the cult was forcibly stamped out either by other more dominant traditions within the Roman religious program, or by an attack from beyond the frontier. The complete absence of Constantinian coins in the Mithraeum suggests that the cult was abandoned at Carrawburgh by the time he rose to prominence.¹⁴⁸ Given the cult's competition with early Christianity, along with the

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 34-35. The authors note that there were only a few later third century coins found within the space of the Mithraeum, and there seems to be some doubt about whether they should be associated with activity in the space, or attributed to later deposition as the sanctuary filled with water and debris.

military expansions and reforms enacted by Diocletian and Constantine, it is hardly surprising their changes coincide strongly with the military abandonment of the cult. With overall expansions of the military under Diocletian and subsequent alterations made under Constantine to the makeup of the armies garrisoned on the frontiers of the Empire,¹⁴⁹ it is entirely possible that the relative popularity of the cult here and along other frontiers may have been affected by an influx of new soldiers into the small Mithraic communities. Given the largely private nature of the mysteries, they may have been abandoned or otherwise have fallen out of fashion in the face of difficulties maintaining the secrecy of the cult with the arrival of new units on the frontiers.¹⁵⁰ While it would be untenable to argue that this evidence that Mithraism was actively suppressed under Constantine, it remains possible that any disruption to the existing Mithraic community at Carrawburgh around the time of his rise to power coupled with the legalization of Christianity under the Edict of Milan in 313 CE finally allowed Christianity to overtake Mithraism in popularity, leading to the mysteries simply falling out of fashion.

In light of the evidence from these different Mithraea across the Roman Imperial world, it is worth revisiting some of the scholarly detailed in the historiography at the beginning of this work. First, while it is certainly the case that Cumont's ideas occasionally stretched the available evidence and strayed too far into speculation, many of his notions are at least partially vindicated by later research, as Roman Mithraism

¹⁴⁹ E. C. Nischer, "The Army Reforms of Diocletian and Constantine and Their Modifications up to the Time of the Notitia Dignitatum." *Journal of Roman Studies* 13 (1923): 1-55.

¹⁵⁰ This is an idea which occurred to me regrettably only very late in the writing of this thesis, but it is something to which I wish to return when I work in the future to investigate the abandonment of Mithraism across the entire Roman world by the end of the fourth century CE.

certainly drew some influence at least from Iranian and Anatolian traditions in the names and modes of dress of the cult's central figures. However the connections to Zoroastrian and Avestan traditions are not tenable when the cult is examined more broadly, as figures such as the dog and serpent are shown not to be in opposition to one another in most cases, but rather as allies or at least neutral to one another in many scenes of the *tauroctony*.¹⁵¹ Perhaps in partial support of Cumont's ideas, there is the possibility that equestrian and lion imagery from sites like Dura-Europos was carried west by soldiers who had served on the Eastern frontiers. However this would have been much later in the cult's development within the Roman tradition, rather than part of its foundation, as he originally argued. While the Mithras, Cautes, and Cautopates all dress in distinctly eastern fashion, it may be argued that this, along with their names, was the extent of the ties between Avestan, Zoroastrian, and Mazdean traditions with Mithraism in its Roman form. However, given the highly variable nature of the cult, it is still impossible to assert that this is true for all Mithraic sites of the Roman period.

While Speidel and Ulansey both espoused fascinating possibilities as to Mithras' origin amongst hero cults of Anatolia and Greece, neither of these theories offers a completely satisfying answer to why the cult is so poorly attested in those areas in comparison to Italy and the rest of the Roman world (Map 1). However it is possible that the already established hero cults in these areas are precisely what prevented Mithras from achieving as much popularity among locals or long term transplants to the areas. It

¹⁵¹ See note 70: Campbell was one of the earliest scholars to dismiss the idea of the dog and the serpent appearing as figures antagonistic to one another, and the prevailing opinion by the time of the 1971 conference at which Cumont's ideas were largely called into question was that these animals were essentially working in unison with one another and with Mithras, or at the very least more interested in consuming the bull's vital fluids than in fighting one another. Speidel (1980): 4-6 and Ulansey (1989): 15-16 both promote the idea that these animals simply appear because they appear in the constellations of the night sky.

is also possible that the relative stability of these regions compared to the frontiers of the Empire from the second century onwards would account for the much lower frequency of Mithraic sites, as there was simply less of a military presence. Certainly Ulansey's idea that Mithras may have been an adaptation of Perseus is more convincing than Speidel's Orion theory, simply because of the relative position of the constellations in the night sky. Given the cosmological and zodiacal fascinations of the cult evident in much of the associated imagery, it seems entirely likely that Perseus would have been chosen over Orion for a reason as simple as this. Despite the strength of this theory, however, it still does not account for everything associated with Mithras in the Roman mysteries, meaning that the hero cult was simply a step along the way in the further development of the cult as it worked its way into the Mediterranean.

Therefore it is untenable to conceive of Roman Mithraism as either entirely dependent upon Indo-Iranian traditions as Cumont argued, or as completely independent from those traditions as some of his more outspoken critics like Gordon suggested. Rather, it is essential to mediate between these two schools of thought, relying more on objective collections of data from sites where possible, and paying careful attention to the chronology of different aspects of the cult. With these types of information taken into account, it seems most likely that Mithraism in its Roman or Western form was descended from the remnants of Eastern Persian traditions adopted by later Anatolian peoples, perhaps in the late first century BCE and conflated then with hero cults of the Mediterranean. The cult seems to have made its way into Italy via Ostia and then Rome in the first and early second centuries CE, at which point Roman traditions and

conceptions of the east (accurate or not) influenced the cult before it was spread further, borne abroad by the military.

Additional aspects of the cult picked up on various frontiers during the later second and third centuries then travelled with veterans along the borders of the Roman world, leading to similarities in otherwise atypical aspects of the cult being found in regions quite removed from one another, both culturally and geographically. We might also note the difference in civilian cult spaces from those associated with the frontiers and military garrisons. Whereas in Ostia and other more settled areas with higher populations overall and therefore more potential worshippers of Mithras, we find that more Mithraea were constructed over time, while in places like Carrawburgh and Dura-Europos, cult sites were enlarged and repurposed over time. This might also indicate a greater necessity for secrecy and isolation from the uninitiated amongst civilian populations, given the lower percentage of the population who were initiates of the cult, as opposed to military cult communities, wherein the percentage of those initiated into the mysteries was likely much higher.

It would also be a mistake to argue that the cult of Mithras cannot be conceived of as a unified tradition in the Roman period. While there is substantial variation between sites across the Empire, this is not a trait unique to Mithraism. Many deities within the Roman religious tradition were conflated with local deities on a regional level, but were still considered part of the central Roman religious complex. If anything, the cult's adaptability across various regions points to the strength of its core principles and iconography, as a more dilute tradition would likely disappear entirely further from the

core of the Empire, having been subsumed by local traditions as the processes of syncretism eroded the uniqueness of cult imagery and values.

Future Research

From what I have written here it should be clear that there is still much more work for me to do in my investigation of Mithraism, as well as a great deal more mediation that might be done between the polarized schools of thought concerning the mysteries' origins and significance. In the future I would like to return more critically to the many accounts of the cult's origins in the regions of Anatolia and Asia Minor, and attempt to determine the point, geographically and chronologically, of the mysteries' first establishment on the Italian Peninsula. With such a determination made, it would finally be possible to address more meaningfully questions of the direction of spread of later cult imagery and beliefs. Did additions to or complications of scenes of the *tauroctony* originate in Rome and spread outward in a spiral away from the Roman core, or was Rome simply the first major hub through which new cult developments passed before becoming visible in the cult more broadly? If developments arose within Italy, were they made by native Italians, or by transplants from other areas of the Roman world?

In addition to questions about the origins of the cult, I would like to address the cult's later stages and ultimate disappearance at much greater length. What ultimately led to the abandonment of Mithraic sites along the frontiers of the Empire? Had the cult waned enough in popularity by the time many frontier positions suffered third and fourth century attacks that the Mithraea were simply not deemed to be worth rebuilding, or was there simply too much competition with Christianity following the Edict of Milan?

In order to answer these and many other questions, in the future I hope to add to efforts like Campbell's and Vermaseren's, as their volumes were published in the mid-20th century and therefore do not include any Mithraic sites discovered since then. By

adding any new Mithraic sites, icons, and inscriptions to an already formidable body of evidence available to Mithraic scholars, any conclusions borne out by this new material and the evidence already compiled would be strengthened considerably. Additionally, I intend to visit as many Mithraic sites as is reasonable in order to take updated photographs of the monuments and reliefs still existing today. While volumes like Vermaseren's contain a number of invaluable images and plans, any detail-oriented discussion of Mithraic sites demands much higher resolution photos than are currently available.

Finally, in the future I would like to look much more closely at all ancient textual mentions of Mithras and his worship to determine if it is possible to distinguish definitely between Mithras within Indo-Iranian traditions and within Greco-Roman traditions. While modern scholarship is confident about the prominence of Mithras as a figure within Roman religion by the time of the second century CE, it is considerably more difficult to determine whether mentions of that name--or any variation on it--in the first centuries (CE and BCE) and before do indeed relate to the god worshipped by the Romans. In addition, I intend to delve much more into the epigraphic evidence for Mithraic dedications in order to investigate the identities of those making the dedications, in the hopes that this will lead me to some better sense of Mithraic communities' identities.

Conclusion

The history of Mithraism and Mithraic scholarship is complex and uncertain, beset on all sides by speculation and unsubstantiated theories both ancient and modern as to the cult's origins, significance, activities, and even its most fundamental principles. Firsthand insider accounts of the cult and its rituals simply do not exist, unlike those that exist for some other mystery cults, and therefore scholarship on the cult has long been focused on either perpetuating decades-old theories about the cult, or on rejecting any theories which came before. Mithraism is, quite simply, still an enigma. However by focusing on the facts of the cult available in the archaeological record, I believe it is not only possible, but necessary to mediate between the extremes of Mithraic scholarship.

While the variable nature of the cult across the Roman world can stymie efforts to understand it as a cohesive tradition and make statements which are broadly applicable to the cult as a single entity, there are constants within the cult, and it is on these constants that we must rely in order to demonstrate the continuity of the cult across time and space. We must also turn to the unique aspects of the cult in different parts of the Imperial world if we are to understand the cult more fully, as its compatibility or incompatibility with different local traditions offer great insight into the largely mysterious practices and beliefs its worshippers maintained. The persistence of the *tauroctony* scene in cult spaces across the Empire is one of a handful of consistencies we might utilize, but there are other Mithraic scenes which also occur all over the Roman world, and I intend to return to many of these in later research on the cult.

Overall, it must be acknowledged that Mithraism is unique within Roman religion because of aspects such as its gender-exclusivity, its broad distribution across the Empire,

and its fierce competition with early Christianity. However I also argue that Mithraism is one of the single best examples of how Roman religious syncretism worked. The mysteries of Mithras emerged from an origin unclear even to ancient scholars, swept across most of the Imperial world, and even in its later stages began to function like just another component of Rome's native religious complex, settling into local traditions all over and incorporating iconography and figures from those traditions. The *tauroctony* central to the cult was accepted by civilian worshippers as a demonstration of necessary sacrifice and the fulfillment of duty, while to military adherents, it exemplified Roman dominance over the Empire's enemies, civilization's inevitable conquest of barbarianism and wilderness, and the potency of virility. While much is yet uncertain about the cult, its images and iconography carry unmistakable meaning even today, and attest to the mysteries' important position within the Roman religious tradition.



Fig. 122 – Mon. 435

1. Typical *tauroctony*, Rome, from Vermaseren *CIMRM* 435, Fig. 122.



3.1 The constellations Perseus and Taurus.

2. Perseus and Taurus constellations on 18th century star map, from Ulansey p. 27.



75. Sidon, Syria.

3. Campbell Type I *tauroctony*, Sidon, Syria, from Campbell, Fig. 75.



2331 A. Tatar-Basardjik, Bulgaria.

4. Campbell Type II, Bulgaria, from Campbell, Fig. 2331 A.



1958. Apulum, Dacia (v. fig. 24).

5. Campbell Type III, Apulum, Dacia, from Campbell, Fig. 1958.



2171. Romula, Dacia.

6. Campbell Type IV, Romula, Dacia, from Campbell, Fig. 2171.



1861. Salona, Dalmatia.

7. Campbell Type V, Salona, Dalmatia, from Campbell, Fig. 1861.



Fig. 15 – Mon. 40

8. Campbell Type VI with architectural cave, Dura-Europos Zenobios relief, from Vermaseren *CIMRM* 40, Fig. 15.

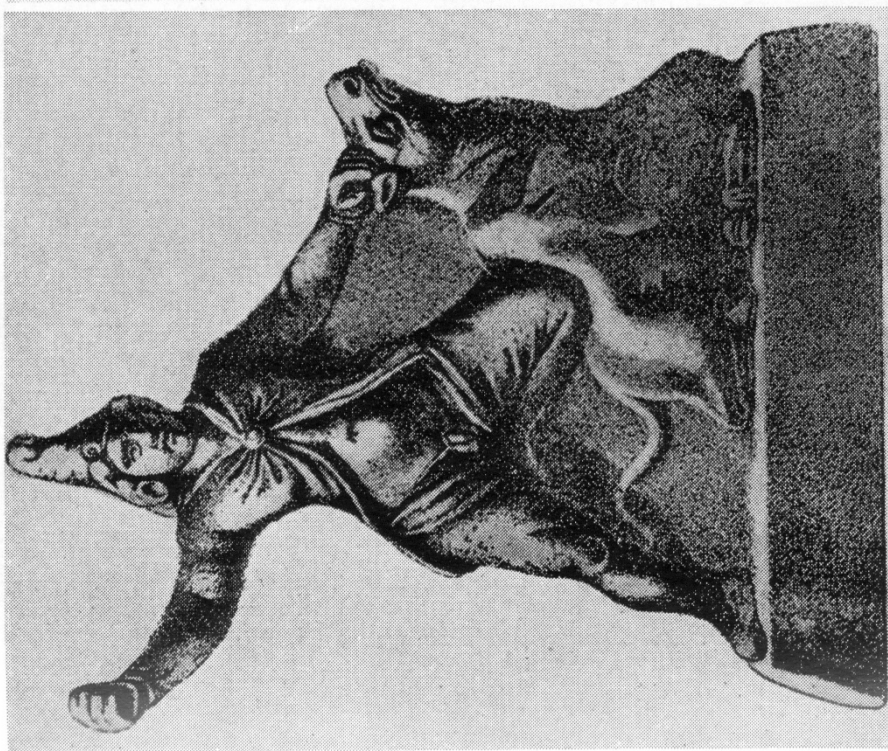


Fig. 2 – Mon. 11

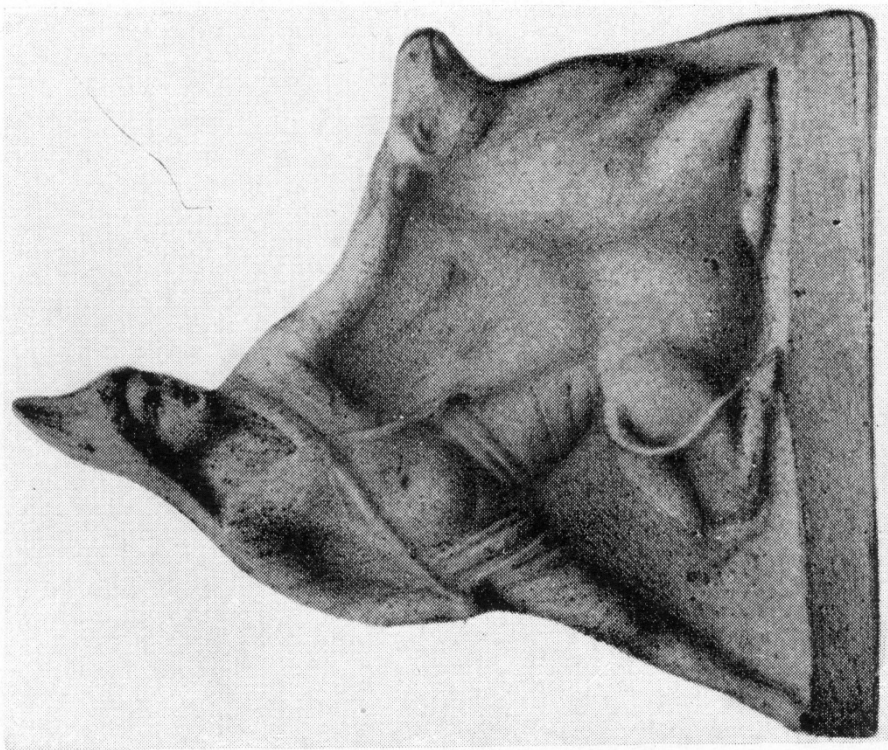


Fig. 3 – Mon. 12

9. Campbell Subtype A, Glinitschtsche, Kertsch, from Vermaseren *CIMRM* 11&12, Figs. 2&3.



Fig. 340 – Mon. 1292

10. Campbell Subtype E, Osterburken *Tauroctony*, Osterburken, from Vermaseren *CIMRM* 1292, Fig. 340.



650. Nersae.

11. Natural Cave Type, Nersae, Italy, from Campbell, Fig. 650.



Fig. 13 – Mon. 34

12. Dura Europos Mithraeum *in situ*, Syria, from Vermaseren *CIMRM* 34, Fig. 13.



Fig. 14 – Mon. 37

13. Dura-Europos Ethpani relief, from Vermaseren *CIMRM* 37, Fig. 14.

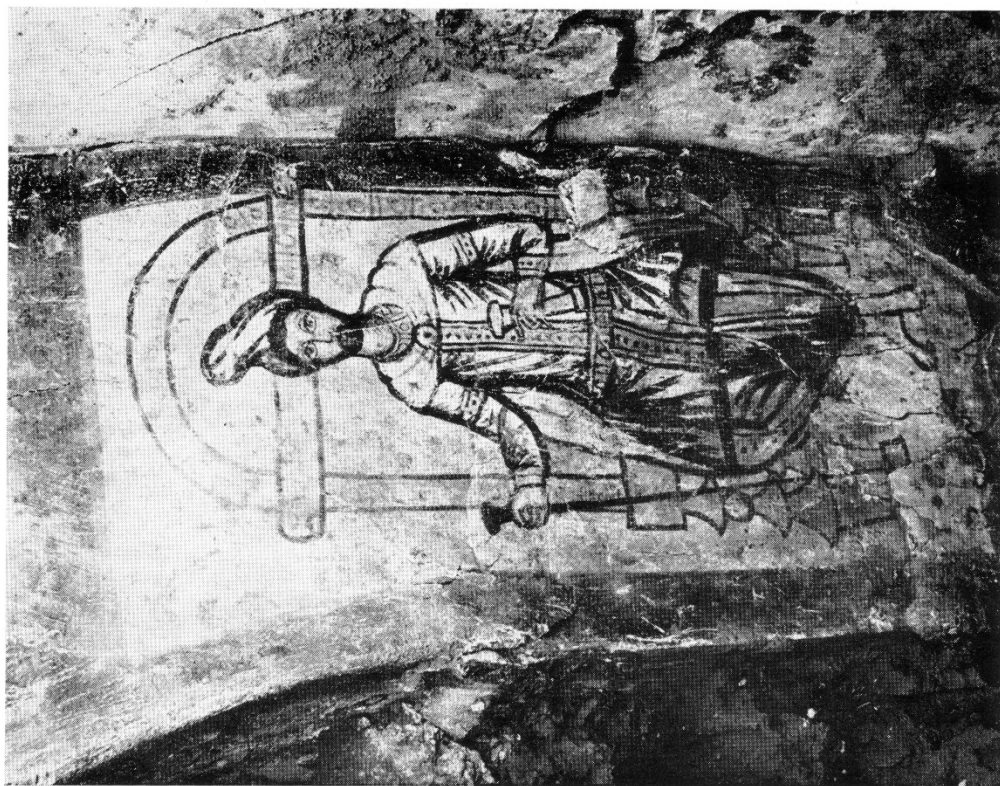


Fig. 22b – Mon. 44



Fig. 22a – Mon. 44

14. Dura-Europos Magi paintings, from Vermaseren *CIMRM* 44, Figs. 22a & 22b.



Fig. 24 – Mon. 52

15. Dura-Europos Mithras hunting fresco, from Vermaseren *CIMRM* 52, Fig. 24.

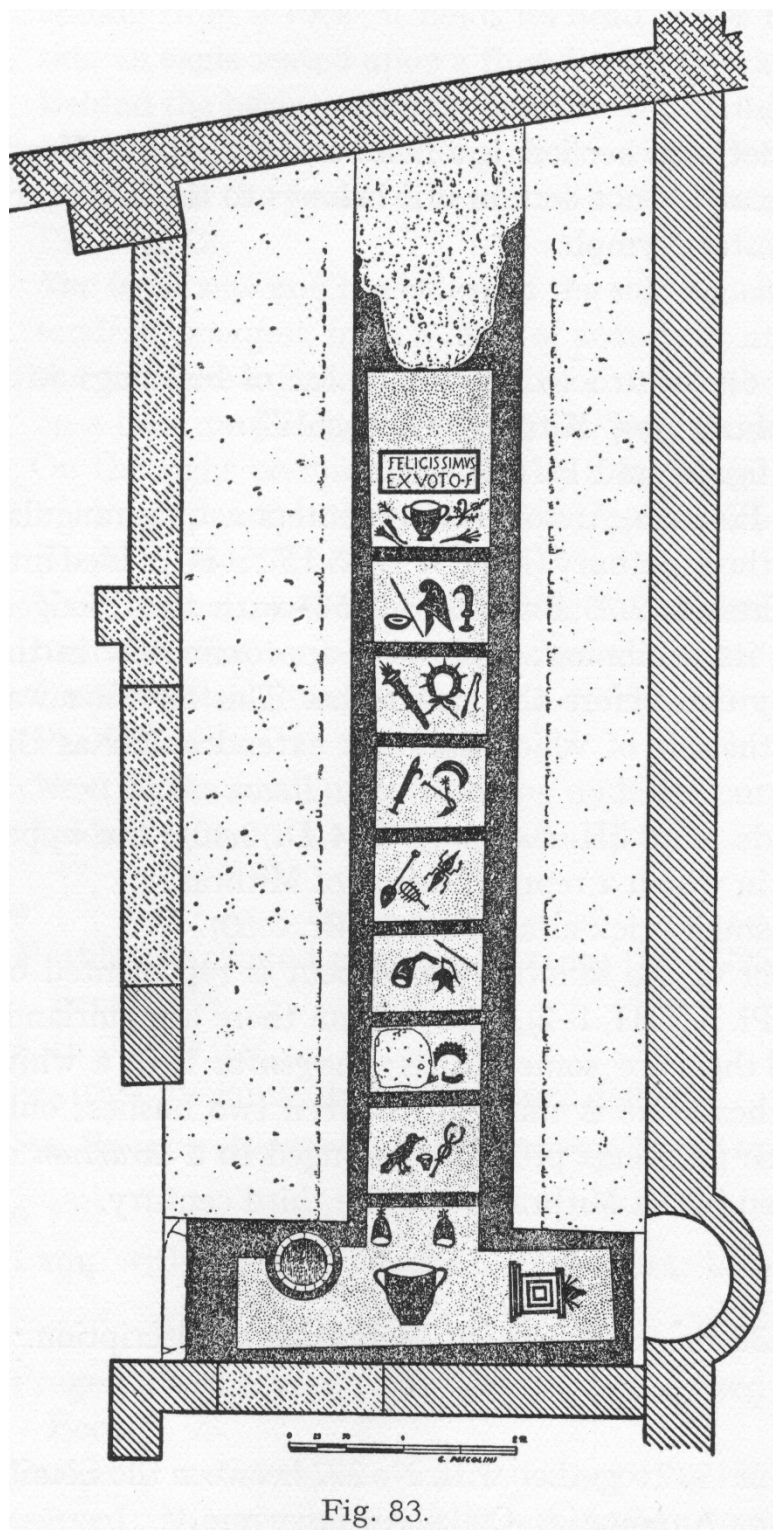


Fig. 83.

16. Felicissimus Mithraeum mosaic showing grades of initiation, Ostia, Italy, from Vermaseren *CIMRM* 299, Fig. 83.



Fig. 95 – Mon. 338

17. Mithraeum beneath Basilica di San Clemente, Rome, Italy, from Vermaseren *CIMRM* 338, Fig. 95.



Fig. 97 – Mon. 339

18. San Clemente altar, Rome, Italy, from Vermaseren *CIMRM* 339, Fig. 97.



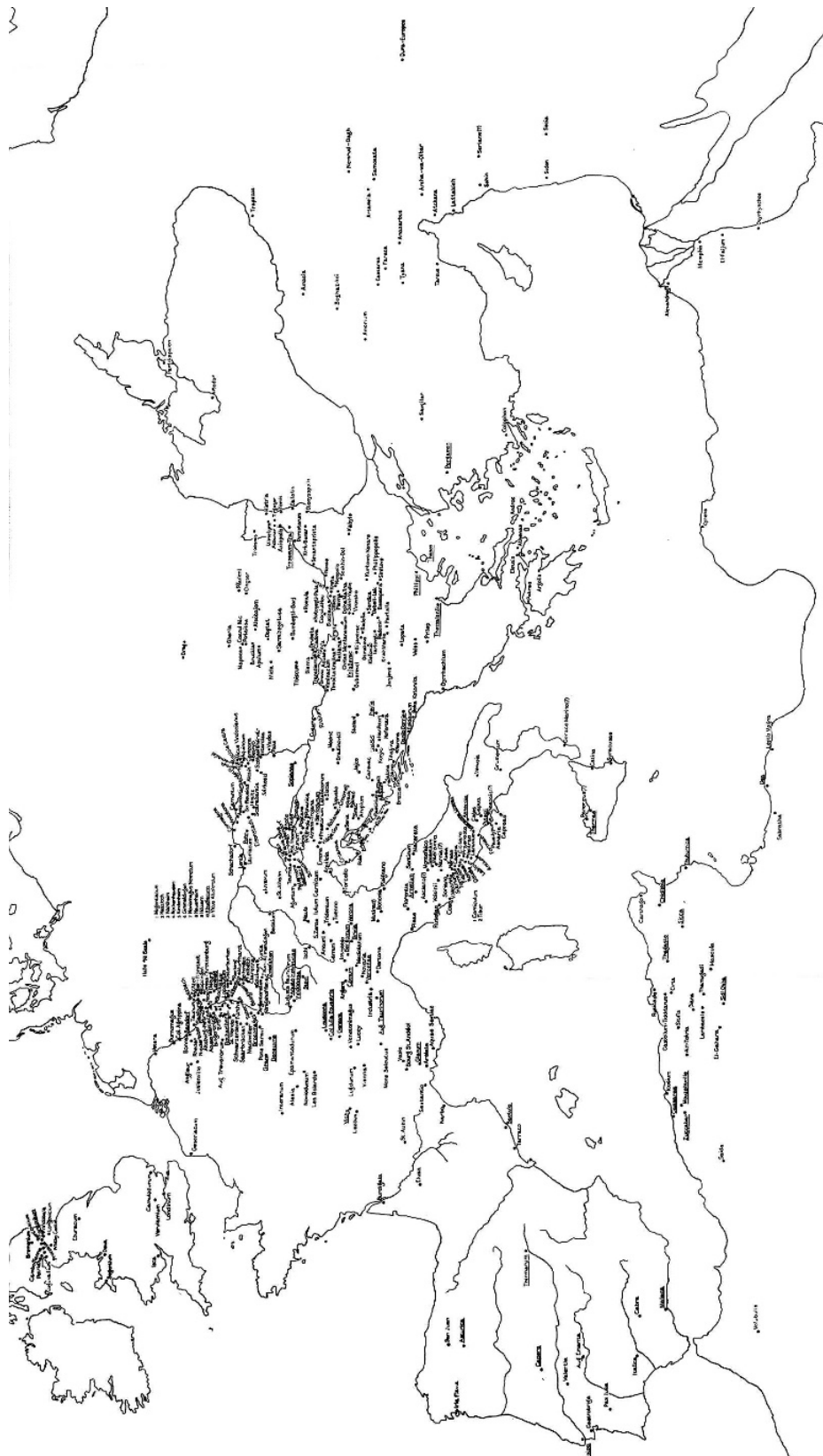
Fig. 323 – Mon. 1247

19. Front of Dieburg Mithraeum relief panel, Dieburg, Germany, from Vermaseren *CIMRM* 1247, Fig. 323.



Fig. 324 – Mon. 1247

20. Reverse of Dieburg Mithraeum relief panel, Dieburg, Germany, from Vermaseren *CIMRM* 1247, Fig. 324.



Map 1. Locations of Mithraea in the Roman Empire, from Vermaseren *CIMRM*.

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