

Mithra and the Evil Eye: Another Interpretation of the Mithraic Bas-Reliefs

Dominique J. Persoons

ABSTRACT

The ritual tympanum of the god Mithra has no clear interpretation to date. In particular, the animals under the bull remain mysterious. If they have been considered as representations of certain constellations, this esoteric hypothesis remains disputed. Could the god Mithra, symbol of the Roman army, be attracted by the stars? Another hypothesis is to consider this religion as pragmatic. These small animals would be familiar to the Romans. They would symbolise trust. To understand Mithra, don't we have to change our way of seeing the Roman mentality?

Keywords: Evil Eye, Hypercosmic, Mithra, Phallus, Sol Invictus, Superstition.

Published Online: May 17, 2023

ISSN: 2736-5514

DOI: 10.24018/ejtheology.2023.3.3.106

D. J. Persoons *

Medical doctor, Ph.D., Pain clinic and Hypnosis, Hospital practitioner, Brie Hospital, France

(e-mail: pers00ns@aol.com)

**Corresponding Author*

I. INTRODUCTION

The reliefs of the god Mithra have been interpreted in a very symbolic way, being the son of the Sun and the Moon, a god of light. He would command the entire Universe. The evil animals under the sacrificed bull would represent the constellations and the Zodiac, so extremely esoteric. This religion supposedly started in the same time as Christianity. It was officially supported by the Emperors for centuries (until the end of the 5th century). But was it so celestial, and ethereal, knowing the harshness and pragmatism of the Roman citizens? Other representations make it possible to doubt it.

II. SIGNIFICANCE OF "MUCH SUFFERING EYES"

Roman citizens were superstitious (Cousland, 2005). People, animals and objects were probably hit by Evil Eyes. It destroyed everything it got, causing fatigue, illness or death, but also led to disputes among family, neighbors or friends, and the destruction of trade. In short, it could deal with anything that belonged to one's happiness. Harmful jealousy affected the person's social, material or moral status. This situation still exists in some Muslim countries in the Mediterranean region. This is called "*hased*" in Moroccan dialect (jealousy) and "*hasad*" in classical Arabic (Saâdia, 2013). It is clearly stated in the Koran, Surat 113, called "dawn" (Kaz à Fatima, n.d.):

*I seek the protection of the Lord of the dawn from the evil he has done;
Against the evil of darkness;
Against the wickedness of those who blow knots;
Oppose the evil of the jealous when envious is jealous.*

Here is a Koran proof that Evil Eyes exist and jealousy is harmful. All beautiful things are good, and all good things are a gift from God. Therefore, we must maintain humility and wisdom. We must avoid exaggerating the success of God's business more seeking too much our own happiness or prosperity. Otherwise, it may cause "bad eyes". In classical Arabic, "*ayn*" means "eye" and "to give the Evil Eye". When someone says: he is "*ma'īn*" or "*ma'yūn*", it means that he was hit by Evil Eyes. Of one who gives the Evil Eye "*mi'yān*", it is said that "his eye is not good": "*inū ma mezyānach*" (Radi, 2019). According to Muslim theologians, the Imam must prohibit him from mixing with other believers; he must also lock him up so that he will not spread his evil. According to this literature, there would be people of a "poisonous" nature whose eyes would release poison when they looked at a being or an object that they liked. This conception of the Evil Eye is likened to poisoning, to the possibility of casting a spell. Witchcraft kills by destroying nothing of the material body but by attacking the soul of the organs. This belief is undoubtedly very close to the Roman mentality, as certain remains attest.

III. PROTECT AGAINST THE EVIL EYE

A. Protection Against Bad Eye

One of the forms of protection against the Evil Eye of others consists in the relative dissimulation of what is going well, because showing one's success could cause evil. Thus, must one hide one's happiness and prosperity. Sometimes, when we go out in a group, we bring an ugly woman with us so that her ugliness hides the beauty of others, attracting attention. When we ask someone how he is, he avoids answering: "it's going very well", he says: "*labās lhamdū lillah*" (it's fine, praise be to God) or simply: "*lhamdū lillah*" (praise be to God). When we want to express admiration for someone or for something, we say: "*assalat 'ala n-nbi*" (blessings and greetings to our Prophet) or "*tbārek Allah*" (bless the name of God). It is the invocations "*du'ā*" of the name of God and His Prophet that serve to protect oneself and others from the Evil Eye.

B. Talisman

In order to protect oneself, one also uses gold or silver jewelry in the shape of an open hand (what the Europeans called "the hand of Fatima"), but also in shape of a Koran or of a plate on which is written "*sura Al Fātiha*" (the opening sura of the Koran). One also carries a "*herz*" or "*hjab*" (talisman), made by a "*fqih*" or bought in a sanctuary, or a "*srīra*" a small bag containing peganum harmela and alum which mainly protects children and pregnant women, or even a simple penny. One hangs on the walls of the images on which appear an eye or two or an open hand, tables comprising suras or a horseshoe at the entry of a place. These precautions are usually taken discreetly so that the prospective "*mi'yān*" does not notice them. Herber (1927) explains that the open hand was not used to protect against the Evil Eye but only the middle finger, considered as a phallic symbol. However, modesty would have preferred the whole hand to the only extended middle finger, which remains very coarse.

C. Class Struggle

For the same reason, the number "5" has become a taboo in the case of possible bad eyes. This evil vision also provides symbolic compensation for the uneven distribution of wealth (class struggle). The prophet said, "Evil Eyes are real". One can easily imagine that in Roman times, it was dangerous to leave one's social class and enter the higher social class. In this case, the danger would come from the group we belong to (jealousy). The most dangerous were therefore the disadvantaged, the handicapped, infertile women, whisperers, one eyed people, people with shells and the poor. In this sense, the Evil Eye is used to tell you how to hide. It sets boundaries and possibilities for the arrangement of social relations between those who do not want to openly conflict. Because the hand of possession declares its control over all things, it creates miracles, such as blessing crops, sheep and people, and protecting them from all kinds of evil. The hand has been depicted on monuments, from caves and rock carvings to Greek and Roman tombs. People should see the origin of the hand amulet in these basic senses.

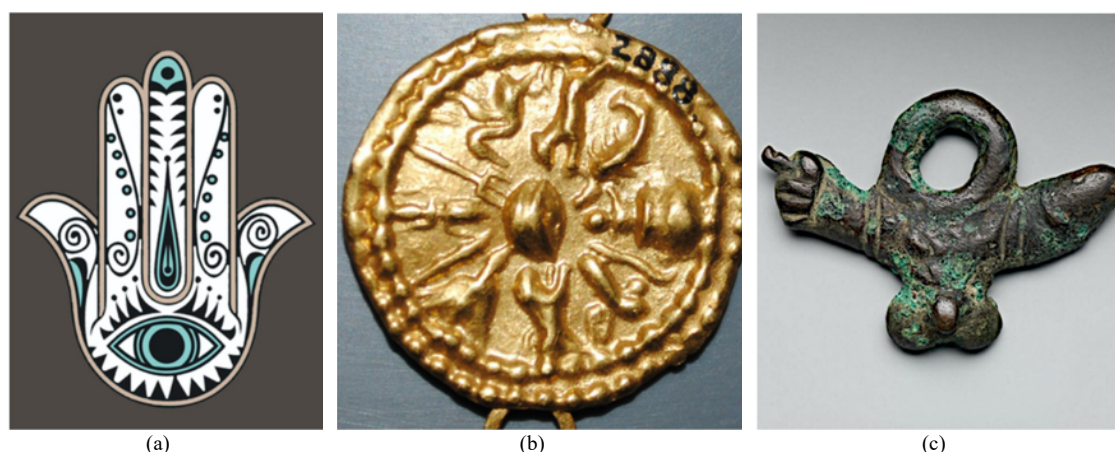


Fig. 1. a) Hand of Fatima in modern Islam. The middle finger, the main (phallic) finger, protects against the Evil Eye; b) British museum, gold amulet, Roman, 2nd Century C.E. An Evil Eye attacked by a thunderbolt, a trident, a swan with raised wings, a running dog, a scorpion, a vase with the upper part of a child, a serpent, a winged phallus, a lion, a flying duck, and a club [2]; c) Metropolitan Museum, Roman amulet, 1st century CE: Hand and Phallus amulet [3].
It seems that among the Romans, the protective finger was the index finger (personal hypothesis).

IV. PHALLUS IN ANTIQUITY

A. The Defeat of the Envious

The fear of the Evil Eye, more superstitious than religious, already occupied a large place in ancient life. It seemed to merge with the fear of the “Invidus” the envious. It was a malevolent and hostile gaze, which meant evil, which wanted to prevent the realization of certain projects. The envious individuals were called “*lividus*”, bluish, the color called cadaverous lividity. The fear of the “*envious*” was therefore very widespread in the Greco-Roman world. In the ancient world, people were suspicious of others, and they cast a spell on them so that they would not hinder their own projects. This maxim had great success in the Greco-Roman world. Laporte (2010) cites Lambiriridi's mosaic where one can read: “*Invide vive et vide ut possis plura videre*”, (Envious lives and looks, so that we can see more). A mosaic in Sullectum, Salacta in Tunisia, states: “*Nisibus hic nostris prostratus libor anhelat*” (By our efforts, the envy here crushed is out of breath). Or again in Thala in Tunisia: “*Hoc vide et vide ut possis plura videre*” (look and look again at this thing to be able to contemplate others).

B. Evil Eye

All these maxims affirm the defeat of the envious, of those who have fought the Great Work. The relief of the responsible person is marked by the formula “*hoc factum est*” (the work is well done). Martial's sentence:

“*Qui ducis vultus et non legis ista libenter omnibus invidias, livide, nemo tibi., livide, nemo tibi*”-You who frown and reluctantly read these words, may you, naughty and jealous, envy the whole world without anyone envying you.

This was accompanied by scatological threats *invide cacas* (envious shit) or obscene *curios pedico* (curious bitch). An erect phallus was engraved, sometimes with wings (fig. 2 c), which is found on doors or embrasures. Today it corresponds to an erected middle finger, which is an insult like “fuck you” and contains an obvious scatological side. This gesture of the outstretched finger is widely used in marginal circles, and its origin is certainly ancient. Sometimes Evil Eyes are depicted like this, but with wings. It is attacked from all sides, by a rooster, a snake, a scorpion, a snail, a lizard, a dog, and so on from all directions, just like here in Fig. 2.

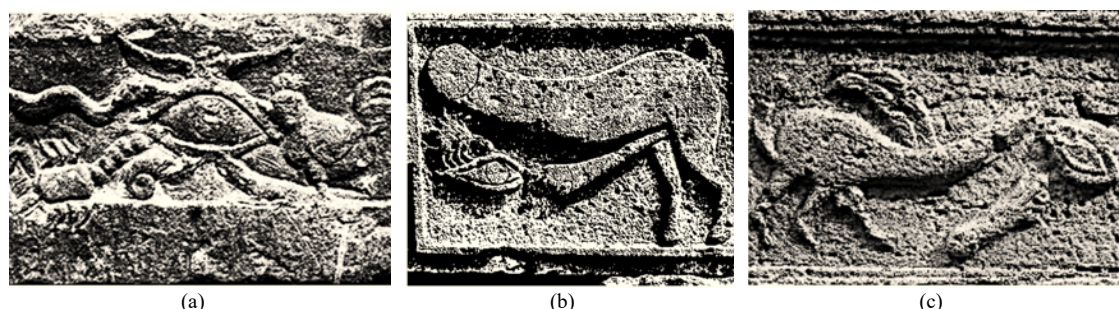


Fig. 2. a) Algiers beneficiarius bas-relief from Auzia, Algiers Antiquities Museum. (photograph JP Laporte 1970); b) and c) bas-reliefs from Leptis Magna (Libya) 2nd century AD. JC. These images correspond to insults of a phallic nature. They are still common today, the term “fuck” comes directly from antiquity.

We can conclude that Romans were an extremely superstitious people. In their daily existence, they were careful not to attract the Evil Eye. To this end, they always wore amulets supposed to protect them (the “*bullā*” for children) and did not hesitate to write magic formulas on the walls of their homes. When a Roman left his house, he had to take care to advance his right foot first before walking; if one pronounces in front of him words of bad omen, he spat three times on the ground or held out the index and the little finger towards the ground. Obscenity had a magic value: a phallus painted on a wall or represented on a mosaic often adorned the entrance to a house to protect it from misfortune. The Romans, to call the deities to witness, interspersed their remarks with interjections by Jupiter.

C. “*Kai Su*”

The “*Kai su*” mosaic from the Devil's House in Antioch is in the Antakya Museum in Turkey. It reproduces exactly this same staging of threats against the Evil Eye of the “*Invidus*” (envious). This mosaic was at the entrance of a house. It shows a devil with sticks and a giant phallus turned towards an Evil Eye. The latter is also attacked by a dog, a scorpion, a crow, a fork, a nail, a tabby cat, a snake. Now, these animals are also found on the bas-reliefs of Mithra. Is this a coincidence?



Fig. 3. a) mosaic "KAI SU" (You also) of Antioch devil's eye house. Hatay Arkeoloji müzesi, Antakya, inv. b) "The birds are destroyed by (their) jealousy, but the owl does not care: floor mosaic from Thysdrus (c. late 3rd c. CE) c) Mosaic with an *apotropaic* (turn away) symbols designed against the Evil Eye, with snakes, and phallus, from Sousse in Tunisia.

Other mosaics reproduce the same pattern, in El Haouria, which stipulates: "Hey, you jealous pale man, this building has so much dedication, but you think it can't see the day; This led to its completion". All this shows the Romans' concern for challenging their critics and affirming their concern for everyone's success. Parker (2020) reported recently in his article on the Evil Eye :

The Evil Eye is the Roman embodiment of bad luck and was feared and respected. In Virgil's Eclogues (III.1.103) the shepherds Damoetas and Menalcas are lamenting the state of their stock and Menalcas asks: "nescio quis teneros oculus mihi fascinate agnos" (What eye is it that has fascinated my tender lambs?) (2020, p.3).

He quotes that in 1822, a Roman plaque with an Evil Eye conserved in the Woburn Abbey Museum, was interpreted as a Mithraic work. It references the interpretations of Mr. Millington and Rev. Weston: "The former who interpreted it as an Evil-Eye, the latter as Mithraic in nature." Already Franz Cumont pointed out in 1902, in his book about Mithraic Mysteries that:

"The independent power attributed by Mazdaisai to the principle of evil afforded justification for all manner of occult practices. Necromancy, oneiromancy, belief in the Evil Eye and in talismans, in witchcraft and conjurations, in fine, all the puerile and sinister aberrations of ancient paganism, found their justification in the role assigned to demons who incessantly interfered in the affairs of men. The Persian Mysteries are not free from the grave reproach of having condoned, if not of having really taught, all these superstitions" (Cumont, p. 531).

V. APPLICATION TO THE STATUARY OF MITHRA

A. Mithraism

Mithraism imposed itself from the first century AD. JC., thanks to its internal value, its devotion and its morality. It determined the center of religious trends for four centuries. This religiosity imposed itself "as moral, superstitious, sublime and fanatical". Mithraism was recruited particularly among the people, and seems to have won the predilection of the men and soldiers of Africa, Rome and Northern Europe. The pragmatic Romans probably felt reassured under this strong religious discipline, where the feeling of unity and power reigned. Their piety was not contemplative but active and constructive. Such a desire for purity, fueled by liturgical purification, left no room for coarse spirits.

Under the pressure of Mithraism, “paganism has become a school of morality and its priests, directors of conscience” (King, 1951). The moral requirement increased along with the misfortunes of the people (economic crisis). It will therefore be understood that this quasi-military religion had to show an image of great firmness. In particular, it was to denounce gross and unwholesome spirits. We can admit that the bas-reliefs have acquired a Manichean or Stoic aspect, sharply separating the sincere and devoted believers from the envious evil thinkers. The late third century was a time of superstition and occultism that impressed even the greatest minds like Plotinus.

B. Superstition

This extreme religiosity was therefore imbued with strength and superstition. We will not be surprised to find on the Mithraic bas-reliefs superstitious symbols like those surrounding the Evil Eye: dogs, scorpions, snakes, crows, worms, etc. It seems quite logical that the phobia of the Evil Eye permeated the religion of Mithra in a time when the level of moral requirement increased sharply. We find under the sacrificed bull the same animals that accompanied the “*Kai Su*” of the mosaic of the devil (fig. 3). The message would be clear: Mithra dominates the bull after a long fight, in order to fertilize the earth and bring wealth to men. But, let the envious and coarse spirits be banished, who would helplessly assist in the realization of the Great Work.

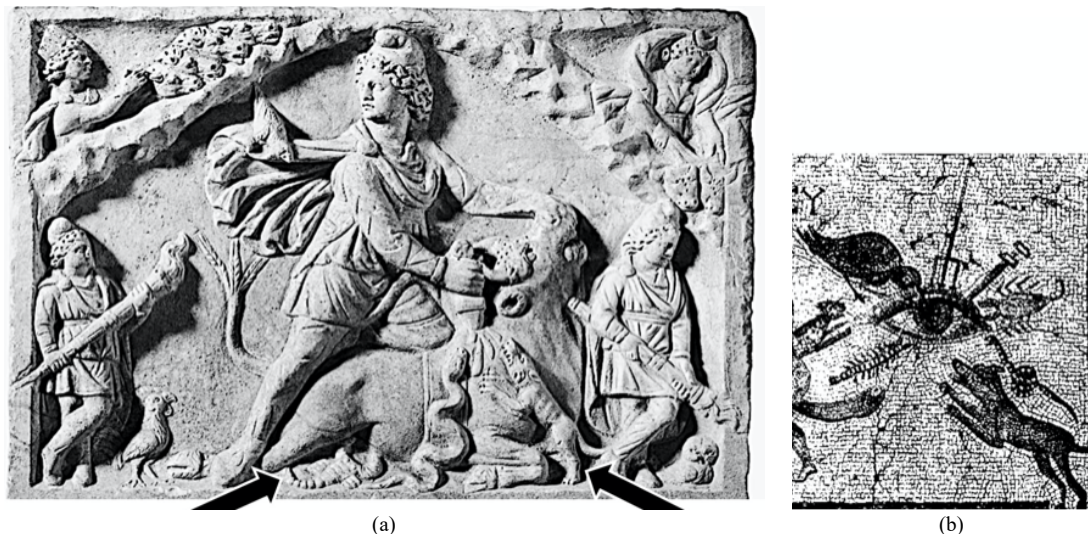


Fig. 4. a) Bas-relief of the god Mithra from the Feischmann collection in New York. b) mosaic “KAI SU” (You also) of Antioch devil's eye house. We find the same threatening animals under the bull (raven, scorpion, snake, stray dog). Does it mean that Mithra is related and helps to fight against the Evil Eye? Does the death of the bull protect against the Evil Eye? Would the bas-reliefs of Mithra be superstitious?

The bottom of the relief therefore would represent the protective animals of success and would prevent from jealous people. Mithra would be the example of the Roman success story, with a solar god as the “winner”, the dog, snake, scorpion, bird, as his “followers”, and the bull would represent the wilderness, or the foreign peoples, or even our own body, which it would submit to our will. The bull, i.e. savagery, is submissive, Mithra dominates it and the protective spirits drink its blood. The sun and the moon would show that this success will last forever. Even if many inscriptions give the Mithraeum centered on the tauroctony the name of *templum*, the acts which one carries out there (purifications, initiations, meal of the group) have nothing in common with what one made in a Roman temple, with no sacrifice, since the altars which one found in the crypts did not serve for this service. On the other hand, bread and water, if not wine, were consecrated there, and in any case, the food distributed to the mystics lying on the podia (Turcan, 1981)

The origin of the animals under the bull is therefore problematic and little studied. As Ernest Will (1990), many scholars are convinced that these were purely Persian elements that were part of the legend:

“The animals depicted near Mithra, the dog, the raven, the snake, are those of the Avesta; but the Mithraic bull is indeed the bull of the Persian legend. From its tail come ears of wheat; at its feet is the serpent, which is Ahriman. He stands up to drink the blood that has spurted out under the sacrificial knife, but a dog pushes him away; the dog, the sacred animal par excellence. The animal's tail is raised and we see that it ends in a handful of wheat, a sign of agrarian fertility. Mithra grabs his knife and kills the Bull, whose blood flows out, a marvellous blood, according to some specialists, since it gives life; the snake and a dog rush to benefit from it; a scorpion clings to the Bull's sex to suck out its vital force... Mithra, having defeated the Bull, takes credit for his warrior strength. This victory makes him an important god and he assumes the titles of the Sun, he becomes Mithra-Sun-invincible who gains the celestial heights”.

Are the Persian legendary animals linked to the history of Mithra? If so, it is difficult to explain the lion, the vase, or even the goddess Demeter, found on some Mithraic bas-reliefs. They do not appear in the Vedic or Babylonian tradition, and seem to be purely Roman additions.

C. Astronomical Hypercosmic Symbol

Some authors have defended another analysis. They attributed to these lower animals a celestial or even astronomical symbolism. According to David Ulansey (Ulansey, 1991), the explanation of these lower animals would be radically different from the mystical image of sacrifice, since it would invoke astrological symbolism. Mithra would be a god so powerful that he would be able to transform the very order of the Universe. The bull would be the symbol of the constellation Taurus. For the faithful, the sacrifice of the bull had a salutary character, and participation in the mysteries guaranteed its immortality. Would this explain the profusion of zodiacal images in Mithraic iconography?

“Given the general presence of astronomical motifs in Mithraic art and ideology, the parallel noted above between the tauroctony-figures and constellations is unlikely to be coincidence. My own research over the past decade has been devoted to discovering why these particular constellations might have been seen as especially important, and how an icon representing them could have come to form the core of a powerful religious movement in the Roman Empire” (Ulansey, 1991, p. 27).

The principle evidence for the identification of Mithra with Orion comes in the fact that the rich symbolism of the Mithraic temples is almost wholly astrological (Barlament, 2021). The central figures of the bull-slaying scene are almost always shown surrounded by a supporting cast; a dog, a snake, a raven, a scorpion and a pair of twins, and sometimes a lion and a cupbearer pouring water. And above it are the sun and the moon. The dog would be an allusion to *Canis Minor*, the snake to the constellation *Hydra*, the raven to *Corvus*, the scorpion to *Scorpio*, the twins represent *Gemini*, the lion is *Leo* and finally the cupbearer is *Aquarius*. Under the god Mithra and the bull, the first four animals (dog, snake, raven, scorpion) form a map of their region of the sky, while *Leo* and *Aquarius*, which occupy opposite places on the zodiac, may represent Mithra's mastery of the twelve signs. Indeed, the twelve figures of the zodiac are found on statues, floor mosaics and walls of Mithraic temples (i.e. Fig. 5a). (Ulansey, 1991, Will, 1990, Turcan, 1990). The cellars that serve as a temple have the ceiling painted with stars. Mithra taming the bull is a “Sun with a lion's head”: in other words, it is the star in the constellation of *Leo*, where it exalts its torrid heat. As for his victim, it represents the Moon (Turcan, 2008). *Sol Inuictus* kills the bull, which means that the sun dominates the moon, and *Anima* dominates *Spiritus* (Delatte *et al.*, 1983).

The bull-slaying scene shows Mithra placed just left of the bull, stabbing it with either a dagger or a short sword. While Orion is most often shown holding a club and shield, beneath his belt is invariably placed a short sword. It's no stretch of the imagination, then, to suggest that the Roman bull-slayer is, in fact, the starry giant who slays the bull of heaven to create the world. As mentioned, Orion is a mythological motif, most often either serving as a giant, a cultural hero or a thunder god. In the giant interpretation, the Orion archetype slays a great bull gifted by the gods to create from its remains the earth. Again, Orion and Mithra align ever further. The theory of Mithra as the “hypercosmic sun” (a god responsible for the phenomenon of the precession of the equinoxes) has gained great traction in recent 25 years.

The hyper cosmic sun theory inexorably would link Mithra to the voyage of human souls after death to eternal positions upon the celestial sphere. He is, after all, posited to have been an Atlas-like god, alone outside the celestial sphere that contains the whole cosmos (cf. Fig. 5b). The god, meanwhile, is posited to have been the one with the keys to the gates that open up the separate layers of the celestial sphere for ascending souls to pass through en route to settling amongst the stars.

D. Terrestrial Calendar

In the Sidon relief (Fig. 5a), Mithra is not linked to a hypercosmic sun, but to the cycle of our (astronomic) seasons. On this relief, the four corners show the busts of four children personifying the seasons, recognisable by their vegetal crowns and their symbols sculpted next to them, for example the wheat and the sickle to characterise Summer at the top right and the vine and the grape for Autumn at the top left. The main scene is framed by the twelve signs of the zodiac; one can recognise in particular Pisces between the Sun and Gemini between Autumn and the Moon. Astronomy, born in Babylon in the 2nd millennium, was then taken up and developed by Greek scholars, and the idea that the stars would influence natural phenomena and the destiny of mankind took on a very important role in religious sentiment in the Roman period. Of course, the four magical animals are always under the bull.



Fig. 5. a) Sculpture of Mithra from Sidon (Libanon). This high-relief shows the terrestrial zodiac, the twelve months and the four seasons. b) Mithraeum of Marino (Italy): this shows that the sun is directly connected to Mithra, by an oblique ray (hypercosmic symbol). Mithra wears a cape with stars, he carries the cosmos on his back. The bull looks at the moon as it dies.

E. Can This Opinion be Maintained?

There was certainly an influence of the stars in Roman religious thought. But, we can criticize those astronomical analyses for not considering the very superstitious character of the Romans, marked by the famous mosaics of the Evil Eye, and by the surge of extreme suspicion towards their contemporaries. Finally, it is also ignored that Mithraism was a popular religion, practised by pragmatic citizens, probably very distant from sophisticated astrological concerns. In addition to soldiers, ready to die, the cult's membership included significant numbers of bureaucrats and merchants, i.e. down-to-earth professionals. Seeing in Mithraism a soft esoteric cult seems unlikely. The Romans were both anxious and individualistic. The religion of the officers and officials had to reflect this expectation and legitimize the victory of the strong against the weak. "Challenging" was very Roman, they were not idealists. The Mithra's celestial cape would be a symbol of the Great Work of the Roman elite. The starry sky would symbolise universal success. We find this celestial symbol among Christians too, like in Apocalypse of St. John 22:16. "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify these things to you in the churches. I am the offspring and the seed of David, the bright morning star".

To protect themselves against the Evil Eye, the Romans may have used magical animals that evoked names of constellations, such as the scorpion or the dog. But are a thunderbolt, a trident, a swan with raised wings, a vase with the upper part of a child, a winged phallus, a flying duck, or a club, also constellations? There is little chance that these animals were hypercosmic. These animals under the bull were probably magical and meant the same thing on the bas-reliefs of the Mithraeum as on the mosaics of the private houses or the public enclosures.

The Epicurean, Stoic, Cynical, or Sceptic schools teach wisdom. And the wise man is above all the one who is self-sufficient. He is defined by detachment, indifference or, at least, by the relativization of worldly values. Mithraism was a partially Stoic religion, whose values of courage were glorified by the army. But it was also elitist, and it defended individual values, as evidenced by its secret ritual, forbidden to women, and by successive ranks. This could explain the animals' advocate for their secret society. Mithra was thus a virile, elitist god. This would explain Mithraism was not able to take advantage of the economic crisis of the third century to impose itself to the whole population. According to Tcherkezoff (Tcherkezoff, 1994), the success of Christianity, in the Hellenistic and Roman cultural context, is probably linked to the fact that it conveyed a form of individualism more similar to these Stoic and Epicurean philosophies, because open to all.

F. The Early Christian Religion

At the same time, the Christian religion was beginning to develop. A few Christian inscriptions have been found in Africa namely containing the phrase of Saint Paul (Ad. Rom., VIII, 31): "If God is with us, who (will be) against us?" This sentence is very interesting because it shows, again, the fear of the other. But it may seem less aggressive than the official Roman mentality. Saint Paul gave this sentence a spiritual dimension. The Christians continued to be suspicious of others, but God brought help by himself through his love, probably a new feeling.

This Christian epigraph lintel of Tizirt was discovered on a modern house by Alain Hus in 1951, and analysed by Kevin Uhalde. It bears two inscriptions on either side of a chrism. On the left, the sentence of Saint Paul:

Si Deus / pro no(bi)s /, quis adue-r-sus nos (literary: If God is with us, who (will be) against us?)

On the right, Martial's phrase, classic in pagan times:

[inuide], ui/[ue et] ui/[d]e ut possis / meliora / uidere (Envious live and look, so you can see what I will do in spite of you) (Uhalde, 2007, p. 30).



Fig. 6. a) Christian lintel from Tizirt (Alain Hus, 1951). b) Autun French Romanesque tympanum: Christ between the sun (left) and the moon (right), like in the Mithras iconography.

The association of the pagan formula of Martial the Roman poet, and the Christian sentence of Saint Paul, shows that the latter had become a superstitious formula, still and always motivated by the fear of the envious, to whom it was appropriate to prohibit the entry of the residence. There remains the chrism narrowly framed on the lintel of Tizirt by the two classic formulas, pagan and Christian, against the “*Invidus*”. It is clear that it has an “*apotropaic*” (protective) value. The case is not isolated. As indicated by an inscription dated 546 AD. JC., on a house in Sabba (Syria): “The cross being placed there at the head, the Evil Eye will not prevail” (Laporte, 2010, p.4781). This clearly shows that the pious image had an apotropaic action among Christians, a function it borrowed from its rival, the religion of Mithra.

Among the several monograms used by early Christians to refer to Jesus, the so-called “staurogram” is comprised of the Greek majuscule forms of the letters Xi and Rho $\chi\rho$, to say: “*Chrestos*” (χρηστός), the Just. The verb “*χράω*” (“*Chrao*”) means to exchange, to share, and “*Chrestos*” was well known long before Messiah arrived. It means auspicious and was used by scribes to mark a good passage in a papyrus. Thus, Chrism (Xi and Rho) was the symbol of sharing and the first two letters of “*Chrestos*” meant Just or auspicious, the exact opposite of suspicious. It seems likely that this Xi-Rho staurogram served as a protector for Christians, like Mithras' dog or serpent, or Roman amulets.

At that time, were the Christians less superstitious than the Mithraists? Probably not. The magic animals of the bas-reliefs of Mithra would probably be intended to protect from the envious. So the staurogram, the Xi-Rho, the fish, the cross for the Christians. Those symbols were auspicious. In both cases, Mithra and Jesus were two protective religions. This state of mind is so true that it still persists today in Arab countries. The amulet of the hand of Fatima, the saving symbolism of the “5”, and the surahs of the Evil Eye, show the attraction of the Mediterranean peoples for superstition and distrust of the judgment of others. On the other hand, conformity to religious precepts has been and remains the main element of life in society.

VI. THE PARTICULAR CASE OF JULIUS CAESAR

There is another argument, on the state of mind of the Romans, admitted as very superstitious. When Julius Caesar was assassinated on the Ides of March in the year 44 BC, he exclaimed:

“*Tu quoque mi fili*” (*You too my son*).

In fact, Caesar did not say this sentence, but “*Kai su teknon*” in Greek, which means: “you too urchin”.

Atque ita tribus et uiginti plagis confossus est uno modo ad primum ictum gemitu sine uoce edito, etsi tradiderunt quidam Marco Bruto irruenti dixisse: kai su teknon. (And so he was pierced with twenty- three blows: only at the first one did he groan, without saying a word. However, some writers report that, seeing Marcus Brutus advancing against him, he said in Greek, “And you too, my son!”) Suetonius, *Life of Caesar*, 82. (Lévêque, 2018).

It was not until the 17th century that the sentence was translated into Latin. However, “*Kai su*” is found on mosaics of the Evil Eye, such as that of Antioch, and is close to Martial's sentence: “And you, can you, naughty and jealous, envy the whole world without anyone envy?”. This sentence was entirely summarized in the “*Kai su*”. It would be translated in a modern way as: “And you, go to hell!”. Caesar would have said that when he died, much more likely than “You too, my son”.

This explanation on the death of Caesar offers a great advantage: it shows the deep mentality of the Romans. The general's last words are a superstitious incantation that shows the great importance of the “*kai su*”, the mockery of the hunchback, the handicapped, the thug, the urchin. Cesar did not complain to the sun or the cosmos, he despised his aggressors.



(a)



(b)



(c)

Fig. 7. a) Antakya Archeology Museum, hunchback mosaic. Bad genius with his arrows, what Cesar probably said; b) Roman amulet; c) various Roman amulets (good luck charms) with a phallus shape (Livianaugustae).

VII. CONCLUSION

The cross-sectional study of Roman iconography shows that citizens were cautious about adverse views and were willing to be superstitious. They did not hesitate to protect themselves against the opinions of others. They then treated their adversaries as “*Invidus*” (jealous) and threw anathemas at them symbolised by the Evil Eye. They largely rejected anyone who was not up to their standard. The sick, the infirm, the hunchbacks, and the sterile women, were despised and mocked. Roman society was elitist, and social compartmentalization was high, explaining that psychological barriers were installed. Romans threatened each other “You too can end up like them(…)” Julius Caesar would have treated his assassins in a very Roman way, with contempt. This character trait of the Romans would impose a reinterpretation of the Mithra bas-reliefs, probably much less astronomical and scholarly, and much more trivial than we think. This religion would have been that of the winners. The sacrificed bull would symbolise the submission of others. Animals such as the scorpion or the snake, which seem evil to us, were at that time the magical protectors of private and public life. This sectarianism would logically be found in their religious reliefs. Curiously, early Christians also seem to have protected themselves from the gaze of others. Christians considered themselves loved by God, which reassured them of the dangerous gaze of others. This Evil Eye still exists today in Mediterranean countries, and certainly in the Muslim religion.

REFERENCES

- Barlament, J. W. (2021). *The mysteries of Mithra and identity of Orion*. Retrieved from: <https://medium.com/interfaith-now/the-mysteries-of-mithras-and-identity-of-orion-ec9c5c284a66>.
- Beschaouch, A. (1975). *A propos de récentes découvertes épigraphiques dans le pays de Carthage*. CRAI, p. 101-118.
- Bonte, P. (1991). *Dictionnaire de l'ethnologie et de l'anthropologie*. PUF, Paris, p. 20.
- Bourdieu, P. (1980). *Le sens pratique*. De Minuit.
- Boyle, J. A. (1976) Mher in the Carved Rock. *Journal of Mithraic Studies*, 1(2), 112.
- British Museum. (n.d.). *disc; jewellery-fitting; amulet*. Retrieved from: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1814-0704-1172.
- Cousland, J. R. C. (2005) The Much suffering Eye in Antioch's House of Evil Eye: is it Mithraic? *Religious Studies and Theology*, 24(1), 61-74.
- Cumont, F. (1897). Les mystères de Mithra, les religions orientales. In *Propagation des mystères de Mithra dans l'Empire romain*. RHLR.
- Cumont, F. (1929). *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain* (4th ed.). Paris, p. 140.

- Cumont, F. (1902). The Doctrine of the Mithraic Mysteries. Illustrated. *The Open Court*, 9(2), p. 531.
- Delatte, L., Govaerts, S., Denooz, J. (1983) *Note sur spiritus*. Daphnet Digital Library. Retrieved from: <https://scholarlysource.lexicon.cnr.it/ojs/index.php/DDL/article/view/645>.
- Desparmet, J. (1939). *Coutumes, institutions, Croyances des indigènes de l'algerie: L'enfance, le mariage et la famille, Volume 1*. (H. Pérès & G. H. Bousquet Eds.). Impr. La Typo-Litho et Carbonel reun.
- Euzennat, M. (1992) Le mausolée de Taksebt (Algérie). *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 136-1, pp. 235-248
- Herber, J. (1927). La main de Fatima. *Hespéris*, 7, 209-219.
- Höpf, L. (1994) Archeological indications on the Origins of Roman Mithraism. In *Uncovering Ancient Stones*, Eisenbaums Publishers, p. 147-156.
- Husquin, C. (2020). L'intégrité du corps en question. *Presse Universitaire de Rennes*, 57.
- Kaz à Fatima. (n.d.). *Sourate 113 : L'aurore (Al-Falaq)*. Retrieved from: <http://kazafatima.org/coran/le-livre-de-dieu-les-114-sourates/sourate-113-lauror-al-falaq/>.
- King, M.L. (1951). Study of Mithraism. *Stanford Research and Education Institute, Vol. 1, Crozer Theological Seminary*.
- Laporte, J. (2010). Mauvais œil (Antiquité). *Encyclopédie Berbère*, 31, 4778–4783. <https://doi.org/10.4000/encyclopedieberbere.534>
- Laurin, J.-R. (1954). Orientation maîtresse des Apologistes chrétiens. *Analecta Gregoriana*, LXI, 30-33.
- Lévêque, M. (2018). *Antiquité #4 – Jules César n'a pas dit "Tu quoque mi fili", pas plus qu'on lui a dit "Prends garde aux Ides de Mars!"* Arrête Ton Char. Retrieved from: <https://www.arretetonchar.fr/antiquite-4-jules-cesar-na-pas-dit-tu-quoque-mi-fili-pas-plus-que-on-lui-a-dit-prends-garde-aux-ides-de-mars/>.
- Maroti, E. (1970). Die Rolle der Seeräuber in der Zeit der mithridatischen Kriege. In *Ricerche storiche ed economiche in memoria di C. Barbagallo*, I, Naples, 1970, 485.
- Martial, E. (n.d.). *Paradis des Albatros / Contre un envieux : Tu fronces le sourcil aux vers*. Retrieved from: <http://www.paradis-des-albatros.fr/?poeme=dubos/contre-un-envieux-tu-fronces-le-sourcil-aux-vers>.
- Ogilvie, R., Speidel, M.P. (1981). Mithras-Orion. Greek Hero and Roman Army God. *Études Préliminaires aux Religions Orientales dans l'Empire Romain*, 81, 56.
- Parker, A. (2020). A Marble Relief of the 'All-Suffering Eye' in Woburn Abbey. Retrieved from: https://www.academia.edu/49058665/A_Marble_Relief_of_the_All_Suffering_Eye_in_Woburn_Abbey.
- Prost-Biraben, J. H. (1933). La main de Fatma et ses antécédents symboliques. *Revue anthropologique*, 43, p. 370-375.
- Radi, S. (2019). Le mauvais œil. In *Surnaturel et société: L'explication magique de la maladie et du malheur à Khénifra, Maroc*, pp. 19-39, doi.org/10.4000/books.cjb.481.
- Russell, J. R. (1994). On the Armenian-Iranian roots of Mithraism. In J. R. Hinnells (ed.), *Studies in Mithraism*, Rome, p. 183-193.
- Tcherkézoff, S. (1993). L'"individualisme" chez Louis Dumont et l'anthropologie des idéologies globales. Genèse du point de vue comparatif (2e partie). *Anthropologie Et Sociétés*. <https://doi.org/10.7202/015302ar>.
- The Metropolitan Museum of Art. (n.d.). *Bronze phallic amulet | Roman | Imperial*. Retrieved from: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/255092>.
- Turcan, R. (1981) Le sacrifice mithriaque : innovations de sens et de modalités. In *Le sacrifice dans l'Antiquité (Entretiens sur l'Antiquité Classique, XXVII)*, Fondation Hardt, Vandoeuvres-Genève, p. 344-345.
- Turcan, R. (1990). Mithra et l'astronomie. *Pour la science*, 149, 8.
- Turcan, R. (2004). Les autels du culte mithriaque. In *L'espace sacrificiel dans les civilisations méditerranéennes de l'Antiquité Publ. de la Bibl. S. Reinach*, V, Paris, p. 217-225.
- Saadia, R. (2013). Surnaturel et société. Chapter 1: *Le mauvais œil*. <https://books.openedition.org/cjb/481>.
- Uhalde, K. (2007). *Expectations of Justice in the Age of Augustine*. University of Pennsylvania Press. <https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812203035>.
- Ulansey, D. (1991). The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries. *Cosmology and Salvation in the Ancient World*, New York-Oxford, p 27.
- Ulansey, D. (1994). Solving the Mithraic Mysteries. *Biblical Archaeology Review*, 20(5), 40-53.
- Will, E. (1990). Mithra et les astres. *Syria*, 67(2), 427–433. <https://doi.org/10.3406/syria.1990.7166>.
- Wilburn, A. T., (2019). Building Ritual Agency; Foundations, Floors, Doors and Walls. *Guide to the Study of Ancient Magic*, 189, 555-602. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004390751_021.