

# DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN THE CULTS OF MITHRAS AND CYBELE

Hideo OGAWA\*

## Introduction

Several Near Eastern religions diffused throughout the Roman world, and among these, Christianity and Judaism were certainly the most representative of the great religions. Nevertheless, deities representing many other sects also existed. For example, there were Isis and Serapis of Egypt; Cybele and Attis of Anatolia; and Mithras of Persia. And, among many minor deities, there were Men, Apis, Anubis, Jupiter Heliopolitanus, Jupiter Dolichenus, Dea Syria, and others.

Nevertheless, throughout the long history of the ancient Near East until the advent of the Roman Empire, there existed no region in which many, diverse cults were introduced and worshiped simultaneously.<sup>(1)</sup> Then, subsequently, after the Romans began to consolidate their rule over many of the Near East areas, the phenomenon of a multitude of gods co-existing in time and place became common and is even known in the Asiatic provinces. For example, people residing in the Hauran district of south Syria worshipped not only the deities of Syria and Phoenicia but also paid homage to the deities of Mesopotamia, North Arabia, Egypt, and Persia.<sup>(2)</sup> In contemporary Palmyra, the names of deities in regions as diverse as Mesopotamia, North Arabia, Anatolia—as well as native deities—appeared in inscriptions and iconography.<sup>(3)</sup> A similar situation existed in Dura-Europos. We cannot, however, just call such a polytheistic tendency Near Eastern, for without doubt, it is definitely Roman.

As well, these Near Eastern deities were neither of the same character nor did they receive the same forms of worship during the era of the Roman Empire as they had previously. For example, the concept of god was different for each sect. To consider one deity, we see that Mithras was invincible,

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\* Professor, Keio University

immortal, and victorious following a long struggle to attain salvation in this world. All titles ascribed to him and relevant iconography buttress this view.<sup>(4)</sup> The case of Mithras, though, is different from that of Attis and Christ, who died earthly deaths and then were resurrected in order to offer salvation to human beings.<sup>(5)</sup> Thus, Attis and Christ were quite dissimilar from Mithras and other classical gods.<sup>(6)</sup>

While Greek mystery cults and Judaism had close connections with a principal, sacred place of worship, some Near Eastern cults—such as Mithraism—did not possess a central sanctuary. Other deities had places of origin—such as Alexandria for Serapis, and Pessinonte and Mt. Ida for Cybele—but their ties with these sites were quite loose, for these deities became relatively “international” in nature.

Mithraism was, so to speak, a finished mystery religion. Its temple was of regular shape, and it possessed a fixed iconography as well as a standard type of initiation ceremony. In contrast, we see that worship forms for other deities did not always coincide with the corresponding mysteries; and, often, rituals performed for Cybele and Isis were not always conducted in secret. Further, in some instances in which similar styles of worship buildings existed, various sects utilized these places for their own ceremonies.<sup>(7)</sup>

As Bowersock has asserted,<sup>(8)</sup> relationships among these Near Eastern cults in the Roman Empire were, generally speaking, not antagonistic but mutually co-existent. There were, however, some exceptions. Both Judaism and Christianity were exclusive and competitive. In this respect, the religious policies of Emperor Julian were similar to Christianity since it was his intention to establish a kind of anti-church which would be in opposition to the then victorious Christian Church which was proselytizing vigorously for adherents. Also, in the history of ancient Near Eastern religions, there occurred intense sectarian strife in Egypt during the Amarna period and in Israel. It should be noted, though, that these were exceptions.

Concerning relationships between Mithraism and Christianity, E. Renan once penned a well-known evaluation that there existed intense opposition and rivalry between these two sects. Over the years, this opinion gained varying degrees of support from Cumont, Vermaseren, and others.<sup>(9)</sup> But, as Martin has pointed out,<sup>(10)</sup> this view is most likely biased and based upon the hostile stance of the apostolic fathers toward paganism in the early

days of formative Christianity.

Thus, we must explore extensively actual conditions for the many sects of Near Eastern origin which co-existed during the days of the Roman Empire. Were these sects really friendly and tolerant toward each other? Did they exchange ideas and influence the practices of their neighbors? Franz Cumont responded positively to these questions, especially regarding relationships between the cults of Mithras and Cybele. It is regrettable, though, that only a limited number of source materials are now available for clarifying this situation. But as Prof. Vermaseren has stated,<sup>(11)</sup> it is now possible for present day researchers to assess afresh relationships among the mystery cults utilizing various collections of source materials extant for each of the Near Eastern cults in the Roman Empire.

In this article, I will focus upon the assumed—but never proved—relationships between the two major Near Eastern religions in the Roman world of that day: that is to say, the cults of Cybele and Mithras.

## **I. Syncretism in Anatolia**

Franz Cumont posits three different aspects for claiming a relationship existed between the cults of Mithras and Cybele-Attis. I will consider the first of these three points in this section and then treat the two other aspects in following sections.

First, Cumont asserts that the long history of the cult of Mithras reached its final stage in Anatolia and that the Iranian pair of Anahita and Mithras was identified there with the native pair of Cybele and Attis.<sup>(12)</sup> Accordingly, the taurobolium (the bloody rite of bull-killing) under the auspices of Cybele and Attis was not just a primitive and barbarous act, but was intended to invoke a higher religious ideal as revealed in the phrase “in aeternum renatus” found in three Latin inscriptions.<sup>(13)</sup>

Why did such an older form of nature worship in Anatolia evolve into such a spiritualistic belief? According to Cumont,<sup>(14)</sup> this was due to contact with Mazdaism which had diffused throughout Anatolia during the time of the Persian Empire. The dogmatic emptiness of the native worship of Cybele and Attis was complemented by contact with Mazdaism. For example, it accepted the Zoroastrian idea of the netherworld: the archaic belief of *mana*—which people thought resided in the body of a wild bull—was

later replaced with a belief in the immortality of the purified soul.<sup>(15)</sup>

Cumont's position was succeeded and augmented by Graillot.<sup>(16)</sup> He asserted, as did Cumont, that Mithraic magi had contact with the Phrygian native religion and that they were successful in spiritualizing it. According to Graillot, the idea that the blood of a bull can purify human souls derived from Avesta.<sup>(17)</sup> Thus, when the rite of the taurobolium was introduced into Rome in the reign of Antonius Pius, Hvarna (the Iranian concept of kingship) accompanied it.<sup>(18)</sup>

Graillot follows Cumont in stressing that Mazdaism contributed to the enrichment of theological and ethical values in the worship of Attis.<sup>(19)</sup>

Such a syncretistic background for assuming a relationship between the cults of Mithras and Cybele-Attis might also explain the so-called protection of the former by the latter in Rome.<sup>(20)</sup> I will address this question below.

The inscriptions which mention the rite of the taurobolium under the auspices of Cybele and Attis belong to the third and fourth centuries, that is, to the third stage of this rite, as was shown by Duthoy.<sup>(21)</sup> It is not possible to trace this rite back to the Hellenistic period or even to the times of the Roman Empire. On the other hand, Cumont's presupposition that the Iranian pair of Anahita and Mithras existed from time immemorial is not supported by any evidence. Therefore, this so-called syncretism with the Anatolian pair of Cybele and Attis is dubious and purely hypothetical. And I would add that the importance of Attis in the worship of Cybele occurred as a later phenomenon in the Roman world.<sup>(22)</sup>

Further, Cumont's theory of the syncretism in Anatolia is based upon another conjecture concerning the origin of Roman Mithraism. Cumont surmised that Mithras was originally an Iranian god and that he was propagated westward through Mesopotamia to Anatolia where he became the god of a mystery religion. This theory, though, is hypothetical as is Cumont's assertion regarding a relationship between Mithras and Cybele-Attis. It is also known that Cumont himself admitted that his theory lacked support.<sup>(23)</sup>

Indeed, circumstantial evidences exist concerning this issue. First, a Phrygian myth tells us that Agdistis, a bi-sexual monster, was born from the coupling of Jupiter and Cybele, the rock. Part of this story may have been borrowed from the Mithraic myth of the rock-birth of the god.<sup>(24)</sup> Second, the iconography of Attis in his mournful attitude is identical with

that of Cautopates, one of the Mithraic torch bearers who stands beside the bull-slaying Mithras with a down-turned torch in his hands.<sup>(25)</sup> This coincidence might show an intimate relationship as well as a dogmatic influence between the two sects. In this respect, Cumont postulates for the fusion of the Phrygian idea of immortality and the Iranian concept of resurrection.<sup>(26)</sup>

Regarding these two points, I must stress that there exist no images of the bull-slaying Mithras or the torch bearer in Anatolia. Also, concerning a third point of circumstantial evidence, we might mention the six terracotta figurines of a bull-slaying god. They were found at Panticapaeum, a Greek colony on the north shore of the Black Sea, and were made through the molding process. They all range in height between 6.5 and 13.9 centimeters.<sup>(27)</sup> When Cumont published his "Textes et monuments" at the end of the nineteenth century, only two examples were known to him and these two did not come from archaeological excavations. Essentially, they were chance discoveries.

Overall, these idols are similar in shape to the bull-slaying Mithras, but there are, in fact, some differences. All of the Crimean examples are made of clay and the god does not stab the bull in the shoulder but, instead, lift his sword upwards. Of the Mithraic representations of bull-slaying, only one example shows this stance. This one was sculpted by Criton, the Athenian,<sup>(28)</sup> and it is considered rather unusual.

The Crimean idols were funerary offerings while the Mithraic idols were enshrined in temples. Besides, each of the Crimean ones appears to be opening his garments to expose his genitals. On the contrary, Mithras is never shown in such a revealing posture. Thus, it is surmised that these differences indicate that the Crimean idols are most assuredly representations of Attis.

Dating for these idols has been variously given from the typological point of view : from the first century B. C. to the first century A. D. Those which were exhumed from a grave were dated from the latter half of the first century B. C. to the earlier half of the first century A. D. In fact, this dating is too high for that of the Mithraic bull-slaying group.<sup>(29)</sup>

Cumont surmised that these Crimean figures were produced in Anatolia and imported to the north shore of the Black Sea.<sup>(30)</sup> Among them, though, one was discovered in situ at a pottery kiln in Panticapaeum which indicates

that the figures were made in that area.<sup>(31)</sup> Some historical background for this type of pottery is as follows: the worship of Cybele was introduced there in the fourth century B. C. and she was accepted as a deity in the Bosphorus kingdom. Similarly, Attis, too, was diffused throughout this region and was considered a god of fertility; in fact, Attis was only a subordinate god to Cybele.<sup>(32)</sup>

Graillot expanded on Cumont's theory and asserted that the Panticapaeum figurines represented a purified or spiritualized stage of the Anatolian religion.<sup>(33)</sup> According to Graillot, these idols were nothing but an Iranized form of Attis. This presupposes a close relationship between Mithras, the bull-slayer, and Attis, the god of the taurobolium.<sup>(34)</sup> But such a state of purification or spiritualization, as revealed in the history of the taurobolium, is actually attested to only during the imperial period of Rome. On the other hand, the iconography of the bloody emasculation or bull-slaying still gives credence to the existence of primitive nature worship. Thus, it was not possible for the Crimean idols to be influenced by Mazdaic spiritualism and purification.

Dating for the figurines, as noted above, is about 50 years earlier than that of the oldest image of the bull-slaying Mithras; and the oldest reference is by Statius (ca. 45-96 A. D.).

Cumont and Graillot posited that the Crimean idols were the earliest Mithraic bull-slaying images; however, some recent researchers have taken a more skeptical view of this position. For example, Turcan argues that the idols from Panticapaeum represent Mithras—disguised as Attis—but that these figures cannot be considered as evidence for Mithraism and its diffusion to that area.<sup>(35)</sup> Some Russian specialists have also asserted that the Mithraic beliefs which were diffused in Crimea were different from Roman Mithraism and that Mithras was confused there with Attis and became a subordinate god of Cybele.<sup>(36)</sup>

In short, the Crimean figures do not signify the syncretism of Roman Mithraism and the cult of Cybele-Attis. Of course, the syncretism of the Iranian religion and the native religions in Anatolia and Crimea cannot be proved by later evidences that might show a mutual dependence of both these sects in the Roman Empire.

## II. "Official Recognition" of Mithraism and the Trust of Mithraists's Women

As stated above, I do not believe that the cults of Mithras and Cybele-Attis co-existed in a mutually tolerant and friendly manner in Anatolia. Nor do I believe that they were dependent upon each other even after they diffused into the Roman world.

There are two theories concerning the supposed relationship between these two sects in the Roman world: first, that the Mithraic sect was under the protection of the Cybele sect and profited from official recognition by the latter; and second, that the wives and daughters of Mithraists were entrusted to the sect of Cybele because women were, in the main, not accepted in the Mithraic community.

Diffusion of the cult of Cybele to the Roman world occurred earlier than that of the cult of Mithraism. This goddess arrived in Greece in the sixth century B. C. and, according to Livy (XXIX, 10, 4ff.), there was a grand occasion marking the introduction of the worship of this Anatolian goddess in Rome.<sup>(37)</sup> In 205-204 B. C., during the Second Punic War, Italy was devastated by the invasion of Hannibal's army. Whereupon, the Senate of Rome decided—upon being prompted by an admonitory oracle—to bring in the stone idol of Cybele, who was then called the mother of the gods or the great mother, from Anatolia to Rome. It was necessary to build a sanctuary in the capital of Rome and Palatine Hill was selected as the proper site with all expenses paid by the state.

In contrast, the introduction of Mithraic mysteries to Rome was realized in a very different manner (Plut., *Vita Pomp.* 24). In the sixties B. C., Cilician pirates in the east Mediterranean Sea area, who conducted the mystery rite of Mithras, were conquered by Pompey the Great. Thus, it was on this occasion that this religion became known in Rome for the first time. And, as this incident shows, the earliest believers of Mithraism were rogues and outlaws.

Cumont surmised<sup>(38)</sup> that the Mithraists were protected by the officially recognized cult of Cybele although they did not enjoy the direct favor of the state. Cumont's theory is based upon the hypothesis that there had occurred a syncretism of the two sects in Anatolia even during the Persian period. As stated above, however, this theory of Anatolian syncretism

depends upon a close relationship between the two sects in Rome which did not actually exist. Thus, it is clear that Cumont's argument is circular and not based upon available evidences.

Further, Cumont writes<sup>(39)</sup> that the priests of Mithras flattered their associates in the Cybele sect in order to obtain profits from the only officially recognized sect, and that both sects—in spite of their differing characters—collaborated in order to avoid difficulties.

Graillot also states that a close relationship between the two cults, which had been earlier established in Anatolia, gave aid to Mithras in the Roman Empire,<sup>(40)</sup> and that since Cybele patronized all Oriental deities, then Mithras, too, was included in her good graces.<sup>(41)</sup>

Such statements by Cumont and Graillot seem to have been made in order to explain the very rapid growth of Mithraism in the Roman world.

I would emphasize, though, that neither the state nor the sect of Cybele-Attis was concerned with Mithraism—the only exception being a dedication to Mithras at Carnuntum by the four rulers in the fourth century.<sup>(42)</sup> We cannot conclude from this source, though, that official recognition was given to Mithraism before that date. As well, no influence by the cult of Cybele can be observed in that dedication.

On the other hand, Merkelbach says<sup>(43)</sup> that one of the characteristics of the Mithraic leaders was the practice of declaring loyalty to the emperor and the state, and that although Mithraism was not a recognized religion, leaders intentionally fulfilled the loyalty requirement and subsumed the Mithraic religion under imperial powers. This means, then, that Mithraism maintained a peaceful relationship with the imperial authorities and, consequently, reduced or eliminated the need for assistance from the Cybele sect.

Cumont and Graillot state<sup>(44)</sup> that the sect of Cybele accepted wives and daughters of Mithraists who were excluded by this male-centered sect. This was only a corollary of the above mentioned hypothesis of the two sects' co-existence. However, there exists no proof to support the assertion that female members in the family of a Mithraist were accepted by the Cybele sect.

The proposition of a close relationship existing between the two sects in the Roman Empire rests also on the following two premises: 1), the "neighboring" positions of sanctuaries for both sects; and 2), interpretations of the votive inscriptions of fourth century pagan nobles in Rome.



### III. Mithras and Cybele in Ostia

Mitreo degli Animali in Ostia,<sup>(45)</sup> which was discovered in 1867 by C. L. Visconti, was, at first, deemed to be a temple of Cybele, but according to Cumont, it was said to be a mithraeum. Its plan was tripartite and a raven, a cock, a scorpion, and a snake were inscribed on its mosaic floor. Dating is set at 150 A. D., by Cumont and Graillot, and at 160 A. D., by Becatti, Squarciapino, Schreiber and others.<sup>(46)</sup> It is certain, therefore, that this is one of the oldest Mithraea.

The Mitreo degli Animali temple is located in the central area of Ostia. There, also, is found a temple of Cybele which is located inside a walled, triangular site. Positioning of these two temples is especially remarkable: the former sits outside a side wall of the triangular site while the latter is located inside the same wall. The distance between the two temples is a mere 20 meters although both buildings are clearly demarcated by the side wall.

The temple of Cybele dates from the end of the reign of Hadrian to the early period of the reign of Antoninus Pius.<sup>(47)</sup> It is, therefore, about 10 years older than the temple of Mithras.

A carved head was discovered in the temple of Cybele. At first, Visconti designated it a head of Attis<sup>(48)</sup> but, later, it was redesignated as the head of a bull-slaying Mithras. Further, from the office of the dendrophori for the worship of Cybele near the temple of this goddess, a votive inscription by M. Cerellius Hieronymus was discovered.<sup>(49)</sup> Opinions differ about this inscription for it may belong to the Mithraic sect or it may concern the worship practices of Cybele.<sup>(50)</sup>

Cumont was aware<sup>(51)</sup> that the temples of Mithras and Cybele were obviously separated by the side wall at the triangular site and that it was impossible for these two temples to be in direct contact with each other. Nevertheless, Cumont asserts<sup>(52)</sup> that the close proximity of the two temples must be acknowledged and taken as a sign of friendly relations between the two sects.

Cumont's reasoning was supported by Graillot<sup>(53)</sup> who also considered the two temples' neighboring positions as evidence that Mithraism sought the overall protection of the sect of Cybele. M. J. Vermaseren has, to some

degree, concurred with this view.<sup>(54)</sup>

Today, we are in possession of several evidences which would most likely render Cumont's position untenable. When Cumont structured his theory at the end of the nineteenth century, only three Ostian temples of Mithras, including the Mitreo degli Animali, were known to him. And because one of these three temples was located in the vicinity of the sanctuary of Cybele and Attis, it seemed to Cumont highly probable that this positioning indicated an intentional decision by the two sects to co-exist in an amiable manner.

Up to the present, though, some 14-15 mithraea have been discovered at Ostia.<sup>(55)</sup> They are scattered all over the city-zone area and there has been no further instance of a mithraeum being found neighboring a temple of Cybele.<sup>(56)</sup> Of these mithraea, the Mitreo degli Animali is, as was stated above, the oldest and it was located in the central area of the city where other sects also wished to erect a temple.<sup>(57)</sup> Thus, it is very unlikely that a special relationship between the two sects can be construed merely from observing the positioning of two temples in the most important, central area of Ostia.

Schreiber once compiled a list of buildings neighboring Mithraic temples in Ostia and he chronicled a varied assortment of structures: private houses, public baths, arenas, offices, and imperial storehouses.<sup>(58)</sup> It seems certain, then, that the placement of any of these buildings beside a mithraeum was pure happenstance.

In the second century, mithraea erected in Ostia were apt to be located on private land while those constructed in the third century were built mostly on public land.<sup>(59)</sup> This change indicates that over the passing decades there was a trend to establish and exert an independent Mithraism; this development certainly defies the argument that Mithraism owed its existence to the protection of the sect of Cybele.

As well, we should not emphasize only the relationship that might have existed between the sects of Mithras and Cybele, for in the Ostia of that day, there were also temples for Dioscouri, Liber, Silvanus, Serapis, Isis, Jupiter Heliopolitanus, Jupiter Dolichenus, and Hercules<sup>(60)</sup> besides those for Mithras and Cybele-Attis.

In this respect, Graillot mentions various cities in the Roman Empire where sanctuaries for Mithras and Cybele were both discovered.<sup>(61)</sup> These

total 16 cities, including Milano, in Italy ; four cities, including Lyon, in France ; four cities, including Bonn, in Germany ; and temples in Philippeville and Setif in North Africa, respectively. While it is certain that such temples existed in the same city during the same period, this does not also mean that they were "neighboring" temples or that they possessed any special connections.

While it might seem possible in some instances<sup>(62)</sup> for a relationship to exist between the two sects, evidence is lacking. For example, the situation in Saalburg is quite dubious.<sup>(63)</sup> Also, there is scarce information to support the existence of a "double temple" for Mithras and Cybele in Castellum Tiggitarum (Tiddis).<sup>(64)</sup> Although both Mithras and Cybele are mentioned together in an inscription found in a suburb of Rome, in fact, this listing also includes other deities such as Hercules, Jupiter, Astarte, and Isis. Thus, this does not show the existence of any special or unique relationship between Mithras and Cybele.<sup>(65)</sup> Again, we find in Poetovio, Pannonia, both a bust and a head of Cybele which were found in the vicinity of a mithraeum. This fact might beguile us into supposing that this is yet another instance of "neighboring" temples for Mithras and Cybele, but to this date, the temple of Cybele has not been identified.<sup>(66)</sup>

In this manner, all the above examples lack support for one reason or another.<sup>(67)</sup> And as Clauss has pointed out<sup>(68)</sup>, we should also pay attention to other combinations of structures or geographical positionings of sect temples in a neighborhood: a mithraeum located in the vicinity of a temple of three Capitoline deities in Linz and again of a temple of Jupiter Dolichenus in Deutsch-Altenburg.

Thus, the close positioning of a temple of Mithras near one of Cybele does not necessarily indicate any special theological or institutional relationships between the two sects as Cumont once believed. The physical layout of a neighborhood was mostly due to accidental circumstance.

#### **IV. Pagan Nobility in Fourth Century Rome**

Why did Cumont come to believe in a close connection of the two sects of Mithras and Cybele? Perhaps the stimulus for his theory originated in the finding of a group of votive inscriptions of the pagan nobility in the city of Rome in the fourth century A. D. Herein, Mithras and Cybele-Attis

appear together in about 10 Latin inscriptions of the same category in Rome and its suburbs.<sup>(69)</sup> For example, we find that Senator Gaius Magius Donatus Severianus was a "pater" of Mithras and performed the rite of the taurobolium (A. D. 313);<sup>(70)</sup> again, we see that Senator Caelius Hilarianus was also a "pater" of Mithras and dedicated a taurobolium to the Mother of the Gods, that is, to Cybele, and to Attis (A. D. 377).<sup>(71)</sup>

Even though Mithras and Cybele-Attis are mentioned together in these inscriptions, this does not necessarily suggest that there existed a direct and amicable relationship between the two deities. First, we see that these dedications were extremely public in nature and different from the private nature of a mystery religion like Mithraism. Second, conceptions of god changed considerably during the fourth century. So we cannot presuppose a similar or ongoing relationship between the deities. In the dedications made by Roman nobles, we find that Cybele and Attis presided over the rite of the taurobolium, while other deities, including Mithras, Liber and Hecate, were not even called upon directly—with their names appearing as part of the title of the dedicators. Thus, we cannot really know what the sectarian nature of the relationship was.

The real object of worship in these inscriptions was not Mithras, Liber, or Hecate. Instead, it was Sol, the supreme god, with the deity of each sect representing a manifestation or function of Sol.

On the other hand, such conservative nobles as Synmachus, Praetextatus, and Camenius did not belong to any particular sect, the reason being they felt free to wear the sacred title of any sect they chose at the moment in order to better defend the "idea of Rome."<sup>(72)</sup> Calling upon the names of various deities only gave verbal expression to this idea. As Graillet says,<sup>(73)</sup> these dedicators were seeking a universal religion and they thought that the mere mention of each deity was inadequate to express fully this concept.

It is clear, then, that these inscriptions do not indicate any particular relationship between the cults of Mithras and Cybele. These gods were only elements in forming a universal concept of god.

It goes without saying, then, that the rites of the taurobolium and the criobolium (the rite of sheep-killing) which the nobles presided over and participated in, were never performed as part of the Mithraic ritual. Cumont was aware of this<sup>(74)</sup> but he, as well as Graillet, suggested that the

origin of these rites were somehow related to Iranian religion. In fact, the origins of these bloody rites was in a type of ceremonial hunt which was practiced in the ancient Near East and then later organized in Ostia and Rome after 160 A. D. These rites had nothing whatsoever to do with the development of Mithraic worship.<sup>(75)</sup>

## Conclusion

During the period of the Roman Empire, the cults of Mithras and Cybele never established nor enjoyed amicable relationships with the other as each sect pursued the proselytization of its own religion. In fact, there exists no evidence to prove that these two sects had any substantial contacts with the other. As they both spread throughout Iran and Anatolia, they created their own forms of a mystery religion in the Hellenistic age; later, they both diffused independently into the Roman Empire—without contact or conflict with the other.

Although Mithraism was a “male-centered” religion, it contained no weak point which necessitated having to be complemented by another religion such as the worship of Cybele, a mother goddess. Mithraism included as one of its rituals the sacred marriage rite which originated from the ancient Near Eastern worship of vegetation. As well, Mithras’s action of killing the bull must have also been derived from the same kind of vegetation worship. During the whole history of the Mithraic mysteries, therefore, there was no need or opening for introducing various supplementary elements from the cult of a mother goddess like Cybele.<sup>(76)</sup>

Martin states<sup>(77)</sup> that the Iranian worship of Mitra and the Roman mysteries of Mithras were not continuous and that Mithraism was created in one of the eastern Roman provinces.

In my opinion, the original place where the Mithraic mysteries were formed was not Anatolia but, rather, Syria. If this is so, then, the theory of an Anatolian contact supposed by Cumont must be in error.

Like Bowersock,<sup>(78)</sup> I, too, must admit that there is some importance in the worship of Tyrian Melkart as a source for the birth of the Mithraic mysteries. And if this is so, then, all Anatolian worship of Cybele and Attis must be disregarded. If there had been any influence of Cybele-Attis upon Mithras, then it must have occurred in Syria—if at all.<sup>(79)</sup>

## Notes

(1) For example, there are various traces of Canaanite deities in the Egyptian Delta in the age of Hyksos; Sumerian deities continued to be worshipped in Mesopotamia in later ages; there was a mixture of Yahweh worship and that of Canaanite deities in the Hebrew kingdoms; and in the Persian Empire, magi, priests of Mazdaism, migrated into provinces with their concepts of god and their eschatology which became accepted by native peoples to form a mixed form of religion. But the degree and extent of mixing and co-existence of several religions in the Roman Empire was far-reaching and exhaustive. The question asking to what degree such co-existence was accompanied by syncretism is a separate problem. The topic of the present article is the supposed syncretism of the cult of Mithras with that of Cybele.

(2) Cf. D. Sourdél, *Les cultes du Hauran à l'époque romaine*, Paris, 1952.

(3) Cf. G. Février, *La religion des palmyréniens*, Paris, 1931, pp. 2; 216-218.

(4) G. Sfameni Gasparo, *Soteriology and Mystic Aspects in the Cult of Cybele and Attis*, Leiden, 1985, p. XVI.

(5) R. Turcan, "Les dieux et la divin dans les mystères de Mithra," *Knowledge of God in the Graeco-Roman World*, Leiden, 1988, pp. 245; 248.

(6) Sfameni Gasparo, *op. cit.*, p. XVII.

(7) R. Turcan, *Les cultes orientaux dans le monde romain*, Paris, 1989, p. 212.

(8) G. W. Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge, 1990, p. 6.

(9) M. J. Vermaseren, *Mithras de geheimzinnige god*, Amsterdam, 1959, pp. 153ff.

(10) L. H. Martin, "Roman Mithraism and Christianity," *Numen* XXXVI-1, 1989, pp. 2f.

(11) M. J. Vermaseren, "Onderlinge betrekkingen tussen Mithras-Sabazius-Cybele," *Academiae analecta, Mededelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunst van België, Klasse der letteren*, 46-1, 1984, p. 28.

(12) F. Cumont, *Textes et monuments relatifs aux mystères de Mithra*, Bruxelles, I, 1899, p. 333; *idem*, *Les mystères de Mithra*, Bruxelles, 1913, p. 189; *idem*, *Les religions orientales dans le paganisme romain*, Paris, 1963, pp. 62; 229, n. 63.

(13) Cf. R. Duthoy, *The Taurobolium, its Evolution and Terminology*, Leiden, 1969, p. 18, No. 23=M. J. Vermaseren, *CIMRM* No. 520.

(14) Cumont, *Les religions orientales*, pp. 62-64; *Les mystères de Mithra*, p. 190.

(15) Cumont, *Les mystères de Mithra*, pp. 190-192.

(16) H. Graillot, *Le culte de Cybèle*, Paris, 1912, pp. 192; 390.

(17) *Ibid.*, pp. 157f.; 59f.; 228, nn. 58; 60. Graillot admits here Semitic influence (pp. 62; 65).

(18) *Ibid.*, pp. 159f.

(19) *Ibid.*, pp. 212-214.

(20) *Ibid.*, p. 192.

(21) Duthoy, *op. cit.*, pp. 116; 121.

(22) *Ibid.*, p. 65.

(23) Cumont, *Les mystères de Mithra*, pp. 16f.

(24) Cumont, *Textes et monuments* I, p. 160; H. Hepding, *Attis, seine Mythen und sein Kult*, Berlin, 1967, pp. 104f.

(25) Graillot, *op. cit.*, p. 215; cf. W. Blawatsky et G. Kochelenko, *Le culte de Mithra sur la côte septentrionale de la Mer Noire*, Leiden, 1966, p. 16.

(26) Cumont, *Textes et monuments* I, p. 212; II, p. 328.

- (27) Blawatsky et Kochelenko, *op. cit.*, pp. 14f. ; M. M. Kobylina, *Divinités orientales sur le littoral nord de la Mer Noire*, Leiden, 1976, pp. 8f. ; M. J. Vermaseren, *CIMRM* Nos. 11-14.
- (28) G. Becatti, *Scavi di Ostia, I Mitrei*, Roma, 1954, pp. 32ff. and Tav. IV, 1-2, XXVII-XXX ; *CIMRM* Nos. 230f. and fig. 69.
- (29) Blawatsky et Kochelenko, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
- (30) Cumont, *Textes et monuments* I, p. 213.
- (31) Blawatsky et Kochelenko, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
- (32) Cf. Kobylina, *op. cit.*, pp. 4f.
- (33) Graillot, *op. cit.*, p. 214.
- (34) *Ibid.*, pp. 157f. ; cf. 479.
- (35) Turcan, *Les cultes orientaux*, p. 200.
- (36) Blawatsky et Kochelenko, *op. cit.*, pp. 17 ; 19 ; Kobylina, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
- (37) M. J. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis, the Myth and the Cult*, London, 1977, pp. 38-41.
- (38) Cumont, *Textes et monuments* I, pp. 280 ; 333-336 ; *Les mystères de Mithra*, pp. 152-155 ; 190 ; *Les religions orientales*, p. 65.
- (39) Cumont, *Les religions orientales*, p. 62 ; *Les mystères de Mithra*, pp. 189f.
- (40) Graillot, *op. cit.*, p. 192.
- (41) *Ibid.*, pp. 188 ; cf. 345.
- (42) *CIMRM* No. 1698.
- (43) R. Merkelbach, *Mithras*, Königsstein, 1984, pp. 153-188 ; cf. Martin, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
- (44) Cumont, *Les mystères de Mithra*, pp. 190 ; *Les religions orientales*, p. 62 ; Graillot, *op. cit.*, p. 193.
- (45) *CIMRM* Nos. 278-286 ; cf. Becatti, *op. cit.*, pp. 87 ; 90 ; Tav. XVII, 1 ; L. Ross Taylor, *The Cults of Ostia*, Pennsylvania, 1912, pp. 84f. ; M. F. Squarciapino, *I culti orientali ad Ostia*, Leiden, 1962, p. 48.
- (46) Cf. Becatti, *op. cit.*, p. 92 ; *CIMRM* Nos. 285f. (in the years 142-143)
- (47) Becatti, *op. cit.*, p. 92.
- (48) *Ibid.*, Tav. XXXI, Nos. 2 ; 3 ; *CIMRM* No. 280 ; M. J. Vermaseren, *CCCA* III, No. 396.
- (49) Becatti, *op. cit.*, p. 92 ; Squarciapino, *op. cit.*, p. 49 ; *CIMRM* No. 282.
- (50) Cf. Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 86f.
- (51) *CCCA* III, No. 362.
- (52) Cumont, *Les religions orientales*, p. 62 ; *Les mystères de Mithra*, pp. 19 ; 178-182 ; cf. Becatti, *op. cit.*, p. 92 ; Squarciapino, *op. cit.*, p. 49. Cumont emphasizes the fact that the earliest record of the rite of the taurobolium is known from this sacred precinct in Ostia. Cf. Cumont, *Les mystères de Mithra*, pp. 192f.
- (53) Graillot, *op. cit.*, pp. 192 ; 341-345.
- (54) Vermaseren, *Mithras*, p. 93, while Squarciapino is sceptical (*op. cit.*, pp. 4 ; 49).
- (55) Martin, *op. cit.*, p. 2 ; D. Groh, "The Ostian Mithraeum," *Mithraism in Ostia, Mystery Religion and Christianity in the Ancient Port of Rome*, ed. by S. Laeuchli, Northwestern University Press, 1967, p. 9.
- (56) Cf. J. Schreiber, "The Environment of Ostia Mithraism," *Mithraism in Ostia*, pp. 23 ; 33.
- (57) *Ibid.*, p. 38 ; cf. Martin, *op. cit.*, pp. 4f., where the same situation in Rome is mentioned.

- (58) Schreiber, *op. cit.*, pp. 42–45. Cf. M. Clauss, *Mithras, Kult und Mysterien*, München, 1990, p. 52.
- (59) Cf. Schreiber, *op. cit.*, pp. 38–40; Martin, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
- (60) Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 56–82; cf. 86f.
- (61) Graillot, *op. cit.*, p. 193; cf. Cumont, *Les mystères de Mithra*, p. 189.
- (62) Blawatsky et Kochelenko, *op. cit.*, p. 17 (four examples).
- (63) Cf. Graillot, *op. cit.*, p. 470; *CIMRM* No. 1040 (II, p. 55).
- (64) *CIMRM* No. 162 (I, p. 98; II, p. 22).
- (65) *CIMRM* Nos. 634–639.
- (66) *CIMRM* No. 1578 (II, p. 193).
- (67) Further, the examples from Paternion, Noricum (*CIMRM* No. 1428), Augusta Rauricorum, Germania (No. 1387), Philippi and Thessalonike, Macedonia (Nos. 2343 and 2345).
- (68) Clauss, *op. cit.*, p. 53.
- (69) Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis*, pp. 47–51. Cf. Cumont, *Textes et monuments*, II, p. 333, n. 8. 16 senators appear as Mithraic “patres” (cf. Martin, *op. cit.*, p. 14, n. 38).
- (70) *CIMRM* No. 523=CCCA III, No. 234.
- (71) *CIMRM* No. 513=CCCA III, No. 229.
- (72) E. Altheim, *A History of Roman Religion*, London, 1938, pp. 467–469; cf. pp. 470f.
- (73) Graillot, *op. cit.*, pp. 536.
- (74) Cumont, *Textes et Monuments*, p. 334, n. 4; cf. Duthoy, *op. cit.*, p. 66.
- (75) Cf. Duthoy, *op. cit.*, p. 126.
- (76) Various points of my arguments in this conclusion are discussed all together in my work, *A Study of the Mysteries of Mithras*, Lithon, Tokyo, 1993 (in Japanese).
- (77) L. H. Martin, *Hellenistic Religions*, Oxford, 1987, pp. 113f.
- (78) Bowersock, *op. cit.*, pp. 46f.
- (79) ‘Ate’ in a Palmyrene inscription may be Attis (Février, *op. cit.*, p. 125), and Anahita with Sabazius appears in a votive inscription in September of 18 B. C. (J. Teixidor, “Cultes d’Asie Mineure et de Thrace à Palmyre,” *Semitica* XXXII, 1982, pp. 97–100). Further, there is in a relief at the temple of Bel an image of Attis, which is similar to a pottery idol of Attis of Panticapaeum. Anatolian deities seem to have been brought to Syria by Palmyrene archers as is the case of Mithraism of Dura-Europus (Teixidor, *op. cit.*, p. 98).