

Mithrâ, Mithrâs and Mehr

Parviz Varjavand

Mithrâic studies are a well-established field of research in the academic community of the West. A distinction is made in these studies between the Mithrâ of the Persians and the Mithrâs of the Romans. The researchers in the West are divided between those who believe the Persian Mithrâ and Roman Mithrâs to be of the same religious root and those who believe these two to be separate unrelated entities.

In ancient Persia, before the time of the prophet Zarathushtrâ, we have the worship of a sun god Mithrâ and of a water goddess Ânâhitâ. This places Mithrâ and Ânâhitâ at times before the date for Zarathushtrâ of 1735 BC. The cult of Mithrâs on the other hand becomes notable from about 70 to 370 AD in the Roman Empire. The most renowned scholar of the school that considers Mithrâ and Mithrâs to be related is Franz Cumont and the most notable scholar of the school that considers them as not related is David Ulansey. I feel that it is the work of an Iranian scholar, Dr. Mohamad Moghdam that can break this tie and show that the roots of Roman Mithrâism lie in the events surrounding the life of an Iranian Messiah named Mehr and his Neo-Mithrâic religion.

In Iran, a great scholar in the art of Persian calendar making and astronomy was the late Mr. Zabih Behrooz. In the course of his research some sixty years ago, he discovered records pointing to the existence of a personality claiming to be the Messiah who called himself Mehr or Mithrâ. Legends about Mehr claim that he was Immaculately conceived by a young virgin named Ânâhitâ or Nâhid. It is claimed by the cult that this Nâhid became impregnated magically while bathing in the waters of Lake Hâmun in Sistân. Mehr was born on December 25th, 272 BC and was worshiped by his followers as the god Mithrâ reincarnated in the flesh. He lived 64 years and died in 208 BC in the village of Bid Âbâd in the province of Bâjestan. The ancient Aryan sun god Mithrâ is supposed to be reborn from Ânâhitâ, the virgin goddess of waters, every year at the time of winter solstice or December 21st. This is of particular interest to those who follow the events of December 21st and 25th and their significance to Mithrâists. The date of the rebirth of the god Mithrâ "The Unconquerable Sun" or "Sol Invictus" is on winter solstice and the birthday of the man "Mithrâ the Messiah" on December 25th. "Mehr

Afzoon" or "May Love Ever Increase" is the greeting amongst lovers of Mithrâ.

After Zabih Behrooz, Dr. Mohamad Moghdam dedicated a lifetime to following the leads established by Behrooz. His masterpiece was his final book on this topic entitled "Research on Mithrâ and Ânâhitâ" (Jostâr dar bâreye Mehr o Nâhid). Dr. Ali Hassoury is another scholar who works on Behrooz's theories. One Mithraeum that Dr. Hassouri has discovered recently in a remote location in Iran astonished me, for every aspect of the structure was correct and in place, as were significant details. Unfortunately the icons of Mithrâ have been broken and removed from the altar of this "Mehr Âbe" which is presently functioning as an "Emâm Zâde". Mr. Ahmad Hammi, Mr. Aslan Ghaffari, Dr. Hossein Vahidi, Dr. Mahmoodi Bakhtiyari and Dr. Davar Sheykhavandi are some of the other scholars who are knowledgeable about this Iranian Messiah or Mehr. The rest of the many Iranian scholars of Mithrâism have little of original substance to present and are often only paraphrasing in Persian what they read of the works of Western scholars.

The Magi with their pointed red caps were priests of Mithrâ and had little to do with orthodox Zoroastrianism. The Pârthians were Mithrâists while the Sâsâniâns became fanatical Zoroastrians and destroyed most things Mithrâic in their Empire. A similar fate destroyed Mithrâism in the West when Christianity became its mortal enemy. A lot of Mithrâic teaching and symbolism remains hidden in spiritual and Gnostic traditions of the East and West. These Mithrâic elements are usually mixed with those of another hidden religion, that of the prophet Mâni. A sect of Manichaeans even calls themselves "Mehriye" or "those following Mehr." They call themselves this even though their teachings are almost the exact opposite of those of the Mithrâists. The Magi tradition and the rituals described in the Magi Sanctuary or "Deyr e Moghân" belong to the religion of this Mithrâ rather than the religion established by prophet Zarathushtrâ.

The sacred book of Gâthâ is a guide to what the core teachings of Zarathushtrâ might have been like. The present day religion of the Zoroastrians is a fascinating mix of the teachings of Zarathushtrâ with elements of Mithrâism and Manichaeism. I consider this religion in its present form of great value and find myself often in opposition to persons and groups who want to purge it into an intellectual but sterile religion of the mind only. Mithrâ as a god of Love and Contract is an Archetype and a manifestation of Ahurâ Mazdâ that represents all of the male energies. Ânâhitâ on the other hand represents all of the female

energies and feminine forces in nature. Like the Yin and Yang of the Tao religion, Mehr and Nâhid are present in every fiber of the cosmos, dancing with one another and thereby moving the universe forward toward perfection and immortality. These two forces are "Getig" or of the Physical realm and very different from the twin mental forces of Vohu Manah and Angra Mainyu that are in constant battle with one another in the "Menog" or Mental realm.

As a concept, Ahurâ Mazdâ and the laws of Ashâ are so vast that the average human mortal may have a hard time striking a bargain and a personal rapport with them. This is where the Archetypes in form of the Izadân and Ameshâsepandân become important. They animate and make different aspects of Godhead more tangible for believers. If a soldier were going into mortal combat, it would be hard for him to try and strike a bargain with Ashâ and beg it for help. Ashâ is so vast that to ask a favor of it would be like asking the force of gravity for help in a hard phase of life. In that mortal combat, the soldier needs all of his masculine and warlike energies, and so he asks Mithrâ for help. A woman going through childbirth may find herself in a similar hard spot. As she needs to come into grips with all her feminine strengths and energies, she can ask Ânâhitâ for favors and help. These archetypes are needed in an old and functioning religion and without them the religion would become no better than a textbook in philosophy and ethics. These elements animate and give life force to a religion while the books of philosophy and ethics gather dust in libraries.

We are entering a new era of understanding in the twenty-first century; the ancient heritages of man are shaking away the dust of prejudice and neglect that eclipsed their grandeur for the past two Millennia. We of Iranian background have in our ancient culture elements that rival anything that Greece and Rome has offered to the heritage of man. It would be a shame if a few with a narrow understanding of what a full-bodied culture is succeed in hijacking our chance of proper self discovery and tie our hands with their limited views. More than ever, we need persons with broad worldviews such as Joseph Campbell to take the helm of analyzing our civilization and guiding our youth rather than persons similar in mentality to Billy Graham. May it be so, "Eydoon bâd".

Mehr Afzoon