

# THE DISSEMINATION OF MITHRAISM IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE.<sup>1</sup>

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[CONTINUED.]

OF all countries Germany is that in which the greatest number of Mithraeums, or places of Mithraic worship, has been discovered. Germany has given us the bas-reliefs having the greatest



MITHRA MONUMENT OF OSTBURKEN.<sup>1</sup>

Discovered in 1861 near the ruins of a Roman fort, in the Odenwald, Hesse. (Cumont, III., p. 350.)

dimensions and furnishing the most complete representations, and certainly no god of paganism ever found in this nation as many enthusiastic devotees as Mithra. The *Agri decumates*, a strip of land lying on the right bank of the Rhine and forming the military confines of the empire, together with the advance posts of the Roman military system between the river Main and the fortified walls of the *limes*, have been marvellously fertile in discoveries. North of Frankfort, near the village of Heddernheim,<sup>2</sup> the ancient *civitas Taunensium*, three important temples have been successively ex-

humed; three others existed in Friedberg in Hesse and two more have been dug out in the surrounding country. On the other side, along the entire course of the Rhine, from Augst (Raurica) near Basel as far as Xanten (Vetera), passing through Strassburg, May-

<sup>1</sup> Extracted by the author from his *Textes et Monuments figurés relatifs aux Mystères de Mithra* (Brussels: H. Lamertin). Translated by T. J. McCormack.

<sup>2</sup> See the Frontispiece to this number of *The Open Court*.

ence, Neuwied, Bonn, Cologne, and Dormagen, a series of monuments have been found which show clearly the manner in which the new faith spread like an epidemic, and was disseminated into the very heart of the barbarous tribes of the Ubians and Batavians.

The influence of Mithraism among the troops massed along the Rhenish frontier also accounts for the extension of this religion into the interior of Gaul. A soldier of the eighth legion dedicated an altar to the *Deo Invicto* at Geneva, which lay on the military road from Germany to the Mediterranean, and other traces of the



BAS-RELIEF OF NEUENHEIM.<sup>1</sup>

Oriental cult have been found in modern Switzerland and the French Jura. In Sarrebourg (*Pons Saravi*) at the mouth of the pass leading from the Vosges Mountains, by which Strassburg

<sup>1</sup>The monument which has escaped the fate of mutilation by the hands of fanatics, was discovered in 1838 in a cave near Neuenheim, on the southern slope of the Heiligenberg, near Heidelberg, by workmen laying the foundation of a farm house. It is interesting because it shows very clearly twelve small bas-reliefs exhibiting scenes from the life of Mithras, beginning with his birth from the rocks on the top of the left border, passing over to the right side where he catches the bull, carrying him to the cave so as not to show the footprints of his hoofs, and ending on the top border, where his ascent to Ahura Mazda is represented. Some of the scenes have not yet been explained satisfactorily. Of interest is the second one, in which Ahura Mazda hands to Mithras the scepter of the government over the world.

communicated and still communicates with the basins of the Mosel and the Seine, a *spelæum* has recently been exhumed that dates from the third century; another, of which the principal bas-relief carved from the living rock still subsists to our day, existed at Schwarzerden, between Metz and Mayence. It would be surprising that the large city of Treves, the regular residence of the Roman military commanders, has preserved only some débris of inscriptions and statues, did not the important rôle which this city played under the successors of Constantine explain the almost total disappearance of the monuments of paganism. Finally, in the valley of the Meuse, not far from the route that joins Cologne with Bavay (*Bagacum*), some curious remains of the Mysteries have been discovered.

From Bavay, this route leads to Boulogne (*Gesoriacum*), the naval basis of the *classis Britannica* or Britannic fleet. The statues of the two dadophors, or torch-bearers, which have been found here and were certainly chiselled on the spot, were doubtless offered to the god by some foreign mariner or officer of the fleet. It was the object of this important naval station to keep in daily touch with the great island that lay opposite, and especially with London, which even at this epoch was visited by numerous ships. The existence of a Mithræum in this principal commercial and military depot of Britain should not surprise us. Generally speaking, the Iranian cult was in no country so completely restricted to fortified places as in Britain. Outside of York (*Eburacum*), where the headquarters of the troops of the province were situated, it was disseminated only in the west of the country, at Caërleon (*Isca*) and at Chester (*Deva*), where camps had been established to repel the inroads of the Gallic tribes of the Silures and the Ordovices; and finally in the northern outskirts of the country along the wall of Hadrian, which protected the territory of the empire from the incursions of the Picts and the Caledonians. All the stations of this line of ramparts appear to have had their Mithraic temple, where the commander of the place (*præfectus*) furnished the model of devotion for his subordinates. It is evident, therefore, that the Asiatic god had penetrated in the train of the army to these northern regions, but it is impossible to determine precisely the period at which it reached this place or the troops by whom it was carried there. But there is reason for believing that Mithra was worshipped in these countries from the middle of the second century, and that Germany served as the intermediary agent between the far Orient

"*Et pœnitus toto divisos orbe Britannos.*"

At the other extremity of the Roman world the Mysteries were likewise celebrated by soldiers. They had their adepts in the third legion encamped at Lambæse and in the posts that guarded the defiles of the Aurasian Mountains or that dotted the frontiers of the Sahara Desert. Nevertheless, they do not appear to have been as popular to the south of the Mediterranean as in the countries to the north, and their propagation has assumed here a special character. Their monuments, nearly all of which date from later epochs, are due to the officers, or at least to the centurions, many of whom were of foreign origin, rather than to the simple soldiers, nearly all of whom were levied in the country which they were charged to defend. The legionaries of Numidia remained faithful to their indigenous gods, who were either Punic or Berber in origin, and only rarely adopted the beliefs of the companions with whom their vocation of arms had thrown them in contact. Apparently, therefore, the Persian religion was practised in Africa almost exclusively by those whom military service had called to these countries from abroad; and the bands of the faithful were composed for the most part, if not of Asiatics, at least of recruits drawn from the Danubian provinces. Finally, in Spain, the country of the Occident which is poorest in Mithraic monuments, the connection of their presence with that of the garrisons is no less manifest. Throughout the entire extent of this vast peninsula, in which so many populous cities were crowded together, they are almost totally lacking, even in the largest centers of urban population. Scarcely the faintest vestige of an inscription is found in Emerita and Tarraco, the capitals of Lusitania and Tarraconensis. But in the uncivilised valleys of Asturias and Gallæcia the Iranian god had an organised cult. This fact will be immediately connected with the prolonged sojourn of a Roman legion in this country, which remained so long unsubjugated. Perhaps the conventicles of the initiated also included veterans of the Spanish cohorts who, after having served as auxiliaries on the Rhine and the Danube, returned to their hearths converted to the Mazdean faith.

The army thus united under the same fold citizens, emigrants, and adventurers from all parts of the world; kept up an incessant interchange of officers and centurions and even of entire army-corps from one province to another, according to the varying needs of the day; in fine, threw out to the remotest frontiers of the Roman world a net of perpetual communications. Yet this was not the only way in which the military system contributed to the dissemination of Oriental religions. After the expiration of their term



of service, the soldiers continued in their places of retirement the practices to which they had become accustomed under the standards of the army; and they soon evoked in their new environment numerous imitators. Frequently they settled in the neighborhood of their latest station, in the little towns which had gradually replaced in the neighborhood of the military camps the shops of the sutlers. At times, too, they would choose their home in some large city of the country where they had served, to pass there with their old comrades in arms the remainder of their days. Lyons always sheltered within its walls a large number of these veteran legionaries of the German army, and the only Mithraic inscription that London has furnished us was written by a soldier emeritus of the troops of Britain. It was customary also for the emperor to send discharged soldiers to some region where a colony was to be founded; Elusa in Aquitania was probably made acquainted with the Asiatic cult by Rhenish veterans which Septimius Severus established in this region. Frequently, the conscripts whom the military authorities transported to the confines of the empire retained at heart their love for their native country, with which they never ceased to sustain relations; but when, after twenty or twenty-five years of struggle and combat, they returned to their native land, they preferred to the gods of their own city or tribe, the foreign deity whose mysterious worship some military comrade had taught them in distant lands.

Nevertheless, the propagation of Mithraism in the towns and country districts of the provinces in which no armies were stationed was due in great measure to other agencies. By her continued conquests in Asia, Rome had subjected to her domination numerous Semitic provinces. After the founding of the empire had assured peace to the entire Roman world and permanently insured the safety of commerce, these new subjects, profiting by the special aptitudes of their race, could be seen gradually concentrating in their hands the entire traffic of the Levant. As the Phœnicians and Carthaginians formerly, so now the Syrians populated with their colonies all the shores of the Mediterranean. In the Hellenic epoch they had established themselves in the commercial centers of Greece, and notably at Delos. A number of these merchants now flocked to the vicinity of Rome, settling at Pozzuoli and at Ostia. They appear to have carried on business in all the maritime cities of the Occident. They are found in Italy at Ravenna, Aquileja, and Tergeste; at Salonæ in Dalmatia, and as far distant as Malaga in Spain. Their mercantile activity even led them into

the distant interior of these countries at every point where there was the least prospect of profit. In the valley of the Danube they penetrated as far as Sarmizegetusa and Apulum in Dacia, and as far as Sirmium in Pannonia. In Gaul, this Oriental population was particularly dense. They reached Bordeaux by the Gironde and ascended the Rhone as far as Lyons. After occupying the banks of this river, they flocked into the interior of the province, and Treves, the great capital of the north, attracted them in hordes. They literally filled, as St. Jerome puts it, the Roman world. Even the later invasions of the barbarians were impotent to dampen their spirit of enterprise. Under the Merovingians they still spoke their Semitic idiom at Orleans. Their emigration was only checked when the Saracens shattered the navigation of the Mediterranean.

The Syrians were distinguished in all epochs by their ardent zeal. No people, not even the Egyptians, defended their ideals with such great pertinacity against the Christians. So, when they founded a colony, their first care was to organise their national cults, and the mother country frequently allowed them generous subsidies toward the performance of this pious duty. It was in this manner that the deities of Heliopolis, of Damascus, and Palmyra first penetrated to Italy.

The word *Syrian* had in popular usage a very vague significance. This word, which was an abbreviation of *Assyrian*, was frequently confounded with it, and served to designate generally all the Semitic populations anciently subject to the kings of Nineveh, as far east as, and even beyond, the Euphrates. It embraced, therefore, the sectaries of Mithra established in the valley of this river; and as Rome extended her conquest in this quarter, the worshippers of the Persian god necessarily became more and more numerous among the "Syrians" who dwelt in the Latin cities.

Nevertheless, the majority of the merchants that founded the commercial houses of the Occident were servitors of the Semitic Baals, and those who invoked Mithra were generally Asiatics in humbler conditions of life. The first temples which this god possessed in the west of the empire were without doubt mainly frequented by slaves. The *mangones*, or slave mongers, procured their human merchandise preferably from the provinces of the Orient. From the depths of Asia Minor they drove to Rome hordes of slaves purchased from the great landed proprietors of Cappadocia and of Pontus; and this imported population, as one ancient writer has put it, ultimately came to form distinct towns or quar-

ters in the great capital. But the supply did not suffice for the increasing consumption of depopulated Italy.

War also was a mighty purveyor of human chattels. When we remember that Titus, in a single campaign in Judæa, reduced to slavery 90,000 Jews, our imagination becomes appalled at the multitudes of captives that the incessant struggles with the Parthians, and particularly the conquests of Trajan, must have thrown on the markets of the Occident.

But whether taken *en masse* after some great victory, or acquired singly by the regular traffickers in human flesh, these slaves were particularly numerous in the maritime towns, to which their transportation was cheap and easy. They introduced here, concurrently with the Syrian merchants, the Oriental cults and particularly that of Mithra. This last-named god has been found established in an entire series of ports on the Mediterranean. We signalise above all his presence at Sidon in Phœnicia and at Alexandria in Egypt. In Italy, if Pozzuoli and its environs, including Naples, have furnished relatively few monuments of the Mysteries, the reason is that this city had ceased in the second century to be the great *entrepôt* from which Rome derived its supplies from the Levant. The Tyrian colony of Pozzuoli, at one time wealthy and powerful, complains in the year 172 A. D. of being reduced to a small settlement. After the immense structures of Claudius and Trajan were erected at Ostia, this latter city inherited the prosperity of its Campagnian rival; and the result was that all the Asiatic religions soon had here their chapels and their congregations of devotees. Yet none enjoyed greater favor than that of the Iranian god. In the second century, at least four or five *spelæa* had been dedicated to him. One of them, constructed at the latest in 162 A. D., and communicating with the baths of Antonine, was situated on the very spot where the foreign ships landed, and another one adjoined the *Metreon*, or sanctuary in which the official cult of the *Magna Mater* was celebrated. To the south the little hamlet of Antium (Porto d'Anzio) had followed the example of its powerful neighbor; while in Etruria, Rusellæ (Grosseto) and Pisæ likewise accorded a favorable reception to the Mazdean deity.

In the east of Italy, Aquileja is distinguished for the number of its Mithraic inscriptions. As Trieste to-day, so Aquileja in antiquity was the market in which the Danubian provinces exchanged their products for those of the South. Pola, at the extremity of Istria, the islands of Arba and Brattia, and the sea-ports of the coast of Dalmatia, Senia, Iader, Salonæ, Naronæ, Epidaurus, in-

cluding Dyrrachium in Macedonia, have all preserved more or less numerous and indubitable vestiges of the influence of the invincible god, and distinctly mark the path which he followed in his journey to the commercial metropolis of the Adriatic.

His progress may also be followed in the western Mediterranean. In Sicily at Syracuse and Palermo, on the coast of Africa at Carthage, Rusicada, Icosium, Cæsarea, on the opposite shores of Spain at Malaga and Tarraco, Mithraic associations were successively formed in the motley population which the sea had carried to these cities. And farther to the north, on the Gulf of Lyons, the proud Roman colony of Narbonne doffed its exclusiveness in his favor.

In Gaul, especially, the correlation which we have discovered between the spread of the Mysteries and the extension of Oriental traffic is striking. Both were principally concentrated between the Alps and the Cévennes, or to be more precise, in the basin of the Rhone, the course of which had been the main route of its penetration. Sextantio, near Montpellier, has given us the epitaph of a *pater sacrorum*, and Aix in the Provence a presumably Mithraic representation of the sun on his *quadrigium*. Then, ascending the river, we find at Arles a statue of the lion-headed Kronos who was worshipped in the Mysteries; at Bourg-Saint-Andéol, near Montélimar, a representation of the tauroctonous god sculptured from the living rock near a spring; at Vaison, not far from Orange, a dedicatory inscription made on the occasion of an initiation; at Vienne, a *spelæum* from which, among other monuments, has been obtained the most unique bas-relief hitherto discovered. Finally, at Lyons, which is known from the history of Christianity to have had direct relations with Asia Minor, the success of the Persian religion was certainly considerable. Farther up the river, its presence has been proved at Geneva on the one hand and at Besançon and Mandeure on the Doubs, a branch of the Saone, on the other. An unbroken series of sanctuaries which were without doubt in constant communication with one another thus bound together the shores of the great inland sea and the camps of Germany.

Sallying forth from the flourishing cities of the valley of the Rhone, the foreign cult crept even into the depths of the mountains of Dauphiny, Savoy, and Bugey. Labâtie near Gap, Lucey not far from Belley, and Vieu-en-Val Romey have preserved for us inscriptions, temples, and statues dedicated by the faithful. As we have said, the Oriental merchants did not restrict their activity to establishing agencies in the maritime and river ports; the hope of



more lucrative trade attracted them to the villages of the interior, where competition was less active. The dispersion of the Asiatic slaves was even more complete. Scarcely had they disembarked from their ships, when they were scattered haphazard in every direction by the auctions, and we find them in all the different countries discharging the most diverse functions.

In Italy, a country of great estates and ancient municipalities, either they went to swell the armies of slaves who were tilling the vast domains of the Roman aristocracy, or they were afterwards promoted to the rank of superintendents (*actor, villicus*) and became the masters of those whose miserable lot they had formerly shared. Sometimes they were acquired by some municipality, and as public servants (*servi publici*) they executed the orders of the magistrates or entered the bureaus of the administrations. It is difficult to realise the rapidity with which the Oriental religions were thus able to penetrate the regions which it would appear they could never possibly have attained. A double inscription at Nersæ, in the heart of the Apennines, informs us that in the year 172 of our era a slave, the treasurer of the town, had restored a Mithraeum that had fallen in ruins. At Venusia, a Greek inscription Ἡλιῶ Μίθρα was dedicated by the steward of some wealthy burgher, and his name Sargaris at once proves his servile rank and Asiatic origin. The examples could be multiplied. There is not a shadow of a doubt but these obscure servitors of the foreign god were the most active agents in the propagation of the Mysteries, not only within the limits of the city of Rome itself, and in the other great cities of the country, but throughout the entire extent of Italy, from Calabria to the Alps. We find the Iranian cult practised at Grumentum, in the heart of Lucania; then, as we have already said, at Venusia in Apulia, and at Nersæ in the country of the Æqui, also at Aveia in the land of the Vestini; then in Umbria, along the Flaminian road, at Interamna, at Spoletum, where one can visit a *spelæum* decorated with paintings, and at Sentinum, where there has been discovered a list of the patrons of a *collegium* of Mithraists; likewise, in Etruria this religion followed the Casian way and established itself at Sutrium, at Bolsene, and perhaps at Arretium and at Florence. Its traces are no less well marked and significant to the north of the Apennines. They appear only sporadically in Emilia, where the provinces of Bologne and Modena alone have preserved some interesting *debris*, as they do also in the fertile valley of the Po. Here Milan, which rapidly grew to prosperity under the empire, appears to be the only locality in

which the exotic religion enjoyed great favor and official protection. Some fragments of inscriptions exhumed at Tortona, Industria, and Novara are insufficient to prove that it attained in the remainder of the country any wide-spread diffusion.

It is certainly remarkable that we have unearthed far richer booty in the wild defiles of the Alps than in the opulent plains of upper Italy. At Introbio, in the Val Sassina, to the east of Lake Como, in the Val Camonica, watered by the river Oglio, altars were dedicated to the invincible god. But the monuments which were consecrated to him specially abound along the river Adige (Etsch) and its tributaries, near the grand causeway which led in antiquity as it does to-day over the Brenner pass and Puster-Thal to the northern slope of the Alps in Rhætia and Noricum. At Trent, there is a Mithræum built near a cascade; near San-Zeno, bas-reliefs have been found in the rocky gorges; at Castello di Tuenno, fragments of votive tablets have been unearthed with both faces carved; on the banks of the Eisack, there has been found a dedicatory inscription to Mithra and to the sun; and Mauls finally has given us the celebrated sculptured plaque discovered in the sixteenth century and now in the museum at Vienna.

The progress of Mithraism in this mountainous district was not checked at the frontiers of Italy. If, pursuing our way through the valley of the Drave, we seek for the vestiges which it left in this region, we shall immediately discover them at Teurnia and especially at Virunum, the largest city of Noricum, in which in the third century at least two temples had been opened to the initiated. A third one was erected not far from the same place in a grotto in the midst of the forest.

The city of Aquileja was undoubtedly the religious metropolis of this Roman colony, and its important church proselytised much in all this district. The cities that sprang up along the routes leading from this port across Pannonia to the military strongholds on the Danube almost without exception favorably received the foreign god: they were Æmona, the Latovici, Neviodunum, and principally Siscia, on the course of the Save; and then toward the north Adrans, Celeia, Poetovio, received him with equal favor. In this manner, his devotees who were journeying from the shores of the Adriatic to Mæsia, on the one hand, or to Carnuntum on the other, could be received at every stage of their journey by co-religionists.

In these regions, as in the countries south of the Alps, Oriental slaves acted as the missionaries of Mithra. But the condi-

tions under which their propaganda was conducted were considerably different. These slaves were not employed in this country as they were in the *latifundia* and the cities of Italy, as agricultural laborers, or stewards of wealthy land-owners, or municipal employes. Depopulation had not created such havoc here as in the countries of the old civilisation, and people were not obliged to resort to foreign hands for the cultivation of their fields or the administration of their cities. It was not individuals or municipalities, but the state itself, that was here the great importer of human beings. The procurators, the officers of the treasury, the officers of the imperial domains, or as in Noricum the governors themselves, had under their orders a multitude of collectors of taxes, of treasurers, and clerks of all kinds, scattered over the territory which they administered; and as a rule these subaltern officers were not of free birth. Likewise, the great *entrepreneurs* who leased the products of the mines and the quarries, or the customs returns, employed for the execution of their projects a numerous staff of functionaries, both hired and slave. From people of this class, who were either agents of the emperor or publicans whom he appointed to represent him, are those whose titles recur most frequently in the Mithraic inscriptions of southern Pannonia and Noricum.

In all the provinces, the lowly employees of the imperial service played a considerable part in the diffusion of foreign religions. Just as these officers of the central power were representatives of the political unity of the empire in contrast with its regional particularism, so also they were the apostles of the universal religion as opposed to the local cults. They formed, as it were, a second army under the orders of their prince, and their influence on the evolution of paganism was analogous to that of the army proper. Like the soldiers, they too were recruited in great numbers from the Asiatic countries; like them, they too were perpetually changing their residence as they were promoted in station; and the lists of their bureaus, like those of the legions, comprised individuals of all nationalities.

Thus, the imperial administration transferred from one government to another, along with its clerks and quartermasters, a knowledge of the Mithraic Mysteries. A characteristic discovery made at Cæsarea in Cappadocia tells us in very good Latin that a slave, probably of indigenous origin, an *arcarius dispensatoris Augusti* (a clerk of the imperial treasury), offers an image of the sun to Mithra. In the interior of Dalmatia, where the monuments of the Persian god are rather sparsely scattered for the reason that this province

was early stripped of its legions, employees of the treasury, the postal and the customs service, left nevertheless their names on some inscriptions. In the frontier provinces especially, the financial agents of the Cæsars must have been numerous, not only because the import duties on merchandise had to be collected here, but because the heaviest drain on the imperial treasuries was the cost of maintaining the army. It is therefore natural to find cashiers, tax-gatherers, and revenue-collectors (*dispensatores, exactores, procuratores*), and other similar titles mentioned in the Mithraic texts of Dacia and Africa.

Here, therefore, is the second way in which the Iranian god penetrated to the towns adjoining the military camps, where, as we have seen, he was worshipped by the Oriental soldiers. The general domestic service, as well as the political functions, of these administrators and officers, was the cause of the transportation of public and private slaves to all garrisons; while the constantly renewed needs of the multitudes here assembled attracted to these points merchants and traders from all parts of the world. Then again, as we have pointed out, the veterans themselves afterwards settled in the ports and the large cities, where they were thrown in contact with merchants and slaves. In affirming categorically that Mithra was introduced in this or that manner in a certain region, our generalisation manifestly cannot lay claim to absolute exactitude. The concurrent causes of the spread of the Mysteries are so intermingled and intertwined, that it would be a futile task to attempt to unravel strand by strand the fibres of this entangled snarl. Having as our sole guide, as we frequently do, inscriptions of uncertain date, on which by the side of the name of the god appears simply that of an initiate or priest, it is impossible to determine in each single case the circumstances which have fostered the progress of the new religion. The more fleeting influences are almost absolutely removed from our ken. On the accession of Vespasian, did the prolonged sojourn in Italy of Syrian troops who were faithful worshippers of the sun have any durable result? Did the army which Alexander Severus conducted into Germany, and which, as Lampridius has recorded, was *potentissima per Armenios et Osrhænos et Parthos* (viz., very largely composed of Armenians, Osrhænians, and Parthians), impart a new impulse to the Mithraic propaganda on the banks of the Rhine? Did any of the high functionaries that Rome sent annually to the frontier of the Euphrates embrace the beliefs of the people over whom they ruled? Did priests from Cappadocia or Pontus ever embark for the Occident after the manner

of the missionaries of the Syrian goddess, in the expectation of wresting there a livelihood from the credulity of the masses? Even under the republic Chaldean astrologists roamed the great causeways of Italy, and in the time of Juvenal the soothsayers of Commagene and Armenia vended their oracles in Rome. These subsidiary methods of propagation, which were generally resorted to by the Oriental religions, may also have been put to profitable use by the disseminators of Mithraism; but the most active agents of its diffusion were undoubtedly the soldiers, the slaves, and the merchants. Apart from the detailed proofs already adduced, the presence of Mithraic monuments in places where war and commerce were constantly conducted, and in the countries where the vast current of Asiatic emigration was discharged, is sufficient to establish our hypothesis.

The absence of these monuments in other regions is also clear proof of our position. Why are no vestiges of the Persian Mysteries found in Asia, in Bithynia, in Galatia, in the provinces adjoining those where they were practised for centuries? Because the production of these countries exceeded their consumption, because their foreign commerce was in the hands of Greek ship-owners, because they exported men instead of importing them, and because from the time of Vespasian at least no legion was charged with the defence or surveillance of their territory. Greece was protected from the invasion of foreign gods by its national pride, by its worship of its glorious past, which is the most characteristic trait of the Grecian spirit under the empire. But the absence of foreign soldiers and slaves also deprived it of the least occasion of lapsing from its national religion. Lastly, Mithraic monuments are almost completely missing in the central and western parts of Gaul, in the Spanish peninsula, and in the south of Britain, and they are rare even in the interior of Dalmatia. In these places also no permanent army was stationed; there was consequently no importation of Asiatics; while there was also in these countries no great center of international commerce to attract them.

On the other hand, the city of Rome is especially rich in discoveries of all kinds, more so in fact than any of the provinces. In fact, Mithra found in no other part of the empire conditions so eminently favorable to the success of his religion. Rome always had a large garrison made up of soldiers drawn from all parts of the empire, and the veterans of the army, after having been honorably discharged, flocked thither in great numbers to spend the remainder of their days. An opulent aristocracy resided here, and



their palaces, like those of the emperor, were filled with thousands of Oriental slaves. It was the seat of the central imperial administration, the official slaves of which thronged its bureaus. Finally, all whom the spirit of adventure, or disaster, had driven hither in search of fame and fortune flocked to this "caravansary of the universe," and carried thither their customs and their religions. Collaterally, the presence in Rome of numbers of Asiatic princelings, who lived there, either as hostages or fugitives, with their families and retinues, also abetted the propagation of the Mazdean faith.

Like the majority of the foreign gods, Mithra undoubtedly had his first temples outside of the *pomoerium*, or limits. Many of his monuments have been discovered beyond these boundaries, especially in the vicinity of the prætorian camp; but before the year 181 A. D. he had overleaped the sacred barriers and established himself in the heart of the city. It is unfortunately impossible to follow step by step his progress in the vast metropolis. Records of exact date and indubitable origin are too scarce to justify us in reconstructing the local history of the Persian religion in Rome. We can only determine in a general way the high degree of splendor which it attained there. Its vogue is attested by a hundred or more inscriptions, by more than seventy-five fragments of sculpture, and by a series of temples and chapels situated in all parts of the city and its environs. The most justly celebrated of these *spelæa* is the one that still existed during the Renaissance in a cave of the Capitol, and from which the grand Borghesi bas-relief now in the Louvre was taken. (See the illustration on page 204 of the April *Open Court*.) To all appearances, this monument dates from the end of the second century.

It was at this period that Mithra came forth from the partial obscurity in which he had hitherto lived, to become one of the favorite gods of the Roman aristocracy and the imperial court. We have seen him arrive from the Orient a despised deity of the deported or emigrant Asiatics. It is certain that he achieved his first conquests among the lower classes of society, and it is an important fact that Mithraism long remained the religion of the lowly. The most ancient inscriptions are eloquent evidence of the truth of this assertion, for they emanated without exception from slaves or freedmen, from soldiers active or retired. But the high destinies to which freedmen were permitted to aspire under the empire are well known; while the sons of veterans or of centurions not infrequently became citizens of wealth and influence. Thus, by a natural evolution the religion transplanted to Latin soil was bound

to wax great in wealth as well as in influence, and soon to count among its sectaries influential functionaries at the capital, and church and town dignitaries in the municipalities. Under the Antonines, literary men and philosophers began to grow interested in the dogmas and rites of this Oriental cult. The wit Lucian parodied their ceremonies; and in 177 A. D. Celsus in his *Truc Discourse* undoubtedly pits its doctrines against those of Christianity. About the same period a certain Pallas devoted to Mithraism a special work, and Porphyry cites a certain Eubulus who had published *Mithraic Researches* in several books. If this literature were not irrevocably lost to us, we should doubtless re-read in its pages the story of the Roman armies, both officers and soldiers, passing over to the faith of the hereditary enemies of the empire, and of great lords converted by the slaves of their own establishments. The monuments frequently mention the names of slaves beside those of freemen, and sometimes it is the former that have attained the highest rank among the initiates. In these societies, the last frequently became the first, and the first the last,—to all appearances at least.

One capital result emerges from the detailed facts which we have adduced: It is that the spread of the Persian Mysteries must have taken place with extreme rapidity. With the suddenness of the flash of a train of gunpowder, they make their appearance almost simultaneously in countries far removed from one another: in Rome, at Carnuntum on the Danube, and in the *Agri decumates*. Manifestly, this reformed church of Mazdaism exercised on the society of the second century a powerful fascination, of which today we can only imperfectly ascertain the causes.

But to the natural allurements which drew crowds to the feet of the tauroctonous god was added an extrinsic element of the highest efficacy: the imperial favor. Lampridius informs us that Commodus was initiated into the Mysteries and took part in the bloody ceremonies of its liturgy, and the inscriptions prove that this condescension of the monarch toward the priests of Mithra created an immense stir in the Roman world, and told enormously in favor of the Persian religion. From this moment the exalted dignitaries of the empire are seen to follow the example of their sovereign and to become zealous cultivators of the Iranian cult. Tribunes, prefects, legates, and later *perfectissimi* and *clarissimi*, are frequently mentioned as authors of the votive inscriptions; and until the downfall of paganism the aristocracy remained attached to the solar god that had so long enjoyed the favor of

princes. But to understand the political and moral motives of the kindly reception which these dignitaries accorded to the new faith, it will be necessary to expound the Mithraic doctrines concerning the sovereign power and their connection with the theocratic claims of the Cæsars. This we shall do in a forthcoming article.