

# Mythological Motifs in the Tauroctony Sculpture

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## Abstract

This article is a follow-up to a previous article on astronomical hypotheses in the Roman mysteries of Mithras. In my earlier article, I suggested that the tauroctony symbology was not a map entirely derived from astronomical theology, and perhaps non-astrological mythological symbols and narratives are also deployed. In this article, I have surveyed the most important myths related to tauroctony in the Indo-European regions, and by utilizing library data, I have considered the hypotheses put forward by modern Mithra researchers in accounting for the motifs and mythological symbols of the tauroctony sculpture. I conclude that, as per the well-established Roman practice, the sculpture of Roman tauroctony does not only narrate one myth but compared to the previous myths, it narrates at least three tauroctony myths, borrowing symbols from each of them. The first is the myth of Gilgamesh's battle with, and slaughter of, the Bull of Heaven; the second is the slaying of the Hadyusha by Saoshyanet; and the third is the myth of the Gavaevodata. Moreover, in the part about Mithra's fight with the bull and its hunt, there are similarities with the myth of Hercules's battle with the Cretan bull.

**Keywords:** Mithras, Mithraism, tauroctony, Taurobolium, Symbolism, Myth.

## Introduction

Ancient and symbolic human thought is partly characterized by the ability to think in abstract, symbolic, and mythological ways. Some thinkers in ancient civilizations coded and symbolized their words and ideas to preserve them in various written and pictorial bodies. In a sense, the formation of these signs, pictorial symbols, and communication codes in myths resulted from convergence of the thoughts of who who systematized mysterious circles in different ways and diverse societies. However, it is natural for symbols to migrate through cultural communication between different nations, during which the basic and original concepts of each symbol may take on a different function and form. It is also possible that the layers of meaning in myths will find new meanings from one generation to another, even in new homelands, and the concepts of the past will remain hidden in the thoughts of the narrator's fathers.

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With the end of the myth writing era, readers in the subsequent periods started to decipher and explore the layers of meaning in those codes. Without a doubt, understanding each symbol and having knowledge about the cultures, religions, and supernatural beliefs of the people of the mythological era formed the foundation of their research.

Researchers of the modern era explored the concepts of myths and rituals using three approaches: linguistic, structural, and psychological. Jung proposed the theory of archetypes as symbols that are present in the collective unconscious of humans and as universal and ancient concepts of human behavioral representations. Although the archetypes of different cultures are diverse, it is possible to achieve a comprehensive list of common archetypes that are constantly repeated in literature, art, or mythology of different nations. Campbell took this theory to the extreme, considering the numerous myths of nations to be only one myth, which he called "*Hero's Journey*."

The prominent presence of animals in mythology is highly significant, particularly that of sacred animals like the first bull, which as a common archetype and as representative of an eternal force, voluntarily descended to the material world to be sacrificed for the salvation of its fellow beings and then return to the immaterial world after death during the resurrection.

## Research Method

The present research is a fundamental study, which contributes to the latest research on Mithra and Mithraic mythology. The method of this research is theoretically based on collecting information from library sources.

## Literature Review

Franz Cumont published his two-volume documentary *Textes et monuments figurés relatifs aux mystères de Mithra* in 1896 and 1899. He collected a detailed index of literary, historical, and archaeological shreds of evidence about Roman Mithraism in one volume and described them in another one. Moreover, he was the first scholar who presented a mythological interpretation of the central image of Mithraic mysteries, namely tauroctony, arguing that it was derived from the Iranian myth of the Gavaevodata. Some Mithraic researchers such as I. Gerschvitch, M. J. Vermaseren, H. Koepf, G. Widengren, R.C. Zaehner, R. Merkelbach, L. Campbell, S. Wikander, R. Turcan, E.t Will, C. Colpe, E. Schwertheim, M. Boyce, M. Nilsson, M. Clauss, W. Liebeschuetz, B. Jacobs, and H. M. Jackson also considered the same myth *mutatis mutandis*, but they offered alternative accounts of the historical origin of archaeological symbols. J. Hinnells and R. L. Gordon were the first to challenge Cumont's mythic interpretation at the First International Congress of Mithraic Studies at the University of Manchester in 1971, but they did not propose an alternative

mythic interpretation. W. Lentz, A. Deman, and U. Bianchi also followed the school of Hinnells and Gordon. F. Saxl and D. Ulansey were among the first to propose alternative myths such as the myth of the sacrifice of the Greek Nike (Roman Victoria) and the myth of the battle of Perseus and the Gorgon Medusa.

### **Varieties of Tauroctony Myths**

Each of the eight motifs associated with Mithras in tauroctony, i.e. Bull, Scorpion, Dog, Snake, Raven, Lion, Cup, and Wheat Ear, has a counterpart in earlier myths. Among these, the most prominent motif is tauroctony or bull slaying. By examining the background and mythological motifs of tauroctony, the way can be paved to discover the meaning of the other motifs and symbols.

Of course, there are some researchers who disagree with the use of the term “sacrifice” about the image of the Mithraic tauroctony. This is because, according to famous Mithraic paintings, the bull-slayer puts his left knee on the bull's back and holds the rear leg of the animal with his right foot, and while pulling the bull's head back, he thrusts a spear into its shoulder. This image does not correspond to any actual sacrificial scene, and the sacrificial custom, especially Olympian sacrifices where the victim's head is pulled back so that the neck can be more easily severed and more blood gushes out. Hence, it is possible to assume that the Mithraic tauroctony depicts the scene of a fight, rather than a sacrifice. Placing one's foot on the back of an animal's knee was an ancient Greek ritual depicted in many scenes, where the conqueror would put his foot on the opponent's foot as a sign of victory before knocking him down (Will 1385 Sh, 583). However, this battle could also be considered a kind of religious sacrifice; that is, an allegorical sacrifice on which the fate and history of the world depend, such as the crucifixion of Jesus, which is technically a form of execution, but religiously, it is a form of sacrifice for the salvation of the mankind (Will 1385 Sh, 584).

From this point of view, the main tauroctony myths in the Indo-European regions, which amount to eleven myths and reports, can be divided into three categories: first, the myths that merely mention the fight with a bull; second, those that mention fight, hunt, and slaying of a bull; and third, those that merely mention the slaying of a bull without mentioning its fight or hunting.

In the first category, two myths stand out: the battle of Devi Mahatmya with the buffalo-faced demon Mahishasura and the battle of Hercules with the Cretan Bull.

In the second category, which contain prominent and more detailed myths, four myths are noteworthy: Gilgamesh and Enkidu with the Bull of Heaven, the battle of Ahriman with the Bull of Gavaevodata, the battle of Theseus with Marathonian Bull; and Mithraic tauroctony.

Finally, in the third category, there are both myths and fragments of historical or religious reports: two myths of the sacrifice of the Roman Victoria (Greek Nike) and the myth of the sacrifice of Soma in the Yajurveda by Mithra, a historical report related to the Roman Taurobolium or Attis in the Cybele sect,

and two religious reports about the bull-slaughter of Zoroaster's enemies in Avesta and the bull-slaying of Saoshyanet before the Frashokereti.

A glance at the above myths and reports can yield the symbols pertaining to the Mithraic tauroctony and provide an answer to the question of which of the ancient myths is closer to the Mithraic image.

### **Two Myths of Fighting with Bulls**

The first tauroctony myth is related to Goddess Devi Mahatmya. After the initial defeat of the gods, when Mahishasura became the ruler of the world, the devas approached Vishnu and Shiva, the greatest among them, for help. They admitted their impotence. From their collective rage emerged Shakti the Supreme Power, the Goddess who engaged in battle against Mahishasura. Possessing the weapons of each deity, she vanquished countless demons and their leaders, but Mahishasura seemed invincible. In his buffalo form, he wreaked havoc among Devi's army. Just as she was about to ensnare him with a lasso, he transformed into a lion. When she tried to strike him down with her sword, he turned into a human form. When Devi attacked him with a bow and arrows, he changed into an elephant. About to be crushed by Devi's mace, he switched back into his original buffalo form. The final battle between Devi and Mahishasura is described in a highly dramatic manner. The Goddess takes on her most fearsome appearance, with bulging eyes reddened by a potent potion and a red tongue protruding from her mouth. Eventually, she beholds the demon with her sword, thus restoring the gods to their realms and ensuring the safety of humanity on the earth (Klostermaier 2007, 92).

The second myth is in the Labors of Hercules. Minos, the mythical king of Crete, sacrificed a bull to gain the favor of Poseidon, one of the twelve Olympian gods. As a sign of approval for his kingdom, Poseidon sent him a bull to sacrifice, but when Minos saw the magnificence of the bull, he did not sacrifice it and killed another bull instead. As punishment for his omission to sacrifice the bull, Poseidon caused Pasiphaë, the wife of Minos, to fall in love with that bull. Minos's wife mated with a bull, and from this intercourse, Minotaur emerged, a monster with a bull's head and a human body. On the other hand, Hercules traveled to the island of Crete to atone for the sin of killing his wife and children and to perform the seventh labor. King Minos gave him full authority to catch this wild bull as soon as possible, as the cattle roamed freely in his fields and destroyed their crops. To capture the bull, Hercules pursued it relentlessly until the animal was exhausted. Then, at just the right moment, he threw a rope around its neck and managed to calm the animal. He then rode the bull back to Athens and presented it to Eurystheus as proof that he had completed another labor of his. Eurystheus wanted to sacrifice the bull for Hera, but Hera, who hated Hercules, refused to sacrifice the bull because that would bring honor and fame to Hercules. She therefore set the bull free in the plains of Greece. Later, the bull reached the Marathon Plain (Grimal 1391 Sh, 1:387; Fiore 2001, 180; Huber 2009, 69).

### **The Four Myths of Fight, Hunting, and Bull Slaying**

First: According to the myth of the battle of Gilgamesh and Enkidu with the Bull of Heaven, having beheaded the guardian of the Cedar forest, Gilgamesh and Enkidu triumphantly marched to Uruk. At this time, Ishtar gazes upon Gilgamesh and implores him to take her as his lover. However, in response to the unkind treatment that she inflicted upon her prior lovers, Gilgamesh denies her request. Ishtar becomes enraged and pleads with her father Anu to send the celestial dragon to vanquish Gilgamesh. However, Gilgamesh vows to cut the bull into pieces and distribute its meat among the poor. Gilgamesh and Enkidu collaborate to slay the Bull of Heaven. While Enkidu maneuvers behind the bull and pulls its tail, Gilgamesh kills it by plunging his sword into the bull's neck. After defeating the bull, Enkidu hurls the bull's right thigh at Ishtar in a gesture of contempt. True to his word, Gilgamesh cuts the bull into pieces and distributes its meat amongst the destitute. Moreover, he offers its horns to the temple of Inanna and its heart to the Sun God, Shamash (Jacobsen 1976, 201; Rouhi 1397 Sh, 201-2).

Second: According to Iranian mythology, Gavaevodata is a bull that Ahura Mazda created in the fifth stage of creation. The bull was white and bright like the moon. Before the attack of Ahreman, Ahura Mazda gave the bull healing medicine to alleviate its discomfort. Despite this, the bull eventually fell ill and passed away. After its death, fifty-five types of grains and twelve types of healing plants grew from the ground. The light and purity that were within the bull's semen grew to the moon. That semen was purified by the light of the moon, and from it two cows emerged: one male and one female. This marked the first of Ahriman's fights with a bull (Afifi 1383 Sh, 598-99).

Third: In the myth of Theseus, it is said that Theseus was tasked with hunting a wild bull known as the Marathon bull. This was the same bull that Hercules had the duty to capture as his seventh labor, but finally refused to sacrifice it, leaving it in the plain of Marathon. Theseus encountered a severe storm on the way to Marathon and sought shelter in a woman's hut. The woman swore that if Theseus succeeded in capturing the bull, she would sacrifice it for Zeus, the god of the heavens. Theseus eventually trapped the bull, but when he returned to the woman's hut, she was dead. Then Theseus took the Marathon bull to Athens and sacrificed it in front of Athena, the patron goddess of the city (Grimal 1391 Sh, 2:885; Mills 1997; 237-41; Richardson 1911, 194).

Fourth: In the main scenes of the Roman Mithraism reliefs, the adventures of Mithra with the bull are depicted. Before killing the bull, Mithra has to capture it, which proves an arduous task for him. Mithra first manages to catch the grazing bull, but the bull drags Mithra after him until the animal is exhausted and Mithra can take it back to the cave, where Mithra is portrayed as a young hero, dressed in a tunic and flying cape. Further, he is always depicted as wearing what is his most characteristic feature, namely the felt hat with a forward-curving peak,

called a Phrygian cap, which in ancient art signified that the person wearing it was oriental. As the bull-slayer, he is always directly atop the bull with his left knee bent and his right leg extended, stabbing the bull in the neck with a short dagger held in his right hand, while with his left hand, he holds up the bull's head. Finally, he is most often shown in the puzzling posture of looking away from the bull as he kills it (Hinnells 1373 Sh, 126; Ulansey 2011, 25).

### **Five Myths and Reports of Bull Sacrifice**

First: In the myth of Nike, the Greek goddess of victory, adopted by the Romans as Victoria, slays a large bull with a knife. She pulls the bull's head back to cut its throat (Mastrocinque 2017, 60).

Second: the main evidence of bull sacrifice is found in the Yajur Veda, cited by Lommel. There, the gods try to extract the sap of the intoxicating plant Soma, the Indian god, which is both a bull and the moon. Indian gods have to squeeze the plant to take the juice of Soma. What emerges from the mythological image is that the gods must kill their partner god, Soma. They ask Mitra to participate in the slaying, but he refuses, since as his name implies (Mitra = friend) he should be a friend of living beings. Ultimately the gods encourage the opposing Mithras to participate in Soma's slaying. Mithra unwittingly sacrifices the bull, which is considered a sacred act. The bull is white and is believed to be identical to the moon. Rain and semen are created from the moon and bull (Merkelbach 1394 Sh, 27-29).

Third: In the Roman Empire, between the second and the fourth centuries, the Taurobolium ceremony refers to the slaying of a bull. After the mid-second century, this ceremony was associated with the worship of Magna Mater, the great mother of the gods, and the Latin name of the Anatolian mother goddess, Cybele. In this Roman ritual, the worshiper would stand in a pit and be drenched in bull's blood, asking for immortality or something similar. Sometimes, the blood of the sacrificial bull was poured over an initiate, who lay in a pit under the bull's blood (McLynn 1996, 312). Three phases of Taurobolium have been reported: the first phase (c. 59-135 AD) in which the ceremony was not related to the Magna Mater ritual; the second phase was extensive (c. 290-159) in the western Adriatic; and the third phase was short (c. 376-390) and limited to aristocratic polytheist circles. The first taurobolium in Italy took place in Pozzuoli in 134 AD, in honor of Venus, as documented by an inscription (Rutter 1968, 227-31).

In the second and third centuries, the taurobolium was commonly used as a measure to indicate the prosperity of the empire or society. By the end of the third and fourth centuries, its usual motive was to purify or regenerate the person who performed the ceremony and was referred to as "one who has been reborn for eternity", while its effect was not eternal and lasted up to twenty years (Showerman 1911, 455). Criobolium, i.e. the sacrifice of a ram instead of a bull, was also sometimes performed together with taurobolium (Showerman 1911, 226).

Fourth: Extreme slaughter of cows and other livestock was one of the disgusting behaviors that prevailed before Zoroaster, which is referenced in Gahan's poems, but Zoroaster fought against this custom. At the very beginning of Gahan, Geush-urvan complains to Ahura Mazda and says he created him, as anger, aggression, impudence, and insolence had overwhelmed him and he had no other refuge except Ahura Mazda, so he asked him to be shown a worthy savior (Yasna 1:29). In fact, one of the reasons for Zoroaster's prophethood is said to be the protection of Geush-urvan (Yasna 8:29). In the subsequent verses, Zoroaster asks Ahura Mazda about the punishment for the evil forces that slay cows (Yasna 31:15). There is a mention of Jamshid and his sinfulness (Yasna 8:32) and we know that one of Jamshid's sins in the sources was feeding beef to people (Merkelbach 1394 Sh, 21). Moreover, in an enigmatic text, Zoroaster speaks of false teachers who corrupt the right education, teaching that the cow and the sun are the worst things that could be seen with the eyes (Yasna 10:32). Lommel believes that this text refers to the tradition of cow slaying prevalent among Mithra worshipers (Merkelbach 1394 Sh, 25). Zoroaster declares that those who take the lives of cows are cursed by Ahura Mazda (Yasna 12:32) and those who diligently take care of cows are considered to be of good character (Yasna 3:33).

Fifth: A narrative that is transmitted to us from Bundahishn recounts two instances of slaying: the first is offered by Saoshyanet and his helpers who offer sacrifices to awaken the dead. They kill Hadayusha's cow and provide a kind of syrup from cow's fat and the white Haoma, giving it to all people to drink. The drink makes people immortal (Bundahishn 226:19; Molé 1395 Sh, 113). It is stated that the savior (Saoshyanet) will sacrifice a white bull in the apocalypse (Merkelbach 1394 Sh, 27).

### **The Closest Image to the Mithraic Tauroctony**

For purposes of comparison, I described the tauroctony myth along with ten other myths and reports. Among the researchers who have studied the image of tauroctony from a mythological point of view, Cumont was the first one who, in search of an ancient counterpart for tauroctony, proposed that it was a Roman reading of the myth of the demon's attack on the cow of Gavaevodata, but the problem was that according to Bundahishn, Ahriman brought down pain, sickness, lust, and sleep on the body of the cow, and before the Ahreman's attack on the cow, Hormazd fed the cow with the curative Mang to reduce its destruction and restlessness (4:52). Thus, the sacred cow is killed by a demonic force, not a divine force of which Mithra is a representative. Cumont himself had pointed out this inconsistency and lack of coherence (Ulansey 2011, 7-8), but no alternative plan was found. A brief reference has been made to the connection between Mithra's slaying and Saoshyanet's slaying (Merkelbach 1394 Sh, 24), but it has not yet been presented as an independent hypothesis.

In addition, Cumont attributed the origin of the creation of the tauroctony image to the school of Pergamum in the second century BC, but researchers did not take his suggestion seriously (Will 1385 Sh, 583).

According to some other researchers, the cow slaying by the goddess of victory, the Greek Nike, is strikingly similar to Mithras's tauroctony, but there is a very important difference here. Nike almost always looks directly at the bull, but Mithras almost always turns away from the bull, which is not usual during the slaying (Ulansey 1991, 30). Others believe that the slayer in this picture is not Nike, but Mithras who is depicted with two wings (Hami 1355 Sh, 74). Of course, there are several paintings with Mithraic tauroctony icons recorded in history with slight differences and there is no particular reason to identify the slayer as Nike, Victoria, or anyone else unless the name of the slayer is mentioned in the text of the painting. In some paintings, the slayer is portrayed as a woman, and perhaps cannot be identified as Mithras, but on the other hand, we must not forget that even a great historian like Herodotus made such a mistake and considered Mithras as a feminine character. According to Merkelbach, perhaps Herodotus thought that Iranians were talking about Mithras, who is praised as a mother goddess in all of Asia Minor and the East (Merkelbach 1394 Sh, 20). According to Merkelbach, this mother goddess is probably the same Magna Mater that was talked about in Taurobolium.

According to some researchers, the original model of the image of the cow-slaying god was the work of an Athenian sculptor who created the image of Athena-Nike on the top of the Acropolis of Athens. This particular gesture of killing a cow was inspired by the Greek context (Will 1385 Sh, 585).

Another group of researchers, such as Saxel and Ulansey, suggest that the scene of the Mithraic tauroctony is derived from the scene of the Gorgon Medusa being killed by Perseus, although there is no sacrificial animal such as a white cow in the latter, and indeed Perseus did not sacrifice Medusa. Rather, Perseus and Medusa were fighting. These two researchers have cited evidence for this similarity and modeling: a piece of astronomical evidence mentioned by Ulansey who suggests that the constellation above the head of Taurus is Perseus (Ulansey 2011, 26) and three other shreds of evidence are as follows: firstly, the cover of Mithras and Perseus in the reports is almost the same; for example, both have Phrygian hats; secondly, Perseus turns away from Medusa when he kills her as Mithras turns away from the sacrificial cow; and thirdly, in Mithraic iconography, a clear analogy is found for the Gorgon: the famous lion-headed god (Ulansey 2011, 30-33).

There is no doubt that Roman Mithraism shares significant similarities and differences with Iranian Mithra, which are of course natural due to the transfer of the Mithraic cult to the Roman world. On the other hand, in the second century AD, many followers of Hellenic and Egyptian cults lived in Rome. If they joined the cult of Mithras, then they must have brought fruitful ideas from various intellectual fields into Roman Mithraism (Hinnells 1373 Sh, 122-23).



As for the main similarities between tauroctony and Iranian mythology, Cumont suggests that killing a cow represents the act of creation and the forces of good. These forces are embodied in the form of dogs, while the forces of evil, which take the form of snakes and scorpions, fight for the source of life, namely blood and semen, but ultimately it is the force of good that prevails, which is embodied in the sprouting of wheat ears from the tail of the sacrificed cow. Finally, before his ascension to the sky, Mithras partakes in a ritual feast, where the skin of sacrificial cow is held. This is the ritual that the Mithra worshipers constantly imitate and perform in their ceremonies. Hinnells and Gordon were the first to challenge Cumont's theory. According to Hinnells, although a core of Iranian ideology remains at the center of Roman Mithraism, Cumont's interpretation raises many questions, since in Mithraic paintings, especially in hunting scenes, the snake is a companion of Mithras, and there is no evidence in any of the paintings for hostility between the snake and the dog, but both are looking for sacrificial blood regardless of the other (Hinnells 1373 Sh, 126).

Nevertheless, the most important objection by Hinnells is that in Hellenic religions, many different stories are narrated about the life of the gods, while there was no such a practice among Iranians who merely use mythological images rather than mythological narratives, only to express abstract concepts (Hinnells 1373 Sh, 126). Gordon also rejected Komen's argument in that, from the outset, Komen had assumed that the tauroctony scene was taken from the Persian cow sacrifice myth of Gavaevodata, without any evidence outside of this premise being presented (Ulansey 2011, 13-14).

The main problem with Hinnells, Gordon, and most other researchers on Mithraism is that they do not propose an alternative hypothesis in mythological discussions. We know that the traditions of bullfighting, tauroctony, and taurobolium have their origins from Asia Minor (Rutter 1968, 227), outside of Rome and Greece. Among the myths mentioned above, the Gavaevodata myth and the story of Saoshyanet are the most similar to the Mithraic tauroctony. Each of these stories contributes to the overall mystery of the tauroctony.

Historically, the first tauroctony story goes back to Gilgamesh. There are several similarities between the tauroctony and the story of Gilgamesh: first, before slaying the bull of heaven, there is a scene of battle and hunting, as the one told of the bull hunt by Mithras. Second, this bull of heaven comes from the sky and may be related to the constellations present in tauroctony. Thirdly, Gilgamesh slays the cow and offers its heart to the temple of Shamash. Fourthly, Gilgamesh slays it by plunging his sword into the neck of the bull. Finally, the character of the slayer, like Mithra in tauroctony, is positive rather than negative.

The similarities between the tauroctony and the myth of Gavaevodata largely go back to the events after the sacrifice rather than the scene of the sacrifice itself, since in the myth of the cow, Ahriman goes to the cow with the weapons of pain, sickness, desire, and sleep, instead of daggers and swords.

Even before the demon reaches the cow, Hormazd anaesthetized the cow with the healer Mang, which is why this myth does not involve any fights, hunting, or sacrifice. After Gavaevodata's death, however, fifty-five types of grains and twelve types of healing plants grow from its semen, and the light and purity that was in the cow's semen are entrusted to the moon. From that semen, two cows emerge, one male and one female. Of course, in the myth of Gavaevodata, except for the image of the wheat ear, there are no traces of other tauroctony images such as Scorpion, Dog, Snake, Raven, Lion, and Cup. An account should be provided for the presence of these pictures and their connection with the earlier myths. Such presence strengthens the hypothesis that the tauroctony scene is a combination of several different myths from a mythological point of view, since at least in none of the previous tauroctony myths, this number of images was not present.

Some researchers have inferred that Mithras is the savior from verses 22 and 93 of Mehrisht and also from the text that Rashna, Mithra, and Soroush stand on the Chinvat Bridge and help the spirits to cross the bridge (Boyce 1393 Sh, 1:281). These gods are interpreted as psychopomps (guides of souls or soul-bearers) (Mazhjo 2017, 57-58). Interestingly, according to Bundahishn's narration, even there, the soul of a person first meets a person with a cow's body.

Celestial immortality or astronomical eschatology, as Cumont said, is connected with the god Mithra. According to him, in the Hellenistic period until the Roman era, there was a peculiar perception of celestial immortality in such a way that Plato's followers saw the Milky Way as a path for the descent of spirits, and as stated in Plato's treatise *Timaeus*, each soul is related to its respective star and everyone leaves that star once incarnated on the earth and returns to the same star again when he dies (Ulansey 2011, 86). The connection of this material with Mithra the savior is where the priest Origen states, quoting Celsus the atheist writer, that such perception of Mithra's role in celestial immortality has been a Mithraic doctrine. According to Celsus, there are two symbols of the celestial circuit in Mithra's mystery cult: one is the circuit of the constants and the other is the circuit of the ecliptic region, and the circuit of the soul's path passes between these two. In this circuit, there is a ladder with seven gates, the last step of which ends at the eighth gate and Mithra's seat. Porphyry, a Neoplatonist of the third century, attributes the same thing to the Mithra worshipers and calls Mithra riding on a bull as the lord of creation and the controller of these two orbits, standing in the region of the celestial equator (Ulansey 2011, 17-18).

In this regard, we can also find similarities between the scene of Mithraic Touroctony and the story of the sacrifice of the Hadayusha cow by Saoshyanet. Just like Mithra, Saoshyanet has both a savioristic role and a role of resurrection and rebirth. The Pahlavi narrative speaks of many sacrifices, in all of which Saoshyanet plays the main role, and in a way, can be considered the main sacrificer in Zoroastrianism due to the large number of his sacrifices.

Saoshyanet will revive one-fifth of the dead with the first sacrifice, with the second one-fifth victim, with the third one-fifth, with the fourth one-fifth, and with the fifth all the dead will have been raised. Before Saoshyanet resurrects the dead, an army will be formed under his command and will fight against the demon of lies. This lying demon is the son of the devil, is unforgivable, and must be fought to the end. Saoshyanet will make a sacrifice again. The lie will flee to the place where it is now, but the earth cannot bear the destruction caused by the lie and calls the Mazda worshipers for help. They organize a new army and offer a sacrifice. Then the lying demon flees to other parts of the earth. The earth will cry out twice, and the worshipers of Mazda will offer a similar sacrifice, but they will not succeed in vanquishing him with their sacrifice. When the punishment of the liars is being enforced, Saoshyanet will once again offer a sacrifice, and one-fifth of the rest of the liars will perish. He will make another sacrifice, and another fifth will perish. With the third, another one-fifth, and with the fourth, yet another one-fifth. He will offer a fifth sacrifice and all liars will be destroyed. As soon as their punishment is over and they pass through the molten iron, the last sacrifice will be offered and the earth will rise to the sky (Molé 1395 Sh, 113-17).

## **Conclusion**

Tauroctony is considered the main image of Roman Mithraism, and as I have demonstrated in another article, this image is not entirely astronomical and is a combination of astronomical theology and mythological traditions. In this article, I outlined eleven Indo-European myths and stories that somehow refer to the battle, hunting, and sacrifice of the bull. I reviewed the literature on identification of the closest principles and concepts to Mithraic tauroctony. The Mithraic tauroctony seems to be a combination of several myths and stories, as Mithra engages in war and hunts the bull, which is similar to the myth of Gilgamesh, who goes to a battle and hunts the celestial bull. Furthermore, this part is similar to the myth of the battle of Hercules with the Cretan bull. As Mitra Yazidi is recognized as a savior, his act of sacrifice is similar to Saoshyanet's sacrifice to save mankind and regenerate life. Moreover, after the cow's sacrifice, it is breathed back into nature from the body of the vital sacrificed animal, which is similar to the myth of the Gavaevodata cow in its servant.

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