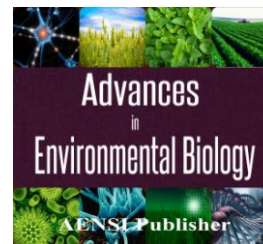




AENSI Journals

Advances in Environmental Biology

ISSN-1995-0756 EISSN-1998-1066

Journal home page: <http://www.aensiweb.com/AEB/>

Sport and physical Education in Mithra (Mitra) Religion and their Relations with Roman-Persian Wars

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 4 September 2014

Received in revised form 24 October 2014

Accepted 10 November 2014

Available online 1 December 2014

Keywords:

Mithra, sport in ancient Iran (Parthia), sport in ancient Rome, Roman-Persian wars

ABSTRACT

Mithraism has been one of the most important and influential religions in Roman and Persian empires which has been transmitted from Iran to Rome in early BC's and has enjoyed a much respected position in both great empires of the ancient world. Being a brave combatant god, Mithra is mostly lionized by warriors, and more than any other god, his name is associated with physical activities and consequently joint with those events in which athletic activities were held or at least, those which are regarded as athletic activities today. In this research and also based upon a number of ancient texts and some nowadays researchers' analyses of these works, it will be tried to trace the athletic activities in Mithraism using the historic-analectic method, to find an answer for this question that, to what extend have those activities been shaped in relation to martial skills and long-term battles between Persian and Roman and also, how prominent has been the role of deity Mithra in such events.

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To Cite This Article: Iran Ahmadpour and Jasem Manouchehri, Sport and physical Education in Mithra (Mitra) Religion and their Relations with Roman-Persian Wars. *Adv. Environ. Biol.*, 8(21), 422-428, 2014

INTRODUCTION

Deity Mithra (Avestan: Miθra, Pahlavi: Mihr, Latin: Mitras, Sanskrit: Mitra) is one of deities that not just for having his own specific religion in ancient Iran, but because of his influence and position that is the higher place in Zartoshti religious system after Ahoura Mazda, the most veneration is dedicated to him in Avestan texts [19].

This deity, which his name has come even in older eras in Rig Wada as one of the mighty gods of Hinduism and in Bogazkouy tablets as well, belonging to Mitani culture, his name is used as a sacred oath, went through the Roman Empire in early BC's and until the formal recognition of Christianity, his rituals as a solar god become one of the prominent religions of Roman Empire that many lithographic and Mithraeums relating to Mithraic religion, especially in eastern Europe countries and the Balkans, verify this claim. "During the AD's, Mithraism has such developed in Roman Empire that even the Roman-Persian wars did not affect his dignity" [17].

In this research we will initially look through the footmark of sport in Mithraism in Iran and Rome, especially in sports such as archery, Javelin throw, Chariot race and Zoorkhaneh then, the relationship between Iran and Rome and, consecutive peace and battles are investigated and at the end, the effects of Roman-Persian wars on the worship of deity Mithra on one hand, and sport in both empires on the other hand will be surveyed to find an answer for this fundamental question that, to what extend have the athletic activities been shaped in relation to martial skills and long-term battles between Persian and Roman and also, how prominent has been the role of deity Mithra in such events.

Sport and physical education in Mithra religion:

Although many of sport branches which have been mentioned whether in Mithraism or relating myths, but they are just today recognized as a sport branch and they are used to be considered as martial skills in the past, but considering Zoorkhaneh sport as we will see, a specific physical exercises were done for being trained in martial skills that can be categorized as physical education. On the other hand, many of these fields had recreational functions separately from their combative aspects and for this; they can be classified as sportive activity alongside their military usage.

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One of the sport branches associated with Mithraism whether in Iran or Rome, deserving to discuss is Archery which has had a recreational function alongside its military usage.

Mihr is considered as a unique Archer in various resources. In the tenth yasht of Avesta which is appointed to deity Mihr and called Mihr-yasht, reads:

'On a side of the chariot of Mithra, the lord of wide pastures, stand a thousand bows well-made, with a string of cowgut; they go through the heavenly space, they fall through the heavenly space upon the skulls of the Daevas [4].

There are many significant mythic narratives in Roman Mithraism associated with the archery of Mithra that shows the importance of archery in the Roman Mithraism. It is depicted on remaining inscriptions from eastern and central Europe that, Mithra is born in the shape of a youngster man from a heart of a rock. "A rock was conceived and gave birth to Mithra. As born Mihr was prepared for risky does, his blade was ready to slaughter the cow and a bow and arrow hanging to his waist, ready for hunt and miracle of water to the drought" [17].

Also, two significant miracles of Mithra related to arch and archery occurs after his birth. "Mithra performs two miracles using his bow and arrow which are putative: the first one is bringing the water out of a rock by his arrow and the second miracle happens when he hunts in a meadow, riding his horse shooting for hunt and all the arrows hit the targets" [17].

The second sportive field associated with deity Mithra that is worthy of discuss is Javelin, which has both military and recreational function as well. It is read in Mihryasht:

'And even though the spear be flung well, even though it reach the body, it makes no wound, for the number of the evil spells that the foe of Mithra works out.²⁶ The wind drives away the spear that the foe of Mithra flings, for the number of the evil (part 21)

'Not the wound²⁷ of the well-sharpened spear or of the flying arrow reaches that man to whom Mithra comes for help with all the strength of his soul, he, of the ten thousand spies, the powerful, all-seeing, undeceivable Mithra (part 24)

'The warrior of the white horse, of the sharp spear, the long spear, the quick arrows; foreseeing and clever (part102)

'On a side of the chariot of Mithra, the lord of wide pastures, stand a thousand spears well-made and sharp-piercing. They go through the heavenly space; they fall through the heavenly space upon the skulls of the Daevas (part130) [4].

In the Roman Mithraism also, the most significant deity relating to javelin is deity Sol whom is recognized as the god of sun in Mithraism Panteon, with a huge javelin in his hand. Regardless of this fact that before Mithraism enters Rome, deity Sol was worshiped as a mighty god but when Mithraism entered, he became one of the most important deities of Mithraism and classified in the second place right after Mithra.

"Usually in Mithraic iconography, the image of Mithra is depicted as he involves in various activities associated with the god of sun (Helios or Sol). Many of these scenes clearly show Mithras as a super-Sol power. For instance, we see some of sings showing Helios stooped humbly in front of Mithras" [16].

The name of well-known Coliseum in which javelin and spear combat were of among competitions, is adopted from the name of this deity. This name is adopted from a statue named Clousal which is not by accident for this huge statue has a spear in his hands. Many researchers have called this deity Invincible Sun or the deity Sol. "The name of Coliseum is adopted from the name of a huge statue nearby, this statue, which is called Clousal, has some similarities with the Roman deity Sol and after all it has been given a solar crown after reconstruction by the Roman emperor Nero" [14].

The other sport with military function that has an interconnection with Mithraism in both Iran and Rome, is Chariot Racing and two major reasons for this, are:

Firstly, in mythic texts the Mihr is the god of the sun and the east-to- west rotation of it is considered as a heavenly chariot-racer movement and for this reason it is possible to find such metaphor related to the god of sun in different nations' myths.

"In Greek myths, the chariot pulls the sun and dedicated to him. From the Greek point of view, the horse is the symbol of Apollo or so-called god of sun and the Apollo himself is the charioteer of the sun" [3]. We can see such concept in Hindu god of sun, Surya. "Like Mihr his Iranian pair, Surya rides the heaven and as the charioteer, he dislodges the dark forces from heaven" [8].

In Iranian myths as well, Mihr has such characteristics. He is described as the owner of the vast lush pastures. "He has a golden armor on his body, a silver shield on his shoulder and a heavy mace in his hands rides the star-marked heavenly chariot with four immortal horses that have golden and silver horseshoes" [7].

There are even interesting mythic narratives about the horses which carrying the Mihr's chariot. "The angel who pulls the sun's chariot is in shape of a horse called Eloisa and it is said that it was long-sighted and was able to hear the horse hooves echo from far" [19].

The second reason is, Mihr is the guardian of war and warriors and considering the importance of chariot and horse in the battle fields, the chariot racing has been described in relation to the deity Mihr who is the protector of warriors.

For instance, there are many descriptions about the chariot of deity Mihr and his bravery in this chariot in various parts of the Mihryasht [4].

In Roman myths also, Mithra appears as a chariot rider god and of course an archer, but more importantly, the companion gods of Mithra in the Roman Mithraism whom are the deity Sol or Invincible Sun and the deity Luna or Moon are chariot racers, as well.

In ancient Rome, as we realize from banquet ceremonies between Mithra and Sol, Mithra himself is a chariot-racer god. "After sacrificing the cow, Mithras came on the meal beside the Sol and they took part in a banquet and signed a pact of fraternity between them. Then they rode on the chariots of fire pulled by horses and went to the heaven, the scene is called the Ascension of Mithras" [11].

One of the most important sports associated with the deity Mihr and Mithraism, is the Zoorkhaneh which has a military background and it was used likely as military exercises, because any piece of equipment and tools are compatible with military devices. "Milis the mace, and Kabadeh is the bow and rock is the shield.

Chivalry and athletic characteristics are even considered at the time of running this sport and this indicates that, the Zoorkhaneh sport is based on chivalry rituals more than anything, as "the sport commences with the rock which is the symbol of the shield and ends with Kabadeh which is the symbol of the bow and this suggests that, the athlete is initially in a defensive position and he never preempts the battle and the last trick of any athlete is attack in which the rock is the shield and the bow is the sign of battle."

There are many ideas about the origin of the Zoorkhaneh sport; some like Parto Beyzaee and Sabbag Langroudy believe that it belongs to the post-Islamic era. The second idea suggests that it belongs to far older centuries and its roots came from pre-Islamic Iran "the origin of Zoorkhaneh sport is often searched in early Islamic years and it is considered as a cover over the effort of patriot Iranians for acquiring the battle techniques with bow, shield and so on against Arabs. Referring the Zoorkhaneh sport ' tradition to such a close history is a big fallacy... It is necessary to know about the old traditions and beliefs of Iranian in order to know about the origins of this custom.

Mihرداد Bahar refers the roots of Zoorkhaneh sport to Mihr's rituals and suggests many similarities between them:

"According to the Zoorkhaneh rituals the athlete must be chaste and early riser and fulfill the statutes and customs and have a good temper. At overcoming the enemy, he does not humiliate Opponent in front of people eyes and he does not go far away from generosity. He helps the indigents to the extent of his ability and he avoids cheap moral codes. We see these qualities in Mithras: the Avesta says that the body of Mithras is the Divine Word (Mehryasht part 25), he is the enemy of the lie (part 26) and he is aware of the real word (part 49) Representative Good thoughts, good speech and good deeds (part 106).

Mithras is the first Divine who rises before sun's sharp immortal horses on the top of Mount Hera. The first one who is adorned with ornaments and rises from the beautiful mountain and sees all the Aryan lands (part 13). He is a supporter of the Treaty (part 3) Never be deceived (part 5) he is the world's top judge (part 1).

He is dreamless powerful that patrols people (part 7) a wise monarchy (part 35). Supporter of all creatures (part 54).

But the duty of a standard hero is to defend the weak, to eliminate bullying and protect the righteous. He is gracious, merciful, and assisting provider to these virtues in Mehryasht we read:

Verily He will come to our aid. He will be facilitating the duty for us. He will come to sympathy us. He will be come to our victory. Greatly He will be our salvation. That he is our justice (part 5).

A hero is exemplary of Fearless courageous warrior that will never hesitate to tackle the formidable prowess alone and remove them.

Mithras is also among the most powerful beings (part 6). Handsome, tall and strong (part 7). Champion is gallantry and a strong arm (part 25). Who will be stable in the war (part 36), the most powerful of gods, the strongest of gods, the most agile of gods, most wins gods (part 98).

In regulations of athletics, sports should be started after the morning rituals. Namely sunrise, so when Mithras shines to the world and in this time also it is the beginning of Mithras's religion.

There are common grounds between rules for athletics champions and treat each other with Mithras's rituals. As followers of Mithras trained with the spirit of war, as was pointed out in the Zoorkhaneh battle symbolic rules are learned. In the Zoorkhaneh, as well as Mithraea only those who have reached the age of puberty can enter. In the tradition of athletics is that on the face of the new athletics should be comb stand (Namely have a beard).

In the Zoorkhaneh, as well as Mithras's rituals women are not admitted. In the Zoorkhaneh, as well as Mithras's rituals social status and wealth does not create any value and cannot score. Heroes as Mithras rituals call each other brother or coterie. The Zoorkhaneh has always been a priority in any work with people with a history of the protagonists, and this is what we see as the customs of Mithras.

Mithras characteristics and behaviors and Mithraism rules and regulations are not only that is implementing the properties and behavior of athletes and Zoorkhaneh regulations, Zoorkhaneh with its temples and a matching Mithraea is comparable. Zoorkhaneh always with the long staircase from under arrives to the street or alley and except the new Zoorkhanehes, the old Zoorkhanehes in the basement, usually under other buildings were constructed, these Zoorkhanehes had the only little light. Mithras ceremony usually takes place in caves, but in the cities and plains there is no cave, the temples to resemble caves were constructed in the basement. Temple with a long staircase reaches the ground. The temples used the outside light" [1].

Like temples' Mithras Zoorkhaneh stairs, sometimes leads to the room before the main site Zoorkhaneh where heroes and athletes are getting ready, then go to the Zoorkhaneh. Just like at the Zoorkhaneh Mithras temples along the side walls there are platforms for the deployment of audience where the audience look at the ceremony.

Near the Zoorkhaneh entrance look like Mithras temples are so active. Instead fireplace in the Mithras temples, the Mithras images are located on both sides of the bottom stage, at Zoorkhaneh and in front of the Hearth, which today are used to warm up the beat and preparing hot beverages.

As at the walls of Mithras temples there were sacred roles, at the Zoorkhaneh also there were paintings and photographs and stories related to Rostam and wrestling. "Tradition of wrestle in Zoorkhaneh also imitate the old model wrestle is Mithras and the sun" [1].

Two wrestlers at the end of wrestling, according to tradition, with left hands take the right arms of each other and with right hand shake hands with each other. This is Mithras custom shake hands with a right hand to the sun. And as the sun, with the Mithras with this shake hands they are making friend and loving each other, the two wrestlers never should be hostile to each other if you have a grudge against each, you should have kissed each other. Another tradition is Zoorkhaneh ringing bell that hangs on a chain on the top of Zoorkhaneh and mentor sounds it for great heroes to arrival, so everyone will be aware of his arrival. This ring is also commonly found in Mithras temples to show the image of Mithras, which at the end or beginning may have been done, are related. Some of the researchers claim that the genuine culture of the Zoorkhaneh is actually the Magus culture and its historical roots were formed when Darius put into practice the celebration of Moghkoshi as routine and Magi forced to underground activities. Finally the era of Magus Victory and its culture came as the official religion of the empire of Parthia in the form of Regulation Mithras" [12].

Relations between Iran and Rome:

In the middle of the third century BC, in the East Seleucid, Parthian state was established. In the year 250 BC the Parthians were attacked the United Parto that was located in the East the Caspian Sea and they led by the first Arsaces, at last Parthian kings were able to stabilize his reign in the territories mentioned. The declining Seleucid defeated from victorious campaign of Parthians in the West, especially in the West that it faced with new strength and global of the Roman. In The most prominent King of era of Parthian dynasty, the Mithridates II, were able to extend their domination of the West to Armenia and Mesopotamia and in this era the international role of the Parthian government began to contact with Rome. The West power means Roman emperor defeated Hellenistic emperor was in the favorable situation, due to the enormous expansionist policies of its dominance in the second and first centuries BC, not only in Asia Minor, but also extended throughout the Near East. "After the year 74 BC Pompeius based the Syrian state puts a neighboring to the Roman and the Parthian government. The first Formal contact occurred when Sulla was present the Parthian ambassador to Orobas in 69 BC on the west bank of the Euphrates. Through the Romans had gained considerable power in the East, the Parthian tried to organize around their interests have to provide compromise. The result of this contact was to create something called consensus (Amicitia) between the two governments" [18].

In the year 66 BC business relationship led to signing a contract with the Parthian government therefore Euphrates known as western boundary of the Parthian State. "But diplomatic activities of the Romans have to be more tactical matters to be looked upon as a permanent settlement on the basis of an equal partnership between neighbors. Pompeius manner after contract 66 BC shows that Roman thoughts and opinions do not recognize any other power on their side and do not tolerate it. When the Roman soldiers, unlike contracts and agreements, crossed the Euphrates River, the ruler of the Parthian third Phraates protest and heard in reply that the only power weapon that makes right. Lack of adherence to legal standards of Rome's relations with the East could appoint, but the assurance in terms of political, military and cultural power that the Roman is Superior power" [18]. But this assurance did not last long, and in 54 BC the Roman general Crassus invaded Mesopotamia and heavy defeat was incurred at the Battle Carrhae. "When Crassus was determined as the console of Syria, greed heads of Romans had reached its peak. The Senate was not going to war with the Parthians, but Crassus like soldiers imagined Iran as an easy conquest and assumed the country's wealth would be a great opportunity for him.

Close to the Carrhae, Parthian cavalry led by Surena, Iranian commander, defeated the Romans. Three-quarters of Crassus' army captured and destroyed Crassus and her son were killed in the war. (53 BC.) Parthian

cavalry consisting of archers were victorious over the Roman army that had no organization of archer and cavalry could triumph. Carrhae War forced Roman to put the cavalry to the army" [6].

After this battle we saw continuous conflict and peace between the Parthian kings and rulers of the Roman emperors such the battle between Roman commander Antonius and Phraates IV and in the third decade BC, Augustus peace agreement in 20 BC that during these battles and treaties, the Parthians show themselves as a powerful empire in the region. "Public opinion in Rome changed about the Parthians, their defenses were known. The Romans knew the desires of those who seek to attack are errors, and triumph policy Euphrates in the east had been invalidated" [6].

Romans look at Iran as a superpower after the invasion of Alexander of Macedon reappear and they were no longer in desire of conquering the whole world. Authors reveal that the State of the early Empires of Parthian and the Romans as the two superpower under the Sun and even the world between them occupied and this undoubtedly is a sign of discipline that should be the Parthian Government mentioned in it" [18]. Peace treaty went so far which resulted in the year 66 AD the Parthian king Tiridates was welcomed Nero the Caesar. But Roman expansionism broke the peace treaty in the early second century AD, and at the beginning of the Trajan empire war between Iran and Rome is flaming. Despite the remarkable success of the campaigns Trajan, the State Parthians' military expedition ended in a fiasco. " Trajan successor the Hadrian returned back to politics of Augustine, it means that government should be kept within principles the borders of the State Parthian on the basis of consensus to restore the status quo before the war" [2]. With the change of each emperor the treaty also was violated. During the early centuries AD wars between Persia and Rome consecutively happened. Most of the attacks were initiated by the Romans and in many cases they were defeated and sometimes with a victory of Roman army. Even in the late second century AD, Septimus Voros took the army close to the capital of Parthians. One of Caracalla in Rome in the third century conquistadors planned multiple attacks on Iranian soil was and achieved some success in this field. However, Parthians and the Sassanids end his rule, before the civil wars destroyed what could Iran's borders against invaders primitive Eastern Roman Empire and the power to protect themselves. "The state Parthian until its deterioration was an enemy that should be taken him seriously and always remains alert and vigilant" [9]. The rise of the Parthian and often their triumphant wars for Iranians that their pride was hurt after Alexander's invasion, has other achievements. "In a period of nearly three centuries Iran as defender against the Romans resists intensely and their attacks except for a few temporary advances led to failure. Iran was involved in such prolonged conflict, took up arms against the redoubtable power because the power of the Roman Empire conquered the battle Cardo. The country will benefit from this war and that rose the Old Iranian warrior spirit" [6].

At the time of the Sassanid Empire also continued the ongoing war and peace with the Romans. With the rise of Sassanid dynasty, there was a huge gap in foreign relations with Rome. The first Sasanian king Ardashir I inherited their boundaries with Romans from the Parthians. But after his strengthening and stabilizing of power within the state he could raise new claims by which large parts of the eastern half of the Roman Empire was threatened and sparked again to go to war with Iran. "After Ardashir I deployed his power he turned to the West. According to The report of Herodyun which coincided with him on the first letter of Alexander Severus, who was urged to make peace with the Sasanian ruler and This request was answered That the Roman must take its strength from across Syria and Asia Minor" [18]. This led to a war between Ardashir and Severus and the beginning of consecutive battles of Iran and Rome from the beginning of the third century. The most important battles occurred during Ardashir's son Shapur I. In The decisive battle in 260 AD Shapur I defeated the Romans and the arrest Valerian and the Roman Emperor. "Five huge contours depict this victory: contour of Darabgerd, three contours of Bishapour and the contour of victory at Naghshe Rostam. In this contours Roman Emperors are under the hooves of Shapur's horse and bring them to knee for its horse and they have been on the fetters and chains. At mentioned contours portrayed the Roman armies with gifts and booty at their hands and the Imperial Guard and the nobles and courtiers and the people of Iran" [10].

These battles and conflicts and peace continued until finally leads to the collapse of the Western Roman Empire. And even in the Eastern Roman Empire (the Byzantine) also continued and the peace treaty was violated each time by one of sides. In the year 651, with the death of the last king of the Sassanid against the Arabs actually the war and peace with Iran came to an end.

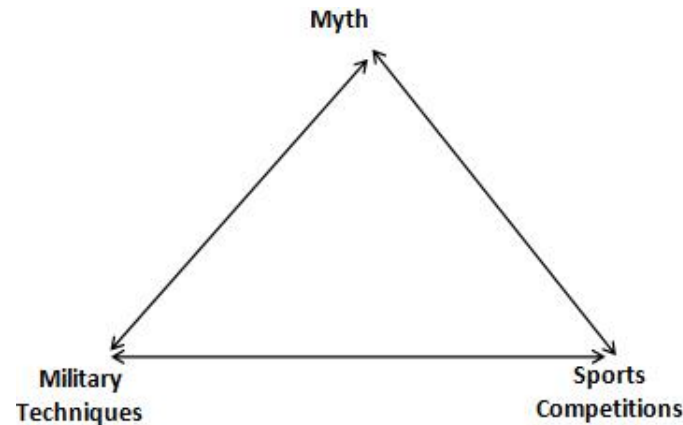
Roman-Persian wars and its impact on the sport:

Sporting myths of the Roman and Persia in connection with the war issue that will be important, Therefore, adhering to the gods as Mithras which was the divine Warrior and courageous and at training and competitions that will be held in the name of god has an important role in military exercises between Romans and Persians. In other words, what was more important phenomenon in military applications, rose the importance of Relevant god and relevant which creates the triple relationship between them. For example, when horses and horsemanship played important factor in the success against the enemies of the Persians in particular the Romans then they increased in training and racing horses and even at the height battles during the Parthian and

Sasanian Persia and Rome constitute a special class of riders named Savaran and they found a special and privileged position in society.

On the other hand the position of gods who have a special relationship with the horse and chariot racing such as Mithras also became more important. As the era of Parthians worshiped Mithras turned as the official religion and at the coronation of kings Mithras rode horses there. In ancient Rome the fighting techniques based on the sword and spear, such as competitions like gladiatorial battles, were thriving and gods like Mars because of a better relationship with these tools and games they were more important and with changing the military technology and bringing horses, chariots and bows into the Roman army, other gods such as Mithras, Sol and Luna got more important and sporting events based on these instruments, the gods were formed and flourished in competitions such as the chariot race.

As it is mentioned the relationship between mythology, martial arts and sports events are a triple relation and all three factors have a direct impact on each other which can be summed up in this way:



Therefore it can be claimed that there is a direct relationship between mythology, military skills and training and athletic competitions and at that time the two important empires Iran and Rome engaged in long-term battles and this has led to thriving or halting some sports or in some other fields. Also it made some of the gods important and sidelined others.

Conclusion:

Functions of Mithras, the god in Roman and Iran, is connected with the consecutive battles between Iran and Rome because this god is known in Iran as the divine warrior and by the soldiers transmitted to the Roman Empire and even in Roman Mithraism rituals there was a ranking as soldier. On the other hand the sports that are associated with the rituals of Mithras either in Iran or in Rome that can be studied are the sports that mainly get important in association with the war. Therefore this led to a threefold relationship between the religion of Mithras, Iranian and Roman sports and activities that are associated with the rituals of Mithras. In other words, at the time of war between Iran and Rome sports are important in connection with military exercises and fitness of soldiers. And consequently also the gods such as Mithras had the foremost importance due to them being brave and warrior gods. And ritual worship of such gods in Iran and Rome spread. On the other side names of these deities is connected with activities and sports that are connected to the war and the warrior.

The fact that the divine Mithras be worshiped in both Iran and the Roman Empire of the ancient world, despite the many wars and conflicts and for both are the great divine is not so fortuitous because the main characteristic of Mithras is associated with bravery and warfare and even the religion of Mithraism by Roman soldiers during the Roman-Persian battles is transmitted to the Roman Empire.

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