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## MITHRA SAECVLARIS

**Summary:** Even though the Mithraic epiclesis SAECULARIS has been explained with a link to the *Ludi SAECULARES* of 248, we prefer to elucidate it with the relief that we can observe between the two altars consecrated to *MYTRAE SAECULARI*, in Housesteads, in the civil parish of Bardon Mill in Northumberland, England, south of Broomlee.

Close to Hadrian's *vallum*, we can actually see a representation of Mithras, identified with Phanes, emerging from the cosmogonic egg with a zodiacal belt around him, lighting up the world. Concerning Jupiter (*IOVI SECVLARI*), moreover, on an *Antoninianus* of Claudius II "the Gothic", this epiclesis expresses his responsibility for the *kosmos* in its cyclic eternity. Like Jupiter, Mithras is a sovereign of the universe.

**Key words:** Mithras, Jupiter, time, universe, zodiac

In Borcouicium (or Vercouicium), to the north of the province of Britain, near a Roman fort, two altars consecrated to Mytrae Saeculari<sup>1</sup> enclose a sculptured representation of Mithras coming out of the cosmic egg, encircled by the signs of the zodiac.<sup>2</sup> The relief is an open work around the broken egg and the god.

When applied to Mithras, this epithet is the only example known. One does not see any other divinity of the Greco-Roman pantheon qualified in this manner except – and this testimony offers a quite unrecognized interest – on the reverse of a coin of Claudius II, "the Gothic" found in the treasury of Lancié (Rhône), where the epiclesis concerns Jupiter: *IOVI SECVLARI*. The legend is paired with the image of an eagle. This Antoninianus does not figure in the body of Roman Imperial Coinage,<sup>3</sup> although

<sup>1</sup> VERMASEREN, M. J.: *Corpus Inscriptionum et Monumentorum Religionis Mithriacae* [CIMRM]. Vol. I. The Hague 1956, 299, nos 863–864.

<sup>2</sup> CIMRM 860. Cf. GUNDEL, H. G.: *Zodiakos. Tierkreisbilder im Altertum. Kosmische Bezüge und Jenseitsvorstellungen im antiken Alltagsleben* [Kulturgeschichte der antiken Welt 54]. Mainz 1992, 227, n° 72 and 229.

<sup>3</sup> *Roman Imperial Coinage* [RIC] V 1 (London 1927, re-edited).

the discovery dates back to 1880. The coin is authentic, since it was found in a collection of coins hidden away in 293 or 294.<sup>4</sup>

F. Cumont<sup>5</sup> was asked about this “obscure” epiclesis. He thought at first, with good reason, that it could designate in Mithras “the first ... principle, named *Aiôn* or *Saeculum*”. But, as one of the two altars<sup>6</sup> bears mention of the consulate of “Gallus” and of “Volusianus”, and moreover speaks of Trebonian Gallus and of Volusianus in 252 AD, the learned Belgian, no doubt influenced by J. Hodgson, who wrote three-quarters of a century before him, affirmed “the date of these texts makes it more likely that the surname of this god is in accord with the secular games celebrated in 246 AD”. There follows a reference to Herodian (III 8. 10), devoted to the secular games in 246 AD, which under the circumstances did not take place.

In reality, the secular games of 246 were those of the Roman centennial in 248, which effectively designated the coins and the medallions<sup>7</sup> with the label, *SAECLARES*, even if this refers to the *Ludi* of 204, they consecrated some centuries of 100 years, and not those which the Sibylline Oracles decreed.

The relationship of a *Mithra Saecularis* with the celebration of the millenium of Rome, however, is not at all obvious, at least not *a priori*. Assuredly, for the two soldiers who had dedicated the statues to a god honored by loyal servants of the Empire, the eternity of Rome and the Roman order would be obvious. The Secular Games of 248 would have ostentatiously sacralised festively this eternity. Corresponding to this Roman order would be that of the universe which Mithras was thought to manage throughout its duration. J. Gage<sup>8</sup> recalled that “Mithras received from some faithful follower, on the next day of the Millenium, the qualification of *saecularis*”, and he looked back on this point to the aforesaid text of F. Cumont. But in his *Mysteries of Mithras*,<sup>9</sup> Cumont did not believe it was necessary to discuss the epiclesis, no doubt because he was no more satisfied by the explanation which he had given.

In truth, this epiclesis sends us back, as was justly said and repeated, to the relief flanked by the two altars and then it depicts us a Mithras arisen from the two halves of the cosmogonic egg. Inasmuch as he is *saecularis* (or “Aionian”, in Greek),

<sup>4</sup> LÉPAULLE, E.: Note sur l'atelier monétaire de Lyon, à l'époque de la réforme de Dioclétien, à propos d'une trouvaille faite à Lancié en 1880. Lyon 1883, 7–9, no. 1; BLANCHET, A.: *Les trésors de monnaies romaines et les invasions germaniques en Gaule*. Paris 1900, 172, n° 288; LORiot, X. – RÉMY, B. – BUISSON, A.: *Corpus des trésors monétaires antiques de la France*. Vol. V. Rhône-Alpes–Paris 1987, 52 s., no. 5; FAURE-BRAC, O.: *Le Rhône 69/1* [Carte Archéologique de la Gaule]. Paris 2006, 253 (“sans doute une imitation associant un droit de Claude à un revers CONSECRATIO à la légende déformée”) and 254, fig. 206.

<sup>5</sup> CUMONT, F.: *Textes et monuments figurés relatifs aux mystères de Mithra* [MMM]. Vol I. Bruxelles 1899, 307, n. 1.

<sup>6</sup> *CIMRM* 863.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. TURCAN, R.: Le millénaire de Rome au Grand Cirque : un cas de condensé symbolique. *Journal des Savants* 2014, 151–163.

<sup>8</sup> GAGE, J.: Le « Templum Urbis » et les origines de l'idée de « Renovatio ». In *Mélanges F. Cumont*. Bruxelles 1936, 180.

<sup>9</sup> CUMONT, F.: *Le Mystères de Mithra*. 3rd ed. Brussels 1913, 141, n. 1 (new ed. by BELAYCHE, N. – MASTROCIQUE, A. – BONANNO, D. [Bibliotheca Cumontiana. Scripta maiora III]. Turin 2013, 110, n. 85).

Mithras is interchangeable with Aion, who causes the world to live and to endure. He is *saecularis* as well as responsible for the Cosmos in its spatial-temporal totality, inasmuch as he masters the stars and their revolutions, both regular and perpetual, just the same as the *aion* (eternity) of the *Corpus Hermeticum*,<sup>10</sup> which “makes an order for the universe and introduces the immortality and the duration in matter”.<sup>11</sup> For, in making the blood of the bull burst out and flow, Mithras animated or reanimated all of living creation.

But, on the open-work relief at Housteads, Mithras is apparently identified – and traditionally – with Orphic Phanes, born from an egg, which is identified with Helios/the Sun (Macr. *Sat.* I 18. 12 [= *OF*, p. 249, n° 237 Kern]). Like Phanes, this Mithras Saecularis, in brandishing his torch, lights the universe on this monument. The signs of the Zodiac which surround the god represent the seasons of the year or the twelve sidereal stages of the circuit of the sun. Concerning the Sun, the Pseudo-Clément author of the *Homilies* (VI 10, p. 110, 10–12 Rehm) exactly affirms that this one “is called Mithras (Meithran) from the fact that he replenishes entirely the circular course of the year”. In effect, where *Basilides*, recognized by means of the isopsephy the 365 days of the annual cycle in the word, *Abrasax*, he found the same value, under the form of Meithras, in the very name of Mithras. In this regard, the Mithraic iconography confirms well for us that the tauroctony is responsible for the zodiacal cycle. Not only is it depicted within the cycle or under the orbit of the constellations,<sup>12</sup> but in the relief of Trier one sees a Mithras who seems to make the sky turn, *uoluentem sidera Mithram*, as Claudian (*Laud. Stil.* I 63) was to say.<sup>13</sup>

Among the Manicheans of Roman Africa, whom Augustine denounces in his *Contra Faustum* (XV 5 [p. 425. 5–25 Zycha]), a song celebrates the “Celestial King” who is surrounded by twelve *saecula* or “eons”.<sup>14</sup> These twelve *saecula* suggest to us the zodiac giving a pattern to the solar cycle of twelve annual months. We know that Mithras was recurring in Manichaeism and in its imagery.<sup>15</sup> But in every way, the

<sup>10</sup> *Corpus Hermeticum* XI 3 (p. 148 Nock–Festugière, in the *CUF*).

<sup>11</sup> FESTUGIÈRE, A.-J.: *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*. Édition définitive, revue et corrigée. Paris 2014, 1580, 1608.

<sup>12</sup> CUMONT: *MMM* (n. 9) I 110–111; MERKELBACH, R.: *Mithras*. Hain 1984, 200–201, 215–221; GUNDEL, H. G.: *Zodiakos: Tierkreisbilder im Altertum. Kosmische Bezüge und Jenseitsvorstellungen im antiken Alltagsleben*. Mainz 1992, 134–137.

<sup>13</sup> CUMONT: *MMM* I 218; L'ORANGE, H. P.: *Likeness and Icon. Selected Studies in Classical and Early Medieval Art*. Odense Univ. Press 1973, 305–306.

<sup>14</sup> CUMONT: *MMM* (n. 9) I 77, n. 2; DECRET, F.: *Aspects du manichéisme dans l'Afrique romaine. Les controverses de Fortunatus, Faustus et Felix avec saint Augustin*. Paris 1870, 100; DECRET, F.: *L'Afrique manichéenne (IV<sup>e</sup>–V<sup>e</sup> siècles). Étude historique et doctrinale*. Paris 1978, I 303, II 115, n. 27, II 228–229, n. 159; und GUNDEL, W. – GUNDEL, H. G.: *Astrologumena. Die astrologische Literatur in der Antike und ihre Geschichte* [Sudhofs Archiv 6]. Wiesbaden 1966, 329–331.

<sup>15</sup> CUMONT: *MMM* (n. 9) I 44–45, 349–350; WIDENGREN, G.: *Les religions de l'Iran*. Paris 1968, 205; BOYCE, M.: Mithra in the Manichaean Pantheon. In HENNING, W. B. – YARSHATER, E. (ed.): *A Locust's Leg. Studies in Honour of S. H. Taqizadeh*. London 1962, 44–54; PUECH, H.-CH.: *Le manichéisme*. In PUECH, H.-CH. (ed.): *Histoire des religions* [Encyclopédie de la Pléiade]. Vol. II. Paris 1972, 530, 567; SUNDERMANN, W.: Some more Remarks on Mithra in the Manichaean Pantheon. In *Études mithriaques. Acta Iranica, 1<sup>ère</sup> Série, Actes de Congrès, IV, Actes du 2<sup>e</sup> Congrès International, Téhéran, 1–8 septembre*

epithet *saecularis* translates the Greek *aiōnios* and thus tends to imply that Mithras is *aeternus*, “eternal”. As it has been emphasized, *saecularis* reflects a tendency to confuse Mithras with *Aiōn-Chronos*. The Leontocephalis of Arles,<sup>16</sup> bears, among the circles of the serpent evoking the circular journeys of the sun in the ecliptic, the same twelve zodiacal constellations as those which encircle Mithras-Phanes on the relief at Housesteads. It is a matter of the eternal return of sidereal time.

On this “Orphic” aspect of Mithraic imagery at Bourcoucium, it has been arbitrarily glossed, as if the god born from the egg in the zodiacal orb, where the tauroctony is also accomplished, would put an end to Ahriman’s *Aiōn* just before the infinite *Aiōn* of Ohrmazd/Ahura Mazda.<sup>17</sup> This hypothesis implies the conjecture of the idea of an absolute transcendental eternity in Greco-Roman paganism, which actually ignores it (as far as it seems to me).<sup>18</sup>

Under different aspects, it is the perpetual periodicity of the measured time, regulated by the “invincible” sun, which is represented in the iconography on the relief of Housesteads, and the void separating Mithras *Saecularis* from the zodiacal orb was meant to enact games of light,<sup>19</sup> as in the cases of the open-work relief of Palermo<sup>20</sup> and of the Sun, whose rays shone from behind in the Mithraeum of the Baths of Caracalla,<sup>21</sup> for example. In the nocturnal banquets, these visual effects, for example, could not but be the equal of a Mithras-Phanes shedding light with his torch to the universe which he rescued from thirst by stabbing the throat of the bull, by means of the dagger he held in his right hand. In effect, the Orphic Phanes would pass for having illuminated the universe with shining fire, the prominent among the elements.<sup>22</sup>

The isolated evidence, in Britain of a *saecularis* Mithras has, surprisingly enough, presents the role of a centurion and of a *beneficiarius* “of a consul”. The expression of an orphic Mithraism, near the Hadrianic vallum, was raised apparently as a peculiar choice by two foreign soldiers.

The spelling Myrta (instead of Mithras) is found in Britain, at Vindobola,<sup>23</sup> as well as on the borders of the Rhine and the Danube. It is recognized in the Mithraeum of Königshofen,<sup>24</sup> where the dative *Mytrae* is followed by *SECV*, which could be completed (following M. J. Vermaseren) with *LARI*, at long as it is not a question of a dedication by a man named *Secundus* or *Secundinus*.

1975. Téhéran–Liège 1978, 485–499. Cf. *Acta Archelai* 40 (36). 7, p. 59. 27–28 Beeson (*O barbare sacerdos Mithrae et collusor, Solem tantum coles Mithram...*).

<sup>16</sup> *CIMRM* 879.

<sup>17</sup> HARRIS, E. – HARRIS, J. R.: *The Oriental Cults in Roman Britain* [EPRO 6]. Leiden 1965, 34, n. 6.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. TURCAN, R.: *Ouranopolis. La vocation universaliste de Rome*. Paris 2011, 7–30.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. CUMONT, F.: *Les mystères de Mithra*. Paris 1913<sup>4</sup> (réimp. Paris 1985), 129; TURCAN, R.: *Mithra et le mithriacisme*. Paris, 2004<sup>4</sup>, 82.

<sup>20</sup> *CIMRM* 164 et fig. 46.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. CUMONT: *Les mystères* (n. 19) 189, no. 458 and fig. 126.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. SCHALLMAYER, E. ET AL.: *Der römische Weihebezirk von Osterburken I. Corpus der griechischen und lateinischen Beneficiarius-Inschriften des römischen Reiches*. Stuttgart 1990, 14.

<sup>23</sup> *CIMRM* 841.

<sup>24</sup> *CIMRM* 1367.

But the spelling *Mytra* is also found in Rome,<sup>25</sup> where Litorius Pacatianus could have received from the consul the privilege of being a *beneficiarius*. The City itself, in effect, was the location where the cult of a Mithras-Phanes, identified with Helios and Zeus,<sup>26</sup> is well attested, in connection with other dedications from the Via Marmorata, near the arc of St. Lazarus, on the Aventine.<sup>27</sup> But it is necessary to recognize that the weird spelling *Meithras* does not allow the above-mentioned isopsephy, which would make the divine name the equivalent of the days of a year.

The relationship of the Leontocephalus, so frequent in Rome, has been recently underlined with the Orphic theogony. Nothing assures, however, that the treaty of Hellanikus and of Hieronymos cited by Damascius<sup>28</sup> and reporting the theogony would have had a notable impact in the City itself. Moreover the authors of this work are hardly identifiable, a work which is currently situated “at the beginning of the Christian Era”,<sup>29</sup> but without any decisive arguments. In every way, the description which Damascius gives about this Orphic Chronos does not coincide with the Mithraic Leontocephalus. But, at the time of Marcus Aurelius, a similar Orphic theogony was known in Rome, to judge from Athénagoras.<sup>30</sup>

In all likelihood, the sculptured marble panel, which is housed at Modena, in the Estense Gallery,<sup>31</sup> comes from Rome. This bas-relief, dated to between 130–140 AD, was recovered by some Mithraists who recognized their god Phanes.<sup>32</sup> It is also in the Antonine period that Platonists like Eubulus, Celsus, and Numenius became interested in Mithraism. These intellectuals did not fail to notice the faithful in the caves, where one explanation of the tauroctony and of the related iconography preceded the sacramental meal.<sup>33</sup> We should not underestimate the culture of Mithraists and their level of thought.<sup>34</sup> The comments on these images occupied their spirits, even if they were unable to read.

<sup>25</sup> *CIMRM* 566.

<sup>26</sup> *CIMRM* 475.

<sup>27</sup> PIETRANGELI, C.: *Musei Capitolini, I monumenti dei culti orientali*. Rome 1951, 11–12, no. 7.

<sup>28</sup> Damasc. *De princ.* 123 bis; III p. 161 Westerink-Combès = *OF*, p. 130–131, no. 54.

<sup>29</sup> BRISSON, L.: Les théogonies orphiques et le papyrus de Derveni. Notes critiques. *RHR* 202 (1985) 411. Cf. BRISSON, L.: Orphée et l'orphisme à l'époque impériale. *ANRW* II 36. 4 (1990) 2897–2914.

<sup>30</sup> *Leg.* 18. 3–4, and 20. 4 = *OF*, p. 137–139, nos 57–58. Cf. BRISSON, L.: La figure de Chronos dans la théogonie orphique et ses antécédents iraniens. Témoignages et interprétations philosophiques, de Plutarque à Jamblique. In TIFFENEAU, D. (dir.): *Mythes et représentations du temps*. Paris 1985, 41–42.

<sup>31</sup> CAVEDONI, C.: Appendice alla nuova Silloge epigrafica modenese. *Atti e memorie della deputazione di storia patria per le provincie Modenesi e Parmensi* 4 (1867) 17–18; *CIMRM* 695.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. EISLER, R.: *Weltmantel und Himmelzeit. Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur Urgeschichte des antiken Weltbildes*. Munich 1910, II 400–408. *Contra*, CUMONT: *Les mystères* (n. 19) 86, n. 7; *supra*, n. 19.

<sup>33</sup> TURCAN: *Mithra* (n. 19) 80–81.

<sup>34</sup> CLAUS, M.: *Cultores Mithrae. Die Anhängerschaft des Mithras-Kultes* [Heidelberger Althistorische Beiträge und Epigraphische Studien 10] Stuttgart 1992, 82: the representation of Mithras issued from the cosmic egg supposed philosophical and religious ideas, “die kaum bei den Angehörigen der Hilfstruppen zu vermuten sind” (that it is impossible to ascribe to members of the auxiliary soldiers). Cf. DANIELS, C.: *Mithras Saecularis*. The Housesteads Mithaeum and a Fragment of Carrowburgh. *Archaeologia Aeliana* 40 (1962) 111. According to F. CUMONT (The Dura Mithraeum. In HINNELLS, J. R.

In the period of the Roman Empire, the existence of a diffuse Orphism can be noticed, which was disparate and colorful, often more literary than cultural, so to speak, syncretic and convenient for henotheism which is affirmed also in Mithraism.<sup>35</sup> This Orphism, for the time, philosophic and “popular” was similar neither to a doctrine nor to a precise religion.<sup>36</sup> It would make its mark here and there on the mentalities or imaginations, in Rome and outside of Rome, far from topical cults, in different milieus that of soldiers included, in a world where people moved from one province to another. Everywhere the figure of a god, born out of the primeval egg under the stars of the sky, would receive a significance. Near Hadrian’s Wall, in Africa or in the East as well as in Rome, Mithras was emphasized as a Phanes-Aiôn, lord of time and of the sidereal universe, of the centuries (*saecula*) and thus *saecularis*. Is he not qualified as the cosmocrator on a cippus from the Mithraeum fitted out in the Baths of Caracalla?<sup>37</sup> Mithras Saecularis is Aiôn, who brings life to the universe and makes it turn eternally. He is *saecularis* inasmuch as he is responsible for the *saecula*, also said for the cosmos in its sidereal totality, which the zodiac evokes on the relief at Housesteads. It could thus be understood, without difficulty, that some years later the epithet could be said to concern Jupiter as the ruler of the world and the sovereign of the sky on certain coins of Claudius the Gothic.<sup>38</sup>

The author of the *Epistles to the Hebrews* (I 2) Christ acts in the role of master of the world comparable to that of Mithras Saecularis of Housesteads. Through Jesus, in effect, God has created *aiôns* or *saecula*, i.e., the “universe”. He has the universal sovereignty of a *cosmocrator*. The latin *saeculum* does not have the same weight as the Greek *aiôn*, as Augustine much later emphasized,<sup>39</sup> because the Greek word was applied at the time to a “force of life” and to the eternity of the universe, whose stars

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[ed.]: *Mithraic Studies I*. Manchester 1975, 206), the painted or sculptured images in the Mithraic caves were aimed at “instruire et édifier les illettrés” (teach and educate the illiterates).

<sup>35</sup> BOULANGER, A.: *Orphée. Rapports de l'orphisme et du christianisme*. Paris 1925, 59–67; BOULANGER, A.: *L'orphisme à Rome*. REL 15 (1937) 121–135, here 124; GUTHRIE, W. K. C.: *Orphée et la religion grecque. Etude sur la pensée orphique*. Trad. franç. Paris 1956, 283 ff.; NILSSON, M. P.: *Geschichte der griechischen Religion II*. Munich 1961<sup>2</sup>, 429–430. Cf. CUMONT, F.: *Lux perpetua*. Turin 2009<sup>2</sup>, 292, and, more generally, BRISSON: *Orphée* (n. 29) 2867 ff., 2929–2930 (relief de Modena).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. CUMONT, F.: *Mithra et l'orphisme*. RHR 109 (1934) 64. On Mithras as a *kosmokrator*, see also RISTOW, G.: *Zum Kosmokrator im Zodiacus, ein Bildervergleich*. In DE BOER, M. – EDRIDGE, T. A. (eds): *Hommages à M. J. Vermaseren*. Vol. III [EPRO 68]. Leiden 1978, 985–987; JACKSON, H. M.: *Love makes the World Go Round. The Classical Greek Ancestry of the Youth with the Zodiacal Circle in Late Roman Art*. In HINNELL, J. R. (ed.): *Studies in Mithraism. Papers associated with the Mithraic Panel organized on the occasion of the XVth Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions*. Rome 1994, 141, 143, 157; TURCAN: *Mithra* (n. 19) 101–102 et 147. On the Lion-headed god as a *kosmokrator*, see JACKSON, H. M.: *The Meaning and Function of the Leontocephaline in Roman Mithraism*. Numen 32 (1985) 17 ff., 25.

<sup>37</sup> CIMRM 463.

<sup>38</sup> The surveys on the titles inspired by Jupiter do not take into account *Saecularis*: E. AUST in *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie*. Hrsg. von W. H. ROSCHER. Hildesheim 1965<sup>2</sup>, II. 1, 750–752; DEL PONTE, R.: *La religione dei Romani*. Milan 1992, 283. No mention either in Radke, G.: *Die Götter Italiens* [Fontes et commentationes 5]. Münster 1965, 156–159, or in FEARS, J. R.: *The Cult of Jupiter and Roman Imperial Ideology*. ANRW II 17. 1 (1981) 3–141, even where it was the case of taking it into account (117–118).

<sup>39</sup> *De civ. Dei* XVI 26. 168.

mark its duration.<sup>40</sup> Corresponding to these stars are the zodiacal constellations encircling Mithras as he rises from the cosmic egg on our relief.

For the Christians, the world, inasmuch as it is a divine creation, has its own grandeur and beauty. But sin placed itself in the power of Satan and it became evil. *Saeculum*, “the world”: this is the realm of evil, and the adjective *saecularis* thus concerns pagan activities in Tertullian, among others.<sup>41</sup> Gnosis and, in large measure, the Christians of the 3rd century devalued the material world. It is precisely against this that Plotinus (*Enn.* II 9. 13 et 16) argues in the name of an enthusiastic vision of the cosmos, a veritable “religion of the world,”<sup>42</sup> typical of the “Hellenes” (*Enn.* II 9. 6).<sup>43</sup>

In this regard one can say that the worshippers of Mithras *Saecularis* still defended, as did Plotinus, the colors of fundamentally traditional paganism, also cherished by philosophers who were faithful to ancestral piety in the same manner as the common people, for Mithraism integrated the adoration of the forces of nature in both the terrestrial and the supraterrrestrial universe. In effect, Ohrmazd created the universe to counter the spirit of evil, and the tauroctony fortified the beings summoned to counter it. Like the Christ of the *Epistles to the Hebrews*, Mithras is sovereign of and responsible for the world, whom he has saved and who Ahriman has not succeeded in annexing, whereas, for the Christians, Satan dominates the world. But in the époque where the mitraists celebrated their god as *Saecularis*, this optimistic representation of the universe would soon succumb to the moral consequences of one crisis without precedent for the fate and survival of the Roman Empire.

## CONCLUSION

The epithet *Saecularis* applied to Mithras on the two altars of Borcouicium, in Northern Britain, should not be explained (as F. Cumont believes) in the function of the “secular games” celebrated in 248 for the millenium of Rome, but in relationship with the relief which is associated with them and which shows us the god rising from the egg in the circle of the zodiac. Mithras is *Saecularis*, like Jupiter on the almost unknown coins of Claudius II, “the Gothic”, conceived as the *aiônion cosmocrator*, master of the universe and the stars which mark the rhythm of *Aiôn*, eternal time.

<sup>40</sup> BENVENISTE, E.: Expression indo-européenne de l'éternité. *Bull. de la Soc. de Linguistique* 28 (1937) 103–109; FESTUGIÈRE, A.-J.: *La révélation* (n. 11) 1605; FESTUGIÈRE, A.-J.: *Études de philosophie grecque*. Paris 1971, 254–271.

<sup>41</sup> Tertull. *Idol.* 9. 4; 14. 4; 15. 5. Cf. the edition with commentary by J. H. WASHINK et by J. C. M. VAN WINDEN. Leiden 1987, 241–242.

<sup>42</sup> FESTUGIÈRE, A.-J.: *La révélation* (n. 11) 782–812.

<sup>43</sup> TURCAN, R.: *Mithras Platonius. Recherches sur l'hellénisation philosophique de Mithra* [EPRO 47]. Leiden 1975, 83, 86; TURCAN: *Mithra* (n. 19) 102.