The Cult of Mithras

Melvyn Bragg and his guests discuss the cult of Mithras, a mystery religion that existed in the Roman Empire from the 1st to the 4th centuries AD. Also known as the Mysteries of Mithras, its origins are uncertain. Academics have suggested a link with the ancient Vedic god Mitra and the Iranian Zoroastrian deity Mithra, but the extent and nature of the connection is a matter of controversy.

Followers of Mithras are thought to have taken part in various rituals, most notably communal meals and a complex seven-stage initiation system. Typical depictions of Mithras show him being born from a rock, enjoying food with the sun god Sol and stabbing a bull. Mithraic places of worship have been found throughout the Roman world, including an impressive example in London. However, Mithraism went into decline in the 4th century AD with the rise of Christianity and eventually completely disappeared. In recent decades, many aspects of the cult have provoked debate, especially as there are no written accounts by its members. As a result, archaeology has been of great importance in the study of Mithraism and has provided new insights into the religion and its adherents.

With:

Greg Woolf
Professor of Ancient History at the University of St Andrews

Almut Hintze
Zaroshty Professor of Zoroastrianism at SOAS, University of London

John North
Acting Director of the Institute of Classical Studies, University of London

Producer: Victoria Brignell.

Share this page
Share
Facebook
Twitter

FURTHER READING


Roger Beck, ‘The Religion of the Mithras Cult in the Roman Empire: Mysteries of the Unconquered Sun’ (Oxford University Press, 2007)


Broadcasts

Thu 27 Dec 2012
09:00
BBC Radio 4

Thu 27 Dec 2012
21:30
BBC Radio 4

Free downloads

In Our Time Archive: Culture
Melvyn Bragg and his guests discuss the history of ideas as it applies to culture - from literature...

In Our Time Archive: History
Melvyn Bragg and his guests discuss the people, conflicts and events that have shaped the world.

In Our Time Archive: Philosophy
Melvyn Bragg and his guests discuss the history of philosophy - from ancient Greek thinkers to the...

In Our Time Archive: Religion
Melvyn Bragg and his guests discuss the history of religious ideas - from the faith systems of...

In Our Time Archive: Science
Melvyn Bragg and his guests discuss the history of ideas and the evolution of the sciences - from...

In Our Time With Melvyn Bragg
Melvyn Bragg and his guests discuss the history of ideas - including topics drawn from philosophy....

Related Link

- Mithraic Mysteries - Wikipedia (en.wikipedia.org)

You might also like...

Around the BBC

Ancient Rome
Religion

Similar programmes

BY GENRE: Factual > History
BY FORMAT: Discussion & Talk

LISTEN LIVE

14:15
Afternoon