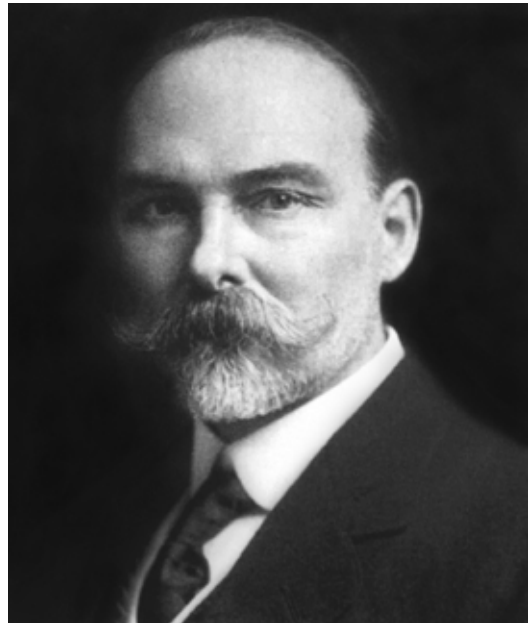


SELECTIONS FROM A MITHRAIC RITUAL

G. R. S. Mead

One of the pioneering esoteric scholars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, G.R.S. Mead (1863–1933), brought to wider attention many ancient materials, including this Ritual which some scholars dismiss, and others cautiously believe retains some Mithraic elements. In this selection adapted for modern readers, from his booklet in the series *Echoes from the Gnosis*, Mead first discusses the provenance and some of the characteristics of the Ritual. Following are a few passages from the Ritual itself.



G.R.S. Mead (1863–1933). Photo by Elliott & Fry, 1916.

Preamble

The last little volume gave the reader a brief outline of what is known of the cult of Mithra and the spread of the Mithraic Mysteries in the Western world. We have now to deal with a Mithraic Ritual of the most instructive and intensely interesting character, which introduces us to the innermost rite of the carefully guarded secrets of the Mithraica.

This Ritual is all the more precious in that our knowledge of the Liturgies of the ancient Pagan cults of the West is of the scantiest nature. A few fragments only remain, mostly in the form of hymns.... Dieterich calls it a Liturgy; but a Liturgy is a service in which several take part, whereas it is plain that our Ritual was a secret and solemn inner rite for one person only. The credit of unearthing it

from the obscurity in which it was buried, and of conclusively demonstrating its parentage, is due to Dieterich; for though Cumont in his great work quotes several passages from the unrevised text, he does so only to reject it as a genuine Mithraic document.¹

It is dug out of the chaos of the great Paris Magic Papyrus 574 (*Supplement grec de la Bibliotheque nationale*), the date of which is fixed with every probability as the earliest years of the fourth century CE. The original text of the Ritual has, however, been plainly worked over by a school of Egyptian magicians, who inserted most of the now unintelligible words and names, and vowel-combinations and permutations, of their theurgic language, which were known in Egypt as “words of power.”

It is exceedingly probable, therefore, that we have in this Ritual of initiation certain theurgic practices of Egyptian tradition combined with the traditional Mithraic invocations done into Greek. As to the chanting of the vowels, it is of interest to learn from Demetrius, *On Interpretation*, that:

In Egypt, the priests hymn the gods by means of the seven vowels, chanting them in order; instead of the pipe and lute the musical chanting of these letters is heard. So that if you were to take away this accompaniment you would simply remove the whole melody and music of the utterance (*logos*).²

The statement of Nicomachus of Gerasa the “musician” and mystic (second century CE), is still clearer; for he not only tells us about the vowels and consonants, but also of certain other “unarticulated” sounds which were used by the theurgists... In speaking of the vowels or “sounding letters”—each of the seven spheres being said to give forth a different vowel or nature-tone—Nicomachus informs us that these root-sounds in nature are combined with certain material elements, as they are in spoken speech with the consonants; but “just as the soul with the body, and music with the lyre-strings, the one produces living creatures and the other musical modes and tunes, so do those root-sounds give birth to certain energetic and initiatory powers of divine operations....³

As we have said, the Ritual before us is not of the nature of a church or temple service; on the contrary, it contains directions for a solitary sacrament, in which the whole effort of the celebrant is to stir into activity, and bring into conscious operation, his own hidden nature or the root-substance of his being. It is a *yoga*-rite (*unio mystica*), or act for

union, in which the physical breath, the etheric currents, and the psychic auræ, or life-breaths, or *prana's*, work together with the inbreathing of the Great Breath, or Holy Spirit, or Atomic Energy.

Excerpts from *The Ritual*:

The Father's Prayer:

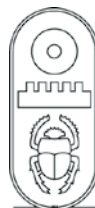
O Providence, O Fortune, bestow on me Thy Grace—imparting these the Mysteries a Father only may hand on, and that, too, to a Son alone—his Immortality—an initiate, worthy of this our Craft, with which Sun Mithras, the Great God, commanded me to be endowed by His Archangel; so that I, Eagle, as I am, by mine own self alone, may soar to Heaven, and contemplate all things.

The Invocatory Utterance

O Primal Origin of my origination; Thou Primal Substance of my substance; First Breath of breath, the breath that is in me; First Fire, God-given for the Blending of the blendings in me, First Fire of fire in me; First Water of my water, the water in me; Primal Earth-essence of the earthy essence in me; Thou Perfect Body of me—son of my N. father and N. my mother—fashioned by Honoured Arm and Incorruptible Right Hand, in World that's lightless, yet radiant with Light, in World that's soulless, yet filled full of Soul!

Utterances

Silence! Silence! Silence! The Symbol of the Living God beyond Decay. O Silence! Silence! I am a Star, whose Course is as your Course, shining anew from out the depth!



ëö · öëö · iöö · öë · ëö · ëö ·
öëö · iöö · öëë · öëë · ööë · ië ·
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euö · öë · eiö · ëö · öë · öë · öë · ee
· ooouiöë!

Draw nigh, O Lord!

Hail Guardians of the Pivot, ye,
sacred sturdy Youths, who all at
once, revolve the spinning Axis of
Heaven's Circle, ye who let loose
the thunder and the lightning, and
earthquake-shocks and thunder-
bolts upon the hosts of impious
folk, but who bestow on me, who
pious am and worshipper of God,
good-health, and soundness of my
frame in every Part, and Proper
stretch of hearing and of sight,
and calm, in the now Present
good-hours of this day, O mighty
Ruling Lords and Gods of me!

Hail Lord, Thou Master of the
Water! Hail, Founder of the Earth!
Hail, Prince of Breath!

O Lord, being born again, I Pass
away in being made Great, and,
having been made Great, I die.

Being born from out the state of
birth-and-death that giveth birth
to mortal lives, I now, set free,
pass to the state transcending
birth, as Thou hast established it,
according as Thou hast ordained
and made, the Mystery.⁴



ENDNOTES

¹ However, Marvin W. Meyers includes this “Mithraic Liturgy” in his 1987 Sourcebook and affirms its Mithraic aspects: “The so-called Mithras Liturgy is one of the most interesting and perplexing of texts concerning the worship of Mithras in late antiquity....[It] manifests a syncretistic piety that makes use of astrology and magic in order to provide a liturgical spell for the ecstatic ascent of the soul to god. Although we cannot agree with Albrecht Dieterich that the Mithras Liturgy preserves the highest sacrament of Mithraic initiation, the text does contain several clearly Mithraic themes.” Marvin W. Meyers, *The Ancient Mysteries: A Sourcebook* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 211–212.

² Demetrius of Phaleron, *De Elocutione* Ch 71, Ed. Ludwig Radermacher (Leipzig: Tübner, 1901), 20.

³ Nichomachus of Gerasa (ca. 60–120). In Mead’s notes, he cites this as “Nichomachus c. 6,” however the specific reference has not been found by subsequent editors.

⁴ The complete text of Mead’s Preamble, his translation of the full ritual, and his commentary may be found at <http://hermetic.com/pgm/mithraic.html>.