

Mithra

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This article is about the [Zoroastrian yazata Mithra](#) (Miθra). For other divinities with related names, see the general article [Mitra](#).

Mithra ([Avestan](#) *Miθra*, modern [Persian](#) مهر *Mihr*, *Mehr*, *Meher*) is an important deity or divine concept ([Yazata](#)) in [Zoroastrianism](#) and later [Iranian history](#) and culture.

Mithra is descended, together with the [Vedic](#) deity [Mitra](#), from a common proto-Indo-Iranian entity **mitra* "treaty, bond".

*Main article: [Etymology of *mitra](#)*

The Avestan common noun *miθra*, meaning "covenant, contract, oath", derives from [proto-Indo-Iranian *mitra](#), which has a root *mi-* "to bind", with the "tool suffix" *-tra-* "causing to." Thus, etymologically *miθra* means "that which causes binding", preserved in the Avestan word for "covenant, contract, oath".

[\[edit\]](#) In Zoroastrianism

The reforms of [Zoroaster](#) retained the multitudes of pre-Zoroastrian divinities, reducing them in a complex hierarchy to "immortals" who, under the supremacy of the Creator [Ahura Mazda](#), were now either [ahuras](#) or [daevas](#). In this scheme, Mithra is a member of the ahuric triad, protectors of [asha](#), the order of the universe. Mithra is additionally the protector of truth and justice and the source of cosmic light. In [Middle Persian](#) Mithra came to be known as [Meher](#).

Relief from [Taq-i Bostan](#) in [Kermanshah](#), Iran, showing [Ardashir I](#) of [Sassanid Empire](#) at the center receiving his crown from [Ahura Mazda](#). The two stand on a prostrate enemy. Here at the left is Mithra as a priest, wearing a crown of sun-rays, holding a priest's *barsam*, and standing on a sacred lotus.

Mithra is not present in the [Gathas](#) of [Zoroaster](#) (Zarathustra) but appears in the younger [Yashts](#) of the [Avesta](#) (Campbell p 257). There, Mithra comes to the fore among the created beings. "I created him" Ahura Mazda declares to Zoroaster, "to be as worthy of sacrifice and as worthy of prayer as myself" (Campbell, *loc. cit.*). In the Yashts, Mithra gains the title of "Judge of Souls" and is assigned the domain of human welfare (which he shares with the Creator). Mithra occupies an intermediate position in the Zoroastrian hierarchy as the greatest of the [yazata](#), created by Ahura Mazda (Ormuzd in later Persian) to aid in the destruction of evil and the administration of the world. He is then the divine representative of the Creator on earth, and is directed to protect the righteous from the demonic forces of [Angra Mainyu](#) ([Ahriman](#) in later Persian).

As the protector of truth and the enemy of error, Mithra occupied an intermediate position in the Zoroastrian pantheon as the greatest of the *yazatas*, the beings created by Ahuramazda to aid in the destruction of evil and the administration of the world. He was thus a divinity of the realms of air and light, and, by transfer to the moral realm, the manifestation of truth and loyalty. As the enemy of darkness and evil spirits, he protected souls, accompanying them to [paradise](#), and was thus a redeemer. Because light is accompanied by heat, he was the promoter of vegetation and increase; he rewarded the good with prosperity and annihilated the bad.

[\[edit\]](#) **In Iranian culture**

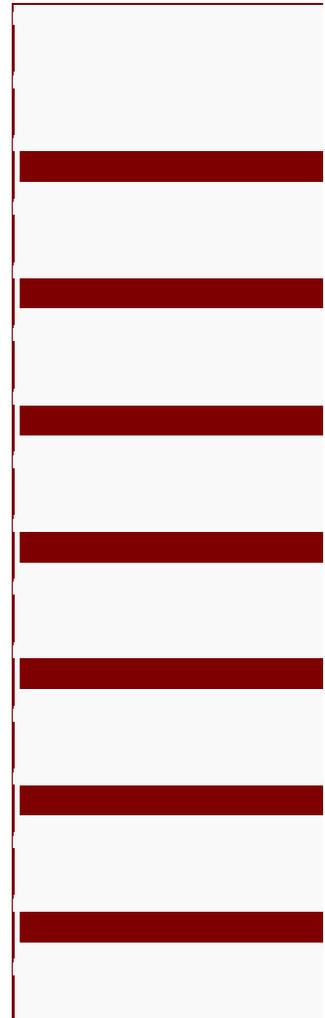


Antiochus and **Mithra**, with radiate [Phrygian cap](#), bas-relief of the temple built by [Antiochus I of Commagene](#), 69-31 BCE, on the [Nemrod Dagh](#), in the [Taurus Mountains](#).

While in older Zoroastrianism Mithra is seen as a creation of [Ahura Mazda](#), and in his role as 'Judge of Souls' as the rewarder of good and annihilator of the bad. Mithra was seen as omniscient, undeceivable, infallible, eternally watchful, and never-resting.

Similarly, while in the *Sirozeh*, Mithra is also referred to as *Dae-pa-Meher*, or Creator of Meher, this separation between 'Meher' and the 'Creator of Meher' dissolves in later texts and the distinguishing characteristics of Mithra and Meher blend. Mithra, reincorporated as "Meher", thus also becomes the representative of truth and justice, and, by transfer to the physical realm, the divinity of air and light. As the enemy of darkness and evil spirits, he protected souls, a [psychopomp](#) accompanying them to [paradise](#). As heat accompanying light, Mithra became associated with growth and resultant prosperity.

Mithra worship spread first with the empire of the Persians throughout Asia Minor, then throughout the empire of [Alexander](#) and his successors.



The [Parthian](#) princes of Armenia were hereditary priests of Mithra, and an entire district of this land was dedicated to [Anahita](#). Many temples were erected to Mithra in Armenia, which remained one of the last strongholds of the Mazdaist cult of Mithra until it became the first officially Christian kingdom.

Royal names incorporating Mithra's (e.g. "Mithradates") appear in the dynasties of Parthia, Armenia, and in Anatolia, in Pontus and Cappadocia.