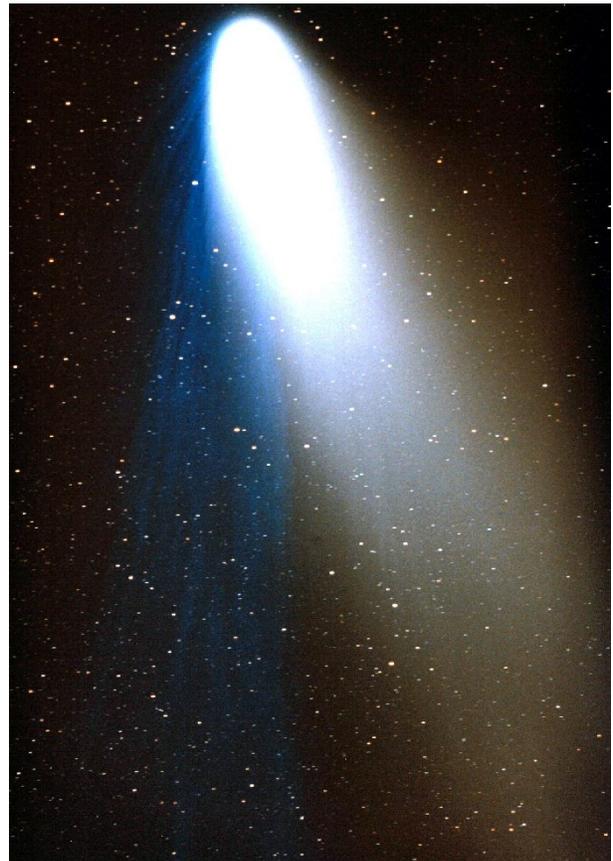


Born from Rock:
An exploratory critique of David Ulansey's "Hypercosmic Sun"

-- Working Draft as of January 1, 2017 --

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Mithras in a Phrygian hat depicted on a 2-3rd c AD Roman relief (left); blazing cone of Comet 109P / Swift-Tuttle (right)

"It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence."

– William Kingdon Clifford (1877)

“The question that faces us, I need not stress, has nothing to do with who is right and who is wrong. But, if our mythological studies are to progress, erroneous planetary identifications have to be laid to rest. Only then can mythology be viewed in the proper perspective as it applies to cosmic catastrophism which, because of recent rival scenarios, is fast becoming a muddled issue.”

– Dwardu Cardona (1985)

The motifs of traditional esotericism stand in great need of redefinition in light of recent catastrophist reconstructions of Solar system history. While the lore surrounding the cosmological ‘world ages’ recalled by mythological accounts and further elaborated by the technical terminology of ancient astronomical systems was indeed later conserved in the ritual inductions of traditional esotericism, the early oral and written testimony of the ancients was much maligned by subsequent attempts of later theologians to reinterpret the mythohistorical record according to doctrinal assumptions and superstitions. Reevaluating traditional esotericism in the context of its foregrounding in archaeoastronomy and mythology, the many weaknesses of conventional modern-day esoteric interpretations -- which are by and large deeply reliant upon uniformitarian views of the cosmos inflated with belated symbolic, doctrinal or metaphorical theologies -- may now be exposed as far-fetched abstractions completely devoid of any factual scientific grounding.

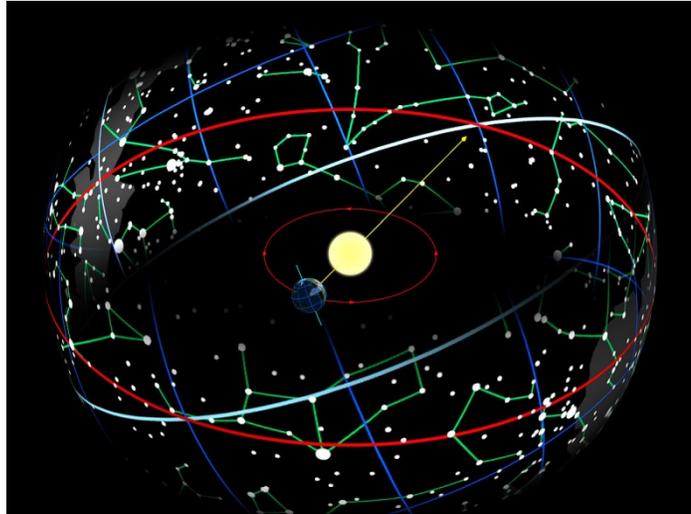
1. *Beyond the Sphere of the Fixed Stars?*

David Ulansey's "[Mithras and the Hypercosmic Sun](#)" offers an intriguing if somewhat far-fetched perspective on the possibilities of the "two suns" seemingly alluded to in Greco-Roman Mithraic liturgy and iconography -- Helios (sun-god) and Mithras (*sol invictus*). The Avestan or Iranian Mithra of Zoroastrianism was similarly regarded as separate from the "radiant sun" Hvare-khshaeta. Both the Greco-Roman Mithras and the Avestan Mithra are sometimes regarded as related to the older Vedic Mitra, who was mostly indistinguishable from Varuna -- often considered a Vedic cognate of the Greek Ouranos. All three seem to be derived from a much earlier PII Mittani-Aryan Miitra, attested to as early as the 14th century BC (where Varuna, Indra and Agni are also referenced). The well-known Mithraic epithet "*sol invictus*" is not attested until the late BC / early AD era, and was never applied to the Avestan Mithra, Vedic Mitra or PII Miitra, but to the Greco-Roman Mithras alone. The Buddhist "Maitreya" motif, dating from the same era as the Greco-Roman Mithras (1st century BC), may represent a related phenomenon; indeed, the etymological root of Maitreya is identical to the Vedic Mitra.



Helios and Mithras depicted on a 2-3rd c AD Roman relief

Ulansey claims that Helios represented "the normal astronomical sun," while Mithras, "the unconquered sun," was "a so-called 'hypercosmic' sun located beyond the sphere of the fixed stars" (Ulansey 1994). The word which Ulansey translates as "hypercosmic" is the Greek *hyperouranios* [ὑπερουράνιος], elsewhere translated more literally as "hyperouranion" (Schmalzriedt 1969; Ackerman 2008). *Ouranos*, in this context specified as a common noun and not a discreet theophoric name, was the technical astronomical term for the sphere of fixed stars (aka the Ptolemaic "*Primum Mobile*") in post-mythological, early Iron Age Greece and Rome. The word "cosmos" / "cosmic" has gathered connotations far outside of the fixed order visible to the naked eye in the night sky, and as such the use of "hypercosmic" in this context can be misleading. Let's stick to the more literal "hyperouranion" for the time being, bearing in mind the common sense of "*ouranos*" as "the sphere of fixed stars" during the late BC / early AD era -- the era of the Greco-Roman Mithraic mysteries (among others).



Ouranos / the Sphere of Fixed Stars / the Primum Mobile as depicted by Ptolemy (left) and modern day (right)

So much for "-ouranios." What about the prefix "hyper-"? Etymologically, the ancient Greek "γερ" [ὑπερ] can mean "above, beyond, or across" (not to mention "under or below"!); Ulansey would have us understand this in the sense of "beyond" -- "beyond *ouranos*," i.e., "beyond the sphere of the fixed stars." Ulansey's further elaboration of Mithras as "the personification of the force responsible for ... the precession of the equinoxes" ... "literally located beyond the outermost sphere of the fixed stars" remains puzzling, and asks us to posit not only an ancient belief in a realm outside the visible cosmos, as a container of the visible cosmos, but also a belief in an "unconquered sun" ordering this realm, itself unseen, indeed invisible.



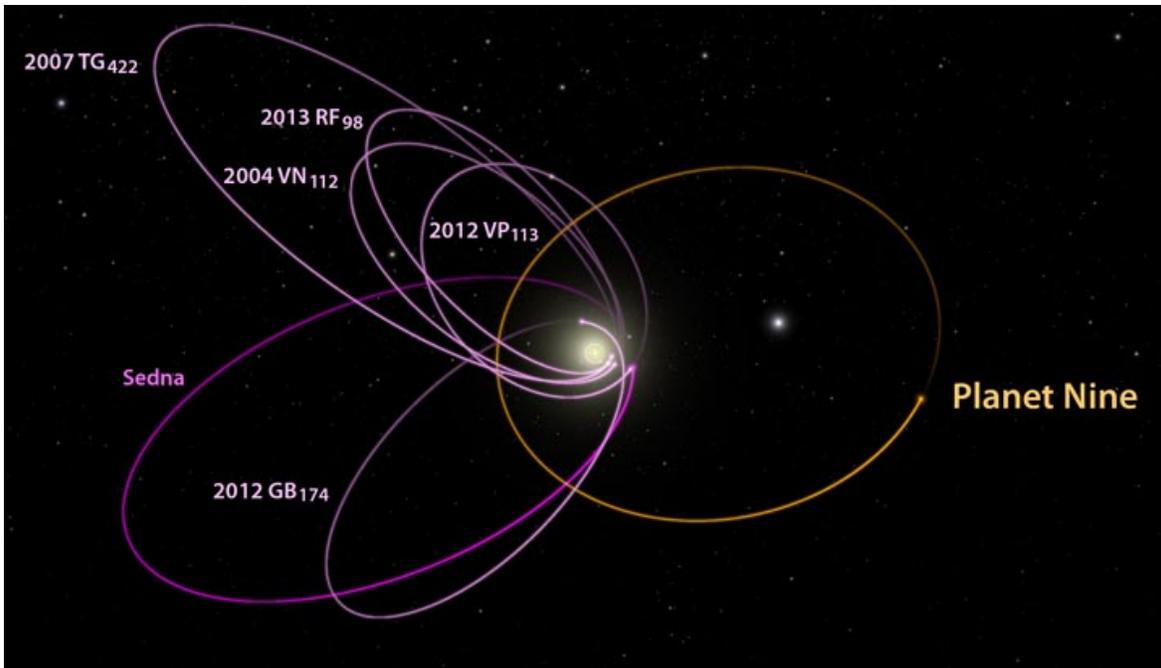
The famed "Atlas Farnese" star-globe, with the constellation Taurus facing right

All in all, this seems rather far-fetched, despite Ulansey's invocation of "star-globes which depict the cosmic sphere as it would be seen from the outside the orientation of the constellations," where the orientation of the constellations are "naturally reversed." These star-globes do not appear indicative of a "hyperouranian" place containing the visible cosmos, but rather betray the limitations of contemporary methods of observation, which appear to have been limited to the sight of the naked eye. --Indeed, the beliefs of the ancients, attested to in their myths, appear indissolubly linked to celestial objects, cosmological interactions and events witnessed with the naked eye; nowhere in the mythohistorical record do we find attestations of imaginative conjectures or abstract theological constructs.

As such, I would seriously guard against taking belated interpretations of this "hyperouranian" sun as "noetic," etc., too seriously, as these interpretations (whether proffered by Philo or Plotinus, Proclus or Iamblichus, Lewy or Ulansey) were tailored to fit a uniformitarian view of the Solar system and the cosmos at large. In this researcher's honest opinion, any interpretation that relies upon a "symbolic," "doctrinal" (dogmatic) or "metaphorical" meaning can be thrown out as too belated to be an accurate mythos or logos of any historical cosmological event. Indeed, the standard Platonic division of the cosmos into "visible" and "intelligible" (aka "material" and "spiritual" or "archetypal") realms appears in retrospect to be wholly spurious and highly suspect -- and likely represents one of the earliest state-sponsored inculcations of cultural amnesia en masse. --Recall that around this same time it was a punishable offense in Greece (and later, Rome) to teach that the planets and stars had ever moved in orbits other than those observable at that time. That the Platonic writings demonstrate a terrific amount of spin-doctoring and misrepresentation of earlier pre-Socratic systems of thought -- those of Pythagoras, Parmenides and Empedocles included -- has been amply demonstrated by the likes of Eric Havelock, Charles Olson and most recently Peter Kingsley. With the Chaldean Oracles and the writings of Plotinus appearing some 500-600 years later, we can only stumble over increasing levels of amnesia and confused mystification. No longer enjoying the visible celestial sights that gave rise to the older mythological notions of multiple suns and the cometary circuit of transmigrating "souls," these later philosophers and theologians have nothing concrete to offer in their increasingly abstract interpretations.

2. Planet Nine?

An alternate possibility, however, of Mithras as a "hyperouranian" sun "understood ... not in a merely symbolic or metaphysical sense, but rather in the literal sense of being located physically and spatially in the region beyond the outermost boundary of the cosmos defined by the sphere of the fixed stars" (Ulansey 1994) could possibly point us to an otherwise lost gas giant / brown dwarf perhaps kicked into an exceedingly wide Solar orbit. This is more or less the gist of the hypothetical "5th Ice Giant" of the Nice Model as well as Michael Brown's recent "Planet Nine" theory. There do appear to be direct correlations to such a notion tucked away here and there in the mythologies of various peoples, and I intend to present an overview of such speculative material in a future draft of *The Jupiter Myth*.

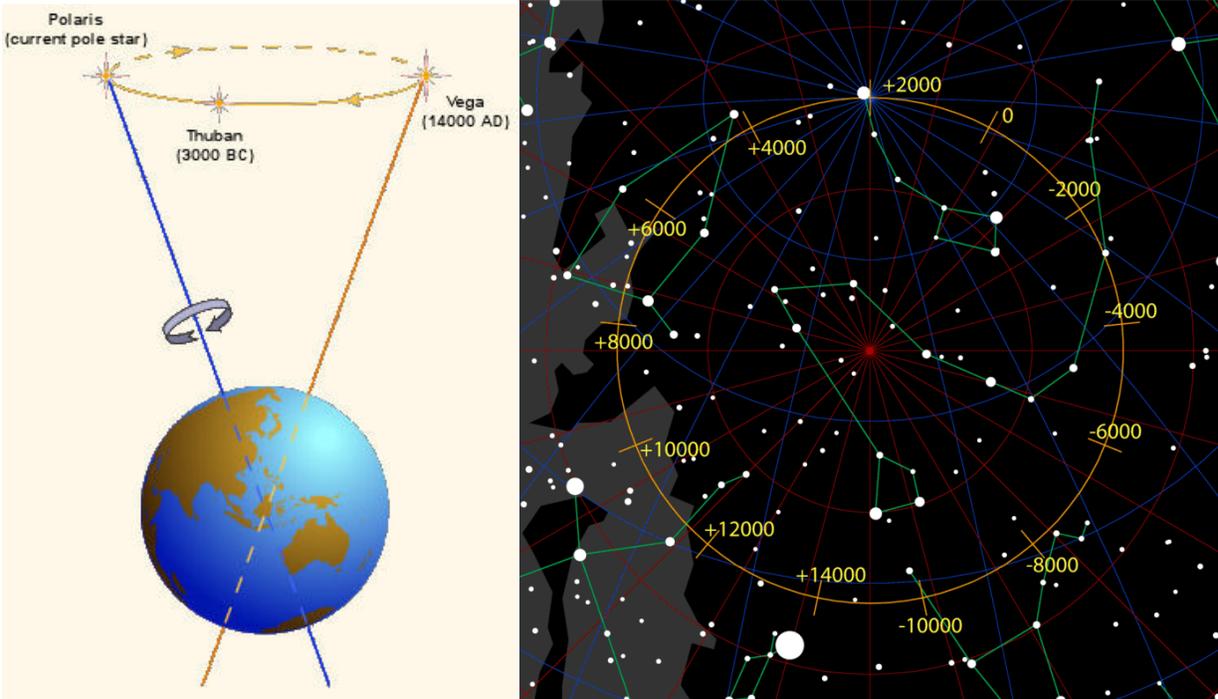


The hypothesized orbit of Michael Brown's "Planet Nine"

But would a lost brown dwarf / dim gas giant like "Planet Nine" continue to visibly discharge long after Jupiter and Saturn had ceased to flare? Bearing in mind the possibility of such a body continuing to migrate outward for a longer period of time than the other giant planets, we might indeed entertain such a hypothesis. However, sparse mentions of a possible *fifth* outbound dwarf star occur only in much earlier chronological contexts. Only the earlier PII Miitra or the Vedic Mitra-Varuna seem to be plausible candidates corresponding to a hypothetical lost brown dwarf / gas giant. Could the later Avestan Mithra and the even later Greco-Roman Mithras have retained their long-lived popularity if such a quasi-stellar body --indeed a dwarf "sun" -- was no longer visible? --What then could possibly be the meaning of an "unconquered sun" if its former radiance had already gone dark?

3. Above the Sphere of Fixed Stars?

But what if the sense of "*hyper-*" in the original context of "hyperouranion" instead meant "*above*" (or "*over*") the sphere of fixed stars (*ouranos*)? In that sense, an "unconquered sun" located "*above*" the fixed stars (and especially the constellations of the Zodiac and the precessional wheeling of the equinoxes) could instead have been an early Iron Age Pole Star -- possibly Thuban (*Alpha Draconis*) [and/or *Kappa Draconis*]; Kochab (*Beta Ursae Minoris*) [and/or Pherkad (*Gamma Ursae Minoris*)]; or even perhaps Polaris (*Alpha Ursae Minoris*).



Conventional uniformitarian model of precessed Pole Stars

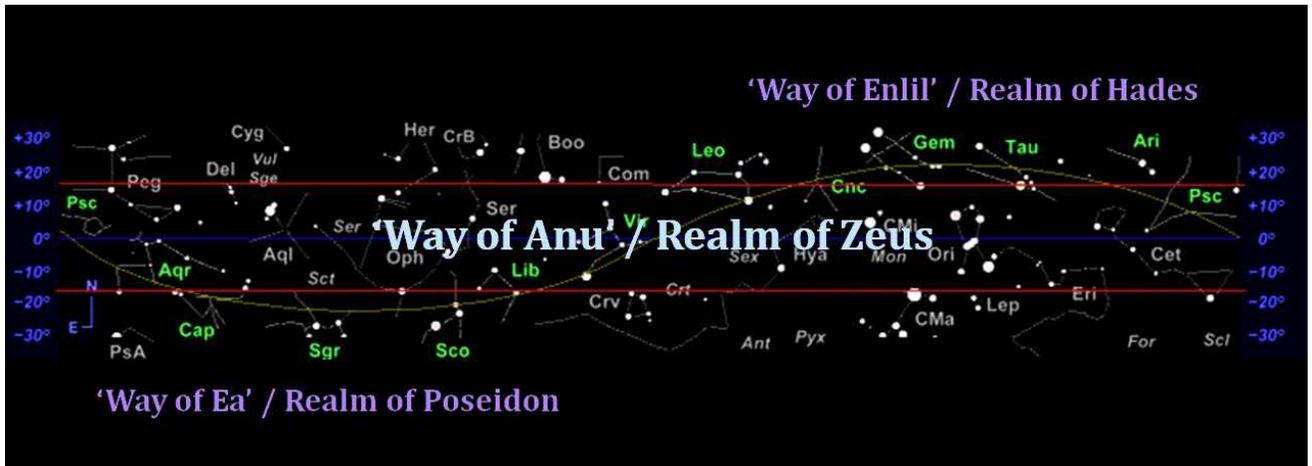
Contrary to popular notions, however, there are absolutely *no recorded observations of Pole Stars prior to Polaris* (in the early Middle Ages, with scant references to its practical use for navigation c. 500 AD), *nor are there records of any observed axial / equinoctial precession prior to the early 7th century BC!* -- I am here following up suggestions stemming from the pool of data collected by the late George Dodwell on the inconstant obliquity of Earth's axial orientation to the ecliptic. For more info, see "[The Dodwell Manuscript.](#)" It is, in fact, highly likely that

- 1) axial precession was emphatically *not* an observable or otherwise measurable phenomenon at all, until at least the early 7th century BC;
- 2) its rate, since its relatively recent inception, has *always* been inconstant and generally progressively slowing down; and
- 3) its rate is intrinsically linked to wobbles in Earth's axial obliquity due to the Moon's daily transit in and out of Earth's plasmasphere (charge sheath) as well as the progressively accelerating rate of the Moon's increasing distance from Earth and the progressive deceleration of Earth's axial spin.

Thus a conjecture of a visible Pole Star as an "unconquered" precessional pivot seems to fall flat also. After all, the Greek navigator Pytheas (whose observations were incorporated by Dodwell), c. 320 BC, described the celestial pole as "devoid of stars." Note the similarity to a line from Emperor Julian's [Mithraic] *Hymn to Helios* some 600 years later: "[this] sun travels in the starless heavens far above the region of the fixed stars."

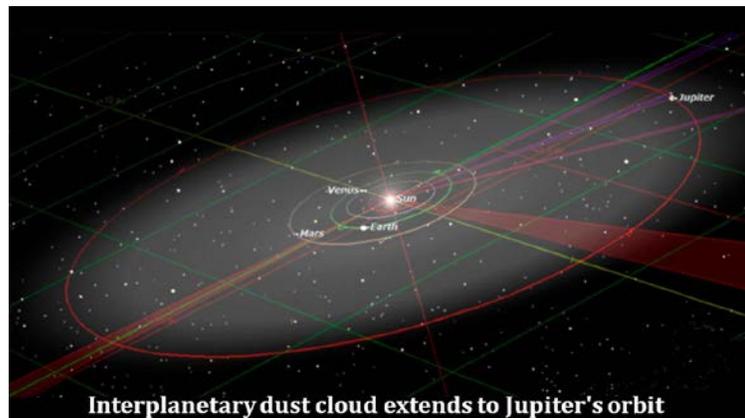
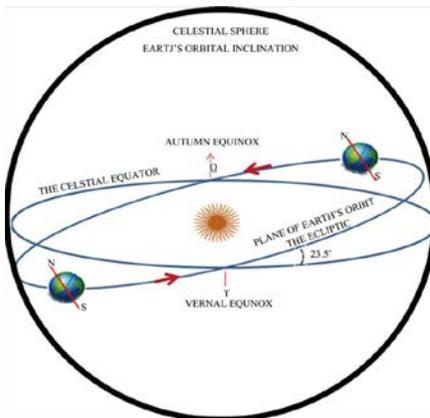
4. The Empyrean

Nevertheless, a potential clue arises from the later medieval use of Plato's "*hyperouranion topos*" [ὑπερουράνιον τόπον] (*Phaedrus* 247b-c) as a "place *above* the sphere of fixed stars" (i.e., including the Zodiacal wheel of constellations). A cognate Greek and later Latin term for the "highest heaven" (i.e., the "highest *ouranos*"), the "*empyros / empyrus*" or "empyrean" realm, refers literally to a "place in the fire [*pyr*]"-- i.e., the "Realm of Hades" or "Way of Enlil," a band of the night sky approximately 17 degrees to 30 degrees North, from Aldebaran (*Alpha Tauri*) upward. That is, literally, "*above* the sphere of fixed stars" -- *hyperouranion*.



The Empyrean / Realm of Hades / Way of Enlil located above Aldebaran (*Alpha Tauri*)

For those living in the Northern hemisphere, Earth's modern orbit orients with regard to this realm between May 1 to August 1 (cross-quarter days, Beltane to Lughnasadh), the season of greatest warmth, the "place of the fire" (empyrean). During earlier world ages (Silver through Bronze) Earth would have then been located below the visibly glowing interplanetary dust cloud shrouding the Solar current sheet above, and those living in the North would as such have had a much clearer view of the fixed stars in the night sky to the south.



Earth's annual orbit below the interplanetary dust cloud lasts from May 1 to August 1

The question then becomes: What "unconquered" and apparently visibly radiant "sun" could have been seen traversing the *hyperouranion empyrean*? Perhaps a lost brown dwarf / gas giant like "Planet Nine," apparently orbiting "beyond" the fixed stars, as suggested above? -- But what if the prefix "hyper-" was instead understood in the sense of "across" -- as in, "across the sphere of fixed stars" (including the constellations of the Zodiac)? In that case, any of the outer giants, especially dim dwarf stars Jupiter and Saturn, could have been representative of an "unconquered sun," traversing the 12 houses of the Zodiac against the sphere of fixed stars. --Interestingly enough, Jupiter revolves against the backdrop of the 12 houses of the Zodiac slightly less than every 12 Earth years [11.86 to be exact] -- spending roughly one Earth year in each house along the way. Could there be an almost forgotten correspondence there? Could the uneven widths of the commonly assigned Zodiacal houses in fact be representative of the temporary retrograde motions of Jupiter as seen from the point of view of Earth's much shorter annual transit around the Sun?

Conjectural considerations aside, it would nevertheless seem to be highly unlikely that Jupiter or Saturn were ever known to the Greco-Romans as Mithras (to the Zoroastrians as Mithra, the Vedic Aryans as Mitra, nor the Proto-Indo-Iranians as Miiitra), because there were other more common names for these bodies, both as theophoric attestations as well as astronomical objects. An even stronger objection, as mentioned previously, is that the epithet "unconquered sun" (*sol invictus*) was only evoked in the relatively late Greco-Roman cult of Mithras, long after recorded archaeoastronomical observations of the outer giants as night-time "suns."

5. Perseus, the Tauroctony and the Precession of the Vernal Equinox

Clearly we stand in need of additional clues in order to continue tracing out the proper cosmological identity of Mithras as "*sol invictus*" and "hyperouranion sun." The expositions above merely stand witness to the weakness of conventional esoteric interpretations relying upon an uniformitarian view of the cosmos coupled with belated symbolic, doctrinal or metaphorical theologies.

A few glimmers uncovered above stand out, however, and encourage deeper delving. --In our considerations regarding the central position of the Zodiac among the fixed stars, the reference to Aldebaran (*Alpha Tauri*) as an annual marker of Earth's axial orientation with regard to the Empyrean, and the observational data pointing to a relatively recent inception of Earth's axial precession, we have touched upon a central thread of Greco-Roman Mithraism: the Tauroctony, the slaying of the sacrificial bull. As Ulansey confirms, "the various astronomical explanations of the tauroctony ... agree that the bull in the Tauroctony is meant to represent the constellation Taurus" (Ulansey 1994).

The surrounding iconography of Zodiacal and nearby fixed star asterisms on many of the Tauroctony reliefs and frescoes provide ample witness to the astronomical facts of the celestial bull. Canis Minor, Hydra, Corvus, and Scorpio are also specifically depicted in many examples of the Mithraic Tauroctony, the very constellations situated along the celestial equator when Taurus was seen to set behind the rising Sun on the dawn of the vernal equinox!

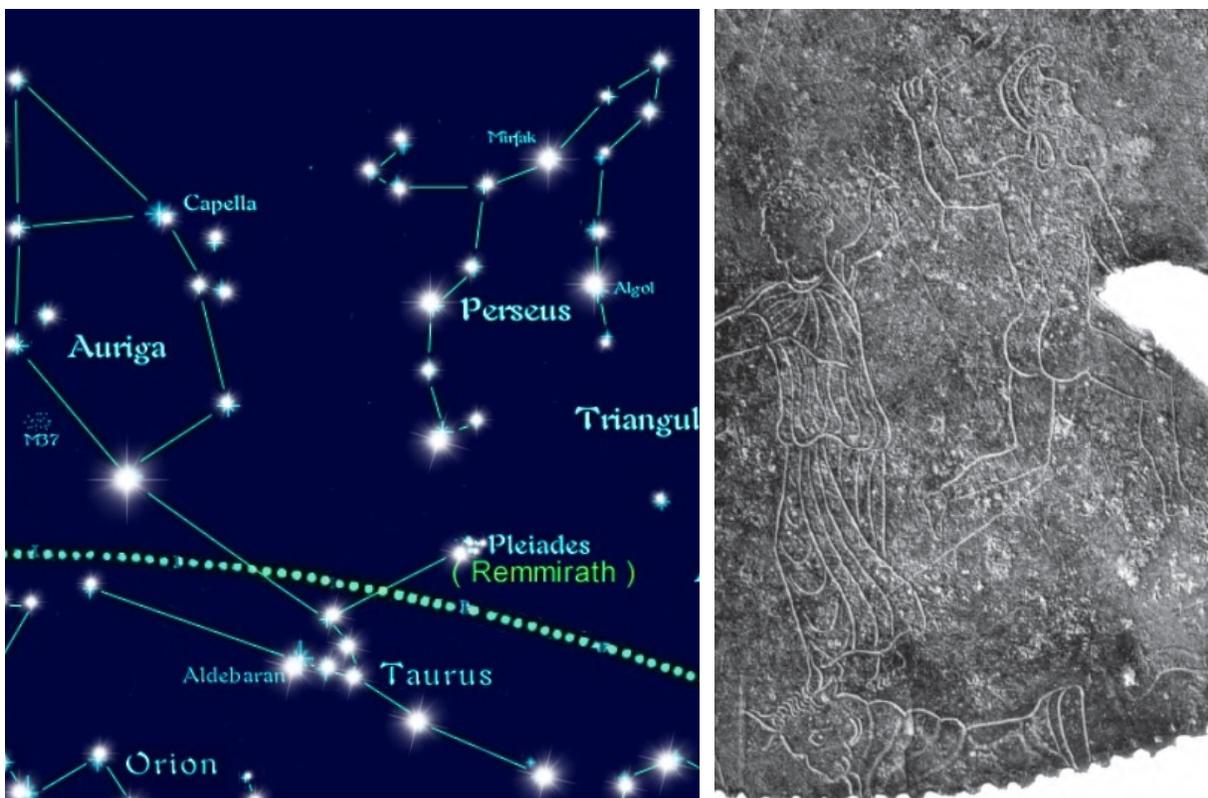


The Tauroctony scene on the verso of the 2-3rd c AD Roman relief featured above

As Ulansey concurs in his full-length work *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries* (1991), the figure of Mithras in icons of the Tauroctony can similarly be easily identified as the constellation Perseus, located immediately north of Taurus in the night sky. In fact, identifying Mithras as a theophoric personification of the constellation Perseus may be the easiest way of reconciling not only the longevity of the Greco-Roman Mithras cult, but also the meaningful correlations of the Greco-Roman Mithras to the older cults of the Avestan Mithra, the Vedic Mitra and the PII Miitra! The recurrence of the Phrygian cap seems to be of the most clear-cut clues to these cross-cultural correlations.



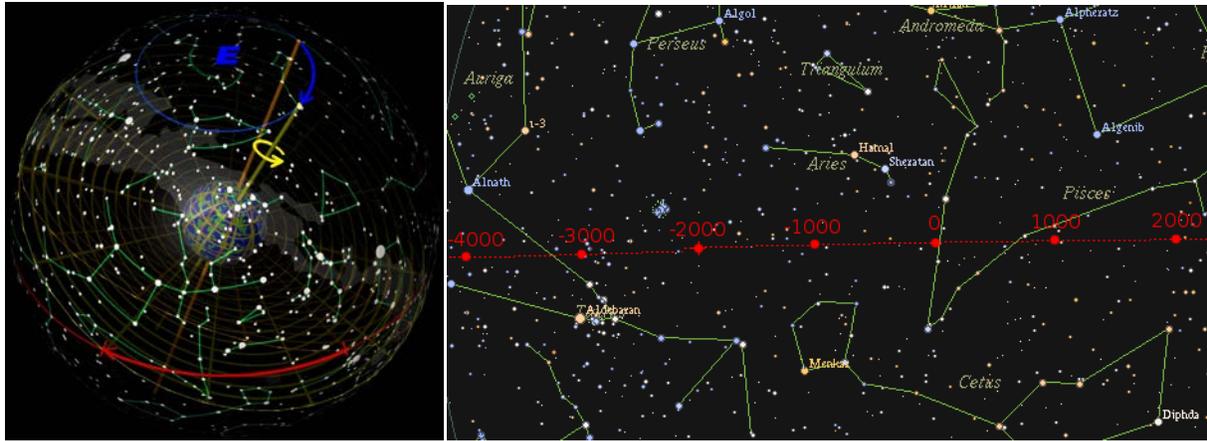
Perseus sporting a Phrygian hat in *Codex Vossianus Leidensis* [79]; Mt. Nemrut Mithra in Phrygian hat with radiant starburst



Perseus and Taurus in the night sky (left); as depicted on the Salzburg Zodiac plaque (right)

The celestial position of Taurus setting behind the rising Sun on the vernal equinox was well attested to among the ancients -- so well-attested, in fact, that we seem to have an observational record of *Taurus remaining in the same location from the earliest observations of the Zodiac* (c. the late 3rd millenium BC) *all the way until c. the early 7th century BC* (and perhaps even later)! This is quite distinct from the modern convention of a uniformitarian precession of the equinox -- a convention which completely lacks support from observational data. In fact, this modern convention relies upon ignoring or "correcting" all observational data prior to the late 19th century AD!

A further observation by Ulansey may help us begin to clarify this gross inconsistency. "The constellation Taurus as seen in the night sky faces to the left while the bull in the tauroctony always faces to the right. How can this apparent discrepancy be explained?" (Ulansey 1994) Ulansey's explanation, however, relies again upon his far-fetched notion of an ancient belief in a realm outside the visible cosmos, in which the constellation Taurus is to be "seen from outside the cosmos," from his asserted (albeit absurd) "'hyperc cosmic' perspective." As he elaborates in note 13: "The fact that the bull in the tauroctony faces right is explicable only if we understand the tauroctony as the creation of someone who had in mind an astronomical star-globe showing the cosmic sphere as seen from the outside" (Ulansey 1994).



The conventional model of precession as seen from "outside" the fixed stars (left) and from within (right)

But what could possibly be the relevance of the constellation Taurus to the cult of Mithras, if Mithras (as *sol invictus*) is indeed to be understood as representative of the motive force of precession, as Ulansey argues? According to the conventional uniformitarian viewpoint, Taurus had not set behind the rising Sun on the vernal equinox since c. 2000 BC (nor had the other constellations often depicted in the Tauroctony -- Canis Minor, Hydra, Corvus, and Scorpio -- been situated along the celestial equator since that much earlier era); while during the inception of the cult of Greco-Roman Mithras near the middle of the 1st century BC (by at least c. 67 BC, according to Plutarch) convention dictates that the equinoctial setting of Aries was already giving way to Pisces!



The Tauroctony fresco at the Santa Maria Capua Vetere Mithraeum; note constellations Hydra and Canis Minor

In light of the above considerations, does it not become more likely that, in the second half of the first millennium BC, *the constellation Taurus had just begun to wheel away from its former prominence at the vernal equinox* -- and that by the time the Greco-Roman cult of Mithras rose to popularity (the middle of the 1st century BC) this astronomical fact had become undeniable to anyone with eyes to see? Iconographic representations of Taurus looking to the right during the Tauroctony might then become easily explicable as *the direction in which the displaced vernal equinox was drifting -- westward, to the right* (when looking out along the ecliptic, i.e., gazing southward, when standing in the northern hemisphere as Greeks and Romans were).

The slaying of the Bull in the Mithraic Tauroctony might then be regarded *a concrete representation of the displacement of Taurus from its former position as a cardinal Zodiacal constellation*. This also affords a notable clue to archaeoastronomical correlations conserved in other cultures, such as the famed Vedic "Horse Sacrifice" -- where the Horse has long been held to be representative of the Zodiacal wheel itself, its head positioned immediately between the constellations Taurus and Aries. The displacement of the "leg of the bull" or the "leg of the horse" motifs found elsewhere in world mythology thus become more easily correlated cognates as well.

6. Born from Rock

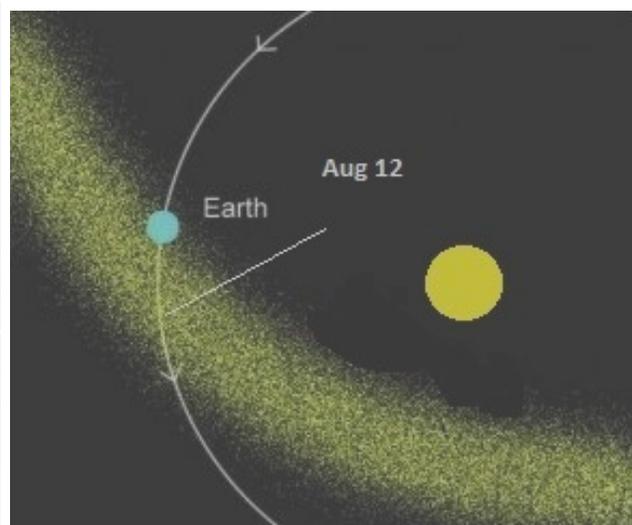
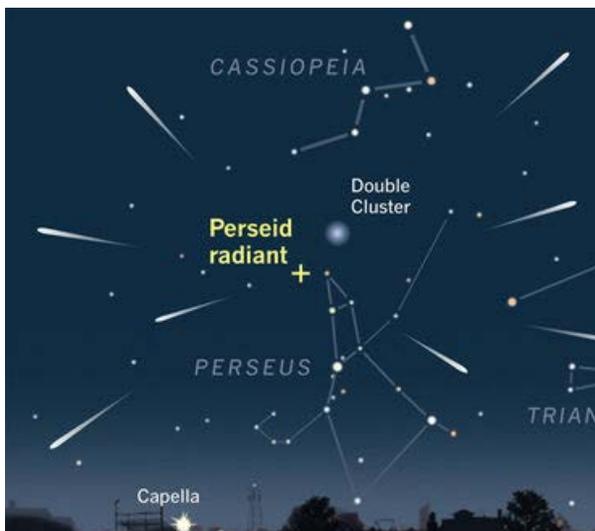
The question initially raised by a fellow colleague in response to Ulansey's take on the "hyperouranian sun" regarding a possible cosmological origin of "the Mithras Born from the Rock motif" has no easy answer. In order to merely suggest a concrete cosmological alternative to Ulansey's "noetic" abstraction, we have had to take a roundabout tour of other Mithraic motifs, paying close attention to the repeated references to Taurus, Perseus and a non-uniformitarian (i.e., catastrophist) take on Earth's axial precession. The "born from rock" motif does not seem likely to represent an earlier encounter between Saturn or Jupiter and the modern Sun, as the Greco-Roman cult of Mithras arrived long after Saturn and Jupiter had retreated to distant dimness, and other theophoric and astronomical names for Saturn and Jupiter had long been assigned by the cultures which also attested reverence for Mithras, Mithra, Mitra and Miitra.

The "rock" from which Mithras was born was often enough depicted as an "egg" also, somewhat akin to the Orphic snake-entwined egg from which Phanes was shown to emerge. Additionally, these depictions of Mithras and Phanes are often surrounded by a ring of Zodiacal constellations (as are some examples of the Tauroctony motif). Both Mithras and Phanes were often shown holding a torch aloft in their left hands and a dagger in their right, their heads surrounded by rays, with a snake coiling upward around their torsos. A Phrygian cap is also often clearly depicted on their heads -- again, one of the few traits which directly links the Greco-Roman Mithras with the Avestan Mithra as well as the constellation Perseus. The combination of these tropes initially appears to be more difficult to analyze backwards to concrete cosmological motifs.



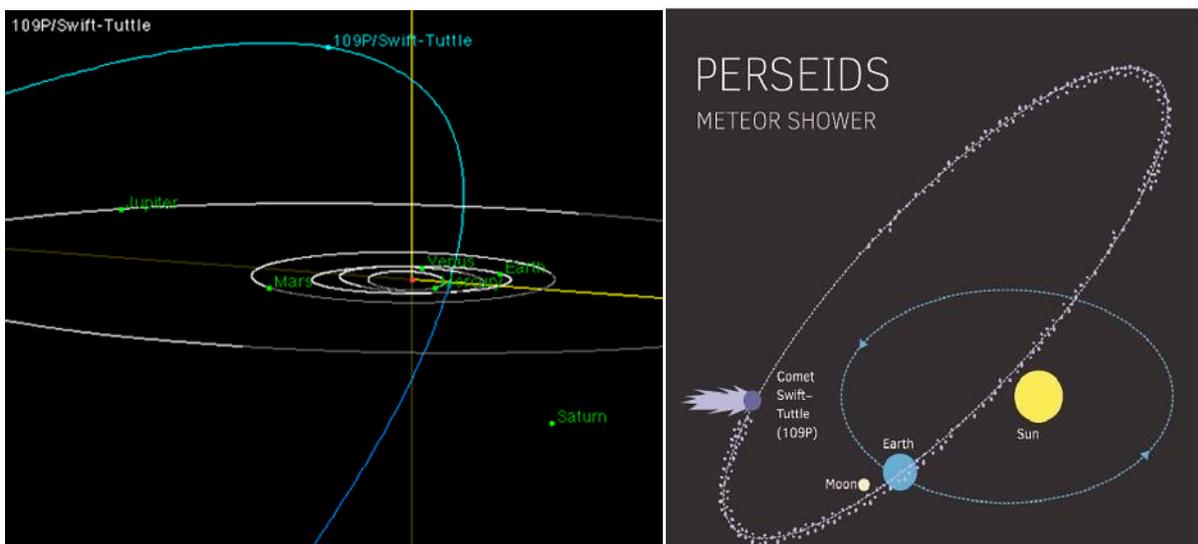
Two variants of "Mithras born from the rock," surrounded by the fixed stars of the Zodiac

That being said, my exploratory delving into the relative locations and positions of the constellations Taurus and Perseus has turned over a potentially notable clue. The constellation Perseus is the visible radiant of the annual Perseid meteor shower, which streaks across the northern skies from mid-July to late August every year, peaking around the 12th of August -- within the same block of time denoted by Earth's axial orientation to the "Empyrean." Observational records of the Perseids (Περσείδες, the "sons of Perseus") go back nearly 2000 years to c. 36 AD -- i.e., they may have been first observed around the same era as the inception of the Greco-Roman cult of Mithras.



Locating the Perseid meteor shower, courtesy *Sky & Telescope* (left) and *The Science Geek* (right)

What is more: The Perseids are actually *a trail of rocky debris following behind Comet 109P / Swift-Tuttle*, observational records of which go back to the same period of time as the earliest notices of the Perseids -- a comet described more recently as "the single most dangerous object known to humanity" (Verschurr 2007). First observed (according to Chinese records) in c. 69 BC, and again in c. 188 AD, comet Swift-Tuttle has made repeated close approaches to Earth and Moon over the past 2000+ years, has proven difficult to pinpoint mathematically and as such may have suffered multiple perturbations in its orbit since it was first observed -- perhaps due to its occasional close approaches to Earth. In fact, Swift-Tuttle's unique orbital trajectory takes it *far above* the plane of the ecliptic and the sphere of fixed stars on a highly elliptical tour of the Empyrean, rendering it as a notable candidate as a "hyperouranian" stellar object. (Swift-Tuttle also appears to be locked in an orbital resonance with Jupiter, but its highly elliptical orbit segregates it from the vast majority of Jupiter Family Comets.)



Comet Swift-Tuttle's highly elliptical orbit and its rocky trail of debris, the Perseid meteors

As is now well known, comet nuclei are barren rocks which appear to spark to sudden brilliant life when approaching the Sun, their vast plasmaspheres (charge sheathes) lighting up as radiant haloes -- star-like or sun-like objects seemingly born from barren rock. Might the "hyperouranian sun" of Mithras be representative of a close approach of Comet Swift-Tuttle during the late BC / early AD era (perhaps initially observed as a rocky captured asteroid akin to Earth trojans 2010-TK₇ and 3753 Cruithne or Earth's recently discovered asteroid companion 2016-HO₃?) -- a cometary quasi-satellite visibly seen to survive a near collision with Earth and Sun, a gleaming star-like comet that rose far above the ecliptic plane and the fixed stars *unconquered*, blazing night and day like a torch through the constellation Perseus, with a trailing serpent tail of cometary dust and debris glowing brilliantly in its wake?

Such a hypothetical scenario might go a long way towards explaining the relatively late development of the "sol invictus" motif in the cult of Greco-Roman Mithras, a motif nowhere attested in the earlier cults of Avestan Mithra, Vedic Mitra or PII Miitra. While the distinct associations with Perseus and the precessional displacement of Taurus appear to be older, more established motifs, the sudden blazing of Comet Swift-Tuttle (c. 69 BC?) and the fiery starburst of Perseus' meteoroid "sons" may have

precipitated a celestial crisis that served to confirm Perseus' notable role in the precession of the vernal equinox, quickly giving rise to the ritual inductions of one of the most popular and widespread mystery religions of late antiquity (c. 67 BC?). -- Clearly further research is in order if we are to recover concrete cosmological history out of the confused mass of belated theological interpretations weighing down the puzzling mystery cults of old.



Rocky nucleus of Comet Halley (left) and radiant coma of Comet Swift-Tuttle (right)