

December 25th Birthday

The similarities between **Mithraism** and **Christianity** have included their chapels, the term "father" for priest, celibacy and, it is notoriously claimed, the **December 25th** birth date. Over the centuries, apologists contending that **Mithraism** copied **Christianity** nevertheless have asserted that the **December 25th** birth date was taken *from Mithraism*. As Sir Arthur Weigall says:

December 25th was really the date, not of the birth of **Jesus**, but of the **Sun-god Mithra. Horus**, son of **Isis**, however, was in very early times identified with **Ra**, the Egyptian **Sun-god**, and hence with **Mithra**.

Mithra's birthday on **December 25th** has been so widely claimed that the *Catholic Encyclopedia* ("**Mithraism**") remarks: "The **25 December** was observed as his birthday, the *natalis invicti*, the rebirth of the winter-**Sun**, unconquered by the rigors of the season."

Yet this contention of **Mithra's** birthday on **December 25th** or the winter solstice is disputed because there is no hard archaeological or literary evidence of the *Roman Mithras* specifically being named as having been born at that time. Says Dr. Alvar:

There is no evidence of any kind, not even a hint, from within the cult that this, or any other winter day, was important in the **Mithraic** calendar. (Alvar, 410)

In analyzing the evidence, we must keep in mind all the destruction that has taken place over the past **2,000** years—including that of *many Mithraic* remains and texts—as well as the fact that several of these germane parallels constituted mysteries that may or may not have been recorded in the first place or the meanings of which have been obscured.

The claim about the Roman **Mithra's** birth on "**Christmas**" is evidently based on the Calendar of Filocalus or Philocalian Calendar (c. **354 AD/CE**), which mentions that **December 25th** represents the "**Birthday of the Unconquered**," understood to refer to the **Sun** and taken to indicate **Mithras** as **Sol Invictus**. Whether it represents **Mithra's** birthday specifically or "merely" that of Emperor Aurelian's **Sol Invictus**, with whom **Mithras** has been identified, the Calendar also lists the day—the winter solstice birth of the **Sun**—as that of *natus Christus in Betleem Iudaeae*: "Birth of **Christ** in

Bethlehem Judea."

Moreover, it would seem that there is more to this story, as Aurelian was the first to institute officially the winter solstice as the birthday of **Sol Invictus** (*Dies Natalis Solis Invicti*) in **274 AD/CE**. (Halsberghe, 158) It is contended that Aurelian's move was in response to **Mithra's** popularity. (Restaud, 4) One would thus wonder why the emperor would be so motivated if **Mithras** had nothing whatsoever to do with the **Sun god's** traditional birthday—a disconnect that would be unusual for *any solar deity*.

Regardless of whether or not the artifacts of the Roman **Mithras's** votaries reflect the attribution of the **Sun god's** birthday to him specifically, many in the empire *did* identify the mysteries icon and **Sol Invictus** as one, evidenced by the inscriptions of "**Sol Invictus Mithras**" and the many images of **Mithras** and the **Sun** together, representing two sides of the same coin or each other's alter ego. Hence, the placement of **Mithras's** birth on this feast day of the **Sun** is understandable and, despite the lack of concrete evidence at this date, quite plausibly *was* recognized in this manner in antiquity in the Roman Empire.