PART TWO

FOUR TAUROCTONE ASSISTANTS

Very few of all the tauroctones that have survived show only Mithra slaying the bull. The absence of any other figures or symbols may be because of a desire for simplicity, but in some instances, at least, the omission reflects a comparatively early date in typological development, for the omissions occur on reliefs and statues of the primary subtypes A (II 12 766), C (352) and D (200 201). There are also two conflates which are probably of quite early date, AB (1625) and AC (230). The last is the Kriton statue from Ostia which was not only older than the Mithraeum in which it had been installed after certain repairs, but which was, in my opinion, one of the earliest Mithraic statuary groups that has come down to us thus far. A study of the tauroctones reveals that there was a strong tendency as time went on to keep adding to the main picture more and more scenes and figures until, by the beginning of the third century, elaborate relief sculptures like those of Poetovio and Nersae had been developed. Wall paintings of oriental inspiration contributed much to this elaboration (see Typology, IV 6c). Conversely, it seems probable that at the beginning of the Mithraic mysteries only Mithra slaying the bull was shown, since this was all that was suggested by contemporary archetypes like the Nike-Victoria or Herakles slaying a bull or Centaur.

a. The Dog. One of the first minor motives to be added to the tauroctone proper may well have been the dog. The Lanuvium plate which balances Mithra taurophoros against an excellent tauroctone of our primary subtype D (207) includes the dog as the only added symbol. The dog is almost always shown leaping against the right forequarter of the bull in order to lick the blood flowing from the wound. On two reliefs of subtype E (71 1275) and on the Lanuvium plate the dog is a mere passive symbol. On the Rožanec or Judovje relief (1482) the dog is shown with his penis erect, whereas on the circular relief of Salona (1861*) he is
omitted, but Cautes the torchbearer is shown holding his own very large penis in the position which is precisely that of the muzzle of the dog on other reliefs.

1. Three dogs accompany Mithra ephippos on the relief of Dieburg (*1247*), whereas in other ephippos pictures he is accompanied by a snake or lion (6 c 3-5). The dog is also associated with the torchbearers, and especially with Cautes (3 f 1.2). He also appears with the Natura dei, along with the raven and snake (*985*, cf 6 d 3).

2. According to Herodotus (1.140) the Magi valued the life of a dog equally with that of a man, and a male Persian was never buried until the body had been attacked by a dog or bird of prey. This perhaps gave rise to the reports that among the Bactrians, Sogdianians and Scythians helpless old people were consumed by dogs kept for the purpose and called “entombers” (*entaphiastai*, Diodorus, *II.II.3*). In the *Pahlavi Rivâyat* it is said that the dog must not be eaten because it has “something of the seed of Gayûmard in it”, whereas birds of prey, including the black crow, must not be eaten because they are full of dead flesh which they were created to eat. The Twin offspring of Gayûmard, the Male and Female (cf 5 j 2.4), were said (*Bund.* 14.9) to have thrown the sacrificed meat on the fire but another portion into the sky, saying, “This is the portion of the gods”. And a vulture passed above them and carried it off, but the first flesh was consumed by the dog. This somewhat obscure statement at least makes it clear that both the vulture and the dog were connected with certain sacrificial rites. According to Plutarch (*De Iside*, 369F) the dog was regarded as a creature of Oromasdes, as were also the cock and certain other creatures.

2.1. While in Egypt the Persian King Cambyses killed the Apis bull and the dog alone of all creatures came near the body and ate it (*De Iside*, 368F). This notice of the slaughter of the sacred bull of Egypt by the Persian King and the eating of its body by a dog provides a striking parallel to Mithra tauroctonos and the

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1) In R. C. Zaehner, *Zurvan, A Zoroastrian Dilemma*, p 366.27. This most important work, containing many transcriptions and translations of Iranian texts, will be CITED HEREAFTER as ZZ.