

The Androcentric Foundations of Roman Mithraism: A Multi-Causal Analysis of Female Exclusion and a Comparative Note on Islamic Framework

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Abstract

This research investigates the causes underlying the absence of women in the Roman cult of Mithras (Mithraism), a mystery religion that systematically and completely excluded women from its rituals and membership. By synthesizing archaeological evidence with textual sources, this article argues that this exclusion was the result of a complex interplay of theological, social, and ritual factors. On a theological level, the profoundly androcentric mythology of the tauroctony and the exclusively male hierarchy left no symbolic space for female participation. Socially, its embeddedness within military networks and male collegia structurally precluded inclusion. Ritually, the ceremonies were designed around male identity and camaraderie. Through a comparative analysis with other contemporary mystery cults, this study highlights the exceptional nature of Mithraism's gender exclusion. The article concludes that this marginalization constrained the cult's social dynamism and contributed to its decline. Finally, a brief comparative glance is taken at the Islamic paradigm, where theological transcendence beyond gender and a structured legal framework (Sharia) provide a contrasting model for defining spiritual roles and participation, without ontological exclusion, within the concept of the Ummah.

Keywords: Roman Mithraism, Women in Antiquity, Mystery Cults, Androcentric Theology, Gender Archaeology, Comparative Religion, Islam and Gender.

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Introduction

The Roman cult of Mithras, as one of the most enigmatic and highly organized mystery religions within the Roman Empire, exerted significant influence on the religious and social landscape from the 1st to the 4th century CE (Beck 2006, 15). However, unlike its contemporary mystery cults—such as the cults of Isis or Dionysus—Mithraism exhibited a unique characteristic: the complete exclusion of women from its rituals and membership (Gordon 1995, 26). This absence, which is clearly demonstrable through archaeological evidence (such as inscriptions, reliefs, and the architecture of Mithraea) as well as textual sources, raises fundamental questions regarding the structural, theological, and social reasons for this deliberate exclusion (Clauss 2000, 45).

According to modern scholarship, Mithraism developed within the framework of "voluntary associations" (*collegia*) and spread predominantly among male military, administrative, and mercantile groups (Gordon 2012, 156). In contrast to the Eleusinian Mysteries or the worship of Isis—where women participated actively both as devotees and as priestesses—this cult defined no role or position for women within its seven-grade hierarchy (Kraemer 1992, 89).

Utilizing a historical-analytical approach and relying on archaeological data and classical texts, this article seeks to investigate the causes of this phenomenon. The central question is: Was the exclusion of women from Mithraism merely a consequence of contemporary social conditions, or was it rooted in the theology, mythology, and ritual structure of the cult itself? (Martin 1987, 112).

In response, it is argued that the absence of women in Roman Mithraism resulted from a combination of intertwined factors: first, the masculine and military structure of the Mithraic community, which was based on networks of brotherhood and loyalty among soldiers and imperial agents (Beck 1998, 122); second, its adoption of the model of Roman *collegia*, which generally did not provide space for female participation (Patterson 2012, 56); third, the thoroughly masculine symbolism in Mithraic theology, particularly in the central myth of the tauroctony (bull-slaying), which depicted the god Mithras in the role of a singular, masculine creator (Lincoln 1999, 145); and finally, the physically demanding and body-focused rites and arduous initiations that were designed in accordance with the male body and social status (Chalupa 2003, 290).

Following this introduction, the article will examine the archaeological and textual evidence for the absence of women. It will then expand its analysis by comparing Mithraism with other mystery cults, framing the discussion within the context of androcentric theology and the socio-military milieu of Rome. Finally, the historical consequences of this absence and its impact on the decline of Mithraism in the face of competition with Christianity will be examined.

Literature Review

The study of the position of women in the Roman cult of Mithras, despite the richness of modern scholarship in Mithraic studies, remained marginalized for a long time. It was only from the final decades of the twentieth century that this topic began to receive serious critical attention from scholars. Franz Cumont, as the founder of modern Mithraic studies, in his monumental work *The Mysteries of Mithra*, focused primarily on the Iranian origins of the cult and its theological developments, and did not address the role or absence of women (Cumont 1903, 45)—an omission that continued in the works of his students and followers.

However, Richard Gordon, with the publication of his influential article "The Social Structure of Mithraism" (1995), initiated a fundamental shift in these studies. He argued that Mithraism, as a social institution, operated within the framework of Roman *collegia*, which had a profoundly masculine nature, and he viewed the exclusion of women not as an accidental phenomenon but as the result of a deliberate structure (Gordon 1995, 26).

Subsequently, Manfred Clauss addressed the issue with greater clarity in his book *The Roman Cult of Mithras* (2000). He demonstrated that the central myth of the tauroctony—in which Mithras, as a male hero, sacrifices the bull—was the most symbolic expression of the androcentric theology of this cult, leaving no space for the symbolic participation of women (Clauss 2000, 150).

On another front, Roger Beck, in his series of articles (1998-2006), emphasized the military context of Mithraism, describing the Mithraea as "brotherhood clubs" for soldiers and veterans that structurally prevented the presence of women (Beck 1998, 122). Alžběta Chalupa (2003) added a new dimension to this discussion by focusing on "initiation rituals." She argued that these rituals—including endurance tests and bodily markings—were directly designed for the male body and marginalized women (Chalupa 2003, 290).

In recent years, feminist and post-structuralist approaches have been advanced by scholars such as Lotta Tarkman (2020), emphasizing the critical re-reading of historical and archaeological sources. They argue that the absence of women in texts and inscriptions reproduces a "male narrative" of history that must be reconstructed using interdisciplinary methods (Tarkman 2020, 78).

Despite these advancements, a significant research gap remains... This article, adopting a holistic perspective, seeks to investigate the causes of the absence of women in Mithraism through the complex interaction of these factors. Furthermore, it will briefly contextualize these findings within a broader religious framework by contrasting Mithraism's absolute exclusion with the integrative, albeit legally differentiated, approach observed in classical Islamic thought.

Research Method

This study employs a historical-analytical method, relying on library resources and archaeological evidence, to investigate the causes of the absence of women in the Roman cult of Mithras. Data were collected through qualitative content analysis of inscriptions, reliefs, and classical texts. A comparative method was also used to examine the differences between Mithraism and other Roman mystery cults. The theoretical framework of the research combines feminist approaches to the re-reading of history with the discourse analysis of Mithraic mythology.

Archaeological Evidence and Historical Analysis

Archaeological and historical evidence forms the foundation of any scientific analysis concerning the status of women in Roman Mithraism. Material and textual data systematically confirm the complete absence of women from the ritual sphere and membership within this mystery cult. A statistical study of Mithraic inscriptions across the Roman Empire reveals a persistent and noteworthy pattern of this absence. Out of 427 identified inscriptions, only five (approximately 1.17%) refer to women—a statistic that is particularly striking when compared to the 38% presence of women in inscriptions related to the cult of Isis (Vermaseren 1956, 145). Even in these rare instances, the role of women is confined solely to that of a "patron" (*patrona*) and they are never counted among the members of the cult's seven-grade hierarchy. For example, an inscription from the Mithraeum of Flora in Rome mentions "Valeria Paola" as a financial donor without any reference to her ritual grade (Gordon 1995, 89).

Archaeological excavations of Mithraea, from Londinium to Dura Europos, further confirm the physical absence of women. Analyses of "spatial archaeology" indicate that these sites were deliberately designed for male gatherings, featuring narrow stone benches, tight and often subterranean entrances, a lack of separate spaces for private rituals, and a limited capacity of 20 to 40 individuals (Clauss 2000, 156). This stands in contrast to temples of Isis or Magna Mater, which boasted more open architecture and separate spaces for women.

Furthermore, an iconographic analysis of approximately 300 Mithraic reliefs and statues indicates the systematic erasure of women from ritual scenes. In the depictions of the tauroctony—the central symbol of the cult—no female figures are present (Lincoln 1999, 201). Even initiation scenes related to the grade of *Nymphus* (Bridegroom) portray men (Chalupa 2003, 295).

Textual sources, such as the treatise by Porphyry and the letters of Jerome—who explicitly states that "among the Mithraists, only men gather together" (Jerome, *Epistulae*, 107.2)—corroborate this absence. Comparisons with inscriptions from other Roman *collegia*—which show a 10-15% presence of women

(Patterson 2012, 145)—along with bioarchaeological analyses of human remains from Mithraea in Pannonia—which identify all the interred individuals as male (Lösch et al., 2014, 536)—collectively attest that the absence of women in Mithraism was not a coincidental phenomenon. Rather, it was the result of a deliberate and structural policy, rooted in the theological, social, and ritual foundations of the cult.

Androcentric Theology and Gendered Mythology in Roman Mithraism

The theology and mythology of Mithraism manifested a profoundly androcentric worldview, deeply embedded in the belief system's foundations. At the heart of this structure lay the concept of the "Father" (Pater), which served not only as the highest initiatory grade but also as an embodiment of the ontological order, where Mithras himself, in the role of "Father of Fathers" (Pater Patrum), was portrayed as the source of all spiritual and temporal power (Clauss 2000, 134). This sacred patriarchy was perpetuated in the deeper layers of the cult's mythology. According to the account by Porphyry, the birth of Mithras from the rock (Petra Genitrix) symbolically negated any need for female participation in the process of creation (Martin 1987, 156).

The apex of this androcentric theology was embodied in the scene of the tauroctony (bull-slaying). In this central tableau, Mithras, as a male hero, sacrifices the bull—a symbol of masculine virility and life force—thereby enabling the creation of the material world (Lincoln 1999, 178). A semiotic analysis of this scene reveals multiple layers of meaning: the deliberate exclusion of a female role in creation; a gendered symbolism centered on the control of male procreative power; and the symbolic transformation of masculine sexual energy into cosmic creation (Gordon 2012, 167).

The cult's seven-grade hierarchy—comprising Corax (Raven), Nymphus (Bridegroom), Miles (Soldier), Leo (Lion), Perses (Persian), Heliodromus (Sun-Runner), and Pater (Father)—was meticulously designed to reproduce masculine titles and reinforce the male social roles of Roman society (Beck 2006, 189). This masculine system was perpetuated even within the Mithraic pantheon; goddesses such as Luna (the Moon) and Tellus (the Earth Goddess)—compared to the Zoroastrian pantheon where Anahita played a central role—were relegated to a subordinate and peripheral position, subservient to Mithras (Kraemer 1992, 145).

The dualistic cosmology of Mithraism was similarly grounded in this principle: Mithras symbolized order, while the bull represented chaos, with women implicitly associated with the latter realm (Lincoln 1999, 201). Even at the level of astral symbolism—which constituted a major part of the Mithraic cult—the

planets were depicted as symbols of male deities, and the Sun (Sol) and Moon (Luna) were portrayed as subordinates to Mithras (Beck 1998, 156).

Finally, the Mithraic rituals—including the cultic meal partaken on stone benches shaped like a bull—not only recalled the tauroctony scene but also physically enacted a "male community." Through the mysterious sharing of bread and wine, these rituals reinforced bonds of brotherhood and reproduced the internal hierarchy (Chalupa 2003, 301). This comprehensive theological structure actively precluded any possibility of female participation and systematically justified their exclusion.

The Social, Political, and Economic Contexts

The absence of women in Mithraism cannot be explained by theological analysis alone; rather, this phenomenon was rooted in the social, political, and economic context of the Roman Empire, which shaped the structures and power relations within the cult. Mithraism emerged concurrently with the peak of the Roman Empire's territorial expansion and spread rapidly among military units. Analysis of the distribution of Mithraea shows a significant concentration of these cult sites along the military frontiers—particularly along the Rhine and Danube rivers (Haynes 2013, 234). The masculine culture of military garrisons, where women had a limited presence, contributed to the formation of Mithraism as an exclusively male institution, and even as it spread to non-military areas, this structure remained unchanged (Beck 1998, 128).

Furthermore, the commercial and economic networks of the Empire—composed predominantly of male merchants, state agents, and estate managers—disseminated the cult throughout Roman territory, naturally excluding women from their communication circles (Terpstra 2013, 158). Commercial collegia, as professional male institutions, also played a significant role in this expansion, as many prominent Mithraists were simultaneously active in these collegia (Patterson 2012, 58).

Imperial policies, in turn, helped reinforce this masculine structure. Roman emperors—particularly from the time of Commodus onward—used Mithraism as a tool to consolidate loyalty among the male elite (Hekster 2002, 125). The ideology of "imperial patriarchy" paralleled the structure of Mithraism; just as the emperor was portrayed as the "Father of the Fatherland" (*Pater Patriae*), Mithraic leaders acted as "fathers" on a smaller scale, and this similarity led to mutual legitimization of the two institutions (Ando 2000, 280).

Within the context of the social and economic transformations of the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE, urbanization and the consolidation of male institutions led to the systematic exclusion of women from the public sphere (Saller 1994, 167). Legal restrictions—although women enjoyed a degree of economic independ-

ence—prevented them from holding public and official religious offices (Gardner 1986, 91). In Roman society, women primarily operated within the private sphere of the family, while the public arena was considered the domain of men. Mithraism, as a public institution, reinforced this gender division (Dixon 1992, 169), and unlike some other religions, offered no possibility for the formation of female networks within its framework (Hemelrijk 2015, 236).

The cult's economy also relied on financial resources from men—ranging from military officers to state officials. Even in the rare cases of female patronage, women had no role in managing these resources (MacMullen 1974, 114). Cultic expenses were primarily devoted to male banquets, symbolic military equipment, and male-exclusive spaces (North 1986, 259). The system for teaching and transmitting cultic knowledge—including initiation stages, tests, and instruction—was designed entirely by and for men, reproducing not only ritual knowledge but also masculine values (Burkert 1987, 91). The ritual language, with terms such as "brothers," "fathers," and "sons," was not only a reflection of social reality but also a tool for reinforcing male identity (Gordon 2011, 441).

Mithraism's relationships with male power institutions—from the army and the administrative bureaucracy to professional collegia—further reinforced the masculine nature of the cult (Price 1984, 158). Therefore, the absence of women in Mithraism must be understood within the broader framework of the social, political, and economic structures of the Roman Empire. The cult was not merely a reflection of the gender norms of its era but actively participated in reproducing and reinforcing these norms.

Comparative Analysis with Other Mystery Cults and Historical Consequences

To better understand the unique characteristics of Mithraism in excluding women, a comparative analysis with other Roman mystery cults—including the cults of Isis, Dionysus (Bacchus), and Cybele and Attis—is essential. This systematic examination, based on four criteria—the presence of women in priestly hierarchies, participation in rituals, role in economic management, and place in mythology (Burkert 1987, 78)—reveals that the cult of Isis served as a prime example of full female participation. Here, women served in positions such as high priestesses (*Sacerdos Maxima*), temple priestesses (*Sacerdos*), and ritual attendants (*ministrae*) (Takács 1995, 134). Inscriptions discovered at Pompeii—including one recording the name "Melissa" as a high priestess—attest that women were active not only as devotees but also in religious leadership roles (Spinazzola 1953, 236). The cult of Dionysus, despite temporary state-imposed restrictions, also featured active female participation in leading *thiasoi* (ecstatic bands), roles in prophecy and healing, and ritual banquets (Henrichs

1978, 145; Detienne 1979, 89). Even the cult of Cybele and Attis—with its primarily castrated male priests (Galli)—accepted women as devotees, financial patrons, and participants in spring festivals (Vermaseren 1977, 156).

In contrast, Mithraism diverged from this pattern due to organizational, social, and theological factors: its organization was based on male collegia (Scheid 2003, 189), whereas other cults utilized more diverse organizational models; its spread was concentrated primarily among military and administrative groups (MacMullen 1981, 167), while other cults permeated various social strata; and its theology was focused on a single male deity (Turcan 1996, 234), while other cults possessed greater theological diversity.

These differences had significant historical consequences: by depriving itself of half the population, Mithraism lacked the demographic dynamism necessary for long-term survival (Hopkins 2000, 234) and failed to utilize family networks and women for expansion, unlike Christianity (Stark 1996, 156). When Christianity attained power, Mithraism lacked the broad social base necessary to resist the resulting pressures (Jones 1964, 278). A case study of Pompeii—with its inscriptions and wall paintings depicting women in the roles of high priestesses and ritual organizers (De Caro 1996, 189; Zanker 1998, 156)—highlights the different power discourses of these cults. While Mithraism reinforced a masculine and hierarchical power discourse, cults like that of Isis created space for female agency and authority (Kraemer 1992, 201).

the absence of women in Mithraism was not only a unique feature among Roman mystery cults but also a key factor in determining its historical fate.

A Contrasting Paradigm: Theological and Legal Frameworks in Classical Islam

The complete and ontological exclusion of women in Mithraism finds a stark contrast in the foundational principles of Islam. While Mithraism's theology was inherently gendered, core Islamic theology emphasizes the absolute transcendence and non-gendered nature of the Divine (Allah). Key verses such as “لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ” (Nothing is like Him) (Qur'an 42:11) establish a God beyond human gender categories (Asad 1980, 248). Spiritual potential is considered equal, as noted in “إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ” (The most noble among you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous) (Qur'an 49:13).

Unlike Mithraism's ritual and structural exclusion, Islam integrates women into the religious community (*Ummah*) through a comprehensive legal and spiritual framework (*Sharia*). This framework recognizes biological and social distinctions but channels them into differentiated yet complementary roles and responsibilities (*al-hukm al-taklifi*), rather than exclusion (Kamali 2008, 115). Women's obligation in core acts of worship (*'ibadat*) like prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage is unequivocal, albeit with specific legal provisions (e.g., menstruation) (al-Qaradawi 1999, 57).

Historically, while participation in certain public congregational spaces (like the main prayer hall for Friday prayers) became more restricted in later periods due to evolving socio-legal interpretations aimed at preserving modesty (*'iffah*) and social order (*maslaha*), early Islamic practice and texts record the active presence of women in the mosque of the Prophet (pbuh) (Spellberg 1994, 40). Furthermore, women played critical roles as transmitters of religious knowledge (*hadith*), scholars, and mystics, contributing to the Islamic intellectual and spiritual tradition (Nadwi 2007, 112). Thus, the Islamic model presents a paradigm where theological transcendence and a detailed legal system facilitate inclusion within a structured order, fundamentally differing from Mithraism's closed, masculinist cultic brotherhood.

Psychological and Anthropological Analysis of Mithraic Rituals

The rites and rituals of Mithraism were not merely reflections of social structures but also powerful tools for shaping the identity and psychology of its members. These rituals were designed to reinforce "ritual masculinity" through successive and rigorous stages of initiation. Each grade—including the grade of Corax (Raven), which emphasized obedience and submission to the "Fathers"—reflected an aspect of the masculine identity prevalent in Roman society (Lincoln 1981, 89; Beck 2000, 156). Functioning as "rites of passage," these rituals guided men through three distinct phases: separation from ordinary society, a liminal stage involving arduous tests and instruction, and finally reintegration with a new identity (Turner 1969, 95)—a process from which women were entirely excluded.

The focus on the "male body" as the locus of religious experience was reinforced through tests of physical endurance, sensory deprivation, and possibly ritual tattooing. The somatic symbolism embedded in these rites—including blindfolding (symbolizing blindness and new sight), simulated death and rebirth, and tests of hunger and thirst to strengthen willpower—was specifically tailored to the male body (Foucault 1988, 145; Chalupa 2003, 295). The ritual banquet, where members reclined on stone benches shaped like a bull, was not only a re-enactment of the tauroctony scene but also a physical embodiment of the "male community." Through the shared consumption of bread and wine, it fostered mysterious bonds between men, reinforced group loyalty, and reproduced the internal social hierarchy (Gordon 2012, 201; Detienne 1979, 134).

The subterranean setting of the Mithraea also carried profound psychological implications. This space evoked both a separation from the mundane world and a symbolism of a womb—albeit one controlled by men—while the sensory limitations fostered concentration and introspection (Bachelard 1994, 189). Animal symbols—including the Lion (symbolizing power), the Raven (messaging), the Scorpion (death and rebirth), and the Snake (knowledge and eternal life)—all

represented various facets of the idealized masculinity in Roman culture (Eliade 1958, 267; Frazer 1922, 201).

The structure of knowledge within Mithraism was also highly gendered. Its "economy of knowledge," transmitted through the male hierarchy and stratified across the seven grades—each with its specific symbols, exclusive rituals, and hidden knowledge—systematically barred women from access to sacred understanding (Bourdieu 1990, 156; Martin 1987, 201).

Through complex psychological mechanisms such as fostering a shared identity, enforcing secrecy to instill a sense of exclusivity, and utilizing repetitive rituals to strengthen group bonds, Mithraism cultivated "extraordinary loyalty" and a "sacred brotherhood" among its male members (Durkheim 1995, 301). From a social psychology perspective, the exclusion of women served to define masculine identity in opposition to an "Other," reinforced a sense of gender superiority, and created a safe space for the performance of masculinity free from female oversight (Kraemer 2011, 189). These rituals did not merely reflect the masculine structure; they actively participated in its reproduction by internalizing masculine values, creating emotional dependency on the existing structure, and providing psychological rewards for conformity (Turner 1969, 134). Thus, the complex system of Mithraic ritual was designed to exclude women not only from physical participation but also from psychological and emotional engagement in the religious experience.

Historical Consequences and Social Impacts of the Absence of Women

The systematic absence of women in Mithraism profoundly impacted not only the internal structure of the cult but also its historical trajectory and social standing within the Roman Empire. This deliberate exclusion confined Mithraism to specific demographics—primarily within military and urban settings—compared to rival religions like Christianity, which utilized family networks and women for expansion, thereby preventing its penetration into rural and familial communities (Stark 1996, 167; Hopkins 2000, 245). Demographically, depriving itself of half the population stripped the cult of the dynamism necessary for long-term sustainability. The pattern of succession in Mithraism, based on horizontal transmission (among unrelated men) rather than vertical transmission (from father to son), undermined its stability (MacMullen 1984, 189; Meeks 1983, 201). This limitation led to the creation of one-sided social structures—Mithraic communities lacked intergenerational and cross-gender diversity, and their social networks remained predominantly based on male cooperative relationships, lacking the complexity and flexibility of family-based and mixed-gender networks (Saller 1994, 234; Rives 2007, 189).

The absence of women gradually influenced Mithraic theology and symbolism as well—the cult's symbolism became increasingly masculine and distanced itself from the gender balance observed in cults like that of Isis (Kraemer 1992, 267; Takács 1995, 201). Mithraic rituals, due to this absence, also suffered from reduced richness; rites related to the life cycle, birth, death, and rebirth—typically enriched by the presence of women—were marginalized, and the scope of religious experiences became limited (Beard, North, and Price 1998, 301; Bremmer 2002, 156). In terms of social relations, the single-gender structure of Mithraism prevented its full integration into broader familial and social structures and weakened its position compared to mixed-gender collegia, which enjoyed more stable social relations (Brown 1988, 201; Scheid 2003, 234). When facing the major crises of the Roman Empire in the 3rd century CE, Mithraism demonstrated less flexibility due to its inability to incorporate women as a source of innovation and adaptation—whereas the participation of women helped Christian communities adapt to changing circumstances (Jones 1964, 301; Lane Fox 1987, 345).

This absence also affected the historical and archaeological legacy of Mithraism—the existing sources provide a limited and one-sided view of Roman society, leading to a distorted historical understanding of women's roles, the dominance of a male narrative of religious history, and difficulties in fully reconstructing the religious life of the period (Salzman 2002, 201; Clark 2004, 167). Furthermore, the single-gender structure of Mithraism has cast a shadow over modern studies—many early researches considered the absence of women as natural, leading to a delay in the development of gender studies, the need for a revision of research methodology, and the necessity of employing interdisciplinary approaches (Tarkman 2020, 134; King 1998, 189).

In the final analysis, had Mithraism incorporated women into its structure, it would likely have possessed greater social dynamism, demonstrated better resistance to political pressures, and left a more enduring cultural impact (Stark 1996, 278). Thus, the absence of women was not only a defining characteristic of Mithraism but also a key factor in its historical decline—a cult that, despite its initial influence, failed to endure in competition with more inclusive religions because it deprived itself of half of humanity.

Conclusion

This study, through a systematic examination of the causes and consequences of the absence of women in the Roman cult of Mithras, concludes that the systematic exclusion of women resulted from a complex interaction of theological, social, political, and psychological factors. The findings demonstrate that the androcentric theology of Mithraism provided the ideological foundation for this

exclusion, the social and political structures of the Roman Empire reinforced it, and the rituals and practices made female participation practically impossible (Gordon 1995, 145; Clauss 2000, 201; Beck 2006, 278).

By integrating historical, archaeological, and gender-analysis approaches, and by employing interdisciplinary frameworks, this research has redefined fundamental concepts such as "religious community," "masculinity" as a socio-religious construct, and "exclusion" as an active and deliberate process (Tarkman 2020, 156; Kraemer 2011, 234).

The broader implications of this research reveal that the absence of women in Mithraism serves as a classic example of how restrictions on the participation of social groups can contribute to the decline of a religion. This pattern is generalizable to the study of other historical religions (Stark 1996, 301). The contrasting case of classical Islam demonstrates how a theological foundation beyond gender, coupled with a legal system designed to integrate rather than exclude, can create a more resilient and expansive religious community. Although this study faced limitations... it paves the way for future research aimed at comparative analysis with other religions that excluded women and at examining the cultural survivals or echoes of Mithraism (Beck 2000, 267).

Ultimately, the history of Mithraism stands as a cautionary tale about the consequences of depriving half of humanity from religious participation. It demonstrates that studying the place of women in ancient religions is essential not only for understanding the past but also for comprehending religious dynamics in the present.

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