

**Roger BECK**

**Heraclitus, the Mithraists, and Porphyry *De antro nympharum* 29: The recovery of a Mithraic ritual of "shooting through opposites" on a cult vessel from Mainz.**

In chapter 29 of *De antro nympharum*, Porphyry lists a number of paired opposites in order to illustrate his point that "since nature arose out of diversity, the ancients everywhere made that which has a twofold entrance her symbol." He concludes this list with a quotation from Heraclitus (fr. 51 DK), somewhat modified: "and so there is a harmony of tension in opposition and it shoots from the bowstring through opposites."

In *Planetary Gods ... in the Mysteries of Mithras* (Leiden 1988), 84-5, I argued that it was the Mithraists who adapted and transmitted Heraclitus' saying to Porphyry, along with the list of opposed pairs and the earlier, explicitly Mithraic opposition between the solstices as the gates of the descent and ascent of souls. The visual expression of the symbol of the bow in Mithraic iconography is the scene of Mithras as archer.

My case is now greatly strengthened by the publication of a cult vessel discovered in Mainz, which shows two scenes of Mithraic ritual (H.G. Horn, *Mainzer Archäologische Zeitschrift* 1 (1994), 21-66; see also my article on the full implications of the scenes forthcoming in *JRS* 90 for 2000). One of the scenes shows the Father of the community, guised as Mithras, drawing a bow at an initiand (accompanied, as in the Capua initiation scenes, by a mystagogue). Part of the intent of the ritual, it will be argued, is to express "harmony in opposition" through the tension of the fully drawn bow. The same principle is exemplified in the other ritual scene through the lowered and raised wands of the attendants of the processing Heliodromus (? = Cautopates and Cautes at the gates of entry and exit at the solstices, as in *De antro* 24).