

*QUI MORTALITATIS CAUSA CONVENERUNT:*  
THE MEETING OF THE VIRUNUM MITHRAISTS  
ON JUNE 26, A.D. 184

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IN 1992 A BRONZE PLAQUE recording the dedication of a mithraeum was discovered in Virunum, the principal town and administrative capital of the province of Noricum.<sup>1</sup> The mithraeum, as the text of the plaque reveals, had collapsed in some sort of catastrophe, probably natural, and the members rebuilt it at their own expense.<sup>2</sup> The plaque functioned as the mithraeum's *album*. The original thirty-four contributors to the rebuilding were listed in the first one and one third columns of an eventual four columns, and thereafter names were added in different hands until the *album* was full.<sup>3</sup>

The primary importance of the Virunum plaque lies of course in the recovery of a complete membership list which shows recruitment into the mithraeum over a considerable period of time. At a stroke, ninety-eight persons have been added to the 997 previously known *cultores Mithrae* so painstakingly tallied and analysed by Manfred Clauss (1992).<sup>4</sup> In the present study, however, I shall discuss some other new information which the *album* yields, of a different sort from the prosopographical or sociological. It concerns an event which took place in the year following the dedication of the new building and was of such moment in the life of the mithraeum that it too was recorded on the plaque. On June 26, A.D. 184 the members assembled, as the text states, *mortalitatis causa* and recorded the fact in a continuation of the dedication in space still vacant for the third and fourth columns of names.<sup>5</sup>

What was this "mortality," why did the Virunum Mithraists meet about it, and was there any reason to record the precise day? The obvious inference

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<sup>1</sup> *AE* 1994, 1334; published in an elegant and thorough edition by Piccottini (1994). On Virunum and on the religious life of the province, see Alföldy 1974.

<sup>2</sup> *D(eo) i(nvicto) M(ithrae) pro salute imp(eratoris) [[Commodi]] Aug(usti) Pii qui templum vii (sic) conlapsum impendio suo restituerunt*. The plaque was later removed and buried off site, so the dedication cannot be matched with its original mithraeum. Although plentiful Mithraic finds have been unearthed at Virunum (most of them casually), no actual mithraeum has yet come to light. On the Virunum finds, see Vermaseren 1960: nos. 1430–40.

<sup>3</sup> There is good reason to believe that the additions represent annual cohorts, of which Piccottini (1994: 25–28) distinguishes 18. The original dedication has a *terminus post* of early 183 (Piccottini 1994: 15), and the first new cohort, as we shall see, dates to 184; so the final intake would be that of 201.

<sup>4</sup> Published in the same year as the *album*'s discovery, surely an undeserved accident of timing!

<sup>5</sup> *et mortalitat(is) causa convener(unt) Marullo et Aeliano co(n)s(ulibus) VI K(alendas) Iulias*.

that members had died since the dedication of the new building no more than a year and a half before and that the community met in response to these deaths is confirmed by the letter theta (for θανάων) set against five of the names. Gernot Piccottini, the *album*'s editor, reasonably concludes that the plague was the probable cause and that the occasion was a commemoration or some sort of death rite for the deceased colleagues (1994: 22). The meeting might also have been convened to co-opt the eight new members of the first additional cohort, including a new Pater, Trebius Alfius (interestingly, recruited from outside, not promoted from the continuing membership).<sup>6</sup> Certainly, that new draft was part of the community's response to the "mortality," if not part of the business transacted on June 26.

There we might well leave the matter were it not for an oddity of language and a coincidence of date. The oddity of language is of course the expression *mortalitatis causa*. Undoubtedly, this is a possible way to speak of a number of actual deaths,<sup>7</sup> but the primary meaning of *mortalitas* is more abstract—"the mortal condition"—and in context one wonders if it was not intended to carry this sense in addition to the more concrete one.<sup>8</sup> First, as we shall shortly see, questions of the soul's entry into and exit from "mortality" were in fact of great concern to the Mithraists. Secondly, such use of an abstract as a code word or allusive label would be typical of the cult's idiosyncratic language.<sup>9</sup> One thinks, for example, of *transitus* or *transitus dei* as the esoteric term for the episode of Mithras carrying the bull in the myth cycle (Vermaseren 1960: no. 1494/5). Similarly, Mithras' birth from the rock is attested as *natura dei* (*idem*: no. 1492/3). It is, therefore, reasonable to suppose that the phrase *mortalitatis causa* carries considerable doctrinal freight, and even, since we are dealing with an event on a particular date, liturgical freight.

This brings us to the coincidence of date, a matter noted by Piccottini (1994: 24). June 26 is close to the summer solstice,<sup>10</sup> and "according to Mithraic doctrine on the journeying of souls it was at this point in time that passage from the heaven of the fixed stars to the realm of mortality (*Sterblichkeit*) was thought to occur" (Piccottini 1994: 24). For Mithraists, then, there would be a peculiar appropriateness in the commemoration of their deceased brethren at this time of year. There would also—and this point is not grasped by Piccottini—be something of a paradox: the dead colleagues were commemorated not at the

<sup>6</sup>The Patres, of whom there were likely two at any one time, are identified as such on the *album*.

<sup>7</sup>As *TLL* s.v. II.2 (*speciatim de communi morbo pestifero*), e.g., Tac. *Ann.* 16.13.2.

<sup>8</sup>As *TLL* s.v. I (*proprie de statu morti obnoxiorum*). Note esp. the references to leaving or putting off mortality: Pliny *NH* 35.139: *Herculem . . . exusta/exuta mortalitate in caelum euntem*; Firmicus Maternus *Math.* 1.4.2: *animi substantia . . . societate terreni corporis et assidua dissolutione mortalitatis hebetatur*.

<sup>9</sup>On Mithraic language, see Gordon 1994: esp. 106.

<sup>10</sup>June 23 was the actual date of the solstice that year. However, from the time of the introduction of the Julian calendar, the twenty-fifth was the nominal date of the solstice. Hence of course the date of the *Natalis Invicti (Solis)* and subsequently of Christmas on December 25 qua winter solstice.

season of their exit from mortality, which the same Mithraic doctrine sets at the winter solstice, but at the season of entry into mortality. We shall return to this paradox below.

Before we impose too much interpretive weight on the coincidence of date, we should note that our *album* does not preserve the only Mithraic dating to the summer solstice. Another inscription from Virunum records the dedication of a rebuilt mithraeum, almost certainly the same as ours, on June 24 in the year 239.<sup>11</sup> And lest celebration of the summer solstice be thought unique to the Virunum Mithraists, an inscription from Nersae in Etruria records a dedication made on June 25 in the year 172.<sup>12</sup> The date of the meeting *mortalitatis causa* was surely not fortuitous.

The Mithraic doctrine to which Piccottini alludes comes to us from two sources. The first is Porphyry's essay *De antro nympharum* (21–29). The Mithraists, Porphyry tells us, are among those who locate the gates of entry and descent into mortal genesis at the summer solstice in Cancer and the gate of exit and ascent back into immortality at the winter solstice in Capricorn. Peculiar to cult doctrine is the cosmic location of Mithras' associate deities Cautes and Cautopates at the winter and summer solstices respectively and of Mithras himself at the equinoxes (24),<sup>13</sup> presumably as control points equidistant between the two solstices. The second source is the archaeology of mithraea themselves. Porphyry, in the same essay (6), tells us that the mithraeum is designed as a model of the universe for the conduct of initiations into the mysteries of the soul's descent into, and exit from, mortal genesis and that its furnishings were arranged accordingly. This is precisely what we find in extant mithraea (notably the Mithraeum of the Seven Spheres in Ostia), including microcosmic solstitial gates in the form of niches midway along the structure's distinctive side benches.<sup>14</sup> At the mithraeum in Dura Europos this point is obligingly marked on one side with the graffito εἴσοδος / ἔξοδος (Vermaseren 1956: no. 66). It is worth bearing in mind that the lost Virunum mithraeum, as likely as not, would have exemplified the norm of midway side-bench niches: its members, when they met to commemorate the "mortality," would be reclining on benches with replicas of the very points through which their colleagues had both entered and departed the mortal condition. If we are to believe Porphyry, conducting rites of "mortality" (and its complement "immortality") was the central function of a mithraeum. What the Virunum Mithraists did on June 26, 184, may have had a particular urgency or poignancy arising from the catastrophe of the plague, but it fits squarely into the proper business of the mysteries and the mithraeum.

<sup>11</sup> Vermaseren 1960: no. 1438, but see Piccottini 1994: 24, n. 50; actual solstice on June 23.

<sup>12</sup> Vermaseren 1956: no. 647; actual solstice on June 23.

<sup>13</sup> On Porphyry's text and its meaning at this point, see Beck 1976b.

<sup>14</sup> On the design of the mithraeum as "cosmic model" and on the features which realize that design, see Beck 1995; also Gordon 1976; 1988: 50–60; Beck 1979.

The Mithraic data reviewed above treat the solstices primarily as points in space: gates located at certain points in the celestial sphere through which souls enter and leave mortality, and their counterparts located at the analogous points in the microcosm of the mithraeum. But the solstices are not only points in celestial space but also points in annual time.<sup>15</sup> The importance of the Virunum plaque is that it relates Mithraic concern with "mortality" directly to the temporal solstice. Was the summer solstice widely observed among Mithraic communities as a festival of "mortality" or was the timing of the event at Virunum a local, albeit very appropriate, exploitation of Mithraic ideology? One cannot tell for certain, but it would be strange if the Mithraists as a rule exemplified the spatial solstices in the design of their mithraea but ignored the temporal solstices in the construction of a liturgical year.

A possible Mithraic festival "of mortality" on or about the summer solstice poses two immediate questions. The first I have already touched on. Why commemorate deceased colleagues at a time associated with entry into, rather than exit from, the mortal condition? The paradox is more easily posed than answered. One should, however, remember that paradox is already at play in these matters. Souls, in Mithraic theory as recorded in Porphyry (*De antro* 24–25), descend through the gate of the *summer* solstice because it is *northern* and therefore *cool* and thus appropriate to genesis; they ascend through the *winter* solstice because it is *southern* and therefore *warm* and thus appropriate to apogenesis (Beck 1995: 114, n. 31). It is preferable to let these paradoxes stand rather than to try to resolve them (Beck 1995: 111–114). They are aspects, finally, of the life-is-death / death-is-life conundrum. The same paradox receives yet more striking expression in the development of another cult's commemoration of the "mortality" of its members: the death-day of a Christian is his or her true birthday; hence the epigraphic shift to recording *this* date rather than the length of life (Shaw 1996: 102–103).

It might be argued that the Virunum Mithraists chose the day following the nominal solstice precisely to avoid this paradox of commemorating their departed colleagues on a day associated with the entry of souls into mortality, not their departure thence. The problem with this solution is that the data are too slight to warrant speculation much beyond the basic fact of the clustering of three dated events (two at Virunum and one at Nersae) *close to* the solstice but each on a different date (June 24, 25, 26). With the explicit allusion to the

<sup>15</sup> Spatially, the solstices are the northern and southern extremes of the ecliptic (the equinoxes being the points midway between, at which this oblique circle intersects the celestial equator). Temporally, the solstices are the dates at which the sun, in its annual journey around the ecliptic, reaches those points (likewise, of course, the equinoxes). The summer solstice occurs when the sun reaches the northern extreme (in antiquity located in the constellation of Cancer—hence "tropic of Cancer"), the winter solstice when it reaches the southern extreme ("tropic of Capricorn"). In the heavens, space and time (annual time, that is) are precisely interchangeable: "when" is "where," and "where" is "when." The agent of fungibility is the journeying sun, not a trivial matter in a solar cult.

commemoration of “mortality” at Virunum, these data warrant a hypothesis that the Mithraists observed the *season* of the solstice as especially appropriate to the mortal condition—and Porphyry (above) tells us why this would be so—but not the twofold hypothesis, first that they generally observed the *day* of the (nominal) solstice and secondly that they occasionally departed from it by a single day. A rule cannot be inferred from one example and two exceptions, however plausible the reason for the exception on one of the occasions might seem.<sup>16</sup>

The second question arises out of the known Mithraic propensity for polarities of all sorts, but particularly for the polarity of genesis and apogenesis which resonates through Porphyry’s whole discussion of these themes in the *Mysteries* and which is exemplified across the cult’s monuments in the iconography of the guardians of the two processes, Cautopates and Cautes respectively.<sup>17</sup> What descends to mortal life must ascend to immortality; what is destined for immortality must enter mortality and live it to the full. The *Mysteries*, Porphyry is clear, initiated into both processes.<sup>18</sup> Would, then, a celebration of “mortality” at the summer solstice imply a complementary celebration of “immortality” at the winter

<sup>16</sup>It would be different, of course, if one were able to demonstrate a commonality between the three dates which might warrant the retention of the solstice in one instance and the displacement therefrom in the two others. Two possibilities suggest themselves, arising out of the dated graffito in the *Sta Prisca mithraeum*. At *Sta Prisca* the day of the week (Saturday) and the day of the lunation (18) are specified (Vermaseren 1956: no. 498). Given the importance to Mithraism of the planetary, i.e., weekday, gods and of the Moon in particular, both might well be relevant factors in determining a date within a given window (the season of the solstice). The three dates, however, fall on different days of the week and on different days of the lunation:

Place	Date	Weekday (planet/god)	Day of Lunation
Nersae	June 25, 172	Wednesday (Mercury)	17 (after full)
Virunum	June 26, 184	Friday (Venus)	0–1 (just after new)
Virunum	June 24, 239	Monday (Moon)	7 (first quarter)

(On the near coincidence of the new moon and the observance of “mortality” at Virunum in 184, see below.) If there were other factors determining the scatter of dates, it seems to me that they are irrecoverable.

<sup>17</sup>The lowered torch of Cautopates intimates descent into genesis, the elevated torch of Cautes ascent into apogenesis. Cautopates thus intimates entry into mortality, Cautes entry into immortality; thus, respectively, physical birth and physical death. These profound meanings invert the superficial—but not for that reason invalid—associations of Cautes with life and Cautopates with death, returning us again to the life-is-death / death-is-life paradox. On the torchbearers and their iconographies, see most recently Hannah 1996.

<sup>18</sup>An allusion to initiation into the entry of souls through the summer solstice may be contained in a recently published papyrus, which the editor, with some justification, identifies as a Mithraic catechism (*P. Berol.* 21196; Brashear 1992). At line 5 recto the (?) initiand is told to reply (to a question unfortunately missing): διὰ τὴν θεινὴν [. The supplement τροπήν (suggested by Merkelbach and Burkert—see Brashear 1992: 23) is tempting. I have suggested (Beck forthcoming) that it is precisely such a ritual of initiation into mysteries of descent and ascent through the gates of the solstices that is represented in one of the two scenes on the important, recently published ritual vessel from Mainz (Horn 1994).

solstice? The logic of the Mysteries would suggest so. It seems to me no less plausible than the other candidate for the winter solstice, the celebration of the birth of Mithras, which is widely postulated on the grounds that December 25 was the “birthday” of the public Sun god, the *Natalis Invicti*.<sup>19</sup> Porphyry (*De antro* 23), following Numenius, certainly ties the freeing of souls into immortality to an actual Roman festival, the Saturnalia, occurring at this time of year. Likely enough, the urban Mithraists, with their strong complement of freedmen and slaves, were among those who placed this construction on the Saturnalia, giving the festival of liberation an esoteric ideological spin. The Saturnalia was an extended celebration, starting on December 17. If the Mithraists celebrated their “immortality” over the period of the Saturnalia, the complementary summer celebration of their “mortality” might likewise have extended over several days, including the three attested. Here, then, is another reason why we should not be concerned that the Virunum Mithraists missed the (nominal) summer solstice by a day.

There is one further piece of evidence to suggest that the Virunum Mithraists located the commemoration of their dead in a wider ideological matrix of “mortality.” Souls descend to mortality from the sphere of the fixed stars, and thither they return. The vault of heaven is represented in a mithraeum by the vault of the “cave” which all mithraea claim to be, whether in actuality or by metaphor (Porph. *De antro* 6). A roof, of course, is usually the first part of a structure to go, so not many Mithraic ceilings are preserved. But where they are, their decoration reinforces their symbolic function as heaven’s vault.<sup>20</sup> The Virunum mithraeum, for all that its site is lost, we know to have had such a decorated ceiling, for the bronze plaque records its donation by one of the members: *et camaram picturis exornavit*. We can be certain, by precedent from other mithraea, that those pictures would have comprised, at a minimum, the stars from which the deceased colleagues had descended into mortality and to which they would ascend to immortality.

In this context, there is another Mithraic ceiling of particular interest and relevance, the vault of the mithraeum at Caesarea Maritima. An off-centred scuttle in the vault throws sunlight on to the mithraeum’s altar at midday around the date of the summer solstice (Bull 1978: 79). The positioning of the aperture was hardly accidental. It suggests that there, at least, the solstitial season was marked and commemorated as such by Mithraists. The device would not have been accurate enough to capture the precise day of the solstice, since the daily change in the sun’s declination, and thus in its noon altitude, is minimal at that time of year. Rather, it would serve, over several days, as a visual demonstration

<sup>19</sup> Thus, for example, Merkelbach 1984: 141.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. esp. the stars on the ceiling of the Capua mithraeum (Vermaseren 1956: no. 180) and the zodiac on the ceiling of the Ponza mithraeum (Beck 1976a, 1978), both noted by Piccottini (1994: 19, n. 28).

of an annual predetermined "fact" ("see, now is the season of the solstice—and of mortality").

In A.D. 184, a new moon occurred on June 25. This approximate coincidence of new moon and summer solstice might well have added significance to the observance of "mortality" on the twenty-sixth,<sup>21</sup> since the syzygies (i.e., the conjunctions and oppositions) of Sun and Moon figured, along with the solstices and equinoxes, in celestial theories of entry into and exit from mortality. Such doctrine, as I have shown (Beck 1994: 48–49), was current not only in the culture at large but also esoterically within Mithraism, where it was given expression in the icon of the bull-killing, one of whose meanings at the astronomical level was the encounter of Sun and Moon for the genesis and apogenesis of souls. Particularly relevant here is the ceiling of the mithraeum on the island of Ponza, which was designed to commemorate the most dramatic form that this encounter can take, a conjunction so close that it issued in a solar eclipse (August 14, 212).<sup>22</sup>

A most useful distinction has been drawn by Jonathan Z. Smith between what he terms the "locative" and "utopian" traditions of ancient religion (Smith 1990: 121–142).<sup>23</sup> The locative is concerned with maintaining order in the here and now, with separating the realms of the living and the dead, the utopian with a more radical salvation that confounds those barriers. Smith, as most others these days, downplays the utopian, which he finds among early Christianities (*sic*) almost solely in a Pauline tradition of dying-and-rising-with-Christ and in the mystery cults scarcely anywhere.<sup>24</sup> The locative, in contrast, is everywhere predominant; it is the norm.

What to do about death and one's dead is a challenge to locative and utopian traditions alike. Undoubtedly, the Virunum Mithraists were confronted with a locative crisis. Theirs was a religion, all would agree, crafted to the moderately successful and conformist in this world, which validated and rewarded their conformism. Generally, good fortune rather than bad should attend Mithras'

<sup>21</sup>The coincidence could be ascertained in advance from astrologers' tables and verified by simple observation (given clear weather): at Virunum the last sighting of the old moon in the pre-dawn twilight would have been possible on June 24, the first sighting of the new moon in the post-sunset twilight on the twenty-sixth or (more likely) the twenty-seventh. The actual time of new moon, i.e., the moment when moon and sun were in conjunction at the same point of celestial longitude, occurred on the twenty-fifth at about 5:50 p.m. (local time at Virunum; 7:49 p.m. at Babylon: see Goldstine 1973: 99, no. 14650). (Replicating contemporary celestial views with the Voyager 2.0 program for the Macintosh computer revealed that two remarkable events which might have intrigued a Mithraist *studiosus astrologiae*, the occultation of Venus and the star Regulus [Alpha Leonis] by the new moon on the evenings of June 26 and 27 respectively, would have been visible, if at all, only from certain points in America—a pity!)

<sup>22</sup>Beck 1978: 135–136 with n. 95.

<sup>23</sup>See Smith 1990: 121, n. 13, for references to his earlier elaborations of this taxonomy.

<sup>24</sup>To venture a criticism which I cannot properly pursue here, Smith's conclusions on the mystery cults follow almost inevitably from selecting the myth and cult of the non-resurrected Attis as a paradigm (Smith 1990: 125–129).

initiates. Yet here, within a year of the rebuilding and dedication of their “violently” destroyed mithraeum, disaster struck again, and the plague carried off five of the thirty-four members, including two Fathers of the community.

The locative response is obvious and straightforward: hold a meeting to commemorate the dead (and thus locate them safely as dead), and co-opt replacements, including a new Father, to keep up the membership. Most scholars would, I think, given current fashion, be content to look no further than these reactions, about which the *album* is quite explicit. Mithraism, however, was as robustly utopian as it was locative. That, indeed, was its genius.<sup>25</sup> We have seen that it not only initiated its members into a utopian cycle of mortality and immortality but was quite precise in specifying the routes to and from utopia. The deaths of colleagues, then, might properly be located on the grid of utopian theory and practice. To commemorate their deaths at the actual season of mortality is a reminder that even this peculiarly grievous harvest is to be accommodated to the laws and processes of salvation. It is a strategy of comfort and of the reconfirmation of order, of utopian order as well as locative order. To this Mithraic scholar, at least, the import of the meeting *mortalitatis causa* is clear. The only question is whether or not it is generalizable as a festival in a Mithraic cycle current beyond Virunum in the year 184.

From a modern scientific point of view, talk of the celestial tropics, of the syzygies of the Sun and Moon and so on, when applied to something as apparently straightforward as a memorial service, must seem exotic, remote, and not that credible. Even—perhaps especially—among the religious, who must still take account of death in their soteriology, cosmology is generally set aside as an altogether other and secular thing.<sup>26</sup> Astronomy and religion have long since parted company; we no longer “go to heaven” in a literal sense along a precise and discoverable route—or so at least one would have thought until this final decade of the millennium.

<sup>25</sup> I deliberately use the Nockian term, although the blending of the utopian and the locative was not one of the six peculiar characteristics which Nock identified as Mithraism’s “genius” (1937). A good measure of utopianism is, however, the essence of his third characteristic (111), Mithraism’s possession of “its own cosmogony and eschatology” and “a core of philosophy.” This philosophy, Nock properly appreciated, was more than just a projection of philosophical interpretations on to the cult by learned outsiders. In two recent sketches of the cult, I have attempted to capture Mithraism’s peculiar utopian admixture of celestial voyaging in an otherwise rather locative context: Beck 1992: 4–7 and 1996: 182–183. More recently, Peter Kingsley’s brilliant work on Pythagoreanism (1995) has shown that blending the locative and the utopian was not in fact that unusual in ancient cults: two sides of the same coin rather than alternatives.

<sup>26</sup> By contrast, the attitude of a not unsophisticated Christian in late antiquity is illuminating. In criticizing the garbled astral lore of his erstwhile Manichaean mentor, Augustine (*Confessions* 5.3.6) compares the type of sound, rational astronomical data which he had found in secular writings: *et non mihi occurrebat ratio nec solstitiorum et aequinoctiorum nec defectuum luminarium nec quidquid tale in libris saecularis sapientiae didiceram*. It is precisely talk of solstices, equinoxes, and eclipses that Augustine desiderates. I am grateful to Timothy Hegedus for drawing this reference to my attention.



But the idea of a literal and physical path to the heavens is a hardy growth, and when it recrudesces it is noteworthy that the celestial tropics and eclipses both figure, if not in its mapping, then in the timing of its taking. At the winter solstice of December 1995, cultists of a very different self-styled "Solar Temple" gathered in an Alpine setting "for the sake of mortality" and to speed their colleagues on the journey of souls.<sup>27</sup> The same cult dispatched others of its members at the spring equinox of March 1997.<sup>28</sup> At the same equinox, which happened to coincide with a lunar eclipse, the mass exodus of the Heaven's Gate cultists took place.<sup>29</sup>

Between Mithraism and the two modern cults there is of course neither continuity nor, as far as I can ascertain, any conscious borrowing of theory. If there is a point to be made, other than the hardihood of the idea of the celestial voyage and its specifics, it is the contrast in modes of realizing utopia: "getting to heaven" through symbolic action on the one hand, projecting oneself and others physically across that threshold on the other. In such an enterprise it is the choice between the symbolic and the literal that marks the chasm between sanity and derangement. In their rituals, as in their doctrines and use of sacred space, the Mithraists stayed comfortably on the near side of this divide.

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<sup>27</sup> Sixteen dead, on the Vercors plateau, France. An earlier episode (October 1994, fifty-three dead, in locations in Switzerland and Québec) was not timed to the solstices/equinoxes. That the timing of the second episode was no coincidence was admitted by cult survivors—and confirmed by the timing of the third episode.

<sup>28</sup> Five dead, St.-Casimir, Québec.

<sup>29</sup> Forty dead, San Diego, California. A more notable celestial event was the appearance of comet Hale-Bopp, then almost at its brightest. It was to a spacecraft hidden behind the comet that the cultist were to proceed. The destination of the Solar Templists was the star Sirius.

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