

# “ORIENTAL” GODS AS A ROMANIZING FACTOR? A CASE STUDY FROM THE DANUBE LIMES

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## Abstract

*In the hinterland of two military bases on the Upper Pannonian Limes, Carnuntum and Vindobona, a comprehensive survey of all cult-relevant stone monuments has been carried out in recent years. It offers an insight into the religious topography of a rural region in which a very heterogeneous population lived in the first three centuries CE. The particularly strong presence of the so-called Oriental Cults, especially the cult of Mithras, is striking. The study examines whether this overview allows a statement to be made about the role of these cults in the provincial Roman population of this region and the extent to which they were influenced by the cult communities of the provincial capital Carnuntum.*

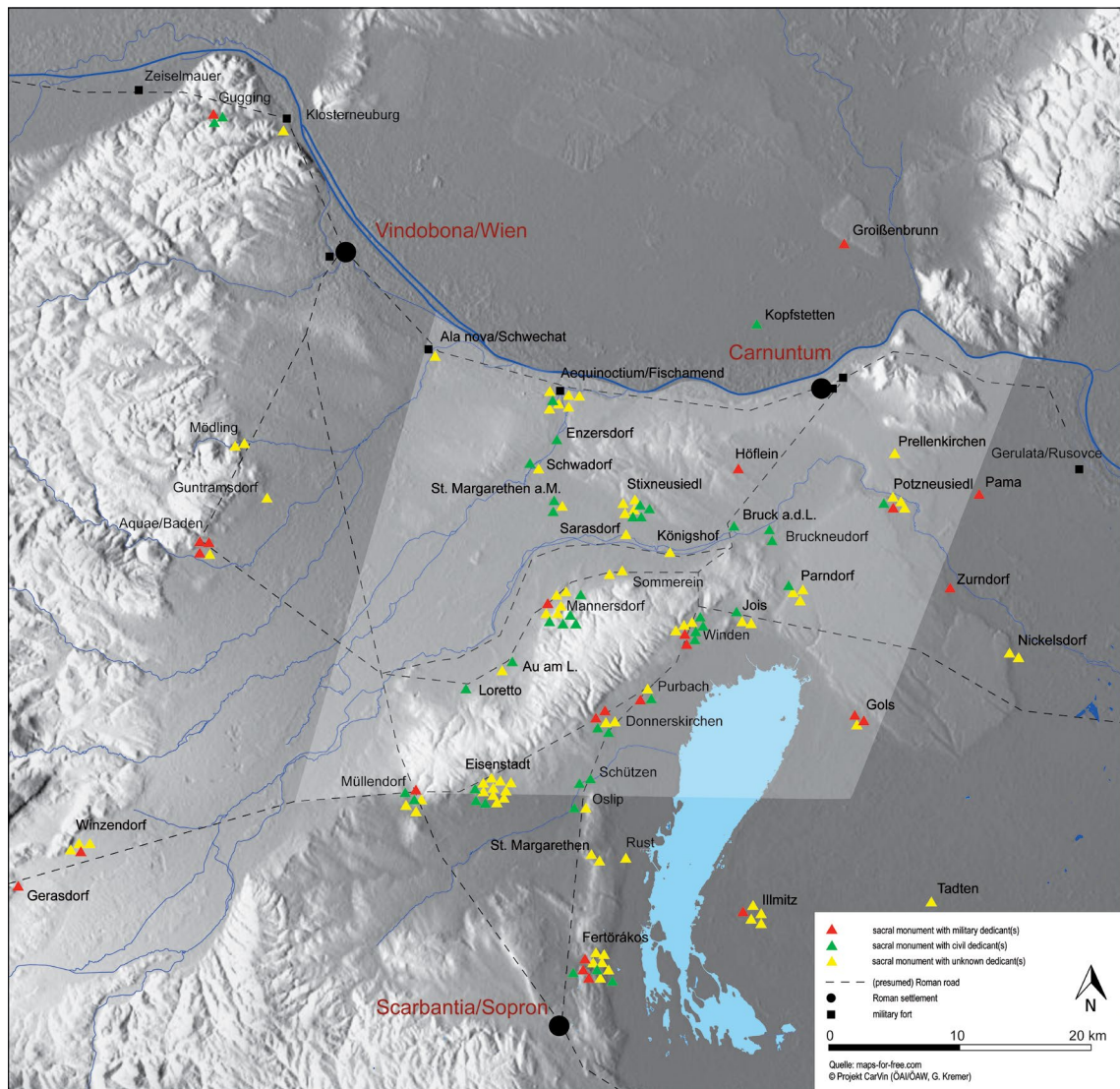
**Keywords:** *Carnuntum – Vindobona – hinterland – rural population – Romanization – sacral monuments – Mithras.*

The title of this paper seems paradoxical as it deals with a Roman cult that is perceived as deliberately emphasizing foreign, “oriental” aspects, at least as far as the name and appearance of the central deity and important elements of the sacred iconography are concerned.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the phenomenon appears in north-western Pannonia superior only from the late 1<sup>st</sup>/early 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD<sup>2</sup>, i.e., in a period that is normally no longer as-

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1 On the orientalizing components of the Mithras cult, independent of the actual origin of the cult e.g., Witschel 2013; Versluys 2013; Gordon 2017.

2 Overview of sites and objects in Schön 1988; Humer and Kremer 2011. Most recently G. Kremer in: Briault et al. 2021, 251–256.



**Fig. 1. Hinterland of Carnuntum and Vindobona with find spots of “sacral” stone monuments and hypothetical territory of Carnuntum based on the evidence of milestones (© ÖAI/ÖAW, G. Kremer)**

sociated with the controversial term “Romanization”. The title is thus to be understood as a provocative question and tied to a specific spatial and historical context.

## The spatial and historical context

Let us first briefly define the spatial context (fig. 1). The study area is the hinterland of Vindobona (Vienna) and Carnuntum (Petronell, Bad Deutsch-Altenburg), the two military centres on the north-western Pannonian Limes along the river Danube, at a distance of about 40 km from each other. Geographically, the area includes the Vienna Basin and the Leitha Mountains, up to the eastern shore of Lake Neusiedl (Neusiedler See, Fertő-tó). The nearest autonomous city to the south is municipium Flavium Scar-

abantia (Sopron), located at a distance of about 60 km on the north-south traffic axis, the so-called Amber Road.

Carnuntum<sup>3</sup> was the starting point of a campaign against the Germanic tribes under Marbod in AD 6 (Vell. Pat. II 109). In AD 40/50, *legio XV Apollinaris* established the legionary fortress, situated west of Bad Deutsch-Altenburg. From this time onwards, at the latest, the systematic development of the hinterland must have taken place, but the exploration of the territory and the construction of transport routes had certainly begun several decades before. One of the major activities was the quarrying of limestone from the Leitha Mountains, most probably organized by the military troops, as funeral stelae from the first stationing phase of *legio XV Apollinaris* testify.<sup>4</sup>

The definition of the territories of Carnuntum and Vindobona from the Hadrianic period onwards is debated on the basis of milestones, inscriptions of urban magistrates as well as topographic borders, like rivers and mountain ranges, and is still disputed among researchers.<sup>5</sup> One of the major problems is that the milestones have rarely been discovered in situ. The territorial border with Scarbantia is assumed to be north of Oslip,<sup>6</sup> that to Vindobona west of Ala nova (Schwechat)<sup>7</sup> or along the river Fischa.<sup>8</sup> A Severan milestone that probably originates from Eggendorf indicates a distance from Vindobona of about 30 miles and suggests a road to Scarbantia passing through Inzersdorf and Ebreichsdorf (fig. 1).<sup>9</sup> The question is of interest in relation to several inscriptions mentioned below.

A brief look at the historical context might be enlightening for the assessment of religious and cultural phenomena in the Roman period. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, the Celtic tribe of the Boii settled in the area under discussion.<sup>10</sup> Until their defeat against the Dacians, around the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, their central location was on the castle hill of Bratislava, on the north bank of the Danube about 13 km east of Carnuntum.<sup>11</sup> In 15 BC, the area south of the Danube probably came under Roman rule with the annexation of the *regnum Noricum*, and was incorporated into the newly established province of Pannonia under Tiberius.<sup>12</sup> The term *deserta Boiorum*, used by Pliny (nat. hist. 3, 147) to describe the north-western part of Pannonia, might be a reference to a plainland or a barren land,<sup>13</sup> maybe to a sparse population,<sup>14</sup> or simply a historical reference.<sup>15</sup>

3 General overview in Humer 2014.

4 Kremer et al. 2021.

5 E.g. Doneus and Gugl 2014, 42.

6 AE 2006, 1084 = Iupa 14769; Weber 1968/71, 136–137 no. 14.

7 Ployer 2007, 60–61.

8 Cf. Zabehlicky 2004, 24–26.

9 Iupa 32004; Kronberger and Mosser 2013, 108–110 fig. 1; Weber 2020.

10 Mócsy 1974; Kóvacs 2015; Strobel 2015.

11 K. Harmadyová and V. Plachá, in: Humer 2006/I, 178–183.

12 Kovacs 2014, 55.

13 Kovács 2015; Strobel 2015, 43–47; Bíró 2017, 23. 269.

14 Ployer 2007; Zabehlicky 2015, 107–108.

15 Cf. Scherrer 2002, 51–55. On results of systematic archaeological prospection in the area of the Leitha Mountains: Doneus and Griegl 2015.

The numerous gravestones depicting peregrine families, especially women in their characteristic local costume, are usually associated with the remnant Celtic population<sup>16</sup> (fig. 2, 3). An inscription from the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century mentions M. Cocceius Caupianus, *pr(inceps) c(ivitatis) B(oiorum)* and his wife Cocceia Dagovassa.<sup>17</sup> There seems to be written evidence of a *civitas Boiorum* well into the imperial period.<sup>18</sup>

The course of the old trade route coming from the north and leading from Carnuntum southwards to Scarbantia and Savaria along the Leitha Mountains and the western shore of the Lake Neusiedl, is secured in large parts.<sup>19</sup> As a first axis of Romanization, the Amber Road attracted traders from Northern Italy, such as the Barbii, Caesernii or Petronii, who appear as *patroni* in the funeral inscriptions of slaves and freedmen in this region<sup>20</sup>. Slavery also seems to have been common among the indigenous population, since a number of inscriptions attest to slaves who, like their owners, often bear Celtic names<sup>21</sup> (fig. 2). Personal names reveal the granting of Roman civil rights to individuals under the Flavians<sup>22</sup> and the influx of population from Noricum.<sup>23</sup>

Roman military presence along the Amber Road between *colonia Claudia Savaria* and the Tiberian settlement and Flavian *municipium Scarbantia* has been documented at several points, at least since Tiberian times.<sup>24</sup> A trading and military post of Augustan period is attested under Devín Castle, on the north bank of the Danube.<sup>25</sup> Also, on the section between Scarbantia and Carnuntum as well as along the connecting roads to Vindobona, road stations under military protection must be presumed from the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, so for example at Müllendorf.<sup>26</sup> The evidence is however limited so far mainly to early Roman weapon graves and isolated military equipment finds.<sup>27</sup> Roman finds of the early 1<sup>st</sup> century AD appear for example in the cemetery of Potzneusiedl.<sup>28</sup>

16 Garbsch 1965; Garbsch 1985; Harl 1993; Wedenig 2008; Kremer 2019.

17 AE 1951, 64; Iupa 2248: *M(arcus) Coc[ce]ius / Caupianus pr(inceps) / c(ivitatis) B(oiorum) v(ivus) f(ecit) sibi et / Cocceiae Dago/vassae coniugi / anno[r]um LV* (from Bruckneudorf; heavily restored and completed). – *Princ(ipes) Boior(um)* are also mentioned as witnesses in a military diploma of the year 71: AE 2002, 1771; see also Zabehlicky 2015, 108.

18 Kovács 2015, 181.

19 Kaus 2006.

20 Mócsy 1974, 77–79, 120–124; Weber-Hiden 2021. Examples in Kremer 2019.

21 Mócsy 1959, 31–36; Mócsy 1974, 135; Meid 2005; Weber-Hiden 2021. E.g. M. Cocceius Caupianus (n. 17), who became Roman citizen under Nerva. In the same area, an altar to Silvanus was dedicated by Mogetius, *servus saltuarius* of Flavius Victor and Flavius Victorinus (AE 1938, 168 = Iupa 10389).

22 Mócsy 1974, 135; Zabehlicky 2015, 107–108.

23 Scherrer 2002, 51–55.

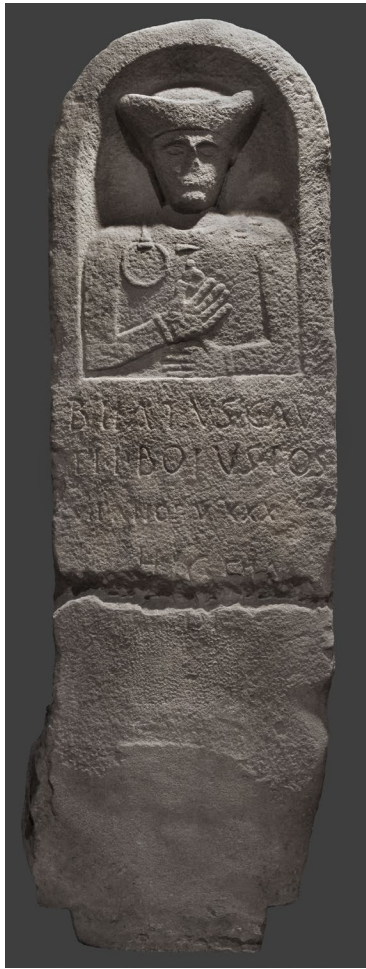
24 Overview in Mráv 2013.

25 Gabler 2006; Musilová 2023.

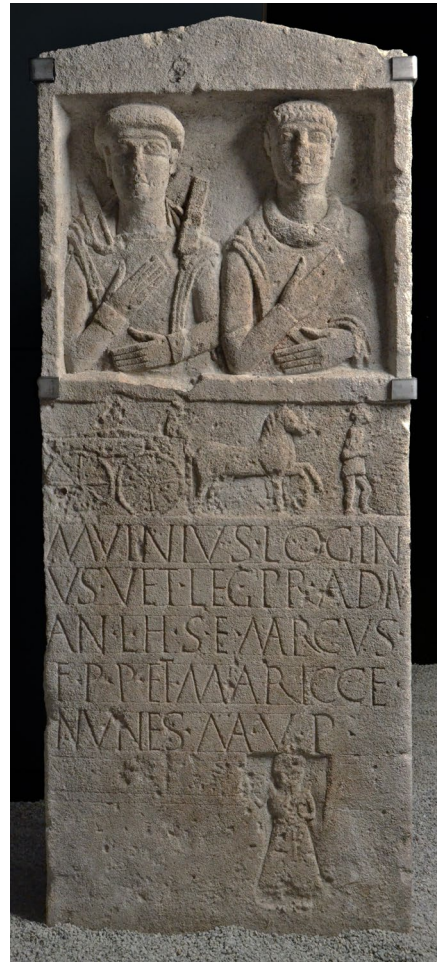
26 Kaus 2006, 212–213. See among others the altar to IOM set up by C. Nonius Valentinus, *speculator leg(ionis) X gem(inae)*: AE 2001, 1645 = Iupa 5796.

27 Mráv 2013.

28 Currently evaluated in an ongoing project: Formato 2021. See e.g. a face pot from grave 241, most probably an import from Northern Italy with parallels on Magdalensberg (Formato 2021, 117–118).



**Fig. 2. Funeral stele of Bilatusa, Cauti (liberta), erected by Boius, from Bruckneudorf, Hanság Múzeum Mosonmagyaróvár inv. 68.1.9 (ÖAI/ÖAW, photo G. Kremer)**



**Fig. 3. Funeral stele of M. Vinus Longinus, veteranus of leg(io) pr(ima) Adiu(trix), and Maricca, from Leithaprodersdorf (© Wien – Österreichisches Bundesdenkmalamt, photo O. Harl)**

On the stone monuments, members of the troops are attested from Tiberian times,<sup>29</sup> in Carnuntum at least from the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century onwards.<sup>30</sup> Two marble stelae of auxiliary riders from Walbersdorf (territorium of Scarbantia) are dated to the Claudian or Neronian period.<sup>31</sup> A recently discovered fragmented funeral stele from Leithaprodersdorf shows the auxiliary soldier Comatus, *Buttonis [filius]*, with his mili-

29 E.g. stele of Abilus Lucocadiacus, *equus alae Pannoniorum* from Peresznye: *CIL* III 4227 = lupa 3365; stele of Salvius Aebutius from Scarbantia: *AE* 1914, 7 = lupa 3072.

30 The earliest stelae of the *legio XV Apollinaris* from Carnuntum are commonly dated to the Claudian period, according to the earliest phase of the legionary camp: Mosser 2003; Beszédes 2020. However, the presence of troops in the Tiberian period is transmitted (*Vell. Pat.* II 109–110) and some arguments also support the early dating of certain grave stelae: Weber-Hiden 2017. E.g. the stele of L. Cossutius Costa, *tribunus militum leg XV*, made of local (!) limestone: *AE* 2002, 1150 = lupa 4563.

31 Stele of Ti. Iulius Rufus, veteran of *ala Scubolorum*: *AE* 1906, 111 = lupa 423; stele of C. Petronius, veteran of *ala Gemelliana*: *AE* 1909, 200 = lupa 427.



tary equipment (2<sup>nd</sup> half 1<sup>st</sup>–early 2<sup>nd</sup> century).<sup>32</sup> Further gravestones testify to the presence of veterans from legionary or auxiliary troops (fig. 3), as well as from the fleet, who were among the owners of *villae rusticae* in the hinterland of the Limes.<sup>33</sup>

One more element that contributed to the diversity of the population in this area in Roman times has to be mentioned: after the defeat of Vannius, parts of Germanic tribes settled in the region (Tac. Ann. 12, 29–30). They are occasionally detectable in the settlement remains and the related find material,<sup>34</sup> and even among the funeral stelae that depict the grave owners in portraits according to Roman custom.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, the graves in the hinterland that contain sculptures, architectural elements and/or inscriptions carved in stone reflect from the mid 1<sup>st</sup> century onwards a heterogeneous “rural” elite. Their names, indications of origin and legal status, clothing and/or troop affiliation and, last but not least, the form and quality of their gravestones provide information about their cultural identity, or at least about what they explicitly want to portray as their cultural identity. By far the largest part of the population, however, does not appear directly through monuments.

### Overview on “oriental” cults in the area of investigation

Against this background, it is surprising that little is known about Roman-era cult sites in this region.<sup>36</sup> Apart from the new and not yet evaluated finds in the vicus Müllendorf,<sup>37</sup> no Roman temple can be localized until now. Besides the – sparsely documented<sup>38</sup> – small finds, the stone monuments are therefore our main source on cult and religion. A total of 159 sacral stone monuments (votive altars, inscriptions, sculptures, reliefs) have so far been registered (fig. 1). The dense dissemination on the slopes of the Leitha Mountains is particularly striking. Only sparse finds are registered east of Lake Neusiedl – certainly not only a result of poor state of research or preservation. Findings are also sparse in the western half of the area, with a few exceptions along the western rim of the Vienna Basin.

In addition to the monuments from the hinterland, far more than 700 registered cult related monuments from the urban area of Carnuntum,<sup>39</sup> 57 from Vindobona<sup>40</sup> and

32 Formato 2018; *AE* 2018, 1295.

33 E.g. from Mannersdorf: *AE* 2001, 1652, 1653, 1655 = lupa 1877, 1876, 1878. See overview in Ployer 2009, 1441; Zabehlicky 2015, 108.

34 Humer 2006, 58–70; Ployer 2009, 1440–1441; Ployer 2015.

35 Funeral stelae of the slave Cassus and his wife Strubilo (*liberta*) from Katzelsdorf (*CIL* III 4551 = 11301 = lupa 425), or of Tudrus, *libertus* of Ariomanus from Lichtenwörth (*AE* 1939, 261 = lupa 95). See Weber-Hiden 2021, 78–79.

36 Overview in Ployer 2007, esp. nos. 23, 57, 77b.

37 Excavations of the University of Vienna since 2019 brought to light a building which is supposed to be a podium temple, but which cannot be assigned to a specific deity until now. C. Hascher and A. Stuppner, *FÖ* 59, 2020, 69.

38 Small votive objects are most probably numerous, but hardly available for scientific evaluation.

39 Kremer 2012. Not included are the monuments from the Jupiter sanctuaries on Pfaffenberg and Mühlacker in Carnuntum. See overview in Humer and Kremer 2011, 194–217, 242–255.

40 Recorded in the course of the CarVin project (ÖAI/ÖAW). See CSIR Vindobona 1967 and lupa.

34 from the surroundings of the auxiliary fort in Gerulata (Rusovce)<sup>41</sup> must be taken into account. By assessing the occurrence of the individual cults within this material, a clear result emerges, despite all reservations on the informative value of statistics that are based on low quantities and moreover triggered and biased by the random state of preservation and research. Comparing the urban space of Carnuntum with the hinterland, the first three positions are occupied by the same cults, namely those of Jupiter, Silvanus and Mithras. While in Carnuntum the votive altars to Silvanus are in absolute majority, followed by Jupiter and the Mithras cult,<sup>42</sup> the hinterland shows a high number of Mithraic monuments (29 objects), followed by Jupiter (18 objects) and Silvanus (16 objects). A distortion is certainly caused by the coincidental discovery of two Silvanus shrines with a huge number of votive altars in Carnuntum,<sup>43</sup> while the numerous inscriptions and sculptures from the two main Jupiter sanctuaries on Pfaffenberg and on Mühläcker are not included.<sup>44</sup> More generally, the listing of sacral monuments according to deities, regardless of sacral and archaeological contexts, also requires caution. Nevertheless, the importance of the three most frequently documented cults can be affirmed for Carnuntum as well as for the hinterland. Further on, the *Genii militares* are significant in Carnuntum,<sup>45</sup> as in most of the military centres on the Limes,<sup>46</sup> whereas in the hinterland, the dedications to Hercules (8 objects) follow in fourth position. This is not surprising, since the quarry activities play a major role in the area of the Leitha Mountains.<sup>47</sup> In the hinterland, the monuments dedicated to the Nymphs (5 objects) are also worthy of mention. Spring sanctuaries are relatively frequent, and they are characterized less by stone monuments than by other types of finds.<sup>48</sup> As expected, the range of deities in Carnuntum is much more diverse than the one in the hinterland: 126 monuments of "other cults" are distributed among 43 different deities (including those of "oriental" origin), whereas in the hinterland only 16 "other deities" have been registered. Altogether, "oriental" cults<sup>49</sup> account for about 12% of the total in Carnuntum, while in the hinterland the percentage is 21% – a remarkable result at first glance.

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41 Schmidtová et al. 2005.

42 Kremer 2012, 372–387.

43 Kremer 2012, 341–344 (with literature).

44 See n. 39. The extensive find material of these more recently excavated sanctuaries is intended for separate publication and therefore not included in the Corpus.

45 Kremer 2012, 387.

46 E.g. Stoll 1992.

47 Kremer et al. 2021. Cf. on Hercules Saxanus: Matijević 2016. A head of Hercules is attested near a source sanctuary in Winden, where ancient quarry activity is assumed: Kremer 2020.

48 E.g. in Müllendorf, Potzneusiedl, Winden. See among others Schön 1988, 63–65; Alram-Stern and Gassner 1989; Kremer 2020.

49 The much-discussed and questionable term in this case includes Mithras, *Cautes*, *Cautopates*, IOM *Dolichenus*, IOM *Heliopolitanus*, IOM *Ammon*, *Attis*, *Sabazios*, *Harpocrates*, *Kybele/Mater Magna*, *Isis*, *Sarapis* and the so-called Danubian Riders.

## “Oriental cults” in Carnuntum – some considerations

In order to understand this better, a brief overview of the “oriental” cults<sup>50</sup> in the two centres Carnuntum and Vindobona themselves is required.

Among the 90 relevant monuments from Carnuntum, Mithras takes the first place with 53 preserved monuments.<sup>51</sup> Four main points regarding the “oriental” cults in Carnuntum appear important. The mapping shows several Mithras communities throughout the settlement area – around the civil town, the *canabae* and outside (fig. 4).<sup>52</sup> The so-called Mithraea I and III were unearthed during old excavations; several more sanctuaries are indirectly proven by cult reliefs.<sup>53</sup> In addition to the relatively high number of monuments, their rather early date must be considered. The earliest known altar was dedicated by C. Sacidius Barbarus, an active *centurio* of *legio XV Apollinaris*, which left Carnuntum around AD 114<sup>54</sup> (fig. 5a. b). It was generally assumed since F. Cumont,<sup>55</sup> that Sacidius Barbarus was either recruited during the stay of the 15<sup>th</sup> legion in the East (AD 68–71), for example in Galatia or Cappadocia, or at least came into contact with the cult of Mithras there, and that after the return of the legion he initiated the cult in Carnuntum. Taking into account an average duration of 25 years for military service, this would even suggest a dating of the altar no later than AD 96. Doubts have been expressed about this early dating, mainly because the name and the rank of the *centurio* make his recruitment in the East rather unlikely, and also because of the scant evidence of the Mithras cult east of the Adriatic in general.<sup>56</sup> Although the mechanisms of a possible “transmission from the East” remain at present unknown and therefore questionable, the presence of the Mithras cult in Carnuntum before AD 114 can nevertheless be affirmed. The altar of Sacidius Barbarus was most probably originally set up in the so-called Mithraeum I,<sup>57</sup> a partially bricked cave situated next to potentially ancient quarries<sup>58</sup> at the foot of the Kirchenberg east of the *canabae*. Its origin in the late 1<sup>st</sup>/early 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD seems to be assured by the stamped bricks of *legio XV Ap(ollinaris)* as well

50 Since a further discussion of the term and the implied suggested dichotomy would be out of place here, and since the vast majority of the relevant monuments for this study are related to Mithras, only selected aspects of the other “oriental” cults will be considered.

51 The analysis is based on the published material in Kremer 2012. Meanwhile the numbers increased for the Mithras cult as well as for other cults, but the ratios have not changed significantly.

52 Kremer 2021, 251–256 fig. 1.

53 See the discussion in Kremer 2012, 330–337, 382–387.

54 *Invicto Mit<h>r(h)e / C(aius) Sacidius Ba/rbarus >(centurio) leg(ionis) / XV Apol(linaris) / ex voto [[?]]*. *CIL* III, 4418 = *Iupa* 6150; *CIMRM* 1718; Mosser 2003, 267–268 no. 204; Kremer 2012, 180–181 no. 352 pl. 108 (with literature).

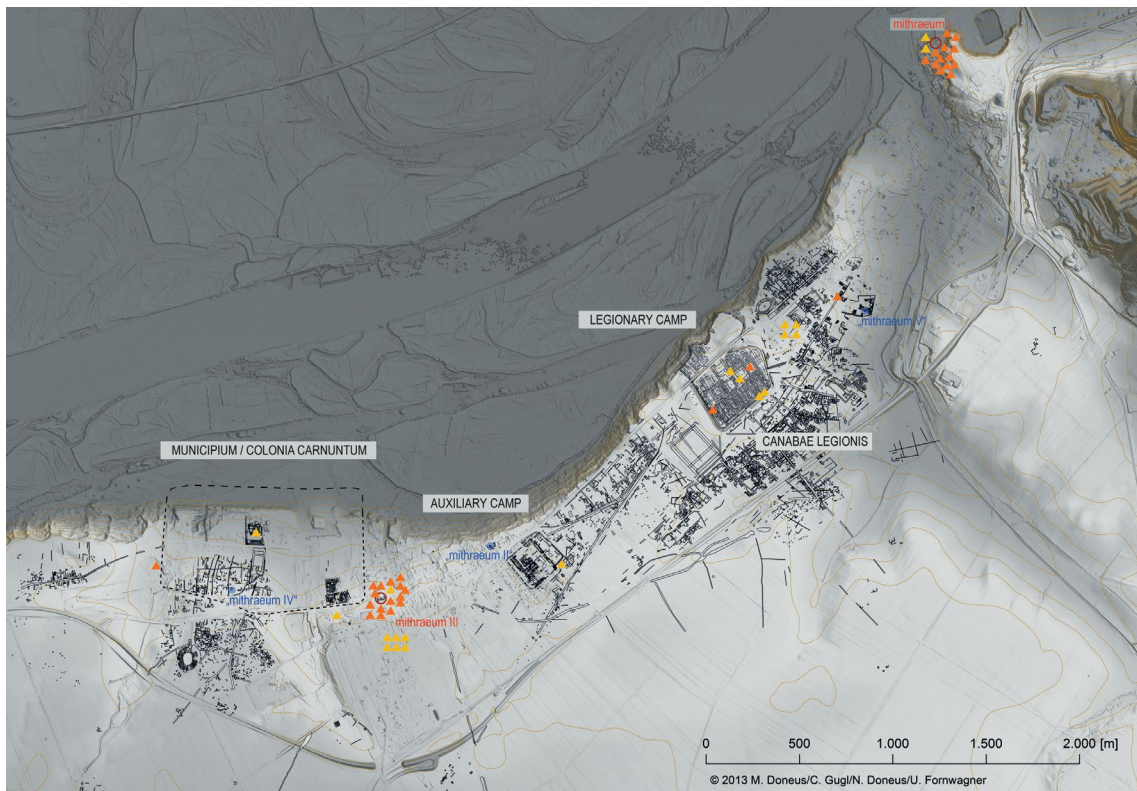
55 Cumont 1899, 252–253.

56 Gordon 2009, 393 n. 81 suggests that the founder might have belonged to a *vexillatio* of the legion that was active in the area at the time of the Marcomannic Wars. Apparently agreeing with the early dating, however Gordon 2009, 395. Confirming (“before 114”): Chalupa 2016, 83–84, 90. Ph. Swennen and L. Bricault in: Bricault et al. 2021, 36–37: even “81–86 C.E.”, without further justification.

57 “Mithraeum I” was unearthed during the very first archaeological excavations in Carnuntum in 1853 (von Sacken 1853, 338–339) and completely destroyed by quarrying activities soon after. Only a description of the findings is available. The altar of Barbarus was found slightly later in the same area (literature in Kremer 2012, 180). On the site cf. C. Gugl and G. Kremer, in: Humer and Kremer 2011, 164–166.

58 The description allows the assumption that the “cave” was located near a former quarry, comparable to the situation at Fertőrákos (n. 96) or Doliche (Schütte-Maischatz and Winter 2004, 79–126), among others.





**Fig. 4. Settlement area of Carnuntum with identified (I, III) and so-called Mithraea (II, IV, V); Mithraic monuments with known findspots (orange) and with approximately known findspots (yellow) (© ÖAI/ÖAW, map M. Doneus, C. Gugl, N. Doneus, U. Fornwagner; additions G. Kremer)**

as of *legio XIII g(emina) M(artia) V(ictrix)*,<sup>59</sup> the legion which took over after AD 113.<sup>60</sup> A *vexillatio legionis XIII geminae*, operating in Carnuntum before the arrival of the legion, is indeed proven by a votive altar to Jupiter Optimus Maximus in the sanctuary on Pfaffenberg.<sup>61</sup> As to the altar of Barbarus itself, it has suffered severe damage, probably due to a secondary impact at a later date.<sup>62</sup> In part of line 5 and below, the surface of the inscription was completely worked over. If this is an erasure of a consular datation, it could be related to the *damnatio memoriae* of Domitian.<sup>63</sup> Both typography and layout of the inscription, the ornaments on the pulvini and the focus (wreath, grapes), as well as the shape of the profiles are compatible with a dating to the 1<sup>st</sup>/early 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD (fig. 5a. b). The use of limestone from the northeastern Leitha Mountains<sup>64</sup> is traceable

59 von Sacken 1853, 338–339. Brick stamps of *legio X* (cf. Schön 1988, 15) are not mentioned in the description of Arneth and von Sacken, which does not allow for more precise statements about the building and its possible construction phases.

60 On the military troops in Carnuntum see e.g. Mosser 2017.

61 *CIL* III, 11124; Piso 2003, 17–18 no. 2.

62 The accessibility of the sanctuary until the 4<sup>th</sup> c. is documented by coins of Gordianus III and Constans I (von Sacken 1853, 340).

63 Who was consul several times between AD 77 and AD 95.

64 Petrological analysis by Andreas Rohatsch and Beatrix Moshhammer (project CarVin, ÖAI/ÖAW).



**Fig. 5a, b. Altar of C. Sacidius Barbarus, left side (a) and front side (b), KHM Vienna inv. III 35 (KHM, photo a: G. Kremer, b: N. Gail)**

among the monuments in Carnuntum from the middle of the 1<sup>st</sup> century onwards until the 3<sup>rd</sup> century at least.<sup>65</sup> Even if the arguments for the early dating before 96 are not considered firm enough, the *terminus ante* AD 114 can be maintained. The importance of the Mithraeum I and its revival in the late 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries is evidenced by an altar found inside the sanctuary, mentioning its deterioration due to age (*templum [v]etustate conlabsum*) and its restoration by a man of equestrian rank.<sup>66</sup> Several other votive altars dedicated by higher military ranks of different legions are also among the monuments found here.<sup>67</sup>

The second point of interest is the relatively early evidence of Jupiter Dolichenus in Carnuntum and the close connection of cults with Syrian roots to the official military cult practice and the imperial cult.<sup>68</sup> The inscription of the *iuventus colens Iovem Dolichenum*, dedicated *pro salute imperatoris*, proves the construction and dedication of a building in the extra-urban sanctuary of Jupiter Optimus Maximus on Pfaffenberg between AD 128 and 138.<sup>69</sup> The evidence of dedications on Pfaffenberg starts with a

65 Kremer et al. 2021, 56.

66 *CIL* III 4420=11088=14356 = lupa 8906; Kremer 2012, 181–182 no. 353 pl. 109 (with literature): the name of the dedicant is probably C. Atius Secundus *v(ir) p(erfectissimus)*.

67 See Kremer 2012, 330–331, 386 nos. 75, 81, 83, 85, 87, 192, 193, 353–355, 362, 363, 367, 708.

68 Cf. Blömer 2012.

69 *AE* 1936, 132 = lupa 13713; Piso 2003, 18–19 no. 3 (with literature).

small votive altar to Victoria set by a member of the 15<sup>th</sup> legion<sup>70</sup> and ends with a number of altars to I O M K(arnuntinus), reaching to AD 313 at least.<sup>71</sup> The dedicants reveal a strong but not exclusive military component. Jupiter Dolichenus, who is not directly addressed in the surviving votive inscriptions, seems to be worshipped on Pfaffenberg only in a secondary position, outside his own sanctuary.<sup>72</sup> Besides the aforementioned inscription, his presence is attested by a small bearded head with Phrygian cap,<sup>73</sup> maybe also by a second, though beardless small head with Phrygian cap<sup>74</sup> and a bronze hand of uncertain provenance.<sup>75</sup> The possibly accurate identification of the three-aisled Temple II as a banquet hall of the Dolichenus cult<sup>76</sup> cannot be corroborated by corresponding finds.

The third point is the possible relationship between local (ethnic) communities in Carnuntum and deities with "oriental" origin or components. Carnuntum had its own sanctuary for Jupiter Heliopolitanus, another cult with Syrian roots, and under Commodus at the latest, the cult was officially promoted.<sup>77</sup> The idol of IOMH is depicted on the armour of a Severan emperor's statue from the legionary camp.<sup>78</sup> Among the dedicants addressing this deity, we know some holders of high military ranks, a few civilians, freedmen and one woman.<sup>79</sup> In several cases, the names indicate an origin from the East, as for example on the altar of Pompeius Caeneus,<sup>80</sup> *princeps legionis*, or on the votive tablet of Pomponius Sosipater.<sup>81</sup> This may point to a special but by no means exclusive significance of the cult for the numerous people of Syrian origin living in Carnuntum and in the north-western part of Pannonia.<sup>82</sup> The attractiveness of the deities of "oriental", or in this case Syrian origin for certain ethnic groups seems plausible, even if the impulse for their spread came most likely from the Roman military.<sup>83</sup> In the case of IOM Dolichenus, the integrative political concept behind it becomes particularly clear.

A last point that needs to be emphasized here is the longevity of the Mithras cult, also in Carnuntum, where it is documented by the famous so-called Altar of the Em-

70 AE 2003, 1381; Piso 2003, 17 no. 1.

71 AE 1991, 1313; Piso 2003, 47–48 no. 45.

72 On the sanctuary of Jupiter Dolichenus, discovered in the *canabae* in 1891: Kandler 2011; Kremer 2012, 331–332, 345–346 (with literature).

73 Kremer 2004, 88–90 no. 21 fig. 51 pls. 46, 47; Humer and Kremer 2011, 205 no. 156.

74 Groller 1900, pls. 11, 60; Jobst 1968–71, 262 no. 5 fig. 8; Humer and Kremer 2011, 205 no. 157. The youthful head is more likely to be identified as Attis or Mithras.

75 Jobst 1968–71, 269, 275 fig. 18. The mutilated hand is only known from a photograph and apparently lacks the characteristic attributes of the Dolichenus cult.

76 Kandler 2004; Gassner 2005.

77 E.g. V. Gassner and E. Steigberger, in: Humer and Kremer 2011, 242–255.

78 Kremer 2012, 100–101 no. 185 pl. 51 (with literature).

79 See below and tab. 1 no. 4.

80 *CIL* III, 11138 = 13728.

81 AE 1982, 774; Humer and Kremer 2011, 253 no. 292.

82 Mócsy 1974, 227–230; Mosser 2003, 151.

83 Cf. Blömer 2017, esp. 105–106.

perors, which was endowed by the tetrarchs during the conference of AD 308.<sup>84</sup> The dedication to Sol invictus Mithras – protector of the *imperium* – was written on a re-used Mithras altar dated to the (early?) 2<sup>nd</sup> century.<sup>85</sup> It reports on the renovation of a sanctuary which is most probably the so-called third Mithraeum of Carnuntum.<sup>86</sup> There is no better proof of the importance the Mithras cult must have had in Carnuntum, even in the highest circles.

From Vindobona, only two Mithras monuments have been documented so far, namely a “Danubian style” votive relief from the area of the civilian town,<sup>87</sup> and a small altar to *I(nvictus) d(eus) M(ithras)* of a soldier of *legio X g(emina)* from Sieveringer Straße, where a Mithraeum is supposed to be related to ancient quarries.<sup>88</sup> Beyond that, we only know about two dedications to IOM Sarapis,<sup>89</sup> which are not available today. I am not aware of any other finds of “oriental” cults from Vienna so far, except several fragments of snake vessels,<sup>90</sup> but other types of finds need to be investigated.

### “Oriental” gods in the hinterland of Carnuntum and Vindobona

The distribution of stone monuments related to “oriental” cults in the hinterland shows as follows (fig. 6): Egyptian cults, well attested in Carnuntum and also in Vindobona, have so far not been found in the rural area.<sup>91</sup> Cults of Syrian origin are also sparsely represented, but a hexagonal altar with a badly preserved inscription to IOM Dolichenus (1)<sup>92</sup> (fig. 7) was found in Müllendorf, underlining the importance of the vicus and corroborating the existence of a road station protected by the military.<sup>93</sup> The other finds of “Syrian cults” are limited to two heads of bearded deities with Phrygian caps from Rust (2) (fig. 8) and Illmitz (3), attributed to Jupiter Dolichenus, and a mutilated altar in Pama (4), mentioning priests who are also known from a votive column to IOM Heliopolitanus and Venus victrix at Carnuntum<sup>94</sup> and therefore most likely originating from the capital.

Much more interesting here are the monuments of the Mithras cult (5–35). They are clearly concentrated in the eastern half of the territory (fig. 6), and suggest – in addition to the known Mithraea in Fertőrákos and Stixneusiedl – several Mithras sanctu-

84 *CIL* III, 4413 = lupa 4951; E. Weber, in: Humer et al. 2014, 16–26 and 224–225; Kremer 2012, 179–180 pls. 106, 107 no. 351 (with literature). On the testimonies from the 4<sup>th</sup> c. see Clauss 2000, 28–32.

85 Some thoughts on the context and the possible meaning of this reuse in Kremer 2022.

86 *CIL* III, 4413 p. 2328.321, after Petrus De Lama (1795). Cf. Kremer 2012, 179–180, 332–334 no. 351 fig. 15.

87 Kronberger and Mosser 2011, 110 fig. 51; lupa 6389.

88 *CIL* III, 14359.28 = lupa 6388.

89 *CIL* III, 4560 = *RICIS* 613/0801 (in private collection?) and 4561 = *RICIS* 613/0802.

90 Schön 1988, 72–74.

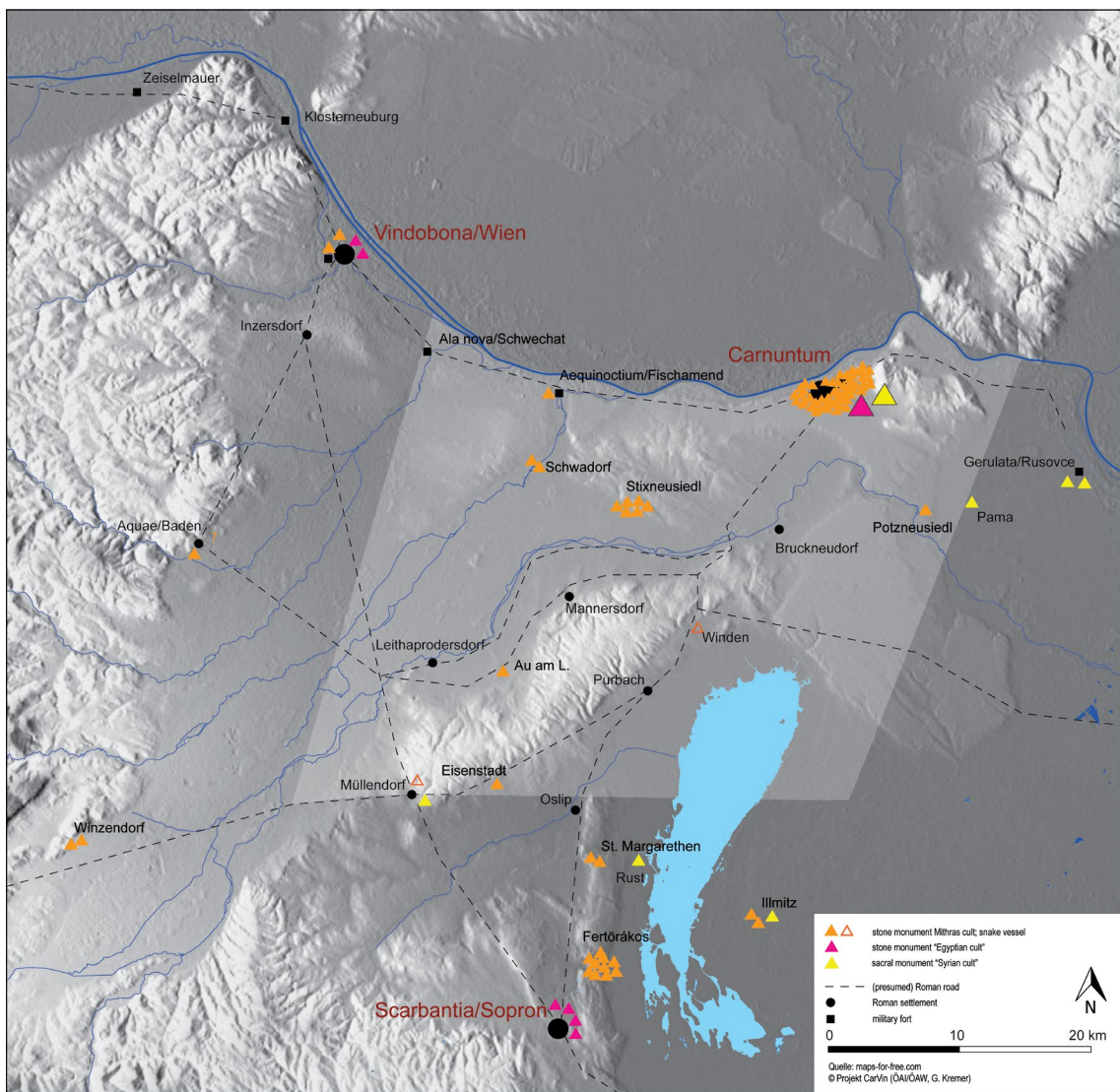
91 The head of a statuette from Illmitz (3), formerly attributed to Serapis (?) appears more likely to represent Jupiter Dolichenus.

92 The numbers in brackets refer to tab. 1.

93 See n. 26 and 37.

94 *CIL* III, 11139 = lupa 13729; Ubl 1979; Kremer 2012, no. 729.





**Fig. 6. Hinterland of Carnuntum and Vindobona with find spots of stone monuments of "oriental" cults and presumed territory of Carnuntum based on the evidence of milestones (© ÖAI/ÖAW, G. Kremer)**

aries in the rural area.<sup>95</sup> The Mithraeum of Fertőrákos is integrated into the rock walls of an ancient quarry and preserved today under a protective structure.<sup>96</sup> Apart from the cult image (5) with a fragmentary founder's inscription, several monuments of the inventory are preserved (6–14), including another tauroctony relief with a dedicatory inscription of Iulius Saturninus (6). Of particular interest are the altars, which provide further information on the stakeholders in this sanctuary: two votive altars (7, 8) were erected by Septimius Iustianus, *custos armorum* of the 14<sup>th</sup> legion stationed in Carnuntum. Another votive altar (9) mentions L. Avitus Maturus, *decurio* of *colonia Karnun-*

95 Cf. Schön 2988; Claus 2000, 37.

96 Gabrieli 1993.



**Fig. 7. Votive monument for IOM Dolichenus from Müllendorf, Burgenländisches Landesmuseum Eisenstadt inv. SW 5.266 (ÖAI/ÖAW, photo G. Kremer)**

*tum* as a dedicant. There is no doubt, however, that Fertőrákos belonged to the territory of Scarbantia, a fact that is probably confirmed by the use of stone material which does not originate from the Leitha mountains.<sup>97</sup>

The Mithraeum of Stixneusiedl is a discovery of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and little is known about the circumstances of its excavation.<sup>98</sup> A magnificent (but heavily restored) cult relief (15) with remains of polychrome colour<sup>99</sup> is preserved, as well as a related basis (16) mentioning Valerius and Valerianus, two *seviri* of the *colonia Karnuntum* as dedicants (fig. 9). The same persons erected a votive altar (19) to *Deus Sol invictus* in honour of the emperors – probably Septimius Severus and Caracalla –, on which the renovation of the *templum* is reported. From another, nowadays lost tauroctony relief (17) with interesting iconographic details, only fragments of the votive inscription had survived. Two monuments, however, provide us with further names, in one case a *peregrinus* (or a slave?) named Longinus (18), in the other case two *peregrini*, Vitalis and Silvanus (20). These monuments possibly belong to an earlier phase of the sanctuary, which was renovated in the Severan period by the forementioned *seviri coloniae Karnunti*.

Two finds from the 19<sup>th</sup> century have been preserved from Schwadorf: the fragment of a monumental tauroctony relief (22), still 91 cm high (fig. 10), and the statuette of the rock birth with a dedication to *p(etra) g(enetrix) d(ei)* (23) by Aurelius Statinus (fig. 11). We do not learn more about the identity of the dedicants here, but these monuments point to the existence of a Mithras sanctuary in the advanced 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century in Schwadorf.

The same might be true about Potzneusiedl, where three relief fragments (24–26) have been discovered in secondary use. They are preserved in a very bad condition, but at least one fragment with Luna and the head of Cautes (24) obviously belonged to a monumental bull-killing scene (fig. 12). Another fragment seems to be part of a separate relief of Mithras carrying the bull<sup>100</sup> (fig. 13). It

97 See n. 6 and 64.

98 Schön 1988, 67–71 (with older literature).

99 Currently under investigation: <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/oeai/forschung/altertumswissenschaften/antike-religion/polychromon>.

100 Schön 1988, 65–66.





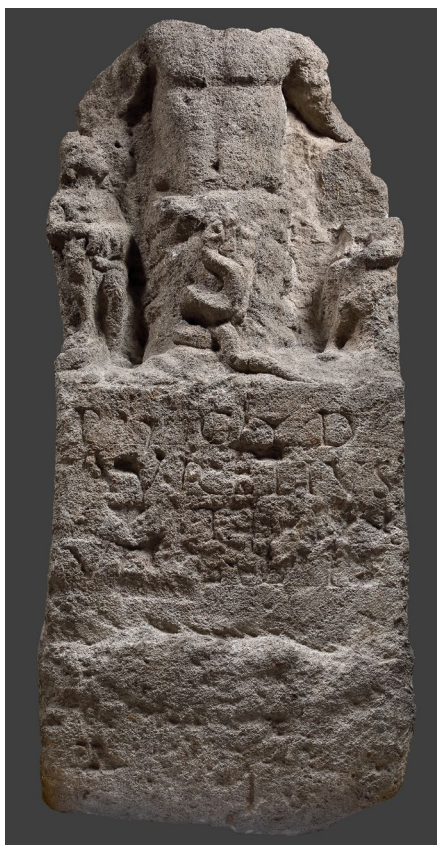
**Fig. 8. Head with Phrygian cap (?) from Rust, Burgenländisches Landesmuseum Eisenstadt inv. 7328 (ÖAI/ÖAW, photo G. Kremer)**



**Fig. 9. Relief with bull-killing scene and base with inscription from Stixneusiedl, KHM Vienna inv. I 254 and II 254 (ÖAI/ÖAW, photo N. Gail)**



**Fig. 10. Relief with bull-killing scene from Schwadorf, KHM Vienna inv. I 277 b (ÖAI/ÖAW, photo N. Gail)**



**Fig. 11. Rock-birth statuette from Schwadorf, KHM Vienna inv. I 277 a (ÖAI/ÖAW, photo N. Gail)**





**Fig. 12.** Fragment of a tauroctony relief from Potzneusiedl, Burgenländisches Landesmuseum Eisenstadt inv. 29.259 (ÖAI/ÖAW, photo G. Kremer)



**Fig. 13.** Fragment of a Mithras relief (?) from Potzneusiedl, Burgenländisches Landesmuseum Eisenstadt inv. 7933 (ÖAI/ÖAW, photo G. Kremer)

could belong to a *transitus dei* scene and be related to the special worship of personifications (*transitus dei*, *fons perennis*, *petra genetrix*) in northwestern Pannonia.<sup>101</sup> Two recent finds of fragmented animal's heads (26, 27) might also originate from a sacral context.

Fragmentary inventories are moreover known from Winzendorf (28, 29), at the western shore of the Vienna basin, and Illmitz (30, 31) on the eastern edge of the study area. In both cases, there are remains of tauroctony reliefs (in the case of Illmitz, the location is not certain), and the dedicants are *immunes*, associated with the legions: in Winzendorf, a *strator legati legionis* of the 10<sup>th</sup> legion (stationed in Vinodobona), in Illmitz a *strator consularis* of the 14<sup>th</sup> legion (stationed in Carnuntum).

An interesting votive altar (32), found in 1937 and nowadays lost, from Au am Leithaberg on the western slope of the Leitha Mountains was set by Aurelius Dignus, another *decurio* of the *colonia Carnuntum*.



**Fig. 14.** Votive relief with bull-killing scene allegedly from St. Margarethen, location currently unknown (ÖAI/ÖAW, photo G. Kremer)

<sup>101</sup> See e.g. the statuette from Mithraeum I in Poetovio: *CIMRM* 1495 = lupa 9325. On these kind of personifications see Tóth 1977; Kremer 2005; Kiss 2011; Kremer 2012, 187 no. 367 (*petra genetrix*), 188 no. 368 (*transitus*), 109 no. 199 (*fons perennis*?) and 384.

Finally, two small votive reliefs from the villa in Eisenstadt “Gölbesäcker” (33) and from St. Margarethen (34) (fig. 14) must be mentioned for the sake of completeness.

## Conclusion

What picture does emerge from the monuments of “oriental” cults in the hinterland of Carnuntum and Vindobona? The determination of their significance in the overall environment of sacral activities in the study area must be left to the thorough analysis of the whole evidence in this region, which cannot be given here.<sup>102</sup> Rather, the consideration has to be narrowed down to the cults of IOM Dolichenus and Mithras, without presupposing common features between them nor a fundamental distinctiveness with regard to other cults.

The votive altar to IOM Dolichenus in Müllendorf (1), dedicated *pro s[alute] Aug(us-ti)*, is linked to a context that still needs to be further defined.<sup>103</sup> It was obviously dedicated in an official context that distinguishes it from the monuments originating from the Mithras communities.

Among the dedicants to Mithras, the *decuriones* (9, 32) and the *sevir* (16) might be descendants of Romanized landowning families, who had made a career in the *caput provinciae*. Their adherence to the Mithras cult is a consequence of advanced Romanization, then, in terms of transferring urban practices to the rural area. The motivation remains in the dark, but might be linked to the establishment of the *colonia* under Septimius Severus and the assumption of the corresponding offices by the dedicants.

Several military dedicants are attested (7, 8, 29, 31), all of them legionaries who were still in an active position – none of them is a *veteranus*, though many veterans are known in the hinterland by funeral inscriptions and by votive inscriptions to other deities.<sup>104</sup> These dedications by militaries, especially those of the *custos armorum* in Fertőrákos (7, 8), give the impression of an active dissemination of the cult starting from the troops in Carnuntum. The motivation remains again unknown, but some kind of “encouragement”<sup>105</sup> seems to be given through the military rank of the dedicants. Even if the importance of the military for the spread of the Mithras cult may not be generalized, the role of individual personalities in its dissemination – as one of probably several parallel development strands – seems evident here,<sup>106</sup> as well as the importance of Carnuntum as a religious centre in these processes. Whether it was linked to a specific strategy, in the sense of social control in the rural environment, for example,

102 The corpus of sacral stone monuments and its evaluation is in preparation by the author.

103 Cf. above n. 26.

104 To IOM (AE 1956, 81), Fortuna Augg. (AE 1951, 67), Mercurius (AE 2006, 1076) and Hercules conservator (Hild 1968, no. 35). See also Ployer 2009.

105 Cf. Gordon 2009, 396, who sees any direct “official patronage or encouragement” through the army refuted by the spatial distance between forts and peripherally located Mithraea on the “Obergermanisch-Rätischer Limes”.

106 I owe thanks to Nirvana Silnović for the discussion on this topic. On the role of individuals in the spread of the Mithras cult in Pannonia cf. Van Haepere 2020.

remains speculation.<sup>107</sup> But undeniably, the active members of the military troops – and especially the higher ranks – must have contributed an element of official “Romanness” to the Mithras cult communities in the hinterland.<sup>108</sup>

Peregrine dedicants are probably recorded in Stixneusiedl (18, 20), where incidentally also deviating iconographic details on one (nowadays lost) monument have been noticed (17). In this case, the aspect of integration may be stressed, as participation in these cult communities probably allowed for easier access to higher societal circles than traditional cults. The structure, the setting and the networking of the Mithras communities – otherwise eventually similar to the private character of the popular Silvanus worship in this region<sup>109</sup> – might therefore have been particularly attractive to certain groups of the rural population. In the votive inscriptions on stone monuments, we certainly find the leaders, though not necessarily the founders of the Mithras communities, or at least some of the most wealthy and important protagonists of the cult practice. The identity of the other members of these communities remains largely unknown, and we do not know to what extent the acculturated indigenous male elite participated in the initiation rites and celebrations over the course of time. How strong the attraction was in the sense of Romanization or, better, acculturation of larger groups of the population is difficult to judge – at least from the evidence of the stone monuments, so far.

Another question finally remains open: how important were the “oriental” elements of the Mithras cult for the population in the hinterland of the Limes? Were the categories “Roman” and “oriental” as such still perceptible and valid in a context that was geopolitically Roman, but culturally not homogeneous at all, as we have seen? Has “Orientalism” to be given a significant part in the attractiveness of the cult?<sup>110</sup> In the considered context, the Mithras cult is perceived as a third option, so to speak, between the loyalty owed to Roman state gods, such as Jupiter Optimus Maximus, and the sparsely attested traditional and probably locally rooted cults, such as the Nymphs or Silvanus for example. Was this a Roman concept, that made accessible to a wider (male) public (thus excluding 50% of the population!) similar “advantages” as the cults of authentic eastern provenance, such as initiation, salvation, or even after-life concepts?<sup>111</sup> Was it precisely the strikingly “non-Roman” manifestation of the god that made the cult attractive to the population in the hinterland as well, in contrast to the cult of Dolichenus, which apparently remained limited to more official circles? In any case, it seems to have been a very successful concept from a certain point on, because apart from the official sacral activities<sup>112</sup> and the popular worship of Silvanus and the Nymphs, traditional cults do not appear to have had much significance among the rural population in the area of investigation.

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107 On social, professional and political strategy rather than appropriation, assimilation or even proselytism see Bonnet et al. 2009, 12.

108 Cf. Clauss 2000, 41.

109 On similar structures of “Gruppenreligionen”, no matter if with “oriental” roots or not, see Rüpke 2007, esp. 113–126. On Silvanus and Mithras: Kremer 2012, 378.

110 Cf. Versluys 2013.

111 See the discussion and the referred literature in Alvar 2008; Sfameni Gasparro 2013, 158–160.

112 E.g. in Müllendorf (n. 36), or in Mannersdorf (Ubl 1974).

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