

# MONUMENTS DEDICATED TO LEO AND FONS FROM GOLUBIĆ (BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA) – A SPECIFIC FORM OF WORSHIP OF MITHRAS' CULT?

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## **Abstract**

*The paper analyses the dedications to Leo and Fons on two small altars in the context of the Roman finds from the area of Golubić near Bihać (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and in the context of the cult of Mithras. Information is provided on the location of the Mithraic monuments from the area, which were visited for the purposes of this research. A review for inscriptions and dating respectively is also offered. The connection between the dedication to Fons and the specific context of the find, a territory in which the Una river and its tributaries played an important role, is considered.*

**Key words:** Mithras – Leo – Fons – Fons Perennis – Raetinum – Golubić – Bihać – Mithraic grades – Bindus Neptunus.

*Fons concludere petris, geminos qui aluisti nectare fratres.*<sup>1</sup>

A lot has been written about the Roman cult of Mithras to this day, from topics related to the origin of the cult, its “orientality”, “romanity” to its mysterious aspects, ico-

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1 CIMRM II, 484.



**Fig. 1. Tauroctony relief from Golubić (Archaeological Museum in Zagreb, photo by the author)**

nography, etc.<sup>2</sup> So many monuments have been interpreted that it sometimes seems as if there is not much of the “new” left to say, to analyse. However, the number of sites that continue to be discovered, and aspects of the cult that are being reviewed prove otherwise. There are also still localities, monuments which for various reasons were neglected or simply did not get their turn, such as those dedicated to *Leo* and *Fons* from the vicinity of Bihać (Bosnia and Herzegovina). As I will try to present in this work, these monuments from the interior of the Roman province of Dalmatia emphasize numerous similarities, but, which is more important, also a certain local specificity of worship with respect to other Mithraic communities from the province. In my opinion, the context, the main theme of this conference, in which this community operated is the precise reason for the development of particular aspects of the worship in the cult of Mithras, which is also the reason why some more attention should be given to them.

At least five monuments related to the cult of Mithras originate from the area of today's Bihać: two tauroctony reliefs, one altar dedicated to *Invictus Mithras* and two square shape blocks with a dedication to *Leo* and *Fons* respectively with the rest of the inscription in the form of a monogram and/or an unusual abbreviation (figs. 1–4).<sup>3</sup>

2 From the vast corpus of bibliography, I cite only those works that have been used the most in this paper: Vermaseren 1960; Beck 1988; Clauss 2001; Alvar 2008; Bonnet and Bricault (eds.) 2013, 1–14; Sfameni Gasparro 2013, 145–167; Versluys 2013, 235–259; Belayche 2021, 1–27.

3 Tauroctony reliefs: *CIL* III, 10034=13276; *CIMRM* II, 1907; altar: *CIMRM* II, 1908; dedication to *Leo*: *CIL* III, 13276 a; to *Fons*: *CIL* III, 13276 b (both first published as *CIL* III, 10042).



**Fig. 2. Altar to Invicto Mithrae and tauroctony relief from Pritoka (from Sergejevski 1939)**

Until now the monuments from Bihać were analysed, mostly in basic terms, in discussions on Mithraism or in catalogues of Mithraic monuments of the province.<sup>4</sup> Most of the authors consider dedications to *Leo* and *Fons* to be Mithraic. Opinions differ in the interpretation of *Leo* and the letters from the monogram.<sup>5</sup>

Keeping in mind that the research topic of this conference is the contextualization of “Oriental cults”, the first part of the paper presents data on the discovery of Mithraic monuments from Bihać region, its geographical and historical background. The second part focuses on the analysis and the interpretation of the inscriptions to *Leo* and *Fons* with revision of the text and dating. In the third part of the paper, a review of the meaning of the dedications to *Leo* and the *Fons* and the function of the monuments is given. The latter, as it will be shown, is in a special relationship with the context of the finding, with the Roman-Iapodic community that developed in the area of Bihać from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, and with the territory that surrounded them.

### **Circumstances and context of findings**

In 1882 the captain of the 12<sup>th</sup> infantry regiment of the Austro-Hungarian army Victor Freiherr von Handel found the mentioned two blocks in the wall of Muhamed Haraslić's house in Golubić, near Bihać (fig. 5).<sup>6</sup> The monuments were removed from the facade and shipped to the National Museum in Sarajevo, where they have remained until present.<sup>7</sup> According to W. Radimský and C. Patsch, their finding place must have

4 On the Mithraic monuments from Bihać region see: Gabričević 1987 (1953), 182–190; Miletić 1996, 153–156; Lipovac Vrkljan 2001, 66–72; Karković Takalić 2019, 474–478.

5 *CIMRM* II, 1913; Imamović 1977, 278.

6 Tomaschek 1882, 469; Radimský 1895, 53–54; Patsch 1899, 210–211.

7 Narodni muzej is now called *Zemaljski muzej Bosne i Hercegovine* / National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina.



**Fig. 3. Monument to Leoni from Golubić (National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, photo Ortolf Harl, from <http://lupa.at/23787>)**



**Fig. 4. Monument to Fonti from Golubić (National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, photo Ortolf Harl, from <http://lupa.at/23787>)**

been somewhere near the house in which they were built. They linked the two blocks with the previous discovery of Roman architecture identified as a Mithraeum and a relief with the depiction of a tauroctony at the site of Crkvina (Big church), also in Golubić.<sup>8</sup> Thanks to the cooperation with a colleague Dijana Muminović, curator of the Museum of the Una and Sana Canton in Bihać (Muzej Unsko-sanskog kantona), and the conversation with the residents of Golubić, we were able to identify the site of Crkvina as the hill on which the Catholic church of St. Martin with the cemetery is located today (fig. 6). We visited the site and found no remains that would indicate the existence of a Roman sacral or any other type of architecture. However, we concluded that the remains of the “Mithraeum”, referred to by Patch, Radimský and others, must have been located on the slope of that hill (fig. 7). We couldn’t locate the house of Haraslić, where the monuments to *Leo* and *Fons* were built. Since Golubić is a relatively small community, we assumed that it could not have been far from the site “of the Mithraeum”.

In addition to this, in 1937 a plate with a tauroctony relief and an altar dedicated to Mithra the Invincible, were found along the river Una, at the site called Branda, near the lapod necropolis Jezerine in the settlement of Pritoka (fig. 2).<sup>9</sup> Again, thanks to the cooperation with the curator Muminović, we identified the place in the immediate vicinity of Golubić, but on the opposite bank of the river (fig. 8). According to the bibliography, the remains of the Mithraeum were probably visible on that site too, but due to the vicinity of the river, its waters gradually carried them away.<sup>10</sup> Although our field research didn’t result in finding any kind of architecture mentioned in the bibliography, I believe

8 Radimský 1895, 53–54; Patsch 1899, 210–211.

9 *CIMRM* II, 1907–1908; they were first published by Sergejevski 1939, 7–8. Inscription on the altar (*CIMRM* II 1908) reads as follows: *l(nvicto) M(ithrae) S(oli?) / C(aius) O() C() / pro s(alute) / sua v(otum) / l(ibens) s(olvit)*, EDCS-51000060.

10 *Ibid.*



**Fig. 5. Location of Bihać, Golubić, Privilica, Pritoka (from Google Earth, edited by the author)**

that the presence of the tauroctony relief, the dedications to *Leo* and *Fons* together with reports from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century point to the existence of a sanctuary dedicated to Mithras in Golubić. Just as the discovery of the tauroctony and the altar to Invincible Mithras point to the existence of another Mithraeum on the opposite side of the river Una at the locality of Jezerine.

In ancient times the area of today's Bihać was part of the territory of the lapodes, conquered by Octavian during the so-called *Bellum Illyricum* in 35 BC<sup>11</sup> and gradually Romanised during the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.<sup>12</sup> The remains of several larger lapodic settlements were found in Bihać area, on hills and valleys along the banks of the river Una,

11 "The lapodes lived in the territory extending from the Adriatic coast, the eastern boundaries of Istria and the eastern spurs of the Alps through Lika and Krbava and into the Cazin region and the central Una River Valley. The lapodes were one of the largest and most important indigenous tribes of the Illyrian provinces. At the Privilica site, south of modern-day Bihać, there was a general lapodic cult centre. The fact that the lapodes are mentioned together with the Liburnians in the Scardona conventus, without indication of the number of decuries, demonstrates that they, for some reason, were registered in a manner different from that of the indigenous civitates in other conventi of Illyricum Superior." Citation: Mesihović 2011, 60. Although in the description of the war between Octavian and the lapodes (35–33 BC) sources don't mention the communities of the lapodes in the vicinity of the Una river, scholars agree that, during the war, Octavian probably conquered their entire territory. For Octavian's campaign against the lapodes see: Bojanovski 1988, 309–310; Šašel Kos 1999, 255–264; Olujić 2003, 27–47; Šašel Kos 2018, 42–44. For Roman literary sources on the lapodes see: Mesihović 2011, 60.

12 Large number of Roman monuments from the period between the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC and the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, a relatively high number of people with Iulian citizenship, etc., speak in favour of that; Bojanovski 1988, 309–310.



**Fig. 6. Locality of Crkvina (photo by the author)**

some of which most likely continued to exist in the Roman time.<sup>13</sup> The river was probably navigable and, together with a branch of the main road that connected Salona with Siscia, served as the main traffic communication line.<sup>14</sup>

Due to a large number of archaeological findings dated in the period from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD (mostly inscriptions and smaller objects), scholars believe that the area between Golubić and Privilica, along the banks of Una, was occupied by an important Roman settlement (fig. 5).<sup>15</sup> The literature disagrees with regard to the identification of this settlement as ancient *municipium Raetinum/Raetinum*.<sup>16</sup>

Cassius Dio mentions *Splonum*, *Raetinum*, *Seretium* and smaller hillforts, among the settlements that Germanicus besieged in 9 AD, in the final stage of the Roman suppression of the so-called uprising of the two Batons.<sup>17</sup> Depending on the reconstruction of Germanicus campaign that could have started from Siscia or from the hinterland of southern Dalmatia, *Raetinum* is located in the valley of the river Una (near

13 Bojanovski 1988, 305, 312–313.

14 Bojanovski 1988, 313, with previous literature. On Roman roads in the territory of today's Bosnia and Herzegovina see: Bojanovski 1974; Imamović 1985, 31–52.

15 Bojanovski 1988, 313–314.

16 I thank my colleague N. Cesarik who drew my attention to the problem of identifying the place where the ancient Raetinum was located. Bojanovski, Mesihović locate Raetinum in the area of today's Bihać; Bojanovski 1988, 314, passim; Mesihović 2009, 15, passim. J. Šašel discusses the location of Seretium, J. J. Wilkes discusses the location of Splonum; they place both sites in the area between today's south-eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina and the northern part of Montenegro. Indirectly, they also place Raetinum in that area. Šašel 1953, 262–267; Wilkes 1965, 111–125.

17 Cass. Dio LV, 11–12, 1.



**Fig. 7. Locality of Crkvina, probable place of discovery of the Mithraeum (photo by the author)**

Bihać) between the territories of the Iapodes and the Maezaei,<sup>18</sup> or in the territory of today's south-eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>19</sup> The second source is an inscription written on funerary stelae from Mogontiacum, which mentions *Andes, cives Raetinio, eques ala Claudia*.<sup>20</sup> *Andes* is an autochthonous, Iapodic, name and the inscription is often used as a testimony of the recruitment of Dalmatian indigenous inhabitants into the Roman military units, in this case, *ala Claudia nova*.<sup>21</sup> The monument dates between 69 and 75 AD, when *ala Claudia* moved from Dalmatia to Germania.<sup>22</sup> There are several tombstones of members of this *ala* from Dalmatia. Most of them originate from the area of an auxiliary *castellum*, identified in Kadina Glavica, near today's Drniš, in central Dalmatia.<sup>23</sup> However, there are other monuments erected by members of this

18 Following the hypothesis of G. Alföldy and I. Bojanovski, S. Mesihović believes that Germanicus moved principally from Siscia, since it was the main command point of the Romans and their auxiliary, allied and mercenary troops during the entire "Bellum Batonianum", Mesihović 2009, 12. In 7 AD Germanicus must have marched against the Maezaei from Siscia, because their territory was located closely, south of Siscia, along the rivers of Sana and Vrbas. From the geographical point of view, it seems logical that in the following period Germanicus efforts also remained focused on the territories of the rebelled tribes located south and southeast of Siscia, around the rivers Sana, Una, Vrbas. However, this theory does not solve the "problem" with the involvement of the Iapodic tribes along Una, which, according to literary sources, didn't take part in the rebellion. See: Alföldy 1962, 3–12; Bojanovski 1988, 48–54.

19 J. J. Wilkes in 1965 already proposed to locate ancient Sponum in today's Pljevlja (Montenegro). Accordingly, the other two settlements mentioned by Cassius Dio, Raetinum and Seretium, are to be placed in southwestern Illyricum; Wilkes 1965, 111–125. On the topic see also: Džino 2005, 154.

20 *CIL* XIII, 7023.

21 Rendić-Miočević 1974, 100. On the inscription of *Andes*: Maršić 2015, 12; EDCS-11001084.

22 Maršić 2015, 12; EDCS-11001084.

23 *CIL* III, 10033; Maršić 2015, 11–12.



**Fig. 8. Location of Crkvina in relation to the location of Pritoka (photo by the author)**

unit, among which the altar dedicated to *Iuppiter Optimus Maximus* by *Titus Flavius Sabinus, decurio tertius alae Claudiae*, also found in Golubić, confirms the presence of *ala's* divisions in other areas of the province.<sup>24</sup> So, the hypothesis that Andes was recruited from a division of *ala Claudia* located in the area of today's Golubić, i.e. ancient *Raetinium*, seems possible. The fact that Andes is *cives Raetinio*, suggests that *Raetinium* gained its municipal status before 69–75 AD. As Bojanovski notes: “*Raetinium*, therefore, would have received its autonomous (municipal) status (somewhat) before 70 AD, apparently from Emperor Vespasian, who, in Dalmatia's inland, also founded Mun. *Malvesiatium* (Skelani) and mun. *Bistuensium* (Bugojno), and in Pannonia colonies in *Siscia* and *Sirmium*, which marked the beginning of the first urbanization in the interior of antique Illyricum.”<sup>25</sup>

Judging by different literary sources, Romans had difficulties conquering Iapodia.<sup>26</sup> This could explain the presence of *ala Claudia's* division in the Bihać area in the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. However, it seems that the process of introducing Roman rule was relatively peaceful from that time onwards. From Privilica, located between Golubić and Bihać, there are at least three altars, dating back to the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, dedicated by the representatives of Iapodic community, *principes* and

24 Maršić 2015, 11–12.

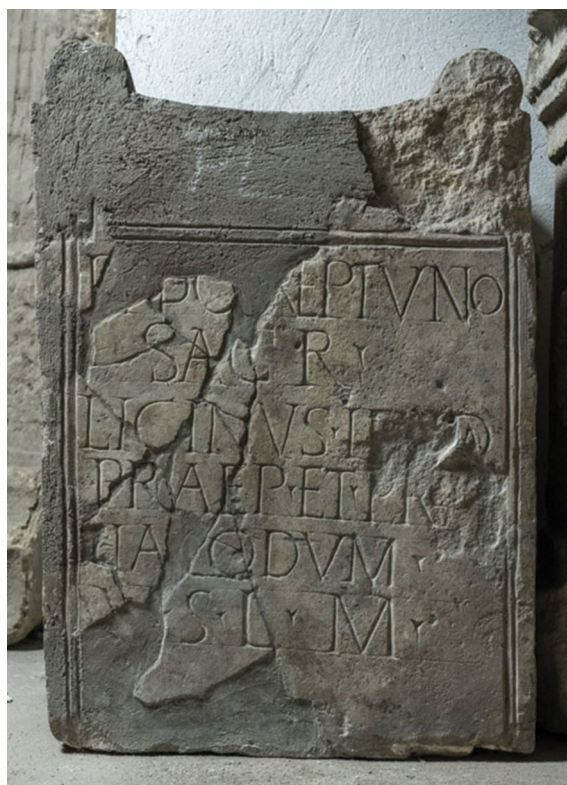
25 “*Raetinium* bi, dakle, svoj autonomni (municipalni) status dobio još (nešto) prije 70. g., očito od cara Vespazijana, koji je u unutrašnjosti Dalmacije podigao i mun. *Malvesiatium* (Skelani) i mun. *Bistuensium* (Bugojno) a u Panoniji osnovao kolonije u *Sisciji* i *Sirmiju*, čime je i otpočela prva urbanizacija u unutrašnjosti starog Ilirika”, Bojanovski 1988, 315 (translation by author).

26 See n. 11.



*praeposites lapodum*, to *Bindus Neptunus* (figs. 5, 9).<sup>27</sup> *Bindus* was an autochthonous god affine to Roman *Neptunus*, and the site, located near a source of water, had to be an important cult site for the entire lapodian community of the area.<sup>28</sup> Continuity of this site, as well as its importance, is supported by another altar to *Bindus Neptunus* dedicated by a consular beneficiary, *Licinius Galba*, dating back in the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.<sup>29</sup>

The presence of soldiers of *ala Claudia Nova*, local authorities, and representatives of the provincial governor's office, i.e. the presence of a consular beneficiary station, all speak in favour of the strategic, political-administrative and religious importance of this Roman site/settlement and its community in a period between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. They also suggest a certain preservation of the autochthonous elements and "religiousness" during the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, which are all important facts in the discussion on the cult of Mithras.



**Fig. 9. Altar to *Bindus Neptunus* from *Privilica* (National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, photo Ortolf Harl, from <http://lupa.at/23298>)**

### Dedications to *Leo* and *Fons* and the “problem” of the monograms

These relatively small cube-shaped blocks are in local limestone and, apart from the inscriptions, bare no other decoration. The text on the first block (0.31 × 0.30 × 0.31 cm, fig. 3) runs in two lines. In the first line, there is the word *Leoni*, identified as the Mithraic grade of Lion, known from numerous epigraphical and literary sources.<sup>30</sup> At the beginning of the second line, there is a monogram consisting of the letters *TPRA*, another monogram in the shape of the letter *O* with the letters *IP* or *IPR* inside, and at the end the letter *S*.

The monogram is an element that is characteristic of late antiquity and Christianity, primarily because of the popularity it gained from the Constantin era onwards. However, it is present in both ancient Greek and Roman epigraphy, on coins, manufactures, but also in late antique inscriptions. In late antiquity "...monograms are widespread

27 *CIL* III, 14325, 14325.

28 Cambi 1994, 500; Simon and Bauchhenss 1994, 483–500.

29 *CIL* III, 15066; *B[indo Neptun]/o s[acrum] / [3 Li]cin[i]u[s] / Galba / mil(es) leg(ionis) I Ad(iutricis) / b(ene) [f(iciarius)] co(n)s(ularis) v(otum) [s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito)]*, EDCS-32200025.

30 See, for example *CIMRM* I, 325, 367, 480–485, 568; *CIMRM* II, 1337, 1773.

both in funerary inscriptions, monumental and votive inscriptions. Apart from the different forms of monogram relating to the name of Christ, they were mainly used for proper names, especially masculine, while less often they are used for greetings and wishes for peace.<sup>31</sup> That's why the inscription *Leoni* shouldn't be interpreted as Christian or under the influence of the Christian religion, as suggested by some authors.

Judging by the position of the monogram after the dedication to *Leo*, I would agree that it could contain an abbreviated name of the dedicator and/or his function. In fact, based on the identification of the letters as *TPROS*, in 1933 R. Marić proposed the reading of the second line as the name of the dedicant *T. Prioris*.<sup>32</sup> In his paper from 1953 B. Gabričević went a step further. He accepted the idea of the name of the dedicant in the second line but rejected Marić's proposal considering the absence of the name *Prioris* in the known Roman onomasticon.<sup>33</sup> Instead, he interpreted the letters *TPRA* or, in reverse order *PATR*, as an abbreviated form of the noun *pater*, which, as the head of every Mithraic community, could be the one that gave the offering to *Leo*. Based on a comparison with other Mithraic inscriptions in which *pater* has the apposition *sacrorum* or the addition *et sacerdos*, he proposed the interpretation of the last letter in this line, the letter *S*.<sup>34</sup> As for the second monogram composed of letters *OIP* or *OIR* Gabričević suggested it is a derivation of the phrase *O(mnipotentis) I(nvicti) R(egis)*, also known from other Mithraic inscriptions. According to Gabričević, the entire inscription would therefore read: *Leoni, Pater sacrorum Omnipotentis Invicti Regis* or *Pater Omnipotentis Invicti Regis, sacerdos*.<sup>35</sup> M. J. Vermaseren and the majority of other scholars accepted or transmitted Gabričević's proposals.<sup>36</sup> The editors of the Heidelberg database instead of *T* read the letter *F*, with no *A* in the end but do not offer concrete readings.<sup>37</sup>

The text on the second block (0.32 × 0.28 × 0.30 cm; fig. 4) from Golubić also runs in two lines, but the right part of the inscription field is damaged. However, the first line reads *Fo[nti]* and it can be interpreted as *Fons* or *Fons Perennis*, also known from several other Mithraic inscriptions.<sup>38</sup> In the second line, there is a similar monogram as on the first inscription composed of the letters *TPR*, then *O* with the letters *IP* or *IR*. Due to the damage, the last letter *S* is only partially visible. The accepted reconstructions of the second line are the same as in the first inscription.<sup>39</sup> A date to these

31 Citation: David and Melega 2020, 109.

32 Marić 1933, 158 n. 45.

33 Gabričević 1987 (1953), 184.

34 For *pater sacrorum* see: *CIMRM* I, *CIMRM* II, 395, 1243, 1438, 2250.

35 *Ibid.*

36 *CIMRM* II, 1913; Miletić 1996, cat. no. 7, 154–155; Lipovac Vrkljan 2001, cat. no. 7 c, 68–70. The editors of the Clauss Slaby database reconstruct the text as part of a single monument: *Leoni / pater I(nvicti) O(mnipotentis) R(egis) s(acerdos) // Fo(nti) / pater s(acrorum) I(nvicti) O(mnipotentis) R(egis)*, EDCS-30400599 (accepted also by <http://lupa.at/23787>).

37 The editors of Heidelberg database give the transcription: *Leoni / F(---)(?) P(---)(?) R(---)(?) O(---) I(---) R(---) S(---)*, HD033256.

38 There are variants of: *fonti pereni/perenni* (*CIMRM* II, 1465, 1533, 1753) and *fonti* (*CIMRM* II, 1810).

39 See n. 32. The editors of Heidelberg database give the transcription: *Fon[ti] / F(---)(?) P(---)(?) R(---)(?) O(---) I(---) R(---) S(---)*, HD033259.



**Fig. 10. Monograms of Mithras' name from Ostia (from David and Melega 2020)**

inscriptions was first proposed by the editors of online epigraphical databases in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD.<sup>40</sup>

Confirmation for Gabričević's suggestions and the reading of certain letters can be found in various Mithraic inscriptions. However, I believe that this is an opportunity to review them and possibly correct the solutions accepted so far.

Regarding the topic of this paper, it is important to remember that the monograms from Golubić's inscriptions are not the only monograms known from a Mithraic context and their analysis can also offer a key in understanding the letters behind the carved monograms of Golubić. Beccati, Vermaseren, and others have already published some examples from Ostia, and in a series of articles from 2018 to 2020 M. David and A. Melega revisited and discussed them with some newly discovered cases.<sup>41</sup> Authors brought a transcript of monograms from inscriptions found in the Mithraeum of Fructosus and Aldobrandini in Ostia, two monograms from Ostia that are out of Mithraic context, but are still considered to be Mithraic, and a recently discovered monogram graphite from the Mithraeum of coloured marbles, also in Ostia.<sup>42</sup> In the first two Ostian Mithraea monograms recur in the context of a written text, as an abbreviation, while in other examples the monogram is autonomous and independent from the text (Fig. 10). The analyses suggest that they all refer to the name of the god Mithras.<sup>43</sup>

As for the monograms in the inscriptions from Golubić, they are also part of a text. In both cases, in the second line of the text, two monograms are followed by a letter. This could be the indication of the presence of three words or three parts of text abbreviated: two words or a syntagm expressed by the use of monograms, and one by a commonly used textual abbreviation. Since the first two are in the form of a monogram, I assume that they carry more importance than the third.

If we read the first monogram in the order of appearance of the letters from top to bottom, it consists of letters *TPRA* or *TPR*. Bearing in mind that "By their very nature,

40 EDCS-30400599; HD033256; HD033259.

41 David and Melega 2018, 137–142; 2020, 111–114, with previous bibliography.

42 Ibid.

43 These varying forms depend on the different writing forms of Mithras' name: Mithra, Mitrha, Mithras, Mythra, Mitra, Mytra, Methra; David and Melega 2020, 111; Bricault and Roy 2021, 481.

monograms escape any rule and the letters that compose them can be, all, or almost all, expressed, assimilated, repeated or only hinted at, so it is easy to understand the extreme difficulty that is often encountered in dissolving them, so much that in several cases the possible solutions remain more than one and sometimes they are multiple",<sup>44</sup> the letters *TPRA* or *TPR* could be reordered, as Gabričević proposed, as *PATR*. Bearing in mind its position in the text and the importance given to the monogram, I agree that this could be an abbreviated form of the word *pater*, i.e., *pat(e)r* or *patr(i)*. However, it should be kept in mind that the same combination of letters *TPR* appears on the first part of the two Mithraic monograms from Ostia, cited by David and Mellega (fig. 10). Unfortunately, they do not come from a Mithraeum, but letters suggest quite clearly that they form the name of Mithra. I don't believe that the first monogram from of Golubić inscriptions "hides" the name of the god as the Ostian examples do because in that case, the first letter M would be clearly visible in some way. They do suggest the existence of a sort of a common way in which a name related to the Mithras cult was abbreviated.

As for the second monogram, I also agree that the letters *OIP* or *OIR* could refer to the name or the character of the god in question, whose name has been missing from the inscription up until now. The proposed solution as *Omnipotentis Invicti Regis* could be accepted in a form *O(mnipotentis) I(invicti) R(egis)*. The same goes for the abbreviated word *S*, i. e. *s(acerdos)*. So, based on Gabričević's readings, the solution for the text of the two inscriptions could be the following: *Leoni / pat(e)r O(mnipotentis) I(invicti) R(egis) s(acerdos)* and *Fo[nti] / pat(e)r O(mnipotentis) I(invicti) R(egis) s(acerdos)*.

As for the dating of the monument, several elements should be considered. The presence of the monograms could be a dating element, connected to the aforementioned Constantine era. However, the inscriptions and graffiti from Ostia suggest an earlier date, in the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. They can present a *terminus post quem* of the "trend" of introducing monograms in place of Mithras' name or, generally, in Mithraic inscriptions. In addition, we must not forget that the two blocks are connected to the same Mithraeum from Crkvina to which one tauroctony relief with an inscription also belonged to.

The relief from Crkvina is in sandstone (0.68 × 0.95 × 0.18 m; fig. 1).<sup>45</sup> Nowadays it is recomposed of two parts, and it generally shows numerous damages on the surface: even the faces of all the figures have been carved away. In the centre of the scene, below the semicircular aedicule, Mithras is killing the bull. The bull's tail reaches the height of Cautes head and ends in two classes of grain. Below the bull's genitals, there is a scorpion, while a snake and a dog are raised towards the bull's neck wound. To Mithras' right, there is a poorly preserved figure of Cautopates, and to the left, there is a figure of Cautes, recognizable by his raised torch. Between Cautopates and Mithra there is an inscription that reads: *Aure/lius / Ma/ximus / Pantadie/nus*.<sup>46</sup> Above Cautopates, there is a bust of Sol. To the left of Sol, the figure of a raven can be seen on the aedicule. A bust of Luna is also displayed above Cautes in a separate section.

44 Mazzoleni 1997, 165 (translation by author).

45 *CIMRM* II, 1911.

46 *CIL* III, 100034; reconstruction based on the autopsy and Tomaschek 1882, 468.

The work is of rather poor quality, which is most evident in the disproportionately rendered body parts of the figures. The dedicant states his gentile name and two cognomina *Maximus* and *Patadienus*. Gentilicius Aurelius points out that he is most likely a person who acquired citizenship through Caracalla's constitution. D. Rendić-Miočević sustained that he is a person of autochthonous origin who kept his original name *Pantadienus* at the end.<sup>47</sup> Onomastic elements allow only an approximate dating of the monument to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD.

Considering the dating of the tauroctony from the site of Crkvina and dating of the inscriptions with monograms from the Mithraea in Ostia, the *Leo* and *Fons* inscriptions should date after the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.

### **Leo and Fons, between Mithraic grades and the Four elements**

In the article from 1953 mentioned before Gabričević interpreted the dedications to *Leo* and *Fons* in relation to two of the four elements that he considered to be, similar to the religion of the Persian Magi, typical and important for Mithraism. "This is the reason why the symbols of these elements are very often represented on Mithraic reliefs, i.e., vessel (water), lion (fire), snake (earth) and bird (air)."<sup>48</sup> His interpretation was later accepted both by Ž. Miletić and G. Lipovac Vrkljan.<sup>49</sup> M. J. Vermaseren considers "... acceptable that a pater dedicated a monument to the *fons perennis* and to a *Leo* if this lion is not conceived as a mystic grade, but as a lion which sometimes serves as a decoration of a fountain = fons."<sup>50</sup> I assume his position is based on the absence of related inscriptions in stone that are dedicated to the Mithraic grade of the Lion or the figure of lion depicted in some tauroctony reliefs, and that he was referring to the monuments such as the reclining lion who holds a vase with pouring water, from Les Bolards (fig. 11),<sup>51</sup> and similar, which are attested in different Mithraea.<sup>52</sup>

The fact that the Lion and the Spring were chosen for the two inscriptions would indicate that these two have something in common, that they are part of the same "group" of elementary symbols, as proposed by Gabričević, or the "group" of accompanying figures from mithraic myth/iconography, as suggested by Vermaseren.

The question that arises is "to which" *Leo* the inscription refers to? The *leo* – lion, which is part of the iconography of the tauroctony and has a symbolic meaning related to fire, or the *Leo* - Lion that is the Mithraic grade?

"In the Mithraic corpus, it is not always easy to disentangle the symbolism of the iconographic lion which tends towards astrology, from the meaning and function of the epigraphic Lion which concerns the grade."<sup>53</sup> On several taurorctony reliefs (mostly

47 Rendić-Miočević 1974, 103.

48 Gabričević 1987 (1953), 182–183; (translation by author).

49 Miletić 1996, cat. no. 7, 154–155; Lipovac Vrkljan 2001, cat. no. 7 c, 68–70.

50 *CIMRM* II, 1913.

51 *CIMRM* I, 921.

52 For example: *CIMRM* I, 31, 100, 921.

53 Bricault and Roy 2021, 102 (translation by author).



**Fig. 11. Reclining lion that holds a vase from which the water springs, from the Mithraeum in Les Bolards / Dijon (from <https://www.tertullian.org/rpearse/mithras/display.php?page=cimrm921>)**

from Germania and Noricum), there is a depiction of a lion, facing a crater, placed below the bull's neck-wound, with the snake on the opposite side of the crater.<sup>54</sup> According to the authors such as R. Beck, who interpret the tauroctony scene as a celestial image (or "map of the heavens"), the lion is an "iconic" sign of the constellation of Leo. Accordingly, the crater is a sign of the constellation of Aquarius, snake of Spica, etc.<sup>55</sup> Other scholars, such as R. Turcan and J. Alvar, interpret the depicted motives of the lion and the crater as opposite symbols of fire and water, symbols of purification, the "divine elements" that played a central role in Mithraic ritual.<sup>56</sup> The crater in this case is also seen as a container for bull's blood and symbolically represents a source of life.<sup>57</sup> In this context, the lion and the source are opposite but complementary Mithraic symbols and can "function" as a pair, almost like *Leo* and *Fons* from Bihać inscriptions. However, this is only one of many proposed interpretations of tauroctony and its ico-

54 CIMRM I, 966; II, 1083, 1118, 1149, 1206, 1275; 1283, 1292, 1306, 1727.

55 Beck 2007, 195. The representation of a lion as part of the 12 zodiac signs that sometimes accompany the depictions of tauroctony has a similar, astrological-astronomical meaning. On the tauroctony and the methodological problems that its reading presents, see Beck 2007, 190, passim; Belayche 2021, 2–3, with previous bibliography.

56 Citation: Alvar 2008, 79; see also Turcan 1993, 61–62.

57 Turcan 1993, 61–62.

nography to date.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, it is questionable if the two monuments could have been erected to honour the natural elements. I believe that the link should be sought with the Mithraic grade of Leo.

Leo is commonly known as the fourth mithraic grade. Recent research shows, however, that the “normative” seven Mithraic degrees of Miles, Corax, Nymphus, Leo, Perses, Heliodromus and Pater appear with those names and order only in a small percentage of written and pictorial sources, which means that there was probably a changing and flexible number of grades.<sup>59</sup> Studies also show that *Leo*, together with *Pater*, mostly occurs in epigraphic and written evidence in respect to other Mithraic grades and grade names. This leads to the assumption that, regardless of the specificities in the rites held by certain Mithraic communities, Leo and Pater as grades were the most present.<sup>60</sup> According to literary sources, the grade of Lion foresaw the rite of purification by versing the honey on the hands of the initiates, a liquid/substance which, unlike water, is “suitable” for fire. *Leones* were also known as incense-burners. The connection with incense, embers and fire is recognisable in the depiction of *vattillum* and lightning on the fourth field of the central mosaic in *Felicissimus* mithraeum in Ostia. Leo can, therefore, represent both the grade and what the grade symbolizes - fire and purification. Considering the mentioned role that the “Lions” had in mithraic communities, and their symbolic meaning, it wouldn’t be unusual if a pater, as a certain type of community leader, erected a monument in that honor. In a similar way as the text follows the depiction of a procession of Mithraists on the wall of Mithraeum of S. Prisca: *Nama Leoni*, Salutation to the Lion.<sup>61</sup>

For the dedications to the Source as *Fons* or *Fons Perennis*, there are several other known examples. In fact, apart from the inscription in Golubić, they seem to be attested only in the area of Pannonia.<sup>62</sup> According to L. Bricault and P. Roy, spring and water are two factors of equal importance in Mithraism: “The source is a mythological object and the water is a ritual factor”.<sup>63</sup> The source is a motif from Mithras’ myth and the scene of the so-called Miracle of water. The scene is visible on almost all of the composite tauroctony reliefs, most often at the beginning of the depiction of the events that preceded the killing of the bull.<sup>64</sup> Sometimes it appears as an “independent” scene

58 Beck 2007, 190, passim; Adrych et al. 2017, 5, passim.

59 “In the epigraphic record, the grade of leo occurs most frequently of all seven priest-grades apart from pater – just under forty times”, citation from Clauss 2001, 134. In a recent paper, P. Aldrich questions the coherence of the seven Mithraic grades, their number and order. She bases her opinion on the fact that the “normative” seven degrees of Miles, Corax, Nymphus, Leo, Perses, Heliodromus and Pater appear with those names and order only in a small percentage of written and pictorial sources. For that reason, she proposes the idea that there was a changing and flexible number, sometimes seven, sometimes more or less, of grades and that their significance and number might have differed between communities, Adrych 2021, 121. On the Mithraic grades: Beck 1988, 6, passim; Miletić 1996–1997, 195–196; Alvar 2008, 364, passim.

60 Some inscriptions address this degree in the plural form as *Leones*. *CIMRM* I, 480, 484, 485, 689, 718; *CIMRM* II, 803 (*CIL* II, 2705), 1745.

61 *CIMRM* I, 481a.

62 *CIMRM* II, 1465 (Višnja Gora), 1533 (Poetovio), 1753, 1810 (Aquincum).

63 “La source est un objet mythologique et l’eau est un facteur rituel”, Bricault and Roy 2021, 256 (translation by author).

64 See for example: *CIMRM* II, 1292–1293 (Osterburken); *CIMRM* II, 1283 (Neuenheim). Based on sculptural and pictorial representations, at least 49 scenes depicting the myth of Mithras have been identified so far.

such as the one represented on the altar to *Deo Soli Invicto Mithrae* erected in honour of emperor Galienus in Mithraeum III in Poetovio.<sup>65</sup> After being born from the rock, one of the first Mithras' acts is to make a source of water spring, shooting an arrow against the rock, "delivering thus the nature from the drought that it suffers, which allows the full and complete return of life on earth."<sup>66</sup> The importance of the spring is also evident from dedicatory inscriptions to *Fons Perennis*, like the ones from the Mithraeum II in Aquincum or Mithraeum II in Poetovio.<sup>67</sup>

Water as such can also have a symbolic and ritual meaning for the Mithraists. Judging by the words of Porphyry, water is an integral part of every Mithraic "microcosmos" starting from the cave, in which Mithras is born, which, like any real cave, is filled with water, plants, it has everything necessary to create and sustain life.<sup>68</sup> The water is present in almost all Roman religious ceremonies, including Mithraism. A large number of pools and fountains found in various Mithraea throughout the Empire confirm this.<sup>69</sup> As I previously mentioned, the interpretations developed by Gabričević and Vermaseren probably stem from this point.

One should therefore distinguish between the spring, which is part of the myth of the Mithra, and the water, which has the purifying significance in the rituals. However, I think that the examples of some Mithraea/monuments show that these two aspects of source/water can coincide. The example from Boladris shows a sanctuary organised around a therapeutic spring of water, where several deities, such as a local variant of Apollo, Venus, Minerva, Mercurius and Mithra, were celebrated.<sup>70</sup> Another example is a Mithreum in Septeuil which was first used as a spring sanctuary and then, from the 4<sup>th</sup> century onwards, as a Mithraeum.<sup>71</sup>

I've already pointed out that dedications to *Fons Perennis* occur almost exclusively in Mithraeums in the Pannonian area, namely in Poetovio and Aquincum. This may not be a coincidence since both Roman cities are located on the great rivers Drava and Danube, which played an important role in the economy, and possibly also in their cult life.<sup>72</sup> That

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As R. Beck underlined, because the disposition of the scenes on the monuments varies, the order of the episodes in the story of Mithras cannot be reconstructed definitively. In general terms, the "story" of the god is divisible into four major sequences: the appearance of Mithra, the capture of the bull, the killing of the animal, the relationship between Mithras and Sol. The "Miracle of Water" scene would belong to the first sequence. Beck 2002, 285, passim; Bricault and Roy 2021, 136.

65 *CIMRM* II, 1585, *D(eo) S(oli) I(nvicto) M(ithrae) / pro sal(ute) d(omini) n(ostr)i Gallieni P(ii) F(elicis) / Invicti Aug(usti) Fl(avius) Aper v(ir) e(gregius) I(ibens) m(erito)*, from EDCS-13302523. On *Fons Perennis* as an independent scene see also an example from Carnuntum: Kremer 2005, 433–440.

66 Citation: Bricault and Roy 2021, 137 (translation by author). See also: Vermaseren 1960, 71–74.

67 *CIL* III, 10462, Aquincum: *Fonti / Perenni / M(arcus) Ant(oni)us / Victori/nus dec(urio) / col(oniae) Aq(uincensium) aedil(is)*, reconstruction from EDCS-29500123; *CIL* III, 15184<sup>24</sup>, Poetovio: *Fonti / Perenni / Epictetus / et Viator / Servandi / Q(uinti) Sabini Verani / t(ertiae) p(artis) c(onductoris) p(ublici) p(ortorii) vilici / vicari(i)*, from EDCS-32700128. See also the example from Savaria: *Fonti / Perenni*; Kiss 2011, 189.

68 Beck 1976, 95–98; Maurete 2005, 63–81.

69 Bricault and Roy 2021, 258–259.

70 *CIMRM* II, 917; Walters 1974, 11.

71 Roy 2013, 360–378.

72 On river deities in the Roman province of Pannonia see: Rendić-Miočević 2012, 293–305.





**Fig. 12.** Locality of Privilica today (photo by the author)

could also be the reason why the Mithraists from Poetovio and Aquincum celebrated the Spring/Fons in a special way, i.e. the river water that from different aspects guarantees “life” to the community.

Maybe a similar situation can be recognized in the case of the Mithraic monuments from Golubić. Nearby locality of Privilica, which has been already mentioned, is known for the discovery of the altars dedicated to *Bindus Neptunus* by prominent members of the community. It is a place where a stream springs from a small cave and then flows into the river Una (fig. 12). Based on the number and quality of Privilica monuments as well as the social status of the dedicants, it is considered one of the most important sacred places of the lapodian and Roman community of that area. The remains of the sanctuary to which altars belonged have never been found or researched because of the construction of a small hydroelectric power plant on site (fig. 12). Therefore, it is not possible to determine how long the shrine remained in use. Nevertheless, the fact that a monument dedicated to the Source appears in the relative vicinity, even within the Mithraic context of the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century, could be related to and indicate a reminiscence of the local tradition in the veneration and importance of the source and of water as mythological and ritual element. The dedication to *Fons* can therefore be connected not only by the role of water in the myth of Mithras but by the specific topographical context – the proximity of the consecrated spring in Privilica and/or to the river Una itself.

Regarding the function of these cube shaped blocks, I can again cite the case of Mithraeum IV in Aquincum whose excavations provided one of the richest archaeological materials. The statues of Mithra killing the bull, *Cautes* and *Cautopates*, altars with respective dedications to *Fons Perennis* and *Cautes*, a statue of *Mithras Petrogenitus*

and a statue of lying lion are some of those.<sup>73</sup> Among the materials, however, the discovery of seven small altars, several unusual spheres and a sort of a pyramid stand out. Unfortunately, they are all without inscriptions. Their presence in the Mithraeum, however, indicates that, in addition to larger monuments, altars and statues, which occupied a central position in the interior of the Mithraeum and the ceremony itself, smaller objects were also made that must have had a similar function, but on a “lesser scale”, probably to celebrate some accompanying events or ceremonies.<sup>74</sup>

I believe that something similar can be recognized in the case of Golubić’s cube-shaped monuments as well. The two smaller altars – and there may or may not have been more of them – were dedicated to figures that were important for this particular community. The Lion as a significant grade and the symbol of fire, the Source as an important element of the myth, but important in the community itself and the territory where this Mithraeum was located, famous for its spring temple in Privilica and the river Una.

## Conclusions

The Roman settlement that developed in the area of today’s Bihać (between Golubić and Privilica), in the territory of the former eastern Iapodia and the upper course of the Una river, had both strategic and traffic importance. This is supported by the presence of ala Claudia Nova’s division, *praeposites* and *principes Iapodum*, in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, i.e., by the existence of the station of consular beneficiaries in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. The presence of Mithras’ cult in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century could also be linked to the traffic and strategic significance of this area and the presence of individuals who performed related municipal and civil duties. A similar situation is recognized in other areas of the region as well. The nearest Mithraic centres in the territory of the former Iapodia are Arupium and Vratnik, a station of *Publicum Portorium Illyrici*, both located along the road that connected the northern coastal part of the province of Dalmatia with its interior, whose Mithraic monuments date in the late 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century. In the area of Pannonia, with which Una valley borders, the nearest Mithraic centre was Siscia, and then, connected via regional road to the north Poetovio, the headquarters of *Publicum Portorium Illyrici*. In these centres the cult of Mithras was present between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. In line with those directions, the arrival of Mithras’ cult in the Una valley could be expected. Given the context, the similarities in the character of the settlements, the location of the Mithraea along the river, and the aspect of worshipping the water spring, I believe that the relation with Poetovio seems more probable.

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73 *CIMRM* II, 1767.

74 Another example is the painted arch above the niche with tauroctony from the second phase of the Mithraeum in Dura Europos that shows at least seven burning altars flanked by torches; *CIMRM* I, 45; Adrych 2021, 121.

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