

MITHRAS AND THE IMPERIAL CULT

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Abstract

The Roman cult of Mithras did not belong to sacra publica: it was never supported by the state with public funds and was never admitted to the official list of festivals. However, there are epigraphic sources testifying the relationship between Mithraic and the Imperial cult, which has not been studied up to this point. The closest possible relation is attested by dedications of officials of the Imperial cult (flamines or seviri Augustales), which will be presented, analysed and interpreted in this paper, just as the Mithraic inscriptions mentioning the Imperial attribute Augustus. On the basis of twenty inscriptions I shall try to explain the relationship between the cult of Mithras and the Imperial cult.

Keywords: Mithras – Cautopates – Leo – Augustus – imperial cult – flamen Augustalis – sevir Augustalis.

Mithras and emperors

Roman emperors often identified themselves with different deities, worshipping them and promoting their cult. Mithras was not one of them. The rare literary sources that mention Roman emperors and Mithras in the same context refer only to Nero and Commodus. Cassius Dio relates the story of Tiridates' journey to Rome to receive his kingdom and his crown from Nero;¹ the Armenian king hailed the Roman emperor with the carefully prearranged formula: "I have come to you, my god, to kneel to you as I do to Mithras too". Pliny the Elder wrote that Nero was initiated into the Mazdaean rites by king Tiridates of Armenia, but found his initiation ineffective and so repudiated it.² Commodus was initiated into Mithras' mystery rites according to *Historia*

1 Cass. Dio LXIII, 5. 2.

2 Plin, NH. XXX. 6–17. Suetonius also mentions Tiridates arrival at Rome and his meeting with Nero (Nero XIII. 2).

Augusta.³ However, there is no material or epigraphic evidence of Nero or Commodus supporting or identifying themselves with Mithras.⁴

The only epigraphic evidence of Imperial favour to Mithras is an altar bearing a dedication by Diocletian, Galerius and Maximianus to Mithras – *fautor imperii sui*.⁵ The altar was set on 11th November 308, when the Conference of the Four Emperors was held in Carnuntum in order to prolongate the political system of the Tetrarchy.⁶ However, the fact that Sol Invictus Mithras, not Iuppiter, is referred to as the protector of the Empire does not mean that emperors were personally inclined to the Mithras cult. M. Clauss explains that this dedication gave expression to an understanding of Mithras already shared by his followers for centuries, as god of the contract.⁷ O. Latteur considers it as an expression of honour towards the Mithras cult which was very popular in Carnuntum from the 2nd century AD onwards, attested by numerous inscriptions mentioning followers, among which are members of local elite.⁸ G. Kremer claims that it is considered as a concession to the troops based at Carnuntum, comprising many followers of Mithras, but she also highlights the fact that the altar was probably found in the civilian town, just as votive inscriptions of very important civilians.⁹ Bricault and Roy pointed out that the emperors traditionally dedicated to the god of the places they visited: in Carnuntum, an important centre of the Mithras cult, they recognized Mithras as a member of the Imperial pantheon.¹⁰ It has to be pointed out here also that Mithras is equated with Sol Invictus, a cult which had strong imperial support, and that would be one of the reasons for naming him also as the protector of the Empire in Carnuntum.

As for the numismatic sources, the Roman cult of Mithras left no trace in the imperial coinage; the only monetary issues that used Mithraic iconography are provincial and civic, dating from the 2nd and 3rd centuries. The provincial one is the medallion of Gordian III struck in the name of the citizens of the city of Tarsus in Cilicia, with a representation of the tauroctony on the reverse.¹¹ This would not imply an emperor's personal affinity for the cult of Mithras, nor the local practice of a cult of Mithras which would have been recognized by the city.¹² The civic coinage from Trapezonte in Pontus, with the representation of Mithras with radiate crown or as a cavalier god, suggests that the cult of Mithras was recognized there by the city.¹³ The reasons why Mithras is

3 Hist. Aug. Comm. IX.

4 For the interpretation of these literary sources see Beck 2002; Gordon 2012, 975.

5 *D(eo) S(oli) i(nvicto) M(ithrae) / fautori imperii sui / Iovii et Herculii / religiosissimi / Augusti et Caesares / sacrum / restituerunt*, CIL III, 4413; MMM II, 367; ILS 659, CMIRM II, 1698, Kremer 2012, 179–180 no. 352 pls. 106, 107; EDCS 26600136.

6 For the historical circumstances see Jobst 1977, 591; Simon 1978, 416; Chastagnol 1982, 98–104; Clauss 2000, 28; 2021, 71; Latteur 2011, 749; Bricault and Roy 2021, 515–517; Kremer 2022, 201.

7 Clauss 2001, 28.

8 Latteur 2011, 751.

9 Kremer 2022, 202.

10 Bricault and Roy 2021, 516.

11 BMC Cilicia, Tarsus 258 pl. 37.4.

12 Turcan 2001, 141, 145, Bricault 2021, 462.

13 Bricault 2021, 462–469. However, this civic cult differs radically from the Mithraic forms of worship which developed in the West.

totally absent from the imperial coinage and very rarely present in the provincial and civic coinage is the fact that his cult was not promoted by the emperors, belonging to the category of *sacra privata*. Rare examples probably were minted in those places where the cult of Mithras was well appropriated and supported by the members of the local aristocracy.

So, it is obvious that Roman emperors did not find Mithras suitable for their own promotion. Even his equation with Sol Invictus, whose cult was official, prominent and promoted by the emperors in the late Roman Empire, did not make Mithras the protector of the state. Perhaps his “Orientalism”, iconography and terminology of its *sacra*, although he was a Roman god, and the theophoric names of “Oriental” kings, associating him with the Arsacid and Sassanid monarchies, could be the reasons for the lack of Imperial support of the cult of Mithras.

Sacra privata Mithrae

The Mithraic cult did not belong to *sacra publica* – it was never supported by the state with public funds and was never admitted to the official list of festivals celebrated by the state and the army.¹⁴ There is no epigraphic evidence which mentions public financing of *mithraea*, or the magistrates who would make dedications to Mithras as part of their duty.¹⁵ Mithras was worshipped exclusively in private contexts (*sacra privata*): numerous inscriptions testify to private dedications, vows or investments. However, there are two inscriptions from Rome which could attest to the official Mithraic organization inside the imperial palace. The first one mentions a freedman of the emperors, who was *Pater* and the priest of Mithras in *domus Augustana* during the reign of Commodus¹⁶ or Caracalla.¹⁷ The second one testifies that the *procurator castrensis*, the head of the organization of the domestic side of the Roman imperial palace, was a worshipper of Mithras and who made dedications for the health of Commodus. Although made by officials close to the emperor, within his palace, those dedications are private and do not imply the public worship of Mithras.

According to epigraphic evidence, priests of Mithras never referred to their city or civil community.¹⁸ There are rare inscriptions mentioning local authorities involved in the building of Mithras sanctuaries; eminent members of the Mithraic community, private persons, built *Mithraea* at their own expense to in public places.¹⁹ This probably does not mean that the cult of Mithras had an official character in those places,

14 Clauss 2000, 24.

15 Bricault and Roy 2021, 182.

16 Clauss 2000, 25.

17 Gordon 2012, 975.

18 Van Haepereen 2006, 44.

19 The *Mithraeum* in Mediolanum was built at the aera given by *Res publica* (*CIL* V, 5795) and an altar was found there testifying that the place was ordered by the decree of a decurion (*CIL* V, 5796). The same could be said for the *Mithraea* in Novae (Moesia Inferior), Trier (Gallia Belgica), Nuits-Saint-Georges (Gallia Lugdunensis), Octodurus (Alpes Poeninae, Latteur 2011, 751–752, Bricault and Roy 2021, 182–183), and for the *Mithraeum* of the Seven Spheres in Ostia (Van Haepereen 2016a, 24–25).

but instead, *mithraea* were private sanctuaries, built in public locations given by the community.²⁰ Furthermore, there are numerous inscriptions mentioning that the local elite worshipped Mithras, especially in the Danubian provinces, but that evidence also exclusively belongs to *sacra privata*. M. Clauss believes that local authorities in the Danubian provinces supported Mithraism without its becoming official, since the cult contributed to the spread of Roman values, and thus to the Romanization of those areas (2000, 45). O. Latteur considers the hypothesis of officialization there to be reasonable, although he points out that there is no reliable evidence.²¹ Nevertheless, Mithras was integrated into the local pantheon and was prominent there, although there is no evidence that his cult attained official status.

Relation of Mithraic and Imperial cult

Despite the fact that the cult of Mithras belonged to *sacra privata*, epigraphic evidence clearly demonstrates its relation with the Imperial cult. In the first place it is demonstrated by dedications set up by officials of the imperial cult. *Augustales* (*seviri/sexviri, flamines* or *magistri*)²² were mostly wealthy freedmen (85–95%), who played significant civic role in *coloniae* and *municipia* of Italy and Western provinces, and who were involved in many religious and profane activities, mainly the *Iudi Augustales*.²³ Since the imperial cult in “Oriental” provinces as in the city of Rome was organized differently, only the testimonies from Italic regions and the Empire’s western provinces will be considered in this paper.

Furthermore, the inscriptions addressed to Cautopates Augustus and those dedicated to an emperor and to Mithras will be considered in this paper, since they imply the relation of his cult and the imperial one. We will not consider dedications to Mithras *pro salute imperatoris/imperatorum*, dated from the reign of Marcus Aurelius and especially Commodus.²⁴ We believe that they were the expressions of personal religious acts, having nothing to do with the authorities, nor with the imperial cult.²⁵

20 Van Haepereen 2006, 49.

21 Latteur 2011, 743, 754.

22 Concerning the origin and function of *Augustales* see Von Premerstein 1895; Nock 1934; Duthoy 1974; 1978; Abramenko 1993; Van Haepereen 2016b.

23 See Van Haepereen 2016b. It has to be pointed out that in the city of Rome *Augustales* are not recorded at all (Duthoy 1978, 1290–1291; Van Haepereen 2016b, 128). The imperial cult was not organized in the same manner as in other parts of Italy and other provinces, where it had to be active due to imperial propaganda. The situation is the same in the Eastern provinces: there are no dedications by *Augustales*, since the imperial cult was not organized there as it was in the Western part of the Empire.

24 As far as we know, 17 of them are recorded by now, referring to Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, Marcus Aurelius, Marcus Aurelius and Commodus, only Commodus, Septimius Severus, Caracalla and Geta, Caracalla and Geta, Caracalla and Julia Domna, only Caracalla, Elagabalus, Alexander Severus, Maximinus Thrax, Gordian III, two Phillipi and Otacilia Severa, Valerianus with Gallienus and Salonina, only Gallienus and the group of emperors during the Tetrarchi period (see Clauss 2021, 87).

25 M. Clauss considers these inscriptions as one of the most characteristic forms of the imperial cult, since votive inscriptions mentioning an emperor could not have been dedicated without the authorities’ knowledge (2000, 23; 2021, 67–68).

Augustales and Mithras

Twelve inscriptions are known to date which mention officials of the imperial cult who worshipped Mithras: two *flamines*, nine *seviri Augustales* and a pontarch. A *flamen duoviralis*, Gaius Condius Paternus, fulfilled a vow to Sol Invictus Mithras in Octodurus (Martigny, Alpes Poeninae), in the 2nd century or the first half of the 3rd century AD.²⁶ Statorius, *decurio* and *flamen municipii Septimi Apulensis* from Apulum (Dacia), built a Mithraeum for the health of himself and his family, at his own expense at the end of the 2nd or the first half of the 3rd century AD.²⁷ He was a member of the local authority, but his investment in the Mithras sanctuary did not involve public funds or public land.

Four *seviri Augustales* are attested in Italic regions. The first one chronologically is from Dertona (Liguria, Regio X).²⁸ The monument with the inscription is very damaged, and we only can read that a *sevir* made a dedication to Sol Invictus Mithras, probably in the 2nd century AD.

Marcus Statius Niger, *sevir Augustalis*, chosen by the decree of *decuriones Mediolanenses*, *legatus* (?) *dendrophorum*, together with Gaius Valerius Iulianus, fulfilled the vow willingly and deservedly to Cautopates in Angera (Regio XI).²⁹ Both *sevir* and his colleague were initiated into the Mithraic mysteries and belonged to the grade of *leo*.³⁰ Their inscription can be dated to the 2nd century AD.

The third Italic *sevir Augustalis* is attested in Aquileia (Regio XI). Gaius Calidius Agathopus, *sevir Aquileiensis*, fulfilled a vow to Sol and Mithras in the second or the first half of the 3rd century AD.³¹

A *sevir Augustalis* of Casuentum and Carsulae (Regio VI), Sextus Egnatius Primitivus, was *sacerdos probatus* (sc. *legitimus* according to the decision of the *ordo sacerdotum*) and a quaestor of the imperial treasury. He rebuilt the sanctuary of Sol and Mithras, destroyed in an earthquake, at his own expense in the 2nd century AD or the first half of the 3rd century AD.³² It has to be pointed out that a *leonteum* was attested

26 Deo Soli / [I]nVicto / Mithrae / [C(aius?)] Condiu[s] / Paternu[s] / flamen / Ilviralis / v(otum) [s(olvit)] I(ibens) m(erito), AE 1998, 867b; EDCS 11801000.

27 [D]eo Invicto / [M]it(h)rae sac(rum) / [-] Statorius / [-]anus dec(urio) / [et] flamen m/[uni]c(ipii) Sep(timi) Ap[ul]l(ensis) / [In]victi templum pr[o] / salute(m) sua suorum/[que] p[re]cu//ni//a mea feci AE 1998, 1079; 2011, 85, EDCS 12000869

28 D(eo) S(oli) M(ithrae) i(nvicto) / ... (se)vir / ... et / ... LI / I / 1. ... af. /; CIL V, 7362, MMM II, 163, CIMRM I, 698, Suppl. It., n.s., 26 (2012) 86–87.

29 Cautopati sac[r(um)] / M(arcus) Status Nig[er] / VI vir aug(ustalis) c(reatus) d(ecreto) d(ecurionum) [M(e)diolanensium] / leg(atu)s? dend(ro)phorum c(oloniae) A(ureliae?) A(ugustae?) M(ediolanii) / et C(aius) Valerius Iulia[nus?] / leones leg(ati?) v(otum) s(olverunt) I(ibentes) m(erito), CIL V, 5465, CIMRM I, 718, AE 2001, 1084; 2009, 413; 2014, 513, EDCS 05100619.

30 Leones were most often mentioned after *patres* in Roman inscriptions (see Bricault and Roy 2012, 373–377).

31 S(oli) I(nvicto) M(ithrae) / C(aius) Calidius / Agathopus / Vlvir Aqu(ileiae) / v(otum) s(olvit) CIL V, 806, CIMRM I, 744, EDCS 01600084.

32 Soli et Invicto Mithrae / ex permissu san[ctissimi] / ordinis dec[ur(ionum)] / Sex(tus) Egnatius Primitivus / sacerdos probatus Vlvir / Aug(ustalis) Casuen<t=I>i et Carsulis / q(uaestor) arcae Aug(ustalium) designat(us) / spe<l=I>aeum vi motu(!) terrae di / ruptum ex suo omni i<m=N>mpen / sa re<f=E>ecit; Ciotti 1978, 00002 = Epigraphica 1996–52 = AE 1996, 601 = AE 2013, +444; EDCS 03000271.

in Carsulae by another inscription of *leones* in the first half of the 3rd century AD. It was built at their own expense at the location given by a decree of decurions.³³

A dedication to *Augustus* and *cultores dei Mithrae* found in Stabiae (Castellamare di Stabia, Regio I), dated in the latter half of the 2nd century AD, should also be stressed here, since it could perhaps mean that *Augustales* were also members of the Mithraic community in Stabiae. A specific dedication to *Mithras ac Genii Augustorum* from Tihaljina (Dalmatia), made by Rus(?) Pinnes, soldier of cohorts I. Belgarum between 161–180 AD, would also imply a relation between Mithras and the imperial cult.

Four *seviri Augustales* are attested in Pannonian centres of the cult of Mithras: two of them are from Poetovio.³⁴ Sextus Vibius Hermes donated a silver statue to Sol Invictus Mithras, while Lucius Vernasius Heraclida was *Pater*. The inscription can be dated to the 2nd century AD, while the second inscription, which testifies that a *sevir Augustalis*, Titus Flavius Restutus, dedicated to the Invictus Mithras for himself and his family, dates to the 3rd century AD.³⁵ Two *seviri Augustales* are attested in Carnuntum. Valerius and Valerianus fulfilled the vow to Invictus Mithras Sol for the health of Septimius Severus and his son Caracalla.³⁶ The same *seviri Augustales* dedicated once again: for the health of the same emperors they rebuilt the sanctuary at their own expense.³⁷ The dedications are dated to the first half of the 3rd century AD and the occasion was the fact that they had been freed by the emperor.³⁸

One *sevir Augustalis*, Cratus, dedicated to Cautopates in Apulum (Dacia), in the second half of the 2nd century or in the 3rd century AD.³⁹ The statue base with this inscription is damaged and it is not certain if it was dedicated to Cautopates and *deus loci*, probably Liber Pater,⁴⁰ or to Cautopates as *deus loci*.

Finally, there is a Greek inscription from Histria (Istros, Moesia Inferior), which lists ten contributors, members of the local elite, to the foundation of a *mithraeum*. Roman citizens and Greek non-citizens, members of the local city council and a soldier in the

33 *Leontium cu<m=A> signo et cetero cultu exornatum / ex permissu sanctissimi ordinis ex pec(unia) sua / a solo fecerunt leones consummati ab Egnatio Re/para[t]o sacerdote legit(imo) et collatore T(itus) Lepidius Ho/norinus Alexander et Amicus circ(itores) Aug(usti) n(ostrum) LL(uci) Vicri Severus / et Speratus T(itus) Satron<i=T>us Sabinianus P(ublius) Vatinius Iustus L(ucius) Iulius / Felix L(ucius) Longinius Stachys faber de HS V(milibus) n(ummum) I(ocus) d(atus) d(ecreto) d(ecurionum)*, AE 2013, 453; Bricault and Roy 2021, 180–183.

34 *S(oli) I(nvicto) M(ithrae) / Sex(tus) Vib(ius) Hermes Aug(ustalis) / c(oloniae) U(lpiae) T(raianae) P(oetoviensis) sign(um) argent(eum) / cum base sua d(onum) d(edit) / cum suis patre / pros(edente) L(ucio) Vernasio / Heraclida*, CMIRM II, 1598, EDCS 11301011.

35 *[D(eo) I(nvicto)] M(ithrae) T(itus) Fl(avius) Restutus IIIIIv[ir] / [Aug(ustalis) col](oniae) P(oetoviensis) pr(o) se [e]t sul[is] om[nibus]*, CIL III, 15184, CIMRM II, 1537, EDCS 32700119.

36 *D(eo) I(nvicto) M(ithrae) S(oli) pro s(alute) Aug(ustorum!) nn(ostrorum) L(uci) Sep(timi) / Valerius et Valerianus sex(viri) col(oniae) K(arnunti) / v(otum) s(olverunt) I(ibentes) m(erito)*, CIL III, 4539, CIMRM II, 1659; EDCS 28800099.

37 *Invic(to) deo s(acrum) / pro s(alute) Imp(eratoris) L(uci) Sep(timi) / Valerius et Va/lerianus temp(lum) / vestust(ate) conl(apsum) / i<m=N>p(endio) suo rest(ituerunt)*, CIL III, 4540, CIMRM II, 1661; EDCS 28800100.

38 Clauss 2000, 24; 2021, 69.

39 *Cautopati / [et?] deo / loc(i) Cratus Aug(ustalis) col(oniae)*, Sicoe 2014, 22, Szabo 2018, 103–104, EDCS 74800007.

40 Szabo 2018, 103–104.

administrative branch, *beneficiarius consularis*, were among them, as was Marcus Ulpius Artemidoros the pontarch – that is, the chief magistrate in charge of the Imperial cult in the *koinon* of the cities of the western Black Sea shore,⁴¹ the priest of Rome and Augustus of the Pontic League in the mid-2nd century, during the reign of Hadrian.⁴² The names of the priest and *pater* of the local Mithraic community are also mentioned in this inscription.

Dedications to Mithras made by officials of the imperial cult have thus far been found in the territories of Italic regions (4), Pannonia (4), Alpes Poeninae (1), Dacia (1), and Moesia Inferior (1). They all are dated in the 2nd and 3rd century AD. Four *Augustales* made private investments in Mithras' sanctuaries – there is no public financing of Mithras sanctuaries or other *sacra* recorded among them, although a *flamen* from Apulum was a decurion at the same time and a *sevir* from Carsulae was quaestor of the imperial treasury – the cult of Mithras was not recognized as *sacra publica* despite the support of the imperial cult officials. Due to the fact that two officials of the imperial cult were initiated into the Mithraic mysteries as *leo* (Angera) and *sacerdos* (Carsulae), and two of them (Poetovio and Histros) mention the *Pater* of their communities, it is certain that they were personally involved with the cult of Mithras.

One *flamen* and two *seviri* have to be emphasised, since they were most prominent and they obtained other duties. The *flamen* of the municipium Apulum was at the same time a city decurion. Although he was the most eminent member of society there, his investment in the sanctuary was private and does not imply the official status of the cult of Mithras in Apulum. Nevertheless, it testifies that Mithras was an important member of the local pantheon. A *sevir* from Angera, Marcus Statius Niger, mystes of Mithras in the grade of *leo*, made a dedication to Cautopates with a colleague from the same grade. He was an active cult official: *leones* performed the offering of incense during Mithraic mysteries and occur in the epigraphy the most frequently of all seven grades, excluding *patres*.⁴³ Besides performing his duty in the imperial and the Mithraic cult, the *sevir* from Angera was an active official of another “Oriental” cult in Apulum, that of Mater Magna; he was a member of the *collegium dendrophorum*, perhaps as a *legatus*, who actively participated in her Spring festival. Unfortunately, this is the only testimony of the *collegium dendrophorum* and the cult of Mater Magna in Angera found so far,⁴⁴ so we can not assume that the popularity of “Oriental” cults there was the reason for their relation with the imperial cult.

The second *sevir*, Sextus Egnatius Primitivus, was *sacerdos probatus* and a *quaestor* of the imperial treasury, who performed his duties in Casuentum and Carsulae. It is very significant that there is one Mithraist in the grade of *leo* from Carsulae, Egnatius Repa-

41 τύχη αγαθή / Ἡλίω Μίθρα ἀνεικήτω / ἐπὶ ἰέ[ρ]εω Ἰουλίου Σεουήρο[υ] / ὑπατικοῦ / οἶδε συνεισηένεγ[κα]ν εἰς τ[ὴν] / [σ]ῆκοδομίαν τοῦ ἱεροῦ / σπηλέου καὶ [θεο]σέβει/αν ὑπη[ρ]ετοῦ[ν]τος πατρὸς / [ε]ύσεβοῦς Μ[εν]ἰσκου Νουμηνί[ου] / Μ(ἄρκος) Οὔλπ(ιος) Ἀρτεμίδωρος ποντάρχ[ης] / [Ἰ]ππόλοχος Πυθίωνος / [Κ]άρπος Ἀ[π]πολλοδώρου / [Κ]αλλίστρατος Ἀπολλοδώρου / [Α]ἰλ(ιος) Διονύσιος Δημοκράτου[ς] / [Ἰ]ούλ(ιος) Βάσσης β(ενεφικιάριος) ὑπατικοῦ / [Α]ύρηλιος Αἰμιλιανός / [Αἰ]λ(ιος) Φίρμος Διονύσιος Διονυσοδ[ώ]ρου, *ISM* 193, *CIMRM* II, 02296, *AE* 1927, 59, *EDCS* 36900150.

42 Clauss 2000, 23, 41; 2021, 68; Bricault and Roy 2021, 171–172.

43 Clauss 2000, 136; Bricault and Roy 2021, 375.

44 *CCCA*, *EDCS*.

ratus, who invested in the building of a *leonteum* there – the only Mithraic sanctuary built for this specific group of initiates.⁴⁵ Egnatius Reparatus was *sacerdos*, as was the sevir Sextus Egnatius Primitivus: the first one *legitimus*, the second *probatus*. They both were probably *patres*, initiators of their communities,⁴⁶ and they made private investments in Mithras sanctuaries. Since they were contemporaries and they shared *nomen gentile*, we can presume that priests in Carsulae were blood relatives and that Mithraic priesthood was hereditary there. The fact that one of the *seviri* was *leo* and the second one is possibly related to a member of the same Mithraic grade is not surprising, since *leones* statistically must have constituted the great majority in Mithraic communities.

Eight out of ten dedications of *Augustales* were made to Mithras and Sol. It is well known that the official support for Sol Invictus encouraged entry into the mysteries of Mithras. Since emperors recognised Sol Invictus as their protector, the followers of Mithras saw their god as the protector of the imperial house.⁴⁷ Therefore, it has to be underlined that the equation with Sol probably was one of the reasons that *Augustales* made dedications to Mithras. Two *seviri* dedicated to Cautopates, implying that he was worshipped as the individual deity from the Mithraic circle in Angera and Apulum. The fact that there are just two dedications addressed only to Mithras is the additional evidence that his cult belonged only to *sacra privata*.

Cautopates Augustus, Mithras and Augustus

The imperial attribute *Augustus* was often added to a name of a Roman deity.⁴⁸ It is not possible to precisely define the nature of gods with the imperial attribute, or to state that they were identified with an emperor or that their cults had official status. Villaret sees the “augustalization” of gods as the process of mediation of an emperor between gods and people⁴⁹ and considers it as a phenomenon of political, religious and social acculturation in the Western provinces: *Augusti* were usually the most popular, important regional gods, invoked more often for the health of individuals than for the health of an emperor. Almost half of those individuals (41%) were members of the local elite who spread and popularized the cults of *dei Augusti* throughout the territory.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, it is certain that adding the imperial attribute to the name of a deity was an important way of expressing loyalty to a reigning emperor, assigning the power of the deity to an imperial house and therefore proving their relation to the imperial cult.

There is one dedication to Cautopates *Augustus* in Aquileia (Regio X) dated to the 2nd century AD, by an individual, Callistus.⁵¹ This is one of two dedications to Cautopates

45 Bricault and Roy 2021, 182.

46 Idem 2021, 401.

47 Clauss 2000, 28.

48 For the list of deities whose names are accompanied in inscriptions by the attribute *Augustus/Augusta*, based on research in *EDCS* for the entire empire, see Christodoulou 2015, 195–197.

49 Villaret 2021, 397.

50 Villaret 2019, 397–400.

51 *Cautopati / Aug(usto) sac(rum) / Callistus / O[-]* CIL V, 765 = *InscrAqu* I, 170 = *CIMRM* I, 740, *EDCS* 01600042.

recorded there (the other includes Cautes and was made by *Pater*).⁵² The fact that Cautopates was worshipped as *Augustus* is proof of the prominence and popularity of the Mithraic cult in Aquileia;⁵³ however, it is not possible to assert that it enjoyed imperial support which has not been attested elsewhere, nor that it belonged to *sacra publica* there.

The imperial attribute Augustus or Σεβαστός to Mithras' name has not been recorded. However, there are four dedications from Gallia to a reigning emperor and to Mithras Invictus (*Augusto deo Invicto Mithrae*).⁵⁴ Three of them are from Iuliomagus (Angers, Gallia Lugdunensis). The first one notes the vow of Pylades, the slave of the imperial slave (*vicarius*) Felix Agathangelianus.⁵⁵ It is dated to the second half of the 2nd century AD. He was one of the middle-ranking imperial officials, already known from the Iuliomagus epigraphy in the 2nd century AD.⁵⁶ The second inscription from Iuliomagus is damaged and we cannot reconstruct the dedicator's name formula: Ma[-] gave as a gift to *Augustus* and to Mithras Invictus.⁵⁷ It was carved into a plaque attached to an unknown object gifted to Mithras, and it is dated to the second half of the 2nd century AD. Due to the damage to the monument, it is not possible to reconstruct the dedicator's name formula on the third inscription from Iuliomagus, dedicated to *Augustus* and Mithras Invictus at the end of the 3rd or the beginning of the 4th century AD.⁵⁸ The fourth inscription, dedicated to *Augustus* and to Sol Invictus Mithras, was found in Intaranum (Entrains, Gallia Lugdunensis)⁵⁹ and it is also very damaged. It can be dated in the period 171–230 AD.⁶⁰

Although the inscriptions mentioned here testify to the association, yet not identification, of an emperor (*Augustus*) and Mithras, we believe that they suggest the relation of his cult and the imperial one. Although it seems that these were private dedications, Mithras was invoked for the protection of a reigning emperor. Their purpose was probably the promotion of Mithras, associating him with an emperor, considered as the deity him-

52 *Cauti / Q(uintus) Baien(us) / Procul(us) / pater // Cautop(ati) / Q(uitus) Baien(us) / Procul(us) / pater* CIL V, 763, CIMRM I 738, EDCS 01600040.

53 The cult of Mithras is very well attested in Aquileia (CIMRM I, 736–753, Bricault and Roy 2021, 302–306, 63a–h).

54 Dedications to Augustus and to one of the Roman deities as such are often attested in Gallia (Fishwick 1991, 436–445; Raepsaet-Charlier 1993, 20–21; Van Andringa 2002, 162, 294; Villaret 2021, 26–28).

55 *Aug(usto). Deo Invicto / Mithrae Pylades / Felicis Aug(usti) ser(vi) / Agathangeliani (servus) / v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito)*, AE 2015, 927; Molin et al. 2015, 30–48.

56 Mithras' civil worshippers were often recruited among lower civil imperial officials, who were state representatives of Roman power within the provincial population in Poetovio, Noricum, Aquileia and Dalmatia (Turcan 1992, 236). Administrative officials, perhaps foreign to the region and coming from Rome, succeeded in bringing a structured cult of Mithras to Iuliomagus during the 2nd century (Molin et al. 2015, 121).

57 *[Au]g(usto) l(invicto) M[ithrae -] / [-]is Ma[-] / d(ono) [d(edit)]*, AE 2015, 928; Molin et al. 2015, 45–48.

58 *Aug(usto) De[o] Invic[to] M[ithrae] Val[entin]us ver[na], or: Aug(usto) De[o] Invic[to] M[ithrae] Adv[entin]ius Cijna*, AE 2015, 930; Molin et al. 2015, 98–107.

59 *[A]ug(usto) sacr(um) deo / [In]victo Myt(hrae) S(oli) / [-]stor*, AE 1897, 16, CIL XIII, 2906.

60 Two dedications *numini Augusto deo Invicto* were found in Lengfeld (Germania Superior). The first one notes the fulfillment of the vow of Caet[-]ius Maior (CIL XIII, 6431, CIMRM II, 1279), the second one of Lucius Trougilli (CIL XIII, 6432; CIMRM II, 1278). They can be dated at the end of the 2nd, or the beginning of the 3rd century AD. However, since there is no Mithras name beside the title *deo Invicto*, we can not be sure that the inscriptions are dedicated to him.

self, and thus entering the sphere of the imperial cult. Unfortunately, the majority of the inscriptions is damaged and we do not know much about the dedicators – it is only certain that one of them, a *vicarius* from Iuliomagus, was related to the imperial house. It is important to point out also that only one of the dedications mentioned refers also to Sol, which could imply that the official support of Sol and his equation with Mithras was not the dominant reason for the relation between Mithras and the imperial cult in this case.

Conclusion

Twelve dedications of *Augustales* (*flamen* and *seviri*) and a pontarch to Mithras, just as four dedications to him and an emperor, point to a relation between the imperial cult and the *sacra privata* of Mithras. There are three reasons for dedications by imperial cult officials to Mithras.

The first one, a personal devotion to Mithras, is the most common. The best evidence is the fact that many *Augustales* were simultaneously followers of Mithras; there is one priest of the Mithraic cult among *seviri Augustales*, one *mystes* in the grade of *Leo*, and two *seviri* made dedications mentioning *pater* – these were active members of the local Mithraic communities. The additional proof is the fact that the *sevir* from Apulum, who dedicated to Mithras, was also a decurion – a highly prominent member of society. Furthermore, the pontarch from Histros invested in a Mithraic sanctuary together with a *beneficiarius consularis*, the official who was directly subordinate to the provincial governor, enjoying his trust and performing a variety of tasks.

The second reason is the fact that *Augustales* worshipped deities popular in the places where they held office in order to better adapt to the local environment and to demonstrate loyalty to the society to which they belonged. Their presence in the Mithraic community must have meant a certain recognition of the cult of Mithras by the local authorities. They made dedications to Mithras predominantly in the northern Italic regions and in Pannonia, where the level of the appropriation of the cult of Mithras was higher. It is surprising that there is no *Augustales* who dedicated to Mithras in Gallia recorded to date, since the imperial and Mithraic cults were very well attested, yet we can assume that they must have existed there.

The third reason is the fact that Mithras was often equated with Sol – 80% dedications by imperial cult officials are made to Sol Mithras, so it can be stated that the imperial support of Sol encouraged *Augustales* to promote the Mithras cult. In contrast, dedications to an emperor and to Mithras from Gallia only once included Sol, which points to the fact that the identification of Mithras with Sol was not the dominant reason for the relation with the imperial cult there.

The fact that Cautopates was worshipped by two *seviri* in Angera and Apulum and that he was addressed as *Augustus* in Aquileia is very significant. These represent three out of twenty-three dedications to Cautopates found until now.⁶¹ They testify that

61 Pannonia (8), Dacia (4), Regio X (3), Germania (2), Regio I (2) and once in Regio XI, Belgica, Noricum and Africa Proconsularis (EDCS).

he was recognized and worshipped as an independent deity, and they might lead to an assumption that the Mithraic torch bearer was particularly visible in the society of Aquileia, Angera and Apulum. There are no dedications to Mithras *Augustus* recorded until now, but bearing in mind all the epigraphic evidence considered in this paper we can assume that they might have existed.

According to all the evidence considered in this paper we can conclude that the relation between the Mithraic and the imperial cult is well attested, mainly by the dedications of *Augustales*. Its nature was exclusively private: none of the inscriptions testify to the public funding of Mithraic sanctuaries or other public donations. There is also no other proof that the cult of Mithras passed from the *sacra privata* to *sacra publica*, despite the support of officials of the imperial cult, even when he was equated with Sol Invictus, one of the favourite protecting deities of the imperial house during the late Roman empire. However, dedications by officials of the imperial cult, just as those mentioning the attribute *Augustus*, testify to the fact that the cult of Mithras was well accepted and privileged in the 2nd–3rd centuries AD, especially in northern Italy and Pannonia.

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