

## **CONTEXTUALIZING "ORIENTAL" CULTS**

New Lights on the Evidence between the Danube and the Adriatic

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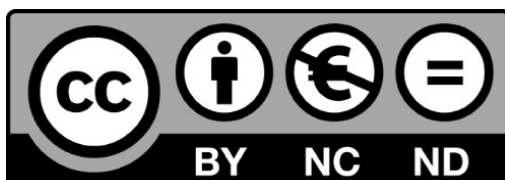
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# CONTEXTUALIZING “ORIENTAL” CULTS

New Lights on the Evidence between the Danube and the Adriatic

Proceedings of the International Scientific Symposium  
Zagreb, 15–17<sup>th</sup> September 2022

Zagreb – Vienna – Skopje

 **press**

2024



# CONTEXTUALIZING "ORIENTAL" CULTS

## New Lights on the Evidence between the Danube and the Adriatic

International Scientific Symposium  
Zagreb, 15–17<sup>th</sup> September 2022

### PROGRAM

#### 15<sup>th</sup> September

CONFERENCE HALL, FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES, ZAGREB

Morning (Chair: Bruna Kuntić-Makvić)

9:00–9:30 Welcome, introduction

#### Political and social context

9:30–10:00 Anja Ragolič, *Mithraism in Poetovio: old data, new findings*

10:00–10:30 Ljubica Perinić & Ivan Radman Livaja, *"Orientals" and "Oriental" cults in Southern Pannonia: is there a correlation?*

10:30–11:00 Nadežda Gavrilović, *"Oriental" cults in Moesia Superior through the eyes of their worshippers*

11:00–11:30 Inga Vilogorac Brčić, *"Oriental" gods and imperial cult*

#### ZAGREB ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM

Afternoon (Chair: Ante Rendić-Miočević)

#### Private context and ritual practice

15:00–15:30 Aleksandra Nikoloska, Duško Temelkoski & Olivera Jandreska, *The sculpture of Faustina, Isis, and the trade of grain in Styberra*

15:30–16:00 Arnaud Saura & Dan Deac, *Music in Isiac contexts*

16:00–16:30 Palma Karković Takalić, *Monuments dedicated to Leo and Fons from Golubić (Bosnia and Herzegovina). A particular form of worship of Mithras' cult in the territory of Raetinium?*

16:30–17:00 Željko Miletić, *Architectural elements on the tauroctonies from the Diocese of Pannonia*

17:30–18:30 Tour of the museum

## 16<sup>th</sup> September

CONFERENCE HALL, FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES, ZAGREB

Morning (Chair: Boris Olujić)

### Impulses and methodology

- 9:00–9:30 Laurent Bricault & Richard Veymiers, *Les cultes de Mithra: un état de la question*
- 9:30–10:00 Gabrielle Kremer, *"Oriental" gods as a romanizing factor?*
- 10:00–10:30 Csaba Szabó, *Religious communication and space sacralisation in the mithraea. Cases studies from Daciae and Pannoniae*

### Symbolism

- 11:00–11:30 Eleni Tsatsou, *Alexander the magician: Receptions of Alexander the Great in the Roman provinces in Southeast Europe – The testimony of amulets and inscriptions*
- 11:30–12:00 Mirna Cvetko, *Born from a rock. The altar to Petra Genetrix from Salona*

REGIONAL MUSEUM PTUJ – ORMOŽ

Afternoon (Chair: Gabrielle Kremer)

### Topographic context

- 17:30–18:00 Nirvana Silnović, *Contextualizing Mithras cult in the Roman province of Dalmatia*
- 18:00–18:30 Szilvia Bíró & Ottó Sosztarits, *Iseum – A cohabitation: the micro-topographical and functional environment of the Isis sanctuary in Savaria in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries AD*
- 18:30–19:00 Christoph Hinker, *Archaeological finds from a small cave in Carinthia (Austria) as indicators for the worship of Mithras at a rural site in southern Noricum*

## 17<sup>th</sup> September

CONFERENCE HALL, FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES, ZAGREB

Morning (Chair: Laurent Bricault)

### Case studies

- 9:00–9:30 Perikles Christodoulou, *Osiris in Thessaloniki. Revisiting the votive relief to Osiris mystes*
- 9:30–10:00 Annareta Touloumtzidou, *Isiaca from graves in Thessaloniki*
- 10:00–10:30 Lenče Jovanova, *Romanized "oriental" cults from Scupi in an archaeological-historical context*

### Poster discussion

- 10:30-11:00 Tatjana Kuznicov & Igor Krnjeta, *Mithras followers in Dalmatia*  
Ivona Lodoli, *Cults of Isis in Upper Pannonia*  
Ema Odorčić, *Sabazius' monuments found in Croatia*  
Klara Petroci, *Cult of Harpocrates in Pannonia*

### Exhibition announcement

- 11:00-12:00 Wolfgang David, *Mysterium Mithras: Annäherungen an einen römischen Kult* (Archaeological Museum Frankfurt, November 2022)







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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This volume presents the proceedings of the international symposium *Contextualizing „Oriental“ Cults. New Lights on the Evidence between the Danube and the Adriatic*, held in Zagreb and Ptuj, 15–17<sup>th</sup> September 2022, at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (University of Zagreb) and in the Regional Museum Ptuj – Ormož.

The symposium would not have been possible without the support of several persons and institutions to whom we would like to express our sincere gratitude. We are much indebted, first of all, to Laurent Bricault, for his advice and practical assistance with the organisation of the Symposium, as well as his precious help in editing this volume. We gratefully acknowledge the financial support for the Symposium and provided by the Österreichisches Archäologisches Institut (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften), the Department of History at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (University of Zagreb) and to the Croatian Ministry of Science and Education. The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (University of Zagreb) and the Regional Museum Ptuj – Ormož provided the excellent facilities during the Symposium and kindly put their staff at our disposal. Our gratitude goes also to the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb for providing an exhibition of posters of selected objects of “oriental” cults hosted at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb.

Thanks are finally due to the Österreichisches Archäologisches Institut (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften) for financing the publication of this volume. We are very grateful to Sarah Cormack for the English proofreading of the papers and to the Publishing office, FF Press, at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (University of Zagreb) for guiding this volume to press and publication.

*Zagreb, Vienna, Skopje, October 2024*



# CONTEXTUALIZING “ORIENTAL” CULTS. NEW LIGHT ON THE EVIDENCE BETWEEN THE DANUBE AND THE ADRIATIC

Numerous testimonies of what has currently been subsumed under the term “oriental cults” were found in the Roman Danubian provinces; cults originally of Egyptian, Anatolian, Syrian and Iranian origin were well accepted and integrated into the religious system during the Roman imperial period. They were received differently in different places, depending on the particular method of transmission and on the various historical and social circumstances under which they were adapted or transformed. By integrating new values and meanings, specific provincial forms of traditional cults were created.

Ten years ago, the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts with the co-organizers, the Universities of Toulouse and Leiden, hosted the conference “Romanizing Oriental gods. Religious Transformations in the Balkan Provinces in the Roman Period; New Finds and Novel Perspectives” in Skopje (September 18–21, 2013). Scientists dealing with “oriental” cults in the Danubian provinces of the Roman Empire gathered here for the first time. The meeting was extremely successful, and on that occasion it was determined that researchers should come together at regular intervals.

The Center for Interdisciplinary Research of Ancient History of the Institute of Croatian History agreed to be the initiator and main organizer of the international scientific symposium “CONTEXTUALIZING ‘ORIENTAL’ CULTS. New Lights on the Evidence between the Danube and the Adriatic”, which was held in Zagreb and Ptuj on 15–17 September 2022. The co-organizing institutions were the Université de Toulouse Jean Jaurès, the Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, the Research Centre for Cultural Heritage “Cvetan Grozdanov” of Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts, the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb and the Provincial Museum of Ptuj – Ormož. The objectives of the Symposium were to investigate and dis-

cuss the manner in which "oriental" cults manifested themselves in the Danubian and Balkan provinces, based on the characteristics of epigraphic and material sources. Attention was paid to the spread and development of the mentioned cults in different contexts – historical, political, topographical, civil, economic, and military. The presentation of the latest findings, material and epigraphic evidence and remains of architecture in South-Eastern Europe was one of the main goals of the Symposium. Presentations and discussions created precious new knowledge and conclusions, and the goal was achieved, among other things, that the monuments from the Balkans and the Danube are included in a wider scientific context. It was confirmed that various aspects of "oriental" cults and their testimonies in the areas mentioned require further study. The international character of this meeting, whose participants were from several countries (Croatia, Slovenia, Austria, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, North Macedonia, Greece, Hungary and Romania), enabled an extremely cohesive and dynamic academic and cultural exchange.

Two years after the Symposium, we collected the scientific contributions of most of the participants. Some of them concern various aspects of the acceptance of "oriental" cults in general. John Scheid, in the article *"Oriental" Deities in the Urban Context*, writes about the shrine complex at the crossroads near the church of S. Martino dei Monti on the Esquiline in Rome. He reconstructs the religious center where there were also holy places of "oriental" gods. In the article *Not only Mithras – Reflections on Sanctuaries of the High and Late Roman Empire on private Ground, with Particular Consideration of Noricum and Pannonia*, Peter Scherrer considers the private sphere of "oriental" cults and the ways in which they were practiced outside the context of the *sacra publica*, in the sanctuaries of Noricum and Pannonia. Gabrielle Kremer, in the article *"Oriental" Gods as a Romanizing Factor? A Case Study from the Danube Limes*, evaluates the material and epigraphic evidence of "oriental" cults in the hinterland of Carnuntum and Vindobona. She aims to trace how the implantation and apparent dominance of the Mithras cult occurred in relation to the two limes sites. In the article *Cult of Anatolian Local Gods in Moesia Inferior through the Eyes of their Worshippers*, Nadežda Gavrilović gives an overview of the followers of Anatolian cults in Upper Moesia and, based on that, considers the reasons why some of these cults were extremely popular there during the Roman imperial era.

Five scholars deal with the cult of Mithras and its specifics in the context of "oriental" cults. In the article *Cult of Mithras, Slaves, Portorium and Salinae in Dacia*, Françoise van Haepere offers a new interpretation of inscriptions dedicated to the god Mithras from Apulum found in 2010. At the same time, she defines the network of Mithras' followers there. In the article *Mithras and the Imperial Cult*, Inga Vilogorac Brčić provides an overview of epigraphic sources that testify to the connection between the imperial and Mithraic cults. She judges the reasons for these connections and the extent to which they encouraged the acceptance and spread of the Mithras cult in certain areas and in certain periods. In the article *The Mithraeum from Colonia Sarmizegetusa: on the Limits of Materiality of Religion*, Csaba Szabó tried to answer the hitherto unexplained questions related to the Mithraeum in Sarmizegetusa and to contextualize its rich material and epigraphic sources in the light of new research. In the article *Invicto Mithrae Spelaum fecit: Mithraic Temples in the Roman Province of Dalmatia*, Nirvana Silnović examines Mithraic shrines in Dalmatia, which were otherwise in the background of

scientific research compared to the rich artistic and epigraphic material. She gives a refreshed overview of Mithras' Dalmatian sanctuaries, trying to dispel the prejudice about their rural and poor character. Palma Karković Takalić in the article *Monuments Dedicated to Leo and Fons from Golubić (Bosnia and Herzegovina). A Specific Form of Worship of Mithras' Cult?* discusses altars with dedications to the Lion and the Source, related to the cult of Mithras. She offers a new reading of the inscriptions, dating and interpretation, among other things, based on the findspot.

Five articles are devoted to Egyptian cults. Szilvia Bíró and Otto Sosztarits in the article *Iseum – a Cohabitation: the Micro-topographical and Functional Environment of the Isis Sanctuary in Savaria in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries AD* provide a micro-topographical and functional interpretation of the fourth largest Isis temple in the Roman world – the one in Savaria (Szombathely, Hungary). In the article *Locating Dionysus at the Isiac sanctuary in Thessaloniki* Perikles Christodoulou discussed religious practices and cult adherents in the Isiac sanctuary in Thessaloniki. Dan Deac and Arnaud Saura-Ziegelmeier in the article *The Presence of the Sistrum in the Balkan and Danubian Provinces of the Roman Empire* investigated all the evidence of the sistrum, an Egyptian musical instrument that testifies to the cult of Isis. They discuss its importance in cult rites and the importance of its depiction in the spread of Egyptian cults. In the article *Faustina the Younger, Isis, and the Grain Trade in Styberra*, Aleksandra Nikoloska, Olivera Jandreska and Duško Temelkoski publish the sensational find of a large statue of Empress Faustina - Isis, which was found in Styberra (Prilep, Macedonia). They discuss the context of the find and the importance of the grain trade in Stibera, which was controlled by the Antonines who symbolically erected the statue of Faustina in the guise of Isis at the Agora. In the article *Isiaca from the Roman Cemeteries of Thessaloniki*, Annareta Touloumtzidou presents the material and epigraphic sources of Egyptian cults from the Roman necropolis in Thessaloniki. She judges the context in which they were found and the cult of Isis in Thessaloniki in general.

One article is devoted to the cult of the Great Mother: *Mater Deum Magna Idaea and the Imperial Cult in Latin Inscriptions*. The author Wolfgang Spickermann provides an overview and an evaluation of all the monuments that testify to the connection between the imperial cult and the cult of the Phrygian Cybele, the Roman Great Mother. The last article, *Epigraphic Testimonies of Jupiter Dolichenus: Iatric Aspects*, deals with the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus. Vladimir Petrović presents three inscriptions from Upper Moesia, Numidia and Dacia, which prove that Dolichenus was also worshipped as a healer.

The publication is intended for the international scientific public, to whom it presents the latest findings and conclusions about the so-called "oriental" cults. We would like to dedicate the Proceedings to the late Professor of the Department of History at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb, Petar Selem (1939–2015), who spent his scientific career dealing with "oriental" cults.

*The editorial board*





# ABBREVIATIONS

## ARYS

Antigüedad: Religiones y Sociedades

## BASD

Bulletino di archaeologia e storia dalmata

## BMC

British Museum Catalogues

## CCCA VI

M. J. Vermaseren, *Corpus cultus Cybelae Attidisque (CCCA)*, VI. *Germania, Raetia, Noricum, Pannonia, Dalmatia, Macedonia, Thracia, Moesia, Dacia, Regnum Bospori, Colchis, Scythia et Sarmatia*, ÉPRO 50, Leiden – New York – København – Köln 1989.

## CCID

M. Hörig, E. Schwertheimer, M. B. de Boer and M. E. C. Vermaseren-van Haaren, *Corpus Cultus Iovis Dolicheni (CCID)*, Leiden 1987.

## CIMRM I–II

M. J. Vermaseren, *Corpus inscriptionum et monumentorum religionis Mithriacae I–II*, Hagrae Comitum 1956–1960.

## CSIR III Greece

M. Lagogianni-Georgakarakos, *Corpus signorum imperii Romani. Corpus der Skulpturen der römischen Welt. Griechenland, 3, 1. Die Grabdenkmäler mit Porträts aus Makedonien*, Athens 1998.

## DAHPN

Database "Ancient Hebrew Personal Names", <https://www.dahpn.gwi.uni-muenchen.de/>

## DGE

*Diccionario Griego-Español*, also online: <http://dge.cchs.csic.es/xdge/>

## EAM

*Ἐπιγραφές Ἄνω Μακεδονίας (Ἐλίμεια, Ἑορδαία, Νότια Λυγκηστis, Ὀρεστis)*, Τόμος Α', Κατάλογος Ἐπιγραφῶν, eds Θ. Ριζάκης and Γ. Τουράτσογλου, Ἀθήνα 1985.

## ΕΑΜΦΑ

Επιγραφές Αμφαξίτιδας (μεταξύ του Αξιού ποταμού και της ορειογραμμής Βερτίσκου - Κερδυλλίων), Τεύχος Α', Επιγραφές Κρηστωνίας, Μυγδονίας, Ανθεμούντα, eds. Π. Πασχίδης, E. Martín González, Γ. Αθανασιάδης, I. Γραικός et al., Αθήνα 2023.

## EDCS

Epigraphik-Datenbank Clauss – Slaby

## ΕΘΑ

*Επιγραφές τῆς Θράκης τοῦ Αἰγαίου, μεταξύ τῶν ποταμῶν Νέστου καὶ Ἑβρου (νομοὶ Ἐάνθης Ροδόπης καὶ Ἑβρου) / Inscriptiones antiquae partis Thraciae quae ad ora maris Aegaei sita est (praefecturae Xanthes, Rhodopes et Hebri)*, eds. Λ. Δ. Λουκοπούλου, Ά. Ζουρνατζή, Μ. Γ. Παρισάκη and Σ. Ψωμά, Αθήνα 2005.

## ΕΚΜ

*Επιγραφές Κάτω Μακεδονίας (μεταξύ τοῦ Βερμίου ὄρους καὶ τοῦ Ἀξιοῦ ποταμοῦ), Τεύχος Β' / Inscriptiones Macedoniae inferioris (inter Bermium montem et Axium flumen repertae)*, Fasciculus secundus, eds Λ. Γουναροπούλου, Π. Πασχίδης and Μ. Β. Χατζόπουλος, Αθήνα 2015.

## IDR

*Inscriptiones Daciae Romanae I–III*, București – Paris

## IG X.2.1

*Inscriptiones Graecae Epiri, Macedoniae, Thraciae, Scythiae. Volumen X, Pars II: Inscriptiones Macedoniae. Fasciculus 1: Inscriptiones Thessalonicae et viciniae*, ed. C. Edson, Berlin 1972.

## IG X.2.1s

*Inscriptiones Graecae Epiri, Macedoniae, Thraciae, Scythiae. Volumen X, Pars II: Inscriptiones Macedoniae. Fasciculus 1: Inscriptiones Thessalonicae et viciniae. Supplementum primum: Tituli inter a. MCMLX et MMXV reperti*, ed. P. M. Nigdelis, Berlin – Boston 2017.

## IG X.2.1s.2

*Inscriptiones Graecae Epiri, Macedoniae, Thraciae, Scythiae. Volumen X, Pars II: Inscriptiones Macedoniae. Fasciculus 1: Inscriptiones Thessalonicae et viciniae. Supplementum alterum: Addenda, indices, tabulae*, eds. D. Papakonstantinou-Diamantourou, E. Martín González and K. Hallof, Berlin – Boston 2020.

## IGBulg V

*Inscriptiones graecae in Bulgaria repertae V: Inscriptiones novae, addenda et corrigenda*, ed. Georgi Mihailov, Sofia 1997.

## IGUR

*Inscriptiones graecae urbis Romae*

## IHadr

E Schwertheim, *Die Inschriften von Hadrianoi und Hadrianeia*, IK 33, Bonn 1987.

## ILD

C. C. Petolescu, *Inscripții latine din Dacia (Inscriptiones Latinae Dacicae)*, București 2005

## ILJug

A. Šašel and J. Šašel, *Inscriptiones Latinae quae in Iugoslavia inter annos MCMXL et MCMLX repertae et editae sunt*, Ljubljana 1963.

## ILS

H. Dessau, *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae I–III*, Berlin 1892–1916.

## ISM

*Inscriptiones Scythiae Minoris*

## IStr

Ç. Şahin, *Die Inschriften von Stratonikeia I, Panamara, IK 21*, Bonn 1981.

## LSJ

H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, H. S. Jones (ed.), Oxford.

## LTUR I

E. M. Steinby (ed.), *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae I*, Roma 1993.

## LTUR III

E. M. Steinby (ed.), *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae III*, Roma 1996.

## LTUR V

E. M. Steinby (ed.), *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae V*. Roma 1999.

## lupa

F. und O. Harl, <lupa.at> (Bildatenbank zu antiken Steindenkmälern)

## MMM

F. Cumont, *Textes et monuments figurés relatifs aux mystères de Mithra I–II*, Bruxelles 1896–1898.

## RICIS

L. Bricault, *Recueil des inscriptions concernant les cultes Isiaques (RICIS)*, Paris 2005.

## RICIS suppl. II

L. Bricault, *RICIS supplément II*, in L. Bricault and R. Veymiers (eds.), *Bibliotheca Isiaca II*, Bordeaux 2011, 273–307.

## RICIS suppl. III

L. Bricault, *Recueil des inscriptions concernant les cultes isiaques. Supplément III*, in L. Bricault and R. Veymiers (eds.), *Bibliotheca Isiaca III*, Bordeaux 2014, 139–195.

## RICIS suppl. IV

L. Bricault, *Recueil des inscriptions concernant les cultes isiaques. Supplément IV*, in L. Bricault and R. Veymiers (eds.), *Bibliotheca Isiaca IV*, Bordeaux 2020, 357–375.

## ROMIC I

P. Selem and I. Vilogorac Brčić, *ROMIC I. Religionum Orientalium monumenta et inscriptiones ex Croatia I*, *Znakovi i riječi/Signa et litterae V*, Zagreb 2015.

## ROMIC II

P. Selem and I. Vilogorac Brčić, *ROMIC II. Religionum Orientalium monumenta et inscriptiones ex Croatia II*, *Znakovi i riječi/Signa et litterae VI*, Zagreb 2018.

**ROMIS**

P. Selem and I. Vilogorac Brčić, *ROMIS. Religionum Orientalium monumenta et inscriptiones Salonitani*, Znakovi i riječi/Signa et litterae III, Zagreb 2012.

**RPC**

Roman Provincial Coinage

**SIRIS**

L. Vidman, *Sylloge inscriptionum religionis Isiacae et Sarapiacae*, Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten 28, Berlin 1969.

**Suppl. It.**

Supplementa Italica

**TitAq I**

A. Szabó, *Tituli Aquincenses I*, Budapest 2009.

**TitAq II**

P. Kovács, A. Szabó, B. Fehér and L. Borhi, *Tituli aquincenses II : Tituli sepulcrales et alii Budapestini reperti*, Budapest 2010.

**TitAq IV**

G. Alföldy, P. Kovács, A. Szabó and B. Fehér, *Tituli Aquincenses IV: Pars septentrionalis agri Aquincensis*, Budapest 2020.

# INTRODUCTION

Laurent Bricault

Université Toulouse Jean Jaurès – Institut universitaire de France

The skin of historiography is often made of very thick leather. And its weight is closer to a kilo of lead than a kilo of feathers. More than a century after the publication of Franz Cumont's *Religions orientales dans le paganisme romain*, and despite several decades of deconstruction, the category of "Oriental Cults," while no longer operative, remains very much alive. Many scholars, no doubt for the sake of convenience, still lump together the eggs of Mithras, Isis, Mater Magna and Jupiter Dolichenus - to name but a few of the divine powers featured in John North's "marketplace of religions". The use of quotation marks, the use of "cosidetti" or "so called" don't change a thing. In a way, they underline the persistence of a concept that will soon be several centuries old.

A concept which, since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has had to coexist with less vast fields of research which, in the end, also raise questions. "Mithraic studies," like "Isiac studies," to whose development I am no stranger, have structured territories which, in turn, undoubtedly deserve to be partly deconstructed, perhaps in order to be delimited – if not defined – differently. By excluding the homeland of Isis and her kin from their field of investigation for so long, the Isiac studies – "ex Aegypto," that is – have deprived themselves of a fundamental part of the datas enabling us to better apprehend the fascinating phenomenon of the success of the goddess, her husbands Sarapis and Osiris and the other members of her divine circle throughout the Greco-Roman empire, of which Egypt is obviously a part. By neglecting Egypt – voluntarily – the scholars of whom I was one have deprived themselves of many keys to analyzing the phenomenon they studied, on several levels. Not only did they ignore the evolution of the cult of these ancestral divinities on Egyptian territory during the Greco-Roman period, thus depriving themselves of highly fruitful elements of comparison with what was happening on the other side of the Mediterranean, but they also ignored an essential aspect of their field of study, namely what happened to Alexandrianized, Hellenized and Romanized forms – in short, forms outside traditional Egypt – when they returned to the Nile valley after their wanderings in the East, Greece or the West. Not to mention

Sarapis, whose cult “in Aegyptō” has never been the subject of the slightest synthesis, the majority of works on the god having focused on his origins and his disappearance in the flames of the Alexandrian Sarapieion. The same applies to Mithra. While the hypothetical origins of Roman Mithra have filled pages and pages of scholarly and illusory reflections, very few have ventured to analyze the cult of Roman Mithra, not in Persia, of course, but in Roman Syria for example, despite the fact that documentation has grown considerably in recent decades around the mithraea of Sidon, Dura and Hawarte, not to mention isolated monuments like the extraordinary relief now in the collections of the Israel Museum. Or on the shores of the Pontus Euxinus, between Trapezus and Colchis, Mithraic lands par excellence, where various ways of worshipping Mithras coexisted and intersected during the Imperial period, assuming that it was always the same divine power that hid behind the same theonym. Polytheism is plural not only because of the sheer number of divinities that nourish it, but also because each divinity has a multitude of manifestations, often designated by cult epithets and materialized by an infinite number of representations, anthropomorphic or otherwise.

One way out of these various compartmentalizations may well be to give priority to multi-scalar studies, which allow us to envisage the plural networks that structured the Greco-Roman world; for polytheism is not a stack of gods, carefully labeled and endowed with a single prerogative. To understand it, we need to think in terms of relational networks, of a nebula charged with divine dust, worked by complex gravitational phenomena. The world of the gods, in other words, is alive with movement and turmoil; it is effervescent and bubbling, despite the constant efforts of sovereign gods such as Amun, Marduk, Baal, Yahweh, Zeus and Sarapis to subject it to their authority. These fluid relational networks, never static, are built vertically, between different levels, on different scales, whether the approach is from the general to the particular or from the particular to the general; horizontally, allowing the comparative analysis of case studies of the same level; but also transversally, giving rise to three-dimensional glocal studies. Within ancient polytheisms that form a system, through the permanent interaction of the multiple components they nourish within their breasts (humans, animals, monuments, objects, places, moments, rituals, words, images, gestures, divinities), this type of investigation proves extremely fruitful, as recent work on the cults of Mithra and Isis has shown.

The organizers of the superb symposium that brought us together in Zagreb in September 2022 understood this perfectly, inviting participants to study documentation at different levels, from the most local to the most global, within a deliberately limited space, between the Danube and the Adriatic Sea. This approach led to some fascinating discussions, of which the beautiful book you are holding in your hands is the perfect outcome.

*Laurent Bricault*  
*Toulouse, October 3, 2023*

# “ORIENTAL” DEITIES IN THE URBAN CONTEXT

John Scheid

## Abstract

Researchers are used to studying cult places in isolation, and not in relation to other sanctuaries. As a result, they risk missing important testimonies and overlooking potential new insights to the *doxa* that are important in understanding cult sites. This is proven by the example of imperial Rome. In the neighbourhoods of the city and on the *Ager Romanus* one can find public temples and smaller, local sanctuaries. What is the connection between the different cult places in the neighbourhoods and in the *suburbium*? This paper examines the problem with the help of some examples from south-western Rome. These examples show that certain religious sites attracted different cultic communities, notably the so-called oriental cults, and that they did not exclude each other before the prohibition of the “pagan” cults.

**Keywords:** Rome – *compitum* – Isis – *Mithraeum* – Jupiter *Dolichenus* – *compitalia*.

Walking on the Esquiline along the *Vicus patricius* for a certain distance to the north, one arrives at the crossroads near S. Martino ai Monti, a church leaning against the ruins of what is considered to be the home of Pliny the Younger. In this place, various discoveries have brought to light testimonies of an interesting concentration of cult-places. The first is a group of two inscriptions belonging to a *compitum*;<sup>1</sup> they were discovered in the garden and near the apse of San Martino. One of these inscriptions, which is a fragment of an architrave and therefore comes from the *aedicula* of the *compitum*, addresses the *Lares Augusti* of the *Vicus Fagutal* and the *Genii* of the *Caesars*, and of the Emperor Trajan.<sup>2</sup> The second, dating from 203, is a dedication to the

1 *LTUR* V, 169 s.v. *Vicus Iovis Fagutalis*.

2 *CIL* VI, 452 (109 AD): [Laribus A]ugust(is) vici Iovis Fagutal[is et] / [Genis Caesarum I]mp(eratori) Nerva(e), Divi Nervae f(ilius), Traian}o / [Aug(usto) Germanico Dac]ico, Pont(ifice) Max(im)o, trib(unicia) pot(estate)

Lares Augusti of Septimius Severus and Caracalla.<sup>3</sup> We learn that the four *magistri* of the *compitum*, all four of whom are freedmen, restored this *aedicula* of the third region at their expense in 109. The inscription mentions also that the *magistri* are those of the 121<sup>st</sup> year of the *compitum*, which dates its first restoration by Augustus in the year 12 BC. There is a good chance, if not absolutely certain, that these two inscriptions come from the same cult-place, that of Vicus Fagutal. This takes its name from the temple and grove of Jupiter Fagutal, the Jupiter of the beech grove, who is otherwise unknown. The Severan inscription is too mutilated to record anything beyond the survival of the institution of the *compitum*, and a restoration made by Septimius Severus and Caracalla (since they are mentioned in the nominative). On the other hand, the document of 109 provides some additional data. First, the reference to the central divinities, the Lares Augusti and the Genii of the Caesars. The chapel in question is called *aedicula regionis tertiae*, chapel of the third region, where it is located. So, the Fasti of the Esquiline,<sup>4</sup> which were discovered along the apse of the same church, presumably are an equipment of this *compitum*. We will see below another example of a calendar drawn up in the *schola* of the *vicomagistri*.

Now with the *compitum* of the Vicus Fagutalis, we have found evidence of other cults. First, as often happens, the statues were offered by Augustus himself. At a short distance from our *compitum*, between the streets Giovanni Lanza and San Martino ai Monti, on the Clivus suburbanus, several inscriptions have been discovered. At first two boundary stones, which indicate that Augustus had recovered here a space of 41 × 21 metres that was occupied by private individuals. This recovery is evidence of Augustus's restorations. In this case, he restored the public nature of this space, and perhaps attributed it to the center of the neighbourhood's former collective cult. In addition, Augustus gave the *vicus* in question a statue of Mercury.<sup>5</sup> The inscription relates that in 10 BC, he dedicated this statue, which was created or bought from the New Year gifts that the Roman people had offered him while he was absent.

Among the inscriptions found in the church of San Martino ai Monti, another *compitum*, there were also two altars dedicated to Aesculapius.<sup>6</sup> These inscriptions were set up by Nicomedes, a doctor from Smyrna, and provide two different versions of a poem, the second of which is more elaborate, while the first, which is written in Doric dialect, may have been copied at Epidaurus, Cos or Corinth. Nicomedes dedicated an

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(*tertia decima*), *imp(eratore) (sextum)*, [*co(n)s(ule) (iterum)*], / [*permissu ...*] *Pollionis, tri(buni) pleb(is), aed(iculam) reg(ionis) (tertia) vetusta[te] / [dilapsam a solo ma]gistro anni (centesimo uicesimo primo) sua impensa restitu[er(unt)] / [- - -] Phoebus, A(ulus) Nonius, A(uli) l(ibertus) Onesimus / [- - -] Callistus, L(ucius) Valerius, L(ucii) l(ibertus) Eutichus (sic).*

3 *CIL VI, 30859 (202 AD): [- - - -] l i l [- - -] Larib(us) Aug(ustis) [- - - -] / [Imp(erator) Caesar L(ucius) Septimius Seueru]s Pius Pertinax Au[g(ustus) Arabic(us) Adiabenic(us)] / Parthic(us) Max(imus), pontif(ex) max(imus), tri]b(unicia) pot(estate) (undecima), imp(erator) X[l] (undecimum), co(n)s(ul) tertium, proco(n)s(ul), p(ater) p(atriciae) et] / [Imp(erator) Caesar M(arcus) Aurelius Antoninus pijus felix Aug(ustus) tr]ib(unicia) pot(estate) (quintum), co(n)s(ul) proco(n)s(ul), p(ater) p(atriciae)] / [- - - -].*

4 Degrassi 1963, 85–89.

5 *ILS 92 (10 BC): Imp(erator) Caes[ar], Diui f(ilius), August(us), / pontif(ex) maximus, co(n)s(ul) (undecimum), / tribunicia potest(ate) (quarta decima), / ex stipe, quam populus Romanus / K(alendis) Ianuariis apsent(i) ei contulit / Iullo Antonio Africano Fabio co(n)s(ule), / Mercurio sacrum.*

6 *IGUR 102; IG 14.968a.*



image he had seen in a Greek temple, and had it reproduced in Rome in a cult space on the Esquiline.

Another inscription found in the church reports that "on the order of the gods, Gaius Valerius [- - -] restored the chapel for Hercules, Epona and S[ilvanus] ... for his well being" as well as that of other people whose names are no longer extant.<sup>7</sup> So around the public chapel of the Lares Augusti and the Genius Caesaris, monuments of private devotion were gathered. The *compita* were sort of small public spaces in the neighbourhoods, where neighbourhood cults and families celebrated their devotions. Yet these were also social spaces, not only because of the annual festivals, one on August 1, the anniversary of the restoration of *compita*, and another towards the beginning of the New Year, during the Compitalia. There were also shops, as for example one on the Vicus Acili, close to the Colosseum. Already in 229 BC the doctor Archagathos, son of Lysanias, opened a cabinet at the *compitum* Acili in a shop bought by the State.<sup>8</sup> One can also be reasonably certain that the booksellers who, according to Aulus Gellius and Galen, were holding shop at the Vicus Sandalarius, were also close to this *compitum*.<sup>9</sup> We may add in the interest of completion that, according to a gloss of Servius' commentary on Aeneid, on certain days that are not known, the matrons gathered at the *compita* in clothes of mourning, with unkempt hair, striking their chest and with torches in hand, to express mournful lamentations to call Proserpina who had been abducted by Dis Pater.<sup>10</sup> These few examples therefore reveal that the sanctuaries at the crossroads brought together a series of traditional cults, public and private, male and female.

Now, and this is what interests us here, not only traditional Roman cults are found there. At the *vicus* located near S. Martino ai Monti, judging from what has been found in the surroundings of the church, there was also a Mithraeum. An inscription records that a certain Fl(avius) Septimius Zosimus, a Roman knight, priest of Bronton and of Hecate, built a cave (*speleum*) for Sol invictus Mithra.<sup>11</sup> If our conclusions are correct, it would seem that Mithras also received, at a relatively late date to judge from the name of the dedicant, a place of worship near the *compitum*.

Unless it was one and the same, there may have been another Mithraeum there. In the courtyard of a late *domus*, now located at 128 via Lanza,<sup>12</sup> next to our *compitum*,

7 CIL VI, 293: *Iussu deaorum C(aius) Vale[rius - - -] / Herculi Eônae S[ilvano aedi]/culam restituit [ sua pec(unia) pro] / salutem suam et [- - - - et] / Proculo muliis [- - - -].*

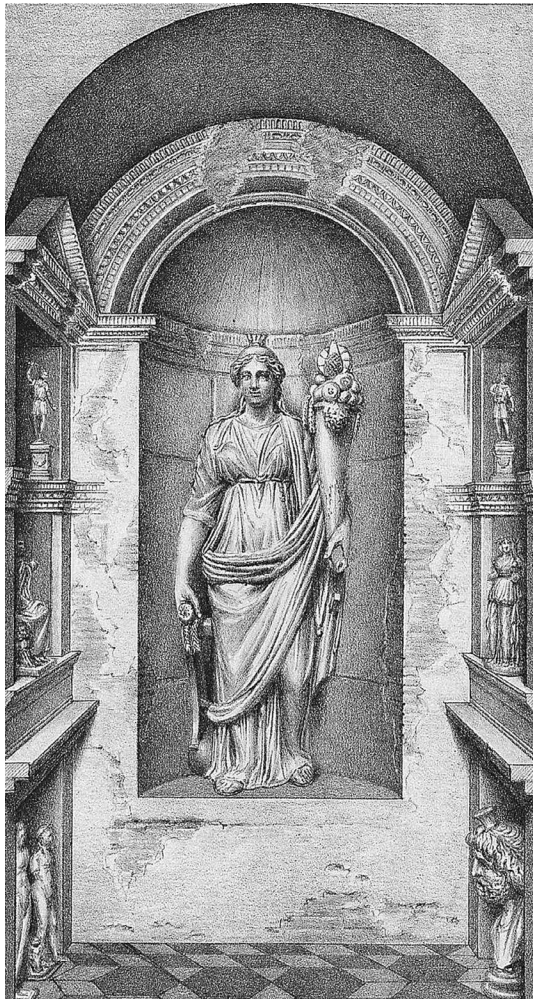
8 Plinius, nat. hist. 29, 6, 12: *Cassius Hemina ex antiquissimis auctor est primum e medicis venisse Romam Peloponneso Archagathum Lysaniae filium L(ucio) Aemilio M(arco) Livio co(n)s(ulibus) anno urbis (quingentesimo tricesimo quinto), eique ius Quiritum datum et tabernam in compito Acilio emptam ob id publice.* For the Compitum Acili, cf. LTUR I, 314–315.

9 Cf. LTUR V, 189.

10 Servius, Commentary of the Aeneid, 4, 609: *NOCTVRNIS : non triviis nocturnis, sed per nocturnum tempus. Sacra enim Hecatae in triviis frequentantur per noctem. Ideo autem Hecaten invocat, quasi quae tanti matrimonium fecerit, ut sperneret matrem. VLVLATV PER VRBES : Proserpinam raptam a Dite patre Ceres cum incensis faculis per orbem terrarum requireret, per trivium eam vel quadrivium vocabat clamoribus. Vnde permansit in eius sacris, ut certis diebus per compita a matronis exerceatur ululatus.*

11 CIL VI, 773 (church of S. Martino in Monte): *Deo Soli Invicto Mithre (sic) / Fl(avius) Septimius Zosimus u(ir) p(erfectissimus) / sacerdos (sic) Dei Brontonis / et Aecate hoc speleum / constituit.*

12 Ensoli Vittozzi 1993; Ensoli 1997; Ensoli 2001, 280–282; LTUR III, 260–261 (Mithra, Speleum, via G. Lanza 128).



**Fig. 1.** The “Lararium” of the *Domus in via G. Lanza (Esquilina)*: the edicule (from Visconti 1885, pl. IV)

aristocracy, and this part of the Esquiline then was filled with large residences. Into one of these houses, the Mithraeum and the chapel were integrated. This Isiac chapel may well have been built by an individual in the imperial gardens, which at that time had succeeded the gardens of Maecenas. A similar situation may have occurred with the Mithraeum, whose statues are also dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century on stylistic grounds (fig. 2).

there is a chapel with a series of statues of gods and goddesses, and a staircase leading down to a Mithraeum. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the chapel, that archaeologists have named a Lararium, seems to be the collective place of worship of this house. The chapel included a main statue, placed in the niche at the bottom of the construction and identified as representing Isis – Fortuna, which scholars date to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD (fig. 1).<sup>13</sup> On shelves to the right and left are located busts and statuettes of other deities,<sup>14</sup> a mixture of traditional domestic deities, Lares or Genius, Hercules, Apollo, Jupiter, and Egyptian or Greek divinities, which gives us an idea of the domestic pantheon of a Late Antique *domus*. It has been proposed<sup>15</sup> that this sanctuary should be identified as a sanctuary of Isis, surrounded by deities who are closely (Serapis and Harpocrates) or commonly (Apollo, Aphrodite, Hecate, bacchants) related to her; domestic deities would join these gods and goddesses.

In fact, things are more complicated and perhaps even more interesting, even if the excavation was not conducted with the precision we would require today. The so-called Lararium and its statues are dated by scholars to the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the imperial domains passed into the hands of the high

13 Cf. *LTUR III*, 115 (Isis-Fortuna, Lararium, via G. Lanza 128).

14 On the right side, a bust of a male god, maybe of Serapis (21), a statuette of Lar or Genius (14), another statuette (15); two hermai of Hercules (2–3), a statue of Serapis sitting with Cerberus (6); a statuette of Apollo (18), a statuette of Hercules (13). To the left, a statuette of Lar or Genius (14 or 15); a statuette of Hecate (7), a herm of Hercules (12), a herm of a bacchant (4); – below: a bust of Serapis (8), and two other statuettes. Also found at this location were a Harpocrates, a statue of a seated woman, a harpocratic stele, as well as another Hercules, three small bases, and a Mars (the identification is not certain).

15 Cf. n. 13.

This reconstruction, however, ignores the fact that in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, rather than belonging to the imperial gardens, the chapel adjoined the *compitum* of S. Martino. It would therefore not be surprising if, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, the Isiac Chapel and the Mithraeum belonged to this group of cults located in the centre of the neighbourhood, close to the altar of the Lares. All the inscriptions relating to this *compitum* have been found in the church or in a small radius around it, and so it would be more satisfying to relate the chapel and the Mithraeum to this common place of worship. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century, as we can see, the religious topography and in any case the context of neighbourhood cults evolve, since large mansions now cover areas formerly public or imperial, including earlier cult places in new buildings. I do not mean to say that the entire compital sanctuary was transformed into a domestic sanctuary, but I do note that at least one part of it was. Certainly, as always in Rome, one could also assume that the cult place of the 4<sup>th</sup> century was equipped with statues taken from an older sanctuary, located in another neighbourhood. Given the lack of more accurate data, however, we will have to stop there. In order to check the hypothesis of the presence in the crossroads sanctuaries of cults recently arrived at Rome, we can examine two other examples.

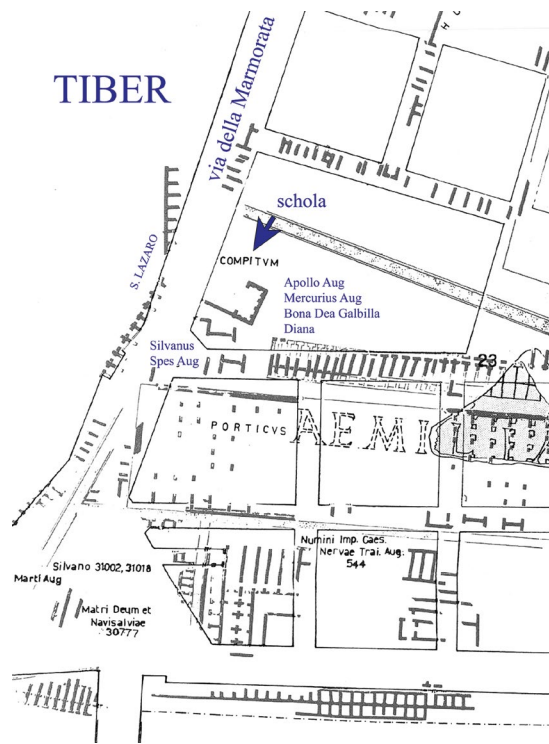


Fig. 2. The *compitum* and the *schola* of the Via della Marmorata (Lungotevere) (personal modification of the map given by Almeida 1984)

At the via della Marmorata we find a *compitum* whose name is not known, but which is very well preserved (fig. 2).<sup>16</sup> First, the excavators of the site discovered the *schola* of the *collegium compitalicium* of the inhabitants of this *vicus*. This consists of a little square, at the bottom of which an *exedra* opens out; it is one of those *scholae* about which we hear in inscriptions, perhaps closed by a grid. To get a more precise description, we may briefly consult an inscription, which is a little older and which was discovered on the opposite bank of the Tiber, in Transtevere.<sup>17</sup> This concerns the setting up of the place of worship of the Pagus Ianicolensis, the equivalent in the Republican period to the *vici* of imperial times. An initial inscription recalls that a certain Pupius, son of Aulus, *magister* of the Pagus Ianicolensis, on the decision of the *pagus* constructed a portico, a chapel, a kitchen and an altar. The second text concerns other works, of which only the mention of the construction of a wall is preserved.

16 Almeida 1984, 98–106.

17 CIL VI, 2219: [P]upius, A(uli) f(ilius), Mag(ister) / [pa]gi Ianicol(ensis) porticu[m] / [ce]llam culinam / [ar]jam de pagi senten[tia] / [fa]ciundu(m) coiravit.

These documents provide an almost complete picture of this type of cult place. At first there was a wall, and inside it a chapel for the gods, a porticus for the members of the *pagus*, and for the rites which united men and gods, an altar and a kitchen. The inhabitants of the neighbourhood met under the portico, which may also have been the seat of the *magistri*, and the kitchen was intended to prepare sacrificial offerings and banquets. It should be noted that the *pagi*, as presumably later the *vici*, held meetings during which they decided on the equipment of the place and probably on the financing of the works.

In the *compitum* of via della Marmorata, we know only the *schola* and a piece of wall, but we can bet that the layout was almost the same as in the Pagus Ianicolensis a few decades earlier. The interior walls of the *schola* were lined with marble plaques on which were engraved the Fasti of the *magistri* of the *compitum*, as well as a calendar of the Roman year.<sup>18</sup> This *schola* was both the seat of the annual presidents of the *compitum* and a place of worship. It is necessary to imagine that beside the building stood the aedicule with the Lares Augusti and the Imperial Genius, surrounded by statues, bases and altars of other deities. The title of the beautiful inscription of the Fasti tells us that the Emperor Augustus gave the Lares Augusti to the *magistri* of the *vicus* between the 1<sup>st</sup> of August and the 31<sup>st</sup> of December, 7 BC. This is how they commemorate the foundation of the new development of the *compitum*: Augustus officially gave the statuettes of Lares Augusti, and financed the reconstruction or construction of the cult site.

Besides the Lares and the Imperial Genius, the *compitum* also welcomed other deities. Thus, in our *compitum* stood the statues and altars of Apollo Augustus, Diana and Mercurius Augustus.<sup>19</sup> The dedications to Mercury and Apollo were made by the magistrates of the *vicus*, which unambiguously establishes that they were part of our sanctuary. While the other inscriptions mention only the *magistri* of the *vicus*, one of the dedications is to Apollo, dedicated in the fifty-second year of the existence of the *compitum*, that is to say in 45 AD, by a *magister* and a *minister*, the first being a freedman, the second a slave. A fragment of a dedication to Diana belongs to the same context, as well as two dedications to Silvanus and Bona Dea Galbilla.<sup>20</sup> These two offerings were offered by imperial slaves of the Horrea Galbiana, in accordance with the usual devotions of the administrative staff. A final dedication discovered in the area is

18 Degrassi 1963, 90–98.

19 CIL VI, 34 (3/2 BC): *Mercurio Aug(usto) sacrum / mag(istri) anni (quinti) d(ono) d(ederunt) / M(arcus) Milionius, M. I(ibertus), Auctus, / P(ublius) Cornificius, (Publiorum) I(ibertus), Eros, / M(arcus) Pontius, M(arci) libertus, Eros, P(ublius) Sulpicius, P. I(ibertus), Felix*; CIL VI, 33 (2/1 BC): *Apollini Aug(usto) sacrum / mag(istri) anni (sexti) d(ono) d(ederunt) / Sex(tus) Trebonius, Sex(ti) I(ibertus), Philemo, / A(ulus). Cornelius, A(uli) I(ibertus), Nysus, / Q(uintus) Fufius, Q(uinti) I(ibertus), Epaphroditus, / C(aius) Sulpicius, Galb(ae) I(ibertus), Ragia*; CIL VI, 35 (45 AD): *Apollini Augusto / sacrum / magister et minister / anni (quingagesimi alterius) d(ono) d(ederunt) / L(ucius) Laberius, L(uci) I(ibertus), Felix, / Tertius (Quintorum) Nunniorum Lune(n)sis et Montani (seruus)*.

20 BCom 1936, 79 no. 4: *Diana[– –] / [– –]*; CIL VI, 584: *Silvano sacrum / P(ublius) Aelius, Aug(usti) I(ibertus), / Philumenus*; CIL VI 30855: *Bonae Deae / Galbillae / Zmaragdus, / Caesaris Aug(usti) seruus, / uillicus / Horreorum / Galbianorum / coh(ortium) trium d(ono) d(edit) / cum Fenia Onesime*; CIL VI, 588 (ILS 1624): *Silvano / sacr(um) / Anteros Caes(aris) seruus, horearius / c<o>hortis (tertia) / d(ono) d(edit) a(nimo) I(ibens)*.

the initiative of four freedmen in Spes Augusta.<sup>21</sup> The four dedicants do not mention their function, but it is probable that they were the *magistri* of the *vicus*. They do not indicate their function since the inscription may have been placed inside the space of the *compitum*, making their function clear. We can read that our four dedicants had to ask the *praetor urbanus*, in charge of the administration of this region of Rome, for authorization to dedicate this base, altar or statue, which seems to indicate that it was an important initiative. On the other hand, it is not certain that Claudia Syntyche's base for the Great Mother also comes from the *compitum*,<sup>22</sup> because the information regarding its discovery places it further towards the Tiber. It could be related to the departing point of the procession of the Magna Mater on March 27<sup>th</sup>, which progressed by boat to the Almo river.

With the *compita*, we thus encounter cult places, public cult-places, that also expressed the intentions of the common population, and so reflected in a way the connection between the senatorial and equestrian elite and the people of Rome. We thereby learn that these small public squares at the *compita* were of great importance in the social and religious life of the neighbourhood. Obviously, neighbourhood politics were discussed here, and it is here that one tried to shine if one had some charisma, it is here that one appeared and presented oneself, and here that social prestige in the district was created. Furthermore, the location was a summary of all the important cults in the neighbourhood.

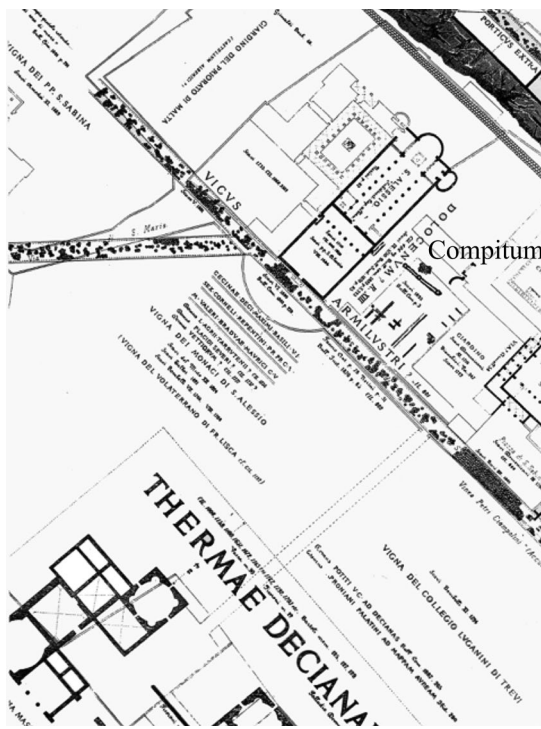
Nevertheless, the list of religious documents discovered around the via Marmorata *compitum* is not complete. Because of the division of studies, one sanctuary has always escaped the attention of those who made the maps or wrote the history of this *compitum*. In the same place, on the slope of the Aventine, three Mithraic inscriptions written in Greek and two anepigraphic stelae were brought to light.<sup>23</sup> They were addressed to Zeus Helios megalos Mithras aniketos, who, on one of the stones, was even likened to the Orphic god Phanes. The excavations also produced an anemoscope, that is to say a disc about 60 cm in diameter, which is adorned on the edge by sixteen summarily carved heads in frontal view, each carrying a name. These inscriptions, whose summary engraving also suggests a late date, represent the major winds: one recognizes Favonius, Auster, and Africus. It has been proposed that a workshop of anemoscopes, near the *emporium*, was located here, whence they would have been exported. The suggestion is attractive, but one wonders if it is not, instead, an object from the *compitum* plot.

In other words, in the heart of the neighbourhood, where locals gathered for their collective devotions, initiates of Mithras had also built a Mithraeum, the darkness of which was probably illuminated by the two six-headed lamps offered by dedicants. Like the synagogue of the Porta Capena which adjoined the grove of the Camenae, the Mithraeum was located in the cult site of the district.

21 ILS 3772: *Spei Aug(ustae) sacr(um)*. / *Cn(aeus) Geminius, Cn(aei) l(ibertus), Nymphius, / Q(uintus) Granius, Q(uinti) l(ibertus), Eutactus, / A(ulus) Cornelius, A(ulorum) l(ibertus), Epagathus, / A(ulus) Cornelius, A(uli) l(ibertus), Conditus / sua pec(unia) d(onum) d(ederunt), / permissu T(iti) Catii Catullini / Sest(imi) Secundini, pr(aetoris) urb(ani) reg(ionis) (duodecimae)*.

22 CIL VI, 492.

23 IGUR 196–198.



**Fig. 3. The compitum Vici Armilustri (Aventine)**  
(copy of part of the Aventine map, Lanciani 1893–1902, pl. 34)

If we cross the via della Marmorata and ascend the western slope of the Aventine, following the via di S. Sabina, we arrive at a *compitum* which has been discovered near the church (fig. 3). Evidence is provided by two inscriptions emanating from *magistri* of the Vicus Armilustri.<sup>24</sup> One of the inscriptions is fragmentary, while the other is addressed to Volkanus Quietus Augustus, and Stata mater, his companion: Quiet Vulcan was a regular guest of neighbourhood places of worship, for reasons that one can easily imagine. The Vicus Armilustri took its name from the neighbourhood of an old cult place, about a hundred yards to the east, called Armilustrum, which should be translated as a “parade of arms”, “circumambulation of arms”, or some similar expression. Space here does not allow a lengthy discussion, but it was a public place of worship, as one can read in the dictionary of Paulus Diaconus: “The armilustrum was for the Romans a festival on which armed men offered sacrifices and sounded trumpets while they sacrificed.”<sup>25</sup>

In addition, under S. Alessio a very well-preserved sanctuary of Jupiter Dolichenus, the Jupiter of Dolichè in Commagene, in northern Syria, with many associated gods and a large number of *cultores* also came to light.<sup>26</sup> Once again, we note that a cult place, generally classified among foreign or exotic cults, is celebrated in the midst of the ancestral Roman cults. The sanctuary of the god, like the Mithraeum in the via della Marmorata, stands next to the chapel of the Lares Augusti as well as the altars of other deities that were found around this chapel. The relations between this cult and the neighbourhood were tangible. The oldest dedication at the Dolochenum was erected by the Collegium of Hercules of the Wheat Measurers, who, on the orders of Jupiter Optimus Maximus Dolichenus, dedicated an altar to Sol and Luna.<sup>27</sup> The new

24 CIL VI, 31069: [– –] *sacrum (vacat) / mag(ister, -tri) uici Armilustri*; CIL VI 802: *Volcano Quieto Augusto / et Stata Matri Augustae / (vacat) sacrum (vacat) / P(ublius) Pinarius Thiasus et / M(arcus) Rabutius Berullus / mag(istri) uici Armilustri anni (quinti)*; AE 1838, 62 (CCID 356): *Pro salute / Imp(eratoris) T(iti) Ael(ii) Hadriani Antonini / Aug(usti) Pii p(atris p(atriciae) et M(arci) Aureli Caesaris / et liberorumq(ue) }a}eorum*.

25 Paulus Diaconus, *Excerpta ex libris Pompei Festi De significatione verborum*, p. 17 edit. Lindsay: *Armilustrum festum erat apud Romanos, quo res diuinas armati faciebant, ac, dum sacrificarent, tubis canebant*.

26 Cf. *LTUR* III, 133–134; Chini 2001.

27 Kan 1943, no. 171 (3): a. (on the upper part) : *Pro salute / Imp(eratoris) T(iti) Ael(i) Hadriani Antonini / Aug(usti) Pii, p(atris) p(atriciae), et M(arci) Aureli Caesaris / et liberorumq(ue) }a}eorum*; b. (on the base): *lusu numinis iouis / Dolochini posuer(unt) / colleg(ium) Herculis / metretarior(um) quod consistit ad salicem cura/nite Q(uinto) Domitio Philumen(o) / immunae*; c. [on the right side]: *Posit(ae) M(arco) Squill(a) / Gallikano / et Carminio Vetere co(n)s(ulibus)*.

god therefore hosted a *collegium* which officiated at the grain markets and which was probably installed in the area of the granaries at the edge of the Tiber, at the foot of the Aventine, to participate in the cult of Dolichenum. Another image represents Artemis and Iphigenia. The torch could allude to the anthropomorphic celestial light, found in Dolichenian shrines, when it would be an attribute of Jupiter Dolichenus. Given the neighbourhood, and admitting that the god and its *cultores* maintained relations of hospitality with the other gods and goddesses of the place, one can just as easily think of a dedication to the neighbour Diana Aventina. To this we may add that in S. Alessio we find a dedication of the *schola* of the *uiatores* (agents) of both the capital *triumviri* and the *quattuorviri viarum curandarum* charged with the maintenance of the roads.<sup>28</sup> The assistants of an official body of Roman magistrates had therefore also installed their seat at the *compitum* of the Armilustrum.

In any case, once again, the *compitum* is a place of meeting where a wide variety of cults are juxtaposed which do not have equal status but which acquire a social legitimacy in the district by their participation in the collective religious life. It is likely that the installation of these sanctuaries, chapels and altars near the place of worship of the Lares Augusti and the Imperial Genius was made under the appropriate authorizations of which we are only rarely informed. In the *compitum* of the via della Marmorata, it was the installation of the altar or the chapel of Spes Augusta which received public authorization, yet there are indeed other examples. This authorization, almost certainly granted by the *vicus* and by the magistrate administering the region, shows how all the religious manifestations were integrated into the life of the city.

In front of the present church of S. Bartolomeo on the Tiber island was also the *compitum* of Vicus Censorius with its chapel. Two altars dedicated to the Lares Augusti have preserved the memory of the first *ministri* of the *compitum*, who took office on August 1, 7 BC.<sup>29</sup> The only difference between the two altars is the order of the four slaves who performed the function of *ministri*. The altar(s) of the *magistri* are not preserved. Does this difference imply that there were two different periods of service in the year, which would have resulted in a different division of roles in the *collegium* of the four *ministri*, subsequently resulting in the dedication of two altars? It is indeed possible. One example is that each altar recalled the celebration of one of the obligatory rituals of the annual calendar of the *compitum*, on the one hand the anniversary of its founding, usually on August 1, the date of the fall of Alexandria in 30 BC and the end of the civil war between the future Augustus and Mark Antony, on the other hand the very feast of the Compitalia, towards the New Year. The altars would be considered as confirmations that the ritual

28 CIL VI, 1936: *In honorem Domus Aug(ustae), / T(iberius) Claudius Secundus coactor cum Ti(berio) Claudio, Ti(berio) [f(ilio), / Quir(ina) tribu], Secundo f(ilio), uiatoribus (trium)uir(orum) et (quattuor)uirum / scholam cum statutis et imaginibus ornamentisque omnibus sua impensa fecit.*

29 CIL VI, 451 (ILS 3619) 100 AD: *Laribus augustis et Genis Caesarum, / Imp(eratori) Caesari, Diui Neruae filio, Neruae Traiano Aug(usto) Germ(anico), pontifici maximo, trib(unicia) pot(estate) (quarta), co(n)s(uli) (tertium), desi(gnato) (quartum), / permissu C(aii) Cassi Interamnani Pisibani Prisci praetoris, aediculam reg(ionis) (quartae decimae) uici censori magistri anni CVI[1] (= centesimi septimi) / uetustate dilapsam impensa sua restituerunt. Idem pr(aetor) probauit. L(ucius) Cercennius L(ucii) lib(ertus) Hermes, M(arcus) Liuius (Caiae) lib(ertus) Donax, / P(ublius) Rutilius P(ublili) lib(ertus) Priscus, L(ucius) Coranius L(ucii) lib(ertus) Euaristus. / Dedicat(um) / (ante diem quartum) k(alendas) Ian(uarias) (29 December) // L(ucio) Roscio Aeliano / Ti(berio) Claudio Sacerdotae (!) co(n)s(ulibus).*

had been carried out, with the names of those who had celebrated it, in the manner of the records of the Roman magistrates and priests. If we compare these data with those of the unknown *vicus* in via della Marmorata, we could thus understand this set of epigraphic documents, which were transcribed on stone, to make them visible to all and to guarantee their survival, data noted in records of the *magistrorum compitum*, written on wax-tablets. The *compitum* would have had on the one hand the Fasti of the Roman people, that is to say a general calendar of the year and the annual lists of the consuls. These formed the sort of chronological and institutional backdrop on which the institution of the *compitum* rituals was grafted. The regional cults and their annual leaders also belonged to the Roman institutions, and this is what these general documents affirmed.

The date of the founding of the chapel and the cult could thus be inscribed on the calendar, on August 1<sup>st</sup>. Under the consular Fasti, the annual list of *magistri* could be drawn up. In this way, everything was in its place in the daily history of Rome. On the other hand, altars could attest to the celebration of annual ritual duties. The public priesthood of the Arval Brethren, for example, inscribed these attestations beside consular Fasti and a general calendar of the State, first in the form of a report on the proclamation of the mobile dates of the Dea Dia sacrifice, and on the co-optations of priests, then, from Tiberius on, as a description of all the acts performed by the aruales during the year.<sup>30</sup> Such a documentary ensemble of the *compita* is never entirely preserved; sometimes, as in via della Marmorata or via dei Serpenti, we know Fasti, while sometimes we have altars of *magistri* and / or *ministri*. In some *compita*, or at certain times, the data concerning the life of the institution were perhaps not or no longer transcribed, or they were only painted on wooden tables, a highly perishable support; perhaps they were even incised on bronze, a precious support, which was hardly more likely to survive than wood.

According to the otherwise excellent book of Ittai Gradel on imperial worship, compital worship was not a public cult.<sup>31</sup> As evidence, the author argues that the constructions and restorations of religious buildings were always financed by *magistri vici*. It would therefore be a private cult of the *collegium* of the *magistri*, which should be assimilated to other *collegia* or associations. This judgment is in my opinion wrong. Admittedly, the worship is not celebrated by a magistrate or a priest of the Roman people, and the cult buildings are financed by magistrates of the *vici*. But by being satisfied with these data, the author of this work forgets several aspects. The Compitalia were a public holiday that was also celebrated in private homes. They were a mobile festival of the public calendar, as evidenced by the annual announcement of its date by a *praetor*, presumably the urban *praetor*, shortly after the Saturnalia of December 17. This information is useful in understanding how this cult works. Let us, for example, read the formula by which the *praetor* proclaimed the date of the Compitalia: "The feasts of the crossings will take place for the Roman people, for the Quirites, on the ninth day (after this proclamation); when they have begun the day will be *nefas* (without official business)."<sup>32</sup> Thus the celebration of the Compitalia belongs to the duties of the Roman people of the Quirites, in other words, to the Roman State. Only, like a certain number

30 Scheid 1998.

31 Gradel 2002, 128–129.

32 Gellius, *Noctes atticae* 10, 24, 3: *Die noni populo Romano Quiritium Compitalia erunt, quando concepta fuerint, nefas.*



of other festivals, this one is celebrated at the *compita* by the *magistri*, elected each year by the inhabitants of the *vicus* or named by an unknown instance.

The burden of the public celebration of the Compitalia lay with the *magistri* of the *vici*, and in the private residences, the festival was celebrated by the household. Added to this is the fact that the constructions, although sometimes financed by the *magistri*, were entirely under the control of the urban *praetor*.<sup>33</sup> This is never done for a private building. The *aediculae* in question are necessarily public buildings, belonging to the State, and not only to the *collegium* of *magistri*. The fact that the *praetor* officially validates the construction works done in the *compita*, indicates that he represents in this activity the Roman people. Compital worship was thus a form of public worship in Rome, and it was through this cult, for example, that the subordinate layers of the population, the freedmen, the slaves and also the ordinary citizens, were integrated into the collective religious life of the State. And as always in this kind of society, these local dignitaries were wealthy men, or dependent on well-to-do families.

To these cults we should also add not only certain synagogues, as I have already mentioned, but also, maybe even in a later period, Christian sanctuaries. The compital chapels that we have previously mentioned are often buried under churches, or have been discovered in their surroundings. The reason for this proximity can be found in the prohibition of the public cults, the free space being given or being bought by Christian communities. Perhaps, however, they already previously gathered around these places, as the *cultores* of other religions did before the prohibition of pagan cults by the sons of Constantine and by Theodosius. An example for such a phenomenon is given by the catacomb and basilica of Generosa in the Roman suburb.<sup>34</sup> On the fifth mile towards Fiumicino, on a hill situated on the right bank of the Tiber, along the via Campana, since the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC a temple of Fors Fortuna was located, and subsequently, since the years 32–30 BC a grove of Dea Dia. Both were public, the first being frequented by the *collegia* of flower-merchants or butchers, as well as by the youth of Rome, on June 24, the other one being a cult celebrated at the highest level by public priests, the Fratres Arvales. The grove of Dea Dia had been constructed by Augustus and amplified by his followers; a last reconstruction falls in the years 210 to 224. So, two very visible public sanctuaries existed at the point where the Tiber and the roads on both sides of the river entered the plain of Rome. The sanctuary of Dea Dia was closed somewhere around 340, but it was not destroyed. The destruction probably occurred only when the Vandals or Goths took Rome, in 410 or 550. But what is very important is the fact that a pozzolano cave situated on the top of the hill, overlooking the pagan sanctuaries, in which there existed a catacomb since the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, was christianized in the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Some years later, Pope Damasus built a martyrion on the top of the hill, near the catacomb. It is evident that he used the situation and the renown of the pagan site to signify his claims in front of the bishop of Ostia, whose territory began at this precise point and in front of other competitors in Rome. There was plenty of empty space in this part of the *suburbium*. If Damasus chose this precise spot, it was only because he followed an old tradition of cult gatherings in and around certain public sanctuaries.

33 See e.g. n. 27.

34 Loretti and Martorelli 2003, 367–397, in particular 379–389.

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# NOT ONLY MITHRAS – REFLECTIONS ON SANCTUARIES OF THE HIGH AND LATE ROMAN EMPIRE ON PRIVATE GROUND, WITH PARTICULAR CONSIDERATION OF NORICUM AND PANNONIA

Peter Scherrer

## **Abstract**

*The “Oriental cults” spread already in the Roman Republic but had their climax in the 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. Whilst sanctuaries of these cults and gods in public places were frequent, in the last third of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD additionally many small sanctuaries and places of worship on private grounds began to appear, increasingly in the Severan period. This phenomenon has not until now been reflected on a general level. When looking for private sanctuaries, especially in cities and city-like settlements – in this study especially in the provinces of Noricum and Pannonia – one may detect that these sanctuaries are found more frequently in so-called insulae than in domus, in keeping with the example of Ostia. Moreover, the same is true, at least up to a certain point, for traditional Roman cults and gods as well, such as in Carnuntum for Silvanus and associated gods. Thus, the process of privatisation of cult and the generating of small groups is not limited to “Oriental cults” alone. The article introduces some well-excavated and analysed examples and discusses the question of who the performers of cult (the owners and users) in these sanctuaries were, and what reasons led them to form such groups.*

**Keywords:** Roman religion – private sanctuaries – Mithras – “Oriental cults” – Noricum – Pannonia.

## Preliminary remarks and issues

This work is concerned – primarily on the basis of a few selected examples from the Danubian provinces of Noricum and Panonnia superior and inferior – with the question of why, and under which social, economic, and conditions of ownership during and after the later 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, a significant increase in sanctuaries on private ground can be observed. In the process, the work does not go into questions of ritual, cultic, or liturgical practices or cultic-religious content, but instead views the phenomenon in general terms and not limited to originally Egyptian or “oriental salvation religions”, since analogous cases are found not only for cultic communities such as for Isis, Mithras, or Jupiter Dolichenus, but also for traditional divinities of the Roman pantheon.

Although a few Egyptian (e.g., inscriptions for Isis Capitolina in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.) and other Oriental cults<sup>1</sup> (e.g. introduction of Magna Mater as a state cult during the Second Punic War, construction of a temple after 204 BC; Bacchanalia scandal as a result of an escalated private cult in 186 BC) were able to become established in Rome already during the Republic, roughly around the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, it was only after the final third of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, however, that a significant increase can be observed in the archaeological-epigraphical evidence in almost the entire Imperium Romanum, if nonetheless in very differing regional intensity. For Mithras as well as for other “oriental” divinities, such as the diverse versions of Baal of Doliche and Heliopolis, equated with Jupiter Optimus Maximus, or also Sabazios, to mention only a couple of prominent names, an increasing number of cult sites arose not only in the centre (Rome, Ostia, etc.) but also in the provinces. In contrast to the deities of the old Roman pantheon and the imperial cult, these – with few exceptions, such as the Severan renovation of the Isis temple in Savaria<sup>2</sup> – were mostly relatively modest sites. These, with their cultic assembly rooms frequently with associated temple buildings which were rather modest in scale (in size being often only *aediculae*), clearly were differentiated from the earlier, mostly (relatively) monumental public temples, not only in terms of construction and inventory, and equipment with wall paintings and mosaics, but also in the inscriptions and statues/statuettes erected in their interiors. A good example might be the sacred precinct of IOM Heliopolitanus in the *canabae legionis* of Carnuntum, with two large cenatoria and only a modest *aedes*.<sup>3</sup> Almost without exception these sanctuaries were located in public space in the 1<sup>st</sup> and up to the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century AD; after the final third of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, however, they shifted increasingly into the private sphere, in the cities being either in large residences, or in marginal areas, accessible from the street, of so-called *insulae* (in the sense of enclosed building blocks), with or without demonstrable, direct connection to an individual “house”. Interestingly,

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- 1 In what follows, the word “cult” will be used non-specifically for ritual/religious actions arbitrarily, also for smaller or purely private groups, and not in the sense of state cults (*polis religion*).
  - 2 After the extensive scientific research and restorations of recent years, the corresponding publication has unfortunately still not appeared; cf., in preliminary fashion, Sosztarits, Balázs and Csapláros 2013.
  - 3 On this see recently Gassner, Kremer, Steigberger and Tober 2010; Gassner, Steigberger and Tober 2009–2011; Steigberger and Tober 2014. – The outlet of the sanctuary might change a lot, if the assumption of a huge podium temple – the interpretation is a result of geophysical measurements in a still unexcavated area – should prove to be correct; see for that Gassner and Steigberger 2013, esp. 14–17 with tab. X.

at the same time period similar sanctuaries become increasingly apparent in the same location for the traditional gods (e.g. very strongly in Pannonia for Silvanus and the goddesses of the ways);<sup>4</sup> there was, therefore, no general, religious-political reason, for example persecution by the authorities of the religious content and religious practices underlying these, or also only social disdain, for these sanctuaries to be privatised.<sup>5</sup> How, therefore, can the phenomenon be explained?

From the beginning, Christianity, as a persecuted religion formed a contrast to the religious cult communities of other “oriental” divinities mentioned above, despite many commonalities of content (and organisation?). Only in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century after the edict of tolerance of Gallienus did Christianity become apparent with publicly visible and accessible church buildings<sup>6</sup> – and also here obviously rather as an exception –, before its final recognition after 311; before, its focus was (generally) on private cult sites and meeting places which were unrecognisable from outside. A good example is already provided by the Acts of the Apostles, when Paul preached initially in the synagogue at Ephesus. Due to the resistance of orthodox Jews, he moved to the *schola* of Tyrannos where he was able to preach unchallenged for two years (Acts 19.8–10).<sup>7</sup> Yet after two years of missionary activities when he had achieved great success and public renown, at least according to the interpretation of the Christian authors, a public demonstration in support of Artemis Ephesia took place in the theatre on the part of the silversmiths under the leadership of a certain Demetrios (Acts 19.23–41).

Such completely private meeting places (the common translation of σχολή / *schola* as “lecture hall” or “school” is perhaps too narrow) were therefore utterly normal in the mid–1<sup>st</sup> century AD; whether they primarily served the purposes of teaching, club evenings, religious goals, or as all-purpose rooms remains obscure in individual cases. During the imperial period such meeting places were certainly found in many houses of the upper classes who were qualified for office (*honestiores*), who received and entertained *clientes* and *amici*, yet who could also commit to their political or other agendas. Such spaces also had a long tradition in the Roman club houses, where guilds of craftsmen or associations with public duties (*centonarii* etc.) celebrated feasts and cultic gatherings, yet also – and above all – discussed and stipulated their internal organisation (voting for leading individuals, distribution of financial support to needy members,

4 Kremer 2012, 330–337; Kremer 2014; on this, see further below.

5 On the general decline of the public temples in the upper Danube region already in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century: Walsh 2016.

6 Strobel 2016, esp. 2–7 and 13–14; on a church in Edessa, destroyed apparently by a flood already in 201: Ross 2001, 104–109.

7 Acts 19.8–10: 8 Εἰσελθὼν δὲ εἰς τὴν συναγωγὴν ἐπαρρησιάζετο ἐπὶ μῆνας τρεῖς διαλεγόμενος καὶ πείθων [τὰ] περὶ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ. 9 ὡς δὲ τινες ἐσκληρύνοντο καὶ ἠπείθουν κακολογοῦντες τὴν ὁδὸν ἐνώπιον τοῦ πλήθους, ἀποστάς ἀπ’ αὐτῶν ἀφώρισεν τοὺς μαθητὰς καθ’ ἡμέραν διαλεγόμενος ἐν τῇ σχολῇ Τυράννου. 10 τοῦτο δὲ ἐγένετο ἐπὶ ἔτη δύο, ὥστε πάντας τοὺς κατοικοῦντας τὴν Ἀσίαν ἀκοῦσαι τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου, Ἰουδαίους τε καὶ Ἕλληνας. – “8 Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. 9 But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. 10 This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.” – In the Acts of the Apostles, however, there is no discussion that Paul had “rented” the rooms, as Strobel 2016, 15, claims. It is much more likely that Tyrannos shared his views.

pricing agreements, purchasing strategies etc.).<sup>8</sup> In his letters, Paul frequently refers to houses with such spaces in which he had met the community.<sup>9</sup> These meeting rooms,<sup>10</sup> affiliated with a group or (better off) individuals, with their symposia during which offerings were made to the Roman house gods, are with great probability the underlying substance from which in the course of the (later) 2<sup>nd</sup> century private sanctuaries arose with communal banquets as an important liturgical event; amongst these were the Christian house chapels.<sup>11</sup> Precisely this pattern of distribution is shown in fortunate individual cases in the archaeological evidence, both in cities as well as in rural villas or *vici*. The architectonic or spatial-sociological background for the development which is investigated here is therefore generally clear; the most important questions to be clarified are those concerning, rather, the motives (the advantages) for the individuals and groups involved. It is therefore clearly significant to elucidate who the sponsors of these cult spaces and organisers of these cults were – not necessarily as named individuals or precisely defined groups, but rather as a species within imperial society.

A fine example of private assembly rooms and prestigious rooms for the urban official élites in the early and high imperial period, and to which religiously defined rooms were appended in the late 2<sup>nd</sup> and early 3<sup>rd</sup> century, is Residence 6 in the so-called Terrace House 2 in Ephesos; its owner in the Severan period is attested epigraphically as C. Furius Aptus, priest of Dionysos. Around 200 AD, a new group of rooms consisting of an apsidal assembly hall (*cenatorium?*) with water basin, an adjacent Room of Mysteries with rich stucco decoration in the vaulted ceiling and an oculus (through which a deity could descend in the sense of an epiphany?), as well as additional smaller rooms were built next to a large reception hall existing since the Trajanic period and behind an atrium, which now served as a vestibule; the new rooms were dug into and carved out of the slope (fig. 1).<sup>12</sup>

### The sponsors of the “oriental” cults

Aside from isolated episodes such as the veneration of Baal of Emesa by the Severan emperor M. Aurelius Antoninus (218–222) who originated from the priestly dynasty

8 On this, see extensively Bollmann 1998.

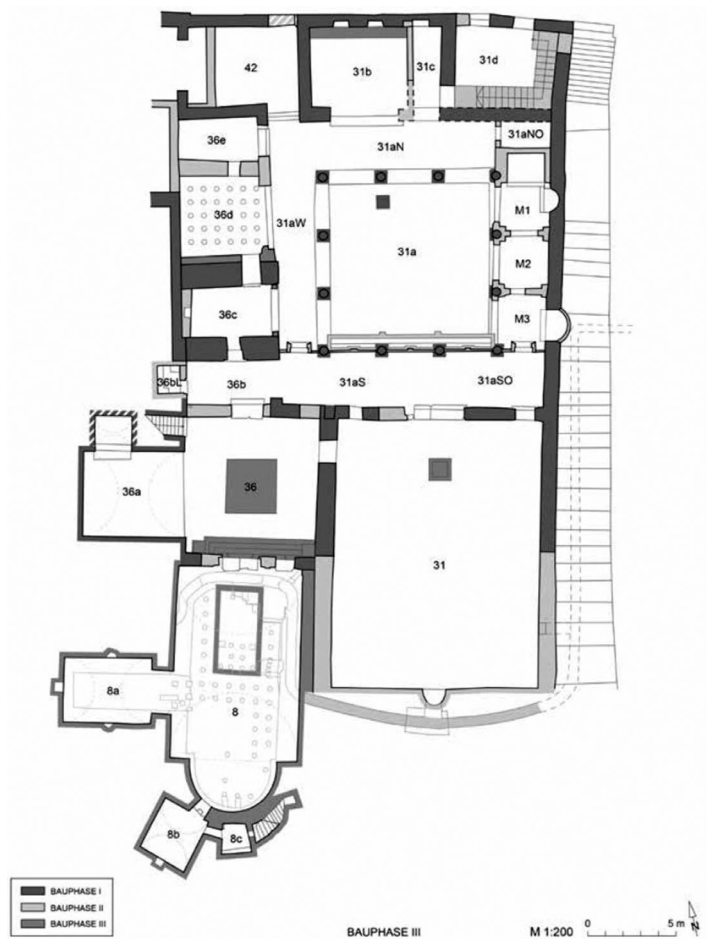
9 Röm 16; Kor 16, 19; cf. also Strobel 2016, 15.

10 These rooms – even if sacrifices to gods were made here occasionally – are by no means identical with the small shrines of the house gods (so-called *lararia*) neither in function nor in locality. For a recent careful examination of the *sacra privata* or “domestic cults” in the Roman house see Dardenay and Bricault 2023. In the present work, however, sanctuaries will be presented that are situated on private property, but obviously did not serve the domestic cult in the narrower framework of the family. On the contrary, they were either open to an extended circle of political and economic *amicitia*, even if they were located within the domus or were created in the vicinity of a domus, but were structurally separated from it or built within an insula on properties that were used by a *collegium* in the broadest sense. But, of course, it cannot be excluded that certain rituals and cultic equipment were not taken from domestic cults for these “sanctuaries on private ground” as especially the frequent use of snake-vessels may show (cf. Scherrer 2021, esp. 240).

11 On the actual, probably distinctly smaller number (in contrast to previous opinion) of house chapels and alternative meeting places, cf. Adams 2016. Extremely critical with regard to the existence of house chapels per se, Strobel 2016, 16–17.

12 Thür 2022. Residence 6 is probably the tract of the Terrace House used for public purposes, whereas Residence 7, dovetailed with it, probably constituted the associated private sphere.





**Fig. 1. Plan of Terrace House 2, Residence 6, in the Severan period (building phase 3), in Ephesos: 8) Cenatorium with apse; 8a) Room of Mysteries; 8b+c) small rooms carved into the rock; 31) large hall; 31a) peristyle courtyard; 36) atrium with conpluvium (after Thür 2022, fig. 5)**

of that city<sup>13</sup> and who later received the name Elagabalus, an excessive devotion to the “oriental” cults never really asserted itself at the Roman imperial court. When, however, Diocletian for example and his co-rulers officially dedicated an altar to Mithras on the occasion of the imperial conference at Carnuntum in 308,<sup>14</sup> one might equally expect a certain exemplary effect on the population just as, conversely, the emperors could assume that they were in line with trends. In the senatorial high aristocracy, as well, individuals had always been involved with these cults, nevertheless without having been particularly active in their organisation or dissemination; this was simply not in accordance with their principal interests, as R. Gordon has emphasised more than once.<sup>15</sup> The fact is that, in their *cursus honorum*, the highest echelons of the imperial

13 On Elagabalus see now extensively: Altmayer 2014.

14 *CIL* 4413.

15 Gordon 2011, 109–110; Gordon 2021, 126–127. On the archaeology of Mithraea in rich private houses, e.g. the senatorial family of the Olympii, in Rome, cf. now Van Haepereen 2023, 88.

population essentially strove for the established, formal offices and positions, and in the religious sector clearly aimed to be accepted into the traditional urban Roman priestly colleges (above all: *pontifices*, *fratres Arvales*; possibly individual offices as *flamen*). A similar situation probably also held true to a certain degree for the majority of the respective urban families who qualified for official duties in their cities in the entire *imperium Romanum*, whereby here old local protective divinities, in particular in the east, and the imperial cult in addition to Jupiter or the Capitoline Triad were in the foreground. In this regard, the interests of a large part of the equestrian class aiming for the Senate, and the well-to-do citizenry below them, were well covered.

As the inscriptions also reveal, the following elements of the population could be considered above all as the sponsoring class for the new cults:<sup>16</sup> on the one hand, soldiers and other individuals who were in professional imperial service over a long period (e.g. customs officials), who during their period of service, characterised by redeployment of troops or relocations and postings, were not able to maintain closer connections to any urban community and who, as a substitute, frequently formed their closest contacts with communities in their profession. On the other hand we can consider the *humiliores*, craftsmen and small tradesmen who were not qualified for public office but who were certainly endowed with ambition and financial means. Both groups, basically so different from each other, were therefore accustomed to organising their social life to a great extent by means of *collegia*, which were frequently officially registered and also occasionally integrated into the social life of the city; these might include professional incorporations, burial clubs, or foreign societies formed on the basis of origin from a province or city. In addition, in the financial and provincial administration below the procuratorial level it was primarily freedmen who were locally active leaders, and were thereby supported by state slaves in the lower ranks. These had an essential similarity with the *humiliores* and *peregrini*, to whom the auxiliary soldiers down to the *missio honesta* also belonged, namely, that even if they had access to a certain wealth, they could not take up any priestly functions in the traditional Roman cults. Indeed, Augustus had already created an outlet for a possible engagement in the imperial cult with the *vicimagistri* and *Augustales*; yet the respective positions were strictly limited and were locally staffed. Now, with the empire-wide emergence of the new cults from the Orient, the possibility existed for practically everyone to become engaged as a functionary in the non-state sector, from the private house cult up to more or less official societies. Typical in this regard are the numerous references to the vague, that is to say not legally protected priestly term *sacerdos* in the relevant inscriptions, which could be combined with the term *pater* in the Mithraic communities.<sup>17</sup> As the two membership lists from Virunum indicate,<sup>18</sup> which will be discussed further, the title of *pater* was by no means limited to one person per group and could also be bestowed on relatively new members; from this it has been concluded that these leading individuals apparently were already hierarchically high-ranked in other Mithras communities before they were appointed or voted to the position of *pater* in

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16 On this comprehensively Claus 1992.

17 On this cf. Mithoff 1992.

18 See below pp. 10-13.

another group.<sup>19</sup> To this must be objected, however, that the position of *pater (familias)* in the Roman social system was inherited, for which the prerequisites were not a long, successful series of activities and a slow advancement, but – in particular with communities in private sanctuaries – the role of the *pater* was probably regularly taken up by the landowner or temple owner, or at least it could be.

The average composition of the cult collegia, equally known from lists of members or which can be extrapolated from other epigraphic material as votive inscriptions, for example for Mithras<sup>20</sup> or Jupiter Dolichenus,<sup>21</sup> shows with few exceptions – when occasionally *patroni* are definitely referred to – that the groups mentioned above are consistently *cultores*. A preliminary overview, which needs to be sharpened, of the dedicatory inscriptions both for Mithras and for Dolichenus in Noricum reveals many similarities, and apparently is in contradistinction to other provinces such as the two Germanias and the two Pannonias. The main regions of dissemination were the large cities and only second the frequently conjured limes zones; soldiers, officials, freedmen, and slaves are rather the exception,<sup>22</sup> the majority of sponsors instead being private individuals with secure or probable citizenship (*tria nomina*; nevertheless, the *praenomen* is often absent, in particular in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century).<sup>23</sup>

It is likely that in such more or less private associations, even when traditional divinities such as Vulcan or Hercules are addressed as the recipient of cult, the respective rituals and sacrifices were conducted on private ground by persons who were excluded from public priestly duties, in a type of extended status as *pater familias*.

The cult of Mithras, exclusively focussed on men but not provided with limitations based on social class, certainly was very attractive for soldiers and others who were excluded from a legal marriage, especially slaves; but also the imperial freedmen who were often active relatively briefly in a *statio* could not easily involve a family in their religious activities. The role of the military and of the customs administration in the dissemination of the cult has already been frequently emphasised.<sup>24</sup> But perhaps what was at stake here was not so much the qualities of Mithras as victor or covenanted deity, qualities which were also implicit in Baal or Dolichenus, equated or merged with Jupiter; but instead loyalty and communal spirit, ignoring the distractions arising from the female sex and possible sources of strife, as has been demanded and promoted at

19 Gordon 1996, 425–426.

20 On the two membership lists from Virunum, see below pp. 10–13.

21 Here, for example from Mauer near Amstetten (formerly: Mauer an der Url), a fine cross-section exists, with the numerous dedicatory inscriptions in the treasure find and the entire metal inventory of the sanctuary (cf. Noll 1958). – The special composition of this treasure with a good deal of agrarian tools, three pairs of scales, kitchen ware and household stuff, still awaits a convincing explanation. Probably it was not hidden by the temple warden or priest, but by Germanic plunderers, who had sacked the whole village and could not pick it up anymore afterwards (cf. Scherrer 2008, 142–44).

22 This is not true for Ostia, where freedmen are much more dominant in the Mithraic evidence than elsewhere; see Gordon 2011, 109. But this may well root in the whole social structure of the port-city of Rome, quite different to average cities in the empire, compare Ciambelli 2020.

23 Naturally, for Dolichenus, a high proportion of women of 20–30% is to be borne in mind; for Mithras, in contrast, the special position of the customs personnel, strongly represented here, with imperial *liberti* and *servi*.

24 On the discussion about the social position of followers of Mithras, cf. already Gordon 1994.

all times in armies and paramilitary organisations. In this respect the leadership of the troops will have viewed the veneration of Mithras as an instrument of discipline and of the strengthening of the soldierly community. The chronological component perhaps plays a greater role than has been previously assumed. From the late Republic up to the end of the Julio-Claudian dynasty the legions were mainly recruited from (Upper) Italy and southern France, that is, the formerly Celtic, population-heavy provinces of Gallia Cisalpina and Gallia Narbonensis. With the civil war of the year of the four emperors and the Jewish insurrection, the troops suffered great losses due to battles as well as to the strain of sudden relocations and additional trenchwork; therefore recruiting constantly took place in the locations of their garrisons and areas through which they marched in order to maintain the strength of troop numbers.<sup>25</sup> In contrast to the opinion of many Mithras scholars, it was probably not so decisive that by these means soldiers came into contact in the east with the Mithras cult; instead, it was important that the soldiers be quickly and intensively integrated into the military community of the *commilitones*, and that *virtus* (fighting in union) should be maintained or increased, in spite of the many new recruits. It seems to be significant, in contrast, that the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus quantitatively increased first in the Severan period, when the active soldiers were allowed to have families, and thereby women (and families) began to play a role in the religious life of the military recruits.

### **Possible reasons for the location of sanctuaries on private grounds**

The question therefore still remains open as to why precisely after the later second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and especially in the Severan period, sanctuaries for Mithras and other “oriental” cults appear on private ground in relatively large numbers. In the German provinces, where there are correspondingly extensive investigations, this phenomenon is well demonstrable for large rural villas,<sup>26</sup> otherwise it is primarily encountered in the cities. The search for the reasons is complicated by the only approximate dating possibilities for the emergence of these sanctuaries. For instance, in Rome and Ostia Mithraea are found after the later 2<sup>nd</sup> century both in a number of *domus* (cf. for example the Mitreo di Fructosus in the cellar under the *oecus*, north of the peristyle courtyard) as well as, in larger numbers, in *insulae*, where probably people of more modest social standing, perhaps organised groups of craftsmen or merchants, had their residential and working spaces.<sup>27</sup> The same also holds true, if not to such a conspicuous extent, for many provincial cities. The first question that arises in this regard is whether, in the choice between a *domus* with one owner and an *insula* with the probable amalgamation of a group, an actual difference exists. In at least individual cases it may even be true that an entire *insula* belonged to one person (or a family), and that the owner, with the building of the sanctuary, likewise played a leading role in the cult community as *sacerdos* or *pater*. Then we might be dealing with a relatively

25 A particularly well studied example of this is the *legio XV Apollinaris*, which was relocated from Carnuntum to the east in 62/63 and returned to Carnuntum again in 73; cf. Mosser 2003.

26 Cf. the corresponding lists in Spickermann 2008 and 2014; cf. also Spickermann 2007, 155–156.

27 Van Haepere 2023, esp. 85–91. – On the Mithraea in Ostia more specifically, still fundamental is Becatti 1954.

wealthy principal who might have erected a sanctuary for his *familia* including *amici* and *clientes* in the sense of Roman munificencia, yet only for a selected group, not the entire civic community; this would then be a site for communal banquets as well as cultic and ritual activities which helped to strongly establish identity.<sup>28</sup> Such a scenario would above all explain the appearance of private sanctuaries in villas, with the choice of divinity being rather of secondary importance. The *pater familias* or *patronus* would then have fulfilled his duty of care with regard to the group that was dependent on him.<sup>29</sup>

Another reason might be that, as the archaeological evidence also reveals, the economic situation of the cities clearly worsened after 165 AD, and new temples (and other public buildings) only arose by way of exception; such constructions were, however, still possible, as the large and elaborate Iseum in Savaria shows. Wealthy sponsors or financially strong cities constituted an exception after this period; during the period of Marcus Aurelius and the subsequent era, many cities were under the supervision of curators (also called logistes in the Greek east). With the end of the war against the Parthians, although victorious, the returning legions and the sutlers and other travellers with them spread the so-called Antonine Plague throughout the entire empire after ca. 165.<sup>30</sup> Only a few years later, probably in spring of 171, the Marcomanni and other peoples raided the empire from the north, reaching as far as Upper Italy and causing a ten-year war with enormous loss of life. It is likely that entire cities and stretches of land were depopulated by periodic abduction of the population; the army also had to endure huge losses, as the reports of the miracle of lightning and rain (probably in 174) reveal. In addition, during the final three decades of the century, a number of volcanic eruptions in New Zealand and Latin America would have caused crop failures and deterioration of the climate, leading in the Danubian provinces to an increased construction of heating installations.<sup>31</sup> One may assume that with all these factors – plague, war, and (unexplainable) natural catastrophes – not only was public building activity strongly affected and many large fortunes withered away, but also – as the increasing nuisance of robbers (*latrones*) shows – the middle classes were also impoverished. With this situation, on the one hand the responsibility of the leading urban classes with regard to the *plebs urbana* increased, while on the other hand so did their burden of raising taxes and duties, as well as the burden of organising the necessary workforce and logistics. Additional natural consequences would be an increased closing of ranks within trusted groups (families, professional associations etc.) and the concomitant xenophobic behaviours. Precisely the inexplicability of the drastic climate deterioration, caused by volcanoes on unknown continents and islands, as well as the

28 On the role of such financially strong leaders of cult communities and the resulting dependence, and implicit weakness, of the group: Gordon 2021, 120–127.

29 Gordon 2011, 108, doubts or rather relativizes the importance of *patron-client*-relations at least for Mithraic communities: “The informal system of patronage thus conflicted with the overt value system. Because in Mithraism the ambition of escaping from the world depended more upon commitment to the god and his commands than upon the whim of the Father ...”. – But see for their importance in all aspects of life: Ciambelli 2020.

30 The plague seems to have lasted for about 30 years, and half a century later the scenario was repeated with the Cyprianic Plague (after 249); on this, see Harper 2015.

31 On this phenomenon in overview: Harper 2017, 65–159; McCormick 2012; Vettters and Zabehtlicky 2003.

related harvest failures and the additional costs for heating, and earthquakes which occurred at least regionally, certainly promoted an orientation towards religions of salvation which at least partly promised more or less a better existence in a “life after death”. Such liturgies and communal banquets could also have taken place, as before, in or near sacred buildings on public ground. Yet one reason why these activities were shifted into the private sphere might have been the possibility of keeping track of the groups that arose in this context. In this manner, the necessary resources could be relatively accurately planned and would benefit only the listed members of a cultic community, without arousing public umbrage due to the inconspicuous exclusion of others. But we have to admit that small private sanctuaries were not limited to “oriental” gods and cults, which flourished in these times, but they could be devoted to any cult or god of the Roman pantheon.

After the experience of the global Covid-19 pandemic, however, the question also arises whether the observed isolation of small groups within a local population (and even more the case with regard to foreigners) might have had its strongest motivation in the fear of contagion. According to modern estimates, in the several Roman provinces approximately one third of the population died of *lues* in the half century until the abatement of the plague. This justified fear of plague, and the frequent deaths it caused, may in fact have been an important reason why social meetings took place in spaces that were easily controlled. For even if a theology was present, one which is not completely comprehensible to us in detail yet which offered the prospect of a permanent other life in the Mithras cult or other “oriental” salvation religions, for Mithras – with his essential openness also regarding the veneration of other divinities – there is no evidence of a desire for an early death and the associated early arrival into paradise or closeness to god – as was expressed by the numerous martyrdoms in Christianity, which strongly prohibited belonging to other religions.

A particularly affecting example for the explanation of this new pattern of behaviour might be the inscription of a Mithras Collegium<sup>32</sup> discovered approximately 30 years ago on the outskirts of Virunum and published in exemplary fashion by G. Piccottini (so-called Album 1, fig. 2):<sup>33</sup>

Heading:

*D(eo) I(nvicto) M(ithrae) pro salute Imp(eratoris) [[[Commodi]]] Aug(usti) Pii / qui templum vii(!) conlapsum impendio suo restituerunt / et mortalitat(is) causa convenerunt / Marullo et Aeliano co(n)s(ulibus) VI K(alendas) Iulias // Iulius Secundinus pat(er) //*

In 4 columns:

*(obitus) Trebius Zoticus pat(er) / Rufius Severinus / Iulius Optatus / Septimius Mercator / Septimius Marcus / Tertinius Tertinus / Mamilius Dionysius / Sabinus Hermaiscus / I(obitus) Sentius Hermes / Priscius Oppidanus / Varius Fortis / Titius Ruso / Annus Syrillio / Lydacius Charito / Baienius Axio / I(obitus) Rufius Fuscus / Marius Achilleus / Claud(ius) Quintilianus / Iulius Carpus / Publilius Moderatus / Mamil(ius)*

32 Piccottini 1994; Gordon 1996; Beck 1998.

33 AE 1994, 1334 = AE 1996, 1189 = AE 1998, 1016.

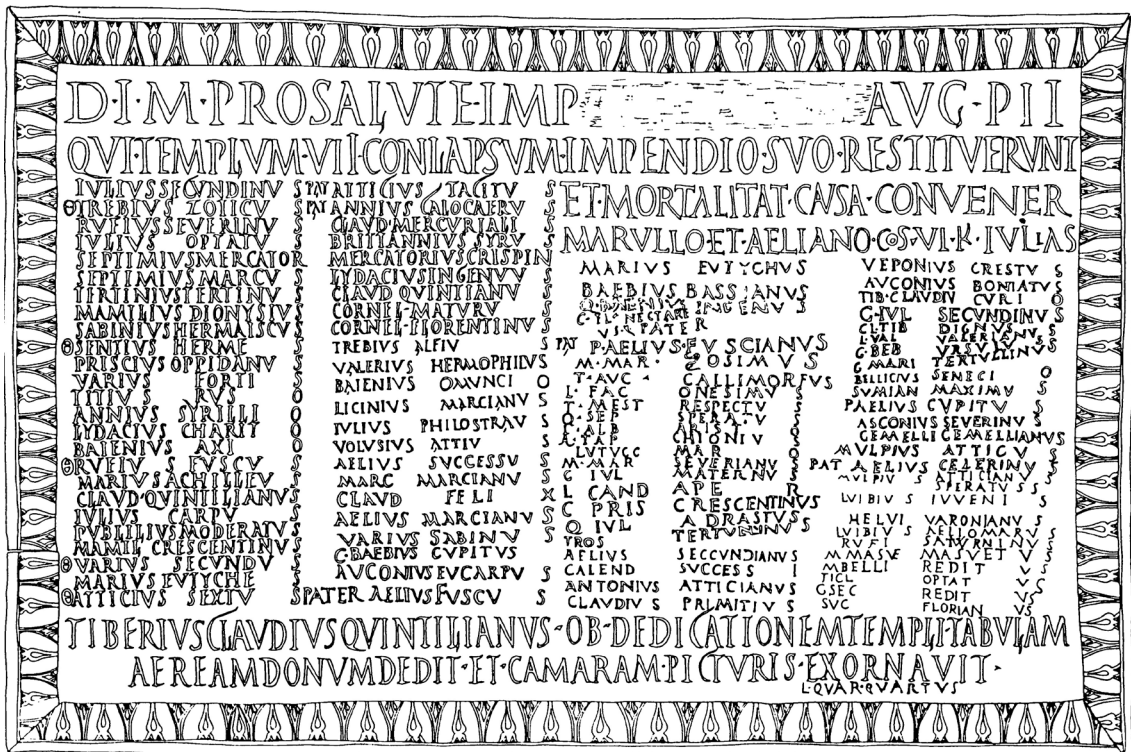


Fig. 2. Bronze plaque of a Mithras Collegium from Virunum (© Landesmuseum Kärnten)

Crescentinus / I(obitus) Varius Secundus / Marius Eutyches / I(obitus) Atticius Sextus pater //

Atticius Tacitus / Annius Calocaerus / Claud(ius) Mercurialis / Britannius Syrus / Mercatorius Crispin(us) / Lydacius Ingenuus / Claud(ius) Quintianus / Cornel(ius) Maturus / Cornel(ius) Florentinus / Trebius Alfius pat(er) / Valerius Hermophilus / Baienius (H)omuncio / Licinius Marcianus / Iulius Philostra(t)us / Volusius Attius / Aelius Successus / Marc(ius) Marcianus / Claud(ius) Felix / Aelius Marcianus / Varius Sabinus / C(aius) Baebius Cupitus / Auconius Eucarpus / Aelius Fuscus //

Marius Eutyclus / Baebius Bassianus / Q(uintus) Baenius Ingenu(u)s / C(aius) Fl(avius) Nectare/us pater / P(ublius) Aelius Fuscianus / M(arcus) Mar(ius) Zosimus / T(itus) Auc(onius) Callimorfus / L(ucius) Fac() Onesimus / T(itus) Mest(rius) Respectus / Q(uintus) Sep(timius) Speratus / L(ucius) Alb(ius) Aristo / A(ulus) Tap(petius) Chionius / Lutucc(ius) Maro / M(arcus) Mar(ius) Severianus pat(er) / C(aius) Iul(ius) Maternus / L(ucius) Cand(idius) Aper / C(aius) Pris(cius) Crescentinus / Q(uintus) Iul(ius) Adrastus / Tros(ius) Tertullinus / Aelius Seccundianus(!) / Calend(inus) Successi / Antonius Atticianus / Claudius Primiti(v)us //

Veponius C(h)restus / Auconius Boniatas / Tib(erius) Claudiu(s) Curio / C(aius) Iul(ius) Secundinus / Cl(audius) Tib(erius) Dignus / L(ucius) Val(erius) Valerianus / C(aius) B(a)ebius Ursulus / C(aius) Mariu(s) Tertullinus / Bellicius Senecio / Sum(m)ian(ius) Maximus / P(ublius) Aelius Cupitus / Asconius Severinus / Gemelli(us) Gemellianus / M(arcus) Ulp(ius) Atticus / Aelius Celerinus / M(arcus) Ulp(ius) Atticianus /

*Speratus s(ervus) / L(ucius) Vibius Iuvenis / Helvi(us) Var(r)onianus / L(ucius) Vibius Aeliomarus / Rufi(us) Saturninus / M(arcus) Ma(n)suet(ius) Ma(n)suetus / M(arcus) Belli(cius) Reditus / Ti(berius) Cl(audius) Optatus / C(aius) Sec(undius) Reditus / Suc(cessius) Florianus / L(ucius) Quar(tinius) Quartus //*

Dedication below:

*Tiberius Claudius Quintilianus ob dedicationem templi tabulam / aeream donum dedit et camaram picturis exornavit.*

According to this text, on 26 June 184 the 30 members who were still living met on the occasion of the inauguration of a Mithras sanctuary that had been destroyed by natural forces (*vii conlapsum*) and re-erected from the year 183 onwards (the imperial title refers to a date after 10 January 183). At the same time, they met to carry out a memorial liturgy for the five deceased *cultores*, who had probably died of the plague and who had contributed financially to the construction.<sup>34</sup> This reveals the solidarity of this community as well as the intimate closeness amongst its members. On the lower border of the *tabula* in two lines a certain Ti. Claudius Quintilianus is particularly emphasised; on the occasion of the *dedicatio templi* he caused the vaulted ceiling in the actual cult room (*camara*) to be decorated with paintings and set up the plaque. In the following years, until at least 198 (at the outside until 209), an additional 64 members (each year shows between one and eight new accessions) were added to the list, so that the group could have consisted of a maximum of 94 individuals. Additional deaths as well as departures due to moving, etc., also need to be subtracted for this relatively long time period, so that seen realistically the group actually grew relatively modestly.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, G. Piccottini concluded, from a membership list extensively reconstructed by him (datable between 198 and 209), that the group divided (in his opinion, in 202) and at least 20 members, whose names are listed in the first Album and all of whom are also listed in the new Album, were transferred to a new Mithras community.<sup>36</sup> Piccottini's point of departure was that the new Album of the Severan period reported about the founding of a new temple:<sup>37</sup> *[D(eo) I(nvicto) M(ithrae) pro sal(ute) Imp(eratorum) Caess(arum) L(uci) Septimi] / [Severi et M(arci) Aur(eli) Antonijni Augg(ustorum) / [Inn(ostorum) [[et P(ubli) Septimii [Getae] nob(ilissimi) Caes(aris)]]] / [templum a] solo i<m=N>pe[ndio] suo exstruxer(unt) // [Val(erius)] Hermofilus / [Li]cin(ius) Marcianus / Iul(ius) Fylostrat(us) / Mar(cius) Marcianus / Ael(ius) Marcianus / Baeb(ius) Cupitus / [3]l(ius) Eucharpus / Ael(ius) Fuscus / Mar(ius) Euty[chus] / [M(arcus)] Mar(ius) [Zosim(us)] / [ // [Q(uintus) Sept(imius)] Speratus / L(ucius) Al[bius] Aristio / A(ulus) Tap[et(ius) Chionius / L(ucius) Lut[u]cius Maron / M(arcus) M[arius] Sever[ianus] / C(aius) Iul(ius) Maternus] / [ // C(aius) Marius Tertul(l)inus / Bell(icius) Senecio / S(extus) Summ(ianus) Maximus / Ael(ius) Cupitu[s] / [...*

Based on the missing areas, it can be assumed that a maximum of only half of those originally named is preserved, so that the group in Album 2 must have originally

34 On the celebration for the dead and the significance of the date in the cult of Mithras, cf. Beck 1996.

35 Gordon 1996, 425.

36 Piccottini 1994, esp. 48; see also Dolenz 2016, 133 n. 432; Walsh 2016.

37 *CIL* III, 4816; *AE* 1994, 1335.



comprised about 40 or 50 persons. The new temple and the new group thereby stated that a certain group size may not be exceeded, since the architectural and economic resources would not permit a larger group, and the confidentiality amongst the members would only be assured in groups of up to about 80 members. Yet this contradicts above all what we otherwise know about ancient cults and their known rituals, which often included an entire urban population. This is also contradicted by the contemporaneous rise of Christianity and its communities, where at least in theory an *episcopus* attempted to unify the entire Christian population of a city under his leadership, and *caritas* concerned not only the members of a church community but all Christians, and also the entire extended population.

Therefore, I would like to propose the hypothesis here that this later Album of an actual inventory of the 40 or 50 (still) living members at this point in time concerns one and the same community that was also listed in Album 1 in 183 AD and which continued for about 20 years up until the drawing up of Album 2. The new temple must not necessarily signify a new Mithras community; the old one might have been irreparably damaged – on whatever grounds – and replaced by the one mentioned here; alternatively, perhaps it had simply become too small for the group of now 40 or 50 members.<sup>38</sup> A third possibility is that we are dealing with a building in private ownership and that the previous building ground or construction was no longer available for the community (sale, lack of interest on the part of the owner, etc.). If, in contrast, the community had been subdivided, one would therefore expect a stark increase in the foundation, yet not a single new name appears.

### **On the property situation and the financing of private sanctuaries**

Furthermore, the outsourcing of a daughter community cannot really be explained with economic arguments; the construction of a new sanctuary used up substantially more financial means than an expansion. Additionally it can be assumed that, independent of whether a financially powerful community member, as the leading individual, made available essential resources for the operation of the cult – as assumed above in the theoretical case – or whether the community in its entirety shared the costs, if the existing means were exceeded at any time, a collection could be made or regular “membership fees” could be collected in order to ensure an adequate financial basis for the costs of the operation and of cult banquets. Album 1 from Virunum indeed refers expressly to the common funding, in the year 183, by the 35 members who vowed the temple, with the surviving 30 celebrating the dedication and commemorating the five deceased on 26 June 184.

In fact, scholars generally assume that such groups regularly maintained themselves by means of communally raised funds.<sup>39</sup> With such group financing, the existence of private sanctuaries in insulae may also be explained: the sanctuary then stood, for example, on the club’s grounds and was financed by the community coffers.

38 See for example the enlargement of the Mithraeum of Strasbourg-Königshoffen in 225, which was about twice the size of its forerunner; cf. Vermaseren 1960, 1335; see also Spickerman 2007, 155.

39 Gordon 2021, 119, 124–125, 127.

It is not insignificant for our theme if the society (*collegium*) was the owner or only the leaseholder of the property, or whether at most a mere *precarium* existed. The property circumstances in provincial cities belong in general to the great unknowns of Roman antiquity. In particular, it is seldom clear if, in the case of an identifiable *domus*, the adjacent undeveloped areas (garden, commercial courtyards) or areas with a variety of structures (guest houses, lodgings for workers, depots and workshops, salesrooms, etc.) were independent from a *domus* or whether they constituted a unified entity of ownership and function with it. In this respect, the simple appearance of a sanctuary within a *domus* or on other areas of an *insula* reveals little about the property situation; at the most, one could conclude that a more or less private circle (close or extended family group, possibly with the inclusion of *clientes* or of a *collegium*) were its users. In Pannonia, moreover, a number of inscriptions and archaeological finds are present that shed light on some of the possibilities of ownership addressed here.

In the *vicus Vindonianus* (today: Budakeszi) not far from Aquincum, eight *possesores*, listed by name (probably house- or landowners) set up (*ex voto posuerunt*) on 11 October 229 an altar (*aram*) in honour of the Capitoline Triad and all other gods and goddesses.<sup>40</sup> The first person named, *M(arcus) Aur(elius) Aepictetianus dec(urio) col(oniae) Aq(uincensium) sacerdotalis*, performed the dedication of the altar; the second one named, *Aur(elius) Vettianus eq(ues) R(omanus)*, made available with express permission (*permissu eiusdem*) a piece of land on his property as a *precarium* for the petitioning inhabitants (*petentibus vicanis*) of the village of Vindonianus. Involved in the action were a *decurio coloniae Aquincensium* and *sacerdos* in the person of Aurelius Aepictetianus – probably rather a *sacerdos arae provinciae* than a priest of a small cult association –, an *equus Romanus*, another *decurio* – more likely an officer of an *ala* than a municipal councillor from Aquincum – and a veteran; the society was therefore of high status and probably prosperous in the region of the village. As patrons of the village inhabitants, with this *precarium* they enabled them to establish a sanctuary on the property of the knight and made the gift of an altar *in (h)onorem vic[an(orum)] vici Vindoniani*. Typical here is the fact that the élite male property owners dedicated the altar to the Capitoline Triad, and not any newly popular deities, yet they did include all the other gods in the votive formula. Based on his 3<sup>rd</sup> century tomb inscription from Budakeszi, a certain P. Aelius Victorinus may also have discharged the functions of priest (*sacerdotalis*) and *patronus* (of a cult association?), in this *vicus* in the vicinity of Aquincum (somewhat earlier).<sup>41</sup> Much more explicit is a dedication to Sol Invictus (Mithras) from the *vicus* near the cavalry camp of Campona (Nagytétény; ca. 20 km south of Aquincum) from the year 213, which was sponsored by a Claudius Neronianus *in*

40 TitAq II 926: *[l(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo)] / lunoni [Re]g(inae) Min[er]vae / [c]eteris dis deabus[q(ue)] / omnibus possessor(e)s vic[i] Vindoniani / ex voto posuerunt q[u]or(um) nom(i)na / sunt / Aur(elius) Aepictetian(us) sac(erdos) / Aur(elius) Vettianus eq(ues) R(omanus) / Au[r](elius) Victorinus de[c](urio) / Aur(elius) [3]dian[3] / [3]R[3]us ve(teranus) / Aur(elius) Trop(h)imus C[3] / [U]lp(ius) Candidianu[s] / [A]ur(elius) Maximu[s] 3 / Ant(oni)us Quirin[us] 3 / Ill Id(us) O[ct](obres) Imp(eratore) d(omino) n(o)stro Ale[xan]dro Severo Aug(usto) Ill et] / Ca[s]si[o] Dione Il co(n)s(ulibus) // item M(arcus) Aur(elius) / Aepictetianus / dec(urio) col(oniae) Aq(uincensium) / sacerdotalis / aram donavi(t) / in (h)onorem vic[an(orum)] / vici Vindoniani // quae ara con/secrata est / [i]n possessione / Aureli Vetti/ani eq(uitis) R(omani) per/misso eius/dem precario / petentibus / vicanis Vindo/niani.*

41 TitAq IV, 1708: *D(is) M(anibus) // P(ublius) Ael(ius) Auscul/tus P(ublius) Ael(ius) Victor / P(ublio) Ael(io) Victorino / sacerdotal(i) / patrono / pientissimo / posuerun(t).*

*templo / Mucapor/is sacerdotis*.<sup>42</sup> Here, with *Mucapor sacerdos*, the property owner in whose legal possession the sanctuary was located is probably addressed. He was so interested in the cult and its associated social contacts that he also functioned as the religious principal of the cult community.

We may now direct our attention to some archaeologically investigated sanctuaries. A special case is represented by the Mithraeum in the house of the *tribunus laticlavus* in the *castra* of the *legio II adiutrix* in Aquincum; this was apparently erected in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century and continued in use until the great devastation of the camp in the 260s (268?).<sup>43</sup> L. Kocsis had already connected the building and the dedication of the sanctuary with the period of service of the tribune L. Cassius Pius Marcellinus in 202, due to the dedicatory inscription below the painted cult image.<sup>44</sup> On the one hand, the service building of the deputy legionary commander was naturally public property, yet on the other hand during the period of his presence it was also his residence with a guaranteed private sphere. Therefore, when he invited guests, this could be viewed both as official as well as private; here – as still today – a certain grey area existed. In addition, this Mithraeum represents, so to speak, the glaring exception to the predominant scholarly opinion that the senatorial aristocracy were not particularly interested in Mithras. Mithras must in any event have been important enough for the senatorial tribune to set up the space for the cult during his relatively brief period of office and to provide it with high-quality wall paintings. The guests and cult companions returned the favour for one of his successors, L. Aurelius Gallus, with a Mithras altar for his well-being,<sup>45</sup> as we also know from Furius Aptus in Ephesos and from many other private sanctuaries, as thanks for the host and patron. In this manner the *cultores* displayed their respect, in a way typical for Roman client culture, towards the hosts who not only bore the costs for the building, maintenance, and/or furnishings, but probably also the communal banquets. Accordingly, the cult space was also used, or at least respected, by the successors for a number of decades.

The cult location, with a total of about 10 m in length, was small and particularly narrow: the usual podium for reclining for banquets existed only on one side, thereby offering space only for nine individuals, the usual group for private invitations in the evening. In terms of size, therefore, this Mithraeum was similar to the Mysteries Room of Furius Aptus in Ephesos, introduced here at the beginning (fig. 1). It seems, therefore, that the previously prevalent approach of researchers to such facilities, under the aspect of each relevant cult, is insufficient, and a new perspective needs to be added, from the social position and the associated responsibilities and expectations of the *pater familias*. What is perhaps important is not the affiliation to a particular cult (association), which a *pater familias* could select for himself (relatively) freely as long as a certain element of acceptance for it existed in his clientele; but instead, the

42 Vermaseren 1960, 1808: *Imp(eratore) [Ant]on[in]o II / co(n)s(ule) // Deo Soli / Invicto / Cl(audius) N(e)ronia/nus v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito) / in templo / Mucapor/is sac(erdotis)*.

43 Kocsis 1989; see also Kocsis 1991; Zsidi 2018, 21–28.

44 Kocsis 1990; *TitAq* I, 254: *D(eo) S(oli) I(nvicto) M(ithrae) / L(ucius) C(assius?) Pius Marcellinus*.

45 *TitAq* I, 251: *Invicto // Mithrae / pro sal(ute) L(uci) / Aur(eli) Galli / trib(uni) laticl(avi) // Aurelius Ali/phus posuit*.

fundamental interests, as a member of the local élite class, apparently determined the amenities of such private cult spaces within a *domus* (and probably similarly for the large villa buildings which, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, increasingly mutated into the primary residence).<sup>46</sup> In this manner the possibility was created to re-evaluate and upgrade the previously predominantly profane “symposium” – which indeed had been established with rites such as libations amongst a group of friends and guests – into a religious act, thereby strengthening the obligations amongst those invited by yet another component. One can assume that the relatively élite officers’ groups, consisting of the legionary commander, the six tribunes, as well as the *primuspilus* and the *praefectus castrorum* regularly met for dinner; with whom else should they have spent the long evenings in the garrison? Yet whoever not only eats and drinks together but also embeds this in the framework of a liturgical activity, has the deity as a witness of their *amicitia*. It is possible to surmise here the background of the Mithras dedication at the imperial conference in Carnuntum on 11 November 308. The hope may very well have existed that the agreements made by the rival emperors would be adhered to when they were struck in the context of a communal banquet with a liturgical background. Against the backdrop of the legionary camp of Aquincum and additional, less well studied garrisons<sup>47</sup>, the obviously strong presence of Mithras in the camps also played a role. In addition to the Mithraeum in the house of the *tribunus laticlavius*, further small-scale, often perhaps only provisionally adapted Mithraea (in the soldiers’ quarters?) can be reckoned with, due to the extensive scattering of Mithras memorials in the camp of the *legio II adiutrix* and the *canabae legionis*. The widespread, small-scale reliefs of the killing of the bull, interpreted by R. Gordon as evidence of private devotion to Mithras, would fit well with this scenario; their display in a wall niche of the troops’ quarters or of a small residence in the *canabae* or urban peripheral areas could (temporarily?) transform a room into a Mithraeum without great effort.<sup>48</sup>

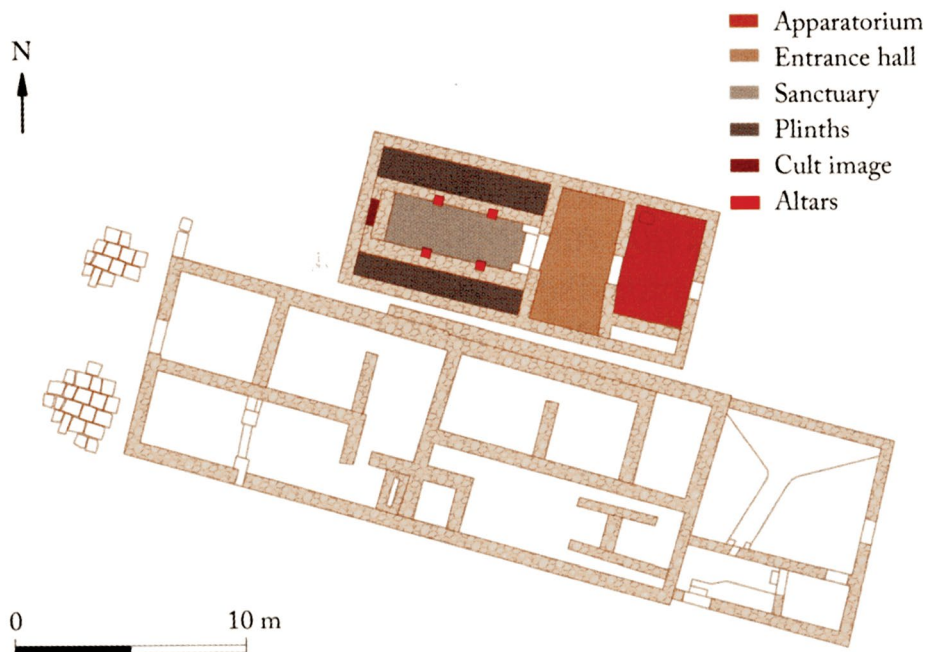
### Sanctuaries in insulae in Aquincum and Carnuntum

In the excavated area inside the *colonia Aquincensium*, three small Mithraea alone are structurally attested; their distance from each other is between approximately 150 and 250 m; two additional Mithraea, deduced by circumstantial evidence, somewhat to the east and west complete the picture, while in total one must reckon with a dense distribution of Mithraea in the entire region of the town, the *canabae* and even in the legionary camp (fig. 3). The intra-urban Mithraea are similar in their size to the one in the legionary camp; the actual cult rooms (with *camara*) possess lengths of 8 to 10 m, so that even if we have to calculate a smaller space per person, the rooms offer the maximum possibility for 20 to 30 *cultores* to participate at a time. Thereby we are again

46 A solid overview of the German provinces, well studied in this regard, is offered by Spickermann 2008 and 2014.

47 Such a Mithraeum, equally strongly diverging from the so-called normal type, was found in the vicus of the fort of Lentia (Linz) in Noricum, where a *veteranus* of an unnamed unit left behind a dedicatory altar (Clauss 1992, 133; AE 1956, 82); on this, see now Jochade-Endl 2011, esp. 25–29.

48 Gordon 2021, 126. For a broad discussion of a new finding from the *canabae legionis* in Aquincum see Kirchhof 2022.



**Fig. 3. Location of the so-called Mithraeum of M. Antonius Victorinus in the colonia Aquincum (after Zsidi 2018, 32 fig. 32)**

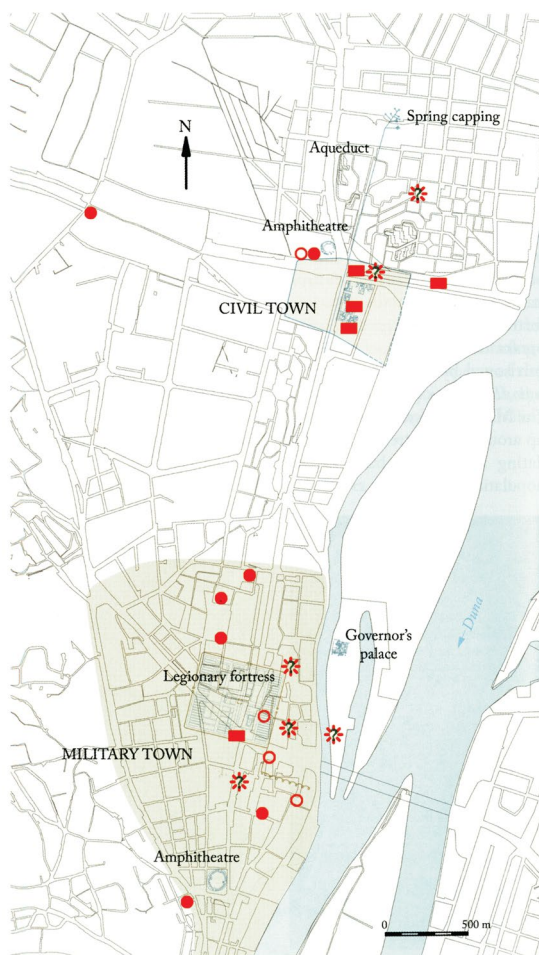
confronted on the one hand with the size proportions of the communities as described in Virunum and other Albums,<sup>49</sup> and on the other hand with a quantity of grown men which ought to correspond approximately to the male percentage of the population of an urban insula, to the members of a small professional *collegium*, or to the clientele of a member of the urban upper class. This should indicate only a few possibilities as to how such cult groups might have been recruited or assembled. Since the precise connection with the adjoining buildings of the insula cannot be exactly determined, yet the Mithraea (so-called Mithraea of Symphorus, of Antonius Victorinus and of Iulius Victorinus, due to the appearance of these persons on votive inscriptions) apparently stood here unattached near the houses (fig. 4),<sup>50</sup> we should rather assume that a group, rather than individual private persons, was the client and user; certainty on this point, however, cannot be achieved.

If we change to Carnuntum, the other large frontier agglomeration in the Pannonian provinces, we may detect similar evidences. Besides some not well explored Mithraea and/or Dolichena<sup>51</sup> in the *municipium/colonia*, we are attracted by an insula-sanctuary for Silvanus and the Quadriviae. The sanctuary with numerous dedication stones, also for additional divinities such as, for example, Diana was already excavated in 1892 in Carnuntum, but the modest building remains and archival materials have only recently

49 Gordon 1996, 425.

50 Zsidi 2018, esp. 28–43.

51 See the overview of Gassner 2003.



**Fig. 4. Dissemination of the Mithras memorials in the area of Aquincum (Zsidi 2018, 22 fig. 18); red rectangles: structurally attested sanctuaries; solid red circles: inscriptions; empty red circles: fragments of cult images; sun symbols: accumulation of finds as evidence of a Mithraeum**

Traun–Abensberg: to the left a Mercury with caduceus and money bag, to the right a figure with bundle of corn, perhaps Diana.<sup>56</sup> The reference to the building elements of *murum* (surrounding wall?) with entrance (*introitus*) and *porticum* (colonnaded hall) with *accubito* (dining room) is significant.

been convincingly analysed and interpreted by G. Kremer.<sup>52</sup> The finds lie in the middle of an insula south-west of the forum of the former *municipium Aelium* and later *colonia Aurelia Severiana Carnuntum*, and are adjacent to a large residential house. A sponsor named C. Sulpicius Seneca appears twice (or we are dealing with close relatives), for which reason Kremer supposed that this one (or these) had the function of patron(s) of the sanctuary or of the *collegium* behind it.<sup>53</sup> The sanctuary ought to have been accessible via a narrow alley along the north side of the residential house, without having to encroach upon the private sphere of the house. This fact supports Kremer's attribution to a *collegium*.<sup>54</sup>

The allocation to this sanctuary of a building inscription, probably found in the immediate vicinity and dated to 211, is important: *Silvanab(us!) et / Quadri<v=B>i(i)s Aug(ustis) sacrum / C(aius) Antonius Valentinus / vet(eranus) leg(ionis) XIII G(eminiae) murum a fu/ndamentis cum suo int/roit<u=O> et porticum cum / accubito vetustate conla/<p=B>sum impendio suo restitu/it Gentiano et Basso co(n)s(ulibus)*.<sup>55</sup> The inscription was embedded between reliefs that are no longer visible due to the walling-in of the stone into Schloss

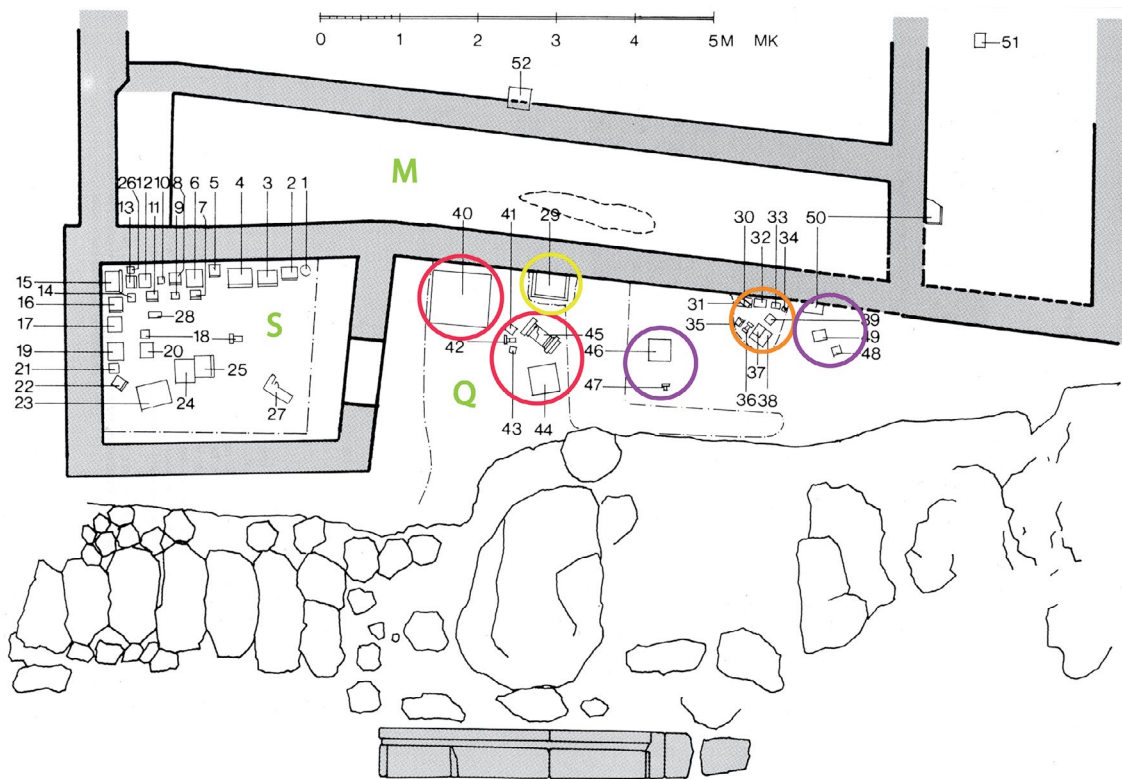
52 Kremer 2014. – See also Kremer 2012, 330–337; for earlier investigations and opinions see Kandler 1986; Gassner 2003, esp. 136.

53 Kremer 2014, 128 and 130.

54 Kremer 2014, 130.

55 *CIL* III, 4441; Kremer 2014, 129–130.

56 Kremer 2014, 129–130, refrains from naming the figure at the right, but since Diana also appears on the dedicatory inscription *CIL* III, 13454, I venture to make this identification.



**Fig. 5.** Groundplan of the sanctuary for Silvanus and the Quadviviae in an insula of the colonia Carnuntum (section of the plan of 1892, re-drawn by M. Kandler 1985), with distribution of the dedicated stone monuments in the area Q, according to four reconstructed phases: violett = Phase 1; red = Phase 2; orange = Phase 3; yellow = Phase 4 (after Kremer 2014, fig. 4)

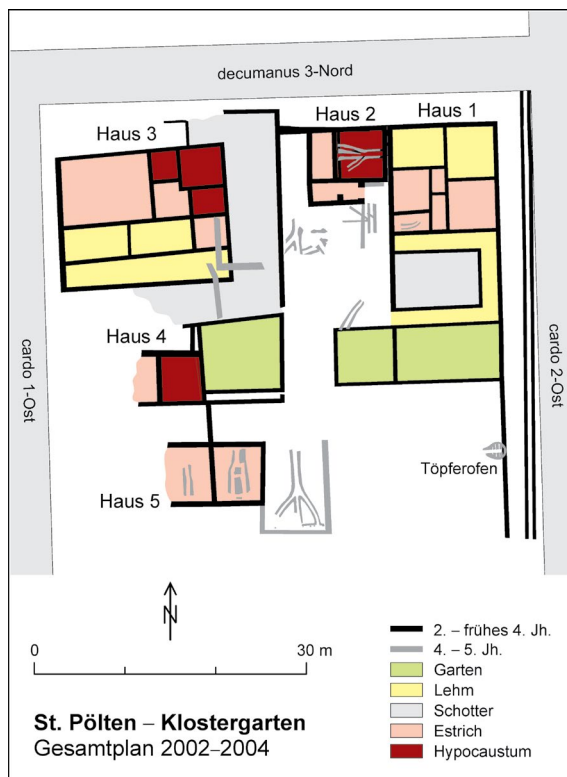
Despite this, the precise construction of the sanctuary is difficult. A three-aisled dining hall with transverse vestibule M,<sup>57</sup> in a manner typical for Mithraea, is recognisable, with a courtyard (Q) in front of it, and within this, built into the vestibule, a room S with entrance oriented to the east. Most of the total of 56 altars and other dedicatory monuments, many of which without chiselled (therefore perhaps once painted?) inscriptions, were found in room S and the court Q, with only three originating from room M.

### An insula-sanctuary in Aelium Cetium

In this regard, a relatively unknown and still not completely published find<sup>58</sup> from an excavation in the years 2002–04 in Aelium Cetium (St. Pölten) in Noricum allows additional insights into the construction, the architectural design, and the issues of property ownership of such small-scale sanctuaries in insulae. Due to the planned construction

57 For this reason also sometimes identified as Mithraeum IV or V in the older literature; on this, see Kremer 2014, 131.

58 Cf. Tschannerl 2008, on whose plans and reconstructions the following remarks are based. On the chronology, preliminarily: Börner 2013, esp. 63–64 (the chronological framework is constructed by her purely on the basis of ceramic material, while the other finds such as coins are not considered).



**Fig. 6. Cetium, plan of the results of excavations in the cloister garden in the north-east of the city (authors: P. Scherrer and M. Hofbauer)**

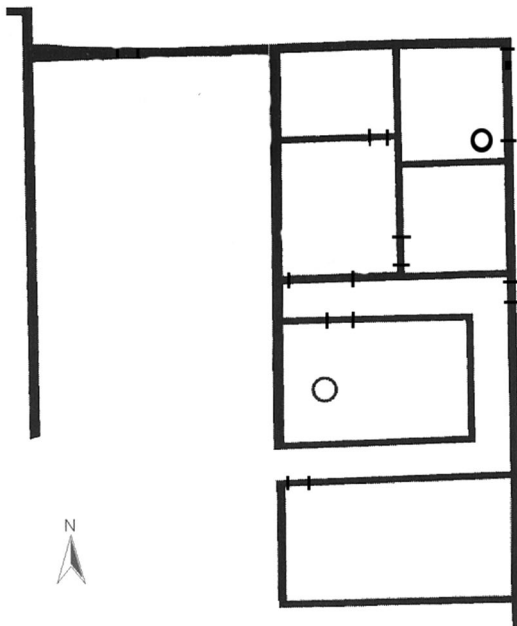
which later (building phase 2 or 3) a row house (House 4) was erected. The second plot of land was only developed in the north-east corner (House 1) during building phase 1 (mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century). In the north, two open working courtyards with mud floors and the remains of a number of furnaces, apparently for small cast-bronzes, were located; to the south was appended a building with originally two rooms, and adjacent to this, in turn, a peristyle courtyard with a well and then a small garden area (figs. 6–7). The entire southern half of the plot of land, as far as we could explore it, was not developed.

During building phase 2 (fig. 8), which at all events can be dated relatively soon after the Marcomannic destruction (after 172), one of the western living rooms in the house was downscaled by an L-shaped corridor. In addition, on the northern street façade to the west of the western court, an almost square room (length of side ca. 5 m), heated via tubular heating and with vestibule (=House 2, figs. 6 and 8) and entrance possibility from the adjacent *decumanus* was erected; this is most probably to be interpreted as a *cenatorium*. Probably shortly afterwards, at least in the Severan period (building phase 3, fig. 9) an extension in the south was added, with the form of a small temple and vestibule (*in antis*) oriented to the east (total length ca. 6.2 m). Most likely already during building phase 2 (at the latest in building phase 3), the western boundary of the peristyle courtyard of House 1 was removed, opening it up to the garden area south of the little temple. The reconstruction in fig. 10 gives an impression of the approximate, probable appearance of the ensemble in the Severan period.

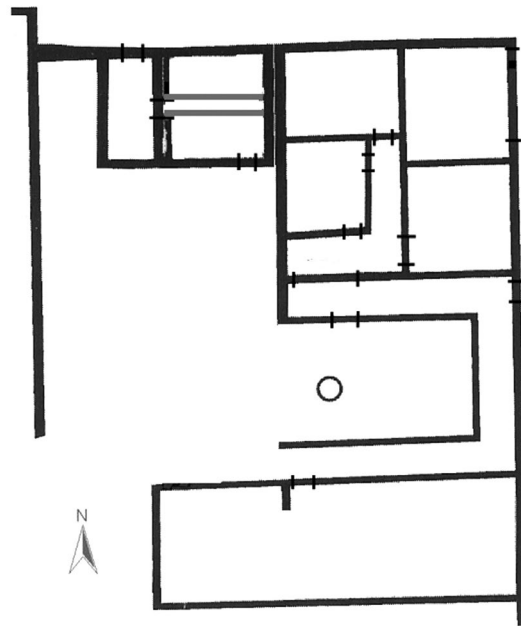
of a music conservatorium on the until now undeveloped terrain of the so-called cloister garden of the former Monastery of St. Pölten (now, the seat of the diocese), an entire insula in the furthest north-east of *municipium Aelium Cetium* was archaeologically investigated; only the outermost southern part, which would not be affected by the new building or which, in part, was destroyed in the Baroque period by the cellar of the monastery, as well as an already developed strip in the west, were exempted (fig. 6).

The northern half of the insula was taken up by two almost square plots (ca. 25 × 27 m), which were originally separated only by a wooden fence, and later by a garden wall. In the north-west lay House 3, which already possessed an extensively heated living space in building phase 2 (after the destruction in the course of the Marcomanni Wars). In addition to the two street façades, in the east and south the house was surrounded by a broad, gravelled entrance. Adjacent at the south was a garden area, in



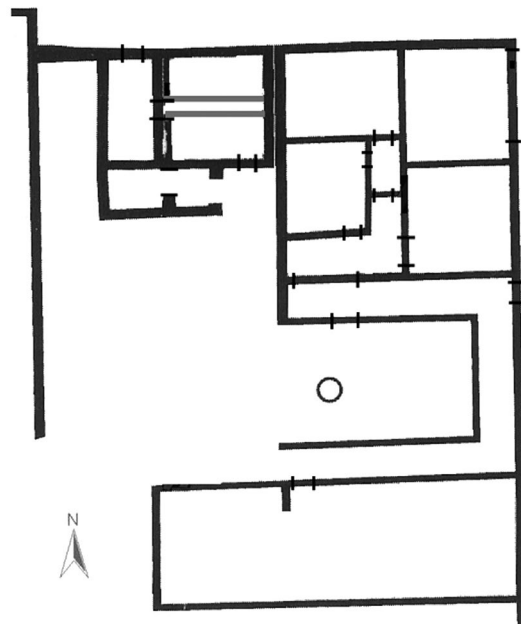


**Fig. 7. Cetium, House 1-2, building phase 1 (after Tschannerl 2008, fig. 18)**

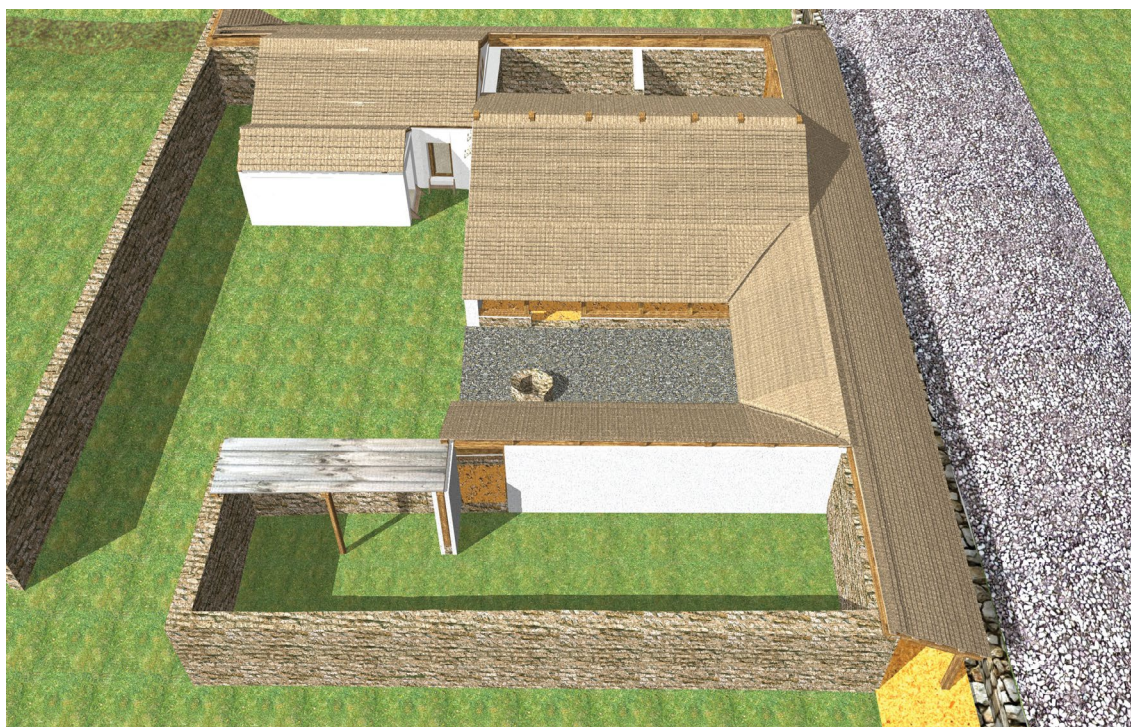


**Fig. 8. Cetium, House 1-2, building phase 2 (after Tschannerl 2008, fig. 19)**

If we interpret House 1 not – as previously thought – as a private residential building in the sense of a small *domus*, but instead as a structure with spaces for the purpose of a collective of craftsmen (with only 2 roofed rooms), then we receive the image of a division into two working courtyards in the north, two bedrooms or lounges in the middle, and a three-sided peristyle court with adjacent garden in the south. During building phase 2 a heated *cenatorium* was added, to which apparently quite quickly an *aedicula* followed. The evidence is structurally very similar to the construction developed for the sanctuary of Silvanus and the *Quadriviae* in Carnuntum, in particular when one includes the garden (or courtyard) areas and the peristyle now opened up for usage by the cult association. Whether the private house (House 3) on the neighbouring plot was involved in terms of ownership or socially (role as patron?) in the events on the land of House 1 and House 2, or whether it was



**Fig. 9. Cetium, House 1-2, building phase 3 (after Tschannerl 2008, fig. 20)**



**Fig. 10. Cetium, House 1–2, reconstruction by M. Tschannerl (Tschannerl 2008, fig. 36)**

separated from this by the border wall, remains speculative. Nothing much can be said about the divinity/ies worshipped there. In addition to a few fragments of vessels decorated with snakes in the area of the heated cult room (*cenatorium?*), only a small marble base with the foot of a female divinity<sup>59</sup> is preserved as a relevant find from the *aedicula*, which was completely destroyed in Late Antiquity. Scant remains of painted wall plaster perhaps show traces of a procession with waving flags.<sup>60</sup> Since the previous assumption that vessels with snakes were predominantly or exclusively employed in “oriental” cults is now questionable, and that their origin is rather in private cults (Roman domestic cult),<sup>61</sup> no definitive assignation of the insula-sanctuary of Aelium Cetium to a traditional Roman or to an “oriental” cult is therefore possible.

## Final review and theories

The starting point for the considerations here was that, in roughly the Severan period, or rather already in the late years of Marcus Aurelius, following military, economic, climatic, and health (so-called Antonine Plague) decline, large parts of the population banded together in private, relatively closed cult associations<sup>62</sup> instead of the former

59 Jilek, Scherrer and Trinkl 2005, 25 cat. no 38; Tschannerl 2008, 82 fig. 13.

60 Jilek, Scherrer and Trinkl 2005, 44 cat. no. 164; Tschannerl 2008, 83 fig. 15.

61 For the snakes in the house cults now Flower 2017; see also above n. 10.

62 The causes and mechanisms of the formation of such groups are multivalent, and cannot be pursued further in the context of this study; in general on this, see now: Lichterman, Rieger and Rüpke 2017.

cult practices in large, public sanctuaries. The choice of divinities, and the deities associated with this, were hardly accidental, yet the phenomenon did not only affect specific cults with more or less implicit salvation character. These associations consisted primarily of Roman citizens of the lower social strata (craftsmen, tradesmen, etc.) – with perhaps occasional involvement of privileged freedmen and slaves; these groups were mostly more or less clearly dependent, although not always, on patrons from the *honestiores* class. Frequently, such *honestiores* perhaps directly provided the impetus for such associations, with their *clientes*, *amici* and *familiares*, or else they formed such associations exclusively amongst their peers, as can be assumed in the case of the *tribunus laticlavus* in Aquincum. R. Gordon's theoretical approach claiming a certain instability and inherent short lifespan of such cult groups – and in his study, in particular Mithraic groups – is in this way on the one hand strengthened, yet on the other hand also generalised and independent of a specific cult. Of great importance were the communal banquets and a relatively strong personal connection between the members (generally, local cultural or professional groups, or associations with other social factors in common); such groups probably were brought together due to reasons of health security, and were strongly promoted. Preservation of life in this world was therefore increasingly superimposed by the hope for a good life in an assumed hereafter.

The theory developed here, by way of example, on the basis of finds and evidence from Noricum (Aelium Cetium and Virunum) and the two Pannonian provinces (Aquincum und Carnuntum) may easily be corroborated by numerous additional excavation results and epigraphical evidence from other parts of the *imperium Romanum*. This must take place, however, in another context. Here we may only indicate in conclusion that, apparently at least in many towns, if small or large – well demonstrated for example in Ostia or Aquincum –, irrespective of their location within the empire and the composition of their populace, in both a civil as well as a military context, extensive sanctuaries arose on private property, and these sanctuaries drew their adherents from only one or a few insulae. Elsewhere, in contrast, apparently the usual sacred precincts with small temple buildings and altars continued in use, as is well documented for example in the Altbachtal in Trier (Augusta Treverorum); these could also open themselves up to "oriental" cults such as that of Mithras.<sup>63</sup> An example of this scenario in Pannonia is Savaria, where an extensive area on the southern border of the city along the Amber Route was used for the imperial cult, the cult of Isis, of IOM Dolichenus, of Mithras, of Magna Mater, and of additional gods, partly unknown elsewhere (Itunus and Ituna); this area continued to be expanded in the Severan period and later, whereas no sanctuaries have yet been discovered in private residential spaces.<sup>64</sup> The formation of cult sites on private property in Roman cities is, therefore – as with so many phenomena in the Roman empire – not explicable by means of a fixed rule; it could take place, but did not have to do so.

63 See i.g. Cüppers 2002; Faust 2007; esp. for Mithras: Ghetta 2021, esp. 142–143 (dating the temple soon after 275).

64 On the Iseum cf. above n. 2. On IOM Dolichenus: Toth 1977, recently on this, critically: Berke 2019, 583–586. On Mithras: Scherrer 2022; Kiss 2011, who produces on p. 190 a good mapping of the inventory of sanctuaries and dedication stones in the whole area.

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

Gabrielle Kremer

## 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.*

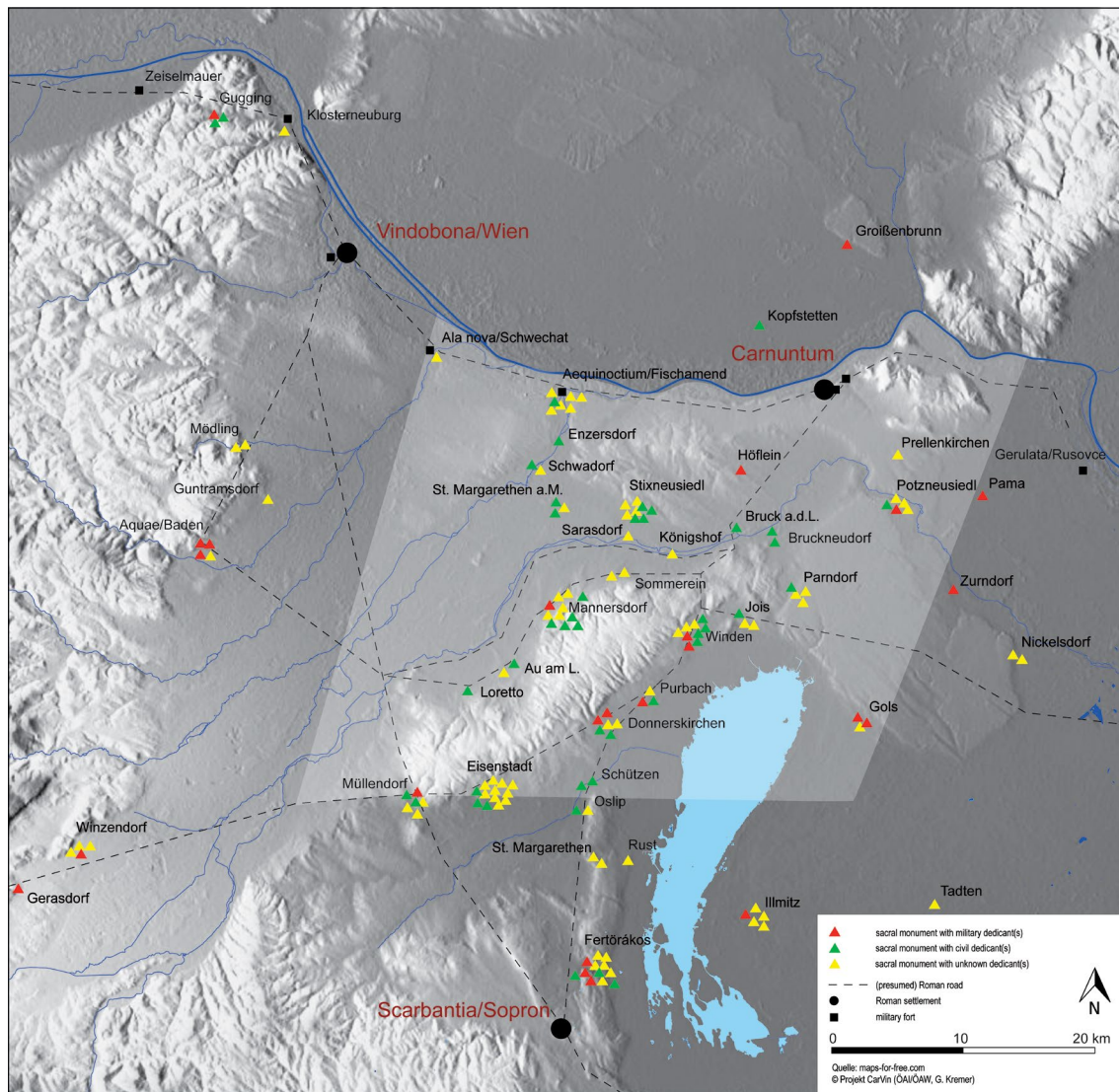
**Keywords:** Carnuntum – Vindobona – hinterland – rural population – Romanization – sacral monuments – Mithras.

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 Griebel 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.

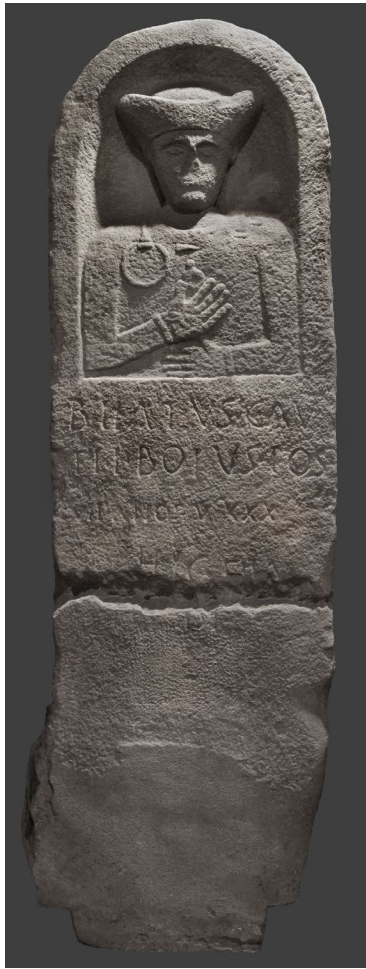
24 Overview in Mráv 2013.

25 Gabler 2006; Musilová 2023.

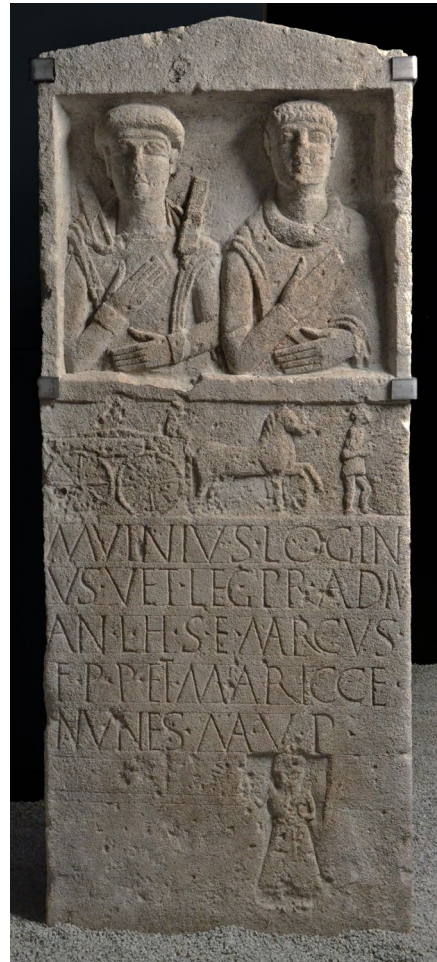
26 Kaus 2006, 212–213. See among others the altar to IOM set up by C. Nonius Valentinus, *speculator leg(ionis) X gem(inae)*: AE 2001, 1645 = Iupa 5796.

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, *eques 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.

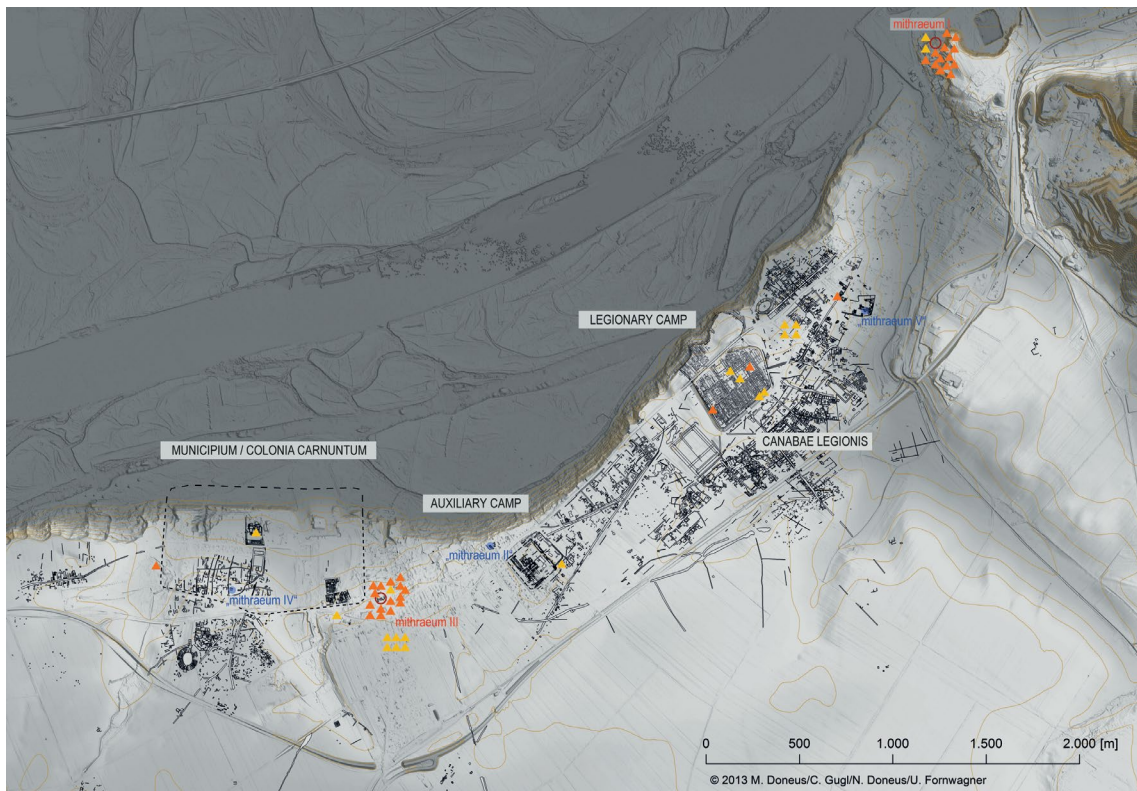
54 *Invicto Mit<h>r(h)e / C(aius) Sacidius Ba/rbarus >(centurio) leg(ionis) / XV Apol(linaris) / ex voto [[?]]*. *CIL* III, 4418 = *Iupa* 6150; *CIMRM* 1718; Mosser 2003, 267–268 no. 204; Kremer 2012, 180–181 no. 352 pl. 108 (with literature).

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.

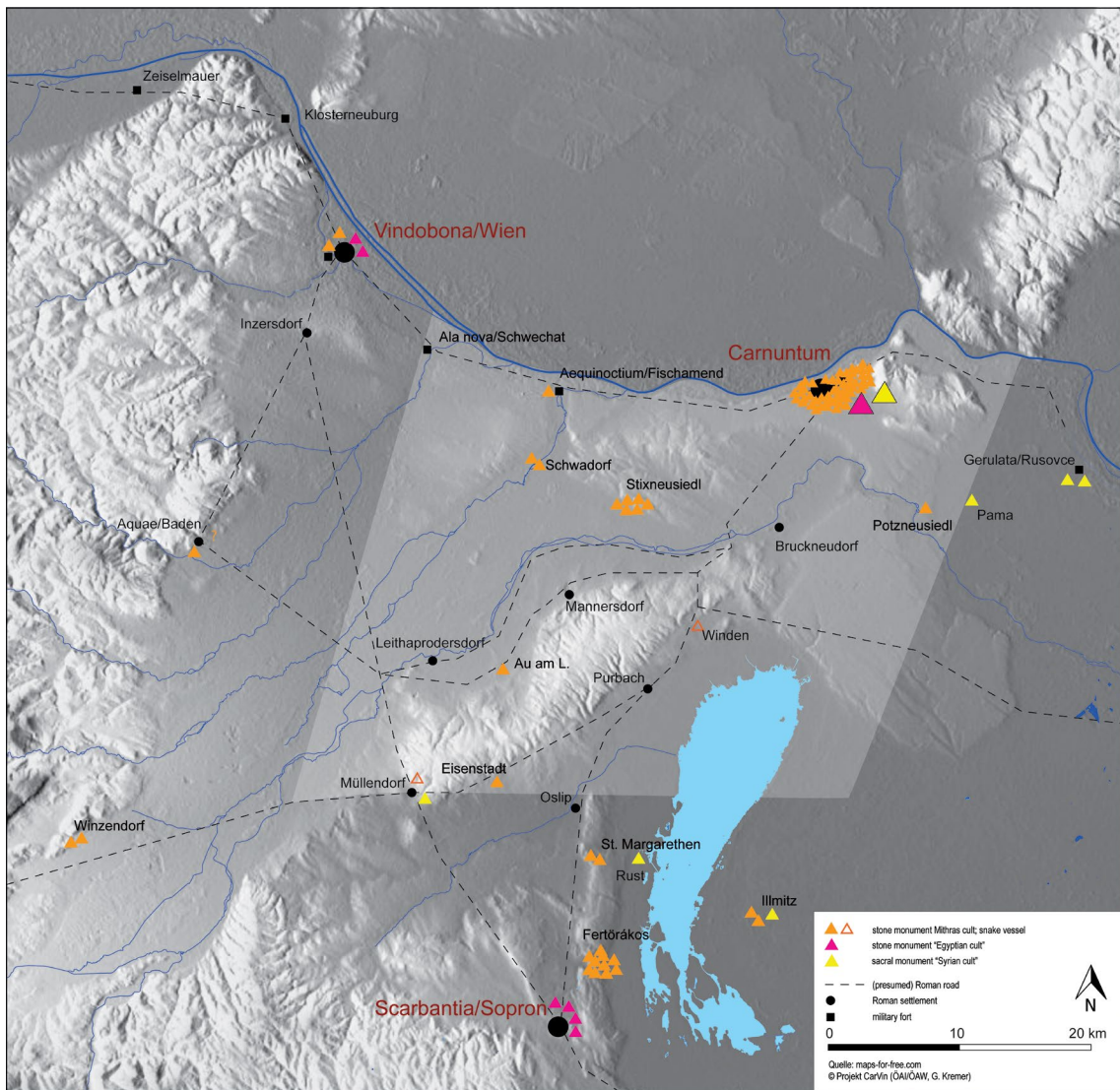
90 Schön 1988, 72–74.

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 1988; 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.





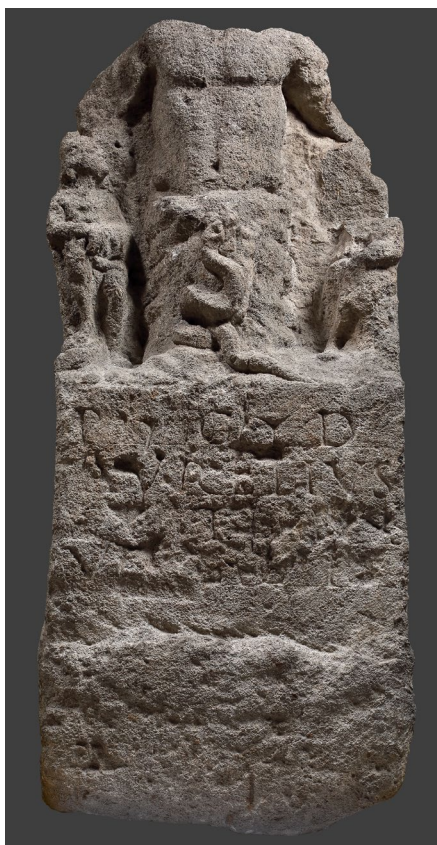
**Fig. 8. Head with Phrygian cap (?) from Rust, Burgenländisches Landesmuseum Eisenstadt inv. 7328 (ÖAI/ÖAW, photo G. Kremer)**



**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 Vin-dobona), 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)

101 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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# FAUSTINA THE YOUNGER, ISIS, AND THE GRAIN TRADE IN STYBERRA

Aleksandra Nikoloska – Olivera Jandreska – Duško Temelkoski

## Abstract

*During the 2021 excavations carried out at the Agora, in the area of the Temple of Tyche, in Styberra by the National Institute and Museum Prilep a remarkable discovery of a portrait bust was made. The bust depicts Faustina Minor dressed in an Isis garment with the typical knot on her chest. The identification of this portrait is additionally confirmed by iconographical analysis and correlation to other material that connects Faustina, the new Augusta, to Isis Faria of Alexandria, patron and protectress of the fleet, ensuring safe trade and arrival of grain.*

*Prior studies show that Styberra reached its urban flourishing during the Antonine and Severan dynasties. It was an administrative centre of the Derriopos region, an important strategic zone and a supplier of grain for the Macedonian army, known from the historical sources. Other recent findings from the Agora such as the mensae ponderirae and an altar dedicated to Hermes provide more specific insights. Based on the available archaeological data this paper focuses further on the context of the erection of the Imperial bust and the purpose of the Agora building, as well as the importance of the grain trade in Styberra.*

**Keywords:** *The Agora of Styberra – Faustina the Younger – Isis – grain trade – the Antonines.*

From what is known from ancient sources, Styberra was a wealthy city, situated in the region of Derriopos in the Pelagonian Plain. It was founded in Hellenistic times, perhaps even earlier, and had become a thriving Macedonian polis during the Antonine and Severan dynasties when the city's economic fortunes were at their peak.<sup>1</sup> The city

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<sup>1</sup> First mentioned by Polybius (*Historiae*, XXVIII, 8) and by Livy (*Ab urbe condita*, XXXI, 39; XLIII, 19–20) while referring to the times of the Macedonian wars. Styberra was of considerable importance during the Roman period and it is one of the towns on the river Erigon, as described by Strabo (VII, 327), who besides Styberra also mentions Brianion and Alkomene (See also *Geogr. Rav.*, IV, 9, 10–13).



***Figs. 1, 2. Sector of the Temple of Tyche (photo courtesy of Prilep Museum)***



**Plan 1. Sector of the Temple of Tyche (plan by K. Jovanoski)**

was the focus of a rich modern historiography. Starting from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, a number of important researchers were interested in the ubication of the region and the historic importance of this ancient city.<sup>2</sup> What attracted them to a site near to the vil- lage of Čepigovo in the vicinity of Prilep was, above all, the numerous epigraphic finds, collected through the years, referring to ephebes, ephebarchs, and gymnasiarchs, pol- itarchs and macedoniarchs, thus illustrating significant social strata.<sup>3</sup> The archaeolog- ical excavations conducted in 1953<sup>4</sup> revealed most of the material including the honor- ary inscription made for Posidipos Thessalou from the council and people of the city, when the site was definitively proven to be Styberra.<sup>5</sup> The areas of the city Gymnasion and the Temple of Tyche were brought to light, where an abundance of sculptural and even more epigraphical material was discovered and further analysed.<sup>6</sup> Since then, the National Institute and Museum Prilep carried out many archaeological campaigns in the aforementioned areas, resulting in further discoveries, mainly of sculpture.<sup>7</sup> The archaeological excavations in Styberra in the course of 2021, in the area next to the Temple of Tyche, revealed more of the importance of the city (Temelkoski and Jandre- ska 2022). A building positioned to the south of the temple was unearthed (figs. 1, 2,

2 To name just some of them: Leake 1841, 318–322; Hahn 1867, 225; Heuzey and Daumet 1876, 317; Demitsas 1896, 278–281; Kazarov 1921; Vulić 1931, 186–191; Papazoglou 1957, 216–221; Mikulčić 1996; Lilčić 2009, 125–147.

3 Papazoglou 1953, 1954, 1959.

4 Vučković-Todorović 1963.

5 Ποσιδίππον Θεσσαλου / ή Στυβερραίων βοθλή / και ό δήμος τόν πολείτην / άρετής" ενεκα (Vučković-Todorović 1963, 79, IV; IG 335')

6 Papazoglou 1988a, 295–304; Papazoglou 1988b; Kalpakoska 2004; Babamova 2005, 117–122, Temelko- ski, Jandreska and Babamova 2023.

7 Systematic archaeological excavations (1983–2011) were led by L. Kepeska and K. Kepeski (Kepeska and Kepeski 1990, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2012), continued by the campaigns led by D. Temelkoski, focusing more on the south terrace of the Tyche temple (2014–2022).



**Figs. 3, 4. Position of discovery of the sculpture (photo courtesy of Prilep Museum)**

plan 1), which served as an administrative part of the Agora and which most probably had two phases, used in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. The 2021 excavations also brought to light valuable marble finds in the context of the Agora's second phase, found along the eastern wall - an exceptional Antonine female

portrait bust, an inscribed *mensae ponderirae*<sup>8</sup> and an altar dedicated to Hermes, also with an inscription,<sup>9</sup> among other finds, providing more specific insights.

### The bust of Faustina Minor

The Antonine female bust was found face down, as it had fallen off the base from its original position at the Agora of Styberra (figs. 3, 4).<sup>10</sup> It is an exceptional portrait of Faustina Minor, fortunately, excellently preserved, meticulously and skilfully executed (figs. 5–10).<sup>11</sup> Between the bust and the circular pedestal, there is a smaller quadrangular excised space where a metal plate with an inscription was probably once placed. Under the circular pedestal an iron peg joined the bust with a massive rectangular un-inscribed marble base.

Both the face and neck of the dignified portrait, with delicate and soft features, have been polished to a high gloss in contrast to the rich and heavy garment formed with deeper carvings. The neck is long and thin, the head slightly tilted to the left, with an elongated face and a small convex chin. This tendency of elongation emphasizes the

8 Temelkoski, Jandreska Kalpakoska 2021; and "Έτους ΘΠΣ' Αίλιος Ύμνος, άγορα/νομών, [ά]νέθηκεν έκ τ[ά]ν ιδίων τά μέτρα, οίς έ/χρητο ή πόλ[ις] In the year 289, Aelius Hymnos was even an agoranomist and at his own expense set up these standards by which the city was served (translation by V. Kalpakovska). I would like to thank P. Christodoulou for kindly checking the epigraphy.

9 Άγαθη τύχη / τόν Έρμήν / τή πατρίδι / Εϋπορος // Αλεξάνδρου.

10 See the chapter below.

11 Jandreska 2021, 48 cat. no. 112; Bitrakova Grozdanova and Nikoloska 2022, cat. no. 8, 109–110 pls. XI–XIII.



elegance of the empress. Simple short carvings indicate the eyebrows which follow the outlines of the large almond-shaped eyes with emphasized lacrimal glands, eye bags, and deep irises, accentuating the serious yet mellow gaze upwards. The nose is long, somewhat pointed and thin, while the lips are shaped into a mild smile. Her delicate ears are decorated with discrete round earrings. The hair is wavy fashioned in a typical "Stirnwellenfrisur", parted in the middle with locks that frame the face. At the back,



**Figs. 5–10. Bust of Faustina Minor, Styberra (photos by I. Blažev)**

the hair is gathered at the nape into a bun with intertwined thick locks, made with tiny meticulous carvings that follow the waves along the face. The intertwined locks at the back follow the same pattern of execution. Below the bun, two tiny locks made in a shallow relief symmetrically fall over the neck.

Relying on the rich art legacy, the portraits of Faustina Minor can be chronologically more precisely interpreted, following the iconographical alterations usually marked by the birth of her children. The portrait style is of an elderly Faustina Minor, expressed with a dash of noble matronal seriousness achieved through the heavy, almost drowsy eyelids and equally heavy eyebrows with two subtle wrinkles. Characteristics of the portrait art of the Middle Antonine period are evident, i.e. the official royal dignity and the diffuse, somnolent sensuality. Based on the hairstyle and the typical facial expression, this portrait can be more precisely identified, especially considering Faustina's depictions on coins.<sup>12</sup> The hairstyle of this bust is recognizable among the portraits of Faustina the Younger of the 8<sup>th</sup> type, according to the classification of Fittschen, dated later than 162 AD, after the birth of her son M. Annius Verus, for which she was celebrated as *Fecunditas* on the mint series of the time.<sup>13</sup> The front parted waves framing the face are closest to two portraits of Faustina the Younger from Rome, one from the Capitoline Museum (fig. 11) and the other from the Terme Museum (fig. 12), also comparable to the portraits from Copenhagen (fig. 13),<sup>14</sup> and Syracuse.<sup>15</sup> On the back on all of these portraits, the bun with intertwined locks is lowered towards the nape, however the Styberra portrait differs by omitting the typical braid. This particular hairstyle with slight differences continues to be used on the portraits of her daughter Lucilla (fig. 14).<sup>16</sup>

The Isiac garments of the empress are of particular interest to our study. Faustina wears a chiton and a heavy folded palla drawn over her shoulders, a portion thrown over the back. On the chest, the palla is tied in a typical knot of Isis ("Knotenpalla"). The chiton has a round neck opening, fastened with three buckles on the shoulders and along the arms, a typical detail seen in garments of female participants in rites taken from Hellenistic art, most common for the Canephorae.<sup>17</sup> The palla over the chest is tied into a knot that falls down into five thick and long folds in typical curved fringes.

Although Styberra had a highly productive local sculptural workshop,<sup>18</sup> this newly found bust of Faustina Minor in the guise of Isis, based on the masterful production, can be assumed to be an import.<sup>19</sup>

12 Wegner 1939, 49–55 pl. 63; Frel and Morgan 1981, 75; Fittschen 1982, 60–63.

13 Fittschen 1982, 31, 60–63.

14 Fittschen 1982, no. 1 pl. 35/1–2; no. 3 pl. 36/1–2; no. 9 pl. 43/1–2.

15 Alexandridis 2004, cat. no. 208 pl. 43, 3.

16 Fittschen 1982, type 2, no. 1 pl. 48/1–2.

17 Jones Roccas 1995, 663 fig. 23; Bitrakova Grozdanova 2005, 295–301 figs. 6–11.

18 Kepeska and Kepeski 2007, 2008, 2010, 2012; Jandreska 2021; Bitrakova Grozdanova and Nikoloska 2022, cat. nos. 6–11, 25–27, 31, 34, 35, 45–48, 61, 70–77, 98–102, 104; Nikoloska 2023.

19 The origin of the marble will be additionally confirmed by the forthcoming chemical analysis.



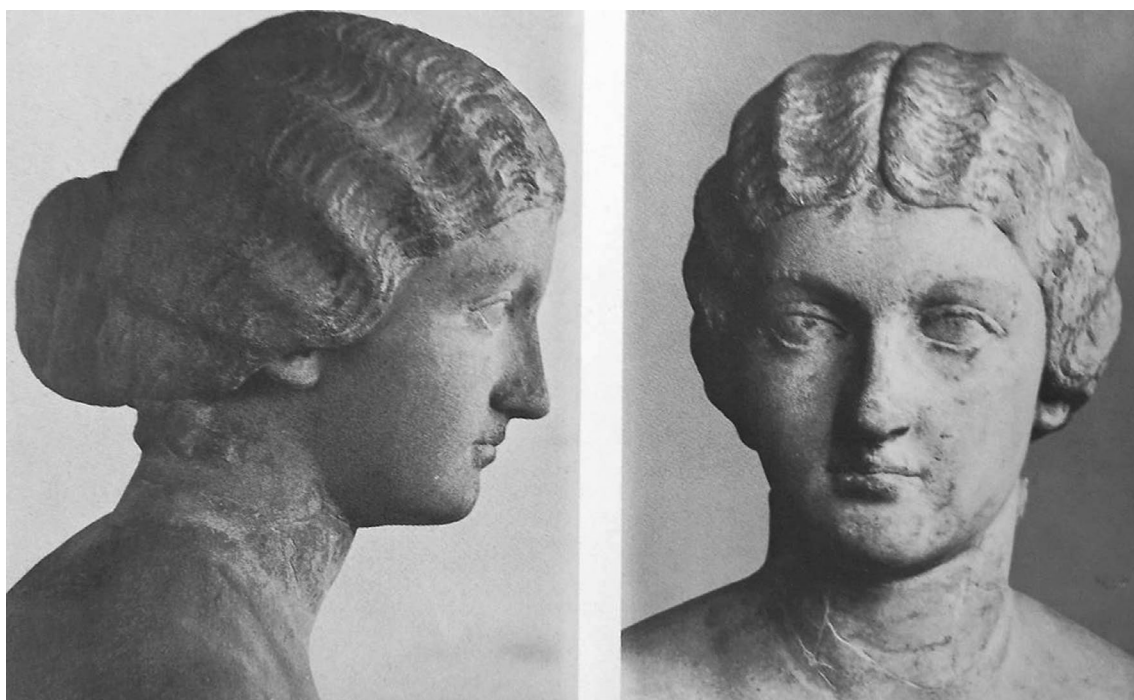
**Fig. 11. Faustina Minor, Capitoline Museum, Rome (after Fittschen 1982, pl. 35, 1-2)**



**Fig. 12. Faustina Minor, Terme Museum, Rome (after Fittschen 1982, pl. 36, 1-2)**



**Fig. 13. Faustina Minor, Copenhagen (after Fittschen 1982, pl. 38, 1-2)**



**Fig. 14. Lucilla, Dresden (after Fittschen 1982, pl. 48, 1-2)**

## Faustina Minor and Isis

Portrayals of both Faustina the Elder and the Younger dressed in Isis garments are not unusual, however they are not common. The statue of Faustina the Elder from the Iseion at Cyrene is dressed in heavy draped Isis garments, with a long garland over her left shoulder.<sup>20</sup> Faustina the Younger from the Capitoline Museum in Rome (fig. 15), on the other hand, has a *basileion* on her head and holds a *sistrum*.<sup>21</sup> There is also an interesting modern reconstruction of Isis as Faustina the Younger in the National Archaeological Museum in Naples.<sup>22</sup> Of what can be found among the relatable material, the portrait of Faustina from Styberra is closest to the bust in Naples with unknown origin, of which only an entry and a drawing exist (fig. 16).<sup>23</sup> Both busts are wearing a *chiton* and a knotted fringed *palla* positioned symmetrically, dividing the dress. They both have elongated faces, even though the one from Naples has a slightly different hairstyle, with the braid wrapped around the head, an indication of an earlier type.

Representations of mortals with certain attributes of Isis are not uncommon; some are priestesses of the goddess, others are followers of the cult, sometimes even initiates. These last images, analyzed by Walters, Eingartner and lastly Bricault and Veymiers (2020), correspond to what Wrede (1981) called *Consecratio in formam deorum*. The numerous Attic funerary reliefs with depictions of women wearing the garment of Isis either impersonate the goddess, or represent priesthood or participation in a cult.<sup>24</sup> However, Faustina's portrait with the Isiac knot from Styberra probably does not belong to one of these categories. Here, we are dealing with an exceptional imperial portrait that allows us to view it differently. According to Walters, this manner of portraying in the guise of Isis is not to imply that an individual was depicted as impersonating Isis, in which case she would have been wearing the emblem of the goddess on her head, but rather as someone initiated into the cult, wearing a fringed mantle with an Isis knot without any other attributes.<sup>25</sup>

More insightful explanations of the Isiac context of Faustina the Younger are to be found in epigraphy. We know of an inscription from Alexandria dated between 147 and 169 from members of an association in charge of effigies of Marcus Aurelius, Lucius Verus and Faustina who is named Pharia, Sosistolos, the New Augusta in honour of a certain P. Aelius Panopaios.<sup>26</sup> Faustina was honourably named Pharia and Sosistolos, or the Saviour of the Fleet, an *epiclesis* usually given to Isis since the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, attested abundantly in literary and epigraphic sources, as well as in numismatics, as Bricault has elaborated in his study.<sup>27</sup> The empress even had her own priest at Oxyrhynchus.<sup>28</sup> As such, Faustina Minor in the guise of Isis imperson-

20 Rosenbaum 1960, 62 no. 61 pls. 40, 1–2; 76, 1.

21 Walters 1988, 80 pl. 31, a–b.

22 Rosso 2018, 539 fig. 18.1.

23 Eingartner 1991, 88 no. 154 pl. XCVII.

24 Dunand 1973a, 148–149; Walters 1988, 52–57; Rosso 2018, 540–541; Bricault and Veymiers 2020.

25 Walters 1988, 79 n. 78.

26 *BCH* 118 (1994) 511; *SEG* XLIV 1994 (1997) no. 1442; Bernand and Bernand 1998.

27 Bricault 2000; Bricault 2020, 124.

28 *P.Oxy.* 3, 502, l. 4; See also Levick 2014, 133–137.



**Fig. 15. Faustina Minor as Isis (after Walters 1988, 80, pl. 31, a–b)**



**Fig. 16. Faustina Minor, Naples (after Eingartner 1991, no. 154 pl. XCVII)**

ated the *Annona* and became a patroness of the fleet that transported grains from Alexandria to Italy.

Complementary to the iconographical changes seen among the sculpture in the round, there are the portraits on the mint issues, where we discover more information. Many coins were issued in the name of the empress with Isiac themes, outnumbering those of her husband and her father. There are at least four series from a mint in Alexandria with sailing Isis on the reverse. There is also a medallion from Rome with the portrait of Faustina on the obverse, and on the reverse an Isis sailing on a ship, in front of the Lighthouse of Alexandria.<sup>29</sup> Examples of Faustina the Younger identified with Isis are known on coins from Amastris in Paphlagonia<sup>30</sup> and from Lystra in Lycaonia.<sup>31</sup>

29 Rickman 1980, 265; Bricault 2000, 147; Bricault 2020, 96–97 fig. 70.

30 Dunand 1973b, 113; Mikocki 1995, 64 cat. no. 376 pl. XV; Rosso 2018, 553 fig. 18.9; Bricault 2020, 75 tab. 11, 87 tab. 20; <https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/type/35523>. Both Dunand and Mikocki observed that at Amastris the cult of Isis had an official character and Faustina was personally engaged in it. This, however, is not supported by documentation.

31 Dunand 1973b, 2, 26; Mikocki 1995, 64 cat. no. 377. According to Dunand the members of the imperial family played a role in the diffusion of Egyptian cults in Lystra which, again, is not sufficiently documented.

## The Agora of Styberra, grain trade, and the Antonines

Based on what we can reconstruct from the context of the discovery, the sculpture of Faustina Minor was placed in a niche in the eastern wall of the Agora of Styberra (fig. 17), formed by columns of building ceramic bricks and richly decorated with vegetal wall-painting ornamentation (fig. 18). In another niche stood the aforementioned sacrificial altar dedicated to Hermes placed on a pedestal with an inscription. Yet another find further explains the purpose of the building – the inscribed measuring table, *mensa ponderaria*, with eight round receptacles of different diameters and depths carved on the upper surface with an engraved profiled frame (fig. 19). The inscription on the front reveals a certain *agoranom* named Aelius Hymnos as a donator. Since we are dealing with the administrative building of the city Agora, where obviously market activities also took place, the position of the statue is more logical and can be ascribed greater significance. The presence of a bust of the wife of the emperor Marcus Aurelius in the administrative building of the Agora, associated with her important role as a patroness of the *Annona* reveals more about the history and the economy of the city.

Styberra was an important strategic zone during times of war as known from Polybius and Livy. The reason for this, among other things, was the importance of the city in the grain trade. The greater area of Pelagonia is abundant with grain, as is known also for the modern period. Specific historical events related to the grain trade of the city of Styberra are mentioned in the writings of Livy (Livy, *Ab urbe condita*, XXXI. 39; XLIII. 18). During the Second Macedonian – Roman War Styberra was one of the cities where the Roman army was supplied with grain. In 200 BC, while retreating from the area of Lynx, the army under the leadership of the consul Sulpicius stocked up on grain in Styberra.<sup>32</sup> Later on, during the Third Macedonian – Roman War, Styberra became one of the main bases for the military defence of Macedonia in this narrower geographical area, and before attacking the Illyrians – allies of the Romans – king Perseus supplied his army with grain.<sup>33</sup> This must have elevated Styberra, the largest city of the Derriope region, as a commercial and administrative centre in the following Roman imperial period.<sup>34</sup> Styberra continued to have primacy as one of the centres for

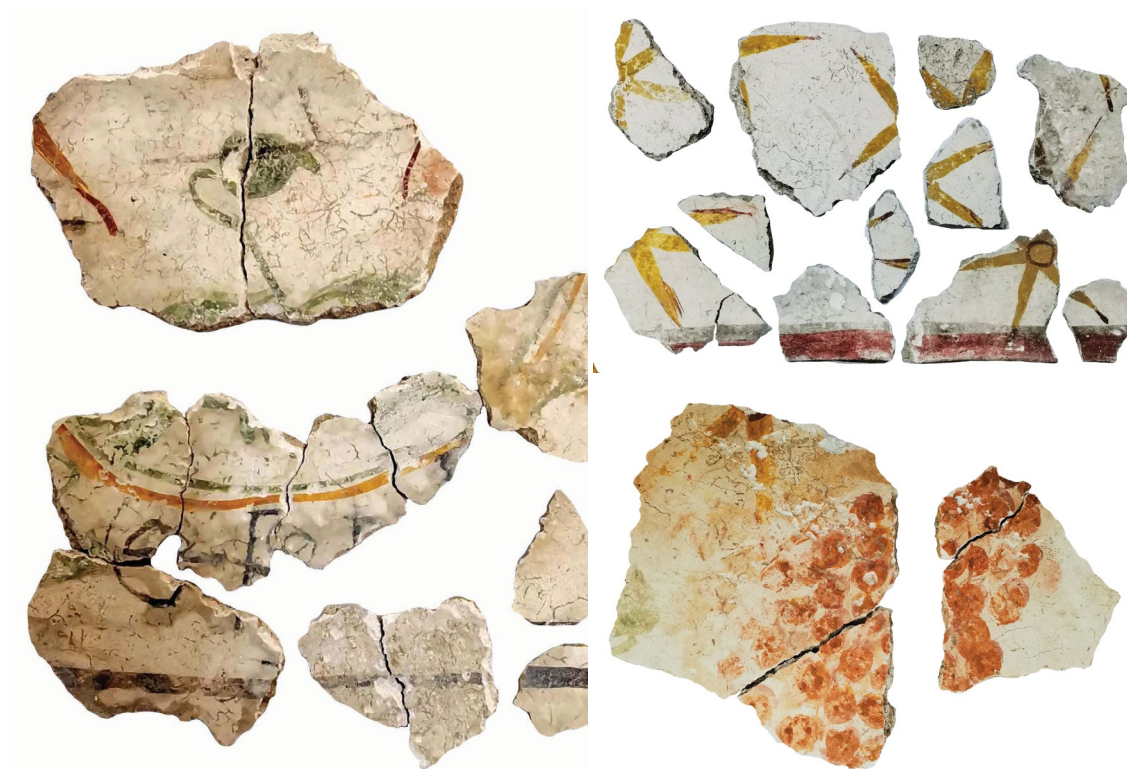
32 *Corpus iam curabat consul cum uenisse caduceatorem et quid uenisset nuntiatum est. responso tantum dato mane postero die fore copiam conueniendi, id quod quaesitum erat, nox dieique insequentis pars ad praecipendum iter Philippo data est. montes quam uiam non ingressurum graui agmine Romanum sciebat petit. consul prima luce caduceatore datis indutiis dimisso haud ita multo post abisse hostem cum sensisset, ignarus qua sequeretur, iisdem stauis frumentando dies aliquot consumpsit. Stuberram deinde petit atque ex Pelagonia frumentum quod in agris erat conuexit....* (Livy, *Ab urbe condita*, XXXI, 39)

33 *Perseus principio hiemis egredi Macedoniae finibus non ausus, ne qua in regnum uacuum inrumperent Romani, sub tempus brumae, cum inexistens ab Thessalia montes niuis altitudo facit, occasionem esse ratus frangendi finitimum spes animosque, ne quid auerso se in Romanum bellum periculi ab iis esset, cum a Thracia pacem Cotys, ab Epiro Cephalus repentina defectione ab Romanis praestarent, Dardanos recens domisset bellum, solum infestum esse Macedoniae latus, quod ab Illyrico pateret, cernens, neque ipsis quietis Illyriis et aditum praebentibus Romano, si domisset proximos Illyriorum, Gentium quoque regem iam diu dubium in societatem perlici posse, cum decem milibus peditum, quorum pars phalangitae erant, et duobus milibus leuium armorum et quingentis equitibus profectus Stuberram uenit. Inde frumento conplurium dierum sumpto iussoque apparatu oppugnandarum urbium sequi, tertio die ad Uscanam—Pentestianae terrae ea maxima urbs est—posuit castra, prius tamen, quam uim admoueret, missis, qui temptarent nunc praefectorum praesidii, nunc oppidanorum animos.* (Livy, *Ab urbe condita*, XLIII, 18)

34 For more detailed historical analysis see Papazoglou 1954; 1957, 217–218; 1959.



**Fig. 17. Reconstruction of the eastern wall of the agora of Styberra (plan by K. Jovanoski)**



**Fig. 18a–c. Fresco decoration of the niche (photo courtesy of Prilep Museum)**

trade, i.e. grain supply, reaching its zenith during the Antonine and Severan dynasties. This wealth is additionally evident in the rich sculptural material of honorary statues.<sup>35</sup>

A bust of Faustina Minor of such grandeur to be positioned in an Agora of the provincial city of Styberra speaks of its regional importance with regard to the *Annona*. At first glance, Faustina in the guise of Isis has been symbolically erected in a niche at the market place as protectoress of the regional grain trade, but the message was probably more specific than that, involving trade regulations and imperial political demands of the Antonines. The assumption is that the grain production and distribution from

<sup>35</sup> Bitrakova Grozdanova and Nikoloska 2022, cat. nos. 45–48, 70–77, 104 pls. XLIII–XLVI, LIX–LXIII.





**Fig. 19. The altar dedicated to Hermes and the mensa ponderaria (photo courtesy of Prilep Museum)**

Styberra was at a greater scale than just supplying the region. This was especially important during the Antonine plague,<sup>36</sup> which is recorded as ravaging the province.<sup>37</sup> The grain supply in Rome in the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century was of utmost importance.<sup>38</sup> According to *Vita Marci Antonini Philosophi*, "During times of famine he (Marcus Aurelius) provided Italian communities with food from the city and carefully administered the whole matter of the grain supply (11.3), ... and provision of the grain supply was a top priority (11.5)."<sup>39</sup>

Further Antonine involvement in the region is additionally to be considered, via the analysis of other imperial statuary. The female portrait from Macedonia from a non-confirmed find spot, now in the Museum of Ljubljana (fig. 20),<sup>40</sup> may be addressed here, not only because of the dynastic relations with Faustina Minor, but also considering the portrait style between both depicted persons. The portrait was made by a skilful master who managed to convey the elegance and nobility of the young woman, obviously a product of a leading workshop. It is a typical portrait of the Middle / Late Antonine period and resembles Faustina the Younger of type 8, primarily based on the hairstyle.<sup>41</sup> However, the closest analogy is the bronze portrait of a girl from Asia Minor, most probably from Lycia, now in the Art Museum in Worcester, Massachusetts, dated to the Late Antonine period.<sup>42</sup> The Worcester portrait depicts Crispina, which is a

36 Gilliam 1961; Silver 2012.

37 Wiseman 1973.

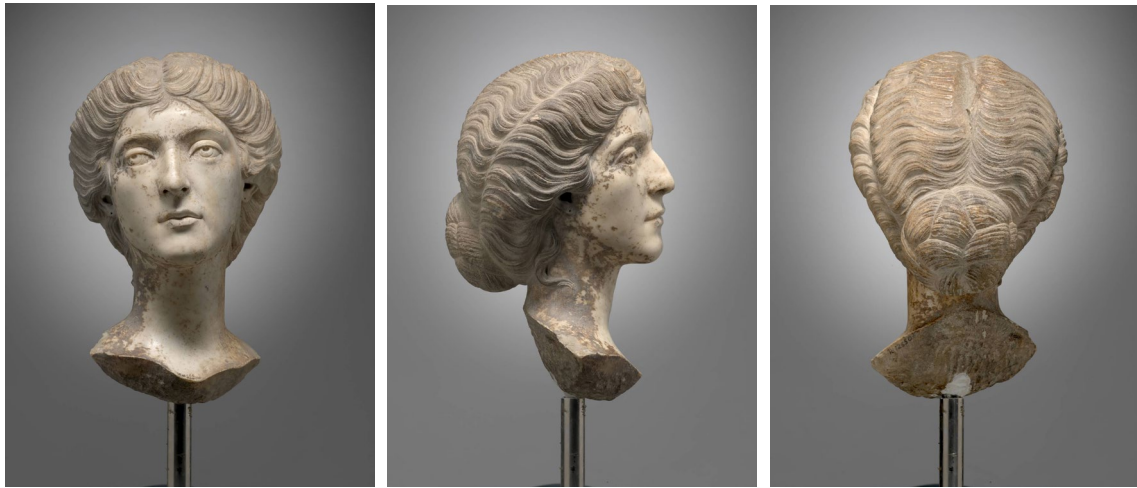
38 Rickman 1980, 196.

39 After Adams 2013, 90–91, 143 n. 356, 276–277.

40 Kastelic 1953, 29–35 fig. 1, 2; Rüsche 1969, 114, P9; Sokolovska 1987, 115 no. 28, T. 16/1; Mikulčić 1996, fig. 13; Cambi et al. 1988, 217 no. 261; Cambi et al. 1989, no. 140; Osvald 2005; Istenič 2015, 95 fig. 104; Bitrakova Grozdanova and Nikoloska 2022, cat. no. 9 pls. XIV–XV.

41 Fittschen 1982, 60–63.

42 Inan and Alföldi-Rosenbaum 1979, no. 339 pls. 247, 248, Vermeule 1981, no. 289 pl. 26.



**Fig. 20a–c. Crispina (photo courtesy of Ljubljana Museum)**

more likely identification of the portrait from Macedonia, as recent studies suggest.<sup>43</sup> During the reign of Commodus, when much attention continued to be given to the importance of the grain supply to Rome, the usual *Ceres* coins were issued with Crispina on the obverse, evoking the *Annona*.<sup>44</sup> This could be viewed as a logical continuation of honoring Faustina by erecting a statue of her daughter in the Agora of Styberra. Not only is it quite probable these two statues originated from the same manufacturing centre, it is also conceivable that they were exhibited in the same place in the Agora of Styberra.<sup>45</sup>

The vicinity of the temple of Tyche in Styberra to the administrative building of the city Agora should also not be ignored. The temple is evidently an older one, restored in 126/7 by the vow of Anthestia Fusca that lists names of her heirs.<sup>46</sup> Based on what we can reconstruct of the renovated structure, it was prostyle, with a stylobate supporting four probably Ionic columns, since fragments of such columns were found in the 1953 excavations. The predecessors Titus Flavius Orestes and his son Philonexus erected a statue of Anthestia Fusca, which has unfortunately never been found. Busts of the heirs Orestes<sup>47</sup> and Filoxenes<sup>48</sup> were also erected in the temple and were discovered

43 Istenič 2015; Osvald 2005.

44 Rickman 1980, 266.

45 This idea was already proposed by Mikulčić 1996. It must be noted that this is just a theory until, and if, we find further information about the exact location in Macedonia where this portrait originated.

46 Vučković-Todorović 1963, 83; Papazoglou 1988; *JG* 336; Kalpakoska 2004, 25, 2.1.1; Babamova 2005, no. 55; The testament of Anthestia Fusca confirms the existence of an earlier sanctuary of Tyche in Styberra, dating to before the restoration that took place according to the vow of Orestes and Filoxenes; this was most likely built in the mid–1<sup>st</sup> century at the earliest, following the flourishing beginnings of the city and in accordance with the epigraphic records of the ephebaic community.

47 Vučković-Todorović 1963, 83, T. 21, 35, 36; Rüsç 1969, 117, P15; Sokolovska 1987, 113 no. 26, T. 13/1, T. 14/1; Jevtović (ed.) 1987, no. 116; Bitrakova Grozdanova and Nikoloska 2022, cat. no. 7 pls. VIII–X.

48 Vučković-Todorović 1963, 83, T. 22; Rüsç 1969, 116, P14; Sokolovska 1987, 110 no. 21, T. 10/1, T. 11/1; Kalpakoska 2004, 25, 2.1.1; Jevtović (ed.) 1987, no. 115; Bitrakova Grozdanova and Nikoloska 2022, cat. no. 6 pls. VI, VII.

in the campaign of the same year; the busts are very well executed, with carefully rendered details of the hair and the beard, and are highly polished, clearly works of master artists. Such portraits, commissioned by local citizens and erected in a restored temple, speak of their wealth and supposed important political engagement forty years prior to the erection of the bust of Faustina. The Imperial cult is confirmed in Styberra by the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century,<sup>49</sup> and a further Severan presence is sculpturally attested by several female portraits.<sup>50</sup> Later on, a portrait of the emperor Trebonianus Gallus was erected in the Tyche temple,<sup>51</sup> demonstrating continuing imperial control over the city in the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century. On the other hand, the Isiac cults are not attested in Styberra as in other regional centres such as Stobi.<sup>52</sup>

## Conclusions

The image of Faustina Minor in Isis garments was evidently a powerful personification of the *Annona* or the grain production and distribution in the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. Her bust was erected in a niche in the eastern wall of the Agora of Styberra, a city that was considered an important regional trading centre for grain, presumably even more so in times of famine and epidemic, and an increased need for grain supply during the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century and even beyond. Based both on the masterful execution and the political message it carried, this fine sculpture was, most likely, a product of a workshop from Rome, imported here to serve as a direct messenger of an imperial order. Such an exceptional portrait of Faustina, erected in a provincial yet wealthy city, surely had to do with more than just a sign of Imperial favour for local loyalty and appreciation for carrying out the Imperial cult. Not only the iconographical allusion of Faustina as the *Annona*, but also the tradition of Styberra as the grain trade centre of Pelagonia, taking into account the latest material from the recently excavated Agora that has illustrated more directly the everyday trade life of the city, leads us to assume a more concrete political statement by the erection of this bust. A portrait of an emperor's wife, an epitome of fertility, initiated in the Isiac cults at Alexandria, was placed at a significant trade point so that the *Annona* officials could deal more efficiently, under imperial protection, with the regulations of the regional grain production and distribution in critical times of food shortage.

The epicleris *Pharia*, reflected in the Isis garment, has maritime meaning above all, regulating the grain trade by sea. Considering that it was important to transport grain by water wherever possible,<sup>53</sup> and its trade was especially managed and monitored in Antonine times, provides an opportunity for an additional interpretation. It could be that

49 Kepeska and Kepeski 2011; Kalpakovska and Jandreska 2020.

50 Bitrakova Grozdanova and Nikoloska 2022, cat. nos. 25–27 pls. XXVI, XXVII.

51 Vučković-Todorović 1963, 84, T. 25, 42; Rüşch 1969, 118, P16 figs. 6, 7; Bergmann 1977, pl. 48, 1, 2; Sokolovska 1987, 125 no. 43, T. 22/1, Jevtović 1987, no. 194; Bitrakova Grozdanova and Nikoloska 2022, cat. no. 35 pl. XXXV.

52 For the temple in Stobi see Blaževska and Radnjanski 2015; Several marble statues and bronze figurines were found in private contexts in the vicinity of Styberra (Bitrakova Grozdanova 1999, 56–97; Bitrakova Grozdanova 2015, 41–47; Nikoloska 2015, 260–262).

53 Rickman 1980, 120.

Styberra was connected to a branch of the land trade route of the Empire that led to the nearest port that the city traded from, probably the port of Dyrrachion, the closest one to Styberra, as the city was located on the side routes of Via Egnatia.<sup>54</sup> The grain produced here might have supplied important cities of the Empire, if not Rome itself, and might have been stored in the large granaries in Ostia. This supposedly successful trade is probably the reason for the city's flourishing economics during Antonine and later Severan times. The bust of Faustina stood at the city Agora as an expression of the Imperial intervention and supervision of the local grain market, but also as a warning for the locals to be wary and follow the price regulations coordinated during the period of Antonine famine. It may therefore be viewed as an imperially-controlled fair trade management of the local grain business in times of need, "supervised" by the revered Faustina, the New Augusta, with her illustrious watchful eye over the transactions carried out at the Agora of Styberra.

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54 Via Egnatia was significant for the insemination of the cult of Isis through the Province of Macedonia. See Nikoloska 2019. However, the erection of the Faustina bust has little to do with the worship of the cult in Styberra, which has not been confirmed to date.

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# ISEUM – A COHABITATION: THE MICRO-TOPOGRAPHICAL AND FUNCTIONAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE ISIS SANCTUARY IN SAVARIA IN THE 1<sup>ST</sup> AND 2<sup>ND</sup> CENTURIES AD

Szilvia Bíró – Ottó Sosztarits

## **Abstract**

*The Iseum Savariense is not only one of the most important sacred sites in Pannonia, but also one of the most challenging archaeological sites in the province, for the interpretation of the archaeological features offers many – until now unanswered – questions. One of these is its micro- and macro-topographical and functional interpretation, which we would like to introduce in the following.*

**Keywords:** *Savaria – Iseum – industrial function – sacral function – functional change – topographical evolution.*

## **Introduction to the research history**

The sanctuary came to light accidentally during reconstruction works in 1955.<sup>1</sup> Its discovery was a sensation, although not completely surprising. Namely, based on the known findings, Vilmos Wessetzky, Professor of Egyptology at the university of Budapest, had argued for the existence of an Iseum in Savaria a year before already.

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<sup>1</sup> For the research history see Sosztarits and Balázs 2016.

The excavations – carried out by Tihamér Szentlélek between 1955–1961 – revealed the main outline of the sanctuary<sup>2</sup> of c. 3000 m<sup>2</sup> and also its sacral findings.<sup>3</sup> The most important and best-known in international scholarship are the elements of the frieze of the podium temple: the marble reliefs depicting Roman and Alexandrian gods and figures,<sup>4</sup> such as Victoria, Mars, Hercules, Genius Augusti, Isis-Sothis, Serapis, and Anubis (fig. 1). The joint depiction of the Roman and non-Roman deities refers to the strong implication of the imperial cult with the worship of the Alexandrian gods in the Severan times.<sup>5</sup> For Isis and Osiris were associated strongly with the prosperity and victory of the Empire, they took their position among the main imperial gods. The depiction of the emperors with the attributes of Serapis became more and frequent, just like Isis as the guardian of the grain supply got larger importance in the turbulent 3<sup>rd</sup> century.<sup>6</sup>

After the excavation, an on-site reconstruction of the façade of the podium temple and the presentation of the buildings around the sanctuary courtyard were carried out based on the work of Tibor Vákár and Gyula Hajnóczy.<sup>7</sup> The elapsed time, the environmental pollution and, nevertheless, the scientific doubts regarding the reliability of the monumental reconstruction<sup>8</sup> made it necessary to start a new archaeological project at the beginning of the 2000s.

Under the leadership of Ottó Sosztarits, new excavations started in the summer of 2001, which continued with smaller interruptions until 2010. The archaeological work resulted in the discovery of many archaeological features and architectural details of the sanctuary and, in addition, many thousands of finds.<sup>9</sup> Archaeological research at the site continued with excavations south and west of the Iseum from 2013 onwards, which completed the previous results.<sup>10</sup> The complete investigation of the find material and the features is still in progress.

Based on the preliminary evaluation of the recent research and its results, it is clear that two “research aspects” have produced significant new results. It has become clear that the earlier assumption for the foundation, dated to AD 188, and the destruction of the sanctuary by an earthquake in AD 456 cannot be supported anymore. The chronology of the Iseum can now be outlined with a high probability as follows:<sup>11</sup>

Following the earliest intensive – but profane – built-up period (period 1), the existence of the Savarian Iseum can be confirmed from the Flavian period onwards beyond

2 For the exact size of the sanctuary: Bíró and Sosztarits 2023, 38–39; Sosztarits et al. in print. The contradiction of the formerly published ground plans and measures was first raised by I. Tóth: Tóth 1999.

3 About the finds see Szentlélek 1965; 1978–1979; and the catalogue of *Iseum Cat.* 2013.

4 Steindenkmäler 1971, nos. 71–74; *SIRIS* 661; *RICIS* 613/503; summarised in Mráv 2005.

5 Sosztarits 2008; Sosztarits 2016, 38.

6 Bricault and Versluys 2014, 13–14; Podvin 2014.

7 Mezős and Botos 2006.

8 Tóth I. 1999; Scherrer 2003, 74–75 fig. 13.

9 See the catalogue items of *Iseum Cat.* 2013.

10 See Balázs et al. 2017 about the Late Roman *horreum* and recently Sosztarits et al., in print.

11 The first attempt for a chronological framework: Sosztarits 2010, 146–150; for the detailed periodisation see Bíró and Sosztarits 2023, 38–40.



**Fig. 1. Part of the temple façade relief of the Iseum Savariense depicting the goddess Isis riding on the Sothis dog, with Mars to the right (photo: Savaria Museum)**

doubt, on the basis of the earliest finds of sacral character and architectural remains (period 2). This sanctuary had a smaller ground plan, and its upper walls were of adobe and wood construction. In the first third of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, large-scale reconstruction work began on the site of the Iseum (period 3). The previous buildings were demolished and replaced by a huge stone complex of 72 × 43 m, with the podium temple at its centre, significantly increasing the size of the sacred precinct. The next major renovation was carried out during the Severan period (period 4), but this time only the interior space distribution and the decoration of the complex were redesigned. The complex stood until the middle third of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, when a systematic dismantling began.

Another new discovery is the large amount of find material associated with a wide range of industrial activities in the early assemblages. Their interpretation has long posed questions, since two major concentrations of find material had already been observed during the excavation: in the northern and southern ends of the Hadrianic entrance hall. We had long been of the opinion that the workshops and the sanctuary were closely related, coexisting in parallel within a given spatial unit.<sup>12</sup>

However, a systematic analysis of the archaeological material of the area and of the different periods has revealed that the story is more complex, and the currently available data provide a slightly more sophisticated overview of the relationship between the different functions (i.e. sacral and industrial-profane) and of the shift in emphasis of a certain function.

12 Sosztarits 2016, 36.



**Fig. 2. The tesserae from the the Iseum**  
(photo: Savaria Museum)

(fig. 2).<sup>15</sup> These are labelled with names, weights, colours, textile fabrics/names that refer to the local cleaning and/or dyeing of the textiles. In addition to these, the finds show that the activities here covered a wide spectrum, from the preparation of raw materials to the making and repairing of textiles. It is yet to be identified if any archaeological features clearly indicate *fullonica* in the excavated area, yet the finds at least suggest its existence.

The other group of artefacts was related to bronze casting and the repair of bronze objects. The large quantities of metal scrap, melting pots, moulds, unfinished pieces and production waste, as well as the furnaces and their work pits identified so far, suggest the existence of several workshops in the area.

### Workshops from the pre-Iseum period (Period 1)

The Iseum-district and the southern suburb of the town show a permanent, intensive building activity from the time of the foundation of the colony around AD 50. This, compared to the known building history of the area of Savaria surrounded by town walls, confirms that this is the earliest known area of the Roman colonia that was continuously built up.<sup>16</sup> From a topographical point of view, the dominant landmark of the area was clearly the Amber Road. As we shall see, the Iseum and the surrounding plots, streets and even the southern town wall were oriented along this line, while the entire urban network within the town wall was built following a different orientation.<sup>17</sup>

Relatively few features can be assigned to period 1, as the earliest layers have been reached only over a very small area, and in many places they have been destroyed

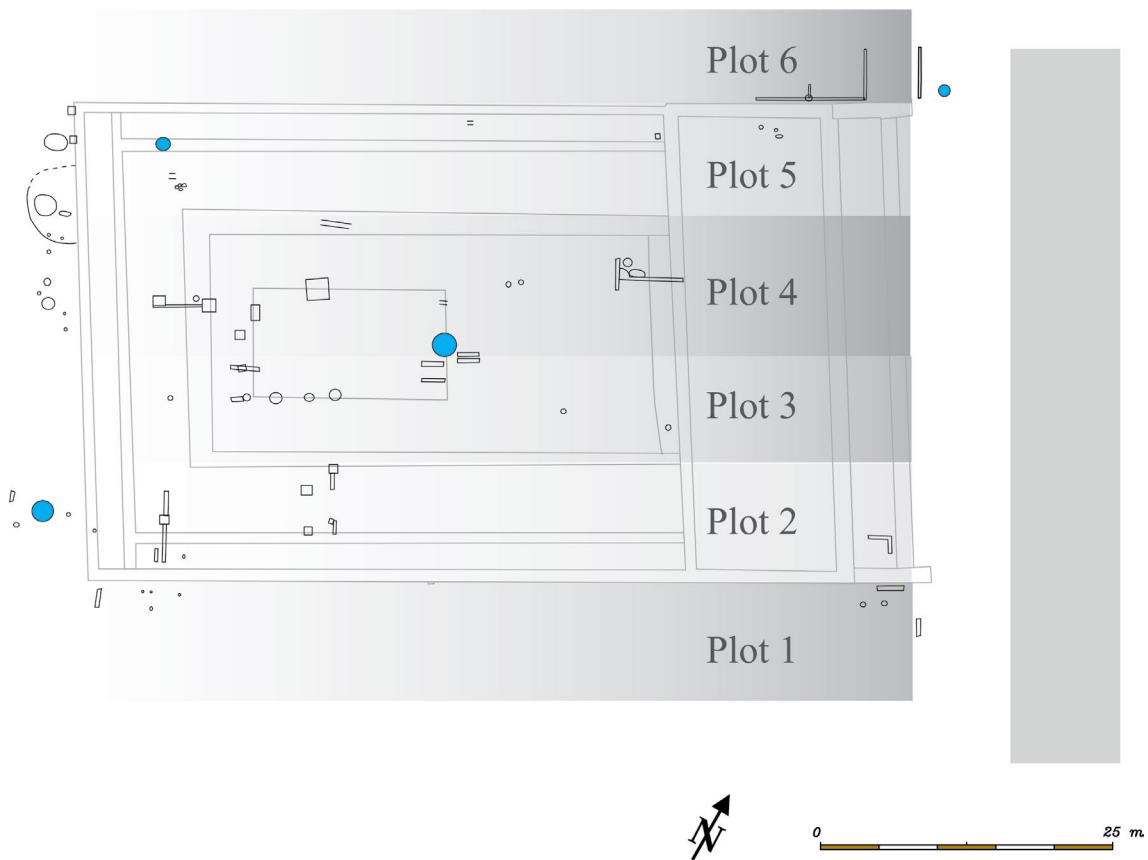
13 Pásztókai-Szeőke and Radman-Livaja 2013.

14 Sey 2013.

15 *Iseum Cat.* 2013, 23.1–18.

16 Bíró and Sosztarits 2023, 38; Sosztarits et al., in print.

17 For the double alignment of the urban street network see: Tóth E. 1971, 165–166 fig. 3; later: Sosztarits 1995, 240; Mladoniczki and Sosztarits 2009, 344–345; Sosztarits 2022, 17.



**Fig. 3. The features of the Period 1 (based on the excavation documentation, drawing by Sz. Bíró)**

by structures of later periods. It is certain that there are indications of parcelling in the area, where buildings, mainly of timber-framed constructions, were erected facing the Amber Road. The eastern end of the plots reached the Amber Road itself, while the western end might have extended to the bed of the former Savarias, now Perint creek.<sup>18</sup> The size of the former plots can be indirectly determined from the buildings of the later period: they were 10–11 metres wide (c. 35–40 Roman feet). We numbered them from south to north starting from one (fig. 3). The southern closing wall of the timber-framed building at the eastern end of plot 6 to the north, and the northern closing timber-framed wall of a similar building on plot 1, also suggest that the area between them (which is the same width as the width of the Hadrianic, larger Iseum) can be divided into plots of roughly the same width. This seems to be supported by the line of E-W oriented beam foundation trenches documented under the later podium temple in the area of plots 3–4, and also by the width of the enclosed area of the Flavian Iseum, which was exactly twice as wide as a reconstructed plot for period 1.<sup>19</sup>

18 For the changing bed of the Perint creek see: Mladoniczki and Sosztarits 2009, fig. 1; Anderkó 2016, 73–76.

19 Sosztarits et al., in print.

As these features are very fragmentary, it is difficult to determine their function. However, based on the finds from the destruction layer of this period, we can assume that there were different workshops in the area. Several assemblages have therefore been identified:

#### **Plot 4–5**

In the western part of the site, traces of a bronze workshop have been found in the form of a large charcoal layer (trench 39/a, SU 1512, 1517, 1627) and the remains of several timber-frame buildings. From the destruction layer a melting pot (inv. no. R.2009.2.9148, 11569?), iron slags, a bronze vessel lid (inv. no. R.2011.4.1501) and a bronze pan (*Iseum Cat.* 8.8) came to light. The finds were discovered from a vast levelling layer from a larger area, but it is not clear on which plot the workshop may have originally stood. It is most likely to have been located in the area of the 4<sup>th</sup> plot.

#### **Plot 3–4**

A possible bronze workshop may be assumed on the eastern area of the later sanctuary courtyard. In the destruction layer of the first period, a couple of finds could be identified, among them a semi-finished bronze bracelet decorated with a circle of dots (*Iseum Cat.* 22.14) and small bronze trimmings.

#### **Plot 3**

In the beam trench (SU 1461) cut into the subsoil on the eastern side of the later podium temple: a loom-weight (inv. no. R.2009.2.10199) and a spindle shaft (*Iseum Cat.* 23.20) were found. They could only be interpreted within this period, since in the following period the area would certainly have become part of the sacred precinct of the Iseum. At the eastern end of the same plot, and at the eastern end of the later courtyard, two “lead tags (tesserae)” from the earliest layer were also found (trench 16=43, SU 1666 – *Iseum Cat.* 23.11, 15). Moreover, other ware labels emerged as stray finds nearby (trench 42/a: *Iseum Cat.* 23.17, between the later altar and stairs: inv. no. R.2020.1.52). This suggests a textile workshop in the area of the later podium temple, which ceased to exist at the latest with the construction of the Flavian sanctuary.

#### **Plot 1**

A timber-framed building from this period is also known on the south side of the later sanctuary. Its northern closing wall ran practically in the same line as the wall of the later stone-foundation building, which continues to function as the closing wall of the building on this plot in the following centuries of the Roman period. Mainly textile-producing finds could be identified from its early layers: e. g. loom weights were found *in situ* (SU 479 – *Iseum Cat.* 23.34–35, SU 438 – inv. no. R.2009.2.622).

For the rest of the site, no clear statement can be made. It is important to mention that no traces of the round huts mentioned by Szentléleký were found during the





**Fig. 4.** The features of Period 2 (based on the excavation documentation, drawing by Sz. Bíró)

2001–2010 excavations.<sup>20</sup> According to his description, these adobe buildings with wattle and daub walls were built until the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD and could be dated by Samian Ware from the Po valley.

### The smaller Iseum (Period 2) (fig. 4)

#### Plot 3–4

In the Flavian period, the first sanctuary with a stone-built enclosure wall was built by combining the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> plots. It occupied an area of 42 × 21.4 m and extended about 20 m from the Amber Road. The exact location of the central temple has not yet been determined, but it can be assumed that it was in the immediate vicinity of the later podium temple. The complex was built partly on a stone foundation but

<sup>20</sup> Szentlélek 1965, 382.



**Fig. 5. Frescoes with motifs of the Alexandrian cult from the Flavian sanctuary (photo: Savaria Museum)**

with a timber and mud upper structure. The walls of some of the inner sanctuaries, which cannot be identified today, were decorated with high quality frescoes (fig. 5).<sup>21</sup> These murals depicted the goddess or her priestess or priest, as well as the main symbol of the cult, the *sistrum*, and other motifs associated with the cult, such as a snake. They should not be seen as decorative items, but as essential elements of the cult, belonging to the goddess through dedication. For this reason, they were not allowed to leave the sanctuary during the later construction work in the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and were therefore deposited as debris in an area which must have been already a sacred place at that time.<sup>22</sup> Their discovery in the west of the larger sanctuary precinct shows that this area was already part of the sanctuary from the Flavian period and that the sanctuary area may have extended as far as the Perint creek. Beside the frescos, a statue base dedicated to Isis Augusta by the *duumvir* of Savaria<sup>23</sup> and the high quantity of “ritual” ceramic finds (e.g. lamps, incense burners, offering plates) from the destruction layer of this period refer to the religious activity of the building.

So far, we have not been able to identify a workshop in this area, or at least we have not been able to assign any features to it, except for a small pit with a burnt-out wall in the western rear section. However, workshop finds have also come to light from these features and layers, but these are mainly from destruction

layers, so they could be from a bronze workshop of the earlier period. So far, leaf fragments of a bronze diadem have been identified (*Iseum Cat.* 8.63 – all from secondary filling, but there is one piece: inv. no. R.2009.2.7190 surely from period 1), all of them

21 Harsányi and Kurovszky 2017.

22 Bíró and Sosztarits 2023, 45–46; Sosztarits et al., in print.

23 *CIL* III 4156 = *RIU* I 14 = *SIRIS* 661–662 = *Iseum Cat.* 1.4.

cut from a bronze plate that had probably been used for other artefacts before. In addition, a semi-finished, strongly profiled brooch with one knob (type Almgren 84 – inv. no. R.2009.2.6982) was found here, which however suggests the continuation of the workshop in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.

In the two plots adjacent to the Iseum, the workshops were undoubtedly still in operation, on the eastern side of the plots, facing the Amber Road. So far, the following workshops have been identified:



**Fig. 6.** The moulds and the products of the brooch-forging workshop (photo: Savaria Museum)

### **Plot 5**

Traces of bronze casting were found in the northern area of the Iseum. The remains of a metal workshop were found in the filling of a furnace pit (KE 592), in which strongly profiled brooches with a single knob (Almgren 69 = Riha 2.9.4.), semi-finished brooches (*Iseum Cat.* 22.12) and fibula moulds (*Iseum Cat.* 22.5, *Iseum Cat.* 22.3, inv. no. R.2009.2.5807–5808) were identified (fig. 6). In addition to the brooches, a mould for a latch (*Iseum Cat.* 22.7) and a lead test mould for a lunula (*Iseum Cat.* 22.9) were also found, which may refer to other products of the workshop. The metalworking itself is indicated by the blast pipe (*Iseum Cat.* 22.6), the melting pot (*Iseum Cat.* 22.1) and the large amount of slag from the furnace and its working pit.

### **Plot 2**

The smaller textile workshop formerly located in the southern area (on plot 1) was probably moved one plot to the north (to the southern end of the later entrance hall of the Iseum). Here (trench 36) spindle hooks (*Iseum Cat.* 23.33 A–B, 23.29, 23.30 and inv. no. R.2009.2.7167, for the spindle hooks see Pásztoókai-Szeőke 2015, 88–92), a spindle button (*Iseum Cat.* 23.21), loom weights (R.2009.2.7898, R.2009.2.7900–7903), several bronze pins and a lead tag (*Iseum Cat.* 23.12) were found.

Similarly, in the western part of the site, south of the podium temple, a couple of lead tags (*Iseum Cat.* 23.13–14), spindle hooks (*Iseum Cat.* 23.28), bone and bronze pins were found (trenches 30 and 40, mainly from the 2<sup>nd</sup> period, from the destruction and levelling layers – inv. no. R.2009.2.4265, R.2009.2.4383, R.2009.2.4485, R.2009.2.7283), and loom weights (inv. no. R.2009.2.10753, R.2009.2.10760) were also discovered from this area. The area of the textile workshop presumably continued to the west, and here a corner of an adobe-walled building was also found above the remains of an earlier timber-framed building (fig. 7). This structure may have belonged to an industrial rather than a residential complex. Only the SE corner of the building survived: an adobe wall corner was built on a hard yellow clay foundation, which had



**Fig. 7. The corner of the adobe-walled building in the SW area, on plot 2 (photo: Savaria Museum)**

a gravelled foundation. The floor of the building was also revealed in the form of a hard white mortar. With a maximum dimension of 220 × 200 cm, the exact size of the room is unknown. Regarding the dating, it is worth mentioning a grey pot buried in the destruction layer of the earlier period 1 outside the adobe wall, and the three coins from them which may also be considered as building sacrifices (all coins from the reign of Titus with the terminus post quem AD 81, *Iseum Cat.* 15.2–5). These suggest that the adobe building can be dated after AD 81. The debris of the entire building was found only inside the room. The finds from its surroundings (wool comb: *Iseum Cat.* 23.19, loom weights: *Iseum Cat.* 23.36–37, bronze pins: inv. no. R.2009.2.2799, R.2009.2.3372, R.2009.2.5718, bone pin: inv. no. R.2009.2.4901, spindle button: inv. no. R.2009.2.3611, spindle hook: inv. no. R.2009.2.2296, R.2009.2.2716) indicate textile processing.

At the eastern end of the site (trench 36), a large quantity of bronze trimmings, a large quantity of slags, 72 negative fragments (inv. no. R.2009.2.7697, R.2009.2.7739) were found, which were used to cast small bronze objects. A melting pot (*Iseum Cat.* 22.2, inv. no. R.2009.2.7733) and a carriage ornament representing a female mask with a casting failure (R.20009.2.7043 = *Iseum Cat.* 14.39) also point to bronze casting. It was also possible to document the remains of a destroyed small furnace, which probably belonged to this industrial complex.

### **Plot 6**

In 2008, a large quantity of cattle horn core and bullock fragments were found on the north side of the entrance hall and the eastern portico of the Iseum, already outside the sanctuary. The dating of the artefacts clearly places the assemblage in the 2<sup>nd</sup> period, and its interpretation should be sought in a more profane context, i.e. in the presence of a possible glue-making workshop.<sup>24</sup>

### **Plot 1**

On the southern side, a stone-foundation building was constructed over the former textile workshop.<sup>25</sup> The function of this partially excavated building is not yet known. The earliest stone buildings in Savaria, which were constructed probably in the Flavian period can be related to sacral or public functions,<sup>26</sup> and the residential buildings were generally built as a result of the great urban development which began in the Hadrianic period. Based on this, we can assume that this building must also have had some kind of public function.

It seems that in the Flavian period two buildings with stone foundations were erected on the site: the Iseum and the other one whose function is still uncertain, although it may have been administrative. In the plots between and next to them we can locate various workshops, mainly for bronze and textile processing. These may have been forced outside the town walls because of the risk of fire. We have no evidence of their possible direct relationship with the sanctuary.

## **Construction of the large Iseum (Period 3) (c. AD 120–200)**

In the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, the spatial organisation of the area changed fundamentally (fig. 8). In the territory of the colony, a major urban development project was launched, which included the establishment of the urban road system, the construction of the public sewerage system and the paving of the streets with basalt. These works also concerned the southern area of the town. With the construction of the road that bounded the district from the south,<sup>27</sup> the former plot system may have been transformed, although its orientation was not changed. The construction of the larger sanctuary of the Iseum was accomplished by incorporating the two adjacent plots (plots 2 and 5), thus eliminating the workshops located there.

The centre of the larger Iseum consisted of the former sanctuary with a system of corridors around it. Smaller adjoining rooms were built along the main enclosure wall on three sides of this corridor, and a two-aisled entrance hall was built on the side facing the Amber Road.

Although it was built as a single architectural unit, the sanctuary must have extended beyond its enclosing walls from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century onwards.<sup>28</sup> The building on the

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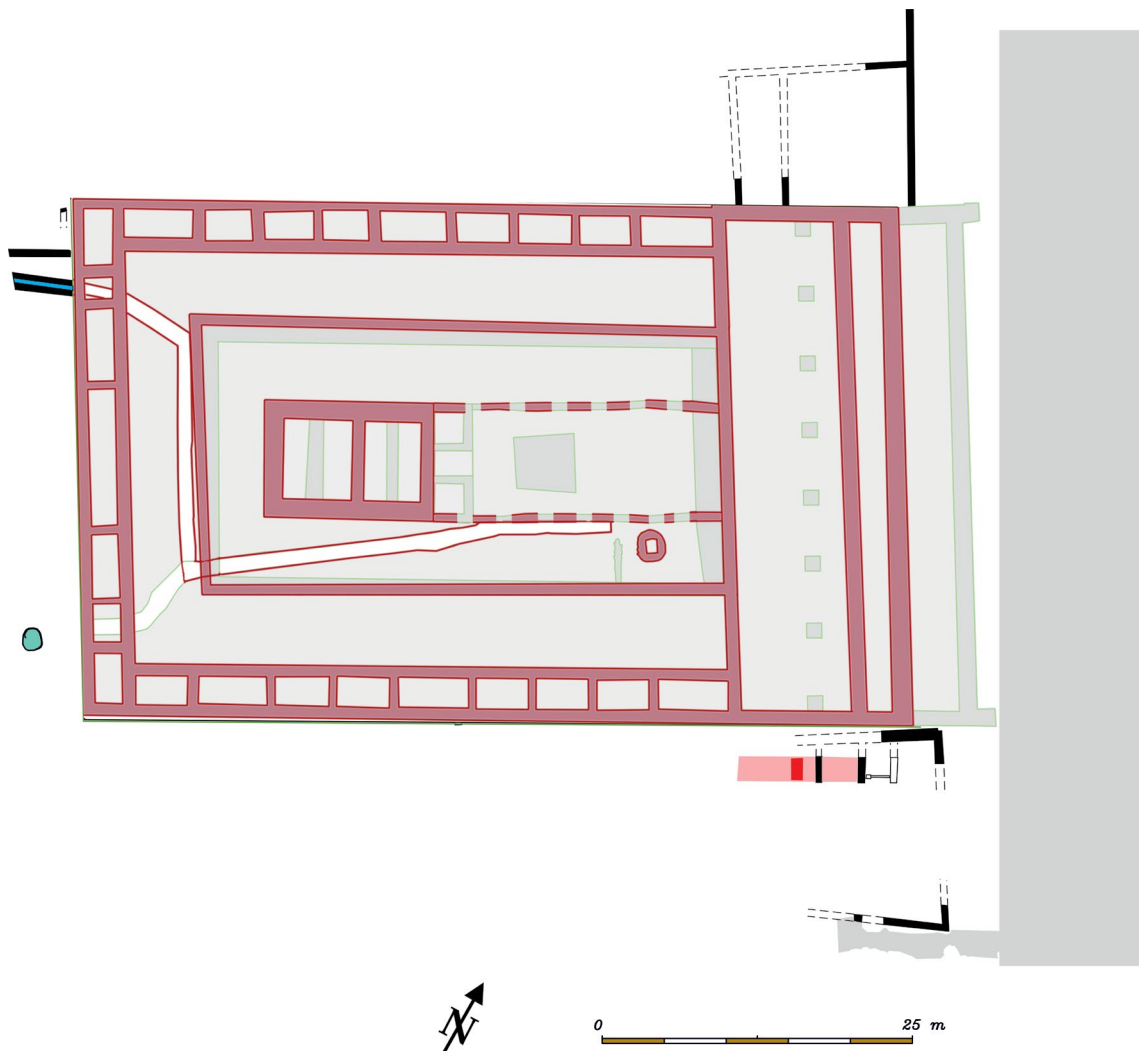
24 See also Sosztarits et al., in print.

25 Sosztarits et al., in print.

26 Bíró and Sosztarits 2023, 35–36.

27 Balázs et al. 2017, 81.

28 Sosztarits et. al., in print.



**Fig. 8.** The features of Period 3 (based on the excavation documentation, drawing by T. Kiss - Sz. Bíró)

northern side, immediately beyond the closing wall, must have formed an integral unit with the sanctuary as early as the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, since the foundation walls of the northern building ran directly to the enclosing wall of the Iseum, without an independent southern enclosing wall. This would also imply that this plot (plot 6) also belonged to the Iseum in some way.

The area of the sanctuary to the west was certainly larger. Due to the ritual burial of the wall elements of the earlier temple in this area, the sacred area had already extended further west in the earlier period.<sup>29</sup> In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, a basalt paved road running parallel to the Perint may have been the road that bypassed the town from the west, which also may have limited the western end of the Iseum area. In the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, the drainage of the Iseum was constructed in the northern half of the larger sanctuary (formerly plot 5), leading the water westwards

<sup>29</sup> Bíró and Sosztarits 2023, 45–46.

through the newly added area. Therefore, the drainage through this area reinforces the possibility of a common owner of the whole area.

This suggests that the sacred area was larger than before, and that the former residential and workshop functions in the area began to be gradually reduced.

Whether the former workshops ceased to exist permanently or simply moved elsewhere is not yet clear, but only a few indications for workshops are available. One of these evidences for industrial activity are the finds from this period coming from the outside of the southern wall of the Iseum (trench 14). Here, although no workshop features could be definitively linked to this period, the finds suggest the establishment of workshops in the front section along the Amber Road,<sup>30</sup> while a residential function can be identified in the rear section.

We should here mention the possible continuation of the bronze workshop at the western part of the Iseum plot, based on the semi-finished brooch of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century (type Almgren 84; see above plot 3–4). Another stirrup piece of a semi-finished fibula Almgren 84 was also found in the area of the NE section of the Flavian Iseum courtyard (*Iseum Cat.* 22.11).

In addition, it should be mentioned that there are also traces for grain processing in the area. Two Pompeii-type millstones and a semi-finished measuring vessel (*modius*),<sup>31</sup> which were buried at the earliest in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, are indications for this activity. The exact location of the grain processing is not yet known, as the three stone monuments were found on three different sides of the Iseum. However, grain processing was closely related to the cult of Isis, since Isis as the goddess of fertility was also responsible for the grain production and as Isis Pharia protected the grain shipments from Egypt to Rome.

### **The Severan Golden Age (Period 4)**

The next major reconstruction of the Iseum took place in the Severan period, but the basic layout of the sanctuary was not changed. The façade of the podium temple received the well-known marble decoration, and an imposing granite colonnade was erected by opening the western wall of the entrance hall towards the courtyard. The corridors surrounding the courtyard were transformed into porticoes. Subsequently, in the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, the entrance hall was raised and this elevation was maintained until the abandonment of the sanctuary in the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century and the systematic demolition of the Iseum.<sup>32</sup>

In the area of the southern building, which dates back to the earlier period, alterations and additions also took place, but its architectural integrity has been preserved. There is also evidence of some industrial activity here: a brick oven, dated by a coin of Gordian III, can be interpreted as a melting furnace.

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30 Sosztarits et. al., in print.

31 Balázs et al. 2017, 83–87 fig. 3; *Iseum Cat.* 2013, 6.10.

32 Sosztarits et al., in print.

In the area north of the Iseum, the building annexed to the sanctuary in the earlier period has also been preserved, although it is possible to assume that it was rebuilt and the rooms rearranged, but architecturally it still formed an integral unit with the northern wall of the Iseum.

In the western area, where there had previously been no obvious built-up area, major changes took place. In the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, two buildings were erected at the NW corner of the Iseum, with a smaller passage between them. This passage was aligned with one of the smaller rooms inside the Iseum, so a smaller gateway, communication floor between the sanctuary and the rear section may be assumed here. The northern building had the more elaborate design: its painted vaulted ceiling<sup>33</sup> and the heating channel indicated a special function for this room.

### **Functional changes in and around the Iseum**

In the 1<sup>st</sup> century, as we have seen, we can assume the existence of several workshops in the area of the later Iseum district (textile workshop, metalworking), in the suburb of Savaria. Although their exact location is uncertain in most cases, the foundation of the first sanctuary in the Flavian period indicated the beginning of a functional change in the area.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, a larger Iseum was created by integrating the neighbouring plots. It is assumed that some (or all) of the buildings on the adjacent plots were functionally linked to the Isis sanctuary in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, since their walls were joined to the walls of the Iseum. These buildings probably had such functions, which cannot be not located clearly within the walls of the Isis sanctuary so far, but their existence has to be assumed based on the evidence from other well-researched sanctuaries (e.g. banquet hall, accommodation for pilgrims etc.).<sup>34</sup> In summary, it is clear that a vast sanctuary complex of imperial importance was built around the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, which is essentially without parallel in Pannonian sacral architecture, both in terms of size and architectural quality.

With the development of the sanctuary, the industrial activity was essentially reduced to the background, but not completely eliminated. In fact, immediately to the south of the sanctuary, on the outside of the enclosure wall (trench 14), a building with several rooms and different periods may have been used as a workshop even in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. The reorganisation of the urban infrastructure in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century also influenced the topography and function of the area: the former plot system arranged along the Amber Road was replaced by an insula system, with the construction of the road running from E to W south of the Iseum, which joined the long-distance bypass along the Perint on the west side. This insula measured approximately 110 × 110 m, with the sanctuary of Isis at its centre (fig. 9).

At present, little information is available regarding the rest of the Iseum insula. Only the results of an archaeological trench provide information on the building activity in

33 See Harsányi and Kurovsky 2016.

34 Sosztarits et al., in print.





**Fig. 9.** The southern suburb of Savaria (surveyed by F. Derdák, graphic by Gy. Isztin)

the north-eastern part of the insula.<sup>35</sup> Here, the same early built-up character was documented as in the Iseum area, but without any indication for the function of the rooms. The excavations revealed the stratigraphy of various rooms, which were located not directly along the Amber Road, but a little west of it. Interestingly, the site more or less coincides with the assemblage of sheep skulls discovered by Vilmos Lipp in the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>36</sup> and later interpreted as the remains of a 4<sup>th</sup>-century cryobolium by István Tóth.<sup>37</sup> If the original description was accurate, the site can refer to the front room of this building, probably the building located in the NE-corner of the Iseum insula.

Less is known about the area on the other side of the Amber Road due to the relatively limited excavations, and this is even more true for the Early Period. At present we only have evidence of industrial activity in the area opposite the north-eastern corner of the Iseum.<sup>38</sup> However, it seems certain that significant changes took place here in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, in parallel with the changes documented in the Iseum district.<sup>39</sup> Directly opposite the Iseum, Tihamér Szentléleky carried out excavations in the 1970s,<sup>40</sup> and one trench reached this area during the 2001–2010 years. This research revealed the complete stratigraphy of a section. Already from the 1<sup>st</sup> century traces of a bronze melting workshop came to light, its chronology corresponding to the period 2 in the Iseum. From the later layers, some semi-finished bronze artefacts and small bronze trimmings also indicate some kind of metalworking activity.<sup>41</sup>

According to our current knowledge, several buildings with a sacral function may have stood in this area from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century onwards. Directly outside the southern town gate, a large enclosed courtyard sanctuary with an inner colonnade was built to Jupiter Depulsor.<sup>42</sup> The building inscription, framed by the figure of Victoria standing in a niche on either side, shows a striking resemblance to the main inscription of the Iseum. The formal characteristics date both to the Severan period.<sup>43</sup>

In the same period, a temple dedicated to Jupiter Dolichenus was built a little further south.<sup>44</sup> Here, the inscriptions on the discovered stone monuments clearly refer to the cult.<sup>45</sup>

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35 Balogh et al. 2002, 157–159.

36 Lipp 1870, 43–44.

37 Tóth I. 1975 and for its interpretation see also Thomas 1979, 231–233.

38 Szentléleky 1974.

39 Szentléleky 1973.

40 Szentléleky 1970, 1972, 1973, 1974.

41 The complete investigation of the features and finds is still in progress.

42 Medgyes 1974; Medgyes–Tóth 1975. For its identification as a sacral building see: Sosztarits 2022, 17; Sosztarits et al., in print.

43 *Iseum Cat.* 2013, 1.2 = *LapSav* 2011, 102–105 no. 41. The inscriptions were first published by I. Tóth (Tóth I. 1983–1984), without identifying that the Victoria relief also belonged to the inscription. The “weiblicher Torso” mentioned by Tóth was identified and also linked to the inscription during the investigation of the stone monuments of the Iseum, and it was confirmed by geological analysis; see: Mráv 2005, 38–40 fig. 13.

44 For its provenience see: Szentléleky 1970, for its dating: Szentléleky 1968, 382–383, and Tóth I. 1971, 80–84.

45 *Iseum Cat.* 2013, 1.16–17, 1.19.; Tóth I. 1977.



**Fig. 10.** The three-figure marble relief depicting Mercury, Silvanus and a Genius Augusti or Genius coloniae (photo: Savaria Museum)



**Fig. 11.** Fragment of a Mithraic head (photo: Savaria Museum)

Although the area has only been partially excavated, the discovered finds suggest that there are other sacral structures between these two. During the research carried out between 1969 and 1973, Szentlélek identified three additional buildings between the above two on the eastern side of the Amber Road, and he also described them as sacral buildings.<sup>46</sup> Only little information came to light about the periods of the 1<sup>st</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> centuries during this research, only the existence of the early, multi-period, timber-framed buildings was documented. During an urban development at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, the known stone buildings were erected over their destruction layers.<sup>47</sup>

First of all, a three-figure marble relief with oriental characteristics must be mentioned; this depicted Mercury, Silvanus and a Genius Augusti or Genius coloniae with a kalathos on his head.<sup>48</sup> This stone monument was discovered in the northernmost of these buildings (fig. 10).

A fragment of a head with a frigate cap of Mithraic type (fig. 11)<sup>49</sup> and a naked female figure holding a snake in her hands (fig. 12),<sup>50</sup> as well as terracotta and lead votive offerings,<sup>51</sup> were found in its vicinity.

The largest and central building of the vast “sacred district”, which included the sanctuaries of several deities, was of course the Iseum. The architectural and functional evolution of the sanctuary changed the specific “coexistence” of the previous-

46 Szentlélek 1978–1979, 186–187.

47 Szentlélek 1973.

48 *Iseum Cat.* 2013, 5.1; Gesztelyi 1989–1990, 144–152.

49 *Iseum Cat.* 2013, 3.13; Scherrer 2022.

50 Steindenkmäler 1971, 121 no. 186.

51 *Iseum Cat.* 2013, 9.3. Furthermore, a little east from the excavation on today’s Music School several lead votives came to light – unpublished excavation.



**Fig. 12.** Relief depicting a naked female figure holding a snake (photo: Savaria Museum)

ly predominantly commercial and/or industrial environment and the early smaller sanctuary in such a way that the sacred function gradually became dominant and later almost exclusive. This naturally affected the character of the relationship between town-walled inner colony territory and the Amber Road area. Its role as a long-distance trade route became secondary as the traffic shifted to the transit road behind the sanctuary, between the stream and the western town wall.<sup>52</sup> Of course, the road retained its traditional character as a main road, but the cult buildings along it transformed it more and more into a sacred road. It is no coincidence that Szentlélekly called it the “Alley of Oriental Sanctuaries” as early as 1969,<sup>53</sup> and a little later István Tóth, following P. Merlat, called it the “Rue of Temples”,<sup>54</sup> apparently not unreasonably.

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52 Mladoniczki and Sosztarits 2009, fig. 1.

53 Unfortunately, T. Szentlélekly did not publish this term; it appears only in the excavation documents.

54 Tóth I. 1977, 66.

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# LOCATING DIONYSUS AT THE ISIAC SANCTUARY OF THESSALONIKI

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## Abstract

*In the Isiac sanctuary of Thessaloniki, there is evidence that several deities, not typically associated with the Egyptian gods, were also venerated. One particularly intriguing example is Dionysus. While Dionysus may be considered as an interpretatio graeca of Osiris, he appears in a unique manner among the finds from the sanctuary, notably in an inscription dedicated to Zeus Dionysus Gongylos. These three names together refer to a single deity, whose identity has intrigued scholars since the inscription emerged. This paper examines the available data about this cult, aiming to clarify what is known, what can be hypothesised, and what remains uncertain. Beyond Zeus Dionysus Gongylos, the sanctuary revealed additional Dionysiac elements, like a second-century CE votive relief dedicated to Dionysus as a listening deity, and some indirect references. Together, this evidence sheds light on the religious practices and cult adherents in Thessaloniki during the Imperial era and underscores the intercultural nature of the city's Isiac sanctuary.\**

**Keywords:** Thessaloniki – Dionysos/Dionysus – Zeus – Osiris – Harpocrates.

## Introduction

Cities, along with their monuments and buildings, have their own fates. Since its founding by Cassander in 316/5 BCE, Thessaloniki has had a continuous existence.

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The modern city preserves its past through layers of material remains beneath the surface, but uninterrupted use has made unearthing this history quite challenging. The planning works undertaken after the Great Fire of Thessaloniki in 1917, which ravaged over half of the city centre, provided an opportunity to delve beneath the surface. Rescue excavations from 1921 to 1925 revealed unexpected ruins of a sanctuary dedicated to Sarapis and other Egyptian gods. Subsequent discoveries in 1939 and in the late 1950s expanded our knowledge of it. However, the sanctuary has not been entirely excavated and both its boundaries and surroundings, including potential adjacent sanctuaries, remain elusive.<sup>1</sup>

The sanctuary must have been established during the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE and it grew over time to include several temples, dedicated to different deities. Four temple structures have been discovered, and more may have existed. Epigraphic evidence attests to an *Osirion*, a precinct of Osiris,<sup>2</sup> a temple of Isis *Memphitis*,<sup>3</sup> and probably to a *Sarapieion*, a precinct of Sarapis,<sup>4</sup> as well as a *sekos*, a sacred enclosure, of Hermanubis.<sup>5</sup> As for the temple discovered in 1921 and immediately labelled as the temple of Sarapis,<sup>6</sup> a recent evaluation of its findings attributes it to the cult of Aphrodite.<sup>7</sup>

The sanctuary was located in the sacred area of the city,<sup>8</sup> but it is difficult to assess its significance within its urban context. This is due to the lack of comparable data from nearby sanctuaries, as they have not yet been unearthed, with one exception – the partial excavation of an Ionian podium temple to the north of the Isiac sanctuary, constructed with reused architectural elements from the Late Archaic period.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, several inscriptions retrieved from the site indicate that the Isiac sanctuary was continuously evolving. Already in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, it must have been a prosperous site.<sup>10</sup> A particular problem is posed by the finds that do not correlate, at least directly, to the cults of the *gens isiac* or, in general, of the Egyptian gods. The image that we derive from the excavations corresponds to its late phases and especially to the situation right before and after its abandonment. Broken sculptures and inscriptions were used as building material in late Roman walls. While this practice contributed to their preservation, it makes it difficult to assess the provenance of this debris, namely whether it was related to the Isiac sanctuary or to other neighbouring or even more distant ones.

1 On these subjects see Christodoulou 2021; Christodoulou and Touloumtzidou 2021, with previous bibliography.

2 Christodoulou 2021, 460–462.

3 *IG X.2.1 102*, 2<sup>nd</sup> c. CE; Christodoulou 2009, 342.

4 Christodoulou 2021, 457–458.

5 The mention of *σηκοβάται* in an inscription by an association of Hermanubiasts (*IG X.2.1 220 = RICIS 113/0576*) led L. Bricault to assume that, since the *σηκοβάται* must have been allowed to enter the *σηκός*, Hermanubis probably had his own chapel, even if it was modestly sized.

6 Cf. Christodoulou 2021, 452.

7 Christodoulou and Touloumtzidou 2021.

8 Vickers 1972, 164; Vitti 1996, 88–92; Steimle 2008, 23–28.

9 Bakalakis 1983 suggested identifying it as the temple of Dionysus. A more recent study proposed that this temple was dedicated to the cult of *dea Roma*, Zeus *Eleutherios*, and the Emperor, cf. Stefanidou-Tiveriou 2012, with further references regarding previous proposals for attributing the temple.

10 Christodoulou 2021, 456.

For example, a marble block of a statuary base that was found built into the "late Roman" wall of a portico bears a 2<sup>nd</sup>-century BCE inscription (fig. 1). It records a dedication to Dionysus by the city of Thessaloniki and mentions the names of two politarchs, the city's annually-elected, executive magistrates at the time.<sup>11</sup> The dedication should have belonged to the Dionysiac sanctuary of the city, but the wall into which the block was incorporated seems to have been situated in the area of the Isiac sanctuary. However, this is not the only find from the Isiac sanctuary related to Dionysus. There are three further finds that will be discussed here: a first century CE inscription with a dedication to Zeus Dionysus Gongylos by members of a *thiasos*, a second century CE votive relief dedicated to Dionysus as a listening deity, and a fragment from a statue of Dionysus.



**Fig. 1. Marble block with dedication to Dionysus, inv. No. MΘ 860 (photo: author)**

The cult of Dionysus had an early and prominent presence in Thessaloniki,<sup>12</sup> which is evident through various factors. One of the city's tribes, the *phyle Dionysias*,<sup>13</sup> was named after the god. The reference to the politarchs in the aforementioned inscription<sup>14</sup> affirms the status of the Dionysiac cult as a city cult. In fact, many late Hellenistic coin issues of Thessaloniki depicted Dionysus on the reverse<sup>15</sup> and the city celebrated an annual festival dedicated to Dionysus, the *Dionysieia*.<sup>16</sup> There were several Dionysiac religious associations – more than for any other deity,<sup>17</sup> and Dionysus-re-

11 Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, inv. no. MΘ 860; Pelekidis 1934, 25 and 91 fig. 3; *IG X.2.1* 28; Hatzopoulos 1996b, 90 no. 72: ἡ πόλις | Διονύσωι, | πολιταρχούντων | Ἀριστάνδρου τοῦ Ἀριστόνου, | Ἀντιμάχου τοῦ Ἀριστοξένου. It is unclear whether the inscription dates from before or after the Roman conquest of Macedon, i.e. before or after 168 BCE. In this respect, a decisive factor is the long-disputed question of whether the politarchate was a magistracy introduced by the Romans or if it originated during the period under the kings. It is however beyond doubt that the earlier certain mention of politarchs dates from immediately after 168 BCE. On this controversial question, which is beyond the scope of this article and cannot be considered to be fully resolved, see Voutiras 1986, 353–355; Papazoglou 1986, 441–444; Hatzopoulos 1996a, 134–138; Mari 2017, 344–350; Nigdelis and Anagnostoudis 2017, 303–305; Mari 2018, 190–193; Rousset 2017, 69 n. 26 and 84 – all with further references.

12 Edson 1948, 160; for a more recent and nuanced approach to the subject, see Steimle 2008, 172–173; Tzanavari 2011, 112–115.

13 The tribe is mentioned in *IG X.2.1* 185; Edson (1948, 160 n. 4) suggested that it was instituted when Cassander founded Thessaloniki through synoecism.

14 See above, n. 11.

15 Kourempas 2016, pls. 4–18 (140–115 BCE), 28–30 (114–100 BCE), 46 (100–85 BCE), 50–52 (80–50 BCE); Kourempas 2021, 111–112. However, it is noteworthy that, during the Imperial period, there are no known coin issues from Thessaloniki that depict Dionysus.

16 *IG X.2.1* 5 ([Διο]νυσείους) and 12 ([Διο]γυσήους).

17 Nigdelis 2006, 101–146; Steimle 2008, 174–183; Nigdelis 2010, 14–16, 28–33 (taking into account the modifications to the reading of *IG X.2.1* 261 by Martín González and Hallof 2020, 236–237).

lated theophoric names were in considerable use.<sup>18</sup> The appeal of the Dionysiac cult and its integration into Thessaloniki is further demonstrated by several sculptures, which vary from monumental to smaller in size,<sup>19</sup> an impressive mosaic floor from a *villa urbana* that depicts Dionysus' encounter with Ariadne on Naxos,<sup>20</sup> as well as clay artefacts.<sup>21</sup> A significant sanctuary dedicated to the god must, therefore, have existed in the city.<sup>22</sup> As a 9<sup>th</sup> century source reveals, it was also the centre of annual festivities that involved a procession, in which a phallus was carried.<sup>23</sup>

It is possible to imagine the Dionysiac finds from the Isiac sanctuary as associated with the sanctuary of Dionysus. Nonetheless, considering that Dionysus was linked with Osiris<sup>24</sup> or Sarapis<sup>25</sup> and he was even mentioned or alluded to in Isiac Aretalogies,<sup>26</sup> it is also possible to consider his presence within the context of the Isiac sanctuary as a reflection of such links. This holds true for other Isiac sanctuaries outside Egypt, where, although rare, dedications to or representations of Dionysus,<sup>27</sup> along with objects featuring Dionysiac elements,<sup>28</sup> have also been discovered.

## Zeus Dionysus Gongylos and his mystai

### *The inscription*

The rescue excavation of 1939 by Stratis Pelekidis and Charalampos Makaronas, conducted near the area explored in 1921–1925, revealed a small Roman temple with an apse over a narrow, vaulted, underground *crypta*, auxiliary buildings containing small

18 The most common is Διονύσιος, followed by Διονυσία; there are also instances of Διονῦς, Διονυσιάς, Διονύσις, Διονυσογένης, Διονυσόδωρος, Διονυσοφάνης, as well as Βάκχιος, Βάκχης, Βακχῦλος and Θύρσος; cf. *IG X.2.1* and *IG X.2.1s, passim*.

19 Despina et al. 1997, 137–138 no. 109 fig. 309–310 (Θ. Στεφανίδου-Τιβεριίου); 184–189 no. 141 fig. 364–365 (Θ. Στεφανίδου-Τιβεριίου); Stefanidou-Tiveriou and Voutiras 2020, 17–18 no. 666 fig. 1858–1864 (E. Τρακοσοπούλου-Σαλακίδου); 18–19 no. 667 fig. 1865–1868 (Κ. Τζαναβάρη); see Stefanidou Tiveriou 1985, 49–55 nos. 6–7, for two marble table supports; Adam-Veleni 1995 for a further marble table support. For the pillars with depictions of Dionysus and Ariadne of the so-called portico of the *Incantadas*, which stood near the *forum*, see Descamps-Lequime and Charatzopoulou 2011, 582 nos. 364/2–3 (L. Laugier and M. Sève).

20 Asimakopoulou-Atzaka 2011, 375–380.

21 Cf. an alabastron from the *forum* of Thessaloniki in the form of a phallus with a bearded head of Dionysus in relief, Descamps-Lequime and Charatzopoulou, 505 no. 319 (P. Adam-Veleni); a mask of Dionysus with bull's horns and *mitra*, Tsamisis 2016, 9 fig. 2, 73 (erroneously identified as Isis-Selene).

22 Bakalakis 1983 addresses the importance of the Dionysiac sanctuary in Thessaloniki. On the location of this sanctuary, to the northeast of and in considerable distance from the Isiac one, see Voutiras 1999, 1337–1341.

23 Bakalakis 1983, 38–42; Voutiras 2012, 566, with further references.

24 Cf. Stambaugh 1972, 53–55; Coulon 2013, 167–190; Smith 2017, 409–411; Koemoth 2006.

25 Stambaugh 1972, 55–59.

26 *RICIS* 104/0206 (l. 8, 10), 112/0201 (l. 15).

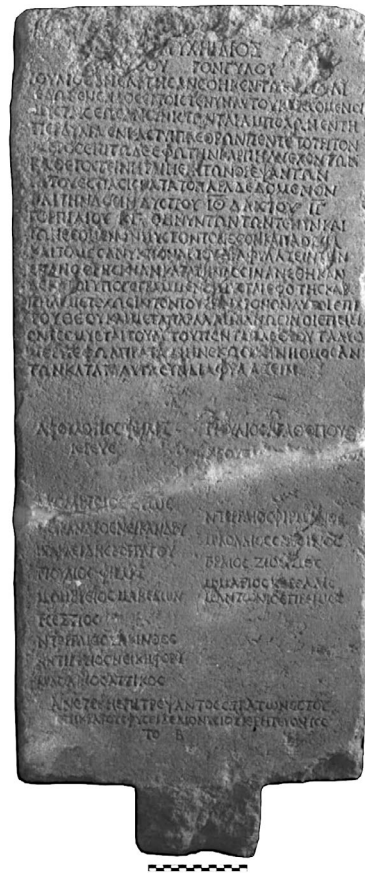
27 *RICIS* 202/0131, 202/0165; Bulard et al. 1907, 524–525 fig. 23; Swetnam-Burland 2015, 37–40 fig. 1.12; 113–114, 121–122 fig. 3.16; Blaževska and Radnjanski 2015, 228 no. 20; Stampolidis et al. 2018, 340 no. 325.

28 Dekoulakou 2003; Dekoulakou 2011.

rooms, and numerous artefacts, including "around 35 inscriptions [...] that contribute to the history of the cults of the Egyptian gods in Thessaloniki".<sup>29</sup> One of these inscriptions stands out from the rest because it refers to a three-named god who is not part of the Isiac pantheon (fig. 2; Annex, no. 1), Zeus Dionysus Gongylos.<sup>30</sup> Whilst the three names might suggest multiple deities, the mention "for the god" – τῷ θεῷ – in line 3 indicates that the three names define a single god.<sup>31</sup> The inscription records the consecration of a vineyard and its bequest to an association of *mystai* of the god, provided that they celebrate certain rituals and banquets annually. It is noteworthy that references of *mystai* occur only in four more inscriptions from Thessaloniki, all related to Dionysiac associations.<sup>32</sup> Two questions arise. What is the identity of this god, and is there any connection between this particular cult or its *mystai* and the Isiac sanctuary? These and similar topics have attracted the attention of many scholars since the discovery of the inscription.<sup>33</sup>

### **Zeus and Dionysus: shared cult**

Dionysus was Zeus' son and Zeus carried him within his thigh until he was born.<sup>34</sup> Connections between the two gods can be traced back to the Mycenaean period.<sup>35</sup> In one of the surviving fragments of Euripides' *Cretans* (F 472), the chorus alludes to mystic rites of Zeus *Idaios* and Zagreus, a



**Fig. 2. Stele of *mystai* of Zeus Dionysus Gongylos, inv. No. MΘ 983 (archive photo: Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο Θεσσαλονίκης)**

29 Makaronas 1940, 465; Walter 1940, 264.

30 Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο Θεσσαλονίκης, inv. no. MΘ 983; *IG X.2.1* 259; *RICIS* 113/0537; Daux 1980, 531–532.

31 Daux 1972, 481. For a different opinion see Versnel 1990, 237 n. 151; Jaccottet 2002b, 51, expresses some reservations, mainly because she deems it impossible to determine the precise meaning of the term *Gongylos*.

32 *IG X.2.1* 260, 309 and 506; *IG X.2.1s* 1077; Jaccottet 2002b, 53–58 nos. 20–22; Nigdelis 2006; cf. above, n. 17.

33 Daux 1972; Wild 1981, 192–194; Kubińska 2001, 156–159; Jaccottet 2002a, 57, 85–86; Jaccottet 2002b, 49–53 no. 19; Steimle 2006, 32–35; Steimle 2008, 183–184; Christodoulou 2009, 338–339; Nigdelis 2010, 30–33; Kloppenborg and Ascough 2011, 352–356 no. 76; *CAPInv.* 716 (P. Paschidis), <http://ancientassociations.ku.dk/assoc/716>.

34 Cf. Leitao 2012, 58–99 for insights into this myth.

35 Duev 2007; Bernabé 2013; cf. Liapis 2007, 392–394. On the joint cult of Zeus, Hera, and Dionysos in Lesbos as attested in fragments of Sappho and Alcaeus, see Picard 1946; Jiménez San Cristóbal 2017. For an analysis of the links between "Zeus and Dionysos" see Cook 1925, 267–291.

god often identified with Dionysus.<sup>36</sup> This "is a highly poetic description and argument persists, in what sense Euripides' detail may be judged accurate",<sup>37</sup> but what is important here is the general image, and Strabo (10.3.11) also refers to a Cretan cult of Zeus with Dionysiac elements. In addition, a small series of inscriptions from Delos, Lebadeia, Thrace and Asia Minor attest to a shared cult of Zeus and Dionysus. However, as we will see, they often record quite different circumstances and do not lend themselves to a single interpretation.

A Delian inscription records a dedication to Zeus *Eleutherios* and Dionysos in the name of the *competalists*, a Delian association of *liberti* and slaves. The dedication comprised the statues of the two gods, a sundial, an altar, and possibly a temple.<sup>38</sup> Of the epigraphic evidence presented here, this inscription, dated to after 125 BCE, is the oldest. It stands apart from the rest because it refers to the links between and the assimilation of Jupiter, Liber Pater, and Dionysus as deities connected to viticulture.<sup>39</sup> In fact, a bilingual inscription from the agora of the *competalists*, recording the dedication of a statue of Zeus, translates Zeus *Eleutherios* – Δία Ἐλευθέριον ἀνέθηκον – as Jupiter *Liber* – *lovem Leiberum statuer(unt)*.<sup>40</sup>

One of the later records on this topic, a 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE inscription from Lebadeia, demonstrates a connection between the two gods in the person of a single priest serving both cults. It records the dedication of a Dionysus statue by the priest of Zeus *Trophonios*, who also presided over a congregation of Bacchic worshippers.<sup>41</sup> This double role should be seen in the context of the increased level of interactions between various cults during this period.

At Thracian Maroneia, situated in an area renowned for producing some of the finest wine in Antiquity, a series of small altars dedicated during the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries CE by priests of "Zeus, Roma, Dionysus, and Maron" indicate a joint cult of these four deities.<sup>42</sup> This appears to be a case of assembling the important cults of the city during the Imperial period. The cult of Zeus and Roma is already attested by an inscription on a 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE small altar;<sup>43</sup> Dionysus, the god of wine, and Maron, the local deity of wine, sometimes considered the grandson or son of Dionysus, have an obvious significance for the wine-producing region. A further testimony from Thrace, a dedication of an altar to Zeus and Dionysus from Bizye,<sup>44</sup> will be examined below in the context of two other inscriptions from the same city that suggest the identification of the two gods.

36 Liapis 2007, 392–393; Bernabé Pajares 2016, 191–193; Tralau 2017, 437–442. Some scholars think that, in this fragment, Euripides avoids the explicit identification of Zagreus and Dionysus, Jouan and van Looy 2002, 311–312. One cannot fail to remark, however, the expression βάκχος ἐκλήθη ὀσιωθείς, "I was consecrated and named a Bacchus".

37 Collard et al. 1995, 67.

38 *ID* 1770.

39 On Jupiter, Liber Pater and their assimilation to Dionysus see De Cazanove 1988.

40 *ID* 1771.

41 Jaccottet 2002b, 42 no. 10.

42 *EΘA* E188–E198.

43 *EΘA* E187.

44 *IGBulg* V 5659 (211–217 CE).

Asia Minor offers two additional inscriptions documenting the shared cult of Zeus and Dionysus. A dedication from *Dios Hieron* in Lydia addresses Zeus, Dionysus, and the Emperors (*Sebatoi*),<sup>45</sup> and an inscription from Hadrianoi in Mysia bears a dedication to Zeus *Ophelios* and Dionysus.<sup>46</sup>

### **Zeus and Dionysus: identification**

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, Aelius Aristides claims to have heard that "Zeus himself is Dionysus" – ὅτι αὐτὸς ὁ Ζεὺς εἶη ὁ Διόνυσος.<sup>47</sup> At least six inscriptions from Thrace and Asia Minor provide evidence of the identification of the two gods. The two Thracian inscriptions come from monuments that originate from Bizye: in both cases, a priest of the *baccheion*<sup>48</sup> offered an altar to Zeus Dionysus.<sup>49</sup> Of the remaining four inscriptions, from Asia Minor, an inscription from Pergamon contains an oracle of Claros (166–215 CE), which prescribes the sacrifice of a three-year old ox to both Zeus and Zeus Bacchus.<sup>50</sup> Three altars come from the area of Dorylaion in Phrygia, all adorned with various forms of Dionysiac ornamentation. Two of them were dedicated by associations of *mystai* who probably identified themselves by their ethnic names (Κητιουερηνοὶ and Κοροσεανοί, corresponding to otherwise unattested rural settlements),<sup>51</sup> and the third by an association of youths from another unknown settlement (Ταναϊτηνῶν νεανίαι).<sup>52</sup> In fact, a seventh inscription exists, one from Scythopolis in the province of Syria Palaestina (today Bet Sche'an in Israel). It appears to bear a dedication to Zeus Bacchus – Διὶ Βάκχ[ω] – despite the fact that this reading has been contested.<sup>53</sup>

The inscriptions from Bizye suggest that there was a temple in the city dedicated to Zeus Dionysus, or to Zeus and Dionysus.<sup>54</sup> As happens very often in such cases,

45 SEG 31, 993.

46 *IHadri* 10 (2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE).

47 Prose hymn to Dionysus (XLI), 4.

48 According to Slavova 2002, 139–140, the word βακχεῖον means "both 'a Dionysiac mystery club' and 'the place where it gathers'".

49 *IGBulg* III,2 1864 and 1865

50 *IvP* II 324, l. 32: τριένου δὲ βοῶς Διὶ καὶ Διὶ Βάκχῳ. To deliver Pergamon from a plague, the Oracle of Apollo at Claros had suggested honouring the gods most favourable to the people of Pergamon through hymns and sacrifices. See further Picard 1922; Várhelyi 2001, 24–26; Busine 2013, 178–180, 185–186; Nissinen 2017, 126–127.

51 Haspels 1971, 352 no.139 and 354 no. 144.

52 *MAMA* IV 360; cf. Haspels 1962, 287; Golubtsova 1977, 86.

53 Lifshitz 1961, 189–190; Nieto Ibáñez 1999, 263–264. Seyrig 1962, 208–210, who tentatively dated the inscription to between 26 and 35 CE, disputed the reading ΒΑΚΧ[Ω], with a valid argument, namely that the letter following ΒΑΚ (only a part of it is preserved) cannot be a *chi*, as it lacks the upper left stroke. However, it is worth noting that the vertical stroke of the *kappa* in ΒΑΚ is somewhat inclined (see Lifshitz 1961, pl. 8, B; the drawing in Seyrig 1962, 209 fig. 1 is not accurate in this respect). Therefore, the only slightly more inclined stroke that follows could potentially belong to another *kappa*, resulting in Βάκκ[ω]; cf. Βακκικός for Βακχικός on two Orphic gems, Mastrocinque 1993, 16, 21; Βακκύλου for Βακχύλου in *SEG* 32, 1427; also, inversely, νεόβακχοι for νεόβακχοι, in Haspels 1971, 354 no. 144, l. 2, or Βακχίου for Βακχίου in *SEG* 53, 726. On this phenomenon, cf. Hatzopoulos and Loukopoulou 1996, 231. Another possibility would be that the upper left stroke of *chi* was omitted by the letter-cutter and added in paint.

54 See Velkov 1978, in particular 178–180.

the boundaries separating shared cult and identification are vague. There are three inscriptions, all dedications of altars, but each one refers somewhat differently to the two gods. A dedication for the welfare of the Emperor Caracalla and Julia Domna is addressed to Zeus *and* Dionysus, Διὶ καὶ Διονύσῳ.<sup>55</sup> The other two dedications, made by priests of the *baccheion*, refer unequivocally to one double-named god. One is addressed to the god Zeus Dionysus, θεῶν Διὶ Διονύσῳ, and the other to the god Zeus who is Dionysus, θεῶν Διὶ τῶν Διονύσῳ.<sup>56</sup>

Within a Thracian context, a surprising connection between Zeus and Dionysus emerges. Pausanias records a triad of statues in Olympia, "works of the Argive Dionysius", believed to be part of the numerous offerings made to the sanctuary by the tyrant of Rhegium Micythus around 460 BCE, after retiring in Tegea, for the return to health of his seriously ill son. The three statues were Dionysus, Orpheus the Thracian, and Zeus "represented as a beardless youth".<sup>57</sup> Pausanias' description raises many questions. One such query pertains to whether Dionysus was also depicted without a beard, something that would be somewhat surprising for the timeframe just prior to the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE.<sup>58</sup> Consequently, there might be doubts as to the veracity of the narrative connecting these sculptures to the dedications of Micythus. Nevertheless, the narratives circulating in Olympia during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, the era of Pausanias, concerning older offerings, are only marginally relevant to our inquiry. What remains significant, is the portrayal of a youthful Zeus positioned alongside Dionysus and Orpheus. In the absence of specific information, we can reasonably assume that the Dionysus sculpture depicted him in a youthful form, consistent with his canonical representation since the late 5<sup>th</sup> century. In this context, Zeus' youthful appearance most probably signified an equal partnership with Dionysus and possibly also Orpheus.

Orpheus' presence in Olympia together with Zeus and Dionysus could imply a connection between the bond of the two deities and Orphic ideas.<sup>59</sup> Interestingly, Zeus is the most frequently mentioned deity in the Orphic fragments, followed by Dionysus.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, there are two Orphic fragments that also attest to the identification of Zeus and Dionysus: an invocation to the "resplendent Zeus Dionysus" – ἀγλαῆ Ζεῦ Διόνυσε<sup>61</sup> – and the henotheistic acclamation that Zeus, Hades, Helios, and Dionysus are one – εἷς Ζεὺς, εἷς Ἄϊδης, εἷς Ἥλιος, εἷς Διόνυσος.<sup>62</sup>

Regarding the study of the monuments from the Phrygian highlands, which comprise dedications to either Dionysus or Zeus Dionysus, Emilie Haspels referred to the similarities in their decoration. This led her to conclude that "they must refer to

55 See above, n. 44.

56 See above, n. 49.

57 Paus. 5.26.3–4, together with 5.24.6.

58 See Carpenter 1993; Jameson 1993, 48–50.

59 Cf. Fol 1993, 183–186.

60 Zhmud 1992, 163, with reference to Kern 1922: "Zeus [...] is mentioned more than 100 times, while Dionysus (together with the names of gods identified with him) almost half as often, and Apollo – one eighth as often".

61 Kern 1922, 249 no. 236, l. 3.

62 Kern 1922, 251 no. 239 b; cf. Sfameni Gasparro 2013, 445 with n. 50.



the same deity", whose character "may quite well be definable in such a way that the names Dionysos and Zeus Dionysos both do him justice".<sup>63</sup> It is true that in Phrygia and other regions of Asia Minor, many cults, especially those of Zeus, had a pronounced local character.

Recently, Robert Parker, without addressing the pairing of Zeus and Dionysus, pointed out that, in Phrygia, Zeus "stretches out beyond the scope of his Greek equivalent in apparently being concerned with the cultivation of vines", whilst "Dionysus presided over the drinking of wine, not the making of it".<sup>64</sup> It is possible that such a redefinition of their roles contributed to a closer association or interconnection between the two gods in the area. In any event, as shown above, the links between Zeus and Dionysus, as well as their identification, are complex and are found in several regions,<sup>65</sup> with the testimonies from Dorylaion in Phrygia and Bizye in Thrace being the most conspicuous – at least on the basis of the evidence available to us so far.

### **The epithet *Gongylos***

In the Thessalonian inscription, the god Zeus Dionysus bears the epithet *Gongylos*.<sup>66</sup> A closely related term, *Goggylates* (Γογγυλάτης), is used by Lycophron in Alexandria as an obscure epithet of Zeus.<sup>67</sup> Additionally, Dionysus takes on the attribute *Gongylōn* (Γονγύλων, in the genitive plural) in a mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century CE inscription that was discovered in the village of Kentrikon near Kilkis,<sup>68</sup> which possibly corresponds to the location of the ancient city of Ioron.<sup>69</sup>

Tzetzes, in his *Scholia* on Lycophron (12<sup>th</sup> century), cryptically explained Zeus' epithet *Goggylates* as the one "through whom the γογγύλαι and the clenched hands are set in motion" – Γογγυλάτης, δι' οὗ αἱ γογγύλαι καὶ αἱ συνεσφιγμέναι χεῖρες κινουῦνται. The term γογγύλη could refer to a turnip or, as an adjective, denote a round-shaped object. In this case the word has been interpreted as possibly referring to Zeus' thunderbolts. Consequently, Γογγυλάτης was translated as "hurling balls of fire".<sup>70</sup> Such an explanation is not totally convincing, especially considering the fact that Athenaeus presents a much less dignified use of the word *Goggyloi*. This pertains to certain peo-

63 Haspels 1962, 287.

64 Parker 2023, 180.

65 Cf. Scott 2008, 328.

66 In *IG X.2.1 259*, Edson states that Γογγύλος has the same meaning as the adjective στρογγύλος, "round" or "compact", but remarks that, as an epithet, it is entirely obscure.

67 Lyc. 435: ὃν Γογγυλάτης εἶλε Βουλαῖος Μυλεὺς. *N.b.* that Zeus is not named directly; the fact that the three epithets refer to Zeus is implied from the narration, the story of the punishment of Kapaneus by Zeus, who blasted him with his thunderbolt; it can also be deduced by the mention of *Boulaios*, which is an epithet known in its masculine form only for Zeus (cf. Paus. 1.3.5; Hornblower 2014, 109 n. 82) – whereas *Boulaia* could be Athena, Hestia, Themis, or Artemis (cf. *LSJ*, s.v. βουλαῖος).

68 *EAMΦA 44* (Π. Μ. Νίγδελης and Η. Κ. Σβέρκος); *n.b.* that the editors raise some doubts concerning the exact provenance of the inscription. The third line of the inscription reads: ἱεροῦ Διονύσου Γονγύλων I[- - -].

69 On Ioron and its possible location, Zannis 2008, esp. 106–107, in regard to the cult of Dionysus in the ancient site near the villages Kentriko and Palatiano.

70 *LSJ*, s.v. γογγυλάτης; cf. Hornblower 2014, 115; Hornblower 2015, 87 and 214.

ple on Delos: "I am not unaware of what Apollodorus of Athens said about the Delians: they used to provide cooking and table-setting services to those who attended the sacred rites; they had names that reflected their roles, such as Cakes (Μαγίδες) and Doughnuts (Γογγύλοι). This was because, during the banquets, as Aristophanes says, they spent their days kneading round cakes and serving them, as women do."<sup>71</sup>

However, another approach is possible. We have three words from the same root that define Zeus in one case, Zeus Dionysus in another, and simply Dionysus in a third one. The key is provided by the genitive plural *Gongylōn*, which means "of *Gongyla*" or "of *Gongyloi*", and presumably refers to a place name. *Goggylates* functions perfectly as a toponymic epithet as well,<sup>72</sup> as does *Gongylos*.<sup>73</sup> These variants should not be surprising, as variations in toponymic epithets did occur.<sup>74</sup> Consequently, Zeus Dionysus *Gongylos* must have been a god of a particular settlement. Considering that toponymic epithets ending in -ος often correspond to place names in the form of neuter plurals ending in -α, we can assume that the name Γόγγυλα rather than Γογγύλοι would be the most plausible one for that settlement.<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless, it is not easy to determine whether this unknown place, where the cult must have originated, was either in the vicinity of Ioron and Thessaloniki,<sup>76</sup> or in Thrace, or in Asia Minor. What is however evident from the preceding discussion, is that the cult of Zeus Dionysus *Gongylos* must in some way be related to similar Zeno-Dionysiac cults.

### **Members and dignitaries of the Thessalonian association**

Let us now shift our attention to the members of the association, the *mystai*. The name of the dedicant appears in the third line of the inscription, immediately below the dedication to the Good Fortune of Zeus Dionysus *Gongylos*: Γ(άιος) Ἰούλιος Βησάρτης. C. Julius consecrated to the god and bequeathed to "the current and future *mystai*" one-third of a vineyard. The remaining two thirds of the vineyard were consecrated by the "undersigned *mystai*", recorded in a list following the main text of the dedication. The text states that the revenue generated from the vineyard is to be used to conduct three annual ceremonial feasts on specific dates. These events were meant to commemorate deceased members, probably the founders, of the association.<sup>77</sup> The list of the "undersigned *mystai*" contains seventeen names, starting with the name of the

71 Ath. 4.73: οὐκ ἀγνοῶν δὲ καὶ περὶ Δηλίων ἅ Απολλόδωρος ὁ Ἀθηναῖος εἶρηκεν ὅτι μαγείρων καὶ τραπεζοποιῶν παρείχοντο χρείας τοῖς παραγινομένοις πρὸς τὰς ἱερουργίας, καὶ ὅτι ἦν αὐτοῖς ἀπὸ τῶν πράξεων ὀνόματα Μαγίδες καὶ Γογγύλοι, ἐπειδὴ τὰς μάζας, φησὶν Ἀριστοφάνης, ἐν ταῖς θοίαις δι' ἡμέρας τρίβοντες παρείχον ὥσπερ ἐν γυναιξὶ γογγύλας μεμαγμένας.

72 Cf. Zeus *Krokeatas* at Κροκέαι (Paus. 3.21.4, reference to a statue Διὸς Κροκέατα); Zeus *Boudiates*, the Zeus of Βούδιον/Βούδειον, a town in Thessaly (*IG* IV<sup>2</sup>.1 516, from Epidauros, dedication Διὶ Βουδιάτη).

73 Cf. Zeus *Panamaros* at Panamara (*IStr* 217 and 244: Διὶ Παναμάρω); Zeus *Narasos* at Narasa (*IStr* 16, 289, 291, 293, 296a, 1028, mentions of priests Διὸς Νάρασου).

74 Gavrilović Vitas and Dana 2022, 203; cf. the numerous variants for the epithet of Zeus from Labranda in Caria, among which Λάβρανδος, Λαβρανδεύς, Λαβρανδηγός, Dimakopoulos 2009, 117.

75 Cf. Chaniotis 2004, 393, arguing about the possible origin of the epithet of Zeus *Nineudios* from "a place name Νίνευδα (rather than Νίνευδος or Νίνευδον), probably the earlier name of Aphrodisias."

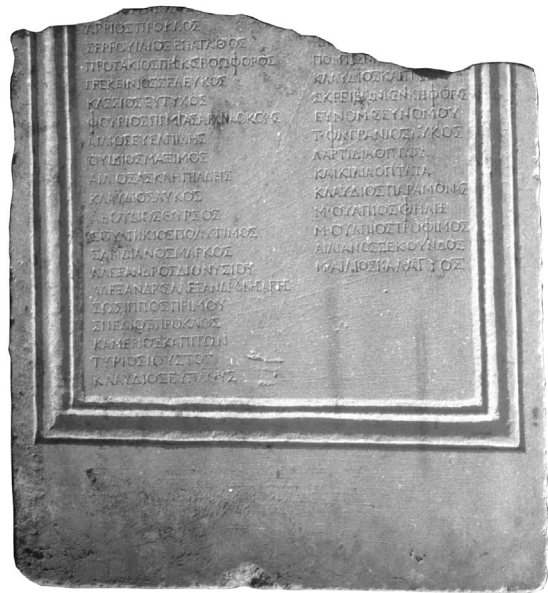
76 Voutiras 1987, 169, suggests that Zeus Dionysus *Gongylos* was most probably a local deity of the region.

77 Nigdelis 2010, 30–33; cf. Mitrev 2002, 294–296.

priest Lucius Fulvius Felix. The names cited may not encompass all the *mystai* of Zeus Dionysus Gongylos at the time, since they are referenced due to their links with the specific donation. The inscription concludes with mention of the priest who facilitated the setting-up of the stele. Charles Edson dated the inscription to the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE.

What appears to be the *cognomen* of the dedicant, Besartes, is a word attested only here and in another inscription, also discovered during the 1939 excavation. This inscription (Annex, no. 3) is preserved on a fragment from the lower part of a marble stele that contains a list of names in two columns and is dated to the second century CE (fig. 3).<sup>78</sup> Edson in *IG* already associated it with the *mystai* of Zeus Dionysus Gongylos. In this inscription, the word *besartes* comes after a name written according to Greek naming conventions, Alexandros, son of Alexandros (Ἀλέξανδρος Ἀλεξάνδρου, βησάρτης). This indicates that the word describes a cult official, which does not exclude its potential use as a *cognomen*,<sup>79</sup> especially if the relevant sacred office was highly significant.

Before discussing the possible meaning of *besartes*, it is important to note that the inscription with the name list preserves two more titles of cult officials: βωφόρος (held by one Προτάκιος Πρίσκος) and ἀρχιναοκόρος (held by a certain Φούριος Πριμιγᾶς). While the first one is a *hapax legomenon*, the term ἀρχιναοκόρος/ἀρχινεωκόρος is well-attested. In a larger sanctuary, with several temples, it presupposes a hierarchy of *neokoroi*, custodians of a temple, and their chief custodian, i.e. the *archineokoros*. The term appears in eight additional inscriptions from Thessaloniki.<sup>80</sup> Four of them were discovered in the Isiac sanctuary.<sup>81</sup> An additional one, an honorary stele for members of an association of Hermanubiasts,<sup>82</sup> is related to the Isiac cults and was initially erected in the sanctuary. One is a second mention of Furius Primigas on a triangular



**Fig. 3. Fragmentary marble stele, inv. No. MΘ 972 (archive photo: Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο Θεσσαλονίκης)**

78 MΘ 972; *IG* X.2.1 244; *RICIS* 113/0561.

79 Cf. Paschidis 2022, 64 n. 25. It is highly improbable that C. Julius Besartes appears later in the list with his "real" *cognomen*, either as C. Julius Agathopous, as proposed by Daux 1972, 482, or as C. Julius Felix, as proposed by Kloppenborg and Ascough 2011, 354. Such a reference would contradict the text of the deed, which distinctly separates the two donations and explicitly states that C. Julius Besartes donates one-third of the vineyard, while the remaining two thirds are contributed by the "undersigned *mystai*".

80 Cf. Robert 1974, 195–196.

81 *IG* X.2.1 37, 114, 115 and 118 = *RICIS* 113/0564, 113/0556, 113/0547 and 113/0542.

82 *IG* X.2.1 220 = *RICIS* 113/0576; first published by Picard and Avevou 1913, 94–97 no. 6, this has been one of the earliest known Isiac inscriptions from Thessaloniki.

base that is relevant to the cult of Zeus Dionysus Gongylos;<sup>83</sup> it will be discussed below. A sixth one pertains to the cult of Cybele/Magna Mater.<sup>84</sup> The last one is on the plinth of a male statue, the exact provenance of which is unknown, with only the feet preserved.<sup>85</sup>

The Isiac sanctuary is the only one in the city excavated so far. It is therefore natural that we are aware of significantly more monuments from this site. Even so, the predominance of inscriptions mentioning *archineokoroi* that relate to it is probably due to its special circumstances. As Laurent Bricault has aptly suggested, "the multiplication of buildings and chapels through the generosity of the faithful, ... which required the appointment of a *neokoros* for each of them, naturally led to the creation of the position of *archineokoros*, a kind of supervisor of the regular *neokoroi* and direct assistant to the head priest."<sup>86</sup>

Concerning the *boöphoros*, the authors of the *DGE* suggest that it probably refers to a cult official entrusted with the task of bringing the ox to sacrifice.<sup>87</sup> However, within the context of an inscription found at Torre Nova, in Rome, dated to 160–165 CE, which records the dedication of a sculpture of the priestess Agrippinilla by a Dionysiac association,<sup>88</sup> the suffix -φόρος (from the verb φέρω, "to bear") denotes individuals responsible for carrying sacred objects or the image of the god during processions.<sup>89</sup> In this respect, the proposal that a *boöphoros* would carry the image of Apis – or another deity in the form of a bull – in processions makes much more sense.<sup>90</sup>

The word βησάρτης presents greater difficulties in deciphering, although there are only a few words that begin with βησ-. Nevertheless, it would be quite surprising if the suggestion to link βησάρτης with βάσσαρος / βασσάρα, "a title used in Dionysiac cult",<sup>91</sup> were valid, because it fails to explain the inclusion of the *tau*. Instead, the *tau* is explained if we consider the suffix -άρτης as presumably deriving from the verb αἶρω, "to raise/lift up". An attempt to link βησάρτης to βήσομαι,<sup>92</sup> the future of the verb βαίνω, is not conclusive either. Georges Daux was the first to propose the Egyptian god Bes, in Greek Βησᾶς, as a possible root of the word, albeit with reasonable reticence.<sup>93</sup>

83 *IG* X.2.1 60 = *RICIS* 113/0562; see Annex, no. 4.

84 *IG* X.2.1 65; Robert 1934, 795–812; for different attributions than to the cult of Cybele, see the literature cited in *IG* X.2.1s.2 65; however, any doubts are unfounded. Louis Robert repeated his basic arguments very succinctly in *Bull. épigr.* 1965, 262: "What matters for the altar of Thessaloniki is its decoration, whose symbols (*pedum*, caduceus, and torches) are appropriate for the triad Cybele, Attis, and Hermes." M. J. Vermaseren appropriately included the altar as Metroac testimony in *CCCA* VI, 64–65 no. 197.

85 *IG* X.2.1 272; Stefanidou-Tiveriou and Voutiras 2020, 94–95 no. 736 (E. Βουτυράς).

86 Comments on l. 12 of *RICIS* 113/0520; cf. the comments on l. 6–7 of *RICIS* 113/0542.

87 *DGE*, s.v. βοωφόρος: "conductor del buey al sacrificio, tít. de cierto sacerdote del culto báquico encargado de tal labor".

88 Vogliano 1933; *IGUR* I, 160; Jaccottet 2002b, 302–310 no. 188.

89 Jaccottet 2002a, 44–45; Slavova 2002, 141–142, 148.

90 L. Bricault in *RICIS* 113/0561, comment on Col. II. 4; cf. Touloumtzidou in this volume.

91 Kloppenborg and Ascough 2011, 354; for the title, cf. Slavova 2002, 141.

92 Mitrev 2002, 293.

93 Daux 1972, 486.

Bes is a dwarf god with protective and apotropaic qualities, who does not directly belong to the "Isiac family", but often appears as its companion. It seems that, apart from Italy, there are relatively few testimonies linking him to Isiac sanctuaries outside of Egypt,<sup>94</sup> but more thorough research into old findings and new discoveries<sup>95</sup> may challenge this assessment. Already in the Ptolemaic period, Bes' perceived bestial characteristics and his dancing prowess, among other things, led to comparisons with Satyrs and Silenus, despite their differences.<sup>96</sup>

Although the connection of Bes to the Isiac deities and the Dionysian retinue is an established fact, his association with the word *besartes* needs further consideration. Similar to *boöphoros* and the other titles mentioned earlier, this term may indicate the role of the individual concerned during religious processions. In this context, *besartes* might refer to the person responsible for holding or "raising" an image of Bes. This remains a hypothesis, but it gains support from visual representations of individuals, possibly priests, impersonating Bes by wearing a mask with the god's image.<sup>97</sup>

If true, this interpretation of the term *besartes* provides a link between the *mystai* of Zeus Dionysus Gongylos and the Isiac sanctuary. An additional link to the Isiac sanctuary is implied by the concluding two lines of the inscription: "(the stele) was set up under the licence of Straton, son of Epicrates, and by birth son of Dionysios, priest for the second year." The priest mentioned here is not the Dionysiac priest of the association, L. Fulvius Felix, who figures among the signatories of the deed, but a priest who had authority over the sanctuary hosting the association.<sup>98</sup> A recently published artefact, discovered in 1972 roughly in the area of the Isiac sanctuary, further supports the idea that Straton was indeed an Isiac priest. It is a table support inscribed on the front (fig. 4).<sup>99</sup> The inscription (Annex, no. 2) consists only of his name and the mention of his priesthood. The dedication and the name of the table's dedicant would have originally appeared on the horizontal element and a corresponding support. Because of the mention of an adoptive and a natural father, Straton's name is too specific for this to be a case of two individuals (for example grandfather and

94 Malaise 2004, 280–290.

95 Cf. for example the Bes statuettes found in Kentrikon, the place where the inscription of Dionysus Gongylon was also discovered, Nigdelis 2010, 16 and n. 17, with further references. Malaise (2004, 291) remarks that Bes' presence at a site can be an indication for the existence of Isiac cults there.

96 Volokhine 2010, 248–253. For a terracotta figurine of Bes-Silenus from Delos, see Barrett 2011, 278–279; for a Bes-Silenus plastic vase from Crete, Vogeikoff-Brogan 2016. An epigram by Hedylus (Ath. 11.497d) describes a rhyton dedicated at the temple of Aphrodite-Arsinoe in Alexandria, shaped in the form of Bes, Gow and Page 1965a, 101 iv; Gow and Page 1965b, 292–293; Sens 2015. This poem illustrates the links forged between Bes and the Dionysiac world (represented by the rhyton and the wine) and suggests a Ptolemaic support for the new interpretation of the god.

97 See an Egyptian schist figure from Rome dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE–1<sup>st</sup> c. CE at the British Museum (inv. no. EA47973; Walker and Higgs 2001, 326 no. 344), as well as a fresco from Herculaneum (Tran Tam Tinh 1971, 29. 40–42. 85 and pl. 28; Malaise 2004, 287–288). In this volume, based on the Herculaneum fresco, A. Touloumtzidou proposes that the term *besartes* refers to a person disguised and dancing as an armour-wearing Bes.

98 In this sense, cf. Wild 1981, 192; Chaniotis and Mylonopoulos 2004, 222 no. 104 (A. Chaniotis); *contra* Daux 1972, 480.

99 Inv. no. M0 6089; Stefanidou-Tiveriou and Voutiras 2020, 579 no. 1191 (E. Voutiras); *Bull. épigr.* 2021, 287 (P. Paschidis).



**Fig. 4. Table support,  
inv. No. MΘ 6089  
(photo: K. V. von  
Eickstedt)**

grandson) sharing the same name. Therefore, there should be no doubt that the two inscriptions refer to the same person. The only difference between the two mentions is that, on the table support, the year of Straton's priesthood is not specified. This may imply that the support was dedicated during his first year as a priest, dating it one year before, or in any event very close to, the Zeus Dionysus Gongylos inscription. The latter has been dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, with some scholars leaning towards an earlier rather than later date within that century.<sup>100</sup> Yet, the form of the letters on the table support,<sup>101</sup> especially the ligature for the letters *rho* and *eta* in IEPHTEYONTOΣ, suggests a possible later date for both inscriptions, probably towards the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and certainly not before the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE.

The names of the *mystai* in the inscription for Zeus Dionysus Gongylos (Annex, no. 1) do not match the names on the fragment with the list (Annex, no. 3), except for one: the *nomen* Ἀβούδιος. It is followed by a different *cognomen* in each case: in no. 1, l. 24, a *cognomen* ending in -ων; in no. 3, col. I, l. 12, the *cognomen* is, fittingly for a Dionysiac adherent, Θύρσοσ.<sup>102</sup> The *nomen* Abudius only appears on two other occasions in Greek texts: in a third inscription from Thessaloniki<sup>103</sup> and in an inscription from Demetrias.<sup>104</sup> In Latin inscriptions, it is encountered primarily in the Western part of the Empire.<sup>105</sup> Given the rarity of the name, the two Abudii must have been related, with Thyrsos probably being a descendant of the other.

Another person from fragment no. 3, the *archineokoros* Furius Primigas, appears with the same title in the inscription on a marble triangular base, the precise findspot of which in Thessaloniki remains elusive.<sup>106</sup> This inscription covered one side of the base and the semi-columns flanking it (figs. 5–7; Annex, no. 4). The name of the current priest was written on the left semi-column (I, fig. 6), while Furius Primigas is mentioned on the right semi-column (III, fig. 7). Edson did not decipher the name of the priest, but the thor-

100 In IG X.2.1 259, Edson remarks that almost all the *gentilicia* in the list of the *mystai* belong to the periods of the Second Triumvirate and the reign of Emperor Augustus; cf. Jaccottet 2002b, 49 no. 19: beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> c. CE, with a question mark, but Daux (1972, 480) prefers to stay vaguer: 1<sup>st</sup> c. CE, "sans plus de précision" ("without getting to be more specific").

101 On the basis of the letter forms, Voutiras (see n. 99) dated the inscription to the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. CE (the mention π.X. – meaning BCE – in the text is obviously a typographical error).

102 Cf. above, n. 18.

103 IG X.2.1 744 (2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> c.).

104 IG IX.2 1162.

105 Research in the "Epigraphik-Datenbank Clauss – Slaby" reveals 28 instances of Abudius/Abudia, five of which are manufacturer stamps on roof tiles (CIL V, 8110, 34a–e). All relevant monuments were discovered in the West, with the exception of one found in Dalmatia and two in Moesia superior.

106 Thessaloniki, in the garden of the Παλιό Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο, inv. no. MΘ 1729; IG X.2.1 60; RICIS 113/0562; Robert 1974, 196 n. 86, 198 n. 106–107; Kubińska 2001, 157–158.



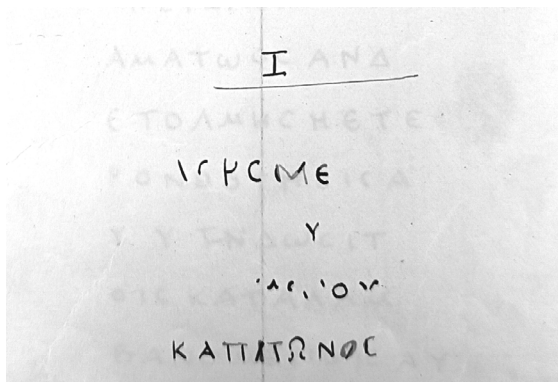
**Fig. 5. Triangular base, inv. No. MO 1729 (photo: author)**



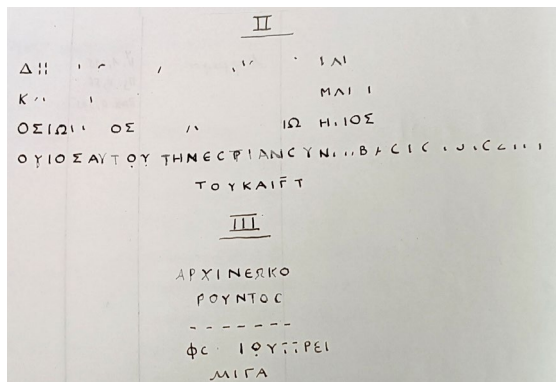
**Fig. 6. Triangular base, inv. No. MO 1729, detail (archive photo: Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο Θεσσαλονίκης)**



**Fig. 7. Triangular base, inv. No. MO 1729, detail (archive photo: Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο Θεσσαλονίκης)**



**Fig. 8. Transcription of the inscription of MO 1729 in the Museum inventory, part I (photo: Styliana Galiniki)**



**Fig. 9. Transcription of the inscription of MO 1729 in the Museum inventory, parts II and III (photo: Styliana Galiniki)**

ough transcription by Makaronas in the inventory of the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki in the late 1950s (fig. 8), when he was Ephor of antiquities of Macedonia, as well as the photograph from the archives of the Museum dating from the same period (fig. 6), assist in tentatively restoring it as [ – – ]merios Kapiton. It is very tempting to identify him with Kamerios Kapiton, who appears on l. 19 of inscription no. 3. Kapiton is not referred to as a priest there, but this is not a problem, as there must have been some time distance between the two inscriptions.

Edson had already linked inscription no. 4 with the cult of Zeus Dionysus Gongylos due to the mention of Furius Primigas. Makaronas' transcription of the central part of the inscription (II) in the Museum's inventory further confirms this (fig. 9): the first three letters of the first line are ΔΗ, the dative of Zeus. Δὴ may well have been followed by Διονύσω Γονγύλω. This inscription is all the more important, because it is precisely dated to 155/6 CE, suggesting a close dating for the list in inscription no. 3. The dating is given in the two last lines of this part of the inscription, together with a description of the dedication, which involved "the hearth together with its base" – τὴν ἐστί[α]ν σὺν τῇ βάσι.

### **On the triangular base**

While the word βάσις can be readily translated as "base", the term ἐστία, "hearth" or "altar",<sup>107</sup> requires further discussion to understand its precise meaning. Louis Robert attempted to interpret the word on the basis of other epigraphic instances of *hestiae* dedications.<sup>108</sup> These dedications are essentially marble rectangular altars and do not conform to our case, where it appears that *hestia* designated a separate element placed atop the marble base. Unfortunately, this element, likely made of metal, has not survived. This layout brings to mind the "small hearth set upon a stone base" – ἐσχαρίς ἐπὶ τὸν λίθον παγεῖσα – mentioned in an account of the *epistatai* of Eleusis.<sup>109</sup>

107 *LSJ*, s.v. ἐστία.

108 Robert 1974, 198 n. 107; Robert 1958, 32–33.

109 *IG II<sup>2</sup>* 1673 (327/6 BCE).



Historically, marble triangular bases were commonly employed, from the Archaic period, for the placement of bronze tripods. These tripods were dedicated in Greek sanctuaries or erected in public spaces as prizes awarded to *choregoi* for their victory in dramatic contests, such as those of *Dionysia* in Athens.<sup>110</sup> In Macedon, the only known examples of triangular stone bases for tripods come from the late Classical palace of Pella<sup>111</sup> and one found in the sanctuary of Zeus at Dion.<sup>112</sup> We can imagine the Thessaloniki base being completed with a tripod, most probably made of bronze, featuring three feet corresponding to the three semi-columns of the base.

Tripods have been associated with Apollo, being one of his customary attributes, as well as with his oracles – a symbol well-recognised in Greco-Roman art and literature.<sup>113</sup> However, they are also closely linked to Dionysus. A decree by an association of Dionysiac *technitai* honouring the Argive Zenon, son of Hekatodoros, highlights Zenon's contributions to the *temenos* of the god in Argos and mentions, among other objects, Bacchic tripods.<sup>114</sup> Some claimed that Dionysus delivered oracles on the prophetic tripod before Apollo's arrival in Delphi<sup>115</sup> and in Euripides' *Bacchae* (v. 298–301), Teiresias praises Dionysus as a god of prophecy, affirming the mantic powers associated with Bacchic frenzy.<sup>116</sup> Notably, an oracle of Dionysus existed in Amphikleia, Phocis,<sup>117</sup> and there is evidence of Dionysian oracles in Thrace.<sup>118</sup>

Returning to Macedon, the Pseudo-Aristotelian *De mirabilibus auscultationibus* (122) recounts a large and beautiful temple of Dionysus in Crestonia, near the land of the Bisaltians. When the god intended to bless the year with fertility, a great flame of fire appeared, visible to all within the sacred area. Conversely, in barren years, the light did not appear, and darkness shrouded the site. This sanctuary has been tentatively identified with the one that existed in Palatiano-Kentrikon,<sup>119</sup> a site where two marble sculptures of Dionysus<sup>120</sup> and the inscription mentioning Dionysus *Gongylon* were found. In this context, Dionysus was evidently venerated as a god of fertility, who also possessed the power to predict the year's harvest.<sup>121</sup>

110 Amandry 1976; Amandry and Ducat 1973; Amandry and Spyropoulos 1974.

111 Makaronas 1960, 81 pl. 60.

112 Unpublished. Personal communication with Dr. Ioanna Vasileiadou.

113 *LIMC* II, s.v. Apollon, 232–233 (W. Lambrinudakis).

114 *IG* IV 558 (114 BC), l. 20: τρίπ[οδες] Βακ[χεῖοι].

115 τοῦ προφητικοῦ τρίποδος, ἐν ᾧ πρῶτος Διόνυσος ἐθεμίστευσε: *Hypothesis Pythiorum* in *ScholiaPyth*, 2; cf. Dietrich 1992, 45.

116 Eur. *Ba.* 298–299: μάντις δ' ὁ δαίμων ὄδε: τὸ γὰρ βακχεύσιμον καὶ τὸ μανιῶδες μαντικὴν πολλὴν ἔχει.

117 Paus. 10.33.11 describes a dream and healing oracle.

118 Iliev 2013.

119 Hammond 1972, 181–182.

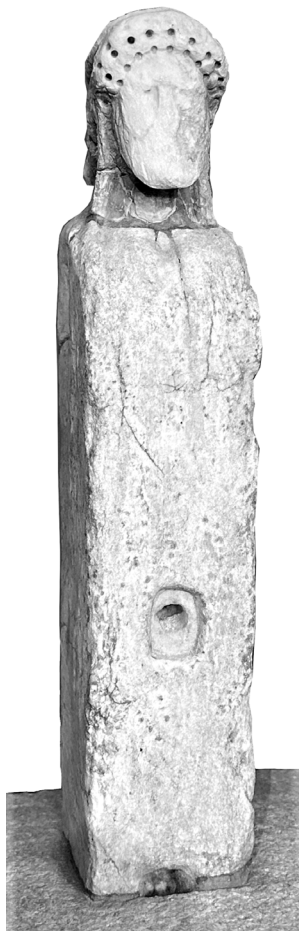
120 Savvopoulou 1998, 106. 108 fig. 49, 114 fig. 54.

121 Iliev 2013, 64–65.

### Summary

The preceding analysis of the few sources regarding Zeus Dionysus *Gongylos* reveals that this cult can be compared to regional cults of Zeus Dionysus. It was active in Thessaloniki during at least the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries CE and involved a guild of *mystai*. While the origins of this local deity remain uncertain, it is evident that he was a god of fertility with prophetic abilities, and his cult incorporated mystical elements. The connections to the Isiac sanctuary may not be immediately apparent, but there are several hints: the authorisation given by the priest Straton, son of Epikrates, to erect the stele (no. 1); certain religious roles, especially the *besartes*, which could be linked to *isiaci*; and, possibly, the reference to the title *archineokoros* in two inscriptions (nos. 3 and 4), as it implies a sanctuary with multiple precincts and temples, resembling what we know about the layout of the Isiac sanctuary.

Speculation surrounds the reasons for the inclusion of the Zeus Dionysus *Gongylos'* *mystai* association into the Isiac sanctuary of Thessaloniki. As a distinctive cult, it was not compatible with the Dionysiac sanctuary of the city. Its incorporation in the Isiac sanctuary may have been the result of endeavours by individual worshippers of both cults. There must have been similarities that would facilitate the correlation of the cults. In the religious landscape of the Roman Imperial period, such accommodations were not uncommon. This cannot imply, however, that Zeus Dionysus *Gongylos* was worshipped as a "hybrid deity, [...] an assimilation of Serapis and Bes", as has been suggested.<sup>122</sup> The Egyptian beliefs associated Bes, a solar god, with Horus the child and Harpocrates,<sup>123</sup> not with Sarapis. In the following, the connection of Harpocrates to Dionysus in the sanctuary of Thessaloniki will become more apparent.<sup>124</sup>



**Fig. 10. Small herm, inv. No. MO 1074 (photo: author)**

The *Gongylos* inscription was discovered at the site that also yielded the significant relief dedicated to Osiris Mystes and all Osirian inscriptions of the sanctuary,<sup>125</sup> a strong indication that the 1939 excavation revolved around the *Osirieon*. It remains unclear, though, whether Zeus Dionysus *Gongylos* was connected to the mystical cult of Osiris as practiced in Thessaloniki. Nonetheless, the welcoming of the Zeus Dionysus *Gongylos* cult in the sanctuary shows the inclusiveness and adaptability of the Isiac cults; it could also hint at an "oriental" origin of Zeus Dionysus *Gongylos*, perhaps from Thrace or Asia Minor.

<sup>122</sup> Paschidis 2022, 64.

<sup>123</sup> Malaise 1989, 54–56; Malaise 1990, in particular 701–717.

<sup>124</sup> See below the chapter "Dionysiac attributes, Harpocrates, and an epithet", with a discussion on the ivy wreath on Harpocrates' head.

<sup>125</sup> See recently Christodoulou 2021, 460–461, with further references.

### **An erroneous identification**

In his overview of the crypt discovered in 1939, Robert Wild considered that the inscription of Zeus Dionysus *Gongylos* "may very well have been connected in some way with the herm found in the crypt" and speculated that the small herm (fig. 10), in the type of Alcamenes' Hermes,<sup>126</sup> "depicted either Dionysus or Zeus Dionysus *Gongylos*".<sup>127</sup> Some authors, including myself, found this proposal appealing.<sup>128</sup> However, upon reflection, it does not make much sense to use an established Hermes' type to represent Dionysus.<sup>129</sup> Hermes was not misplaced in the Isiac sanctuary. He was linked to the Isiac cults as the *interpretatio graeca* of Thoth<sup>130</sup> and of Anubis,<sup>131</sup> whose worship as Hermanubis is testified in Thessaloniki.<sup>132</sup> If the crypt was used for mystery rites as Makaronas suggests<sup>133</sup> and its layout implies, Hermes would assume there Anubis' role of *inventor et custos sacrorum*<sup>134</sup> as a matter of course.

### **Dionysus' hearkening ears**

A votive relief, discovered during the excavations of 1921–25 by Pelekidis, depicts two ears crowned by two curved vine branches with four leaves, from which hang three bunches of grapes (fig. 11).<sup>135</sup> The craftsmanship is rather poor. Instead of the usual hand-shaped vine leaves, the leaves are elliptical. Below the image, there is an awkwardly chiseled inscription:<sup>136</sup>

Θεῶι Διονύσω  
ἀκοὰς κατ' εὐχ-  
ῆν <sup>hedera</sup> Ἀγχίς ἀνέθηκε.

"Anchis dedicated the listening ears to god Dionysus, following a vow."

126 Inv. no. MΘ 1074; Despini et al. 1997, 61–62 no. 45 (G. Despini).

127 Wild 1981, 193.

128 Steimle 2008, 101; Despini et al. 1997, 62 n. 2; Christodoulou 2021, 466.

129 On herms of Dionysus see Wrede 1985, 21–22; they all have Dionysiac attributes. Two herms of the Alcamenes' Hermes type may be associated with the sanctuary of Serapis at Ostia: Rodà 2001, 242–243 no. 17 and 250–251 no. 26.

130 Cf. the aretalogies of Maroneia, *RICIS* 114/0202, l. 25: αὕτη μεθ' ἔρμου γράμμαθ' εὔρεν, and Andros, *RICIS* 202/1801, l. 10–11: δειφαλέω δ' ἔρμᾶνος ἀπόκρυφα σύνβολα δέλτων εὐρομένα γραφίδεσσι κατέξυσα. Cf. Christodoulou 2011, 370 and n. 28.

131 For the ancient sources on Anubis' and Hermes' blending see Grenier 1977, 53–59.

132 See above, n. 5 and 82. On Hermanubis, see Grenier 1977, 171–175; Christodoulou 2011, 372, with further references.

133 Makaronas 1940, 464: φαίνεται ὅτι ἦτο τόπος μυστικῆς λατρείας.

134 For this expression from an inscription on an altar found on the island of Pag, Croatia, see Grisonic et al. 2022, 234, 236.

135 Inv. no. MΘ 829; Despini et al. 2010, 206–207 no. 529 (E. Voutiras).

136 *IG* X.2.1 59 = *RICIS* 113/0558; *RICIS suppl. III*, 142–143.



**Fig. 11. Votive relief to Dionysus, inv. No. MΘ 829 (photo: author)**

"(my) brother" (אָהי – *Ahi* in Hebrew,<sup>143</sup> *ʿH \*ʾahī* in Phoenician<sup>144</sup>) and our Anchis must have had Phoenician/Syrian origins.

The inscription uses the word ἀκοαὶ instead of ὠτὰ to describe the ears depicted on the relief. The same word, however in singular, appears in another inscription from the Thessalonian Isiac sanctuary, the dedication of a relief depicting two ears by a woman named Fuficia: κατ' εὐχὴν · Φουφικία · Ἰσιδι · ἀκοήν, "following a vow, Fuficia

Emmanuel Voutiras dated the relief to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, "not before the reign of Hadrian", based on the overall shape of the letters and the ligature of *kappa* and *epsilon* in the last syllable of the inscription.<sup>137</sup>

The name of the dedicant has caused some confusion. There is no consensus, especially regarding its initial letter and where its accent falls.<sup>138</sup> At the point where the name begins, there is a sign that might either be a *hedera*<sup>139</sup> or a *delta*.<sup>140</sup> Following this sign, the stone clearly displays the letters ΑΓΧΙΣ. Contrary to what some scholars propose,<sup>141</sup> there is no need to correct the name. The letter-cutter had already made all necessary corrections in other parts of the inscription.<sup>142</sup> Given the two possible readings, ΑΓΧΙΣ and ΔΑΓΧΙΣ, the preferred choice is Ἄγχις, which is the only one attested as a name in this exact form. In the Septuagint (*Genesis* 46.21), Ἄγχις is one of Benjamin's grandsons. Thus, Ἄγχις is the Greek rendering of a male Semitic name that translates to

137 Despinis et al. 2010, 207 (no. 529)

138 See all propositions in *IG* X.2.1s.2 59.

139 Edson in *IG* X.2.1 59.

140 Voutiras in Despinis et al. 2010, 206 (no. 529).

141 Edson: Ἀ(γκ)ίς (*IG* X.2.1 59); Hallof: Βαυχίς (*IG* X.2.1s.2 59).

142 Namely OEOY to OEWI and AKOΔC to AKOAC. The missing horizontal stroke of the θῆτα would have been added in paint.

143 *DAHPN* ID b86, version 211 and *DAHPN* ID b85, version 211 (Hans Rechenmacher); Ilan 2002, 61–62; Ilan 2011, 56–59; Ilan and Hünefeld 2012, 60–62. On "names that mean members of family", cf. Ilan 2002, 15 1.5.1.

144 Benz 1972, 263; Krahmalkov 2001, 37.

145 Inv. no. MΘ 995; *IG* X.2.1 100 = *RICIS* 113/0550; Despinis et al. 1997, 68 no. 51 (E. Voutiras); Gasparini 2016, 568 no. 10.

(offered) the listening ear to Isis".<sup>145</sup> The word ἀκοή means hearing, listening to,<sup>146</sup> but in these cases it is used to accentuate the benevolent listening quality of the deities' ears, their nature as hearkening gods – θεοὶ ἐπήκοοι.<sup>147</sup> A similar use of ἀκοαὶ is encountered in the Karpokrates' Aretalogy from Chalcis (late 3<sup>rd</sup>–early 4<sup>th</sup> c. CE) in relation to Isis; in the dedication of the first line, she is entirely defined by her ears' listening willingness: Καρποκράτη, Σαράπιδι, ἀκοαῖς τῆς Ἴσιδος, "to Karpokrates, Sarapis, the listening ears of Isis...".<sup>148</sup>

This meaning becomes clearer when considering the use of ἀκοαὶ in a 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup>-century CE inscription written transversely on the back pillar of an Isis statuette from Egypt, now in Leiden: Ἴσιδι ἀκοαῖς Διονύσιος | υἱὸς Ἀραουῆρ εὐχαριστῶ, "I, Dionysios, son of Araouer, bestow thanks to Isis for having listened".<sup>149</sup> Even more telling is the inscription on a cylindrical altar for Magna Mater (or for Isis?) from Apollonia ad Rhyndacum in Mysia, in which both ἀκοαὶ and ὦτα are used: ἀγαθῆι τύχηι· | ταῖς ἀκοαῖς τῆς | θεοῦ | Ἑ[ρ]μιανὸς ΟΚΙ[ – – ] | ζήσας ἀπέδωκεν | εὐχαριστήριον | τὰ ὦτα καὶ τὸν βωμὸν ἐπὶ ἱερείας | Προ[.....]υτης, "to good fortune; for the hearkening of the goddess, Hermianos, having survived, (gave) the ears and the altar as a thank-offering, when Pro[.....]yete was priestess". In this case, the ears, apparently on a relief, and the altar were dedicated as token of gratitude because the goddess listened to Hermianos prayers and helped him survive a danger or an illness.<sup>150</sup>

An inscription from the area of Lanuvium, dated to the late 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE or the early 1<sup>st</sup> century CE and dedicated to Dionysus, elucidates the dual aspects of the god's listening quality. He is invoked as "listening" – ἐπήκοος – and "assisting" – βοηθός. The two epithets together define the nature of his response.<sup>151</sup> The epithet *epekoos* in reference to Dionysus is preserved in four more inscriptions so far. Three of them come from Asia Minor: an inscription from Silandos in Lydia mentions date, month and year, and details a dedication by a Zosimos, son of Charmos (150 CE);<sup>152</sup> an inscription from Daskyleion in Bithynia (212 CE) records a thanksgiving to Dionysus *Kebre-nios* (the local Dionysus of Cebrene in Troad);<sup>153</sup> a Pisidian inscription documents an offering by a house-steward slave.<sup>154</sup> Finally, an inscription from the island of Aegina in Greece (after 212 CE) is addressed to a Severan Emperor (Caracalla, Elagabalus, or Alexander Severus), who is hailed as the New Dionysus, great and *epekoos* god.<sup>155</sup>

Dionysus' quality as *epekoos* must have been well-known already during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, for Callimachus to use the phrase Διόνυσος ἐπήκοος as a pun in one of his

146 LSJ, s.v. ἀκοή.

147 Robert 1974, 198 with n. 103 and 104.

148 RICIS 104/0206. Harder 1944, 9.

149 Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, inv. no. 1960/3,1; Stricker 1960, 20.

150 Weinreich 1912, 57–58; Schwertheim 1978, 821–822; Horsley 1983, 61 rather misinterprets the text and supposes that Hermianos "recovered his hearing".

151 SEG 45, 1441: Διονύσω θεῶ | ἐπηκόω καὶ βολεθῶ Κάλλιστος | ἀνέθηκε.

152 TAM V.1 49.

153 Corsten 1988, 72 no. 1.

154 Corsten et al. 1998, 58 no. 6.

155 Gill 1967, 298–300.

epigrams. In it, Dionysus *epekoos* is the tragic mask listening to and enjoying the boys citing a phrase from Euripides' *Bacchae*.<sup>156</sup>

Numerous deities were considered *epekooi*.<sup>157</sup> In Hellenistic and Roman Macedon, the use of this epithet has been attested 15 times, involving various deities, some local and some of foreign origin.<sup>158</sup> There are also 20 known dedications featuring ear reliefs, with half of them related to the Isiac cults.<sup>159</sup> The dedication of the relief with ears to Dionysus, found in the Isiac sanctuary, is not devoid of Isiac connotations. It recalls the Bacchus statue from the Iseum at Pompeii, which stood in a niche flanked by a pair of big ears rendered in stucco.<sup>160</sup> Dionysus was possibly perceived there as a counterpart to Osiris. This is probably the link behind the dedication to Dionysus in Thessaloniki as well.<sup>161</sup>

### Dionysiac attributes, Harpocrates, and an epithet

A small marble fragment, measuring 20 cm in height and 10 cm in width, was discovered in 1957 within a plot in the area of the Isiac sanctuary of Thessaloniki. Unfortunately, its current location is unknown and it has never been published or photographed. According to the brief description in the Museum's inventory, the fragment takes the form of a tree trunk entwined with vine leaves and grape bunches. The upper part of the tree trunk preserves the left forearm and hand of a figure. Based on this description and the sculpture's small dimensions, it could have belonged to either a

156 A.P. 6.310; Gow and Page 1965a, 63 xxvi (48); Gow and Page 1965b, 181–183.

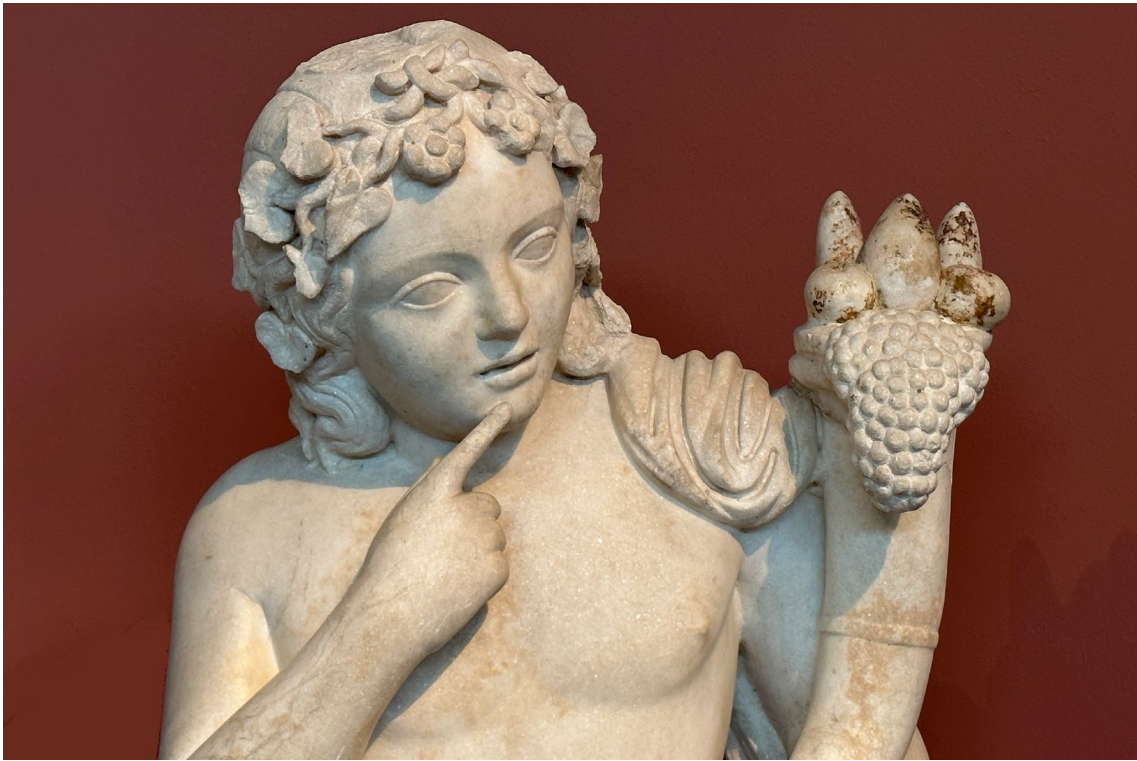
157 For a non-exhaustive, earlier list, see Weinreich 1912, 5–25. For the epithet in connection to the Isiac deities, see Bricault and Dionysopoulou 2016, 17, 19, 83, 124 and 131.

158 The goddess Ma (Edessa, *EKM* 145, 158, 161, 162 – between 234 and 261/2 CE); Darron (Pella, *EKM* 436, first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BCE); Meter Theon/Cybele (Pella, *EKM* 447, 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BCE); the Dioscuri and Manta (from Nikiti, *SEG* 48, 811, late 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BCE); unnamed gods (from Velvendos, *EAM* 23a, 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE); Isis (Thessaloniki, *IG* X.2.1 98, 1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE–1<sup>st</sup> c. CE, and 101, 2<sup>nd</sup> c. CE); Heron/Heros (Sanctuary of Heros Auloneites, *SEG* 51, 828; from Marvinci, *SEG* 55, 691–168 CE); Aphisikake (Neine, *IGBulg* IV, 2245); Salenos (Parthiropolis, *IGBulg* V, 5902 and 5903 – 229/230 CE). The two dedications for Isis from Thessaloniki bear ear reliefs and thus overlap with the next group (cf. n. 159).

159 The ear-reliefs in Graeco-Roman Macedon have been recently studied as a group, Fassa 2019. The author collected 17 examples in an Appendix, p. 57–58 nos. 1–17, to which four additions and one retraction must be made. This increases the Macedonian total so far to 20 reliefs. In particular, ten are from the Isiac sanctuaries of Thessaloniki (nos. 1–6; additionally, an unpublished fragment featuring one ear, MΘ 853), Dion (nos. 7–8), and Stobi (no. 10). Two ear reliefs, found in Philippi (no. 11) and Serres (no. 12), are uninscribed and one, from Aiane (no. 17), does not mention a deity. A relief found in the area of Dion (no. 9) is dedicated to the goddess Parthenos; a pediment from a votive relief found at the sanctuary of Zeus Hypsistos in Dion depicts an eagle flanked by two ears (Polymenidou 2020, 35, 196 no. 1.3.1). From the three reliefs referring to Artemis, we should retain only two (nos. 14–15); the relief from Mieza (no. 13) is unlikely to have represented an ear. There are two reliefs from Kalindoia; the first is dedicated to Nanaia (no. 16), a Babylonian goddess who was identified with Artemis (Fassa 2019, 51), but in Egypt, also with Isis (Holm 2017, 24–25); the second is an offering to Demeter (1<sup>st</sup> c. BCE), Adam-Veleni 2008, 181 no. 46 (K. Sismanidis). Finally, a relief with a single ear was dedicated to Dionysus by a certain Heliophon. It was found in Kolindros (Pieria) and is dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE (Polymenidou 2020, 76, 225 no. 9.3.1).

160 Gasparini 2016, 564–565.

161 N.b. that Dionysus was an appropriate translation of Osiris in Phoenician theophoric names; in the Greek text of the bilingual inscriptions on the two identical "cippi of Melqart" from Malta (2<sup>nd</sup> c. BCE), the name Abd' Osir is translated as Dionysios, cf. Szyner 1975, 197.



**Fig. 12.** Detail of the Harpocrates statue, inv. No. MΘ 844 (photo: author)

statuette or a table support depicting a standing Dionysus, resting his left arm on a tree trunk, as seen in well-preserved specimens.<sup>162</sup>

One remarkable feature of the Harpocrates statue<sup>163</sup> from the Isiac sanctuary of Thessaloniki is the ivy wreath that he is wearing on his head, which brings him close to Dionysus (fig. 12). This is an uncommon characteristic, absent in the known marble sculptures, but sometimes occurring in minor arts.<sup>164</sup> Conversely, the grape bunch emerging from the cornucopia is not necessarily a Dionysiac attribute; it is often seen in cornucopias alongside other fruits, independently of the deities that hold it.

The conflation of Dionysus and Harpocrates<sup>165</sup> is evident in the already mentioned Aretalogy of Karpokrates from Chalcis. By means of a form of false etymology, the slight alteration of Harpocrates' name to Karpokrates, signifying the one who rules over produce (from καρπός and κρατέω), imparts to him the traits of a fertility god. The

162 For statuettes, see Papangeli 2002, 226, 278–279; for table supports, Stefanidou-Tiveriou 1993, 234 no. 6, 235 no. 10, 237–238 nos. 16–20, 239–240 nos. 23–24 and the table supports from Thessaloniki mentioned above, n. 19.

163 Inv. no. MΘ 844; Despiniš et al. 1997, 113–114 no. 86 (G. Despiniš). Descamps-Lequime and Charatzopoulou 2011, 609–610 no. 382 (K. Tzanavari).

164 Tran Tam Tinh 1964, 162–163 nos. 104, 107, 110, pls. XII.1; XXI.2; Properzio 1981, 168–171 no. 80, pl. LVI no. 159; André-Salvini et al. 2010, 335 no. 156; concerning the Dionysiac traits in the iconography of Harpocrates, cf. Touloumtzidou in this volume.

165 And through Harpocrates to Bes, see above, n. 123.

hymn attributes several epithets and qualities of Dionysus (and by analogy of Osiris) to the child god, establishing a strong connection between them.<sup>166</sup> In particular, a phrase in the Chalcis aretalogy – πᾶς καιρός εἰμι ἐγώ, πάντων προμηθῆς, ὥρων<sup>167</sup> εὐρετής: "I encompass all the right moments, provide for everything, and am the inventor of the seasons" – recalls the unique epithet of Dionysus venerated by a religious guild in Thessaloniki, Ὠροφόρος. Dionysus *Horophoros*, the Dionysus "who brings the seasons", was presumably a deity associated with nature and fertility, responsible for season changes and regeneration.<sup>168</sup> These aspects of both gods are shown in artefacts. In Roman Imperial art, Dionysus was occasionally represented among personifications of the seasons,<sup>169</sup> whilst a 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE table support in Ankara depicts Harpocrates with a *basileion*-crown, personified as *hora*, season, holding autumnal fruit and two ears of wheat.<sup>170</sup> Concerning the epithet *Horophoros*, Paschalis Paschidis proposed<sup>171</sup> "a second layer of interpretation", suggesting that for contemporaries, Dionysus might not only have brought the *horai* but also have carried Horus. This is quite hard to imagine – and it is not supported by any source, literary or visual – but what seems even less probable is that the stele documenting the association of Dionysus *Horophoros* could have been "erected at the sanctuary of the Egyptian Gods". The relevant inscription provides no indications that would link it to the Isiac sanctuary.<sup>172</sup>

## Conclusions

Dionysus was present in the Isiac sanctuary of Thessaloniki, both directly and indirectly, in different manifestations, often through his amalgamation with other deities like the well-attested identification with Osiris or, as elucidated in this paper, Harpocrates. Devoid of rigid dogmas, religious practice during the Imperial period exhibited a remarkable flexibility, and was open to different interpretations. This process is exemplified through the monuments explored in this study.

At some point during the Imperial period, the Isiac sanctuary embraced the cult of Zeus Dionysus *Gongylos*, a local deity of uncertain provenance. His worship included mystic aspects and he was associated with fertility, regeneration and the commem-

166 Harder 1944, 11, 14–17, 32, 38, 55–56. N.b. that the assimilation is not only towards Dionysus. In his aretalogy, Karpokrates is also "invested with the attributes of ... Apollo, Asclepius, and with a suggestion of Adonis", Nock 1949, 221.

167 Harder (1944, 8 and 12) proposed to read ὥρων, in the persuasion that it forms a phrase with πάντων προμηθῆς, and πάντων would presuppose a masculine or neutral word. Totti (1985, 15–16 no. 6) separated it from πάντων προμηθῆς and linked it correctly to εὐρετής, but kept the implausible ὥρων. For the correct reading ὥρων, see Matthey 2007, 196.

168 *IG X.2.1s* 1058; Nigdelis 2006, 129–134, esp. 130–131.

169 Nigdelis 2006, 131.

170 Ankara, Anadolu Medeniyetleri Müzesi; Kökdemir 2019.

171 Paschidis 2022, 67–68 n. 44.

172 A recent discovery from the excavations at the metro station Venizelou in Thessaloniki – a mosaic floor from a bath complex depicting a partially preserved male figure dressed in a short chiton and identified as Ὠροφόρος, (see press release of the Greek Ministry of Culture from 20 April 2022, <https://www.culture.gov.gr/el/Information/SitePages/view.aspx?nid=4177>) – may suggest that the epithet and its connotations were more pertinent in another part of the city.



oration of the dead. In the Isiac sanctuary, Zeus Dionysus *Gongylos* was presumably linked to the solar god Bes and, through Bes, to Harpocrates – whose effigy, in Thessaloniki, also bears Dionysiac traits. This distinctive cult was most probably installed in the *Osirieon*, the precinct dedicated to Osiris within the sanctuary, and at least some of its adherents were also prominent members of the Isiac community.

In the cosmopolitan city of Thessaloniki, Isiac worshippers must have come from the most diverse ethnic backgrounds. One such example is provided by the offering made by a man of Syrian origin to Dionysus as a listening god during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. In this instance, Dionysus may have been identified with Osiris.

These two cases, one concerning a distinctive cult and the other, humbler, related to the circumstances of a certain individual, testify both to the adaptability, inclusiveness, dynamism, and self-renewing energy inherent in the Isiac cults.

## Annex

*The inscriptions related to the cult of Zeus Dionysus Gongylos*

## 1. MΘ 983; IG X.2.1 259; RICIS 113/0537

[ἀγαθῆ]ι τύχηι Διὸς  
Διονύσου <sup>νν</sup> Γονγύλου.

- Γ. Ἰούλιος βησάρτης ἀνέθηκεν τῷ θεῷ καὶ  
ἔδωκεν ἐν δόσει τοῖς τε νῦν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἔσομένοις  
5 μύσταις, ἕως ἂν συνιστῶνται, ἀμπέλων ἐν τῇ  
Περδυλίᾳ ἐν τῇ ἄστυι πλέθρων πέντε τὸ τρίτον  
μέρος ἐπὶ τῷδε, ἐφ' ᾧ τὴν καρπὴν ἐχόντων  
καθ' ἕτος γείνηται ἢ ἐπὶ τῶν θρεψάντων  
ἄρτου ἐστίασις κατὰ τὸ παραδεδομένον  
10 καὶ τὴν δόσιν, Δύστρου <sup>ν</sup> ἰθ', <sup>ν</sup> Δαισίου <sup>ν</sup> ἰγ',  
Γορπιαίου <sup>ν</sup> κγ', <sup>ν</sup> ὀμνύντων τῶν τε νῦν καὶ  
τῶν ἔσομένων μυστῶν τὸν θεὸν καὶ τὰ ὄργια  
καὶ τὸ μεσανύκτιον ἄρτου διαφυλάξειν τὴν  
ἐπάνο θρησκίαν κατὰ τὴν δόσιν. ἀνέθηκα  
15 δὲ καὶ οἱ ὑπογεγραμμένοι μύσται, ἐφ' ᾧ τῆς καρ-  
πῆς μετέχωσιν τὸν τοῦ ζῆν χρόνον αὐτοὶ ἐπὶ  
τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ μεταπαραλαμβάνωσιν οἱ ἐπεισι-  
όντες μύσται, τοῦ αὐτοῦ πενταπλέθρου τὰ δύο  
μέρη, ἐφ' ᾧ ἄπρατα διηνεκῶς μείνη, ὁμοσάν-  
20 των κατὰ τὰ αὐτὰ συνδιαφυλάξειν.

Λ. Φουλούιος Φῆλιξ  
ἱερεὺς

Γ. Ἰούλιος Ἀγαθόπους  
Ἀβούδιο[ς .....]ων

- 25 Μ. Ὀμβρειος Ἐρωσ  
Νείκανδρος Νεικάνδρου  
Ἡρακλείδης Κορράγου  
Γ. Ἰούλιος Φῆλιξ  
Μ. Ὀμβρειος Μακεδών

- 35 Ν. Τερραῖος Φιρμανός  
Μ. Λόλλιος Σαβεῖνος  
Γ. Ῥάιος Ζώσιμος  
Μ. Μάριος Κερεάλις  
Μ. Ἀντώνιος Πρεῖμος

- 30 Τ. Σέξιτιος <sup>vacat</sup>  
Ν. Τερραῖος Ὑάκινθος  
Ἀντίγονος Νεικηφόρου  
Μ. Λόλλιος Ἀττικός

- 40 ἀνετέθη ἐπιτρέψαντος Στράτωνος τοῦ  
Ἐπικράτους, φύσει δὲ Διονυσίου, ἱεργεύοντος  
τὸ <sup>νν</sup> β'.

2. MΘ 6089; Stefanidou-Tiveriou and Voutiras 2020, 579 no. 1191 (E. Voutiras); *Bull. épigr.* 2021, 287 (P. Paschidis)

Ἱερητεύ-  
οντος  
Στράτω-  
νος τοῦ  
5 Ἐπικρά-  
του, φύ-  
σει δὲ  
Διονυ-  
σίου.

3. MΘ 972; *IG X.2.1* 244; *RICIS* 113/0561

*Col. I*

---

[--]νιος [-- --]  
Ἄρριος Πρόκλος  
Σερρουίλιος Ἐπάγαθος  
Προτάκιος Πρίσκος βοωφόρος  
5 Γρεκείνιος Σέλευκος  
Κάσσιος Εὐτυχος  
Φούριος Πριμιγᾶς ἀρχιναοκόρος  
Αἴλιος Εὐελπίδης  
Οὐίβιος Μάξιμος  
10 Αἴλιος Ἀσκληπιάδης  
Κλαύδιος Λύκος  
Ἀβούδιος Θύρσος  
Σουλπίκιος Πολύτιμος  
Σαβιδιανὸς Μᾶρκος  
15 Ἀλέξανδρος Διονυσίου  
Ἀλέξανδρος Ἀλεξάνδρου βησάρτης  
Σώσιππος Πρίμου  
Σπέδιος Πρόκλος  
Καμέριος Καπίτων  
20 Τύριος Ἰοῦστος  
Κλαύδιος Εὐπλους

*Col. II*

---

ΗΛ ---  
Πομπώνι[ος ---]  
Κλαύδιος Καιπίω[ν]  
Σκρειβώνιος Νικηφόρος  
5 Εὐνομος Εὐνόμου  
Τ. · Φλ. · Γράνιος Λύκος  
Λαρτιδία Ὀπτάτα  
Καικιλία Ὀπτάτα  
Κλαύδιος Παράμονος  
10 Μ. · Οὐλπιος Φῆλιξ  
Μ. · Οὐλπιος Τρόφιμος  
Αἴλιανὸς Σεκοῦνδος  
Μ. · Αἴλιος Καλάτυος

## 4. MΘ 1729; IG X.2.1 60; R/C/S 113/0562; date: 155/56 CE

I

ἱερομέ-  
 ν[ου . . . ]<sup>v</sup>  
 [Κα]μερίου  
 Καπίτωνος

II

Δι̅ [Διονύσω Γονγύλω -----]Μ . . ΛΙ . .  
 Κ [-----]ΛΙ . . Ι  
 ΟΣΙΩΝ . . . ΟΣ [-----]ἱων Ἡ[λ]ιος,  
 ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ, τὴν ἐστίαν σὺν τῇ βάσει [·] ἔτους : [ζ]πρ' <sup>vv</sup>  
 5 τοῦ καὶ γτ'

III

ἀρχινεωκο-  
 ροῦντος

5 Φο[υ]ρ[ί]ου Πρει-  
 μιγᾶ.

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# ISIACA FROM THE ROMAN CEMETERIES OF THESSALONIKI: THE SMALL FINDS

Annareta Touloumtzidou

*in memoriam* of my father

## **Abstract**

*The Isiac sanctuary in Thessaloniki is one of the earliest in Greece and the Mediterranean, likely established in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC and enduring until the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. Its significant finds, including sculptures and inscriptions, provide valuable insights into the cults of Isis, Sarapis, Osiris, Harpocrates, and Anubis, and an important place in Isiac studies.*

*Thus far, the impact of the Isiac cults on the lives of Thessaloniki's citizens has been primarily explored through finds from its Isiac sanctuary. This paper aims to shed light on a neglected category of finds with Isiac connotations: small finds from the city's cemeteries, which encompass older and more recent finds of various forms and materials (terracotta figurines, jewellery, and an inscribed mug).*

*This paper discusses the typology of these isiaca and their associated deities, drawing comparisons to similar objects from other regions and the finds of the Isiac sanctuary in Thessaloniki. Additionally, it examines the funerary contexts in which the isiaca were unearthed to understand their original purpose in daily life and the rationale behind their placement in a funerary assemblage.*

*Given the considerable number of excavated graves from Thessaloniki's two cemeteries, recovered during rescue excavations conducted by the Archaeological Service over the past 150 years, the rarity of the isiaca stands in contrast to the abundant findings within the Isiac sanctuary. This raises questions about whether the isiaca reflect a lesser impact of the Isiac cults in the city compared to what the discoveries in the sanctuary may suggest. Furthermore, the absence of imperishable isiaca for the deceased or the omission of Isiac references on funerary monuments prompts an inquiry into the reasons behind these choices. To explore these questions and*

*comprehend the scarcity of isiacs in funerary contexts, isiacs from cemeteries in other Greek cities are also considered.\**

**Keywords:** *Thessaloniki; Isis; Sarapis; Harpocrates; Anubis; gens isiacs; grave offerings; cemeteries*

## 1. Introduction

Rescue excavations conducted between 1921 and 1960 by the Greek Archaeological Service in the western part of the city of Thessaloniki have revealed parts of an Isiac sanctuary near the ancient harbour. The excavations uncovered remnants of four temples with adjacent porticoes. One of the temples, as indicated by terracotta figurines of Aphrodite and Eros and the discovery of a cult statue in the cella, was likely dedicated to Aphrodite. An inscription attests to a temple of Isis Lochia; it can most probably be identified with a partially unearthed temple, where the head of a statue of Isis lactans was found. Further inscriptions refer to an Osiris temple; it must have been the one that featured an underground crypt.<sup>1</sup>

The abundance of sculptures,<sup>2</sup> inscriptions<sup>3</sup> and coins hints at a wealthy sanctuary with a prolonged operation, from possibly the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, shortly after the city's founding by king Cassander, until the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. The finds reveal the worship of the entire *gens isiacs*, i.e. Isis, Sarapis, Osiris, Anubis, and Harpocrates, as well as Ammon Zeus and Tithoes. Some inscriptions and sculptures suggest that Aphrodite, Artemis, Apollo, Asclepius, Dionysus, Theos Hypsistos, Zeus Dionysus Gongylos and other deities were venerated either within the sanctuary or in its immediate vicinity.

Evidence of the cult of Egyptian gods in Thessaloniki can also be traced among finds from its Roman cemeteries (eastern and western). These objects not only indicate the diffusion of the Isiac cult among the city's inhabitants, including natives, immigrants, and even visitors, but also shed light on their beliefs regarding the afterlife. They can be categorised into three groups: a) funerary monuments (sarcophagi, altars, stele), b) terracotta figurines, likely crafted specifically as grave goods, and c) objects

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1 Bricault 2001, 26-27; Steimle 2008, 79-132; Christodoulou 2021. For the history of the excavation of the sanctuary and recent identifications based on new research, Χριστοδούλου and Τουλουμτζίδου 2021.

2 Most sculptures and fragments from the sanctuary are published in Δεσπίνης et al. 1997; Δεσπίνης et al. 2003; Despintis et al. 2010; Στεφανίδου-Τιβεριίου and Βουτυράς 2020.

3 For the inscriptions found in the sanctuary, some of which were recently identified on account of archive research, *RICIS* 113/0501-113/0529, 113/0531, 113/0533-113/0538, 113/0540-113/0547, 113/0549-113/0558, 113/0560-113/0561, 113/0563-113/0574, 113/0578; *IG X* 2.1, 27-28, 54, 67-71, 123, 226, 945-950, 981. *IG X* 2.1(s), 1050, 1594-1595. Related to the sanctuary and possibly originating from it are some more inscriptions, *RICIS* 113/530, 113/0532, 113/0548, 113/0562, 113/0575-113/0576; Στεφανίδου-Τιβεριίου and Βουτυράς 2020, 579, no. 1191, fig. 2728-2729 (Εμ. Βουτυράς).

originally used in everyday life (jewellery and a mug). The first group will be treated separately, in another paper.<sup>4</sup>

These artefacts, found in various plots of the city over the past 150 years, have often been subject to incomplete publication or mistaken identification, which may have hindered their comprehensive study as a cohesive group. In fact, they have never been examined as a distinct category. They date to the Roman period, coinciding with a peak of the Isiac sanctuary's affluence. Hence, it is intriguing to investigate whether they reflect the popularity of the cult or if they are associated with some or all of the gods worshipped in the sanctuary. Most finds are unpublished and will be discussed here for the first time.

## 2. Small finds

### 2.1 Terracotta figurines

A 1<sup>st</sup>-century AD child grave from the western cemetery of Thessaloniki contained several terracotta figurines, indicative of the very young age of its occupant:<sup>5</sup> a Maltese dog,<sup>6</sup> a man milking a goat, a man leading a loaded donkey, Telesphorus, Telesphorus with a child, a nude winged baby Eros, Eros embracing Psyche,<sup>7</sup> and a winged nude boy who is riding astride a bull with a solar disk among its horns. In the latter, the boy's right arm is extended to the bull's neck, while the left one is hidden (fig. 1). This figurine has been interpreted as Eros on an Apis bull.<sup>8</sup> A few more identical figurines are known from graves of children in Thessaloniki (fig. 2),<sup>9</sup> Pella,<sup>10</sup> and Stobi.<sup>11</sup> A badly damaged

4 Touloumtzidou, forthcoming.

5 Πέτσας 1974, 377, pl. 83a, 84γ; Κόρτη-Κόντη 1994, 125–128, nos. and figs. 125–133.

6 This terracotta figurine type of a furry, curly-tailed Maltese dog is thought to originate in Egypt, representing the dog-star Sothis or Sirius (*Canis maior*), its heliacal rising preceding the annual Nile inundation. During the Hellenistic and Roman period it is common in Egypt but to a lesser degree outside it. Sometimes Harpocrates or Isis are depicted on the back of such a dog, Barrett 2011, 187–189. In his thorough analysis Gonzalez 2011, persuasively relates such figurines of dogs with the world of childhood, the first phase (from 0 to 5-7 years) of nutrition, education, docility or breeding of both children and dogs, while he recognizes Harpocrates with such a dog and a pot with *athera* as a patron of childhood, nutritioner and breeder of children.

7 As Bosnakis 2009, 49, comments on a similar figurine of Eros embracing Psyche from Cos "it indicates the young and unmarried status of the deceased and symbolizes, through the mourning for the loss, a joyful comforting, reassuring message that initiates into mysteries received the rebirth after the mystic death, the happy ending and Psyche's reunion with Eros".

8 Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, inv. no. MΘ 10862. Height: 10.3 cm. Κόρτη-Κόντη 1994, 126, no. and fig. 128; *LIMC* III (1986), s.v. Eros, 875, no. 277a (A. Hermay, H. Cassimatis and R. Vollommer); Γραμμένος 2011, 810–811, no. 2.

9 Κόρτη-Κόντη 1994, 102, no. and fig. 43; Adam-Veleni et al. 2017, 395, no. 487 (the shaft grave contained 20 figurines of bulls, 4 of Maltese dogs, 3 of Harpocrates on Apis, 2 of Aphrodite, one of Telesphorus with child, vases etc.) (L. Acheilara and I. Ninou).

10 Adam-Veleni et al. 2017, 252–253, nos. 175–176 (M. Lilimpaki-Akamati and N. Akamatis); Λιλιμπάκη-Ακαμάτη and Ακαμάτης 2022, 134, nos. 514–515, 263, pl. 107. The two figurines have been wrongly dated to 325–300 BC, due to an oinochoe and a part of a male figurine from the same grave, Λιλιμπάκη-Ακαμάτη, Ακαμάτης 2022, 133–134, nos. 512, 516, pl. 107–108. However the two figurines of Apis and two of a Maltese dog from the same grave can be dated to the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD due to identical ones from securely dated assemblages. A reuse of the grave at Pella is the only explanation of this chronological discrepancy, coins of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC have been observed in tombs of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC in Pella, see Λιλιμπάκη-Ακαμάτη and Ακαμάτης 2022, 271, 291.



**Fig. 1. Terracotta figurine of Harpocrates on Apis**  
inv. no. MO 10862 (© Archaeological Museum of  
Thessaloniki, Hellenic Ministry of Culture)



**Fig. 2. Terracotta figurine of Harpocrates on Apis**  
inv. no. MO 134 (© Archaeological Museum of  
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figurine from Corinth, found in a tomb with artifacts dating to the 1<sup>st</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD, is close to those; unfortunately, the heads of both figures are not preserved.<sup>12</sup>

The cults of the *gens Isiaca* at Pella are hitherto attested through a handful of grave offerings dating to the 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD.<sup>13</sup> At Stobi, the cult within the Isiac sanctuary begun in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, as evidenced by inscriptions and sculptures.<sup>14</sup> Its temple, on a podium with an underground crypt, bears similarities to one of the temples in the Isiac sanctuary of Thessaloniki.<sup>15</sup> It has been suggested that the cult of Isis spread from Thessaloniki to Stobi via the ancient road along the Axios river.<sup>16</sup> Considering the absence of early Isiac finds from Pella and Stobi, it is plausible to assume that such figurines were produced in a Thessalonian workshop and then distributed to these regions. This hypothesis gains further support from Roman period terracotta figurines of other themes found in Stobi which are identical to those discovered in Thessaloniki.<sup>17</sup>

11 One such figurine was found in a grave with figurines of a rooster and Telesphorus with child, dated to the period of Augustus, Wiseman and Mano-Zissi 1976, 279, no. 3, fig. 10; Petruševska-Petroska 2018, 99, note 19. For other exemplars, Blaževska, *forthcoming*.

12 Warner Slane 2017, 217, 247, no. A8, pl. 90.

13 See below, note 276.

14 RICIS 113/0401–0402; Blaževska and Radnjanski 2015; Maikidou-Putрино 2021, 92–105; Blaževska 2022.

15 For the temple at Thessaloniki, Μακρόνας 1940, 464–465; Steimle 2002.

16 Düll 1977, 150–151; Blaževska and Radnjanski 2015, 229–230; Maikidou-Putрино 2021, 104.

17 Blaževska, *forthcoming*.

These terracotta figurines hold significant importance, considering the rarity of Apis depictions from Greece, some of which are even doubtful.<sup>18</sup> They are even scarcer in Macedonia, as has already been noted,<sup>19</sup> restricted to two marble statuettes of bulls from the Isiac sanctuary in Dion.<sup>20</sup> Bronze coins from Amphipolis, issued after the Battle of Actium and until 27 BC, portray Artemis Tauropolus sitting sidesaddle on a galloping bull<sup>21</sup> with a small *basileion* among his horns<sup>22</sup> – the crown worn by Ptolemaic queens and later by Isis. These coin issues, which are believed to celebrate the conquest of Egypt, do not provide conclusive evidence for the cult of Apis in the city, as they are identical to later issues without the *basileion*. This is irrespective of the contemporary acts of Augustus regarding Apis during his sojourn in Egypt<sup>23</sup> or the possibility of the *basileion* being an attribute of Apis,<sup>24</sup> who was associated with kingship and the renewal of pharaonic power, and not of Cleopatra or Isis; scarce depictions of Apis with a *basileion* do exist.<sup>25</sup>

An intriguing reference in an inscription from the Isiac sanctuary of Thessaloniki that relates to the voluntary association of *mystai* of Zeus Dionysus Gongylos mentions a bovine bearer (βωοφόρος);<sup>26</sup> it is a *hapax*, supposedly indicating a person who carried an image of Apis in processions.<sup>27</sup> In the same inscription and in a second one

18 Kater-Sibbes and Vermaseren 1975b, 4–9, nos. 267–275; Kater-Sibbes and Vermaseren 1977, 46–47, nos. Add.35–36.

19 Veymiers 2009b, 495, note 157.

20 Παντερμαλής 1982, 67, pl. 50β; Παντερμαλής 1997, 73.

21 An almost identical scene of Europa on bull occurs on coins of Sidon under Augustus, *RPC I*, 4563–4564, 4567–4569.

22 Veymiers 2009b, 493–496, fig. 14; Veymiers 2014b, 195–196, fig. 9.1; Mastrocinque 2017, 160–161.

23 Augustus refused a ceremonial visit to Apis at Memphis, as was customary for new Pharaohs, since legitimacy depended on the Memphite clergy (Suetonius, *Vita divi Augusti*, 93; Dio Cassius, 51.16.5). It has been attested that after the conquest of Alexandria, “Apis bellowed a note of lamentation and burst into tears” (Dio Cassius, 51.17.5). The priest of Apis died two days before the conquest of Egypt by Augustus in 30 BC who in return permitted the installation of a new priest only in 28/27 BC, with a new title, that of “Prophet of Caesar”, serving the ruler cult, Thompson 1988, cxiii, 11–12; Takacs 2011, 80–82, 93; Wardle 2014, 508.

24 Malaise 2005, 47, note 106, identifies the bull with Apis, based on a marble relief from the Velian Hill, for which see below, note 25.

25 For Greco-Roman depictions of Apis with a *basileion* on Egyptian statuettes, Kater-Sibbes and Vermaseren 1975a, 27, no. 94, 34, no. 131, 45, no. 180, 47–48, no. 195, 198; Kater-Sibbes and Vermaseren 1975b, 51, no. 415, 57, no. 445, 64, no. 484, 75, no. 544, 77, no. 553, for terracotta figurines, Boutantin 2014, 255–256, pl. VII.2, and for an early Imperial period marble relief from Velian Hill in Rome, Kater-Sibbes and Vermaseren 1977, 41, no. Add.12, pl. XVI, which Veymiers 2018, 37–38, fig. 0.13, disassociates from Apis on account of the ribbon around the horns and therefore identifies it with a sacrificial bovine. However, a late Hellenistic terracotta figurine from Egypt depicts Harpocrates on Apis who is wearing a *basileion* and such a ribbon, see Πιτυγιάτογλου 1993, 42, no. 30. For more examples of Apis with a *basileion*, which he owes from the Memphite cow-headed Hathor, Malaise 2020.

26 *RICIS* 113/0561 (2<sup>nd</sup> century AD). See also the contribution of P. Christodoulou in the present volume.

27 *RICIS* 113/0561 (image of Apis or of Isis in the form of a cow). It should be noted that there are different possibilities, based on depictions in various means: an image of Apis on a litter, carried by two men, as attested in Egyptian terracotta figurines, Kater-Sibbes and Vermaseren 1975a, 47, no. 190–191; Dunand 1979, 263, no. 339, pl. CVII, or on a small standard carried by an Egyptian priest, as on a column from *Iseum Campense*, Kater-Sibbes and Vermaseren 1975b, 10, no. 278, pl. XIX, or on a tray carried by a woman, as on a mural painting from Pompeii, de Vos 1980, 39, fig. 8, which reminds of Apuleius', *Metamorphoses*, XI.11: “a priest with proud and measured step carried a statue on his shoulders, a cow seated upright; the cow being a fruitful symbol of the divine Mother of all”, Griffiths 1975, 219–222.

from the same sanctuary,<sup>28</sup> also related to the same association, there is an equally unique reference to a *besartes* (βησάρτης), a term which has puzzled researchers, evidently denoting a cult official, probably a man bearing an image of the god, as it has already been assumed.<sup>29</sup> However, most plausibly, *besartes* should be identified with a man in the guise of Bes. This assumption finds support in a panel painting from Herculaneum,<sup>30</sup> depicting an Isiac ritual in front of a temple, where the focal figure is a man with a dark complexion (Nubian?), wearing a muscle cuirass over a short chiton, as well as a mask and plumes of Bes on his head; his dancing posture is typical for Bes. In the same posture and attire, also without a sword and a shield, he is encountered only on Hellenistic terracotta objects from Memphis, namely two figurines and two relief vase sherds. These sherds also depict an amphora, alluding to a feast with wine and dance, and a head of the Apis bull,<sup>31</sup> implying his relation to Bes, who was also venerated at Memphis, in his own sanctuary.<sup>32</sup> This relation is further evidenced through terracottas of Bes bearing an image of Apis in a *naos* on his feather crown, possibly originating from Memphis.<sup>33</sup> If the *besartes* was in military attire and wore a mask of Bes, it is plausible that the *boöphoros* had a corresponding appearance, wearing a mask of Apis instead. While there are several depictions of the two gods in military attire from Egypt, signifying their roles as sovereigns,<sup>34</sup> there are no such representations outside Egypt, with the exception of Herculaneum,<sup>35</sup> as mentioned earlier. It is, however, more likely that the *boöphoros* was dressed similarly to the *anubophorus*, wearing a long garment and bearing a mask of Apis, as seen in a mural painting from Herculaneum, where the man is holding a *sistrum* and a *patera*.<sup>36</sup> In either case, the presence of *besartes* and *boöphoros* in the Thessalonian association certainly reflects an Egyptian, possibly Memphite influence,<sup>37</sup> suggesting a possible connection between the cult of Zeus Dionysus Gongylos and the Egyptian gods. If this is the case, it follows that the cult of Apis was also performed in the sanctuary of Thessaloniki.

28 Daux 1972, 478–487; *RICIS* 113/0537 (1<sup>st</sup> century AD); Nigdelis 2010, 16; Klopenberg and Ascough 2011, 352–356.

29 Daux 1972, 485–487; Klopenberg and Ascough 2011, 354.

30 Tran Tan Tinh 1971, 39–42, 85–86, no. 59, fig. 41; Ritner 2015, 404–406, fig. 4. For the connection of Bes to the Isiac family, Malaise 2004; Moormann 2018, 367–372, is skeptical about the dark-skinned dancer and his association with Bes, because of his enormous size and his depiction as a soldier and not nude like usual representations of Bes. He refers to other assumptions regarding this figure and the ritual involved. The figure is simply identified as “Noir, masqué” who is dancing by Bricault 2013a, 332.

31 Koßmann 2014, 180, 521–524, nos. Bes 5, Bes 7 (Bes was not handling a sword and a shield, with his not preserved arms, as suggested by Koßmann, since no traces are observed on the figurine and as is the case in the painting from Herculaneum and the two reliefs from Memphis), 545–548, nos. Bes 33–34, pl. 45e, 46b, 52b–c.

32 Koßmann 2014, 116, 181; Boutantin 2014, 259.

33 Koßmann 2014, 116–117, 544–545, no. Bes 32, pl. 52a.

34 Koßmann 2014, 98–118, 176–189, 484–493, 517–564.

35 Koßmann 2014, 176, ignores the painting from Herculaneum, thus stating that there are no such depictions from outside Egypt.

36 Tran Tam Tinh 1971, 88, no. 62.

37 For Isis Memphitis in the same sanctuary, *RICIS* 113/0549.



Regarding the terracotta figurines depicting the winged boy on Apis, it is important to note that depictions of Eros on a bull are extremely rare in Greco-Roman art.<sup>38</sup> As far as I know, there are only two: a Julio-Claudian silver cantharus from Pompeii, depicting Eros sitting sidesaddle on a bull and touching its horns, and a 1<sup>st</sup>-century BC marble base in Villa Albani, also featuring Dionysian themes, showing Eros on a bovine.<sup>39</sup>

One might reasonably assume that the boy on the figurine could be identified with Harpocrates Eros, despite the absence of Harpocrates' characteristic gesture. Figurines of winged Harpocrates, influenced by depictions of Eros,<sup>40</sup> have been found in Beroea (1<sup>st</sup> century BC),<sup>41</sup> Herakleia Lyncestis,<sup>42</sup> and elsewhere.<sup>43</sup> The assimilation of Harpocrates with Eros is evident in dedications found at Serapea A and C in Delos. One dedication is addressed to Eros Harpocrates Apollo and Isis Soteira Astarte Aphrodite Euploia Epekoos,<sup>44</sup> while another to Eros Nikephoros.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, offerings of marble and bronze statues of Eros in Serapeum C possibly imply a connection with Harpocrates.<sup>46</sup> The reference to Harpocrates being "vengeful against those who are unjust in love", in his hymn from Chalkis, further supports his association with Eros.<sup>47</sup>

Similar to the case of Dion,<sup>48</sup> the Isiac sanctuary of Thessaloniki also had a temple devoted to Aphrodite.<sup>49</sup> In the same sanctuary a priest dedicated a marble statuette of Aphrodite Omonoia and Eros.<sup>50</sup> This circumstance could have influenced the integration of Eros' features into Harpocrates' iconography, a process commonly observed in relation to Aphrodite and Isis.<sup>51</sup> Wings of Eros are also found in the iconography of other deities, for instance, Attis.<sup>52</sup> In fact, the Thessalonian tomb contained a figurine of Eros embracing Psyche and one of baby Eros, suggesting the young and unmarried status of the deceased.

38 An Attic 4<sup>th</sup> century BC plastic vase is actually depicting a panther and not a bull, *LIMC* III (1986), s.v. Eros, 875, no. 277 (A. Hermay, H. Cassimatis and R. Vollommer).

39 *LIMC* III (1986), s.v. Amor/Cupido, 996, no. 340, 344 (N. Blanc, F. Gury).

40 For Eros Harpocrates, *LIMC* IV (1988), s.v. Harpocrates, 442, 444 (V. Tran Tam Tinh, B. Jaeger and S. Poulin); Malaise 2005, 36-38; Malaise 2008. For a relief of Eros holding a torch (Eros Harpocrates or Hesperus?) in temple E at Soloi, attributed to the cult of the Isiac deities, see Kleibl 2007, 144, fig. 12.

41 Adam-Veleni et al. 2017, 265, no. 197 (G. Papazapheiriou).

42 Düll 1977, 411, no. 71, fig. 67A.

43 *LIMC* IV (1988), s.v. Harpocrates, 418, no. 11b, 423, no. 113, 424, no. 118c, 121a (V. Tran Tam Tinh, B. Jaeger and S. Poulin).

44 *RICIS* 202/0365. Wallensten 2014.

45 *RICIS* 202/0123 (late 3<sup>rd</sup>–early 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC).

46 *RICIS* 202/0424 (156/5 BC). Malaise 2005, 37.

47 Matthey 2007, 216.

48 For the temple with the cult statue of Aphrodite Hypolimpidia, Παντερμαλής 1997, 26; Παντερμαλής 1999, 104–109; *RICIS* 113/0208–0209; Falezza 2012, 249–252, fig. III.30.

49 See above, note 1.

50 *RICIS* 113/0563 (182 AD); Δεσπίνης et al. 1997, 115–116, no. 88, figs. 230–233 (Γ. Δεσπίνης).

51 For the early assimilation of the two goddesses, *RICIS* 114/0601 (3<sup>rd</sup> century BC), 202/322 (105/4 BC), 202/0346 (95/4 BC), 202/350 (94/3 BC); *Delta* 1 925,1 (221–205 BC); Malaise 2005, 181–186.

52 Bosnakis 2009.

The figurine type of a winged boy on Apis was likely inspired by Egyptian terracotta figurines of Harpocrates riding Apis, often depicted leaping and occasionally standing, with a pot or a solar disc placed between the bull's horns. Harpocrates is portrayed wearing a short tunic and a *pschent* crown or lotus buds on his head. He holds a pot with *athera* or a *patera* and a cornucopia, and keeps his right index finger over his mouth.<sup>53</sup> His attributes identify him as Karpokrates, the distributor of benefits an *euergetes* and a nurturing monarch.<sup>54</sup>

A figurine from Cyprus depicts a winged mantle-clad boy riding a leaping bull, with his right hand close to his chin.<sup>55</sup> This boy has been identified as Eros. Conversely, marble mantle-clad herms of boys from Delos (2<sup>nd</sup> century BC), whether holding a cornucopia or not, although wingless, have been identified by J. Marcadé as Hellenised depictions of Harpocrates.<sup>56</sup> Consequently, the figurine from Cyprus can be seen as a depiction of Harpocrates Eros, influenced by the aforementioned Egyptian terracottas.

Additional evidence of Egypt as a source for such depictions of boys on bulls comes from a terracotta roundel from Egypt, which depicts a winged Eros playing kithara on the back of a bull striding over the sea, as indicated by the presence of dolphins.<sup>57</sup> This bull is identified as Zeus. A similar terracotta roundel from Memphis features Europa instead of Eros, flanked by two cupids, confirming the representation of Zeus.<sup>58</sup> Achilles Tatius (*Leucippe and Cleitophon*, 1.1.2–13) describes a painting with a very similar composition in the temple of Astarte at Sidon. However, on the Memphite roundel depicting Eros on the back of the bull, the animal may represent both Zeus and Apis, a hypothesis supported not only by the findspot but also by a small detail reflecting Memphite theology: a tiny nude kneeling man holding the bull's horns. This figure, yet to be identified, may possibly represent the god Shu (the wind), son of Atum. Shu and his sister Tefnut are associated with Ptah in Memphis, as their *bau* (plural of *ba*, soul), formed a triad.<sup>59</sup> Since Apis was considered the *ba*, the manifestation of Ptah, a relation between Apis and Shu can be inferred. The absence of the solar disk among the bull's horns in the Memphite roundel is intentional, as it is replaced by Shu, who is typically depicted in Egyptian art as a kneeling figure lifting the sky in the form of a solar disk.<sup>60</sup> Alternatively, the tiny figure could be identified with Ptah, who is portrayed in the sanctuary of Ibis at Memphis as a nude man sitting on the ground with legs wide apart, supporting the starry sky with his outstretched arms, flanked by Shu and Tefnut depicted as two *ba*-birds.<sup>61</sup> The presence of the solar disc among the bull's horns in the terracotta figurines

53 Kater-Sibbes and Vermaseren 1975a, 38, no. 148; *LIMC* II (1984), s.v. Apis, 180, no. 25 (M.G. Vermaseren); Πινηγάτογλου 1993, 42, no. 30; Poulin 1988, 295, 333–336, nos. 384–388, figs. 433–437; Boutantin 2014, 270, no. 123.

54 For an analysis of these symbols of Harpocrates, Gonzales 2011, 176–190.

55 Stampolidis and Tassoulas 2009, 104, no. 37 (P. Florentzos).

56 Marcadé 1989.

57 Perdrizet 1921, 96, no. 246, pl. LXVII.

58 Merkelbach 1995, 524, fig. 47.

59 Kákosy 1980, 53; Das Candeias Sales 2012, 128.

60 Derriks and Delvaux 2009, 223–224 (A. Lebrun-Nélis and Ch. Brasseur).

61 Kákosy 1980, 48–49, fig. 1.

from Thessaloniki firmly identifies it with Apis, not with Zeus in the guise of a bull. The inspiration for this type likely came from figurines of Harpocrates on the back of Apis, without excluding depictions similar to that on the Memphite roundel, where cupids are also present, alongside a potential assimilation of Zeus with Apis.

Among the sculptures adorning the *dromos* in the Serapeum of Memphis, leading to a chapel of Apis, there are falcons with the *pschent* crown and little boys riding lions, panthers, and peacocks. These boys have been consistently identified as representations of Dionysus, due to the inclusion of grapes on the supports and Athenaeus' description (*Deipnosophistai*, V, 200d–f) of the *pompe* of Ptolemy Philadelphus in honour of Dionysus in Alexandria, where a parade included various animals and chariots driven by elephants and horses, however not panthers, lions or peacocks. "On all of these were mounted little boys wearing the tunics and wide-brimmed hats of charioteers ... The lads driving the chariots wore pine crowns".<sup>62</sup> It is evident that the sculptures bear no similarities to this description. Due to the absence of attributes such as ivy wreaths and *nebris*, and considering the young age of the riders, it is plausible to assume that these sculptures might represent a Hellenised version of Harpocrates instead of Dionysus. Dionysian traits, like the ivy wreath, grapes, and *nebris*, are also known in the iconography of Harpocrates, possibly linking him to *Dionysus pais*.<sup>63</sup> The aretology of Karpokrates from Chalkis further describes him as the son of Serapis and Isis, associated with Demeter, Kore, Dionysus, and Iacchos, inventor of the mixing of wine and water, participating in the thiasoi of Bakkhoi and Bacchai, and devising the ways to hunt all kinds of animals.<sup>64</sup>

This assumption gains further support from depictions of Harpocrates in Egypt and elsewhere, showing him riding lions,<sup>65</sup> panthers,<sup>66</sup> peacocks,<sup>67</sup> and other animals,<sup>68</sup> potentially influenced by similar Eros representations on these animals, symbolising their virtues.<sup>69</sup> An epigram by Marcus Argentarius (*A.P.* IX, 221) describes a sealstone with a depiction of Eros riding a lion, holding the reins and a whip. The subject is known from sealstones and sealings.<sup>70</sup> A statue from Memphis preserves reins in the hand of the small god and in the panther's mouth. The absence of wings allows us to identify as Harpocrates the boy on all Memphite statues depicting boys on animals, influenced by the iconography of both Eros and Dionysus.

62 Wilcken 1917; Lauer and Picard 1955, 173–260; Thompson 1988, 27–29, 212–213; Bergmann 2007.

63 Malaise 2000, 406; Poulin 1988, 237–238, no. 257, 288, no. 322, 328, no. 368, figs. 280, 364, 414.

64 *RICIS* 104/0206 (late 3<sup>rd</sup>–early 4<sup>th</sup> century AD); Matthey 2007, 196, 214–221.

65 *LIMC* IV (1988), s.v. Harpocrates, 437, no. 320–321 (V. Tran Tam Tinh, B. Jaeger and S. Poulin); Poulin 1988, 298, figs. 449–451, 458; Dunand 1990, 94, no. 205; Boutantin 2014, 439 note 3.

66 For a coin of Alexandria under Trajan, *RPC* II, 4397.

67 Poulin 1988, 327, no. 366, fig. 412; Thiboutot 2020, 49–50, fig. 5.6a.

68 Poulin 1988, 291–380.

69 *Contra* Burr Thompson 1934, 44, no. 22, pl. XI (terracotta figurines of Eros aside peacocks from Myrina were inspired by the statues of Memphis). For Eros on various animals, *LIMC* III (1986), s.v. Eros, 874–875, nos. 257–272 (A. Hermay, H. Cassimatis and R. Vollommer), s.v. Amor, Cupido, 995, no. 335, 996, no. 337 (N. Blanc and F. Gury); Σταμπολίδης 1992, 178–180, pl. XXXIX.15–19 Stampolidis and Tassoulas 2009, 101–108, nos. 31–47.

70 Pantos s.a.

This assumption is further corroborated by the existence of a priest of Harpocrates (*Har-Pa-Chered*) at Memphis<sup>71</sup> and the presence of statues depicting Horus as a hawk on the *dromos*.<sup>72</sup> The religious aspects of the Memphis sculpture strengthen the identification of these figures as Harpocrates, especially considering that Apis, whose most significant cult center was in Memphis, was regarded there as the son of Isis, and was associated or assimilated with Horus.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, coins and lead tokens of the Memphite nome (under Domitian, Trajan, Antoninus Pius) depict Isis alongside a small Apis,<sup>74</sup> while numerous Egyptian terracotta figurines portray Isis nursing Apis to attain eternal youth.<sup>75</sup> These deities were also depicted together on a relief from Rome.<sup>76</sup>

A bronze figurine from Qaryat al-Faw, attributed to an Alexandrian workshop, portrays a small bull, likely representing Apis, beside a standing adolescent Harpocrates.<sup>77</sup> Few are common depictions of Apis and Harpocrates,<sup>78</sup> significant being a lead token from the Memphite nome featuring Apis with Harpocrates standing on his back, and another showing an enthroned Isis, Apis, and possibly Horus, holding a small figure of Harpocrates emerging from a lotus.<sup>79</sup> Few more depictions of Isis, Apis, and Harpocrates are known.<sup>80</sup> These instances may indicate the perceived identity between Harpocrates and Apis as distinct manifestations of Horus, as supported by Ptolemaic texts, and their association with fertility and regeneration. These qualities were fitting in a funerary context,<sup>81</sup> particularly the graves of children, where terracotta figurines of Harpocrates on the back of Apis from Thessaloniki, Pella, and Stobi were discovered. The creation of this figurine type reveals connections with Egypt, especially Memphis, and suggests the plausible existence of a cult of Apis in Thessaloniki. Interestingly, a 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD inscription from the city's Isiac sanctuary refers to Isis with the rare epithet Memphitis.<sup>82</sup>

A Memphitic theology behind the creation of the terracotta figurine type of Harpocrates on Apis and its Greek adaptation may be corroborated by a similar case of what may appear as another genre figurine, Harpocrates on a ram. According to M.-C. Budischovsky, the ram is Khonsou, son of Ammon, and their common representation denotes his assimilation with Horus, which was a product of Theban theology.<sup>83</sup>

71 Sandri 2006, 44.

72 Lauer and Picard 1955, 210-211, fig. 111.

73 Koßmann 2014, 113–116.

74 Kater-Sibbes and Vermaseren 1977, 14–20, nos. 41–42, 44–46, 49–50, 53, 56–62, 64; Koßmann 2014, 114–115.

75 Tran Tam Tinh 1973, 27–28, fig. 144, 201; Kater-Sibbes and Vermaseren 1975a, 28, no. 101, 30, no. 112, 33, no. 127, 37, no. 141, 45, no. 182, 54, no. 231; Boutantin 2014, 257–259, no. 124; Koßmann 2014, 114.

76 Kater-Sibbes and Vermaseren 1975b, 11, no. 280.

77 *RICIS* 404/0901; Ibrahim Al-Ghabban 2010, 335, no. 156.

78 Kater-Sibbes and Vermaseren 1975a, 28, no. 98, 37, no. 140; Kater-Sibbes and Vermaseren 1975b, 15–16, no. 288, 81–82, no. 577; Boutantin 2014, 255–256, 270, no. 124, pl. VII, fig. 2.

79 Milne 1915, 109, no. 9–10; Kater-Sibbes and Vermaseren 1977, 19, nos. 61–62.

80 Kater-Sibbes and Vermaseren 1975a, 37, no. 140–141; Kater-Sibbes and Vermaseren 1977, 19–20, no. 62; Tran Tam Tinh 1973, 60, no. A–9; Koßmann 2014, 115, 393–394, no. Hor 55, pl. 20b.

81 Boutantin 2014, 256–257.

82 *RICIS* 113/0549.

83 Budischovsky 2011, 167, fig. 5. For representations of Harpocrates on the back of a sphinx (Tithoes), proclaiming their assimilation, Matthey 2007, 212.

## 2.2. Jewellery

### 2.2.1. Isiac pendants

The front side of a marble sarcophagus from the eastern cemetery of Thessaloniki, dating to AD 140–160, features relief portraits of four family members: a young and an older man, and a young and an older woman (fig. 3).<sup>84</sup> The iconography does not carry any Isiac connotation. The sarcophagus held the burials of an adult man, with his remains placed aside for the burial of an adult woman. Remarkably well-preserved, the sarcophagus suggests that it was not used many times, with its final use possibly dated to the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. The woman was accompanied by a pair of gold earrings, a gold ghost coin and gold pendants, which were likely strung together as a necklace. These pendants include two spherical *bullae*, two situla pendants with an arched handle and fluted body featuring a knob at the bottom, two elliptical amulets with an embossed depiction of a goddess with a rudder and cornucopia, a lamp pendant, a lance pendant, and a ring pendant (fig. 4).<sup>85</sup>

Generally, during the Roman period, pendants and amulets of various types (*bullae*, coins, and images of gods) and materials, worn either independently or threaded in a cord, were called *crepundia*. These items served to provide protection against dangers and diseases while expressing personal religiosity. The cords, sometimes depicted in art, were commonly worn around the neck or between the armpit and the neck, especially by children and young women. Pendants and amulets from Campania, some of which bore Isiac connotations,<sup>86</sup> enable a better understanding of the diversity of similar items from Thessaloniki.

In Pompeii, a box held by a mature lady contained various amulets, including a herm, bells, a bunch of grapes, knucklebones, dice, phalli, a cicada, a panther, pinecones, and beads, some of which were related to the *gens isiaca* (such as Osiris of Kanopos, an open palm, and jackals symbolizing Anubis).<sup>87</sup> A figurine of Isis Tyche from Pompeii was suspended from a gold chain with a snake-shaped finial,<sup>88</sup> possibly alluding to Isis Thermouthis.<sup>89</sup> A necklace from another Pompeiian house consisted of pendants in the form of Isis Tyche, Harpocrates, Bes, an arm, a lotus flower, and more.<sup>90</sup> Pompeii yielded more examples of pendants, with Harpocrates and Isis or Isis

84 Stefanidou-Tiveriou 2014, 158, no. 1, pl. 1–2.

85 Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, inv. nos. MΘ 5452 (situla pendant, height 1.85 cm), MΘ 5453 (situla pendant, height 1.64 cm), MΘ 5454 (two *bullae*, height 1.5 and 1.62 cm), MΘ 5456 (pendant with Tyche, height 1.66 cm), MΘ 5457 (pendant with Tyche, height 1.68 cm) MΘ 5458 (lamp pendant, length 1.25 cm), MΘ 5459 (ring earrings, diam. 1 cm), MΘ 5460 (lance pendant, height 1.82 cm), MΘ 5461 (ring pendant, threaded with a glass bead, diam. 1.2 cm), MΘ 32631 (ghost coin). Walter 1942, 160, 163, fig. 31.2–3; Newspapers “Μακεδονία” (6/07/1940, 7/07/1940, 9/07/1940, 10/07/1940), and “Φως” of Thessaloniki (6/07/1940, 10/07/1940).

86 Faraone 2018, 28–61 (also discussing examples from Classical Greece); Beaurin 2013, 389–396.

87 Faraone 2018, 59–60, fig. 2.4.

88 De Caro 2006, 216, no. 140 (S. Venditto).

89 See a gold bracelet from Egypt with depictions of Isis Tyche, Venus, Isis Thermouthis and Agathodaimon, Hill 2000, 95, fig. 75.

90 Tran Tam Tinh 1964, 167, no. 117.



**Fig. 3. The front side of the marble sarcophagus inv. no. MΘ 1942 (© Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, Hellenic Ministry of Culture / photographer: Orestis Kourakis)**

Tyche being prominent. These pendants possibly functioned as protective amulets, particularly those of Isis Tyche, which might have been associated with maritime travels, commerce, or safeguarding against sea dangers.<sup>91</sup> The prevalence of Isis Tyche in amulets from the city likely reflected the importance of her cult, evident in various statuettes, wall paintings,<sup>92</sup> and even a graffito on a house wall referring to “Isistyche protector” (Εἰσιτύχη σώζουσα).<sup>93</sup>

In a tomb of Imperial date in Cumes, a city where the Egyptian gods were venerated,<sup>94</sup> the deceased woman wore earrings with Harpocrates pendants and a necklace featuring eye-beads and miniature pendants in the forms of Harpocrates, Isis Tyche, Baubo, a sphinx, a hawk, and a scarab.<sup>95</sup> Similarly, a small box found in a wine shop (*taberna vinaria*) with a dwelling on the upper floor in Herculaneum contained a necklace with amulets shaped as Harpocrates, Bes, Venus, an Egyptianizing intaglio, a fish (*tilapia nilotica*), and beads.<sup>96</sup>

91 Tran Tam Tinh 1964, 169, no. 128; Beaurin 2013, 390–392.

92 Mol 2015, 169–181.

93 *RICIS* 504/0216.

94 Caputo 2009, 235–250.

95 Semmola 1844, Tran Tam Tinh 1972, 73–74; Faraone 2018, 164, fig. 6.10.

96 Tran Tam Tinh 1971, 12, 73–74, nos. 37–38, 79, no. 51, fig. 28; Scatozza Höricht 1989, 54, 59–60, 102, 113; Mols 2020, 255.



**Fig. 4.** The gold jewellery (pendants, earrings) and the gold ghost coin, which were found in the marble sarcophagus inv. no. MΘ 1942, in a photograph in 1941 (© Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, Hellenic Ministry of Culture)

A *bulla* (fig. 5a-b) was originally an amulet type worn around the neck of Roman boys after their birth, signifying their freeborn status and offering protective effects. During the Roman Imperial period, its use was extended in the provinces to girls and women. A miniature figurine of Isis Tyche was attached to a large *bulla* found in a tomb near Rome,<sup>97</sup> possibly referencing *Isis puel(laris)* (Isis protector of girls), as seen in a dedication from Guadix<sup>98</sup> or the “Isistyche protector” mentioned above.<sup>99</sup> Under Roman influence, Harpocrates is occasionally depicted with a *bulla*, possibly a new version of an Egyptian cordiform amulet protecting the heart.<sup>100</sup> Occasionally, Harpocrates is shown sitting on a ram with a *bulla*, denoting his connections with Ammon.<sup>101</sup> A bronze *bulla* discovered in Carnuntum contained a tiny figurine of Harpocrates.<sup>102</sup> At the temple of Isis in Pompeii, a golden *bulla* was unearthed, possibly associated with

97 Malaise 2008, 50–51, Faraone 2018, 163, fig. 6.8.

98 *RICIS* 603/0101; Dahmen 2018, 521.

99 See above, note 93.

100 Tran Tam Tinh 1964, 162–163, nos. 104, 107, pl. XII.1, XXI.2; *LIMC* IV (1988), s.v. Harpocrates, 420, no. 53b, 423, no. 112b, 424, no. 118d–e, 438, no. 351b, 425, no. 136n–o (V. Tran Tam Tinh, B. Jaeger and S. Poulin); Malaise 2008, 50–51.

101 *LIMC* IV (1988), s.v. Harpocrates, 435, no. 289a–b (V. Tran Tam Tinh, B. Jaeger and S. Poulin). Budischovsky 2011, 167, fig. 5.

102 Luchesi-Palli 1994.



**Fig. 5a-b. Two gold bullae inv. no. MO 1722 (© Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, Hellenic Ministry of Culture)**

Harpocrates.<sup>103</sup> Further evidence linking it to Harpocrates comes from a gold *bulla* which was discovered near an Egyptian base, referring to Horus-Ra, two statues of Harpocrates, one of Isis Fortune and Bes, and an Egyptianizing necklace at the vestibule of a building in the Palaestra of Herculaneum, which is believed to be a sanctuary of Isis and Mater Deum.<sup>104</sup>

*Situla* pendants or Isiac-themed jewelry are not depicted in art,<sup>105</sup> even in portraits of mummies from Fayum, for instance portraits of women, believed to be priestesses, devotees, or initiates in Isis' mysteries, but would be possibly more accurately described as women assimilated with Hathor but displaying an Isiac character.<sup>106</sup> However, pendants featuring depictions of Isis and Sarapis have been observed in five mummy portraits of boys.<sup>107</sup>

The fluted body of the Thessalonian *situla* pendants (fig. 6–7) is a rare characteristic, scarcely attested.<sup>108</sup> In a 1<sup>st</sup> century AD golden torc of unknown context from Egypt strung are four pendants depicting Aphrodite, Osiris, Sarapis, and Fortuna and a

103 Podvin 2021, 148.

104 Gasparini 2010, 234, pl. IV.2.

105 E.g. they are missing from statues and reliefs of Isis or her devotees, Walters 1988; Eingartner 1991; Walters 2010.

106 Thompson 1981; Backe-Dahmen 2018, 523-524; Tallet 2018, 419–431, figs. 14.1–14.3.

107 Trouchaud 2013.

108 Zwierlein-Diehl 1986, 141–142, no. 272, pl. 52 (gem depicting Isis, 50–1 BC); Walters 1988, 21–24, pl. 19a (Attic stele, early 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD); Podvin and Veymiers 2008, 63, εικ. 1–2 (Corinthian lamps depicting Isis, 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> century AD).





**Fig. 6a-b. Gold situla pendant inv. no. MO 5452 (© Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, Hellenic Ministry of Culture)**



**Fig. 7a-b. Gold situla pendant inv. no. MO 5453 (© Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, Hellenic Ministry of Culture)**



**Fig. 8. Gold lamp pendant inv. no. MO 5458** (© Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, Hellenic Ministry of Culture)

golden *situla* pendant. The *situla* has an ovoid body without a neck, like Egyptian parallels, but the body is fluted, a feature unattested in Egypt. The small diameter of the torc indicates that it belonged to a child, possibly a girl.<sup>109</sup> More information can be drawn from the gold *situla* pendants found in controlled excavations. Two *situla* pendants with a spherical body featuring a cylindrical knob and relief checkerboard decoration were found in a cremation grave of a woman at Istria (AD 125–150).<sup>110</sup> Another *situla* pendant, with a fluted body and a knob on the bottom was discovered in a marble sarcophagus at Kios,<sup>111</sup> which was used for the burial of seven individuals (2<sup>nd</sup>–early 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD). The sarcophagus contained a gem with engraved busts of Sarapis and Isis in profile,<sup>112</sup> providing a secure Isiac connection. Notably, the worship of the *gens Isiaca* is attested at Kios.<sup>113</sup> Another *situla* pendant,

similar to the one from Kios, was found in a disturbed grave with the inhumation of a woman in a family tomb at Vidobishta, a suburb of Ohrid (Lychnidos). The grave contained a gold danake (AD 161–169), a few gold threads from a textile, two gold finger rings, and two bronze *styli*.<sup>114</sup> The cult of Isis in the city is attested through two statuettes of the goddess.<sup>115</sup> In these three funerary assemblages, where there is no mention of a cultic office of the deceased, the *situla* pendants likely served as amulets, providing protection and functioning as manifestation of Isis. Women invoked Isis for help and assistance throughout various aspects of their lives, possibly from childhood. These pendants may allude to initiation in the mysteries of the goddess or a possible consecration since childhood.<sup>116</sup>

The lamp pendant (fig. 8) strongly resembles a bronze lamp (AD 50–100) from the Roman *agora* of Thessaloniki.<sup>117</sup> A bronze lamp pendant adorned a bronze earring

109 Backe-Dahmen 2018, 522–523, fig. 17.2.

110 Petrović Markežić and Milošević 2010, 296, fig. 8.

111 Sažir et al. 2011, 38, no. 22, fig. 13.

112 Sažir et al. 2011, 37–39.

113 *RICIS* 308/0301–0302.

114 Кузман 2015, 147, no. 2, fig. 2.

115 Nikoloska 2015, 222–223, fig. 164–165; Bitrakova-Grozdanova 2015, 42–43, figs. 9–10.

116 Backe-Dahmen 2018, 520–524.

117 Αδάμ-Βελένη 2016, 80–83, figs. 1–3.



**Fig. 9. Gold pendant depicting Tyche inv. no. MO 5457** (© Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, Hellenic Ministry of Culture)



**Fig. 10. Gold pendant depicting Tyche inv. no. MO 5458** (© Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, Hellenic Ministry of Culture)

(AD 130–200) from Nîmes, while gold Roman finger rings from Viminacium and Asia Minor feature a bezel in the form of a lamp.<sup>118</sup> The lamp pendant may not be devoid of Isiac symbolism, possibly alluding to a person with the cultic duty of daily lighting lamps in the sanctuary (πυρφόρος,<sup>119</sup> λυχνάπτρια,<sup>120</sup> λυχνάπτῆς<sup>121</sup>) or bearing a lantern (λαμπτηροφόρος)<sup>122</sup> during cult processions in honour of Isis, as part of festivals like λαμπαδεία,<sup>123</sup> λυχναψία,<sup>124</sup> or νυκτέλια.<sup>125</sup> These duties and activities are attested in inscriptions, literature, and depictions in art, emphasising the significance of light in Isiac cults, as evidenced through lamps, torches, lanterns, and candelabra found in temples or attested in temple inventories. There is also a less certain association with the use of lamps in lychnomancy.<sup>126</sup> The Isiac connotation of the lamp pendant is further supported by a necklace from a house at Pompeii consisting of two miniature lamp pendants and pendants in the form of Isis, Harpocrates, Bastet, scarabs, and other symbols.<sup>127</sup>

118 Manniez 2014.

119 *RICIS* 102/0405 (2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> century AD); Podvin 2018, 613–614.

120 *RICIS* 101/0221 (c. AD 120); Podvin 2018, 615, 626 (perhaps related to lychnomancy).

121 Podvin 2018, 613.

122 *RICIS* 202/0209 (95/4 BC); Podvin 2018, 614, 624.

123 *RICIS* 304/0802 (c. 200 BC); Podvin 2018, 625.

124 *RICIS* 501/0221 (AD 354).

125 Podvin 2018, 624.

126 Podvin 2011; Beaurin 2013, 42–43, 55, fig. 4; Podvin 2015; Podvin 2018; Podvin 2021, 153–154.

127 De Caro 2006, 215, no. 137 (S. Venditto).

Regarding the two amulets with a relief depiction of a standing goddess, wearing a chiton and himation and holding a *cornucopia* and a rudder (fig. 9–10), similar ones are known from a few Roman funerary contexts in the Balkans and the Northern Pontus,<sup>128</sup> with the goddess usually identified as Tyche/Fortuna.<sup>129</sup> A headdress, like a *calathos*, is not rendered in these amulets, as in few other pendants. From Thessaloniki we may add a small silver miniature amulet, discovered as a stray find during the excavation of a plot with numerous graves. It has the form of a goddess with a rudder, a *cornucopia*, and a *calathos*.<sup>130</sup> A similar one was found in the grave of a woman at Nea Kerdylia,<sup>131</sup> 90 km to the east of Thessaloniki. Additionally, the bezel of a silver ring from a grave in Thessaloniki bears an engraved depiction of a goddess with a *calathos*, reclining on a *lectisternium* and holding a rudder,<sup>132</sup> a rare iconographic theme related to Alexandria and attested in city ports, thought to represent Tyche of Alexandria or less probably Isis.<sup>133</sup> The presence of a *calathos* usually identifies similar depictions as those of Tyche/Fortuna, while its substitution by a *basileion* or its position in front of a *calathos* identifies the figure as Isis Tyche. However, the *calathos* has also been part of the iconography of Isis since the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC.<sup>134</sup> A bronze figurine of a goddess with the same attributes (*calathos*, rudder, *cornucopia*) from Banyas on the Syrian coast is inscribed as Isis Pharia. Initially, the figure wore an Isis knot, and a *basileion* was attached in front of the *calathos*.<sup>135</sup> Similarly, a Hellenistic papyrus sealing from Paphos<sup>136</sup> and some 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> century AD gems depict Isis with all three attributes, often alongside the figure of Sarapis.<sup>137</sup> In essence, the pendants could have represented either Isis Tyche or Tyche, and the omission of a headdress could have allowed their owners to identify the goddess as either of them.

The assumption in favour of Isis Tyche for the Thessalonian pendants gains further support from votive inscriptions found in the city's Isiac sanctuary, where in two of

128 Greifenhagen 1975, 31, pl. 25.3, 27.4 (2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD); Laffineur 1980, 434–436, no. 139, fig. 55; Буюклиев 1986, 40, pl. 14 (2<sup>nd</sup>–early 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD); Ruseva-Skokoska 1991, 150, no. 131 (2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD); Treister and Zuba 1994, 335–343, fig. 3–4 (under Alexander Severus); Lungu et al. 2012, 126–127, no. 15, pl. LXI.15 (2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD); Журавлев et al. 2017, 73–74, nos. 127–128, pl. 39–40, 42 (1<sup>st</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD); Keramaris 2021, 148, fig. 3 (along with a coin of Domitian).

129 For the qualities and the iconography of Isis Tyche, LIMC V (1990), s.v. Isis, 784–786, nos. 303–316 (V. Tran Tam Tinh); Sfameni Gasparro 1998; Veymiers 2009a, 139–140; Amoroso 2015; Amoroso 2017.

130 Found during excavation for the Metro Station at Sintrivani Square in 2007. Νικάκης 2019a, 139–140; Νικάκης 2019b, 135–6 no. 5.39 (identified as a female figure holding a child).

131 Μάλαμα and Παράκης 2008, 190, no. 3, 430, pl. 81 (not identified as Tyche or Isis–Tyche). The grave contained a coin dated to AD 160–180.

132 Found during excavation for the Metro Station in Sintrivani Square in 2010, in a cist grave with the burials of a woman, a man and two children, containing jewellery, vessels and coins of the third–fourth century AD. Νικάκης 2019a, 229; Νικάκης 2019b, 286–287, no. 8.90, 350–351, pl. XIX (not identifying the scene). Cf. Azarnouche 2020, 110, fig. 14 (same theme on an intaglio).

133 For the iconography, see Azarnouche et al. 2020, 97–147. See also Tran Tam Tinh 1983, 228–229, no. IV C1, fig. 221; Veymiers 2009a, 88, 93, 115–116.

134 Malaise 2014. For these attributes and the difficulties in distinguishing Isis Tyche from Tyche, Amoroso 2015; Amoroso 2017.

135 Bricault 2020, 133–136, fig. 96; RIC/S 402/0501; Amoroso 2017, 70.

136 Bricault 2020, 136, n. 222.

137 Bricault 2020, 101–105, figs. 76, 79–81.

them, Isis Tyche is the dedicand, and in two others Isis Tyche Agathe.<sup>138</sup> Attestations of Isis Tyche or Isis Tyche Agathe or Isis Tyche Protogeneia are known from Athens, Delos, Rome, Pompeii, Praeneste, Mama d'Avio, and Neine/Gorna Gradešnitsa, highlighting the widespread assimilation of Isis to Tyche.<sup>139</sup> This assimilation can be traced back to the association of Ptolemaic queens with Isis and the attestations of Agathe Tyche Arsinoe Philadelphus Isis on Ptolemaic faience jugs, related to the cult of Arsinoe II.<sup>140</sup> Two hymns from Egypt also address Isis as Tyche Agathe.<sup>141</sup> The assimilation of Isis and Tyche is further supported by the dedication of a statue of *Sors* (Fortune) to Isis Domina from Taraccina<sup>142</sup> and a statue of Fortuna offered to Isis Augusta in Lyon.<sup>143</sup> In the central and western Macedonia, Tyche was not the subject of a cult, and her representation is limited to coin issues of Edessa and Pella,<sup>144</sup> while she is prominently featured in pseudo-autonomous issues of Thessaloniki, portrayed as the patroness of the city with her veiled head bearing a mural crown.<sup>145</sup> The only dedication to Tyche from Thessaloniki comes from the Isiac sanctuary of the city, where she is referred to as the “Tyche of the city of Thessalonians”.<sup>146</sup> This dedication highlights the close connection between the two deities due to their shared qualities or even their possible identity, given that at Coptos, Isis was identified with the Tyche of the citizens of Coptos,<sup>147</sup> and the Thessalonian inscription only preserves the first two lines referring to Tyche.<sup>148</sup>

Regarding a possible depiction or statue of Isis Tyche in the Isiac sanctuary of Thessaloniki, it is worth mentioning a temple within the Isiac sanctuary of Dion that was devoted to Isis Tyche. A headless cult statue of Isis Tyche (c. AD 200) was discovered in its niche, while an altar in front of the temple was dedicated to her.<sup>149</sup> The goddess holds a cornucopia and initially held a rudder as well; her garment is typically Greek and lacks any Isiac trait like knot or fringes. The strands of hair falling on her shoulders also deviate from the usual Libyan locks often seen in representations of Isis. Interestingly, if this statue were found in a different context, it could easily be interpreted as a statue of Tyche. The goddess depicted in the pendant from the Cumes necklace bears similar traits and a *calathos*. Her identification as Isis Tyche is

138 *RICIS* 113/0514–515 (2<sup>nd</sup>–1<sup>st</sup> century BC), 113/0531 (1<sup>st</sup> century BC–1<sup>st</sup> century AD), 113/0566 (2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> century AD). For a dedication addressed to the Tyche of Thessaloniki from the same sanctuary, *RICIS* 113/0546 and Νίγδελης 2006, 467–468, who identifies her with Isis.

139 Veymiers 2009a, 139; *RICIS* 101/0258 (Imperial period), 114/1902 (after AD 78), 202/0129 (late 3<sup>rd</sup>–early 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC), 202/0283–0284 (115/4 BC), 501/0139 (late 1<sup>st</sup>–early 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD), 503/0602 (AD 138–161), 504/0216 (before AD 79), 515/1001 (2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> century AD).

140 Amoroso 2015, 212; Amoroso 2017, 42.

141 Bricault and Dionysopoulou 2016, 61.

142 *RICIS* 507/0701; Sfameni Gasparro 1998, 310.

143 *RICIS* 607/0102.

144 Χατζηνικολάου 2011, 175–177.

145 Touratsoglou 1988, 82–93.

146 *RICIS* 113/0546 (1<sup>st</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> century AD); Νίγδελης 2006, 467–468, for another dedication addressed to the same deity, from Smyrna, and her relation/identification to Isis.

147 Malaise 2014, 240.

148 Cf. a marble base from Heraclea Lyncestis, bearing the statue of Nemesis, which was dedicated to “Tyche of the city, goddess Nemesis”, Düll 1977, 384–386, nos. 216–217.

facilitated by the Harpocrates pendants and the other pendants with Egyptian character.<sup>150</sup>

Considering the similarities between the statue of Isis Tyche from Dion and the goddess depicted on the two Thessalonian pendants, along with the affinities between the Isiac sanctuaries at Dion and Thessaloniki, the dedications to Isis Tyche from the Thessalonian Isiac sanctuary, and the Isiac connotations of the gold pendants found in the same sarcophagus, such as the Isiac *situla* pendants and possibly the lamp pendant or even the *bullae*, it is reasonable to assume that the pendants likely depict Isis Tyche rather than Tyche/Fortuna or perceived so by their owner, most likely a devotee of Isis. Additionally, it is important to consider the comparison between Fortuna and Isis Tyche, which Apuleius vividly presents in *Metamorphoses* (XI.15).<sup>151</sup> Fortuna is *caeca* and *nefaria*, while Isis is *videns* and *sospitatrix* and Lucius eventually conquers Fortuna with the help of Isis. Isis' sovereignty over Fortune is explicitly stated in an aretalogy: "I conquer *Heimarmene* (Destiny), *Heimarmene* is subservient to me".<sup>152</sup> This concept is rooted in Egyptian beliefs related to Isis and other Egyptian gods who have power over fate<sup>153</sup>. The benevolent and beneficent character of Isis Tyche as the Mistress of Destiny, the dispenser of wealth, protectress of navigation, and provider of salvation,<sup>154</sup> sets her apart from the ambiguous nature of Tyche or Fortuna. This aspect of Isis Tyche must have been appealing for the creation of amulets, as seen in Pompeii,<sup>155</sup> making her a strong candidate for the interpretation of the Thessalonian amulets.

### 2.2.2. Gem with Harpocrates sitting on a lotus flower

In a grave of unknown context, a dark green jasper gem bears an engraved depiction of Harpocrates sitting on a lotus flower (fig. 11a-b). He places his right hand on his mouth and holds a flail with his left.<sup>156</sup> The rear side is plain. This depiction is common in Hellenistic and Roman period terracottas<sup>157</sup> and magical gems. It is, in fact, the most well-known and widespread theme,<sup>158</sup> with a long history in Egyptian art and was often used to represent child gods, such as Harpocrates.<sup>159</sup> It also appears on Alexandrian

149 Παντερμαλής 1997, figs. on p. 22, 70; Παντερμαλής 1999, figs. on p. 58 and 102; *RICIS* 113/0216; Falezza 2012, 253–254, fig. III.34; Κασσερόπουλος 2024, 62, 109–110.

150 See above, note 95.

151 Griffiths 1975, 241–243; Sfameni Gasparro 1998; Malaise 2014, 241–242.

152 *RICIS* 302/0204.

153 Sfameni Gasparro 1998, 312–314.

154 Amoroso 2015, 212, 214.

155 See above, notes 88–91, and Beaurin 2013, 390–391.

156 Museum of Byzantine Culture, inv. no. BAM 12/4. Length 1.9 cm. Found in 1993 in grave 118 of the northern section of the Evangelistria cemetery. *Ημερολόγιο* 2004, 142–143; Μπονόβας and Τζιτζιμπάση 2009, 2.

157 *LIMC* IV (1988), s.v. Harpokrates, 432, nos. 238–239, 250–251, 433–434, nos. 250–251, 263–268, 437, no. 330 (V. Tran Tam Tinh, B. Jaeger and S. Poulin); Barrett 2001, 255–257,

158 *LIMC* IV (1988), s.v. Harpocrates, 432, no. 233, 433, no. 240, 243, 434, nos. 255–262, 435, no. 376 (V. Tran Tam Tinh, B. Jaeger and S. Poulin); Michel 2004, 65, 68–72, 269–271, no. 19; Poulin 1988, 245–271, figs. 296–349, nos. 270–302.

159 Morenz and Schubert 1954; Sandri 2006, 119–120.



**Fig. 11a-b. Jasper gem depicting Harpocrates on a lotus inv. no. BAM 12/4 and its cast (© Museum of Byzantine Culture, Hellenic Ministry of Culture)**

coins (under Hadrian, Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius, and Commodus).<sup>160</sup> According to Plutarch (*De Is. et Os.* 11), the Egyptians used this motif as an allegory of the rising of the sun from the waters. The theme recalls the lotus that emerged from the primordial waters, which once flooded the land, and from which the sun arose. In other words, it symbolizes the birth of the sun god from a lotus, representing the sun's daily renewal, and thus acting as a symbol of rejuvenation—a reminder of the original creation and its daily and annual renewal, also associated with the annual flooding of the Nile.<sup>161</sup> This notion may have held particular significance for those who chose this gem to accompany the deceased in the afterlife.

Before its use in a funerary context, the gem was likely used in everyday life due to its depiction being considered suitable for blessings and spells, providing protection against various forms of evil. For instance, a hymn on a magical papyrus invokes the infant god seated on a lotus. Similarly, an instruction for a love charm in another magical papyrus involves an iron ring engraved with the depiction of Harpocrates sitting on a lotus, accompanied by the name ABRASAX.<sup>162</sup> Such a function is corroborated by two gems with Harpocrates on a lotus flower on one side and a love spell on the other side.<sup>163</sup>

### 2.2.3. Carnelian scarab

In the eastern cemetery of Thessaloniki, the tile grave of an adult woman yielded a set of jewelry – glass, amber, and jet beads from a necklace, three silver rings, and

<sup>160</sup> LIMC IV (1988), s.v. Harpocrates, 432, no. 236, 433, no. 245 (V. Tran Tam Tinh, B. Jaeger and S. Poulin); RPC III, 5999, 6421; RPC IV.4, 14202 (temporary), 14724 (temporary), 14780 (temporary), 14885 (temporary), 15233 (temporary), 15827 (temporary), 15865 (temporary), 16275 (temporary), 16484 (temporary), 16609 (temporary).

<sup>161</sup> Sfameni Gasparro 1973, 245, no. 78, pl. XLVIII (ΑΒΡΑΣΑΞ ΙΑΩ); Mastrocinque 2003, 153–158, 161–174, nos. 7–41; Michel 2004, 68–72.

<sup>162</sup> Vitellozzi 2018, 203, no. 1.14, fig. 14.

<sup>163</sup> Dasen and Nagy 2019, 433–434.

a pair of golden earrings – a glass unguentarium, a bronze coin from the reign of Caracalla (AD 198–217), and a carnelian gem. The gem, perforated on its long axis, is shaped like a schematically rendered scarab with minimal incisions on its convex side, while the other, flat side, bears an engraved *basileion* consisting of a solar disk with a pair of feathers between cow horns and two ears of wheat below,<sup>164</sup> symbolising the agrarian nature of the goddess.<sup>165</sup> This gem likely served as the swiveling bezel of a ring, a usage recorded in magical spells.

Amulets in the form of the Egyptian scarab (*scarabaeus sacer*) or dung beetle, symbols of new life and resurrection, were made from various materials. They were considered to possess magical properties that were further enhanced through inscriptions or representations on their flat underside, attracting good luck, providing protection, or even manifesting special devotion to a god. These amulets were intended for use by both the deceased and the living. In Pharaonic Egypt, they were worn by children, and their use continued during the Greco-Roman period. Additionally, Egyptian or Phoenician imitations were worn during the Geometric-Archaic period by both Phoenician and Greek children and women.<sup>166</sup>

Pliny (*N.H.* 11.34, 30.47) mentions that beetles were suspended from the necks of infants as a remedy against certain maladies, or their horns were attached to the bodies of infants, functioning as amulets. Magicians recommended the use of scarabs as protective charms. For example, a magical spell in a papyrus concerns the consecration of a “ring of Hermes”, which is addressed to Helios. This ring actually involves an emerald scarab with an engraved figure of Isis, threaded with gold wire to be used as a ring.<sup>167</sup> According to another magical spell, emerald provided every grace and ensured success in all deeds for the wearer. It was considered suitable for hydromancy and helped slaves to gain their freedom. For instance, if someone carved an emerald in the shape of a scarab, engraved a standing Isis on it, and threaded it with gold wire to be worn on the finger, it was believed that the individual could accomplish anything.<sup>168</sup>

The Thessalonian scarab shares similarities with scarabs dating back to the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC –1<sup>st</sup> century AD, suggesting that it was more than a century old when placed in the grave. These scarabs originated in Alexandria but were widespread in Campania during the Hellenistic period. At Herculaneum, a girl’s skeleton was found wearing a string of over forty amulets, including three carnelian scarabs.<sup>169</sup> Some scarabs depict a *basileion*,<sup>170</sup> while others portray Isiac or other deities, diverse creatures,<sup>171</sup> or even

164 Kept at the premises of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Thessaloniki City, inv. no. M.ΣNT.3803a. Length 1.1 cm, width 1 cm, thickness 0.85 cm. Νικάκης 2019a, 239; Νικάκης 2019b, 297, no. 8.110, 335.

165 Veymiers 2014b, 206.

166 Andrews 1994, 50–56.

167 *PGM* V, 213–303; Vitellozzi 2018, 199, no. 1.8, fig. 10.

168 *Orphic Lithica*, 26.2; Faraone 2018, 164, 166, note 104, provides a slightly wrong translation.

169 Faraone 2018, 60.

170 Caylus 1856, 35–36, no. IV, pl. IX; Pannuti 1983, 170–171, nos. 329–331; Philipp 1986, 123, no. 202, pl. 54 (considered as work of the 19<sup>th</sup> century); Pannuti 1994, 293, no. 260; Michel 2001, 330, nos. 568–570, pl. 82–83; De Caro 2006, 215, no. 137 (S. Venditto).

171 Michel 2001, 328–332, nos. 564 (Osiris), 565 (non identifiable figure), 566 (Seth), 567 (Harpocrates), 571 (Isis and Zeus), 572 (rat, lizard, lion), 573 (Hekate), pl. 82–83; De Caro 2006, 215, no. 137 (Silen and bull)



*voces magicae*.<sup>172</sup> The *basileion* appears on coins since the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, and it is also found on other types of objects, such as sealings. The feathers descended from the crowns of queens in Egypt, while the solar disc among horns was the headdress of Hathor. Since the 14<sup>th</sup> century BC, the composite headdress adorned the head of queens, Hathor, and goddesses closely associated with her. Later on, it became part of the iconography of the deified Ptolemaic queens and, finally, in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, it was adopted by Isis, as evidenced by coins and jewellery.<sup>173</sup>

#### 2.2.4. Crystal *Tilapia nilotica* and ball

The burial of a woman in a shaft grave contained four glass perfume bottles, clay lamp (100–150 AD), a clay unguentarium (1<sup>st</sup>–early 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD), a few jewels (a gold earring, bone pins, and a necklace with bone and amber beads)<sup>174</sup> and two objects in the finest rock crystal; one in the form of a ball and the other in that of a *Tilapia nilotica* fish (fig. 12).<sup>175</sup> The ball is preserved intact, free from abrasions caused by a possible mount. The mouth and tail of the fish are broken. A few chips are observed in the dorsal and ventral fins. Incisions on both sides represent the head, the eye, and the pectoral fin of the fish. While these objects may not initially appear to have Isiac connotations, it has been suggested that they could be connected to Egyptian concepts, and perhaps even vaguely related to Osiris.<sup>176</sup>

The *Tilapia nilotica*, native to the Nile, has a unique behaviour observed by the ancient Egyptians. When in danger, it shallows its eggs – which are enclosed in a spherical membrane – or the hatched babies, to protect them. When the danger subsides, the fish releases the eggs or the offspring. This natural phenomenon of emergence and rebirth inspired the use of *Tilapia* as symbol of regeneration, akin to the goddess Nut, the personification of the sky, who daily swallowed and gave birth to the sun god Re.

In ancient Egypt, representations of *Tilapia* can be found in various objects (scarabs and containers, like plates and spoons), while more often they were used as amulets of various materials,<sup>177</sup> some even made of transparent glass to resemble rock crystal.<sup>178</sup> Isolated fish pendants in the shape of *Tilapia* have been discovered in tombs of young

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(S. Venditto); Mastrocinque 2007, 37, no. Fi 7 (Harpocrates), 60, no. Fi 67 (Aphrodite), 177, no. Ve 8 (Thoth); Vitellozzi 2018, 199, no. 1.8, fig. 10 (Isis).

172 Mastrocinque 2007, 96, no. Na 29.

173 Veymiers 2014b. For clay sealings bearing a *basileion* from Sarapieion C of Delos, Brun-Siard 2010, 200–201, nos. S1–S7, fig. 5–11.

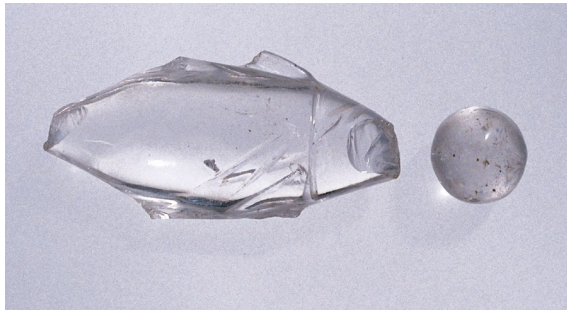
174 Grave 122 (length 2 m, width 0.47 m) of the North section of the Evangelistria cemetery, excavated in 1993. For the burial assemblage, Πελεκανίδου and Μπουλιώνη 1995, 20; Kourkoutidou-Nikolaïdou 1997, 137; Antonaras 2019, 126–129, nos. 127–129, 131.

175 Museum of Byzantine Culture, inv. no. BYμ 10/2. Fish: length 5.8 cm, width 2.6 cm, thickness 1.4 cm, ball: diam. 1.6 cm. Πελεκανίδου and Μπουλιώνη 1995.

176 Πελεκανίδου and Μπουλιώνη 1995.

177 Gamer-Wallert 1970, 24–27, 53–54, 109–113; Dambach and Wallert 1966, 273–294; Andrews 1994, 67, fig. 4, 43, 54, 93.

178 Riefstahl 1972.



**Fig. 12. Rock crystal *Tilapia Nilotica* fish and ball  
inv. no. BYμ 10/2. (© Museum of Byzantine Culture,  
Hellenic Ministry of Culture)**

women since the Old Kingdom, extending through the Later period. Fish pendants in the form of catfish were popular during the Middle Kingdom. Two examples provide insights into the function of these fish pendants. A steatite vase from Thebes dating back to the 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (1985–1795 BC) depicts a young girl wearing a fish pendant hanging from her braid and a belt adorned with cowrie shells, symbols of fertility.<sup>179</sup> An account tells of a “miracle” during the reign of Pharaoh Snefru, where a girl’s hair got

tangled in her fish-shaped pendant, and as she tried to untangle it, the pendant fell into the water.<sup>180</sup>

The Thessalonian rock crystal fish and ball are extremely rare finds. Pliny the Elder (*N.H.* 37.9–10, 78) described rock crystal as the most valuable product found on the Earth’s surface, originating from India – which was preferred over any other source – Alabanda and Orthosia in Asia, Cyprus, an island in the Red Sea, the Alps, and Lusitania. In Rome, a rock crystal fish was found in a cinerary urn,<sup>181</sup> and another was discovered in a funerary context.<sup>182</sup> Additional examples are known from Pompeii.<sup>183</sup> In Herculaneum, a wooden box retrieved between two skeletons contained rock crystal pendants: three amphoras, two Tilapias, an astragalus, an almond, and a bird.<sup>184</sup> A richly furnished early 1<sup>st</sup> century AD tomb of a young girl at Arezzo contained a coin of Augustus (35–28 BC), rock crystal miniature vessels and objects such as a Tilapia, a ball and a shell.<sup>185</sup> A contemporary grave from Piraeus<sup>186</sup> also contained rock crystal pendants (two Tilapias, a shell, and a turtle), along with gold jewelry. Some other examples kept in museums are of unknown provenance, but at least some of them were found in Italy.<sup>187</sup> A few examples of rock crystal or bone fishes with numerical signs, occasionally found in groups, were used as game counters.<sup>188</sup> The Thessalonian fish may also be assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, based on its wear, denoting long use. Initially, it must have had a suspension hole in the mouth, as seen in intact examples.

179 James and Russmann 2001, 107–108, no. 32. For a 12th Dynasty intact tomb of a young girl at Haraga, Egypt, which contained, among other jewellery, four gold fish pendants, three in the shape of catfish and one in that of tilapia, Troalen et al. 2015, 75–86.

180 Simpson 2003, 16–17.

181 Mancini 1920, 34, fig. 2.

182 Bouvenne 1868, 335–337.

183 Kornbluth 2019, 127, note 15.

184 Scatozza Höricht 1989, 71–72, nos. N131–138.

185 Pasqui 1938; Arezzo 1988, 157, no. 128–129; Kornbluth 2019, 126–127, pl. 9/6–7.

186 Pfeiler 1970, 45–49, pl. 5–7; Georgoula 1999, 252–259.

187 Maioli 1994; Kornbluth 2019, 127, note 14.

188 Kornbluth 2019, 127–128.

Possibly in the Roman period young girls wore, as in Egypt, rock crystal fish pendants for their amuletic value and fertility connotations (as denoted by the accompanying shells in at least two cases) but the exact manner of their use escapes us. In the tomb from Arezzo the rock crystal objects were found along the corpse of the young deceased girl,<sup>189</sup> while pendants of a different form were hung around her neck. In the case of the Thessalonian grave, both the age of the woman and the exact positioning of the fish and the ball are unknown.

It is possible that the Thessalonian rock crystal fish and ball were intentionally placed as grave offerings, not merely as jewelry or amulets. This combination is only found in the Arezzo tomb assemblage, as other known crystal balls lack archaeological context. These crystal objects likely held symbolic or apotropaic functions, with the ball potentially representing the sphere of the universe.<sup>190</sup> However, they were not directly related to Isiac concepts about the afterlife. The Thessalonian burial assemblage, consisting of only a fish and a ball, led Pelekanidou and Boulioni to explore the possibility of an association with Egyptian symbolism.<sup>191</sup> They considered the meaning of the Tilapia in Egypt and drew parallels to a mural painting from a tomb (1279–1212 BC) in Deir El Medina, near Thebes, depicting the deceased Khabekhnet not as Osiris but as an enormous *abd-jou*-fish, not as Osiris, being embalmed by Anubis. This fish is related to the Tilapia, as it is attested that both of them followed the solar bark of Ra in his nocturnal journey and kept an eye on the approaching enemies of the god. It can thus be considered as a manifestation of Osiris<sup>192</sup> or may represent the deceased who associated himself with Osiris.<sup>193</sup>

Further arguing in favour of this assumption we may note the following. The colourless and transparent nature of rock crystal (*crystallus* in Latin deriving from Greek *krystallos*, meaning ice)<sup>194</sup> alludes to water. Pliny (*N.H.* 37.9) stated that “rain-water and pure snow are absolutely necessary for its formation, and hence it is unable to endure heat, being solely employed for holding liquids that are taken cold”. This leads to a possible relation to Osiris, who is connected with water and humidity (Plutarch, *De Is. et Os.* 34: “they call Bacchus *the wetter*, they looking upon him as the lord of the humid nature, he being none other than Osiris”). Corroborating this idea is an aquamarine gem, almost colourless like rock crystal, carved in the shape of Osiris Hydreios (1<sup>st</sup> century AD or earlier), admirably embodying the water symbolism.<sup>195</sup>

It would be possible to relate rock crystal objects in a burial context, due to their material, with Osiris and the known sepulchral formula “may Osiris offer you cool water”,<sup>196</sup>

189 “Giovanetta”, according to the excavator.

190 Kornbluth 2019.

191 Πελεκανίδου and Μπουλιώνη 1995, who also refer to a demotic spell, concerning the egg (Horus) that Isis protected and hatched in her chest. Actually this spell cannot be used as evidence of a relation of Isis with Tilapia, since it refers to the seed of Osiris within the womb of Isis, also described as “the god’s form which has congealed in the egg” within the womb of Isis, see Simpson 2003, 263–264.

192 Gamer-Wallert 1970, 131–132.

193 Houlihan 1996, 132.

194 Crowley 2020, 151–152.

195 Whitehouse 2009.

196 Delia 1992.

if we could trace objects of Isiac connotations in burials with rock crystal objects. The rather poor Thessalonian grave provides negative evidence, but the aforementioned Piraeus tomb contained a bracelet<sup>197</sup> with elements in the form of a *cornucopia* and a *basileion*, which were not noticed before. The Isiac character of the bracelet may indicate that it belonged to a devotee of Isis.<sup>198</sup> Subsequently, the rock crystal pendants in this tomb, including the fish, may reflect some relations with Egypt. Supportive evidence comes from an amuletic string from Herculaneum with Isiac pendants and a bone fish pendant.<sup>199</sup>

Regarding the Thessalonian fish and ball, it cannot be excluded that they were placed in the grave simply as symbols of rebirth, providing indirect evidence of Egyptian concepts. However, the degree of their relation to the Isiac cult will remain unknown, as they rather reflect popular religion that traveled afar from Egypt.

### 2.3 An inscribed mug

An unidentified grave yielded a small clay mug (fig. 13),<sup>200</sup> a rather common object in the Roman cemeteries of Macedonia.<sup>201</sup> What makes this mug singular is the painted inscription with calligraphic letters εἷς Ζεὺς Σέραπις (“there is one Zeus Serapis”) (fig. 14). Similar small-sized thin-walled mugs are typically plain. They are found not only in Greece but also in the central and eastern Mediterranean, and as far as the North Pontus, in contexts dating from the late 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. Occasionally, during the mid- and late 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, these mugs feature simple decorations, such as scrolls, or inscriptions in Greek, applied with thin white paint before firing, often of convivial nature, while others mention gods like Isis, Sarapis, Hera, Zeus, Tyche, and Hermes.<sup>202</sup> The mug from Thessaloniki can be dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD based on its shape<sup>203</sup> and the letter forms, which resemble those found on identical mugs from

197 Pfeiler 1970, 47–48, pl. 6–7, compared with the finial of another gold bracelet in form of a calathos with poppies and ears of wheat, Pfeiler 1970, 49–51, pl. 8.

198 Pieces of jewellery of the same tomb were set with emeralds. Emeralds were related to Isis and dedicated to her, *RICIS* 501/0303, 603/0101. See also above, notes 167–168. Ancient emeralds originated from *Mons Smaragdus* in Egypt, Shaw et al. 1999.

199 See above, note 96.

200 The tomb was part of the cemetery north of the hospital “Agios Dimitrios” which was excavated in 1988–1989. Thessaloniki, Museum of White Tower, inv. no. Βκ 4522/2. Height: 6.7 cm., rim diam. 4.5 m., base diam. 2.3 cm. *Ημερολόγιο* 2007, 76–77.

201 Ναλπάντης 2003, 125–126, pl. 40; Μάλαμα and Νταράκης 2008, 403–405, pl. 64–65; Ναούμ 2017, 429–432, pl. 32, 37–38, 44–45, 47–48, 68, 76.

202 Hayes 2008, 101–104. For mugs with dipinti, Robinson 1959, 97–98, nos. M145–148, 101, no. M190, pl. 24, 26, 57 (from layers of mid–3<sup>rd</sup> century AD–AD 267 and later); Barbu 1961, 220, fig. 11; Соломоник 1973; Adamsheck 1979, 89–90, fig. 4, pl. 22 (one of them should be read as [E]ΙΛΕΟΣ and not as ΚΛΕΟ, on account of best preserved exemplars, c.f. Соломоник 1973, 66, no. 17); Соломоник 1987, 117; Σταμπολίδης and Παρλαμά 2000, 81, no. 54 (Β. Χριστοπούλου); Зубарь 2005, 162–163; Paradoroulos and Stern 2006, 262, fig. 217; Hayes 2008, 268, no. 1608, fig. 51; Μπάτζιου-Ευσταθίου 2009, 80–81, fig. 74–77.

203 Barbu 1961, 213, 220, fig. 11 (with a coin of AD 276–282); Ναλπάντης 2003, 79–80, drawing 45, pl. 43 (with a coin of AD 276–282); Hayes 2008, 268, no. 1608, fig. 51 (from a context of early to mid–3<sup>rd</sup> century AD); Емец 2012, 58, no. 160 (AD 250–300).

204 Соломоник 1973.



**Fig. 13. Clay mug with the painted acclamation εἰς Ζεὺς Σέρατις inv. no. Βκ4522/2 (© Museum of Byzantine Culture, Hellenic Ministry of Culture)**



**Fig. 14. Drawing of the acclamation εἰς Ζεὺς Σέρατις in clay mug inv. no. Βκ4522/2 (© Museum of Byzantine Culture, Hellenic Ministry of Culture)**

Chersonesos<sup>204</sup> and Athens.<sup>205</sup> It can also be classified within a subgroup referred to as “Thracian”,<sup>206</sup> named after the presumed place of production in the region of the Thracian coast or the Dardanelles, with Ainos and Troy being proposed as potential manufacturing centers. Plain imitations were produced in various locations. Surprisingly, scholars have largely overlooked a potential production centre of mugs with dipinti in North Pontus, despite the fact that the majority of them was unearthed in Chersonesos and its vicinity. In fact, 23 dipinti from this region were published in 1973 by E. Solomonik,<sup>207</sup> and a few more later on.<sup>208</sup> As for their function, most of them were found in funerary contexts, leading to the assumption that they were used for libations or had a connection to chthonic deities or ideas related to the afterlife due to their inscriptions.<sup>209</sup> However, this assumption is untenable considering the small size and the shape of the mugs, and, most importantly, the convivial character of their inscriptions, such as ‘drink and rejoice’, characteristics that clearly define them as drinking vessels. In fact, several inscribed mugs, including one with the inscription “drink and rejoice”, were found in a *taberna vinaria* at Demetrias.<sup>210</sup> Others were unearthed in the Aphrodision at Corinth,<sup>211</sup> in urban contexts,<sup>212</sup> in a presumed domestic sanctuary at Tyras,<sup>213</sup> or in wells and deposits in Athens.<sup>214</sup>

205 Robinson 1959, 97–98, nos. M147–148, pl. 24, 57 (from a layer of mid–3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD–AD 267).

206 Hayes 2008, 102–104, nos. 1602–1608.

207 Соломоник 1973. See also note 234.

208 From Aul–Kiz, near Myrmekion, Емец 2012, 58, no. 160, and Chersonesos, Соломоник 1987, 117.

209 As argued by Соломоник 1973, 68–77.

210 Μπάτζιου-Ευσταθίου 2009, 80–81, fig. 76.

211 Adamsheck 1979, 89–90, fig. 4, pl. 22.

212 Соломоник 1973, 68.

213 Соломоник 1973, 62–63, nos. 6–7.

214 Robinson 1959, 97–98, nos. M145–148, 101, no. M190, pl. 24, 26, 57; Σταμπολίδης and Παρλαμά 2000, 81, no. 54 (Β. Χριστοπούλου).

The acclamation εἶς Ζεὺς Σέραπις, which proclaims the identity of two gods who belong to different cultural traditions,<sup>215</sup> is only attested once in Macedonia, on a silver ring from a grave at Pella.<sup>216</sup> Other instances of this acclamation in funerary contexts are found on a gold amulet from Perinthus<sup>217</sup> and a jasper prism from Juliopolis.<sup>218</sup> The acclamation commonly occurs in gems and jewelry, unfortunately their provenance is often unknown.<sup>219</sup> It appears to had a protective or apotropaic value and served as a means of communication and expression of exaltation.<sup>220</sup> An illuminating example of the possible use of the acclamation is found in a magical papyrus that describes the ritual of consecrating a ring, where the wearer is instructed to utter the acclamation while invoking Agathos Daimon for power.<sup>221</sup> The acclamation is rarely attested in other media, such as an altar in the Mithraeum of the thermes of Caracalla in Rome,<sup>222</sup> on the walls of buildings in Rome, Doura-Europos, and Berenice,<sup>223</sup> or at a presumed temple of Sarapis, not far from the temple of Dendur.<sup>224</sup> Another example was found in a quarry in Ptolemais Hermeiou.<sup>225</sup> The earliest attestation of the acclamation occurs on a coin issue of Alexandria under Hadrian (AD 123/4), depicting a radiate statue of a god with sceptre on a column.<sup>226</sup> The evidence from this coin aligns with a roughly contemporary account by Aelius Aristides, stating that the citizens of Alexandria identified Sarapis with Zeus.<sup>227</sup> All these attestations, dated to the Imperial period and likely originating in Egypt, reflect the tradition of glorifying the gods in Ptolemaic Egypt.<sup>228</sup> There have already been Hellenistic dedications to Zeus Sarapis<sup>229</sup> and he was depicted on coin issues of Alexandria under Vespasian and Domitian,<sup>230</sup> as well as on those of Tripolis of Lydia under Trajan Decius.<sup>231</sup>

215 Belayche 2010, 157.

216 Χρυσοστόμου 2006, 665 (shortly after AD 222–235).

217 *RICIS* 114/0602.

218 Arslan et al. 2022, 99–100, no. 6, fig. 9.

219 Veymiers 2009a, 200–206, 357–359, nos. VI.DA 1–VI.DA 14, 369–72, nos. A.2, A.4–A.10, A.12–A.14, A.18, A.20–A.21, A.24, A.26–A.27, A.32–A.36, A.38, A.41, pl. 65, 72, XXVI; Veymiers 2011, 254–255, nos. VI.DA.15–16, A.42, A.44, A.47; Veymiers 2014a, 223–224, nos. VI.DA.17, A.50, A.52–53; Veymiers 2020, 321, no. VI.DA 18, *RICIS* 114/0602; Arslan et al. 2022, 99–100, no. 6, fig. 9.

220 Belayche 2010, 149.

221 *PGM* IV,1708–1715; Belayche 2010, 158.

222 Its one side was initially inscribed Εἶς Ζεὺς Σάραπις Ἥλιος κοσμοκράτωρ ἀνείκτητος, *RICIS* 501/0126 (late 2<sup>nd</sup>–early 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD).

223 *RICIS* 404/0101, 501/0216, 701/0301; *RICIS* Suppl. II, 501/0224.

224 The acclamation, which is attested twice on graffiti, and the numerous footmarks of visitors on stones surrounding a brick chamber, support the identification of the location as a shrine rather than a watch-tower, Weigall 1907, 80.

225 Veymiers 2009, 204.

226 Staffieri 1996, 255–269.

227 Aelius Aristides, *Or.* 8.53: οἱ μὲν δὴ τῆς μεγάλης πρὸς Αἰγύπτω πόλεως πολῖται καὶ ἓνα τοῦτον ἀνακαλοῦσι Δία. Weinreich 1919, 26–27. For other accounts in literature, stressing the identity of the two gods, Veymiers 2009a, 201–202.

228 Belayche 2010, 157.

229 Veymiers 2009a, 201.

230 Veymiers 2009a, 202.

231 *RPC* IX, 796–797.

Acclamations on pottery related to Sarapis are almost absent, an exception being a terracotta relief applique from Alburnus maior (Rosia Montana) in Dacia, which bears an acclamation in Greek “May Sarapis and all the gods be propitious to me”, possibly related to Isiac festivals.<sup>232</sup> Apart from the Thessalonian mug, there are only three further instances of the acclamation εἰς Ζεὺς Σέραπις on a vase.

a) The first occurs on a mug with the dipinto [Z]εῦ[ς] Σ[ά]ραπις; its beginning is not preserved. The vase was found during excavations of K. K. Kostsyushko-Valyuzhinich, conducted in 1888–1906 in Chersonesos and its dipinto was published in 1987 by E. Solomonik,<sup>233</sup> in a paper that supplements a previous paper of hers. Unfortunately, there is no published picture or drawing of this vase, which Solomonik calls горшочек – “small pot”, but the previous article deals with 23 specimens of the same category, dated to the third–early 4<sup>th</sup> century AD;<sup>234</sup> based on their illustrations, they are beyond any doubt mugs, exact counterparts of the Thessalonian example.

b) The second is a dipinto on a mug from the excavations of V. Zubar at the western necropolis of Chersonesos, with letter forms very similar to that of the Thessalonian mug. It is erroneously thought to be inscribed with the words “Zeus Hera”,<sup>235</sup> but in reality the dipinto reads [E]ΙΙC ZE[Y]Ç CEPA[ΠIC].

E. Solomonik suggested that these mugs were manufactured in Chersonesos,<sup>236</sup> which seems probable because of the quantities of similar mugs discovered there. Certainly, the Greek inscriptions point to an eastern provenance. Convivial inscriptions on drinking vessels of other shapes, from the West, e.g. those manufactured in the region of Trier, are written in Latin and are dissimilar.<sup>237</sup> However, we may assume that these dipinti functioned similarly to their western counterparts, which “most likely represented a compromise between the views of the potters and/or the merchants and their end-buyers. The former would have wanted to create/select something likely to appeal to the latter, and the latter was unlikely to buy a vessel with a motto far from reflecting their sentiments”. Another common element between western and eastern dipinti is “the striking standardization of mottos, in terms of lettering and content, attested on vessels discovered far afield”.<sup>238</sup> These similarities support the existence of one

232 *RICIS* 616/0601 (AD 200–250); Podvin 2014, 127.

233 Соломоник 1987, 117; the mug is kept in the local museum, with inv. no. 5688. The dipinto is cited by Vinogradov and Zolotarev 1999, 373, n. 49, and *RICIS* 115/0301; both publications simply note the absence of a description, illustration, and dating of the vase.

234 Соломоник 1973. This paper examines dipinti on 23 mugs discovered in Chersonesos (16 specimens), Pantikaraion (two specimens), Tyras (three specimens), Olbia (one specimen) and either Tyras or Olbia (one specimens). Most of these mugs were found in graves dating back to the 3<sup>rd</sup>–early 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. Among them, five bear the name of Serapis, while two mention the names “Isis Zeus” together. Surprisingly, these dipinti are not referenced in Isiac studies, even in studies related to the worship of Egyptian gods in the region, e.g. Vinogradov and Zolotarev 1999; Braund 2018. Other dipinti on these mugs mention the names of gods (Zeus, Hera, or Hermes), or good wishes such as “happiness” (εὐτυχία), “drink and rejoice” (πείνε καὶ εὐφραίνου), “may God be propitious to me” (εἰλεως μοι ὁ Θεός) and “may Tyche be propitious to me” (εἰλεως μοι εἴη ἡ Τύχη). In contrast, a dipinto on a mug from Kiz-Aul, near Myrmekion, with the word “Isis” is known in the Isiac bibliography, *RICIS* 115/0601; Емец 2012, 58, no. 160.

235 Зубарь 2005, 163.

236 Соломоник 1973, 69.

237 *CIL* XIII, 10018.1–246; Harris 1986; Mudd 2015.

238 Mudd 2015, 82.

workshop distributing its products through merchants in Pontus and Greece. However, without an archaeometric analysis, we cannot be absolutely certain whether the Thessalonian mug was imported or manufactured in a local workshop.

c) The third instance of the acclamation εἶς Ζεὺς Σάραπις on pottery is a sherd of a vessel of unknown shape, dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> century AD, which was found in Oxyrhynchus. It bears a crude figure of a snake (?), while its incomplete inscription reads as follows: εὐτυχῶς τ[ῶ...] | Ἑρμῆ τὸ τάχο[ς] | εἶς Ζεὺς Σ[άραπις],<sup>239</sup> reminiscent of the acclamation to Zeus Sarapis and Helios Hermanubis from Ptolemais Hermeiou.<sup>240</sup> The coexistence of the acclamation with the mention – possible acclamation – of Hermes and a possible depiction of a snake reminds of two engraved gems with the acclamation εἶς Ζεὺς Σάραπις on one side and a snake, the god Chnoubis,<sup>241</sup> or Hermes<sup>242</sup> on the other, dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD and the Imperial period, respectively. It is thus possible that this sherd constitutes evidence of megatheism.<sup>243</sup>

A 2<sup>nd</sup>-century AD papyrus from Oxyrhynchus partially preserves an aretalogy of Sarapis, instructing worshippers to utter the acclamation εἶς Ζεὺς Σάραπις after narrating Sarapis' miraculous intervention in providing water to the inhabitants of Pharos island in Alexandria.<sup>244</sup> This acclamation was likely part of Sarapis rituals performed in his sanctuaries, leading to its dissemination by worshippers who recorded it on various media, especially personal objects, as a testament of their faith and the god's power.<sup>245</sup> Voluntary associations of Sarapis in Thessaloniki, such as the ἱεραφόροι συνκλίται or the συνθηρησκευταὶ κλείνης θεοῦ μεγάλου Σαράπιδος,<sup>246</sup> might have played a role in spreading the acclamation during sacred banquets (*lectisternia*) in honour of the god. Two attested associations or groups of people from elsewhere were named after Zeus Serapis.<sup>247</sup> In Roman depictions of *lectisternia* on coins, lamps, money boxes from Egypt, and a gem, the reclining Egyptian gods, including Sarapis, are often shown holding drinking vessels,<sup>248</sup> alluding to drinking festivities in which devotees participated.

The papyrus from Oxyrhynchus with the acclamation εἶς Ζεὺς Σάραπις is referred to as the *arête* of Zeus Helios Megalos Sarapis.<sup>249</sup> The same name is attested in papyri

239 Grenfell and Hunt 1904–1905, 15; Weinreich 1919, 25.

240 See above, note 225.

241 Veymiers 2009a, 370, no. A.9, pl. 71.

242 Veymiers 2009a, 373, no. A.36, pl. 72.

243 Chaniotis 2010.

244 *P.Oxy.* XI.1382; Chaniotis 2009, 208; Bąkowska-Czerner and Łajtar 2021, 37.

245 Bąkowska-Czerner and Łajtar 2021, 37–38.

246 *RICIS* 113/0530 (early 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD), 113/0575 (before the mid–3<sup>rd</sup> century AD).

247 Veymiers 2009a, 201; *RICIS* 102/2001 (Prote, Messenia), 204/0105 (Rhodes).

248 Bricault 2013b. In connecting the Egyptian gods to wine consumption and the shapes of vessels, two polychrome glass goblets from a Meroitic tomb (AD 250–300) can be referred to. These goblets bear the convivial acclamation πίε ζήσεν (drink and you shall live) and depict the veneration of an enthroned Osiris, Leclant 1973, 56–68, nos. 4–5, figs. 5–15. Additionally, a magic spell in demotic script against the effects of poisoning involves a cup filled with wine and mild rue, referred to as the “cup of Osiris”, from which Isis, Osiris, and Agathodaimon had also drunk, Faraone and Torallas Tovar 2022, 209–211.

249 For Zeus Helios megalos Sarapis, attested at least since the reign of Trajan, initially in Upper Egypt, Bricault 2005.



from the same city concerning oracles<sup>250</sup> and invitations to the κλίνη Σαράπιδος (*lectisternium* of Sarapis), mainly held in the Serapeum of the city. Additionally, a partially preserved wooden applique, also from Oxyrhynchus, represents a reclining Sarapis with Harpocrates, part of a scene of a *lectisternium*.<sup>251</sup> The consumption of wine in ritual banquets in honour of Egyptian gods is widely attested,<sup>252</sup> including a specific event called *kothon*, organised by the guild of Sarapiastai in Thasos in honour of Sarapis.<sup>253</sup> *Kothon* was not chosen accidentally, as it designated a kind of mug.<sup>254</sup> The question arises whether the Thessalonian mug was used in such a context. Unfortunately, we will never know its specific use or the purpose behind its placement in a grave. It is possible that the family or the owner deemed it appropriate to accompany the deceased into a blissful afterlife, achieved through the eternal invocation of the mighty and saviour god.

### 3. Discussion

Isiac testimonia from the cemeteries of Thessaloniki date back to the Roman Imperial period, aligning with the timeframe of most finds in the Isiac sanctuary and its expansion. Despite the vast number of excavated graves, only a small fraction has been published, resulting in a limited number of finds related to the cult of Isis. However, this is consistent with the overall pattern observed in Greco-Roman sites across Greece. An exception to this ascertainment are the numerous funerary stelae of Isis' devotees found in Attica, mainly Athens,<sup>255</sup> a city where the Isiac cults flourished.<sup>256</sup> In fact, Thessaloniki ranks second in Greece in terms of the number of Isiac testimonia discovered in funerary contexts, following Athens. It appears that devotees of Isis had the option to publicly express their affiliation with the cult of Isis or furnish their graves with Isiac objects, either used in everyday life or made to accompany them in the afterlife, aside from the perishable sacred garments.<sup>257</sup>

250 Renberg 2016, 383, note 127.

251 Bricault 2013b, 124, note 41, 134, fig. 31, Veymiers 2009a, 95.

252 For ritual banquets in honour of Sarapis, Veymiers 2009a, 95–97. For wine, *RICIS* 202/1503–06 (Minoa), 515/0806 (Verona). For amphorae from Pompeii, most probably containing wine, imported from Crete, perhaps distributed during banquets in Isiac festivals, with dipinti “gift of Serapis”, *RICIS* 504/0219; Baurin 2020. For similar dipinti on amphorae, *RICIS* 101/0212 (Athens), \*515/0124 (Aquilaia). A temple inventory from Sarapieion C in Delos bears a unique attestation to a small silver sarapian situla (καδίσκον σαραπιακόν) with one handle, *RICIS* 202/0424 (156/5 BC). Since situlae are normally related to Isis, it is possible that not a situla but a drinking cup is implied. Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, 473b–c, attests to drinking vessels named *kadiskoi*. Of particular importance was the *kadiskos* of Zeus Ktesios, an anguiform Zeus who was protector of domestic storeroom and guardian of property. The vessel had two handles wreathed with wool and was filled with *ambrosia* (water, olive oil and grains) along with anything the owner found by chance, which alludes to Hermes, thus becoming a symbol of constant health and abundance. Hermes was also connected to *kadiskoi*, Cook 1925, 1054–1068; Rose 1957, 100–103. Zeus Ktesios, along with other Egyptian deities, received dedications at Delos (*RICIS* 202/0371), possibly perceived as a Greek interpretation of Agathos Daimon, who is also associated with Sarapis and the Egyptian anguiform Shai, see Dunand 1969.

253 *RICIS* 201/0101 (2<sup>nd</sup> century BC); Veymiers 2009a, 96.

254 For the identification of *kothon* to a mug and its uses, Παλαιοθόδωρος 2012, 439–441.

255 Walters 1988; Walters 2000. For those from outside Attica, *RICIS* 105/0205–0206, 202/1002.

256 *RICIS* 101/0201–0258; Bricault 2001, 4–5; Maikidou-Putrino 2021, 165–186.

257 Plut., *De Is. et Os.* 3 (352b); Griffiths 1970, 264–268.

Similar patterns are observed in other regions where the cult of the *gens isiaca* was present. For instance, a funerary stele of an Egyptian priest of Isis<sup>258</sup> was found in Demetrias, a cosmopolitan Macedonian harbour.<sup>259</sup> However, the scarcity of Isiac testimonia in funerary assemblages extends even to significant cult centres like Delos, an important hub for the Isiac cults outside Egypt.<sup>260</sup> Out of the over 1000 terracotta figurines discovered on Delos, nearly 100 of them depict Egyptian deities. Only two of these figurines, depicting the ithyphallic Harpocrates and imported from Egypt, were found in individual graves on Rheneia, the burial place of the Delians.<sup>261</sup> In another burial, the deceased woman was found holding a sistrum and wearing a ring with her name.<sup>262</sup> Similarly in Rhodes, another island with a notable Isiac cult centre,<sup>263</sup> only two objects related to the Egyptian gods were found in a funerary context, a 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC funerary altar with depiction of a *kanephoros*<sup>264</sup> and a 1<sup>st</sup> century BC bone handle featuring Harpocrates, which was imported from Egypt.<sup>265</sup> Equally from the island of Cos, where the Isiac cult is well attested,<sup>266</sup> a Roman lamp from a grave depicted Isis Tyche.<sup>267</sup> Sistra accompanied women in very few graves from Arta, Patra, Megara, Thisbe, and Delos.<sup>268</sup> It is important to note that the scarcity of Isiac testimonia from funerary contexts in Greece does not fully reflect the reality, as much material remains unpublished or incorrectly identified. Future publications or excavations may reveal more evidence.

In some cases, Isiac artefacts from funerary contexts are the only indications of an Isis cult in a particular place, such as the sistra from Megara and Thisbe, or a unique marble sarcophagus with Isiac iconography from Hierapetra.<sup>269</sup> Another noteworthy example is a gold necklace with beads, a lunar pendant, and pendants depicting Isis and Sarapis, from a Hellenistic grave at Achinos,<sup>270</sup> a maritime city with limited indications of the Isiac cult.<sup>271</sup>

In Macedonia, the presence of *isiaca* in funerary contexts is extremely limited. A grave in Beroea, a city where the cult of Isis is known,<sup>272</sup> contained a gold ghost coin depicting a bust of Sarapis.<sup>273</sup> Other graves yielded two terracotta figurines of Harpocrates

258 *RICIS* 112/0701.

259 Bricault 2001, 17.

260 Bricault 2001, 36, 38-40; *RICIS* 202/0101-0439.

261 Barrett 2011, 202-208, 372-378, 608-611; Barrett 2015.

262 *RICIS* 202/0418.

263 Bricault 2001, 63; Fantaoutsaki 2011.

264 Μποσνάκης 1994-1995, 54, pl. 7β.

265 Φανταουτσάκη 2014.

266 Μποσνάκης 1994-1995, 56-63.

267 Μποσνάκης 1994-1995, 62-63, pl. 10δ.

268 Saura-Ziegelmeyer 2018.

269 Koch 2017. Actually an indication of the cult of Egyptian gods in the city is provided through a terracotta plastic vase in the form of Bes-Silenus, Vogeikoff-Brogan 2016.

270 Πάντος 1983, 174, pl. 74a; Φρούσσου 2010, 519.

271 Φρούσσου 2010.

272 *RICIS* 113/0301, \*113/0302-0303; Maikidou-Putrino 2021, 121–123.

273 Τουράτσογλου 1969, 315, pl. 328στ.

and two of Isis.<sup>274</sup> In Pella, three individual graves held a lamp with the bust of Sarapis, a ring with the inscription εἰς Ζεὺς Σέρραπυς, and two figurines of Harpocrates on Apis.<sup>275</sup> These finds represent the only indications of the Isiac cults in this important Macedonian city. Isolated funerary stelae of devotees and of a priestess of Isis have been found in Thasos<sup>276</sup> and Amphipolis<sup>277</sup> respectively, where the presence of the Isiac cults is also documented, particularly in Amphipolis.<sup>278</sup> A sarcophagus of an Isis priest was discovered at Doxato/Drama,<sup>279</sup> located in the *chora* of Philippi, a town known to have had an Isiac sanctuary.<sup>280</sup>

Returning to Thessaloniki, five cases of Isiac testimonia are related to funerary monuments, which reveal the owners' adherence to the Isiac cult and their aspirations for a safe journey in the afterlife, blissful existence, and protection by Isis.<sup>281</sup> These monuments unveil a different aspect of "the queen of departed spirits" and provide insights into family histories and personal stories through inscriptions and depictions. Aulus Papius Cheilon, a prominent member of the local Isiac community, sought to be remembered in his funerary stele as an *anubophorus* and the founder of the ἱεραφόροι συνκλίται.<sup>282</sup> Claudius Achilles placed his burial, next to his parents, under the eternal protection of Isis, as relief symbols in his funerary altar denote.<sup>283</sup> Annia Tryphaena presents a more intricate case, as she not only expressed her Isiac identity (as an initiate?) in her sarcophagus through depictions of the sistrum and the caduceus<sup>284</sup> but also expressed her wish for a blissful afterlife, through visual likening of herself and of her brothers (?) with Helen and Dioscuri respectively, possibly indicating the worship of Helen and her brothers in the Isiac sanctuary. Unparalleled is the theomorphic representation of the deceased as Isis Pelagia on a funerary altar,<sup>285</sup> motivated by her rarely attested role as protectress of the voyage between the realms of the living and the dead and potentially indicating the veneration of the goddess under this aspect within the city, a quality absent thus far from the Isiac sanctuary. Equally unique is the case of the sarcophagus of Ammonius,<sup>286</sup> likely an Alexandrian athlete who died in Thessaloniki, where the reference to Ammon is inspired by the name of the deceased and the known

274 Πουλακάκης 2019.

275 Χρυσοστόμου 2006, 665, fig. 10; Ναούμ 2017, 207–208, no. 322, 440–441, pl. XXIV. See also above, note 10.

276 In an uninscribed 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC funerary stele from Thasos a sistrum, a situla and a *basileion* are depicted on the field near the reclining deceased who is wearing the *atef* crown of Osiris, obviously implying an Isiac identity (Hamiaux 1998, 131–132, no. 139; Veymiers 2018, 36, fig. 0.11), membership in an association of *Osiriastai* (for *Osiriastai*, *RICIS* 204/1001; *RICIS Suppl.* II 204/1012), or even a theomorphic representation (cf. Bricault and Veymiers 2020).

277 Christodoulou 2009, 327–329, Taf. 40.1; Veymiers 2009, 512, no. 1, fig. 4–5; *RICIS* 113/0901.

278 For Thasos: *RICIS* 201/0101-0105; Rolley 1968. For Amphipolis: Veymiers 2009.

279 Christodoulou 2009, 332–333; *RICIS Suppl.* II 113/1013.

280 Τσώχος 2002.

281 These five funerary monuments will be treated by Touloumtzidou forthcoming.

282 *IG X* 2,1 58; Δεσπίνης et al. 1997, 139–141, no. 111, fig. 313 (E. Βουτυράς); *RICIS* 113/0530.

283 *IG X* 2,1 822; Αδάμ-Βελένη 2002, 177–178, no. 126, pl. 82.

284 *IG X* 2,1 573; *RICIS* 113/0559; Stefanidou-Tiveriou 2016.

285 Blanchaud 1984; Αδάμ-Βελένη 2002, 82–83, 190, no. 164, pl. 98.

286 *IG X* 2,1 541; Stefanidou-Tiveriou 2014, 196, no. 63, pl. 45.3, 46.1–2.

depictions of Ammon in funerary monuments, as safeguard of the final resting place rather than being directly associated with the god's worship in the Isiac sanctuary.

When it comes to other categories of Isiaca, Sarapis, the second most frequently attested deity in the Isiac sanctuary,<sup>287</sup> is represented in the Thessaloniki cemeteries by a modest mug. This mug, whether imported or locally made, holds value due to its rare acclamation, seldom found on pottery, and its distribution in Macedonia. The most surprising finds are the figurines of Harpocrates, a deity with limited presence in the Isiac sanctuary<sup>288</sup> but significant in popular cult as the overseer of infants.<sup>289</sup> In these figurines, Harpocrates is depicted on the back of Apis. This theme suggests the possible worship of Apis in the sanctuary, as well as the assimilation of Harpocrates to Eros, a concept known in other places and expected due to the presence of Aphrodite in the Isiac sanctuary. The creation of this extremely rare iconographic type, associated with ideas of fertility and regeneration, is likely attributed to a coroplastic workshop in Thessaloniki. It reflects the influence of an Egyptian model, possibly of Memphite origin, the religious significance of which was likely understood by the consumers. Popular Egyptian concepts of rebirth find expression through a well-known iconographic theme on a gem depicting Harpocrates on a lotus, and possibly through a pair of rock crystal items featuring a Tilapia fish and a ball. Finally, the gold pendants with Isiac affinities, which reveal aspects of popular cult and personal religion, signify the owner's hope for protection against all dangers in both her everyday life and the afterlife.

#### 4. Conclusions

The diverse range of Isiaca found within the funerary assemblages of Thessaloniki provides valuable insights into both the public and private spheres of devotees of the *gens isiaca*. Through elaborate funerary monuments as well as more modest personal objects, these depictions shed light on the spread of the Isiac cult within the city, encompassing individuals of different social statuses and origins, particularly women.<sup>290</sup> They also offer glimpses into the connections between Thessaloniki and other regions such as Egypt and Italy. Importantly, these representations reveal the accessible nature of the Egyptian gods, who played a role in all aspects of their devotees' lives, from birth to death, and addressed their concerns regarding rebirth and afterlife. Isis, with her role as guarantor of a blissful life and guardian of the deceased's journey in the Otherworld and of their tombs, occupied a prominent position, a status she also enjoyed within the Isiac sanctuary.<sup>291</sup> She is followed by Harpocrates, the protector of infancy, Sarapis, and Anubis, with the notable absence of Osiris.

287 Sarapis is attested in 21 inscriptions, *RICIS* 113/0501, 113/0503-0504, 113/0507-0511, 113/0513, 113/0521, 113/0525, 113/0527, 113/0533-0534, 113/0536, 113/0544, 113/0555, 113/0565, 113/0569-0571, and through the head of a marble statue, Δεσπίνης et al. 1997, no. 38, figs. 99-102 (Γ. Δεσπίνης).

288 Attested in only three inscriptions, *RICIS* 113/0512, 113/0525, 113/0533, and through two marble statues, Δεσπίνης et al. 1997, 113-114, figs. 221-225, no. 86 (Γ. Δεσπίνης).

289 Backe-Dahmen 2018, 510.

290 Backe-Dahmen 2018, 521.

291 Her name is attested in 35 inscriptions, *RICIS* 113/0501-0502, 113/0504, 113/0506, 113/0508-0515, 113/0521, 113/0523, 113/0525, 113/0527, 113/0529, 113/0531-0534, 113/0536, 113/0545, 113/0549-0552, 113/0555, 113/0565-0566, 113/0568-0572, and is depicted three times in sculpture, Δεσπίνης et al. 1997, 46, no. 27, figs. 54-57, 112-113, no. 85, figs. 217-220, 114-115, no. 87, figs. 226-229 (Γ. Δεσπίνης).

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# THE PRESENCE OF THE *SISTRUM* IN THE BALKAN AND DANUBIAN PROVINCES OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

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## Abstract

*This paper focuses on the sistrum, the well-known instrument strongly connected to what modern scholars define nowadays as Isis, found on multiple occasions during the Graeco-Roman period in the geographic area of the Danubian and Balkan regions. These include the realia as well as portrayals on a variety of archaeological finds, for instance: wall plaster, altars, rock-cut reliefs, funerary monuments, gems and so on. The main purpose of the paper is to offer a contextualization and subsequently, an interpretation of the finds discovered so far in the region mentioned above.\**

**Keywords:** Roman religion – Isis – sistrum – Danubian-Balkan region.

## Introduction

*“Nam dextra quidem ferebat aereum crepitaculum, cuius per angustam lamminam in modum baltei recurvatam traiectae mediae paucae virgulae, crispante brachio trigeminus iactus, reddebant argutum sonorem.”* (Apuleius, Met. XI. 4).

When Lucius shared his experience about the appearance of Isis in the *Metamorphoses*, he diligently described the goddess' *sistrum* held in her right arm. A series of iconographic evidence portrays this instrument in the Balkan and Danubian provinces, from Raetia, Dalmatia and Pannonia to Dacia, Moesia, Thrace or Macedonia. These pieces of evidence

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come in various forms: the instruments themselves, yet still more are representations of them in a variety of forms. This paper explores these items, advancing an answer on the importance the *sistrum* played in the Isiac cults along the Balkan-Danubian provinces and the importance of the iconography of *sistra* in connection to *Isism*.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Isism* in the Balkan Danubian provinces of the Roman Empire. A short introduction**

*Isism*<sup>2</sup> can be epigraphically spotted as soon as the Early Hellenistic Period on the coastlines of the eastern and south-eastern Balkan Peninsula, mainly through the worship of Sarapis, in strong connection with the cultic centre from Delos.<sup>3</sup> Yet during the Roman Imperial Period, the region under analysis was split by two major cultural backgrounds.

In what is the more militarized area of the frontier provinces, where Latin prevails, sacralised spaces dedicated to Isis were consecrated during the major chronological stages when *Isism* was fuelled by support of the central government in Rome, the imperial household, from the Flavian Period up to the Severan Dynasty. Behind this agency was the provincial elite, the provincial government, and the members of the Roman army, using this process of religious communication as a tool of showing (among other things), political loyalty towards the imperial household.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, in the Hellenophone environment, the Greek epigraphic habit has left behind many instantiations which offer more details in reconstructing religious communication, agency, and so on, connected to the deities of the Isiac circle.<sup>5</sup>

Regardless of one region or another, after the Severans, staging *Isism* publicly declined considerably, as did other activities related to Isiac sanctuaries; the only pieces of evidence preserved have a more personal, intimate dimension connected to them.<sup>6</sup> An exception is perhaps the Arch of Galerius at Thessalonica where Isis and Sarapis are portrayed in a heavily politicized context.<sup>7</sup>

In the region under analysis there are only a few sanctuaries dedicated to Isis or Sarapis (or both) which have ever been archaeologically investigated, either partially or in their entirety. For instance, in Pannonia, a sanctuary dedicated to Isis was discovered at Savaria<sup>8</sup> while another one was identified at Scarbantia.<sup>9</sup> Both are located on

1 For the *sistrum* in the Greco-Roman period see the overview in Genaille 1984. For the *sistrum*-instruments see Saura-Ziegelmeier 2017, 211–212, quoted in Gasparini 2021a, 52. For the *sistrum* in nearby regions, for instance Roman Greece, see Maikidou-Poutrino 2021, I 202–204.

2 We employ the term *Isism* as understood and defined by J. Rüpke (Rüpke 2018, 72).

3 See Deac, forthcoming, for a more detailed analysis.

4 E.g. for Pannonia, Dacia and Moesia in Deac, forthcoming.

5 See further Deac, forthcoming.

6 See further Deac, forthcoming.

7 Maikidou-Poutrino 2021, I 350, II 20, S. 37, II 178, fig. 43, with references.

8 For the Isis sanctuary of Savaria, the most comprehensible bibliographic reference is Sosztarits et al. 2013. For a latest overview of this sanctuary, see Deac, forthcoming, chapter 3.2.3.

9 For the Isis sanctuary from Scarbantia see Mráv and Gabrieli 2011 and most recently Deac, forthcoming, 3.2.2.

the Amber Road, were consecrated sometime during the Flavian Period, and in both cases, evidence of the *sistrum* was encountered.<sup>10</sup> In Dacia, a *Serapeum* was found in the area of the *praetorium procuratoris* at Sarmizegetusa, built as early as the reign of Caracalla, based on the current state of affairs, but in this settlement this Isiac symbol, the *sistrum*, is unknown.<sup>11</sup> At Stobi, in Macedonia, another Isiac sanctuary, consecrated sometime at the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, was archaeologically investigated.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, an Imperial era sanctuary was found at Philippi, but the identification remains obscure.<sup>13</sup> In another important settlement, Thessalonica, the sheer number of finds as well as the archaeological excavations point to the existence of a sanctuary from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.<sup>14</sup> Many other sanctuaries are presumed based on the epigraphic evidence in different locations from the region.<sup>15</sup>

### The *sistrum* in the Balkan Danubian provinces (map 1)

As will be apparent in the following, the *sistrum* is encountered most often in relation to the sanctuaries dedicated to Isis and to the funerary environment. Some exceptions exist, for instance, a mould from Micăsasa depicting Isis-Luna possibly holding a *sistrum* in her left hand and some carnelian gems found at Micia, Oescus and Carnuntum portraying Isis holding the *sistrum* in her left hand. The lack of a clear-cut archaeological context for the discovery of these latter artefacts, as well as the lack of testimonies regarding the carving of the images from Philippi, hinder any further pertinent analysis. However, it should be noted that on all representations, Isis is portrayed holding the *sistrum* in her right hand, including the altar from Scarbantia where the *sistrum* is depicted on the right side (cat. no. 7), a feature also present in Greece on the Attic grave reliefs.<sup>16</sup> Regarding the mould from Micăsasa, one can observe that it had to be applied on vessels, casting on them the image of the goddess possibly holding the *sistrum* in her right hand. Similarly, perhaps the gems were used as seals, thus portraying the goddess on the applied surfaces in a similar fashion.

Compared to their Egyptian ancestor<sup>17</sup> or the Hellenistic *sistra*, the ornamentation of the object is very refined, generally retaining only the top.<sup>18</sup> At the top, there is usually a cat alone or nursing a few kittens, with or without a headdress.<sup>19</sup> This element is

10 For an overview see Deac, forthcoming.

11 For an overview see Deac, forthcoming, 3.3.3.

12 For a detailed approach on the archaeological investigations carried out in this sanctuary see Blaževska and Radnjanski 2015 and latest Maikidou-Poutrino 2021, I 92–105.

13 Latest on this sanctuary Maikidou-Poutrino 2021, I 21–34.

14 On *Isism* at Thessalonica and its sacralised spaces, see Maikidou-Poutrino 2021, I 35–70.

15 Latest for Raetia see Cibu and Rémy 2004; for Pannonia, Dacia and Moesia see Deac forthcoming; for Thrace see Bricault 2007, *passim*; for Dalmatia e.g. Bugarski-Mesdjian 2007; Vilogorac-Brčić 2019; for Macedonia see Maikidou-Poutrino 2021, *passim*.

16 Observations of this feature in Matricon-Thomas 2011; Martzavou 2011; Maikidou-Poutrino 2021, I 203. A thorough analysis of these reliefs was recently made also by Veymiers 2021, *passim*.

17 Hickmann 1949, *passim*; Ziegler 1984; Genaille 1984.

18 Saura-Ziegelmeier 2017.

19 Saura-Ziegelmeier 2019.

the only one, besides the *sistrum* itself, which refers to the Isiac story and more particularly to Bastet, whose mythology is detailed by Plutarch in his *De Iside et Osiride* (Plutarch, *Moralia*, V 63).

The bronze *sistrum* of Oescus belongs to a type which appears in the Imperial Period and remains the only instrument found so far in the region, perhaps except for the discoveries from Cambodunum. It is important to specify that this specimen is the most oriental of the Roman Imperial type findings, which shows a sort of refashioning of objects in the Eastern Mediterranean Isiac contexts influenced by the existing situation in the Italian peninsula.<sup>20</sup>

So far, the presence of the *sistrum* in the iconography is above all associated with an overall classical image of Isis standing, which is found on gemstones, as well as on coins and reliefs. In addition, in a few exceptions, there are other versions of the goddess, for instance, Isis-Sothis.

The presence of the *sistrum* in the reliefs when Isis is not represented is complex. In the case of funerary representations, one wonders for example whether the deceased, when the *sistrum* is worn, was a priestess or a simple devotee of Isis, or whether its status was connected to Isis in another form.<sup>21</sup> In death, the deceased imitates the divine figure, taking up its attributes, thus individualizing their religious leanings, here towards the Isiac cults. In the case of the Balkan Danubian provinces, we do not have any humans (except for what were interpreted as “priests”) bearing the *sistrum*, highlighting a very important aspect: the *sistrum* is first of all a divine attribute before being a cult object. However, it is difficult to tell which models the manufacturers based their objects on, or if there was a reciprocity and influence between the *realia* and the images of *sistra*.

The earliest contextualized *sistrum* depiction from the region under analysis comes from Thessalonica,<sup>22</sup> dated to the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, where a marble stela depicts a series of devotees of Isis, among them being a veiled priestess of Isis holding a *sistrum* in her right hand. The Greek text above the image mentions Osiris’ *mystes* and three individuals, Demetrios, Alexandros, son of Demetrios and Nikaia, daughter of Charixenos, this being one of the first pieces of evidence from the region involving initiations into the Isiac mysteries (cat. no. 22). On the other hand, the latest such depiction is from a limestone “false-door” discovered at the entrance of a tomb from the Late Roman necropolis from Tomis, in Scythia Minor, dated to the Constantinian period (cat. no. 12). However, the oldest item, in terms of its fabrication, is the granite statue of a Late New Kingdom official, named Hapi-Chai, who holds a *sistrum* in the form of Hathor, a monument which was discovered in a Roman context, in 1800, in Vindobona (cat. no. 3).

20 Contrary to what has sometimes been claimed. See, for example, Wilkes 1998, 101: “Presque tous les monuments religieux des I<sup>er</sup> et II<sup>e</sup> siècles sont de type romain, les quelques exceptions à cette règle étant les temples de cultes orientaux”.

21 For a wider discussion, which for the moment remains open to debate see Martzavou 2011; Matricon-Thomas 2011; Laubry 2015; Saura-Ziegelmeier 2018; Bricault and Veymiers 2020, esp. 293–296; Veymiers 2021; Saura-Ziegelmeier 2022, *passim*.

22 Cross reference to Touloumtzidou.

In Raetia, two *sistra* were found in a grave located in the necropolis of Cambodunum, modern-day Kempten, Germany (cat. nos. 1, 2).

In Pannonia, all the finds relate to contexts connected to Isiac sanctuaries, except for a red carnelian gem depicting Isis holding a *sistrum* which is a stray find from Carnuntum (cat. no. 8). Further south, at Savaria, the 1<sup>st</sup> century plaster decorations of the sanctuary depicted a *sistrum* and a veiled priestess of Isis, or the goddess herself, holding this instrument; these plaster decoration fragments had been buried near the *aedes* when the sanctuary of Isis had been dismantled and reconstructed anew, sometime at the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD (cat. nos. 5, 6).<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the sanctuary had been remodelled during the Severan Period, when one panel of the main frieze of the *aedes* depicted Isis holding the *sistrum* and riding the Sothis dog (cat. no. 4), a feature that had a very precise meaning for the members of the Isiac *gens* who frequented the sanctuary.<sup>24</sup> At Scarbantia, one of the altars consecrated to Isis, part of the inventory of the local Isiac sanctuary, depicted a *sistrum* on one of its sides (cat. no. 7).

In Dacia, only two such depictions are known. A recently found dark red carnelian gem depicting Isis with her typical iconography, holding the *sistrum* and a *situla* in her hands, was found in the military *vicus* adjacent to the auxiliary fort from Micia, an important Roman settlement located on the western frontier of the province, on the banks of the *Marissos* (modern-day Mureş) river. This gem was found in a pit which had cut through all the Roman strata, but based on the manufacturing features, one is able to advance the idea that it had been produced perhaps sometime during the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD (cat. no. 9). The second find represents a clay mould depicting Isis-Luna, possibly holding a *sistrum* in her left hand; this mould was used for decorating pottery vessels and was part of the tool-kit of Myrinus, one of the pottery craftsmen active during the late 2<sup>nd</sup> and early 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD from the biggest and most important pottery production centre (so far) of the province of Dacia, namely the Roman settlement from modern-day Micăsasa (cat. no. 10).

In Moesia Superior, the only depiction which can be referenced is rather questionable and comes from Viminacium (cat. no. 11). To the east, in Moesia Inferior, a bronze *sistrum* and a red carnelian gem depicting Isis holding perhaps a *sistrum* in her left hand, rendered in a similar fashion as the one from Micia (*vide supra*) were found at Oescus (cat. nos. 13, 14). The latest datable find from the region under analysis is from Tomis, as mentioned above,<sup>25</sup> where on a “false-door” found at the entrance of a tomb dated to the Constantinian era, in one of its registers, a female goddess or a priestess is holding in her right hand what seems to be a *sistrum* (cat. no. 12). Set apart from the other regions discussed in this paper, cities of the provinces of Moesia Inferior and Thrace struck coins depicting Isis holding the *sistrum* and the *situla*. This situation occurs at Nicopolis ad Istrum where on the reverse of provincial coins struck during

23 For a recent detailed approach on the archaeological analysis of the discoveries see Bíró and Soszartits 2023 esp. 38 with references.

24 For a more detailed discussion see Deac, forthcoming.

25 For the Isiac cults at Tomis see Deac, forthcoming, 3.4. Here, the discoveries related to *Isism* are known in a large number, making this settlement one of the most important Isiac centres from around the shores of the Black Sea.

the reigns of Antoninus Pius and Commodus, Isis is depicted standing, facing left, holding the *sistrum* in her right hand and *situla* in her left one. The earliest depictions of Isis holding a *sistrum* occur however in Thrace, at Perinthus, as early as the reign of Claudius, followed by Serdica, during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, Traianopolis depicting Faustina the Younger on the obverse, Philippopolis and Hadrianopolis during the reign of Commodus (also Hadrianopolis struck coins depicting Sarapis on the obverse and Isis on the reverse) and Byzia during the reigns of Marcus Aurelius and Philip the Arab; two coin types, from Byzia, depicting Faustina the Younger and Otacilia Severa respectively on the obverse stand out, as in these cases Isis is portrayed standing, facing right and holding with her left hand the *sistrum* and the *situla* with the right one.<sup>26</sup>

In Macedonia, a bronze pendant in the shape of a *sistrum*, which remains to be published, was found during the archaeological excavations of the local Iseum at Stobi (cat. no. 17). To the south of Stobi, a marble funerary relief possibly depicting a priestess of Isis was discovered at Kavadarci (cat. no. 18). Other such attestations identified in the scientific literature as *sistra* suggest a defunctionalization, or a highlighting of a function other than the sound one. Indeed, most of the contextualized *sistra* findings, some of which are considered amulets, have been found in funerary contexts.<sup>27</sup> This is the case for the Nesactium *sistrum*,<sup>28</sup> showing a particular connection in death to the cult of Isis and its afterlife conception, and an apotropaic protection given to a young (and perhaps female) deceased by an instrument of the cult, made of a copper alloy, which can have its own importance.<sup>29</sup> Further analysis will shed light on the interpretation of the find from Stobi, a key issue in this regard being the archaeological context. A sanctuary dedicated to Isis was discovered at Dion, which thrived from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, when it was destroyed by an earthquake.<sup>30</sup> Except for the marble stela already mentioned from Thessalonica (*vide supra*), a Hadrianic era sarcophagus of Annia Tryphaina from the same settlement depicts on one of its long sides a woman, interpreted as performing a ritual, and next to her the depiction of a *sistrum* (cat. no. 21). Two anepigraphic marble plates depicting feet and *sistra* were found at Neine and Levunovo, both connected to presumed sacralized spaces dedicated to the goddess Isis (cat. nos. 15, 16). These petrosomatoglyphs were some sort of *vestigia* placed most commonly in connection to the staircases of the *aedes* of an Isis sanctuary by the followers, thus activating the religious communication between them and the goddess and, at the same time, making the environment where these were set up a lived space, as V. Gasparini puts it.<sup>31</sup> At Philippi, a series of three rock-cut depictions on reliefs were carved in the upper city depicting Isis and/or her priestesses and many Isiac symbols, among them the *sistrum* (cat. no. 19). Furthermore, an altar dedicated to Isis

26 For a detailed discussion see Peter 2008.

27 Saura-Ziegelmeyer 2018.

28 See further Perc 1968, 157–158 no. 14; Budischovsky 1977, 137 pl. IX; Bricault 2001, 123; Giunio 2002, 26 pl. 6/1; Tomorad 2005a, 17; Tomorad 2005b, 48 no. 3 fig. 3; *ROMIC* I, 16 no. 7; Bugarski-Mesdjian 2007, 318; Tomorad 2015, 175, 179 no. 5; Tomorad 2018, 59, 64.

29 Sánchez Muñoz et al. 2022.

30 Latest on this sanctuary Maikidou-Poutrino 2021, I 71–91, which stresses previous archaeologists' difficulties of investigating this site due to the water rising.

31 Gasparini 2021b, esp. 307.

*Lochia* – a divine epithet specific for the region similar to *Lactans*<sup>32</sup> – which has a depiction of the *sistrum* beneath the text, was found at Beroea; the altar was presumably connected to the local Isiac sanctuary (cat. no. 20).<sup>33</sup>

In Roman Dalmatia, at Diluntum and Naronia, a funerary *cippus* and a stela, respectively, depict the *sistrum* alluding to the fact that either the deceased individuals mentioned in the Latin texts or the individuals who were commemorating them were connected to the goddess Isis, in one form or another (cat. nos. 24, 25). At later, an altar dated to the late 1<sup>st</sup> century AD is dedicated by Publius Quinctius Paris to Isis, Sarapis, Liber Pater and Libera, the goddess Isis being rendered agitating the *sistrum* (cat. no. 23). This monumental altar is considered to have been part of the inventory of an Isiac sanctuary located here.<sup>34</sup>

## Conclusions

Despite the large geographic area under analysis, the testimonies relating to the *sistrum* contain only a few real objects. Indeed, of the corpus considered, only two instances can be regarded as testimonies of *realia*, the one from Oescus and the ones from Cambodunum, to which one may add the amulet from Stobi. Among these documents, at least the first artifact, that from Oescus, seems to have preserved its initial function as a sound object. Regarding the two *sistra* of Kempten, we simply do not have any detailed information about them except for their identification, without a detailed description, by G. Grimm. We therefore prefer to act with caution since several objects from the Germanic space, described as *sistra* in a modern meaning, revealed non-Isiac realities.

All other examples fall within the domain of iconographic depictions in various forms. The relief from Tomis is problematic mainly because cases of individuals carrying double *sitra* are indeed not attested and the instrument is always shaken with the right hand, following the canon described by Apuleius. If the general shape (a handle and an oval) could correspond to the instrument held by the right hand, the absence of branches, although present on small representations, goes against a certain identification for the instrument from her left one. Examples of double *sistra* finds are quite rare, including just two cases in Europe, at Nemausus, now lost, and Ambracia, where one encounters two *sistra-simulacra*.<sup>35</sup>

If no literary or epigraphic testimony are indeed attested for the term *sistrum* in the local contexts discussed in this paper, the image of the *sistrum* is sometimes associated with an inscription. Figural sources are the most common source depicting a *sistrum* in several configurations. Most of them show the goddess holding the instrument, in the right hand. In other cases, the *sistrum* is represented alone, on documents of various kinds. The most precious testimonies are undoubtedly those from the tem-

32 Maikidou-Poutrino 2021, I 121–122 with references.

33 See further on *Isism* at Beroea in Tzanavari 1993 and Maikidou-Poutrino 2021, I 121–123.

34 Latest Vilogorac-Brčić 2019, esp. 357.

35 Saura-Ziegelmeier 2018.

ple of Savaria. Indeed, the fresco fragments complete a corpus of very rare painted *sistra*, the equivalent of which can only be found in Campania, in Pompeii and Herculaneum. The *sistrum* is represented in detail in an almost vermilion color, suggesting that the bronze composing the objects was polished and shiny. This rarity is reinforced by the representation of a five-pointed *sistrum*, which is not attested on the *realia*, and which exists only in a few rare examples in the iconography.<sup>36</sup> The top ornamentation is circular. The other more classic representation shows a *sistrum* with four branches. Many Isiac-themed coins show the *sistrum*, most of the time as an attribute of the goddess. These types from Moesia and Thrace present a classical version of the standing Isis, holding the *situla* and the *sistrum*, wearing the *basileion* and the Isiac knot. When the instrument is carried, it is always carried in the right hand, with the exception of objects made in negatives such as gems or terracotta, as we can see here, and the coins from Byzia. If other symbols and attributes (such as the *basileion*, the *situla*, the rudder) make it possible to identify different forms of Isis, the size of the *sistrum* is disproportionate, highlighting the object, especially on the gems. On the *signaculum*, the *sistrum* is not held by the hand of the goddess but placed at her side, above her shoulder, likewise other terracotta objects or reliefs, perhaps suggesting that the goddess was indeed holding the instrument with her hand. The only specificity is the location of the *sistrum*, as discussed above, on the left side, because what we see is the print of the mould used to make this object.

Thus, the *sistrum*, handled or not, hanging from other visual symbols or alone, constitutes a reminder of Isis and helps identify the goddess or a devotion to her. This symbolic charge is obviously very far from the musical instrument and real objects, as shown by the fact that the object itself retains its original shape, the oval and the branches being the only elements necessary for the recognition of the artefact.

The focus on the Danubian provinces strongly shows this phenomenon, which can be confirmed for other regions of the Mediterranean basin. While the percussion instrument is not found widely, its image is found on a great variety of media and in much larger proportions, thus participating in Isiac propaganda and always referring to the image of the Romanized goddess.

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36 Saura-Ziegelmeyer 2017.

37 A relief depicting a *sistrum* next to an ear was probably found in Dalmatia but the context of its discovery is unknown (Ubi Erat Lupa 30595); for this type of representation, see Gasparini 2016.



## CATALOGUE OF *SISTRUM* INSTRUMENTS IN THE BALKAN-DANUBIAN PROVINCES<sup>37</sup>

### ***Cambodunum (Kempton, Germany) – Raetia***

1–2. Two bronze *sistrum*-like instruments were found in a Roman burial. No other data are preserved regarding these two objects. Dating: Roman Period.

Bibliography: Grimm 1969, 201 no. 111; Cibu and Rémy 2004, 169 no. 54.

### ***Vindobona (Vienna, Austria) – Pannonia Superior***

3. Granite statue of an official named Hapi Chai, depicting a *sistrum* in the shape of Hathor. Found around 1800 in the Wiener Neustädter canal together with other Roman finds, and later donated in 1825 to the museum in Vienna. Dimensions: height = 49.5 cm; width = 19.8 cm; thickness = 31 cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, inv. AES 64. Dating: Late New-Kingdom.

Bibliography: Kenner 1897, 123–124 fig. 81; Leclant 1953, 1–2; Satzinger 1977, 208–210; Komorzynski 1965, 61, 159, 201–202 fig. 53; Bricault 2001, 128; Rogge 1990, 126–134 (facsimile of the inscription with a commentary of the text); Satzinger 1994, 5–6; Binder et al. 2010, 103.

### ***Savaria (Szombathély, Hungary) – Pannonia Superior***

4. Limestone relief depicting Isis riding Sothis and holding a *sistrum* in her right hand (fig. 1). Dimensions: height = 89.5 cm; width = 72 cm; thickness = 43.5 cm. Found in 1955 during the archaeological excavations conducted by T. Szentléleky in front of the *aedes*, in the courtyard. Savaria Museum, inv. R.2009.2.6893. Dating: Severan Dynasty.

Bibliography (selective): Szentléleky 1957, 78–79 pl. XXII/1; Szentléleky 1959, 197–198; Wessetzsky 1959a, 28–29; Wessetzsky 1959b, 276; Szentléleky 1960, 17–21 fig. 14; Wessetzsky 1961, 32–34 pl. III fig. 5; Balla et al. 1971, 99 no. 72 fig. 58, a–b with a complete list of bibliographic references; Tóth 1977, 183; Clerc 1978, 257–259 pl. XXXI; Wild 1984, 1819 (with an updated list of bibliographic references); Wessetzsky 1989, 20–21; Tran Tam Tinh 1990, 787 no. 322; Clerc 1994, 129; Tóth 1998, 329–330; Bricault 2001, 127–128; Mráv 2005, 26–29 fig. 8 and previous bibliographic references; Sosztarits 2008, 199 no. 134; Mráv 2013, 47–48 cat. no. 4.1; Tóth 2015, 141–142 fig. 97; Mráv 2016, 32 fig. 4; Ubi Erat Lupa 8007.

5. Fragment of a mural painting depicting a *sistrum*, made on plaster (fig. 2a, b). Dimensions: height = 16.5 cm; width = 10 cm; thickness = 2.8 cm. Part of a decoration of an interior *tympanum* of a timber phase of the temple of Isis. Found during the archaeological investigations of the early 2000s in a pit located next to the *aedes*, where the older wall decorations were thrown. Savaria Museum, inv. no. PR.6998. Dating: early 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD.

Bibliography: Sosztarits 2008, 206 no. 149; Sosztarits 2010, 147 pl. 33C; Harsányi and Kurovsky 2013a, 4–5 fig. 11; Harsányi and Kurovsky 2013b, 83 cat. no. 7.8; Harsányi and Kurovsky 2014, 108 fig. 11.

**6.** Fragment of a mural painting depicting a priestess of Isis holding a *sistrum* in her right hand (fig. 3a, b). Dimensions: height = approx. 60 cm. It is depicted on a plaster wall decoration of a timber phase of the temple of Isis. Found during the archaeological investigations of the early 2000s in a pit located next to the *aedes*, where the older wall decorations were thrown. Savaria Museum. Dating: early 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD.

Bibliography: Sosztarits 2010, 147 pl. 33A; Harsányi and Kurovsky 2013a, 2 fig. 1; Harsányi and Kurovsky 2013b, 81 cat. no. 7.5; Harsányi and Kurovsky 2014, 103–105 figs. 1, 2; Harsányi and Kurovsky 2017, 523–524 fig. 1.

### **Scarbantia (Sopron, Hungary) – Pannonia Superior**

**7.** Altar dedicated to Isis *Augusta* by Tiberius Iulius Ambi[---] and Iulia (fig. 4). Dimensions: height = 54.5 cm; width = 32.5 cm; thickness = 26.5 cm. Height of the letters = 3.4–4 cm. Found in 2002 in the area in front of the *aedes* of the Iseum of *Scarbantia*. On the right side there is a depiction of a *sistrum*. Liszt Ferenc Museum, Sopron. Dating: late 1<sup>st</sup>–early 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD.

Text: [I]șidi Aug(ustae) / [Ti(berius)] Iu[li]u[s] / [A]mbi[- -] / [Iul]ia [- -].

Bibliography: Gabrieli 2003, 69–70; Gabrieli 2006, 69; *RICIS* 613/0604; Gabrieli 2010, 49 pl. 10; Mráv and Gabrieli 2011, 216–220 no. 2 figs. 11, 12; *AÉ* 2011, 969; *RICIS suppl. III* 613/0604; Deac, forthcoming, App. PS 015.

### **Carnuntum (Bad Deutsch-Altenburg, Austria) – Pannonia Superior**

**8.** Red carnelian gem rendering Isis, holding the *sistrum* and *cornucopia*. Dimensions: height = 10.3 (8.7) cm; width = 0.87 (0.61) cm; thickness = 0.36 cm. Isis-Fortuna wearing a *kalathos* is portrayed standing, to the right, holding the *sistrum* in her left hand and the *cornucopia* in the right one. The rudder is depicted in the lower part of the register. Stray find. Archaeological Museum Carnuntinum Bad-Deutsch Altenburg, Austria, inv. 17898. Dating: 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD according to G. Dembski.

Bibliography: Dembski 2005, 84 no. 322 pl. 32/322; Humer and Kremer 2011, 286 no. 382 and 284 no. 382.

### **Micia (Veșel, Romania) – Dacia Superior**

**9.** Dark-red carnelian gem rendering Isis (fig. 5). Dimensions: height = 0.16 cm; width = 1.18 cm; thickness = 0.2 cm. The goddess Isis is facing right, wearing a *basileion*. She is holding the *sistrum* in the left hand, and in her lowered right hand, beside her leg, a *situla* for carrying Nile water. Found in a pit located in the military *vicus*, adjacent to the auxiliary fort. National History Museum of Romania, Bucharest, inv. 358807. Dating: first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD.

Bibliography: Simion and Deac, forthcoming.

**Micăsa (Romania) – Dacia Superior**

10. Ceramic mold depicting Isis (fig. 6). Dimensions: diameter = 8.4 cm. Height of the letters = 1–1.5 cm. The goddess is facing frontally, wearing a *basileion* and a lunar crescent behind her. In her left hand she is holding the *sistrum*. Next to the goddess, girdles are visible. Found in 1993 during archaeological excavations carried out by I. Mitrofan. National Museum of Transylvanian History, Cluj-Napoca, inv. 47286. Dating: end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> – early 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD.

Text: *si(g)n(aculum) Myrini*.

Bibliography: Deac 2016, 60–61 (with previous bibliographic references), 63–64 pl. II.1; Deac 2020, 124; Piso 2021, 519–521 fig. 2a–b.

**Viminacium (Kostolac, Serbia) – Moesia Superior**

11. Votive marble relief depicting what the editors interpreted as Isis-Fortuna, holding in her left hand possibly a *sistrum* (fig. 7). Dimensions: height = 13.9 cm; width = 13.2 cm; thickness = 2.9 cm. Found in building 1, near the amphitheatre. Documentation Center Viminacium, inv. C-6360. Dating: 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD.

Bibliography: Jovičić and Bogdanović 2022, 157–158 no. 53.

**Tomis (Constanța, Romania) – Moesia Inferior**

12. Limestone door decoration depicting in the upper registers Harpocrates and Isis; the latter is holding two *sistrum*-like instruments in both of her hands (fig. 8). Dimensions: height = 128 cm; width = 76 cm. Found in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in a tomb west of the city. Now in the collection of the V. Pârvan Institute of Archaeology, Bucharest (formerly National Museum of Antiquities), inv. L 500. Dating: Constantinian period.

Bibliography: Bordenache 1968 with previous bibliographic references; Bordenache 1969, 138–139 no. 310, pls. CXXXVIII–IX/310; Barnea 1972, 257–260 fig. 6; Vidman 1989, 1006; Clerc 1994, 130; Barnea 1997; Barnea 1998, 3–7, 10–12 fig. 5–7.

**Oescus (Gigen, Bulgaria) – Moesia Inferior**

13. *Sistrum* made of bronze (fig. 9). Dimensions: height = 19 cm. Stray find. Archaeological Institute and Museum in Sofia, inv. no. 6844. Dating: Roman era.

Bibliography: Tacheva-Hitova 1983, 5 no. 4 pl. II/4, with previous Bulgarian references; Bricault 2001, 31; Bricault 2007, 255.

14. Red carnelian gem rendering Isis (fig. 10). Dimensions: height = 0.13 cm; width = 0.9 cm; thickness = 0.3 cm. Isis faces right, holding in her left hand the *sistrum* which was obliterated by chipping and a *situla* in her right hand. Stray find. Archaeological National Museum of Sofia, Bulgaria, inv. 4955. Dating: 1<sup>st</sup> c. AD.

Bibliography: Dimitrova-Milcheva 1980, 54 no. 97.

**Neine (Gorna Gradeshnitsa, Bulgaria) – Macedonia**

15. Anepigraphic marble plate (fig. 11). Dimensions: height = 40 cm; width = 78 cm; thickness = 15 cm. The register with the depictions is 65 cm wide and 30 cm high. Now in the school in Kresna. On its main register two feet imprints were carved and two *sistra* at the sides. Dating: 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD.

Bibliography: Gerassimova-Tomova 1980, 96 fig. 5; Tacheva-Hitova 1983, 20–22 no. 35 pl. IX/35; Dunbabin 1990, 86 fig. 3; Bricault 2007, 254–255, n. 49; *RICIS* 114/1902; Popova 2016, 215; Gasparini 2021, 318 cat. no. 12.

**Levunovo (Bulgaria) – Macedonia**

16. Marble plate with the depiction of human footprints, a *sistrum* and two *basileia*. Stray find. Dimensions: height = 30.5 cm; width = 34.5 cm; thickness = 9.5 cm. Regional Historical Museum in Blagoevgrad, inv. 1.2/225. Dating: Roman period.

Bibliography: Sharankov 2020, 88, n. 35; Sharankov 2021, 10–11 fig. 10.

**Stobi (Gradsko, North Macedonia) – Macedonia**

17. Bronze pendant. Dimensions, context and whereabouts not given. Dating: Roman period.

Bibliography: Maikidou-Poutrino 2021, I 98, n. 520.

**Kavadarci (North Macedonia, south of Stobi) – Macedonia**

18. Marble funerary stela depicting two busts, among them being one of presumably a priestess of Isis holding a *sistrum* in her right hand. Other information lack is lacking.

Bibliography: Düll 1977, 414–415; Maikidou-Poutrino 2021, I 127, 204–205; II 80, S81.

**Phillippi (Phillipoi, Greece) – Macedonia**

19. Rock cut figures of Isis or her priestesses accompanied by different Isiac symbols such as the *sistrum*. Dimensions of the objects not specified. Unknown dating.

Bibliography: Maikidou-Poutrino 2021, I 203; II 2–3, S. 5–7 (with references), II 160, figs. 5, 6.

**Beroea (Veria, Greece) – Macedonia**

20. Marble altar. Dimensions: height = 87.2 cm; width = 61.4–64.2 cm. Height of the letters = 1.5–4.8 cm. Under the text there is a *sistrum* depiction, 16.5 cm tall. Archaeological Museum of Veria, inv. Λ 313. Dating: 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD.

Text: Εἴσιδι Λοχία / καὶ τῇ πόλει τὸν / βωμὸν ἀνέθηκαν / Λ. Βρούτιος Ἀγαθο-<sup>ς</sup> φόρος  
καὶ ἡ γυνὴ / αὐτοῦ Ἐλευθέριον / ὑπερ τῆς θυγατρὸς / Μειλησίας εὐξάμε-<sup>νοι</sup> ἐπὶ ἱερέως διὰ  
10 βίου Λ. Βρουτίου / Ποπλικιανοῦ.

Bibliography: Tzanavari 1993, 1671–1672; *RICIS* 113/0301; Maikidou-Poutrino 2021, I 121, 123, 203, 220, 253; II 74, I. 84, 215, fig. 153.

### **Thessalonica (Thessaloniki, Greece) – Macedonia**

**21.** Marble sarcophagus of Annia Tryphaina. Dimensions: height = 119 cm; width = 237.5 cm; thickness = 115 cm. Height of the letters = 3 cm. On its main side, it depicts a *sistrum* and a *caduceus* next to a woman performing rituals. It was found in 1878 in a house, in the west wall of the city. Now in the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, inv. 1722. Dating: Hadrianic.

Text: Ἀννία Τρύφαινα ν Ἀννίου Βάσσου θυγάτηρ ν τὴν ληνὸν καὶ τοὺς ὑποκειμένους γράδους ἑαυτῆ καὶ τοῖς // ἰδίσις νννν ἔτους νν ζξρ´ σεβαστοῦ ν τοῦ καὶ νν βπσ.

Bibliography (selective): *CSIR Greece* III 1, 66; *IG X*, 2/1, 573; *RICIS* 113/0559; Stefanidou-Tiveriou 2016 with references; Maikidou-Poutrino 2021, I 203, II 20–21, S. 38; Ubi Erat Lupa 27957.

**22.** Marble stela dedicated to Osiris *mystes*. Dimensions: height = 1.21 cm; width = 52–54 cm; thickness = 20 cm. Height of the letters = 0.7–1 cm. It depicts a series of devotees of Isis, among them a veiled woman portrayed holding a *sistrum* in her right hand. Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki, inv. MΘ 997. Dating: second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC.

Text: Ὅσειριδι μύστει (*vacat*) Ἀλέξανδρον Δημητρίου καὶ Νίκαιαν / Χαριξένου Δημήτριος τοὺς αὐτοῦ γονεῖς.

Bibliography (selective): *IG II* 1, 107; *RICIS* 113/0505; Bricault 2013, 429–431 no. 142/a; Mazurek 2022, 41 fig. 8; Cross reference Christodoulou.

### **Iader (Zadar, Croatia) – Dalmatia**

**23.** Votive altar made of limestone. Dimensions: height = 94 cm; width = 59 cm; thickness = 46 cm. Height of the letters = not given. On the left part of the main side there is a depiction of Sarapis and Isis agitating the *sistrum* with her right hand. Museo lapidario Maffeiiano, inv. 28377. Dating: late 1<sup>st</sup> c. AD.

Text: *Isidi, Serapi, Liber[o] / Liberae voto / suscepto pro salute / Scapulae filii sui / <sup>5</sup>P. Quinctius Paris / s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito).*

Bibliography (selective): *CIL* III, 2903; Drexler 1890, 38–39; *ILS* 4379; Perc 1968, 225 no. 72; *SIRIS* 676; Katter-Sibbes 1973, 180 no. 908; Budischovksy 1977, 178–179 no. IV,1 pl. XC/a–c; Selem 1999, 31; Bricault 2001, 128; *RICIS* 615/0201; Bugarski-Mesdjian 2007, 304–305; Zović and Kurilić 2015, 428 no. 61; Vilogorac Brčić 2019, 349–351; Ubi Erat Lupa 23456.

### **Diluntum (Stolac, Bosnia-Herzegovina) – Dalmatia**

**24.** Rectangular marble *cippus*. Dimensions: height = 111 cm; width = 143 cm; thickness = 80 cm. Height of the letters = 4.3–7.4 cm. On the top right corner, above the in-

scription, there is a depiction of a *sistrum*. Found in 1939 in the Bregava river. National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Dating: late 1<sup>st</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD.

Text: *T(ito) Flavio Blodi f(ilio) / Plasso patri / pientissimo an(norum) L / et Flaviae Tattae matri / <sup>5</sup> an(norum) XXXX bene meritae / et T(ito) Flavio Epicado fratri / an(norum) XII et T(ito) Flavio Laedioni / [---] aed(ili) Illvir(o) i(ure) d(icundo) Naronae / [---] Laedio f(ilius) vivos (sic) sibi et s(uis) f(ecit).*

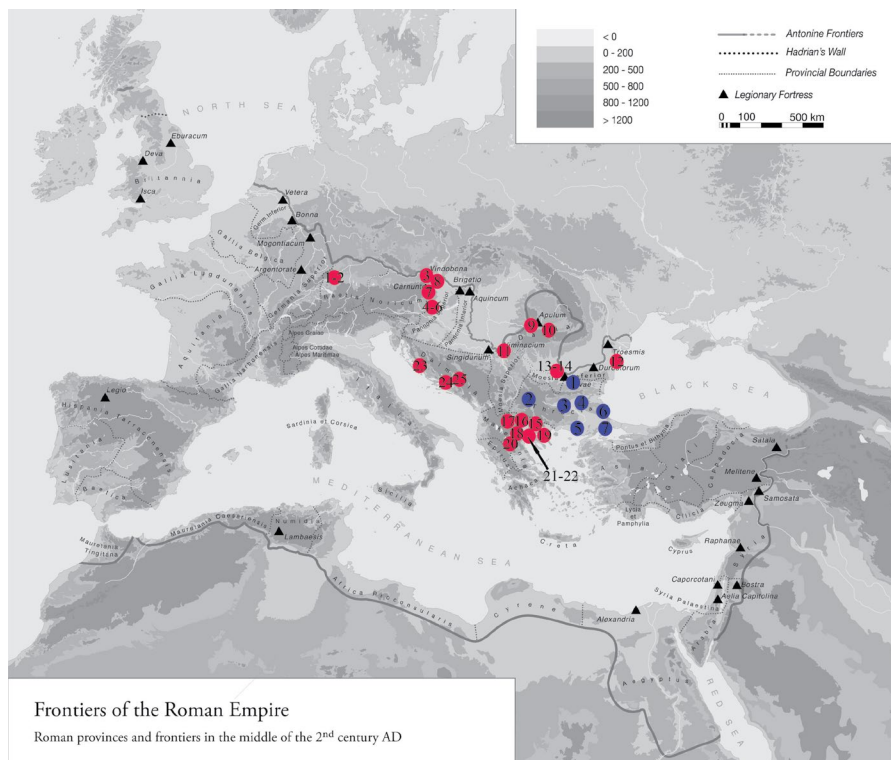
Bibliography (selective): *ILJug* I, 117; Budischovsky 1977, 188–189 no. D XV, pl. XCIV/b; *RICIS* 615/0601; Bugarski-Mesdjian 2007, 318; Paškvalin 2012, 259–260 no. 12 fig. 12a–c; Tomorad 2018, 73, 82; Vilogorac Brčić 2019, 347–348; *RICIS suppl. IV*, 615/0601.

### **Narona (Vid-Croatia) – Dalmatia**

**25.** Funerary stela depicting two *sistra*. Unknown material or dimensions. Now lost. The conditions of discovery, as well as its whereabouts, are unknown. Dating: Roman period.

Text: *D(is) m(anibus) s(acrum) / L. Magn(o) / Victor(is) / L. Cluenti(o) / <sup>5</sup> Corneli(o) / [c]onserv(o) (?)*.

Bibliography: *CIL* III, 1864; Drexler 1890, 49; Perc 1968, no. 96; *SIRIS* 678; Budischovsky 1977, 187 D XIV,1; *RICIS* 615/0501; Bugarski-Mesdjian 2007, 318; Tomorad 2018, 73.



**Map 1. Danube Limes – UNESCO World Heritage / Pen&Sword / CHC – University of Salzburg, authors: David Breeze and Kurt Schaller, modified by the authors with the location of the finds from the catalogue marked with red and the towns which struck provincial coinages depicting Isis holding the sistrum marked with blue: 1) Nicopolis ad Istrum; 2) Serdica; 3) Philippopolis; 4) Hadrianopolis; 5) Traianopolis; 6) Byzia; 7) Perinthus.**



**Fig. 1. The relief of Isis riding Sothis (© Ubi Erat Lupa 8007)**

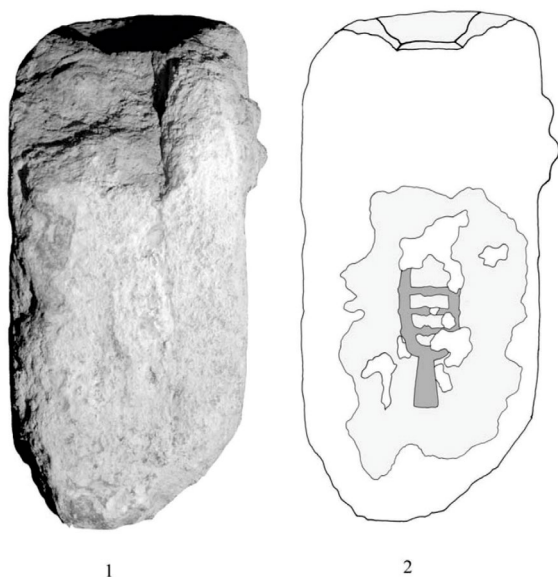


**Fig. 2. a) Sistrum detail (apud Sosztarits 2008, 206 no. 149); b) reconstruction (apud Harsányi, Kurovsky 2013, 5 fig. 11)**



**Fig. 3. Left: Fragment of a mural painting depicting the sistrum discovered at Savaria (after Sosztarits 2006, pl. 33c). Right: Reconstruction of the wall painting depicting a priestess holding a sistrum (apud Harsányi, Kurovsky 2017, 524 fig. 1)**





**Fig. 4. The right side of the altar dedicated to Isis Augusta depicting a sistrum. 1) photo; 2) drawing (apud Mráv and Gabrieli 2011, 218 fig. 12)**



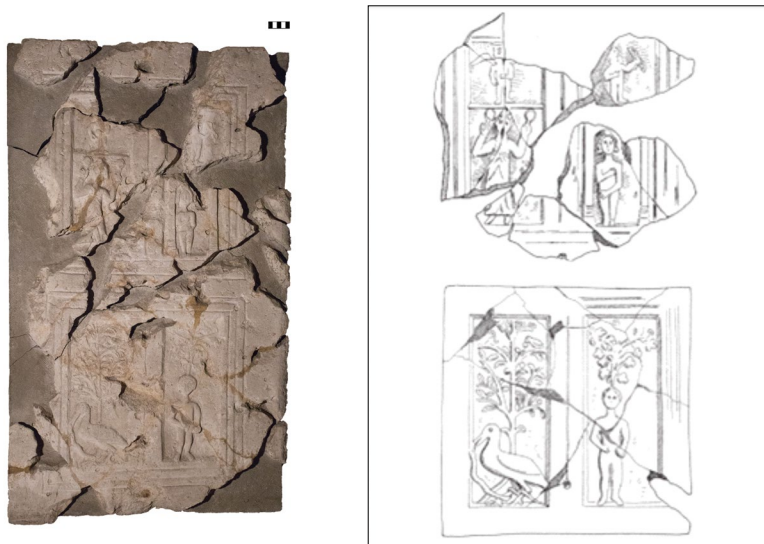
**Fig. 5. The gem depicting Isis discovered at Micia (photo Marius Amarie, National History Museum of Romania, Bucharest)**



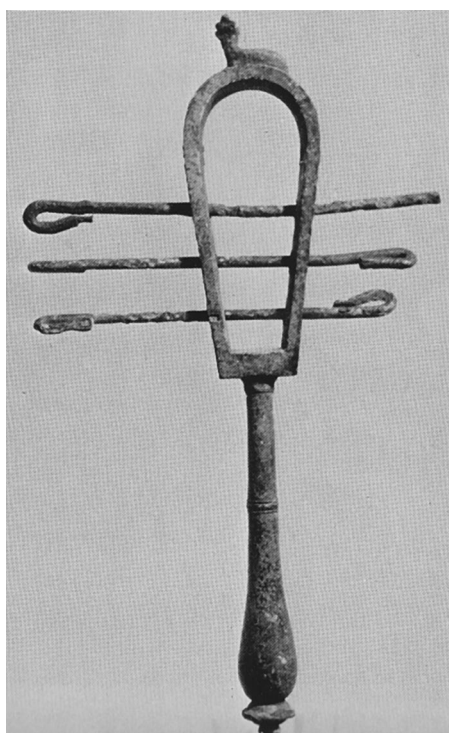
**Fig. 6. Medallion depicting the frontal bust of Isis, with the inscription on the back (S. Odenie, National Museum of Transylvanian History, Cluj-Napoca, Romania)**



**Fig. 7. Votive relief depicting the sistrum (?) (after Jovičić and Bogdanović 2022, 157–158 no. 53)**



**Fig. 8.** Photo of the door decoration (Cătălin I. Nicolae, “Vasile Pârvan” Institute of Archaeology, Bucharest, Romania; drawing after Barnea 1998, 10 fig. 5)



**Fig. 9.** Sistrum discovered at Oescus (after Tacheva-Hitova 1983, pl. II/4)



**Fig. 10.** Gem depicting Isis from Oescus (photo Vessela Atanasova, PhD, Institute of Balkan Studies and Center of Thracology, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia)



**Fig. 11. Marble plate from Neine depicting two sistra (after Tacheva-Hitova 1983, pl. IX/35)**



**Fig. 12. Detail of the Annia Tryphaina sarcophagus (© Ubi Erat Lupa 27957)**



**Fig. 13. Photos of all sides of the altar dedicated to Isis, Sarapis, Liber Pater and Libera from Iader (© RICIS online)**



**Fig. 14. Funerary cippus depicting a sistrum (© RICIS online)**

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# CULT OF MITHRAS, SLAVES, *PORTORIUM* AND *SALINAE* IN DACIA

Françoise Van Haeperen

## Abstract

*This article proposes a new interpretation of the inscriptions of the mithraeum discovered in Apulum in the 2010s. Their dedicator, Vitalis, would not have been a slave of the portorium but an arcarius of the conductor salinarum, P. Aelius Marius, for whose salvation he erected an altar. We also return to the hypothesis defended by the editors of these inscriptions, who considered the latter to be a "major node" in a supra-local network of Mithraic worshippers. If there was a Mithraic network, it was more likely to revolve around the servile agents of the salt-mines tenants, who should be recognised as having their own agency.\**

**Keywords:** *Mithras – portorium – saltworks – Dacia – Apulum.*

The role of the agents of the *portorium Illyricum* in the spread of the Mithraic cult has been repeatedly emphasised by scholars.<sup>1</sup> These officials, mostly slaves, were responsible for collecting taxes on the movement of goods within this vast customs district.<sup>2</sup> The system of the *portorium Illyricum*, established as early as the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, was first entrusted to publicans' societies and, then, from Trajan onwards, to individual leaseholders chosen by the state, who bore the title of *conductores*. At the end of the reign of Marcus Aurelius or at the beginning of that of Commodus, these taxes

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1 See n. below.

2 The *publicum portorium Illyrici* includes the tenth region of Italy and the following provinces: Rhetia, Noricum, Dalmatia, the two Pannonias, the two Moesias, Dacia and Thrace.

were now collected directly by the state. With this transition to direct administration, *procuratores* of equestrian rank became responsible for it.<sup>3</sup> The subordinate staff of the *Illyricum* customs district were mostly slaves, working as *uilicus* (intendant) or *contrascriptor* (comptroller) for example.<sup>4</sup> This was a qualified staff, attached to the various customs posts of the district, the *stationes*, or to its central headquarters which, from Trajan onwards, was located in Poetovio (now Ptuj, in Slovenia).

One of the earliest testimonies of the cult of Mithras in the Roman world, dating from around 100, comes from a slave of the *portorium*, Melichrysus, based at *Nouae*, in Lower Moesia.<sup>5</sup> However, this inscription by a customs slave is isolated and it is not until the middle of the second century that Mithras is found in the context of the *portorium*, at Poetovio, as well as in four *stationes* in Dalmatia and Noricum, where he was worshipped by slaves.<sup>6</sup> The role played by the slaves of the administrative headquarters of the customs district in the spread of the cult in the Danubian provinces from the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century has been emphasised since Franz Cumont.<sup>7</sup> And they certainly contributed to it, as can be seen in particular from the dedications placed in Poetovio by the servile agents of several *stationes* of the customs district, who, as part of their mission, went to the administrative centre of the *portorium* and were able to discover the cult there.<sup>8</sup> This is also shown by the vows that some of them fulfilled before being transferred to a new *statio*, together with a form of promotion. They thanked Mithras in the place where the vow was made and continued to honour him in the *statio* they then joined.<sup>9</sup> If the servile agents of the *portorium* played a role in the transmission of this cult, it should not be overestimated, as I have recently shown.<sup>10</sup> On the one hand, these agents worshipped a number of other deities than Mithras within their *stationes* or in their vicinity, whether these gods were Roman, foreign or local. On the other hand, it should be noted that, as far as we know today, Mithras is absent from a number of *stationes* which nevertheless delivered religious dedications. Finally, it should be added that the agents of the other customs districts of the Empire do not seem to have worshipped this god,<sup>11</sup> with one exception.<sup>12</sup> These different

3 Piso 2013, 293–298.

4 France, Nelis-Clément 2014, 224–226; France 2017, 200–201, 207–208.

5 Belayche 2022, 646; Bricaut and Roy 2021, 377.

6 In Dalmatia, at Senia (AE 1940, 101; *CIMRM* 1847: *S(oli) I(nuicto) M(ithrae) / Faustus / T(iti) Iul(i) Saturni/ni praef(ecti) uehi/culor(um) et cond/uct(or)is p(ublici) p(ortorii) ser(uus) uil(icus) pro se et suis / u(otum) s(oluit) I(ibens) m(erito)*) and at Vratnik (near Senia; *CIL* III, 13283; *CIMRM* 1846: *I(nuicto) M(ithrae) / spelaeum cum / omne impen/sa Hermes C(ai) / Antoni Rufi / praef(ecti) ueh(icolorum) et / cond(uctoris) p(ublici) p(ortorii) / ser(uus) uilic(us) Fortu/nat(ianus) fecit*); in Noricum, at Camporosso in Valcanale (AE 2001, 1576: *D(eo) I(nuicto) M(ithrae) / Telesphorus / C(ai) Antoni Rufi / seru(us) publici p(ortorii) uilicus / u(otum) s(oluit) I(ibens) m(erito)*); AE 2015, 1049: *I(nuicto) d(eo?) / Amandu[s] / C(ai) A(nton)i R(ufi?) p(ublici) p(ortorii) / ((contra)scriptor / u(otum) s(oluit))* and in *Ad Enum* (AE 2008, 1020: *[Inu]ic[ito] / Mi[t]hr[ae] / [F]ructus Q(uinti) / [Sa]bini Verani / [con]d(uctoris) p(ublici) [p(ortorii) ser(uus) uil(icus?) --]A[--] / [--]DI[--] / [--] a]ramq(ue) m[--]*).

7 Cumont 1902, 61; Will 1970; Beskow 1980; Claus 1992, *passim*; Tóth 1995; Claus 2000, 21–23, 37–38; Gordon 2012, 974; Szabó 2015, 412–413.

8 *CIL* III, 15184, 4, 7, 8; Claus 1992, 165–166; Van Haepere 2020, 176–177.

9 *CIL* III, 5121; AE 1903, 287; Van Haepere 2020, 171–173.

10 Van Haepere 2020.

11 See already Beskow 1980, 1.

12 AE 1989, 34 (Augusta Praetoria-Aosta).



observations mean that the *portorium* agents cannot be presented, without nuance, as vectors of the spread of the cult in the Empire.

The recent excavation of a *mithraeum* at Apulum in Dacia (now Alba Iulia, Romania) would bring new elements to the case of the transmission of the cult of Mithras by customs officers, according to the editors of the inscriptions found there, M. Egri, M. McCarty, A. Rustoiu and C. Inel.<sup>13</sup> An *arcarius*, or treasurer, called Vitalis, offers three monuments.<sup>14</sup> On the one hand, he dedicated an altar to the unconquered sun god Mithras, fulfilling a vow for the salvation of P. Aelius Marius, the colony's flamen.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, in fulfilment of a vow, he donated two statues, the bases of which are preserved in a similar workmanship,<sup>16</sup> one to the *Transitus dei*, the other to Cautopates. The abbreviation G.S., to which we shall return, follows the name of Vitalis on the first, and the mention of *[ar]k(arius)* on the second.<sup>17</sup>

According to the archaeological data, the *mithraeum* in which these inscriptions were found is later than the years 150–170, since its foundations rest on a rubbish pit that predates its construction and was filled in during that period.<sup>18</sup> The inscriptions, which could be contemporary with the founding of the *mithraeum*, can be dated to between the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and the first decades of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.

The mention of the flamine of P. Aelius Marius could provide an additional dating clue. The latter is known from four other inscriptions from Dacia, dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> or early decades of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.<sup>19</sup> Three of them identify him as an adjudicator of the state saltworks, the administrative centre of which was probably Apulum.<sup>20</sup> If the priesthood of P. Aelius Marius refers to the colony of Apulum, the altar was erected

13 McCarty, Egri et al. 2017; Egri, McCarty et al. 2018.

14 A dedication to *Fortuna publica* was placed in Apulum by a Vitalis (*CIL* III, 1010 = *IDR* III, 5, 1, 76); perhaps this is the same person (Egri and McCarty 2018, 271). Egri, McCarty et al. exclude on chronological grounds that the Vitalis of Apulum could correspond to the Vitalis, slave of Q. Sabinus Veranus, attested in the *mithraeum* I of Poetovio (*CIL* III, 14354, 26; note in passing that this is not Optimus Vitalis but Vitalis, *uilius* of which Optimus is the *uicarius*). It will be seen below that the chronology proposed here nevertheless allows such a hypothesis. If this is accepted, we would have to assume that the Vitalis of Poetovio was sold by his *conductor* to the farmer of the saltworks P. Aelius Marius - which remains unproven.

15 AE 2018, 1338 (120 × 52.8 × 38.8 cm): *Soli / Inuicto / Mit<hr>RH>ae / pro salut(e) / P(ubli) Ael(i) Ma[ri] flam(inis) col(oniae) / Vitalis ar<c>K>(arius) / u(otum) I(ibens) s(oluit)*. The form Marius should be preferred to Marus. Normally a gentilice, it does indeed also appear as a *cognomen*. Piso 2004–2005, 179–182; Dana and Zăgreanu 2013, 30.

16 AE 2018, 1339 (60.2 × 32.3 × 25.6 cm): *Transi/t<u>O>(i) dei / sacr[u]m / Vitalis / G( ) S( ) u(otum) s(oluit)*. AE 2018, 1340 (62.2 × 32.3 × 25.8 cm): *Cauto/pati sacrum / Vitalis / [ar]<c>K>(arius) G( ) S( ) / [u(otum)] s(oluit)*.

17 A fourth, very fragmentary base, similar to the one dedicated to Cautopates, may have been offered to Cautes (Egri and McCarty et al. 2018, 273).

18 McCarty and Egri et al. 2019, 287.

19 *CIL* III, 1363 (*IDR* III, 119; Micia): *Silvano Do/mestico / P(ublius) Ael(ius) Euph[o]/rus pro / salute P(ubli) Ael(i) / Mari con/ductoris / pascui et sa/linar(um) I(ibens) u(otum) u(ouit)*; AE 1967, 388 (*ILD* 804; Sicoe 15; Domnesti): text *infra*; AE 1983, 799b (*CIL* III, 1549; *IDR* III, 1, 145; Sicoe 203; Tibiscum): text *infra*; AE 2013, 1281 (Dana and Zăgreanu 2013, 28–32; Porolissum): *[AR[---] / [---] P(ubli) Ael(i) Ma[ri] con/ductoris(?)] / salinaru[m] ---] / [---]tati FE[---] / [---]um e[ ]*. Dating: 2<sup>nd</sup> century on the basis of onomastics and palaeography.

20 On the Dacian saltmines, see Mihailescu-Bîrliba 2016.

after 180, when the Aurelian *municipium* was raised to the rank of colony. The editors of the inscription favour this hypothesis, but they point out that this flamine could correspond to that of the only colony that previously existed in Dacia, namely Sarmizegetusa.<sup>21</sup> Depending on which hypothesis is preferred, the lack of precision regarding the place where this priesthood was exercised can therefore be understood in two different ways: this absence can be explained either by the fact that at the time of the inscription there was only one colony in the province, or, on the contrary, by the fact it came from the colony of Apulum itself. However, the complex character of the Apulum conurbation must be noted. The city developed from the *castrum* of the *XIII Gemina* legion. Its southern sector became a *municipium* under Marcus Aurelius (*municipium Aurelium Apulense*) and was then raised to the rank of colony under Commodus (*colonia Aurelia Apulensis*). As for the area of the *canabae* of the camp, located to the north of the city, it was partially promoted under the Severans, becoming the *municipium Septimium Apulense*.<sup>22</sup> It was in this area that the *mithraeum* was found and not in that of the colony. Given the geographical proximity, it is understandable that, if the flamine of P. Aelius Marius was related to that of the *colonia Aurelia Apulensis*, it was not necessary to specify it. The name of the colony where the priesthood was exercised does not appear either in another inscription erected in honour of the same person, this time at Domnesti, almost 200 km south-east of Apulum, outside its territory. It is therefore more likely to accept, following C. Petolescu and the *Année épigraphique*, that these inscriptions date from a time before the reign of Commodus, when Sarmizegetusa was the only colony in the province.<sup>23</sup>

In any case, the *mithraeum* of Apulum is one of the oldest known in the Danubian provinces and the first to be discovered by archaeology in Apulum, where the cult of Mithras is amply attested by other epigraphic and iconographic documents, found out of context or whose place of discovery is not precisely known.<sup>24</sup> The *arcarius* Vitalis played an important role in the decoration of the chapel, offering an altar – perhaps the main altar, given its size – and statues of which only the bases survived. Did he also initiate the construction? Although the available documentation does not allow us to answer this question, it should be noted that the land on which the *mithraeum* was built could not have belonged to him, as he was a slave. Perhaps the owner was P. Aelius Marius, for whose salvation Vitalis offered the altar, unless the *flamen* rented it or the city granted it to him.<sup>25</sup> As for the construction, it could have been financed by the *flamen*,<sup>26</sup> which would explain the altar that Vitalis erected for his salvation, but nothing excludes that it was not financed by the *arcarius*. Other slaves did indeed build or, at the very least, decorate or restore *mithraea*, including

21 McCarty and Egri et al. 2017, 377–378; Egri and McCarty et al. 2018, 270.

22 See the introduction by I. Piso in *IDR* 3, 5, xx–xxi.

23 Petolescu 2019, no. 2012; *AE* 2018, 1338.

24 See Szabó 2013; Szabó 2015 (he estimates the number of *mithraea* in Apulum to be at least 5–6).

25 For such city authorisations, see the examples given by Latteur 2011, 747 (*AE* 1996, 601; *CIL* V, 5796 and *CIL* X, 4110 [text *infra*]); Bricault and Roy 2021, 180–189.

26 A *flamen* of the *municipium* of Apulum *Septimium* offered a temple of Mithras at his own expense. See below.

several agents of the *portorium*, who benefited from the resources due to their occupation.<sup>27</sup>

The editors of the three inscriptions propose from the outset to identify Vitalis as a slave treasurer of the *publicum portorium Illyrici*.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, they argue, an office (*statio*) of the *portorium* is attested by epigraphy at Apulum;<sup>29</sup> the slave-treasurers of the *portorium* had sufficient personal resources to dedicate monuments; the administration of the *portorium* was a fertile ground for the spread of the cult of Mithras, which may explain why Vitalis came to honour this god. His offering of a representation of the *transitus dei* – the episode of the myth that corresponds to the transport of the bull on Mithras' shoulders, after its capture and before its sacrifice – fits perfectly in this context, the authors continue, since most of them come from *mithraea* linked to the *portorium*.<sup>30</sup> Recognising Vitalis as a treasurer of the *portorium*, the authors therefore question the nature of the links between him and P. Aelius Marius.<sup>31</sup> These links cannot be familial, in the ancient sense of the term (thus including master-slave relationships). Nor could they have been professional, they argue, since the inscription does not mention the office of leaseholder held by Aelius Marius; even if Vitalis, in the service of the *portorium*, could have been led to deal with him and to seek his favours, according to them, we should not look for links between the leasing of the saltworks and the administration of the *portorium*, as some have done: these institutions functioned independently of each other.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, they consider, P. Aelius Marius and Vitalis “could have been connected via participation in the same religious community”.<sup>33</sup> From the other dedications in which he is mentioned, they conclude that Aelius Marius seems to have been an important figure in the formation of Mithraic communities in the province, even beyond the immediate sphere of his slaves and clients. Thus,

- 27 CIL III, 13283 (Senia-Dalmatia; text above); CIL III, 8163 (Guberevac-Moesia sup.): *Inuicto deo / Ision Caes(aris) n(ostri) ser(uus) / uil(icus) uectigal(is) Il/lyr(ici) templ(um) omn(i) / re instruct(um) a / solo p(e-cunia) s(ua) f(aciendum) c(urauit)*; AE 1933, 160 (Lamud[---]Lopate in Moesia sup.): *[Deo] Inu(i)c[to] pro / sal(ute) Aug[ug(ustorum)] / n[on]ostrorum]] templum / uetustate / dilapsum i<m=N>pendio suo restituit / Apollonides eor(undem) / ser(uus) sc(rutator) stat(ionis) Lamud() / Gentiano et Bass(o) co(n)s(ulibus)*; CIL V, 810 (Aquilaia-reg. X): *Pro salute / Tiberi Claudii / Macronis con(ductoris) / fer(rariarum) Nor(icarum) Velox ser(uus) / uil(icus) spel(a)eum cum / omni apparatu fecit*; CIL III, 4800 (Virunum-Noricum): *Pro salute Aug(usti) / in honorem d(omi) d(iuinae) Soli / Inuicto M<i=Y>thr(ae) Hilarus / Aug(usti) lib(ertus) tab(ularius) p(rocuratoris) r(egni) N(orici) et Epictetus / ar<c=K>(arius) Aug(usti) n(ostri) tem(plum) uetustate con-l(ap)s(um) / sumptu suo cum pictura refef(erunt) / Imp(eratore) d(omino) n(ostro) Gordiano Aug(usto) et Auiola c(o)n)s(ulibus) / sacerdot(e) Licin(io) Marcello pat(re) / d(edicatum) VIII K(alendas) Iulias Q(uinto) Vi[---]*; CIL IX, 4110 (Aequiculi-reg. IV): *sacellu[m] Solis Inuic[ti] / [Mithrae pro salut]e ordinis et pop[uli] / [Apronianus arca]rius rei p(ublicae) uetustate [collap]/sum / [perm(ittente) ordin(e) de sua pecunia resti-tuit]*.
- 28 Egri and McCarty et al. 2018, 269–270 (“Vitalis does not specify what funds he oversees, but it is most likely that he was a treasurer for the *Publicum Portorium Illyrici*”) and *passim*; McCarty, Egri et al. 2017, 379–381.
- 29 AE 1998, 1074: *[G]enio p(ublici) p(ortorii) / [e]t T(iti) Iul(i) Sa/[t]urnini / conduc(toris) / p(ublici) p(ortorii) Illyr(ici) / Maximianus / [se]r(uus) uilic(us) ex pri(uatis) / [pr]o sal(ute) sua [suorumq(ue)]*. The *statio* is not attested as such, but this inscription makes this hypothesis very likely (in this sense Szabó 2015, 412–413).
- 30 McCarty and Egri et al. 2017, 379.
- 31 McCarty and Egri et al. 2017, 381–384; Egri and McCarty et al. 2018, 274.
- 32 Piso 2004–2005; Szabó 2015a.
- 33 Egri and McCarty et al. 2018, 274.

“Marius seems to have played the role of a cross-site elder, a figure held in regard by Mithraists from Tibiscum to Apulum to Porolissum, including people who would, outside the cult, have had no direct relationship with him”.<sup>34</sup>

The hypothesis that Vitalis was an agent of the *portorium* may seem plausible, but it has its weaknesses. On the one hand, no agent of the *portorium* is recorded as a follower of Mithras in Dacia.<sup>35</sup> However, they left several traces of their worship there, including in Apulum. The *uilicus* slave Maximianus worshipped the Genius of the *portorium* and the Genius of his *conductor* Titus Iulius Saturninus, whose activity can be dated to the 150s, while another of his slaves worshipped Hercules Augustus in the sanctuary of *Ad Mediam* in December 157.<sup>36</sup> A third slave of this tax-farmer, the *contrascriptor* Bellinus, made a vow to Jupiter Optimus Maximus in Dierna – where there was a *statio*.<sup>37</sup> It was probably also a *uilicus* of Iulius Saturninus, Mercator, who made a vow to Partiscum.<sup>38</sup> By the time when the *portorium* was now under the direct control of a *procurator*, slaves – this time imperial – from the *portorium* placed inscriptions to various deities in Dacia:

- in Porolissum, between the last two or three decades of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup>, to Fortuna Augusta;<sup>39</sup> to Jupiter Optimus Maximus and the Genius of the *portorium*, for the salvation of the emperor;<sup>40</sup>
- in *Ad Mediam*, between 211 and 217, for the salvation of the emperor and his wife, to Hercules;<sup>41</sup>
- in Drobeta, between 198 and 209, for the salvation of the emperors;<sup>42</sup>
- in Micia in the last decades of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, to Jupiter Optimus Maximus, *Terra Dacia*, and to the Genius of the Roman people and trade.<sup>43</sup>

In other words, if the cult of Mithras is amply attested in Dacia, none of these testimonies, as far as we know, comes from an agent of the *portorium*.<sup>44</sup> Vitalis would thus be an exception - which is possible, but must be pointed out and kept in mind.

As for the dedications to the *transitus dei* – of a representation of Mithras carrying the bull on his shoulders – they are, according to the editors of the inscriptions,

34 McCarty and Egri et al. 2017, 385. The inclusion of Porolissum in the list is not justified, as P. Aelius Marius appears there on a fragmentary votive inscription whose mention of the deity has not survived (*AE* 2013, 1281 [text *supra*]; Dana and Zăgreanu 2013, 28–32).

35 Sicoe 2014, 41–46; Van Haeperen 2020, 180. According to the present state of our knowledge, Mithras seems not to have been worshipped by the customs officers in some provinces of the *portorium Illyrici*: Lower Pannonia, Upper Pannonia with the exception of Poetovio, Thrace and Dacia.

36 *CIL* III, 1568; *IDR* III, 1, 60; *AE* 2010, 1385.

37 *IDR* III, 1, 35; *AE* 1960, 343.

38 *IDR* III, 1, 281.

39 *ILD* 691; *AE* 1944, 47.

40 *ILD* 678; *AE* 1988, 978; *AE* 1993, 1326; *AE* 2005, 1289.

41 *CIL* III, 1565; *IDR* III, 1, 58.

42 *IDR* II, 15; *AE* 1959, 310.

43 *CIL* III, 1351 = 7853; *IDR* III, 3, 102.

44 On the cult of Mithras in Dacia, see Carbó García 2010; Sicoe 2014; Szabó 2015.

“unique to sites connected with the *portorium Illyricum*”.<sup>45</sup> This statement needs to be examined more closely. Certainly, such a statue of Mithras, accompanied by an inscription *transitu dei*, and an altar dedicated to the unconquered Mithras and *transitus dei* are offered in the first *mithraeum* of Poetovio, around the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.<sup>46</sup> But what about all the other dedications to the *transitus* that are said to come from *mithraea*, “with certain or likely customs sites as well: Savaria, Brigetio, Malvesia, Gorsium, and Carnuntum”?

The two dedications from Savaria (Upper Pannonia) associated with the *portorium* do not refer to Mithras but to Nemesis and Hercules Augustus.<sup>47</sup> As for the dedication to the *tr[ansitus dei]*, it comes from the *mithraeum* found in this locality in 2007.<sup>48</sup> However, according to current knowledge, there is nothing to link it to the *portorium*. The dedication from Brigetio-Komárom (Upper Pannonia) associated with the *portorium* is addressed to *Genius commercii et negotiantium*.<sup>49</sup> There is no evidence to link it to the altar dedicated to *Tra(n)sito* found at Brigetio-Mocsa-Tömörpuszta.<sup>50</sup> It should also be noted that the large number of inscriptions from Savaria and Brigetio makes it all the more likely that inscriptions relating to the *portorium* on the one hand, and the *transitus dei* on the other, can be found there.<sup>51</sup> However, this does not mean that a link can be established between the two, especially when the places of discovery do not coincide.

The authors themselves admit, in a note, that no evidence related to the *portorium* has been found at Malvasia, Gorsium or Carnuntum. Nevertheless, they suggest that the first two sites, located on crossing points, in the case of the former on the river Drina, and in the case of the latter on major roads, were probably the headquarters of a customs office.<sup>52</sup> As for Carnuntum, a major access point to Pannonia, “it seems unlikely that the *portorium* was not collected as goods passed into or out of the province here”. In these three cases, therefore, the link between the *portorium* and the *transitus dei* is based solely on the assumption that a customs office was located there. In the last two cases, the dedicators of the *transitus* are part of the Roman army, an *optio* at Gorsium, a *custos armorum* at Carnuntum, with no connection to the administration of the *portorium*.

It therefore seems hazardous to use the argument of a dedication to the *transitus dei* to support the hypothesis that Vitalis was a customs officer, since this link is only proven in the case of Poetovio.

Finally, it should be noted that the *pro salute* dedications of the servile agents of the *portorium* are either for the salvation of the emperor (and sometimes his family),<sup>53</sup> or for

45 McCarty and Egri et al. 2017, 379–380; the authors are more cautious in 2018 (p. 272).

46 *CIL* III, 14354, 28; 14354, 27.

47 *CIL* III, 4161; 4155.

48 *AE* 2011, 966.

49 *CIL* III, 4288.

50 *CIL* III, 10963; *CIMRM* 1737.

51 In *EDH* (consulted on 18/2/23), 354 entries for Brigetio itself; 147 for Savaria.

52 McCarty and Egri et al. 2017, 380 n. 46; *CIMRM* 1900 (Malvasia); 1811 (Gorsium); 1722 (Carnuntum).

53 *CIL* III, 1565 (= *IDR* III, 1, 58; Ad Mediam, Dacie); *ILD* 678 (= *AE* 1988, 978 = *AE* 1993, 1326 = *AE* 2005, 1289; Porolissum, Dacie); *IDR* II, 15 (= *AE* 1959, 310; Drobeta, Dacie); *ILJug* III, 1413 (= *AE* 1903, 286; Ulpiana, Moesia sup.); *AE* 1903, 287 (Kumanovo, Moesia sup.); *CIL* III, 3327 (= 10301; Intercisa, Pann. inf.); *CIL* III, 15184, 4 (Poetovio, Pann. sup.).

the salvation of the dedicator and possibly his family,<sup>54</sup> or for the salvation of other members of the *portorium* (slaves<sup>55</sup> or citizens<sup>56</sup> including a procurator<sup>57</sup>). As far as we know, therefore, no agent of the *portorium* made a dedication for the salvation of a citizen other than the emperor or a member of the *portorium*. Again, Vitalis would be an exception.

In the end, therefore, there is no solid argument to support the assumption that Vitalis was an *arcarius* in the service of the *portorium*.

Could Vitalis have been the slave of a Gaius or a woman (Gaia), as might be inferred from the G.S.<sup>58</sup> abbreviation? There are several mentions of *serui arcarii*, sometimes preceded by the name of the slave's master (possibly followed by his function), as in the case of Festinus, *T(iti) luli Saturnini c(onductoris) p(ortorii) p(ublici) ser(uus) arc(arius)* making two offerings to Isis at Sublazio (reg. X).<sup>59</sup> However, formulae of the type *arcarius Gai seruus* do not appear in the epigraphic sources.<sup>60</sup> It therefore seems unlikely that the abbreviation G.S. refers to a Gaius (or a Gaia) whose slave Vitalis would have been.

Could Vitalis have been the *arcarius* of a community for which the letters G.S. stand? In the Danubian provinces there are documented *arcarii* of the province,<sup>61</sup> of the fleet,<sup>62</sup> of the fisc,<sup>63</sup> of the 20<sup>th</sup> of the inheritances,<sup>64</sup> of the *conductores* of iron mines,<sup>65</sup> of the *portorium*<sup>66</sup> or of *statio*;<sup>67</sup> beyond these provinces, there are also *arcarii* of cities, military units, colleges or various services.<sup>68</sup> The “area” covered by their function may appear before or after the mention of it. If the G can be interpreted as a C, be it as a lapicide error or a consonant swap, as seen in other Dacian inscriptions,<sup>69</sup> one might suggest, as Egri and McCarty et al. do, *c(onductoris) s(eruus)*. However, with the editors, it must be acknowledged that this would be an unusual formulation: in the few

54 AE 1998, 1074 (Apulum, see text above); AE 2015, 1051 (Camporosso in Valcanale, Noricum); *CIL* III, 10876 (Poetovio, Pann. sup.); *CIL* III, 4161 (Savaria, Pann. sup.).

55 AE 1981, 724 (= 1982, 841; Turiceva, Moesia sup.); *CIL* III, 11674 (= 13522; Atrans, Noricum); *ILJug* II, 1139 (Poetovio, Pann. sup.); *CIL* III, 15184, 7 (Poetovio, Pann. sup.).

56 AE 1938, 91 (= AE 1984, 740; Ratiaria, Moesia sup.).

57 *CIL* III, 4024 (Poetovio, Pann. sup.).

58 See AE 2018, 1339.

59 *CIL* V, 5079–5080 (text infra).

60 According to a search in the EDCS (consulted on 18/2/23) on *serv\* + arcar\**, which produced 34 results.

61 *CIL* III, 4797–4798 (Virunum): *arcarius regni Norici*.

62 AE 2015, 1257

63 AE 1910, 99: *Aur(elius) Vale/rius arc(arius) f(isci) / D(almatiae)* (Municipium Malvesatium, Dalmatia)

64 See note above.

65 AE 2006, 1094 (Mursa, Pann. inf.).

66 *CIL* III, 4015 (Poetovio, Pann. sup.).

67 *CIL* III, 3953 (Siscia, Pann. sup.): *arcarius stationis Siscianae*, linked to the vectigal of the iron mines of the province.

68 *Arcarii* of provinces: *CIL* VI, 8574 (epitaph of an *arcarius* of the *provincia Belgica*), of cities: AE 1933, 113 (Alta Ripa, Germ. sup.), *CIL* IX, 4109–4112 (Aequiculi, reg. IV); of military units: e.g. *CIL* VIII, 3289 (*arcarius* of legion, at Lambaesis); college *arcarii*: e.g. *CIL* X, 486 (Paestum); *arcarii XX hereditatum*: e.g. *CIL* III, 1996 (Salona, Dalmatia); AE 1978, 217 (Brundisium): a *publicus arcarius thermarum*.

69 Egri and McCarty et al. 2018, 272.

known examples, the name of the *conductor* is given and, when mentioned, the term *seruus* precedes *arcarius*.<sup>70</sup> Unless these two letters are to be understood as *c(onductor) s(alinarum seruus)*? The term *conductor* can be abbreviated by a simple *C*,<sup>71</sup> especially in the formula *c(onductor) p(ublici) p(ortorii)*. *Salinae*, on the other hand, never seem to be abbreviated by the single letter *S*.

Other possibilities are: *c(oloniae or olonorum) s(eruus or Sarmizegetusa)*. However, the numerous mentions of the type *coloniae Sarmizegetusae* do not seem to be abbreviated to *C.S.* or to refer to a slave. On the other hand, although rare, the formula *coloniae seruus* exists, even in an abbreviated form (of which I have found only one attestation, in Italy).<sup>72</sup>

Nevertheless, the letters *G.S.* may have nothing to do with *Vitalis'* function as *arcarius* – and it should be remembered that they also appear in the inscription to the *transitus dei*, which does not mention the office of treasurer. Perhaps the abbreviation should then be resolved into *g(ratus) s(e)*, as Petolescu has suggested, but the expression is very rare.<sup>73</sup> The abbreviation *c(um) s(uis)*, which is relatively common and exists in some Danubian provinces, is probably the least unsatisfactory solution.<sup>74</sup>

Whatever the resolution of this abbreviation, *Vitalis* could be the *arcarius* of *P. Aelius Marius*, who, as a *conductor*, needed a slave to perform this kind of function, as McCarty and Egri et al. quickly point out in their 2017 article. However, they reject this possibility, as the inscription does not mention his activity as a leaseholder of the salt mines. The fact that the *arcarius Vitalis* fulfilled a vow for the salvation of *P. Aelius Marius* nevertheless shows that there was a link between the two individuals: the former had promised *Mithras* an altar if the latter kept his *salus*. The nature of this bond is not specified, but was it necessary if *Vitalis* was the slave of the latter? Thus, by way of comparison, it seems clear that the *uilicus Velox*, who made a cave (*spelaeum*) of *Mithras* in *Aquileia* for the *salus* of *Tiberius Claudius Macro*, farmer of the *Noricum*

70 CIL III, 4015 (Poetovio, Pann. sup.): *Isidi / Aug(ustae) / sacrum / Marti//alis / Firmini / Q(uinti) Sabini / Verani / t(ertiae) p(artis) // conduc(toris) / portori(i) / Illyrici / ar[c]ari(i) uic(arius) / uoto // suscepto / d(onum) d(edit) / sac(erdotibus) T(ito) Fl(aui) / Martiale / et Fl(aui) Marul//lino fil(io); CIL V, 5079 (Sublavo, reg. X): *Isidi Aug(ustae) / Festinus / T(iti) Iuli Satur/nini c(onductoris) p(ortorii) p(ublici) ser(uus) / ar<c=K>(arius) ex uoto; CIL V, 5080 (Sublavo, reg. X): *Isidi / Myrionymae / sacrum / Festinus T(iti) Iuli / Saturnini c(onductoris) p(ortorii) p(ublici) / ser(uus) ar<c=K>(arius) / posuit Fortunatus / eiusdem ser(uus) / (contra)s(criptor) / faciundum / curauit.***

71 See for example in Dacia: AE 1937, 141 = IDR III, 4, 248 (Sanpaul): *Soli Inu/icto pro / salute(m) / C(ai) Iuli Valen/tini c(onductoris) salinar(um) / Iulius Omucio / libertus actor / posuit; CIL III, 1568 (Ad Mediam): *Herculi Augusto sacrum / Felix T(iti) Iuli Saturnini c(onductoris) p(ublici) p(ortorii) / t(ertiae) p(artis) ex priu(atis) stationis / Tsiernenen(sis) IIII I(dus) Dec(embres) anno XI / Barbaro et Regulo co(n)s(ulibus) / ex uoto posuit; AE 1960, 343 = IDR III, 1, 35: *I(oui) [O(ptimo)] M(aximo) / Bellinus / T(iti) I(uli) S(aturnini) c(onductoris) p(ublici) p(ortorii) / ser(uus) l(contra)scr(iptor) / u(otum) s(oluit) l(ibens) m(erito).***

72 CIL XI, 2656 (Saturnia, reg. VII).

73 Petolescu 2018, 263.

74 I am grateful to Manon Boving (see \*) who suggested this hypothesis. See e.g. CIL III, 13722 = 14207, 41 (Vicinus Trullensium-Kunino, Moesia inf.): *Dianae Scop/titiae pro salu/te d(omini) n(ostris) Seu(eri) [Ale]x(andri) / Pii Aug(usti) Domi/tianus eiu[s] / uil(icus) u(otum) c(um) s(uis) l(ibens) / p(osuit); CIL VI, 41184 = 31716: ] / [co(n)]s(uli) pr(aetori) candid(ato) quaest(ori) / [ca]ndid(ato) trib(uno) mil(itum) leg(ionis) IIII / [Sc]yth(icae) item V Macedonic(ae) / [Pi]ae VIIuiro epulonum / [Sa]llio Palatino Xuiro / [st]litibus iudicandis / [se]uiro equitum / Romanorum / [He]sper (?) ser(uus) ar<c=K>(arius) c(um) s(uis); Supp. It. VI, Tridentum, 9: *Soli [Inu(icto)] / Q(uintus) Mu[---] / Iustus / c(um) s(uis) [d(onum) d(edit)?].**

iron mines, was the slave of the latter.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, the slave *actor* (agent) Spatalus, who made a vow to the unconquered god in Apulum for the salvation of C. Iulius Rufinus, must be considered the slave of the person for whom he made this offering,<sup>76</sup> regardless of his master's field of activity, which is not specified in the inscription.<sup>77</sup>

At the end of this investigation, therefore, I prefer to consider Vitalis as an *arcarius* slave of P. Aelius Marius. This hypothesis is more convincing than the others and should be preferred. It implies that, contrary to what McCarty and Egri et al. conclude, the ties that bind Vitalis to the individual for whose salvation he fulfils a vow to Mithras are primarily familial – in the Roman sense of the term – and professional.

A further issue needs to be addressed: was Aelius Marius a prominent member of the Mithraic community from which the Vitalis dedications originate? More broadly, was he “a senior ‘node’ linking the Mithraic communities of Dacia in a supra-site network”, as proposed by McCarty and Egri et al.?<sup>78</sup>

It should first be noted that Aelius Marius does not appear to have made any dedications to Mithras himself, either in Apulum or elsewhere. As our documentation is partial, this does not necessarily mean that he was not himself a worshipper of the god. For example, he may have provided the land and financed the construction of the *mithraeum* in Apulum, while Vitalis may have provided the furnishings for the chapel.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, the involvement of Aelius Marius in the cult of Mithras, whose function as *flamen* is recorded in an inscription, would not be surprising, since other members of the elite were active in this cult in Dacia (and in the Danubian provinces).<sup>80</sup> In Apulum itself, Statorius [---]anus, decurion and *flamen* of the *municipium* of *Apulum Septimium* built a temple to Mithras, at his own expense, in the last years of the 2<sup>nd</sup> or rather in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.<sup>81</sup> It should be

75 *CIL* V, 810; *Inscr. Aqu.* 1, 319 (text above).

76 *AE* 2001, 1708 = *IDR* III, 5, 720 = Sicoe 27: *Inui[cto] / deo pro / salute C. Iu[li]i[us] / Rufini I[bi]e[r]orumqu[e] / ei[us] Spatalu[s] / se[r]r[us] actor / [u]otum] s[oluit] I[bi]ens] I[aetus] m[erito]*. Szabó 2015, 409, 411–412; Carbó García 2010, 449, 1035.

77 I wonder to what extent this C. Iulius Rufinus could not be identified with another *conductor salinarum*, attested in Micia: *AE* 2005, 1296: *Jtili Ru[fi]ni cond[uctor]is] / [s]alinarum / Ursio ser[us] / act[or] uer[na]*. According to Piso 2004–2005, 179–180, the *nomen*, which is fragmentary, ends in *tili*, the reading of the *t* being uncertain. From the photograph, only the letters *LJ* are legible, while the drawing suggests two vertical bars for the first two. As in Apulum, it is a *seruus actor* who is worshipping a god for a Rufinus. If we accept the identity of the two figures, the C. Iulius Rufinus of Apulum, like Aelius Marius, would be a *conductor salinarum*. Finally, it should be noted that the altar erected by Vitalis for the salvation of Marius and the one offered by Spatalus for the salvation of C. Iulius Rufinus have formal similarities, both in terms of the support and dimensions and in terms of form. Could the latter, found in the bed of the river Mures 150m east of the bridge according to the *AE*, have come from the Vitalis *mithraeum*? However, this is closer to the colony than to the *municipium* near which the latter was located; but the stone may have been moved or reused before ending up in the Mures.

78 McCarty and Egri et al. 2017, 383.

79 The case of the *mithraeum* I of Poetovio offers an interesting parallel. The only citizen attested there, C. Caecina Calpurnius, is precisely the one who *redemit* the *mithraeum* (bought or rather took over the lease) and restored the *mithraeum* (let us remember that a redemption or a resumption of a lease could not be carried out by a slave). See Van Haeperen in press.

80 See Latteur 2011, 743–748; Sicoe 2014, 41–46.

81 *AE* 1998, 1079 = *IDR* III, 5, 2, 709 = Sicoe 53: *[D]eo Inuicto / [M]it(h)rae sac(rum) / [-] Statorius / [---]anus dec(urio) / [et] flamen m[unicipi]c[ipii] Sep(timi) Ap[ul]l[ensis] / [In]uicti templum pr[o] / salute[m] sua suorum / [que] p[ro]p[ri]a mea feci*.



noted briefly that Aelius Marius and Statorius seem to be the only two flamines attested in Mithraic documentation. A small number of other decurions were active in this cult, especially in the Danubian provinces.<sup>82</sup> On the other hand, only two leaseholders were certainly Mithras worshippers: in Apulum, Turranius Marcellinus and Antonius Senecio, *conductores armamentarii*, made a dedication to Mithras, following a vow.<sup>83</sup>

Given these parallels, it is therefore possible that Aelius Marius was a member of the Mithraic community of Apulum. However, this is not certain since, unlike the examples cited above, he did not himself make an offering to the god. Indeed, it should be remembered that a slave's offering to a god for the salvation of his master does not necessarily mean that the latter was himself a worshipper of the god invoked. Thus, the slaves of several *conductores* (whether they were in the service of the *portorium* or of the iron mines) were worshippers of Mithras, without their master being attested as a follower of the god.<sup>84</sup>

According to McCarty and Egri et al., since other slaves or freedmen of P. Aelius Marius were worshippers of Mithras, the *conductor* would have been at the centre of a supra-local "Mithraic" network. Let us review these testimonies, before assessing the relevance of this hypothesis, which is based on another assumption, that of the *conductor's* Mithraic commitment.<sup>85</sup>

P. Aelius Euphorus makes a vow in Micia to Silvanus Domesticus, *pro salute* of P. Aelius Marius, whose function as *conductor* is mentioned.<sup>86</sup> Even if the dedicator does not explicitly mention it, it is very likely that he was a freedman of Marius, as his *praenomen* and *nomen* show. The same freedman dedicated a temple to *Deus inuictus*, still in Micia.<sup>87</sup> It should be noted, however, that the identification of this unconquered god with Mithras is not accepted by all researchers.<sup>88</sup>

At Domnesti, where there was a salt mine, the slave Atticus, *actor* – that is, agent – of Aelius Marius, made a dedication to Jupiter Optimus Maximus and *T(erra) M(ater)*, for the salvation of his master, *flamen* of the colony and tenant of the pastures and saltworks.<sup>89</sup> McCarty and Egri et al., however, believe that Atticus' dedication was to

82 Latteur 2011, 743–748.

83 *CIL* III, 1121 = *IDR* III, 5, 1, 285 = Sicoe 47: *S(oli) I(nuicto) M(ithrae) Turranius Marcellinus / et Ant(onius) Senecio iunior conductores armament(arii) / ex uoto posuerunt*. I am not taking into account the inscriptions that mention *conductores* as masters of slaves who were themselves worshippers of the god – these alone cannot prove that these *conductores* participated in the cult.

84 Van Haeperen 2020, 181–182.

85 See Dana and Zăgreanu 2013, 30. Perhaps also in Porolissum, but the text is too fragmentary.

86 *CIL* III, 1363; *IDR* III, 3, 119 (see text above); McCarty and Egri et al. 2017, 384; Egri and McCarty et al. 2018, 275; Mihailescu-Bîrliba 2016, 53.

87 *IDR* III 3, 49 = *AE* 1971, 384 = Sicoe 200: *Deo / Inuicto / [P(ublius)] Ael(ius) Eupho(rus) pro / salute sua / et suorum / templum a solo / fecit*. Carbó García 2010, 1038.

88 Carbó García 2010, 1038 recognises the Roman *Sol inuictus* instead; Szabó 2015, 414 does not exclude that it could be Mithras.

89 *AE* 1967, 388 (*ILD* 804; Sicoe 15): *[I(oui)] O(ptimo) M(aximo) et T(errae) M(atri) / [p]ro sal(ute) P(ubli) Ael(i) / Mari fl(aminis) col(oniae) / conduc(toris) pas(cui) / et salina(rum) At(ticus) act(or) eius / u(otum) s(oluit) l(ibens) m(erito)*. Mihailescu-Bîrliba 2016, 54.

Jupiter and *I(nuicto) M(ithrae)*.<sup>90</sup> The preferred reading of *T(errae) M(atri)* seems all the more likely, however, as the goddess is also honoured in the context of salt pans or mines, as the provider of the resources they contain.<sup>91</sup>

Finally, in Tibiscum, another slave, Hermadio, made a vow *S(oli) i(nuicto) N(umini) M(ithrae)* for the salvation of Aelius Marius, whose office is not mentioned.<sup>92</sup> If the first two dedications were made by a freedman and a slave of Aelius Marius, the last one was made by a slave, *an actor*, of another master, Turranius Dius, member of an influential Dacian family (of which there is evidence of a *conductor armamentarium* in Apulum and three decurions in Sarmizegetusa).<sup>93</sup> Why did Hermadio make an offering to Mithras, following a vow, for the salvation of Aelius Marius? According to Egri et al., this slave, like Vitalis, would have been linked to Marius by the cult of Mithras in which the latter held an important position.<sup>94</sup> For others, however, Hermadio, who recalls his position as an *actor*, was the regular representative of his master's business when it came to dealing with the *conductor* of the saltworks; it is in this context that he would have erected this inscription.<sup>95</sup> Although Hermadio may have come into contact with the cult of Mithras through P. Aelius Marius or his dependents, it should be remembered that the god was known to his *familia*, since Turranius Marcellinus, *conductor armamentarium*, honoured him in Apulum (at a time that cannot be precisely determined, the inscription being dated between the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries).<sup>96</sup>

The examination of the documentation of what Egri et al. consider to be a kind of "Mithraic network" formed around P. Aelius Marius thus leads to a qualification of this hypothesis. On the one hand, the Domnesti inscription most probably does not refer to Mithras; on the other hand, Hermadio did not necessarily know about the cult through P. Aelius Marius, since a member of his *familia* also honoured Mithras.

These inscriptions simply show that two slaves and a freedman of the *conductor*, as well as the slave of a Turranius, worshipped different gods for his salvation, in different places – linked in one way or another to the collection of salt taxes, either in the immediate vicinity of the saltworks (Domnesti), or at transit and customs points (Micia, Apulum, Tibiscum),<sup>97</sup> corresponding, at least in the case of Micia and Tibiscum, to military centres.<sup>98</sup> In this respect, the attachment of these people to P. Aelius Marius seems to

90 McCarty and Egri et al. 2017, 384. The inscription is not included in Carbó García 2010.

91 See *IDR* III, 4, 67 = *AE* 1967, 407 (Ocna Mures – Salinae, Dacia); *ILD* 500 (= *AE* 1992, 1469, Potaiassa, Dacia), both in the vicinity of salt mines. At Alburnus Maior (Dacia), in the context of gold mines (*AE* 1990, 844; 2003, 1498 and 1509); at Ljubija (Dalmatia) in the context of *ferraria* (*AE* 1958, 63–65, *AE* 1973, 411–414, *CIL* III, 13240 (Ljubija, Dalmatia); in Hispania cit., in the context of the mining society of *locus Ficariensis* (*CIL* II, 3527; see Gatto 2021).

92 *CIL* III, 1549 = *IDR* III, 1, 145 = Sicoe 203: *S(oli) I(nuicto) N(umini) M(ithrae) / pro salute / P(ubli) Ael(i) Mari / Hermadio / act(or) Turran(i) / Dii u(otum) s(oluit) I(ibens) m(erito)*. Carbó García 2010, 775.

93 McCarty and Egri et al. 2017, 384. *IDR* III, 5, 1, 285 (Apulum); *IDR* III, 2, 445 (Sarmizegetusa).

94 McCarty and Egri et al. 2017, 384–385.

95 In this sense, Mihailescu-Bîrliba 2016, 54.

96 See n. supra.

97 Dana and Zăgreanu 2013, 31; Mihailescu-Bîrliba 2016 (who proposes to identify this farmer with a *quatuoruir* of Apuleius' Septimian *municipium* and patron of the college of *fabri* (*IDR* III, 5, 204).

98 Mihailescu-Bîrliba 2016, 53.

be deeper than that of the slaves of the *portorium* to their *conductor*: the latter did not in fact honour any god for the salvation of their master.

Mithras appears as a deity worshipped by slaves or other individuals who honour P. Aelius Marius: Vitalis, P. Aelius Euphorus and Hermadio. It should be added that the freedman Iulius Omucio, *actor* of another leaseholder of the saltworks, C. Iulius Valentinus, also worshipped Mithras, described as *Sol inuictus*, for the salvation of his patron – and this in the context of the saltworks (Sanpaul-Dacia).<sup>99</sup> Thus, of the eight Dacian inscriptions mentioning individuals who were *conductores salinarum*,<sup>100</sup> seven correspond to dedications,<sup>101</sup> three of which are to Mithras (those of Vitalis, Hermadio and Iulius Omucio), one is to Silvanus (P. Aelius Euphorus, who is also attested as a follower of Mithras), one to Jupiter *optimus maximus* and *T(erra) M(ater)* (Atticus), whereas the last two, too fragmentary, do not preserve the name of the deity.<sup>102</sup>

In the light of this analysis, can we assume, as Egri et al. do, that P. Aelius Marius was at the centre of a supra-local Mithraic network? Caution is called for. There is no evidence that this *conductor* was himself a worshipper of Mithras. On the other hand, one of his slaves and one of his freedmen are clearly worshippers of the god, as is the slave of another *conductor salinarum*. An alternative interpretation is therefore conceivable: would it not be at the level of the subordinate agents of these adjudicators that a form of network should be evoked, recognising the agency of these lower-status individuals in honouring various gods – including Mithras – for their master? The servile staff of the *conductores salinarum* included qualified individuals who represented the interests of their masters in the vicinity of the salt pans and at the key points where this precious commodity was stored or transited. Like the customs agents, most of the slaves of the farmers of the saltworks therefore had to travel and stay away from their masters. As men of trust, they enjoyed a degree of autonomy in the management of their master's affairs, as well as in their daily lives and religious choices.<sup>103</sup> Like the *uilici* of the *stationes* of the *portorium*, these *actores* had to travel regularly to the administrative centre where their master resided, in Apulum.<sup>104</sup> They could have met there, especially for ritual activities, for example in the *mithraeum* where Vitalis was active, who may have resided in Apulum, given his function as treasurer. Wherever they stayed to represent their master, these *actores* may have been accompanied by their own slaves, the *uicarii* – like the *uilici* of the *portorium*. They would have formed small communities in the places where they resided and could have worshipped various deities – including Mithras – for the salvation of their master. Hermadio, a slave representative of Turranius, could have joined such a community in Tibiscum (he had

99 *IDR* III, 4, 248; *AE* 1937, 141. Szabó 2015, 425; Mihailescu-Bîrliba 2016, 55. According to Carbó García 2010, 454–455, 608, 1040, this is not Mithras but Sol Invictus Elagabal.

100 I count among these the two inscriptions placed for the *salus* of P. Aelius Marius which do not mention his office as *conductor*.

101 The eighth is an honorary inscription for the *conductor* P. Aelius Strenuus (*CIL* III, 1209 = *IDR* III, 5, 2, 443; Apulum) by one of his slaves.

102 *AE* 2005, 1296 (Micia); 2013, 1281 (see Dana and Zăgreanu 2013).

103 On the cultic autonomy of slaves living far from their masters, Amiri 2021, 253–330.

104 On Apulum and its links with the *conductores salinarum*, Mihailescu-Bîrliba 2016; Szabó 2015, 413–415.

to deal with a representative of the *conductor* of the saltworks for whose salvation he set up an altar). However, it is also possible that these *actores* joined groups of local worshippers, thus becoming part of communities formed on other bases than their activity in the service of the saltworks.

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# THE MITHRAEUM FROM COLONIA SARMIZEGETUSA: ON THE LIMITS OF MATERIALITY OF RELIGION

Csaba Szabó

## Abstract

*Colonia Sarmizegetusa – known from the epigraphic sources also as colonia Ulpia Traiana Augusta Dacica Sarmizegetusa Metropolis – was one of the major urban centres in the province of Dacia, the political and religious capital of Tres Daciae. The rich epigraphic and archaeological material from the modern site of Sarmizegetusa (Várhely) reflects the splendour of the ancient city and its religious life. The Mithraeum discovered in 1879 and excavated in the following years was a European sensation at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: at the time of its discovery, it was the largest ever discovered treasure of figurative monuments from a Mithraic context. While the epigraphic and figurative material of the partially preserved and today missing site was published and reanalysed several times, the interpretation of the material and the curious case of the site still present us with uncomfortable and unsolved questions, such as the interpretation of the quantity of the reliefs, the chronology of the site and the production, use and fate of the largest Mithraic find ever discovered in Europe. The article will address once again these issues and will summarize the possible answers and research perspectives.*

**Keywords:** *Mithras – Mithraeum – archaeology of religion – Dacia – materiality of religion – Danubian provinces.*

In recent years, there has been a recurring abundance and renaissance of “Mithraic studies”. Several important monographs, syntheses, and catalogues have been published on both old and new material related to the cult of Roman Mithras.<sup>1</sup> With few

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1 The abundant literature was recently collected in the bibliography of Bricault and Roy 2021, Bricault, Veymiers and Amoroso 2021. On new trends and perspectives in Mithraic research, see also: Szabó 2018a.

monographs focusing on local case studies,<sup>2</sup> most of the recent works addressed general, holistic questions on the origins,<sup>3</sup> the end,<sup>4</sup> the figurative narratives<sup>5</sup> or the cognitive aspects of the cult.<sup>6</sup> Site-studies highlighted the importance of local and global approaches in Mithraic studies and the urgent necessity of a *CIMRM* Supplement on provincial and imperial scale as well.<sup>7</sup> The contemporary study of the cult of Roman Mithras today is an inter- and transdisciplinary field: beside the traditional and descriptive approaches from art history (visualities), classical archaeology and Roman provincial archaeology, the material evidence of Mithras can be analysed as part of reception-history and historiography,<sup>8</sup> cognitive approaches, comparative religious studies, spatial aspects,<sup>9</sup> network studies, sensorial studies<sup>10</sup> and various technical and scientific methods as well.<sup>11</sup> In this context of interdisciplinary dialogue, the reanalysis of the already known material evidence is also important, as many recent works proved.<sup>12</sup> In this article, I will focus on the reinterpretation of one of the largest Mithraic finds ever discovered in Central-Eastern Europe, a discovery which provoked an archaeological sensation in Europe in the Belle Époque and attracted a second wave of Mithraic scholars in Transylvania after the initial, late 18<sup>th</sup> century interests.

### **Mithras in colonia Sarmizegetusa before 1879**

The cult of Mithras in Dacia was well attested in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century due to some well-known reliefs and inscriptions from Apulum and other localities.<sup>13</sup> Sarmizegetusa, the first city of the province - well known already in Renaissance literature and by 17-18<sup>th</sup> century travellers, who mapped the ruins of the Roman town for

2 Bull et al. 2017; Zsidi 2018; Siemers-Klenner 2021; Fontana and Murgia 2022. See also the studies in McCarty and Egri 2020.

3 Lahe 2019.

4 Walsh 2018. See also Gordon 2019.

5 Adrych et al. 2017; Mastrocinque 2017; Mastrocinque 2022.

6 Panagiotidou and Beck 2017; Martin 2022.

7 The last imperial-scale catalogue of Mithraic finds was published by M. J. Vermaseren in 1956–60. Several catalogues and supplements have since been published, focusing mostly on urban and provincial-scale documentation of the new finds. See Tóth 1988; Sagona 2009, *Tit. Aq.* I, 227–266; Sicoe 2014; Szabó 2018b; Alvar Ezquerro 2018; Canciani 2022; Chalupa 2023. In bibliography: Chalupa, Aleš, *Římský kult boha Mithry. Atlas lokalit a katalog nálezů I* (The Roman Cult of Mithras. Atlas of Sites and Catalogue of Mithraic Evidence I). 1st ed. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2023 and many others. No empire-scale catalogue or project has ever been financed. A detailed catalogue of the largest Mithraic exhibition organised in the last decades: Bricault, Veymiers and Amoroso 2021. Another important exhibition on the so-called Oriental cults was organised in 2013 in Karlsruhe: *Imperium der Götter: Isis – Mithras – Christus: Kulte und Religionen im Römischen Reich*.

8 Gordon 2021; Szabó 2022a.

9 Dirven 2015.

10 Rubio 2021.

11 Magrini et al. 2019. For techniques of field archaeology, see: McCarty and Egri 2020.

12 Zsidi 2018.

13 Szabó 2013; Szabó 2022a.



**Fig. 1. Large Mithraic relief probably from Sarmizegetusa or Doștat (photo: Ortoľ Harl, lupa 19193)**

the first time in the Modern period<sup>14</sup> – was missing from the early works on Roman Mithras from the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>15</sup>

A possible Mithraic inscription (dedicated to Sol Invictus) was described by Verantius and Mezerzius in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>16</sup> The large-format relief with inscription preserved in the epigraphic collection of the Teleki family in Hosszútelke (Dorstadt, Doștat) was presumed to have been discovered in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (some sources mention the date of 16<sup>th</sup> July 1723; however the evidence for this discovery is missing).<sup>17</sup> Later literature stated that the quality of the relief might indicate that the relief comes from the capital of the province or Apulum, one of the two major urban centres of Dacia (fig. 1).<sup>18</sup> The site of Sarmizegetusa was constantly and extensively looted in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, where the marble was used for burning

14 Szabó 2004; Cupcea and Marcu 2011.

15 The capital of the province was not mentioned by the first catalogues of Mithraic finds: Seel 1823; Hammer-Purgstall 1833.

16 *CIL* III, 7952 = *IDR* III/2, 280 = *CIMRM* 2148.

17 *CIL* III, 968 citing the description of Johann Seivert, however Seivert does not mention this in his epigraphic collection from 1773. A different date (1788) is mentioned by Gábor Téglás: Téglás 1886, 131. The name of the donator is also confused: while the 19<sup>th</sup> century literature named Gusztáv Teleki as the donator, recently Cristian Bodó mentions József Teleki and Teleky Arvéd: Bodó 2021, 122 and her n. 511.

18 Tóth 1977; *IDR* III/2, 306a. See also: Sicoe 2014, 227 cat. no. 188. I. I. Russu rightly argued that the provenience of the relief can be established only on the analysis of the marble or the family archives of the Teleki family from the 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> century. Several Roman monuments were discovered in Hosszútelke, which might indicate that the large-sized Mithraic relief was not transported from other sites, but in the vicinity of the stone quarries there was a natural spelaeum. Téglás 1886, 131.

19 Ompolyi 1858.

lime.<sup>19</sup> From this period, several Mithraic inscriptions were discovered in the *territorium* of Sarmizegetusa, however the exact provenience and context of the discovery is unknown. A small fragment of a relief with an inscription dedicated in honour of a procurator by his libertus was in the collection of the Nopcsa family in Zám already in the 1850's.<sup>20</sup> A fragmented relief with uncertain provenience was associated with Veczel and Várhely as well.<sup>21</sup> Neigebauer describes another fragment of a probably large Mithraic relief in his catalogue from 1851: the relief represents scenes from the Mithras myth, which usually appears only on panelled reliefs (such as the representation of Saturnus).<sup>22</sup>

A well-preserved altar (*CIMRM* 2146 = *CIL* III, 1436 = *IDR* III/2, 283) was found in 1856 in Várhely (Sarmizegetusa village).<sup>23</sup> The exact place and context of the discovery is unknown. Teodor Mommsen during his trip in Transylvania in 1857 saw the altar at Grădiştea or Abrud at the local priest. Russu claims – without explanation – that the altar was found “in the mithraeum”, which is incorrect. The altar was dedicated by a certain Hermadio actor.<sup>24</sup> This person was interpreted by István Tóth as a “prophet” of Mithras,<sup>25</sup> one of the early groups responsible for the diffusion of the cult in Dacia and the Danubian provinces,<sup>26</sup> however it is not certain if the three persons attested on epigraphic sources in Rome, Poetovio and Sarmizegetusa are the same and his chronological interpretation is also problematic.<sup>27</sup> It is, however, sure that Tóth was right when he argued that the earliest Mithraic groups in the Danubian region were “busy” in the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century: that is the period when the first Mithraic communities were formed in this region.<sup>28</sup>

20 Neigebauer 1851, 41 no. 139. See also: *IDR* III/2, 286; Sicoe 2014, 223 no. 179. The dedicant – libertus of a procurator – indicates that it comes from the same sanctuary or context.

21 Sicoe 2014, 225 no. 184 with previous bibliography.

22 Neigebauer 1851, 44 no. 203; Sicoe 2014, 226 no. 186. Neigebauer mentions that he saw the fragmented relief in the private collection of Ignác von Várad and Eszter von Dobai in Déva. The provenience is uncertain. For the Mithraic finds of Transylvania till the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century see also: Lajard 1840.

23 See also: Vermaseren 1963, 62–66. The rare association of Mithras with Anicetus is known only from Britannia (*RIB* 1397). Interestingly, the inscription from Britannia includes solar divinities (Apollo, Sol). The name of Mithras is not preserved, only presumed, based on the context of the discovery in the Vindovala Mithraeum: *Soli / Apollini / Aniceto / [Mithrae] / Apon[i]us / Rogatianus / [–]*. Anicetus, however, can also be an epithet of the divinity, as Vermaseren argued: *Idem*, 63.

24 *CIMRM* 2146 = *CIL* III, 1436 = *IDR* III/2, 283: *Soli In/victo M/it(h)rae Ani/ceto -----Her/madio / votum / solvit / I(ibens) m(erito)*.

25 The notion itself is a historical anachronism. Tóth used this term to emphasize the crucial role of some of the members of the core-groups in the early phase of diffusion. As these altars cannot be dated precisely, the theory of Tóth remains hypothetical on Hermadio from Dacia.

26 Tóth 1992.

27 *CIL* III, 1549: *S(oli) I(nvicto) N(umini) M(ithrae) / pro salute / P(ubli) Ael(i) Mari / -----Hermadio / act(or) Turran(i) / Dii v(otum) s(olvit) I(ibens) m(erito)* attests a Hermadio from Tibiscum. This person is rightly associated by Tóth with the one from Sarmizegetusa. He is closely related to the Turrani, a family which was also attested in Apulum as Radu Ardevan and others argued a long time ago. The inscription from Aquae lasae, Pannonia (*AE* 1985, 714) mentions a Hermadion, associated with the publicum Portorium Illyrici. It is not sure if Hermadion from Pannonia is identical with the Hermadio from Dacia, as Tóth suggested. Another Hermadio(n) was attested in the Mithraeum III from Poetovio (*ILJug* 1145): *Cauti // pro salute FI(avi) / -----Hermadionis / et Aviti Syriac(i) / et filiorum / Felix libert(us)*. See also *CIMRM* 591 from Rome.

28 *Idem*, 159.

There is no information regarding any relevant discoveries around the Mithraeum between 1856 and 1876.<sup>29</sup>

### The discovery and the excavations: 1879–1883 and its aftermath

The exact date of the discovery of the site – later identified as a Mithraeum – is unknown. The discovery of the sanctuary itself was made by local villagers in 1879.<sup>30</sup> A relief of Mithras dedicated by Aurelius Valentinus,<sup>31</sup> and another by Severus were discovered in 1876 or 1877 and sent by Ioan Ianza to the bishop of Lugoj (fig. 2).<sup>32</sup> Ianza mentions in his letter that several “similar figures to the one dedicated by Severus” were discovered. It is uncertain if the discoveries made in 1876/77 are related to the discovery in 1879. An important inscription – possibly the building inscription of a mithraeum – was discovered in this period (uncertain year, before 1882) in an undocumented context in the ruins of Sarmizegetusa dedicated in the honour and memory of a Sextus and Marcus Valerius.<sup>33</sup>

In the period of 1879 and the spring of 1881, the site was systematically looted by the locals; some of the finds were already in the garden of the owner and the steps of the sanctuary had already been sold when the members of the Historical and Archaeological Association of Hunyad County visited the site in the summer of 1881.<sup>34</sup> There is no catalogue of the finds in the possession of the villagers in 1881 or those which remained in the ownership of the locals during and after the excavation.<sup>35</sup> The site of the discovery was on the field of Ioan Armion lui Vieru (or Ármion Mihály, Ármion Áron)<sup>36</sup> and Jován Muntyán (probably Ioan Muntean, in his non-Hungarianized name).<sup>37</sup> The area of the sanctuary was therefore divided by two owners at least; however the contemporary

29 Király mentioned briefly in his monograph those Mithraic inscriptions and monuments which were published before 1879. Király: 1886, 12. It seems that some of the reliefs discovered in Apulum in the 18<sup>th</sup> century were interpreted as discoveries from Várhely in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: Studniczka 1883, 202 citing Lajard. The Brukenthal material was discovered before 1787 in Apulum: Szabó 2013.

30 Király 1886, 17. See also: Boda 2014, 321; Bodó 2021, 196–197.

31 Interestingly, an Aurelius Valentinus appears also in Mithraeum II from Poetovio, however the two persons could be different. See: *CIL* III, 15184 = *CIMRM* 1524.

32 *IDR* III/2, 275 and 290. See also: Pleșa and Rotar 1977, 567. Ianza and the members of the Association were in good relationship, however I am not aware of any letters between Ianza and the members of the Association regarding the discoveries in 1876–1877: Kun 1884, 84.

33 *CIL* III, 7959 = *IDR* III/2, 226 = lupa 17756. The Mithraic nature of the inscription is uncertain, although highly possible: the size of the building inscription (0.74 m long in its fragmentary state, almost 1.5 m long as reconstructed by I. Piso and I. I. Russu), the dedication to Invictus and the *in memoriam* formula might suggest the Mithraic context (but can be also a collegium too). A similar case study was attested in Poetovio: *CIMRM* 1501-3 = lupa 9330, 9331; Beskow 1980, 16.

34 Bodó 2021, 196 and 198. On the history of the Association see also: Boda 2014.

35 Király mentioned 5–6 objects left on the site. Király 1891, 143. See also: Bodó 2021, 197. There was a possible terracotta head of Mithras in the possession of Sándor Tornyai, although the identification of such objects was problematic in that period (it could be easily an Attis or other divine figure too): Bodó 2021, 118. Torma published several inscriptions discovered already in 1881 by Armion: Torma 1882.

36 The name of the Romanian villager appears in several, different forms, see: Téglás 1902, 62; Bodó 2021, 83 and 197.

37 *Idem*, 197.



**Fig. 2. Relief of Aurelius Valentinus discovered before 1882 (photo: after Sicoe 2014, 330 fig. 112 cat. no. 84)**

*nique of Fiorelli*”, the predominant method in that period named after Giuseppe Fiorelli (1823–1896), the archaeologist of Pompeii.<sup>42</sup>

The preserved structure identified by Király as the naos (spelaeum) (fig. 3a–b) is of modest size (5.40 × 6.15 × 8.30 m). The lower part of the walls of the naos was painted with geometrical forms (red and blue colours).<sup>43</sup> The site was covered by soil in a very

reports confirm that the largest part of the Mithraic finds and the sanctuary was discovered on the site of site of Armion, next to the garden of Johann Vida (IDR III/2, 177). The location and position of the site was described by Pál Király (1853–1927):<sup>38</sup> “the building material of the walls of the sanctuary was provided by the Hobicza brook, flowing right next to it”.<sup>39</sup> After the visit to the site in early 1881, the Association asked the Hungarian authorities for financial support of the excavations, which began on 5<sup>th</sup> July 1882.<sup>40</sup> In the first season, Pál Király excavated the remains of the naos and after 14<sup>th</sup> August 1883 continued his work, excavating the peribolos of the building, however no further structures were revealed and only a relief was found in several pieces.<sup>41</sup> He mentioned that he was using the “horizontal archaeological tech-

38 There are few, certain data about the life and activity of Pál Király (born as Kőnig). He was born in Komárom, studied in Szombathely and Budapest. He later became a history teacher in Déva, a member of the Historical and Archaeological Society of Hunyad County and archaeologist of Sarmizegetusa. He authored several important books on Roman Mithras, Apulum and the province of Dacia as well. In his later life, he and his family lived in Erzsébetváros, Dumbrăveni, where his tomb is preserved today. His wife, Csiktapolczai Lázár Ilona, özv. Király Pálné died in 1942 at the age of 81. Their daughter was Király Mária (born in 1895 in Fehértemplom, Temes county). I am very thankful for Lia Ciupe, descendent of the family who provided some of the personal information on the Király family. For his major works, see: Király 1891; Király 1892; Király 1894; Király 1903. His chapter on Roman religion in Dacia (Király 1894, 306–389) is still the most comprehensive summary in the Hungarian language on this topic. See also: Bodó 2021, 220–222.

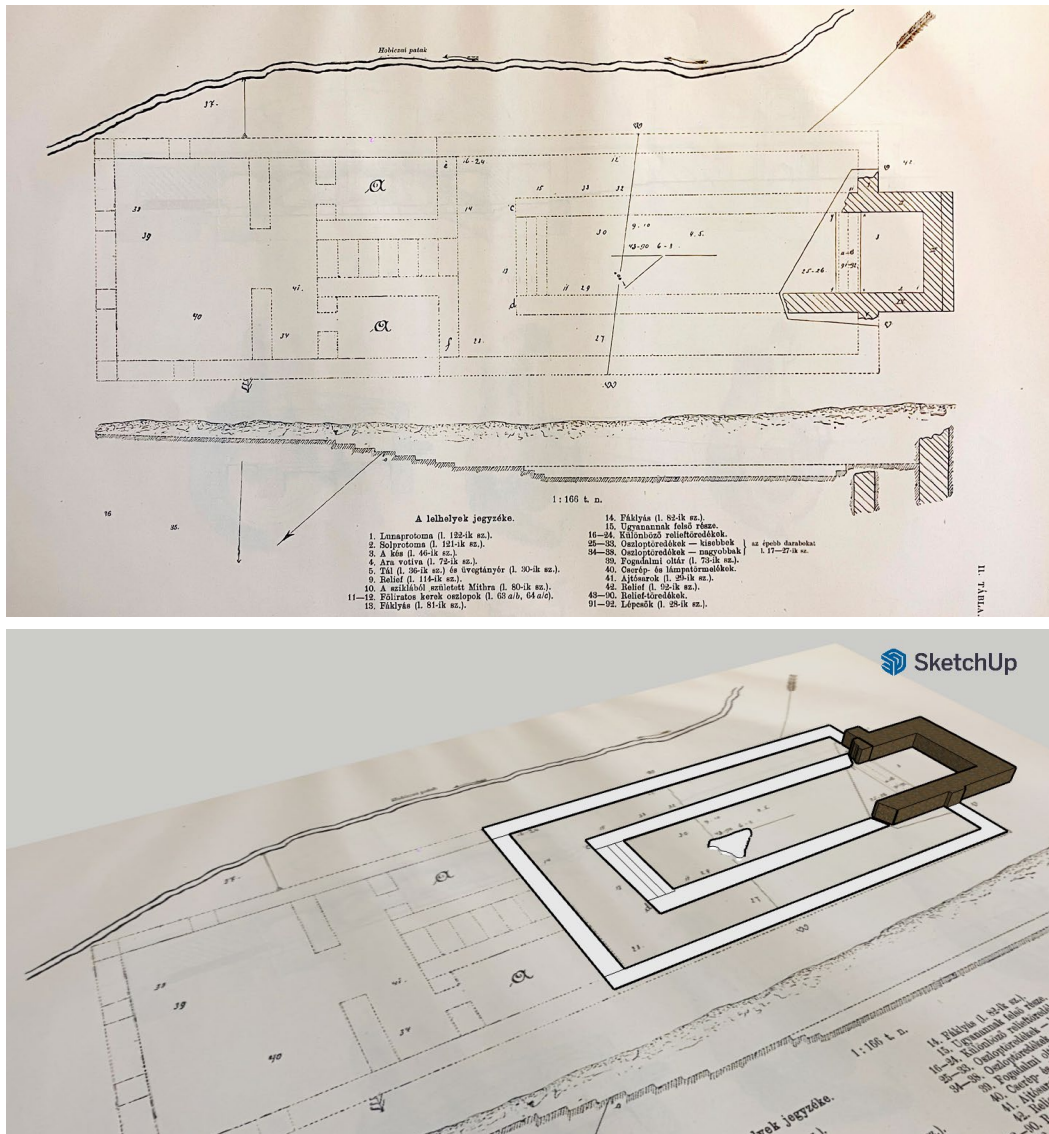
39 Király 1886, 17. See also in Téglás 1902, 75: “Szentélyünk a castrum déli falától 100 méternyire a hobiczai havasokhoz hajló emelkedésen, közvetlenül a patak mellett feküdt” (our sanctuary lies 100 m from the south wall of the castrum, on the bank of the brook, towards a hill to the Hobicza mountain). Téglás also mentioned in the publication of the Palmyrene temple, that the Mithraeum was “1000 feet from the sanctuary” (approx. 800 m): Bodó 2021, 197. The discovery of Mithraic finds from 1966 confirms the position of the sanctuary in the south-west corner of the colonia (extra-muros), however there were no excavations in that period. Mărghitan 1967, 691.

40 Király mentioned in his monograph 5th July 1882. The documents from the Association mentioned two days of excavation: 7th and 8th July 1882. See: Bodó 2021, 82.

41 Kun 1884, 85.

42 Király 1886, 3; Trigger 1989, 196; Malina and Vašíček 1990, 46.

43 Király 1886, 18.



**Fig. 3a. The plan of the Mithraeum with the finds (based on Király 1886, pl. II)**

**Fig. 3b. Remains of the naos and the possible dimension of the sanctuary (based on Király 1886, pl. II)**

thin layer of 0.2–0.8 m. Based on the large amount of material evidence of the cult discovered in front of the revealed building, Király used the available analogies from Ostia and Heddernheim to calculate the dimensions of the sanctuary and argued for an unprecedented, 44.23 m.<sup>44</sup> His calculations however are based exclusively on a proportional, often over-sophisticated calculation and not on the material and archaeological evidence which is painfully lacking from the central and pronaos area of the building.<sup>45</sup>

44 Idem, 14–16.

45 Eight objects were found in the presumed pronaos area (1 altar, 5 column fragments, 1 doorstep, pottery and lamp fragments). Based on the doorstep, the slope and steps going toward the central area of the sanctuary and the 5 column fragments, Király presumed a monumentalised entrance with tympanon and columns in the entrance (pl. III, 2).

Based on the currently available evidence from the archaeologically well-attested Mithraic sanctuaries, Király's calculations seem exaggerated, however the quantity of the roof-material he described (without quantifying it) suggest a large-sized building with a vaulted structure, a central nave and two side naves inside.<sup>46</sup> The fate of the site after the two seasons of excavations is uncertain. In the last report regarding the second season of the excavations, Róbert Kun and Gábor Téglás mentioned that several new buildings were built on the site and the area was constantly used for agricultural purposes, which indicates that the area was continuously looted in 1883 and later too.<sup>47</sup>

The site has not been systematically studied by archaeological research since 1883.<sup>48</sup> Further Mithraic monuments were found in 1966, however no excavations were made on the site.<sup>49</sup> Later publications presumed at least two or more Mithraic sanctuaries in Sarmizegetusa, however their argument is based on speculations and analogies of similar sized towns from the Danubian provinces.<sup>50</sup> The vicinity of the 1879–1883 discoveries and the 1966 discovery might suggest that there were also extra-muros sanctuaries between the brook and the south-western road heading out of the city.<sup>51</sup> An altar or statue base discovered in the building complex of the procuratorial palace was also dedicated to Mithras and several other, Celtic divinities, which is a rare case of religious individuation and personal appropriation of local and universal religious traditions, probably related to the personal choice of the procurator or a historical event in the period of 235–238 AD.<sup>52</sup>

### The building and its finds

The archaeological finds discovered in 7–8<sup>th</sup> July of 1882 were spectacular and marked Sarmizegetusa on the international map of Roman religious and Mithraic studies.<sup>53</sup> The finds were bought (for 50 forint) and saved from the owner of the field (Armion)<sup>54</sup> and most of them were transported to the archaeological collection of the

46 Idem, 17.

47 Kun 1884, 98–86; Bodó 2021, 274–275.

48 An attempt in 1913 to identify the site of the sanctuary was stopped by the outbreak of the First World War: Idem, 206.

49 Mărghitan 1967.

50 Alicu 2002, 221–222; Schäfer 2007, 93–95; Boda 2014, 325–326. See also: Boda 2015, 288.

51 Mithraic sanctuaries are often in close vicinity to each other (50–100 m distance), as was well-attested in Hedderheim, Aquincum, Poetovio and Ostia as well. See also the Digital Atlas of Sanctuaries in the Danubian Provinces: [www.danubianreligion.com](http://www.danubianreligion.com). Last accessed: 16.06.2023. The possible coordinates of the sanctuary: 45.509784, 22.785206. The only chance to find it in the heavily looted and already built-up area (perhaps, in the remaining private gardens) is if we can identify the cadastre books of the field of Armion from 1881. Hunyad county was one of the least mapped areas of the Austro-Hungarian Empire; few settlements had detailed, cadastre-books from the period of 1867–1918: <https://aktakaland.wordpress.com/2015/04/02/kataszteri-terkepek-es-iratok-1850-1916/>. One exemption is the map of Livazény from 1909.

52 Piso 1998, 265; *ILD* 277 = lupa 15155. For possible analogies see: Walters 1974, 42–49.

53 The exact dates of the excavation appear differently in the publication of Király (5<sup>th</sup> July for ten days: Király 1886, 3) and the reports of the Association (Bodó 2021, 82).

54 Bodó 2021, 197.



Association, which later became the Museum of Deva.<sup>55</sup> Several articles were published by the members of the Association after 1882 focusing on various aspects of the cult of Mithras and the new, rare inscriptions, especially the one dedicated to Nabarze, as an epithet of Mithras.<sup>56</sup> Otto Benndorf (1838–1907) and his student, Franz Studniczka (1860–1929), as the authorities on Roman epigraphy in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, visited the museum of Deva from Vienna and contributed to the organisation of the material (probably the reliefs) and the reading of the inscribed monuments.<sup>57</sup>

The monographic analysis of the building and its finds was published in 1886 by Pál Király in 129 pages and 23 tables.<sup>58</sup> It was the first monographic analysis of a Roman sanctuary from the province of Dacia.<sup>59</sup> The building and its finds were presented in detail in the monograph of Király, later summarized in numerous works by him and other members of the Association.<sup>60</sup> The visit of Franz V. Cumont to Transylvania was mainly inspired by the fame of this discovery: the later patriarch of Mithraic studies visited Austro-Hungary (and spent a long time in Transylvania in July 1890) and visited the major museums with Mithraic finds.<sup>61</sup> Cumont visited Deva on 29<sup>th</sup> July 1890 especially for the material from Sarmizegetusa and later repeated his visit in 1893.<sup>62</sup> During his first visit, he was not able to meet Pál Király.<sup>63</sup>

The archaeological material was introduced in the supplement of the *CIL* volume of Roman Dacia, later published in several other corpora focusing on the province or the cult of Mithras in the last 140 years.<sup>64</sup>

The material discovered in 1882 and 1883 is indeed impressive and it is still the largest ever discovered quantity of figurative Mithraic finds to date in the Roman Empire.<sup>65</sup> The

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- 55 *Idem*, 113–192. A large part of the material is still in the Museum of Deva, however a comprehensive catalogue of the currently available finds has not yet been established. Several pieces are in the local museum in Sarmizegetusa and in the Museum of Timisoara. The last catalogue with some new photographs of the reliefs and inscriptions was published in Sicoe 2014.
- 56 *CIL* III, 7938; Kuun 1882; Torma 1882, 107–109, Studnicka 1883. On a recent interpretation of this theonym see: Gordon 2017, 298, especially n. 97 citing all the available sources on Nabarze.
- 57 Király mentioned that Benndorf and Studniczka were amazed by the quantity and quality of the material and worked three days without pause on the epigraphic material: Király 1886, 3–4.
- 58 Király 1886. The publication was financed by Gusztáv Emich with 50 forint: Bodó 2021, 66.
- 59 The publications on the Roman baths from Herkulesbad published in the 18<sup>th</sup> century are earlier, but these were not discovered in an archaeological excavation. On the sanctuaries of Roman Dacia see: Szabó 2018c; Szabó 2020.
- 60 Király 1891, 141–149; Király 1894, 134–149.
- 61 Bonnet 1998, 254; Popescu 2000; Belayche 2013, XVII. He also published several new or reinterpreted inscriptions: Cumont 1891.
- 62 Cumont 1893; Popescu 2000, 28.
- 63 *Idem*, 42.
- 64 Most recently: *CIMRM* 2027–2140, Alicu, Pop and Wollmann 1979, 101–114; Carbó-García 2010; Sicoe 2014, 174–221 cat. no. 72–176 with all the previous literature. See also: Szabó 2014; Szabó 2018b, 346–349.
- 65 A significant quantity of figurative and epigraphic evidence was discovered in the Mithraeum III in Poetovio: *CIMRM* 1578–1612, however as we will see, this is not even comparable to the exceptional case study of Sarmizegetusa. Sanctuaries discovered in the last few decades produced a much larger quantity of small finds (especially bones and pottery): Martens and De Boe 2004; McCarty and Egri 2020.

material catalogued by Király lists 184 objects, although he mentioned in his introduction that the total number of finds was around 250–260.<sup>66</sup>

Architectural elements (roof bricks: 4; wall bricks: 5; vault brick: 1; painted plaster fragments: 5; floor tile: 1; column fragments: 11;<sup>67</sup> steps and door corner: 2).

Furnishings / small finds<sup>68</sup> (glass fragments: 3; ceramic vessel fragments: 7; marble vessel fragment: 1; bronze objects: 4; iron objects: 2; lamps: 3; gypsum: 1; melted lead: 1; carved stone fragments:<sup>69</sup> 11).

Votive altars and columns: 16;<sup>70</sup> lion fragment: 1; Mithras Petrogenius statue:<sup>71</sup> 1; torchbearers:<sup>72</sup> 9; high relief:<sup>73</sup> 1; fragments of another high relief:<sup>74</sup> 3; one-registered relief of the tauroctony:<sup>75</sup> 20; extended forms and fragments of tauroctony:<sup>76</sup> 12; two-registered reliefs:<sup>77</sup> 3; three-registered reliefs:<sup>78</sup> 12; five-registered reliefs:<sup>79</sup> 4; rounded reliefs:<sup>80</sup> 7; small relief-fragments without categorisation:<sup>81</sup> 35.

66 Király 1886, 3 and 21–65. I preserved the categories and denominations used by Király. Károly Torma also mentioned at least 250 monuments discovered: Torma 1882, 101. In his text, Király mentions several burned bones, which were probably not documented or collected. Smaller pieces of pottery were also ignored. The material published by Király was partially photographed (not all of the objects). The detailed history of the objects after their discovery and the reception-history of the material has not yet been published. The most detailed, recent catalogue of the material was published in Sicoe 2014, 174–221 cat. no. 72–176. From the 104 catalogued pieces, only 48 are photographed by Sicoe. A comprehensive reanalysis of the material published by Király is an urgent necessity of the scholarship.

67 Several elements of the columns were found in 2–3 parts, such as cat. nos. 17, 20, 21, 25.

68 The small finds were published and reinterpreted in Szabó 2014. The dating of the ceramic material was not possible. The lamps suggest also only a late 2<sup>nd</sup> or early 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD chronology. Some parts of the metal material (shackle, knife) suggest ritual performances of initiations.

69 A small globus was also discovered (Király 1886, 24 cat. no. 50). Similar finds are known from the Symphorus mithraeum in Aquincum, too.

70 Some of them were found in 2 or 3 fragments (cat. nos. 63, 64), others were anepigraphic column fragments (cat. nos. 66–71). Although the third category of objects is named “votive columns and altars”, it also contains the reliefs and other figurative objects. The main altar dedicated to Nabarze was published several times: Sicoe 2014, 219–220 cat. no. 172 with all the previous bibliography.

71 See also: Sicoe 2014, 219 cat. nos. 171 and 286 fig. 10.

72 Only two statues were found (cat. nos. 81–82), the others are small fragments probably belonging to the same statues or other statuary figures of the Mithraeum (cat. nos. 83–89). See also: Sicoe 2014, 218–219 cat. nos. 169–170 and lupa 17592, 15151. For similar analogies of Cautes see: Szabó 2015a.

73 The high relief (1.33 × 0.92 m) was interpreted by Király as the central signum of the sanctuary, therefore he dedicates 2 pages for this monument: Király 1886, 28–29. The relief today is preserved in fragments, only two parts were identified recently: Sicoe 2014, 313 cat. no. 79.

74 Király argued that based on the dimensions of the fragments (tail of the bull), the fragments were part of a similar, monumental relief as the previous one. No photos were published on the three fragments: Király 1886, 30 cat. no. 91a–c.

75 Some of the reliefs were already in the possession of private individuals, such as the bishop from Lugo (cat. nos. 94, 95, 97, 102), in the collection of Géza Kuun (cat. no. 101) and in the collection of the South Hungarian Archaeological and Historical Museum (cat. no. 99). From the 20 reliefs only 7 are photographed. The identification of the others represents even today a problem, some of them are impossible to find in the collection of the Archaeological Museum of Deva.

76 À jour reliefs (cat. nos. 112–123), most famously the almost completely preserved a jour tauroctony (cat. no. 112 = Sicoe 2014, 186 cat. nos. 100 and 309 fig. 64). Some of the reliefs are not photographed (cat. nos. 115, 116, 119, 120) and their identification today presents a problem.

77 There is no photograph of the relief cat. no. 126.

Király provides a detailed map with the exact position of the finds on his 2<sup>nd</sup> table (see fig. 3 above). Only 92 objects of the 184 appear on his map, 16 of them can be identified exactly.<sup>82</sup> Eight objects are known from the presumed pronaos area (5 columns, 1 altar, 1 doorstep, fragments of a lamp), which gave the impression for Király that the pronaos was a large, built area with columns, steps and a tympanon.<sup>83</sup> The majority of the objects are concentrated in the hollowed, stepped area which has an approx. 24 m length based on the drawing of Király. Based on the column fragments in this area, Király presumed that on the two podia of the sanctuary there were 20 columns of 140–150 cm (fig. 4).<sup>84</sup> This structure would be not unusual in a Mithraic context, although such a monumental mithraeum has no analogies in the Danubian provinces.<sup>85</sup> The only similar analogy would be the Mithraeum under the baths of Caracalla discovered in 1912,<sup>86</sup> the Marino Mithraeum<sup>87</sup> and Els Munts.<sup>88</sup> The position of the two torchbearers in the close vicinity of the steps in the central nave suggests that the calculations of Király regarding the central nave was probably correct (24–25 m).

There were two altars found in 1882–1883,<sup>89</sup> one in the pronaos dedicated by Carpion, tabularius Augusti (fig. 5), known from three inscriptions in Roman Dacia (one from Apulum two from Sarmizegetusa)<sup>90</sup> and one by Protas, vicarius and Ampliatus, dispensator, treasurers of the imperial accounts (fig. 6).<sup>91</sup> Carpion was tabularius in

78 Due to the fragmentary state of the reliefs, it is not certain if these were indeed, 3 registered. See also: Sicoe 2014, 196 cat. no. 116. Some of the reliefs were not photographed by Király, their identification today is problematic (cat. nos. 127, 134–138).

79 Some of the fragmented reliefs in this category were not photographed (cat. nos. 140–142).

80 Some of the fragmented reliefs in this category were not photographed (cat. nos. 147–149).

81 Some of these small fragments were inscribed (cat. nos. 181–184). Only one was photographed (cat. no. 151, fig. XV,1).

82 The others probably are those which were extracted from the ground in the summer of 1881 by the owner, who discovered 48 fragments of reliefs and the central altar dedicated to Nabarze: Király 1886, 17.

83 His reconstruction was contested by D. Alicu: Alicu and Pescaru 2000, 81–83.

84 Király 1886, pl. III no. 1. The best preserved, inscribed column of the sanctuary, dated to the time of Severus Alexander (*CIMRM* 2031), was 114–117 cm without the capital.

85 See *CIMRM* 17, 20, 32, 34, 40, 54, 55, 56, 91, 117, 144, 162, 198, 199, 210, 216, 229, 232, 250, 284, 325, 356, 361, 389, 390, 393, 394, 399, 434, 446, 464, 476, 653, 673, 710, 719, 771, 814, 832, 839, 909, 929, 985, 1001, 1018, 1025, 1033, 1042, 1045, 1057, 1100, 1127, 1155, 1181, 1206, 1247, 1282, 1335, 1347, 1359, 1373, 1392, 1427, 1430, 1528, 1534, 1597, 1672, 1809, 1891, 1896, 1919, 1958, 1985, 2028, 2144, 2145, 2159, 2244, 2267, 2306, 2324, 2338.

86 *CIMRM* 457.

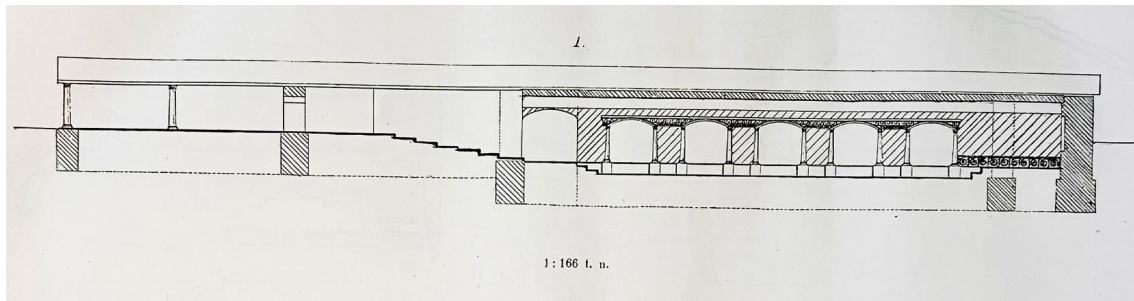
87 Vermaseren 1982, 5.

88 Hensen 2021, 223.

89 Another altar was probably found and extracted already in 1881 by Armion and published by Torma in 1882: Sicoe 2014, 220, cat. no. 174.

90 *CIL* III, 980 = *IDR* III/5, 10: *Aesculapio / et Hygiae / pro salute / sua suorum/q(ue) -----Carpion / Aug(us) ti lib(ertus) / tabularius / provinc(c)iae / Apulensis*; *CIL* III 1467 = *IDR* III/2, 387: *D(is) M(anibus) / M(arco) Aur(elio) One/simo / -----Carpion / Aug(usti) lib(ertus) tabul(arius) / filio / dul[cissimo] p(osuit)?*. The inscription from the Mithraeum: *S(oli) I(nvicto) M(ithrae) / -----Carpion / Aug(usti) / lib(ertus) tabul(arius) / v(otum) s(olvit) I(ibens) m(erito)*. See: Sicoe 2014, 220 cat. no. 173.

91 Sicoe 2014, 219–220 cat. no. 172 with all the previous bibliography: *Nabarze / Deo / pro sal(ute) Ampliati / Aug(usti) n(o)stri disp(ensatoris) et / sua suorumq(ue) / omnium / Protas vikar(ius) / eius*.



**Fig. 4. Columns in the central nave of the sanctuary (after Király 1886, pl. III)**

the province of Dacia Apulensis, which means that his activity can be dated to the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, probably after the Marcommanic Wars (after 180 AD).<sup>92</sup> The exact chronology of the two altars is impossible to determine, but the epigraphic and paleographic specificities of the two altars are very different, which might indicate two different dates.<sup>93</sup> The inscription of Marcus Ulpius Victorinus and Marcus Ulpius Maius was made after 222 AD, during the reign of Severus Alexander as the metropolis title of the city can be dated to this period.<sup>94</sup> These two chronological barriers show that the sanctuary existed at least since the period of Marcus Aurelius till the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. The question if there was a reconstruction of the sanctuary after the Marcommanic Wars cannot be answered based on the epigraphic material, however the paleographic analysis of the inscriptions suggests that the altar dedicated by Protas and the votive column discovered in 1881 in the central nave of the sanctuary by Armon, dedicated by M. U. Victorinus and M. U. Maius, bears the same paleography (fig. 7).<sup>95</sup> This could indicate that the sanctuary was rebuilt in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, however without archaeological evidence (coins, stratigraphy) this cannot be proved.<sup>96</sup> One of the two, well-preserved inscribed columns was dedicated by Flavius (---) Trofimus after a vision in a dream (*ex viso*), which is unusual, but not unique in a Mithraic context (fig. 8).<sup>97</sup> The dedication of Quintus Axius Aelianus, procurator Augusti for Mithras and the Celtic divinities in the procuratorial palace in 235–238 AD or the dedication to Marcus Lucceius Felix around 230–235 AD could indicate an important event in the life of this Mithraic group.<sup>98</sup>

The 21 persons identified in the epigraphic material from the sanctuary are predominantly related to financial activities, the staff of the procurator Augusti and the local, urban elite (*decurio*).<sup>99</sup> The predominantly Greek names indicates probably a Hellenic

92 Popa and Berciu 1967, 1000; Weaver 1972, 247 no. 21; Mihailescu-Bîrliba 2006, 179.

93 Letters of S, G and R especially show two different workshops.

94 Mărghitan and Petolescu 1976, 84; Ardevan 1998, 45.

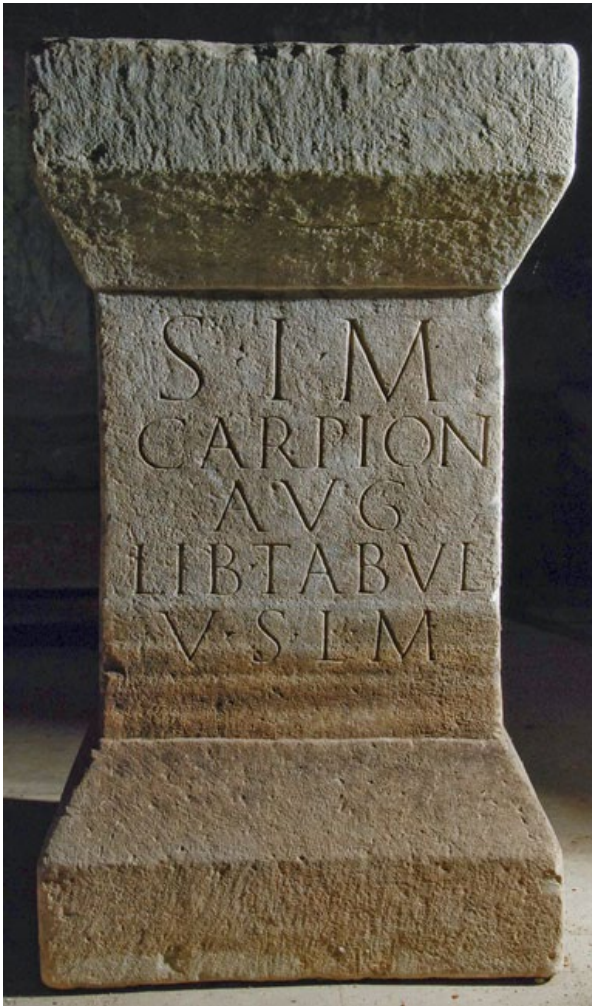
95 See also *CIMRM* 2030 = Sicoe 2014, 220–221 cat. no. 175.

96 Not a single coin was documented by Király in his excavations of 1882 and 1883.

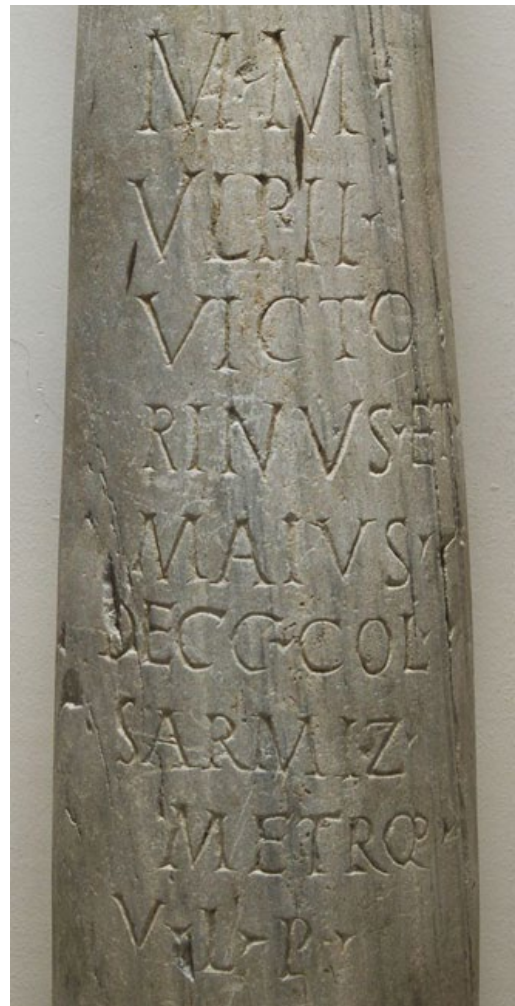
97 See also: *CIMRM* 1229, 1395, 1490, 1497, 1536, 1778, 1805, 1876.

98 Piso 1998, 264; Piso 2013, 221–226 for the *cursus honorum* of Felix and 227–235 for Aelianus.

99 Inscribed monuments from the sanctuary with all the previous literature: Sicoe 2014, 178–221 cat. nos. 82, 83, 84, 85, 88, 97, 99, 101, 105, 117, 119, 120, 126, 129, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176.



**Fig. 5.** Votive altar discovered in the area of the pronaos or outside the sanctuary (photo: Ortolf Harl, lupa 17715)



**Fig. 6.** Votive column discovered in the territory of the Mithraeum (photo: Ortolf Harl, lupa 19189.2)

origin of former slaves (*liberti*), but at a later time – especially in the late Severan period – their legal state is obviously different. The financial treasurers and their staff might indicate why we find Mithras within the procuratorial palace in an unusual, Celtic pantheon: there must be an agent-based network between the sanctuary and the palace.<sup>100</sup> Another important group are the members of the *ordo Augustalium*, who are attested on two inscriptions.<sup>101</sup>

For the social network of the Mithraic groups from the Danubian provinces see: Tóth 1977; Beskow 1980; Tóth 1992; Clauss 2000, 37; Szabó 2015b; Szabó 2022b, 176–182. See also: Egri et al. 2018, 274 n. 28 on the discussion related to the procuratorial influence on the management of the *publicum*. For a general discussion on this topic: Sicoe 2014, 42; Szabó 2021. Needless to say, the argument of R. Gordon regarding the predominantly civic nature of the cult of Mithras can be attested in Sarmizegetusa too, although the diffusion of the cult in Dacia and in Sarmizegetusa in the Antonine period is still uncertain: Gordon 2009.

100 *ILD* 277.

101 Sicoe 2014, 42.



**Fig. 7. Altar dedicated by Protas to Nabarze (photo: Ortoľ Harl, lupa 15152.1)**

The most intriguing aspect of this discovery is the enormous number of figurative monuments. While the number of statues and altars are not unusual and represents well the inner geography of a Mithraeum with several analogies even in the province of Dacia,<sup>102</sup> the number of reliefs is highly unusual and without doubt represents the largest amount ever discovered in the territory of the former Roman Empire:<sup>103</sup> in his monograph, Király lists 62 different reliefs and 35 further fragments. The number is slightly different in Vermaseren's and Sicoe's catalogue (96 reliefs).<sup>104</sup> A large part of the reliefs was found in front of the archaeologically attested building-parts of the naos, in the middle of the central nave, in a V-shaped pit, and in the vicinity of the Nabarze altar (see fig. 7).<sup>105</sup> The place of the discovery, and the large concentration of the reliefs indicate an unusual activity inside the sanctuary: although the dimensions of the sanctuary (even if we count the smallest possible size, approx. 10 × 25 m)<sup>106</sup> could easily host on its walls ca. 90–100 reliefs;<sup>107</sup> there are no analogies for such heavily decorated walls in Mithraea.<sup>108</sup> The fragmented reliefs found in the pit (47 pieces)<sup>109</sup> indicate a deliberate hoarding and intentionally made concentration of reliefs: if these were decorating the walls of

102 The number of statues and altars is not unusual: similar sanctuaries, such as the Mithraeum III from Poetovio, the Merida Mithraeum, Walbrook or Aventine in Rome produced similar quantities and even much more impressive qualities. The Mithraeum on the field of "Oancea" in Apulum had similar number of altars and statues: Romero-Mayorga 2018, 175. See also: Szabó 2018c, 106–110.

103 In comparison, the number of small and middle-sized Mithraic reliefs (smaller than 90 × 90 cm) known from Italy are around 40: Canciani 2022. The number of larger and panelled reliefs in Italy are higher.

104 *CIMRM* 2027–2140; Sicoe 2014, 174–217 cat. nos. 72–168.

105 Some reliefs – such as the cat. no. 92 in Király's catalogue or the ones marked with nos. 16–24 on his plan – are not from the pit. The provenience of the reliefs discovered in 1879–1881 by Armion is not known.

106 *CIMRM* 2027: Vermaseren argued for 26 × 12 m.

107 A sanctuary of 10 × 25 m has at least 225 m<sup>2</sup>. Based on the relatively small dimensions of the reliefs (most of them smaller than 30 × 25 cm, approx. 0.09 m<sup>2</sup>) these could easily fit as decorative elements on the walls of such a large building.

108 A possible reconstruction of the Nida sanctuaries have 6–7 reliefs in the area of the naos: David 2021, 475.

109 Sadly, Király did not mention exactly which of the reliefs were inside the pit and if some of these were inscribed too. There were no photos or drawings made during the ten days of the first season. The photographs of the reliefs were made already in Déva. The first archaeological photographs on systematic excavations in Transylvania were used by Béla Csérni in the 1890s.

the Mithraeum, they could not be found in such a large concentration.<sup>110</sup> This archaeological “anomaly” was interpreted in several different ways in the previous literature: it was presumed either that most of the reliefs decorated the walls of the sanctuary and belonged to the largest Mithraeum ever found,<sup>111</sup> or that it represents a deliberate hoard of reliefs from several sanctuaries of the city.<sup>112</sup> Hoards of reliefs and figurative monuments are not rare in Roman times, however their context usually is not in sanctuaries: stone and bronze monument treasures such as the one from Mauer an der Url/ Mauer-Öhling bei Amstetten (Dolichenus), Apulum (Nemesis) or Tomis (several divinities) were discovered outside of their original context.<sup>113</sup> Others, such as the large number of altars found in the small shrines of the *Quadriviae* and *Silvanus* in Carnuntum are also problematic to interpret.<sup>114</sup> The relief-treasure of the Mithraeum from Sarmizegetusa was interpreted also as a hoard of a Mithraic workshop:<sup>115</sup> the several uninscribed examples, the iconographic similarity and typology of the small sized and round reliefs<sup>116</sup> could suggest that the finds were collected from a neighbouring building which served as a workshop and artistic centre of Mithraic monuments later diffused in other places of the province (especially *Dacia Apulensis*) and perhaps abroad.<sup>117</sup> The reliefs show not only a striking similarity in iconography, but they were all fragmented: Király mentions that the pit with the reliefs was found under the remains of the roof, which suggests that they were buried already when the roof collapsed.<sup>118</sup>

The original use and provenience of these reliefs are, indeed, uncertain and it cannot be determined if they belonged to the sanctuary as votive slabs on its walls, or to a specific workshop attached to the sanctuary which provided a large quantity of reliefs for the local, provincial and local communities. The large



**Fig. 8. Votive column dedicated by Trofimus (photo: Ortolof Harl, lupa 19190.1)**

110 Király mentioned that in 1879–1881 the owner of the field found 48 fragments in the same area (marked with V and W on his plan). We do not know if there were several other pits or one large one in the middle of the sanctuary, in front of the main altar.

111 Király himself believed the reliefs decorated the walls of the central nave as in the case of Fertőrákos: Király 1886, 18. See also: Beck 2006, 21.

112 Alicu and Pescaru 2000. Király also presumed that there were several sanctuaries of Mithras in Sarmizegetusa, but did not associate them with this material: Király 1886, 12.

113 Alexandrescu 2016; Szabó 2018c, 46–48.

114 Kremer 2012, 341–345.

115 Sicoe 2004; Sicoe 2014, 59–70.

116 Idem, 301 with two identical – one inscribed and one without epigraphic text – reliefs.

117 See the rich literature on the small, round Mithraic reliefs identified usually with *Dacia*: Gordon 2004; Silnović 2018, 297.

118 Király 1886, 17.

119 See the case of the *Liber Pater* shrine from Apulum: Szabó 2018c, 78–89 or the *Tienen* Mithraeum: Martens 2021.

concentration of reliefs in a relatively small area within the sanctuary, however, shows that they were intentionally collected there for a purpose, which indicates a radical, non-repetitive event. Such events can be related to the foundation of the sanctuary,<sup>119</sup> but it is more probable that it reflects the end of the Mithraeum or a post-Roman rearrangement of the space.<sup>120</sup> The problem of the end of the Mithraea was recently discussed by David Walsh, although his book focussed on Late Antique (mostly 4<sup>th</sup> century) case studies.<sup>121</sup> He identified several reasons and forms of the fate and end of Mithraea: images reused for spolia, unmolested, removed, destroyed or mutilated. The reason behind these radical actions could be Christian iconoclasm, barbarian incursions, civil war, imperial legislation, mobility of Mithraic members or natural disasters.<sup>122</sup>

Due to the special case of the province of Dacia, abandoned officially by the administration around 270 AD, the functionality of the sanctuary certainly came to an end in this period or even before. The last two to three decades of the province (247–275 AD) reveal a rapid ruralisation of the urban settlements, as well as a radical break in the epigraphic habit and monumental urban architecture.<sup>123</sup> The arrangement of reliefs within the central nave, in front of the main altar of the sanctuary in a large, organised quantity suggests that this pit was made deliberately by one or more Mithraic groups still functioning in Sarmizegetusa in the period of 235–260 AD. It was a period with several military incursions and existential crises especially in urban settlements. Although there are some industrial activities and even well-attested post-Roman rearrangements in the city of colonia Sarmizegetusa after 275 AD (till the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century), there is no evidence for religious activity attested after 260 AD.<sup>124</sup>

The large collection discovered by Pál Király after 1883 became part of several museums in Transylvania. Most of the material was preserved in the Museum of Deva, while several pieces ended up later in Kolozsvár/Cluj,<sup>125</sup> Várhely-Sarmizegetusa Museum,<sup>126</sup> Lugoj<sup>127</sup> and Temesvár/Timișoara.<sup>128</sup> The history of these objects after 1883 has not yet been researched properly. It is unknown when and how the reliefs ended up in Timișoara, Cluj or the Sarmizegetusa Museum.<sup>129</sup> In the case of the material from the

120 See the case studies of Pojejena and Walbrook: Toynbee 1986; Gordon 2009. The provenance of the monumental statue-treasure of the Merida mithraeum is also problematic and impossible to determine if they are from the original sanctuary or from a later deposit: Basarrate and Romero-Mayorga 2021, 257.

121 Walsh 2018. See also: Gordon 2019.

122 Walsh 2018, 67–92.

123 Ruscu 2003; Oltean 2007, 185.

124 Diaconescu 2004, 130–131; Piso 2013, 256–257.

125 Sicoe 2014, 182 cat. no. 89. See also cat. no. 177 in his book.

126 Idem, 193, 221–222 cat. no. 113 = lupa 17604, cat. no. 178 = lupa 17601.

127 Idem, 178 cat. no. 83 = lupa 21954.

128 Idem, 179–192 cat. nos. 84, 87, 90, 111, 157.

129 Vermaseren did not mention in most of his entries where he saw the objects. The *CIMRM* 2051 for example is today in Sarmizegetusa, however Vermaseren did not mention where he saw it or who made the photograph of the relief. In most of the cases, local Romanian researchers (Daicoviciu, Condurachi, Băluță) sent him the photographs. In cases where the object is elsewhere than Deva, he mentions this (see *CIMRM* 2079 from Lugoj). No inventory numbers are given.



Sarmizegetusa Mithraeum we can presume that they were transferred recently, as the statues of Cautes and Cautopates were still in Deva in the 1970s.<sup>130</sup> Following the catalogue of Király, there were several other important publications, where the material of the Mithraeum was published (in most of the cases, copied from Király): Franz Cumont, Dorin Alicu, Constantin Pop with Volker Wollmann, Alfred Schäfer, Juan Carbó-García and most recently, Gabriel Sicoe published the material.<sup>131</sup> The work by Dorin Alicu, Constantin Pop and Volker Wollmann in the 1970s was crucial: the material from Deva appears for the first time with an inventory number, although already in that period some of the finds had no inventory numbers or were lost.<sup>132</sup> Their work was paradigmatic and the following publications only served as addendum to their catalogue. The most detailed catalogue with the description of each individual object and an almost complete bibliography was published by Gabriel Sicoe in 2014 (highly inspired by his tutor, Alfred Schäfer, who personally visited numerous museums and photographed the material). In the catalogue of Sicoe, only 48 of the objects from the Mithraeum are photographed in black and white, good quality photographs. Others are marked as lost objects, and he used only the drawings and photographs of Király.<sup>133</sup> The material from Deva is just partially available in the digital database of Ortolof Harl (lupa.at), listing 14 Mithraic objects.<sup>134</sup> The turbulent history of the collection and the museum can explain why many of the small fragments are currently undocumented.<sup>135</sup>

## Conclusions

Roman religious studies asking new, innovative questions nowadays, for example the methodological approaches of the material turn (study of material religion),<sup>136</sup> sensorial studies, cognitive religion<sup>137</sup> and lived religion<sup>138</sup> have produced numerous important works and reinterpreted the material and literary sources of Roman religion in the Roman Empire.<sup>139</sup> Questioning the uniformity of religious belief, focusing on religious individualisation and local appropriations, analysing the agency role of objects, their production, mobility and economic aspects, the mobility of human agency in local, glocal and global perspectives are a few of the recent topics which have shaped the new trends in Roman religious studies. The adaptability of the questions raised by these new methodological approaches, however, are often confronted with the lack

130 Alicu, Pop and Wollmann 1979, 101.

131 See above n. 64 with literature.

132 Alicu, Pop and Wollmann 1979, 101–114.

133 Sicoe 2014, 334, figs. 126–127.

134 Lupa lists 334 monuments from the Museum of Deva (Deva - Muzeul Civilizatiei Dacice si Romane). The Mithraic material are the following: lupa 15152, 17690, 17715, 17756, 17769, 17861, 18041, 19165, 19168, 19189, 19190, 19193, 19981, 19982.

135 Ferencz 2017.

136 Hicks 2010. See also: Morgan 2016.

137 Eidinow et al. 2022.

138 Albrecht et al. 2018; Rüpke 2018.

139 Rüpke and Woolf 2021.

of sources available in Roman provincial case studies: material evidence found in old excavations, such as the one discussed here, can answer only a few of the most interesting questions of the research.<sup>140</sup>

In re-analysing the Mithraeum of Sarmizegetusa we can reshape the drawing of Király, contextualise the epigraphic material, the network of the individuals of the Mithraic group in the larger network of provincial and Danubian religious mobilities and the impact of a religious centre on the regional production of reliefs and other visual narratives. Although the idea of a central dogma, myth and hierarchic communities needs to be abandoned,<sup>141</sup> the mobility of members from Mithraic groups and their impact on different, often extra-provincial contexts cannot be ignored, as the case study of Sarmizegetusa and its connectivity shows. Details of religious practices (initiations, activities related to the initiations)<sup>142</sup> and sensorial religion can be only presumed, based on a few elements of the small iron and bronze finds, as I argued in one of my previous studies.<sup>143</sup> These details could perhaps be answered if the site could be identified again in the field, although the area has been continuously looted and modified since 1883.

What perspectives of research can be done on such problematic material in the future? At least two dimensions need to be considered. As the photographic material of Gabriel Sicoe and Ortoľ Harl shows, the material from the Museum of Deva urgently needs a digitisation project and a comprehensive digital catalogue. Current projects on digital humanities, photo-3D projects in Romania have already proved the utility of such initiatives.<sup>144</sup> An Addendum of *CIMRM* for Dacia and the Danubian provinces is also necessary, as has been pointed out numerous times in the recent literature.<sup>145</sup> Studies on the provenience of the stone and marble material<sup>146</sup> and polichromy of the monuments might be a possible direction for future studies. Both methods are possible only in the framework of a well-supported, multi-annual project. None of these major perspectives in the research can be addressed in the length of an article but instead will require systematic research.

The Mithraeum of Sarmizegetusa was one of the major sanctuaries built for Mithras and contained the largest ever discovered collection of reliefs. It was partially looted probably in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and later in 1879–1881 by local inhabitants. The two, short excavations conducted by Király Pál can be considered only as a rescue excavation by today's standards, which saved a large part of the material and documented the surviving parts of the building. As Géza Kuun argued, citing the

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140 My book on sanctuaries in Roman Dacia tested the limits of lived ancient religion approach in a peripheral case study, where the materiality of Roman religion suffered from numerous types of limitations and methodological issues: Szabó 2018c.

141 Gordon 2019, 466–467.

142 Adrych 2021; Belayche 2021.

143 Szabó 2014.

144 Timofan et al. 2018.

145 Szabó 2018b.

146 Müller et al. 2012, 90 for the relief discovered in 1965 and page 99 on reliefs from the Mithraeum (*CIMRM* 2142, 2051).

amazed words of Iulius Jung: “from now on, those who want to study the cult of Mithras need to see the collection of Déva”. He also added: “the work of Pál Király cannot be ignored in the study of Roman Mithras”.<sup>147</sup> Kuun was right: M. J. Vermaseren personally asked Henri Boissin (1910–1975) for the translation of the Hungarian text, which remained the only monograph until now on a Mithraic sanctuary from Roman Dacia.<sup>148</sup> 140 years after the last excavation of Király and dozens of well-excavated Mithraea from all over Europe and the Middle East, the relief-hoard discovered in the Mithraeum of Sarmizegetusa still holds the title as the biggest Mithraic treasure ever found.

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147 Kuun 1886, 10.

148 *CIMRM* 2027. See also: McCarty, Egri and Rustoiu 2019.

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# INVICTO MITHRAE SPELAEUM FECIT: MITHRAIC TEMPLES IN THE ROMAN PROVINCE OF DALMATIA

Nirvana Silnović

## Abstract

*This paper deals with Mithraic temples, the so-called mithraea, from the Roman province of Dalmatia. Since there is no scholarly consensus about the number of mithraea in Dalmatia, this paper looks closely at the sites usually identified as mithraea and offers their new evaluation based on the clearly established criteria: the existence of sculptural or epigraphic evidence explicitly related to the cult of Mithras. The paper further addresses their typology and provides an updated list of mithraea in natural settings in and outside Roman Dalmatia. Finally, the paper argues against the traditionally assumed primitive and rural character of Mithraic caves and rock-temples in Dalmatia.*

**Keywords:** *cult of Mithras – mithraeum – Dalmatia – typology – freely-built temple – cave – rock-temple.*

## Introduction

The cult of Mithras and its rich material evidence discovered throughout the Roman province of Dalmatia has attracted considerable scholarly attention over the past seventy years. It suffices to mention that since Branimir Gabričević's doctoral dissertation (1951), which can be taken as the beginning of the scientific study of the cult of Mithras in Dalmatia, four more doctoral dissertations dealing with the same subject appeared.<sup>1</sup> The topic does not cease to fascinate scholars, and new material continues to emerge.<sup>2</sup> Still, despite such a long history of research, there are some aspects

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1 Gabričević 1951; Miletić 1996; Lipovac Vrkljan 2001; Karković Takalić 2019; Silnović 2022.

2 Cambi 2017, 23–29.

of the cult that so far have not received sufficient attention. This is particularly the case with Mithraic architecture, which has been rarely addressed systematically, with one recent exception.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, this paper aims to offer an updated overview of Mithraic sanctuaries from Dalmatia and provide a comprehensive insight into this complex topic. Since there is no scholarly consensus about the number of *mithraea* in Dalmatia, all the sites where the existence of a *mithraeum* is traditionally assumed will be carefully reconsidered. The generally large number of assumed *mithraea*, whose number varies in the literature, indicates that an updated and revised catalog of these buildings is needed.<sup>4</sup> It also shows that the identification of Mithraic places of worship is more complex than it initially appears.

### What is a Mithraic temple?

Mithraic temples are widely perceived to be easily recognizable buildings distinguished by their canonical ground plan. They are simple structures conceived as rectangular and symmetrical buildings, with a characteristic tripartite internal division of space (fig. 1). The cult room (*cella*, a) is usually sunken below ground level and consists of a central aisle flanked by raised *podia* (b). The rear wall of the *cella* is reserved for placing the cult-image showing Mithras killing the bull (the so-called tauroctony). The *cella* is accessed by stairs through an entrance hall (*porticus*, c), which is generally built on the ground level, and one or more service- or ante-rooms (d) are installed in it.

These multifunctional rooms (*apparatoria*) were used to prepare and store food consumed during the communal meal, shared by the worshipers reclining on *podia* inside the *cella*.<sup>5</sup> Otherwise, they could have been used as storage rooms for various kitchen equipment and ritual paraphernalia or as changing rooms where worshippers could have dressed appropriately for partaking in the ritual.<sup>6</sup> Other essential furnishings included a water basin installed near the entrance to the *cella*, where cult participants washed their hands before entering the temple proper.

The Mithraic temple is usually referred to by the Latin term *mithraeum* (pl. *mithraea*), a modern neologism used to denote these buildings.<sup>7</sup> *Templum* and *speleum/spelaenum* are most frequently used in Mithraic inscriptions to denote a *mithraeum*; terms like *antrum*, *aedes*, *fanum*, and *sacraria* are also attested, albeit less regularly.<sup>8</sup>

3 Silnović 2022.

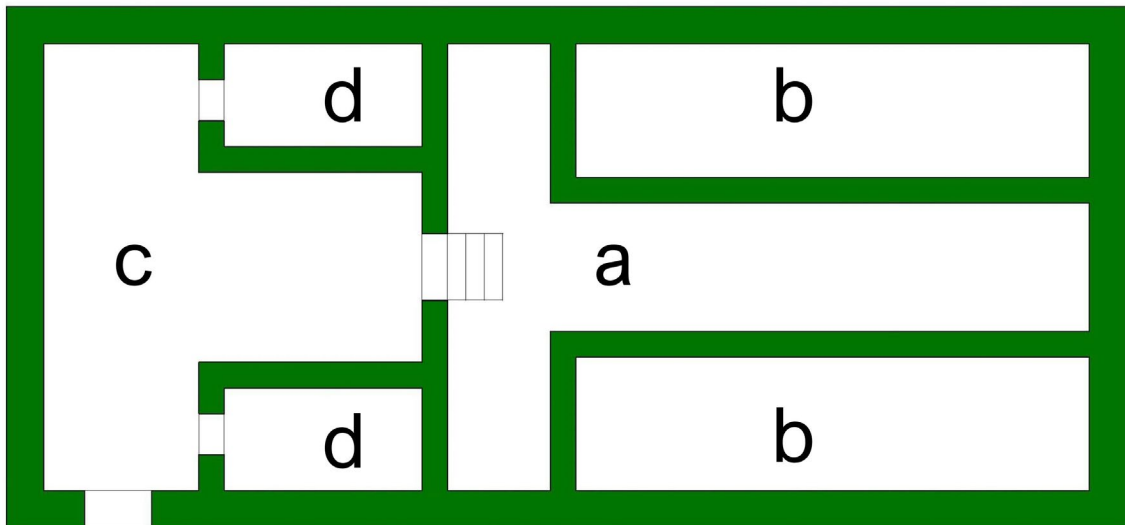
4 A total of 160 *mithraea* were suggested by Klenner 2012, 113, cf. n. 5. Their number was recently lowered to around 130 by Bricault, Veymiers and Amoroso 2021, 20–21 (with a map).

5 The communal meal was the most important ritual celebrated in Mithraic temples, see Hultgård 2004, 299–324; Klöckner 2011, 200–225; Martens 2016, 117–127.

6 For an overview of the possible functions of these rooms see Schatzmann 2004, 12–14; Hensen 2021, 219–220.

7 Since the term became a standard designation for Mithraic temple it will be used in this paper. On the history of the term see Bricault and Roy 2021, 205.

8 In Italy, a term *crypta* (“grotto” or a “vault”) denoting a *mithraeum* is encountered on an inscription from Ostia das well (CIMRM 315). For an overview of the terminology see Clauss 2012, 48, 50 and Bricault and Roy 2021, 205–208.



**Fig. 1. Ideal ground plan of a mithraeum (N. Silnović)**

Only one inscription from Dalmatia refers to a Mithraic sanctuary. An altar found in the vicinity of St. Mark's church in Vratnik (near ancient *Senia*, Senj, Croatia) contains a dedicatory inscription made by Hermes, a slave serving within the *portorium*, who set up a *spelaeum* at his own expense (c. 160–170 AD).<sup>9</sup> The current evidence does not indicate whether other terms were used to denote a *mithraeum* in Dalmatia.

Based on such a simple and characteristic ground plan, the archaeologists had a seemingly easy task, and they could identify a Mithraic temple even in cases where any other evidence, epigraphic or iconographic, was missing. Vermaseren's catalog (1956/1960), the only comprehensive catalog of Mithraic monuments, listed seventy-three *mithraea*, many identified solely based on their characteristic ground plan.<sup>10</sup> Although the pitfalls of such a method are more than obvious, the canonicity of these buildings was only recently questioned.<sup>11</sup>

Not all cult rooms with side *podia* can be associated with the cult of Mithras. Such tripartite spaces are further encountered in tombs and mausolea, where a banquet in commemoration of the dead would take place, or in temples or banqueting rooms associated with different cults in the eastern Mediterranean and the Near East.<sup>12</sup> The already existing type of banqueting room, widely used in various religious contexts where communal dining was practiced, was also borrowed by worshippers of Mithras, whose central ritual consisted of shared meal.

9 *AE* 1894, 22 = *CIL* III, 13282 = lupa 6023 = *HD* 028597 = *CIMRM* 1846 = *ROMIC* I, 74 no. 8. No traces of the actual *mithraeum* were found here.

10 Vermaseren 1956/1960. For a more recent overview of *mithraea* discovered in *Germania Inferior* see Biller 2003, 49–70; for *Germania Superior* see Hensen 2000a, 93–110; for *Germania Superior* and *Inferior*, *Raetia* and *Belgica* see Wiegels 2000, 289–300.

11 See, for example, the discussion about several such cases in Carnuntum, in Gassner 2005, 80–90; Kandler 2011; Kremer 2021, 251–256 (with previous literature). On the problematic identification of several *mithraea* in Rome see Van Haepere 2022, 115–126.

12 For tombs and mausolea see Egelhaaf-Gaiser 2000, 300–321; for the side *podia* in the eastern Mediterranean and the Near East see Schwarzer 2008, 104–190.



**Fig. 2. Mithraeum in Jajce (N. Silnović)**

Likewise, not all surely identified *mithraea* follow the “canonical” tripartite ground plan. *Mithraea* from Dalmatia, for example, already show that diversity is present in the design of these buildings. *Mithraea* from Jajce (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Konjic (Bosnia and Herzegovina) have only one left-hand *podium* (figs. 2, 3).<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the *mithraeum* from Hawarte (Syria, pl. 1 no. 17) has an L-shaped podium along the eastern and southern walls. So far, these “unusual” arrangements have been explained as a result of ritual changes among the Late Antique Mithraic communities and as a signal of the cult’s decline.<sup>14</sup> However, single or otherwise uncanonically shaped *podia* are not necessarily a sign of any particular change in the ritual. They are simply a practical solution to various space demands, or they can be related to the smaller sizes of their Mithraic communities.<sup>15</sup> In Jajce, the construction of the *mithraeum* was conditioned by the rocky terrain configuration and the surrounding swamps; the *mithraeum* in Hawarte was installed in an artificial cave, perhaps originally hollowed out for some other purposes, while the *mithraeum* in Konjic was built on the sloping and foresty terrain which certainly posed some limits to the building.

13 For Jajce see Sergejevski 1937, 11–18; for Konjic see Patsch 1897, 629–656.

14 Walsh 2018, 21. See Gordon’s (justified) criticism of Walsh’s argument in Gordon 2019, 461–475. A similar argument was put forward by David 2016, 175 and David 2020, 105. Here the author presents another example of a *mithraeum* with a single podium, the so-called Mithraeum of the Colored Marbles from Ostia. The identification of this building as a *mithraeum* rests on insufficient evidence and its Mithraic character cannot be ascertained, see also Van Haepere 2019, 455–461.

15 Usage of mobile, wooden *podia* cannot be excluded as well.



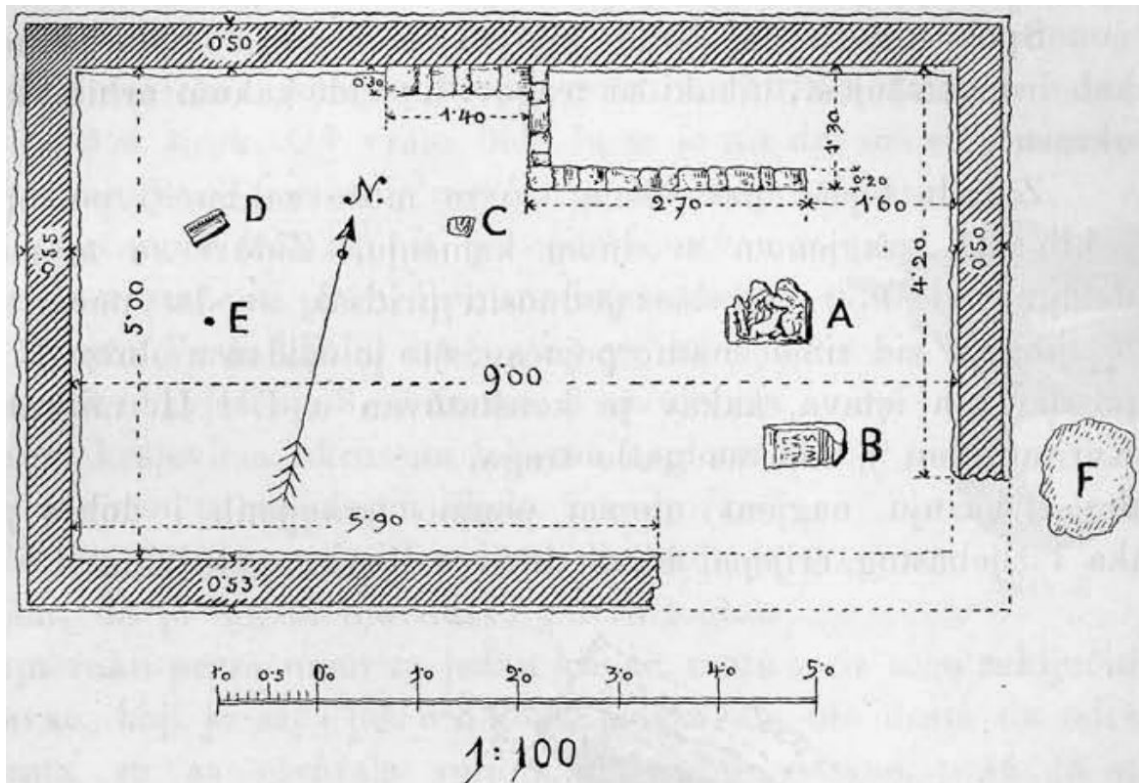


Fig. 3. Ground plan of the mithraeum in Konjic (Patsch 1897, 630, fig. 2)

Despite the seeming uniformity of *mithraea*, there is a great diversity in their internal arrangements, building techniques, and dimensions.<sup>16</sup> This is especially visible in the design of the altar area, which, according to Siemers-Klenner, is a distinguishing feature of each *mithraeum*.<sup>17</sup> In Ostia, with the highest number of *mithraea* within one city,<sup>18</sup> not one altar arrangement closely resembles any other.<sup>19</sup> The altar arrangements at Oltari (*Arupium*, Prozor, Croatia) and Rajanov grič, Čovići (*Arupium*, Prozor, Croatia), which lie close to each other and are similar in many ways, differ from each other in many details and are far from identical (figs. 4, 5).<sup>20</sup>

Besides tripartite buildings, another type of sacred space is usually associated with the cult of Mithras – caves. Caves were first identified as authentic places of Mithraic worship by Franz Cumont, whose idea was inspired by the well-known passage from Porphyry (*De antro nympharum*, 6):

“As Eubulus says, Zoroaster was the first to dedicate a natural cavern in the nearby mountains of Persia, having flowers and streams, in honoring Mithras, the maker and

16 Hensen 2021, 223.

17 Siemers-Klenner 86–87; Gordon 2019, 466.

18 On the number of *mithraea* in Ostia see Van Haepereen 2019; Van Haepereen 2021, 349.

19 Gordon 2019, 466. On Ostian *mithraea* see Van Haepereen 2019; Van Haepereen 2021, 349–356.

20 Beck 1984, 356–371; Rendić-Miočević 2015, 257–278. About the design of the altar arrangements at Oltari and Rajanov grič see Silnović 2024a, forthcoming.



**Fig. 4. Mithraeum at Oltari (N. Silnović)**

father of all. The cavern represented for him an image of the cosmos that Mithras created; the things in the cave were in accordance with symmetrical distances, conveying symbols of elements and seven zones of the cosmos. Then, after this Zoroaster, there also took hold among others the tradition of expounding the mystic rites through caves and caverns, either naturally formed or human-made<sup>21</sup> (emphasis by the author).

It is in a cave where Mithras sacrificed the bull, as depicted on cult images adorning the rear wall of each *mithraeum*. Mithras is shown victoriously pressing the slumped animal under the semicircular arch, emulating the cave vault in these images. Although cave ambiance was often imitated by Mithraic temples (sunken *cella*, vaulted ceilings, lack of natural light, decoration, etc.), caves were rarely used for Mithraic cult purposes, both in Dalmatia and elsewhere (tab. 2 and further in the text).

Despite this fact, scholars are eager to associate caves, natural or artificial, with Mithraic cult activities even when explicit evidence is missing. One extreme example of such an approach is a book by Claudia Sagona on the cult of Mithras in Malta, in which the author identifies no less than thirty *mithraea* in various caves and caverns, as well as in rock-cut *hypogea*, based solely on “certain architectural features”.<sup>22</sup>

A recently published site at Gradišče (Austria) is an excellent example of how difficult it is to identify a “Mithraic cave” when there is no explicit evidence to rely on.<sup>23</sup>

21 Translation from Nilüfer Akçay 2019, 63. On Franz Cumont see further in the text.

22 Sagona 2009. No epigraphic evidence of the worship of Mithras was ever found in Malta, and the author’s argumentation rests on highly problematic iconographical clues.

23 Hinker 2022. Similarly, caves at Zillis and Aventicum (Avenches) in Switzerland were identified as *mithraea* without explicit evidence of the cult. For Zillis see Rageth 2001, 111–126: for Avenches see De Pury-Gysel 2012, 170–177.



**Fig. 5. Mithraeum at Rajanov grič (N. Silnović)**

Despite many archaeological finds, no image or inscription related to the cult of Mithras was discovered here. Nevertheless, the fact that the cult place is located inside the cave, according to Christoph Hinker, indicates Mithras as a probable deity that was worshipped here.<sup>24</sup>

### **Mithraic temples in the Roman province of Dalmatia**

There is no consensus on the number of *mithraea* in the Roman province of Dalmatia (tab. 1). Their varying number indicates the difficulty of identifying some of these sites as Mithraic places of worship as well as the lack of criteria for identifying a Mithraic sanctuary. In the eight major catalogs of Mithraic monuments from Dalmatia produced so far, *mithraea* were treated only sporadically, with one recent exception.<sup>25</sup> Gabričević dedicated only four pages of his dissertation to *mithraea* and identified five of them.<sup>26</sup> Contrary to Gabričević, Zotović covered a wider territory of ex-Yugoslavia and identified twenty-five *mithraea* (eight from Dalmatia), based both on the actual architectural remains or the inscriptions mentioning the foundation or renovation of a *mithraeum*.<sup>27</sup>

24 Hinker 2022, 165. Particularly interesting is the author's discussion of analogous Mithraic cult places from the Eastern Alps and the Balkan region, including several examples from Dalmatia. They are all discussed further in the text.

25 Gabričević 1951; Zotović 1973; Miletić 1996; Lipovac Vrkljan 2001; *ROMIC I*; *ROMIC II*; Karković Takalić 2019; Silnović 2022 (entirely dedicated to Mithraic architecture from Dalmatia).

26 Gabričević 1951, 53–57; he also included Črnomalj, which is actually located in *Pannonia superior*, see Selem 1980, 78–80.

27 Zotović 1973: Vratnik 19 (no. 13); Jajce 26–27 (no. 30); Konjic 29–31 (no. 35); Mile Donje 34–35 (no. 46); Močići 37–38 (no. 48); Rajanov grič 61 (no. 73); Oltari 67 (no. 86); Sv. Juraj 76 (no. 103).

While Gabričević and Zotović were undoubtedly more interested in Mithraic iconography and epigraphy, *mithraea* were nevertheless analyzed along the sculptural and epigraphic monuments. The two doctoral dissertations from 1996 and 2001 also primarily dealt with sculptural monuments, and *mithraea* appear solely as part of the catalog entries.<sup>28</sup>

However, the number of identified *mithraea* seems to be increasing. Željko Miletić identifies ten *mithraea* in Dalmatia,<sup>29</sup> while their number rose to twelve in Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan's catalog.<sup>30</sup> Two catalogs of monuments of "Oriental deities" from Croatia collected by Petar Selem and Inga Vilogorac Brčić also need to be mentioned.<sup>31</sup> Since they concentrate on the territory of the Republic of Croatia, only *mithraea* from the Croatian part of Roman Dalmatia are included.<sup>32</sup>

The relatively high number of *mithraea* in Dalmatia is further maintained by Palma Karković Takalić, who lists nine Mithraic temples in her recent doctoral dissertation dedicated to "mystery cults" in Dalmatia.<sup>33</sup> The exact number of *mithraea* was recently suggested by Christoph Hinker as well. However, the author is concerned only with sanctuaries located in natural settings (adapted rock-niches and caves).<sup>34</sup> Finally, in my recent doctoral dissertation, I have positively identified only six *mithraea*.<sup>35</sup>

Identifying a *mithraeum* is a complex task, and each site needs to be evaluated on its own, considering all the available evidence (architectural remains, epigraphic and sculptural monuments, small finds, etc.). In this paper, I consider the following evidence as the sole conclusive indicators for identifying *mithraea*: only structures with explicit epigraphic (inscriptions dedicated to Mithras) and/or sculptural (tauroctony reliefs or other sculptures related to the cult of Mithras) evidence can be unequivocally identified as *mithraea*.<sup>36</sup> This does not mean, as discussed further in the text, that identifying places lacking this kind of evidence as *mithraea* should be entirely dismissed. It only means that without reliable evidence, it is not possible to identify them as such conclusively.

28 Miletić 1996; Lipovac Vrkljan 2001.

29 Miletić 1996: Vratnik 148 (no. 1); Oltari 150–151 (no. 2), Rajanov grič 151–152 (no. 4); Jajce 170–171 (no. 22); Donje Mile 172 (no. 23); Konjic 173–174 (no. 27); Sv. Juraj 177–178 (no. 30), Močići 178 (no. 31); Rogatica 181 (no. 36); Lever Tara 182 (no. 38).

30 Lipovac Vrkljan 2001: Vratnik 85–86; Oltari 62; Rajanov grič 64; Golubić 67; Crikvine 94–95; Jajce 102–103; Donje Mile 104–105; Konjic 107; Sv. Juraj 117; Močići 118; Dardagan 119–120; Lever Tara 124–125.

31 *ROMIC I*; *ROMIC II*.

32 *ROMIC I*: Oltari 70–71 (no. 4); Rajanov grič 71–72 (no. 5). *ROMIC II*: Močići 86–87 (no. 15); Kapelica 87–88 (no. 4); Sv. Juraj 87–88 (no. 16).

33 Karković Takalić 2019, Crikvine (426); Sv. Juraj (451); Močići (451–452); Oltari (459–464); Rajanov grič (465–470); Jajce (481–484); Donje Mile (484–485); Lever Tara (512–514).

34 Hinker 2022, 156–157, 162–163.

35 Silnović 2022, 53.

36 Based on the related methodological problems with identifying architectural remains of *capitolia* in the provinces, similar criteria was suggested by Crawley Quinn and Wilson 2013, 129–133. On the problematic nature of identifying some *mithraea* in Rome and Ostia see Van Haepereen 2019, 82; Van Haepereen 2022, 115–126.

Mithraic sculptures and inscriptions dedicated to Mithras found outside the context were frequently considered reliable proof of a *mithraeum*'s existence near their discovery site.<sup>37</sup> These objects were often moved and reused for various purposes, and taking them as indicators of *mithraea* is difficult.<sup>38</sup>

### a) Sites that can be positively identified as *mithraea*

Based on the proposed criteria, six Mithraic temples can be positively identified in Dalmatia: Oltari, Rajanov grič, Jajce, Konjic, Sv. Juraj and Močići (fig. 9).<sup>39</sup> Architectural remains of *mithraea* at Oltari (tab. 2, no. 1), Rajanov grič (tab. 2, no. 2), Jajce (tab. no. 3) and Močići (tab. 2, no. 4) are still preserved and can be visited, while the *mithraea* in Konjic and Sv. Juraj (tab. 2, no. 5) had a less fortunate fate. The archaeological remains of the *mithraeum* in Konjic are today overgrown by the forest and no longer visible. However, Patsch, who excavated the *mithraeum* in 1897, published a detailed report including the ground plan of the building with all the finds from the site (fig. 3).<sup>40</sup> The rectangular *mithraeum* (9 × 5 m) consists of one room, the *cella*, built on a single level.<sup>41</sup> The northern wall was sunk into the hill, while the remaining walls rose freely. A local limestone stone was used for its construction, cut in irregular blocks and bound with lime mortar.<sup>42</sup> It appears that the *mithraeum* was vaulted and had a tiled roof.<sup>43</sup> The floor was made of earth, sand, and broken stones. Only the north *podium* was identified (1.30 m wide, 4.30 m long). Besides the well-known double-sided tauroctony relief, an altar dedicated to Mithras by a certain Lucius Veturius<sup>44</sup> and a significant amount of small finds and animal bones were also found.<sup>45</sup>

Similarly, the *mithraeum* at Sv. Juraj Hill in Cavtat (tab. 2, no. 5) no longer exists.<sup>46</sup> The badly worn-out rock-cut tauroctony (fig. 10), accidentally discovered by local sailors in the nineteenth century, was cut out of the rock, and, subsequently, the church of St. George and the adjoining cemetery was built on the site.<sup>47</sup> Sir Arthur Evans gave the first description of the discovery.<sup>48</sup> Besides the cult relief, Evans noted two square altars hewn out of the rock, encircled with a small gutter.<sup>49</sup> He also found three small brass coins inside a natural rock fissure placed below the tauroctony relief: one of

37 See the sites discussed in the b) section of the text.

38 See also examples discussed by Van Haepelen 2022, 117–120.

39 Silnović 2022.

40 Patsch 1897, 629–656.

41 Patsch 1897, 631.

42 Patsch 1897, 632.

43 Patsch 1897, 633.

44 *CIL* III, 14222 = *HD* 052642 = lupa 30326.

45 Patsch 1897, 635–652.

46 Bijadžija 2012, 79–80 fig. 7.

47 The relief is today preserved in the Collection of Baltazar Bogišić, Cavtat.

48 Evans 1877, 387–388; Evans 1883, 19–20.

49 Evans 1883, 19.

Aurelien (270–275 AD), one of Constantius Chlorus (293–306 AD), and one of Constantius II (337–361 AD).<sup>50</sup>

Although Evans found no architectural traces of the remaining parts of the *mithraeum*, he correctly assumed that it must have been artificially constructed against the natural rock.<sup>51</sup> Without the rock-cut tauroctony relief, it would have been hard to identify Oltari as a Mithraic sanctuary since only some small finds were found at the site.<sup>52</sup> Most interesting among them is a fragment of a dark grey-brown cult vessel decorated with a lizard appliqué, which belongs to the well-known group of vessels usually decorated with snakes (*Schlangengefäße*) and other animals (frogs, lizards, tortoises, etc.).<sup>53</sup> Although they are frequently associated with the Mithras cult, *Schlangengefäße* were also used in other cults (Sabazios, Liber, Aesculap, Silvanus).<sup>54</sup>

The conspicuous rock formation bearing the rock-cut tauroctony relief is the sole preserved part of the *mithraeum* at Oltari. The natural setting incorporating various rocky features and the absence of the actual architecture made some scholars conclude that the space functioned as an open-air sanctuary.<sup>55</sup> However, fragments of roof tiles (*tegulae, imbrices*) discovered on the site indicate that the *mithraeum* was once roofed.<sup>56</sup> Although no traces of solid architectural remains were found, a simple structure consisting of four wooden posts was recently proposed.<sup>57</sup>

Carl Patsch, who provided one of the earliest descriptions and a drawing of the site, described it as an enclosed space determined by high ridges, of which the two longer ones face each other and create a spacious room in between.<sup>58</sup> Most of these rocks are no longer preserved, but a structure combining the rocky ridges and wooden construction is likely to have existed here. Moreover, various glass and ceramic kitchenware fragments indicate that a shared meal was practiced at the site.<sup>59</sup> This would have required spaces for its preparation, consumption, and storage, which obviously could not have taken place *sub divo*.

Similarly, the rock-cut tauroctony relief at Rajanov grič is the only remain of a former *mithraeum*. Here, too, an open-air sanctuary was suggested.<sup>60</sup> Based on the description and a drawing provided by Carl Patsch, the space of the *mithraeum* was, similarly

50 Evans 1883, 20.

51 Evans 1883, 19.

52 These include some coarse-ware sherds, fragments of a larger *terra sigillata* plate, fragments of *Firmalampen*, two small fragments of glass vessels, fragments of *amphorae*, a lump of lead with a nail, a yellowish quartz, and seven bronze coins, see Pavelić 1897, 158. In the more recent survey, a *dupondius* (probably of Anotoninus Pius), fragments of everyday coarse ceramics and of fine ceramic plates of African provenance, and a *Firmalampe* with a stamp of *Vibianvs* were found, see Kolak 2012, 555–557.

53 Kolak 2012, 555.

54 Bird 1996, 119–127; Gassner 2004, 229–238; Berger-Pavić and Stökl 2017, 97–125.

55 Zotović 1973, 121; Glavičić 2001, 223; Hinker 2022, 162.

56 Pavelić 1897, 158; Kolak 2012, 556.

57 Kolak 2012, 556.

58 Patsch 1900, 82–83 fig. 31.

59 See n. 54.

60 Zotović 1973, 121; Glavičić 2001, 223; Hinker 2022, 162.

to Oltari, formed by several rows of high ridges, forming narrow gorges.<sup>61</sup> These ridges created a semi-enclosed space, which, as at Oltari, could have been abutted using a light wooden construction that would have perished with time.

A rock-cut tauroctony relief is also preserved in the *mithraeum* in Jajce, along with architectural remains. The *mithraeum* (7 × 4.6 m) has a trapezoidal ground plan, and its western part incorporates the natural marl rock (with the rock-cut tauroctony relief), while the remaining parts of the temple were built using the irregular, roughly processed marlstone blocks.<sup>62</sup> The walls were constructed without foundations, indicating a light roof construction, while the floor was made of beaten earth and sand.<sup>63</sup> Only the remains of the left podium are preserved (width 1.80 m), while the exact location of the north wall is unknown as the stone blocks were not found in their original position.<sup>64</sup> Other finds include the statuette of Cautopates found with three small altars on the podium, three other altars found in front of the cult relief, and a recently discovered lion statuette.<sup>65</sup>

Another rock-cut tauroctony relief is preserved in the *mithraeum* in Močići, on the Tomina jama site.<sup>66</sup> The *mithraeum* is located in a natural limestone cave whose original appearance has altered through time. The lower part of the cave was at some point enclosed in a vaulted cistern whose remains are still visible on the floor.<sup>67</sup> The cave is missing its upper and side walls, which were probably removed when the cistern was installed. On the opposite side to the tauroctony relief, traces of another rock-cut figure are preserved, interpreted as Silvanus or some Mithraic figure.<sup>68</sup>

### **b) Sites that can not be unequivocally identified as mithraea**

The *mithraeum* at Vratnik was often presumed, based on the previously-mentioned inscription donated by a slave, Hermes, and on another altar carrying a dedication to Mithras, which was found built into the base of one of the saint's sculptures in the St. Michael's church (tab. 1).<sup>69</sup> Josip Brunšmid surveyed the site in 1898 and recognized what he thought was the foundation of the southern wall of a *mithraeum*.<sup>70</sup>

He further noticed that the site was already dug over and made a note of several fragments of various vessels found scattered around the surface of the surveyed area: the shattered bottom of a lamp, a few pieces of large wine amphorae, and fragments of long, narrow bricks presumably used for the floor of the *mithraeum*.<sup>71</sup> Although

61 Patsch 1900, 84 fig. 32.

62 Sergejevski 1937, 13.

63 Sergejevski 1937, 13.

64 Sergejevski 1937, 13.

65 Sergejevski 1937, 14–16; on the lion statuette see Silnović 2024b, 637–646.

66 Bijadžija 2012, 81–82 fig. 8.

67 Evans 1883, 20–22 fig. 7.

68 Rendić-Miočević 1989, 531–537; Cambi 2006, 207–208.

69 *ILJug* II, 920 = *HD* 020913 = *CIMRM* 1847 = *ROMIC* I, 76–77 no. 9.

70 Brunšmid 1898, 189–190.

71 Brunšmid 1898, 189–190.

Hermes' altar mentions a *spelaeum*, and it seems reasonable to assume that the *mithraeum* was located near the site of its discovery, its exact location remains open. Senia (Senj) and its hinterland are rich in Mithraic finds, and the altars could have been brought to the site from elsewhere.<sup>72</sup> The nature of Brunšmid's finds remains hard to evaluate as no further archaeological excavations were conducted at the site, and none of the finds can be explicitly associated with the Mithras cult.

Another *mithraeum* was often assumed at Donje Mile, near Jajce (Bosnia and Herzegovina). Here, a tauroctony relief was found in 1912 on the right bank of the river Pliva.<sup>73</sup> The relief was discovered in the vicinity of the creek called Pećine (caves) by some locals, after which Carl Patsch, who first published the monument, visited the site hoping to find the remains of the *mithraeum*.<sup>74</sup> Although he did not find them, he assumed that the *mithraeum* must have been located nearby, where the relief could have been attached to some surrounding cliff.<sup>75</sup>

His assumption was later adopted by Zotović and other scholars, who all presumed a *mithraeum* at this place (tab. 1).<sup>76</sup> Similarly to Vratnik, a *mithraeum* could have existed somewhere in the area where the relief was found, but since the relief was found out of the context and no archaeological excavations were ever conducted at the site, this is not possible to confirm. Thus, the relief can not be taken as evidence of a *mithraeum* at the site.

In Lever Tara (Montenegro), on a site called Preslica, a shallow arched niche was carved into the cliff (fig. 6).<sup>77</sup> Next to it, outlines of an altar were carved in the rock as well, bearing a dedication *Invicto Aug(usto)*, dated to 270 AD.<sup>78</sup> The natural rock setting was taken as an indicator of the Mithraic character of the site, and it was assumed that a tauroctony relief was once placed inside the niche (tab. 2).<sup>79</sup>

Although natural rock is frequently used for carving the tauroctony image in Dalmatia (Oltari, Rajanov grič, Jajce, Močići, Sv. Juraj), such reliefs and associated cult spaces are not exclusive to the cult of Mithras. Several reliefs depicting Silvanus are found similarly carved into the natural rock, and a rock-cut relief of Hercules from the Rasohe quarry (island of Brač) or a rock-cut relief of the Dioscuri from Dračevo on the river Neretva (near Čapljina) should be mentioned as well.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, Silvanus'

72 Overview of finds from the area in Rendić-Miočević 2015, 403–426.

73 Patsch 1925, 137–139. The relief is today lost.

74 Patsch 1925, 137–139.

75 Patsch 1925, 139.

76 *CIMRM* 1906; Zotović 1973, 34; Beck 1984, 363 n. 18; Miletić 1996, 172 no. 23; Lipovac Vrkljan 2001, 104 no. 24.a; Karković Takalić 2019, 484; Hinker 2022, 162–163.

77 Patsch 1896, 292 fig. 77.

78 *AE* 1998, 1027 = *CIL* III, 13849 = *CIMRM* 1888 = *HD* 042305. I am grateful to the Department for the Protection of Cultural Heritage, Ministry of Culture of Montenegro, for the information and photographs of the Lever Tara site.

79 Patsch 1896, 292 fig. 77; *CIMRM* 1887; Zotović 1973, 38–39 no. 49; Miletić 1996, 182 no. 38; Lipovac Vrkljan 2001, 124–125 no. 39; Karković Takalić 2019, 512–514; Hinker 2022, 162.

80 About the rock-cut images of Silvanus see Rendić-Miočević 1982, 133–135; Perinić 2016, cat. nos. III/23, III/24, III/75; about Hercules on Brač see Cambi 2013, 5–19; about the Dioscuri see Paškvalin 1973, 53–59.





**Fig. 6. Lever Tara (courtesy of the Ministry of Culture Montenegro)**

sanctuaries in Dalmatia are likewise placed in natural settings and caves.<sup>81</sup> Although the niche at Lever Tara contains a hole that was probably used for fastening a relief plate, it is not possible to guess, based solely on a natural setting, who and what it represented.

The dedication *Invicto Aug(usto)*, which appears on the inscription, was taken as a further indication of its Mithraic character. Although Mithras, the Invincible Sun God, is frequently invoked as *Invicto*, *Invicto Augusto*, *Soli invicto*, etc., these designations are found associated with different deities (Hercules, Silvanus, Sol, etc.) and their link with Mithras in the absence of a clear contextual or other epigraphic or sculptural evidence, is not possible to confirm.<sup>82</sup> Another similar example is Pljevlja (*municipium S...(?)*) (Montenegro), where an altar bearing a dedication *Soli in/victo sac(rum)* was found secondarily built in the fountain.<sup>83</sup> Its Mithraic character was recently dismissed based on analogous arguments.<sup>84</sup> Thus, without explicit sculptural or further epigraphic evidence mentioning Mithras, it is impossible to confirm its Mithraic character.

81 Cambi 1998/2000, 99–112; Demicheli 2010, 175–185.

82 A good survey of the problems of identifying Mithras with Sol invictus in Berrens 2004.

83 Patsch 1896, 277 no. 2 fig. 42; *ILJug* III, 1701 = *CIL* III, 12751 = *CIMRM* 1886; its Mithraic character is unquestioned by Zotović 1973, 41; Miletic 1996, 181 no. 36; Lipovac Vrkljan 2001, 124 no. 38. a; and Karković Takalić 2019, 509–510. The altar is currently kept in the Homeland museum in Pljevlja.

84 Gavrilović Vitas 2021, 145, 244 no. 2. It is unclear why Hinker assumes a mithraeum here, see Hinker 2022, 162, cf. note 635. His citation refers to Lever Tara and not to Pljevlja.

A *mithraeum* in Golubić (Raetinium, near Bihać, Bosnia, and Herzegovina) is assumed based on the numerous Mithraic finds from the area (tab. 1).<sup>85</sup> However, none of the Mithraic monuments from Golubić was found in situ: two stone blocks bearing dedications *Fonti* and *Leoni* were reused as a building material, while the tauroctony relief was found thrown among the numerous spolia on the hill called Crkvina.<sup>86</sup> Wilhelm Tomaschek, who first investigated the site, noted foundations of a building that he identified as a *sacellum* (13.5 × 8 m), and shortly after, Vaclav Radimsky interpreted them as remains of a *mithraeum*.<sup>87</sup>

Later excavations, however, revealed that these foundations belonged to a medieval church, although an earlier Roman wall was also noticed, whose original function could not have been specified at the time.<sup>88</sup> Since the site was repeatedly dug over, the chances that the remains of the *mithraeum* survived (if they ever existed at this place) are low. It is also impossible to ascertain if the relief, as suggested by Patsch, was set up in the same *mithraeum* as the two stone blocks or if they come from different temples.<sup>89</sup>

Besides these monuments, another altar dedicated to Mithras was found close to the nearby lapodean necropolis in Jezerine, a village on the opposite side of the river Una.<sup>90</sup> Apart from the altar, a tauroctony relief was also found at the exact location.<sup>91</sup> Both monuments were discovered near the river, covered in a thick layer of tuff, which prompted Segejevski's logical conclusion that the *mithraeum*, if ever erected at this place, must have been destroyed by the water.<sup>92</sup>

The number of Mithraic monuments discovered in Golubić points to the existence of a Mithraic community (possibly even more than one) and consequently to the existence of Mithraic temple(s). Without architectural remains, their exact location remains speculative.<sup>93</sup>

In 1965, a tauroctony relief was found in the Roman quarry at Dardagan (near Zvornik, Bosnia and Herzegovina) (fig. 7).<sup>94</sup> The relief was found together with some scattered fragments of a clay vessel, a fibula, and four bronze coins as well as several

85 Lipovac Vrkljan 2001, 67 no. 7. a; also Karković Takalić presumes two *mithraea* in Golubić, see Karković Takalić 2019, 475–478.

86 About stone blocks see Tomaschek 1881, 469; Radimsky 1893, 57 figs. 38, 39; *Fonti*: *CIL* III, 13276<sup>b</sup> = *ILJug* 216<sup>b</sup> = *HD* 033259 = lupa 23787; *Leoni*: *CIL* III, 10042, 13276<sup>a</sup> = *ILJug* 216<sup>a</sup> = *HD* 033256 = lupa 23787. Today kept in the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina. About the tauroctony relief see Tomaschek 1881, 467–468; Brunšmid 1905, 63–65 fig. 123, lupa 8830. The relief is kept in the Archaeological museum in Zagreb.

87 Tomaschek 1881, 468; Radimsky 1893, 54.

88 Čremošnik 1956, 128–129.

89 Patsch 1897, 656.

90 Sergejevski 1939, 8 no. 1; *HD* 033982 = lupa 30501. Today kept in the Archaeological Museum in Split.

91 Sergejevski 1939, 8–9 no. 2 fig. 1. The relief is unfortunately lost.

92 Sergejevski 1939, 7.

93 See the discussion of similar cases in Van Haepelen 2022, 120.

94 Kosorić 1965, 49–56; Bricault and Roy 2021, 79 fig. 24. The relief is kept in the Museum of Eastern Bosnia, Tuzla.



**Fig. 7. Tauroctony relief, Dardagani (N. Silnović)**

hardly recognizable figures carved in the rock, which Milica Kosorić associated with the cult of Mithras.<sup>95</sup> The site was thus identified as a location of another *mithraeum* in Dalmatia, although the *mithraeum* itself was never archaeologically attested (tab. 1).<sup>96</sup>

The relief, made of local limestone, is particularly interesting. It is only roughly carved, while some details are treated rudimentarily. Leaving the compositional and iconographical peculiarities aside, the overall impression is of unfinished work. The intention was undoubtedly to emulate the rocky ambiance of the cave; some parts of the relief show traces of various carving tools without the final finishing and smoothing. Other than this relief, there is no other material evidence of the cult of Mithras in Zvornik.

However, recent research conducted at the quarry in Dardagan has revealed a large complex of open-cast underground extraction of limestone and has shown that Dardagan was the main source of stone blocks and unfinished stone products with which Sirmium (Sremska Mitrovica, Serbia) was supplied between the second and fifth centuries AD.<sup>97</sup> A further examination of Kosorić's archaeological reports and original photographs confirmed that the relief was found outside the complex, where it ended up on a pile of rubbish collected by the workers from the quarry.<sup>98</sup>

95 Kosorić 1965, 49.

96 Miletić 1996, 179–180 no. 33; Lipovac Vrkljan 2001, 119–120 no. 35. a; Karković Takalić 2019, 510–511.

97 Đurić et al. 2012, 471–479.

98 I am thankful to Dr. Dženan Brigić from the Museum of Eastern Bosnia in Tuzla for allowing me the access to the archival documentation.

The unfinished tauroctony relief was, therefore, most likely a product of the local workshop that was operating here.<sup>99</sup> Since the cult is otherwise unattested in the area, the relief was probably intended for export, perhaps even to Sirmium, where the cult of Mithras is otherwise attested and where the limestone products from Dardagan were regularly exported.<sup>100</sup>

The site of Crikvine in Rupotina (near Salona, Solin, Croatia) is another location where a *mithraeum* was assumed (tab. 1). A tauroctony relief was discovered reused as a lid on one of the medieval tombs adjoining the church of St. Elijah, and the remains of a Roman building with an apse (*villa rustica*?) from the same site were immediately recognized as a potential *mithraeum* (fig. 8).<sup>101</sup>

However, no further details about the interior arrangement of this apsidal room are known, and its cultic purpose remains unverified as well. As the graves inside and around the church destroyed the ancient architecture, only traces of walls and some parts of the floor were found.<sup>102</sup> There are no further finds from the site that would imply a *mithraeum* here.

The tauroctony relief was found with several other reused Roman monuments, and although they were most probably all found at the site or its immediate vicinity, they could have been brought from elsewhere as well. The nearest location with rich material evidence of the cult of Mithras is Salona, which boasts the highest concentration of Mithraic finds from a single settlement in Dalmatia and is only three kilometers south of Crikvine.<sup>103</sup>

At the site called Kapelica (small chapel), located above Uroši hamlet in the Godača massif (near Sinac, Croatia), a niche cut into the natural rock containing fragments of some figural representation was spotted.<sup>104</sup> The site is recognized as another potential *mithraeum* (tab. 1), although its Mithraic character is impossible to ascertain, as minefields nowadays surround the site. Until the opportunity arises when the site investigation will be possible, the site can not be positively identified as a *mithraeum*.

Rogatica (*colonia Ris...* (?), Bosnia and Herzegovina) is another site with a *mithraeum* in a natural cave.<sup>105</sup> An altar dedicated to Mithras was discovered in 1967 in the vicinity of a Toplik stream and a cave at a depth of 6 meters and under a 4-meter-thick layer of tufa.<sup>106</sup> Besides some Roman *tegulae*, Ivo Bojanovski did not mention any other finds

99 Silnović 2023, 193–217.

100 Mithras in Sirmium: lupa 5710; lupa 5711; on the export of limestone products from Dardagan to Sirmium see Đurić et al. 2006, 103–137.

101 Bulić 1909, 53–57; *CIMRM* 1871 = *ROMIS* 162–163 no. 4 = lupa 24997. The existence of a *mithraeum* here was further supported by Miletić 1996, 165 no. 17h; Lipovac Vrkljan 2001, 94–95 no. 18. a; and Karković Takalić 2019, 426. The relief is preserved in the Archaeological Museum in Split.

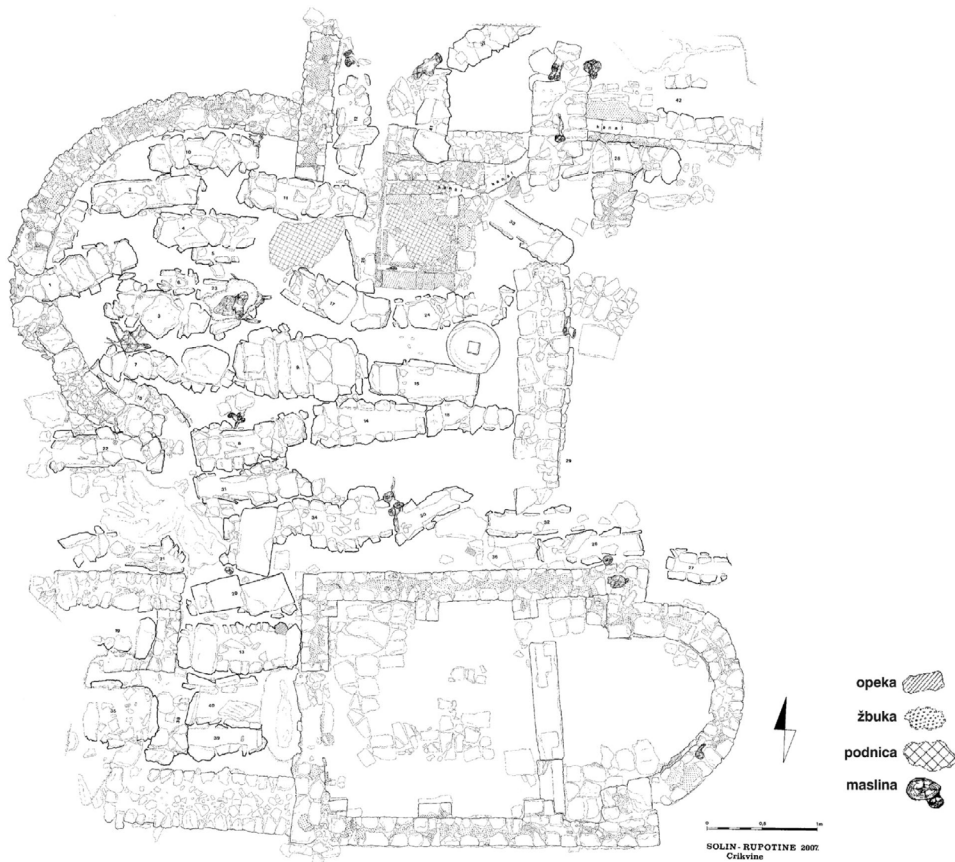
102 Uroda 2008, 73–74; Uroda 2010, 61–75.

103 Silnović 2015, 103–116.

104 The site was first mentioned by Rendić-Miočević 1982, 130; also in Rendić-Miočević 2015, 414; *ROMIC II*, 87–88 (no. 4).

105 Hinker 2022, 163; Šačić Beća 2018, 115, 120 no. 2.

106 Bojanovski 1967, 47–49; *AE* 1976, 0533 = *AE* 1009, 1028 = *ILJug II*, 624 = *HD* 012315. The altar is currently kept in the Museum of Old Herzegovina in Foča.



**Fig. 8. Ground plan, Rupotine (Uroda 2008, 72, Fig. 3)**

from the spot, and the relationship between the said cave and the altar is unclear as no further details about the circumstances of this find are available.<sup>107</sup> Therefore, it is impossible to associate the altar with the cave.

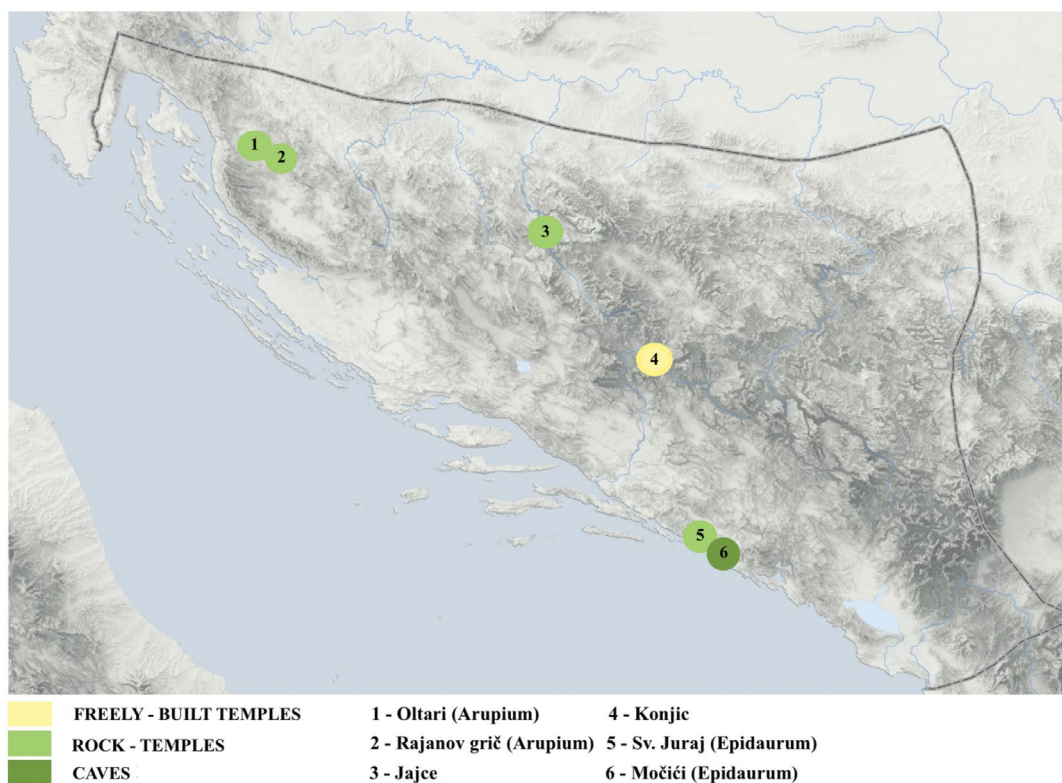
### **Typology of *mithraea* in Roman Dalmatia**

Depending on the kind of their construction, two basic types of Mithraic temples can be distinguished in Dalmatia:

1. Freely-built temples (artificially constructed temples)
2. Temples in natural settings:
  - a) Caves (natural or artificial)
  - b) Rock-temples, i.e., temples constructed against the rock face.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>107</sup> Bojanovski 1967, 49.

<sup>108</sup> A similar classification was also suggested by Gabričević 1951, 53–54; and recently by Hensen 2017, 385–386; Hensen 2021, 216–217. See also a brief remark by Beck 1984, 363–364. Although typological classification of *mithraea* is a complex issue and should include various factors, like altar arrangements etc., it is here limited to the basic construction type. See the discussion in Bricault and Roy 2021, 169–170.



**Fig. 9. Mithraea in Dalmatia (N. Silnović)**

Based on the identified mithraea in Dalmatia, the second type prevails, with five examples (fig. 9): one can be identified as a natural cave (Močići), and the remaining four are rock-temples (Oltari, Rajanov grič, Jajce, Sv. Juraj). The first category is represented by only one example – the *mithraeum* in Konjic.

It should be noted that the current ratio is far from conclusive. It is based solely on positively identified *mithraea*, while their original number was undoubtedly much higher. Therefore, it is impossible to guess which type was dominant in Dalmatia. In places with dense urban structures, like Salona or Iader (Zadar, Croatia), it is more likely that the first type was more present, which, of course, does not exclude the possibility of Mithraic caves or rock-temples located somewhere in their surroundings.

Surprisingly, no *mithraeum* was ever found in Salona, where, judging by the sheer number of Mithraic finds, several sanctuaries must have existed, either inside or outside the city perimeters.<sup>109</sup> Ejnar Dyggve tried to estimate their approximate location based on the find spots of some of the Mithraic monuments.<sup>110</sup> He suggested locations of altogether five *mithraea*: one near the theater, one near the amphitheater, one in the eastern part of the town, and two outside the city walls.<sup>111</sup> However, since none

<sup>109</sup> Silnović 2015, 103–116; Silnović 2018, 291–304.

<sup>110</sup> Dyggve 1951, 8.

<sup>111</sup> Dyggve 1951, 8. A similar proposal was recently made by Karković Takalić 2019, 426–435, maps 5 and 6, who uses find spots of Mithraic monuments in order to establish potential locations of *mithraea*.

of these monuments was found in situ, the exact location of *mithraea* in Salona is impossible to ascertain.

Even if it is impossible to offer a conclusive typological analysis of *mithraea* in Dalmatia, the stark contrast in the number of *mithraea* located in natural settings in Dalmatia (five within one province) and other provinces is evident (tab. 2). Outside Dalmatia, three examples are confirmed in Pannonia superior (tab. 2, nos. 6, 7, 8), two in Moesia inferior (tab. 2, nos. 10, 11), two in Syria (tab. 2, nos. 17, 18), and one in each Noricum (tab. 2, no. 9), Gallia Narbonensis (tab. 2, no. 12), Germania inferior (tab. 2, no. 13), Raetia (tab. 2, no. 14), Italia (tab. 2, no. 15), and Macedonia (tab. 2, no. 16).

Four of these are natural caves (tab. 2, nos. 9, 11, 15, 17), one is an artificial cave (tab. 2, no. 18), while the remaining *mithraea* are rock-temples (tab. 2, nos. 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16). If taken all together, rock-temples are the most represented type (twelve), while only six caves are used as *mithraea* (natural or artificial). When their total number (eighteen) is compared to the overall number of *mithraea*, it seems that the freely-built temple was the preferred type and not the “authentic” cave.

### **Some observations about naturally located *mithraea* in Dalmatia**

So far, the high concentration of *mithraea* located in natural settings in Dalmatia was understood as a result of several factors. One is the province’s favorable physical and natural environment with the predominant karst landscape. Such landscape is rich in natural caves and various rocky features, readily available to Mithraic communities in the surroundings of almost every settlement.<sup>112</sup> According to some scholars, the other factor was the low social status of the cult’s members, who belonged to the poor and rural layers of the society, resulting in “rustic” Mithraic architecture.<sup>113</sup> The idea of the poor and rural character of the Mithraic cult in Dalmatia resulted from the traditional perception of Roman Dalmatia as an underdeveloped province.<sup>114</sup>

Franz Cumont first made the association of ritual usage of caves with primitive rural societies, which he related to his theory of the Persian origins of the cult of Mithras.<sup>115</sup> Contrary to these rural and uncivilized origins of (cave) *mithraea*, it is in the civilized urban environment of the (Western) Roman Empire that the final stage of their development was ultimately achieved in the form of the freely-built temples.<sup>116</sup> Cumont’s ideas continue to be influential, and scholars are still eager to prove the Persian origins of the cult and continue to associate caves with the supposed homeland of the cult.<sup>117</sup>

112 Gabričević 1951, 54; Siemers-Klenner 2020, 241.

113 Gabričević 1951, 56; Zotović 1973, 121.

114 Džino 2014, 1–39; Džino 2016, 193–212.

115 Cumont 1896, 55.

116 Cumont 1896, 57.

117 For example, Schütte-Maischatz and Winter argue for the early date of *mithraea* in Doliche (second half of the second century AD), Schütte-Maischatz and Winter 2004, 124, 126; see arguments for a later date in Gordon 2007, 610. Also see Nielsen 2014, 161. On Cumont and the Persian character of the cult see Gordon 2017, 289–325.



**Fig. 10. Tauroctony-relief, Sv. Juraj (courtesy of Ivan Alduk, Conservation department, Imotski)**

Most recently, Ines Siemers-Klenner also proposed the Cumontian scenario (although not explicitly) of the development of the Mithraic temple.<sup>118</sup> Caves and rock-temples, according to Siemers-Klenner, are characteristic of the first phase of the cult, and *mithraea* from Dalmatia are given as an example.<sup>119</sup> The later stage of the cult's development is marked by the appearance of the freely-built temples, which, according to Siemers-Klenner, first appeared in Germania superior.<sup>120</sup>

The idea of a strictly linear development from natural cult sites to monumental stone architecture has long been criticized.<sup>121</sup> None of the Mithraic caves or rock-temples, both in Dalmatia and outside the province, seems to support this idea. Caves and rock-temples were continuously used from the early second until the late fourth century AD, alongside the freely-built temples, and were not restricted to the initial stage of the cult. Mithraic usage of caves is not a temporally bound phenomenon and does not signify an underdeveloped stage of the cult when proper Mithraic architecture (freely-built temples) was supposedly still nonexistent.

While the exact topography of most of the Roman settlements where these *mithraea* are found (Arupium, Jajce, Epidaurum) is not fully understood, the somewhat romantic idea of the secluded location of these *mithraea*, far away from the public eye, should be abandoned. Recent research has shown how Mithraic temples were integrated into

118 Siemers-Klenner 2020, 240–241.

119 Siemers-Klenner 2020, 240–241.

120 The early date of phase 1 of Mithraeum II in Güglingen (c. 114/125 AD) must be taken with some reservations as the date is conjured based on the indirect evidence, see Siemers-Klenner 2020, 241.

121 See, for example, Mylonopoulos 2008, 51–83; Sporn 2015, 340.



the wider spatial settings of the settlements and at the relatively accessible areas.<sup>122</sup> While the topographical patterns vary from region to region, the general trend of locating *mithraea* on the outskirts of the settlements, either inside or directly outside their perimeters, was recently observed.<sup>123</sup> The *mithraea* in *Arupium*, *Jajce*, and *Epidaurum* were all located near the settlements as elsewhere in provinces.<sup>124</sup>

Table 1: *Mithraea* located in natural settings

| Nr. | Site (Province)   | Location and type   | Evidence (epigraphic and/or iconographic) | Date  | Literature   |
|-----|---|---|---|---|--|
| 1   | Rajanov grič, <i>Arupium</i> (Prozor) (Dalmatia)          | natural setting, near the <i>municipium</i> and Roman quarry, on the right bank of the Rajan's creek; rock-temple | rock-cut tauroctony                       | second half of the second - mid fourth century AD (?) | Fras 1835, 228-229; Ljubić 1882, 19; Patsch 1900, 84-85; Brunšmid 1901, 112; Gabričević 1954, 37, no. 11; CIMRM 1852; Zotović 1973, 61, no. 73; Beck 1984, 356-371; Miletić 1996, 151-152, no. 4; Lipovac Vrkljan 2001, 63-65, no. 4a-b; Rendić-Miočević 2015, 403-426; ROMIC I, 71-72, no. 5; Walsh 2019, 112, E.1.   |
| 2   | Oltari/Kraljev stolac, <i>Arupium</i> (Prozor) (Dalmatia) | natural setting, near the <i>municipium</i> and Roman quarry; rock-temple   | rock-cut tauroctony                       | second half of the second - mid fourth century AD (?) | Ljubić 1882, 12-28; Pavelić 1897, 158; Patsch 1900, 82-84; Brunšmid 1901, 110-112; CIMRM 1851; Gabričević 1954, 37, no. 10; Glavičić 1968, 19; Zotović 1973, 67, no. 86; Medini 1975, 89; Beck 1984, 356-371; Miletić 1996, 150-151, no. 2b-c; Glavičić 2001, 223; Lipovac Vrkljan 2001, 62-63, no. 3a-b; Kolak 2012, 555-557; Glavičić 2013, 97-98; Rendić-Miočević 2015, 403-426; ROMIC I, 70-71, no. 4; Walsh 2019, 33, 112, E.1. |

122 Arnhold 2015, 301–302; Hensen 2000a, 400–402.

123 On the various topographical contexts see Hensen 2000a, 400–401; Hensen 2000b, 87–94; Hensen 2017, 400–402; Hensen 2021, 224–225; Bricault and Roy 2021, 176–204.

124 A detailed topographical discussion of *mithraea* in Dalmatia in Silnović 2022.

|   |   |   |  |  |  |
|---|---|---|--|--|--|
| 3 | Jajce<br>(Dalmatia)   | natural setting, in a wetland area called Bare (swamp), on the left bank of river Pliva, close to the <i>municipium</i> ; rock-temple | rock-cut tauroctony                                  | late third/early fourth century AD     | Sergejevski 1937, 11-18; CIMRM 1901-1905; Zotović 1973, 26-27, no. 30; Miletić 1996, 170- 171, no. 22a; Lipovac Vrkljan 2001, 101-104, no. 23a; Walsh 2019, 112, no. E.3.  |
| 4 | Močići,<br>Tomina jama<br><i>Epidaurum</i><br>(Cavtat)<br>(Dalmatia)                                | natural setting, 5km from Epidaurum, in a hilly and thickly forested area; natural limestone cave                                     | rock-cut tauroctony                                  | late third/early fourth century AD (?) | Evans 1883, 20-22, fig. 7; Gabričević 1954, 37, no. 18, fig. 2; Rendić-Miočević 1953, 271-276=Rendić-Miočević 1989, 531-537; CIMRM 1882; Zotović 1973, 37- 38, no. 48; Miletić 1996, 178-179, no. 31; Lipovac Vrkljan 2001, 118-119, no. 33; Cambi 2006, 207- 208; Bijadžija 2012, 81-82; Cambi 2013, 26; Perinić 2015, 215-228; Perinić 2016, 41, figs. 7 and 7a; ROMIC II, 86-87, no. 15; Lenke 2017, 71-72; Walsh 2019, 112, E.2. |
| 5 | Sv. Juraj,<br><i>Epidaurum</i><br>(Cavtat)<br>(Dalmatia)  | natural-setting, on the hill of Sv. Juraj; rock-temple (destroyed)  | rock-cut tauroctony                                  | late third/early fourth century AD (?) | Evans 1877, 387-388; Evans 1883, 19-20; CIMRM 1883; Rendić-Miočević 1953, 271-272; Gabričević 1954, 37, no. 19, fig. 3; Zotović 1973, 76, no. 103; Miletić 1996, 177-178, no. 30a; Lipovac Vrkljan 2001, 116-118, no. 32a-b; Bijadžija 2012, 80; ROMIC II, 87-88, no. 16.  |
| 6 | Fertőrákos,<br><i>Scarbantia</i><br>(Sopron)<br>(Pannonia Superior)                                 | natural setting; rock-temple  | rock-cut tauroctony, tauroctony relief, inscriptions | beginning - mid third century AD       | CIMRM 1636-1647; Tóth 2007.  |
| 7 | Rožanec,<br>Črnomelj<br>(Pannonia Superior)   | forest canyon; rock-temple  | rock-cut tauroctony, inscriptions                    | first half of the second century AD    | CIMRM 1481-1483; Selem 1980, 78-79; Lovenjak 1998, 286-287;  |
| 8 | Mithraeum I,<br><i>Carnuntum</i><br>(Petronell,<br>Bad-Deutch-<br>Altenburg)<br>(Pannonia Superior) | natural setting at the foot of Kirchenberg hill, outer edge of <i>canabae</i> ; rock-temple (destroyed)                               | tauroctony reliefs, dedications                      | c. 100 AD (?)                          | CIMRM 1664-1680; Gugl, Kremer 2011, 164-166; Kremer 2012, 330-331; Walsh 2019, 109, D.2.   |

|    |   |  |                                  |   |  |
|----|---|--|----------------------------------|---|--|
| 9  | Zgornja Pohanca, Zlodejev greben, <i>Celeia</i> (Celje) (Noricum) | natural cave   | tauroctony reliefs, inscriptions | third century AD (?)                            | CIMRM 1457-1461; Lovenjak 1998, 124-130.                                   |
| 10 | Kreta, near <i>Oescus</i> (Moesia Inferior)                       | south bank of the river Vit, inside a quarry; subsequently enlarged with stone blocks; rock-temple   | tauroctony reliefs, inscriptions | ?   | CIMRM 2256-2262; Bottez 2006, 290; Alexandrescu, Topoleanu 2019, 180.      |
| 11 | Târgușor, La Adam (Moesia Inferior)                               | 3km from the village; natural cave   | tauroctony reliefs, inscriptions | ?   | CIMRM 2303-2309.   |
| 12 | Bourg-Saint-Andéol (Gallia Narbonensis)                           | plateau between two streams, constructed against the steep rock-face, traces of gabled roof; rock-temple   | rock-cut tauroctony              | second century (?)                              | CIMRM 895-897; Walters 1974, 4-5; Lenk 2017, 61-80.                        |
| 13 | Reichweiler-Schwarzerden (Germania Inferior)                      | marshland north of the village, close to a stream, wooden construction with a gabled roof against the steep rock-face; rock-temple   | rock-cut tauroctony              | third century AD (?)                            | CIMRM 1280-1281; Schwertheim 1974, 178-179, no. 139; Walsh 2019, 106, B.4. |
| 14 | <i>Centum Prata</i> , (Kempraten, Rappersweil-Jona) (Raetia)      | northern shore of lake Zurich, partially hewn into the natural rock, stone construction (phase 1), wooden or timber-loam construction (phase 2), mixed construction (phase 3); rock-temple | tauroctony relief, inscriptions  | late third – late fourth/early fifth century AD | Ackerman et al. 2020, 47-63.   |
| 15 | San Giovanni di Duino (Trieste) (Italia)                          | on the hill slope overlooking the coast; natural cave  | two tauroctony reliefs           | late second (?) – end of fourth century AD      | Stacul 1976, 29-38; Walsh 2019, 114-115, F.4.                              |

|    |   |   |                               |                                      |   |
|----|---|---|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| 16 | Kato Thermes (Macedonia)                  | Rhodope mountains, well in its vicinity; rock-temple  | rock-cut tauroctony           | second - third centuries (?)         | Klenner 2012, 121-122.  |
| 17 | Hawarte (Syria)                           | close to the village, under the church of Archbishop Photios; series of natural caves           | frescoes with Mithraic scenes | beginning - end of fourth century AD | Gawlikowski 2020, 183-190; Walsh 2019, 122-124, J.3.                        |
| 18 | <i>Doliche</i> (Dülük), Commagene (Syria) | beneath the ancient hilltop settlement, inside abandoned subterranean quarries; artificial cave | rock-cut tauroctony reliefs   | early – end of fourth century AD (?) | Schütte-Maischatz, Winter 2004; Gordon 2007, 602-610; Walsh 2019, 122, J.2. |

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

Palma Karković Takalić

## **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.

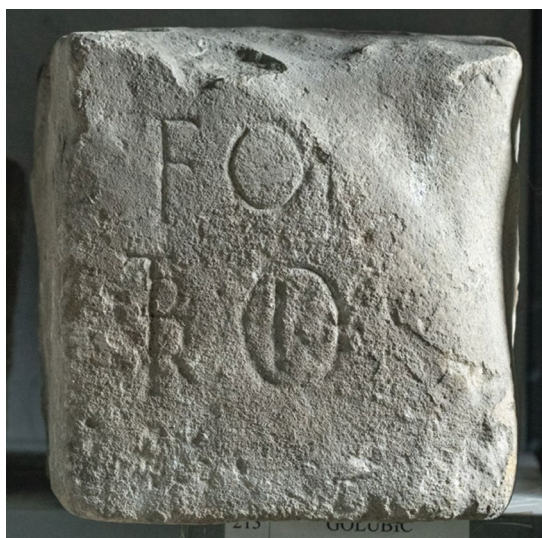
5 *CIMRM* II, 1913; Imamović 1977, 278.

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

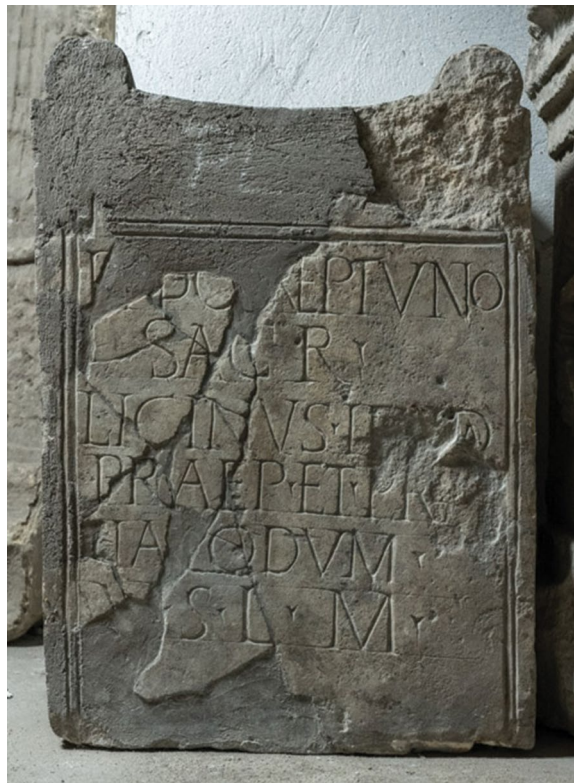
24 Maršić 2015, 11–12.

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*, *Mittha*, *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) 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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# 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;<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> Commodus was initiated into Mithras' mystery rites according to *Historia*

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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*.<sup>3</sup> However, there is no material or epigraphic evidence of Nero or Commodus supporting or identifying themselves with Mithras.<sup>4</sup>

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*.<sup>5</sup> The altar was set on 11<sup>th</sup> November 308, when the Conference of the Four Emperors was held in Carnuntum in order to prolongate the political system of the Tetrarchy.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> O. Latteur considers it as an expression of honour towards the Mithras cult which was very popular in Carnuntum from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD onwards, attested by numerous inscriptions mentioning followers, among which are members of local elite.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> 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 / sacrarium / 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.<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> 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 Commodus<sup>16</sup> or Caracalla.<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup> 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*)<sup>22</sup> 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*.<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup> We believe that they were the expressions of personal religious acts, having nothing to do with the authorities, nor with the imperial cult.<sup>25</sup>

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 2<sup>nd</sup> century or the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD.<sup>26</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> or the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD.<sup>27</sup> 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).<sup>28</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.

Marcus Stadius 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).<sup>29</sup> Both *sevir* and his colleague were initiated into the Mithraic mysteries and belonged to the grade of *leo*.<sup>30</sup> Their inscription can be dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD.<sup>31</sup>

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 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD or the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD.<sup>32</sup> 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) / [I]nVicti 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[Inus?] / 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 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. It was built at their own expense at the location given by a decree of decurions.<sup>33</sup>

A dedication to *Augustus* and *cultores dei Mithrae* found in Stabiae (Castellamare di Stabia, Regio I), dated in the latter half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup> Sextus Vibius Hermes donated a silver statue to Sol Invictus Mithras, while Lucius Vernasius Heraclida was *Pater*. The inscription can be dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD.<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup> The same *seviri Augustales* dedicated once again: for the health of the same emperors they rebuilt the sanctuary at their own expense.<sup>37</sup> The dedications are dated to the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD and the occasion was the fact that they had been freed by the emperor.<sup>38</sup>

One *sevir Augustalis*, Cratus, dedicated to Cautopates in Apulum (Dacia), in the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century or in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD.<sup>39</sup> 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,<sup>40</sup> 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,<sup>41</sup> the priest of Rome and Augustus of the Pontic League in the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century, during the reign of Hadrian.<sup>42</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> 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*.<sup>43</sup> 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,<sup>44</sup> 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]ύσεβου[ς] Μ[εν]ῆσκου Νουμηνί[ου] / Μ(ἄρκος) Οὔλπ(ιος) Ἀρτεμίδωρος ποντάρχ[ης] / [Ἰ]ππλόχο[ς] Πυθίωνος / [Κ]άρπος Ἀ[π]πολλοδώρου / [Κ]αλλίστρατος Ἀπολλοδώρου / [Α]ἴλ(ιος) Διονύσιος Δημοκράτου[ς] / [Ἰ]ούλ(ιος) Βάσσος β(ενεφικιάριος) ὑπατικοῦ / [Α]ύρηλιος Αἰμιλιανός / [Αἴ]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.<sup>45</sup> 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,<sup>46</sup> 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.<sup>47</sup> 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.<sup>48</sup> 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 people<sup>49</sup> 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.<sup>50</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, by an individual, Callistus.<sup>51</sup> 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*).<sup>52</sup> The fact that Cautopates was worshipped as *Augustus* is proof of the prominence and popularity of the Mithraic cult in Aquileia;<sup>53</sup> 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*).<sup>54</sup> 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.<sup>55</sup> It is dated to the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. He was one of the middle-ranking imperial officials, already known from the Iuliomagus epigraphy in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.<sup>56</sup> 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.<sup>57</sup> It was carved into a plaque attached to an unknown object gifted to Mithras, and it is dated to the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 3<sup>rd</sup> or the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD.<sup>58</sup> The fourth inscription, dedicated to *Augustus* and to Sol Invictus Mithras, was found in Intaranum (Entrains, Gallia Lugdunensis)<sup>59</sup> and it is also very damaged. It can be dated in the period 171–230 AD.<sup>60</sup>

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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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] Ci]na*, AE 2015, 930; Molin et al. 2015, 98–107.

59 *[A]ug(usto) sacr(um) deo / [In]vic[to] 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 2<sup>nd</sup>, or the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.<sup>61</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD, especially in northern Italy and Pannonia.

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# MATER DEUM IDAEAE AND THE IMPERIAL CULT IN LATIN INSCRIPTIONS

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## Abstract

*Since Flavian times a connection between the cult of Mater Deum with the imperial cult is detectable. The rule of Antoninus Pius then implied a further development with the implementation of the ritual of the taurobolium all over the Roman empire – very often devoted to the welfare of the emperor. Also, the priesthood of an archigallus appears to have been newly created. The Severan dynasty in particular seems to have taken up this tradition. Especially in the provinces of the western Roman empire the connection of Mater Deum with the imperial house seems to be a public act of loyalty in the provinces until the time of the Tetrarchy. So, Mater Deum Magna, at the latest with the Antonines, was part of the Roman “Imperial religion” and must be counted among the system-stabilizing deities.*

**Keywords:** *Mater Deum Magna – Kybele - Imperial cult – Antoninus Pius – Taurobolium – Archigallus*

## 1. Introduction

The centre of the cult of Mater Deum Magna Idaeae in the Roman Empire was undoubtedly Rome itself. In 204 BCE her cult was officially introduced into the city.<sup>1</sup> She was first worshipped in the temple of Victoria until her own sanctuary was dedicated on the Palatine on April 10, 191 BCE. Augustus later restored this temple in the neighbourhood of his own house.<sup>2</sup> The cult is unlikely to have reached the provinces before

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1 Ovid, *fasti* 4.258; Liv. 29.14.5–14. Cf. Sanders 1981, 282 sq.

2 Cf. Boppert 2008, 29 n. 100.

the establishing of the Roman Empire, a time in which the Roman Mater Deum Magna worship was supplemented by the Phrygian cult of Kubaba/Kybele and Attis, as is shown by the growing veneration of Attis which was not part of Roman tradition. The March rites of the cult, taking place from March 15<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup>, the memorial of Attis' eviration and death, the highest priestly office of the *archigallus*, and the *taurobolium* did not reach the Western part of the Empire until the reign of Antoninus Pius (at the latest around the time of his *Vicennalia* 158/59 CE), although the *archigalli*, unlike the *galli*, usually had Roman citizenship. The emperor's measures were most likely directed at connecting the cult with public institutions, re-ordering and correcting it in this respect.<sup>3</sup>

The earliest evidence of a connection between the imperial cult and that of Magna Mater or Isis Regina are the inscriptions from the sanctuary in the "Römerpassage" in Mainz from the Domitian period mentioned below (no. 38).<sup>4</sup> This connection between the imperial cult and that of the Mater Deum, which has been documented since Flavian times, is also attested by statues of Roman emperors in the metroon of Olympia, which are also mentioned by Pausanias.<sup>5</sup> After that, it took 70 years until the time of Antoninus Pius, for whom this connection is again more frequently attested epigraphically.

The purpose of this article is to examine the epigraphic evidence of a connection between the Imperial cult and that of the Mater Deum Magna. A larger study would be necessary to do the same for iconographic and numismatic evidence.

## 2. Antoninus Pius and the cult of Mater Deum Magna

During his 20-year reign, the emperor encouraged many different cults in the provinces, but especially that of Mater Deum Magna/Kybele. After her 300-year presence in Rome, she can therefore hardly be called an oriental deity at the time of the peak of her spread in the Roman Empire under Antoninus Pius. In a different vein, the Galli performed ecstatic dances on the Blood Day of the Goddess in March and castrated themselves in orgiastically heightened frenzy, which was forbidden to a Roman citizen. During a first phase in the Antonine era, many of the older taurobolia were performed *pro salute imperatoris*. One concludes that the emperor (i.e., Antoninus Pius) was responsible for the introduction of the new rite into the cult of the Mater Deum Magna.<sup>6</sup> It is even probable that this was only spread in the provinces in connection with the imperial cult.<sup>7</sup>

The measures taken by the emperor Antoninus Pius were probably aimed at tying the cult to public institutions and the imperial cult, thus transforming and correcting it.<sup>8</sup> This, for example, is evidenced by the dedication of a *collegium salutare dendrophorum* from *Castrimoenium*/Marino for Magna Mater for the salvation of Antoninus Pius and

3 Schillinger 1979, 360–363; cf. Sanders 1981, 282 sq. and Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 85–122.

4 Cf. Spickermann 2016; Spickermann 2017, 30–34.

5 Paus. 5, 20, 9; cf. Hitzl 1991.

6 Duthoy 1969, 116–117; cf. Schillinger 1979, 352–361; Sanders 1981, 279–289; Spickermann 2017, 24–25; detailed: Van Haepelen and Belayche 2021, 99–148.

7 Turcan 1978, 1057; cf. Turcan 1986, 490–49; Spickermann 2017a, 329–331.

8 Schillinger 1979, 360–362; cf. Sanders 1981, 282–283.

Marcus Aurelius on 5.4.147.<sup>9</sup> A decision of the *ordo decurionum* according to a letter of the emperor himself allowed the installation of the holy spruce of the goddess in an assigned public place. Furthermore, in the Antonine period, an important sanctuary of the Great Mother and Attis was also built in Sarsina in Umbria.<sup>10</sup> Antoninus Pius knew how to use the cult of Mater Deum Magna, which was popular throughout the empire, for his own purposes; votive inscriptions to Magna Mater from the provinces were also donated for his veneration,<sup>11</sup> furthermore, coins and medallions show him and Faustina together with Mater Deum and Attis.<sup>12</sup>

### 3. Epigraphically mentioned emperors

Apart from the emperors Domitian and Antoninus Pius mentioned above, the Augusti Marcus Aurelius and Commodus (no. 43)<sup>13</sup>, Commodus (nos. 17, 19, 32), Septimius Severus (no. 35), Septimius Severus and Clodius Albinus (no. 33), Septimius Severus, Caracalla and Julia Domna (no. 34), Septimius Severus, Caracalla (and Geta) (nos. 8, 23, 26) Alexander Severus (nos. 1, 10, 11, 46), Gordian III (no. 29), Philippus Arabs, his son and Otacilia Severa, his wife (nos. 20, 24), Trebonianus Gallus (no. 47), Probus (no. 13) and the Tetrarchy (nos. 4, 6, 14) are documented by name in inscriptions for Mater Deum Magna. One emperor cannot be identified (no. 9), eight dedications were generally placed for Mater Deum Magna or Attis *pro salute imperii/imperatoris, Augusti/Augustorum* or *domus divinae* (nos. 2, 3, 18, 21, 22, 25, 37, 38), two *in honorem domus divinae* (no. 39, 40). Three others apply to the Numina Augustorum in connection with the Magna Mater (nos. 27, 28, 36), in one case Mater Deum bears the imperial epithet Augusta (no. 32). Also, we know an honorary inscription to a *flaminica divae Iuliae Piae Augustae* (no. 16).<sup>14</sup> The majority of the examined votive inscriptions to Magna Mater (no. 40) were thus donated expressly for the salvation of one or more specific or unnamed emperors.

Most of the testimonies can be dated to the Severan period (no. 28), followed by the Antonine period (no. 14). The great importance of this connection in Severan times is particularly attested by a *taurobolium* from Narbo/Narbonne, which is expressly designated as *taurobolium provinciae Narbonensis* for the salvation of Septimius Severus and Caracalla and was consecrated by the flamen Augustorum himself (no. 26). It becomes clear that the Severans adopted the combination of imperial cult and Mater Deum Magna, especially since they defined themselves in any case by the fictitious descendants of Marcus Aurelius. Gordian III, Philippus Arabs and also Trebonianus Gallus are also still entirely in the tradition of the Severans. The Tetrarchy

9 Appendix no. 42; cf. Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 268.

10 Mansuelli 1966–67; Latte 1992, 342.

11 Appendix nos. 15, 30, 40, 41.

12 Here, the medallions should be mentioned in particular, which – often also in connection with Faustina – document a special closeness of the emperor to Magna Mater/Kybele, on this Mittag 2017, 141–146 with several examples. Cf. also *RIC* III p. 165 no. 1143: *DIVA AUGUSTA FAUSTINA // MATRI DEUM SALUTARI S. C.*

13 The numbers in brackets refer to the appendix.

14 Cf. Van Haepelen 2014, 305.

finally incorporated the cult of Mater Deum Magna into its new theology of rule by the Iovians and Herculians, to whom the existing cults were related. An eloquent example for this new style is a Mithras altar from Carnuntum consecrated by the emperors themselves in 308.<sup>15</sup>

#### 4. The distribution of the inscriptions

The distribution of the epigraphic attestations of Mater Deum Magna in combination with imperial cult shows a clear focus on the African provinces (no. 10) and Gallia Narbonensis/Alpes Graiae (no. 11). Italy has a total of seven attestations, Gallia Lugdunensis and both Germania six each, Dacia and Moesia three, Hispania Baetica and Gallia Aquitania two. The scarce connection between the imperial cult and Mater Deum Magna in the Aquitanian city Lactora, from which numerous taurobolia, especially of women, are attested, is conspicuous with only one document from the municipality itself.<sup>16</sup> No evidence is known from Gallia Belgica, nor from Lusitania and Hispania Tarraconensis. Nevertheless, from the perspective of the findings, it can be said that the connection between Mater Deum Magna and imperial cult spread throughout the entire empire at least from the reign of Antoninus Pius onwards. The distribution of epigraphic evidence of this cult in connection with the imperial cult thus corresponds to the distribution of the total evidence of this cult.<sup>17</sup>

A special situation is to be found in *Lugdunum/Lyon*.<sup>18</sup> Here, six *taurobolium* altars and the relics of a Metroon were found, each with a reference to imperial cult.<sup>19</sup> On one of the altars, which was dedicated on December 9, 160 CE, the oldest *taurobolium* is recorded, that of L. Aemilius Carpus. According to the inscription, the actual ceremony, the *mesonyctium* (i.e. the midnight ceremony), must have taken place in the night of December 8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup>, 160.<sup>20</sup> It is conceivable that December 8<sup>th</sup> of the year 160 marked the official introduction of the *taurobolium* to Gaul, but the dendrophorial college goes back to Flavian times and can be traced into the third century CE.<sup>21</sup> L. Aemilius Carpus was both *dendrophorus* and *sevir Augustalis*, which suggests a close connection between the imperial cult and that of Mater Deum Magna.<sup>22</sup> His *taurobolium* seems to have taken place at the time of his consecration as prime *archigallus*.<sup>23</sup>

There must have been some connections to cult communities in other cities along the Rhône, since the *tibicen* mentioned in *Lugdunum/Lyon* seems to be the same as

15 *CIL* III, 4413.

16 Cf. Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 479–489 nos. 57–78.

17 For the distribution of the cult of Magna Mater in the Roman Empire see the map Borgeaud 2013, 92 sq.

18 For the following remarks see Spickermann 2013, 150–153.

19 See appendix nos. 30–35.

20 No. 30: On the formula *cuius mesonyctium factum est*: Turcan 1972, 124–127.

21 *CIL* XIII, 1723, 1752, 2026; cf. Turcan 1972, 81 sq. and Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 216–272.

22 Turcan 1972, 83 sq.

23 Turcan 1972, 94; cf. Wuilleumier 1953, 62; also Audin 1976, 107 sq. For the *archigalli* cf. Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 182–185.

one named in an inscription in *Valentia*/Valence.<sup>24</sup> Women, too, had a prominent place in the cult community. They dedicated three *taurobolia*, compared to only two set up by men, and are found in a number of cult offices. The highest offices were, however, reserved for men. The taurobolic ceremony in *Lugdunum*/Lyon, which lasted for several days, seems to have been particular to the local congregation. The beginning of the ceremony was marked by an *inchoatum*, its end by a *consummatum*. It is unknown why this period of time was marked out in such a way also on other inscriptions, and it is also possible that the ceremony lasted longer in cases in which this is not explicitly mentioned (nos. 33, 34).

The female dedicants of altar (no. 33) expressed by means of their *taurobolia* their loyalty towards the new emperor Septimius Severus and the newly appointed Caesar Clodius Albinus.<sup>25</sup> Septimius Severus had not yet crushed the resistance of Pescennius Niger. Such an open declaration of loyalty is therefore probably best explained by Severus' governorship of *Lugdunum* in 187–188 CE. In the consequent struggle for power, the city declared for Clodius Albinus and was duly punished by the victorious Septimius Severus in 197, who plundered and partly destroyed the city.<sup>26</sup> Both Caesars are named in the inscription as consuls. The name of Albinus has later been erased. A priest (*sacerdos*) with the name of Aelius Castrensis presided over the *taurobolium* ceremony, assisted by the flute player (*tibicen*) Fl(avius) Restitutus. Both are also named on another *taurobolium* altar put up in June 16, 190, by the *dendrophori* residing in *Lugdunum* (*dendrophori Lugduni consistentes*) under the instruction (*ex vaticinatione*) of the *archigallus* Pusonius Iulianus.<sup>27</sup> The dedicatory formula *fecerunt ex voto* can also be found on the altar put up by the women of 197 CE, not, however, on the altar put up by the *dendrophori* (no. 2).<sup>28</sup>

The *taurobolium* of 197 CE (no. 34) was celebrated for the well-being of Septimius Severus, his son Caracalla, his wife Iulia Domna and the entire imperial house, as well as for the well-being of the city itself. Reliefs on both sides of the stones are very similar to those on the altar of 194 CE (no. 3).<sup>29</sup> The dedication obviously took place after the victory of Septimius Severus, to underline the loyalty of the congregation to the new emperor and his house.<sup>30</sup> It is therefore to be taken as a proclamation of fealty for the victor over Clodius Albinus, celebrating the newly emerging dynasty, and integrating the dedication into the new, expanded imperial cult.<sup>31</sup>

Apart from the presiding priest and the flute player, a priestess is mentioned.<sup>32</sup> Also a novelty is the mention of the function of *apparatores*, most likely some kind of grand

24 Appendix no. 19 with *archigallus* Pusonius Iulianus was, according to Schillinger 1979, 201 no. 1, probably brought from Lyon; cf. Audin 1976, 60.

25 For the female dedicants in Lyon see Spickermann 1994, 199–206 and Spickermann 2013, 150–153.

26 Turcan 1972, 91–98; cf. Spickermann 2023, 414–418.

27 *CIL* XIII, 1752 = Duthoy 1969, 50 sq. no. 127; description in Audin 1976, 57. For the phrase *ex vaticinatione* see Duthoy 1969, 66 and Turcan 1986, 492 sq.

28 See Turcan 1972, 91.

29 Audin 1976, 58 sq.

30 For this interpretation cf. Walser 1993, 88 sq. no. 32.

31 Cf. Fishwick 1987–1992, 1. 2, 348 n. 195.

32 Cf. Van Haepere 2014, 321.

marshals of ceremony.<sup>33</sup> Since all four functionaries have been listed, one must assume a rather complex and elaborate liturgy. It is even more surprising that two further functions are mentioned only three years later. Either these roles had been created in the meantime, or they had not played such a prominent part in the ceremony before. The reason for their reference at this point may be found either in the growing complexity of the ritual or in the upgrading of functions within the cult congregation.

The altars set up by the women (nos. 33, 34) do not mention the name of the goddess, but begin with a dedicatory formula to the emperors.<sup>34</sup> They were put up with the official consent of the *ordo decurionum*. They are therefore to be taken as dedications, the official character of which was formally underlined by the celebration *pro salute imperatoris* and the formula *l(ocus) d(atus) d(ecreto) d(ecurionum)*. The missing name of the deity underlines the emphasis put on the imperial formula. Dedications of this kind are more than unusual for women.<sup>35</sup> We do, however, have an earlier dedication – probably of buildings – for Isis Panthea and Mater Magna *pro salute Augustorum*, by an imperial freedwoman and a slave (?) of a Caesar in Mainz.<sup>36</sup> It is remarkable that both plaques (*tabulae ansatae*) were put up in years of special significance to the city. Since the cult community of Mater Magna in Lugdunum was in 194 CE presided over by a mostly male clergy and a college of *dendrophori*, it is more than significant that women appear as dedicants when it comes to these significant historical markers. The close connection between Mater Deum Magna and the imperial cult in Lugdunum can already be found in the *taurobolium* of Aemilius Carpus which was celebrated in honour of Antoninus Pius, as well as by the *taurobolia* of the dendrophorial college of 190 CE in honour of Commodus. The two *taurobolia* of the women should be seen in this tradition.<sup>37</sup> In contrast to the altar put up by the dendrophorial college, these two altars do not make use of the phrase *ex vaticinatione archigalli* (with the authorization of the *archigallus*) which was one of three conditions for tax exemption for having paid for public *taurobolia*.<sup>38</sup> It seems to be probable that the initiative to put up the two *taurobolia* did not come from Pusonius Iulianus, who may still have been *archigallus* at the time,<sup>39</sup> but was an independent decision of the women, a fact which was underlined

33 An *adparator* is known from Massilia/Marseille: *CIL* XII, 405. See Turcan 1972, 92; cf. Turcan 1986, 485 and for the frequent phrase *cum suis hostis et appamentis*.

34 This is common on *taurobolia* performed on behalf of institutions, see Schillinger 1979, 374 sq.

35 The celebration of a *taurobolium pro salute imperatoris* by women is not otherwise attested in the Western Roman Empire. In *Narbonensis* where this kind of inscription was quite frequent (from 32 examples mentioned by R. Duthoy 16 come from Gaul), women are mentioned only on four altars together with other devotees: Appendix nos. 17, 18, 21 and 24. Furthermore, I know of only one dedication by a woman to IOM from Narbonne: *CIL* XII, 4334 *pro salute imperatoris*, cf. Spickermann 1994, 34–38. From Hispania we know of two *taurobolia* of couples for the salvation of the emperor: Appendix nos. 1 and 2.

36 Appendix no. 37 and Witteyer 2004, no. 3 = *AE* 2004, 1016 = *AE* 2007, 148 = *AE* 2013, 108 = *AE* 2017, 1071: *Pro salute Augustorum et / s(enatus) p(opuli) q(ue) R(omani) et exercitus / Isidi Pantheae Claudia Aug(usti) l(iberta) Icmas / et Vitulus Caes(aris servus) sacer(dote) Claud(io) Attico lib(erto)*. Cf. Spickermann 2016, 203.

37 A third (only fragmentarily preserved) *taurobolium*, probably from the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE, (appendix no. 35), is considered to have been donated for the salvation of Septimius Severus, Caracalla and Geta.

38 Schillinger 1979, 367 sq.

39 For this person: Schillinger 1979, 201 no. 493.



by the inscription.<sup>40</sup> Considering that the *taurobolium* of 194 CE is a public declaration for one party in a civil war, and the dedication of 197 CE an ovation for the victor – and considering that the imperial cult was newly organized after this victory, with the victor staying in Lugdunum in May 197 – one can only read the stone as a political statement to which the city council must have consented. This is borne out by the fact that both *taurobolia* were, like the earlier ones, celebrated for the welfare of the town (*pro statu coloniae*).<sup>41</sup> Moreover, we are dealing with elaborate ceremonies which were surely witnessed by the larger part of the local population. The connection between the cult congregation and the city council is already established by the decurions' electing the cult's priests, their offices then having to be sanctioned by the *XVviri* in Rome who presided over the cult.<sup>42</sup>

A dedication of *taurobolium* altars under the circumstances just described, especially if this dedication was undertaken by women belonging to the municipal elite, is hardly possible without the authority of cult functionaries.<sup>43</sup> Maybe there were no longer any male members left who had the means to pay for the ceremonies, or perhaps these men did not want to expose themselves in quite such a public way: men might have connections both social and political with the followers of Clodius Albinus who were now persecuted by the victor's party. Such an approach was certainly less risky for women – private persons *par excellence* – than for men, so that we may speculate that this was the reason for their public performance as dedicants. The participation of women in official ceremonies seems moreover to have advanced their standing within the cult community. Advancement within the priestly ranks is clearly noted on the altar of 197 (no. 34), namely with a *sacerdotia*. The priestess explicitly calls herself *sacerdotia*, while the term *sacerdos* was more common for both men and women.<sup>44</sup> It is thus possible to show that the public *taurobolia* ceremonies in Lyon, which lasted for some days, were not only visited by the cult community, but were highly political actions which almost suppressed any individual component of the action in public. Individual action occurred in the service of the community. The case seems to be very different, however, for the Aquitanian city of Lectoure, from where we have only one example of a connection between Mater Deum and imperial cult (no 29).

40 Also, the dedication formula *fecerunt ex voto* is unusual for *taurobolia*.

41 Spickermann 2023, 417.

42 Cf. appendix no. 30, where the priest Sammius Severus gets his insignia from the *XVviri*: *ab XVviris occubo et corona exornato* and his dignity as *sacerdos perpetuus* from the council of the city, something he clearly points out was an extraordinary honor: *cui sanctissimus ordo Lugdunensis perpetuitatem sacerdoti decrevit*. See Ladage 1971, 81; cf. Turcan 1972, 87 sq.; Schillinger 1979, 358 and Audin 1976, 56 who points out the connection between the clergy of Cybele and the city council.

43 This is particularly evident in the person of Optatia Siora who, given her certainly simple origin, had no reason for such a dedication, especially considering that her husband and son were non Roman citizens with the name Modestius, and for whom we know of no profession or a political function; *CIL* XII, 1986 and Schillinger 1979, 220 no. 548.

44 Cf. for example *CIL* XII, 185 and 5724 (Antibes): *flaminica et sacerdos*; 3224 (Nîmes): *Isidis sacerdos* and *CIL* IX, 1540 *consacerdos*!. Cf. Van Haepere 2014, 310, 321.

## 5. The *taurobolium*

The vast majority of the testimonies are *taurobolia* dedicated to the emperors and/or the imperial house (no. 31).<sup>45</sup> This ritual is often referred to in connection with the cult of Cybele since Prudentius has been connected with so-called “blood baptism”. J. B. Rutter (1968) and R. Duthoy (1969) have shown that such a connection is quite wrong, since there is no evidence that the *taurobolium* was an initiation rite or that it was always connected to blood baptism. A number of *taurobolic* altars in the Roman West have been dedicated by women.

The celebration of the *taurobolium* was, by all accounts, repeatable. It was therefore a repeatable sacrifice of a bull and the burial of its testicles, accompanied by exotic ceremonies. The *taurobolium* apparently always included the endowment of an altar with the name of the *tauroboliatus/tauroboliata* and the date of the *taurobolium*. According to the *carmen contra paganos* of 394 CE, its effect lasted for only twenty years.<sup>46</sup>

## 6. The dedicants

The dedicants belonged to almost all sections of the population but each of them must have been wealthy. First of all, there are groups of consecrators, including the representatives of entire municipalities, such as the *res publica coloniae Thuggensis* (no. 6), the *res publica Vocontiorum* (no. 23) and the *ordo Lactoratium* (no. 29), which publicly dedicated their altars from public funds. In addition, cult communities of Mater Deum Magna appear as dedicators, such as the dendrophors (no. 32: *dendrophori Luguduni consistentes*, no. 42: *collegium salutare dendrophorum*) and *consacrani* (no. 37). Furthermore, individual dendrophors (nos. 7, 30) and an *archigallus* (no. 43) are also attested as benefactors. One person is also *sevir Augustalis* (no. 30), whereby this imperial cult community is also mentioned on another inscription (no. 20).

Two dedicators from the late period were members of the equestrian order (nos. 4, 13), including a *dux limitis provinciae Scythiae* (no. 4). Two *du(u)mviri fratres* (no. 15) and a *decurio coloniae Dacicae*, *decurio municipii Napocae*, *decurio kanabensium* (no. 3) come from the decurion order. Municipal priests are also attested as dedicants, including pontifices (nos. 10, 19, 24), a *flamen Augustorum primus* (no. 26) and *sacerdotes* (nos. 8, 9 [wife], 12–14 [*sacerdos perfectis*], 25, 28 [son of a *sacerdos*]). A centurion is also mentioned (no. 41), once the wife of such (no. 36), as well as a *veteranus ex decurione* (no. 3). The relatively large number of women among the dedicants is striking: five dedicated their monuments alone (nos. 9, 31, 33, 34, 36) and eight others together with their partners and families (nos. 1–3, 17, 18, 21, 24, 38). In addition, there is the already mentioned honorary inscription for a *flaminica* (no. 16). Two dedicants from Corduba refer to themselves as *thalamas* “oarsmen”. Whether this actually refers to an occupational title or even a cult function cannot be definitively clarified (nos. 1,

45 See appendix nos. 1, 2, 7, 9–14, 17–26, 28–35, 44–47.

46 *Vivere num speras viginti mundus in annos?* Duthoy 1969, 54 no. 2. For the *carmen contra paganos* cf. Coskun 2004. For the state of recent research see Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 299–307.

2).<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, there is a *nautarum quinquennalis* (no. 5). Two dedicants were freedmen (nos. 38 [*Augusti liberta*], 39), one was an imperial slave (no. 38).

## 7. Divine connections

Most of the dedications are devoted to the Mater Deum Magna herself, twice also to Attis (nos. 39, 40). Three times she is worshipped together with the Numen/-ina Augusti/-orum (nos. 17, 27, 28). Otherwise, the Matronae (no. 27), Nemesis (no. 43) and Isis together with Mater Deum are mentioned only once (no. 36). However, the combination with Isis and the imperial cult seems to have been more common. In addition to the building inscription from the Römerpassage in Mainz (no. 38), there exists an identical inscription from the same dedicants for Isis Panthea mentioned above,<sup>48</sup> and the *flaminica* from *Aeclanum*/Mirabella Eclano, to whom was devoted an honorary inscription, was acting at the same time as *sacerdos* of Mater deum Magna and Isis Regina (no. 16)<sup>49</sup>. Most of the endowments consisted of (*taurobolium*) altars, but there are also donations of buildings such as a *templum* (nos. 6 [with *porticus*], 15) or unspecified *aedes* (nos. 36, 41). Furthermore, a silver statue of the Mater Deum Magna of one pound together with an image of Nemesis (no. 43) and the already mentioned spruce of the Mater Deum (no. 42) were donated.

## 8. Conclusion

The connection of the Mater Deum with the imperial cult can be traced back to late Flavian times, but it was not until Antoninus Pius, especially through the ritual of the *taurobolium*, that it was substantially promoted and spread throughout the Roman empire. The Severan dynasty in particular seems to have taken up this tradition. In the Latin-speaking provinces, the close connection between the originally Phrygian goddess and the imperial house can be traced epigraphically almost everywhere. The most widespread evidence is documented with the *taurobolium* altars, whose inscriptions often contain information not only about differentiated local priesthoods, including female priests, but also about ceremonies that sometimes lasted several days. These were public acts that were also performed by representatives of the local urban communities. It seems striking, if it is not due to the circumstances of the tradition, that we have no inscriptional evidence for Mater deum and the imperial cult from Rome itself. So, the connection with the imperial house seems to be a public act of loyalty in the provinces; this is especially true for the time of the Tetrarchy. The donators, including the women, were all wealthy, since on the one hand they donated the expensive monuments and on the other hand they had to pay for the performance of the ceremonies. In conclusion, it can be said that Mater Deum Magna, at the latest with the Antonines, is part of the Roman "Imperial religion" and must be counted among the system-stabilizing deities.

47 Cf. AE 2010, 313 = CCCA 4, 1 *Literno/Liternum Campania: --] sacerdos / [M]atris deum / [tha]lamas condidit*

48 See n. 35.

49 For the evolution of the Egyptian cult of Isis in the Roman Empire see Bricault and Versluys 2010.

## Appendix

### Hispania Baetica

1) *CIL* II 7, 233 = Duthoy 1969, no. 75 = Schillinger 1979, no. 7–9 = Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 467 no. 24 (Cordoba/Corduba)

*Pro salute / Imp(eratoris) domini n(ostri) [[M(arci) Aureli]] / [[Severi Alexandri]] Pii Felicis / Aug(usti) / tauribolium fecit Publicius / Fortunatus t(h)alamas suscepit / chrionis Coelia Ianuaria / a{d}stante Ulpio Heliade sacerdo[te] / aram sacris suis d(ederunt) d(edicaverunt) / Maximo et Urbano co(n)s(ulibus)*

234 CE

2) *CIL* II 7, 234 = Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 466 no. 23 (Cordoba/Corduba)

*Ex iussu Matris deum / pro salute imperii / tauribolium fecit Publicius / Valerius Fortunatus thalamas / suscepit crionis Porcia Bassemia / sacerdote Aurelio Stephano / dedicata VIII Kal(endas) April(es) / Pio Proculo co(n)s(ulibus)*

25.3.238 CE

### Dacia

3) *CIL* III, 1100 = *ILS* 7141 = *CCCA* 6, 485 = Schillinger 1979, no. 32–36 (Alba Iulia/Apulum)

*Pro salute Aug(usti) M(atris) d(eum) M(agnae) / sanctum / T(itus) Fl(avius) Longinus vet(eranus) ex dec(urione) al(ae) Il Pann(oniorum) / dec(urio) col(oniae) Dac(icae) dec(urio) mun(icipii) Nap(ocae) dec(urio) kanab(ensium) / leg(ionis) XIII G(eminae) et Cl(audia) Candida coniunx et Flavi / Longinus Clementina Marcellina fil(ii) / ex imperio pecunia sua fecer(unt) l(ocus) d(atatus) d(ecreto) d(ecurionum)*

117–180 CE

### Moesia Inferior

4) *CIL* III, 764 = *ILS* 4103 = *CCCA* 6, 435 = Schillinger 1979, no. 31 (Constanta/Tomi)

*Matri deum / Magnae / pro salute adq(ue) / incolumitate / dd(ominorum) nn(ostrorum) Augg(ustorum) et Caess(arum) / Aur(elius) Firminianus / v(ir) p(erfectissimus) dux / limit(is) prov(inciae) Scyt(hiae) / bonis auspiciis / consecravit*

293–305 CE

### Moesia Superior

5) *IMS* 2, 61 = *CCCA* 6, 380 = *AE* 1905, 153 = *AE* 1907, 40 = *AE* 2012, 1249 = Schillinger 1979, no. 30 (Kostolac/Viminacium)

*[Pro salu]te Aug(usti) / C(aius) Val(erius) Vi/bianus / nautar(um) / q(uin)q(uennalis) sig(num) Ma/tris deum et / ad restitu/tionem tem/pli Neptuni / s(estertium) Il(milia) n(ummum) d(onum) d(edit)*

2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE

### Africa Proconsularis

6) CIL VIII, 1489 = CIL VIII, 26562 = CCCA 5, 87 = AE 1941, 158 = Schillinger 1979, no. 692 (Dougga/Thugga)

*Pro salute [dddd(ominorum) nnnn(ostrorum)] / Imp(eratoris) Caes(aris) C(ai) Aur[eli] Valer[i] Diocletiani Pii Fel(icis) Aug(usti) p(ontificis) m(aximi) [trib(unicia) pot(estate) XV co(n)s(ulis) VI des(ignati) VII et] / Imp(eratoris) Caes(aris) M(arci) Aur[eli] Valer[i] Maximiani Pii Fel(icis) Au[g(usti) p(ontificis) m(aximi) trib(unicia) pot(estate) XIII] co(n)s(ulis) V d[es(ignati) VI et] / Flavi Vale[ri] Const]anti nob[iliss]imi Caes(aris) [trib(unicia) pot(estate) VI] co(n)s(ulis) I[II et] / Galeri Valeri Maximiani [n]obilissimi Caes(aris) [trib(unicia) pot(estate) VII] co(n)s(ulis) II] / porticu{u}s templi deum Matris res p(ublica) col(oniae) Thugg(ensis) s[ua pecunia] / perfecit et dedicavit [[pro[co]nsulatu Ael[i] Helvi Dionysi]]*

298 CE

7) CCCA 5, 114 = AE 1961, 201 = Duthoy 1969, no. 68 = Schillinger 1979, nos. 185 + 186 = Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 464 no. 17 (Utique/Utica)

*Matri Magnae Id(a)eae sacr(um) / [[pro salute imperatoris]] / [[6]] / [[6]] / [[6]] / [[3]] Q(uintus) Latinius Victor et Q(uintus) Latini/us Egregius fil(ius) eius dendrofori / cerno et criobolio de suo acceptis / aram pecunia sua fecerunt et consa/craverunt tradente C(aio) Raecio Aprile et / Pompeia Satria Fortunata eius sacer/dotibus M(atris) d(eum) M(agna)e I(daeae) col(oniae) Utik(ae) astantibus / dendroforis et sacratis ministrante / C(aio) Rombio Felice dendroforo apparatore / dedicata X Kal(endas) Iulias*

22. 6. 235–238 CE

### Numidia

8) CIL VIII, 2230 (p. 950) = CIL VIII, 17668 = CCCA 5, 117 = Schillinger 1979, no. 190 (Khenchela/Mascula)

*[Matr]i deum Aug(ustae) sac(rum) / [pro] salute Imp(eratorum) / L(uci) Septimi Seve[ri] Pii Pertinac(is) / et M(arci) Aureli Anto[ni]ni Augg(ustorum) [[et P(ubli) / Septimi Getae Caes(aris)]] / et Iuliae Aug(ustae) / totiusque dom(us) / divinae C(aius) Sit/tius Ianuarius / sacer(dos) dono / dedit*

209–211 CE

9) CCCA 5, 122 = AE 1931, 63 = Duthoy 1969, no. 72 = Schillinger 1979, no. 191 = Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 461 no. 9 (Ain Zana/Diana Veteranorum)

*M(atri) d(eum) M(agnae) I(daeae) A(ugustae) s(acrum) / pro salute [3] / [[3]] Hor-te[n]/sia Fortunata sacerdos / taurobolium et criobol[iu]m motum sancit manda/nte M(arco) Tullio Pudente p[a]/tre*

211–282 CE

**10)** *CIL VIII, 4846 = CCCA 5, 144 = Duthoy 1969, no. 73 = Schillinger 1979, no. 193 = Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 459 sq. no. 5 (Ksar Tifech/Tipasa)*

*M(atri) d(eum) M(agnae) I(daeae) / sanctissimae / pro salute et / incolumitate d(omni) n(ostri) / Imp(eratoris) Caes(aris) [[M(arci) Aureli]] / [[Severi / Alexandri]] Pii Fel(icis) / Aug(usti) et [[Luliae Mamaeae]] / Aug(ustae) t(otius)q(ue) d(omus) d(ivinae) eorum / P(ublius) Caecilius Felix / [sa]c(erdos) ex ordine pont(ificum) crio/[bol]ium et tauribo/[lium] --- didit*

222–235 CE

**11)** *CIL VIII, 8203 = CIL VIII, 19981 = ILS 4136 = CCCA 5, 131 = Duthoy 1969, no. 71 = Schillinger 1979, no. 206/207 = Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 460 no. 8 (Milev/Mila)*

*M(atri) d(eum) M(agnae) I(daeae) Sanctae / sacrum factum / pro salute / [[Imp(era-toris) Caes(aris) M(arci) Aureli] Se/[[veri Alexandri]] Pii Fel(icis) Aug(usti) / [[et Luliae Ma-maeae / Aug(ustae)]] / et domus eor(um) divinae / Qu[inti] Claudii Basilicus / NAP (?) et Mnesius criobol[iu]m fecerunt et ipsi susc[e]/perunt per C(aium) Aemilium Satur/ninum sacerdotem ex va/ticinatione archigall[i] / I(ocus) d(atu)s d(ecreto) d(ecurionum)*

222–235 CE

## Byzacena

**12)** *AE 1955, 49 = CCCA 5, 81 = Duthoy 1969, no. 62 = Schillinger 1979, no. 214 = Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 462 no. 13 (Maktar/Mactaris)*

*matris to[tius]que divi/nae domus [eorum] / P(ublius) Valeri[us 3]/tianus [sacerdos] / perfectis rit[is] sacris cer/norum] et cri[obol]ii et tau/roboli ---*

222–235 CE

**13)** *CIL VIII, 23400 = CCCA 5, 79 = AE 1892, 18 = AE 1955, 49 = Duthoy 1969, no. 60 = Schillinger 1979, no. 209–211 = Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 463 no. 14 (Maktar/Mactaris)*

*M(atri) d(eum) M(agnae) I(daeae) Aug(ustae) sac(rum) / pro salute Imp(eratoris) Caes(aris) M(arci) Aureli [[Probi]] Pii Felicis Aug(usti) / totiusque divinae domus / Q(uin-tus) Arellius Optatianus / eq(ues) R(omanus) sacerdos perfec/tis ritae sacris cer/norum crioboli et tau/roboli suffragio ordi/nis col(oniae) suae Mactaritan(ae) / comprobatus antistes sum(p)/tibus suis tradentibus / Rannio Salvio eq(uite) R(omano) pon/tifice et Claudio Fausto / sacerdotibus una cum / universis dendroforis / et sacratis utriusq(ue) sexus / v(otum) s(olvit) I(ibens) a(nimo)*

276–282 CE

**14)** *CIL VIII, 23401 = ILS 4142 = CCCA 5, 80 = AE 1892, 18 = AE 1897, 121 = AE 1898, 46 = AE 1955, 49 = Duthoy 1969, no. 61 = Schillinger 1979, no. 212 + 213 = Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 463 sq. no. 15 (Maktar/Mactaris)*

*M(atri) d(eum) M(agnae) I(daeae) Aug(ustae) sac(rum) / pro salute Imp(eratorum) Caess(arum) / C(ai) Valeri [[Diocle[tia]ni]] Pii Fel(icis) / Aug(usti) et M(arci) Aureli Valeri [[Maxi/miani]] Pii {Pii} Fel(icis) Aug(usti) totiusq(ue) / divinae domus eorum / Q(uintus) Minthonius Fortuna/tus sacerdos perfectis / rit{a}e sacris cernorum / crioboli et tauroboli / suffragio ordinis col(oniae) / suae Mact(aritanae) comprobatus / antistes sum(p)tibus su/is tradente Claudio Bo/no sacerdote una cum / universis dendro/fori{i} s et sacratis / utriusque sexus / v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) a(nimo)*

286–292 CE

### Mauretania Tingitana

**15)** *CCCA 5, 151 = AE 1957,63 = Schillinger 1979, no. 689 (Sidi Ali Bou Jenoun/Banasa)*

*Pro salute / Imp(eratoris) Caes(aris) Titi Aeli Hadrian[i Antonini] / Aug(usti) Pii p(atri) p(atriciae) templum Matri deum [---] / ex decreto ordinis Tib(eri) Claudi Iulianus et Saturninus du(u)mviri / fratres a solo faciendum / curaverunt*

138–161 CE

### Italia Apulia et Calabria Regio II

**16)** *CIL IX, 1153 p. 695 = ILS 6487 = SIRIS 469 = CCCA 4, 108 = RICIS 2, 505/901 = AE 2000, 352 = Schillinger 1979, no. 231 (Mirabella Eclano/Aeclanum)*

*Cantriae / P(ubli) fil(iae) / Longinae / sacerdoti flam(inicae) // div[ae] Iuliae Piae / [A]u[g(ustae) e]t Matr(is) deum / M(agnae) [I]d(aeae) et Isidis Regin(ae). / Haec ob honorem / sacerdotii ((sestertium)) L(milia) n(ummos) r(ei) p(ublicae) d(edit). // P(ublice) d(ecreto) d(ecurionum)*

After 217 CE (more Iulia Domna than Iulia Titi filia)

### Gallia Narbonensis

**17)** *CIL XII, 1222 = CCCA 5, 352 = Duthoy 1969, no. 87 = Schillinger 1979, no. 475 = Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 469 no. 31 (Bollene/Arausio)*

*Num(ini) Aug(usti) / Matri deum / pro salut(e) Imp(eratoris) / M(arci) Aur(eli) [[Commodo/di]] Antonini Pii / Felicis / tauro<b>P</b>olium / fecerunt / Sex(tus) Publicius / [---]anus / [---]iana*

185–191 CE

**18)** *CIL XII, 1311 = CCCA 5, 355 = Duthoy 1969, no. 86 = Spickermann 1994, 111–112 = Schillinger 1979, no. 476–478 = Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 469 sq. no. 32 (Vaison-la-Romaine/Vasio)*

*Matri deum / Magna[e] l[d]aeae / [pro sal(ute)?] / domu[s divi]na[e] tauro/<b=P>o[[  
ium [et c]rio<b=P>oli/um fecerunt Aul(us) / Pompeius Avitian(us) / et Claudia Firmin(a)  
/ praeunte Aul(o) [Ti?]/tio Phronimo sacerd(ote)*

197–235 CE

**19)** *CIL XII, 1782 (p. 827) = ILS 4130 = CCCA 5, 369 = Duthoy 1969, no. 93 = Schillinger 1979, no. 492 = Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 474 no. 42 (Tain-l’Hermitage/Tegna/Vienna)*

*M[a]/tr(i) M(agnae) / [l]d(a)e[ae] // [pro sal(ute) Imp(eratoris) Caes(aris) M(arci) Au-  
r(eli) Commodi / Antonini Aug(usti) Pij]i domu<u>sq(ue) divi/nae colon(iae) Copiae Clau-  
d(iae) Aug(ustae) Lug(udunensis) / [t]aurobolium fecit Q(uintus) Aquius Antonia/nus  
pontif(ex) perpetuus // [e]x vaticinatione Pusoni Iuliani archi/galli. Inchoatum XII Kal(en-  
das) Mai(as) consum/maturn VIII Kal(endas) Mai(as) L(ucio) Eggio Marullo / Cn(aeo)  
Papirio Aeliano co(n)s(ulibus) praeunte Aelio / Castrense sacerdote tibicine Albio /  
Verino*

20.–30.4.184 CE

**20)** *CIL XII, 1782 p. 827 = ILS 4130 = CCCA 5, 369 = Duthoy 1969, no. 90 = Schillinger 1979, no. 714 = Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 478 no. 53 (Caveirac)*

*Matri deum Mag[nae] / [l]daee Phryg]iae Palatinae / [taurobolia] et criobolia / [pro  
salute dd(ominorum) nn(ostrorum) Imp(eratorum)] Caes(arum) [M(arci) Iulij] / [Philippi  
Pij] Fel(icis) Aug(usti) [et M(arci) Iulij] / [Philippi nob(ilissimi) Caes(aris)] Aug(usti) [f(ilius?)  
e]t Ota/[ciliae Severae Aug(ustae)] XVvir / [---] Nemaus/[ens(es) 3] omni/[---] IIIIIvir(is)  
Aug(ustalibus) / [---]III kal(endas) / [---] prae/[euntib(us) sacerdotib(us) Au]relio / [--- et  
--- Imp(eratore)] / [Philippo Aug(usto) et Ti]tiano co(n)s(ulibus)*

245 CE

**21)** *CIL XII, 1569 = CCCA 5, 359 = AE 1982, 695 = Duthoy 1969, no. 85 = Spickermann 1994, 113–114 = Schillinger 1979, no. 486–488 = Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 471 no. 35 (Ponet-et-Saint-Auban/Dea Augusta Vocontiorum)*

*D(eum) M(atri) / pro sal(ute) Imper(ii vel -atoris) taur(obolium) fec(erunt) T(itus) Hel(-  
vius) Mar/cellin(us) et Val(eria) Decumilla ex voto / sacerd(ote) Attio Attiani fil(io)*

190–230 CE

**22)** *CIL XII, 1568 = CCCA 5, 365 = AE 1982, 695 = Duthoy 1969, no. 84 = Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 471 no. 34 (Ponet-et-Saint-Auban/Dea Augusta Vocontiorum)*

*[P]ro salut(e) Imp(erii vel -eratoris) taurobol(ium) / [f]ec(it) Attius Attia[ni f(ilius)] / de  
suo*

190–230 CE



**23)** *ILGN 231 = CCCA 5, 361 = AE 1889, 81 = Duthoy 1969, no. 86 = Schillinger 1979, no. 489 + 490 = Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 471 sq. no. 36 (Die/Dea Augusta Vocontiorum)*

*[M(atri) d(eum) M(agnae)?] / pro salute L(uci) Sept(imi) Severi Pii P[ert(inacis) Aug(usti)] et M(arci) Au[rel(i)] / Antonini Aug(usti) et [[P(ubli) Sept(imi) Getae Caes(aris) ]] et Lu[li]/ae Aug(ustae) taurobol(ium) fec(it) r(es) p(ublica) Voc(ontiorum) Fl(avio?) Talusio [--- / ---] Appiano p(ublice?)*

198–209 CE

**24)** *CIL XII, 1567 = ILS 4140 = CCCA 5, 363 = AE 1982, 695 = ILGN 231 = CCCA 5, 61 = AE 1889, 81 = Duthoy 1969, no. 83 = Schillinger 1979, no. 479–490 = Spickermann 1994, 112–113 = Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 470 no. 33 (Die/Dea Augusta Vocontiorum)*

*M(atri) d(eum) M(agnae) I(daeae) / sac(rum) trib(us) taur(is) fecer(unt) / cum suis hostis et apparam(entis) / omnib(us) L(ucius) Dagid(ius) Marius pont/if(ex) perpet(uus) civit(at)is Valent(iae) / et Verullia Martina et / Verullia Maria fil(ia) eorum / pro salute Imp(eratorum) et Caesar(um) / Philipporum Augg(ustorum) et Otaci/liae Severae Aug(ustae) matris / Caes(aris) et castror(um) praeun/tibus sacerdotibus Iuni[o] / Tito XV-vir(al)i Arausens(i) et / Castricio Zosimione ci/vitat(is) Albens(is) et Blattio / Paterno civitatis Voc(ontiorum) / et Fabricio Orfito Liber(i) / Patris et ceteris a<s=D>sis/tentibus sacerdotibus / v(otum) s(olverunt) I(ibentes) m(erito). Loco vires con/ditae die prid(ie) kal(endas) Oct(obres) / Imp(eratore) Philippo Aug(usto) et Titi/ano co(n)s(ulibus)*

30.9.245 CE

**25)** *CIL XII, 1745 = CCCA 5, 367 = Duthoy 1969, no. 92 = Schillinger 1979, no. 491 = Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 273 sq. no. 41 (Valence/Valentia)*

*Pro salute Augg(ustorum) / proque d(omo) d(ivina) / taurobolium et c[ri]/obolium M(atri) d(eum) M(agnae) Id(aeae) fe[cer(unt)] / C(aius) Valerius Ur[ba]/[n]us(?) sacerdos C(aius) [Fl(avius) Re/stit]utus [tibicen?--]*

Ca. 207 CE

**26)** *CIL XII, 4323 = ILS 4120 = CCCA 5, 270 = Duthoy 1969, no. 96 = Schillinger 1979, no. 700 = Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 475 sq. no. 45 (Narbonne/Narbo)*

*[Ex] Imperio d(eum) M(atri) tauro-<b>P</b>olium provinciae / Narbonensis / factum per C(aius) Batonium / Primum flaminem Augg(ustorum) / pro salute dominorum / Imp(eratorum) L(uci) Septimi Severi / Pii Pertinacis Aug(usti) Ara/bici Adiabenici Parthi/ci maximi et M(arci) Aureli / Ant(onini) Aug(usti) [---]*

198–209 CE

## Alpes Graiae

**27)** *ILGN 17 = ILS 9333 = CCCA 5, 404 = AE 1904, 140 = AE 1905, 217 = AE 1978, 453 = Schillinger 1979, no. 504 (Moutiers/Darantasia)*

*Numinibus / Augg(ustorum) / Matri deum / et Matronis // Salvennis / T(itus) Romanus / Mercator / ex voto // [3]quadus // Trid[3] // [3]bis*

161–180 CE

### Gallia Aquitania

**28)** *CIL XIII, 11042 = ILS 9278 = CCCA 5, 420 = Duthoy 1969, no. 125 = Schillinger 1979, no. 540 = Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 490 no. 81 (Perigueux/Vesunna)*

*Numinib(us) Aug(ustorum) / et Magnae Matri deum / Aug(ustae) L(ucius) Pompon(ius) Sext(i) / Pompon(i) Paterni / sacerdotis Arens(is) fil(ius) Quir(in)a tribu / Paternus aram taurob(olicam) / posuit dedicavit/que*

180–250 CE

**29)** *CIL XIII, 511 = ILS 4126 = CCCA 5, 229 = Duthoy 1969, no. 109 = Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 482 sq. no. 64 (Lectore/Lactora)*

*[S(acrum) M(atri) d(eum)] / pro salute Imp(eratoris) M(arci) / Antoni Gordiani / Pii Fel(icis) Aug(usti) et Sa(bin)iae Tranquil(l)inae Aug(ustae) toti/usq(ue) domus divi/nae proq(ue) statu / civitat(is) Lactor(atium) / tauro<b=P>olium fe/cit ordo Lact(oratum) / d(omino) n(ostro) Gordiano / Aug(usto) II et Pompeiano co(n)s(ulibus) / VI Idus Dec(embres) curantib(us) / M(arco) Erotio Festo et M(arco) / Carinio Caro sacerdot(e) / Traianio Nundinio*

8.11.241 CE

### Gallia Lugdunensis

**30)** *CIL XIII, 1751 = ILS 4131 = CCCA 5, 386 = Duthoy 1969, no. 126 = Schillinger 1979, no. 541 + 542 = Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 490 sq. no. 82 (Lyon/Lugdunum)*

*Taurobolio Matris d(eum) M(agnae) Id(eae) | quod factum est ex imperio matris {D} | deum | pro salute Imperatoris Caes(aris) T(it)i Aeli | Hadriani Antonini Aug(usti) Pii p(atris) p(atriciae) | liberorumque eius | et status coloniae Lugudun(ensium) | L(ucius) Aemilius Carpus IIIIIvir Aug(ustalis) item | dendrophor(us) | vires excepit et a Vaticano trans/tulit ara(m) et bucranium | suo inpendio consecravit | sacerdote | Q(uinto) Sammio Secundo ab XVviris | occubo et corona exornato | cui sanctissimus ordo Lugudunens(ium) | perpetuitatem sacerdoti decrevit | App(io) Annio Atilio Bradua T(it)io Clod(io) Vibio | Varo co(n)s(ulibus) | I(ocus) d(at)us d(ecreto) d(ecurionum) || cuius Mesonyctium | factum est V Id(us) Dec(embres)*

9.12.160 CE

**31)** *CIL XIII, 1756 = CCCA 5, 393 = Duthoy 1969, no. 131 = Schillinger 1979, no. 552 = Spickermann 1994, 201 sq. = Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 494 no. 88 (Lyon/Lugdunum)*

*Taurobolium | matris deum Aug(ustae) | Billia T(iti) fil(ia) Veneria | I(ocus) d(atus) d(ecreto) d(ecurionum)*

ca. 160–199 CE

**32)** *CIL XIII, 1752 = ILS 4132 = CCCA 5, 385 = AE 2007, 948 = Duthoy 1969, no. 127 = Schillinger 1979, no. 543 + 544 = Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 491 sq. no. 84 (Lyon/Lugdunum)*

*[[Pro salute Imp(eratoris) Caes(aris) M(arci) Aureli Commodi Antonini Aug(usti)]] | numinibus Aug(usti) totiusque | domus divinae et statu c(oloniae) C(opiae) C(laudiae) | Aug(ustae) Lugud(unum) | taurobolium fecerunt dendrophori | Luguduni consistentes | XVI Kal(endas) Iulias | Imp(eratore) [[Caes(are) M(arco) Aurelio Commodo VI]] | Marco Sura Septimiano | co(n)s(ulibus) ex vaticinatione | Pusoni Iuliani | archilgalli sacerdote | Aelio Castrense | tibicine Fl(avio) Restituto | honori omnium | Cl(audius) Silvanus Perpetuus | quinquennalis inpen(dium) huius arae remisit | I(ocus) d(atus) d(ecreto) d(ecurionum)*

17.6.190 CE

**33)** *CIL XIII, 1753 = ILS 4133 = CCCA 5, 392 = Duthoy 1969, no. 128 = Schillinger 1979, no. 545 + 546 = Spickermann 1994, 199 sq. = Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 492 sq. no. 85 (Lyon/Lugdunum)*

*Pro salute Imp(eratoris) L(uci) Septimi Severi Pertina|cis Aug(usti) et D(ecimi) Clodi | [[Septimi Albini Caes(aris)]] | domusq(ue) divinae et statu c(oloniae) C(opiae) C(laudiae) Aug(ustae) Lug(udunum) | taurobolium fecerunt Aufustia | Alexandria et Sergia | Parthenope ex voto | praeunte Aelio Castren|se sacerdote tibicine Fl(avio) | Restituto inchoatum est | sacrum VII Idus Mai(as) con|summatum V Id(us) easdem | [[Imp(eratore) L(ucio) Septimio Severo Pertinac(e) Aug(usto) | [[D(ecimo) Clod(io) Sept(imio) Albino Caes(are)]] | Il co(n)s(ulibus) | I(ocus)] d(atus) d(ecreto) d(ecurionum)]*

9.–11.5.194 CE

**34)** *CIL XIII, 1754 = ILS 4134 = CCCA 5, 395 = Duthoy 1969, no. 129 = Schillinger 1979, nos. 547–551 = Spickermann 1994, 200 sq. = Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 493 no. 86 (Lyon/Lugdunum)*

*[Pro] salute Imp(eratoris) L(uci) Septimi | [Seve]ri Pii Pertinacis Aug(usti) | [et] M(arci) Aureli Antonini Caes(aris) | Imp(eratoris) destinati et | Iuliae Aug(ustae) matris castror(um) | totiusque domus divinae | eorum et statu c(oloniae) C(opiae) C(laudiae) Aug(ustae) Lug(udunum) | taurobolium fecerunt | Septicia Valeriana et | Optatia Siora ex voto | praeunte Aelio Antho sacerdotia Aemillia Secundilla tibicine Fl(avio) Restituto apparatore Virelio Hermetione | inchoatum est sacrum IIII | Nonas Maias consummatum Nonis eisdem | T(ito) Sex(tio) Laterano L(ucio) Cuspio | Ru[f]ino co(n)s(ulibus) | I(ocus) d(atus) d(ecreto) d(ecurionum)*

4.–7.5.197 CE

**35)** *CIL* XIII, 1755 = *CCCA* 5, 394 = Duthoy 1969, no. 130 = Dubosson-Sbrigione 2018, 493 sq. no. 87 (Lyon/Lugdunum)

[--] | Per[*tinacis* 3] | Part[*hici* 3] | [[6]] | [[6]] | [I]mp(eratoris) Caes(aris) L(uci) [3] | Per-  
ta[3] | Caes(aris) M(arci) Au[r(eli) 3] | Pii Feli[cis 3] | [Par]t(hici) m(aximi) Ara[bici m(axi-  
mi) 3] | [3 taurob]oli[um--]

Ca. 211–217 CE

### Germania Inferior

**36)** *AE* 2006, 864 = *AE* 2007, 1018 = *AE* 2009, 914 = *AE* 2013, 108 = *AE* 2013, 1115 = Wiegels 2017 = *AE* 2017, 990 (Aachen/Aquae Granni)

Numinibus / divor(um) Aug(ustorum) in / honorem domus / [d]ivinae Iul(ia) Tiberina  
Q. Iul(ii) /<sup>s</sup> [FL?]avi ux(r) o (centurionis) I[e]g(ionis) XX Val(eriae) Vic(tricis) ae/des Matri  
d[eum] et Isidi ex voto / de [suo ?] s(olvit) I(ibens) m(erito)

160–200 CE

**37)** *CIL* XIII, 7865 = *CCCA* 6, 35 = *AE* 2001, 1435 = Schillinger 1979, no. 708 (Inden-Pier)  
Pro salut[e] / Imperator[is] / Augusti M[a]/t<ri=ER> Magnae / consecrani // I(ibentes)  
m(erito)

200–250 CE

### Germania Superior

**38)** *AE* 2004, 1015 = *AE* 2007, 148 = *AE* 2017, 1071 (Mainz/Mogontiacum)

Pro salute Augustorum / s(enatus) p(opuli)q(ue) R(omani) et exercitus / Matri Mag-  
nae Claudia Aug(usti) I(iberta) Icmas / et Vitulus Caes(aris) sacer(dote) Cla(udio) Attico  
li(berto)

81–96 CE

**39)** *CIL* XIII, 6664 = *CCCA* 6, 45 = Schillinger 1979, no. 564 (Mainz/Mogontiacum)

In h(onorem) d(omus) d(ivinae) / De[o A]ttini [Vi]cto/rius Salu//taris / libert[us]

150–180 CE

**40)** *CIL* XIII, 11606 = *CIMRM* 2, 1349 = Schillinger 1979, no. 567 (Strasbourg-Königs-  
hofen/Argentorate)

In h(onorem) d(omus) d(ivinae) / D(eo) Atti / Cantin(ius) / Capell(a) / v(otum) s(olvit)  
I(ibens) I(aetus)

200–250 CE

**41)** *CIL* XIII, 7458 = *CCCA* 6, 51 = Schillinger 1979, no. 565 (Saalburg)

*[Matri De]um in h(onorem) d(omus) d(ivinae) / pr[o in]c(olumitate) Imp(eratoris) Caes(aris) T(iti) Aeli / H[adr(iani)] Antonini Aug(usti) Pii p(atris) p(atriciae) / [A]nton(inus) Aemilianus c(centurio) leg(ionis) / [XXII] Pr(imigeniae) p(iae) f(idelis) pro se et suis / [aede]m subst(ravit?) et v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) a(nimo)*

138–161 CE

### Latium et Campania / Regio I

**42)** *AE* 1927, 51 = *AE* 1927, 115 = *AE* 1927, 144 = *CCCA* 3, 464 = Dubosson-Sbrigli-  
one 2018, 268 (Marino/Castrimoenium)

*Pro salute Im[p(eratoris) Caes(aris) T(iti) Aeli Ha]driani Antonin[i Aug(usti) Pii et M(-  
arci) Ae]li Aureli Caes(aris) totius[q(ue) domus divinae] / collegium salutare den[dro-  
phorum] // sanctum Matri deum [Magnae Idaeae] / faciend(um) curaverunt. Locus  
adsign[atus est ad] / pinus ponendas / ab(!) C(aio) Dissenio Fusco curatore municipi[pii  
Bovillens(ium)] / secus epistula(m) Imp(eratoris) Antonini Aug(usti) ad [latam decu-  
rio]/nibus decreto eor(um) C(aio) Tatinio Gemellino [et] / Soteriano aed(ilibus) cur(am)  
agent(e) C(aio) Albio Cep[halo sacerdot(e)] / act(um) Nonis Aprilib(us) // L(ucio) Annio  
Largo / [et Pacato co(n)s(ulibus)]*

5.4.147 CE

**43)** *CIL* XIV, 34 p. 612 = *ILS* 4111 = *CCCA* 3, 401 = Schillinger 1979, no. 576 (Ostia  
Antica)

*P[ro salute imp(eratoris) ---] // --- F]/elicis(?) Q(uintus) Caecilius / Fuscus archigal/lus  
coloniae Ost(i)en/sis imaginem / Matris deum ar/genteam p(ondo) l cum / signo Neme-  
sem / <c=K>annoph<o>ris // Ostiensibus d(onum) d(edit)*

169–171 CE

**44)** *CIL* XIV, 40 p. 612 + *CIL* XIV, 41 = *CIL* XIV, 4301 = *CIL* XIV, 4302 = *ILS* 4135 = *CCCA*  
3, 405 = Duthoy 1969, 35 + 36 = Schillinger 1979, no. 650 = Dubosson-Sbrigli-  
one 2018, 512 sq. no. 118 (Ostia Antica)

*Tauro[bolium factum Matri deum Magn(ae) Idaeae pro salute] / Im[p(eratoris) Cae-  
saris] / M(arci) Aureli[i Antonini Aug(usti) et] / L(uci) A[[ureli] [Commodi Caes(aris)]] et]  
// Faustina[e Aug(ustae) et cetero]/rum libe[rorum eorum senatui, XVvir(is) s(acris) f(a-  
ciundis), equestri] / ordin(i), ex[ercitui p(opuli) R(omani)] / navigan[tibus---] ]RO[3] / decu-  
rio[nibu]s coloni[ae Ostiensium] / canno[phoris] dendroph[oris] / nata[---]atis taurob[olia-  
tis] / in [campo Matr]is deum col(oniae) [Ostiensium] / [3]q(ue) eorum ea[rumque(?)]] //  
Cri[n]obolium factum [Matri] / deum Mag(nae) Id(a)eae pr[o salute] / Imp(eratoris) Cae-  
s(aris) [[L(uci) A[ureli]]] / [[C[ommodi] Augusti]] // [to]tiusq(ue) dom[us divinae] // ]rniam  
[---] / [---]ux Ul[---] / C[ombari]sio Hes[perione] / [decurionum(?)] decret[o publ[ice(?)]]*

169–175 CE

**45)** *CIL* XIV, 43 = *CCCA* 3, 407 = Duthoy 1969, no. 39 = Schillinger 1979, no. 712 = Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 413 no. 120 (Ostia Antica)

*Taurobolium factum / Matr(i) deum Magn(ae) Idaeae pro / salut(e) et redit(u) et victor(ia) Imp(eratoris)*

200–250 CE

**46)** *CIL* XIV, 4303 = *CCCA* 3, 417 = *AE* 1917/18, 116 = *AE* 1919, 60 = Duthoy 1969, no. 40 = Schillinger 1979, no. 713 = Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 513 sq. no. 121 (Ostia Antica)

*[Taur- sive Cri]oboliu[m(?) factum / M(atri) d(eum)] M(agnae) I(daeae) pro salu[te et] / [r]edit(u) et victo[ria] / [[.--]] / Pii Felic(is) Aug(usti) et [[.--]] / [[.--]] Aug(usti) nostri tot[usque] / domus divinae s<e=I>natui XV[ir]is / sac(ris) fac(iundis) equestri [ordini] / e<x=R>e(r)citui p(opuli) R(omani) matri[b(us) sive -ronis(?)*

222–235 CE

**47)** *CIL* XIV, 42 (p. 612) = *ILS* 526 = *ILS* 4141 = *CCCA* 3, 406 = Duthoy 1969, no. 38 = Schillinger 1979, no. 711 = Dubosson-Sbriglione 2018, 513 no. 119 (Ostia Antica)

*Taur[obolium factum Matri deum] / Mag[nae] Idaeae pro salute et victoria] / Imp(eratoris) Caes(aris) C(ai) V[ibi] Treboniani Galli Pii] / Fel(icis) Aug(usti) et [Imp(eratoris) Caes(aris) C(ai) Vibi Afini Galli] // Veldum[niani Vol]usiani P[(ii) Fel(icis) / Aug(usti) totiu] sq(ue) domus divin(ae) eor(um) [et] / sen[atus XV]vir(or)um] s(acris) f(aciundis) equestr(is) ordin(is) / ex[ercituum naval]ium navigantium / S[---*

251–253 CE

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# CULTS OF ANATOLIAN LOCAL GODS IN MOESIA SUPERIOR THROUGH THE EYES OF THEIR WORSHIPPERS

Nadežda Gavrilović Vitas

## **Abstract**

*With only a few studies about the cults originating from the Eastern provinces, mainly interpreted through archaeological and epigraphical material and architectural remains, it is not easy to analyse and interpret how immigrants from Eastern provinces settled in the new province of Moesia Superior, and how Romanised inhabitants in the same territory experienced cults of Asia Minor and Syrian origin. Thus, it can be perceived that certain cults, such as those of Asia Minor local gods equated with the god Zeus/Jupiter, enjoyed popularity not only among the population originating from the Eastern provinces, but also presumably among some Romanised citizens. The reasons for venerating those deities were varied, depending on the dedicator's origin, profession and social status, but in the cases where small communities of phratra/collegia existed, one of the main reasons was that the devotees stayed loyal to their home gods and goddesses in the wish to preserve their national identity and tradition.*

**Key words:** *Asia Minor – Syria – Moesia Superior – cults.*

The subject of “Oriental” cults in the territory of the Roman province of Moesia Superior, unfortunately has not been systematically studied until now, yielding only a few studies dedicated to the problematic of the cults of Asia Minor, Syrian, Egyptian or Persian origin.<sup>1</sup> Sporadic articles about mentioned cults mainly deal with the finds related to some of these deities, but do not elaborate in great depth on all of the other important elements, such as the possible sacral spaces, ritual practices, beliefs and experiences of inhabitants who accepted or maintained religious customs and tradi-

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1 Zotović 1966; Zotović 1973; Gavrilović Vitas 2021.

tions of “Oriental” deities (their degree of knowledge about the theology of a particular cult) etc. Through combining epigraphic, iconographic, archaeological and burial testimonies, we will attempt to clarify some of the relevant questions.

In the corpus of votive and funerary monuments known so far from Moesia Superior, one-tenth can be related to immigrants originating from the Eastern provinces judging by the inscriptions,<sup>2</sup> furthermore, there are even more monuments whose iconography, in some cases combined with the anthroponomical elements, implies an origin of the dedicator or the deceased from the Eastern provinces. A fine example of this can be observed in a funerary monument from Singidunum dedicated to the Manes, the spirits of the dead (*Dis Manibus*) two-year-old Valeria Apphion, by her parents veteranus Gaius Valerius Valens and Valeria Elpis in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century (fig. 1).<sup>3</sup> In the register field of the monument, some objects belonging to *mundus muliebris* are presented: a pair of sandals, a mirror and a writing tablet. The child’s diminutive *Apphion* is very frequent in Phrygia, particularly in Sardis and Pergamon.<sup>4</sup> The images of a mirror, sandals and writing tablet depicted on the monument are also well known as motifs from Asia Minor sepulchral art, thus implying that Valeria’s parents were of presumably Phrygian origin.<sup>5</sup> Although the image of a writing tablet underlines the Valerii’s adoption of Roman cultural identity, all other elements which express parental sorrow for the prematurely lost daughter suggest their maintaining the traditions and customs of their Asia Minor homeland, which can be also perceived in other monuments from Singidunum, Viminacium, Timacum Minus, Scupi etc.<sup>6</sup>

Regarding epigraphic and archaeological monuments dedicated to the deities of Asia Minor or Syrian origin in which we find the dedication to a particular divinity combined with iconography, the situation is complicated because of their rarity in the territory of Moesia Superior. Focusing first on Occidental immigrants who came and stayed for a variety of reasons in Moesia Superior, epigraphic and archaeological testimonies attest that they were of different origins and professions. One aspect they had in common was their need to preserve and nurture their ethnic, cultural and religious identity and maintain ties to their homelands while integrating into the new environment. In particular, worshippers of local Asia Minor or Syrian divinities gathered in closed, small communities, on the basis of ethnic, social or professional purposes.<sup>7</sup> Certain deities, such as Sabazius, Jupiter Dolichenus or Jupiter Melanus are referred to in votive inscriptions as “paternus deus”, for example in monuments from Timacum Minus, Prizren and Ulpiana.<sup>8</sup> However, in addition to the case study on Jupiter Dolichenus whose

2 Михајловић 2009.

3 *IMS I*: num. 42; Кондић 1968, 272; Danković 2020, 137–138.

4 Özlem-Aytaçlar 2010, 521 n. 88.

5 About motifs of Asia Minor sepulchral art in the Central Balkans see Gavrilović Vitas 2021a, 271–286.

6 *Ibid.*

7 Gavrilović Vitas 2021, 118–122.

8 The text of the inscription from the votive monument dedicated to Sabazius Paternus from Timacum Minus: *Pro salute Imp(eratoris) / Flaviu[s] Cleme(n)[s] / Saba[zi]o Pate/rno A[ug(usto)] posu/i[st] M(arco) Ant[o]nio / Gordiano / Augusto et C[lodio] / Pomp(eiano) co(n)s(ulibus)*, *IMS III-2*, no. 13. The inscription from the votive monument dedicated to Jupiter Paternus Dolichenus from Prizren: *[Telesphoro Hygiae] //*

venerators left enough epigraphic and archaeological attestations in Moesia Superior about the god's popularity, other evidence about several Anatolian local gods equated with Zeus are also interesting and will be the subject of this paper.

In Moesia Superior in antiquity, in no other cult than in the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus did the priests leave traces of their presence and activities – nine priests have been attested on votive and funerary monuments,<sup>9</sup> presumably even more once existed; on the votive altar from Karataš dated from 212 to 214, an unknown number of priests is mentioned.<sup>10</sup> Archaeological excavations confirmed the existence of a shrine to Dolichenus in Karataš<sup>11</sup> and a new find of a god's life-size head in Karataš (fig. 2)<sup>12</sup> shows all the traits of the representative imperial sculpture, presenting Jupiter Dolichenus with an imperial wreath of laurel leaves with a circular medallion *corona gemata* on his Phrygian cap. This is a detail known from Syrian iconography, for instance from the relief of a priest of a storm god equated with Jupiter Dolichenus on a stele discovered in Hamman and dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> century.<sup>13</sup> Presumably the statue of Jupiter Dolichenus to which this head belonged was placed in the sanctuary of the god at Karataš, where his devotees could honour the god and understand in more depth the theology of the cult, perceiving it through the eyes of the Syrian priests.

Two priests of Jupiter Dolichenus mentioned in votive monuments from Jasen and Ratiaria were presumably in active military service as well, while a rare example of a priest of Jupiter Dolichenus and Dea Syria is known from a funerary monument discovered in the Danube Limes locality of Glamija-Rtkovo.<sup>14</sup> Julius Apollinaris, who probably originated from the Eastern provinces, was a priest of both deities, analogous



**Fig. 1 – Funerary monument of Valeria Apphion, Singidunum (Danković 2020, 138, fig. 41)**

*As/clep[i]/o / So[3] / Heracliti Su/rus et pro / Gen(io) I(ovis) O(ptimi) Dolic(h)eni / Paterno deo et Geni(o) / co(ho)rtis votum libies(!) f(ecit).* Gavrilović Vitas 2021, 234, cat. no. 13. The inscription from the votive monument dedicated to Jupiter Melanus Paternus: AE 1990, 859. For more about all three monuments see Gavrilović Vitas 2021, 81–82, 109, 119–120.

9 Ibid, 108.

10 The text of the inscription from the votive monument discovered in Karataš: *I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo) Dol(icheno) [p(ro) s(alute)] / M(arci) Aur(eli) Anto/nini Pii Aug(usti) et Iul(iae) / Domn(a)e Aug(ustae) ma(tri)s Aug(usti) et castro/rum dedicante L(ucio) / Mario Perpetuo / c(onsulari) per Restutum / m(agistrum?) c(ivium) R(omanorum) D(ianae?) sacerdo/tes eiusdem loci / d(edicaverunt?).* Mirković 2015, 39.

11 Ранков-Кондић 2009, 367–400.

12 Popović and Borić-Brešković (eds.) 2013, 309 no. 70.

13 Blömer 2015, 186–192.

14 Gavrilović Vitas 2019, 231–246.



**Fig. 2 – The marble head of Jupiter Dolichenus from Karataš (Gavrilović Vitas 2021, 239, cat. 27)**

to the priest Flavius Barhadadi from the votive inscription found in Apulum.<sup>15</sup> Flavius was also a priest of Jupiter Dolichenus and Dea Syria identified with the goddess Caelestis, but also perhaps – because its authenticity is regarded as doubtful – to the dedication to Jupiter Dolichenus and Iuno Assyria Regina of Lucius Fabirius from Rome.<sup>16</sup> It is interesting to observe that priests of Jupiter Dolichenus in Moesia Superior were not only active in larger centres such as Ratiaria and Viminacium, and Limes localities like Karataš (Diana), but also in smaller, interior regions like the area of Gračanica,<sup>17</sup> thus confirming that they spread the god's cult not only in urban centres, but also in less accessible areas. Of course, the diffusion of the Dolichenus cult in urban and Limes centres can be attributed presumably mainly to the officers and soldiers of the Legion VII Claudia, who participated in a military campaign in Syria and could have brought the cult from there. The names of the dedicators on two marble statuettes of Jupiter Dolichenus standing on

the bull from Egeta<sup>18</sup> – Pompeus Isauricus and Kastor – reveal their origin from the Eastern provinces. The statuettes are of similar iconography to the statuette from Pincum<sup>19</sup> dedicated by Silvanus and Leonides – the analogy is apparent in the detail of the altar beneath the animal's body on all three statuettes.

It can be presumed that already established networks and the mobility of not only soldiers, but also traders, artisans, miners, migrants and as we saw priests, contributed to the spread of the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus. The incorrect vulgar Latin forms of the god's epithet such as Dolicenus, Dulcenus and Dolycinus<sup>20</sup> instead of Dolichenus, can be attributed to dedicators of indigenous origin,<sup>21</sup> this confirms that not only smaller communities of immigrants from the homeland of Jupiter Dolichenus, attested by

15 AE 1965, 30a; Szabo 2018, 163.

16 CIL VI, 465.

17 Gavrilović Vitas 2021, 235.

18 Gavrilović Vitas 2020, 204–208.

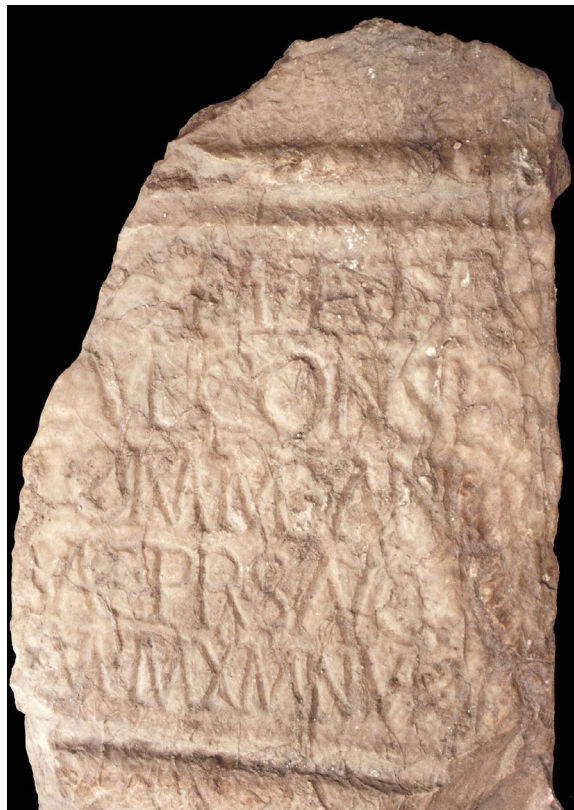
19 Timoc and Boda 2016, 121–127.

20 Gavrilović Vitas 2021, 233 cat. no. 1; Timoc and Boda 2016, 121–127; Gavrilović Vitas 2021, 234 cat. no. 9.

21 Vágási 2019, 537–546.

lost monuments from Viminacium, were among the god's venerators, but also indigenous inhabitants as well.

A marble altar (fig. 3) recently discovered between the villages of Kušiljevo and Vezičevo, north of Svilajnac near Jagodina in the centre of Moesia Superior, near the location of *Iovis Pagus*, a station on the Roman *via militaris* on the road between Viminacium and Naissus, provides interesting evidence for the honouring of local gods from Asia Minor.<sup>22</sup> It is dedicated to both Jupiter and Hercules by Gaius Valerius Maximinus, for the health of Septimius Severus and Caracalla or Caracalla and Geta.<sup>23</sup> As can be seen from the inscription, Hercules is here commemorated as *Conservator Comameanorum*, that is as the protector of the citizens of Comama, Colonia Julia Augusta Prima Fida Comama (or Comamenorum), a Roman colony in Pisidia founded by Augustus in 25 BC.<sup>24</sup> We presume that behind the name of *Hercules Conservator Comameanorum* the ancient Anatolian god Kakasbos is hidden, associated with the Greek god Herakles/Roman god Hercules before or at the beginning of the Imperial period, with established iconography until the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.<sup>25</sup> Both Kakasbos and Herakles/Hercules carried a club as their main weapon, fought successfully against destructive forces, ensured victory and protected their devotees.<sup>26</sup> At Comama, beside the rock-face sanctuary of Apollo of the Perminoundeis, there was another rock sanctuary where, in addition to the god Men, and the Dioskouroi with a lunar goddess, the god Herakles/Kakasbos was venerated.<sup>27</sup> The fact that Gaius Valerius Maximinus' origin is expressed with an epithet given to the god, but derived from the name of ded-



**Fig. 3 – Votive altar to Jupiter and Hercules  
Conservator Comameanorum (Archaeological  
Heritage of Svilajnac 2011, 5, no. 4)**

22 Grbić 2015, 126–127; Archaeological Heritage of Svilajnac 2011, 5 no. 4.

23 The text of the inscription from the votive monument dedicated to Jupiter and Hercules: *[[I(ovi)] O(ptimo) M(aximo) et Herc(uli) Conser(vatori) / Comameano(rum?) / sac(rum) pr(o) s(alute) Augg(ustorum) nn(ost-rorum) / C(aius) Val(erius) Maximinus v(otum) s(olvit)]*, Grbić 2015, 126–127.

24 Mitchell 1993, 90.

25 Kakasbos was a local god most worshipped by the populations of Northern Lycia, Western Pamphylia and Pisidia, presented riding a horse with a club in his hand on rock-cut areas and votive stelae, Candaş 2006, 1–5.

26 Talloen 2015, 95. For more about the iconography of Kakasbos/Herakles see Candaş 2006, 24–33.

27 Ibid, 231.

icator's hometown "Comama",<sup>28</sup> it implies that he dedicated the monument not only in his name, but for a group of his countrymen with whom he was united in an ancestral cult of the homeland god, whose *interpretatio Romana* is the god Hercules.

This kind of group dedication is familiar in Moesia Superior, particularly in mining areas, where migrants from different parts of Asia Minor were employed either as miners or clerks in mine administration. Their gods were mostly ancient local gods from their homeland who were equated with the supreme Roman deity Jupiter; we may now focus on these cases to highlight their significance and characteristics. One votive monument from Prizren and three votive altars discovered in Lipljan, Ulpiana are dedicated to Jupiter Melanus,<sup>29</sup> who on one monument is addressed as *Paternus* and on two monuments as *Melanus Cidiessus*. The dedicators were either of Bythinian or Phrygian origin, since the epithet Melanos was probably derived from the name of the city of Mele in Bithynia, or the names of the villages Melakome or Malos in Phrygia.<sup>30</sup> The god Zeus Melenos is known from Trajanic coins from the Phrygian town of Dorylaeum.<sup>31</sup> The epithet Cidiessus could be derived from the name of the Phrygian town Kidyessos in the vicinity of the town of Dorylaeum.<sup>32</sup> Thus, this local Asia Minor god, Jupiter Melanus, was from Anatolia, rich in ores; he was presumably regarded there as the protector of mines and miners, as he was honoured by the immigrants of Asia Minor origin in Moesia Superior.

Another Phrygian god was honoured in Lipljan, Ulpiana: Zeus Ezzaios, whose epithet in the opinion of S. Dušanić was derived from the name of the Phrygian town of Aizanoi,<sup>33</sup> is known by emissions of coins which emphasised the strong tie between the city and the supreme Greek god,<sup>34</sup> but also by the famous pseudo-dipteral temple of Zeus and Cybele built under Domitian.<sup>35</sup> The dedicator Apollonios, son of Menelaos was probably a Hellenophone immigrant or descendant of an immigrant,<sup>36</sup> as was also Sokrates, son of Paulos who was also a miner or related to the mining activities in the Kosmaj region near Belgrade, Singidunum. Sokrates made a dedication to the god Zeus Okkonenos (fig. 4), whose epithet is presumably derived from a toponym Okaenon, near Nicaea in Bythinia, where eight dedications to the god have been confirmed so far<sup>37</sup> and

28 There is also a possibility that Gaius Valerius Maximinus was of occidental origin, but spent a certain amount of time in Pisidia. I sincerely thank colleague Laurent Bricault for his suggestion.

29 Gavrilović Vitas 2021, 242, cat. no. 1-4.

30 Душанић 1971, 257.

31 *RPC* III, 2635.

32 The name of Zeus Kidiesos has been attested on coins from Asia Minor, Parović-Pešikan 1990, 607.

33 Душанић 1971, 259.

34 The coins from Aizanoi implied that the town was the birthplace of the god Zeus, Chiai 2020, 214; *RPC* I, 3088.

35 The temple was dedicated to Zeus and Cybele: Zeus was worshipped in the above-ground part of the temple, while the underground chamber was for honouring the goddess Cybele. The acroteria on the temple of Zeus and Cybele were in the form of Cybele's head, that is of Meter Steurene's head, a local version of the Mother goddess; she appears on bronze coins of Aizanoi shown as Rhea holding Zeus and surrounded by the dancing Koribants, *Ibid.*

36 Душанић 1971, 259.

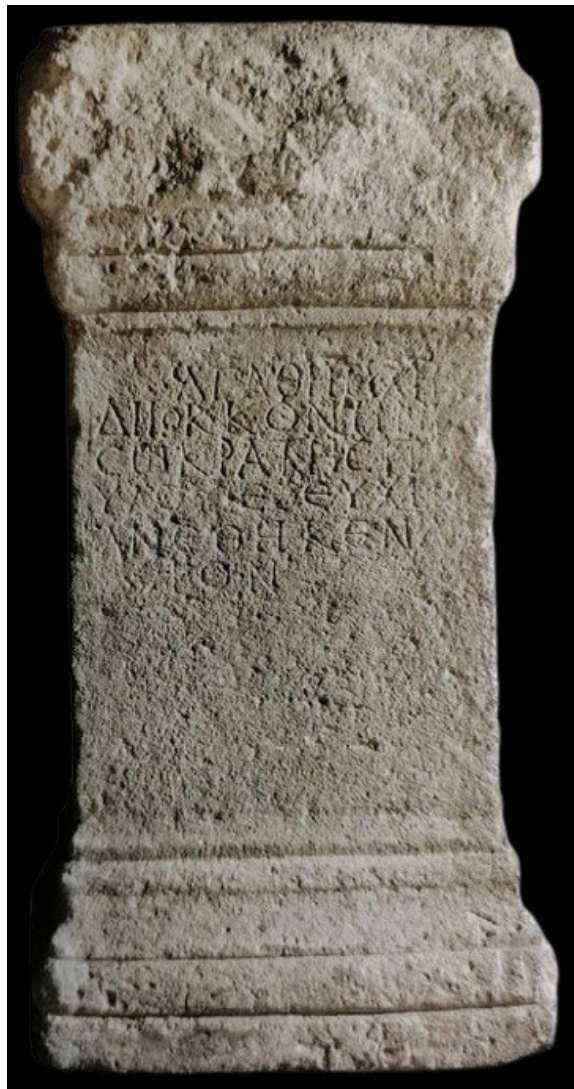
37 Delchev and Raycheva 2018, 254.



whose sanctuary was founded in the Imperial period in the vicinity of Kilciler in southern Bithynia.<sup>38</sup> In addition to Moesia Superior, the cult of Zeus Okkonenos is also confirmed in Dalmatia and Thrace, where his cult was practised in Nicopolis ad Istrum by Bythinians such as Palumbos Apolonidu, who honoured his homeland god.<sup>39</sup>

The votive altar dedicated to Zeus Synenos (fig. 5) was also discovered in the Kosmaj mining region, near the find-spot of the monument dedicated to Zeus Okkonenos. Zeus Synenos was honoured by Antipater, son of Timotheos, whose home town was probably the city of Synnada in central Phrygia.<sup>40</sup> These individual dedications were just as important as the group dedications, like the one from a votive monument discovered in Singidunum, made to the god Jupiter for the health of Septimius Severus, Caracalla and Geta, by *Cilices contirones* in the year 196. *Cilices contirones* were part of the legion IV Flavia stationed in Singidunum and their presence is also attested by a stamp on a lamp found near the presumed Roman forum in Singidunum.<sup>41</sup> This ethnic association perhaps had a club and a *sacellum* in Singidunum, and since its provenience is emphasised in the inscription, as is the case with other Asia Minor associations confirmed in Viminacium

(*κώμη Σιγῶν*, *κώμη Χαϊρουμουτα* and Abdarmisu),<sup>42</sup> it can be presumed that one of the most important reasons for their forming was to preserve the national identity and tradition of the association's members. These private associations known as *phratra* or *collegia* consisted of migrants from the Eastern provinces who were involved in emperor worship, were active participants in the Roman army and city administration,



**Fig. 4 – Votive altar to Zeus Okkonenos (Нинковић 2019, 68, cat. 79, T. XXVI/79)**

38 Ozlem-Aytaclar 2010, 512.

39 Guinea Diaz 2019, 80.

40 Gavrilović Vitas 2021, 120, 242, cat. no. 7.

41 Ibid, 120.

42 Ibid, 191.



**Fig. 5 - Votive altar to Zeus Synenos (Hunković 2019, 67, cat. 77, T. XXV/77)**

jupiter Melanus, Zeus Okkonenos, and Zeus Synennos allowed the venerators to more easily connect, prepare and organize amongst themselves, sharing interests that encompassed different aspects of life, including cult practices. Although the army was the most visible element in the epigraphic monuments, this does not mean that other venerators of "Oriental" cults did not exist just because they were not visible. In that context, the analysis and interpretation of the practising of the cults originating from the Eastern provinces are comprehensible only through the combination of epigraphic, architectural and archaeological data, in order to gain a more accurate reconstruction of the religious beliefs, practices and rituals of "Oriental" cults in the way that their devotees experienced them in antiquity.

took up various priesthoods, or simply made private dedications to continue and cherish the religious heritage and tradition of their homeland deities.

Resuming our inquiry into the perception of deities of Anatolian or Syrian origin through the eyes of their devotees in Moesia Superior, unfortunately we cannot speculate on presumed sacral spaces and ritual practices that took place; their existence, however, is not debatable and was probably similar to the sacred spaces and ritual practices of the deities in question in other parts of the Roman Empire. Venerators of "Oriental" deities sought the protection and support of the gods they honoured in this life and the afterlife, through votive dedications, characteristic motifs in sepulchral art or cult objects placed as grave goods, which had an apotropaic and a soteriological dimension. Although no traces of sacral spaces are attested, we can presume that they were small and modest sites where rituals in honour of a particular deity could be performed and votive gifts placed. The existence of *phratra* or *collegia* of previously mentioned Asia Minor divinities such as Ju-

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# EPIGRAPHIC TESTIMONIES OF JUPITER DOLICHENUS: IATRIC ASPECTS

Vladimir P. Petrović

## Abstract

*The Jupiter Dolichenus cult, as it is well known, originates from the region of nowadays North Syria and Southern Turkey. Among the considerable number of epigraphic testimonies dedicated to Jupiter Dolichenus discovered so far in the Roman world, only a few are related as well to the healing divinities such as Asclepius/Aesculap(i)us, Hygia, and Telesphorus. Three inscriptions of Moesia Superior, Numidia, and Dacia are indicative and essential because they link the Dolichenian deity directly to the appropriate iatric cults and point towards its curative aspects.*

**Keywords:** Roman Pantheon – Jupiter Dolichenus – epigraphic testimonies – healing aspects.

Among the considerable number of epigraphic testimonies dedicated to Jupiter Dolichenus discovered so far in the Roman world, only a few of them are related as well to the healing divinities such as Asclepius/Aesculap(i)us, Hygia, and Telesphorus. This article aims to shed new light on this fascinating phenomenon and outline some suppositions on the purpose of the existence of these monuments, their finding spots, and their dedicants.<sup>1</sup>

The worship of Jupiter Dolichenus, as is well known, is native to the present-day area of northern Syria and southern Turkey. It is generally connected with the Commagen-

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**Fig. 1. The altar from Prizren (private collection of dr Petar Petrović)**

ian town of Doliche (Dülük in today's Turkey).<sup>2</sup> His homeland has a significant meaning after the interpretation of many inscriptions discovered in the Roman world and dedicated to the Dolichenian deity. This is an area rich in iron ore, as indicated by the epigraphic formulas *ubi ferrum nascitur*,<sup>3</sup> or *ubi ferrum exoritur*.<sup>4</sup> Iron metallurgy is evident in Doliche itself and on the Anatolian Plateau, rich in mineral deposits in the past and today. The two regions are considered the centers of origin of the cult.<sup>5</sup> Within the Roman Pantheon the Dolichenian deity was connected and identified with Jupiter, the primary deity of the Roman state religion, under the name of *Iuppiter Optimus Maximus Dolichenus*. Within the Roman Pantheon, the Dolichenian deity was connected and identified with Jupiter, the supreme god of the Roman state religion, under the name of *Iuppiter Optimus Maximus Dolichenus*. The cult gained popularity in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, peaked under the Severan dynasty in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, and virtually disappeared shortly afterward. But it is evident that the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus existed in Roman society even before the second century, based on the epigraphic material, primarily connected with the settlers and recruited soldiers of Syrian origin.<sup>6</sup>

The followers of the Commagenian deity derive not only from one group of believers of Eastern origin, primarily soldiers, as is usually thought, but we can also trace them among social classes like priests, traders or artisans, freedmen, and those connected with the mining areas.<sup>7</sup> The dedicants associated with healing activities and locations could further enlarge this list.<sup>8</sup> Among the large number of epigraphic material on Jupiter Dolichenus, three inscriptions from Moesia Superior, Numidia, and Dacia are indicative and vital as they connect this divinity with the proper iatric cults. The first inscription comes from the extreme southwest of Moesia Superior, located at the border with the Dalmatia province, close to the present town of Prizren.<sup>9</sup>

2 Blömer 2021.

3 *Civitas Taunensium* (Heddernheim): *AE* 1902, 17; *Statio Vettoniana* (Pfünz): *AE* 1889, 68; *Novae* (Svishtov): *AE* 2008, 1187.

4 *Apulum* (Alba Iulia): *CIL* III, 1128.

5 Concerning the homeland of the Dolichenus cult, see Dörner 1965; Speidel 1978, 45; Gavrilović-Vitas 2021, 92–113.

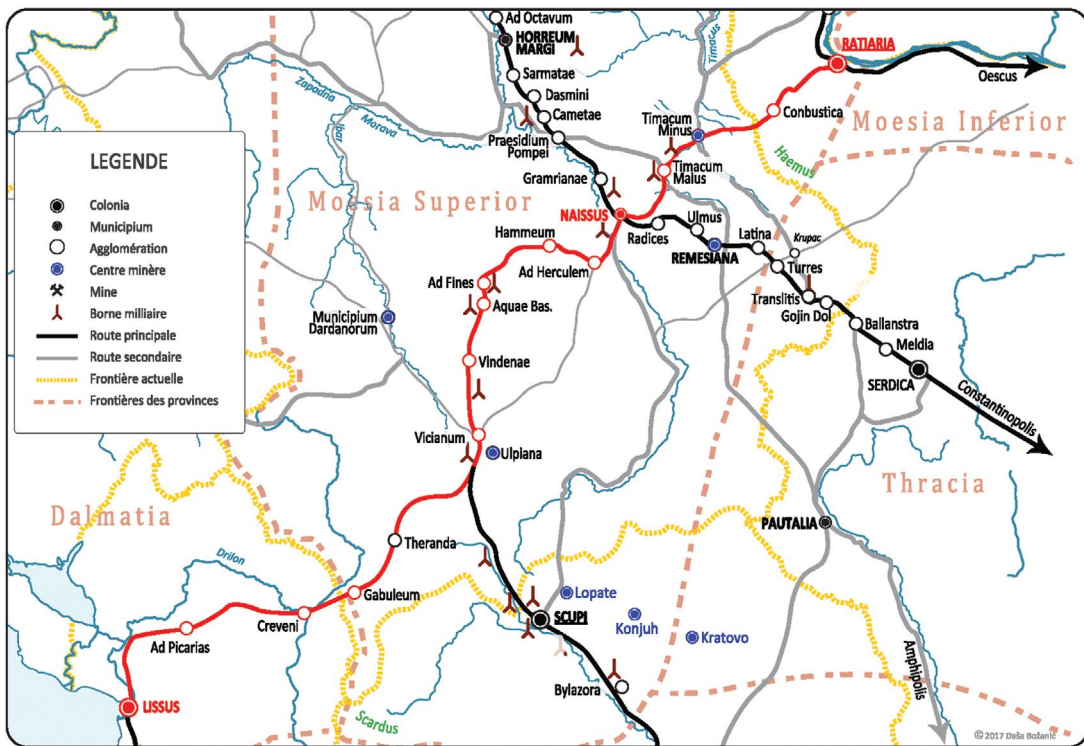
6 Petrović 2015, 323–332.

7 Popescu 2004, 317; Petrović 2019, 101–120.

8 Speidel 1980, 182–185.

9 Prizren: *ILJug* III, 1438 = *CCID* 126 = *AE* 1981, 739; Dušanić 1984.





**Map 1. Roman Road Lissus - Naissus (Daša Božanić and Vladimir P. Petrović)**

It reads: [Telesphoro Hygiae] || As|clep[ī]l<sup>5</sup>o | So[3] | Heracliti Sulrus [m]et(allarius) pro(curatoris) | Gen(io) l(ovis) O(ptimi) Dolic(h)eni |<sup>10</sup> Paterno deo et Geni(o) | co(ho) rtis votum libies(!) f(ecit) (fig. 1). This area, situated on the slopes of Mount Scardus (Šar Planina), is crossed by one of the oldest and most important transbalkan Roman land communication lines.<sup>10</sup> It connected the Adriatic coast and the town of Lissus (Lezha) with the main urban settlement of the central Balkans, the city of Naissus (Niš) (fig. 2).<sup>11</sup> This Roman road, depicted in Tabula Peutingerina, was actually in its major part the compendium or shortcut that linked the Adriatic coastline major urban centers (Lissus, Apollonia, and Dyrrachium) with the main Balkanic North–South communication axes. It ran from the Danube (Singidunum – Belgrade and Viminacium – Kostolac), along the Morava (Margus) and Vardar (Aksiós) River valleys, to the north Aegean coast and the town of Thessalonica (Thessaloniki). The oldness, character, and importance of the Lissus–Naissus route are further supported by the unique inscription from Hadrian’s epoch mentioning a *Via Nova* and a *compendium*.<sup>12</sup> The inscription of Jupiter Dolichenus from the vicinity of Prizren could be related to the station of Gabuleum or, more likely, Theranda, which are mentioned on Tabula Peutingeriana.<sup>13</sup>

10 Speidel 1980, 183.

11 Petrović 2019, 109–114.

12 AE 1980, 786 = AE 1984, 792; Petrović 2019, 102.

13 About *Gabuleum* and *Theranda*, Petrović 2019, 103–104.

In my last article about Jupiter Dolichenus, I connected this inscription with the mining activities in the region of the South of the uppermoesian mining district of Dardania, *metalli Dardanici*, as this was the primary economic activity in this region.<sup>14</sup> Surus, the dedicator of this altar, was presumably a member of one of the uppermoesian cohortes, maybe I Aurelia Dardanorum, who have been dispatched to the office of the procurator of the Dardanian mines (*metallarius procuratoris*).<sup>15</sup> It should also be borne in mind that in the text of the inscription, Jupiter Dolichenus is mentioned as *paternus deus*,<sup>16</sup> which certainly indicates that the dedicant was foreigner probably of Eastern origin and that he found some work on the soil of Upper Moesia, primarily as a soldier, and then as part of the administration in mines. Based on analogies in the inscriptions known so far, there were associations (*collegia*) of foreigners - migrants bound by common origin and activity in Upper Moesia. Ethnic associations were limited to the mining regions in this province.<sup>17</sup> They did not have to be exclusively soldiers but could be employed in administrative jobs or as miners. They consecrated altars to their ancestral deities and directly connected them with the supreme god of the Roman pantheon as part of the Romanization process to which they were exposed. The associations of migrants from Thrace, Bithynia, Anatolia, Dalmatia, Syria, and other empire regions in the uppermoesian province are attested.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, this was not necessarily an example of Jupiter Dolichenus cult spreading among the local population. Still, it may be an individual spiritually connected to the place of its origin.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, as the altar is dedicated to Asclepius, Hygia, and Thelesphorus in addition to Jupiter Dolichenus as *deus paternus*, it could be presumed that there were some direct relations between proper iatric divinities and the Commagenian god. As the author of this study, I am inclined to the belief that Surus dedicated this altar in one sanctuary of Asclepius that probably existed in the area of Prizren to the Roman healing divinities, which became more firm and decisive with the support of Jupiter Dolichenus. Even though it is not clear from the text of the inscription, Surus may have been driven to this action, *ex praecepto*, by a dream, as is the case with similar inscription found in Apulum (*Dacia*).<sup>20</sup> In support of the sanctuary of Asclepius in the vicinity of Prizren, reports another votive monument dedicated to Asclepius, in the Greek language, with a dedication and a relief representation of the healing deity.<sup>21</sup> It runs: Κυρίῳ Ἀσκληπιῶ Σωτῆρι | ἔθηκᾰν | Μικ(–), Γαι(–), Ἀσκλη(–), Ἰῶ Ουα(–), Δημη(–), Ἄρτε(–) | ὑπὲρ τῆς ἑαυτῶν | σωτηρίας δῶρον. It was not found *in situ* but was secondarily embedded in the apse of the Church of the Holy Sunday in Prizren, the endowment of young King Marko Mrnjavčević from 1371. Like the previous one, this inscription was brought from the immediate vicinity, from the station

14 On mining activities in the Central Balkans in Roman times, see Dušanić 1977; Dušanić 2004; Petrović 2015, 323–332.

15 Dušanić 1984, 31; Petrović 2015, 323–332.

16 Grbić 2015, 128.

17 Grbić 2015, 133.

18 Grbić 2015, 128.

19 Grbić 2015, 134.

20 Apulum: *CIL* III, 1614 = *CIL* III, 8044 = *CCID* 158.

21 *SEG* 44.646,1; Dušanić 1984.

of *Gabulem* or, more likely, *Theranda*. It is a standard dedication to the healing deity by six individuals. The names of the dedicants are listed without patronymics or gentilic, so it is logical to assume that they were slaves or individuals from a lower social class who may have been bound by a common job or joined in some *collegium*.

Given that not far from today's Prizren, the Roman road left the province of Upper Moesia and entered the hilly regions of the province of Dalmatia towards Lissus, and that there was also a beneficiary and customs stations, it is logical to assume that votive monuments could also be dedicated to Asclepius and other healing deities as gratitude for health or recovery after a strenuous journey, especially in case of the second inscription without the explicit connection with Jupiter Dolichenus.<sup>22</sup>

The second altar of Apulum is dedicated to Jupiter Dolichenus and Aesculapus by Veturius Marcianus, a veteran of the legion XIII Gemina.<sup>23</sup> This inscription reads: *I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo) D(olicheno) | ex praecepto | Num(inis) Aesculapi | somno monit(us) |<sup>5</sup> Veturius Marcian(us) ve(teranus) I(egionis) XIII G(eminae) p(ro) s(alute) s(ua) suor(um)q(ue)*. The inscription points to the same conclusion about the strong bond between healing divinities and Jupiter Dolichenus. Its finding place is connected with the mountainous area of *Aureriae Dacicae*, where massive mining activities occurred, similar to the Prizren altar.

The third altar, dedicated to Asclepius, Hygia, and Jupiter Dolichenus by Titus Flavius Maximus, the highest ranking officer of the legion of III Augusta, derives from Lambaesis in Numidia (Lambèse – Tazoult, Algeria), the Roman legionary fort and colony (fig. 3).<sup>24</sup> The text of the inscription reads: *I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo) Dolic(heno) | Aesculapio | (H)ygiae cetelrisq(ue) di(i)s | immort(alibus) T(itus) Fl(avius) |<sup>5</sup> Maximus ex I(centurione) | praet(oriano) p(rimus) p(ilus) praef(ectus) | [[I(egionis) III]] Aug(ustae) Severi(anae) | cum Antonia An(tonina) coniulge v(otum) s(olvit)*. The Roman settlement of Lambaesis, located on one of the major roads in the province of Numidia, was the headquarters of the III Augusta Legion. It had a sizeable civilian colony and abundant water springs from the mountains nearby, as evidenced by the remains of



**Fig. 2. The altar from Lambaesis (EDCS 20600075)**

22 Dušanić 1984, 29–30.

23 Apulum: *CIL* III, 1614 = *CIL* III, 8044 = *CCID* 158.

24 *CIL* VIII, 2624 (p. 1739) = *D* 4323 = *CCID* 624 = *Hygiae* p. 123.

aqueducts.<sup>25</sup> The temple of Asclepius, unfortunately severely damaged, was located among the other religious buildings. It was inspired by the famous sanctuary of Asclepius in Epidaurus (Greece), the well-known Doric temple dedicated to the medical god.<sup>26</sup> This was a specific medico-religious complex used by soldiers and their families to cure themselves and improve their health conditions, using thermal waters protected by the deity who could strongly contribute to the curative processes.

Based on these three inscriptions mentioned above, it is acceptable that the cult of Jupiter Dolichenus was thus also associated with medical deities in Roman times. Its basic features, such as the “eternal preserver”, the “firmament preserver”, and the “invincible provider” should be linked to health in symbiosis with purely medical divinities. Jupiter Dolichenus, in combination with the strictly iatric cults, contributed to the strength, faithfulness, invincibility, and positive outcome of the medical treatment. The finding places of all three altars are linked to mountain slopes abundant with water sources and mineral resources, the natural areas of the apparent healing character, positioned on strategic itinerary roads, and with various populations—the land of passage, land of anchor.

25 Christol and Janon 2005, 73–86.

26 *CIL VIII, 2680 = CCID 620 (from Lambaesis in Numidia): Pro s[alute] et incolumitate | Imp(eratoris) Cae[s(aris) Traia]ni Hadriani Augusti | Sex(tus) Iuli[us Maio]r legatus ipsius propraetore | templ[um I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo) D]olicheno dedicavit.*

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