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MITHRAS IN MOESIA INFERIOR

NEW DATA AND NEW PERSPECTIVES

Summary: The paper starts by adding to the corpus of Mithraic monuments the recently (re)discovered monuments, from *Carsium*, *Nicopolis ad Istrum*, *Tropaeum Traiani*, *Tomis* and *Capidava*. In the second part it focuses on the differences and similitudes between the cults in *Novae* and *Istros*, by analysing Mithraism's place in their respective communities.

Key words: Mithraism, *Moesia Inferior*, *Novae*, *Istros*, community

The present paper comes as a continuation of an article I published in 2006,¹ and focuses on two issues. The first is updating the information on the different Mithraic communities in the province by presenting the latest published additions to the Mithraic corpus and by adding two new monuments. The second issue is the place this cult had in the pantheon of the communities they developed in, by analysing the social status of the dedicants, the beginning of these cults, as well as the religious context in which they were embedded. As analysing all the Mithraic monuments in the province² is beyond the scope of this article, I will focus on just two relevant case studies: the communities of *Novae* and *Istros*.

RECENTLY AND NEWLY DISCOVERED MITHRAIC MONUMENTS³

Carsium (Hârşova, Tulcea County, Romania):

a) Limestone altar⁴ (fig. 1) discovered in 1999 (H 0.32m; L 0.20m; T 0.16m). Height of letters 0.02m. Inv. 43452. End of 3rd – beginning of 4th c. AD.

¹ BOTTEZ, V.: Quelques aspects du culte mithriaque en Mésie Inférieure. *Dacia* 50 (2006) 285–296.

² I plan on publishing a volume on Mithraism in Moesia Inferior in the near future.

³ There is a relief from Durostorum (*JGB* II no. 865) attributed to the Mithraic cult by E. Popescu (comments on *ISM* IV no. 109), based on the presence of a lion and a rosetta on the monument. In my opinion, there is no proof this relief could actually be connected to the Mithraic cult.

⁴ BĂRBULESCU, M. – BUZOIANU, L.: Inscriptions inédites et révisées de la collection du MINAC.I. *Pontica* 42 (2009) 400–402, no. B.2, Fig. 6 a–b = *AE* 2009 no. 1210.

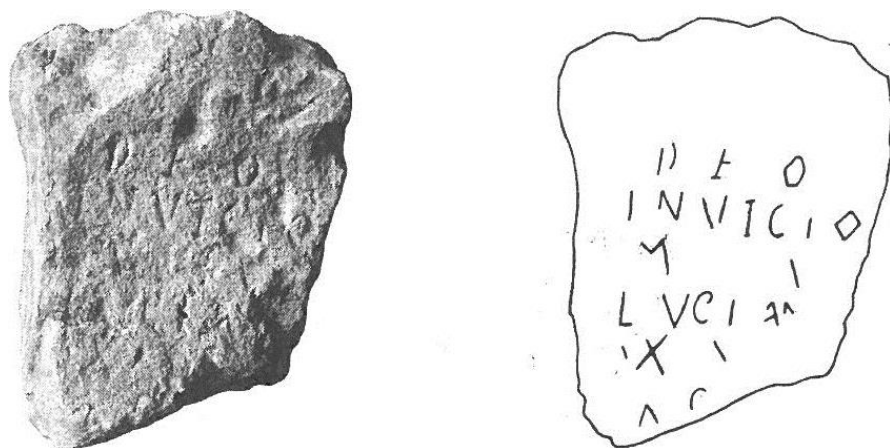


Fig. 1. Altar dedicated to Mithras at Carsium (BĂRBULESCU-BUZOIANU [n. 4] fig. 6 a-b)

- 1 *Deo*
Invicto
M[it(h)r]a[e]
Lucia[n(us)]
 5 *ex v[oto]*
[posuit]

In this case there is no further information concerning the person who set up the monument and the first editors consider that he did not use the *tria nomina*. What is very significant about the monument is its late date. It is among the very rare religious monuments set up in the entire province; a similar example is the inventory of a sacred ware deposit discovered at Târgușor, which is dated to the 4th c. AD.⁵

Nicopolis ad Istrum (Nikyup, Veliko Târnovo County, Bulgaria):

b) Marble stele⁶ (H 1.20m; L 0.62m; T 0.25m; fig. 2). In the upper part there is a tauroctony relief in a carved out square (fig. 3). Inside the square there is an inscription;⁷ height of letters 0.02/0.014-0.015 m. End of 2nd – beginning of 3rd c. AD.

⁵ In the natural cave “la Adam” in the territory of Istros – *CIMRM* nos 2303–2309 = *ISM* I nos 374–377 and AVRAM, A.: Le corpus des inscriptions d’Istros revisité. *Dacia* 51 (2007) 111, nos 374 and 375; ALEXANDRESCU-VIANU, M.: *Histria IX. Les statues et les reliefs en pierre*. Bucharest 2000, nos 191–192; COVACEF, Z.: *Arta sculpturală în Dobrogea romană. Sec. I-III p.Chr* [Sculptural Art in Roman Dobruđa]. Cluj 2002, no. 165, p. XXVI, fig. 3; COVACEF, Z.: *Sculptura antică din expoziția de bază a Muzeului de Istorie Națională și Arheologie Constanța* [Ancient Sculptures in the Main Exhibition of the Museum of National History and Archaeology Constanța]. Cluj 2011, nos 61–62.

⁶ *CIMRM* no. 2264; Vermaseren mistakenly asserts that the slab (in fact a stele, as we shall see) is made of limestone.

⁷ SHARANKOV, N.: A dedication to Mithras from *Nicopolis ad Istrum*. *Archeologija* 54/2 (2013) 38–56. I would like to thank Dr Sharankov for the photographs he provided for this article.



Fig. 2. Mithras stele from Nicopolis ad Istrum (photo courtesy of N. Sharankov)

- 1 Κυρίδ (!) Μίθρα εὐχ[ῆ]ν
Γαλέριος Προτέως (!) ἐπιгнаφ{α}εὺς.

The newly published inscription was somehow unnoticed by the previous editors, and it is older than the inscription⁸ surrounding the carved-out square. Therefore, it is assistant-fuller Galerios, son of Proteos, who dedicated the monument. The monument itself is unique, as – to my knowledge – it is the only Mithraic stele, only befitting

⁸ *CIMRM* no. 2265 = *IGBulg* V no. 5225.



Fig. 3. Earlier inscription on stele from Nicopolis ad Istrum (photo courtesy of N. Sharankov)

a Greek donor. And there is no doubt that it is a stele, because the later inscription around the square labels it στήλιον, the diminutive of stele. N. Sharankov also noticed the three rectangular slots carved along the square's inner margin, one of which still preserves a fragment of a leaded iron bar. This discovery prompted the editor to consider that the initial square relief was covered at a later date by a painted plaque attached in the three slots. He made reference to several other monuments as analogies, namely double faced reliefs⁹ that present the viewer with a succession of mythological scenes. These were supposed to guide the worshipper through the mythological narrative and, in the end, to present him with the revelation of the slaying of the bull. Therefore, the mythological scene painted on the plaque must have preceded the tau-roctony in the narrative. It is also possible that this cult object was actively involved in religious ceremonies. Mithras is called "Lord", and the only analogy for this term is found in Pautalia, Thrace.¹⁰

⁹ CLAUSS, M.: *The Roman Cult of Mithras*. Edinburgh 2000, 52.

¹⁰ *IGBulg* IV no. 2115(2).



Fig. 4. Altar dedicated to Mithras at Tropaeum Traiani (*ISM* IV no. 32)

Tropaeum Traiani (Adamclisi, Constanța County, Romania):

c) Fragmentary limestone altar¹¹ (H 0.61m; L 0.34m; T 0.28m). Height of letters 0.04–0.045m (fig. 4). 2nd–3rd c. AD.

- 1 *Invicto*
Mithrae
[.] *Octavi-*
us P[ro-]
- 5 *bus v(otum) l(ibens) [s(olvit)]*

Octavius Probus, a Roman citizen, is not attested at Tropaeum Traiani. His *praenomen* was erased from the stone. This brings the number of Mithraic dedications in *Tropaeum Traiani* to three.¹²

Tomis (Constanța, Constanța County, Romania):¹³

d) Marble relief¹⁴ (H 0.30m; L 0.22m; T 0.04m) discovered in Constanța in 2016 (fig. 5). Unpublished. 2nd–3rd c. AD.

¹¹ BĂRBULESCU–BUZOIANU (n. 4) 398–400, B.1 = *AE* 2009 no. 1208; *ISM* IV no. 32.

¹² The other two are *ISM* IV nos 31 and 33.

¹³ There is also a tombstone (CONRAD, S.: *Die Grabstelen aus Moesia Inferior. Untersuchungen zu Chronologie, Typologie und Ikonographie*. Leipzig 2004, 160–161, no. 132; BĂRBULESCU, M. – CĂTEIA, A.: *Pater nomimos* în cultul Hecatei la Tomis [*Pater nomimos* in the cult of Hecate in Tomis]. *Pontica* 40 [2007] 245–254 = *AE* 2007 no. 1231; *SEG* 57 no. 680; *BE* 2008, 369) that mentions a *pater nomimos*, a term used at Sidon in a Mithraic context – BARATTE, F.: *Le mithreum de Sidon : certitudes et questions*. *Topoi* 11/1 (2001) 207. In Sidon the donor, Fl. Gerontios, uses this title on two purely Mithraic monuments (the tauroctony and Aion) and a statue of Hecate, which indicates that this title was most likely part of the Mithraic *cursus honorum* or a special priesthood in common with/connected to the cult of Hecate. Although we must consider this possibility, in Tomis there is no conclusive proof that the title *pater nomimos* corresponded to a priesthood in the local Mithraic cult.

¹⁴ I would like to thank Dr Tiberiu Potîrniche and Dr Aurel Mototolea, (museographers 1A and 1, respectively, at the Museum of National History and Archaeology, Constanța) for providing the informa-



Fig. 5. Mithraic relief discovered in Tomis in 2016 (photo courtesy of T. Potârniche and A. Mototolea)

The tauroctony scene covers most of the relief. In the centre Mithras is slaying the bull (whose tail is not visible) with the right hand while holding its head up with the left. With his left knee he holds the bull down and his right foot holds down the beast's hind legs. His head, turned towards Sol,¹⁵ is covered by a Phrygian cap and his mantle is floating behind him. His clothes are represented schematically. A long serpent (starting at the relief's lower-left corner) stretches towards the wound, while at the same time the dog jumps at it. There is no trace of the scorpion.¹⁶ Under the vault (there is no graphic representation of the cave) Mithras is joined by Cautes (to the right) and Cautopates (to the left), whose heads are covered by the usual Phrygian cap

tion and photograph. The relief will be published with the full archaeological context in the near future, in an article focusing on Mithraism in Tomis.

¹⁵ CLAUSS (n. 9) 99.

¹⁶ I have not yet examined the stone personally, so there may be details I missed and which will be corrected in the coming article mentioned at n. 14.

and legs crossed. Their position is typical for the Danubian reliefs¹⁷ and has a special celestial meaning.¹⁸ Cautopates also seems to hold a torch upwards in his left hand and his clothes' folds are visible, even if schematically represented. No details of Cautes' clothes can be discerned and his cap is highly schematic. Outside the vault, on the margins of the relief there are two altars associated with the two dadophoroi,¹⁹ whose role was to guide the souls into our world and further on into the celestial one.²⁰ The altars represent the two points through which this transfer was performed,²¹ and were located on the edge of the two ritual benches, usually in the middle but sometimes in other positions. In the upper corners there are the depictions of Sol (left) and Luna (right). Sol's head could be surrounded by a nimbus or he just has long hair, as in the next relief, while behind Luna appear the characteristic horns. Between them and above the vault are six altars similar to those connected to the dadophores. Usually seven²² altars are represented, signifying the seven celestial spheres²³ and we have no explanation for this variation. The small dimensions of the relief indicate that it was more likely an offering than a cultic relief. The style places it clearly in the frame of the Danubian reliefs, with similar pieces discovered at Istros²⁴ and Târgușor.²⁵ The relief's workmanship is not high; the stone is of low quality so the details are scarcely visible.

e) Dedication. Unknown dimensions and other characteristics.²⁶ End of the 2nd – beginning of the 3rd c. AD?

Θεῶ Μίτρα Ἑρμόδωρος Θεοδότου ὑπὲρ ἑαυτοῦ [καὶ τῶν ιδίων]
ἀνέθηκεν

A Hermodoros, son of Theodotos, is also mentioned in an inscription from Tomis,²⁷ set up by the association of worshippers of the Mother of the Gods. As the name Her-

¹⁷ HINNELS, J.: The Iconography of Cautes and Cautopates, 1: The Data. *Journal of Mithraic Studies* 1 (1976) 36–67.

¹⁸ BECK, R.: *The Religion of the Mithras Cult in the Roman Empire. Mysteries of the Unconquered Sun*. Oxford (2006) 208.

¹⁹ The altars are located near their heads.

²⁰ *Genesis and apogenesis* – BECK, R.: Interpreting the Ponza Zodiac. *Journal of Mithraic Studies* 1 (1976) 15.

²¹ GORDON, R.: The Sacred Geography of a *Mithraeum*: The Example of Sette Sfere. In GORDON, R.: *Image and Value in the Graeco-Roman World. Studies in Mithraism and Religious Art*. Aldershot 1996, 132–133.

²² CLAUS (n. 9) 85.

²³ *CIMRM* nos 40, 368, 1275, 1818, 2245 and 2264 for example.

²⁴ BORDENACHE, G.: Histria alla luce del suo materiale scultoreo. *Dacia* 5 (1961) 205, fig. 22; ALEXANDRESCU-VIANU (n. 5) no. 189 – here the author does not mention the raven on the left side and the altar in the lower left corner.

²⁵ See n. 5.

²⁶ BĂRBULESCU – BUZOIANU (n. 4) 401, n. 84. This inscription, part of a private collection located in the town of Medgidia, was presented in 1990 by Dr Forin Topoleanu (ICEM, Tulcea) at a *Pontica* Session in Constanța, and was never published. I enquired about the stone and Dr Topoleanu informed me that the owner had died and nothing is known about the monument.

²⁷ *ISM* II no. 83, l. 29.

modoros is rare,²⁸ and at Tomis we have an exact match, we could be dealing with the same person. Because the inscription set up by the association is dated to 198–201/202, we propose the inscription from Medgidia could be dated to the same period, even though there are no available palaeographic data. If this is indeed a monument from Tomis, it would bring the total number of Mithraic monuments discovered there to seven, which is the highest number in the Greek cities on the Black Sea coast and will require a separate discussion.

Capidava (Capidava, Constanța County, Romania):

f) Marble? relief²⁹ (fig. 6). Unknown dimensions. 3rd c. AD.

This relief was discovered at Capidava, in unknown conditions. Its photograph was used in a tourist guide for the site in 1968. From the photograph, as well as from the word used for it – “tableță”³⁰ – in the illustration text that also mentions it is dated to the 3rd century, I believe it was a small-size, slim relief similar to the one presented above. Only a fragment of its left side is preserved. On it we see most of the relief’s surface was covered by the tauroctony scene. The vault is represented so that it looks like a cave. Part of Mithras’ floating mantle is preserved, and we can see, in the lower part, the god’s right foot pressing upon the bull’s hind legs. Underneath is what seems to be the snake’s tail. To the left is Cautopates wearing a Phrygian cap, legs crossed. His clothes are rendered in some detail. Above him, facing front, is Sol, rendered with long hair. To its right is the raven, the messenger between Sol and Mithras.³¹ This is a Danubian relief very similar to the previous one. It is worth noticing that it was the first Mithraic discovery from Capidava, which allow us to add another spot on our Mithraic map. Capidava was a military fort built by Trajan³² in his effort to strengthen the Danubian frontier in the context of his war against the Dacians. Two units were stationed here³³ and a civilian settlement also developed. Therefore, it is again in the military milieu that the Mithraic cult appears, although there is no epigraphic proof for it.

²⁸ There are five other persons of this name in Skythia Minor, three in Istros (*ISM* I no. 196, l. 21; *ISM* I no. 197, l. 3; *ISM* I no. 193 II, l. 77), one in Tropaeum Traiani (BĂRBULESCU, M. – BUZOIANU, L.: *Inscriptions inédites et révisées de la collection du Musée d’Histoire Nationale et d’Archéologie de Constantza. II. Pontica* 43 [2010] 359–361, no. 6) another one in *Tomis* (*ISM* II no. 83, l. 31). All of these inscriptions are dated to the 2nd c. AD.

²⁹ FLORESCU, R.: *Ghidul arheologic al Dobrogei* [The Archaeological Guide to Dobrudja]. Bucharest 1968, fig. 56. I would like to thank Dr Ioan Carol Oprea, (Associate Professor at the Faculty of History, University of Bucharest), for providing the information concerning this very important monument.

³⁰ Tablet/plaque.

³¹ CLAUS (n. 9) 98.

³² FLORESCU, G. – FLORESCU, R. – DIACONU, P.: *Capidava. Monografie arheologică* [Capidava. Archaeological Monograph]. Bucharest 1958; SUCEVEANU, AL. – BARNEA, AL.: *La Dobroudja romaine*. Bucharest 1991, *passim*.

³³ *Cohors I Germanorum civium Romanorum* and *Cohors I Ubiorum equitata* – MATEI-POPESCU, F.: *The Roman Army in Moesia Inferior*. Bucharest 2010, 213–215, 235–236.



Fig. 6. Mithraic relief from Capidava (FLORESCU [n. 29] fig. 56)

MITHRAS IN THE LOCAL PANTHEONS

Since Franz Cumont's monumental work at the end of the 19th century, most of the analyses of the Mithraic cult focused on the monuments themselves – the most impressive being Vermaseren's corpus, still a reference work after more than half a century –, finding analogies and differences. Several excellent works also focused on the social aspects of Mithraism, and on the cult itself and its location – the mithraeum. These contributions led to the refinement of our understanding of this cult, and raised a series of new questions. One of the questions was: Where did this standardized cult originate? This question received several different answers: either invented by a brilliant high magistrate at the imperial court, as a religion for the *Caesariani* group origi-

nating from the southern or eastern Black Sea area;³⁴ or invented by the entourage of the deposed Antiochus IV of Commagene in Italy,³⁵ spreading from Italy (Ostia) to the provinces via the military³⁶ or appearing in the context of the Flavian organization of the Euphrates frontier.³⁷

Two suggestions in particular caught my attention, as they have a special significance for the province of Moesia Inferior. The first is Merkelbach's remark on Mithraism being a religion for the *Caesariani* and a *Bruderschaft* of soldiers, and that both members of the administration and of the army (the two institutions upon which the Empire was built) were involved in the cult;³⁸ the second is Richard Gordon's observation that the scenes of the Danubian reliefs reveal an overall coherence but, quoting the decoration of the Huarti/Hawarti Mithraeum, that "innovation was always possible, and welcome".³⁹

This induced me to consider the role Mithraism played in each community, and for this I have chosen two cases, two cities which provided us with sufficient information on both the local community and the Mithraic community – namely Novae and Istros in Moesia Inferior. Why these two cases? – because Novae is the oldest and largest Mithraic centre that developed in the province's so-called Latin milieu, while Istros is an old Greek colony with a conservative pantheon, and this raises two questions: Why did the same cult develop in both communities? Was it perceived in the same manner?

Moesia Inferior offers a very intriguing ground for the study of specific cults, as history gave it a unique cultural aspect. Most of the Lower Danube area was first organized as the province Moesia during the latter part of Augustus' reign,⁴⁰ while Dobrudja was added to the province either under Claudius⁴¹ or less likely the Flavian emperors.⁴² The province was finally divided into Superior and Inferior during the reign of Domitian.⁴³ It was essentially a military province, where civilian settlements slowly developed into cities around forts along the Danube and its hinterland. This created a cultural area that, for lack of a better term, I conventionally call "Latin", as this was the language mainly used in the written documents transmitted to us. The rest of the province, namely the coastal area, was dominated by the Greek language used

³⁴ MERKELBACH, R.: *Mithras*. Königstein 1984, 161. According to Merkelbach, the *Caesariani* were the "cement" of the Empire, the equestrian officers and *procuratores*, imperial freedmen and slaves that formed the *Familia Caesaris*, whose head/patron was the emperor himself.

³⁵ BECK, R.: The mysteries of Mithras: a new account of their genesis. *JRS* 88 (1998) 115–128.

³⁶ CLAUSSE (n. 9) 21–22.

³⁷ GORDON, R.: Institutionalized Religious Options: Mithraism. In RÜPKE, J. (ed.): *A Companion to Roman Religion*. Malden, MA 2007, 395.

³⁸ MERKELBACH (n. 34) 159–160.

³⁹ GORDON (n. 36) 399–400.

⁴⁰ MIRKOVIĆ, M.: Die Anfänge der Provinz Moesia. In PISO, I. (ed.): *Die Römische Provinzen. Begriff und Gründung*. Mega 2008, 249–270.

⁴¹ Commentary of the *ISM* III volume, 54–60.

⁴² SUCEVEANU, AL.: De nouveau autour de l'annexion romaine de la Dobroudja. In PISO (n. 39) 271–279.

⁴³ MIRKOVIĆ (n. 39).

in the old Greek cities and their territories from the Archaic period. Therefore, they are two areas with very different cultural traditions, including aspects of political and religious organization.

Novae (Svištov)

Novae was one of the main Roman military bases on the Lower Danube, the headquarters of the *Legio VIII Augusta* (45–69 AD) and then of the *Legio I Italica*, which was stationed there until the second half of the 5th c. AD.⁴⁴ The first fort was made of earth and wooden structures, and only during the reign of Trajan, in the context of the reorganization of the *limes* for the Dacian war, did the construction of stone structures begin. Although traces of Thracian settlements are documented in this area, the fort itself and the city that developed in connection to it rose on unoccupied land.⁴⁵ This means that the settlement depended on the Roman presence there, which had military and administrative duties. They were, as Merkelbach put it, *Caesariani*.

As there was, as far as we can say, no previous local religious tradition, these soldiers and members of the administration created their own pantheon, which reflected their identity prior to moving there, but which in turn defined them as a community. Several gods are attested, which can be grouped into different categories. First there are gods that are protectors of the occupations which the worshippers were involved in, i.e. in this case official (civilian or military) business. One of the most revered gods at *Novae* is Asklepios, the god of medicine, so important to soldiers. He was revered by a doctor of the fort's hospital, Aurelios Diodoros, as well as by others – among which a provincial governor – in the *Asklepeion*⁴⁶ inside the *valetudinarium*, which was probably repaired and modified by another governor later on.⁴⁷ This temple is the oldest attested cultic place at *Novae*, during the reign of Trajan.⁴⁸ Hygia⁴⁹ was also worshipped there. Other inscriptions are dedicated to the gods protectors of the army (*Genius*, *Virtus*, *Aquila*)⁵⁰⁵¹ and the *Genius* of the *centuria*,⁵² probably in connection with a military standards shrine in the fort.⁵³ Other gods popular with the soldiers at

⁴⁴ LAJTHAR, A.: A Newly Discovered Greek Inscription at *Novae*. *Tyche* 28 (2013) 107.

⁴⁵ *IGLNovae* no. 13.

⁴⁶ *IGLNovae* no. 176, *AE* 2012 no. 1264 and *AE* 1998 nos 1130–1135. For this cult see KOLENDO, J.: Le culte des divinités guérisseuses à *Novae* à la lumière des inscriptions nouvellement découvertes. *Archeologia* 33 (1982) 65–76; KOLENDO, J.: Inscriptions en l'honneur d'Esculape et d'Hygie du *valetudinarium* de *Novae*. *Archeologia* 49 (1998) 55–71; DYCZEK, P.: A *sacellum Aesculapii* in the *valetudinarium* at *Novae*. In GUDEA, N. (ed.): *Roman Frontier Studies. Proceedings of the 17th International Congress of Roman Frontier Studies*. Zaláu (1999) 495–500; RIGATO, D.: Una devozione senza confine: Asclepio nelle province danubiane. In ZERBINI, L. (ed.): *Culti e religiosità nelle province danubiane*. Bologna 2015, 83–84.

⁴⁷ *IGLNovae* no. 18.

⁴⁸ *AE* 1998 no. 1131.

⁴⁹ *IGLNovae* nos 16, 17 and 18.

⁵⁰ Other dedications for the Eagle – *IGLNovae* nos 33 and 47.

⁵¹ *IGLNovae* no. 12.

⁵² *AE* 2004 no. 1248.

⁵³ SARNOWSKI, T.: Les effigies impériales dans les forteresses militaires romaines. À propos d'une découverte récente de *Novae*. *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Ges.-*

Novae are Dolichenus,⁵⁴ Hercules,⁵⁵ Mars,⁵⁶ Roma, and Victoria.⁵⁷ But by far Jupiter, protector of the Roman state, was the prevailing god at Novae, with almost a quarter of all religious dedications addressed to him.⁵⁸ And 14 out of 22 of these inscriptions were dedicated by soldiers and veterans of the *Legio I Italica*, which makes him the most important god of the *Caesariani* – there was even an association of his worshippers.⁵⁹

Another category of divinities, typical for a community made up of individuals from all corners of the Empire, was that of gods from the homeland. Such a god is Okkonenos,⁶⁰ to be identified probably with the local god of the Ὀκκωνῶ[ν] κώμη present-day Tarakli, near ancient Nicaea in Bithynia.⁶¹ Divinities from closer in the Empire were the Thracian Apollo Cendrissenus⁶² and Deus Aeternus.⁶³

Other gods are also documented, such as the Mater Deum,⁶⁴ Dea Placida,⁶⁵ a Latin variant of Hecate,⁶⁶ Apollo,⁶⁷ and Diana,⁶⁸ Sabazios,⁶⁹ Liber Pater,⁷⁰ Isis and Sarapis,⁷¹ Eventus,⁷² Quadriviae,⁷³ and Luna,⁷⁴ who was also adored in connection to Sol Invictus. Apart from the dedications to Asklepios from the *valetudinarium*, no other inscription can be dated with certainty to the beginning of the 2nd c. AD.⁷⁵

Sprachw. R. 31 (2/3) (1982) 273–275; SARNOWSKI, T.: Tête de Caracalla en marbre de *Novae* (in Bulgarian). *Arheologija Sofia* 22.3 (1980) 35–43.

⁵⁴ *IGLNovae* nos 26, 27 and 28.

⁵⁵ *IGLNovae* no. 13.

⁵⁶ *IGLNovae* nos 32 and 33.

⁵⁷ *IGLNovae* nos 45 and 46, respectively.

⁵⁸ For a complete analysis of his cult at Novae see SARNOWSKI, T.: Iuppiter und die *Legio I Italica*. In ZERBINI (n. 45) 507–524.

⁵⁹ *IGLNovae* no. 24.

⁶⁰ *IGLNovae* no. 183.

⁶¹ GRBIĆ, D.: Ancestral Gods and Ethnic Associations: Epigraphic Examples from Upper Moesia. *Lucida intervalla* 44 (2015) 132.

⁶² *IGLNovae* no. 2.

⁶³ *IGLNovae* nos 8, 9 and 74. The commentary of *IGLNovae* no. 8 considers this a Syrian god, while BARTELS, J. – KOLB, A.: Ein angeblicher Meilenstein in *Novae* (*Moesia Inferior*) und der Kult des Deus Aeternus. *Klio* 93.2 (2011) 411–428 = *AE* 2011 no. 1132 consider it a god present only North of the Balkans. On the other hand, BUONOPANE, A.: Deus Aeternus: *alcune considerazioni in margine a una iscrizione inedita*. In STELLA, C. – VALVO, A. (eds): *Studi in onore di Albino Garzetti*. Brescia 1996, 149–164 considers *Deus Aeternus* a different god – the god of eternal time, to be identified with the Αἰών worshipped in Alexandria and probably assimilated to Sarapis. I would like to thank Professor Mastrocinque for suggesting the last-mentioned article.

⁶⁴ *IGLNovae* no. 34.

⁶⁵ *IGLNovae* no. 39 and *AE* 2011 no. 1126.

⁶⁶ BORDENACHE, G.: Domna Placida. *StudClas* 7 (1965) 315–318.

⁶⁷ *IGLNovae* no. 1.

⁶⁸ *IGLNovae* nos 10, 11, *AE* 2004 no. 1249 and MACDONALD, D. J.: A Soldier's Votive to Diana. *ZPE* 162 (2007) 279–280.

⁶⁹ *AE* 1998 no. 1137.

⁷⁰ *IGLNovae* no. 30.

⁷¹ *IGLNovae* nos 29 and 43, respectively.

⁷² *IGLNovae* nos 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.

⁷³ *IGLNovae* nos 41 and 42.

⁷⁴ *IGLNovae* no. 31 and 44 – where she is worshipped along with Sol Invictus.

⁷⁵ *IGLNovae* nos 1, 2, 11, 13, 19, 21–23, 34, 41–43 and 174 are dated loosely to the 1st–3rd c. AD, while 16, 20, 30 and 31 are dated to the 2nd c. AD.

Of course, future excavations will bring new evidence that may change the overall picture; but for now, if we take into account the number of available monuments, the cult of Mithra and Sol Invictus/Augustus comes second at Novae. Given the fact that it was a mystery cult based on a small community of initiated worshippers,⁷⁶ Mithras could not have been a “popular” god. But his cult certainly seems to have been active, as there are 7 monuments related to it, plus the finds from the Mithraeum.⁷⁷

First of all, we would like to mention that several Mithraic inscriptions were discovered at Iatrus that were linked to the cult at Novae, which could be true if Mithraists from the main fort gave birth to a community at Iatrus.⁷⁸ But these monuments should be treated separately, as they were set up by members of a different community, maybe stemming from the former. One of the monuments, set up by Tiberius Claudius Zenodotos, is dated to 101–130 AD, which suggests Mithraism at Novae spread very quickly among the legionaries inside the main camp and outside it, as well.⁷⁹

At Novae one of the Mithraic dedications⁸⁰ was offered by the slave of P. Chargonius Philopalaestrus, clerk of the customs office for Ripa Thraciae around 100 AD. A second inscription was dedicated by the *praefectus castrorum*, C. Iulius Maximus⁸¹ in the 2nd c. AD. A third inscription was set up by a [---gi]us Maxim[ianus]⁸² in the later 2nd c. AD, when a certain Mucatralus also offered a Mithraic relief.⁸³ The first inscription is very important, not only for the symbols it uses,⁸⁴ but also because it is one of the oldest Mithraic inscriptions in the entire Empire,⁸⁵ from around the time *Novae* was transformed into a stone fort and a civilian settlement started developing there. This means that Mithras was among the first gods to receive a cult in this settlement, while the official gods were worshiped in the fort.

The Mithraeum of Novae,⁸⁶ up to now one of the most interesting archaeological situations in Moesia Inferior as far as I am concerned, was published several times,

⁷⁶ Or several communities.

⁷⁷ Apart from the epigraphic monuments we will present in this paper, the following reliefs were also discovered there: 1) *CIMRM* no. 2267 = KOLENDO, J.: Invictus Deus z Novae. *Acta Universitatis Nicolai Copernici. Historia* 27 (1992) 102, no. 7 = NAJDENOVA, V.: Le culte de Mithras à Novae (Mésie inférieure). In VON BULOW, G. – MILČEVA, A. (eds): *Der Limes an der unteren Donau von Diokletian bis Heraklios*. Sofia 1999, 118, no. 5; 2) NAJDENOVA, V.: Nouvelles observations sur le culte de Sol. In *Studia in memoriam Velizari Velkov*. 2000, 316–317 = *AE* 1998 no. 1128; 3) *CIMRM* no. 2270; KOLENDO 102, no. 8; NAJDENOVA: Le culte 117, no. 3.

⁷⁸ *ILBulg* no. 343; VAHTEL, K. – NAJDENOVA, V.: Monuments de Liber et Mithra de Jatrus. *Archaeologia* 26.1 (1984) 39–453 = *AE* 1985 nos 762 and 763; KOLENDO (n. 77) 101–102, nos 4 and 6.

⁷⁹ VAHTEL–NAJDENOVA (n. 77) 48, n. 4.

⁸⁰ *CIMRM* nos 2268–2269 = *ILBulg* no. 289 = *IGLNovae* no. 35.

⁸¹ *CIMRM* no. 2271 = *ILBulg* no. 290 = *IGLNovae* no. 36.

⁸² *ILBulg* no. 291 = *IGLNovae* no. 37.

⁸³ *IGLNovae* no. 38; *AE* 1999 no. 1329 was also inscribed on a relief.

⁸⁴ BOTTEZ (n. 1) 288–290.

⁸⁵ CLAUSSE (n. 9) 21.

⁸⁶ NAJDENOVA, V.: Le *mithraeum* récemment découvert à Novae (Mésie inférieure). In *Actes des XIII. Internationalen Kongresses für Klassische Archäologie*, Berlin 1988. Mainz 1990, 607–608; NAJDENOVA, V.: Les autels mithriaques de la Mésie et de la Thrace. In *L'Espace sacrificiel dans les civilisations méditerranéennes de l'Antiquité: actes du colloque tenu à la Maison de l'Orient, Lyon, 4–7 juin 1988*. Paris 1991, 141–145; NAJDENOVA, V.: Un sanctuaire syncrétiste de Mithras et de Sol Augustus découvert à Novae (Mésie inférieure). In HINNELS, J. R. (ed.): *Studies in Mithrasism*. Rome 1994, 225–

but never with a plan until recently and with an incomplete archaeological discussion. This was fortunately remedied, as the complex was surveyed and the plan of the monument published,⁸⁷ together with a complete list of discoveries in 2015. This allows me not to describe it again, but I would like to stress several aspects. Archaeological evidence suggests the Mithraeum was built at the end of the 2nd – beginning of the 3rd c. AD.⁸⁸ Yet the three altars found standing *in situ*, dated to the same general period, do not seem to be part of it. The first altar has a dedication to Sol Invictus,⁸⁹ made by an *immunis librarius*, the second was offered to Sol Augustus and the third mentions the main donor, the prefect of the fort T. Flavius Sammius Terentianus.⁹⁰ Sol Augustus is a specific form of the imperial cult, in which the emperor is associated to an already existent divinity; in the Danubian provinces, Augustan gods seem to be associated mainly with the military milieu,⁹¹ which is consistent with our case. But this is a different god, and the fact that a Mithraic relief was found behind one of the altars, while in front of another there still stood a cosmic egg surrounded by a serpent, could indicate that the temple was rededicated to Sol Augustus, as a different aspect of the same solar divinity.⁹² This points to an affinity between the Mithraic community, dominated by members of the official sector of society and a view of the world that stressed the importance of fidelity on the one hand, and manifestations from the sphere of the imperial cult on the other. We also notice such an affinity in a contemporary inscription from Tropaeum Traiani, where a centurion of the *Legio I Italica* dedicated an altar to Sol Invictus⁹³ in honor of the divine imperial house.

Istros (Histria)

At Istros the situation of the Mithraic community is easier to grasp, as we have much more archaeological information in general. But, on the other hand, the entire religious context is much more complicated.

228; NAJDENOVA, V.: Nouvelles évidences sur le culte de Sol Augustus à Novae (Mésie inférieure). In FREZOULS, E. – JOUFFROY, H. (eds): *Les empereurs illyriens. Actes du colloque de Strasbourg (11–13 octobre 1990)*. Strasbourg 1998, 171–178; NAJDENOVA: Le culte (n. 77) 117–120; NAJDENOVA: Nouvelles observations (n. 77) 311–318; NAJDENOVA, V.: Certaines observations sur l'organisation et les rites dans le *mithraeum* de Novae. *Novensia* 16 (2005) 5–8.

⁸⁷ TOMAS, A. – LEMKE, M.: The *Mithraeum* at Novae Revisited. In TOMAS, A. (ed.): *Ad fines imperii romani. Studia Thaddaeo Sarnowski septuagenario ab amicis, collegis discipulisque dedicate..* Warsaw 2015, 227–248.

⁸⁸ TOMAS–LEMKE (n. 86) 240.

⁸⁹ A votive relief with Luna and dedication [*Soli Invic*]to / [*et Lunae*] (AÉ 1995 no. 1336 = IGLNovae no. 44) was set up more or less at the same period.

⁹⁰ NAJDENOVA: Nouvelles évidences (n. 85) 171–178 = AÉ 1998 nos 1127–1129 = AÉ 2001 no. 1734.

⁹¹ VILLARET, A.: *Les dieux augustes dans l'Occident romain : un phénomène d'acculturation. Histoire. Université Michel de Montaigne – Bordeaux III*. Bordeaux 2016, 205. This PhD thesis unfortunately omits the temple of Sol Augustus at Novae.

⁹² AÉ 2004 no. 1243 mentions the repair of a temple, maybe that of Sol Invictus, by a VVV – again, the intervention of military authorities. Could this be the rededication of the Mithraeum?

⁹³ CIMRM no. 2312; ISM IV no. 33.

Istros is one of the oldest Milesian colonies in the Black Sea, and at the time it entered the Roman sphere of influence it already had a well-established and complex pantheon.

Thus the main god of Istros was the god of the mother-city, namely Apollo. He was honoured mostly under the epiclesis of Ietros (the Healer),⁹⁴ as well as that of Pholeuterios⁹⁵ and Boreas.⁹⁶ His priest was eponymous and the official decrees were deposited in his temple.⁹⁷ That role was either shared with or taken over by the temple of the Great Gods of Samothrace⁹⁸ in the 3rd c. BC. Aphrodite⁹⁹ is attested epigraphically and archaeologically since the 6th c. BC¹⁰⁰ and her cult was celebrated in a temple¹⁰¹ that played an important role in the Greek sacred area. The cult of Zeus, honoured with the epiclesis of *Polieus* was also celebrated in a temple in the sacred area,¹⁰² as was that of a – still – unknown divinity called Theos Megas.¹⁰³ Asklepios¹⁰⁴ was also worshiped, as were Hermes,¹⁰⁵ Athena,¹⁰⁶ Demeter, Meter theon,¹⁰⁷ Dionysos,¹⁰⁸ Heros,¹⁰⁹ the Dioscurs,¹¹⁰ and Poseidon,¹¹¹ as well.

During the Roman period, we could identify only two new cults that became part of the city's religious life: the cult of Mithras and that of the emperors.

⁹⁴ AVRAM, AL. – BÎRZESCU, I. – ZIMMERMANN, K.: Die apollinische Trias von Histria. In BOL, R. – HÖCKMANN, U. – SCHOLLMAYER, P. (eds): *Kult(ur)kontakte. Apollon in Milet/Didyma, Histria, Myus, Naukratis und auf Zypern. Akten des Table Ronde in Mainz vom 11.–12. März 2004*. Mainz 2008, 107–134.

⁹⁵ ISM I no. 105; AVRAM (n. 5) no. 16.

⁹⁶ ISM I 97; AVRAM (n. 5) no. 97.

⁹⁷ ISM I nos 6, 10?, 21, 34, 422 = AVRAM (n. 5) no. 422.

⁹⁸ ISM I nos 11, 19 and 58; PIPPIDI, D.M.: *Studii de istorie a religiilor antice. Texte și interpretări* [Historical Studies of Ancient Religions. Texts and interpretations]. Bucharest 1998², 63–65.

⁹⁹ PIPPIDI (n. 97) 51–56.

¹⁰⁰ ISM I nos 101, 108, 113, 118, 119 and 173.

¹⁰¹ ALEXANDRESCU, P.: *Histria VII. La zone sacrée d'époque grecque*. Bucharest 2005, 86–88 and 159–173; AVRAM, AL. – BÎRZESCU, I. – MĂRGINEANU CĂRSTOIU, M. – ZIMMERMANN, K.: Archäologische Ausgrabungen in der Tempelzone. *II Mar Nero* 8 (2010–2011) 51–54.

¹⁰² ISM I nos 8, 54 and 222; PIPPIDI (n. 97) 45–48; ALEXANDRESCU (n. 100) 80–82. Another epiclesis under which Zeus was worshiped was *Ombrimos* – ISM I no. 334.

¹⁰³ PIPPIDI (n. 97) 61–63; Alexandrescu (n. 100) 123–137 with all the bibliography.

¹⁰⁴ ISM I nos 124 and 135; VARBANOV, I.: *Greek Imperial Coins and their Values. The Local Coinages of the Roman Empire. Vol. 1. Dacia, Moesia Superior and Moesia Inferior*. Burgas 2005, no. 635.

¹⁰⁵ ISM I nos 59, 175 and 176; TALMAȚCHI, G.: *Monetăriile orașelor vest-pontice Histria, Callatis și Tomis în epocă autonomă*. Cluj 2011, 108–109, pl. 29, no. 3.

¹⁰⁶ ISM I no. 34; SUCEVEANU, AL.: Cîteva inscripții ceramice de la Histria [Several ceramic inscriptions from Histria]. *StudClas* 7 (1965) 273–275, nos 1–3, figs 1–2; ALEXANDRESCU-VIANU (n. 5) nos 13 and 149; TALMAȚCHI (n. 104) 110, pl. 29, nos 1–4; VARBANOV (n. 104) nos 685–687.

¹⁰⁷ ISM I nos 57, 100, 126, 127 and 128; ALEXANDRESCU-VIANU (n. 5) nos 14–28; VARBANOV (n. 104) nos 597, 607, 608, 609, 610, 611, 626, 636, 654, 662 and 663.

¹⁰⁸ ISM I nos 99, 142, 167, 198, 203, 204, 205, 206 and 221; AVRAM (n. 5) no. XXXII; TALMAȚCHI (n. 104) 107–108, pl. 21 and 26; ALEXANDRESCU-VIANU (n. 5) nos 56–58 and nos 173–177d; report for Istria, Sector T, on <http://www.cimec.ro/Arheologie/cronicaCA2010/cd/index.htm> (accessed on January 15th, 2017).

¹⁰⁹ ISM I nos 131, 246 and 268; ALEXANDRESCU-VIANU (n. 5) nos 150–152, 154–171.

¹¹⁰ ISM I nos 112, 123, 142; SUCEVEANU (n. 105) 274–275, no. 5, fig. 2; ALEXANDRESCU-VIANU (n. 5) nos 178–183; PIPPIDI (n. 97) 65–67.

¹¹¹ ISM I nos 57, 60, 61 and 143. In 2016 the archaeological team of the University of Bucharest discovered a Hellenistic inscription dedicated to *Poseidon Helikonios*, which will be published in the near future.

The imperial cult developed as a means for the Roman authority to control the local authorities and for the latter to obtain more rights and privileges by assuring the former of their fidelity.¹¹² The emperor's religion did not aim to radically change the religious life of the Greek communities, but only to obtain a high-profile position by associating itself with the latter's most prestigious manifestations in order to ensure the loyalty of Greeks in the provinces.¹¹³

The first imperial temple and statue were dedicated in Istros to Augustus during his lifetime, which indicates an immediate reaction from the local notables to the new single ruler of the Roman world.¹¹⁴ After this initial *élan*, all trace of an active public life almost disappeared, including any proof of the cult of Augustus. The next information concerning the imperial cult in Istros is from the 2nd c. AD: the first information, given by the list of benefactors of the *gerousia*,¹¹⁵ concerns religious ceremonies in which imperial busts were involved; then there is the mention of an imperial high priest in mid-2nd c. AD¹¹⁶ and of two high priestesses.¹¹⁷ Another fundamental development of the imperial cult during the 2nd c. AD is the creation of the *koinon*¹¹⁸ of the Western Black Sea Shore (probably during the reign of Hadrian), headed by a pontarch. Istros was part of this federation, which provided at that time the main arena for political competition in the cities involved.

The cult of Mithras is attested at Istros by two fragmentary reliefs¹¹⁹ and one inscription. One of the reliefs pertains to the basic, standard series we have discussed in connection to the relief from Tomis discovered in 2016. The other was a relief with mythological scenes, and the fragment preserves (left to right) the figure of Mithras moving to the right, with Sol reclining to the left in front of him;¹²⁰ Sol and Mithras feasting behind a tripod with two spherical objects on it; Mithras getting on Sol's chariot for the ascension. This type of mythological representation is common in the Danubian area, either with each episode set in a separate panel or in a continuous narrative,¹²¹ as is the case here.

The inscription is very important, as it is the foundation document for the Mithraic cult in Istros.

¹¹² K. HARTER-UIBOPUU: *Kaiserkult und Kaiserverehrung in den Koina des griechischen Mutterlandes*. In CANCIK, H. – HITZL, K. (eds): *Der Praxis der Herrscherverehrung in Rom und seinen Provinzen*. Tübingen 2003, 209; PRICE, S. R. F.: *Rituals and Power. The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor*. Cambridge 1984, 65–77.

¹¹³ SARTRE, M.: *L'Orient romain : provinces et sociétés provinciales en Méditerranée orientale d'Auguste aux Sévères : 31 avant J.-C. – 235 après J.-C.* Paris 1991, 116.

¹¹⁴ *ISM* I no. 146.

¹¹⁵ *ISM* I 193; AVRAM (n. 5) no. 193.

¹¹⁶ *ISM* I no. 78.

¹¹⁷ *ISM* I no. 57 and SUCEVEANU, AL.: *Histria XIII. La basilique épiscopale. Les résultats des fouilles*. Bucharest 2007, 149, no. 6 = *AE* 2007 no. 1227 = *BE* 2008, 698–699, no. 379 (6).

¹¹⁸ BOTTEZ, V.: *Cultul imperial în provincia Moesia Inferior (sec. I–III p.Chr.)*. Bucharest 2009, *passim* with references; MAURER, K.: *Der Pontarch des westpontischen Koinons*. *Dacia* (N.S.) 58 (2014) 141–188.

¹¹⁹ *CIMRM* no. 2296 = *ISM* I no. 137 = AVRAM (n. 5) no. 137; ALEXANDRESCU-VIANU (n. 5) nos 189–190.

¹²⁰ A detail not mentioned in ALEXANDRESCU-VIANU (n. 5) no. 190.

¹²¹ *CIMRM* nos 2272, 2291, 2292, 2295, 2320 and 2331.

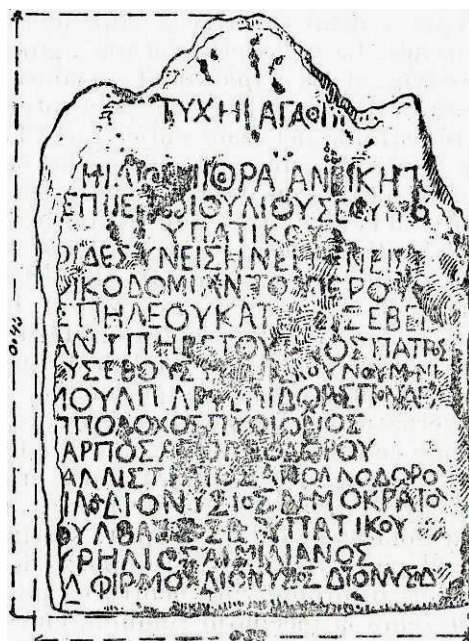


Fig. 7. Inscription concerning the foundation of the Mithraeum of Istros (*ISM* I no. 137)

Marble stele (fig. 7),¹²² reused (H 0.45 m; L 0.32 m; T 0.18 m). Height of letters 0.012/0.015 m. Date: 159 AD.

- Τύχη ἀγαθῇ.
 2 Ἡλίω Μίθρα ἀνεικήτω.
 Ἐπὶ ἰέ[ρ]ω Ἰουλίου Σεουήρ[ου]
 ὑπατικοῦ
 5 οἶδε συνεισήνεγ[κα]ν εἰς τ[ὴν]
 [ο]ικοδομίαν τοῦ ἱεροῦ
 σπηλέου καὶ [θεο]σέβει-
 αν, ὑπη[ρ]ετοῦ[ν]τος πατρὸς
 [ε]ὐσεβοῦς Μ[εν]ίσκου Νομηνί[ου]
 10 Μ. Οὔλπ. Ἀρτεμίδωρος ποντάρχ[ης]
 [Τ]ππόλοχος Πυθίωνος
 [Κ]άρπος Ἀ[π]ολλοδώρου

¹²² *ISM* I no. 137 = *SEG* 27 no. 369; NAWOTKA, K.: The 'First Pontarch' and the Date of the Establishment of the Western Pontic KOINON. *Klio* 75 (1993) 346–348 = *SEG* 43 no. 489 = *AE* 1993 no. 1379; MUSIELAK, M.: Prosopographia Histriaca im 2. Jh.: Artemidoros, der Sohn des Herodoros, und M. Ulpus Artemidoros, der Pontarch. In MROZEWICZ, L. – ILSKI, K. (eds): *Prosopographica*. Poznań 1993, 109–114 = *AE* 1993 no. 1378; RUSCU, L.: Zum Kult des Mithras an der westpontischen Küste. *RIS* 8–9 (2003–2004) 24–27; BOTTEZ (n. 117) no. 117; ALEXANDROV, O.: *The Religion in the Roman Army in Lower Moesia Province (1st – 4th c. AD)* (in Bulgarian). Veliko Târnovo 2010, no. 193; AVRAM (n. 5) 137; MAURER (n. 117) no. 16.

- [K]αλλίστρατος Ἀπολλοδώρου
 [A]ῖλ. Διονύσιος Δημοκράτου[ς]
 15 [Γ]ούλ. Βάσσος β(ενεφικιάριος) · ὑπατικοῦ
 [A]ῖρήλιος Αἰμιλιανός
 [Aῖ]λ. Φέρμος, Διονύσιος Διονυσοδ[ώρου].

Significantly, among the members there is Iulius Bassus, a *beneficiarius consularis*, that is the representative of the Roman administration in charge with the city's security. Another connection to the Roman authorities is that the temple was dedicated during the eponymate of Iulius Severus, the provincial governor. This could suggest the entire process took place in the context of the governor's involvement in local affairs.

The god's cave, the Mithraeum, was dedicated by members of the local elite – Meniskos, the *pater*, could be the son of Noumenios, son of Polemon and brother of Polemon,¹²³ both members of the *gerousia*. Of Karpos, son of Apollodoros, another member of this association,¹²⁴ we know that he was involved in a sacred contest that was part of the imperial cult manifestations in Istros.¹²⁵ Furthermore Dionysios, son of Dionysodoros, was probably the son of Dionysodoros, son of Dionysios,¹²⁶ also member of the *gerousia*. The *gerousia* was an institution that during the Roman period was re-created/re-invented with the approval of Roman authorities, with the precise objective of concentrating local Greek tensions in a competition aimed at proving the subjects' fidelity to Rome.¹²⁷ Therefore, it was involved in the imperial cult (providing financial support and organizing public celebrations).

But the most significant presence among the founding members of the Mithraic community is M. Ulpius Artemidoros,¹²⁸ 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. He could also be the same M. Ulpius Artemidoros, son of M. Ulpius Euxenides (son of Artemidoros) and nephew of M. Ulpius Demetrios (son of Artemidoros),¹²⁹ all members of the above-mentioned *gerousia*. Also, he is probably the same as the protopontarch M. Ulpius Artemidoros mentioned in another inscription,¹³⁰ which means he was later promoted to run the entire *koinon*.

¹²³ ISM I no. 193, l. A 39 and A 49, respectively.

¹²⁴ ISM I no. 193 l. B 34.

¹²⁵ ISM I no. 207 = see AVRAM (n. 5) no. 207; BOTTEZ (n. 117) no. 127; MAURER (n. 117) no. 20.

¹²⁶ ISM I no. 193 l. A 67.

¹²⁷ The main works on this subject remain OLIVER, J. H.: *The Sacred Gerosia* [Hesperia. Suppl. 6]. 1941; OLIVER, J. H.: *Gerosiae and Augustales. Historia* 7 (1958) 473–496; OLIVER, J.H.: *The Sacred Gerosia and the Emperor's Concilium. Hesperia* 36 (1967) 329–335; VAN ROSSUM, J.A.: *De gerosia in de Griekse steden van het Romeinse Rijk*. Leiden 1988; and GIANNAKOPOULOS, N.: *Ο θεσμός της Γερουσίας των ελληνικών πόλεων κατά τους ρωμαϊκούς χρόνους*. Thessaloniki 2008.

¹²⁸ He may be also mentioned in ISM I no. 208 in connection to the *hymnodoi* of Dionysos, who were heavily involved in the imperial cult. As K. Nawotka and M. Musielak proved, he is to be differentiated from Artemidoros, son of Herodoros (ISM I no. 193 l. A34, B 3–4, 14 and 20–21) and *synagogeus* of the *gerousia*.

¹²⁹ ISM I no. 193 l. A 76, A 72 and A 73, respectively.

¹³⁰ ISM I no. 207.

The composition of this Mithraic community seems to suggest a clear and powerful connection between this cult and that of the emperors. The only reason for the introduction of a foreign cult in the otherwise conservative pantheon was – as in the case of the imperial cult – the desire of the Istrian elite to integrate itself in the religious structures favoured by the Roman authorities.

*

In conclusion, when analysing the Mithraic images used by the two communities we have focused on, we find that they are surprisingly similar, which only confirms Manfred Clauss' conclusion¹³¹ that the iconography was highly standardized due to the fact that they referred to the same doctrine. The reliefs, such as those from *Istros*, can be found everywhere in Latin-speaking Mithraic communities of the Lower Danube area.

As far as dating the moment the Mithraic cult was implanted in the two communities is concerned, the situation could not be more different. At Novae the cult started as the local pantheon was being shaped, and we can suppose that – through its already-mentioned characteristics – it was one that helped cement the new community, that was – at least initially – based on professional categories that pertained to the official sphere. At Istros on the other hand, the cult started in a period when the local cults had been well-established for centuries. The gods of the Istrian pantheon were probably divided into *enchorioi* – gods that govern/inhabit a certain land – and *patrooi* – who are gods of the ancestors, protectors of the kinship, gods that travel with the people wherever they may move to.¹³² As future analyses of the religious system at Istros should take into account this approach, it is difficult to establish where exactly Mithras fitted in. An answer may lie in the composition of the Mithraic community.

The fact that at Novae two inscriptions were set by a prefect of the fort reminds us of the importance of having a prominent member of the community as a fellow or leading member. As Richard Gordon showed, the entire Roman society was based on patron-client relationships, and as Mithraism tried to imitate the social structures of the outer world, certain prominent Mithraists could be seen as patrons of their specific community.¹³³ If we consider the society at Novae as one built on military and administrative interests, the influence of a high customs official and the fort's prefects indicates that the Mithraic community – otherwise made up of middle and lower class individuals, as far as the available sources indicate – could have originated from and evolved around this group of officers, thereby also playing an important role in the life of civilians as a factor of unity (*Bruderschaft*) and creator of identity. At Istros, on the other hand, the community seems to be mainly made up of members of the local elite – either members or relatives of members of the local *gerousia*, plus the local

¹³¹ CLAUSS (n. 9) 79.

¹³² This religious system is brilliantly explained and applied in POLINSKAYA, I.: *A Local History of Greek Polytheism. Gods, People, and the Land of Aigina, 800–400 BCE*. Leiden 2013, especially 36–43.

¹³³ GORDON (n. 36) 402–403.

beneficiarius consularis, which would imply a public interest in the establishment of this new cult.

In both cases we find some common features. At Novae, starting with the 3rd c., we witness a sudden shift in the Mithraic cult towards the imperial cult, a change also overseen by the same members of the administration and mirrored by military elements of other communities in the province. The reason for this could lie in the increase of dependability of the official milieu on the emperor, seen as the supreme patron. At Istros, the imperial cult connection is evident, as the *gerousia* (to which several of the *mystai* belonged) was involved in activities related to it, and M. Ulpius Artemidoros was in fact the leading figure in this cult. This is not surprising because Istros, like many other Greek cities, used the imperial cult as an instrument through which the community sought to integrate itself in the fabric of the Empire and established good and direct relations with the authorities, possibly the emperor himself. Due to its unique combination of political interests with religious aspects, this cult became extremely appreciated and much of the local elite became involved in it. The same desire of integration in the Roman structures and practices must have prompted the impetus to the local Mithraic cult, which was alien to the Greek world but perceived as supporting the existent social structure, patronised by the emperor.

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