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SOLI DEO STELLAM ET FRVCTIFERAM:
THE ART OF THE MITHRAIC CULT IN SALONA

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by

Nirvana Silnović

(Croatia)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,
Central European University, Budapest, in partial fulfillment of the requirements
of the Master of Arts degree in Medieval Studies.

Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

Chair, Examination Committee

Thesis Supervisor

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I, the undersigned, **Nirvana Silnović**, candidate for the MA degree in Medieval Studies, declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Budapest, 21 May 2014

Signature

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AÉ	<i>L'Année Épigraphique</i>
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>
BASD	<i>Bulletino di archaeologia e storia dalmata</i>
CIL III	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum. Vol. III. Inscriptiones Asiae, Provinciarum Europae Graecorum, Illyrici Latinae. Ed. Theodor Mommsen. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1873 (impr. Iter. 1958).</i>
CIMRM	Maarten J. Vermaseren, <i>Corpus inscriptionum et monumentorum religionis Mithriacae I-II</i> . Haag: Martinus Hijhoff, 1956-1960.
EDH	Epigraphic Database Heidelberg
GZM	<i>Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja u Sarajevu</i>
HAM	<i>Hortus Artium Medievalium</i>
ILS	Hermann Dessau, <i>Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae</i> , 3 Vols. Berlin: Berolini Weidmann, 1892-1916.
JMS	<i>Journal of Mithraic Studies</i>
JRA	<i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i>
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
LCL	<i>Loeb Classical Library</i>
PAM	<i>Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean</i>
RFFZd	<i>Radovi Filozofskog fakulteta u Zadru</i>
VAHD	<i>Vjesnik za arheologiju i historiju dalmatinsku</i>
WMBH	<i>Wissenschaftliche Mitteilungen aus Bosnien und der Herzegowina</i>

1.INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Since its first appearance in the Roman world at the end of the first century AD until its disappearance by the beginning of the fifth century,¹ the Roman cult of Mithras flourished as one of the most prevalent “oriental” cults.² More than 3000 artefacts, 200 sanctuaries, and around 1000 known adherents from the entire Roman Empire are witness to the growing success and widespread of the cult (Figure 1.1).³ Its broad popularity was encapsulated in the nineteenth century by the French historian Ernest Renan who proclaimed “if the growth of Christianity had been arrested by some mortal malady, the world would have become Mithraic.”⁴

¹ Manfred Clauss, *Mithras: Kult und Mysterium* (Darmstadt: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 2012; an only slightly revised edition from Munich: C. H. Beck, 1990), 161-167; Roger Beck, “Four Men, Two Sticks, and a Whip: Image and Doctrine in a Mithraic Ritual,” in *Theorizing Religions Past. Archaeology, History, and Cognition*, ed. Harvey Whitehouse and Luther H. Martin (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 2004): 87.

² The well-established notion of “oriental religions/cults” has been proven unsatisfactory as the term carries false assumptions about the origins and character of the various cults (Isis, Mithras, Iuppiter Dolichenus, Magna Mater, Sarapis etc.) consolidated by the overarching concept coined by Franz Cumont, *Les religions orientales dans la paganisme romain* (Paris, 1906). In the absence of the more suitable terminology it has become standard to use the term in quotation marks, see *Religions of Rome*, Vol. 1, *A History*, ed. Mary Beard, John North, Simon Price (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 246-247; Anemari Bugarski-Mesdjian, “Les ‘cultes orientaux’ en Dalmatie Romaine,” *VAHD* 96 (2003), 564-566; Jaime Alvar, *Romanising Oriental Gods. Myth, Salvation and Ethics in the Cults of Cybele, Isis and Mithras* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 1-16. The debate over the designation of the cult of Mithras is vast, but the most recent overview has been offered by Christian Witschel, “Die Ursprünge des Mithras-Kults. Orientalischer Gott oder westliche Neuschöpfung?,” in *Imperium der Götter. Isis, Mithras, Christus. Kulte und Religionen im Römischen Reich*, ed. Claus Hattler (Karlsruhe: Badisches Landesmuseum/WBG Darmstadt, 2013): 201-210. The alternative term “mystery cults” offered by Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), has gained wide acceptance, but has also proved to be somewhat problematic as it refers to certain Greek cults. As Richard Gordon points out, in the case of Mithras (which, according to the sources, was known among its contemporaries as “the mysteries of Mithras”) the most neutral term, and the one which will be used in this thesis, is “the Roman cult of Mithras,” Richard Gordon, “Institutionalized Religious Options: Mithraism,” in *A Companion to Roman Religion*, ed. Jörg Rüpke (Malden: Blackwell, 2007), 394.

³ The abundant archaeological and epigraphical material is listed by Maarten J. Vermaseren, *Corpus inscriptionum et monumentorum religionis Mithriacae* I-II (Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1956-1960). Currently *A New Corpus of Mithraic Documents and Monuments* is being prepared by the University in Heidelberg, which will provide an updated version. The extensive epigraphic material has been analyzed by Manfred Clauss, *Cultores Mithrae: Die Anhängerschaft des Mithras-Kultes* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1992).

⁴ Ernest Renan, *Marc-Aurèle et la fin du monde antique* (Paris: Calmann Levy, 1882), 579.

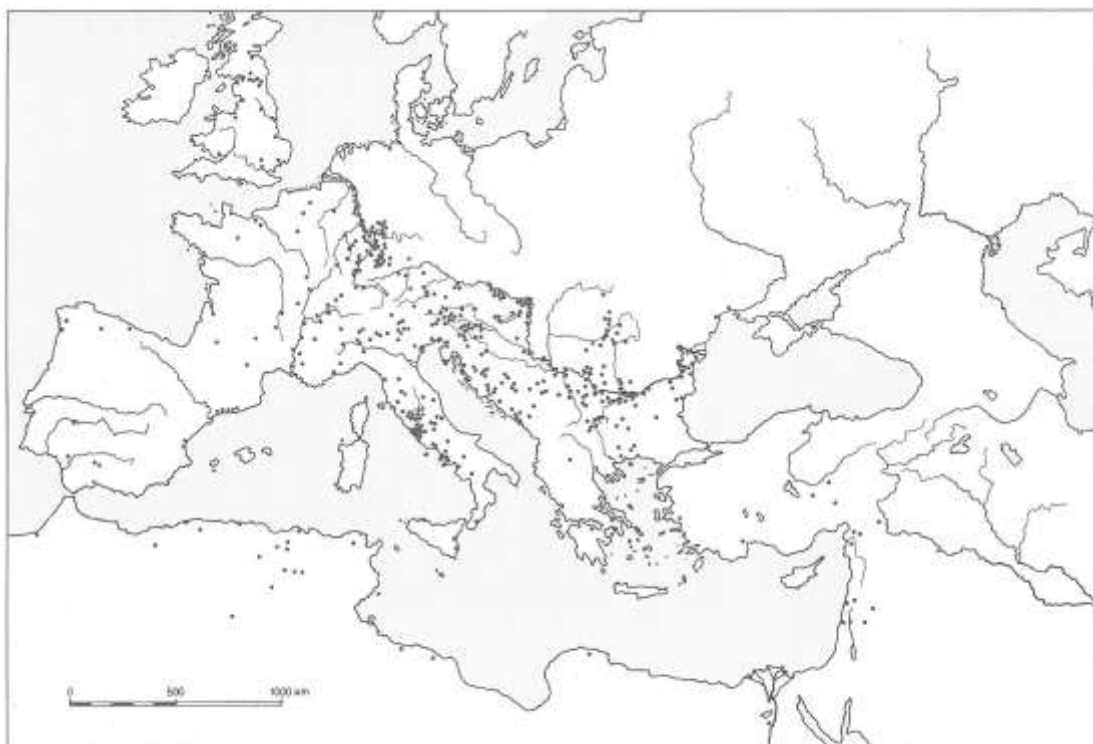


Figure 1.1 Map showing the geographical extent of the Roman cult of Mithras (Manfred Clauss, *Mithras: Kult und Mysterium* (Darmstadt: Verlag Philip von Zabern, 2012), 13).

The Roman province of Dalmatia and its capital Salona (present day Solin, near Split) boast with a considerable density and plethora of Mithraic artefacts and archaeological finds (around forty-two reliefs and sculptures, eighteen mithraea, and thirty-three inscriptions are known so far),⁵ which makes the Roman cult of Mithras one of the most dominant religious phenomena in the province between the middle of the second century AD until the end of the fourth century AD/beginning of the fifth century AD (Figure 1.2).⁶ Given the sheer number of the Mithraic monuments and the

⁵ Most recent catalogue is offered by Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan, “Posebnosti tipologije i ikonografije mitrijskih reljefa rimske Dalmacije” [Typological and iconographical particularities of the Mithraic reliefs in the Roman province of Dalmatia], PhD dissertation, (Zagreb: Filozofski fakultet, 2001), 57-126; although Lipovac-Vrkljan listed the double-sided relief from Proložac Donji (near Imotski), a full description and analysis was made by Ljubomir Gudelj, *Od svetišta Mitre do crkve sv. Mihovila* [From the sanctuary of Mithras to the church of St. Michael] (Split: Muzej hrvatskih arheoloških spomenika, 2006).

⁶ Most scholars agree that the earliest Mithraic monuments in the province of Dalmatia are the votive inscription from Vratnik (Senj) and the relief from Zadar (CIMRM 1879) dated to the middle/second half of the second century AD, and that the end of the Mithras cult came with the spread of Christianity. Branimir Gabričević, “Mitrin kult na području rimske Dalmacije” [Mithraic cult in Roman Dalmatia], PhD dissertation (Zagreb: University of Zagreb, 1951), 67-68; Ljubica Zotović, *Mitrazam na tlu Jugoslavije* [Mithraism in Yugoslavia] (Belgrade: Arheološki institut, 1973), 111, 119; Julijan Medini, “Neki aspekti razvoja antičkih religija na području Japoda” [Some aspects of the development of ancient religions in the area of Japods], *Arheološka*



Figure 1.2 Map showing the Mithraic localities in the Roman province of Dalmatia (Goranka Lipovac Vrkljan, “Posebnosti tipologije i ikonografije mitrijskih reljefa rimske Dalmacije” [Typological and iconographical particularities of the Mithraic reliefs in the Roman province of Dalmatia], PhD dissertation, (Zagreb: Filozofski fakultet, 2001), map A).

localities, and the occurrence of the cult almost immediately after its first appearance in the Roman world, the Roman province of Dalmatia and its capital were an indispensable part of the wider Mithraic mosaic and are therefore an invaluable source for the study of the Roman cult of Mithras.⁷

Recent scholarship on the cult of Mithras has mainly focused on deciphering the origins, the iconography, and reconstructing the “doctrine” of the cult.⁸ Croatian scholarship

problematika Like: znanstveni skup, Otočac 22.-24.9.1974. [Archaeological problems of Lika: Conference, Otočac 22.-24.9.1974.], ed. Željko Rapanić (Split: Hrvatsko arheološko društvo, 1975), 90; Željko Miletić, “Mitrazam u rimskoj provinciji Dalmaciji” [Mithraism in the Roman province of Dalmatia], PhD dissertation (Zadar: Filozofski fakultet, 1996), 18-19, 28, 142; Goranka Lipovac Vrkljan, “Arheološke potvrde mitraičke religije na prostoru rimske provincije Dalmacije. Pitanje kontinuiteta” [Archaeological confirmations of the Mithraic religion in the Roman province of Dalmatia. The question of continuity], MA thesis (Zagreb: Filozofski fakultet, 1997), 130, 136; Goranka Lipovac Vrkljan, “Posebnosti tipologije,” 2001, 54-56.

⁷ Richard Gordon is of the opinion that the cult of Mithras made its first appearance almost simultaneously in several different parts of the empire (Rome, Germania Superior, Raetia/Noricum, Moesia Inferior, Judea), while in north Africa, Spain, western Gaul, Britain, and throughout the east Mediterranean the cult remained somewhat uncommon, connected mainly with military and harbor towns, Richard Gordon, “Institutionalized Religious Options,” 395-396.

⁸ It has long been acknowledged that one cannot speak about the Mithraic “doctrine,” as there is no extant evidence that the cult of Mithras ever possessed one. Instead, as Roger Beck suggests, one can speak of a “loose network of cosmological, theological and soteriological ideas which were expressed, transmitted and

followed the mainstream in this respect, which has created a wide gap in the study of the cult of Mithras not only in Salona, but also in the whole province of Dalmatia by neglecting other aspects of the cult. As a result, there is no comprehensive study of the Roman cult of Mithras and its art in Salona. The questions of the appearance, dissemination, and the final disappearance of the cult in Salona are still waiting for answers. The study of the cult of Mithras in Salona has remained tied to some general observations about the cult and its art on the territory of the Roman province of Dalmatia, wherein Salona appears only sporadically, mainly when the iconography and the “doctrine” of some of its reliefs is discussed. Speaking even more broadly, the late antique cult of Mithras has not received much attention from scholars and no large-scale study of the cult in late antiquity has ever been written.⁹

Therefore the aim of this thesis is to offer for the first time a comprehensive examination of the cult of Mithras in Salona. This will be achieved by a detailed analysis of reliefs and inscriptions and a brief review of five alleged mithraea. As no written sources concerning Salona are known, it is only by material evidence that we can draw some conclusions about the religious, cultural, and social life of the city.

Following this introductory chapter, the second chapter seeks to provide a framework for examining of the material evidence of the cult of Mithras in Salona. Strong emphasis will be put on the cult of Mithras and the importance of its art in the light of the present state of research. A concise overview of Mithraic scholarship will be given, with a special note on the

apprehended symbolically,” in “Four Stages on a Road to Redescribing the Mithraic Mysteries,” in *Beck On Mithraism. Collected Works with New Essays*, ed. John Hinnells (Aldershot: Ashgate Pub., 2004): xxii; Beck defined the “Mithraic doctrine” as a “loose web of interpretations, both actual and potential, located in the symbol system of the mysteries,” in Roger Beck, “Doctrine Redefined,” in idem, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult in the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 41-64; Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price have previously also defined “different religions as clusters of ideas, people and rituals, sharing some common identity across time and place, but at the same time inevitably invested with different meanings in their different contexts,” in *Religions of Rome*, Vol. 1, 249. More details on the nature of the cult of Mithras will be discussed below.

⁹ This problem has been emphasized by Jonas Bjørnebye in his recent study of the cult of Mithras in fourth-century Rome, the only extensive study so far which offers a glimpse into the late antique cult of Mithras, in Jonas Bjørnebye, “*Hic locus est felix, sanctus, piusque benignus*. The Cult of Mithras in Fourth-Century Rome,” PhD dissertation (Bergen: University of Bergen, 2007): 2.

iconography of Mithraic art. A survey of the previous research on the cult of Mithras in Salona follows, accompanied by a brief geographic, religious, and social description of the town which will allow for a wider contextualization and (re)evaluation of the cult.

The third chapter discusses the main body of evidence. For the sake of clarity, it will be divided into three subchapters. The first will be devoted to the question of Salonitan mithraea, the second will deal with inscriptions, and the third one will deal with Salonitan reliefs. Mithraea will be mentioned briefly, supplemented with a previously unpublished map showing their possible location, in order to shed further light on the cult of Mithras in Salona. The content of the inscriptions, one of them previously unpublished, will be examined in order to provide a possible chronology, as well as possible information on cult followers. Detailed iconographical and typological analysis of the reliefs will be employed in order to determine the characteristics of Mithraic art in Salona. A previously unpublished small relief from the Archaeological Museum in Split will be presented here for the first time.

The fourth chapter will bring a detailed analysis of the form and content of the Salonitan Mithraic tondo, resulting in a new interpretation pointing to the relief's uniqueness in a whole corpus of Mithraic art.

Conclusions offered by the previous three chapters will be brought together in the final chapter of this thesis, seeking to establish the dynamics of the cult of Mithras in Salona. One of the main questions to be addressed will be whether Salona can be regarded as a regional Mithraic religious and artistic centre. Questions and answers on the nature and dynamics of the cult of Mithras will provide general insight into the Salonitan religious and cultural setting.

1.2 Sources, the theoretical framework, and the methodology applied

Among the various religions and beliefs that flourished in Salona, the cult of Mithras stands out as one of the most prominent. Altogether thirteen bas-reliefs and seven votive

inscriptions have been discovered both *intra* and *extra muros*, and traces of the cult have been identified on two archaeological sites in the territory surrounding Salona (*ager Salonitanus*). All together the corpus of this study is fifteen bas-reliefs and seven inscriptions. Ejnar Dyggve, a Danish archaeologist who conducted research in Salona in the 1920s to the 1960s, briefly mentioned the existence of a total of five mithraea dispersed both *intra* and *extra muros*.¹⁰ More precisely, one was near the theater, the second near the amphitheater, the third in the eastern part of the town, and two outside the city walls, but so far there have been no certain archaeological confirmations of any of them. Considering the wealth of material and the status of Salona as the capital of the Roman province of Dalmatia and the burgeoning number of publications on the Roman cult of Mithras, the almost complete lack of attention attributed to the question of the cult of Mithras and its art in Salona is stunning.

Since images played the central role in the Roman cult of Mithras, it seems sensible to begin with the focal point of the cult.¹¹ The significance of the images as sources of incomparable importance has long been acknowledged. Peter Burke emphasizes their role as historical evidence:

The uses of images in different periods as objects of devotion or means of persuasion, of conveying information or giving pleasure, allows them to bear witness to past forms of religion, knowledge, belief, delight and so on. Although texts also offer valuable clues, images themselves are the best guide to the power of visual representations in the religious and political life of past cultures.¹²

¹⁰ Ejnar Dyggve, *History of Salonitan Christianity* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1951): 8.

¹¹ Manfred Clauss asserts that “der Mithras-Kult ist ein Beispiel für den Bilderreichtum der Antike,” in Manfred Clauss, *Mithras: Kult und Mysterium*, 26; Luther H. Martin also defines the cult as “an iconic tradition,” in Luther H. Martin, “Reflections on the Mithraic Tauroctony as Cult Scene,” in *Studies in Mithraism*, ed. John R. Hinnells (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 217-224; he has recently widened his definition by calling the cult a “representative of an ‘imagistic’ mode of religiosity,” Luther H. Martin, “Performativity, Narrativity, and Cognition. “Demythologizing” the Roman Cult of Mithras,” in *Rhetoric and Reality in Early Christianities*, ed. Willi Braun (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), 188-190; Roger Beck also admits that “Mithraism’s chosen medium of expression was visual art,” in Roger Beck, “The Mysteries of Mithras,” in *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World*, ed. John S. Kloppenborg and Stephen G. Wilson (London: Routledge, 1996), 176; recently, Richard Gordon also stated that “the focus of each *mithraeum* was the cult image,” in Richard Gordon, “Institutionalized Religious Options,” 398; most recently the cult has been characterized as “einen besonderen Bilderreichtum,” in Romy Heyner, “Aus dem Felsen geboren...Die Ikonographie des Mithras-Kultes,” in *Imperium der Götter*, 219.

¹² Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing. The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 13.

He continues by stating that images “have often played their part in the ‘cultural construction’ of society. For these very reasons, images are testimonies...above all of past ways of seeing and thinking.”¹³

Although the preeminence of images as essential sources remains uncontested, it can be said that some images proved to be more worthy of study than others. Eberhard Sauer has raised this point, although in a slightly different context. Namely, he pointed out the symptomatic lack of interest in studying damaged and mutilated monuments, as the interest in major and Classical examples of art outweighs them.¹⁴ In neglecting the whole corpus of “imperfect” and less interesting monuments, scholars have created a disparity in the study not only of Mithraic art but art in general. This same phenomenon affects the Salonitan Mithraic monuments, which have remained completely under-researched with few notable exceptions. It has been argued that the artistic production of the province of Dalmatia could not compete with major artistic centers of the empire, and that it therefore has only limited local significance.¹⁵ Not only do they show features of local, provincial artistic production, but also several Salonitan Mithraic monuments had the unfortunate fate to survive only as fragments. Therefore, analyzing them presents serious methodological problems and challenges.

Fifteen bas-reliefs, preserved either in their entirety or in fragments, will be categorized according to their typology and iconography.¹⁶ Among Salonitan reliefs there are outstanding examples of Mithraic art that are distinguished either by their quality and/or rare

¹³ Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing*, 185.

¹⁴ Eberhard Sauer, *The Archaeology of Religious Hatred in the Roman and Early Medieval World* (Stroud: Tempus Publishing, 2003), 17-18.

¹⁵ Nenad Cambi, “Kiparstvo,” [Sculpture], in *Longae Saloniae I*, ed. Emilio Marin (Split: Arheološki muzej, 2002), 117-118; idem, *Kiparstvo rimske Dalmacije* [The sculpture of the Roman province of Dalmatia] (Split: Književni krug, 2005), 9-10.

¹⁶ The typology and iconography will be discussed in detail below, but a preliminary mark is that it should be made clear that the L. A. Campbell’s typology, which Croatian scholars have relied heavily on, will be avoided; for details see Leroy A. Campbell, “Typology of Mithraic Tauroctones,” *Berytus* 11 (1954-1955), 1-60. As Richard Gordon rightly criticised, it is “founded upon a tangle of indefensible assumptions and executed in a cloud of errors,” Richard Gordon, “Panelled Complications,” *JMS* 3 (1980), 201. Also, iconography will not be deployed in order to reconstruct the “doctrine” of the cult, as shortcomings of this way of using it have been analyzed extensively by Roger Beck, “Old Ways: The Reconstruction of Mithraic Doctrine from Iconography,” in Roger Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 16-25.

and specific iconographic motifs (for example, a circular relief with water animals, CIMRM 1861). Based on the iconographic and qualitative (re)evaluation of Salonitan Mithraic monuments, I will argue that the Mithraic art in Salona overrode the boundaries not only of local production, but fully participated in contemporary cultural and religious currents. Establishing the typological and iconographical patterns will allow me to trace possible related influences and establish a chronology. Another question concerns the question whether the Salonitan community followed the established iconographical and typological canons or if they used some original elements. By looking at the circular relief (CIMRM 1861), which is unique in the whole corpus of Mithraic art, it is already evident that the cult of Mithras in Salona was not adopted passively. Rather, it will be argued, it was subject to creative rethinking which can give some insight into the intellectual background of at least some of its adherents. Since most of the Salonitan reliefs show strong iconographical uniformity and homogeneity (as Mithraic reliefs tend to do in general), they are often hard to date. Additional difficulties are posed by the earlier mentioned stylistic preferences, which place them in the sphere of provincial art. Different sets of criteria are therefore required when (re)evaluating their qualitative and stylistic values. As one is dealing exclusively with stone reliefs, this media preference represents another Salonitan characteristic which, together with the degree of sophistication, size, and execution, can also yield some insight into the social features of the Mithraic community and to establishing connections to local traditions. It has been assumed that Salona functioned as an artistic center and that there was a local workshop which produced some of the innovative Mithraic reliefs.¹⁷ Based on the following analysis I will argue in favor of this assertion.

Although only seven Mithraic votive inscriptions have been preserved in Salona, they are nonetheless valuable sources for investigating the Mithraic community and will be

¹⁷ Julijan Medini, "Mitrički reljef iz Banjevaca" [A mithraic relief from Banjevci], *Diadora* 8 (1975): 39-83.

collected in the Appendix. There seems to have been a striking decline in Mithraic epigraphy from the late third century, which corresponds to the decrease in Roman epigraphic material in general.¹⁸ Could the scarce Salonitan Mithraic epigraphic evidence be a result of this general trend, or was there perhaps a cultural change that led to other forms of religious expression? In addition to the possible chronology provided by the dates recorded in these inscriptions, the content and wording may illustrate how important grade hierarchy was to the Mithraic community in Salona (if it was at all). This will be achieved by assessing the presence or absence of grades of initiation on them. The social locations of the adherents of the cult will also be pursued.

As mentioned above, there are no certain archaeological confirmations of the five alleged mithraea in Salona. Fortunately, Ejnar Dyggve included a map among his sketches marking the position of mithraea mentioned in his work.¹⁹ The map will provide a glimpse into the topographical pattern, i.e., the role of mithraea in public and private space in Salona. According to Bjørnebye, the growth and prosperity of the cult can be seen in two mithraea that were situated near the theater and amphitheater, public buildings near the center of the city with a high frequency of people passing by.²⁰ Even if not available for detailed analysis of their size, structure, layout, and furnishing, the little evidence available about Salonitan mithraea will serve to widen the knowledge of the cult's presence in the city.

With the thesis structure defined, and the sources presented with the theoretical and methodological framework, inquiry into the Salonitan cult of Mithras can begin.

¹⁸ Jonas Bjørnebye, "*Hic locus est felix*," 175-176. Earlier, Robert Turcan has noted the decline in epigraphic finds of "oriental cults," Robert Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 328. Although in this decline Turcan sees symptoms of the decline of paganism in general, Eberhard Sauer concludes that "inscriptions have long ceased to be a reliable yardstick for the popularity of pagan deities," but rather sees it as "evidence for a major cultural change," Eberhard Sauer, *The Archaeology of Religious Hatred*, 121-122.

¹⁹ Ejnar Dyggve's notes and sketches are preserved as *Ejnar Dyggve Arhiv Split*, and are available at the Croatian Ministry of Culture in Zagreb.

²⁰ Jonas Bjørnebye, "*Hic locus est felix*," 75.

2. MITHRAIC ART IN SALONA IN THE LIGHT OF THE PRESENT STATE OF RESEARCH

2.1 A brief overview of Mithraic scholarship

A detailed in-depth survey of the Mithraic scholarship would go beyond the scope and purpose of this study. However, several significant moments will be emphasized in order to identify the most important research directions and interpretations, with special emphasis on recent scholarship that provides a basic parameters for (re)evaluating the scholarship on the topic.

Mithraic scholarship can be divided into several important groundbreaking stages.²¹ The history of Mithraic scholarship began with Franz Cumont, a Belgian archaeologist, historian, and philologist, today considered a founding father of the separate and independent discipline of Mithraic studies. In his monumental two-volume *Textes et monuments figurés relatifs aux mystères de Mithra*, published at the end of the nineteenth century, he collected and made available for the first time all the monuments and written sources related to the study of Mithraism. Based on the iconography of the “monuments figurés,” he reconstructed the first reliable Mithraic myth from which he further deduced Mithraists’ beliefs and “doctrines.”²² Cumont saw the Roman cult of Mithras as an adaptation and amalgamation of Iranian Mazdaism, a thesis that remained unshaken for more than a half a century.²³

²¹ A survey of Mithraic scholarship is offered by Roger Beck, “Mithraism Since Franz Cumont,” *ANRW* II.17.4 (1984), 2002-2115; an updated addition to his earlier text with a brief overview of new discoveries and research trends can be found in “Mithraism After ‘Mithraism Since Franz Cumont’, 1984-2003,” in Roger Beck, *Beck on Mithraism*, 3-23; in several instances Beck reflects critically upon previous scholarship in Roger Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 16-40; a brief note on scholarship is also given in the much-debated David Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries. Cosmology and Salvation in the Ancient World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 3-24; the main research directions and interpretations are delineated by Ennio Sanzi, “A *Deus Invictus* Among Persia, Stars, Oriental Cults and Magic Gems,” in *Charmes et sortilèges, magie et magiciens*, ed. Rika Gyselen (Bures-sur-Yvette: Groupe pour l’étude de la civilisation du Moyen-Orient, 2002), 209-229; the most recent and concise survey is offered by Aleš Chalupa, “Paradigm Lost, Paradigm Found? Larger Theoretical Assumptions Behind Roger Beck’s ‘The Religion of the Mithras Cult in the Roman Empire,’” in *Pantheon* 7, no. 1 (2012), 5-8.

²² Franz Cumont, *Textes et monuments figurés relatifs aux mystères de Mithra* I-II (Brussels: H. Lamartin, 1896-1899); interpretations offered in the first volume were soon expanded and published separately as Franz Cumont, *Les mystères de Mithra* (Brussels: H. Lamartin, 1913).

²³ More correctly, Cumont calls the Roman cult of Mithras “une secte du mazdéisme,” and “rameau détaché du vieux tronc mazdéen,” Franz Cumont, *Les mystères*, 25-27.

Cumont's firm dominance was only challenged at the First International Congress of Mithraic Studies held in Manchester in 1971, the event that marked a second stage of Mithraic studies.²⁴ On that occasion, Richard Gordon delivered a paper that changed the future course of Mithraic studies.²⁵ Gordon considered Cumont's Mazdaism a wrong model of Roman Mithraism; on the one hand, he pointed to the fact that there is no unique tradition compatible with Roman Mithraism, and, on the other hand, he singled out some elements of the Roman Mithraism that find no parallels in Mazdaism.²⁶ Gordon did not offer an alternative answer to the question of the origins of the Roman cult of Mithras, and he even considered that it should not be in the focus of the research, as the answer will never be known. On the contrary, Gordon suggested that scholars should focus on deciphering the symbolism of representations and on general characteristics of Mithraic belief.²⁷

As Aleš Chalupa rightly observed, this made "a starting point of the still unfinished quest for a new dominant interpretation of Mithraism," and opened the field to the immense "plurality" of interpretations and contributions which mark the third stage of Mithraic studies.²⁸ In the next few decades research was devoted precisely to the decoding of the Mithraic iconography, as Gordon proposed, but also to the puzzling origins of the cult. As Mithraic art and iconography form a special focus of this chapter they will be discussed separately, while some of the main scholars and their contributions will be briefly discussed further in the text.

The quest for the origins and antecedents of the cult has recently returned to Franz Cumont.²⁹ Namely, the most dominant and, in the words of Roger Beck, "potentially the most fruitful new approach," is the one that proposes a certain "revisionism of the classic

²⁴ Proceedings of the congress are published in *Mithraic Studies I*, ed. John R. Hinnells (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1975).

²⁵ Richard Gordon "Franz Cumont and the Doctrines of Mithraism," in *Mithraic Studies I*, 215-248.

²⁶ Ibid, 242-244.

²⁷ Ibid, 246.

²⁸ Aleš Chalupa, "Paradigm Lost, Paradigm Found?," 6.

Cumontian scenario.”³⁰ This new approach has been assisted by two recent discoveries that are among the most important Mithraic monuments discovered in the past two decades. They are the mithraeum in Hawarti (Syria), and more importantly, the twin mithraea in Doliche (Anatolia, Turkey).³¹ Situated in Anatolia, a region where both Cumont and Beck saw the origins of the cult of Mithras, the mithraea in Doliche have come to play an especially prominent role in the newly revived debate. By 1998, the year when research in the mithraeum in Hawarti had only just begun and only the first of the twin mithraea in Doliche had been discovered, Roger Beck published an article proposing a “new scenario for the genesis of the Mysteries.”³²

As mentioned earlier, Cumont saw Anatolia as the place where “Mithraism received approximately its definitive form,” although he did not mention the exact chronology.³³ Beck suggested that the cult of Mithras was formed in the military and civilian surroundings of the Commagenian royal dynasty, more exactly he tied it to the reign of Antiochus IV, who, as an aftermath of the Judaeian and Civil wars, spent some time in exile in Rome during the reign of Vespasian.³⁴ The cult of Mithras arose as a synthesis of Iranian religion (centred on Mithra

²⁹ The most recent overview of the debate over the origins of the cult is offered in the article by Christian Wirschel, “Die Ursprünge des Mithras-Kults,” 201-210.

³⁰ Roger Beck, “Introduction,” in *Beck on Mithraism*, 27. Despite the dominant neo-Cumontian scenario a group of scholars still maintain that the cult of Mithras was created in Rome or Ostia, Maarten J. Vermaseren, *Die orientalischen Religionen im Römerreich* (Leiden: Brill, 1981); Reinhold Merkelbach, *Mithras* (Königstein: Hain, 1984), 77, 146-153, 160-161; Manfred Clauss, *Mithras*, 18; idem, *Cultore Mithrae*, 253-255.

³¹ Michał Gawlikowski, “Hawarti Preliminary Report,” *PAM* 10 (1999), 197-204; idem, “Hawarte Excavations 1999,” *PAM* 11 (2000): 261-271; idem, “Hawarte: Third Interim Report on the Work in the Mithraeum,” *PAM* 12 (2001): 309-314; idem, “Le mithraeum de Haouarte (Apamène),” *Topoi* 11, no. 1 (2001): 183-193; idem, “Hawarte Excavation and Restoration Work in 2001,” *PAM* 13 (2002): 271-278; Ewa Parandowska, “Hawarte: Conservation of a Mural,” *PAM* 14 (2003): 295-299; idem, “Hawarte: Mithraic Wall Paintings Conservation Project Seasons 2005-2006,” *PAM* 18 (2006): 543-547; Michał Gawlikowski, Krzysztof Jakubiak, Wiesław Małkowski, Arkadiusz Sołtysiak, “A Ray of Light for Mithras,” in *Un impaziente desiderio di scorrere il mondo: Studi di onore di Antonio Invernizzi*, ed. Carlo Lippolis and Stefano De Martino (Florence: Le Lettere, 2011), 169-174; Anke Schütte-Maischat, Engelbert Winter, “Neue Forschung in Kommagene,” *Rundbrief des Münsteraner Historisch-Archäologischen Freundeskreis* 1997, 31-37; idem, “Die Mithräen von Doliche. Überlagerungen zu den ersten Kultstätten der Mithras-Mysterien in der Kommagene,” *Topoi* 11, vol. 1 (2001): 149-173; idem, *Doliche-Eine kommagenische Stadt und ihre Götter. Mithras und Iupiter Dolichenus*. Asia Minor Studien 52, (Bonn: Dr. Rudolf Habelt, 2004).

³² Roger Beck, “The Mysteries of Mithras: A New Account of their Genesis,” *JRS* 88 (1998), 116.

³³ Franz Cumont, *Les mystères*, 27.

³⁴ Roger Beck, “The Mysteries of Mithras,” 121-122. David Ulansey’s interpretation, although severely criticized, has wide popularity and should be mentioned. He traced the origins of the cult of Mithras to the

worship) and Western tradition (the astrological component), wherein Tiberius Claudius Babillus, the leading astrologer of the period in Rome, related by family ties to the Commagenian dynasty, played a key role.³⁵ Due to the high mobility and interactions of Commagenian military and civilian members, the cult spread rapidly to various parts of the empire.³⁶ Beck sees the discoveries of the mithraeum in Hawarti and the twin mithrea in Doliche, along with numerous recent discoveries in the Middle East as supporting his hypothesis on the origins of the cult of Mithras.³⁷

The sensational discovery of the twin mithraea in Doliche was presented as a starting point of the “triumphal march” of not only the cult of Mithras but also of Jupiter Dolichenus towards the West.³⁸ It is assumed that the unique case of twin mithraea, according to their researchers, simultaneously functioned from the second half of the first century BC until the middle of the third century AD, are the earliest known mithraea and cult reliefs in the whole Roman Empire that show tauroctony, and also the first reliable evidence of the cult of Mithras in Commagene, which Beck already identified as a source of the cult.³⁹ However, Richard Gordon is more cautious when it comes to drawing such radical conclusions.⁴⁰ He is of the opinion that the Doliche caves were converted into mithraea only at the beginning of the third century AD and that their reliefs bear the typical features of the Rhenish-Danubian

intellectual circles of Cilicia (in particular in its capital Tarsus) in Asia Minor in the first century BC: idem, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries. Cosmology and Salvation in the Ancient World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 67-94.

³⁵ Ibid, 126. It has become a custom to differentiate between two forms of name: Mithra for the Iranian deity, and Mithras for the Roman version of the cult.

³⁶ Ibid, 122.

³⁷ Roger Beck, “New Thoughts on the Genesis of the Mysteries of Mithras,” *Topoi* 11, no. 1 (2001): 59-76; updated postscript of the article in “The Mysteries of Mithras,” in *Beck on Mithraism*, 44. Recent discoveries in the Middle East, especially in Syria, are the topic of numerous articles published in *Mithra au Proche-Orient, Actes de journées de colloques* (Lyon, 17-18 novembre 2000), *Topoi* 11, no. 1 (2001), 35-328.

³⁸ Anke Schütte-Maischat and Engelbert Winter, “Resümee: Doliche – Ein Ausgangspunkt ‘religiöser Ideen’?,” in idem, *Doliche - Eine kommagenische Stadt und ihre Götter. Mithras und Jupiter Dolichenus*, Asia Minor Studien 52 (Bonn: Dr. Rudolf Habelt, 2004), 201.

³⁹ Anke Schütte-Maischat and Engelbert Winter, “Die Mithräen von Doliche. Überlagerungen zu den ersten Kultstätten der Mithras-Mysterien in der Kommagene,” *Topoi* 11, no. 1 (2001): 149-173; idem, *Doliche-Eine kommagenische Stadt und ihre Götter*, 98, 126-127. Eberhard Sauer agrees with this identification, in *The Archaeology of Religious Hatred*, 138.

⁴⁰ Richard Gordon, “Mithras in Dolichê: Issues of Date and Origin,” *JRA* 20 (2007), 602-610.

type of the relief, which would point to influence transmitted by military troops between the Rhine-Danube region and the Euphrates frontiers.⁴¹ Roger Beck agrees in this respect with Gordon by defining them as a “back-formation from the Rhine frontier to Doliche, presumably by the transfer of military personnel.”⁴²

In their quest for the origins of the cult some scholars, stimulated by the burgeoning number of discoveries in the area where the origins of the cult were traditionally sought, still direct their focus towards the East. Richard Gordon has recently shown the interconnections between the cosmic role of Mithras in the Western tradition and in the Iranian, i.e., Avestan, sources, from where, in his opinion, a small group of private persons played a key role in transmitting the cult to the West.⁴³ Others suggest that, although of Iranian origins, the Roman cult of Mithras has fundamentally different features and newly discovered monuments in the Middle East are nothing but a “backward flow of a Western invention.”⁴⁴ Christian Witschel concludes his survey of the current debates on the origins of the cult with the conclusion that there is no simple model of its origins and dissemination; the cult was conceptualized again and again over a long time span in different regional contexts where various meanings were embedded in it through constant “re-Iranisation.”⁴⁵ The “perennial question of oriental versus occidental” still awaits an answer.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Ibid, 609-610.

⁴² Roger Beck, “Introduction,” in *Beck on Mithraism*, 28.

⁴³ Richard Gordon, “*Persei sub rupibus antri*: Überlegungen zur Entstehung der Mithrasmythen,” *Ptuj v rimskem cesarstvu, mitraizem in njegova doba. Pokrajinski muzej Ptuj, Mednarodno znanstveno srečanje 11.-15. Oktober 1999* [*Ptuj in the Roman Empire, Mithraism and its era. Pokrajinski muzej Ptuj, International scientific symposium 11.-15. October 1999*], *Archaeologia Poetovionensis* 2 (2001): 289-300; Gordon offers a brief survey of the debate over oriental vs. occidental origins in idem, “Von Cumont bis Clauss. Ein Jahrhundert Mithras-Forschung,” in *Imperium der Götter*, 237-242. Philip G. Kreyenbroek traces the antecedents of Western Mithras even beyond the Iranian tradition back to the Vedic sources, in “Mithra and Ahreman in Iranian Cosmogonies,” in *Studies in Mithraism*, 173-182.

⁴⁴ Robert Turcan, “Comment adore-t-on un dieu de l’ennemi?,” *Topoi* 11, no.1 (2001): 138; similar conclusions were drawn at the conference “Religious Flows in the Roman Empire – The Expansion of ‘Oriental Cults’ (Isis, Mithras, Iuppiter Dolichenus) From East to West and Back Again,” 27.-28.11.2010, Heidelberg, abstracts available on <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/tagungsberichte/id=3061>, accessed May, 2014.

⁴⁵ Christian Witschel, “Die Ursprünge des Mithras-Kults,” 209-210.

⁴⁶ Roger Beck, “Mithraism After,” 4.

2.2 Mithraic art and iconography

In this section a concise survey of the essential features of Mithraic art and iconography is offered. Since the topic and the growing scholarship are too vast for the scope of this thesis, I shall concentrate on several items fundamentally important for my argument. The unique nature of the Mithraic cult icon will be emphasised, along with an explication of basic iconographic and typological features and interpretations. The recent view on the general characteristics, and especially the importance of the local contribution to the Mithraic art, will be stressed, which will have important repercussions in the subsequent study of Mithraic art in Salona.

As noted in the introduction, images played a prominent role in the cult of Mithras and the focus of each mithraeum was the cult image.⁴⁷ What made the images so quintessential for adherents of the cult of Mithras? Margalit Finkelberg defined two types of cult images in ancient Greece: “images of gods which functioned as cult objects but were not intended as objects of contemplation,” and “images especially designed as objects of contemplation but which were not regarded as cult objects proper.”⁴⁸ This distinction between “cult image” and “votive image,” between “image of the god” and “image offered to the god” in Rome became the distinction between “the images of the gods” (*simulacra deorum*) and “the ornaments of temples” (*ornamenta aedium*).⁴⁹ Jaś Elsner examined the further development of the nature of the cult image in late antiquity by comparing the imagery of the official Roman religion and the cult of Mithras, concluding that Mithraic cult icons had embodied both cultic and votive functions.⁵⁰ The icon became “a simulacrum of a spiritual journey which those viewers could be reasonably expected to see themselves as

⁴⁷ See footnote 11 in the Introduction, also Roger Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 20-21.

⁴⁸ Margalit Finkelberg, “Two Kinds of Representation in Greek Religious Art,” in *Representation in Religion. Studies in Honor of Moshe Barasch*, ed. Jan Assmann and Albert I. Baumgarten (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 38-39.

⁴⁹ The rich Roman vocabulary on divine representations is discussed by Sylvia Estienne, “*Simulacra Deorum* Versus *Ornamenta Aedium*. The Status of Divine Images in the Temples of Rome,” in *Divine Images and Human Imaginations in Ancient Greece and Rome*, Joannis Mylonopoulos ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 257.

making.”⁵¹ The exceptional importance of images for “oriental cults” is explained in term of reversal:

Where Roman religious art imitated Roman sacrificial practice, Mithraic ritual imitated the Mithraic cult image. It is this fundamental reversal that catapulted images in the mystery cults into a position of incomparable importance, for the image is no longer parasitic on actuality, but rather, religious practice becomes in some sense a mimesis of the cult icon.⁵²

What actually happened with the nature of the cult icon is what Elsner calls “the most remarkable and radical change in society that the Western world has seen.”⁵³ Essential to this change was the transformation of the nature of the art from literal into symbolic; the image was no longer a god but a symbol of the god which required “mystical viewing” wherein a cult icon became “a text in its own right – a particular polysemic arrangement and commentary that demands to be read within the ideology of its time and in its own unique way.”⁵⁴

The iconography of Mithraic art is relatively uniform, a feature which Richard Gordon calls “stereotypy.”⁵⁵ Gordon sees it as a device of the cult’s claim to legitimacy,⁵⁶ and Jaś Elsner reached similar conclusions.⁵⁷ The rich plurality of the cults in the Graeco-Roman world served as an impetus for their self-definition and self-affirmation achieved through uniformity of their art and iconography, especially in the case of Mithras cult. The stereotypical nature of iconography thus had a function of creating a strong sense of cultural identity among the cult’s adherents.⁵⁸ Not only did the stereotypy of the Mithraic

⁵⁰ Jaś Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer. The Transformation of Art From the Pagan World to Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 212.

⁵¹ Ibid, 88.

⁵² Ibid, 241.

⁵³ Ibid, 245.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 88, 124, 218-219.

⁵⁵ Richard Gordon, “A New Mithraic Relief From Rome,” *JMS* 1, no. 2 (1976): 171.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 171.

⁵⁷ Jaś Elsner, *Roman Eyes. Visuality and Subjectivity in Art and Text* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 250.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 250, 255, 258, 268.

iconography serve to legitimize and to create identity, but it also played an important role as a pattern of communication in conversion.⁵⁹

The general uniformity of Mithraic cult images allows one to define its basic elements clearly and to establish two principal types: basic and complex.⁶⁰ The basic type shows exclusively the tauroctony, i.e., Mithras killing the bull, while the complex type offers “elaborate commentary upon the central scene of sacrifice” in form of additional scenes surrounding the central tauroctony.⁶¹ A cult image showing a tauroctony occupies the cult niche at the end opposite the entrance of a mithraeum. On most cult images Mithras is shown pressing the back of the already slumped bull with his kneeling left leg, while his right leg is stretched backwards over the bull’s rump and right hind leg. With his left hand Mithras grabs the bull by its nostrils and pulls his head backwards, while with his right arm he stabs the bull in the shoulder with a dagger.⁶² Less frequently, Mithras is shown with his right arm raised. Generally, Mithras turns his head away from the bull’s shoulder, directing his view towards the observer or over his right shoulder towards the Sol in the upper left corner of the composition. The bull’s tail occasionally appears to end in an ear of wheat. Mithras is usually dressed in an “oriental suit,” i.e., long-sleeved tunic, long trousers, and boots, and wears a cloak and a Phrygian cap.

Torchbearers, Cautopates and Cautes, flank Mithras and bull, standing with their legs crossed and holding lowered and raised torches respectively. Usually Cautopates is on the left

⁵⁹ Fritz Stolz, “From the Paradigm of Lament and Hearing to the Conversion Paradigm,” in *Transformations of the Inner Self in Ancient Religions*, ed. Jan Assmann and Guy G. Stroumsa (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 10-11.

⁶⁰ The basic features of Mithraic iconography are described by Romy Heyner, “Aus dem Felsen geboren,” 219-229, a short description of two basic types is provided by Richard Gordon, “Institutionalized Religious Options,” 398; two basic types of Mithraic cult reliefs were established by Ernest Will, *Le relief cultuel gréco-romain. Contribution à l’histoire de l’art de l’Empire romain* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1955).

⁶¹ Richard Gordon, “Institutionalized Religious Options,” 398.

⁶² The placement of the wound on the bull’s shoulder is unique to the Roman cult of Mithras according to Glenn Palmer, “Why the Shoulder?: A Study of the Placement of the Wound in the Mithraic Tauroctony,” in *Mystic Cults in Magna Graecia*, ed. Giovanni Casadio and Patricia A. Johnston (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 314-323; according to the most recent interpretation Mithras is not killing, but wounding the bull, in Christopher A. Faraone, “The Amuletic Design of the Mithraic Bull-Wounding Scene,” *JRS* 103 (2013): 96-116.

side, directly below Sol (represented as a bust or as a full figure in a *quadriga* drawn by horses), while Cautes stands on the right side, below Luna (also represented as a bust or drawn in a *biga* by oxen). Sometimes their positions are reversed. A raven, a dog, a snake, and a scorpion are also found among Mithras' usual companions. A raven is usually perched on Mithras' billowing cloak or is found between the bust of Sol and Mithras. A dog and a snake are shown striving towards the blood dripping from the bull's wound, while the scorpion pinches the bull's genitals.

The complex type of the cult icon is found particularly in the German provinces and in the Danube region. The scenes usually show the birth of Mithras from the rock (*petra genatrix*), the so-called water-miracle showing Mithras shooting a bow at a rock, apparently to call the water forth, Mithras hunting the bull and subsequently carrying the animal to the cave (*transitus*), the kneeling Sol, the meal shared by Mithras and Sol, and Mithras' final ascension to heaven in Sol's chariot.

What is the meaning of the bull-slaying scene? Here the importance of the "monuments figurés" is revealed again, as in the absence of any written sources it becomes clear that "mithraïsme nous est accessible surtout et directement par l'iconographie."⁶³ As mentioned above, Franz Cumont was the first to reconstruct "the myth of Mithras" based on the iconography of the monuments, and both the advantages and the deficiencies of such a method have been explained in detail by Roger Beck.⁶⁴ Despite the methodological problems the basic meaning of the bull-slaying scene has been explained as follows: by killing the bull Mithras released life-giving liquids, blood and semen, which soaked the earth and brought all the living animals and plants to life.⁶⁵ Mithras thus becomes the creator of the cosmos.⁶⁶

⁶³ Robert Turcan, *Mithra et le mithraïsme* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1993), 45.

⁶⁴ Roger Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 17-25.

⁶⁵ The Mithraic sacrifice is unique in the Graeco-Roman world because of the means by which the bull is brought to the place of sacrifice, the place itself (cave), and the mode of its death, according to Richard Gordon, "Authority, Salvation and Mystery in the Mysteries of Mithras," in *Image and Mystery in the Roman World*.

It should be made clear that despite its general uniformity and normativity, at the same time Mithraic art shows an extreme diversity of iconographic motifs and innumerable variations of its compositions, wherein some regional features and elements of style can be detected.⁶⁷ Although Mithraic communities in different parts of the Roman Empire followed the established iconographic pattern, they nevertheless “pursued their own interests and elaborated their own peculiar ideas and beliefs.”⁶⁸

The frescoes discovered in the mithraeum in Hawarti provide some further insight into the importance of the local context.⁶⁹ At the same time they represent a unique case of a mithraeum that was once completely covered in frescoes.⁷⁰ Among some usual elements of the Mithraic iconographic repertoire, several scenes are without parallels in the whole corpus of Mithraic art, meaning that originality was a quality of Mithraic art and

Three papers Given in memory of Jocelyn Toynbee, ed. J. Huskinson, Mary Beard and Joyce Reynolds (Cambridge: Alan Sutton, 1988), 49.

⁶⁶ The story of the myth can be found in almost any overview of the cult of Mithras, for example in Franc Cumont, *Les mystères*, 130-140; Maarten J. Vermaseren, *Mithra, ce dieu mystérieux* (Paris: Éditions Sequoia, 1960), 63-88; Robert Turcan, *Mithra*, 95-102; Manfred Clauss, *Mithras*, 65-97.

⁶⁷ For the general survey of Mithraic monuments and their diversity see Maarten J. Vermaseren, *Corpus inscriptionum et monumentorum religionis Mithraicae* I-II; the abundance of the Mithraic iconography and more than 900 types and subtypes of Mithraic cult relief's are established by Leroy A. Campbell, *Mithraic Iconography and Ideology* (Leiden: Brill, 1968); in an earlier article Campbell defined eight formal types of Mithraic compositions with six subtypes according to their regional appearance, based on which he further established their chronology, in Leroy A. Campbell, “Typology,” 1-60; Robert Turcan also divided Mithraic cult icons in two basic types: simple and complex, where the complex one was further subdivided into Raetio-Rheinish, Danubian, and double-sided subtype, in Robert Turcan, *Mithra*, 45-61; the dangers of such methodology, which gained wide acceptance in Croatian scholarship, are emphasized by Richard Gordon, “Panelled Complications,” *JMS* 3, no. 1-2 (1980): 200-227; see also footnote 16 in the Introduction.

⁶⁸ Aleš Chalupa, “Paradigm Lost, Paradigm Found,” 13; Luther H. Martin distinguishes between universal Mithraic practices and regionally differentiated rituals, in “Ritual Competence and Mithraic Ritual,” in *Religion as a Human Capacity. A Festschrift in Honor of E. Thomas Lawson*, ed. Timothy Light and Brian C. Wilson (Brill: Leiden, 2004), 259-261; he also thinks that “the various elements of the Mithraic tauroctony constitute an iconic lexicon from which local meanings might be constructed,” in “Performativity, Narrativity, Cognition,” 197; on other instance he asserted that the cult of Mithras “belongs to a ‘mode of religiosity’ ... characterized by a diversity of precepts and practices that are based on local knowledge, that are associated with small-scale, face-to-face groups,” in Luther H. Martin, “The Amor and Psyche Relief in the Mithraeum of Capua Vetere: An Exceptional Case of Graeco-Roman Syncretism or an Ordinary Instance of Human Cognition?” in *Mystic Cults*, 283; Richard Gordon, “Institutionalized Religious Options,” 400.

⁶⁹ Michał Gawlikowski, “The Mithraeum at Hawarte and its Paintings,” *JRA* 20 (2007): 337-346.

⁷⁰ Partially embellished with frescoes are mithraeum in Dura-Europos (CIMRM 42-52), the mithraeum in Palazzo Barberini in Rome (CIMRM 388-390), the Santa Prisca mithraeum in Rome (CIMRM 476), the mithraeum in Santa Maria Capua Vetere (CIMRM 181), and the mithraeum at Marino (Maarten J. Vermaseren, *Mithriaca III. The Mithraeum at Marino* (Leiden: Brill, 1982)).

iconography.⁷¹ Most extraordinary among them is the so-called “city of darkness,” depicting a city wall and gate topped with a row of severed heads pierced with a lance.⁷² Both Richard Gordon and Roger Beck both argue that these frescoes are evidence of the adaptation of the cult of Mithras to local needs, where it was especially important to accentuate the moral aspect of the cult, i.e., since the whole iconographic program is pervaded with the idea of a battle between good and evil the local community must have been influenced by Avestan texts.⁷³

The question remains what was the idea behind every tauroctony that, regardless of local facets, connected each Mithraic community in one coherent and universal cult? According to Roger Beck, “Mithraic mysteries, across their axioms, motifs, domains, structures, and modes, communicated symbolically in a peculiar *idiom*. This idiom is a form of jargon of one of Graeco-Roman culture’s most pervasive languages, the language of astronomy and astrology.”⁷⁴ During the 1970s, Roger Beck offered an astral interpretation of the tauroctony, according to which the tauroctony represents a map of the heavens wherein each of the nine elements of the composition are “star-talk signs for constellations.”⁷⁵ The correspondences are as follows: bull–Taurus, dog–Canis Major/Minor, snake–Hydra, raven–Corvus, scorpion–Scorpius, torchbearers–Gemini (Taurus-Scorpius), wheat ears at the end of

⁷¹ Richard Gordon, “Institutionalized Religious Options,” 399.

⁷² More detailed on the iconography of frescoes in Michał Gawlikowski, “The Mithraeum at Hawarte,” 355; Richard Gordon, “Trajets de Mithra en Syrie romaine,” *Topoi* 11, no. 1 (2001): 115; Levente Nagy, “The Short History of Time in the Mysteries of Mithras: The Order of Chaos, the City of Darkness, and the Iconography of Beginnings,” *Pantheon* 7, no. 1 (2012): 37-58.

⁷³ Richard Gordon, “Trajets de Mithra,” 115-116; Roger Beck, “Mithraism After,” 7.

⁷⁴ Roger Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 7.

⁷⁵ Franz Cumont already gave some hints to the connection between tauroctony and astronomical symbolism, in Franz Cumont, *Les mystères*, 130. The correlation between the standard elements of tauroctony and certain constellations were first noticed by Karl B. Stark, “Die Mithrassteine von Dormagen, nebst anderen Inedits des Mithrasdienstes,” *Jahrbuch des Vereins von Altertumsfreunden im Rheinlande* 46 (1869): 1-25, but were finally reintroduced in modern scholarship and further elaborated by Roger Beck, “A Note on the Scorpion in the Tauroctony,” *JMS* 1 (1976): 208-209; idem, “Cautes and Cautopates: Some Astronomical Considerations,” *JMS* 2 (1977): 1-17; idem, *Planetary Gods and Planetary Orders in the Mysteries of Mithras* (Leiden: Brill, 1988); idem, “In the Place of Lion: Mithras in the Tauroctony,” in *Studies in Mithraism*, 29-50; the latest review of the state of research and previous scholarship on the topic is offered by Roger Beck, “Mithras and the Heavens: First Explorations,” “Mithras and the Heavens: *Quis Ille?*,” “The Astronomical and Astrological Matrix,” in *Beck on Mithraism*, 127-231, 235-291, 295-329; idem, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult in the Roman Empire*.

the bull's tail–Spica (Virgo), and sometimes lion–Leo, crater–Crater.⁷⁶ The astral identity of Mithras has remained enigmatic for some time and has inspired many interpretations.⁷⁷ Roger Beck has been the most convincing; he identified Mithra's place in the constellation of Leo, the Sun's astrological house, i.e., the place where he has the strongest influence and power and where he literally becomes *Sol Invictus*.⁷⁸ The victory of the bull-killing Mithras signifies the Sun's triumph over the Moon (the astrological house of Taurus, i.e., the bull).⁷⁹

The tauroctony, as has been widely acknowledged, served as a map (simulacrum) of a soul's celestial journey, a belief that is additionally confirmed in literary sources.⁸⁰ Through the initiation into the seven grades, the initiated hoped to reach the celestial path that would lead them to immortality. Mithras played the central role in this process; he is the focus of both the tauroctony scene and of the celestial map, from where he oversees the processes of genesis and apogenesis, i.e., of the descent and ascent of the soul.⁸¹ Along with this salvific assurance, it has recently been suggested that tauroctony also offered protective power to the adherents of the cult of Mithras.⁸²

Did every adherent of the cult of Mithras understand this “star-talk” of “great complexity and subtlety?”⁸³ The answer is yes. It has long been acknowledged that “celestial

⁷⁶ Roger Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 194-195.

⁷⁷ Mithras has been variously identified as the constellation of Orion, Auriga, Perseus or others. An overview of alternative interpretations is offered by Roger Beck, “The Rise and Fall,” in *Beck on Mithraism*, 236-237. The one that has drawn the most attention is David Ulansey's interpretation which identifies Mithras as the constellation Perseus, and according to Ulansey he is responsible for the precession of the equinoxes, in David Ulansey, *The Origins of Mithraic Mysteries*, 67-94; Ulansey's interpretation received serious criticism by Manfred Clauss, “Mithras und die Präzession,” *Klio* 83 (2001): 219-225.

⁷⁸ Roger Beck, “In the Place of Lion,” 267-291; idem, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 190-239.

⁷⁹ Roger Beck, “In the Place of Lion,” 47; idem, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 197-200.

⁸⁰ Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6. 22; Porphyry, *De antro nymphaeum* 21-24. The soul's celestial journey and the role of the tauroctony in the process has been analyzed in detail by Roger Beck, “Cautus and Cautopates” 1-17; idem, *Planetary Gods*; idem, “In the Place of Lion,” 29-50. In short, Mithraists believed that souls enter the world of mortal incarnation through the gate located at the summer solstice in Cancer (Cautopates; the so-called genesis), and could one day, through initiation into the seven grades, leave through the gates of the winter solstice in Capricorn (Cautus; the so-called apogenesis) and travel through the seven planetary spheres to reach ultimate salvation.

⁸¹ Porphyry says that his seat is at the equinoxes (Porphyry, *De antro nymphaeum* 24).

⁸² Christopher A. Faraone, “The Amuletic Design,” 96-116. More on this role of the tauroctony in the chapter dealing with the Mithraic tondo from Salona (CIMRM 1861).

⁸³ Roger Beck, “In the Place of Lion,” 34.

templates were a central feature of the Graeco-Roman *mentalité*.”⁸⁴ Every member of the cult, regardless of his educational and intellectual background, could have achieved a full comprehension of Mithraic star-talk communication, a basic requirement that was enabled to all initiates.⁸⁵

2.3 Mithraic art in Salona and its place in historiography

Considering the sheer number of Mithraic monuments preserved (fifteen bas-reliefs, seven inscriptions, five mithraea(?)) and the status of Salona as the capital of the Roman province of Dalmatia, it is astounding that the question of the Roman cult of Mithras and its art has somehow escaped previous research. As a result, there is no comprehensive study of the cult of Mithras and its art in Salona. Although the primacy of the cult of Mithras among other “oriental cults” has long been recognized, studies have not ventured to go beyond this acknowledgment.⁸⁶ In the numerous studies concerned with the larger focus on the province of Dalmatia Salona unjustly appears only sporadically.

In examining the Mithraic art in Dalmatia Croatian scholarship followed the mainstream of Mithraic scholarship by focusing on the iconography, which served for deducing the cult’s “doctrines” and beliefs.⁸⁷ As a result, the issue of a Mithraic communities in Salona has never been examined. The attention of researchers until now has mostly been given to the Jewish and Christian community on the one hand, and to the pagan (as a huge whole) on the other hand. The questions of the appearance, dissemination, and the final

⁸⁴ Luther H. Martin, “Performativity, Narrativity, Cognition,” 197.

⁸⁵ Luther H. Martin, “‘Star Talk’: Native Competence; Initiatory Comprehension,” *Pantheon* 7, no. 1 (2012): 67; Darius Frackowiak, “‘Star Talk’ and the Archaeological Evidence: Critical Aspects and New Perspective,” *Pantheon* 7, no. 1 (2012): 23-26;

⁸⁶ Emilio Marin, *Starokršćanska Salona: studije o genezi, profilu i transformaciji grada* [Early Christian Salona: studies on genesis, profile and transformation of the city] (Zagreb: Latina et Graeca VPA, 1988), 16; Duje Rendić-Miočević, “Antička Salona (*Salonae*): povijesno-urbanistički i spomenički fenomen (S.O.S. za baštinu)” [Ancient Salona (*Salonae*): historical-urbanistic and monumental phenomenon (S.O.S. for heritage)], in *Duje Rendić-Miočević. Dalmatia Christiana. Opera omnia*, ed. Nenad Cambi (Zagreb: Arheološki muzej, 2011; originally published in *Arhitektura* 30 (1977), 54-69), 355-356.

⁸⁷ As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Roger Beck warned about the error this method can lead, see footnote 64.

disappearance of the Mithraic cult in Salona are still waiting for answers. Nor is there any study dedicated to establishing the basic features of the Mithraic art in Salona.

The beginnings of scholarly research on the cult of Mithras in the province of Dalmatia are associated with Franz Cumont. In his extensive corpus of monuments he lists altogether twelve inscriptions from the province of Dalmatia (five from Salona), and five reliefs are included in the list (only one from Salona).⁸⁸ This initial scarce appearance of individual Mithraic monuments in Salona has been enabled by the indispensable archaeological research conducted by Frane Bulić (1846-1934), who made a detailed description of each monument, but unfortunately did not offer any interpretation or dating.⁸⁹ However, his articles are still the starting point for anyone undertaking the study of the Mithraic art in Salona.

During the 1930s the impression of the modest appearance of the cult started to change due to a growing number of discoveries. This gave an impetus to the flourishing number of studies dedicated to the cult of Mithras in Dalmatia.⁹⁰ In 1951 Branimir Gabričević embarked on the first comprehensive study of the cult in Dalmatia.⁹¹ For the first time, he gave monuments from Salona prominent places among the remaining corpus of then-known Mithraic monuments in Dalmatia and conducted the first systematic analysis. Based on the reconstructed dimensions of four relief fragments from Salona, Gabričević came to the conclusion that they must have served as cult icons (CIMRM 1860, CIMRM 1862-1863, CIMRM 1868, CIMRM 1869). In other words, he argued that there must have

⁸⁸ Franz Cumont, *Textes et monuments*, II, 139-140, 334-335.

⁸⁹ Frano Bulić, "Quattro bassorilievi di Mitra a Salona," *BASD* 32 (1909): 50-57.

⁹⁰ Arnolfo Bacotich, "Il culto di Mithra nella regione marittima della provincia Dalmazia," *Archivio storico per la Dalmazia* 11 (1931): 267-290; Rastislav Marić, *Antički kultovi u našoj zemlji* [Ancient cults in our land] (Belgrade: Privrednik, 1933), 82-84; Dimitrije Sergejevski, "Novi nalazi na Glamočkom polju" [New discoveries in Glamoč polje], *GZM* 54 (1933): 7-14; idem, "Das Mithräum von Jajce," *GZM* 49 (1937): 11-18.

⁹¹ Branimir Gabričević, "Mitrin kult na području rimske Dalmacije" [The Mithras cult in Roman Dalmatia] PhD Dissertation (Zagreb: Sveučilište u Zagrebu, 1951). Parts of the dissertation were published as a separate publication, Branimir Gabričević, *Studije i članci o religijama i kultovima antičkog svijeta* [Studies and articles about religions and cults of the ancient world] (Split: Književni krug, 1987).

been several mithraea in the city which housed these cult reliefs.⁹² Gabričević failed to suggest, however, where they could have been situated or when they could have been in use.

According to their typology, the Mithraic monuments were arranged in two groups: simple and complex.⁹³ According to Gabričević, the simple type shows strong Italic influences (Aquileia) in its plasticity and naturalistic tendencies and this type of relief prevails mainly on the coastline, especially at Salona.⁹⁴ It emerged with the first wave of expansion of the cult of Mithras in Dalmatia in the second half of the second century AD, when the ports of Senia (present-day Senj), Naronia (present-day Vid), and Salona played major roles.⁹⁵ The complex type of Mithraic reliefs appeared during the second, later, wave of the cult's expansion in the third century AD.⁹⁶ Features of complex reliefs gravitated towards Pannonia and the Danube region.⁹⁷ This type can also be found in Salona: a relief showing Mithras being born from a rock (CIMRM 1865), and two circular reliefs (CIMRM 1861, CIMRM 1870).⁹⁸ According to Gabričević, Mithraism persisted in the province of Dalmatia until fifth century AD, with an especially strong impetus in the fourth century AD.⁹⁹ Gabričević's dissertation stirred the scholarly interest in the topic, and is to this day still considered relevant when dealing with the Mithraic art in the province of Dalmatia. Although some of his conclusions are still pertinent, it is evident that they rest on a narrow body of evidence and therefore need reevaluation.

In the following decades, several studies dedicated to the cult of Mithras and its art in the province of Dalmatia appeared, all confirming Gabričević's main conclusions. Among

⁹² Branimir Gabričević, "Mitrin kult," 34-35, 55.

⁹³ Ibid, 35-36. On the features of the simple and complex type of Mithraic reliefs see the section on Mithraic art and iconography. On the simple and complex type of Mithraic reliefs in Dalmatia see Branimir Gabričević, "Iconographie de Mithra tauroctone dans la province romaine de Dalmatie," *Archaeologia Jugoslavica* 1 (1954), 37-52.

⁹⁴ Branimir Gabričević, "Mitrin kult," 40-43.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 40-43; idem, "Iconographie de Mithra tauroctone," 40-50.

⁹⁶ Branimir Gabričević, "Iconographie de Mithra tauroctone," 40-50.

⁹⁷ Branimir Gabričević, "Mitrin kult," 43-51.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 43-51.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 63.

them, the monograph of Ljubica Zotović drew scholarly attention immediately after its publication in 1973.¹⁰⁰ Besides numerous lacunae (for example, Zotović did not include monuments from Istria), scholars mainly criticized it because it analyzed Mithraic monuments from all over Yugoslavia.¹⁰¹ Historically viewed, Yugoslavia consisted of several Roman provinces which each had its own historical context and cultural background. Therefore, Zotović's conclusions were considered groundless and were discarded from further scholarship.

An important place in Croatian historiography concerning the cult of Mithras belongs to Petar Selem, although he mainly dealt with the cult in Pannonia.¹⁰² Nevertheless, some of his conclusions are important for the question of the Mithraic cult in the province of Dalmatia as well, primarily regarding the intermediary role of Petovio (present-day Ptuj, Slovenia) in the diffusion of Mithraism in both Pannonia and Dalmatia.

After exhausting Gabričević's legacy, sometime at the end of the 1970s, almost twenty years passed until new studies appeared bringing novel and stimulating conclusions. Several doctoral dissertations appeared whose major contribution was a deliberation of contemporary scholarship on the origins and iconography of Mithraic art, whose conclusions were then applied to Mithraic monuments from Dalmatia without any critical approach.¹⁰³ Among them, Željko Miletić was the first scholar to include astrological and astronomical analysis in the discussion of Dalmatian Mithraic monuments, motivated mainly by the groundbreaking interpretations of Roger Beck on the one hand, and by the quite harshy

¹⁰⁰ Ljubica Zotović, *Mitraizam na tlu Jugoslavije* [Mithraism in Yugoslavia] (Belgrade: Arheološki institut, 1973).

¹⁰¹ Julijan Medini, "Ljubica Zotović: Mitraizam na tlu Jugoslavije" [Ljubica Zotović: Mithraism in Yugoslavia] *Diadora* 8 (1975): 187-205.

¹⁰² Petar Selem, "Mithrin kult u Panoniji" [Mithras cult in Pannonia], *Radovi Zavoda za hrvatsku povijest Filozofskog fakulteta u Zagrebu* 8 (1976): 5-48; Petar Selem, *Les religions orientales dans la Pannonie Romaine. Partie en Yougoslavie* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980).

¹⁰³ The interpretation that has left the greatest imprint in Croatian scholarship are those by Leroy A. Campbell, see footnote 67.

criticism and rejected conclusions of David Ulansey on the other hand.¹⁰⁴ His most significant contribution is his doctoral dissertation, in which he collected and revised all the known Mithraic monuments from the province of Dalmatia.¹⁰⁵ A special note was given to Campbell's typology of Mithraic cult icons, based on which Miletić tried to establish the chronology of various influences traceable on Dalmatian reliefs.¹⁰⁶ Miletić dated the earliest Mithraic relief from Dalmatia to the second half of the second century AD (CIMRM 1879), and based on its stylistic features he accepted Gabričević's conclusions about the first "Italic" phase of the cult's dissemination in Dalmatia.¹⁰⁷ According to Miletić, penetration of Pannonian stylistic elements can be traced in the third and fourth century, thus confirming Gabričević's earlier conclusions.¹⁰⁸ In his opinion, Mithraic activity in Dalmatia can be detected until the beginning of the fourth century AD, after which it vanished due to the advent of Christianity.¹⁰⁹ Among other things, Miletić argued that, based on their typological analysis, two circular reliefs (CIMRM 1861, CIMRM 1870) are genuine Salonitan inventions.¹¹⁰

Among the very few scholars who have dealt with the cult of Mithras in the province of Dalmatia is Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan. In her doctoral dissertation, Lipovac-Vrkljan included some of the newly discovered monuments and altogether forty-two monuments from the province of Dalmatia are listed in the catalogue.¹¹¹ One part of her dissertation is devoted to analyzing the relationship between the Roman road system and Mithraic sites in

¹⁰⁴ Željko Miletić, "Astronomski sadržaj na mitričkom motivu ubijanja bika" [Astronomical content of the Mithraic bull-killing motif] *RFFZd* 33 (1994): 93-107; idem, "Astronomija i astrologija u mitraizmu" [Astronomy and astrology in Mithraism], in *Kučerin zbornik*, ed. Miroslav Berić and Vilijam Lakić (Šibenik: Gradska knjižnica i Astronomsko društvo Faust Vrančić, 1995), 83-102. On Roger Beck's interpretations and bibliography on astronomical/astrological interpretations see footnote 75, David Ulansey's interpretation and criticism are mentioned in the footnote 77.

¹⁰⁵ Željko Miletić, "Mitraizam," 1996.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 9-42.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 18-19.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 28.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 142.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 13.

¹¹¹ Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan, "Posebnosti tipologije," 2001.

Dalmatia. From her analysis it is clear that almost every Mithraic locality is situated in the vicinity of the main road communication of the province of Dalmatia, which connected the urban centers of Senia (present-day Senj), Iader (present-day Zadar), Salona, Narona (present-day Vid), and Epidaur (present-day Cavtat) with the Dalmatian heartland.¹¹² It is also interesting to note that each of these sites had economic importance, as some of them served for mining and transporting various mineral ores.¹¹³ Mithraism is only associated with the army in two cases (Burnum, Tilurium); the presence of the Mithraic cult is mainly connected with places where the customs service was positioned (*publicum portorii Illyrici*).¹¹⁴ Based on the typology and iconography of Dalmatian Mithraic monuments, Lipovac-Vrkljan tried to reconstruct the routes and temporal frameworks of cult's diffusion. She also agreed with the earlier conclusions about placing the first phase of Mithraic arrival in the second half of the second century AD, and the later phase at the beginning of the third century AD.¹¹⁵

In her extensive study of the "Oriental cults" in the Roman province of Dalmatia Anemari Bugarski-Mesdjian also concluded that Mithraic monuments are of Western, i.e., Italic character and iconography.¹¹⁶ She agreed with the previous conclusions that the Roman administration, not the army, played a prominent role in spreading the Mithraic cult in Dalmatia.¹¹⁷ Mithraism is, according to Bugarski-Mesdjian, part of Roman religion and

¹¹² Ibid, 85.

¹¹³ Ibid, 197. Also in Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan, "Mithraic Centers on the Road Communications in Croatia (Parts of Roman Dalmatia, Pannonia Inferior, Pannonia Superior and Histria). The Example of Mursa," *Ptuj v rimskem cesarstvu, mitraizem in njegova doba. Pokrajinski muzej Ptuj, Mednarodno znanstveno srečanje 11.-15. Oktober 1999* [*Ptuj in the Roman Empire, Mithraism and its era. Pokrajinski muzej Ptuj, International scientific symposium 11.-15. October 1999*], *Archaeologia Poetovionensis* 2 (2001): 233-249; idem, "Naselja rudonosnih prostora Dalmacije i Panonije. Nekoliko pitanja prisutnosti istočnih kultova" [Settlements in mining areas of Roman Dalmatia and Pannonia. A few questions on the presence of eastern cults] *Histria Antiqua* 11 (2001): 361-375.

¹¹⁴ Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan, "Posebnosti tipologije," 197.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 144-147, 196.

¹¹⁶ Anemari Bugarski-Mesdjian, "Les 'cultes orientaux' en Dalmatie Romaine," *VAHD* 96 (2004): 662.

¹¹⁷ Anemari Bugarski-Mesdjian, "Les 'cultes orientaux'," 672.

culture, and its diffusion was tied to the main routes and time of the Romanisation of the province of Dalmatia.¹¹⁸

Several extensive surveys of the art of the Roman province of Dalmatia exist.¹¹⁹ In no single one of them did the Mithraic art from Salona receive the treatment it deserves, or is the Mithraic art from Dalmatia treated in the context of general artistic production at all. In the two most recent publications the attempt to correct this negligence was undertaken, nevertheless in incomplete results. The first is devoted to the study of “Oriental cults” on the territory of the Salonitan *ager*, wherein a brief and general introductory text is given, after which a catalogue of monuments follows grouped according to the associated cult/religion.¹²⁰ Although the greatest merit of this publication is that for the first time it gathered all the Salonitan monuments concerning “Oriental cults,” it is lacking in providing wider contextualization and interpretations. Also, the authors have erroneously classified all Mithraic reliefs as cult icons, although not all of them served that purpose. The most recent publication, the catalogue accompanying the exhibition “Classical Rome on the Territory of Croatia. Architecture, Urbanism, Sculpture” in the Klovićevi dvori gallery in Zagreb.¹²¹ In the section dedicated to “Oriental religions” one sentence is dedicated to the Salonitan Mithraism only stating that Salona yielded the greatest number of Mithraic reliefs in the province of Dalmatia.¹²²

As is apparent from this survey, Salonitan Mithraism was unjustly and long neglected not only in Mithraic scholarship, but it has received the same treatment in any publication regarding the artistic production in the province of Dalmatia. Given the survey of previous

¹¹⁸ Anemari Bugarski-Mesdjian, “Les 'cultes orientaux'”, 676, 682.

¹¹⁹ Nenad Cambi, *Antika* [Antiquity] (Zagreb: Naklada Ljevak, Institut za povijest umjetnosti, 2002); idem, “Kiparstvo, 2002;” idem, *Kiparstvo rimske Dalmacije*, 2005.

¹²⁰ Petar Selem, Inga Vilogorac-Brčić, *ROMIS. Religionum Orientalium monumenta et inscriptiones Salonitani*, Znakovi i riječi. Signa et litterae III (Zagreb: FF Press, 2012).

¹²¹ Marina Šegvić, Danijela Marković, ed., *Klasični Rim na tlu Hrvatske. Arhitektura, urbanizam, skulptura* [Classical Rome on the territory of Croatia. Architecture, urbanism, sculpture] (Zagreb: Kerschoffset, 2014).

¹²² Željko Miletić, “Religija i religijska kretanja u zapadnom Iliriku (orijentalne religije)” [Religion and religious flows in the western Illyricum (oriental religions)] in *Klasični Rim*, 250.

scholarship on the cult of Mithras in Salona, it is evident that not only is it deserving of a new and updated inquiry, but also of the first such attempt.

2.4 Salona: Cultural and religious hub on the eastern Adriatic

Ancient Salona, once the capital city of the Roman province of Dalmatia, covered the largest city area in the province and a plethora of material evidence bears witness to the richness of cultural and ethnic diversity which gave Salona its specific dynamic development.¹²³ The city is situated along the central part of the eastern Dalmatian coast, and its favorable geographical location at the heart of ancient Manios Bay (present-day Kaštelanski zaljev) offered natural protection from the sea, while Kozjak and Mosor mountains secured the city in the hinterland. The core of the city was situated along the fertile delta of the Salon River (present-day Jadro), but the vast Salonitan territory (*ager Salonitanus*) spread from the ancient town of Tragurium (present-day Trogir) in the west to the Epetium (present-day Stobreč) in the east.¹²⁴

The rich stratigraphy of archaeological finds, monuments, and urban elements prove the attractiveness of the city from the early beginnings.¹²⁵ Starting as a settlement of the Illyrian tribe Delmatae, during the Caesar's reign in the aftermath of civil war Salona was granted the status of a Roman colony, with the formal title *colonia Martia Iulia Salona*.¹²⁶

¹²³ Mate Suić, *Antički grad na istočnom Jadranu* [Ancient city on the eastern Adriatic] (Zagreb: Golden Marketing, Tehnička knjiga, Institut za povijest umjetnosti, 2003), 40.

¹²⁴ On the geographical position of the city see Emilio Marin, *Starokršćanska Salona: studije o genezi, profilu i transformaciji grada* [Early Christian Salona: studies on genesis, profile and transformation of the city] (Zagreb: Latina et Graeca VPA, 1988), 9-12; see also in Emilio Marin, ed., *Salona Christiana* (Split: Arheološki muzej, 1994), 16-17.

¹²⁵ A basic survey of archaeological heritage and monuments from Salona are available in three articles by Jasna Jeličić-Radonić and Ana Sedlar, "Topografija antičke Salone I. Salonitanska *Urbs vetus*" [Topography of the Roman Salona I. The *Urbs vetus* of Salona], *Tusculum* 2 (2009): 7-32; idem, "Topografija antičke Salone II. Istraživači Salone u XIX. stoljeću" [Topography on Roman Salona II. The nineteenth century researchers of Salona], *Tusculum* 3 (2010): 167-213; idem, "Topografija antičke Salone III. Salonitanska *Urbs occidentalis*" [Topography of Roman Salona III. The Salonitan *Urbs occidentalis*], *Tusculum* 4 (2011): 67-86; also in Mirjana Sanader, *Antički gradovi u Hrvatskoj* [Ancient cities in Croatia] (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 2001), 89-98; Duje Rendić-Miočević, "Antička Salona," 334-365; a good examination of the architectural and urban development is offered by Jasna Jeličić-Radonić, "Urbanizam i arhitektura rimske Dalmacije" [Urbanism and architecture of Roman Dalmatia] in *Klasični Rim*, 85-88.

¹²⁶ On the history of the city see Duje Rendić-Miočević, "Antička Salona," 329-333; Emilio Marin, "Grad Saloniae/Salona" [The city of Saloniae/Salona] in *Longae Saloniae* I, 9-12.

The frequently encountered toponym *Salonae* (in the plural) testifies to the complexity of the urban development.¹²⁷ A forum with the Capitol was settled in the central and the oldest urban core of the city, *Urbs vetus*/*Urbs antiqua*/*Urbs Graeca* as Ejnar Dyggve called it.¹²⁸ As a result of barbarian threats during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, the extensive Salonitan suburbs to the eastern (*Urbs orientalis*) and western (*Urbs occidentalis*) sides of the *Urbs vetus* were consolidated with a new ring of city walls (Figure 2.1).¹²⁹ The amphitheatre, the largest public building in Salona, was thus incorporated into the unique fortification system of the *Urbs occidentalis*.¹³⁰ This created the characteristic longitudinal urban design of Salona, with the typical elongated form which inspired the Roman poet Lucan to call it *longae Salonae*.¹³¹

¹²⁷ Emilio Marin, "Grad Salonae/Salona," 12.

¹²⁸ Ejnar Dyggve, *La ville de Salone, Disposition et topographie, I Plan de la ville, II les matériaux, Recherches à Salone I* (Copenhagen: J. H. Schultz, 1928), 11-20.

¹²⁹ Jasna Jeličić-Radonić, "Salona, The *Urbs Orientalis*," *HAM* 12 (2006): 43; Jasna Jeličić-Radonić, Ana Sedlar "Topografija antičke Salone III," 69; Jasna Jeličić-Radonić, "Urbanizam i arhitektura," 86.

¹³⁰ Jasna Jeličić-Radonić, "Amfiteatar i zapadni bedemi Salone" [The amphitheatre and the western bulwarks of Salona], *Tusculum* 1 (2008): 35-44.

¹³¹ Duje Rendić-Miočević, "Antička Salona," 334; Emilio Marin, "Grad Salonae/Salona," 12; Mate Suić, *Antički grad*, 213-217.

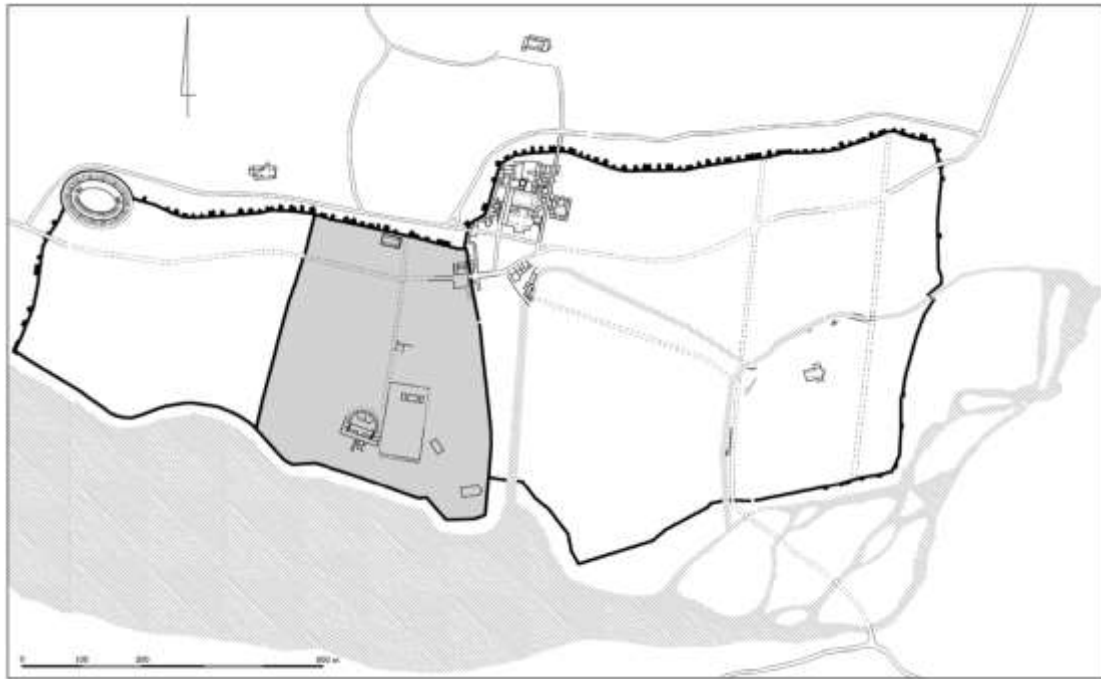


Figure 2.1 Map of Salona with *Urbs vetus* (gray), *Urbs orientalis*, and *Urbs occidentalis* according to Jasna Jeličić-Radonić and Ana Sedlar “Topografija antičke Salone I. Salonitanska *Urbs vetus*” [Topography of the Roman Salona I. The *Urbs vetus* of Salona], *Tusculum* 2 (2009): 8.

With five military roads built under governor Publius Cornelius Dolabella (14-20 AD), Salona became *caput viae* of the province and this strategic position enabled excellent connections with the hinterland of the province and further with Pannonia (Figure 2.2).¹³² Salona was also a sea port of wide regional economic and military significance.¹³³ Along being the strategic centre of the province, Salona was also the main administrative center with the residence of the imperial governor and seat of the Roman customs service (*publicum portorii Illyrici*).¹³⁴

¹³² Miroslav Glavičić, “Organizacija uprave rimske provincije Dalmacije prema natpisnoj građi” [Administrative organization of the Roman province of Dalmatia according to inscriptions], in *Klasični Rim*, 43.

¹³³ Emilio Marin, “Moguće pomorske komunikacije starokršćanske Salone” [Possible maritime connections of early Christian Salona], *Histria Antiqua* 21 (2012): 123-128; Igor Borzić, “Rimske luke – riječne i morske – i pomorstvo na Jadranu” [Roman ports – river and sea – and shipping on the Adriatic] in *Klasični Rim*, 54.

¹³⁴ Mate Suić, *Antički grad*, 156; John J. Wilkes, “Salona: A Roman Colony and its People (c. 50 BC-c. AD 150),” in *Longae Saloniae*, 89.



Figure 2.2 Map showing the web of road communication in the province of Dalmatia (bold black lines mark Dolabella's roads) (Emilio Marin, ed., *Longae Saloniae* II [Split: Arheološki muzej, 2002], 9).

Beneficial conditions ensured Salona's steady growth and prosperity until it finally reached a peak during the reign of Emperor Diocletian (r. 284-305 AD).¹³⁵ This was the time of the city's greatest territorial spread with the population estimated between 40 000 to 60

¹³⁵ Emilio Marin, *Starokršćanska Salona*, 13; idem, *Salona Christiana*, 24-26; Mirjana Sanader, *Antički gradovi*, 90; Nenad Cambi, "Kiparstvo," 140.

000.¹³⁶ *Martia Iulia Valeria Salona Felix* was the full name of the city during this period, suggesting its opulence.¹³⁷

Rich epigraphic evidence records the varied ethnic backgrounds of Salona's inhabitants. Some of the *gentilicia* and *cognomina* are of local origin (from the Venetic-Liburnia region and of Illyrian origin), others are of eastern, predominantly Greek, origin, but the majority are of Italian origin.¹³⁸ Accordingly, various religions and beliefs intersected at this cosmopolitan capital. To name just a few, besides the imperial cult, votives to Jupiter, Apollo, Venus Victrix, Hercules, Lares Augusti, and Fortuna Domestica have been discovered.¹³⁹ The most prominent cults in the epigraphic record are the cult of Magna Mater and Silvanus and the Nymphs.¹⁴⁰ Other well-attested cults include Egyptian cults (Isis, Osiris, Serapis), cult of Cybele and Attis, oriental religions of Danubian horsemen, Syrian deities, Phrygian Men, Jupiter Dolichenus, Thracian Sabazios, and last but not least: the cult of Mithras.¹⁴¹ In the fourth century the coexistence of three large religious groups, pagans, Jews, and Christians, is attested in rich epigraphic material.¹⁴²

¹³⁶ Mirjana Sanader, *Antički gradovi*, 89-90.

¹³⁷ Duje Rendić-Miočević, "(In) felix Salona. In memoriam gradu koji ponovno umire" [(In) felix Salona. In memoriam for the city that dies again] in *Dalmatia Christiana* (originally published in *Mogućnosti* 3-4 (1988): 324-329), 367.

¹³⁸ John J. Wilkes, "Salona," 90-95.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 95.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 95.

¹⁴¹ Petar Selem, Inga Vilogorac-Brčić, *ROMIS*.

3. THE ART OF THE MITHRAIC CULT IN SALONA

3.1 Salonitan mithraea: Illusion versus reality

Ejnar Dyggve briefly mentioned the existence of a total of five mithraea dispersed both *intra* and *extra muros*.¹⁴³ More precisely, one was near the theater, the second near the amphitheater, the third in the eastern part of the town, and two outside the city walls, but so far there have been no certain archaeological confirmations of them. The recent discovery of a map showing the exact position of Dyggve's mithrae allows one to visualize and approximately contextualize their location within the urban structure of Salona.¹⁴⁴

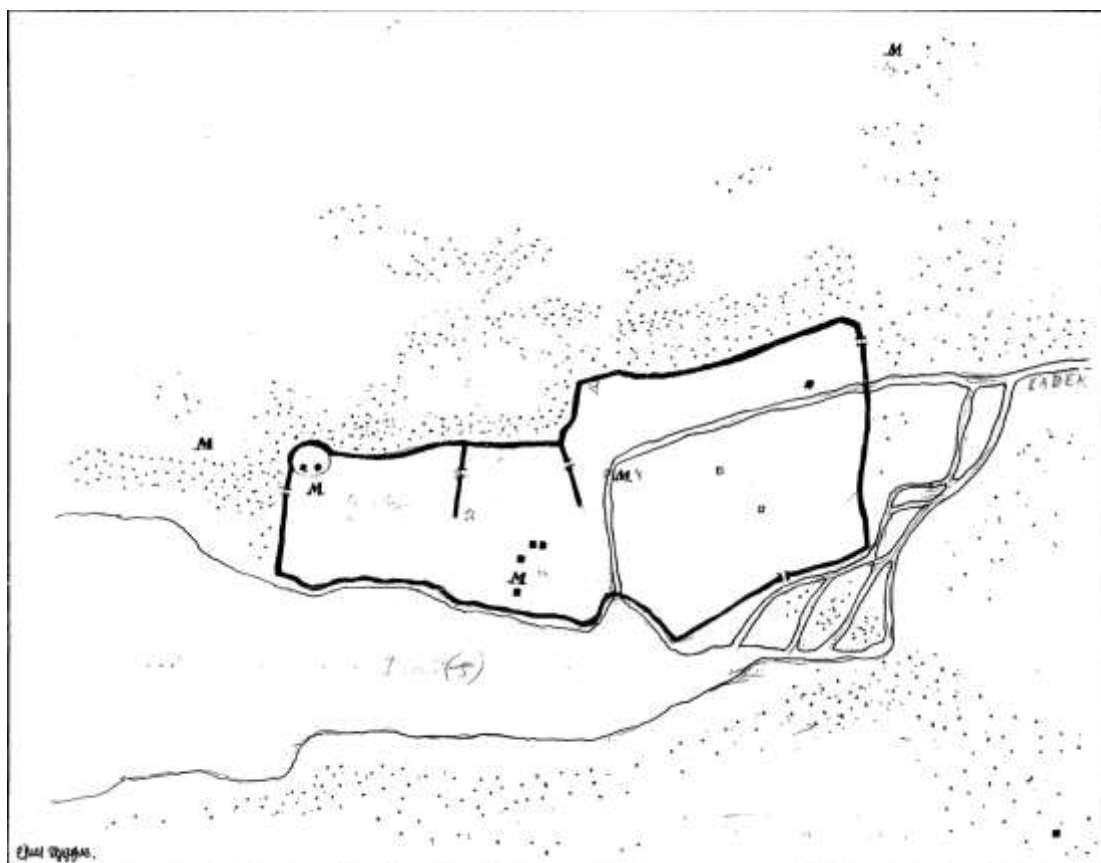


Figure 3.1 Map showing the position of Salonitan mithraea according to Ejnar Dyggve.

Although the map legend has not been preserved, it is easy to recognize its main features. The map shows only the essential topographical details; the perimeter walls of the

¹⁴² Dora Ivanišević, "Fourth-Century Epitaphs From Salona: Religious and Social Identity," MA Thesis (Budapest: Central European University, 2010).

city (bold black line), the Salon River running through the *Urbs Orientalis*, and the beginnings of the wall that once surrounded the *Urbs vetus*. The small squares probably mark the main sites of Dyggve's research, while the capital letter M is used to indicate the location of five mithraea. It is clearly visible that two mithraea were located outside the city walls, one was in the immediate vicinity of the amphitheatre, other near the theatre, while the remaining mithraeum was located near the road running through *Urbs occidentalis*.

The topographical pattern provided by the map can already give some insight into the role of mithraea in public and private space in Salona. Mithraea were only accessible to those initiated into the cult, and secrecy and seclusion were therefore desirable when choosing the location. The theatre and amphitheater were public buildings near the center of the city with a high frequency of people passing by, and such locations, according to Bjørnebye, point to the growth and prosperity of the cult.¹⁴⁵ Unfortunately, nothing can be said about their size, structure and layout. Generally mithraea are easily identifiable because of their recognizable ground plan, which consists of a rectangular room with flanking podia. The distinct structure and uniformity testify to the stability and continuity of some of the central elements of the cult, but as has recently been shown, not every mithraeum-shaped structure can be, without further evidence, interpreted as a mithraeum.¹⁴⁶ What made Dyggve suggest those specific locations will remain uncertain (did he discover archaeological remains? or possibly other traces of Mithraic activity at those exact spots?) and it remains to hope that further research will shed more light on the topic. Since Dyggve was known for his meticulous and highly precise research methodology, there must have been a good reason for him to suggest this exact number of mithraea and their locations. Taking into consideration the general estimates

¹⁴³ Ejnar Dyggve, *History*, 8.

¹⁴⁴ Ejnar Dyggve's notes and sketches are preserved at the Croatian Ministry of Culture in Zagreb.

¹⁴⁵ Jonas Bjørnebye, "*Hic locus est felix*," 75.

¹⁴⁶ Darius Frackowiak, "'Star Talk,'" 26-31.

of an average community consisting of 30 Mithraists per mithraeum,¹⁴⁷ yields a total of 150 Mithraists in Salona, a number which is not certain and conclusive.

3.2 The epigraphic evidence of Mithraic communities in Salona

Although Salona boasts altogether 6000-7000 inscriptions from antiquity and has the third largest number of late antique inscriptions,¹⁴⁸ only seven inscriptions are associated with the cult of Mithras (see Appendix), out of 35 from the whole province of Dalmatia.¹⁴⁹ Six of them are found on votive altars, while one, partially preserved, runs along the bottom of the relief showing tauroctony (CIMRM 1862-1863).

With only one exception, all of them are personal votives erected for either personal benefit and safety (4), or to benefit a friend (5, 6), or they were simply erected in honor of Mithras (1), in one case to both Mithras and other immortal gods and goddesses (2). In one example, an altar was erected in honor of the birth-giving rock (referring to the Mithras' birth) (3). The majority of Mithraic votives in Dalmatia were personal votives, showing that Salona is part of the wider picture of the province.¹⁵⁰

Mithraic inscriptions from Salona do not offer much information on the socio-legal status of the persons listed on them. More importantly, no data on Mithraic grade-structure and hierarchy is recorded on any single inscription,¹⁵¹ which is not surprising when taking into account that only 15% of the epigraphically recorded Mithraists carry explicit ranks.¹⁵² For a more general picture of Mithraic communities, the extensive study of Manfred Clauss provides a survey of the social catchments of the cult's adherents.¹⁵³ Of 997 Mithraists catalogued, elements of status, rank, and occupation can be deduced for about one third:

¹⁴⁷ Jonas Bjørnebye, "*Hic locus est felix*," 182.

¹⁴⁸ Dora Ivanišević, "Fourth-century epitaphs," 3-4.

¹⁴⁹ Manfred Clauss, *Cultores Mithrae*, 141-152.

¹⁵⁰ Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan, "Posebnosti tipologije," 243.

¹⁵¹ The same is valid for the whole province of Dalmatia, in Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan, "Posebnosti tipologije," 236.

¹⁵² Roger Beck, "The Mysteries of Mithras," 180.

¹⁵³ Manfred Clauss, *Cultores Mithrae*.

senators (11), equestrians (37), municipal decurions (18), military personnel 123 ((25) centurions, (52) *principales*, (28) common soldiers, (18) veterans), imperial freedmen (15), imperial slaves (23), other freedmen (32), other slaves (64).¹⁵⁴ On the remaining inscriptions the majority display the *tria nomina* (416); 129 have single names, and 24 are *peregrini*.¹⁵⁵ In general, it was a cult of petty bureaucrats, soldiers, successful freedman, and slaves.¹⁵⁶

Since Salona was a station of the Roman custom service (*publicum portorii Illyrici*), it seems logical to assume that a substantial number of adherents were members of the bureaucratic system. According to Richard Gordon, cult's early "colporteurs" to the provinces were Italians recruited into the legions and agents of the *conductores* of the road tolls, who also came from Italy.¹⁵⁷ Altogether five names are recorded on Salonitan Mithraic inscriptions, four of them consisting of *tria nomina*, the distinctive mark of Roman citizenship (Sextus Cornelius Antiochus, Lucius Cornelius Apalaustus, Marcus Vivius Crestus, Terentius Dalmata Mantius).¹⁵⁸ Aurelius, mentioned in the second inscription in the appendix, was probably from the equestrian class, which the formula *a milit[iis]* suggests.¹⁵⁹ Pamphilius and Fortunatus, *dispensator* and *arcarius* mentioned in inscription number 4, were probably imperial slaves/freedmen belonging to the administrative staff of the financial and custom offices.¹⁶⁰ Petar Selem and Inga Vilogorac-Brčić consider Lucius Cornelius Apalaustus and Marcus Vivius Crestus of Eastern origin, because of their eastern cognomens.¹⁶¹ The methodology of deducing one's socio-legal status and origins based on the onomastic evidence is without prosopographic grounds, and as such, has long been

¹⁵⁴ Roger Beck, "The Mysteries of Mithras," 178.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 178.

¹⁵⁶ Roger Beck, "Four Men, Two Sticks," 88.

¹⁵⁷ Richard Gordon, "Who Worshipped Mithras?" *JRA* 7 (1994), 463.

¹⁵⁸ Roger Beck, "The Mysteries of Mithras," 178.

¹⁵⁹ Petar Selem and Inga Vilogorac-Brčić, *ROMIS*, 171.

¹⁶⁰ Manfred Claus, *Cultores Mithrae*, 149; Petar Selem and Inga Vilogorac-Brčić, *ROMIS*, 173.

¹⁶¹ Petar Selem and Inga Vilogorac-Brčić, *ROMIS*, 174.

criticized.¹⁶² Anemari Bugarski-Mesdjian argues that the usual assumption about “Oriental slaves” belonging to the Roman customs service spreading the cult of Mithras on the territory of Dalmatia is no longer valid, as those persons belonged to the Roman bureaucratic system, which means that they were Romanized.¹⁶³ Probably Lucius Cornelius Apalaustus and Marcus Vivius Crestus had the status of freedmen.

The conclusions offered by such scarce epigraphic evidence are far from conclusive, but nevertheless, they offer some hints about the social positions of Salonitan Mithraists. On two of the inscriptions probably slaves or freedmen belonging to the administrative offices are recorded. On one inscription a person belonging to the equestrian rank is mentioned, which would fit with the previous conclusions about adherents of the cult of Mithras who, in majority of cases, belonged to the administrative and bureaucratic staff or were military personnel.¹⁶⁴

An interesting case is offered by the inscription number five in the appendix. It was discovered during the rescue archaeological excavations conditioned by the construction of the Split detour road in 1986 but it has never been published.¹⁶⁵ In the area of the the western necropolis a rectangular structure consisting of three rooms, built in two phases and oriented north-south, was partially discovered.¹⁶⁶ In the northern room, according to Jagoda Mardešić belonging to the later building phase, four sacrificial altars were found. One was dedicated to Mithras, two to Silvanus, while the fourth one mentions no particular deity (DEO POR BONO).¹⁶⁷ More detailed account on this discovery does not exist, and therefore no certain conclusions could be offered. The fact that Silvanus and Mithras were found together in the

¹⁶² Lily Ross Taylor, “Freedmen and Freeborn in the Epitaphs of Imperial Rome,” *The American Journal of Philology* 82, no. 2 (1961): 113-132.

¹⁶³ Anemari Bugarski-Mesdjian, “Les ‘cultes orientaux,’” 672.

¹⁶⁴ Manfred Clauss listed three soldiers and six slaves/freedmen from the province of Dalmatia, in idem, *Cultores Mithrae*, 151-152; Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan, “Posebnosti tipologije,” 239; Roger Beck, “Four Men, Two Sticks,” 88.

¹⁶⁵ Jagoda Mardešić, “Solin-Salona,” *Arheološki pregled* 28 (1987): 95-97.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 97.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 97.

same sancturay (?) is not surprising, as another example of pairing of these two deities on the territory of the province of Dalmatia exists. In Močići (near Cavtat, ancient Epidaurus) a tauroctony scene was carved into the natural cave rock opposite of which, near the entrance to the cave, a depiction of Silvan stands, likewise carved into the natural rock (CIMRM 1882-1883).¹⁶⁸ There is nothing extraordinary in the co-existence of Mithras and various deities inside a single mithraeum and examples are numerous. In the words of Luther H. Martin, such cases represent a “conscious and intentional re-representation” of a certain deity/classical myth in a Mithraic context, and are a result of a “cognitively mature, flexible and innovative mind.”¹⁶⁹ The pairing of Silvanus and Mithras could be regarded as another example of a local method of creating their distinctive identity. Silvanus is well attested in Salona in both figural representations, as well as in epigraphy,¹⁷⁰ and the mere fact that both examples of their pairing were discovered on the territory of the *ager Salonitanus* (Cavtat marked its eastern limit) could speak in favor of such an argument.

The dating of Salonitan Mithraic inscriptions are far from clear, but generally it is thought that dedication formulae bearing the epithet *Invictus* are approximately dated to the second half of the second century/first half of the third century AD (2: *Soli Deo*; 4: *Deo Invic(to)*; 6: *D(eo) Inv(icto) M(ithrae)*), while those including the solar aspect of Mithras's name are from the second half of the third century AD (1: *Soli Deo*; 5: *D(eo) I(invicto) S(oli) M(ithrae)*), which would roughly correspond to the two phases of the spread of the cult.¹⁷¹

The apparent discrepancy between the large number of Mithraic reliefs and the scarcity of epigraphic evidence of the cult of Mithras could be evidence of the conscious

¹⁶⁸ Arthur J. Evans, *Antiquarian Researches in Illyricum*, VOL. XLVIII, (Westminster: Nichols and Sons, 1883), 20; Duje Rendić-Miočević, “Da li je spelaeum u Močićima služio samo mitrijačkom kultu?” [Did spelaeum in Močići serve only for Mithras' cult?] *GZM* 8 (1953): 271-276; Ante Rendić-Miočević, “Uz dva Silvanova svetišta u okolici Salone,” [On the two Silvanus' sanctuaries in the surroundings of Salona] *Arheološki radovi i rasprave* 8-9 (1982): 121-140; Duje Rendić-Miočević, “Da li je spelaeum u Močićima kraj Cavtata (Epidaur) služio samo Mitrinu kultu?” [Did spelaeum in Močići near Cavtat (Epidaurus) serve only for Mithras' cult?] in idem, *Iliri i antički svijet* (Split: Književni krug, 1989), 531-537.

¹⁶⁹ Luther H. Martin, “The Amor and Psyche Relief,” 282, 286.

¹⁷⁰ Silvia Bekavac, “Silvan u Saloni” [Silvanus in Salona] *VAHD* 104 (2011): 151-166.

choice made by Mithraic communities in favor of reliefs rather than inscriptions, which was another mean of creating a distinctive local identity.

3.3 Reliefs

The aim of this subchapter is to provide an overview of Mithraic reliefs from Salona. Reliefs will be categorized according to their typology and function. One can distinguish between two types of Salonitan reliefs: rectangular and circular. Rectangular reliefs can be further divided into simple and complex types. According to their function, reliefs will be organized into three groups: cult icons, secondary reliefs (personal votives), and the so-called “house-reliefs.” Some of them are in such a fragmentary state of preservation that their previous size and function can only be guessed (with more or less certainty).

Cult reliefs were treated *in extenso* in previous chapter, but a few words should be said concerning the other groups. It should be noted that the average size of a cult relief would be approximately 100 x 100 cm, with the largest examples measuring more than 100 x 145 cm (examples from the Rhine-Danube area measure well over 5 m²!).¹⁷¹ Richard Gordon described the secondary reliefs/personal votives as:

generally smaller and therefore cheaper than cult-reliefs in the narrow sense and were designed to be fixed to the side-walls of temples and shrines, or otherwise permanently mounted, as records of vows paid. They are not cult-reliefs yet differ from them only in terms of function and, usually, of size; in their iconography they are indistinguishable. In this sense, we may think of them as secondary representations, which derive their connotative value from the cult-relief proper.¹⁷²

Their measurements would then be approximately between 80 x 80 cm and they would not be smaller than the “house-reliefs.” According to Gordon, the dimensions of the “house-reliefs” are smaller than 0.10 m² (approximately 30 x 32 cm), and were used in

¹⁷¹ Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan, “Posebnosti tipologije,” 247-248.

¹⁷² Richard Gordon, “Small and Miniature Reproductions of the Mithraic Icon: Reliefs, Pottery, Ornaments and Gems,” in *Roman Mithraism: the Evidence of Small Finds*, Marleen Martens and Guy de Boe ed. (Brussels: Museum Het Toreke, 2004), 260-261. It should be noted that determining the function of the relief according to size is far from certain. However, given the nature of the evidence for the Salonitan reliefs, whose original placements are completely unknown, it is only by their approximate size that conclusions can be drawn.

“domestic worship of Mithras independent of temple and community.”¹⁷⁴ Most of “house-reliefs” come from the lower Danube area, and are of “rather mediocre quality, standard products of the local workshops, and some are downright poor.”¹⁷⁵

After a brief description a possible chronology will be established based both on typology and style. It will be argued that Salonitan reliefs followed approximately the two main phases of the spread of the cult in Dalmatia. Special attention will be devoted to the so-called Salonitan tondo (CIMRM 1861). Its peculiar iconography has long been recognized and various interpretations offered, but none of them has proved satisfactory. Due to its distinctiveness a thorough analysis will be presented, followed by a fresh interpretation.

Two nearby localities are included in this survey, as their location in *ager Salonitanus* means that they were in the Salonitan sphere of influence. These localities are Bijaći (church of St. Marta in Kaštel Stari, approximately 10 km from Salona) and Crikvine in Rupotina (a settlement in the immediate vicinity, north of Salona) with which Salona had a direct road connection.¹⁷⁶

3.3.1 Cult reliefs

A. Rectangular cult reliefs

A.1 Simple type

a) A relief fragment of large dimensions (65 x 77 x 25 cm), made of local white limestone, was found in 1904 outside the perimeter walls of Salona, west of the ramparts and north of the Salonitan necropolis *in horto Metrodori* (CIMRM 1860) (Figure 3.2).¹⁷⁷ Of the tauroctony scene only Mithras’ right leg stretched backwards over the bull’s rump and bull’s

¹⁷³ Ibid, 260.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 260.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 266.

¹⁷⁶ Nikolina Uroda, “Prilog poznavanja lokaliteta Crikvine u Rupotini” [A contribution to identifying the locality of Crikvine in Rupotina], *Tusculum* 1 (2008): 73.

¹⁷⁷ Frane Bulić, “Quattro bassorilievi,” 51; Branimir Gabričević, “Mitrin kult,” 34; idem, “Iconographie de Mithra,” 37; Ljubica Zotović, *Mitraizam*, 71; Željko Miletić, “Mitraizam,” 164; Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan, “Arheološke potvrde,” 214; idem, “Posebnosti tipologije,” 89-90; Petar Selem and Inga Vilogorac-Brčić, *ROMIS*, 163-164. This fragment is preserved in the Archaeological Museum of Split, catalogue entry D-307.

right hind leg are preserved. Mithras' figure is preserved up to the waist, dressed in the typical long trousers and tunic.¹⁷⁸ An ornamental zigzag motif (snake?) runs along the bottom, while the scorpion pinches the bull's testicles.

Although its quality is somewhat mediocre, the high relief was executed according to the classical sense of proportions, while naturalistic tendencies are visible in the rendering of draperies (Mithras' tunic follows the anatomy of the body smoothly). According to its reconstructed dimensions (150-180 cm) the relief must have functioned as cult icon, and it ranks among the largest ones.¹⁷⁹ Bulić suggested that the mithraeum it came from must have been situated somewhere near the place of its discovery, although no traces of it were ever found.¹⁸⁰



Figure 3.2 Fragment of a cult icon (Photo by N. Silnović, 2013).

¹⁷⁸ Maarten J. Vermaseren described Mithras' tunic as red colored, in idem, *CIMRM*, Vol. 2, 256. If traces of polichromy were once visible, they have unfortunately completely vanished by the time I visited the museum.

¹⁷⁹ Branimir Gabričević, "Mitrin kult," 34; Željko Miletić, "Mitraizam," 164; Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan, "Arheološke potvrde," 214; idem, "Posebnosti tipologije," 90; Richard Gordon classified all the tauroctony reliefs listed in *CIMRM* according to their size. Reliefs larger than 150 cm are the largest ones and according to Gordon, are common in Germania Superior, idem, "Small and Miniature Reproductions," 261.

¹⁸⁰ Frane Bulić, "Quattro bassorilievi," 51.

b) A second cult icon is also preserved in fragmentary state (7.5 x 7 x 3 cm), showing the bust of Sol with a radiating crown executed in white marble (CIMRM 1866) (Figure 3.3).¹⁸¹ The literature reports that the fragment was discovered in 1895, but no circumstances of its discovery are described.¹⁸² Judging by the reconstructed dimensions of Mithras' figur, the relief must have measured over 150 cm, which would classify it among the largest of its type.¹⁸³ Since the fragment is rather damaged not much can be deduced about its style, but in general it can be said that it shows the typical signs of provincial mediocre artistic execution, with schematically rendered anatomical features, emphasized eyes, and stern frontality.



Figure 3.3 Fragment showing the radiating bust of Sol (Photo by N. Silnović, 2013).

c) Another fragment of tauroctony (16 x 20 cm), made of local limestone, shows Mithras' left hand grasping the bull's nostrils (CIMRM 1868) (Figure 3.4).¹⁸⁴ The circumstances of its

¹⁸¹ Branimir Gabričević, "Mitrin kult," 29; idem, "Iconographie de Mithra," 38; Ljubica Zotović, *Mitraizam*, 72; Željko Miletić, "Mitraizam," 167; Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan, "Arheološke potvrde," 209-210; idem, "Posebnosti tipologije," 88; Petar Selem and Inga Vilogorac-Brčić, *ROMIS*, 166; fragment is preserved in the Archaeological Museum of Split, under the catalogue entry D-192.

¹⁸² Branimir Gabričević, "Iconographie de Mithra," 38.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 38; Željko Miletić, "Mitraizam," 167; Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan, "Arheološke potvrde," 210; idem, "Posebnosti tipologije," 88.

¹⁸⁴ Branimir Gabričević, "Mitrin kult," 34; idem, "Iconographie de Mithra," 38; Ljubica Zotović, *Mitraizam*, 72; Željko Miletić, "Mitraizam," 167-168; Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan, "Arheološke potvrde," 208-209; idem, "Posebnosti tipologije," 87; Petar Selem and Inga Vilogorac-Brčić, *ROMIS*, 165; fragment is preserved in the Archaeological Museum of Split.

discovery are unknown, but it is assumed that the fragment is of Salonitan provenance.¹⁸⁵ The overall dimensions must have been slightly over one meter.¹⁸⁶

The high artistic quality of this fragment made Branimir Gabričević call it “one of the most beautiful examples of ancient art in Dalmatia.”¹⁸⁷ The high relief is rendered with a great sense of plasticity and proportion, following the canons of Classical art, especially visible in the bull’s eye and the shaping of Mithras’ fingers, which are almost full sculpture.¹⁸⁸



Figure 3.4 Fragment of bull’s head and Mithras’ hand (photo by N. Silnović, 2013).

d) The Salonitan provenance is assumed for another fragment of tauroctony executed in white marble (30 x 23 x 17 cm), showing a bust of Luna with a crescent and the head of a torchbearer (Cautes or Cautopates) (CIMRM 1869) (Figure 3.5).¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁵ Branimir Gabričević, “Mitrin kult,” 30.

¹⁸⁶ Branimir Gabričević, *Studije i članci*, 180-181.

¹⁸⁷ Branimir Gabričević, “Iconographie de Mithra,” 38.

¹⁸⁸ Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan, “Some Examples of Local Production of Mithraic Reliefs from Roman Dalmatia,” in *Religija i mit kao poticaj rimskoj provincijalnoj plastici: Akti VIII. međunarodnog kolokvija o problematici rimskog provincijalnog stvaralaštva*, ed. Mirjana Sanader and Ante Rendić-Miočević (Zagreb: Golden marketing-Tehnička knjiga, 2005), 253.

¹⁸⁹ Branimir Gabričević, “Mitrin kult,” 30-31; idem, “Iconographie de Mithra,” 38; Ljubica Zotović, *Mitraizam*, 72; Željko Miletić, “Mitraizam,” 168; Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan, “Arheološke potvrde,” 208; idem, “Posebnosti tipologije,” 87; Petar Selem and Inga Vilogorac-Brčić, *ROMIS*, 166; this fragment is preserved in the Archaeological Museum of Split.

Luna is depicted wearing the chiton with lush strands of hair decorated with the double hair-band. Branimir Gabričević suggested the function of cult icon based on the reconstructed dimensions of approximately one meter.¹⁹⁰ It has been suggested that the torchbearer is shown without his typical Phrygian cap, but if one looks carefully, it is apparent that some sort of headdress is indicated.¹⁹¹ The fragment stands out due to its remarkable quality and beauty of execution.¹⁹² The bust of Luna is rendered in high relief with drapes of chiton falling softly and naturally over her body.



3.5 Fragment of tauroctony showing the bust of Luna (Photo by N. Silnović, 2013).

¹⁹⁰ Branimir Gabričević, "Mitrin kult," 32-33.

¹⁹¹ Branimir Gabričević, "Mitrin kult," 31. Other authors have followed the same description (see footnote 12), but recently Petar Selem and Inga Vilogorac-Brčić have described its headdress as a "shallow cylindrical cap," in idem, *ROMIS*, 166.

¹⁹² Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan, "Some Examples," 253.

e) A relief showing tauroctony was found built in the wall of the eastern apse of the so-called “Large Salonitan Thermae” in *Urbs orientalis* (46 x 72 cm).¹⁹³ Since the relief has been and is only known from a small photograph, the description depends on publication by Željko Miletić.¹⁹⁴ According to Miletić, the relief was heavily damaged. Mithras’ head and shoulders and the sides of the relief are missing, and it is therefore hard to recognize torchbearers. Many details are missing, too. Other than its bad state of preservation, the relief shows all the standard elements of the composition: Mithras is depicted in the standard pose in semi-profile, wearing an “Oriental suit,” grabbing the bull by its horn. The dog, snake, and scorpion are in their usual positions. Nenad Cambi has suggested a possible smaller mithraeum inside the thermae complex which ceased to exist after the building was taken over by the Salonitan bishop, sometimes in the fifth century AD.¹⁹⁵

f) A relief showing tauroctony (46 x 73 x 14 cm), made in local limestone, was found in 1908 in a secondary position (used as the cover of a grave) during the archaeological excavations when a church and parts of another ancient building were discovered (CIMRM 1871) (Figure 3.6).¹⁹⁶ The relief is of rather mediocre workmanship, with a negligent sense of proportions (note the discrepancy between the size of Sol and Luna, the torchbearers, and Mithras and the bull).

Besides Mithras and the bull in their usual position, due to the badly damaged state of the relief it is possible to recognize the dog’s head, the raven perched at Mithras’ cloak, and

¹⁹³ Nenad Cambi, *Antička Salona* [Ancient Salona] (Split: Književni krug, 1991), 472.

¹⁹⁴ By the time I visited the Archaeological Museum of Split in February, 2013, I had been informed that the relief was found again, but seeing and photographing it was not allowed as the relief was, and still is, in the process of publication. Therefore I am relying on the description made by Željko Miletić, “Mitrazam,” 168-169.

¹⁹⁵ Nenad Cambi, *Antička Salona*, 471-472.

¹⁹⁶ Frane Bulić, “Quattro bassorilievi,” 56-57; Branimir Gabričević, “Mitrin kult,” 26; idem, “Iconographie de Mithra,” 37; Ljubica Zotović, *Mitrazam*, 70-71; Branka Migotti, “Antičko-srednjovjekovni sakralni kontinuitet na području Dalmacije,” [Ancient-medieval sacral continuity on the territory of Dalmatia] *Opuscula Archaeologica* 16 (1992): 225-249; Željko Miletić, “Mitrazam,” 165; Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan, “Arheološke potvrde,” 207-208; idem, “Posebnosti tipologije,” 94-96; Nikolina Uroda, “Prilog poznavanju,” 69-79; idem, “Ranosrednjovjekovni grobovi s lokaliteta Crikvine (sv. Ilija) u naselju Rupotina u Solinu” [Early medieval graves from the locality Crikvine (St. Elijah) in Rupotina near Solin] *Starohrvatska prosvjeta* 37 (2010): 61-75; Petar Selem and Inga Vilogorac-Brčić, *ROMIS*, 162-163; this relief is on display at the Archaeological Museum of Split, catalogue entry D-412.

the left torchbearer holding an unidentified object in his raised right hand, while the left one has been completely destroyed. Since it cannot be said with certainty whether he held an inverted torch in the missing hand, and some additional attribute in his right one, one can only presume that it is a Cautopates indeed, judging by analogy with the remaining examples from Salona.



Figure 3.6 Relief showing tauroctony from Crikvine (Photo by N. Silnović, 2013).

Frane Bulić suggested that the preserved apse of the earlier ancient building belonged to the mithraeum where this relief was once placed.¹⁹⁷ Nikolina Uroda seconds him, stating that the mithraeum was probably made by converting one of the rooms of the *villa rustica*, perhaps already in the second century AD or during the reign of Emperor Diocletian when the cult was at its apex.¹⁹⁸ Although its dimensions are somewhat smaller than the average dimensions of a cult icon in general, given the nature of the evidence of the supposed mithraeum in a villa rustica (which would certainly be of modest dimensions itself) it is possible to suggest the cultic function of this relief.

¹⁹⁷ Frane Bulić, "Quattro bassorilievi," 53.

A.2 Complex type

a) In 1906 a fragment in a white local limestone (14.5 x 15 x 3 cm) showing Mithras' birth from rock was found inside the perimeter city walls (CIMRM 1865) (Figure 3.7).¹⁹⁹ Mithras is shown naked, wearing only a Phrygian cap, emerging from a rock. In his raised right hand he holds a torch, while the left one is partially damaged, but according to the analogous examples, he held a knife. Next to the rock a lion's head is depicted.

The scene of Mithras' birth was evidently a part of the subsidiary scenes framing the central tauroctony, and would therefore belong to the complex type of relief.²⁰⁰ Taking into consideration that there were multiple scenes framing the central tauroctony on both sides, the overall dimensions of this relief must have been considerable, and would therefore fit the role of the cult icon.

Drawing a parallel with examples from Dacia, Moesia, and Tracia, whose influence reached Dalmatia during the third century AD, Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan concluded that this particular scene was not shown inside a framed register, as was the custom on examples from the Danube region or Noricum, but was inserted freely into the upper right portion of the tauroctony.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ Nikolina Uroda, "Prilog poznavanju," 73-74.

¹⁹⁹ Branimir Gabričević, "Mitrin kult," 29; idem, "Iconographie de Mithra," 38; idem, *Studije i članci*, 175-177; Ljubica Zotović, *Mitraizam*, 71; Željko Miletić, "Mitraizam," 167; Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan, "Arheološke potvrde," 210; idem, "Posebnosti tipologije," 88; Petar Selem and Inga Vilogorac-Brčić, *ROMIS*, 167-168; the relief is preserved in the Archaeological Museum of Split, catalogue entry D-315.

²⁰⁰ There are only two examples of the complex type of reliefs in the province of Dalmatia. Besides the Salonitan one, the second example is the front side of the double-sided relief from Konjic, dated variously to the first decades of the fourth century AD, or to the middle or second half of the fourth century AD, in Branimir Gabričević, *Studije i članci*, 188; Željko Miletić, "The Nymphus Grade and the Reverse of the Mithraic Cult Icon from Konjic," *Ptuj v rimskem cesarstvu, mitraizem in njegova doba. Pokrajinski muzej Ptuj, Mednarodno znanstveno srečanje 11.-15. Oktober 1999 [Ptuj in the Roman Empire, Mithraism and its era. Pokrajinski muzej Ptuj, International scientific symposium 11.-15. October 1999]*, *Archaeologia Poetovionensis* 2 (2001): 285-286; Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan, "Prilog čitanju sadržaja i kompozicije donjih polja konjičke tauroktonije" [A contribution to reading the content and composition of the lower registers of the Konjic tauroctony] *Prilozi Instituta za arheologiju u Zagrebu* 19 (2002): 131-140.

²⁰¹ Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan, "Posebnosti tipologije," 175.



Figure 3.7 Fragment showing Mithras' birth from a rock (Photo by N. Silnović, 2013).

Since the fragment is in such a bad state of preservation it seems impossible to determine the exact position of the scene. Above Mithras's head there is a fragment of a circular mass and some scene must have stood above. The only conclusion that can be drawn with some certainty is that the relief belonged to the second phase of the cult's spread in Dalmatia. Whether the inspiration for this particular relief came from the northern or eastern provinces suggested by Lipovac-Vrkljan, the presence of their typological and iconographic solutions is evident through the third century AD and this should be the approximate date for this fragment.²⁰²

B. Circular cult relief

a) A fragment of a circular relief showing the signs of the zodiac (30 x 13 x 7 cm) was found in the Split shipyard “Vicko Krstulović,” only a few kilometres away from the Salonitan city walls (CIMRM 1870) (Figure 3.8).²⁰³



Figure 3.8 A fragment of a circular relief with zodiac signs (Photo by N. Silnović, 2013).

The fragment is executed in white marble, and out of twelve zodiac signs only those of the Twins and Bull are preserved, running in a counter-clockwise direction. Zodiac signs are inserted inside the rectangular fields marked by border profilations. Judging by its reconstructed dimensions, the whole relief must have measured approximately one meter, which would point to a cult function.²⁰⁴ Some authors suggest that zodiac signs framed the

²⁰² Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan also dated the fragment to the third century AD, in idem, “Posebnosti tipologije,” 175.

²⁰³ Branimir Gabričević, “Mitrin kult,” 31; idem, “Iconographie de Mithra,” 39; Ljubica Zotović, *Mitraizam*, 72; Željko Miletić, “Mitraizam,” 168; Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan, “Arheološke potvrde,” 215-216; idem, “Posebnosti tipologije,” 92; Petar Selem and Inga Vilogorac-Brčić, *ROMIS*, 161; this fragment is preserved in the Archaeological Museum of Split, catalogue entry E-891.

²⁰⁴ Branimir Gabričević, “Iconographie de Mithra,” 39.

usual tauroctony scene,²⁰⁵ while it is also possible to suggest the scene of Mithras' birth analogous to examples from Housesteads (CIMRM 860) and Trier (CIMRM 985), which would make the relief more suitable for the role of secondary/votive relief rather than cult relief. Due to its sheer size the relief is classified as a cult icon. Judging by examples from Banjevac²⁰⁶ and another Salonitan circular relief framing the scene of tauroctony, a regional preference of encircling the tauroctony could be argued for, pointing additionally to its use as cult icon.

3.3.2 Secondary/personal votive reliefs

A. Rectangular votive reliefs



Figure 3.9 Fragment showing the foremost part of the bull, the dog, and the serpent (Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan, “Posebnosti tipologije i ikonografije mitrijskih reljefa rimske Dalmacije” [Typological and iconographical particularities of the Mithraic reliefs in the Roman province of Dalmatia], PhD dissertation (Zagreb: Filozofski fakultet, 2001), T. XX, Sl. 1).

²⁰⁵ Branimir Gabričević was of the opinion that the zodiac sign framed some scene related to Mithras, but did not specify the exact scene, in idem, “Mitrin kult,” 31; Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan followed Gabričević’s opinion at first, in idem, “Arheološke potvrde,” 216, but later suggested tauroctony, in idem, “Posebnosti tipologije,” 92; Petar Selem and Inga Vilogorac-Brčić are of the same opinion, in idem, *ROMIS*, 161.

a) A fragment of a relief in marble²⁰⁷ of small dimensions (26 x 19 x 9 cm) with the foremost part of the bull, the dog, and a part of the serpent is preserved (CIMRM 1862) (Figure 3.9).²⁰⁸

On the wide bottom profile a part of the inscription is preserved, read as OR INP[endio suo] (CIMRM 1862-1863), which means that the relief was erected at someone's own expense. Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan has suggested that the relief had the function of a cult icon based on its inscription. It is true, for example, that on the Mithraic cult relief from Pannonia Superior (CIMRM 1641-1642) an inscription reads ...*fecit impendio suo*, and could thus serve in favor of Lipovac-Vrkljan's argument. However, the supposed dimensions of this relief (the overall dimensions would not go beyond 70 x 70 cm) seems to rather point to a secondary, votive, function.

b) An interesting fragment of a tauroctony made in local limestone (27 x 23 x 6 cm) depicts a partial figure of Cauter, with a bust of Luna with a crescent inserted between Cauter's head and the tip of his torch (CIMRM 1867) (Figure 3.10).²⁰⁹ The bull's head is visible with Mithras' left hand holding the animal by its nostrils, and his right arm stabbing it with a knife. Branimir Gabričević argues that the bust of Luna was inserted afterwards, and considers the fragment altogether intriguing because of the impression it is half-finished, apparent in the contrast between the finely modeled Cauter's head and the rest of the crudely surfaced fragment.²¹⁰

²⁰⁶ The same segmented zodiac frame is found on the relief from Banjevci, where the zodiac frame is inserted inside the rectangular cult icon framing the tauroctony, Julijan Medini, "Mitraički reljef," 39-83.

²⁰⁷ Branimir Gabričević and Maarten J. Vermaseren described the relief as made of local limestone, while other authors report it is made of marble. Since the relief was not available for study during my visit to the museum, I will accept the opinion of the majority of authors.

²⁰⁸ Frane Bulić, "Due frammenti di bassorilievo di Mitra nel Museo di Spalato," *BASD* 35 (1912): 57-58; Branimir Gabričević, "Mitrin kult," 27; idem, "Iconographie de Mithra," 37; Ljubica Zotović, *Mitraizam*, 71; Željko Miletić, "Mitraizam," 166; Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan, "Arheološke potvrde," 211; idem, "Posebnosti tipologije," 89; Petar Selem and Inga Vilogorac-Brčić, *ROMIS*, 168-169; the relief is preserved in the Archaeological Museum of Split, catalogue entry D-202.

²⁰⁹ Branimir Gabričević, "Mitrin kult," 30; idem, "Iconographie de Mithra," 38; Ljubica Zotović, *Mitraizam*, 72; Željko Miletić, "Mitraizam," 167; Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan, "Arheološke potvrde," 209; idem, "Posebnosti tipologije," 87-88; Petar Selem and Inga Vilogorac-Brčić, *ROMIS*, 164; the relief is preserved in the Archaeological Museum of Split, catalogue entry D-308.

²¹⁰ Branimir Gabričević, "Iconographie de Mithra," 38.



Figure 3.10 Fragment showing tauroctony (Photo by N. Silnović, 2013).

Although half-finished, the relief shows a strong sense of detail (simple ornamentation of the torch and drapes of Cautes' dress) and proportions. The rich drapes of the Cautes' dress have lost a naturalistic quality and do not follow the anatomy of the body, but nevertheless the fragment reveals the hand of an artisan who is capable of producing a figure of a solid quality (despite the awkwardly inserted bust of Luna). The fragment is only half-finished and the final impression cannot be judged.

c) A marble²¹¹ fragment (30 x 20 x 12 cm) showing the headless Cautopates with crossed legs and a lowered torch, with part of Mithras' leg and bull's tail preserved (CIMRM 1864) (Figure 3.11).²¹² Judging by the small fragment, the relief was a good quality.

²¹¹ Branimir Gabričević and Maarten J. Vermaseren described it as made of local limestone, while in later literature it is described as made of marble. My personal impression is that the relief is made of marble.

²¹² Frane Bulić, "Due frammenti," 58; Branimir Gabričević, "Mitrin kult," 27; idem, "Iconographie de Mithra," 37; Ljubica Zotović, *Mitraizam*, 71; Željko Miletić, "Mitraizam," 166; Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan, "Arheološke potvrde," 210-211; idem, "Posebnosti tipologije," 89; Petar Selem and Inga Vilogorac-Brčić, *ROMIS*, 165; the relief is preserved in the Archaeological Museum of Split, catalogue entry D-270.



3.11 Fragment showing the Cautopates (Photo by N. Silnović, 2013).

d) Two fragments made in local limestone and belonging to the single relief showing tauroctony were found in Bijaći, in the proximity of the church of St. Marta (CIMRM 1909) (Figure 3.12).²¹³



Figure 3.12 Fragments of a single relief showing tauroctony (Photo: Courtesy of Archaeological Museum of Split).

²¹³ Branimir Gabričević, "Mitrin kult," 29-30; idem, "Iconographie de Mithra," 38; Ljubica Zotović, *Mitraizam*, 71; Željko Miletić, "Mitraizam," 161; Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan, "Arheološke potvrde," 207-208; idem, "Posebnosti tipologije," 84-85; fragments are preserved in the Archaeological Museum of Split, catalogue entry D-302.

The left fragment (23 x 31 x 6 cm) depicts the bull's hind legs, Mithras' extended right leg, a scorpion, and a lower part of the torchbearer standing with spread legs. The right fragment (23 x 30 x 6 cm) shows the right torchbearer standing in the same position as the left one, and the foremost part of the bull with a dog and a snake. Judging by the quality of the preserved fragments, the relief was of mediocre if not poor quality. The modest sizes point to overall dimensions which would belong to the category of secondary/votive reliefs. The figures are only superficially treated, with no sense of proportion.

3.3.3 “House-reliefs”

a) A marble relief ²¹⁴ of modest dimensions (26 x 25.5 x 7 cm) was found in 1892 built into the wall of a private house in Vranjic near Solin (CIMRM 1859) (Figure 3.13).²¹⁵ Almost square in shape, the relief shows the standard scene of tauroctony in a mediocre quality of handicraft, and it is extensively damaged as a result of secondary usage (Mithras’ right arm is missing, and sides of the relief are completely distorted).



Figure 3.13 A votive relief showing tauroctony (Photo by N. Silnović, 2013).

²¹⁴ Maarten J. Vermaseren wrote that relief was made of sandstone, in idem, *CIMRM*, Vol. 2, 256; Richard Gordon followed his description, and concluded that it is made in a different stone from other reliefs from Salona, in idem, “Small and Miniature Reproductions,” 266 (footnote 54).

²¹⁵ Franz Cumont, *Textes et monuments*, Vol. 2, 502; Carl Patsch, “Arheološko-epigrafska istraživanja” [Archaeological-epigraphic research] *GZM* 11 (1899): 69-123; idem, “Archäologisch-epigraphische Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Römischen Provinz Dalmatien IV,” *WMBH* 7 (1900): 160-162; Frane Bulić, “Quattro bassorilievi,” 50-51; Branimir Gabričević, “Mitrin kult,” 26; idem, “Iconographie de Mithra,” 37; Leroy A. Campbell, *Mithraic Iconography*, 10; Ljubica Zotović, *Mitraizam*, 77 (incorrectly located in Čitluk); Željko Miletić, “Mitraizam,” 163-164; Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan, “Arheološke potvrde,” 214-215; idem,

Mithras is shown killing the bull inside the cave which is indicated by the arch surmounting the central act. The raven is perched on the cave's edge. The bull's tail ends in corn-ears. The dog, the serpent, and the scorpion are in their standard places. Cautes and Cautopates flank the Mithras and the bull, standing with their legs crossed and holding their torches. In the left upper corner a bust of Sol in a crown with seven rays is depicted,²¹⁶ while a bust of Luna in a crescent is in the right corner. Although a typical "product of provincial production,"²¹⁷ with somewhat awkwardly rendered details, the relief leaves the impression of a harmonious totality, with special effort put into the depiction of Mithras' cloak in the form of three wide folds.²¹⁸

b) A miniature Mithraic relief is exhibited in the Archaeological Museum of Split (Figure 3.14), next to the Salonitan tondo (CIMRM 1861), but despite its visibility to the wider public it has remained unpublished.²¹⁹ Although described in the catalogue entry as of uncertain provenance, it seems logical to suppose that it must have been found either in Salona or close by, since it is preserved in the Archaeological Museum of Split where the remaining Salonitan Mithraic reliefs are kept.

"Posebnosti tipologije," 90; Petar Selem and Inga Vilogorac-Brčić, *ROMIS*, 161-162, the relief is preserved in the Archaeological Museum of Split, catalogue entry D-164.

²¹⁶ Maarten J. Vermaseren described the Sol as holding a whip in his left hand, but that detail is no longer visible, in idem, *CIMRM*, Vol. 2, 256.

²¹⁷ Carl Patsch, "Arheološko-epigrafska," 117.

²¹⁸ Petar Selem and Inga Vilogorac-Brčić, *ROMIS*, 162.

²¹⁹ I would like to express my gratitude to Zrinka Buljević, museum advisor, for granting me permission to publish this relief, and for providing me with the necessary information and with the photograph of the relief. The relief is recorded under the catalogue entry D-615.



Figure 3.14 A miniature relief showing tauroctony (Photo: Courtesy of Archaeological Museum of Split).

The relief was executed in marble and it measures only 8.3 x 7.5 cm. This “pocket-sized” relief clearly served the personal needs of piety and devotion of a certain individual, who could therefore, due to its convenient size, carry it around and use it when necessary.²²⁰ The mediocre quality of execution is standard for this type of relief.²²¹ Under the semicircular upper frame symbolizing the cave, a standard scene of tauroctony is represented. Mithras is shown stabbing the bull, while turning his head over the shoulder towards the raven perched on his fluttering cloak. Torchbearers flank Mithras and the bull, with Cautopates standing in semi-profile on the left side holding an inverted torch, while his counterpart, Cautes, is badly damaged, but can be recognized. Of the three animals usually found at the bottom of the composition only the dog can be identified. In the upper corners, under the arch of the cave, the busts of Sol and Luna are placed, directing their gazes to the left and right, respectively.

²²⁰ Although of miniature dimensions, the relief is made of marble meaning that it was too heavy to be literally carried around in one’s pocket, but it could have served as a portable miniature icon.

²²¹ See footnote 174.

Although it is apparent that the mutual proportions of the figures depicted were neglected, one notes that Mithras' head was especially overemphasized.

Despite the clumsiness and summary treatment, this miniature relief encapsulates all the necessary elements of the tauroctony. As Richard Gordon rightly pointed out, the existence of such miniature Mithraic reliefs is contrary to the usually perceived nature of the relationship between the adherents and Mithras, which was established exclusively inside the boundaries of the mithraeum.²²² By breaking those boundaries, individuals were able to develop their own personal religious reflections and experiences and were able to express their religious identity.²²³ The mithraeum and the icon it housed made two inseparable parts of a single entity. The cosmogonic and astrological/astronomical symbolism of the tauroctony was intimately connected with the mithraeum proper, which in the eyes of the cult's adherents represented the universe.²²⁴ Therefore, to possess a "pocket-sized" reproduction of the cult icon meant to carry the universe in one's own pocket.

According to Richard Gordon, "around 15% of all complete or nearly complete surviving reliefs may have been intended for private contexts," and the majority of them come from the lower Danube area.²²⁵ It is therefore possible to assume that this Salonitan miniature relief dates to the third century AD when influences from this region appeared in Dalmatia.

c) A separate chapter is devoted to the third "house-relief" (22.5 x 3 cm) (CIMRM 1861) (Figure 4.1), as its unique circular form and unusual iconography deserve detailed and fresh interpretation.

²²² Richard, Gordon, "Small and Miniature Reproductions," 267, 278.

²²³ The importance of the individual within the wider framework of various "cults" and "religions" in the ancient Mediterranean was recognized by an international group of scholars working on the project "Lived Ancient Religion: Questioning 'Cults' and 'Polis religion,'" (2012-2017) conducted at the Max Weber Centre of the University of Erfurt, more info available on <https://www.uni-erfurt.de/en/max-weber-center/projects/cooperation-projects/lived-ancient-religion-questioning-cults-and-polis-religion-2012-2017/> (Accessed May, 2014).

²²⁴ Richard Gordon, "The Sacred Geography of a Mithraeum; the Example of Sette Sfere," *JMS* 1, no. 2 (1976): 119-165; also in Roger Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 16-17, 102-152.

3.3.4 Conclusions

Based on the previous overview it possible to establish several conclusions about Mithraic art in Salona. First of all, one can distinguish between three basic types of reliefs according to their different function: cult icons (eight examples), secondary/personal votive reliefs (four examples), and “house-reliefs” (three examples). Most of them have the usual rectangular form, while the two examples have circular forms (CIMRM 1870, CIMRM 1861). The cult icons are predominantly of a simple type (CIMRM 1860, CIMRM 1866, CIMRM 1868, CIMRM 1869, CIMRM 1871, relief from *thermae*), although one was presumably of the complex type (CIMRM 1865) and one was circular (CIMRM 1870). All four examples of secondary/personal votive reliefs are of the simple rectangular type (CIMRM 1862, CIMRM 1864, CIMRM 1867, CIMRM 1909). Two of the “house-reliefs” are simple rectangular (almost square) reliefs (CIMRM 1859, miniature relief from Archaeological Museum), while the remaining one is circular (CIMRM 1861).

Second, the apparent contrast in the style of execution among the Salonitan reliefs allows one to establish two principal stylistic tendencies.²²⁶ The first can be described as a Classical tendency, where the Classical canons of proportion, plasticity, and realistically rendered anatomy are applied. Three reliefs show features of Classical expression (CIMRM 1860, CIMRM 1868, CIMRM 1869). The second stylistic tendency can be described as provincial in the full sense of a word, where mediocre quality is expressed in a schematic, sometimes awkward, treatment of figures and their proportions. They can be considered standard products of local workshops.

Based on their stylistic preferences, a further conclusion about their approximate chronology can be deduced. Since classicizing features are characteristic for the first phase of

²²⁵ Richard, Gordon, “Small and Miniature Reproductions,” 266.

²²⁶ One should be reminded that Salonitan Mithraic reliefs belong to the sphere of provincial art, and therefore to evaluate the style a different set of parameters is required. Since most of provincial artistic production show no

the spreading of the cult in the province of Dalmatia, with the earliest monument of this type dated to the middle/second half of the second century AD (CIMRM 1879), it can be concluded that three Salonitan reliefs showing Classical tendencies belong to this period. Some authors have suggested that reliefs belonging to this phase were under the direct or indirect influence of Italic workshops, primarily Aquileia.²²⁷

Most Salonitan reliefs, however, belong to the second phase of the cult's spreading. The second phase is marked by the more prominent influence of the Danubian region with the important intermediary role played by Petovio and Siscia (present-day Sisak, Croatia), starting in the third century AD.²²⁸ Although it is impossible to distinguish exact "Danubian features" on reliefs of such mediocre and provincial quality (besides Danubian influence exercised in the form of small and miniature "house-reliefs," and in the example of the complex type of cult icon), the fact itself that local workshops are turning to a different set of stylistic and typological features means their abandonment of the initial Italic influences. It could be possible that after the first phase of the spread of the cult local workshops and Mithraic communities needed some time to adapt and later develop their own expression of the cult (including artistic expression).

This resulted in a specifically Salonitan manifestation of the cult in the form of circular reliefs (CIMRM 1870, CIMRM 1861). Namely, Salonitan circular reliefs represent the only two examples of the so-called zodiac-frames which are not inserted into the rectangular relief but are instead free-standing sculptures. The fragment showing the two zodiac signs (CIMRM 1870) has some similarities with the relief from Banjevac (although the zodiac frame in this case is inserted inside the rectangular relief) in their segmentation of the

ambition to expressing the stylistic trends of their epoch, and could therefore be called astylistic, minor details can help in establishing their chronology.

²²⁷ Branimir Gabričević, "Mitrin kult," 43, idem, "Iconographie de Mithra," 37-52; Željko Miletić, "Mitraizam," 18-19; Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan, "Arheološke potvrde," 136; idem, "Posebnosti tipologije," 195.

²²⁸ Branimir Gabričević, "Mitrin kult," 43, idem, "Iconographie de Mithra," 37-52; Željko Miletić, "Mitraizam," 28; Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan, "Arheološke potvrde," 136; idem, "Posebnosti tipologije," 196.

frame itself, while the second Salonitan circular relief (CIMRM 1861) shows some liberty in its selection of aquatic animals, without segmentation of its frame. This pair of circular reliefs led some scholars to conclude that they are of Salonitan provenance,²²⁹ but, although possible, the origins of this type are not as simple as it seems. Circular zodiac frames can be found inserted inside the rectangular relief on examples from Sisak (CIMRM 1472), London (CIMRM 810), Stockstadt (CIMRM 1161), Dieburg (CIMRM 1247), and Trier (CIMRM 985). The oval zodiac frame can also be found also on the rectangular relief from Modena (CIMRM 695), and as a free-standing but oval frame on the example from Housesteads (CIMRM 860). The closest parallel can be drawn between the relief from Banjevaci and rectangular reliefs with inserted zodiac frames. Since they do not have segmented frames, one can see this as a regional feature. Further, it is clear that the fragment from Salona borrows this same feature, but it developed, or rather, it became an independent type of cult-relief. The Salonitan tondo (CIMRM 1861) took over the idea of a circular form, but its iconography is different, showing the artistic originality and imaginativeness. Unfortunately, the original spatial context of the Salonitan Mithraic reliefs is unknown. This makes it impossible to offer more details on their function and relationship with architectural frameworks.

No mural, mosaic, or stucco Mithraic icon/representation has been discovered in Salona. In their persistent usage of exclusively stone reliefs, Salonitan Mithraic communities made a conscious choice of material, thus creating another Salonitan feature. The stones used are the local limestone (six reliefs) and marble (eight reliefs). Since marble was more expensive and often reserved for the more important pieces of sculpture, it is a telling indication of the value communities attached to the reliefs. An interesting case is offered by

²²⁹ Julijan Medini was of the opinion that they are of Italic or Dalmatian origin in idem, "Mitrički reljef," 64; Željko Miletić, "Mitraizam," 13; idem, "Typology of Mithraic Cult Reliefs From South-Eastern Europe," in *Religija i mit*, 269-274; Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan follows Medini's conclusions, in idem, "Posebnosti tipologije," 155.

the fragment showing the bust of Luna with a crescent (CIMRM 1869), made of marble unavailable in Roman Dalmatia. It either came as a direct import, or local workshops imported an un-worked block of marble.²³⁰ The second option seems more plausible, as another example of a fragment showing the bust of Luna almost identical to the Salonitan one was discovered in Pharos (present-day Stari Grad on the island of Hvar).²³¹ The high artistic quality led some scholars to call it “the most beautiful depiction of Luna on the territory of Roman province of Dalmatia.”²³² Given the sheer number of Mithraic reliefs, the evidence of Luna from Pharos, and the innovative circular reliefs, it is apparent that a local workshops not only met local needs, but it is possible to regard Salona as a regional Mithraic center on the eastern Adriatic coast.²³³

As a final conclusion it can be said that despite the seeming uniformity and stereotypic typology and iconography, Salonitan Mithraic communities were able to create their own local identity through pursuing their particular preferences and by establishing “Salonitan features” (exclusive use of stone medium, circular reliefs). The importance of art in this process of self-affirmation and of creating of a strong sense of cultural and religious identity cannot be overemphasized.²³⁴ The role of Mithraic art can in this respect be twofold: it united Mithraists on two levels, both local and universal.

²³⁰ Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan, “Some Examples,” 253.

²³¹ Ante Rendić-Miočević, “Skulptura” [Sculpture], in *Pharos, antički Stari Grad* [Pharos, Ancient Stari Grad], ed. Jasna Jeličić-Radonić and Biserka Rauter-Plančić (Zagreb: Muzejsko galerijski centar, 1996), 122.

²³² Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan, “Some Examples,” 254.

²³³ Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan, “Posebnosti tipologije,” 87.

²³⁴ Jaś Elsner, “Roman Eyes,” 255; Jonas Bjørnebye reached a similar conclusion about the creation of local identity through art in his interpretation of Mithraic cult icons from Rome, in idem, “*Hic locus est felix*,” 160-168.

4. THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE MITHRAIC TONDO REVISITED

*All things are in a state of flux, and everything is brought into being with a changing nature.*²³⁵

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*

4.1 Introduction

A circular votive relief depicting the standard scene of tauroctony encircled with, for the rich Mithraic body of iconography, a highly unusual and unique sequence of aquatic animals, was found in 1908 inside the south-western perimetral walls of the ancient town of Salona (present day Solin); it was found in secondary position, the original placement is unknown (Fig. 1) (CIMRM 1861).²³⁶ The relief is made of marble, and is now on display in Split at the Archaeological Museum. A majority of scholars have associated the iconography of the Salonitan tondo with the symbolism of the seven-grade structure of initiation or have simply overlooked its peculiarity by ascribing it to the local context of the every-day life of the sea port.²³⁷ Although the relief has been the subject of much debate, no scholar has offered a possible dating, nor there have any further attempts been made to place it into a wider temporal and cultural context. The identification and interpretation of this remarkable piece of Mithraic art thus still remains open to debate.

Before a detailed review of previous interpretations, a formal description of the tondo is needed, in order to allow following the argument further. A circular relief measuring only 22.5 cm in diameter and 3 cm thick, was cut obliquely on the reverse in order to facilitate its insertion into the wall, to which traces of plaster clearly point. The central field, encircled by a simple semicircular profile, depicts the standard scene of tauroctony. Mithras is shown

²³⁵ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XV, ed. G. P. Goold, trans. Frank J. Miller, LCL 43 (London: William Heinemann, 1916), 377.

²³⁶ Frane Bulić, "Quattro bassorilievi," 56-57.

²³⁷ On the connection between the seven-grade structure of initiation and the Salonitan tondo see Reinhold Merkelbach, *Mithras* (Königstein: Hain, 1984), 380; Petar Selem, "Mitrazam Dalmacije i Panonije u svjetlu novih istraživanja" [Mithraism in Dalmatia and Pannonia in the light of new research], *Historijski zbornik* 34 (1986): 201. That the aquatic animals have no Mithraic meaning, but are instead related to the life in the surrounding sea-port was suggested by Manfred Clauss, *Mithras: Kult und Mysterium* (Darmstadt: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 2012; only slightly revised edition from Munich: C. H. Beck, 1990), 90. A detailed review of previous interpretations will be discussed below.

wearing an oriental suit (long-sleeved tunic and long, baggy trousers), with a Phrygian cap and fluttering chlamys, looking at the raven which is perched on his flying cloak. With his left hand he grabs the bull by its nostrils, and with his right hand he stabs it with a knife. A scorpion pinches the bull's testicles while a snake is moving towards the bull's wound. On either side a torchbearer stands, dressed only in a shoulder cape and wearing a Phrygian cap. To the left a frontal figure of Cautopates stands. He is holding an inverted torch in his hands, directing his gaze to the bull's wound. To the right, Cautes stands with his legs spread. He holds an upright torch and is pointing to the bull's wound with his phallos.



Figure 4.1 Salonitan tondo (Courtesy of the Archaeological Museum, Split).

At the top of the frame, marked by the rim profile, a recumbent male figure is depicted. Partly covered by a mantle, the figure is leaning its head on the left hand, while resting his right arm on the body. The figure is flanked on the left by the bust of Sol with a radiate crown of six rays, and on the right by Luna with crescent. Four aquatic animals follow clockwise; this sequence is interrupted at the bottom of the frame, where a hydria flanked by

two snakes is depicted.²³⁸ Both the reclining male figure and the aquatic animals have been the subject of various interpretations.

A re-examination of the puzzling iconography of the Salonitan Mithraic tondo will lead to a better understanding of its meaning and the circumstances of its production. I will argue against the traditional interpretation which refers to the seven-grade structure of initiation and will emphasize the multilayered and refined symbolic language that was embedded in its design. The tondo, I will show, belongs to the cultural setting of the second half of the third century AD.

A few words must be said on the typology and purpose of the relief itself. Judging by its dimensions, the tondo was used as a “house-relief.”²³⁹ “House-reliefs” are generally of small dimensions and were used in domestic worship of Mithras.²⁴⁰ As the sloping edges and traces of plaster on the back side of the Salonitan tondo clearly indicate, it must have been inserted into the wall of a *privat*, domestic shrine. Other similar stone medallions, circular or oval in shape, were all made of marble and designed in the provinces along the Danubian frontier: Noricum, Dacia, and Moesia Superior.²⁴¹ Still, none of them has the so-called zodiac frame. A fragment of another possibly circular relief was found near Salona (CIMRM 1870)

²³⁸ Richard Gordon rightly observed that one should distinguish between different vessel shown in the Mithraic iconography. According to him, *krater*, when shown at the bull-killing or feast scene, contains bull’s blood and semen, while the *hydria* represents the water brought forth by Mithras, that is the “stream” or the “*fons perennis*,” in idem, “Viewing Mithraic Art: The Altar From Burginatum (Kalkar), Germania Inferior,” *ARYS* 1 (1998): 257. On the other instance Gordon concludes that “the *krater* is the source of souls which ordinarily exist in time unless saved by Mithras,” in idem, “The Sacred Geography of a Mithraeum: The Example of Sette Sfere,” *JMS* 2, no. 2 (1978): 124. The vessel on the tondo looks like *hydria*, and according to the overall context and the following interpretation, in this particular case the meaning of the two has been conflated.

²³⁹ According to the most recent interpretation, Mithras did not kill the bull, but he wounded it instead and the overall design of the scene reflects the evil-eye amulet design; therefore, the scene of tauroctony had protective power, as well as offering salvific assurance, see Christopher A. Faraone, “The Amuletic Design,” 96-116. Such an interpretation could be in accordance with the personal nature of small house medallions which individuals could have offered in exchange for protection from Mithras, and as a pledge of their own salvation.

²⁴⁰ Richard Gordon classified the “house-reliefs” as those whose surface is smaller than 30 x 32 cm, in idem, “Small and Miniature Reproductions,” 260.

²⁴¹ (CIMRM 1415, 1416, 1815, 2023, 2187, 2246, 2254, and a small circular relief from Caesarea Maritima); the relief from Caesarea Maritima is dated to the end of the third/beginning of the fourth century AD, Robert J. Bull, “A Mithraic Medallion from Caesarea,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 24 (1974): 187-90; Richard Gordon, “Trajets de Mithra,” 92-93. Both authors point to the Danubian frontier as a source of the relief’s style. Gordon is of the opinion that all Mithraic stone medallions were created in Moesia Superior or southern Dacia, Richard Gordon, “Small and Miniature Reproductions,” 273.

showing the zodiac signs of the Twins and Bull.²⁴² According to Campbell's typology, both Salonitan reliefs were classified as Upper Moesian, but those reliefs have leaf-frames, instead of the zodiac and are all inscribed inside rectangular reliefs.²⁴³ A zodiac frame is found on the reliefs from Sisak (CIMRM 1472), London (CIMRM 810), and Stockstadt (CIMRM 1161), all having circular frames inscribed inside a rectangular relief, usually surrounded by subsidiary scenes and personifications; a relief from Banjevci (central Dalmatian coast) has the same transversely segmented zodiac fields as the reliefs from Salona, but its zodiac-frame is inscribed inside a rectangular relief.²⁴⁴

Considering the concentration of circular reliefs with zodiac frames in Dalmatia, some scholars have thought it a genuine Salonitan invention.²⁴⁵ Examples from the Danube region and Dalmatia share the same characteristics of rather mediocre craftsmanship, and can be seen as standard products of local workshops. The influence from the Danube region in the province of Dalmatia occurred during the middle and second half of the third century AD, the time when Salonitan tondo must have been created.²⁴⁶ The snake-crater-snake motif on the tondo would also point to the Danubian area as its source of inspiration.

4.2 Salonitan tondo – Hypotheses

Frane Bulić, a noted Croatian archaeologist, was the one who discovered the relief in 1908 and the first who sought to identify the figures represented on it.²⁴⁷ The relief was found

²⁴² Branimir Gabričević, "Iconographie," 39. Based on its dimensions, the genuine relief would have measured around 1 meter in diameter, and would have thus served as the main icon of the mithraeum.

²⁴³ Leroy A. Campbell, "Typology of Mithraic Tauroctones," 13.

²⁴⁴ Julijan Medini, "Mitraički reljef," 39-83. Medini dated the relief to the end of the second and beginning of the third century AD, and is of opinion that the type must have originated somewhere on the Dalmatian coast, under Italic influences. Monuments from Housesteads (CIMRM 860), Trier (CIMRM 985), and Modena (CIMRM 695) should also be mentioned, although their frame is not circular, but oval instead. More on the Salonitan circular reliefs in the conclusions of previous chapter.

²⁴⁵ Željko Miletić, "Mitrazam," 13. In the other publication, Miletić suggests its qualification as Pannonian-Dalmatian type (relying on the Campbell's typology), due to the frequency of the type in those two provinces, Željko Miletić, "Typology of Mithraic Cult Reliefs," 274. The shortcomings of this method have been emphasized several times, see footnote 16 and 67.

²⁴⁶ Branimir Gabričević, "Iconographie," 50; Željko Miletić, "Mitrazam," 28; Goranka Lipovac-Vrkljan, "Posebnosti tipologije," 144-147, 196.

²⁴⁷ Frane Bulić, "Quattro bassorilievi," 56-57.

during the removal of the bulk of the material that filled the inside of the southwestern perimeter walls of ancient Salona.

Bulić described the recumbent male figure as bearded, but due to the bad state of preservation that detail is no longer visible. He identified it as Oceanus, according to his own observations of the recurrence of the same figure in the identical posture on several Mithraic monuments. The aquatic animals are recognized as a lizard, a dolphin with twisted tail, a scorpion that, in his view, is rendered as crab, and a snail. Bulić did not go beyond the formal description and basic interpretation of figures depicted on the relief; he did not seek possible further parallels or explanations.

In 1954, Branimir Gabričević reflected upon the Salonitan tondo while analyzing the iconographical typology of Dalmatian Mithraic reliefs.²⁴⁸ He included the tondo among the complex type of reliefs, i.e., the type which depicts additional scenes besides the usual tauroctony. Gabričević concluded that the circular form is unique, and finds no analogy among the Mithraic monuments. In his opinion, the tondo is a mere reduction of the complex type of reliefs which have circular frames inscribed inside a rectangular frame, usually surrounded by subsidiary scenes and personifications. He also identified the recumbent figure as Oceanus, flanked by Sol and Luna, followed by the lizard, dolphin, crater with snakes, crab, and snail. According to Gabričević, the tondo shows a free combination of figures, most of which have some Mithraic meaning, without further elaborating his argument.

Reinhold Merkelbach was the first to propose, in 1984, the reading of the sequence of the unusual animals as symbols of the seven-grade structure of initiation.²⁴⁹ The crab, which Merkelbach identifies in the figure of the snail as the smallest of the water animals symbolizes the first grade (Raven). Snake, in his opinion Hydra, the water-snake, symbolizes the second grade (Nymphus). The third grade (Soldier) is symbolized by the figure of the

²⁴⁸ Branimir Gabričević, "Iconographie," 49.

²⁴⁹ Reinhold Merkelbach, *Mithras*, 380.

crab or lobster, with pincers similar to a scorpion's in Merkelbach's opinion. The dolphin symbolizes the fifth grade (Persian) and the crocodile the sixth (Sun-runner) because, according to Clemens of Alexandria, whom Merkelbach refers to, the Sun god used to ride on the crocodile. According to Merkelbach, the fourth grade is not represented as its symbol was fire, while the animals represented on the relief are all aquatic; the seventh grade, the Father, is also missing. The recumbent figure depicts, in his opinion, the sleeping Saturn instead of Oceanus.

Manfred Clauss identified the water animals as crocodile, dolphin, lobster, and a shrimp, and saw Oceanus in the reclining figure at the top.²⁵⁰ Various sea-creatures, Clauss remarked, do not bear any Mithraic symbolism, but are rather the result of the immediate surroundings of Salona, which was a sea port.

Petar Selem followed the same identification of Saturn and aquatic animals as Merkelbach, but kept the identification of the snail, seeing in the translation of earthly symbols of the initiation grades into the watery ones.²⁵¹ According to Selem, the snail is the symbol of the first grade, the water-snake of the second, the crab replaces the scorpion as the symbol of the third grade, the dolphin is the fifth grade, and the crocodile stands for the sixth grade. The fourth and seventh grades are not represented, although Selem leaves the possibility of replacing the crater with the lion, and therefore with the fourth grade (Lion), as they are depicted together on numerous other Mithraic monuments, while the figure of Saturn, in his opinion, can be taken as a symbol of the seventh grade (Father).

Another interpretation, following the same line of argument, was offered by Željko Miletić.²⁵² In his opinion, the idea of the interconnection of psyche and water permeates the whole relief. According to Miletić, the three antropomorphic figures (Sol, Saturnus, Luna) are

²⁵⁰ Manfred Clauss, *Mithras*, 92-93.

²⁵¹ Petar Selem, "Mitrazam Dalmacije," 201-202.

symbols of the three highest grades (Perses, Sun-runner, Father), while the water animals (snail, crab, dolphin, and crocodile) represent the four lower grades (Raven, Nymphus, Soldier, and Lion). Miletić connected the meaning of the water animals with Plutarch's idea of the cosmological voyage of the immortal soul, where the psyche, with the help of moisture, travels through the planetary spheres in order to reach its immortality.

4.3 Mithraic bestiary

Aquatic animals can be found occasionally on Mithraic monuments, but no parallel example of this kind of grouping is known so far. The lizard appears on only a few monuments. On a marble relief from Rome (CIMRM 435), in the upper left corner, below the bust of Sol, a lizard is depicted creeping out of a grotto, as if sunbathing. In a supposed mithraeum in Petronell (Austria) a lizard is depicted among the grapes and vine tendrils on the fragments of a crater, and a wall fragment was discovered with another lizard among the loaves.²⁵³ It has been reported that a lizard was depicted on a vase from Stockstadt, but it has unfortunately been lost.²⁵⁴

The dolphin is found more frequently, either in connection with Neptune (CIMRM 1942, 966), or as a companion of Oceanus (CIMRM 778), Venus (CIMRM 460, 784), one of the torchbearers (CIMRM 124), or Mithras himself (CIMRM 773). The lobster and snail are not found on any of the monuments listed in the CIMRM, or otherwise known to me.

Snakes are found among the regular group of tauroctony animals, striving to feed themselves with the bull's life-giving blood from the wound on his neck. More importantly, they appear in the so-called snake-crater-lion group, placed at the bottom of tauroctony

²⁵² Željko Miletić, "Mitričko putovanje duše" [The Mithraic journey of the soul], *Diadora* 18-19 (1996-1997): 216-217; idem, "Čežnja duše za vlažnošću tijela" [The longing of the soul for the body's moisture], *Histria Antiqua* 10 (2003):122.

²⁵³ The sanctuary in the eastern part of the *canabae* of Carnuntum has been variously attributed to Heliopolitan gods or to Mithras, most recently by Verena Gassner, who argued in favor of the cult of Sabazios, although she admits that the interpretation still remains open, Verena Gassner, "Snake-Decorated Vessels From a 'Canabae' of Carnuntum – Evidence for Another 'Mithraeum'?", in *Roman Mithraism: the Evidence of the Small Finds*, ed. Marleen Martens, Guy de Boe (Brussel: Museum Het Toreke, 2004), 232-233.

compositions characteristic for the Rhine-Danube area (CIMRM 1083, 1118, 1206, 1283, 1292, 1306, 1388). Elsewhere they are shown encircling the altar (CIMRM 641), a crater (CIMRM 798, 942, 988, 1061, 1083A), or a rock from which Mithras is being born (CIMRM 126), among other things, and recent research on Mithraic small finds have yielded a notable number of various vases, offertory plates and bowls decorated with snakes.²⁵⁵

4.4 Multivocality of the symbols

The lack of references is the main objection in interpreting the Salonitan tondo as a symbolic representation of the seven-grade structure of initiation. In their pursuit of establishing the correlation between the aquatic animals and the complex of seven grades, scholars have failed to offer a convincing set of references to support their arguments. Merkelbach simply associated aquatic animals with grade hierarchy proportionate to their size, without providing further explication for such an interpretation. Other scholars have followed his hypothesis without critical reinvestigation, nor have they offered any possible answer to the basic question of why represent the grade structure with these particular animals, and if it is the case, why are some grades omitted?

The seven Mithraic grades are still the subject of scholarly controversy, both in terms of their function (initiatory or priestly hierarchy) and in terms of their definite numbers and names.²⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the general opinion is that they are connected with initiation and that

²⁵⁴ Elmar Schwertheim, *Die Denkmäler orientalischer Gottheiten im Römischen Deutschland*, (Leiden: Brill, 1974): 150; Reinholdt Merkelbach, *Mithras*, 122; Verena Gassner, "Snake-Decorated," 234.

²⁵⁵ *Roman Mithraism: The Evidence of the Small Finds*, ed. Marleen Martens, Guy de Boe (Brussel: Museum Het Toreke, 2004).

²⁵⁶ The overall review and detailed discussion of scholarly debates on Mithraic grades is beyond the scope of this study, but some basic insight into the problem can be provided. The priestly function of Mithraic grades was suggested by Manfred Clauss, "Die Sieben Graden des Mithras-Kultes," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 82 (1990): 183-194; idem, *Cultores Mithrae: die Anhängerschaft des Mithras-Kultes* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1992), 275-277; idem, *Mithras*, 124-133; the number of grades was contested by William J. Phythian-Adams, according to whom there were only six grades, "The Problem of Mithraic Grades," *Journal of Roman Studies* 2 (1912): 53-64. The confusion about the names of Mithraic grades was caused by the unusual terminology used by Porphyry, *De abstinentia* 4.16, who mentions eagles and hawks, and by graffiti in Dura-Europos mithraeum which mention *stratiôtēs* and *patēr paterōn* among other unusual names, see E. D. Francis, "Mithraic Graffiti From Dura-Europos," in *Mithraic Studies: Proceedings of the First International Congress of Mithraic Studies*, ed. John Hinnells (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975), 424-445; the second grade has been variously interpreted as Nymphus/Cryphius/Gryphus, see Bruce M. Metzger, "St. Jerome's

there were definitely seven.²⁵⁷ They are attested in both written (Classical authors, epigraphic testimonies) as well as visual sources. The most important written source, and the only one giving the complete sequence of grades is St. Jerome's letter to Laeta (written in AD 403), where the grades of Raven, Bridegroom, Soldier, Lion, Persian, Sun-runner, and Father are listed.²⁵⁸ The exact order of the grades of initiation was further revealed by the discovery of the floor mosaic in the mithraeum of Felicissimus at Ostia (CIMRM 299), dated to the second half of the third century AD, where each grade, following the same sequence as at St. Jerome's letter, was given three symbols, two of the grade and one of the planetary god, but nowhere depicting any aquatic animal.²⁵⁹ The dipinti above the frescoes showing the procession of initiated cult worshippers in the Sta. Prisca mithraeum in Rome (CIMRM 476, end of the second century AD/first quarter of the third century AD), shed further light on the relation between grades and planets, bringing the grades under the protective power of planetary gods, again without reference to aquatic animals.²⁶⁰

Testimony Concerning the Second Grade of Mithraic Initiation," *American Journal of Philology* 66 (1945): 225-233; Nymphus was even interpreted as Hyena by Željko Miletić, "The Nymphus Grade," 283-288; The most recent study on the problem of Mithraic grades, with a detailed overview of previous scholarship and both written and visual sources is provided by Aleš Chalupa, "Seven Mithraic Grades: An Initiatory or Priestly Hierarchy?" *Religio: Revue pro religionistiku* 16 (2008): 177-201, where the author concludes that they most certainly had an initiatory function, and that there were definitely seven of them.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 198-199.

²⁵⁸ St. Jerome, *Select Letters of St. Jerome*, trans. F. A. Wright, LCL 262 (London: William Heinemann, 1933): 341-343. Other sources giving information on Mithraic grades are Porphyry, *De abstinentia* 4.16; idem, *De antro nympharum* 15-16; Tertullian, *De corona militis* 15.3-4; idem, *De praescriptione haereticorum* 40.4; idem, *Adversus Marcionem* 1.13; Firmicus Maternus, *De errore profanorum religionum* 5.2; Ambrosiaster, *Questiones veteris et novi testamenti* 113.11.

²⁵⁹ The mithraeum was published by Giovanni Becatti, *Scavi di Ostia 2: I Mitrei* (Rome: Libreria dello Stato, 1954), 105-112. On the correlation of initiation grades and planets see Roger Beck, *Planetary Gods*. The symbols of the Felicissimus mosaic have recently received a new interpretation, more specifically, the third symbol of the Soldier grade was recognized as a bovine palvic/thoracic bone instead of soldier's sling bag, Aleš Chalupa, Tomáš Glomb, "The Third Symbol of the Miles Grade on the Floor Mosaic of the Felicissimus Mithraeum in Ostia: A New Interpretation," *Religio: Revue pro religionistiku* 21 (2013): 9-32. The same volume features a special section with several articles dealing with the new interpretations of the Felicissimus mosaic symbols. The mosaic symbols are: Raven – raven, beaker, and caduceus (Mercury); Bridegroom – diadem (veil?), and lamp (Venus); Soldier – bovine pelvic/thoracic bone, helmet, and spear (Mars); Lion – fire-shovel, *sistrum*, and thunderbolt (Jupiter); Persian – *falx*, plough and star, and moon sickle (Moon); Sun-runner – torch, rayed crown, and whip (Sun); Father – *patera* and sceptre, Phrygian cap, and sickle (Saturn).

²⁶⁰ M. J. Vermaseren, C. C. Van Essen, *The Excavations in the Mithraeum of the Church of Santa Prisca in Rome* (Leiden: Brill, 1965).

Although the graffiti in the Dura-Europos mithraeum (CIMRM 34), with their astounding diversity of grade names, might speak in favor of the regional flexibility and variability of the seven-graded structure of initiation, and could therefore allow the possibility of such an interpretation of Salonitan aquatic animals, it is nevertheless certain that the seven-grade initiation hierarchy was established in all Mithraic communities, where, despite the local preferences and adaptations, the cult maintained an overall coherence throughout the whole of the Roman Empire.²⁶¹

The second problem in interpreting the Salonitan aquatic animals as symbols of the initiation grades lies in the complex and subtle iconography of the tauroctony itself. Namely, the symbols of the seven-grade structure of initiation can be found embedded in each standard composition of a tauroctony.²⁶² Moreover, a series of correspondences between the usual elements of the tauroctony and certain constellations has been established.²⁶³ The tauroctony, as has been widely acknowledged, served as a map of a soul's celestial journey, a belief expressed additionally in literary sources.²⁶⁴ Through the initiation into the seven grades, the initiated hoped to reach the celestial path that would lead them to immortality.

²⁶¹ Darius Frackowiak has recently argued that the Dura-Europos graffiti show the regional flexibility of the seven-grade canon, idem, "'Mithras is mein Kranz.' Weihegrade und Initiationsrituale im Mithras-Kult," in *Imperium der Götter. Isis, Mithras, Christus. Kulte und Religionen im Römischen Reich*, ed. Claus Hattler (Karlsruhe: Badisches Landesmuseum/WBG Darmstadt, 2013): 232-233; However, it has been shown that despite the regional disparity in the spread of the grades and the diversity of their names, they were universal and formed an integral part of all Mithraic communities, M. J. Vermaseren, *Mithras, the Secret God* (London: Chatto&Windus, 1963): 138; Roger Beck, "Mithraism After," 15; idem, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 72-73; Richard Gordon, "Institutionalized Religious Options," 400; Aleš Chalupa, "Seven Mithraic Grades," 198.

²⁶² Reinhold Merkelbach identified the standard elements of the tauroctony with each of the seven grades, and since the grades are correlated to the planets, each element in the tauroctony alludes secondarily to a certain planet: raven – Raven – Mercury, snake – Bridegroom – Venus, scorpion – Soldier – Mars, dog – Lion – Jupiter, Cautopates – Persian – Moon, Cautes – Sun-runner – Sun, and Mithras – Father – Saturn. *ibid*, *Weihegrade und Seelenlehre der Mithrasmysterien* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1982), 17-19; idem, *Mithras*, 80-82; Roger Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 161.

²⁶³ On the astrological-astronomical interpretation see section 2.2 dealing with the Mithraic art and iconography in the second chapter, esp. footnotes 75-80.

²⁶⁴ Origen, *Contra Celsum* 6. 22; Porphyry, *De antro nympharum* 21-24. The soul's celestial journey and the role of the tauroctony in the process has been analyzed in detail by Roger Beck, *Cautes and Cautopates*; idem, *Planetary Gods*; idem, *In the Place of Lion*. As previously mentioned, Mithraists believed that souls enter the world of mortal incarnation through the gate located at the summer solstice in Cancer (Cautopates; the so-called genesis), and could one day, through the initiation to the seven grades, leave through the gates of the winter solstice in Capricorn (Cautes; the so-called apogenesis), and travel through the seven planetary spheres to reach

Mithras had the central role in this process: he is the focus of both the tauroctony scene and of the celestial map, from where he oversees the proces of genesis and apogenesis.²⁶⁵ Thus, the question then arises whether the aquatic animals have any role in this intricate and sophisticated process?

Even though it might seem that their placement on Salonitan tondo is purely accidental, and the result of a randomly inspired selection of motifs, it has recently been shown that various elements of the tauroctony were chosen by precise criteria and united in a coherent and complex narrative with specific intent.²⁶⁶ Furthermore, it is a long-established fact that Mithraism must be regarded as part of the wider cultural and social context of the Graeco-Roman world and that it did not hesitate to borrow ideas of different origins, which were further embedded into a sort of a Mithraic “bricolage.”²⁶⁷ Various elements of the tauroctony had multiple meanings; they were simultaneously symbols of the initiation grades, their tutelary planets, and constellations. The “multivocality” of the Mithraic symbols means

ultimate salvation, see section 2.2 dealing with the Mithraic art and iconography in the second chapter, esp. footnote 80.

²⁶⁵ Porphyry says that his seat is at the equinoxes (Porphyry, *De antro nympharum* 24). Based on this statement, as mentioned previously in the second chapter, the celestial identity of Mithras has been variously interpreted, most convincingly by Roger Beck, who identified his place in the constellation of Leo, the Sun’s astrological house, i.e., the place where he has the strongest influence and power and where he literally becomes *Sol Invictus*, Beck, *In the Place of Lion*, 267-291. An overview of alternative interpretations is offered by Roger Beck, *The Rise and Fall*, 236-237, see footnote 78.

²⁶⁶ Roger Beck, “Astral Symbolism in the Tauroctony: A Statistical Demonstration of the Extreme Improbability of Unintended Coincidence in the Selection of Elements in the Composition,” in *Beck on Mithraism*, 251-265.

²⁶⁷ The term “bricolage” is borrowed from Richard Gordon, who was among the first scholars to emphasize the “eclectic” character of Mithraism, see Richard Gordon, “Authority, Salvation and Mystery in the Mysteries of Mithras,” in *Image and Imagery in the Roman World. Three Papers Given in Memory of Jocelyn Toynbee*, ed. J. Huskinson, M. Beard, J. Reynolds, (Cambridge: Alan Sutton, 1988): 48. Robert Turcan analyzed the idea of sacrifice in Mithraism with references to the surrounding culture, “La sacrifice mithriaque: innovation de sens et de modalités,” *Entretiens Fondation Hardt* 27 (1981): 341-80; Turcan also turned the attention of Mithraic scholars to the quality of the Mithraic iconography which “integrated and adapted...certain ideas common to the Graeco-Roman world”, in “Feu et sange: À propos d’un relief mithriaque,” *Comptes Rendus des séances de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 1 (1986): 221; Mithraism was further defined as a “subsystem within the cultural system of Graeco-Roman paganism” by Roger Beck, *The Religion of Mithras Cult*, 71-74, and else in the book. The most compelling example of this approach, in my opinion, remains the one by Richard Gordon, who when analyzing the symbolism of seven grades argued that “the wider context, the content of the Graeco-Roman ‘encyclopedia’ concerning certain animals” must be consulted. Gordon reached into the rich encyclopedic sources of Pliny the Elder and Aelian in order to illuminate the wider symbolism of the seven grades, Richard Gordon, “Reality, Evocation and Boundary in the Mysteries of Mithras,” *Journal of Mithraic Studies* 1 (1976): 19-99.

that they “can speak different cultures simultaneously,” and it is these “alternative Mithraisms” that will help decipher the symbolism of aquatic animals.²⁶⁸

4.5 The Flux of the (Re)Creation

The immediate association stimulated by the content and the form of the Salonitan relief is water. Water was quintessential for both Greek and Roman cultures, and it pervaded the religious and social life of the ancient world.²⁶⁹ Water’s symbolic nature has always been charged with ideas of death, transformation, rebirth, purification, healing, and life itself.²⁷⁰ Mircea Eliade summarized the role of water in ancient religious systems by describing it as “*fons et origo*, the source of all possible existence...water symbolises the primal substance from which all forms came and to which they will return.”²⁷¹

In Greek cosmology, a primordial river god, Oceanus, possessed ongoing generative power.²⁷² Oceanus, the father of all gods, was perceived as a river that encircled the outer limits of the earth, with the sun, moon, and stars arising from it in the morning and plunging into it in the evening.²⁷³ The Homeric description of the creation of circular shield for Achilles depicting the world and basic human agricultural activities enclosed within the frame where sun, moon, stars, constellations, and the all-encompassing circle of Oceanus are

²⁶⁸ Roger Beck, *The Religion of the Mithras Cult*, 29; idem, *Beck on Mithraism*, 16.

²⁶⁹ The survey of multiple roles and functions of water in antiquity is offered in *The Nature and Function of Water, Baths, Bathing, and Hygiene from Antiquity Through the Renaissance*, ed. Cynthia Kosso, Anne Scott (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

²⁷⁰ The significance of water in ancient societies has recently drawn the attention of scholars, for example, see *A History of Water: Ideas of Water from Ancient Societies to the Modern World*, Series 2, Vol. 1, ed. Terje Tvedt, Terje Oestigaard (London: I. B. Tauris, 2010). The cosmological, ritual, and ethnographic role of water in the Graeco-Roman world, especially in the literary sources, is offered by Prudence J. Jones, *Reading Rivers in Roman Literature and Culture* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005).

²⁷¹ Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1963): 188.

²⁷² On the role of Oceanus in Graeco-Roman cosmogony see Prudence J. Jones, *Reading Rivers*, 3-18.

²⁷³ Homer, *The Iliad*, V. 5-6, VII. 421-22, VIII. 485-6, XIV. 200-1, XIV. 245-6, XIV. 301-2, trans. Anthony Verity, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011): 67, 115, 130, 227, 228, 229. Hesiod, *Theogony*, ed. and trans. Glenn W. Most, LCL 57N (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 23. Evidence of such a belief can be found both in Classical authors, and in astronomical treatises. Astrologer Manilius (1 AD) wrote in his *Astronomica* that the earth is encircled by water (4. 597-99) from which constellations rise, and where they sink (5. 27-29), Manilius, *Astronomica*, ed. G. P. Goold, LCL 469 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977): 269, 303. Astrologer Julius Firmicus Meternus (4 AD) also says that “Oceanus flows around and embraces the land,” (1.5), Firmicus Meternus, *Metheosis Libri VIII*, trans. Jean Rhys Bram (Park Ridge: Noyes Press, 1975): 12. A detailed survey of the perception of Oceanus can be found in Dirk L. Couprie, *Heaven and Earth in Ancient Greek Cosmology. From Thales to Heraclides Ponticus* (New York: Springer, 2011).

located, has been interpreted as an allegory of cosmogony, of the creation of the spherical universe.²⁷⁴ Oceanus was the father and source of all the rivers, and springs of Oceanus himself issued from a cave where he lived with his wife, Thetys.²⁷⁵

The idea of the interdependence of water and cosmogony was not alien to Mithraism. Mithras was the creator of the universe, and the central act of tauroctony can often be found surrounded with subsidiary scenes depicting the creation of the world (CIMRM 1292). The relief from Modena (CIMRM 695), shows Phanes, the Orphic primal generator of life and creator of the universe surrounded by the zodiac, who when hatched from the egg brought the first light to the world and the same iconographic motifs were appropriated in representations of the cosmic creator Mithras.²⁷⁶ Evidence for the Mithraic belief in the generative power of water is the omnipresent figure of Oceanus, seen both as a freestanding sculpture and as a part of subsidiary relief scenes; more explicitly, a head of Oceanus is depicted on the front of the rocky mass from which Mithras was born, thus indicating the primordial role of water (CIMRM 666). A magnificent mosaic showing cosmogony, with a seated figure of Oceanus in the lower left corner, is preserved in the so-called House of the Mithraeum in Merida,

²⁷⁴ Homer, *The Illiad*, XVIII. 478-608, trans. Anthony Verity, 309-312; P. R. Hardie, "Imago Mundi: Cosmological and Ideological Aspects of the Shield of Achilles," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 105 (1985): 15.

²⁷⁵ Hesiod, *Theogony*, ed. and trans. Glenn W. Most, 31-33. Homer, *The Illiad*, XVIII. 402-3, XXI. 195-7, trans. Anthony Verity, 307, 341-2.

²⁷⁶ Phanes was an offspring of Chronos, who himself was created at the primeval beginning out of water and earth. The Orphic cosmogony myth was preserved by the fifth-century Neoplatonic philosopher Damascius, who transmitted the version of a certain Hieronymus/Hellanicus, according to whom there were two principal matters in the beginning, water and earth, from which the universe was created, Damascius, *Damascius' Problems and Solutions Concerning First Principles*, trans. Sara Ahbel-Rappe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): 415-16. The identification between Mithras and Phanes is indicated by a relief showing Mithras emerging from an egg, surrounded by the signs of the zodiac, holding a knife in one hand and torch of the *Sol Invictus* in the other (CIMRM 860). More explicitly, an inscription found in Rome bears a dedication to Zeus-Helios-Mithras-Phanes (CIMRM 475). As a ruler of cosmic time, Mithras was also identified with Aion, the Hellenistic god of time, who was frequently shown turning the zodiac with his hand, just like Mithras on a relief from Trier (CIMRM 985). On the role of Orphism in Mithraism see Franz Cumont, "Mithra et l'Orphisme," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 109 (1934): 64-72; David Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries. Cosmology and Salvation in the Ancient World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989): 95-124. Also, one of the most frequent subsidiary scenes found on Mithraic reliefs from the Danube area, the so-called water-miracle, shows Mithras shooting an arrow at a rock, apparently to call water forth (CIMRM 1283).

suggesting a universal recognition and widespread belief in the role of water in the cosmogony.²⁷⁷

The importance of water can be further deduced from Porphyry, who equates water with birth; souls coming into genesis are naiad nymphs who are nourished and embodied water and the numerous craters and amphoras that can be found on Mithraic monuments symbolize springs, i.e., they are the place of genesis and apogenesis of the soul.²⁷⁸ Further, Porphyry writes that:

Zoroaster was the first to dedicate a natural cave in honor of Mithras, the creator and father of all; it was located in the mountains near Persia and had flowers and springs. This cave bore him the image of the Cosmos which Mithras had created. (...) they dedicated caves and grottoes to the Cosmos. In the same way, too, they dedicated to the nymphs caves and grottoes because of the waters that flow either from above or below; (...) the ancients made the cave a symbol of the Cosmos.²⁷⁹

Porphyry described caves as dark, rocky, and watery, composed of resistant and fluid matter, often of spherical shape.²⁸⁰ The importance of the cave cannot be overemphasized: not only was it connected with water sources and thought to be of watery substance, as a

²⁷⁷ The precise significance, origin, and nature of the mosaic are still subjects of scholarly controversy. The general consensus is that the mosaic belonged to the mithraeum associated with a group of Mithraic monuments found nearby. Eugenia García Sandoval, "El mosaico cosmogónico de Mérida," in *XI Congreso Nacional de Arqueología* (Zaragoza: Secretaría General de los Congresos Arqueológicos Nacionales, 1970): 743-68; Antonio Blanco Freijeiro, "El mosaico de Mérida con la alegoría del Saeculum Aureum," in *Estudios sobre el mundo helenístico*, ed. José Alsina (Seville: Publicaciones de la Universidad, 1971), 153-78; J. M. Blázquez, "Cosmología mitriaca en un mosaico de Augusta Emerita," *Archivo Español de Arqueología* 59 (1986), 89-100. In the most recent publication, the mosaic is dated to the mid-fourth century AD and considered to belong to the mithraeum, *El mosaico cosmológico de Mérida*, ed. J. M. Álvarez Martínez (Mérida: Museo Nacional de Arte Romano, 1996); in contrast, Kathrine M. D. Dunbabin remains unconvinced in the Mithraic nature of the mosaic, Kathrine M. D. Dunbabin, *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 147-50.

²⁷⁸ Porphyry, *De antro nymphaeum*, revised text with translation by Seminar Classics 609, State University of New York at Buffalo (New York: Arethusa, 1969), 13-15.

²⁷⁹ Porphyry, *De antro nymphaeum*, 6, 9.

²⁸⁰ Porphyry, *De antro nymphaeum* 9-10, 11-13. Mithraea were therefore recognized as caves, and if possible situated in natural caves. If not, vaulting was used in imitation, and subterranean spaces were preferred. Being in the vicinity of a water spring was desirable, and numerous water basins and springs can be found inside mithraea proper, for example, numerous water springs and water basins found in mithraea in Doliche, or water basins found at the entrances to the mithraea at Ostia and S. Clemente, together with symbolically indicated water springs on the mosaics (Mitreo delle Sette Porte, Ostia). In one of the adjoining rooms of S. Clemente mithraeum a mural, today unfortunately no longer visible, showing a Nereid on a sea-monster and Naiades once stood (CIMRM 338). On the symbolism of the Mithraic cave see Roger Beck, *The Religion of Mithras Cult*,

place of the soul's transition, but it was a place where the tauroctony, a central Mithraic act took place. By killing the bull, Mithras released his life-giving liquids, blood and semen, which soaked the earth and brought all the living animals and plants to life, pointing to the bull's generative role.²⁸¹

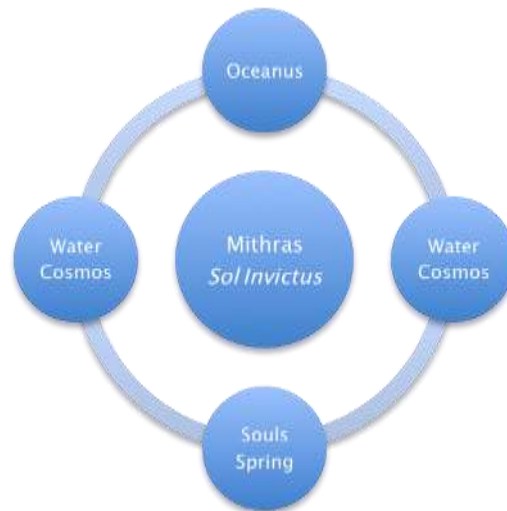


Figure 4.2 Diagram showing the processes depicted on the Salonitan tondo (by N. Silnović).

4.6 (Re)Creating the Cosmos

In the reclining figure at the top of the Salonitan tondo, Oceanus, the source of the life giving water, can be identified. Directly below him stands Mithras, *Sol Invictus*, in the act of the creating the cosmos (Fig. 2). Interestingly, Emperor Julian equated the Sun with the Ocean, the generator of all things, by recalling the long-established tradition of their identification.²⁸² To the right, Cautes is standing as *Deus genitor*, indicating explicitly the

102-52; also in Leroy A. Campbell, *Mithraic Iconography*, 6-11. On the role of the cave in mystery cults see Yulia Ustinova, *Caves and the Ancient Greek Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): 226-255.

²⁸¹ The association between the bull and fertility exists almost among all ancient civilizations; on the rich symbolism and the origins of the bull-cult see Michael Rice, *The Power of the Bull* (London: Routledge, 1998). The cosmogonic meaning of the bull-slaying scene is reviewed in Manfred Clauss, *Mithras*, 78-88. Moreover, in Greek iconography the most common depiction of river gods was in the form of a man-headed bull. In both Greek and Roman literature rivers are referred to as "bull-form," see Gretchen E. Meyers, "The Divine River: Ancient Roman Identity and the Image of Tiberinus," in *The Nature and Function of Water*, 238; More detailed information on the river god in the form of the bull in Ruth Michael Gais, "Some Problems of River-God Iconography," *American Journal of Archaeology* 82 (1978): 355-70.

²⁸² Emperor Julian, *Hymn to the Sun* 27; L'Empereur Julien, *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. Christian Lacombrade (Paris, Société d'édition 'Les Belles-Lettres,' 1964): 123. The Mithraic nature of the *Hymn*, as well as the notion of Julian's initiation into the Mithraic cult remains a subject of scholarly debates. The most recent overview of the literature is offered by Tommaso Gnoli, "Giuliano e Mitra," *Antiquité Tardive* 17 (2009): 215-

idea of creation.²⁸³ Snakes flanking the crater are souls plunging into genesis and apogenesis.²⁸⁴ Circling in this vortex of creation, lizard, dolphin, lobster and snail are living proof of the ongoing, endless journey of (re)creation. They are depicted on numerous mosaics showing Oceanus, especially dolphins and lobsters. Oceanus often has lobster claws emerging from the top of his head, and dolphins are occasionally shown flowing from his beard on either side of the mouth. They are also stars and constellations, rising and setting into the ocean.

Pliny the Elder praised aquatic animals for their healing benefits.²⁸⁵ Lizards can be found as attributes of Apollo Sauroktonos, the Lizard-killer.²⁸⁶ Pliny also wrote about lizards named stellions (after the Latin word *stella*, referring to the numerous spots found on their skin that resemble stars), who live on both water and land.²⁸⁷ Aelian and Pliny praised lizards for their ability to regenerate, and they can often be found on funerary monuments.²⁸⁸ A number of lizards crawl among the acanthus scrolls of the Ara Pacis Augustae, thus

234, where author concludes that Julian was never initiated into Mithraic cult. Two examples from Corinth are indicative in this respect, suggesting that the identification of the Sun and water might have been a commonplace. Namely, on the reverse of a coin from the time of Commodus, Apollo is shown standing on pedestal with a water basin at his feet, and it is believed that a figure of Apollo once stood at the top of the fountain before the Arch of Trajan in the same city, Betsey A. Robinson, "Playing in the Sun. Hydraulic Architecture and Water Displays in Imperial Corinth," *Hesperia* 82 (2013): 378-379.

²⁸³ Torchbearers are symbolically linked to the idea of fertility, four seasons, the cycle of life, and they are gates for the genesis and apogenesis. On the symbolism of torchbearers see Leroy A. Campbell, *Mithraic Iconography*, 29-43.

²⁸⁴ The meaning of the snake as a generative pneuma has been elaborated by Leroy A. Campbell, *Mithraic Iconography*, 200-1. Especially in connection with a bowl or a krater, snakes are identified as principles of life, souls attracted to the water because of their longing for embodiment, and therefore a snake shown "plunging downward toward the bowl of water was therefore the symbol of the descent of the soul into a physical body, the soul itself as a fiery moving principle being represented by the pneumatic snake," Leroy A. Campbell, *Mithraic Iconography*, 287.

²⁸⁵ Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, Vol. 8, XXXI, ed. G. P. Goold, trans. W. H. S. Jones, LCL 418 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983): 379.

²⁸⁶ *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, Vol. II/I, ed. J. Ch. Balty, J. Boardman, P. Bruneau, F. Canciani, L. Kahil, V. Lambrinoudakis, E. Simon (Zurich: Artemis Verlag, 1984): 199.

²⁸⁷ Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, Vol. 3, VIII, ed. G. P. Goold, trans. H. Rackham, LCL 353 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989): 80-81; 489. Aristotle also wrote that lizards live in underground holes, Aristotle, *Historia Animalium*, Vol. 9, I, trans. A. L. Peck, LCL 437 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993): 15.

²⁸⁸ Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, Vol. 3, VIII, ed. G. P. Goold, trans. H. Rackham, 80-81; Aelian, *De Natura Animalum*, Vol. 1, trans. A. F. Scholfield, LCL 447 (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1958): 122, 343. On the lizard's role in funerary art see Jean Sorabella, "Eros and the Lizard: Children, Animals, and Roman Funerary Sculpture," *Hesperia Supplements* 41 (2007): 353-70.

reappearing in the spring after the cold weather and partaking in the overall message of renewal and abundance.²⁸⁹

Dolphins are animals in perpetual motion, and they are praised for the ability of holding their breath for a long time.²⁹⁰ They bear their youngs in summer, and at no other time.²⁹¹ Pliny wrote that bulls are reproductive in January, following the rise of the constellation of Dolphin.²⁹² Dolphins are also frequently represented in funerary art, especially in connection with Oceanus, symbolizing the journey of the human souls across the Ocean.²⁹³

Lobsters, according to Pliny, remain hidden for the five months and in the spring they cast and renew their skin. They love rocky and stony places, and in winter they seek warm and sunny shores, while in summer they retire into deep holes in the shade.²⁹⁴ They were often mistaken for crabs, and as such do appear as sign of the constellation Cancer (for example, in a mosaic in Aquileia), a sign of the summer solstice, i.e., the day that has the longest period of sunlight.²⁹⁵

Snails hibernate during the winter and summer, thus appearing and regenerating in the spring and autumn, and they usually cling to rocks.²⁹⁶

²⁸⁹ Peter J. Holliday, "Time, History, and Ritual on the *Ara Pacis Augustae*," *The Art Bulletin* 72 (1990): 542-57. Aristotle wrote that lizards hide in winter, and cast their old skin in spring and autumn, Aristotle, *Historia Animalium*, Vol. 11, VII, ed. and trans. D. M. Balme, LCL 439 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991): 149, 159.

²⁹⁰ Aelian, *De Natura Animalum*, Vol. 2, trans. A. F. Scholfield, LCL 448 (London: William Heinemann, 1959): 391; Vol. 3, trans. A. F. Scholfield, LCL 449 (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1959): 29.

²⁹¹ Aristotle, *Historia Animalium*, Vol. 10, VI, ed. G. P. Goold, trans. A. L. Peck, LCL 438 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press: 1993): 267. Aristotle also concludes that dolphins are the oddest of all animals, as they are both terrestrial and aquatic animal, because they take in sea water, but also take in air by their lungs. Also, they rear their young on dry land. Aristotle, *Historia Animalium*, vol. 11, VII, ed. and trans. D. M. Balme, 73-75.

²⁹² Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, Vol. 3, VIII, ed. G. P. Goold, trans. H. Rackham, 125.

²⁹³ J. M. C. Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971): 38.

²⁹⁴ Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, Vol. 3, IX, ed. G. P. Goold, trans. H. Rackham, 227-229. Similar characteristics are found in Aristotle, *Historia Animalium*, Vol. 10, V, ed. G. P. Goold, trans. A. L. Peck, 113-5; idem, *Historia Animalium*, Vol. 11, VII, ed. and trans. D. M. Balme, 161-3.

²⁹⁵ Renato Iacumin, *Le porte della salvezza. Gnosticismo alessandrino e Grande Chiesa nei mosaici delle prome comunità cristiane. Guida ai mosaici della basilica di Aquileia* (Udine: Gaspere editore, 2006): 64.

²⁹⁶ Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, Vol. 3, VIII, ed. G. P. Goold, trans. H. Rackham, 99. The same observations are to be found in Aristotle, who says that snails hide in winter, and regenerate during the warm

Thus it appears that all pieces of the puzzle seem to fall into place. Celebrated for their healing properties, aquatic animals appear to have been chosen in order to enhance the apotropaic powers of the tauroctony. Being both terrestrial and aquatic animals, they point to the Ocean as a place of transition, i.e. souls' genesis and apogenesis. Also, their life cycle is deeply dependant on the Invincible Sun. While during the cold weather they usually hide in stony and rocky places, recalling Porphyry's description of the cave as a place of rocky and watery substance where souls's transition happens, Sun's warmth gives them a new breath of life. They all need sunny and warm weather to regenerate and reproduce, symbolizing the life-giving power of the Sun/Mithras/Oceanus. They symbolize fertility, opulence, (re)birth, and cyclical rhythm of life in cosmos which is, like dolphins, in perpetual motion.

4.7 Change Against a Backdrop of Continuity

The person who stands behind the design of the Salonitan tondo must have been well acquainted with not only the Mithraic teachings, but also with the cosmological, astrological, and cultural traditions of antiquity.²⁹⁷ The Salonitan tondo must be seen as a product of deliberate and informed choice; the message is that of the never-ceasing process of (re)creation, fertility, abundance, harmonious life in the cosmos, and ultimate salvation under the guidance of its creator, Mithras. The exercise of an eclectic deployment of iconography does not imply that the individual components were somehow less well understood or more casually employed.²⁹⁸ Quite the opposite: it points to the refined late antique culture in which one can trace overlappings of different discourses regardless of religious boundaries.²⁹⁹ As

and sunny weather, Aristotle, *Historia Animalium*, Vol. 10, V, ed. G. P. Goold, trans. A. L. Peck, 131; Vol. 11, VII, ed. and trans. D. M. Balme, 149.

²⁹⁷ According to Luther H. Martin "Mithraists of all grades were able to achieve an increasing comprehension of Mithraic star-talk communication," in idem, "'Star-Talk': Native Competence; Initiatory Comprehension," *Pantheon* 7, no. 1 (2012): 67.

²⁹⁸ The same eclectic approach to the use of iconography in late antique art was emphasized by Dominic Perring, "'Gnosticism' in Fourth-Century Britain: The Frampton Mosaic Reconsidered," *Britannia* 34 (2003): 103.

²⁹⁹ Kocku von Stuckrad has recently pointed to the strong diversity of employed sources in his discussion of late antique astrology, but the same conclusion can be applied to the late antique art, in Kocku von Stuckrad, "Jewish and Christian Astrology in Late Antiquity: A New Approach," *Numen* 47 (2000): 7-8.

the case of Salonitan tondo suggests, Mithraists did not hesitate to blend various traditions in their own religious identity, witnessing intellectual and spiritual cross-currents of the time.

5. CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to provide not only an updated and new interpretation of the cult of Mithras in Salona, but also to offer, for the first time, any such attempt. As the second chapter pointed out, the long neglect of the topic resulted in outdated scholarly discourse on the cult of Mithras in the province of Dalmatia which remained deprived of recent interpretations and approaches. Thus, a fresh and new approach was needed which would make it possible to place the cult of Mithras in Salona in a wider context of recent discoveries, interpretations, and discussions on the topic. The third chapter gathered all the known material concerning the cult in Salona, including some previously unpublished material. The survey of the material enabled me to establish the contours of the cult and to place it into a wider framework.

Given the nature of the evidence, the beginning and the end of the cult's existence in Salona cannot be established with certainty. However, as the analysis of the reliefs' typology and iconography has shown, the cult of Mithras appeared in Salona with the first wave of its spread on the territory of the province of Dalmatia during the second half of the second century AD. As Salona was the capital city, one of the main harbours, and a *caput viae* of the province, it seems only natural that it would be among the first contact zones and receptors of new religious flows. Salona was not a passive adopter of the new cult, but showed a remarkable creativity and ingenuity in its further development. The most remarkable evidence is the Salonitan tondo, the new interpretation of which shows the imaginativeness of Mithraic communities. Thus, the cult of Mithras in Salona broke the local boundaries and participated fully in religious currents of the time.

The apogee of the cult of Mithras in Salona can be placed in the third century AD, the date of most of the material evidence presented. The reliefs abandoned the initial Classical expression and embraced new influences arriving from the Danubian region. As the

examination has shown, reliefs do not follow their models blindly; as the cult reached its full adaptation and independence a more local expression was created characterized by the typical provincial, mediocre quality of handicrafts. In this sense the epithet provincial should be taken as a geographic rather than qualitative category. The lower quality of Salonitan Mithraic reliefs does not mean that local workshops were unable to produce high quality reliefs. On the contrary, it points to a specific local will that found its mode of expression in this specific artistic idiom.

The climax of the Mithras cult in Salona has been attached to the influence of Emperor Diocletian.³⁰⁰ According to one tradition, the emperor was born in Salona in 243 AD.³⁰¹ The emperor returned to the vicinity of his native city to spend his retirement in a palace built around 300 AD in Aspalathos (present-day Split).³⁰² The imperial conference held at Carnuntum (present-day Petronell, Austria) in 308 AD shows that the emperor cultivated a special affection toward Mithras. Diocletian proclaimed Mithras protector of the empire (*fautor imperii sui*) and commissioned the renovation of the already existing mithraeum in Carnuntum.³⁰³ Some scholars have been eager to see the remains of a mithraeum in the emperor's palace,³⁰⁴ and recent studies on the solar aspects of the palace

³⁰⁰ Željko Miletić, "Mitrazizam," 55; Nikolina Uroda, "Prilog poznavanja," 73-74.

³⁰¹ Stephen Williams, *Diocletian and the Roman Recovery* (London: Routledge, 2000), 22.

³⁰² Ivan Basić, "Spalatum-ager Salonitanus? Prilog tumačenju pravno-posjedovnog položaja priobalja Splitskoga poluotoka u preddioklecijanskome razdoblju" [*Spalatum-ager Salonitanus? A contribution to the understanding of the property law status of the coastal region of Split peninsula in pre-Diocletian period*], *Povijesni prilozi* 42 (2012): 10.

³⁰³ CIL III 4413.

³⁰⁴ According to several authors the mithraeum was situated below the cryptoporticus of the palace, Branimir Gabričević, *Studije i članci*, 167; Jerko Marasović, Tomislav Marasović, "Pregled radova Urbanističkog biroa na istraživanju, zaštiti i uređenju Dioklecijanove palače od 1955. do 1965. godine" [A survey of works conducted by Urban bureau on examination, protection, and organization of Diocletian's palace from 1955 to 1965], *URBS: Istraživanje i uređenje Dioklecijanove palače* 4 (1961-1962): 27; Jerko Marasović, "Znanstveni projekt Graditeljsko naslijeđe Splita" [Research project Architectural heritage of Split], *Obnova povijesne jezgre* 2 (1997): 36; Snježana Perojević, Katja Marasović, Jerko Marasović, "Istraživanja Dioklecijanove palače od 1985. do 2005. godine" [Research in the Diocletian's palace from 1985 to 2005], in *Dioklecijan, tetrarhija i Dioklecijanova palača o 1700. obljetnici postojanja: zbornik radova s međunarodnog simpozija održanog od 18. do 22. rujna 2005. u Splitu*, ed. Nenad Cambi, Joško Belamarić and Tomislav Marasović (Split: Književni krug, 2005), 58; Jerko Marasović, Sanja Buble, Katja Marasović, Snježana Perojević, "Prostorni razvoj jugoistočnog dijela Dioklecijanove palače" [Spatial development of the southeast part of Diocletian's palace], *Prostor: znanstveni časopis za arhitekturu i urbanizam* 8, no. 2 (2000): 179; Stanislav Živkov, "Varia Diocletianea," in *Dioklecijan, tetrarhija i Dioklecijanova palača*, 510-511, 517-523.

design might indicate Diocletian's preoccupation with Mithraism.³⁰⁵ However, one should be aware that until solid evidence is found everything remains speculation. It is up to future research to bring more insight on the question of emperor's relationship with Mithras.

The end of Mithraic activity in Salona is even more unclear than its beginnings. However, a relief found built in the wall of the eastern apse of the so-called "Large Salonitan Thermae" in *Urbs orientalis*, taken over by the bishop in the fifth century AD,³⁰⁶ could point to the end of the fourth/beginning of the fifth century as the approximate chronological framework of the cult's gradual disappearance from the Salonitan religious landscape.³⁰⁷ Whether the advent of Christianity played a role in it cannot be said with any certainty, as the nature of evidence does not allow such conclusions.

The epigraphic evidence showed that the adherents were mainly members of the petty bureaucracy and military staff. That there must have been several mithraea in Salona is indicated not only by Duggve, but also by the measurements of reliefs which point, without any doubt, to the existence of several mithraea, dispersed both *intra* and *extra muros*.

This thesis offered several conclusions about the cult of Mithras in Salona, but they should not be taken as conclusive. However, they are the first necessary step in (re)evaluating the cult and should serve as an impetus for further inquiry into the cult of Mithras not only in

³⁰⁵ Mladen Pejaković has conducted a thorough measurements of the palace showing that the whole structure was adjusted to the solar events, especially equinoxes and solstices, and has argued that it speaks in favor of emperor's worship of Mithras, in idem, *Dioklecijanova palača Sunca* [Diocletian's Sun Palace] (Zagreb: Litteris, 2006); other archaeoastronomical measurements were undertaken on the so-called Romula's mausoleum at Gamzigrad and at the mausoleum at Šarkamen, allegedly commissioned by Galerius and Maximinus Daia. The author concluded they are "evoking the Mithras through their alignment to the constellation Orion," in Dragana Mladenović, "Astral Path to Soul Salvation in Late Antiquity? The Orientation of Two Late Roman Imperial Mausolea from Eastern Serbia," *American Journal of Archaeology* 113, no. 1 (2009): 94. These examples clearly point to the Tetrarch's interest in solar phenomena, but one should be cautious in connecting it with Mithras without any specific evidence. However, they can serve as a good starting point for the further inquiry on the topic.

³⁰⁶ Nenad Cambi, *Antička Salona*, 471-472.

³⁰⁷ The question of the end of the cult of Mithras is still the topic of scholarly debate. For example, Eberhard Sauer has argued that in the northern provinces (Belgica I, Germanis I, Lugdunensis I, and Sequania) the cult ceased with its activity in the third quarter of the third century AD, in idem, *The End of Paganism in the North Western Provinces of the Roman Empire: The Example of the Mithras Cult* (Oxford: Tempus Reparatum, 1996); Richard Gordon has rightly observes that his conclusions are based on the evidence from a selected area, and are

Salona, but in the whole province of Dalmatia. The fresh perspective and contemporary discourse employed in the analysis of the cult of Mithras in Salona showed that it is deserving of a significant place not only in Croatian, but rather in a general Mithraic scholarship. As one of the most prominent cults in the capital city of the province of Dalmatia, with fifteen bas-reliefs, several (five?) mithraea, and a significant number of communities of adherents, it proves to be the one whose particular identity and a high level of imaginativeness matches the standards of the cult on a wider scale. The uniqueness of the Salonitan tondo points to the high cultural environment the cult once enjoyed not only in Salona but in a whole Roman Empire.

therefore inconclusive, and that pagan cults survived well into the fifth century AD, *idem*, “The End of Mithraism in the Northwest Provinces,” *JRA* 12 (1999): 683, 688.

APPENDIX

1. ALTAR

Limestone

28 x 26 cm (without base)

Found in the southern perimeter city walls.

SOLI DEO

SEX(tus) CORNEL(ius)

ANTIOCHVS

STELLAM

ET FRVCTI

FER(am) EX VIS(u)

LIB(ens) POS(uit)

Soli deo / Sex(tus) Cornel(ius) / Antiochus / stellam / et fructi/fer(am) ex vis(u) / lib(ens) pos(uit).

Third century AD.

F. Bulić (1884); O. Hirschfeld 1885; CIL III 8686; ILS 3943; F. Cumont 1896-1898; F. Bulić 1902; B. Gabričević 1951; B. Gabričević 1952; B. Gabričević 1954; CIMRM 1876; Lj. Zotović 1973; M. Šašel-Kos 1993; Ž. Miletić 1996; Ž. Miletić 1997; G. Lipovac-Vrkljan 1997; G. Lipovac-Vrkljan 2001; P. Selem, I. Vilogorac-Brčić 2012; EDH 040057.

2. ALTAR

Lost

Marble

Found secondary used as part of the sarcophagus, later built into the stairway of a prive house in Solin.

DEO M[ithrae invicto]

CETERIS[que dis dea]

BVSQV[e immor]

TALIBV(s) [Aur?]

ELIVS[-]

A MILIT[iis]

Deo M[ithrae Invicto?] / ceteris[que dis dea]/busqu[e immor]/talibu[s ---]/lius [---] / a milit[iis ---] / [----- .

151-300 AD.

F. Bulić 1885; CIL III 8677; F. Cumont 1896-1898; CIMRM 1872; B. Gabričević 1951; Lj. Zotović 1973; Ž. Miletić 1996; G. Lipovac-Vrkljan 1997; G. Lipovac-Vrkljan 2001; P. Selem, I. Vilogorac-Brčić 2012; EDH 053172.

3. ALTAR

Limestone

31 x 25 cm

Found in the southern perimeter city walls.

PETR(a)E

GENE

TRICI

Petr(a)e / Gene/trici.

151-300 AD.

F. Bulić 1884; CIL III 8679; F. Cumont 1869-1898; F. Bulić 1902; B. Gabričević 1951 CIMRM 1874; LJ. Zotović 1973; Ž. Miletić 1996; G. Lipovac-Vrkljan 1997; G. Lipovac-Vrkljan 2001; P. Selem, I. Vilogorac-Brčić 2012; EDH 053174.

4. ALTAR

Lost

Found in Salonitan vineyard.

DEO INVIC(to)

PRO SALVTE

ET INCOLV

MITAT(e) PAMPHI

LI DISP(ensatoris)

AVG(ustorum) NN(ostrorum)

FORTVNATVS

ARCARIVS

Deo Invic(to) / pro salute / et incolu/mitat(e) Pamph[i]/li disp(ensatoris) Augg(ustorum) nn(ostrorum) / Fortunatus / arcarius.

171-300 AD.

F. Lanza 1850; CIL III 1955; F. Cumont 1896-1898; B. Gabričević 1951; CIMRM 1875; Gaston H. Halberge 1972; Lj. Zotović 1973; Ž. Miletić 1996; G. Lipovac-Vrkljan 1997; G. Lipovac-Vrkljan 2001; P. Selem, and Vilogorac-Brčić 2012; EDH 053175.

5. ALTAR

Unknown

Found inside a rectangular structure in the area of western necropolis.

D(eo) I(invicto) S(oli) M(ithrae) TER
ENTIVS DALM
ATA MANTIVS
V(oto) S(olvit) IN HONO
REM AMIC(orum)
SVORVM

D(eo) I(nvicto) S(oli) M(ithrae) Ter/entius Dalm/ata MANTIVS / v(otum?) s(olvit?) in
hono/rem amic(orum) / suorum.
151-300 AD.

J. Mardešić 1987; AÉ 1989; EDH 018318.

6. VOTIVE PLATE

Lost

Marble

20 x 15 cm

Found at the private Bubić house in Solin.

D(eo) INV(icto) M(ithrae)
L(ucius) CORN(elius) APALAVS
TVS PRO S(alute) M(arci) VIVI
CRESTI AMIC(i) [K]ARIS(simi)
EX VOTO P(osuit)

D(eo) Inv(icto) M(ithrae) / L(ucius) Corn(elius) Apalaus/tus pro s(alute) M(arci) Vivi / Cresti
amic(i) kariss(im)i / ex voto p(osuit).

171-300 AD.

F. Bulić 1885; CIL III 8677; F. Cumont 1869-1898; B. Gabričević 1951; CIMRM 1873; Lj.
Zotović 1973; Ž. Miletić 1996; G. Lipovac-Vrkljan 1997; G. Lipovac-Vrkljan 2001; P.
Salem, I. Vilogorac-Brčić 2012; EDH 053173.

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