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DEVELOPMENT, DECLINE AND DEMISE:
THE CULT OF MITHRAS *ca.* A.D. 270-430

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Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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February 2016

Word Count: 89,490

ABSTRACT

This thesis provides an overview of the cult of Mithras from the late third to early fifth centuries across the entire Roman world. It seeks to illustrate what developments occurred in the cult during this period and how it subsequently came to an end. In doing so, it elucidates alterations in the environment and architecture of mithraea, the patrons and adherents of the cult, and Mithraic ritual practices. It demonstrates that by the fourth century the cult of Mithras had become increasingly localised, with a significant degree of variation evident among different Mithraic communities. Furthermore, it will be shown that, contrary to the traditional narrative, the end of the Mithras cult was not the product of an Empire-wide persecution by Christian iconoclasts, but a more gradual process that occurred over a long period of time. Additionally, it explores whether adopting a sociological approach, as has been suggested by other scholars in the past, can be used to explain how the transformations evident in the cult may have contributed to a decline in the commitment of Mithraic adherents in the fourth century.

This study contributes to the wider field of research on the late antique period in three ways. Firstly, it is to my knowledge the only analysis of a non-Christian cult in Late Antiquity to cover the entire Roman Empire and thus hopes to contribute to a greater understanding of the sacred landscape in this period. In particular, it sheds some light on areas which are generally understudied in this regard, such as the Rhine and Danube frontiers. Secondly, it seeks to place the end of a cult in this period in its sociocultural context, rather than focusing only on the evidence from cult sites alone as previous studies have often done, thus providing a more nuanced explanation for why this occurred. Finally, through comparing the Mithras cult to other cults in this period it also shows that there is little to support any notion of a uniform 'decline of paganism' in late antiquity, with various cults experiencing divergent rates of decline which began at different times.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people I need to thank who have helped and supported me in the course of writing this thesis. First is the long list of those who have provided me with information, shown me around sites and museums, and read over various chapters of this work: József Beszédes, Jonas Bjørnebye, Neil Christie, Jitse Dijkstra, Richard Gordon, Alison Griffith, Marion Großmann, Michael Gawlikowski, Ines Klenner, Orsolya Láng, Ray Laurence, Roger Pearse, Peter Talloen, Sadie Watson, Francois Wibl , and Paula Zsidi. Thanks to Lloyd Bosworth for producing Fig. 13. I am tremendously grateful to John Beale and the School of European Culture and Languages for providing me with a fee-wavier, without which I would not have been able to undertake this opportunity. Thanks also go to James Burchell and Andrew Martinovs for keeping me employed throughout, and to my flatmate Andrew Rawlinson, who probably now knows far more about cults in the Roman Empire than he ever expected he would. Special acknowledgement must go to my supervisor Luke Lavan for his unwavering enthusiasm and support throughout.

Finally, the most important thanks go to my parents. I doubt they thought trips to the British Museum and the purchasing of many ‘Horrible Histories’ would end up here, but I hope this goes someway to repaying their endless faith and love. Any success I achieve is as much theirs as it is mine.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
INTRODUCTION	
Religious Change in Late Antiquity: Changing Scholarly Views	1
The Cult of Mithras in Late Antiquity	4
A Sociological Approach to Religious Change	6
Structure of the Thesis	12
Critiquing the Model	13
Selecting the Evidence	15
A Note on Terminology	15
CHAPTER 1: THE LOCATION OF MITHRAEA IN LATE ANTIQUITY AND CHANGES TO THEIR ENVIRONMENT	
Introduction	17
Geographical and Chronological Changes in the Distribution of Mithraea	18
<i>Discussion</i>	23
Mithraea and their Environment I: Previous Studies on Rome and Ostia	24
Mithraea and their Environment II.1: The Provinces Before the Late Third Century	25
<i>Discussion</i>	26
Mithraea and their Environment II.2: The Provinces from the Late Third Century	26
Onwards	
<i>Urban Mithraea Neighbouring by Industrial Buildings</i>	27
<i>Urban Mithraea Neighbouring by Religious Buildings</i>	28
<i>Urban Mithraea In/Neighbouring by Residential Buildings</i>	31
<i>Extra-Mural Mithraea</i>	32
<i>Urban Mithraea from Unknown Contexts</i>	33
<i>Private Estates</i>	34
<i>Rural Mithraea</i>	34
<i>Discussion</i>	35
Prominence of Sanctuaries and Temples Belonging to Other Religious Groups	36
<i>Temples to Isis/Sarapis</i>	36
	iii

<i>Temples to Magna Mater</i>	37
<i>Churches</i>	37
<i>Discussion</i>	38
Conclusion	38
CHAPTER 2: ARCHITECTURE AND DECORATION OF MITHRAEA IN LATE ANTIQUITY	
Introduction	42
The Architecture of Mithraea Before the Late Third Century	42
<i>The Symbolic Nature of the Mithraeum</i>	46
<i>Limiting Numbers?</i>	48
<i>Discussion</i>	49
Alterations to Pre-existing Mithraea from the Late Third Century	50
<i>Size</i>	50
<i>Plan</i>	51
<i>Orientation</i>	51
<i>Construction Materials</i>	51
<i>Internal Fittings</i>	51
<i>Decoration</i>	52
<i>Altars, Statues and Reliefs</i>	53
<i>Discussion</i>	54
Mithraea Constructed in the Late Third and Fourth Centuries	55
<i>Size</i>	55
<i>Plan</i>	57
<i>Orientation</i>	59
<i>Construction Materials</i>	59
<i>Internal Fittings</i>	60
<i>Decoration</i>	62
<i>Altars, Statues and Reliefs</i>	63
<i>Discussion</i>	64
Architecture of Other Religious Groups	65
<i>Temples to Isis/Sarapis</i>	65
<i>Temples to Magna Mater</i>	67
<i>Churches</i>	67
<i>Discussion</i>	68

Conclusion	69
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CHAPTER 3: HIERARCHY, PATRONS AND INITIATES IN LATE ANTIQUE MITHRAIC COMMUNITIES

Introduction	72
Membership and Structure in the Cult of Mithras Before the Late Third Century	73
<i>Membership</i>	73
<i>The Exclusion of Women</i>	74
<i>The Grade System</i>	75
<i>Discussion</i>	77
Evidence for Patrons and Initiates from the Late Third Century Onwards	78
<i>Emperors</i>	78
<i>Senators</i>	78
<i>Provincial Governors</i>	80
<i>Duces</i>	81
<i>Soldiers</i>	81
<i>Doctors</i>	82
<i>Citizens/Freedmen</i>	82
<i>Slaves</i>	83
<i>Unknown Status</i>	84
<i>Discussion</i>	85
Elite Patronage and Membership of Later Mithraic Communities in Context	88
<i>The Provinces</i>	88
<i>Rome</i>	90
Patronage and Membership of Other Religious Groups	92
<i>The Cult of Isis/Sarapis</i>	92
<i>The Cult of Magna Mater</i>	94
<i>Christian Communities</i>	95
<i>Discussion</i>	97
Conclusion	98

CHAPTER 4: MITHRAIC RITUAL PRACTICE IN LATE ANTIQUITY

Introduction	101
Mithraic Rituals Prior to the Late Third Century	102

<i>Initiations</i>	102
<i>Votive Practice</i>	106
<i>Sacrifices</i>	107
<i>Feasting</i>	108
<i>The Curation of Objects</i>	109
<i>Festivals</i>	110
<i>Discussion</i>	110
Mithraic Rituals from the Late Third Century Onwards	111
<i>Initiations</i>	111
<i>Votive Practice</i>	113
<i>Sacrifices</i>	120
<i>Feasting</i>	120
<i>The Curation of Objects</i>	121
<i>Festivals</i>	122
<i>Discussion</i>	122
Mithraic Ritual Practice in the Wider Context of Late Antiquity	124
<i>Initiations</i>	124
<i>Votive Practice</i>	125
<i>Sacrifices</i>	129
<i>Feasting</i>	131
<i>The Curation of Objects</i>	132
<i>Festivals</i>	132
<i>Discussion</i>	134
Conclusion	135

CHAPTER 5: MITHRAEA AND WIDER BUILDING PATTERNS IN LATE ANTIQUITY

Introduction	139
Regional Patterns	140
Temples to Other ‘Mystery’ Deities Across the Roman World	145
Construction and Repair of Mithraea in the Third and Fourth Centuries	147
Conclusion	151

CHAPTER 6: THE FATE OF MITHRAEA

Introduction	153
Geographical and Chronological Variation in the Fate of Mithraea	154
<i>Discussion</i>	158
Destruction and Damage to Mithraea	159
<i>Destruction and Damage via Fire</i>	159
<i>Levelling</i>	161
<i>Graffiti and Damage to Frescoes in Mithraea</i>	161
Reuse of Mithraea and their Materials	163
<i>Mithraea Reused of Different Purposes</i>	163
<i>Mithraea as Sources of Spolia</i>	166
The Fate of Internal Fittings	167
<i>Absence of Fittings</i>	167
<i>The Fragmentation of Reliefs and Statues</i>	168
<i>Items Sealed in the Mithraeum</i>	170
Human Remains	172
Motors for the Fate of Mithraea	172
<i>Christian Iconoclasm</i>	172
<i>Barbarian Incursion and Settlement</i>	180
<i>Imperial Legislation</i>	185
<i>Civil War</i>	186
<i>Relocation of Mithraic Initiates</i>	187
<i>Natural Disasters and Accidental Destruction</i>	189
Conclusion	190

CONCLUSION

Developments in the Cult of Mithras <i>ca.</i> A.D. 270-430	194
<i>The Context and Architecture of Mithraea</i>	194
<i>Ritual Practice</i>	195
<i>Cult Hierarchy</i>	196
<i>Members and Patrons</i>	197
The Localisation of the Mithras Cult	198
Using a Sociological Model to Explain Religious Change	199

Motors for the Fate of Mithraea	200
Possible Avenues for Future Work	203
APPENDIX: GAZETTEER OF MITHRAEA ACTIVE IN THE FOURTH CENTURY AND THOSE THAT EXHIBIT EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIAN ICONOCLASM	205
BIBLIOGRAPHY	279

LIST OF FIGURES

- Fig. 1 The Context of Active Mithraea from the Late Third Century (excluding Rome and Ostia)
- Fig. 2 Distribution of Active Mithraea *ca.* A.D. 271-300
- Fig. 3 Distribution of Active Mithraea *ca.* A.D. 301-330
- Fig. 4 Distribution of Active Mithraea *ca.* A.D. 331-370
- Fig. 5 Distribution of Active Mithraea *ca.* A.D. 371-400
- Fig. 6 Distribution of Active Mithraea *ca.* A.D. 400-430
- Fig. 7 Buildings Neighbouring Active Urban Mithraea (Excluding Rome and Ostia)
- Fig. 8 The Martigny Mithraeum and its Environs (Adapted from Wibl  (2008) Fig. 162)
- Fig. 9 The Trier Mithraeum (37D) and Its Environs *ca.* A. D. 400 (Adapted from Ghetta (2008) Fig. 7)
- Fig. 10 The Standard Plan of a Mithraeum
- Fig. 11 The Mithraeum of the Seven Spheres (Beck (2006c) Fig.3)
- Fig. 12 The Layout of the 'Ideal' Mithraeum (Beck (2006c) Fig. 2)
- Fig. 13 Mithraea Constructed *ca.* A.D. 271-330
- Fig. 14 Patrons of Temples to Isis and Sarapis
- Fig. 15 A Sword from the Riegel Mithraeum (Source:
http://www.landesmuseum.de/website/dyndata/Imperium_Mithras_04_Kultschwert.jpg)
- Fig. 16 Mithraic Votives *ca.* A.D. 271-300
- Fig. 17 Mithraic Votives *ca.* A.D. 301-330
- Fig. 18 Mithraic Votives *ca.* A.D. 331-370
- Fig. 19 Mithraic Votives *ca.* A.D. 371-400
- Fig. 20 The Chronological Distribution of Coins found in Mithraea (Number of Coins Found/ Identifiable Coins) (Based on Sauer (2004) Table A)
- Fig. 21 Distribution of Coins (*ca.* A.D. 330-348) in the Martigny Mithraeum (Adapted from Wibl  (2004) Fig. 7)
- Fig. 22 Distribution of Coins (*ca.* A.D. 378-402) in the Martigny Mithraeum (Adapted from Wibl  (2004) Fig. 8)
- Fig. 23 Distribution of Coins (*ca.* A.D. 81-330) in the Orbe 'Mithraeum' (Adapted from Luginb hl, Monnier and M hlemann (2004) Fig. 12)
- Fig. 24 Distribution of Coins (*ca.* A.D. 330-Late 4th c.) in the Orbe 'Mithraeum' (Adapted from Luginb hl, Monnier and M hlemann (2004) Fig. 13)
- Fig. 25 Public Construction in Italy *ca.* A.D. 131-400 (excluding Mithraea)

- Fig. 26 Public Construction in Noricum and Pannonia *ca.* A.D. 131-400 (excluding mithraea)
- Fig. 27 Construction and Repair of Temples to Isis/Sarapis across the Roman World *ca.* A.D. 131-400
- Fig. 28 Construction and Repair of Temples to Magna Mater *ca.* A.D. 131-400
- Fig. 29 Construction and Repair of Mithraea across the Roman World *ca.* A.D. 201-400
- Fig. 30 Public Building v Mithraea in Italy *ca.* A.D. 131-400
- Fig. 31 Public Building v Mithraea in Noricum and Pannonia *ca.* A.D. 131-400
- Fig. 32 Construction Work Relating to Isis/Sarapis Temples v Temples of Magna Mater v Mithraea *ca.* A.D. 201-400
- Fig. 33 Construction and Repair v Abandonment of Mithraea *ca.* A.D. 271-430
- Fig. 34 Fate of Mithraea *ca.* A.D. 271-300
- Fig. 35 Fate of Mithraea *ca.* A.D. 301-330
- Fig. 36 Fate of Mithraea *ca.* A.D. 331-370
- Fig. 37 Fate of Mithraea *ca.* A.D. 371-400
- Fig. 38 Fate of Mithraea *ca.* A.D. 401-430
- Fig. 39 Statuettes from the Dieburg Mithraeum (Source: *CIMRM* Fig. 325 and 326)
- Fig. 40 Relief of the Rock-birth from Septeuil (Source: Gaidon-Bunuel (1991) Fig. 7)
- Fig. 41 The Relief from the Konjic Mithraeum (Source: *CIMRM* Fig. 490)
- Fig. 42 The Housesteads Mithraeum (Adapted from *CIMRM* Fig. 224)
- Fig. 43 The Mithraeum at Carrawburgh as Found (Richmond et al. (1951) Fig. 7)
- Fig. 44 First Phase of the London Mithraeum (Shepherd (1998) Fig. 97)
- Fig. 45 The Biesheim Mithraeum (Pétry and Kern (1978) Fig. 24)
- Fig. 46 The Bornheim-Sechtem Mithraeum (Ulbert (2004) Fig. 3)
- Fig. 47 Fragments of a Torchbearer Statue (R) (Wulfmeier (2004) Fig. 1) and a Broken Cultic Vessel from Bornheim-Sechtem (L) (Huld-Zetsche, Ulbert and Wulfmeier (2004) Fig. 7)
- Fig. 48 The Mackwiller Mithraeum (Reproduced from (Sauer 2004) Fig. 6, based on Hatt (1957) Fig. 5)
- Fig. 49 The Ad Enum Mithraeum (Adapted from Garbsch (1985) Fig. 4)
- Fig. 50 The Lentia Mithraeum (Adapted from *CIMRM* Fig. 361)
- Fig. 51 The Symphorus Mithraeum in Aquincum (Adapted from Tóth (1988) 46)
- Fig. 52 Carnuntum III (Adapted from *CIMRM* Fig. 429)
- Fig. 53 Poetovio II (Adapted from *CIMRM* Fig. 385)
- Fig. 54 Poetovio III (Adapted from *CIMRM* Fig. 399)
- Fig. 55 The Mithraeum of Jajce (Adapted from *CIMRM* Fig. 492)

- Fig. 56 The Mithraeum of Jajce (Adapted from *CIMRM* Fig. 492)
- Fig. 57 The Capua Mithraeum (*CIMRM* Fig. 51)
- Fig. 58 The Mithraeum at Ponza (Vermaseren (1974) Fig. 2)
- Fig. 59 The Mithraeum at Spolegium (Adapted from *CIMRM* Fig. 192)
- Fig. 60 The Trier Mithraeum (Adapted from Walters (1974) Fig. 3)
- Fig. 61 Figure 6: The Septeuil Mithraeum (Gaidon Bunuel (1991) Fig. 3)
- Fig. 62 The Lambaesis Mithraeum (Le Glay (1954) Fig. 1)
- Fig. 63 The Caesarea Maritima Mithraeum (Adapted from Blakely & Horton (1987) Fig. 5)
- Fig. 64 The Hawarte Mithraeum (Gawlikowski (2012) Fig. 2)
- Fig. 65 The Ša‘āra Mithraeum (Adapted from Kalos (2001) Fig. 4)

INTRODUCTION

The aims of this thesis are to chart developments in the cult of Mithras across the Roman world from the late third to early fifth centuries and to establish what drove the widespread abandonment of mithraea during this period. By ‘developments’, I refer to changes evident in the environment, architecture and decoration of mithraea, the patrons and adherents of Mithraic communities, and the ritual practices conducted by the cult.

The objectives of this thesis are to assess: 1) What chronological and regional variation is evident in the cult based on the archaeological, epigraphic and historical records 2) To establish whether a sociological approach can aid our understanding of why the cult declined 3) Whether such a decline is reflected in the patterns of construction and repair of mithraea 4) Based on the context of mithraea and the state of the evidence found therein, what the most plausible motors for the final abandonment of mithraea during the fourth century are.

It is hoped that this thesis will be beneficial to the wider field of late antique studies in several ways. Firstly, it is to my knowledge the only empire-wide study of a non-Christian cult in Late Antiquity and thus will contribute to a greater understanding of the sacred landscape in this period. In particular, it looks to shed some light on areas which are generally understudied in this regard, such as the frontier regions of Noricum, Pannonia and the Rhineland. Secondly, it seeks to place the end of the Mithras cult in its sociocultural context, rather than focusing only on the evidence from Mithraic sites alone, as previous studies have often done, and thus intends to provide a more nuanced explanation for the cult’s demise. Finally, through comparisons between the cults of Mithras, Isis/Sarapis and Magna Mater, it will be shown that rather than a uniform decline of ‘paganism’ in this period, evidence for decline in each of these cults can be observed beginning at different times and occurring at alternate rates.

Religious Change in the Late Antiquity: Changing Scholarly Views

For centuries, the transformation of the Roman Empire from a world filled with a variety of temples, cults and beliefs into one dominated by Christianity had been seen as a largely violent process. Particular moments in the late fourth century have often been thought to have defined the struggle between the old ‘pagan’ world and the new Christian one, such as the destruction of the Alexandrian Serapeum, the death of the philosopher Hypatia and the Battle of the Frigidus. Such views were evident in the works of Tolland, Voltaire and Gibbon, while in the 20th century studies by Deichmann and Fowden have had a strong influence in perpetuating this narrative, with the former claiming temples were widely closed around the turn of the fifth century and the latter arguing that many

temples were converted into churches.¹ Much of this was based on the historical texts, particularly the lives of saints and bishops, which detail the destruction of various temples in the late fourth century by Christian iconoclasts. Some recent volumes have continued to present the transformation of the late antique sacred landscape in the same fashion, with Ramsey MacMullen observing that post-Constantine Christianity was “determined on [paganism’s] extinction”, Robin Lane Fox commenting on the “robust history of Christian temple- and statue-breaking”, and David Frankfurter referring to the destruction of shrines as an “epidemic around the Mediterranean world”.²

However, as greater emphasis has been placed on the archaeological evidence in recent decades there has been a notable shift in scholarly views on the end of non-Christian cults in Late Antiquity. Richard Bayliss’ study of the conversion of temples to churches has shown Deichmann’s conclusions to be largely unfounded, as the former could only find 120 examples where temples had been converted into churches from across the entire Roman world. Only a third of these conversions occurred prior to the fifth century, while Bayliss also found only four definite acts of de-sacralisation in the archaeological record.³ Furthermore, many of the case studies included in the recent *The Archaeology of Late Antique ‘Paganism’* have shown that evidence for the violent destruction of temples is relatively uncommon in regions such as Gaul, Egypt, North Africa and Spain.⁴ As a result, scholars are now approaching the *Lives* of saints with greater caution, realising that these texts served as panegyrics that exaggerate (or possibly even falsify) information.⁵ None of this is to say temples were never destroyed by Christian iconoclasts and that these events were fabrications, for non-Christian authors such as Libanius also recorded instances of temple destruction by Christians,⁶ but rather that it appears that such incidents may have been far less common than traditionally thought.

Instead, it is now becoming apparent that the transformation of the sacred landscape was a much more complex process that went beyond the confines of the late fourth century. There is a growing realisation that things had begun to change in the generations preceding Constantine, with the construction of temples already in decline and animal sacrifice becoming less common.⁷ It is also now acknowledged that many pre-Christian traditions continued beyond the fourth century, such as festivals, ritual feasts at grave sites, and (despite a general decline) animal sacrifice.⁸ In some cases,

¹ Tolland (1722); Voltaire (1764); Gibbon (1781); Deichmann (1939); Fowden (1978).

² MacMullen (1997) 13; Lane-Fox (1986) 672; Frankfurter (1998) 278.

³ Bayliss (2004). This work is not comprehensive and does not include many of the mithraea included in this study. On the rarity of temple to church conversion, see also Hanson (1978).

⁴ Lavan and Mulryan (2011).

⁵ For example, on the *Life of Porphyry*, see Hahn (2004) 202-209 and on the *Life of Shenoute*, see Dijkstra (2011) 398.

⁶ Lib. *Or.* 30.9.

⁷ On the decline of temple construction, see Lavan (2011a). On a decline in animal sacrifice, see Bradbury (1995).

⁸ On the continuation of festivals, see Graf (2015); on grave-side feasts, see MacMullen (1997) 110-120; on continued instances of animal sacrifice, see Trout (1995).

such survivals have been described as either a form of ‘pagan resistance’ or a ‘pagan revival’,⁹ yet in reality the continuation of these activities was due to the fact that Christianity and ‘paganism’ were not mutually exclusive entities, for many Christians were happy to embrace non-Christian elements of society and vice-versa. The Codex-Calendar of A.D. 354, with its lists of Christian holy days, martyrs and popes, alongside images of ‘pagan’ festivals is a case in point. To quote Cameron, “[W]e should not confuse the end of paganism with Christianity, nor should we assume that it was active pagan opposition that kept certain practices alive”.¹⁰

But what was ‘paganism’? The use of this phrase has come under increasing scrutiny in recent times.¹¹ In literal terms, ‘pagan’ meant ‘rustic’ and was applied by Christians to the whole spectrum of non-Christian cults in the Roman world. Although undoubtedly there was a great deal of interaction and exchange between cults, particularly as people could be a member of several at one time, such a term obviously does not do justice to the wide range of beliefs and practices that existed in the Roman Empire. As Greg Woolf put it, “[P]aganism is the most obvious version of a catch-all category defined only in negative terms”.¹² Consequently, if one seeks to ascertain how ‘paganism’ declined and fell, the resulting possible answers are innumerable:

[S]o when did paganism really, finally, end? ...If we define paganism as the civic cults of the pre-Christian Graeco-Roman world, official Roman paganism really did effectively end with the disappearance of the priestly colleges in the early fifth century. To use the term in the wider but well-established sense of any and all religious beliefs and practices that preceded conversion in what became Christian societies, Gothic paganism ended in the mid-fourth century, Viking paganism not until the mid-twelfth.¹³

Indeed, how, why and when different ‘pagan’ cults and practices came to an end was highly variable, both in relation to each other and within themselves. Once again, archaeological investigation has been highly beneficial in highlighting this, for example the recent discovery of a dolichenum at Vindolanda that remained in use until the late fourth century, subsequently proving that not all dolichena were violently destroyed in the third century as once thought.¹⁴ Yet how is it that temples to the same deity came to meet different fates at different times? Arguably, the best way to ascertain why this was is to place the respective temples and their congregations in their sociocultural setting, assess how this altered over time, and what effect this may have had on the cult community. Cults do not remain static, geographically or chronologically, but are continuously forced to react to the changing world around them. As a result, Greg Woolf has suggested that deities should be viewed

⁹ On ‘pagan resistance’, see MacMullen (1997); on revival, see Watts (1998).

¹⁰ Cameron (2011) 783. On the Codex Calendar of A.D. 354, see Salzman (1990).

¹¹ Lee (2000) 8-9; Cameron (2011) 1-32; Jones (2012).

¹² Woolf (2009) 22.

¹³ Cameron (2011) 783.

¹⁴ Dijkstra (2011); Birley and Birley (2012); Tóth (1973).

in the same way as objects, in that they have a ‘cultural biography’, with them “...undergoing processes of utopianization and processes of localization, their transformations entangled on each occasion with shifts in the social and political geography and identity characteristic of world empires and diaspora”.¹⁵ As this study shall highlight, in case of the cult of Mithras significant variation began to emerge in the cult across the third and fourth century, with Mithras meaning different things to different people in different places.

Finally, it is important to highlight that, while many strides have been made in our understanding of the sacred landscape in Late Antiquity, there are a number of provinces that have yet to receive adequate attention in this regard. In the bibliographical essays provided in *The Archaeology of Late Antique ‘Paganism’*, there is barely a single entry on the Danubian provinces or the Rhine frontier.¹⁶ There are various reasons for this, such as little textual evidence to supplement the archaeological record and the existence of the ‘Iron Curtain’ inhibiting interaction between scholars until recent decades. However, these areas have provided an abundance of archaeological material that is just as important to the study of the religious landscape in Late Antiquity as Italy or North Africa. In particular, as will be shown, evidence from these regions is of great importance to the study of the cult of Mithras in this period.

The Cult of Mithras in Late Antiquity

Of the various non-Christian cults that were still active in Late Antiquity, the cult of Mithras has arguably received more attention than most. The majority of scholars have been content to see the disappearance of the cult as the result of the traditional narrative of violent Christian persecution. In the earliest days of Mithraic studies, Cumont commented that the “ruins of Mithraeums (*sic*) bear witness to [the Christians] devastating fury” and this view has been echoed by many up to the present day.¹⁷ Among the most prominent works of recent times to adhere to this narrative are those of Eberhard Sauer, who suggested that the cult of Mithras was “the most hated cult and first victim of the Christian persecution of paganism”.¹⁸ At first glance the evidence does appear convincing, with many mithraea providing a *terminus post quem* of the late fourth century (i.e. contemporary to the ‘anti-pagan laws’ of Theodosius) for having been destroyed, or their reliefs and statues smashed. The

¹⁵ Woolf (2014) 85.

¹⁶ Demarsin (2011); Mulryan (2011).

¹⁷ Cumont (1913) 203 (Quoted from McCormack’s 1955 English translation). See also, Clauss (2000) 170, Turcan (1984), (1996) 246; Winter (2000).

¹⁸ Sauer (1996) 79, (2003).

historical texts also appear to concur, recounting how mithraea were attacked at Rome and Alexandria, while various Christian authors made their disdain for the cult abundantly clear.¹⁹

However, there are some dissenting voices that have begun to question whether there might be other explanations for the demise of the cult. Richard Gordon produced a strong critique of Sauer's initial volume, pointing out that many of the mithraea Sauer had looked at had failed to produce any convincing diagnostic evidence for Christian iconoclasts (i.e. no crosses carved into any walls). Furthermore, Gordon also questioned Sauer's selection of provinces – Britain, Gaul and parts of Germany – arguing they did not provide enough evidence to be considered representative of the Mithras cult in the fourth century. Subsequently, he questioned why Sauer failed to look at Italy, Dalmatia or Pannonia, which have produced significant Mithraic evidence dating to this period.²⁰ Indeed, given that no study has ever discussed how the cult of Mithras came to an end in areas where it was particularly prevalent, such as Pannonia, Noricum, Italy (outside of Rome) and Dalmatia, a large amount of material has been overlooked in attempting to ascertain why and how it happened that the cult ceased to exist.

Another issue is the lack of attention paid to any apparent changes that occurred within the cult itself during this period. Often when the status of the Mithras cult in the fourth century is discussed it is dismissed within a page or so, with one left believing that the cult was much the same as it was in the early second century,²¹ while some scholars have also suggested that cult was in decline at the turn of the fourth century.²² Such views are erroneous, for many mithraea were still active in the fourth century and have produced evidence that suggests continuing chronological and regional developments in the cult. However, little has been done to bring this evidence together to form a general study of the cult in the late antique period.

Furthermore, little attention has been paid to the context of mithraea in the fourth century: what happened to the structures they neighboured? What changes occurred in the social networks of cult members? How does the cult of Mithras compare to other contemporary cults in regards to their prominence, architecture, members and rituals? Indeed, nearly all the works which claim Christian iconoclasts as the main motor for the destruction of mithraea rarely attempt to ascertain whether there is *any* evidence of a Christian presence in the area at the time. This, in my opinion, has been another flaw in many studies that have looked at the end of the Mithras cult, for how can one establish why

¹⁹ Alexandria: Ruf. *Hist. eccl.* 11.2; Sozom. *Hist. eccl.* 5.7; Socrates *Hist. eccl.* 3.2.3. Rome: Jer. *Ep.* 107.2. Christian authors hostile to the cult of Mithras: Justin Martyr *Apol.* 1.66; Tert. *De Prae.* 40.3-4; Firm. Mat. *De Err.* 4.

²⁰ Gordon (1999). For other works questioning the narrative of Christian iconoclasm directed at mithraea, see Martin (1989); Nicholson (1995).

²¹ Clauss (2000) 28-29.

²² Cameron (2011) 149.

the cult came to an end with any reasonable plausibility if one does not know the context in which it existed at the time? It is by addressing this that this study hopes to achieve a greater understanding of the cult of Mithras in Late Antiquity.

A Sociological Approach to Religious Change

We are fortunate that the cult of Mithras has left a great deal of information in the archaeological and epigraphic records. Evidence for the cult stretches from the Syrian Desert to Hadrian's Wall (although it is much more prevalent in the Western provinces), with numerous extant Mithraic temples and inscriptions allowing us to place Mithraic congregations in their sociocultural context. Yet there are many aspects which remain a mystery to us, with scant literary evidence surviving from the cult itself (barring a few scraps of papyrus) to inform us about Mithraic doctrine, or even if there was any doctrine to speak of.²³ As a result, there is little that can be discussed in this regard when exploring changes in the cult in the late antique period. This is unfortunate, but as Richard Gordon commented "the explanation of religious change can be seriously undertaken only by the historical sociology of religion".²⁴ With the available evidence, such an approach to the study of the cult of Mithras in Late Antiquity is possible.

The application of a socio-archaeological approach is, to my knowledge, not common in the field in the study of Late Antiquity. One scholar that did seek to apply sociological theory in attempting to explain the transformation of the sacred landscape in this period was Rodney Stark in his influential study, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders*, although this focused almost solely on the historical record with little use of the archaeological data. While there was merit in his study, it rightly received criticism, most notably from Roger Beck, in how it attempted to explain success of Christianity over 'paganism' by utilising the theory of religious economics.²⁵ Stark argued that as a 'firm' Christianity achieved greater 'brand loyalty' by being exclusive and being "engaged in the collective production of religion",²⁶ two attributes that 'pagan' cults did not have. As Beck pointed out, the considerable flaw in this paradigm is the aforementioned problem of viewing the cults of the classical world as inherently all the same under the umbrella of 'paganism'. Furthermore, Beck argued that simply because these cults were not always exclusive does not mean people did not strongly adhere to them, or that their followers would not band together for a collective enterprise. It is a Mithraic community from Virunum that Beck provides as an example of how such a view is

²³ Certainly, the initiation and purification rituals point towards some form of behaviour that was expected of members following these 'transformations', but what this involved is unclear, see Beck (2006b) 179-180.

²⁴ Gordon (1976) 145.

²⁵ Beck (2006b).

²⁶ Stark (1996) 203.

incorrect, as these men came together to fund the repair of their temple, and argues that there is no objective reason

...to assume initiates of Mithras were any less committed to their group, to each other personally, and to their saviour god, than were, say, Paul's Christians at Corinth or John's seven churches in Asia. To claim that Mithraists and the devotees of other mystery gods adhered to their communities (as if temporarily stuck there until something better came along) while the Christians were converted to theirs, is unwarranted – and belittling.²⁷

However, this is not to say that the work of Stark and his fellow sociologists cannot necessarily be utilised to address the decline of various cults in the ancient world, just that a greater understanding of the religious landscape of the Roman world is needed than the one provided by Stark in *The Rise of Christianity*. Indeed, an article by Marquita Volken a few years ago argued that the growth of the cult of Mithras, and other initiatory cults, could be explained using Stark's model.²⁸ However, as an article Volken's study was only limited to a brief overview. In this thesis, with the wide range of data that has been brought together, it can be tested whether or not this model is indeed applicable to the evidence or not.

Let us now outline how this model works. To begin, why do people join religious movements? The traditional model for this was 'deprivation theory', which assumed people seek a religion that will provide them with something they feel they are lacking (e.g. people who join healing cults are predominantly sick). However, studies of membership in religious movements have shown no evidence of this. Instead, what has been discovered is that religious affiliation is largely based on desire (either consciously or subconsciously) to conform to those with whom we are closest. Stark and Lofland's study of the Unification Church was one such case that demonstrated this:

...all the people the Unificationists encountered in their efforts to spread the faith, the only ones who joined were those *whose interpersonal attachments to members overbalanced their attachments to non-members*. In part this is because... social networks make religious beliefs plausible and *new* social networks thereby make *new* religious beliefs plausible. In addition, social networks also reward people for conforming – in this case by converting. In effect, conversion is seldom about seeking or embracing an ideology; it is about bringing one's religious behaviour into alignment with that of one's friends and family members.²⁹

In another modern example, despite being one of the fastest growing religious movements in the modern world, the records of the Mormon mission president from 1981-1982 indicate that on average

²⁷ Beck (2006b) 241.

²⁸ Volken (2004).

²⁹ Stark and Finke (2000) 117.

only one out of a thousand attempts to convert a stranger ends in success (and even then a friendship must first be cultivated), while there is a 50% chance of a friend or relative converting. Many other studies have found this pattern repeated elsewhere in other religious groups.³⁰ Thus, the driving force behind joining a religious movement is the desire to maximize ‘social capital’ (i.e. interpersonal attachments);³¹ if the majority of people a person knows are part of certain religious movement, then they are likely to join that movement too.³²

As a result, this means that major shifts in a person’s social network can make them more susceptible to joining a different religious movement. Marriage and migration are the two situations where this is most likely to occur as they can result in significant exposure to new social networks. A major crisis, such as a plague or famine, may also lead to people adopting new religious affiliations, as these events can rapidly remove many members of one’s existing social network. For example, if one has ten friends, six of which belong to one cult (‘X’) and four to another (‘Y’), in terms of religious affiliation there is a ratio of 6:4 between cults X and cult Y, thus one would be likely to be a member of cult X. However, should a crisis remove three of those members of cult X, one would be left with a ratio of 3:4 in favour of cult Y, thus there is now more to be gained in terms of social capital by shifting allegiance to cult Y.³³

If this why people join a cult, then how does the cult maintain the commitment of its followers? In order to participate in any religious movement, members of a cult will have to pay certain ‘costs’. Such costs may be material, social, physical or psychological and can take a variety forms: regulations surrounding dress, diet and sexual practice, or the rituals in which members must participate. Thus, the higher the costs the greater commitment among members as “potential members are forced to choose whether to participate fully or not”.³⁴ Simply put, the more expensive something is, the more we value it.

Furthermore, the greater the costs, both in terms of value and number, a religious group places on its membership, the higher the ‘tension’ (the degree of distinctiveness, separation, and antagonism between a religious group and the “outside” world) in which the cult exists with ‘normal’ society. Given that membership to all religious groups will require some form of cost, all religious groups exist in tension with society to a degree.³⁵ If we imagine this tension on a spectrum, at one end the

³⁰ For 25 examples, see Knox, Meeus and t’Hart (1991).

³¹ Throughout this study I use terms such as ‘capital’ and ‘costs’ which is taken from ‘religious economy’ that has become the common approach towards explaining religious activity in a relatively straight-forward way. It should be noted that this is not the same as North’s (1992) ‘market-place of religions’ metaphor, which implies people have free-choice of religions. Indeed, referring to religions in economic terms demonstrates this was by no means the case.

³² Stark and Finke (2000) 118.

³³ Iannacone (1990); Stark and Bainbrige (1997).

³⁴ Iannacone (1994) 1188.

³⁵ Stark and Finke (2000) 143.

costs are so negligible that the tension with society is barely noticeable. At the opposite end of the spectrum, some religious movements are in such a great state of tension with society that this results in outbursts of violence. Therefore: the greater the tension that exists between a religious movement and society, the greater the commitment of the movement's members. Such observations echo anthropological studies:

[D]emonstrable or obvious truths do not distinguish the believer from the infidel, and they do not excite the faithful. Only difficult belief can do that. And what makes belief difficult? There must be both an element of menace and risk.³⁶

By placing significant costs on its members which can only be satisfied by high levels of commitment, a religious group can also eliminate those referred to as 'free-riders'. A rational person, if possible, will participate as minimally as possible in collective efforts if they feel they can still reap the same rewards as they would if they exerted themselves to the maximum.³⁷ We see this in religious activity, with a primary example being people who only attend church at Christmas. They hope for the same rewards (forgiveness of sins and life after death) as those who attend all year round, while they also expect the churches to be operating without having made contribution to this in the previous 364 days. These people are free-riders. If these free-riders are perceived to be reaping the same benefits as other members who do attend often and contribute to the upkeep of the church, then the latter will naturally begin to question why they are exerting themselves to such an extent. Let us imagine commitment on a scale of one to ten, with the commitment of a congregation the average of its members' total commitment. In a congregation of fifty who all have a commitment rating of ten out of ten, then the average commitment will be ten. If they are joined by 20 more adherents who all fall at a three on our scale, then average commitment for the whole congregation will fall to eight. Essentially, free-riders dilute the commitment of congregations.³⁸

Another way to reinforce commitment is to maintain a high social density among members. Social density is the number of relationships which exists in a group: in a congregation of ten, there are nine relationships available to each individual, giving a total of 81 possible relationships between all members; in a congregation of 20, the overall number would be 361; in congregation of 30 it would be 841, and so forth. The greater the number of possible relationships in a congregation, the harder it becomes to maintain relatively close relationships with all of one's fellows. Indeed, modern studies of religious groups have shown this to be the case (for example, see Table 1).³⁹ Therefore, by maintaining a relatively small group with high social density, the commitment of group members will

³⁶ Gellner (1993) 41.

³⁷ Olson (1965); Hetchner (1987) 27.

³⁸ Stark and Finke (2000) 147-150.

³⁹ Finke (1994); Stark and Finke (2000) 154-162; Zaluski and Charles (1995).

be reinforced both inside and outside the religious setting, as they will be less exposed to adherents of other religious groups on a regular basis. It also means that members' behaviour can be more easily monitored, for the congregation leader will have a closer relationship with all members of a small congregation than in a much larger one. Thus anything that might be deemed 'deviant behaviour' can be eliminated swiftly before it generates discord in the group, while free-riders can also be quickly recognised and dealt with.

Table 1: Congregations in Northern California 1963⁴⁰

"Of your five closest friends, how many are members of your congregation?"

Congregation Size (Adult Members)				
	50 or less (n=69)	51 – 200 (n=314)	200 – 400 (n=517)	400+ (n=1787)
4 – 5	50	21	22	15
2 – 3	33	34	31	27
1	9	15	13	18
0	8	30	34	40

"Generally speaking, would you say most of the people you associate with in activities aside from church affairs are or are not members of your congregation?"

Half or more are members (%)	77	42	44	37

"All in all, how well do you think you fit with the group of people who make up your congregation?"

Very Well	66%	35%	31%	24%

A significant level of participation in cult activities also builds up 'religious capital'. Religious capital "consists of the degree of mastery of and attachment to a particular religious culture".⁴¹ In essence, it is an emotional and cultural investment. The greater the religious capital someone has accrued as a member of a religious movement by participating in its rituals and following its regulations, the less likely they are to join another movement because they would risk losing or the reducing the religious capital they have earned.⁴² If people do join another religious movement, they

⁴⁰ Stark and Finke (2000) Table 10.

⁴¹ Stark and Finke (2000) 121.

⁴² Sherkat (1993); Sherkat and Wilson (1995).

“will tend to select an option that maximises their conservation of religious capital”.⁴³ In broad terms, someone from a Jewish background is more likely to join a Jewish denomination than become a Hare Krishna, while what Jewish denomination they join will depend on their background: “People raised in one Jewish Hasidic body are more apt to shift to another Hasidic group than to join a Conservative Synagogue, are more likely to join a Conservative than a Reform Synagogue and are far more apt to become Reform Jews than Unitarians”.⁴⁴ Thus, the more unique a cult is, the harder it is for members to transfer their established religious capital should they join another cult, making it less likely they would do so.

Events such as miracles and mystical experiences also serve to sustain the commitment of members by strengthening their faith in the religious rewards provided by a cult. Otherworldly rewards cannot be proven or disproven, so believers must rely on the example of others to conclude that they exist. There is ample evidence that demonstrates many in society will at some point encounter a moment where they believe they have interacted with a supernatural being – a ‘miracle’.⁴⁵ Miracles need not be the parting of the Red Sea or being cured of disease, but can be relatively low-key events. Indeed, “even the least intense mystical experience constitutes a “small miracle” and provides recipients with personal confirmation of their religious explanations”.⁴⁶ What is more is that the majority of these people will be normal and sane, thus giving others little reason to doubt them. When such people share these experiences with their friends, the testimony is coming from a trustworthy source and will serve to enhance their friends’ belief as well.⁴⁷

If these are ways in which a cult gains members and generates commitment among them, should something negatively affect these attributes, logically commitment among the adherents would decrease and new members become harder to attract. As will be demonstrated, in the cult of Mithras many of these attributes were indeed negatively affected in Late Antiquity.

Finally, it is worth establishing what is meant by ‘commitment’ in the context of this thesis. Commitment to a religious organisation can take two forms: objective and subjective. Objective religious commitment refers to the behaviour of cult members, including “all forms of religious participation or practice (taking part in rites and services, for example), material offerings (sacrifices, contributions and donations), and conformity to rules governing actions (not sinning)”. Subjective commitment concerns the “belief in, and knowledge of, the explanations sustained by a religious

⁴³ Stark and Finke (2000) 123.

⁴⁴ Stark and Finke (2000) 123.

⁴⁵ Yamane and Polzer (1994).

⁴⁶ Stark and Finke (2000) 111.

⁴⁷ Stark and Bainbridge (1997).

organization and having the appropriate emotions”.⁴⁸ Of course, in regards to religious practice in the ancient world it is very difficult to assess the latter of these two forms of commitment. In the case of objective commitment, however, we have more evidence informing us about the behaviour of Mithraic initiates, such as the construction and repair of mithraea and the remains of Mithraic rituals. Thus, when commitment is referred to in the course of this thesis, it means the amount cult members were willing to invest physically in the cult community, such as via constructing mithraea and the extent of their participation in Mithraic rituals. In terms of changing commitment levels, this might be represented in a decline in building activity or less intense rituals.

Critiquing the Model

While even the critics of the model outlined above are willing to acknowledge that this is the most commonly accepted sociological model regarding religious adherence - the “biggest game in town” to quote one example⁴⁹ - and thus may give us some indication as to why the Mithras cult declined, it is important to outline that there are issues with this model too. One is how we define so-called ‘tension’ with society and whether this really affects religious commitment. As Williams has pointed out, while Stark and Finke claimed that the Southern Baptist Convention’s rapid rise is due in part to its high level of tension with American society, the SBC is actually “in near perfect concert with the recent conservative changes in American politics and public religion”.⁵⁰ Furthermore, as Wilson has noted, Methodists who practice same-sex marriage are not necessarily, as Stark and Finke suggest, reducing the tension with society – “[L]iberal they might be, but low tension they are not!”.⁵¹ Here we see the issue of how we define ‘dominant’ culture: is it the culture of those in power, who may not be the most populous, or is it the culture of the masses that may greatly outnumber the elites yet hold little power? As Williams has suggested, “one needs more of a theory of power to deal with such questions than this economistic theory provides”.⁵²

Secondly, as with any model, even if it can be applied to a number of groups and is shown to be coherent, there may still be instances where it fails to correlate. As Glazier observed: “[R]eligious history is replete with examples of religious organizations that have withered when their demands became too high (e.g. Shakers) and thrived when they became less demanding (e.g. the Campbellites)”.⁵³ In this study, we face even more uncertainty as we are dealing a large number of cult communities over a wide area that existed in varying geographical, social and political contexts.

⁴⁸ Stark and Finke (2000) 103.

⁴⁹ Bankston III, Robbins and Wilson (2001) 334.

⁵⁰ Stark and Finke (2000) 151; Williams (2001) 1841.

⁵¹ Bankston III, Robbins and Wilson (2001) 339.

⁵² Williams (2001) 1841.

⁵³ Glazier (2002) 193.

Preferably, one would be able to explore how the model fits in relation to each individual community. However, while this thesis attempts to address the context of each site, it is difficult to elaborate on the nuances of each case, resulting in a more generic approach.

Another point of note, raised by Glazier, is that this model does not take into account what degree gender plays a role in commitment to religious organisations, despite the fact that women constitute “the overwhelming majority of religious adherents everywhere”.⁵⁴ This is particularly relevant in our case, as a key component of the cult of Mithras appears to have been the exclusion of women.

Finally, the most evident problem is the danger in taking the information we have regarding modern groups and comparing this with those active in antiquity. The modern examples provided above are all monotheistic in nature, but the Mithras cult, as with most cults in Roman world, did not prevent their adherents from participating in other religious organisations. How does this affect people’s religious choices? Additionally, our evidence relies on what survives in the archaeological record, with much information either lost or reconstructed using our best guess. How much of our modern perceptions regarding society are reflected onto the archaeological record, resulting in a misinterpretation? Such issues must be borne in mind throughout this thesis when discussing the sociological implications of the evidence.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is arranged into six chapters. The first four explore various themes in the Mithraic evidence across the entire Roman world and how this fits within the wider sociocultural context. Such an approach is admittedly broad, but it is only by studying the cult across the Roman world that we can truly attempt to ascertain what evidence there is for localisation among Mithraic communities. In each case, these chapters begin by outlining what is known about this particular attribute of the cult prior to the late third century and what implications this had for the commitment of the cult adherents. Following this, the evidence from the late third and fourth centuries will be presented to establish what changes are evident and what impact these may have had. These chapters consist of:

- 1) The location and environment of mithraea, in which the following questions will be asked: Where do we find mithraea in this period? How prominent are mithraea? How does this vary regionally or chronologically? What became of their environment during the fourth century? How would this have impacted on the social networks their congregations belonged to?

⁵⁴ Glazier (2002)

2) The architecture of mithraea constructed from the late third century. The aim of this chapter is to establish whether any major changes occurred in their architecture, plan, decoration, building materials and orientation of mithraea. Furthermore, the evidence for the restoration and repair of mithraea in this period will also be addressed to see if these led to any major alterations to pre-existing mithraea. Did mithraea become any more accessible? Do they exhibit any indications of increased localisation? What impact would any changes have had on a Mithraic adherent who arrived at a mithraeum from a different Mithraic community on the other side of the Roman world, would they have understood what met them?

3) The patrons and initiates of Mithraic communities. Did the social status of Mithraic initiates or patrons change? What drove such men to act as patrons or join the cult? How did they commemorate this? What evidence is there for alterations in the grade system? Do we find different types of people interacting with the cult depending on the region?

4) Mithraic rituals. What evidence is there for new forms of ritual in the fourth century and is there any indication that other forms were abandoned? Where these new forms of ritual unique or present in non-Mithraic contexts? Why might the cult have adapted its rituals? Does this provide any evidence of increased localisation?

Over the course of Chapters 1-4, the Mithraic evidence will also be compared to the wider sacred landscape, particularly the evidence relating to the cults of Isis/Sarapis,⁵⁵ Magna Mater and Christianity. This is in order to see whether any of the attributes that served to foster commitment among Mithraic adherents were evident in these cults, whether any changes occurred in these, when this happened, and whether this affected the building patterns for their places of worship. These religious movements provide interesting parallels to the cult of Mithras as they all, like Mithras, entered the Roman World as ‘outsiders’, in at least some regard, but were subsequently integrated into Roman society. However, it should be noted that the information provided regarding these cults is only to establish general comparative patterns and cannot be said to represent full analyses.

In Chapter 5 explores how the patterns of construction and repair of mithraea compare with other buildings. This chapter will also seek to compare the construction patterns exhibited by mithraea to other buildings used by mystery-cults, such those used by the followers of Isis/Sarapis and Magna Mater, to test whether or not these cults experienced a uniform decline or if there was a degree of variation among them. If the latter is the case, then it adds credence to the argument that the end of

⁵⁵ It is not clear to what degree these deities were worshipped separately, thus throughout this study I have looked at the cults in

religious movements in Late Antiquity should be looked at on an individual basis, rather than under the umbrella of ‘the decline of paganism’.

Chapter 6 addresses the final fate of mithraea. Dwindling commitment, as well as changes in the environment and social networks that surrounded mithraea, may have led to the cult being in unhealthy position, but it does not explain why mithraea completely ceased to be used by the early fifth century. This chapter seeks to review the evidence to establish how and why mithraea were abandoned: was this was a predominantly violent process? How does the evidence vary regionally and chronologically? Who might have been responsible for this? Is it possible that the worship of Mithras might have survived in a different form?

Finally, the Conclusion brings together themes that have been established to elaborate on how the cult of Mithras developed in Late Antiquity, how this may have led to a decline in commitment among the cult followers, and how mithraea finally came to be abandoned. Following this, further possible avenues of research will outlined.

Selecting the Evidence

Given that this study covers the Mithras cult across the entire Roman Empire in the late antique period, inevitably limits have to be set on which data to include. As a result, the mithraea discussed in this thesis have been included because they have produced diagnostic evidence indicating that they were being used as mithraea past the year A.D. 270. Such evidence may include epigraphic or iconographic material which explicitly refers to Mithras, the torchbearers or the Mithraic grades. However, if a building has produced no such evidence, even if it has a ground-plan of a mithraeum it has been excluded. As will be demonstrated, mithraea were reused for other purposes, thus it cannot be said with any certainty, even if a building did serve as a mithraeum initially, whether it was still being used as such without any diagnostic evidence, especially if it had been constructed a century or more before. Furthermore, such structures are also not included even if they have produced faunal evidence that is suggestive of a mithraeum, (e.g. a significant number of chicken bones) as this evidence has rarely been published with any chronological distributions illustrated, thus it is possible the evidence originates from earlier phases of occupation.

A Note on Terminology

It is worth making some brief remarks regarding the use of certain words in this thesis. First, I must state that I have endeavoured throughout this study not to use the terms ‘Mithraism’ and ‘Mithraist’. This is primarily because these are modern labels (to its contemporaries it would have been the

Mysteries of Mithras and its followers known as ‘Persians’) that instil preconceived notions. As we do not know of any central Mithraic doctrine, or particular parameters for how Mithraic initiates had to live their lives, the use of term Mithraism risks drawing parallels with modern religious ‘-isms’, such as Judaism, Hinduism or Buddhism, that are a “differentiated social [entities that offer] a distinctive view of the world, including history and fate, one that demands exclusive adherence from its members and claims sole authority in matters cosmological and ethical”.⁵⁶

Secondly, the term ‘mystery-cult’ will also appear often. This is a label has been applied to a number of religious organisations between the seventh century B.C. and fourth century A.D.. In the Roman period, examples of these include the cult of Mithras, that of Isis/Sarapis, Magna Mater and Dionysus. According to Clauss, there are two main prerequisites in being deemed a ‘mystery-cult’: a wall of silence surrounding their inner-most rituals and a theology that promised salvation⁵⁷. As stated, it is unclear whether the latter played a role in the cult of Mithras as there is no evidence for Mithraic burials or funerary rites. In regards to secrecy surrounding their inner rituals, many of these so-called mystery cults, required a prospective member to undergo an initiation process in order to join them, the working of which were hidden from the outside world. However, undergoing these rituals did not prohibit them from joining other religious organisations, nor is there any evidence of forced initiation; the decision to join one of these cults was taken by the individual.

⁵⁶ Woolf (2014) 66.

⁵⁷ Clauss (2000) 15, Burket (1987) 21-7.

CHAPTER 1: THE LOCATION OF MITHRAEA IN LATE ANTIQUITY AND CHANGES TO THEIR ENVIRONMENT

INTRODUCTION

For any temple or shrine, the environment in which they are situated can have a considerable bearing on how the cult they are used by operates and its relationship with wider society. The decision of where to construct a temple can be determined by a range of factors, such as access, visibility, orientation, cost, and proximity to natural features. Yet, even if the initial setting is ideal, it is rarely the case that the environment of these structures will remain static, with a temple erected in the second century A.D. likely to find itself in a different context by the late fourth century. Such a change may mean the environment no longer suits the needs of the cult, or alternatively it might be that changes within the cult itself mean that locations which were once deemed desirable are no longer so. For example, if a cult is initially to be found operating on the periphery of society, but then begins to attract large numbers of adherents, any new temples may need to be erected in more accessible areas to accommodate this. However, according to the sociological model, such changes may have significant bearing on the average commitment of a cult's adherents. If temples that were hidden from the view of mainstream society now became commonplace in the urban fabric, then this could have a detrimental effect on the average commitment of the adherents as the tension between the cult and society would be reduced.

In regards to the Mysteries of Mithras, a rich and varied archaeological record allows for wide-ranging observations on the changing contexts of Mithraic temples in Late Antiquity. In this chapter, I will seek to answer the following questions: how did the location of mithraea alter from the late third century onwards on both a regional and local level? How prominent were mithraea in this period and how may this have affected the commitment of Mithraic adherents? What changes occurred in the environment of mithraea? What implications does this have for the continued use of the temples and the social networks that their members existed in? To begin with, I shall illustrate how the distribution of mithraea across the Roman world altered between the late third and early fifth centuries. I will then take a closer look at the environment of the mithraea, initially outlining how the changing prominence of mithraea in Rome and Ostia has been demonstrated in previous studies, then moving onto the provinces to see not only if mithraea across the Roman World followed a similar pattern to those of Ostia and Rome, but also what became of the contexts in which these temples were situated.

GEOGRAPHICAL AND CHRONOLOGICAL CHANGES IN DISTRIBUTION OF MITHRAEA

Where mithraea were situated varied considerably in the late third and fourth centuries. The location of mithraea can be divided broadly into three categories: towns/*vici*, rural and private estates. The category of towns/*vici* is admittedly vague, but distinguishing between different forms of settlements in the provinces is fraught with difficulties and the intention here is simply to convey the point that these were not isolated temples, but were part of populated settlements. Rural mithraea, on the other hand, are those that do appear to have been situated in remote locations, while those on private estates fall in between these two categories, being erected on private land in the countryside. It is possible that some of those classed as rural mithraea might have been part of private estates, but without any additional evidence to support this they retain this classification.

In Fig. 1, the chronological distribution of Mithraic temples in these three types of environment is presented. It is evident that throughout the fourth century mithraea were to be found predominantly in and around settlements. However, there was a decline in the number of mithraea found in such contexts during the fourth century, with a notable reduction occurring in the mid-fourth century and then again in the early fifth century. In contrast, the number of rural mithraea gradually increased until the mid-fourth century, at which time those in urban and rural contexts almost became equal in number, but thereafter the number of rural mithraea also goes into decline. The number of mithraea found on private estates remains relatively consistent until the late fourth century, although they are by no means common, at which time they also exhibit a decline in numbers. By the early fifth century only three mithraea still exhibit evidence of activity: the mithraeum located in the *Crypta Balbi* in Rome (urban), at Hawarte in Syria (rural), and on a private estate at Bornheim-Sechtem, of which none appear to have remained active past the opening decades of this century.

Figure 1: The Context of Active Mithraea from the Late Third Century (excluding Rome and Ostia)

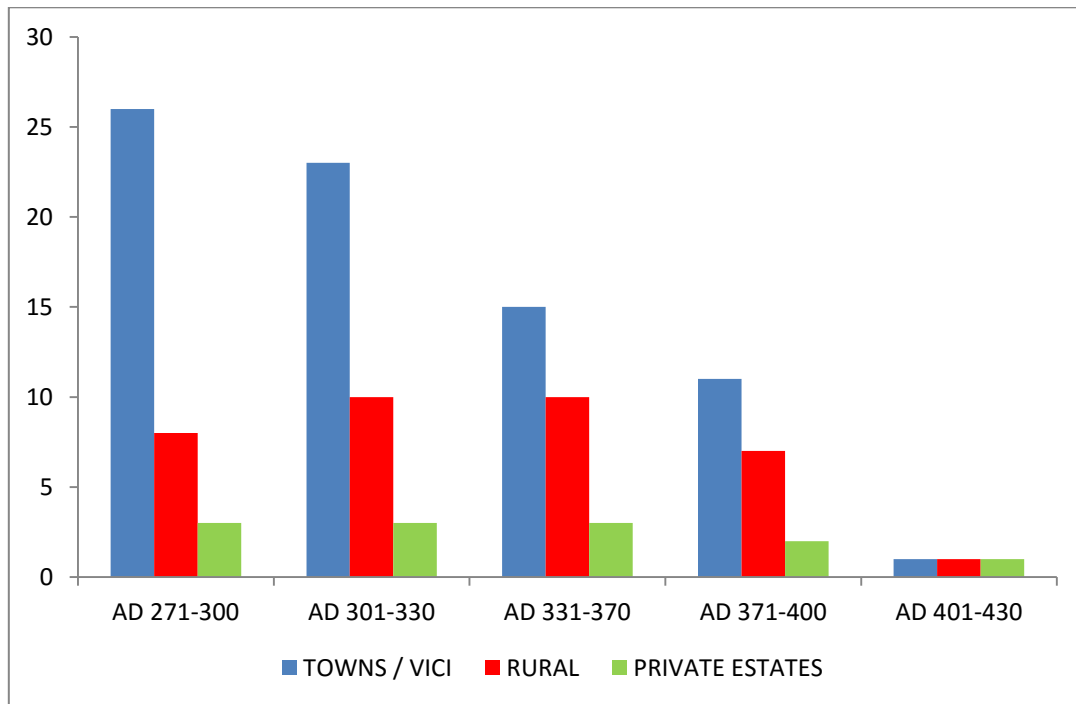
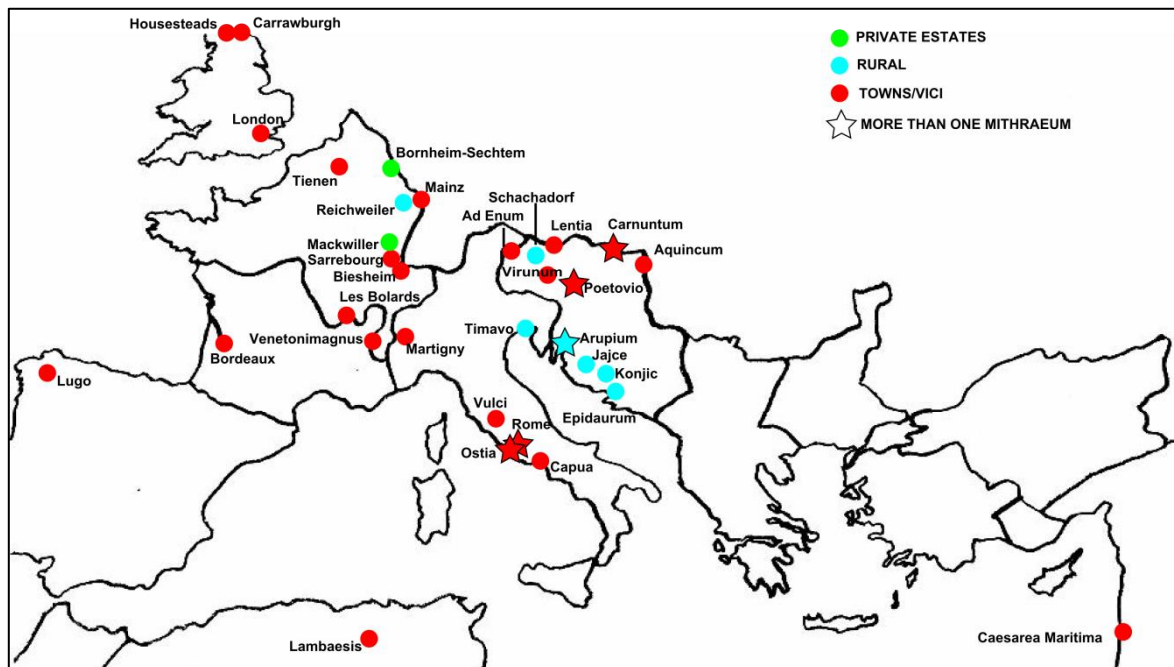


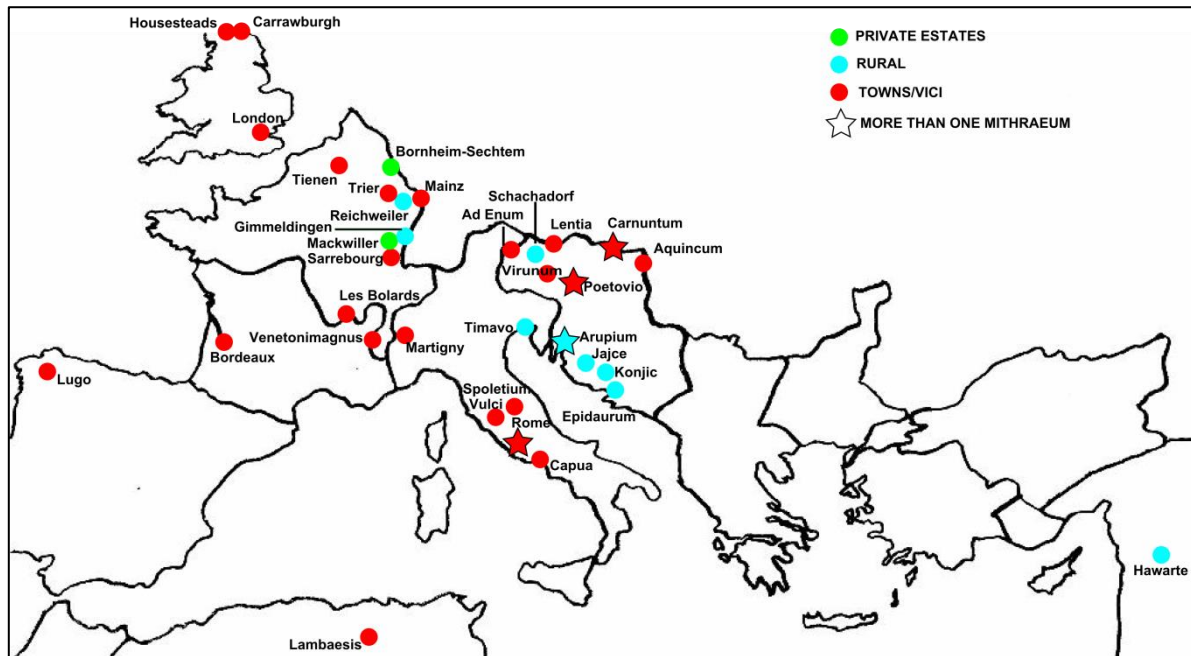
Figure 2: Distribution of Active Mithraea ca. A.D. 271-300



Let us look at the geographical distribution to see how this decline in the use of mithraea played out on a regional basis. In Fig. 2, the distribution of mithraea across the Roman Empire in the late third century is illustrated. What is clear is that mithraea were to be found mainly on the northern frontiers:

along Hadrian's Wall, the Rhine, and as far as Aquincum on the Danube bend.⁵⁸ There are also small concentrations of mithraea in eastern Gaul, along the Dalmatian coast, as well as in Rome and its environs. However, other than Rome and Ostia, only three locations appear to have contained more than a single active mithraeum at this time: Carnuntum and Poetovio in Pannonia and Arupium in Dalmatia. Given the prevalence of mithraea in the Rhine area, one may have expected to see at least one site with such a concentration here, yet there is no evidence of this dating to this period.⁵⁹ In contrast, barely any mithraea have been found that were in use during this period in North Africa, Spain or the Near East, while significant areas of Britain, Gaul and Italy have also produced no such evidence. Given the prevalence of archaeological excavations in these regions, it is difficult to believe that this uneven distribution could be entirely the product of mithraea having not been found, but rather it appears that the cult of Mithras did not have any considerable appeal in these regions. In terms of mithraea distribution via the type of context they were located in, those found in towns and settlements are evenly distributed, with examples found both on the frontiers and in the interior provinces. Rural mithraea are less common in the frontier regions, with a particular concentration along the Dalmatian coast, an area which, incidentally, is also devoid of any urban mithraea. Finally, the few examples of mithraea located on private estates were all situated on the Rhine frontier.

Figure 3: Distribution of Active Mithraea ca. A.D.301-330

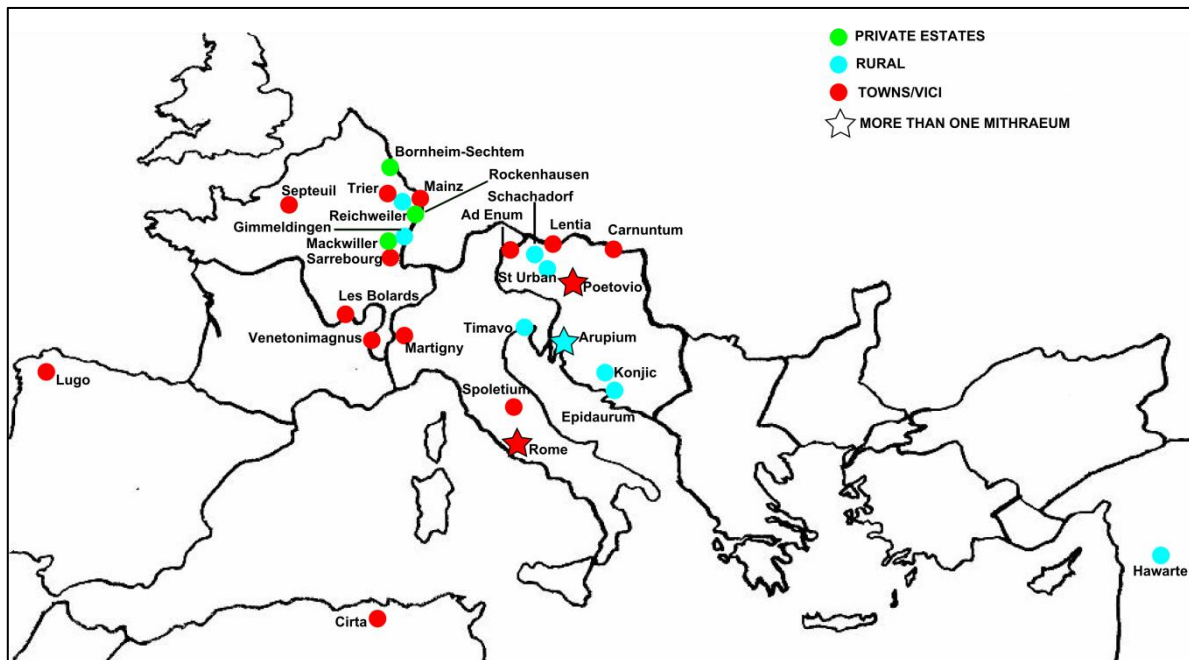


⁵⁸ It is worth noting that the Rhine and Danube regions have also been the main source for the eight intaglios that have been confirmed as being Mithraic in nature. As these cannot be dated and are small in number they do not merit discussion in detail here, but their presence in these regions may be taken as another indication of the cult's popularity here. See Ezquerro (2010) 534-539.

⁵⁹ Certain towns in the Rhineland have produced evidence of more than one mithraea at a single settlement in previous periods, such as at Köln: Ristow (1974) and Nida-Heddernheim: Huld-Zetsche (1986).

In the early fourth century (Fig. 3) there are only a few notable alterations to the distribution of Mithraic temples, with the overall number of mithraea appears to have remained relatively unchanged. There was a slight increase in the concentration of mithraea in the Rhine region, with mithraea now present at Trier (urban) and Gimmeldingen (rural). Following the conversion of the mithraeum at Caesarea Maritima into a storehouse, another mithraeum was installed in a cave at Hawarte in Syria, still leaving just one known active mithraeum in the entire eastern half of the empire. By this time there is also no evidence for the continued use of any mithraea at Ostia, but it is likely that this is due to information having been lost in the excavations rather than this being truly representative of the state of the cult in the town at this time.⁶⁰

Figure 4: Distribution of Active Mithraea ca. A.D. 331-370



As we move into the mid-fourth century (Fig. 4) the distribution of Mithraic evidence remains much the same in the Rhineland, around Rome and along Dalmatian coast. In northwest Gaul, we find a new mithraeum at Septeuil near Paris, although the Tienen Mithraeum, which had also been located in this region, no longer appears to have been in use. By this time, all the mithraea in Britain appear to have ceased in use. There is also a reduction in the number of active mithraea on the Danube bend, with no more extant evidence from Aquincum and just a single mithraeum still active at Carnuntum.

In contrast to the largely unaltered distribution of mithraea in previous periods, by the last decades of the fourth century (Fig. 5) the picture looks considerably different. In the western provinces, the

⁶⁰ Boin (2013) 114.

evidence for active mithraea is less widespread, with no extant evidence to be found in western Gaul or in Britain. The distribution of mithraea along the Danube frontier became increasingly limited to Noricum, with evidence of Mithraic activity having ceased at Carnuntum. Along the Dalmatian coast, many of the rural mithraea appear to have gone out of use in this period, as did the rural mithraea along the Rhine frontier, although in the case of the latter many of those in and around settlements continued to function. In eastern Gaul and Rome and its environs, things appear to have remained relatively unaltered.

Figure 5: Distribution of Active Mithraea ca. A.D. 371-400

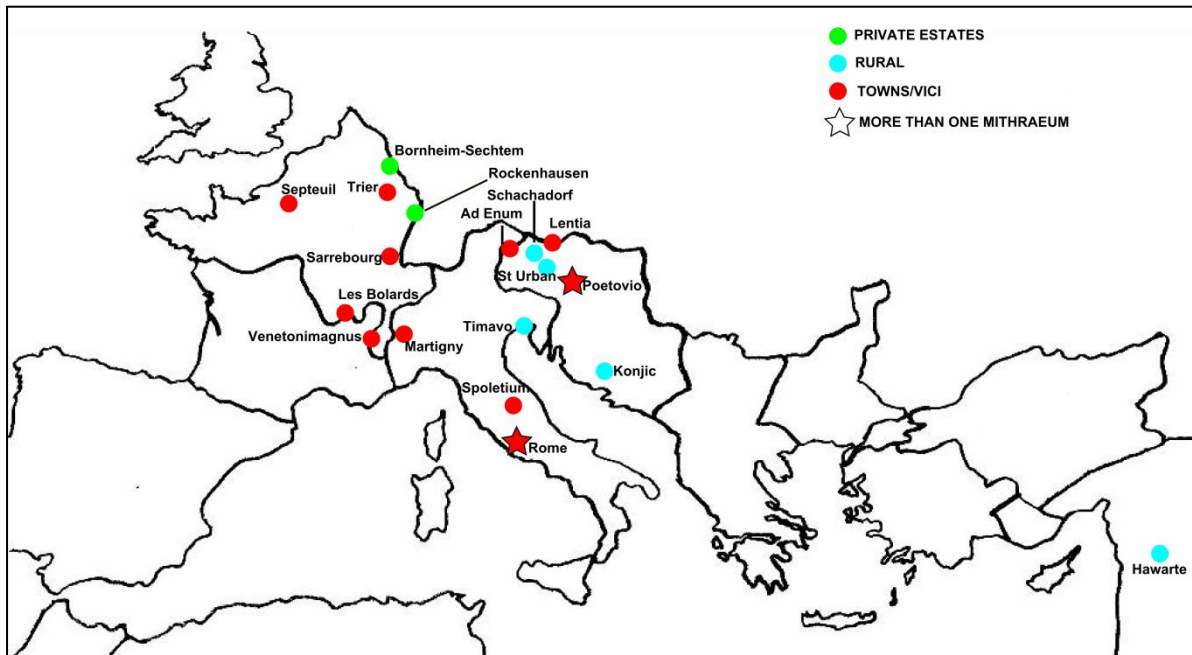
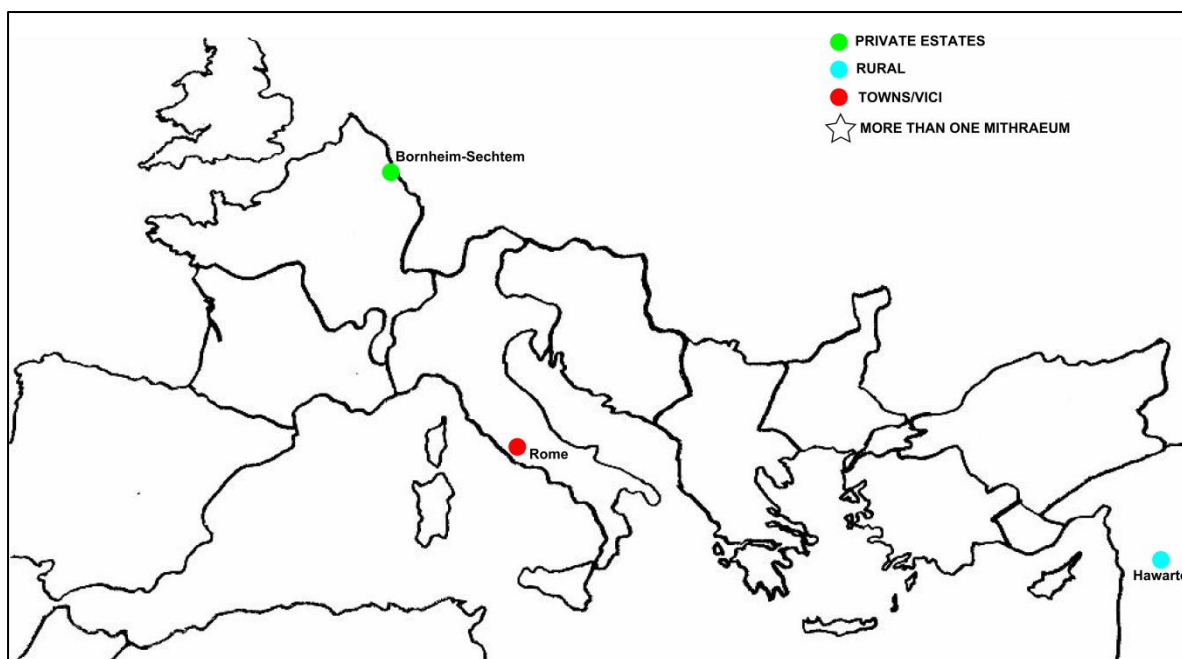


Figure 6: Distribution of Active Mithraea ca. A.D. 401-410



By the early fifth century (Fig. 6), there was a dramatic reduction in the number of active mithraea. There is no evidence that any of the mithraea on Rhine, Danube, or in eastern Gaul were still in use at this time, instead they all appear to have been abandoned in the final decades of the fourth century. Indeed, there is little one can say about the distribution of mithraea in this period, as there is no evidence of a notable geographical shift, or any final, significant concentrations of Mithraic activity. Indeed, the last mithraea still in operation are to be found at a considerable distance from each other, with one in Rome, one in the Syrian countryside at Hawarte, and one on a private estate of Bornheim-Sechtem in Germany. This suggests there was little chance of communication between these communities, with the last Mithraic congregations probably existing in isolation from each other.

Discussion

The distribution of mithraea from the late third to early fifth centuries has provided us with several insights. Firstly, the evidence indicates that throughout the fourth century the cult operated primarily along the northern-western frontiers, although there were some Mithraic congregations located in the interior provinces in eastern Gaul, Rome and its surrounding areas, and Dalmatia. In contrast, there is little indication that the cult of Mithras had any significant presence in the provinces of the East, North Africa or Spain during Late Antiquity.

Secondly, mithraea in certain contexts sometimes occur in particular concentrations together: mithraea in rural locations were common in the Dalmatia, while around Rome, eastern Gaul and on

the Danube frontier mithraea were predominately located within or near settlements. The Rhine frontier stands out as a region where one would find mithraea in the greatest range of contexts, with Mithraic temples here associated with settlements, in rural locations and on private estates. However, the Rhine has produced no evidence for any settlements at this time that contained more than one mithraeum, while at Poetovio in Pannonia and Arupium in Dalmatia more than one active mithraeum was present at some point during the fourth century.

Finally, as the fourth century progressed, the concentration of mithraea became increasingly restricted to the central areas of the western half of the empire. On one side of this region, the distribution of active mithraea along the Danube became increasingly limited to Noricum, with many of the mithraea in Pannonia ceasing to display any evidence of occupation, while those in rural areas of Dalmatia were also abandoned. On the other side of this region, mithraea in Britain and western Gaul ceased to be used, while many of their contemporaries located in and around settlements on the Rhine and in eastern Gaul continued to be occupied. By the early fifth century, nearly all mithraea in the Roman Empire appear to have been abandoned, with just several isolated temples situated at great distances from each other persevering for a decade or so, but it seems unlikely they were in communication with each other.

MITHRAEA AND THEIR ENVIRONMENT I: PREVIOUS STUDIES ON ROME AND OSTIA

The context of the mithraea uncovered in Rome and Ostia have already been addressed in various studies.⁶¹ Given Rome's unrivalled size and status in the Roman Empire, and Ostia's role as a major point of access to it, it is unsurprising that both locations have produced large numbers of mithraea, with nineteen identified in Rome and fifteen in Ostia. These may only constitute a fraction of the total number of mithraea that existed in Rome and its environs, with total of *ca.*700 projected by Coarelli and *ca.*500 by Bjørnbye, with the latter suggesting half of his estimate may still have been active in the fourth century.⁶² Whether these numbers are close to the reality is unclear, but it is evident from the extant evidence that Mithraic activity was certainly common in both Rome and its port.

It has been observed that the mithraea erected in third century Rome would have been more apparent to the general public than their predecessors, which were often hidden away from public spaces. By the third century, mithraea now tended to be located either close to or within public buildings, such as baths, barracks, large insula and the Circus Maximus. Furthermore, these included the unusually large mithraea located in the *Terme di Caracalla* (*ca.*223m²) and *Crypta Balbi*

⁶¹ For studies on the mithraea of Rome, see Coarelli (1979), Griffith (1993) and Bjørnebye (2007).

⁶² Bjørnebye (2007) 64-65.

(ca.384m²), both of which were installed in the early third century. Mithraea of such size were unlikely to have been particularly ‘secret’ in any case, but their locations – in a public bath house and a large insula respectively – suggests that this was not a concern for the adherents of these mithraea. This is not to say that it appears that the cult had flung open its doors to anyone who happened to pass by, but as Bjørnbye has noted: “it is unthinkable that no one would be aware of the fact that there was an active temple of some sort on the premises”.⁶³

In Ostia, the cult was evidently at its height in the third century as nine of the fifteen mithraea found in the town were erected in this period.⁶⁴ Like Rome, the mithraea of Ostia appear to have become increasingly integrated into mainstream society, with those built in the third century closer to centre of town and the *Decumanus Maximus*. Of the six constructed in the second century, two were located in houses and another was found in what appears to have been a privately-owned warehouse. However, like Rome, the location of mithraea appears to become more prominent in the third century: one was erected in a major bath-house; another was located adjacent to a bath-house; two were connected to large store-houses (likely under imperial control); one under a collegial hall; and a sixth was found in a *tabernae* of a commercial building. Yet despite becoming more evident to wider society, none of the third century Ostian mithraea were located on major streets, while only two were accessible directly from the street. As John Schreiber describes: “[I]n the third century the inside of a mithraeum may have been as hidden as ever. Its cultic acts and rituals were probably as secret as ever. Sociologically, however, Mithraism had become more visible in Ostian society”.⁶⁵

MITHRAEA AND THEIR ENVIRONMENT II.1:

THE PROVINCES BEFORE THE LATE THIRD CENTURY

The earliest extant mithraea in the provinces were constructed in the second century. Mithraeum I at Carnuntum seems to have been built in the early second century, but lay far outside of the fort and town, being situated on a hillside near the Danube. Around the mid-second century, a mithraeum had also appeared on the bank of River Inn in Noricum at Ad Enum, but once again this was some distance from Roman settlement, which was located on the other side of the river at Pons Aeni. The mithraeum at Dura-Europos, which was constructed in A.D. 168, was installed within three rooms of a house, but there is nothing to indicate the existence of the temple would be evident to passers-by. Another mithraeum was constructed near Carnuntum in the late second century at Fertörakos, but once again this was some distance from the town, being situated south of Carnuntum on the road to Scarbantia. Contemporary to this, a mithraeum was installed in the basement of a house at Köln, while at Biesheim the mithraeum appeared on the edge of the town at this time in an area that appears to

⁶³ Bjørnbye (2007) 78.

⁶⁴ For studies on the mithraea of Ostia, see Schreiber (1967); Bakker (1994) 111-117; White (2012).

⁶⁵ Schreiber (1967) 40.

have remained mostly unused, and the mithraeum at Koenigshoffen was erected near the Mühlbach River some distance from Argentoratum (Strasbourg).⁶⁶

Discussion

Many of the earliest mithraea erected in the provinces were located at a significant distance from the main settlement, or if inside a town they were not visible to the public eye, such as at Köln and Dura-Europos where mithraea were installed in the rooms of houses. In this regard, these mithraea were like the earlier examples from Rome and Ostia in that they do not appear to have been readily apparent to non-members. Such circumstances may suggest a cult that existed in some degree of tension with mainstream society at this time, as small groups meeting in private, beyond the watchful, regulatory eyes of the government, is something that was generally frowned upon in mainstream Roman society. Indeed, Christians met in similar circumstances and this appears to have been one of the reasons behind their intermittent persecution, while various *collegia* were also forced to disband over similar concerns.⁶⁷ There is no evidence Mithraic congregations were ever the subject of suspicion or fear from mainstream Roman society, but then more often than not tension between a cult and society does not necessarily result in violence, with many religious groups living in tension with society yet remaining largely at peace. Thus, even if Mithraic gatherings were a cause for concern it may never have amounted to anything worth addressing, but their discreet locations may have produced enough tension to help foster commitment among Mithraic adherents.

However, is it possible that people were well aware of these earlier mithraea and were simply not bothered by them? That in the late first century the poet Statius was able to make reference to the cult in the *Thebaid* suggests it was not entirely beyond the realm of mainstream society.⁶⁸ Furthermore, that mithraea were located on the fringes of towns does not mean they were invisible; indeed, many people may have seen them entering and leaving the settlements. If this were the case, can we really say that there was any significant tension between the cult and society?

MITHRAEA AND THEIR ENVIRONMENT II.2:

THE PROVINCES FROM THE LATE THIRD CENTURY ONWARDS

In this section, the mithraea found in urban locations have been subdivided into smaller categories based on the buildings they neighbored: religious precincts, industrial areas, residential areas, and extra-mural. Those that are listed as 'unknown' are those whose environs have not been extensively

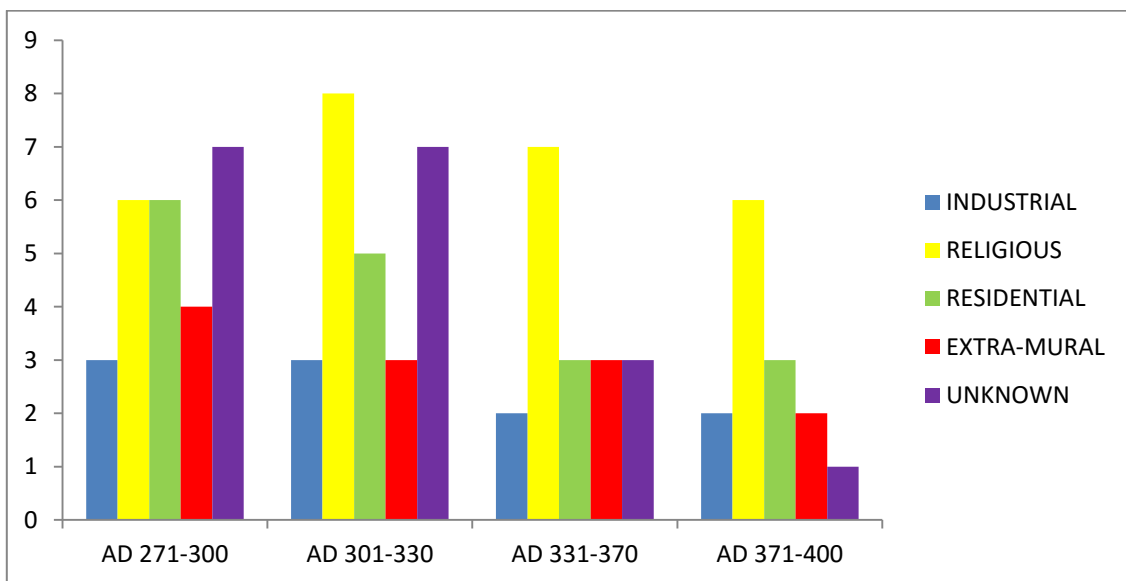
⁶⁶ *Carnuntum*: *CIMRM* 1164, the mithraeum was situated relatively close to the temple precinct at Pfaffenberg, but at a great enough distance there is no clear relationship between the two. *Fertötrakos*: *CIMRM* 1636; *Köln*: Ristow (1974) 11-15 *Koenigshoffen*: Forrer (1915) 11-12; *Ad Enum*: Garbsch (1985) 357; *Biesheim*: Kern (1991) 60; *Dura-Europos*: *CIMRM* 34.

⁶⁷ Cotter (1996).

⁶⁸ *Theb.* 1.179-210.

excavated or are mithraea only known to us via inscriptions. Once again these are only broad descriptions and there are evident limitations to this. One problem is such categories are not mutually exclusive. For example, a temple district may be extra-mural, while a mithraeum located within said district may be part of a larger domestic structure, such as at Trier, which means it could also be classed as residential. In such circumstances, the classification is based upon the primary use of the mithraeum's environs: the vicinity of the Trier mithraeum is clearly a temple precinct rather than a residential area, although there were houses present alongside the temples. Another is that the archaeological record does not always provide enough information to clearly establish what the buildings neighbouring a mithraeum were used for. In these cases, the decision as to which category a mithraeum should be placed in is based on whatever limited evidence is available, such as the interpretation of finds pointing towards sanctuaries to healing deities at as Les Bolards and Venetonimagnus. It is entirely possible that future excavation will demonstrate these were not areas with religious meaning, but currently this remains the most viable interpretation.

*Figure 7: Buildings Neighbouring Active Urban Mithraea
(Excluding Rome and Ostia)*



Urban Mithraea Neighbouring by Industrial Buildings

As can be seen in Fig.7, only a few mithraea active in this period were situated alongside buildings of an industrial nature. Mithraeum II at Poetovio, built in the early third century, lay to the south of administrative buildings and warehouses used by the *portoria*, who were the primary worshippers to use this mithraeum. This mithraeum was constructed close to Mithraeum I, which was situated to its north and had been built sometime during in the second century. However, the choice of location for Mithraeum II does not only appear to have only been to provide easy access for staff of the *portoria*,

for the mithraeum was also placed over a natural spring which fed into a basin in the temple. The mithraeum at Tienen, built in the mid-third century, lay next to craft workshops on the fringe of the *vicus* and was surrounded by a fence, although precisely how hidden this left the mithraeum is unclear. In a similar situation to the mithraeum at Tienen, Mithraeum V at Poetovio was found amongst pottery workshops on the fringe of the town, *ca.*250m from the main road.

In all three cases, the environment of the mithraea altered considerably in the fourth century. The environs of Mithraeum II at Poetovio, which remained in use until the late fourth century, look to have been abandoned in the second quarter of the fourth century, when burials begin to appear in the neighbouring administrative buildings, with most the evidence for the occupation of Poetovio at this time restricted to a fortified hill overlooking the river. The industrial area around Poetovio V, which ceased to be used after the late fourth century, appears to have been abandoned in the mid-fourth century. At Tienen, the *vicus* was occupied until the end of the third century, at which time activity relating to the mithraeum also ceases.⁶⁹

Urban Mithraea Neighbouring Religious Structures

By the late third century and throughout the fourth century, the most common type of building to be found neighbouring a mithraeum was another temple. Many of the mithraea that make up this group were to be found in Gaul. At Martigny, excavations have shown that the mithraeum lay on northwest edge of a collection of structures (Fig. 8), which include a bathhouse and the so-called ‘indigenous temple’. Like the example from Tienen, this mithraeum was surrounded by a palisade, but once again to what extent it impeded people from seeing the temple is unclear. In regards to changes in the surrounding topography of the Martigny mithraeum, which was abandoned in the late fourth century, a number of structures in the town appear to have gone out of use in the mid- to late fourth century, including the amphitheatre, the houses of Minerva and *Génie domestique*, and the ‘indigenous temple’ to the south of the mithraeum, suggesting that by the turn of the fifth century the town was in a significant state of disrepair.⁷⁰

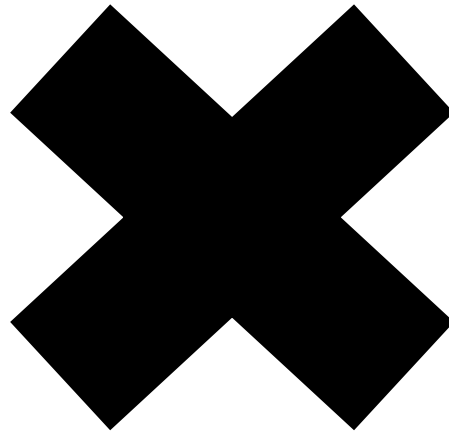
At Les Bolards, a hypocaust and various *ex votos* relating to eye illnesses were found near the mithraeum, while two kilometres away is the natural spring of La Courtavaux, which may indicate a temple area connected to healing waters. Limited excavation of the surrounding *vicus* indicates that it had been abandoned by the late fourth or early fifth century, around the same time evidence for activity in the mithraeum also ceased. In a similar case, excavations at Venetionimagnus also yielded *ex votos* relating to eye diseases around the mithraeum, while a bathhouse and natural spring were

⁶⁹ *Poetovio II*: Horvat *et al.* (2003) 175; *Tienen*: Martens (2004) 26-28; *Poetovio V*: Horvat *et al.* (2003) 170.

⁷⁰ Wiblé (2008) 82, 117, 123, 175.

found close-by. At Septeuil, a mithraeum was installed in a converted spring sanctuary that neighboured another large building, possibly either a temple or bath-house, but it has not been explored extensively to provide significant information.⁷¹

Figure 8: The Martigny Mithraeum and its Environs (Adapted from Wibl  (2008) Fig. 162)



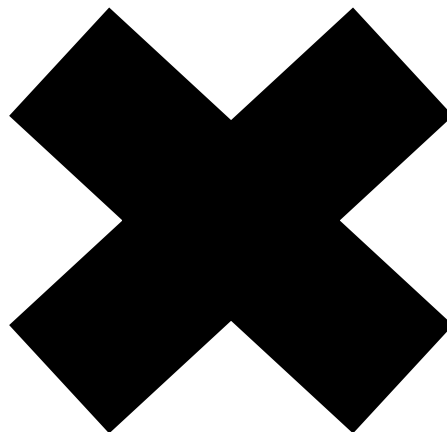
Another mithraeum was installed in a temple precinct at Trier, the capital of the Gallic provinces, around the turn of the fourth century. Unlike the other Gallic mithraea, which were standalone structures, the mithraeum at Trier was installed in the room of a house that was situated amongst the many temples in the *Altbachtal* district. Yet while the mithraeum was not necessarily as evident as its counterparts, its inclusion in the temple precinct of an imperial capital does not suggest a cult that operated on the margins of society. By the late fourth century the mithraeum was one of the few temples still active in this precinct. The neighbouring temples and structures rarely show any sign of use past the late fourth century, with some destroyed in the latter half of the fourth century during the reign of Valentinian I to make way for a new road (Fig. 9). To the west of the mithraeum a temple (building 31, possibly to Hercules) was burned down to make way for the road, as were temples 14, 15, 16, 17. The house next to the mithraeum was not destroyed, but the numismatic evidence indicates it was abandoned shortly thereafter in the reign of Theodosius I.⁷²

⁷¹ For both Les Bolards and Venetonimagnus, see Walters (1974) 5-17. For the abandonment of the vicus at Les Bolards, see Rorison (2001) 136-137.

⁷² Ghetta (2008) 83-85.

At Lambaesis in North Africa, a mithraeum was situated outside a military camp next to the large Asklepieion. Lambaesis had served as the capital of Numidia from the reign of Septimius Severus until Constantine, when the administration was moved to Cirta. The archaeological evidence for occupation does not provide a clear indication of the state of the site in the fourth century, but the epigraphic record suggests activity had dwindled significantly by this time. The presence of the *legio III Augusta* in the neighbouring camp is known until the mid-third century, at which time inscriptions attesting to them cease, while in the ‘Grand Camp’ inscriptions terminate under the Tetrarchy. The last evidence for the use of the neighbouring Asklepieion comes in the form of an inscription erected by the governor Domitius Zenofilus in the early fourth century.⁷³

*Figure 9: The Trier Mithraeum (37D) and
Its Environs ca. A.D. 400 (Adapted from Ghetta (2008) Fig. 7)*



At the forts of Carrawburgh and Housesteads on Hadrian’s Wall, the mithraea could be found in the *vici* neighbouring other shrines. At Housesteads, the mithraeum lay close to a temple to Mars Thincus and another shrine, while at Carrawburgh a temple to Coventina and an open-air nymphaeum were situated in the vicinity of the mithraeum. At Housesteads, the *vicus* looks to have been abandoned in the late third century and subsequently demolished for building material, while the shrine to Mars Thincus, like the mithraeum, has a *terminus ante quem* of the early fourth century. In regards to the fort itself, the defences were enhanced and new barracks blocks appear that are less

⁷³ *AE* 2003, 2022. For the fate of Lambaesis in the fourth century, see Gros Lambert (2011) 22, 24.

regular in plan suggesting they may now have been used to accommodate families.⁷⁴ Indeed, the disappearance of *vici* and alterations to forts that suggest the occupation of families is a common theme along Hadrian's Wall at this time, with some forts found to contain child burials.⁷⁵ The evidence for the situation at Carrawburgh is less clear, but the neighbouring temple to Coventina went out of use at the end of the fourth century (later than the mithraeum which was abandoned in the first half of the fourth century), at which time its reliefs and sculptures were deposited in a water cistern on top of a layer containing *ca.*16,000 coins and various items of jewellery.⁷⁶

Finally, a mithraeum was built at Lentia in Noricum in the late third century alongside the restored temple of *Dea Roma*. Although Lentia was a frontier town, the construction of the mithraeum alongside the restored temple to *Dea Roma* may suggest that, at least locally, Mithras was recognised as a deity linked to the Roman state. Both the temple to *Dea Roma* and the mithraeum continued to be used until the end of the fourth century, but by this time the occupation of Lentia had shrunk significantly in size to a fortified position on Castle Hill, leaving the temples unprotected.⁷⁷ Late Roman inhumations found in the Castle Hill area indicate an almost equal number of males and females were cohabitating inside the defences, while the artefacts from the graves indicate the movement of items between the occupants and the surrounding areas, including across the Danube, and it is possible that people from the latter were among those living in the late Roman settlements, although this is difficult to verify archaeologically.⁷⁸

Urban Mithraea in/Neighbouring Residential Buildings

At the end of the third century a relatively high proportion of mithraea were located in or around residential buildings, although the use of these mithraea declined throughout the fourth century. Mithraea in this context were distributed across a wide geographical area, including Britain (London) Gaul (Bordeaux), Italy (Spolegium), Pannonia (Aquincum IV and Poetovio III), and Spain (Lugo). The mithraeum installed in a house in Lugo, Spain, in the early third century is an indication that these mithraea may have served more than a single household, for while much of the house in which the mithraeum was located was destroyed to make way for the city wall in A.D. 262 evidence for activity in the mithraeum continues until the mid-fourth century. Yet unlike earlier mithraea in residential areas, the majority of these were not located within houses but were constructed as standalone buildings adjacent to them, such was the case at Aquincum IV, Poetovio III, Vulci and

⁷⁴ Rushworth (2009) 311-314. A sketch of 1725 by William Stukeley of the fort at Housesteads appears to depict altars from various temples lying in the area referred to as 'Chapel Hill'.

⁷⁵ Christie (2011) 88, 91; Collins (2012) 50.

⁷⁶ Allason-Jones and McKay (1985).

⁷⁷ Karnitsch (1956); Ruprechtsberger (2005) 14.

⁷⁸ Ruprechtsberger (1999). On the difficulties of identifying ethnicity via finds on the late Roman frontiers, see Swift (2000).

London. Poetovio III was situated between two villas in a predominantly residential area of town, on the other side of the river from Mithraea I and II; the Bordeaux mithraeum looks to have been erected next to a suburban villa, while the Vulci mithraeum was placed between the slave-quarters of one house and the so-called House of the *Crypto-Porticus*, suggesting all three were to be found in relatively affluent areas of towns. The recent excavations on the Walbrook in London have also brought to light the existence of what appears to be two large houses next to the mithraeum, although the exact relationship between the temple and these residences is yet to be established.⁷⁹

From what can be discerned from the archaeological evidence, the environs of many of these mithraea suffered notably in the latter half of the fourth century. Like Poetovio II, the area surrounding Poetovio III was now used as a cemetery with many of the buildings abandoned. At Aquincum, during the course of the fourth century the side of the town containing the mithraeum was abandoned, with the population of the town appearing to have reduced considerably and now occupying more defensible positions. The villa which neighboured the mithraeum at Bordeaux looks to have remained in use until the sixth century, when it was mined for *spolia*, but little else is known about the surrounding area.⁸⁰

Extra-Mural Mithraea

The number of mithraea located on fringes of settlements looks to have remained relatively consistent throughout this period. However, the precise context of the extra-mural mithraea is also often hard to define. As discussed above, Mithraeum I at Carnuntum was located far outside of the settlement. It is now generally accepted that Carnuntum was the victim of a powerful earthquake in the mid-fourth century, which significantly damaged many buildings across the settlement. Despite reconstruction work under Constantius II, the town never appears to have recovered significantly and was described by Ammianus as deserted and in ruins by the late fourth century. The mithraeum appears to have been left to decay after this event, with the civilian town and the Pfaffenberg complex both abandoned and the majority of activity now confined to the military camp.⁸¹

At Ad Enum in Noricum, the Roman settlement across the River Inn looks to have been a trading hub and pottery production centre, but it appears to have ceased producing pottery in the final decades of the third century. Shortly thereafter a number of stone buildings were erected and armour and weapon fragments were recovered, concurring with the presence of the *Equites Dalmatae Aquesiani comitatenses* recorded on an inscription of the early fourth century, although the main fort has not

⁷⁹ London: Watson *Pers. Comm.* (19/11/15).

⁸⁰ Poetovio III: Horvat *et al.* (2003) 178; Aquincum IV: Láng (2012), Póczy (1997) 49. Ammianus describes how Valentinian did not wish to linger at Aquincum as it did not provide suitable winter quarters, see 30.5.14.

⁸¹ On the earthquake at Carnuntum, see Kandler (1989) and Decker *et al.* (2006). Amm. Marc. 30.5.2.

been uncovered. Coins on the site indicate occupation continued until the early fifth century, falling shortly after the *terminus post quem* of the mithraeum in the late fourth.⁸²

At Sarrebourg, the mithraeum was built on a hillside in the late second century near to the road leading to the town. It is debatable, however, whether the mithraeum was used by people from the town, or whether it was connected to one of the five villas found in a 5km radius of the *vicus*. The *vicus* looks to have been abandoned by the mid-fifth century, although evidence for activity declines after the mid-third century, while the mithraeum ceased to be used in the late fourth century.⁸³

Urban Mithraea from Unknown Contexts

In regards to the mithraea whose context is ‘unknown’, there are unfortunately a relatively high number. This is either because the area surrounding the mithraeum was not excavated, leaving the mithraeum as isolated island in the archaeological record, or inscriptions referring to the restoration or construction of mithraea is all that remains of them. In the case of the latter, this is the situation we find in regards to mithraea at Poetovio (Mithraeum IV), Virunum and Cirta that were restored by governors and a *dux* in the fourth century. Given the status of these patrons, it would be fascinating to ascertain what sort of environs these mithraea were situated in: where they located in major public areas where many would have seen them, or where they more private affairs?

Several excavated mithraea have also been recorded in isolation, although were unlikely to have been so when they were in use. The mithraeum at Ponza in Italy was found in the centre of the island away the main port, while at Capua the mithraeum was not located too far from the Capitolium, but in both cases the context of immediate environs is unknown. The same can also be said of Carnuntum III, although we do at least know the mithraeum was located in the civilian town, marking a notable shift in prominence from Mithraeum I which was situated far from the main settlement, while it is reasonable to assume the environment of this mithraeum was affected by the earthquake and subsequently abandoned as with the rest of the civilian town.⁸⁴

Private Estates

Mithraea on private estates vary in their distance from the central villa. At Bornheim-Sechtem the mithraeum lay only several metres to the northeast of what looks to have been a villa. However, the occupation of the villa only appears to have lasted between the second and third centuries, while the mithraeum continued in use until the early fifth century. Whether it was left as an isolated structure or

⁸² Kellner (1974).

⁸³ Rorison (2001) 223.

⁸⁴ Ponza: Vermaseren (1974) Fig.1; Capua: Vermaseren (1971) 1; Carnuntum III: Kandler (2004) 49.

if another villa was erected elsewhere is unknown. The second scenario is perhaps more likely, as to the southeast of the mithraeum lay a group of late Roman graves, which contained coins from the first half of the fourth century. Unfortunately, the relation between Mackwiller and Rockenhausen with their respective villas is unknown; indeed, that these were located on private estates is by no means certain, but was deemed by the excavators to be the likeliest scenario.⁸⁵

Rural Mithraea

There is not much to state in regards to the environments of rural mithraea, with the majority either isolated, standalone structures or installed in natural caves. In Noricum, the Schachadorf mithraeum lay close to a road leading to Ovilava and the St Urban mithraeum was found in a cave near to the St Urban Lake. In Germany, the Gimmeldingen mithraeum was situated close to the Mulßach stream. Of the various mithraea located in Dalmatia, the Jajce mithraeum was erected abutting a hillside on the bank of the Pliva River, those at Arupium were also set against rock-faces, the Epidaurum mithraeum was located in a cave with a well, and the mithraeum at Konjic was constructed on a hillside. That many of these mithraea were located in mountainous regions does not suggest they were readily accessible to those who did not know of their whereabouts. Notably, although located in northern Italy, the mithraeum at Timavo was also situated in a cave which overlooks the coast. Given that this mithraea lay in closer proximity to the Dalmatian mithraea than those of Rome and its environs, the Mithraic congregation that used this site were perhaps were more closely linked with the former.⁸⁶

It is worth noting all these mithraea were to be found in areas where, as outlined above, in the latter half of the fourth century people had begun to take refuge in fortified locations. In the case of Dalmatia, a similar situation looks to have occurred in the late fourth and early fifth centuries during the Gothic invasion, with some towns abandoned in favour of old hill-top fortifications, while in A.D. 415 a law was issued ordering government officials to oversee the movement of refugees from the area.⁸⁷

Finally, there is also the single mithraeum in the East known to date to the fourth century at Hawarte. No evidence of occupation, other than the mithraeum, has been found here which pre-dates

⁸⁵ On the Bornheim-Sechtem villa, see Ulbert (2004) 81-82. That the Mackwiller mithraeum was located on an estate is based on the fragments of a statue depicting a man in a toga and an inscription which refers to an unidentified equestrian, see *CIMRM* 1330; Hatt (1955) 407. The Rockenhausen mithraeum is recorded as having been found on an estate, but the notes regarding its excavation are scant, see Schwertheim (1974) 135.

⁸⁶ Schachadorf: *CIMRM* 1409; St Urban: *CIMRM* 1442; Gimmeldingen: *CIMRM* 1313; Jajce: *CIMRM* 1901; Arupium: *CIMRM* 1851-1852; Konjic: *CIMRM* 1895; Timavo: Pross Gabrielli (1975) 7.

⁸⁷ Wilkes (1969) 419; *Cod. Theo.* 6.29.12.

the fifth century when two churches were erected. However, the various caves which dot the landscape may have been used for habitation.⁸⁸

Discussion

To begin, the evidence indicates that by our period mithraea in urban settings were often to be found alongside other temples, while others were situated in industrial areas or neighbouring residential buildings. This suggests a cult which had generally become much more integrated into society than it had been in the second century, when mithraea were predominantly located outside of settlements or within houses. Indeed, the installation of mithraea in temple precincts at Trier and Lentia in the late third century suggests that these were by no means religious communities that were ostracised from society, but that Mithraic worship was accepted as part of the social norm in these towns. This is not to say we do not still find mithraea outside of settlements, but many of those which were extra-mural in this period had been erected in the second century. Based on this evidence, it would appear that if the Mithras cult had existed in tension with society in the first and second centuries due to the limited visibility of mithraea, this had altered by the turn of the fourth century. Now, not only was it evident where Mithraic meetings were held, at least in some areas, but as a result it would be clear who the Mithraic initiates were as they entered and left the mithraea.

However, we must be cautious and remember that while this is what the archaeology suggests, it is not necessarily the truth. As discussed above, the location of mithraea in earlier periods may have been widely known and inconsequential to many people. Indeed, that mithraea were now more prominent may have caused *increasing* discontent among non-members. If so, what appears to be a reduction in tension could, in some cases, have actually resulted in an increase in the tension between the cult and society. Under these circumstances, the commitment of the adherents would have theoretically increased.

Secondly, the environment of mithraea suggests that the status of the cult may have varied in different locations. That from the early third century a number of mithraea in Gaul appeared close to other temples and sacred springs, which were possibly used for healing purposes, is perhaps an indication that the cult in this region occupied a different niche from the cult in Lentia, where it was placed next to a temple of *Dea Roma*, or the mithraea at that were erected in an industrial areas. That the mithraea of Dalmatia were all found in rural contexts may also be due to a different approach among the adherents in this area than in other regions where urban mithraea were far more common. We may also say the same of mithraeum at the village of Hawarte in Syria.

⁸⁸ Gawlikowski (2007) 337.

Another notable trend that emerges from the evidence is that many mithraea that were still active in the fourth century found themselves surrounded by buildings that were no longer in use. Along Hadrian's Wall and the Danube, settlements declined in size to defensible positions, usually inside the pre-existing forts, with the civilian areas in which the mithraea were situated largely abandoned. Often the mithraea appear to have continued in use despite these circumstances, but visiting them had evidently become increasingly precarious. This also correlates with the aforementioned observation that rural mithraea (i.e. mithraea with no protection) on the Rhine frontier went out of use at this time while their urban counterparts remained in use. The same situation of urban decline was not limited to the frontiers, however, but was also to be found among the civilian areas of eastern Gaul, where many settlements had been largely abandoned by the turn of the fifth century.

Finally, such shifts in settlement patterns would likely have had a significant bearing on the social networks of the Mithraic adherents. This may have particularly impacted on those drawn from the military, who now found themselves in far more regular contact with civilians, some of whom would have been their wives and children, as these people now inhabited the spaces inside the forts with them. In such circumstances, one must wonder whether the social capital of Mithraic adherents, and prospective members, might look to be better served through affiliation with other cults.

PROMINENCE OF SANCTUARIES AND TEMPLES BELONGING TO OTHER RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Temples to Isis/Sarapis

The cult of Isis/Sarapis was another 'mystery-cult' that spread across the Roman West, but in an earlier period than the cult of Mithras. By the time mithraea begin to appear in the archaeological record in the second century, the majority of temples to Isis/Sarapis already lay next to, or close by, public buildings and spaces: in Rome, by the latter half of the first century an *iseum* was already to be found on the Campus Martius (built first century A.D.); in Pompeii, the temple of Isis stood next to a theatre and gymnasium (late second century B.C); at Baelo in Spain an *iseum* (built *ca.* A.D. 80) was built next to the forum; at Ephesos an *iseum* was constructed next to the Tetragonos-Agora (built early second century); and at Pergamon a huge Isis/Sarapis complex abutted the forum (built first half second century A.D.).⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Nielsen (2014) 75-81.

Temples to Magna Mater

The temples of Magna Mater were also particularly prominent in the Roman world. Given that the goddess' arrival in Rome was orchestrated by the Senate at the beginning of the second century B.C., a temple to Magna Mater was given immediate prominence on the Palatine Hill. Later, the temple's location grew in prestige as it came to neighbour the house of Emperor Augustus. At Ostia, the triangular campus of Magna Mater was erected in the first half of the first century A.D. close to the city wall and alongside a bath complex. Around the same time, a temple to the goddess was built in at Lepcis Magna alongside a temple to Rome and Augustus, near the Basilica Vetus and the *curia*. At Lugdunum in Gaul, another campus to the goddess was constructed in the first half of the second century A.D. next to a large theatre, not too far from the forum.⁹⁰

Churches

In contrast to the temples of Magna Mater and Isis/Sarapis, Christian churches were far less prominent, being located in houses for much of the first-second centuries. As with mithraea, one wonders how often outsiders would have known of the existence of Christian meeting places. One imagines that the scenario at Dura-Europos, with a house-church situated just down the street from a mithraeum which was also installed in a house, was unlikely to have been a unique situation.⁹¹ While it can only remain conjecture that Mithraic gatherings generated a degree of suspicion amongst outsiders, this was certainly the case in regards to those that took place in Christian communities, with various references attesting to outsiders who were bemused or worried by these events as they did not know what they were designed to achieve.⁹² However, it appears that during the third century churches began to be erected as standalone structures.⁹³ Unfortunately, with no extant archaeological evidence it is difficult to establish how prominent these churches were, but if they continued on parallel trajectory to that of mithraea they were likely to have at least become evident enough to non-members that they would have known who was coming and going from them. Of course, from the reign of Constantine onwards the prominence of churches altered considerably, but even this did not occur over night, with large churches in this period initially appearing on the fringes of towns, such as was the case with St John the Lateran at Rome, Ostia's Episcopal Basilica and the churches of Augustodunum, or around martyr sites, as with *Santa Costanza* in Rome and the churches in the suburbs of Vienne in Gaul, rather than in major public spaces.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Rome: CCCA 3.1; Ostia: CCCA 3.362; Lepcis Magna: CCCA 5.46; Lugdunum: CCCA 5.384.

⁹¹ On early Christian assemblies, see White (1990) 102-123.

⁹² Pliny *Ep.* 10.96; Min. Fel. *Oct.* 8-12.

⁹³ Porph. *Adv. Chr. Frag.* 76.

⁹⁴ Christie (2011) 174-178.

Discussion

The prominence of temples to Isis/Sarapis and Magna Mater in the urban landscape of many towns suggests in this regard that these cults did not exist in any considerable tension with society by the second century. In contrast, mithraea and Christian churches were hidden away at this time, with the apparent secrecy that surrounded their meetings a source of tension between them and wider society. However, as the third century progressed, these structures also began to become more prominent (or at least this is what we garner about churches based on the scant evidence), indicating they had may also have begun to exist in a reduced state of tension with society. Although this undoubtedly would have varied chronologically and regionally, it appears to be a general trend that the earlier a cult gained a following in the Roman world the sooner we find its temples becoming evident in the urban landscape, with no cult remaining entirely 'hidden' forever. Such circumstances would suggest that, on the basis of the sociological model, the commitment of the cult's adherents would have lessened as a result, as there was less chance of their attending these temples being perceived as deviant behaviour by non-members than when such meeting places were hidden from the general public. However, as outlined in regards to the mithraea above, as we do not know how outsiders actually perceived such gatherings and such observations can only remain tentative.

CONCLUSION

The location of mithraea, both on a regional and local level, provides a number of insights into the status of the cult throughout the late third and fourth centuries. First, the context of many mithraea in this period suggests the cult became increasingly intergrated into mainstream society across the third century. This may have led to a reduction in any tension that existed between the cult and society as mithraea. Mithraea located in temple districts would have been evident to those who visited the neighbouring structures, particularly at Lentia where the mithraeum stood next to the temple of *Dea Roma*. Mithraea located in industrial areas certainly would have been noticed by the people passing through the area on their way to work or obtain goods, while mithraea in residential areas now stood alongside neighbouring houses, rather than being hidden in basements. In this respect, the mithraea of the provinces followed the pattern of increased prominence exhibited by those in Rome and Ostia, with these Mithraic congregations evidently feeling that there was no need to hide their presence; on the contrary, mithraea were becoming an established part of the urban fabric. Even on private estates, that mithraea usually constituted separate buildings meant they were evident to those who came to the villas and may have represented a symbol of the landowner's generosity to his dependents.

If a reduction in tension between the cult and society did occur as a result of mithraea becoming more prominent, then this could have negatively impacted on the commitment of the cult's followers. In previous generations, to join the cult one had to attend meetings in hidden rooms, often away from

the main-roads. While there is no evidence to prove that this ever brought the Mithraic congregations into open conflict with wider society, there may have been some level of risk involved as other groups who met in similar circumstances had been deemed a danger by the authorities. Yet by the turn of the fourth century a prospective initiate could now stop off at a mithraeum while at the bath-house or on his way home from work, suggesting a more benign and far less mysterious experience. Such a situation was by no means unique to the cult of Mithras, as other cults eventually found their temples (or churches) becoming increasingly more prominent, suggesting that they also found themselves in less tension with society. However, as postulated with the cult of Mithras, one may expect this to have an adverse effect on the average commitment of the adherents of these cults as well.

Yet such integration of mithraea into society is not evident everywhere, with the rural mithraea in Dalmatia and at Hawarte in Syria having no urban counterparts during the fourth century. Whether the choice of location for these mithraea was based on a religious reason or if they were ostracised from the urban sphere is unclear, but there does appear to be a significant difference in the relationship between these Mithraic communities and urban society than in other western provinces.

Of course, when discussing the changing contexts of mithraea and other cult buildings, such observations regarding a lessening of tension and its adverse effect on commitment are difficult to verify. It is possible that this was the case, yet it is by no means certain. Many people may have been aware of the existence of mithraea in the first and second centuries and thought little of them, but in later generations having mithraea appear in the centre of towns may have caused a greater cause of concern. If true, this would mean, based on the sociological model, that the commitment of Mithraic adherents would have *increased* in places such as Lentia and Trier, while perhaps the mithraea of Dalmatia and Hawarte remained in less tension with society and their adherents were less committed. In short, we do not know how the prominence of mithraea affected the commitment of adherents.

In regards to what the context of mithraea can tell us about who joined the cult, the prevalence of mithraea on the frontiers of the Rhine, Danube and Britain in the fourth century suggests the primary source of adherents for many Mithraic communities at this time continued to be the military. This is supported by the contrast to the areas which were less militarised, such as the eastern Mediterranean, Spain and North Africa, where mithraea are very rare. Notably, where mithraea did appear in Spain and North Africa, it was in the house of a centurion and a town attached to a military fort respectively. Of course, the Mithras cult did have a presence among some civilian communities, such as in Rome, eastern Gaul and Dalmatia, but the adherents of these mithraea were likely to have been from a different social context to the soldiers on the frontiers. Indeed, evidence for such localisation can be discerned from the buildings that mithraea neighboured in different regions. In eastern Gaul, mithraea were often found alongside shrines to healing deities, a setting of which appears unique to this area,

perhaps an indication that in these communities Mithras' role may have been predominantly as a healing deity. In contrast, in the highly militarised frontier town of Lentia a mithraeum was placed next to a temple dedicated to *Dea Roma*, suggesting that this community may have seen Mithras as deity equated with Roman military power.

From the mid-fourth century there was a considerable alteration in the contexts mithraea were located in, with the majority now situated in or around areas where urban development began to decline rapidly. Along the frontiers in particular, many mithraea were to be found in areas of towns that were in a significant state of dilapidation or that had been completely abandoned. Many of the inhabitants of these settlements look to have fled or sought shelter inside the forts. By the mid-fourth century, the *vici* of Hadrian's Wall had largely been abandoned, while at the same time the civilian areas in which the mithraea were located, of Lentia, Aquincum and Poetovio also show little indication of continuing occupation, with inhumations starting to appear in neighbouring buildings in the case of the latter two. In North Africa, a similar situation was to be found at the military fort of Lambaesis with the soldiers and administration moved elsewhere. Such decline was not a phenomenon confined only to the frontier, however, and is evident among the settlements of eastern Gaul, with many structures surrounding the mithraea now abandoned. In some places, it was not necessarily that whole town had fallen into disrepair, but rather the mithraeum found itself in an area of the town that had ceased in its usefulness, such as at the imperial capital of Trier where the temple precinct was now being dismantled for secular use.

Finally, this changing context of mithraea has important implications regarding the social networks in which the cult's adherents operated. It is clear from the evidence that many of the mithraea were located in settlements with declining populations, which meant the Mithraic adherents now had an increasing chance of being exposed to non-initiates. This would have been particularly notable in military communities where the fort now housed those who had lived in the neighbouring civilian towns and *vici*. Detecting the presence of different people inside forts from archaeological record is fraught with difficulties; for example, establishing an increased female presence cannot be achieved through artefact analysis, given that the assumption of that certain items equate to certain genders is misleading. However, there are some indications that the occupation of military fortifications had altered in the fourth century, such as with the case of the male and female burials evident in the late antique settlement at Lentia discussed above. On Hadrian's Wall, infant burials appear more frequently inside forts during the fourth century, while barrack blocks were modified in the mid-fourth and now had a less regular plan, possible now used as family spaces. Under these circumstances, with their social networks disrupted and increased exposure to non-initiates, the

Mithraic adherents of the fourth century may have found their social capital better served by membership to other cults, rather than that of Mithras.

CHAPTER 2: ARCHITECTURE AND DECORATION OF MITHRAEA IN LATE ANTIQUITY

INTRODUCTION

We have seen how mithraea grew in prominence across the third century, and how this may have affected the commitment of Mithraic adherents, but what of the temples themselves? What did the construction and restoration of mithraea in the late third and fourth centuries actually involve? Were the new mithraea any more monumental than their predecessors? Were there any changes to their layout? Does their decoration display any innovations? Do mithraea appear to have become more accessible? How did the materials used in the construction of new mithraea compare to their surroundings? Is there any evidence for regional variation among Mithraic temples during this period? How does the architecture of other sacred buildings compare to mithraea? In order to answer these questions, in this chapter I will explore: what the archetypical mithraeum consisted of in earlier periods and how this helped to foster significant levels of commitment among Mithraic adherents; what alterations were made to pre-existing mithraea from the late third century onwards; what features newly constructed mithraea consisted of; and, finally, how mithraea compared to the temples of Isis/Sarapis, Magna Mater and what we know of early Christian churches.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF MITHRAEA BEFORE THE LATE THIRD CENTURY

Prior to our period, what did the typical topography of a mithraeum (Fig. 10) generally consist of? Beginning at the entrance, there are a few examples of mithraea that had courtyards or porticoes, but they are not in abundance. To access the mithraeum at Dura-Europos, one first had to proceed across a walled courtyard, before reaching the entrance to the mithraeum which was covered by a portico. A similar arrangement was to be found at the mithraeum of Ša'āra, which shared a walled courtyard area with another shrine, while its entrance was also sheltered by a portico. Small wooden porticoes have been identified in front of some mithraea in the western provinces, such as at Ad Enum in Noricum and Venetonimagnus in Gaul.⁹⁵ There is little indication as to what these sheltered spaces were used for other than providing cover against the sun or rain, but it is possible that some Mithraic adherents might be placed on guard to prevent any non-members entering while a Mithraic ritual was ongoing. Notably, there is no substantial evidence for any mithraeum having external decoration.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Dura-Europos: *CIMRM* 34; Ša'āra: Kalos (2001) 239; Ad Enum: Garbsch (1985) 364; Venetonimagnus: Walters (1974) 7.

⁹⁶ The remains of a façade were uncovered on the hillside that ran between the early third century Ša'āra mithraeum and a neighbouring shrine, but it is unknown whether it was decorated and in any case it was hidden behind an exterior wall, see Kalos (2001) 233.

The entrance to a mithraeum would usually have been a small doorway which rarely aligned the main axis of the temple, sometimes being situated at ninety degrees to it.⁹⁷ Having entered the mithraeum, one would find oneself in an anteroom, of which there might be several to navigate before entering the main *cella*. These anterooms could consist of either specifically constructed rooms, or spaces divided from the *cella* by a more temporary measure, such as the wooden screen that was erected in the mithraeum at Carrawburgh.⁹⁸ These spaces were not large enough to hold any processions, but they may have served as spaces to prepare initiates before their induction into the cult or to prepare food for cult meals.

When one entered the *cella*, one would find the same arrangement in almost all mithraea from Syria to Britain: a central aisle flanked by parallel benches, with the main cult relief situated at the terminus of the nave, usually placed on either a podium, in a niche, or occasionally attached to the back wall of the *cella*.⁹⁹ The arrangement of the space was clearly designed to focus one's attention towards where the cult-image was located, although the relief itself was not always immediately visible: at Koenigshoffen, columns that supported a curtain rail were found on either side of the relief, while at Mithraeum II at Nida-Heddernheim indentations in front of the cult-niche indicate some form of barrier that divided it from the nave.¹⁰⁰ In front of the cult image would regularly be at least one altar, though in various mithraea several have been found.¹⁰¹ A basin would usually be situated close to the start of the nave, although they have also been found in anterooms.¹⁰² Given that the *cella* of mithraea often tended to be located at lower than ground level they usually had to be accessed via steps, while in some cases steps would also be placed in front of the cult image, leading up to it.

In at least some mithraea, the leader of the community (the *pater*) would sit on a throne in front of the relief. Inscriptions record that thrones were placed in the cult-niche at the mithraea of the Painted Walls and *Aldobrandini* in Ostia. The remains of a throne were found in the *Santa Prisca* mithraeum, although this sat in the middle of one of the side benches, thus equating the *pater* less directly with Mithras but still making his standing evident. Iconographic depictions from Dura-Europos, *Santa Prisca* and Mainz show a *pater* seated, either overseeing an initiation ceremony or receiving a

⁹⁷ For entrances off-set from the main axis, see *Capua*: *CIMRM* 179; *Martigny*: Wibl  (2004) 135; *Poetovio II*: *CIMRM* 1509.

⁹⁸ Richmond *et al.* (1951) 12.

⁹⁹ Cult niches: *London*: Shepherd (1998) 225; *Nida-Heddernheim I-IV*: Huld-Zetsche (1986); *Lambaesis*: *CIMRM* 138. Cult image attached to the wall: *Carnuntum III*: *CIMRM* 1683.

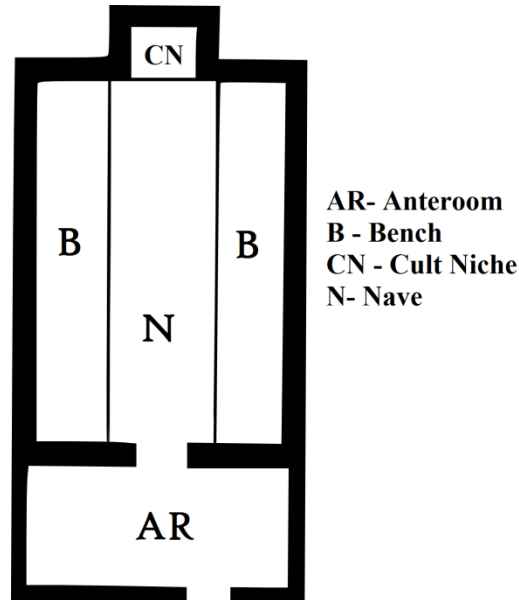
¹⁰⁰ *Koenigshoffen*: *CIMRM* 1335; *Nida-Heddernheim II*: *CIMRM* 1108. At Caesarea Maritima, small holes run in a line across the vault-roof perpendicular to the nave and 4.5 from the eastern end where the cult image would have stood. It is possible this denotes some form divider that existed to separate this from the rest of the mithraeum, see Bull (1978) 78.

¹⁰¹ Claus (2000) 57-60.

¹⁰² Examples of basins in mithraea: *Stockstadt I*: *CIMRM* 1196; *Koenigshoffen*: *CIMRM* 1353, 1368, 1369; *Poetovio II*: *CIMRM* 1509; *Rudchester*: *CIMRM* 838; *Palazzo Imperiale, Ostia*: *CIMRM* 250; *Painted Walls, Ostia*: *CIMRM* 275.

procession of lower grades. Evidently, to anyone who entered the mithraeum during a Mithraic ritual, the position of the *pater* as the dominant individual would have been clear.¹⁰³

Figure 10: The Standard Plan of a Mithraeum



The *cella* of mithraea would usually be painted and decorated, although such evidence is not always extant. An inscription from a mithraeum at Virunum records a member of the congregation providing ‘vaulting decorated with frescoes’,¹⁰⁴ while evidence for painted ceilings have been found in the mithraea of *Santa Prisca* in Rome and Ponza, both of which feature signs of the zodiac.¹⁰⁵ The walls of various mithraea have yielded evidence that they were painted, although this mostly appears to have consisted of colour patterns and landscapes: at a mithraeum in Sarmizegetusa the walls were decorated with red and blue squares connected via ‘serpent-shaped lines’; at Colonia Agrippina in Germany the walls were plastered and painted red and black with a yellow line running along the base; in the Mithraeum of the Seven Gates in Ostia the remains of paintings depicting bushes and trees can still be seen. Among the mithraea of Ostia there is evidence of mosaics decorating the central nave of the *cella*, as was the case in the mithraea of the Seven Gates and the Seven Spheres. In the provinces such evidence is less common, although fragments of mosaic were found at the mithraeum of Biesheim, with the floors of most provincial mithraea consisting of stamped earth or

¹⁰³ *Dura-Europos*: CIMRM 44; *Santa Prisca*: CIMRM 480; *Mainz*: Beck (2000) 149; *Painted Walls, Ostia*: CIMRM 277; *Aldobrandini, Ostia*: CIMRM 266.

¹⁰⁴ *AE* 1994, 1334.

¹⁰⁵ *Santa Prisca*: Vermaseren and Van Essen (1965) 140; *Ponza*: Beck (2004) 151-171.

mortar.¹⁰⁶ The *cella* of mithraea often appear to have had vaulted ceilings. In some cases, this was because they were installed in pre-existing rooms with a barrel-vaulted roof, such as at Capua, the Baths of Caracalla, *San Clemente* and Caesarea Maritima. In some cases the ceiling looks to have been decorated to give the appearance of a cave, such as at Groß-Krotzenburg in Germany where the roof of a mithraeum was lined with rough basalt.¹⁰⁷

In terms of iconographic depictions, the central image of Mithras slaying the bull in a cave was present in every mithraeum.¹⁰⁸ This image remains largely unchanged across the Roman world, with Mithras aided in this act by a dog, snake and scorpion, and flanked by the two torch-bearers, Cautes and Cautopates. On occasion, Sol and Luna appear in the upper left and right corners of the main relief, while the raven and the lion are sometimes included in the main scene. It was not unusual for individual statues or reliefs of these additional figures to also be present in mithraea. Two other scenes that are also common in mithraea across the Roman world are images of Mithras being born from a rock and Mithras celebrating a feast with Sol.¹⁰⁹ However, additional scenes from Mithraic lore are more common than others in certain regions. The water miracle, where Mithras is depicted bring water forth from a rock, appears to have been a major part of the Mithraic narrative in the Danube and Rhine areas,¹¹⁰ while of the forty known images that show Mithras attempting to bring the bull under control prior to killing it, three quarters originate from the lower Danube (Dacia, Moesia and Thrace).¹¹¹ Additionally, in around a quarter of illustrations, also mainly from Danubian contexts, the torch-bearers positions are reversed, possibly to denote the changing seasons.¹¹²

According to some Christian authors mithraea were places shrouded in darkness.¹¹³ This has been corroborated by the archaeological evidence which has provided little indication of natural light being allowed to pass into Mithraic temples. What light there was appears to have been provided by braziers and lamps, the latter of which have been found in considerable numbers in mithraea. However, it is possible that mithraea may have had apertures in their ceilings to allow light to shine on certain spots within the *cella* on specific occasions. At Caesarea Maritima, natural light was allowed to shine through a small aperture in the ceiling of the *cella* that would have aligned with the altar at the summer solstice.¹¹⁴ This hole could easily be boarded up when not in use, suggesting that it was specifically made to be used during the solstice, rather than left open all the time. Unfortunately,

¹⁰⁶ Sarmizegetusa: *CIMRM* 298; Colonia Agrippina: *CIMRM* 1018; *Of the Painted Walls*, Ostia: *CIMRM* 268; *Of the Seven Gates*, Ostia: *CIMRM* 287; *Of the Seven Spheres*, Ostia: *CIMRM* 240; Biesheim: Kern (1991) 61.

¹⁰⁷ Capua: *CIMRM* 180; Baths of Caracalla: *CIMRM* 457; *San Clemente*: *CIMRM* 338; Caesarea Maritima: Bull (1978); Groß-Krotzenburg: Clauss (2000) 51.

¹⁰⁸ Clauss (2000) 63.

¹⁰⁹ Clauss (2000) 62-71, 109-113.

¹¹⁰ Several inscriptions from the Danube region also refer to Mithras as the *Fons Perennis*, see *CIMRM* 1465, 1533 and 1753.

¹¹¹ Clauss (2000) 73.

¹¹² Alvar (2008) 85-86.

¹¹³ Firm. Mat. *Err. prof. rel.* 5.2 and Tert. *De Cor.* 15.

¹¹⁴ Bull (1978) 79. No evidence of glass used for windows has been found on any Mithraic site.

whether this was a common occurrence in other mithraea is unknown due the fact that rarely little more than their foundations survive. It should also be noted that there is no dominant alignment of mithraea, indicating that even if apertures were often present in the ceilings of all mithraea they did not necessarily conduct the sun's rays in a similar fashion to each other.

The Symbolic Nature of the Mithraeum

The intention behind making mithraea appear 'cave-like' appears to have been to recreate the cave that acted as the setting for the tauroctony.¹¹⁵ However, it has been argued, most prominently by Roger Beck, that the Mithraic cave (and therefore the mithraeum) also served as a representation of the universe. Beck hypothesised that there was an ideal layout that the *cella* of a mithraeum should follow that acted as a blueprint of the universe. In this idealised plan of a mithraeum, the cult relief served as the spring equinox, which faced the entrance that represented the autumn equinox. The side benches represented "...the ecliptic/zodiac. But they also represent... the celestial equator", thus to stand in the centre of the nave would be to stand at the centre of the universe. Of all extant mithraea, Beck suggested that the closest a mithraeum came to recreating this layout was the *cella* of the second century Mithraeum of the Seven Spheres at Ostia (Fig. 11-12). In this mithraeum, the tops of the benches were decorated with mosaics depicting the signs of the zodiac, while their sides were painted with representations of the planets (with the exception of the sun which is represented by the tauroctony relief). At the end of the benches closest to the entrance, Cautes and Cautopates were depicted, with the former a symbol of the sun and the latter the moon, thus emphasising the roles of the respective benches: spring/autumn, heat/cold, exit/entry from earth, night/day.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, the fact that all mithraea were all designed to recreate a space, rather than actually *be* that space, meant no mithraeum had greater prestige than another. As Beck observed, "no mithraeum, as far as we know, was any more special or authentic than any other mithraeum".¹¹⁷

Beck also suggested the reason why there is such little evidence for any exterior decoration of mithraea was due to the mithraeum's symbolic nature:

A cave is an appropriate image of the universe because, like the universe, it is an inside without an outside. That is why, ideologically at least, the exterior of a mithraeum, in dramatic contrast to the exteriors of standard Greek

¹¹⁵ That the mithraeum was supposed to be a cave or a cave-like structure is mentioned by Justin Martyr (*Dial. Tryh.* 70), Porphyry (*De Antro Nyph.* 5-6, 9 and 20), Tertullian (*De Coro.* 15.) and Statius (*Theb.* 1.719). The term *spelaeum* is also used in numerous Mithraic inscriptions to refer to mithraea in Italy, see *CIMRM* 423, 660, 706, 747, 1846.

¹¹⁶ Gordon (1976) 129. Beck (2006c) 102-115. The appearance of the planets in the order shown in the *Sette Sfere* mithraeum does not follow the standard order of the Roman planets, which Beck suggests was designed to reflect the arrangement of the planets on the spring equinox in A.D. 172.

¹¹⁷ Beck (2006c) 106.

and Roman temples does not matter. Literally, it does not signify. Economic considerations no doubt played their part, but in an urban context an anonymous room or suite of rooms makes good symbolic sense.¹¹⁸

The reason for this layout, Beck surmised, was due to Mithraic rituals which involved the passage of the soul across the universe.¹¹⁹ Whether this was the case or not cannot be established for certain, yet the uniformity of mithraea across the Roman world indicates their topography must have had some form of ritual significance. As result, should we find examples of mithraea that do not adhere to this layout we may surmise that the Mithraic congregation that used this temple differed from other Mithraic groups in terms of their ritual practice in some form.

Figure 11: The Mithraeum of the Seven Spheres (Beck (2006c) Fig.3)

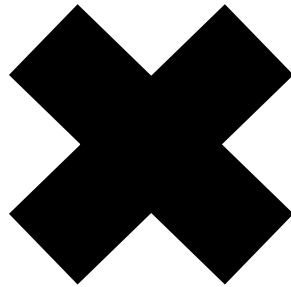
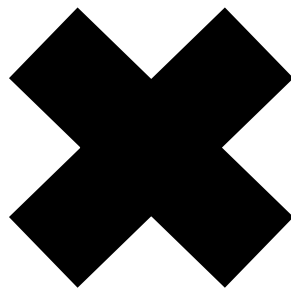


Figure 12: The Layout of the 'Ideal' Mithraeum (Beck (2006c) Fig. 2)



¹¹⁸ Beck (2006c) 106.

¹¹⁹ Beck (2006c) 151-152.

Limiting Numbers?

It has been estimated that the average mithraeum had seating for between fifteen to twenty people, while there were likely to have been those serving during cult meals and the *pater* might have occupied a separate space on his throne, thus the average number is probably closer to forty.¹²⁰ At various sites significant numbers of mithraea have been uncovered, with the majority small in size: at Rome nineteen mithraea have been identified, with a further sixteen at Ostia; at Aquincum and Poetovio five mithraea have been found; at Nida-Hedderheim in Germany there were four mithraea; and at Carnuntum there were certainly two mithraea, while a possible third has been identified (Mithraeum II). Undoubtedly, given that at Göglingen a timber mithraeum was found in close proximity to a masonry-built mithraeum there are places where multiple mithraea coexisted, but only one or two have been found.¹²¹

It is highly unlikely that the congregations using these mithraea formed and operated autonomously of each other, particularly as many of these settlements were not of considerable size. That the appearance of new mithraea was often the result of a pre-existing congregation dividing is indicated by the two Mithraic albums discovered at Virunum, which date to the late second/early third century. These demonstrate that a Mithraic community, upon reaching *ca.*100 members, split into two smaller congregations.¹²² That this was repeated elsewhere would explain the appearance of numerous mithraea in close proximity to each other, rather than the many pre-existing mithraea expanding or being abandoned in favour of new, larger mithraea.¹²³ Evidence for a feast at the Tienen mithraeum (see chapter 5) in the late third century also indicates that it is unlikely these congregations were autonomous of each other. The remains of the feast indicates it could have fed hundreds of people, but the mithraeum covered an area of only 90m², and thus could not have held all these adherents at the same time.¹²⁴ Given that there is no evidence for Mithraic rituals being held beyond the confines of a mithraeum, it is possible that small congregations used the mithraeum at different times during the space of a few days. If this was the case, whether it was a permanent arrangement or was the result of adherents coming from other mithraea across the region is unclear. Either way, the evidence clearly indicates a conscious preference among Mithraic congregations to divide, and thus keep their temples relatively small in size, rather than continually expand.

¹²⁰ Volken (2004) 2.

¹²¹ Rome: Griffith (1993); Ostia: White (2012); Aquincum: *CIMRM* 1742-1772; Póczy (2005) 215; Poetovio: *CIMRM* 1487-1618, Vomer-Gojkovič and Kolar (1993); Nida-Hedderheim: Huld-Zetsche (1986); Carnuntum: *CIMRM* 1664, 1681, 1682; Göglingen: Kortüm and Neth (2005).

¹²² Piccottini (1994).

¹²³ Some mithraea were expanded in size, but this was rarely considerable, see Dura-Europos: *CIMRM* 34; Capua: Vermaseren (1971); Carrawburgh: Richmond *et al.* (1951); Poetovio III: *CIMRM* 1578.

¹²⁴ Martens (2004).

Discussion

By limiting the size of their congregations, it would appear that the cult of Mithras would have maintained a high level of social density among its followers. If most mithraea held only around thirty people, then this would result in a considerable level of social density, with the majority of members forming significant bonds with their fellows. Not only that, but they would also have a close connection to the *pater*, regardless of their status, which would mean less scope for deviant behaviour that might have had an adverse effect on the average commitment of the congregation. Additionally, the uniformity of mithraea in their plan and iconography suggests that ritual practice remained largely the same in all Mithraic temples, thus movement from one site to another would not have involved any significant acclimatisation, with religious capital remaining largely intact.

Once again, however, it must be noted that there is a degree of assumption here. Unfortunately, we do not know how often the Mithraic initiates would actually frequent the mithraeum. We assume that it would be relatively often, but we cannot be sure of this. Was it once a week, once a month, or even once a year? If it was only on rare occasions, then what implications would this have regarding the social density of the group in comparison to larger ones that met much more regularly? Even if these men spent a great deal of time together outside of the Mithraic context, then to what extent did their involvement in the cult affect their social bonds? Could they just have easily survived without Mithraic membership?

ALTERATIONS TO PRE-EXISTING MITHRAEA FROM THE LATE THIRD CENTURY

Unfortunately, little information is extant regarding many of the mithraea that were restored in this period, with the mithraea at Cirta in North Africa, Virunum and Poetovio (IV) only known to us via the epigraphic record.¹²⁵ At Carnuntum, an inscription dating to A.D. 308 refers to the restoration of a mithraeum by Tetrarchs, although precisely which mithraeum this refers to is uncertain, although it is generally assumed to be Mithraeum III.¹²⁶ However, there are instances of adaptations to pre-existing mithraea from the late third century onwards which can be discerned from the archaeological record at Carrawburgh, Martigny, and those located in the *Crypta Balbi* and under *San Stefano Rotondo* in Rome.¹²⁷ In terms of dating, most of these alterations occurred around the late third and early fourth centuries, with only Martigny the subject of restoration work in the mid-fourth century. All of these mithraea appear to have been originally constructed in the late second or early third century.

¹²⁵ Poetovio IV: *CIMRM* 1614; Cirta: *IIAlg* 2.541; Virunum: *CIMRM* 1431.

¹²⁶ *CIMRM* 1682.

¹²⁷ According to Gaidon-Bunuel (1991) 56, the mithraeum at Bordeaux was apparently restored in the early fourth century, but I can find no specific indications as to what this involved. For the provincial mithraea, see the Gazetteer: *Carrawburgh*: A.2; *Martigny*: G.4. For those in Rome, *San Stefano Rotondo*: Lissi-Caronna (1986); *Crypta Balbi*: Ricci (2004).

Size

The *San Stefano* mithraeum in Rome appears to have been the only mithraeum to have been substantially expanded in size (from 45m² to 95m²) during the late third century.¹²⁸ Relatively speaking, this extension was quite significant, with the mithraeum more than doubling in size, but even then it still covered less than 100m². At Carrawburgh, when the mithraeum was reconstructed around the turn of the fourth century the size of the overall structure of the temple remained the same, but the *cella* was shortened (now ca.41m²) and the anteroom space enlarged (now 11m²). The *Crypta Balbi* mithraeum remained unaltered in this regard, although as mentioned in the previous chapter it was one of the largest mithraea uncovered. However, it is worth noting that the *cella* of the *Crypta Balbi* mithraeum still only covered ca. 92m², while the *cella* of the Martigny mithraeum covered a similar area, thus none of these mithraea could have held exceptional numbers in these spaces at any one time.

Plan

None of the restoration work undertaken in this period altered the plan of any of these mithraea in a notable way. At *San Stefano Rotondo*, the *cella* was expanded into the room on its east-side, but this entailed simply extending the existing tripartite plan to fill the space, although new the entrance to the *cella* was now moved slightly to the right so that it did not align with the cult image. Around the turn of the fourth century the anterooms on northern side of the *Crypta Balbi* mithraeum were combined into a single space by knocking down dividing walls and raising the floors to all the same level, but the *cella* plan was left unaltered. At Carrawburgh, as in previous phases the mithraeum consisted of one room which had a wooden screen that divided a small area from the main *cella*. Following its restoration, the post-holes denoting the wooden screen were reduced in number, but the size of the new posts looks to have increased in diameter. The presence of a hearth in this area also suggests this area was used for cooking.

Orientation

There is no indication that the orientation of any of these mithraea changed in correlation with these renovations, while there was no prevalent orientation among them to begin with. The *Crypta Balbi* mithraeum was orientated east-west, the mithraea of Carrawburgh and Martigny southeast-northwest, and the *San Stefano Rotondo* south-north.

¹²⁸ Nielsen (2014) 245.

Construction Materials

At *San Stefano*, the steps leading to the altar in front of the cult relief were made of travertine, while the extension to the western bench utilised *opus vittatum mixtum*. At Carrawburgh, the reconstructed temple was built predominantly using clay-brick rather than the stone used in previous phases, although some *spolia* from the previous structure was utilised in the floor. At Martigny, the floor was re-laid with mortar in the mid-fourth century. At the *Crypta Balbi* mithraeum, four small pillars were added in the nave were, according to Ricci, made from a mix of materials, while the base to the south of the cult-niche was raised using *laterizi* bricks and the steps leading to cult image were made of marble.

Internal Fittings

At *San Stefano*, a niche was added to house the cult relief, in front of which an altar was placed that had two steps ascending to it. At the *Crypta Balbi* mithraeum, the area for the cult relief was widened and a niche was created around it that was topped with an arch. A base (possibly for a throne) now sat to the right of the relief, while two sets of steps were added to lead up to these, the widths of which corresponded to the breadth of the cult image and the base respectively. Another base was added to left of the altar, on the south bench, that looks to have supported an altar. In contrast, the cult-niche at Carrawburgh was reduced in size.

At Carrawburgh, the benches were also shortened, with a row of oak-beam roof supports now inserted in front of either bench. As stated, the benches of the *San Stefano* mithraeum were now enlarged, with their faces containing misaligned niches, one of which was rectangular and the other semi-circular.

In terms of additional fittings, at *San Stefano* access to an area between the far wall and the eastern bench was now restricted via the erection of two columns and a balustrade an altar, accessed by two steps, was placed in front of the cult-niche in the latter half of the third century. A basin was also to be found in front either bench. In the *Crypta Balbi* mithraeum, two columns were used as roof supports and look to have supported a wooden lintel. The *cella* roof was also reworked to appear like a barrel vault and a triangular niche containing a font was placed in northern wall.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Given that the Martigny mithraeum was in use from the late second to late fourth century, it is possible that the addition of the podium occurred in the late third or fourth centuries, but no dating evidence was recorded for it. It is the opinion of Wibl  that these alterations occurred early in the mithraeum's occupation (i.e. the early third century, *Pers. Comm.* 21/04/2015).

Decoration

At *San Stefano*, the benches and the steps to the altar were covered in plaster and then painted to look as though they were covered in marble, suggesting the intention was to present a more lavish decoration than was actually the case. The surviving walls of the mithraeum also provide evidence of later repainting, with a large marble krater painted on the wall next to the entrance, while traces of images of Luna and Sol along with some red bands were visible on what remained of the eastern wall. The interior of the Carrawburgh mithraeum may also have been painted as the benches were fronted with wattle, over which traces of plaster were found. The renovations of the *Crypta Balbi* mithraeum appear to have included some notable additions to the decoration. The arch over the cult relief displayed traces to plastering and red paint. Although the rooms to the north were unified into a single space, the decoration for each space remained different, with some walls plastered and painted red (as were the two columns), while others were covered in frescoes with red, yellow, brown and green diamonds. However, the floor was unified and decorated with a mosaic of black diamonds on a white surface.

Altars, Statues and Reliefs

At Carrawburgh three large altars from earlier periods were placed in front of the cult-niche. They are very different in style: one depicts an image of Mithras emerging from the rock, garbed in a tunic and holding a whip; the other two bear no images and are simply inscribed. Four smaller altars were also found, one of which (erected originally to the Mothers by Albinus Quartus) shows evidence of weathering, suggesting it had been retrieved from elsewhere, while the face bearing in this inscription was turned toward the bench so it could not be seen. Statues of the torchbearers were also erected on capitals either side of the nave just inside the entrance to the *cella*, echoing their position on the benches in the Mithraeum of the Seven Spheres. A statue of a mother goddess was also found in the anteroom space, while a fragment of the tauroctony was also recovered.

The *San Stefano* mithraeum appears to have continued to be well endowed with a variety of images. It contained two statues depicting Mithras being born of the rock, one large relief (surface area 1.4m²) of the tauroctony along with two smaller counterparts, at least one torchbearer statue, and two marble altars dedicated to the torchbearers. The main relief and one of the rock-birth statues have been dated stylistically to the late third century and so are likely to be new additions following the refurbishment of the temple. The main relief is unusual in that Hesperus is depicted alongside Luna and an owl is situated at Cautes' feet. In contrast, one of the smaller tauroctonies has been dated to the late second or early third century and thus probably originates from the first phase of the temple. The

remains of two non-Mithraic statues, depicting Isis and Telesphorus, were also found in the temple, although when they date to is unclear.

At Martigny, the mithraeum was found to contain a bronze statuette of the tauroctony and three altars. One of these altars had been taken from a temple to Jupiter and must have been placed in the mithraeum during the fourth century as it was erected to commemorate the restoration of the Jupiter temple in the late third century. Another was dedicated in honour of all the gods with no evident reference to Mithras and thus may also have been reused.

In regards to the *Crypta Balbi*, little was retrieved in this regard aside from fragments of the cult relief, a possible bust of Mithras, and statues of a torch-bearer and time-god Aion. Once again, whether these were additions at the time of the refurbishment, or items that had been placed in the mithraeum at an earlier phase is unclear.

Finally, although we lack any indication what the Tetrarchic renovations of Mithraeum III at Carnuntum involved, we know they did furnish the temple with the altar upon which the inscription attesting to this was made. The altar was reused from a different context, with a vague trace of another inscription detectable on it, while it is not particularly ostentatious with just basic images of the torchbearers on either side. Given the reuse of the altar in this case and the aforementioned examples, it is possible that the large altar found in Mithraeum III which depicts nine figures may have been placed in the mithraeum as part of this refurbishment. Neither the images nor the inscription on the altar bear any indication of being Mithraic and such an item is unparalleled in any other mithraeum.¹³⁰

Discussion

The mithraea that were subject to repair and reconstruction from the late third century do not display any major break from the past. There is little to suggest any notable major changes in ritual practice at this time or any significant evidence for localisation. The main relief in San Stefano mithraeum has the additional figures of Hesperus and an Owl, but the majority of this scene follows the standard format. There is no shift towards any greater monumentality, with the mithraeum under *San Stefano* the only pre-existing mithraeum to be enlarged in this period and even then it covered less than 100m². As Bjørnbye has argued, it suggests that this expansion indicates an increase in congregation size, and this would concur with the addition of a new relief that was of notable dimensions, thus allowing the detail to still be visible at a distance. However, bearing in mind the *cella* was now only

¹³⁰ *CIMRM* 1685, 1698. It is noted out in the original report that ceramics were found under where the south and western walls of the anteroom intersect, which Bormann believes is an indication that the temple was rebuilt. However, no dating for the ceramics is provided, see Bormann (1895) 199. The inscription on the altar reads [*Pr*]o sal[ute] Aug[usti] deo invic[ito] Mag[ist]ri[us] He[r]acla d[omi]ni d[omi]ni, see *CIMRM* 1686.

around the same size as those of Martigny or the *Crypta Balbi*, there is no reason to assume it was an unusually large congregation.¹³¹ Building materials used in these restorations, although better quality than in previous phases, were not particularly outstanding. Furthermore, there was still considerable emphasis on limiting access to the *cella* in the early fourth century, despite the increasing prominence of mithraea, with entrances remaining where one could not see the cult image directly and no indication of natural light being allowed to shine in.

Notably, at both Carrawburgh and Martigny there is evidence of items being taken from other temples and placed in the mithraea in the fourth century, suggesting the mithraea continued to be used while other nearby cult buildings were going out of use. It is possible that the appearance of statuettes of Isis and Telesphorus in the mithraeum at *San Stefano Rotondo* was the result of a similar situation. As discussed, at Martigny various nearby buildings, including those of a cultic nature, were being abandoned in the mid-fourth century, while the early fourth century began to see the abandonment of *vici* along Hadrian's Wall. There is no way to prove it conclusively, but could the movement of altars or statuettes from other temples into these mithraea signify that worship within them was no longer limited to just Mithras?

MITHRAEA CONSTRUCTED IN THE LATE THIRD AND FOURTH CENTURIES

New mithraea continued to be erected from the late third century well into the fourth century. The latest known mithraea to be constructed were located in Rome (*ca.* A.D. 350s-360s), although the only evidence for these temples comes from the epigraphic references. In regards to those that do survive in the archaeological record, a number of these have yielded little in the way of information regarding the structure of the temple, either because they were natural caves (Epidaurum and St Urban, late third and mid-fourth century respectively), were wooden buildings which have not survived (Gimmeldingen, constructed A.D. 325), were not recorded in detail (Schachadorf, constructed late third century), have not been published in detail (*Ospedale San Giovanni*) or only because only minimal fragments of their structure survive (Poetovio V, built late third century). That the mithraeum at Gimmeldingen is not extant is particularly unfortunate given that the inscription referring to it describes it as *fanum*, rather than the usual *templum* that was used by provincial Mithraic communities.¹³² Did this simply refer to a standard mithraeum by different name, or does

¹³¹ Bjørnebye (2007) 52. Bjørnebye states that the *Crypta Balbi*, *Foro Boario*, and *Piazza San Silvestro* were also expanded around this time, but while the former two were renovated the overall dimensions do not look to have been changed. In the case of the latter, no actual remains of the mithraeum survive and this is based on the inscription of Tamesius Augentius Olympius, who refurbished the mithraeum built by his grandfather, Nonius Victor Olympius, in the late fourth century. However, it is unknown if this is the same indeed the same mithraeum referred to in the inscription.

¹³² *CIMRM* 1315.

this indicate some variation in structure? Without the remains of the mithraeum we will never know. However, a sufficient number of examples have been more forthcoming with information.¹³³

Size

In Table 2 the size of mithraea constructed from the late third century onwards is provided. There is no noticeable increase in size from mithraea in previous generations, with the average size only 61m². The mithraeum situated in a converted nymphaeum at Septeuil was particularly small, as were the two mithraea founded in Rome in the early fourth century at *Ospedale San Giovanni* and *Via Giovanni Lanza* 128. Indeed, it is around Rome that we find many of the smallest mithraea erected in this period, with the Mithraic temples erected in the late third century at Ostia also occupying less than 50m². However, as discussed, this does not really give us an indication of how many people frequented these mithraea as they may have been used by multiple groups at different times. The mithraeum at Hawarte is the largest, although much of this was adapted from a pre-existing cave system, rather than being a completely man-made structure.

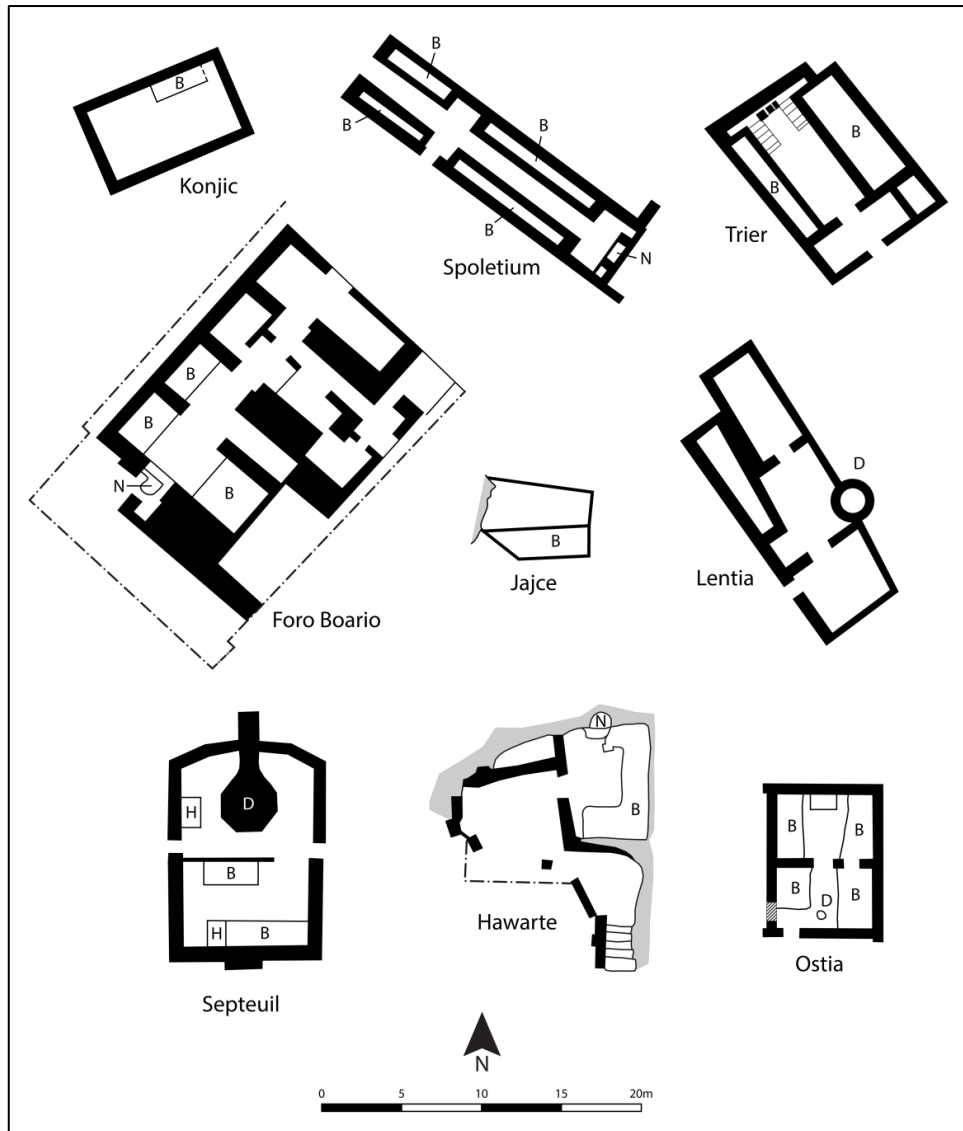
¹³³ For the provincial mithraea, see Gazetteer: *Jajce*: E.3; *Konjic*: E.4; *Lentia*: C.2; *Spoletium*: F.3; *Hawarte*: J.3; *Trier*: G.1; *Septeuil*: G.6. For those in Rome, *Foro Boario*: *CIMRM* 435-455; Pietrangeli (1940); Griffith (1993) 124-130, (2003) 77-82; Bjørnebye (2007) 34-36. *Ospedale San Giovanni*: Santa Maria Scrinari (1979); Griffith (1993) 39-41; Bjørnebye (2007) 37. *Via Giovanni Lanza* 128: *CIMRM* 356-360; Gallo (1979); Griffith (1993) 68; Bjørnebye (2007) 50-51. For those in Ostia, *House of Diana*: *CIMRM* 216- 223; White (2012) 452-459; *Felicissimus*: *CIMRM* 299. Alterations were made to the mithraea at Hawarte and the *Foro Boario* in the fourth century, but these are discussed in this section rather than as part of the previous section to avoid confusion with chronology.

Table 2: The Size of Extant Mithraea Constructed in the Late Third to Fourth Centuries¹³⁴

<i>Province</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Construction Date</i>	<i>Size (m²)</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Dalmatia	Jajce	Late Third Century	39	<i>CIMRM</i> 1901
Dalmatia	Konjic	Late Third Century	85	<i>CIMRM</i> 1895
Noricum	Lentia	Late Third Century	59	<i>CIMRM</i> 1414
Ostia	Felicissimus	Late Third Century	40	White (2012) 443
Ostia	House of Diana	Late Third Century	48	White (2012) 443
Rome	<i>Foro Boario</i>	Late Third Century	89	Pietrangeli(1940) 148
Rome	<i>Ospedale San Giovanni</i>	Late Third Century	26	Santa Maria Scrinari (1979) 22
Italy	Spoletium	Early Fourth Century	84	<i>CIMRM</i> 673
Syria	Hawarte	Early Fourth Century	91	Gawlikowski (2007) Fig. 6
Gaul	Trier	Early Fourth Century	82	Walters (1974) 25
Rome	<i>Via Giovanni Lanza</i> 128	Early of Fourth Century	6	Gallo (1979) 249
Gaul	Septeuil	Mid-Fourth Century	21	Gaidon-Bunuel (1991) 51

¹³⁴ This list does not include those in natural grottos whose dimensions are unknown.

Figure 13: Mithraea Constructed ca A.D. 271-330¹³⁵



Plan

In most cases, the general layout of the mithraea constructed in this period (Fig. 13) does not differ notably to the established topography of mithraea from previous periods. In almost all cases the mithraea have produced evidence for a series of anterooms leading to the *cella*. At Lentia, the mithraeum had several anterooms, one of which served as a kitchen. At the *Foro Boario* mithraeum in Rome, a several anterooms led to the *cella*, while the installation of the mithraeum across what had been four separate rooms meant the *cella* itself did not consist of a single unified space, but was instead divided in half by an arch created by the cut in the wall. A particularly interesting feature of

¹³⁵ Thanks to Lloyd Bosworth for producing this image. B = Bench; D = Drain/Well; H = Hearth; N = Niche.

the *Foro Boario* mithraeum is that there was another room that could be accessed via a door behind the cult-niche, suggesting that certain members of the community may have appeared from this room during a Mithraic ritual. At Septeuil, there was no anteroom to speak of, but rather the adjoining space was used to house a spring sanctuary.

Several mithraea were also installed in structures where associated rooms appear to have been used for dwellings: at Trier there were two anterooms, plus the rooms of the house in which the mithraeum was installed, to navigate in order to reach the *cella*; at *Via Giovanni Lanza* 128 the mithraeum could only be accessed through the house that looks to have belonged to a senator,¹³⁶ which would have meant passing through a *lararium* that contained images of various other deities; at Spolegium the entrance, which unusually cuts through the right-hand bench rather than being placed at the end of the nave, led from an anteroom (identified as such by a sacrificial knife and the remains of a relief depicting signs of the zodiac) which was connected to a series of other rooms that look to have served a domestic purpose.¹³⁷ The two mithraea at Ostia were both installed in houses, although only the Mithraeum of Felicissimus appears to have had rooms adjoining it that were used as anterooms. A doorway that would have provided access from the street to this mithraeum was walled up when the mithraeum was created. In the case of the Mithraeum in the House of Diana the *cella* was spread across two rooms with a doorway in the centre of the nave providing access between the two spaces. Another doorway was also present in the partition wall in the middle of the bench on the right-hand wall, while on the left-hand side the bench remained split across the two rooms.¹³⁸

In regards to rural mithraea, at Schachadorf the mithraeum consisted of two rooms, while mithraeum of St Urban utilised two natural grottos so that the mithraeum had an anteroom. The mithraeum at Hawarte was installed in a series of natural caves and included two anterooms and the *cella*. Additional spaces that look to have served a religious purpose were identified further into the cave system, but there no evidence dating to the late first century A.D. was found therein, making it unlikely these were part of the Mithraic temple. Notably, the rural mithraea of Dalmatia have not provided any evidence of adjoining spaces, with just the *cella* evident, although this may be due to preservation or the archaeological recording process.

¹³⁶ *CIMRM* 360.

¹³⁷ According to the plan for the Spolegium mithraeum, there appears to be an opening at the northwest end of the nave but no information about it is provided.

¹³⁸ The House of Diana mithraeum is traditionally dated to the mid-second century. However, recent archaeological excavation have demonstrated that a number of building phases existed prior to the installation of the mithraeum, the latest of which occurred in the mid-third century, see White (1990) 452-459.

Orientation

Among the mithraea constructed from the late third century onwards there was notable variation in their orientation. Only the mithraea at Jajce and Septeuil were orientated east-west, while Konjic was orientated west-east. At Lentia, the mithraeum was orientated south-north, at Spolegium and the *Foro Boario* the mithraea were situated northeast-southwest, and at Trier southeast-northwest. However, the orientation of the urban mithraea was predetermined by their environs: the Lentia mithraeum utilised the remains of a building that had been destroyed and had to fit alongside the temple to *Dea Roma*, while the mithraea at Septeuil, Trier and Spolegium were installed in pre-existing structures. Given that only the foundations of these mithraea were extant, whether natural light could penetrate the *cella* on certain days is unknown. At Konjic and Jajce, that these mithraea were erected on hillsides suggests that their alignment may have been in the minds of the adherents when choosing a location. At Hawarte, the *cella* of the mithraeum was orientated south-north, but unlike other mithraea given that the *cella* was located in a cave the ‘roof’ survives and was found to contain an aperture like the Caesarea Maritima mithraeum. However, in this case light would shine onto the main relief during December, rather than on an altar at mid-summer as it did at Caesarea Maritima. This difference suggests that Mithraic rituals based around the seasons could be varied in different mithraea, even in those that were situated in close proximity to each other.

Construction Materials

In urban contexts, the mithraeum at Lentia and Poetovio V are the only examples that were built as new independent structures and thus allow for a comparison with the materials used in neighbouring buildings. The mithraeum at Lentia utilised the foundations of a previous building, while the walls of the temple were mainly built out of gneiss rubble and lime-sand mortar, although there is evidence of *spolia* being used in the form of an altar fragment dedicated by the *ala I Thracum* who had been stationed in Pannonia in previous periods.¹³⁹ The so-called Temple to *Dea Roma*, rebuilt around the same time and located next to the mithraeum, was constructed using the same materials. At Poetovio, the fragmentary remains of the Mithraeum V indicate the foundations of the walls here were constructed using rocks from the river, a common practice in the town during the fourth century, with brick often used on top of the foundations.¹⁴⁰

Of the mithraea found in rural areas, the mithraeum at Jajce utilised marlstone held together without cement, which contrasts with its fellow Dalmatian mithraeum at Konjic, where the mithraeum’s *cella* was built out of limestone. The mithraeum at Gimmeldingen does not survive, but

¹³⁹ Clauss (1992) 133.

¹⁴⁰ Lentia: Karnitsch (1956) 205; Poetovio: Horvat *et al.* (2003) 163.

appears to have been built out of timber. At Hawarte, the wall separating the second anteroom from the *cella* was made of ashlar blocks, while small stones and bricks were used to smooth the cave walls. The benches of the *cella* were built using stone, while the bench near the entrance to the caves, which looks to have been fitted with a wooden frame, was cut into an ashlar slab. A podium that was erected in front of the cult-niche in this mithraeum during the latter half of the fourth century was built from rubble.

Internal Fittings

The setting of the cult-image varied across the mithraea constructed in this period. At Spolegium there were three niches against the far wall of the *cella*, with the central niche, ones assumes, for the cult-relief. The two smaller niches may have held images of the torchbearers. At Trier, the mithraeum follows a similar tripartite pattern, although here the items were placed on pillars, rather than in niches, with an image of Mithras' rock-birth flanked by altars. Similarly, at the *Foro Boario*, the cult-relief was placed in a niche, with two reliefs attached to walls on either side of it. Such tripartite division of the cult-relief area does not suggest a radically different approach, given that this was the standard format of a mithraeum. There was, however, no evident division of the cult-niche area in the other mithraea constructed at this time, with the cult-relief at Lentia placed on a balustrade and the relief at Septeuil set against a flat wall. At Hawarte, the central relief looks to have stood in the niche at the end of the *cella* which was cut into the rock, which was bordered by two pilasters and a vaulted lintel above it. In the latter half of the fourth century, a podium was placed in front of the cult-niche, followed by a pedestal to its right-hand side in the early fifth century. Two grooves running the length of the niche on either side suggest that a frame was erected around it order to conceal the cult image. Similarly, the niche for the cult-image in mithraeum in the House of Diana at Ostia was flanked by brackets for columns, which may have supported a curtain rail. In the mithraeum of *Via Giovanni Lanza* 128, a marble relief of the tauroctony was found positioned on a marble slab while being held to the wall by brackets. The situation regarding the cult-image in Dalmatian contexts is particularly unusual. Unlike the aforementioned mithraea where the cult image was placed on a podium or attached to the wall, at both Arupium mithraea, Jajce and Epidaurum the cult-image was actually carved into natural rock on cliff-faces or cave walls.

In most mithraea of the northwest provinces, the benches are present in their standard position, running parallel either side of the nave, although most present certain unique features. The mithraeum at Spolegium is unusual in that the entrance to the *cella* was located in the middle of the left-hand bench, cutting it in half, but this appears to have been born out of necessity and one still needed to progress down a nave flanked by benches to reach the cult-image. Four niches are evident in the side of these benches, although what they held is unknown. Trier is unusual in that the northeast bench is

significantly larger than its southwest counterpart. At Septeuil, two benches were present as usual, but the benches were not placed symmetrically: the bench abutting the north wall only ran half the length of the wall from east to west due to the doorway, while the bench against the south wall began at the western wall but only ran half of the length of the wall because of a hearth. At Lentia, no evidence for the benches survives, but it is likely they were made of wood and incinerated by the fire when the mithraeum was abandoned.

At Konjic, Jajce and Hawarte, the arrangement of the benches differs from the customary arrangement. At Hawarte, there was only a single bench, running in an 'L' shape along with eastern and southern walls, with the entrance to the *cella* laying in the western wall. There was also an additional bench opposite the entrance in the anteroom of this mithraeum, suggesting this was used for more than simply passing through, perhaps being a space for instructing prospective initiates before they entered the *cella*. At Konjic and Jajce, there was only one bench running along the northern and southern walls respectively, meaning that in both cases there was a bench to left of the cult image but not the right.¹⁴¹ Most unusual is the mithraeum of *Via Giovanni Lanza* 128, which does not appear to have had any benches at all. In this regard, these four mithraea are highly abnormal and could not adhere to Beck's template for the ideal mithraeum, implying a departure from traditional ritual practice.

Steps appear in most of the later mithraea, indicating they were still supposed to feel subterranean to some extent. At Konjic, the mithraeum looks to have had wooden steps, given that it was submerged below ground-level, while at Jajce, also cut into the ground by 2.80m, the remains of stone steps were found at the threshold. At Jajce, there were also two steps leading up to the cult-image, as was the case in the mithraea at the *Foro Boario* and in the House of Diana. Similarly, at Trier steps were to be found flanking the three podia, abutting the benches. In the mithraeum of the *Via Giovanni Lanza* 128 a flight of seven steps led down from the *Lararium* to a landing, following which were another nine steps to the floor of the mithraeum. At Hawarte, which was subterranean, one had to descend five steps to access the mithraeum and then a further two into the *cella*. Initially, steps also led up to the cult-niche, but these were covered by a podium in the late fourth century.

The presence of water features in these mithraea demonstrates that water evidently still played a major role in Mithraic ritual activity in the first half of the fourth century. Both Ostian mithraea had drains present at the beginning of their naves. Spolegium had basins in both benches, and the Lentia mithraeum's anteroom had a well in it, as did the lower part of the grotto at Epidaurum. At Septeuil,

¹⁴¹ At Konjic, Vermaseren states only one bench 'survives', but this appears to be based on the assumption there must be two benches to follow the standard plan rather than from any extant evidence, see *CIMRM* 1895.

given that the mithraeum was installed in part of a spring sanctuary, it is possible adherents could have retrieved water from there, or alternatively a statuette of a nymph in the southern wall had a pipe which fed into it to allow it dispense water. Such features do not appear to have been a necessity at the mithraea of Gimmeldingen, St Urban, Jajce and Konjic, as they were all constructed close to natural sources of water in the form of lakes or streams.

Decoration

Evidently, some of the mithraea erected in this period still sought to replicate a cave-like atmosphere inside the *cella*: at Lentia daub-charcoal and the remains of charred beams amongst the destruction layer suggest that the room was probably made to resemble a cave, with wooden arches holding up a (probably painted) wattle and daub mesh, while at Konjic the remains of wedge-shaped stones and tiles indicates that the mithraeum likely had a vaulted roof. At Spolegium, the walls, benches and floor were covered in marble, while the benches of the mithraeum also displayed traces of plaster and red colouring. There is no indication from the report that this marble might have been reused, suggesting that it may have required significant expenditure by the patron of the mithraeum. The cult-niche in the *Foro Boario* mithraeum decorated with marble a revetment, as were the benches and floor. The walls of this mithraeum were covered in stucco and bear faint traces of red paint and the signs of the zodiac, while the space already had vaulted ceiling. In the mithraeum in the House of Diana, the arch above cult niche was decorated with pumice which looks to have given it a rock-like appearance.

The most outstanding nave decoration from the late third century onwards comes from the Mithraeum of Felicissimus, which was covered with a mosaic depicting a 'ladder' showing the Mithraic grades and symbols relating to them. The lowest grade, the raven, is closest to the entrance, while the *pater* is closest to the cult relief. In the case of the later mithraea built in the provinces, either through a lack of funds or preservation, there is no indication of such mosaics, but there is still indications that, in some cases, they were decorated. At Lentia, on the mortar floor traces of red paint have been found. As mentioned, the nave in the mithraeum at Spolegium has produced the most lavish decoration, having been paved in marble, while the *Foro Boario* mithraeum's opus sectile floor was in polychrome marble. No such evidence has been found at the rural mithraea in Dalmatia, with the floor in the Konjic mithraeum consisting of stamped earth and clay, as was the case at Jajce.

The decoration of the Hawarte mithraeum is unusual amongst the late mithraea, and indeed mithraea from any period. Both the ceiling and walls of the *cella* were plastered then painted, as were the walls of the anterooms. Five stages of painting can be detected, of which only the last two can be distinctively analysed, although there does not appear to have been a considerable difference between the two phases, with the images of period V the same as those of period IV, just redrawn slightly.

Depicted are various scenes from the life Mithras and the battle between good and evil, the latter of which is presented in the form of black demons. The good versus evil images are to be found in the anterooms and include: the depiction of the lions devouring these demons; another image from the outer room consisting of a man in Persian garb (Mithras?) holding the chains of a short, black two-headed being, standing in front of a large white horse; and a city wall topped by various black heads, with rays of light descending on (or attacking) them. Such images are unparalleled in other mithraea and, Richard Gordon has argued, are likely to be the product of distinctly local tradition which has been influenced by Zoroastrianism.¹⁴² Depictions of Mithras' life were located in the *cella* and include: the rock birth; the tauroctony; Mithras in a tree; and Mithras holding an arrow. Other images, within the *cella*, include images of items which may represent the seven Mithraic grades (located underneath the tauroctony painting); hunters on horseback dressed in Phrygian hats chasing animals; Helios; *Transitus*; and Zeus. Little of the ceiling painting in the *cella* survives, but from the phase 4 an inscription could be discerned which read "The fortune of the [invincible] Mithras [wins!]", which may be an adaption of a hippodrome chant. The division of these images between the anterooms and *cella* suggest a particular spatial arrangement was involved in their composition, perhaps providing some form of narrative.

Altars, Statues and Reliefs

In regards to the reliefs, altars and statuary these mithraea were adorned with, the evidence is rarely forthcoming, but many of these suggest the usual items expected in mithraea were present. At Hawarte, six square altars and one cylindrical altar were found in the mithraeum dumped amongst the rubble, as was a small marble statue base, with their original arrangement unknown and all other items, including the cult relief, leaving no trace. At Lentia, a small circular relief of the tauroctony and a votive altar were all that were found. At Spolegium, a votive altar was found in front of the cult-niche, along with a bone statuette depicting a young man wearing a tunic, cloak and laurel wreath. In the mithraeum of *Via Giovanni Lanza* 128 an upside down Ionian column found under the relief looks to have served as an altar under the main cult relief. At Jajce, six altars (only one inscribed with the word *invicto*) and statue of Cautopates were recovered. At Konjic, a limestone altar and the main relief were retrieved. At Gimmeldingen, three altars and several reliefs were made of sandstone, the latter of which included: the main cult relief, a relief of Mercury and another of a bearded man alongside Minerva; and statue of Cautes. Like Trier, at Schachadorf a statue of the rock birth was located on a podium at the end of the mithraeum, although it is possible that it had been removed. Finally, the mithraeum at Septeuil, the latest extant example in the archaeological record, contained a cult relief, along with a relief and statue depicting Mithras emerging from the rock.

¹⁴² Gordon (2001) 106-116.

In most cases, the reliefs retrieved from these mithraea remain much the same as in previous periods with Mithras shown as the bull-slayer or born from the rock. However, the cult-relief from Konjic is unusual in that it depicts the tauroctony on one side and an image of the ritual meal on the other. What is striking about this second image is that it appears to be an actual representation of a feast in a mithraeum, with the columns either side of figures suggesting it is supposed to be the interior of the temple.¹⁴³ It looks to show members of the lion and raven grades serving two other figures, most likely the *pater* and *Heliodromus*, who occupy the places of Mithras and Sol. It has been suggested that the role of the raven, which looks to have been the lowest Mithraic grade, was to serve as the raven is sometimes shown offering meat to Sol and Mithras.¹⁴⁴ Additionally, the inscription reads *Deo Soli inv[ict]o Meter[ae]*, with *Meterae* replacing 'Mithras'.

A word should also be said an odd relief found at Dardagana (surface area 0.35m²). It was discovered with coins from the reign of Valentinian I, thus would appear to have been manufactured in the fourth century. The image shows Mithras slaying the bull (the latter is now mostly missing) flanked by the torch-bearers, who are both holding croziers rather than torches and have them pointed downward. Sol and Luna are pushed together in the top-left of the relief, while the snake sits a Mithras' feet with a halo around its head.¹⁴⁵

Discussion

To begin, there is little variation in terms of the size of these mithraea, with nearly all less than 100m², although the smallest of these seem to be mainly located within Rome and its environs. The small size of these temples demonstrates continuity with the majority of their forbearers. As a result, it is evident that at the turn of the fourth century the size of Mithraic congregations generally remained small in number and sociological implications of this remained unaltered, with a high level of social density generated - assuming they were used on a relatively regular basis. In most cases, access to the *cella* of the mithraea still required people to navigate through various anterooms, even those situated in major public areas such in the temple precincts at Lentia and Trier. Many of these mithraea also retained the tripartite plan that appears so intrinsic to how Mithraic worship was conducted, while the bull-slaying scene looks to have remained the central image of the cult. From what decoration is extant, the interior of most of these mithraea appeared 'cave-like'.

However, there are some notable differences that suggest increasing localisation. Firstly, none of the mithraea in Dalmatia appears to have been constructed with anterooms, as was the case with the

¹⁴³ *CIMRM* 1896 = *CIL* 3.14617.

¹⁴⁴ For depictions of the raven offering food, see *CIMRM* 42 and 1584.

¹⁴⁵ Zotović (1973) n. 22.

other mithraea. The arrangement of their fittings is also unusual, with only a single bench present at both Jajce and Konjic on the left-hand side of the nave, while at Epidaurum there is no record of any benches inside the grotto. Furthermore, in many of these mithraea, rather than the relief being placed on a podium or attached to a wall, it was carved into natural rock. The relief found at Dardagana, perhaps one of the latest ever manufactured, also provides a particularly unusual depiction of the tauroctony. The single mithraeum present in the East at Hawarte is also highly unusual for a variety of reasons. For one, its iconography is exceptional and suggestive of a highly localised, perhaps Zoroastrian, influence. The arrangement of its *cella*, with a single bench in an 'L' shape, is also a rarity in the mithraea, while it is the only mithraeum erected in the fourth century to produce any evidence of the main relief being hidden. Finally, the mithraeum at *Via Giovanni Lanza* 128 in Rome is another unusual example, with no benches, suggesting a significant departure from the astrological model. In regards to other nearby mithraea, those in the *Foro Boario* and at Ostia do adhere to traditional plan, but these predate the mithraeum at *Via Giovanni Lanza* 128 by perhaps as much as half a century.

ARCHITECTURE OF OTHER RELIGIOUS GROUPS

Temples of Isis/Sarapis

Sanctuaries to Isis/Sarapis often covered large areas. Two of the smallest extant sanctuaries are those found at Pompeii, which was originally *ca.*350m² but in its second phase was enlarged to *ca.*620m², and the sanctuary at Baelo, which was *ca.*528m². Others covered gigantic areas: the platform of the iseam the Oppius Hill in Rome was *ca.*4408m², while the sanctuaries at Argos, Ephesos and Pergamon covered areas of *ca.*2866m², *ca.*8930m² and *ca.*27400m² respectively.¹⁴⁶ At Savaria, the temple precinct of Isis covered *ca.* 2940m², although we know from an inscription of Severan date that its congregation only consisted of 88 individuals,¹⁴⁷ suggesting a significant discrepancy could exist between the size of these structures and the number of regular worshippers. Notably, this is contemporary to the aforementioned Mithraic community at Virunum which consisted of a similar number, but one assumes the Mithraic adherents met at a much smaller temple. Furthermore, the Mithraic community divided into two smaller groups when close to 100 members, but there is no indication that the same occurred among Isiac worshippers.

In nearly every case it appears that these temples were surrounded by walls, often with a single entry way from the main street. However, these entry points were not hidden, but instead often took the form of a monumental arch, as at Praeneste and Pergamon (which had three monumental portals),

¹⁴⁶ Nielsen (2014) 69-82.

¹⁴⁷ *CIL* 3. 4150.

and/or staircases, as at Baelo and Ephesos.¹⁴⁸ During the day, it does not appear that entry to these sanctuaries, or at least public spaces within them, were heavily regulated. An inscription from Esna in Egypt dating to the mid-second century A.D. indicates men must not be bewitched or fall asleep in the temple courtyard, but it is questionable whether this would have affected the majority who wished to enter. Indeed, there appears to have been many people coming and going given the evidence for commercial activity taking place in various out buildings.¹⁴⁹

Once inside the sanctuary, the topography of the site could vary from place to place. The sanctuary of Isis at Pompeii produced a main *cella*, a small, lamp-lit *sacrarium* (which looks to have been the site of initiations), a water-crypt and a ‘priest’s house’. The Praeneste iseum, however, only consisted of a large apsidal-hall and a court-yard space. At Pergamon, three large temples stood at the rear of the sanctuary to form a basilica-hall. The hall had windows only in its western-half, with the eastern-side left in darkness. At Savaria, the temple was in the traditional Roman style, erected on a raised platform with a flight of steps leading the *cella* which was fronted by a portico.¹⁵⁰ Entrance to the *cella* appears to have been more strictly guarded, at least according to the aforementioned inscription from Esna, with men having to remove all body-hair, be tonsured, dressed in the correct clothing, and abstained from sexual contact and impure foods for period. As for women, they had to remain at a certain distance (200 *setat*) from temple-area at all times.¹⁵¹ In this list we can see a tremendous number of ‘costs’ involved in the worship of Isis at Esna, but it is unclear how far these regulations were imposed in other locations.

At least some of these temples also incorporated accommodation into their structures. In the *Metamorphoses*, Lucius stays in the iseum at Cenchreae after witnessing the *Isidis Navigium*, during which time he has visions of the goddess urging his initiation into her mysteries,¹⁵² while spaces that might have been used for lodgings have been identified at the sanctuary of Sarapis in Ostia.¹⁵³

Some temples of Isis/Sarapis have provided evidence of structural alterations in the Late Antique period. Around the turn of the fourth century the temple of Sarapis at Ostia looks to have been divided from adjacent rooms and had two wells added, which has led some to suggest it was now entirely a public temple with no rooms set aside for initiations or to house people. A crypt that may have been

¹⁴⁸ Nielsen (2014) 79-81.

¹⁴⁹ Alvar (2008) 308-309.

¹⁵⁰ Nielsen (2014) 69-81; Fitz (1998) 95.

¹⁵¹ Alvar (2008) 309.

¹⁵² *Meta.* 11.19.

¹⁵³ Nielsen (2014) 132.

set aside for initiations in the temple complex at Pergamon also looks to have been transformed into a cistern at some point from the third century onwards.¹⁵⁴

Temples to Magna Mater

Generally speaking, temples erected to Magna Mater tended to follow the standard ground-plan of a Roman temple, with a series of steps leading to a raised platform on which the temple would be situated. A portico would run along the front of the *cella* and inside would be a large open room which housed the cult statue. This is the plan we find in regards to the temple on the Palatine Hill and Ostia. These temples were usually would be located inside a large sanctuary, which often included a shrine to goddess' consort Attis, rooms for the colleges associated with the cult (*dendrophori* and *cannophori*) and other additional structures, such as baths. These temples and sanctuaries were often monumental: the temple of Magna Mater in Rome was *ca.* 561m², the Campus of Magna Mater at Ostia covered an area of *ca.*4500m², and the campus at Lugundum covered *ca.* 2014m². Where the initiation rites of the cult took place is unclear from the extant remains. Nielsen has suggested a narrow corridor built into the back-wall of temple on the Palatine might be one location, or perhaps in separate building that neighboured the temple. Subterranean rooms have also been found under the sanctuary, which would seem an ideal location for such rites. At Ostia, it is possible that such rites were conducted in the temple to Attis, although once again this by no means certain.¹⁵⁵ Much like the cult of Isis/Sarapis, it appears that worshippers could freely enter the public areas of these sanctuaries given the large spaces within them, although how regulated this may have been is unclear, while one presumes access to the *cella* of the temples would have required some form of cost.

Churches

For much of the first to early third centuries Christians would meet in the rooms of houses,¹⁵⁶ although the only extant example of such a meeting place is the house-church of Dura-Europos. Like the nearby synagogue and mithraeum, the house in which the Christian community gathered was eventually adapted (or at least the still extant ground-floor) in the mid-third century so that its primary function was to serve as a church. This involved the courtyard being paved and the installation of benches around its periphery, while in the main hall the only permanent fixture was a raised platform

¹⁵⁴ Nielsen (2014) 81, 132. Nielsen suggests that initiations may have been performed in the basilica of the Pergamon complex, but given the secrecy surrounding them this would be an odd place to hold them.

¹⁵⁵ **Rome:** Nielsen (2014) Fig. 58; **Ostia:** Nielsen (2014) 90; **Lugundum:** CCCA 5.384.

¹⁵⁶ For a summary of all textual references to house-churches from the first to third centuries, see White (1997) 36-87.

which, as in mithraea and other temples, acted as the central focus of the shrine, which probably served as a platform for a reader.¹⁵⁷

By the time of Porphyry in the late third century, Christians appear to have begun erecting standalone churches of notable size, for he remarked “the Christians, imitating the constructions of temples, erect great buildings in which they meet and pray”,¹⁵⁸ while Valerian’s seizure of Church property suggests these were more prominent structures.¹⁵⁹ There is little archaeological evidence to supplement this, but it infers that the architecture employed by Christians was moving towards monumentality evident amongst other cults. This would suggest that, like the Mithras cult, it was beginning to reduce the tension between itself and society, at least in regards to how overt its meeting places were. Of course, from the age of Constantine onwards this tension reduced even further as churches became larger and more monumental, covering areas akin in size to the temples of Isis/Sarapis and Magna Mater. The Church of the Apostles in Rome looks to have covered *ca.*2190m², while the Basilica of Saints Marcellinus and Peter covered *ca.* 1950m², and the Basilica of Saint Lawrence of the *Via Tiburtina ca.* 3200m².¹⁶⁰

Discussion

There were considerable differences between the temples to Isis/Sarapis, Magna Mater and mithraea. Firstly, by the third century isea and temples to Magna Mater were prominent fixtures in the urban landscape, for many covered tremendously large areas and consisted of monumental temples and halls, rooms for accommodation, and areas of commercial activity. However, although it is difficult to discern how many people would have regularly attended these temples, the evidence from Savaria suggests that the size of temples to Isis/Sarapis was not necessarily always representative of this, with this temple’s number of worshippers roughly the same as a contemporary Mithraic temple at Virunum, which one assumes would have had far less ostentatious dimensions. Furthermore, unlike their Mithraic counterparts there is no indication that worshippers of Isis/Sarapis or Magna Mater would seek to limit the size of their congregations. Indeed, in many cases a congregation in one of these cults could continue to grow to a sizeable number and still be accommodated within their sanctuaries. It is also often difficult to discern where initiation rites took place in the temples of Isis/Sarapis or Magna Mater. The presence of small rooms and crypts provide the most likely location, but archaeological evidence suggests that by the turn of the fourth century some of these areas were either being converted to different uses or partitioned from the temple to create separate structures,

¹⁵⁷ White (1997) 123-131.

¹⁵⁸ Adv. Christ. Frag. 76.

¹⁵⁹ Haas (1983).

¹⁶⁰ Armstrong (1993).

suggesting the focus had now shifted to the more public aspects of the cults. Thus the evidence in both cases suggests that these cult communities were now demanding fewer costs from their adherents, who may have been increasing in number. If this was the case, then there would be greater scope for free-riders to join and lower the average level of commitment.

In contrast, Christian house churches and mithraea were small and often incorporated into larger structures. If we are to believe Porphyry churches perhaps became more monumental, but even by the turn of the fourth century there is little evidence that they had reached the proportions of the temples to Isis or Magna Mater. It is possible that by having to meet in relatively small numbers in houses Christian communities produced a high-level of social density in the same way that Mithraic adherents did. As demonstrated, Mithraic congregations would usually divide when they became too large, thus resulting in either a new mithraeum or perhaps a pre-existing temple being shared between the two congregations. Given one could only fit so many into a house, one imagines Christian congregations would also have had to divide, resulting in them either sharing a space at different times or having to meet in another house. In either case, the size of their congregations would have remained relatively small, leading to members generating a significant level of social density which would reinforce their commitment to the cult.

CONCLUSION

Firstly, despite mithraea becoming more prominent during the third century, those constructed in the late third and early fourth centuries remained relatively small, with none covering an excess of 100m², nor were any existing mithraea enlarged considerably. We can therefore assume the size of Mithraic congregations of the early fourth century remained relatively small and contained a high level of social density, circumstances that would have continued to foster a strong sense of commitment among the Mithraic initiates, although we cannot be certain how often mithraea were actually used.

There is also nothing to suggest mithraea were becoming any more extravagant. Many were installed in pre-existing structures, while the building materials used to construct standalone mithraea in the late third and early fourth centuries were not considerably different to those used in neighbouring buildings. Decoration does not appear to have been any more opulent than in earlier mithraea, although on occasion marble would be used for decoration, such as the *Foro Boario* and *Spoletium* mithraea, suggesting these temples hosted individuals who were either able, or willing, to spend more than their counterparts elsewhere. However, given we are talking about spaces that were not particularly large we should be cautious in assuming that this cost the benefactor(s) a significant amount.

In this regard, mithraea differed from the temples of Isis/Sarapis or Magna Mater. As the cult became increasingly integrated into society, the temples of Isis/Sarapis show considerable variation in their topography, with greater monumentality and more spaces provided to accommodate larger numbers. In contrast, mithraea have much more in common with the earliest evidence for churches, which were small, confined spaces inside houses that were not viewable to the general public. While we have Porphyry's account that the Christians had begun to erect structures similar to temples in the third century, there is no indication how large these were; indeed, a mithraeum was a temple and contained many aspects that were comparable with temples to other deities, but they remained small in size and closed-off to non-members. Such similarities in their meeting places and that both cults entered the fourth century in what appears to be relatively healthy stead is not necessarily coincidental.

Furthermore, in terms of their spatial grammar, many mithraea continued to have entrances that did not align with the main-axis of the temple, while at least one anteroom would need to be passed through before entering the *cella*. In most cases there is no evidence that anything had changed regarding the arrangement of these *cella*, with the traditional tripartite division terminating at the cult image still evident, while natural light was still not allowed to shine into the space. In these mithraea, we may assume that the Mithraic adherents were still constructing mithraea with the intention of replicating the universe. As a result, no major shifts in ritual practice can be inferred among the mithraea which retained the traditional layout, while despite mithraea becoming increasingly prominent in a number of locations the rituals held therein remained hidden from public view.

However, there are some mithraea that did begin to exhibit significant differences to the traditional template that suggests increasing regional variation in certain areas. In particular, the rural mithraea of Dalmatia do not appear to have contained the usual bench arrangement, with examples from Konjic and Jajce only containing one bench each and no extant benches present at Epidaurum. Furthermore, in most of these mithraea the tauroctony was carved into natural rock, rather than as a standalone relief. The mithraeum of *Via Giovanni Lanza* 128 in Rome also did not contain any benches. Given that the model of the universe produced through the plan of the mithraeum appears to have been fundamental to Mithraic practice, a fact inferred from the stubborn adherence to it until the fourth century, these differences are mark a considerable alteration. Indeed, the indication is that these congregations either did not know, or did not agree, with the traditional mithraeum plan. It is a shame that little is known about the mithraeum at *Ospedale San Giovanni* or those built by the senatorial groups in the mid- to late fourth century to see how they compare. The mithraeum at Hawarte, the only extant mithraeum from the East, is perhaps the most unusual, as it too contained just a single bench in its *cella*, but the iconography of the temple is also striking. These images appear to be a

highly localised, with no known parallels in any other mithraeum, and have look to have been influenced by Zoroastrian tradition.

Finally, among the mithraea constructed before the third century that were restored at this time we find altars and statuettes of other deities that had looked to have been moved into the mithraea around this time. The reasons for this are unclear, but it does suggest that activity in these temples may no longer have been solely Mithraic. Indeed, at Martigny an altar was placed in the mithraeum which was dedicated 'to all the gods'. What impact this would have had on the Mithraic congregation is unclear, but it could be an indication of strong relationship between the Mithraic communities and other cults.

CHAPTER 3: HIERARCHY, PATRONS AND INITIATES IN LATE ANTIQUE MITHRAIC COMMUNITIES

INTRODUCTION

When the Tetrarchs convened at Carnuntum in A.D. 307 and chose to erect a dedication to Mithras as the ‘Protector of the Empire’ this marked the first time the deity had been explicitly honoured, as far as we know, by an emperor. Indeed, prior to the Tetrarchic period it was rare to see the involvement of any elites in the cult of Mithras, with the extant evidence indicating the majority of adherents were drawn from average citizens, freedmen, soldiers and members of the *portoria*. Yet from the Tetrarchic period, many of those who acted as patrons and leaders of Mithraic communities appear to have been men of significant standing, including senators, governors and *duces*. This shift poses some important questions regarding the cult’s status and structure in this period.

In this chapter we will explore the evidence for the patrons and members of the Mithraic cult from the late third century onwards. The key questions are: who were these men and what was their social status? Why were they drawn to the Mithras cult and what did they provide for it? Why did their involvement come to an end? Can any indications of chronological and regional variation be observed in the evidence? How does this compare to the congregations of other contemporary groups, such as Christianity, the cults of Isis/Sarapis and Magna Mater? First, I shall begin by looking at the different types of people that are present in Mithraic inscriptions, what their connection to cult was and what these inscriptions tell us about the structure of Mithraic communities in this period. I will then place the Mithraic evidence in the wider context to ascertain why these men were drawn to the cult of Mithras and why their involvement ceased. Finally, I shall then turn to other contemporary religious groups to see how the membership and patronage of the cult of Mithras compared to these.

It is important to note that, given the information in the epigraphic and historical records was produced primarily by, or for, Roman society’s highest strata, the image we are provided with only gives us a glimpse of these late antique Mithraic communities, with the wealthier and more prominent members dominating the picture. However, there are a number of dedications made by people from the lower levels of the social strata, which provides us with some insight as to who these Mithraic congregations consisted of. Furthermore, it is important to note that nearly all the provincial evidence ceases after the first decades of the fourth century, but as we have seen many mithraea remained active until later in the century, thus the epigraphic record does not provide us with information from across our entire period.

MEMBERSHIP AND STRUCTURE IN THE CULT OF MITHRAS BEFORE THE LATE THIRD CENTURY

Membership

The majority of identifiable Mithraic adherents from the first to mid-third centuries were ordinary citizens, soldiers, *portoria* staff, freedmen and slaves. In his survey of Mithraic adherents, Claus found of the 323 inscriptions that provide the occupation of an adherent, 38% came from the military, 15% were freedmen and 27% were slaves. Of the slaves and freedmen, in both cases around a third was attached to imperial government. Out of a total of 997 names, he found 416 had the *tria nomina*, indicating many held citizenship. In addition to those in Claus' volume, there are the Mithraic albums from Virunum, which record a further 98 Mithraic adherents, 96 of whom appear to have been citizens.¹⁶¹

It is among the soldiers serving on the Rhine frontier at Nida-Hedderheim in the late first century that we find the earliest epigraphic evidence attesting to worshipper of Mithras, with an inscription erected by a centurion in *ca.* A.D. 100. The earliest Mithraic inscriptions from the Danube frontier, which refer to another centurion and a slave working for the *portoria*, also date to around this time.¹⁶² As they were generally highly mobile, it is likely that the cult spread on the backs of soldiers and *portoria* staff, diffusing through their social networks: first their colleagues, then their dependents and finally (having retired from service) their neighbours.

Furthermore, there is also evidence that membership of the Mithras cult was in some cases the result of family ties. At Dieburg, a man Silvestrius Silvanus (who was a stonemason by trade) dedicated a relief along with his brother and grandson in the early third century, what appears to have been two brothers are recorded on a Mithraic relief from Salona, and various members of the Gessi family were involved in a Mithraic community at Sentium.¹⁶³

There is little evidence of participation by members of the Roman government prior to the Tetrarchic period. One exception to this is Marcus Aurelius' general M. Valerius Maximianus, who erected altars to Mithras at Lambaesis when governor of Numidia.¹⁶⁴ Occasionally we do find instances of local magistrates joining the cult and/or acting as patrons of Mithraic communities. Most examples of this have been found on Danube, such as the *aedilis* M. Antonius Victorinus who built a mithraeum next to his house at Aquincum and donated four altars to Mithras in the early third

¹⁶¹ Claus (2000), on Virunum see Piccottini (1994).

¹⁶² Claus (2000) 21.

¹⁶³ *Dieburg*: *CIMRM* 1247; *Salona*: *CIMRM* 1876; *Sentium*: *CIMRM* 685-689, Claus (1992) 56-58.

¹⁶⁴ *CIMRM* 137; *AE* 1955, 79. He also erected two altars to Sol at Apulum earlier in his careers which are recorded in *CIMRM*, but there is no indication as to whether he was a Mithraic worshipper at this time, see *CIMRM* 1950, 1952. Furthermore, it is unknown whether the altars erected at Lambaesis are connected with the mithraeum that was in use in the town until the fourth century.

century.¹⁶⁵ Additionally, there is evidence of military personnel of a higher ranking than centurions making dedications, such as the equestrian Flavius Aper who donated an altar to Mithraeum III at Poetovio in the mid-third century.¹⁶⁶

The Exclusion of Women

The possibility that women may have joined the cult of Mithras has been explored in a number of studies, but none have found conclusive proof this was ever the case.¹⁶⁷ One piece of evidence that infers the presence of women in Mithraic congregations is a passage by Porphyry that states women were initiated into the grade of ‘hyena’. However, there is no evidence from Mithraic contexts of such a grade. Gordon has suggested that this reference to women as hyenas in Mithraic circles is linked to Pliny’s description of hyenas being able to change sex and thus reproduce on their own offspring, in a mirror image to Mithras’ own rock birth. As a result, this should not be seen as a reference to women being initiated into the grade of hyena, but rather they were assigned the name as a symbol of their rejection by the Mithras cult.¹⁶⁸

A recent study of inscriptions referring to women that have been proposed as being Mithraic was conducted by Aleš Chapula, who found only two examples from a possible ten which may be considered plausible. One came from Rheder in Germany, which is usually read as being a dedication by a woman named Paterna on behalf of a deceased man named Firmino:

D(eo) I(nvicto) M(ithrae) Firmino votum referet Iustini Paterna v(otum) [s(olvit) l(ibens) l(aetus) m(erito)].

Yet questions remain over the interpretation of this, for it may have been Firmino who was initiated and left instruction for the altar to be erected in the event of his death, thus Paterna was not initiated but carrying out the wishes of the departed. It is also possible that the inscription has been misread, with Richard Gordon suggesting that it should be read *Iustini(us) Patern{a}(us) v(et(ernus))*, thus eliminating the separate female name.

The other possible dedication to Mithras by a woman comes from the *San Stefano Rotondo* mithraeum in Rome, where a woman named Cascelia Elegens donated an altar to Dominus Aeternus on behalf of herself, her family, her patron and his wife. However, the lack of a direct reference to Mithras and the fact that Dominus Aeternus is an expression not found in any other Mithraic context

¹⁶⁵ *CIMRM* 1750.

¹⁶⁶ *CIMRM* 1594.

¹⁶⁷ Gordon (1980); Griffith (2006); Chapula (2005).

¹⁶⁸ *De Abst.* 4.16; Plin. *HN.* 8.105; Gordon (1980) 57.

casts doubt as to whether this altar was originally to be found in the mithraeum. Most probably, the altar was reused by the Mithraic congregation from another shrine during the course of the third century, much like the statuettes of Isis and Telesphorus found in the mithraeum that were discussed in the previous chapter.

It is highly doubtful women ever played a role in the cult of Mithras before the late third century. However, it should be noted that the belief that women were never involved in the cult of Mithras is based on the epigraphic record. There is little cause to doubt this reasoning in the second or third centuries given the many inscriptions we have, but the tendency of scholars to view the cult of Mithras as static in its practices until its demise in the fourth century has meant the question of whether women might have become involved *after* the epigraphic evidence ceases has not been posed.

The Grade System

In the writings of St. Jerome, we are told that the cult of Mithras consisted of seven ‘grades’.¹⁶⁹ In this regard Jerome’s account appears to be correct, given that the seven grades were laid out as a ‘ladder’ in a mosaic decorating the nave of the Mithraeum of Felicissimus. Judging from symbols assigned to the grades on the Felicissimus mosaic, each of the grades was connected to a one of seven planets (i.e. gods, see Table 3). It would appear that when one was initiated into the Mithras cult, one entered at bottom rung of the ladder as a *corax* (raven), with the intention of rising through the ranks. Yet it does not appear that all members ascended through all seven grades, with the highest positions remaining in the hands of those who were also the highest-ranking in the secular world. One does not see a slave as a *pater* and freedmen as a *corax*, or an ordinary soldier ranked above a centurion. Notably, when two *patrēs* passed away at Virunum in the late second century, rather than promote from within their replacements appear to have come from different Mithraic congregations, suggesting those among the congregation were not deemed suitable to fill the void, perhaps due to their secular status.¹⁷⁰ As a result, the Mithraic grade system does not appear to have been a rejection of the hierarchies in the secular world, but actually served to reinforce them. As Richard Gordon observed some years ago: “There is no possibility of discussing Mithraism as a response to some form of deprivation: we find simply a confirmation or reiteration of ordinary social experience”.¹⁷¹ Indeed, given that inscriptions erected by *patrēs* were often for the good of those above them on the social ladder, in particular the

¹⁶⁹ *Ep* 107.2

¹⁷⁰ Piccottini (1994); Beck (2006a) 190.

¹⁷¹ Gordon (1972) 95.

emperor, this indicates these men did not see themselves as above their social superiors, even in a Mithraic context.¹⁷²

Unfortunately, references to Mithraic grades are not common in the epigraphic record, with only 14% of Mithraic inscriptions mentioning a grade. Nor is this evidence evenly distributed, with half of the references coming from Rome and Ostia, while two-thirds come from Italian contexts.¹⁷³ Why references to the grades are relatively rare beyond Italy is unknown, but it is possible that many initiates either chose not record their grade or, more likely, did not have the financial means to have them carved in stone. Of the inscriptions we do have, as the leader of the congregation and the highest status member in the secular world, the *pater* is unsurprisingly the most commonly referenced of all the grades. The second most frequently mentioned grade is the *Leo*, while at a mithraeum discovered at Umbria in Italy there is a reference to a ‘lion room’ and a *pater leonum* (‘Father of Lions’).¹⁷⁴ Given that this grade appears to have occupied the mid-point in the Mithraic ladder, it is possible that this was the furthest many initiates reached in their Mithraic progression. Under these circumstances, the creation of the *pater leonum* and lion room at Umbria may have been designed to accommodate an over-subscription to this grade by allotting them a separate space and their own sub-*pater*.

Table 3: The Mithraic Grades

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Symbols</i>	<i>Planet/Deity</i>
<i>Corax</i> (Raven)	Small beaker and the caduceus	Mercury
<i>Nymphus</i> (Bridegroom/ the one who is shrouded)	Oil lamp and diadem	Venus
<i>Miles</i> (Soldier)	Sling-bag, lance and helmet	Mars
<i>Leo</i> (Lion)	Fire-shovel, a rattle and thunderbolt	Jupiter
<i>Perses</i> (Persian)	Sickle, <i>akinakes</i> (Persian dagger) and a crescent moon	Venus
<i>Heliodromus</i> (Runner of the Sun)	Torch, seven-rayed crown and a whip	The Sun
<i>Pater</i> (Father)	Phrygian cap, libation bowl, staff and sickle	Saturn

¹⁷² *CIMRM* 53, 142, 161 347, 510, 626, 876, 2350.

¹⁷³ Clauss (2000) 131-132.

¹⁷⁴ *CIMRM* 688, 1750.

Discussion

Evidently, many those who joined a Mithraic congregation in the first to third centuries would have known their fellow members relatively well outside the cult setting, either serving together in a military unit, as staff of the *portoria*, or working alongside each other as slaves and freedmen attached to a particular household. Notably, some Mithraic adherents referred to their fellows as their ‘brothers’ in a figurative sense, suggesting these men were closely affiliated beyond the cult setting.¹⁷⁵ That their membership to the cult did not reject their social status, but actually replicated it by having their commanding officer or a freedman as their *pater* (who in turn may honour the emperor or master of the house in a Mithraic inscription), is an indication that many may have joined to align their religious commitment with those to whom they were closest in order to retain their social capital. Indeed, that social capital played a major role in motivating people to join the Mithras cult has been observed previously by Volken.¹⁷⁶

That these men were average members of society, with no apparent restrictions applied by the cult in regards to how they acted in the wider world (that we know of), might also explain why there is little evidence of violent conflict between Mithraic groups and mainstream society. While these men worshipped a deity in Persian garb in small, private groups, they did so within the framework of Roman society, not in opposition to it, thus while there may have been unease at the prospect of such gatherings, outsiders were perhaps willing to give them the benefit of the doubt. Thus, while the cult perhaps existed in tension with society given the secrecy surrounding it, the type of members it attracted and their deference to their social superiors both in and outside the Mithraic context meant no tension was generated in this regard. However, the rejection of women was perhaps one way in which the membership of the cult did serve to create some tension with society, for by entirely rejecting a significant portion of the population outright the cult was placing itself beyond the normal conventions of society. However, as outlined in the Introduction, little sociological study has been undertaken on gender roles and religious adherence, so such observations can only remain speculative.

¹⁷⁵ *CIMRM* 510, 1243, 1477.

¹⁷⁶ Volken (2004). However, Volken does not use the term ‘social capital’, but rather stressed the importance in these men attempting to conform to their social networks.

EVIDENCE FOR PATRONS AND INITIATES FROM THE LATE THIRD CENTURY ONWARDS

Emperors

The Tetrarchic dedication of A.D. 307 is the only Mithraic inscription that was erected by an emperor or emperors. This inscription was etched on an altar and appears to refer to the restoration of Mithraeum III at Carnuntum, but as we have seen there is little evidence from the archaeological record for any considerable alterations to the temple. It also refers to Mithras as ‘The Protector of the Empire’, an epithet not found in other Mithraic contexts. Yet this was not a brand new altar that was erected especially for this occasion, but rather it had been taken from a different context and re-carved, which in combination with the lack of evident alterations to the mithraeum suggests the Tetrarchs had not lavished great sums on the Mithraic community. There is no indication that the Tetrarchs themselves were members of the cult.¹⁷⁷

Senators

The fourth century also marks the first evidence for a notable number of men of senatorial status involved in the cult in Rome.¹⁷⁸ However, there is a distinct chronological gap in the evidence, with two of the inscriptions dating to the early fourth century and the rest from the A.D. 360s-380s. Beginning with the two earlier inscriptions, a *vir perfectissimus* by the name of Flavius Septimius Zosimus installed a mithraeum in his house, the aforementioned example from *Via Giovanni Lanza* 128. However, while he states he was a priest of Brontis and Hecate, no mention is made of a Mithraic title, suggesting the mithraeum was provided for adherents in his household as opposed to him being a member of the community.¹⁷⁹ The other inscription was erected in A.D. 313 at a Phrygianum located on the Vatican Hill by C. Magius Donatus Severianus who held the Mithraic title *pater sacrorum*. Severianus informs us in the inscription that he also served as a priest Liber, while he had also partaken of a *taurobolium* in honour of Magna Mater.¹⁸⁰

The inscriptions from the mid- to late fourth century were uncovered at two find spots. Firstly, like the aforementioned inscription of Severianus, around a dozen inscriptions were found at a

¹⁷⁷ *CIMRM* 1698.

¹⁷⁸ It is worth acknowledging that the extent to which these men were actually initiates of the Mysteries has been often been debated. In his study of Mithraic adherents, Manfred Clauss relegated most of these, particularly the Olympii group, to an appendix and did not consider them to be true initiates Clauss (1992) 295-296. In contrast, Alan Cameron (2011, 142-149) has argued that this group, as well as many of the other elites who refer to themselves by Mithraic titles, should be considered as Mithraic communities, even this was “an innovation rather than either a survival or revival” of a cult that had long since passed its peak. Finally, both Alison Griffith (2000) and Jonas Bjørnbye (2007) 66 did not set these men apart from other Mithraic evidence, given that, in their opinion, the cult was still widespread (and perhaps even still growing) in fourth century Rome.

¹⁷⁹ *CIMRM* 360.

¹⁸⁰ *CIMRM* 523.

Phrygianum located on the Vatican Hill, which predominantly speak of one family: the Caenii.¹⁸¹ Among them is the city prefect of A.D. 365, Caenius Rufius Volusianus Lampadius, who served as a *pater*. His son Ceionius Rufius Volusianus is also mentioned in one of the later inscriptions, erected in A.D. 390, as a *pater*. Other members of this group, nearly all of whom are listed as *patrēs* include: Alfenius Caenius Iulianus Kamenius, whose inscription was erected in A.D. 374 and who served as governor of Numidia in the A.D. 370s (he is called both a *pater* and *hieroceryx sacrorum*); Rufius Caenius Sabinus in A.D. 377; Petronius Apollodorus and his wife, the daughter of Lampadius, Rufia Volusiana. However, Volusiana is not referred to via a Mithraic title and, as result, there is no reason to assume she was an initiate. Other initiates who were not part of the family include Caelius Hilarius, Ulpus Egnatius Faventinus, and Iunius Postumianus. While Postumianus was a *pater patrum*, the other two held the grade of *hieroceryx*, once again an amended version of *corax*, in tandem with the title of *pater*. All of these men were of senatorial rank, although one inscription bears the name Sextilius Agesilaus Aedesius, who was not of noble birth, but was mentioned by Ammianus as a friend of Volusianus Lampadius.¹⁸² Finally, the famous aristocrat Vettius Agorius Praetextatus is also listed among these inscriptions as a member of a Mithraic community. Praetextatus is perhaps the outstanding member of these later Mithraic adherents, having served as a governor, proconsul and praetorian prefect, as well as being a consul elect at the time of his death in A.D. 384. Like Severianus, all these individuals held more than a single priesthood, including those of Liber and Hecate, and most had partaken in a *taurobolium*. It would appear these inscriptions were erected in courtyard of the Phrygianum as they are honorific in nature, listing numerous titles that do not pertain to one cult. How apparent they would have been to the general public is hard to ascertain without any extant evidence of their original context, but they were certainly not designed to be kept hidden inside a mithraeum.

The second group consists of seven Mithraic inscriptions discovered on the Campus Martius, which also refer to a Mithraic group based around one family, in this case the Olympii.¹⁸³ Most of the inscriptions are dated, covering a period of the late A.D. 350s-380s, and look to have been from a mithraeum located on the family's property which is now lost. The men listed are: Nonius Victor Olympius and his sons, Aurelius Victor Olympius and Aurelius Victor Augentius, and in a dedication of A.D. 376, the latter's son, Aemilianus Corfo Olympius. Initially, Nonius Victor Olympius is listed as a *pater patrum* while his sons held the grade of *pater*, but by A.D. 376, the latter two had both been elevated to the role of *pater patrum*. Another grandson of Nonius Victor Olympius was Tamesius Augentius Olympius, who is recorded as building a mithraeum in A.D. 382, although he provides no

¹⁸¹ *CIMRM* 420, 466, 513-515, 521, 520, 522, 544,

¹⁸² 15.4.4.

¹⁸³ *CIMRM* 400-406, 751b

Mithraic title. All of these men were *vir clarissimi*, except for Aemilianus who is listed as a *clarissimus puero*, indicating he was only a child when he was initiated. Aemilianus also holds the unusual title of *hierocoracica*, which appears to be an alternative form of *corax*. Unlike their contemporary counterparts from the Phrygianum Mithraic group, these men make no reference to additional titles in these inscriptions, suggesting that having been situated on private property as opposed to a major sanctuary they were more private in nature.

Contemporary to these dedications in Rome, senators also erected Mithraic inscriptions at Antium and Lavinium just outside of Rome. Both were on statue bases, with the example from Antium referring to the same Alfenius Ceionius Iulianus Kamenius from the Phrygianum inscriptions in Rome. At Lavinium, the senator Iunius Gallienus is named, but he does not appear any surviving Mithraic inscription from Rome. Both men referred to themselves as *pater patrum*. Further down the coast at Neapolis, a *ca.*1m² marble relief, which is the only certain example of a relief from the senatorial Mithraic congregations of the mid- to late fourth century, was paid for by the Appius Claudius Tarronius Dexter.¹⁸⁴

Provincial Governors

From the Danube there is just the one example of a Mithraic dedication that mentions a governor, which was commissioned to commemorate his restoration of a mithraeum at Virunum in the Tetrarchic period. Surprisingly, a number of Mithraic dedications which refer to governors have been found in North Africa, an area which has not produced extensive Mithraic material. One of these dedications was made at Diana by M. Aurelius Decimus, who was governor of Numidia in A.D. 283-284. This dedication lists Mithras alongside Jupiter, Minerva, Hercules and Mercury, which gives the impression that, at least to M. Aurelius Decimus, Mithras shared a similar status to deities in the official Roman pantheon. Another two altars were found at Lambaesis, one in the mithraeum and the other in the outside of the temple. The latter was another dedication by M. Aurelius Decimus, while the former was commissioned by a later governor, Valerius Florus, in A.D. 303, who was also a known persecutor of Christians. These dedications, which were all votive in nature, look to have stood alongside that made by Valerius Maximianus over a century before in the same mithraeum, while in the intervening years dedications were erected by a *princeps legionis*, a *praefectus legionis*, a *legatus Augusti pro praetore*, and a *legatus legionis*, indicating that these Tetrarchic dedications were following a precedent in which the mithraeum was officially recognised by high ranking individuals. In the A.D. 360s, Caeionius Caecina Albinus repaired a mithraeum at Cirta. This man had almost certainly been initiated into the cult in Rome before arriving in North Africa, given that his father,

¹⁸⁴ Antium: *CIMRM* 206; Lavinium: *CIL* 14.2082; Neapolis: *CIMRM* 175.

Ceionius Rufius Volusianus, was an initiate, but the inscription makes no mention of a grade. Finally, fragments of another altar were found at Satafis, which had been erected by a *vir clarissimus*, who we may assume based on this title also served as a governor. According to the inscription, this unidentified man also served as the *pater patrum* of a Mithraic community, which may suggest that he, like Caecionius, had come from one of the senatorial communities in Rome in the latter half of the fourth century.¹⁸⁵

Duces

Although soldiers had often featured on Mithraic inscriptions, it was rare for a leading military commander to be involved in the cult, with the exception of the aforementioned Valerius Maximianus. However, from the early fourth century there are a couple of examples of *duces* acting as patrons of Mithraic communities. A fragment of an inscription carved on Mithraic relief found at Axiopolis in Moesia informs us it was commissioned by a *dux*. It probably dates to the Tetrarchic period, but unfortunately nothing more about the man is known, not even his name, nor do we know if this was a votive inscription or a gift to a Mithraic community by a non-initiate. At Poetovio, another *dux* repaired a mithraeum, although once again this dedication can only be tentatively placed in the Tetrarchic period. Which mithraeum this inscription refers to is also unclear, but the consensus is that it originates from a mithraeum (Mithraeum IV) that has not been discovered.¹⁸⁶

Soldiers

Soldiers still appear in a number of Mithraic inscriptions from the late third century onwards. There are a couple of dedications from North Africa. A marble relief from the Tetrarchic period was found at Stifis, which was commissioned by the entire *legio II Herculia*, rather than an individual soldier, suggesting that Mithras was seen as something akin to a patron deity of the legion. Notably, the legion in question was originally from the Danube and came to North Africa in A.D. 298/9, when they accompanied the emperor Maximian to Mauretania, but subsequently returned to the northern frontier.¹⁸⁷ A short time later, probably in the A.D. 310s, a centurion of the *legio II Flavia* also erected a Mithraic inscription at Thysdrus (Byzacène).¹⁸⁸

From the Danube, there is another inscription from Virunum that dates to the Tetrarchic period that refers to a *speculator legionis*, who donated an altar as an *ex voto* with the permission of an unnamed

¹⁸⁵ *Virunum*: *CIMRM* 1431; *Diana*: *CIMRM* 140; *Lambaesis*: *CIMRM* 138, *CIL* 8.18235 = *AE* 1973, 633; *Cirta*: *IIAlg* 2.541; *Satafis*: *CIL* 8.8397 = *CIL* 8.20241. On Valerius Flavianus' persecution of Christians, see *CIL* 8.6700 = *CIL* 8.19353.

¹⁸⁶ *Axiopolis*: *CIMRM* 2280; *Poetovio*: *CIMRM* 1614.

¹⁸⁷ *CIMRM* 149; Clauss (1992) 250-251.

¹⁸⁸ Lepelley (2002) 274. The dating of the inscription from Thysdrus is based on the legion, which could not have come into being prior to the reign of Constantine and is mentioned in *Not. Dig. Occ.* 5.250. The inscription has not been published in full.

pater. A stone altar was found in the Lentia mithraeum which was erected by a veteran. Precisely when this dedication was made is unclear, but given the changes that occurred both in depositions in this mithraeum (see Chapter 5), the abandonment of the surrounding area in the fourth century (see Chapter 2), and the declining evidence for the epigraphic habit in the region, it probably dates to the Tetrarchic period. In A.D. 297 another veteran erected an altar at Ulcisia Castra in Pannonia. In Poetovio, four altars bearing *ex votis* inscriptions were found alongside the aforementioned inscription attesting to the restoration of a mithraeum by a *dux*. These inscriptions probably all came from the same mithraeum, but whether these date to the same period as the restoration inscription is unknown. They provide no other details about the men other than their names and that two of them were brothers, but given the prevalence of the military in the mithraea of Poetovio and the presence of the *dux* in one inscription, it is likely they were soldiers.¹⁸⁹

Doctors

In Gaul, at Venetonimagnus the *pater* C. Rufius Virilis erected an altar around the turn of the fourth century which mentions his father, the *pater patrum* C. Rufius Eutactus.¹⁹⁰ The latter's occupation is listed on another inscription as being a doctor, which provides the only known instance of a Mithraic initiate with such an occupation. What this would mean for Eutactus' status in the secular world is unclear. Occasionally, doctors could rise to a high level of social status, such as Claudius' personal physician Xenophon, who provided new buildings and restored others at his home on the island of Cos, but rarely did they reach such heights and there is nothing to indicate whether Eutactus' status in the Mithraic community was achieved due to his financial status.¹⁹¹ In fact, Eutactus' status may have something to do with the location of the mithraeum at Venetonimagnus, which was located close to a healing sanctuary that was found to contain surgical instruments. The citing of this mithraeum and the prominence of a doctor among the initiates is a further indication that Mithras' primary function in this region was perhaps as a healing deity.

Citizens/Freedmen

At Ostia, a statue to Ahriman was commissioned by Petronius Felix Marsus with the permission of the *pater* M. Lollianus Callinicus. The statue itself is lost, with the inscription carved on an architrave. Another inscription carved on a slab of marble indicates an additional statue was provided by the same man, again with the permission of the *pater*. Given the dating of the mithraeum, it is likely to have been erected in the late third century, although the marble slab has another inscription on it

¹⁸⁹ Virunum: *CIMRM* 1434; Lentia: *CIMRM* 1419; Ulcisia Castra: Clauss (2000) 188; Poetovio: *CIMRM* 1615, 1617, 1618.

¹⁹⁰ *CIMRM* 911.

¹⁹¹ Jackson (1988) 56-57.

which refers to a Mithraic adherent by the name of M. Caerellius Hieronimus, who is known to have lived at the turn of the third century. White suggests this slab originated from the nearby Mithraeum of the Animals, but was moved to the House of Diana when the Mithraic congregation relocated following a decline in numbers.¹⁹² The *pater* M. Lollianus Callinicus also erected an altar in the mithraeum. Like the aforementioned marble slab that came from an earlier mithraeum, this altar was reused, having originally been dedicated to Hercules. The altar was placed upside down and back-to-front in front of the cult-niche to hide this fact.¹⁹³

At the *Foro Boario* mithraeum, an inscription informs us the sanctuary was constructed by a citizen with the permission of a priest named A. Sergius Eutyclus sometime in the latter half of the third century. Whether this priest held a Mithraic grade is not mentioned, although it is not long after this that the dedication of Severianus, which refers to him as *pater sacrorum*, was made, while some of the later senatorial Mithraic adherents also use this title, thus it would seem likely that this man did serve as a *pater* and the title listed here was an adaption that became increasingly common in later periods. Another *pater* of this Mithraic community was also named on an inscription, although only fragments of this survive, while two other altars and a relief from the mithraeum attest to three men who look to have been citizens.¹⁹⁴

Slaves

On the walls of the mithraeum in the House of Diana at Ostia seven names have been inscribed, probably in the late third century. They are all single names, none of which appear to be Roman, suggesting they were likely to have been slaves. White has hypothesised that the mithraeum may have been linked to a neighbouring bakery and these men worked there. No other information provided or any votive nature is inferred in this graffito, but it may be considered a very basic Mithraic album, akin to those found at Virunum. Additionally, at Trier a man named Nicasius inscribed a limestone votive *aedicula* and deposited it in the mithraeum sometime during the fourth century.¹⁹⁵

A crudely carved inscription from Potoci in Dalmatia, which may date to the late third or fourth century, bears the name of two men who appear to be slaves: Marcianus and Rumanus. The reason this inscription may date to this period is that, like the relief from the nearby late third century

¹⁹² White (2012) 454-457.

¹⁹³ *CIMRM* 275.

¹⁹⁴ *CIMRM* 436, 449, 450, 452.

¹⁹⁵ *Ostia*: *CIMRM* 218; *Trier*: *CIMRM* 987.

mithraeum of Konjic, it was made in honour of *Deo Soli Invicto Meterae*, rather than the usual *Deo Soli Invicto Mithrae*.¹⁹⁶

Unknown Status

In the Rhineland, despite the significant number of mithraea still active at this time, only one Mithraic inscription has been found dating to the early fourth century. Materninius Faustinus, a *carax* (seemingly an alternative spelling of *corax*) whose secular status is unknown, paid for the construction of the mithraeum in A.D. 325 and erected several altars and the central relief. However, Faustinus required the permission of a *pater* named Potentianus to make this donation. Of further note is that this inscription also refers to ‘*Midre*’ as opposed to Mithras, and uses the term *fanum* instead of *templum* or *spelaeum*. At Trier, the *pater* Martius Martialis made a dedication of two limestone altars in the mithraeum, probably around the turn of the fourth century.¹⁹⁷

The aforementioned inscription from Potoci mentions three men, two of whom may have been brothers: Aurelius Maximinus, Flavius Marcellinus and Flavius Marcellus. At the fellow Dalmatian site of Konjic, a votive altar was found that was erected by a Veterius Lucius. In contrast to the relief from the Konjic mithraeum, which was erected in on honour of ‘*Meterae*’, Veterius’ altar refers to Mithras.¹⁹⁸

Fragments of two further reliefs were also found at Pregade in Pannonia, which appear to have been dedicated by two brothers during the early fourth century. However, given their size these may have been designed for personal use rather than to be set up in mithraea: one relief was only 0.2m², while the dimensions of the surviving fragment of the second relief suggests that it was not much bigger.¹⁹⁹

Some unnamed individuals also occasionally appear in the inscriptions from Rome relating to the Olympii group. These individuals held the traditional Mithraic grades of *leo*, *perses* and *helidromus*, while the *nymphus* grade is also mentioned, but it is now named *cryfios*.²⁰⁰

A collection of marble statues from Sidon in Syria were paid for by Fl. Gerontios in A.D. 390, making them the latest extant Mithraic dedication. The statues include the representations of: the bull-slaying scene; Mithras carrying the bull; two sets of the torchbearers (in one set they hold torches, the other axes); Venus; Hecate; and Aion. This set is completed by a relief of the tauroctony, also in

¹⁹⁶ *CIMRM* 1891, 1892.

¹⁹⁷ Gimmeldingen: *CIMRM* 1315; Trier: *CIMRM* 986, 987

¹⁹⁸ *CIMRM* 1898.

¹⁹⁹ *CIMRM* 1469, 1471.

²⁰⁰ *CIMRM* 401-405.

marble, while another Venus, this one in bronze, was also found.²⁰¹ The level of craftsmanship is impressive, while the fact they nearly all made from marble suggests they were costly to produce. The name Fl. Gerontios is unknown outside of these statuettes and he provides no mention a grade, while the mithraeum also remains lost to us. Given the paucity of Mithraic evidence from the Eastern provinces it might be that Gerontios and the statues had come from the West.

Discussion

First, let us begin with what aspects of the Mithras cult these inscriptions suggest remained the same. One thing is that a significant proportion of adherents appear to have been soldiers, with them appearing in a number of inscriptions from both the Danube and North Africa, while inscriptions erected by emperors and governors also tend to appear around military sites, such as Carnuntum and Lambaesis. Furthermore, in Rome it appears that the cult still appealed to slaves, freedmen and citizens. However, given that the epigraphic evidence largely terminates after the early fourth century, it is difficult to ascertain whether the presence of such adherents continued across the subsequent century. Judging from the distribution of the evidence outlined in Chapter 1, it would appear soldiers did continue to support the cult into the late fourth century, while the survival of at least the *Crypta Balbi* mithraeum into the early fifth century suggests that the cult did retain some following among lower to middle class people in Rome after the epigraphic evidence terminates.

The fact that the cult continued to attract the same type of people into the early fourth century also suggests that the major motor for joining the cult remained unaltered, namely the desire to retain or enhance their social capital. Indeed, in this period we find an entire legion donating a Mithraic relief and one doubts whether the odd soldier who did not wish to contribute would have been popular among his colleagues, while at Ostia, it appears that the staff of a bakery may have made up the majority of one community. Family ties are another trend in the evidence which indicates a continuing desire to retain social capital through Mithraic adherence. Instances of membership being determined by this are evident in inscriptions from Rome, where several generations of two families were part of Mithraic communities. Such evidence is also present at Venetionimagnus, where a father and son led the congregation, while on the Danube there is evidence for brothers at Pregade and Poetovio.

The dominant position of the *pater* also appears to have remained unchanged in the early fourth century. In a number of cases, such as the *Foro Boario* mithraeum, Gimmeldingen and the House of Diana at Ostia, initiates had to receive the permission of the *pater* in order to make a gift to the Mithraic community. Unsurprisingly, external donors, such as emperors, governors and *duces* make

²⁰¹ Will (1950).

no reference to such permission, but given that Mithraic *patrēs* look to have deferred to their social superiors in earlier periods, even in Mithraic contexts, it is unlikely that they took this as an affront. Indeed, one may argue that it only added to their prestige and that of the local Mithraic community.

Now let us address the changes in the evidence. First, there is the appearance of elites among the patrons and adherents of the cult, something that was a rarity in previous periods. During the Tetrarchic period we find emperors, senators, governors and *duces* contributing or joining Mithraic communities. This alteration alone is of importance as it indicates that the cult had intergraded into mainstream Roman society at the highest level, suggesting that any tension that had existed between the Mithras cult and society had all but disappeared. Whereas the Mysteries had once been celebrated in back-alleys, they were now being conducted in the homes of elites, with some putting their Mithraic titles on public dedications, while at Carnuntum the emperors themselves had proclaimed the power of Mithras. Even if these dedications were made in private, it is unlikely that such men could enter or leave a mithraeum without it being common knowledge.

Another key aspect of these inscriptions is the increasing evidence for the localisation of the cult. In particular, on the Danube we find a cult that looks to have still drawn its members from the military and which could now count emperors, governors and *duces* among its patrons, suggesting the ‘unconquerable’ Mithras was perhaps now seen as a symbol of Roman military power in this region. In contrast, the evidence from eastern Gaul indicates a rather different approach. In the epigraphic record from this area no elites or soldiers are mentioned, but instead we find a congregation at Venetonimagnus led by a doctor. As such, it would seem that the composition of the Mithraic community at Venetonimagnus and other mithraea in eastern Gaul would have been notably different to those found elsewhere, while this is also further evidence that the Mithras worshipped in eastern Gaul was perhaps more akin to a healing deity. Localisation is also suggested in the vocabulary of some inscriptions. At Gimmeldingen, the terms *corax* and Mithras are written as *carax* and *Midre*, while the mithraeum is referred to as a *fanum*, a term not found elsewhere in Mithraic contexts. In Rome, the terms *hieroceryx sacrorum*, *hierocoracica* and *hieroceryx* were used, sometimes in tandem with the title *pater*, among the senatorial Mithraic communities. In Dalmatia, we find another example of Mithras’ name being changed to *Meterae*.

Importantly, the alterations to Mithraic grade titles do not appear to have been limited to their names, but perhaps also in their position in the hierarchy. In regards to the *carax* who donated the relief, altars and even the mithraeum itself at Gimmeldingen, it is striking that someone who could pay for all this should hold the lowest grade, given that Mithraic hierarchies would have almost certainly mimicked those of the secular world. How do we explain this? It is unlikely that this man was humble enough to pay for these things and then take on a less central role during rituals, while it

is also improbable that, despite his financial status, he was of a lower social status than his fellow initiates and thus had to take the lowest grade. The most plausible explanation seems to be that the *corax* grade was not seen, at least in this congregation, as the lowest grade but as one of the highest. Similar evidence appears among the senatorial Mithraic adherents of the mid- to late fourth centuries, where members held the grade of *pater* at the same time as some form of the *corax* grade. This is even stranger, as it provides evidence of initiates holding both the highest and lowest grades simultaneously. Given that these men were all of the senatorial class they were unlikely to have been happy to serve in the lowest positions. Notably, among these inscriptions the grades of *leo*, *heliodromus* and *nymphus* (now called *cryfios*) are referred to without naming those who held them, yet those of the *corax* position are named, a further indication that *corax* now appears to have outranked these grades. Indeed, it seems as though the title of *corax*, or at least a version of it, now inferred a position that acts almost as a lieutenant to the *patrēs* in these communities, which would explain why the *corax* (or *carax*) at Gimmeldingen would have provided so much for the community; he was not a member of the lowest grade, but one of the highest.

In further regards to the grade system, there is also a notable increase in use of the term *pater patrum*. Unlike the aforementioned innovations in the grade system, this title does appear in earlier Mithraic inscriptions: on a statue of Oceanus found in a mithraeum uncovered in Merida, an inscription dating to A.D. 155 refers to Gaius Accius Hedychrus as *pater patrum*,²⁰² while the title was also used by the head of the Dura-Europos Mithraic community in the first half of the third century. An undated inscription from Rome also refers to a Flavius Antistianus, who was a *vir egregius*. In our period, such a title is common among the senatorial groups in Rome, while two inscriptions refer to men holding this title in the provinces: Rufius Eutactus in Gaul and an unnamed *vir clarissimus* in Satafis in North Africa. It is not clear as to why the title *pater patrum* only appears occasionally in Mithraic inscriptions, or precisely what holding this position entailed. Perhaps it was a way of elevating themselves over pre-existing *patrēs* who were of a lower secular status, for if the cult was to continue reflecting the order of secular society, it could not allow one to be on a par with one's inferiors. It may also be that they wished to position themselves as the head of several Mithraic communities that were led by their own *patrēs*, for, if the cult was as popular in these areas, then this might provide someone who could place himself at the head of these communities with significant, far reaching influence. That in the Mithraic communities of the Olympii in Rome and at Venetionimagnus the title *pater patrum* was held by the father of the family while the sons held the title of *pater* may also indicate it was a way of establishing a hereditary line of succession for the community's leader.

²⁰² CIMRM 779.

Finally, it is important to note that the chronological discrepancy between the epigraphical record of Rome and the provinces. In Rome, the evidence continues until the final decades of the fourth century, but no provincial inscription can be dated later than A.D. 325. The one exception to this is the inscription erected by Publius Caecionius Caecina Albinus in A.D. 364 at Cirta, but this is an isolated case linked to the elites in Rome, rather than representative of an independent Mithraic community in North Africa. As a result, we cannot say for certain who supported, led or joined provincial Mithraic congregations after this point. However, it should not be assumed that the hierarchy and membership of the Mithras cult continued in much the same vein as it had done, given that this period marked a shift in membership and patronage. The alterations that were made to the grade system in some early fourth century communities indicate the hierarchy of Mithraic congregations was far from static, while we have seen how the context many mithraea existed transformed during the fourth century, affecting the social networks of those who would have attended mithraea.

ELITE PATRONAGE AND MEMBERSHIP OF LATE MITHRAIC COMMUNITIES IN CONTEXT

As outlined, this period was marked by the appearance of a number of elites acting as patrons or becoming initiates of the cult of Mithras. This evidence for this can be divided into two groups: the provincial evidence of the Tetrarchic period, consisting of emperors, governor and *duces*, while the second group consists of the senatorial adherents in Rome, with this evidence generally originating from a later period. The questions that must be posed now are: why did these men turn to the Mithras cult, and why did they subsequently abandon it after a relatively short period?

The Provinces

On the Danube, there is no indication that any of these elites were initiates of the cult themselves; rather it appears they wished to earn the loyalty of the Mithraic congregations by acting as their patrons. That mithraea in three of the major towns of the Danube provinces (Carnuntum, Poetovio and Virunum) were chosen to receive such benefaction, while one also received an altar from the Tetrarchs calling Mithras ‘the Protector of the Empire’, is unlikely to have been coincidence, but rather it looks to have been intended as a statement. This region had produced many usurpers during the third century and gaining the commitment of the soldiers along the Danube was vital for the reigning government. While some soldiers would pledge their loyalty for a pay increase or by being provided with entertainment,²⁰³ for others who were highly committed to a particular cult, as was

²⁰³ On material incentives for the military’s loyalty, see Lee (2007) 57-66. An example of rare public building on the Danube under the Tetrarchy was the repair of the Virunum amphitheatre, see *CIL* 3.4826.

likely to have been the case with the Mithraic adherents, their support might be obtained through restoring their local temple. Such an action might be particularly appealing to the elites if the temple in question was relatively small and unassuming, as opposed to the expense necessitated in the repair of more monumental structures. Indeed, the evidence from Carnuntum III does not indicate tremendous sums were lavished on this restoration, with even the altar being an example of reuse. Similarly, the evidence from North Africa indicates the cult was almost exclusively military in nature here, with all dedications either by soldiers or by elites in the vicinity of military camps, thus perhaps a similar approach to fostering the loyalty of the soldiers was being enacted in this region too.

Why these elites may have ceased to act as patrons of Mithraic communities after the early fourth century is unclear. One possible explanation is the support now given almost exclusively to the Christian church by the imperial family. Given that the imperial court was now relatively mobile and cities such as Sirmium and Trier were made imperial capitals in the Tetrarchic period, the relationship between the elites in the provinces and the emperor became ever closer. As a result, there was far more to be gained in investing in religion preferred by the emperors. Indeed, as Salzman has demonstrated, there were only marginally more Christians than non-Christians known to have filled the role of *dux* in the fourth century, while in Gaul between A.D. 284 and 423, 20 out of 31 (65%) recorded aristocrats can be identified as Christians, while a further two converted to Christianity.²⁰⁴

In regards to the *duces*, we must also bear in mind that many of the frontier commanders in the latter half of the fourth century were not from within in the Roman Empire. The Gothic chieftains Alatheus and Saphrac were made *duces* in Pannonia following the settlement of their people in the region.²⁰⁵ Not only did these men have no personal vested interest in the Mysteries of Mithras, nor did the people they led, thus there was little cause for them to sponsor any further restoration of Mithraic temples.

Finally, it may be that the Mithraic congregations that certain elites had supported now moved elsewhere or, as postulated, no longer displayed the levels of commitment they once did and consequently the elites saw little benefit in supporting the cult. That the Mithraic community sometimes moved away appears to have been the case in North Africa, for, as we saw in Chapter 1, the fort at Lambaesis to which the mithraeum was connected was abandoned by the mid-third century. It is unfortunate we do not know what became of the mithraea restored by elites at Virnunum or Poetovio, but at Carnuntum III there is no evidence of further occupation of this mithraeum after the

²⁰⁴ Salzman (2002) 131, Table 3.1.

²⁰⁵ Amm. Marc. 31.4-16.

Tetrarchic dedication (though we may assume it continued for a period) and the mithraeum was not repaired following the earthquake in the mid-fourth century.²⁰⁶

Rome

Statius' reference to the cult of Mithras in the *Thebaid* suggests the cult was widely known in Rome even in the first century,²⁰⁷ yet there is little to indicate any elite involvement in the cult before the fourth century. Why did such men choose this time to establish Mithraic communities? To begin with, despite the upheavals of the third century, the aristocracy in Rome had survived in much the fashion it had under the early *principate* until the Tetrarchic period.²⁰⁸ However, from the Tetrarchic period onwards the social landscape of the Roman elite underwent significant changes, particularly in regards to the size of the aristocracy. Prior to the reign of Constantine, it is estimated that the senate of Rome had *ca.*600 members; by the mid-fourth century it is believed to have been around 2,000.²⁰⁹ Despite attempts by Constantius II to curb this inflation of the aristocracy,²¹⁰ under Valentinian I the senate continued to expand, with *duces*, *comites* and tribunes also now included. Status was absolutely fundamental to the identity of the traditional aristocracy, who thought of themselves as “the better part of the human race”,²¹¹ yet now they were faced with barriers that had separated them from their inferiors being removed. Naturally, this state of affairs led to friction between the older, established aristocratic families and the newly promoted men. For one, it led to emergence of new terms such as *spectabilis* and *illustres* alongside the more traditional *clarissimus*, as a way for the major office holders to separate themselves from the more ‘ordinary’ senators.²¹²

Religion could also provide ways of differentiating the older families from the new. For generations, the holding of public priesthods had been a feature of aristocratic life and the close ties between the aristocracy and traditional polytheistic religions in Rome was still evident in fourth century, as a letter from Paulinus to an aspiring *clarissimate* in A.D. 398 attests to.²¹³ As a result, it appears some members of long established families sought to enhance their status by obtaining a number of priesthods, which included Mithraic titles, to separate themselves from these new men. Of course, in holding various priesthods, one wonders how committed these men were to these cults: did they separate their time between them equally? Did they have any particular preference among them? Furthermore, it is unclear how this would relate to the wider Mithraic community: did these

²⁰⁶ On the fourth century earthquake at Carnuntum, see Decker *et al.* (2006)

²⁰⁷ *Theb.* 1.179-210.

²⁰⁸ Jacques (1986) demonstrates that many families continue to appear across the ‘Third Century Crisis’ and into the Tetrarchic period, while the overall size of the senatorial order looks to have remained relatively consistent.

²⁰⁹ Salzman (2002) 31.

²¹⁰ 21.16.2.

²¹¹ *Sym. Ep.* 1.52.

²¹² Salzman (2002) 14.

²¹³ *Paul. Ep.* 8.3.

men set themselves up as the leaders of entire Mithraic community in Rome, or were they a community apart? Was there even a substantial Mithraic community in Rome at this time, given that few mithraea can be shown to have still been in use in the city? If there were large numbers of slaves and citizens partaking in the cult, why would the elites look to add to their prestige by holding titles relating to a cult that predominantly consisted of men of a lower status? Unfortunately, while the evidence for these elites can provide us with insights as to their relationship with the cult, the other Mithraic adherents of fourth century Rome remain silent.

There is no evidence that these Mithraic communities survived beyond the end of the fourth century. In the early fifth century document the ‘Speech of Praetextatus’ by Macrobius, many deities are listed in relation to a almighty solar deity, yet Mithras is not referred to once (even more notable given Praetextatus was a *pater*) suggests the cult was no longer a considerable force in Rome at all, let alone among the aristocracy.²¹⁴ If we look at the circumstances that these senatorial Mithraic adherents found themselves in by the late fourth century, it is unsurprising this had become the case. The membership of these groups had been based largely on family relationships, but as time progressed and the older members of the congregation passed away the social ties of the surviving younger members would likely shift through marriage and career postings, resulting in an increased exposure to other cults, making their membership to the Mithras cult unbeneficial to maintaining their social capital. There is no reason to assume that it was to Christianity these adherents turned. There is no evidence that the likes of Symmachus or Nicomachus Flavianus the Elder ever joined a Mithraic community, nor the many other senators that came from long established families. Between A.D. 368 and 395, Michele Salzman has identified that the position of Praetorian Prefect was held by a mixture of non-Christians and Christians and almost none of these, save for Praetextatus, are known to have been Mithraic initiates, while just 31% of aristocrats respectively could be identified as Christians.²¹⁵

Furthermore, the links between the aristocracy of Rome and North Africa remained strong, with many senators in Rome (including some of our Mithraic initiates) serving in Africa, but the still predominantly non-Christian African aristocracy (Salzman identified just 35% as Christian before the fifth century) never appears to have taken to the cult of Mithras at all.²¹⁶ Therefore, due to their high social mobility, the members of these Mithraic congregations would have been continuously exposed to other cults in both Rome and abroad, which in turn would have lessened their already limited commitment to the cult as they sought to bring their religious orientation in line with their new friends, colleagues and families. It is interesting to note that those who served as governors in North Africa do not appear in any subsequent Mithraic inscriptions after their posting ceased.

²¹⁴ Liebeschuetz (1999).

²¹⁵ Salzman (2002) 118, Table 3.1.

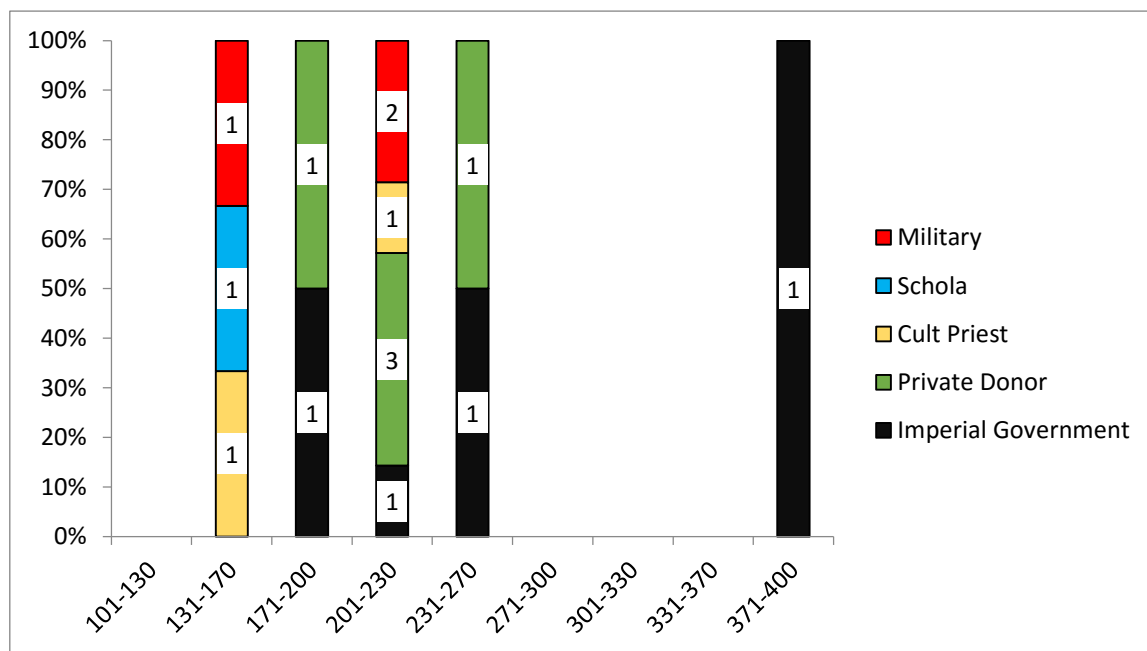
²¹⁶ Salzman (2002) Table 3.1.

PATRONAGE AND MEMBERSHIP
IN OTHER RELIGIOUS GROUPS

We have seen how the patrons and initiates of the cult of Mithras were drawn increasingly from the elites, but how does this compare to other cults? Did the followers of Isis, Magna Mater or Christ differ greatly to that of Mithras? Although the festivals of Isis survived into the fifth century, as we have seen, her temples, along with those of Sarapis, failed to attract significant investment after the Severan period. Christianity on the other hand went from strength to strength – can any distinction be ascertained from the evidence of their patrons and initiates that might explain this discrepancy? Perhaps the most important question is what role women played in these other cults, as women were prohibited from the cult of Mithras; does the presence of women in a cult make any considerable difference to the spread and prosperity of a cult?

The Cult of Isis/Sarapis

Figure 14: Patrons of Temples to Isis and Sarapis²¹⁷



In Fig. 14 the known patrons of temples and shrines to Isis/Sarapis from the second to fourth centuries are illustrated. Although the cult had been present in Italy for some time, it was not until the latter half of the first century that the imperial government provided funds for building work associated with one of the cult's temples, with Domitian restoring the Temple to Isis on the Campus Martius. In

²¹⁷ 100-130: *CIL* 13.5233. 131-170: *CIL* 3.12387 = *AE* 1891, 88; *CIL* 11.3123; *CIL* 14.2901. 171-200: *Eutrop. Brev.* 7.23.5; 201-230: *AE* 1975.727; *AE* 1990.778; *AE* 1992, 1412 = *AE* 2000.1209; *CIL* 3.12385 = *AE* 1891, 87 = *AE* 1895, 61; *CIL* 6.570 = *CIL* 6.30796; *CIL* 13.5233; *SIRIS* 713. 231-270: Jouffroy (1986) 144; *RIB* 3.3001. 371-400: *AE* 1961, 152 = *AE* 1968, 86 = *AE* 1971, 67.

subsequent periods, a variety of people acted as patrons of such projects, with soldiers, private donors and a *schola* all contributing to the construction or repair of these temples. The culmination of this was Caracalla's construction of an isseum on the Quirinal in the early third century, the only definite example of a temple to Isis/Sarapis built by an emperor. However, notable by their absence are local magistrates, who were often one of the main motors for civic building in the earlier periods of imperial rule.²¹⁸ It is possible that they did provide funds for such projects and that we simply lack any surviving evidence of this, but a more plausible explanation is that they had little to no involvement in the erection and maintenance of such structures. After the early third century the evidence for patronage becomes much scarcer, with a break of over a century until the next datable inscription for the restoration of a shrine, the aforementioned example from Portus, which was restored at the behest of the emperors.

In regards to who worshipped Isis/Sarapis, Takács' study of dedications to these deities on the northern frontiers indicates that the cults of Mithras and Isis/Sarapis drew on the same social groups for adherents, with soldiers, *portoria* staff and occasionally private individuals.²¹⁹ One obvious difference between the cult of Isis/Sarapis and that of Mithras was that women could join the former. However, only *ca.* 18% of the inscriptions dedicated to Isis were erected by women, although how representative this is of the actual male to female ratio in the cult is unclear. Textual and iconographic evidence suggests women were present in notable numbers. In the *Metamorphoses*, the *Isidi Navigium* is described as being led by women carrying various objects, while the group carrying torches to light the procession consisted of both men and women.²²⁰ At Pompeii, wall paintings in the Temple of Isis depict 17 men and 12 females, while women are also evident in other frescoes depicting the Isaic festivals.²²¹ However, there is no evidence that the chief priest of any temple Isis/Sarapis was a woman: Porphyry does not name any women among the priests of the Egyptian gods, while in the *Metamorphoses* all the principal priests are all described as male.²²² Furthermore, the aforementioned inscription from Esna indicates that women, at least in this case, were not allowed to enter the *cella* of Isis/Sarapis sanctuaries, which would have made it impossible for them to become head priests.

Dedications to Isis and Sarapis follow a similar chronological pattern to the general epigraphic habit, becoming increasingly rare during the third and fourth centuries,²²³ thus leaving us uncertain as to whether the composition of these groups altered. Just four inscriptions from Rome erected by senatorial elites in the second half of the fourth century indicate they were members of the cult. Of

²¹⁸ Patterson (2006) 185.

²¹⁹ Takács (1995).

²²⁰ Apul. *Met.* 11.13.

²²¹ Heyob (1975) 83.

²²² Porph. *Abst.* 4.8; Apul. *Met.* 2.28, 11.12, 20.

²²³ Mora (1990) 448-450, 484-485, 520.

these, two were males who held Isiac priesthoods, while the wife of Ceionius Rufius Volusianus Senior, Caecinae Lollianae, was also listed as a priestess of Isis. The wife of Praetextatus (who appears to have had no affiliation with Isis) was recorded as an *Isaica* in one inscription, although on Praetextatus' funerary monument makes no reference to this status.²²⁴

The Cult of Magna Mater

From its first appearance in Rome, the cult of Magna Mater could rely on the imperial government for support, for it was they who brought the goddess to the capital in 205 B.C. Later, Augustus himself renovated the temple on the Palatine Hill and made Magna Mater patroness of the imperial family.²²⁵ Such support runs all the way through to the fourth century, when an imperial governor restored a temple at Carthage in A.D. 336. Temples to Magna Mater also garnered the support of local elites, such as a decurion who restored a temple of Magna Mater at Civitas Nattabutum in North Africa during the reign of Caracalla.²²⁶

Despite the official status of the cult, at least initially Roman citizens were discouraged from joining. In the first century B.C. Dionysus of Halicarnassus talks of how praetors would perform sacrifices and celebrate games to honour Magna Mater, but her priesthoods could only be held by Phrygian men and women, while participation in her processions was also not permitted among citizens.²²⁷ However, this had clearly changed by the second century, as inscriptions referring to Roman citizens holding such priesthoods appear along with a new position of head-priest (*archigallus*), which was always held by a Roman citizen. The oldest inscription referring to an *archigallus* comes from Lugdunum and dates to A.D. 160. The man in question was also a *sevir Augustalis*, suggesting he also served the imperial cult, a further indication of how integrated the cult of Magna Mater had become in mainstream Roman society.²²⁸ Additionally inscriptions from Salona in Dalmatia inform us the temple to Magna Mater was restored here twice using public money, suggesting the temple was an important feature in civic life.²²⁹

Women clearly played a role in the cult of Magna Mater, but, like the cult of Isis, precisely how prominent they were is uncertain. Of dedications made in the western provinces, Spickermann found only 10% were erected by women, and the priesthoods of the cult appear to have been held mostly by men. However, women could fund the repair of temples and cult ceremonies and in some places the number of dedications erected by them outnumbers those made by men, such as at Lectoure. They

²²⁴ Praetextatus' wife Paulina: *ILS* 1260; 1259.

²²⁵ *CCCA* 3.1.

²²⁶ Carthage: *CIL* 8.24521 *Civitas Nattabutum*: *ILAlg* 12.6094

²²⁷ *Dion. Hal.* 2.19.4-5, translation from Bowden (2010) 98.

²²⁸ *CIL* 13.1723, 1752 and 2026.

²²⁹ *CCCA* 6.153, 155

could also play a prominent role in the ceremonies of the cult, such as the sacrifice of the bull (*taurobolia*) and in eviration ceremonies enacted by some *galli*. In the case of the latter, female members of the cult community appeared to have filled the role of Magna Mater in receiving the genitals of a *gallus* who sought to enact the eviration of the goddess' consort, Attis.²³⁰

Evidence relating to membership of the Magna Mater cult in the fourth century generally mirrors that of the Mithras cult in Rome, with references to *taurobolia* mostly found on the same inscriptions that record the position of the elites in the Mithras cult. Participants of the *taurobolia* who held Mithraic titles included Magius Donatus Severianus (in the early fourth century), Praetextatus and Alfenius Ceionius Julianus Kamenius.²³¹ As with the cults of Mithras, it appears that their involvement with the cult of Magna Mater was largely born out of a desire to separate themselves from the new men of the senate; in regards to anyone of any lower social status, there is no evidence. As Alan Cameron has pointed out, instances of *taurobolia* being performed between A.D. 320 and 370 are rare, which suggests the spate of sacrifices between A.D 370 and 390 did not follow a continuous precedent, but was a revival of such activities by these aristocratic groups.²³² However, this also means that their membership was likely a product of their kinship ties, which meant that, like their affiliation to the cult of Mithras, subsequent changes in their social networks could have drawn them away from the cult of Magna Mater. Indeed, it is perhaps no coincidence that evidence for membership to both cults among these elites ends around the same time.

Christian Communities

From the literary evidence it is clear that Christian congregations, like other cults, were led by those of the highest social standing in the group, thus reflecting the structure of wider society. In the Third Epistle of John, Christians are said to meet in the home of the Diotrophes, who was described as a leading member and patron of the community, while in the third century, bishops such as Cyprian and Paul of Samosata came from a wealthy, if not elite, background.²³³ The house-church at Dura-Europos gives no indication as to whether the owner of the house acted as a leader of the community, but given that this appears to have been the case in the nearby synagogue, along with the picture that emerges from early literary sources, it is highly plausible that this was the case.²³⁴ That these early Christian communities would form around the house of an individual would suggest that they were

²³⁰ Spickermann (2013).

²³¹ *CIMRM* 523, 420, 515.

²³² Cameron (2011) 152.

²³³ Countryman (1980) 183-186.

²³⁴ White (1990) 146.

predominantly made up of members and associates of the household,²³⁵ which would mean that, like the cult of Mithras, social capital played a significant role in attracting new Christians.²³⁶

Of course, from the accession of Constantine things began to change. For one, the Church could now count on the imperial family for patronage. Such favouritism had been displayed by emperors towards cults before, yet the subsequent, almost uninterrupted, support given by the imperial family to Christianity was unprecedented. However, like the movement of churches into the centre of the urban landscape, elites did not immediately flock toward the Church in the reign of Constantine. From the first half of the fourth century, the leaders of Christian communities drew, in the words of A.H.M. Jones, largely “from the middle classes, professional men, officials, and above all *curiales*”. Indeed, the fathers of Gregory of Nazianus, John Chrysostom, Augustine and Severus of Antioch all served as local magistrates while their sons went on to serve in the Church. It was not until the late fourth century that members of the highest strata of Roman society began to take up roles in the church. As outlined above in the work of Salzman, it was only in this period than Christians become increasingly evident among the elites of Italy and Gaul, when the likes of Ambrose and Paulinus of Nola, who had both served as governors, obtained roles as heads of Christian communities, while Nectarius, made bishop of Constantinople by Theodosius in 381, was drawn directly from his role as senator.²³⁷

Finally, what role did women play in these Christian communities? The archaeological and historical texts infer a considerable number of adherents in the early church were female, with a letter of A.D. 251 reporting that over fifteen hundred widows were in the care of the Church in Rome, while of tunics donated to the church at Circa in A.D. 303, sixteen belonged to men, while eighty-two were provided by women.²³⁸ This was not simply limited to Christian communities in the interior of the Empire, for archaeological evidence of Christians in fourth century Noricum and Pannonia also hints at a strong female element, with many of those identified from inscriptions and burials being women, with examples at Lentia, Virunum, Ovilava, Brigetio and Siscia.²³⁹ Women certainly played major roles in the church hierarchy, even if they were not the leaders of Christian communities; Paul makes reference to a deaconess at Cencreae, while Pliny the Younger also mentions women in the same role.²⁴⁰ However, the most prominent early Christian women served as patrons, rather than as leaders, of Christian communities. One such example was Melania the Elder in the fourth century, a widow who converted to Christianity in Rome before heading to Alexandria, where she spent time among ascetics, and then on to the Holy Land where she founded a monastery on the Mount of Olives. While

²³⁵ Judge (1960) 60.

²³⁶ The importance of social capital in the formation of early Christian communities has previously been discussed by Bremmer (2006).

²³⁷ Van Dam (2007) 346-7. See also Rapp (2005) 172-207, esp. 188.

²³⁸ Lane-Fox (1986) 310.

²³⁹ For catalogues of early Christian evidence in Pannonia, see Gáspár (2002) and Migotti (1997). On Noricum, see Lentia: *CIL* 3. 13532; Virunum: *CIL* 3. 4921; Ovilava: Noll (1954) 47; Brigetio: *RIU* 634; Siscia: *CIL* 3. 3996a.

²⁴⁰ *Rom.* 16:1-2; Pliny *Ep.* 10.96.

Melania became a follower of Rufinus, another aristocratic widow named Paula followed a similar path, abandoning her family to finance Jerome's monastery in the Holy Land.²⁴¹ Even though women could evidently play a prominent role as participants and benefactors in the cults of Magna Mater or Isis, to discard one's social responsibilities entirely to live life supporting the church was something rather different. Thus, while there were limits on the role of women in the Christian church, arguably their autonomy and the proportion of them was perhaps as unusual as the cult of Mithras' complete exclusion of them.

Discussion

There were few differences between Mithraic congregations and those of the cults of Isis/Sarapis, Magna Mater or Christianity in the first to third centuries. Their congregations appear to have mostly consisted of people from the middling classes, although as time progressed their support expanded to include people of elite status as members and patrons. However, this was a staggered process which depended on how long the cult had been present in the Roman world. In the case of Magna Mater, she could count Augustus among her patrons in the late first century B.C., while Isis/Sarapis later received the backing of the Flavians and then Caracalla. For the cult of Mithras and Christianity, these cults had to wait until the early decades of the fourth century to gain such patrons.

Undoubtedly, the most important patron of the Church from Constantine onwards was the emperor himself. Given its monotheistic nature, Christianity arguably had an advantage over other cults, including those of Isis/Sarapis, Magna Mater and Mithras, when receiving imperial benefaction, for as the emperors were now Christians they were likely to provide sustained support rather than exhibit fleeting generosity. In contrast, their predecessors support for the temples of Isis/Sarapis, Magna Mater and Mithras do not appear to have included the emperors actually being initiated into the cults themselves, or at least going beyond the initial stages, and thus they were never bonded to these cults enough to warrant their successors continuing the same trends. Furthermore, the continued support of the imperial family for Christianity set a precedent, as from the fourth century onwards the social networks emanating from the emperor drew increasing numbers towards the church. Even if one wondered whether this imperial benefaction would last beyond the reigns of Constantine or Constantius II, by the time of Theodosius it was clear that imperial support for the church was not like the occasional benefaction exhibited towards other cults in the past. Christianity may not have become the religion of the entire Roman Empire in the fourth century, but it was the religion of the majority of emperors and this was a considerable change.

²⁴¹ Palladius, *The Laustic History* 54; Cloke (2000) 440-441; Miller (2005) 207-228.

Finally, there was one particular difference between the cult of Mithras and the membership of other cults: the presence of women. Yet while women were active in the cult of Isis as initiates, benefactors and even priests, there is little evidence to suggest membership to cult gave them any special privileges in terms of their place in their secular affairs. The same also appears to be the case of the cult of Magna Mater. However, in Christian communities, the status of women was unusual, particularly in regards to widows who did not have to remarry and could retain their own property. As a result, arguably Christianity placed itself in further tension with society via the unusual status of women, just as the cult of Mithras may have done by creating a community without women. However, as stated, we do not know how gender roles affect religious adherence in this model, so such an observation can only remain tentative.

CONCLUSION

During the first to third centuries, adherents of the cult of Mithras consisted predominantly of rank-and-file soldiers, customs-officials, slaves, freedmen and ordinary Roman citizens. By the late third century, most of these groups were still represented in the Mithraic epigraphic record, with the *portoria* being the one exception. However, it is around this time that men of elite status begin to appear in Mithraic inscriptions either as initiates or, more predominantly, as patrons. It was not completely unheard of for men of elite status to be connected to the cult, but it was a rarity and such a chronological concentration of inscriptions referring to governors, *duces* and senators involved with the cult was unprecedented. Furthermore, this period also marked the only known dedication to Mithras by an emperor.

As a result, this looks to represent another aspect of how any tension that existed between society and the Mithras cult could have been reduced. Membership to the cult had never forced adherents to re-evaluate their relationship with their social superiors, rather it actually appears to have reflected and reinforced the hierarchy of the secular world, but emperors, governors and senators had rarely involved themselves in the cult prior to the Tetrarchic period. Yet now emperors were proclaiming Mithras ‘the Protector of the Empire’ and governors were paying for the restoration of mithraea. That the inscriptions that recorded these acts of patronage were on public display is unlikely, but one would still expect such actions would become known outside of the Mithraic community. When these men acted as patrons, or in the case of certain senators, became initiates, there was little reason to suspect Mithraic meetings were the setting of deviant practices. Indeed, this may even have attracted more people to the cult, as they sought to associate themselves with a cult that had the stamp of approval from the imperial government. Yet such a situation would not necessarily be beneficial to the average commitment of Mithraic adherents, as there was now less risk in attending mithraea, while a wave of new adherents who were not from the social networks of traditional adherents, but simply sought to

win the approval of the government, would also reduce commitment as they would inevitably include free-riders.

However, an alternative possibility does exist in regards to how the patronage of elites may have affected the tension between the cult and society and/or commitment of cult members. Against the backdrop of recurring civil war across the third and fourth centuries, might the blessing of elites in one region lead to the ire of others in a different area? If some elites backed the cult of Mithras, reducing the tension in their local area, in other areas this may have actually caused greater tension between the cult and society. Might non-members have been resentful of the favouritism shown towards the cult of Mithras? Furthermore, might some adherents become even more committed to the cult if they knew the local governor, *dux* or even the emperors were willing to support the cult? Might they have been more willing to invest in the cult if they thought that it now provided greater scope for earthly rewards? Once again it is very difficult to verify whether the sociological model can indeed be utilised in this situation or not.

In regards to other cults, the evidence suggests that they too followed a similar pattern of integration into Roman society that the cult of Mithras did. Magna Mater was introduced into the Roman world with official backing and received the patronage of the first emperor, Augustus. The cult of Isis, although present in the Roman world for nearly as long as Magna Mater, did not receive any official recognition until the late first century. Christianity, which shared similar sociological traits to the cult of Mithras and looks to have spread to the Roman world around the same time, received imperial patronage only slightly later than the cult of Mithras. However, Christianity differed to these other cults in that imperial patronage was not fleeting, rather it had the continuing support (to varying extents) of all emperors from Constantine onwards, apart from during the short reign of Julian. In the case of Isis/Sarapis, there was a gap of over 100 years between Domitian's restoration work in Rome and Caracalla's construction of a temple to Isis on the Quirinal. The cult of Magna Mater remained a major Roman deity, but there is little evidence of a temple to her being constructed or restored by an emperor after Augustus. We find the same pattern in the cult of Mithras. After the first decades of the fourth century, there is no further evidence for an emperor, governor or *dux* supporting the cult in the provinces, as many of these men either turned to Christianity or, in the case of *duces*, led groups who had little to no prior relationship with the cult.

The fleeting patronage of emperors, governors and *duces* appears to have little bearing on the relationship between senators in Rome and the Mithras cult, whose involvement mostly dates to a later period. These men look to have been attracted to the cult in order to gain another priesthood that would differentiate them from the 'new men' who now flooded the senate. That this involvement was

also only brief is probably the result of the lack of social capital the cult provided to their successors who were constantly exposed to the beliefs of other elites in both Rome and North Africa.

Another aspect that emerges from the evidence is increased evidence for localisation. The connection between the cult, the military and the imperial government that is suggested through inscriptions on the Danube and North Africa may reflect a cult that had become a symbol of Roman military power: the ‘unconquerable’ Mithras watching over a military fraternity of ‘brothers’. In Gaul, we find a Mithraic congregation not led by a soldier or supported by the government, but led by a doctor and his son. Given that the mithraea in this area were located close to healing springs, that a congregation was led by doctor may be a reflection of the god’s status in this region as a healing deity. In Rome, we find a Mithras tied to the aristocratic identity of senators who felt their standing undermined as more ‘new men’ were added to the Senate. Additionally, the terminology used in inscriptions varies from place to place, with *carax*, *Midre* and *fanum* replacing *corax*, Mithras and *templum* at Gimmeldingen, alternative names for *corax* and *nymphus* among one of the senatorial groups in Rome and Mithras referred to as *Meterae* by some Dalmatian communities.

The evidence also provides some notable insights into the grade system during this period. In the Tetrarchic period, the pre-eminence of the *pater* is still evident, as in a number of cases we find his approval being required to make donations to the Mithraic community. The term *pater patrum* is also begins to become a more regular occurrence in inscriptions, although why is unclear. In some cases it appears to have been used to denote a line of succession regarding the position of congregation leader, with the sons of these *patrēs patrum* serving as *patrēs*. It may also have been to establish a head of a Mithraic community made up of numerous congregations that each had their own *pater*. However, while the position of *pater* looks to have remained intact in this period, the status of other grades is far less certain. That the lowest grade paid for a mithraeum and all its fittings at Gimmeldingen is striking, given that one would expect someone of such generosity to hold a higher grade. Furthermore, in some of the inscriptions from Rome the *corax* grade is amalgamated with the title of *pater*. This would seem to suggest that *corax* was no longer deemed the lowest grade, but held a much more esteemed position in these congregations. It is unfortunate that the provincial evidence ceases in A.D. 325 and that we cannot track any further alterations to the grade system. That the epigraphic record suggests the roles of certain grades were changing has significant bearing on the organisation of the cult. Given the indications that the cult was becoming increasingly localised, we cannot assume that simply because grades were still in use among a senatorial congregation in Rome the same would apply to those on the Rhine and Danube.

CHAPTER 4: MITHRAIC RITUAL PRACTICE IN LATE ANTIQUITY

INTRODUCTION

As was outlined in the Introduction, rituals play an important role in reaffirming the commitment of cult followers. The degree of commitment a ritual generates is based on the extent to which people participate in it and the costs (e.g. financial, physical and psychological demands) that are incurred through participation. Ritual practices that require extensive participation and which are expensive to partake in prevent free-riders from joining the cult and reducing the overall level of commitment, while also serving to enhance the religious capital of existing members. Furthermore, the more abnormal a ritual may seem to mainstream society, the greater the tension that is created between the cult community and society, which will subsequently increase the commitment of cult members.

The aim of this chapter is to establish what evidence there is for changes in Mithraic ritual practice during the late third and fourth centuries, how this would have affected levels of participation among cult members, if there was any considerable reduction in the costs these rituals exacted, and to what degree they still served to maximise the religious capital of the cult's adherents. To do so, I will first outline the evidence for Mithraic ritual practices in earlier periods, after which I shall draw together the evidence from the late third century onwards to demonstrate what changes are evident. I will then compare this with wider evidence for changes in ritual practice during the fourth century to see how unique the evidence for Mithraic rituals was in this period.

Unfortunately, there is much that remains unclear regarding ritual practices in Roman World, including those conducted by the Mithras cult, with much of our understanding the product of interpretation based on fragmentary evidence. Problems with the evidence are manifold: there are elements of ritual practice that do not survive in the archaeological record, such as offerings that consisted of perishable materials (e.g. cakes and libations),²⁴² while other actions such as prayers, hymns and body movements may leave no trace unless noted in the textual record. In the case of the cult of Mithras, the survival of votive altars indicates prayers were made while it is also possible Mithraic hymns were sung, but what these consisted of is unknown.²⁴³ Furthermore, objects that were once offered as votives might also be removed from their original context and reused for a variety of reasons: they were made of precious metals; they consisted of materials that could be used elsewhere (e.g. *spolia*); they were removed by the adherents themselves when abandoning the temple; or they

²⁴² Sozom. *Hist. eccl.* 2.4 records such offerings at Hebron near Mambre.

²⁴³ The wall-paintings of the *Santa Prisca* mithraeum indicate Mithraic hymns may have been sung, given that the words 'rehearse in song' were once evident, although have now disappeared, see Vermaseren and Van Essen (1965) 240.

were taken by others in order to desacralize the temple. Thus, when these objects are retrieved from the archaeological record what their meaning in a ritual context was is not always discernible. Given the lack of attention paid to later occupation levels in the excavations of the 19th and early 20th centuries, in many cases we do not even know what the final context of an object was when it entered the archaeological record. Finally, the surviving evidence also tends to be over-representative of the wealthier members of a congregation, as they were the ones who could afford offerings that are more likely to survive in the archaeological record, such as altars and statues. As a result, we can never be certain as to how accurate a representation we have of ritual practices, but this does not mean conclusions cannot be drawn from the extant evidence.

MITHRAIC RITUALS PRIOR TO THE LATE THIRD CENTURY

Initiations

Initiation rites were one of the key attributes of the so-called mystery-cults, although it is only the cults of Mithras and that of Isis/Sarapis that have provided us with substantial evidence of these rites in a mystery-cult setting during the Roman period.²⁴⁴ These rituals served to reveal at least some of the mysteries to the cult members, while also marking a transformation in the initiate that is often described as akin to a metaphorical (or literal on the sacred plane) resurrection.²⁴⁵ Anthropologists have found that initiation rituals usually consist of three stages: separation, transition and incorporation. In the separation stage, the initiate's original identity is stripped away, followed by a transitional period in which the actions needed to bring about incorporation, when the initiate receives their new identity, are undertaken. It is often the case that participants will have to undergo such processes a number of times as more of the mysteries were revealed, such as was the case in the *Metamorphoses* (mid-second century) where Lucius undergoes several initiations in the Mysteries of Isis/Sarapis.²⁴⁶ Given the existence of the grade system in the Mithras cult, it is likely that Mithraic adherents would have undergone various initiations as they moved from grade to grade.²⁴⁷

Of course, the costs of these rituals could vary from cult to cult. Members of the cult of Isis/Sarapis eventually had to shave their heads when they had passed through enough initiation stages, which would have made their membership of the cult apparent to anyone on the street. In contrast, the cult of Mithras does not appear to have imposed any overt display of loyalty on its

²⁴⁴ Other mystery-cults, such as that of Bacchus, look to have included such rites but what they involved and whether they were still enacted in the Roman period is unclear, see Bowden (2010) 129-133. The Eleusinian Mysteries did continue to be conducted, but unlike those of Isis and Mithras these were confined to a single location in the East.

²⁴⁵ Eliade (1958) 118.

²⁴⁶ In this context I equate Sarapis with Osiris.

²⁴⁷ In a modern parallel, Scientologists and members of Rosicrucian organisations undergo a series of rituals which are designed to bring them closer to total self-transmutation, see Stark and Bainbridge (1987) 199.

adherents that would have been recognisable to non-members as a consequence of initiation. However, we should not underestimate the costs of the Mithraic initiation rituals because their results were not evident to the general public. To assess what costs were involved in Mithraic initiations, we must take a closer look at what these rituals appeared to involve.

Unfortunately, precisely what form Mithraic initiations took cannot be established, but a range of iconographic and archaeological evidence allows for at least a partial reconstruction. One source that is particularly enlightening is seven frescoes which have been preserved to varying degrees on the walls of a mithraeum located at S. Maria Capua Vetere in Campania. These images, which date to the early third century, depict:²⁴⁸

1. An initiate naked and blindfolded. A second figure stands behind the initiate, with his hands placed on the initiate's shoulders. This second figure wears a short tunic and is identified by Gordon as *mystagogue*.
2. The initiate kneeling on the floor, still blindfolded and naked. The second figure once again has his hand on the initiate's shoulder. A third figure, wearing a cloak and a Phrygian cap, holds what appears to be either spear or lighted torch to the initiate's face. Given his attire and role in the proceedings it is likely that the third figure is a *pater*.
3. The centre of the panel is damaged, but the initiate is still visible. The initiate, although still naked and with his hands bound, is now standing and no longer blindfolded. The initiate is held by the second figure while the *pater* remains to left-hand side.
4. The initiate, down on one knee, has his hands bound behind him. The second figure stands behind him, holding an object over his head, with the *pater* to the left. I am inclined to think that, based on the archaeological evidence and Tertullian's reference to the crowning of an initiate (see below), that Vermaseren's reading of this as a crown was correct.²⁴⁹
5. Most of the fresco is lost, but the initiate can be seen lying down, with several objects around him. Another object, possibly a scorpion, is placed on the prostrate initiate.
6. Next to nothing remains of this panel. The initiate is shown kneeling, being pushed with some force by the second figure, who is now on the left. The *pater* is now on the right, once again holding what appears to be lighted torch towards the initiate.
7. The initiate is shown kneeling, his hands clasped behind his head, gripped by the second figure. The *pater* holds an object, likely a sword. Other objects, which are unclear, sit on the floor next to initiate.

²⁴⁸ Based on the reading of the frescoes by Gordon (2009).

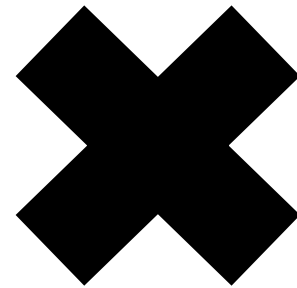
²⁴⁹ Vermaseren (1971) 37; Tert. *De Coro.* 15

Another depiction of what appears to be a Mithraic initiation ritual is to be found on a vessel recovered from a mithraeum at Mainz. On one side of the vessel a scene looks to depict a *pater* pointing a bow and arrow at an initiate, echoing the image of Mithras firing his bow into the rock from which water flowed forth.²⁵⁰ It is possible that such an image was originally present amongst the Capua frescoes and has been lost over time, but given that the icon of the water-miracle is mainly confined to the Rhine and Danube frontiers it may be that this ritual was unique to Mithraic initiations in these areas, rather than one which was universally practiced.²⁵¹

A third instance of such evidence comes from the Caesarea Maritima Mithraeum, where several poorly preserved panels appear to show what could be an initiation ceremony. Panel A depicts a man on his knees (the initiate) in front of a standing figure (the *pater*), while vague traces of a third figure could be discerned. The kneeling figure looks to be holding an object in his hands, with a crown seemingly the most likely explanation. In Panel B, the first two figures are again shown in the same stances, though the standing one now points a sword at his kneeling counterpart who is depicted as being naked. In the final panel, a rectangular object (perhaps a pedestal) is placed between the two figures, which are now both standing, on top of which was a yellow orb. One of the figures looks to be holding a staff, while both he and the second figure look to be reaching for the orb. The second figure now wears a crown.²⁵²

Figure 15: A Sword from the Riegel Mithraeum (Source: http://www.landesmuseum.de/website/dyndata/Imperium_Mithras_04_Kultschwert.jpg)

Archaeological evidence relating to these images has not been found in many mithraea, but some German mithraea have been found to contain swords, arrows and crowns. The second mithraeum at GÜglingen was destroyed in the early third century while still in use and amongst the finds recovered from the temple were two swords (one of which had been placed across an altar), a crown and arrow fragments. The Künzing mithraeum, which was destroyed around the same time, also yielded a complete sword, a fragment of another sword, an arrowhead and a knife. At the mithraeum of Riegel, a sword was found that was bent in a semi-circle in the middle of the blade (Fig. 15), suggesting it could have placed on someone to make it appear as though they had been run-through with it.²⁵³



²⁵⁰ Beck (2000).

²⁵¹ On the water-miracle, see Claus (2000) 71-74.

²⁵² Bull (1978) 85-88.

²⁵³ Gügingen: Kortüm and Neth (2002); Künzing: Schmotz (2000); Riegel: Cammerer (1976).

Despite the fact the accounts by Christian writers regarding the cult of Mithras are not entirely reliable, much of this iconographic and archaeological evidence concurs with Tertullian's (d.240) description of Mithraic initiations, which states that these rites involved a crown and a sword. Tertullian also mentions that Mithraic initiations culminated in the metaphorical resurrection of the initiate.²⁵⁴ This also appears to be correct, as the aforementioned images do suggest that the Mithraic initiates, just as with of initiation into other groups, 'died' during the process, only to be reborn in their new Mithraic status.

Although it is not depicted in the images from Capua or Mainz, it is probable that these initiation rituals would begin with an act of purification.²⁵⁵ Such rites were conducted before initiations in the cult of Isis/Sarapis and are common element in the initiation rites among earlier Greek mystery cults.²⁵⁶ Basins which look to have contained water for these rites have been found in either the ante-room or at the beginning of nave in various mithraea.²⁵⁷ Honey may also have been used to purify initiates of the lion and Persian grades, as Porphyry describes:

The votaries use honey for many and diverse symbolic purposes, because of its variety of properties, since it possesses both purgative and preserving virtue. For by honey many things are preserved from corruption and wounds of long standing are cleansed. It is also sweet to the taste and is gathered from flowers by bees which are regarded as born of cattle. When therefore into the hands of those initiated into the lion grade honey is poured for washing instead of water, they are charged to keep their hands clean from all wrong and injury and defilement; the offering of actual water to the initiate is avoided as being hostile to the fire with its purifying qualities. The tongue also is purified from all sin by honey. And when honey is offered to the Persian as the guardian of the fruits, its preservative virtue is symbolically expressed.²⁵⁸

Another aspect of these rituals that can be discerned from the archaeological record is that they would likely culminate in Mithras appearing with a burst of light in the midst of darkness. As discussed, in some mithraea there is evidence that the main relief was kept hidden, suggesting a moment of a 'grand reveal', while in some cases holes or niches that could have contained candles or lamps have been found in the wall behind where the main relief stood, indicating they would have been lit up from behind. Hollowed out Mithraic altars, such as those found at Carrawburgh and Koenigshoffen, also appear to have been used for similar effects.²⁵⁹ Given that the *cella* of mithraea were small, windowless spaces, once the door to these was closed no light could enter, while the initiate would have also been blindfolded, thus for them it would have been literally pitch-black as

²⁵⁴ *De Cor.* 15 and *De Prae. Hae.* 40, 3-4.

²⁵⁵ According to Gordon (1976) 120-121, the basin is also the recreation of the spring that was present in the original mithraeum.

²⁵⁶ *Met.* 11.3; Bremmer (2014) 5.

²⁵⁷ Clauss (2000) 73-74.

²⁵⁸ *De. Antro.* 15. Porphyry's account dates to the late third century, but as his work is based on earlier accounts, I attribute such rituals to this period.

²⁵⁹ Carrawburgh: *CIMRM* 847; Koenigshoffen: *CIMRM* 1366.

they underwent many of the trials. One can imagine that, having been placed in a highly emotional state, to have the blind-fold removed and to be hit with a sudden burst of light radiating from an image of Mithras would have had significant impact. Although we have no first-hand account surviving from a Mithraic adherent, the effects of such a display can be discerned from Lucius' initiation into the mysteries of Isis in the *Metamorphoses* when he talks of how sunlight appeared in the midst of darkness.²⁶⁰ It is possible that if the aforementioned images from Caesarea Maritima depict an initiation ceremony, the appearance of a golden orb on a pedestal may represent this aspect of the ritual.

Votive Practice

Inscribed altars are the most common form of Mithraic votive evidence to survive in the archaeological record, with examples having been found on most Mithraic sites across the Roman Empire. These altars could vary greatly in their style, with some having just a basic inscription etched onto them, while others displayed reliefs of varying styles, such as the tauroctony or images of Mithras and/or Sol.²⁶¹ Unfortunately, what was asked of Mithras to warrant these offerings is rarely recorded. In one example, Claudius Marcellus erected an altar in early third century Dalmatia to thank Mithras for helping him gain promotion to the position of *beneficarius*, thus Mithras could evidently be called upon to help with career prospects.²⁶² That Mithras is often referred to as 'unconquerable' would likely have had resonance among soldiers, as being unconquerable was part of their job-description. On an altar found near Angera in eastern Gaul, he is called 'Helper',²⁶³ adding further credence to the possibility that Mithras was predominantly seen as a healing deity in this region.

Reliefs were also offered as votives to Mithras. Most examples of these come from along the Rhine, Danube and Dacia. They were frequently erected by soldiers, but also by *vicari*, *sexviri* and *Augustali*.²⁶⁴ One of the most impressive reliefs comes from Dieburg in Germany, which depicts various scenes from the life of Mithras on one side and the myth of Phaeton on the other, an image unknown in any other Mithraic context.²⁶⁵

A great deal of ceramic evidence has emerged from many Mithraic sites, suggesting that food or libations may also have been offered as votives. However, this phenomenon has not been studied in detail as much of the evidence has not been recorded sufficiently. One exception to this is the

²⁶⁰ *Met.* 11.22-24.

²⁶¹ For altars bearing the image of the tauroctony in earlier periods, see *CIMRM* 339 (*San Clemente*). For depictions of Mithras and Sol: *CIMRM* 848 (Carrawburgh); *CIMRM* 1584 (Poetovio III).

²⁶² *CIMRM* 1881

²⁶³ *CIMRM* 717.

²⁶⁴ *CIMRM* 1543, 1659, 1959, 2047; *CIL* 3.1120; *CIL* 13.11611; *AE* 2008, 1019.

²⁶⁵ *CIMRM* 1247.

excavations of the mithraeum at Martigny, where 99 vessels were reconstructed and found to have names and votive formula inscribed upon them. The items in question were bowls and cups (largely the latter) which dated to the second and third centuries and which were imported regionally, from either Valais or the western Swiss Plateau.²⁶⁶

Offerings of incense also appear to have been commonplace in mithraea. Frescoes painted on the walls of the *Santa Prisca* Mithraeum in the early third century depict members of the lion grade presenting incense to the *pater*. Other images of incense offerings have been found at Mithraeum III at Heddernheim in Germany, the Mithraeum of the Animals at Ostia and in the earlier phases of the Carrawburgh mithraeum on Hadrian's Wall.²⁶⁷ Items used for the burning of incense have also been found in mithraea, with such evidence particularly prevalent in second century mithraea on the Rhine frontier, including Freiburg, Heddernheim, Köln and Stockstadt. A common source of fuel for incense burning in mithraea appears to have been pinecones. Pinecones have often been found depicted in Mithraic iconography, including examples from Aquincum, *Santa Prisca* and *San Stefano Rotondo* in Rome. The use of pinecones in this manner was not unique to the cult of Mithras, however, for the pinecone, while appearing dead on the outside, carries its seeds within and thus could be seen as a symbol of rebirth and its use in incense offerings in non-Mithraic is attested to in second and third century Egyptian papyri, thus one expects it was also burned during the initiation process.²⁶⁸

To what extent Mithraic adherents were allowed to set up altars and offer other votives under their own initiative is unknown, as in some instances we are told the approval of the *pater* was required. Two altars for Emerita in Spain record that the blessing of the *pater* was given in order to erect them.²⁶⁹ Additionally, as mentioned above, offerings of incense made by the lion grade at *Santa Prisca* also had to be presented to the *pater*. Given the evident importance of the hierarchy in the Mithras cult, it is likely that obtaining such permission was a usual requirement to make such offerings, as it allowed the *pater* to regulate ritual practice and prevent any deviance.

Sacrifices

The presence of altars and apparent ritual deposition of certain animal remains indicates that some form of blood sacrifice occurred in Mithraic rituals. In the aforementioned paintings from *Santa Prisca*, members of the Mithraic congregation are depicted presenting cocks, a bull and a boar to the *pater*, perhaps as sacrificial animals. Given that many mithraea were too small for a bull to enter,

²⁶⁶ Wibl  and Cusanelli Bressenel (2012).

²⁶⁷ *Santa Prisca*: CIMRM 481-482; *Nida-Heddernheim III*: CIMRM 1123, 1126, 1134; *Of the Animals, Ostia*: CIMRM 279; *Carrawburgh*: Allason-Jones (2004) 183.

²⁶⁸ For a general overview of the use of incense in mithraea, see Bird (2007).

²⁶⁹ CIMRM 774 and 793.

whether this image represents a real event or is an idealised projection is unclear.²⁷⁰ However, the remains of birds deposited in a seemingly ritual fashion have been found in various mithraea: in one of the mithraea at Nida-Hedderheim a cistern was found to contain the bones of a cock and at Sarrebourg a pot stood in the corner of the *cella* containing ash and bird bones.²⁷¹ The practice of sacrifice is also suggested by the presence of sacrificial knives found within mithraea.²⁷²

Feasting

Ritual feasts appear to have been a common occurrence in mithraea across the Roman world. Both Justin Martyr and Tertullian criticised Mithraic feasts for being a parody of their own Christian Eucharist,²⁷³ but the real intention of these activities looks to have been to replicate the feast of Mithras and Sol, which is the second most common Mithraic image behind the tauroctony. They may also have been held to celebrate certain celestial events, given Mithras' close association with Sol,²⁷⁴ as part of initiation ceremonies,²⁷⁵ which appears to have been the case following initiation into the Mysteries of Isis (see below), or when a mithraeum was consecrated.

Establishing what Mithraic feasts included has emerged from a combination of the archaeological, epigraphic and iconographic evidence. Two food price-lists were preserved on the walls of the early third century mithraeum at Dura-Europos, which predominately refer to meat, wine and *garum*, while at the Künzing mithraeum a great number of animal bones (most of which were from chickens) were deposited in pits around the mithraeum. At Martigny, the remains of a ritual meal that consisted of goat, pig and chicken were found buried in a pit under the nave of the mithraeum, which may have been deposited to commemorate the consecration of the temple. A similar deposit was found at the mithraeum of Mundelsheim in Germany, which was in use from the late second to early third centuries, where the skull of a cow, along with the bones of a piglet and cock, were deposited in ceramic vessels that were buried in the floor of the shrine.²⁷⁶ Unfortunately, although many mithraea have produced animal remains, they were either not present in abundance or not recorded, at least in detail, during the excavation process.²⁷⁷ However, what does emerge from the available information is

²⁷⁰ I am inclined to agree with Alvar (2006) 346 that these were idealised images designed to communicate the hierarchy of the cult, rather than being the image of a real-life event.

²⁷¹ Nida-Hedderheim: Huld-Zetsche (1986) 21; Sarrebourg: Walters (1974) 19.

²⁷² Taanum: *CIMRM* 1069; Ober-Florstadt: *CIMRM* 1080; Nida-Hedderheim II: *CIMRM* 1115.

²⁷³ Just. *I Apol.* 66.4; Tert. *De praesc. haer.* 40.3-4.

²⁷⁴ The importance of astronomical events in Mithraic communities is suggested in the archaeological record, but it is unclear how universal this was. The mithraeum at Caesarea Maritima had an aperture in its ceiling that allowed the sun to shine directly on the main altar during the Summer Solstice (see chapter 3), while a solar eclipse of A.D. 212 was commemorated on the ceiling of the Ponza mithraeum, see Beck (2004) 219-220.

²⁷⁵ Beck (2000).

²⁷⁶ Dura Europos: *CIMRM* 64-65; Künzing: von den Driesch and Pöllath (2000) and Lentacker, Ervynck and Van Neer (2004) 70; Martigny: Wibl  (1995) 9; Mundelsheim: Planck (1990) 180.

²⁷⁷ For example, in final report on faunal remains from the London mithraeum a lack of thorough recording in the excavation process is noted, see Macready and Sidell (1998).

the prevalence of bird remains, which correlates with the ritual deposits of birds apparently offered as sacrifices found in the aforementioned examples.²⁷⁸

A relief from Merida depicts a Mithraic banqueting scene, with three figures sat around a table while another two stand beside them as torchbearers, another serves them. On the far left of the image there appears to be a rock-birth statue, suggesting that this relief was meant to depict activities inside a mithraeum. Another relief from Ladenburg near Heidelberg depicts Sol and Mithras reclining on benches with a table of food set up in front of them, which one imagines would have been similar to the use of the benches in mithraea, while a fragment of a relief from Mithraeum I at Stockstadt may display a group of Mithraic adherents reclining on a bench.²⁷⁹ Given the hierarchical nature of the cult, based on these reliefs that the higher grades would recline on the benches while the lower grades played subservient roles.

The Curation of Objects

There is growing evidence that objects such as statuary and ceramic vessels were still viewed with importance in Mithraic circles when broken and were retained by cult members as a result. Instances where such activity can be proven are rare, but this may be due to a lack of attention paid to the context of finds in older excavations. Most of the strong evidence for this relates comes from later contexts uncovered in the Bornheim-Sechtem and London mithraea (see below), but there is some indication that it occurred in earlier contexts as well. The aforementioned 'Mainz Vessel' was found to be missing certain elements that carried depictions of animals from Mithraic lore: a snake, a lion and a raven. To have broken the container with such precision is highly unlikely to have been result of an accident. It is unfortunate that in this case the missing pieces have not been found, but, as will be show in the case of Bornheim-Sechtem in the fourth century, it is possible they were ritually deposited somewhere in the mithraeum, but as the mithraeum was only partially excavated the opportunity to uncover them was missed. Other Mithraic sites have produced individual ceramic sherds bearing images of animals, such as at Tienen (a lion and a snake), Heddernheim (a snake) and Aquincum IV (a lion and a snake). Huld-Zetsche has postulated that these images were saved and deposited separately because of their identification with the Lion, Nymph (snake) and Raven grades.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁸ For a list of Mithraic sites with citations that have produced a prevalence of bird remains, see Lentacker, Eryvnyck and Van Neer (2004) 71-72.

²⁷⁹ Merida: *CIMRM* 782; Ladenburg: Claus (2000) 10-11; Stockstadt: *CIMRM* 1175.

²⁸⁰ Ulbert, Wulfmeier and Huld-Zetsche (2004).

Festivals

There is no evidence of any Mithraic rituals ever taking place outside of a mithraeum. The cult never appears to have engaged in any public processions and/or festivals; much like the lack of evidence for the external decoration of mithraea, appeal to the outside world does not appear to have been of great importance to Mithraic congregations.

Discussion

Based on the evidence, many of the rituals carried out in mithraea were nothing unusual in the Roman world. Sacrifices, votive altars and feasting were common elements of ritual practices in many cults. However, there are indications that there was a particular Mithraic ‘spin’ to these: a preference for certain types of animals that were sacrificed or eaten at ritual meals (in this case chickens), the specific duties required of each grade, and the ritual breaking or curation of objects. As a result, all these rituals served to generate levels of religious capital among Mithraic initiates, which was almost certainly further enhanced by prayers and hymns which are lost to us. The one ritual in the cult of Mithras that was highly unique, and thus would probably have generated significant levels of religious capital, was the initiation process(es). By passing from one grade to the next, the initiates would enhance their understanding of the Mysteries and their religious capital would grow as a result.

Furthermore, Mithraic initiations were evidently highly intense procedures that extracted significant psychological, and perhaps physical (given the use of torches, swords, and possibly even a scorpion), costs from cult members, thus only the most committed could join the cult. That they also culminated in a ‘mystical experience’ also helped to enhance commitment, both of the individual and the group as a whole. As was stated in the Chapter 1, such events serve to not only enhance the commitment of those who experience them, but of the entire group. In most instances the person who experienced this mystical experience will be someone who is entirely sane and sober and will be well known by the rest of the congregation. Subsequently, their (apparent) momentary connection with the divine is more likely to be accepted as fact and will reaffirm the belief of the collective in the existence of, and rewards provided by, the deity.

Another important aspect is that all of these rituals took place inside the mithraea, with no public displays. What these rituals consisted of or what their intended aims were probably largely unknown to outsiders and may have created a degree of suspicion around Mithraic activities. Indeed, we find similar unease surrounding the ‘secret’ activities of contemporary Christian groups and Bacchic

followers in the Republican period.²⁸¹ Thus it was not necessarily the rituals themselves that created tension with society, but the fact they were conducted in private. Yet, as has often been reiterated in the course of this thesis, given that there is no record of Mithraic communities ever coming into conflict with mainstream society, was the secrecy of the cult really viewed with suspicion or did the fact that it supported the structure of Roman society allow it to continue unimpeded?

Finally, another notable trait of Mithraic rituals that served to enhance the commitment of cult members was that they required all members to participate to a significant extent. The fact that Mithraic congregations were not particularly large suggests that most members would have to contribute in some fashion to most ritual activities. Indeed, this does appear to be the case in the extant iconography, where we see certain grades providing offerings and perhaps playing different roles during the cult meals. Whether the items required to play these roles or the offerings made were paid for by the initiate whose duty it was to perform these acts is unclear, but given that this was the case in cult of Isis/Sarapis,²⁸² we may assume a similar situation existed in Mithraic congregations. Requiring a monetary investment from adherents is a further way in which the cult could extract significant costs from its followers. That most of these rituals would apparently be repeated (although how often we cannot be certain) would serve to continually extract further costs and subsequently continually foster commitment. Under such circumstances, free-riders would also be prevented from joining and the average level of commitment among Mithraic initiates would have remained relatively high.

MITHRAIC RITUAL PRACTICE FROM THE LATE THIRD CENTURY ONWARDS

Initiations

There is little evidence for Mithraic initiation rites from the early fourth century onwards from the north-western provinces, which provides a crucial change in our evidence. The mithraeum at Ad Enum in Noricum was the only mithraeum found to contain a sword, although this could have been deposited during the temple's violent de-sacralisation,²⁸³ while no iconographic representations of such rituals dating to this period have been found. Furthermore, it is hard to determine whether the basins which look to have been used to purify initiates remained in use, with the deposition of coins in the basins of Septeuil and Poetovio II in the mid-fourth century suggesting these were now used for a

²⁸¹ For Christians, see Pliny *Ep.* 10.96. For Bacchists, see for example Livy 39.13.

²⁸² *Apul. Met.* 11.22

²⁸³ Garbsch (1985) 435.

different purpose.²⁸⁴ As outlined in the previous chapter, with the epigraphic evidence in these regions ceasing in the early fourth century, it is unclear if the grade system was still in place either.

In regards to Rome and Ostia, the nave of the Felicissimus mithraeum indicates the grade system was certainly a feature of this Mithraic community in the third century, but how long this remained the case is unclear as no evidence for the cult in Ostia post-dates the turn of the fourth century. In Rome, inscriptions that record the participation of aristocrats in the cult during the mid- to late fourth century do make explicit reference to initiation rites as well as grades, although what these rites entailed is unclear. One does wonder whether the senatorial members of these congregations would have allowed themselves to be stripped, bound, blindfolded and threatened with torches and swords, particularly as a child was among their number. That such rituals may have been less intense is suggested by the writings of Christian authors at this time. In the mid-fourth century, the Christian convert Firmicus Maternus described how Mithraic adherents greeted each other with a handshake “of the illustrious Father”, a gesture that appears to mimic the handshake carried out by Mithras and Sol in various reliefs and which is referred to in a third century Mithraic dedication from Rome.²⁸⁵ However, Maternus makes no mention of other ritual practices and he does not indicate where he gained this information. Writing in the latter half of the fourth century, the anonymous Christian writer ‘Ambrosiaster’ describes Mithraic initiations as involving the initiate being blind-folded and having abuse hurled at them, while other initiates would flap their arms, make bird noises, and roar like lions. He also states that the initiates may be pushed across ditches filled with water and their hands tied with chicken intestines,²⁸⁶ but given he was likely to have been writing in Rome it is possible that his accounts refer only to contemporary Mithraic communities in the city which, as we have seen, were no longer representative of their counterparts elsewhere in the Roman Empire. Furthermore, if Ambrosiaster is correct in his account, these initiation rites, while still exerting some cost on the participants, were not as intensive (i.e. costly) as the earlier images depict.

Surprisingly, it is in Egypt, an area which has produced little in the way of Mithraic finds from any period, that evidence for Mithraic initiation rites enacted the fourth century has been found. This evidence comes in the form of two papyri fragments. One bears the script to a catechism and uses the terms ‘lion-place’, ‘lion’ and ‘father’, with the father asking the lion questions.²⁸⁷ The scenario in which this would be performed is unclear and the dialogue is quite fragmented, but it certainly

²⁸⁴ Septeuil: Foucray (1987) 39-40. Unfortunately, it is difficult to ascertain how many of the 1,311 coins found at Septeuil pre- or post-date the mithraeum, with only percentages provided for each layer regarding dates, not quantities. However, all coins following A.D. 378 when the mithraeum was destroyed were located in both the basin and the destruction layer, suggesting it may have once again been used as a spring sanctuary. Poetovio II: Abramič (1925) 68.

²⁸⁵ *Err. Prof. Rel.* 5.2. Images of Sol and Mithras shaking hands: *CIMRM* 1584. Inscription describing Mithraic initiates as *syndexioi* (those bound by a handshake): *CIMRM* 423.

²⁸⁶ *Quaestiones veteris et novi testamenti* 113.11 (PL 34.2214).

²⁸⁷ *P. Berol.* 21196; Brashear (1992).

indicates initiation rituals were still conducted in this region and that at least some of the grades were still used. Another papyrus fragment from Egypt dated to *ca.* A.D. 300 records an initiation prayer in which Sol-Mithras is mentioned as the recipient. This has become known as the ‘Mithras Liturgy’, but to what degree it is a Mithraic document has been debated. It consists of seven prayers, through which the initiand rises through planetary spheres before reaching the sun and coming face-to-face with Mithras himself. This is interspersed with periods of silence, along with whistling and tongue-clicking, a mighty crash of thunder (possibly symbols) and the Mithraic adherent bellowing until he is on the verge of collapse.²⁸⁸

Votive Practice

As demonstrated in Figs. 16-19, the form of Mithraic votives altered across the fourth century. Evidently, there is a decline in votive altars in Mithraic contexts during this period, although given the general decline in the epigraphic habit evident at this time this perhaps to be expected.²⁸⁹ Much of this evidence was outlined in the previous chapter, but to recap altars that were erected as votives include: three altars from North Africa (one from Diana and two from Lambaesis); one in Dalmatia at Konjic; and on the Danube frontier, examples were erected at Lentia, Poetovio, Ulcisia Castra and Virunum. On the Rhine frontier at Gimmeldingen, a set of sandstone altars were erected in A.D. 325, including the latest Mithraic votive altar erected north of the Alps. One of these was dedicated to Luna, although this is not surprising given the goddess’ regular appearance in the tauroctony scene and references to her have been found on other altars from mithraea, albeit not in great numbers.²⁹⁰ Various Mithraic reliefs have been found that were dedicated in this period, most of which were either situated in militarised areas or display a direct link to the military personnel. At Sitifis in North Africa, an entire cohort looks to have provided funds for a votive Mithraic relief, while two unidentified individuals at Pregrade in Pannonia had two small representations of the tauroctony manufactured from marble as votive offerings. In the *Foro Boario* mithraeum the main relief was also votive in nature.²⁹¹ Like the last extant votive altars, these reliefs all appear to date to the late third or early fourth century. There is little evidence regarding offerings of incense dating to the late third century or beyond, although a partially burnt pinecone was also found in the layers dating to latter half of the third century in the London mithraeum.²⁹²

²⁸⁸ Meyer (1976).

²⁸⁹ The decline in the epigraphic habit has been looked at in various articles, including Mrozek (1973); MacMullen (1982) and Meyer (1990). Derks (1998) 238 suggests that Caracalla’s extension of Roman citizenship brought to an end the desire to demonstrate one’s citizenship via inscriptions. A search of the Heidelberg database (<http://edh-www.adw.uni-heidelberg.de/inschrift/erweiterteSuche>) using the specifications ‘altar’ and ‘votive’ yields the results from across the entire Roman Empire: A.D. 150-199, 263 examples; A.D. 200-249, 486 examples; A.D. 250-299, 53 examples; A.D. 300-349, 10 examples.

²⁹⁰ Luna on Mithraic altars: *CIMRM* 324, 799, 800, 1484.

²⁹¹ Only a fragment of a relief from Axiopolis survives, thus whether it had a votive formula is unknown, but would not be unusual.

²⁹² Bird (2007) 194; Shepherd (1998) 155.

However, the absence of evidence for the aforementioned types of votives did mean that offerings ceased to be made in provincial mithraea, but rather they may have taken a new form. Extensive coin finds have emerged from the later occupation levels of various mithraea in eastern Gaul, Germany, Pannonia and Noricum that appear to be votive in nature, a phenomena which has been extensively studied by Eberhard Sauer.²⁹³ In the majority of cases where large quantities of coins have been recovered from mithraea, the excavations were undertaken in the 19th and early 20th centuries, so little information regarding their context is available, but the prevalence of coins dating to the mid-fourth century and later is clear (see Fig. 20). Fortunately, recent excavations at Martigny did record the exact location of each coin found in this mithraeum (see Figs. 21-22). The resulting distributions have produced a strong indication that the deposition of these coins was votive in nature, as it is clear that the bulk of the coins were deposited around the main cult relief over the course of the fourth century. One may assume that had the coins been mapped in earlier excavations similar patterns might have been evident elsewhere.

In some mithraea, only a relatively small number of coins were found in total, but their location suggests they were not deposited accidentally. At Bornheim-Sechtem, a small concentration of coins was found at the foot of the cult relief, while at the mithraea of Arupium and Epidaurum in Dalmatia a small number of coins (just three in the case of the latter) were deposited in small niches around the reliefs in the first half of the fourth century.²⁹⁴ Furthermore, not all coins were deposited around the cult relief. At Trier, the deposition of the coins differs from the other examples in that, while 49 coins were found on the floor of the temple, there were also another 329 deposited in a rectangular pit at the shrine's entrance along with a thick layer of ash and bird bones. Given that these were coins of negligible value, this was unlikely to be a hoard, while one doubts whether the person responsible saved these coins over decades, with a more likely scenario that the coins had littered the floor of the mithraeum but were picked up and deposited in the pit. This deposition provides the *terminus post quem* for the shrine's abandonment, suggesting it might even represent the ritual closure of the site.²⁹⁵ As mentioned, at Poetovio a number of mid-fourth century coins were found in a water-basin of Mithraeum II, while a similar occurrence was found at Septeuil. Coins found in the Mackwiller Mithraeum ran until A.D. 351 and were found in area of *ca.*0.50m² along with sherds of broken

²⁹³ Sauer (1996) and (2004).

²⁹⁴ Bornheim-Sechtem: Ulbert (2004) 86; Arupium I and II: *CIMRM* 1851-1852; Epidaurum: *CIMRM* 1883.

²⁹⁵ No remains of a container for the coins were found.

ceramic, indicating they were contained in the vessel.²⁹⁶ Notably, Poetovio II, Sarrebourg, Septeuil and Mackwiller were constructed over or adjacent to springs.²⁹⁷

Among the mithraea where extensive coins founds from the fourth century have been uncovered, there is an evident decline in the numbers deposited after the mid-fourth century. The sites where this occurs (Lentia, Trier and Sarrebourg) all lay on the frontiers and this reduction in the evidence is contemporary to the abandonment of surrounding structures, as outlined in Chapter 1, and thus may be indicative of declining use of these mithraea. At Trier, just eight coins out of an identifiable 442 post-date A.D 378, at Sarrebourg 36 of 180 identifiable coins post-date A.D 378, and at Lentia only nine coins out of an identifiable 123 post-date A.D. 378. Certainly at Lentia and Trier it would appear the use of these mithraea significantly reduced in the final decades of the fourth century.

The large scale deposition of coins raises certain questions regarding the practicality of continuing to enact other Mithraic rituals in these mithraea. If the floor of certain mithraea were indeed increasingly covered by coins, did the Mithraic adherents continue to carry out initiations and engage in the cultic meal while walking over them? It seems rather implausible that the Mithraic adherents would offer coins as votives, only for them to be trampled underfoot in other ceremonies. Given that these mithraea produced no further evidence of initiation rituals or the grade system in concurrence with this evidence, it is possible that the deposition of these coins does mark a shift in Mithraic practice, not only in changing forms of votive offerings, but also the abandonment or adaption the cult hierarchy and/or the initiation process.

In addition to these coin offerings, there are also a few examples of other forms of votive offerings from this period, but precisely when they were deposited is unknown. At Lentia, strips of silver that when combined form a picture of a crescent moon were recovered from the mithraeum.²⁹⁸ This is a unique find in a Mithraic context, but it does provide an indication that like the shrines of Jupiter Dolichenus, which have produced similar finds,²⁹⁹ mithraea may have contained offerings of a high monetary value. At Trier, a small limestone votive *aedicula* was presented by a man who looks to have been a slave or freedman. There is no indication that the *pater* provided permission for this, but given its small size either such information could not be included in the inscription or approval was not required.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁶ Trier: Walters (1974) 25; Poetovio II: Sauer (2004) 347; Mackwiller: Hatt (1957) 58-62.

²⁹⁷ In the case of Poetovio, Mithraeum III also remained active until the late fourth century, but the coin deposition here has a far more even chronological spread than its counterpart, making it unclear whether there may have been similar votive deposition of coins in the mid-fourth century. Sauer (2004) 347.

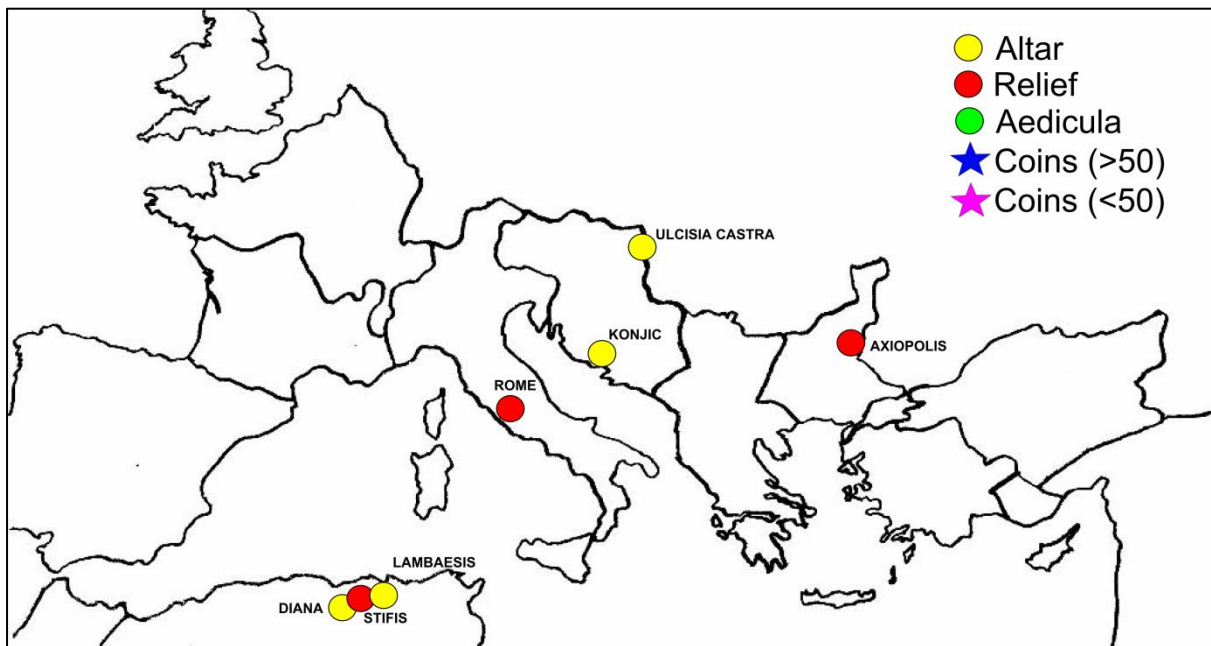
²⁹⁸ *CIMRM* 1420.

²⁹⁹ Noll (1938).

³⁰⁰ Walters (1974) 112.

There are also a number of sites where coin finds were not abundant or appear to have been deposited with a ritual intent. None of the mithraea located in Rome and Ostia have produced such evidence, but this may be the result of poor excavation techniques in the first half of the 20th century, but no recent excavations of mithraea in Rome have produced significant numbers of coins were deposited.³⁰¹ The mithraeum at Hawarte has also produced no significant coin finds, while at Konjic in Dalmatia *ca.*80 datable coins found in the mithraea consist of an even chronological distribution between the late third and fourth centuries.³⁰²

Figure 16: Mithraic Votives A.D. 271-300



³⁰¹ For example, see the *Crypta Balbi* excavations: Ricci (2004).

³⁰² Hawarte: Gawlikowski (2007); Konjic: Sauer (2004) Table 1.

Figure 17: Mithraic Votives ca. A.D. 301-330

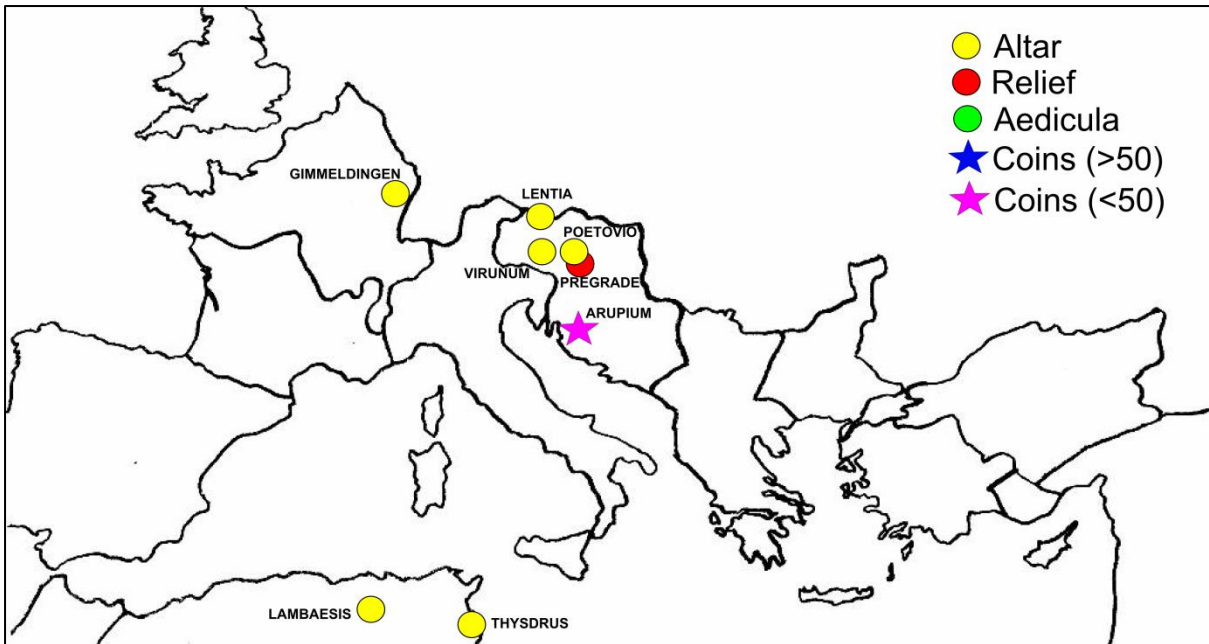


Figure 18: Mithraic Votives ca. A.D. 331-370

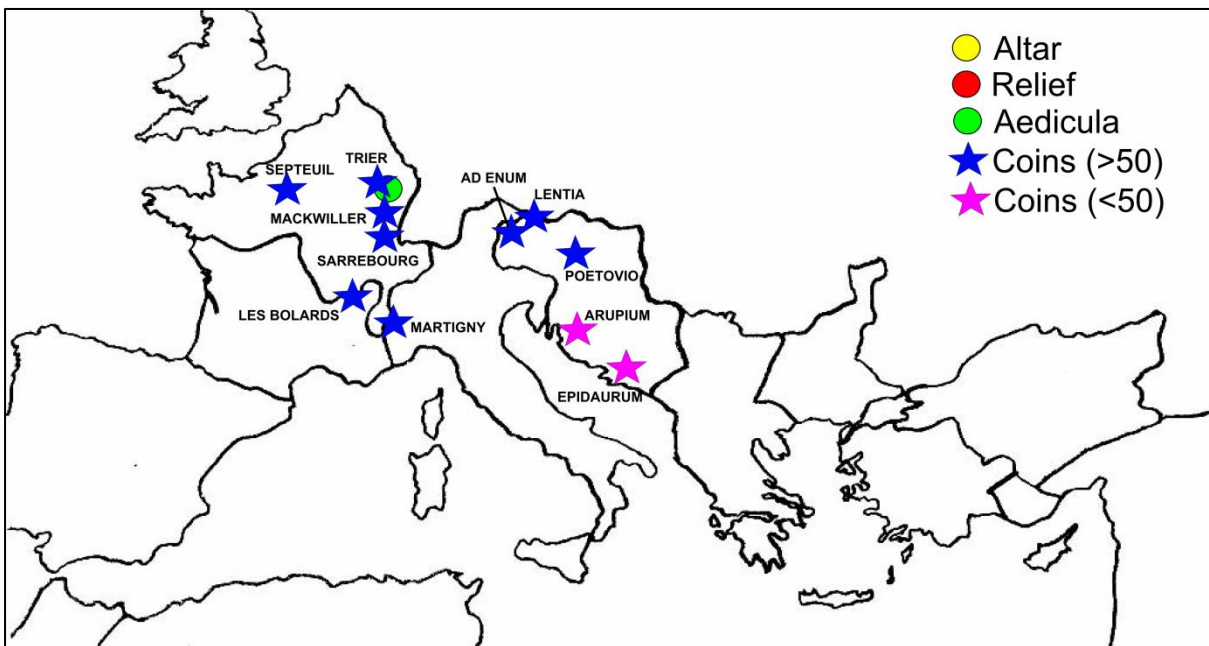


Figure 19: Mithraic Votives ca A.D. 371-400

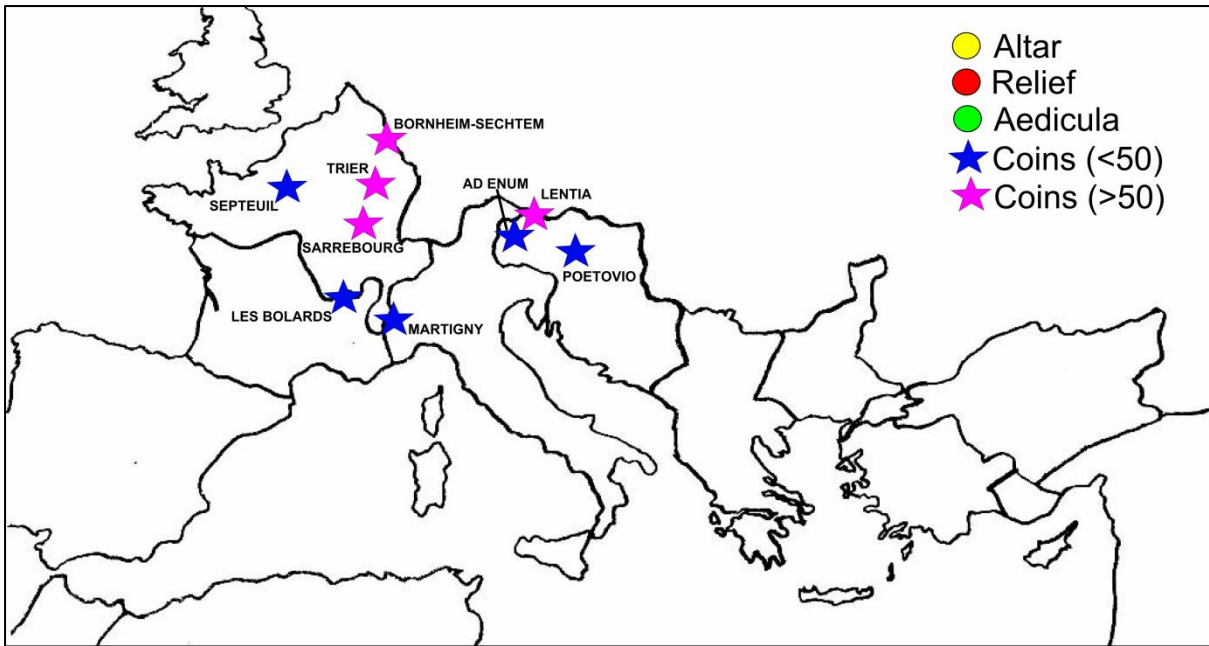
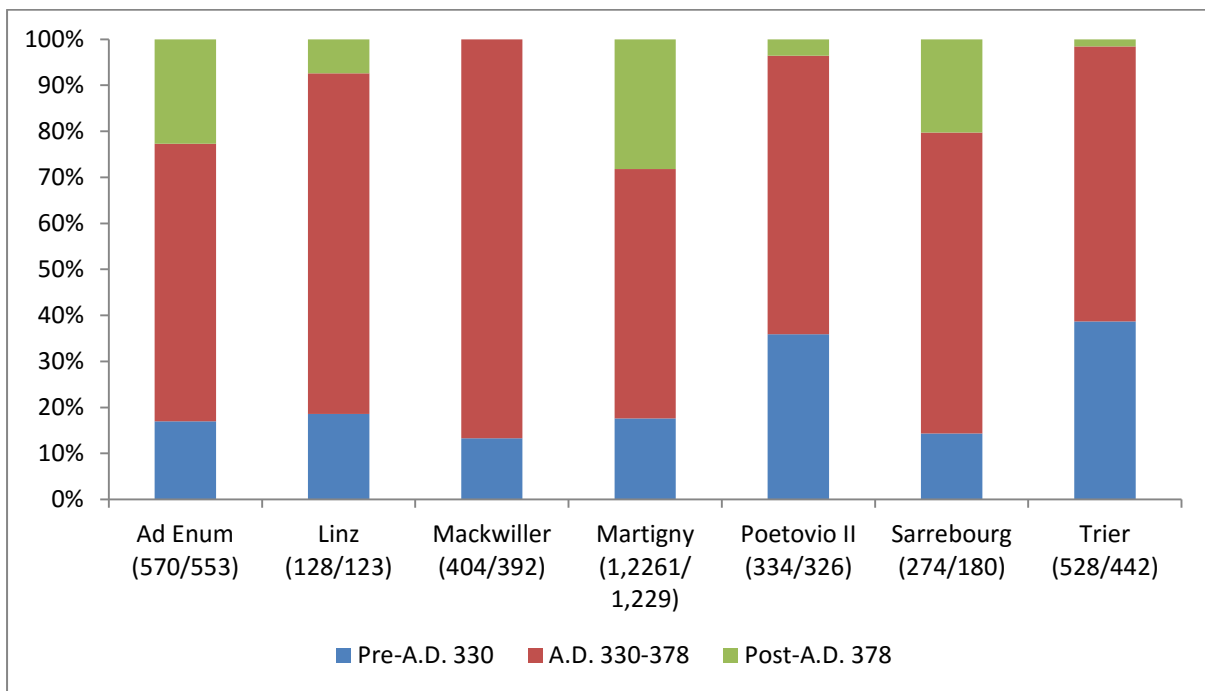
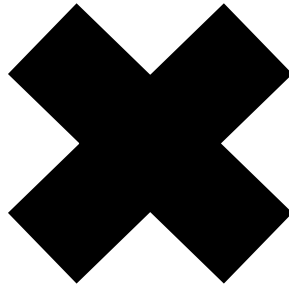


Figure 20: The Chronological Distribution of Coins found in Mithraea (Number of Coins Found/ Identifiable Coins) (Based on Sauer (2004) Table A)³⁰³

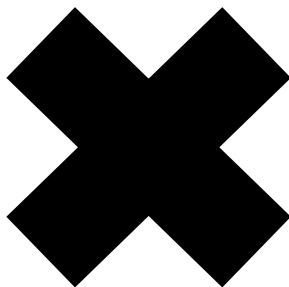


³⁰³ The mithraeum at Les Bolards is likely to have had a similar chronological distribution, but all that is known from this site is that of ca.627 coins, of ca. 127 identifiable 70% dated to the fourth century, see Sauer (2004) 347.

*Figure 21: Distribution of Coins (ca. A.D. 330-348)
in the Martigny Mithraeum (Adapted from Wibl  (2004) Fig. 7)*



*Figure 22: Distribution of Coins (ca. A.D. 378-402)
in the Martigny Mithraeum (Adapted from Wibl  (2004) Fig. 8)*



Sacrifice

Evidence for blood sacrifice in Mithraic communities also becomes increasingly rare in this period. The burnt bones of a fowl were found in a pot deposited in late third century strata next to the altar of the London Mithraeum, while at Carrawburgh a bird skull was buried under one of the altars when the temple was reconstructed at the turn of the fourth century. There is also the aforementioned bird remains deposited in the pit at the entrance to the Trier mithraeum, which looks to have been one of the last acts performed in the mithraeum at the end of the fourth century, but this is the only example that can definitely be dated to the fourth century. The emperor Julian was known to have sacrificed birds to Helios-Mithras for divinatory purposes, although how 'Mithraic' this practice was is debatable.³⁰⁴ There is some evidence for other ritual depositions containing the remains of animals other than birds. In the *Foro Boario* mithraeum, two tusks of a boar were found in an amphora placed in a pit dug at the entrance, while the skull of an ox was buried in the nave of the Biesheim mithraeum, but this looks to have occurred after the second destruction phase when the building had long since ceased to be a mithraeum.³⁰⁵

Feasting

Feasts evidently continued to be conducted in Mithraic contexts across the late third and fourth centuries. One of the most important Mithraic finds of recent years is the remains of a particularly large Mithraic cult meal at Tienen, which was provided for perhaps over a hundred people and appears to have been held to celebrate the summer solstice sometime in the latter half of the third century. This suggests that the Mithraic community here was either much larger than the size of the shrine (*ca.*90m²), or that initiates from other towns came to Tienen to partake in a larger gathering. Considering the secrecy that surrounded the cult's activities, it is unlikely such a celebration would be in full view of the public. Given that a palisade surrounded the mithraeum, which, minus the space occupied by the mithraeum itself, consisted of an area of over *ca.*650m², it is possible that the attendees sat both in and around the mithraeum but beyond the view of non-initiates. It is also possible that small, individual groups used the mithraeum separately over the course of several days. Regardless of how it was facilitated, that the remains of this feast were buried inside the palisade also suggests that the intention was to keep this act from public view. This feast also indicates the continuing importance of chickens in Mithraic ritual practice, as the deposits contained a high percentage of such remains in stark contrast to the surrounding area where cattle appears the most

³⁰⁴ Lib. Or. 1.121; 12.80-82; 18.127.

³⁰⁵ London: Macready and Sidell (1998) 209; Carrawburgh: Richmond *et al.* (1951) 35-36; Trier: Walters (1974) 25; Foro Boario: *CIMRM* 434; Biesheim: Pétry and Kern (1978) 18.

common meat.³⁰⁶ The aforementioned relief from the mithraeum of Konjic, which depicted a feast taking place in a mithraeum, also probably dates to the late third century. Given that this appears to show an actual feast in a mithraeum we can assume that the Mithraic adherents were not only still enacting feasts, but doing so in a manner where they each occupied a role relating to their grade.

From the fourth century, there is no comparable evidence for feasting in terms of quantity as that uncovered at Tienen. However, evidence of feasting has been retrieved from some mithraea which were active in this period. All of these examples were in provincial locations; whether such rituals were practiced by the aristocratic-led communities of Rome in the mid- to late fourth century is unknown. At Septeuil, which was only in use for a short period in the mid- to late fourth century, 8,612 animal bones were found among the ashes of a hearth, 74% of which came from chickens. 29,361 animal bones were also found in and around the mithraea at Martigny, but when these depositions were made is unclear; notably none of the ceramic evidence from this mithraeum appears to post-date the early fourth century, perhaps indicating that such items were no longer needed by the mid-fourth century.³⁰⁷ Animal remains were also found in the rural mithraea at St Urban and Schachadorf in Noricum and at Konjic and Jajce in Dalmatia. These deposits included bird remains, but their ratio in comparison to other faunal remains is unclear. However, at Konjic the presence of the relief might indicate meals continued to be conducted in a traditional manner.³⁰⁸ The remains of a cult meal, consisting of culinary pottery and animal bones consisting mostly of chicken and goat, have also been found at Hawarte in Syria, which were deposited in a pit during the final phase of occupation at the turn of the fifth century. Unusually, in the mithraeum in Lentia, which included a kitchen in its layout, there is no evidence of animal remains, but instead it contained a significant quantity of fruit and nuts.³⁰⁹

The Curation of Objects

As mentioned above, the excavation of the Bornheim-Sechtem mithraeum has also provided strong evidence for the retention of broken statues and ceramics in Mithraic contexts. At this mithraeum, various elements of statuary were recovered that had been deposited in two distinct locations: a niche in the northeast wall of the temple and a down a shaft in the centre of the nave (along with a scorched coin of Valentinian I). What was particularly striking about the statuary was that all the pieces bore traces of fire damage, yet the mithraeum itself showed no sign of having been burnt down. In addition to this was the deposition of fragments from the same lead-glazed cult vessel in three different

³⁰⁶ Lentacker, Erynyck and Van Neer (2004) 70.

³⁰⁷ Olive (2004) 149. On the ceramic evidence from Martigny, see Wibl  and Cusanelli Bressenel (2012) 48.

³⁰⁸ Gaidon-Bunuel and Caillat (2008) 265.

³⁰⁹ *CIMRM* 1421.

contexts in two different building phases: one amongst the statuary fragments in the niche, one down the shaft in the centre of the aisle, and another in earlier shaft that had been covered over during the second phase. In all three cases, the ceramics bore a complete image (Cautes, a snake and a lion), which suggests the vessel had not been broken randomly, but with precision. The conclusion here is that the cult vessel had been broken and certain fragments were deposited over time, possibly to usher in the beginning or end of the mithraeum's different phases. In regards to the statuary, it appears to have been recovered from another mithraeum which had been burnt down in the late fourth century, give the scorched coin alongside it.³¹⁰ The London mithraeum also produced a number of statue fragments that were deposited in the floor of the temple, although it is unclear if this was done by the Mithraic adherents or whoever took over the temple (see below).

Festivals

Notably, despite the involvement of elites in the cult in fourth century Rome, who certainly could have funded public celebrations of Mithras if they chose to do so, no public occasions associated with Mithras ever appear to have been adopted. Arguably, this lack of public festivities may have been part of what attracted elites to the cult, as their membership and participation made them part of a select few, a status they were keen to promote as new elites joined their ranks during the fourth century (see Chapter 4).

Discussion

The fourth century appears to have marked a major shift in ritual practice among many Mithraic congregations. Evidence for sacrificial deposits and incense are uncommon after the early fourth century, while the deposition of coins in some basins suggests a change in the function of these fittings. The erection of votive altars and reliefs also appears to have ceased, although such evidence is uncommon in any context in this period. Most notably, from the extant evidence there is little to suggest the continuation of the initiation process, the most unique and costly of Mithraic rituals, in its traditional forms, except for perhaps at Ad Enum where a sword was found.

One Mithraic ritual that does look to have continued in the fourth century was ritual feasts. Evidence for such activities dating to this period has been found at the briefly occupied mithraeum at Septeuil, while it is possible that these rituals were still being carried out at other mithraea in Gaul, Noricum, Dalmatia and at Hawarte. However, while some of these deposits indicate traditional Mithraic culinary habits may still have been in place, they do not give use any indication if these

³¹⁰ Ulbert, Wulfmeier and Huld-Zetsche (2004); Wulfmeier (2004).

rituals were still conducted in the fashion indicated by the iconography, with different roles assigned to different grades, with the possible exception of Konjic where a relief depicting a Mithraic meal was found. Notably, Konjic is also one site where there is no indication coins were deposited as votives. However, even if such rituals were still occurring in the early fourth century, we cannot be certain that they were still being conducted when the mithraea were abandoned. Furthermore, at Lentia only fruit and nuts were found in a kitchen area, suggesting perhaps a different approach to this ritual in this community. Notably, while Lentia is an urban site, most of the mithraea that have produced indications of traditional Mithraic feasting were located in rural contexts.

Among the mithraea of the northwest provinces, we also begin to see the large-scale deposition of coins from the mid-fourth century, which appear to have acted as votives. From the recent excavations at Martigny it appears that the coins may have been deposited at the foot of the cult relief. This has several important ramifications. Firstly, given that these coins were of low monetary value and the act of deposition is not particularly strenuous, we are not looking at a ritual practice that demanded a considerable cost from participants, thus it is questionable whether it indicates any significant commitment among them. Secondly, that such an act requires little guidance to carry out and that there is no evidence to indicate that permission was required to perform it, may suggest that the grade system (particularly the role of *pater*) may have ceased to exist, or at least exist in the traditional form. Thirdly, such an act can easily be undertaken on an individual basis, negating any need for a collective effort to obtain religious rewards. However, such depositions were not made in the same fashion in all mithraea, such as in Dalmatia where a small number of coins were placed in niches next to the cult image, while at Trier a notable number of coins were deposited alongside a sacrifice.

The aristocratic Mithraic communities in Rome appear to have been an exception to this change, with the grades and initiation rites still in place and no evidence of coin deposition, but what form these initiations took is unclear. If we use the literary accounts from Christian authors, then these were perhaps less intensive affairs, with insults replacing swords and torches, or it may even have been a simple handshake was all that was required. Indeed, it is notable that these late Mithraic communities were contemporary to the rise in accusations of sorcery among the elite in Rome at this time, particularly during the reign of Valentinian I.³¹¹ Those leading the investigations were ‘new men’, such as the *praefectus annonae* Maximinus, while those under suspicion were members of the establish aristocracy, just like those who attended these Mithraic congregations. However, while one can see how a small group of elites gathering in private to worship Mithras might be easily (or fortunately) ‘confused’ by those outside of the group as meetings of a nefarious nature, it is striking

³¹¹ Amm. Marc. 28.1.1-56; Brown (1970).

that the cult of Mithras is never mentioned in the account of these events, suggesting there may have been very little that was secretive about them. Yet given that there appears to have been little to no conflict between the cult and mainstream society in the past, we cannot be sure if this is reflective of changes in Mithraic rituals, or whether it was a case of the cult being active in Rome for so long that many did not feel threatened by the activities of Mithraic initiates.

Unfortunately, however, such observations are based on limited evidence and we have no indication as to whether there were any other additional rituals that went alongside the deposition of the coins or the feasts that were celebrated. For all we know, there may well have been aspects to these rituals that required significant commitment that cannot be conveyed in the archaeological record. Flogging oneself with a rope or whip, wearing a hair-shirt for penance and fasting are all examples of rituals that require extreme dedication that we would not have any evidence for in the archaeological record. What we can say is that, overall, the evidence points towards the Mithraic cult becoming increasingly localised in its rituals in Late Antiquity. In certain cases, Mithraic rituals were retained by some communities, while in others they appear to have introduced new forms of ritual practice.

MITHRAIC RITUAL PRACTICE IN THE WIDER CONTEXT OF LATE ANTIQUITY

Initiation

It is not clear whether initiations into the cult of Isis/Sarapis, the closest parallel to Mithraic initiations we have in the Roman world, continued into the fourth century.³¹² One assumes the aforementioned examples of aristocrats in Rome who became priests and priestesses of Isis underwent these rituals, but they make no mention of such rites in the inscriptions. According to certain Christian texts dating to the late fourth century, some senators who worshipped Isis/Sarapis did shave their heads. However, Cameron has strongly refuted this:

Were such figures really to be seen on the streets of Rome every day? The truth is that Christian polemic tends to dwell on the gods of Egypt (a) because shaved heads and eyebrows, tambourines, and dog-headed god were so much easier to mock than dignified aristocratic pontiffs; and (b) because this mockery goes back to the

³¹² In regards to the mainstream civic cults, there is little evidence these required any considerable initiation processes, with such rituals mainly being the proviso of so-called mystery cults. This is unsurprising, given that these titles were often bestowed as political rewards rather than taken up out of religious adherence. In contrast, initiation rites were seen as an integral part of many mystery-cults, even when these cults had grown to accommodate to large numbers.

classical poets themselves. Anubis is already barking in Propertius (iii.11.42) and Ovid (*Met.* IX. 690) as well as Virgil. Such polemics tell us more about the classical culture of the writers than contemporary pagan practice.³¹³

Yet the Codex-Calendar of A.D. 354 does include a depiction of a shaven-headed priest of Isis, suggesting they were not entirely unheard of at this time, although this does not tell us if this was common in Rome let alone the provinces,³¹⁴ nor do the Christian polemics of the fourth century make any mention them shaving their head as part of an initiation process. Even if these men did undergo an initiation process, it does not provide any indication that regular members had to. Furthermore, it was discussed in Chapter 3 how spaces in various temples that may have served to hold such rites, such as at Ostia and Pergamon, were partitioned from the temple or given a new use in the late third and early fourth centuries. Overall, if initiation rites were still present in the cult of Isis/Sarapis, there is no indication they were still considered a fundamental aspect of the cult.

What initiation into the cult of Magna Mater entailed remains unknown.³¹⁵ It was thought that the *taurobolium* was part of this process, but this has been shown to be incorrect.³¹⁶ Some *galli* did practice eviration, which may be seen as initiation rite, but this is unlikely to have been common among Roman citizens who served in the cult. This was clearly an act of immense dedication would have fostered extremely high commitment, for not only did it exact a significant cost in a physical and mental sense, but it also created immense tension with society, to the extent *galli* could be banished or lose discounted from inheritances.³¹⁷ However, there is little evidence for eviration after the mid-third century; *galli* still apparently existed in time of Augustine, who described them as dressing and acting effeminately but he makes no mention as to whether they practiced eviration.³¹⁸

Votive Practice

As discussed, various mithraea in the north-western provinces have produced a substantial amount of coin finds dating to the mid- to late fourth century, which appear to have been deposited as votives. Where such offerings common in non-Mithraic contexts at this time? To begin, there are examples of mithraea which were converted to house the worship of a different deity that have produced such finds from their post-conversion phase. In the late third century the mithraeum at Biesheim suffered fire damage, while its reliefs were destroyed and subsequently covered over. The temple continued in use thereafter, now with a raised floor level suggesting a large open floor rather than the standard

³¹³ Cameron (2011) 148.

³¹⁴ Salzman (1990) 76-78.

³¹⁵ Alvar (2008) 276-282.

³¹⁶ Cameron (2011) 160-163; McLynn (1996).

³¹⁷ Obs. *Lib. Prod.* 44; Val. Max. 7.7.6, both quoted in Bowden (2010) 101.

³¹⁸ August. *De civ. D.* 7.26

tripartite division.³¹⁹ Coins dating from the late third century until A.D. 395 were found dispersed across this floor. Similarly, the mithraeum at Mackwiller also underwent two distinct phases of occupation separated by a destruction layer. The first phase ended in A.D. 351, around which time the mithraeum was destroyed and its sculptures broken, thus it appears the vessel which had contained the coins had fallen from a raised position during the temple's destruction. A spring sanctuary arose in its place, which also contained coins found dispersed over the floor, the latest of which was minted in A.D. 388.³²⁰

A large number of coins have also been found in three structures at Königsbrunn in Raetia, Orbe and Mandeleiu (both in southern Gaul). In all three cases the building had the ground-plan of a mithraeum, but no statues, reliefs or inscriptions remained to provide definite identification. At Orbe (see Figs. 23-24) and Königsbrunn a similar distribution pattern for the deposition of coins was found to that of Martigny, lying in a semi-circle around where the cult relief might have stood. At Orbe, *ca.* 300 coins were found, terminating in the late fourth century, while at Königsbrunn 96 coins were found, the latest of which was minted in A.D. 367.³²¹

In Gaul, such activity is also recorded in the non-Mithraic cave sanctuary of Pennes-Mirabeau and a rural shrine at Lioux. In Italy, various sites have produced coins dating to the fourth and fifth centuries, including examples found at Marina Piranomonte, Pertosa, Celle Civita and Grotta Bella. Notably, most of these shrines bear an association with water, as do many mithraea, while the deposition of these coins, much like in mithraea, was also centred on the main cult statue/relief. Offering coins in this fashion is mentioned by Lactantius, suggesting that this practice – *stips* – was commonplace.³²² There is also evidence from Britain of coins being deposited in temples that appear to have been left to decay, such as at Hayling Island where coins ran to the end of the fourth century, while in Temple V at Springhead small concentrations of coins, the latest of which dates to A.D. 375, were found against the west wall.³²³

Various natural spring sites have also yielded extensive coin finds from the fourth century, while the importance of ritual activity at such locations is mentioned by the fourth century grammarian Servius, who observed “there is no spring that is not holy”.³²⁴ The relationship between water and cult activity is not unique to Late Antiquity, however, as watery locations were equated with the divine

³¹⁹ It would seem the benches now only stood 0.10m above the nave now, see Kern (1991) 64.

³²⁰ Biesheim: Kern (1991) Mackwiller: Hatt (1957)

³²¹ Orbe: Luginbühl, Monnier and Mühleman (2004); Königsbrunn: Overbeck (1985) Mandeleiu: Brenot (1990)

³²² On cave sanctuaries, see Brenot (1990) 206-210. On sites in Italy, see Goddard (2006) 296-297, which includes the quote by Lactantius from *Inst.* 2.2.14-15

³²³ King (2008) 37. It is worth noting that given that this phenomenon has only recently been established in mithraea despite large amount of coins appearing in many early excavations, thus it is to be expected that there are other (perhaps many other) examples of such coin depositions in temples that have not been recorded.

³²⁴ 7.84, translation from Rodgers (2011) 43.

throughout the Greek and Roman periods.³²⁵ Eight such sites have yielded over 1000 coins in the late antique period: Conventina's Well and Bath in Britain; Bourbonne-les-Bains and Nîmes in Gaul; Bornheim-Roisdorf in Germany; Vicarello in Italy; Burgaski Bani in Bulgaria; and Zichron Ja-akov in Israel.³²⁶ Of these sites, the most notable in the context of this study is Conventina's Well, which lay in close proximity to the mithraeum of Carrawburgh. The mithraeum of Carrawburgh, like its fellow British Mithraic shrines, did not produce a large body of coins, yet here we find one of the highest concentrations of coins as votive offerings from across the whole Roman world. Over 16,000 coins were found in the well, with reliefs and altars from the associated temple deposited on top of them intact and unmolested.³²⁷ Bornheim-Roisdorf was also situated less than two hours walk from the Bornheim-Sechtem mithraeum, while Bourbonne-les-Bains is another site which is situated close to the Rhine frontier. At Bornheim-Roisdorf, the height of deposition matches that of mithraea, falling in the mid to late fourth centuries, before ending in at the turn of the fifth. At Bourbonne-les-Bains, the pattern is different, as the height of coin deposition occurred between the first century and A.D. 299, after which a smaller number of coin deposits, which do look to have been votive in nature, were made until the early fifth century.

Notably, the end of coin deposition at these spring sites did not always mean the end of religious activity surrounding them. Occasional finds dating to the early medieval period have also been found at these spring sites, while the historic texts refer to prayers and other unspecified ways of worshipping at these features, indicating that votive practice had altered rather than ceased entirely when the coin series come to an end. This therefore means we should be careful in assuming the same about mithraea. But if this is the case, why did the practice of offering coins cease both at springs and mithraea at this time? The answer is most likely practicality: this period also saw a large decline in the minting of coins in the north-western provinces, meaning they would not have been readily available for people to give as offerings.³²⁸ If this were the case, then it leaves open the possibility that the termination of the coins does not represent the end of ritual practice and that it may have continued in some other form that is not extant in the archaeological record.

Finally, it is perhaps no coincidence that the deposition of coins was to be found at various spring sites and many of the mithraea where such finds have been found were either located on or next to springs, while the Mackwiller mithraeum was converted into a spring sanctuary. It was noted in Chapter 3 that the Rhine and Danube are the areas where the image of Mithras' bringing forth water from the rock and is mentioned in several inscription as *Fons Perennis*, while the version of the

³²⁵ Camp (1988).

³²⁶ Sauer (2011).

³²⁷ Allason-Jones and McKay (1985).

³²⁸ Esmonde Cleary (2013) 348-349; Kent (1994); Moorhead (2012).

initiation depicted on the Mainz vessel appears to draw on this scene. It is possible that the deposition of such votives is indicative that the influence of this image had grown in these regions, with Mithras as the *Fons Perennis* now the central aspect of the cult and Mithras worshipped in the same fashion as one would a natural spring.

Figure 23: Distribution of Coins (ca. A.D. 81-330) in the Orbe 'Mithraeum' (Adapted from Luginbühl, Monnier and Mühlemann (2004) Fig. 12)

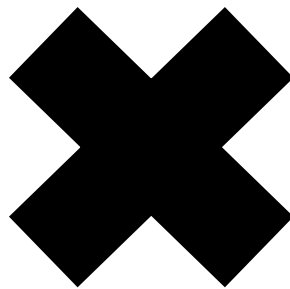
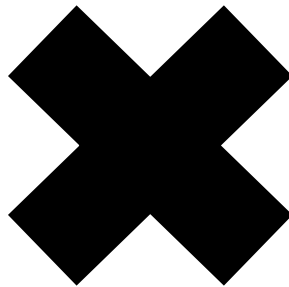


Figure 24: Distribution of Coins (ca. A.D. 330-Late 4th c.) in the Orbe 'Mithraeum' (Adapted from Luginbühl, Monnier and Mühlemann (2004) Fig. 13)



Sacrifice

Blood sacrifice was one of the most common, and most important, rituals in the ancient world, yet by the end of the fourth century it had become increasingly rare. This change appears to have been the result of various motors. To begin, some philosophers in the late third century such as Porphyry rejected blood sacrifice on the basis that it only appeased daemons.³²⁹ Other non-Christians simply appear to have viewed it as excessive if it involved anything more than a single animal. For example, when Julian attended a ceremony at the Temple of Apollo in Antioch in the mid-fourth century, with the expectation a great sacrifice of cattle, much to the chagrin the emperor the priest produced only a single goose.³³⁰ Yet as the writings of Ammianus indicate it was Julian, rather than the priest, who was deemed to be at fault, with the emperor's views seen as excessive, both in practice and cost.³³¹ Finally, priests who would have paid for and conducted the act of animal sacrifice had been drawn mostly from local elites in most previous periods, yet during the course of the third century these men sought new forms of promotion, usually in either the army or military administration, and now tried to avoid positions that placed any significant burden on them. At the same time, the economic troubles of the third century also impacted on the civic and sacred funds accrued from the public in order defray such costs, thus through a combination of local elites not wanting to be saddled with paying for such events, while also having to perhaps contribute more than their predecessors, it is not surprising such activity declined.³³²

By the fourth century, laws began to be introduced that banned animal sacrifice,³³³ so it is quite possible the final abandonment of such practices in some areas was partly the result of coercion. The first such law appeared in A.D. 341, yet the last recorded public sacrifice to occur in Rome did not take place until A.D. 359 and was performed by the prefect Tertullus, while Libanius and Eunapius also tell us of men who ignored such rules and continued to sacrifice in public, with both instances occurring around the same time as Tertullus' sacrifice in Rome.³³⁴ The sacrifice of a bull to honour Magna Mater in Rome (*taurobolium*) is also attested to in the various inscriptions dating to between the A.D. 370s and 391 from the site of the *Phrygianum* on the Vatican Hill Rome, which were made by many of the same aristocrats who were part of Mithraic congregations. That these altars look to have stood in the open courtyard of the *Phrygianum* suggests these practices were by no means a secret. Inscriptions also indicate activities were also still being conducted by elites in Athens, one of

³²⁹ *De abst.* 2.34, 2.36.5, 37.5.

³³⁰ *Jul. Misop.* 25-26.

³³¹ *Amm. Marc.* 22. 12.6-7.

³³² Bradbury (1995) 347-353. See Chapter 6 for a more in-depth account of this and how it impacted on the construction and restoration of temples.

³³³ *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.3-4 and 16.10.10-12.

³³⁴ On Tertullus, see *Amm. Marc.* 19.10.5; *Lib. Or.* 12.80; 18.170. On other instances, see *Lib. Or.* 1.27; *Eunap. VS* 10.6.8.

which dates to the A.D. 360s, the other to A.D. 387.³³⁵ As Casau has argued, given that it was these men who were expected to enforce the law one wonders how many people felt the need to abandon such rites.³³⁶ Archaeological examples for animal sacrifice post-dating this law have also been found, such as on the Greek island of Patmos, and piglet with the knife still embedded in its neck was uncovered in a fifth century deposit in the House of Procolus at Athens.³³⁷

That these laws were not particularly effective is also suggested by the fact some Christians preferred to allow animal sacrifice to continue as long as it was done for ‘Christian’ reasons. In A.D. 406, at the shrine of St Felix at Nola, Paulinus relates in three separate tales how two pigs and a heifer were raised by local rustics with the intention of being brought to shrine and sacrificed, after which their remains were cooked and given to poor.³³⁸ This was done to fulfil vows made by the animal’s owners. As Dennis Trout has observed, Paulinus “...was willing to create and promote a sanctioned Christian context for the enactment and reshaping of certain rituals rooted in the pre-Christian traditions of the Italian countryside”.³³⁹ Shortly thereafter, we find Maximus of Turin complaining that local landowners were not doing enough to prevent their tenants engaging in sacrificial activities.³⁴⁰ Even two hundred years later, Pope Gregory’s letter to St. Augustine, during his mission to Britain, urges that the locals should be allowed to continue with such practices, but they should be persuaded to do them in honour of the Christian God.³⁴¹

Evidently, the act of sacrifice was something that might have been rarer in the fourth century, but it was far from abnormal. Yet perhaps it is not so much animal sacrifice itself that may have caused a problem in regards to the cult of Mithras, but given the secrecy that had surrounded them what people thought this sacrifice was undertaken for. Along with the ban on sacrifice, laws were also issued in the fourth century that prohibited the practice of divination.³⁴² Such laws were nothing new, the emperor Tiberius had issued a similar proclamation against soothsayers in the first century, while Diocletian had announced laws prohibiting such activities in A.D. 294.³⁴³ In reality, the underlying issue was political rather than religious. Divination supposedly allowed one to see into the future, which could be a dangerous thing if that future involved a new emperor on the throne. Particularly after the endless usurpations of the third century, the laws of Diocletian and subsequent emperors sought to reduce the chances of any possible claimants seeing the imperial throne as their destiny. This is not to say such rulings immediately brought an end to such activities, the oracle of Bes at Abydos in Egypt was only

³³⁵ Saradi (2011) 285.

³³⁶ Casau (2011) 117.

³³⁷ Saradi (2011) 277.

³³⁸ *Carm.* 20.

³³⁹ Trout (1995) 298.

³⁴⁰ *Serm.* 107.1, translation from Trout (1995) 267.

³⁴¹ Bede *HE.* 130.1.

³⁴² *Cod. Theod.* 9.16.2 and 6, 16.16.4

³⁴³ On Tiberius, see Suet. *Tib.* 36.2. On Diocletian, see *Cod. Just.* 9.18.2.

closed in A.D. 359, tellingly because people had asked questions of a political nature,³⁴⁴ while as we saw in the previous chapter the division between the new and old elites in Rome manifested itself in such accusations. Given the many usurpers that the Danube region had produced during the third century, one can see why there might be a desire in the Roman government to prevent all forms of private divination in such regions that could give another usurper the impetus to try and obtain power. However, if this were the case then it need not have resulted in the closure of Mithraic temples, but simply that they become more accessible to prove they were doing nothing wrong. The rise in the deposition of coins as votives does suggest some provincial mithraea were indeed more accessible from the mid-fourth century onwards, which follows a period when the elites had shown a greater interest in the cult. However, such a link can only remain speculation.

Feasting

There are two laws from the late fourth and early fifth centuries that refer to banquets, indicating that they remained popular throughout this period and were not seen as intrinsically ‘un-Christian’. One, issued in A.D. 399, allowed people to continue engaging in banquets as long as they did not involve traditional rites, such as sacrifice. The second was issued A.D. 407, which forbade feasts from taking place in the countryside as they may be used to disguise non-Christian practices.³⁴⁵ Indeed, the fear that banquets could lure Christians astray was voiced by Augustine of Hippo.³⁴⁶ Yet realistically, it was very difficult to police such activities. Feasts were part of larger celebrations such as festivals and were popular social activities. We have seen in Italy in the fifth century and Britain in the seventh century how the appropriation of such rites for Christian worship was sometimes seen as more viable than trying to eliminate them. As Goddard has argued, Christians and non-Christians alike could even partake in the same feasts, such as those that were held as part of the imperial cult celebrations, which were seen by Christians as purely traditional, rather than as religiously-charged, while others continued to engage in them as religious activities.³⁴⁷

Curation of Objects

Just as in regards to the evidence from mithraea, the retention of objects in other cult contexts has generally not been looked at in considerable detail. One exception to this is Ben Croxford’s study of the deposition of late Roman statuary in Britain, which has plausibly argued that such practice may have occurred in this province.³⁴⁸ At the London mithraeum, elements of various statues were

³⁴⁴ Amm. 19.12.12

³⁴⁵ *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.17, 19.

³⁴⁶ *Serm.* 62.15, translation from MacMullen (1997) 6.

³⁴⁷ Goddard (2002).

³⁴⁸ Croxford (2003).

deposited in a pit inside the mithraeum close to the entrance during the early fourth century. This collection included the heads of Mithras, Sarapis and Minerva, all of which were undamaged, with the burial evidently undertaken with care and consideration.³⁴⁹ While it is possible that this was done by the Mithraic community themselves as an act of ritual closure, it may also have been the work of the cult (possibly that of Bacchus) who took over the shrine, suggesting a similar approach to cultic statuary. In regards to the retention of ceramics in cult contexts, no study to my knowledge has been undertaken of this phenomenon.

Festivals

The Codex-Calendar of A.D. 354 records 177 festival days in Rome a year, with celebrations linked to the Imperial Cult accounting for 98 of these, while other traditional deities received 69 days. Many long running traditional festivals, such as the *Lupercalia* and the *Saturnalia*, continued into the fifth century. The former looks to have come to an end when it became a source of dispute between Pope Gelasius and the Senate in the early fifth century, while the latter was still active in A.D. 488, when it is listed in the calendar of Polemius Silvius, although by this time it was referred to as the ‘festival of the slaves’.³⁵⁰

Alongside the traditional Roman festivals, the festivals of so-called mystery cults continued into the fourth century and beyond. The Calendar-Codex of A.D. 354 records various festivals associated with Isis still being performed throughout the year, including the *Lychnapsia* in August and the *Pelusia* in March, while an Isaic priest is the image that accompanies November.³⁵¹ One of the cult’s major celebrations, the *Navigium Isidis*, also appears in the Calendar-Codex; this festival occurred in March at the start of sailing season with a procession followed by ship launching ceremony. The festival is described in the *Metamorphoses* taking place at Cenchreae and is known to have occurred at various other port towns including Byzantium and Ostia.³⁵² Additionally, it was noted by the author Rutilius Namatius in the early fifth century that he came across a festival of Osiris being held in the Italian countryside.³⁵³ According to fourth century Christian poem a prefect of Rome also still celebrated the festival of Magna Mater by having her image drawn through the street by lions, while as mentioned above Augustine refers to such events in North Africa.³⁵⁴

Public celebrations of other cults also continued across the Roman world. In Athens, the Panathenaic procession was still being held in the fourth, perhaps even early fifth century, while in the

³⁴⁹ The head of Mithras was removed from the neck by a blow from a blunt instrument, but the head itself is undamaged.

³⁵⁰ On the Lupercalia, see Beard, North and Price (1998) I.47; Brown (2012) 458. On the Saturnalia, see Salzman (1990) 240.

³⁵¹ Salzman (1990) 169-176.

³⁵² *Met.* 11.7-11, 11.12-15. *Byzantium*: *RICIS* 114/703; *Ostia*: Boin (2013) 208.

³⁵³ *On his Return* 1.371-6, translation from Beard, North and Price (1998) II.12.4g.

³⁵⁴ Anon. *Contra. Pagan.* 80-83, translation from Croke and Harries (1982) 80-3.

East, Dionysian celebrations were at their height in the mid-fourth century and even in the sixth century, eastern bishops still complained of nude swimming in the theatre as part of the May celebrations.³⁵⁵ In the West, Merovingian Church councils continued to try and ban people celebrating the Kalends of January in the fifth and sixth centuries.³⁵⁶

The survival of festivals should not surprise us, for they were undoubtedly a highlight of many people's social calendar. The extent to which the popularity of many festivals meant they could not simply be banned is demonstrated in the laws issued for their protection by in A.D. 342/6 and 382, while a law of A.D. 399 refers to festivals in North Africa as 'traditional amusements' and thus they should be allowed to continue.³⁵⁷

Yet while for some the religious meaning of these celebrations would have continued it is important to remember there is a crucial difference between popularity and commitment. Indeed, it is unclear to what extent many would have joined in the activities because they felt a sacred duty to do so or simply because they found these events enjoyable. To return to our sociological framework, such large-scale celebrations can have a negative impact on the commitment of cult adherents as they reduce social density and provide increased scope for 'free-riders'. It is perhaps no coincidence that festivals to Isis/Sarapis and Magna Mater carried on long after the evidence for their initiation rites ceases.

However, it should also be noted that while festivals are known to have carried on in the interior provinces, there is little comparable evidence for the frontier regions where the Mithraic evidence appears most frequently. The decline of the urban fabric, the reduction in the size of urban populations, economic instability and threat of raids were just some of the factors that made such events unlikely occurrences on the Rhine and Danube in Late Antiquity, but even in earlier periods evidence for such celebrations is uncommon. Even if the adherents of Mithras in late fourth century Noricum or Pannonia wished to enact any sort of festival to Mithras, the situation would have made it difficult, if not impossible.

Discussion

From the evidence, it appears that there was increasingly little to distinguish Mithraic rituals from those of other cults in the fourth century. If Mithraic feasts and sacrifices did continue at this time, then they were by no means the only examples of such practices still being conducted in the Roman

³⁵⁵ On the Panathenaic procession, see Saradi (2011) 265-266. On Dionysian celebrations, see Soler (2006), esp. 77-90.

³⁵⁶ Goodman (2011) 175.

³⁵⁷ *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.3, 8, 17.

world. The same can also be said regarding the deposition of coins as votives, which appears to have been a phenomenon that occurred at spring sites, other temples (in some cases even those that neighboured the mithraea) and in converted mithraea. Indeed, one may speculate that the deposition of coins in the basins of Poetovio II and Septeuil, which were situated over springs, may indicate these mithraea were viewed by worshippers as being akin to spring sites. This suggests that access to mithraea may no longer have been strictly regulated, which would be an important shift, as the secrecy that surrounded Mithraic rituals was one of the ways the cult could generate tension with society and thus helped to foster commitment among adherents. Furthermore, that Mithraic ritual activity no longer appears to have been particularly unique in some cases suggests less religious capital would be lost when partaking in the rituals of other cults.

In regards to initiation rites, if the cult of Mithras had largely discarded these rituals in the fourth century having risen to greater prominence in society then this would not be without precedent. There is little evidence of the cult of Isis/Sarapis continuing to implement such rituals from the third century, save for perhaps among its priests. Whatever initiation rituals were practiced by the followers of Magna Mater remains a mystery, but the act of eviration no longer appears to have been a feature of the cult by the late third century. However, the public festivals associated with these cults look to have continued into the fourth century and beyond, along with many other non-Christian festivals. Of course, such circumstances would encourage the participation of free-riders. If this is true, then based on the sociological model it may be suggested that, despite these large public gatherings, the average commitment of the adherents in these cults had reduced significantly by the late third century.

It is worth noting that such scenarios, whereby a initiatory cult becomes more prominent in society, then subsequently discards its initiation rites and embraces a more public form has precedents in other contexts. For example, the temple of Artemis Mounichia located in the Greek Piraeus, built in the ninth century BC, was located on a hillside away from any major settlements and acted as the site of secret initiation rituals. However, as the centuries passed and Athenian naval power grew the nearby port had expanded and by the fifth century had enveloped the shrine. However, it was from this port that the Athenian fleet launched to the Battle of Salamis in 480 B.C. and following the Athenians' success, the goddess was honoured as a patron of the navy and a yearly public festival was held in her honour. The initiation ceremonies were largely marginalised and the cult survived in connection with this festival until the third century A.D..³⁵⁸

In contrast, Christianity never implemented such initiation rituals, while the rituals Christians did partake in, such as baptism (purification) and feasts, were commonplace in Roman society. Much like

³⁵⁸ Papadopoulou (2014).

the cult of Mithras, the only major problem was that they occurred in private. However, unlike the cult of Mithras, whose members appear to have had no limits on what non-Mithraic rituals they could undertake, Christianity remained in tension with society into the early fourth century because of the rituals Christians would *not* partake in, most evidently animal sacrifice for the good of the emperors.³⁵⁹ Given that such practices were the social norm that members of most other cults appear to have adhered to, such an aversion proved highly contentious and brought Christian communities into violent conflict with the state in the form of the Diocletianic persecution. Of course, this did not serve to destroy Christianity or force them to integrate such sacrifices into their rituals; rather it only appears to have further enhanced the average commitment of the Christians, as those who were not sufficiently committed would have left the faith in the face of such a threat.

CONCLUSION

Across the third and fourth centuries, there is a clear alteration in the ritual practices of the Mithras cult. Until the early fourth century, Mithraic ritual activity appears to have remained relatively consistent. While some aspects may have varied regionally (e.g. the use of a bow and arrow in initiations on the Rhine), the basic principles, much like the plan of the mithraeum, remained relatively uniform. Additionally, all rituals appear to have been regulated by the *pater*: it was he who presided over initiation ceremonies, by whom sacrifices and donations to the mithraeum had to be ratified; and it was the *pater* who took the place of Mithras when recreating the sacred meal. As a result, there was little scope for deviation in these practices among the participants. Initiation from grade to grade formed the cornerstone of the Mithraic communities as they reinforced commitment by repeatedly extracting psychological, and perhaps, physical and monetary costs from members. Small congregations which relied on their members to play certain roles in the cult feasts and provide offerings meant that there was little room for so-called ‘free-riders’; it is unlikely one could turn up at a mithraeum, stand at the back until worship was over and then leave. Through a combination of all these ritual practices Mithraic initiates would seemingly generate a considerable level of religious capital which would also enhance their commitment as there were few other cults where one could translate the experiences of Mithraic membership into the worship of another deity.

Furthermore, what made Mithraic rituals even more unusual was that they all occurred behind closed doors. As a result, it is possible that a degree of tension was created between the cult and society as it would not be clear to outsiders what these activities involved and what their intended outcome was. Such parallels made be sought in Christian circles, whose rituals were somewhat different to the cult of Mithras (particularly the lack of animal sacrifices), but like the cult of Mithras the perceived secrecy that surrounded them and the possible social deviance they entailed looks to

³⁵⁹ Lactant. *De mort. pers.* 10.1-5.

have placed Christians in tension with society as well. However, given that there is no evidence of the Mithras cult ever coming into conflict with society over the secrecy of its rituals, to what degree this affected the commitment of Mithraic adherents remains open to debate.

Around the early to mid-fourth century, there is a considerable shift in the evidence, particularly in the western provinces. We have seen how there is no further evidence for the grade system outside of Rome after A.D. 325, which suggests initiation rituals had ceased to be implemented, at least beyond initially joining the cult. The changes in the archaeological evidence concurs with this: no arrowheads or crowns have been retrieved from the mithraea that have a *terminus post quem* of the fourth century, while just one mithraeum was found to contain a sword. There is also no evidence of reliefs or altars being manufactured that were designed to light up or revolve and it appears that in some cases the basins used for purifications were now used to collect votives. There is evidence for sacrifices and ritual meals dating the fourth century, but these are not common. There is just one instance of a sacrificial deposit (at Trier), while a few mithraea, such as Hawarte, Konjic and Septeuil, have produced indications that traditional Mithraic feasting practices were still in place. It might be that feasts continued at other mithraea, but the evidence has not been recorded in enough detail to establish whether this was the case. However, given the lack of evidence for the grade system and no iconographic depictions, it is unclear whether these offerings or cult meals would have been conducted in the same way as in previous generations.

While the evidence for traditional Mithraic practices becomes rarer in the fourth century, the deposition of many low denomination coins began to be made in various mithraea in Dalmatia, Gaul, Germany and Noricum, which recent excavations have demonstrated were likely to have been votive in nature. That they would have been placed under the relief, or at least in the nave, over an extended period also adds further credence to the possibility that the initiation rituals had ceased, as to carry them out would have meant trampling over these offerings, as would also be the case during ritual meals.

What is notable about these coin depositions is that such ritual activity was by no means unique to Mithraic contexts. The deposition of coins in this fashion is to be found in non-Mithraic contexts in the same period, such as other temples and at spring sites; indeed, at Martigny the deposition of coins in both the mithraeum and a neighbouring temple suggest there was little difference in the ritual activity carried these respective buildings. Furthermore, large numbers of coins dating to the fourth century have been found in mithraea that had been converted into places of worship for different cults.

Why this change in ritual practice occurred can only be speculated. It may be the impact of certain laws on these rituals and/or the secrecy that surrounded them; Mithras was no longer appearing to

fulfil what was asked of him and it was decided new forms of ritual had to be enacted; the social networks of those who frequented these mithraea had altered considerably and this was a way of adapting the cult to compensate; the end of the grade system in many communities left them without guidance to perform the more complex Mithraic rituals. Perhaps it was a combination of all of these reasons and more.

Regardless of what caused this transformation in Mithraic ritual practice, the deposition of coins is clearly a radical departure from the expensive and highly participatory rituals of earlier generations. That the deposition of a coin requires little effort and was not a uniquely Mithraic ritual (assuming there were no additional rituals to go alongside it) suggests this neither fostered significant levels of commitment, nor did it generate religious capital to the same extent as repeatedly engaging in initiation ceremonies and cult meals did. Indeed, this is demonstrated by the deposition of coins in the *San Clemente* and Carrawburgh mithraea by tourists today, many of whom would probably not identify themselves as worshippers of Mithras. That it can be easily carried out by an individual could also negate the need for a hierarchy that would be required in more complex rituals. It also indicates another way in which any tension between the cult and society could have been reduced. However, the problem here, as with elsewhere, is that we cannot be certain as to what extent this is all representative of Mithraic rituals: how much do we not know? What other aspects might such a ritual involve that do not survive in the archaeological record? Might there have been things required of these Mithraic adherents that we have no indication of? We do not know.

In any case, this transformation in ritual activity was not uniform across all Mithraic sites, further indicating an increased localisation in the cult. The instances of such activity on the Rhine and Danube may be indicative that the image of Mithras bringing forth water from the rock had become a, if not the, defining image of the cult in these regions and, as a result, this is why such finds are to be found in large quantities in mithraea connected with springs. In contrast, at the mithraea of Arupium and Epidaurum these offerings were placed in niches around the relief as opposed to at the foot of it. If the deposition of coins on the Rhine and Danube was intended to echo the water miracle, perhaps the insertion of coins into rock faces at Arupium and Epidaurum was related to Mithras being born of the rock.

From the mithraea in Rome, Konjic in Dalmatia and at Hawarte in Syria there is no evidence for large-scale coin deposition and it is perhaps no coincidence these are the sites where we see more traditional Mithraic practices possibly still in place. Furthermore, Rome is the only place where Mithraic initiations certainly continued to be carried out, although it is possible that these were ‘watered-down’ versions. Given that the central relief at Hawarte was also hidden, it is possible that initiations were also still conducted here. There is no indication of this at Konjic, but this mithraeum

has produced evidence, in the form of a relief, of ritual meals perhaps still being conducted with different members playing certain roles based on their grades.

One aspect of Mithraic ritual that remains particularly problematic is the curation of objects. The prevalence of ceramic sherds broken in a fashion as to retain the individual images does not appear to be a coincidence. The evidence from Bornheim-Sechtem is also highly suggestive of a congregation that rescued broken Mithraic statuary from another mithraeum which had been destroyed in the late fourth century. London may be an example of a Mithraic congregation who ritually buried cult statues, although this may also have been the work of those who took over the temple. The problem here is that the current archaeological record does not allow for a more nuanced study of this evidence, with the deposition of statuary fragments in many mithraea not recorded in detail; had the Bornheim-Sechtem mithraeum been discovered in the early 1900s, it is unlikely this evidence for the curation of statue fragments would have been recorded. Was this an aspect of the cult that arose in Late Antiquity or something that was prevalent in Mithraic circles from the beginning? As it stands we do not know, but it clearly was something practiced in at least some Mithraic congregations in the fourth century. If these Mithraic initiates did view these objects as imbued with some form of sacredness, then this raises the possibility that other items were removed from mithraea and kept for personal worship. This is something that has important implications for the apparent end of the cult discussed in Chapter 7.

Finally, the festivals of various other cults look to have continued into and beyond the fourth century, but may have come at the expense of other, more esoteric rituals. In regards to the cult of Isis/Sarapis, while various festivals associated with the cult were still occurring in the late fourth century, there is little evidence for initiation rituals still being enacted after the early third century. The same can also be said of the cult of Magna Mater. However, this should not be assumed to indicate that these cults had continued to generate a greater level of commitment among their followers than the cult of Mithras. Arguably, public festivals reduce tension with society, decrease social density among adherents and are a prime way of including free-riders in cult practice. Thus while the popularity of the Isis/Sarapis and Magna Mater cults may have continued the average commitment of their followers declining considerably. Alternatively, returning to the debate surrounding the prominence of mithraea, it may also be possible that by holding festivals and putting the cult on public display, these communities increased tension with some areas of society who would have been less effected by them had these cults remained more marginal.

CHAPTER 5: MITHRAEA AND WIDER BUILDING PATTERNS IN LATE ANTIQUITY

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapters highlighted how, from the late third to mid-fourth centuries, the attributes of the Mithras cult which had generated significant levels of commitment among its adherents began to wane. Furthermore, changes in social networks from which the cult had traditionally drawn many of its adherents may have impacted on the ability of the cult to attract new members. As a result, we may assume that the cult of Mithras began to enter a period of decline. Indeed, we have seen how the number of active mithraea did decline in the fourth century, but this is only half of the story. Evidence of activity occurring in mithraea at this time could simply be the result of just one or two individuals visiting the site, while the state of the evidence from many mithraea makes it questionable whether this should be taken as indicative of continued cultic worship at all. A better reflection of the commitment of Mithraic adherents can perhaps be gained from the quantitative data regarding the construction and repair of mithraea. Other than for a brief spell during in the Tetrarchic period, the cult does not appear to have relied on state or elite support to erect or maintain its temples, but rather it looked to its own congregations to contribute to this. Mithraic adherents are known to have funded the construction and repair of mithraea, but in many cases it is more likely they would have undertaken such work themselves. Given that mithraea were small, windowless structures whose congregations often consisted of individuals who spent much of their lives conducting manual labour, it was unlikely that the construction or repair of these temples would have been a difficult undertaking for such groups if significantly committed to the cult.

Modern parallels for this are to be found among the Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses, two groups who, like the cult of Mithras, limit their congregation sizes and, due to strict regulations on their membership, live in relatively high tension with mainstream society. In the case of the former, it has been calculated that the average Mormon Ward receives 400-600 hours of voluntary work from its members, which mostly covers mundane tasks such as janitorial and clerical functions.³⁶⁰ In the case of the latter, their places of worship (Kingdom Halls) are built by groups consisting mostly of volunteers who are Jehovah's Witnesses. These structures are often not especially large, tend to follow the same plan, and usually take just three days to construct.³⁶¹ Thus, even with just a small number, if they were highly committed it is arguable that a Mithraic congregation could construct or repair a mithraeum on its own, without outside help.

³⁶⁰ Stark and Finke (2000) 150.

³⁶¹ Stark and Iannacone (1997) 148. It is also worth noting that the majority of Kingdom Halls, like mithraea, are built without windows.

The premise of this chapter is to provide a quantitative study of the evidence for construction and repair of mithraea in order to ascertain whether a decline in this evidence can be established in correlation with the sociological observations outlined thus far. If the sociological model is correct, we should witness a significant decline in the construction and repair of mithraea from the early fourth century onwards, with levels prior to this remaining relatively consistent. Of course, one may argue that the changes in the data relating to mithraea are simply a product of wider alterations in building patterns. Thus, this chapter will also seek to establish how building patterns in certain regions and among other cults changed to see if the alterations evident with in regard to mithraea are unique or simply a reflection of wider changes. Furthermore, this will also serve to test the theory that the commitment of followers of the cults of Isis/Sarapis and Magna Mater began to decline at earlier stages, even though evidence for festivals associated with these cults continued into the fifth century. To begin with, I shall outline general patterns of temple and civic building in the Roman West,³⁶² after which those relating to the construction and repair of temples to Isis/Sarapis and Magna Mater will be discussed. Following this, I will turn to the evidence for the construction and repair of mithraea across the third and fourth centuries.

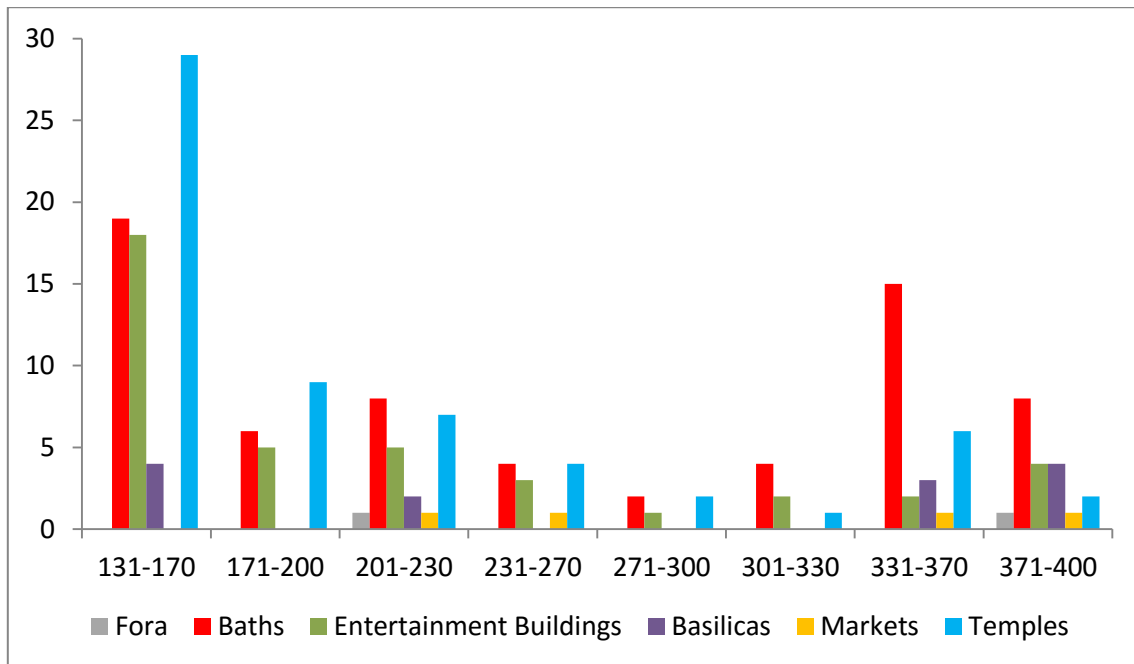
REGIONAL PATTERNS

In Italy (barring the city of Rome) Jouffroy has shown that building activity associated with temples and shrines was already in decline by the second century A.D., with only 61 temples providing such evidence from this period as opposed to the 129 from the first century. In the third century, there is a significant reduction in the evidence, with only 11 temples exhibiting building activity, followed by just eight after the turn of the fourth century. However, Jouffroy also demonstrated that this decline in temple construction and restoration was part of a wider lack of investment in public building from the first to third centuries: only 17 utility buildings (baths, basilicas and markets) were constructed in the third century, as opposed to 54 in the second century, while only 11 entertainment buildings (theatres, circuses and amphitheatres) were erected in the third century following 38 in the second century. If we break this information down into smaller chronological periods (Fig. 25), we can see that there was a notable drop in building work associated with all types of structures in the late second century, with the evidence thereafter decreasing a much more gradual rate. Furthermore, despite there being less evidence for construction and restoration of temples in the fourth century than in the third overall, there was an increase in such activity in the mid-fourth century, in correlation with a resurgence in civic building, that saw such activity return to almost the same level as the early third century. Building activity associated with temples is less evident in late fourth century Italy, but once again

³⁶² I have paid little attention to the Eastern half of the Roman Empire in these regional studies as the Mithraic evidence originating from this region is negligible, especially by the fourth century. Such evidence has, however, been included in the data for the 'Empire-wide' construction and restoration of Isis/Sarapis temples, Magna Mater temples and mithraea.

this is in tandem with a reduction in the overall evidence for public building. Thus, in Italy the patterns of construction and repair for temples never differ significantly to those evident for civic buildings in general.

Figure 25: Public Construction in Italy ca. A.D. 131-400 (excluding Mithraea)³⁶³



In the city of Rome, a similar decline in the fortunes of temples can be traced: only two new temples were built under Severus Alexander, another under Aurelian, and the Temple of the Divine Romulus on the *Sacra Via* was the only new temple erected in the early fourth century during the reign of Maxentius. There is not much evidence for restoration during this period either: the Temple of Jupiter Ultor on the Palatine was restored under Alexander Severus and the Temple of Venus was restored in A.D. 307. Like the rest of Italy, this correlates with a decline in civic building during the third century. Between the death of Alexander Severus and the accession of Diocletian, only one bathhouse (the Baths of Decius) was constructed in the city, while only one other was restored (the Baths of Nero). It also took more than thirty years to complete the restoration of the Colosseum after it was struck by lightning in A.D. 217, over three times as long as for its initial construction. However, in the fourth century there was, as in the rest of Italy, an increase in civic building in Rome. Once again, this mainly consisted of the construction and repair of utility buildings, particularly baths (construction of the Baths of Diocletian, Constantine and Naeratius Cerialis; restoration of the Baths

³⁶³ Based on Jouffroy (1986).

of Helena, Domus Augustiana and Agrippa), while other forms of building, including temples, received far less attention.³⁶⁴

Jouffroy has also demonstrated that there was a reduction in building work associated with temples in North Africa from the second century. However, the decline here from the second to third centuries is far less significant than in Italy, with 140 temples having provided evidence of construction and/or restoration in the second century and 112 in the third century. In contrast, during the fourth century there was a considerable reduction, with only 26 temples in North Africa exhibiting some form of repair, although this is still considerably more than in Italy. Furthermore, as Sears has pointed out, just two temples are known to have been constructed from the late third century onwards, the Temple of the Divine Carus at Verecunda in A.D. 283-284 and another at Thignica, indicating that the desire to erect new temples had all but ceased. When this is placed against the patterns of building work associated with utility buildings there is a strong contrast, with only a minor reduction between the second and third centuries (60 to 55) in the evidence relating to these buildings, followed by a subsequent rise during the fourth century, with 76 utility buildings exhibiting evidence of construction and repair. However, like temples, there was a decline in building work associated with entertainment buildings from the second to fourth centuries. It would seem in North Africa that, in contrast to utility buildings, temples and entertainment buildings were increasingly viewed as superfluous in the late antique period, although building activity associated with them was still not uncommon.³⁶⁵

A quantitative analysis of the construction of Romano-Celtic temples in Gaul undertaken by Fauduet found that the number of newly constructed temples declined considerably after the first century. During the first century 98 temples had been constructed, yet there are only 38 known examples from the second century. Only eight temples were built in the third century and none were constructed in the fourth.³⁶⁶ Occasional evidence for the renovation of certain temples is known from the fourth century, with examples from Champallement, Matagne-la-Grande and Matagne-la-Petite, and even as late as the sixth century, Caesarius of Arles recalled admonishing his congregation in southern Gaul for rebuilding a temple.³⁶⁷ Once again evidence for civic building is far less common in the third century, with just one amphitheatre to be erected (at Metz) after the Severan period,³⁶⁸ while the construction of public baths also became far less common.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁴ Richardson (1992) 456-457.

³⁶⁵ Jouffroy (1986) 399; Sears (2011).

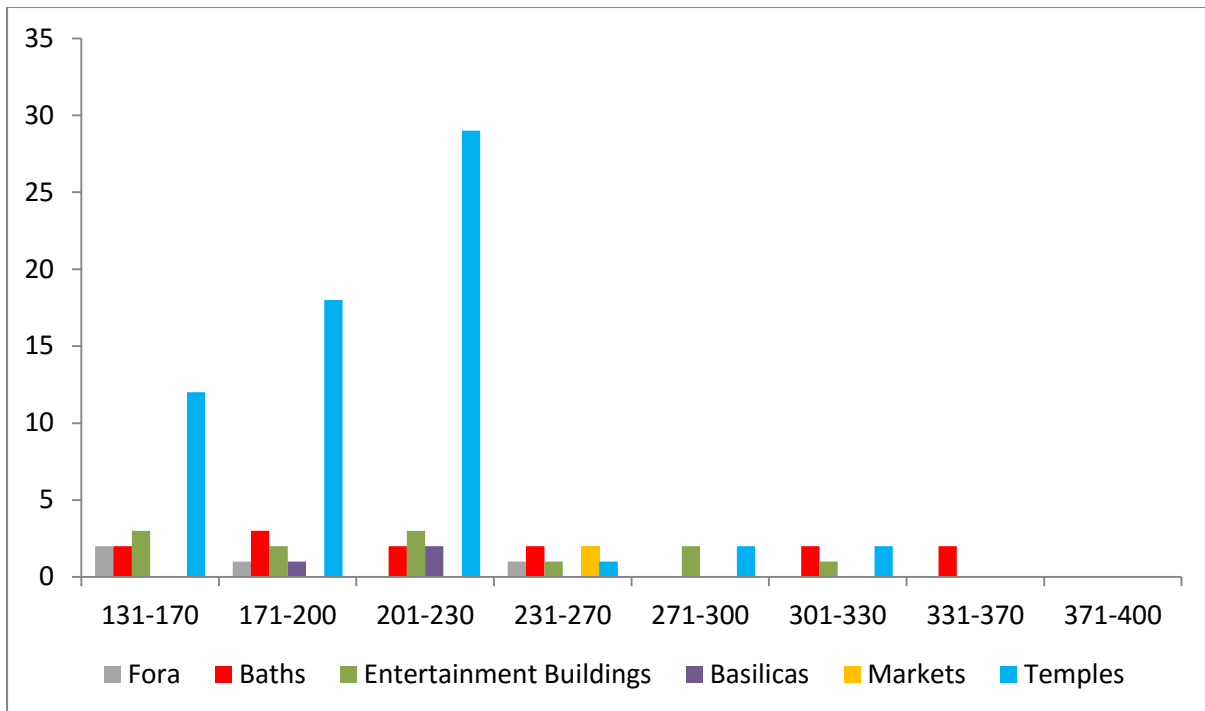
³⁶⁶ Fauduet (1993) 119-120. This from a total of 223 temples recorded in Gaul.

³⁶⁷ *Serm* 53.3; Goodman (2011) 168.

³⁶⁸ Bedon, Chevallier and Pinon (1988) 257.

³⁶⁹ Bedon, Chevallier and Pinon (1988) 290-303; Laurence, Esmonde Cleary and Sears (2011) 229. To my knowledge, no complete quantitative survey of all temples or public buildings in Gaul exists.

Figure 26: Public Construction in Noricum and Pannonia ca. A.D. 131-400 (excluding mithraea)³⁷⁰



What then of the Rhine and Danube regions, areas that have been particularly fertile in regards to Mithraic evidence? Unfortunately, due to space and time constraints we can only focus on one region, the neighbouring Danubian provinces of Noricum and Pannonia, for, as was outlined in the Introduction, few studies exist on the sacred landscapes of the Rhine and Danube provinces in Late Antiquity, thus attempting to establish patterns for both here would be a significant undertaking. In Fig. 26 chronological changes in the construction and restoration of public buildings and temples in Noricum and Pannonia are illustrated.³⁷¹ Most notable is the immense amount of evidence for building activity associated with temples in the second to early third centuries, which far outweighs all the other evidence for public building combined. However, by the mid-third century the data presents a marked shift, as from this point onwards only five instances of temple building work are known: a temple reconstructed at Lentia (possibly to *Dea Roma*); another was built to Silvanus at Cirpi by a veteran; the restoration of temples to Jupiter and Victory by the Tetrarchs at Aquincum and Bedauium respectively; and the restoration of a temple to Bona Eventus at Sirmium by an imperial freedman in the reign of Constantius II, which is the last known example of building activity relating to a temple in this region. At the same time, evidence relating to civic building is relatively low, but this does not differ considerably from the second century, at which time building activity also appears

³⁷⁰ Adapted from Walsh (2016).

³⁷¹ A more in-depth study of temples in Noricum and Pannonia, which includes a comparison to wider public building, is to be published shortly, see Walsh (2016).

to have been a rarity. Indeed, much of the extant evidence for urbanisation in this region originates from the first and early second centuries and there does not appear to have been many considerable additions to this in subsequent centuries.³⁷² It does appear that by the Tetrarchic period both civic buildings and temples were considered unnecessary in this region. This is demonstrated at Gorsium, which at some point in the third century was largely destroyed, with its large temple precinct, which possibly served as the centre for the Imperial Cult in this region, left in ruins. Under the Tetrarchs a large reconstruction program of the town was undertaken, yet both temples and civic buildings were conspicuously absent, with the main focus now appearing to be on buildings of a military or administrative nature.³⁷³ Furthermore, almost all civic buildings that were erected in the early fourth century were to be found in Sirmium, which was made an imperial capital in the Tetrarchic period and as a result held unusual status in comparison to many other Danubian towns. Such chronological and regional discrepancies are to be expected, however, given that, as outlined in Chapter 1, by the mid-fourth century many towns in this region were in a dilapidated state with significantly reduced populations.

It is clear that in many locations across the Roman West building activity associated with temples had declined notably in the third century. However, there is a degree of regional variation evident: in Italy this decline begins in the late second century, at which time the construction and repair of temples in the Danube region was still increasing with the evidence here not going into decline until the mid-third century, and in North Africa there was not a considerable reduction in temple building until the fourth century. A further regional difference is that temples in Italy, North Africa and Gaul continue to exhibit evidence of repair into the fifth century, while in Noricum and Pannonia there is no extant evidence of such activity dating to the later than the opening decades of the fourth century. In some cases, we also find a closer relationship between the fortunes of civic buildings and temples: in Italy and Gaul, the building patterns of temples fall and rise in correlation with those of other buildings, while in Noricum and Pannonia this is not the case, with civic building already at a minimum in the second century when temples were increasingly being repaired and constructed. In North Africa, while evidence for temple building declines from the first century onwards, the construction and repair of civic buildings appears to have remained relatively consistent into the third century, although a subsequent rise in the construction and repair of utility buildings in the fourth century is accompanied by a reduction in such evidence relating to entertainment buildings. Therefore, while temple construction and repair did decrease in the third century, when this decline began, the rate at which it occurred, and how it relates to the wider context varied from region to region.

³⁷² Šašel-Kos (2010).

³⁷³ Poulter (1992) 110–111.

TEMPLES TO OTHER 'MYSTERY'
DEITIES ACROSS THE ROMAN WORLD

Having had a look at regional patterns, now let us turn to the evidence for the construction patterns of temples dedicated to Isis/Sarapis and Magna Mater. By analysing alterations in these, we will be able to ascertain whether any changes in the patterns of construction and repair of mithraea were part of wider trend evident in other 'mystery-cults' at this time, or if there is any significant differentiation among these groups. So far, we have seen how both the cults of Isis/Sarapis and Magna Mater had gradually lessened their membership costs and reduced the tension between themselves and society, with their festivals eventually becoming major events in the Roman calendar and their temples large, prominent fixtures in the urban landscape. If my hypothesis is correct, then these changes would have resulted in a decline in the average commitment of cult adherents, which would have subsequently led to a decline in the construction and repair of the temples used by these cults. Given that these cults arrived in the Roman world at an earlier stage than the cult of Mithras, one would expect this decline to be apparent at an earlier stage, although given that these two cults were integrated into Roman society at different rates, this decline is unlikely to have run in parallel.

In Fig. 27 a chronological breakdown of the construction and restoration of temples to Isis/Sarapis across the Roman world is provided. The evidence reaches its peak in the early third century and the subsequently declines from the mid-third century onwards. After the mid-third century there is no evidence of any new temples of Isis/Sarapis being constructed in the Roman world, with all the extant evidence relating to the repair of pre-existing examples, although this evidence is wide ranging, with examples from London, Paestum, Soli and Ostia. The only evidence dating to the late third century is the aforementioned adaptations to the temple of Sarapis at Ostia.³⁷⁴ For much of the fourth century there is a complete absence of evidence for building activity associated with these structures, although a shrine to Sarapis was restored at Portus by Valentinian II, Valens and Gratian, although how extensive this work was is unknown as the shrine itself has not been uncovered. However, it is worth noting that this does indicate that even in the late fourth century if the emperors felt there was something to be gained in supporting the restoration of a temple to a non-Christian deity they would do so.

³⁷⁴ Wild (1984) 1805. I have omitted the restoration of the Campus Martius iseu under the Tetrarchs recorded in Wild's table, as I have not been able to verify this.

Figure 27: Construction and Repair of Temples to Isis/Sarapis across the Roman World ca. A.D. 131-400³⁷⁵

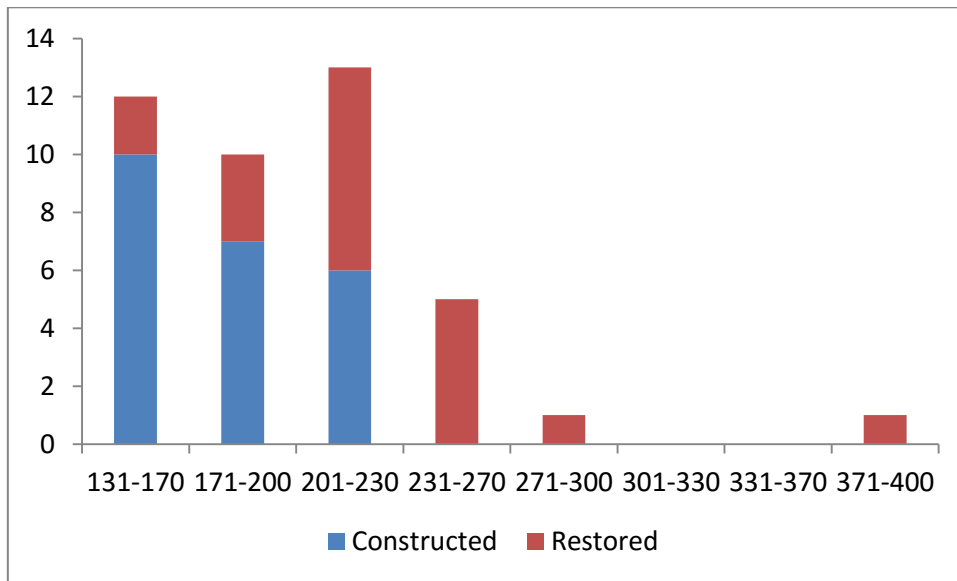
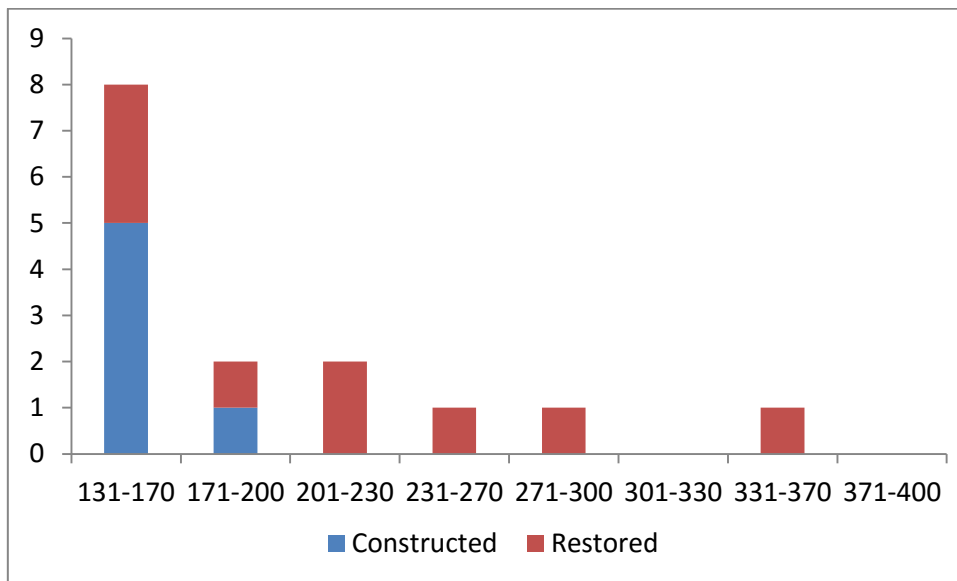


Figure 28: Construction and Repair of Temples to Magna Mater ca. A.D. 131-400³⁷⁶



³⁷⁵ Based on all certain and probable temples recorded in Wild (1984) with the addition of sanctuaries now known at: Achaia (SIRIS 155), Aquae Helvetorium (CIL 10.7514 = SIRIS 520 = AE 2004, 668), Baelo Nielsen (2014) 70-71; Bulla Regia (Jouffroy 1986, 209); Carnuntum (AE 1992, 1412 = AE 2000, 1209), London (AE 1976, 363), Mainz (Witteyer 2004), Micia (CIL 3.1341 = AE 1975, 727 = SIRIS 686), Municipium Montanensium (CIL 3.12387 = AE 1891, 88 = SIRIS 702), Portus (AE 1968, 86 = AE 1971, 67 = SIRIS 562), Praeneste (CIL 14.2901 = SIRIS 527), and Sulci (CIL 10.7514 = AE 2004.668 = SIRIS 520).

³⁷⁶ Sites included: Banasa (CCCA 5.151); Brigetio (CCCA 6.110); Carthage (CIL 8.24521); Civitas Mattiacorum (CCCA 6.49); Civitas Nattabutum (ILAlg 2.6094); Gnathia (Jouffroy 1986, 118); Leukopetra (CCCA 6.179); Lugundum (CCCA 5.384); Mainz (Witteyer 2004); Maurentania (CIL 8.8457 = CIL 8.20343 = AE 2008, 1613); Ostia (CCCA 3.362); Fora Romanum (CCCA 3.1); Saalburg (CCCA 6.50)

In the regards to temples of Magna Mater (Fig. 28), there is an evident contrast to those of Isis/Sarapis, with a decline in the building activity relating to the former originating in the late second century. After A.D. 170 there is evidence for just one new temple to Magna Mater, which was constructed at Carthage (on Bysra Hill). In terms of restoration in the third century, although greatly reduced in number, just as with the cult of Isis/Sarapis examples of such activity originate from across the empire, with examples Brigetio, Civitas Mattiacorum, Civitas Nattabutum and Rome. Furthermore, like temples of Isis/Sarapis, those of Magna Mater did not completely cease to be the subject of restoration work during the fourth century, although once again the evidence is not in abundance; the only example of a the temple of Magna Mater being restored in the fourth century once again comes from Carthage, where the restoration was funded by a governor in the A.D. 330s.

Thus, the evidence for investment in temples to Magna Mater and Isis/Sarapis both exhibit a decline, but at different times correlating with how soon they were integrated into Roman society and a reduced their membership costs. Furthermore, this also demonstrates that just as the decline of temple construction and restoration varies regionally, so too does it differ among various cults. As a result, there is no uniform 'decline in temple paganism', but instead a highly variable process that looks to have depended on the cult and on local circumstances. Ideally, it would also have been beneficial to present a similar chronology for the construction and repair of churches, but without much evidence prior to the mid-fourth century this is not possible. However, it is not unlikely that the construction and repair of churches increased leading into the fourth century, while we can say with some certainty it would have continued increasing from the reign of Constantine onwards.

CONSTRUCTION AND REPAIR OF MITHRAEA IN THE THIRD AND FOURTH CENTURIES

What then of our subject, the cult of Mithras? Do mithraea exhibit any significant differences in their construction patterns in comparison with the regional trends or those relating to the cults of Isis/Sarapis and Magna Mater? As illustrated in Fig. 29, building activity associated with mithraea across the Roman world remained relatively consistent throughout the third century and it is not until the early fourth century that decline sets in, but even then this was a gradual process as opposed to any considerable reduction evident among the temples of Magna Mater and Isis/Sarapis demonstrated above.

Figure 29: Construction and Repair of Mithraea across the Roman World ca. A.D. 201-400

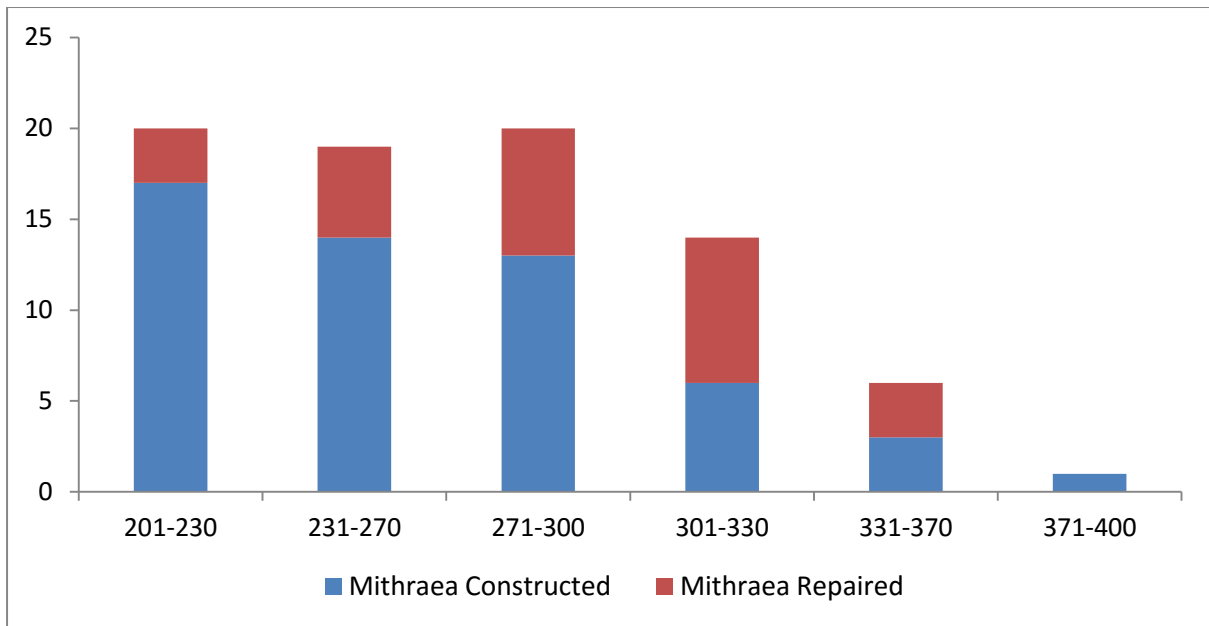


Figure 30: Public Building v Mithraea in Italy ca. A.D. 131-400

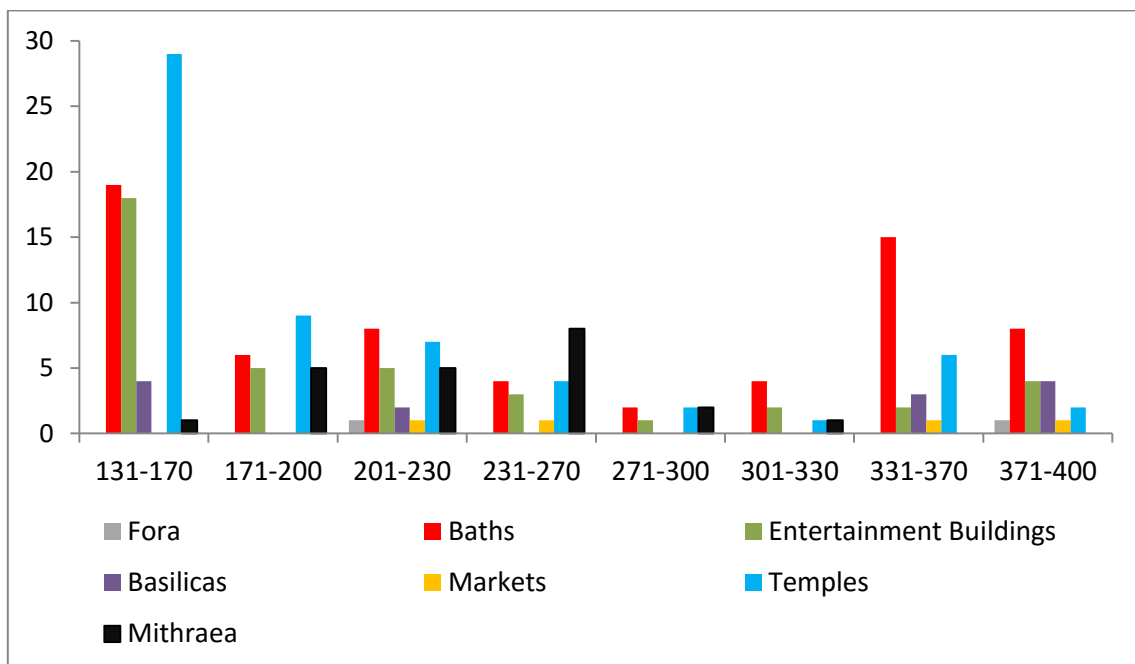


Figure 31: Public Building v Mithraea in Noricum and Pannonia ca. A.D. 131-400

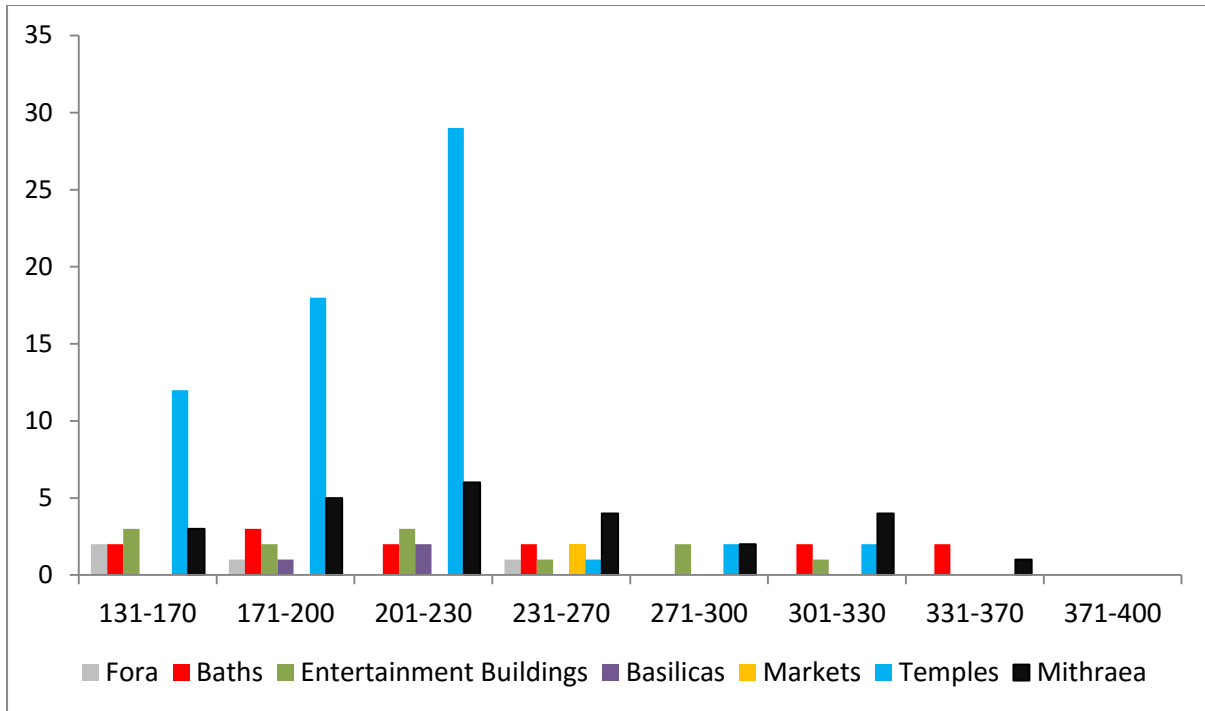
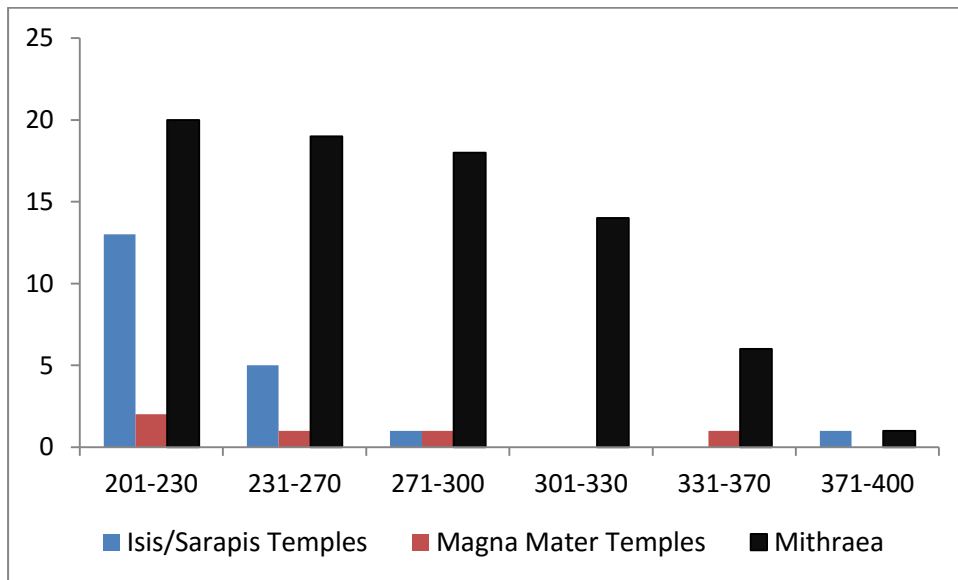


Figure 32: Construction Work Relating to Isis/Sarapis Temples v Temples of Magna Mater v Mithraea ca. A.D. 201-400



In regards to regional patterns, in Italy (Fig. 30) we can see evidence for building activity associated with mithraea increases until the mid-third century and then gradually declines thereafter, before disappearing completely in the mid-fourth century, unlike the patterns of temple and civic building which decline from the late second century onwards. Bjørnbye has demonstrated that mithraea in Rome follow a similar pattern, as they continued to be constructed and repaired until the mid-fourth century,³⁷⁷ which contrasts with a lack of building activity exhibited in the city during the third and fourth centuries outlined above. In Noricum and Pannonia (Fig. 31), mithraea exhibit more building activity than any type of public building or temples across the third century. The evidence in this region differs from that found in Italy in that there is a decline in the mid-third century, but the resurgence in the evidence under the Tetrarchs is striking in comparison to that relating to other types of building, which remains minimal. Furthermore, given the Tetrarchs' focus on military and administrative buildings in this region at the expense of civic buildings or temples, the support provided by the imperial government for mithraea now looks even more unusual and infers that in this region the cult enjoyed a particularly significant level of prestige.

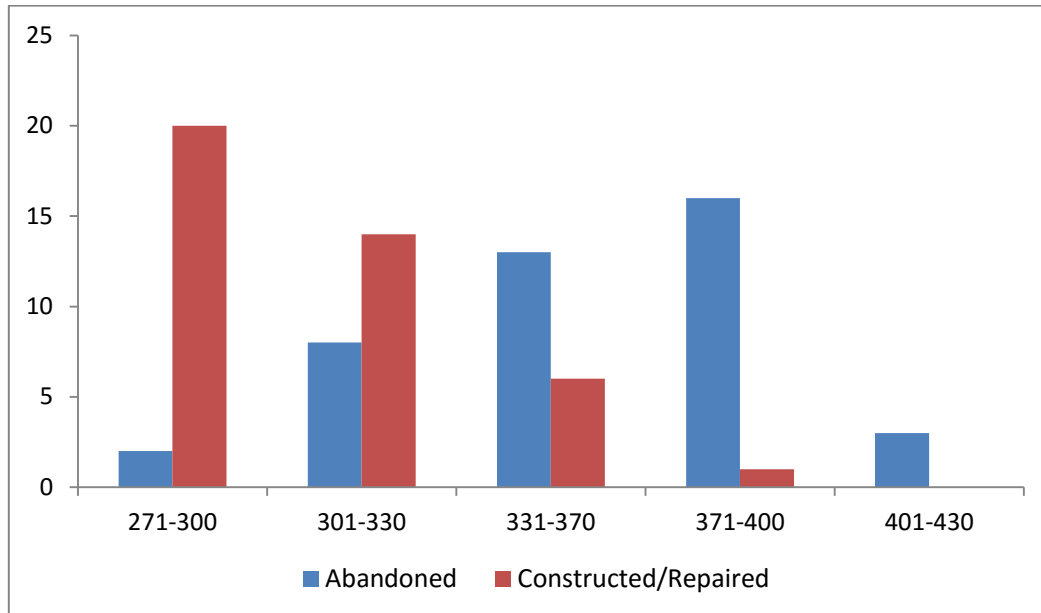
Finally, in Fig. 32 the construction activity relating to mithraea in the third and fourth centuries is placed alongside that of temples of Isis/Sarapis and Magna Mater. The difference is quite astounding, with far more mithraea constructed and repaired than the temples of these other cults during this period. That evidence for the construction and repair of mithraea continued well into the fourth century adds further credence to the argument against a unified decline in 'temple paganism', while given that the patterns relating to the cults of Mithras, Isis/Sarapis and Magna Mater all differs this indicates there was no shift towards so-called 'mystery cults' in Late Antiquity.

Thus, the changes that occurred in the cult of Mithras during the third and early fourth centuries do appear to have ushered in a period of overall decline in the commitment of many of its adherents, with less and less mithraea exhibiting evidence of construction and repair. As was outlined in Chapter 1, during the course of the fourth century fewer mithraea also exhibit evidence of activity, thus across this period the abandonment of mithraea was inversely proportional to those being constructed (Fig. 33). Of course, this decline was not entirely uniform across the Roman world, with new mithraea subsequently appearing at Hawarte, Septeuil, Rome and St Urban, while others were restored at Cirta and Martigny. This indicates that some Mithraic worshippers did still feel significantly committed to the cult, even though, as demonstrated, the mithraea constructed by these congregations took on localised forms and their motives for worshipping Mithras were not necessarily the same as their contemporaries elsewhere. Yet overall the evidence indicates from the early fourth century the cult of

³⁷⁷ Bjørnbye (2007).

Mithras was in terminal decline, with the combination of mithraea being abandoned and new ones not being constructed a clear indication the number of followers was dwindling.

Figure 33: Construction and Repair v Abandonment of Mithraea ca. A.D. 271-430



CONCLUSION

By the fourth century, temple construction and repair across the Roman world was far rarer than it had been in previous periods. Yet this development did not result in a unified decline in all provinces, but rather there was significant variation among different regions, with a decline in temple construction beginning at different times and occurring at different rates. For instance, on the Danube, building work associated with temples was at its height in the early third century, while by this time in Italy it had long been in decline. Furthermore, how this related to wider civic building also alternated among provinces, for while in Italy and Gaul the fortunes of temples closely match those of civic buildings, in Noricum, Pannonia and North Africa there is a notable contrast. Such variability is also evident among different cults, for temples to Magna Mater exhibit a significant reduction in construction and repair in the late second century, while in regards to the temples of Isis/Sarapis this does not look to have occurred until a century later. In the case of the cult of Mithras, a decline in the construction and repair of mithraea does not become evident until even later, in the early fourth century. As a result, there is clearly no unified 'decline of temple paganism', but rather transformations in the sacred landscape were determined by the context in which they occurred and varied on a cult by cult basis.

Judging from the evidence outlined in previous chapters, it does seem that the sooner there was a reduction in the tension between a cult and mainstream society, and the cult removing the more costly

elements of its membership, the earlier a decline becomes evident in the construction and repair of its temples. The cult of Magna Mater was the earliest of these cults to be integrated into the Roman world and new temples to this deity ceased to be constructed after the turn of the third century, while the restoration of its pre-existing temples became a rarity. In contrast, in regards to the cult of Isis/Sarapis, which was not significantly integrated into Roman society until perhaps the late first century, a decline in temple building work is not evident until the mid-third century.

The same situation is evident in the cult of Mithras. Evidence for the construction and repair of mithraea begins to decline in the early fourth century, following a period when mithraea had become more prominent, members and patrons of the cult more high-profile, and Mithraic rituals began to become less unique. Prior to this decline, the numbers of mithraea being built and restored are extraordinarily high, both in comparison with other cults and general building patterns in Italy and on the Danube, suggesting that, as speculated, the commitment of Mithraic adherents at this time was relatively high, but that the late third and early fourth centuries had marked a significant shift in this. It was certainly not the case that there were 'enough' active mithraea in the Roman Empire in the fourth century and the numbers of adherents had simply plateaued, for as demonstrated more and more mithraea were being vacated in the fourth century while fewer were constructed. Rather, by the late fourth century the cult of Mithras was in a state of severe decline.

CHAPTER 6: THE FATE OF MITHRAEA

INTRODUCTION

This section brings this analysis of the Mithras cult in the late antique period to its culmination by discussing when, how and why the cult completely disappears from the archaeological record. In this chapter, the answers to the following questions will be sought: What was the fate of mithraea that were active from the late third century and how did this vary regionally and chronologically? What forms of destruction and de-sacralisation are evident at Mithraic sites? Having answered these questions I will then explore the possible motors for the state of the evidence from a range of possibilities (Christian iconoclasm, barbarian incursion, pressure from the Roman government, civil war, Mithraic ritual practice, and natural disasters) and attempt to establish how common each of these scenarios looks to have been.

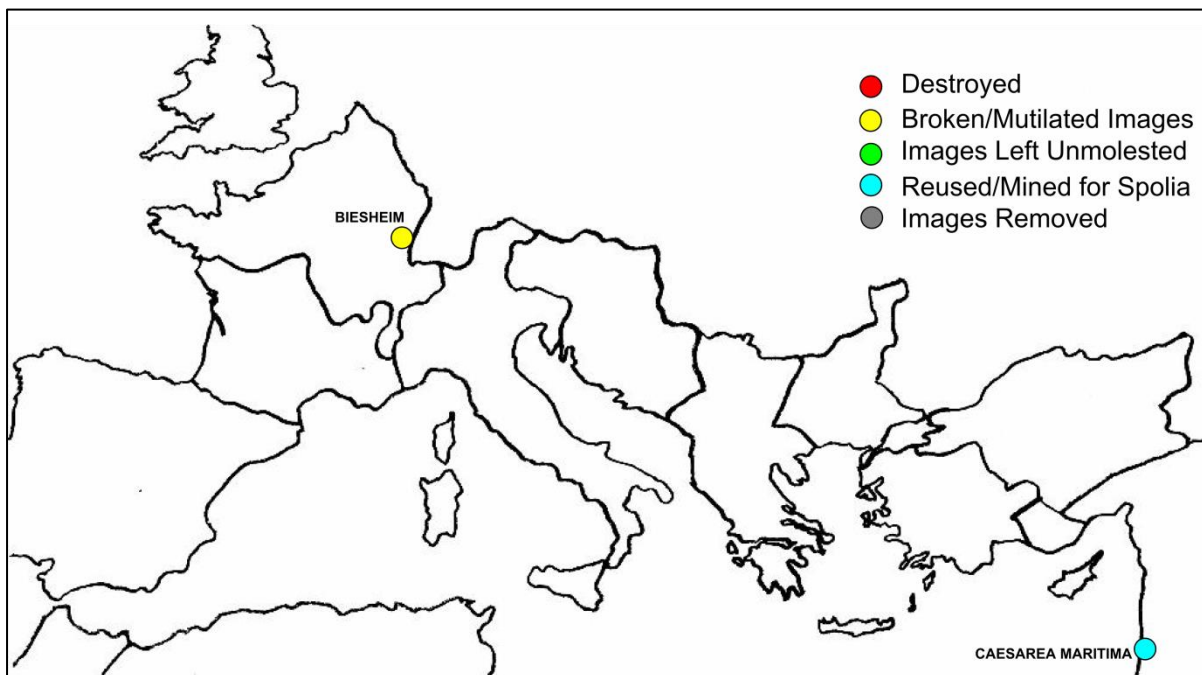
Unfortunately, attempting discern what became of temples in the late antique period is fraught with problems. Much information comes from excavations conducted in the 19th and early 20th centuries, which often sought to clear everything down to levels dating to the ‘High Empire’ of the first and second centuries. Where later levels have been recorded, rarely was this in detail and what was established was often imbued with preconceived notions of the excavators. For example, to an archaeologist of the late 1800s, objects found in fragmentary condition were clearly the victims of violent destruction, yet we now know the cultural biographies of objects and structures can be highly varied over time, with their meaning changing from context to context, and what may seem to be meaningless fragments could have had entirely different meaning at the time of deposition. As such, we must be cautious in interpreting their fate without full consideration of the evidence. Furthermore, as highlighted in the previous chapter, we cannot be entirely certain whether the *terminus post quem* of a temple is indeed close to the date of abandonment, or whether there was a period of occupation or abandonment not evident in the archaeological record, particularly when reviewing earlier excavations where stratigraphy was not recorded.³⁷⁸ Yet while earlier reports may be less than ideal by modern standards, data obtained from more recent archaeological investigation has presented an opportunity to revisit some of this older work and re-evaluate the conclusions that were drawn at the time, as this chapter will demonstrate in regards to mithraea.

³⁷⁸ For further analysis, see Ward-Perkins (2011).

GEOGRAPHICAL AND CHRONOLOGICAL VARIATION IN THE FATE OF MITHRAEA

In Figs. 34-38, the geographical distribution of the fate of extant mithraea across this period is depicted.³⁷⁹ As Fig. 34 indicates, only two mithraea appear to have gone out of use in the final decades of the third century and these were located at opposite ends of the empire.³⁸⁰ On the Rhine frontier, a mithraeum at Biesheim was partially burnt down and had its images broken. Given that this looks to have been an isolated incident, there is little to suggest any significant widespread threat to the cult in this region at this time, although due to the fact that all the statues and reliefs were smashed it is unlikely that this was an accidental event. In the East, the mithraeum at Caesarea Maritima met a more passive fate, reverting to being used as a storehouse. Given the scarcity of Mithraic finds from this region, the transformation of the Caesarea Maritima mithraeum may have left the East entirely devoid of mithraea for a time until the construction of the Hawarte mithraeum at the turn of the fourth century.

Figure 34: Fate of Mithraea ca. A.D. 271-300



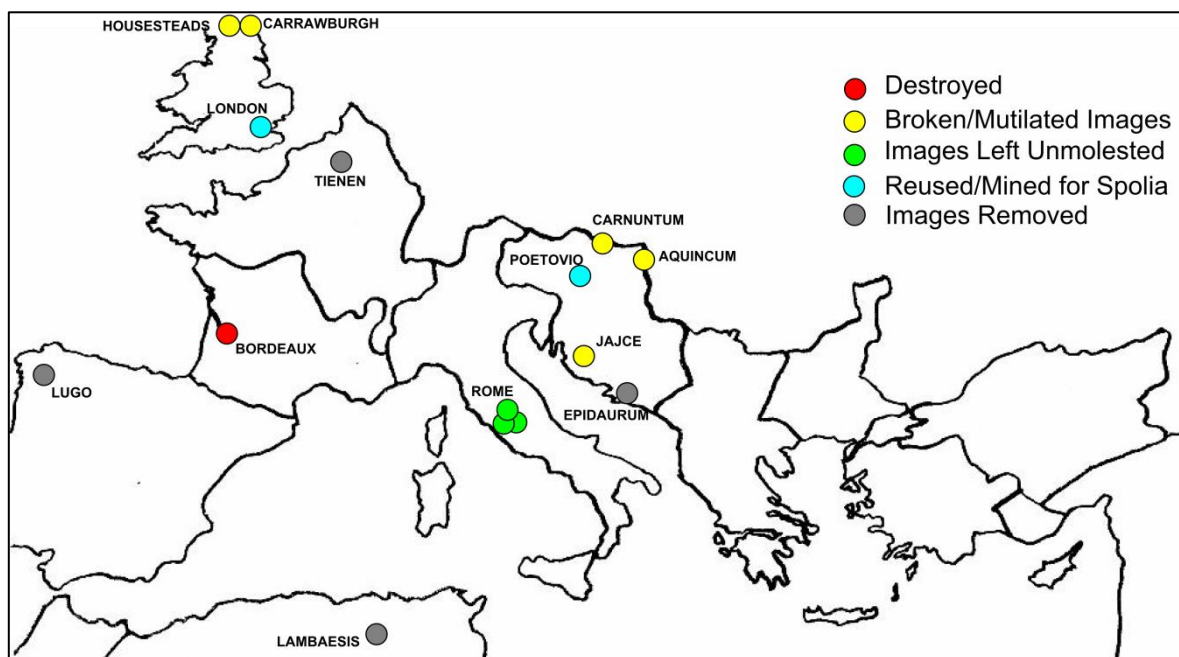
In the first decades of the fourth century (Fig. 35), the distribution of mithraea going out of use is relatively evenly distributed across the Western half of the Roman Empire. In Rome, several mithraea

³⁷⁹ It should also be mentioned that of the many mithraea uncovered in Ostia none are known to have been active into the fourth century. It is highly likely that some were, given the cult continued to be active well into the fourth century in Rome, but as there is no archaeological evidence emerges support this they cannot be included here. See Boin (2013) 114.

³⁸⁰ Of course various Mithraic temples had been abandoned before this time, such as those in Germania Superior following its loss in the early third century.

(*Foro Boario, San Stefano Rotondo* and at *Via Giovanni Lanza 128*) looked to have been abandoned during this time, with most of their cult items left untouched. Most mithraea outside of Rome were found with their statues and reliefs completely removed (Epidaurum, Capua, Lugo, Lambaesis and Tienen), while the mithraeum in London was used to house a different cult group and Poetovio IV was mined for *spolia*. Only one mithraeum looks to have been destroyed (Bordeaux),³⁸¹ while there are four others that have produced broken or mutilated statues, three of which lay frontier areas (Carnuntum I and Aquincum IV on the Danube; Carrawburgh on Hadrian's Wall) and one in Dalmatia at Jajce.

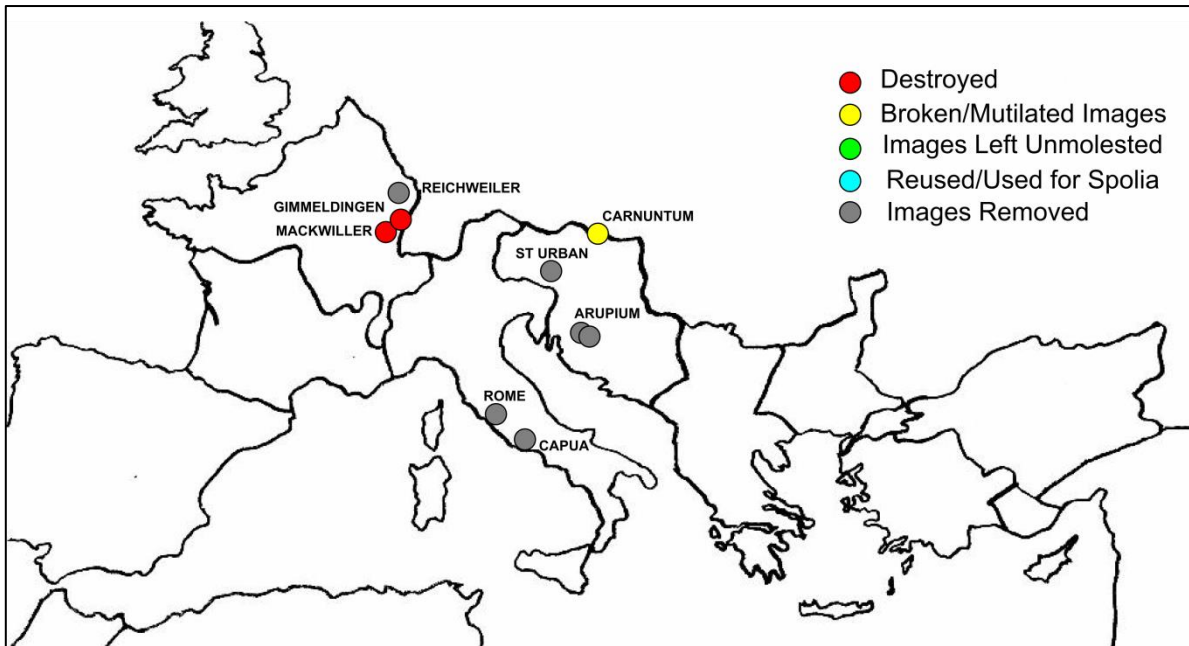
Figure 35: Fate of Mithraea ca. A.D. 301-330



In the mid-fourth century (Fig. 36), the overall number of mithraea going out of use declines. Those which were destroyed or had their images mutilated were predominantly located on the northern frontiers. There is particular concentration along the Rhine, where one mithraeum was abandoned (the rural temple at Reichwieller) and another two destroyed (Gimmeldingen and Mackwiller, the latter of which was rebuilt as a spring sanctuary), suggesting there may be a link between their fates. At Carnuntum on the Danube frontier we also find a mithraeum with its images broken. In contrast, all mithraea located in the interior, at Arupium, Capua and at *Ospedale San Giovanni* in Rome, were found with all portable reliefs and statues removed.

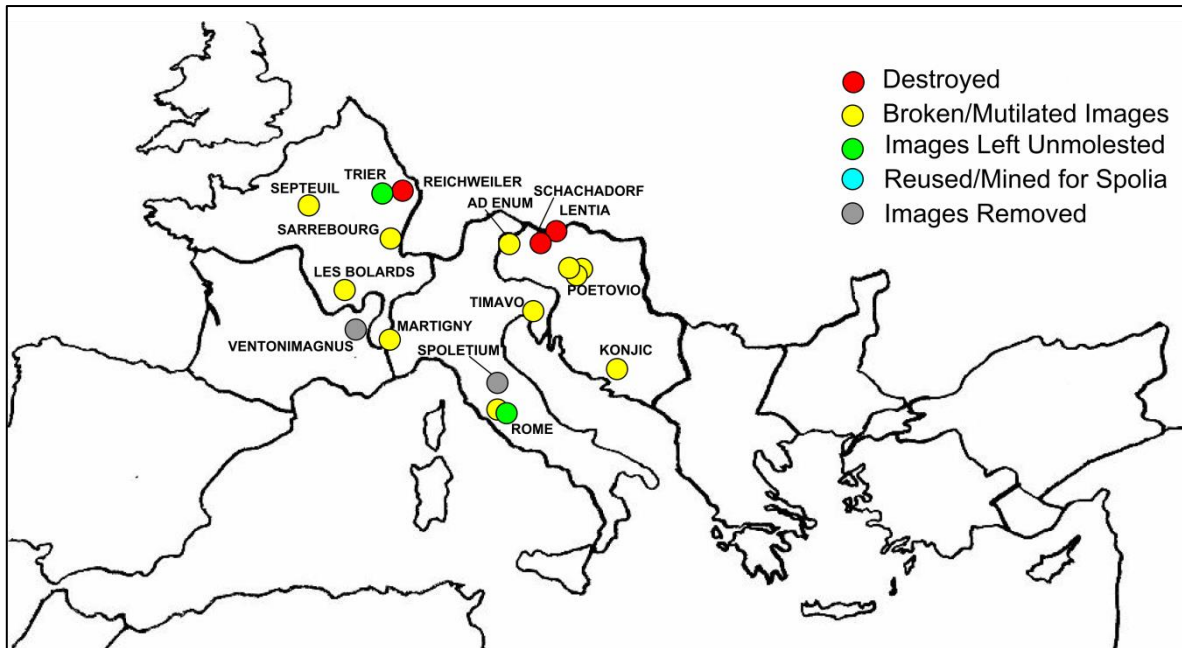
³⁸¹ The details regarding the Bordeaux mithraeum are unclear, with much of the material unpublished. I have attempted to contact those who have published on the mithraeum, but have received no response.

Figure 36: Fate of Mithraea ca. A.D. 331-370



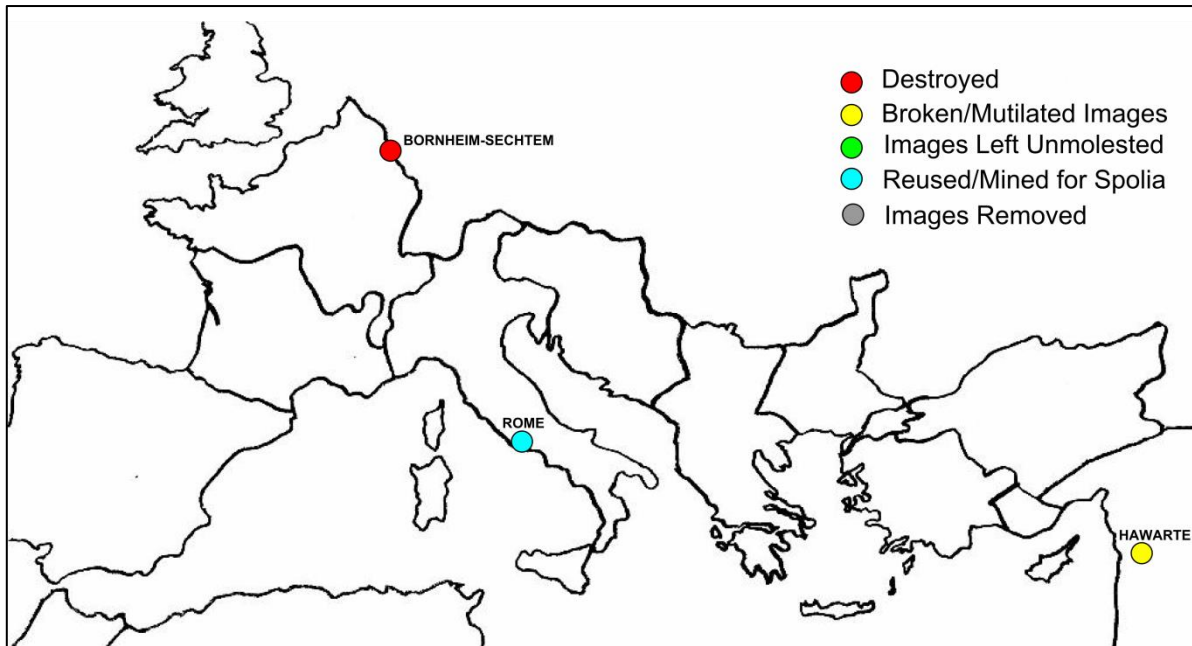
In the final decades of the fourth century (Fig. 37), the evidence for mithraea that were destroyed or had their images mutilated is more widespread than in previous periods, with the two strongest concentrations to be found along the Rhine and Danube frontiers. These mithraea were located in a variety of contexts: in or around settlements (Ad Enum, Lentia, Poetovio and Sarrebourg), rural locations (Reichweiler and Schachadorf), and on private estates (Mackwiller and Rockenhausen). In the interior provinces the fate of mithraea was more varied: in eastern Gaul, two mithraea (Martigny and Les Bolards) have produced broken sculptures, while another (Venetonimagnus) was abandoned and all its fittings removed. In the case of the latter, it is possible that given its close proximity to the two former examples, the damage to these may have prompted its abandonment. At Trier, it appears the mithraeum was left relatively untouched (although as will be outlined below it was mined for *spolia*) at a later date. In Italy, there is a mixture of de-sacralisation (*Santa Prisca* in Rome and at Timavo) and abandonment (*San Clemente* in Rome and Spoletium), while the Dalmatian mithraeum at Konjic was found with its main relief broken.

Figure 37: Fate of Mithraea ca. A.D. 371-400



By the early fifth century (Fig. 38), there are several mithraea, located at a considerable distance from each other, which have produced evidence of a *terminus ante quem* from this period. At Bornheim-Sechtem, the mithraeum was completely levelled. In Rome, only the large mithraeum in the *Crypta Balbi* was apparently still active, but this was soon transformed into a stable. In the East, the mithraeum in the village of Hawarte went of use sometime in the first decades of the fifth century and had a church built over it shortly thereafter. Christian graffiti was etched into its walls, suggesting violent coercion may have been the cause.

Figure 38: Fate of Mithraea ca. A.D. 401-430



Discussion

So what patterns emerge from this broad look at the fate of mithraea? In terms of violent closure, the late fourth century provides the greatest number of examples, although this is by no means unique to this period as even a hundred years previous a mithraeum was destroyed at Biesheim. Geographically speaking, it is on the northern frontiers of Britain, the Rhine and the Danube where the greatest abundance of mithraea that exhibit some form of evidence of violent closure are to be found. In contrast, there is less evidence for violent closure of mithraea in the interior provinces. In Italy and along the Dalmatian coast most mithraea had their fittings removed or left untouched, with only four producing evidence of image destruction. The mithraea at both Lugo in Spain and Lambaesis in North Africa were also found devoid of any images. The only mithraeum located in the interior provinces that looks to have been destroyed was located at Bordeaux. However, the majority of mithraea still active in the interior provinces at the end of the fourth century do appear to have met a violent end, suggesting a change in circumstances at this time.

It is worth noting that in some cases, mithraea that have produced no evidence of violent closure were located near to other mithraea that were abandoned around the same time, suggesting a possible connection between their fates. Such is the case in eastern Gaul, where three mithraea were abandoned towards the end of the fourth century, two of which contained broken images (Martigny and Les Bolards), while another (Venetonimagnus) had all its images removed. This may also have been the case at Reichweiler, which was abandoned around the same time as other nearby mithraea at

Gimmeldingen and Mackwiller were destroyed. It is possible that some Mithraic congregations, upon hearing of a violent end to a nearby mithraeum, decided to remove the objects and abandon the temple in favour of a safer location.

DESTRUCTION AND DAMAGE TO MITHRAEA

Destruction and Damage via Fire

There are instances in the historical record where fire was used as part of the process in destroying temples. When the bishop Marcellus sought to raze a temple in Apamea, the techniques involved by local craftsmen were described in detail by the historian Theodoret, who recorded how timbers were inserted to prop-up the ceiling, following which the columns already in place were undercut and the then timbers burnt, bringing down the roof.³⁸² However, the destruction of temples in such a fashion was not only a late antique phenomenon, for archaeological evidence indicates that the Temple of Zeus at Cyrene, which looks to have been destroyed *ca.* A.D. 115, was destroyed using such methods.³⁸³ Yet many mithraea would not have required such an approach as their roofs were usually supported by a wooden frame and posts, meaning all one had to do was simply light fires at the bottom of the supports. Given the small size of mithraea, destruction by fire would be a fairly swift, making them theoretically easier to destroy via conflagration than the large temples.³⁸⁴

It is of course just as possible that mithraea might burn down as the result of an accident, given they contained various lamps and burners. Indeed, there are various examples where fire damage is evident in mithraea, but this did not bring an end to the use of the temple. At Carrawburgh on Hadrian's Wall the wooden screen that divided the mithraeum into the *cella* and the anteroom burnt down at an unknown date, although this was prior to the final restoration of the mithraeum at the turn of the fourth century. At Martigny, traces of fire were found at the entrance to *cella* of the mithraeum, where two steps had provided access from the anteroom. At the mithraeum at Ad Enum in Noricum a series of steps at the entrance to the temple look to have been incinerated. Furthermore, an inscription from Milan indicates a mithraeum here was restored after it had burnt down.³⁸⁵

In regards to those mithraea that suffered such damage in the fourth century, at Housesteads on Hadrian's Wall, excavations in the late 19th century uncovered a layer of charcoal which looks to have been the remains of the roof. A jet bracelet found in the mithraeum dates to the turn of the fourth century, providing a *terminus ante quem* for the mithraeum's destruction. The fragments from the

³⁸² Theodoret *Hist. Eccl.* 5.29, 5.21.

³⁸³ Bayliss (2004) 23.

³⁸⁴ Bayliss (2004) 23.

³⁸⁵ Carrawburgh: Richmond *et al.* (1951) 27; Ad Enum: Garbsch (1985) 364; Martigny: Wibl  (2004) 135; Milan: *CIMRM* 706.

main relief and statuettes were found inside the mithraeum, indicating that it may have been the victim of an attack, rather than an accidental fire.³⁸⁶

In Germany, all four of the mithraea that have produced evidence of burning are located in rural areas, three of which appear to have been situated on land that was part of private estates (Biesheim, Mackwiller and Rockenhausen). The mithraeum at Mackwiller is unusual in that it burnt down twice: once in A.D. 351 and again in A.D. 388, but the former marks the end of the structure's use as a mithraeum. At Biesheim, during the late third century the mithraeum's anteroom was burnt down, while the *cella* also displays evidence of fire damage. At this time the Mithraic images were fragmented and buried, suggesting that it ceased to be used as a mithraeum, although the site did continue to be used for ritual practice with coins deposited until A.D. 395, at which time it was completely burnt down. At both Biesheim and Mackwiller the total destruction of their images suggests these fires were intentionally lit. Archaeological excavations of the (likely) mithraeum at Rockenhausen, whose coin series ends in A.D. 395, established the mithraeum was burnt down, while it also produced some fragments of statuary. However, with such little information regarding the site known it is difficult to ascertain how likely this was to have been accidental or intentional. The mithraeum at Gimmeldingen also looks to have been burnt down in the fourth century. Little dating evidence was retrieved from the mithraeum and its destruction can only be placed after A.D. 325. The fragmentation of two statues may be indicative that this was intentional.³⁸⁷

On the Danube, the *cella* of the mithraeum at Lentia in Noricum contained a stratum of burning which contained coins running to A.D. 394. Here, other than a single small broken relief, the absence of cult fittings may suggest this happened after the mithraeum was abandoned, a possibility given further credence by the declining coin deposition in the late fourth century outlined in Chapter 4. A layer of burnt material was also recorded at the nearby rural mithraeum at Schachadorf. The latest coin deposited in this mithraeum was minted in A.D. 392, suggesting its destruction may have been contemporary to that at Lentia. However, at Schachadorf a statue depicting Mithras' rock-birth was found in the burning layer undamaged, suggesting this may have been an accidental fire.³⁸⁸

Thus overall, the majority of the mithraea that were destroyed or damaged by fire were to be found on the northern frontier, although the chronological distribution is wide-ranging, with the evidence occurring between the late third and late fourth centuries. Of course it is almost impossible to say with certainty whether any of these were intentional, but their location (in areas with recurring conflict and often surrounded by open space) and the fact that most contained broken fittings suggests that the

³⁸⁶ *Housesteads*: Allason-Jones (2004) 184.

³⁸⁷ *Mackwiller*: Hatt (1957) *Rockenhausen*: Schwertheim (1974) 174-176; *Biesheim*: (Plouin 2004); *Gimmeldingen*: *CIMRM* 1313.

³⁸⁸ *Lentia*: Karnitsch (1956) *Schachadorf*: *CIMRM* 1409-1412.

majority were. It is feasible that fittings could have been broken during an accidental fire because either their wooden supports had been incinerated, causing them to fall, or due to the collapsing roof knocking them from their positions. However, the extensive fragmentation of images in these instances does not suggest this to have been the cause, rather it appears the images were purposely broken prior to the burning of the mithraeum. There are some possible exceptions, such as at Lentia, where the absence of fittings barring one object may suggest the mithraeum had been abandoned prior to the fire, while the evidence from Schachadorf is perhaps indicative of accidental destruction. Notably, it is only at Mackwiller and Biesheim that reconstruction work was undertaken following fires, but in both cases the structure does not appear to have continued being used as a mithraeum; regardless of what caused the other mithraea to burn down, no-one sought to rebuild them.

Levelling

There are a few examples where it can be ascertained that a mithraeum was torn down so that the area could be levelled. At Bornheim-Sechtem, this looks to have been the fate of a mithraeum that neighboured a *villa rustica*. Only the foundations of the mithraeum were found in situ, with elements of its structure deposited in two nearby pits. This looks to have occurred in the early fifth century, as the last coin deposited in front of the cult image dates to A.D. 402. Other than the remains of the statuary that looks to have been brought from another mithraeum (see Chapter 5), no trace of the main relief or other items were found in the mithraeum or in the nearby pits, suggesting it had been largely emptied prior to levelling. The other possible instance of levelling is the Bordeaux mithraeum, although details for this are scant. Many materials were removed from the mithraeum, but what became of them is unknown.³⁸⁹ In these cases, it is possible that these structures were not specifically targeted because they were mithraea, but simply because they were disused buildings.

Graffiti and Damage to Frescoes in Mithraea

In a number of cases the decoration of mithraea has been vandalised.³⁹⁰ In some instances, there is little doubt that Christians were to blame, but unfortunately most of these examples cannot be adequately dated. At Doliche in Turkey, a cross was carved over Mithras' face on the main (rock-cut) relief, while around the cave various other crosses had been etched into the walls. The mithraeum looks to have gone out of use in the mid-third century, when Shapur's army conquered the city, and there is nothing to date the latter graffiti. At the mithraeum of Ša'āra in Syria, two crosses were carved into the wall at the mithraeum's entrance. The mithraeum has produced no evidence of

³⁸⁹ *Bornheim-Sechtem*: Ulbert (2004); *Bordeaux*: Gaidon-Bunuel (1991) 56.

³⁹⁰ In Italy, a wall painting of Mithras in the mithraeum at Capua had had its eyes scratched, although bizarrely this damage is believed to have been caused during the excavation process. According to Vermaseren (1971) 7, this happened during the course of the excavation, but in *CIMRM* 181 he states it was children based on a conversation with the owner.

occupation past the early third century and once again there is nothing to date these Christian carvings, although Byzantine churches were later constructed nearby.³⁹¹ In Italy, at the Ponza a cross was carved into the wall opposite a mithraeum's entrance, yet once again the lack of finds from the mithraeum (which looks to have been constructed in the early third century but has no subsequent dating material) makes it impossible to establish a relationship with the graffiti.³⁹² The use of the cross in epigraphic texts or as decoration on objects does not emerge until the early fifth century and there is no evidence to demonstrate that the etching of crosses on temples was undertaken any earlier. Under Theodosius II a law was issued that temples should be destroyed and marked with a cross, but once again this post-dates the occupation of any mithraeum.³⁹³ Thus in all likelihood the carving of the crosses post-dates abandonment of all these mithraea.

Only at Hawarte can a close relationship be established between Christian graffiti, the damage to various wall-paintings and the closure of the mithraeum. Here, a cross was etched on a wall opposite the entrance and the eyes of demonic figures depicted in the wall-paintings throughout the mithraeum were carved out. The mithraeum looks to have gone out of use at the end of the first decade of the fifth century, given the presence of stratified coin dating from the reign of Arcadius (d. 408), with a church, whose foundations cut into the mithraeum, built over it shortly thereafter in AD. 421. Like the aforementioned undated examples, no fittings were left in the mithraeum.³⁹⁴

In Rome, there is just the one example of Mithraic images that have been defaced, although notably this was in a mithraeum located under the Church of *Santa Prisca*.³⁹⁵ Here, the faces of Mithras and Sol in one relief look to have been purposely damaged, while other figures have had their eyes etched out like the demons at Hawarte. However, the face of Mithras was certainly not the victim of iconoclasts, but rather it was destroyed when it was removed in 1953 to be taken away for restoration. However, there does appear to be an axe blow that struck the body of one figures in the wall paintings. The figure looks to be a member of the lion grade, given the inscription *Nama Gelasio Leoni*. He is depicted as carrying two loaves of bread and there is nothing outstanding about him that would make him a particular target.³⁹⁶

³⁹¹ Doliche: (Schütte and Winter 2004) 102, 104; Ša'āra: Kalos (2001) 236.

³⁹² Ponza: Vermaseren (1974) 10-11.

³⁹³ For the use of the cross in epigraphic texts, one can search the LSA database: <http://laststatues.classics.ox.ac.uk/database/browse.php>. For the use of cross as decoration on artefacts, see Thomas (1981) 91. The Theodosian law on the crosses in temples: *Cod. Theo.* 16.10.26.

³⁹⁴ Gawlikowski (2007) 341.

³⁹⁵ In the Mithraeum of San Stefano Rotondo frescoes were found damaged, although precise dating for when this occurred is unknown due to church foundations displacing the original stratigraphy. However, the type of damage does not look to be as specific as at these other sites and most artefacts from the mithraeum were found in excellent condition.

³⁹⁶ For the damage to Mithras' during the restoration attempt, see Vermaseren and Van Essen (1965) 150. Sauer (2003) 134-136 argues that this is definitely an act of Christian iconoclasm, while Ward-Perkins (2011) 194 has highlighted the dubious nature of this interpretation.

Thus the appearance of graffiti in mithraea appears to be a phenomenon that was mainly confined to the East, with rare occurrences in Italy too. This matches the wider patterns for the distribution of such evidence as well, as instances of crosses carved into the walls of temples is generally more common in the East, with examples found at the temple of Isis at Philae in Egypt, the Greater Propylaea at Eleusis in Greece, and the temple of Apollo Klarios at Sagalassos, but all of which are dated to the end of the fifth century or later, which makes it even more likely that at the sites with limited dating evidence the crosses post-date the abandonment of the mithraea.³⁹⁷

REUSE OF MITHRAEA AND THEIR MATERIALS

Mithraea Reused for Different Purposes

Few mithraea display any signs of reuse, but given that mithraea were small, windowless structures, they did not lend themselves to a great number of alternative uses. However, there are occasional occurrences of this, some of which pre-date the fourth century. For example, in the mid-third century the mithraeum at Fertőrákos, situated on the Carnuntum-Scarbantia road in Pannonia, was reused as a mausoleum for cremations.³⁹⁸

In regards to the reuse of mithraea from the late third century, in some cases where mithraea had been installed in a space that had previously served a different function when the mithraeum was stripped out the space was restored to its pre-Mithraic state, such as the Caesarea Maritima mithraeum, which once again became a storeroom in the late third century.³⁹⁹ In some situations, mithraea may have been converted to living spaces. It has been speculated by Lindsay Allason-Jones that the mithraeum at Housesteads on Hadrian's Wall was used as a domestic space in the early fourth century, as a jet armband and two-strand twisted bronze bracelet were found in the mithraeum and these usually indicate the presence of women, but given broken statuary was found in the temple this seems unlikely, while it is unadvisable to assume that a) the presence of women can be established by a single find, and b) that by this time women were still excluded from mithraea given the changes evident in the cult at this time.⁴⁰⁰ Domestic occupation has been uncovered with greater certainty from the mithraeum at Koenigshoffen, but this was in the sixth century long after the abandonment of the mithraeum (sometime in the third century).⁴⁰¹ In Rome, the mithraeum of the *Crypta Balbi* was the

³⁹⁷ On Philae, see Nautin (1967) on Eleusis, see Saradi and Eliopoulos (2011) 284; on Sagalassos, see Rott (1908) 14-16. See also Rufinus *Hist. Eccl.* 2.29 on the images of Sarapis being replaced with crosses following the destruction of the Serapeum in Alexandria.

³⁹⁸ *CIMRM* 1646.

³⁹⁹ The floor of the mithraeum was plastered over and traces of amphora and coins dating to from the late third to early fourth centuries found deposited on it.

⁴⁰⁰ Allason-Jones (2004) 184.

⁴⁰¹ Forrer (1915) 91-97.

latest mithraeum to be converted, becoming a stable around the mid-fifth century (although the mithraeum was probably abandoned in the early fifth century).⁴⁰²

The most famous example of a mithraeum being converted for another purpose is from London, where it has been postulated that the mithraeum was transformed by the worshippers of another deity, possibly Bacchus. This involved the colonnades in front of the benches being removed, the floor of the nave being raised to that of the benches and the filling in of the well. By doing this an open floor-plan was created, although continuing evidence for tripartite timber partitioning running the length of the building was also found. Given the raised height of the floor, one now had to ascend steps to enter the building as opposed to descending. The identification of the mithraeum as a *bacchium* is not certain, but is based on several aspects that make it plausible. A building in the forum at Cosa was remodelled during the fourth century as a mithraeum to *Liber Pater* in a similar fashion to the London mithraeum. A marble statuette of Bacchus was found in fourth century levels, along with two torsos which look to be from Bacchic statues, one inside and one outside the mithraeum. A silver casket that has been dated to the late third/early fourth century and which depicts wild beasts has also been suggested to be Bacchic.⁴⁰³ Recent excavations have suggested that even if this was not a Bacchus mithraeum it did fill some form of cult function. A well that has been identified next to the mithraeum had a number of metal objects, four cattle skulls and around forty coins deposited in it during the late fourth century.⁴⁰⁴ London is not the only example of this form of reuse among mithraea, with the aforementioned mithraeum at Mackwiller was transformed into a spring sanctuary in the mid-fourth century, while Biesheim also looks to have been used by another cult from the turn of the fourth century.

A word must also be said on mithraea being used as the foundations in the construction of churches, which, despite the claims of scholars, was an uncommon occurrence.⁴⁰⁵ In the West, there is not a single example of a mithraeum being converted into a church or being utilised in their foundations outside of Rome. In some respects it is odd that mithraea were not converted to churches, as the tripartite division and presence of an apse in some mithraea gave them a similar topography to that of some early churches.⁴⁰⁶ One possible reason for the lack of evidence for a correlation between Mithraic and Christian sites is that mithraea did not fit the requirements of a church structure in this period. The small size and lack of light did not suit a religion that was increasingly moving towards

⁴⁰² Ricci (2004) 164.

⁴⁰³ Henig (1998).

⁴⁰⁴ Watson, *Pers. Comm.* (19/11/15).

⁴⁰⁵ Vaes (1990) 337. In many respects this echoes the long-held views based on the influential work of Deichmann (1939) that many temples were converted to churches. In fact, as Bayliss (2004) has demonstrated this phenomenon was a rarity and where it did occur it was usually long after temples had been abandoned.

⁴⁰⁶ The confusion surrounding the so-called Silchester 'church' is an example of this. It is almost certain that this was not a church, but the tripartite ground-plan and the apse at its rear were the main attributes of its initial identification. The similarities between this structure and that London mithraeum/possible Bacchus mithraeum have been discussed by Henig (1998).

more monumental structures as Christianity was in the fourth century. When one looks at other examples where temples were converted to churches in later periods, one of the reasons the sites were chosen is their already impressive size and decorated, such as the temple of Aphrodite at Gerasa, the temple-church at Aphrodisias or the sanctuary of Jupiter Heliopolis at Baalbek.⁴⁰⁷

In Rome, there are three cases of churches having been built over mithraea, but this is a relatively small number when one considers how common both would have been in the city. In most cases the dating evidence from these sites is unclear and creates difficulty in establishing a chronological relationship between the mithraeum and church. The Mithraeum at *San Stefano Rotondo* was filled in and the church subsequently constructed above it, but the construction of the church severely impacted on the stratigraphy of the site and the occupation of the mithraeum cannot be traced beyond the early fourth century, with the church constructed at least a hundred years later. A similar situation is to be found at the mithraeum under *San Clemente*, where the church was built in the late fourth or early fifth century, but when the mithraeum was actually abandoned is unknown. At *Santa Prisca*, the mithraeum was filled with rubble at the turn of the fifth century, after which the church was constructed above it.⁴⁰⁸ The fact that so many churches and mithraea existed within the city would make the likelihood of finding a church over a mithraeum relatively high and this was probably often the result of Christians utilising a vacant spot, rather than making a statement regarding Christian 'triumph'. Furthermore, given the importance of purifying water in both cults, the presence of a spring, such as that under *San Clemente*, may also have been a determining factor behind a church and mithraeum being located at the same site.

Of the cases in the East, at Alexandria several accounts (none of which are first-hand) describe how an abandoned mithraeum was given to a group of Christians by Constantius II to be used as church.⁴⁰⁹ Yet rather than simply convert the temple as it stood the Christians sought to demolish it, suggesting that a direct conversion from mithraeum to church was not possible. At Hawarte, parts of the mithraeum were used in the substructure of the church, such as the door jambs of the Mithraic *cella* which were found in the foundation of the church's narthex, thus it may be that the site was intentionally selected as the mithraeum provided foundations that the church could use in an otherwise empty landscape.

⁴⁰⁷ On the temple of Aphrodite at Gerasa, see Browning (1982) 94. On the temple-church at Aphrodisias, see Smith and Ratté (2000). On the sanctuary of Jupiter Heliopolis at Baalbek, see Ragette (1980).

⁴⁰⁸ *San Stefano Rotondo*: Lissi-Caronna (1986) 46; *San Clemente*: *CIMRM* 338, Griffith (1993) 47-62; *Santa Prisca*: Vermaseren and Van Essen (1965) 241-242.

⁴⁰⁹ Ruf. *Hist. eccl.* 11.2; Sozom. *Hist. eccl.* 5.7; Socrates *Hist. eccl.* 3.2.3. According to Socrates' account, thirty years after this event the bishop Theophilus found a deserted mithraeum and had his followers parade the items from the mithraeum around the streets of Alexandria. However, the similarities in these accounts suggest that Socrates is actually relating the same event twice.

Mithraea as Sources of Spolia

On a couple of occasions, there is evidence that mithraea were mined for *spolia* following their abandonment. This is to be expected, as the appropriation of materials to build a new structure or repair a dilapidated one was a common feature throughout the Roman Empire at this time.⁴¹⁰ At Aquae Mattiacae on the Rhine frontier, architectural pieces from the mithraeum were used in the construction of the city wall, the so-called (and possibly unfinished) *Heidenmauer*, which is dated to the fourth century (probably erected during Valentinian's construction program).⁴¹¹ The *Heidenmauer* was built largely from *spolia* from both secular and religious structures, with a dedication to Diana found amongst its remains. However, the mithraeum had been out of use for maybe a hundred years at this point, having been burned down sometime after the dedication of an altar in 218, perhaps during the Alammanic incursions of 260s, and its remains were located in close proximity to the wall, making it an easily accessible source of building material.⁴¹²

At Poetovio, a slab bearing an inscription to Sol that is believed to have come from a mithraeum (likely Mithraeum IV) was found having been reused, among other pieces of *spolia* for street paving sometime in the fourth century.⁴¹³ However, if this inscription was indeed from a mithraeum (which is not certain) then this is of interest, given the cult's popularity in Poetovio, where at least two mithraea were still active at this time. Did initiates of other Mithraic congregations knowingly allow a mithraeum to be mined for *spolia*, or was this done without their knowledge? Or is this further evidence that Mithraic worshippers, with their declining commitment, were increasingly less concerned about such things? Regardless, at both Aquae Mattiacae and Poetovio the amount of material taken from either mithraea appears to have been negligible, while the destination of the reused material was only a short distance from the mithraeum, a combination which suggests that they were used as a quick stop-gap rather than as part of a planned operation.⁴¹⁴

Additionally, materials need not have been kept intact for secular reuse, with items sometimes mined and thrown into limekilns. It was suggested by the excavator that limekilns found near the remains of Mithraeum V in Poetovio may have been the fate of items from this mithraeum, while a lime-burning pan was found in the mithraeum at Trier. The latter had contained a limestone relief of the tauroctony and limestone statue of Mercury, with fragments of both found in a pile together. In the

⁴¹⁰ Liebeschuetz (1992); Ward-Perkins (1984). Libanius complains that people mine temples for *spolia* with which to build houses, see Or. 18.126. A law of 397 (*Cod. Theod.* 15.1.36) states Count of the East must ensure that *spolia* from temples used for general maintenance, such as for roads, bridges, aqueducts and fortifications.

⁴¹¹ A precise date of construction is unknown, with original estimates placing it in the reign of Valentinian, but it is possible that it was erected during the early third century

⁴¹² Czysz (1994) 144-145; 222-224.

⁴¹³ Horvat *et al.* (2003) 162.

⁴¹⁴ The mithraeum at Wiesbaden was found 24m from the city wall, while the location of Poetovio IV is only postulated.

Frankish period a limestone wall was constructed in the cult room, thus it would appear the limestone images had been fragmented, the pieces piled and parts used in a lime-burning to make the blocks for the wall. Such a scenario is given further credibility by the fact that a stone relief of Mithras' rock-birth and the altars were left untouched.⁴¹⁵

THE FATE OF INTERNAL FITTINGS

Absence of Fittings

In a number of cases widely distributed throughout the Roman Empire mithraea have been found which are completely devoid of any statues or reliefs.⁴¹⁶ Naturally, the removal of objects can be explained for a wide range of reasons: external threat, de-sacralisation, for reuse that is not evident in the archaeological record. However, the fact that these mithraea produce such little evidence makes it difficult to determine what the likeliest cause is. The absence of such objects is particularly common amongst mithraea in Italy: mithraea at Capua and Spolegium were found with not a single item remaining in them, while a similar state of affairs was to be found at sites across the West: Venetionimagnus in Gaul, Lambaesis in North Africa, Lugo in Spain.⁴¹⁷

The absence of such items is also frequent among the mithraea of the eastern Mediterranean, with no artefacts left in the mithraea at Hawarte, Doliche and Ša'āra, while at Caesarea Maritima only a small medallion was left.⁴¹⁸ What is of note is that Hawarte, Ša'āra and Ponza were all victims of Christian iconoclasts (although how this relates to the closure of the latter two is difficult to establish) In correlation with this, in the accounts relating to the de-sacralisation of the Alexandrian mithraeum the Christians removed the objects from the mithraeum and paraded them around the streets, which suggests there may be a pattern here.

Occasionally, some images remain but the main cult relief has either been removed or only a minuscule traces are evident: at Carrawburgh, where statues of the torchbearers were found broken, the main relief was removed but a fragment depicting the bull's horns was left behind, suggesting it was broken prior to this. This evidence from Carrawburgh should make us cautious in assuming that because there is no evidence for the destruction of statues or images in the aforementioned mithraea this did not occur, for in some cases it may be that this happened but all traces were later removed.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁵ Tušek (1990) 270; Trier: Walters (1974) 26; Gose (1972) 112-115.

⁴¹⁶ I do not include altars amongst this, for while they may have been the victims of iconoclastic activity (and appear to be so in some cases) they were unlikely to be removed if the adherents left the mithraeum given their bulk and weight.

⁴¹⁷ Ponza: Vermaseren (1974); Capua: Vermaseren (1971) Spolegium: *CIMRM* 673; Lambaesis: Le Glay (1954); Venetionimagnus: Walters (1974) 5-11; Lugo: Alvar, Gordon and Rodriguez (2006). In regards to Spain, there is very little evidence of temple destruction in the province as a whole, see Arce (2011). Instead, temples tended to be reused for domestic occupation.

⁴¹⁸ Hawarte: Gawlikowski (2007); Doliche: Schütte and Winter (2004); Ša'āra: Kalos (2001) Caesarea Maritima: Bull (1978).

⁴¹⁹ *CIMRM* 844.

The Fragmentation of Reliefs and Statues

The vast majority of mithraea that have evidence of continued occupation into the late fourth century have been found with their items in fragmentary condition. Evidence for this can be found in almost every region, with examples from Britain, Gaul, the Rhine and Danube frontiers, Italy and Dalmatia. The exception is the Eastern Mediterranean, where, as explained above, none of the fittings from the mithraea were left in the mithraea. However, despite the significant amount of extant evidence from the Western provinces, these examples are not without their problems, given that the vast majority of excavations that have uncovered mithraea were undertaken in the 1800s and early decades of the 20th century, with the stratigraphic location of the debris and its distribution rarely recorded.

Many of the mithraea in Gaul have produced extensive evidence for the fragmentation of Mithraic images. At Bordeaux, Septeuil, Sarrebourg and Trier, evidence has been found for the destruction of the main reliefs. At Bordeaux, a few fragments of the border of the main relief was found, but the main image itself had been removed, while in the case of Trier just several small fragments remained. At Septeuil and Sarrebourg, the evidence for destruction of the main cult images was more complete, as their debris littered the floors. At both Septeuil and Sarrebourg the head of Mithras was never recovered, while the bull's head is absent from the Septeuil assemblage and Mithras' hand holding the dagger from that of Sarrebourg. However, the treatment of images other than the main relief differs amongst these mithraea. At Sarrebourg, the destruction of other reliefs and statues was thorough, but these, like the central relief, are often missing many fragments. In some cases the damage inflicted on other images is more exact, with decapitation and damage to faces evident in most mithraea: at Septeuil, a relief of the rock birth has suffered a blow to Mithras' face, perhaps via a pick, and a statue of the rock-birth was missing its head; at Trier, although the image of the rock birth that sat on the podium was left alone, a naked statue of Mercury was found decapitated (both head and body were present in the mithraeum); at Bordeaux most of the statuettes were beheaded, save for a relief of Aion which was untouched. The most unusual find is from Martigny, where fragments (consisting of Cautes, Sol and few other small pieces) of a set of bronze statuettes depicting the tauroctony were found. Whether this was the central image is unknown (although it is unlikely), but the fact that it was made from bronze makes it a unique find, particularly as such items would usually have been completely removed to be melted down for reuse.⁴²⁰

Another area where such evidence is relatively common is on the Danube frontier. In Noricum, both Lentia and Ad Enum mithraea were found with their fittings broken, although the latter is much

⁴²⁰ Bordeaux: Gaidon-Bunuel (1991); Septeuil: Gaidon-Bunuel (1991); Sarrebourg: *CIMRM* 965-984, Walters (1974) 17-23; Trier: Gose (1972) 112-117; Martigny: Wibl  (2004) 143-144.

more extensive; at Lentia just a small circular relief of the tauroctony and its border were found in a fragmentary state, with the head of Mithras broken off, while an altar was found to have been split in two. At Ad Enum, the main relief had been broken and the face of Mithras has been chipped away, all ten altars in the mithraeum were smashed and a statue of Mithras had been beheaded, but on this occasion it is the body that was absent while the head was left behind.

In Pannonia, all three major hubs of Mithraic activity (Aquincum, Carnuntum and Poetovio) have produced mithraea which were found to contain fragmentary remains. The main reliefs of Carnuntum I and III and Poetovio II and III were all found to have been smashed to pieces: at Carnuntum I the upper half of the relief was missing; at Carnuntum III most parts were recovered; while at Poetovio II and III the vast majority of the images are missing, with only fragments of the border and parts of Mithras' cloak and thigh preserved in the former while in the latter only Mithras dagger-hand has been found. At Aquincum IV, a statue of the tauroctony was found broken to pieces in front of the cult niche. Damage is also evident amongst other finds from these mithraea. At the Carnuntum mithraea, other objects were found broken, with statues at Carnuntum I missing arms and heads, while at Carnuntum III it is the upper halves of the statues that tended to survive better, while a statue of the rock-birth has lost its arm. One of the most prominent finds from Carnuntum III is the large altar which is supported by busts of various deities; although it has lost fragments, it was found mostly intact. A similar lack of coordinated damage is evident at both Poetovio mithraea, for while both have produced a great many fragments of reliefs and statues, at Poetovio II one relief of the tauroctony was untouched and a statue of a lion was left undamaged and at Poetovio III a relief of the rock-birth was found unscathed, as was a naked image of Sol depicted on an altar. At Aquincum IV, all that was left of a statue of Cautopates was his feet, but a statue of Cautes was left intact.⁴²¹

In Britain, two Mithraic sites on Hadrian's Wall have produced fragments of their internal fittings. However, the evidence is far from uniform: the main relief at Carrawburgh was broken and then removed, with a single fragment of the border left, while the relief from Housesteads found in fragments on the floor of the mithraeum. Statues were found beheaded in all three examples, although at Carrawburgh the statue of the Cautes was produced separately to its head which could be removed. At Carrawburgh and Housesteads damage was not inflicted on all items: at Carrawburgh, the statuette of the Mother Goddess in the anteroom was left alone, while a statuette of Cautes was left intact at Housesteads; at both sites altars depicting Sol were untouched.⁴²²

⁴²¹ Lentia: *CIMRM* 1415-1417; Ad Enum: Garbsch (1985) 398; Carnuntum I: *CIMRM* 1665-1669, 1680; Carnuntum III: *CIMRM* 1683-1690 Poetovio II: *CIMRM* 1510-1576; Poetovio III: *CIMRM* 1579-1580, 1584, 1589, 1591, 1593, 1599-1608; Aquincum IV: *CIMRM* 1769-1770.

⁴²² Carrawburgh: *CIMRM* 845-850; Housesteads: *CIMRM* 853-858.

In other areas, such evidence is in less abundance. At both Mackwiller and Biesheim the fragmentation of statues and reliefs was extensive when the mithraea were destroyed and damaged in the mid-fourth century and late third century respectively, but there is no evidence that such objects were replaced when they were rebuilt. Fragments from statues of the torchbearers were found at Rockenhausen, but the evidence was not well recorded. Gimmeldingen is an unusual case, for while the main relief was intact, the upper half of a Cautes statue has been removed, and a naked statue of Mercury has had its face and the caduceus damaged, suggesting it was specifically targeted. In Dalmatia, the main relief at the Jajce was left intact, save for Mithras' dagger hand having been removed, while a statue of Cautes had had its head removed. At Konjic, the fourth century relief was found in pieces, with the heads of Mithras and Sol on one side absent. Finally, while other mithraea in Italy were left empty (see above) at Vulci two statues of the tauroctony were found smashed with evidence of nicks and abrasions over them; in both cases the heads of Mithras and the bull had been removed. Also recovered was a statue of Cautes, broken in two with an arm missing and also covered in small blows. The statue of the raven, however, was completely untouched.⁴²³

Items Sealed in the Mithraeum

A small number of mithraea have been found to contain intact (or at least mostly so) images. It is incredibly rare that any objects would emerge unscathed from the archaeological record - one need only look at the endless sculptures and reliefs present in any museum to see this - thus while some of the examples included in this section do exhibit some damage, the overall the state of the finds does not indicate this was deliberate.

The majority of these examples were located in Rome (*San Stefano Rotondo*, *San Clemente*, *Foro Boario*, and the mithraeum found at *Via Giovanni Lanza 128*) along with the possible mithraeum at Sidon in Syria. As discussed, two of the mithraea from Rome found in such condition were located under churches, but the construction of these churches meant that the stratigraphy was heavily disturbed and thus it is difficult to accurately establish when the mithraea were abandoned. The main relief from *San Stefano Rotondo* is one of best preserved tauroctonies ever found, with much of its original colour still evident. There is evidence of a possible blow to the image, but this mark is situated in the space between Mithras and Luna and no damage was inflicted on any of the figures, suggesting it was unlikely to have been made by an iconoclast. Furthermore, a smaller relief of the tauroctony was also found undamaged, with its colouring still clear, as were two rock-birth images. In contrast, the border of a Mithraic relief in the Danubian style (with images of Mithras' life forming a

⁴²³ Mackwiller: Hatt (1957); Biesheim: Plouin (2004); Gimmeldingen: *CIMRM* 1314-1318; Rockenhausen: Schwertheim (1974) 174-176; Konjic: *CIMRM* 1896; Vulci: Moretti (1979) 268-276.

narrative around the tauroctony) was found in pieces, but the main bull-slaying image had been completely removed, suggesting the breakage was done in order to obtain this relief. Finally, a statuette of a torchbearer was found on the right hand bench, its arms and feet missing while its head was lying next to it, but rather than having been removed by blows the arms and head look to have been detachable. Overall, the state of the finds suggests the mithraeum was left sealed by its adherents, but was disturbed by the construction of the church.⁴²⁴

San Clemente contained fewer finds, with just an altar depicting the tauroctony found almost intact, a bust of Sol untouched, and an image of the rock-birth missing its forearms, but otherwise unmolested. Once again, the damage is minimal and it does not appear the Mithraic community was violently expelled.⁴²⁵

The main relief from *Foro Boario* mithraeum, which was abandoned some time in the fourth century,⁴²⁶ was so well preserved that like the example from *San Stefano Rotondo* traces of paint could be detected on it, while a smaller tauroctony relief was also recovered intact. There was evidence for three other statues in the mithraeum, a base for a statue of Venus, the lower half of a statue of Minerva and the decapitated body of a male in secular drees were recovered. Given that it is the upper portions of the goddess statues and the head of a statue with no religious connotations that are missing, it is plausible that they were removed to be used in a different setting, possibly having been re-carved.

In regards to the mithraeum found at *Via Giovanni Lanza* 128, there is little known regarding the excavation. However, although two statues of the torchbearers were found missing various pieces, it appears unlikely that the temple met a violent end as it was found with the main relief *in situ* and in almost perfect condition.⁴²⁷

Finally, some of the best preserved statues from a mithraeum were uncovered by a journalist in the late 1800s at Sidon. The truth regarding the mithraeum of Sidon remains shrouded in mystery, as the location of the site was never revealed, but the ten statuettes and tauroctony were apparently recovered from it with not the slightest hint of damage evident. The date of A.D. 398 makes them the youngest Mithraic items ever recovered, which means the mithraeum they adorned might have still been in use into the fifth century, but unless it is ever found we shall never know.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁴ Lissi-Caronna (1986) 28-45.

⁴²⁵ *CIMRM* 338-348.

⁴²⁶ A coin from Maximianus was the last datable find, see *CIMRM* 444.

⁴²⁷ *CIMRM* 357-359.

⁴²⁸ Will (1950).

HUMAN REMAINS

There are several examples of human remains being found in mithraea, including Koenigshoffen and Doliche, but the only case which can be dated to the period of the mithraeum's destruction with relative certainty is at Sarrebourg, where the skeleton of a male was found bound in chains and laying on the base of the cult image in the mithraeum.⁴²⁹ There was no sign of trauma on the skeleton which, alongside the fact the body was covered with stone blocks, raises the possibility that he was buried alive, but regardless of how he died it is clear that the man did not meet his fate willingly.⁴³⁰ However, it is uncertain whether he was actually a Mithraic adherent or not; the location of the deposition makes it possible, with this as a final act of de-sacralisation following the breaking of the cult images. However, it must also be acknowledged that this man may have been brought to an abandoned mithraeum outside the town's gate to be executed or to have his body deposited. That Sarrebourg lay on a military road and occupied an important crossing point of the River Sarre, means such acts of violence by members of the military community would not be unheard of, while as a small *vicus* that had been in decline since the third century there was little to guard against raiding parties.

MOTORS FOR THE FATE OF MITHRAEA

Christian Iconoclasm

Christians have often provided the first port of call for scholars looking to establish why the Mithras cult appears to have ceased in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. The evidence for the destruction and de-sacralisation makes this seem an obvious choice, as who else would go to such through lengths to prevent these temples from ever being used again? It has already been mentioned how a mithraeum in Alexandria was de-sacralised by a group of Christians in the mid-fourth century, while there is another account which refers to a mithraeum in Rome meeting a similar fate. In A.D. 377/8 the prefect of the city Gracchus is described by Jerome as having destroyed a mithraeum and broken its images. However, to assume that these accounts prove a particular hatred among Christians for the cult of Mithras would be incorrect. Firstly, there is no clear indication whether the mithraeum in Rome was still in use, while in the case of Alexandria the temple had almost certainly been abandoned at this time. Secondly, the epigraphic evidence clearly indicates that a number of Mithraic adherents in Rome in the A.D. 370s were drawn from aristocratic stock, making it doubtful there was any major persecution of the cult in the city at this time. Finally, in some areas of the Western Empire, such as the Rhine and Danube frontiers, Britain, and Dalmatia there is a dearth of literary evidence

⁴²⁹ At the mithraeum at Koenigshoffen a child's skull and femur were found under fragments from the altar. Given this mithraeum has provided no evidence of Mithraic activity after the first half of the third century and there is no definite activity until the sixth century, when this occurred is difficult to establish but most probably post-dates our period, see Forrer (1915) 75-79. The same applies to Doliche mithraeum which contained a burial; when the body is deposited is not possible to ascertain given the disturbed stratigraphy, but it is unlikely to post-date the mithraeum's abandonment in the mid-third century, see Gordon (2007) 610.

⁴³⁰ *CIMRM* 983.

attesting to conflict between Christians and non-Christians in the fourth and early fifth centuries.⁴³¹ In Gaul, Martin of Tours was a particularly active Christian iconoclast, but none of the accounts attesting instances of him attacking temples refer to mithraea.⁴³² Thus there is little from the texts that can be used to establish whether the damage inflicted on many of these Mithraic sites was carried out by Christians. Instead, we must look to diagnostic material from the archaeological record to ascertain any indications of Christian involvement.

Certain evidence of Christian de-sacralisation has been found in four mithraea - Ponza, Doliche, Hawarte and Ša'āra – in the form of crosses carved into the walls. Unfortunately, the dating and lack of evidence from these sites makes establishing diagnostic patterns difficult, for the only example where this is likely to have been contemporary to the closure of the mithraeum is at Hawarte, where the last evidence for activity in the temple is almost contemporary to the construction of a church on the site. At Doliche, the mithraeum was abandoned in the A.D. 250s, while when Ponza and Ša'āra were abandoned is unknown as all datable evidence had been removed. However, the absence of sculptures or reliefs in these examples (save for Doliche where they were carved into the wall) may be just as important. When the Alexandria mithraeum was to be converted into a church by Christians in the mid-fourth century, the Christians are described as removing artefacts from the mithraeum and parading them around the street. This concurs with various historical accounts of temple de-sacralisation collected by Trombley, which tend to follow a usual pattern: acclamations are made by a bishop against evil spirits, the statues were then smashed and removed, and finally Christian symbols were etched onto the structure.⁴³³ But this does not mean that the mithraea were initially closed because of Christian iconoclasts (although perhaps under the threat of them) and the appearance of crosses next to doorways in temples and mithraea may have been, as Richard Bayliss has suggested, a more common occurrence at sites that had already abandoned: “[T]he position of crosses... appears to highlight their apotropaic function for keeping banished demons re-entering the structure. Their use in this way may not therefore be part of the actual de-consecration, but subsequent activity in order to prevent re-consecration”.⁴³⁴ Unfortunately, at other mithraea where the majority of artefacts were removed, such as Capua, Lambaesis and Lugo, there is no evidence of Christian graffiti, leaving their fate far more open to interpretation.

Another trait that scholars have used as diagnostic evidence of Christian iconoclasts is the mutilation or destruction of naked statues, such as those found in the baths at Perge, Aphrodisias and

⁴³¹ Some later texts describe efforts of Christian holy-men in these regions, but they lack instances of iconoclasm. For example the *Life of St Severinus* describes the saint's travels around Noricum in the fifth century. Not a single reference is made to the destruction of idols or temples in the whole text.

⁴³² Sulp. Sev. *V. Mart.* 13-15, *Dial.* 3.8, see also Goodman (2011) 176-178.

⁴³³ Trombley (1993-94) I.245.

⁴³⁴ Bayliss (2004) 13.

Corinth.⁴³⁵ In some cases, Christian authors mention nudity as a bone of contention, with Mark the Deacon describing the statue of Aphrodite at Gaza as “naked, and having all her shame uncovered”, while Theodoret remarked of a similar statue that it was “more shameless than that of any prostitute standing in front of a brothel”.⁴³⁶ However, generally speaking mithraea were not often filled with images of nudity. Mithras and the torchbearers tended to be depicted fully-clothed, with an exception sometimes being the rock-birth, but even then Mithras is frequently portrayed only from the waist-up. Naked images are a rarity among the mithraea discussed here: there is a relief of Mercury from Gimmeldingen, an altar from Poetovio III that carries an image of Sol, and statuettes of the rock-births found in Carnuntum I and III. If Christians were to blame for the smashed fittings in Poetovio III, then it is very peculiar that the image of Sol was left intact; in fact this would infer that Christian responsibility in this case, based on these criteria, is actually unlikely. In the case of the rock-birth from Carnuntum III, only the right-hand of the statuette was missing, while the rest of it was left relatively intact, suggesting the damage had nothing to do with the deity’s nudity. At the same mithraeum, the images on various gods on the large altar located in this mithraeum were also left untouched despite not being clothed. The relief of Mercury from Gimmeldingen gives the strongest inference of an image being assaulted because of its nude depiction, with the head and *caduceus* in the god’s right-hand having been struck off. Yet if this was carried out by Christians, it is odd that the main relief was left untouched; could it be that these Christians had little problem with Mithras himself, but simply sought to eradicate an image of indecency? If this was the case, then we are not dealing with Christian persecution of the cult of Mithras *per se*, but only selected images that were not even required by the Mithras cult to operate. Only at Carnuntum I have nude depictions been found mutilated alongside other fragmentary images. Here, a statue of naked Mithras being born from the rock was found with its head, arms and genitals missing, while most other images were also destroyed; only a statue of a lion was left intact. Thus, based on the treatment of naked images, only two sites (Carnuntum I and Gimmeldingen) exhibit strong evidence for Christian involvement in their closure, although given at Gimmeldingen the Mithraic images were left unmolested suggests that it was not the cult itself that invoked the ire of the assailants.

Images of animals and/or foliage being found intact while other items were destroyed is another form of evidence sometimes used to identify possible Christian involvement. This looks to have been the case at the confirmed example of Christian iconoclasm of Ša‘āra, where an arch decorated with signs of the zodiac was defaced, but images of foliage were left intact. However, like nude depictions, images of animals outside of the main relief are not common in mithraea. From those discussed here,

⁴³⁵ On Perge, see Hannestad (2001); on Aphrodisias, see Smith (2012); on Corinth where a herm was decapitated and cross marked over the genitals, see Saradi and Eliopoulos (2011). On such instances in Egypt, see Kristensen (2013) 186-190.

⁴³⁶ On the statue at Gaza, see *V. Porph.* 59. For Theodoret, see *Hellenikon Therapeutic Pathematon* 3.79, translation taken from Kristensen (2013) 224.

Carnuntum I and III, Poetovio II and III and Vulci are the only mithraea to have produced images of animals separate to the main relief. However, at Poetovio III a relief depicting a goat was found broken, with only the head remaining, thus lessening the possibility of Christian involvement in the destruction of the images. In contrast, at Poetovio II a statuette of a lion was found intact and the raven was all that remained of the central relief, at Carnuntum III a statuette of a lion was found intact, and at Carnuntum I a statue of a lion was found untouched. Yet at both Poetovio II and Carnuntum III images relating the cult also survived: at Poetovio II a smaller tauroctony image was found intact, while at Carnuntum III the main altar supported by the depictions of various gods was also relatively undamaged. If this was the selective work of Christian iconoclasts, why leave these images alone too? Once again, Christian involvement is by no means conclusive. At Vulci in Italy, where there is no dating evidence, the statuette of a raven survived while two tauroctony statues and a statue of Cautes were found not only broken, but with blows evident all over their bodies. The evidence here strongly infers a violent attack on the mithraeum and the fact that the raven was completely spared does suggest the perpetrators were selective. As a result, in this instance religiously motivated iconoclasts are arguably the most plausible culprits. At Les Bolards in Gaul a statue of Cautes was found with a damaged face, while his counterpart had been broken in two pieces (which are now lost) along with fragments of various other images, including some possible remains of the tauroctony; the only image found intact was a statue of a lion near the entrance. Thus only three sites (Carnuntum I, Vulci and Les Bolards) provide a plausible indication for Christian iconoclasts based on the survival of animal depictions, although at Vulci the lack of dating means this could have occurred post-abandonment.

As is evident, attempting to ascertain Christian involvement in the destruction and/or de-sacralisation of Mithraic temples based on the archaeological evidence is very difficult. It is therefore worth asking: is there actually any evidence of Christians living close to these Mithraic temples when they were abandoned or destroyed? By evidence, I refer to textual records, evidence for churches, burials of a clearly Christian nature and small finds with Christian symbols. This may also include so-called 'negative evidence', which is the likely de-sacralisation or destruction of temples by Christians in the locale of mithraea, although, like the mithraea, this can be extremely difficult to prove.

In the case of Rome and its environs, there is no debate to be had over whether any Christians were present. Instead it is only to what degree there is any evidence of violence carried out by Christians against non-Christians in the city during the fourth century. The reference to prefect Gracchus attacking a mithraeum has been discussed, but it is important to once again urge caution in using this as proof of the persecution of the Mithras cult in Rome in the latter half of the fourth century. Similarly, the debate over the presence of the altar of Victory in the Senate House has been

exaggerated in its importance regarding the dispute over Rome's religious identity, with the statue of the god still present in the Senate under Honorius.⁴³⁷ For widespread violence to have been directed against non-Christians in Rome at this time is tremendously unlikely, given that many of the aristocracy still worshipped non-Christian gods. Inscriptions dedicated by both Christian and non-Christian aristocrats (including those who were part of Mithraic communities) uncovered close to St Peter's Basilica do not present any evidence of dispute between the two and there is no reference to this in the literary texts.⁴³⁸ There is very little in the literary evidence to suggest any extensive animosity between Christians and non-Christians in the city during the fourth century, with disputes within the Christian communities a much more frequent occurrence, such as during the papal election crisis of A.D. 366.⁴³⁹ The construction of churches over several mithraea may be taken as an indication of competition, but in reality there is little to suggest that this was the case, with the mithraea already out of use. However, there is some evidence for possible iconoclastic activity in the mithraeum under *Santa Prisca*, for which the most plausible explanation remains Christians during the construction of the church.

It is in Syria we find evidence of significant Christian presence which could have come into conflict with their non-Christian neighbours. Churches from the fourth century tend to be more extant in Syria than in other provinces and can often be accurately dated from inscriptions recording their construction: at Brad, a man named Julianus had a church constructed in A.D. 395-402; Marcianus Cyris paid for a series of churches on the mountain road between Antioch and Aleppo at the turn of the fifth century; the Bishop Flavian oversaw the construction of a martyr-mithraeum at Antioch in A.D. 380;⁴⁴⁰ and Bishop Alexandros built the church at Hawarte over the mithraeum in A.D. 421.⁴⁴¹ The textual record provides various examples of Christians involved in violent disputes with other communities, the most famous case of which was in A.D. 403 when the Bishop of Gaza, Porphyry, petitioned the hesitant emperor Arcadius launched a crusade against the town's temples and idols, which subsequently led to an outbreak of violence. However, the hagiography's author, Mark the Deacon, acknowledged the fact that the Christians did not make up a considerable number of the population, but rather only consisted of a few hundred.⁴⁴²

In Gaul, Christian communities are known to have existed in Bordeaux and Trier in the early fourth century as their respective bishops attended the Council of Arles in 314.⁴⁴³ A Christian basilica

⁴³⁷ Lavan (2011b) 445-446.

⁴³⁸ Gwynn (2011) 146.

⁴³⁹ Amm. 27.3.11-13.

⁴⁴⁰ Milburn (1988) 125-127.

⁴⁴¹ Gawlikowski (2012) 490. See Trombley (1993-94) II.134-204 and 347-374 for the Christianity in rural Syria.

⁴⁴² Trombley (1993-94) I.191-3. Mark's hagiography was written sometime in the fifth century after the events it describes and he was not an eye-witness, thus to what degree it presents historical facts is debatable.

⁴⁴³ Wightman (1970) 227.

was erected in town under Constantine, although attempting to ascertain how reflective this is of the size of the Christian community, given its status as an imperial project, is difficult to ascertain.⁴⁴⁴ In the town's hinterland, there is no indication of churches until the fifth century, but some early Christian gravestones have been found just outside the city walls.⁴⁴⁵ According to a medieval inscription, as early as the latter half of the third century Christians were already targeting idols at Trier, with the bishop setting up a torso from a statue of Venus to be ridiculed by the Christian population, but this story is likely to have been later fabrication.⁴⁴⁶ It is notable that inside the basilica various Christians etched small inscriptions into the walls, yet no Christian graffiti was found in the mithraeum. Gaul's most famous iconoclast Martin of Tours visited the Trier when Valentinian I resided in the town, although his visit mainly concerning the Priscillian controversy, as it did the later visit of Ambrose, another famous exponent of limiting non-Christian activity, and in neither case is there any mention of them urging for the closure of temples in the town.⁴⁴⁷ Indeed, one may argue that the presence of the court would actually provide a deterrent for any would be iconoclasts, given that it also meant that various high-ranking polytheists also frequented the town, such as Symmachus.⁴⁴⁸ Martigny is known to have had a bishop by A.D. 381 as he attended the Council of Aquileia that year. Notably, the bishop's name was Theodorus, which was the same name as that found on a ceramic vessel buried at the mithraeum's entrance representing the town.⁴⁴⁹ Archaeological excavation has uncovered what appears to be a funerary chapel (9.5m x 5.5m) at Martigny that looks to have been attached to a suburban villa erected in the mid-fourth century and enlarged before the turn of the fifth century.⁴⁵⁰

In regards to negative evidence for a Christian presence in Gaul, one may expect to find many examples, given the apparent pro-activeness of Martin in such matters.⁴⁵¹ Yet only 2.4% (17/711) of temples in Gaul are known to have been destroyed by violent means, and many of these included in this figure are the Mithraic sites discussed here.⁴⁵² Examples that have been touted as possible cases Christian iconoclasm in Gaul include two hill-top sanctuaries at Tawern and Hochscheid. At Hochscheid, the temple was abandoned in the late third century and the statues were broken at a later date only parts of the legs and arms of a large statue of Apollo were found, while another of Sirona

⁴⁴⁴ The construction of the cathedral is usually assumed to be the church mentioned by Eusebius (*V. Const.*4.17), although it is not certain whether this building is the one he is referring to. The foundation layers of the cathedral were found to contain coins from 312-318, see Kemp (1978).

⁴⁴⁵ Wightman (1970) 232.

⁴⁴⁶ Wightman (1970) 229.

⁴⁴⁷ On Martin's visit to Trier, see Sulp. Sev. *Dial.* 2.5.7-9. On Ambrose's visit, see Ambrose *Ep.* 30.

⁴⁴⁸ For an overview of Symmachus' time in Trier, see Sogno (2006) 1-30.

⁴⁴⁹ *CSEL* 82, pp. 312-68. It has been suggested that the appearance of the name in these two contexts is more than coincidence by Wibl  (2004) 139) and it is not entirely impossible. A precedent may be found in Julian's visit to Ilion in 354, where he was met by the local bishop Pegasius who was also a worshipper of the Sun and utilised his position to protect temples from Christian iconoclasts, see Julian *Ep.* 19.

⁴⁵⁰ Biemann (2013) 411.

⁴⁵¹ On the fate of temples in Gaul, see Goodman (2011).

⁴⁵² Goodman (2011) 179-180.

was found fragmented into three pieces, but with only the legs missing and the rest showing no signs of intentional damage. Another statue of Apollo, naked, was found well preserved. The preservation of the Sirona and smaller Apollo makes Christian iconoclasts unlikely culprits, while there is no reason to assume the missing parts from the larger Apollo statue were removed to be destroyed; they may have been used as *spolia* or decoration elsewhere.⁴⁵³ At Tawern the coin series runs to the end of the fourth century, when the head of the Mercury statue was decapitated and thrown down a well along with an inscription and two altars, while a broken statuette of Artemis was found in the temple enclosure.⁴⁵⁴ Once again, this deposition of the Mercury head and reliefs bears no diagnostic evidence for Christian iconoclasm and other examples of this, such as Coventina's Well,⁴⁵⁵ have not been interpreted in such fashion either. Furthermore, of the fifteen instances where a church replaced or was built into a temple in Gaul, rarely is there a close chronological link between the two phases. In fact, in most cases there was a period where the abandoned temples became necropolises in a similar vein to secular buildings at the same time. It was more likely because of these cemeteries that the churches were erected. This would also infer that Christians buried around abandoned temples did not worry about being polluted by them, from which, as Penelope Goodman observed "[W]e may postulate a more peaceable progression from polytheistic to Christian religious activity than the texts suggest".⁴⁵⁶

On the Danube frontier, by the late fourth century Christian communities are attested to in the eastern and southern parts of the provinces, but the majority of the Mithraic evidence comes from the northern-western areas. Only at Poetovio is there evidence of Christians inhabiting the town in the latter half of the fourth century at the same time several mithraea were still active. In one of Ambrose's letters, he refers to a dispute between Arian bishop of Poetovio, Julianus Valens, and his orthodox counterpart, Marcus, but no mention is made of any non-Christian activity in the town.⁴⁵⁷ In Noricum, a church is known to have existed at Lauriacum in the late fourth century.⁴⁵⁸ Lauriacum is not far from Lentia, but the latter has not produced any significant evidence for a Christian community, save for a single tombstone relating to a widow. Another female tombstone was uncovered at Ovilava, just outside of which the Schachadorf mithraeum was situated, but in this case the wording on the tombstone suggests that her husband, who had it carved, was himself not a Christian.⁴⁵⁹ The use of 'negative evidence' for Christian presence in this region is not convincing either. A number of temples which were found to have been destroyed and their images broken, including the temple of Mars Lendorf near Teurnia, Mars Latobius at St Margarethen and the

⁴⁵³ Sauer (2003) 75-78.

⁴⁵⁴ Sauer (2003) 73.

⁴⁵⁵ Allason-Jones and McKay (1985).

⁴⁵⁶ Goodman (2011) 180-181.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ep.* 10.9-10.

⁴⁵⁸ Eckhart (1981).

⁴⁵⁹ *Lentia*: *CIL* 3.13532; *Ovilava*: Noll (1954) 47.

mithraeum to Jupiter Dolichenus at Virunum, have been used to highlight Christian iconoclasm in the region.⁴⁶⁰ Yet none of these mithraea produced secure finds post-dating the end of the third century: the Dolichenum likely to have been destroyed in the early decades of the third century; the mithraeum of Mars Lendorf could only be securely dated to the second century; and the mithraeum to Mars Latobius was found to neighbour another mithraeum that was systematically levelled in the final decades of the third century.⁴⁶¹ Under such circumstances, this casts doubt as to whether the state of the evidence at Carnuntum I really was the result of Christian iconoclasts, or at least if they were responsible this may have occurred long after the mithraeum was abandoned.

In Britain, much like the Danube frontier, it would not be until long after the last activity for the Mithras cult that Christianity would have considerable impact. Early Christian sites are known in Britain, most famously the likes of Lullingstone and Hinton St Mary, but these are not to be found in close proximity to Mithraic sites. Possible churches have been found on Hadrian's Wall at Housesteads and Vindolanda, but these date to at least the turn of the fifth century, thus a considerable length of time after the mithraea went out of use.⁴⁶² In terms of 'negative evidence', the most widely touted examples are the mithraea of Hadrian's Wall, which are discussed elsewhere here with serious doubts cast over whether Christians were to blame. A curse tablet from Bath which refers to "a holy place, wrecked by insolent hands and cleansed afresh" has been suggested as being evidence for Christian iconoclasts, particularly as another curse table references Christians, but there is no reason to assume it could not refer to any other conflicts between cults.⁴⁶³

Likewise, early Christian evidence from Dalmatia is not in abundance either. Salona is known to have been a bishopric in the fourth century, while St Jerome's (b. 347) hometown of Stridon on the border with Pannonia is likely to have had a Christian community.⁴⁶⁴ At the town of Narona (modern Vid), excavators have claimed to have found evidence of Christian iconoclasm in the archaeological record. An imperial cult building was found on the west side of the town's forum and contained a series of toppled statues and their bases, with the pottery finds providing a *terminus post quem* of the late fourth century. The statues depicted various emperors and members of their families from the first to early second century A.D., most of which had had their heads removed, with some of the heads later found outside the temple. According to the inscriptions found in the temple there should also have been two silver statues of Venus, but these were absent. Christians were known to have lived in the town around this time as three early Christian basilicas and a baptistery have all been found, so it is plausible they may have been to blame. However, there is no diagnostic evidence to prove the

⁴⁶⁰ Alföldy (1974) 210.

⁴⁶¹ Walsh (2016).

⁴⁶² Rushworth (2009) 321-322.

⁴⁶³ Lewis (1966) 143-145; Thomas (1981) 133-136.

⁴⁶⁴ Wilkes (1969) 419, 430.

involvement of Christians and given the high quality of the statues, that some of the heads were never recovered may indicate they were taken to be refashioned and reused, or sold to collectors. Furthermore, Sauer has suggested one way of establishing Christian involvement in the desecralisation of a temple is whether valuable goods were left, given that those who assaulted temples for religious reasons would be blaspheming by removing such objects for personal gain, yet in this example the two silver statues were removed.⁴⁶⁵ Of course, there is no guarantee as to whether the removal of these items was contemporary to destruction of the other images.

Overall, the evidence does not provide a strong basis for claiming Christianity was the single biggest motor for the end of the Mithras cult. Many of the mithraea that continued in use during the fourth century were located in frontier regions that have not produced evidence for any substantial Christian populations, or least such evidence rarely correlates with the presence of mithraea. For example, in Noricum and Pannonia where the Mithras cult was still active on the frontier to the northwest, Christianity is found in south and eastern areas. By the time evidence for a notable Christian presence arises in the same area, often the mithraea had already been abandoned. Furthermore, much of the so-called 'negative evidence' for the presence of Christians remains open to interpretation, with little in the way of diagnostic evidence to prove their involvement.

However, this is not to say Christian iconoclasts were not responsible for the closure of all mithraea. There is evidence for Christian communities existing close to active mithraea in fourth century in some locations in the inner provinces and in the East. At Hawarte, Christians do appear the most likely perpetrators given the diagnostic evidence and the construction of a church on the site shortly after the abandonment of the mithraeum. At both Vulci and Les Bolards, the evidence does suggest Christian involvement given the lack of attention paid to depictions of animals by those responsible for the breaking of the images. Additionally, Christians were certainly to be found in towns such as Martigny, Trier and Poetovio around the time mithraea in these locations were desecralised and thus cannot be entirely excluded as possible motors for this. The diagnostic evidence would also seem to indicate that Carnuntum I could have been the victim of Christian iconoclasts, but this may have occurred long after it was abandoned given the dearth of contemporary Christian evidence in the surrounding area.

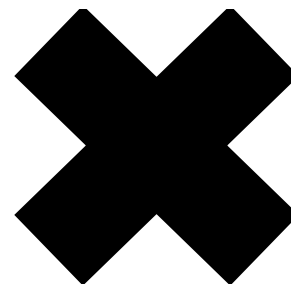
Barbarian Incursion and Settlement

The movement of peoples across the Roman frontiers in order to raid and/or settle would have had considerable impact on the regions which contained many active mithraea. By the latter half of the

⁴⁶⁵ Christie (2011) 165; Sauer (2004) 330.

fourth century, the pressure that groups such as the Franks, Goths, Alamanni and Sarmatians exerted on the Rhine and Danube frontiers had grown considerably and we have seen how the populations of many towns and *vici* fled or sought refuge inside neighbouring forts. The historic record provides a number of instances where conflict flared along the Northern frontiers throughout the fourth century. According to Ammianus, in the mid-fourth century the Quadi “got together and sent out parties to devastate our territory. They crossed the Danube and fell upon the country folk, who were busy with their harvest and had no thought of an enemy”.⁴⁶⁶ In 365/6 the Alamanni crossed the frozen Rhine during winter, a move repeated by the Lentienses in 378. Other groups look to have settled along the Danube frontier during the reigns of both Constantius II and Valens, which was permitted on the basis that they would provide recruits for the Roman army.⁴⁶⁷ That significant numbers of barbarians were now serving either in or alongside the Roman army as *foederati* is implied by the actions of the Roman commander Julius in the wake of devastating loss to Gothic forces at Adrianople in A.D. 378 under Valens. Julius issued orders to the commanders of various garrisons in the east to execute Gothic soldiers under their command. That these Gothic soldiers were commanded by Roman officers was according to Ammianus, “an unusual thing at the present time”,⁴⁶⁸ suggesting it was more common for these barbarian groups to have their own commanders rather than be directly responsible to Roman officers. These events did not stop further groups seeking to settle within the Roman frontier, however, with lands in Pannonia granted to the Goths and Alans, under the command of Alatheus and Saphrac in the wake of Adrianople these forces would contribute to the sizable numbers of non-Roman troops utilised by Theodosius in his conflict with Eugenius.⁴⁶⁹ Around the same time in Dalmatia Visigoths were to be found attacking cities along the Illyrian coast.⁴⁷⁰ In the early fifth century the situation did not improve, as the end of monetary circulation above the Alps meant that what Roman forces were left on the Northern frontiers could no longer be paid, while “Vandal wanderings (401), Visigothic assaults (402) and plundering by the forces of the Goth Radagaisus (405/7) made the interiors of Pannonia and Noricum scarred battlegrounds”.⁴⁷¹

Figure 39: Statuettes from the Dieburg Mithraeum (Source: CIMRM Fig. 325 and 326)



Unfortunately, while the literary evidence provides much information regarding movements of barbarian groups, evidence for new settlers along the Danube and Rhine is not easy to identify from

⁴⁶⁶ 29.6

⁴⁶⁷ Amm. Marc. 19.11.7; 31.4.4-5.

⁴⁶⁸ 31.16.7.

⁴⁶⁹ Amm. Marc. 31.4-16.

⁴⁷⁰ Jerome *Ep* 60.16.

⁴⁷¹ Christie (2011) 86.

the archaeological record. At Poetovio a small cemetery found near the late Roman fortress on Castle Hill dates the late fourth and early fifth centuries and consisted of burials that contained “barbaric elements”, suggesting that they may have acted as the garrison.⁴⁷² At the site of Krefeld-Gellep on the Rhine, burials dating to between A.D. 400 and 425 were immured within an existing cemetery but broke from previous norms, with weapons and Germanic jewellery appearing alongside the deceased, while at the fort of Vermand in Gaul a particularly large burial dating to *ca.* A.D. 400 was found to contain expensive weapons and apparel may indicate a Frankish chief serving as the site’s commander.⁴⁷³

Not only is attempting to identify barbarian presence in the archaeological record problematic, but it is even more difficult to establish diagnostic evidence for any destruction or de-sacralisation of temples carried out by them. However, there is evidence from earlier periods of what is most probably damage inflicted on mithraea by barbarians. In the A.D. 260s the Roman Empire abandoned its territories north of the Rhine, an area that contained various mithraea which now ceased to be used. At one of the mithraea at Dieburg many of the fittings recovered from a mithraeum were extensively damaged (Fig. 39), with the large double-sided relief missing the heads of Mithras on one side and Phaeton on the other, numerous statues beheaded, while a statue of Mercury was smashed into at least 23 pieces and elements of a tauroctony relief were discarded down a well outside the mithraeum.⁴⁷⁴ The evidence from these earlier barbarian incursions also calls into question certain so-called diagnostic traits of Christian iconoclasm. A recurrent feature of the damage evident in many mithraea is the absence of heads from statues and reliefs, a feature commonly prescribed as a particularly ‘Christian’ act of iconoclasm. However, a number of sites in Germany have produced evidence of destruction and damage dating to around the time of the Alammani invasion, including the rural site of Harting in Germany where the remains of a family were recovered; they had been mutilated, scalped, their heads removed and their bodies thrown down a well.⁴⁷⁵ The key here is that the bodies were mutilated and heads are absent, mimicking the fate of Mithraic statuary, while the deposition of the bodies down the well echoes the fate of the Mercury statue from Dieburg. Notably, the Biesheim mithraeum, which was partially burnt down and its statuary broken towards of the end of the third century, lay in the same region.

Several small finds from beyond the Rhine frontier may also be an indication of valuable items being taken from mithraea by raiders. It has been suggested that a miniature of the bull-slaying scene

⁴⁷² Horvat *et al.* (2003) 164.

⁴⁷³ Christie (2011) 64.

⁴⁷⁴ *CIMRM* 1247-1264.

⁴⁷⁵ Carroll (2001) 138. Also stated on the same page: “Ritual defacement and smashing of statues and monuments to Roman gods at vici such as Bad Wimpfen and Walheim and at the villa at Brackenheim-Hausen an der Zaber also seem more likely to have been acts of Alammanic vengeance”.

in bronze found in the River Salle near Halle was taken from a mithraeum as booty in Germania Superior sometime in the mid-third century,⁴⁷⁶ while the discovery of bronze dagger-hands from the bull-slaying scene have been recovered at Hamburg, Flechtorf and Berlin. The Hamburg hand was found in the River Alster, while the original provenance of the Flechtorf hand is unknown and the Berlin example has been lost. However, given the two finds from known provenances were recovered from rivers, ritual deposition cannot be excluded, while trade may also have resulted in them being found outside of the Roman sphere.⁴⁷⁷

In Britain, it is even harder to estimate how much conflict occurred around Hadrian's Wall when the mithraea went out of use. According to the literary evidence, there were problems with the Picts during Constantius Chlorus' reign, while Constantine's title *Britannicus* may refer to a campaign.⁴⁷⁸ Around 367 the 'Barbarian Conspiracy' occurred, which began with the rebellion of garrisons on Hadrian's Wall that allowed Picts to cross the into the Roman province and led to the deaths of the *dux Britanniarum* and the commander of the coastal defences. The province was pacified by Count Theodosius, father of the later emperor, but the incident, even if overblown by Ammianus to glorify Theodosius' (emperor at the time of writing) father, does indicate significant unrest.⁴⁷⁹ The destruction of Carrawburgh may have been a product of this unrest if groups had been allowed across Hadrian's Wall unchecked, while the earlier campaigns of the Constantinian dynasty would fit with the destruction of the Housesteads mithraeum, particularly as both these mithraea lay beyond their defences of the nearby forts.

Overall, the key point here is that mithraea frequently lay in areas that saw an influx of people from beyond the frontiers to either settle, raid or conquer. To these people crossing into the Roman World, Mithras may have appeared as a symbol of the Empire, given the frequency of his temples and dedications made by powerful individuals, most notably the Tetrarchs declaration at Carnuntum that Mithras was the 'Protector of the Empire'. That 'Roman' deities would be targeted by those in conflict with the Empire was not unheard of. When the Roman garrison left the town of Gholaia in North Africa in around A.D. 260, the local inhabitants tore down the statues of Victory and Fortuna located within the military camp to demonstrate the weakness of Rome's power. That they continued to worship Jupiter Hammon in a temple constructed by the Romans for over another hundred years is perhaps an indication they targeted deities they saw as connected to the Roman military.⁴⁸⁰ The prefix *Deo Invicto* may even have seemed a challenge to those crossing the Rhine, Danube or Hadrian's Wall. In the midst of this, it would be unsurprisingly if not only mithraea, which usually lacked any

⁴⁷⁶ Gordon (2004) 267.

⁴⁷⁷ Marquart (2004).

⁴⁷⁸ Mattingly (2006) 233-234.

⁴⁷⁹ Amm. Marc. 27.8.

⁴⁸⁰ Caseau (1999) 21-22.

protection, were abandoned and became the victims of ‘anti-Roman destruction’. However, without diagnostic evidence this can only remain conjecture.

Turning to the Eastern frontier, it is possible that incursions by the Sassanid Empire adversely affected the cult. Although Mithras’ attire had been a feature of the Roman cult’s iconography since its earliest days, there is no evidence that the image of Mithras as a Persian had been a source of conflict, although we can assume it may have generated some tension with society, particularly in the East. However, during the third century the border between the two empires destabilised considerably, culminating in the first case of a Roman emperor, Valerian, being captured. Although peace was largely restored under the Tetrarchy, conflict between the Romans and Persians again arose between the mid- to late fourth century, during which time the Persians made significant gains, and the resumed again in the first half of the fifth century. During the course of the fourth century these conflicts had taken on a religious element, beginning with Constantine warning the Persian ruler Shapur that he should refrain from persecuting Christians, lest the Roman Empire be forced to into action to protect them, a persecution which was subsequently carried out in the A.D. 340s. The war in the early A.D. 420s has also been seen as being partially the result of Persian persecution of Christians.⁴⁸¹

In such circumstances it is possible that the Persian aspects of the Mithras cult came under increasing scrutiny. Notably, Firmicus Maternus, in his criticism of the cult, talks more of its Persian origin than it being non-Christian:

[T]o him they give the name Mithras, and celebrate his rites in secret caves, that shrouded in the dim obscurity of the darkness they may shun the touch of the pure and glorious light. Truly an ill-omened exaltation of a deity! a hateful recognition of a barbarian rite! To deify one whose criminal acts your confess. When you affirm therefore that in the temples the Magian rites are duly performed after the Persian ceremonial, why do you confine your approval to these Persian rites alone? If you think it not derogatory to the Roman name to adopt Persian cults and Persian laws...⁴⁸²

Furthermore, a law was passed under the Tetrarchs against the Manicheans, a Persian sect which had arisen in the mid-third century, which suggests the ‘Persian’ origin of the cult was a point of contention:

...they have advanced or emerged from their homes in Persia – an enemy of ours – like strange and monstrous portents... [T]here is a danger that in time they will try, as usual, to contaminate with the Persian’s criminal

⁴⁸¹ Holum (1977).

⁴⁸² *De Erro.* 4.1.

habits and insane laws, the innocent, orderly and peaceful Roman people, and the whole empire as well, as if with the position of an evil snake.⁴⁸³

It is notable that of the evidence for Christian de-sacralisation of mithraea, three out of the four sites were located in Syria, the area most exposed to Persian invasion. Indeed, Doliche was sacked by the Persians in the mid-third century, while the Hawarte mithraeum's iconography suggests a community influenced by Zoroastrianism. Is it possible that the carving of crosses on the walls and reliefs of these mithraea represented not the victory of Christ over the cult of Mithras, but the triumph of the Christian empire of Rome over the Zoroastrian Persians, with whom they identified Mithraic imagery? That in this case the abandonment and de-sacralisation of mithraea was a reaction amongst the local population to barbarian incursions? In regards to a cult being in tension with society, the Hawarte mithraeum in particular now fell at the extreme end of the spectrum: a small group meeting in private to worship a non-Christian deity in Persian garb at the edge of an empire that frowned on such meetings, promoted the Christian god, and was at war with Persia. Thus while the Mithraic adherents were perhaps driven from this location by Christians, this may have been only partially motivated by religious reasons, with a variety of aspects bringing the cult to peak of tension with society prompting a violent outburst.

Imperial Legislation

There is little evidence of a desire amongst the Roman authorities for the destruction of temples or to legally justify religious violence in communities. While the government condemned various rituals connected with temples and attempted to prevent funds coming into them, throughout the fourth and fifth centuries it was reiterated that the destruction of these buildings was not encouraged.⁴⁸⁴ It is of course highly questionable to what degree any of these laws were carried out, given that many who held governorships and prefect positions came from a nobility that largely still adhered to classical religion, while bribery and ineptitude also likely played a part in limiting how effective they were. Additionally, one wonders to what extent such laws could be implemented in rural areas. The fact that the legislation had to be repeated suggests that it had little impact, for as Bayliss observed "the Theodosian Law Code presents almost a collection of legal posterity rather than an efficient and effective source of reference by which to rule".⁴⁸⁵ Furthermore, the laws concerning classical temples and rituals do not constitute a large portion of laws found in Book 16.5; there are only 25 laws applying to *De Paganis, Sacrificiis, et Templis*, while 66 laws were enacted against heretics and 29 filed under Jews, Caelicolists, and Samaritans. Although concerned that people should not be carrying

⁴⁸³ Manichaean Rescript, *Collation of the Laws of Moses and Rome* 15.3. Translation taken from Gwynn (2015) 17-18.

⁴⁸⁴ *Cod. Theod.* 16.10.8, 15, 18.

⁴⁸⁵ Bayliss (2004) 117.

out improper rituals, particularly relating to oracles and soothsayers, the laws indicate that the Imperial government was generally more concerned with suppressing unorthodox forms of Christianity.

However, none of this is to say mithraea in the Western provinces were entirely beyond the reach of such legislation; as the mithraeum at Trier was on the door-step of the imperial government it may have reflected badly on them had the mithraeum continued to operate. Indeed, the reduction of coin finds in the late fourth century in the Trier mithraeum around the same time surrounding temples were being levelled and the sacrificial deposit which appears to mark the closure of the temple was made suggests we may be looking at the eviction of the Mithraic community from their temple. Indeed, given the apparent decline in commitment among Mithraic adherents, perhaps the laws were enough to deter other Mithraic communities from continuing to attend their local mithraeum, hence perhaps this is why across the early to mid-fourth century there was a rise in the number of mithraea abandoned and their images removed.

Civil War

Although it was important to maintain the allegiance of the frontier troops, the eradication of certain cults or temples in this region might still be the direct, or in-direct, result of Roman civil war. Even though many soldiers in the fourth century would have been drawn from rural areas and were unlikely to have been Christians, one should not assume this mean they had any qualms in carrying out the destruction or de-sacralisation of a mithraeum they had no connection to, particularly if it provided prospects of booty. In Britain, the end of the Mithraic temples also finds a correlation with the apparent mass destruction of temples on military sites around the turn of the fourth century, which Lewis postulated was the result of Constantius Chlorus defeat of Carusian revolt, but it is difficult to ascertain whether this was the case without further archaeological evidence.⁴⁸⁶ One mithraeum whose *terminus post quem* aligns exactly with such conflict occurring in its environs is the example from Septeuil. This mithraeum was clearly the victim of a vicious attack sometime in the 380s and it is perhaps not a coincidence that in A.D. 383 the usurper Magnus Maximus is recorded as having defeated Gratian just outside of Paris.⁴⁸⁷ Magnus' force consisted of troops he brought from Britain, a province where the Mithraic evidence ceases over a half a century previous, thus his army had little to no affiliation with the deity and may have seen the mithraeum at Septeuil as simply a site to be pillaged during their successful advance.

⁴⁸⁶ Lewis (1966) 143.

⁴⁸⁷ Leeham (2010) 167-169.

Relocation of Mithraic Initiates

Given that there is evidence for the curation of broken objects in Mithraic circles, and given the growing appreciation for the cultural biographies of objects in archaeological research, we must also consider the idea that the breaking of the statues and reliefs was undertaken by the Mithraic adherents themselves. That broken statuary from temples may have continued to have a religious importance attached to it has been explored by Ben Croxford in regard to evidence found in the late Roman Britain:

[A]t the end of Roman Britain, with the arrival of outsiders and the threat of barbarian invaders, these fragments may have been especially valuable to individuals suffering perhaps uncertain times; they may have been used as apotropaic amulets or as personal objects of veneration, a private piece of the divine... to suppose that everyone abandoned or even deliberately destroyed their 'old faith's' idols and images is now unsupported.⁴⁸⁸

Such a description could also apply to the Rhine or Danube frontiers, with many mithraea located in perilous positions and many of the local inhabitants having fled or withdrawn to defensive positions. If the Mithraic communities felt that the danger of attending the mithraea had grown too great and decided to abandon them, it is plausible that they would wish to take some of the fittings with them. However, to carry the reliefs or statues may have been impractical, either as they were too large to carry or because the congregation was no longer large enough to warrant it as a necessity. Yet to break a relief or statue and remove the head or hands, the most expressive part, may have provided a method of retaining the essence of the image, in much the same fashion the relics of saints would later be viewed as being as powerful as the whole.⁴⁸⁹ Indeed, when one surveys the remains of the statues and reliefs from mithraea a pattern does emerge: the head of Mithras, occasionally along with that of the bull, is absent in many cases.⁴⁹⁰ Furthermore, it is notable that the mithraeum at Dieburg abandoned in *ca.* A.D. 260 during the Roman cessation of land beyond the Rhine has produced numerous sculptures and reliefs also missing their heads. Could this have been the work of the initiates fleeing the oncoming Alamanni? While it is plausible that the heads of statues could be removed and refashioned for different uses, given that many reliefs were also found to be missing the head of Mithras is unusual, given that there would have been little alternative use for them. If we are

⁴⁸⁸ Croxford (2003) 93-94.

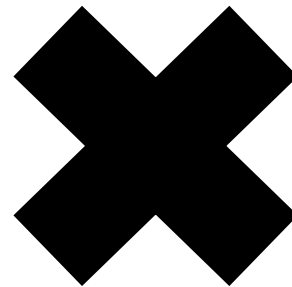
⁴⁸⁹ Brown (1981) 78.

⁴⁹⁰ Heads Missing: Carrowburgh: *CIMRM* 850 (Cautes Statue); Jajce: *CIMRM* 1903 (Cautes statue); Konjic: *CIMRM* 1896 (Mithras' head missing from main relief); Septeuil: Gaidon-Bunuel (1991) 55 (Heads of Mithras and the bull missing from main relief); Timavo: Pross Gabrielli (1975) 18-33 (Head of Mithras and bull missing from two reliefs); Vulci: Moretti (1979) 268-276 (Heads of Mithras and the bull missing from two statues); Lentia: *CIMRM* 1415 (Mithras head missing from small relief); Carnuntum I: *CIMRM* 1665, 1669 (Mithras' head missing from main relief and rock-birth statue); Poetovio II: *CIMRM* 1511 (Mithras' head missing from relief); Poetovio III: *CIMRM* 1600 (Mithras' head missing from relief).

to believe the previous conclusions of scholars, this was the result of the heads being pulverised to dust.⁴⁹¹

Are there any cases where the state of the evidence looks to have been the result of Mithraic adherents breaking the images in order to remove certain elements? One such example might be Septeuil. At this mithraeum, the heads were removed from one statue and the main relief, the latter of which was heavily fragmented, but another relief was left intact and exhibits blows to face of Mithras (Fig. 40). Given that this mithraeum lay in the path of Magnus Maximus's army and looks to have been abandoned at this time, it is possible as the army approached the Mithraic adherents sought to remove the head of Mithras and the bull from the main relief, as well as from the statue of the rock-birth, but left the additional rock-birth image, which would have required fragmentation to obtain parts of the image. Thus, we find the remaining image of the rock-birth having received several blows, a fate which contrasts with the other images.

Figure 40: Relief of the Rock-birth from Septeuil (Source: Gaidon-Bunuel (1991) Fig. 7)



Such a scenario could also explain the state of the evidence in some of the Dalmatian mithraea. At Jajce, a headless statue of the torchbearer was found, yet the main relief, which was carved into a rock-face, was left intact except for Mithras' dagger hand, which had been removed. Such precise removal of certain features while other aspects were left intact does not appear to indicate this was born out of animosity. At Konjic, on one side of the main, double-sided relief all depictions of Mithras (three in total) have had their heads removed, while in the top corners the images of Sol and Luna had been removed (Fig. 41). On the reverse, which depicts Mithraic adherents recreating the banquet of Sol and Mithras, all the figures remain intact.⁴⁹² Once again, that the heads of the deities were removed with precision suggests care was taken to do this. While one may argue that this could have been outsiders attempting to negate the power of enemy gods or demons, that they left reverse image alone contradicts this, for how would they know the figures on the other side were human and not divine?

It must be borne in mind that unlike in other provinces in the West, the cult of Mithras never appears to have achieved the prominence or attracted the patronage of important members of society in Dalmatia. They also did not adopt ritual practices that echoed other cult sites and, given the iconography of the main relief at Konjic, may have continued enacting at least some of the traditional

⁴⁹¹ Sauer (2003) 82, 151.

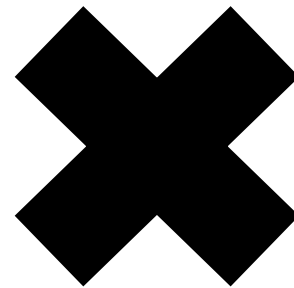
⁴⁹² Jajce: *CIMRM* 1902-1903; Konjic: *CIMRM* 1896.

Mithraic practices. As a result, the adherents here were more likely to have retained a higher level of commitment than their counterparts in other provinces and thus seek to preserve at least some of their statuary in a portable form. At Septeuil, this Mithraic congregation may also have still generated a relatively high level of commitment from its adherents. This mithraeum was located in a province where Mithras had achieved some level of popularity, but this was in the east of the province and there is no previous evidence for a mithraeum around Paris. Furthermore, this mithraeum has produced

Figure 41: The Relief from the Konjic Mithraeum (Source: CIMRM Fig. 490)

evidence that ritual feasts were occurring around the time the mithraeum was abandoned, perhaps indicating they persevered with at least some of the traditional rituals of the cult.

Finally, there is the aforementioned broken, fire-damaged statuary from the Bornheim-Sechtem mithraeum. That this statuary had not originated from this mithraeum, but rather looks to have been retrieved from another mithraeum that was destroyed sometime in the late fourth century, does suggest that these Mithraic adherents in this region sought to save these items from a temple that had been destroyed.



Natural Disasters and Accidental Destruction

Natural disasters, particularly earthquakes, certainly brought a premature end to various temples. Even if a temple was only used sporadically, without any severe dilapidation the cost of such activities could be kept to a minimum, but the devastation of a natural disaster could change this situation considerably. The damage to, and destruction of, mithraea caused by natural disasters is very difficult to establish; it appears to have been the fate of the Temple of Apollo at Hyle in Cyprus and the second phase of damage inflicted on the Temple of Zeus at Cyrene.⁴⁹³ It is difficult to ascertain if many mithraea were affected by such occurrences, but Carnuntum provides a rare example of where such a situation was highly likely to have impacted on the Mithraic temples in the town. When Ammianus visited the town with Valentinian I in A.D. 375, he described it as “deserted and in ruins”.⁴⁹⁴ As we have seen, urban decay was common in this region during the latter half of the fourth century, but archaeological excavation has uncovered extensive destruction levels dating to the mid-fourth century, which occur in both secular and religious buildings. The damage evident is consistent with the impact of a seismic event, which in tandem with the fact that Carnuntum lies only 8km northwest

⁴⁹³ Hyle: Trombley (1993-94) I.177; Cyrene: Bayliss (2004) 25.

⁴⁹⁴ 30.5.2.

of Lasse Fault Line,⁴⁹⁵ makes an earthquake the most plausible explanation for this. It seems unlikely these mithraea would have remained untouched by the effects of the earthquake, thus at least some of the damage must have resulted from this, while there is no evidence of activity in either case post-dating the earthquake. As suggested, some of the damage found in Mithraeum I could indicate Christian involvement, but given the evidence relating to the earthquake and the lack of contemporary Christian evidence in the region, if this was the case it certainly post-dated the abandonment of the temple.

It is worth mentioning the mithraeum at Schachadorf as a possible example of a mithraeum having been accidentally destroyed. The recovery of an intact rock-birth statue does not infer construction was a violent act and mithraea certainly presented a high-risk of fire given the lamps used therein. Naturally, it is difficult to prove this was the case at Schachadorf, but certainly such occurrences must have taken place and this is by far the most likely example from the archaeological record.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the fate of most mithraea from the late third to early fifth centuries was a violent one, with 26 destroyed or found with their images broken. Only 16 mithraea either had their images removed or left intact, while five were used as sources of *spolia* or for a different function. Chronologically speaking, in the early fourth century, the fate of mithraea was at its most varied, with some mithraea abandoned, some reused and others desecrated. In the mid-fourth century there is less variation, with most mithraea to having been vacated and their images removed. In the final decades of the fourth century, there is a considerable increase in the number of mithraea whose images were broken, while the number of those destroyed also rose. In regards to geographical distribution, most cases where mithraea were destroyed or had their images broken were to be found on the frontiers throughout the fourth century, while in the interior provinces the closure of mithraea apparently remained relatively benign until the late fourth century when there is an increase in de-sacralisation in these regions.

Who was to blame for these closures and destructions? In total, only four mithraea (Doliche, Hawarte, Ponza and Ša'āra) can be proven to have been desecrated by Christians, but of these Hawarte is the only example where this can be dated to have coincided with the closure of the temple. However, given the context of these mithraea, their de-sacralisation by Christians may have been motivated by more than simply destroying the temple of a 'pagan' god. When one bears in mind that, given the lack of Mithraic material in the East at this time, this was an unusual group who met as small private group in a rural sanctuary to worship a non-Christian deity who wore Persian garb on the Roman frontier with Persia in an area where Christians were active, then the tension that could

⁴⁹⁵ Decker *et al.* (2006); Kandler (1989).

have been generated with society may have been considerable, so much so it resulted in a burst of violence leading to the closure of the temple. As a result, the de-sacralisation of mithraea in these instances may represent the manifestation of a myriad factors, rather than just religious fervour.

Using possible diagnostic evidence to identify Christian iconoclasts, Carnuntum I and Gimmeldingen are the only two examples which were found to contain nude images that look to have been specifically targeted. In regards to those that have produced evidence where images of animals have been left intact while others were destroyed (Carnuntum I, Vulci and Les Bolards) do provide likely indications of Christian iconoclasm, especially as such evidence is present in the mithraeum at Ša'āra which was certainly desecrated by Christians. However questions remain regarding the interpretation of some of these sites. At Gimmeldingen, the lack of damage to the Mithraic images may indicate that if this were the work of Christian iconoclasts they had little issue with Mithras or his cult, thus we cannot be sure if this would have marked the end of worship in the mithraeum. At Carnuntum I, the lack of evidence for a Christian presence in the area makes it unlikely that it was Christians who forced the closure of the mithraeum, with the earthquake of the fourth century a more likely motor, although they may have desecrated the temple at a later stage. Additionally, although it has produced no clear diagnostic evidence for Christian involvement, the damage evident in the mithraeum under *Santa Prisca* is likely to have been carried out by Christians.

The evidence suggests that barbarian incursion may have been a more common motor for the destruction and de-sacralisation of mithraea. During the course of the fourth century, mithraea in frontier regions, such as on Hadrian's Wall, Poetovio, Lentia, Mackwiller, Ad Enum and Sarrebourg all found themselves beyond the defences of their respective settlements, thus leaving them open to assault by external threats. The destruction of mithraea during incursions by barbarians does appear to have a precedent with the destruction and de-sacralisation of mithraea in the Rhineland in the early third century following the retraction of Roman hegemony, while there is evidence of the continued destruction of mithraea in the late third and early fourth centuries in the same area. Both the mithraea destroyed in earlier periods and in the fourth century have produced various statues and reliefs missing their heads, which, given that groups such as the Alammani would decapitate their victims and dispose of the heads separately, perhaps suggests a 'ritual' killing of Mithras. That along the Danube and Hadrian's Wall Mithras had been strongly associated with the Roman army, in the case of the former being named the 'Protector of the Empire' by the Tetrarchs, may have made his temples an attractive target to barbarians who wished to demonstrate Roman power was no longer what it once was.

Another viable alternative for the state of the evidence is that the Mithraic adherents were the ones who broke the images in order to take certain elements with them when abandoning the temple. The

absence of heads from many mithraea has been assumed to indicate Christians, but given the head is the most expressive part of an image if one wished to leave a mithraeum and could not carry a whole relief or statue, breaking it to take these individual elements might provide a solution. Modern excavations of mithraea have demonstrated that Mithraic communities did indeed retain fragmented items, but believed they were still sacred, while such evidence has been found in other cultic contexts in this period. Such a scenario does fit the situation at Septeuil if the temple was indeed abandoned during Magnus Maximus' approach to Paris, given the extensive breaking of main relief and the removal of a statue head compared with the heavy blows delivered to another image. Furthermore, the selective breaking of images at Konjic and Jajce in Dalmatia also suggest the perpetrators were not motivated by hate, while the adherents in this region would be among those most likely to still have a high level of commitment and were thus keen to save at least some of the imagery.

In some cases, such as at Trier, it appears the Mithraic adherents were pressured to abandon their mithraeum, although there is no evidence of violent struggle, perhaps indicating an instance where imperial laws had an effect. The coin depositions in this mithraeum suggests the Mithraic congregation had begun to dwindle in the late fourth century as the surrounding temple precinct was demolished, before finally ritually closing the temple at the turn of the fifth century. That the temple was closed in such a manner suggests that the Mithraic adherents had given up on using it as a place of worship.

We must also bear in mind that accidents and natural disasters, such as the earthquake at Carnuntum, can also result in the destruction of images and structures. What is notable about the situation at Carnuntum is that it serves to highlight the lack of commitment the cult now garnered from its followers in some areas. The Tetrarchs had restored a mithraeum and erected a dedication to Mithras at Carnuntum, calling him the 'Protector of the Empire', suggesting a highly committed Mithraic community in the town. Yet only a few decades after, following the earthquake there was no apparent attempt to repair either of the mithraea at Carnuntum, nor is there any evidence of another being constructed. At Schachadorf, the discovery of an intact image of the rock-birth in the remains of a mithraeum which was burnt down may also indicate an accidental fire, but once again there was no attempt to rebuild the mithraeum.

In summary, Christian iconoclasm directed at mithraea was to be predominantly found in the East and, on occasion, in the interior Western provinces. However, it appears that the motivation for these incidents was not simply religious, but rather borne out of a combination of factors, while in most examples this iconoclasm was likely to have occurred after the abandonment of the mithraeum. Furthermore, such examples are not common, with the majority of mithraea that met a violent end located in frontier regions where Christianity had yet to gain considerable numbers, thus barbarian

incursions are a more likely motor. In isolated incidents, mithraea were also likely destroyed or vandalised due to conflict between opposing Roman armies, natural disasters, accidents and coercion by the imperial government. In some of these instances, it is also possible that the fragmentation of reliefs and statues was caused by the Mithraic adherent themselves in the face of external threats, although how common this was is difficult to discern from the archaeological record.

CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to establish what transformations are evident in the cult of Mithras in the late antique period and what caused the widespread abandonment of mithraea during the fourth century. By doing so it intended to challenge the traditional narrative that the cult remained relatively unaltered from the first to fourth centuries before being brought to an end via violent attacks carried out by Christians. In order to present a more in-depth account I have undertaken an empire-wide survey of the archaeological evidence for the Mithras cult in the late third to early fifth centuries so as to ascertain what alterations can be traced chronologically and regionally in the cult. Subsequently, I applied sociological theory to the evidence in order to explore whether these changes could have contributed to a decline in the commitment of Mithraic adherents. From the patterns of construction and repair that can be discerned from the archaeological and epigraphic records, it does this may have been the case from the early fourth century. Furthermore, similar trends are apparent regarding other cults, such as those of Isis/Sarapis and Magna Mater, although at different times. Finally, I demonstrated that mithraea met a range of fates and explored the different possible causes. Here I shall bring together the various themes and observations highlighted throughout this thesis which have shown how the cult of Mithras developed, subsequently entered into decline and why many of its temples were abandoned.

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE CULT OF MITHRAS *ca.* A.D. 270-430

The Context and Architecture of Mithraea

First, we saw in Chapter 1 that mithraea active in the third and fourth centuries were generally more prominent in the urban landscape than those in use during the second century. In earlier periods, mithraea had been located away from main-roads in private buildings, but they were now to be found in temple precincts, industrial areas, outside of houses rather than within them, and on private estates. Previous studies have already demonstrated that such a shift occurred in regards to the mithraea of Rome and Ostia, but the evidence assembled in this thesis has demonstrated for the first time that this was also the case in various other towns and settlements across the West.

In such circumstances, it would have been impossible for non-members to have been unaware that these mithraea existed, while they almost certainly would have known the identities of the Mithraic adherents as they were seen entering and leaving the mithraea. It is clear that by the early fourth century in a number of locations there was no longer anything particularly secretive about being a Mithraic adherent or attending Mithraic gatherings, with mithraea in many cases an evident part of the urban landscape.

Not only did the setting of mithraea alter in the late antique period, but the topography of certain mithraea also demonstrates a break with the established template of previous periods. At Jajce and Konjic, the *cella* of the mithraea appear to have contained only a single bench, both on the left-hand side of the relief. The *cella* of the mithraeum at Hawarte also contained just the one bench, although in this case this was to right of the relief and followed an L-shape around the far wall. In Rome, the one mithraeum that can be certainly connected to a senator in the fourth century, the example from *Via Giovanni Lanza* 128, has provided no evidence for benches at all. That the tripartite arrangement of the *cella* was prevalent in earlier mithraea from Caesarea Maritima to Hadrian's Wall indicates this was considered a central aspect of the cult. Therefore, that these mithraea rejected the established topography is indicative of a considerable adaptation among these communities, although precisely why this was the case is unclear.

Ritual Practices

By the mid-fourth century, there is far less extant evidence than from previous periods relating to traditional Mithraic rituals, such as initiations, sacrifices, offerings of incense and ritual meals. In regards to initiation rituals, a sword found at Ad Enum might be an indication that this ritual was still enacted here. According to the epigraphic record, initiations still took place in Rome, although whether this included initiates being stripped, bound, blind-folded and having torches and swords waved in their faces is unclear. The contemporary Christian sources (although not entirely reliable) suggest that initiations among these groups perhaps took a less intensive form than in previous periods, now involving handshakes and verbal abuse rather than swords and torches being waved in the faces of initiates, which seems plausible given that one of these groups initiated a child. In terms of sacrificial deposits, only at Trier has such evidence been found post-dating the early fourth century. Certain sites have produced evidence of Mithraic ritual meals, such as Hawarte, Septeuil and some of the Dalmatian mithraea, but it is unclear whether they were still conducted in the traditional fashion. In regards to offerings of incense, there is also no evidence of such activities after the early fourth century.

A number of mithraea in the north-western provinces have produced evidence that a new form of ritual practice was conducted by their congregations in the mid- to late fourth century in the form of large-scale deposition of low denomination coins. Although earlier excavations failed to record the context of each coin, simply stating they were found on the floor of the mithraeum, modern excavations where similar evidence has been uncovered have demonstrated that in these cases the coins were deposited at the foot of the cult relief (or at least where the relief had stood). In many instances where significant concentrations of coins have been found in mithraea, these temples were built over or next to natural springs. Given that the water-miracle appears to have been particularly

popular along the Rhine and Danube frontiers, this change in ritual practice perhaps represents the increasing importance of this aspect of Mithraic lore in these regions at the expense of others. The deposition of coins as votives in this period has also been found at certain mithraea in Dalmatia as well, but in these instances a small number of coins were placed in niches around the cult image, rather than numerous coins at the foot of it. Unfortunately, precisely what this ritual involved beyond the deposition of the coins is unclear: were prayers said? Were other perishable offerings made? What did the worshippers hope to gain from it? We do not know.

One aspect of Mithraic ritual practice that may also have become more common in Late Antiquity is the curation of objects, with evidence of such activity dating to this period found at London and Bornheim-Sechtem. That individual elements of a sculpture or relief were still considered important by Mithraic adherents, even when removed from the main body, is perhaps an indication of an increasingly individualistic approach at the expense of collective worship, given that such items could be carried around with greater ease than large reliefs or sculptures. Unfortunately, how common this practice was among Mithraic communities is unclear. It is possible that such evidence may also have been evident in other mithraea uncovered in the 19th and early 20th centuries, but this can only remain conjecture given that most finds from these excavations were recorded without a context.

Cult Hierarchy

There is some evidence for the use of the grade system in both Rome and the provinces in the early fourth century, but it suggests that the application of Mithraic titles no longer followed the traditional format. In Rome, the senator C. Magius Dontus Severianus referred to himself as a *pater sacrorum*, an unusual form of the title *pater*. At Gimmeldingen in A.D. 325, *Midre* and *carax* were used in an inscription instead of Mithras and *corax*. Not only was the spelling of *carax* unusual, but it is striking that the individual who held this title, the lowest of the Mithraic grades, paid for all the altars and the temple itself; it seems implausible that having done so he would adopt such a subservient role in the hierarchy. This appears to indicate a Mithraic congregation which had altered not only the names, but possibly even the roles, of some of the grades.

Despite many mithraea outside of Rome continuing to exhibit activity until the late fourth century, none provide any evidence for the grade system post-dating the example from Gimmeldingen. Of course this may be the result of the decline in the epigraphic habit, rather than the grade system itself disappearing, but given that altars were re-used in Mithraic contexts in the late third and early fourth centuries at Ostia, Martigny, and Carnuntum, if these communities were still going strong and consisted of the traditional hierarchy, why do we find not a single inscription attesting this? Furthermore, the lack of evidence for the initiation rituals in the majority of mithraea also casts doubt

as to whether the traditional hierarchy was still utilised among these congregations, while the deposition of coins does not suggest in-depth instruction was required from the *pater*.

In contrast to the provinces, in mid- to late fourth century Rome the grade system was still being used by the senatorial Mithraic communities (notably in correlation with continuing evidence for initiations), but, like the group at Gimmeldingen, they also appear to have made some alterations to titles and structure of the Mithraic hierarchy. *Cryfios* was now used instead of *nymphus*, *hieroceryx* and *hierocoracica* in place of *corax*, while the title of *pater* was used in tandem with forms of *corax*, thus the traditionally highest and lowest grades were held by the same person at the same time. If the *corax* grade in these congregations now held a much more esteemed position, this would echo the evidence from Gimmeldingen of *corax/carax* paying for the mithraeum and its fittings. Additionally, a number of these senatorial initiates used the title *pater sacrorum* as Severianus had, while others referred to themselves as a *pater patrum*. In the case of the latter, occasionally this may have been used to denote a planned succession of leadership in the community, with fathers holding this role and their son(s) acting as a *pater*, with the sons perhaps taking the role of *pater patrum* when their father passed away.

Members and Patrons

The patronage of Mithraic communities altered considerably in this period. From the Tetrarchic period, the involvement of members of the elite strata of Roman society in the Mithras cult, both as patrons and initiates, reached unprecedented levels. Much of the evidence for patronage by the imperial government has originated from contexts associated with the military in North Africa and on the Danube frontier. Seemingly, the reason behind this was to garner the support of the Mithraic adherents in these military communities, with the elites attempting to channel the high levels of commitment generated in Mithraic congregations into support for their own rule. By the mid-fourth century, there were also two Mithraic communities in Rome that consisted of men of senatorial status. These men were not only Mithraic adherents, but held priesthoods connected with a range of deities, many of which were worshipped by so-called mystery cults. Yet rather than represent any sort of ‘pagan-revival’ as has been suggested in the past,⁴⁹⁶ these men look to have adopted Mithraic titles, as well as these other priesthoods, in order to separate themselves from the ‘new men’ who flooded the Senate in the fourth century. This should not be taken to mean that they should be considered any less

⁴⁹⁶ Bloch (1963).

authentic in their status as Mithraic adherents than anyone else involved in the cult (contra to Clauss),⁴⁹⁷ but rather that they simply had their own unique reason for joining the cult.

Unfortunately, it is unclear whether the composition of any of the provincial Mithraic congregations altered in any significant way in this period. The distribution of the mithraea suggests that soldiers still made up a considerable proportion of adherents, while the inscriptions we have that were not erected by elites were predominantly commissioned by soldiers. However, when one factors in the changing sociocultural environment (with large numbers of non-military personnel moving inside the forts from the abandoned adjoining *vici* and civilian towns), changes in Mithraic rituals and the lack of evident authority in these Mithraic communities, it is possible that those using mithraea could have come from all manner of backgrounds, with no knowledge of the Mithras cult beyond what was visible in the inscriptions or reliefs. It cannot be proven, but in such a scenario it is entirely possible that this included women.

THE LOCALISATION OF THE MITHRAS CULT

It was suggested in the Introduction that we should see deities as having cultural biographies; that as they travelled across wide areas via ‘world empires’ and begun to be integrated into local communities they underwent a series of transformations. We can see this in the cult of Mithras during Late Antiquity. From the late first to early third centuries, the cult spread across the Roman world and, while there were some regional differences, the evidence does remain largely uniform: the topography of mithraea remained the same, the central tauroctony was present everywhere, and ritual practices involved the same premises. If a Mithraic initiate left the mithraeum of Caesarea Maritima and travelled to Hadrian’s Wall via Rome in the late second century, he would have found Mithraic communities along the way that were not radically different to his own.

By the fourth century, this would have not been the case. If a Mithraic adherent departed on a voyage from Hawarte to the western provinces, he would be leaving what appeared to be a very isolated rural mithraeum, with its own unique iconography and a *cella* with an L-shaped bench. He might pass through Dalmatia, where some Mithraic communities called Mithras ‘Meterae’ and met in mithraea with just a single bench and tauroctony carved into a rockface. Coming to Rome he would have found very a different Mithraic community, one that was built around senators who included Mithraic titles, among many others, as they sought to differentiate themselves from the ‘new men’ entering the Senate. If he visited the mithraeum of *Via Giovanni Lanza* 128, he would find a bizarre situation of a mithraeum with no benches. Moving to Gaul, he might have encountered a Mithraic community that worshipped Mithras as a healing deity, with mithraea situated alongside temples devoted to such practices, altars referring to Mithras as ‘helper’, and a doctor as the head of a

⁴⁹⁷ Clauss (1992).

congregation. All the mithraea here would also contain two benches running in parallel to each other, unlike those in Hawarte, Dalmatia and *Via Giovanni Lanza* 128 in Rome. From Gaul he could have headed north to Lentia, where a mithraeum took pride of place alongside a temple to *Dea Roma*, while other mithraea in the surrounding area received the benefaction of the imperial government, suggesting that Mithraic adherents played a prominent role in these frontier societies. If you then passed into Germany, at Gimmeldingen he would have found a mithraeum referred to as a *fanum* with words Mithras and *corax* spelt differently. It was also possible that along the way he also would have noticed that as moved into the north-eastern provinces a great number of coins were being deposited in mithraea as votives, something made all the more unusual given that neighbouring temples and sacred springs also receive such offerings. This is a broad sketch, but the evidence outlined in the preceding chapters indicates that the Mithraic cult, although initially appearing as relatively uniform, had seemingly come to mean different things in different places.

USING A SOCIOLOGICAL MODEL TO EXPLAIN RELIGIOUS CHANGE

In Chapter 6 the patterns of construction and restoration in the late antique period were discussed. As demonstrated through the work of others and the case studies presented, during the third century temple construction declined significantly in many regions. Yet in the regions where the cult of Mithras appears most widespread, mithraea continued to be constructed and repaired at relatively consistent levels. Why was this? Given that, according to the sociological model outlined in the Introduction, the cult fulfilled all the criteria necessary to produce high levels of commitment among its members, one may assume that the Mithraic initiates were more willing to provide resources for the construction and restoration of mithraea than the adherents of many other cults were for their temples. One may also argue that a significant level of commitment to the cult of Mithras would be detrimental to the contributions made by Mithraic adherents to other cults they were involved in during times of hardship, as they would have been more likely to use their limited resources to sustain the Mithraic community than other religious communities they were part of.

Yet mithraea did not enjoy this unusual status for long, for after the early fourth century the evidence for their construction and repair rapidly diminishes, suggesting that the average commitment of Mithraic adherents was no longer what it once was. We have observed how various aspects of the cult altered which may have led to a decline in the tension between it and mainstream society, such as mithraea becoming more prominent, Mithraic rituals apparently less unique (and possibly less secretive), and the increasing involvement of the elites. Furthermore, initiation rituals may have required less involvement from initiates, while the changing context of mithraea may have led to the social networks of Mithraic adherents shifting considerably and exposing them to new groups with different forms of religious practice. Arguably, the model fits. But is this because the rules set down

in the model are all-encompassing and will determine how things will play out regardless of the context, or are we simply seeing analogies? As Roger Beck pointed out in his review of Stark's work:

[W]hat holds, I suspect, is not a principle at all, but merely a comparison... When all is said and done, Stark's generalizations are not universal laws of human religious behaviour within any social context, but analogies that happen to work well in the comparison of early Christianity and new religious movements in Western society. The mystery and other associative cults of Greco-Roman antiquity might be fitted, with some adjustments, onto the same comparative grid⁴⁹⁸

Is fitting these cults on to the same comparative grid what has been achieved here? It does appear that certain elements of this model can be used, at least in part, to explain why the Mithras cult began to lose followers, such as the changing social networks of Mithraic adherents. However, much of it remains inconclusive: we cannot discern how 'in tension' Mithraic communities were with mainstream Roman society or how this altered; we do not know if Mithraic rituals did become less costly, as so little is known regarding what these involved in later periods; we cannot be certain as to whether Mithraic rituals of the fourth century were any less unique than in the first century. Too much of this relies on assumption and, as a result, while the model does fit the decline of the Mithras cult, whether this fit is superficial or not remains unclear.

MOTORS FOR THE FATE OF MITHRAEA

During the course of the fourth century an increasing number of mithraea were abandoned while fewer mithraea were constructed or restored. In many cases, it seems that if Mithraic adherents were given cause to abandon their mithraeum they did so and subsequently had no desire to build a replacement, an observation that should come as little surprise given the evident decline in their commitment to the cult. Yet what was it that caused the final abandonment of mithraea during the fourth century?

Christian iconoclasts were certainly responsible for the de-sacralisation of some mithraea. In four examples, this is indicated by the carving of crosses into the walls of the temple. However, only at Hawarte was the de-sacralisation by Christians likely to have been contemporary to the abandonment of the mithraeum, given that the *terminus post quem* for the occupation of the temple dates to only shortly before the erection of a church over the site. Yet the circumstances in which this mithraeum found itself suggest the violent expulsion of the Mithraic congregation was driven by more than just religious fervour. Hawarte is the only extant mithraeum located in the East that was certainly in use during the fourth century and it appears that this community continued to conduct their rituals in private, unlike many of its western counterparts. Furthermore, the iconography of this mithraeum

⁴⁹⁸ Beck (2006b) 252.

indicates a Mithraic group that had perhaps been influenced by Zoroastrianism, which in tandem with Mithras' Persian garb, may have caused problems with non-members given the state of war between Persia and Rome. Thus it appears that it was a combination of this community's non-Christian worship, the apparent scarcity of Mithraic communities in Eastern society, its secrecy, and its worship of a deity in Persian garb that brought it into conflict with society. If it was indeed the case that the cult's Persian attributes caused anger among outsiders, it is perhaps no coincidence that of the three further examples of Christian graffiti appearing in mithraea, two were located near this frontier.

There are a couple of other cases where Christian iconoclasts appear the most likely culprits behind the de-sacralisation of mithraea. At Les Bolards and Vulci, statues were not only broken but display evidence of nicks and abrasions, while in both cases images of animals were left completely intact. In contrast to Hawarte, the mithraea at Les Bolards and Vulci were located in regions where the level of tension between the Mithras cult and society was relatively low. Thus it is possible that these do represent attacks driven primarily by religious conviction, rather than an amalgamation of factors as at Hawarte. However, it is worth reiterating that the evidence from Vulci is undated and could have occurred long after the mithraeum was abandoned. Furthermore, even if the aforementioned mithraea were abandoned due to Christian iconoclasts, they do not constitute the majority of mithraea active in the fourth century. In most cases it is actually unlikely that Christian iconoclasts were responsible for the fate of mithraea as many of these temples were situated on the northern frontiers (along Hadrian's Wall, the Rhine and Danube), which were areas where Christianity had yet to make a substantial impact.

As a result, we must seek alternative explanations for the fate of various mithraea in the West, with the most likely candidates being barbarians. That they were responsible for the abandonment of many mithraea located in frontier regions is plausible for a number of reasons: the majority of the mithraea situated in these regions lay beyond the defences of the late Roman settlements, often in derelict areas of the civilian towns or among dilapidated *vici*; various mithraea located in Germania Superior were destroyed and de-sacralised following the cessation of Roman control in the early third century, with statues and reliefs found in much the same state as those recovered from mithraea abandoned in the fourth century; there is evidence of mithraea being destroyed on the Rhine frontier in the late third century; and groups such as the Alammani appear to have beheaded people and deposited the heads separately to the bodies, thus the ritual killing of statues in such a fashion should not be ruled out. It is also possible that Mithras' connection with the Roman army and his status as 'unconquerable' made his temples an attractive target for enemies of Rome who wished to demonstrate Roman military power was no longer what it once was.

However, there were also occasional instances where mithraea appear to have been abandoned for other reasons. At Septeuil, the abandonment and de-sacralisation of the mithraeum may have been caused by rival Roman forces, given the location and *terminus post quem* of the site correlates with the Magnus Maximus' defeat of Gratian in the A.D. 380s. That Magnus' troops had come from Britain, a province that does not appear to have contained an active mithraeum for nearly half a century, it is possible that the image of the rock-birth at Septeuil was the subject of several blows to the face by a Roman soldier. At Trier, we find a mithraeum that looks to have been voluntarily abandoned around the turn of the fifth century, perhaps as a result of the imperial administration curbing non-Christian activities. The evidence from this temple suggests the numbers of adherents went into decline in the mid-fourth century around the same time various 'anti-pagan' laws were enacted. The destruction of surrounding temples to make way for a road might be seen also be seen as indirect pressure from the government, for while they did not sanction violently directed at temples, this made it clear that the Roman world was changing and temples were a relic from the past. Finally, natural disasters and accidental destructions may account for the fate of mithraea at Carnuntum and Schachadorf respectively.

Of course, various mithraea may have been abandoned for no other reason than their congregations had simply lost interest. A number of mithraea in Rome were left with their images mostly untouched, while various other mithraea in the interior provinces were found with their images removed. That the latter provide no indication of violent de-sacralisation may indicate that when the objects were removed there was no fear of any Mithraic congregation returning and using the site again, suggesting the cult of Mithras was no longer active in these areas.

Thus, there is no one single explanation as to why numerous mithraea were abandoned during the fourth century. If we are to rate the possible reasons in terms of how many mithraea they caused to be abandoned, barbarian incursion appears to be most common, followed by Christian iconoclasts, and, in odd examples, a mix of Roman soldiers, coercion by the imperial government, natural disasters, accidental destruction and the Mithraic congregations abandoning the cult because they no longer felt any significant commitment to it.

However, it must also be acknowledged that the fragmentation of images in mithraea need not necessarily represent a violent end. The evidence from Bornheim-Sechtem indicates that at least some Mithraic congregations at this time still viewed such items as being sacred and sought to retain them. Indeed, the evidence from this site suggests a Mithraic congregation who rescued broken and burnt statuary from another mithraeum which had been destroyed in the latter half of the fourth century. The prevalence of broken Mithraic reliefs and statues that are missing the heads of Mithras, and on occasion his dagger hand and the head of the bull, in frontier regions is a common theme and it may

be that some Mithraic adherents sought to remove the most expressive parts of the image to carry as personal objects. At Septeuil, the contrasting fates of two reliefs may indicate this occurred here, with the rock-birth still whole but the face having received several heavy blows while the main relief was broken into many pieces and the heads of Mithras and the bull removed. The fate of the images at Konjic and Jajce may also have resulted from the adherents abandoning the mithraea, but not the worship of Mithras, given the precision used to remove certain parts of the images and the lack of defacement on others that remained. As a result, while the cult of Mithras may cease to be evident in the archaeological record from the early fifth century, the worship of Mithras in at least some locations may have continued.

POSSIBLE AVENUES FOR FUTURE WORK

There are a number of lines of enquiry for the future work that have emerged from this thesis. Firstly, the evidence suggests that a significant review of many of the so-called archaeologically attested examples of Christian iconoclasm is required. Mithraea were supposedly frequently targeted by such people, yet this study has shown that the evidence for this is not conclusive and that much of the extant evidence has other, more viable interpretations. It is likely there are many other examples where Christian iconoclasm has long since been enshrined as the only, or at least most probable, reason for the demise of a temple, yet a look at the original report will show this was not the case. Indeed, during the writing of this thesis I have discovered a number of examples from Noricum and Pannonia of temples that were supposedly destroyed in the late fourth century, yet in the course of reviewing the excavation reports I could locate no secure dating evidence for this, often finding this was based on an un-stratified coin, with the latest securely datable evidence instead originating from at least decades, sometimes centuries, before.⁴⁹⁹ This also provides a cautionary tale for future archaeological investigations to avoid hastily interpreting the evidence to fit traditional narratives. Thankfully, with the level of archaeological expertise now existing in many countries, future records may supply information that will help with the reinterpretation of older sites.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁹ Walsh (2016).

⁵⁰⁰ For an example of this see, Groh and Sedlmayer (2011) for recent work at St Margarethen in Noricum, which has demonstrated the temple here was probably destroyed in the third century, contra to Alföldy (1974) 210, which describes it being destroyed by Christians in the fourth century.

Secondly, as subsequent mithraea come to light and are excavated using modern techniques, one assumes a greater corpus of evidence will be amassed regarding the contexts of finds deposited in the late antique period. This will hopefully allow for future studies to assess the patterns of votive offerings and the retention of broken objects in these contexts, following which such studies will be able to establish a more nuanced understanding of these ritual acts.

Finally, it has been illustrated that there is much work to be done in regards to the sacred landscapes of the Northern frontiers in this period, particularly in regards to accumulating quantitative data. This study has made some contribution to our understanding of this sphere in regards to Noricum and Pannonia which will subsequently be expanded on further in a soon to be published article.⁵⁰¹ However, space and time did not allow for a greater analysis of Britain, Germany or the eastern Danube provinces, and I know of no volume that has collected any quantitative data on temples in these regions as Jouffroy has done in Italy and North Africa or Fauduet in Gaul. Once such data has been amassed it will no doubt provide new and important insights transformations in sacred landscape of these regions and the Roman world as a whole.

⁵⁰¹ Walsh (2016).

APPENDIX:

GAZETTEER OF MITHRAEA ACTIVE IN THE FOURTH
CENTURY AND THOSE THAT EXHIBIT EVIDENCE OF
CHRISTIAN ICONOCLASM

A. BRITAIN

A.1 BORCOVICIUM (HOUSESTEADS)

Selected Bibliography: *CIMRM* 852-869; Bosanquet (1904); Clauss (1992) 82; Allason-Jones (2004) 184.

Excavated

1822 and 1898

Location

The mithraeum was built over a natural spring, situated in an area known as 'Chapel Hill', that was outside of the main fort in the adjoining *vicus*. A temple to Mars Thincus existed nearby, along with another cultic building, also built over a natural spring, which contained numismatic evidence running to the reign of Constantine.

Structure

The temple lay on an east-west axis, measuring 4.80m x 12.80m. The entrance lay in the east wall, while the cult niche (2.13m x 0.76m) lay at the opposite western end. The northwest corner of temple was uncovered in an excavation of 1822, but this was subsequently demolished. The outline of where it had stood could still be established in the later 1898 excavation. The central aisle (W 1.65m) was paved with flagstone which, in one area, had been covered with planks of oak and small birch logs. The central nave was flanked by two wooden benches (W 1.52m), the remains of which were still present *in situ*. In the middle of the aisle was a stone box, made of flagstone and clay, into which water from the natural spring rose. Two gutters, running east alongside the benches, were cut into the earlier floor to drain excess water.

Finds

During the 1822 excavation of the temple's western end, an image of the rock-birth, surrounded by the signs of the zodiac, was found *in situ* in the cult niche, along with various altars, a headless statue of one of the torchbearers, and fragments of the central limestone tauroctony image. A further four small pieces from the central relief were found in the middle of the nave. The altars found in 1822 consisted of: a dedication to Cocidius, a local deity, dedicated by a soldier of the sixth legion; another to Sol by an individual named Herion; an altar to Mars and Victory; one erected by centurion, on

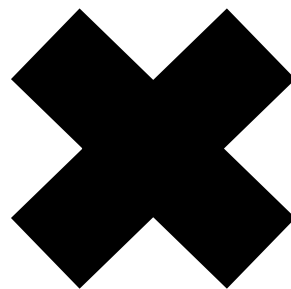
behalf of himself and his son, in A.D. 252 which appears to have suffered notable weathering; and a dedication by a *beneficarius consularis* for himself and his family.

During the 1898 excavations statues of the torchbearers and Aion were found lying face down in the centre of the nave. All of them were headless, although the head of one of the torchbearers was found nearby. Two altars were also found: one dedicated to both the local deity Cocidius and Jupiter, which was erected by soldiers of the *legio II Augusta*, and the other to Mars and Victory. It has been suggested that these and the other altar to Cocidius originated elsewhere and were moved to the temple. The rest of the finds assemblage consisted of red and black-glazed pottery sherds; an iron knife; a Collingwood type T knobbed bow brooch; a two strand twisted bronze bracelet; and a jet armband bead of late third/early fourth century date.

Epigraphic Record

Of the six names recorded in the temple, most were associated with the military, including two soldiers, a centurion and the centurion's son. Herion could conceivably been a slave in the service of someone who lived in the fort or *vicus*. The group is completed by the *beneficarius consularis*, Litorius Pacatianus.

Figure 42: The Housesteads Mithraeum (Adapted from CIMRM Fig. 224)



Chronology

A coin of Faustina I was found deposited in the floor layer of the temple, giving its construction a date of the Severan period. It was evidently in use into the latter half of the third century, given the altar of A.D. 252. The presences of a jet armband bead dating to the turn of the fourth century led Allason-Jones to speculate that the mithraeum may have been converted for domestic use at this time. A charcoal

layer found in the 1898 excavations indicates that the wooden roof of the temple had been burnt down, following which, given the weathering evident on the altars, it would appear that the temple was then left open to the elements.

A.2 BROCOLITIA (CARRAWBURGH)

Selected Bibliography: *CIMRM* 844-851; Richmond, *et al.* (1951); Clauss (1992) 79; Allason Jones (2004) 183-184.

Excavated

1950

Location

The mithraeum lay outside the fort, on the east bank of a valley which also contained a temple to Coventina. Reliefs and altars from the temple of Coventina were found deposited in a well associated with the temple, although they had evidently been placed in the well with care as they were still intact. On top of these items were found 16,000 coins (the latest dating to A.D. 388) and items of jewellery. An open-air shrine dedicated to the Nymphs was also located nearby.

Structure

Phase I

The mithraeum lay on a northwest by southeast axis. In its first phase the temple consisted of a single room built from stone measuring 5.58m x 7.92m. The doorway (W 1.28m) was not located on the central alignment of the temple, but slightly off to the right. The first 1.28m of the room was separated from the rest by a wooden screen, two stumps of which were found *in situ*, creating an antechamber. On the right-hand side of the anteroom was a drain from which water, emanating from a natural spring under the mithraeum, could be accessed. Another wooden stump, near the north-eastern wall, looks to have supported an item of furniture, possibly a cupboard. The nave consisted of a gravel strip (4.42m x 1.27m) and aligns with the door, rather than the central axis of the building. Nothing of the benches from this phase remained. At the far end of the temple post-holes provide an indication of some form of frame, perhaps from which curtains hung to hide the altar platform. To the left of the altar platform a Mediterranean pinecone was found. The remains of a small hearth (0.15m²) were also found in this area of the mithraeum, which was bordered by slabs on its northeast and southeast sides. It contained a sizable amount of charcoal and three chicken bones. To the southeast of this, closer to

the aisle, fragments of another Mediterranean pinecone were found underneath two slabs along with a small deposit of hazel charcoal. No trace of a roof structure was found and the excavator suggested a simple gabled roof may have been in place.

Phase II.1-3

In building phase II.1, an extension terminating in an angular apse (W 1.74m x D 1.71m) was added to the northwest end. The niche contained a platform which would have held the main cult image. The central aisle (now 1.88m x 8.84m) was moved to align with the central axis of the mithraeum. The anteroom was also expanded (now 2.23m in length) by moving the line of posts further into the temple. The drain was completely sealed and a stone bench was installed on its southwest side; evidence of a hearth was found next to it. The remains of the stone foundations for the benches that ran either side of the nave, along with the steps that provided access to them on their southeast ends, were also recovered from this phase. As one entered the main chamber from the anteroom, one would have found oneself flanked by a base on either side, upon which probably stood images of the torchbearers.

Phases II.2 and II.3 did not include any structural changes, but consisted of refurbishing the inside of the mithraeum. There is, however, evidence that the roof required reinforcing, as nine post-holes appear in phase II.2 at irregular intervals in front of the benches, three on the northeast side of the nave and six on the southwest. The floor of the sanctuary was raised up, paved and covered in a layer of heather. In the anteroom, the floor now reached the level of the small bench on its southwest side and a pit (labelled 'ordeal pit' on the plan) was dug into the floor and cut through the bench. The pit was 0.48m wide, 2.13m long and 0.46m deep, large enough to fit a person into, but contained only a few sheep bones. This also meant stepped access to the benches was no longer required.

In phase II.3 the pit was covered over when the floor of the mithraeum was raised again, this time using clay, and covered with oak boards. A new bench was installed in the antechamber (which was again enlarged, now measuring 1.92m). New post-holes for roof supports were installed, two on the northeast edge of the nave and three on the southeast, this time at regular intervals. To the right of the cult niche was a group of posts that appear to have supported storage tables or stands, close to which fragments of amphorae were found.

Phase III

The third phase of the mithraeum began with the building being completely reconstructed at a higher level (only the capitals of the pedestals of the torch-bearers from previous phases could be seen rising

from the floor), but it retained roughly the same dimensions as its predecessor. It was predominantly a clay-brick building, although some masonry from the older phases was reused. The doorway (W 1.07m) was still offset from the main axis. The anteroom was expanded once again, now measuring 2.45m across, and still contained a hearth on a raised platform. The floor was made of reused stone and clay. In the north corner of the room stood a pedestal, at whose base was found a broken statue of the mother goddess and large jar, perhaps for offerings to her. There are fewer post-holes designating the partition between the anteroom and main chamber, but their size (0.13m²) indicates the poles were larger than in previous phases.

The length of the benches was reduced to 4.87m and they were once again fronted with wattle. In front of the benches ran a line of oak roof-posts at 1.5m intervals that divided them from the central nave and four small altars, two on each side; evidence for a plaster coating was found over the wattle and around the altars. The cult niche was reduced in size and was fronted by three larger altars. Under these altars was a pit containing intentionally packed rubble in its top layer, below which was deposited a small, upright Castor-ware beaker, bordered on three sides by stones. Inside the vessel were two lumps of pinecone fuel, along with the head and two vertebrae of a domestic fowl. Alongside the beaker was a small tin cup, which also contained a small amount of pinecone fuel.

Finds

Various items used in the operation of the mithraeum were found across the different occupational phases, including nineteen drinking vessels, platters, an iron fire-shovel, a thatch-hook, and a candlestick. A great deal of animal bone was also found in all levels of occupation, including a significant number deal of bird and pig remains, along with some lamb. The three large altars which sat in front of the cult niche are very different in style: one depicts an image of Mithras emerging from the rock, garbed in a tunic and holding a whip; the other two bear no images and are simply inscribed. Four smaller altars were also found, one of which (erected originally to the Mothers by Albinus Quartus) shows evidence of weathering, suggesting it was brought from elsewhere, while this altar was also turned to face the bench so the face bearing the inscription to the Mothers could not be seen. Whether this bore any relation to the mother goddess image used in the anteroom is unknown.

Epigraphic Record

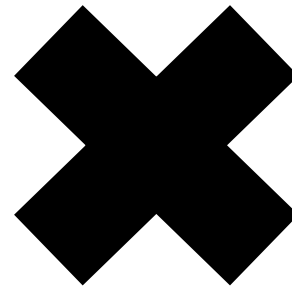
All three of the large altars were erected by prefects: both Lucius Antonius Proculus and Aulus Cluentius Habitus were recorded as coming from the first cohort *Batavians Antoniniana*, while Marcus Simplicius does not provide this information. It is reasonable to assume, however, that Simplicius was also a prefect of the *Batavians Antoniniana* and that the role of prefect in this cohort

was linked to the upkeep of the temple; it may be that by this point, with the two altars already in place, he had no need to record his title. The four small altars do not provide any epigraphic information, aside from one which was erected to the Mothers by Albinus Quartus.

Chronology

The precise date for the mithraeum's construction is unknown, but its use by the *Batavians Antoniniana* indicates it probably occurred in the Severan period. Layers from Phases I-II.3 all contain third century pottery, indicating that the temple was refurbished throughout this period, probably due to structural problems caused by drainage. The end of phase II.3 is marked with evidence for the burning of the screen dividing the anteroom and main chamber, the wattle edge of the benches, and the breaking of a fine stone laver. Disturbed floor levels have been suggested as indicators that the perpetrators were looking for some hidden valuables, although given the evidence for fire one cannot rule out accidental destruction, especially as stone monuments from the earlier phases were still in good enough condition to reuse in the final phase.

Figure 43: The Mithraeum at Carrawburgh as Found (Richmond et al. (1951) Fig. 7)



The final phase (III) occurred at the turn of the fourth century, with the final occupational layer containing fourth century pottery and five coins, the latest of which dated to the reign of Maximianus I (A.D. 296-308). This phase does not appear to have lasted long, as a rubbish deposit lay across the ruins of the temple, among which was found a coin of Magnentius (A.D. 350). The fate of the temple's contents was varied: one of the torchbearer statues had its head removed (although Dowel-holes present in the neck line suggest that, rather than beheading, the head was simply removed), while the other was cut down at the shins; the image of the mother goddess which stood in the anteroom was left untouched; the main cult relief was removed, although it may have been broken as a fragment of one of the bull's horns was left behind.

A.3 LONDINIUM

Selected Bibliography: *CIMRM* 810-826; Grimes (1968); Shepherd (1998); Clauss (1992) 80-81.

Excavated

1954

Location

The mithraeum was situated on the bank of the east bank of the Walbrook River. Recent excavations suggest it was bordered to the north and south by housing.

Structure

The temple (19.27m x 7.84m) was constructed over rubbish dumps laid down in the first half of the third century. Its foundations consisted of mortared rag-stone rubble, while its walls were built from coursed rag-stone. It follows the standard layout of a mithraeum, although its apse was rounded (as opposed the more common square format) and required three external buttresses. The mithraeum lay on an east-west axis, with the entrance located in the east wall. Recent excavations have uncovered evidence of at least two anterooms, one which contained a well. The stone threshold at the entrance to the building had sockets for two doors. Two steps led down from the entrance to the temple's sunken floor which was re-laid nine times during the temple's occupation. The remains of sleeper-walls indicated where the side benches had been, and their tops were lined with column bases, seven on each wall. Evidence of timber fittings for the benches was found on top of the walls. A timber lined channel, cut into the nave floor, ran alongside the north sleeper wall during the third floor phase. Across the use of floor phases 3 and 4, a timber frame, which could have supported a great weight, was added to the south bench. The implementation of the fourth floor phase brought the level of the nave to the same as the sleeper walls, necessitating the raising of the benches via the addition of squat walls between the columns. In the southwest corner of the mithraeum, to the left of the apse, was a well. Directly in front of the apse was at least another two steps; given the height between the second step and the dais, a third may have been either removed or destroyed. Inside the apse was a plinth on which to display the tauroctony; both this and the inside of the apse displayed evidence of contemporary plastering. Also present along the curve of the apse were four holes, all the same size and roughly equidistant to each other, which may have held posts to support more furnishings. During the use of the fourth floor level, a recess appears just below the plinth, probably created by the removal of the tauroctony image paid for by Ulpian Silvanus.

Finds

The group of sculptures buried in pit A, when floor level 5 was in use, included marble heads of Mithras, Sarapis and Minerva, a large hand of Mithras, a forearm from the main cult image (the only piece of it found), a marble Mercury statue, and a stone laver. The heads do not appear to have been broken from statues, but rather were created separately and attached to bodies. The head of Mithras had been separated from the neck via a blow from a blunt instrument, although both head and neck were buried together, while the heads of Sarapis and Minerva do not show any sign of such damage. The statue of Mercury depicts the naked god reclined on his cloak, accompanied by a ram and tortoise. The hand of Mithras holds the remnants of a knife pointing downwards, but whether the hand was part of a larger scene or stood alone could not be ascertained. The limestone left hand and forearm of Mithras, his arm wrapped in a sleeve, is smaller than a life-size equivalent; the hand grasps the upper lip of the bull. Barring the break on Mithras' neckline, none of these objects show any sign of intentional damage and are incredibly well preserved.

Several other marble items, found during construction work in 1889, are believed to have also originated from pit A as they were recorded as having been found next to it. These included the upper body of a water-deity, a statuette of a *genius* with its head missing, and a round relief of the tauroctony that is bordered by the signs of the zodiac. This relief was dedicated by Ulpus Silvanus, a veteran of the *legio II Augusta*, but bears no indication of a date.

Found *in situ* in floor level 6 is part of an inscription which might be Mithraic. What remains refers to Invictus and the Tetrarchy and is dated to A.D. 307-308. Given the excellent state of preservation provided by the waterlogged environment in which the mithraeum was discovered, a great many other finds were also uncovered, including pottery, items made of wood, iron, copper alloy, leather and bone. A Mediterranean pinecone was found partly burnt in the layers dating the second half of the third century.

Epigraphic Record

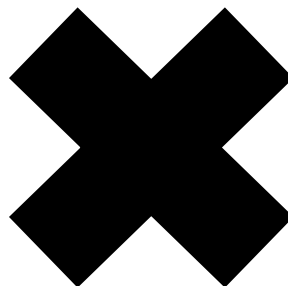
The only person we know from the mithraeum is the aforementioned *emeritus legionis* Ulpus Silvanus.

Chronology

The layers immediately preceding the mithraeum contained pottery that was dated, at the latest, to the mid-third century. Given that floor level 2 also contained pottery dating to the mid-third century, the construction of the mithraeum evidently lay sometime around A.D. 240-250. In total, there are nine

distinct floor levels known to have existed in the mithraeum, the first four of which belong to its time as a mithraeum. The rapid addition of new floors was probably due to the unstable ground on which the temple was constructed; as areas subsided, the floor required patchwork additions to keep it relatively level. Floor level 3 contained a coin of the usurper Marius (A.D. 268). Floor 4, the last definite Mithraic floor level, cannot be dated, but the inscription referring to the Tetrarchy (A.D. 307-308), found in floor level 6 appears Mithraic, which, along with coins from level 5 dating to the first quarter of the fourth century, indicates that the building ceased to be a mithraeum in the first decades of the fourth century. Into floor level 5, near the entrance of the central sanctuary, a pit was cut into which sculptures from the mithraeum were deposited, although the feature contained no dating evidence. The mithraeum appears to have been subsequently transformed into that of another deity, possibly Bacchus: the colonnades in front of the benches were removed; the floor level of the nave rose to that of the benches; the well was covered over, thus a flat and open surface – unlike a mithraeum – was created. Whether the anteroom was present during the building's time as a mithraeum is unknown, it can only be definitely linked to the later phases, although the presence of such a room is typical among mithraea.

Figure 44: First Phase of The London Mithraeum (Shepherd (1998) Fig. 97)



B. GERMANY

B.1 BIESHEIM

Selected Bibliography: Pétry and Kern (1978); Kern (1991); Plouin (2004).

Excavated

1976-1979

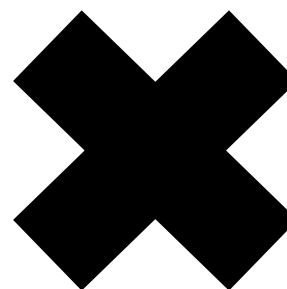
Location

The mithraeum lay on the edge of the *vicus* in an area that does not appear to have been densely populated.

Structure

The mithraeum was orientated north to south and was constructed out of basal masonry blocks. It measured 11.50m x 7.25m and consisted of the main cult room and two anterooms. One of the anterooms was 7.00m in length, was attached to the building at a later stage. The entrance was 1.40m wide and one had to descend down two steps; you then pass through the second anteroom with small storage space on both the left and right. Inside the *cella*, the benches (H 04.0m x L 5.80m x W 1.80m) ran either side of the nave, which consisted of silty clay and gravel, and at the far end stood the cult niche. In the southeast corner of the room there was also a small well.

Figure 45: The Biesheim Mithraeum (Pétry and Kern (1978) Fig. 24)



Finds

Remains of the main cult image, made of limestone, were found scattered across the floor of the shrine. In the second anteroom, various pot-sherds were also found, some of which depicted a lion, snakes, a female head, a torchbearer and Mithras as the bull-killer; unfortunately, no major analysis of sculpture has been undertaken. The coins from the second phase were found scattered across the floor, but a list of these has not been published. A pit was cut into the floor sometime in the late fourth century, in which the skull of an ox was deposited.

Chronology

The mithraeum was constructed over occupational layers dated to the first century, giving the temple an approximate construction date of the early second century. This is complemented by ceramic finds of the second and third century found in the mithraeum and surrounding pits. At some point in the late third century, the mithraeum suffered fire damage and the reliefs and statues were broken into pieces. Following this, the temple appears to have continued in use; the fragments from the earlier phase, as well as some traces of wall-plaster, were simply covered over. This meant the floor level of the nave rose, but the benches were not raised to compensate. Given the burial of the sculpture fragments and the raising of the nave, it seems unlikely it continued to be used as a mithraeum. There is no ceramic evidence from this final period, but around 200 coins were recovered, the latest dating to A.D. 395, when the temple was burnt down again.

B.2 BORNHEIM-SECHTEM

Selected Bibliography: Ulbert (2004); Wulfmeier (2004); Huld-Zetsche, Ulbert and Wulfmeier (2004).

Excavated

1998-1999

Location

The mithraeum was situated several metres from a building which appears to be a *villa rustica*. The villa has not been dated precisely, but finds indicate it was occupied between the second and third centuries, while nearby burials run to the first half of the fourth century. Early medieval burials were also found in the same area, suggesting perhaps a period of abandonment before occupation resumed. Unfortunately, the rest of the settlement has not been subject to excavation.

Structure

All that can be discerned about the first phase of the mithraeum is that it contained a shaft in the centre of its nave and a channel that flowed out of the temple just in front of the southwest wall. In its second phase, the *cella* of the mithraeum measured 13.50m x 6.80m and lay on a northeast-southwest orientation. The floor of the *cella* was probably around 1m below the ground level. Two benches ran either side of the central aisle at a width of 1.70m. In the centre of the nave was a shaft c.0.50m deep lined with tufa blocks that was dug next to the shaft from the first phase. Situated in line with this

shaft was a niche in northwest wall. At the western end of the mithraeum were two sandstone blocks, one in the corner and the other in the central aisle. There was no remaining evidence of the cult niche or platform that held the tauroctony here.

Finds

In the central shaft of the later mithraeum was found the left leg of a statuette, a yellow-glazed ceramic relief depicting Cautes, a coin of Valentinian damaged by fire, a cup, a boar's tooth and slag. In the niche, various sculpture fragments damaged by fire, a yellow-glazed ceramic fragment depicting a lion, and a small silver leaf inscribed with "*D(eo) I(nvicto Mithrae) BENAGIVS V(otum) S(olvit) L(ibens) M(erito)*". Buried under the niche was another cup. In front of the southeast wall, assumedly where the cult image had stood, 25 coins had been deposited, which ranged from the reigns of Postumus and Laelianus (both A.D. 260) to Valentinian III (d. A.D. 402). A shaft located from the earlier phase was found in the middle of the nave which contained another piece of yellow-glazed ceramic depicting a snake. The three pieces of yellow-glazed ceramic appear to all be from the same vessel, despite being buried in different contexts. Evidently, the vessel was broken in the first phase, with one sherd being placed in the shaft and the others being kept by the adherents, suggesting some particular importance attached to them. From the sculpture fragments, statuettes of Cautes and Cautopates have been discerned, with the former dated to the second century by the style of his tunic, although many parts of the statuettes were also absent, including their heads. These sculpture elements also exhibited fire damage, but no traces of destruction by fire were discerned from the later *cella*, which suggests they may have come from another mithraeum and are perhaps related to the burnt coin of Valentinian I. Fragments of what may have been the central relief were found on *cella* floor, but no traces of Mithras or the bull were evident among these.

In the vicinity of the mithraeum were various pits, one of which had been cut straight through the entrance to the shrine. Two large pits just beyond the limit of the surrounding structure, which look to predate the later mithraeum stratigraphically, were found to contain nothing but some sherds of pottery, although there may have been material that has since decomposed. Another pit, even further to the northeast contained remnants of the building's architecture, as did a pit 3.5m west of the mithraeum.

Chronology

The mithraeum appears to have undergone three building phases. The earliest two cannot be dated, but they are evident by the earlier masonry found under the north-western corner of the later mithraeum and surrounding patches of gravel which is also stratigraphically below the later cella. The later cella may date from the mid- to late third century, as two coins dating to this period were deposited on the floor. At the turn of the fifth century it appears the mithraeum was levelled, with various architectural elements buried in surrounding pits.

Figure 46: The Bornheim-Sechtem Mithraeum (Ulbert (2004) Fig. 3)

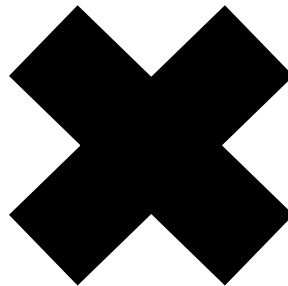
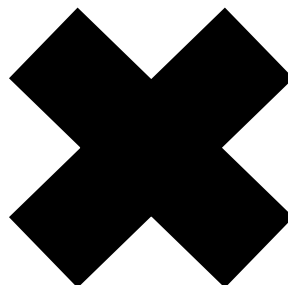


Figure 47: Fragments of a Torchbearer Statue (R) (Wulfmeier (2004) Fig. 1) and a Broken Cultic Vessel from Bornheim-Sechtem (L) (Huld-Zetsche, Ulbert and Wulfmeier (2004) Fig.7)



B.3 GIMMELDINGEN

Selected Bibliography: *CIMRM* 1313-1322; Schwertheim (1974) 140; Clauss (1992) 110.

Excavated

1926

Location

The mithraeum was a rural shrine near to the Mußach stream alongside another small sanctuary.

Structure

No record.

Finds

All the altars and reliefs were made of sandstone. The main cult relief was found intact, but a statue of Cautes was missing its upper half and a relief of Mercury displayed evidence of damage on the god's face and the caduceus in his left hand. The upper part of a relief depicting a bearded man alongside Minerva was also found, but there is no indication of specific damage to their faces. Three altars were uncovered, one of which was fragmented.

Epigraphic Record

Materninius Faustinus held the supposed lowest grade of *corax*, but was evidently a wealthy individual as he paid for the shrine and several altars. Potentianus was the community's *pater*, but no additional information is known about either man. Interestingly, the terms used in the inscriptions differ from what one usually finds, such as 'Midre' instead of Mithras and 'Carax' instead of *corax*.

Chronology

The temple was badly recorded and little information survives with which to build a chronology. An inscription on the main cult relief, however, does provide us with a precise date for the shrine's

consecration (22nd January A.D. 325). It appears to have been destroyed by fire, but no dating evidence for this was retrieved.

B.4 MACKWILLER

Selected Bibliography: *CIMRM* 1329-1334; Hatt (1955) and (1957).

Excavated

1955-1956

Location

The mithraeum was located in a rural setting, possibly in the environs of a villa.

Structure

The excavator was uncertain as to whether the remains of the structure that had been transformed into a spring sanctuary had originally served as the *cella* or the anteroom of the mithraeum (*ca.*10.00m x 8.19m). It was assumed that this was an anteroom given its square shape, but given the presence of the finds and that other mithraea with a rectangular shape are known, such as Sarrebourg, it does appear this was indeed the *cella*.

Finds

Given that 404 coins (over 80% dating between and A.D. 330 and 350) were found in an area of *ca.*0.50m² along with sherds of a broken pot, one may assume they were kept together in the container which had stood on a shelf; fire damage evident on the pot fragments and coins indicates that this shelf was incinerated when the building was burnt down. Strewn across the mithraeum floor were various fragments of Mithraic sculptures and reliefs, including elements of: the central tauroctony relief (half-life size); a statue of a man in a toga; fragments of a rock-birth statue; and a second, smaller tauroctony relief.

Epigraphic Record

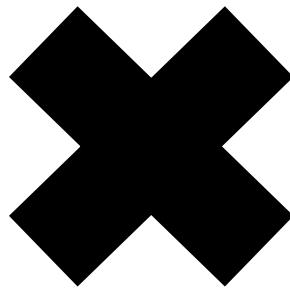
Just one fragment bearing a couple of letters is all that survives of any names, but we do know the man in question was a knight.

Chronology

The foundation of the mithraeum is dated to the mid-second century, according to the stylistic dating of the sculptures. Sometime in the late third century, the neighbouring shrine was destroyed, which is dated by numismatic evidence, at which time the mithraeum also suffered fire damage. The numismatic evidence for the mithraeum ends in A.D. 351, when the temple was burnt down and its sculptures broken. A wooden and dry stone spring sanctuary appears to have arisen in its place (the coin series of which runs to around A.D. 388), before being burned down again.

Figure 48: The Mackwiller Mithraeum

(Adapted from Sauer (2004) Fig. 6, based on Hatt (1957) Fig. 5)



Key

A: Coin deposit of AD 351; B: Tuscan capital; C: hand of Mithras (part of tauroctony relief A); D: head of wind-god (part of tauroctony relief A); E: large torso of a torchbearer; F: fragments of sculpture; G: Fragments of the rock birth; H: Decorated column; I: head from the rock-birth; J and K: coins; L and M: reused altars; N: capital; O: coins and fragments of lamp; P: coins; Q: head of Mithras or torchbearer (part of tauroctony relief B); R: dedicatory inscription (part of tauroctony relief A); S: reused altar; T: fragments of the head of a statue depicting a man in a toga; U: *ex voto*; V: knife and hook of lamp; W: upper part of the head of a torchbearer (part of tauroctony relief A); X: sculpture fragments; Y: roof tiles and planks; Z: foot a bull (part of tauroctony relief A); Vasque: water basin.

B.5 REICHWEILER

Selected Bibliography: Bernhard (1990).

The mithraeum, which was located in rural marshland, was first acknowledged in 1588 and its remains sketched in 1824. The temple no longer exists today, aside from the natural rock-face onto which it was attached, but a general picture of it has survived; it was a 5.15m long wooden structure, with a side room and gabled roof. The main cult image was carved into the natural rock-face, similar to the mithraea of Dalmatia. Ceramics and a small amount of coins (running from the reign of Claudius Gothicus to that of Constans) found nearby indicate activity in the third and fourth century, although given the context of their discovery they cannot be considered entirely reliable.

B.6 ROCKENHAUSEN

Selected Bibliography: *CIMRM* 1272-1274; Schwertheim (1974) 135.

Excavated

1898

Information regarding the supposed mithraeum at Rockenhausen is scant and reports about it only survive in note form and are often conflicting. It was situated in the grounds of a rural estate and the structure was recorded as having been evidently destroyed by fire. The numismatics of the site (totalling around 50 coins) date to between A.D. 330 and A.D. 395. A fragment of a relief depicting the torso of a torchbearer and another which may be the head of a torchbearer were found and have

led to the building's identification as a mithraeum; along with these was found the bearded head of statue and a dedication to Mercury.

C. NORICUM

C.1 AD ENUM (PONS AENI)

Selected Bibliography: Garbsch (1985); Steidl (2008).

Excavated

1978-1980

Location

Ad Enum lay across the river from Pons Aeni, which marked an important road junction and acted as a customs station, trading hub and pottery manufacturing centre. The mithraeum itself was situated on a hill 70m from the bank of the river.

Structure

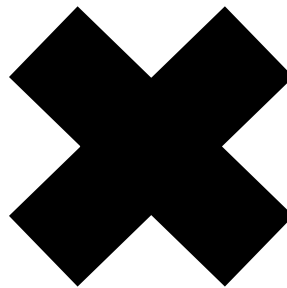
The sanctuary was 8.70-8.80m x 12.00-12.20m and was built on a north-south axis. Two podia (W 1.90m x H 0.5m) were located on either side of the central nave (Br 3.55-3.60m). Both the floor and the podia had mortar surfaces which were probably covered with planks of wood. A tiled roof was supported by beams, the existence of which was denoted by brick panels (L 0.16m). The entrance to the mithraeum (Br c.1.50m) was located in the south wall and was covered by a wooden porch (Br c.2.00m). The threshold of the mithraeum has a layer of burning, indicating that a series of wooden steps were descended to enter into the sanctuary.

In the central nave three pits were discovered. Pit 1 (Semi-circular, Br 1.70-1.90m, R 1.4m, H 0.50m), located just in front of where the cult image stood, contained two layers; a top layer of gravelly-humous and a lower layer of loamy humus containing charcoal, mortar and tuff rubble and shattered numerous altar fragments, shards, broken glass, nails and coins. Pit 2 was approximately trapezoidal (3 m x 1.8m x H 0.4m). It had a single fill of black humus with many numerous broken altar remains, bricks, broken glass, nails and coins contained within it. Pit 3 was rectangular (2.00m x 1.10m x H 0.20m) with a single dark black fill containing a lot of charcoal. What these pits were used for remains unknown, although Garbsch has suggested that they might have been used for ritual practices which involved Mithraists actually lying in them.

Finds

The remains of the cult image (in which the head of Mithras has been chipped off) and ten altars made of limestone were found in the main sanctuary, all smashed, along with a head belonging to a statue of Mithras. Some 'votive stones' were also found close to the south wall. Eight lamps were discovered, some bearing images such as a gladiator, comedy mask and Kantharos, although none have a design which could be deemed 'Mithraic'. A variety of bronze finds were recorded, such as a candlestick, nails, two rings and the remnants of brooches. One of the most unique finds was the discovery of a sheath for a sword and the handle of a ring pommel sword. A range of pottery was recovered, with the main cultic items being two craters decorated with snakes, another painted vessel, and, most impressively, a Dragendorf 54 vessel with *DEO INVICTO MITHR[A]E MA[RT]INVS* inscribed onto it above the image of the tauroctony (featuring the lion).

Figure 49: The Ad Enum Mithraeum (Adapted from Garbsch (1985) Fig 4)



570 coins were found in and around the mithraeum, of which 553 could be identified. Those from outside the mithraea were deemed to have originated from it, having been washed away from their original contexts down the slope of the hill. The majority of the coins were minted in the fourth century, including the largest known collection of coins from the reign of Magnus Maximus (A.D. 383-384) discovered in the region. In Garbsch's opinion, this vast number of coins does not come from a single hoard, but was possibly deposited in the sanctuary as a votive offering.

Chronology

A recent reappraisal of the site by Steidl has placed the construction of the mithraeum in the mid- to late second century. It appears to have been abandoned *ca.* A.D. 395 when the last coin was deposited.

C.2 LENTIA

Selected Bibliography: *CIMRM* 1414-1421; Karnitsch (1956) and (1962).

Excavated

1953-1954

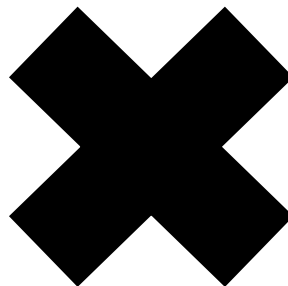
Location

The mithraeum was situated in what may have been the town's temple district. Next to the site of the mithraeum two other temples were found, which were identified by Karntisch as temples to the Capitoline Triad and *Dea Roma*, although the identification of both is not certain. Both of these temples were destroyed in the latter half of the third century, although the temple to *Dea Roma* was rebuilt at the same time as the mithraeum was constructed.

Structure

The mithraea was not a new construction, but rather made use of a pre-existing building. It was aligned south-east to north-west and consisted of several rooms and two anterooms (one of which is TIII). The room furthest south (TIV) appears to have been a kitchen (L 6.90m x Br 4.50m) and was subdivided by a low wall. The middle room (TII; L 5.40m x Br 2.70m) houses a well (diam. 2.29m). To the north of this room lay the main sanctuary (T1; L 5.10m x Br 2.70m), which, unusually, contains no benches, but it is likely these were made of wood and destroyed by a fire at the end of the temple's occupation. A small balustrade upon which monuments could be placed was found at the end of the nave. The floor of this room was made of mortar and retained traces of red paint, while its roof probably vaulted and used wicker-work and loam.

Figure 50: The Lentia Mithraeum (Adapted from CIMRM Fig. 361)



Finds

The mithraeum did not yield much in the way of finds. A circular marble relief depicts the tauroctony, at which a lion is present. It also depicts three additional scenes, one of which remains indistinct, while the others show interactions between Mithras and Sol. Two fragments of a border which encircled this relief were also found. Originally it displayed numerous scenes, but now only the rock birth and a goat, or possibly an ibex, with another animal's feet resting on it are all that remain. Fragments of only a single altar were found, although in comparison to other mithraea in the region there is more pottery recorded, including sherds which appear to have been part of vases decorated with snakes encircling their handles. A terracotta plate, with graffiti etched on the centre of one of its faces, has seven holes through its border. Alongside the coins, a silver votive plaque with what are either horns or a crescent moon inscribed onto it was also found. Finally, traces of fruit (4210g) were also uncovered in the kitchen, including vines, prunes, berries, apple-pips, walnuts and millets. Although assumed to be votives by the excavators, the presence of a kitchen may indicate these were to have been used for the sacred meal.

Epigraphic Record

Two fragments of a stone altar bore the name the veteran Tiberius Ursalus.

Chronology

Six coins were found underneath the nave, all of which date to before A.D. 275, while of the 122 coins found within the mithraeum, nearly 60% date A.D. 363-378, 10% from A.D. 330-363 and less than 8% past A.D. 378, with the final coin dating the reign of Honorius (A.D. 394). 108 of these coins were found in a burning layer which covered the mithraeum's floor, suggesting that a fire signalled the end of the sanctuary.

C.3 SCHACHADORF

Selected Bibliography: *CIMRM* 1409-1412.

Excavated

1935-1936

Location

The mithraeum lay close to the town of Ovilava, one of the main imperial administrative centres in late Roman Noricum.

Structure

It consisted of two rooms, a vestibule and the main sanctuary (L 8.00m). The vestibule had two bases, assumedly for the torch bearers, and located beside each of these were two lamps.

Finds

The mithraeum apparently held twenty-three coins dating from Claudius II-Valentinian II, giving a terminus post quem of A.D. 392. Additional finds included an iron dagger, a knife and bones of chicken, sheep and pig. At the far end of the second room a depiction of the rock-birth was discovered, with a base on the far wall designed to hold it. In this image Mithras holds two objects which cannot be discerned, but a snake can be seen moving up the image.

Chronology

Judging from the coin finds the mithraeum likely came into being at the end of the third century and survived until the late fourth. The image of the rock-birth was found in a layer that provided evidence of burning, but given it remained intact it appears unlikely that this fire was intentionally started to destroy the mithraeum and may have been accidental.

C.4 ST. URBAN

Selected Bibliography: *CIMRM* 1442-1443; Leber (1955) 187-191.

Excavated

1838

Location

The shrine was located in a small natural grotto, situated on the south side of Lake St. Urban in the Central Carinthian Lakes region.

Structure

It was a mithraeum of modest size (8.50m x 5.50m). Its floor had been partially paved and the remains of a water-pipe were discovered. An even smaller grotto (Br 5.00m) is connected to this and appears to have also been used as part of the mithraeum.

Finds

Little is known about its excavation, but finds such as animal bones, pottery fragments, pieces of charcoal give some indication of the ritual meal possibly being performed here. Oddly, children's teeth were also apparently among the assemblage. The smaller grotto yielded a limestone slab bearing an inscription stylistically dating to the third century. Coin finds from the larger grotto include those of Constantius, Crispus, Valentinian, Valens and Gallus, which suggests a short period of occupation in the mid-fourth century.

Chronology

The mithraeum appears to have been in use in the mid- late fourth century. The lack of any finds, suggests the shrine was abandoned voluntarily.

D. PANNONIA

D.1 AQUINCUM IV ('OF SYMPHORUS')

Selected Bibliography: *CIMRM* 1767-1772; Tóth (1988) 46-51.

Excavated

1942

Location

This mithraeum was discovered in a residential area close to the southern town wall, lying c.150m south of the Mithraeum of Victorinus which was constructed in the early third century.

Structure

The mithraeum (L 17.00m x W 9.00m) was orientated east to west and appears to have had two construction phases. Initially, when one entered the mithraeum one found oneself in an anteroom, from which one could proceed forward into the *cella* or turn left into another anteroom. The *cella* consisted of the standard tripartite plan. On the back western wall was a platform (W 2.00m x D 0.40m) with a niche for the central relief. In the second phase, the *cella* was enlarged, with benches no longer reaching the back wall, but now 2m away from it. The niche was refashioned and decorated with stucco and had a cult statue placed in it, while the room to the south was also repaired. The anteroom located to the side was also enlarged and divided in two.

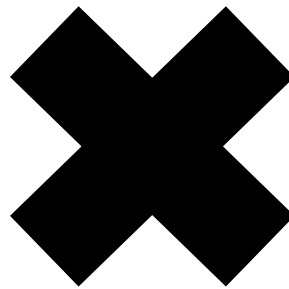
Finds

Small fragments of a statue depicting Mithras slaying the bull were found in front of the niche, along with the remains of statues of the torchbearers either side. A terracotta relief of a goddess, who may be Venus, was also discovered in the *cella*. A limestone altar was found to the right side of the podium wall and a fragment of another was found near the entrance, alongside which the remnants of a marble water basin were situated. Sherds of a *terra-sigillata* bowl, with its handle moulded like a dog's head; a vase depicting a serpent, four pine-apples made of sandstone, twenty-three balls of stone, and seven altars made of sandstone (bearing no inscriptions), make up the rest of the finds.

Chronology

The mithraeum underwent two construction phases. Its precise construction date is unknown, but coins from Domitian, Trajan and Hadrian makes it most likely to have been the first half of the second century. The expansion of the building is thought to have occurred under the Severans, when widespread construction work was undertaken in Aquincum. A total of 32 coins have been recovered from the mithraeum, dating from Domitian to Constantine (the latest coin appears to be from *ca.* A.D. 319). There were only two Constantinian coins uncovered, with no Tetrarchic coins. The majority of the coins come from the second and third centuries, with Probus (A.D. 276-282) the latest pre-Constantinian emperor.⁵⁰²

Figure 51: The Symphorus Mithraeum in Aquincum (Adapted from Tóth (1988) 46)



D.2 CARNUNTUM I

Selected Bibliography: *CIMRM* 1664-1680; Clauss (1992) 158-159.

Excavated

1852

Location

The shrine was located on the side of a hill outside of the town, not too far from the large cult complex at Pfaffenberg.

⁵⁰² I am grateful to those at the BTM Aquincum Museum for providing me with this information.

Structure

The report does not provide much detail in terms of the dimensions of the mithraeum. Only the apse was extant to a substantial degree at the time of excavation, which is described as being built from a mix of the natural rock and masonry. The remains of a wall with an entrance were also uncovered.

Finds

The sanctuary produced the remains of four statues, two of which have had their heads removed (both are likely to have been Mithras). Seven altars, one in marble the others in sandstone, with several bearing inscriptions, were also recovered mostly intact. Evidence of coal and wood burning, with layers of ash containing bones and teeth from oxen, sheep and goats were recorded, along with fragments of terracotta vessels.

Chronology

An inscription on one of the altars refers to the *legio XIII gemina*, suggesting the mithraeum came into existence as early as the first decades of the second century. It was restored at some point by C. Atius Secundus, although the exact date of this remains unknown. Two coins were found, one of Gordianus III (A.D. 238-244) and another of Constans I (dating from his elevation to Caesar in A.D. 333), the latter providing the *terminus post quem*, but given the lack, by modern standards, of adequate recording, we cannot be certain these can be definitely used to date the mithraeum.

D.3 CARNUNTUM III

Selected Bibliography: *CIMRM* 1682-1722; Bormann (1895); Clauss (1992) 159-160.

Excavated

1894

Location

This mithraeum was located on the eastern edge of the civilian town.

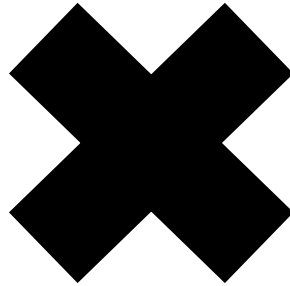
Structure

This mithraeum is one of the largest ever discovered (L 34.00m x W 10.00m). It was constructed on an east-west axis, with its entrance lying to north at the eastern end. First, one passed through two anterooms (L 8.50m x Br 8.50m and L 3.50m x W 8.50m) before finally entering the *cella* (L 8.00m) includes the nave (W 4.00-4.50m) and parallel benches (H 0.60m x W 1.50-1.85m x L 15.00m). The structure's roof was made of wood.

Finds

The central sandstone tauroctony was found at the western end of the nave in pieces, of which numerous fragments were missing, although it has now been restored. Judging from holes on the reverse of the relief it was originally attached to the wall. Another sizable find was an altar carved from stone, which was supported by six figures and decorated with a further three. These nine figures, beginning from the front of the altar and circling it clockwise, have been interpreted as Caelus, Ver, Favonius, Autumnus, Eurus, Septentrio, Hiems, Auster and Aestas (i.e. the winds and the seasons). An additional fifteen altars of various sizes were discovered along a number of statues, many of which were carved from sandstone. Smaller finds included lamps, pottery, vessels decorated with snakes and shell carved from sandstone which most likely served as a water basin. No additional reliefs, other than the central tauroctony, were found in the mithraeum, although one was found in a nearby area. Additionally, a statue depicting a lion with its front paws resting on the bull's head, another lion on a block of sandstone, and the head of a Medusa were also found.

Figure 52: Carnuntum III (Adapted from CIMRM Fig. 429)



Key

a.1: The Large Altar; a.2: The Smaller Altar; b.1-6: Remains of main relief; c: Mithras' Rock-birth; d: Inscription of Propinquus; e: Second inscription of Propinquus; f: ? Not provided in *CIMRM*; h: 'Elaborate Stones'; i: Altar; k: Head of Cautopates; l: Base of Cautopates; m: Lion Statue; n: Altar; o: Base of Cautopates; p: Relief of Cautes; q: Foot of Cautes; r: Foot of Cautes; r: Shell; s: Terracotta Vessels.

Chronology

A coin of Macrinus (A.D. 217-218), which was found near the entrance of the mithraeum, provides us with the earliest dating evidence. There is no subsequent information regarding dating, but the Tetrarchic dedication of A.D. 307 recording the restoration of a mithraeum is believed to relate to this temple. The altar was found sometime prior to 1795, but where is unclear. It is not certain, but there are reasons to believe this altar did originate from this temple. Firstly, the altar depicting numerous figures appears to unlikely to have originally been erected in a Mithraic context as it has no parallel in any other mithraeum and may have been brought to the temple as part of this renovation process. Secondly, Bormann observed that ceramic fragments were found under a wall of the anteroom suggesting it had been rebuilt. Thirdly, as the identification of Mithraeum II remains uncertain, Mithraeum I lay far outside of the town, and Mithraeum III was not only the largest of the three, but one of the largest mithraea in the provinces, it appears a likely candidate for an imperial restoration. If this is the mithraeum referred to in the inscription, then this provides a *terminus post quem* for its use.

D. 4 POETOVIO II

Selected Bibliography: *CIMRM* 1509-1577; Abramić (1925) 63-73; Selem (1980) 43-83; Beskow (1980); Horvat *et al.* (2003) 173-4.

Excavated

1901

Location

The mithraeum was located *ca.*20m from Mithraeum I in an area of the town which also contained warehouses, administrative buildings and temples to the Nutrices and Jupiter.

Structure

The mithraeum measured 13.40m x 7.30m and the majority of its floor-plan is taken up by a central nave *ca.*4.00m wide. Worshippers entered from the eastern end via an anteroom. The benches (H 0.70m x Br 1.00m) ran down both the north and south sides of the sanctuary. The surfaces of the benches were covered in loam. The sanctuary was constructed over a spring which was channelled up into a marble-revetted water-basin (H 0.65m x Br 0.85m-0.92m), from which the water was drained away by canal which led out of the structure. The water-basin drain was repaired using material from the nearby sanctuary of the Nutrices, including an altar dedicated to Nutrices by Fl. Iovinus. The same Fl. Iovinus appears on an inscription from the mithraeum as well, dating to A.D. 244, thus the repairs to the drain must have occurred sometime after this. At the far western end of the interior nave is a niche (H 0.80m x Br 2.35m x D 0.90) with its central area projecting out, for the main relief.

Finds

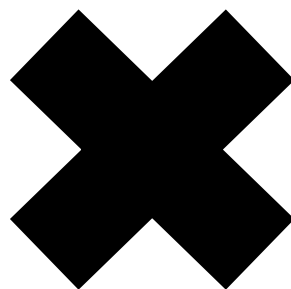
Twelve trapezophores (supports for low tables) were recorded, six lined against each bench. Abramić describes them as being decorated with the images of lion's heads, but the only trace of such decoration is a single complete example adorned with a paw. Another marble water-basin, with a rose design, was also found near the entrance. The remains of various altars, reliefs and statuettes were also present. Only several of altars survived relatively intact, the largest of which was erected by M. Antonius Celer, another erected by Epictetus and Viator and the other is not inscribed. The main cult relief has been broken into numerous pieces. Several other reliefs were discovered, the largest of which depicts several scenes involving Mithras, Sol and what an image of what could be Cautes and Cautophates emerging from cypresses alongside Mithras. Another smaller fragment depicts a person

in oriental dress walking to the right. These fragments would have bordered the relief's right-side, while Abramić records a piece of the border which ran along the top of the tauroctony which was engraved with images of Aion, a serpent and Caelus, but the whereabouts of this piece is unknown. Along with numerous fragments of reliefs, various other elements of representations have been found, including a number of marble heads wearing Phrygian caps and other body parts. One damaged statue depicts a version of rock birth in which Mithras being entwined by a snake. Aside from the usual characters depicted, Luna appears on one relief, Hercules alongside Jupiter on another, while Jupiter also appears alone, possibly battling the giants, in another engraving. It is also worth mentioning that, similar to some of the imagery of several other mithraea in the region a lion is also depicted with a pig's head in its grasp.

Chronology

The earliest evidence we have is an inscription which refers to Geta as Caesar, which Beskow points out would provide a date of A.D. 198-209. The sanctuary was certainly still in use sometime during the fourth century, as the vast majority of coin finds date from 330s-370s, with a *terminus post quem* of A.D. 388. Eighty of these coins were found in the water basin, most of which dated to the first half of the fourth century.

Figure 53: Poetovio II (Adapted from CIMRM Fig. 385)



KEY

- A. Podium for the Tauroctony
- B. Water Basin
- C. Drain
- D. Benches
- E. Low Partition Wall

D.5 POETOVIO III

Selected Bibliography: *CIMRM* 1578-1612; Abramić (1925) 172-193; Selem (1980) 84-109.

Excavated

1913

Location

The mithraeum was built near the Drava River, some distance from the first two, between two Roman villas. A statue of Magna Mater was found in the remains of a building to the east of the mithraeum, perhaps denoting this was also a religious building.

Structure

This mithraeum almost certainly existed in two phases, with the walls of the first building (L 11.20 x Br 6.85) constructed out of pebble (narrow cross-hatched lines on the plan) and the later additions erected in brick. The original plan had an anteroom, which was incorporated into the *cella* in the second phase when another anteroom was added in front of it. Extensions were also added to the eastern and western sides of the mithraeum, with the former acting as a possible storage area for ritual artefacts. In both phases the mithraea conforms to the typical mithraeum plan, with a central nave formed by two benches running parallel down the side walls, which in the second phase were lengthened to the end of the former anteroom. At the north end of the nave a base constructed out of brick was used as a podium upon which the central cult image sat. This was later enlarged to the same breadth as the nave. Evidence of red paint and stucco could be found to the right side of this platform and the side walls were painted white with red edges. The roof was made of wood, as was evidenced by traces of loam found on the mithraeum's floor.

Finds

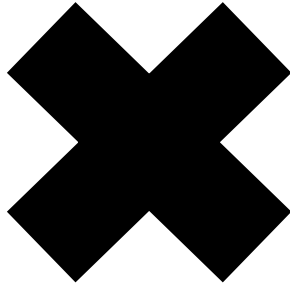
The fragments of the main relief were found in location 1 on the plan. Only the sheath of Mithras' dagger and the part of the bull being stabbed by Mithras survive from the two central actors, along with the images of the serpent, the dog and the upper part of one of the torchbearers. Based on the surviving pieces, Vermaseren observed that the scene was occurring within a cave. Bordering this relief were smaller depictions, including various interactions between Sol and Mithras who wear the usual eastern attire. A large marble altar, found at find spot 3, depicts the water miracle, along with a scene described by Vermaseren as showing Mithras appearing to offer Sol a dagger, with pieces of

meat speared onto it across a burning altar, and is inscribed with reference to Augustus Flavius Aper, who commanded the *legio V Macedonia* and the *legio XIII Gemmina*. Another well preserved marble altar was found at point 5, while 6 marks the location of a marble stone into which a unique depiction of the rock birth was carved. It shows Mithras emerging from the rock, being helped on either side by torch bearers, while above him Saturnus is crowned by Victory. Along the bottom of the carving reads an inscription which refers to the *legio V Macedonia* and the *legio XIII Gemmina*. Little has been found of statuettes, which comes in contrast to Poetovio II, although Vermaseren suggests bases located on the corners of the benches held statues of the torchbearers. From Abramić's work we know there were remnants of trapezophores, two of which stood in front of the left bench. In contrast to Poetovio II, this mithraeum did produce ceramic evidence, including lamps, dishes, vases and brown-glazed scale pottery. On one sherd of pottery the name 'Valerius M...' was inscribed. Other than those already mentioned deities that are not standard Mithraic figures depicted in the sanctuary are Luna and Silvanus.

Chronology

Despite inhabiting a different area of the town to Mithraea I and II, Mithraeum III appears to have been a contemporary of them both. The Flavius Hermadion referred to in an inscription from the mithraeum is almost certainly the same L. Flavius Hermadion who appears in a Mithraic inscription from Rome in the latter half of the second century. The activity in the mithraeum appears to have reached its apex in the mid-third century, however, as most of the inscriptions were dedicated by soldiers of the *legio V Macedonia* and the *legio XIII Gemina*, who were garrisoned in Poetovio during the reign of Gallienus (A.D. 258-68). The mithraeum also contained 317 coins dating from Augustus to Theodosius (the latest coin dated to A.D. 392), with particular concentrations from the time of the reigns of Gallienus, Claudius Gothicus (A.D. 268-270) and the Constantinian dynasty. However, given that the coins were recorded without provenance, how they relate to the use of the mithraeum is difficult to discern and a late fourth century date for abandonment can only be applied tentatively.

Figure 54: Poetovio III (Adapted from CIMRM Fig.399)



In the plan the stages of the building are difficult to discern, both in the original publication and *CIMRM*. The walls with tight hatches slanting left are the oldest; the benches are denoted by lines slanting to the right; the walls with less tightly packed lines slanting left are the extensions and the darkest walls are the final additions.

1. Fragments of the Tauroctony
2. Pedestal
3. White marble altar
4. White marble altar
5. White marble Altar
6. White marble stone with rock-birth image
7. Circular-plate
8. Bases for statues of the torchbearers

D.6 POETOVIO V

Selected Bibliography: *FMRSL* 3.197 Tušek (1990); Ertel (2001).

Excavated

1987

Location

The context in which the mithraeum existed is unknown.

Structure

The excavations uncovered the poorly preserved foundation walls of the temple (H 0.80m x W 0.55-0.60m), along with some reliefs and altars. The walls did not appear to have been very sturdy, but the remains of marble pillars indicate the structure was reinforced. It has been suggested that the architectural design of this mithraeum was quite similar to other religious and civic buildings in the town, as the columns which were used in the temple were stylistically similar to those found elsewhere.

Finds

A large marble altar, which was inscribed during the consulships of Severus and Quintianus (A.D. 285), was disturbed by machine digging, which led to the mithraeum's discovery. The other finds were found within a pit that had been dug within the mithraeum. Another sizeable altar made of yellow sandstone was also discovered. Heavily weathered fragments of an altar relief were also recovered. A fragment of a large enamel jug is the only significant pottery find, with bore a depiction of a snake winding its way around the vessel and then up the handle before resting its head on the top. Of the eleven coins, one was minted in reign of Caracalla, another under Gallienus and the rest from the reign of Constantine until A.D. 379.

Chronology

Judging from the finds, the mithraeum is likely to have come into being in the third century, perhaps the Severan period and remained active until the end of the fourth century. It appears the altar relief was broken and the fragments left in the open for some time, and then perhaps buried when the mithraeum was either levelled or, given that the foundations were not particularly sturdy, collapsed.

E. DALMATIA

E.1 ARUPIUM (PROZOR) I AND II

Selected Bibliography: *CIMRM* 1851-1852; Beck (1984).

Excavated

1896 and 1900

Two mithraea were discovered in the late nineteenth century in the countryside of Arupium. The first consisted of a space enclosed by rocks which at its east end had a natural niche; in the niche a badly weathered representation of the tauroctony was carved. In a case of modern damage to a cult image, the central relief had been used for target practice. A small number of coins had been deposited in front of the niche, the dates of which ran from A.D. 260 to 360.

A second mithraeum found in the area was also built into an enclosed, rocky space and utilised a natural niche that contained a heavily weathered image of the tauroctony. Once again, a small group of coins were found in this space which ran which to A.D. 350. The numismatic data thus indicates that the two temples were active at the same time and, given the similarity between their styles, Beck has suggested that the carving of two reliefs may have been carried out by the same artisan.

E.2 EPIDAUURUM (CAVTAT)

Selected Bibliography: *CIMRM* 1882-1884; Evans (1884) 20-23.

Excavated

1884

Like those of Arupium, the mithraeum at Epidaurum was located in the countryside in a natural grotto. A well was located at its entrance, where an image of the tauroctony was carved into a rock face. At the far end of the grotto, again carved into the wall, was another relief showing the mithraeum on the hill overlooking the settlement of Epidaurum and featuring Mithras as the bull-killer. In a natural groove in the rock-face under this relief were found three coins, dating from the reign of Aurelian to A.D. 324. Unfortunately, the mithraeum produced little else in the way of finds.

E.3 JAJCE

Selected Bibliography: *CIMRM* 1901-1905; Sergejevskij (1937).

Excavated

1937

Location

The shrine was situated on the bank of the river Pliva.

Structure

The mithraeum lay on an east-west axis and only a cult room survives, dug 2.80m below ground level. It was made of marlstone blocks on three sides, only the western wall was a natural rock face, and had an irregular quadrangle shape. Into the western wall the central relief was carved. Two steps lay in front of the relief, while another two were located in the southwest corner, most likely where the entrance had lain. As opposed to the standard plan of two benches flanking a nave, only one bench is present here, against the south wall.

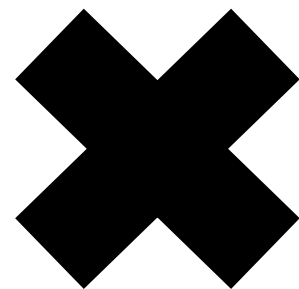
Finds

A statue of Cautopates was found headless, while that of Cautes is completely absent. In two small, triangular hollows either side of the main relief were found broken pottery sherds, while in front of the relief more fragments of pottery, a fibula and various coins were found amongst rubble deposited in front of the relief. Six altars were found, but only one bears an inscription (simply 'invicto').

Chronology

It is not possible to reconstruct any clear chronology of the site. The coin finds, the latest of which dates to A.D. 306, may indicate the shrine went out of use in the early fourth century, while the pottery and fibula found with the coins were also identified as late Roman in date. It was the belief of

Figure 55: The Mithraeum of Jajce (Adapted from CIMRM Fig. 492)



the excavator that the temple, which was not built in a particularly sturdy fashion, collapsed due to the exceedingly damp condition of the area.

E.4 KONJIC

Selected Bibliography: *CIMRM* 1895-1899.

Excavated

1897

Location

The mithraeum was situated on a slope of a hill, close to the right bank of the river Trstenic.

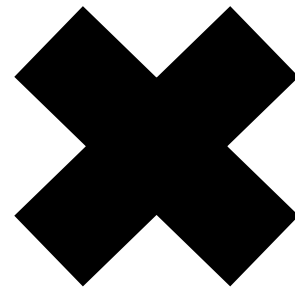
Structure

The cult room alone (9.00m x 5.00m) is well preserved. The shrine lay on an east-west axis and had a floor of stamped clay and pebbles, with a benche (L 4.30m) running along the left side of the nave. The remains of wedge-shaped blocks suggest the mithraeum had an arched roof.

Figure 56: The Konjic Mithraeum (Adapted from CIMRM Fig. 489)

Finds

The main cult relief was found in fragments and had carvings on both sides; on one was the depiction of tauroctony flanked by images of Mithras-*taurophorus* and on the other Sol and Mithras sharing a meal. In the case of the former, all three images of Mithras have had their heads removed. For unspecified reasons, the suggested date of the relief is the fourth century, but the dating is possible given that, of the 91 coins were found in across the floor of the shrine, 67% are fourth century in date, the latest of which was minted in A.D. 383.



Chronology

Given that there is relatively even chronological distribution of coins dating to between A.D. 260 and 383, it would seem the temple was erected in the late third century and abandoned in the final decades of the fourth century.

F. ITALY (OUTSIDE OF ROME AND OSTIA)

F.1 CAPUA

Selected Bibliography: *CIMRM* 180-199; Vermaseren (1971); Clauss (1992) 51.

Excavated

1922

Location

The mithraeum was located not too far from the *capitolium*, although the actual state of its environs is unknown.

Structure

The temple is located underground and consisted of an adapted *cryptoporticus*. The first section (*o*, *p* and *q*, each separated by large pilasters) runs north to south for a total of 13.32m and is 4.41m wide. On the western wall in section *q* is an elevated dais. When one reaches the end of section *o*, to the left you are faced with the main shrine (L 12.27m x W 3.37m), running on an east to west axis, which was completely stuccoed and painted with scenes of Mithraic lore and stars on the vault. Remains of blue glass indicate that glass decorations may have been existed in the holes visible in centre of the stars. The central aisle *n* (W 1.60m) was inlaid with marble and a threshold was placed in the floor just over 3m out from the cult niche. The aisle was flanked by two benches which were extended from 1.40m to the door in phase II (as indicated by the older paintings disappearing behind the extensions). In both benches water basins (*d* and *m*) were included halfway along and under *d* was a large well (*c*). Near to the basins small niches were cut into the front of the benches, which, based on the evidence for burning within them, were probably used for lamps. The cult niche was located in the western wall and contained a podium (*i*) which ran across its entire width (2.83m) and slopes towards a drain that leads off to basin *d*. In the southern wall three air holes had been cut.

Finds

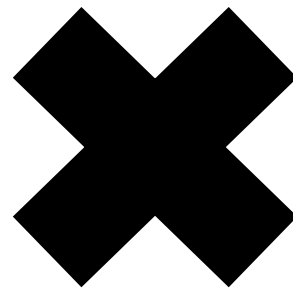
The remains of various lamps, amphorae, and animal bones were found amongst the rubbish dumped in the shrine, but no reliefs or statues were remained.

Chronology

Vermaseren was able to distinguish different phases of painting, pointing out that the different style and colour scheme used in the painting of panel III differs from the others and highlighting that there a figure in this panel who has been later covered over. Based on the style of panel III, which is similar to the fourth Pompeian style, the mithraeum may have come into existence in the first half of the second century. The rest of the paintings, evidently composed in a different artist, were dated by Vermaseren to the Antonine period.

The final period of alteration came with the enlargement of the benches that covered some of the earlier paintings; the benches were subsequently decorated with initiation scenes that Vermaseren dated stylistically to the early third century. Precisely when ritual activity ceased cannot be ascertained, but the absence of any finds may indicate intentional abandonment on the part of the Mithraists. This had occurred by the mid-fourth century, as amongst rubbish dumped in the mithraeum was a coin of Constantine. Given the damage to the eyes and nose of Mithras in the central tauroctony painting, one may assume that, based on other examples such as Hawarte, that this was the work of Christians; yet the damage actually occurred during the excavation.⁵⁰³

*Figure 57: The Capua Mithraeum
(CIMRM Fig. 51)*



⁵⁰³ The actual facts behind this are unclear. Vermaseren remarks in the *CIMRM* 181 that “According to the custodian [the damage] had been inflicted by playing children”.

F.2 PONZA

Selected Bibliography: Vermaseren (1974).

Excavated

ca.1866

Location

The shrine was located just outside of one of the island's ports, although what lay in its immediate environs is unknown.

Structure

Ten steps were uncovered leading down to the sanctuary, with a platform situated between steps eight and nine. The shrine itself (L 10.90m x W 6.45-90) is on an east-west axis and consisted of a central aisle of stamped earth and two parallel benches, over which was a vaulted roof painted with signs of the zodiac. A low podium had been cut into the left hand wall, its function unknown. At the western end, the cult apse, flanked by pilasters, contained a ridge about 1m high which may be the remains of a podium that would have held the image of the tauroctony. To the right of the main apse is a smaller niche that Vermaseren believed was a natural feature, rather than cut intentionally during the creation of the mithraeum.

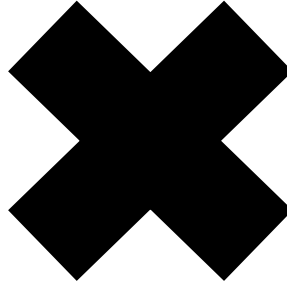
Finds

Like Capua, this mithraeum appears to have had its contents removed upon abandonment.

Chronology

Given its irregular construction the shrine was almost certainly not built as a mithraeum, but later converted. There were no inscriptions or datable finds, but Vermaseren placed the construction of the mithraeum to the third century, based on the style of the vault's zodiac painting. Given the absence of any finds, it would appear this mithraeum was abandoned by its congregation intentionally; a Latin cross found hewn into the wall opposite the entrance may suggest Christian de-sacralisation following abandonment, but when this occurred cannot be established.

Figure 58: The Mithraeum at Ponza (Vermaseren (1974) Fig. 2)



F.3 SPOLETIUM

Selected Bibliography: *CIMRM* 673-682; Gori (1879) 55-62, 252-256.

Excavated

1878

Location

Just outside the city gate.

Structure

The mithraeum is connected to a series of other rooms, which Vermaseren suggests may have acted as a living space. The sanctuary (L 21.10m x W 3.90m) is on a northwest-southeast axis and was accessed via a door placed in the middle of the southwest bench; the parallel bench as gap, without a door, to match this. Four niches were made in the faces of the benches, situated opposite each other in pairs (F and E). Above one of the pairs of niches (E), water basins (D) had been installed. At the far end of the shrine are three niches (A), a central niche (in front of which stood the base of a pillar (B)), for the tauroctony flanked by two smaller ones, most likely for representations of the torch bearers. Another, smaller bench (or shelf?) was situated between the left-hand niche and the northeast bench.

The aisle and walls were paved with marble, while the benches were covered in plaster and bore traces of red colouring.

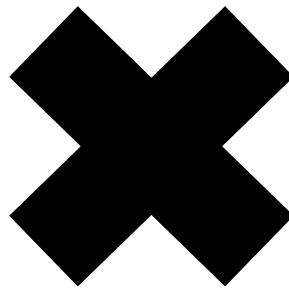
Finds

A votive altar was found near B, an earthen lamp, a bone statuette depicting a young man wearing a tunic, cloak and laurel wreath. In the adjoining rooms a sacrificial knife and a piece of marble inscribed with signs of the zodiac were found.

Chronology

The only dating evidence from the mithraeum came in the form of coins from the reigns of Constantine and Gratian. Thus the construction is likely to have been in the early fourth century, while it was abandoned in the late fourth century. It was burnt down, but given all the cultic objects had been removed (apart from the odd small fragment) this may have occurred post-abandonment.

Figure 59: The Mithraeum at Spolegium (Adapted from CIMRM Fig. 192)



F.4 TIMAVO

Selected Bibliography: Pross Gabrielli (1975); Claus (1992) 68.

Excavated

1965

Location

The mithraeum was situated in a grotto on the side of a hill overlooking the coast.

Structure

The mithraeum (*ca.*48m²) was located in a natural cave and contained a central nave (W 2.6m) flanked by parallel benches (H 0.45m x W 0.70m); in front of each bench stood three pillars. The cave also had a well dug into it and the remains of tiles and wooden truss suggest the ceiling may have been covered over.

Finds

The contents of the mithraeum were found deposited across the floor of the temple. They included fragments of two broken reliefs, both depicting the tauroctony; in both cases the majority of the images are missing, including the heads of Mithras and the bull. Also found was an iron knife, a piece of a spear, ceramic fragments from amphora, cups, saucers and (around seventy) lamps. Dating can be established by the *ca.*300 coins found, which run from the reign of Antoninus Pius to that of Theodosius, the last dating to A.D. 379. Unfortunately, the chronological distribution of these coins has not been recorded. A square block of limestone, which appears to have been used as an altar, was found in the middle of the nave.

Epigraphic Record

On the two reliefs the names of five Mithraists have been recorded. One refers to three brothers from the Tulli family, the other bears the name of Aelius. On the altar are the names Aurelius Hermes and Aurelius Protemus. Unfortunately, nothing else is known about any of these men.

Chronology

Dating the mithraeum is somewhat difficult given the lack of information provided regarding the coins. It would seem they all came from the same layer as the reliefs and ceramic fragments, indicating that this damage occurred at the end of the fourth century, while a construction date cannot be established any more securely than the latter half of the second century. The absence of the main figures from the central relief is perhaps an indication they were taken elsewhere when the mithraeum ceased to operate.

F.5 VULCI

Selected Bibliography: Moretti (1979); Clauss (1992) 50.

Excavated

1975

Location

The mithraeum was built between what appears to have been the slave-quarters of a large domus and the so-called House of the *Cryptoporticus*; the area to the north-east of the sanctuary remains unexplored.

Structure

The mithraeum (L 13.20m x W 5.10m) lay on an east to west axis, cut into a natural slope. The two benches (H 1.20m x W 1.20m) border an earthenware central aisle and contain six niches in their front faces that run deep under them. At the end of the aisle, in front of the niche, two shallow pits had been dug into the floor (L 0.38m x W 0.25m x D 0.32m and L 0.62m x W 1.14m x D 0.78m), the larger of which contained a hole at the bottom that fed into an underlying channel.

Finds

Several statues were found in the mithraeum. Two of these depicted the tauroctony, the larger of which was found in fragmentary condition to the left of the main altar; various pieces were missing, including Mithras' head and most of his arms, and nicks and abrasions were evident across the statue. The smaller tauroctony statue was also found on the floor in a fragmentary state next to the altar abutting the mithraeum's south wall. Once again various parts are missing, such as Mithras' head, parts of his arms and horns of the bull, while blows are also evident across the statue. Both sets of

statues have been dated to the post-Severan period due to the style of Mithras' cloak. Sculptures of a raven and Cautes were also found; the former at the entrance to the mithraeum relatively intact, the latter in the central aisle, broken in two, missing one of its arms and, like the tauroctony statues, displays evidence of chips and abrasions.

Chronology

Moretti's stylistic dating of the sculptures is the only evidence with which the mithraeum can be dated, placing its occupation sometime in the mid-third century. When the mithraeum went out of use, and when the statues were desecrated, cannot be established.

G. GAUL

G.1 AUGUSTA TREVERORUM (TRIER)

Selected Bibliography: Gose (1972) 110-117; Walters (1974) 23-29; Ghetta (2008) 115-118.

Excavated

1928

Location

The mithraeum was located within a house at the north end of one of Trier's two sanctuary areas in the valley of Altbach, which was populated by at least 30 other temples.

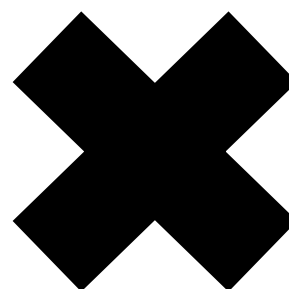
Structure

Rather than being a standalone structure, the mithraeum was a room (c.82m²) within a large building. The central nave (8.70m x 4.00m) was flanked by benches, the eastern one of which was much wider (H 0.40m x W 1.20m/3.40m). At the far end of the nave lay a podium-wall, on which stood a large limestone block that supported an image of the rock-birth. This block was flanked by two small altars, with steps leading up to it abutting the benches on both sides.

Finds

Some small fragments of the main relief were recovered from the temple. A sculpture of Mercury was found decapitated, but the head was left in the mithraeum. A relief depicting Mithras emerging from the rock was found completely intact. Several altars were also found, bearing inscriptions (see below) as did several ceramic vessels which were painted with the phrase 'Deo Invictus'. At the entrance to the *cella* was a rectangular pit (1.84m x 0.80m x D 0.45m) that contained a thick layer of ash. Deposited in the pit were bird bones and coins from the fourth century, the latest of which dates to the time of Honorius.

Figure 60: The Trier Mithraeum (Adapted from Walters (1974) Fig. 3)



Epigraphic Record

The two altars were dedicated by the *pater* Martius Martialis. It was suggested by Walters that the name Martialis may be indicative of the man's local origins. Another name, 'Nicasius', also appears on a votive *aedicula* from the sanctuary, but nothing else about this man is known.

Chronology

The house to which the mithraeum belonged appears to have been built in the third century, but given the mithraeum was installed during the room's third occupational phase, the mithraeum is likely to have come into being around the turn of the fourth century. Abandonment looks to have been in the late fourth century, with the votive deposit in the pit perhaps representing the ritual closure of the temple. The nearby temple area went out of use in the latter part of the fourth century, with some temples torn down and paved over to make way for a road, while others were converted into living spaces. A later wall was cut through the mithraeum, while a pan used for lime-burning was found in strata of this period. It is worth noting that many of the sculptures and reliefs in the mithraeum were made of limestone.

G.2 BURDIGALA (BORDEAUX)

Selected Bibliography: Gaidon-Bunuel (1991); Barraud and Caillabet-Duloum (2007) 256-258.

Location

From what excavations have discerned, the surrounding area appears to have predominantly housing, situated in the southern edge of the Roman town.

Structure

The mithraeum was a subterranean structure, cut 2.6m into the limestone natural. It was a particularly large mithraeum and the main mithraeum (18.4m x 10.3m) was partially submerged, with access provided by ten steps at ninety degrees to the main axis of the mithraeum. The nave (W 4.00m) is flanked by two benches (W 2.50-2.77m x H 0.77m), which look to have had columns placed on top of them to support the roof. The centre of the eastern bench was removed to accommodate another feature which is now lost. A small podium was placed in the southwest corner. At the northern end of the sanctuary was a raised niche of substantial size (4.70m x 3.30m), where the cult image looks to have been held. Just in front of this, two post-holes have been found on either side of nave, suggesting that some form of screen or railing was erected in front of it.

Finds

Fragments of what is likely to be the main cult image's border were uncovered, but the majority of the image was never found. Small statuettes of the torchbearers and one of the rock-birth were found headless, but a relief of Aion was found intact; an altar was found broken in two.

Chronology

The style of the statues suggest the mithraeum was constructed in the early third century, while coins dating to the latter half of the same century were found in the annex. According to what has been published, the mithraeum was destroyed at the beginning of the fourth century, but was then subsequently rebuilt before being destroyed again. No dating material was provided for the interpretation of these latter stages.

G.3 LES BOLARDS

Selected Bibliography: *CIMRM* 917-928; Walters (1975) 11-17.

Excavated

1948

Location

Near the mithraeum a hypocaust and many *ex votos*, which appear to have been in connection to eye illnesses, have been found near the mithraeum. Two kilometres from the mithraeum is the natural spring of La Courtavaux.

Structure

The mithraeum was partially submerged, requiring access via three steps. The size and general structure of the building was not recorded.

Finds

The statue of Cautes was found largely intact, but with a slightly damaged face, while the statue of Cautopates was found in pieces (the current whereabouts of both statues are unknown). A statue of a lion was found near the entrance, untouched. Various fragments of other statues and reliefs were recovered, including the head of an unknown beast; heads of two youths in Phrygian caps, probably

from the tauroctony image; the foot and hoof of a bull, along with the jaw of a dog, also from the central relief; a woman (possibly Luna); and an image of Sol's head. Unusually for a mithraeum, there were a number of offerings found that look to have been *ex votos* connected to ailments, including a marble hand and two legs. Around 627 coins were found in the mithraeum, of which only 127 could be identified.

Chronology

Judging from the coin finds found in the mithraeum, it was active from sometime in the mid- to late third century until around A.D. 393.

G.4 MARTIGNY

Selected Bibliography: Wibl  (1995), (2004) and (2008) 146-166.

Excavated

1993

Location

The mithraeum was located in the southwest part of the Roman town, close to other cultic buildings and a large bath house, in what may have been a temple precinct.

Structure

The mithraeum (23.40m x 9.00m) was built on a southeast-northwest axis and was surrounded by a fence. The southern fa ade has survived largely intact and indicates that the mithraeum's walls were at least 3.75m high and it was covered with a gabled roof. As one crossed the threshold of this enclosure, you would walk over a pit (1.70m x 1.10m x D 1.35m) which contained a beaker incised with Greek graffiti honouring Mithras. The entrance to the anteroom lay in the southwest corner, so one would not be able to see straight into the mithraeum, with the outline of an *appartorium* (2.30m x 3.00m) was found in the northern corner of this room. A dry-stone surface, perhaps for food preparation, appears to have existed on the southeast wall of this room as well. A wooden entrance sill gave access to the inner sanctuary, and bore traces of fire damage, via two steps. The inner room (8.00m x 14.40m) is divided into three, the benches and central nave (W 3.70m); the left-hand bench was not built as a single whole, but originally had gap about halfway along that was later bricked up

in to make a single unified bench. The cult niche lay at the end of the aisle, originally entirely covered in yellow stucco, but with a podium later added.

Finds

Pieces of bronze statuettes depicting the tauroctony were found broken with various bits missing; an image of Cautopates was found largely intact, save for his right leg, but Mithras and the bull are largely absent save for a few small parts. Three altars were found, one of which was erected to honour the restoration of a temple to Jupiter, another was in honour of all the gods, and the third was erected to Mithras. The altar from the temple of Jupiter was placed in a pit, while the other two were found broken. 2091 coins were found, with their deposition becoming increasingly concentrated around the main cult image over time; nearly all the coins deposited after AD 378 (28.2%) were found in this area, indicating perhaps changing practices over the course of the fourth century. Some 29361 animal bones were also found in and around the temple.

Epigraphic Record

On a cup deposited at the threshold of the palisade was written, in Greek, an offering to Helios by a man named Theodore. On one of the altars, the governor of the province Publius Ancilius Theodore is referred to, but this altar was erected to all the gods and may have been brought to the mithraeum from a different context. The same can be said of one of the other altars, which had originally been set up in the temple of Jupiter, to commemorate its reconstruction by the governor at the end of the third century, but was moved to the mithraeum and the inscription painted over. This would suggest that the temple of Jupiter had gone out of use in the fourth century, while the mithraeum still attracted devotees. The altar in honour of Mithras bears the name Condius Paternus, a former *duumvir* and priest of the imperial cult.

Chronology

The mithraeum's first floor was made of clay and was covered in the remains of bone, tile, pottery and coins, which date the mithraeum's construction to the latter half of the second century. Later alterations were made, such as the podium and the filling in of the southwest bench, although a precise date for these is not given. A stratum of mortar was laid over the original earthen floor in the A.D. 360s as two coins predating this period was found sealed under the new floor. The latest coin to be found in the mithraeum dated to A.D. 394, after which the building was abandoned. One of its altars was subsequently buried in a pit, although wear and frost damage suggests that it was left out in the open for some time prior to this.

G.5 PONS SARAVI (SARREBOURG)

Selected Bibliography: *CIMRM* 965-984; Walters (1974) 17-23.

Excavated

1895

Location

The mithraeum was located on a hill around 50m from the Sarre River outside of the town near a natural spring.

Structure

The mithraeum (6.20m x 5.48m) lay on a north-south axis and was built against the side of a hill. Based on two angled blocks found near the entrance, the original excavation report suggested the mithraeum had been housed under a gabled roof, and from the angle of these blocks Walters calculated the side walls stood at least 2.9m high. The building may have had an anteroom, given the paving slabs found at the entrance, while water from a nearby spring was brought here via a conduit. The mithraeum was partially submerged, *ca.* 2m below surface level being entered via a doorway (W 1.25m) which led to an anteroom via several steps. The inner sanctuary follows the standard ground plan: two benches (W 1.35-1.38m x H 0.90m x L 4.80m) elevated by limestone fragments and clay and supported by two parapet walls. The cult niche stood at the far end of the nave.

Finds

The main cult relief had been smashed into 300 identifiable pieces. Reliefs of the torch-bearers were found broken and additional smaller statues were found of headless men (possibly Mercury and Mithras), while two heads of two female statues were recovered without their bodies. Of the pottery found, a trachyte bowl bears evidence of burning; a *mortarium* had a lip in the form of a lion's head; a dark grey pot which contained ash and bird bone; a *terra sigillata* bowl depicted a hunting scene; and a lamp had an inscription reading *Soli*. Given this description of the pottery evidence, it seems unlikely it was rubbish dumped from elsewhere as Walters postulated, and actually consists of items used in Mithraic rituals.

Epigraphic Record

From two inscriptions, including the cult relief, we have the name Marceleius Marianus, but no further information about him.

Chronology

274 coins were found in the mithraeum, running from the first century (one coin) to the reign of Theodosius (394), and the vast majority of which (250) originate from the fourth century. The pottery found suggests the mithraeum may have been built in the second century, while the cult relief has been stylistically dated to the Severan period, but with no stratigraphy provided it is not possible to give an accurate chronology. It would seem that the sanctuary met a violent end, as not only the statues exhibit evidence of blunt trauma and the main cult relief was smashed, but where the cult relief would have originally stood was found the remains of a man, bound in chains.

G.6 SEPTEUIL

Selected Bibliography: Cholet (1989); Gaidon-Bunuel (1991).

Excavated

1984, 1985 and 1988

Location

Septeuil was located where the Flexanville River met the ancient road between Paris and Evreux. The precise location of the mithraeum in relation to the small settlement is unknown, but a large building, possibly a temple or baths, stood close by.

Structure

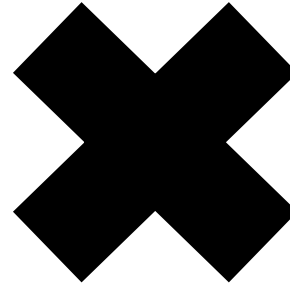
The mithraeum was orientated east to west and lay 2.60m below ground level. The structure of the previous nymphaeum (*ca.* 42m²) was divided in half, with the *cella* of the mithraeum to the south and an anteroom to the north. It was separated from the rest of the nymphaeum by a wooden partition inserted into a ditch which ran the width of the building. Two entrances existed, one of the eastside and the other on the west. The cult mithraeum consisted of a nave (W 2.60m) panelled with oak, flanked by two benches (W 1.50m) that were propped up using architectural fragments. The bases of two columns were also used to prop up the main cult image at the western end. Reused tiles were

placed in northwest corner of the room to create what might have been some form of platform, while a large hearth was also found in this room.

Finds

The cult image was found broken, the heads of both Mithras and the bull absent. Both a relief and a statue depicting the rock-birth were also retrieved. In the case of the former, the face of Mithras had been broken in, while a statuette was headless. Of the 1000+ coins distributed throughout the structure (although there appears to have been a particular concentration post-dating the destruction of the mithraeum around A.D. 378 in the nymphaeum basin), the last dated to the A.D. 388. Two fibulae, apparently military in design, were found which dated to the mid-fourth century and latter half of the fourth century. A large amount of animal bones and cooking ceramics were uncovered, indicating the hearth in the northern room was used frequently.

Figure 61: Figure 6: The Septeuil Mithraeum (Gaidon Bunuel (1991) Fig.3)



Chronology

The mithraeum was constructed in a room of an earlier nymphaeum. The first stratigraphic layer associated with the mithraeum is dated by coin finds and a fibula to the mid-fourth century, with coins post-dating 378 found in the destruction layer, giving a final abandonment date in the A.D. 380s.

G.7 TIENEN

Selected Bibliography: Martens (2004); Lentacker, Ervynck and Van Neer (2004).

Excavated

1998

Location

The mithraeum lay in the south-western edge of the *vicus*, close to a cemetery, in an area containing predominantly craft workshops. The mithraeum was surrounded on at least three sides by a palisade, and stood across the road from a plot of land containing various refuse pits and a sunken hut. A large

number of pits, dating to the second and third centuries, believed to have been ritual in nature have been uncovered in this area.

Structure

This mithraeum (12.00m x 7.50m) is unusual in that it is a rare example of a timber mithraeum. The mithraeum stood on a southwest-northeast axis and was partially submerged, with the central aisle (L 12.00m x W 2.00m) 1.20m below the Roman ground level. Given the large quantity of nails found in the excavation, it has been suggested that the central aisle was covered with boards. It was flanked by benches that do not survive, but post-holes attested to their presence. In the centre of the aisle a pit had been dug and lined with tiles, in which a container bearing burnt material was found. At the northwest end a 2.00m x 2.00m square of hypocaust and roof tiles were found ceiling a pit containing a sword, animal bone and ceramics. Two channels were cut into the floor, one alongside the right hand bench, the other perpendicular to this.

Finds

Pits located next to the southwest wall of the mithraeum were found to contain a variety of finds, including at least 89 lids; 85 dishes; 103 incense burners; 79 drinking vessels; 12 oil lamps; 14,000 animal bones and a host of other items. Analysis of the animals bones suggested the piglets and lambs were killed around the end of June or beginning of July, most likely for a celebration of the summer solstice, while the deposition of the pits indicates they were all filled in rapid succession. All of this has led to the conclusion this may have been the remains of a large ritual feast, catering for at least 100 people.

Epigraphic Record

A votive found just outside the Mithraeum bears the inscription *DIM* (Deo Invicto Mithrae) and was offered by Tullio, who was either the slave or son of a certain Spurius.

Chronology

The mithraeum bore 4 coins, one from the first-second century, the others AD 310 to 350, while the pits contained coins from the first to mid-fourth century. Beakers found in the pits date to the latter half of the third century, providing the most likely date of construction for the temple. Martens suggested that the fourth century coins were deposited after the mithraeum had been abandoned, but there does not seem to be anything to prove this. It would appear that the mithraeum was abandoned in the latter half of the fourth century, but no reliefs, sculptures or altars remain.

G.8 VENETONIMAGNUS (VIEU-EN-VAL-ROMNEY)

Selected Bibliography: *CIMRM* 909-914; Walters (1974) 5-11.

Excavated

1840 and 1868-1890

Location

Information regarding the Roman *vicus* and its topography is sparse, although the prefix ‘-magus’ may indicate a market town. It has been suggested that this may have been sanctuary area, as parts of a colossal statue have been found in the area, while a large number of *ex votos* regarding eye diseases have been found. To the south of the mithraeum lay the remains of what appear to be baths and it is suggested by Walters that this complex may have been similar to the sanctuary of Apollo Moritagus in Alise-Sainte-Reine. This interpretation is made even more likely by the close proximity of a natural spring.

Structure

Little was recorded regarding the structure. The mithraeum (10.60m x 3.40m) appears to have run a north-south axis and was accessed by a door to the south, which was sheltered on the outside by a portico. Inside, a channel ran along the west wall; the only remnant of the benches seems to have been a parapet wall.

Finds

Only an altar was recovered, with no trace of statues or reliefs.

Epigraphic Record

C. Rufius Virilis erected a Mithraic altar to his father, C. Rufius Eutactus, the *pater* of the Mithraic community, who we know from another inscription was a doctor.⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰⁴ *CIL* 13.2509.

Chronology

The only dating evidence originating from the mithraeum consisted of coins dating to the reign of Claudius Gothicus (A.D. 269-70) and a small bronze from the reign of Magnus Maximus (d. A.D. 388).

H. SPAIN

H.1 LUGO

Selected Bibliography: Alvar, Gordon and Rodriguez (2006).

Excavated

ca. 2006

Location

The mithraeum was constructed by converting rooms of the high-status house.

Structure

The mithraeum, which was orientated north-south, consisted of a rectangular *cella* (L c.15.70m x W 7.00m), and four anterooms. The foundations of much of the building were dug into the natural substrate, although the eastern end of the mithraeum was constructed on a pre-existing cement platform which had been enclosed by a wall. The north wall, where the cult niche would have been, had been completely destroyed, while there was also no trace of the entrance way from the narthex to the *cella* in the southern wall. Along the central axis of the *cella* was a nave, which had a low step in its path, bordered by five equidistant pillars on both sides. No remains of benches have been found, but the existence of low walls between the pillars and outer walls was probably intended to support wooden ones. A similar situation is suggested by the existence of low walls to abutting the pillars that could support a timber platform for the main altar. A system of drains ran under the mithraeum and a well was discovered in the one of the adjoining rooms.

Finds

A fragment of a granite votive altar bearing the remains of the word *sacerdos* was uncovered as part of the infill for later building at mithraeum's far north-east corner, thus it may not originate from the mithraeum. Another granite altar was also found the middle of the aisle where the hypothetical wooden platform existed.

Epigraphic Record

The altar found in the middle of the mithraeum's aisle bears the name of C. Victorinus Victorinus, a centurion of the *legio VII Gemina Antoniniana*, and his two freedmen, Victorinus Secundus and Victorinus Victor. The presence of the *Legio VII Gemina* suggests that the inscription dates from A.D. 212-218. Rather than be a Mithraic adherent himself, Victornius dedicated the altar in honour of his own freedmen, whom the mithraeum may have been installed for.

Chronology

The mithraeum appears to have been built in the early third century, as dated by the inscription of Victorinus. Part of the house was destroyed in A.D. 262 to make for the city wall when the city was refortified following a Frankish raid. However, the mithraeum was left intact and its coin finds run until A.D. 350.

I. NORTH AFRICA

I.1 LAMBAESIS

Selected Bibliography: *CIMRM* 138A-138F; Le Glay (1954); Clauss (1992) 248-249; Gros Lambert (2011) 94-96.

Excavated

1951

Location

The mithraeum was located outside the military camp, close to the temple precinct of the Asklepieion.

Structure

The mithraeum (8.40m x 16.40m) is situated on an east-west axis and was built from irregular stones and its interior painted with plaster. Partially submerged by 1.00m under the Roman street level, it was entered via a door from the west that lay at the bottom of two large steps. Traces of the benches (H 0.80m x W 2.00m) were found *in situ*, they ran for the length of the main room and consisted of two walls running parallel to the side of the mithraeum, in-between which stones and earth was packed. The apse (W 2.00m x D 1.80m) was situated about a metre above the floor level and was accessed by four steps. Another room (4.55m x 3.65m) was attached to the main mithraeum, accessed via a door to the southwest. This room was constructed with different building material (cut bricks) from the mithraeum, thus it would appear it was a later addition to the mithraeum. A pipe runs along the front the room's north wall and was intersected by another pipe coming from the northwest; these are likely to have fed a water basin.

Finds

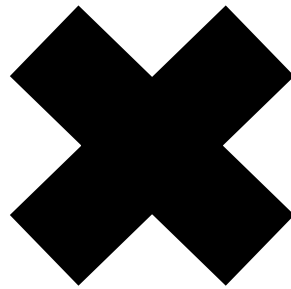
A number of altars were found in and around the mithraeum, but all other portable fittings look to have been removed.

Chronology

The only datable evidence from the mithraeum comes from two of the three altars found here. The earliest was erected by the M. Valerius Maximianus between A.D. 183 and 185. Notably, Maximianus

was from Poetovio, which was one of the major centres of Mithraic activity in the Roman world. The second altar has been dated to the early third century and was erected by an *actuarius*, while the final altar was paid for by the governor of Numidia in A.D. 303, Valerius Florus. It is possible that the addition of the small adjacent room was contemporary to one of these altars, but this cannot be verified.

Figure 62: The Lambaesis Mithraeum (Le Glay (1954) Fig.1)



J. THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

J.1 CAESAREA MARITIMA

Selected Bibliography: Bull (1978); Blakely & Horton (1987); Holum (1988); Clauss (1992) 243.

Excavated

1973-1974

Location

The mithraeum was located in storage area close to the docks.

Structure

The vault (*ca.*101m²) was divided into two along its north-south axis and consisted of a space. The mithraeum's main chamber (L 13.50m) contained 0.40m high benches running parallel along the north and south walls, and a 1.10m high bench on the eastern wall. The eastern bench was divided into two by a low wall (L 1.05m x W 0.32m x H 0.32m). In front of this bench stood an altar (0.60m x 0.60m x H 0.22m), to the northeast corner of which was found a drain. Traces of painted plaster were found on the north and south walls, as well as the ceiling. 19 small holes were cut in a line along the walls and ceiling 4.50m from the end of the eastern end of the chamber, upwards of 2.34m above the floor. At the edge of one of the holes plaster was found to have been shaped against wood, indicating a wooden structure was fitted in this place to divide this part of the mithraeum from the rest, although no vertical supports were found. Just behind this, to the east, was a small opening (D 0.45 x 0.45m) which allowed light into the mithraeum, which would align with the altar on the summer solstice the light. Another aperture (0.80m x 0.30m) was located at the western end and allowed light into the mithraeum's antechamber. At the western end of the room a stone foundation (W 3.25m) believed to mark the entrance was found, although no traces of a door survive.

Finds

A small circular marble medallion (D 0.075m) was found bearing an image of the tauroctony scenes from the life of Mithras. A white circular area (D 0.08) was found on the small wall dividing the two end benches, suggesting it had been fixed here, so that one would view it just above the altar. What is unusual is that such images of the tauroctony are very rare, except in Noricum and Upper Moesia,

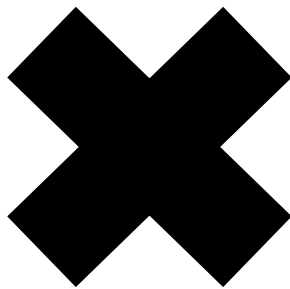
while the craftsmanship is also reminiscent of this region. The lack of any central tauroctony or other instruments indicates the Mithraic faithful removed them when their occupation came to an end.

Iconography

On the southern wall three painted scenes survived, albeit in poor condition. On Panel A (W 0.65m x H 0.50m) the vague image of two figures can be discerned, one of which is kneeling. The standing figure, on the left, appeared to be wearing trousers and a purple garment with a red border, with both hands extended to the kneeler. The other figure was painted in red and wore a cloak, his hands also extended in the direction of the opposite figure. He appears to offer him a yellow sphere separated horizontally into two.

To the right, Panel B (W 0.80m x H 0.50m), depicted two figures in similar positions; although this time they are slightly further apart. The standing figure is again in trousers, though his cloak is blue with a red edge. The kneeling figure is completely red again though wears a green and blue cape. A faint red line next to the standing figure indicates he was depicted holding something, perhaps a sword, which was resting on the kneeling figure's shoulder. Above and behind each figure were vague yellowish areas, the right one appearing to be a vase or bust.

Figure 63: The Caesarea Maritima Mithraeum (Adapted from Blakely & Horton (1987) Fig.5)



In the final panel, C, two figures were shown, both 0.43m tall, between which stands a rectangular object, (W 0.10m x H 0.15m) with a yellow disk positioned above it. The figure on the left once again holds the (?) sword, although this time it is upright. The two figures' right hands appear joined over the yellow disk. The right-hand figure, naked apart from what maybe a crown, appears to have a yellow line coming out of his head. Who these scenes depicted is difficult to ascertain. Bull suggested Mithras and Sol rather than scenes from a Mithraic initiation, but this latter possibility should not be ruled out.

Chronology

The earliest strata of the vault revealed coins dating to the reign of Nero and fragments of amphora used for wine and garum. Judging from the ceramic evidence, the vault was converted into a mithraeum in either the late first or early second century. During the third century, builders covered the top of the vault with hydraulic cement, in which stone piers (H 0.10m) were placed at regular intervals. Over these piers were placed ceramic tiles and over these marble slabs which provided the base for a new building, possibly an honorific portico. Towards the end of this century the mithraeum ceased to function and the vault was used for a different purpose; the floor was covered with a new plaster surface and traces of amphora, along with coins dating to from the late third to early fourth centuries, have been found, suggesting the vault was once again being used as a storehouse. Another layer above this containing Byzantine amphora suggests the vault's function continued in this vein after the Roman period.

J.2 DOLICHE

Selected Bibliography: Winter (2000); Schütte & Winter (2004); Gordon (2007).

Excavated

1997-1998

Location

The mithraea were located within a natural cave on a hillside outside of the town.

Structure

The entrance (H 1.4m, although probably larger when the mithraea were in active) to the cave lay on the west side of Keber Tepe, the hill upon which Doliche is situated. Mithraeum I was about 40m long and consisted of a long entrance corridor, which after the first 15m has a rather steep gradient. At the end of this is an open area of about 10m x 7m, with various basins cut into the walls (these may be remnants of the extraction phase) and the Mithraic relief against the far wall, offset from the axis of the entrance way. Mithraeum II was accessed via an entrance way on the south-east side of the corridor leading to Mithraeum I. The space in this cave is roughly 32m x 18m, but the actual space that could be used for the mithraeum was, like Mithraeum I, only 10m x 7m.

Finds

A *tabula ansata* was found near the entrance, but its 18 line inscription is unreadable. Some Greek graffiti is present on the south-eastern wall of mithraeum II, but it is crudely drawn and is just the first letters of the alphabet. Aside from a possible snake's head, no other finds were uncovered in the mithraea.

Chronology

The phases of occupation in the two mithraea have been disputed, with Gordon providing a new assessment of the material which led him to argue for a different sequence to that provided by the excavators. This discrepancy is unsurprising, as the strata of the mithraea have been disturbed and toxic air inside of the mithraea meant only limited excavations were undertaken around the main cult reliefs. It was the opinion of the excavators that the mithraea, or at least one of them, may have constituted one of the earliest to ever be discovered in the Roman world, dating to the late Hellenistic/early Roman period, with its destruction occurring when Shapur sacked the city in A.D. 253. There are, however, numerous problems with this interpretation, which are discussed by Gordon in his review of the final report. I am inclined to agree with Gordon's chronology, which is what is outlined here.

Both caves were originally used as extraction sites for building blocks, with the walls of both producing evidence of step-wise extraction and niches for oil lamps, while the ceilings of both are almost completely level. In mithraeum I, three blocks have been marked out on the wall and work had already begun on extracting them. It would appear that this activity ceased rather suddenly. Around the central relief in mithraeum I, the first stratum above the natural limestone contains impacted limestone with no finds. This stratum is followed by a thin burning layer which produced a coin of the Seleucid king Antiochus IX (114-95 B.C.). The next layer up had been greatly disturbed, with no clear difference between the strata detectable. It contained various items, including broken roof tiles, eight pieces of *terra sigillata* A from late Hellenistic/early Roman period, some glass and two coins dating to the reign of Elagabalus. A burial, which had been disturbed, was found in the north-west corner of the mithraeum, dug into the top layer, which Gordon believes may either predate the use of the cave as a mithraeum, or may even be that of a Mithraic adherent. In mithraeum II, again around the central relief, the bedrock and first two layers are the same as in mithraeum I, although the burning layer is only existent around the relief. The next stratum consisted of brown earth, which had been set down as a floor, containing more *terra sigillata* A and some local coarse-ware. Above this was a layer containing a volute lamp of the first century A.D.. Finally, the top stratum consisted of dark brown earth with debris from the city (pottery and roof tiles) with two Warzen-lampen dated to

the third/fourth and sixth centuries. Gordon believes that the *terminus post quem* of the mithraea should be dated by the coins of Elagabalus. At some point Christians entered the abandoned mithraea and vandalised the two central reliefs, replacing Mithras' face with a cross in mithraeum I and etching crosses into various recesses around the cave. The top stratum of both mithraea suggests the site may have been used as a rubbish dump in the late Roman period.

J.3 HAWARTE

Selected Bibliography: Gawlikowski (2000), (2001), (2007).

Excavated

1998-2003

Location

The mithraeum was installed into a natural series of caves lying close to a village.

Structure

The 'Vestibule' (C)

Five steps lead from the entrance to the mithraeum (W 1.50m) into the vestibule. The remains of a wooden frame for the door were found along with two columns either side of it. The right hand wall of the vestibule was covered in soot and bore two sets of horizontal holes running parallel, indicating that grille had sat here. Directly opposite the foot of the stairs was a small bench. At the north end of the room a pit had been dug into the ground 1.5m deep and *ca.*1.70m in diameter. It was partially covered by the wall, with its upper fill containing stones to support the wall. The lower half of the pit, however, is only 1.10m wide and is not covered by the wall and was found to contain mostly chicken and sheep bones, with some cattle and pig, but no dating evidence. The two fills were separated by a stone slab, indicating the pit had two distinct phases. At some point the ceiling of this space developed a crack, stretching from one side to the other. Two pillars consisting of mismatched blocks, one of which cut through the corner of an earlier stone shelf, was erected to support the roof. Between the two pillars and over the shelf a fill was found containing ash, animal bone and culinary pottery dating the late fourth century.

The 'Outer Chamber' (B)

Proceeding from the vestibule one would find oneself in a larger rectangular room (L 6.0-6.6m). The first thing encountered in this room is a square pillar (0.65m) of which only two blocks remained, while another pillar was found in the western side of the room. Gawlikowski suggested a third may have existed between them and they acted as roof supports. Against its north wall is a large recess (W 3.5m) with a stone platform (H 0.40m). On the west side of the room was a passageway, bordered by two pillars and accessed by some small steps, which led to space D. The wall to the right of this passage bore the remains of painted plaster. The north wall was painted five times (as was the walls of the *cella*, suggesting all the painting is contemporary) and was erected to cut off the northern area of the cave (E).

Cella (A)

The *cella* (L 6.45m-7.20m x W 4.80m) was separated from outer chamber B by an ashlar wall that ran north to south between faces of natural rock. In the middle of the wall was an entrance way (H 2.25m x W 1.70m) to the outer chamber, which contained two steps. At the far end of the *cella* was a niche (H 1.40m x W 1.40m) cut into the rock. The niche was bordered by two pilasters and a lintel, slightly vaulted, over the top. It was initially painted red, then plastered and whitewashed. A series of steps, which were later covered partially by the podium, led up to the niche. On either side of the niche were two vertical grooves (H 1.40m x W 0.04m) indicates where wooden shelving had existed. However, unlike standard mithraea layout, as the entrance was to the left of the niche, the benches could not run parallel on either side of it. Instead, the bench (H 0.60-0.80m x W 2.00m) against the eastern wall turns at the corner and continues along the south wall, although it stops short of reaching the western wall. The benches were plastered and reinforced with stone slabs. There was a narrow cut (H 0.50m x W 0.25m) through the western wall, located on one side of the door, which has been suggested to have been a light source for the room. The remains of a light shaft also appeared in the north-east corner of the room's ceiling, but the construction of the successive churches means it no longer reaches the surface.

Spaces D, E and F

The excavated space 'D' (15m x 20m) contained at least 15 stone pillars made from ashlar blocks (0.50m x 0.70m) piled 2.40m high to support the roof, although the pillars' original alignment is unknown, and were covered with painted plaster. The space continues into another grotto ('F'; 4.00m x 5.50m) which has been cut through at its south-western end by a foundation containing sixth century material. In this region of the cave four pits were found, two of which contained the aforementioned

finds dating to the first century B.C. and first century A.D.. Space 'E' was cut off from the rest of the space when the cave was in use by filling the gap between pillars at the north side of space 'D' with rubble, while the northern wall of the outer room also blocked the space off.

Finds

Six square altars were found broken in the rubble deposited in the *cella*, along with the cylindrical inscribed altar referred to above. Aside from the other small finds found in pits and the small statue base already described the mithraeum was void of finds.

Iconography

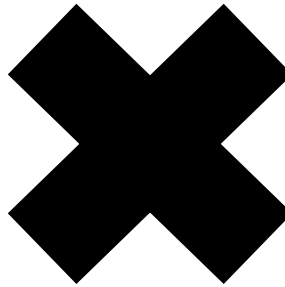
The iconography of the Hawarte mithraeum has been well publicised for its uniqueness and quantity. Scenes were painted on the walls throughout the mithraeum; the entire of the *cella*, walls and ceiling, was painted. Of the five stages of painting, only the last two can be distinctively analysed; the images of period 5 are the same as though of period 4, just redrawn slightly. Depicted are various scenes from the life of Mithras and the battle between good and evil, the latter of which is presented in the form of black demons. The good versus evil images include: the depiction of the lions devouring these demons; another image from the outer room consisting of a man in Persian garb (Mithras?) holding the chains of a short, black two-headed being, standing in front of a large white horse; and a city wall topped by various black heads, with rays of light descending on (or attacking) them. It is the eyes of the demons that have been scratched out, possibly by the Christians. Such images are unparalleled in other mithraea and are likely to be the product of distinctly local tradition which has been influenced by Zoroastrianism. Depictions of Mithras' life include: the rock birth; the tauroctony; Mithras in a tree; and Mithras holding an arrow. The scenes from Mithras life were to be found in the *cella*, while the demons adorned the walls of the other rooms, indicating there was a particular spatial arrangement. Other images, within the *cella*, include images of items representing the seven Mithraic grades (located underneath the tauroctony painting); hunters on horseback dressed in Phrygian hats chasing animals; Helios; *Transitus*; and Zeus. Little of the ceiling painting in the *cella* survives, but from the phase 4 an inscription could be discerned which read "The fortune of the [invincible] Mithras [wins!]", which may be an adaption of a hippodrome chant.

Chronology

The earliest activity from the site has been detected in space D, where a pit was found to contain ceramic material from the first century B.C. that was later covered over by a bench. In the same area another pit, possibly contemporary to the bench, was found to contain ceramics from the first century

A.D.. Another pit, located in the *cella* of the mithraeum, also contained ceramic material, along with glass vessels, animal bones and ash, from the latter half of the first century AD. This was also covered by a bench. Who it was that deposited these remains is unknown, but the deposits predate the Mithraic structure by centuries. An altar dumped amongst the rubble of the cave bears a short Greek inscription referring to M. Longinus has been matched to another inscription on an altar that dated to A.D. 142/3 which was found in a previous excavation in a modern building nearby. Neither altar bears any indications of being Mithraic.

Figure 64: The Hawarte Mithraeum (Gawlikowski (2012) Fig. 2)



The mithraeum itself appears to date to the turn of the fourth century as stratum just above the bedrock produced a coin of Diocletian and two others dating to the second century. In the mid-fourth century, alterations were made with the addition of the podium in front of the niche in cella (A),⁵⁰⁵ at which time, or after, the images were first painted onto the walls and the podium. Another stratum covers the floor level, which produced lamps and coins dating to the fourth century. The walls and podium were repainted five times, until a pedestal was added to the right-hand wall of the niche. Between the wall and the podium was a fill containing lamps and coins, the latter of which dated to the reigns of Theodosius and Arcadius (d.408). In Space D two coins of Arcadius were also found, demonstrating that the mithraeum was limited to the eastern side of the cave. The temple must have been abandoned shortly after these coins were deposited, as an inscription from the church erected above it attests to the church's construction in A.D. 421. Probably around the time the church was constructed the mithraeum was the victim of Christian vandals: the altars were broken, the eyes of the figures on one of the wall paintings were etched out and a cross was engraved on the wall immediately opposite the entrance. The mithraeum was subsequently filled in, after which the

⁵⁰⁵ Dated from coins of Constans and Constantius II.

foundation trenches for the church were cut through the fill. Parts of the mithraeum were used in the substructure of the church, such as the door jambs of the cella which were utilised in the foundation of church's narthex.

J.4 ŠA'ĀRA

Selected Bibliography: Kalos (2001).

Excavated

2000

Location

The mithraeum was situated in a cave system outside of the village. It was located in close proximity to several other buildings, two of which appear to have been military in nature (in building K 01 a Roman military fibula of third/fourth century date was found), the other religious.

Structure

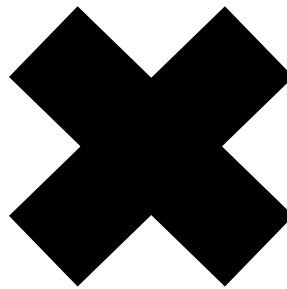
The mithraeum consisted of a natural cave in the side of a hill which was artificially extended. The entrance to the mithraeum was to the south, with adherents passing through a large courtyard. The side of the hill was covered with a 43m long façade which currently stands at 3-4m tall. This façade does not extend to the front of the mithraeum, which was left plain. The remains of a portico have been found that was at least 4m high, which appears to have been destroyed and rebuilt at one stage. Excavations revealed evidence for doorposts that had been removed.

The mithraeum is divided into two rooms, the first being a hall, roughly square in shape (L *ca.* 7m x 7m). The section of the roof's hall closest to the door consisted of flat basalt slabs, while at the far end is a lowered barrel vault supported by corbels. Through the middle of the room runs an arch, much of which has been chiselled away save for the images of foliage. The walls of the hall were made of basalt blocks which have produced traces of lime mortar and were most likely painted. Along the south and side walls are niches, about 1-1.3m off the ground and 0.6-0.8m deep. The remnants of basalt slabs used to pave the floor survive, but do not stretch to the walls, with a band of 0.4-0.6m running around the outside. Kalos believes that this space was occupied by benches, taken out at a

later stage. In the north-eastern corner of the room, where a niche should have existed, is another doorway which led to another courtyard.

Accessed via an entrance in northern side of the hall (W 2.6m), the apse, which was a natural crevice, was raised to 1m higher than the floor of the hall. Its entrance was decorated with the signs of the zodiac in an arch. It is offset to west of the axis of the main entrance, so it could not be seen directly through either doorway. Evidence for doors, in form of jambs, has been uncovered. To the west of the apse was a small space with three small niches within its walls, possibly where the sacred objects were stored.

Figure 65: The Ša'āra Mithraeum (Adapted from Kalos (2001) Fig. 4)



Chronology

Although medieval occupation had severely disturbed the site, a coin dating to the reign of Trajan was found in the mithraeum. Kalos has compared some of the architectural features of this mithraeum to that of Dura-Europos' final phase, such as the raised podium and the intention to make the inner sanctuary as cave-like as possible, which, along with the similar zodiac reliefs from both sites, led him to suggest the mithraeum was modified in the early third century.

When the mithraeum went out of use cannot be dated. The vandalism of the images on the arch, chiselled away systematically apart from those of foliage which were largely spared, and two crosses etched on the doorway indicate the mithraeum was a victim of Christian iconoclasts, but the lack of finds from the mithraeum suggests the Mithraic adherents had abandoned the mithraeum prior to this attack. Kalos postulates that the vandalism occurred in the Byzantine period, when several churches

were constructed near the site, rather than in the late Roman. A lintel bearing two crosses was also found amongst the ruins of the grotto to the south.

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