



The Public Defense of the Doctoral Dissertation of

Nirvana Silnović

on

Invicto Mithrae spelaeum fecit:

Typology and Topography of Mithraic Temples in the Roman

Province of Dalmatia

will be held on

Tuesday, 8 March 2022, at 11:00 am

Examination Committee

Chair: Matthias Riedl, CEU, History Department

Members: Baukje van den Berg, CEU, Department of Medieval Studies

József Laszlovszky, CEU, Department of Medieval Studies

Volker Menze, CEU, Department of Medieval Studies (supervisor)

External Readers:

Gabrielle Kremer, Austrian Archaeological Institute, AAS, Vienna

Aleš Chalupa, Department for the Study of the Religions, Masaryk University

The doctoral dissertation is available for inspection on the CEU e-learning site. Should you wish to access it and/or join the defense that will take place online, contact Csilla Dobos (dobos@ceu.edu)

Dissertation Abstract

This dissertation deals with the Mithraic temples from the Roman province of Dalmatia. Although the cult of Mithras is attested on thirty-six sites across the province and has been in the scholarly focus for a long time, not a single study is dedicated to its architecture. The burgeoning number of the newly discovered Mithraic temples, as well as the advancements in the methods of their excavation and preservation, have led to a better understanding of their internal arrangements, building techniques, and their topographical contextualization. Particularly, the broad range of small finds have opened new perspectives in the study of the cult of Mithras and have allowed new insights into its ritual practices, virtually unknown aspects of the cult.

The dissertation is divided into five chapters. In the introduction, terminology, sources, as well as the theoretical and methodological approach are discussed. The canonicity of the Mithraic temple is addressed and a clear set of criteria is established by which a certain building can be identified as a *mithraeum*, i.e., Mithraic temple. The final part of the introduction provides a geographical overview of the province since the physical environment is important for contextualization and interpretation of the Mithraic temples in Dalmatia.

The first part of the second chapter is dedicated to the critical survey of the historiography of the topic. Special attention is given to the important question of the origins of the Mithraic temple and the influence of Franz Cumont's ideas about the Persian origins of the cult. Based on the evidence of Mithraic

architecture from Dalmatia, it is argued against the existing linear understanding of the development of the Mithraic temple and a need for a regional approach is emphasized.

The second part of the second chapter discusses the typology of Mithraic temples, otherwise not systematically discussed in the scholarship. To avoid the multiplicity of confusing and frequently imprecise terminology applied, a simple typological categorization of Mithraic temples is proposed. A particular predilection for installing Mithraic temples in natural settings is discussed as well. The final part of the second chapter shows how the temples located in natural settings were associated with different deities both from pre-Roman and Roman times, and are, thus, deeply embedded in the cultural and religious history of the province.

The third chapter offers a detailed topographical discussion of the Mithraic temples in Dalmatia. It is divided into four subchapters, each corresponding to a different geographic region consistent with the spatial distribution of Mithraic temples: the Gacka river valley, the Vrbas river valley, the Neretva river valley, and the southern Dalmatia. A closer survey of the geography of the particular region is given, followed by a short overview of the Roman settlements and the related finds from the area, which are relevant for the contextualization and interpretation of the cult. The chapter takes a holistic approach, by which the entire evidence of the cult of Mithras from each site is considered: *mithraea* are studied as integral parts of the physical, urban, and cultural environment in which

they appear, and other relevant finds (inscriptions, reliefs, statues, small finds, etc.) are included in the discussion as well.

The sites and monuments studied in the third chapter are accompanied by a detailed catalog, where all the necessary and available information about each of the monuments is provided. An updated list of Mithraic temples from the Roman Empire has been compiled in appendix 1, with altogether 108 temples listed. The appendix summarizes the basic information on each of the temples: dates (where known), precise topographical location, dimensions of *cella* and the construction type (where known), and selected bibliography. Appendix 2 provides an updated list of Mithraic sites from Dalmatia (excluding the sites examined in this dissertation). Altogether twenty-three sites are listed, summarizing the basic information about each of the forty-five objects: type of the object and its date (where known), with an image and transcription (where necessary), as well as recording the object's current location and selected bibliography.

Overall, the dissertation bridges an important gap in the scholarship not only regarding the Mithraic temples, but it provides a comprehensive and updated survey of the Roman settlements and related sites from Dalmatia that have so far remained out of scholarly discussions.

Curriculum Vitae

Education

- 2014–2022 PhD, Central European University, Department of Medieval Studies, Budapest, Hungary
- 2013-2014 MA (with Distinction), Department of Medieval Studies, Central European University, Budapest, Hungary
- 2009-2013 MA, Art History Department, University of Zagreb, Croatia
- 2005-2009 BA, History of Art/Swedish Language and Culture, University of Zagreb, Croatia

Research Experience

- 2021-2023 Project assistant, Austrian Archaeological Institute, Austrian Academy of Sciences. Project title: “Colours Revealed – Polychromy of the Roman Monuments in the Danubian Provinces (POLYCHROMON),” ÖAW/Heritage Science Austria. Vienna, Austria.
- 2020 Visiting researcher, Institut für Kulturgeschichte der Antike, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Vienna, Austria.
- 2018 Visiting researcher, Centre for Urban Network Evolutions, The Danish National Research Foundation, School of Culture and Society, Aarhus University, Denmark.

- 2018 Research assistant, Careers Services Office, CEU. Project title: “CARERA – Supporting European Research Career Choices and Opportunities for Students and Researchers in Hungary: ERA Mobility and Career Day,” Horizon2020, Budapest, Hungary.
- 2012 Research assistant, Art History Department, University of Zagreb. Project title: “Interior of the Dominican Church in Dubrovnik: Reconstruction According to Written Sources and Liturgical Context,” Zagreb/Dubrovnik, Croatia.

Fellowships and Awards

- 2021 Twelve-month Write-up grant, CEU
- 2019-2021 The Frankopan Fund, Staples Trust, UK
- 2019 Global Teaching Fellowship Program Fellow at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest
- 2019 Doctoral Research Support Grant, CEU
- 2018 Henrik Birnbaum Memorial Scholarship Award, CEU
- 2014-2017 Full CEU Doctoral Fellowship
- 2013-2014 Full CEU MA Fellowship
- 2006-2009 Academic Achievement State Scholarship, Ministry of Science, Education, and Sports of the Republic of Croatia

Key Publications and Research/Innovation Products

“Keeping One’s Voice Down? The Social Function of the Cult of Mithras,” in *Dialectics of Religion in the Roman World*, ed. Francesca Mazzilli and Dies van der Linde, Potsdamer Altertumswissenschaftliche Beiträge 78, (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag 2021), 145-168.

“The (Im)Materiality of Divine Agency: Small and Miniature Reproductions of Mithraic Icon,” in *Pervading Empire. Relationality and Diversity in the Roman Empire*, ed. Vladimir D. Mihajlović and Marko A. Janković, Potsdamer Altertumswissenschaftliche Beiträge 73, (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag 2020), 315-332.

“Migrations of Objects, Ideas, and Meanings: The Case of the Mithras Cult.” In *Migrations in Visual Art*, ed. J. Erdeljen et al., (Belgrade: Faculty of Philosophy 2018), 111-124.

“Prolegomena to the Study of Mithraea in the Roman Province of Dalmatia,” in *Alia Miscellanea Antiquitatum. Proceedings of the Second Croatian-Hungarian Ph.D. Conference on Ancient History and Archaeology*, ed. Daniel Bajnok, (Budapest: ELTE 2017), 81-110.

“Iconography of the Mithraic Tondo from Salona Revisited,” in *Tradition and Transformation: Dissent and Consent in the Mediterranean. Selected Papers from the Third CEMS International Graduate Conference (Budapest, May 30 – June 1, 2013)*, ed. Mihail Mitrea, (Kiel: Solivagus, 2016), 56-67.

Five Key Scientific Talks and Presentations, Conference Contributions

Contextualizing “Oriental” cults. New lights around the evidence between Danube and Adria, University of Zagreb, September 2022, invited speaker. Title of the talk: “Contextualizing Mithras Cult in the Roman Province of Dalmatia.”

Sanctuaries in the Danubian Provinces. New Results and Perspectives, University of Szeged/Institut für Kulturgeschichte der Antike, Vienna, October 2021, invited speaker. Title of the talk: “The Cult of Mithras in Dalmatia: A Glocal Perspective.”

Produced and Displayed. Dynamics of Production and Contexts of Roman Sculptures in the Ancient Mediterranean Region, University of Graz, February 2019. Title of the talk: “Production, Dissemination, and Display of Mithraic Sculpture in the Roman Province of Dalmatia.”

Symposium Peregrinum: “The Mysteries of Mithras and other Mystic Cults in the Roman World, Tarquinia, Italy, June 2016, invited speaker. Title of the talk: “To Carry the Universe in One’s Own Pocket: A Miniature Mithraic Relief from the Archaeological Museum of Split.”

The 12th Roman Archaeology Conference, La Sapienza University, Rome, March 2016, panel organizer and speaker. Panel title: “Religious Diversity in the Roman Province of Dalmatia: New Approaches and Challenges.” Paper title: “Mithras and the Sacred Landscape: The Case of the Gacka Valley.”