

AKTI VIII. MEĐUNARODNOG KOLOKVIJA O PROBLEMIMA RIMSKOG PROVINCIJALNOG UMJETNIČKOG STVARALAŠTVA

AKTEN DES VIII. INTERNATIONALEN KOLLOQUIUMS ÜBER PROBLEME DES PROVINZIALRÖMISCHEN KUNSTSCHAFFENS

THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE 8TH INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM ON PROBLEMS OF ROMAN PROVINCIAL ART

LES ACTES DU VIII^{ÈME} COLLOQUE INTERNATIONAL SUR LES PROBLÈMES DE L'ART PROVINCIAL ROMAIN

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RELIGIJA I MIT KAO POTICAJ RIMSKOJ PROVINCIJALNOJ PLASTICI

RELIGION UND MYTHOS ALS ANREGUNG FÜR DIE PROVINZIALRÖMISCHE PLASTIK

RELIGION AND MYTH AS AN IMPETUS FOR THE ROMAN PROVINCIAL SCULPTURE

LA RELIGION ET LE MYTHE COMME INSPIRATION POUR LA SCULPTURE ROMAINE PROVINCIALE

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PROVINCIALE

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TYOLOGY OF MITHRAIC CULT RELIEFS FROM SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE

BY ŽELJKO MILETIĆ

The majority of scholars occupied by Mithraic studies rejected the Cumontian theory of Persian cult origins, namely his transmission from the East to Rome.¹ However, the place, time and mode of genesis of Roman Mithraism is still unexplained. Merkelbach's hypothesis, that Mithraism was engendered by a group of intellectuals from imperial *palatium*, where it was created during the 1st century AD seems very plausible.² They created mysteries and inserted some elements from Iranian religion, Platonic philosophy and very popular contemporary astrological learning. According to this theory, it is most likely that the artistic archetype of the tauroctony, the most important mythical episode, was formed in the same circumstances. Icons, showing Mithras killing a bull, along with other characters, were placed in every sanctuary – speleum.

This article deals with three types of bull-slaying scenes: types I, V and VI. While defining the iconographical and compositional features of the Mithraic icons I have used Campbell's typology.³ He defined eight types of cult icons (in regard to the composition as a whole) and five main subtypes (in regard to the realization of the tauroctony scene). Starting from the revised views on the Mithraic genesis, itinerary and theology, it was established that Campbell did not define the places of origin of the individual types of bull-slaying scenes and, especially, of their subtypes quite cor-

rectly. His opinion is that various bull-slaying compositions emerged during the process of Mithraic expansion from the East through the Greek world to the Roman West. Accordingly, subtype A (Graeco-Phrygian) originates from Phrygia, subtype D (Hellenistic) from Cappadocia, subtype C (eastern Greek), characterized by a mixture of elements of A and D, from Cilicia, subtype E (Iranian) from Pontus, and subtype B from Rome. The fact that the earliest monuments of the cult dated with certainty are known from *Nida* in *Germania Superior*, *Novae* in *Moesia Inferior* and *Carnuntum* in *Pannonia* has very strong implications for the expansion of the Mysteries.⁴ However, it is not acceptable to discuss archetypes, or their long-lasting existence in Asia Minor and some surrounding areas, as long as specimens of some subtypes have not been attested there, whereas rare examples of others from the same region are later than the western ones. For example, reliefs of subtype C were probably created in Rome and its surroundings where they occurred from the end of the 1st century AD.⁵ Reliefs of subtype C, as well as those of mixed ABC features, spread from central Italy northwards in Raetia and Noricum, as well as eastwards in Dalmatia and Pannonia.

Campbell's conclusion that type I occurs most frequently in the Mediterranean basin "where Greek influence is very strong" and less frequently in more distant provinces, is implausible and too generic.⁶ For instance,

¹ For the evolution of the critique of traditional Cumontian view of the mysteries of Mithras: R. Beck, *Mithraism since Franz Cumont*. ANRW II 17,4 (Berlin, New York 1984) 2002 ff. – R. L. Gordon, *Franz Cumont and the doctrines of Mithraism*. In: J.-R. Hinnells (Hrsg.), *Mithraic studies. Proceedings of the First International Congress of Mithraic Studies* (Manchester 1975) 215 ff. – R. Gordon, *Who worshipped Mithras?*. JRA 7, 1994, 459 ff.

² R. Merkelbach, *Mithras* (Hain 1984) 153 ff.

³ L.-A. Campbell, *Typology of Mithraic Tauroctones*. Berytus 11, 1954, 1 ff. – L.-A. Campbell, *Mithraic iconography and ideology* (Leiden 1968) 1–3.

⁴ Merkelbach (Anm. 2) 146–153. – M. Clauss, *Cultores Mithrae* (Stuttgart 1992) 115 ff; 156 f; 224.

⁵ L.-A. Campbell, *Mithraic iconography and ideology* (Leiden 1968) 21.

⁶ Campbell (Anm. 5) 13.



FIG. 1 MITHRAIC TAUROCTONY CIMRM 1879 FROM IADER.

in the regions of Thrace and Macedonia, which were under strong Greek influence, type II is dominant, and not type I. It is hard to believe that type I emerged in the area of the Greek peninsula, Asia Minor or Magna Graecia. Crucial elements determining type I were probably created in the workshops of the city of Rome. Type I monuments were numerous (more than half of all Mithraic tauroctony icons), very widespread, long-lasting and of different quality. Thus, it is certain that, after first impulses from the Italian peninsula, they were produced in a number of workshops in Italy and the provinces. (Fig. 1)

Type I cult icons and subtype C dominate in the province of Dalmatia. A combination of type I and subtype C occurs in the earliest cult icons from Dalmatia at the beginning of the 2nd century,⁷ though its use is continued up to the 3rd and 4th centuries.

The main feature of type V is a circular composition of the tauroctony surrounded by a ring of the leaves, or with a Zodiac ring. Campbell named it Upper Moesian, in spite of his own observations that it started spreading from the Dalmatian capital Salona.⁸ In addition, specimens of type V are less frequent in Upper Moesia than in, for instance, Dalmatia or in Pannonia. (Fig. 2)

⁷ B. Gabričević, *Iconographie de Mithra tauroctone dans la province romaine de Dalmatie*. *Archaeologia Jugoslavica* 1, 1954, 42–43 concluded that earliest Mithraic cult icons in Dalmatia were under the Italian influence. J. Medini, *Mithriaca Jadertina*. *Radovi (Zadar)* 24(11), 1975, 63–65. has the same opinion.

⁸ Campbell (Anm. 5) 13 ff.



FIG. 2 TAUROCTONY CIMRM 1871 WITHIN ANNULAR FRAME, FROM SALONA.

Only two monuments, both from Salona, have an entirely rounded plate.⁹ Other Tauroctonies of Campbell's type V were placed on relief's plate of heterogeneous form. I emphasise that examples with the ring of leaves were cut on plates with a half circular upper part (which is a common characteristic, especially for types II and IV, and which frequently occurred in the provinces of Tracia, Dacia and Moesia). On the contrary, Tauroctonies surrounded with a Zodiac were placed on rectangular plates. (Fig. 3) Such combinations give us reason to suppose that each of the two rings, which surrounded the tauroctony, had its own origin and different significance. The Zodiac is not placed there be-

cause of its subject or decorative value; rather, it has theological and doctrinal value.¹⁰ Structurally and symbolically it is connected with the cosmological idea of a vertical journey of the soul through seven planetary spheres up to the sphere of the fixed stars.¹¹ Mithraic monuments with the Zodiac are known from London to Sidon. Relief CIMRM 695/6 from Modena, of high artistic value, contains exceptionally rich symbolism, which points that the origins of type V with the tauroctony surrounded by a Zodiac ring should be sought in the Italian peninsula. It cannot be identified as the Upper Moesian simply because it has not been attested in that province. Monuments in which a ring of leaves

⁹ CIMRM 1870, CIMRM 1861.

¹⁰ J. Medini, *Mitrički reljef iz Banjevacca*. Diadora 8, 1975, 66–67.

¹¹ Cosmic journey of the soul reconstructed: Ž. Miletić, *Mitričko putovanje duše*. Diadora 18–19, 1997, 195 ff.



FIG. 3 TAUROCTONY (J. MEDINI, DIADORA 8, 1975) FROM KAŠIĆ NEAR IADER.

surrounds the tauroctony are more similar to type IV or II, than to V, which is why they should be differentiated from the latter and considered as a variant of the former.

A wreath of leaves (mostly olive, oaken, myrtle and laurel), standing as a usual ornamentation on reliefs and free standing sculpture, doubtlessly signified some kind of victory or excellence of individuals. Jupiter and deities are wreathed, Victoria honours a triumphant general with *corona*, and officers and athletes receive a crown of leaves for their achievements on the battlefield and in sporting races. Victorious Christogram inside of

corona was depicted in early Christian art.¹² In Roman funeral practice a green wreath of leaves was a symbol of victory over death and the afterlife. The same motif was carved on sepulchral monuments in the honour of ancestors. That is why some examples of Mithraic tauroctony - a scene explaining Mithras' cosmological role (starting genesis by the stroke of a knife and making possible human life after bodily death) - were represented within *corona*.

In the provinces of Pannonia, Dalmatia, Moesia, Thracia and Macedonia, numerous sepulchral monu-

¹² See examples of Christogram: G. Koch, *Frühchristliche Sarkophage* (München 2000) Abb. 5; 7; 57; 58; 66; 79; 89; 99; 100; 103; 106; 111; 114; 120; 171-175; 188; 196; 201; 206; 227; on sarcophagus from Ravenna (Abb. 102) triumphating Christ was offered by *corona* and Christogram.



FIG. 4 TAUROCTONY CIMRM 1893/4 TYPE I FROM VRATNICE-LISIČIĆI.

ments contain a ring of leaves; therefore it is quite possible that they served as inspiration for a circular frame on the tauroctony of diverse types. Some elements of sepulchral art evidently were incorporated into mithraic iconography.¹³ Round sepulchral portrait medal-

lions, encircled with leaves, are common in Noricum and Pannonia, whether as part of a funeral monument, or even sometimes self-standing.¹⁴ Stelae with a wreath and without a portrait, except in very few examples, were produced in Moesia.¹⁵ On small anepigraphic stela

¹³ Ž. Miletić, *The Nymphus grade and the Reverse of the Mithraic Cult Icon from Konjic*. In: Akten des internationalen Simposium "Ptuj im roemischen Reich/ Mithraskult und seine Zeit" [Ptuj 1999] = *Archaeologia Poetovionensis* 2 (Ptuj 2001) 283–288. In the same edition: A. Tengely, *Mithraic Connections of the Mythological Tombs in Pannonia*, 303 ff.

¹⁴ A. Schober, *Die römischen Grabsteine von Noricum und Pannonien* (Wien 1923) 144–154 No. 164 –166; 168–172. – W. Boppert, *Ein freistehendes Rundmedallion aus Wörms*. In: B. Djurić/I. Lazar (Hrsg.), *Akten des IV. internationalen Kolloquiums über Probleme des provinzialrömischen Kunstschaffens*. Celje 8.–12. Mai 1995. *Situla* 36, 1997, 53 ff.

¹⁵ M. Mirković, *Inscriptions de la Mésie Supérieure I* (Beograd 1976) No 40; 56; 131. – M. Mirković, *Inscriptions de la Mésie Supérieure II* (Beograd 1986) No 131; 174.

from Salona there is a portrait of a young man in a medallion of leaves.¹⁶ Poor quality busts of Diocletian and his wife Prisca in an oval ring of leaves are preserved in their mausoleum in Palast in Split.¹⁷

Type VI – the so called “Asia Minor” type – occurs with the greatest frequency in the provinces of Pannonia, Dalmatia and Noricum, just sporadically in Moesia Superior, Dacia, Germania Superior and Italy and, until now, never in Asia Minor.¹⁸ Therefore, its origin should not be looked for where monuments are not attested, but rather in Pannonia and Dalmatia where it occurs very frequently. Due to such frequency and a fact that in these two provinces monuments of this type were made mostly of local stone (meaning in lo-

cal workshops), it should be considered as the Pannonian-Dalmatian type. Some descriptive term would be even more appropriate, one that is connected with its main distinction: the abundant use of architectonic elements (columns, beams, arcades), characteristic for late Roman sculptural art. That is why Campbell’s statement that such elements were taken from Asia Minor sarcophagi¹⁹ should be rejected. After all, in the Danube-Adriatic area there is only scarce evidence of imports from Asia (mostly half fabricated sarcophagi from Prokonnesos). It is more probable that local stonecutters were inspired with monumental buildings such as Diocletian’s Palace in Split and Galerius Palace in Gamzigrad (Romuliana). (Fig. 4)

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¹⁶ N. Cambi, *Imago animi. Antički portret u Hrvatskoj* (Split 2000) 54; 327 Abb. 73.

¹⁷ Cambi, (Anm. 16) 80; 402 Abb. 128–129. N. Cambi, *Dioklecijanova palača i Dioklecijan (lik i ličnost)*. In: *Dioklecijanova palača* (Split 1994) 26.

¹⁸ Campbell (Anm. 5) 14 f; 41. Relief CIMRM 1893/4 from Vratnice near Lisičići, donated by *Lucius Antonius Menander Aphrodisieus* does not correspond to type VI, as Campbell stated on page 41, but to type I.

¹⁹ Campbell (Anm. 5) 14.