
INES SIEMERS-KLENNER, ARCHÄOLOGIE DES MITHRASKULTES. ARCHITEKTUR UND KULTPRAXIS AM BEISPIEL DER TEMPEL VON GÜGLINGEN, KREIS HEILBRONN, FORSCHUNGEN UND BERICHTE ZUR ARCHÄOLOGIE IN BADEN-WÜRTTEMBERG 16,
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Roger Beck (1937-2023) summarized the current state of the once-called Mithraic Studies in 2004 in his collective volume and argued, that the future research will need to focus on the local specificities, small finds and materiality of religion in each individual sanctuary of Mithras¹. This methodological paradigm was rightly followed by several important publications in the last two decades, focusing on the particularities of local Mithraic communities and their materiality of religion in Tienen, Aquincum, Caesarea Maritima, Martigny, Apulum, Ostia, Mariana – to name a few well documented cases². Few of these sanctuaries had a monographic publication however: the case of Caesarea Maritima or the Mithraeum from Circus Maximus are the exceptions³.

In this historiographic context, the exceptionally detailed monograph of Ines Siemers-Klenner can be considered without exaggeration as the most well documented monograph of an archaeologically attested sanctuary of Mithras. In fact, the volume presents not one, but two mithraea (Mithraeum I and II) in an unusual context, attested in the territory of a civilian *vicus* (Güglingen, Kreis Heilbronn, Zaubergäu region, Baden-Württemberg, Germany).

The volume has eight major chapters discussing 58 different topics and a special subchapter written by Frauke Jacobi, focusing on the archeozoological (bone analysis) material of the sanctuaries.

The author presents shortly the history of Mithraic research and the importance of archaeological finds and systematically excavated sanctuaries, which contributes with new, relevant data to the already existing knowledge on this cult and generally, on Roman religious communication in provincial (local and global) contexts. Since the literary evidence remained unchanged in the last hundred years, the only significant group of sources constitutes the materiality of religion. Ines Siemers-Klenner rightly argued that from the approx. 160 excavated Mithraic sanctuaries (around 43 of these are in the Danubian provinces⁴) few are systematically excavated with modern, field-archaeological methods and even less have a detailed and well documented catalogue of the small finds and the stratigraphy, which helps us to understand the real history of a building and the use of the space by a religious community.

The larger topography and Roman landscape of the region is also presented: the Roman *vicus* at Güglingen founded in the early 2nd century AD (around 115-125) was surrounded by dozens of other, presumably Roman sites, although a comprehensive *vicus* system of the region cannot be reconstructed, as several modern towns and villages (Güglingen, Frauenzimmern, Cleeborn, Botenheim, Brackenheim, etc.) were formed in the area. The region is researched since 1838 and several Roman finds were identified around, but the systematic excavation started only in 1999. The Roman *vicus* was on the crossroads of two commercially and strategically important roads in antiquity.

The first Mithraeum (Mithraeum I.) was excavated between 30th August – 15th November 1999. The small, rectangular stone building was found in the North-Eastern periphery of the *vicus* in a civilian context, although the most densely built area of the *vicus* was South of the Mithraeum. The second Mithraeum (Mithraeum II) was found south of the first one, along the same road in the eastern periphery of the *vicus*.

The second chapter (25-142 pp.) is an exceptionally detailed presentation of the architecture (the modern excavation plans and ancient construction phases) of the two mithraea. The excavations revealed Mithraeum I. with 4 consecutive plans and at least two building phases (10,9 x 7,3 m). On the earliest phase, the central nave of the sanctuary was built on a drainage and a large pit. The drainage and the water seem to represent an important aspect of the sanctuary even in the second building phase. A modern drainage channel was also identified, which affected the sanctuary in the post-Roman phases. An irregular wall in the north-eastern part of the sanctuary was added later and other structures around the sanctuary suggest a possible *temenos*. The inventory of the sanctuary was not preserved, although several elements (the podia, the remains of the altar-pediment, several layers of the two building phases) suggest changing dynamics of the interior. South of the sanctuary, another large pit with

¹ Beck 2004, Szabó 2024a.

² McCarty-Egri 2020.

³ Bull et al. 2017, Fontana-Murgia 2022. See also the short booklet on Aquincum IV: Zsidi 2018.

⁴ Szabó 2024b, 3.

ceramic material was identified (Grube 34). The datation of the sanctuary is problematic, as the material evidence is poorly preserved, but based on the findings the author estimated that the sanctuary existed from 150-165 till 230-240 AD. Despite the fact, that the building was severely affected in late Roman and post-Roman phases, the number and accuracy of the documented finds are impressive: the catalogue of the volume presents 221 major finds from Mithraeum I (some of them, such as the pit nr. 34 - Grube 34 had 113 individual pieces and fragments, ancient and modern fillings). Almost 2000 ceramic fragments were collected from Mithraeum I and its neighborhood. The quantity of the finds presented even from this, less preserved and severely affected sanctuary shows the extraordinary careful and meticulous documentation of the finds and the stratigraphy, which makes this volume a paradigmatic work in the archaeology of the mithraea not only in Germany, but on continental level.

Only 140 m south from the Mithraeum I. another sanctuary of Mithras was identified in 2002 and was excavated in three major campaigns in 2003, 2004 and 2006. The excavation revealed an impressive 9 layers (plans) of the sanctuary from the post-Roman and contemporary topsoil (upper layer) till the Neolithic layer which not only surrounded but was identified also in the central navy of the sanctuary. A cross-shaped profile walkway was established for the better documentation of 9 stratigraphic layers of the sanctuary. The majority of the Roman finds from the sanctuary were identified in layers nr. 4, 5 and 6. Mithraeum II. is an exceptional find not only among the mithraea of Germania Inferior, but on empire-scale as well: the exceptional, 9 layers documented the post-Roman layers, the collapse and intentional burning layer of the sanctuary in the mid-third century AD, the Roman layers during which the sanctuary was in use for cultic purposes and the pre-sanctuary layers (Roman and pre-Roman as well). This exceptional building history and the well-preserved cultic inventory of the sanctuary, the wooden structures and the rich quantity and quality of the small finds makes Mithraeum II one of the best-preserved Mithras sanctuaries ever discovered.

The first building phase of the sanctuary (9,5 x 4,7 m) consists of a small, wooden phase with a stone altar pediment and several postholes identified. The wooden podia of the sanctuary were unsymmetric, however this is not unusual in Mithraic contexts, as the author exemplified this with several case studies from Londinium, Ostia and Carnuntum as well. A fragment of the central relief (taf.20.) and two figurative blocks of the altar-pediment were found (taf.44-45), representing Mithras petrogenitus and a Phrygian cap, one of the symbols of the 7th initiation grades (see Felicissimus Mithraeum, Ostia). In the second building phase the sanctuary was completely rebuilt in timber, with several new altars and an impressive wall painting with geometric and vegetal motifs. The author presents not only the painting fragments from the sanctuary (taf.37-38) but presents a detailed summary of the state of art of Mithraic wall paintings and chromatic programs of other sanctuaries (103-109 pp.). A third building phase was also identified, however with less modifications. Around 230-240 AD the sanctuary was abandoned and burnt, which indicates a deliberate destruction probably in the Germanic invasion of the Limes Germanicus in this period. A well and a cistern was also identified in the presumed precinct of the sanctuary.

The 3rd-5th chapters present the major finds from Mithraeum II. The exceptional cult inventory is presented with several analogies from other Mithraic contexts, making a rich comparative study for the archaeology of the cult. The sanctuary preserved 31 stone monuments (altars, statue bases, relief-fragments, statues, columns, column bases) dedicated to Mithras, Mercurius, Epona (?) and Matrones. The association of local, Celtic or Germanic divinities with Mithras is not unusual in Germania Inferior and it shows the autonomy of the local communities in shaping the pantheon and their divine agency as well in a sanctuary. The iconography of the torchbearers (their nudity and unusual hats) is analyzed also in a global context, comparing the local, regional traditions with the empire-scale visual traditions of the Mithras iconography. In the analysis of the stone block with the relief of the presumed Phrygian cap the author mentions the analogies only in footnotes, without photographic material. Two inscribed altars are preserved, one is dedicated to Deus Invictus Omnipotens by a certain Candidus and another to Deus Invictus Mithras by Ture(ius?). Several anepigraphic altars served as light-bearers in the interior of the sanctuary with important sensorial impact in the sacralization of the space. Similar solutions of light-effects we can observe in several sanctuaries of Mithras. The most extraordinary group of objects were identified around the pediment of the central relief, where several metal and a large amount of ceramic objects (swords, arrowheads, ray-crown, metal-holders of torches, lead reliefs, 18 lamps of Loeschke IX and X, brooches). The sanctuary had also approx. 4000 ceramic fragments, consisting one of the largest quantities of such sources known from Mithraic contexts. The ceramic material is presented also in a detailed subchapter with several statistics on the functionality and findspot distribution of the material within the two sanctuaries, especially in Mithraeum II. (187-213 pp.). Siemers-Klenner suggests that the Drag.54 jar or beaker could be interpreted as a special cultic vessel in small group religious contexts. A separate subchapter discuss the special ritual deposits (known in early literature as *favissae*, although this notion was contested by John Scheid and many others). In Mithraeum II, 20 deposits were identified. Parts of a calf were also identified in the sanctuary, as well as a foundational coin-deposit. Several

deposits were identified in the podia, which indicates a dynamic, repetitive ritual activity in the sanctuary. The osteological material shows predominantly young animals (chicken – 36%, pork- 21%, 29% small ungulates).

The 6th chapter presents the sanctuaries of Mithras from Güglingen in a larger, regional context of the Neckar-area and the Limes Germanicus. Siemers-Klenner argues, that the early foundation date of the Mithraeum II (first two decades of the 2nd century AD) can be interpreted in the context of the early foundation of the Hedderheim I Mithraeum (90-110 AD) and the network of the Mithraic sanctuaries in the Neckar area (Speyer, Ladenburg, Mundelsheim, Osterburken, Wiesloch). If we accept, that the cult was founded in the last two decades of the 1st century AD (68-90 AD), it is possible, that the first or second generation of the worshippers were the founders of these early sanctuaries in the Limes Germanicus. In this case, Güglingen is particularly interesting, as it was not founded by a military community (in contrast with Hedderheim), which proves that even in the early phase of the cult diffusion the civilian groups played an equally crucial role in the spread of this new religious movement in early 2nd century AD.

The 7th chapter is particularly important for religious studies and the archaeology of religion. It analyses the material evidence of the possible initiations and ritual events of the sanctuary. The archaeological material of Mithraeum II is analyzed in the context of literary sources (Tertullian, *De corona militis* 15), epigraphic and figurative sources of sanctuaries (Santa Prisca, Capua Vetere) and special cult objects (Mainz krater), showing and proving not only the universal aspects of some of the initiation-rituals, but their local variety and the innovativity of the local communities. This dual nature of the rituals (universal, collective narrative of the so-called Mithras myth and the traditions transported through the extra-provincial diffusion of the cult and the local traditions and appropriations) reflects the global nature of Mithras cult. Siemers-Klenner compares the animal-consumption and deposits of several mithraea too, showing again the importance of local contexts and regionality in ritual traditions. In her table on the deposits in Mithraic sanctuaries (256-258 pp.) she mentions incorrectly Savaria as a case study from Romania (it is Szombathely, Hungary). The author rightly points out the intense connectivity between the Mithraic groups from the Limes Germanicus and the Danubian provinces. Based on the distribution of the Mithras Omnipotens inscriptions (predominant in Dacia, Moesia Superior, Pannonia) Siemers-Klenner argues that there could be an extra-provincial mobility and connectivity between the Mithraic communities. Although the archaeological material of the Mithraeum II seems to be a local production, their iconographic and epigraphic features indicate an extra-provincial connection. The study of Anna Collar on the network of Dolichenian groups between Asia Minor and Dacia⁵ and the rare representation of Cautes with bucranium in Boppard and Dacia⁶, as well as the distribution of the small, portable round reliefs of Mithras in Caesarea Maritima and the Danubian provinces⁷ shows an intense connectivity on extra-provincial level of Mithraic groups.

The book ends with an extraordinarily detailed catalogue, a selection of the large amount of objects documented in the two mithraea. 54 panels present the finest selection of ceramic, stone and metal objects discovered in the two sanctuaries. Several plans and stratigraphic drawings present the excavation history. The book ends with the special chapter of Frauke Jacobi focusing on the archeozoological material of the two sanctuaries with detailed diagrams and statistics of the animals consumed and their deposited bones.

The monograph of Ines Siemers-Klenner is a paradigmatic publication in the research field of the Mithras cult for several reasons: the rich and unique archaeological material of the Mithraeum II gives an extraordinary insight in the material evidence and creativity of a religious community, the civilian nature of the two sanctuaries (in a strategically positioned Roman vicus) and their possible extra-provincial network makes the case study of Güglingen a rare case in the archaeology of the Mithras-cult. The detailed and interdisciplinary presentation and analysis of the material, the precise archaeological documentation of the stratigraphy and the extraordinary quality of the plans, maps, drawings and photographs makes the monograph on the two mithraea of Güglingen a paragon for archaeology of religion.

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⁵ Collar 2013. See also: Chalupa et al. 2021.

⁶ Szabó 2015.

⁷ Bull et al. 2017.

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