

Izvorni znanstveni rad (Original scientific paper)

904:[726.1:2-162.4(497.6)]

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## Mithraism in the territory of today's Herzegovina

**Abstract:** The cult of Mithras has been present for three centuries in Herzegovina. Its significance for classical history and civilization is reflected through the fact that it continued to exist in the territory of today's Herzegovina after Roman emperor Theodosius I prohibited any forms of pagan religions in 392. Numismatic findings from the temple of Mithras in Konjic can be used as a proof. In this temple, coins from the reign of the emperor Arcadius (*Flavius Theodosius Augustus 395 – 408*) were found. Research in this paper is mainly focused on the fact that the cult of Mithras retained longer inside the Roman province of Dalmatia than it was previously assumed in the historiography, and that its specificity can be seen through the typical local iconology and epigraphic orthography.

**Keywords:** Mithraism, epigraphic orthography, distorted form of the name – *Metheri, Deus*, relief, votive ara, religious municipality, Mithraic ritual, dedicant, linguistic localism, Orientals, Theodosius I, Arcadius

**Apstrakt:** Mitrin kult u Hercegovini bio je prisutan puna tri stoljeća. Njegov značaj za klasičnu historiju i civilizaciju se ogleda u činjenici da je nastavio egzistirati na prostoru današnje Hercegovine i nakon što je rimski car Teodosije I 392. godine zabranio sve oblike paganske religije. Jedan od dokaza za to jeste numizmatička građa pronađena u mitreju u Konjicu. U tom hramu pronađen je novac iz vremena vladavine cara Arkadija (*Flavius Theodosius Augustus 395–408*). Istraživanje ove teme je usmjereno na činjenicu da se kult Mitre u unutrašnjosti rimske provincije Dalmacije zadržao duže nego što se do sada u historiografiji pretpostavljalo, te da se njegova specifičnost može sagledati kroz karakterističnu lokalnu ikonologiju i epigrafsku ortografiju.

**Ključne riječi:** Mitraizam, epigrafska građa, iskrivljeni oblik imena - *Metheri, Deus*, relief, votivna ara, vjerska općina, mitraistički obred, dedikant, lingvistički lokalizam, orijentalci, Teodosije I, Arkadije

The cult of Mithras in the territory of today's Herzegovina is just another foreign cult from the classical period that represented a piece of religious mosaic of that area in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It's important to emphasize that the cult was present

only in eastern Herzegovina, in a part of the micro-region where the Romanization process was rather slow because of its geographical isolation. Research history for this topic is quite poor, so authors like: Patsch, Gabričević, Sergejevski, Zotović, Wilkes, Imamović, Bojanovski and Paškvalin<sup>1</sup> engaged with the topic in the scope of general analysis and votive items comparison.

Literal sources, like testimonials of ancient writers, are not giving any factual knowledge about existence of this cult in eastern part of the Roman province of Dalmatia. Epigraphic votive monuments<sup>2</sup> are the only unquestionable proof that Mithras cult existed in the land of Herzegovina. Mithraism spread to Western Balkans from the area of Aquileia, and that's the reason Mithras sanctuaries from Herzegovina, conditionally said, are considered monuments of western group.<sup>3</sup> Argument that supports this thesis is the age of the monuments of Mithras from Eastern Herzegovina. In fact, modern historiography, archeology and epigraphy their dating is not questionable at all since they are considered to date from the 4th century AD. Because starting point for spreading the cult has been geographically and culturally distant from today's territory of Eastern Herzegovina, Mithraism is not reaching its zenith until 4th century AD, although it appeared in 2nd century AD. While relief shape with pointed arch can relate to Aquileia, because until now they've been found only in western provinces of the Empire, irregular form of the name "Meteri"

<sup>1</sup> Carl Patsch, "Mithraeum u Konjicu", *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja*, year IX, No. 4, Sarajevo, 1897, 629-645; Idem, "Rimska mjesta u Knjičkom kotaru", *GZM*, year XIV, Vol. III, Sarajevo, 1902, 303-333; Idem, "Arheološko – epigrafska istraživanja o povjesti rimske pokrajne Dalmacije", *GZM*, year XVI, Vol. I. Sarajevo, 1904, 33-59; Branimir Gabričević, „Liturgijsko značenje prikaza na reversu Mitrine kultne slike”, *GZM*, Vol. VII, Sarajevo, 1952, 19-25. Idem, „O nekim mitraističkim natpisima Sarajevskog muzeja”, *GZM*, Vol. VIII, Sarajevo, 1952, 141-144; Idem, *Studije i članci o religijama i kutovima antičkog svijeta*, Književni krug, Split, 1987, 161-210; Dimitrije Sergejevski, *Kulturna istorija Bosne i Hercegovine*, Narodna prosvjeta, Sarajevo, 1955, 97-98; Ljubica Zotović, *Mitraizam na tlu Jugoslavije*, Posebna izdanja arheološkog instituta XI, Beograd, 29-30; J.J. Wilkes, *History of the provinces of the Roman empire - Dalmatia*, Routledge & Kegan Broadway House, London, 1969, 276; 400-402; Enver Imamović, *Antički kulturni i votivni spomenici na području Bosne i Hercegovine*, Veselin Masleša, Sarajevo, 1977, 278-286; Ivo Bojanovski, *Bosna i Hercegovina u antičko doba*, ANU BiH, Djela LXVI, CBI, 6, Sarajevo, 1988, 139-143; Veljko Paškvalin, *Antički sepulkralni spomenici s područja Bosne i Hercegovine*, ANU BiH, Djela, LXXXIII, CBI, 9, Sarajevo, 2012, 283-285.

<sup>2</sup> Votive monuments belong to the group of so called dedicatory inscriptions (*votum, vota* - a vow) raised in honor of a specific deity, often as an act of gratitude and fulfillment of the requirements a person has done in a specific situation. They were named after the final formula *V(otum) S(olvit) L(ibens)*, which means "Vow gladly fulfill."

<sup>3</sup> Ljubica Zotović defined in her work Mithraism in Yugoslavia on the basis of epigraphic and iconographic analysis two separate groups of Mithras' monuments on the territory of the former Yugoslavia. (Zotović, *Mitraizam na tlu Jugoslavije*, 131-115). It's noteworthy that the area of Lisičići near Konjic is considered by Zotović utmost eastern border to which has spread mentioned cult from Aquileia. To this conclusion Zotović came using comparative historical method by analyzing the overall material and comparing it with neighboring Balkan provinces of the Roman Empire.

that appears only in the valley of the river Neretva, points to cultural distance from parental location of the cult. In the name of the fact, expansion of Mithraism in the Western Balkans should be considered centuries-long historical process, opposite to religious or social phenomenon.

When we talk about Herzegovina, we can say that only four epigraphic monuments dedicated to the cult of Mithras have been found until now. Although number of these monuments might seem insignificant, its value is relatively important. First it must be said that all monuments have been discovered in the upper course of the river Neretva. Two of them have been found in Konjic, third in Lisičići (also the municipality of Konjic) and the last one in Potoci (the municipality of Mostar). All mentioned toponyms are located in the valley of the river Neretva, which can confirm its importance for communication in the process of Mithraism expansion. Four monuments of Mithras that have been found in the upper course of the river Neretva lead to conclusion that Konjic, Lisičići and Potoci make spatial triangle in which the deity of Mithras was worshipped.<sup>4</sup>

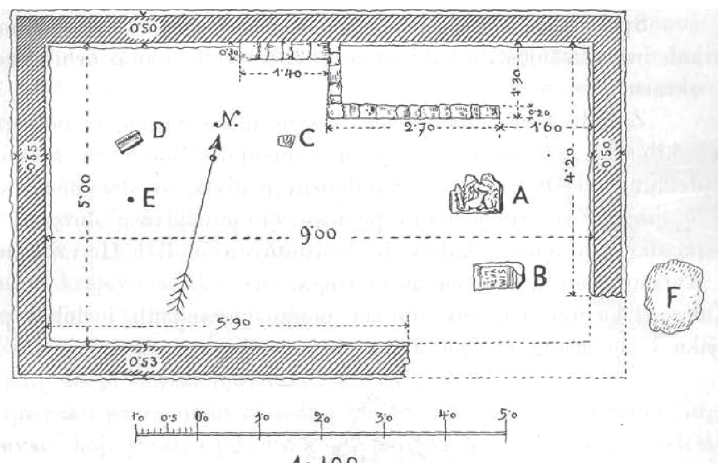
At the end of the 19th century, archaeologist Karl Patsch did systematic field research of Mithras sanctuary that existed on the right bank of the stream Trstenica which flowed into the river Neretva.<sup>5</sup> Unlike the usual practice of building Mithras sanctuaries in natural or artificial caves, sanctuary from Konjic was located above the ground in the woods, which still gave it some level of protection. Also, this area has been on quite a steep slope that was inaccessible. Patsch gave detailed description of the sanctuary's appearance and size. The sanctuary was built in the shape of a rectangle. North side of the temple was the natural slope of the hill, while the other three were artificially built. It can be assumed that for practical reasons entrance had to be on the west side.<sup>6</sup> In accordance with the usual practice that existed in the Late

<sup>4</sup> Amra Šaćić, "Kulturno-historijski razvoj ilirskog naroda Naresa (civitas Narensium)", *Godišnjak CBI*, br. 41, ANU BiH, Sarajevo, 2012, 97-112.

<sup>5</sup> Patsch, "Mithraeum u Konjicu", 630.

<sup>6</sup> Interior dimensions of the sanctuary are 9,00 x 500 m. On the eastern side, wall is preserved to a height of 1,10 m without any openings. Near the northeast corner of the building a stone arch of the lintel was found, based on whose construction Patsch concluded that entrance was wide (0,60 m). According to iron hinges he concluded that the door was made of wood, 4 cm thick. Since the stone stairs have not been found, it can be assumed that wooden ones were used. The floor was out of packed ground mixed with sand and fine crushed stone. Wall thickness varies from 0,50 m to 0,60 m. At 1,30 m from the north wall and 1,60 from the base of the temple starts subsequently built wall, that goes to the west having the length of 2,70 m and then turns at a right angle and leans completely along the northern wall, with the length of 1,40 m. Patsch assumed that there was a podium inside the sanctuary which had become rotten over time. (Patsch, "Mithraeum u Konjicu", 631-633; Zotović, *Mitraizam na tlu Jugoslavije*, 29) It's interesting to note that although 4th century is in question, that the walls were made of drywall without using concrete. Similar style of construction is evident in the Roman locality Dželilovac near Travnik to indicate that such style of masonry was present in Bosnia and Herzegovina in late antiquity.

Roman Empire regarding construction of the Mithras sanctuaries, this one was very small too. The reason for this lies in the fact that the followers of Mithras wanted to build sanctuary in Konjic that was as similar as possible to traditional underground Mithras temples. It seems that this sanctuary was partially buried too. Since there are no signs of fire and violent destruction of the sanctuary, assumption that the temple was destroyed during centuries-long collapsing seems reasonable.<sup>7</sup> Therefore it can be concluded that mentioned eastern cult gradually disappeared from the religious scene of that part of Roman Dalmatia.



**Figure 1:** Draft of Mithras sanctuary from Konjic (taken from Patsch, *Mithraeum u Konjicu*, 631)

Within the temple of Mithras in Konjic were found two monuments – one relief with epigraphic inscription and one epigraphic ara. It should be pointed out that the relief from Konjic is one of the most significant monuments of its kind, not only in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also in the European context. It belongs to the so called complex iconography and less than ten such monuments have been found by now across Europe, mainly in the Danube and the Rhine region.

The main characteristics of this relief from Konjic is that it is painted on both sides – it has obverse and reverse. Gabaričević thinks based on this relief it's possible to analyze the religious rituals of Mithras followers and dogmatic background of the religious act.<sup>8</sup> Before the discovery of equestrian relief, in archeology were known only representations of feasts by Mithras and Sol, while in this relief feast of Mithras followers can be seen.<sup>9</sup> Relief was not fixed to the wall of the sanctuary, but was hung

<sup>7</sup> Zotović, *Mitraizam na tlu Jugoslavije*, 29.

<sup>8</sup> Gabričević, "Liturgijsko značenje prikaza na reversu Mitrine kultne slike", 19.

<sup>9</sup> This finding is particularly significant because it represents the first archaeologically documented subjective news of early Christian writers of St. Justin (*Justin Martyr*) and Tertullian (*Quintus Septimus Florens Tertullianus*) who noted in their subjective representations that Mithras' followers

in order to allow Mithras followers from both sides to gain insight into the content of the relief. On the front side of the relief there is a four picture composition, which is quite rare in the Western Balkans.<sup>10</sup> Scientists believe that this represents reincarnation of Mithras. On the other side of the relief there is a major cult scene, which describes detailed religious ritual.<sup>11</sup> According to some historians, like Cumont, one of the figures on the relief represents a person of Persian origin. Also, the ritual itself is associated with the ancient Persian religion. In fact, the ancient Persians believed in the resurrection of the dead and the followers of Mithras believed in the prophecy in which on the last day on Earth hero Saoshyant will kill a bull and make potion of immortality.<sup>12</sup> Gabričević made a precise comparison of Mithraic ritual with Christian liturgy by analyzing the relief from Konjic. Since Mithras relief from Konjic could rotate it indicates that religious ritual itself consisted of several parts, as well as Christian service, which consists of two separate parts. Another parallel is the dinner where bread and wine are transformed into the body and blood of Christ<sup>13</sup>, as the blood of the holy bull is converted to elixir of immortality, as Mithras followers believed. Blood has a special liturgical significance in both ceremonies.

Besides iconographic significance of the relief, monumental inscription is also an important historical source. On the arch of the monument following inscription

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have sacrament, thereby accusing them of Satanism, because the feast was considered imitation of the Holy Christian Communion.

<sup>10</sup> One picture shows tauroctony. Between the forelegs of a bull rises a snake that goes to the wounds he received during the sacrifice. Right from the snake, in height of a wound, are preserved the head and front paws of a dog. On the bull's genitals is shown a scorpion. On the left side of the upper arch is shown a raven. Left of the scene with the bull is shown dadophor with crossed legs, which holds downed torch. In upper right corner can be seen the remains of Luna in the form of a crescent. At the bottom of the composition is visible figure of a man holding a ram for its last legs pressed against his back. On the opposite side is the same person wearing a boar on their back. Right field is adorned by a young man's representation, dressed in oriental outfits that over the altar with holy fire probably offers the sacrifice. (Zotović, "Mitraizam na tlu Jugoslavije", 29-30; Imamović, *Antički kulturni i votivni spomenici na području Bosne i Hercegovine*, 279-280).

<sup>11</sup> On the relief was a scene that clearly shows the ambience of celebrating religious ritual. In the middle of the scene is a bed (bed for "dining" in a laying position in antiquity) upholstered with ram's fleece with clearly distinctive head of a ram. For it seated two male individuals. People are bareheaded and dressed in chitons with long sleeves. With their left hand they rely on the bed, and right one is raised high. In front of them is a tripod with four cakes. To the left of the table is shown some animal, which Zotović assumes is the lion while Imamović has a dilemma whether it is a lion or a dog. Towards the table from the left and the right side two people are moving with their arms extended in front of them. The first person to the table on the left holds rhyton and the one on the right holds larger bowl. Figures closer to pillars are wearing animal masks - the one on the left raven's and another one lion's. The person in front of the raven has a Phrygian cap. (Zotović, "Mitraizam na tlu Jugoslavije", 30; Imamović, *Antički kulturni i votivni spomenici na području Bosne i Hercegovine*, 279-280)

<sup>12</sup> Gabričević, *Liturgijsko značenje prikaza na reversu Mitrine kultne slike*, 22.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 24.

is engraved:

*Deo Soli Inv[ict]o Met[h]er[i]*<sup>14</sup>

God Sun Invincible Metheri

Besides the usual attributes that follow the name of Mithras (*Deo, Soli, Invicto*) this inscription is important in onomastical sense because the name of the deity is written in disorted form *Metheri*. Since the inscription found in Potoci near Mostar has the same form of the name, it can be concluded that it is related to “*muta cum liquida*” (a specific linguistic phenomenon of narrow geographical area) for the valley of the river Neretva. Comparing other Mithraic monuments found in the area of Western Balkans, Gabričević concluded that the monument dates from the period after the reign of a Roman emperor Gallienus (260 - 268), because attribute *Deus* appears mostly in the Balkan provinces in this period.<sup>15</sup> Imamović also thinks that relief from Konjic dates from 4th century.<sup>16</sup> For classical historians this dating is extremely important because it proves that in the Dalmatian inland Christianity spread relatively slowly in the aftermath of the so called Edict of Milan after year 313, and that Mithraism retained on the historic scene of this part of Europe almost to the early Middle Ages.



**Figure 2:** Obvers of the relief from Konjic (taken from Patsch, *Mithraeum u Konjicu*, 658, Tab. II)

<sup>14</sup> *CIL* III, 14617 = *CIMRM* 1896; fig. 490 u. 491.

<sup>15</sup> Gabričević, *O nekim mitraističkim natpisima Sarajevskog muzeja*, 144.

<sup>16</sup> Imamović, *Antički kulturni i votivni spomenici na području Bosne i Hercegovine*, 284.



**Figure 3:** Reverse of the relief from Konjic (taken from Patsch, *Mithraeum u Konjicu*, 659, Tab. III)

In addition to the aforementioned relief, bones of wild boar, lamb, cattle, birds, animals that were most likely sacrificed, and coins of various Roman emperors<sup>17</sup> were also found in the temple of Mithras in Konjic, indicating the centuries-long presence of the cult in the valley of the river Neretva. The finding of 90 coins apparently originates from the common sanctuary's treasury.<sup>18</sup> Dating of money is quite simple and it confirms that this sanctuary has existed since the beginning of the 2nd to the end of the 4th century AD. The presence of Arcadian money confirms that the cult of Mithras possibly existed in Herzegovina after year 392 and Theodosius' prohibition of paganism. The assumption is realistic if we take into account the fact that it's related to one of the most isolated geographical areas in the province

<sup>17</sup> Money of the following emperors was found: **Trajan** (*Imperator Caesar Nerva Traianus Divi Nervae filius Augustus 98 - 117*), **Hadrian** (*Publius Aelius Traianus Hadrianus Augustus 117 - 138*), **Antonius Pius** (*Titus Fulvius Aelius Hadrianus Antoninus Augustus Pius 138 - 161*), **Gordian II** (*Marcus Antonius Gordianus Sempronianus Romanus Africanus Augustus 238*), **Gaius** (*Publius Licinius Egnatius Gallienus Augustus 253 - 268*), **Claudius II Gothicus** (*Marcus Aurelius Valerius Claudius Augustus 268 - 270*), **Aurelian** (*Lucius Domitius Aurelianus Augustus 270 - 275*), **Tacitus** (*Marcus Claudius Tacitus Augustus 275 - 276*), **Florianus** (*Marcus Annius Florianus Augustus, 276*), **Probus** (*Marcus Aurelius Probus Augustus 276 - 282*), **Numerianus** (*Marcus Aurelius Numerius Numerianus Augustus 282 - 284*), **Diocletian** (*Marcus Aurelius Numerius Numerianus Augustus 285 - 305*), **Maximian** (*Marcus Aurelius Valerius Maximianus Herculeus Augustus 286 - 310*), **Galerije** (*Gaius Galerius Valerius Maximianus Augustus 305 - 311*), **Constantine I the Great** (*Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus Augustus 306 - 337*), **Licinius** (*Gaius Valerius Licinianus Licinius Augustus 308 - 324*), **Constantine II** (*Flavius Claudius Constantinus Augustus 337 - 340*), **Constantius** (*Flavius Julius Constantinus Augustus 337 - 361*), **Constans** (*Flavius Julius Constans Augustus 337 - 350*), **Julian** (*Flavius Claudius Julianus Augustus 361 - 361*), **Valentinian I** (*Flavius Valentinianus Augustus 364 - 375*), **Valens** (*Flavius Julius Valens Augustus 364 - 378*), **Gratian** (*Flavius Gratianus Augustus 375 - 383*), **Valentinian II** (*Flavius Valentinianus Augustus 375 - 392*), **Theodosius I** (*Flavius Theodosius Augustus 379 - 395*) and **Arcadius** (*Flavius Arcadius Augustus 395 - 408*).

<sup>18</sup> Patsch, "Mithraeum u Konjicu", 649-654.

of Dalmatia. Significant finding alongside relief and money is votive ara with this epigraphic inscription:

*S(oli) I(nvicto) M(itbrae)*

*V[e]tur(isu)*

*Lucius /*

*v(otum) s(olvit)*<sup>19</sup>

God Sun Invincible Metheri, Venturius Lucius, vow fulfills.

Unlike the aforementioned relief, on this votive ara there is a name of dedicant whose onomastics points to oriental origin.<sup>20</sup> Since the monument is dedicated to Mithras, whose cult has been very popular in military circles, it's possible Veturius was a soldier who was in the valley of the river Neretva. It's strange that only one votive ara was found in the temple of Mithras although sanctuary has existed for many centuries. Explanation can be taken in two ways. In fact, if it's assumed that in the area existed religious municipality of Mithras' followers<sup>21</sup>, lack of this type of votive monuments shows their making didn't come alive in practice for that local religious municipality. In this case, Veturius' ara would actually represent an exception that proves the rule. Another possible reason is purely of a practical nature – votive monuments were used as a secondary building material due to their regular shape in historical eras that followed.

As arguments for the existence of organized religious municipality or community in the upper course of the river Neretva can serve the following facts. On the relief from Konjic although there is an epigraphic inscription engraved, name of the dedicant is not, which goes in favor of a thesis that it's ordered by a community whose monument was common good. Size of the temple of Mithras and discovered archaeological material in it is a good indicator that this is a public religious

<sup>19</sup> *CIL* III, 14222, 1. = CIMRM 1898.

<sup>20</sup> Onomastic term *Veturius* in the form of cognomen in the province of Dalmatia occurs a total of only two monuments, and in the form of gentile nomen appears on six epigraphic monuments. (András Mócsy, *Nomenclator provinciarum Europae Latinarum et Galliae Cisalpine cum indice inverso*, col. "Dissertationes Pannonicae", Elte Eégészeti Tanszék, Budapes, 1983, 310) This is an old Italic name, derived from the genus to which it belonged to the mother of the Roman hero Coriolanus from the 5th century BC. It was quite widespread in Italy (Géza Alföldy, *Die Personennamen in der römischen Provinz Dalmatia*, *BzN, N.F. Beiheft 4*, Heidelberg, 1969, 136). The name is probably derived from the Latin word *vetus* (*vetus, veteris* m - old) (Fritz Lochner von Hüttenbach, *Die römerzeitlichen Personennamen der Steiermark*, Leykam, Graz, 1989, 180) If the above is kept in mind, Veturius from Konjic is likely originating from the western provinces of the Roman Empire.

<sup>21</sup> Imamović's attitude is that the concentration of Mithraic findings located on one narrow region or locality clearly indicates that they were organized religious municipalities (Imamović, *Antički kulturni i votivni spomenici na području Bosne i Hercegovine*, 231). In the area of the upper flow of the river Neretva Mithras' cult is present in three different locations with specific local characteristics such as irregular naming of the deity.



object. This sanctuary was probably visited by the followers of the cult from the area around Konjic and Mostar. One of the confirmations for this hypothesis are archaeological finds in Lisičići near Konjic. Patsch, by having the opportunity to use the method of archaeological survey, has found that there was a sanctuary in this part of the river's flow. Its dimensions were smaller than the sanctuary's from Konjic, but the position of the building was mostly the same.<sup>22</sup> The most significant finding from that archaeological site is a votive monument consisting of embossed panel and votive formula.<sup>23</sup> Opposite the relief from Konjic, image from Lisičići is one-sided and the whole composition is located in an area that surpasses an arch created in deeper relief that would in aesthetic sense point to a cave where the sacred ritual was performed. The inscription is below the visual presentation of Mithraic ritual:

*L(ucius) Antonius Menander Aphro*

*disieys (i)nvicto*

*Avg(usto) v(otum) f(ecit)*<sup>24</sup>

Lucius Antonius Menander Aphrodisias, invincible sublime, vow fulfill.

In the case of this monument, dedicant is a person of oriental origin too. It's concluded based on onomastic analysis of the second part of the dedicant's name.<sup>25</sup> Cognomen Mender is of a Greek origin and is a Latinized form of Hellenic name Μέγανδρος. Addition to the name *Aphrodisieys*<sup>26</sup> reveals that Mender's origin is from a city *Aphrodisias* located in Caria in Asia Minor. Although the cult of Mithras binds to the army, possibility that the person whose name is stated on the monument in the valley of the river Neretva came as a craftsman or sculptor should not be dismissed, because in the name of a city there are graphemic elements characteristic for Hellenic - speaking region.

<sup>22</sup> Patsch, "Rimska mjesta u Konjičkom kotaru", 319.

<sup>23</sup> Height of embossed plate is 0,44 m and width 0,565 m. Mithras is killing a sacred bull on the relief, sticking with his right hand a knife to his throat. He's dressed in short chiton, with cloak thrown over his shoulders and fluttering, facing the viewer while wearing a Phrygian cap. On the left of Mithras is *Cautes* and on the right *Cautopates*. The two of them as torchbearers or dadophors symbolize sunrise and sunset. Both torchbearers are dressed as Mithras. In the upper corners can be seen busts of Sol and Luna. As well as on the relief from Konjic sacred animals appear on the monument: scorpion, snake and dog drinking blood erupting from the bull's wound inflicted by Mithras. (Imamović, *Antički kulturni i votivni spomenici na području Bosne i Hercegovine*, 456)

<sup>24</sup> *CIL* III, 14617 = *CIMRM* 1896; fig. 490 u. 491.

<sup>25</sup> Möscy in its nomenclature from 1983 did not include the name *Menander*.

<sup>26</sup> Occurrence of the Greek grapheme Ypsilon (Y) instead of Latin (i) confirms that the person is an immigrant from the Greek - speaking area. It is possible that dedicant was also the sculptor of the monument. Also, if Menander wasn't a stone mason of monuments, it is likely that the stone mason was an immigrant of oriental origin.



**Figure 4:** Votive monument from Konjic  
(taken from Imamović, *Antički kulturni i votivni spomenici na području Bosne i Hercegovine*, 456)



**Figure 5:** Mithraic relief from Lisičići (taken from Patsch, *Rimska mjesta u Knjižkom kotaru*, 319)

The southernmost point to which, according to archaeological finds, the cult of Mithras has spread in Herzegovina are Potoci near Mostar. In this area, epigraphic monument was found which by its shape doesn't fit classical votive ara and it represents a beautiful example of primitive late antique, provincial epigraphy.<sup>27</sup> Evidence of dogmatic specialty of the cult of Mithras in Herzegovina is visible in the inscription of the monument from Potoci mentioned above. The name of the Persian deity Mithra in this case is written in the characteristic form Meteri as on the monument from Konjic. Unlike inscriptions from the monuments found in Konjic and Lisičići,

<sup>27</sup> The board is 0,78 m high, 0,325 m wide and 0,135 m thick. The front side is divided into three areas. Across all three areas is carved a votive formula in a single row. (Imamović, *Antički kulturni i votivni spomenici na području Bosne i Hercegovine*, 452)

this inscription from Potoci is more complicated because in addition to usual votive formula there's also a graffito. The monument wasn't created in stone carving shop, but it's a work of an amateur. Patsch believes that it's the work of one of the three people whose name is mentioned on the monument.<sup>28</sup>

*Deo S*

*oli Invicto*

*Met(h)ri*

*Aur(elius) Maximinus*

*Flavi(us) Marcellinus*

*Flavi(us) Marcellus*<sup>29</sup>

God Sun Invincible Metheri, Mithras, Aurelius Maximinus, Flavius Marcellinus, Flavius Marcel *Graffito: Ruman*

*Marcianus ... IV ... P[i]n[us] II, ficus X*

Ruman (or Roman), Marsian ... four ... pine... fig, ten.



**Figure 6:** Votive monument from Potoci (photo by: A. Šačić)

Onomastic analysis shows that the people represented on the monument are of oriental origin and that their gentile nomen Flavius belongs to the dynasty of another Flavians founded by Constantius Chlorus (*Marcus Flavius Valerius Constantius Herculius Augustus*, 293 - 306) and Constantine the Great (*Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus Augustus* 306 - 377).<sup>30</sup> Through this monument can be

<sup>28</sup> Patsch, "Rimska mjesta u Konjičkom kotaru", 35.

<sup>29</sup> *ILJug* I, 112 = AE 1906, 0184 = CIMRM 1892.

<sup>30</sup> Names *Maximinus*, *Marcellinus* and *Marcellus* are relatively often showing on epigraphic monuments in the province of Dalmatia. *Maximus* is a name for which Möscy proved it appears on 170 inscriptions in the Roman province of Dalmatia (Möscy, *Nomenclator provinciarum Europae*

traced social stratification of Mithras' followers in Herzegovina. Dedicants of these monuments belong to the upper class of society and they have probably spent only a short period in the valley of the river Neretva. It's possible that after they've left comes to engraving of the graffito. Authors of the graffito show little knowledge of the language and there is a high probability that one of the names is written. That the graffito wasn't created for the purpose of monument's destruction but for the votive reasons, tells the fact that next to the names there are also words *pinus* (pine) and *figus* (fig)<sup>31</sup> that represent attributes of the cult of Mithras. Besides these words, numbers two and ten are also carved. Also, there are hands on sacred panel from Potoci, which can be interpreted in the context of the religious ceremony. It seems that Ruman and Marsian saw four pines and ten figs as a form of sacrificial ritual to Mithras, and stated it on the monument that has already been there. Occurrence of a dish on the panel is interpreted by Patsch as a symbol of water, one of the four elements in Mithraic belief and ritual.

### Conclusion

The cult of Mithras, as a form of religious consciousness of the Roman world, was present in Herzegovina from the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century to the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD. That long continuity of existence of this Persian cult in eastern part of the Roman province Dalmatia is confirmed by finding treasury in the temple from Konjic. At that locality money is found that dates from the period of the Roman Emperor Trajan (98 - 117) to the period of the Emperor Arcadius (*Flavius Theodosius Augustus* 395 - 408). In the 4<sup>th</sup> century, when Christianity slowly takes primacy in the Roman Empire, the cult of Mithras culminated. In this area, it is not a sporadic phenomenon practiced by individuals, but a cult that has fully organized religious municipality of it's followers. This thesis is confirmed by existence of three Mithraea in the upper course of the river Neretva. Relief that was found in the sanctuary in Konjic is undoubtedly a common good of religious community that existed in that area. This community was without a doubt associated with Mithras'

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*Latinarum et Galliae Cisalpine cum indice inverso*, 183), while *Marcellinus* is present in a form of cognomen on 36, and *Marcellus* on 33 monuments. (Möscy, *Nomenclator provinciarum Europae Latinarum et Galliae Cisalpine cum indice inverso*, 178). All these names are characterized by Hüttenbach and Alföldy throughout the Roman Empire. Name *Ruman* on graffiti is not common in the Roman onomastical system and it's possible that stone carver made a mistake and that name is actually *Roman*. Another name on graffito, *Marcianus*, is spelled correctly. It appears on 9 monuments in the province of Dalmatia. (Möscy, *Nomenclator provinciarum Europae Latinarum et Galliae Cisalpine cum indice inverso*, 178).

<sup>31</sup> The fig tree rarely appears as a symbol on the Mithras' monuments. Here it can be associated with the legend of the birth of the Persian deity. Fig tree grew along the river in which from the rock was born Mithras. According to mythology, Mitra was hiding in the fig tree where he ate its fruit, and its leaves used as clothes.

followers in Lisičići and Potoci. In favor of this reasoning goes characteristic appearance of Mithras' name on the monuments from that area in disorted form *Metheri*. Possibility that this was a mistake produced during stone carving shouldn't be dismissed, although the assumption of linguistic localism seems justified. If this is a stonemason's fault, it would represent a confirmation that Mithras' followers used the service of the same workshop and that they were all connected and organized.

Followers of the ancient Persian God Mithra in Herzegovina didn't made temples in caves, although it was a generally accepted practice. Sanctuaries in Konjic, Lisičići and Potoci were built near running water, close to the river Neretva. If this fact is considered from dogmatic perspective than the impression is made that Mithras' believers who lived in Herzegovina in ancient times, had chosen water as a key element in their ritual. As a confirmation of this can be taken appearance of the sacral panel from Potoci, where spring water is shown as a small fountain. Due to it's climate conditions, the valley of the river Neretva was ideal for planting fig, which represented sacred plant in Mithraic dogma and that's one of the reasons fig appears as Mithras' symbol on the monument from Potoci, while it was a rarity in the rest of the Empire.

Special importance of long duration of Mithras' cult in the Neretva valley lies in the fact that the process of Christianity expansion in the 4<sup>th</sup> century should be taken with reserve. It's not possible that Mithras' cult continued to exist in this geographically relatively isolated part of the Roman Empire after Theodosius' prohibition of practicing polytheistic religions in the empire from year 392. If one takes into account that some of the monuments, such as milestones, in this part of the empire were not subjected to *damnatio memoriae* although it was strictly ordered, it is quite reasonable to assume that the cult of Mithras continued to be practiced even at the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Arcadian money that was found in treasury of the Mithraea from Konjic would be a realistic argument that would go in favor of this hypothesis.

Finally, we can conclude that the cult, which came from a distant Persia, has taken an important place in diverse religious mosaic of the ancient world in the territory of today's Herzegovina.

Amra Šaćić

*Kult Mitre na tlu današnje Hercegovine***Sažetak**

Na prostorima današnje Bosne i Hercegovine, mitraistički nalazi se manifestiraju kroz pronađene mitreje, reljefne likovne predstave i epigrafske spomenike. U Hercegovini, do sada su pronađena samo četiri epigrafska spomenika posvećena Mitrinom kultu. Iako je broj spomenika na prvi pogled minoran, njihov historijski značaj je veliki. Kult se javlja samo u istočnom dijelu Hercegovine, odnosno u onom dijelu te mikroregije gdje su se procesi romanizacije i širenja kršćanstva dosta sporije odvijali zbog geografske izoliranosti prostora. U klasičnom historijskom razdoblju ovaj kult se na prostor današnje Hercegovine proširio sa zapada, iz pravca Akvileje. U skladu s tim, ovi spomenici se mogu svrstati u uslovno rečeno zapadnu skupinu mitraističkih spomenika. Onomastička formula imena božanstva, koja se na hercegovačkim natpisima u dolini Neretve pojavljuje u obliku “*Meteri*”, ukazuje na kulturološku udaljenost od matičnog kulturnog sjedišta. Nepravilnost u navođenju Mitrinog imena nađenog na natpisima u Konjicu i Potocima kod Mostara može se okarakterizirati kao “*muta cum liquida*” (specifičan lingvistički fenomen užeg geografskog područja). Reljef sa dva lica, nađen u svetištu u Konjicu datira se u IV. stoljeće nove ere, te je za historičare klasičnog razdoblja ova datacija iznimno značajna, jer dokazuje da se u unutrašnjosti Dalmacije kršćanstvo relativno sporo širilo, čak i u razdoblju nakon čuvenog Milanskog edikta (*Edictum Mediolanense*) iza 313. godine i da se mitraizam zadržao na povijesnoj sceni Europe gotovo do ranog srednjeg vijeka. Velika koncentracija Mitrinih sljedbenika u gornjem toku rijeke Neretve rezultirala je nastankom vjerske općine Mitrinih sljedbenika na prostoru današnjeg Konjica. Kao argumenti za postojanje organizovane vjerske općine ili zajednice na tom prostoru mogu poslužiti i sljedeće činjenice. Naime, na reljefu iz Konjica, iako ima epigrafski tekst, ime dedikanta nije uklesano, što bi nedvojbeno išlo u prilog tezi da je naručilac spomenika neka zajednica čiji je spomenik bio opće dobro. Veličina mitreja i nađenog arheološkog materijala u njemu dobar je pokazatelj da je riječ o javnom sakralnom objektu. Tom svetištu su vjerovatno gravitirali i sljedbenici kulta iz okoline Konjica i Mostara. Jedna od potvrda toj tezi su i arheološki nalazi u Lisičićima kod Konjica. Sljedbenici staroperzijskog boga Mitre u Hercegovini nisu pravili hramove u pećinama kako je to bila općeprihvaćena praksa. Svetišta u Konjicu, Lisičićima i Potocima bila su podizana pored tekuće vode, u neposrednoj blizini rijeke Neretve, pa je stoga vjerovatno voda bila ključni element u njihovom obredu. Numizmatički materijal pronađen u mitreju u Konjicu dokazuje da je kult Mitre poštovan na prostoru Istočne Hercegovine od vremena rimskog princepsa Trajana, pa sve do Arkadija, dakle i nakon zabrane paganskih religija.