

HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

Masaryk University

Applicant

Mgr. Aleš Chalupa, Ph.D.

Habilitation thesis

The Roman Cult of Mithras: Atlas of Sites and Catalogue of Evidence I

Reviewer

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Aleš Chalupa's name is well-known for all researchers dealing with the cult of Roman Mithras, Roman religion and recently also for those interested in network- and cognitive studies in antiquity. His contributions on the cult of Roman Mithras in the last two decades are often cited (almost 300 citations in Google Scholar, predominantly because of his articles on Mithras) and contributed to the better understanding of this popular and abundantly researched cult within the religious market of the Roman Empire. Chalupa's studies on the origin of the cult, the gender aspects of Mithras, the seven initiation grades prepared him as a scholar in the study of Mithras, although during his career he mostly focused on iconographic and theoretical aspects of the cult and rarely on regional studies or corpora studies of the provinces.

His scholarly evolution prepared him for the task to establish an addendum and supplementum for the monumental work of M. J. Vermaseren established 6 decades ago.

The importance of such an addendum was presented in several regional studies in Romania (Sicoe 2014, Szabó 2018), Hungary (Tóth 1988), Italy (Canciani 2022), Spain (Alvar 2018), Dalmatia (Silnovic 2022). A comprehensive work accessible for the international academic community is still missing and the two English volumes of A. Chalupa in preparation will be therefore essential for further studies. Modern epigraphic and other databases of figurative monuments (Iupa.at, EDH, Clauss-Slaby, LIMC Online, Arachne, etc.) are important, however not comprehensive especially in figurative monuments, small finds, contextual analyses, critical approaches on each, individual objects. Such an endeavour cannot be done by one person and A. Chalupa did not intend this: his work cannot replace the critical review or collection of the complete provincial materiality of Roman Mithras (including small finds, gemstones, portable objects, sanctuary inventories) which enriched significantly due to the large amount of systematically excavated sanctuaries in the last half a century (Egri-McCarty 2020, see also the work of Innes Klenner 2020 as a "prototype" of well-documented and published sanctuary). Such an endeavour can be made only by an international team as part of a multi-annual, international project. The reason why a comprehensive catalogue (digital, or printed – or perhaps, both) is not a one person's job is well-argued in his 26th footnote in the introduction: as my own studies show too, every single Mithraic monument (even the small finds of well-known mithraea and old, antiquarian discoveries) has an enormous historiography, with a significant amount of antiquarian or old literature (often in 5-6 languages in several countries and libraries) which can serve with new data on topography, archaeological context and possibilities of interpretation (Szabó 2013, Szabó 2014, Szabó

2018). In his short historiographic overview on each regions and provinces, the common and repetitive sentence is: “there is no up to date or comprehensive catalogue for the province” or “the material is difficult to access”. For such a grand work I would have imagine a much more detailed historiographic introduction, although several of these were published since Vermaseren (Gordon 1978, Beck 1984, Belayche-Mastrocinque 2013).

Till such an initiative will be successful, Chalupa’s corpus will be indispensable, because it offers not only the up-to-date state of research on each province, but also on the several other monuments with uncertain provenience, scattered in private collections, auction house websites and rarely accessible, local publications. The catalogue has short entries, marked with different colours (the description of colours on page 2 of the introduction perhaps could be more visual with a legend). The abbreviations, codes (004-Aeg-M-001, 2 C7, etc.) are a bit confusing in the beginning, for the published version would be necessary a much easier, new version (the dimension of footnote 7 exemplifies why it is too complex). Inscriptions are often not transcribed or presented within the text, they are partially mentioned as integral parts of each entry. Methods used in ZPE or other, canonical journals of Roman Epigraphy might be useful to separate the inscriptions in new paragraphs (at least, for those who will come from epigraphic studies will observe this, in contrast with scholars from religious studies or archaeology).

Chalupa’s work is rich in new and comprehensive maps made by Adam Martel, which often correct the topographic mistakes of Vermaseren or the previous literature. As a researcher with great experience in contemporary network studies and data visualisation in his recent publications, one would expect much more interactive maps and data visualisation too: heat maps with distribution, detailed maps of cities or specific maps of networks. Plans of sanctuaries and their urban or non-urban contextual analysis is also missing from the atlas-catalogue. Not much is presented from the small finds of the sanctuaries and the general, archaeological context, the well-excavated sanctuaries published after Vermaseren (for example, Martigny) are shortly summarized based on the French publications.

For scholars dealing with the Mithraic material, a relevant aspect is the photographic documentation. Many of the photos published by Vermaseren are bad quality or often missing, therefore the 113 photos of Chalupa’s work is also an important addendum, however not without problems. As most of the photos enlisted in his work are from various websites (museums, online databases, wikicommons, personal blogs, social media pages, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), it will be a real challenge to find out how can one publish later the photographic material in an official publication, as his Czech publication (Chalupa 2023) proves this challenge, where no photographs are published.

The work ends with an impressive bibliography and a concordance of the Mithraic finds which is helpful to understand the catalogue. Some works are cited, but I could not find in the text (Hijmans 2023).

In conclusion: the work of A. Chalupa is a great work, a detailed catalogue and atlas of finds and a useful tool and addendum for Vermaseren’s corpus. It is a starting point for a much detailed analysis of the cult of Roman Mithras, presented in several paradigmatic syntheses in the recent years (Beck 2006, Clauss 2012, Mastrocinque 2017, Bricault-Roy 2021). The work is by definition is interdisciplinary: it unites sources of Latin and Greek Epigraphy, Roman provincial archaeology, historiography and reception history and perhaps, religious studies too (although this one is least emphasized in the work, as a detailed, comprehensive analysis of the material is missing and not really intended by this work).

With the systematic modifications suggested here and perhaps a more comprehensive introduction and a preliminary study on the material, the work can be published.

Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence (number of questions up to the reviewer)

- How will you publish the photographic material presented in the volume (issues of copyright)?
- Religious Studies (history of religion, sociology of religion, cognitive studies) are missing from the book. Will you prepare a study covering these issues as an introduction or you don't consider it necessary?
- Why there are no plans of sanctuaries in the book?

Conclusion

The habilitation thesis entitled The Roman Cult of Mithras: Atlas of Sites and Catalogue of Evidence I by Mgr. Aleš Chalupa, Ph.D. **fulfils** the requirements expected of a habilitation thesis in the field of Classic Philology.

Date: 6th March 2024

Signature: