

HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

Masaryk University

Applicant

Habilitation thesis

Reviewer

**Reviewer's home unit,
institution**

Mgr. Aleš Chalupa, Ph.D.

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

dr hab. Andrzej Gillmeister, prof. assoc.

University of Zielona Góra, Institute of History

Aleš Chalupa is a recognised scholar of Roman religion. A special place in his research is devoted to questions related to the cult of the god Mithras. He has dedicated many studies to this subject. In them, he presents great research maturity. It manifests itself in the technical, but also in the methodological dimension. I would like to emphasise that Chalupa presents a not-so-frequent case of a scholar of antiquity who takes a keen interest in theoretical trends from other sciences and successfully applies them to the study of ancient religions.

It should be emphasised at the outset that Aleš Chalupa has undertaken a very ambitious task. The thematic scope of his study includes Volume I of the monumental and classic work by M.J. Vermaseren *Corpus Inscriptionum et Monumentorum Religionis Mithraicae* (CIMRM). For almost 70 years it has been an essential reference book for researchers of the cult of Mithras. Aleš Chalupa's habilitation work is a comprehensive study of the sites and monuments associated with the cult of Mithras in the Roman Empire, running to over six hundred pages. In addition to a brief, if too brief, introduction, it consists of an extensive catalogue of over 400 pages. The work is supplemented by an interesting appendix with iconographical material and an extensive, in fact complete, bibliography. The core element of the study is the thirteen maps, which verify previous findings and present the current state of 'topographical' knowledge on the spread of the Mithras cult. Equally important for researchers of Mithraic subjects is the concordance with the CIMRM placed at the end of the volume.

Since the publication of Vermaseren's work in 1956, the corpus of sources as well as research methods and methodologies has expanded. These changes have led to a revival in

the study of the cult of Mithras, which has been observing for about two decades. This research reorientation has made it necessary to undertake a reworking of the archaeological evidence of the cult of this extremely interesting deity. Aleš Chalupa's undertaking seems to me important and relevant for several reasons. Firstly, it summarises in some way, completes to a certain extent, these partial findings. Secondly, it brings researchers an intended complete catalogue of evidence and atlas of sites. Thirdly, it fits into the now popular current of research on the materiality of Roman religion. I am convinced that Aleš Chalupa's work *The Roman Cult of Mithras: Atlas of Sites and Catalog of Mithraic Evidence I* will become an indispensable reference book for researchers of Roman religion in its various aspects (e.g. provincial). Putting the work online will help it to be widely disseminated. I am preconceived that it can at least partly replace Varmaseren's *opus*.

The substantive level of the catalogue's entries deserves special mention. Chalupa has taken the effort to think comprehensively about the archaeological, iconographic and epigraphic material and the existing literature on the subject while straightening out errors and shortcomings appearing in previously published works. Chalupa's precision is demonstrated by the system of abbreviations he has employed. At first glance, it seems a little vague. However, the author applies it consistently and without exception. This makes the voluminous volume easy to use as a result. Particularly as a reference to topographical material has been included next to each entry code. The same is the case with references to iconographic material.

Out of a reviewer's unpleasant duty, I would like to point out a few shortcomings. Some are of a substantive nature, but those of an essentially editorial nature predominate. I will start with these. Some of the maps, e.g. p. 4, are not very legible. The colour coding of the tables that begin each subsection is probably unnecessary and introduces unneeded confusion. Perhaps it might be worth considering letter abbreviations, or dividing the tables into sections according to the likelihood of 'mithraism' of particular sites and monuments? Another problem is the illustrative section. Important and interesting, but in view of the provenance of the individual photographs basically unusable for a scientific work in this form.

The merit of the comment I wish to make is but one. I have to admit that, bearing in mind the methodological competence of Aleš Chalupa, which I value highly, I was disappointed with the introduction to the work. It is of a purely technical nature. The highlighted methodological part ("... and notes on the methodology"), on the other hand, are one-page notes on the method. Here, the correspondence of the content with the title is disappointing. It would be

worthwhile for the author to rethink and describe more extensively the methodological framework and theoretical perspective of his work.

In conclusion. Aleš Chalupa's work is a work that confirms the author's high competence as a researcher of antiquity. It has the potential to enter the main scholarly circulation and become a basic reference book among works on Mithraism. It presents a high level of content and, let us repeat it again, is an excellent scientific work.

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

1. Does the author intend to prepare an interactive version of the atlas?
2. What are the contemporary paradigms of research on Roman religion *sensu largo* and where does the author place his research method?
3. What are the main research streams in the study of the cult of Mithras at present?

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** requirements expected of a habilitation thesis in the field of Classic Philology.

Date:

Signature:

13/03/2024