

Chapter 12

Interpretation of the *compita*, the *mithraea*, and the Sacello del Silvano

§ 1 Introduction

The final concluding chapter deals with the *compita*, the *mithraea*, and the Sacello del Silvano. In all three cases the Imperial cult or loyalty towards the Emperor was prominent. Both the shrines at crossroads and those of Mithras were meant for people living in the neighbourhood.

§ 2 The *compita*

Dates

The oldest remains of Ostian *compita* date back to the late first century BC and the first half of the first century AD. No evidence is later than the period of Antoninus Pius. The absence in Rome of inscriptions pertaining to the *compita* after the period of Alexander Severus and the possible abandoning in the third quarter of the third century AD of the large *compitum* on Piazza dei Lari (see also § 4) justify the hypothesis that the cult was neglected from the period of the Soldier Emperors onwards.

Position and distribution

Compita could, of old, be found on all intersections in a city, *κατα παντας τους στενωπους*. They were meant for the people living in the neighbourhood, the *γελητονες*. After the Augustan reorganization each *vicus* in Rome had one shrine. An analysis of the *vici* shows that the number of shrines had been reduced by Augustus.

It is generally assumed that a *vicus* - at least in Imperial Rome - was on the one hand a district and a subdivision of a *regio*, made up of buildings, a main thoroughfare, and secondary streets, and on the other a general term for street. The fourteen *regiones* of Rome were divided in 265 *vici*. The average number of *vici* was 19, their average size 5.5 hectares (squares with sides of approximately 234.5 metres), their minimum and maximum average size per *regio* was 0.75 and 14.5 hectares (squares with

sides of 86.5 and 381 m.).¹² According to a definition by Festus the *vici* in *oppida* were separated from each other.³

In Rome the *vici* must have consisted of several blocks, not, as Harsh suggests, of one block surrounded by streets.⁴ If Harsh is right we cannot understand how streets could be called *vici*, because every street would be part of at least two districts (although even larger districts shared some streets). Also, if the *vici* were made up of one block, they would be too small. The large Ostian block V,II for example has a total area of c. 1110 m²,⁵ so that the *vicus* would have a total area of 0.444 hectares (a square with sides of 66.5 m.) plus the area of the streets. From the composition of the *vici* can be deduced that after the Augustan reorganization many crossroads in Rome no longer had a shrine. Augustus had apparently reduced the number of *compita*. This may have been done out of fear that disorders could arise amongst the officials, who might assume a political role.⁶ Such developments were not tolerated in Rome. For this reason guilds were abolished in 64 BC by Iulius Caesar, and later by Augustus.⁷ If the number of shrines was smaller, the amount of officials was smaller, and thus control easier.

Vici are documented in Republican and Imperial Pompeii, as in many other cities.⁸ The size of the Pompeian *vici* is not known.⁹ It can be

¹ Some *regiones* probably had relatively few *vici* due to the presence of large *villae*, gardens, and old burial-places (Flambard 1981, 147).

² On *vici* in general: Harsh 1937; Van Buren 1958; cf. Kornemann 1942 and Bickel 1954. On the *vici* in Rome furthermore: Jordan 1871, 80; Jordan 1878, 312-316, 513-548 with Jordan 1874; Grenier 1913, 861-863; Lugli 1952, 73-91; Marchetti Longhi 1961; Flambard 1981, 144-149.

³ Festus, De Significatione Verborum 371: *Altero, cum id genus aedificiorum definitur quae continentia sunt his oppidis quae itineribus regionibusque distributa inter se distant nominibusque dissimilibus discriminis causa sunt dispartita*. Jordan suggests *in* for *his* (Jordan 1878, 532).

⁴ Harsh 1937, 50-58.

⁵ Boersma 1985, 221.

⁶ For the political role of the *magistri* and *ministri* in the first century BC and the attitude of the authorities: Fine 1932; Accame 1942, 13-31; Flambard 1977, 115-144; Flambard 1981, 161-165.

⁷ Kaser 1971, 308.

⁸ Flambard 1981, 147-148. Pompeii: CIL IV, 60 (late-Republican) and CIL IV S III, 7807 (Imperial).

⁹ The Imperial *vicus* is documented in a painted text consisting of a consular date, an *album*, [---] *Jurbul* | [---] *vici* (lines 3 and 4), and [---] *mpit* (line 11). According to Jongman the text listed the *magistri et ministri vici et compiti Urbulani*. This would then imply that the Urbulanenses, Forenses, Campanienses, and Salinienses, groups of people documented in different parts of Pompeii - possibly voting districts -, were the inhabitants of large *vici* (Jongman 1988, 304-307. Cf. Castrén 1975, 79-82 and Mouritsen 1988, 67-68). However, whereas it is clear that the Urbulanenses, a *vicus*, and a *compitum* were in some way related, the order of lines 3 and 4 and the considerable gap between *Urbul* and *vici* argue against Jongman's Vicus Urbulanus.

established however that in the Imperial period they did not have one *compitum*, as in Rome. In Imperial Pompeii *compita* were located at successive intersections of Via dell'Abbondanza. If a *vicus* would have belonged to each, the districts would have been made up of parts of blocks (one may imagine circles around the intersections of a grid), which is incompatible with Festus' statement that the *vici* were separated from each other. For the same reason it is not possible that several *vici* used the same shrine: the *vici* would then also be made up of one or more parts of blocks. Apparently the *compita* were here, contrary to Rome, as numerous as in the Republican period and still meant for the γε_τονεζ. Consequently the relation between the shrines and the *vici* was different from that in Rome: the Pompeian *vici* could have more than one shrine.

In Ostia a *vicus* is documented at the end of the first century BC, another possibly in 115 AD.¹⁰ Furthermore an inscription from the third century AD informs us that D. Flavius Florus Veranus was *sodalis corp(or)is V region(um/is) col(on)iae Ost(iensis)*, a member of the guild of the five regions or fifth region.¹¹

The antique name of one Ostian street is known. To the northeast of the Domus delle Gorgoni (I,XIII,6), and on the east side of the road leading from the Porta Laurentina to the intersection of Via dei Molini and the Decumanus, are two stone *cippi*, which gave the road its modern name: Semita dei Cippi. The southern one is badly damaged, but seems to record the same as the northern one,¹² which is a few metres away and has the inscription *HAEC | SEMITA HOR | P R I | EST*. In SO I the inscription has been interpreted, with some hesitation, as *Haec | Semita Hor(reorum) | p(---) r(---) i(---) / pri(---) | est*, "This is the Depot Path".¹³ *Horrea* is the only sensible explanation for *hor*.¹⁴ The name

¹⁰ § 2A, Ostia nr. 6 (late first century BC); Degrassi 1947, 203 nr. 23 (Fasti Ostienses, 115 AD): *[II v]ir(i) L. Furius Manlianus, Ti. Clau[dius ---] | K. Ianuar. incendium ortum in v[ico?---] | et praedia complura deusta sun[t]* (referring to a fire in Ostia: Vidman 1957, 67).

¹¹ CIL XIV, 352 with Meiggs 1973, 335 ("guild of the five districts"). As to the date, Dessau in his commentary in the CIL prefers 251 over 202 or 287 AD.

¹² Northern one: h. 0.58; w. 0.48; d. 0.14. One of the *cippi* may have been brought to this place after some building activity. Here the Exedra I,XII,3 comes to mind, which according to Heres blocked the north end of Semita dei Cippi from the middle of the fourth century onwards (Heres 1982, 390-392).

¹³ SO I, 120. Van Essen holds the word *semita* to be a remnant of rural properties which once occupied the area (Van Essen 1957, 509).

¹⁴ The known solutions for the abbreviation are: *hora*, *hordeum* (barley), *horrea*, *horrearius* and Horatia (the *tribus*) (Calderini 1974, 292).

may refer to the largely unexcavated Horrea V,I,2, directly to the east of the *cippi*, built during the reign of Claudius.¹⁵ I know of no parallels for *P R I*. Perhaps *p(rincipium) r(egionis) I* or *p(rimae) r(egionis) i(nitium)?*. *Cippi* containing street-names are expected at the beginning of a road, not further on, where these two are. They were at an intersection however before the plot occupied by the Domus delle Gorgoni was built upon. The earliest masonry now visible in the Domus has been dated by Blake to the Hadrianic period.¹⁶ Because the data with regard to the division of the Ostian city-area is scarce, and because only one *compitum* can be identified with certainty (on Piazza dei Lari) no further conclusions can be drawn with regard to the distribution without adducing further data.

Appearance

If the appearance of the *compita* in Rome, Ostia and Pompeii is compared some striking differences come to light. Whereas those in Rome and Ostia, and apparently another one in Verona, known from an inscription, could be fairly large and have marble altars and decoration, those in Pompeii are all small, consisting for the most part of paintings on facades and of masonry altars. The Ostian altar on Piazza dei Lari differs from those in Rome in that the latter are all square and this one round.

The simple Pompeian *compita* are similar to many shrines inside the dwellings, workshops, shops and the like in that town. Spinazzola and Fröhlich have noted that the similarity also involves a detail in the paintings: the depiction of puppets.¹⁷ The puppets may refer to two customs. During the Compitalia puppets and balls were suspended from the *compita*, a custom for which the doors of houses could be used as well.¹⁸ At the end of their childhood girls gave their puppets to the Lares.¹⁹

In chapter 8, § 2A I have said that the curious lay-out of the edifice on Piazza dei Lari - consisting exclusively of entrances - and its close proximity to a *compitum*-altar justify the hypothesis that this was a *sacellum*. The relation between the *compita* and entrances has been discussed in detail by Holland, whose exposition is summarized below.

¹⁵ SO I, 234.

¹⁶ Blake 1973, 177. Cf. Heres 1982, 402-410, fig. 73.

¹⁷ Spinazzola 1953, 161-185; Fröhlich 1992, 34.

¹⁸ Wissowa 1897(1), 1874; Böhm 1924, 808-810; Holland 1937, 439; Macrobius, Saturnalia 1, 7, 34.35: *pro singulorum foribus*.

¹⁹ Scholium pseudo-Acronis on Horatius, Saturae 1, 5, 65.66: *Solebant pueri, postquam pueritiam excedebant, dis Laribus bullas suas consecrare, similiter et puellae puppas*, with Böhm 1924, 808-810.

According to the scholiast on Persius, cited in chapter 8, § 2B, *iugum pertusa ad compita figit* refers to the custom of hanging broken yokes at the shrines of the crossroads by farmers, an explanation criticized by Holland. She remarks that the breaking of yokes is very rare, and that they should last for several generations. To break a yoke intentionally every year is uneconomical, especially for the miser whose behaviour is described in Persius' satire. If the yokes were not broken, they would only have been left temporarily in the custody of the gods, and the verb *suspendere*, not *figere* - suggesting permanence - would have been used.

Holland then puts forward the hypothesis that a *iugum* was "planted", fixed in the ground, and that it was a religious structure, the shrine of the Lares Compitales. The *iugum* was a crossbeam supported by two uprights, and looked like a gate. It is sometimes mentioned in antique literature in a religious context.²⁰ Holland supports her hypothesis with two further arguments. The expressions *pertusa compita* (Persius) and *pervia compita* (Calpurnius Siculus) recall the *iugum*. Dionysius of Halicarnassus calls the Lares Compitales ῥωεζ προν;πιτοι, that is "the heroes who stand before the gate".²¹ Holland has also related the *iugum* to Janus, proposing that its primary function was to mark the entrance to the passage over which this god presided. The Tigillum Sororium in Rome, with altars of Janus Curiatius and Juno Sororia, she regards as a *iugum* and symbol of Janus. It may be noted that this structure was *ad Compitum Acilium*.²²

Mention may furthermore be made here of a famous calendar-painting from Ostia, now in the Vatican, part of which refers to a feast of Diana. She holds a bow and takes an arrow from the quiver on her back. She is standing on a round base in a gate-like structure, consisting of two torches connected by a horizontal beam. To the left of Diana are people and an animal, possibly a deer, to the right is a group of children holding torches. This may be a depiction of Diana Trivia, associated with Hecate, related to the crossroads.²³

²⁰ See below, n. 38.

²¹ Waites 1919, 15-17; Holland 1937, 430-434. The texts of Persius, Calpurnius Siculus and Dionysius Halicarnassus: chapter 8, § 2B.

²² Holland 1961, 66-73, 77-91. Cf. Wissowa 1912, 104.

²³ Nogara 1907, 72-76, Tav. XLVII; Piganiol 1923, chapter IV, especially 46-49, Pls. I and II; Helbig 1963, 366-367 nr. 467. The painting was found in 1868 in some building in the neighbourhood of the Porta Laurentina. The date is disputed. See also CIL XIV, 4, where Diana is mentioned in connection with the Traianenses in Portus, an organization whose members may have come from a quarter or *vicus* (see below n. 53 and Wissowa 1912, 252). The ground floor of the building opposite the shrine on Piazza dei Lari was protected by Diana (Caseggiato di Diana: chapter 6, § 2A, cat. A, nr. 6).

There can be little doubt that the *pervia*, *pertusa compita* were characterized by passages, and a relation with gates is also suggested by Dionysius' text. But were *iuga* gates? This is denied by Versnel, who argues that the ritual called *sub iugum missio* was not a passage through a gate, but being under a crossbeam. It could make the conquered enemy completely harmless, and, probably, serve the purpose of expiation.²⁴ *Intrare sub iugum* was a ritual most likely related to the assumption of a certain priesthood in North Africa.²⁵ It is unlikely that a *iugum* as described by Versnel is meant here: the antique sources do not suggest a ritual purpose for crossbeams during the Compitalia.

The answer to the problem may lie in external influence. The *iugum* presents similarities to the Greek δοκωνα, related to the Dioscures. The δοκωνα consisted of two vertical beams and one or two horizontal ones. This structure was a gateway of which, according to Plutarch, the uprights represented the Dioscures, whereas the lintel symbolized the brotherly love of the twins. It may originally have been a passage between the world of the living and the underworld.²⁶ Were the δοκωνα perhaps copied for the Lares? Influence of the Dioscures on the Lares has been noted by Waites.²⁷ Sometimes the Dioscures were depicted leaning against uprights,²⁸ and on some Pompeian paintings the Lares can be seen to do the same.²⁹ The possible chthonic aspect calls to mind the controversy about the origin of the Lares.³⁰ A further investigation of this problem is beyond the scope of this study.

Returning now to the edifice on Piazza dei Lari (fig. 17; pl. 81), I suggest that this structure, with its many wide entrances, is actually to be understood as consisting of six gates, and that it belongs to the class of the *pervia compita*. Further research may show if in fact the gates were *iuga*.³¹ The absence in Ostia of other large, isolated shrines from the Hadrianic and Antonine periods suggests that the *compitum* on Piazza dei

²⁴ Versnel 1970, 137-151. Antique sources: Livius, *Ab Urbe Condita* 1, 26, 13; 3, 28, 11; 9, 6, 1.2; Dionysius Halicarnassus, *Antiquitates Romanae* 3, 22; Festus, *De Significatione Verborum* 104.

²⁵ Nock 1926 (Nepheris).

²⁶ Waites 1919; Holland 1937, 431; Quinn-Schoffield 1967; Guarducci 1984. See Plutarchus, *De Fraterno Amore* p. 478 A.

²⁷ Waites 1920, 251-261.

²⁸ Waites 1919, 7.

²⁹ Pompeian *compitum* nr. 19; Boyce 1937, nrs. 185 and 265.

³⁰ See chapter 8, § 2B.

³¹ The structure may also illustrate the remark of Persius' scholiast that *compita* could look like towers (see chapter 8, § 2B).

Lari had a special status.

Deities

All *compitum*-altars from Rome are dedicated to the Lares Augusti.³² The Ostian altar on Piazza dei Lari however, erected after the Augustan reorganization, was dedicated to the Lares Vicin. (Vicinales, Vicinis, or Viciniae), which are related to a district or a neighbourhood.³³ The central god on the altar on Piazza dei Lari is Hercules. In the last quarter of the second or first quarter of the first century BC the Tempio d'Ercole (I,XV,5) was erected in Ostia, a little to the west of the spot where once was the western gate of the Castrum. One of the most prominent Ostians from the first century BC, C. Cartilius Poplicola, dedicated a statue in the temple, representing Poplicola perhaps as Theseus. The cult in the temple was oracular.³⁴ Very little is known about the Ostian cult of Liber Pater, to whom a *thyrsus* on the altar refers. One undated dedication has been preserved.³⁵

An attractive explanation for the presence of Hercules and the symbol of Liber Pater has been forwarded by Alföldi. He has suggested that on this altar the two gods are to be understood as divine forerunners of Augustus.³⁶ What makes this suggestion attractive is the fact that Augustus had introduced the cult of his Lares and Genius at the *compita*, in and outside Rome. It may furthermore be noted that Hercules can very often be found as a member of the Dionysian *thiasus* and quite often together with Pan,³⁷ that Liber Pater and Hercules can also be found

³² As far as Augustus is concerned it may be noted that we hear of the Lares and Genius Augusti, not Octaviani (Versnel 1988, 241-242). The worship of the Lares of persons instead of the Lares Familiares is also documented in relation to the *domus*.

³³ *Vicinus* and *vicanus* are derived from *vicus*, *vicinalis* and *vicinia* from *vicinus*. *Vicanus* means "of a *vicus* = village". Cf. Digesta 43.8.2.22: *Vicinales sunt viae quae in vicis (rural villages) sunt vel quae in vicos ducunt*, and Suetonius, *De Vita Caesarum*, Augustus 30: *Spatium Urbis in regiones vicosque divisit instituitque, ut illas annui magistratus sortito tuerentur, hos magistri e plebe cuiusque viciniae lecti*. See also Mouritsen 1988, 67 on the expression *vicini rogant* in Pompeii, and in general Vitucci 1946, 403-404.

³⁴ For Hercules in Ostia: Meiggs 1973, 347-350, 478. For the statue of Poplicola: SO III, 209-210, 221-228; Picard 1976; cf. CIL XIV, 315 with Meiggs 1973, 350.

³⁵ CIL XIV S, 4299 with Meiggs 1973, 347.

³⁶ Alföldi 1973, 33-34, 55. Cf. Vergilius, *Aeneis* 6, 801 to 805 (Augustus compared to Hercules and Liber); Horatius, *Carmina* 3, 14, 1 to 4 (Augustus compared to Hercules) with Peter 1890, 2982; Schilling 1942. A fragment of an undated relief with the head of Hercules and the text [---*Her]c August[---]* was found near the theatre (Vaglieri 1910, 100, fig. 7; Becatti 1939, 37, fig. 1; CIL XIV S, 4286). Cf. Bötticher 1856 for the tree and *thyrsus* on the altar.

³⁷ Wernicke 1902, 1451-1452; Bayet 1926, part 4 *passim*.

together in inscriptions, in which case they are protective deities of estates,³⁸ and that certain rites in the cult of Liber took place at crossroads.³⁹

As to the Panes on the altar, according to Bulard they represent Silvanus, the *tutor finium*, who is sometimes called Lar Agrestis. The possibility is attractive because at the *compita* the Lares (Compitales) were worshipped and because the *compita* were located at crossroads, that is in between buildings or estates.⁴⁰ Floriani Squarciapino prefers to assign the Panes to the train of Liber Pater, because of the presence of the *thyrsus*.

Participants and organization

In the late-Republican period *magistri vici* leading the cult at the *compita* are found both in and outside Rome. In a Pompeian inscription a large number, perhaps nine, is documented. In late-Republican inscriptions from Minturnae *magistri* are mentioned which are possibly related to *vici* or the rural equivalent, the *pagi*. Four groups of three *magistri* are encountered per inscription.⁴¹ In an inscription from the same period from Capua a group of four and two groups of five *ministri Laribus*, possibly related to a *pagus*, are listed.⁴² From these documents Accame has deduced that groups of *vici* had a common shrine and that several groups of officials were in charge of one *compitum*.⁴³ A better explanation is however that several shrines formed part of one *vicus*. Of old the Lares Compitales were worshipped at each intersection. We have already seen that this situation was still in force in Imperial Pompeii, and that in Imperial Rome each *vicus* had its own *compitum*.

After the Augustan reorganization *magistri vici* are documented in Rome

³⁸ Wissowa 1897(2), 2026; cf. Peter 1890, 2958-2959.

³⁹ Augustinus, De Civitate Dei 7, 21: *Inter cetera, quae praetermittere, quoniam multa sunt, cogor, in Italiae compitis quaedam dicit* (sc. Varro) *sacra Liberi celebrata cum tanta licentia turpitudinis, ut in eius honorem pudenda virilia colerentur, non saltem aliquantum verecundiore secreto, sed in propatulo exultante nequitia. Nam hoc turpe membrum per Liberi dies festos cum honore magno plostellis inpositum prius rure in compitis et usque in urbem postea vectabatur*. Cf. Ross Taylor 1912, 27-31 and Brouwer 1989, 72-76 nr. 67, 294, 308 nr. 25, 374, 385 on the Bonadienses and Spira Traianensium in Portus, related to the cults of Liber Pater and Diana. The Bonadienses and Traianenses may have been organized as inhabitants of districts, perhaps *vici*. Cf. Fraccaro 1958 (dedication to Hercules and Diana by a *magister vici*; probably from Rome).

⁴⁰ Bulard 1923, esp. 478-483.

⁴¹ Bömer - Herz 1981, 101-105.

⁴² CIL X, 3789 with Bömer - Herz 1981, 98-101 and Flambard 1983, 78.

⁴³ Accame 1942, 17-20.

only, with one exception: in an inscription from Spoletium they occur next to *compitales*. Outside Rome Augustus had given other titles to the officials leading the cult. This is a curious phenomenon: the Republican title was preserved in Rome, where the number of *compita* had been reduced, and abolished in cities where each intersection could still have a shrine. A possible explanation is suggested by the situation in Spoletium. The wording of the inscription may imply that here the *magistri* performed certain non-religious tasks, whereas the *compitales* were religious officials. Perhaps then the distinction between the *magistri* in Rome and the officials in charge of the cult outside Rome is that the former had to perform non-religious tasks as well.⁴⁴

In Ostia *magistri vici* are documented in the late-Republican period. One or more *magistri* are mentioned on the altar on Piazza dei Lari, from the first half of the first century AD. We hear of *magistri anni primi* during the reign of Claudius, in 51 AD. According to Bloch this title and the dedication of the altar on the Piazza to the Lares Vicin. imply that the cult of the Lares Augusti was introduced at the Ostian *compita* as late as 51 AD. He recalls the attention paid to the harbour by Claudius (let it suffice to mention the building of Portus), and a tendency to return to tradition in his religious policy.⁴⁵ It is unlikely however that Augustus would have skipped the harbour of Rome when introducing his household gods at the *compita*. The Lares Augusti may have been painted on a *sacellum* accompanying the altar.⁴⁶

The exceptional shape of the altar on Piazza dei Lari - it is round instead of square -, and the dedication to the Lares Vicin. suggest that the cult had in Ostia not been reorganized as in Rome, that, in other words, the *magistri* were not *magistri vici*, and that, presumably, the Ostian *vici* could have several shrines. The title *magistri anni primi* may indicate that in 51 AD the Ostian cult was modelled after that in Rome.⁴⁷ If that is so however, it is difficult to understand why the *magistri* did not proudly record their new title: *magistri vici*. Perhaps we must assume therefore that the inscriptions of the *magistri anni primi* belong to a shrine built at a crossroads which previously did not have a *compitum*, or to a shrine in a new *vicus*.

By the cult at the *compita* society was simultaneously divided and bound

⁴⁴ Cf. Wissowa 1912, 230; Bleicken 1958, 2482; Bömer - Herz 1981, 38-39.

⁴⁵ Bloch 1962, 221-223. Return to tradition: Scramuzza 1940, 147-150.

⁴⁶ There are two pairs of Lares in the painting of *compitum* 18 in Pompeii.

⁴⁷ It may be noted that a date of c. 50 AD has been suggested for the altar on Piazza dei Lari, and that the Semita Horreorum may have been named after Claudian *horrea*.

together. The eventual restriction of the office of *magister* to freedmen, and of that of *minister* to slaves implies a social dividing line between slaves and freed slaves, but simultaneously the existence of a social group made up of both slaves and former slaves. The areas served by the *compita* integrated the participants: all those living in the neighbourhood of the shrine, free and unfree, rich and poor.⁴⁸ After the introduction of Augustus' household gods at the shrines the participants in a way became members of the *domus* of the Emperor, in which the master and his servants lived together. The Emperor had now become the true overseer of the districts. From that point of view it is significant that the disappearance of the cult coincides with the crisis of Imperial government in the third century.

§ 3 The *mithraea*

Dates

The sixteen Ostian *mithraea* were steadily built and modified from the middle of the second century AD up to the second half of the third. Unexcavated shrines may of course prove to be earlier or later, but given what is known at present it may be assumed that chronologically the development in Ostia did not differ much from that in Rome, where the earliest evidence is from the period of Trajan and the latest from the period of Constantine.

Position and distribution

The even distribution of the *mithraea* over Ostia has always led archaeologists to the conclusion that they were meant for people in the neighbourhood: if the number of adherents grew too large a new *mithraeum* was built.⁴⁹ The similar size of the shrines (fig. 16) leads to the same conclusion: if the shrines would have been related to people from one building, such as the workers in a store building, large fluctuations in their capacity would be inevitable. There are on the other hand some indications that at least not all *mithraea* were meant for all potential, male adherents in the neighbourhood. The Mitreo di Fructosus is a shrine where Mithras was worshipped as the protective deity of a guild, witness its location: it is the central shrine in a guild-seat.⁵⁰ The Mitreo del Palazzo Imperiale

⁴⁸ Cf. the *cultores imaginum Caesaris nostri, qui sunt in vico Stramentario*, mentioned in an inscription from Truentum (EE 8, nr. 210).

⁴⁹ See e.g. Becatti 1954, 133; Schreiber 1967, 33.

⁵⁰ Outside Ostia further instances of Mithras in the capacity of protective deity of guilds (possibly *collegia funeraticia*) are known (Bömer - Herz 1981, 163-164).

I must have been meant for the personnel working in the palace - Imperial slaves and freedmen - and/or the Emperor, because the shrine is in the heart of the residence, in between and a little to the west of its two courtyards. The names known from this *mithraeum* are not those of Imperial slaves or freedmen (C. Caelius Hermeros, *antistes*, and L. Agrius Calendio, who had financed the floor mosaic⁵¹), but it is possible that the leaders in this shrine came from outside the palace.⁵² Finally the relation between *mithraea* in Rome and barracks should be remembered.

Two conclusions must then be drawn. First of all the eventual even distribution and similar size of the shrines indicate that they were meant for all potential adherents in the neighbourhood. Secondly at least two shrines were meant for groups composed in a different way. One of these, the Mitreo del Palazzo Imperiale I, has about the average capacity (c. 40), but the second one, the Mitreo di Fructosus, is the smallest, with its maximum capacity of approximately 18 people, and it is tempting to think here of a relation between the size of the guild and that of the shrine. This difference in composition of the groups of adherents is perhaps the explanation for the two exceptions to the even distribution: the shrine in the Caseggiato di Diana may have been in a guild-seat,⁵³ while its neighbour, the Mitreo di Menandro, may have been meant for the neighbourhood. Similarly, the Mitreo del Palazzo Imperiale II may have drawn adherents from outside the palace, contrary to the other shrine in the same building.

Deities

In the cult of Mithras loyalty towards the Emperor is apparent from a large number of dedications for his well-being.⁵⁴ From the Mitreo della Planta Pedis in Ostia comes a dedication *pr(o) sal(ute) Aug(ustorum duorum)*, from Florius Hermadio, *sacerdos*.⁵⁵

Participants and organization

The seclusion of the *mithraea* points to a withdrawal of the initiated from society, a voluntary withdrawal, because the cult was not regarded with

⁵¹ CIL XIV, 56.57.58.59; Becatti 1954, 54.

⁵² C. Caelius Hermeros, in 162 AD *antistes* in the palace, appears at the end of the second century in the Mitreo delle Pareti Dipinte, again as *antistes* (Becatti 1954, 67).

⁵³ See chapter 6, § 2A, catalogue A, nrs. 6 and 7.

⁵⁴ Sfameni Gasparro 1979, 383.

⁵⁵ Becatti 1954, 82.

hostility by the non-initiated.⁵⁶ There is an obvious link here with the fact that the cult of Mithras was a mystery cult. But how radical was the withdrawal: did it take place within the existing social framework of society, or was this framework rejected? Was the withdrawal to the *spelaeum*, like the worship at the *compita*, an aspect of life in the neighbourhood, or an alternative?⁵⁷

We have seen that the pantheon was accepted by the initiates, and that loyalty towards the Emperor was an important feature of the cult. Furthermore Gordon has argued that the social structure in the shrines imitated the social hierarchy of everyday life, in the army, in the Imperial administrative service and in the household.⁵⁸ Let it suffice to mention two elements from his argumentation here. First of all the structure inside the shrines was based on authority, as can be deduced from the system of initiatory grades. The authority of the *pater* was greatest. Thus the symbols referring to the grade *pater* in the floor mosaic of the Mitreo di Felicissimus express the idea of rule.⁵⁹ From the Mitreo di Menandro comes an inscription set up by a certain Diocles *ob honorem C. Lucreti Menandri patris*.⁶⁰ The most important man in the cult in Ostia was called *pater patrum*. Secondly, from both the Ostian and other material can be deduced that there was a relation between status in the outside world and inside the *mithraeum*: the more important men inside were also more important outside.⁶¹ Many adherents never reached the top of the hierarchy.⁶² A major distinction between the higher and lower grades of initiation is indicated by partitions separating the back and front sections of the benches, found in several Ostian shrines.⁶³ Thus Laeuchli concludes: "This was by no means a radical withdrawal. The merchants and slaves continued their business happily after finding communal and psychological satisfaction. It was the genius of this urbanized, Romanized Mithraism to offer man a new life by leaving him right where he was".⁶⁴

Like the cult at the *compita* Mithraism integrated and divided, witness the hierarchy inside the *mithraea*, witness also the absence of the upper

⁵⁶ Gordon 1972, 102.

⁵⁷ Cf. on mithraism and society Beck 1984, 2093-2094.

⁵⁸ Gordon 1972, esp. 103-104.

⁵⁹ Gordon 1972, 109.

⁶⁰ Becatti 1954, 20. Cf. CIL XIV S, 4315, with Becatti 1954, 130.

⁶¹ Gordon 1972, 109.

⁶² Gordon 1972, 100.

⁶³ Groh 1967, 19; Stewardson - Saunders 1967, 82.

⁶⁴ Laeuchli 1967(2), 64.

class (setting aside the late-fourth century revival in Rome), which accentuated the notion of the lower classes. Again the Emperor features prominently. One may recall here that in the Ostian Imperial Palace two shrines are found, which may well have been financed by the Emperor.⁶⁵ Commodus had even been initiated in the mysteries.⁶⁶ It is likely that the conversion of Constantine brought down the cult.

§ 4 The Sacello del Silvano

Deities

In the Sacello del Silvano we again find the Imperial cult. The Severan date of the shrine is not surprising. The importance of the Imperial cult in this period has recently been described by Fishwick. The association, assimilation, or identification of the Emperor with deities, which had begun during the reign of Augustus, culminated under the Severan Emperors. It now took place on a larger scale and more frequently than before. The court ceremonial became increasingly elaborate. Extravagant epithets were more often used, worded in bombastic language. In short, the Emperor was closer to the gods than before.⁶⁷

Participants and organization

The Imperial cult is documented in the Sacello from the reign of Caracalla onwards. The initiator of the additions under Caracalla remains anonymous. It may even have been the *corpus pistorum*. In any case the location of the shrine, in the rear part of a bakery, indicates that we are not confronted with propaganda, or flattery of the Emperor. Caracalla's order to be depicted as Alexander the Great must have appealed to the workers.⁶⁸ Whether Silvanus was regarded as Silvanus Aug. cannot be

⁶⁵ If Coarelli is right in supposing that the Mitreo delle Sette Sfere was built around 150 AD by Apuleius, this would be the earliest dated *mithraeum* in Ostia. The shrines in the palace were built some ten to forty years later.

⁶⁶ SHA, Commodus 9, with Meiggs 1973, 374 and Simon 1979.

⁶⁷ Fishwick 1987(2), 335-347. Furthermore on the religious policy and the Imperial cult in the Severan period: Cerfaux - Tondriau 1957, 367-373; Taeger 1960, 407-434, 443; Palmer 1978; Turcan 1978. Cf. for Caracalla Dio 78, 16, 5 (corrupt) and SHA, Caracalla 5, 7: *Damnati sunt eo tempore qui urinam in eo loco fecerunt in quo statuae aut imagines erant principis, et qui coronas imaginibus eius detraxerunt, ut alias ponerent, damnatis et qui remedia quartanis tertianisque collo adnexas gestarent.*

⁶⁸ It is probably superfluous to mention Price's pioneering study of the Imperial cult at this point (Price 1984).

established. It would not be surprising. There are indications that both this deity and Mithras formed a link between the Emperor and the lower classes: their worship took place primarily amongst the lower classes, but both deities are also documented twice in the Imperial Palace. The absence of the upper class calls to mind the virtual absence of the wealthy in the excavated part of second century and Severan Ostia.

The shrine stands out because of its public feel-and-touch. The row of figures conveys a message which is also found in the form of coins and statues in public places. It is the private nature of the location where this "language" was used which deserves our attention. Similarly there is nothing new about the axial position and distinct presence of some of the evidence dealt with in the previous chapter. The best public example of these aspects is offered by the Capitolium on the Forum. Their occurrence in a private context is a striking feature of religion in Ostia.