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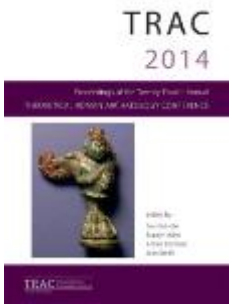

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Cognitive Theory and Religious Integration: The Case of the Poetovian Mithraea

Blanka Misic

Introduction

In recent years a trend of applying interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks to the study of ancient cultural and religious change has become ever more popular amongst scholars of antiquity. Although anthropological and sociological models have been popular in the past, recent scholarship has started to focus more on psychological and cognitive theoretical approaches. One area which has grown rapidly among scholars working on religion in Graeco-Roman antiquity is the study of cognitive science of religion, which attempts to examine human thought processes and behaviours in order to explain how humans formulate and transfer religious concepts.

The current predominant theory of cognitive science of religion among researchers of antiquity is Harvey Whitehouse's theory of 'modes of religiosity'. Whitehouse's (2009: 1, 10) theory seeks to explain patterns of deviation with respect to religious rituals: how religious notions are transferred among individuals and communities, and how they vary and evolve from society to society. His theory proposes two divergent routes of religious transmission: doctrinal and imagistic (Whitehouse 1995; 2000: 124, 130; 2002: 293–294, 309; 2004a: 216; 2004b; 2009: 5). The doctrinal mode can be found most often in literate societies, which exhibit some kind of centralised leadership. In the doctrinal mode, religion and religious meaning are transmitted in written form, through official religious texts, as well as in oral form, through leaders who, by frequent repetition of religious rituals and ideas can transmit these to wide audiences and embed them in the participants' consciousness and semantic memory. Thus, an 'imagined community' is formed among various worshippers who, although they do not know each other personally, share the same religious beliefs and values, creating solidarity between themselves and loyalty to their cult (Whitehouse 2009: 5). Therefore, as they spread and become more popular, religions exhibiting the doctrinal mode tend to develop a clear centralised hierarchy among their members (Whitehouse 2002: 304; Martin 2004: 10; Whitehouse 2004b: 8; Wiebe 2004: 198; Whitehouse 2009: 5; Whitehouse 2013: 77).

Contrastingly, the imagistic mode of religiosity is characteristic of non-literate societies. The imagistic mode is transmitted in oral and visual form through infrequent but highly visually arousing and emotional rituals so that in this manner, the religious rituals and ideas can become embedded in the participants' consciousness and episodic memory. Due to the high emotional appeal of this mode, each worshipper experiences and interprets this imagistic religious experience in their own way. According to this conception of the imagistic mode, loyalty to the cult is cemented through the emotional experience offered, and solidarity bonds between cult members are formed on the basis of a shared (although not the same) religious experience, creating a small but tightly-knit group of worshippers (Whitehouse 2002: 304; Martin 2004:

10; Whitehouse 2004b: 4, 8; Wiebe 2004: 198; Whitehouse 2009: 5–6; Whitehouse 2013: 77).

Although Whitehouse's theories of modes of religiosity were developed and tested in modern societies (Whitehouse 1995), few scholars have yet applied them to the study of ancient cults (Whitehouse and Martin 2004; Martin and Pachis 2009). This paper will attempt to show that neither Whitehouse's doctrinal nor imagistic modes by themselves are fully representative of Mithraic religious trends, especially with respect to votive evidence found in the Pannonian colony of Poetovio, and that this evidence displays not a polarity but an integration of both modes (e.g. Wiebe 2004: 200–201). The *colonia* of Poetovio is the best documented and the richest site in terms of Mithraic evidence in southern Pannonia and it is for this reason that this settlement was chosen for study. Additionally, since material culture in itself is an embodiment of one's cognitive framework, examining Mithraic votive evidence from Poetovio may offer an insight into this settlement's wider cultural and social framework.

Imagistic and Doctrinal Modes of Religiosity in Mithraism

Mithraism, as far as we know, does not have a recorded, cult-wide doctrine in the form of official sacred texts (Burkert 1987: 70; Chalupa 2011: 113). While it must be acknowledged that we do have evidence of Mithraic 'mystical utterings', recorded in the form of fragmented verses on the walls of the Santa Prisca Mithraeum (Vermaseren and Essen 1965: 148–172, 179–240), we must question the official, cult-wide use of these, as they are not reproduced in any other Mithraea throughout the Empire. The same is the case with the Egyptian prayer-texts (Betz 1993: 48–54; Clauss 2000: 105–108), consisting of seven prayers instructing the initiate on how to achieve an enlightened state. According to Clauss, these prayers were 'performed' in an oral and visual form, in such a manner as to solicit a state of high emotional arousal, rendering them more imagistic than doctrinal in nature (Clauss 2000: 106–107). Thus, with respect to these texts, we cannot claim with certainty that they were part of widespread, 'official' Mithraic teachings, but we must instead entertain the idea that they could have been particular to a specific Mithraic congregation, a specific locale, and even a specific time period (Vermaseren and Essen 1965: 173–178), reflecting perhaps a local emphasis or variation of particular aspects of Mithraic worship (Clauss 2000: 16; Gordon 2001: 258–259; Martin 2006:140–141; Whitehouse 2009: 4). What we do find more often is that Mithras' mythology and origin are conveyed in the form of iconographic depictions, set up by his worshippers, which may display local variations. The exact meaning and the divine message behind these depictions can often be interpreted in several ways by the viewer and/or the worshipper (Will 1970: 634–635; Whitehouse 2004b: 4). The images most frequently depicted, such as the tauroctony, Mithras' birth out of a rock, and Mithras shaking hands with Sol, are often constructed as complex group-scene narratives, appealing to the emotive side of the viewer and/or worshipper, more like a mythological narrative and less like a rigid religious code of conduct. In this respect, Mithraism would seem to fit the imagistic criteria.

However, although Mithraism appears to lack an official sacred text, part of Mithraic worship, in addition to the setting up of reliefs, consists of setting up inscribed votive altars. Although these do not strictly adhere to the doctrinal requirement of official written texts, inscribed dedications do display some elements which could be attributed to the doctrinal mode of religiosity. For example, there are specific formulae for addressing the god ('*Deo Invicto Mithrae*' and '*Deo Soli Invicto Mithrae*' being among the most frequently used), including the use of specific epithets ('*Invictus*') to pay proper respect to the divinity. Thus we see that although inscribed

altars do not offer us with an official religious code in the manner that Whitehouse's doctrinal mode stipulates, they do nevertheless display a manner of written code of conduct: how it was acceptable to address and worship the divinity. In this sense, it could be claimed that inscribed altars, with their formulaic features, could be classified as a doctrinal element.

Secondly, tied in with the apparent lack of sacred texts is a lack of centralised religious leadership, which Whitehouse ascribes to the doctrinal mode. As far as we are aware, there does not appear to have been a centralised religious hierarchy for Mithraism, which fed down its teachings to smaller groups spread throughout the Empire (Clauss 2000: 16; Beck 2004: 87–88). Instead, it appears that the cult of Mithras was composed of independent religious cells, rather than a centralised and coordinated hierarchy characteristic of a doctrinal mode, which would lead us to conclude that this aspect of Mithraism conformed to the imagistic mode.

However, it cannot be denied that in Mithraic religion there existed a hierarchy based on the seven Mithraic grades (Vermaseren and Van Essen 1965: 155–160; Clauss 2000: 131–140; Gordon 2001: 248). Each cell was headed by a '*Pater*', the senior individual of the local Mithraeum who held the highest grade in the Mithraic hierarchy. As an elder of his specific Mithraic cell, the '*Pater*' was likely a source of veneration and authority (Vermaseren and Van Essen 1965: 158–159; Gordon 2001: 254–255; Whitehouse 2013: 70). Thus, as a leader, he would have transmitted ritual knowledge and ritual meaning to his fellow Mithraists through both oral and visual forms and frequent and infrequent repetition of various rituals. Therefore, while there was no overarching centralised hierarchy, the presence of a hierarchy within each independent cell incorporates elements of both imagistic and doctrinal modes.

Thirdly, Mithraism required secret initiation rites to be performed on the individual who wished to join the cult. Although the specifics of these rites remain puzzling to us due to their secrecy, it could be argued that they can be classified under the imagistic mode of religiosity (Beck 2004: 89; Gragg 2004: 76–78). Namely, in the absence of official sacred texts, the rites of initiation needed to be visually and emotionally powerful enough in order to cement the worshipper's allegiance to the cult. A pottery vessel from Moguntiacum discovered in 1976 may shed light on this Mithraic initiation ritual (Beck 2004: 89–90). Among other scenes the vessel depicts the senior individual of the Mithraic cult dressed as Mithras and shooting an arrow at a naked individual presumed to be the initiate. If this vessel indeed depicts the Mithraic initiation ritual, it appears that it would have evoked high levels of emotion (stress, excitement, and fear, for example) for the initiate and would have thus proved effective as an imagistic mode, not only cementing the initiate's membership into the Mithraic mysteries (Beck 2004: 89–90), but also denoting the individual's place within the Mithraic hierarchy, securing their respect and loyalty towards the cult and its senior members (Gordon 2001: 253–254; Martin 2006: 136–137). Senior members of the cult, and especially the '*Pater*', served as a type of 'didactic support' in the process of initiation and the subsequent transmission of Mithraic teachings (Gordon 2001: 254–255; Whitehouse 2009: 5–6; Chalupa 2011: 116). In addition to the Moguntiacum vessel, imagistic aspects of the initiation ritual are also supported by several frescoes found at the S. Maria Capua Vetere Mithraeum. One fresco depicts an initiate blindfolded, kneeling, with his hands tied behind his back, and being threatened by a stick or a sword held by a senior official who is dressed as Mithras (*CIMRM* 187, 188, 191, 193, 194; Vermaseren 1971: 24–51; Clauss 2000: 102–104). Initiation rituals such as these could have been interpreted cognitively as a symbolic destruction of the body in order to enhance the initiate's spiritual aspect (Whitehouse 2013: 71), perhaps through symbolic re-birth into the Mithraic faith (*CIMRM* 498; Clauss 2000: 104–105). Therefore, the prospect of facing death (even if symbolically) alongside the

humiliation of the initiate who is depicted as naked, submissive and powerless, in addition to accompanying sensory pageantry, would have very likely stirred high levels of emotional arousal characteristic of the imagistic mode (Clauss 2000: 105; Gordon 2001: 259, 264; Martin 2006: 135; Chalupa 2011: 115). Recent research on cognition and emotion likewise seems to support this claim, stating that emotionally-arousing and unpleasant events not only become encoded in human memory faster and more profoundly, but they can also later be recalled more readily and vividly (Murray *et al*. 2013: 157, 159, 164–165). Furthermore, the rite of initiation also conforms to the imagistic mode in that the rite is a one-time occurrence for the individual being initiated (unless the initiate wished to pass through all of the seven grades, and even then, it is likely that the initiation ritual for every grade would have been different (Gordon 2001: 253; Martin 2006: 134)). Likewise, due to the often small size of Mithraic cells, it is also likely that initiation rituals were not performed very frequently. The ritual practice of initiation therefore appears to be characteristic of the imagistic mode, provoking an emotional arousal in the individual, and in its scarcity of repetition (Beck 2004: 94, 97).

Other types of Mithraic ritual may conform to the doctrinal mode. For example, it is possible that the cult meal, a form of ritual congregation of members in the Mithraeum, occurred at frequent intervals, creating a frequent repetition of ritual characteristic of the doctrinal mode (Beck 2004: 97; Chalupa 2011: 114). Whitehouse (2009: 5) notes that when rituals are often repeated they stand a greater chance of wider geographical diffusion. It is perhaps partially due to this reason, as well as the socially and spiritually bonding practice of sharing food (Clauss 2000: 109, 113), that we have more evidence in the archaeological record of ritual meals taking place throughout the Mithraea of the Empire (as evidenced by finds of pottery, utensils, lamps, and animal bones, as well as by relief depictions such as *CIMRM* 1083), than of specific, 'standardised' initiation rites. Moreover, while other types of ritual devotion may have been characteristic of the imagistic mode (such as the setting up of large and expensive stone votives whose erection would have likely been an infrequent and memorable occurrence, leaving an emotional imprint on the worshipper), the placement of more regular and smaller offerings to the deity (pottery, lamps, etc.) would have conformed to the doctrinal mode. Thus, it is possible to argue that in terms of ritual, Mithraic religious values were transmitted to Mithras' followers by an integration of imagistic and doctrinal modes, with the cultic practices becoming embedded through both intense, emotional experience and the frequent repetition of rituals.

All of these Mithraic rituals, both imagistic and doctrinal, formed a complex and interconnected system of symbols representing the human cognitive construction of the cult (Beck 2004: 94). Mithras' worshippers comprised individuals from different backgrounds and levels of society, and as these individuals changed and evolved, so too did the cult itself, and with it the meaning and the manner of transmission of its religious teachings (Clauss 2000: 16–17). Therefore, it seems natural, given the differing backgrounds of its worshippers, that the cult of Mithras would have evolved to feature an integration of imagistic and doctrinal elements (Selem 2008: 393).

The Case of the Poetovian Mithraea

The fact that the cult did not remain static, that it evolved with changing populations, and that it incorporated both doctrinal and imagistic elements, can further be seen by the evidence preserved from the Poetovian Mithraea.

The territory of Poetovio came under Roman control around 15 B.C., but did not become a *colonia* until the reign of Trajan. Poetovio quickly became an important administrative and

customs centre, housing the central administration office of the entire Illyrian customs service (Selem 1980: 10-11). In terms of religious life, Poetovio displays a vibrant mix of Roman, Celtic/autochthonous and Eastern cults, reflecting the nature of its settler populations. The most predominant cult in terms of the sheer degree of epigraphic and archaeological evidence, however, is the cult of Mithras. The worship of Mithras is first recorded in Poetovio in the A.D. 140s, and thrives until the early fourth century, encompassing five Poetovian Mithraea (Belak 1993: 234–237). Thus, the popularity of Mithras at Poetovio largely coincides with the same trend throughout the rest of the Roman Empire (Beck 2004: 87).

The Poetovian Mithraea conform to the doctrinal mode in several ways. Firstly, explicit references are made to the Mithraic hierarchy in inscribed dedications, such as the mention of the highest grade, the '*Pater*' (*AIJ* 312 (Third Mithraeum) and *AIJ* 300 (Second Mithraeum)). It is to be noted that no other Mithraic grades are explicitly mentioned in any of the five Mithraea, although Belak attempts to assign, on the basis of iconography, the first six grades to various worshippers within the first Mithraeum (Belak 1993: 234). Due to the still debatable interpretations of various myth-scenes, their exact meaning, and their chronological order (Clauss 2000: 62), alongside the lack of explicit naming of other grades in our evidence, the present author is reluctant to accept Belak's conclusions. For the purposes of this paper it is sufficient to note that Mithraism did indeed subscribe to a hierarchical structure, consisting of seven priestly grades, and that this hierarchy is evident in our Poetovian evidence by the explicit mention of the highest grade, the '*Pater*'. According to Whitehouse (2013: 76-77), the observation of a religious hierarchy instilled in the worshipper notions of social order and discipline, regulating the worshipper's behaviour. Moreover, a hierarchy created a stronger sense of identity both within the religious and the professional sphere of the worshippers, as everyone knew their place. Several studies have already suggested that Mithraism, with its hierarchical structure, would have appealed to worshippers in highly-structured and hierarchical professions, such as soldiers and administrative officials, and this statement is likewise supported by evidence from the Poetovian Mithraea (Will 1970: 633–634). Mithraism appears to have been brought to Poetovio by the Illyrian customs officials via Aquileia. In the case of our first and earliest Mithraeum (in use *circa* A.D. 150–180), seven out of the ten recorded dedications explicitly belong to the members of the customs service, attesting four *vicarii* (*ILS* 4242; *ILS* 4243; *ILS* 4245; and *AIJ* 294), one *contrascriptor* (*AIJ* 297 and *AIJ* 298) and one *scrutator* (*ILS* 4247). Moreover, it is implied on at least one other inscription that the dedicator may have been attached to the customs service (*CIL* III 14354/32 = *AIJ* 296). Thus, although most of the dedicators from the first Mithraeum were slaves, they nevertheless clearly display a connection between the professional and religious spheres of their lives through the explicit mention of their particular occupations, displaying their hierarchical standing and conforming to the doctrinal mode. In addition to listing their occupations and their affiliation to the customs service, a large number of Mithraic worshippers belonging to the customs service at Poetovio also display a connection between their personal and professional lives by listing their patrons and supervisors on their dedications. Some even include a veritable chain of command, identifying themselves through their superiors (*OPTIMVS / VITALIS / SABINI VERANI / P(ublici) P(ortorii) VIL(ici) VIC(arius)* (*ILS* 4243); *PRVDENS PRIMI / ANTONI RVFI P(ublici) P(ortorii) / VIL(ici) VIC(arius)* (*ILS* 4245)), therefore displaying not only their position within the hierarchical structure of the customs service, but also their devotion and loyalty to their organisation and their patrons, as well as their sense of religious brotherhood (Will 1970: 637–638). In this sense, the first Mithraeum could almost be perceived as a *collegium* of customs agents (Chalupa 2011: 114).

Secondly, the Poetovian Mithraea also conform to the doctrinal mode by their inclusivity. Although they feature small, tightly-knit groups of worshippers (e.g. the customs officials from the first Mithraeum, and Gallienus' troops from the third Mithraeum), and require the worshipper to be male and initiated, the epigraphic evidence from the Poetovian Mithraea nevertheless displays a variety of worshippers in terms of cultural and professional backgrounds. Although the first Mithraeum displays dedications erected primarily by customs officials, the names of the dedicators point to their various cultural origins. We encounter frequently-given slave names such as Optimus (*ILS* 4243) and Felix (*AIJ* 294), which likely mask individuals of various backgrounds, as well as Greek (Theodorus (*ILS* 4247)) and Dalmatian (Caius Caecina Calpurnius (*AIJ* 292)) names. The doctrinal inclusivity and wide spread of Mithraism is even more apparent in subsequent Mithraea (Will 1970: 636). The second Mithraeum (in use *circa* A.D. 193–337) appears to have been established as a direct result of overcrowding in the first Mithraeum. In this respect the initial dedicators likewise identify themselves as customs agents (*AIJ* 299; *AIJ* 302; *CIL* III 15184/8; and *CIL* III 15184/24), although with the rise in popularity of Mithras during the third century, we also find soldiers (*AIJ* 301 and *AIJ* 363), and even an *IIIIvir Augustalis* (*CIL* III 15184/9) attested among the remaining (presumably civilian) dedicators. Moreover, among the dedicators in the second Mithraeum we find slaves, freedmen and citizens, of Italian (Titus Flavius Restutus (*CIL* III 15184/9)), autochthonous/Pannonian (Aurelius Valentinus/Aurelius Valens (*AIJ* 303) and Secundus/Acutio (*AIJ* 304)) and Greek/Oriental (Epictetus (*CIL* III 15184/24)) backgrounds, among others whose names prove harder to place. The same type of inclusivity is again found in the third Mithraeum (in use during the third century A.D.). Although initially built as a civilian Mithraeum (*AIJ* 311 and *AIJ* 312), the third Mithraeum is quickly taken over by Gallienus' *XIII Gemina* and *V Macedonica*, who are transferred to Poetovio from Dacia. Thus, in addition to soldiers (*AIJ* 313; *AIJ* 314; *AIJ* 315; *AIJ* 316; *AIJ* 317), we find customs and administrative personnel (*AIJ* 311; *AIJ* 318; and *AIJ* 290), a priest (*AIJ* 312), and several other (presumably civilian) dedicators. Among these dedicators are to be found slaves, freedmen, citizens and an equestrian commander, of Italian/Oriental (*AIJ* 312), Illyrian (*CIMRM* 1604–1605) and Syrian (Selem 1980: 128, no.88) origins. We begin to see a decline of the cult in the later third century at Poetovio, as the number of dedications diminishes to six in the fourth Mithraeum and finally one in the fifth Mithraeum. The fourth Mithraeum (in use in the third and fourth centuries), although containing only six dedications, displays surprising variety and inclusion. We have one equestrian administrative official attested, possibly of autochthonous/Pannonian origin (*CIL* III 4039), one unaffiliated citizen of Graeco-Oriental origin (*CIL* III 4040), another unaffiliated dedicator of possibly Oriental or autochthonous/Pannonian origin (*CIL* III S10874) and another pair of citizens (*CIL* III 4041). Lastly, the fifth Mithraeum yields only one dedication, dated to A.D. 235 (*AE* 1991: 1301) too badly damaged to ascertain the professional affiliation of the dedicator Lucius Vanderius. Thus, as our Poetovian evidence shows, Mithraism appeals to a wide audience, is inclusive and spreads quickly and widely throughout Poetovio, all characteristics of the doctrinal mode. Moreover, it would also appear that the Poetovian Mithraea were inclusive in the sense that they allowed members of other Mithraic cells who had temporarily come to Poetovio to join the Poetovian Mithraea and participate in its rituals. For example, we have attested customs agents from Atrans (*AIJ* 299), Confluentes (*CIL* III 15184/8) and Enensis (*AIJ* 302) as well as a soldier of the *legio II Italica* (*AIJ* 301). All of these aspects can be classified as characteristic of the doctrinal mode.

Finally, although no evidence of official Mithraic religious code in textual form exists, the written code of conduct on how the deity should be addressed in the form of invocatory formulae

can be found on votive altars. In the case of the Poetovian Mithraea we see both uniformity and variety in the use of invocatory formulae, indicating an integration of imagistic and doctrinal modes. The first Mithraeum, although almost exclusively frequented by customs officials, displays the most varied collection of invocatory formulae, such as '*Invicto Mithrae*' (*ILS* 4242), '*Deo Invicto Mithrae*' (*ILS* 4243), '*Invicto Mithrae et Transitu Dei*' (*ILS* 4247), '*Transitu*' (*AIJ* 292), '*Naturae Dei*' (*ILS* 4245), '*Petrae Genetrici*' (*AIJ* 294), '*Cauti*' (*AIJ* 295), '*Cautopati*' (*AIJ* 296) and '*Primitivos*' (*AIJ* 298). Specific formulae invoking aspects of Mithraic mythology, such as '*Transitu*', '*Naturae Dei*', '*Petrae Genetrici*', '*Cauti*', '*Cautopati*', and '*Primitivos*' are accompanied by relief or statue depictions of Mithras carrying a bull on his back (*AIJ* 292), Mithras' birth out of a rock (*AIJ* 293 and possibly *AIJ* 294 (damaged)), and Cautes and Cautopates (*AIJ* 295; *AIJ* 296; and *AIJ* 298). Thus, it appears that both the variety of formulae and the depictions of different aspects of the Mithraic myth in the first Mithraeum indicate an imagistic mode of religious transmission, as the combination of specific invocatory formulae with accompanying imagery of myth scenes seeks to arouse an emotional response from the viewer. It is also possible that the choice of depicting a specific mythological scene on the part of the dedicator was due to an emotional identification to that particular myth. This would imply that our customs agents, dedicators from the first Mithraeum, were not only well-versed enough in Mithraic mythology to understand the complexities of its narrative, but also that they served as 'didactic support', transmitting their knowledge to new members who were unconnected to the customs service, such as the Dalmatian Calpurnius (*AIJ* 292) whose dedication of Mithras taurophorus has clear connections to Aquileia in terms of theme and execution. Mithraic iconography, along with verbal and visual support provided by fellow initiates, would have served as an imagistic mode of religious transmission (Chalupa 2011: 112, 116). Whitehouse (2004b: 4; 2013: 77) stresses that one of the key characteristics of the imagistic mode is the individual experience and interpretation of religious symbols. In that sense, although each Mithraic initiate may identify with and interpret differently certain aspects of the deity's myth, a group solidarity is still formed between worshippers due to their common emotional connection to the deity, and to each other as *fratres* (Selem 2008: 393). It is precisely this type of tight-knit brotherhood that we see exhibited in the Poetovian Mithraea, and especially in the first and the third Mithraea. As concerns the other Poetovian Mithraea, tauroctony scenes predominate among possible depictions of Mithraic myth, although we still find some instances of variation, such as the depiction of Mithras and Sol shaking hands (*CIMRM* 1584), as well as the scene of Mithras' rockbirth (*CIMRM* 1593) from the third Mithraeum. The predominant *formulae* in the other Poetovian Mithraea are '*Deo Invicto Mithrae*' and '*Deo Soli Invicto Mithrae*'. This preference for the '*Deo Invicto Mithrae*' formula, as well as for the tauroctony scene, may reflect a later standardisation of the cult at Poetovio, which would be characteristic of the doctrinal mode.

The Poetovian Mithraea further conform to the imagistic mode of religiosity in that they featured small, tightly-knit groups of worshippers. This is particularly exemplified in the first three Mithraea, which not only have a relatively small number of surviving dedications considering the time period during which they were in use, but are also composed of worshippers who have, for the most part, the same professional background. This sense of camaraderie and brotherhood between the Mithraic worshippers is further exemplified by the joint dedications set up by specific sub-groups within the *XIII Gemina* and *V Macedonica*, such as the joint dedications of the *librarii* (*AIJ* 314), the *tesserarii* and the *custodes armorum* (*AIJ* 315). Considering the large numbers of dedicators belonging either to the two mentioned legions stationed at Poetovio or to the Illyrian customs service, it is likely that adhering to the cult of Mithras formed an integral part of this

professional experience and served to cement loyalty and trust within one's professional group (Will 1970: 637; Sosis and Alcorta 2003; Sosis and Bressler 2003; Whitehouse 2013: 75). It is also likely that certain members joined the Mithraic cult for professional advancement, either to gain a more intimate access to their superiors who may have already been Mithras' worshippers, or to form an exclusive, members-only sub-group within their professional affiliation (Clauss 2000: 105). The Poetovian evidence would seem to weigh towards the latter, as, for example, a large number of customs officials who dedicate to Mithras occupied the post of *vicarius* (*AIJ* 318; *ILS* 4242; *ILS* 4243; *ILS* 4245; *AIJ* 294). In any case, it is due to this tight-knit emotional connectedness to fellow group members that localised group identities of worshippers are formed (Whitehouse 2009: 6; Whitehouse 2013: 76–77). For example, as part of Mithraists who occupy the post of *vicarius*, then as part of their specific Poetovian Mithraic cell and larger Mithraic tradition and history, then as part of the Illyrian customs service, and on a grander scale, as inhabitants of the Roman Empire; sharing in each of these cultural frameworks in order to create localised but multifaceted identities.

The Mithraic evidence of Poetovio, in light of Whitehouse's 'modes of religiosity', gives us an insight into the role of Mithraic religion and ritual in group creation (McCorkle and Xygalatas 2013: 2), revealing to us that although Mithraism was exclusive with regards to non-initiates into the religion, at the same time it appealed to a wide variety of worshippers and included men of various cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. This fine balance of inclusiveness and exclusiveness created social subgroups within the Poetovian society which helped to reconcile professional, personal, and religious aspects of the worshippers' lives.

Conclusion

While recent literature which has examined ancient cults in light of Whitehouse's theory of modes of religiosity claims that, by and large, Roman state religion can be classified under the doctrinal mode and the mystery cults under the imagistic mode (Whitehouse 2009), it is likely that Mithraism employed a mix of elements of the doctrinal and the imagistic modes, as this paper has attempted to demonstrate. Mithraism, therefore, would have transferred its core ideas and values to its worshippers through both highly-visually arousing experience of initiation as well as through frequent repetition of selected rituals. This integration of modes was likely the result of local Mithraic subculture(s), as well as the larger cultural and social fabric of the Empire, in which the Mithraic cult evolved and spread. This is exemplified by the Mithraic worshippers of Poetovio, customs agents and soldiers for the most part, who find in Mithraism the doctrinal hierarchical structure as well as the imagistic, tightly-knit, brotherly camaraderie reflected in their own professions.

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