

Isis and Serapis in Poetovio

Inga VILOGORAC BRČIĆ

Abstract

The cults of Isis and Serapis have been attested in the Roman province of Pannonia in the Antonine period, peaking during the reign of Severan dynasty. According to epigraphic and other material evidence, Poetovio was one of the three most important cult centres in the province together with Savaria and Carnuntum. Here I shall present all inscriptions and figural representations testifying to the cults of Isis and Serapis found in the Poetovio ager. I shall describe all the aspects of the worship of Isis and Serapis and endeavour to determine the reasons for the appropriation of their cults in the ager. Non-reliable evidence, such as monuments bearing representations of Jupiter-Ammon or the crowns of funeral stelae with bearded male heads in relief interpreted as Serapis, will not be taken into consideration.

Keywords: Isis; Serapis; Egypt; Pannonia Superior; Poetovio; cult

Izvleček

Izida in Serapis v Petovionu

Kult Izide in Serapisa je bil v rimski provinci Panoniji prisoten že v antoninskem obdobju, vrhunec pa je dosegel za časa severske dinastije. Po epigrafskih in drugih materialnih dokazih je bila Petoviona, skupaj s Savarijo in Karnuntom, eno od treh najpomembnejših kulturnih središč. Na tem mestu so predstavljeni vsi napisi in figuralne upodobitve iz petovionskega agra, ki pričajo o kultu Izide in Serapisa. Opisani so vsi vidiki čaščenja in skušamo ugotoviti, zakaj sta bila njuna kulta prenesena v ager. Prispevek ne upošteva nezanesljivih podatkov, kot so spomeniki z upodobitvijo Jupitra-Ammon ali ovršja nagrobnih stel z bradatimi moškimi glavami v reliefu, interpretiranimi kot Serapis.

Ključne besede: Izida; Serapis; Egipt; Zgornja Panonija; Petoviona; kult

Introduction

The cults of Isis and Serapis gradually made their way across the Greek islands to Rome from Egypt during the Hellenistic era. While Rome was at first repelled by the cult, especially during the Late Republic and Early Empire, it probably became the official Roman religion during the reign of Vespasian: he promoted Isis and Serapis as the divine protectors of the new ruling dynasty. The popularity of the cults of Isis and of Serapis in particular peaked a second time under the Severan dynasty.

Although the cults of Isis in Pannonia flourished during the Severan dynasty, they were appropriated earlier, in the Antonine period. According to epigraphic and material evidence, Poetovio was one of three most important cult centres of the province.¹ Located between two important hubs of the cults of Isis, Aquileia and Savaria, it may be said that Poetovio served as an intermediary for their dissemination into Pannonia's provincial interior. I shall present all inscriptions and figural representations testifying to the cults of Isis and Serapis found in the Poetovio ager. Then I shall describe aspects of the worship of Isis and Serapis and endeavour to determine the reasons for the appropriation of these cults in the ager. Non-reliable evidence, such as monuments bearing representations of Jupiter-Ammon or crowns of funeral stele with bearded male heads in relief interpreted as Serapis, will not be taken into consideration.

Epigraphic evidence

Six altars, one statue base and two tabulae ansatae from the Poetovio ager bear inscriptions dedicated to Isis and Serapis.

1 The base of a statue of Isis with votive inscription was built into the Church of St Martin in Spodnja Hajdina, but has since been lost.

*Isidi / Aug(ustae) / signum / cum bas(i) / Victorin(us) / ex voto / posuit*²

Victorinus dedicated a statue with a base to Isis Augusta, according to a vow. He added the imperial epithet to Isis. It is impossible to precisely define the nature of gods with the imperial attribute, or to declare that they were identified with an emperor or that their cults had official status. Villaret sees the "Augustalization" of gods as a process of mediation between the gods and people via the emperor, and considers it a phenomenon of political, religious and social acculturation in the Western provinces:

¹ Selem 1980; Bricault 2003.

² Bibliography: Pichler 1879, 17; *CIL* III 4016; Drexler 1890, 24, no. 2; Saria 1937, 20, no. 2; Perc 1968, 185, no. 34; *SIRIS* 655; Selem 1972, 33, no. 18; Selem 1980, 14, no. 18; *RICIS* II, 613/0102; Bricault 2003, 217; *EDCS* 24400832; HD068878.

Augusti were usually the most popular and important regional gods, invoked more often for the health of individuals than the emperor's health. Nevertheless, it is certain that adding the imperial attribute to the name of a deity was an important way of expressing loyalty to a reigning emperor, assigning the power of the deity to an imperial house and therefore proving their relation to the imperial cult.³ The inscription dedicated by Victorinus has been dated to the 1st or 2nd century.

Two *tabulae ansatae* made of bronze were hung on the wall of the Isis sanctuary in Poetovio (Figs. 1 and 2). They were discovered in 1898 and 1935 at the Spodnja Hajdina site, near the Church of St Martin, in the vicinity of the Mithraeum and horrea. Among the architectural remains, the so-called W building contained an interior space (10 × 5.75 m) which was flanked on three sides by a corridor (width 2.8 × 3.75 m). Dedications no. 4 and no. 5 were discovered nearby.

2 The first *tabula ansata* bears a votive inscription (Fig. 1):

*Apollinar(is) / Isid(i) v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito)*⁴

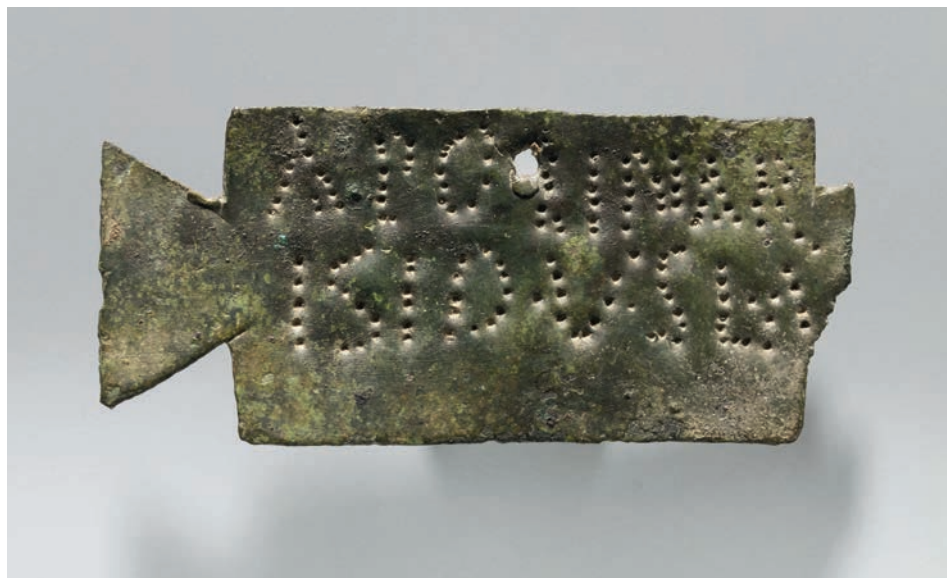


Fig. 1: *Tabula ansata* of *Apollinaris* (Archive of Regional Museum Ptuj - Ormož; photo: B. Farič)

³ Villaret 2019, 397–400.

⁴ Discovered in Spodnja Hajdina, 1898, Ptuj Regional Museum (inv. no. 1010). Dimensions: 0.025 × 0.055 m. References: *CIL* III 15184; Abramić 1925, 128, no. 134; *AIJ* 00270; Saria, 1937, 22, no. 5; Perc 1968, 189, no. 37; *SIRIS* 658; Selem 1972, 33, no. 18; Selem 1980, 15–16, no. 20; *RICIS* II 613/0105; *EDCS* 30200464; HD068555.

3 The second one is only partially preserved (Fig. 2):

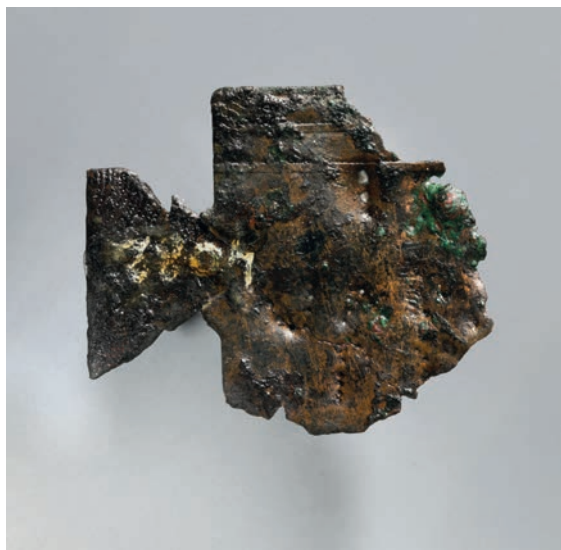


Fig. 2: Tabula ansata of Valerius
(Archive of Regional Museum Ptuj
- Ormož; photo: B. Farič)

*Is[idi] / Val(erius) A[---] / P(ublius) M[---]*⁵

The dedicant mentioned in the first inscription, Apollinaris, fulfilled a vow to Isis. The second inscription is considerably damaged and we can only suggest that two persons dedicated to Isis: Valerius (?) and Publius (?). The first tabula ansata has been dated to 1st/2nd century, and the second to the 2nd century.

4 The altar found in the Church of St Martin at Spodnja Hajdina has, unfortunately, been lost. It bears the inscription:

*Isidi / Aug(ustae) / sacrum / Marti / 5 alis / Firmini / Q(uinti) Sabini / Verani
/ t(ertiae?) p(artis?) II conduc(toris) / 10 portori / Illyrici / ar[k]ari vic(arius) /
voto / suscepto / 15 d(onum) d(at) / sac(erdotibus) T(ito) Fl(avio) / Martiale et
Fl(avio) Marul / lino fil(io).*⁶

It testifies that Martialis, *servus vicarius* (slave of a slave) of Firminus, who was the *arcarius* (treasurer) of *conductor* (leaseholder) Quintus Sabinius Veranus, presented

⁵ Discovered in Spodnja Hajdina, 1935, Ptuj Regional Museum (inv. no. 4082). Dimensions: 0.026 × 0.005 m. References: *AIJ* 00271; Saria 1937, 22–23, no. 6; Perc 1968, 189–190, no. 38; *SIRIS* 659; Selem 1972, 34, no. 18; Selem 1980, 16, no. 21; *RICIS* II 613/0106; *EDCS* 11300996; HD068556.

⁶ *CIL* III 04015; Drexler 1890, 24, no. 1; Saria 1937, 20, no. 1; Perc 1968, 185–186, no. 35; *SIRIS* 654; Selem 1972, 31–32, no. 18; Selem 1980, 11–12, no. 15; *RICIS* II, 613/0301; Bricault 2003, 217; *EDCS* 24400831; HD068877.

the altar as a gift to Isis Augusta in fulfilment of a vow. This occurred when Titus Flavius Martialis and Flavius Marullinus served as priests to the goddess. The dedicant, Martialis, like his colleagues Firminus and Quintus Sabinius Veranus, was an official of the *Publicum portorium Illyrici* – the Illyrian customs district. This institution was established in 1st century AD and its jurisdiction encompassed the tenth region of Italy and the following provinces: Raetia, Noricum, Dalmatia, the two Pannonias, the two Moesias, Dacia and Thrace. The customs office linked Poetovio to Aquileia, Celeia, Atrans and Ad Publicanos.⁷ It is well known that the officials of the *Publicum portorium Illyrici* promoted the cult of Mithras in Poetovio, which was very well documented there.⁸ This and the following inscription (no. 5) suggest that this was also the case with the cults of Isis.

The two priests of Isis serve as proof of an existing community of her followers and the temple where they performed their duties in Poetovio. Titus Flavius Martialis and Flavius Marullinus were father and son – the priesthood of Isis was hereditary, as confirmed elsewhere beginning in the Hellenistic era.

Finally, this is the second case of adding the imperial attribute Augusta to Isis. As we have already mentioned, it attests to the importance of the goddess' cult in Poetovio in AD 147 to 161.

5 The altar found at an unknown site in Ptuj in 1852, bears the inscription (Fig. 3):

[Is]idi / [my]riol[ny]mae / [pro] Fructo / [Sabi]ni Verani / [co]nduct(oris)⁹

Fructus was *servus vilicus* (intendant) of the same Quintus Sabinius Veranus, *conductor*, mentioned in the preceding inscription. Here it is also noteworthy that there are two more inscriptions discovered in Poetovio that mention Veranus: his slaves were followers of Mithras.¹⁰ It suggests not only the specific involvement of custom officers in “oriental” cults, but also a relationship between the worshippers of Isis and Mithras in Poetovio.

⁷ The officials of the *Portorium* were responsible for collecting taxes. The *Portorium* system was first entrusted to publican societies and, then, from Trajan's reign onwards, to individual leaseholders chosen by the state (*conductores*). At the end of the reign of Marcus Aurelius, or at the beginning of that of Commodus, these taxes were collected directly by the state and entrusted to *procuratores* of equestrian rank. The subordinate staff of the *Illyricum* customs district consisted mostly of slaves, *vilici* (intendants) or *contrascriptores* (comptrollers) (Van Haepelen 2024, 263–264).

⁸ On the employees of the *Publicum portorium Illyrici* as worshippers of Mithras, see Van Haepelen 2020; Van Haepelen 2024; Chalupa et al. 2024.

⁹ Joanneum, Graz, inv. no. 491. References: *CIL* III 4017; Pichler 1879, 40; Drexler 1890, 24, no. 3; Marić 1933, 81; Saria 1937, 20–21, no. 3; Perc 1968, 187–188, no. 36; *SIRIS* 00656; Selem 1972, 32, no. 18; Selem 1980, 12, no. 16; *RICIS* II 613/0103 = *RICIS*, Suppl. II, p. 294; *EDCS* 24400833; HD068868.

¹⁰ *CIMRM* II 1491; *CIMRM* II 1533.



For Fructus, the dedication to *Isis Myrionima* – Isis of a thousand names,¹¹ serves as evidence of worshipping the goddess in all of her manifestations. The same person made a dedication to Mithras (Muhlthal am Inn/Pons Aeni)¹² and to the nymphs (Balnea Romana Celeia)¹³ in Noricum. Fructus was therefore one of the slaves employed in the customs office of Poetovio. He worshipped “oriental” deities, Mithras and Isis. His inscription has been dated to AD 147 to 161.

Fig. 3: The altar of Fructus (Archive of Joanneum, Graz)

6 An altar discovered in Spodnja Hajdina is dedicated to Isis and Serapis (Fig. 4):

*C(aius) Ul(pius) Aur(elius) / Gaianu[s] / I(sidi) V(ictrici) et Ser(api) / pro
salu[te] / 5 s]ua suorum[q(ue)] / omnium / v(otum) / s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito).*¹⁴

Gaius Ulpius Aurelius Gaianus fulfilled a vow to Isis Victrix and Serapis, *pro salute sua suorumque* – the dedication made for his personal health and the health of his family. Worshipping Isis as the patron or guarantor of health has been well attested since the pharaonic period. In Hellenistic Egypt there were major pilgrimage sanctuaries dedicated to Isis in Menoutis and to Osiris in Canopus, where both Isis and Serapis were worshipped as healing gods: sick people would spend the night in their sanctuaries expecting the gods to appear in dreams with the promise of a remedy.¹⁵

Gaianus is noted in two identical inscriptions discovered in Mediolanum¹⁶ and

¹¹ See Bricault 1994.

¹² [Inv]ic[to] | Mi[t]hr[ae] / [F]ructus Q. / [Sa]bini Verani / [con]d(uctoris) [p(ublici) p(ortorii) ser(vus), vil(icus)]—A / [—] DI [—] / [—] | — a]ramq(ue) m[—], AE 2008, 1020; EDCS 51400041.

¹³ Nymphis / Aug(ustis) / Fructus / Q(uinti) Sabini Verani / c(onductoris) p(ublici) p(ortorii) ser(vus) vilic(us) / posuit, CIL III 5146; EDCS 14500452.

¹⁴ Dimensions: 0.82 × 0.35 × 0.10 m, Ptuj Regional Museum, inv. no. 31. References: AIJ 269; Saria 1937, 23, no. 7, fig. 4; Perc 1968, 182–183, no. 32; AE 1937, 245; SIRIS 660; Selem 1972, 33, no. 18; Selem 1980, 13, no. 17; RICIS II, 613/0107 = RICIS, Suppl. II, p. 294; Bricault 2003, 217; EDCS 11300995; HD023613.

¹⁵ Bricault 2014.

¹⁶ CIL V 5797; ILS 4193.

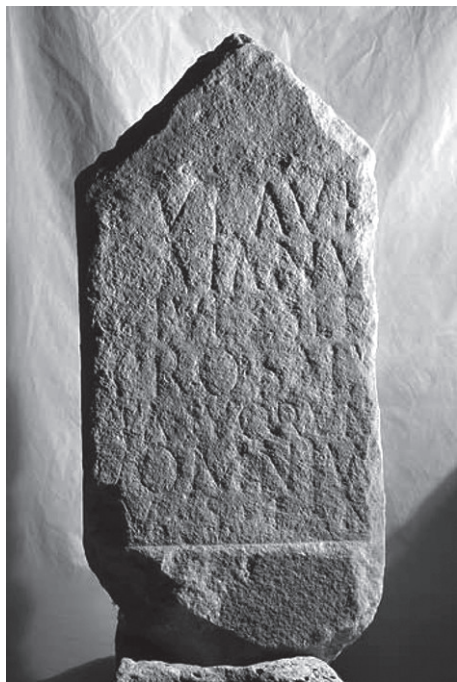


Fig. 4: The altar of Gaius Ulpius Aurelius Gaianus (Archive of Regional Museum Ptuj - Ormož)

Virunum,¹⁷ dedicated *Invicto Patrio* – he was also a worshipper of Mithras, and this would confirm the suggestion made above that the sanctuaries of Isis and Mithras were close by. Besides, a monument from Virunum was discovered, according to *CIL* III 4802, with “*una cum statua viri barbati modium habentis*” – the head of bearded man with a kalathos, which may have been the head of Serapis.

The inscriptions from Mediolanum and Virunum testify that he was *prae-fectus vehiculorum* (an official overseeing the *cursus publicus*, the state courier service), a title which implies that he was of equestrian rank. Gaianus was also a *iuridicus* in Alexandria in AD 167. This fact helps to date his inscription to the reign of Marcus Aurelius, and suggests an affinity with Isis Victrix and Serapis, which is also supported by his time in Egypt.

7 An altar built into the northern wall of the medieval tower in Slovenski trg (square) in Ptuj bears the votive inscription (Fig. 5):

*Serapi / Aug(usto) / sacrum / Epap(h)roditus / 5 Alexandri / Aug(usti) disp(ensatoris) / tabularius / v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito)*¹⁸

Epaphroditus was a *tabularius*, a financial clerk in the Publicum portorium Illyrici. His superior was the imperial *dispensator* Alexander. Epaphroditus fulfilled a vow to Serapis Augustus, thus expressing his loyalty to his superior, who was employed as an imperial administrator, but also to the emperor, underscoring the high status of the cults of Isis in Poetovio, as in the previous cases (no. 1 and no. 4). The inscription has been dated to the latter half of the 2nd/first half of the 3rd century.

¹⁷ *CIL* III, 4802; *ILS*, 4193; *CIMRM* II 1439.

¹⁸ It was found “*in vestibulo aedium Ioannis Aurifabri*”. It is currently built into the base of a medieval tower in Slovenski trg in Ptuj. Dimensions: 0.94 × 0.49 × 0.24. References: *CIL* III 4044; *AIJ* 336; Drexler 1890, 24, no. 2; Saria 1937, 20, no. 2; Perc 1968, 185, no. 34; *SIRIS* 657; Selem 1972, 32, no. 18; Selem 1980, 14–15, no. 19; *RICIS* II 613/0104; *RICIS*, Suppl. II, p. 294; *EDCS* 26600453; HD068847.



Fig. 5: The altar of Epaphroditus (Photo I. Vilogorac Brčić)



Fig. 6: The altar of Publius Valerius Priscus (Photo I. Krajcar)

8 An altar recently discovered in Varaždinske Toplice (*Aquae Iasae*), in the Poetovio ager. It was built into the structure of the north wall of the spring pool (Fig. 6):

*Isidi et / Serapi Aug(usto) / sacrum / C(aius) V(alerius) Priscus / Aug(ustalis) c(oloniae) U(lpiae) / T(raianae) P(oetoviensis) et / Catienia / Fortunata con(iunx) / sive Oriclio*¹⁹

Gaius Valerius Priscus and his wife Catienia Fortunata made a dedication to Isis and Serapis Augustus after their health was restored at the thermal sanctuary of Isis

¹⁹ References: Kušan Špalj et al. 2014, 68–69, 93–95, no. 73; Kušan Špalj 2017, 291–292; *RICIS* III, 613/1001; *AE* 2014, 01048; *AE* 2017, 1142; *ROMIC* II, 35–35, no. 24; *EDCS* 68200018; HD074972.

and Serapis in Aquae Iasae. The altar's size²⁰ implies that it was intended for cult services in front of the sanctuary of Isis and Serapis, but its precise location in the thermal complex in Aquae Iasae is no longer known.

Gaius Valerius Priscus was a *sevir Augustalis*, an official of the imperial cult and he made a dedication to Serapis Augustus – further proof of the importance of the cults of Isis in the Poetovio ager. He was a member of the respected gens Valeria, whose members had moved to Poetovio in the 1st century AD. During the 2nd century they held some of the city's most important posts. His wife's name, Catienia Fortunata, is followed by a word of unknown origin: Oricclio. This may be her indigenous name, or even a local version of the word for spouse, *coniunx*, which precedes it. The altar has been dated to the late 2nd or the early 3rd century.



Fig. 7: The altar of Caecilius Saturninus
(Photo I. Krajcar)

9 Another altar from Aquae Iasae is considerably damaged, but it bears a discernable inscription (Fig. 7):

*Seraphi / sancto et / Nymphis / salutaribus / 5 Caecilius / Saturninus*²¹

Caecilius Saturninus made a vow to Sanctus Serapis and the Nymphs who bring good health. The form of the name *Seraphi* is unusual and has not been confirmed elsewhere. Perhaps this reflected local linguistic traits. The epithet Sanctus accompanying the name of Serapis has only been recorded on three more inscriptions found thus far.²² The unusual formula for the name of Serapis and the association of his cult

²⁰ Height 156 cm, base width 70 cm, base thickness 44 cm.

²¹ References: Kušan Špalj et al. 2014, 70, 95–96; Kušan Špalj 2017, 293–294; Bricault 2014, 193–194, 613/1002; ROMIC II, 36–37, no. 25; EDCS 68500330; HD074973.

²² RICIS 604/0101, 615/0101, 503/1111; Bricault 2016, 119, 122.

with the local Nymphs of Iasae may point to the hypothesis that the dedicant was an indigenous resident who had acquired Roman citizenship, and, together with his local faith, he also accepted the cult of Serapis the healer. However, he may have also been an immigrant or a visitor to the *thermae*, who sought the blessing of Serapis and of the local Iasae nymphs, whose cult he had accepted. The altar has been dated to the early 3rd century.

Epigraphic and material evidence from Aquae Iasae testify to the worship of Apollo, Aesculapius and Serapis there, which indicates the presence of the official religion, the imperial cult, primarily apparent in the emphasis on the divine nature of Emperor Caracalla.²³ Cassius Dio mentioned that Caracalla grew ill after the murder of his brother Geta, and desperately sought help from Apollo, Asclepius and Serapis (*Cass. Dio* LXXVIII, 5–7). During his travels, he would send votive offerings to the deities through his emissaries to various sanctuaries, and went there personally in the hope that he would be healed. It is assumed that Caracalla marched from Rome across Roman Gaul and Germania Superior in the spring of AD 213 to punish the Alemanni. The emperor stopped in Aquae (Baden-Baden) and Phoebiana (Faimingen), where a sanctuary of Apollo was located (Apollo Grannus).²⁴ One inscription found in the sanctuary of Aquae Iasae, commissioned by Caracalla's servant Avitianus for the emperor's health and victories,²⁵ implies the possibility that the ill emperor himself visited the sanctuary and made dedication to his favourite deities Asclepius, Apollo and Serapis after his war against the Alemanni in September of AD 213. The Aquae Iasae sanctuary is, thus far, the only sanctuary in Pannonia where all three of Emperor Caracalla's favourite deities, Apollo, Asclepius and Serapis, were worshipped.²⁶

Material evidence

It is surprising that no monumental representations of Isis and Serapis in Poetovio have thus far been discovered, given the richness of the epigraphic evidence of their cults and the fact that their sanctuary existed there. The only monuments are two terracotta lamps, which testify to the private sphere of the cult of Isis. One is decorated with a bust of Isis wearing the solar crown and a crescent moon. It was found in the Hajdina necropolis²⁷ together with a coin of Emperor Claudius, but there is insufficient evidence

²³ Kušan Špalj 2017.

²⁴ Mráv 2000, 86.

²⁵ Kušan Špalj et al. 2014, 72–74, 97–99; Kušan Špalj 2017, 273–275.

²⁶ Kušan Špalj et al. 2014, 97–99; Kušan Špalj 2017, 289–299. There is a relief representing Nymphs and a goddess which was identified as Isis-Fortuna by Kušan Špalj (Kušan Špalj et al. 2014, 62–65; Kušan Špalj 2017, 294–297). However, whether the knot of Isis is represented on her breast is uncertain, so I would not take this monument as reliable evidence of the cults of Isis in Aquae Iasae.

²⁷ It is held in the Joanneum (Graz, inv. no. 5683). References: Fischbach 1896, 37, no. 325; Saria 1937, 23; Perc 1968, 192, no. 40; Selem 1972, 34, no. 18; Selem 1980, 19, no. 31; Bricault 2003, 217.

to date the lamp in the first half of 1st century AD. The second has an identical depiction of Isis as the preceding one, but it was found elsewhere in the Hajdina necropolis.²⁸

There are two categories of monuments considered testimony to the cults of Isis in Poetovio, although there is no reliable evidence. The first group consists of the crowns of funeral stelae with a depiction of two lions holding ram's heads and a bearded male head between them, interpreted as Serapis.²⁹ There is no evidence that these reliefs represent the Egyptian god, for another Roman god or the deceased himself may have been placed in the same position on the crown. Djurić recently considered them representations of the older Dionysos or Dionysos Zagreus.³⁰ The second group consists of figural representations of Jupiter Ammon:³¹ there is no doubt that those are representations of a Hellenistic deity, but they were rendered as decorations and they are not evidence of the cult of Jupiter Ammon.

Appropriation of the cults of Isis and Serapis in the Poetovio ager

The rich epigraphic material provides insight into the reasons for the worship of the cults of Isis and the level of their appropriation in the Poetovio ager. No evidence has thus far been found that would attest to the official status of the cults of Isis with any certainty – all of the dedications have a private character. However, hereditary priesthood, indicated by inscription no. 4, assumes the constant need for the cult practices that were performed in the sanctuary. Although its precise location has not been reliably confirmed, the tabulae ansatae (no. 2 and no. 3) and inscriptions no. 1 and no. 4, found in Spodnja Hajdina, indicate that it was in the vicinity of the Mithraeum and horrea.

Five out of eight inscriptions point to a link between the cults of Isis and the imperial cult: Isis is twice called Augusta (no. 1 and no. 4), just as Serapis is called Augustus twice (no. 7 and no. 8). Isis is also revered as Victrix (no. 6), which implies the same, since it associates her with Venus, the mother of Aeneas and thus also the “mother” of the Roman nation. One dedicant was a *sevir Augustalis*, an official of the imperial cult (no. 8). It is thus evident that the cults of Isis and Serapis were well appropriated and distinguished in the pantheon of Poetovio. Adding the imperial attribute to their names was a way of underscoring the significance of their cult in Poetovio society, and a way of demonstrating loyalty to the reigning emperor. The attribute Myrionima, recorded in inscription no. 5, implies all manifestations of the goddess Isis for which she was worshipped there.

²⁸ It is held in the Joanneum (Graz, inv. no. 8310). References: Fischbach 1896, 37, no. 326; Saria 1937, 23; Perc 1968, 192, no. 41; Selem 1972, 34, no. 18; Selem 1980, 19, no. 32; Bricault 2003, 217.

²⁹ See Selem 1980, nos. 22–26.

³⁰ Djurić 2024, 110–111.

³¹ Two stone blocks and two terracotta lamps with the relief images of Jupiter Ammon. See Selem 1980, nos. 27–30.

Another important reason for the worship of Isis and Serapis, as attested by the inscriptions from the Poetovio ager, is for protection and a guarantee of health. It is well known that Isis and Serapis were worshipped as healing gods since the Hellenistic era, and there are many thus far attested vows for the health of an individual, family or the emperor. At this point, three dedications have been discovered that testify to the worship of Isis and Serapis as healers (nos. 6, 8 and 9).

The cults of Isis were well received in the customs office (*Publicum portorium Illyrici*): two *servi* (no. 4 and no. 5) and one *tabularius* of the imperial *dispensator* (no. 7) were worshippers of Isis and Serapis. Two employees of the portorium (no. 4) were *servi* of the same conductor who was a superior of two worshippers of Mithras – they all were obviously colleagues with an affinity for “Oriental” gods. The link between the cults of Isis and the very well-established cult of Mithras in Poetovio can perhaps also be stressed, given that the temple of Isis was in the area of Spodnja Hajdina, where evidence of two Mithraea has been found.

Finally, we can conclude that testimony to the sanctuaries of Isis and Serapis, hereditary priesthood and the significant community of worshippers, which includes an official of the imperial cult and employees of the customs office, clearly implies the prominence of their cults in the Poetovio ager from the 1st to 3rd centuries AD.³²

³² The paper was created within the Croatian Science Foundation project “Women and Changes: Women as Subjects of Historical Changes in Croatia” (IP-2024-05-3847).

Bibliography

Abbreviations

AE = *L'Année épigraphique*.

AIJ = V. Hoffiler, B. Saria, *Antike inschriften aus Jugoslawien*, Zagreb 1938.

CIL = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*.

EDCS = *Epigraphik-Datenbank Clauss / Slaby*. <http://www.manfredclauss.de/>

EDH = *Epigraphische Datenbank Heidelberg*, Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften. <https://edh.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/home?lang=de>

lupa = *Ubi Erat Lupa*, F. and O. Harl, <https://lupa.at/> (Bildatenbank zu antiken Steindenkmälern).

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Inga Vilogorac Brčić
Department of History
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
University of Zagreb
Ivana Lučića 3
HR-10000 Zagreb
ivbrbic@ffzg.hr
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9197-5003>