

THE MYSTERY OF MITHRAS

EXPLORING THE HEART OF A ROMAN CULT

Edited by Laurent Bricault, Richard Veymiers and Nicolas Amoroso

with the collaboration of Laure Barthet, Margaux Bekas, Pascal Capus,
Alexandra Dardenay, Wolfgang David and Carsten Wenzel

MUSÉE ROYAL DE MARIEMONT 2021

THE MYSTERY OF MITHRAS. EXPLORING THE HEART OF A ROMAN CULT

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FOREWORDS

"You know that I am wearing a pointed cap and a robe embroidered with stars." It was with this comment full of self-deprecating humour that the Belgian scholar Franz Cumont responded on 2 June 1918 to his friend Alfred Loisy, who had become accustomed to addressing him by calling him "My dear Mithras".

The author of fundamental publications on Mithras and his cult, Cumont was at the time the greatest expert in the world on this subject. His intellectual authority was such that he left a mark on all research into Mithraic materials lasting for several generations. And this is still the case today, even if archaeological progress has made available a vast quantity of new information. Year after year, new discoveries come to light. Most recently, sanctuaries were revealed at Angers in France's Maine-et-Loire region, Inveresk in Scotland, Kempraten in Switzerland and Mariana on Corsica! Such excavations are restoring the cult of Mithras within the contexts to which it belonged, putting us in contact with individuals who had practiced it, and gradually leading to a renewal of approaches and the posing of new questions.

Born from an idea of Laurent Bricault and enriched by the analytical frameworks that we and our colleagues have developed over the last fifteen years for Isis and her family, this exhibition is informed by the most recent research and aims to bring a new focus to Mithras and his cult. The Musée royal de Mariemont was the ideal setting to host it, recalling the special connection between its founder, Raoul Warocqué, and Cumont at the beginning of the previous century. It is to the Belgian historian's expert advice that we owe a large portion of the Mediterranean antiquities preserved at the museum.

Dealing with a subject that is at the same time fascinating and novel, for which attestations are found throughout Europe, this exhibition project rapidly drew the interest of other museum



Meeting of the organisers of the exhibition at the Domaine de Mariemont, 22 November 2019.

institutions desiring to host it. An exceptional partnership thus was formed with the Musée Saint-Raymond de Toulouse and Archäologisches Museum Frankfurt, directed, respectively, by Laure Barthet and Wolfgang David. The representatives of the three museums gathered at the Domaine de Mariemont on 22 November 2019 for a crucial meeting that gave birth to a project of cooperation that in 2020 gained the support of the European Union as part of the Creative Europe programme.

Having thus taken on a European dimension, the exhibition inspired an infectious excitement that generated an impressive international mobilisation involving more than 20 countries. Archaeologists, historians, artists, collectors and professionals from the museum world have all shared their expertise for the benefit of this academic and cultural project that was conceived with the purpose of generating public interest.

Richard Veymiers
Director, Domaine et Musée royal de Mariemont

Established in the very heart of Toulouse within the brick walls of a 16th-century university college classified as a historical monument, the Musée Saint-Raymond is at the same time a museum of archaeology and a site in its own right. It features collections from Antiquity to the Middle Ages, the majority coming from regional excavations, and its basement preserves in place the traces of an early Christian necropolis associated with the first great Basilica of Saint-Sernin.

The Saint-Raymond Museum is principally known for its very important collection of antiquities, among which there stands out the exceptional group of Roman sculptures from the villa of Chiragan. The ancient Mediterranean worlds constitute a privileged area of exploration in our permanent collections and programming of temporary exhibitions. This is the reason for the significant attention given to this project dedicated to the Roman cult of Mithras, which has left numerous pieces of evidence in southwestern Gaul. Along with our two European partners, we hope to present an exhibition rich in meaning and ambitious from a scholarly perspective, while seeking to make it accessible to the broader public. Following *Age of Classics* in 2019, and then *Wisigoths, rois de Toulouse* in 2020, the Musée Saint-Raymond is proud to present “The Mystery of Mithras: Exploring the Heart of a Roman Cult”, beginning 14 May 2022.

Laure Barthet
Director, Musée Saint-Raymond de Toulouse



The south side of the Musée Saint-Raymond.



Roman antiquities at the Archäologisches Museum Frankfurt.

The Archäologisches Museum Frankfurt was split off from the Historisches Museum Frankfurt in 1937. Since 1989, the museum has been housed in the old, Gothic monastery of the Carmelites, to the west of the historic city centre. The Church of Saint Mary attached to the monastery was built at the end of the 13th century and then enlarged in the 15th century in Late Gothic style. After having been deconsecrated at the beginning of the 19th century and then destroyed in 1944 during the war, it was reconstructed and given an extension in Postmodernist style by Josef Paul Kleihues (1933-2004) in order to be used as a museum.

Under a single roof have thus been reunited collections devoted to Prehistory, Protohistory, and provincial Roman archaeology from the Rhine-Main Metropolitan Region, but also to classical Mediterranean antiquity, the ancient Near East and Egypt. A good part of the collections come from excavations undertaken in Frankfurt's Heddernheim and Praunheim quarters. It was at this location that from the 1st to the 3rd century was found Roman Nida, the capital of the Civitas Taunensium and administrative, economic and religious centre for the countryside of Germania Superior's *limes*.

Since 1827, four (or even five) temples of Mithras have come to light in the Roman settlement. Their supraregional importance was revealed internationally as early as the 19th century thanks to the joint research efforts of Georg Wolff (1845-1929) and Franz Cumont (1868-1947). It is in this spirit of cross-border collaboration that the museums at Mariemont, Toulouse and Frankfurt in 2019 embarked on a collective and convivial project seeking to present to the broader public in Belgium, France and Germany the latest results of international research undertaken into the cult of Mithras.

Wolfgang David

Director, Archäologisches Museum Frankfurt

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Entitled “MITHRA: Mobility and Intercultural Dialogue for the Transmission of Heritage from Roman Antiquity”, this project directly meets the objectives of the European Union’s cultural policy: encouraging the circulation of cultural heritage and its promotion before large numbers, while fostering creativity and innovation. It is necessary to thank here Max Godefroid, Coordinator at the Creative Europe Desk of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, for his helpful advice during the grant application process. The project, which runs from 2020 to 2023, has been benefitting from the expert support of Vincent Roels (EACEA) and Kathleen Louw (MRM) as European Grant Managers.

This European cooperation project brings together three museum institutions from Belgium, France and Germany: the Musée royal de Mariemont (MRM), research establishment of the French Community of Belgium, as the lead coordinator, and the Musée Saint-Raymond de Toulouse (MSR) and Archäologisches Museum Frankfurt (AMF) as co-partners. The authorities overseeing our three museums are to be thanked for supporting the successful undertaking of this scholarly and cultural project: Bénédicte Linard, Minister of Culture and Vice-President of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation Government, and Freddy Cabaraux, Administrator-General of Culture of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation’s

Ministry; Jean-Luc Moudenc, Mayor of the city of Toulouse, and Pierre Esplugas-Labatut, Deputy Mayor in charge of museums; and Peter Feldmann, Mayor of the city of Frankfurt, and Ina Hartwig, City Councillor in charge of culture.

The launching of this European cooperation project mobilised our institutions as early as 2019, but its implementation is the result of a group effort on the part of personnel from all three museums. We are deeply grateful to the curators and assistant curators who have devoted themselves to this project at Mariemont, Toulouse and Frankfurt: Nicolas Amoroso, Curator of the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities (MRM); Pascal Capus, Assistant Curator and Head of the Sculpture and Numismatic Collections (MSR), and Carsten Wenzel, Curator of the Roman Provincial Collections (AMF). We must likewise thank all of the members of the production teams who have contributed their expertise to this project and have done so with enthusiasm, professionalism and energy:

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Lastly, we salute the valuable support of our respective societies of Friends: the Cercle royal des Amis de Mariemont (Philippe Fontaine, President, and Graham Cuvelier, Coordinator), the Association des Amis du Musée Saint-Raymond, and the Friends of the Archäologisches Museum Frankfurt.

The initial inspiration for this project came from Laurent Bricault, Professor at the Université de Toulouse – Jean Jaurès, a specialist in the history of the religions of the ancient world, who never stopped supporting us and giving us the benefit of his learned expertise. He thus is serving as co-curator of the exhibition, along with Alexandra Dardenay, Lecturer at the same institution. Thanks to their assistance, the top specialists in the field were alerted to this project and involved in the catalogue, leading to a wonderful scholarly undertaking that is reflected in the list of authors featured in the following pages.

In addition to this group of experts, the exhibition has aroused a genuine spirit of international cooperation, effectively facilitated by the support of the Creative Europe programme. We must therefore thank all of those – and they are many in number – who have contributed to this project, whether it be by providing photographs or information, works specially conceived for the exhibition, or ancient objects transported over long distances for display at one or more of the three museums. This group of partners includes the following:

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- Melanie Herget**
Historisches Museum der Pfalz Speyer
- Fraser Hunter**
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- Gheorghe Vasile Nataea**
Muzeul de Istorie, Sibiu
- Irina Nemeti**
Muzeul de istorie al Transilvaniei, Cluj-Napoca
- Trinidad Nogales Basarrate**
Museo Nacional de Arte Romano, Mérida
- Fabien Pècheur**
Musée Communal de Nivelles
- Ophélie de Peretti**
Musée archéologique de Mariana
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