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## A dedication to Mithras from Nicopolis ad Istrum (Abstract)

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The paper examines a dedication to Mithras from the village of Nikyup near ancient Nicopolis ad Istrum (Fig. 1; CIMRM II, 2264-2265), which has been known since 1896 and commented by numerous scholars, and yet an earlier inscription on the stone appears to have remained unnoticed until now. The monument is a stone block with relief tauroctony and two Greek inscriptions. The earlier inscription, published here for the first time, is engraved on the inner frame around the relief (Fig. 2). It is a dedication to Lord Mithras by a certain Galerius, son of Proteus: “Κυριῶ (!) Μίθρα εὐχ[ῆ]ν | Γαλέριος Προτέως (!) ἐπιγναφ{α}-εὐς.” The trade of the dedicant, ἐπιγναφεύς (‘assistant fuller’), is a hitherto unattested Greek noun which, as we can infer from a passage in Lucian’s “Runaways” containing the corresponding verb ἐπιγνάπτω (Luc. *Drap.*, 28), designates the person who shears off the excessive nap on clothes.

The later inscription (IGBulg II, 679), which was hitherto incorrectly associated with the relief tauroctony, is engraved above and to the right of the field with the relief. It is a dedication to the “listening god Helios Mithras” (Ἡλίῳ Μίθρα θεῶ ἐπήκῳ) by the fuller (γναφεύς) Aurelius Marcus who, according to the text, made “the small stele with the painting” - τὸ στήλιον σὺν τῇ ζωγραφίᾳ. Previous authors, who have commented on the text associating it with the relief and without knowing about Galerius’ inscription, arbitrarily suggested that ζωγραφία meant ‘painted relief’ and designated the existing tauroctony. However, three rectangular slots around the relief,

one of which still containing part of a leaded iron bar (Fig. 4), clearly show that there was a metal structure/frame which was attached over the relief and apparently supported some plate-like object. Aurelius Marcus’ inscription is actually later than the three slots, since its line 7 is adjusted to one of them (Fig. 5), and therefore its text should have referred to the object which was mounted in these slots and not to the relief.

The author examines the use of the words στήλιον and ζωγραφία in epigraphic and literary texts. Στήλιον, a diminutive form of στήλη ‘stele’, is only attested in two more inscriptions, one of which, the stele IGBulg IV, 2112 (Fig. 6) shows the phonetic variant στήλεον, hitherto incorrectly read as σπίλεον (i.e. σπήλαιον ‘cave’!). Ζωγραφία has numerous attestations, but always with the meaning ‘painting’ and not ‘relief’. It is therefore suggested that the dedication of Marcus Aurelius was only a painting on flat surface (wooden or marble plaque) and not a relief. It could have represented another tauroctony, replacing the older relief due to some damage (although the only damage to the relief seems rather recent) or changes in the iconography. Another possibility - considering the existence of two-sided reliefs turning on pivots (Figs. 16-18) and the evidence of painted curtains placed over images in mithraea - is to think of a plaque with different scene which was moveably attached to the metal construction.

The inscription of Galerius could be dated to the second half of the second century AD or the beginning of the third century AD, while that of Aurelius Marcus belongs to the end of the second

century AD or the first half of the third century AD (probably after AD 212 because of the gentilicium Aurelius). It has been suggested that Aurelius Marcus was the same person as the dedicant of a small mithraic altar from Nicopolis ad Istrum (Fig. 19; IGBulg V, 5229), whose name is only Marcus (i.e. before he was granted Roman citizenship with the

Constitutio Antoniniana). Both Galerius and Aurelius Marcus belonged to the same trade; therefore, it is not impossible to suppose that the mithraeum where the tauroctony was dedicated, and probably the introduction of the cult itself in Nicopolis ad Istrum, could have been connected with the professional community of fullers in the city.