CHAPTER TWO

THE DEDICANTS OF MITHRAIC MONUMENTS

Although in Gaul the structural remains of Mithraea are relatively few, over eighty monuments, including sculptures, inscriptions, and representations on pottery, may be associated with the cult of Mithras, and these are given detailed commentary in the Catalogue and in Appendix B. The representations on pottery (Appendix B) form a coherent and specialised group and are discussed in the following chapter, but it is the purpose of this summary to make some general observations on the type of people who dedicated monuments to this god, their origin, class, and occupation.

It is frequently asserted that the army played a very considerable role in the diffusion of Mithraism, and García y Bellido, in his recent work on oriental cults in Spain, explains the paucity of Mithraic monuments in Spain by the infrequency of legionary traffic in the Peninsula.¹

In Gaul, the situation is more complex. The provinces of Gaul were not garrisoned, and yet they have yielded a much larger number of Mithraic monuments than Spain. Of the inscriptions included in the Catalogue, only two specifically mention soldiers, and these are dedications to a Deus Invictus (Nos. 19 & 55). Their Mithraic character must, therefore, be treated with some caution.

On the other hand, the available evidence, although limited and therefore of doubtful value statistically, reveals the interesting fact that all the Mithraic inscriptions found in the area round the mouth of the Rhône are dedicated by men bearing Greek cognomina. As Thylander has pointed out, the possession of a Greek cognomen does not necessarily indicate a freedman of Greek origin — these names could be passed on for generations after enfranchisement ² — but it is striking that the inscriptions were found in cosmopolitan centres which had a low proportion

of indigenous inhabitants. At Vaison, where the dedication by L. Apro-nius Chrysomallus was found (No. 10), the indigenous population was only 13% of the total. Moreover, J.-J. Hatt has included a number of these *cognomina* amongst a group of religious names, the popularity of which spread into Gaul via the Rhône valley, largely through the agency of orientals, slaves, freedmen, and members of corporations. The evidence indicates that the cult of Mithras followed this same route.

From the mouth of the Rhône (where all the dedications have been dated tentatively before the end of the second century) the followers of Mithras carried the worship of their god northwards to Bourg St. Andéol, where a relief of the bull-slaying scene has been found cut into the rock-face (No. 13), and to the *mansio* of Mons Seleucus, a thriving commercial centre. A marble statuette of the bull-slaying scene (No. 14) is dedicated by a romanised Gaul, M. Julius Maternianus, probably one of the more prosperous inhabitants of the town, but the discovery at the same time of graffiti dedications to a *Deus Invictus* by the slaves Gaudentius and Euporius (No. 15) may indicate that the god had followers amongst the most humble members of the community.

At Vieu-en-Val-Romey, further up the Rhône valley, a dedication is made to a Mithraic *pater* (No. 20), a man probably of Greek origin to judge by his *cognomen*, Eutactus, and the fact that he served the community as *medicus*. He seems to have married a woman of local origin, Caesiccia Januaria (their son was given the Celtic name Virilis), and his influence may well have encouraged a number of the local inhabitants to become followers of the cult of Mithras. Remains of a Mithraeum have been excavated, and a second inscription, dedicated to the Sun God and mentioning a man with the Gallic *cognomen*, Billicatidos (No. 21), possibly had a Mithraic context.

At several points along important routes outside the Rhône valley similar indications of Mithraic worship have been found. Evidence from Les Bolards seems to suggest that Mithraic influence travelled up the Saône, and at Elusa, in Aquitaine, situated on an important trade route

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3 It must be noted, however, that Hirschfeld considers these graffiti dedications false: *CIL*, XII, 5686, 1160.