

The mithraeum in the vicus of Wiesloch, Lkr. Rhein-Neckar, Baden-Württemberg

About 183m N. of the Leimbach at Wiesloch, in an area of unused land known as Die Dornmühle, a mithraeum was discovered in Autumn 1988 and excavated in the course of 1989 by Dr. R-H. Behrends and the staff of the Archäologische Denkmalpflege, Karlsruhe.

The vicus of Wiesloch grew up early in IIP at the crossing of the main Mainz-Augsburg road with the important road linking Speyer and Bad Wimpfen. The first Mithraists here may have been veterans from Ladenburg and Heidelberg, which are nearby. The mithraeum is situated about 13m from a road running N-S, and approached by a paved path leading off the road.

Phase 1:

The first phase of the mithraeum was dug 1.80m deep into the earth, and oriented roughly E-W, with the entrance at the E. end (fig. 1). The main aisle was 1.70m wide, flanked by podia 4.40m long, 1.20m wide and 50/60cm high. At 1.4m² per man, this means that altogether around 6-8 men could have lain on the podia. Their facings were simply cut out of the clay soil, and stabilised with turf-sods on the inner side, themselves shored up by wattle fencing or wood. Along the outer edge of the podia ran a channel, in which the roof-posts, some of them in pairs for added strength, were fixed. It is probable that the gaps between these posts were also clad with turf. Turf sods had also been piled up against the W. wall to support the cult-image. This is the first time that turf-sods have been found in a Roman building other than fortification walls prior to mid IIP. The upper part of the building, which projected above ground, was half-timbered. Nothing is known of the entrance area of this phase to the E., but it probably corresponded to that of phase 2.

This building burned down.

Phase 2.

The second phase was simply built over the first: the total length is 5.70m, width 4.60m. The side walls were faced with dry-stone walling just above the ancient ground-level, which is c. 50cm above the level of the top of the podia (fig. 2). Above this level the walls seem to have again been half-timbered. The podia were also now faced by means of dry stone walls without a foundation, whereas the central section of the W. end wall was built entirely of masonry and cement to a width of 50cm, evidently to provide an adequate support for the cult-relief: a shelf 14cm wide was constructed at a height of 62cm to receive the relief, which was also supported by wooden posts on either side. These dimensions suggest a cult-relief of about the size of the Osterburken relief, i.e. c. 1.70m wide. The roof was supported on each side by means of four wooden posts set into the dry-stone walling, and the building was probably thatched or covered in wooden shingles.

At the E. end, outside the main cella, an area of clay mixed with the remains of burned organic matter and pottery sherds, suggests that there was a lightly-built *pronaos*, which must have been approached by means of descending steps. A single one-handed jug was found here.

Graves

Some 3.70m E of this *pronaos* two graves were found (evidently, though the report does not say so, dug into the ground level, so rather higher than the mithraeum itself). One was an incineration grave (Brandschüttungsgrab) dated to the reign of M. Aurelius (161-180 AD) or a little later by an As and two lamps, the other by its two t-s bowls to mid-IIP (Brandgrubengrab). Hensen believes these graves are connected with the mithraeum (see now

his 'Mithräum und Grab,' *Saalburg Jahrbuch* 50 (1999), 353-61. Two other graves were found 18m away. These burials suggest that the temple was situated outside the limits of the vicus, and that the first phase of the temple was in existence c. mid IIP, when we know there were already mithraea at Riegel, Königshoffen, Biesheim, Heddernheim, Mundelsheim and Stockstadt.

Finds

Rather few material remains were found, and it must be concluded that the mithraeum was deliberately cleared before its abandonment.

Stone monuments

A single uninscribed altar (fig. 3.1) was found in front of the cult-relief area (fig. 1); it had presumably once carried a painted text. Two rather wretched fragments of a votive relief to Mercury (fig. 3.2) were found on the floor, incised DEO MER(curio). The remainder was probably painted onto the flattened surface below. (Deo occurs first in the 2nd half of IIP.) Hensen has collected the Mithraic dedications to Mercury/Mithras-Mercury in: A. Hensen, 'Mercurio Mithrae – Zeugnisse der Merkurverehrung im Mithraskult,' *Provinzialrömische Forschungen: Festschrift für Günter Ulbert zum 65. Geburtstag*, eds. C. Czysz et al. (Espelkamp 1995), 211-16.

Pottery

Some sherds of circular incense-burners were found E. of the walls near the surface (fig. 3.3), but they may derive from burials.

Galenite

A galenite crystal the size of a walnut, presumably from the local lead-workings between Nußloch and Wiesloch, was found near the altar. This may have no religious significance, but may equally have been a foundation-deposit.

Other finds:

About 6m. SE of the building was found a rectangular rubbish-pit (1.50 x 1.10m, 1.07m deep), which was filled with coarse-ware sherds belonging to IIP and a large number of cattle, pig, sheep/goat and horse bones. This will represent the remains of collective meals, although unfortunately no analysis comparable to that commissioned by K. Schmotz for the bones at Künzing was undertaken. On top was found a curious assemblage: the carefully paired bones of a raven, covered by a large oil-amphora sherd, on top of which was a horse's skull.

The end of the mithraeum

Nothing suggests that the temple was destroyed violently. A silver-plated brooch (Armbrustscharnierfibel) found by the entrance suggests that it was abandoned later than c. 225 AD. The building soon filled up with clay fallen from the walls, and alluvial deposits, and was clearly used as a rubbish-dump later in the IIP.

Source: A. Hensen, 'Das Mithräum im Vicus von Wiesloch,' *Archäologische Nachrichten aus Baden* Heft 51/2 (1994), 30-37.

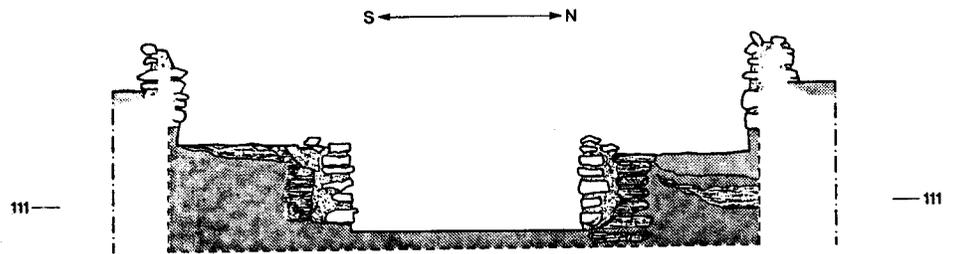


Abb. 2: Wiesloch, Rhein-Neckar-Kreis. Nord/Süd-Schnitt durch das Mithräum nahe dem Ostende der Podien.

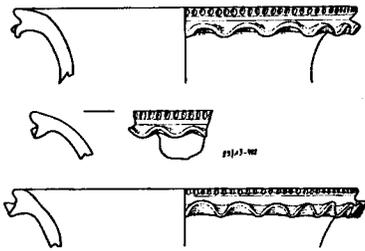
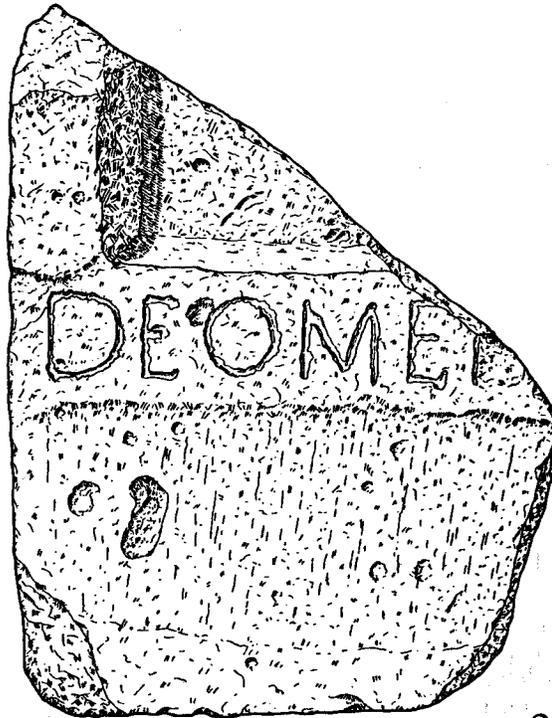
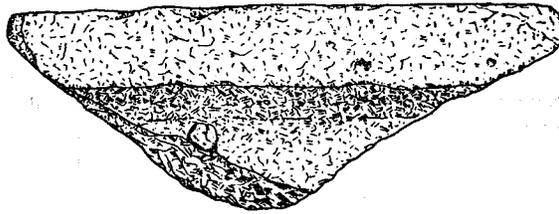
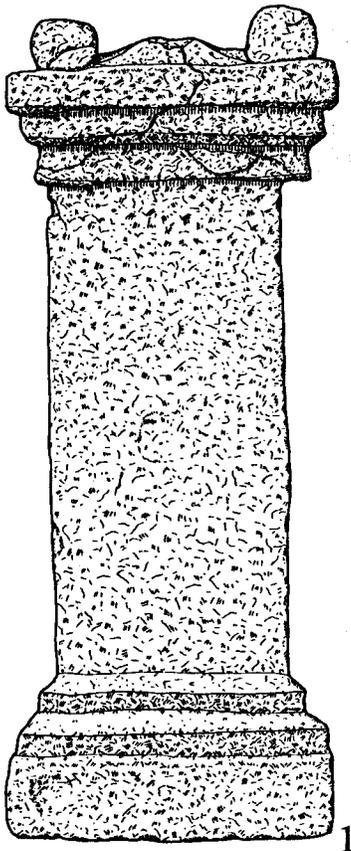
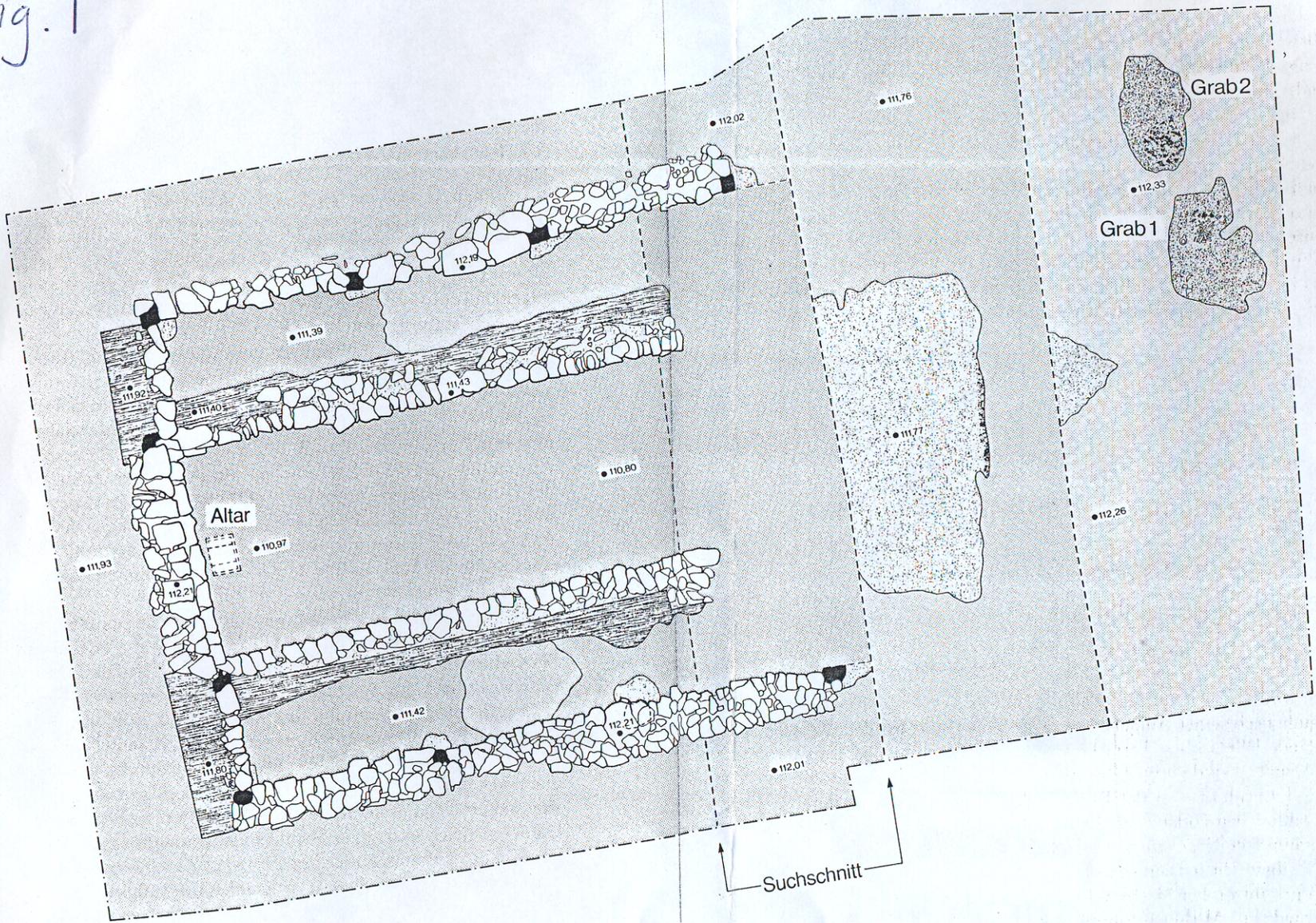


Abb. 3: Wiesloch, Rhein-Neckar-Kreis. Funde aus dem Mithräum. 1. Altar aus Schilfsandstein (1:8)
2. Inschrift für Merkur aus Keupersandstein (1:2) 3. Räucherkelche, Randfragmente (1:3)

Fig. 1



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|---|------------------------------------|---|----------------------|
|  | Mauerwerk |  | Rasensoden |
|  | Silt (tonig) |  | Pfosten |
|  | Lehm (siltig) |  | Holzkohle |
|  | Lehm (siltig, humos) |  | Leichenbrandhäufchen |
|  | Mischerde (z. B. Grubeneinfüllung) |  | Grabungsgrenze |
|  | Brandschüttung |  | Planumsrand |