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A NEW MITHRAIC RELIEF FROM VEII*

This paper examines a newly discovered marble relief composed of two pieces (A and B) found on the plateau of the city of Veii, located along the Via Cassia about km 17 north of Rome (*Fig. 1*). The relief, which has not been fully studied until now, provides new and significant evidence of the Cult of Mithras in Veii in Etruria. It is kept today in the *Nuovo Museo dell'Agro Veientano* in *Palazzo Chigi*, in the town of Formello (relief: inv. 143672)¹. Although it features the typical bull-slaying scene (tauroctony), the high stylistic quality of the piece and the presence of an iconographic feature uncommon among other existing Mithraic reliefs, are what distinguish it from other similar finds.

The relief (*Fig. 1*) was recovered in March 2009, during an operation by the *Gruppo Tutela Patrimonio Archeologico della Guardia di Finanza* of Rome in collaboration with the *Procura della Repubblica*. It had been hidden in a barn of one of the farm houses situated just north of the vast plateau where the ancient Etruscan city of *Veii* once stood. The large marble slab (A) depicts the god Mithras in the typical act of killing the bull. When it was found the top right hand corner was missing and the relief was in the process of being sold to a buyer in the Far East. A few weeks after it was seized by the authorities, the corner piece (B), which featured the biga of Luna, was handed in to the *Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici dell'Etruria Meridionale* by the same person who had been in possession of the slab (A). Some information about the location of the find was acquired during the recovery operation.

In 2011, I requested geophysical surveys to be carried out in the area where the relief was found. The research was carried out thanks to the help of S. Piro from the *Istituto per le Tecnologie Applicate ai Beni Culturali del CNR*, who has been researching in *Veii* for a number of years. The results of this research allow us now to begin focused archaeological digs in order to widen our knowledge of the context of the relief.

FRANCESCA BOITANI

This study is organised in three parts, in order to provide the reader with the most comprehensive historical archaeological context in which to consider the new find. The first part is a brief introduction to the cult of Mithras with particular focus on its presence and

* I would like to thank Dr. F. Boitani for allowing me to examine the find; Profs. L. Musso, E. Equini Schneider, C.J. Smith, R. Beck, B. Rose, E. La Rocca, A. Mastrocinque, D. Palombi and M. Papini for their advice; Dr. E. Lissi Caronna with whom I was able to discuss some of the iconographic elements; Dr. I. Van Kampen, director of the *Nuovo Museo dell'Agro Veientano*, for facilitating the documentary research; Dr. M. Brilli from the *Istituto di Geologia Ambientale e Geoingegneria, CNR*; Dr. R. Cascino from The British School at Rome and Dr. H. Di Giuseppe for their information about the Mithraic discovery during the field survey carried out by J. Ward-Perkins in *Veii*; Mr. C. Brecciaroli for his time and willingness to assist; A. Faulkner and N. Luciani.

¹ A brief mention of the find can be found in PORCAROLI, 2009 (factual publication) and in LIVERANI 2012b, p. 147.



Fig. 1. *Veii*. Photo mosaic of the two findings A-B (photos taken by the author).

spread in Etruria based on previous studies and the most recent archaeological discoveries. The second part concentrates on the discovery itself and deals with the problems linked to the area in which it was found, to the analysis and interpretation of the subjects depicted and to the chronology. A more in depth analysis is dedicated to an object depicted in the relief, considered to be a bow, due to its symbolic importance in the Mithraic mysteries. Finally, the third part provides the historical background of the site of *Veii* during the Roman age, including an overview of the main cults which existed during the Imperial age.

THE CULT OF MITHRAS AND ITS SPREAD IN ETRURIA

The Roman cult of Mithras differs from the Indo-Iranian cult of Mitra. The god Mitra, known since the Bronze Age, has every contract and agreement including oaths

under his protection². Over the centuries he took on further characteristics: in Persia in the Achaemenid period, he is both god to the kings and the people and in the 5th-4th century B.C. his link to the sun, symbolizing light in contrast to darkness, is documented³. His solar deity was further developed in the Hellenistic period through identification with the Greek sun-god⁴. The Roman cult should be considered as an independent creation in that it does not have any direct continuity with the antique Indo-Iranian cult worship but combines old and new religious concepts⁵. Exactly how the cult of Mithras was spread is uncertain⁶ and early evidence of its existence in various areas of the Roman world (Italy and the west) can be dated to the late first century A.D.⁷. The large number of Mithraic discoveries recovered in Rome and Ostia⁸ lead us to believe that these are the areas from which the cult spread, due perhaps to the mediation of the legions of soldiers from the East or of Oriental origin⁹. From the middle of the second century A.D. the cult was wide-spread, as the numerous archaeological inscriptions and shrines (*spelaeum*-cavern) prove. The cult was a mystery religion and esoteric in nature; therefore it was not public and was not supported by the state with public funds¹⁰. The congregation was generally made up of a few members (the *fratres*) who would gather in a shrine under the guidance of a *Pater*¹¹. The shrine was usually a building of limited capacity because of the reserved rituals for which it was used, such as initiation ceremonies, theological and philosophical discussions and sacred banquets. By analysing inscriptions we understand that the congregation was made up of mainly soldiers, members of the Imperial administration, slaves and freedmen belonging to the Imperial House, private households and citizens¹², while women were totally excluded¹³. An important point is the close relationship between Mithraism, the Emperor, his family and his army¹⁴. In particular from the period of the rule of Commodus (180-193 A.D.), who was himself a member of the cult¹⁵, some inscriptions found in shrines were dedicated by soldiers to the health and the safety of the Emperor, whose role was to

² CLAUSS 2000, p. 3; GRAF 2005, p. 34; GORDON 2007, p. 394; WITSCHERL 2013, pp. 201-203.

³ CLAUSS 2000, pp. 3-5.

⁴ MERKELBACH 1984; CLAUSS 2000, pp. 3-8.

⁵ On the Roman cult of Mithras: MERKELBACH 1984; BIVAR 1998; CLAUSS 2000; GRAF 2005; BECK 2006; GORDON 2007; ALVAR 2008; GAWLIKOWSKI 2009; SANZI, SFAMENI 2009; GORDON 2012; WITSCHERL 2013; PAPINI 2015.

⁶ See for example BECK 1998; WITSCHERL 2013, pp. 205-209.

⁷ CLAUSS 2000, p. 22; GRAF 2005, p. 34; SFAMENI GASPARRO 2005, p. 102; GORDON 2007, p. 395.

⁸ As far as the most ancient evidence of Mithraism in Rome and Ostia is concerned, the oldest Roman Mithraeum dates back to around 180 A.D. (S. Stefano Rotondo), while that from Ostia to around 140-160 A.D.; the most ancient inscriptions from Rome date back to 80-120 A.D. (*CIL*, VI 718 = 30818 = *ILS* 4199 = *CIMRM* 594; *CIL*, VI 732 = *ICUR* 179 = *CIRM* 362); the poet Statius alludes to a Mithraic relief in Rome around 90 A.D. (*STAT., Theb.* 1, 719-720): GORDON 1994, p. 467; CLAUSS 2000, p. 22; GORDON 2009, pp. 391-395.

⁹ ROMIZZI 2005. For the central role of Italy in the spread of the cult: CLAUSS 2000, pp. 21-22; opposing opinion in GORDON 1994, pp. 467, 471; ID. 2007, p. 395 and ID. 2009, pp. 389-90.

¹⁰ Furthermore, more recent research tends not to consider the cult as purely practised privately: MASTROCINQUE 2009b, pp. 10-12 and LATTEUR 2011; contrary to this hypothesis for example, CLAUSS 2000, pp. 24-25 and SANZI, SFAMENI 2009, p. 99 and note 49.

¹¹ GORDON 2007, p. 400.

¹² GORDON 1994, pp. 468-469; CLAUSS 2000, pp. 33-41; GRAF 2005, p. 34; GORDON 2007, p. 400.

¹³ GORDON 1994, p. 465; CLAUSS 2000, p. 33; SFAMENI GASPARRO 2005, p. 103; GORDON 2007, p. 393.

¹⁴ CLAUSS 2000, pp. 23, 25, 34-380; SFAMENI GASPARRO 2005, p. 103; GORDON 2007, p. 395; MASTROCINQUE 2009a, pp. 173-175.

¹⁵ MASTROCINQUE 2009a, pp. 175-176; PAPINI 2015, p. 110 and LAMPR. *Comm.* 9, 6.

guarantee the peace and safety of the Empire under the protection of Mithras¹⁶. The end of Mithraism is considered to be the late fourth century A.D. which is linked to the ban on the celebration of pagan cults¹⁷.

In order to outline the spread of the cult of Mithras in Etruria (*Regio VII*) we must remember that the collection and study of evidence of the cult has been ongoing for some time. In terms of existing historical studies on this subject, we may initially refer to research by F. Cumont in the late 1800s¹⁸ whose work was then followed by L.R. Taylor's work on the cults in Etruria¹⁹. These early works were then updated with the publication of the first volume of *Corpus inscriptionum et monumentorum religionis mithriacae (CIMRM)* by M.J. Vermaseren²⁰. Further evidence of the existence of the cult came to light following recent archaeological research in Cerveteri, Vulci, Bisenzio and *Portus Pisanus*. Unfortunately, even after examining all the archaeological evidence surrounding the cult, the picture we have remains incomplete and unsatisfactory. While there are some confirmed places of worship linked to the cult²¹, there is substantial evidence supporting the existence of the cult in the form of reliefs²², statues²³, inscriptions²⁴ and more²⁵, the most ancient of which generically date to the second century A.D. All of these artefacts may be interpreted both as an indication of how widespread the cult was in the area examined and as an indication that other shrines may have been present in the area, which remain undiscovered to date. The only general study on the development of the cult of Mithras in Etruria is that of F. Cumont in 1937. He suggests that given the distribution of discoveries in the area, the spread of the cult was not just limited to cities located near the main road, but also smaller towns further

¹⁶ MASTROCINQUE 2009a. For the spread of the cult among soldiers particularly those in the northern provinces: GORDON 2007, p. 396. For more on the relationship between Mithraism and the Roman army see the recent critical analysis by GORDON 2009.

¹⁷ CLAUSS 2000, pp. 31-32; SCARPI 2003, p. 353.

¹⁸ CUMONT 1896-1899.

¹⁹ TAYLOR 1923, pp. 58 (Turrita near Nazzano), 103 (Soriano in Cimino), 109-110 (Sutri), 112 (*Vicus Matrini*), 158-159 (near Orvieto), 164 (near Orvieto), 174 (*Rusellae*), 182 (near Montalcino), 200 (Arezzo), 215 (Firenze), 222 (Pisa).

²⁰ *CIMRM* 645-668. More recent publications which collate information on Mithraic artefacts (VOLLKOMMER 1992 and GAWLIKOWSKI 2009) do not provide any significant advances on the subject.

²¹ *Cosa*, middle second century (RICHARDSON 1957; BROWN, RICHARDSON, RICHARDSON 1993, pp. 244-245) or first half third century A.D. (FENTRESS 1994, p. 213); Bisenzio, end of second century A.D.-Severian Age (BIAMONTE 1997); *Portus Pisanus*, middle second-middle third century A.D. (GENOVESI 2011); Sutri, Imperial period (*CIMRM* 653); Vulci, third century A.D. (SGUBINI MORETTI 1979, pp. 259-268). The existence of a place of worship at *Lucus Feroniae* is less certain (EAD., p. 474) and finally the inscription *CIL*, XI 2684 (*CIMRM* 660, *Volsinii*), from the area north of Orvieto datable to second century A.D. (MUNZI 2001, p. 23), which mentions the construction of a Mithraic temple with all its furnishings. Evidence of the cult of Mithras has recently been found on the walls of the hypogeum of Clepsina, in Cerveteri. I would like to thank F. Colivicchi for providing me with the news of this discovery which will shortly be published in *Mouseion: Journal of the Classical Association of Canada*. M.A. Rizzo had already suggested there was evidence of the cult of Mithras within the structure in the second century A.D.: RIZZO 1994, p. 105.

²² *CIMRM* 641 (Fiano Romano), 654 (Sutri), 655-656 (*Vicus Matrini*), 657 (Soriano in Cimino), 663 (Pisa), 668 (Etruria).

²³ *CIMRM* 644 (via Cassia), 645 (Torrita), 661 (*Rusellae*), 662 (Asciano), 664-667 (Firenze?); TRACCHI 1978, p. 73 (Cavriglia-Arezzo); SGUBINI MORETTI 1979, pp. 268-276 (Vulci). I would also like to mention the recent recovery (march 2015) of a statue of the god Mithra and the bull (second-third century A.D.) from the territory of Tarquinia.

²⁴ *CIMRM* 646 (Torrita), 658 (Arezzo).

²⁵ *CIMRM* 659 (*Volsinii*).

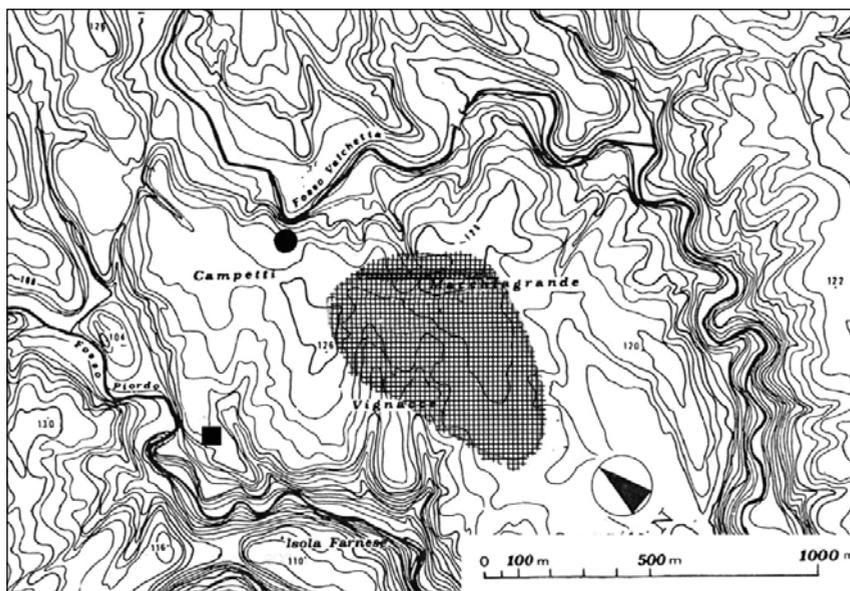


Fig. 2. *VEII*. Map with areas indicating where the relief was discovered (circle) and the location of the south-west Campetti site (square). The area marked by crosshatching indicates the probable extent of the town of Veii in the Imperial age (reworking from LIVERANI 1987, p. 23, fig. 4).

afield²⁶. This reconstructed hypothesis is still valid and can be combined with the idea of considering not only the main roads (such as the Aurelia, the Clodia, the Flaminia and the Tiberina) and secondary roads as a means of transfer but also the sea routes and seaports pertinent to the main centres of Maritime Etruria, as in the case of *Portus Pisanus*. Furthermore, F. Cumont believed that the Cult of Mithras in Etruria was not so much linked to the values of the military world as to agriculture of the land, centred in particular on fertility of the fields and livestock²⁷. M. Claus's study dedicated to *Cultores Mithrae*, in which worshippers from Etruria are taken into account confirms that there is no evidence of soldiers²⁸.

THE NEW FIND

The Location

The two pieces of the relief were found on separate occasions in the same field, located in the north Campetti area on a slight downward slope towards the Valchetta stream, near the periphery of the Roman city of *Veii* (Fig. 2). The field is a short distance from the Vicolo Formellese road, which runs lengthwise across the plateau. The fracture at the

²⁶ CUMONT 1937, p. 103. See also, SESTIERI 1933.

²⁷ CUMONT 1937, p. 103.

²⁸ CLAUS 1992, pp. 45, 48-50.

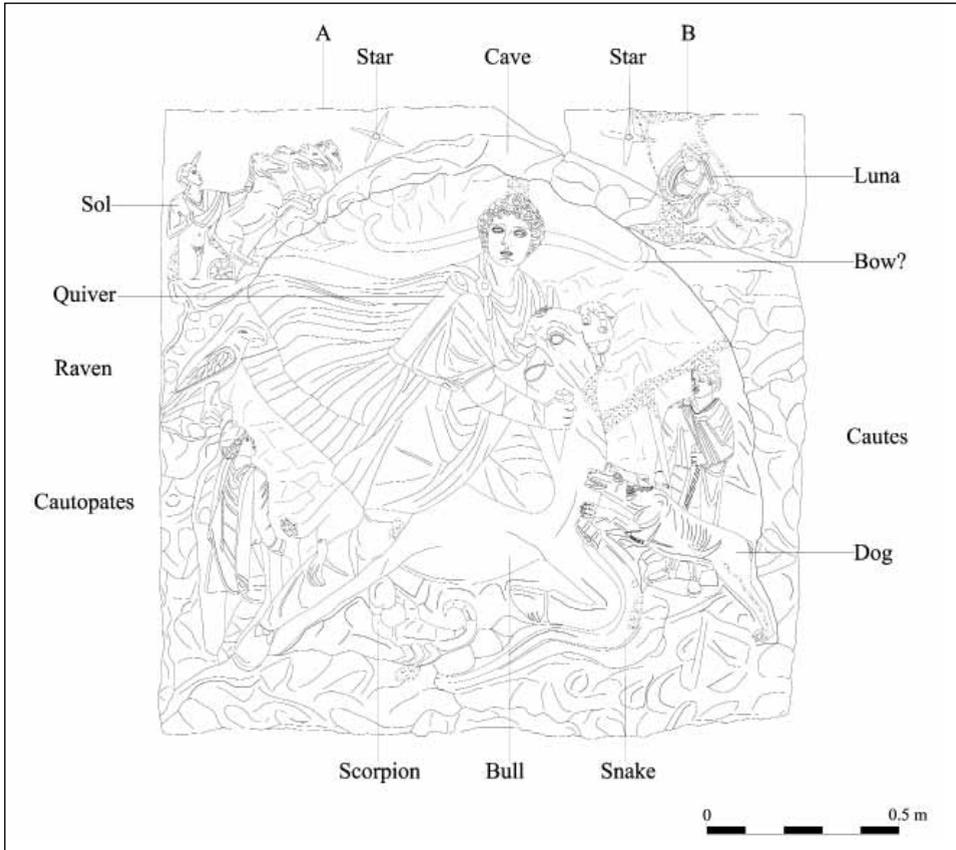


Fig. 3. Drawing of the relief, the dots indicate damaged areas (drawing by the author).

upper right corner of piece A is old and indicates that the two pieces had been separate for an indeterminable period of time. The abrasion marks on the surface of piece A, which are easily identifiable due to the colour of the marble, occurred at the time of the clandestine discovery of the relief (Fig. 3).

There are neither emerging wall structures visible on the ground, nor geological layers of tuff in this field, which is today used to grow alfalfa. A recent publication by the British School at Rome provides significant information which helps to define the archaeological framework of the areas which neighbour the site. The British School study concerns materials found during the field survey carried out by J. Ward-Perkins in the 1960s on the inhabited plateau of *Veii* (Fig. 4). The areas indicated as 20, 21 and 28 are those closest to the area of the find. Area 20 is considered to have been either a public or private building of notable quality, such as a villa, occupied from 305 B.C. to 650 A.D.²⁹. Area 21 is classi-

²⁹ DI GIUSEPPE, PATTERSON 2012, p. 41. According to FONTANA, PATTERSON 2012, p. 372, this site could make up a single archaeological complex with area 16 and could be related to the so-called villa of Quarticcioi of the suburbs of *Veii*.

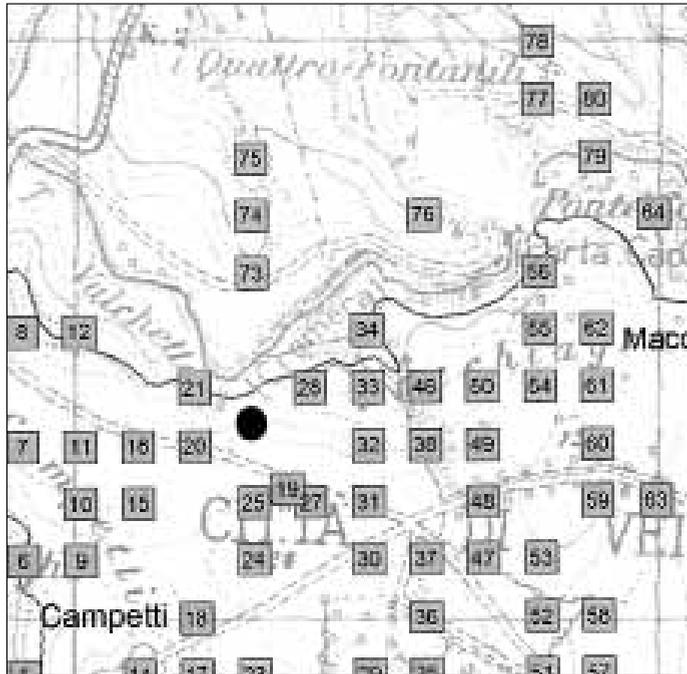


Fig. 4. *VEII*. Map of the area where the relief was found (black circle) and archaeological sites identified by J. Ward-Perkins (reworking from CASCINO, DI GIUSEPPE, PATTERSON 2012, fig. 4.1).

field as an area of concentration of pottery fragments datable to the Republican and Imperial period³⁰. Finally, area 28 is considered to be another area of concentration of pottery fragments, datable to between the fourth and third century B.C.³¹. This last site is located near to the sanctuary of Campetti, which was researched by M. Pallottino in 1937. It consists of monuments from the Etruscan period (an enclosure and structure of tufa blocks) and the Roman period (remains of dwellings)³². Nearby, there is a rectangular-shaped, underground room. This underground room or so-called ‘hypogeum with pillars’ is still partially visible, however the dimensions are not known. This room was part of the Etruscan shrine and appears to be carved directly from the geological layer³³. It is worth noting that in area 37 (*Fig. 4*) about m 400 from the area being examined, further evidence of the presence of the Cult of Mithras was found in the form of a fragment of a marble relief depicting figures from the Mithraic cycle³⁴. Unfortunately neither information concerning the chronology nor images of this piece are available.

³⁰ DI GIUSEPPE, PATTERSON 2012, p. 42.

³¹ DI GIUSEPPE 2012a, p. 47.

³² PALLOTTINO 1938-1939; COMELLA, STEFANI 1990.

³³ CAROSI 2002.

³⁴ DI GIUSEPPE, PATTERSON 2012, pp. 50-51.

The find was certainly part of a Mithraic shrine (*spelaeum-cavern*) and this would have been the focus point of the room³⁵. The shrine itself was most likely a natural cave or a space adapted for worship³⁶ and would generally have been located within or nearby a main building (for example a villa, thermal baths, barracks etc.)³⁷. In an attempt to reconstruct the original archaeological context, we may propose at least two, more plausible hypotheses while bearing in mind that they are still only possibilities³⁸: the first posits that the relief was part of a shrine situated in one of the archaeological areas previously described and therefore the relocation of the piece would have been minimal. The second theory assumes that the relief belonged to a shrine from a different archaeological site located further away on the *Veii* plateau. This hypothesis therefore implies that the relief would have been moved a significant distance at some point for unknown purposes.

To support the first hypothesis, we must consider the great size (fragment A: length m 1,59, height m 1,54 width m 0,16-0,33; fragment B: length m 0,57, height m 0,365, width m 0,11) and combined weight of the relief (around kg 1500). The relief and the presumed shrine may have been part of a private, suburban villa which could have been located in site 20³⁹. This type of settlement can be compared to that from Vulci in the Mithraeum of the so-called '*Domus del Criptoportico*'⁴⁰, where the owner of this house and a small circle of followers worshipped the god⁴¹. Moreover, in view of the close connection between the cult of Mithras and water/springs⁴², the presence of the nearby Valchetta stream is worth mentioning, while there is currently no evidence of springs in the area.

The second hypothesis, on the other hand, suggests that the most suitable archaeological location for a Mithraic shrine would have been the south-west Campetti site, an area located about m 600 south-west of where the relief was found (*Fig. 2*). This complex is one of the places containing the largest number of buildings in the suburb of *Veii* and is believed to have been a thermal, therapeutic and sacred site, where various different cults were practised which was in use from the end of the first century B.C. to the third century

³⁵ For the presence of reliefs depicting the bull-slaying scene on the back wall of Mithraic shrines: CLAUSS 2000, pp. 48-57.

³⁶ For construction features and dimensions: CLAUSS 2000, pp. 42-48; ALVAR 2008, pp. 350-351, 357-358 and SANZI, SFAMENI 2009, p. 102.

³⁷ Generally speaking, the shrine may have been situated, as well as in private houses, within the city for example in the *forum*, in thermal baths and in storehouses: ROMIZZI 2005, p. 275; ALVAR 2008, p. 352; MASTROCINQUE 2009a, p. 173; GORDON 2007, p. 393 and ID. 2013.

³⁸ We certainly cannot rule out *a priori* that the find originally came from other archaeological sites on the plateau of *Veii*, whether known or unknown. At present however, it is considered appropriate to put forward only the most likely hypotheses.

³⁹ As previously mentioned, the site could be related to the so-called villa of Quarticcioli. On the importance of the so-called villa of Quarticcioli in *Veii* from the Imperial period to Late Antiquity: FONTANA, PATTERSON 2012, pp. 371, 372 and in particular 374.

⁴⁰ MORETTI SGUBINI 1979, in this case, however, the building is situated within the city and not in the immediate suburbs, as in *Veii*. For the presence of villas in the immediate suburbs of *Veii*: FONTANA, PATTERSON 2012, pp. 366-367.

⁴¹ For more on people who participated in the mysteries of Mithras: CLAUSS 2000, pp. 33-41; GORDON 2007, pp. 396-397, 400.

⁴² This link is supported by the episode of the "water-miracle", in which Mithra creates a spring by firing an arrow at a rock, and also by numerous other features and structures (water-basins and cisterns) connected with the liturgy of the cult: VERMASEREN 1971, p. 12; GORDON 1976, pp. 120-123; VERMASEREN 1982, pp. 11, 83; TURCAN 1993, p. 76; CLAUSS 2000, pp. 71-74; BECK 2000, p. 152; SFAMENI GASPARRO 2003, p. 217 and ROMIZZI 2005, p. 276.

A.D. It had springs⁴³ and numerous architectural structures linked to water⁴⁴ (cisterns, baths, wells and *nymphaeum*). The association between Mithras and water supports this theory; however, nothing has been discovered that could link this complex to the cult.

Analysis and Interpretation

By joining the two pieces A and B we restore the relief almost to its original form (*Fig. 1*). It is made from a single slab of white, fine-grained marble (it is presumed to be Carrara but further analysis is required) and features mixed techniques: the central figure is in high relief while the others are in low relief. There are no visible traces of colour on the surface. The scene is set inside a cavern and depicts the slaying of the bull by the god Mithras, conventionally called the tauroctony⁴⁵.

We begin our analysis by looking at the figures who are outside the cavern. On the left, we can see Sol on his chariot as he is being drawn skyward by four horses; he is wearing a radiate solar crown. Two four-pointed stars can also be seen, and we shall come back to these later. On the right we can see Luna with her robes blowing in the wind to reveal one of her breasts. She is also aboard her biga being drawn downward by two horses. The goddess is looking towards Mithras⁴⁶. The scene inside the cavern is dominated by Mithras, who is much larger than the other figures. His face, which has decidedly idealised features, is turned toward the spectator⁴⁷. His hair is rather coarse and is made up of large, full-bodied curls, depicted by grooves in the marble. This effect is achieved by moderate use of the drill. He has large, elongated, almond-shaped eyes, with smooth eyeballs. His eyelids are protruding and noticeable. His mouth is small and slightly open with a full lower lip (*Figs. 5-6*). The soft lines of his face and the complete lack of emotion recall the classical ideal. The god is wearing typical Oriental dress, which is comprised of a sleeved tunic (*tunica manicata*) which forms a single bulge just above his waist⁴⁸, a Phrygian cap, which is only partially visible due to a crack in the marble, and long trousers (*anaxyrides*). Around his shoulders is a billowing cloak with numerous folds⁴⁹ clasped by a circular fibula on his right shoulder; over the same shoulder he is carrying a quiver⁵⁰. He holds the bull by its nostrils with his left hand, while his right hand plunges the dagger into the shoulder of the animal⁵¹ (*Fig. 6*). His left leg is bent, resting on the back of the animal while his right leg is outstretched with his foot on the hind right hoof of the bull. This iconographic composition falls within type I or type II of the classification by Campbell or type II C proposed more recently by R. Volkommer⁵². The bull is depicted with particular detail to its head (*Fig. 7*) and its body

⁴³ FUSCO 2013-2014.

⁴⁴ FUSCO 2008-2009 and ID. 2011.

⁴⁵ For more recent interpretations of the scene: MARTIN 1994; CLAUSS 2000, pp. 78-90; SFAMENI GASPARRO 2003, pp. 215, 218, 220; SFAMENI GASPARRO 2005, pp. 98-99; PRESCENDI 2006; ALVAR 2008, pp. 77, 96-97, 100; SANZI, SFAMENI 2009, pp. 99, 101; HEYNER 2013. On the meaning of Mithraic reliefs: HUET 2009.

⁴⁶ For a general view on both figures: WILL 1955, pp. 272-290; CAMPBELL 1968, pp. 134, 139, 141; CLAUSS 2000, pp. 84; BECK 2006, pp. 197-198. For iconography of Sol: LETTA 1988; and of Luna: GURY 1994.

⁴⁷ VOLKOMMER 1991, p. 270. For a comparison see for example *CIMRM* 966, 1083, 2306.

⁴⁸ On the right side of his waist, it is possible to see what we may assume is the sheath of the dagger.

⁴⁹ There are no stars visible on the cloak.

⁵⁰ For quivers in other reliefs: *CIMRM* 52, 83, 430, 546, 650, 693b and KIERNAN 2002, p. 239, fig. 1.

⁵¹ For more on how and where the fatal wound is inflicted on the bull: PALMER 2009.

⁵² CAMPBELL 1954: Type I, subtype A; VOLKOMMER 1991, pp. 270-73 Type II, C, 3a; ID. 1992, pp. 622-623 B, Type C, Subtype C 3.



Figs. 5-6. *VEII*. Mithraic Relief, detail of Mithras' face and of Mithras killing the bull (photo by the author).



Fig. 7. *VEII*. Mithraic Relief, detail of bull's head (photo by the author).

assumes a typical crescent shape⁵³ due to the pressure on its back. The bull's fragmented tail lies on Mithras' right leg and has not yet transformed into ears of corn. The torchbearers (*dadophori*) are smaller than Mithras but dressed similarly to him⁵⁴ (*Fig. 1*). Cautopates is seen on the viewer's left. He is depicted with his back to us⁵⁵ and his gaze is toward the god. He is holding something in his right hand, which is presumably his torch held low, and only his right leg is bent⁵⁶ (*Fig. 8*). Cautes is on the right facing us with his head turned round three quarters to look at the god. He is holding his torch up with his right hand⁵⁷ while his left arm is bent and covered by his cloak. His legs are straight and he is holding two objects in his left hand (*Fig. 9*): the first is wider (perhaps a second torch?) and the other is thinner and decorated with a series of incisions (a baton or *pedum*)⁵⁸.

The sequence of the figures is Cautopates → Mithras → Cautes, with the consequent iconographic connection between Cautopates – Sol – star on the left and Cautes – Luna –

⁵³ VOLKOMMER 1991, p. 268.

⁵⁴ For a general view on these figures: CUMONT 1896-1899, pp. 203-13; WILL 1955, pp. 193-204; CAMPBELL 1968, pp. 29-43; SCHWARTZ 1975; HINNELLS 1976; BECK 1977; ID. 1982; ULANSEY 1989, pp. 112-116; VOLKOMMER 1992, pp. 625-626; TURCAN 1993, pp. 47-48, 52; CLAUSS 2000, pp. 95-98; SFAMENI GASPARRO 2003, p. 215; BECK 2006, pp. 207-214, 222.

⁵⁵ This iconography is not widespread.

⁵⁶ HINNELLS 1976, p. 48.

⁵⁷ The end part of the object is damaged and is not clearly visible.

⁵⁸ For objects linked to Cautes: HINNELLS 1976, p. 44.



Figs. 8-9. *VEII*. Mithraic Relief, Cautopates (left) and Cautes (right; photo by the author).

star on the right. This order of the torchbearers can be defined as the northern type based on evidence from the Roman provinces in the north⁵⁹ and is widely documented. Taking up Cumont's theory, M. Clauss interprets Cautopates as the symbol of death and Cautes as that of joy and new life⁶⁰. This traditional view is expanded by Beck who provides an astrological interpretation. This is based on the common association between Cautopates and the scorpion and between Cautes and the head of the bull, and with their possible identification with the stars Antares and Aldebaran, the principal stars of the constellations Scorpio and Taurus respectively. Accordingly, they are linked to «... phenomena associated with the annual revolution of the sun, that is, with spring and autumn, Taurus (the sign of the zodiac through which the sun travels in April and May) and Scorpio (the sign through which it travels in October and November) that determines their positions. For there is a compelling reason why Cautes as Aldebaran should be placed in the west on the right and Cautopates as Antares in the east on the left»⁶¹. These are their proper positions when the bull-slaying scene is viewed as a star chart of sorts. Therefore, according to this theory, the star above Cautopates in the relief could be identified as Antares-Scorpio while

⁵⁹ BECK 1982, pp. 128; ID. 2006, p. 208; see also some critical comments in VERMASEREN 1971, pp. 11-12. The other sequence, defined as Italian (BECK 1984, p. 2084; ID. 1994, p. 43, note 52; ID. 2006, p. 208), is Cautes → Mithras → Cautopates and together with Sol and Luna they symbolise the passage from dawn (Cautes-Sol) to sunset (Cautopates-Luna): CLAUSS 2000, pp. 95-96, ALVAR 2008, p. 85 and BECK 2006, p. 208.

⁶⁰ CLAUSS 2000, pp. 97-98. See also GORDON 1976, p. 127, note 46. ALVAR 2008, p. 86 believes, on the other hand, that they seem to connote the two seasons, Spring and Autumn.

⁶¹ BECK 1977, p. 10. See also ID. 1984, pp. 2084-2085; ID. 1994, p. 33, note 27 and pp. 42-43, note 52; ID. 2006, p. 208. This hypothesis is also supported by ULANSEY 1989, pp. 62-66.

the one above Cautes as Aldebaran-Taurus⁶². However, it should be noted that according to the ‘principle of multivalency’ developed by Beck, the torchbearers may have additional meanings, depending on how one is scanning the bull-slaying scene as a map or chart or view of the heavens. As twins, the torchbearers may signify Gemini or the Dioscuri, Castor and Pollux. As a pair, they signify all opposing elements in space, in time and in the cosmos⁶³ according to the principle of ‘harmony of tension in opposition’, to which I shall return later⁶⁴. The presence of two stars is also documented in another relief in which each star is positioned on the pointed ends of the half moon⁶⁵.

The scene inside the cavern is completed by animals depicted with great anatomical detail⁶⁶. The dog has its tongue out ready to lick the blood of the bull (the blood would have originally been painted) and stands with its two front paws on the bull⁶⁷. The long snake follows the curve of the bent front right leg of the bull with its head resting next to the front left leg of the dog⁶⁸. The scorpion has a long tail⁶⁹ and sits under the belly of the bull. Lastly, the raven is positioned standing on a rock⁷⁰.

This leaves one last object to describe which constitutes the most original iconographic element of the relief. It can be seen aligned behind Mithras’ head, which does in fact obscure the central part of the object. It is long with curved ends and is positioned at the back of the cavern as though hanging from the wall. This object has no relation to the god’s cap or head, as seen in *Fig. 5*, and is not comparable with any other Mithraic reliefs from Etruria or from the Roman world. The interpretation of this object is therefore not simple and uncertain. Despite this difficulty, a possible interpretation could be put forward: considering its shape and the presence of the quiver on Mithras’ right shoulder, the object could be identified as a bow. Of course it is hoped that ongoing archaeological research may lead to the discovery of new findings which might allow us to identify the object with more certainty, either confirming or disproving the hypothesis currently proposed.

The Presence of the Bow in the Cult of Mithras

The bow is an object widely found in Mithraic iconography and is linked to various characters. Mithras has a bow when he is presented as a hunter⁷¹ or when associated with

⁶² For more on the presence of stars in Mithraic reliefs: CAMPBELL 1968, pp. 91-93.

⁶³ For example: the visible hemisphere and the invisible hemisphere; the north and the south; the summer solstice and the winter solstice; the spring equinox and the winter equinox.

⁶⁴ BECK 2006, pp. 194-197, 200-214.

⁶⁵ *CIMRM* 546. See below *Fig. 12*.

⁶⁶ For an interpretation of the animals from an astrological point of view: BECK 2006, pp. 192-193, 195.

⁶⁷ CAMPBELL 1968, pp. 12-15; MARTIN 1994, p. 223; CLAUSS 2000, p. 99. For the relationship between the dog and the blood of the bull and on the meaning of the blood as a saving power: SFAMENI GASPARRO 2003, p. 223.

⁶⁸ For an iconographic comparison: *CIMRM* 1791 and CLAUSS 2000, p. 86, fig. 50. For general view on the snake: SWOBODA 1937; CAMPBELL 1968, pp. 15-22; HINNELLS 1975, pp. 293-298; MARTIN 1994, p. 223; CLAUSS 2000, p. 100; KIERNAN 2002, pp. 237-238; SFAMENI GASPARRO 2003, p. 218 and note 24.

⁶⁹ For a general view on the scorpion: CAMPBELL 1968, pp. 25-28; HINNELLS 1975, pp. 298-300; BECK 1976; MARTIN 1994, pp. 223-224; BEARD, NORTH, PRICE 1998, p. 285; CLAUSS 2000, p. 99; SFAMENI GASPARRO 2003, p. 218 and note 24.

⁷⁰ For a general view of the raven: CAMPBELL 1968, pp. 22-55; SMALL 1979; MARTIN 1994, p. 224; CLAUSS 2000, pp. 98-99; BECK 2006, pp. 192-193.

⁷¹ For example: *CIMRM* 52; 1247 A.



Figs. 10-11. PTUJ (POETOVIO), SLOVENIA. Two reliefs; details of the bows depicted on two altars (from *CIMRM* 1496, fig. 381 and photo by A. Mastrocinque).

the so-called ‘water-miracle’⁷² or in numerous other situations⁷³. The god is often depicted with different attributes such as ears of corn, a bunch of grapes, a bow with quiver and arrows, and according to J.M. Vermaseren ‘all of which symbolize the heroic deeds the god soon will accomplish’⁷⁴. The torchbearers are also often depicted with this weapon (Cautes⁷⁵, Cautopates⁷⁶ or both at the same time⁷⁷) and again according to J.M. Vermaseren «... both torchbearers hold the bow ready for the great Mithras who alone is able to perform the water-miracle»⁷⁸. The object is often attributed to figures who are difficult to identify⁷⁹ and lastly it is also found in reliefs⁸⁰. The bows featured in *CIMRM* 1247 A; 1283, 5; 1496 (*Fig. 10*), and 1584 (*Fig. 11*) are more akin in shape and size to the bow in

⁷² For example: *CIMRM* 42,8; 390 left 4 (Palazzo Barberini); 1083 A; 1128, 10; 1225; 1249; 1283, 2 e 5; 1292, 5 a; 1294, 1; 1301, 2 e 3; 1359, 13; 1584, fig. 404; 1602?; 1935, 2; 1958; 1972, 2; 1975, 1; 2046, 4; 2159; 2272, 2; VERMASEREN 1982, p. 11, plate VIII right (Marino).

⁷³ For example: *CIMRM* 590; 1475, 1; 2046, 9; 2108.

⁷⁴ VERMASEREN 1982, pp. 69-70.

⁷⁵ For example: *CIMRM* 1084; 1128; 1815; 1920; 1975.

⁷⁶ For example: *CIMRM* 1430; 1958.

⁷⁷ For example: *CIMRM* 181 (Capua).

⁷⁸ VERMASEREN 1971, p. 12.

⁷⁹ For example: *CIMRM* 828; 1325; 2373, 1.

⁸⁰ For example: *CIMRM* 1496; 1584, fig. 402.



Fig. 12. VATICAN CITY. Mithraic relief (from *Archivio e servizio fotografico dei Musei Vaticani*, inv. 870).

the relief we are examining⁸¹. The presence of both a bow and a quiver in a bull-slaying scene can also be found in another marble relief⁸² (Fig. 12) where two objects can be seen behind the god just above his cloak. The first is rectangular in shape with a pointed end and the second, which is partially visible next to the first, is elongated and curved at the end (Figs. 13, 14). Despite being only partially visible, the two objects have been unanimously identified by scholars as a quiver and a bow⁸³.

The particular position of the bow inside the cavern, as observed in the relief from *Veii*, is however, unique. The sculptor (and therefore whoever commissioned the relief) undoubtedly intended to give great prominence to this object by depicting it separately and in perfect symmetry with the head of the god. Therefore this peculiarity may indicate that

⁸¹ There is no string visible in the hypothetical bow in the relief from *Veii*, as there is for example in *CIMRM* 1584. However, there are no visible strings in the bows depicted in *CIMRM* 546 and 1496.

⁸² *CIMRM* 546. The relief is dated to the middle of the second century A.D.: ANDREAE ET AL., p. 213.

⁸³ CUMONT 1896-1899, p. 211; AMELUNG 1903-1956, pp. 178-79; *CIMRM* 546; VOLKOMMER 1992, n. 150.



Fig. 13. VATICAN CITY. Enlarged detail of the Mithraic relief (from *Archivio e servizio fotografico dei Musei Vaticani*, inv. 870).

the presence of the bow in this Mithraic representation has a specific symbolic importance. A recent study by Beck⁸⁴ may help us to interpret it. In an iconographic analysis of a series of figures depicted on a cult vessel, discovered in a Mithraeum in Mainz and datable to the first quarter of the second century A.D., Beck identifies a seated figure in the act of firing an arrow at another figure as the Father of the Mithraic community, initiating a candidate; in so doing the Father imitates the mythic archery of Mithras at the so called 'water-miracle'. Thus, according to Beck, «the scene on the cup is both cult initiation and water miracle... Ritual is here a mimesis of myth»⁸⁵. Both ritual and myth in this case represent a principle of 'harmony of tension in opposition' encapsulated in a quotation from Porphyry's *De antro nympharum* 29: «And so there is a tension of harmony in opposition, and it shoots from the bowstring through opposites»⁸⁶. The 'harmony of tension in opposition' is interpreted by Beck as the second axiom of the cult and therefore an important principle of Mithraic doctrine. This concept of opposition and polarity is evident in the iconography of Cautes and Cautopates, while it is more veiled for others such as the bow. According to Beck, the bow would in fact symbolise opposition, both with regard to the metaphor above («... and it shoots from the bowstring through opposites») and to its own visual image⁸⁷.

⁸⁴ BECK 2000 and in general ID. 2006, pp. 6, 11, 81-85.

⁸⁵ BECK 2000, p. 150 and fig. 1. On the vessel two scenes are depicted. Only one of these, which Beck terms 'The Archery of the Father', is relevant to this study.

⁸⁶ Translation by BECK 2006, pp. 82-83.

⁸⁷ «The symbol of opposition in Scene A (of the Mainz Cup) is the bow itself, the bow of the father and thus of



Fig. 14. Drawing of the Mithraic relief (*CIMRM* 546) conserved at the Vatican Museum Pio Clementino (from CUMONT 1896-1899, p. 210, fig. 38).

Dating

Despite some studies on the history of *Veii* and on statues and architectural finds from the Roman period⁸⁸, we are unable to establish with certainty if the relief in question was made on site or commissioned and then transported to the shrine of *Veii* when complete. The high stylistic quality and the refined workmanship of the piece lead us to believe that the work was most likely a high commission entrusted to a workshop in Rome⁸⁹.

The dating of the find can only be estimated by basing it on the stylistic qualities of the piece as the original archaeological context is unknown and any other evidence such as inscriptions which would allow for a more precise chronology is absent. An initial comparison with other reliefs dated to around the second century A.D.⁹⁰ allows us to date the find

Mithras. The archery of the Father, which is a mimesis of the archery of Mithras, represents at the highest and most abstract level the polarity of opposites held in harmonious tension» from BECK 2000, p. 168, see also pp. 170-171.

⁸⁸ LIVERANI 1987 and PAPI 2000, pp. 103-115.

⁸⁹ Also in the case of statues from the Mithraeum of Vulci there is uncertainty over whether the statues were the work of local workshops or those in Rome: MORETTI SGUBINI 1979, p. 274.

⁹⁰ *CIMRM* 339-340 (= VOLKOMMER 1992, n. 146, from Rome, San Clemente, second century A.D.); 415-416 (= VOLKOMMER 1992, n. 148, from Rome?, second century A.D.); 546-547 (= VOLKOMMER 1992, n. 150, from Rome?, middle second century A.D.); 603-604 (= VOLKOMMER 1992, n. 135, from Rome?, second century A.D.); 641 (= VOLKOMMER 1992, n. 136, from Fiano Romano, second half second century A.D.); 650-651 (= VOLKOM-

to the same period. Other observations however, may allow us to determine a more precise chronology. The stylistic features of Mithras' face previously described, can be compared to those on a marble sculpture of a young boy's head from the Trajan's Forum, recently analyzed and dated by Arata to the Antonine period⁹¹. In addition the sculptural quality of the drapery of Mithra's cloak and clothes can be likened to that found on some sarcophagi dating from between 140-150 A.D. and 160-170 A.D.⁹². In conclusion, we are inclined to date the relief to the middle of the second century A.D., during the late Hadrianic/early Antonine period.

THE NEW FIND AND MITHRAIC RELIEFS IN ETRURIA

The total number of Mithraic reliefs documented in Etruria (*Regio VII*), including this discovery in *Veii* is seven. The table below is arranged according to the location of the discovery, beginning with Southern Etruria and details the main features of each find.

n.	Location of discovery	Material	Dimensions	Chronology	Reference
1	Veio	white marble	m 1,55 × 1,54 × 0,16-0,33	middle of the second century A.D.	unpublished
2	Fiano Romano	white marble	m 0,67 × 0,62 × 0,16	second half second century A.D.	<i>CIMRM</i> 641 (= VOLKOMMER 1992, nn. 136, 436)
3	Sutri	marble	m 1,07 × 0,63 × 0,025-0,03	late Roman?	<i>CIMRM</i> 654; MORSELLI 1980, p. 143, n. 36
4	<i>Vicus Matrini</i>	peperino	m 1,13 × 0,86	late Roman?	<i>CIMRM</i> 655-656; ANDREUSSI 1977, p. 69, n. 170
5	Soriano in Cimino	white marble	m 0,62 × 0,58	third-fourth century A.D.	<i>CIMRM</i> 657; SCARDOZZI 2004, p. 59
6	Pisa	white marble	m 0,55 × 0,44	late second-third century A.D.	<i>CIMRM</i> 663 (= VOLKOMMER 1992, n. 128); GENOVESI 2011, p. 285
7	Unknown, from Etruria	marble	m 0,50 × 0,68 × 0,09	late Roman	MINTO 1949, p. 207, n. 1; <i>CIMRM</i> 668

MER 1992, n. 153, from *Nersae*, second half second century A.D.); 966-967 (= VOLKOMMER 1992, n. 117, A.D. 140-60); 1283 (= VOLKOMMER 1992, n. 183, from Neuenheim, A.D. 150-70); VOLKOMMER 1992, n. 161 (A.D. 140-60).

⁹¹ ARATA 2011.

⁹² The sculptural quality of the folds of the clothing can also be seen in some recently re-examined sarcophagi: sarcophagus depicting a battle scene between Amazons and Greeks, from Rome, A.D. 140-50 (AMBROGI 2012); sarcophagus featuring a Galatomachia, from Rome, A.D. 160-170 (MUSSO 2012); polychrome sarcophagus featuring a Bacchic procession, from Rome, A.D. 160-70 (TACCALITE 2012).



1



2



3



4



5



6



7

Fig. 15. The new discovery from Veii, n. 1 (photo taken by the author), and the other reliefs from Etruria (*Regio VII*), nos. 2 (from *CIMRM* 641), 3 (from *CIMRM* 654), 4 (from ANDREUSSI 1977, p. 69, fig. 123), 5 (from *CIMRM* 657), 6 (from GENOVESI 2011, p. 285, fig. 7), 7 (from MINTO 1949, p. 207, n. 1).

A comparison of the reliefs reveals similarities and differences⁹³ (Fig. 15). The material from which they are made is generally marble⁹⁴ with the exclusion of n. 4 which is made of peperino. The dimensions are fairly uniform, with the exception of n. 1 which is by far the largest. In terms of style, the quality of production is somewhat irregular and in fact n. 5 is assumed to have been made by local workers because of the poor quality of the workmanship⁹⁵. The reliefs of the highest stylistic quality are nn. 1 and 2 and also in this case the relief from *Veii* is of superior quality with greater attention to detail. In terms of iconography the scene of the slaying of the bull by Mithras is always depicted⁹⁶. In some cases only a few figures are featured (3⁹⁷, 4⁹⁸ and 5⁹⁹) while in others the scene is more detailed (1, 2¹⁰⁰, 6¹⁰¹, 7¹⁰²). The order of the torchbearers (northern type) depicted in the relief from *Veii* is not seen in any another case, while in nos. 6 and 7 the Italian sequence is represented. The relief from *Veii* therefore emerges as unique in terms of its size and stylistic qualities compared to the others. Furthermore, the proposed chronology makes it the most ancient of the Mithraic reliefs in Etruria and it could also be considered as one of the earliest testimonies of the cult of Mithras in *Regio VII*.

In view of the particularities of this discovery and in order to put forward the most thorough analysis of the general archaeological context, it is appropriate to look at the development of the city of *Veii* in Roman times, with particular attention to the cults.

THE SITE OF *VEII* IN THE ROMAN AGE: HISTORY AND CULTS

The Etruscan city of *Veii*, which during the Orientalising and Archaic periods was one of the most important inhabited areas from a political and artistic point of view, stretched over the vast tuffaceous triangular plateau, including the separated prominence of Piazza D'Armi (185 hectares)¹⁰³. The Roman conquest by Furius Camillus in 396 B.C. brought about big changes to the type of occupation of the inhabited area¹⁰⁴. The city was not completely abandoned and its initial use was that of a strategic military base. A new occu-

⁹³ Relief n. 4 is the only one with an inscription: *CIMRM* 656 = *CIL*, XI 3320: *L(ucius) Avillius Rufinus* posuit.

⁹⁴ Specialist spectrographic analysis would be required in order to establish the type of marble.

⁹⁵ CUMONT 1937, p. 102 and SCARDOZZI 2004, pp. 19, 59, 101-102.

⁹⁶ It should be noted that relief n. 2 is the only one sculpted on both sides.

⁹⁷ Mithras, slaying the bull, whose tail ends in three ears. The dog, serpent, scorpion and raven. In the upper corners the bust of Sol (left) and the bust of Luna (right).

⁹⁸ Mithras, slaying the bull. The serpent, scorpion?, raven?

⁹⁹ Mithras, slaying the bull, whose tail ends in three ears. The dog, serpent, scorpion.

¹⁰⁰ Obverse: Mithras, slaying the bull, whose tail ends in a bundle of ears. The dog, serpent, scorpion and raven. In the upper corners, busts of Sol (left) and Luna (right). Reverse: Sol and Mithras banqueting with Luna (left) and the twin divinities Cautes and Cautopates. Presence of an altar in the coils of a crested snake.

¹⁰¹ Mithras, slaying the bull. The dog, serpent, scorpion and raven. Cautes (left) and Cautopates (right). In the upper corners the bust of Sol (left) and the bust of Luna (right). This is the Italian sequence of the torchbearers.

¹⁰² Mithras, slaying the bull, whose tail ends in three ears and with the body surrounded by a large band. The dog, serpent, scorpion and raven. Cautes (left) and Cautopates (right). In the upper corners the bust of Sol (left) and the bust of Luna (right). This is the Italian sequence of the of the torchbearers.

¹⁰³ The bibliography on Etruscan *Veii* is of course vast and continually updated, therefore recent contributions which give an overview may be consulted in BOITANI 2008; CASCINO 2012, pp. 341-349; DI SARCINA 2012, pp. 351-353.

¹⁰⁴ For the story of *Veii* in the Republican age: DI GIUSEPPE 2012b, pp. 359-366; LIVERANI 2012c, pp. 243-244.

pation, concentrated in particular in the central area was recorded from the end of fourth century B.C. The most interesting fact, however, is the continued occupation of Etruscan cult sites. From the middle of the third century B.C., a decrease is recorded which affected a wider area, namely Etruria Tiberina. This lack of occupation of the area subsequently allowed Caesar to distribute the territory in favour of his veterans in 46 BC¹⁰⁵. The reference to the colonial foundation, again thanks to Caesar, is mentioned in an enigmatic passage of the *Liber Coloniarum*¹⁰⁶ although it is of uncertain historical reliability. This settlement by Caesar was not successful¹⁰⁷, in as much as it was abandoned after military clashes during the battle of Perugia¹⁰⁸. From the early Augustan age to the middle of the first century A.D. a process of transformation and development of the site began, which can be traced through inscriptions and archaeological evidence¹⁰⁹. As a consequence of a project of social, political and religious restoration Augustus established the *Municipium Augustum Veiens* on the central part of the plateau with his veterans of the *legio XXII Deiotariana* who had served in Egypt¹¹⁰. The rebirth of the new society and the construction of the new city was carried out, not only due to the intervention of the Emperor, but also thanks to the euergetism of certain figures belonging to the elite, who were either closely or loosely linked to the Imperial house. Among them were *M. Herennius Picens*, patronus of the *municipium*¹¹¹, *L. Iunius Silanus*¹¹², *M. Tarquitius Saturninus*¹¹³ and the Imperial freedman *C. Iulius Gelos*¹¹⁴. The town also housed various buildings, such as the *Porticus Augusta*¹¹⁵, a theatre¹¹⁶ and a *schola*¹¹⁷ which are only mentioned in inscriptions. In addition excavations carried out at the beginning of the nineteenth century uncovered numerous architectonic monuments and Imperial portraits belonging to the Julio-Claudian

¹⁰⁵ C¹., *Fam.* 9.17.

¹⁰⁶ Ed. Lachmann. 220. From an administrative point of view, the presence of the *duoviri* in the *municipium* during the Augustan age (*CIL*, XI 3777 = *ILS* 3387, 3780, 3805, 3807 = *ILS* 6582b, 3808) instead of the usual *quattuorviri*, could indicate the existence of a previous colony, for more on this: LIVERANI 1987, p. 143; SMITH 2012, p. 4; LIVERANI 2012a, p. 144.

¹⁰⁷ In this historical context the famous passage by Propertius (*PROP.* 4, 10, 27-30) in which the site is described as completely abandoned, must be inserted.

¹⁰⁸ LIVERANI 2012a, p. 144, with previous bibliography.

¹⁰⁹ For a summary on knowledge of *Veii* during the Imperial period: LIVERANI 1987, pp. 143-162; FONTANA, PATTERSON 2012; LIVERANI 2012b and ID. 2012c.

¹¹⁰ The military component within the community must therefore have been consistent. We recall for example inscriptions by *M. Tarquitius Saturninus praefectus cohortis Scutatae, primuspilus* of the XXII legion and *tribunus militum* of the III and XXII legions (*CIL*, XI 3801 = *ILS* 2692, LIVERANI 1987, pp. 93-96, n. 42 and *CIL*, XI 3804), of *tribunus militum Aescionius Capella* (*CIL*, XI 3798 = *ILS* 6581, LIVERANI 1987, p. 90, n. 40) and in addition *CIL*, XI 3799. LIVERANI 1987, pp. 90-93, n. 41; *CIL*, XI 3800, 3803. On this theme: LIVERANI 1987, p. 147 and PAPI 2000, pp. 109-112. The establishment of the *municipium* is generally dated to *post* 27 B.C., as the inscription *CIL*, XI 3797 = *ILS* 922, 1 A.D., which mentions the already existing *municipium* is to be considered as a *terminus ante quem* for its foundation and not a *terminus post quem*: LIVERANI 1987, pp. 144-145.

¹¹¹ *CIL*, XI 3797 = *ILS* 922, LIVERANI 1987, pp. 88-89, n. 39. On this figure: *ibid.*, p. 145; PAPI 2000, pp. 103-107.

¹¹² *CIL*, XI 3790, LIVERANI 1987, pp. 82-85, n. 36. On this figure: *ibid.*, p. 151; PAPI 2000, pp. 108-109.

¹¹³ *CIL*, XI 3801 = *ILS* 2692, LIVERANI 1987, pp. 93-96, n. 42. On this figure: *ibid.*, pp. 146-147; PAPI 2000, pp. 109-111.

¹¹⁴ *CIL*, XI 3805 = *ILS* 6579. On this figure: LIVERANI 1987, p. 146; PAPI 2000, pp. 112-113.

¹¹⁵ *CIL*, XI 3784; see LIVERANI 1987, pp. 77-80, 151; PAPI 2000, p. 115.

¹¹⁶ *CIL*, XI 3807 = *ILS* 6582b, LIVERANI 1987, pp. 96-99, n. 43; *CIL*, XI 3808 = *ILS* 6582c; see LIVERANI 1987, p. 153.

¹¹⁷ *CIL*, XI 3810; LIVERANI 1987, pp. 101-102, n. 45; see *ibid.*, p. 159; PAPI 2000, p. 216.

dynasty¹¹⁸. The close link between the Imperial house and the *municipium* was short lived and from the second half of the first century A.D. the process of decline began¹¹⁹. Unfortunately, information on *Veii* in the second century A.D., when we believe the relief was made, is insufficient and the evidence concerns in particular some funerary inscriptions and imperial interventions on the territory¹²⁰. More data are available for the third century A.D. when around the middle of the century the last, important private benefactor *Cn. Caesius Athictus* was prominent, who along with his wife *Caesia Sabina*, dedicated himself to restoring several monuments dating from the Augustan period, which was a time of the greatest prosperity in the centre¹²¹. The last record of civilian life is provided by an inscription dedicated by the *ordo civitatis Veientanae* to *Augustus Constantius Chlorus*¹²² after which we can trace the disintegration of the urban fabric of the town and the appearance of large villas on the plateau.

As far as religion was concerned, the new find supports the existence of the cult of Mithras and enriches our understanding of the divinities worshipped in *Veii* during the Imperial period, given that our knowledge is not extensive and is generally limited to inscriptions. Let us begin our analysis with 'Oriental' cults. Discoveries including a hand with a bust of Serapis¹²³, a small bust of Isis¹²⁴ and a small Egyptian style statue¹²⁵ were found in the urban and suburban area of the city. These artefacts can be linked to the repopulation of the centre during the Augustan period by soldiers from the *legio XXII Deiotariana*¹²⁶. As far as the remaining cults are concerned, we can begin by briefly examining the evidence found in the town and surrounding areas. There are two inscriptions from the third century A.D., in one the cult of *Fortuna Redux*¹²⁷ is mentioned, whose introduction into the *municipium* traces back to the Augustan age¹²⁸. In the other, the Temple of Mars¹²⁹ is cited and is described as ruins. The monument, which is no longer visible today, was excavated during the 1700s and was probably situated on the outskirts of the city¹³⁰. In the immediate suburbs there is evidence of the cults of Dioscuri¹³¹ and *Pietas*¹³² and *Victoria Augusta*,¹³³ but the evidence is more extensive at the thermal, therapeutic and sacred site of south-west Campetti where, in addition to the votive inscriptions to Hygieia, Hercules,

¹¹⁸ LIVERANI 1987.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 154; LIVERANI 2012b, p. 147; ID. 2012c, p. 245.

¹²⁰ LIVERANI 1987, pp. 154-158; PAPI 2000, p. 153.

¹²¹ *CIL*, XI 3807 = *ILS* 6582b, 3808 = *ILS* 6582c, 3809 = *ILS* 6582a, *CIL*, XI 3810, 3811 = *ILS* 6583; on these figures: LIVERANI 1987, p. 159; PAPI 2000, pp. 215-216.

¹²² *CIL*, XI 3796 (293-305 A.D.), LIVERANI 1987, pp. 161-162 and PAPI 2000, p. 230.

¹²³ MALAISE 1972, p. 50 (from Isola Farnese).

¹²⁴ LIVERANI 1987, pp. 183, 209-210 (from the plateau of the city).

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49, n. 16 (from the plateau of the city).

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 147; PAPI 2000, pp. 4-5, 110. In addition it should be noted that J.M. Reynolds believed that a funerary altar inscription, dated to second-third century A.D., found just inside the North-west gate of *Veii*, could be attributed to a priestess of Isis due to the presence of a *sistrum*, visible on the left side of the altar (REYNOLDS 1961, p. 88, n. 7).

¹²⁷ *CIL*, XI 3810; LIVERANI 1987, pp. 101-102, n. 45.

¹²⁸ PAPI 2000, p. 216.

¹²⁹ *CIL*, XI 3801 = *ILS* 2692; LIVERANI 1987, pp. 93-96, n. 42.

¹³⁰ For more on the temple: DI GIUSEPPE 2012a, p. 58.

¹³¹ *CIL*, XI 3777 = *ILS* 3387; LIVERANI 1987, pp. 72-73, n. 32.

¹³² *CIL*, XI 3779 = *ILS* 3791; LIVERANI 1987, pp. 54-58, n. 21. See also the statues of Phoebe, Athena and Eros found during Giorgi excavations (1811-1813): LIVERANI 1987, pp. 45-48, nn. 13-15.

¹³³ *CIL*, XI 3780 = *ILS* 6580; LIVERANI 1987, p. 160 (249 A.D.).

Fontes and Diana, the archaeological context is also known¹³⁴. The area must have played an important role in the territory of *Veii* during the Imperial age based on the numerous organised structures which were found and the opulence of the interior design¹³⁵. Additional votive inscriptions were also found in the territory of the *municipium*¹³⁶.

CONCLUSION

Considering its dimensions, the relief falls into the category of large reliefs while the proposed chronology makes it one of the oldest examples of the cult of Mithras in Etruria. The depicted iconography does not substantially differ from what is already known, except for the unusual positioning of the bow behind the head of the god which, according to the suggested interpretation, has a specific, symbolic importance. The high artistic quality and size of the relief suggest that the person who commissioned it was of notable wealth and was part of the elite of the town of *Veii*¹³⁷. The question of the shrine the relief comes from remains unanswered and no shrine has been located to date. The most probable hypothesis is that the location of the shrine is in the area closest to where the relief was found.

What remains uncertain is how the cult was introduced to the site we are examining. As previously mentioned, the presence of the military in the *municipium* of *Veii* from the moment of its foundation is widely documented, but it is unlikely that veterans who had served in the East (namely Egypt) who were present when the town was formed were responsible for introducing the cult into the site. The two main reasons for this are that the chronological distance between the foundation of *Veii*, which is dated to the Augustan age, and early evidence of Mithraism in Italy, which is dated several generations later to the end of the first century A.D., is too great. The second reason, more significantly, lies with the fact that Mithraism in Etruria was not connected to the military, as already claimed by F. Cumont. Therefore, it seems more likely that the cult spread to *Veii* from Rome considering the proximity of the two sites.

In order to reconstruct the original context of worship, it is hoped that future archaeological research may lead to the discovery of the shrine.

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¹³⁴ FUSCO 2008-2009.

¹³⁵ FUSCO 2011.

¹³⁶ *CIL*, XI 3778: dedication to Jupiter and Hercules Musino from Monte Musino; *CIL*, XI 7740: dedication to *Ceres*; *CIL*, XI 7742: dedication to Jupiter; REYNOLDS 1961, p. 86, n. 1: dedicated to *Fortuna* and *Penates*.

¹³⁷ Unfortunately the epigraphic data relating to the second century A.D. is scarce, two families may be mentioned (*gens Flavia* and *Cassia*) who were related to one another: LIVERANI 1987, p. 158.

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RIASSUNTO

Questo articolo prende in esame un rilievo in marmo di recente scoperta composto da due pezzi (A e B) e rinvenuto sul pianoro della città di Veio. Lo studio è organizzato in modo da fornire al lettore il contesto storico-archeologico più completo in cui considerare la nuova scoperta: la prima parte è una breve introduzione al culto di Mitra, con particolare attenzione alla sua presenza e diffusione in Etruria in base a precedenti studi e alle più recenti scoperte archeologiche; la seconda parte si concentra sulla scoperta e in particolare sull'area in cui è stato trovato. Una più approfondita analisi è dedicata a un oggetto raffigurato nel rilievo, considerato un arco, per la sua importanza simbolica nei misteri di Mitra. Infine, la terza parte fornisce il contesto storico di Veio in epoca romana e una panoramica dei principali culti esistenti durante l'età imperiale. Il confronto tra il rilievo di Veio e gli altri provenienti dall'Etruria (Regio VII) rivela analogie e differenze: il rilievo da Veio emerge come unico in termini di dimensioni e di qualità stilistiche. Inoltre, la cronologia proposta lo rende il più antico dei rilievi di Mitra e potrebbe anche essere considerato come uno delle prime testimonianze del culto di Mitra in Etruria.