

# The Decline and Fall of the Mithraea of Rome

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## Abstract

*The end of paganism has traditionally been explained as a result of the rise of Christianity. In recent scholarship, the romantic image of an epic battle between pagans and Christians in Late Antiquity has been significantly altered and corrected. According to the new interpretative model, pagans and Christians lived amicably side by side well into the fifth century, as paganism petered out in a natural way. At the micro-level of the Mithraea of Rome, however, the archaeological record contains clear signs of religious hatred that challenge this revisionist model. The present article discusses how, when, and why the Mithraea in Rome ceased to exist, and it elaborates the question of how these data impact our current understanding of Christian attitudes towards paganism in Late Antiquity.\**

## INTRODUCTION

At the height of the Age of Enlightenment, Edward Gibbon (1737-1794) famously argued that the decline and fall of the Roman Empire resulted directly from the rise of Christianity.<sup>1</sup> According to Gibbon, it was precisely the clash between the age-old pagan civilization and the new, intolerant Christian creed that ultimately caused the end of Roman civilization and the collapse of the Roman Empire. Ever since, there has been a tendency, be it conscious or subconscious, to ascribe the end of paganism - I use this term loosely to denote the aggregate of traditional Roman religion, Imperial cult, and the so-called oriental religions<sup>2</sup> - to a direct confrontation with Christian intolerance. Gaston Boissier (1823-1908), for example, writing one century after Gibbon, displayed great sympathy for the religious traditions that preceded Christianity, describing the heroic struggle of the pagans against Christianity in terms similar to those of Gibbon. Just like Gibbon, Boissier was convinced that 'la fin du paganisme' was the final outcome of 'les dernières luttes religieuses en Occident au quatrième siècle.'<sup>3</sup> In the 20<sup>th</sup> century András Alföldi (1895-1981)<sup>4</sup> drew on numismatic research to further support the prevailing notion of what he called '[t]he reaction of the last representatives of the old Roman traditions against Christianity and their relentless struggle in the defence of the religion of their fathers.'<sup>5</sup> Likewise, Herbert Bloch (1911-2006) conceived of inter-group relations in oppositional terms, coining the phrase 'the last pagan revival in the West'.<sup>6</sup> Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Gibbon's influence continues to be strong, especially in French-written scholarship. In a recent study on the rise of intolerance

in Late Antiquity, for example, Polymnia Athanassiadi quite explicitly contrasted a free and tolerant 'anthropocentric' Roman model with a restrictive, intolerant 'theocentric' Christian model.<sup>7</sup>

In an interesting turn of events, the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a group of influential British and American scholars, led by Peter Brown (\*1935) and Glen Bowersock (\*1936), attempt to erase this all-pervasive image of a pagan struggle against Christian intolerance.<sup>8</sup> According to the new model, the Roman empire was transformed non-violently into a Christian society, and paganism did not disappear overnight but petered out slowly and gradually. One especially important protagonist of this new movement is Alan Cameron (\*1938), whose *magnum opus*, *The Last Pagans*, meticulously demolishes the idea of a 'pagan revival' as it had been propagated by his predecessors, Alföldi and Bloch.<sup>9</sup> Clearly, this new scheme of things leaves no room for the notion that the end of Antiquity was brought about by a great battle between pagans and Christians. As noted above, however, there remain staunch pockets of resistance against this new peace-and-harmony model, most notably in French scholarship, where the school of Brown, Bowersock, and Cameron has been disparagingly dubbed 'l'école anglo-saxonne',<sup>10</sup> or worse, 'le club anglo-saxon'.<sup>11</sup>

What is perhaps more troubling than the recent Anglo-French divide is the virtual absence in the scholarly discourse, on either side, of references to archaeological data, let alone a pertinent discussion of recent scholarship on these data. For example, in Cameron's *Last Pagans* we find hardly any mention of the important work done in this field by Eberhard Sauer, who has studied evidence



Fig. 1. Mithraea in Rome: 1. Santo Stefano Rotondo; 2. San Clemente; 3. Via Giovanni Lanza; 4. Via Giuseppe Passalacqua; 5. Castra Praetoria; 6. Via Firenze; 7. Palazzo Barberini; 8. San Silvestro; 9. San Lorenzo in Damaso; 10. Crypta Balbi; 11. Domus Augustana; 12. Circus Maximus; 13. Baths of Caracalla; 14. Santa Prisca (map author; adapted from Coarelli 1979, map facing p. 80).

of religious hatred in the archaeological record.<sup>12</sup> The strong predilection for literary sources is an element that the French and 'Anglo-Saxon' schools of thought appear to have in common.<sup>13</sup> Needless to say, the study of texts is extremely valuable and necessary. The obvious problem, however, with the exegesis of historical texts without firm grounding in archaeological evidence is that without the benefit of archaeology, our view of Late Antiquity runs the risk of becoming too one-sided. Of course, I do not wish to claim that the interpretation of archaeological evidence is by definition less problematic than that of textual sources, but, as I will argue at length below, evidence suggests that the archaeological record contains clues

that are essential for understanding the transformation of Roman society from pagan to Christian.

In what follows, I propose to present a case-study relating to Mithraic cult rooms in the city of Rome, on the basis of a clearly defined and coherent set of archaeological data. This particular focus is worthwhile for several reasons. First, ever since French philosopher Ernest Renan (1823-1892) remarked that 'if Christianity had not carried the day, Mithraism would have become the religion of the world', the cult of Mithras has been viewed as one of the greatest competitors of Christianity.<sup>14</sup> Second, quantitative analysis of historical and archaeological evidence has shown that the sanctuaries most prone to being destroyed

by Christians were those of Mithras.<sup>15</sup> Finally, the fact that the destruction of Mithraea coincides with the construction of some of the first churches in Rome, is another factor too significant to be disregarded. In the following sections, I will, therefore, analyse the evidence of how and when the Mithraea of Rome ceased to exist. I will then explain why this happened, by taking into account the larger historical context, as such a procedure will allow us to come to a deeper understanding of the particular chronological distribution of the data presented in this article. Documentation of all the relevant archaeological data is provided in an appendix.

#### DELIMITING THE EVIDENCE

In determining which sites to study, the most convenient starting point is Filippo Coarelli's topographical catalogue of Mithraism in Rome, in which he identified a total of forty sites: ten Mithraea and thirty other known find-places of Mithraic monuments.<sup>16</sup> On the basis of a critical re-evaluation of the archaeological and epigraphical evidence, Alison Griffith determined that five of Coarelli's find-places of Mithraic monuments must have represented actual Mithraea.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, she found that one of Coarelli's Mithraea was in fact only a possible Mithraeum. Among the fourteen Mithraea thus identified by Griffith, there are two whose identification remains problematic in my opinion: at the Ospedale San Giovanni, and in the Baths of Titus. For a discussion of these two cases, as well as the one in the Vigna Muti, the reader is referred to the second appendix at the end of this article. Finally, it should be noted that since the appearance of Griffith's dissertation, two additional Mithraea have come to light, at Via Giuseppe Passalacqua and at the Crypta Balbi.

On the basis of archaeological or epigraphical evidence, we can now, therefore, identify and locate a total of fourteen Mithraea in Rome.<sup>18</sup> Eight are extant and can be visited at San Clemente, Santa Prisca, Santo Stefano Rotondo, Crypta Balbi, the Baths of Caracalla, Palazzo Barberini, Circus Maximus, and Via Giovanni Lanza.<sup>19</sup> Three Mithraea are known only from excavation reports; they are located at San Lorenzo in Damaso, at Via Giuseppe Passalacqua, and at Via Firenze. On the basis of inscriptions, three more Mithraea are known to have existed at San Silvestro, at the Castra Praetoria, and in the Domus Augustana, but these have never been excavated. Another Mithraeum, supposedly destroyed by the urban prefect Gracchus, is known exclusively from literary sources. It can-

not be linked to any of the archaeologically attested Mithraea. As is evident from the map (fig. 1), the known Mithraea appear to be distributed evenly throughout the city of Rome.

#### ANALYSING THE EVIDENCE

An analysis of the physical end of the Mithraea of Rome is expected to produce interesting results, especially considering that archaeological data uncovered outside Rome clearly indicate that the destruction of Mithraea may have been a rather common phenomenon in Late Antiquity.<sup>20</sup> In the modern-day region of Alsace-Lorraine, for example, there are two iconic examples of Mithraea that ceased to exist as a result of violent destruction: the Mithraea at Sarrebourg and at Koenigshoffen/Strasbourg.<sup>21</sup> Each contained an enormous tauroctony relief that was pulled down and hacked into more than 300 pieces, while the other cult images were broken and scattered. The Sarrebourg Mithraeum, moreover, produced a most bizarre and gruesome find: the skeleton of a man in his thirties, lying face down on the base where the tauroctony relief had stood, his hands shackled behind his back with an iron chain; a rare testament to the human cost of religious violence in Late Antiquity. Given the widespread destruction of Mithraea throughout the Roman Empire<sup>22</sup>, one inevitably wonders whether the evidence on Mithraea in the city of Rome, where Christianity is known to have been an important factor early on, reflects a similar pattern.

For determining whether a Mithraeum in Rome was violently destroyed by Christians, I will be using the following criteria:<sup>23</sup>

1. The deliberate destruction of Mithraic images, in particular the tauroctony;
2. Other signs of violent engagement with Mithraic objects, e.g. the scattering of objects;
3. The wholesale erasure of a Mithraeum, which occurred, for example, when a church was built over it.

#### *Signs of Violent Destruction in the Extant Mithraea*

The following observations are based on a thorough review of the evidence, of which the reader finds full documentation in the appendix at the end of this article. In the Mithraea under the churches of San Clemente, Santa Prisca, and Santo Stefano Rotondo, the evidence for violent destruction by Christians is unmistakable. As for *San Clemente*, the altar, decorated with the tauroctony scene, was hammered into pieces and parts of it were

carried outside the sanctuary, which clearly took an inordinate amount of effort. The small statue of Mithras Petrogenitus was broken in three and the statues of Cautes and Cautopates had been so thoroughly smashed that only a few fragments could be retrieved. The only object found intact was a bust of Sol, who also appears in Christian art and may have been perceived as less offensive than other pagan deities. The Mithraeum was destroyed in a targeted and laborious way, and it was subsequently built over by a church.

At *Santa Prisca*, the evidence for religious hatred is even stronger. The doors of the Mithraeum were badly damaged. The stucco sculpture group of Mithras killing the bull was smashed into pieces and scattered, the head of Mithras removed to the far end of the sanctuary. The *opus sectile* head of Mithras was taken from the wall and thrown down onto the pavement. The statue of Cautes was missing its head - it may have been reduced to unrecognizable chips and powder - and the faces of several figures on the walls were mutilated by axe strokes. Incidentally, one of the figures whose faces had been cut off was Sol, which demonstrates that even he was not always spared. The destruction was thorough and laborious, as

evidenced also by the fact that the Mithraeum was built over by a church.

Equally clear is the evidence for iconoclastic destruction at the Mithraeum at *Santo Stefano Rotondo*. The wall-painting of Luna was not damaged, but the stucco tauroctony relief that sat next to it was smashed into pieces. The great marble tauroctony relief was broken with a huge hammer blow. This was a solid marble slab of one by one and a half metres, six centimetres thick, so someone must have used substantial force to destroy it. Even though the relief has now been artfully restored, the fracture pattern in the stone (fig. 2) can still be seen with the naked eye. A second, smaller tauroctony scene was pulverized and fragments of the border and two torchbearers are all that remain. A very tiny tauroctony relief (16.3 x 16.5 x 4 cm) was the only bull-killing scene found intact. The fact that the three larger tauroctony scenes were all destroyed, suggests that this image was particularly hated and was, therefore, specifically targeted. This notion appears to be confirmed by the fact that the other monuments in the Mithraeum were not all destroyed, but were instead laboriously scattered throughout the sanctuary. It is interesting to note that Isis and

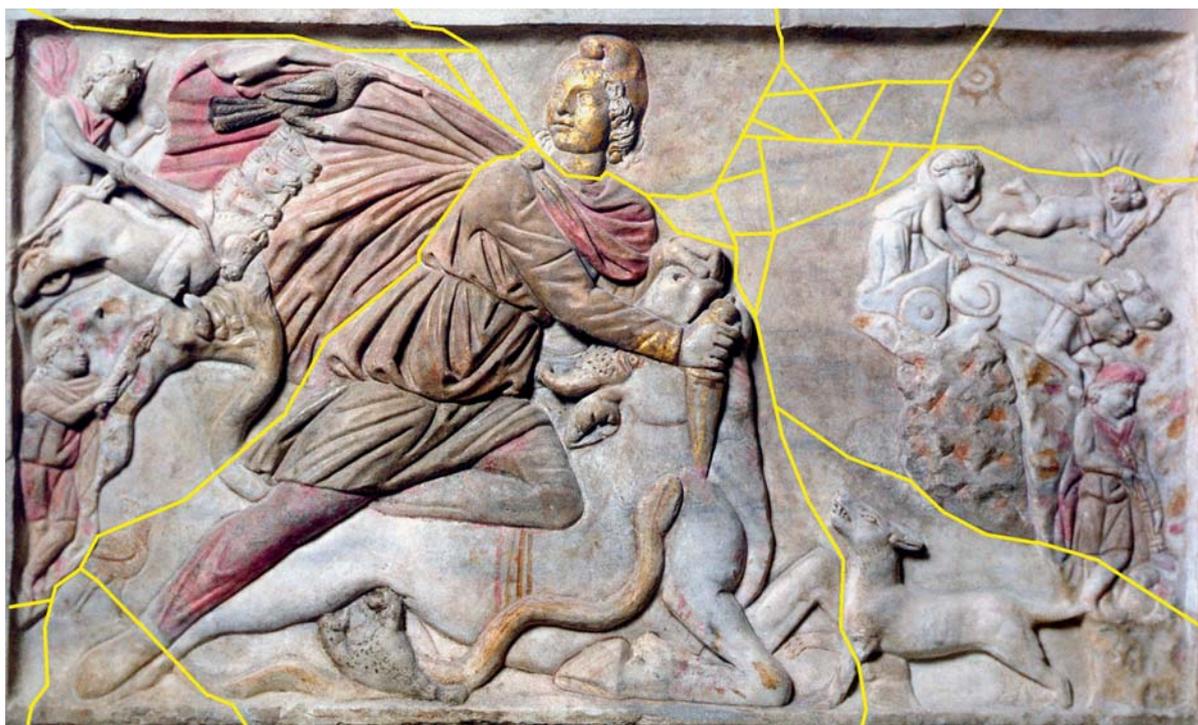


Fig. 2. Fracture lines in the great marble tauroctony relief of the Mithraeum of Santo Stefano Rotondo, indicated in yellow (image author; adapted from Badisches Landesmuseum Karlsruhe 2013, 250, fig. 158).

Cautopates were both beheaded and the head of Isis was placed next to the body of Cautopates, which can perhaps be considered evidence of a desire to add insult to injury. To sum up, the destruction at Santo Stefano Rotondo was targeted and laborious. Significantly, this Mithraeum was also built over by a church.

The Mithraea at the Crypta Balbi and the Baths of Caracalla were also destroyed. In the case of the *Crypta Balbi* Mithraeum, the cult objects, including a small tauroctony relief and a large crater, were broken into pieces, scattered and used as rubble. In the *Baths of Caracalla*, the marble tauroctony relief had been hacked into pieces and the figure of Mithras in one of the niches had his face removed. Likewise, Sol's head in a relief of Sol and Luna had been completely obliterated. Even though no churches were built over these two Mithraea, the fact that their cult objects and religious monuments were systematically destroyed, indicates that this must have been the work of Christian iconoclasts.

The next two Mithraea are remarkable exceptions among the Mithraea of Rome, as they do not appear to have been destroyed. At *Palazzo Barberini*, the grand tauroctony fresco was found intact. All cult objects had been removed. At the *Circus Maximus*, the main tauroctony relief was simply put to the side, face down, and a smaller tauroctony relief was also left undamaged. A head of Sol sculpted on a pilaster was found intact. The statues of the torch-bearers were no longer in their niches; presumably they were removed from the sanctuary when it was dismantled. As to why the Mithraea at Palazzo Barberini and at the Circus Maximus were not destroyed, the answer probably lies in their specific topography. It is hard to imagine an iconoclast foolish enough to attack an imperial building or the home of a powerful Roman aristocrat when there were softer targets to be found.

The Mithraeum at *Via Giovanni Lanza*, finally, is a peculiar Mithraeum. It was installed in a *domus* from the Constantinian period, which shows that Mithraism still had a following in 4<sup>th</sup>-century Rome. Nevertheless, it is such a strange, makeshift Mithraeum that it makes one wonder what considerations guided its construction. It does not display the characteristic shape of a Mithraeum, and it is a rather cramped space, completely unsuitable for holding banquets. It was newly installed in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century, later than any other Mithraeum in Rome, yet its furnishing consists purely of monuments that were already well over a hundred years old. The altar was a reused Ionian capital on top of a base, and instead of the

normal pair of torchbearers, there were two statues of Cautopates. Cumont dryly observed that the Mithraeum had not been destroyed.<sup>24</sup> Of course, there is no denying that the monuments were found intact. One still wonders, though, from where these monuments originated, especially considering that the most logical scenario here is to suppose that they came from one or more demolished Mithraea. The fact that this little cult room is so abnormal in every way may very well be an indication of the kind of harassment that Mithraism had to face in the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

#### *Signs of Violent Destruction in the No-longer-extant Mithraea*

When we now turn to the evidence relating to Mithraea of which little or no architectural remains survive, it is apparent that in these cases it will be more difficult to retrieve evidence of violent destruction. Yet, as we will see, even here some interesting patterns can still be ironed out.

At *San Lorenzo in Damaso*, the tauroctony relief was smashed into pieces to such a degree that the figure of the god has been almost completely lost, and the head of the statuette of Mithras Petrogenitus had been completely obliterated. This shows that the Mithraeum almost certainly suffered a violent destruction. According to the latest archaeological insights, the Mithraeum was not actually built over by the basilica, but it was located directly in front of it.<sup>25</sup> Clearly, this position must have still made it a conspicuous target for Christian iconoclasts.

The Mithraeum at *Via Giuseppe Passalacqua* appears to have been destroyed in a targeted, thorough and laborious way. Nothing remained of the tauroctony fresco, except one torchbearer and traces of a second. This might, of course, be due to accidental damage, but what was certainly not an accident is that the whole place was ransacked and its objects mixed with rubble and thrown on a pile in the antechamber, with no other apparent purpose than to render the Mithraeum inaccessible. No church was ever built over it.

The end of the Mithraeum at *Via Firenze* is difficult to interpret because the evidence is very scanty. All that remained of this Mithraeum was the original tauroctony wall-painting; all monuments had been removed and not even a fragment was recovered of the stucco tauroctony relief that had apparently replaced the painting. For the sake of completeness, it should be mentioned that the Mithraeum was situated just outside the apse of the church of San Caio (demolished in 1885), and there

is, therefore, the possibility that the Mithraeum was destroyed and built over by a church.<sup>26</sup> As far as we know, however, this church was first built in 1630 by the Barberini pope Urban VIII, on what were then believed to be the ruins of the ancient title church of Gaius. When it was demolished in 1885, no rigorous archaeological investigation was done on this site, so we may never know whether there had in fact been an older church there; the ancient *titulus Gaii* is now generally equated with the church of Santa Susanna, one block up Via XX Settembre.<sup>27</sup> In order to determine whether the Mithraeum at Via Firenze belongs to the select group of Mithraea built over by churches, we should compare it to extant Mithraea. When we do this, it becomes immediately apparent that the situation at Via Firenze closely resembles that at Palazzo Barberini, where all movable religious objects had been removed from the sanctuary, and does not resemble at all what we found at San Clemente, Santa Prisca and Santo Stefano Rotondo, where the religious objects were scattered. There is no conclusive evidence that Mithraic monuments were targeted, that objects were scattered, or that a church was erected over the Mithraeum at Via Firenze. On this basis, it is most plausible that Mithraeum of Via Firenze was not destroyed by Christians.

The Mithraeum near *San Silvestro* was never excavated and apart from the inscriptions none of the Mithraic monuments were recovered, so we cannot be certain whether the Mithraeum was

destroyed. There is no early Christian basilica in the vicinity, only a small *diaconia*, Santa Maria in Via Lata, which was built into a Roman warehouse. The church of San Silvestro was first built in the 8<sup>th</sup> century<sup>28</sup> and the convent of Santa Maria Maddalena delle Convertite, which occupied the site of the Mithraeum for centuries, was not built until 1520. Even though the Mithraeum near San Silvestro has not been excavated, we may surmise, therefore, that it was not built over by a church.

The Mithraeum at the *Castra Praetoria* must have been destroyed when the castra were demolished by Constantine in 312. Its destruction should therefore be regarded as collateral damage rather than a case of targeted religious violence.

At the *Domus Augustana*, finally, there is no evidence about how the Mithraeum there ended. The most plausible scenario is that an early Christian emperor, quite possibly Constantine himself, decided that he would not tolerate the presence of a Mithraeum in his own palace.

To summarize, a preponderance of the evidence points towards a clear pattern of violent destruction in as many as half of the known Mithraea in Rome. In fact, there are so many indications of wilful acts of damage that it becomes virtually impossible to argue that all these documented cases are the product of mere coincidence. How consistent the evidence really is, becomes particularly apparent when we compile it into a table; see table 1.

Table 1. Termination of the Mithraea of Rome

1 = tauroctony targeted for destruction				
2 = objects/fragments scattered				
3 = Mithraeum built over by church				
Location	1	2	3	end
San Clemente	+	+	+	destroyed by Christians
Santa Prisca	+	+	+	destroyed by Christians
Santo Stefano	+	+	+	destroyed by Christians
San Lorenzo	+	+	–	destroyed by Christians
Crypta Balbi	+	+	–	destroyed by Christians
Baths of Caracalla	+	+	–	destroyed by Christians
Via Passalacqua	?	+	–	destroyed by Christians
Via Lanza	–	–	–	not destroyed, but consisting of salvaged items
Circus Maximus	–	–	–	not destroyed
Palazzo Barberini	–	–	–	not destroyed
Via Firenze	?	–	–	not destroyed
San Silvestro	?	?	–	unknown, no indication that it was destroyed
Castra Praetoria	?	?	–	demolished by Constantine
Domus Augustana	?	?	–	most likely dismantled by a Christian emperor

### *End Dates of the Mithraea*

Now that we have established that a significant number of Mithraea in Rome ceased to exist through violence, it is imperative that we also determine when this happened. Because archaeological data alone cannot provide a decisive answer in every individual case, they will be supplemented, where necessary, with topographical and historical data.

The only Mithraeum for which we can date the end with pinpoint accuracy is the one at the *Castra Praetoria*. It was destroyed by Constantine in 312. After Constantine's victory over Maxentius, the Praetorian Guard was disbanded and its castra were completely torn down. The Mithraeum in the *Domus Augustana*, for which we unfortunately have no archaeological data, probably followed in the years after, since it is highly unlikely that, with the rise of Christianity, the presence of a Mithraeum would have been tolerated in the imperial palace.

As for the other Mithraea, precise dates for their destruction are difficult to establish. Even so, when studied comprehensively, a consistent pattern can nonetheless be shown to emerge. The destruction of the Mithraea at *San Clemente* and *Santa Prisca* occurred in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century, when the modest house churches there were replaced by monumental basilicas. The Mithraeum at *Santo Stefano Rotondo* was destroyed a few decades later, towards the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, shortly before the basilica was built. As for the Mithraeum at *San Lorenzo*, the fragmentary state of the archaeological evidence prevents us from drawing any firm conclusions. Whereas it is conceivable that it was destroyed ca 380, when the basilica was built, a later date cannot be excluded.

The Mithraeum at the *Baths of Caracalla* appears to have been destroyed by Christians, but on the basis of the archaeological evidence we cannot tell when this happened. The sanctuary was located in a public building, but it was clearly isolated from the visiting areas of the baths and it had its own entrance, which suggests that worshippers came from outside and were not just people who worked at the baths. This, plus the fact that it was destroyed, puts the Mithraeum in a different category from the one at the Circus Maximus, discussed below. The closest parallel for a Mithraeum in a bath complex being destroyed by Christians is found at the Terme del Mitra in Ostia. Just like the Mithraeum of the Baths of Caracalla in Rome, it was located in the underground service area, close to the water mill. It contained

a large sculpture group of Mithras killing the bull, now in the local museum. What very few visitors realize when they marvel at the fine quality of the sculpture is that, when it was found, the heads of Mithras and the bull had been cut off, and so had the arms of the god and the horns, knees, tail and ear of the bull.<sup>29</sup> The Ostian Mithraeum was destroyed in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century, when a Christian oratory was installed above it. The Mithraeum at the Baths of Caracalla in Rome may have been destroyed around that same time, or perhaps a bit later, in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century, when the other Mithraea in the city were destroyed.

The end of the Mithraeum at the Circus Maximus is particularly difficult to date because it was not destroyed. We may, however, find an approximate end date by taking its specific topographical context into account. The Mithraeum was located in an imperial building connected with the organization of games in the Circus Maximus. The people who worked and worshipped there were therefore presumably in the employment of the emperor, and when they were instructed, either directly or by means of legislation, to clear this building of all visible reminders of paganism, in particular altars and idols, they had no choice but to comply. In addition to the fact that an imperial building is perhaps not the most suitable target for Christian aggression, an early deconsecration would also explain why the Mithraeum at the Circus Maximus was not destroyed by Christians. If the Mithraeum had already been converted to secular use before the iconoclastic surge began - as I propose it was - there would be little reason to want to destroy it.

The destruction of the Mithraeum at *Via Giuseppe Passalacqua* in all probability took place in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century, as is clear from the find of an oil lamp with the Chi-Rho monogram and fragments of a late antique crater in the rubble. The destruction layer in the Mithraeum at the *Crypta Balbi*, which among other things contained fragments of a similar crater, has been dated to the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

The Mithraea at San Silvestro, Via Firenze, Palazzo Barberini, and Via Giovanni Lanza do not appear to have been destroyed, yet it is still pertinent here to try to establish when they were abandoned. The end of the Mithraeum of *San Silvestro* must postdate the late 4<sup>th</sup>-century inscriptions that were retrieved from it; in other words, it was probably abandoned in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century. The ends of the Mithraea at *Via Firenze* and *Palazzo Barberini* are more difficult to date. We know for a fact that the *domus* of the Nummii Albini

was still occupied by that family in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century, but we cannot be sure until when they remained pagan. In my opinion, the most plausible explanation is that as a result of the wholesale christianization of the senatorial aristocracy at the turn of the century, Christian sons who inherited the family estates had their fathers' Mithraea stripped of all cult objects. Alternatively, it is conceivable that the houses, and therefore the Mithraea, were simply abandoned - we know that by the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, the eastern part of the Alta Semita belonged to the *disabitato*. This, however, would not explain why all objects were removed from these Mithraea. The makeshift Mithraeum at Via Giovanni Lanza, finally, was apparently installed in the 4<sup>th</sup> century and may have continued to exist into the 5<sup>th</sup> century in closely guarded secrecy, undetected in spite of its proximity to the *titulus Equitii*.

When we now collect the end dates in a table, it becomes particularly evident that the majority of Mithraea of Rome were abandoned or destroyed not in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, when 'les dernières luttes religieuses' were supposed to have taken place, but instead at a later point in time, that is to say in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century, when Christians had gained complete control of the city; see table 2.<sup>30</sup>

#### Conclusion

To summarize, the picture that has emerged is that the end of the Mithraea in Rome happened not in a single wave of violence, but in stages. First, in the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, several Mith-

raea were closed down rather matter-of-factly by Constantine and his successors. This happened in case of the Mithraea at the *Castra Praetoria*, *Domus Augustana*, and *Circus Maximus*. At this stage, there is no evidence for a systematic programme of destruction aimed at obliterating the Mithraea in Rome. In the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, there are some early signs that the coexistence between Christians and Mithraists was not always entirely peaceful. For example, the altar in the Mithraeum at *San Clemente* was suddenly in need of repair, and the sculptures that were hidden away in the Mithraeum of *Via Giovanni Lanza* had to be salvaged from other Mithraea. But even at this stage, there is no clear-cut evidence for widespread destruction of Mithraea in Rome. Only in the final phase, in the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, does the collective evidence indicate an actual surge in violence. The Mithraea at *Santa Prisca* and *San Clemente* were ransacked and filled with rubble, so that churches could be built over them, and the Mithraeum at *Santo Stefano* followed a few decades after. The Mithraea at the *Crypta Balbi* and at *Via Giuseppe Passalacqua* were also destroyed, but in these cases no churches were built over them. The former was converted into a stable; the latter was rendered inaccessible by filling its only point of access with rubble. Naturally, the Mithraea in the houses of powerful senators, at *Via Firenze* and *Palazzo Barberini*, were left in peace. These may have continued to exist well into the 5<sup>th</sup> century, although, with a view to the christianization of the senatorial aristocracy, it is perhaps more

Table 2. End dates of the Mithraea of Rome

Location	end date	<i>terminus post quem</i>	<i>terminus ante quem</i>
<i>Castra Praetoria</i>	312	defeat of Maxentius	destruction of <i>Castra Praetoria</i>
<i>Domus Augustana</i>	312 or later	defeat of Maxentius	–
<i>Circus Maximus</i>	312 or later	defeat of Maxentius	–
Baths of <i>Caracalla</i>	4 <sup>th</sup> /5 <sup>th</sup> century	–	–
<i>San Lorenzo</i>	late 4 <sup>th</sup> century?	–	–
<i>Santa Prisca</i>	early 5 <sup>th</sup> century	various objects	basilica (ca 400)
<i>San Clemente</i>	early 5 <sup>th</sup> century	–	basilica (ca 410)
<i>Santo Stefano</i>	early 5 <sup>th</sup> century	( <i>Chonodomarius</i> )	basilica (ca 450)
<i>Crypta Balbi</i>	early 5 <sup>th</sup> century	crater	destruction layer (ca 450)
<i>Via Passalacqua</i>	early 5 <sup>th</sup> century	crater; oil lamp	–
<i>San Silvestro</i>	early 5 <sup>th</sup> century	inscriptions	–
<i>Via Firenze</i>	early 5 <sup>th</sup> century?	–	–
<i>Palazzo Barberini</i>	early 5 <sup>th</sup> century	–	–
<i>Via Lanza</i>	early 5 <sup>th</sup> century?	–	–

likely that their own occupants stripped them of their cult paraphernalia. As we shall see in the next section, all outward display of Mithraic affiliation by even the most powerful senators had come to an end by 390. In all of Rome, there is only a single example of a Mithraeum that demonstrably survived the wave of iconoclasm with its religious monuments intact: the makeshift Mithraeum at Via Giovanni Lanza.

#### CONTEXTUALIZING THE EVIDENCE

Rome's senatorial aristocracy played a vital role in the final years of Mithraism, and it is only by drawing in evidence of Mithraic priests from the senatorial class that we can begin to understand the larger patterns underlying the demise of Mithraic worship in Rome. The pertinent evidence can be subdivided into three periods that correspond neatly to the different stages of Mithraeum destruction recorded above. This chronological match becomes particularly evident when we look at the dates of inscriptions recording Roman senators who served as Mithraic priests; see table 3.

Characteristic for the first stage of anti-paganism (312-357) is a distinct paucity of Mithraic inscrip-

tions. In fact, from this period, when Constantine and his successors were promoting Christianity at the expense of other religions, we have only one dated inscription by a Mithraic senator. It appears that during this first stage, Roman senators were adopting a cautious attitude, keeping their heads low, so to speak. Perhaps they hoped or believed that Constantinian religious policy was a temporary fashion that would go away by itself.

During the second stage (357-390), which is the period when the first physical signs of tensions between Christians and Mithraists begin to appear, the involvement of senators in the worship of Mithras all of a sudden becomes tremendously strong, and, as witnessed by their inscriptions, they identify themselves quite conspicuously as priests of Mithras and other mystery gods. The inscriptions provide a particularly valuable context for our archaeological data in that they establish that Mithraism was still thriving during this period and had patrons among leading citizens of Rome. The question of whether these senators were actually devotees of Mithras or merely used religion as a political instrument, is inconsequential. Let us imagine, for the sake of argument, that

Table 3. Mithraic senators of the 4<sup>th</sup> century

Senators	inscriptions	date
C. Magius Donatus Severianus <sup>31</sup>	CIL VI 507	313
Nonius Victor Olympius <sup>32</sup>	CIL VI 749-753	357-362
Aurelius Victor Augentius <sup>33</sup>	CIL VI 749-753	357-362; 376
Iunius Postumianus <sup>34</sup>	CIL VI 2151	4 <sup>th</sup> century
Agrestius <sup>35</sup>	CIL VI 47	4 <sup>th</sup> century
C. Ceionius Rufius Volusianus <sup>36</sup>	CIL VI 846	4 <sup>th</sup> century
Publilius Ceionius Caecina Albinus <sup>37</sup>	CIL VIII 6975	364-367 (Numidia)
Petronius Apollodorus <sup>38</sup>	CIL VI 509 <sup>39</sup>	370
Sextilius Agesilaus Aedesius <sup>40</sup>	CIL VI 510	376
	CIL VI 31118	376
Ulpus Egnatius Faventinus <sup>41</sup>	CIL VI 504	376
Anonymous <sup>42</sup>	AE 1971, nr 35	376
Tamesius Augentius Olympius <sup>43</sup>	CIL VI 754	after 376
Rufius Caeionius Sabinus <sup>44</sup>	CIL VI 511	377
Caelius Hilarianus <sup>45</sup>	CIL VI 500	377
Sextius Rusticus Iulianus <sup>46</sup>	AE 1953, nr 237	4 <sup>th</sup> century
Alfenius Ceionius Iulianus Kamenius <sup>47</sup>	AE 1953, nr 238	374
	CIL VI 1675 = 31902	374-380
	CIL VI 31940	374-380
	ILS 1264	385 (Antium)
P. Vettius Agorius Praetextatus <sup>48</sup>	CIL VI 1778-1779	384

Christianity had already won the hearts and minds of the whole Roman populace, and that Mithraic temples were no longer in use. Would ostentatiously styling one-self a priest of Mithras not then be utterly senseless and politically ineffective? The fact that the senatorial aristocracy used the pagan religions as the linchpin of their re-found identity, shows, if nothing else, that the ideas connected with the old religions were still potent and very much alive until the last decade of the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

This active involvement of senators in the worship of Mithras came to an end ca 390. Praetextatus had died in 384, Kamenius in 385, and Iulianus in 387/388. Caecina Albinus was still alive, but appears to have been kept in check by his Christian wife and daughter. We have one final Mithraic inscription from Rome (not by a senator) and dated 391, though it is suspected to be a forgery.<sup>49</sup> In the third stage (390-450), pagan senators realized that their efforts had led to nothing. Anti-pagan policies and legislation had been intensified. Aside from the legal ramifications, going against this would have amounted to political suicide, so naturally the senators, with their finely honed political instincts, knew better than to keep pressing the point. Instead, these last pagans went with the only remaining option - christianization - and reluctantly conformed to the new situation. This spelled the end of Mithraism in Rome. Not only did Christianity now reign supreme, the Mithraic religion no longer enjoyed the support and protection of powerful senators. From this last period onwards, there is not a single new Mithraic monument or inscription. If there were any remaining Mithraists, they must have operated below the radar, as was apparently the case at the makeshift Mithraeum at Via Giovanni Lanza. This is also the time when churches were built at various key positions in the city, thus transforming the city's landscape, and it is hardly a coincidence that at least three Mithraea were built over by such churches. It is exactly at this juncture that Mithraea are destroyed on a large scale. Nor was this kind of religious violence limited to pagan monuments, for in the very same period, synagogues were also being destroyed throughout the empire.<sup>50</sup>

Quite significantly, it was precisely in this third stage that the church father Jerome wrote a letter to Laeta, daughter of Caecina Albinus, who, as one will recall, was one of the Mithraic senators on our list. In his letter, Jerome gives Laeta advice on how to raise her daughter in the Christian faith and on how to keep trying to convert her

father, who was apparently still alive and pagan in 403. Jerome also brings up the story of how one of Laeta's ancestors on the mother's side of her family, the urban prefect Gracchus<sup>51</sup>, had supposedly destroyed a Mithraeum and had paraded its idols through the streets.<sup>52</sup> Jerome applauded such actions, because, according to him, Mithraic images were monstrous things (*portentuosae simulacra*). Whether this curious incident had actually taken place or Jerome simply fabricated the story for added effect, we cannot tell. Yet what is interesting about this letter is that at the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, Jerome felt safe to write and publish it in the first place. Had someone dared to send such a message to an aristocratic young lady just a few decades before, he would no doubt have felt the full brunt of a senator's wrath. By 403, however, Christians were apparently protected to such an extent that even the most powerful senators opted to ignore their jibes.

Towards the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the anti-pagan legislation of Christian emperors, the growing power of the bishop of Rome, and a new ideology of martyrdom in the Catholic Church gradually led to a shift in the religious landscape from pluriformity to a totalitarian regime, where one faith was promoted at the expense of others as the ultimate point of reference for all questions. While each of these factors contributed to the demise of Mithraism in Rome, I submit that the final push that had a crucial and decisive effect, was the christianization of the senatorial aristocracy, without whose active support the polytheistic religions were destined to be extinguished. As is evident from their inscriptions, Roman senators had played a crucial role in the final phase of Mithraism, both financing Mithraea and personally leading various congregations. This suggests that the two phenomena - cessation of senatorial support and the end of the Mithraea of Rome - were not merely correlated, but that there was in fact a causal link. By 400, these senators were either dead, christianized, or bullied into silence, and without the patronage of these powerful men, the fate of the Mithraea of Rome was sealed.

## CONCLUSION

In the introduction, we discussed two different lines of interpretation for the religious transformation of Late Antique society. According to the traditional model, Christians defeated pagans in a protracted battle that had as its predictable outcome the triumph of Christianity and, as a consequence, the decline and fall of classical civiliza-

tion. The revisionist model, on the other hand, argued that the opposition between pagans and Christians has been greatly overstated, and that Roman society in fact transitioned naturally into a new, Christian world. The evidence presented in this article suggests that neither model is sufficient to account for the archaeological data, and that they both fail, therefore, to fully explain the larger historical processes reflected by these data. Whereas the traditional model placed too much emphasis on active pagan opposition against Christianity and the cultural superiority of classical civilization, the revisionist model, by insisting that the process of christianization was essentially peaceful and harmonious, is incapable of explaining the clear signs of tensions that obviously existed between pagans and Christians.

At the micro-level of the Mithraea of Rome, the archaeological record has yielded incontrovertible evidence that Mithraea in Rome were being violently destroyed by Christians in the period of ca 390-450. The traditional framework of continuous religious struggle cannot adequately explain why in the whole Christian era, from Constantine onwards, there was actually only a relatively short and late period of violence against pagans. More specifically, it cannot explain why the majority of Mithraea of Rome were abandoned or destroyed not in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, when the great religious struggles were supposed to have taken place, but rather in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century, i.e. at a time when Christians had gained complete control of the city. The notion of peaceful transformation, on the other hand, fails to clarify why there was a surge of religious violence in the first place. Clearly then, the archaeological evidence calls for a more nuanced approach, inducing us to formulate a narrative of events that is capable of accommodating and explaining the full complexity of the evidence.

In the course of this article, we have established that the violent destruction of Mithraea in Rome began as soon as the active involvement of the senatorial aristocracy in Mithraic worship had ended. It stands to reason, therefore, that up until that time, there had existed a balance of power between Christians and pagans, in which their relationship was not necessarily harmonious, but neither party stood to gain from an escalation of violence. The fact that the emperor was Christian, and Rome's senatorial aristocracy was still overwhelmingly pagan, meant that Christians were in fact a privileged group but not actually all-powerful. This situation changed as a result of the wholesale de-paganization of the senatorial aristocracy by the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> cen-

tury. No longer protected by the leading citizens of Rome, Mithraea soon became the targets of Christian iconoclasts, who were eager to fortify their religious identity by seeking to eradicate anything that was not Christian. The process of polarization was intensified further by the rantings of anti-pagan church fathers such as Jerome, for whom the destruction of pagan sanctuaries was considered both a natural by-product of and a glorious means of achieving the complete christianization of the city and the world. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century, pagans and Christians did not always get along, but they had a common understanding that they would not attack one another. Yet, when the senatorial aristocracy was christianized, the balance of power shifted irrevocably, and Christians were now free to attack and destroy the remaining Mithraea in order to completely rid the city of the last traces of paganism. This subtle narrative that has emerged from the data of the Mithraea of Rome has the great advantage of explaining, on the one hand, why in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, there was no open conflict between pagans and Christians, and, on the other, why in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, Christian responses to the remnants of the pagan past tended to be far from amicable.

#### APPENDIX A: CATALOGUE OF THE MITHRAEA OF ROME

In order to properly evaluate the archaeology of the Mithraea vis-à-vis the notion of peaceful transition from classical to Christian Antiquity, it is necessary here to present a summary of the relevant archaeological data relating to the Mithraea in Rome. Each lemma will include: 1. a synopsis of technical data; 2. a brief description of the archaeological context; 3. a summary of archaeological evidence; 4. observations concerning the dates of the Mithraea (beginning and end); and 5. bibliography, limited to one or two key publications followed by references to *TMMM*, *CIMRM*, Coarelli 1979, Griffith 1993, *LTUR*, Moormann 2011, and Carandini 2013 (or *FUR*). The Mithraea are presented in topographical order.

##### *Santo Stefano Rotondo* (Castra Peregrina)

1. Regio II *Caeliomontium*. Extant. Dimensions: 10 x 4.5 m (phase I); 10 x 9.5 m (phase II). In use: late 2<sup>nd</sup> century, until early 5<sup>th</sup> century. Discovered: 1969.
2. The Mithraeum was built into the barracks of the Castra Peregrina, which housed Roman soldiers detached from the provincial armies for special service. The camp was still in use in 357, when Chonodomarius, the defeated king of the Alemanni, was sent there to waste away as a prisoner.<sup>53</sup>

3. The Mithraeum has two podia. The ceiling, presumably vaulted, was demolished when the foundations for the church of Santo Stefano Rotondo were laid. Like the Mithraea at San Clemente and Santa Prisca, this Mithraeum had been filled with rubble. A wall-painting of Luna was found intact and there are faint traces of a corresponding wall-painting of Sol. All that remains of a great stucco tauroctony relief, are a preliminary sketch scratched into the plaster of the cult niche and some scattered fragments, including a miraculously preserved gilded head of Mithras. A large marble tauroctony relief was found broken into pieces by a forceful blow with a heavy, blunt instrument. It has been carefully restored, and it is a truly magnificent work of art, preserving much of the original gilding and polychromy. The excavators found fragments of another, small tauroctony relief with two torchbearers, but its central characters, Mithras and bull, were missing. A fourth, tiny tauroctony relief was found intact. On one of the podia lay a headless statue of Cautopates with a disembodied head of Isis next to it. Other monuments were found more or less intact, scattered across the sanctuary: an inscribed statue of Mithras Petrogenitus, a statuette of Mithras Petrogenitus, a statuette of Telesphorus, inscribed altars and other dedications. A dedication by the temple custodian of the command area of the *Castra Peregrina*, Aurelius Bassinus, firmly establishes the link between Mithraeum and castra.<sup>54</sup>

4. On stylistic grounds as well as on the basis of the inscriptions, the founding of the Mithraeum can be dated to ca 180.<sup>55</sup> The Mithraeum was nearly doubled in size when it was renovated towards the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, which indicates that it apparently had a thriving community at the time. Numismatic and dendrochronological evidence suggests that the church was built in the 450s and early 460s.<sup>56</sup> This provides a *terminus ante quem* of ca 450 for the end of the Mithraeum.

5. Lissi-Caronna 1986. Coarelli 1979, 70, nr 2; Griffith 1993, 26-31, nr 1D; E. Lissi Caronna, in *LTUR* I (1993) 251; Moormann 2011, 164-165. Cf. Carandini 2013, II tav. f.t. 26.

### San Clemente

1. Regio III *Isis et Serapis*.<sup>57</sup> Extant. Dimensions: 9.6 x 6 m. In use: late 2<sup>nd</sup> or early 3<sup>rd</sup> century, until early 5<sup>th</sup> century, when the basilica was built.<sup>58</sup> Discovered: 1867.

2. The Mithraeum was built into the *cryptoporticus* of a *domus* of the late Flavian period. There is no evidence to suggest that the house belonged to an official of either the *Ludi* or the *Moneta*.

3. The Mithraeum has two podia and a vaulted ceiling. It was walled up and filled in to serve as the foundation for the 5<sup>th</sup>-century basilica of San Clemente. An inscribed altar with tauroctony scene was found broken into pieces, partly inside the sanctuary, partly outside. It shows traces of having been repaired before it was finally broken. A small statue of Mithras Petrogenitus was found with horizontal breaks below the neck and knees. Its lower arms are lost; they presumably held sword and torch. There were statue fragments of Cautes and Cautopates, and there was also an inscribed cippus dedicated to Cautes. A bust of Sol was found intact except for the tip of his nose.

4. On the basis of the style of the Corinthian capitals in the antechamber, the installation of the Mithraeum can be dated to the late 2<sup>nd</sup> or early 3<sup>rd</sup> century. The building of the apse for the basilica in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century provides a *terminus ante quem* for the end of the Mithraeum, because that is when it was filled in to serve as part of the foundation for the basilica. As Irma Della Giovampaola has noted with a subtle use of litotes, up to that time the Christian house church and the Mithraeum had coexisted, even if not in an altogether peaceful manner.<sup>59</sup>

5. Guidobaldi 1992. *TMMM* II 105, nr 64; 203-206, nr 19, fig. 30-32; *CIMRM* I, nr 338-348; fig. 95, 96a, b, 97. Coarelli 1979, 70, nr 3; Griffith 1993, 45-62, nr 5D; I. Della Giovampaola, in *LTUR* III (1996) 257-259; Moormann 2011, 166. Cf. Carandini 2013, II tav. 116; tav. f.t. 20.

### Via Giovanni Lanza 128

1. Regio V *Esquiliae*.<sup>60</sup> Extant. Dimensions: 2.70 x 2.20 m.<sup>61</sup> In use: late 4<sup>th</sup> century, until early 5<sup>th</sup> century? Discovered: 1883.

2. The Mithraeum at Via Giovanni Lanza (formerly Via dello Statuto) is situated 20 metres east of the apse of San Martino ai Monti. It was a tiny Mithraeum, built into the cellar of a reasonably affluent *domus* from the Constantinian period. The room is far too small for ritual banqueting. It could be accessed only from the garden by descending a flight of stairs. In the garden stood a small *Iseum*.<sup>62</sup>

3. This is an unusually small Mithraeum with a vaulted ceiling but no podia. The excavator, Carlo Lodovico Visconti, called it 'un mitrèo di ripiego' ('a makeshift Mithraeum'). The altar consisted of a reused Ionian capital placed upside down on top of a square base. A small tauroctony relief was found intact except for a clean horizontal break. There was also a statue of Cautopates, lower right arm lost, and another statue of Cautopates, right arm and head lost.

4. On stylistic grounds, the tauroctony relief can be dated to ca 200, the one Cautopates statue is late 2<sup>nd</sup> century, and the other is early 3<sup>rd</sup>. In other words, the monuments are considerably older than the Constantinian *domus* in which they were found. The curious re-use of monuments is probably best explained in the context of the so-called pagan revival of the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. There is no indication of when the Mithraeum was finally abandoned.

5. Visconti 1885; tav. III, V; Gallo 1979b; fig. 1-8; for the sculptures, see also: S. Ensoli, in Ensoli/La Rocca 2000, 524-525, nr 161-163. *TMMM* II 199-200, nr 15, fig. 25; *CIMRM* I, nr 356-359; fig. 102-104; Coarelli 1979, 71, nr 5; Griffith 1993, 67-71, nr 7D; J. Calzini Gysens, in *LTUR* III (1996) 260-261. Cf. *FUR*, tav. 23.

### Via Giuseppe Luigi Passalacqua

1. Regio V *Esquiliae*.<sup>63</sup> No longer extant. Dimensions: 5.95 x 3.75 m. In use: late 2<sup>nd</sup> century, until early 5<sup>th</sup> century. Discovered: 1928.<sup>64</sup>

2. The Mithraeum was located in a building on the main road that runs west-southwest into the city from Porta Praenestina, now Via Stalilia.<sup>65</sup> In Late Antiquity, this was a sparsely populated green area within the walls.

3. This was a very small Mithraeum, with a single podium along half of the right wall and with a vaulted ceiling that had almost completely collapsed. On the rear wall there was a wall-painting of Cautopates and perhaps also a trace of Cautes. In between, where one would expect to find the tauroctony, no trace of painting was found. The antechamber of the Mithraeum was filled with rubble, making the sanctuary inaccessible. Most of the objects found, were among this rubble. A particularly interesting find was a large glazed crater, broken into pieces, with plastic decoration depicting several Labours of Hercules. Fragments of a similar crater were found in the Crypta Balbi Mithraeum, but the specimen from Via Giuseppe Passalacqua is better preserved. It is definitely late antique and probably dates from the mid to late 4<sup>th</sup> century.
4. Among the non-Mithraic objects found in the rubble was a fragmentary oil lamp decorated with the Chi-Rho monogram.<sup>66</sup> These lamps were popular in the late 4<sup>th</sup> and early 5<sup>th</sup> century, which puts the end of the Mithraeum around 400.<sup>67</sup>
5. Bellelli/Messineo 1994; J. Calzini Gysens, in *LTUR* III (1996) 259-260; Moormann 2011, 166.

#### *Castra Praetoria*

1. Regio VI *Alta Semita*. No longer extant. Dimensions: unknown. In use: late 2<sup>nd</sup> century, until early 4<sup>th</sup> century. No architectural remains discovered thus far.
2. This Mithraeum was located in the *Castra Praetoria*, the barracks of the imperial guards.
3. The evidence for the existence of this Mithraeum consists of three items. A fragment of a double-sided Mithraic relief was found in the castra in 1902; one side depicts the tauroctony scene, only the left part of which is preserved, and the other side shows Mithras dining with Sol. A statue of a torchbearer was found in the castra in 1882; its head, arms and feet were lost. And last but not least, an interesting inscription was found outside the city wall at only a short distance from the castra.<sup>68</sup> It records how Quintus Pompeius Primigenius, an otherwise unknown father and priest of this place (*pater et sacerdos huius loci*)<sup>69</sup>, had built the sanctuary (*sacrarium*) and paid for a statue of the god.<sup>70</sup> The inscription is dedicated for the health and return of Septimius Severus, Caracalla and Geta, and of the *cohortes praetoriae*. This last element clearly establishes the link between the Mithraeum and the *Castra Praetoria*.
4. On the basis of the inscription, we know that the Mithraeum already existed in 198-202, when Septimius Severus was away on military campaign. Constantine completely destroyed the *Castra Praetoria* when he conquered Rome in 312, which provides the end date for the Mithraeum.
5. *TMMM* II 100, nr 37; 197, nr 12; *CIMRM* I, nr 397-398; 235-236, nr 626; Coarelli 1979, 73, nr 21; Griffith 1993, 85-88, nr 14D.

#### *Via Firenze (Domus of the Nummii Albini)*

1. Regio VI *Alta Semita*. No longer extant. Dimensions: not given.<sup>71</sup> In use: late 2<sup>nd</sup> or early 3<sup>rd</sup> century, until

early 5<sup>th</sup> century? Discovered: 1885.

2. The Mithraeum was discovered underneath Via Firenze in 1885 during the construction of the Ministero della Guerra, now Ministero della Difesa. It was located in one of five underground vaulted rooms that were surrounded on three sides by a cryptoporticus, in a domus on the ancient *Alta Semita*. The domus has been identified as the property of the Nummii Albini on the basis of inscriptions.
3. The Mithraeum had a single podium and a vaulted ceiling. The actual podium was not found back, but its existence is demonstrated by the fact that the mosaic pavement stopped one meter before the long north-eastern wall.<sup>72</sup> On one of the walls was a colourful tauroctony wall-painting, found coated with a new layer of white plaster, in which traces were found of a preliminary sketch for a stucco tauroctony relief.<sup>73</sup> Nails had been driven into the wall to support the weight of the relief, not a single fragment of which was found. When the plaster was carefully removed, the tauroctony fresco appeared. Unfortunately, the fresco could not be salvaged in its entirety, but the head of Mithras and the figures of the two torchbearers, undamaged by the pickaxe and nails, were detached by the Commissione archeologica municipale and sent to the Capitoline Museums for preservation.<sup>74</sup> One can only hope that some trace of these extraordinary pieces may one day be rediscovered. No photo or drawing of the painting was ever published, but it was reported to be of good quality.<sup>75</sup>
4. Alessandro Capannari dated the style of the fresco to ca 200. Later on, it appears to have been replaced by a stucco relief. It is unclear when the Mithraeum ended, but the house appears to have remained in the possession of the Nummii Albini throughout the 4<sup>th</sup> century.
5. Capannari 1886; tav. III. *TMMM* II 197, nr 11; *CIMRM* I, nr 386-388; Coarelli 1979, 72, nr 18; Griffith 1993, 82-84, nr 13D; J. Calzini Gysens, in *LTUR* III (1996) 262; Moormann 2011, 167. Cf. Carandini 2013, II tav. f.t. 10.

#### *Palazzo Barberini*

1. Regio VI *Alta Semita*. Extant. Dimensions 11.83+ x 6.25 m (not the entire length has been excavated). In use: late 2<sup>nd</sup> century, until 5<sup>th</sup> century? Discovered: 1936.
2. The Mithraeum was installed in the westernmost of three underground rooms belonging to a mid-1<sup>st</sup>-century domus, presumably as part of a cryptoporticus. The domus was located in the wealthy residential area flanking the *Alta Semita* (now Via del Quirinale - Via XX Settembre). It may have belonged to the domus of the exceedingly wealthy Alfernius Ceionius Iulianus Kame-nius, parts of which have been excavated in the gardens of Palazzo Barberini; the Mithraeum sits just north of its porticus. Archaeologically, however, the Mithraeum has not been confirmed to be part of the same *domus*.
3. The Mithraeum has two podia and a vaulted ceiling. The tauroctony wall-painting with Mithraic side scenes on either side was found intact in the cult niche. Walled into the small projecting elevation beside the right podium, in front of the cult niche, is a small inscribed marble base. No movable objects were found in the Mithraeum.

4. The Mithraeum was installed in the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. In the Severan period, the left podium was enlarged and a number of large pilasters were constructed on top of it. The style of the fresco dates from the second quarter of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.<sup>76</sup> There is no indication of how long the Mithraeum remained in use. 5. Gatti/Annibaldi 1943-1945. *CIMRM* I, nr 389-395; fig. 111; Coarelli 1979, 72, nr 17; Griffith 1993, 77-81, nr 12D; J. Calzini Gysens, in *LTUR* III (1996) 263-264; Moormann 2011, 164. Cf. Carandini 2013, II tav. 189a; tav. f.t. 10.

### San Silvestro

1. Regio VII *Via Lata*. No longer extant. Dimensions: unknown. In use: 4<sup>th</sup> century, until early 5<sup>th</sup> century? Discovered: 15<sup>th</sup> century.  
 2. The Mithraeum has not been rediscovered by archaeologists, but it appears to have been located between the *Via Lata* (now *Corso Vittorio Emanuele*) and the western end of *Piazza San Silvestro* in *Capite*, where *Palazzo Marignoli* now stands.  
 3. The evidence for the existence of this Mithraeum is a group of inscribed altars and bases dating from the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. These inscriptions are significant, because they demonstrate that Mithraism was still very much alive at this time and, what is more, that it was actively supported by the leading citizens of Rome. Furthermore, they give an interesting insight into the workings of Mithraism. Six inscriptions are formulaic in character, each recording the consul year, the names of the Mithraic fathers, and what Mithraic ranks these fathers conferred on what dates. In the first five inscriptions, a *vir clarissimus* by the name of Nonius Victor Olympius was *pater patrum*, 'father of fathers', while his son Aurelius Victor Augentius was *pater*, 'father'. Please note that Nonius Victor's second son, 'Aurelius Victor Olympius', who appears in *PLRE*, is a mere phantom, a careless conflation of Aurelius Victor Augentius and Nonius Victor Olympius.<sup>77</sup> The last inscription, from 376, was dedicated by Augentius alone, now *pater patrum*, who conferred the rank of *hierocorax* on his son, Aemilianus Corfo Olympius, thirty years after he himself had been initiated into the Mithraic mysteries. It is a small miracle that we find as many as six of the seven Mithraic ranks preserved in this small sample of inscriptions: *hierocoracica*, *cryphios*, *leontica*, *persica*, *heliaca*, and *patrica*.<sup>78</sup> And finally, there is an inscription of an entirely different nature. It is inscribed on a block of stone found while laying the foundation for *Palazzo Marignoli* in 1867. The block is unusually wide, because the back contains a row of seven niches, corresponding to the number of Mithraic grades. On the front is a verse inscription, written in a *tabula ansata*. It commemorates how the Mithraeum had been founded by the grandfather, Victor (i.e. Nonius Victor Olympius), and renovated by the grandson: Tamesius Augentius Olympius.<sup>79</sup> The fact that the grandson is said to be an heir, suggests that his father, Aurelius Victor Augentius, had passed away.  
 4. The Mithraeum was first built by Nonius Victor Olympius, probably before 347 (when his son was initiated). The dated inscriptions, ranging from 357 to 376, show a vibrant congregation in which all the different

Mithraic ranks were represented. The last inscription recalls a rebuilding of the Mithraeum, most likely in the last quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, after the death of Aurelius Victor Augentius.

5. Gallo 1979a; fig. 1-5. *CIL* VI 749-754; *TMMM* II 92-95, nr 7-13; 196, nr 9; *CIMRM* I, nr 399-406; Coarelli 1979, 73, nr 22; Griffith 1993, 102-106, nr 22D; J. Calzini Gysens, in *LTUR* III (1996) 264-265. Cf. *FUR*, tav. 15.

### San Lorenzo in Damaso

1. Regio IX *Circus Flaminius*. No longer extant. Dimensions: unknown. In use: 3<sup>rd</sup> century, possibly until late 4<sup>th</sup> century?<sup>80</sup> Discovered: 1937.  
 2. Remnants of this Mithraeum were found underneath the guards lodge of the *Palazzo della Cancelleria*. Its architecture was almost completely destroyed by the construction of the palazzo at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The sanctuary was located in a building just east of the *stabula* of the *Factio Prasina*, the circus faction of the Greens, which pope Damasus tore down to build his basilica.<sup>81</sup>  
 3. There is not a trace of *podia* or a vaulted ceiling. The remains of a coarse mosaic floor and parts of two brick walls are insufficient to reconstruct a floorplan. The excavators reported seeing a fragment of a wall painting with stars and moon crescents. The lower part of a tauroctony relief was found, broken into pieces, the figure of the god almost entirely destroyed. A statuette of Mithras *Petrogenitus* was found, but its head had been completely obliterated. There was also a statuette of *Cautopates*, arms lost, head broken off and found back elsewhere.<sup>82</sup> The corresponding statue of *Cautes* was not retrieved. A marble slab gives the name of the man who built and dedicated the cave: a Mithraic father called *Proficentius*.<sup>83</sup> He also dedicated a round altar.<sup>84</sup> Fragments of two more inscriptions were found. One was dated to the year when Maximus was consul, presumably L. Valerius *Poplicola Balbinus Maximus*, *cos. 253*.<sup>85</sup> The other was a dedication to the *Unconquered* (i.e. Mithras).<sup>86</sup>  
 4. The inscriptions appear to date from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. The founding of the basilica has traditionally been ascribed to pope Damasus (pont. 366-384), and numismatic and ceramic evidence confirms that it was built in the last quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. In this instance, however, the construction of the basilica cannot provide a firm *terminus ante quem* for the end of the Mithraeum, because the church was not actually built over Mithraeum.  
 5. Nogara/Magi 1949; for a plan of remains of the sanctuary, see Royo 1984, fig. 17. *CIMRM* I, nr 421-428; fig. 117, 118; Coarelli 1979, 74, nr 27; Griffith 1993, 107-109, nr 23D. J. Calzini Gysens, in *LTUR* III (1996) 266; Moormann 2011, 167. Cf. Carandini 2013, II tav. f.t. 13.

### Crypta Balbi

1. Regio IX *Circus Flaminius*. Extant. Dimensions: unpublished.<sup>87</sup> In use: late 2<sup>nd</sup> century, until early 5<sup>th</sup> century. Discovered: 2000.  
 2. The Mithraeum was built into an *insula* from the period of Trajan, located just outside the *exedra* of the *Crypta Balbi*.

3. The Mithraeum had two podia and a vaulted ceiling. There is no trace of a large tauroctony scene, but a small tauroctony relief was broken into pieces and used as rubble in a wall. Only the top half has been found back, on which we immediately recognize the familiar scene in the cave: Mithras killing the bull, the raven watching, and in the corners the figures of Sol (top left) and Luna (top right).<sup>88</sup> Particularly noteworthy among the objects found in the 5<sup>th</sup>-century destruction layer are fragments of a glazed crater with plastic decoration, one of which depicts a female figure, perhaps Victoria. Similar craters have been found in the Mithraeum at Via Giuseppe Passalacqua and in the Mitreo delle Sette Porte in Ostia, as well as in the Villa of Maxentius on the Via Appia and at an undisclosed location in Rome.<sup>89</sup>

4. The Mithraeum was first built at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and underwent renovations at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The glazed crater probably dates from the mid to late 4<sup>th</sup> century. In the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, the Mithraeum was destroyed and its cult furnishings were broken into pieces. Fragments of the tauroctony relief were used as rubble in a wall. The aisle between the podia was filled with rubble to create a level floor, and the room was subsequently used as a stable. This mid-5<sup>th</sup>-century destruction layer provides the *terminus ad quem* for the end of the Mithraeum.

5. For some preliminary notes, see Ricci 2004a; 2004b; for a detailed discussion of the pottery finds, see Sagui 2004a; 2004b; on the floors, see Del Vecchio et al. 2005; on the wall decoration, see Moormann 2011, 168. Cf. Carandini 2013, II tav. f.t. 19.

### *Domus Augustana*

1. Regio X *Palatium*. No longer extant. Dimensions: unknown. In use: early 3<sup>rd</sup> century, probably until early 4<sup>th</sup> century. No architectural remains discovered thus far.

2. This Mithraeum was in the imperial palace on the Palatine. It has not been found.

3. The sole evidence for its existence is an inscription found in Trastevere near the Ponte Emilio (not *in situ*):<sup>90</sup>

*D(is) M(anibus) | L(ucius) Septimius Auggg(ustorum) lib(ertus) Archelaus<sup>91</sup> | pater et sacerdos Invicti | Mithrae domus Augustanae | fecit sibi et Cosiae Primitivae | coniugi bene merenti libertis liberta | busque posterisq(ue) eorum.*

*For the divine spirits. Lucius Septimius Archelaus, freedman of the (three) Augusti, father and priest of the Unconquered Mithras of the Domus Augustana, made this for himself and for his well-deserving wife Cosia Primitiva and for his freedmen and freedwomen and for their descendants.*

As noted by Cumont, this inscription is remarkable, inasmuch as it signals a worship of Mithras in the imperial household.<sup>92</sup>

4. Archelaus was a freedman of Septimius Severus, Caracalla, and Geta, which means that the inscription must date from 209-211 or later.

5. *TMMM* II 100, nr 35; *CIMRM* I, nr 511; Coarelli 1979, 75, nr 38 (find-spot of the inscription, not location of

the Mithraeum!); Griffith 1993, 160-161, nr 40D; J. Calzini Gysens, in *LTUR* III (1996) 266.

### *Circus Maximus*

1. Regio XI *Circus Maximus*. Extant. Dimensions: unpublished.<sup>93</sup> In use: late 3<sup>rd</sup> century, until 5<sup>th</sup> century? Discovered: 1931.

2. The Mithraeum was located across the street from the short end of the *Circus Maximus*, in an imperial building that was in all likelihood associated with the organization of games.

3. The Mithraeum has two podia, and it had a vaulted ceiling, now lost. The great tauroctony relief was found intact, face down on the floor. Only the tip of Mithras' nose was missing. On the border above the relief is an inscription.<sup>94</sup> A second, much smaller tauroctony relief was also found intact. Among the other finds were a marble serpent's head, a fragment of a small relief with Cautes, and a marble pilaster, broken in two, with a head of Sol at the top end. There were also several fragmentary inscribed dedications, and one complete one.

On either side of the first arch is a niche with a statue base, where the torch-bearers once stood, but the statues were not found back. Finally, there were a number of other finds, including a statuette of Minerva and two bases for Venus statuettes, but according to the excavator, these could not be attributed with certainty to the Mithraeum.

4. The brickwork of the walls added to create the Mithraeum is dated to the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. There is no indication of when the Mithraeum was abandoned.

5. Colini 1931; Pietrangeli 1940. *CIMRM* I, nr 434-455, fig. 120-121; Coarelli 1979, 74, nr 31; Griffith 1993, 124-130, nr 31D; A.M. Ramieri, in *LTUR* III (1996) 266-267; Moormann 2011, 166. Cf. Carandini 2013, II tav. 177; tav. f.t. 25.

### *Baths of Caracalla*

1. Regio XII *Piscina Publica*. Extant. Dimensions: 23 x 9.7 m. In use: 3<sup>rd</sup> century, until early 5<sup>th</sup> century? Discovered: 1912.

2. The Mithraeum was built into the subterranean service area at the western edge of the baths, near the water mill. It had its own entrance on the Via Antoniniana and could be closed off from the service area by means of a door or gate.

3. The Mithraeum has two podia and a vaulted ceiling. The marble tauroctony relief that once stood against the back wall was almost completely destroyed; only fragments of it remain. In one of the niches there was a wall painting of Mithras holding a solar disc.<sup>95</sup> His face has been cut away, but we can still recognize him by his characteristic Phrygian hat. A relief was found of Sol (curly hair and radiate crown). There is a gaping hole in the relief where his face used to be. Other finds include pieces of roughly worked stone, perhaps a sculpture of the birth-giving rock? In the antechamber of the Mithraeum, a cippus was found with Greek inscriptions on the front and back.<sup>96</sup> In a small room

connected with the antechamber, a marble statue of Venus Anadyomene was found broken, her head missing. As one of the planetary gods, she may well have belonged to the sanctuary; a mosaic representation of Venus Anadyomene can be seen on the left podium in the Mitreo delle Sette Porte in Ostia.

4. The baths were built between 212-216, but it is not clear exactly when the Mithraeum was installed. Nor is it clear when it was terminated.

5. Ghislanzoni 1912. *CIMRM* I, nr 457-463; fig. 124-127; Coarelli 1979, 74, nr 32; Griffith 1993, 144-148, nr 34D; M. Piranomonte, in *LTUR* III (1996) 267-268; Moormann 2011, 165-166. Cf. Carandini 2013, II tav. f.t. 31.

### *Santa Prisca*

1. Regio XIII *Aventinus*. Extant. Dimensions: 11.25 x 4.20 m (phase I); 17.50 x 4.20 m (phase II). In use: late 2<sup>nd</sup> century, until early 5<sup>th</sup> century, when the basilica was built.<sup>97</sup> Discovered: 1934.

2. The Mithraeum was built into a late Trajanic cryptoporticus belonging to a *domus* first built in the late Flavian period. It was situated in a wealthy district, close to the Baths of Licinius Sura. On the basis of an inscription found nearby, Vermaseren and Van Essen argued that the building might even have belonged to the *privata Traiani*, Trajan's private residence.<sup>98</sup>

3. The Mithraeum has two podia and a vaulted ceiling. It was walled up and filled in to serve as the foundation for the 5<sup>th</sup>-century basilica of Santa Prisca. The Mithraeum was located just outside the apse of the church. Its doors were badly damaged in Antiquity. In front of the cult niche, three pieces were found of a marble slab with an inscription for the Unconquered Sun God Mithras. The right wall of the Mithraeum shows a procession of figures representing the seven Mithraic grades, labeled with *dipinti*.<sup>99</sup> On the left wall is a procession of Mithraic lions, whose faces had been mutilated with an axe.<sup>100</sup> Next to this is a painting of Mithras and Sol dining together, where the head of Sol had been damaged by the stroke of an axe.<sup>101</sup> The stucco sculpture group of Mithras Tauroctonus and Oceanus in the cult niche was found broken into pieces and scattered. The head of Mithras was found all the way at the other end of the Mithraeum, behind the niche of Cautes.<sup>102</sup> In front of this niche, a marble statue of Cautes was found, but its head was missing.<sup>103</sup> The corresponding statue of Cautopates was not found back at all. In one of the side rooms of the Mithraeum, a head of Mithras (or Sol) in finely carved opus sectile was found largely complete, although some fragments were scattered and others lost when it was thrown down.<sup>104</sup>

4. On the basis of their style, the earliest paintings in the Mithraeum have been dated to ca 195, which puts the installation of the Mithraeum at the beginning of the Severan period. The sanctuary was enlarged in ca 220, probably a sign that it had a thriving community. The many finds (glass, pottery, etc.) are entirely consistent with a continuous use of the Mithraeum until the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, when it was filled up with earth and debris to serve as a foundation for the basilica.<sup>105</sup>

5. Vermaseren/Van Essen 1965. *CIMRM* I, nr 476-500; fig. 129-143; II 29; fig. 250; Coarelli 1979, 75, nr 37; Griffith 1993, 131-138, nr 32D; M. Andreussi, in *LTUR* III (1996) 268-269; Moormann 2011, 165. Cf. Carandini 2013, II tav. 168; tav. f.t. 30.

### APPENDIX B: THREE SPURIOUS MITHRAEA IN ROME

Among the Mithraea identified by Coarelli<sup>106</sup> and by Griffith<sup>107</sup>, there are three cases where the identification as a Mithraeum remains uncertain: *Vigna Muti*, *Ospedale San Giovanni*, and the Baths of Titus. I shall now explain my reasons for doubting or rejecting these three so-called Mithraea.

As for the *Vigna Muti*, the Roman sculptor and antiquarian Flaminio Vacca (1538-1605) wrote in his memoirs that a lion-headed idol and a relief of the same figure had been found in a room in the *vigna* of Orazio Muti, which was across the street from San Vitale.<sup>108</sup> Griffith decided that this was only possibly a Mithraeum, because she thought that none of the monuments found was Mithraic. Contrary to Griffith, I consider the leontocephaline god, commonly referred to as Aion, to be quite specifically Mithraic. His role in Mithraism has been discussed at length by Howard Jackson (apparently overlooked by Griffith), and again, more recently, by Raffaella Bortolin.<sup>109</sup> Still, the little information that we have about the find context of these sculptures does not support the identification as a Mithraeum. All we know is that they were found 'in una stanza vota con la porta rimurata'. Griffith interpreted this as a vaulted room, i.e. possibly a Mithraeum, but there is good reason to argue that we are rather dealing here with an empty room (*vota = vuota*). This seriously weakens the case for a Mithraeum at this site, and so, having followed a different line of reasoning, we must come to the same conclusion as Griffith, that this is only a possible Mithraeum.

As for the *Ospedale San Giovanni*, we know that during construction work there in the 1960s, a room was found with a rectangular floor plan with podia on three sides.<sup>110</sup> In the absence of Mithraic monuments or inscriptions, the identification hinged on the interpretation of faint traces of a fragmentary wall-painting as a tauroctony scene. The excavator thought that she recognized the head of a youth with curly brown hair and a halo, his right arm held high and his left leg bent on a dark mass, oozing vermilion drops towards the ground. Unfortunately, no-one else appears to have seen this, and none of it can be made out in the published photographs.<sup>111</sup> In short, there is simply not enough evidence to warrant the identification of this room as a Mithraeum.

Finally, the purported Mithraeum at the *Baths of Titus*. As rumour has it, a Mithraeum was discovered in the 'Casa di Tito' near the Colosseum.<sup>112</sup> The site was never excavated or even described, and the sole piece of evidence that we have for its existence are rather clumsy reproductions of a tauroctony wall-painting that was supposed to have been seen there. While there are different versions of the drawing in different collections<sup>113</sup>, they all seem to trace back to the artist Francesco Bartoli (ca 1675-1730), son of Pietro Santi Bartoli (1635-1700). The pioneer of ancient Roman topography, Rodolfo Lanciani (1845-1929), made a bold attempt to piece together the archaeological context from various snippets of information. Using the evidence available to him, Lanciani tentatively associated the fresco with a group of underground rooms discovered in 1668 and described by Pietro Santi Bartoli as being located in the ruins of the 'Casa di Tito' at a distance of 250 palmi (ca. 55 m) from the western side of the Colosseum. Lanciani took this to mean 55 metres from the *eastern* side of the Colosseum, i.e. in the Baths of Titus.<sup>114</sup>

There are, however, two problems regarding

the location of this Mithraeum. First of all, the reported location of the fresco cannot be taken at face value, because, as Thomas Ashby (1874-1931) already noted, 'Francesco Bartoli's statements as to the locality to which the paintings belonged [are not] by any means always trustworthy.'<sup>115</sup> Second, Lanciani's floor plan of the underground rooms is misleading. The dimensions of the rooms were actually 23 x 23 *palmi* (ca 5 x 5 m), but for some reason Lanciani decided to draw them not as squares but as rectangles with the proportions of a Mithraeum.<sup>116</sup> All in all, there is no confirmation that there was ever a Mithraeum in the underground rooms of the 'Casa di Tito'.

An even bigger problem concerns the fact that the very authenticity of the painting must be called into question because of its many iconographic anomalies.<sup>117</sup> In the drawings (e.g. *fig. 3*), Mithras is adorned with a diadem and radiate nimbus instead of his usual Phrygian cap, and he is facing forward rather than away from the bull, which is quite uncommon. The bull is rearing up on its hind legs and is made to look like a sea creature, with fin-like hooves but without the characteristic fishtail of a sea-bull. The serpent is



Fig. 3. Tauroctony painting, purportedly seen at the 'Casa di Tito' (Turnbull 1740, pl. 9).

slithering in the wrong place, near the bull's hind quarter, and in the wrong direction, away from where the bull is stabbed. The dog and Cautopates are absent, Cautes is nude, which is highly unusual, and the Sun is where the Moon should be, top right instead of top left. In the Eton, Holkham and Turnbull drawings, there is also a river-god, but in the *Codex Nettuno* he is absent. With regard to the archaeological value of Bartoli's drawings in general, Ashby remarked that 'Francesco Bartoli's veracity is by no means of suspicion' and 'he cannot be trusted for colours, nor even for details, which he often varied arbitrarily for reasons of his own.'<sup>118</sup> As a result, we have no way of reconstructing what Bartoli saw or where he saw it. Since neither the location nor the authenticity of the wall-painting could be ascertained, we cannot reasonably conclude that there was an actual Mithraeum at the Baths of Titus.

#### NOTES

- \* I am very grateful to Leonard Rutgers for his valuable criticism and suggestions, and I also thank Eric Moormann and Bouke van der Meer for fruitful discussions. Any mistakes are, of course, my own.
- <sup>1</sup> Gibbon 1776-1788.
  - <sup>2</sup> The term 'oriental religions' is somewhat misleading, because, whereas the Romans presented them as being of Eastern origin, they were in fact developed in Rome; the term was invented by Franz Cumont: Cumont 1907.
  - <sup>3</sup> Boissier 1891.
  - <sup>4</sup> Also known as Andreas or Andrew Alföldi, depending on the audience.
  - <sup>5</sup> Alföldi 1937, 7; 1942-1943.
  - <sup>6</sup> Bloch 1945, 199-244; 1963, 193-218.
  - <sup>7</sup> E.g. Athanassiadi 2010; the underlying notion here seems to be that before the advent of Christianity, Rome was happily 'anthropocentric'; see also Arietta Papaconstantinou's review of this book in *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 2011.07.32.
  - <sup>8</sup> E.g. Brown 1995; Bowersock 1978, who depicts the emperor Julian as a cruel, self-serving despot rather than a valiant defender of Roman values.
  - <sup>9</sup> Cameron 2011.
  - <sup>10</sup> E.g. Ratti 2012.
  - <sup>11</sup> E.g. Athanassiadi 2010.
  - <sup>12</sup> See esp. Sauer 1996; 2003.
  - <sup>13</sup> Alan Cameron is an expert on Claudian, while on the opposing team Pierre Chuvin and Stéphane Ratti are experts on Nonnus and the *Historia Augusta* respectively.
  - <sup>14</sup> Renan 1898. Cf. also Clauss 2013.
  - <sup>15</sup> Followed by a narrow margin by Zeus and Asclepius. See Bayliss 2004, 17, chart 1. Cf. Clauss 2013, 249: 'Die Erinnerung an Mithras wurde in der Antike weitaus gründlicher getilgt als bei anderen Kulturen.'
  - <sup>16</sup> Coarelli 1979, with a map facing p. 80, which is reproduced in Beard et al. 1998, vol. 1, xx-xxi, map 3. (I am discounting the marble relief found at Palazzo Primoli, which, Coarelli indicated, belongs to the Egyptian gods

rather than Mithras; Coarelli 1979, 74, nr 28). The same ten Mithraea are found, along with five others, in the list compiled by Manfred Clauss, among whose uncertain Mithraea one should include the Mithraeum on the Capitoline hill, which cannot be regarded as 'epigrafisch oder archäologisch nachgewiesen'; Clauss 1992, 16-18; 17 n. 4.

- <sup>17</sup> Griffith 1993, nr 6D; 13D; 14D; 22D; 40D.
- <sup>18</sup> I.e. Griffith's fourteen Mithraea, plus the Mithraea at Via Passalacqua and Crypta Balbi, minus the so-called Mithraea at the Baths of Titus and Ospedale San Giovanni. There must, of course, have been many more. Based on the number of find-places of Mithraic monuments in Rome (ca 40) and the number of tauroctony reliefs from Rome (ca 100), and allowing for the fact that one Mithraeum could house multiple tauroctonies (both simultaneously and successively), I would estimate that there existed at least 50 Mithraea in Rome. For the find-places of Mithraic monuments, see Coarelli 1979. On the number of tauroctony reliefs, see Clauss 1992, 16; 17 n. 3; cf. Bjørnebye 2014, 72.
- <sup>19</sup> I.e. Coarelli's ten Mithraea, plus the Crypta Balbi Mithraeum, minus the Mithraeum at San Lorenzo in Damaso (which cannot be regarded as extant), and minus the so-called Mithraea at Ospedale San Giovanni and Vigna Muti.
- <sup>20</sup> See e.g. Sauer 1996. We find violently destroyed Mithraea from Britain (Caernarfon, Housesteads, Carrawburgh, Rudchester) to Syria (Doliche, Hawarte).
- <sup>21</sup> Sarrebourg (Pons Saravi): *CIMRM* I, nr 965-984; Koenigshoffen: *CIMRM* II, nr 1335-1375. For the story of their destruction, see esp. Sauer 2003, 79-88.
- <sup>22</sup> See note 20, above.
- <sup>23</sup> Cf. Sauer 2003, 38.
- <sup>24</sup> *TMMM* II 199: 'Il n'a pas été détruit.'
- <sup>25</sup> See Frommel/Pentiricci 2009, I 270, fig. 4; 171, fig. 92.
- <sup>26</sup> For the location of the Mithraeum at Via Firenze relative to the church of San Caio, cf. Capannari 1886, tav. III, fig. 3; 1885, tav. I.
- <sup>27</sup> Kirsch 1918, 9, 70-74; G. De Spirito, in *LTUR* I (1993) 214; A. Milella, in *LTUR* IV (1999) 387-388; cf. also Carandini 2013, vol. 1, 466. Carlo Cecchelli, however, was convinced that Santa Susanna and the titulus Gaii were two distinct churches, see Armellini/Cecchelli 1942, 1459.
- <sup>28</sup> Krautheimer 1980, 113.
- <sup>29</sup> Sauer 2003, 18; 16, fig. 2.
- <sup>30</sup> Precise dates for the final abandonment and/or destruction of the individual Mithraea are difficult to establish, because in most cases we only have either a *terminus post quem* (e.g. pottery in the rubble) or a *terminus ante quem* (e.g. a basilica on top of the rubble). But when we study the Mithraea comprehensively as a group, the pattern that emerges appears to be quite consistent.
- <sup>31</sup> *PLRE* I, Severianus 9; *FS*, nr 2326.
- <sup>32</sup> *PLRE* I, Olympius 18; *FS*, nr 2573.
- <sup>33</sup> *PLRE* I, Augustinus 2; *FS*, nr 788.
- <sup>34</sup> *PLRE* I, Postumianus 4; *FS*, nr 2120.
- <sup>35</sup> *PLRE* I, Agrestius 1-2; *FS*, nr 545.
- <sup>36</sup> *PLRE* I, Volusianus 5; *FS*, nr 1130.
- <sup>37</sup> *PLRE* I, Albinus 8; *FS*, nr 2857.
- <sup>38</sup> *PLRE* I, Apollodorus; *FS*, nr 2653.
- <sup>39</sup> = *CIG* 6012b; *IG* XIV 1018; *IGUR* I 129.
- <sup>40</sup> *PLRE* I, Aedesius 7; *FS*, nr 448.
- <sup>41</sup> *PLRE* I, Faventinus 1; *FS*, nr 3318.
- <sup>42</sup> *FS*, nr 13.
- <sup>43</sup> *PLRE* I, Augustinus 1.
- <sup>44</sup> *PLRE* I, Sabinus 13; *FS*, nr 999.

- <sup>45</sup> *PLRE* I, Hilarius 4; *FS*, nr 1005.
- <sup>46</sup> *PLRE* I, Iulianus 37; *FS*, nr 3089.
- <sup>47</sup> *PLRE* I, Iulianus 25; *FS*, nr 1128.
- <sup>48</sup> *PLRE* I, Praetextatus 1; *FS*, nr 3468.
- <sup>49</sup> *CIL* VI 736 = 30823; Lebegue 1889; Claus 1992, 17 n. 3: 'bei dem auf dem Relief angebrachten Text handelt es sich um eine moderne Fälschung'; the assertion that this is 'das bisher späteste datierte Mithras-Relief' (Claus 2012, 35) or 'the latest known Mithraic monument' (Claus 2001, 31) is therefore incorrect.
- <sup>50</sup> Rutgers 2009, 82: 'In the late fourth and early 5<sup>th</sup> century, attacks on synagogues were not just a recurring phenomenon, they also occurred empire-wide, in very different locations.'
- <sup>51</sup> *PLRE* I, Gracchus 1; perhaps identical to *Furius Maecius Gracchus*, *PLRE* I, Gracchus 3.
- <sup>52</sup> Hier. *Ep.* 107.2.
- <sup>53</sup> *Amm.* 16.12.66.
- <sup>54</sup> *AE* 1980, nr 48.
- <sup>55</sup> Lissi-Caronna 1986, 45.
- <sup>56</sup> The church of Santo Stefano Rotondo was dedicated but not built by pope Simplicius (468-483); *LP XLVIII*: 'Hic dedicavit basilicam S. Stefani in Celio monte.' A chestnut tree felled in 451 was used for the architraves, see Valeriani 2003, 2032 n. 11. Cf. Brandenburg 2004, 204, who dates the building to the early 460s.
- <sup>57</sup> Incorrectly attributed to Regio II by Della Giovampaola.
- <sup>58</sup> For the date of the basilica, see Guidobaldi 1978, 86; 1992, 276.
- <sup>59</sup> Della Giovampaola 1996, 258: 'Dunque per un certo periodo di tempo il luogo di culto cristiano ed il mitreo coesisterono, anche se non in modo del tutto pacifico.'
- <sup>60</sup> Attributed to Regio III by Coarelli, but it appears to be east of the district line.
- <sup>61</sup> Gallo has the correct measurements; Vermaseren's length of 3.70 m is an obvious typographical error.
- <sup>62</sup> The Iseum is referred to as a 'lararium' in older literature; it has been positively identified as an Iseum by Serena Ensoli.
- <sup>63</sup> Incorrectly attributed to Regio II by Calzini Gysens.
- <sup>64</sup> The Mithraeum was excavated in 1928, but no report was published until seven decades later, when Gloria Bellelli discovered four pages of summary notes, sketches, and a plan of the Mithraeum in the archives of the Soprintendenza.
- <sup>65</sup> Cf. Vacca 1594, 44, nr 115 [114]: 'Appresso di essa vi fu scoperta una strada selciata, e molto spaziosa, e vidi che si partiva da porta Maggiore, ed andava a S. Gio. Laterano.'; *FUR*, tav. 13; Carandini 2013, II tav. f.t. 22.
- <sup>66</sup> Another oil lamp with Chi-Rho monogram was found in the rubble of the Santa Prisca Mithraeum, Vermaseren/Van Essen 1965, 360, nr 214; pl. LXXXVI.2.
- <sup>67</sup> Bellelli postulated an end around the middle of the fourth century; I do not see a reason for such an early date.
- <sup>68</sup> *CIL* VI 738; *TMMM* II 100, nr 37; *CIMRM* I (II), nr 626.
- <sup>69</sup> Cf. the *Castra Peregrina*, where Aurelius Sabinus was identified as *pater huius loci*; *AE* 1980, nrs 49 and 50.
- <sup>70</sup> Cf. *FS*, nr 2761.
- <sup>71</sup> According to Capannari's plan (tav. III, fig. 3), the Mithraeum measured approximately 12 x 5 m, which is a normal size for a Mithraeum.
- <sup>72</sup> See also Capannari 1886, tav. III, fig. 2, which shows where the mosaic floor stops.
- <sup>73</sup> Capannari indicates the northeastern wall, but surely he meant northwestern. The short, northwestern wall is where one would expect to find the tauroctony scene, whereas the long, northeastern wall is a completely unsuitable place: it has three windows and the one podium ran along it, so that the celebrants would be lying with their feet against the tauroctony fresco if it were placed there. Moreover, the fresco is nowhere to be seen in Capannari's drawings of the northeastern (tav. III, fig. 1) and southeastern (tav. III, fig. 2) walls, so it must have been on the northwestern wall.
- <sup>74</sup> Capannari 1886, 24; Visconti 1886, 415; I have found no mention of the fate of the paintings since they arrived at the museum. Alessandro Capannari sadly passed away on 24 December 1886, otherwise he could have seen to it that the paintings were treated with the care that they deserved.
- <sup>75</sup> Capannari 1886, 22 notes that 'il dipinto è condotto con non poca cura'; Visconti 1886, 415, however, calls its style mediocre.
- <sup>76</sup> Meyboom 1982.
- <sup>77</sup> *PLRE* I, Olympius 17 (misreading *CIL* VI 752); *ibid.* stemma 22; cf. Cameron 2011, 143, who repeats the mistake.
- <sup>78</sup> The rank of *cryphius* (veiled one) is to be equated with that of *nymphus* (bridegroom) recorded in the dipinti at Santa Prisca.
- <sup>79</sup> *CIL* VI 754; *TMMM* II 94-95, nr 13; *CIMRM* I, nr 406, who curiously omits the name Olympii.
- <sup>80</sup> For the date of the basilica, see Frommel/Pentiricci 2009, 233. Based on the lack of 4<sup>th</sup>-century finds, Pentiricci posited that the Mithraeum did not continue to exist beyond the 3<sup>rd</sup> century; *ibid.*, 186. However, given the fact that the stratigraphy of the site was completely compromised, this argument is not compelling.
- <sup>81</sup> For the Stabula, see F. Coarelli, in *LTUR* IV (1999) 339-340; cf. also Carandini 2013, I 514, 523.
- <sup>82</sup> For a photo of the statuette with its head reattached, see Nogara/Magi 1949, fig. 7.
- <sup>83</sup> *AE* 1950, nr 199; *CIMRM* I, nr 423.
- <sup>84</sup> *AE* 1937, nr 231 (Aebutius, line 1, corrected in *AE* 1949, nr 172); *CIMRM* I, nr 422; cf. *FS*, nr 447.
- <sup>85</sup> *AE* 1950, nr 200; *CIMRM* I, nr 424.
- <sup>86</sup> *AE* 1950, nr 201; *CIMRM* I, nr 425.
- <sup>87</sup> Lorenzo Bianchi gives tentative dimensions of ca 25 x 12 m, which would make it the largest Mithraeum in Rome (Bianchi 2004, 62); cf. also the anonymous author in *EJMS* who gives the dimensions 31.5 x 12 m, <http://www.uhu.es/ejms/CryptaBalbi/Balbi.htm>. As one can see on the detailed plans published by Mario Ricci, however, it cannot have measured more than ca 14 x 7 m. See Ricci 2004a, 157-165, fig. 1-5; 2004b, 231-241, fig. 1-6.
- <sup>88</sup> Ricci 2004b, 238, fig. 10 (b/w ph.).
- <sup>89</sup> The crater from the Villa of Maxentius was first erroneously ascribed to the *Domus Augustana*, corrected by Sagui 2004b, 277, N.B. According to Mazzuccato, it dates from the 9<sup>th</sup> (!) century, e.g. O. Mazzuccato, in Ensoli/La Rocca 2000, 504-506, nr 128, but this should be rejected, see Sagui 2004a, 172; 2004b, 256.
- <sup>90</sup> *CIL* VI 2271 *TMMM* II 100, nr 35; *CIMRM* I, nr 511.
- <sup>91</sup> The cognomen Archelaus was erroneously omitted by Cumont and by Vermaseren.
- <sup>92</sup> *TMMM* II 100: 'Cette inscription est remarquable, en ce qu'elle signale un culte de Mithra dans la *familia* imperiale.'
- <sup>93</sup> As seen in Pietrangeli's map, the sanctuary, from entrance up to cult aedicula, measures approximately 10.5 x 9.5 m.
- <sup>94</sup> *AE* 1933, nr 96; *CIMRM* I, nr 436, who incorrectly prints

- Ti(tus) instead of Ti(berius).
- <sup>95</sup> Cf. Moormann 2011, 165-166: 'Some suggest that the man should be a torchbearer, *dadaphoros*, an identification that might fit better considering his secondary position on the side wall.' From an iconographic point of view, however, this suggestion is problematic, because the figure does not show the defining characteristics of a torchbearer (i.e. crossed legs and a torch).
- <sup>96</sup> *IGUR* I 194; *CIMRM* I (II), nr 463.
- <sup>97</sup> For the date of the basilica, see Vermaseren/Van Essen 1965, 115-116.
- <sup>98</sup> Vermaseren/Van Essen 1965, 14-18.
- <sup>99</sup> For the Latin texts, see Vermaseren/Van Essen 1965, 155-160; cf. *CIMRM* I, nr 480, where Luna and Mercury had erroneously exchanged places. Fragmentary traces of nearly identical dipinti were found in the lower layer of paintings, see Vermaseren/Van Essen 1965, 168-169.
- <sup>100</sup> Vermaseren/Van Essen 1965) 148-150; axe marks seen in nr 1, 2, 3, 8.
- <sup>101</sup> Vermaseren/Van Essen 1965, 150, nr 9b.
- <sup>102</sup> Vermaseren/Van Essen 1965, 129.
- <sup>103</sup> *CIMRM* I, nr 477; Vermaseren/Van Essen 1965, 341, nr 19.
- <sup>104</sup> Vermaseren/Van Essen 1965, 442, nr 27; pl. xxxvi-xxxvii; cf. Carandini 2013, I fig. 149 (colour ph.).
- <sup>105</sup> Vermaseren/Van Essen 1965, 43, who note that 'the entire 150 cubic metres of sand did not produce one single item later than the 4<sup>th</sup> or at the latest the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century.'
- <sup>106</sup> Coarelli 1979.
- <sup>107</sup> Griffith 1993.
- <sup>108</sup> See esp. Vacca 1594, 44-45, nr 117-118 [116-117]; cf. J. Calzini Gysens, in *LTUR* III (1996) 262-263; *CIMRM* I, nr 381-383; Coarelli 1979, 72, nr 14; Griffith 1993, 89-91, nr 15P. Cf. *FUR*, tav. 16.
- <sup>109</sup> Jackson 1985; Bortolin 2004.
- <sup>110</sup> See esp. Santa Maria Scrinari 1979; cf. J. Calzini Gysens, in *LTUR* III (1996) 261-262; Coarelli 1979, 71, nr 11; Griffith 1993, 39-41, nr 3D.
- <sup>111</sup> Santa Maria Scrinari 1979, fig. 4 and 6.
- <sup>112</sup> See esp. Lanciani 1895; cf. J. Calzini Gysens in *LTUR* III (1996) 260; *CIMRM* I (II), nr 337; fig. 94; Coarelli 1979, 70-71, nr 4; Griffith 1993, 63-66, nr 6D.
- <sup>113</sup> Topham Collection at Eton (*Eton* II, nr 19); Windsor Castle Library (inv. 11405 = *Codex Nettuno* 156); Holkham Hall (*Holk.* II, nr 36); Turnbull 1740, 175-176 and pl. 9.
- <sup>114</sup> Lanciani 1895, 175.
- <sup>115</sup> Ashby 1914, 5, who gives specific examples of locations given by Bartoli that were shown to be incorrect.
- <sup>116</sup> Lanciani 1895, 176; cf. Caylus 1757, fig. 1.
- <sup>117</sup> Adolph Michaelis already regarded the composition as modern, but Thomas Ashby remained convinced of its genuineness, because there existed several copies, see Ashby 1914, 19, nr 19. The drawing at Eton may well be a genuine Bartoli, but this certainly does not make it a faithful reproduction of an ancient tauroctony fresco.
- <sup>118</sup> Ashby 1914, 3.
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