

# THE ROCK-CUT MITHRAEA OF ARUPIUM (DALMATIA)

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THE FIRST OBJECTIVE OF THIS ARTICLE is to lay a ghost—or rather, a pair of ghosts. The ghosts are two Mithraic monuments listed under a single entry as no. 1850 in the basic inventory of the cult's remains, M. J. Vermaseren's *Corpus Inscriptionum et Monumentorum Religionis Mithriacae* (*CIMRM*).<sup>1</sup> They do not appear in L. Zotović's more recent catalogue of the Mithraic monuments of Yugoslavia,<sup>2</sup> but since they are neither explicitly disposed of there nor their origin explained, it seems that some more positive exorcism is called for. Undertaking that rite will lead to my second objective, which is to discuss the two interesting—and very real—monuments from which the ghosts first emanated.

The two items of *CIMRM* 1850 are among the monuments listed under "Arupium," which is the name of the Roman *municipium* occupying the valley of the Gacka river in the mountains of Dalmatia.<sup>3</sup> Vermaseren's comments on the pair are brief and tantalizing:

Along the way Otočac-Gospić there are the two mountains Veliki and Mali Vitalj.<sup>4</sup> Ljubić<sup>5</sup> . . . mentions an altar from this region; Fras<sup>6</sup> . . . mentions "a Hercules who tears a lion to pieces," a relief which Ljubić called a statue of the Holy Virgin. According to Patsch . . . we have to do with two Mithraic reliefs which by now have got lost. He could not make a more profound study of these monuments, which at the time were used as practicing targets. It seems that they do not deviate from the normal type. [my note nos.]

Part of this material was presented in a paper at the 1983 meeting of the Classical Association of Canada in Vancouver. Acknowledgements below, n. 9.

<sup>1</sup>2 vols. (The Hague 1956–60), at 2.254. This work is cited below as *CIMRM*, and the following are cited by author's name: J. Brunšmid, "Arheološke bilješke iz Dalmacije i Panonije," *Vjesnik hrvatskog arheološkog društva* n.s. 5 (1901) 110–112; K. Patsch, *Die Lika in römischer Zeit* (Schriften der Balkancommission, Antiquarische Abteilung 1, Vienna 1900) 82–85.

<sup>2</sup>L. Zotović, *Mitraizam na tlu Jugoslavije* (Belgrade 1973, hereafter "Zotović" or "Z"). A French version of the general survey of Mithraism throughout Yugoslavia (though not of the catalogue) follows the Serbian. The two items of *CIMRM* 1850 are not listed in B. Gabričević's earlier catalogue and study of Dalmatian tauroctonies either: "Iconographie de Mithra tauroctone dans la province romaine de Dalmatie," *Archaeologia Jugoslavica* 1 (1954) 37–52.

<sup>3</sup>On Arupium and vicinity see J. J. Wilkes, *Dalmatia* (London 1969) 51, 182 f., 265 f., 289 f.; M. Pavan, *Ricerche sulla Dalmazia* (Venice 1958) 39 f.

<sup>4</sup>I.e., Big and Little Vitalj, the two peaks of what is actually a single hill.

<sup>5</sup>S. Ljubić, "Archäologische Reisenotizen," *Vjesnik za arheologiju i historiju dalmatinsku* n.s. 4 (1899) 19.

<sup>6</sup>F. J. Fras, *Vollständige Topographie der Karlstädter Militärgrenze* 2 (Zagreb 1850) 228 f.

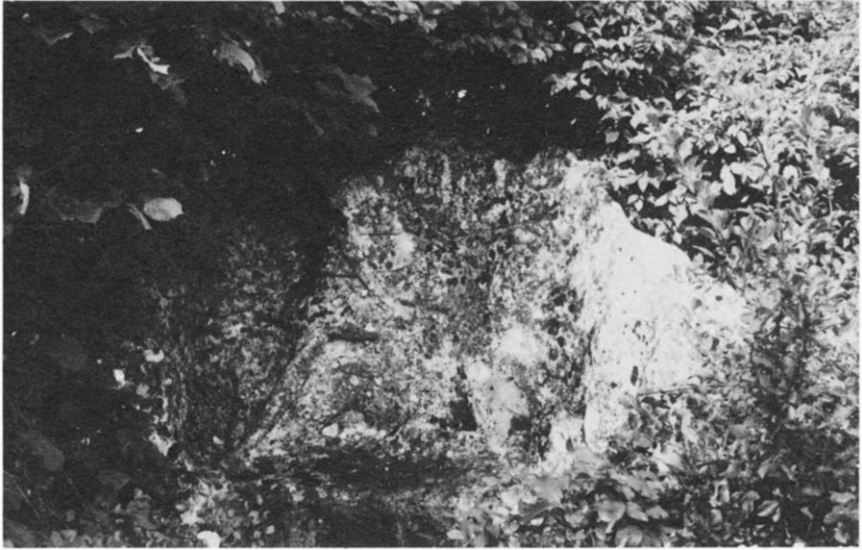


Figure 1 *CIMRM* 1851: Rock-cut tauroctony

In this enigmatic description, one's interest is immediately piqued by the second item, a work which, it seems, could equally appear to represent the Virgin Mary and Hercules dismembering a bull. That a monument of the bull-killing Mithras would suggest the latter is understandable. But how might it also suggest the former?

To solve that riddle and to exorcize the ghosts one must turn first to the other Mithraic monuments of Arupium (see map, below, 361). Three are random finds. No. 1853 (Zotović no. 12) is an altar dedicated to Mithras, found on the hill Vitalj settled by the pre-Roman tribe of the Iapodes.<sup>7</sup> No. 1854 (Z. 57) is a stone with a dedication to Mithras found to the north-east on the opposite side of the plain. No. 1849 (Z. 87) is a tauroctony, i.e., a relief of the bull-killing Mithras, without inscription, found in a stream in the village of Sinac. There remain nos. 1851 (Z. 86) and 1852 (Z. 73). These both belong to a rather rare class of Mithraic monument in which a tauroctony has been cut directly on to the natural rock. Each monument is thus both cult-relief and mithraeum—or, more precisely, the end wall of a mithraeum. They were properly described for the first time as Mithraic monuments by Patsch (82–85) and shortly afterwards, with a photograph of each, by Brunšmid.

The five monuments and their spread suggest considerable Mithraic

<sup>7</sup>Presumably that surrendered in 35 B.C. to no less a person than Caesar Octavian (Appian *Ill.* 22).



Figure 2 *CIMRM* 1851: Detail—Mithras *tauroctonos*

activity in so minor a settlement.<sup>8</sup> Was there more? If there was, it is not that intimated by *CIMRM* 1850. These two items are doublets of nos. 1851 and 1852, as an inspection of these sites soon reveals.<sup>9</sup> The “altar” men-

<sup>8</sup>Arupium has some significance as lying at or close to the junction of the main road running north from the coast into the hinterland and on to Pannonia with a branch road climbing up from Senia: see Wilkes (above, n. 2) 265. It is dangerous to infer, however, from the Mithraic remains that “foreign traders” were present in Arupium. (Wilkes 266). The Mithraists were too heterogeneous a group to guess *a priori* their occupation except in a locality with an obviously restricted function (such as a military camp).

<sup>9</sup>My guide to the sites—they are by no means easy to find—was Mr Milan Stefanić of Otočac, to whom I am also indebted for some crucial information about their histories, especially that of 1852. I also wish to thank Mr and Mrs F. Markovich of Toronto for first alerting me to these out-of-the-way Mithraic rock-carvings. My visit to the sites (in July 1981) was made possible by a Gilbert Norwood Travel Award from the Department of Classics, University of Toronto. The photographs are my own.



Figure 3 *CIMRM* 1851: Detail—Cautes

tioned by Ljubić is 1851, and the “Hercules” of Fras or “Holy Virgin” of Lubjić is 1852. The duplication stems from Vermaseren’s reading of Patsch’s descriptions. Patsch first briefly introduces the two monuments. Then, with a somewhat abrupt and misleading switch, he starts on the detailed descriptions. Vermaseren, with some justification, read the descriptions as those of two new monuments. Consequently, he assigned the material of Patsch’s introductory paragraphs (82) to a separate entry, no. 1850, before proceeding to 1851 and 1852, and so created two imaginary Mithraic monuments. Of necessity, they were “lost” monuments, for no location had ever been given for them over and above the locations of 1851 and 1852.

Its description as an “altar” identifies the first item of *CIMRM* 1850 unambiguously as a doublet of no. 1851. In fact, what Lubjić records is not an actual altar but a monument *called* an altar or *named* the Altar (“... ein Denkmal . . . , welches das Volk *oltar* (Altar) nennt,” Patsch 82). The



Figure 4 *CIMRM* 1852: Rock-cut tauroctony

allusion is to a conspicuous feature of 1851, a natural ledge or shelf in the rock just below the carved tauroctony. The feature also accounts for the site's modern name, Kraljev Stolac ("King's Throne").<sup>10</sup> There is nothing to indicate that it ever actually was an altar, although it could of course have served that purpose in the mithraeum.<sup>11</sup>

This leaves as *CIMRM* 1852 the monument which Fras reported as a "Hercules" and Lubjić as a "Holy Virgin."<sup>12</sup> A view of the site (see figs. 4 and 5) soon solves the enigma. Inspection at close quarters shows Mithras' animal victim—hence the Hercules rending a beast (though not in fact a lion). But at even a few yards' distance, or to a casual view, what one sees is only a large bell-shaped figure suggestive of a woman in a full skirt—hence the Mary. The full skirt is, of course, Mithras' tunic.

<sup>10</sup>The name is not given in any of the literature. But it was used by my guide and can be found on the map of the district (Jugoslavia 1:100,000, Sheet 58 SEN), where the word Oltari (altars) also occurs.

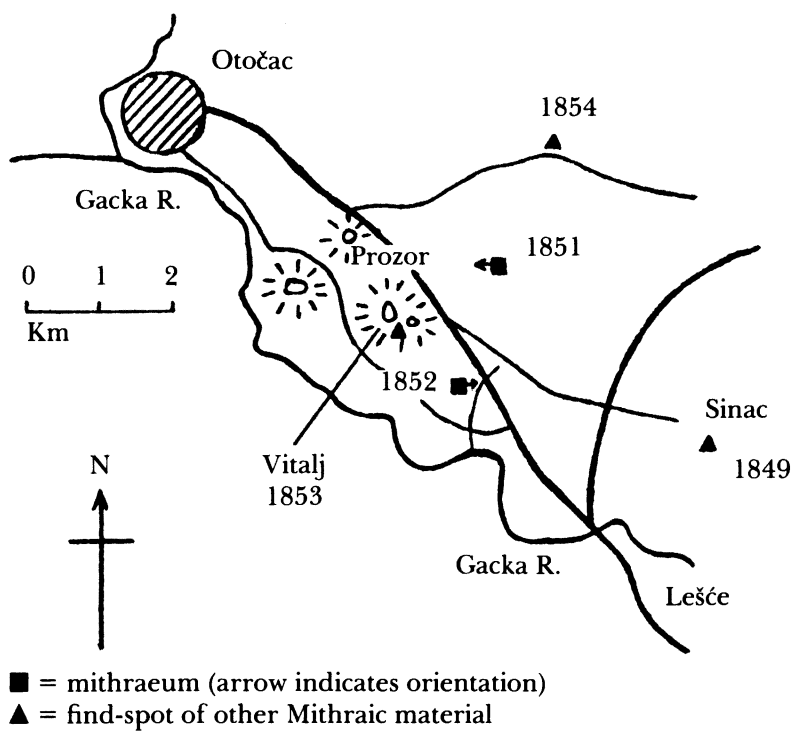
<sup>11</sup>The ledge can be discerned in fig. 1 as the dark area, with a lighter front edge, just below the body of the bull straddled by Mithras. The carved surface of the rock projects in wings on either side (the sides or arms of the "King's Throne"). That on the right is the part lit by sunlight in the figure. On the use of these wings in the composition, see below. An altar of more traditional design was actually cut out of the natural rock at a mithraeum near Plevlja, *CIMRM* 1887–88 = Z. 49 (below, n. 18).

<sup>12</sup>In fairness to Ljubić, what he reported was a local appellation and not his own identification of the subject. It seems that its true subject is now known locally, for the monument is called, according to my guide, Bog Mitra ("the God Mithras").



Figure 5 *CIMRM* 1852: Rock-cut tauroctony

### Mithraic sites of the Gacka valley



One remaining riddle is posed by the appearance of the site of 1852. Patsch's description (83), echoed by Vermaseren in *CIMRM*, speaks of lines of rocks forming narrow defiles: "Hier ziehen sich . . . mehrere Reihen hoher Klippen hin, enge Schluchten bildend." The rock carrying the tauroctony supposedly formed part of the west wall of one of these defiles (Patsch *ibid.* with the plan in fig. 32). And yet, the rock which bears the tauroctony on the present site is a solitary outcrop exposed on the summit of a slight elevation, with no other rocks close by and certainly without trace of any "defile" (fig. 4). Happily, the resolution of this second enigma proved simple, conclusive—and dramatic. Some twenty years ago, as my guide told me, the surrounding rocks were dynamited and removed for building material. Only a timely call to the police saved the rock of the tauroctony itself. The lone outcrop now visible and the rocky defile of the descriptions thus turn out to be the site of the selfsame monument.

With the ghosts of *CIMRM* 1850 now exorcized and the possibility of further "lost" mithraea excluded, we may concentrate on the two real monuments, 1851 (figs. 1–3)<sup>13</sup> and 1852 (figs. 4–5). As mentioned, the tauroctony has been cut directly on the natural rock, which thus serves both as the medium for the icon and as the end wall of the cult structure. This is quite uncommon among the mithraea and tauroctonies of the Empire, but its rarity has more to do with the absence of suitable terrain than with the deliberate exclusion of a possible option. Thus, in the Yugoslav mountains, where such sites are readily available, one finds several more instances, quite widely separated: at Jajce in Bosnia (*CIMRM* 1901 f. = Zotović no. 30: the finest example), on the coast near Epidaurum/Cavtat (two different sites: 1882 = Z. 48, 1883 = Z. 103), near Prilep in Macedonia (2341 = Z. 60), and near Črnomelj in southern Slovenia (1481 f. = Z. 78). It is worth noting that at three other Yugoslav sites where the natural rock was used for the structure of the mithraeum, the option of carving the tauroctony directly on to the rock was declined in favour of a separate relief affixed to the surface: near Brežice on the river Sava (1457 = Z. 27), near Plevlja in Montenegro (1887 = Z. 49), and at Mile Donje near Jajce (1906 = Z. 46). Elsewhere in the Empire, however, I know of only three further examples of tauroctonies cut directly into the rock wall of a mithraeum—also widely separated: at Bourg-Saint-Andéol in the Rhône Valley (*CIMRM* 895 f.),<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup>1851 is difficult to photograph effectively and impossible to photograph in its entirety, since it is overgrown with dense brush-wood, principally hazel. This also makes it singularly difficult to find: it is hidden in the centre of a featureless plain—featureless, that is, except for numerous other hazel clumps concealing other rocky outcrops. Neither monument, incidentally, is marked or fenced in any way.

<sup>14</sup>On the Bourg-Saint-Andéol Mithraeum and the tauroctony with its inscription, see R. Turcan, *Les religions de l'Asie dans la Vallée du Rhône* (Leiden 1972) 7–10; R. Lauxerois, "La dédicace du bas-relief mithriaque de Bourg-Saint-Andéol," *Revue du Vivarais* 1972,

near Schwarzerden in the Saar (1280 f.),<sup>15</sup> and at Scarabantia/Fertörakos in Hungary (1636–41). The feature, then, appears to be not some highly localized idiom but a variant used occasionally where the terrain furnished the opportunity.

Of the artificial structures added to the natural rock to complete the mithraea at Arupium, only some tile survived (among other trivial finds of an excavation in 1896) at *CIMRM* 1851.<sup>16</sup> At both sites—and despite the present appearance of 1852—the natural rock would have provided at least parts of some of the other walls in addition to that carrying the tauroctony (see the site plans in Patsch, figs. 31 and 32).<sup>17</sup> The fact that no material survived from 1852 does not, I believe, warrant Zotović's inference that there was no original structure at all. Zotović classes 1852 as one of a small group of "open-air sanctuaries . . . marked only by a rock with the cult-icon in relief" (153).<sup>18</sup> But such hypothetical holy places, open and

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113–124; V. J. Walters, *The Cult of Mithras in the Roman Provinces of Gaul* (Leiden 1974) nos. 2 and 13 (pp. 4–5, 70–73); H. Lavagne, "Éléments nouveaux au dossier iconographique du *mithraeum* de Bourg-Saint-Andéol (Ardèche)," *Journal of Mithraic Studies* 1 (1976) 222–224; Turcan, *id.* 194 f.

<sup>15</sup>E. Schwertheim, *Die Denkmäler orientalischer Gottheiten im römischen Deutschland* (Leiden 1974) no. 139, pp. 178 f.

<sup>16</sup>See Patsch, Brunšmid, *CIMRM*, and Zotović. The coins found at 1851 date from the second half of the third century to the first half of the fourth. Some coins of the mid fourth century were also found at 1852. There are no further indications of when either mithraeum was in use.

<sup>17</sup>Neither of Brunšmid's photographs shows more than the wall of the tauroctony.

<sup>18</sup>Although her words ("un rocher portant en relief l'image de culte") suggest that the relief was cut directly on to the rock, in fact 1852 is the only member of this group where this was the case. The other two members of the group have already been mentioned: the mithraea near Plevlja (Z. 49 = *CIMRM* 1887—assigned in *CIMRM* and in earlier literature to a spurious place name "Nefertara") and at Mile Donje (Z. 46, from which comes the relief *CIMRM* 1906). All that is known about the latter is that the tauroctony was fixed to a rock. The site seems now to be lost, and no systematic search, let alone an excavation, was made at the time of its discovery. Whether or not there was a building there is thus quite uncertain. The mithraeum near Plevlja is of interest here in that, although the tauroctony was not carved from the natural rock, an altar with a dedicatory inscription (= *CIMRM* 1888) was so carved on the right of the cult-niche. Zotović adds as another possible "open-air" mithraeum her no. 28 at Ilinjača near Zvetozarevo. She rightly leaves it as an open question whether this site was a mithraeum at all. Its present remains consist of a spring fenced and roofed with stones, a hearth, and a stone slab on which was fixed a tauroctony much too small (0.14 x 0.12 m.) to have served as a main cult-icon. This group of "open-air" monuments is the first of four groups into which Zotović divides the Mithraic sites of Yugoslavia. The others are (2) caves, (3) "semi-spelaea" where, as at 1851, there are remains of artificial additions (walls, benches, roofs), and (4) "temples" where the structure is entirely artificial. A more meaningful typology, in my view, would differentiate merely between mithraea which incorporated some natural feature of the terrain whatever that happened to be (rock, cliff-face, cave) and those which did not—there being in the majority of instances throughout the Empire no such feature available. Zotović is also somewhat



lonely, seem altogether alien to a cult which we know consisted of mysteries celebrated sociably by initiates in an *enclosed* space called, whatever its appearance, a "cave" (*spelaeum*). It is surely, then, more probable that primitive structures which were roofed and walled with entirely perishable material should have since disappeared than that these few sites were never functioning mithraea of the usual sort. Particularly, of course, the lone monolith of 1852, displaying its bull-killing to full and open view like a calvary, is an illusion—the product of the dynamiting of its surroundings. Mithraea were essentially closed, inward-looking, and somewhat secretive structures with the tauroctony at the heart.<sup>19</sup> Where natural features were incorporated into the design, artificial elements are generally found to have been added to bring the whole into the usual format of a mithraeum.<sup>20</sup> I see no reason why this should not always have been the case, however primitive, and therefore perishable, the additions.

The two mithraea of Arupium are oriented so that the tauroctony of 1851 faces west, that of 1852 east. Was this deliberate? There was no shortage of suitable rocky sites in the vicinity: were these particular ones chosen in part because of their aspect? In general, there is no discernible principle which governs the orientation of mithraea throughout the Empire. Mithraea are found oriented towards virtually every point of the compass in

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misleading about "caves." One should differentiate carefully between two very different senses of the word: a few mithraea are situated in *natural* caves (usually rather shallow ones); *all* mithraea are "caves" by definition of ideology and symbolism: that is the case whether or not their inscriptions happen to speak of them, as they occasionally do (though seldom outside Italy), as *spelaealantra* (see epigraphic indices to *CIMRM*, both vols.). Most, indeed probably all, of the mithraea so named were artificial. Hence, it is quite mistaken to infer—even very tentatively, as Zotović does (n. 75)—the possibility of a mithraeum situated in a real cave near Senj from *CIMRM* 1846 (Z. 13, *CIL* 3.13283) because that inscription records the dedication of a "*spelaeum*." Particularly misleading is the term "semi-splaea" used of Zotović's third group which includes 1851. These are not "partial caves:" rather, they are full Mithraic caves in the religious sense and not caves at all in the geological sense.

<sup>19</sup>That the tauroctony was a work of *private* art, intended for the contemplation and understanding of the initiates, is forcefully suggested by the fact that of its scores of exemplars not one is indisputably known to have been displayed in a public place. That mithraea tended to be set back in somewhat secluded locations is apparent at Ostia, where a considerable number of them can be seen in their original environment: see J. Schreiber, "The Environment of Ostian Mithraism," in S. Laeuchli, ed., *Mithraism in Ostia* (Chicago 1967) 22–45, esp. 36.

<sup>20</sup>At Jajce (*CIMRM* 1901) and Schwarzerden (1280), for example, where the remains are considerable. Where a mithraeum was built against a cliff-face or out from a shallow cave, holes for timbers to carry the roof are sometimes extant: e.g., at Schwarzerden and at Bourg-Saint-Andéol (895). At the latter, incidentally, traces of the foundations of the side-benches are still visible, *pace* Turcan and Walters (above, n. 14).

virtually every region.<sup>21</sup> But there is some slight evidence that particular mithraea might have been aligned or otherwise constructed so as to allow, at particular times or seasons, beams of sunlight to enter in some significant way; and in a solar cult such a possibility is at least not unlikely *a priori*.<sup>22</sup> The off-set scuttle in the ceiling of the Caesarea Mithraeum is thought perhaps to have had such a purpose;<sup>23</sup> and the mithraeum at Carrawburgh on Hadrian's Wall (*CIMRM* 844, stage II A) may have been so designed as to admit a shaft of dawn sunlight at the time of the winter solstice.<sup>24</sup> It is possible, then, that the sites of the Arupium mithraea were chosen to catch the light of the rising sun (1852) and of the setting sun (1851) on the rock faces carrying the tauroctonies. This has been suggested for the Bourg-Saint-Andéol Mithraeum (895) where the tauroctony looks east across the valley of the Rhône. On this scenario, the most obvious supposition would be that the doorways of the mithraea served as crude diaphragms to narrow the incoming sunlight and direct it on to the tauroctonies. If the doorways were set opposite the tauroctonies roughly on an east-west axis, illumination of the rock faces by the rising and setting sun would take place at about the time of the equinoxes, spring and fall. The hypothesis is of course a very fragile one. It depends not only on the positioning of doorways about which we know nothing, but also on the absence of any obstructions immediately outside the mithraea. At 1851 there seems to have been none, but at 1852 the demolition of the surrounding rocks makes this impossible to tell. The latter mithraeum was set in a defile running north-

<sup>21</sup>L. A. Campbell, *Mithraic Iconography and Ideology* (Leiden 1968) 51–55, tried to establish a very complicated system of orientation based on hypothetical differences of ideology between variant traditions—also hypothetical—within the Mysteries. It has not proved convincing, and in fact his tabulations seem to demonstrate quite the opposite: that, collectively, mithraea show only a random pattern of alignment.

<sup>22</sup>See W. Lentz, "Some Peculiarities Not Hitherto Fully Understood of 'Roman' Mithraic Sanctuaries and Representations," in J. R. Hinnells, ed., *Mithraic Studies* (Manchester 1975) 2.358–377. Inside mithraea, artificial light shining through pierced monuments was certainly used effectively: see D. Wortmann, "Ein Mithrasstein aus Bonn," *BJ* 169 (1969) 410–423. This suggests perhaps a similar use of natural light.

<sup>23</sup>R. J. Bull, "The Mithraeum at Caesarea Maritima," in J. Duchesne-Guillemin, ed., *Études mithriaques* (Leiden 1978) 75–89, at 79.

<sup>24</sup>The beam would pass through, and be focussed by, the off-centre opening in the inner screen; it would then graze the front of the statue of Cautes and his elevated torch and alight on whatever it was that occupied the large stone base east (i.e., in front and to the right) of the cult-niche. I base my calculations on an azimuth bearing of the winter solstice sunrise point kindly provided by Mr P. J. Carmody of the Department of Surveying, Newcastle University. On the Carrawburgh Mithraeum, see I. A. Richmond and G. P. Gillam, *The Temple of Mithras at Carrawburgh* (Newcastle 1951), esp. fig. 3 for the plan of stage II A. It must be added that the height of the ground immediately in front of the mithraeum in its third-century phase is an unknown factor; it could have obstructed the line of sight to the horizon. So my hypothesis here necessarily remains tentative.

south, and the rocks on the east could well have blocked the incoming dawn sunlight. Yet the use of the tauroctony for target practice before the leveling of the surrounds<sup>25</sup> suggests that its rock stood higher than those opposite and could therefore have been accessible to the early sunlight through an opening in an artificial superstructure on the east side. Finally, of course, the orientation of the two mithraea might be no more than coincidence—a choice, for other reasons, of rocks for the tauroctonies which happened by chance to be facing west and east respectively.

A feature which distinguishes 1851 not only from 1852 but from all other rock-cut tauroctonies is the use of the concave surface in the composition. At 1852, as elsewhere, the rock face is more or less flat, so that the carving differs little from that of the standard relief. At 1851, however, there are two projecting wings, and the sculptor has used these surfaces in his composition, placing there the figures of the torchbearers who regularly flank the scene—Cautes with his raised torch on the right and Cautopates with lowered torch on the left. This gives the pleasing effect of a triptych. It suggests, too, a certain intelligence in the fitting of the given subject to the particular medium at hand. The figures of the torchbearers, like much else, are very worn, but that of Cautes on the right is still readily discernible (see fig. 3).<sup>26</sup>

1852 also manifests a peculiarity in the adaptation of the rock surface to the composition. Cut back into the rock is an arciform niche. Indeed, this is the monument's most striking and readily observable feature. In part, no doubt, the rock was cut back so as to provide depth for the relief. But, curiously, the hollowed arch does not define the perimeter of the composition as a whole. Outside have been carved small figures of the two torchbearers<sup>27</sup>—one on each side—and, on the left, of Mithras emerging from the rock that gave him birth.<sup>28</sup> This suggests that the arch is no mere frame but an element of content in the composition. What it is, of course, is the cave in or in front of which the bull-killing takes place in so many of its representations, the cave which represents the universe which Mithras

<sup>25</sup>Patsch (82) is explicit that both monuments were so used.

<sup>26</sup>Cautopates on the left is discernible in Brunšmid's photograph (fig. 71).

<sup>27</sup>The figures are too worn or damaged to tell which is Cautes (raised torch) and which Cautopates (lowered torch), as was already so for Patsch (84) and Brunšmid (112). Indeed, the damage has now progressed so far that I could see no remaining trace of the figure on the right. Norms for the region and the parallel of 1851 suggest that it was Cautes on the right: see J. R. Hinnells, "The Iconography of Cautes and Cautopates, I: The Data," *Journal of Mithraic Studies* 1 (1976) 36–67, at 38 f. and 63. This is the positioning given in *CIMRM*, though on what evidence is unclear. No. 1849, however, which is the relief from Sinač nearby, has Cautes on the left, contrary to the regional norm.

<sup>28</sup>Only the head and trunk and traces of the right arm are still visible. Patsch could make out the "broad, sword-like dagger" (84) in the god's right hand, but little of the torch in the left; so too Brunšmid (112).

created and which is replicated not only in the tauroctony but also in the “*spelaeum*” which houses the tauroctony.<sup>29</sup> The intention of representing this cosmic cave would explain why the rock seems to have been cut much deeper than was strictly necessary for depth of relief, especially at the top.<sup>30</sup>

The tauroctonies of 1851 and 1852, as is all too obvious, are both badly damaged and weathered.<sup>31</sup> Although several other features can be detected visually at the sites, photographs show only the following: 1851 (figs. 1 and 2)—the body of Mithras with the outlines of his tunic, his extended right leg down to the foot, his right arm (which would end at the dagger plunged into the bull’s flank), a line marking the top edge of the left arm (which would be grasping the bull’s muzzle), the bull’s extended right rear leg (pinned under Mithras’ leg), traces of its body (clearest where it joins with the rear leg), and its bent right fore leg; also (fig. 3, and see above), Cautes on the right projecting wing; 1852 (figs. 4 and 5)—the body of Mithras with the outlines of the tunic as in 1851, his head, and his extended right leg. Even in their dismal state of preservation, however, there is a remarkable similarity between the two reliefs: the treatment of Mithras’ tunic, with flared skirt and the two strong horizontal lines marking folds in the fabric, is practically the same in each. So alike are they that I believe it is not improbable that they were executed by the same artist or at least in conscious imitation the one of the other. The similarity reinforces a suspicion, engen-

<sup>29</sup>The passage from Porphyry *De antro nympharum* 6 which justifies this interpretation of the Mithraic cave as an image of the cosmos created by Mithras will be quoted below. On the importance of the cave in Mithraic art and ideology, especially in Italy, see H. Lavagne, “Importance de la grotte dans le Mithriacisme en Occident,” *Etudes mithriaques* (above, n. 23) 271–278.

<sup>30</sup>The rock of the Jajce tauroctony (1902) is similarly cut back to its greatest depth on top. At Jajce, however, the upper border, instead of being curved, is made of two straight lines joining at an obtuse angle, as if the tauroctony were sheltered under the pitched roof of a shrine. This artificial effect—culture rather than nature as at 1852—is heightened by the decoration above, which consists of architectural rather than naturalistic foliage. At 1852 the ledge formed at the bottom of the relief by the cutting back of the rock is altogether different from the ledge at 1851 which is both natural and very much wider. I mention the fact because the descriptions (see *CIMRM* and Zotović) speak of the two in very much the same terms. It is perhaps possible that a wider ledge at 1852 was destroyed in the dynamiting of the site twenty years ago, but I think it unlikely. Brunšmid’s photograph (fig. 72) is inconclusive, but suggests that little if anything has been lost from the mass of rock in front and below.

<sup>31</sup>To judge from Brunšmid’s photographs, 1851 seems to have been somewhat better preserved at the start of the century than now, while 1852 had deteriorated virtually to its present state. Brunšmid’s photograph of 1851 (fig. 71) reveals quite clearly the outline of Cautopates on the left (above, n. 26) and of Mithras’ billowing cloak, neither of which is readily discernible today even by autopsy on the site.

dered by the complementary orientation east and west, that the two mithraea may have been founded as a pair.<sup>32</sup>

In 1852, except for the torchbearers and the nascent Mithras outside the niche, there are no traces of any figures other than Mithras and the bull. It is unlikely that no other elements of the traditional scene were originally included. To my knowledge, such a minimalist composition, with neither attendant animals nor Sol and Luna, would be unparalleled. More probably, some of the additional elements were present but have since been obliterated. Certainly, some of them are present in 1851. Traces of the dog can be discerned just above the bull's fore leg and of the scorpion presumably set as usual at the bull's genitals.<sup>33</sup> The snake, however, is absent; so, it seems, is the raven. Of the luminaries, there are remains of the bust of Luna in the upper right.<sup>34</sup> On the left, but at a lower level, are what appear to be the remains of the lower half of another bust—that of Sol. The descriptions so interpret it,<sup>35</sup> and Patsch (83) explains the asymmetry with the bust of Luna on the supposition that there was no room higher up on the rock on the left side. However, I am not convinced that that was originally the case, and it seems to me possible that this "pear-shaped" excrescence (Patsch *ibid.*) may be the remains of a rock-birth. That scene, as we saw, occupies an analogous position on the left in 1852. Finally—and this feature seems to have escaped comment altogether—the bull in 1851 has a remarkably long tail which curves upwards and on to the projecting left wing, ending (presumably in the usual ear of wheat) close to the upper part of the figure of Cautopates.

The position of the rock-birth on the left in 1852—and perhaps also in 1851—merits some attention. The left is the usual side for the rock-birth in the monuments of Italy and Germany and of the so-called Raetian group.<sup>36</sup> These are all elaborate compositions in which the rock-birth is

<sup>32</sup>There is of course no way of telling which monument was carved first. The treatment of the tunic is very similar also in the rock-cut tauroctony at Jajce (1902). Perhaps we are dealing with a local idiom of the Dalmatian hinterland.

<sup>33</sup>Brunšmid (111), Vermaseren, and Zotović deny the presence of the scorpion, although Patsch (83) tentatively identified traces of one of the pincers.

<sup>34</sup>Zotović reports traces of a crescent on her shoulders, but I could not detect any, and neither Patsch nor Brunšmid records it.

<sup>35</sup>Patsch (83) does allow the possibility that it might be the remains of the raven.

<sup>36</sup>Germany: *CIMRM* 1161A (Stockstadt I), 1247A (Dieburg), 1283 (Neuenheim), 1292 (Osterburken); also 966 (Sarrebouurg in N. E. Gaul); but not 1083 (Heddernheim I) where it is in the upper right. Italy: 650 (Nersae), 390 (Barberini fresco), and the Marino fresco (M. J. Vermaseren, *Mithriaca* 3: *The Mithraeum at Marino* [Leiden 1982]). "Raetian:" 1400 (Mauls), 1430 (Virunum). On this last category, see E. Will, *Le relief cultuel gréco-romain* (Paris 1955) 361 ff.; also, H. Lavagne, "Les relief mithriaques à scènes multiples en Italie," in *Mélanges de philosophie, de littérature et d'histoire offerts à Pierre Boyancé* (Collection de l'Ecole franç. de Rome 22, Paris 1974); on the limitations of this classification, R. L. Gordon, "Panelled Complications," *Journal of Mithraic Studies* 3 (1980) 200–227.

only one of many subsidiary scenes. By contrast, in the reliefs of the Danubian provinces the rock-birth regularly appears on the right side (in the upper corner), and occasionally it is privileged in one of two senses: either it is the only side-scene—or one of very few—to be represented, or else it is promoted, as it were, by being brought inside the main field of the tauroctony from among the other scenes on the borders.<sup>37</sup> 1852 thus appears to follow a Danubian pattern in the singling out of the rock-birth, but a Western pattern in its location on the left. Unfortunately, with the possible exception of 1851, there is no other extant Dalmatian tauroctony with a rock-birth whose position can be compared.<sup>38</sup>

Was it for some ideological reason that the tauroctonies at Arupium were cut directly on to the natural rock? Or does some trivial and forgotten reason, such as the taste of a local craftsman or economy of cost, explain it? As with so much else in the Mysteries of Mithras, the answer to this concluding question is necessarily tentative. It may be that there is little significance in the rock-cut reliefs at these—or any—particular sites. Nevertheless, there are indications in the Mysteries of a concern with nature and the natural which might help to explain in a general way the idiom found at Arupium. Our best—indeed, our only—evidence from literary sources of what a mithraeum is supposed to be, its underlying ideology, is Porphyry's account in *De antro nympharum* (6) of the archetypal—and of course fictitious—"cave" founded by Zoroaster in Persia:<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup>*CIMRM* 1650, 1656, 1740, 1797, 1958, 1972, 2036, 2037, 2052, 2059, 2164, 2171, 2182, 2187, 2191, 2194, 2214, 2237, 2243, 2244, 2292, 2315, 2332, 2338; also, no. 22 in V. Canarache *et al.*, *Tezaurul de sculpturi de la Tomis* (Bucharest 1953); Deva, Regional Museum, inv. no. 20.162 (publ. L. Mărghită, "Două noi reliefuli mithraice de la Ulpia Traiana-Sarmizegetusa," *Studii și cercetări de istorie veche* 18 [1967] 693–700); Sofia, National Archaeological Museum, inv. nos. 1682 and 8097; no. 5 in V. Naïdenova, *Mithraism in Lower Moesia and Thrace* (diss. [in Russian] Moscow University 1975). When one or two other scenes are singled out with the rock-birth, these tend to be, on the left Mithras *taurophorus* (the *transitus dei*) and Mithras riding the bull, on the right the reclining Saturn and/or the lion plunging into the crater. To the list above should be added certain monuments of obvious Danubian origin but transported in antiquity and discovered elsewhere: *CIMRM* 1036 and 1084 (Germany), 469 (Rome: see Lavagne [above, n. 36] 486 f.). *CIMRM* 556, a monument in the Vatican probably from Rome, appears to be something of a hybrid. It has the rock-birth on the right, but Lavagne (487 f.) correctly characterized it as "beaucoup plus italien d'aspect." Nevertheless, though it was probably sculpted in Italy, I believe that a Danubian model was used. Not only is there a rock-birth on the right, but there are also scenes of the *transitus* and of Mithras riding the bull on the left and a lower register of scenes—admittedly, somewhat different from the usual Danubian ones—below.

<sup>38</sup>A fragment from Salona, *CIMRM* 1865, has a rock-birth. It is probably a tauroctony, but since the only other element preserved on it is a lion and since the lion does not have an unvarying location in the composition either, the position of the rock-birth cannot be determined.

<sup>39</sup>The translation is that of the Arethusa edition (Buffalo 1969). Much of what Porphyry tells us about the Mysteries in the *De antro* has been called in question by R. Turcan (*Mithras Platonicus* [Leiden 1975] 62–89) as being a distortion for philosophical purposes

Similarly, the Persians call the place a cave where they introduce an initiate to the Mysteries, revealing to him the path by which souls descend and go back again. For Eubulus tells us that Zoroaster was the first to dedicate a natural (αὐτοφυές) cave in honor of Mithras, the creator and father of all; it was located in the mountains near Persia and had flowers and springs. This cave bore for him the image of the cosmos which Mithras had created, and the things which the cave contained, by their proportionate arrangement, provided him with symbols of the elements and climates of the cosmos. After Zoroaster others adopted the custom of performing their rites of initiation in caves and grottoes which were either natural or artificial.

Ideally, then, the mithraeum is close to nature. Its original was a natural cave in the mountains, furnished with flowers and springs, and its exemplars are still "caves" whether natural or artificial. Archaeology has abundantly confirmed this ideology: running water and ritual fonts abound; mithraea are called "caves" on inscriptions and are found in vaulted and subterranean structures; pumice is even applied to their ceilings or cult-niches to heighten the naturalistic effect.<sup>40</sup> But while the mithraea in the urban centres or in other localities where the terrain does not afford the natural material must create these effects artificially, mithraea at suitable sites with rocks, cliffs, or caves can achieve them directly and therefore with greater authenticity;<sup>41</sup> for they are that much closer to their hypothetical original, Zoroaster's cave "in the mountains near Persia." They are thus indisputably legitimate places for doing the business of the Mysteries, which is the conducting of souls into and out of the cosmos which the "cave" symbolizes. This authenticity, I suggest, is heightened at Arupium by the unmediated

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rather than information about the cult's actual teachings. This particularly applies to the doctrines of the descent and ascent of souls and of Mithras as demiurge, both mentioned in the passage here quoted. Turcan is, I believe, mistaken in his scepticism, but this is not the place to argue this very complicated question. In any case, the Mysteries' concern with nature, which is the main point at issue here, is not in dispute.

<sup>40</sup>There is no need to labour these well-known points with elaborate documentation. The mithraeum as "cave" is fully treated by H. Lavagne, "Importance de la grotte . . ." (above, n. 29), who demonstrates that it was particularly a concern of Italian Mithraism. For a conspectus of the various types and locations of water sources in mithraea, consult the indices to both volumes of *CIMRM* (s. basin, water, well). It is tempting to add the elaborate hydraulic system at Itri (M. De' Spagnolis, *Nuovi ritrovamenti: Il mitreo di Itri* [Leiden 1980]), but there is no positive evidence that the structure was a mithraeum at all; also the fenced spring at Ilinjača (Z. 28: see above, n. 18), where the chances of the site's being a mithraeum are somewhat better. The mithraea which used pumice in their decor are *CIMRM* 216 (Casa di Diana, Ostia), 338 (S. Clemente), 389 (Barberini), 434 (Circus Maximus), 476 (S. Prisca). The niche of the Barberini Mithraeum is decorated with sea-shells as well as pumice.

<sup>41</sup>One must not, of course, exaggerate. Not all mithraea show this concern with the natural, nor are natural features always seized upon when available. There are extant mithraea in rocky and mountainous country built of four artificial masonry walls, e.g., that at Konjic (*CIMRM* 1895). And, as we have seen (above, 362), even where the natural rock is used for the structure, it is not always used for the cult-relief.

display of the tauroctony on the rock face. It is as if the earth itself, of which Mithras is the artificer, proclaims his greatest act. Nor is it coincidence, I believe, that at 1852—and perhaps at 1851 too—the rock-birth is portrayed alone from among the subsidiary scenes. Mithras is shown, as usual, from the waist up emerging from the rock that gave him birth. To reveal that scene on the natural rock springing from the ground is to validate the story of the *deus petrogenitus* which it expresses. In the field of religious iconography there could be no nicer example of the coordination of the medium with the message.

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