An Examination of Cavità 254 in Orvieto, Italy, and its Primary Usage as an Etruscan Quarry

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ABSTRACT

An Examination of Cavità 254 in Orvieto, Italy and its Primary Usage as an Etruscan Quarry

A thesis presented to the Graduate Program in Ancient Greek and Roman Studies

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In 264 BCE, the Etruscan city of Velzna fell to the Romans, who destroyed the homes and other structures on top of the tufa plateau now known as Orvieto, Italy. Orvieto’s unique soft-rock plateau allowed its Etruscan inhabitants to dig wells, cisterns, and tunnels and today 1,200 artificial cavities are documented beneath the city. Archaeologists investigating these structures hope to uncover what the Etruscan city of Velzna looked like prior to its demise. This thesis examines Cavità 254 a unique type of underground structure found beneath Orvieto.

Cavità 254 is the first Etruscan pyramidal hypogeum structure to be systematically excavated beneath the city of Orvieto. Since the discovery of Cavità 254 in 2012, the site has enthralled and motivated archaeologists to determine the original function of the site. This thesis presents new excavation evidence of quarrying techniques uncovered on the walls of Cavità 254 and the use of the site as a quarry in Etruscan Velzna. Cavità 254 was filled with various types of materials from the Etruscan occupation of Orvieto at the end of the fifth century BCE. The Fifth century in Etruria was a time of change in political structure that replaced the rule of kings with magistrates. As political culture shifted, efforts to appease a population governed by its own
peers began. New buildings were constructed for public use as older buildings were torn down erasing the kingship in Etruria. This major social shift is precisely what occurred in Velzna in the fifth century BCE. Political changes motivated new building efforts and Cavità 254 and other quarries used for now out of date buildings were filled in the fifth century to make way for new public structures.
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Introduction

Italian archaeologist and Orvieto native Mario Bizzarri joked in his book *Magica Etruria* that Orvieto’s fame was attributed to three things: the famous Duomo with breathtaking frescoes by Luca Signorelli; the famous wine Orvieto Classico; and the Etruscan tombs excavated by Bizzarri himself: “la fama di Orvieto, si dice qui scherzomente, è affidata a tre cose: il Duomo, Il vino, le tombe etrusche.” In addition to Bizzarri’s three selections of Orvieto’s claim to fame I would add the Etruscan caves that lie beneath the city. Most tourists will travel to Orvieto to experience the sight of the Duomo, the wine, and the tombs without knowing a thousand cavities and tunnels lie just beneath their feet as they walk over the cobblestone streets.

In 264 BCE Velzna (the Etruscan name for Orvieto) was overtaken by the Romans. The defeat was a turning point for the city; the Romans destroyed the homes, and other structures on the surface of the city tufa plateau. While everything on top of the city was leveled to the ground, dug deep into the soft tufa tunnels, cisterns, and wells dug by the Etruscans were left untouched. These tunnels and caves turned into time capsules sealed with the history and hands-on evidence of Etruscan Velzna. This paper examines Cavità 254, the first Etruscan underground pyramidal structure to be systematically excavated beneath the modern city of Orvieto. Much work still needs to be done to gather, summarize and publicize the contributions Orvieto can make to our knowledge of the Etruscan past. This thesis is a small step in this direction.

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1 Mario Bizzarri, Claudio Curri, and Raffaello Bencini *Magica Etruria*, (Firenze: Vallecchi 1968), 57.
Cavità 254 is located underneath the Via Ripa Medici on the southeast side of the city near the Porta Romana (Fig. 1). The structure is one of 1,200 underground cavities dug into the tufa rock since the Etruscan occupation of the city (Fig. 2). Excavations of the site have revealed layers of homogenous loci filled with artifacts from the Bronze Age to 430 BCE.² Many of these objects were found as fragments with joins in different loci indicating that the structure was filled in a single action.³

The exact reason why the structure was filled is unknown, but evidence of the original primary use of the structure has become apparent after five seasons of excavation. Since the first discovery of the site, the excavators hypothesized that the structure was not a cistern due to lack of cocciopes or clay covering on the walls to allow the structure to hold water, and that the structure was not used as a quarry due to the regularity of the facing on all four walls.⁴ Recent excavations have yielded evidence of the activity of quarrying visible on the walls of the structure.

This paper addresses these new finds and challenges the original interpretation that the structure was not used as a quarry in antiquity. Although no exact parallels exist for the underground structure outside of Orvieto, a site excavated in Cerveteri (Etruscan Caere) maintains in its archaeological record similar material to Cavità 254. The site known as the Vigna Parrocchiale in Cerveteri has brought to light an Etruscan quarry structure filled with various Etruscan materials dating to the end of the fifth century BCE. This thesis examines the Etruscan quarry discovered at the Vigna Parrocchiale site and compares the structure and the material fill to that of Cavità 254.

³ Ibid. 40
⁴ Ibid. 52
First, I will present a brief history of ancient Velzna and the archaeological material left behind in the aftermath and what these sites can communicate about the story of the Etruscans who lived in Orvieto. Few archaeological sites offer a glimpse of the city of Velzna on top of the city, as the Etruscan structures were leveled to make way for the developing medieval town. The city landscape was rebuilt and changed across the centuries, while the underground area remained untouched. The underground area provides a view the ancient city of Velzna from the perspective of its urban infrastructure.

Cavità 254 is part of this preserved history of ancient Orvieto as new evidence suggests that the site was a large quarry in the Etruscan period. The site demonstrates that the Etruscans built large structures in the city of Orvieto, which are now lost. The site was filled at the end of the fifth century BCE with various types of materials which will be discussed in the following chapters. Evidence from the structure of Cavità 254 itself and the material filling it both contribute to the reconstruction of the ancient city and what the urban landscape of the city looked like during the fifth century BCE. The excavations of Cavità 254 have yielded new evidence of how Orvieto evolved from an unremarkable tufa plateau into a thriving Etruscan city from the sixth century to its demise.
Chapter 1: Orvieto’s Thriving Etruscan Past

A City with Many Names: Orvieto, Urbs Vetus, Velzna, Volsinii

Quae etiam Volsiniensium urbem gravibus et erubescendis cladibus

inpicaverunt. erat opulenta, erat moribus et legibus ordinata, Etruriae caput

habebatur: sed Postquam luxuria prolapsa est, in profundum iniuriarum et
turpitudinis decidit, ut servorum se insolentissimae dominationi subiceret.

Valerius Maximus 9.1 ext. 2

They involved the city of Volsinii too in grievous and shameful calamities. It was

rich, well organized in manners and laws, regarded as the capital or Etruria. But

after it degenerated with luxury, it fell into an abyss of outrage and turpitude

ending in subjection to the insolent rule of slaves.  

5

The Italian hill-town of Orvieto is situated in the Umbria region about 80 miles north of

Rome. The city sits high on an elliptical plateau of volcanic tufa and stands out from the

surrounding valley (Fig. 3). 6 Orvieto is a city with roots in the Etruscan period, in which the city

was called Velzna in Etruscan and called Volsinii by Latin authors. 7 The Etruscan city flourished

at the beginning of the sixth century BCE and was considered a prominent city in Etruria.

The wealth of Velzna was based on the production of ceramic wares and bronze works of art. 8

Velzna was a powerful city-state that had many homes and buildings built on top of the

6 The Orvieto rock formation is from a volcanic eruption near the Bolsena volcanic district circa 330,000 BP; The city of Orvieto is built on top of an elliptical slab made up of a soft pyroclastic rock (tuff) formed by the “Orvieto and Bagnoregio Tuff”, Claudio Morgottini, “Historic Urban Landscapes Made up of Soft Rock (Buildings Realized with Soft Rock): Orvieto (Italy)” in Engineering Geology for Society and Territory. Edited by Giorgio Lollino. Volume 8, Preservation of Cultural Heritage, (Cham: Springer, 2015.), 10-28.
7 Volsinii is the Latin name of Orvieto given by the Romans Volsinii is mentioned many times Velzna on coins (find them and cite) by Livy (cite Livy here from The Etruscan World)
tufa plateau and outside of the city tombs were filled with large amounts of material. The city of Orvieto is more than just a beautiful tourist destination. Orvieto conceals beneath its surface pieces of an Etruscan past waiting to be rediscovered and studied to understand not only how the citizens of Velzna lived, but how Velzna the Etruscan civilization in its entirety lived their lives and built their cities.

This chapter presents the various excavations conducted in Orvieto that exposed the Etruscan past of Velzna. The presence of the city in the Etruscan period is documented by Latin writers including the Roman historian Livy.

A Brief History of Orvieto and Its Wall

The Etruscan city was sacked by the Romans in the 264 BCE as Rome was expanding their power. The high plateau that Velzna was built on gave the Etruscans a natural barrier of defense against intruders and enemies so they chose not to build walls to protect their city. A city undefended by walls led to the desolation of Velzna. After the destruction of the city the Romans took 2,000 bronze statues to Rome. The historian John Zonara recounts that the city was destroyed and the inhabitants were sent to live in nearby Bolsena. From Livy, we know that the city of Velzna did not build again after the Roman conquest as Volsinii was not one of the Etruscan cities mentioned by Livy who sent various contributions to Scipio in 205 BCE.

After the sack of Velzna, the city was periodically occupied by people travelling to Rome until the eleventh century when Orvieto became a Comune and in 1860 was annexed to the Italian Kingdom, which then later became the Italian Republic. Orvieto has a rich history from

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9 The Fasti Triumphales mentions the triumph of M. Fulvius Flaccus in 264 BCE; See Attilio Degrassi, Fasti Capitolini, (Torino: G.B. Paravia, 1954), 99.
10 Pliny (NH 34.16.34)
12 Livy, History of Rome (28, 45.10-12)
the end of the Etruscan period. The city has not only been visited by weary travelers headed for Rome, but also the Roman general Flavius Belisarius who commanded the army under the Emperor Justinian.

Procopius of Caesarea a Byzantine historian of the sixth century writes about the campaigns of Flavius Belisarius and his attempts to recapture Italy. Procopius followed Belisarius on many of his campaigns and he describes the siege of Orvieto in his book on the Gothic Wars (de Bello Gothicorum) in 538 CE. Procopius describes the arrival of and the commands of Belisarius to his army.¹³

For Belisarius, immediately upon reaching Urviventus, commanded the whole army to encamp in a place suitably situated, while he himself made a complete circuit of the city, looking carefully to see whether it was perhaps not impossible to capture it by storm.¹⁴

The historian calls the city Οὐρβιβεντὸς, a corruption in Greek of the Latin Urbs Vetus. Later into the modern age the city came to be called Orvieto another linguistic corruption of Latin and modern Italian. Procopius then goes on to describe the city as Belisarius plans his attack on the city.¹⁵

On this hill, the men of old founded a city, but did not surround it with walls or any other kind of fortification, thinking that Nature had herself made it

¹³ Procopius. Procopius, Translated by H. B Dewing. (London: W. Heinemann 1914) 6.20.5
¹⁴ Translations from Procopius are from: Procopius. Procopius, Translated by H. B Dewing. (London: W. Heinemann 1914)
¹⁵ Ibid. 6.20.8
impregnable. For there is only one way of access to it from the heights and, if this is guarded, the defenders need fear attack from no other quarter.

Both Procopius and Zonara mention the unique city walls that define the city of Orvieto. In the 1960s, part of the ancient wall of the Etruscan city was discovered on the southwest side of the side beneath a private home on the Via della cava. The wall is constructed of tufa stones of various sizes placed on top of each other without the use of mortar. The wall in the Etruscan period provided a safe entrance into the city and kept out unwanted assailants. This single entrance is similar to what Procopius describes in his book on the Gothic Wars. The archaeological evidence of the Etruscan wall on the Via della Cava in Orvieto corroborates the description of the city Procopius calls Οὐρβίβεντὸς. As the city came to be reoccupied the name of the city changed eventually to Orvieto. Explorations and discoveries of Etruscan material culture demonstrate that the city had an eventful past that survives in the archaeological record.

**Archaeological Evidence of the Etruscan Period on the Surface of Orvieto**

The Etruscan occupation in the city of Orvieto has come to light not only from literary descriptions, but from excavations across the city and surrounding areas. The destruction of Velzna in 264 BCE left archaeological evidence in a few locations in the city. Some objects were taken back to Rome as previously mentioned, but the foundations of buildings have remained across the centuries. Remains of a temple, two necropoleis, and a sanctuary all reflect in their archaeological remains the complexity and organization of the Etruscan city. Significant excavations in many places across modern Orvieto have provided evidence of the religious beliefs, burial practices, and artistic abilities of the Etruscans, who lived and died in the city they called Velzna.

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16 Zonara, (8.7)
17 The two necropoleis are separate today but in antiquity there was a single necropolis that wrapped around the city. These tombs will be addressed later in this paper.
In 1828, the foundations of a temple were unearthed during construction a new road in the city. This temple is called the Belvedere temple and dates to the fifth century BCE and is thought to be sacred to Tinia (Fig. 4).\textsuperscript{18} Archaeologists discovered the foundations of the temple, the high base, the entrance stairway, and the terracotta figures that were placed on the pediment upon excavation. From the remains of the foundations of the temple we know that it contained three \textit{cellae} (Fig. 5). The plan of the temple is similar to the Tuscan temple proportions described by Vitruvius in his \textit{Ten Books on Architecture}.\textsuperscript{19} The three \textit{cellae} of the temple suggests that the temple was dedicated to the Capitoline triad, similar in plan to the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus in Rome.\textsuperscript{20}

Material evidence recovered from the Belvedere temple excavations provide information as to which deities the temple was dedicated to. Three inscriptions provided evidence that the temple was dedicated to Tinia.\textsuperscript{21} Two of the inscriptions were found on bucchero cups dating to the fifth century BCE which read “apas” meaning “of the father”.\textsuperscript{22} The other inscription was found on a black-figure cup dating to the fourth century BCE that read “Tinia Calusna” meaning “Tinia of Calus”.\textsuperscript{23} The Belvedere temple excavations have yielded multiple architectural terracottas and building materials. One of the architectural terracottas from the temple is of a man stroking his beard (Fig. 6).\textsuperscript{24} The colors of the figure are well preserved and the figure is sculpted rather realistically. Numerous materials found at the site are kept in the Museo Claudio Faina in Orvieto

\textsuperscript{18} Tinia is the Etruscan equivalent of the Roman Jupiter and Greek Zeus; Tinia was the god of storms, the thunderbolt, and the sky.
\textsuperscript{20} The Capitoline triad is made up of Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva these three deities in Etruscan are Tinia, Uni, and Nortia respectively.
\textsuperscript{22} CIE 10525 and CIE 10535
\textsuperscript{23} CIE 10560; Calus is an Etruscan underworld or chthonic deity.
\textsuperscript{24} The terracotta is now housed in the Museo Claudio Faina in Orvieto
Faina and the Museo Nazionale di Orvieto. The finds discovered at the site demonstrate that the city had a functioning religious system and as the historian Livy recounted the Etruscans were a culture dedicated to religious practices.\(^{25}\)

The ring necropolis that wrapped around the city in antiquity, now is only visible in two locations around the rock walls of the city at Crocifisso del Tufo and Cannicella. The two necropoleis demonstrate in the contents of their tombs that Velzna was a flourishing city from the early sixth to the end of the fourth centuries BCE.\(^{26}\) The significant material discoveries at the necropoleis prove Velzna’s wealthy past and trade connections with the Greeks.

The striking necropolis of Crocifisso del Tufo, is located north-west of the city walls of Orvieto and is a tourist site open to the public well worth visiting.\(^{27}\) The name of the necropolis is attributed to a crucifix carved into the tufa rock cliffs of Orvieto that is located just above the necropolis and can be accessed on the anello della rupe (the ring around the rock) walking trail that wraps around the city. Crocifisso del Tufo is planned and built like an Etruscan city in the fifth century BCE. The tombs of Crocifisso were commissioned by the Etruscan state so that the citizens of the aristocracy were not allowed to demonstrate their wealth by building elaborate tombs. The state having this power demonstrates a change in the social organization in Velzna during this time period. The tombs at Crocifisso truly are replicated after city streets and the tombs act as homes all organized in neat rows purposefully constructed city for the dead.

The tombs of Crocifisso del Tufo differ from the tombs at other Etruscan cities like the painted tombs of Tarquinia and the tumulus type tombs of Cerveteri. The tombs are constructed

\(^{25}\) Livy 5.1.6 *Ab Urbe Condita*, “Gens itaque ante omnes alias eo magis dedita religionibus, quod excelleret arte colendi eas.”


\(^{27}\) Crocifisso del Tufo was originally excavated by Riccardo Mancini in the nineteenth century and later by Mario Bizzarri beginning in 1960.
out of square tufa stones as cube-shaped monuments (Fig. 7). Inside of each tomb we can find funerary benches made out of tufa stones used for the deposition of the remains of the deceased. Some of the tombs have a single small chamber area made for two people and others have two chambers: one for the deposition of the remains and the other for the deposition of funerary goods. On top of each tomb someone placed a cippus in the form of a cylinder, pine-cone, or sphere. On the architrave of the tomb or on a separate cippus placed in front of the tomb are Etruscan inscriptions of the names of the deceased. Orvieto has the most funerary inscriptions than any other town due to the size of the necropolis and the preservation of the inscriptions (Fig. 8).

The material found in Crocifisso is invaluable evidence of trade with Greece. Tomb robbers have looted many of the tombs at Crocifisso over time, but upon excavation many different types of Attic pottery were found and bucchero; a pottery typical of the Etruscans made locally in the area of Orvieto. The Etruscans took much of their own culture from that of the Greeks. The Attic pottery found at Crocifisso made it to Etruria through trade. During the seventh century trade increased between the Greeks and the Etruscans due to the high demand from the Etruscans for Greek pottery. Etruscan pottery spread throughout Italy, Sardinia, Sicily, North Africa, southern France, Spain, Greece, Asia Minor, and Cyprus.²⁸

The Attic pottery found in Orvieto shows that the Etruscan city of Velzna played a role in the trade system between Greece and Etruria. The city of Velzna in antiquity was situated at the meeting point between the Paglia and Tiber rivers.²⁹ Both of these rivers permitted navigation up to Orvieto and to other Etruscan territories such as Chiusi, Tarquinia, and Cerveteri (Caere). The advantageous location of Orvieto allowed for the city to participate in trade, especially large

quantities of good quality Attic black and red-figure vases. A well-known Attic red-figure calyx krater known as the Niobid krater from Crocifisso del Tufo and is now housed at the Louvre Museum in Paris (Fig. 9). The vase dates to the middle of the fifth century BCE and depicts Artemis and Apollo killing the children of Niobe on the reverse side. On the obverse of the vase it is argued that the vase depicts the heroes seen by Odysseus when he made his journey to the underworld.\(^{30}\) Although Crocifisso del Tufo has many fragments and complete Attic vases, the necropolis also boasts a famous funerary cippus in the form of a warrior’s head with a helmet. The cippus is housed in the Museo Claudio Faina in Orvieto (Fig. 10). The warrior head cippus was found on top of a tomb during the excavations of Riccardo Mancini. The inscription reads that the cippus was dedicated to Larth Cuperes son of Aranth. The archaic shape of the letters indicates that the cippus dates to the sixth century BCE.

Recently, new explorations of Crocifisso del Tufo are in progress to explore additional areas of the necropolis.\(^{31}\) Black bucchero, a pair of gold earrings, and fragments of Attic vases are just a few of the new objects discovered since the necropolis was reopened to be excavated in June of 2015 (Fig. 11). The goal of the new explorations is to excavate as much as possible in the previously excavated tombs to secure all finds for preservation. The project is also focusing on reconstruction and preservation on the tombs themselves so they can be saved for future visitors and archaeologists. The tombs are full of materials that demonstrate the wealth of the people of Velzna, but they do not provide a view of the living city of Velzna.

The second necropolis excavated just outside Orvieto is the Cannicella necropolis located on the south-east side of Orvieto (Fig. 12).\(^{32}\) The Cannicella tombs range in date from the


\(^{31}\) The excavations at Crocifisso del Tufo are now under the direction of archaeologists Claudio Bizzarri and Paolo Binaco in collaboration with the Parco Archeologico ed Ambientale dell’Orvietano

\(^{32}\) The Cannicella necropolis dates to around 600 or 575 BCE based on the excavated grave goods.
seventh to the first century BCE. The site was continuously visited even after the sack of the city in 264 BCE. The necropolis contains fossa tombs, chamber tombs dug into the tufa rock, and some tombs similar to those at Crocifisso. Cannicella, like Crocifisso has many inscriptions found along with four stone altars, a nude female statue in marble, and remains of a votive deposit.

The marble statue known as the Cannicella Venus is a symbol of a cult centered at the necropolis which was also used as an area for a shrine (Fig. 13). The statue is made up of two kinds of marble, not easy to find or attain near Orvieto. The figure is a rare archaic Etruscan female nude placed in a cemetery signaling the cult was specific to dealing with the dead. Inscriptions found in the area of Cannicella refer to the Etruscan goddess Vei, the equivalent of the Greek goddess Demeter. Demeter was deity in the Olympian pantheon known to care for the dead. An inscription found at the site of Cannicella is a dedication to Vei that reads “thval veal” indicating that in the necropolis a shrine was dedicated to Vei.

The Cannicella Venus is evidence that the site of the necropolis was more than a place to bury the dead, but a place where families of the deceased could feel that their loved ones would be content in the afterlife. A common theme in the Etruscan belief of the afterlife is that death is a continuation of life and they would be able to continue to do the same things they did while they were living. Wall paintings from Tarquinia depict scenes of banqueting, games, hunting,

34 The female marble statue is known as the Cannicella Venus and is housed in the Museo Claudio Faina in Orvieto
38 Ibid. 47, In Greece the dead were called Demetreioi or “Demeter’s property”.
and athletic events all accompanying the dead to show that they would continue to do these enjoyable things in their afterlife. The families buried in Cannicella chose to be near this cult of Veii so much that new tombs were built on top of older tombs. Cannicella is likely the site of some kind of community cult, but it is unknown if the cult was surrounding a single aristocratic family.

**The Identification of the site of the Fanum Voltumnae: Latin Sources**

Just outside the city of Orvieto is a site now identified as the sanctuary of the *Fanum Voltumnae*, Campo Della Fiera. The site was used as the sanctuary of Voltumna, where the leaders of the Etruscan cities came to have feasts and other celebrations. Livy mentions in his writings the federal sanctuary of the Etruscans, but he never records the name of the city in which the sanctuary was located. Livy also recounts, that the twelve *principes* of the Etruscan cities met at the *Fanum* site to make seminal decisions together concerning foreign policy during the conflicts with Rome and Veii. Servius Honoratus in his commentary to the *Aeneid* states that Etruria had twelve *lucomones* (kings), and one was in charge of all of the others. Livy in his own writings recounts that there was an election of a king among the others and they each gave a *lictor* for the *fasces*. Again, Livy recounts election of a *sacerdos* at the *Fanum Voltumnae*. The election of the *sacerdos* was the head of the Etruscan alliance against Rome in the previously mentioned conflicts at the end of the fifth century BCE. Aside from political decisions, the

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40 Ibid. 81  
41 Campo della Fiera is under the direction of Doctor Simonetta Stopponi of the University of Perugia in collaboration with the University of Macerata  
42 The god worshipped at the sanctuary was Voltumna-Vertumnus; Varro in his *Lingua Latina* (5.46) defines the god as “deus Etruriae princeps”.  
43 Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 4.23.5, 4.25.7, 4.61.2, 5.17.6, 6.2.2  
44 Servius Honoratus was a writer in the fourth century AD; *ad Aeneid*, 8.475.  
45 Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, 1.8.2  
46 Ibid. 5.1  
sanctuary was used as a venue to hold religious ceremonies, fairs, markets, theatrical events, and games that were forbidden to be interrupted.48

**Identification of the Fanum Voltumnae in Orvieto: The Rescript of Spello**

The most striking primary source used to identify the location of the sanctuary of the *Fanum Voltumnae* in Orvieto comes from evidence of an inscription called the *Rescript of Spello*, which gave permission to celebrate various festivities outside of Volsinii.49 The *Rescript of Spello* was written between 333 and 337 CE and discovered in 1733 (Fig. 14).50 The citizens living in Spello petitioned the Emperor Constantine to allow them to celebrate an annual festival outside of Volsinii in Tuscia.51 In return, the people of Spello would build and dedicate a temple to Constantine and his family. From the inscription on the so-called *Rescript of Spello*, the Emperor Constantine gave the right to celebrate religious ceremonies and games to the people of Spello without having to travel to Volsinii.52 The poet Propertius also mentions the origin of the god Vertumnus as Volsinian when he was called to Rome in 264 BCE when the consul Flavius Flaccus captured Volsinii.53

Excavations at the site of Campo della Fiera began in 1876 and yielded very few finds in the beginning stages including architectural terracottas and *temenos* walls that appeared to belong to a cult-place.54 The early excavations of the site were not accurately documented and so a new team of excavators began in the year 2000. One of the most helpful finds that corroborates

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49 CIL XI, 5265
50 Today the marble tablet is on display in the Communal Palace of Spello, Italy
52 Spello is about 96 km away from Orvieto and is also located in the Umbria region of Italy
53 CIL I.2, 46;
the identification of Campo della Fiera as the Etruscan *Fanum Voltumnae* comes from a
translation of an Etruscan inscribed base for a statue which is now lost (Fig. 15). The inscription
on the base details that the statue placed on top of it was an offering of some sort.

*kanuta larecenas lautenîθa aranθia pinies puia turuce
thlusχval marveθul faliaθere*

Kanuta, freedwoman of the Larecena, wife of Aranth Pinies, has offered… [this
statue?] to *Tluschva*

The name of the deity *Tluschva* appears on the famous Piacenza liver as “*Tluse*”, “*Tluscv*”, “*Mar
*Thluc.” The name *Tluschva* was also found on a new inscription from Cerverteri. The deity is
considered to be female, chthonic, and even perhaps a group of deities. The translation of the full
name *thlusχval marveθul faliaθere* is controversial since there is not much progress on deciphering
the Etruscan language due to the lack of literary materials left behind to study. Giovanni Colonna
suggests that *marveθul* has a connotation relating to a magistrate and that the title of *Tluschva* in
the inscription is an epithet such as the “helper” or “minister” of some kind of underworld deity
like the Greek deity Hades. The translation with Colonna’s definition of *marveθul* would make
*Tluschva* a chthonic deity as referenced on the Piacenza Liver. The director of the Campo della
Fiera excavations Simonetta Stopponi suggests a different interpretation of *marveθul.*

The term *marveθul* according to Stopponi may mean “of the seat” or “residence”. Stopponi then takes
*faliaθere* as a form related to the term *faladum* an Etruscan term Latinized and was translated as
“heaven”. Stopponi’s translation of the second line of the inscription *marveθul faliaθere* as “in
the celestial place.”

The statue base discovered at Campo della Fiera is very rare since the

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55 Simonetta Stopponi, “*Campo della Fiera at Orvieto: New Discoveries*”, in: N. de Grummond and I. Edlund-Berry
(Eds), “Archaeology of Sanctuaries and Ritual in Etruria”, Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplement 81,
(Portsmouth, Rhode Island, 2011) 37-42.

56 Ibid. 42

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original offering now lost was given by an Etruscan woman in the Archaic period. The noteworthy point of the argument of the statue base is that with this inscription according to Stopponi, we may have the Etruscan name of the site that was used across centuries. The statue base recalls the bronzes taken back to Rome after the sack of Velzna and the inscription can supplements the ongoing studies of the Etruscan language.

Orvieto maintains in its archaeological record a rich history of Etruscan culture on the surface of the soft tufa plateau. The tombs of Cannicella and Crocifisso demonstrate the large investment of money and time the Etruscans put into their funerary monuments, but they only partially display a reflection of how the city of Velzna was set up based on the regular organization of the tombs. Below the surface of the Orvieto, a complex system of manmade cavities, cuniculi, and cisterns present the infrastructure of the Etruscan city. During the Etruscan period of Orvieto’s history, the inhabitants manipulated their environment to shape a viable city on the tufa plateau. The major obstacle to living on top of the tufa plateau is the difficult accessibility to water as there are no water sources anywhere in the city. To gain access to sources of water the Etruscans needed to dig wells and cisterns to collect rainwater for cooking, cleaning, and drinking.

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58 Ibid. 42
59 Ibid. 42
60 cuniculi is an Italian term for tunnels and channels that carry water
Chapter 2: A City Underground

*Digging to Reconstruct a City*

The unique geological makeup of the city of Orvieto allowed its residents both modern and ancient to carve out artificial cavities like Cavità 254 into the city’s tufa foundation. The structures found beneath the surface of Orvieto not only provide a visual understanding of the ancient city, but also a glimpse into the social structure of an Etruscan city. The excavations also present how the Etruscans handled the challenge of accessing water while living on the tufa plateau.

The Etruscans knew how to control and manage water in their cities by using underground tunnels, wells, and cisterns. This is especially proved in excavations beneath the city of Orvieto. The control over water sourcing and the infrastructure was placed can represent a sort of flipped view of how Velzna was planned out.\(^1\) To excavate the underground structures is a worthwhile task, because no other Etruscan city is similar in geological makeup to Orvieto. The unique research being done underground in Orvieto can provide more information than other cities, that preserved just foundations of cities. The underground structures and tunnels of the entire city are documented (See Fig.2). The various structures and their contents provide a view of the ancient city of Velzna. Adolfo Cozza in his explorations of the underground areas of Orvieto discovered tunnels dug beneath the streets that received rainwater from cisterns that were placed

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in the *atria* of Etruscan buildings.\(^{62}\) Archaeologists found an example of this near the Belvedere temple on the eastern side of the city, where a part of a paved street was uncovered in the beginning of the twentieth century during the digging of foundations for the infirmary of the barracks in the city.\(^{63}\)

Beneath Orvieto, are two kinds of water management systems, one for clear water and the other used to drain water out of the city. On the one hand, the previously mentioned tunnels/paved streets placed underground were used to drain water outside of the city to prevent flooding. On the other hand, the system of cisterns with *cuniculi* were used to collect and manage water to be used for drinking, cooking, and other purposes.

The remains of water systems in Orvieto provide clues as to where domestic homes were located within the ancient city. All homes needed access to water for cleaning and for consumption. We can attribute the preservation of these underground cavities to the reuse of the structures from the reoccupation of the city in the Medieval period, which then continued through modernity. By looking at the archaeological remains of the city’s underground structures we can learn much about the infrastructure and organization of the Etruscan city of Velzna. Archaeological investigation on top of the city is neither easy nor conclusive for the entirety of the city. New structures built in the Medieval period replaced the buildings and other structures of the Etruscans in Orvieto. The Medieval population living in Orvieto did not assign any importance to the remnants of the Etruscan past of Orvieto. With the archaeological remains of the water infrastructure beneath the city it is simple enough to estimate where domestic buildings were placed on top of the city. Cisterns were placed under the *impluvium* in the atrium of the

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\(^{63}\) Ibid. 713
home. The House of the Surgeon in Pompeii is an example of the Tuscan style atrium, which would be included in an Etruscan domestic context (Fig. 16). Domestic homes were not the only structures built on top of the city as seen in the excavations of the Belvedere temple, but the evidence adds to the work of archaeologists in reconstructing the city.

Cavità 254 in its first use was not a part of the water management system in Velzna. The site has no evidence of use as a cistern due to a lack of a hydraulic cocciopesto or clay covering on the four walls of the structure. In the archaeological area in which Cavità 254 is placed an Etruscan cistern was discovered on the opposite side of the western wall lined with cocciopesto (Fig. 17). The function of Cavità 254 in the Etruscan period is related not to the movement and collection of water, but tied directly to the urban landscape of Velzna as a tufa quarry.

The first scientific systematic excavation that revealed evidence of an underground conduit was located where the escalator leads up to the city facing the site of Campo della Fiera. Excavations exhibited that the city planners designed the movement of water based on the various branches that lead off from a cuniculus and end in a large cistern. The cistern was constructed well with stones and was originally discovered separately from the escalator tunnel in the 1920s. The excavators of the escalator did not complete their digging and the debris is still in situ and will likely continue on in the future. After the first round of excavations fragments such as bucchero in the form of kylikes, plates, and lekythoi were found.

Water in the ancient city was a necessity and it was collected in private homes. In the

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64 Vitruvius named this the Tuscan atrium; Vitruvio Polión, *Vitruvius: The Ten Books on Architecture*. Trans. by Morris Hicky Morgan. (New York: Dover, 1960) 6.3.1
65 cuniculus is a term for an underground water channel; The cistern is now beneath a modern restaurant and is preserved.
66 The discovery was made by Pericle Perali, who drew the cistern; See Pericle Perali, *Orvieto Etrusca*, (Roma: Tipografia. del Senato,1928), p.79, n.66, pl. V, n. 37.
area of the Palazzo Monaldeschi a foundation of an Etruscan home was excavated in 1990 (Fig. 18) and the results demonstrated a relationship between the infrastructure of Velzna and its population. In the area, the excavators uncovered a structure paved with small river stones sloping towards the modern level of the street. On the west side of the site, excavators uncovered an area that reaches four squared off tufa blocks with a hole cut in the center, likely for rain water drainage. The evidence shows that this area is the top of a cistern. Etruscan pottery fragments were found allowing the site to be dated when it was filled in, along with large squared off tufa blocks that appear to be the foundation of a domestic building now lost.

The underground structures in the area beneath the church of Sant’Andrea demonstrate a similar situation to the structures beneath Palazzo Monaldeschi (Fig. 19). Excavations began under the church in 1927, yet no publications detailing what was excavated ever appeared. Even excavations conducted by Prof. M. Cagiano de Azevedo from 1967-1969 were unpublished. The Soprintendenza alle Antichita dell’Etruria of Florence noted during excavations that there was a paved Etruscan area, a tufa structure, drains, channels, shafts, and cisterns connected to them. The tufa structures again are like the foundation tufa blocks found beneath Palazzo Monaldeschi and could be the foundation of another private Etruscan building.

The structures found underneath Orvieto primarily relate to the function of controlling water for usage in private homes, agriculture, and to expel it from the city. The series of cuniculi evident from these underground excavations show that a public works system was in effect for the city. The more tunnels and water channels, the more work that needed to be put into maintenance to keep the system running smoothly.

Cavità 254 is a rather large and unique underground structure that does not follow a plan

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for tunnels or cisterns. The site has four regular walls that enclose a cavity that was once used for quarrying large amounts of tufa material for building in the ancient city of Velzna. Private homes can be identified from the location of their cisterns and foundations, but other structures destroyed in the medieval period of Orvieto are lost and the only evidence that they existed comes from evidence discovered in structures like Cavità 254.
Chapter 3: Cavità 254

The most recent excavation exploring one of the underground structures in Orvieto began in May of 2012, in what is called Cavità 254. Cavità 254 is located on the west side of the city on the Via Ripa Medici. At street level the location overlooks the site of the Fanum Voltumnae (Campo della Fiera). The structure is a pyramidal hypogeum truncated at its top for support of the construction of a home in the medieval time period of the city. Before excavations, the top area of the structure was used as a wine cellar by the owner of the property. Excavations were prompted to take place after the discovery of a piece of a black bucchero chalice with molded decorations (Fig. 20). In addition to the black bucchero fragment, at the beginning elevation a series of Etruscan steps carved out of tufa were noted on the western wall of the structure that continued more deeply into the floor (Fig. 21). This chapter discusses the first few seasons of excavations at Cavità 254 and how the material discovered in its fill and the walls of the structure demonstrate that its primary usage in the Etruscan period was as a tufa quarry.

Beginning Excavations

Cavità 254 is not the only underground structure located on the property. Cavità 254 for

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69 Cavità 254 is under the direction of David B. George and Claudio Bizzarri, with field supervisor Paolo Binaco, the project is a collaboration with the Parco Archeologico ed Ambientale dell’Orvietano, the Fondazione per il Museo “C. Faina,” Saint Anselm College, and the University of Arizona with the assistance of the Speleotecnica (s.r.l).
70 See figure 2 again for the location of Cavità 254 on the Via Ripa Medici in Orvieto
71 The foundations of the medieval structure still remain and can be seen in the underground area
72 The property is owned by Antonino Pagliaccia and Maria Perali on the Via Ripa Medici near the Porta Romana on the west side of Orvieto above the underground area is his home and office
the sake of excavation organization is labeled Area A. Adjacent to Area A is a second pyramidal structure labeled Area B (Fig. 22). These two structures communicate with one another by way of an Etruscan tunnel (Fig. 23). In the underground area, a Medieval *columbarium* and a workshop area with a kiln used to manufacture pottery from 1930-1940 are present. The workshop was used by Ilario Ciaurro, the Vascellari family, and the Riccardi family. The famous forgeries of the Metropolitan Etruscan terracotta Warriors were likely made in this workshop. The site has many other notable niches, cisterns (medieval and ancient), and tunnels.

The focus of research and excavations are currently focused on Area A (Fig. 24). This area at the beginning of excavation work measured 4 x 4 meters square. After the removal of the debris and items kept in the storage space, a concrete floor was discovered dating to the 1960s about 1.5 meters below the zero point of the beginning excavation. Beneath the layer of concrete was a layer of material dating to the 1950s deposited on top of another layer with material dating from 1920-1930. After the removal of the 1920-1930 material a layer of crushed tufa stones mixed with lime was found packed down at about 2.4 meters below the zero point. The ceramic material recovered in this layer was datable to the seventeenth century and was on top of a layer of brown soil.

The brown soil layer was identified as locus 17, a stratum filled with material from the Iron Age to the end of the fifth century BCE. The material ranged in type from bucchero (gray and black), to Attic red-figure, impasto ware, coarse common ware, and Etruscan inscriptions.

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73 The *columbarium* is connected to stairs that would have lead up to the medieval house and was used to house pigeons for domestic consumption; See David B. George and Claudio Bizzarri, “A Field Report of the Excavations of Cavità 254 in Orvieto (2012–2014),” *Etruscan Studies* 18 no.1 (2015): 40-41.
74 Ibid. 40-41.
75 Ibid. 43
76 Ibid. 43
and sigla. The impasto ware finds in this locus are decorated with various grooved lines and they establish that a Villanovan phase occurred in Orvieto at some point (Fig. 25). At the end of the excavation of locus 17 no material dates past the fifth century BCE. The deposition of the material did provide some insight as to how it was deposited into the cavity, as much of the material was found concentrated near the center of the structure, indicating that it was dumped from the central area of the tufa stairs on the western wall. Locus 18 was the next stratum, identified as a sandy gray pozzolana-like material. The same material was found filling the tunnel connecting Area A and Area B. Locus 18 showed clearly that the material had been poured into the cavity from above. The gray material may have served as a sort of leveling fill, since only a few bone fragments were discovered in this locus. At this point in the excavation it is clear that the site was purposefully filled at the end of the fifth century BCE based upon the latest datable objects in the upper loci.

The major political system from the eighth to the fifth century BCE was changing over from a monarchy to an oligarchy in Etruria. Kings in the Etruscan city-states were replaced by magistrates, each responsible for different aspects of city responsibilities such as building. During this period of political change new buildings were constructed for public use as noted at the Vigna Parrocchiale site in Cerveteri (Etruscan Caere). A new temple was built over older

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77 sigla inscriptions are identified as markings or shapes while inscriptions are primarily letters both types of inscriptions and pottery types will be addressed later in this chapter.


81 Ibid. 45


83 Ibid. 354

structures to make way for a public area similar to the Greek *agora*.

The same situation was likely happening in Velzna as in Caere where new buildings were being constructed for public use in the fifth century BCE. The dating of the material culture from Cavità 254 is important to understanding its function within the context of a changing political environment in the powerful city of Velzna.

At *locus* 21, the deposition of the material indicated that about halfway down the tufa stairs on the western wall the material was dumped in, since the material slopes away from the stairs down to the east wall. Although these *loci* show variation in their color and matrix, they all preserve the same pattern of deposition, meaning they were dumped from the west wall toward the east wall. The materials found in all of the *loci* below (*Loci* 32-44) were consistent in the typology of their contents with the latest datable material around 430 BCE. One hundred and sixty Etruscan inscriptions and *sigla* have been identified on artifacts from these loci and will be mentioned later in this chapter. The objects excavated include gray bucchero in a large quantity, fragments of black bucchero, some Attic black-figure and a notable amount of Attic red-figure pottery, *ollae*, common ware, braziers, *dolia*, washbasins, bronze *fibulae*, *aes rude*, iron, animal bones and ash, building materials (pantiles and cover tiles), and architectural terracotta pieces from *acroteria* and other elements of temple architecture.

The largest *locus* excavated appeared next in the course of excavations in the summer of 2015. The *stratum* identified as *Locus* 45 was carefully excavated to expose the high concentration of materials consistent with the materials found in the previous *loci* (Fig. 26).

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86 Ibid. 45
87 Ibid. 45
Locus 45 sloped from the west to the east wall falling about two meters in elevation. Upon excavation of Locus 45, an overwhelming amount of material was discovered including complete vessels in bucchero, loom weights, common ware (both complete and incomplete), and an abundance of cover and pantiles that appeared to be stacked on top of each other. Also, many bones from different types of animals were recovered in this locus and a zooarchaeological study has begun on the bones found at the site and the results are mentioned later in this chapter.

The beginning excavations of Cavità 254 gave insight to when the structure was filled and the status of the political climate of ancient Velzna. Kingships turned to rule by way of magistrates as Etruria’s city-states were governed in a Republican system. New buildings were built for public use in Etruria as seen in the case of the temple at the site of the Vigna Parrocchiale in Cerveteri. The material excavated in the various loci not only gives evidence of a date for the filling of the cavity, but also from what context the various materials came from before their final deposition at the end of the fifth century BCE.

**Studying the Evidence of Excavations**

At the end of the excavation season in 2015, the structure of Area A was able to be studied well enough to identify that the original stairs on the western wall turn onto the northern wall by making a right angle. The carved stairs only go about halfway down the northern wall until they collapsed or were destroyed. Along the north wall there are also a series of post holes that appear to be used in connection with the tufa stairs and they descend evenly and continue onto the eastern wall of the structure until the stairs stop about midway down the wall (Fig. 27).

The most fascinating facet of the material culture of Cavità 254 is that many fragmented pieces of vessels often acquire joins from other loci than the locus the objects were found in. The

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joins are either discovered by the excavators in the field or in the lab that sorts and inventories each piece of pottery from the site. From this work, many pieces are restored including a red-figure kylix (Fig. 28). The red-figure kylix is not the only restoration in progress, other Attic vessels and bucchero vessels are in similar condition. The fact that the excavators are finding joins signifies that the material dumped into the cavity happened over a short period of time. The filling of the structure in a single action demonstrates that the material came from a single area and was dumped in heaps, that then became jumbled and broken as they rolled into the cavity hitting the walls and other materials.

The beginning excavations of Cavità 254 shed light on the process in which the large amounts of Etruscan material filled the structure. Cavità 254 in the Etruscan period was filled quickly at the end of the fifth century BCE, according to the latest datable objects found in these beginning excavations. The usage of the structure in the Etruscan period still remained unknown to the excavators who stood by their hypothesis that the structure was neither a quarry nor a cistern. Continuing excavations was the only choice to attempt to understand the primary usage of the structure. Excavations in 2017 began by finishing the removal of the large material-dense locus 45. After the removal of locus 45, changes in the northeastern corner of the cavity’s wall were seen. Two large flat squared off tufa “steps” in the northwestern corner of the structure (Fig. 29). These “steps” are larger and the distance between them is much steeper than the carved tufa stairs along the western wall that turn onto the eastern wall. The new blocks of tufa in the northeastern corner of the structure are not faced in the same way as the walls of the structure and the surface of each “step” is very smooth and regular. The new “steps” represent that the structure was used to quarry large tufa blocks that were left in situ in the northeastern corner of

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89 Excavations from 2012-2016; Except in the 2016 season, excavations halted for the safety of the excavators and to allow the lab to catch up on the artifact inventory, excavations resumed in 2017.
the structure. Based upon the material discovered within the fill it is logical to assume that the primary usage of the structure was as a tufa quarry, but amidst the changing political structure of the fifth century BCE the empty cavity was needed to discard mass amounts of material from a domestic context.

Artifacts: Etruscan Inscriptions from Cavità 254

One hundred and sixty Etruscan inscriptions and *sigla* are documented so far from Cavità 254. The inscriptions from Cavità 254 contribute to decoding the Etruscan language and the growing corpus of inscriptions. The difficult problem of understanding the Etruscan language is dissimilar to the way Linear B was translated by Michael Ventris. Breaking the code of Linear B came down to solving the script and then being able to translate the known language. The problem of the Etruscan language is reversed, meaning that the language is written in a known script (the alphabet), but the language is unknown. Another problem surrounding the language of the Etruscans arises from the lack of textual examples such as plays, histories, poetry, and other written works. 13,000 Etruscan inscriptions survive, yet they are very short. These inscriptions are names, dedications, epitaphs, numbers, and titles. Bilingual texts also exist in the archaeological record such as the Pyrgi tablets written in both Phoenician and Etruscan found in 1964 along with Etruscan-Latin inscriptions (See Fig. Pyrgi tablets). As more inscriptions are discovered from sites like Cavità 254, the closer we can get to decoding the language of the Etruscans.

The inscriptions found on the vessels from Cavità 254 appear on the rim, the inside, and on the base of objects. The inscriptions are written from right to left as the Etruscans wrote in

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90 The excavators are currently working on an online photographic database of the materials from Cavità 254 including pieces with inscriptions.
91 Larissa Bonfante, *Etruscan*, Reading the Past, V. 8. (University of California Press, 1990), 12
92 Ibid. 12
this way. Many of the inscriptions are either a single letter, a series of letters, lines, or sigla. The most frequent combination of letters found on vessels is the Etruscan “L” in combination with “A” (Fig. 30).\footnote{Claudio Bizzarri, Paolo Binaco, and David George, “Lo Scavo Nella cavità N. 254 in Via Ripa Medici, Orvieto.” (Roma: Quasar, 2015), 526} Another combination of letters found together on inscriptions are “CNA”, found written on two vessels right to left and on five vessels written left to right.\footnote{Ibid. 526} Inscriptions written in different directions are common in other archaic inscriptions.\footnote{Larissa Bonfante, Etruscan, Reading the Past, V. 8. (University of California Press. 1990), 17} On the rim of just four vessels is the inscription “CAVI” which could be a shorter form of cava(tha), which appears on the famous Piacenza liver.\footnote{Claudio Bizzarri, Paolo Binaco, and David George, “Lo Scavo Nella cavità N. 254 in Via Ripa Medici, Orvieto.” (Roma: Quasar, 2015), 526} The inscriptions identified so far have not given any clear indication that the structure was dedicated to any particular deity. Many of the inscriptions are still in the process of being pieced back together and continuing the study on the inscriptions may lead to a source of the material dumped into the cavity.

**Artifacts: Attic Pottery from Cavità 254**

The excavators recovered good quality Greek pottery in large amounts from Cavità 254, which allows the site to be dated based on typology, the identification of the painters of the vessels, and the designs themselves. An example of a black-figure vessel from the site is a Tyrrhenian amphora that dates to 550 BCE (Fig. 31).\footnote{David George, Claudio Bizzarri, Paolo Binaco, Angela Trentacoste, Jade Whitlam, and Julia Best “Recent Research in Cavità 254 (Orvieto, Italy).” *Etruscan Studies* 20 no.1 (2017), 63.} One of the many red-figure shards is identified as belonging to the group of the Penthesilea Painter in the form of a klyix (Fig. 32). The shard displays on the internal design shows a young man and a woman looking at each other face to face. *Comparanda* to the shard is found in the Museo Claudio Faina in Orvieto (Fig. 33).

Another shard of red-figure found at the site depicts a Herm of Dionysos. The god wears a crown
with a wreath decorating his phallus with *pinakes* hanging from the “arms” of the figure (Fig. 34). ⁹⁸ A fragment of an Attic black gloss *kantharos* is stamped with the image of the hero Perseus (Fig. 35). ⁹⁹ The *kantharos* dates from 440-430 BCE. The hero wears a chiton, while he moves to the left and holds a bag close to his chest with a blade in his right hand. ¹⁰⁰ The Attic pottery gives a clear date for the fill of the structure of Cavità 254. The identified Attic red-figure attributed to the Penthesilea painter gives a clear-cut date that the fill is from the fifth century BCE along with the unique piece of black gloss depicting the hero Perseus.

*Artifacts: The Warrior of the Cave*

In excavations, the most recent and intriguing architectural terracotta discovered is of a male figure dressed as a warrior kneeling and facing left (Fig. 36). The terracotta warrior was found in two separate pieces, the bottom half with the legs first and then later the head during the 2014 excavation season. The figure measures 24 cm high and 22 cm in width. ¹⁰¹ The colors of paint on the object are well preserved due to the constant temperature of the underground structure without exposure to light. The skin is painted red while the beard, hair, and background area are blue, and the breastplate is painted a black-brown color. Enough of the preserved hairstyle on top of the warrior’s head indicates that it could be related to the warrior acroterion found at Cannicella. (Fig. 37) ¹⁰² The figure is also similar to the pediment of pyrgi due to the expression and half-open mouth that make the figure comparable to the figure of Capaneus. ¹⁰³

The presence of the warrior terracotta in the fill of the cavity indicates along with the

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⁹⁸ Ibid. 63
⁹⁹ Ibid. 63
¹⁰¹ David George, Claudio Bizzarri, Paolo Binaco, Angela Trentacoste, Jade Whitlam, and Julia Best “Recent Research in Cavità 254 (Orvieto, Italy).” *Etruscan Studies* 20 no.1 (2017), 65.
¹⁰² David George, Claudio Bizzarri, Paolo Binaco, Angela Trentacoste, Jade Whitlam, and Julia Best “Recent Research in Cavità 254 (Orvieto, Italy).” *Etruscan Studies* 20 no.1 (2017), 65.
¹⁰³ Ibid. 65.
mass amounts of building materials that a structure such as a large temple or sanctuary was dismantled. The remains of the destruction were then dumped into the empty cavity left behind from quarrying activities at the end of the fifth century BCE. Other architectural terracottas were recovered from the site with preserved painted decorations and as excavations progress further, more terracottas are expected to be recovered (Fig. 38). In the fifth century BCE, the Etruscan city-states rescinded the power of Etruscan kings in favor of magistrates and a political system geared toward pleasing the populace of Etruria. In this period, many public works projects were enacted and many buildings were demolished and then new ones were built in their place.

*Odd, Old, and New Interpretations of Cavità 254*

The interpretation of Cavità 254 after its discovery in 2012 has received much speculation on what the original purpose of the structure was. Some publications have suggested the site to be the lost tomb of Lars Porsenna. The farfetched idea that the structure could be the tomb of Porsenna originates from Pliny the Elder’s description of the Etruscan king’s tomb in his *Natural History*, which Pliny states was originally recounted by Varro.

For it is proper to use the term “Italian” for that [labyrinth] which Porsenna, the king of Etruria, built for himself as a sepulcher, in order to show at the same time how even the vanity of foreign kings is exceeded by those of Italy. But since the fabulous nature of the description exceeds all bounds, I shall make use of the words of Varro himself in presenting it: “He is entombed just outside Clusium in a place where he has left a square monument built of squared stones; each side is three hundred feet long, and the height is fifty feet. Within the square base there is an extremely complex labyrinth, from which if a person were to enter it without a ball of thread, he would not be able to find the exit again. On this base there stand five pyramids, four at the corners and one in the middle, which measure seventy-five feet along the base and one hundred and fifty feet in height. They slope in such a way that a single bronze disc and a hat-shaped cupola are placed on top of all of them from which hang bells connected by chains…Above this disc are four more pyramids, each of which rises to a height of one hundred feet, and above

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104 Ibid. 65; The other architectural terracottas are painted with anthemia and meander decorations.

105 Lars Porsenna was an Etruscan King who fought against Rome.

these, on a single disc, are five more pyramids.” As to the height of these last, Varro was too embarrassed to give it. But the Etruscan fables hold that it was equal to the total height of the work up to the level of these pyramids-insane madness…

Pliny in his writings even mentions that Porsenna was the King of Volsinii.\textsuperscript{107} Although Cività 254 is a pyramidal structure, the site is nothing compared to the detailed description of Varro reported by Pliny. The underground area of Cività 254 has at most just three pyramidal hypogeum structures, two of which communicate with each other via an Etruscan tunnel. The excavators of the site are also aware of at least four other similar structures in Orvieto and are in no way connected Cività 254 on the Via Ripa Medici.\textsuperscript{108} The various artifacts discovered inside Cività 254 also do not suggest that any king especially King Porsenna was buried inside the structure. The material filling the cavity has material from domestic contexts such as loom weights, pieces of kitchen wares, and common ware ceramics. The glaring mistake for those who choose to identify Cività 254 as the tomb of Lars Porsenna is that one might expect valuable grave goods to be present such as high quality black bucchero, Attic ware, and bronze materials. These items are not present in Cività 254 and the site does not resemble a funerary context.

\textit{A Comparison of Cività 254 in Orvieto with the Vigna Parrocchiale Quarry in Cerveteri}

A more real and new interpretation of Cività 254 is that the structure was first used as a tufa quarry and then was filled during the fifth century BCE as a result of new building programs and political changes geared towards the people of various city-states. The following is a comparison between the site of an Etruscan quarry at the Vigna Parrocchiale in Cerveteri to the site of Cività 254 in Orvieto. The material evidence excavated at both sites are similar in date

\textsuperscript{107} Pliny, Natural History 2.54.140
and the structures themselves have the same regularity of facing on the walls and evidence of the removal of tufa blocks for building.

Upon first examination of the structure of Cavità 254, the directors of the site published that the cavity was neither a quarry nor a cistern. The justification that the structure is not a quarry was attributed to the walls being very well faced. The structure is not associated with a cistern since the walls are not covered in hydraulic cocciopesto or clay. Excavations in 2017 brought to light more of an explanation of the primary usage of Cavità 254 indicating that the structure was used as a quarry in the Etruscan period. The quarry was then filled after it was sourced for building materials at the end of the fifth century BCE, a time of political change and rebuilding. The deep cavity suggests that the materials sourced from it were to build a large structure, likely for public use. Four other structures like Cavità 254 exist in Orvieto and are known to the excavators, but they are not currently under archaeological investigation. The quarry at the site of the Vigna Parrocchiale in Cerveteri excavated and published by Mauro Cristofani is comparable to that of Cavità 254 with well faced walls and filled with similar material dating to the end of the fifth century BCE.

The Vigna Parrocchiale quarry at Cerveteri was found after the discovery of an elliptical building and a temple in 1983 (Fig. 39). Excavators were hoping to discover the remains of a city, yet they discovered between two large buildings a rock-cut trench filled with 600 cubic meters of dumped material. The site was identified as a quarry once the dumped material was removed and excavators saw that the structure was immense with regular walls (Fig. 40) dug into

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109 Ibid. 50
112 Ibid. 197
the tufa bedrock of the area.\textsuperscript{113} The quarry is connected with the structures excavated on top and was covered by slabs prior to excavation suggesting a structure was built above it.\textsuperscript{114} In the Etruscan period of Cerveteri, the structure was open to the air to remove blocks of tufa for building new structures.\textsuperscript{115} As evidenced from inspection, the top of Cavità 254 was truncated in the medieval period by some kind of domestic structure so it is highly likely that the structure was also open to the air for the purpose of removing tufa material.\textsuperscript{116}

The examination of the Vigna Parrocchiale quarry yielded evidence that the material was dumped in small amounts all at the same time.\textsuperscript{117} The artifacts within date from the Iron Age to the early fifth century BCE and provide a large view of the material from the Archaic period of Cerveteri.\textsuperscript{118} The material contained dumped in the structure included bones, Iron Age impasto ware, kitchenware, loom weights, bucchero, braziers, and Attic black and red-figure.\textsuperscript{119} Cavità 254, as previously mentioned, maintains in its archaeological record material dating also from the Iron Age to the fifth century BCE. The stratigraphy of the loci identified in Cavità 254 are also identified as various dumps into the structure rather than different time periods of repeated dumping, creating a single unified stratigraphy. The material in Cavità 254 is all from the same range of time periods and is similar to the domestic materials found in the Vigna Parrocchiale quarry. We can tell from the various fragment joins and the sloped deposition of the material

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid. 6-7
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid. 197
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid. 197; See also Giuliana Nardi, \textit{Cerveteri: Topografia della Vigna Parrocchiale I. Ricerche e dati archeologici, con Appendice di S. Piro} in Archeologia e Calcolatori n. XIV (2003): 159-160.
demonstrated in *locus* 45 with its mass concentrations of material that the dumping of the material was very fast again, the same as evidenced at the Vigna Parrocchiale quarry. Some questions then remain as to where the material originated prior to its final deposition in Cavità 254 and the quarry at Vigna Parrocchiale, how the Etruscans managed to move large stones from great depths, and what the quarried tufa material was used for.

*Restructuring in Archaic Etruria*

To identify where the fill material of both Cavità 254 and the Vigna Parrocchiale quarry came from a study of the time period must be done. Both sites demonstrate a wide variety of domestic objects from the fifth century BCE. The fifth century was the beginning of a social change from monarchy to magistrates as previously mentioned. The materials at both sites were mixed together from what appears to be different domestic contexts. The large quantity of objects and fragments excavated suggest that the materials were discarded from nearby areas. In the fifth century BCE, much restructuring and rebuilding was happening across city-states in Etruria for new buildings for public use. For example, near Cerveteri the sanctuary of Pyrgi was re-organized to make way for agriculture and a growing population in the Archaic period. We can attribute the cause of the deposition into both cavities from the destruction of older buildings to make way for new public buildings. The Vigna Parrocchiale quarry was filled at the same time the elliptical structure found near the quarry was built. The archaeological situation suggests that

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120 The exact location of origin may never be known, but we can assume the type of context based on the typology of the domestic material culture at each site.
a previous domestic structure where the new structure was built was destroyed and the material was then buried into the open quarry.  

**How an Etruscan Tufa Quarry Functioned**

* Sed haec omnia quae mollia sunt hanc habent utilitatem quod ex is saxa cum sunt exempta in opere faciliter tractantur. et si sunt in locis tectis, sustinent laborem, si autem in apertis et patentibus, gelicidiis et pruina contacta friantur et dissolvuntur. Item secundum oram maritimam ab salsugine exesa difluunt neque perferunt aestus.  

*Ten Books on Architecture*, 2.7.2

But all these quarries which are of soft stone have this advantage: when stones are taken from these quarries they are easily handled in working, and if they are in covered places, they sustain their burden, but if they are in open and exposed places, they combine with ice and hoar frost, are turned to powder and are dissolved: along the sea-coast, also, being weathered by the brine, they crumble and do not endure the heat.  

Vitruvius mentions the advantages of the quarrying tufa stones in his writings on architectural elements. Tufa is a soft and shapeable material that is also very light yet strong enough to be used for the foundations of buildings. Established so far is that the quarries of the Vigna Parrocchiale and Cavità 254 were both used to source tufa blocks and were both likely open to the air in antiquity. Both quarry sites are very deep so the tufa needed to be removed efficiently and safely for both sites.

The sourcing of tufa from at the Vigna Parrocchiale site in Cerveteri can be seen on the walls of the structure (Fig. 41). The walls show narrow imprints and a changing direction of the tool marks that show where the rectangular blocks were freed from the structure after they

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were shaped. Similar markings of tool marks are found on the walls of Cavità 254 that could easily at both sites be mistaken as purposefully faced walls without careful observation. Left behind at the Vigna Parrocchiale site were blocks of tufa in situ in the southwest area of the structure (Fig. 42). The same occurrence is happening in the northeastern corner of Cavità 254 where blocks of tufa were left attached to the wall of the cavity as previously mentioned. The various niches discovered on the walls at the site of Vigna Parrocchiale quarry near its opening indicate that a wooden structure was used to haul out large blocks of tufa. The use of some kind of a wooden structure was also found in Cavità 254 on the walls just below the stair collapse (See Fig. 27). These holes were used to maneuver the blocks up and out of the cavity by use of such a wooden structure and ropes to pull the blocks out (Fig. 43). The stairs of the structure of Cavità 254 would have allowed the Etruscan to work more deeply into the cavity as the tufa was removed. The depth of the Vigna Parrocchiale quarry was 11 meters at the end of the removal of the fill within the cavity. Cavità 254’s current depth of excavation is at 18 meters and the structure is still filled with material. Although each structure is different in depth the material, time period, and construction of the walls of both Cavità 254 and the quarry at the Vigna Parrocchiale coincide with one another

The two sites in their fill and construction indicate a clear connection between the changing political environment happening in Etruria in the Archaic period. Both sites played a role in the discarding of older materials for buildings and domestic use to make way for new structures geared towards the public sphere. The site of the Vigna Parrocchiale differs from that of Cavità 254, because Cerveteri was neither sacked nor built on top of so the various phases of

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127 Ibid. 15
128 Ibid. 16
building and rebuilding can be seen in the features of the site. Cavità 254 is a unique case in itself, since it preserves evidence of a rebuilding phase in Velzna during the fifth century BCE, but the structures that were rebuilt in connection with the quarry no longer exist due to destruction in 264 BCE and the reoccupation of Orvieto in the Medieval period.
Chapter 4: Conclusion

As Tom Rasmussen comments in his review of the two volumes of the publications of Cerveteri’s Vigna Parrocchiale excavations: “The quality of all these studies, and of others included that are not mentioned here, will mean that the Caere volumes will long be consulted for reference by those working on Archaic Etruria” so will the results of Cavità 254 at the end of its excavation. Both Cavità 254 and the Vigna Parrocchiale site at Cerveteri offer great quantities of material evidence from the Archaic period at Orvieto and Cerveteri. Both sites provide a glimpse of the past of their respective Etruscan city-states the Vigna Parrocchiale ancient Caere and Cavità 254 ancient Velzna.

The preservation of Cavità 254 after the destruction of the city of Velzna in 264 BCE is an invaluable resource for reconstructing the domestic culture and urban layout of the ancient Etruscan city. The actual domestic structures do not survive in the archaeological record, but the domestic material recovered in the fill of Cavità 254 demonstrates that the Etruscan population of Velzna participated in trade and that they were wealthy enough to rebuild what they destroyed to fill the empty cavity.

The site of Cavità 254 fits nicely into the new interpretation that the structure was a quarry in the Etruscan period of Orvieto. Previously published ideas that the structure is not a quarry can be disproved by looking at the site of the Vigna Parrocchiale quarry in Cerveteri. The materials from both sites are comparable including bucchero, architectural terracottas, and Attic

wares. The time period of the filling and unified stratigraphy at each site show that both cavities were filled in a rather short span of time.

The quarry in Cerveteri and Cavità 254 prove the rebuilding of Etruscan city-states and the removal of large private structures to make way for new public buildings. A culture like the Etruscans that has very few primary source materials needs this archaeological evidence to help illustrate what the Archaic period was like in both Caere and Velzna. Archaeologists prove through the material culture that in the fifth century BCE this rebuilding was occurring. Excavating and researching a site like Cavità 254 is a unique experience that provides more contributions to Etruscology as to what a whole century was like for the citizens of Velzna do to the mass quantities of materials dating to the Archaic period. Ultimately, the investigation of the structure of Cavità 254 has given priceless evidence of the way of life in ancient Orvieto and demonstrates a common theme of rebuilding in the fifth century BCE.
Appendix of Images

**Figure 1:** Map of Orvieto with arrow pointing towards the Via Ripa Medici

**Figure 2:** Map of Orvieto underground area with red indicating an underground structure
FIGURE 3: VIEW OF ORVIEO FROM ITS SOUTHERN SIDE
Photo is my own

FIGURE 4: VIEW OF THE BELVEDERE TEMPLE IN ORVIEO
Photo is my own
**FIGURE 5: PLAN OF THE BELVEDERE TEMPLE**


**FIGURE 6: ARCHITECTURAL TERRACOTTA OF A MAN STROKING HIS BEARD FROM THE BELVEDERE TEMPLE**

Figure 7: View of Crocifisso del Tufo
Photo is my own

Figure 8: Tomb Inscription from Crocifisso del Tufo
Photo is my own
Figure 9: Niobid Krater from Crocifisso del Tufo now housed in the Louvre Museum
From: https://www.louvre.fr

Figure 10: Drawing of the Warrior Cippus from Crocifisso del Tufo
From: "Necropoli Etrusca Di Crocifisso Del Tufo Orvieto".
**Figure 11: Gold Earrings Found in New Excavations at Crocifisso del Tufo**

From: "Necropoli Etrusca Di Crocifisso Del Tufo Orvieto".


**Figure 12:**

**Figure 13: The Cannicella Venus**

From: "Tuneful Experiences".

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FIGURE 16: PLAN OF THE HOUSE OF THE SURGEON IN POMPEII

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Photo is my own

FIGURE 18: ARCHAEOLOGICAL AREA BENEATH PALAZZO MONALDESI IN ORVIEO
FIGURE 19: ARCHAEOLOGICAL AREA BENEATH THE CHURCH OF SANT’ANDREA

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Photo is my own

Figure 28: Red figure Kylix in process of restoration from Cavità 254
Photo is my own
FIGURE 29: Emergence of TuFA “steps” in the northeastern corner of Cavità 254
Photo is my own

FIGURE 30: Inscription from Cavità 254 on common ware rim
FIGURE 31: FRAGMENT OF TYRRHENIAN AMPHORA FROM CAVITÀ 254

FIGURE 32: ATTIC RED-Figure ATTRIBUTED TO THE PENTHESELEA PAINTER FROM CAVITÀ 254
FIGURE 33: COMPARANDA TO THE PENTHESIlea PAINTER SHARD FROM CAVITÀ 254 IN THE MUSEO CLAUDIO FAINA IN ORVIETO

Photo is my own

FIGURE 34: ATTIC RED-Figure SHARD WITH HERM OF DIONYSUS FROM CAVITÀ 254 WITH GREEK INSCRIPTION KALOS KALOS

Figure 35: Attic Black Gloss Depicting the Hero Perseus from Cavità 254


Figure 36: Warrior Terracotta from Cavità 254

FIGURE 37: WARRIOR ACROTERION FROM CANNICELLA
Photo is my own

FIGURE 38: PAINTED ARCHITECTURAL TERRACOTTA FROM CAVITÀ 254
FIGURE 39: PLAN OF THE SITE OF
VIGNA PARROCCHIALE IN
CERVETERI
From: Cristofani, Mauro,
and Martin Boss. 1992. Lo
Scarico Arcaico Della
1. Caere, 3. Roma:
Consiglio Nazionale delle
Ricerche.
Figure 40: Area View of the Vigna Parrocchiale with the open-air quarry at the top


Figure 41: Marks of quarrying on the Vigna Parrocchiale structure

Figure 42: In Situ Tufa from the Vigna Parrocchiale Quarry


Figure 43: Reconstruction of the Vigna Parrocchiale Quarry

References


