

Fireplace and Holy Altar in Curiceta at Apuan Alps, Italy

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ABSTRACT: The Apuan Alps, High Versilia and Garfagnana are part of the Apuan Alps Park, and are rich in petroglyphs and archaeological finds which are, in part, unknown and not precisely datable. These areas have been inhabited since Neolithic times but, the meaning and the reason for signs engraved on stone, is unclear. The Apuan Alps were chosen as a dwelling by people who left many ancestral and Christianity signs including sacred altars, thrones and artefacts carved in stone. This area acts like a stone atlas revealing our past and our roots. The Curiceta site is located inside a thick forest of chestnut trees, in an area where dried stone terraces are perfectly preserved. The first building approached along the path, is the so-called “*fireplace*”, a large flat stone that protrudes from the ground and surrounded by a series of aligned stones where, most probably, a fire was lit. Behind the big stone, is a cavity where the smoke could emerge. The lower part of the flat stone features a “handle” carved in the rock, its function is still unknown. Along a short stretch of the uphill path protected by a high dry stone wall, lies the sacred stone altar. This enigmatic structure has revealed many surprises during the tests performed with electronic instruments. This altar is carved from a single block of stone and consists of a backrest and a horizontal supporting surface. From the left side, there are inclined planes which climb down, below these one can find a vertical groove. The altar features the same carved handle found on the “fireplace”. Rock altars are very common around the world, for example throughout Southern Italy and the Middle East but, in High Versilia this is the only one example. Archaeoacoustic analysis of the altar found a dominant and powerful frequency present of between -47 and -50db at 25 – 28Hz. A second peak of infrasound at 15-16Hz was also found. This inaudible acoustic characteristic is commonly found at sacred sites, such as the Neolithic temples of Malta (Tarxien – Xaghra Stone Circle). These same vibrations are present near the altar but at a much lower volume. In this case the loudest volume was found directly under the altar decreasing as one walks away from it. In both cases, the most likely source of this frequency is from underground water. The emotional state of eight volunteers was analysed using a TRV camera. 7/8 felt emotionally uncomfortable or uneasy. Based on these results, a hypothesis was formulated on the function of the Curiceta’s site. The two stone structures are connected. On the altar, sacrifices were probably, made, with blood flowing along the left side to the groove on the floor. The fireplace, could have been used to burn the bodies or maybe just some organs.

KEYWORDS: archaeoacoustics, Apuan Alps, dolmen, altar, low frequency sound, infrasound

¹ Note. Super Brain Research Group (SBRG) is an international and interdisciplinary team of researchers, researching the archaeoacoustic properties of ancient sites and temples throughout Europe and Asia (www.sbrg-searchgroup.eu).

Introduction

When the first hominids appeared on Earth, the wild nature in their surrounding environment imposed on them the need to adopt strict rules to guarantee their survival. The advancement of glaciers shaking the northern hemisphere into a frostbite vortex, made those surviving grateful for the shelter and warmth offered by the caves. These ensured an effective thermal insulation by providing shelter from the fury of fierce elements and wild beasts. Like other animals that shared the space, the senses of hearing, sight and smell were acutely developed. Sounds, ultrasounds, vibrations and energy fields were perceived instinctively as part of the natural environment. Inside these caves, people began to erect the first monuments to provide both functionality and sacredness. The caves were equipped with pits dug beneath the stalactites to collect water drops, but they also assumed a ritual charge, as evidenced by many representations and graffiti found that refer to fecundity rites. When man began to build sacred artefacts outside of the rocky environment, the location of such structures was likely chosen according to the vibrations felt and experienced at any specific location. There was a combination of beauty, sacredness and functionality; these three aspects were the foundation which characterized the heritage of mankind, the unity between *man*, the *ecosystem* and the *cosmos*.

At the bottom of the caves of Matera is a cistern devoid of any connecting pipes, yet filled with precious liquid, due to the entire cave working like a water condensation system. A ray of sunshine penetrates the cave and beats against the rocky bottom, thus celebrating the encounter of the solar male principle with the female principle of the earth, which in turn creates water the source of life (Fig. 1).

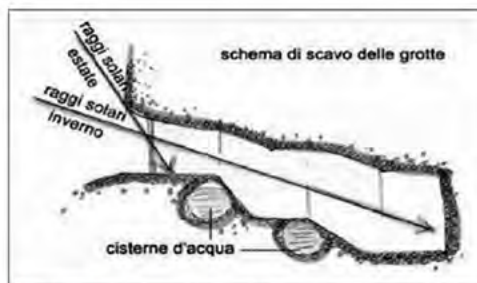


Fig. 1 – Graphic representation of a cave section in Matera (Basilicata) showing the inclination of solar rays in summer (raggi solari estate) & winter (raggi solari inverno).

To consider archaeoacoustics a modern discipline is incorrect, if we consider that man in the past naturally perceived sounds and vibrations of a particular location channeling the energy to favour his body.

In order to hear the voice of sacred structures in the modern age, we need sophisticated instruments to capture their sounds, the interpretation of which can present a challenge.

A spectacular case of such a Bronze Age complex, can be found on the Murgia Materana (Matera-Basilicata, Italy). The site consists of two concentric stone rings crossed by an East-West corridor, which leads to a central hypogeum. The hypogeum is divided into two environments supported by a pillar carved from the rock (Fig. 2, above left). This structure is quite similar to the so-called “solar monuments” of the Sahara, whose function remains enigmatic and whose name is attributed to the astral motifs attributed to the stone circles ^[24] (Fig. 2, above right).

The analogies with other important monuments attest to the fact that its design was connected to water cults. Having a similar aspect to Sardinia with its great sacral complexes from the Metal Age passing through the access corridor to descend a deep stairway into the central hypogeum that features a sacred well that works not because it

meets groundwater but because it intercepts the rainwater (Fig. 2, below right).

In Petra, the so-named “*high place*” located on the highest mountain, was a centre of energy and power over life and death, where ablutions and rites with holy waters were celebrated. On its summit lies an altar the shape of which consists of two concentric rings penetrated by a duct which is designed

to collect rain water. When this water filled the cisterns it brought the place to life and the ceremonies commenced, filled the cisterns and brought life ^[24], (Fig. 2, below left). Beauty, sacredness and functionality were united in celebrations of banquets and funeral ceremonies that had an important social value and were permeated by profound symbolic content.

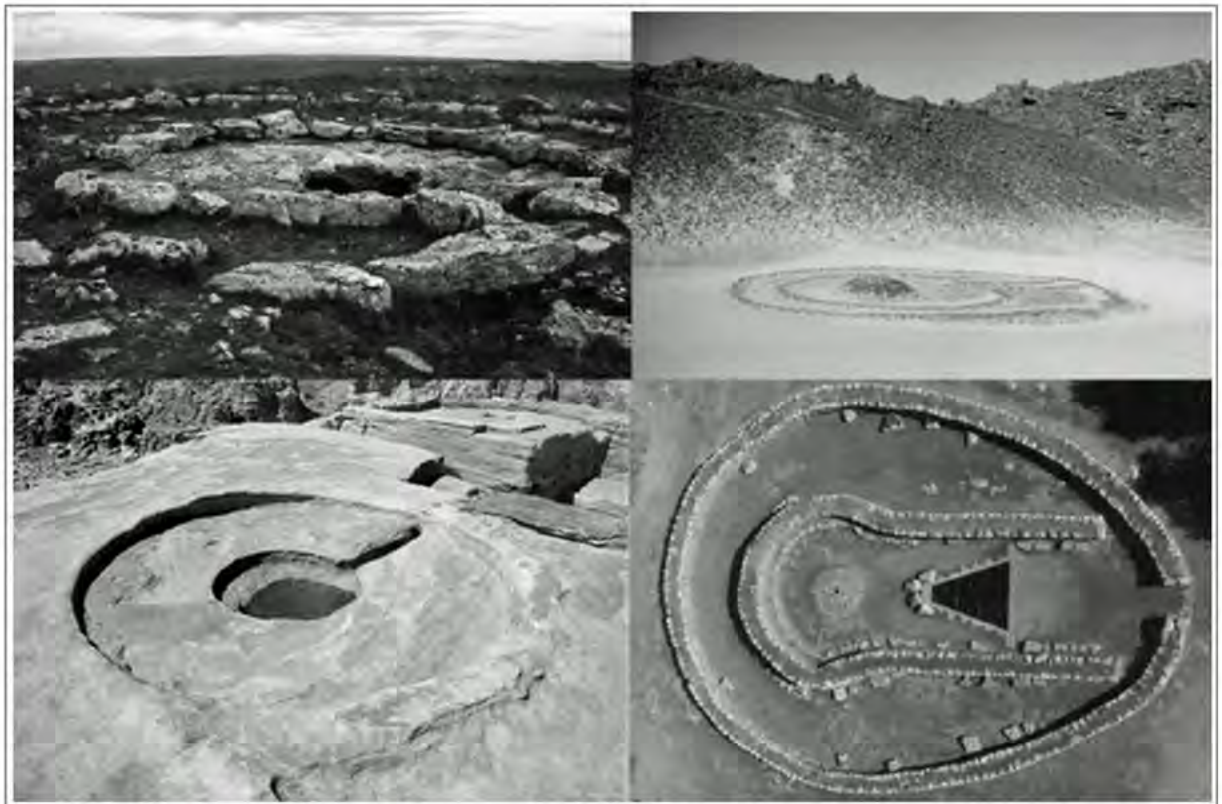


Fig. 2 – Bronze Age Monument in Matera, Basilicata, Italy (above left); Solar Monument in Sahara desert (above right); Holy Pool in Petra, Jordan (below left); S. Cristina sacred well, Sardinia, Italy (below right)



Fig. 3 – Cave of Loltun, Yucatan (above); Cave of Tanaccio, Tuscany, Italy (below).