

### **Typology 3: Places of worship**

*Structures built for religious purposes and regarded as holy, or natural cavities used for the same purposes.*

Be it that certain caves were effectively chosen as places of worship or be it that they became places of worship only subsequently to being used, we now know that many places, considered sacred by many religions, were created within natural cavities.

Whether due to a change in the concept or the basic idea of a cave or through making the most of certain situations rather than being simply subject to their effects or perhaps due to the very nature religion, various man-made structures have been uncovered along rocky flanks and crags. Some of these have even been found in natural rock recesses or underground. In this latter case, there are structures of essentially underground development and others, whose environments and even entire cultural complexes, were cut directly into the rock matrix.

#### ***Crypt***

*The underground sections of a public building, normally a sacred or cemeterial building; in religious architecture, this is the only environment or complex of environments that develops in the area beneath a church.*

In architecture, a crypt was originally a vaulted passageway, which was not necessarily underground. In Christian basilicas, the term was later applied to the area under the presbytery, where martyrs' tombs can often be found. The first examples being restricted to the pre-Roman period, with the advent of Roman architecture, the crypt takes on a specific character and becomes a room in itself. Despite their increase in size, crypts are primarily used for burial and ossuary purposes in subsequent periods. There are many isolated crypts on private property, although these are more frequently found in cemeteries.

#### ***Favissa***

*Normally well-shaped environment reserved for votive objects; located on holy ground but outwith the sanctuary.*

Possibly of Etruscan origin, the Latin term *favissa* generally referred to well-shaped cavities, used in the storage of votive objects as and when these became excessive in number. Disused objects and images of Gods who were no longer worshipped were also kept here.

#### ***Holy well***

*Vertical perforation in the ground, considered sacred in nature.*

The term holy well refers to a series of man-made structures, with vertical axis, connected to particular places of worship. They sometimes reached a water source, which was considered to be sacred or to have health-giving properties whereas on other occasions they represented the conjunction with Mother Earth or with "underground dimensions".

*Well of destiny:* at the Terrace of the Exedrae ("*Terrazza degli Emicicli*"), part of the lower structure of the ancient Paenestre Temple of the Primagenial Fortune in Rome, there is a *tholos* with a holy well, from which it seems that lots were drawn. Cicero tells of the oak lots (*sortes*), bearing ancient inscriptions in *De Divinatione*.

*Well temple:* this type of well consists of large steps and dates to the Nuragic period. It was utilised in the celebration of particular rites linked to the worship of water. One of the best examples is the Temple well of Santa Cristina at Paulilatino (Oristano), the long stairway of which, leads to the water source.

### ***Mithraeum***

*Normally an underground environment where religious ceremonies were held in honour of the Iranian god, Mithra.*

In Latin these were known as *spelaeum* (cave) as Mithra was born in a cave and the original ceremony had to be held in a natural cavity. In the urban environment, or in the absence of natural cavities, a subterranean or semi-subterranean environment with no windows or with small skylights replaces the cave.

### ***Rock hermitage***

*Isolated environment generally cut directly into a rocky flank where one or more people retreat to conduct a religious lifestyle.*

Environment created within a natural cavity or by adapting an existing underground structure. In many religions, a cave is considered the place of preference by men retreating to become hermits. Once an underground structure has been visited by a 'sacred' or 'enlightened' person, it normally becomes a place of worship. Special structures can be created within it or it may become part of a larger, architectonic complex, which may also extend outwith the cavity.

### ***Rocky place of worship***

*Place of worship, partially cut into the rock or situated within a karst cavity.*

Cut into the rockface or exploiting horizontal or sub-horizontal natural and artificial cavities, over time many places of worship were created as a testament to the many religious concepts.

*Rock-cut church:* building dedicated to Christian worship, cut directly into the rockface, created from adapting a natural cave or build within the cave itself. It should not be forgotten that many churches, whether or not dedicated to a particular saint, were originally pre-Christian sites, which were subsequently 'demonized' by Christianity. Several cavities were dedicated to St. Michael the Archangel whose teachings were first followed by eastern cultures at the beginning of Christianity and only later diffused to the west by the Byzantines. He was proclaimed by the Longobards as patron saint of their militia.

### ***Underground hermitage***

*Isolated environment, generally cut directly into a rocky flank where one or more people retreat to conduct a religious life.*

Similar to the rock hermitage, although not as common, the underground hermitage serves the same functions and can be either of the following: a natural cavity, an underground excavation or the adaptation of a pre-existing structure.

### ***Underground place of worship***

*Underground religious structure.*

Various religions met in primarily underground environments; others simply found the underground environment more suitable and safer from a contingent point of view. It is not always possible to know what the celebrations of these particular religions entailed.

*Underground church:* dedicated to Christian worship, the church may have been built or created underground.