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CULTURAL RUPESTRIAN HERITAGE
in the
CIRCUM-MEDITERRANEAN AREA
Common Identity - New Perspective



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RUPESTRIAN RELIGIOUS PRACTICE IN SPAIN DURING THE LATE MIDDLE AGES

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Since the beginnings of Christianity, there has been a constant tendency to occupy caves and crevices in order to convert natural spaces into religious spaces. The cave, occupied and consecrated since the dawn of humanity for ritual purposes such as collective burial grounds or merely as a living space to shelter from the elements, is probably man's earliest "architectural" use of space as a temple. Examples of such use exist in nearly every culture and throughout the ages and this sacred character of caves survives to the present day.

Its existence throughout the Mediterranean Arc is particularly prevalent in the case of Spain, and especially relevant to the late Middle Ages, a period in which the peninsular saw a confrontation between two antagonistic religious cultures which was ideological and also political and social. In Medieval Spain, divided as it was by a long border going from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, the frontier lands suffered constant incursions and raids and were to a great extent scarcely populated. In the crevices and caves another battle was being fought out, a religious battle in which pious anchorites and hermits would Christianize newly conquered lands, empty and sparsely populated areas in which small religious communities or isolated hermits lived sheltered by the rocks and crevices which were "reconstructed" in the image and likeness of the pre-Romanic temples in the North of the peninsular.

These spaces are at the limit of architecture. In type they are related to Asturian pre-Romanic architecture and remain as testimony to a way of life and of prayer which reflects, perhaps with greater precision than constructed architecture, the ideology of a society and of an era.



LA RELIGIOSIDAD RUPESTRE EN ESPAÑA EN LA BAJA EDAD MEDIA

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Desde los inicios de la Cristiandad, la tendencia a ocupar grutas y cuevas para transformar los espacios naturales en espacios religiosos es una constante. La cueva, ocupada y sacralizada desde los inicios de la Humanidad, bien sea con fines rituales, como enterramientos colectivos, o como mero espacio vital que permite la vida a salvo de las inclemencias, es posiblemente el primer espacio “arquitectónico” utilizado como templo, existiendo ejemplos de este uso caso todas las culturas y en casi todas las épocas, y la pervivencia de este carácter sacro ha continuado hasta nuestros días.

Su existencia en todo el arco mediterráneo tiene una importante presencia en el caso de España, pero es especialmente relevante en la Baja Edad Media, periodo que en la Península se caracteriza por el enfrentamiento entre dos culturas religiosas antagónicas, tanto en lo ideológico como en lo político y en lo social. En la España medieval, atravesada por una larga y dilatada frontera que va desde el Mediterráneo hasta el Atlántico, en la que las tierras sometidas a las ralias y las incursiones se mostraban ampliamente despobladas, en las grutas y cuevas se libra otra batalla, esta vez religiosa, en la que anacoretas y eremitas “cristianizan” los territorios recién conquistados; territorios vacíos y despoblados en los que pequeñas comunidades religiosas, o eremitas aislados, viven al abrigo de espacios rocosos y grutas, que “reconstruyen” a imagen y semejanza de los templos cristianos prerrománicos del norte peninsular.

Son espacios al límite de la arquitectura, tipológicamente afines a la arquitectura prerrománica asturiana, que se conservan como testimonios de una forma de habitar y de orar que refleja, posiblemente con mayor precisión que la arquitectura construida, la ideología de una sociedad y una época.

Fig. 2 Ermita de San Miguel in Presillas, Burgos

