Dome and cave

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Abstract
Since the very first human manifestations the dome was considered as the cave of the life. In its complexity it signifies the natural element that has always been accompanying men in their moments of activity or rest. Due to its shape and its sparkled-inside suggestions, caves soon became metaphor of mother womb in which man connects to his biological matrix. Often linked to darkness for the aptitude to penetrate into the darkness world or the unconscious sphere, it also became the treasure of vital forces that regenerate man and tremble him from quite. Cave’s image stands indeed for a bridge between two worlds, the earthly and metaphysical one, heaven and earth. It is certainly for this limberness that cave became the archetype from which new symbolic languages are generated and tested, affecting both architecture and art especially on religious fields.

Keywords sign, symbol, spiritual

Main element of Christian and pagan, cosmic and telluric sacred object, the dome has always marked and characterized human influence and crossing the sacred with building science. Shelter but also precious jewel, custody of an inca lculable artistic heritage, from the beginning it became the hinge element that connects man to God, evoking the celestial sphere, sphere of history and perfect universe miniature. But it also stands for a shadowy world, place of the unknown that dwells within men and Universe; metaphysical location beyond time and space, but also synonymous of death, or life, divine and demonic lair; path leading to the same knowledge as we describe several examples mythological winds along the succession of dark cavities.

Protective element similar in form and function to mother's belly, the human being finds refuge and protection in it, like in a symbolic re-entering the primitive womb, where man re-establishes his umbilical cord to its matrix to reborn to Light. Since ancient times, cave imagine brings an erotic connotation because of its association with mother's womb. The vital episode is kept in the vulva that, recalling a soul germination fertilized by Light, has to be found in the deepest rock cavities in which seed develops and grows.

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The farmer, too, throws the seed into the dark earth and it is from darkness that life springs forth.
Man’s point of arrival and end it becomes interstitial outline between the two archetypal worlds, place of confusion and darkness but also where light indicates the path of Truth. In the early Iron Age cave is the symbol used for the first monumental tombs, the *tholos* (whose testimony can be read in Sardinia and Sicily), because its character closely relates to the underworld and so evocative instrument to wish the deceased rebirth. Turned into a community memorial in which the beloved one is remembered, its spatiality suggests the deceased path taken by souls towards afterlife; domed space is accessed through a narrow strip, emblem of inside earth life, called *dromos*. These underground tombs were designed with a circular space covered with stone blocks tapered toward the centre to stand against the ground above weight.
The dome is closely linked to the cave symbol because the shared spatiality better embodied heroes’ birthplace, Sibyls and hermits home. In Ancient Greece it was explicit reference to a soul renovation: the suffering one was left with his dreams in dark loneliness to reach a metaphysical position and then come back to the light of life. The cave is thus the ultimate boundary that goes beyond imagination, where cosmos and terrestrial forces are concentrated in equal measure. Greeks saw dream as a prophetic and healing event, and in the "Cave of Dreams" intense experiences could rank as rebirth symbol. Not by chance Nile River springs from a rock cave in the Egyptian worldview. Cave is evidence of the free choice by individuals that can live positive or negative moments depending on actions taken. It is where Osiris lives and it soon became source of inspiration in literature and religion. The Book of Caverns, nineteenth dynasty dated, testifies a strong binding to this element, and it is one of the documents that during the funeral accompanied the deceased in the afterlife for guaranteeing immortal life. It consisted of magic formulas and rituals where the idea of path through the cave it was a common thread. Everything focuses on the journey of the Sun God that in order to rise every morning

Figure 3- isometric sketch of a tholos tomb
had to fight the darkness of the snake Apopis. The afterlife is seen as a series of dark caves through which passes the Sun God in its pilgrimage night.

In Ancient Rome the habit consisted in building sacred are near caves dedicated to the woods Lord, the god Faunus. Usually those who wished to gratify God and reach a metaphysical understanding state spent a night in the cave covered by a sheepskin waiting for deity contact. After hunting it represented a shelter and a shady refuge after hard and aggressive activities. In several Byzantine icons cave is considered the stage of symbolic world and a place of contact with the Hell forces. Crossing point between earth and sky in the art of the Eastern Church, Christ's birth is almost always depicted as a cave, where he was also buried (Bethlehem stable is represented as a rock cave, and Jesus was buried in a tomb rock) and while descending the underworld or ascending in heaven.

In the icon of the Nativity attributed to Andrey Rublev (about 1420) the Virgin Mary occupies a central position within the narrative of the scene, lying down and dressed in royal robes, and the background is a large black cave. The architecture of the cave becomes rocky hinge that connects different theological narratives unfolded in a loop to the observer. In the black cave the Child to which his destiny is already written, the Light of Salvation, is placed (“placed in a trough-shaped tomb (…) but the darkness did not receive him” quoting John, 1.5). The burial cave is red as the place of vocational illumination and revelation: it is perfectly readable in the framework of Van Eyck, the stigmata of St. Francis, where the saint is portrayed when receiving the stigmata, as well as from the description of Thomas from Celano, at the foot of the cave of Christ and Verna turned out to be covered by wings of seraphim and Brother Leo at his side.
In the Virgin of the Rocks by Leonardo Da Vinci the motif of cave and rock becomes the intimate mystery of nature revealed to men. The underlying tenet is that the Immaculate Conception and virginal motherhood is discovered in a dual space, an inside-outside the womb of the land marked by processes of erosion and transformation smoothed by water and wind. Here the embracing Virgin absorbs and introduces the children into the mystery that is taking place.
The Gethsemane Mount in Bible is depicted as a cave, foreshadowing the saving mission of Christ that defeats the darkness to give the Light. In the book of Genesis, the architecture of the cave becomes a treasure chest, which holds the true essence of good, giving the opposite to the usual conception of a positive and divine. The cave already mentioned by Vitruvius as the source of the architecture is revived later by Marc-Antoine Laugier in the Essai sur l'Architecture (1753) as referential "archetype" with no time, to be build with a beautiful simplicity and logical rigor, to become crucial element in Christian Churches to highlight indoor air of renewal and regeneration when Church was working to decisively respond to the raising Protestant Reformation in Europe. This particular architectural element is taken from ancient times to affirm the new Tridentine precepts restoring the concept of Heaven, represented by a dome, where it is established the Throne of God at the centre of Heaven and Earth.

Figure 9 – Virgin of the Rocks, Leonardo Da Vinci, 1485, London
In the philosophy of Plato in the cave man can see only the shadows of ideas, reproductions of a higher reality whose vision is impeded by his limited capacity. It is the place of deception and illusions. The cavern-cave is identified as the place of insight and vision of human condition from the higher point of view. It is the world of chained in which can be run the way to the intelligence and the ascent of the soul toward spirit light. The dome in the architectural-religious symbolism often becomes a substitute for a universal 'cave', embedded in a larger cosmos. In the Islamic religion is recognizable as a sign where to look at and pray. Like the mihrab it is the most rich in ornaments, recalling it sometimes. The dome brings the inside out with its magnificence and grandeur and internally it receives the light.

Figure 10 – heavenly glory, G. Lanfranco, 1643, Naples
This cavity, clear evocation of the cave, is the call toward truth and to the way to go when you please. The two elements are one the container of the other, the sign’ sign. Very often the outer dome is coupled to another dome located above the prayer hall to boost the axis towards to pray for.

This system of domes becomes leading and also compass in the way of truth, emphasizing the sanctity of the Islamic community that gathers in prayer, but is also seen as a sign within the architectural and urban fabric of the city and the countryside. Direction and guidance roles assumed paramount importance in Islam as in all great religions. Men have taken a certain position to pray, a direction that has profoundly affected sacred worship to God. Jews pray at the cave that houses the Holy of Holies, the cave becomes a treasure chest that holds the Ark of the Covenant.

Like in Christian religion, in Christian church the apse gives the feeling of ascension to God, emphasizes the place where Christ meets the man, the Word of Life in the Eucharist. The cave became a place of memory of the sacrifice, but also a place of sharing and Light, that is God. Christian basilicas had the apse to the east, because it is at east that the sun, i.e. Christ, rises.
In the symbolism of dreams, full of danger the way through a dark cave is sometimes interpreted as a search for meaning in life through the layers of the unconscious inherited breast or as a symbol of regression in the maze of prenatal life, cavities friendly place to find strength and support, but for which it is necessary to transcend his nature dark and mysterious. So the fascination and the means to enter into a cave in psychological terms and get back in the womb in the nocturnal world of the indistinct.

In the cave there is time, not any yesterday and tomorrow and the day and night are undivided. This produces a kind of isolated existence in a larval stage like that of the afterlife that allows to reach a metaphysical dimension has always sought by men. That is why the dome became a symbol of the cave as a place of direct reception of symbolic and ritual forms and transcendental.

Figure 12 – Theophany, Basilica of San Vitale, VI century, Ravenna
REFERENCES