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# ANCIENT HOLY WELLS





1. Importance of water nowadays and in the past



1.1. True for basically every country and culture in the world

1.2. Cults, religions and rituals developed from it

1.3. It molded social habits and cultural development, still shaping human culture



1.4. Cults, religions and rituals developed from it

1.5. Traditionally regarded as the principle of life

1.6. Historically it had the power to regenerate, purify and other magical properties (i.e. erase the memory)



2.  
Since prehistoric times,  
humans venerated  
gods and goddesses  
of water  
(fragmentaries  
evidences)



2.1. Source of life: Mother Goddess of the Earth (Nature)

2.2. Nature renews herself in the eternal cycle of seasons and water

2.3. First evidences of this cult: Middle Paleolithic (about 100.000 years ago)

2.4. Humans start using triangular tombstone symbols and carve little cups into the stone to collect rainwater (life-giving fluid)



2.5. Cup-and-Ring marks, curved and similar to the ripples produced when raindrops hits water

2.6. Neolithic (10.000/6.500 years ago): first evidences of rituals near water sources

2.7. Bronze Age: first hypogean structures built with the purpose to worship water (sacred wells)



3.  
As sources of precious life-sustaining fresh water, sacred wells were presumed to be the abodes of powerful goddesses, even in more recent times



3.1

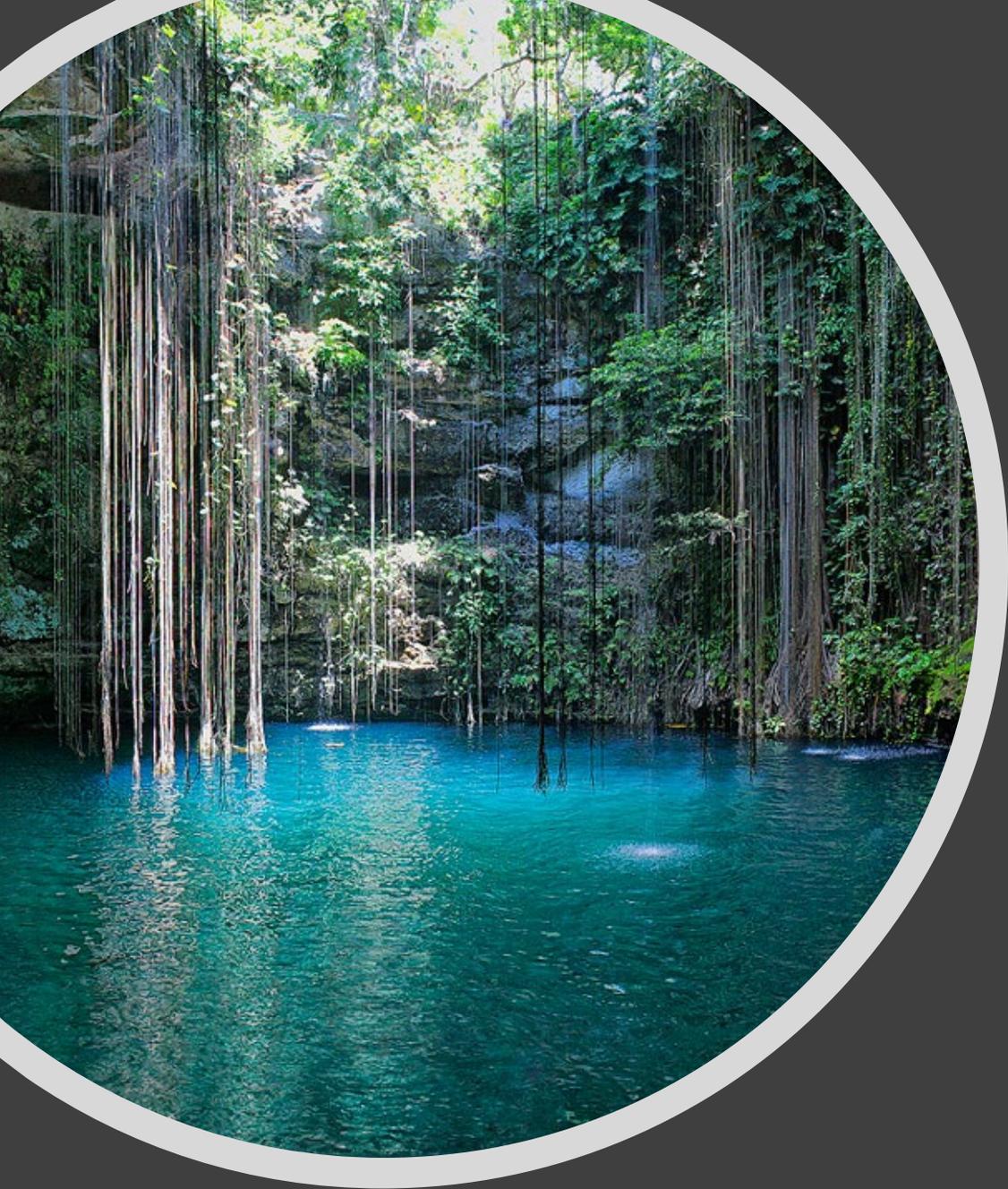
Roman and Greek age, e.g. Nymphaeums, monuments consecrated to spirits of air, seas and water (natural grottoes and caves)

3.2

Sybils: influenced by divine inspiration, able to predict future after purification rituals



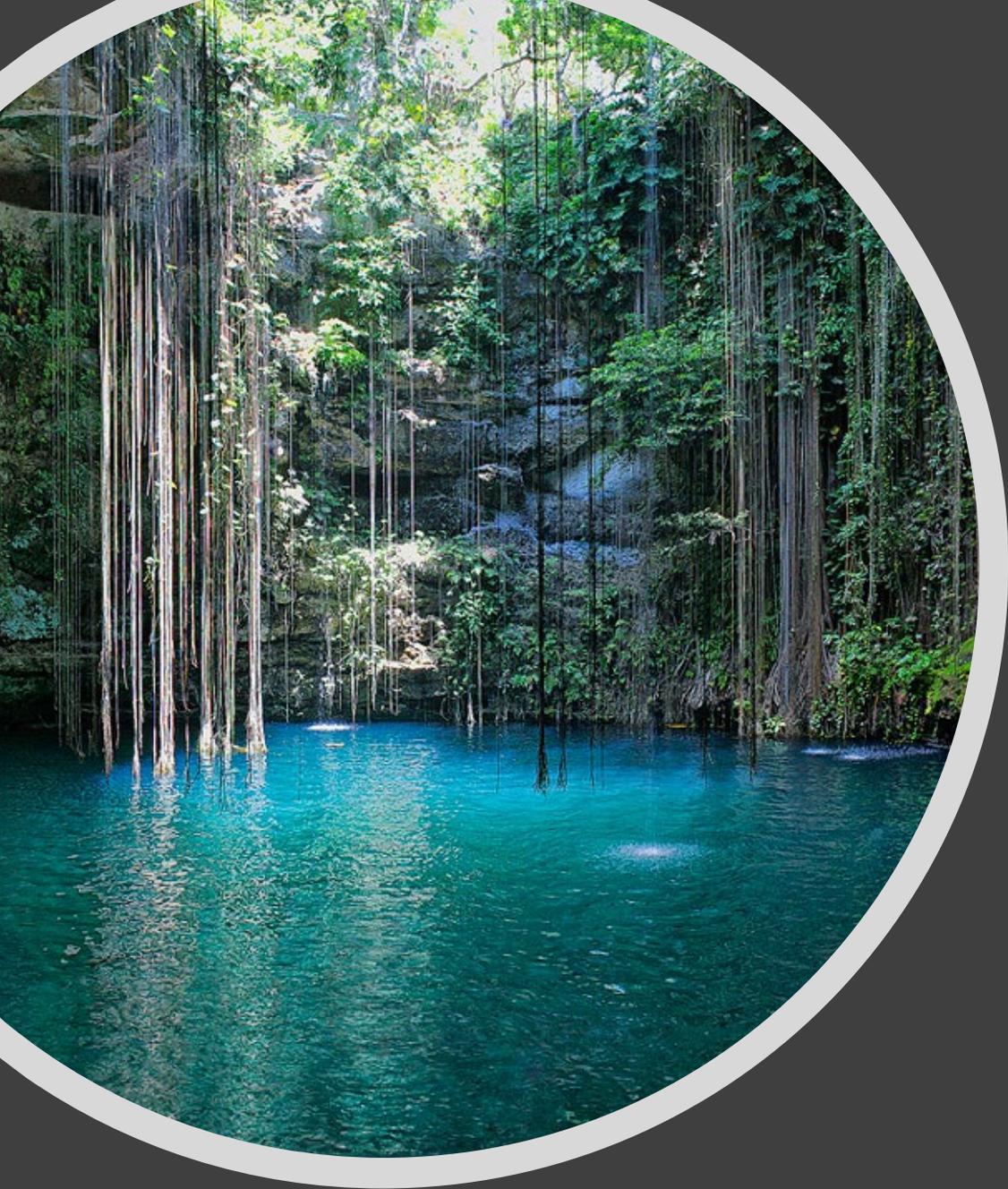
4.  
Most of the sacred wells and waters of the world are found and studied in Europe. However, they occur worldwide in a variety of cultures



4.1. Cenotés (from Mayan language word “Dzonot”, sacred water) are evidences of ancient connections to water in North and South America

4.2. Devotional venues where pilgrims gathered in some times of the year

4.3. Chichen Itza in Yucatan, Montezuma Well in Arizona, Las Animas Spring in California, to name a few



4.4. Sacred wells were believed to be places of healing

4.5. Ritual performances of health were expressed in loco, usually prior to drinking the water

4.6. With the coming of Christianity, the sacred wells of antiquity are consecrated and given saint's names

4.7. "Magic" wells became baptismal fonts, and the healing powers started to be called "miracles"



5.  
Water intended as the first source of life has always played a central role in the history of Sardinia and Sardinians as well



5.1. Cenotés are evidences of ancient connections to water in North and South America

5.2. The traditional scarcity of water resources made this element even more precious to the eyes of ancient inhabitants.

5.3. Desire and effort to honour and worship water



5.4. Extraordinary sanctuaries centered on the presence of a well structure were erected in some regions of the island, often near a sacred source

5.5. More than 50 buildings are dedicated to the cult of water

5.6. Ceremonies and rituals, as sort of pre-christian ablutions, water ordeals or subsidiary customs (i.e. guilty verdicts) took place in these sites

5.7. Officiant were often shamans or priests



6.  
The Sardinian sacred  
wells and springs all  
show a similar  
architecture



6.1. The underground well is accessible via a stone staircase

6.2. It is usually fenced to highlight the centrality of the well

6.3. The planimetric appearance recalls the female external genital apparatus (fertility and regeneration)

6.4. As confirmation of this, the S. Cristina well presents analogies with elements of Egyptian culture



6.5. The Ankh (hieroglyphic symbol of life) and the Menat pendant (emblem of Hator, goddess of love and joy)

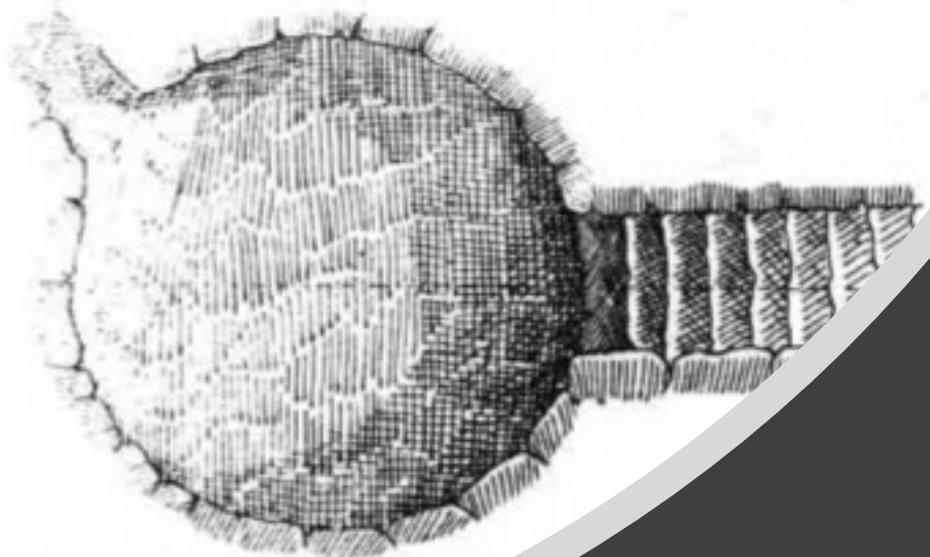
6.6. Both recur in the symbol of Tanit, Punic goddess of fertility and pleasure, and Phoenician goddess Astarte

6.7. All elements allow to attribute sacred wells and water contained in them an extraordinary symbolic value

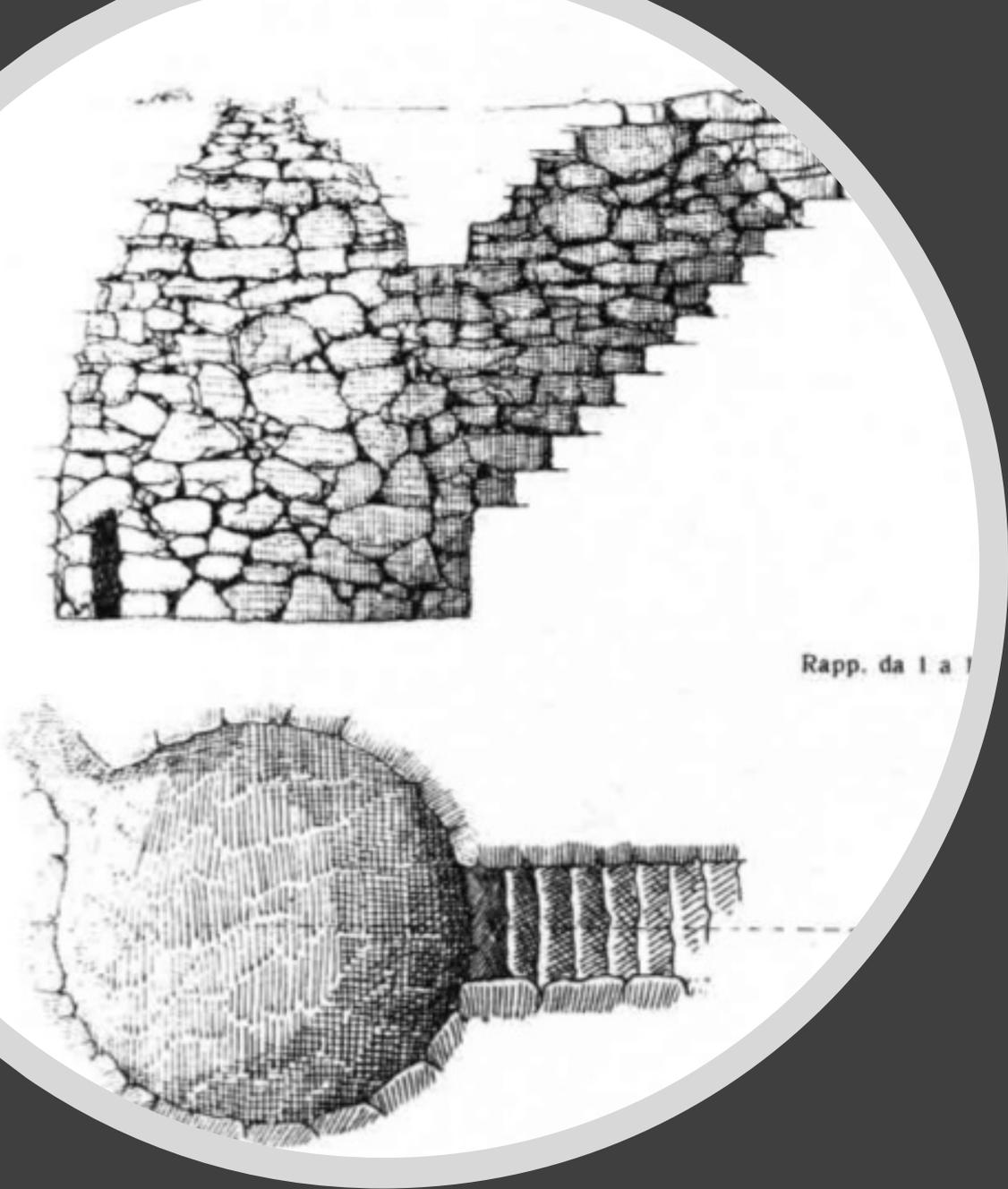




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7.  
The structure of  
Sardinian sacred wells  
consists of three parts

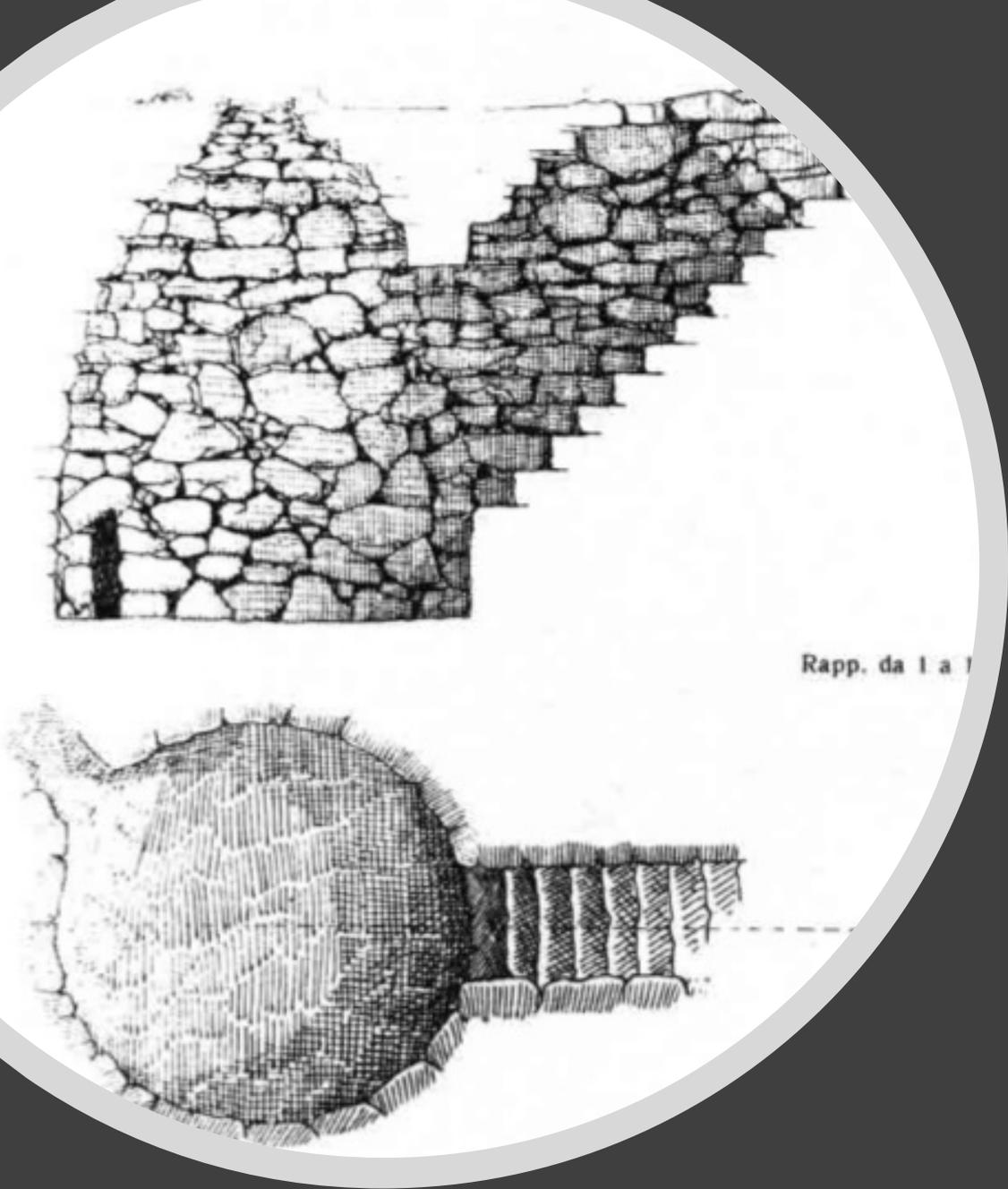


7.1. The Atrium, fenced off (Themenos)

7.2. The stairway to the well, gradually narrowing to the cell

7.3. The inner sanctum, the well or spring itself, usually domed with an open cover at the top (Tholos)

7.4. The opening allows the observation of sun, moon and stars



7.5. As many other prehistoric structures, these sanctuaries may in fact have been places of astronomical observation

7.6. Older water temples were made of rough stones

7.7. More recent structures were constructed from chiseled stones, often finely decorated and carved



## Conclusion

The sacrality of these ancient sites was conserved also during the Christian era and Middle Age

Churches and sanctuaries were often built ex novo in the vicinity

They are still able to attract the interest of modern visitors

They say they can feel a deep healing power still emanating from the wells











Thank you  
for your  
Attention!

