

1

MURGIA VIEW POINT



Matera is in front of us. Our gaze moves from the Casalnuovo district to the convent of Saint Augustine, following all the lines of Via Madonna delle Virtù, which runs along the steep slope that plunges into the Gravina, broken for just a moment by the apsidal part of the church of San Pietro Caveoso, which seems to stand on a base that is almost unsteady.



Bell towers, churches, noble palaces, houses one on top of each other: the town offers a breath-taking spectacle. It is difficult to retain the wonder of the general view, which makes us miss the individual details ... but maybe that's how it should be! We are observing the town from the most ancient places, steeped in the past, from the side that hosted man's first settlements in the area.



2

The stages of this route are located in the Murgia Materana Park.

Before entering this fascinating inaccessible zone, it is best to ask for all the necessary information on the routes to follow or – even better – rely on the help of a guide.

The harsh nature surrounding us has been shaped by man, who wanted at all costs to live there and made it less wild by means of sacred paintings that filled the inside walls of the rock caves with colours and magic figures. Let's take the time to visit this zone, rich with cave churches, underground crypts, caves, hermitages, tuff quarries, jazzi and farms.

3

CAVE CHURCH OF SAN VITO

A cupola of tuff built to protect a water cistern is the first image one has of the small cave church of San Vito.

The architectural value of the church and the surrounding farmhouse buildings is overshadowed by the landscape in which visitors find themselves.

In fact, it is an extremely fascinating place. Nature seems to embrace us and protect us like an attentive mother who offers her most precious possessions without hesitation.

We are inside the Matera gorge. With just a glance, we are able to admire the whole surrounding landscape, featuring the monuments that man and Nature have formed and are hard to distinguish from each other – camouflaged as they are by the calcarenite rock from which they have taken life.

This church was chosen by Pier Paolo Pasolini as the set for the sepulchre of Christ in one of the most significant scenes of his film "The Gospel according to Saint Matthew".



4

NEOLITHIC VILLAGE OF MURCIA TIMONE

We are at Murgia Timone... and man lived here ten thousand years ago.

His hut village was surrounded and defended by an entrenched moat. His neighbours live in Murgecchia and Trasanello, the hill that after the Iron Age would have given origin to the Matera Civita.

Neolithic man made his living from farming and stock raising and his survival was guaranteed by a year-round water reservoir called the "Jurio".

The discovery of traces of his presence were found thanks to the intuition and experience of Domenico Ridola, who remembers the discovery as follows:

"My attention was caught by two unusual underground buildings at Murgia Timone, discovered by chance... Access to one of these, which stood in the middle of a stone circle... was by means of a sort of corridor flanked by two small dry-stone walls... I thought that - as in Sicily - the two walls could hide the entrance to other tombs... But instead, digging... a long moat appeared, another unusual work at the hands of man..."



A moat that, encircling the village centre, had to isolate and protect the group of primitive huts and at the same time gave the impression that, for its meaning as a sacred boundary, the sign on the ground not only defined the actual physical space, but also that beyond this world, like the legendary pomerium, boundary ploughed by Romulus when founding his city.



LE TOMBE DI MURCIA TIMONE

The collage features several elements: a photograph of a tomb entrance, architectural drawings of the structures, and a portrait of Domenico Ridola. The text on the left side of the collage discusses the discovery and the structures, while the text on the right side of the collage discusses the discovery and the structures.

5

To reach our next stop, the Bat Cave, we must take the car and drive back towards Matera. It is advisable to ask for the help of a professional guide. We drive along the road for 4 km heading south-east then, after leaving the car at the beginning of the path, continue on foot.

The low bushes are unable to hide this cave, full of traces of man that take us back to echoes of prehistoric life, when man lived there, leaving extremely valuable traces of the various historical periods of the Paleolithic, Neolithic and the following Metal age.

Fantastic places, hidden treasures, dangerous dark gorges: we are about to visit a timeless space, a cave that has always contained secrets and legends that have been passed down by word of mouth through numerous generations of Matera inhabitants.

6 BAT CAVE

"My quarrymen told me not to go to the "grott du mattivagghi", the bat cave, because there was nothing down there."

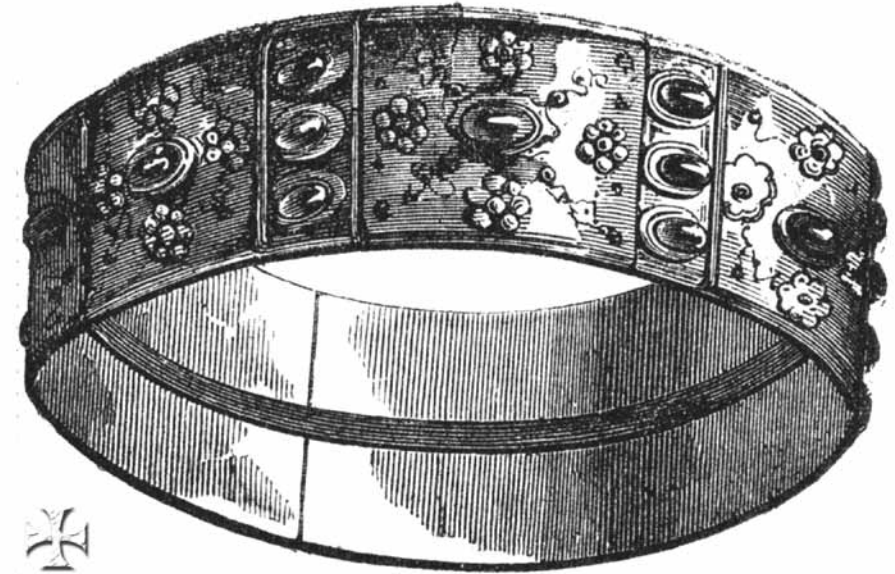
"But I had to go into the cave, I had to discover what was hidden behind the bats. Once, there was no need to go down, to lower oneself down: the entrance to the cave was level. But now, as all the guano - the excrement of these infernal beasts - had been removed, everything collapsed and the cave dropped."



It is senator Domenico Ridola talking. The father of the archaeological discoveries of Matera, who personally narrates the chronicles of the years from 1872 that led to him going into this cave.

"Numerous people had already dug for many years. They too had once believed in the treasure of the Emperor Barbarossa." In fact, the story goes that when he was on his way to the Crusade, Frederick Barbarossa passed through Matera. Near the town, his daughter, who was accompanying him, died.

The emperor was so grief-stricken and angry for his loss that he destroyed a church hewn out of a large cave to make it the tomb for his deceased daughter and filled it with countless riches.



"The father and grandfather of some of my collaborators had dug and had climbed further down but nothing... there was no treasure, no riches."

I was well aware that Barbarossa's treasure didn't exist. And then, Barbarossa who?, who was this mysterious king? King of what - of whom? A king in Matera, in a cave, whatever for?

Archaeology does not exist to search for treasures of coins or riches. I was searching for - and hoping to find - something else. In fact, perhaps I only wanted to understand, to dig to know."

7

We go back down the path, get back into the car, and continue to head south-east.

We leave the car and, as always accompanied by a guide, set off along the rough path that leads into a side ravine. It is a long tiring route, but fatigue and expectation will be amply rewarded by the extraordinary scenario that opens up before our eyes.

The endless series of caves of the saraceno Village is immersed in a extraordinary naturalistic and landscape scenario full of thick vegetation and vertiginous rocky spurs.

8

SARACENO VILLAGE

Homes, churches, narrow roads, cisterns, jazzi (underground dwellings opening out of a central space), everything in this village is the result of the compromise that man came to with Nature during the numerous centuries in which he lived in the area.

The result is this anthropic settlement of seventy cave-homes connected by paths linked together by steps cut in the rock.

The small channels hewn in the tuff that, starting from a single point, run like numerous wounds through the dwelling buildings, enabled to convey the rainwater to the cisterns located in the cave and at the bottom of the cleft.



The Village, in the Vitisciulo quarter, is known by the name of the Saraceno family, owners of the land it stands on, but atera peasants and shepherds have always connected it with the presence of Saracen pirates that, arriving from the Ionian Sea, had come up the Bradano River and settled in this place, from which they set off on their raids into the inland areas of Basilicata and the town of Matera itself, which is remembered in this dramatic episode:

"The people of Matera withstood the siege for approximately four months, at the end of which they realized that hunger was also fighting them from inside the walls. A mother, assailed by this enemy and by the sad thought of seeing her small son in the infidels' hands, felt compelled to eat him. It is said that, just before the outrageous act, throwing herself on the child, she said to him:

How could my heart suffer seeing you in the hands of these wicked cruel Saracens, becoming a humble servant and slave of these brutes? Ah! Rather than me having to see such a thing, let the sunlight, the movement of the skies and the elements come to an end with my wretched days, and the earth open up and swallow me live. So return inside the body from which you came, the same one that give you life and intelligence, now close the tender hapless limbs in eternal darkness and in their final resting place give them refuge and burial".



9

It's time to return to the town, as our intense tiring journey "on the other side of the Gravina" is over.

The moments of social and cultural life of the populations that lived in these places live on thanks to archaeological works and finds preserved in the "Domenico Ridola" National Archaeological Museum of Matera, in which the memory of the sites we have just visited is kept and protected.