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## A NEW HIEROPHANY AT MONTE CROCCIA (BASILICATA)

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### ABSTRACT

We have presented in previous SEAC Conferences the winter solstice hierophany at rock complex of “Petre de la Mola” sited on Monte Croccia (Basilicata, Italy), which demonstrates the sacred value of this site in past epochs. However, during our last visit to Monte Croccia on winter solstice 2016 we discovered a new and even more astonishing observing point of the winter solstice sunset inside the Osco-Samnite settlement, located on the same mountain peak at 1150 m above sea level, a few hundred meters from the rock complex (40° 33' 02" N, 16° 11' 39" E).

Right at the highest point of the acropolis of this settlement, the city walls goes around two big boulders, including them in its interior and not using them as a part of the wall, as in all other parts of the fortification. The narrow opening between the two boulders was monumentalized with a series of steps, leading to a flat passage between them. A square petroglyph, with incisions inside, was engraved on one of the boulders. Standing in front of the steps leading to the passage, the sun is seen to set at the winter solstice exactly between the two boulders. We can not exclude that this fact happens by chance. However, the monumentality of the place, the fact that the two boulders have been included inside the city walls and the presence of the hierophany on the same day in the nearby megalith suggest that the cult of the winter solstice on Monte Croccia was maintained through the centuries, until the end of the occupation of the site.

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**KEYWORDS** Osco-Samnites, Basilicata, Winter solstice, Monte Croccia, hierophany.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

We have presented in previous SEAC Conferences the winter solstice hierophany at rock complex of "Petre de la Mola" (Figure 1) sited on Monte Croccia (Basilicata, Italy), which demonstrates the sacred value of this site in past epochs (Curti *et al.*, 2009; Lozito *et al.*, 2014).

However, during our last visit to Monte Croccia on winter solstice 2016 we discovered a new and even more astonishing observing point of the winter solstice sunset inside the Osco-Samnite settlement, located on the same mountain peak, a few hundred meters from the rock complex.

## 2. THE OSCO-SAMNITE SETTLEMENT

The Croccia Cognato archaeological site (40° 33' 02" N, 16° 11' 39" E) is sited at 1150 m over the sea level on a mountain belonging to the Lucanian Dolomites arch, dominating the Basento Valley and the upper flow of the Cavone river. Traces of human frequentation go back to Mesolithic Age (12,000 - 8,000 BC) and also during the Bronze Age the area was surely frequented.

Lacava (1887) performed the first archaeological investigations of the area at the end of the 19th Century. Later, Di Cicco (1896; 1919) uncovered the Osco-Samnite settlement, with a double surrounding wall and various structures sited inside the acropolis on the top of the mountain (Figure 2).

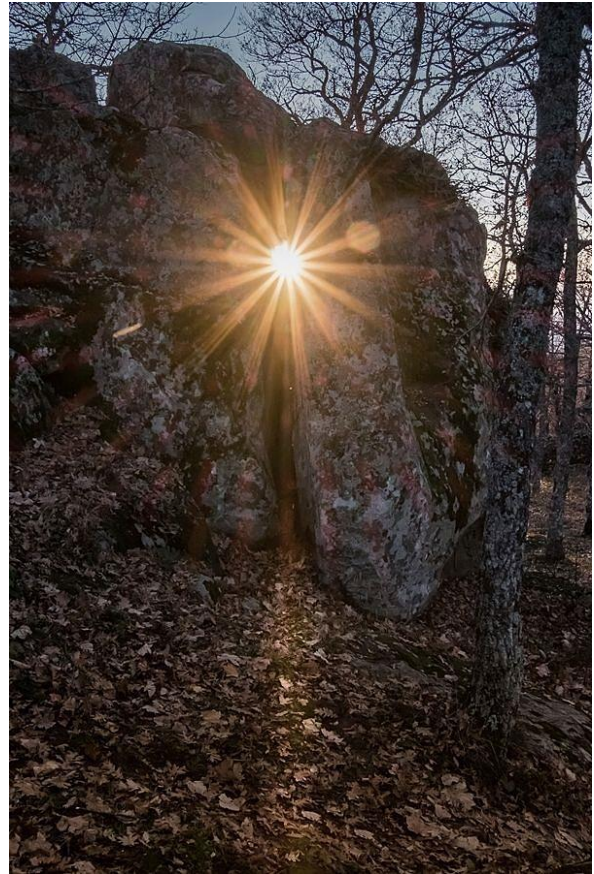


Figure 1. The winter solstice hierophany at rock complex of "Petre de la Mola".

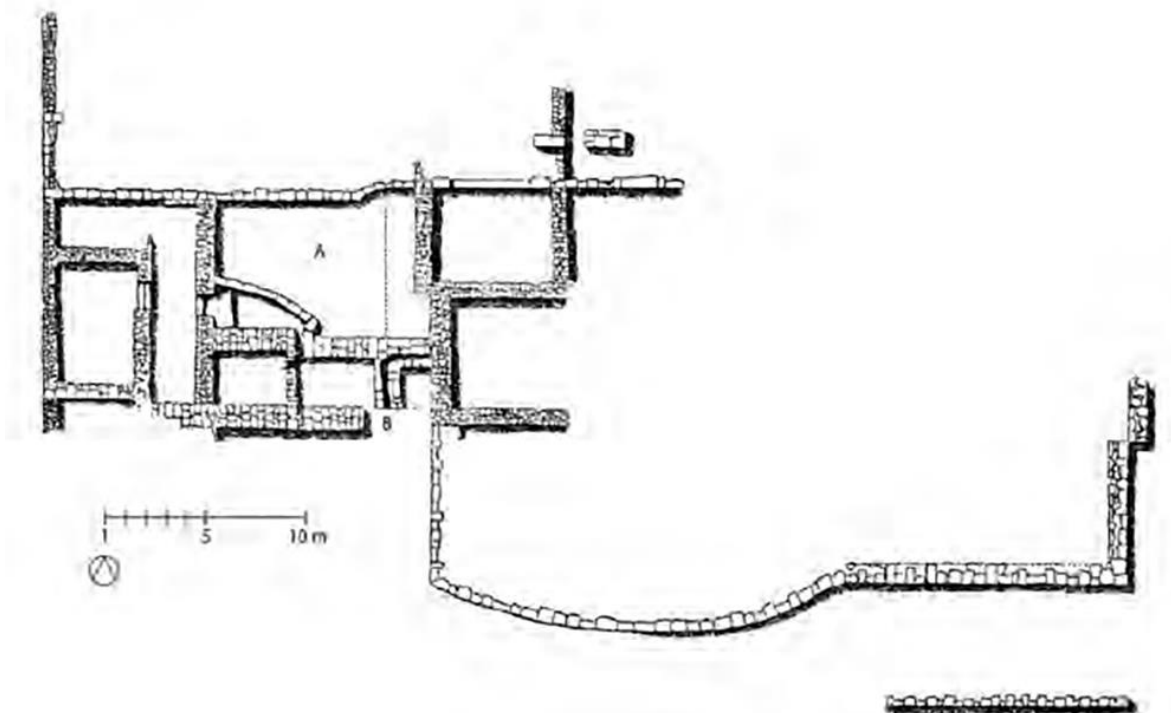


Figure 2. Planimetry of the structures excavated from Di Cicco (from Di Cicco, 1919).

The Basilicata Superintendence explored the southern side of the fortification in 1998 for a length of about 60 m (Russo, 1999). The first wall, dated between the end of the 8th and the end of 6th Century BC, is partly made of squared and partly of polygonal huge sandstone blocks (Figure 3), alternating with natural outcrops of the bedrock.

The acropolis is sited on the top of the mountain; it is surrounded by a second wall in squared opus with emplecton, of quadrangular shape, 700 m long (Figure 4). This wall is dated, according to archaeological finds, at the beginning of the 4th century BC. The southern side of the two walls is common. Five posterns are sited on the northern, eastern and southern side of the internal wall, whose well preserved main entryway is made by two doors closing a small courtyard (Figure 5).



Figure 3. Prof. Vito Francesco Polcaro near the remains of the fortification.

Monte Crocchia  
Acropolis' wall belt  
traces of the walls

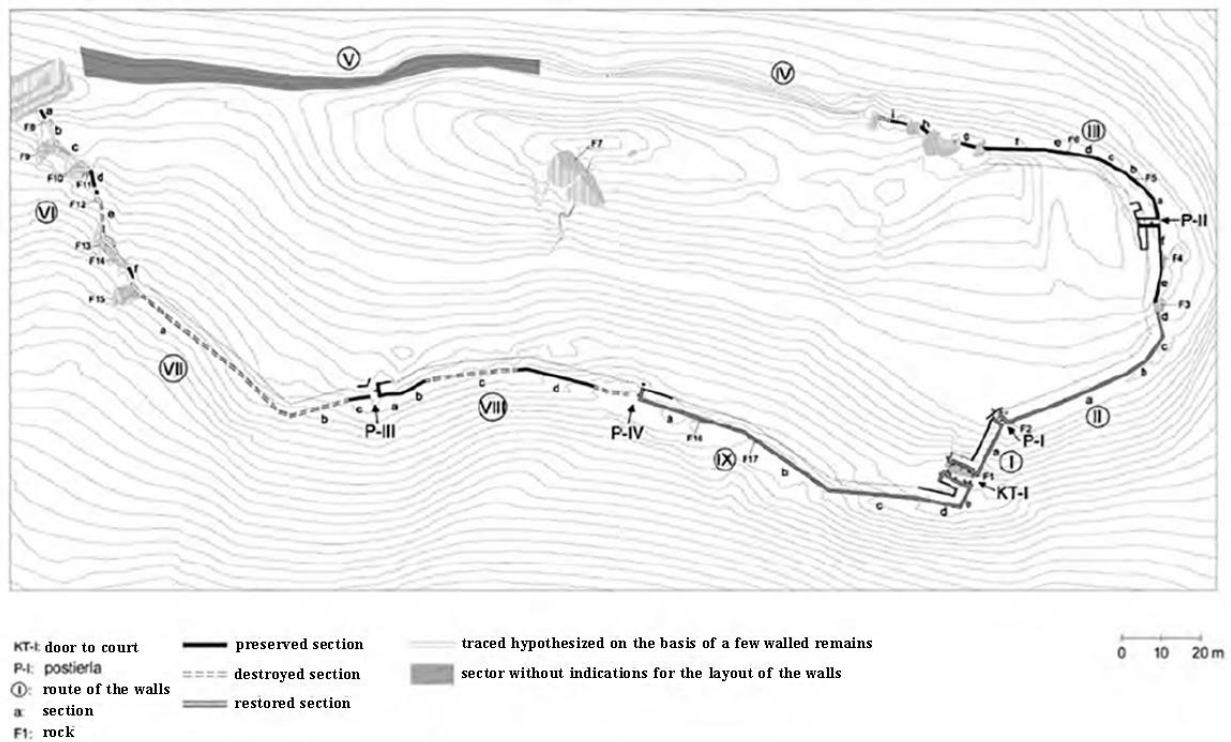


Figure 4. Monte Crocchia: the route of the walls of the acropolis with the division into sectors (drawing of Dalyanci-Berns, from Henning, 2012).



*Figure 5. The main entry-way of the Monte Croccia Osco-Samnite settlement.*

The lack of systematic excavations does not allow a precise dating of the settlement. However, it seems sure that it had two phases, the first one in Archaic Epoch, at the time of the building of the first wall, the second around the 4th Century BC, when the settlement is localized on the top of the mountain. Actually, during the excavation performed at the beginning of the 20th Century by Di Cicco (Di Cicco, 1919), the remains of a relatively large squared building, divided in a number of rooms, located in-

side the internal wall were discovered: inside, a Republican Age bronze coin, an iron spear head and a little bronze fibula, were found, together with remains of tiles and of rough pottery, strongly suggesting the housing use of the building. The same archaeologist reported the presence of the remains of a possible small temple in the acropolis, though the present state of this building does not allow a precise determination of its use.

The data collected to date suggest that the settlement was abandoned in the 3rd Century BC, when, due to the Roman pressure, most of the small Lucano fortified settlements were left (Osanna, 2001).

### 3. THE BOULDERS AT THE TOP OF THE ACROPOLIS

Right at the highest point of the acropolis, the city walls goes around two big boulders, including them in its interior and not using them as a part of the wall, as in all other parts of the fortification. The narrow opening between the two boulders was monumentalized with a series of steps, leading to a flat passage between them (Figure 6).



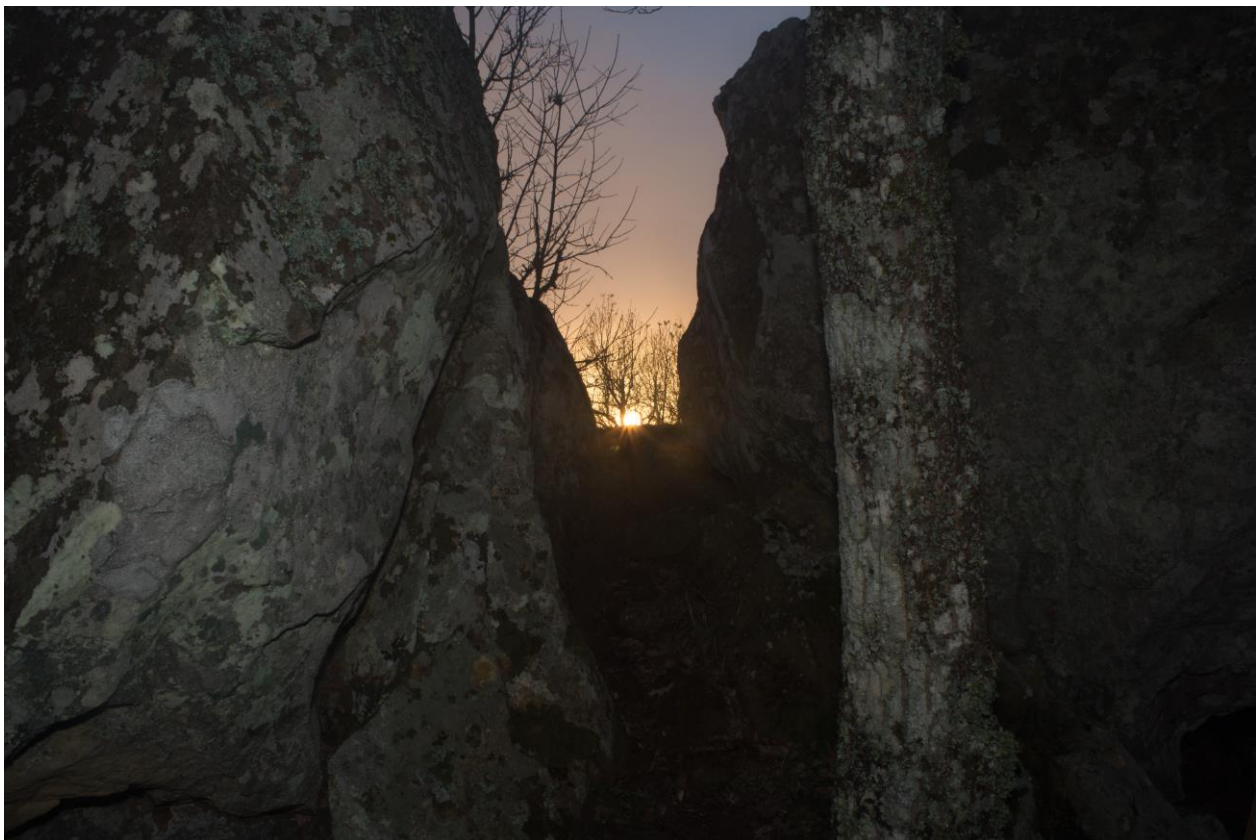
*Figure 6. Monte Croccia, Acropolis: the passage between the two boulders (photo by Rino Maggipinto).*

A square petroglyph, with incisions inside, was engraved on one of the boulders (Figure 7). Standing in front of the steps leading to the passage, the sun is

seen to set at the winter solstice exactly between the two boulders (Figure 8).



*Figure 7. Monte Croccia, Acropolis: the squared petroglyph (photo by Rino Maggipinto).*



*Figure 8. Monte Croccia, Acropolis: the winter solstice sunset (photo by Rino Maggipinto).*

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

It is well known that the presence of one of the eight fundamental solar directions (the cardinal directions and the ones of sunrise and sunset at winter and summer solstice) has a statistical significance respect to the null hypothesis of random coincidence of only  $2.08 \sigma$  (Schaefer, 2006).

We can not thus exclude that this fact happens by chance. However, the monumentality of the place, the fact that the two boulders have been included inside the city walls and the presence of the hierophany on the same day in the nearby "Petre de la Mola" rock complex suggest that the cult of the winter solstice on Monte Croccia was maintained through the centuries, until the end of the occupation of the site.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We want to thank the Municipality of Oliveto Lucano for the hospitality during the stay in the days of the winter solstice 2016. We also thank Rino Maggipinto for the photos taken just the day of the winter solstice at the top of the Acropolis.

This work is dedicated to the memory of Prof. Vito Francesco Polcaro, unfortunately passed away on 11th February 2018, who has dedicated many of his studies to Monte Croccia and to several sites in Basilicata, in Campania and in Southern Italy in general.

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