

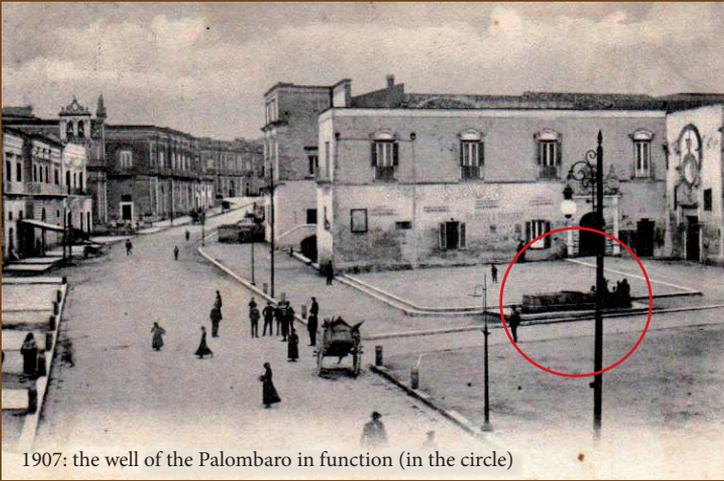
# PALOMBARO LUNGO



In Matera the municipality provided the drinking water through a few fountains and five huge public cisterns collecting spring water, and called “palombari”. Furthermore, there were hundreds of private cisterns collecting rain water for the non-drinking purposes. The Palombaro lungo is the biggest cistern in town, and is a man-made excavation dating back to the 16th century, and later enlarged over the centuries. Therefore, it is not a natural cave, but an entirely man-made cavity (like every other cave in town). Its capacity is 5 millions liters of water, its depth is 16 meters and its length is 50 meters. Its shape is extremely irregular as it is the result of many pre-existing caves combined together. These caves used to be wine cellars, snow-houses, tanneries, and they were merged together to create a bigger cave, to be used as a public water cistern. Its rocky walls are sealed with “cocciopesto”, a water-proof plaster made with terra cotta. The water was withdrawn only when the public fountains did not provide enough water, so mostly in summer.

People withdrew the water using aluminum buckets through a well in the square.

When you are inside the palombaro, you can see the mouths of the well on the ceiling, as seen from below. Unfortunately there are no more signs of the well in the square, as it was destroyed in 1927, when the palombaro was disused, as a national aqueduct was built. The well was quite long, as it included six mouths (that’s why this is called “Palombaro lungo”, meaning “the long Palombaro”, as there was a long well on the square). The bottom is not flat, but it is sloping, and its deepest point is exactly under the well, so even if the cistern had been almost empty, the buckets would have found the water deep enough to get it. In 1991, during some works in the square, the municipality decided to explore the cistern: they knew it existed but they had never seen it inside: nobody knew its size nor its shape. It was still completely full of water, and so two scuba divers were the first ones to explore it. The scuba divers found many objects laying on the bottom: they had been lost over the centuries from the square, through the well, in the attempt of drawing water (coins, pins, buttons, watches). There were also many buckets, and some of them were floating. In some areas of the ceiling you can see circles of rust: they are the marks of the lost buckets, pushed by water against the ceiling. Today you can visit the Palombaro lungo on easy-to-walk boardwalks suspended over the water: its level has been decreased to allow you to see the full size of the cistern, and fully appreciate this masterpiece of the ancient hydraulic engineering.



1907: the well of the Palombaro in function (in the circle)



The mouths of the well seen from the inside



1991  
Video  
By boat



The circles of rust of the lost buckets



1991  
Video  
Scuba divers



1991 - First scuba divers exploration