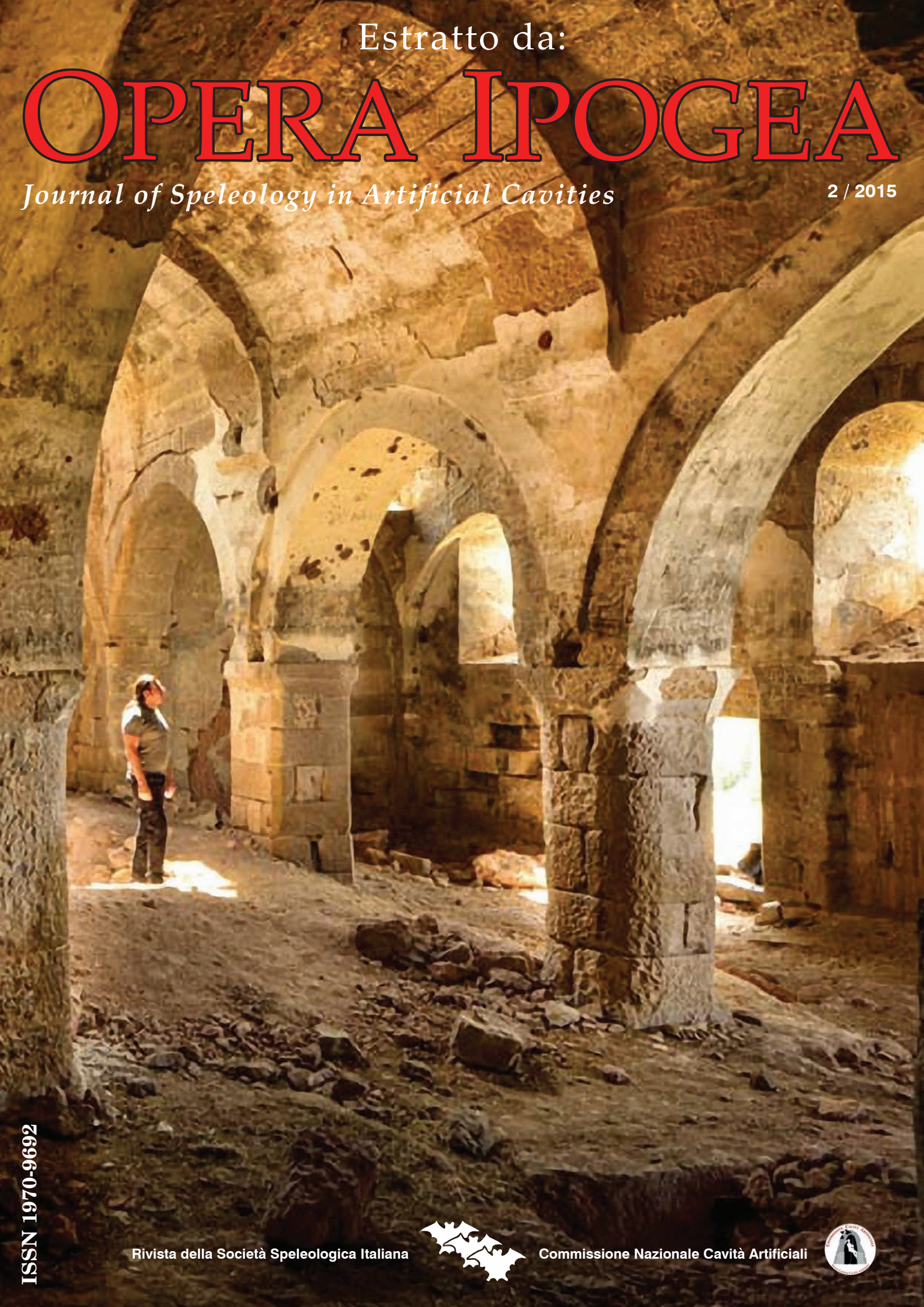


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Cave dwellings and underground cities of Belagasi village and Otedere valley (Kayseri - Turkey)

Ali Yamaç¹, Ezgi Tok^{1,2}

Abstract

Although the region known as “Cappadocia” is located in the Nevşehir-Ürgüp-Göreme triangle of Anatolia (Turkey), the capital of that region in ancient times was the antique Caesarea city which is known as Kayseri today. As the same in Nevşehir-Ürgüp-Göreme triangle, in antique Caesarea the volcanic tuff which was piled up by the active volcanoes around was dug by the local people. Houses, churches, protective underground settlements were built into those rocks and a troglodyte civilization had been established.

Different from the known touristic places of Cappadocia, the rock dwellings and underground settlements of Kayseri region have not been investigated. Nevertheless, underground structures of that region have such an architectural quality to compete with the dwellings in other parts of Cappadocia. After the 3rd century Kayseri was the cradle of Christianity in Anatolia and there are several underground cities around this city carved in order to protect Christians from the invasions and raids beginning from the 7th century.

We find new and unexplored underground cities on every spot around Kayseri. Apart from several rock settlements, several underground cities on the walls of deep valleys around the city, which were unknown and not recorded before, had been explored and surveyed. Those underground cities are rather different than the ones around the touristic Cappadocia. Apart from the architectural differences, at least some of them were not used again after the first construction period, whilst in other cases even the excavation of the underground city is uncompleted. When appreciated in this context, the underground cities of Kayseri have features to shed light on the beginning of this type of architecture, which is different from Goreme, where most examples were continuously enlarged and new passages added during the history.

In this article, Belagasi cave dwellings of Kayseri and four different underground cities in the area will be explained in detail.

KEY WORDS: Kayseri, cave dwelling, underground city.

Riassunto

INSEDIAMENTI RUPESTRI E CITTÀ SOTTERRANEE DEL VILLAGGIO DI BELAGASI E DELLA VALLE DELL’OTEDERE (KAYSERİ - TURCHIA)

Sebbene la regione conosciuta come “Cappadocia” sia localizzata nel triangolo compreso tra le regioni di Nevşehir, Ürgüp e Göreme nell’Anatolia centrale, la capitale di questo territorio, nei tempi antichi, era Cesarea, conosciuta oggi come Kayseri.

In maniera simile a quanto accaduto per le altre città della regione, i tufi vulcanici che ne caratterizzano la geologia sono stati scavati dalle popolazioni locali allo scopo di ricavarne singole abitazioni, chiese e città sotterranee, generando numerosi emblematici esempi di insediamenti sotterranei e rupestri.

Contrariamente a quanto accaduto per le altre province, studiate abbondantemente, e diventate nel corso del tempo importanti luoghi turistici, gli insediamenti sotterranei di Kayseri meritano ulteriori approfondimenti scientifici per la loro ricchezza e per le qualità architettoniche che le caratterizzano.

Nei dintorni della città, che è stata la culla della Cristianità in Anatolia a partire dal III secolo, sopravvivono diversi esempi di realtà urbane ed insediamenti rupestri, dal VII secolo in poi, realizzati con lo scopo di proteggere le comunità dalle invasioni provenienti dalle altre parti della regione.

Nel corso delle nostre attività di ricerca siamo riusciti a scoprire e rilevare diverse città sotterranee sconosciute o studiate solo superficialmente. L’insieme di questi fenomeni urbani presenta diversi caratteri pecu-

¹ OBRUK Cave Research Group; Acikhava Apt. 16/7, Nisantasi, Istanbul, Turkey, email: ayamac@gmail.com.

² ITU, Istanbul Technical University, EURASIA Institute of Earth Sciences.