

GEO wellbeing: the wellbeing of the Earth

The Earth, by which is meant our planet or Planet Earth is a source of natural resources that man has learned to recognize, exploit and imitate from ancient times. Spas, springs, mud, caverns, waters and minerals are resources, or rather, “geo”-resources, related to what goes on underground, deep within the Earth, and which delight man by offering him pleasurable sensations that might be called psycho-physical “geo”-wellbeing.

Genuine miracles of nature, geo-resources are often located in attractive and inviting settings in the earth’s system, so much so that they can be considered to all intents and purposes as islands of regeneration and wellbeing. This same setting can provide, in turn, the driving force for a cascade of emotions and sensations that can evoke a state of pleasure in those who use them.

The spa bath is a good example of a geo-resource. Spa culture in Italy boasts a long tradition and is also generally well rooted in Mediterranean and continental Europe. The artificial reproductions that man has made of these phenomena are common all over the world: sauna, Turkish baths, *hammam*, thermarium, artificial caves (the Romans used caves, disused mines). Scattered throughout the Region of Emilia-Romagna there are geothermal spa centres, each one with specific curative properties connected to the spring waters of the respective thermal baths. In some cases these geo-resources have maintained their original morphological and environmental features and, as natural swimming pools, wells or steam baths, they draw people who are attracted by the primordial, unreal atmosphere they evoke or by the unexpected heat that envelops them. At times, near to the thermal springs, hot natural caverns are opened, called *grotte* (grottoes) if they are hot and humid, and *stufe* (stoves) if they are hot and dry, in which *antrotherapy* (cave therapy) can be practiced. In other areas, where the subterranean caverns are cold, the low temperatures allow us to apply speleotherapy (cave therapy) treatments, which are particularly indicated for respiratory problems and asthma. Clay, which becomes malleable when mixed with water, is also a good example of a well known geo-resource whose chemical and physical properties are exploited in all cultures. Initially used for making everyday objects such as dishes and drinking vessels, as well as an impasto for building huts, clay has become the raw material from which bricks and ceramic tiles, heat-resistant receptacles and porcelain are made. The ceramic-tile district in the province of Modena developed by reprocessing and applying ancient know-how and traditions which trace their origins to the clay deposits which dominate the rim of the Emilian Apennines, as attested by archaeological finds dating from the Neolithic age, the so-called Fiorano culture (6000 BC) and from the pottery culture uncovered at the Pescale site at Bocca Quadrata (5000 BC).

Clay also possesses important cosmetic and therapeutic properties (antiseptic, antitoxic, absorbent, cicatrising etc.) which are widely applied in mud-therapy treatments practised in spa-bath medicine to create poultices, mudpacks and mixtures for internal use; such products can also be found a long way from the spa-centres in urban clinics. Unfortunately, however, not all peoples have been able to conserve and hand on intact their folk culture and traditions, once firmly rooted in the Earth.

It is in the heart of Africa, where the spell cast by the image of place is still chanted to the rhythms of the past, that clay culture lives on in ancient folklore and ritual gesture, signs and designs, which are born of clay, and which are used to seek the physical and emotional wellbeing of both the individual and the community.