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Acoustics of Ancient Sacred and Ceremonial Spaces

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Acoustical features contributed to the designation of certain sites for sacred and ceremonial use. This paper seeks historical continuity of the acoustical features of sacred and ceremonial spaces from Paleolithic to modern times. Acoustical features of natural environments include the presence of echoes, whispering galleries, symbolic sounds (animal, human, or natural), and unusual quiet. Ancients may have sought to incorporate the acoustical phenomena that impressed them in the transition to built sacred and ceremonial spaces. If so, can remnants be identified in historical built spaces? The acoustics in a decorated American Indian cave and at outdoor Mesoamerican temples are demonstrated.