

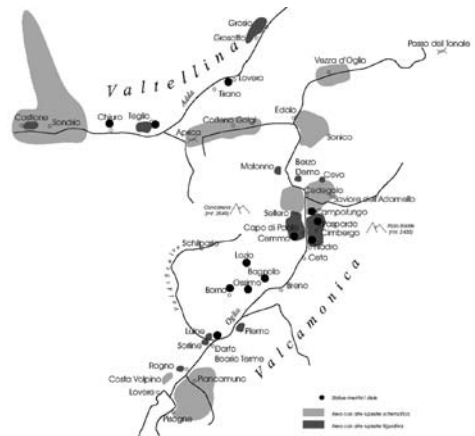
The Way of Life Recorded in the Rock Art of Valcamonica

Introduction

The 75 kilometres long Valcamonica (Camonica Valley) in the Italian Alps includes over 300.000 rock engravings spanning for 10.000 years, from the Epi-Palaeolithic period to the Middle Ages. The Valley is at the crossing of the Alps from Italy to Central Europe where both ideas and people passed through. This area has been studied uninterruptedly for fifty years thus enabling scholars to recognize stylistic and thematic changes from period to period. Such changes reflect the mutations in way of thinking, in the economy and in the social organization throughout the formative period of modern society. A new research approach was created and applied in this site, concerning the use we can make of rock art as a mean of historical reconstruction, producing a history of periods which were considered as prehistoric. Valcamonica has been declared by UNESCO, World Cultural Heritage in 1979 and is the first rock art site in the world to have obtained such nomination. Also it is the first Italian site that became part of the World Heritage list.











































































New sceneries of historical reconstruction are now emerging from the deciphering of the content of the messages that rock art intended to convey. An immense mosaic of events, traditions and myths provide a new dimension on 10.000 years of European history. In the present paper, however, we shall concentrate on the way of life revealed by the images of rock art.

Stylistic changes in rock art, just as in pottery or in architecture, reflect changes in the



Map of the rock art sites distribution in Valcamonica and Valtellina (Records WARA Documents)

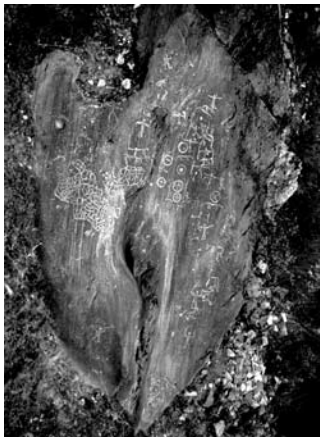
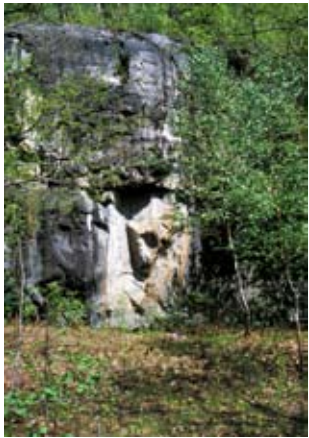
way of thinking and in the way of living. From Epi-Palaeolithic to the Iron Age, style and subject matter appear to derive from a search of expression, synthesis and symbolization which vary from period to period. In each period the rock art reflects the aesthetic and intellectual values of its age. The style, the subject matter, the grammar of the graphemes and the syntax of the association of graphemes, the composition concept and the artist's choice of the rock surface, indicate ideological-conceptual needs, along with social patterns, economic and technological characters of the artist's cultural background in his own epoch.

SPLE	FASE	PERODO ARCHEOLOGICO	DATAZIONE TENTATIVA	ANTROPOMORFI	CERCHI	ASCI	SIMBOLI	EDIFICI	ARRETI	CARRI	STRUTTURE
Prato Comune	Solo Naturalistico	Epipaleolitico									
I		Neolitico	5.000								
II	A, B, C Transizione		3.000								
III	A, Medio Tardo	Calcolitico	2.800								
	B, C, D Transizione	Età del Bronzo	2.000								
IV	A, B	Bronzo/Ferro transizionale	1.100								
	C	Età del Ferro	850								
	D		700								
	E										
	F										
Post Comune		Età romana o medievale	16 a.c								

Typology of some of the main represented subjects in rock art of Valcamonica (Records WARA W07744)

Below left. The man living in nature becomes its observer and interprets it. The narrow valley from which is coming the track to Campanine is characterized by a natural shape of the rock that looks like a big mask. Similar forms have been interpreted by prehistoric man as signals for the sacred meaning of a place. Region Ceto. (WARA W07695).

Below middle and right. The natural shape of this rock is particularly suggestive because of its likeness with a feminine body. The shape itself of the rock is the frame where the men representations are inserted. The engraved figures are part of the final phase of Period III and the beginning of Period IV. The rider is one of the oldest examples of such a subject. The net, frequent pattern of recent phases of Period III of Valcamonica, that is also known in Scandinavia and in others rock art zones, seems to be linked with the requirements of giving a form to untouchable realities, and thus symbolize hell. Seradina III. (WARA W05648) ; Tracing CCSP ; (WARA W07500).





A decorated rock has just been enlighten by a clearing work. Cleaning and tracing have reveal a complex sequence of engravings phases. Between the first and the last figures of this surface, more than 2000 years have pass, before the rock eventually was covered with dirt. Seradina III. Picture E.Anati ; (WARA W07697, W07699, W07700).

The sequence of Camunian periods illustrates 10,000 years of history. In simple terms, the Proto-camunian period dates back to the first phases of the Holocene, between 10,000 and 7,500 years ago. From recent considerations about iconographic phenomena in other regions of Europe, it is possible that the beginning of this period may go further back. The Camunian Periods I and II correspond to the Neolithic and are currently dated from 7,500 to 5,300 years ago (5,500 – 3,300 B.C.). Period III spans from 3,300 to 1,200 B.C. and includes the Chalcolithic (3,300 – 2,500 B.C.), the Early (2,500 – 1,600 B.C.) and Middle Bronze Age (1,600 – 1,200 B.C.). Period IV includes the Late (1,200 – 1,000 B.C.) and Final Bronze Age (1,000 – 800 B.C.), and the various phases of the Iron Age from 800 B.C. until the arrival of the Roman legions of Publio Silo in the year 16 B.C. Finally, the Post-camunian period concerns the “historic” phases of rock art: Roman, Medieval and recent.

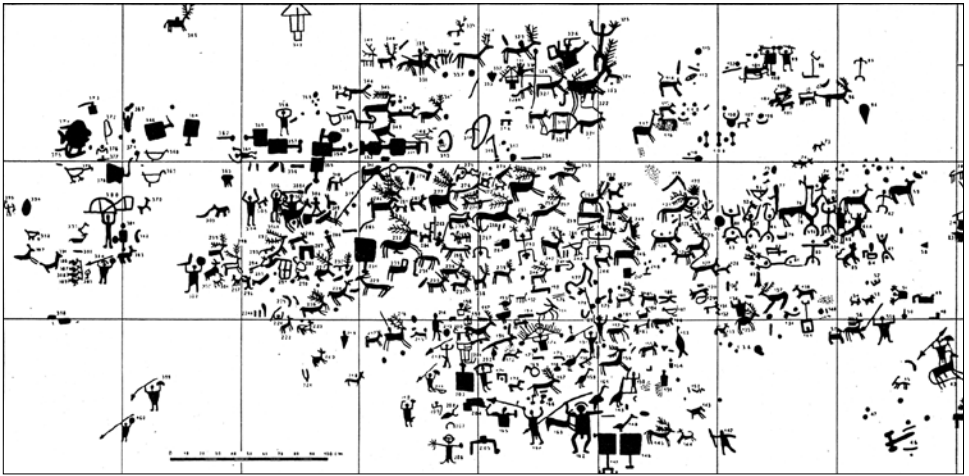
Each period in the sequence illustrates the substantial modifications of style, themes, concepts that occurred throughout 10,000 years. In each period rock art reflects the interests and concerns of its time, the economy, the beliefs and the cult, the social organization, the political trends and the international relations. In certain periods tools and weapons depicted in the rock art illustrate foreign objects or foreign influence. The introduction of new elements of technology such as the wheel, or metal working, or weaving are meaningful for defining the way

of life. Changes in the architecture of huts, of shrines and of other buildings depicted in the rock art, figures of different ways of funerary practices and other descriptions of habits, are analysed as documents providing the historical background of the various periods.

Proto-camunian period (10,000? – 5,500 B.C.)

Research conducted so far indicates that the Proto-camunian period refers to the archaeological features that precede the Neolithic (Final-Palaeolithic, Epi-Palaeolithic and Proto-Neolithic) and to the development of elements characteristic of the Camunian Civilisation in the Pre-boreal and Boreal climatic stages. On the basis of the study of pollens from geological logging in Valcamonica, in this period tall trees are pine trees and birches. Rock art localities of this style are on the hill of Luine and at Crape, near Darfo-Boario. Remains of settlements of this period have been found at Nadro (Shelter II), Castello di Breno, and Cividate Camuno. Material culture is characterised by a lithic industry of blades and abundant microliths. They are very small splinters of retouched flint stones differently shaped such as points, segments, and geometrical forms that were part of composite instruments, mostly to be fixed on wood or bone.

The iconographic style is defined as sub-naturalistic, that is, a simplified naturalism with figures schematised just by a contour



Schematic tracing of Sector I and central sector of the "Big Rock" of Naquane which is the first entire tracing from Valcamonica, realized in 1957. Parc de Naquane, (WARA W07703).

line. Main themes are large animals. Sometimes they are shown to be hit by spears. Figures of elks are exclusive of this period and will not be found any longer in later periods; apparently in the region this animal became extinct during the early Holocene. Weapons and tools represented here are practically limited to spears or darts; a curved sign has been interpreted as a boomerang, but this hypothesis is doubtful. A basket-shaped fishing trap is represented in an engraving on the hill of Luine: it consists of parallel lines inside which a fish seems to be trapped. The essential economic activities substantiated by rock art are hunting and fishing; food collecting is not documented so far but should not be excluded. The social structure was the clan. Anthropoc levels consist of fireplaces and bivouacs of modest size. These small hunting groups had reached the foothills of glaciers, where preys could not escape the assailants. Beliefs and religion, as far as we know, concerned hunting rituals related to resources for economic survival.

There are stylistic and thematic similarities with the rock art of the Arctic region (Northern Scandinavia) and the archaic hunters phase of the Near East and North Africa. In Italy we know analogous expressions in the sub-naturalistic art of Levanzo (Egadi) and the cave of Addaura, Monte Pellegrino

(Sicily). There are also similarities with the archaic rock art of Totes Gebirge (Austria), with the first phase of rock art of Pontevedra, with a group of engravings from the valley of the river Tago (Spain and Portugal), and with some instances of rock paintings in Levantine Spain.

This sub-naturalistic style with large animals outlined by contour lines extends from Scandinavia to the Middle East and to the Atlantic coasts of the Iberian Peninsula. In Europe this style developed first in the late phases of the Upper Palaeolithic earlier than 10,000 years ago. For most of its duration this style was contemporary to the Mesolithic microlithic cultures.

Parallel events occur in permanent settlements with artistic creativity in Eastern Europe, Anatolia and Near East (Lepenski Vir, Catal Hüyük, Jerico), where the first communities engaged in the production of food emerged in this period.

In the Epi-palaeolithic period (Proto-Camunian), large animal figures are depicted in contour lines. Some of them appear to be wounded, with dots marking the wounds and spears wounding their body. Such type of rock art may be referred to hunters-gatherers and may be connected to an industry of blades and microlites which are typical



Inside a megalithic wall of a great thickness, a "fortress" shelters a few habitation cabins and a large area for farm animals. The base structures made of stone, at the top of the hill, are those of a sanctuary from Iron Age, including a sacred room, full of intentionally-broken ceramics. Map of the prehistoric city of Dos dell'Arca, with indications of stone structures and cabins bottoms from Bronze Age (light grey) and Iron Age structures (dark grey) (Archives WARA W07533);

Megalithic walls vestiges (picture E. Anati; Records WARA W07775).



to the end of Palaeolithic and to the Epipalaeolithic period.

Camunian Periods I – II (5,500 – 3,300 B.C.)

After the Proto-Camunian horizon, style changes drastically. The main subject matter is no more animal preys; it is stylized anthropomorphic figures mostly with upraised hands in the so-called praying posture. In the course of Period I and II the first domesticated animals appear: the dog, the ox, the goat; in the late phases of style II, the earliest representations of ploughs are documented.

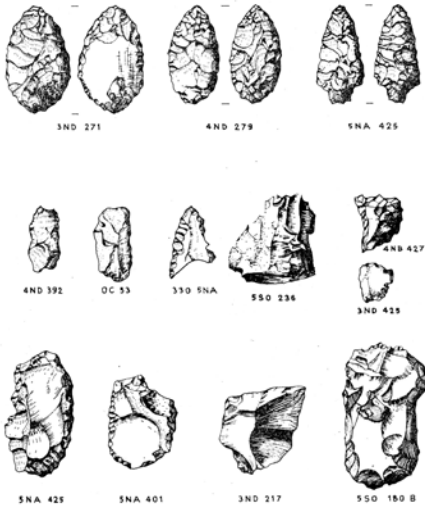
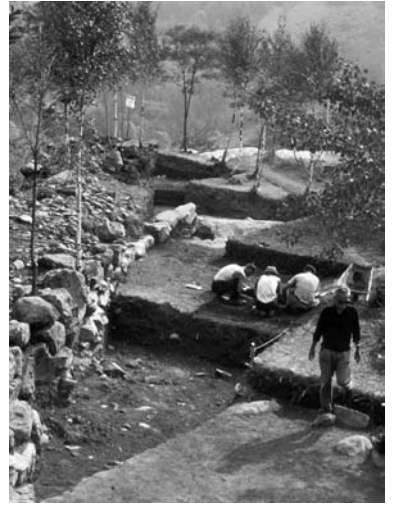
The drastic change in subject-matter and in style is likely to testify the penetration in Valcamonica of a new population devoted

to a complex economy which included agriculture and animal rearing. Following the trend common to other European regions, these people were colonizing new regions in search of agricultural and pastoral land.

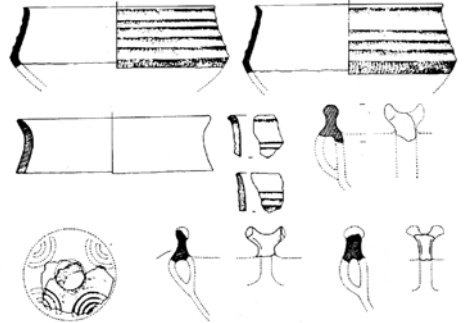
According to the depictions, the concerns of the artists are no more hunting preys; the focus is on humans. Large groups of human figures illustrate the habit of assembling and socializing. The change in the repertory reveals a social revolution. The previous hunters were dependent on their prey which was the focus of their cognitive concepts. The change in the economic background caused a change in the cognitive focus which is reflected by the rock art style and subject matter. In the new economic pattern, man becomes the centre of gravity. Awareness on society and



During the excavation and tracing of the city of Dos dell'Arca, Capo di Ponte. Up, rests from the sanctuary of Iron Age. Tracing of a cabin bottom from Bronze Age. (Picture E. Anati ; W07538) ; Excavation of the North "thick wall" dating from Bronze Age. (Picture E. Anati; WARA W07535).



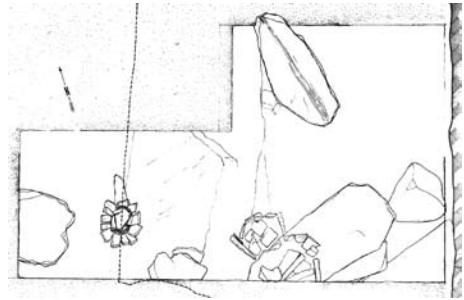
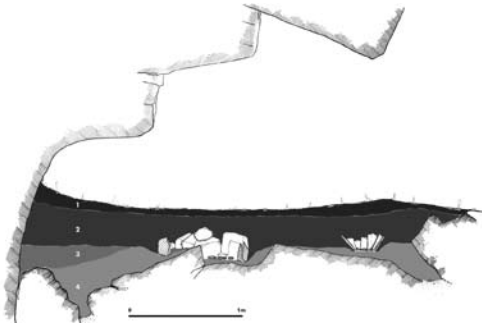
Silex tools from Old Bronze Age. Dos dell'Arca : arrows points, blades, scrappers on nucleus and blades, sickle elements (WARA W07539) ; ceramics from cabin bottom from middle Bronze Age, Dos dell'Arca (WARA W07540)



socialization reflects the importance of team cooperation and the need of conviviality. The hunters were totally integrated, they had no questions on socialization as each clan was a spontaneous team for hunting and survival. The new comers were organized in larger human units which required coordination and planning. The new patterns and themes of rock art seem to indicate that human relations are no more as spontaneous and obvious as they used to be. From the horizon of Hunters-gatherers to that

of Food-producers the social structure had become more complex, more sophisticated and also more problematic. The trend of growing complexity of society had been in progress ever since.

In the late phases of Period II large ghost-like anthropomorphic figures appear, some of them beings over 2 m. high. They provide evidence of an ideology concerning human-like supernatural beings. They had become part of the collective imagination and of the mystic-mythic ethnic heritage. They probably



Excavations in shelter II of Foppe di Nadro with Meso-lithic and Iron Age levels. (W07562, W07560).



Three Paleolithic silex, Mesolithic industry tools and Iron Age pot found in a same shelter. (WARA W07561)



were representations of mythic ancestral spirits or some other sort of non visible idealized kin entities.

The Camunian Periods I and II correspond to the Neolithic of the fertile lands of the plains. During the Atlantic climatic stage, also called *Climatic Optimum*, Valcamonica was a rocky land but had forests of firs, alders, oaks and some grass-land that fostered animal grazing, as proved by the presence of the pollens in geological logging carried out in various sites of the valley.

The main localities of rock art in Valcamonica corresponding to the Style I-II are Foppe di Nadro, Naquane, Luine di Darfo, Selero, and Sonico. Archaeological settlements are at Torbiere d'Isèo and Castello di Breno. The material culture is that of the Neolithic with pottery. The pottery is characteristic of cultures generally present in Northern Italy, as the so-called Bocca Quadrata (Square mouth pots) and that of the Lagozza Culture. According to current dating, these types of vessels had been used for a long period of time, from the 6th to the late 4th millennium B.C. The contemporary rock art represents

figures of axes and other tools used in the same period.

The style of Period I is synthetic and essential, with worshippers accompanied by adoration symbols, such as the solar disc, the axe, and other instruments. In the subsequent Period II there are also representations of rituals and social and economic gatherings. Some scenes represent ceremonial occasions; weddings, worshipping of the dead and sun worshipping. Cult activities were varied and occupied a relevant place in daily life.

As mentioned already, toward the end of Period II, large-size figures of anthropomorphic ghosts or "idols" emerge (Period II-B). This new theme is the expression of an ideology introduced from outside. Figures of anthropomorphic spirits are already present in central and Eastern Europe at the beginning of the 6th millennium B.C. in particular in the Danubian culture of Lepenski Vir. In Valcamonica these images appear later, and precede of some centuries the occurrence of menhir-statues and the monumental compositions of Period III-A. The presence of a new ideology, concerning beliefs in anthropomor-



Big moose with a smaller animal (cervid or caprid). Both belongs to the Proto-Camunian style (WARA W00224).

Big elk figure with sub-naturalistic style, overcome by an "anthropomorphic spirit", 2 meters high, from Neolithic Period (Period II-B). (WARA W00387). The graceful figure, of important size, reveals the mentality of hunters peoples. In Valcamonica as in other peripheral regions, the last Paleolithic hunters probably found a great hunting territory there. Luine Park, Darfo, B.T.



phic supernatural spirits, is spreading over large parts of Eurasia in the course of the Neolithic Period. An open question concerns the possible relation between these three horizons, are they culturally related? In other words, is there a sequential conceptual link between the Lepenski Vir anthropoid spirits of the 6th millennium B.C., the "spirits" of V.C. Period II-B of the 5th millennium B.C., and the menhir-statues of V.C. Period III-A, belonging to the late 4th millennium B.C.?

Weapons and tools represented in Periods I and II are spears, boomerangs, bows and arrows, paddles, and agricultural tools (hoes and ploughs). The first domesticated animals appear. Initially only dogs; oxen and then

goats follow. Technological and cultural innovations include the production of earthenware, animal breeding, and growing vegetables. The technological level demonstrated by engravings includes instruments, such as ploughs, traps, looms. Essential economic activities are hunting and fishing, which are integrated by agriculture and animal breeding. Figure of certain objects and structures, such as axes and ploughs of exotic origins, indicate an incipient, organised trading. The social structure is represented by clans and small tribes.

Religious beliefs concern sun worshipping and worshipping the dead. Toward the end of Period II the repertoire becomes richer



Quartz pecking tools and rests from coloring materials, found at the bottom of a decorated stone. The rock engravings were made with very simple stone tools. The discovery of coloring material with use traces and of grind stone suggest that the rocks could have been colored. (Picture E. Anati ; Records WARA Documents)

with the evidence of animal worshipping, especially dogs that were the first domesticated animals. The image of a winged anthropomorphic being, referred to as “butterfly idol”, is match by similar figures in the Balkans.

Objects of the Neolithic coming from the excavations of the shelter Riparo Gaban (Trento, Italy) are decorated with themes similar to those of Camunian rock art: schematic anthropomorphs, similar repeated ideograms, as well as an anthropomorphic figure similar to the “spirits” of Valcamonica.

In later and more evolved phases there are some cases of resemblance with rock painting at the complex of Porto Badisco (Puglia, Italy) and several rock paintings of an evolved phase of Levantine Spain. The problem of apparent typological analogies with elements of the Atlantic megalithic culture is attractive, but it requires further consideration. Concepts and functions of the Valcamonica rock art and those of the funerary Atlantic megaliths, despite some typological similarities, may not be exactly the same.

These Camunian rock art periods are contemporary with the cultures of impressed

pottery of Bocca Quadrata and Fiorano. There are some figurative analogies with decorations on pottery in the contemporary cultures of the Danubian Neolithic. The Late Neolithic of Central Europe was a period of international contacts, trade gradually developed and ethnic entities were aware of the deeds and customs of other human groups.

While the Camunian tribes were producing rock engravings, the first urban civilisations were emerging in the Near East. In Egypt, Pre-dynastic cultures were already moving toward more complex societies, with burial centres, large-scale ceremonies, and a hierarchical social structure headed by an aristocratic regime. In Valcamonica, as in most parts of Europe, autonomous human groups were maintaining a simpler social structure.

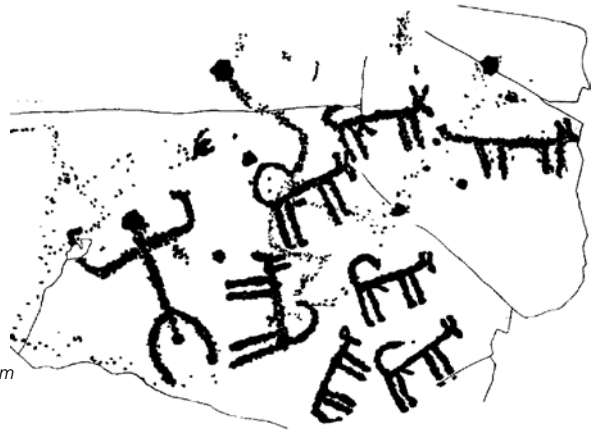
The large-size “spirit” figures are accompanied by symbols or ideograms and are connected to groups of cup-marks. They may well represent ancestral spirits with specific attributes, the solar disk, the axe and other tools are frequently associated to them. Some are also connected to sexual symbols referring to copulation and fertility.



Composition of schematic anthropomorphs from final Period I or Period II-A. Several characters couples appears, in which one has an head and the other doesn't. Bottom left, a figure is represented with large hands and rays emanating from its body. The last bottom figure is masked with an animal head. Parc de Naquane, r.50, Capo di Ponte. (Picture E. Anati ; WARA W00293).



Feminine prayer with reticulated figure, looking anthropomorphic. Period II. Foppe di Nadro. (Picture E. Anati ; WARA W00358).



Prayer figure with a group of dogs, the first animal for which domestication is known in Valcamonica. Period II. Foppe di Nadro, r.27 ; Réserve Régionale des Gravures rupestres de Ceto-Cimbergo-Paspardo. (Picture E. Anati ; WARA W00363).

Toward the end of Period II the first anthropomorphic images on standing stones or monoliths appear. The so-called menhir-statues and anthropomorphic stelae are shaped, engraved or painted on stone blocks.

The stone is the body of the "supernatural" being. Such representations reflect a new element in the ideology which is reaching Valcamonica around 3.300 B.C. Similar monuments had appeared earlier in various parts of Europe and Asia in the course of the Neolithic Period.

Camunian Period III-A (3,300 – 2,500 B.C.)

The menhir-statues and the monumental compositions are the issue of a new ideological or religious movement which emerged in the 6th millennium and spread over Europe in the 4th millennium B.C. It developed peculiar characters in the Central Alpine Region which includes, besides Valcamonica, also Valtellina, the Aosta Valley, South Tyrol, and the Swiss Cantons of Valais and Grison. Valcamonica and nearby Valtellina develop a highly metaphorical iconography. Monu-



The "butterfly-idol", engraving from Period II (Neolithic).
Foppe di Nadro. (Tracing CCSP ; WARA W00518).



Coren del Valento. Sun cult scene (WARA W00515).



Plough and bovid heads are a testimony of agriculture activities and a new focus on bovids that become an important mean of work and food. That is why they become divinized. During Neolithic, such figures indicates not only the presence of a new economy, but also of a new ideology. (Tracing CCSP ; WARA W00356).



Luine. Idol or mask-looking figure. (WARA W00522)



Three superimposition phases with different graphemes. In the third phases, in black, we can see a dagger with leaf-shaped blade, similar to the silex blade found in Chevron in Switzerland (on the side), from Recent Neolithic. Dos Cui, Réserve régionale des Gravures rupestres de Ceto-Cimbergo-Paspardo. (Tracing CCSP ; WARA W07721). ; Picture Musée archéologique Cantonal de Lausanne; Records WARA W07753).



Large anthropomorphic figure and meander-looking form : head, body and arms are made of several meanders. Under the main figure, one can observe the image of an idol with zigzag decorations. Recent or Final Period II. On the left, a small dagger from Bronze Age is superposing the image. Parc de Luine, Darfo, B.T. (Tracing CCSP ; WARA W02021).





Copper Age objects from Fontanella Mantovana, Remedello culture. Triangle shaped blade in copper, dagger blade, spear point and silex arrow point, ax in polished stone and silex hammered ax. At this period the use of metal tools is attested. (WARA W06157). Detail of the composition of a engraved dagger on the "Masso di Cemmo" 1 (Picture E. Anati ; WARA W06190).



mental compositions and menhir-statuses represent "beings" with a tripartite structure. A solar or lunar image represents the head, the bust or central part of the body displays depictions of the breast and sometimes neck-

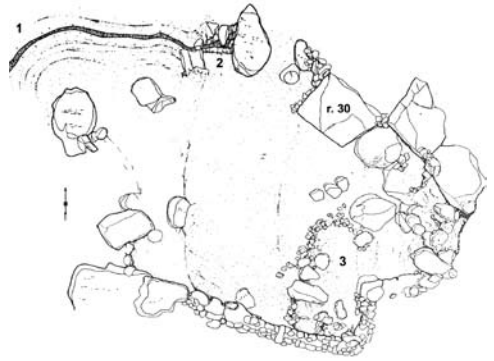
laces for feminine figures and of weapons for masculine figures; the lower part may have the figure of a pubic triangle, a snake, or two weapons positioned as the legs of a vaguely anthropomorphic being.

"Five dagger rock". Monumental composition from Period III-A, discovered in 1957, which became the emblem of the Centre Camunien d'Etudes Préhistoriques. (Picture E. Anati; WARA W05642).



Ossimo 9. Engraved stele with mythological scene. The sun disk and the two axes are characteristic of the Copper Age period. (WARA W07605).





Foppe di Nadro, r.30 (Records WARA W07599). Cabin bottom next to a Copper Age engraving and a water source (WARA W07601).

Such representations appear at the same time as the earliest depictions of wheels, daggers and other metal weapons. It is the beginning of metallurgy in the area. The met-

allurgy was not invented here, its knowledge was imported and arrived with a new ideology which was assimilated and reshaped. The monumental compositions reflect the

*Below: Caven 3, Teglio (Valtellina). Monumental Copper Age composition. (WARA W05354).
Right: Cornal 1, Teglio (Valtellina). Monumental Copper Age composition. (WARA W05645).*



vision of a supernatural being conceived as the union of three logoi: the head being the sun, the moon or the sky, the bust having the attributes of the living people, power, procreation, tools of daily life; the lower part had the images of the pubic triangle or of what is hidden, the underworld. When the monument is standing this third section is below surface as it is digged into the soil. The concept of the "Purusha" giant which is englobing the universe is the prototype of

the tripartite Indo-European conception in the Sanscrit mythology, which was memorably analysed by Claude Levi-Strauss.

From the discoveries in Valcamonica it seems that the concept of a tripartite universe evolved from the standard and widespread pattern of the menhir-statues in the 4th millennium B.C. At the present state of research, such highly metaphorical tripartite pattern has its earliest expressions in the Alps and specifically in Valcamonica and Valtel-

Part of the site "Mappa di Bedolina". (Picture E. Anati; WARA W07614).



"Mappa di Bedolina", Capo di Ponte. Topographic composition from Bronze Age, completed during Iron Age by the addition of a few cabins. The first topographic representations are aged from the Neolithic period. The subject is still represented until Recent Bronze Age. Tracing CCSP ; WARA W00645).





Two-wheeled charriot figure from Valcamonica, compared to a Mycène stèle. The four rays of the wheel indicates the attribution of this engraving to Recent Bronze Age. Parc de Naquane, Capo di Ponte. (Tracing CCSP; WARA W01937; picture E. Anati; WARA W07797).



lina. It is therefore not unlikely that it was born here. If such hypothesis is confirmed by future investigation, it would lead to far reaching conclusion about the place of origins of Proto-Indo-European ideology.

There is a deep conception in the view of a universe conceived in anthropomorphic shape, in which sky, earth and underworld make a global unity in the shape of the human body. The archaic world vision of the binary order (male-female, light-darkness, day-night, kin-no.kin) is being replaced by the tripartite concept. It is a new way of thinking. The shadow of a prehistoric prophet is likely to be behind such concept.

Period III has been divided into two sizable stages, III-A and III-B-C-D that reflect two different types of cultures, beliefs, and social organisations. The first one corresponds to the Calcolithic, the second one to the Bronze Age. Period III-A marks the beginning of metallurgy in the area, it lasts from 3,300 to 2,500 B.C., that is the early phase of the Sub-boreal climatic stage.

Its main rock art localities known in Valcamonica are Capitello dei Due Pini (Paspardo), Borno, Ossimo, Bagnolo di Malegno, Cemmo di Capo di Ponte, Corni Freschi and Luine di Darfo-Boario Terme. The main known archaeological settlements where this period is documented are Castelliere di Dos dell'Arca,

Torbriere d'Iseo, Castello di Breno, Altopiano di Ossimo-Borno. Material culture consists of various *facies* of the Calcolithic: on the basis of tools and weapons represented, the evolved phases are associated with the Redemello culture.

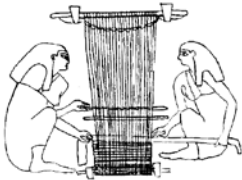
The iconographic style is characterised by monumental compositions with astral, earthly and underworld symbols that are arranged in canonical order. Weapons are numerous and represent metal objects. On the basis of dating established from archaeological levels and the findings of archaeological objects analogous to those engraved, the copper industry arguably began to arrive in Valcamonica around 3,300 B.C. The shapes of dagger, axes and halberds are like elsewhere in Northern Italy and Central Europe in this period. Along with metalwork, new implements arrived in the valley: wheels and wagons; a new age started for communication and transportation.

Domesticated animals represented in rock art are numerous: besides dogs, ox and goats, now there are pigs as well. The important technological and cultural innovations, such as metalwork and the use of wheels, bring changes in daily life. Essential economic activities include animal breeding, agriculture and hunting, with the added complements of metalwork, organised trade, and probably

Left: Tracing CCSP; WARA W01939).



The vertical weaving loom, similar to Valcamonica's engravings, is represented in several archeological contexts of Mediterranean sea :

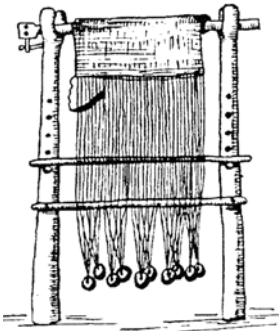


Beni-Hassan, Egypt ca 2000 B.C.



Painting on a greek vase.
Vth century B.C.

Restitution, Iron Age weaving loom, Poland.



Weaving loom engraved on the "Great Rock" of Naquane, Capo di Ponte. (Picture E. Anati; WARA W07620.



professional craftsmen. Animal breeding appears to be a major activity and concern.

The socio-political structure is reflected by the monumental composition: a tripartite social organization: celestial head, body with weapons and tools indicating warriors and artisans, and a lower class down to earth. The planning and organization of the rock art compositions seem to reflect the tribe with an authoritarian government and social stratification.

The clergy appears to have covered an important and powerful position. The religious beliefs reflected in rock art are the expressions of a cosmological religion that views the world as the supreme force. The universe is the divinity itself, a divine body made of three *logoi*: sky, earth and the underworld.

The widespread patterns of the menhir-statues were images of ancestral spirits related to the tribal traditions and considered to have blood relations with the tribe. A true revolution takes place in the vision of the supernatural. The tripartite entity displays a new concept, of a supernatural being beyond and above the kin ancestors, replacing the local ancestral cults with that of a God, father and owner of the universe, being the universe itself.

The rock art compositions of this period are among the most elegant, best planned and suggestive works of the whole Camunian cycle. As the places of worship grow in number, priesthood is arguably acquiring a dominant role, a privileged class in a regime that looks like an oligarchic-theocratic system.

The menhir-statues and monumental compositions, display the iconographic variants of this period in Valtellina, Alto Adige, Lunigiana, Val d'Aosta, Swiss Valais, French Midi, Corsica, the Iberian Peninsula and beyond, spreading between Central Asia and Morocco, till the Atlantic coasts of Europe. Such diffusion probably suggests a religious movement of substantial significance. The peculiar character we described of Valcamonica may represent a sect or a specific denomination of the religion characterized by the menhir-statues which had reached beyond ethnic and linguistic borders.

Material culture, weapons, and objects represented in rock art are similar to those of the Baden culture, in the Danube Valley, the cultures of Remedello and Rinaldone in Italy, and those of the Rhône Valley in Switzerland and Southern France.

While the Alpine region is in the Chalcolithic period, the city-states of the Early Bronze Age develop in the Near East. Parallel developments include the first Egyptian dynasties, the urban cultures in the Near East and in the Balkan area. The Atlantic and Mediterranean megalithic cultures, acquire different patterns in the various areas of their distribution, eventually including some of the major prehistoric monuments of Europe, such as the famous temples of Malta or Stonehenge in England.

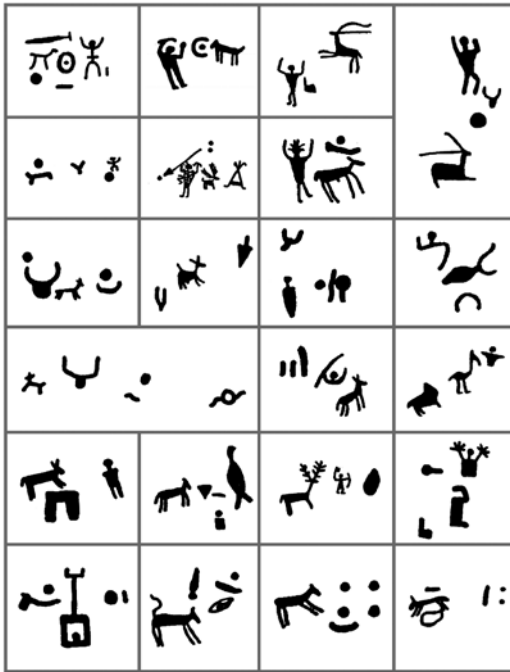
In the course of the Chalcolithic period, a typological evolution is followed in Alpine rock art. The menhir-statues and the monumental compositions were at first simple anthropomorphic icons on monoliths. They developed into the tripartite cosmological images; then these images became more complex and were accompanied or surrounded by other figures such as animals, weapons, solar and astral disks and rectangular symbols which represent the earth, land or territory.

The divinity which represents the entire universe is accompanied by metaphors of plenty like the animals, symbols of power like the weapons and other symbols representing fertility, wealth, rank, peerage and other attributes.

The figures of domesticated animals are numerous. The depictions include the pig in addition to the dog, the ox and the goat, which were previously present.

Engraved rock surfaces and menhir-statues are concentrated in cult sites, open-air sanctuaries where tens of such monuments may be found in one area, the presence of fire places near the menhir-statues, heaps of stones and other stone structures, indicated a wide range of performances and cult activities.

According to the rock art depictions, while the Neolithic people were primarily agriculturalists, the Chalcolithics were primarily pastoral people, raising stock and



Some symbolical composition from the "Great Rock" of Naquane. Ideograms and pictograms form a visual language. This kind of association can be considered as a sort of proto-writing at Recent Bronze Age and beginning of Iron Age. (WARA Documents)

using hunting and gathering along with domestication of animals.

Toward the end of the Chalcolithic period and the beginning of Bronze Age, around 2.500 BC a new change takes place in the style of rock art. The same symbols that were represented on monumental composition are now spread on the entire rock. The shape of the daggers and the axes are no more Chalcolithic, they are Early Bronze Age. The focus of interest is no more the tripartite entity. Single figures that were part of the monumental composition and of the iconography of the menhir-statues in the Chalcolithic period are now represented and probably worshipped individually. Another aspect of the iconographic development is illustrated by strange compositions of weapons which together make a sort of anthropomorphic being.

The evolution of subject matter and style in the rock art of Valcamonica shows the shifting of an Alpine society from the stage of hunter-gatherer to that of early agriculturalist, to a pastoral society, to the formation of Bronze Age village society.

A special interest concerns the change in the religious expressions of this population from the Epi-palaeolithic hunting cult to the Neolithic concern for ancestral spirits to the pantheistic cosmological religion of the Chalcolithic to the cult of power and weapons which characterized the Early Bronze Age.

The rock art of a small valley in the Alps has provided the depictions which illustrate the change of the way of life and the way of thinking from pre-agricultural times to village society.

Camunian Periods III-B-C-D (2,500 – 1.200 B.C.)

The stereotyped syntactic structures of rock art, menhir-statues and monumental compositions are characteristic of the Camunian period III-A, They are discontinued at the end of this period. Changes in the themes and style of art also herald changes in the social system. Canonical images in organised compositions become assemblages of less structured compositions that reflect a



Four-wheeled charriot with an elongated frame, pulled by two horses. The charriot seems to be trailing an object that could be a funeral urn. Until middle Iron Age, the car was especially a "status symbol" used in ceremonies and important funeral. (Period IV-C, old Iron Age). Parc de Naquane, Capo di Ponte. (Picture E. Anati; WARA W07626; Tracing CCSP; WARA W00601).



softer social discipline. Motifs of depictions change and in each phase figures of tools and weapons contribute to establish a well documented chronology. Periods III-B-C-D last from 2,500 to 1,200 B.C. and cover most of the Bronze Age. Period III-B belongs to the Early Bronze Age. Period III-C relates to the end of the Early and the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age. Period III-D covers the later phases of the Middle and the beginning of the Late Bronze Age till about

1,200B.C. Periods IV-A and B cover most of the Late and the Final Bronze Age. The transition between the Bronze Age and the Iron Age is tentatively dated in this Alpine area around 800 B.C.

The phases of the rock art periods are defined by changes in style and subject-matter which is correlated to contemporary changes in the typology of metal objects and to pottery styles that establish the traditional subdivision of the Bronze Age.



Cerreto di Cemmo. "Incantation" scene. A character without arm nor sex is near two others whom are provided with large hands and sex. (WARA W00647).



Foppe di Nadro. "Nadro Temple". Large building with a series of smaller structures in front. On the frontage we can observe a strange anthropomorphic image and on the roof, axes representations. On the central structure is a large cupmark and at the bottom, other cupmarks are placed in series on the sides of the composition. It is probably a "marai" or the spirit house. (Period IV-C, Old Iron Age). (Tracing CCSP; WARA W00586).



Highly symbolical composition; in center, a large phallic figure with a liquid spouting out. Inside the phallus are represented "palettes", probably tools considered as having magical powers. Paspardo. (Tracing CCSP; WARA W07759).



An ithyphallic character is sodomizing a horse. The scene is completed with a sign representing a knot, union and alliance symbol. An extremity of the rope has a phallic form. Above the man we can observe a series of punctuation that could be exclamations. Next to it, a character masturbation scene. Coren del Valento. (Tracing CCSP; WARA W00570).

The climatic stage is the Sub-boreal. The relevant localities for rock art are Naquane, Bedolina, Seradina (Capo di Ponte), Foppe

di Nadro and Dos Cui (Ceto), Luine (Darfo). The main known settlements are at Luine di Darfo-Boario Terme, Lovere, and Dos



Erotical scene. A group of images in which appear, on the right, two anthropomorphic figures one on top of the other. On the left of those, a feminine figure with a dog the muzzle between her legs. The dog is supposed to give her pleasure. On the top of the two scenes, another character, the legs spread out seems to be ejaculating. Foppe di Nadro. (Picture E. Anati; WARA W07629; Tracing CCSP; WARA W00571).

dell'Arca. Material culture has local *facies* in association with the culture of Polada and, later, that of Terremare.

The iconographic style is characterised by weapons and other objects, but also by those compositions called "topographic maps" which are considered to represent fields and other territorial features.

Toward the end of this period, mythological scenes and anthropomorphic figures in action bring a new stylistic approach of the rock art. Changes like this do not coincide with the beginning of a new archaeological period. The change is rather drastic and it anticipates the character of the rock art in the Iron Age. It appears in the course of the Late Bronze Age. The most common weapons in rock iconography are sub-triangular daggers, battle-axes, spears, and shields. The chronological definition of the numerous depictions of metal weapons and tools is supported by comparable finds in datable archaeological levels of archaeological excavations.

Domesticated animals include dogs, oxen, goats, and pigs; in the later phases of this period, a new domesticated animals appear: the horse which will occupy an important place in the iconography of the Iron Age. Throughout the Bronze Age the most commonly depicted animal is the wild deer which was both worshipped and hunted. Technological and cultural innovations represented in rock art suggest an increase in metalwork

and weaving. The most represented economic activities are in relation with metal instruments that implies both production and trade. Hunting, fishing, agriculture, animal breeding continue, but new economic dynamics develop as a consequence of trade and the accumulation of surplus.

The socio-political structure is the tribe whose authoritarian government is less pyramidal and centralised than in the previous period. Beliefs and religion undergo another change. The evidence from rock art shows that the cosmological religion of the Chalcolithic renovates, as the cult of objects and weapons develops. Metal weapons are divinized, as one attributes to them autonomous powers. In later phases the cult of spirits and heroes also spread. Again it is an element of the Iron Age that is present already in the Late Bronze Age. The exceptional documentation provided by rock art on the process of modification of cults and beliefs constitutes a major contribution for the history of religion.

In the course of Period III, at different moments, there are parallels with the rock art of Mount Bego (France), with that of Southern Scandinavia and of the Iberian Peninsula. Some areas of Europe have rock art styles and themes that are rather similar.

Among contemporary cultural expressions there are exceptional megalithic monuments, such as Stonehenge in England. The



"Great Rock" of Naquane. "Procession". The tribe chief is the only one on a horse: he shows the warrior weapons and wears the ritual hairstyle of the priest. We find next to him the "palette" symbol. (Tracing CCSP; WARA W00646).



Bedolina. Scene realized in two successive periods. On the right, a "camunian rose" is protected by a soldier. To that first phase have been added eight warriors that seem to be moving against the oldest character and its symbol. (Tracing CCSP; WARA W01932)

Minoan and Mycenaean civilisations flourish in Greece. It is the epoch of Troy and the events handed on by the ancient chapters of Greek mythology. In Mesopotamia the empire of the Sargonid dynasty was born; later on the Assyrian-Babylonian civilisation followed. Egypt was at the Middle and New Kingdom stage. During this period Indo-European invasions occurred in Europe and the Near East. The Hittite and Hyksos cultures prevailed in the Near East. In Central Italy the Apennine culture was developing.

In the Mediterranean regions dynamic political structures developed with thriving city-states. Sea faring promoted trades. In the Alpine regions, introverted tribes gradually opened up to international relations. The trade of amber and precious metals makes use of transalpine tracks and the mountain regions benefit from these exchanges. Wagons and weapons of Mycenaean type are represented in the rock art of Valcamonica.

Camunian Period IV (1,200 – 16 B.C.)

The Camunian Period IV (1,200 – 16 B.C.) coincides with the later phases of the Bronze Age, the Final Bronze Age and the Iron Age.

Five main typological phases are recognized in Period IV, the first two are related to the Bronze Age and the three other to the Iron Age. The climatic stage is the end of the Sub-Boreal and the Sub-Atlantic. The typical rock art localities in Valcamonica are Carpenè (Sellero), Cimbergo, Capo di Ponte, Nadro (Ceto), and Luine (Darfo-Boario Terme). The main settlements are Dos dell'Arca, Dos Piti-gla, Lovere, Rocca d'Iseo, Luine di Darfo, and Necropoli di Breno. Various facies of the final Bronze Age and the Iron Age show similarities with corresponding sites in Tyrol Alto Adige.

The character of the iconographic style is realistic-narrative with descriptive and anecdotal scenes of daily life, of magic and of mythological nature. Weapons and tools represented include shields, helmets, swords, lances, and axes, all of which are mostly held by people. Figures of isolated tools and weapons are typical of the Bronze Age and tend to become rare in the Iron Age. Many agricultural instruments are represented, such as ploughs, hoes, sickles, small sickles, and picks. There are numerous figures of structures, huts, barns, shrines and temples. There are representations of handicrafts ac-

tivities, such as metalwork and construction of wheels. Domesticated animals are: dogs, oxen, horses, donkeys, goats, ducks, chickens, and geese. The breeding of rabbits appears at later stages. The animal farm is more diversified than in the Bronze Age.

Among technological and cultural innovations represented in the iconography is the industry of iron. During this period writing begins with a local language that was using the Northern Etruscan alphabet. The Camunians learn how to write. Essential economic activities are trading, mineral extraction, metalwork, animal breeding, agriculture, and hunting. The categories of professional warriors and priests emerge. In the initial phases, the socio-political structure is based on the lordships of the hill-forts (*castellieri*). In the evolved phases, during the periods of Etruscan and Celtic influences, the depictions of groups of warriors and the growing number of fighting scenes, present the image of the establishment of a wider social organization and political entity, in which it might be possible to identify an initial ethno-national character.

Beliefs and religion are drastically changed toward the end of the Bronze Age. They include the cult of spirits and heroes. Polytheism emerges with classes of heavenly and infernal divinities. When compared to previous periods, conceptual innovations are considerable. Rock figures often represent pieces of epical and heroic events similar to those of the Germanic mythology.

In the transition period (final Bronze Age) thematic and stylistic analogies with the Urnfield and Proto-Villanovian cultures are evident; in the middle phase there are strong Villanovian and Etruscan influences. In the more evolved phases, Celtic, Raethian, and Venetian influences alternate each other in less than three centuries. International relations and cultural influences appear to move on faster dynamics.

During this period the Assyrian Empire emerges in Mesopotamia, the Hebrew Kingdoms in Palestine have their ups and downs; in Egypt the civilisation of Pharaohs is in decline. The Phoenicians spread trades and their alphabet along the shores of the Mediterranean. Carthago is growing. City-

states thrive in Greece. In Europe the first nations rise and decline. Rome emerges and her domination spreads in Europe.

The latest pictures preceding the arrival, in the year 16 B.C., of the Roman legions led by Publius Silo, display a style which reflects Roman influence. The Camunians were conquered by the Roman culture even before the arrival of the Romans.

Conclusions

The custom of producing rock art as a pattern of culture came to its conclusion with the Roman occupation. Sporadic rock engravings were made in Roman, Medieval and recent times but the spirit was no more the same as rock art was no more a cultural and ritual necessity.

The rock art of Valcamonica appears as an archive of 10,000 years of European history. Over 300,000 pictures are a sort of mirror of the events and contacts that shaped the evolution of human society, from hunters-gatherers to modern way of life. All this immense documentation is recorded and must now be studied. The ancient Camunians did not produce their pictorial "data base" just to embellish the rock surfaces. Rock art was a mean of communication and they used it for communicating messages, for commemorating events, for teaching the candidates to initiation, for operating magic and for other purposes. All the same uses of modern phonetic writing could function with the pictographic and ideographic writing. Prehistoric man was able to read the messages. Research is now progressing toward the goal of decoding the archives left behind. They are providing the major history book ever written on the origins of the European civilization.

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Note

For a more extended version of the same theme and for bibliographic references see: Anati, E. 2008. *The Civilization of Rocks*, Capo di Ponte (Edizioni del Centro), 336 pp.