The recent discoveries in Zurla and Dos Cui
(Valcamonica, 2002)

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Introduction
Also this year researches in Valcamonica have brought to light engravings which had remained hidden under a thin layer of clay for thousands of years. Over sixty colleagues, students and people interested in the subject documented dozens of new engraved surfaces during the archaeological field-work held from 27th July to 14th August 2002 by the Dipartimento Valcamonica e Lombardia of Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici. In some cases, the discoveries have gone far beyond the expectations, being endowed with an extraordinary scientific relevance. In fact, for the second consecutive year, the rocks of Zurla and Dos Cui have revealed their extraordinary amount of prehistoric images: huts, foot prints, big “dancing” warriors, scenes of deer hunting, birds, daggers, ploughing scenes and several symbols, among which a camunian rose and some enigmatic “shovel” figures. These images have been added to the increasing number of engravings belonging to Valcamonica (about 300,000), making the valley the major rock art site in Europe and the first Italian site to be included in the World Heritage List of UNESCO.

Zurla, images and rituals of a warriors’ mythology

The new rocks
Several novelties and important confirmations are the result of the work in Zurla. The discovery of a large rock (R.4) is particularly evocative. It was used during the Neolithic (IV millennium B.C.), and it is characterized by a lot of figures representing schematic prayers, sometimes endowed with “big hands” (symbolizing power), accompanied by topographic compositions, “eight-shaped” patterns of cupmarks, a lot of deep furrows sometimes ending with a spear blade made à polissoirs, dogs and other later figures. These images are superimposed on one another, thus completely covering a few square metres wide surface with a very complex ensamble of hundreds of figures. No doubt this unusual density demonstrates the great cultural value attributed to this place, definitely a point of reference for rituals along the millenia. The importance of this panoramic rock is also confirmed by wide scratches in the upper part, suggesting the possible presence of ceremonial fires and of practices linked to the rock engravings.
Among the other surfaces analysed, some have been recently discovered, some others were only partially known. Most of the scenes refer to the Middle Iron Age (VI - beginning of IV century B.C.); from a stylistic point of view, they can be dated to the period of etruscan influence. Several scenes recur on rocks which were occasionally engraved earlier, with prayers, zoomorphs or enigmatic schematic signs, or later, from the final Iron Age to historical period. This confirms last year suggestions about the extraordinary discoveries on the rocks n. 1, 2, 3, seeing Zurla as a place of primary importance and high artistic quality during the Middle Iron Age, except for R.4 oldest phases. Therefore, the typological and qualitative importance of the place is borne out maybe by the “secluded” location, apart from the main ways of run, almost like a steep cul de sac towards the river, meanwhile near the large areas of Naquane and Foppe di Nadro, with which it shares some important subjects. As already said (Sansoni & Marretta, 2002a), this area was supposed to have a particular value concerning religion and/or initiation, as a further demonstration of a complex way of thinking, often implying a real esoteric “language”, with a strong stylistic and iconographic homogeneity that in other zones is much less stressed (Sansoni & Marretta, 2002b). The choices made here seem accessible to a limited number of people, a refined elite paying attention to aesthetic effects, as confirmed by the high qualitative level of several figures.

Many figures of warriors seem to follow this guidelines. They show a careful and detailed execution and have well-proportioned bodies. Some of them seem to be done by the same artist or at least share particular formal features that could lead to think of an existing “school”, characterised by the imitation of etruscan models, that we call of “the Master of Zurla”. The two couples fighting a dance-like duell (R.1 and R.18) probably belong to this group. They wear radiate helmets and in two cases the heads are detailed until the face profile. The same features are recognizable in few figures in Foppe di Nadro as well. A third duelling and richly dressed up couple is strictly associated with a warrior (perhaps a god) of clear importance, characterised by a showy helmet with crest and by a kopis or makaira (curved-bladed sword of greek/tracian origin). He brandishes the sword with his right hand, while with the left one he holds a big hollow shield typical of this period (R.16). On the near R.17 we can see two warriors made with fine peckings and completed with scratched elements (legs, lances). They are surrounded by more naturalistic warriors (hollow shield with central umbone, sword, developed muscles), very similar to those of the “Master of Zurla” carved a few metres far. Several contemporary but less defined figures are spread all over the area.

**War ideology and funerary symbols**

This group of scenes with weapons might refer to some sort of ritual, not necessarily bloody duels, with comparisons in the classic, etruscan and italic
world. Some of them are linked to funerary ceremonies following mythical tales and events, whose repetition marks the continuous importance of founding actions carried out by gods or heroic ancestors. The single warrior with weapons up could be seen as the celebration of a deity or a remarkable figure connected to it. The frequent association with water birds, rarely carrying a rider, conveys new signs in the funerary field. Water birds, which have been spread in the iconography of central and mediterranean Europe since the Final Bronze Age (XII – X century B.C.), stand out in some scenes in Zurla, generally near anthropomorphs, but above all as a sustain for a hut with an unusual typology, different from actual huts and similar to a small boat with a double bird-shaped prow. This refers once again to the funerary sphere (hut-shaped cinerary urns in clay from Latium, from the villanovian-etruscan zone and from northern Europe), with the water-bird having a probable psychopomp appearance (R.15). Other mythical tales seem to be hidden in the scene with a camunian rose located between a bird and two figures with their weapons up going in the same direction (R.3) or in the panel with warriors wearing a radiate or plumed hat and three very small water birds (R.8). The meaning of this scenes remain obviously still very arguable.

The discovery of a dagger outline nearby has raised a particular interest. It belongs to Introbio-Lovere type of daggers (II-I century B.C.), made in the same scratched technique as in other sites like Pià d’Ort and Piancogno. This weapon is also present in a bas-relief on a roman altar in Valtrompia (a valley near Valcamonica and probably belonging to the same prehistoric culture), which demonstrates the probable sacrificial value of the instrument instead of that of actual weapon. The symbolic importance of daggers and axes has appeared in Valcamonica since the Chalcolithic, going on during the Early Bronze Age and coming out in the Iron Age: the reappearance in a later period may be considered as renaissance of a deep-rooted tradition through the new instruments (we mention also the same repetition of Hellebardenaxt axes of late celtic or roman period).

The discovery of an engraving representing a chariot is very important, as such images are not very frequent. The figure was made with very light peckings: it is synthetic, with no animals, unspoked wheels and a triangular plane to which the yoke board is joint. Among these extraordinary discoveries it can also be mentioned an over one metre high hut, surrounded by big schematic prayers and particularly enigmatic objects or symbols, according to one of the unusual models which are common in this area.

**Metal, plough and territory**
New surveys at Dos Cui and Foppe di Nadro
The researches carried out at Dos Cui and Foppe di Nadro allowed to enrich the data on a period, the Copper Age (3400 – 2200 B.C.), well-known thanks to the engraved menhir of Valcamonica and Valtellina, but quite poor of evidence as regards rock surface engravings. Because of the impossibility to complete the whole drawing of the site, which is put off to the next archaeological field-work, we can do just some preliminary considerations.
Dos Cui is composed of a single wide surface, whose emerging part has already been drawn completely and studied in the 60s by the CCSP (Rivetta, 1965). The peculiarity and the importance of this rock for the study of camunian rock art were the main reasons for a new examination and a new complete drawing (included the surfaces still covered by soil). The importance of Dos Cui is in fact given by the remarkable quantity of calcolithic engravings (daggers, ploughing scenes and topographic maps), rare on irremovable surfaces (there are some cases in Luine and Seradina). Calcolithic engravings are present with an uncommon frequency of ploughing scenes (13) and are associated with big schematic prayers whose connection with calcolithic figures is revealed by crucial cases of superimposition. This year work has brought to light a large part of surface with previously unknown engravings, similar to those already mentioned, but with new cases of superimposition between prayers (big hands), topographic maps, daggers and later warriors.
Dos Cui ploughing scenes can be dated to Copper Age (3400 – 2200 a.C.) thanks to the strict connection with daggers of Remedello type. They represent the main concentration of this iconography on a single surface in Valcamonica. All the other examples, associated with daggers and maps (R.23), are located on rocks in the central part of Foppe di Nadro, where another surface discovered this year, above the already marked R.24, represents two new ploughing scenes. Again near R.24, a new surface full of engravings has been found out; it may be the southern part of the same rock. The parts discovered, hidden under a thin layer of soil and bushes, show daggers (we still cannot say whether they refer to the Calcolithic or to the Early Bronze Age), schematic prayers, a possible figure of labyrinth (unfortunately damaged in the low part), huts and Iron Age warriors.

The connection with the engraved menhir
The Copper Age seems to be comparable to the engraved menhir tradition, with features deriving from it (or maybe the opposite) and marked traits. Unlike the menhir, the iconographic material is limited and it is represented by a smaller sub-group of signs (daggers, topographic maps, ploughing scenes, rare halberds). Another important but still obscure fact is the absence of symbols of possible female value, as “vault-shaped” patterns or double-spiral pendants (see below). The triad composed of daggers-maps-
ploughing scenes can be found also on the menhir, where the unique three cases of topographic maps are nearly always associated with ploughing scenes and daggers (Borno 1, Bagnolo 2 and Ossimo 8, which does not have weapons). One of the ploughing scene of Dos Cui is located inside a topographic structure, which could be a representation of the territory. Other archaeological sites show the importance of ritual ploughing from the point of view of cults, for example the one found in megalithic contexts with engraved stelae of St.Martin de Corleans (Val d’Aosta).

If compared to menhir, these scenes are made in a less precise way (big peckings, exactly the opposite of the precise and detailed engravings on rocks). The variability in the typology of daggers is remarkable as well. On rocks surfaces we found, for example, daggers with many cupmarks around the knob or details like the joint of the hilt on the blade or the middle notches, features which are almost absent in the camunian menhir. Also the nearly “geometric” order in the composition, typical of the menhir, is here absent. For example, daggers are never put in lines or columns, but they seems to follow a different organization.

The arrangement is apparently random, with weak connections between groups of figures. All these features characterise also the Early Bronze Age weapons compositions, located near calcolithic examples both in Foppe di Nadro and Luine, as to show a direct continuity of cult traditions. The same thing can be found also in other areas, with topographic maps and schematic anthropomorphs. This constant tradition is not surprising and is confirmed even by an archaeological point of view (see below). We find a secondary Calcolithic on rocks, similar to the Early Bronze Age patterns and different from the “official” pattern, common on menhir and ceremonial centres like in Cemmo or Ossimo. It looks like an evidence a latere, made in different ways and with various cult purposes. In Dos Cui and Foppe di Nadro we find calcolithic figures of schematic prayers, completely absent on the menhir, but representing a leit motiv during the Neolithic and characterising the Bronze Age. This may show the persistence on rock of the neolithic tradition which was absent or modified on the menhir. This current seems to last at a different social level, together with the most ancient expressions of male and female prayers, maps and probably cupmarks. At the end of the Copper Age and in the Bronze Age this mixed tradition on rocks prevails, developing this iconography and abandoning the sanctuaries with menhir.

Finally, in Foppe di Nadro there is also a monumental composition of “classic” type (R.30), with a “vault-shaped” pattern, circles, animals and anthropomorphs. It is a big isolated rock located between Dos Cui and the above mentioned rocks in Foppe. Is it the real ceremonial centre in the area, which involves the various expressions analysed up to now, or is it an “orthodox” intervention confirming a threatened tradition?
The discovery of new engraved menhir in Campolungo (Cedegolo)

The discovery of new engraved menhir during last year archaeological fieldwork is a good example of the difference between this iconography and rock engravings. In the summer 2001 we found in Campolungo (Cedegolo, Valcamonica) two engraved boulders dated to the Copper Age and part of a third one inserted into the external wall of a building (we know about a fourth menhir kept inside the building taken away by the government authorities some days later). The menhir n. 1 is shows depictions organized in different levels: the symbol of the sun in the shape of deer horns in the upper part, then a single double-spiral pendant (the association with sun disk and weapons is not frequent), then six daggers of Remedello type put in two columns, in horizontal position and with converging points, and six parallel horizontal lines in the lower part. The menhir n. 2 is more complex and don’t show any of the elements seen so far. There are instead anthropomorphic figures, together with animals typical of this period (maybe female fawns and a boar or pig) and obscure horizontal signs with a vague triangular shape, perhaps arrow points or the symbolic drawing of daggers. This rock has been engraved in different moments, with two superimposed rows of anthropomorphs in the upper part of the engraved side. The small fragment of into the wall (menhir n. 3) has an inverted “vault-shaped” pattern, made by a lot of concentric circles arches, and a smaller circle recalling the “female” menhir iconography found in Ossimo (Fedele, 1995). Originally the boulders must have been located not very far, together with other similar elements which were probably destroyed by the building activities carried out in the area. Anyway, these discoveries lead to think about the existence of a new important calcolithic concentration in Valcamonica. In fact the site of Campolungo (Cedegolo), on the left orographic side of Oglio river, joins now the “traditional” sites known so far: the group around Capo di Ponte (Cemmo boulders, Plas – Capitello dei Due Pini, Foppe di Nadro R.30), the group in Malegno – Ossimo – Borno, the isolated boulder of Corni Freschi in Monvecchio di Darfo. Today this new site represents the most northern concentration of menhir known in Valcamonica. The four monuments are the only examples of this typology known on the left side of the valley, so far characterised in this period by big isolated boulders (Foppe di Nadro, R.30) or by uncommon engravings on rock walls (Plas – Capitello dei Due Pini).

Conclusions

The contemporary presence of engravings dated to the Early Bronze Age on the same rocks maybe indicates a final phase of the Copper Age, when the previous composition rules and the mobile support were less frequently used or completely abandoned, thus leading to the known results of the Bronze
Age. The new interpretation of calcolithic rocks and sites during the Iron Age seems to be also more relevant. Dos Cuì shows the clear example of three warriors made in a wonderful way, with long sword and hollow shield with a boss in the middle; no doubt it is one of the main artistic creations of the Middle Iron Age. In the upper part of the surface there are other figures belonging to this period, as for example huts, footprints and other warriors. The same recurs on other rocks in Foppe di Nadro, in Seradina III (R.28) and in Luine. Recent discoveries in Ossimo (Poggiani Keller, 1996), Cemmo (Poggiani Keller, 2000), Teglio in Valtellina and perhaps Luine constitute an archaeological evidence of the re-use of calcolithic sites during Iron Age. In well-known centres with calcolithic stelae, as for example the Lunigiana complex and the northern Apulia, these monuments reappear exactly during the Iron Age. It is clear that Iron Age people showed an interest in putting new life in the Copper Age tradition, and Valcamonica rock-art is a very interesting example of this merely ideological behaviour. Further analysis in this period will probably show an unsuspected “consciousness” of the past by those people, a past still living on the rocks they choose to engrave again. In some aspect, we face the same problem, as all those periods are in front of us apparently on the same layer and talk to us in a way that through our research we expect to hear and understand once again.

Translated by Nadia Mensi

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