

Valcamonica - archaeological discoveries



Foppe di Nadro R17.

Great warrior with complete panoply and crested helmet in shape of bird – beak. Middle Iron age (VII-V sec. b.C., Etruscan influence).

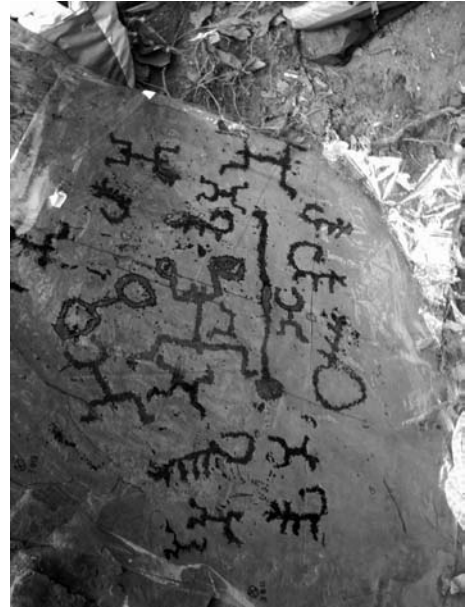
During summer 2004 the equip of *Dipartimento Valcamonica del Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici* has worked in Valcamonica on a new site with prehistoric rock art: the site of "I Verdi" (in the Regional Reserve of Rock Carvings of Ceto, Cimbergo, Paspardo, middle Valcamonica). This small area is between the well-known site of Naquane, the National Park of Rock Carving (to the north) and the smaller Park of Foppe di Nadro (to the south). As we suspected, we found also here engraved surfaces hidden by moss, plants, thin layers of earth: I Verdi provides a link between the two greater concentrations

of rock carvings, yet this site has got its own, well defined, themes and peculiarities.

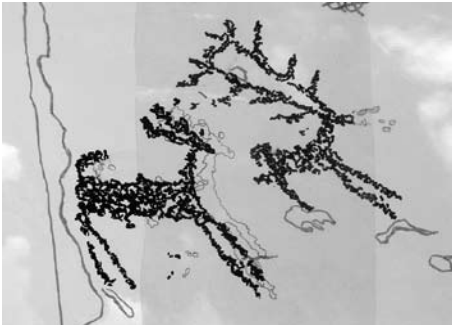
We discovered 7 new engraved surfaces in this site, and worked on 12 rocks with carvings in the border line with Foppe di Nadro, discovering 5 unknown surfaces in this area. The 19 rocks have been cleaned and the panels recorded, both with photos and on plastic sheets; every carving has been recorded in a database. We count a total amount of 814 figures: 126 "anthropomorphs" (human figures), 90 "zoo morphs" (animals), 26 "huts", 91 objects and symbols, 480 other signs.



*Foppe di Nadro R16.
Circles, dots, strange figures and a deer in an enigmatic composition of Middle Iron age (VII-V sec. b.C.).*



*Foppe di Nadro R78.
Prayers, dogs, circles and symbols, probably from Late Neolithic.*



*Verdi R2.
Couple of deer, probably running stag and dam. Middle Iron age.*



*Verdi R3.
A very complex scene, composed in three different phases around a circular shape and what seems to be a long spear in shape of animal (dog?). Prayers of Bronze age, a warrior and a knight engraved in two different moments of Iron age seem to compose a mythological scene.*

Some surface continues under earth and grass, but we were not allowed to dig in order to bring to light the whole engraved panels; in fact we think that about the 20% of figures of this site are still under earth and unknown.

The chronological ambit covers a very long period, from IV millennium BC to historical period; in the site of "I Verdi" we find characteristic figures of every prehistoric age: from Neolithic to Calcolithic, to Bronze and Iron Age. To this last period belongs more than



Verdi R5.

A big praying figure with big hands and big feet is surrounded by a great number of schematic symbols.



Verdi R7

A typical figure of aquatic bird of the Etruscan period was carved near a warrior and a snakelike figure; the same panel during the tracing.



Verdi R7

The panel during the tracing

85% of the rock carvings we have found in the whole area, and that is quite an usual data for middle Valcamonica's rock art. The results of this archaeological field-camp are of great value: the discoveries are of high quality, both in meaning and aesthetic.



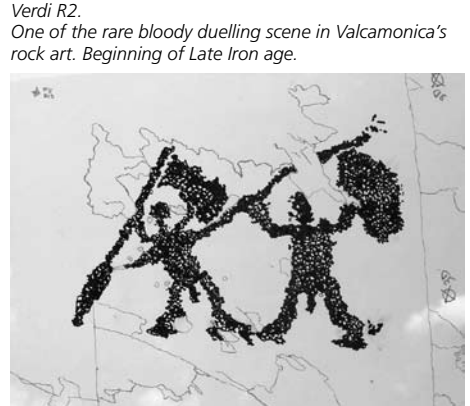
Verdi R7.
 This panel was carved in two phases: in late Bronze-early Iron age were engraved the four dogs; later, in middle Iron age, was added the anthropomorphic figure, in some relation to the dogs.



Verdi R2.
 A hut superimposed on a big horse with his legs over a wounded alpine ibex. Huts and horses are frequently engraved with clear relations one to the other. Late Iron age.



Verdi R2.
 Anthropomorphic figures. The lower figure is a double-headed Celtic god. Late Iron Age.



Verdi R2.
 One of the rare bloody duelling scene in Valcamonica's rock art. Beginning of Late Iron age.

Among the most interesting images we have:

An "androgynous", i.e. a schematic 'praying' figure that can be dated to Late Neolithic, with evidence of the penis and the breasts; near the figure there are other 'praying' figures and oxen, with their symbolic details. This scene gives us the imagine of a world that is essential and hermetic, but it reveals

an undoubted central position of the feminine figure; this fact, from the 3th millenium, will be gradually reduced in behalf of a more virile and martial life.

Four labyrinths, dated to the Etruscan period (middle of I millennium BC). We know now 14 labyrinths engraved in Valcamonica and the recurring here of this theme is surpris-



*Verdi R3.
Exceptional figure of androgynous, probably Late Neolithic.*

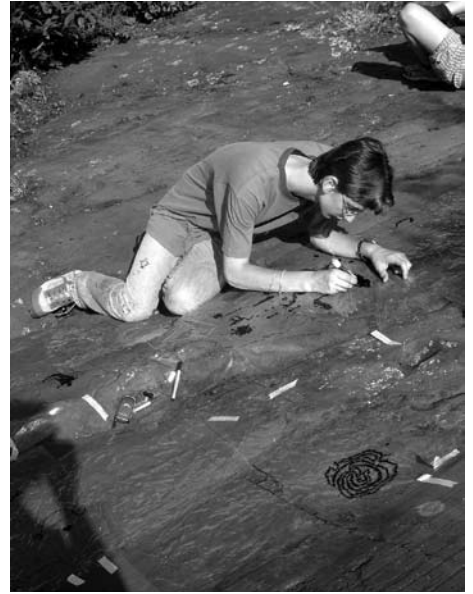
*Verdi R3. (above left).
Anomalous anthropomorphic figure with an enormous phallus, probably a god of Celtic Period.*



*Verdi R3.
Another typical association between huts, dots and animals. Beginning of Late Iron age.*

ing: Valcamonica's rock art shows the most meaningful evidences of labyrinths in Europe from the 2° half of the I millennium BC to Roman age. This subject is often related with birds, axes, warriors, revealing its symbolic and initiatic value.

A praying human figure with two heads, dated to the Late Iron age (Celtic period: III-I century BC). This carving – as three others already found in Valcamonica - could represent a Celtic god (the so-called "Celtic Janus") and confirms a cultural attention



Verdi R1.
A labyrinth-shaped carving of middle Iron age. The same panel during the tracing.

Verdi R1.
A probable representation of a crested helmet (middle Iron age). Not far we have another clear helmet of the same size.



on figures from the Celtic world. To the same framework belong the engraving of a wheel, probably the attribute of Celtic god Taranis.

Praying human figures, dogs and a circular shape, associated in a very complex scene. The focus is on the circular figure (spiral or labyrinth), engraved between two prayers in Late Bronze-Early Iron age. It is almost "hanging" from the stomach of an enormous lengthened dog. In Middle – Late Iron age this scene was reinterpreted adding a knight wearing a decorated armour, a word written in north-Etruscan or "Camunian" alphabet, another knight holding the "elongated dog" as a spear. In the upper part of the surfaces was engraved a rough labyrinth, associated with a bird. The panel suggest a mythical – initiatic value.

Some warrior from Middle - Late Iron age, represented as if acting in a ritual armed dance (?). They wear beak-helmets and a long tunic, suggested by a thick pecking that covers the legs. These elements prove the existence of brotherhoods as were the *Salii* in Rome. Many of the figures are carved with great attention to details and body proportions, typical of the phases of Etruscan influence in Valcamonica.

Mythological figures: animals with lines outstretching from their back, human figures with very long arms, banners ending with a bust or a horse, complex structures (Iron Age).

A helmet, represented in original size, probably from VI century BC. as the only other one known, engraved in the nearby area of Zuria.

A violent duel from Middle Iron age: a warrior strikes with a spear his opponent's shoulders. This kind of scenes is rare in Valcamonica's rock art, where only few other cases are known.

A well detailed carving of a warrior wearing helmet of a complex shape, shield with umbone and sheath of a dagger or a short



Verdi R1.
An animal, probably mythological. Early Bronze age.

sword hanged to the belt. The armour, the formal characteristics and the well-proportioned body are typical elements of the phase of Etruscan influence. The carvings of a bust and two warriors upside down, in an unusual and rare position, complete the panel.

Some warriors and animals engraved with much attention and care; in particular aquatic birds, deer and horses, many of them from Etruscan influence (VII-beginning of the IV century BC).

A figure of a spiral, representing a musical instrument like a buccine (a Celtic - Roman trumpet); it is associated to a four-leg animal: the scene remembers a panel on Rock number 1 in Pià d'Ort (Capo di Ponte) and could be the representation of a particular myth; figure of "trumpet" from Middle and Late Iron age (second half of I millennium BC) are more frequent on the right side of Camonica valley, between Bedolina and Pià d'Ort.

Three inscriptions written in north-Etruscan or "Camunian" alphabet and local language.



Verdi R1.
Panel with dancing (?) warriors that are raising weapons and wearing bird-beck shaped helmets or masks. -Middle-Late Iron Age.

One of them is identical to a preroman Rethic inscription on a pebble found at San Zeno (Verona) and could be an offering name or a god name. A second inscription, difficult to read and interpret, seems to be part of an alphabet.

We are studying with special care, extending the research from Valcamonica to Europe, some special items, such as huts, "palette" (i.e. "shovel-shape" figures), deer, praying schematic figures. We intend to study deeply every subject as a monography, through an analytic account of the evidences, in order to identify the evolution in style and the most frequent associations with other items; finally we want to clarify the role played by each item in Valcamonica's context, also through iconographical comparison with coeval cultures.

We study every area and every rock with particular attention, considering both what has been already published and what is known but still unpublished. Students and researchers work in small groups, starting with a bibliographical and archives research; then, using the topographic map of each area with engravings, they find and analyse every panel

with rock art, take pictures and fill in a detailed file. Data are then compared with the ones from other rock art sites and with the contexts of similar archaeological cultures. As for now, we already have some meaningful results, though the analysis is not yet complete: for example, we recorded 1380 huts from Iron age with very different typologies, whose distribution reveals that rock-carvers in the prehistory selected accurately where and which definite typology engrave; there are also evidences of ritual configurations and recurring associations.

The Camunian rock art confirms its extraordinary value in giving us archaeological, historical, symbolic and religious data; read with attention, they are of very high quantity and quality.

The challenge is: can we ever understand to the best all the information we get from rock art, and transform these finds in an historical document?

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