

# Bridging the gap: rock art and archaeological context in the “Quattro Dossi” area (Capo di Ponte, Valcamonica, Italy)

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

In recent years, University of Pavia and the Soprintendenza Archeologia della Lombardia have started a common research project, aimed at resuming the investigation in the “Quattro Dossi” archaeological area, one of the most interesting prehistoric sites in Valcamonica (UNESCO site n. 94, Italy), due to the combined presence of material remains and rock art. Previous research, conducted by Emmanuel Anati in the Dos dell’Arca portion of this area during the early sixties, was the first extensive archaeological excavation in Valcamonica, and while its original goal of studying both rock art and the material remains certainly was an exceptional scientific endeavour at the time, it never became standard practice, nor was it ever attempted again with the same ambition and scope. Despite their very limited editorial outcome (Anati 1968; Sluga 1969), several features of the material culture of Dos dell’Arca stood out, highlighting some of the general archaeological attributes of the entire Italian central alpine region for the Bronze and Iron Ages. The so called “Breno – Dos dell’Arca” culture, as described by Raffaele de Marinis, for example, encompasses the Central Italian Alps between the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, forming a well-defined archaeological group, with its own specific material features and, notably, its pre-Roman alphabet (De Marinis 1989, 1992). Nonetheless, Dos dell’Arca remained in the background of mainstream scientific research over the last fifty years, partly because of the abundance of other

important rock art areas (e.g. the famous sites of Naquane, Cemmo, Seradina etc.), and partly due to the common misconception that the archaeological potential of this site had been already exhausted.

## Morphology and landscape

The Quattro Dossi (Four Hills) area is located in the municipality of Capo di Ponte (BS), on the left hydrographic side of middle Valcamonica, in the central part of southern Alpine region<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 1). It includes a remarkable sequence of four rocky hills, aligned along the North-South axis, that all together form a compelling landmark in this part of the valley (Fig. 2-3). Each of the four smaller sites contains unique archaeological evidence in the form of rock art, material culture, or both. They are situated at an average altitude of 400 meters above sea level, on a massive conoid of sediments amassed by the tumultuous flow of the stream called “Re di Tredenus” during its descent towards the bottom of the valley, where it joins the Oglio river.

The Quattro Dossi area is located in a particularly narrow portion of the valley, where paths are complicated by the complex topographical conditions. Due to this situation, and considerably more so when paired with the “twin” site of Corno di Seradina (Marretta 2016) on the opposite side of the valley, it displays a perfect strategic spot for controlling the communication and trading routes all along Valcamonica (Pog-



Fig. 1. Map of Valcamonica, Central Italian Alps. The red square shows the location of the rock art sites discussed in the text.

giani Keller 2017).

The emerging bedrock here is the local Permian sandstone known as Verrucano Lombardo, a smooth and levigated geological formation upon which the great majority of Valcamonica rock art was created. The Quattro Dossi area is rich in water: as well as the Re di Tredenus torrent, which flows immediately southwards of Dos dell'Arca, there are several other small streams running between the hills, along with a spring considered to be healing and still well-known by the local people. All in all, the area addressed includes from South

Fig. 2. (below) Topography of the area around Capo di Ponte, Valcamonica (BS, Italy). On the hydrographic left the four rocky hills, here considered together as a unique macro-area called "Quattro Dossi": 1. Dos dell'Arca, 2. Piè, 3. Pisciò, 4. Quarto Dosso. On the hydrographic right, the Seradina area: 5. Corno di Seradina. Two Christian buildings (A. Church of Le Sante, B. Monastery of San Salvatore) enclose the Quattro Dossi area from South to North (GIS elaboration based on LIDAR data by Regione Lombardia, 2015).

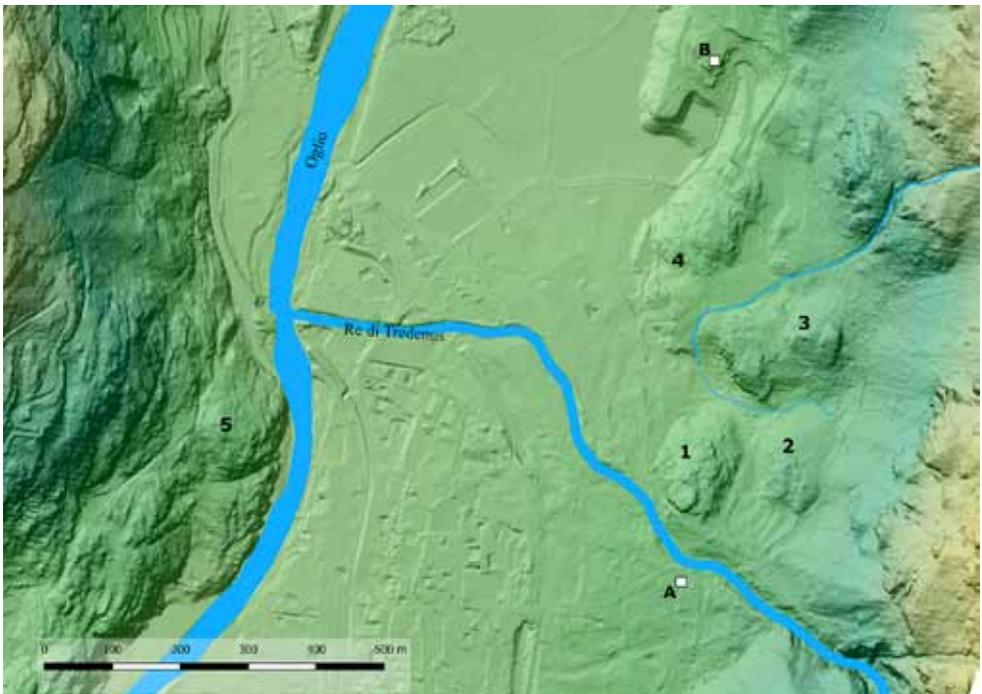




Fig. 3. Overview of Dos dell'Arca taken from Piciò. In the background the Concarena mountain.

to North the sites of Dos dell'Arca, Piè, Piciò and a fourth hill, still unnamed, and forms an archaeological complex of more than 17 hectares, with profuse evidence of prehistoric settlements and ever-present rock art.

### A quick glance at past research

The importance of this area has been established since the beginning of the thirties, when archaeologist and scholar Raffaello Battaglia (Battaglia 1933) explored the land aided by local guides in order to record instances of prehistoric rock art, a novelty at the time, only first mentioned twenty years earlier by Walther (later, Gualtiero) Laeng and in subsequent research by Paolo Graziosi and, especially, anthropologist Giovanni Marro (Marretta 2009a, b; Poggiani Keller 2009a, b). Between 1935 and 1937, the Quattro Dossi area, then referred to, in its entirety, by the vague name of "Piè", was also visited by the German expeditions promoted by Leo Frobenius's *Forschungsinstitut für Kulturmorphologie*, based in Frankfurt am Main (Germany). When World War II began, every archaeological field activity ceased, and the memory of the area was almost lost.

Research resumed in the early fifties and, thanks to Gualtiero Laeng and other scholars of the Natural History Museum of Brescia, in 1957 the site was "re-discov-

ered": notably Laeng wrote to the Soprintendenza mentioning, for the first time, the presence of archaeological materials on the southernmost of the four hills, the one we now call "Dos dell'Arca". Laeng and his colleagues were also the first to name "Piciò", the third of the four hills in the area, highlighting its material evidence, but ignoring the rock art. Following Laeng's report, the young archaeologist Renato Peroni, later to become a famous professor of archaeology at the University La Sapienza in Rome, was assigned by the Soprintendenza to conduct a study in the area, aimed at the documentation and excavation of the prehistoric remains. Unfortunately, his activity in Valcamonica lasted only a year, due to both overwhelming obligations in other Italian regions, and the increasing presence of Emmanuel Anati in the vicinity.

In fact, between 1959 and 1960, the Italian-Israeli archaeologist firmly established his research in Valcamonica, gaining momentum and, each year, widening the area of his work. In 1962, between June and October, he started an ambitious excavation campaign at Dos dell'Arca. The work was conducted with limited attention to stratigraphy, and yet the results were stunning: the site turned out to be a settlement with several phases of use and a chronology that spanned, with long pauses, from the Copper Age (3300-2200 BC) to Bronze

(2200-900 BC) and Iron Age (900-100 BC). House remains with fireplaces, massive stone structures, a great deal of artefacts (flint, pottery and metal), all accompanied by a rock art ensemble of great variety and the same long chronology of the material evidence, were uncovered (Fig. 4). Moreover, three carved rocks were found beneath archaeological stratigraphy, a nearly unique condition in this field of study (Fig. 5).

The publication of the excavation data was carried out between 1968 (Anati 1968) and 1969 (Sluga 1969), separating the two features: the structures and the material culture on one side, and the rock art on the other, and thus establishing a definitive disjunction of the two fields, a fact which still hinders archaeological research in Valcamonica. Quite surprisingly, the crucial find of rock art below stratigraphic anthropic layers was not discussed, and never reconsidered later on.

During the eighties, prehistorian Raffaele de Marinis, resumed the study on a restricted range of artefacts found at Dos dell'Arca for a general reconsideration of the protohistory of the central alpine Italian area (De Marinis 1989). Later on, thanks to a Ph.D. research project, the entirety of

Fig. 4. Dos dell'Arca. Stone walls and archaeological layers during the excavation in 1962 (after Poggiani Keller 2017, p. 100).

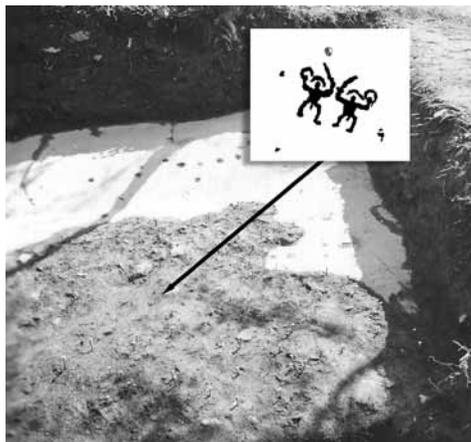


Fig. 5. Dos dell'Arca, R. 8. Rock art emerges in 1962 under deposits rich with pottery and other material remains (after Poggiani Keller 2017, p. 101). Above, on the right, the two fighting warriors found after removing the covering archaeological layers (detail of tracing after Sluga 1969).

the material culture found at the site was finally recorded and analysed between 2011 and 2015 by one of the authors, and the results, partly illustrated here, are due to be published in the coming months. The new project presented in this paper, which can be considered as the continuation of "excavation in the archives" (Rondini 2016), has led to a wealth of unexpected new findings, bringing the total amount of rock art in Dos dell'Arca from the 14 presented in the most recently published catalogue (Ruggiero & Poggiani Keller 2014) to 38, by the latest count (Rondini *et al.* in press).

Here we offer a quick account of the rock art known in the rest of the Quattro Dossi area, following the result of the extensive archaeological survey conducted by the authors between 2016 and 2017. As for the other hills, Piciò was the only one aside from Dos dell'Arca to be mentioned by the same people responsible of the "second discovery" of the area, during the fifties (Rondini 2016). This is the third of the four hills, from South to North, and it's the highest and steepest of all. For certain, some pottery, probably related to a prehistoric settlement, were discovered during the sixties, but unfortunately, all the data remained unpublished. The new survey conducted for

this project has brought the number of engraved rocks in the Piciò area to nine. The second hill, the smallest and lowest, from South to North, is Piè. Briefly studied between 1977 and 1979 by the International School of Geneva, under the direction of Yves Lebas and André Blain, the Piè hill has a total of nine carved rocks. The fourth hill, the northernmost of the Quattro Dossi area, still unnamed due to the lack of proper toponomastic references, was previously unknown, but thanks to the latest research it is now known to contain two engraved rocks.

The Quattro Dossi area, which in 2017 boasts of an astounding number of 58 carved rocks, shows an overall consistent range of rock art subjects covering roughly two main topics: the geometric compositions of earlier phase (the “maps” of Late Neolithic/early Copper Age period, i.e. 3500-2900 BC) and the Iron Age imagery of warriors, horsemen and connected symbols (house/granary images, “palette” etc.).

### Material culture and human presence in the area

The excavations carried out by Anati in 1962, along with the subsequent analysis conducted by the Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici on the recovered materials, quickly proved that Dos dell’Arca had not been exploited solely for rock art purposes, but had been partly occupied by a stable settlement for many centuries. The first hu-

man presence on site is evidenced by several stone tools, generally dated to Copper Age knapping (3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC). It is mostly made up of scrapers, blades and few arrowheads, both leaf-shaped and tanged (Fig. 6: 2-5). Of particular interest is a small, levigated redstone slab marked by an artificial hole (Fig. 6: 1): this can probably be interpreted as a fragmented Bell-Beaker bracer, or wrist-guard (Fokkens *et al.* 2008). A few shards of pottery found during the excavations might be attributed to the Copper Age, but they are in too poor a condition to establish whether the human presence in this period is actually stable, or if we are dealing with sporadic, out-of-context objects. It is, however, worth noticing that the most well represented rock art images found on the rock surfaces of Dos dell’Arca are dated by scholars to the late Neolithic and Copper age, therefore showing a substantial consistency with the materials recovered in past excavations.

After a prolonged hiatus, the Middle Bronze Age (1600-1300 BC) marks a new important phase in the use of the site, revealed by remains of five stone structures and fireplaces, interpreted likely as huts (Fig. 7). They are located in the central and northern areas of the hill, just a few metres from the northernmost sector of Dos dell’Arca, where, at the end of the Bronze Age, a huge stone wall, 30 meters long and 4 meters wide, was constructed (Anati 1968). The study of the numerous artefacts, mostly pottery, recovered in connection

Fig. 6. Dos dell’Arca, material culture of late Neolithic-Copper Age: 1) Bell Beaker bracer or wrist guard. 2-5) Selection of flint artefacts.

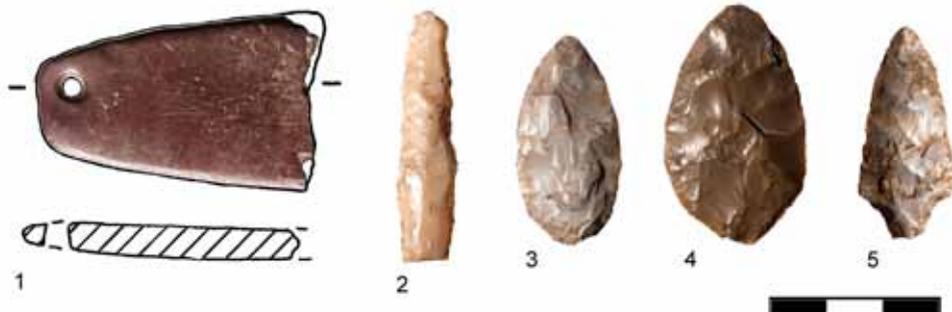


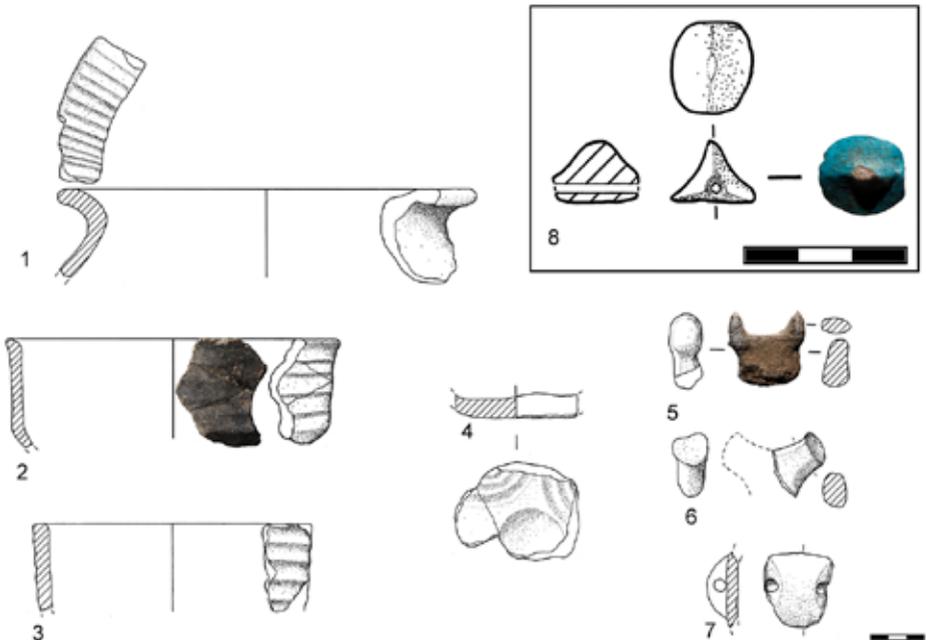


Fig. 7. Dos dell'Arca, original planimetry of the 1962 excavations (elaboration after Anati 1968).

Fig. 8. Dos dell'Arca, material culture of medium Bronze Age: 1-7) Pottery. 8) Glassy Faience button.

with these stone buildings, point to the middle Bronze Age 2 (1500-1400), and identifies this small, but interesting, settlement to the Terramare Culture (Bernabò Brea *et al.* 1997), at the time, the major cultural group of northern Italy. The Terramare Culture is characterized by extended villages, often built on piles, which flourished all over the Po Plain and developed a network of long-trade routes across the Mediterranean.

The most distinctive shapes in this ensemble are the carinated bowls and cups, in black smooth ceramic, with straight or slightly convex sides, small rim and decorative horizontal grooves (Fig. 8: 2-3). Other pottery variants include small ovoid jars and bi-conic vases (Fig. 8: 1), again with groove ornamentation on the surface, and characteristic high handles, shaped as truncated horns (Fig. 8: 6), or as lateral wide appendixes (Fig. 8: 5). A conic button of mixed-alkali glassy faience (LMHK) was also recovered (Fig. 8: 8). This artefact belongs to a rare type of ornamental buttons (Bellintani *et al.* 2005), defined by a high



flattened ridge, parallel to the passing hole, and consistently found in the Italian middle Bronze Age 2 layers of the Terramare settlements (Poviglio, Vicofertile, Parma). It is a prestigious object, often found in association with other valuable items indicating a high status, and represents, without doubt, an exceptional discovery, more so considering the peripheral location and the modest extent of the Dos dell'Arca settlement.

The final phases of the Bronze Age (1300-900 BC) in the Quattro Dossi area are poorly represented, especially in regard to the correlation between material culture and recognisable structures. The pottery datable to the Final Bronze Age (1150-900 BC) does not certainly relate to any of the stone walls excavated by Anati, likely due to the lack of stratigraphic records from the 1962 excavations. To this period belong also several random finds of pottery from the site of Piciò. They are very similar to the ones found in Dos dell'Arca and, for this reason, shows another possible settlement on this nearby hill. As for the rock art, no evidence of figures clearly dating to the Bronze Age have been identified, which implies now an interruption in contemporary rock art and material culture.

The decrease in data from Dos dell'Arca, already noted for the Late Bronze Age, also applies to the first Iron Age (900-500 BC). The finds pertaining to this phase are even less conspicuous, indicating an abandonment of the settlement, or maybe a change in function and a relocation of the population. In this period, however, a general and substantial rarefaction of the settlements is widely attested in the whole valley, a trend that opposes what happens concurrently in the rest of northern Italy, where the main cultural groups of the Late Bronze Age coagulated and centralized, thus entering into the proto-urban phases which led to the historical population later recorded by Classical sources.

From the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC onwards, human presence at Dos dell'Arca regained strength and stability, rapidly flourishing to a well characterized originality — much like the rest of Valcamonica and the whole central alpine Italian region

—, all the way until the Roman conquest, which, in the Alps, dates to the late 1<sup>st</sup> century BC (Rondini 2017). During these centuries, the site takes the form of a small enclosed village, with an internal area separated from the rest of the site and dedicated to ceremonial activities (the so-called "Bastion"). The great northern wall, built during the Bronze Age, was maintained and renovated, while many other stone structures were erected all around the site, probably to strengthen the defences and reinforce the hillsides (Fig. 7). At least one house belonging to this phase has been identified during the excavations in the north-western part of the site. Measuring 4 x 5 meters, it was built with stone foundations and probable wooden walls. The material culture during this period points to the cultural group called "Breno-Dos dell'Arca"<sup>3</sup>, which, at the time, encompassed the whole central alpine Italian region, from the Giudicarie valleys to Valtellina, with a very distinctive artisanal production, its own language and alphabetic variant. In the vast ceramic assembly of Dos dell'Arca, in this instance just showcased for illustration purposes (Fig. 9: 2-5), big pans, often with low handles, large bowls decorated with *Besenstrich*, pots and ovoid vessels, along with a typical bucket vase, the Wattens-type situla, are present. But the most characteristic artefact of all is the "Dos dell'Arca"-type mug (Fig. 9: 1) a recognizable drinking vessel with sinuous profile, short-necked edge bending outwards, bell-mouthed bottom and long belt handle. This mug — along with its slightly similar and little bit older companion, the "Breno"-type — is the main trademark of this culture, which probably credited it with a highly symbolic value, as it was the sole pottery artefact used, not only as a grave good, but also as a tool for rituals. In fact, on the upper part of the Dos dell'Arca hill, dubbed "Bastion" by Anati, several hundred shards related to this type of mug, have been uncovered. Moreover, many of these fragments carried inscriptions in the local pre-Roman alphabet, a hint to some rite performed in this particular sector of the site.

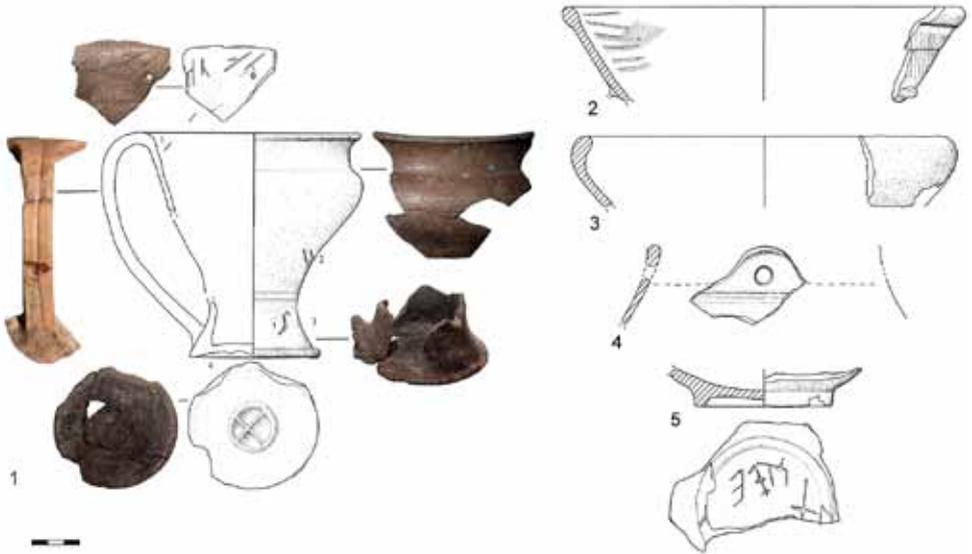


Fig. 9. Dos dell'Arca, material culture of second Iron Age: 1) Dos dell'Arca-type mug, with pre-roman inscriptions and decoration on the bottom. 2-4) Typical shapes of Iron Age pottery. 5) Bottom of a bowl, with pre-Roman inscription.

One of the most interesting features highlighted during the excavations at Dos dell'Arca was the discovery of three engraved rock surfaces below the archaeological layers. Emmanuel Anati noted this particular feature and wrote that this could help the dating of the engravings (Anati 1968). Nonetheless this crucial remark was soon abandoned and the topic was never reconsidered in later work (Fig. 05).

### Rock art at Dos dell'Arca: a complete reassessment

The new findings confirm and, at the same time, expand the distribution and richness of what was known from previous investigations. The first thing to note is that now the rock art is spread all over the entire hill and not just on the top sector excavated in 1962 (Fig. 10). The two main motifs, already highlighted at the time, i.e. the large pecked areas of "topographic" type (Fig. 11) and the figurative imagery of the Iron Age (Sluga 1969), have now been uncovered almost everywhere on the hill. They show a capillarity, which reveals new questions regarding the function through time,

especially in relation to the material culture uncovered on the top.

The geometric trend, which comprises almost  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the new findings, is dominated by the pecked areas of irregular shape, occasionally substituted by more regular units which form the complex images with connected elements belonging to the "topographic" domain. The former, often called "maculae", are generally attributed to the earlier phase of Valcamonica rock art chronology, the Late Neolithic/Early Copper Age period, and are supposedly slightly older than the latter (Arcà 1999, 2004). The figurative trend, with its new examples, suggests an intense and mature exploitation also in the Iron Age, with panels that rival the quality and visual impact of some of the many celebrated rocks of Naquane or Seradina. Here, we will briefly illustrate three of the newly discovered panels at Dos dell'Arca, in an attempt to give an overview of the potential that the project is already providing for the crucial advancement of the field.

Rock n. 24, a large sloping panel at the western border of Dos dell'Arca, is one of the most striking novelties (Fig. 12). This sur-

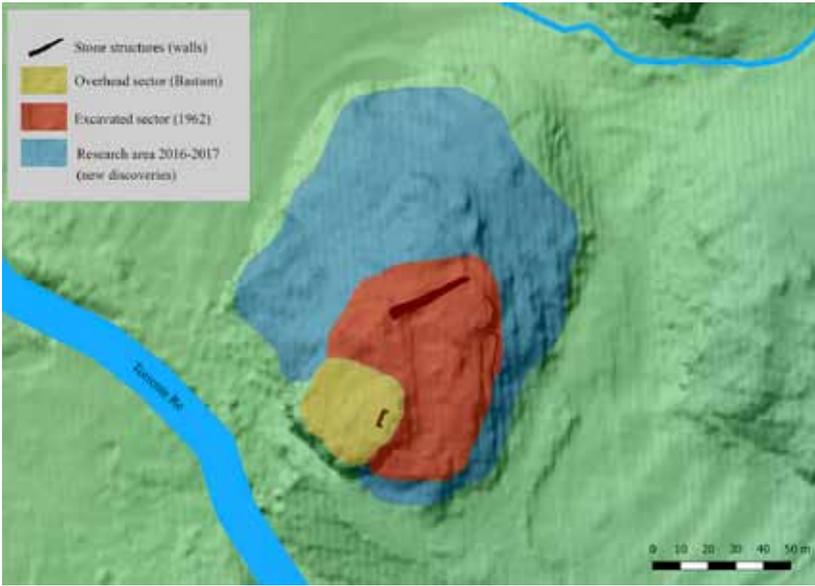


Fig. 10. Dos dell'Arca. Extent of the various archaeological investigation on the hill. In blue the area explored in the present research (GIS elaboration based on LIDAR data by Regione Lombardia, 2015).

Fig. 11. Dos dell'Arca, RR. 6 (a.), 7 (b.), 10 (c.). Pecked areas of generally irregular shape ("maculae") sometimes morph into rectangular or linear images (combined image after Sluga 1969).

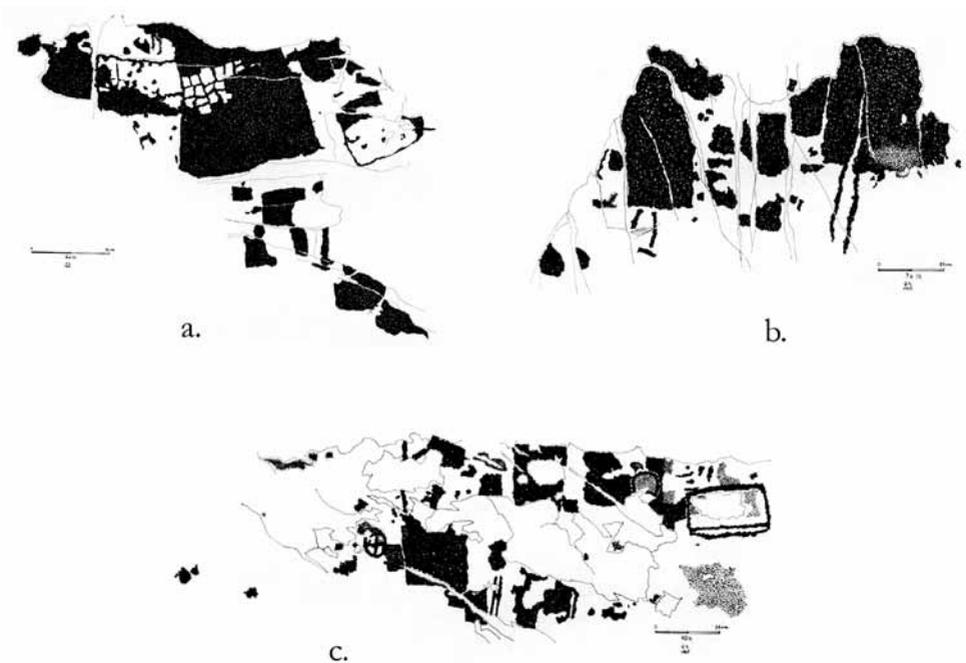
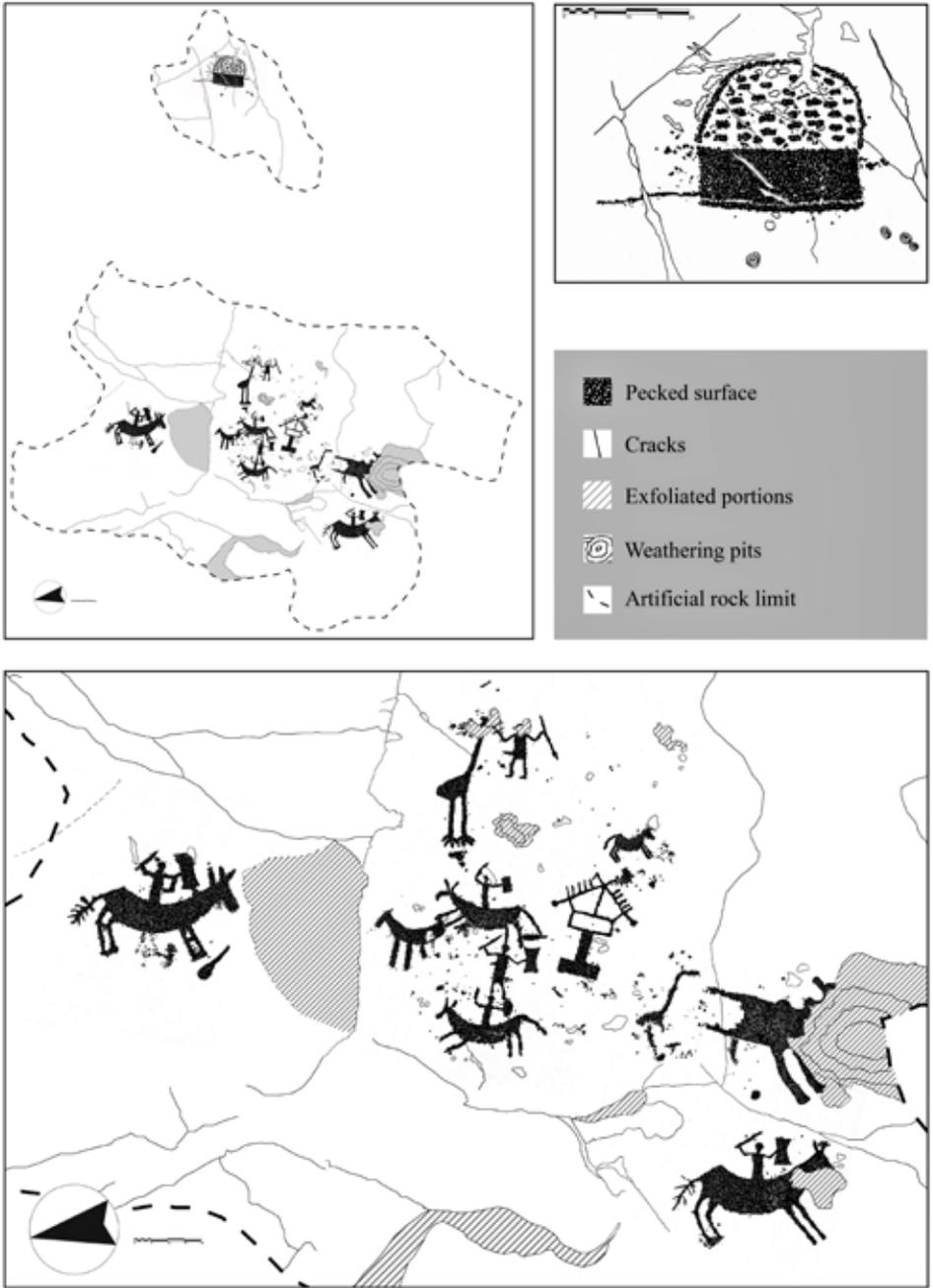


Fig. 12. Dos dell'Arca, R. 24. Rich panel with horsemen, horses, warriors, birds, house and, above, a geometric figure of the "topographic" type (tracing by the authors).





*Fig. 13. Dos dell'Arca, R. 24. Night photography. One of the new huge horses with riders. The horseman raises a sword and the typical oxhide rectangular shield with convex sides which can be seen in several warriors of the same period.*

face was photographed in the thirties but was then lost (Altheim & Trautmann 1940; Battaglia 1933). The main sector is dominated by images of horsemen, produced by exquisite technique and very refined style (Fig. 13). The two major horses stand out, not only because of their unusual size (about 50 cm in length), but due to specific stylistic details, like the "fishbone" tails, the hind legs bent inward and the front ones stretched straight forward. The riders hold swords and oxhide rectangular shields with convex sides. The same armament can also be observed in an infantry warrior placed at the centre of the panel and surrounded by two minor horsemen (with different shields) and two horses.

At the top of the panel, a remarkable



*Fig. 14. Dos dell'Arca, R. 24. Night photography. Bird with long neck and slender legs opposing a smaller warrior armed with spear.*

scene can be observed (Fig. 14). A huge bird and a warrior with his right arm raised toward the head of the animal (unfortunately lost due to heavy weathering) and a long spear in the left hand with the point facing downward. The bird has a very long neck and two stretched legs ending in four-fingered paws. The connection of these two figures, clearly indicated both by their proximity and mutual orientation, make up a scene with suggestions and references found in Classical Antiquity, in which a small man at arms is coping with a huge and threatening bird.<sup>4</sup> A similar animal, perhaps also connected with the only other footsoldier visible on the rock, is depicted on the right of a beautiful image of a single pole house/granary on platform, a type already documented in the area, e.g. on Rock n. 1 (Sluga 1969). The panel is bordered on the right, just above one of the big horsemen, by an even larger representation of an incomplete and mysterious four-legged animal with two strange "humps" on the back of the neck.

The themes depicted on this portion of R. 24 epitomise a significant innovation for the site, which now displays strong ties with the "twin" hill of Pié and with the areas further South of the Re di Tredenus. The single-pole hut (Fig. 15) is in fact a well-known subject of Dos dell'Arca R. 1 and Pié RR. 1-3, having its maximum diffusion throughout the low-altitude rock art areas of Dos del Pater-Pagherina-Naquane-Foppe di Nadro (Fig. 16). In the same group of sites lies the most convincing comparison for the great horses with riders, although oversized horsemen are also known in the extraordinary painted wall of Paspardo-Vite R. 134 (Chippindale *et al.* in press; Stig Hansen 2008), where the large oxhide rectangular shield with convex sides handled by the riders resemble the ones on Dos dell'Arca R. 24. On the basis of traditional and broadly shared chronologies for the Valcamonica rock art of the first millennium BC (De Marinis & Fossati 2012; Sansoni & Gavaldo 2009) the panel can be roughly dated to the Middle Iron Age, i.e. between the 6<sup>th</sup>

Fig. 15. Dos dell'Arca, R. 24. Night photography. House/granary standing on single pillar and basement.



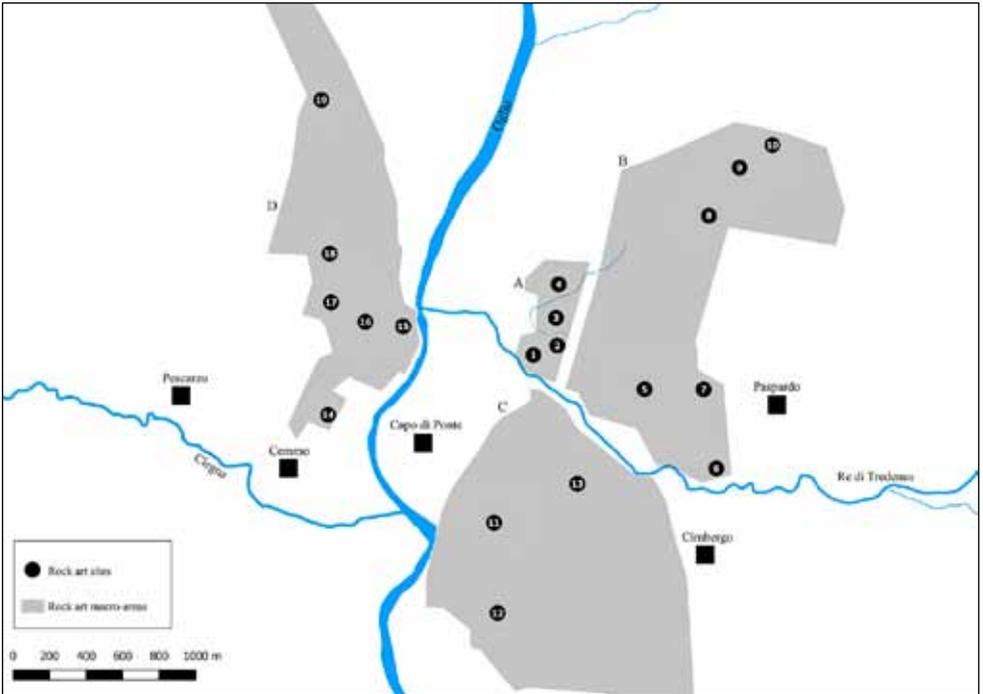


Fig. 16. Map of the main rock art sites around Capo di Ponte and mentioned in the text: A) Quattro Dossi area: 1. Dos dell'Arca; 2. Pié; 3. Piciò; 4. Quarto Dosso; B) Paspardo: 5. Vite; 6. In Valle; 7. Castagneto; 8. Plas; 9. Dos Costapeta; 10. Dos Sullif; C) Naquane-Cimbergo-Nadro: 11. Naquane; 12. Foppe di Nadro; 13. Campanine; D) Cemmo-Seradina-Pià d'Ort: 14. Massi di Cemmo; 15. Seradina; 16. Bedolina; 17. Dos Mirichi; 18. Redondo; 19. Pià d'Ort.

and the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, although with some doubt in light of the possibilities that Dos dell'Arca offers for future clarification on the questionable topic of the chronology of rock art.

A couple of meters Northeast, but still on the same rock, a well-known "topographic" image was carved: it's a geometric element composed of a rectangle with a single parallel line to the bottom surrounded by a cloud of sub-oval points, enclosed in a perimeter which connects to the upper corners of the rectangle (Fig. 17). This is a recurring image in other Valcamonica rock art areas and is also partly known in Mt. Bego and in Haute Maurienne (France). Coined as the "common module" by Andrea Arcà, this element is considered one of the most significant connecting features between the two most important alpine rock art traditions, namely the Valcamonica-Valtellina

and the Mt. Bego (Arcà 2007, 2009). Again, the strongest comparisons in Valcamonica, beyond the already published rock art panels of Dos dell'Arca, can be found in Pié R. 3b and almost exclusively in the rock art sites of Paspardo, in particular at Vite 'Al de Plaha R. 3a, b and R. 36. Notable is the absence of this "common module" in the Western areas of Capo di Ponte, although an extraordinary wealth of rocks with "topographical" images marks uniquely some areas, like for ex. Redondo or Pià d'Ort (Sansoni & Galvaldo 1995).

R. 28 (Fig. 18) is a carved surface discovered at the north-western corner of Dos dell'Arca. It contains a gigantic human figure and two shovels. The human figure, altogether more than a meter tall, has a large rectangular body and arms raised in a praying position. The head is surmounted by a crested helmet depicted by a simple



Fig. 17. Dos dell'Arca, R. 24. Geometric figure belonging to the more evolved "topographic" type. These images are generally dated across the IV-III millennium BC.

line, but it is not accompanied by the usual offensive/defensive weapons in the hands. The legs, linear and aligned with the sides of the body, terminate in two short feet. Again, this is a completely unexpected find at Dos dell'Arca. Human figures in gigantic form are quite rare in Valcamonica and can

be found almost only in Naquane (RR. 50, 70), in the sub-areas of Paspardo — chiefly Vite R. 54, Dos Sottolaiolo R. 5 and In Valle R. 4 (Marchi 2007) —, and in Luine at Darfo Boario Terme R. 34 (Anati 1982). However, the giant of Dos dell'Arca R. 28 appears more schematic than the other ones, he

does not handle any offensive weapon and, above all, it clearly distinguishes itself from the anthropomorphic repertoire of the Quattro Dossi area (Fig. 19). The two shovel images nearby are too poorly executed to be put in one of the many variants identified so far in Valcamonica rock art. Nonetheless, the image is already known in the area, occurring in Pié R. 1b and in Piciò RR. 3 and 6. The link with Paspardo is again significant, because a rare variant with an eyelet in the

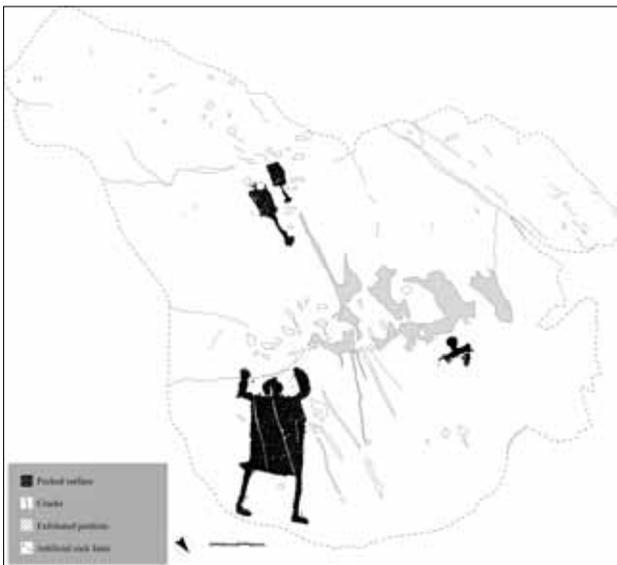


Fig. 18. Dos dell'Arca, R. 28. Giant human and unrecognizable figure (anthropomorphic bust?). Above two shovels (tracing by the authors).



*Fig. 19. Dos dell'Arca, R. 28. Night photography. The regular and precise pecking of the big anthropomorphic figure is here clearly visible.*

central point of the handle, found on Piciò R. 3, is identical to one at Dos Sulif R. 1, placed at 1200 m above sea level. Dos Sulif, for its peripheral position, also marks the eastern border of the great rock art concentration of Middle Valcamonica. Dating of R. 28 should be in line with R. 24, from 6<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> century BC.

R. 33 (Fig. 20) is again a newly discovered surface, placed at the north-eastern corner of Dos dell'Arca. It bears a complex representation of quadrangular geometric elements and connecting lines, which also include sets of points/small cup-marks and a completely pecked rectangle. Here, different features stand out: the geometric regularity of certain elements (squares or rectangles, in two cases with lines running along the longer edge), the will to organize

the composition through connected basic units and the sets of points/small cup-marks occupying the space between the joining lines and geometric shapes. Similar motifs are found in Pié R. 1 and, more generally, among the rock art of Paspardo-Vite.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

We believe that the preliminary data presented here, although related only to Dos dell'Arca, dramatically change the traditional perception of the role played by this site in the wider context of Capo di Ponte and, more generally, all Valcamonica rock art areas. The most obvious evidences are, firstly, the huge and sudden increase in carved rocks, now more than doubled in terms of absolute total count, and secondly

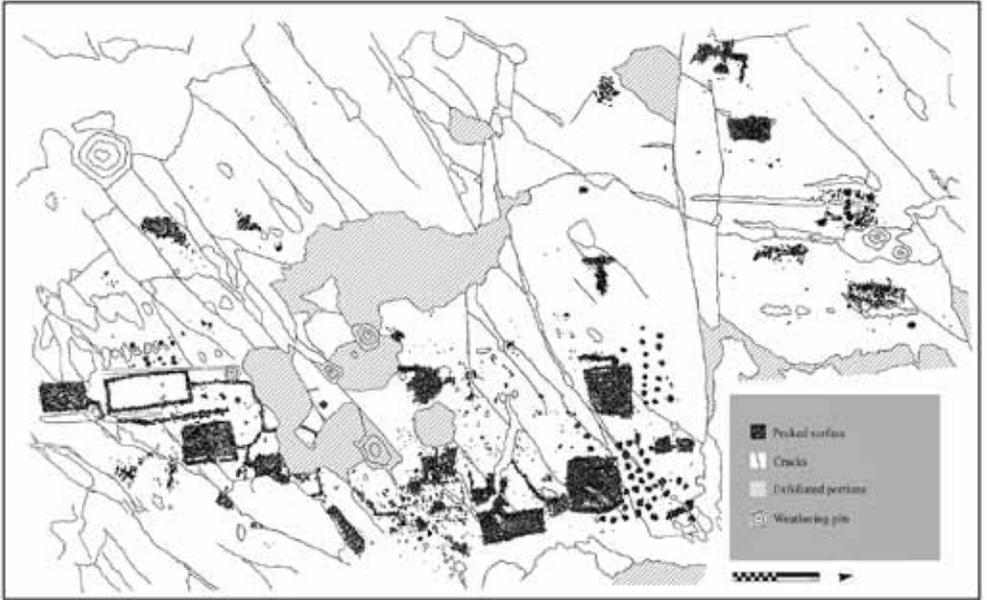


Fig. 20. Dos dell'Arca, R. 33. Elaborated geometric images composed by basic recurring elements sometimes connected by lines. These images are commonly thought to be representation of the cultivated landscape, likely in a symbolic and not realistic manner (tracing by the authors).

the impressive spatial coverage of the rock art, no more confined to the summit sector – known thanks to past research – but spread all over the whole extension of the hill, which now displays a widespread, almost pervasive carving activity. As a matter of fact, Dos dell'Arca stands today as one of the rock art areas in Valcamonica with the highest density of carved panels. The relationship between this extraordinary rock art ensemble and the, just as extraordinary, archaeological remains will be the main focus of the immediate future research.

What was the function of the site? Did it change across time or did it serve a multipurpose activity? Was the rock art connected to settlement phases? Was it a sacred place? Do we need a change in perspective about the role and scope played by rock art across the wider spectrum of human activity in the local landscape?

For sure, one of the most pressing matters is the relationship between archaeological evidence and rock art. The discovery, during the 1962 excavations at Dos dell'Arca, of three carved rock surfaces below archaeological stratigraphy offers a starting point. Even if Anati never analysed nor published these data, something is emerging from the new study of the entire material culture of the site, carried out by one of the authors in his dissertation. In this research, currently in preparation for publication, the original vertical sequence of all the findings has been reconstructed (Rondini 2016), including the spots where the three rocks were found, showing an interesting dichotomy between the dating of the materials and the chronology of the carved figures underneath. In addition, in the next three years, we plan to get back to Dos dell'Arca, resume the research and, begin a new excavation campaign. One of the immediate goals will be to investigate with up-to-date methodology and the help of modern technologies, the section closest to the three rocks found in 1962.

As for the rock art, the two main themes already uncovered by Anati, i.e. the geometric compositions of "topographic" type usually dated to the late Neolithic/early Copper Age and the classic Iron Age panels

with armed figures, animals and symbols (e.g. the shovel or the house/granary), continue to characterize the rock art of the hill, the second standing out, among the new discoveries, for its uniqueness and updated spatial distribution. The depictions of big armed horsemen and warriors, giant humans and birds are unexpected originalities in Dos dell'Arca, which is now more in line with the themes of the celebrated nearby area of Naquane. Even the compositions of pecked areas, either irregular or more geometric, are numerically much higher and typologically more varied than what was previously acknowledged, being also more comparable to examples from the above areas of Paspardo. In short, Dos dell'Arca and, in general, the Quattro Dossi area is no longer just an eccentric corner of the territory, as it appeared in the sixties (Sluga 1969), but something else entirely, well integrated in the complex network of prehistoric human activities.

The Quattro Dossi Project, starting in 2018, will therefore have three main goals. The first will be to produce complete documentation of all the engraved rock surfaces, both the newly found and the "old" ones, beginning with Dos dell'Arca and then proceeding with the other three hills. The second goal aims to resume excavations, in order to shed new light on the relationship between rock engravings and the settlement, as well as to better clarify the purpose of the area. Ultimately, we intend to consider the Quattro Dossi as a unique, central and multifaceted archaeological site, a sort of epitome, not only of Valcamonica prehistory, but of the whole alpine Italian prehistory.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Although the present paper is the result of a strict collaboration among the two authors, the various sections have been curated as follow: *Introduction, Morphology and landscape, A quick glance at past research in the area, Discussion and Conclusion* (PR, AM), *Material culture and human presence in the area* (PR), *Rock art at Dos dell'Arca: a complete reassessment* (AM). We would like to thank: prof. Maurizio Harari (Università degli Studi di Pavia), for supporting and encouraging this research; Maria Giuseppina Ruggiero (Polo Museale della Lombardia, former functionary of Soprintendenza Archeologia della Lombardia) for the full support in the planning and first phase of the project; Shae N. Jensen for editing the manuscript.

<sup>2</sup> The site is in private property and it is not accessible without permission by the legal owners.

<sup>3</sup> Several characters of this culture have been isolated at Dos dell'Arca, so that the site has given name to the culture itself (De Marinis 1989).

<sup>4</sup> The reference here is to the well-known folk tale, common to peoples worldwide, of the struggle of farmers, declined in the classical Greek and Italic world with the people of the Pygmies, with cranes (Harari 2004).