

The continuity between pagan and Christian cult

nearby the archaeological area of Naquane in Capo di Ponte.
Research inside the Church of Saint Faustina and Liberata

Introduction

When it was proposed me to write a brief essay about the "the Church of the Saints" in Capo di Ponte, I ask myself who they were and why the local piety has chosen, among the wide Christian pantheon, these two sisters, stranger to the local tradition. The cult of Saint Faustina and Liberata is an isolated phenomenon in Camonica Valley: for this reason, the dedication seems curious and it deserves attention. There is another question I ask myself and I

will try to discuss about it in these few lines, although they are certainly not exhaustive: I would like to establish if there could be a link between the surrounding archaeological areas of Naquane, Pagherina, Piana degli Svedesi (The Swedish Plain) and Campanine with the building of the church.

Others researchers have already carried out this idea and we have to consider their studies as a basis for this research.

Fig 1. Church of the Saints Faustina and Liberata, view from the outside with the entrance enclosure, at "Sante" place, Capo di Ponte (Italy).



Who were the Saints?

In Capo di Ponte the two sisters are simply known as the Saints. Similarly, the building is defined as "the church of the Saints" and by extension the area where the church stands, where there is also a small residential settlement, it is also locally called "Sante"¹ (Fig. 1).

The sisters, according to local tradition, probably lived as hermits in Capo di Ponte and according to the most widespread hagiography, Faustina and Liberata were two sisters who lived during the sixth century, daughters of a certain Giovannato, a sir who lived in the fortress of Olgisio in Pianello Val Tidone, in the province of Piacenza. The two young women, given the social status and wealth, were promised in marriage to two men of their social class, but the girls didn't want to give themselves to the married life after the vision of a woman mourning the death of her husband and in order to avoid the birth pangs² and so fled from the castle and lived as a hermits and later moved to Como and joined the Order of the Benedictines which was spreading in those years. During their existence they were accompanied by a tutor: the pious Marcello, who we might call a spiritual father. Father Gregorio Brunelli, a Capuchin who originally comes from a small town in Upper Camonica Valley and who lived in the second half of the seventeenth century, in his book *Curiosi trattenimentij*³, printed in 1698, expatiates in different passages romancing the hagiographic story.

It is conceivable that the area was very busy because of the road that passed through; even the dedication of an altar of the church to the Saints Philip and James could remind the presence of a medieval resting place since St. James is often thought as patron saint of xenodochia (free hospices for pilgrims and foreigners).

The miraculous event took place during a natural disaster that threatened to destroy the small town of Serio⁴. Serio was also the name of the stream which swollen after days of rain and which hung over the small village. The people, unable to save their homes from water and rocks, then went to the church, not because a safer place, but because they hoped to receive help from God; in the meantime the river flooded the area and swept away stones



Fig 2. The Saints Faustina and Liberata and Marcello stop with their hands the boulder and the stream that is destroying the church, 17th- century fresco, front of the right arch, interior of the church.

that hung on people and things. The people took refuge near the church, and invoked the saints, who appeared with Marcello and laid their hands on a "bad stone" and immediately stopped it and diverted the flow of water thus saving the church⁵ (Fig. 2). The spread of the saints' cult in other zones is often so confusing that in some areas of Europe Saint Liberata is identified with St. Wilgeforte and other names depending on geographical location, but even with some variations, the Saint is always linked to women's fertility and to frail children protection⁶.

Why were Faustina and Liberata chosen?

In Camonica Valley the Saints are documented only in Capo di Ponte; it seems that the act of dedication is a move cleverly designed and engineered by some educated person concerned - perhaps - about the continuity of pagan worship in the area and who knew, which is very likely, the engraving practice which was still ongoing in the area above Campanine of Cimbergo; the presence of two Saints coming from far away and not very well known except by the villagers of Capo di Ponte, seems to assert an enough learned design of the cult.



Fig. 7. Santa Liberata bearer of children, fresco of 152 (?), Church of Saint Filastro to Tavernole sul Mella (Brescia).

Near the place, now called "Sante", there are the famous prehistoric site of Naquane, the area called Pagherina and low Campanine, also affected by prehistoric carvings and by a resumption of attendance for the engraving purpose from the fourteenth to the nineteenth century.

The toponym Naquane, as demonstrated in a compelling article by Angelo Fossati⁷, most probably refers to the original name of "Aquane" (acqua = water; the term "Aquane" phonetically refers to the water, but it doesn't mean water), that is to say the semi-divine figures which populated the central-eastern Alps and that can be found also in classical literature.

The toponym Aquane, found at other sites and in Roman inscriptions, confirms the link of the name with the cult of water because Aquane are female anthropo-zoomorphic mythological figures that can be turned into otters and mermaids that dwell in lakes, caves and springs.

Even before the discovery of the name Aquane on a copy of a early nineteenth century map, Mario Alinei already connected the area called Naquane to the female mythological figures⁸. Folklore describe them as beautiful women with water hair and backwards feet just as the mermaids: Angelo Fossati refers

rightly to the iconography of the Romanesque style capitals of the nearby church of the monastery of San Salvatore. Therefore their spheres of influence is on the water, the one that comes from heaven and the one that moves upon the earth; in some traditions the Aquane are associated with waterfowl⁹. The analogy between the Aquane and Saint Faustina and Liberata is clear: they are female characters who live a retired life, far from society, even if they have sporadic contacts. The Aquane and the Saints live near springs and they have power over them. It's no coincidence that Father Gregory will hand down the miracle in order to make understand that the imposition of the Saints hands stopped the boulder and the water, which was carried it, immobilizing them; this mode of description was useful to emphasize the power of controlling the nature and especially the runaway course of water.

As on the cliff of Olgisio Rock (Piacenza), where Faustina and Liberata were born, there are prehistoric caves¹⁰ known as those of the "Saints", also nearby the church of Capo di Ponte there are caves, nowadays disused, but still easily found. The caves of Capo di Ponte are reported by the population and mentioned in a pastoral visitation (bishop's visitation) as the home where the sisters would live. The tradition of Capo di Ponte considered the caves as the places where babies were born and the Saints played a significant role because they were invoked as patronesses of women in labour. Iconographic evidence, dating from the XV-XVI centuries and which comes from outside Camonica Valley, confirm this protection because St. Faustina is represented in frescos while clasping infants in her arms: in the chapel of Montalto Dora castle next to Saint there are Saint Margaret and Saint Lucy; in the chapel of Avogadro Castle in Quinto Vercellese; in the church of San Filastro in Tavernole sul Mella (Province of Brescia) (Fig. 7).

The boulder, the rock carvings and the water

But who in Capo di Ponte could replace so ably a pre-Christian cult? The question remains unanswered, but it is conceivable that also in 1607 the priest Antonio Ricci, archpriest



Fig 3. The engraved stone kept inside the small shrine next to the church; the covering and the protective railings are visible.

of Cemmo, felt the need to revive the holy presence by writing a short life of the Saints, which was printed, but not found. Gregory himself, a little in contrast with many of his accounts where he drag on fictional digressions without restraint, dwells in order to provide

evidence of the truthfulness of the story: on this point, is an example his sentence through which he states that the large boulder with the handprints leaved by the three Saints is a testimony which makes up for the lack of other data that got lost during the flood. A

Fig 4. Rock with the handprints. Photo by Gerhard Milstreu.



Fig 5. Frottage of the engraved surface.



very interesting and controversial question is exactly the boulder kept in a chapel inside the church.

The stone has the engraving of six paired hands made through pecking technique (Figs. 3-5). Ausilio Priuli believes that the stone was already present on site before the flood of the thirteenth century and the catastrophic event did nothing but bring it to light; according to the author the handprints would be traced back to prehistory¹¹. It seems very unlikely that the handprints date back to prehistoric period; if it was so, we should put forward too many correspondences.

The six imprints are indeed coupled in pairs so that the side pairs have the same size and features, while the central pair is more squat and bigger, as well as placed higher. That shows that the central handprints were imprinted by Marcello: a man with bigger hands and taller than the two sisters who made instead smaller and very much alike signs (Fig. 5).

This fact discards the idea of a pre-Christian action and suggests that the engraving was planned for as evidence of the miraculous event; and Father Gregory lays emphasis on the boulder considering it as a evidence.

It remains to be understood who has promoted this initiative: a connoisseur of the faithful, and - we suppose - of the practice of engraving since the date (after which/post quem) of the boulder carving should be dated back at least after the events related in the legend of the flood and then from the fourteenth century onwards, that is during the years when they resumed, unexplainably, the engraving activity on the rocks of Campanine in Cimbergo, which are situated, as the crow flies, a few hundred meters above the church¹².

I consider it very interesting to report that the stone was known outside Camonica Valley; it is an evidence a text published by a Veronese author in Lugano in 1747¹³.

Footprints have been never found inside and in the vicinity of the church, while in the area above the place of "The Saints", in the town of Cimbergo, there is a pair of handprints engraved only in outline. Unfortunately, there is trace of this carving only in the documentation published in 1936 by Marro¹⁴; more than a decade of researches in the area of Campanine of Cimbergo have failed to find the rock with

the engraved hands. From the tracing which was published it is clear that this is a carving dating back to historical age but since we don't know its exact location and environment, it is impossible to add more. While an outline engraved hand was recently¹⁵ discovered and traced on rock n.7 in Pagherina, a place located about 200 meters away from the church of the Saints.

It is also interesting the idea advanced by Giacomo Camuri, who, in a learned and speculative article, recognizes a link between certain representations of doe on rock n. 14 of Naquane Park that should identify themselves as "the archaism of the goddess, who rediscovers through the images of the couples the original face of Nymph, the spirit of the water which is not very different from the rivers or lakes goddesses of the of the Balkan legends, all figures which are wonderfully related to deer or to pairs of does"¹⁶. The author himself, focusing on the importance of water in the area of investigation, suggests several connections and similarities between the Aquane and the goddess Artemis. In fact, both Artemis and the Aquane are young and virgin; Artemis has been given birth without pain; she is also considered as an elderly and virgin person, propitiator of births; both the Aquane and Artemis have also powers of metamorphosis and reproduction¹⁷.

Making reference to Gimbutas' opinion, I would like to give another example of continuity with the culture of Neolithic Europe: the holy women are two and they are represented in pairs, as in Europe double figures (figures in pairs) were used in order to underline the power or the duplication and the abundance. This dualism is noticed in "the frequent use of double images, even of Goddesses"¹⁸.

Furthermore, various sites in Europe, where instead of Artemis and Diana a worship of a Christian Saint has been created, have been documented. We can take into consideration the case of Sain Brigit, who is venerated in Ireland and Scotland, or Saint Verena to Aargau in Germany.

Even regarding Saint Brigit the feast of the eve seems very similar to the feast staged nearby the church of Capo di Ponte: it is said of unchecked dances that lasted all through the night.

In the county of Louth to Faughart, in Ireland, the sanctuary of Saint Brigit possesses a stone that has the name of the Saint; the site is also full of megalithic graves and of other big stones placed upright by the side a river.

Still in Ireland, there are the sources of Saint Brigit which are visited with great celebration in springtime: around the sources of the Dungiven parish there is also a big river stone with footprints. As demonstrated by this brief catalogue, the "christian goddesses" are linked by common elements.

According to Gimbutas "the greek Artemis *Eileithyia*, the Thracian Bendis, the Rehtia of Veneto and the roman Diana, like the Fate still presents in European folk beliefs [...] are undeniable descendants of the prehistoric Goddess Giver of Life"¹⁹.

These archaic female figures and their Christian descendants are mistresses of the mountains, of rock, of water, of woods and animals, and they are also giver of health. "Throughout prehistory and history, it [the goddess] appears as a bird-woman, bird or woman. As aquatic bird, she was the woman who fed humanity and increased material goods"²⁰.

The similarities seem very compelling on several fronts: cultural, iconographic as well as for the goddesses characteristics and for the descriptions of places. In Capo di Ponte there is the pair of women, who favour fecundity and protect women in labour, there are the boulder with the prints, the cave where babies are born; the two Saints, live in caves and in the middle of the wood, they have power over stones and over the course of water.

In order to understand other similarities with the piety in Capo di Ponte and the relation between the Saints and territory, it should be thought back to the places where Faustina and Liberata got under way. The Fortress of Olgisio is situated on a plateau with steep rock faces and two rivers, the Rio Tinello and the Chiarone; the rock is scattered with holes for pillings, stairs and basins to collect water. On the side towards the Tidone there is a very big cave with steps carved into the living sandstone rock: everything should lead to think of a hypogeum. The cave was dedicated to the cult of Saint Faustina and Liberata, a boulder, which looks like an altar, comes out of the

ground; the continuous human habitual attendance has been attested.

In the nearby plain of San Martino excavation campaigns are underway for years; recently many engraved surfaces with cupmarks have emerged.

The abundance of water in the area is also due to the infiltration in the sandstones, which also give origin to sources. So, it's obvious that the Saints lived, in their birthplaces, inside caves which were certainly already frequented during the prehistoric age, and with a certain link with the water.

The church and the cult of the Saints

The cult of the Saints in the diocese of Como²¹ should spread as long ago as before the year one thousand, but it is more likely that an intensification occurred as a result of a new translation of the relics, ordered by Bishop Leone de Lambertenghi; the operation took place on the 14th of May 1317 and the corpses of the Saints moved from the cathedral of Como to the Church of San Carpofo. It is conceivable that during the exhumation other relics were created, because of subdivision or contact, in order to send them in as many churches.

Perhaps as result of the translation, which took place in Como, the cult of the Saints gained new vigour strong and spread; but in order to spread the cult of the Saints among the people of Camonica Valley it was necessary to furnish the Church with images and, even more important, the mortal remains through which the devout could satisfy the need for contact thanks to the relics. Even following these considerations, it could be argued that it was after the fourteenth century when the relics of Faustina and Liberata reached Capo di Ponte.

In this regards it is curious the passage handed us down by Father Gregorio who told the discovery. The interest is not only provided for the data itself, which is not to be considered as historic truth, but because the monk constructs the narration on the model of the hagiographic literature. In particular, the relics are not taken by someone, but there is a chance discovery in a box kept in the middle of the altar of the old church; once the holy

relics have been discovered, they were placed inside the new church which was being built.

It has been already said that the stone has been situated in the same place for several millennia, but the engraving of the handprints should date back to Christian epoch since the fourteenth century.

For this analysis, the bishop's visits can be useful²². It is more interesting for this study the imposition of 1580 made by the learned apostolic visitor Cardinal Carlo Borromeo: a few years later Bishop Pilati (1573) the church is so still in bad condition that Borromeo ordered several important structural interventions. The cardinal announced that *"In oratorio Sanctorum Marcellini, Faustinae et Liberatae, Area, in qua asseritur reconditas esse reliquias Sanctarum Faustinae et Liberatae, pallio semper tecta teneatur"*, thus confirming the veracity of the relics, confirming also the presence of the boulder engraved with the hands. The acts report that on the boulder there are the handprints of the Saints and Marcellino.

1580 is therefore a definite date for the presence of the engraved boulder and it's very likely, given the description of Borromeo, that the 6 hands were already present because in

the description of the boulder he mentions the three saints. In addition to the eye evidence is also noteworthy that the cardinal takes care of setting a specific sacred space around the boulder with a low wall closed by a gate and covered with tiles (Fig. 3). In the case of the church of the Saints the visitor (Borromeo), who is very attentive to the identification and to the elimination of pagan worships, does not care to stop the visit to the engraved rock: on the contrary, he decide to incorporate it inside the holy place (Fig. 6). Behaving like that he gives veneration dignity through the arrangement of an adequate coverage and protection.

From the visit of Monsignor Nava on the 18th of August 1809 we know that the Saints lived in that area when they were alive, and some low caves are mentioned as, according to tradition, the places where the Saints lived²³.

As a final consideration with regard to the worship we have to remember that the church was dedicated, and in fact the devotion persists, to the mystery of the Ascension, a feast felt deeply by the inhabitants and which took place originally around the church of Saints. The Ascension is the final event of Christ's

Fig. 6. The apse of the church which is seen from the east; the lower structures have incorporated some rocks and the stone with the handprints; on the side further to the left there are the caves of the Saints.



Figure 8. Entrance to the deepest cave where it was thought the Saints, who were bearers of children, lived.

Fig. 9. Interior of the underground cave.

Fig 10. (below) Ashlar inserted into the masonry which leads to deepest cave: there are the engraved signs representing the water.



earthly residence and place of the ascent to heaven: and the place of the Ascension is the last strip of land that Christ touched. They have documented some sites where the footprints of the Redeemer, who leaved them on slabs of stone before lifting to God Father, are kept.

The place and the caves

The caves of the Saints were known inside the tales which circulated among the people living in Capo di Ponte, and they were also cited in the bishop's visit above-mentioned. However, I must confess that these evidences didn't allow to understand and prove whether the belief was linked to oral tradition, or based on a historic fact. From the accounts I thought the caves as shallow rock shelters which was opened on one side and small. In order to write this essay I got to mount a quick search of the area, to locate the site and to go down into the caves.

All with the help of Ilaria Zonta, whom I thank for the cultural and logistical support.

In reality the caves are a series of tunnels which are large and high enough to live in them. The caves are situated on the right side of the church beyond the inner court and beyond the area of the engraved rock, but always part of the same building complex; over the caves a building, that has partially covered and perhaps protected them from the destruction, was built. There are also masonry works which probably date back to more recent historical periods. However, it is of great interest the presence of big rocks that form the walls. Inside the deepest cave there is a big slab which is probably made up by a single rock surface that functions as ceiling (Fig. 9).

The entrance is very narrow, but the interiors is livable. Unfortunately, we merely had a quick tour in the absence of light and research permissions and also because of safety reasons; I publish in this essay some images (Fig. 8) of this discovery in the hope that in future someone could broach the subject in a systematic way. I limit myself to reporting the use of a carved ashlar for the building of a wall (Fig. 10); the ashlar was engraved with zigzag marks representing the waters and already seen in the nearby Romanesque church of San Siro in Cemmo.

Fig 11. The exterior of the church with the prothyrum. The access to the caves is over the building on the right; the hermits lived in the house.



Some notes about the church

After visiting the church in the light of the information gathered from the bishops visits and, even more, from hagiographical texts, I would like to report some observations that I consider very interesting and in some ways exceptional. For reasons of space I shall confine myself to draw up a list of these.

On the right side of the church there are two chapels containing respectively the stone with the footprints of the Saints and the wooden group of the *Lament over the Dead Christ*. Among these rooms and the church there is a part of what is presumed to be the oldest Romanesque church, and then a section which is dated back to the eleventh-twelfth century: it is half an apse with the remains of frescos dating back to the late sixteenth century. I'm certain of recognizing in these frescos the fusion of the two cults present in the church: the Ascension of Christ and the Saints Faustina and Liberata. I had already speculated on the cult of the Ascension and its importance as, in some sites, the footprints left by Our Lord before going to heaven are also reminiscent of the place where this devotion is: it is the last manifestation of Christ-God before leaving the earth. So, it would be meaningful to find also footprints on the

rocks, but all this didn't happen: however, I have found the footprints of Christ inside the high altar painting in the church, namely the meadow (Fig. 13) from which Christ ascended to the sky. With regard to the hypothesis it seems that the episodes of the Ascension and the miracle of the Saints have a double bond between them, a symbolic and visual one. The faithful visitor of the site could get in touch with the hierophany: the contact was not only visual but also physical regarding the imprints of the Saints. Hence, we might suggest the link between the footprints of the Ascension and the handprints of the Saints.

The frescoes of the church are reminders of specific episodes of the Saints' lives and local events such as the miracle of the boulder (Fig. 2). I consider very interesting the accurate citation of stories that took place outside Camonica Valley I have been able to find in some of the learned authors' texts, who didn't come from Camonica Valley and who wrote about the Saints' lives.

I was aware of the presence of some paintings representing the Sibyls, which long ago were placed on the walls of the church and now are kept in the house of the priest of Capo di Ponte; while I was visiting the church,



Fig 13. A detail of the high altar painting: the footprints of Christ left on the ground.



Fig 14. A Sibyl with scroll with the inscription "Summus nascetur ex Virgine puer", a 17th- century fresco.

the presence of other 6 Sibyls which was frescoed 3 by 3 in the intrados of the two side chapels of the church, surprised me. The Sibyls are ancient female figures dedicated to the prophecy; some of them did the predictions in caves situated in places which are not easily accessible. Certainly they were born in the pagan world, but from the fifteenth century they were reassessed and "used again" even in Christian circle because, according to some authors, they forecasted the coming of Christ in certain passages of their prophecies (Fig. 14). The Renaissance then appropriated the Sibyls, it freed them from the pagan world by giving them the dignity to be represented inside the churches often alternating them with the representations of Old Testament prophets who forecasted the coming of the Messiah: they are usually represented in pictorial groups concerning the life of Christ or even more in pictorial groups with the stories of the Virgin. In the church of the Saints in Capo di



Fig 12. High altarpiece of the church which represents the Ascension of Christ among the Apostles (work by Palma il Giovane, attr.) High there is the triad Faustina, Liberata and Marcello.

Ponte the six painted Sibyls have been represented without the prophets and even the reference to the life of the Virgin and Christ is not present²⁴. So, it is possible to affirm that the presence of Sibyls doesn't depends on the prophets. Only as food for thought I would like to put forward the hypothesis that suggests an analogy between the Saints and Sibyls, but even more with Aquane: in fact the Aquane knew the future and the past, as well as the Sibyls are pre-eminently the prophetesses. Moreover the Sibyls are one of the clearest examples of a pagan female figure 'redeemed' by the Catholic Church.

I conclude by signaling a further iconographic anomaly I report as such and I shall deal at another time. In the frontal of the high altar where the Saints have been depicted (in the middle), there are also wooden decorative elements. Among them, in the two basements of the responds which are inserted between the small spiral columns placed on either side



Fig. 16-17. A detail of the frontal: children with bandaged head, gilded wood, XVII century.



Fig 15. A detail of the high altar frontal: figures of birds / fish which are drinking, gilded wood, XVII century.

and which supported the niches with the statues of the Saints, there are pairs of figures, perhaps mythological figures. They are two animals which face each other and turn their muzzles, which seem to be made up of a beak, into the upper plate of a fountain which is supported by a second plate (Fig. 15), a lower and bigger one, where the animals rest the front limbs formed by claws. The bodies, as well as the napes, look plumed, while the lower limbs ended with a twisted tail like a snake.

We can't name these figures, but they certainly remember the pairs of animals, half birds and half fishes, of which the face is hidden; the fact that they rest the muzzle and the claws in a fountain suggests that these have connections with aquatic creatures: they look like mermaids. We don't want and we can't say they are the Aquane, but it is reasonable to assume that such a decoration can't be placed by accident. According to Massimo Centini, in the Alpine folk tradition the *Anguane* (our Aquane) are considered as "a kind of fairies, which have absorbed many of the symbolic features which are typical of pre-Christian aquatic nymph"²⁵; the author himself shows the older Christian source which was found from the same; it is the *De Jerusalem Celesti* (XIII century) wrote by Brother Giacomo of Verona, who "considers the 'aiguana' as synonymous with mermaid"²⁶.

Contrary to the other above-mentioned authors, Centini didn't find certain elements of an hypothesis concerning an iconographic link

between the images engraved on Naquane rocks and Aquane / Adganae. The previous authors have never mentioned the decorative element carved in wood in the frontal.

Other two statuettes, which are placed at the sides of the frontal and represent naked human figures, are even more curious and emblematic; we have a back view of one (Fig. 16) and a front view of the other, but both the statuettes have bandaged faces which are covered by a bandages so as to hide their features. The hair is black and it stands out from the rest of the body that is made of gold leaf. The poses and their covered faces give a sense of anguish as well as the bodies which give the impression they are wriggling. Their bodies look like the children's one, but they aren't angels because they don't have any wings. In the figure on the left, which is viewed from the front (Fig. 17), the female sex is recognizable even if the breasts are not prominent: in the very act of wriggling we can note that it holds a scroll behind its back, but the face is awfully covered. With reference to Aquane it is well-known that the name couldn't been identified, but that they were prophetesses: in the Christian iconography the scroll usually indicates foresight while the covered face could show anonymity. The children could also refer to the intercession of the Saints as they encourage the births, but doesn't explain the bandaged face. Among the hypothesis, pending in-depth studies, we can include even the "unborn" children who have not received the light, or the children who were born, but died before baptism, and were then forced to the Limbo state²⁷.

Conclusions

I think that what I have explained is enough to provide at least a preliminary account and some food for thought, so I hope other researchers could study the subject in depth. For example, it would be interesting to study the triad of the three holy virgins - Faustina, Liberata, Paolina - which has also references into the triads of the Celtic religion²⁸, but although there are links, this comparison seems too strained, with reference to the state of research; on the contrary it is necessary to wonder if the triad, made up of the two sisters

and Marcello, may have some previous worship which is rooted in the research area. See also the traditional Ascension celebrations, a feast that usually takes place toward May. According to what has been handed down by oral sources, we can find in the past rites of Capo di Ponte rustic cults which coincide with the spring season. This eve was passed in a very libertine way: the devotees came to the sanctuary of the Saints and they spent the night there. Furthermore the pilgrims were in the habit of resting their own hands on the hand-prints engraved on the stone, but the religious celebration turned into a fair and it was a meeting for the trade of iron goods which was made by craftsmen of local and Camonica Valley forges. Angelo Fossati²⁹ suggests that we are talking about pre-Christian cults and rituals related to fertility and the iron and other oral evidence reports that during the night vigil there was a use of lighted candles and sexual excesses. I conclude with a final thought noting how the proper name of the prehistoric goddesses of the waters wasn't known, but they were generally called Aquane, as well as in Capo di Ponte the church, the place and the feast are not those of Faustina and Liberata, but it is used a generic "Sante", so much so that even nowadays some inhabitants don't know their names.

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Notes

¹ A. FAPPANI, *Santuari nel bresciano*, Brescia, La Voce del Popolo, 1983, III, p. 119.

² A chronicler from Milan, Goffredo da Bussero, "*Cogitauerunt eis hoc posse euenire. et dangers praegnationis et pariendi. et uidendi Filios infirmos et alia et mortuos fine*". The author working in the thirteenth century, but our version is a reworking of the fourteenth century. The text consulted is a modern reissue: GOFREDO DA BUSSERO, *LIBER NOTITIAE SANCTORUM MEDIOLANI*, ed. edited by M. MAGISTRELLI - U. MONNERET DE VILLARD, Milan, 1917.

³ PADRE GREGORIO BRUNELLI DI VALCAMONICA, *CURIOSI TRATTENIMENTI CONTINENTI RAGUAGLI SACRI, E PROFANI DE' POPOLI CAMVUNI*, in Venetia, Appresso Giuseppe Tramonti, MDCIIC. The book is a work that collects a lot of data about people, places and customs of the inhabitants of Camonica Valley during the seventeenth century, the title could be translated as "*Curious accounts with sacred and profane information of Camonica Valley people*".

⁴ A. SINA, *Serio. L'antico villaggio travolto e distrutto nel secolo XIII*, in «Dal Tonale al Sebino», 1 (1952), pp. 4-7. The stream came down from the mountains of Paspardo and Cimbergo. The author reports of findings of roman burials during the nineteenth century. The village was abandoned in the middle of the thirteenth century; from the bishops investitures it follows that in 1299 the population spread over Capo di Ponte, Cemmo and Zurla.

⁵ G. BRUNELLI, 1698, p. 384.

⁶ There are the names of Haigneforte, Milleforte, Débarras, Jolifort, in J.E. MERCERON, *Dictionnaire des Saints et imaginaires facétieux*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 2002, pp. 624-627. See also *Vies des Saintes*, Librairie Letouzey et Ane, Paris, 1935, volume I, pp. 360-361.

⁷ A. FOSSATI, *Il ruolo dell'etnografia nell'interpretazione dell'arte rupestre della Camonica Valley*, in «NAB», IX (2001), 1, pp. 91-111. During this research I tried to study in depth what Fossati has proposed; the student relies on a map kept by private citizens in Capo di Ponte. For research sake I went back to original source and I found the original cadastral map kept in the Archives State of Brescia and dating from the early decade of nineteenth century. As a matter of fact, there are cadastral parcels which are also present in other municipalities adjacent to Capo di Ponte and having a similar toponym. "Aquane" is also present in an earlier document, namely the 1645 cadastral survey of the Comune of Ceto (territory which occupies a part of the Reserve of Rock engravings). Thanks to

a quick research I also discovered that even in Nadro "Nacquane" is cited (with the "C") in the Napoleonic cadastre of 1811; the toponym is taken up again and partially modified turning to "Acquane" (with the "C") inside the Austrian cadastre of 1837. In Capo di Ponte, inside the Napoleonic cadastre, there is "Naquane" then turned to "Naquani" inside the Austrian one of 1835; to same year dates back also the name "Alle Sante", but it was already present inside the Napoleonic cadastre. Whereas the earlier toponym I could find in Capo di Ponte citing "Sante" dates back to the land register drawn up by Da Lezze in 1609.

⁸ M. ALINEI, '*Naquane' nella Valle Camonica nei suoi rapporti con le 'Aquane', esseri mitologici delle Alpi centro-orientali*, in «Quaderni di Semantica», (1984), V, 1, pp. 3-16.

⁹ See the links, which have been already highlighted, between waterfowl and rock carvings in the nearby archaeological park of Naquane, in A. FOSSATI, 1994, pp. 203-216.

¹⁰ Out of the rock of Olgisio there are "*Grotta del Corvo*" (the Crow Cave) and the "*Grotta del Cipresso*" (the Cypress Cave), because there is a big tree grown in the middle of a basin and fed by water flowing from the cave, cf. A. CORNA, *Castelli & Rocche del Piacentino*, Piacenza, 1913, p. 82. "*Grotta del Corvo*" was a place where the Saints were bewitched by a crow which confide them to be under a spell. Then the father set up a tournament for knights in order to give one of his daughters in marriage. 13 riders showed up; the thirteenth one was named Montenero; this knight won the duel, but as he was bringing the young Liberata with him, Marcello intervened to bless them; then the knight sunk underground with a rumble leaving Liberata; now in that place there is the well. Since then the cave has been called "del Corvo" (of the Crow) but the saints didn't go in that cave anymore, in C. ARTOCCHINI, *Il folklore piacentino*, Piacenza, 1979, pp. 141-143.

¹¹ A. PRIULI, "*Le mani delle Sante*" a *Capodiponte nel quadro più ampio delle figure manifoldi preistoriche e di tradizione in Italia*, in «Quaderni Camuni», XIV (1991), n° 53, p. 119. The author reports also a detailed research of other engravings with imprints which were found in Italian sites. Even A. FOSSATI, *L'età del Ferro nelle incisioni rupestri della Valle Camonica*, in AA. VV., *Immagini di un'aristocrazia dell'Età del Ferro nell'arte rupestre camuna* in Essays on the occasion of the exhibition in Milan - Sforzesco Castle, Milan, 1991, p. 64, writes that inside the church "there is a rock with prehistoric carvings of cup marks and handprints [...]".

¹² C. GASTALDI - F. TROLETTI, *La fase IV. L'età storica*, in U. SANSONI - NSONAVALDO (by), *Lucus Rupestris*.

Sei millenni d'arte rupestre a Campanine di Cimbergo, Capo di Ponte (Bs), Ed. del Centro, 2009, pp. 339-378.

¹³ A.L. DELLA PORTA, *Vita delle SS. Vergini Liberata e Faustina fondatrici del Monastero di S. Margherita di Como*, Lugano (CH), 1747, pp. 62-67. The names of the places have slightly mispronounced, but they are easily recognizable Paspardo = Pasquardo and Cimbergo = Cembergo. Cimbergo and Paspardo are two villages situated above the town of Capo di Ponte. The presence of the name "Serio" has very often given rise to misunderstandings even in contemporary authors who have located the area of the river Serio, a place near the city of Bergamo, and not the small village of Serio in Capo di Ponte. Examples of it are the error quoted in A. TINCANI, *Mandra. Storia del castello e del Santuario*, Reggio Emilia, Bizzocchi, 1995, p. 218, note 318, and in G. EREMO, *Rocca d'Olgisio...Castrum, et Villam Olzisi*, s.l., s.e., 1996, p. 161.

¹⁴ G. MARRO, *La roccia delle iscrizioni di Cimbergo*, in «Rivista di Antropologia», (1936), n° 31, tab. II, fig. 2.

¹⁵ Archaeological summer camp 2010 organized by the Dipartimento Val Camonica e Lombardia di CCSP Capo di Ponte (BS), which I would like to thank for the provided materials.

¹⁶ G. CAMURI, *In 'contrada Aquane'. Il linguaggio dell'acqua nelle figure di cervo della roccia 14 del Parco Nazionale delle Incisioni Rupestri*, in «NAB», II (1994), 1, p. 286. The author also suggests the power of the double the two Saints embody and the episode of the river crossing which is represented in a XIV century fresco.

¹⁷ It is interesting to report the presence of goddesses in Camonica Valley which are linked to the worship of the waters in Roman period as the goddess Minerva *Hygieia* and epigraphs dedicated to *fontes divini*, cf. A. FOSSATI, *L'acqua, le armi e gli uccelli nell'arte rupestre camuna dell'età del Ferro*, in «NAB», II (1994), 1, p. 203. But goddess *Reitia* itself is a deity which was venerated in sites with the presence of water, on this point the reference provided by Fossati inside the analysis of the derivation of the name of *Reitia*, which should mean the one who "helps the childbirths", "goddess of writing", "river", is significant; while concerning the goddesses related to the goddess *Reitia* as *Pora* and *Sainato* the derivations should derive from "good goddess, woman in childbirth" and goddess of the "ford or of the passage", "senator", in A. FOSSATI, 1991, pp. 65-66. Cf. A. FOSSATI, *Figures and Male Site in the Rock Art of Valcamonica, Italy*, in *Pre-Atti del XXII International Valcamonica Symposium*, Darfo B.T. 18-24 maggio 2007, Capo di Ponte (BS), Ed. del Centro, 2007, pp. 131-144.

¹⁸ M. GIMBUTAS, *Il linguaggio della dea. Mito e culto della dea madre nell'Europa neolitica*, Milano, Longanesi & C., 1990, p. 161.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 111.

²⁰ *Ibid*. Cf. V. DINI, *Le madri del parto, delle acque, della terra. Continuità protettiva e santuari terapeutici*, in T. GIANI GALLINO (by), *Le Grandi Madri*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1989, pp. 84-92.

²¹ As a matter of fact there are many evidences of the devotion to the Saints in Como. There are evidences in frescos (Town museums), but also in marble bas-reliefs inside and outside the cathedral.

²² A. FAPPANI, 1983, p. 120. There are clashes among the versions about the bishop's visits which have been reported by A. Fappani and by V. BONOMEILLI, *La Valcamonica della Controriforma nelle visite del vescovo Bollani*, Brescia, La nuova Cartografica, 1978.

²³ A. FAPPANI, 1983, p. 123.

²⁴ On the front of the two respective arches of the chapels, where there are the Sibyls, the four Doctors of the Church are frescoed.

²⁵ M. CENTINI, *Sulle tracce delle divinità di Aquane. Incisioni rupestri ed echi di culti acquatici*, in «Quaderni Camuni», XV (1992), n° 59, p. 235.

²⁶ *Ibid*. See also what writes Maria Gimbutas concerning the figure of the bird and the link with the water: "the goddess Bird was the Source and the Dispenser of the moisture that gives life, which is an ancient and continuous human concern. As a waterfowl, it connects the heaven and the earth, and probably it believed that its earthly dwelling reflected an aquatic divine realm", in M. GIMBUTAS, 1990, p. 29.

²⁷ F. MATTIOLI CARCANO, *Santuari à répit. Il rito del "ritorno alla vita" o "doppia morte" nei luoghi santi delle Alpi*, Torino, Priuli & Verlucca, 2009, p. 114.

²⁸ M. GREEN, *Symbol and Image in Celtic Religious Art*, London, Routledge, 1989.

²⁹ A. FOSSATI, 1994, p. 204.