PROSPECTS FOR THE PREHISTORIC ART RESEARCH
50 years since the founding of Centro Camuno

PROSPETTIVE SULLA RICERCA DELL’ARTE PREistorica
a 50 anni dalla fondazione del Centro Camuno
Proceedings

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SUN, WATER AND SACRED MOUNTAIN BETWEEN THE ROMANS AND THE CAMUNIANS

Monica Pavese Rubins *

Summary
The culture of the Camunni was linked to the territory on which it was located among the mountains. Roman beliefs overlapped local worships without wiping out previous native cults. The sun, the water and the mountain were locally adapted and kept their sacred meanings in Roman Age. The Romano-camunians culture was a rare syncretism of Roman and Camunian characteristics. Rock art was still a form of expression in Valcamonica under the Roman rule. Valcamonica showed a conflation of Roman and Camunian customs and tastes where the indigenous traditions were integrated into the new Roman system. Rock art subjects were renewed with new topics and symbols, as for example the introduction of Latin Inscriptions. The preroman magic-ritual beliefs may be interpreted through the message on stone of the Latin Inscriptions.

The culture of the Camunni was linked to the territory on which it was located among the mountains. Roman beliefs overlapped local worships without wiping out previous native cults. The sun, the water and the mountain were locally adapted and kept their sacred meanings in Roman Age. The Romano-camunians culture was a rare syncretism of Roman and Valcamonica characteristics. The middle valley remained still relatively inaccessible as a border region in the middle of the Alps during the Roman Empire. The Roman impact arrived very slowly. Augustus conceived and implemented the projects to arrange economically and administratively the Gaul 1. Valcamonica was certainly a minor junction between Northern Italy and the Raetia. It became a buffer state to consolidate the Roman power in the middle of the Alps on the fringes of the Empire 2. Alpine economy was still based on pastoralism and forest exploitation 3. Material with a religious association began to be visualized in a Roman form. Ancient local deities, although obscure, were recorded in Latinized form on inscriptions, as for example Aburnus and Aburna in Lo vere 4. Human memory was perceived as a container of traditions whose knowledge might be expressed by transmitting native rituals and by passing down stories 1

1 FERDIERE 2005, p. 88.
2 PAVESE RUBINS 2014, pp. 18, 95, 336.
3 TASSAUX 2003, p. 105.
6 Ibid.
7 CI. V 4935; INS CR IT X, V 1162; URBINATI 1958, p. 251; ABELLI CONDINA 1986a, pp. 104-105 n.21; SUPPL. IT N.S., 8, n. 1162 p. 185; GREGORI 1990, p. 125 n. A, 179, 005; Io. 2000, p. 289; PAVESE 2006 n. 103; Io. 2014, pp. 279-280 n. 1: Aburno et / Aburnae / Lucret(ia) Anapaum(a) / V(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito)
and myths through the centuries8. Rock art was still a form of expression in Valcamonica under the Roman rule. Valcamonica showed a conflation of Roman and Camunian customs and tastes where the indigenous traditions were inte grated into the new Roman system. The new Roman culture started to take own place among the Camunian rock engravings, but all steps which marked out the transformation process of Camunian society under the Romans appear to have been gradual9. The local identity was very strong and specific if compared to other neighbouring alpine valleys. Valcamonica was annexed to the Empire and had own magistrates and electoral tribe (the Tribus Quirina), so it was considered as a separate territorial and administrative entity, other than Valtrompia, Brixia, Bergomum and Tridentum10. Archeological evidences show that the local lifestyle has not been very affected between the 1st century BC and the first part of the 1st century A.D. In the light of the archeological data, the integration of Valcamonica to the rest of the Roman Empire seems to have started pretty early, according to the field excavation results of the few Roman sites which have been well explored (Cividate Camuno, Breno and Borno)11. Since the first Empire, the adoption of Roman-type representations was gradually naturalized by local gods and goddesses. Rock art subjects are renewed with new topics and symbols, as for example the introduction of Latin Inscriptions. New rituals and new deities were worshipped on Roman altars, votive stones, statues, temples and shrines. One of the first sacred Roman documents is an altar in Pescarzo which was dedicated to an unknown god by the centurion Cerialis during the Early Empire12. Pescarzo is located on the Concarena, which was a sacred mountain since ancient times. In the middle Valcamonica prehistoric rock art was indeed mostly engraved on its slopes between the Concarena and the Pizzo Badile Camuno. Still nowadays, in the collective unconscious, the local community talks about the “The Spirit of the Mountain” (“Genio della Montagna”), when the sun goes beyond the horizon of Concarena in the evening or beyond the Pizzo Badile in the morning and the sun-rays spread in a circular ring throughout the indented mountaintops. Roman Valcamonica was also home to imported deities and worships. From the second half of the II century A.D., eastern Gods and Goddesses were transplanted as a continual interest of native cults which were perceived as equivalent or complimentary. The Mother Goddess (Mater Deum), Isis, Serapis, Cautopates and the Divine Sun (Sol Divinus) were adapted to the local context. Many of the people who settled in the valley came for military and business opportunities. Roman Valcamonica became a relatively international cosmopolite society of soldiers, traders and freedmen who imported and adapted their beliefs from Europe, Northern Africa and Near East into the valley13. That’s not indeed easy to interpret exactly the value of Isis in Valcamonica, as she could have been the Roman visualization of a local Mother Goddess14 as well as an official cult devoted to her in Cividate Camuno, the administrative center of the valley, where all her inscribed stones have been found15. The connection with a local native deity could be mirrored by her traditional attributes. Her headdress consisted in the solar disc between the horns of a cow, and sometimes she’s depicted on a solar barge16. The sun has indeed prolific evidence in the magic world of the preroman Valcamonica rock art17. Rock engravings were at the center of the preroman sacredness and were carved on the slopes of a sacred mountain, in some inaccessible or uneasy to reach spots, and close to a water course18. Some key elements of the native religion of Camunni persisted until the Roman time. The mountain, the sun and the water continue to be the key players in the local sacred ritualism. The fusion and the combination of sun, mountain and water is present on a rock at Poppe di Nadro, the n.

8 About the importance of traditions, rituals and social relations in prehistoric societies GIDDENS 1995, pp. 4-5 in CREIGHTON 2006, p. 81
9 In the indigenous preroman camunian society the relationship with the father indicated the social identity as a continuous line of succession from ancestors and forefathers. The indigenous patronymic is indeed often quoted in the Latin inscriptions of Valcamonica as the case of priest C.Claudius the son of Sassius/Sassius in Cividate Camuno, Roman citizen of an indigenous family (CIL V 4960; ILS 5525; INSCR IT X, V 1199; AEBELI CONDIVA 1986a, p.58 n. 20, 1; SUPPL IT n.s., 8, n. 1199 p. 186; GREGORI 1990, p. 67 n. A081, 002; GREGORI 2000, pp. 39, 42, 63, 153, 256, 290, 318; PAVESE 2006 n. 29; AEBELI CONDIVA 2012, p. 29 n. 24; PAVESE RUBINS 2014, pp. 279-280 n. 11: (ci)us Claudius | Sassi (filius) | Cunitina (tribu) | Sacerdos Aug(usti) | (D)ec | (p)cen(nia) | (s)au | Res (publica) | tribunal | Fecit et columnam | mutuavit.
11 Romanisation involved a few villages in the low and middle Valcamonica, and in some strategic crossroads where small altars were dedicated to some Roman deities. Archaeological remains from Lovere and Borno consist mostly in graves and tombs. Pescarzo’s house discovering opened indeed an interesting window of the local lifestyle during the 1st century BC. About Pescarzo’s house ARZELINO 2002. 12 CIL V 4951; INSCR IT X; V 1195; GREGORI 1990, p. 252 n. D021; ID. 2000, p. 172; PAVESE 2006 n. 128; ID. 2014, pp. 288-289 n. 9: Cerialis Pladaius | (filius) | cent(a)rius coh(ortis) | Alpinae | are(a) refe(cit) | libens | merito.
17 Roccia dei SOle (Sun stone) at Capitello dei Due Pini (ANATI 1982, p. 217 n. 231); Rock of Cemmo n. 2 (IBID., p. 207 n. 220); Rock of Bagnolo (IBID., p. 226 n. 237) and many other rock engravings with sun symbols.
4, the so-called “the diver” (il tuffatore). This panel represents a diving man who seems to plunge into a rock cavity which is filled up with water after it has rained. A round shaped effect surrounds the protagonist which recalls a solar disc. The engraving can be seen just during the morning or the evening at the oblique sun lighting. It seems to take advantage of the natural shapes of the rock. The sacred mountain Concarena stands out in the background. We don’t know the exact hydrography of this site in Ancient time, but the image utilizes the three major local sacred elements (rock, water, sun). The Masso di Bagnolo II21, the Rocca del Sole al capitello dei Due Pini in Paspardo20 and the menhir of Caven in Valtellina23 are other samples with these three elements which occur often in Valcamonica rock art and revive later in the Latin Inscriptions. The Romans were generally very impressed by the high frozen tops of the mountain and perceived them as sky entities22. In Aquitania, a Latin Inscription was devoted to the Mountain Gods23. The stone was indeed intended for mortal human beings24. The high concentration of sacred engravings in Valcamonica show that the action of rock carving is essential in preroman magic ritualism where a concrete activity might influence the reality25. Valcamonica’s cliffs continued to be carved in Roman time with some new and renewed contents and styles (Latin inscriptions, deities and personal names, boundary signs, ex votos)26. Mountains have always been important according to many ancient myths and traditions, from China to native Americans, from Near East to Jews and Christianity27. In the religious history of many communities, it appears often to be a mystical and physical place with many shapes and purposes. Mount Carmel, the Sinai, the Tabor are just a few samples. It’s the target of pilgrimage. It’s the cosmic mountain which bears the vault and links the sky to the earth and the cardinal points in Babylon cosmology; it’s the favorite connection’s place between man and God where man can reach the divine vision and its power while climbing to the mountain top in the Christianity; it’s the abode of the God in the Semitic religions28; the paradise in the Koran is a mountain. In Ethiopia, the Book of Enoch reports that the settlement of the Eden is on a mountain too29. In the Armenian mythology, heroes seat on mountains, as shown by the protohistoric steles (višap) near mountain springs water30. The mountain has always been sacred as well as the water. Water is a recurring pagan symbol on rocks and standing stones of Darfo, Borno, Bagnolo of Malegno, Ossimo, Paspardo. In Northern Bohuslän in Sweden it seems that many of the engraved panels were deliberately centred on natural water runs that had smoothed the rock, and it may well have been water itself that was important to the Bronze Age people31. The Swedish landscape was probably lower, it was warmer, nearer the sea, perhaps the waves lapping the foot of the rock, while around the low soil was damper32. In the Bronze Age, the sea reached far inland, flooding the valleys and spreading around many of the low rocky hills and ridges of Northern Bohuslän33. In Valcamonica rocks were maybe in strict contact with some watercourse, spring, river or others as well. A Latin inscription of Berzo inferiore was devoted to the Holy Springs (Fontes Divinit)34 at the end of the 1st century A.D. and it is unique in Cisalpine Gaul, where local tutelary deities (genii locorum) and nymphs (nymphae) are more common35. It could be also a local reinterpretation of the Fons Perennis, a sacred spring that was created from an arrow thrown by Saturn into a stone36. The first nucleus of Minerva’s

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19 ANATI 1982, p. 228.
20 IBD., p. 218.
21 IBD., p. 231.
22 “Saca impellentia caedum” according to Silius Italicus, It. PUN. XI 216-218 (GIORCELLI BERSANI 2001, p. 30).
23 CI. XIII, 382. DEI MONTES.
25 ASTORI 2000, p. 27; CARDONA 1987, p. 182.
26 PAVESE RUBINI 2014, pp. 216-220.
28 IBD.; CLIFFORD 2010.
29 NERI 2001, p. 67.
31 COLES 1990, p. 36.
32 IBD., p. 39.
33 IBD., p. 43.
35 PASCAL 1964, pp. 93, 95-97; CHEVALLIER 1983, p. 458. Fons Perennis is in Milan (CI. V 5766). Other inscriptions devoted to the Fons Divini: ILS 3885; AR 1936, n. 160. Other deities of water are Neptunes (Brescia, CI. V 4285), the Nymphae (Carate, Como Lake): CI. V 5224; Este: CI. V 2476; Fumane: CI. V 3915; Cardone (Val Trompia): CI. V 4918, CI. V 3184, CI. V 3106; Sarsina: CI. XI 6493; Schio (Vicetia): CI. XI 3106; Val Pollicella: CI. V 3915; Valeia: CI. XI 1162; Vicetia: CI. V 3184; Villincino (Brianza): (CI. V 5684), Fons (Sarsina: CI. XI 6494), Fontes (Aquileia: CI. V 754; CI. V 8250).
36 SEINGLER 1957, p. 970; FONTAINE 1990, p. 103.
shrine in Breno which dates back to Augustus, is related to a sacred spring where the ablation was probably performed by the pilgrims with water gushed from the rock and collected in basins. Holy water has been always well used in both pagan and christian religions. The baptismal font is just a sample. In the Middle Age, the pagan religion was still worshipped in Valcamonica. In Edolo, Aripert the II, king of Lombards and nephew of Theodelinda, has to demolish a portrait of Saturn at the beginning of the VIII century. The persistence of pagan cults reaches the XVIII century in Valcamonica when people and entire villages are still prosecuted for witchcraft and sorcery. In 1624, a historic document reports an interesting pagan ritual in Vione where a procession of twelve young girls paid homage to a holy rock while begging a pagan god and sprinkling it with water during drought. That’s a speaking witness of an ancestral deity with the association of the rock and the water in post-medieval time. The association of pagan cults reaches the XV century in Valcamonica when people and entire villages are still prosecuted for witchcraft and sorcery. In the middle Valcamonica, in a field between Capo di Ponte and Cemmo, every March the incoming springtime is celebrated by burning a puppet of a witch who represents the winter to exorcise. In a local dialect this fact is called “Brusa la ‘ecia” (Burn the old lady). The 30th of April is the eve of a similar celebration day in the Northern Europe (Netherland, Germany, the Czech Republic, Sweden, Finland and Estonia) for the so called Walpurgis night when huge bonfires are built and burnt in the evening. The sun occurred on prehistoric rock art as well as on Latin inscriptions of Valcamonica. In Breno an inscription was consacrated to the Sol Divinus. It could have been connected to a local Sun deity as well as to Mythras. In the shrine devoted to Minerva in Breno a pendant-amulet depicts a figure of a half a woman and a half a bird who is rising from a solar boat. It has been interpreted as a Goddess of the Water, well known in the Paleovenetian region under name of Reitia or Pora, a deity of fording or transit, metaphorical or real. That’s specifically the Latin inscription to Cautopates from Sale Marasino that summarizes all three elements of sun, water and rock. It’s a solar deity connected to the stone as the God Mithras was born from the rock and in Latin “cautes” means “rock, cliff”. In the traditional iconography, Mythras is depicted between Cautopates and Cautes, two torch bearers who represent the sunset and the sunrise respectively. Other interpretations have seen them as the personification of the evening and the morning, the autumn and the springtime, the West and the East, the life and the death, the sun (Cautes) and the moon (Cautopates), and vice versa. As already mentioned, the nowadays collective unconscious of Valcamonica still looks at the “The Spirit of the Mountain” which is embodied by
the Concarea at the sunset and the Pizzio Badile at the sunrise. Cautes and Cautopates are also linked to the water as they used to drink at a sacred spring created from an arrow thrown by Saturn into a stone. In Britannia, new knowledge by far may have arrived with freedman trading and members of the army, though their experience and behavioural norms will have been very different. They re-created pattern of life on the basis of their own experience. In Valcamonica the presence of Cautopates could be explained in the same way, as he’s not much spread in Cisalpine Gaul and he’s more common in Germania Superior where it arrived through the army. In the Mithraeum of Martigny, Cautes (the personification of the rising sun) is associated to the Sun. The preroman magic-ritual beliefs expressed by the Valcamonica Rock Art seem to continue to have the same strong symbolic value in the Roman time, thanks to whose Latin words inscribed on the stone we could try to read the message.

50 SPENGLER 1957, p. 970; FONTANA 1990, p. 103.
51 CREECHTON 2006, p. 86.
52 ibid., p. 106.
53 Three Latin inscriptions in Northern Italy, two in Aquileia (C. V. 763: Cauit / Q(uintus) Baien(us) / Procul(us) / pater // Cautop(at)/ / Q(uintus) Baien(us) / Procul(us) / pater; C. V. 765: Cautopati / Aug(usta) sacrum / (Callistus / O[--]), and one in Novara (C. V. 5465: Cautopati sacrum / Marcus Status Nig(er) / Vleir Aug(usta) c(reatus) / decretor (deurionum) Mediolanensium / legatus? ded(orphorum) c(oloniae) A(ureliae?) A(ugustae?) M(ediolanii) / et C(aius) Valerius Iuliu(nus?) / leones leg(ati?) v(otum) s(olverunt) l(ibentes) m(erito).

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Abbreviations
ae = L’Annee epigraphique, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1888-
cil = Corpus Inscriptionum Latinorum, Berlin, Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences, 1863-
inscr. it. = Inscriptiones Italicæ, Ist. Poligrafico dello Stato, Rome 1931-
suppl. it. = Supplementa Italia, n.s., Ed. Quasar, Rome 1981-

Fig. 1 - Foppe di Nadro, rock n. 4 (photo by M. Pavese Rubins)
Fig. 2 - Latin Inscription of Fontes Divini (CIL V 4938)
Fig. 3 - Latin Inscription of Cautopates (CIL V 4935)

Fig. 4 - Latin Inscription of Sol Divinus (CIL V 4948)

Fig. 5 - Latin Inscription of Pescarzo (CIL V 4951)

Fig. 6 - The Concarena (photo Pavese Rubins)