

Cautopates and Sol Divinus. Sun deities in Valcamonica

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Summary - Roman beliefs were locally adapted and renewed in Roman Age. 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 integreted into the new Roman system. The sun behind the sacred mountains of Valcamonica kept a strong sacred meaning. Latin inscriptions were dedicated to solar deities as Cautopates and Sol Divinus. Cautopates, in particular, testifies the persistence of a local ancestral God and he seems to be his anthropomorphic representation.

Keywords: Cautopates / Sol divinus / Valcamonica / Roman Age

Riassunto - In epoca romana nuovi culti vengono progressivamente naturalizzati e integrati alle divinità ancestrali locali preromane. Le incisioni rupestri si rinnovano grazie all'introduzione di soggetti nuovi, come per esempio le epigrafi latine su roccia. Alcuni elementi portanti della sacralità camuna persistono e sembrano essere tradotti e reinterpretati in chiave locale. Il sole al di là della montagna sacra camuna continua a essere venerato. I culti di Cautopates e Sol divinus sono testimoniati in Valcamonica grazie al rinvenimento di due iscrizioni sacre latine dedicate a queste divinità. E Cautopates in particolare sembra essere la rappresentazione antropomorfica di un culto locale.

Parole chiave: Cautopates / Sol divinus / Valcamonica / età romana

Under the Roman rule, Valcamonica showed a conflation and integration of Roman and Camunian customs and traditions. Indigenous magic-ritual beliefs were gradually adapted and reinterpreted, while the new Roman culture started taking its own place inside the Camunian society. Some imported cults seem anthropomorphic representations of local Gods. Some key elements of the native religion of Camunni persisted until the Roman time¹. Among other deities, the sun shows prolific evidence in the magic world of the pre-roman Valcamonica's rock art.

The middle valley remained relatively inaccessible as a border region in the middle of the Alps during the Roman Empire. The Roman impact occurred very slowly. Augustus conceived and implemented the projects to economically and administratively arrange the Gaul². 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 Empire³. Local history still remains unclear during the Ist century B.C. as the Roman literature and historiography rarely mention the valley of Camunians⁴. Material with a religious association began

¹ The sun, the water and the mountain continue to be the key players in the local sacred ritualism (Pavese Rubins 2015: 181-187).

² Ferdiere 2005: 88.

³ Pavese Rubins 2014: 18, 95, 336.

⁴ The first archaeological Roman remains date back to the 1st century B.C., between the leadership of Julius Caesar and Augustus (Rossi 2010: 19). Remote valley corners show early trading contacts with the Romans as new imported artefacts were flanking the local production (Rossi 2004: 39; ROSSI 2010: 21). Evidence of conservatism appears with the persistence of interment in

to be visualized in a Roman form. Ancient local deities, although obscure, were recorded in Latinized form on inscriptions, as for example *Alantedoba* from Ossimo which is not recorded anywhere else in the Roman world⁵. In Brescia a sacred inscription recalls *Deus Alus Saturnus*⁶. The value of Saturn in Valcamonica could have been quite strong in the past. At the beginning of the VIII century in Edolo, Aripert the II, king of Lombards and nephew of Theodelinda has still to demolish a portrait of Saturn⁷. The persistence of pagan cults certainly lasted until the XVIII century in Valcamonica as people and entire villages were still prosecuted for witchcraft and sorcery⁸.

The sun was a topic in the prehistoric rock art as well as in the Latin inscriptions of Valcamonica. Many pre-roman Camunian rock engravings were carved with sun symbols, as for example the *Roccia del Sole* at *Capitello dei Due Pini*, the Rock of Cemmo n. 2 and the Rock of Bagnolo. The stone was indeed seen as an eternal material that was dedicated to the deities and to the spirit of the ancestors who were immortal⁹. In Foppe di Nadro, on panel n. 4, a round shaped effect recalls a solar disc and surrounds a diving man who seems to plunge into a natural rock cavity which is filled up with water after raining. The sacred mountain Concarena stands out in the background. The panel represents the fusion and the combination of the three major local sacred elements: sun, mountain and water¹⁰.

As a cult, it seems the Sun was adapted to the local context while keeping his sacred meaning. *Cautopates* and *Sol Divinus* (the Divine Sun) were adopted in the valley probably because they were perceived as equivalent or complementary to a local deity.

The Latin altar consecrated to *Cautopates* in Sale Marasino in the 2nd century AD seems to be the most pitching¹¹. It was commissioned by Caius Munatius Tiro, duumvir (one of two joint

funerary rituals and the use of specific grave goods, as well as the fact that traditional dwellings are still made of local elements (wood and stone) (Rossi 2010: 21).

5 CIL V 4934; IB 770; ILS 4897; Inscr. Ital. X, V 1161; Urbinati 1958: 247; Bertolini Panazza 1980 vol.I: 199; Abelli Condina 1986: 39, 50a; Suppl It n.s., 8, n. 1161: 185; Gregori 1990: 79 n.A, 088, 044; Gregori 2000: 274, 288, 292; Pavese 2006 n. 76: *Alantedoba/Sex(tus) Cornelius/Primus/V(otum) S(olvit) L(ibens) M(erito)*. The root *al-, very common in the Celtic world, seems to be connected with the idea of "white, light" (Ellis Evans 1967: 132-133; Pascal 1964: 134).

6 Inscr. Ital.. X 3; Gregori 2000: 281.

7 Lorenzi 1991: 15, 26.

8 Docc. XLVIII-LII of 8th of December 1485 (Putelli 1929: 30-31); CVCS 1498, chapp. 458. 460, 463, 469, 470, 461; Letter of the castellan of Breno, Carlo Emiliani, to Marin Giorgio, a Venetian diplomat, 24th of June 1518 (Prevideprato 1976: 20-25); *I Diarii di Marino Sanuto*, XXV, Pisogne 1518 (Sanuto 1889: 586-587); *Libro antico delle vicinie del Comune di Edolo*, 7th of August 1558, (Putelli 1929: 38-39), proceedings of the trial against the maggots, "rughe", accused of damaging the local agriculture (Lorenzi 1991: 98-99, 202-209).

9 Wood was a perishable material that could fit just with the huts of living people and it was not supposed to last forever. Maybe in Valcamonica, as it has been hypothesized at Stonehenge, rock art was addressed to all immortal beings. On the base of the comparison with the modern megaliths of Madagascar, tombs and monuments erected in a sacred place should be made in stone as an eternal material creating an enduring contact with the Gods and the immortal spirits of the deceased; in contrast, wood was intended for mortal human beings (Covington 2010: 18). 10 Pavese Rubins 2015: 181-187.

11 *Cil* V 4935; Inscr. Ital. X, V 1162; Urbinati 1958: 251; Abelli Condina 1986: 104-105 n.21; Suppl. It. n.s. 8: 185, n. 1162; Gregori 1990: 25A, 179, 005; 2000: 289; Pavese 2006: n. 103; 2014: 207, 280-281: *Cautopati / C(aius) Munatius / Quir(ina tribu) Tiro II vîr / I(ure) d(icundo) et C(aius) Mun/atius*

magistrates who performed their roles in conjunction with the *ordo decurionum* and who were annually elected)¹² and by his son Caius Munatius Fronto. We know that they were part of the Camunian community as they mention the tribus Quirina, which is the tribe of Camunni¹³. We cannot exactly know the origins of Tiro as he doesn't mention his patronymic, but the same family name (gens Munatia) recurs also in Lovere, Cividate Camuno and Cemmo¹⁴. In Cemmo, a funerary inscription has been dedicated to the memory of a certain Caius Munatius Fronto, husband of Pontia Ponticia, but we cannot know if it was the same person or just a namesake. 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 to the valley¹⁵. A local god has been reshaped through the addition of a Latin name.

Cautopates is a solar deity connected to the God Mithras. In the traditional iconography, Mythras is depicted between *Cautopates* and *Cautes*, two torch bearers who represent the sunset and the sunrise respectively, or the autumn and the springtime, even the death and the life¹⁶. Cautopates holds his torch downward which symbolizes the setting sun, while Cautes holds it upward symbolising the rising sun. Cautopates cult is not much known in Cisalpine Gaul¹⁷, as it's more common in Germania Superior where it was introduced by the army¹⁸. In the Mithrae-

Fronto / Filius D(ono) D(ederunt).

14 Inscr. Ital. X, V 1216; Abelli Condina 1986: 74 n. 12; Suppl It n.s., 8, n. 1216: 186; Gregori 1990: 125, n. A179, 006; 2000: 47; Pavese 2006, n. 43: [---]*m*[---]/*Mun*[---]/*Ti(beri) fil(ius VEL io) -/---;* CIL V 4946; IB 782; Inscr. Ital. X, V 1178; Abelli Condina 1986: 112 n. 6, 2; Suppl It n.s., 8, n. 1178: 185; Gregori 1990: 126 n. A179, 009; Gregori 2000: 286; Pavese 2006: n. 100: *Miner(vae)/Munatia/Secunda / V(otum) S(olvit) L(ibens) M(erito;* Inscr.Ital. X, V 1217; Suppl It n.s., 8, n. 1217: 186; Gregori 1990: 125 n. A179, 003 and 146 n. A222, 005; Gregori 2000: 47, 93; Pavese 2006 n. 122: [*C(aio)] Munatio/*[*F*]*rontoni/*[*P*]*ont(ia) Ponticia/*[*ma*]*rito.*

16 Friggeri, Granino Cecere, Gregori 2012: 643, 647 n. IX, 54 and 656 n. IX, 59; Pascal 1964: 63; Ianovitz 1972: 12, 34, 47, 100; Vermaseren 1981: 100. Other interpretations have seen them as the personification of the evening and the morning, the West and the East, the sun (*Cautes*) and the moon (*Cautopates*), and vice versa (PW 1813; Vermaseren 1981: 101). The torch flame is important in the cult of Mithras as usually it was celebrated in the darkness of underground shrines and natural caves (*castra tenebrarum*), just enlighted by a few sacred fires, even if it was the deity of the Sun (IVI: 98).

17 Three Latin inscriptions in Northern Italy, two in Aquileia (CIL V, 763: *Cauti / Q(uintus)* Baien(us) / Procul(us) / pater // Cautop(ati) / Q(uintus) Baien(us) / Procul(us) / pater; CIL V, 765: Cautopati / Aug(usto) sac(rum) / Callistus / O[--]) and one in Novara (CIL V, 5465: Cautopati sac[r(um)] / M(arcus) Statius Nig[er] / VIvir Aug(ustalis) c(reatus) d(ecreto) d(ecurionum) M(ediolanensium) / leg(atus?) dend(rophorum) c(oloniae) A(ureliae?) A(ugustae?) M(ediolanii) / et C(aius) Valerius Iulia(nus?) / leones leg(ati?) v(otum) s(olverunt) l(ibentes) m(erito).

18 Vermaseren 1981: 102; Pascal 1964: 60-61.

¹² About the duoviri legislation, see Laurence, Clearly, Sears 2011: 73-74.

¹³ 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 Tridentum (Richardson 2012: 21; Gregori, Filippini 2012: 118).

¹⁵ A comparison of cosmopolitism and religion in the Britannia Romana De La Bedoyère 2010: 235.

CAVTOPATI G · MVNATIVS QVIR · TIRO II VR I·D·ET·G·MVN ATIVS · FRONTO FILIVS · D·D·

Fig. 1 - Latin Inscription of Cautopates (CIL V 4935)

SOLI · DIVINO APISOCIVS SVCCASVS · PRO SE·ET PRO-PATRO NIS 5 MGLQ

Fig. 2 - Latin Inscription of Sol Divinus (CIL V 4948)

um of Martigny, Cautes is clearly the personification of the rising sun¹⁹. New knowledge by far may have arrived to Valcamonica with trading freedmen and members of the army, though their experience and behavioral norms could have been very different²⁰.

In the Hellenistic period, the autumn equinox and the vernal equinox were consecrated to the God Mithras which personified the divine sun, the universe demiurge²¹. A natural phenomenon of light refraction appears every equinox in springtime and in autumn in Valcamonica on the Concarena and on the Pizzo Badile Camuno²². Still nowadays, the collective unconscious of the local community of Valcamonica talks about the "Spirit of the Mountain" ("Genio della Montagna"), when the Pizzo Badile Camuno seems to transfigure itself into a strange effect of light blue shade before the sunrise. That's a curious atmospheric phenomenon of humidity on the air which should have moved the imagination of ancient people. The same days, when the sun goes beyond the horizon of Concarena, the sunrays spread in a circular ring throughout the indented mountaintops and the mountain seems to have been split apart. The autumn equinox is symbolically the beginning of the descent to the underworld, when the night will triumph over the daylight. The torch of Cautopates represents the night and the autumn equinox when the darkest season starts²³. A festival dedicated to the autumn equinox is still celebrated nowadays in Saviore, in Valsaviore, a small village where it is possible to see the Concarena. The tradition of burning a puppet of a witch ("Brusa la 'ecia") in Valcamonica is connected to the spring equinox in order to make the soil fertile after the wintertime²⁴

19 Wiblé 2001: 52.

- 21 Cattabiani 1994: 303.
- 22 Bartaletti 2004: 74-75.
- 23 Cattabiani 2015: 326.

²⁰ Freedman trading and members of the army re-created pattern of life on the basis of their own experience in Britannia (Creighton 2006: 86, 106).

²⁴ In the Celtic society there were four important celebrations in the course of the year, at the

In Breno, district Onera, a Latin inscription could have been connected to a local Sun deity as well as to Mithras²⁵. It was consecrated to the *Sol Divinus* by freedman *L. Apisocius Successus*²⁶. The family name is absolutely unique, as well as the epithet of the Sun that usually is "Perennis" in Cisalpine Gaul²⁷, with just an analogue in Pannonia²⁸. Many roles of autumnal Mithras were inherited in the Middle Age by the archangel Michael whose feast is celebrated on the 29th of September, immediately after the equinox, while marking the transition to autumn²⁹. That's not probably just a coincidence that Breno Castle was built on the site of an ancient Langobardic small church dedicated to Saint Michael in 1000 AD ³⁰.

In the shrine devoted to Minerva in Breno (district Spinera), a pendant-amulet depicts a figure of a half woman and a half bird who is rising from a solar boat³¹. Sometimes Isis is depicted on a solar barge. That's not indeed easy to exactly interpret the value of Isis which is a popular Goddess in Cividate Camuno³² and in Cisalpine Gaul³³. She could be the Roman visualization of a local Mother Goddess³⁴ as well as an official cult devoted to her in Cividate Camuno, the

25 Generally Mythras is depicted as the personification of the Sun, with or without the epithet "Invictus"; in Brescia an iscription (*CIL* V 4283) is dedicated to *Sol Deus Invictus* (Urbinati 1958: 251).

26 *CIL* V 4948; Inscr. Ital. X, V 1185 (=X, V 33: 228); Urbinati 1958: 251, n. 4; Abelli Condina 1986: 27, n. 8; Suppl. It. n.s., 8, n. 1185: 185; Gregori 1990: 42, n. A021, 005; Ae 1991, 847; Garzetti 1991: 228, n. 33; Gregori 2000: 74, 217, 223, 290, 291; Pavese 2006: n. 109; 2014: 209-210: *Soli divino / L(ucius) Apisocius / Succ[e]ssus, pro / se et pro patro / nis / MGLQ / [...]+.+io / [----?] / [---]++eniis.* 27 Pascal 1964: 64; Vermaseren 1981: 105.

28 Just another sample in the Roman World in Podvrsko (Pannonia): AE 1977, 630: *Soli / divino*. Usually this cult was common among soldiers, merchants and officials from Septimius Severus (192-211 AD). Under Heliogabal (218-222 AD) the Sun has his temple on the Palatine in Rome and he's married to Minerva (Grant 2002: 175). Under Aurelian (270-275 AD) the Sol Invictus becomes the supreme God above all others, starting the first step towards monotheism (Altheim 1960: 11-12; Roda 1999: 57). About the Sun deity and possible interpretations and dating according to Roman emperors devotions, see Pavese Rubins 2014: 210.

29 Cattabiani 1994: 303.

30 Mountain, forest, cave and holy water are connotative elements of many sanctuaries dedicated to Saint Michael (Giovetti 2005: 61-61). Other two churches were as well dedicated to Saint Michel (on the top of the col above Berzo, near Cividate Camuno, and in Gianico).

31 Rossi 2010: 92-95. About solar ships and birds in Valcamonica rock art De Marinis 1992: 162, 164. It has been interpreted as a Goddess of the Water, well known in the Paleovenetian region under the name of *Reitia* or *Pora*, a deity of fording or transit, metaphorical or real (Rossi 2010: 94-95, 214; Fontaine 1990: 103; Spengler 1957: 970).

32 Four Inscriptions to Isis: CIL V 4939; Inscr. Ital. X, V 1168; Inscr. Ital.. X, V 1170; Inscr. Ital. X, V 1169

33 Pascal 1964: 46.

34 Isis and the Goddess Mother are associated to two Latin inscriptions from Garda Lake. In Malcesine (CIL V, 4007): *Matri Deum et Isidi / G(aius!) Menatius G(ai!) filius / Fab(ia) Severus fanum refe/cit et pronaum de suo fe/cit ex voto.* In Arco (INSCR. IT. X, V 1058): *Matri deum [magnae?] / Numisius Her[mes] / Numisiae Tyches [et] / Numisi Primi Herm[etis f(ilius)] / fanum ampliavi[t].* In Valcamonica a Latin Inscription could be interpreted in the same way: *Matri deum [et Isidi]* (CIL V 4940; Inscr. Ital. X, V 1172; Abelli Condina 1986: 72 n. 1; Suppl. It. n.s., 8, n. 1172: 185; Gregori

two solstices and two equinoxes: Alban Arthan (winter solstice), Alban Eiler (vernal equinox), Alban Hevin (summer solstice), Alban Elvis (autumnal equinox) (Parson 2013: 15).



Fig. 3 - Foppe di Nadro, rock n.4 (photo by M.Pavese Rubins)

administrative centre of the valley, where all inscribed stones of her have been found³⁵. 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 cow³⁶.

The value of Serapis³⁷ of Cividate Camuno rises some doubts too. According to Macrobius, Serapis stands for the Sun³⁸. He's usually together with Isis, but could be connected with other deities as Iuppiter Sol Serapis³⁹.

The local ancestral deity represented during the Roman time by Cautopates seems to be connected to the mountaintop in direct contact with the sky. Cautopates is a solar deity connected to the stone as the God Mithras was born from the rock⁴⁰ and in Latin "cautes" means "rock, cliff". As it appears in other alpine contexts, the peaks attract devotion. Local ancestors were probably intimidated by the power of atmospheric phenomena on the mountaintops, where the tops were touching the sky, on the border between man and celestial dimension⁴¹. 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 Empire⁴². The simple form of his name (the cognomen followed by the patronymic Plada) could show a sort of conservatism, as he was a centurion and he was almost certainly a Roman citizen (with

2000: 290; Pavese 2006, n. 10; 2014: 208).

35 Fontana 2010: 34-35. In general about official roman religion Scheid 2005: 75.

36 As syncretic Goddess, Isis could correspond also to Athena, Demeter, Kore, and Hera (Witt 1971: 20, 110, 121, 126, 129, 151).

37 Inscr. Ital. X, V 1169; Abelli Condina 1986: 63-64; Suppl It n.s., 8, n. 116: 185; Gregori 1990: 240 n. C239; ID. 2000: 195; Pavese 2006: n. 8: [Isidi e?]t Serapi(di)/[---] Tertia/[v(otum) s(olvit)] l(ibens) m(erito).

38 Macrobius, Sat., I, 20: Ex his apparet Sarapis et Solis unam et individuam esse naturam. 39 CIL V 3232, CIL VI 402, CIL VI 707, CIL IX 5824, CIL XI 5738.

40 A portrait of Mithras born from the rock, "petra genetrix" (AE 1980: 48; Friggeri, Granino Cecere, Gregori 2012: 642-643 IX, 51). According to the mythology, *Cautes* and *Cautopates* used to drink at a sacred spring created from an arrow thrown by Saturn into a stone (Spengler 1957: 970; Fontaine 1990: 103).

41 Sansoni 2006: 12.

42 CIL V 4951; Inscr. It. X, V 1195; Gregori 1990: 252, n. D021; 2000: 172; Pavese 2006: n. 128; 2014: 288-289, n. 9. Cerialis Pladae f(ilius) / cent(urio) coh(ortis) Alpinae / aram refecit l(ibens) m(erito)

three names), but he prefers the usual name in his native context⁴³. Pescarzo is located toward the top of Concarena. The ex-voto seems a hybrid solution. A standard religious inscription on the altar is placed on the sacred mountain, close to the sky, without need of naming the deity. The Concarena was indeed a sacred mountain since ancient times, as the prehistoric rock art was mostly engraved in its area⁴⁴.

The interpretatio romana is sometimes paring local cults with Roman deities, as well as incorporating local cults and imported divinities into the military pantheon⁴⁵. If we observe the conformity of other rural communities under the Roman rule, as for example in Tripolitana, Roman and Latin elements have limited penetration outside the urban communities⁴⁶. The inscription of Pescarzo and the inscription of Cautopates can demonstrate the same discrepancy or conformity to the Roman religion and customs depending on rural and urban context.

Human memory is a container of traditions whose knowledge might be expressed by transmitting native rituals and by passing down stories and myths through the centuries⁴⁷. Latin inscriptions dedicated to a solar deity as Cautopates, which is not well know in North of Italy, can provide a key to read the cult of the sun through the times inside the circumscribed space of Valcamonica. An eastern God as Cautopates could have been transplanted as a continual interest of a native ancestral cult.



Fig. 4 - The Concarena during the equinox (photo by Gigliola Rizza)



Fig. 5 - The Pizzo Badile Camuno during the equinox (photo by Gigliola Rizza)

45 Mattingly 2011: 231. While Roman governors and generals had no handbook that prescribed how they should deal with native communities, their education and the examples set by their ancestors could be lead by a stereotyped behaviour (Vallat 2010: 104-105). Conquerors show a great capacity to adapt to the diversity of each situation in relation to the non-Roman regions and populations under their control (Williams 2011: 94). 46 Mattingly 2011: 241-245.

47 About the importance of traditions, rituals and social relations in prehistoric societies Giddens 1995: 4-5; Creighton 2006: 81.

⁴³ Kraft 1951: 66, 81; Forni 1992: 186. According to Dobson, Cerialis hadn't the Roman citizenship as everyone could be a centurion in the auxiliaries troops (Dobson 1981: 57).

⁴⁴ In the Celtic society, the Sky-god was often associated with mountains, because they reached high into own element (Green 1997: 156). Germanic and Slavic deities as Perun, Taranis and Thor have similar characteristic and power (Sansoni 2006: 73-82).



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Abbreviations

AE = L'Année épigraphique, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1888-

CIL = Corpus Inscriptionum Latinorum, Berlin, Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences, 1863-

CVCS = *Communitatis Valliscamonicae Statuta, Brixiae 1498,* reprinted in its original form, Brescia, Sintesi Editrice, 1975.

ILS = Dessau, Hermann (1892-1916). Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae, Berlin, Weidmann,

INSCR. IT. = Inscriptiones Italiae, Rome, Ist. Poligrafico dello Stato, 1931-

RE = Pauly, August; Wissowa, Georg (1839-1980), Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft (Pauly-Wissowa), Stuttgart, J. B. Metzler.

SUPPL. IT.=Supplementa Italica, n.s., Rome, Ed. Quasar, 1981-