



# Valcamonica, Remedello and Oetzi the Ice Man

by Ralph M. Rowlett\*

## ABSTRACT

*Two of the greatest archaeological discoveries of the late twentieth century, the analysis of the petroglyphs in Val Camonica and Oetzi the Ice Man on the Italian-Austrian border are integrally linked together. They are linked by the Remedello Variant of the Chalcolithic, since it provides the cultural context for both the petroglyphs and Oetzi, whose flint and pollen traces derive from the Remedello region. The Val Camonica petroglyphs depict much of the lifeway of Oetzi and his compatriots. Particularly emphasized are the role of weapons, especially axes and daggers, in this culture, significant since Oetzi was fatally injured by an arrow ostensibly foreign to the Remedello Variant. Val Camonica, on the cultural frontier, like Oetzi, depicts clashes taking place there. The petroglyphs also depict more peaceful pursuits in the life of Oetzi, the close association of hunting and herding, farming and fields, plows, wagons and sledges, and other activities are illustrated. Oetzi's equipment and clothing provide a detailed look at some items depicted in the artwork. The petroglyphs show not only some of these tissues and items, they illustrate the costume which was worn by the female counterparts of Oetzi.*

## Riassunto

*Due delle principali scoperte archeologiche del recente ventesimo secolo quali le incisioni rupestri della Valcamonica e Oetzi, l'uomo di ghiaccio ritrovato sul confine italo-austriaco, sono legati tra loro. I due sono collegati dalla Variante Calcolitica di Remedello, poiché quest'ultima fornisce il contesto culturale di entrambi, le cui pietre focaie e tracce di polline derivano dalla regione di Remedello. Le incisioni rupestri della Valcamonica riproducono in parte lo stile di vita condotto da Oetzi e dai suoi compatrioti. Il ruolo delle armi e principalmente delle asce e dei pugnali, di questa cultura, viene particolarmente enfatizzato cosa significativa se pensiamo che Oetzi fu ferito a morte da un'arma apparentemente estranea al contesto della Variante di Remedello. La Valcamonica, come Oetzi sulla frontiera culturale, narra, attraverso le sue incisioni, gli scontri che ebbero luogo in quest'area. Le incisioni riproducono anche lati più pacifici della vita di Oetzi, lo stretto legame tra la caccia e il branco, tra l'agricoltura, i campi, l'aratro, i carri e le slitte, così come tutta una serie di altre attività. L'equipaggiamento e il vestiario di Oetzi sono molto simili a quelli delle rappresentazioni artistiche. Le incisioni mostrano, non solo alcuni di questi tessuti e oggetti, ma anche gli abiti indossati dalle donne all'epoca di Oetzi.*

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The petroglyphs in the Val Camonica and Oetzi the Iceman are among the most significant archaeological discoveries of the late twentieth century. The analyses and subsequent publications regarding these finds actually link them together by way of the Remedello Variant of the Chalcolithic.

As Schindler (1993) early on pointed out, the Remedello Variant is the primary cultural context for Oetzi, and the Val Camonica occurs at the western frontier, near Lago Garda, of the Remedello territory (Fig. 1). Thus the petroglyphs of the Val Camonica and associated Chalcolithic stelae may well illustrate the cultural background and activities of Oetzi. We are presently working on detailed analyses of how the Val Camonica petroglyphs depict much of the lifeway of Oetzi and his community. There have been a host of elaborate suggestions put forth concerning the immediate circumstances -- even psychical motivations

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- surrounding Oetzi's demise in the Hauslobjoch. Some fabrications began barely a year from the primary find and new, novel speculations continue to the present.

Dramatic and engaging as the narratives may be, most of the reasons circulated for Oetzi's flight and eventual death are ill supported by the evidence available. It is important to note carefully the contextual elements that can inform a find such as this without prejudicing -- emotionally, politically or otherwise - interpretation (Rowlett, R.A.: 2000).

Chronologically, the Val Camonica petroglyphs extend over a vast array of time, from the Upper Palaeolithic until the Renaissance and later, but great numbers of the petroglyphs date to the Chalcolithic and Bronze Age (Anati 2004: 123-126) as also at the nearby Valtellina to the northwest. Since radiocarbon dating places Oetzi just after 3,000 bc, this would put him in the time frame of the "Chalcolithic" series of petroglyphs at Val Camonica (Anati 1994: 48-50; Bradley, Chippindale, and Helsog 2001: 514-516).

Ironically, Val Camonica and Oetzi both occur at the frontiers of the Remedello region, but the affiliation is still clear enough. The flint for Oetzi's endscraper, multiple purpose drill, knife and arrowheads all come from the flint near Brescia, Italy (Barfield 1994) and the pollen on his well-chosen Alpine expeditionary clothing all points to the valleys south of the spot in the Oetztal where he was found. Also moss found on the body comes from Vinschagau. Isotope analysis of bones, teeth and stomach contents indicate he spent his youth in the Eisack Valley. The fact that Oetzi was found near the northern frontier of the Remedello Variant (Fig. 2) has implications for interpreting both the find itself and for how to use the Val Camonica petroglyphs for understanding the life styles of his native society.

The Remedellan Ventosa petroglyphs depict a hafted axe, which can be used as either a tool or weapon, or even medium of exchange (Keeley 1996), closely resembling the one carried by Oetzi (Spindler 1994: 31) (Fig. 3) indicating that the Lombardian petroglyphs reflect with considerable accuracy the equipment and paraphernalia of the local inhabitants. In fact, axes closely resembling Oetzi's axe are one of the most common motifs in the Chalcolithic artwork of this region (Anati 2004: 124-125).

Oetzi was well-equipped for a high Alpine journey, as shown by his full gear of fur hat, rain cloak, insulated Alpine hiking shoes, backpack, fire starting kit, beads, fungus supply, and flint drill, endscraper, flint knapper, as well as knife, points, arrows and bow. This equipment and the timing in early autumn but during expectable reasonably mild weather mitigates against his trek into the higher altitude being an emergency foray or hastily arranged flight in view of unforeseen circumstances. However he arrived to his final resting place near the summit, above the Tisenjoch, it appears he was prepared in advance for climatic conditions along a mountain crest.

To judge from stelae, as at Campolungo 4 (Solana and Marreta 2004: 127-129) the knife would be carried in woven sheath and stuck into the belt. Oetzi's equipment appears depleted only in terms of the small number of complete arrows (both of which were broken), implying that he had launched most of them previously in some kind of action that resulted in his being struck in the back by a projectile from some non-native, non-local source. Certainly he needed the flint flaker that he brought with him to make new flint points.

He carried 12 unfinished, unpointed arrow shafts plus the 2 arrows with fletching and stemmed flint heads mounted with tar and so as to separate from the arrow shaft in the target. His yew wood bow stave was unfinished, but the flint tools he had with him were adequate to do the task. That he was involved in some kind of armed conflict is evidenced not only his slightly depleted weapon supply and that fact that blood from four other individuals, besides himself, was found on his broken arrows, quiver, knife, rain cloak, and there were cuts on his body.

The recently discovered arrowhead deeply embedded into Oetzi's left shoulder and separated from an arrow shaft points obscurely to the direction of his assailant. This arrowhead, (Fig. 4) with long stem and wide sharp shoulders, is of the general style current in the late Chalcolithic of the Alps, but the shoulders are much too wide and angular to be of local workmanship.

The points of Oetzi in particular and Remedello generally are well known (Fig. 5), tending to be narrow, with short stems and long blades. The exact length of the point inside Oetzi is not exactly known, nor is it totally clear as to the length of the blade in relation to the stem, but clearly the proportions of the Oetzi death arrow are different from Remedello arrow and spear points.

Using the diameter of Oetzi's left humerus, visible in the x-ray as a scale, the point is just under 30 mm long, so it is indeed an arrowhead and not a spear point. The shape of this arrowhead hints strongly that Oetzi's attacker was not from his own society or local culture. For example, the angle between the stem and the base of Remedello points tends to be close to a right angle or even becoming acute as the full Bronze Age culture develops (Anati 1995: 50-55) but the arrowhead in Oetzi has a markedly obtuse angle between the stem and the base of the point.

Just to the northwest of the Oetzi's locality lies the Lutzengutle section in the Swiss Graubunden, who, despite belonging to the Horgen Variant of the Western "Neolithic", make similar arrowheads to the Re-

medello ones, although not normally so narrow as the Remedello points. So Lutzengutle seems not to be the source of the point (Rowlett, R.M. 1993) found by x-ray inside Oetzi. Further study, still under way by us, seeks a close match for the point that disabled Oetzi.

The Val Camonica petroglyphs do depict men armed with bows hunting herds of wild fauna (Fig. 6). They also show an armed combat with archers and spear men fighting each other (Fig. 6). Since this artwork occurs at frontier of Remedello, it might also, depict a frontier battle between opposing socio-political groups. The archers have already released their arrows, as can be seen by the flexure of the bows, while one spearman has his weapon poised for thrusting or for heaving. The long stemmed point to the right of the spear man matches well the configuration of the point in Oetz shoulder. The figures to the left, on the opposite side from the point, also bear round shields. Since the Remedello, with its Bell Beaker pottery (Anati 1995: 58-60), may well already have been Indo-European speaking, the figures with the shields could be the local folk, given that the Proto-Indo-European word for shield, reconstructable as *\*spelhoa* (Mallory and Adams 2006: 245-246), indicates that already the early Indo-Europeans wielded shields.

Additional confirmation that the Remedellans could possibly also be Indo-European speaking comes from their symbolism of a tripartite universe, with upper, middle and lower levels depicted on the petroglyphs (Anati 2004: 301-304), a conceptualization consistent with reconstructed early Indo-European belief (Mallory and Adams 2006: 108, 438-439)

Walter Leitner also proposes 'a political struggle,' and a hand-to-hand melee ensued. The body had several fresh 'cuts' and the blood of four individuals was found variously on his gear. As he fled higher up the pass, an arrow hit him in the back. Though able to temporarily escape his attackers, "exhausted and losing blood he kept climbing," nearly reaching the summit above the Tisenjoch (Leitner quoted in Bernstein 2006:84-85). Admittedly, Leitner leans toward internicine conflict, which turns on how high was the status of Oetzi within his society.

He even speculates that perhaps his attackers eventually found the dead man slumped over a rock, but dared not touch his prized axe--it would prove they(!) had something to do with his disappearance.

The petroglyphs imply that the absence of two kinds of Remedellan artifacts from Oetzi's inventory is remarkable. Halberds show up in the petroglyphs and on stelae almost as frequently as axes. This predilection continues into the Bronze Age, when triangular halberd points are depicted, (Bradley, Chippindale and Kelsog 2001: 515-516), but the Chalcolithic halberds sport elliptical halberd points (Fig. 7 ), which could well be stone points because elliptical bronze points are virtually non-existent. It is noteworthy that Oetzi did not have in his possession a halberd. Perhaps he lost it at the combat wherein he was wounded.

Experiments with halberds and spiked clubs in the Seminar in Old World Archaeology at the University of Missouri demonstrate that short stemmed points make quite effective halberd or spiked club points. These same experiments also demonstrate that riveted bronze "daggers" are also effective, and more durable, halberd tips. Virginia deer heads, in lieu of human schools, mounted on small mobile cars provided the target for the halberds and clubs in these experiments (Fig, 8).

The other item noticeably missing from Oetzi's possession is the copper artifact called typologically, the "spectacle pendant." While more common on female representations in the Remedello Variant (Fig. 9), they are occasionally depicted singly on male representations. These pendants, like the possession of a copper axe, imply a very high social status, or even highly spiritual associations, for the one who wears them, so the absence from Oetzi (unless taken from him or lost by glacial outwash) possibly indicates his standing. These spectacle pendants, which in Europe occur from the Late Neolithic through the Chalcolithic until the Early Bronze, may very well some way relate to spectacles as understood today.

These forms were still being made of wood in Manchuria throughout the 20th century according to the native Manchurian informants of R.M. Rowlett. The spectacle pendants really are a kind of spectacle, being used as a kind of "sun glasses" to reduce the glaring brightness of sunlight reflecting off snow. Certainly in the high, snow-covered Alps, there were times when such protection from the glare of reflected light would be needed. Stelae showing the spectacle pendant often do have sun symbols depicted as well. In Manchuria, the spectacles are made of elm bark, partly because the material is suitable for such application, and partly because the elm is cherished since its protein-rich leaves and buds can be cut up and used as human food, as a flavoring in cookies, like chocolate chips in Switzerland.

The petroglyphs and the engraved stelae show that spectacle pendants, while occasionally being worn singly by men, are much more common on female representations, where they occur in multiples, at least two but sometimes up to 8 or more pendants. In fact, the Val Camonica and associated art provide an image of the clothing worn by females in Oetzi's society. Even if the women depicted on the stelae are goddesses, one knows from full scale archaeology that spectacle pendants were used by actual people, so these stelae seem to show how women dressed (Fig.9).

A necklace is common on stelae of both sexes, and these are indeed recovered in full scale archaeology as at Foppe de Nadro, shelter 2 (Anati 1995: 116) In addition, there is some sort of integument around the



neck that looks like a kind of scarf. Besides the belt, there is often a kind of apron as well. Apparently, a high aesthetic value was placed on the females having high, round breasts, a cultural value that persisted into Graeco-Roman times.

The fields and settlements and herds of the local culture defended by these warriors are also depicted on the Val Camonica petroglyphs (Arca 2004 ) and uncovered archaeologically in the Remedello region . While this tradition of depicting fields and landscapes continues from the Neolithic until the full Bronze Age, the Chalcolithic landscape depictions show long rectangular plowed fields connected by pathways and trails (Anati 2004:125; Arca 2004: 320-322) . At Vite, Val Camonica, the rectangular fields seem to nestle near the squarish houses with rounded corners and palisade walls or fences, (Arca 2004:320). Such houses have been dug in full scale archaeology as at Foppe de Nadro in front of Rock 30 (Anati 1995: 116). Given the high altitude, glacial conditions, and rugged terrain where Oetzi was found, one would not expect to see with him any sign of living cattle being present, but his artifacts of horn and bone betray the presence of such domesticates (Schindler 1994) The stelae and petroglyphs show the Remedellans well equipped with such Indo-European favorites as plows and square wagons, while the two stelae at Caven, especially Stela No. 1, depict long narrow sledges for use on snow covered terrain (Anati 1968: figs. 2.3 and 4.5).

Alpine transhumance herding should already have been established (Scarre 2005).

*Fig. 1 Map of the Val Camonica location in relation of the Remedello region and the Oetzi find spot in the Oetzal.*

*Fig. 2 Location of the find spot of Oetzi the Iceman.*

*Fig. 3 Potrglyphs depicting axe similar to the one carried by Oetzi, Val Venosta, and halberds typical of the Chalcolithic in the Val Camonica (redrawn from Schindler and Anati).*

*Fig. 4 Scale drawing from the x-ray of the arrow point embedded in Oetzi's shoulder*

*Fig. 5 The form of Oetzi's knife and points and of typical Remedello Variant (redrawn from Schindler and Anati).*

*Fig. 6 Val Camonica engravings showing hunters or herdsmen with a herd of ungulates. (redrawn from Anati).*

*Fig. 7 Val Camonica petroglyph showing armed combat between warriors armed with bows and shields and those armed with bows and spears. Note in a lower left a point similar to the one found in Oetzi's shoulder (if it is not meant to be a tree). (redrawn from Kuhn, 1957).*

*Fig. 8 Modern experimental stemmed stone point and bronze point arming a halberd.*

*Fig. 9 Female representation from Remedello variant wearing multiple spectacle pendant (redrawn from Anati).*

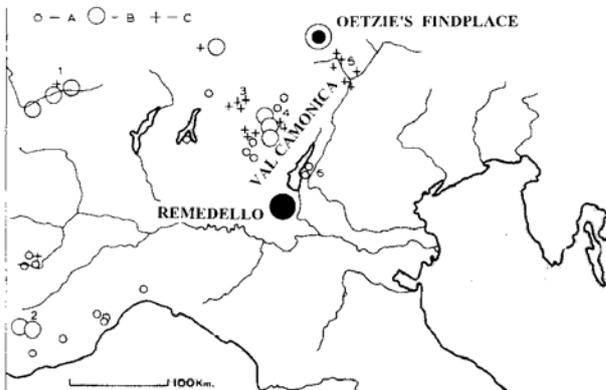


fig. 1

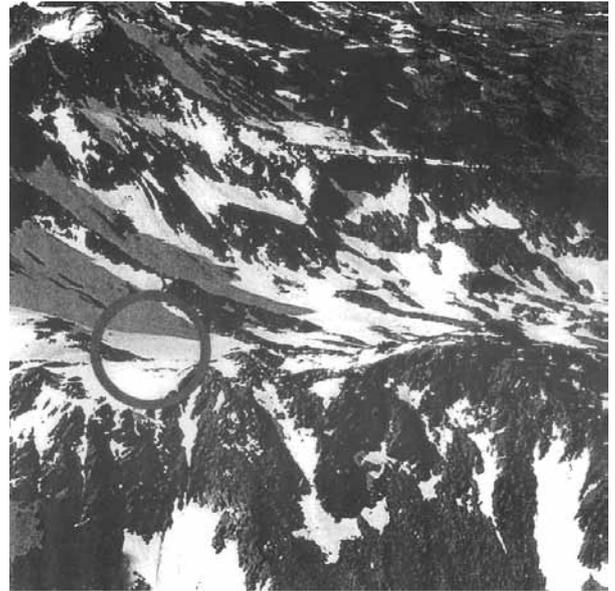


fig. 2

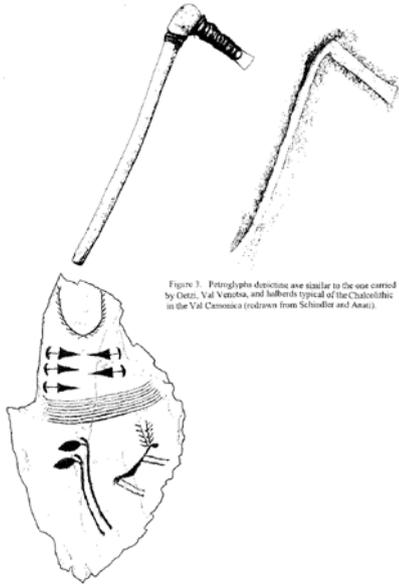


fig. 3

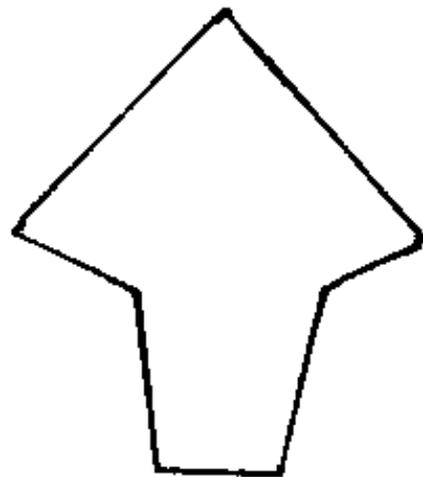


fig. 4

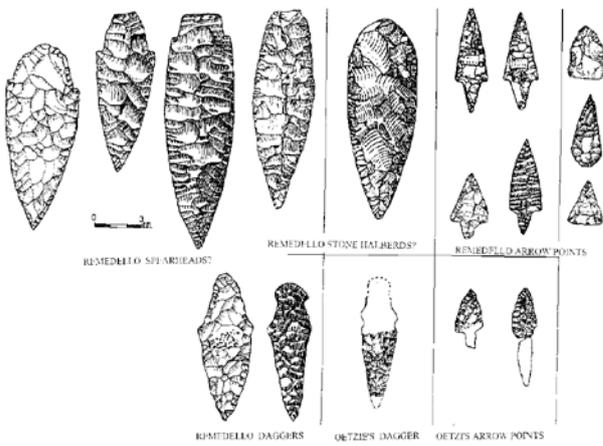


fig. 5

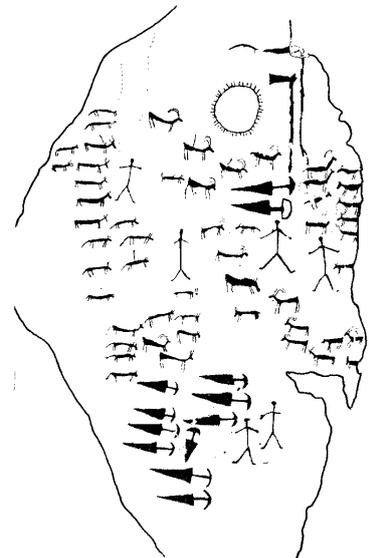


fig. 6



fig. 7



fig. 8

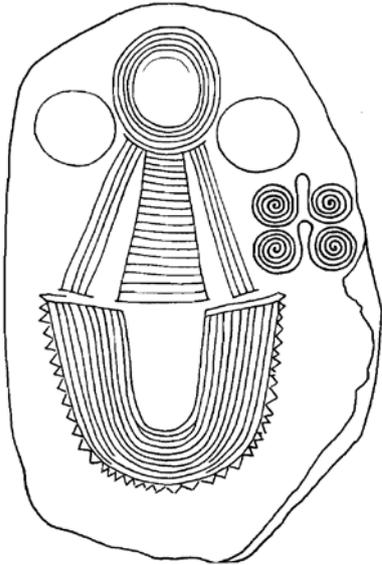


fig. 9