

## VALCAMONICA ROCK ART: STATE OF THE ART

EMMANUEL ANATI\*

### SUMMARY

An overview of the prehistoric rock engravings of Valcamonica from a conceptual anthropology approach. The data have been schematised to constitute a sort of descriptive chart. Particularly useful for comparative analysis with other rock art sites on a world base.

### RIASSUNTO

Una visione d'insieme dell'arte rupestre della Valcamonica da un punto di vista di antropologia concettuale. I dati sono stati sintetizzati così da formare uno schema descrittivo. Particolarmente utile ai sensi di ricerche comparative con altri siti a livello mondiale.

The 75 kilometres long Valcamonica (Camonica Valley) in the Italian Alps includes over 300.000 rock engravings spanning 10.000 years, from the Epi-Palaeolithic period to the Middle Ages. The Valley is at the crossing of the Alps from Italy to Central Europe where both, ideas and people passed through. This area has been studied uninterruptedly for over fifty years by the same team, thus enabling scholars to recognize the meaning of stylistic and thematic changes from period to period. Such changes reflect mutations in way of thinking, in the economy and in the social organization, and contribute to the understanding of the formative period of the European society. The method used and the results obtained have become a landmark in rock art studies.

After 20 years of careful, constant studies, Valcamonica has been declared by UNESCO, "World Cultural Heritage" in 1979 and is the first rock art site in the world to have obtained such nomination. Also, it is the first Italian site that became part of the World Heritage list, and it was recognized to be the major Post-Palaeolithic area of rock art in Europe. Valcamonica is primarily renowned for the new research approach applied, focusing on the use of rock art as a mean of historical reconstruction, producing history for periods considered as prehistoric.

The succession of different styles, "fashions" of rock art, allowed to define a sequence of Camunian periods illustrating 10,000 years of events and human adventures. The numerous cases of superimpositions, the depictions of datable weapons, tools and objects, the presence of extinct animals in the earliest phases and of datable inscriptions in the later ones, make of this sequence a chronological pillar of Post-Palaeolithic rock art in Europe.

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\* Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici, Capo di Ponte (Bs) - Italy

Updating results published in "Camonica Valley" (Anati, 1961), "La datazione dell'arte preistorica camuna" (Anati, 1966), "Capire l'arte rupestre" (Anati, 2007), the present state of the art presents a clearly recognizable sequence of successive periods or historical horizons illustrated by the rock art. The Proto-Camunian period dates back to the first phases of the Holocene, 12.000 to 7.500 years ago. The Camunian Periods I and II correspond to the Neolithic and are currently dated from 7.500 to 5.300 years ago (5.500 – 3.300 B.C.). Period III spans from 3.300 to 1.200 B.C. and includes the Chalcolithic (3.300 – 2.500 B.C.), the Early (2.500 – 1.600 B.C.) and Middle Bronze Age (1.600 – 1.200 B.C.). Period IV includes the Late Bronze Age (1.200 – 1.000 B.C.) and Final Bronze Age (1.000 – 800 B.C.), and the various phases of the Iron Age from 800 B.C. until the arrival of the Roman legions led by Publio Silo in the year 16 B.C. Finally, the Post-Camunian period concerns the "historic" phases of rock art: Roman, Medieval and recent.

In each period rock art reflects the interests and concerns of its people in its time, the economy, the beliefs and the cult, the social organization, the political trends and the international relations. In certain periods tools and weapons depicted in the rock art illustrate foreign objects or foreign influence. The introduction of new elements of technology such as the wheel, or metal working, or weaving, are meaningful for defining the way of life and aspects of the technological abilities. Changes in the architecture of huts, of shrines and of other buildings depicted in the rock art, figures of different ways of funerary practices and other descriptions of habits, are providing the historical background of the various periods. This paper provides a synthesis. For illustrations and additional information please refer to "*The civilization of rocks*" (Anati, 2008).

Two main queries, vital for the understanding of rock art, have been, and will be further, considered in other publications: *Why was it made?* and *What did it intend to convey and to whom?*

#### PROTO-CAMUNIAN PERIOD (12.000 – 5.500 B.C.)

In the Pre-boreal and Boreal climatic stages, this rock-art horizon is related to pre-Neolithic material industry. On the basis of the study of pollens from geological logging in Valcamonica, in this period tall trees are pine trees and birches. (Rock art localities of this style are on the hill of Luine and at Crape, near Darfo-Boario. Remains of settlements of this period have been found at Nadro (Shelter II), Castello di Breno, and Cividate Camuno). Material culture is characterised by a lithic industry of blades and abundant microliths. These are small splinters of retouched flint stones differently shaped such as points, segments, and geometrical forms that were part of composite instruments, mostly to be fixed on wood or bone handles.

The iconographic style is defined as sub-naturalistic, that is, a simplified naturalism with figures schematised just by a contour line. Main themes are large animals represented in large, almost natural size. Sometimes they are shown to be hit by spears. Figures of elks are exclusive of this period and are not found in later periods; apparently this animal became extinct in the region during the early Holocene. The human figure is so far absent. Weapons and tools represented are practically limited to spears or darts; a curved sign has been interpreted

as a boomerang, but this hypothesis is doubtful. A basket-shaped fishing trap is represented in a rock engraving on the hill of Luine: it consists of parallel lines crossing a fish which seems to be trapped. The essential economic activities substantiated by rock art are hunting and fishing. Anthropoc levels consist of fireplaces and bivouacs of modest size. Small hunting groups had reached the foothills of glaciers, where preys could not escape the assailants. Beliefs and religion, as far as we know, concerned hunting rituals related to resources for economic survival.

There are stylistic and thematic similarities with the rock art of the Arctic region (Northern Scandinavia) and archaic hunter's phases in the Near East and North Africa. In Italy analogous expressions are known in the sub-naturalistic art of Levanzo (Egadi) and the cave of Addaura, Monte Pellegrino (Sicily). There are also similarities with the archaic rock art of Totes Gebirge (Austria), with the first phase of rock art of Pontevedra, with a group of engravings from the valley of the river Tago (Spain and Portugal), and with some instances of rock paintings in Levantine Spain.

This sub-naturalistic style with large animals outlined by contour lines extends from Scandinavia to the Middle East and to the Atlantic coasts of the Iberian Peninsula. In Europe this style developed first in the late phases of the Upper Palaeolithic earlier than 10.000 years ago. Such type of rock art may be referred to hunters-gatherers and connected to a "blades and microlithic flint industry" typical to the end of Palaeolithic and to the Epi-palaeolithic period.

#### CAMUNIAN PERIODS I - II (5.500 - 3.300 B.C.)

After the Proto-Camunian horizon, style changes drastically. The main subject matter is no more animal preys; it is stylized anthropomorphic figures mostly with upraised hands in the so-called "praying posture". The sharp changes in subject-matter and in style are likely to testify the penetration in Valcamonica of a new population practising a complex economy which included agriculture and animal rearing. Following the trend common to other European regions, these new people were in search of agricultural and pastoral land. What happened to the people of the Proto-Camunian phase? They either migrated or were assimilated by the new-comers, or both.

Large groups of human figures illustrate the habit of assembling and socializing. Apparently the change in the repertory reveals a social revolution. The previous hunters were dependent on their prey which was the focus of their interest and likely of their cognitive concepts. The change in the economic background caused a change in the cognitive focus as reflected by the rock art style and subject matter. In the new economic pattern, man becomes the centre of gravity. Awareness on society and socialization reflects the importance of team cooperation and the need of conviviality. The new comers were organized in larger human units which required coordination and planning. The new patterns and themes of rock art seem to indicate that human relations are no more as spontaneous and obvious as they used to be. From the horizon of Hunters-gatherers to that of Food-producers the social structure had become more complex, more sophisticated and also more problematic. The trend of growing complexity of society had been in progress ever since.

In the late phases of Period II large ghost-like anthropomorphic figures appear, some of them being over 2 m. high. They provide evidence of an ideology concerning human-like supernatural beings.

The Camunian Periods I and II correspond to the Neolithic of the fertile plains. During the Atlantic climatic stage, also called *Climatic Optimum*, Valcamonica was a rocky land but had forests of firs, alders, oaks and some grass-land that fostered animal grazing, as defined by the pollens in geological logging carried out in various sites of the valley. (The main localities of rock art in Valcamonica corresponding to Style I-II are Foppe di Nadro, Naquane, Luine di Darfo, Sellero, and Sonico. Archaeological settlements are mainly at Torbiere d'Iseo and Castello di Breno). The material culture is that of the Neolithic. The pottery is characteristic of cultures generally present in Northern Italy, as the so-called Bocca Quadrata (Square mouth pots) and that of the Lagozza Culture. The contemporary rock art represents figures of axes and other tools used in the same period. It includes also the earliest figures of ploughs.

The style of Period I is synthetic and essential, with worshippers accompanied by adoration symbols, such as the solar disc or the axe. In the subsequent Period II there are also representations of rituals and social and economic gatherings. Some scenes represent ceremonial occasions; weddings (?), worshipping of the dead and sun worshipping. Cult activities appear to have been diversified and probably occupied a relevant place in daily life.

Toward the end of Period II, large-size figures of anthropomorphic ghosts or "idols" emerge (Period II-B). This new theme is the expression of an ideology introduced from outside. Figures of anthropomorphic spirits are already present in central and Eastern Europe at the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> millennium B.C. In Valcamonica these images precede of some centuries the occurrence of menhir-statues and the monumental compositions of Period III-A. The presence of a new ideology, concerning beliefs in anthropomorphic supernatural spirits, is spreading over large parts of Eurasia in the course of the Neolithic Period. Weapons and tools represented in Periods I and II are spears, *boomerangs*, bow and arrow, paddles, and agricultural tools (hoes and ploughs). The first domesticated animals appear. Initially only dogs; oxen and then goats follow. Technological and cultural innovations include the production of earthenware, animal breeding, and growing vegetables. The technological tools illustrated by the rock engravings include ploughs, traps, looms. Essential economic activities are hunting and fishing, which are integrated by agriculture and animal breeding.

Religious beliefs concern sun worshipping and worshipping the dead. Toward the end of Period II the repertoire becomes richer with the evidence of animal worshipping, especially dogs that were the first domesticated animals. The image of a winged anthropomorphic being, referred to as "butterfly idol", is matched by similar figures in the Balkans.

Neolithic objects coming from the excavations of the shelter Riparo Gaban (Trento, Italy) are decorated with themes similar to those of Camunian rock art: similar repeated ideograms and an anthropomorphic figure similar to the "spirits" of Valcamonica.

In later and more evolved phases there are some cases of resemblance with

rock painting at the complex of Porto Badisco (Puglia, Italy) and several rock paintings of an evolved phase of Levantine Spain.

These Camunian rock art periods are contemporary with the cultures of impressed pottery and Fiorano. There are some figurative analogies with decorations on pottery in the contemporary cultures of the Danubian Neolithic. The Late Neolithic of Central Europe was a period of international contacts, trade gradually developed and ethnic entities were aware of the deeds and customs of other human groups.

While the Camunian tribes were producing rock engravings, the first urban civilisations were emerging in the Near East. In Egypt, Pre-dynastic cultures were already moving toward more complex societies, with burial centres, large-scale ceremonies, and a hierarchical social structure headed by an aristocratic regime. In Valcamonica, as in most parts of Europe, autonomous human groups were maintaining a simpler social structure.

Toward the end of Period II the first anthropomorphic images on standing stones or monoliths appear. The so-called menhir-statues and anthropomorphic stelae are shaped, engraved or painted on stone blocks. The stone is the body of the "supernatural" being. Such representations reflect a new element in the ideology which is reaching Valcamonica around 3.300 B.C. Similar monuments had appeared earlier in various parts of Europe and Asia in the course of the Neolithic Period.

#### CAMUNIAN PERIOD III-A (3.300 – 2.500 B.C.)

The menhir-statues and the monumental compositions are the issue of a new ideological or religious movement which emerged in the 6<sup>th</sup> millennium and spread over Europe mainly in the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium B.C. It developed peculiar characters in the Central Alpine Region which includes, besides Valcamonica, also Valtellina, the Aosta Valley, South Tyrol, and the Swiss Cantons of Valais and Grison. Valcamonica and nearby Valtellina develop a highly metaphorical iconography. Monumental compositions and menhir-statues represent "beings" with a tripartite structure. A solar or lunar image represents the head, the bust or central part of the body displays depictions of the breast and sometimes necklaces for feminine figures and of weapons for masculine figures; the lower part may have the figure of a pubic triangle, a snake, or two weapons positioned as the legs of a vaguely anthropomorphic being.

Such representations appear at the same time as the earliest depictions of wheels, daggers and other metal weapons. It is the beginning of metallurgy in the area and metallurgy was not invented here, its knowledge was imported and arrived with a new ideology which was assimilated and reshaped. The monumental compositions reflect the vision of a supernatural being conceived as the union of three *logoi*: the head being the sun, the moon or the sky, the bust having the attributes of the living people, power, procreation, tools of daily life; the lower part was the images of the pubic triangle or of what is hidden, the underworld. When the monument is standing this third section is often below surface as it is hidden into the soil. The concept of the "Purusha" giant, which is englobing the universe, is the prototype of the tripartite Indo-European conception in the San-

skrit mythology, which was memorably analysed by Claude Levi-Strauss. The discoveries in Valcamonica are one millennium older than the earliest presence in India of the same concepts.

It seems that the concept of a tripartite universe first evolved from a widespread pattern of menhir-statues in the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium B.C. At the present state of research, such highly metaphorical tripartite pattern has its earliest expressions in the Alps and specifically in Valcamonica and Valtellina. It is therefore not unlikely that it was born here. If such hypothesis is confirmed, it would lead to far reaching conclusion about the place of origins of Proto-Indo-European ideology. Could it have been born in poorly inhabited, remote alpine valley?

The conception of a universe conceived in anthropomorphic shape, in which sky, earth and underworld make a tripartite global unity in the shape of the human body. The archaic world vision of the binary order (male-female, light-darkness, day-night, kin-no.kin) is being replaced by the tripartite concept. It is a new way of thinking. The shadow of a prehistoric "prophet" is likely to be behind such concept.

Period III has been divided into two sizable stages, III-A and III-B-C-D that reflect two different types of cultures, beliefs, and social organisations. The first one corresponds to the Calcolithic period, the second one to the Bronze Age. Period III-A marks the beginning of metallurgy in the area, it lasts from 3.300 to 2.500 B.C., that is the early phase of the Sub-boreal climatic stage. (Its main rock art localities known in Valcamonica are Capitello dei Due Pini (Paspardo), Borno, Ossimo, Bagnolo di Malegno, Cemmo di Capo di Ponte, Corni Freschi and Luine di Darfo-Boario Terme. The main known archaeological settlements where this period is documented are Castelliere di Dos dell'Arca, Torbiere d'Iseo, Castello di Breno, Altopiano di Ossimo-Borno). Material culture consists of various *facies* of the Calcolithic: on the basis of tools and weapons represented, the evolved phases are associated with the Redemello culture.

The iconographic style is characterised by monumental compositions with astral, earthly and underworld symbols that are arranged in canonical order. Weapons are numerous and mostly represent metal objects. On the basis of dating established from archaeological levels and the findings of archaeological objects analogous to those engraved, the copper industry arguably began to arrive in Valcamonica around 3.300 B.C. The shapes of dagger, axes and halberds are like elsewhere in Northern Italy and Central Europe in this period. Along with metalwork, new implements arrived in the valley: wheeled wagons; a new age started for communication and transportation.

Domesticated animals represented in rock art are numerous: besides dogs, ox and goats, now there are pigs as well. The important technological and cultural innovations, such as metalwork and the use of wheels, bring changes in daily life. Essential economic activities include animal breeding, agriculture and hunting, with the added complements of metalwork, organised trade, and probably professional craftsmanship. Animal breeding appears to be a major activity and concern.

The socio-political structure is reflected by the monumental composition: a tripartite social organization: celestial head, body with weapons and tools indicating warriors and artisans, and a lower class down to earth. The planning and

organization of the rock art compositions seem to reflect the tribe with an authoritarian government and social stratification.

The clergy appears to have covered an important and powerful position. The religious beliefs reflected in rock art are the expressions of a cosmological religion that views the world as the supreme force. The universe is the divinity itself, a divine body made of three *logoi*: sky, earth and the underworld.

The widespread patterns of the menhir-statues were images of ancestral spirits related to the tribal traditions and considered to have blood relations with the tribe. A true revolution takes place in the vision of the supernatural. The tripartite entity displays a new concept, of a supernatural being beyond and above the kin ancestors, replacing the local ancestral cults with that of a God, father and owner of the universe, being the universe itself. Likely it is the dawn of monotheism.

The rock art compositions of this period are among the most elegant, best planned and suggestive works of the whole Camunian cycle. As the places of worship grow in number, priesthood is arguably acquiring a dominant role, a privileged class in a regime that looks like an oligarchic-theocratic system.

The menhir-statues and monumental compositions, display the iconographic variants of this period in Valtellina, Alto Adige, Lunigiana, Val d'Aosta, Swiss Valais, French Midi, Corsica, the Iberian Peninsula and beyond, spreading between Central Asia and Morocco, till the Atlantic coasts of Europe. Such diffusion probably suggests a religious movement of substantial significance. The peculiar character of Valcamonica society may represent a sect or a specific denomination of the religion characterized by the menhir-statues which had reached beyond ethnic and linguistic borders.

Material culture, weapons, and objects represented in rock art are similar to those of the Baden culture, in the Danube Valley, the cultures of Remedello and Rinaldone in Italy, and those of the Rhône Valley in Switzerland and Southern France.

While the Alpine region is in the Chalcolithic period, the city-states of the Early Bronze Age develop in the Near East. Parallel developments include the first Egyptian dynasties, the urban cultures in the Near East and in the Balkan area. The Atlantic and Mediterranean megalithic cultures, acquire different patterns in the various areas of their diffusion, eventually including some of the major prehistoric monuments of Europe, such as the famous temples of Malta or Stonehenge in England.

In the course of the Chalcolithic period, a typological evolution is followed in Alpine rock art. The menhir-statues and the monumental compositions were at first simple anthropomorphic icons on monoliths. They developed into the tripartite cosmological images; then these images became more complex and were accompanied or surrounded by other figures such as animals, weapons, solar and astral disks and rectangular symbols which have been shown to represent the earth, land or territory.

The divinity which represents the entire universe is accompanied by metaphors of plenty, like the animals, symbols of power like the weapons and other symbols representing fertility, wealth, rank, peerage and other attributes.

The figures of domesticated animals are numerous. The depictions include the pig, the dog, the ox and the goat.

Engraved rock surfaces and menhir-statues are concentrated in cult sites, open-air sanctuaries where tens of such monuments may be found in one area, the presence of fire places near the menhir-statues, heaps of stones and other stone structures, indicated a wide range of performances, social, ritual and cult activities.

According to the rock art depictions, while the Neolithic people were primarily agriculturalists, the Chalcolithic inhabitants were primarily pastoral people, raising stock and using hunting and gathering along with domestication of animals. The wealth of depictions of weapons may indicate the growth of military activities.

Toward the end of the Chalcolithic period and the beginning of Bronze Age, around 2.500 B.C. a new change takes place in the style of rock art. The same symbols that were represented on monumental composition are now spread on the entire rock. The shape of the daggers and the axes are no more Chalcolithic, they are Early Bronze Age. The focus of interest is no more the tripartite entity. Single figures that were part of the monumental composition and of the iconography of the menhir-statues in the Chalcolithic period are now represented and probably worshipped individually. Another aspect of the iconographic development is illustrated by strange compositions of weapons which together make a sort of anthropomorphic being.

The evolution of subject matter and style in the rock art of Valcamonica shows the shifting of an Alpine society from the stage of hunter-gatherer to that to early agriculturalist, to a pastoral society, to the formation of Bronze Age village society.

A special interest concerns the change in the religious expressions of this population from the Epi-palaeolithic hunting cult to the Neolithic concern for ancestral spirits to the pantheistic cosmological religion of the Chalcolithic to the cult of power and weapons which characterized the Early Bronze Age.

The rock art of a small valley in the Alps has provided the depictions which illustrate the change of the way of life and the way of thinking, from pre-agricultural times to village society.

#### CAMUNIAN PERIODS III-B-C-D (2.500 – 1.200 B.C.)

The stereotyped syntactic structures of rock art, menhir-statues and monumental compositions are characteristic of the Camunian period III-A, they are discontinued at the end of this period. Changes in the themes and style of art also herald changes in the social system. Canonical images in organised compositions become assemblages of less structured compositions that reflect a softer social discipline. Motifs of depictions change and in each phase, figures of tools and weapons contribute to establish a well documented chronology. According to the standard Bronze Age chronology of the region, periods III-B-C-D last from 2.500 to 1.200 B.C. and cover most of the Bronze Age. The weapons and tools represented in Period III-B belong to the Early Bronze Age. Those of Period III-C relate to the end of the Early and the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age. Period III-D covers the later phases of the Middle and the beginning of the Late Bronze Age till about 1.200.B.C. Periods IV-A and B cover most of the Late and the Final Bronze Age. The transition between the Bronze Age and the Iron Age is tentatively dated in this Alpine area around 800 B.C. The phases of the rock art periods are defined by changes in style and subject-matter which is correlated to



contemporary changes in the typology of metal objects and to pottery styles that establish the traditional subdivision of the Bronze Age.

The climatic stage is the Sub-boreal. (The relevant localities for rock art are Naquane, Bedolina, Seradina (Capo di Ponte), Foppe di Nadro and Dos Cui (Ceto), Luine (Darfo). The main known settlements are at Luine di Darfo-Boario Terme, Lovere, and Dos dell'Arca). Material culture has local *facies* in association with the culture of Polada and, later, that of Terremare.

The iconographic style is characterised by weapons and other objects, but also by those compositions called "topographic maps" which are considered to represent fields and other territorial features, either real or imaginary.

Toward the end of this period, mythological scenes and anthropomorphic figures in action bring a new stylistic approach to the rock art. The change is rather drastic and it anticipates the character of the rock art in the Iron Age. It appears in the course of the Late Bronze Age. The most common weapons in rock-art iconography are sub-triangular daggers, battle-axes, spears, and shields. The chronological definition of the numerous depictions of metal weapons and tools is supported by comparable finds in datable archaeological levels of archaeological excavations.

Domesticated animals include dogs, oxen, goats, and pigs; in the later phases of this period, a new domesticated animal appear: the horse which will occupy an important place in the iconography of the Iron Age. Throughout the Bronze Age the most commonly depicted animal is the wild deer which was both worshipped and hunted. It is not unlikely that the deer was a totemic animal and the icon of the Camunian Peoples: "Camunians, peoples of the deer".

Technological and cultural innovations represented in rock art suggest an increase in metalwork and weaving. The most represented economic activities are in relation with metal instruments that imply both production and trade. Hunting, fishing, agriculture, animal breeding continue, but new economic dynamics develop as a consequence of trade and the accumulation of surplus.

The socio-political structure is the tribe whose authoritarian government is less pyramidal and centralised than in the previous period. Beliefs and religion undergo another change. The evidence from rock art shows that the cosmological religion of the Chalcolithic gradually turns into the cult of objects and weapons. Metal weapons are divinized, as autonomous powers or magic abilities are attributed to them.

In later phases the cult of spirits and heroes also spread. Again it is an element of the Iron Age, although, as remarked already, some evidence indicates its presence already in the Late Bronze Age.

The exceptional documentation provided by rock art on the process of modification of cults and beliefs is likely to offer new chapters for the history of religion.

In the course of Period III, at different moments, there are parallels with the rock art of Mount Bego (France), with that of Southern Scandinavia and of the Iberian Peninsula. Some areas of Europe have rock art styles and themes evolving in similar orientations, indicating the presence of similar trends over rather vast regions.

Among contemporary cultural expressions there are exceptional megalithic monuments, such as Stonehenge in England. The Minoan and Mycenaean ci-

vilisations flourish in Greece. It is the epoch of Troy and the events handed on by the ancient chapters of Greek mythology. In Mesopotamia the empire of the Sargonid dynasty was born; later on the Assyrian-Babylonian civilisation followed. Egypt was at the Middle and New Kingdom stages. During this period Indo-European invasions occurred in Europe and the Near East. The Hittite and Hyksos cultures prevailed in the Near East. In Central Italy the local Apennine culture was developing, under the cultural influence of both, the Mediterranean area and Central Europe.

In the Mediterranean regions dynamic political structures developed with thriving city-states. Sea faring promoted trades. In the Alpine regions, introverted tribes gradually opened up to international relations. The trade of amber and precious metals used transalpine tracks and the mountain regions acquired benefits from these exchanges. Wagons and weapons of Mycenaean type are represented in the rock art of Valcamonica. Figures of wheeled wagons are represented all the way north to Scandinavia.

#### CAMUNIAN PERIOD IV (1.200 – 16 B.C.)

The Camunian Period IV (1.200 – 16 B.C.) coincides with the later phases of the Bronze Age, the Final Bronze Age and the Iron Age. Five main typological phases are recognized in Period IV, the first two are related to the Bronze Age and the three other to the Iron Age. The climatic stage is the end of the Sub-Boreal and the Sub-Atlantic.

(The typical rock art localities in Valcamonica are Carpena (Sellero), Cimbergo, Capo di Ponte, Nadro (Ceto), and Luine (Darfo-Boario Terme). The main settlements are Dos dell'Arca, Dos Pitigla, Lovere, Rocca d'Isèo, Luine di Darfo, and Necropoli di Breno). Various facies of the final Bronze Age and the Iron Age show similarities with corresponding sites in Tyrol Alto Adige.

The character of the iconographic style is realistic-narrative with descriptive and anecdotal scenes of daily life, of magic and of mythological nature. Figures of isolated tools and weapons are typical of the Bronze Age and tend to become rare in the Iron Age. In the Iron Age weapons and tools are mostly represented held by people. They include shields, helmets, swords, lances, and axes. Many agricultural instruments are represented in scenes showing people using them, such as ploughs, hoes, sickles, small sickles, and picks. There are numerous figures of structures, huts, barns, shrines and temples. There are representations of handicrafts activities, such as metalwork and construction of wheels. Domesticated animals are: dogs, oxen, horses, donkeys, goats, ducks, chickens, and geese. The breeding of rabbits appears at later stages. The animal farm is more diversified than in the Bronze Age.

Among technological and cultural innovations represented in the iconography is the industry of iron. During this period writing begins using a local language in the Northern Etruscan alphabet. The Camunians learn how to write. Essential economic activities are trading, mineral extraction, metalwork, animal breeding, agriculture, and hunting. The categories of professional warriors and priests emerge. In the initial phases of period IV, the socio-political structure is based on the lordships of the hill-forts (*castellieri*). In the evolved phases, during

the periods of Etruscan and Celtic influences, the depictions of groups of warriors and the growing number of fighting scenes, present the image of an unstable and warlike political society, probably the birth of princedoms acquiring some sort of ethno-social autonomy.

Beliefs and religion are drastically changed toward the end of the Bronze Age. They include the cult of spirits and heroes. Polytheism emerges with classes of heavenly and infernal divinities. When compared to previous periods, conceptual innovations are considerable. Rock figures often represent pieces of epical and heroic events similar to those of the Germanic mythology.

In the transition period (Final Bronze Age) thematic and stylistic analogies with Bronze and pottery decorations of the Urnfield and Proto-Villanovian cultures are evident; in the middle phase there are strong Villanovian and Etruscan influences. In the more evolved phases, Celtic, Raethian, and Venetian influences alternate each other in less than three centuries. International relations and cultural influences appear to move in fast dynamics.

During this period the Assyrian Empire emerges in Mesopotamia, the Hebrew Kingdoms in Palestine have their ups and downs; in Egypt the civilisation of Pharaohs is in decline. The Phoenicians disseminated their trades and their alphabet along the shores of the Mediterranean. Cartago is growing. City-states thrive in Greece. In Europe the first nations rise and decline. Rome emerges and its domination spreads in Europe.

The latest pictures preceding the arrival, in the year 16 B.C., of the Roman legions led by Publius Silo, display a decadent style. The low quality of the rock engravings is sometimes embellished by tools, shields, hats, trumpets and other minor details which reflect Roman influence. The Camunians were conquered by Rome even before the arrival of the Romans.

## CONCLUSION

The custom of producing rock art as a pattern of culture came to its conclusion with the Roman occupation. Sporadic rock engravings were made in Roman, Medieval and recent times but the spirit was no more the same as rock art was no more a cult and ritual necessity.

The rock art of Valcamonica appears as an archive of 10.000 years of European history. Over 300.000 pictures are a mirror of the events that shaped the evolution of European society, from hunters-gatherers to modern way of life. All this immense documentation has been documented, recorded and described. It must now be understood. The ancient Camunians did not produce their pictorial "data base" just to embellish the rock surfaces. Rock art was a mean of communication and they used it for communicating messages, commemorating events, teaching the candidates to initiation, operating magic and for other purposes. All the same uses of modern phonetic writing could function with the pictographic and ideographic writing. Prehistoric man was able to read the messages. Research is now progressing toward the goal of decoding the archives they left behind, attempting to read them like the peoples that produced them thousands years ago. New chapters of the history of Europe are gradually emerging from the decription of prehistoric rock art.

NOTE: For a more extended version of the same theme and for bibliographic references see

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