

## THE CUPMARKS AS DIACHRONIC PHENOMENON LINKED TO THE TERRITORY: THE TRENTO ALTO – ADIGE

*Fabio Cavulli e Giampaolo Dalmeri*

### RIASSUNTO

*I massi coppellati rappresentano un fenomeno ancora da comprendere appieno. Attribuire loro una cronologia è spesso impossibile e affidata solo ad indizi indiretti come la prossimità con depositi archeologici o gli strumenti impiegati. Anche la funzionalità del manufatto è affatto chiara. Per di più non si presta a interpretazioni univoche, né di piccola scala, valide per la maggior parte di esse o per una regione allargata.*

*Il Trentino – Alto Adige conferma purtroppo questo quadro ma è un'area interessante per la ricerca. Le coppelle sono diffuse in regione ma raggruppate in aree che sembrano circoscritte; tra queste delle aree vuote. Per citare alcuni addensamenti: Val di Sole – Pejo – Val di Non; Val di Cembra; alta Valsugana; Val di Fiemme; Valle dei Laghi – Arco, Pinzolo per il Trentino e in Alto Adige le si trova in media Val Venosta – Val Senales – Fosse; Velturmo; conca di Bressanone; Val Passiria; Val d'Ultimo, Val d'Isarco; Val Pusteria; Val Badia; Valle dell'Adige.*

*La tipometria è piuttosto articolata: coppelle singole, multiple, canalette, croci, trie, geometrie, vaschette, piedi, ecc. A volte associate con incisioni figurative, altre volte a depositi archeologici.*

*Il lavoro che si va ad esporre tenta di mettere in correlazione questo fenomeno con le litologie affioranti per evidenziare i problemi di conservazione o di riconoscibilità, oppure eventuali selezioni del supporto da incidere. Ciò introduce ad una analisi del fenomeno come testimonianza della frequentazione del territorio che può essere compresa tramite l'esame dei massi sotto l'aspetto della loro prominenza, visibilità, altitudine, la vicinanza con vie di transito, con le aree di attività, con le alture, i crinali, i fondovalle, limite del bosco, ...*

*L'analisi, ancora in buona parte in itinere, non si può esimere dal tentare una collocazione cronologica delle evidenze che aiuterebbe la lettura diacronica di un fenomeno complesso e articolato di frequentazione del territorio.*

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Cup-marks have been defined as minor art forms or “schematic art” in contrast to figurative art, in other words as simple stone incisions made by man which reproduce, more or less explicitly, reality. Of variable shape and size, with diameters ranging from a few centimetres to more than a decimetre, cup-marks have a circular plan or, less frequently, ellipsoidal or asymmetric plans with a concave profile, sometimes conical or “bottle-necked”. All recesses, more or less regular in shape, form cup or bowl-shaped features but they must be related to human activity, and not exclusively to erosive processes, in order to be defined cup-marks. Quite often such markings are found grouped together on erratic boulders or on portions of rock, perhaps because these are more evident and easily identified than single markings, which have been documented but are harder to recognise. These markings seem to be found on more dominant features although they are not totally absent from minor morphologies.

The techniques used for the creation of such markings, when recognisable, can be: percussion, chaffing, linear incision in the case of grooves and other elements and circular abrasion with another stone or a metal tool. This last method would explain the regularity often found in such features (Priuli 1983; Arcà 1995b).

These are very simple markings, which may be associated to small channels, spirals, circles, crosses or even figurative art. Perhaps the depth and schematic nature of the markings, which have no need for particular tools for their creation, have favoured their preservation and a much greater diffusion than figurative art (Arcà 2003, 2004).

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Fabio Cavulli

Università degli Studi di Trento, Trento - Italy    fabio.cavulli@lett.unitn.it

Gianpaolo Dalmeri

Museo Tridentino di Scienze Naturali, Sezione di Paleontologia Umana e Preistoria, Trento - Italy

The scarce attention, the scepticism or even the embarrassment with which the scientific community has sometimes regarded this phenomenon are linked to two main problems: chronology and function. The majority of rocks and boulders are lacking a stratigraphic context and other dating techniques such as typological, technical, chrono-stratigraphical, historical, cross-dating methods, the lichen method and methods linked to overlapping, proximity, erosion layers, microerosion, thermoluminescence, radiocarbon dating and others still, have been minimally applied and have yielded varied results (Bednarik 2002). To date the most ancient evidence of such markings seems to be that found in central India, at the Auditorium Cave in Madhya Pradesh and at the Daraky-Chattan Cave near Bhanpura, both referable to the Lower Paleolithic: the upper Acheulean layer with evidence of concretions along the top constitutes an *ante quem* term (Bednarik 1993, 1994; Kumar 1996; Bednarik et alii 2005). Among the rare datable contexts found in Europe we have the La Ferrassie cave in France that dates back to the middle Palaeolithic: the stone slab with eighteen cup-marks and other markings covered grave no. 6, that of a Neanderthal infant (Peyrony 1934). Many of the more accurately dated cup-marked rocks are found in the Alpine region (cfr. Schwegler 1995; Arcà 1995a; Gambari 1991, 1998), and in chronological order are: Egolzwil and Chavannes-le-Chêne in Switzerland, dating from the Ancient and Middle Neolithic respectively; Escoural in Portugal predating the Copper Age; Vollein, Velturmo-Tanzgasse and St. Martin de Corléans, attributable to the Copper Age; Maladers in Canton Grigioni dating back to the Upper Bronze Age like the French site of Douvaine; Rances in Switzerland dates from the Middle Bronze Age; Aussois in France predates the Final Bronze Age, period to which the Uffing rock in Upper Bavaria has been placed and the Swiss sites of Hauterive and Gals are generally attributed to the Bronze Age. Among the more recent Italian sites we have Sesto Calende and Como Pianvalle, both dating back to the Iron Age. In the Trentino region, Doss Zelor is worthy of note (Fiemme Valley, Trento, Leonardi 1991) and whose cup-marks can be dated back to Roman times or even earlier; the best documented case is however the cup-marked boulder of Montesei di Serso (Valsugana, Trento) which, on the basis of stratigraphy, has been dated to before the deposition of material referable to Luco B (Broglia & Perini 1964; Perini 1973, 1978).

Of no less interest is the proximity of the cup-marked boulders to archaeological deposits, often brandopferplätze (votive pyres); limiting examples to the region subject of our study we have: Ciaslir at Monte Ozol (Perini 1971), S. Rocco in Pejo (Dalmeri & Marzatico 2002), the Pennes Pass, the Vizze Pass (Gleischer 1993) and Sotciastel (Tecchiati 1998) ...

Even less certain however are the functional hypotheses put forward for these cavities, in brief (for a more complete list please see Magni 1901): containers for inflammable liquids or fat/oil for illumination and/or signalling, depressions for breaking acorns, hazelnuts or similar food-stuffs, mortars, anvils, containers for dyes and colouring powders, boundary markings, direction signs, maps of the surrounding territory or of the night sky, lithophones, games, pastimes for shepherds all through history, votive cavities, sacred or ritual elements, sacrifices or hybrid functions such as territorial rites or rituals linked to the surrounding peaks (cfr. Graziosi 1973; Gambari 1997; Sansoni 2006)... All, or at least the majority, of the hypotheses put forward have some kind of rational basis, but there is definitely no single explanation for such a varied manifestation, simple in form yet complex in the significance it can assume. By all means, "cup-marking" is a phenomenon which deserves attention for its territorial diffusion and its continuity in time. It places some difficulties in connection with chronological and interpretative aspects, as we have seen, and also linked to intrinsic characteristics of the markings themselves: they represent a language quite difficult to decipher, less expressive and fascinating than "realistic" representations. Then we might add the occasional difficulties linked to the actual identification of the incisions, a problem which is linked to the nature of the rock substrate and subsequent erosion. It is quite clear why such a phenomenon has often been conferred only a secondary role in archaeology.