



## Figures and Male Sites in the Rock Art of Valcamonica, Italy

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### ABSTRACT

*The different female or male perspectives in the interpretation of some figurative items of rock art allow identifying some important sites in Valcamonica as areas concerning the different genders. Cases at Naquane (Capo di Ponte), and In Vall and Dos Costapeta (Paspardo) have been selected as examples. The presence of shovels, weaving frames and female anthropomorphs in the Bronze Age suggests that Naquane and In Vall were essentially female sites. At Dos Costapeta we observe, instead, what has been defined as "competition for the site". In this area, in fact, phases with the representation of weapons (the famous spears with continuous groove) a typically male theme, alternate with female oranti and shovels. In Iron Age, even in all sites rock art expresses mainly belligerent and male themes, toponomastics and the presence of semidivine beings (the Aquane) in stone blocks shaped as water wave, reveal the original destination of the area that today is National Park of Rock Art. Some symbols such as foot prints and camune roses, probably female themes, often are side by side with figures of warriors, obvious male themes: how to interpret this association? This contribution will propose an interpretation of these compositions.*

### RIASSUNTO

*La lettura in senso femminile o maschile di alcuni temi figurativi nell'arte rupestre permette di interpretare, come aree pertinenti ai diversi generi, alcuni siti importanti in Valcamonica. Sono qui esemplificati i casi di Naquane (Capo di Ponte), e di In Vall e Dos Costapeta (Paspardo). Durante l'età del Bronzo la presenza delle palette, dei telai e delle figure antropomorfe femminili indirizzano ad interpretare Naquane ed In Vall come siti eminentemente femminili; a Dos Costapeta assistiamo, invece, a quella che è stata definita come una "competizione per il sito". In questa zona si alternano, infatti, fasi con rappresentazioni di armi (le famose lance a solco continuo) tipicamente maschili, a fasi con oranti femminili e palette. Nell'età del Ferro anche se, in tutti i siti, l'arte rupestre esprime ormai solo un carattere guerresco e maschile, la toponomastica e la presenza di esseri semidivini (le Aquane) nelle rocce conformate ad onda d'acqua, chiariscono l'originaria destinazione di quell'area che oggi è Parco Nazionale delle Incisioni Rupestri. Alcuni simboli quali le impronte di piedi e le rose camune, forse dal carattere femminile, vengono spesso avvicinate a figure di guerrieri, dal chiaro significato maschile: come interpretare queste associazioni? Viene proposta una chiave di lettura di queste composizioni figurative.*

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### FOREWORD

A labyrinth figure, an ancient initiatic game, lies on the rock 1 of the Naquane National Park of Rock Engravings, Capo di Ponte, just in the centre of a site that once was simply known as Aquane (fig. 1). This probably was one of the most important areas for cultural activities related to the rock art tradition of the Camonica Valley. Looking at this rock with the eyes of a non expert visitor, the surface will appear as a confused set of figures: men and dogs are hunting deer, while women are working on looms, duellists are fighting while warriors follow an horseman fully armed, probably a chief (fig. 2). Most of the figures appear connected to other engravings: cup marks, shovels, footprints, huts. All this imagery, depicted on the rock all around the labyrinth, is the witness of the last prehistoric rock art phase on this surface: that of the Iron Age, a period where rock art appears as the production of the male warrior class of the Cammunian society

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(De Marinis 1988; Fossati 1991). Women are not present among this art. Scholars think that almost the 80% of the 300,000 engravings of the Valcamonica rock art tradition belongs to this period, the first Millennium BC. Is all the rock art tradition a construction of the male classes or is it possible to define themes and figures related to female activities? The basic idea of the present paper is, in fact, that would be still possible today:

- to go back to the origins of specific rock art activities in some Valcamonica sites, as Naquane, Foppe di Nadro, Luine, In Valle and other sites
- to correlate these activities to a special group, the women of the local aristocracy
- to create a reading key useful to understand how the rocks were engraved in the sites

#### VALCAMONICA ROCK ART TRADITION: A SHORT INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, only the Cemmo boulders were known in Valcamonica, a long valley north of the city of Brescia in Lombardy, popularly called “the rocks of the puppets”, discovered by the geographer Walther Laeng at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Laeng 1914). Most discoveries were made during the 1930s thanks to the archaeologist Raffaello Battaglia and the anthropologist Giovanni Marro (Battaglia 1934; Marro 1930). A more scientific comprehension of the different phases was reached during the 1960s and the 1970s, with the works of Emmanuel Anati (Anati 1976) and his Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici and of other scholars, among them especially Raffaele De Marinis (De Marinis 1988; 1995) (Milan University) and our group of Footsteps of Man Archaeological Society. After the Garda Lake (1964) and Valtellina (1966) discoveries the central-eastern Alps zone can be considered a unique area with common stylistic, thematic and chronological characteristics. The core remains Valcamonica: an archaeological, artistic and historical patrimony of inestimable value, inscribed by UNESCO in its World Heritage List, - the first rock art site together with the French painted caves of the Vezere Valley - to be included since 1979<sup>1</sup>.

The art is mainly located on flat open air rocks, heavily polished and moulded by the glaciers during the last Ice Ages (fig. 3). From Pisogne on the Iseo lake, south of Valcamonica, to the sites of Sellero - Grevo in the middle valley, the rock used is sandstone, only in small part limestone (Piancogno). In the upper part of the valley rock engravings have been made on the schist. Almost exclusively are present rock engravings, as only 7 paintings to date have been discovered (Fossati 2001a) (Fig. 4). The discovery of pieces of red ochre allows to think that the engravings were also coloured or that other figures only painted were added to the carvings. The engravers used hammering (the most common) and scratching techniques, with the help of quartz tools: it is common to find them abandoned near the rocks.

Rock art covers four fundamental periods, from the Neolithic to the arrival of the Romans (Anati 1976; De Marinis 1988; Fossati 1991, 1993b) (fig. 5). In the first phase, from the end of the Neolithic to the first Copper Age (4<sup>th</sup> Millennium BC, 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> styles of the Valcamonica rock art), topographical figures constitute the most diffused pattern. They are the first representations of the territory, probably tied to a real division of agricultural lands sanctioned by the ritual engraving practice (Arcà 1999, Fossati 1993a, 2002). Other figures attributed to this phase are spirals and necklaces.

Most scholars think that this first phase is preceded by a more ancient period, perhaps going back to the end of the Paleolithic (Anati 1974). Figures are very few, all representing animals, especially elks and deer (fig. 6). This phase, called Proto Cammunian, is tied to the Ice Age art style, which is no more limited to caves in Europe but also present on open air rocks, as testified by the recent findings in Spain and Portugal (Abreu, Arcà & Fossati 1995) and old discoveries in Gobustan, Azerbaijan, on the southern Caucasian slopes (Rustamov 2000).

The second phase, which corresponds to the full Copper Age (4<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> Millennium BC, the so-called 3<sup>rd</sup> A Valcamonica style), is characterised by stele and menhirs, boulders that represent the first anthropomorphic divinities of the alpine people (Casini & Fossati 1994). The most important depiction is the Sun, sometimes represented as a man crowned by a solar circle with beams (fig. 7), and often associated with weapons; two other personages are represented: one feminine, adorned with numerous jewels (eye pendants, necklaces, combs), and another male divinity, symbolised by a cloak provided with fringes. The repertoire is very rich, including animals like deer, dogs, foxes, wolves, chamois, ibexes, boars, bovines and weapons such as axes, halberds and daggers. The chronology is well established thanks to depicted weapons, especially the so-called Remedello type dagger, which has a very well defined triangular blade and a half moon shaped pommel. It is testified in contemporary tombs at Remedello (2900-2400 BC, Carbon 14 calibrated dates), and moreover on the Copper Age stelae in the Alpine Range, like in the beautiful compositions of Aosta, Sion, Arco or Lunigiana (De Marinis 1994).

The third phase (the 3<sup>rd</sup> B-C-D Valcamonica styles) is dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Millennium BC and corresponds to the Bronze Age (De Marinis 1995). The repertoire is more reduced, but not less important: numerous weapons (no longer associated with divinities), ploughing scenes, ritual scenes formed by praying anthropomorphs, symbols (solar signs and shovels), charts. The chronology is ensured by the presence of well re-

cognisable weapons: Early Bronze Age halberds (fig. 8), Middle Bronze Age axes and Recent-Final Bronze Age spearheads. In the Final Bronze Age (12<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> cent. BC) the first warrior figures appear, a prelude to the immense repertoire of the Iron Age, the 1<sup>st</sup> Millennium BC (Fossati 1992).

This last prehistoric phase (the so-called 4<sup>th</sup> style) is the richest and the best dated (Fossati 1991). It is probably tied to the initiation rites of young people of the local warrior aristocracy, not excluding a relation with sport-like activities during common meetings or games. We can find hunting scenes, ritual duels, races and armed dances, constructions, wagons, weapons, musical instruments, agricultural scenes, figure with a strong symbolic value (such as footprints, cup marks, swastikas, stars), divinities and topographical representations. Engravings took on greater realism, like a descriptive naturalism (De Marinis 1988). Warriors emerge with great strength: war scenes however and warriors in combat are relatively rare. Heavily armed warriors are often shown with their weapons raised in sign of exaltation. In duelling scenes the contenders face each other lightly armed, as if for a sporting event (fig. 9).

Duellists and onlookers are placed side by side, the former with a smaller size, leading on to assume they are teen-agers. Footprints or footwear with laces also appear to belong to boys (Fossati 1998). This constant reference suggests that the representations of the Iron age rock art should be interpreted as votive images engraved on the occasion of initiation rites or feasts through which young men of the local aristocracy gained access to adult society. As well as duelling, horse-riding, balancing feats, racing and dancing fully armed and deer hunting were probably part of the trial. Cup marks grouped in eight and the so-called "Cammunian Rose" (a symbol originated from the swastika) probably constituted other initiation symbols. Social differences are also shown by scenes where riders are escorted by their attendants.

The chronology of the Iron Age rock art, divided in 5 different sub-phases, is linked not only to the study of the superimpositions, which assures a relative chronology, but also to the depiction of weapons. These arms are very well characterised, like shields, constantly circular in the first Iron Age, and quadrangular-oval during the Second Iron Age, due to the influences exercised firstly by the Etruscans and then by the Celts. Particular weapons appear in the Late Iron Age, such as the halberd-axe, a half moon blade shaped axe, a typical weapon of the Central-Eastern Alps populations, or the Introbio knives, with the characteristic anchor-shaped point savor: both these weapons were found in contemporary tombs or settlements (Fossati 1991).

Also the style is a chronological indicator. Until the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC styles were influenced by the Etruscan art: from the linear geometric style (8<sup>th</sup> cent.) to the full naturalistic phase (5<sup>th</sup> cent.) (De Marinis 1988). The apogee of the naturalism is reached at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century when it is possible to recognise artistic schools and even single artist's hands<sup>2</sup>. Second Iron Age styles are the direct consequence of the separation from the Etruscan world caused by Celtic invasions in the Po Plain. In this period the styles become decadent and themes poor. It is not possible to talk about a Celtic art phase in the Cammunian rock art, even if the Celts transmitted to the nearby population their preference for a symbolic and almost aniconic art. Some themes have a chronological value: horse riding is possible only starting from the 8<sup>th</sup> cent. BC; North-Etruscan inscriptions are possible only after the 6<sup>th</sup> cent. BC. Some Latin alphabetaries must be dated to the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cent. BC, due to the Roman arrival in the valley in 16 BC.

Iron Age rock art was made by the *Camuni*, a population associated with the *Euganea gens* by Roman historians (Cato cited by Plinius III, 133-135). The cultural peculiarity of the area is testified, at least from the 5<sup>th</sup> cent. BC, by the diffusion from Valtellina to the Giudicarie of same-kind potteries (the wine vessels of Breno/Dos dell'Arca/Lovere type), by the autonomous writing tradition utilising the north-Etruscan alphabet (the Camunnian alphabet) and, last but not least, by the figurative language that we call "rock art" (De Marinis 1988, Fossati 1991). This wide area, even if with strong connections with the Retic world of the Adige Valley, should be unified under the common *ethnos* of the *Euganei*<sup>3</sup>.

In Valcamonica the rock art tradition continued till the arrival of the Romans (16 BC) (Fossati 1991). A legion of about 6,000 soldiers, commanded by the consul Publio Sillio Nerva, subjected in a single fast military campaign *Triumplini*, *Camunni* and *Vennonetes*, the inhabitants of Valtrompia, Valcamonica and Valtellina. This is attested by the registration of these names in the *Tropaeum Alpium*, the monument built by the Emperor Augustus in 6-7 AD at La Turbie (France). The interruption of the rock art tradition is perhaps due to the assumption of the Roman culture during the second part of the 1<sup>st</sup> cent. AD (Flavian Age). A growing economic, cultural and religious attraction was caused by the Roman settlements, in particular by the new colony of *Civitas Camunnorum*<sup>4</sup>, which reduced and finally destroyed the power of the aristocratic classes whose traditional themes had constituted, till then, the iconographic patrimony of the rock engravings (Fossati 1991).

#### FEMALE ROCK ART PRODUCTION AT NAQUANE, IN VALLE AND OTHER SITES

If we could erase the Iron Age engravings from the rocks (thing that can be easily done on the tracings), the result would be that important sites as Naquane<sup>5</sup> (Capo di Ponte), In Valle (Paspardo) and few other



sites, clearly and abundantly frequented during the Iron Age by young warriors (as we can see from their engravings), appeared differently (poorly?) engraved during the previous periods. Only some Bronze Age figures are, in fact, engraved on the rocks in Naquane: groups or isolated praying figures on rocks 1, 11, 14, 23, 26, 32, 35, 44, 47, 49, 50, 57, 59, 71, 72, 99; looms on rock 1; shovels (*palette*) on rock 1, 11, 35, 44, 47, 50, 57, 72, 99; Copper Age figures are even less: daggers on the rocks 23 and 100; anthropomorphs on rock 1; ploughing scenes on rock 94; Neolithic/Calcolithic topographic and ploughing scenes on rocks 99.

In Valle is not different from Naquane: most of the figures belong to the Iron Age, with abundant scenes of duels and warriors. Groups of Bronze Age figures are present: praying figures, shovels. These figures overlap imagery of previous ages as spirals and daggers, probably of Neolithic or Calcolithic Age (fig. 10).

How was the cultural situation during the Bronze Age in Valcamonica? During this period (that is the phase between the end of the 3rd Millennium BC and the 9th cent. BC) Valcamonica appears to be included in the area of the Polada culture (Early Bronze Age) and subsequently, during the Middle-Recent Bronze Age in the terramare-benacense culture, as it is confirmed by a series of pottery complex and sporadic findings (De Marinis 1988). The Final Bronze Age potteries are too rare to permit a better comprehension of the cultural situation, even if the bronze findings suggest a connection with the so-called Luco-Meluno group, a central alpine culture.

The engravings of the Bronze Age are, for sure, the less studied if we compare the papers and the corpus of the rocks published regarding other periods, for example Copper Age and Iron Age (Fossati 2001b).

From the Copper Age onwards begins the depiction of weapons. During the Chalcolithic time these compositions of weapons appear as very regular and calligraphic, while in the Bronze Age the arms are positioned disorderly and in heterogeneous groups. These weapons: axes, daggers, halberds, knives, spears and swords, are engraved in different periods on the same rocks, as we understand studying their typology (fig. 11). It is often possible, in fact, to compare the engraved weapons with real objects found in settlements, tombs or hoards (Fossati 2001b). This is the case of the halberds, that have a triangular blade with a semicircular base, very similar to the Montemerano, Calvatone and Cotronei types dated to the Early Bronze Age; but also the typical alpine dagger, as the Ledro dagger, can be recognised in the rock engravings. The axes are usually of the shovel type, a shape that appears during a passage phase between the end of the Early Bronze Age and the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age. The axes with a bell-shape blade are datable to the Middle and Recent Bronze Age (De Marinis 1995).

It is also possible to compare these occurrences with the votive deposits or hoards typical of the Bronze Age in the whole Europe. Due to the fact that these deposits have been sometimes found in springs, swamps and lakes, few scholars have spoken of a votive activity. It is also clear that in some of these hoards there are materials that can be considered as "male" objects - e.g. the weapons - and for this reason can be perhaps related with part of the initiation rites of the male youth. If we transfer this idea to rock art we can consider the execution of figures of weapons as a symbolic substitution of a real act which had a ritual meaning. This idea has been sometimes associated with a sacred attitude of a "poor" population that could offer only substitutions of weapons and not the real objects (Malmer 1991). In any case it can be assumed that the practice of rock art for these people was a very strong ritual disposition, with the same value that other groups could confer to different ritual acts, included those of the votive hoards.

Moreover the rocks engraved are often related with waters - e.g. the rock 4 and the 22-23 of Foppe di Nadro, Valcamonica, follow the course of a stream; the rocks of Luine, Valcamonica, are looking on to the Boario spa; the Castelletto rock was found few meters far from the waters of the Garda lake - and this can be linked to the fact that special weapons like sword were found in the waters (often rivers) and suggests a ritual meaning of the rock art activity<sup>6</sup>. Usually the rocks - moulded by the glaciers - appear as petrified waves, giving the impression to the observer to be in front of water<sup>7</sup>. This connection with the theme of the water will become very strong during the following Iron Age rock art, as we will demonstrate later in this paper.

The depiction of weapons proposes the research of rock art areas related with a presence of an imagery with a sexual value. The concentration of such images on certain rocks can represent a special sign which indicates to the frequenters of the area that the site can be visited only by males. What to say if the symbol is of female type? The opposite for sure. This is the case of the so called *palette* figure (fig. 12). The *palette* consists of a quadrangular (rarely circular) engraving with a handle (often also with a pommel). On the basis of the variation of these elements (body, handle, pommels) 21 different types of shovel are recognizable (Fossati 1987). These shovels are often placed side by side, in couples, set in horizontal or vertical way. Praying figures are sometimes associated with them (fig. 13), other times groups of five or six shovels are together in horizontal lines. On the rock 1 of Naquane shovels are near looms at least in three cases (fig. 14).

The *palette* figure appears during the Middle Bronze Age, continue to be present in the iconographic repertoire during the rest of this period, and seems to disappear from the context during the middle part of

the Iron Age, at the end of what is called the 4th 2 style (end of the 6th cent. BC). During the Iron Age the *paletta* figures are associated with warriors. On the rock 1 of Naquane, in a scene published many times, a *paletta* is associated to a labyrinth; in another famous scene accompanies what is called the "procession of the chief" (fig. 15).

*Paletta*-shovels are present in the rock art of other areas, as I have already written (Fossati 1987): in particular there are many strictly similarities with figures in the rock engravings of the Galician area in Spain, and in Northern Portugal often associated with swastikas and horse shoes<sup>8</sup>. The chronology proposed for these figures is the Final Bronze Age (end of the 2nd millennium BC). The Abbé Breuil published some *paletta* figures painted in megalithic context of the Iberian Peninsula, noting a certain similarity with laundry shovels still in use in some European areas<sup>9</sup>. In Portugal some warrior's funerary stelae (Final Bronze Age) show, except for the typical warrior elements as shield, sword, spear and chariot, also a shovel type figure, sometimes interpreted as the mirror or the razor<sup>10</sup>. A similar interpretation has been proposed for the *paletta* of Valcamonica in the past<sup>11</sup>. The similarity of the *paletta* with the double blade razor or with the window one (with a quadrangular body) has been already noted<sup>12</sup>; because these types of razors have been sometimes left in the ashes of the funerary urns dated to the Recent-Final Bronze Age. Some scholars have thought that the razors could have been used to collect the burned bones and the ashes during the funerary rituals<sup>13</sup>; some other researchers proposed that also the *paletta* could have been used with the same purposes, with a clear funerary meaning<sup>14</sup>. But how is the archaeological context in which the real palette were found? From the Late Bronze Age onwards the palette are left in the grave goods of female tombs. This is clear in the Golasecca, Villanovian and Venetic Culture (fig. 16). They are made in bronze until the 5th cent. BC, when they are substituted by *palette* of the same shape but made in iron. This is why R. De Marinis thought that the *paletta* figure could not be interpreted as a mirror<sup>15</sup>. In the ancient Venetic culture bronze sheet palette are present, sometimes found in votive hoards, clearly used for ritual purposes only, as testified in the deposit of Via Rialto at Padoa, not far from Venice<sup>16</sup> (fig. 17). In a female tomb of the beginning of the 3rd cent. BC, the so called "Nerca Tomb" at Este, a *paletta* was found among the objects used for the care of the fire, as spits, ladle and so on. The *paletta* could have been used for removing the ashes or take out the bread from the fire: this object would be interpreted as a symbol of the fire or connected to the fire. Is this interpretation working also for the figures of Valcamonica rock art? The connection with female imagery would suggest a positive answer, but we must not forget that we have *paletta* figures also during the Iron Age, often associated with warriors. Is the *paletta* in this case a female symbol engraved in a period in which real female figure are never represented<sup>17</sup>? Or is it a symbol of a ritual activity, practiced by the aristocratic classes, that wants the use of the fire<sup>18</sup>? Is this attitude a practice of votive substitution<sup>19</sup>?

I have already said something about the iconographic context in which the *palette* figures are found in the rock art of Valcamonica. I will now add some notes that can be used for a general interpretation of the phenomenon: in most of the cases the lines of 5-6 *palette* have been positioned at what can be considered the "entrance" of the rock. This is the case of the rocks 50 and 35 of Naquane, and the rock 4 of In Valle (figg. 18-19). Usually the rocks contain other composition of praying figures or other shovels; at the end of the rocks other shovels appear; in the case of In Valle rock 4 the rock itself seems closed with the same composition of some *palette* in lines, similar to that appearing at the entrance. What to say about this phenomenon? In my opinion this is a sort of public art, with a use of figures that are positioned in a clearly visible part of the rock to avoid intrusions of males in the area<sup>20</sup> (fig. 20). If you consider that the patina of the engravings remains white for two centuries or more, it is clear that the figures should remain very visible from afar for a long period. Looking at the map of the National Park at Capo di Ponte (that is Naquane) designed in 1954 by E. Süß, it is clear that it is possible to follow a trail from the rock 50, where the Park (more or less) starts, to the rock 35, where the Park finishes: these are the rocks where there are *paletta* figures in lines. My idea is that a sort of public language could exist, not only confined to a rock but, to a complete area. There is also the case of an interesting scene on the rock 32 where a group of female figures is engraved on the border of a little glacial channel observing another female figure lying down (fig. 21). Previous interpretations<sup>21</sup> read these figures as a ritual scene where the lying down woman is interpreted as a dead or, vice versa, as a birth or as an initiation rite. Another possibility for the interpretation of this scene is again associated with the theme of the water. The surface was in part dry (the area where there is the group of women), in part wet (the area of the lying figure) because the day before rained and the soil was still dropping: in fact the waters were floating down the little channel suggesting the idea of a stream where the lying woman was swimming. This scene is considered ritual because it appears not only on the rock 32 of Naquane, but also on the rock 1 and on the rock 44 of the same park, on the rock 4 of In Valle and on the rock 51 of Vite at Paspardo<sup>22</sup>. Is this the representation of the beautiful siren Aquane, whose name recurs in the ancient toponomy of the Park?



#### THE WARRIORS AND THE AQUANE

In 1989 a cadastral map of the *Contrada Aquane* was brought to my attention<sup>23</sup> (fig. 22): this was the original toponymy of the actual location of Naquane, corresponding to the central area of the National Engravings Park, as the linguist M. Alinei had already proposed (Fossati 1991; Alinei 1984). Alinei was not aware of the cadastral map but had already linked the toponymy of Naquane to that of Aquane, semi-divine beings widely known in the folklore of the central-eastern Alps, especially in the Dolomites where the dominant culture was that of the Ladins (Wolff 1987), by several names and attributes. A few of the known names are: Aquane, Anquane, Enguane, Eguane, Gane, Guane, Laganes, Sagane, Sguane, Aivane and Vivane. They are known to be referred to also in the classical world: we remember Aganippe, the nymph and the homonymous well on the Elicona in Beozia; the witch with the name of Sagana mentioned by Horace; the Latin *saga*, from *sagus*, means sorcerers, or prophetess. Naquane represented, for Alinei, the most western toponymy of the central-eastern alpine area. Due to my research in the last few years, we know now that this is not so: there is an inscription of the Roman age from Cantù, not far from Como, dedicated to Aquane (*Corpus inscriptionum latinarum* V, 5671), and at Soncino (prov. of Cremona) the toponymy of Aquane is found in close proximity to a spring; this is the more southern toponymy, testifying the presence of the Aquane cult in the Po river plain. According to Raffaele De Marinis, also the name of the Euganei, from the same ethnic group to which the Iron Age inhabitants of the Camonica valley also belong, would not differ too much from Eguane or Enguane (Fossati 1991).

But who were the Aquane? Here I will briefly sum up the descriptions collected by Alinei, with the knowledge that the work could be considerably expanded: in the folklore they are remembered as anthropo-zoomorphic beings; the oldest legends describe them as women who can change into otters, or rather beautiful sirens with the hair of water and feet turned backwards, inhabitants of lakes, caves and springs. In more recent legends, clearly influenced by the Christian religion, they have acquired the attributes of the Faun: they have legs and the feet of a goat, as the devil.

The *classic* Aquane (the sirens) in general have the quality of knowing the past and the future, but the present is obscure to them. Furthermore they have powers over all types of water present on earth and over the rain itself. They are often defined as fearful. At times, however, they have been said to unite in matrimony with humans, and after a certain time they disappeared, never to be seen again. They can sing mysterious dirges or laments and often come to give advice to young men. According to several accounts, it is better do not know the personal names of the Aquane, to avoid being spirited away forever. In some legends the Aquane are accompanied by waterfowls and weave on the loom: and here it is very interesting the fact that on the rock n° 1 of the National Park of Naquane there are 7 looms, and this is the only place where you find looms in the Valcamonica rock art!

Alinei also describes sites that would appear to be evidences connecting them with rock art: in Friuli, near Clauzetto, one hears of the Clap des Aganes (rock of the Aquane) bear engraved footprints (most likely cup marks) which are related to the legend of the Aquane. Naquane is therefore not the only prehistoric site connected to the Aquane: also at Lagole de Calalzo, in Cadore, the local inhabitants spoke of the Laganes (Aquane) who lived around the sulphur springs, where there should have been a paleo-veneto sanctuary, attested to by numerous *ex voto* found therein.

Just beyond the borders of Naquane Park in Valcamonica is found a small church dedicated to the Saints Faustina and Liberata. These are two women who lived as hermits in small caves in the Medieval period and are said to have saved Capo di Ponte from an avalanche, blocking the falling boulders with their own hands. In the crypt of the church, in fact, one can still find a large rock with the deeply engraved prehistoric figures of hands and cup-marks, which the legend would connect with the two Saints. The site is also connected to the Christian celebrations which take place in May (the Ascension) and precludes a long nocturnal vigil with extravagant use of candles. It is quite probable that this ceremony has transplanted an earlier pagan rite of Spring, so-called "May", closely related to fertility rites. The night-time festival, which was abolished after the visit of S. Carlo Borromeo to the valley because he deemed it immoral, was also the occasion for the participants to conclude commercial affairs regarding not only domesticated animals, as still happens today, but also instruments made of iron, forged in the local smithies - workshops which were among the most important manufacturing sites in the Valley during the Medieval period (Bontempi 1989). Here one can discern a clear tie between the rite, the theme of fertility and the iron which came to be shaped into weapons. According to those living near the church of the Saints, up until the fifties, pilgrims came from all parts of the valley to place their hands in the prints engraved in the boulder to ask for protection and grace.

To us it appears valid to connect the Saints with the Aquane, not only due to the proximity of Naquane to the zone in question, but also because the church and the engraved stones lie near a water course, the stream Serio, which flows by no more than a few meters away. Furthermore, the legend describes the Saints just as the Aquane are depicted: they live in caves and act as helpers, a role which the folklore accounts

often attribute to the Aquane<sup>24</sup>. It is also interesting to note the engravings of the Great Rock of Naquane, where one sees an anthropomorphic figure from the Iron Age, identifiable as masculine by his sexual attributes, who seems to hold his own, spread-apart legs in his hands: this is an extremely rare scene in rock art and a close parallel can be found in the near-by Church of the Monastery of San Salvatore (11th cent.), where one of the Romanesque capitals carries the motif of the siren who holds her own mermaid-like legs spread apart around the corners of the capital.

This connection between aquatic divinities and the presence of rock engravings seems to have a precedent also in the Copper Age in the locality of Valzel de Undine in Borno, that is The Valley (or the Stream) of the Ondine, where engraved rocks were found. The Ondine are aquatic nymphs, always present in the legends of the Ladin, who bear all the same attributes as the Aquane.

Coming back to Naquane a very important point of discussion is the fact that it is very well known that in this site there is no water at all<sup>25</sup>. So why the theme of water is so important in rock art (the waterfowls) and in toponomy? If you have never been to Naquane this is a difficult thing to get. There are two points to underline: one is the morphology of the rocks, that are very polished and mounted by the prehistoric glaciers, in a way that sometimes true waves are shaped into the rock surfaces. I think that the imagination of the prehistoric men was crossed by some questions about the origins of this phenomenon. Who did create the waves? Is this petrified water? Is someone living in this petrified waves? Answers are all in the rock art imagery.

The second point is that the glacier have sometimes created hollows, little pool, where water can stay for a while. Are these the places where the Aquane can emerge from the petrified waters?

This was for me an interesting hypothesis but it will remain an hypothesis until I could not find in the local tradition any belief in spiritual being living in engraved rocks. This came occasionally in 1997 during a work of didactic archaeology with a class of Esine, in Valcamonica. We managed classes where we taught pupils to draw and record the engravings. So we usually went to local rock art sites of less tourist importance: at that time we were working in a site engraved called Librinì in Esine, in the village called Plemo. I told the students, as usual, to ask to their parents and grandparents if they knew some legends about the rock art of the area. The day after a girl student came to me and indicating a huge rock with a single cup mark, that had not attracted our attention before, said: "According to my grandparents and to other people in Plemo this rock has an interesting tradition". I was surprised and asked to the student to go ahead.

"They say that in this area lived a lady called *sciurina dei pé de cavora* (in cammunion dialect: the young lady with goat feet) who threading her clog into a cup mark opened a rock where she used to eat her prey. The legend says that the lady enjoyed scaring people, above all the hunters and the visitors of the wood. While they were passing, she jumped out of the rock kidnapping them. Behind her house, says the legend, there was a well where she threw the skulls of the victims. The story tells us that a group of men captured and chained her to a mountain but she was able to escape and during the full-moon nights one can still hear the sound of the chains that she is carrying to revenge her capture"<sup>26</sup>.

This legend was very important for me. It was the prove that the idea of beings living in the rocks really existed, and also gave a sort of interpretation to the cup marks<sup>27</sup>. But most important was the fact that the spirit living in the rock is described as the more recent Aquane, a lady with a goat feet. She lost the mermaid attributes to keep those characteristics of the evil. The legend suggests also the presence of human sacrifices (the skulls) with the idea of a votive deposit nearby the rocks.

Another legend which suggests that there are spirits living in the rocks regards San Vito, a local Christian Saint from Valcamonica: in this legend the Saint could pass through the rocks and refuge inside them in case of danger (see Ertani s.d.).

At the moment these are the only legends collected that talks about beings living in rocks. The rock art suggests other figures that are thought to live in the rocks: this is the case of the so-called "bust of praying people", anthropomorphs engraved only in the upper part of the body, the bust, sometimes only the head is found, sometimes the line of the shoulder with the head (fig. 23). Gaudenzio Ragazzi thinks (Ragazzi 1995) that these engravings can be compared with similar figures painted on Greek and Etruscan vases. These are not simply figures not completed<sup>28</sup>, but signs with a special interpretation and meaning. They would be representations of spirits appearing in front of the warriors from the ground, the place where they live. Sometimes they are with weapons, as to say that they are considered males. This is also a suggestion that the Aquane are not the only beings living in another world.

## CONCLUSIONS

Like Theseus in the labyrinth, following the Arianna's thread (the faded traces left on the rocks) we have discovered - at least published for the first time- that Naquane was originally thought as a female site, by the ancient engravers: it became a male site only during the Iron Age, when the female figures practi-



cally disappeared, leaving space for a warrior world. This masculine world in any case did not cancel the idea that the site was a female space in ancient times. And what we wrote before, that Iron Age rock art in the area should be interpreted as votive images engraved on the occasion of initiation rites through which young men of the local aristocracy gained access to adult society is true, but we must add that these images were probably dedicated to the Aquane that helped (like in the actual legends of the Dolomites) the young warriors to pass their proves. So... a male rock art made for special women!

(FOOTNOTES)

<sup>1</sup> This inclusion does not go together with a real conservation of the Valcamonica rock art. The problems for the art arise from the want or the lack of the management of the engraved areas. In addition there is not a complete corpus published of the rock engravings and the visual context of the nature, where the rock art is inserted, is strongly affected by electric lines, industrial constructions, roads and wood works. These problems are discussed in my recent paper *Le ultime ricerche e i problemi di gestione dell'arte rupestre della Valcamonica*, in Atti del Convegno: 2° Congresso Internazionale "Ricerche paleontologiche nelle Alpi Occidentali", Pinerolo (TO), 17-19 Ottobre 2003, Centro Studi e Museo di Arte Preistorica di Pinerolo (CESMAP) in the press.

<sup>2</sup> As the so called "Paspardo school" or the "Artist of the *astronauts*" (actually warriors with strange helmets) of Zurla and Foppe di Nadro.

<sup>3</sup> I totally agree with this interpretation proposed by R. De Marinis (1988). Recently few scholars have published papers that link the Camunni to the Celtic world, from the ethnic and linguistic point of view (as V. Mariotti, *The Roman Circus of Cividate Camuno*, schede didattiche, 2003, Cividate Camuno, and A. Morandi, *L'iscrizione di Grevo in Valcamonica*, in S. Solano-A. Marretta, *Grevo. Alla scoperta di un territorio fra archeologia e arte rupestre*, 2004, pp. 142-148). These studies are superficial, in my opinion, and do not take in account many aspects of the archaeological and cultural situation in Lombardy during the Iron Age.

<sup>4</sup> *Civitas Camunnorum* was a city of great importance during the roman times, not less important than Brescia, Bergamo or Verona: archaeologists have found a circus, a theatre, a spa, and numerous private and public buildings of major size.

<sup>5</sup> It is the popular name of the National Park of the Rock Engravings in Capo di Ponte (BS).

<sup>6</sup> As suggested by P. Frontini, *Aspetti rituali delle deposizioni di armi durante l'età del Bronzo in Italia settentrionale: alcuni spunti*, in 2° *Convegno Internazionale di Archeologia Rupestre. "Archeologia e Arte Rupestre. L'Europa. Le Alpi. La Valcamonica."*, Atti del Convegno di Studi, Darfo-Boario Terme 2-5 Ottobre 1997, a cura di A. Fossati-P. Frontini, pp. 105-112, Milano.

<sup>7</sup> I have touched this point in my recent paper *Nymphs, Waterfowls and Saints: the Role of Ethnography in the Interpretation of the Rupestrian Tradition of Valcamonica, Italy*, in the Seminar *Ethnography and rock art*, organized by the Oregon Archaeological Society, Portland 3-6 September 2002, the proceedings of which are in the press.

<sup>8</sup> See: E. Anati, *Arte Rupestre nelle regioni occidentali della Penisola Iberica*, *Archivi*, 4, 1968; A. Pena Santos-J. M. Vasquez Varela, *Los Petroglifos Gallegos. Grabados rupestres prehistoricos al aire libre en Galicia*, La Coruna, 1979.

<sup>9</sup> H. Breuil, *Les peintures rupestres schématiques de la péninsule Ibérique*, Lagny, 1933, in particular pp. 67-68, fig. 40.

<sup>10</sup> A.C. Ferreira Da Silva-M. Gomes Varela, *Proto-Historia de Portugal*, Lisboa, 1992.

<sup>11</sup> The interpretation of the *paletta* as a mirror is in S. Ferri, *Il significato delle palette nell'arte rupestre della Valcamonica*, in *Les Religions de la Préhistoire, Valcamonica Symposium '72*, 1975, pp. 263-269; as a paddle is in G. Marro, *Il grandioso monumento paleontologico di Valcamonica*, in *Atti della Reale Accademia di Scienze di Torino*, 1932, p. 79; as a spade or agricultural shovel is in G. Forni, *Coppelle, palette, protoerpici*, in *Art and Religion, Valcamonica Symposium '79*, 1983, pp. 405-425; and also in J.P. Maher, *The Paletta, pro manuscripto*, 1986; as the schematic representation of a bovid is in O. Cornaggia Castiglioni- G. Calegari, *Il bovide a paletta ovvero l'estrema schematizzazione di un motivo figurativo del repertorio delle incisioni europee di età olocenica*, in *Natura*, 63, 1972, pp. 87-101.

<sup>12</sup> M. Zuffa, *Le palette rituali di bronzo*, in *Atti e Memorie Deputazione di Storia Patria per le Provincie di Romagna*, VIII, 1956-57, pp. 67-170.

<sup>13</sup> V. Bianco Peroni, *I rasoi nell'Italia Continentale*, PBF, VIII, 1976.

<sup>14</sup> The interpretation of the *paletta* as a funerary symbol is in E. Süs, *Le incisioni rupestri di Valcamonica*, Milano, 1958; and is in V. Fusco, *Su alcuni aspetti, di incisioni rupestri camune scoperte ad alta quota*, in *Sibirium*, 11, 1972, pp. 31-51.

<sup>15</sup> Iron is not a reflecting metal, at least in prehistory. R. De Marinis, *Dibattito sulla paletta*, in *Les Religions de la Préhistoire, Valcamonica Symposium '72*, 1975.

<sup>16</sup> M. Tombolani-P. De Min, *Stipe di Via Rialto*, in *Padova Preromana*, Catalogo della mostra, 1981, p. 181.

<sup>17</sup> Maybe due to a ritual ban? The Iron Age rock art seems to be completely a male activity.

<sup>18</sup> As the practice of the Symposium, the ritual banquet of greek style.

<sup>19</sup> I have suggested this in Fossati 1997, p. 58.



<sup>20</sup> Ritual interdictions to special sites (sometimes with rock art) are known in many other part of the world as in Australia, where one of the most famous is the case of the site called Bulajang linked to the God Bula (Gunn 1992).

<sup>21</sup> Few years ago I have written the explanation of this scene that you can find in the panel near to rock 32 in the National Park, but today I would add also this new hypothesis.

<sup>22</sup> But this of the rock 32 is the only case where the lying woman is in a glacial channel.

<sup>23</sup> The Map of the Contrada Aquane has been brought to my attention by the former owner of the area, Battista Ruggeri, at that time guardian of the National Park. I was explaining to him that M. Alinei thought that the original name of Naquane could come from Aquane, and I agreed with him, but Alinei had no proves to say this because "...there is no maps indicating this", I said. "But I have this map and I will show it to you!" said Ruggeri. Dated to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> cent. the map is not the only document that testifies this name: later I discovered that also the cadastral maps of the area of Foppe di Nadro show the original name of the road that put in connection Naquane to Nadro. The road is called *Strada delle Aquane* (Road of the Aquane).

<sup>24</sup> See also Camuri 1995.

<sup>25</sup> The two fountains available in Naquane take their water from a pool situated quite distant.

<sup>26</sup> The legend has been collected by Anna Erculiani, I C Scuola Media Statale "Don A. Sina" Esine.

<sup>27</sup> This particular cup mark can be interpreted as a technique to create a contact between two different realities, that of the real world with the world of the Spirits.

<sup>28</sup> In the Valcamonica rock art there are several unfinished figures: anthropomorphs, buildings, animals, and various symbols as palette, footprints and camunnian roses. The total number of not finished figures is so high that it is difficult to think that this could be a case: all the unfinished figures have probably a special meaning.



fig. 1



fig. 2



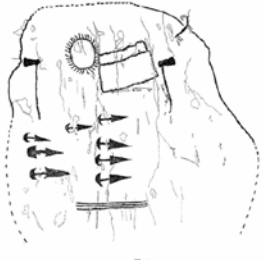
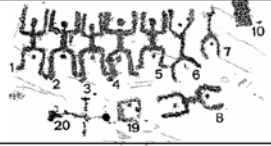




fig. 3



fig. 4



Style	Themes	Chronology
Protocamunnian		13 <sup>th</sup> -6 <sup>th</sup> Mill. BC
1 <sup>st</sup> -2 <sup>nd</sup>		5 <sup>th</sup> -4 <sup>th</sup> Mill. BC
3 <sup>rd</sup> A		4 <sup>th</sup> -3 <sup>rd</sup> Mill. BC
3 <sup>rd</sup> B-C-D		2 <sup>nd</sup> Mill. BC
4 <sup>th</sup>		1 <sup>st</sup> Mill. BC
Postcamunnian		Roman - Mediaeval – Recent

**VALCAMONICA**  
**THEMES AND CHRONOLOGY**  
Fig. 5



fig. 6

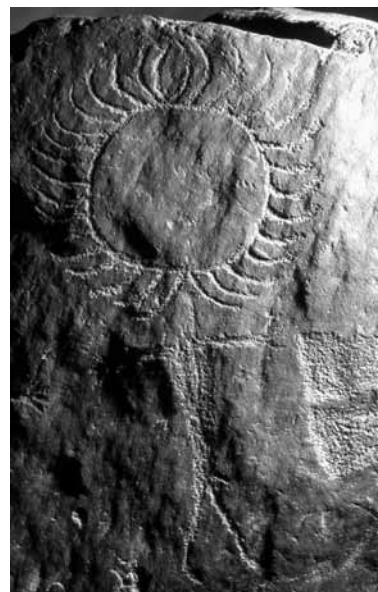


fig. 7

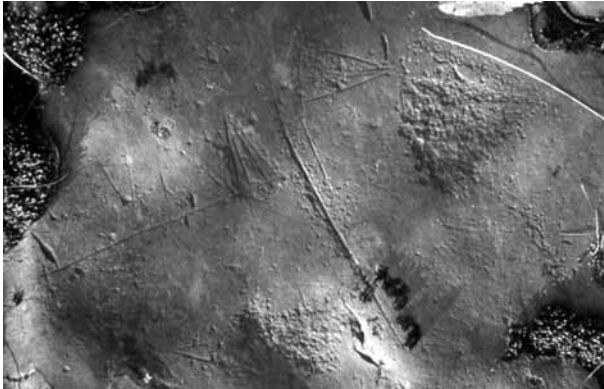


fig. 8



fig. 9



fig. 10



fig. 11



fig. 12



fig. 13



fig. 14



fig. 15



fig. 16

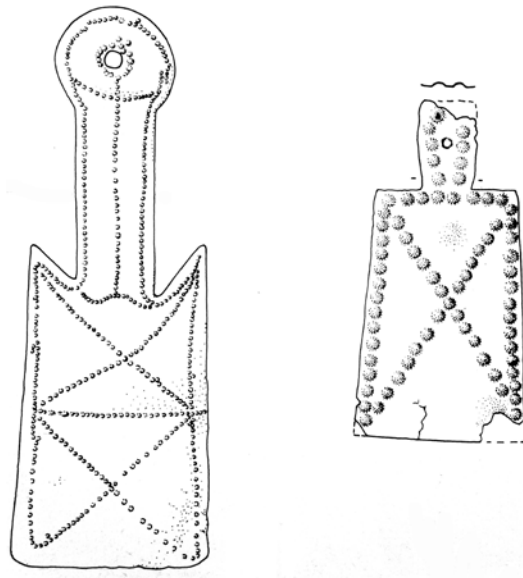


fig. 17



fig. 18



fig. 19



fig. 20



fig. 21

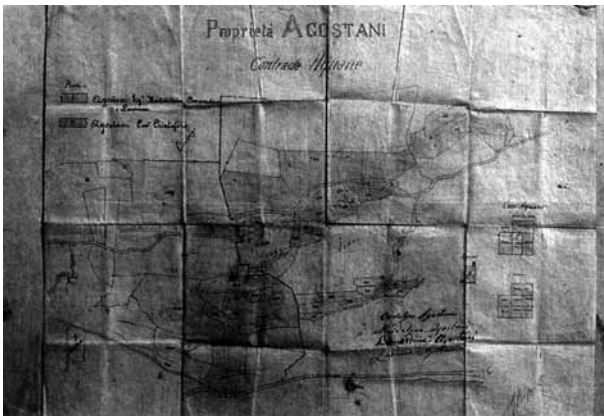


fig. 22



fig. 23

**CAPTIONS**

- Fig. 1: The labyrinth on the rock 1 of Naquane
- Fig. 2: Figures of various ages on the rock 1 of Naquane, Capo di Ponte
- Fig. 3: The rock 35 of Naquane mounted and eroded by the prehistoric glacier, Capo di Ponte
- Fig. 4: Wheel with internal rays painted in red, Campanine, Cimbergo, Bronze Age.
- Fig. 5: Themes and Chronology of Valcamonica rock art
- Fig. 6: Deer with turned head, Luine, Boario Terme, Palaeolithic Age
- Fig. 7: The Sun God on Ossimo 9 stele, Copper Age
- Fig. 8: Halberds engraved on a rock near Termen, Ceto, Early Bronze Age
- Fig. 9: Duellists on a rock of Vite-Deria, Paspardo
- Fig. 10: Praying figures of the Middle Bronze Age overlap a Neolithic spiral, In Valle rock 4, Paspardo
- Fig. 11: Groups of Bronze Age weapons, Foppe di Nadro, rock 23, Ceto.
- Fig. 12: Paletta figures from Dos Costapeta, rock 1, Paspardo
- Fig. 13: Praying figures associated to a paletta, Dos Costapeta, rock 1, Paspardo, Bronze Age

- Fig. 14: Looms and palette on the rock 1 of Naquane, Capo di Ponte, Bronze Age
- Fig. 15: Paletta and horseman on the rock 1 of Naquane, Capo di Ponte, Iron Age
- Fig. 16: A bronze paletta from ancient Venetic culture (from Tombolani-De Min 1981)
- Fig. 17: Paletta realized in bronze sheet from Padoa (from Tombolani-De Min 1981)
- Fig. 18: Paletta in lines on the rock 35 of Naquane, Capo di Ponte, Bronze Age
- Fig. 19: Paletta in lines on the rock 4 of In Valle, Paspardo, Bronze Age
- Fig. 20: Paletta in lines and a male observer on the rock 35 of Naquane, Capo di Ponte,
- Fig. 21: Female figures on the rock 32 of Naquane, Capo di Ponte, Bronze Age
- Fig. 22: Map of the Contrada Aquane, before 1835
- Fig. 23: Duellists and bust, rock 15, Vite-Deria, Paspardo, Iron Age

*All figures, where not stated differently, are made by the author or "Le Orme dell'Uomo"*



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