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ROCK ART IN THE ITALIAN PENINSULA AND ISLANDS: ISSUES ABOUT THE RELATION BETWEEN ENGRAVED ROCKS AND PAINTED, SYMBOLS, MOUNTAIN AREAS AND PATHS

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This session intends to resume the issues discussed during the Round Table “L’arte rupestre dell’età dei metalli nella penisola italiana: localizzazione dei siti in rapporto al territorio, simbologie e possibilità interpretative” that took place in Pisa in 2015. The addressed issues were related to the Post-Pleistocene rock art along the Apennine ridge; in recent years an increasing amount of data has been collected, characterized by a regional and peculiar iconography with some common elements: anthropomorphic figures, weapons, daggers, halberds and several other symbols, all stylised. A peculiarity of this research is the site’s locations within small shelters, inappropriate for habitation or in places suitable for supervising mountain and territory roads; this research demonstrates similarities to that carried out in the Western Mediterranean Sea. A new topic that has not been discussed during the Round Table is about the possible interpretations of some engravings as solar and stellar symbols related to the measuring of time and to economic, daily and seasonal factors.

Therefore, the proposed guidelines are:

- A brief summary of the peninsula and its regionally distinct aspect.
- Relation between sites and territory regarding natural and anthropic landscape.
- Rock art and routes: cultural trades and supervision of the territory.
- Probable meanings linked to solar and stellar cycles: symbols and interpretations.

The “Pietra delle Croci” di Lettopalena (Chieti, Abruzzo): first reproductions and investigations

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The “Pietra delle Croci” (Stone of the Crosses) is a large isolated limestone boulder, located in an area crossed by ancient “tratturi” (pastoral routes). The first exploration was undertaken in 2012, but only in 2017 were the first drawings and laser-scanner reproductions made. The boulder is dome-shaped, sloping towards the west and largely covered with engraved figures with wide and deep grooves. The more frequently recorded symbols are crosses, simple or “potent”, that is with a crossbar at the end of each of its arms. The latter type is more numerous, probably Christian and can be placed in the modern age. However, other figures seem prehistoric, particularly the lozenge-shapes and circles with a cross engraved into them, an 8-radius wheel and a pair of horns. There are also several cup-marks, whose diameter ranges from a few centimeters to a dozen. The largest one is connected by a groove to two small cup-marks, placed a little higher. Other cups are also connected by grooves. Finally, there are some cylindrical holes, a few centimeters wide and deep. All these cavities raise many interpretative problems which will require further research.



Fig. 1 Lettopalena, Pietra delle Croci. (photo Di Fraia)

Fig. 2 Lettopalena, Pietra delle Croci. (photo Di Fraia)

The engraved and painted figures on the Parete Manzi of Montelapiano (Abruzzo) and possible connections with mobility and transhumance

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Numerous figures are engraved on the Parete Manzi (Montelapiano), while the paintings are very few. The most recurring engraved figure is a rod with a straight or curved appendix-like form at one end, there is also a rod painted in red. A few of the rods have a curved end. Due to the fact that among the engraved figures there are at least ten fish and a probable cetacean, transfixed by many rods, we can hypothesize a scenario of fishing with harpoons, certainly in the sea in the case of the cetacean, but perhaps also in some river (for fishes). Since Montelapiano's site is along an important axis for transhumance, is it possible that some shepherds were able to fish along the coasts of Abruzzo and Puglia or at least know of this activity? A painted figure and an engraved figure show similarities with that of the Dolmen du Berceau, at Saint-Piat. They are formed by a straight rod, ending with one or two hooks, below which a semicircle appears: maybe a rope or a ring to fasten a rope? The interpretation of Montelapiano's figures (what objects or animals? referential or symbolic?) and the identification of their authors (local communities or mobile groups?) will still require many investigations.



Fig.1 - Montelapiano, Parete Manzi.
(photo Di Fraia)

Fig.2 - Montelapiano, Parete Manzi.
(photo Di Fraia)

The cave of “Bagno Penale” at Cagliari (Sardinia, Italy): prehistoric rock art and landscape

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Keywords: cave, rock art, Middle Neolithic, landscape, Sardinia

The Bagno Penale cave is a partially collapsed limestone cavity, noted in archaeological literature since the early 20th century when the archaeologist Antonio Taramelli found and excavated it. A large amount of pottery fragments were found in this cave and a well-known two-handled globular bowl with a distinctive neck, decorated with incised and impressed geometric motifs, belonging to the Bonu Ighinu culture (Middle Neolithic A: 4800-4300 BC). The southern and well preserved part of the cave has some hard-to-understand prehistoric engraved and painted figures.

The Bagno Penale cave is located near the modern urban area of Cagliari, in the middle of “Gulf of the Angels”, a large bay in southern Sardinia (Italy), facing the Tyrrhenian Sea. It is positioned on the southern part of “Capo Sant’Elia” in Cagliari, a sedimentary rock promontory from the Miocene period. This promontory reveals traces of human presence since VI millennium BC, thanks to a favourable habitat for the prehistoric population, located near the sea and the big Campidano plain.

The Bagno Penale cave is an excellent case study for GIS multiple site relationship analysis, due to its location, its prehistoric rock art figures and the rich archaeological background.



Fig.1 - The cave of “Bagno Penale” with a prehistorical painted figure highlighted by the plugin DStretch, extension of the ImageJ software. (Elaboration of C. Mannu)

Fig.2 - Elevated View of “Capo San’Elia” with the prehistoric sites in this area. (Elaboration of M. Cabras)

The rock art in the territory of Trapani (NW Sicily). Linear engraving: analysis of settlements and their relationship to the landscape

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Since the second half of the last century, different sites have been reported in the territory of Trapani, located in shelters and caves, containing engravings and two cases paintings. The recent resumption of searches by the authors, in cooperation with the *Soprintendenza* of Trapani, is addressing the systematic cataloguing of sites (more or less twenty) and the drawing of the depictions of about one thousand different signs. The ongoing study is leading to new unprecedented finds, in the attempt to understand if linear engravings could not only be related to the immediate site containing them, but also to the surrounding landscape environment (i. e. access to marine resources along the coastline overlooked by the caves). The dating of such signs is still uncertain, although their traditional chronological placement in the Late Palaeolithic and Mesolithic can be accepted.



Fig.1 - Salinella Cave, S. Vito lo Capo.
(photo A. Filippi)

Fig.2 - Nicchia Rocche Giglio, Valderice.
(photo A. Filippi)

Rock art in the Gargano: considerations

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The relationship between a number of the karstic caverns in the Gargano, where prehistoric engravings and paintings have been discovered, with the territory and the anthropic landscape of the Copper and Bronze Age will be illustrated. There will be a particular focus on the Sfinalicchio "C" Shelter, the Campo and the Sorbo Valley Caves, respectively located on the eastern headland and the extreme western side of the Gargano and along the southern Pedegarganica (Gargano foothill) route.

The Sfinalicchio "C" headland located close to the middle of the Peschici-Vieste area, one of the richest flint mines, exploited between the last period of the Neolithic and the Eneolithic Ages. The Campo di Pietra Cave was a sort of Junction point between the southern Pedegarganica route and the promontory on the northern coast. The Patience Cave and the Riposo Shelter are situated opposite each other on both sides of Ividoro Valley, which opens up a short distance from the Candelaro River and appears to be one of the shortest and easiest routes going from the river bank to the first rocky crags of the Gargano, where traces of people living and dwelling in the Eneolithic and Bronze age still persist.



Fig.1 - Campo di Pietra Cave, Apricena (Fg), Italy. (photo A. Gravina)
Fig.2 - Campo di Pietra Cave, Apricena (Fg), Italy. (photo A. Gravina)

Some prehistoric figures of Gargano rock art. A proposal of interpretation

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Keywords: Gargano, shelter, cave, paintings, engravings, Copper Age, Bronze Age

Some Gargano prehistoric rock art styles seem to be part of a common heritage of iconographic themes found in a number of caves and rock shelters with a large number of engravings and graffiti. The extraordinary similarities of the figurative language found in these karstic cavities, located in different areas of the promontory at remarkable distances from one another, are indicators of cultural traits shared over a large and well-defined territorial area.

Contextual links will be drawn between the Graffiti and engravings and the paintings and in particular to the "fungi-forms" and "ribbon-like forms" which will be analyzed as well as their territorial diffusion and location within the karstic structures. We will analyze the technique of their execution and the evolution of their schematic representation in the presumed chronological and cultural period from the Copper Age to the Bronze Age and their likely ideological and social significance.



Fig.1 - Campo di Pietra Cave, Apricena (Fg), Italy. (photo A. Gravina)

Fig.2 - Campo di Pietra Cave, Apricena (Fg), Italy. (photo A. Gravina)

Rupestrian sites with painted and engraved rocks in Appenninic Italy: symbols, land use, paths and routes

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Keywords: Apennines, rock art, paintings, engravings, Italy, land use, routes

Analysis of certain sites (open-air or in caves) will be made, where evidence of cults or rites (agrarian, water, geothermal manifestations) have been discovered. Votive offerings are very often found in 'transit' or 'control' sites, or upon dominant or isolated ground. Further examination will also be carried out on sites along the Italian peninsula where engravings and/or schematic paintings attributed to the end of the Neolithic and metal ages have been discovered.

Despite the overlapping of various epochs, in many of these sites, certain distinguishable symbols recur (anthropomorphs, stars, hourglass shapes, double zig-zags, etc.). These symbols are also present over vast European areas and are often components of complex rock art scenes. These manifestations are invariably found on rocky walls or small shelters with difficult access but with dominant transit routes or mountain path crossroads. Thus, the true reason for the presence of such recurring symbology could have many reasons beyond reference to cults. One could suppose that the sites were sacred places continuing on through to historical epochs, and that these symbols were, at the same time, signs of territory and control. Another problem concerns the possible representations of constellations.



Fig.1 - Rock shelter Pacentro, Sulmona, Italy. (photo Guzzardi)

Fig.2 - Tracing of rock engravings in rock shelter Il Cavone di Spinazzola, Bari, Italy.

Rock art of Corsica

The Rock Art of Corsica is little known outside of the Island. This is one of the motivations for presenting a synthesis of the principal productions of this Art. The basis of our research is a book published some years ago by Professor M.C. Weiss from the University Pascal Paoli (Corsica). Two categories of Rock Art are present: the first is the 'Grotta Scritta', the only evidence of painted figures and symbols which permit comparisons with the Spanish and Sardinian painted rock art. Many large blocks of rock covered in incised patterns and symbols (with differing techniques) constitute the second category of Corsican Rock Art. The greatest portion of these blocks is located in the north of the Corsica and situated in particularly places in the landscape. In regards to the interpretation of the incised symbols, the greatest challenge remains in dating them and establishing a chronology.

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art location, chronology



Fig.1 - Grotta Scritta (Olméta-du-Cap, Haute-Corse), painted symbols. (photo N. Mattei)

Fig.2 - Vaglia (Mansu, Haute-Corse), incised symbols. (photo F. Lorenzi)

Rock Art and Rock Complexes in Val Dènone (Sicily): Riparo Cassataro, Rocca Pizzicata, Rocca San Marco, Altipiano dell'Argimusco and Riparo della Sperlinga

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This work intends to present some important archaeological sites in north-eastern Sicily, formerly known as Val Dènone. Though the rock art of western Sicily is better known, the eastern part also has sites of great interest, which are little-known or studied. As such the following sites are highlighted: a) the Riparo Cassataro, Simeto Valley, where there are cave paintings from the Neolithic period (fig. 1); b) the Rocca Pizzicata, Alcantara Valley which includes a rock complex with numerous signs of anthropic activity (carved stairs, rock-cut tomb, altars, inscriptions, etc.); c) the Rocca San Marco, Nebrodi Mountains, a prehistoric shelter from the Palaeolithic period; d) the Altipiano dell'Argimusco, on the border between Peloritani and Nebrodi Mountains, an almost unknown place with rock artifacts (tub, altar, rock-cut tomb, rocky millstone, petroglyphs, etc.) and huge rocks that are characterized by rare and beautiful anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures; e) the Riparo della Sperlinga, Novara di Sicilia, the second shelter from the Mesolithic period discovered in Sicily, with a series of linear wall engravings whose meaning is currently unclear, but certainly associated with site attendance in prehistoric times (fig. 2). This multidisciplinary study presents and describes the archaeological, geological, ethnographic and, in some cases, astronomical features of the sites in question.

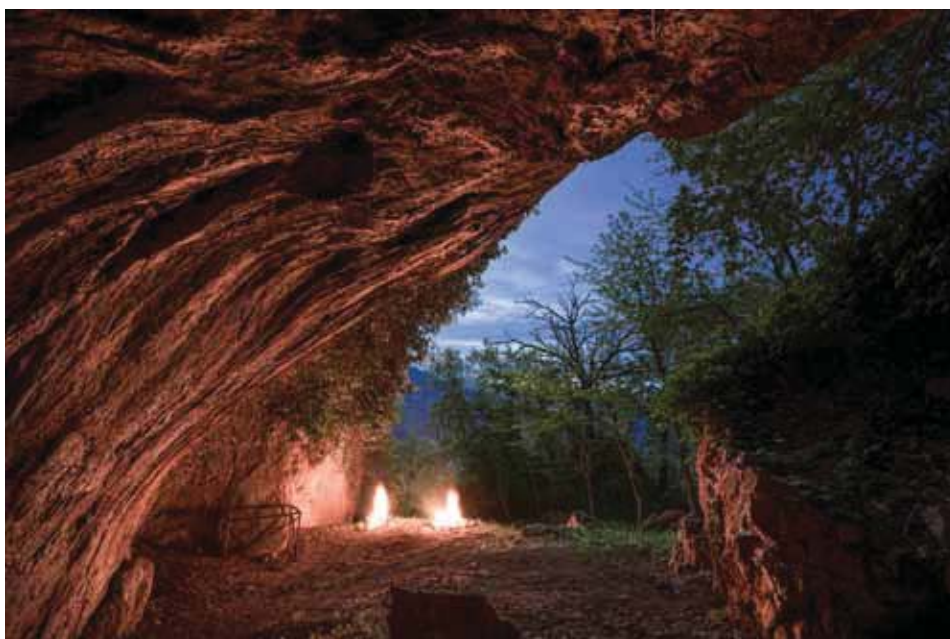


Fig. 1 - Cassataro Shelter, Centuripe, Enna. (photo Diego Barucco)

Fig. 2 - Sperlinga Shelter, Novara di Sicilia, Messina. (photo Emilio Messina)

The influence of environmental context in rock art: paintings, engravings and symbols from the Anfratto Palmerini

The discovery of Anfratto Palmerini in Pescosansonesco (PE) is presented for the first time to the international scientific community. This narrow uninhabitable cavity, discovered in 2016 in La Queglia Mountain 560m above sea-level, is vulva shaped and its particular position receives total illumination only on the days following the winter solstice. Inside, the remains of several red ochre paintings are preserved, often superimposed by engravings and some charcoal marks. This paper will present the research of the Anfratto's figurative repertoire, among which are handprints in red ochre and various symbols, painted or engraved, such as floral pictograms, anthropomorphic figures and stylized female genitals. Through the analysis of the painting and engraving superimpositions, a related chronology is proposed for the artistic phases that will eventually be substantiated by the preliminary analysis results of the pigments that is still in progress. Lastly, we will try to understand how the environmental context has influenced the first artists in selecting the site, characterizing its functions and thus determining the semiotic value of Anfratto's handprints, engravings and symbols.

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Keywords: Anfratto Palmerini (Pescosansonesco), environmental context, rock art, handprints, filiform anthropomorphs



The marked route: Pianaaura and the rock engravings in the Mount Stivo landscape (SW Trentino region, NE Italy)

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path, rock shelter, billhook

The slopes of Mount Stivo, from the Cavedine and Gresta valleys (west and south) towards lake Cei on the eastern slope, are dotted with engravings representing religious symbols, anthropomorphic figures, inscriptions, dates and tools. The engravings are similar in style, type and technique, but every site has its own peculiarity. Their locations are on slopes crossed by medieval and modern routes, which link the valley-bottoms with higher settlements. One of the most interesting routes is the cobbled path linking the village of Massone with Drena castle and the Cavedine valley, where three rock-shelters with thematically connected engraving complexes are located (Nogaiole, Sant'Antonio and Pianaaura). This research aims to investigate the specific characteristics of the rock engravings (stratigraphy, typology, techniques). Contact tracing, 2D and 3D photogrammetry and frottage have been used to record the engravings, and this approach has been linked with surface, cartographic and toponomastic surveys for better comprehension of land use, exploitation of resources, religious signs and structures, history of settlements and viability. The final purpose of the study is the chronological and functional interpretation of the engravings as part of the historical-archeological reading of the landscape in its evolution and stratification over time by the interaction of natural and man-made factors.



Fig. 1 - Sant'Antonio, Arco (TN). (photo
Fabio Cavulli)

Fig. 2 - Pianaaura, area C, Arco (TN).
(elaboration Nicola Pedernana)



New Evidence of Rock Art in Calabria

Until a couple of years ago, when talking about the rock art in Calabria, the main and only reference was inevitably and exclusively the aurochs figures from the Romito shelter in Papisidero, dated to the final Epigravettian. However, recent archaeological investigations undertaken in this region, especially in its central-northern parts, have brought to light a much richer context than always supposed. These investigations, conducted by different research institutions, led to the discovery of artistic expressions that can be referred to as from both prehistory and protohistory, demonstrating a more diversified and interesting picture of the rock art phenomenon in Calabria. Finally, the present work not only describes the new discoveries, all belonging to the Holocene, but refers them to a broader and more diversified national and international context within what is termed Landscape archeology; this also points to new investigative pathways within the rock art research of the region.

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Fig.1 - Anthropomorphic figure like "phi" painted in red, Passo del Monaco, Papisidero, CS, Italy. (photo F. Larocca)
Fig.2 - Pietra di Santa Filomena, Decollatura, CZ, Italy. (photo D. Sigari)

Rock engravings in the area around the Apuan Alps between Massa and Lucca (Tuscany, IT)

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Keywords: Italian pre-
protohistory, rock-engraving,
landscape archaeology,
mountain paths, footprints,
bill-hook, cup-marks

Numerous sites with petroglyphs, both iconic and aniconic, have been mapped: the Diana Cave (Mulazzo, MS) in the Lunigiana area, stands out for the recent research that has revealed a pre-protolithic iconographic complex. Many aniconic elements (cup marks) have been found along the fluvial valleys and they have been related to probable communication or transhumance routes. One such likely route, situated in the Frigido river Valley between the coast and the Lunigiana area, consists of mountainside paths where many petroglyphs, such as cup marks, cup marks with tails-like markings and basins, have been found on panoramic boulders, some of which are situated on cliffs. They are located in a position of high visibility, therefore of control, of the underlying valley or at both road and fluvial confluences. Besides several aniconic expressions, there is also a site with prehistoric anthropomorphic figures. In Versilia, several cup marks and basins are located along mountainside paths and on boulders on the cliffs. Iconographic elements and some cross-shaped figures can be found in the high-altitude sites, remarkably the presence of footprints, a bill-hook, a forestry tool and engravings have also been found.



Fig. 1 Colle del Cipollaio (Stazzema, LU) masso con coppelle, vaschette e canaletta (foto S. Pucci);

Fig. 2 Valle del Giardino (Stazzema, LU), coppelle su mulattiera (foto S. Pucci)

The middle Magra river valley, prehistoric mountain landscapes between rituals, trade and control of the territory: a topographical interpretation in light of new discoveries

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During the study and survey of the engraved elements inside Diana Cave (Mulazzo (MS) loc. Canossa) some engraved lines were found at the base of natural openings overlooking the Magra valley. These signs, 30 to 40 cm long and reciprocally oblique, are distributed in groups of 5 to 6. One of the Authors has observed that the lines appear to be aligned with places where stone-statues have been found (Sorano, Groppoli, Gigliana, Malgrate, Filetto, Mocrone, Venelia, Treschietto). This research on the visibility of sites indicates the intention of those using the cave of controlling the territory in pre-protolithic times. But this doesn't exclude other possible uses related to commercial, productive or ritual activities. The authors take into consideration the above-mentioned sites in context of the published archaeological data, the mineral resources, and the geographic data (roads, trails and waterways). The lines in the Diana Cave appear to be not only physical but also ideological directrices which continue beyond the Parma Apennines between Mount Sillara and Mount Aquila (Carrera, Tosatti 2015). For this purpose, the research is restricted to the Magra valley, from Pontremoli to the Taverone valley, up to the Parma Apennines' ridge and the Tuscan-Aemilian Apennines.

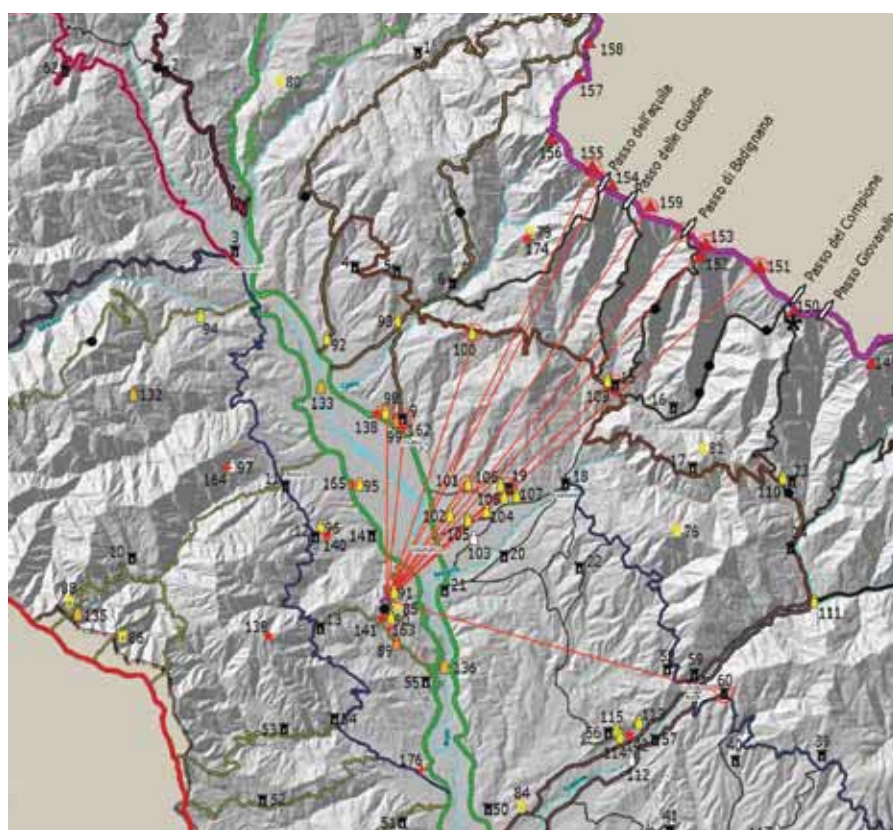


Fig.1 - Diana Cave, Mulazzo (MS), alignments (elab. Carrera)

Fig.2 - Bagnone (MS), view of the plan at the foot of the Mt. Losanna and of the boulder with the petroglyph "Omino del Sillara" (photo Carrera)

