

Chapter 3

ARCHAEOLOGY AS A SOURCE OF HISTORY

What is the process of studying an archaeological find and of transforming it into an historical document? Perhaps, better than some carefully planned out theory, the reality of personal experience can supply concrete illustrations. Upon first seeing the rock engravings, our archaeological team wondered who the artists might have been, where they lived, how they might have looked. From the beginning we searched for their settlements and their material culture. We tried to establish to which epoch the engravings of weapons and tools might have belonged, and we quickly realized, contrary to the widespread opinion of the time, that not all of the engravings were from the same period. We asked ourselves why those particular engravings had been made on the rocks. From the environmental context we sought to decipher why these engravings were in a particular place and not in another. These are all questions which we continue to ask ourselves because the answers, after so many years of study, are not yet complete.

In an effort to interpret the huge amount of finds we had before us, we first used a number of complex formulae, punch cards, and various other types of data processing methods. They were the very latest techniques that the archaeologists of that time were just beginning to use. Then we realized that all of these devices required a far greater amount of energy and funds than was necessary or even possible in our situation. They are useful for arranging and tracing data, for preparing indices and catalogues, for statistics, especially when the researcher does not have the subject matter entirely under control, and when one is adequately financed; or when one has more money than ideas. To understand however, requires thought and vision. Once the data has been obtained, the most important thing to do is to reflect upon it in a logical, coherent fashion. No computer has yet been able

to replace the intuition, curiosity, and ability to reason of the human brain. At that point, then, our most important tools were our heads and our hands.

Now that we are in the computer age and computers have become an easy tool to work with, it is almost inconceivable how difficult, complicated, and expensive it was to adapt our program to the computer 40 years ago. The main consequence of our attempts to do so was to eat up large quantities of our limited economic resources. The results were not satisfactory. We soon abandoned the high-tech systems and tried to acquire for ourselves the memory power which we had at first delegated to computers. The first computer-oriented period was useful in that it imposed a logical order on the material. However our research became productive only when we had abandoned this approach in favor of manual work and effort that gave us direct, continuous, and minute contact with the material as we studied and assimilated it.

After more than thirty years, we turned to the use of computers once more, but with very different criteria than those we had used back in the fifties, and with the specific aims of multidimensional analysis, researching paradigms or constants, and monographic research. Working with small computers on a vast data bank, we prepared custom-made programs for the research that we were carrying out, and in these terms, a good computer is an instrument that assures efficiency and saves time and energy. In the last thirty years, research logic has changed, and so have computers.

The main purpose of every historical-archaeological study is to understand as much as possible about a phenomenon, an event, or a certain group of documents. Discovering an engraved rock, recording the data it yields, and cataloguing it are the means by which data are gathered for study. After a series of rock engravings have been recorded, a large number of questions arise: To what period do they belong? In what cultural, social, and historical context were they created? Why were they made? What do they mean? The purpose of studying them is to make the finds "speak," to draw out their content and transform them as far as possible into documents which can be used to reconstruct the history of the society and the evolution of the culture that created them. Their importance will depend on the quantity and quality of the information that can be drawn, and on the size of the analysis and the synthesis that can be produced.

We had at our disposal an immense archive of documents. Material remains from the pre-Roman epochs are few and far between, but the Camunian rock art is an extraordinary piece of evidence of the formative phases of European civilization. During the course of 10,000 years, over 300,000 figures were created and left for us to read by the very protagonists of this development! Studying, interpreting, and understanding this historical source means getting to know the very roots of European society. It was not an easy undertaking, but it was very exciting.

To the untrained eye, the engraved rocks look like complex indistinct groups of drawings, lines, and arabesques that cross over each other and overlap in an apparently inextricable tangle. There are also rocks that are easier to decipher, engraved completely in the same style with the same technique, and in which the figures make up a single composition, but they are rare, and even they require lengthy work in order to understand the relationships between the figures and the meaning of the associations and compositions. The figures are related to each other as are the words of a sentence, and to understand their significance, we must know how to read the sentences.

Some of those in the field have developed a strange psychological tendency in viewing rock art. Since all of the engraved figures are on the surface of the rock and therefore on the same plane, they see the petroglyphs as intentional compositions, neglecting the fact that the figures could instead be an accumulation of marks occurring over the course of centuries and that all the pictures do not necessarily make up a single assemblage. It can be difficult to consider the existence of different "levels" of marks existing on the same surface. However, without separating the many overlapping phases, recognizing the whole is impossible, and any attempt to interpret them becomes plagued with difficulties. It would be like trying to read a book with transparent pages which allow the letters and words from different pages to overlap and blend into each other.

If the figures are the words in the language of rock art, the way in which they are connected forms the sentence. To understand the figures, it is necessary also to know how the syntax which links them together operates. Grammar alone is not enough, just as it would not be enough to understand the logic of a discourse in another language without being familiar with the rules of the language itself.

When we began research in the Camonica Valley, no method

existed for recording and analyzing rock art, so one had to be invented. And today that method, born in the Camonica Valley and now studied and applied in many countries, is called the "Anati method." When a number of different phases are detected on the same surface, it is first necessary to isolate each group and study it separately. One then realizes that the figures make up small units, each with a main theme and recurring motifs.

The casual observer often believes that he has succeeded in deciphering what the artist wanted to depict. Thus, for example, human figures standing opposite an animal with weapons in hand could be defined as hunters, men face to face with swords pointed at each other could be considered warriors fighting, and men with their arms raised to heaven standing next to sun disks or some other symbol of probable religious meaning could be considered worshippers.

At times, however, we realize that the scenes and compositions have more than one signification. Beneath the purely figurative meaning which seems obvious, even if it is not, there are often hidden intentions and ideas which emerge only in the course of a deeper analysis. What could be said, for example, about the "fighting" scenes in which a woman and a man with an erect penis confront each other with weapons in hand? Or how to explain other "fighting" scenes, surrounded by symbols, in which the two fighters are often masked or have zoomorphic faces and seem to be dancing rather than confronting one another in single combat? What could be the significance of

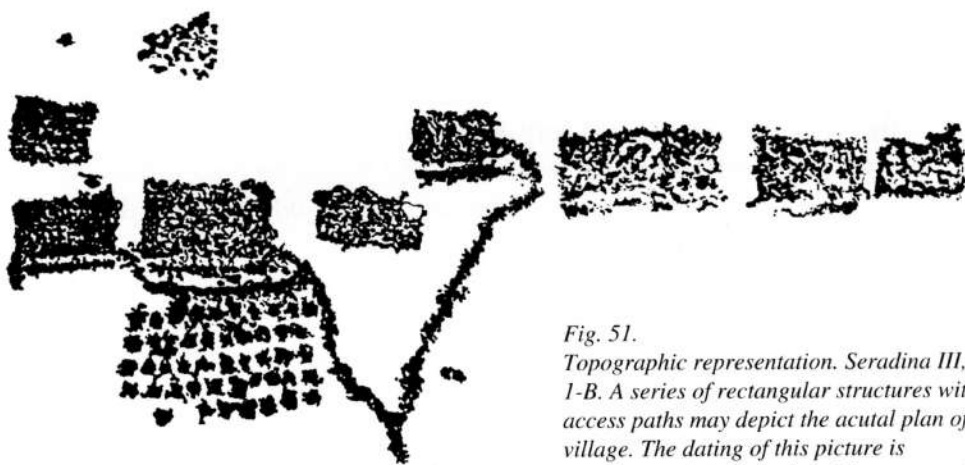


Fig. 51.
Topographic representation. Seradina III, rock
1-B. A series of rectangular structures with
access paths may depict the actual plan of a
village. The dating of this picture is
controversial. It is attributed by some to the
Chalcolithic, by others to the Bronze Age.

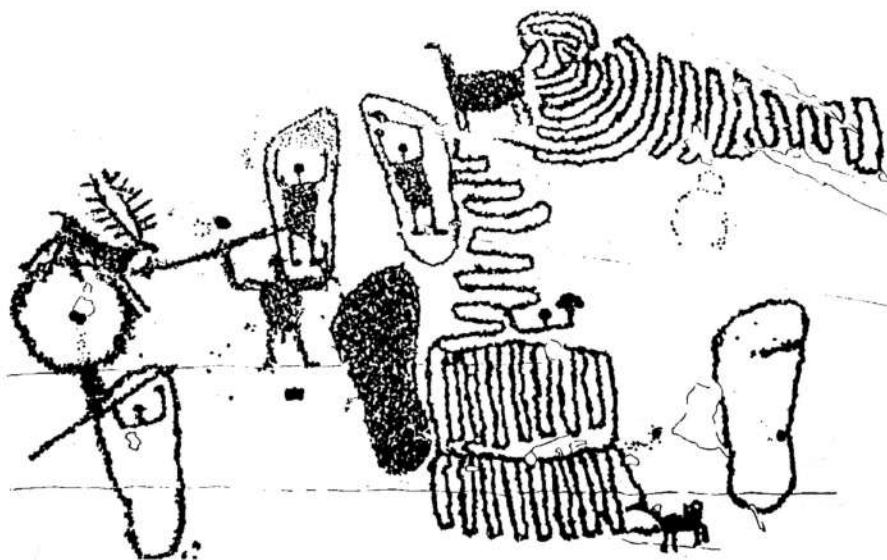


Fig. 52.
 Group of figures partially superimposed one over the other. From left to right one sees a scene of a person armed with a spear hunting a deer. The deer is placed over a disc with a central cup-mark. The hunter in his turn overlaps a footprint with

another human figure inside. Further right, a meander unites two quadrupeds. The upper one seems to be the representation of a pregnant female quadruped. Zurla, Ceto. Period IV/C (Early Iron Age: 850-700 B.C.).

“hunting” scenes where the presumed hunter, accompanied by a bust-length figure or paddle symbol, confronts an imaginary animal? The elementary figurative meaning, that at first glance might be taken for granted, ends up being inadequate and often unreliable.

Prehistoric man (in the sense that he existed before written history), just as the members of many contemporary tribal societies, was able to reason and express himself in metaphor. These abstract levels of thought then found physical expression in the images he left on the rocks, images which for us now hold the key to unlocking the mind of ancient man.

More often, however, even the simple meaning of the figures is obscure, and at times it cannot be established with certainty whether some figures belong to the same unit or not. Furthermore, there are certain marks and symbols which are repeated and connected to each other which are difficult to isolate and neither their figurative

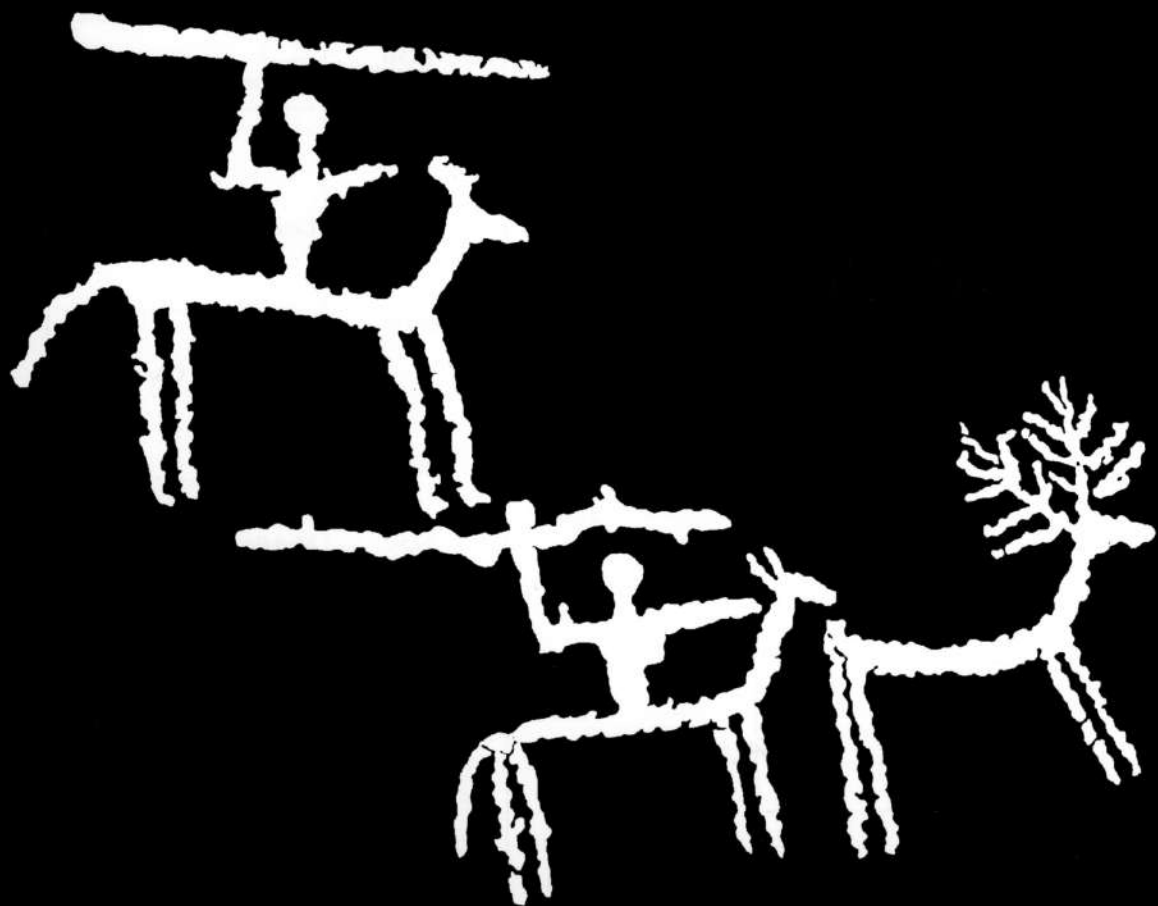
boundaries nor their context are easy to comprehend. Rock art is a visual language with its own rules, which changed from period to period.

Only the detailed study of thousands of rock engravings has made possible the unraveling of the artists' mentality, the methods they used to group various subjects under the same scene or composition, the fundamental ideas behind the various styles, the symbolic spirit of the schematic marks, and the untangling of at least part of the more complex groupings. But even though the more recent discoveries are continually casting new light on the old, and often help solve problems that once seemed insoluble, there remain a great many more finds that remain to be deciphered.

Our knowledge of the visual vocabulary and metaphorical syntax of rock art is increased through the analysis new finds. Without research there cannot be discovery. There are those who believe that exploration and discovery should stop because when new engraved rocks are found they are inevitably badly deteriorated. This provokes a serious ethical problem. Would it be right to halt research because most of these engraved rocks are preserved beneath the earth? How many thousands of archaeological finds remain underground? Only those that are discovered can become instruments for the enrichment of culture, of education and of historical reconstruction.

As far as we know, no material evidence is eternal, but that which we have found, even if worn by time, communicates a message. What we have not found, even if it stands in a better state of preservation, cannot tell us anything. The spirit of man is to find what can be found and to discover what can be discovered. If restrictions against exploration and research had been in place when the study of Camonica Valley rock art began, today the civilization of the ancient Camunians would be unknown. What further important discoveries would remain hidden from our culture if such restrictions were put in place today?

Forty years of research in the Camonica Valley has constituted a great adventure. These years have given us the opportunity to solve numerous problems, but in the meantime new problems have arisen, and an even more thorough reading of the individual figures has become a challenge from which we cannot withdraw.



*Fig. 53.
Scene of deer hunting. Two figures mounted
on horses are holding spears. Figures of this t
ype from period IV/A-B (ca. 1000-900 B.C.)
are very rare. The horse used as a mount will
become popular only later. Seradina III, rock 18.*

SYNTHETIC TABLE OF CAMUNIAN ROCK ART

Camunian Periods	Phases	B.C. Dating Absolute (Tentative)	C.14 Dating Not calibrated	Archaeological Periods
PROTO-CAMUNIAN I II III IV	<i>Sub-Naturalistic</i>	8000		Epi-Paleolithic Proto-Neolithic
	-----	-- 5500 4500	
	<i>Archaic</i>	5000 4150	Early
	-----	-- 4500 3750	-----
	<i>Evolved</i>	-----		Middle
	-----	-- 4000 3200	-----
	<i>A</i>	-----	3800	
	-----	-----	3600	Neolithic
	<i>B</i>	-----	3500	
	-----	-----	3300	Late
	<i>C</i>	-----	3200	
	<i>Trans. II-III</i>	-- 3000 2400	
	-----	-----	2800	Early
	<i>A Early</i>	-----	2600	-----
	<i>Middle</i>	-----	2500	Late
-----	-----	2000	Chalcolithic	
<i>Late</i>	-- 2000 1500		
-----	-----	1650	Early	
<i>B</i>	-----	1500	-----	
<i>C</i>	-----	1400	Middle	
-----	-----	1200	-----	
<i>D</i>	-----	1200	Late	
<i>Trans. III-IV</i>	-- 1000 830	-----	
-----	-----	850	Final	
<i>A-B</i>	-----	700	-----	
<i>C</i>	-----	550	Early	
-----	-----	500	-----	
<i>D</i>	-----	450	Middle	
-----	-----	400	-----	
<i>E</i>	-----	400	Middle	
-----	-----	200	-----	
<i>F</i>	-----	200	Late	
<i>Final</i>	-----	B.C.		
-----	-- 0 + 60		
<i>A</i>	-----	A.D.		
-----	-----	500	ROMAN	
POST-CAMUNIAN	<i>B-C</i>		-----	
			MEDIEVAL	

Fig. 54.

This table shows the chronological sequence of periods in Camunian rock art and their correspondence with archaeological periods.

Chapter 4
**VARIATIONS IN TYPOLOGY AND DEFINITION
OF THE PERIODS**

The point of departure of any research is observation. This in turn provokes questions which must be answered. There are a variety of different figures in the rock art of the Camonica Valley. Some are schematic, others realistic, and still others approach naturalism. There are static, fixed, idealized figures as well as those which are full of movement and action. Some subjects appear represented by a contour line, some have their entire surface pecked, while others are traced in a thin filiform line which indicates the plan, but at times does not take into account the details inside the subject. In some carvings, special attention to detail predominates, in others there is a keener interest in generalization and in the global value of both space and form.

Some figures have accurate and precise layouts and outlines while others have much vaguer definition. The work techniques also vary considerably. The majority of the figures were carved with stone tools, but in some engravings the use of metal tools is obvious. Most of the engravings were executed with the pecking technique. There are numerous incised engravings however, as well as others created by the *polissage*, or rubbing, method. Cases exist as well in which two or more techniques were used on the same figure. Occasionally pecked figures were first "traced" with a point, and in other cases parts of the figure were created by pecking, while the finer, more delicate parts were completed with simple engraved tracing. It has also been found that in each period there were preferred techniques, and so the study of these techniques serves also to help establish the chronological identification of the groups.

A large quantity of the engravings were executed by striking the rock with tools that left traces of their blows. Spaces and lines are thus marked by the numerous scratches produced by the impact of the

point of the instrument. The pecking itself varies considerably according to the tool used. Some blows can reach a width of half a centimeter, others do not exceed one millimeter. This depends for the most part on the type and weight of the engraving tool.

Observation of the indentations and of the relative regularity of the marks also reveals that there are engravings done by direct pecking, that is by striking and chipping the surface by hitting it directly with a pointed instrument. There are others executed with an auxiliary tool, such as a mallet or hammer, which hit the engraving tool, using the same technique as a sculptor would (indirect). These types of engravings also vary in depth, ranging from almost imperceptible marks of a fraction of a millimeter to engravings that are a few centimeters deep. Sometimes the artist also created tiny, almost invisible images which were probably seen by no one else, until rediscovered by an archaeologist. These could be like 'whispered phrases' that man made almost unconsciously or for practice. Even if the casual observer does not notice them, they are no less important for the archaeologist. Indeed, they can reveal how some anonymous artist was feeling as he worked the stone several thousand years ago, enabling us to steal a look into the intimate moments of prehistoric life. The spirit of the archaeologist is defined by curiosity and finds a particular pleasure when he sees, as if on the sly, some secret entry in a private diary written before the existence of writing.

The figurative concepts often vary from figure to figure, but it is mostly when we look at groups of figures that we begin to recognize more consistent patterns of differences. There are simple associations, compositions forming complex symbols and actual scenes of narrative or descriptive character. The type of symbolism also varies from period to period. Furthermore, each has a different range of subjects and therefore of interests. In some periods, animal figures are prevalent, while human figures, picture of weapons, or other objects and symbols dominate in others. An analysis of these differences has made it clear that in each period the artists portrayed specific themes and had a rather limited repertory of symbols and images which represented a well defined range of interests. They also portrayed objects that give the archaeologist precious information for establishing the chronology: weapons and many other items characteristic of a certain period; including clothing, personal ornamentation, architecture of buildings, and particular styles of carts and plows.

Other elements which are extremely useful for defining both the chronology and the history of economic and social organization, are the representations of hunting methods, funeral rites and other religious rituals. All of these have typical features in each stylistic phase, enabling the various stages to be recognized.

The continual connection between artistic style and pictorial indicators was one of the starting-points for the search for stylistic-chronological subdivisions in Camunian art. Indeed, if special characteristics can be seen in more recent periods of art history, why shouldn't this be the case before the classical period as well? Most people with even a moderate knowledge of Western culture can distinguish a Renaissance from a Baroque painting. Differences of custom and mentality within a tradition that is thousands of years old are no less evident.

One hundred years ago, the first attempts to establish pottery and flint stone as important dating tools were met with skepticism by conventional archaeologists. Today, no archaeologist can do without these methods. The same situation now holds for rock art typology.

Figures and groups of figures in different styles often appear on the same rock, and thousands of cases of superimposition exist in which certain engravings overlap those of other periods. In such cases, an attempt was made to establish the chronological relationship between the superimposed figures and all the figures connected to them in the same group or composition.

Considerable age differences often exist among the rock engravings located on the same surface. In such a case, it is actually possible to determine the level of preservation and the differences in "freshness" between the rock engravings. Often the pecking in more recent engravings appear sharper; less worn by time. Such differences can usually be seen even with the naked eye, but to obtain exact, quantifiable data, laboratory analyses with a microscope on extremely precise microcasts are necessary.

In some cases, even differences in patina between older and more recent engravings have been noted. In other zones, especially in tropical and subtropical regions, the patina can be a very important element in dating various engravings found on a single surface, because the chromatic differences are considerable. In the Camonica Valley, with engravings that are more than two thousand years old, differences in patina are of secondary importance since the rock

composition itself and the environmental context do not produce the same chromatic range of patina. But the patina allows us to distinguish without a doubt a prehistoric incision from a more recent one.

Yet it is the combination of all of the available elements which makes it possible to identify multiple phases on almost every rock examined. The comparative study of the stratigraphy found on about 2,000 rocks has made it possible to establish a constant group of sequences of repetitive elements which have served as "guide fossils" in forming a general chronology of Camunian rock art.

In this analysis, it is necessary to proceed from the particular to the general. The study of the various elements found on an engraved surface: the superimposition, the differences in technique, the patina, and the degree of preservation, allowed us to establish a sequence of local phases and to place different sets of engravings within the time scale. By comparing the sequences of various rocks, the presence of repetitive successions can be recognized. Certain styles or modes, as well as technical characteristics of how an engraving has been represented or put together allow us to establish the local succession of recurring patterns. A comparison of the results of the chronological analysis carried out in many areas leads to a general chronology. This method of analysis is applicable everywhere there is rock art, and its use has shown that contingent realities can vary from zone to zone.

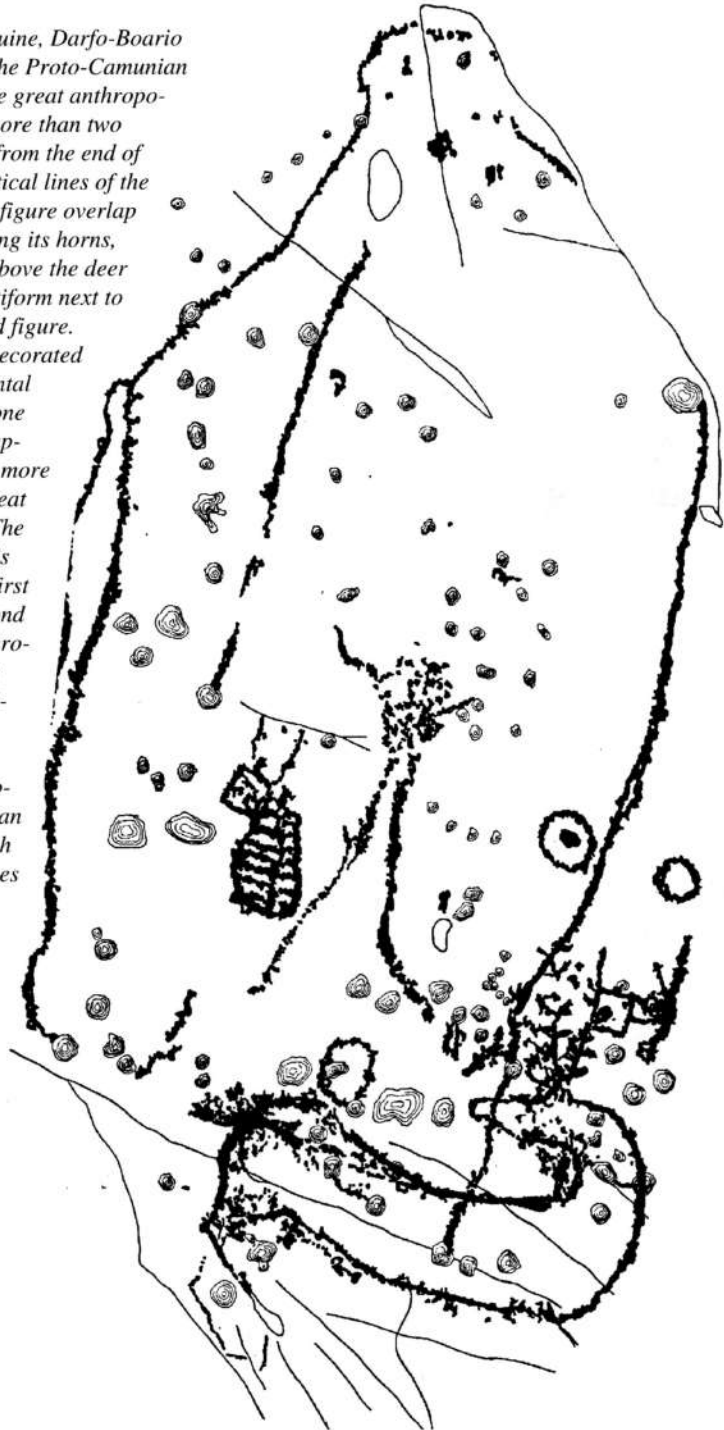
When the Anati expedition began research, it was commonly thought that the rock engravings all belonged to the same period, sometimes identified as the late Iron Age and grouped under titles such as "Celtic" or "Ligurian", but more often simply called "pre-Roman" or "pagan." The study of rock art had never been tackled systematically. For this reason, it was necessary to create a methodology. The methods and techniques created and elaborated for the rock engravings of the Camonica Valley have been found to be applicable to many groups of rock etchings and are now applied throughout the world.

Study should further the reading of documents and the historical interpretation of the messages contained in them. The task of establishing the age of each document is essential. The dating of Camunian rock art has opened roads towards new horizons of archaeological research in two directions: for the reading of rock art and also the methodology of dating other groups of rock art elsewhere.

Achieving these results was possible only because we had a great

Fig. 55.

Rock 34-A from Luine, Darfo-Boario Terme. Detail of the Proto-Camunian deer or elk and the great anthropomorphic figure (more than two meters in length) from the end of period II. The vertical lines of the anthropomorphic figure overlap the animal, crossing its horns, snout and back. Above the deer one can see a scutiform next to a smaller, squared figure. The scutiform is decorated with seven horizontal lines bisected by one vertical line and appears fresher and more recent than the great anthropomorph. The stratigraphy of this group would be: first phase - deer; second phase - large anthropomorphic figure; third phase - scutiform and small rectangular sign: The numerous cup-marks are later than the anthropomorph and in several cases overlap it.



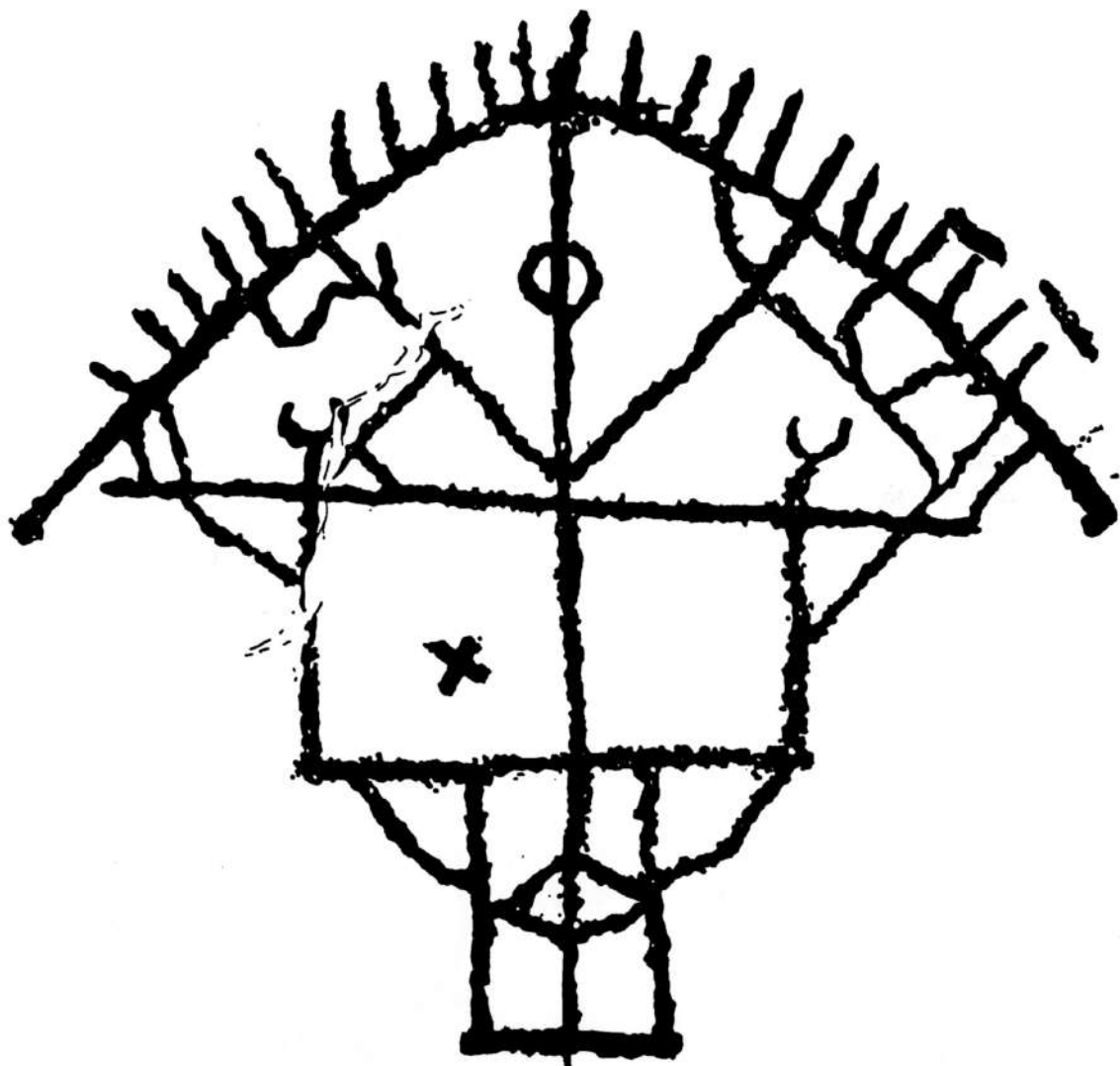


Fig. 56.

Large ritual hut decorated with bull-horn motifs and other ideograms. The structure is divided into three levels: the roof and attic, living quarters and base, reflecting a precise concept in which the hut is

identified with the tripartite emblem of the universe: sky, earth and underworld. Each line and form has its specific *raison d'être*. Period IV/D. Coren del Valetto, rock 60.

deal of archaeological evidence to work with. Minor rock art sites are much more problematic. The richer and more varied the number of elements that can be used, the easier it becomes to develop a consistent, efficient methodology and to reach conclusions about chronology. Even now, though, there are a large number of unanswered questions about the chronology of most of the major European rock art groups. The Camonica Valley is different from the other groups in this respect, since here a number of elements combine to make the chronological problem much easier to solve:

1. The great abundance of iconographic material is an exceptional source of documentation.

2. The unusual amount of overlapping makes it possible to establish a chronological sequence for the styles and phases of engravings.

3. A large number of depictions of weapons, tools, and other objects have shapes and characteristics which are datable on the basis of a comparison with actual objects found in archaeological excavations.

4. The changes in style and repertory make it easy to recognize the chronological characteristics of most of the engravings.

5. The fact that some rock engravings have been found within human settlements, located in the stratigraphy of archaeological finds, adds other precious chronological data.

6. More than 100 inscriptions in Northern Etruscan letters make it possible to date the last phases of the rock art.

7. Some animal figures of extinct species make it possible to date the more ancient phases.

It should also be said that work in the Camonica Valley has been intense, methodical, and carried out over a longer period of time than in other localities. Few other rock art sites in the entire world can boast of the kind of systematic research that has gone on uninterrupted in this valley for forty years.

The basis and criteria for chronological analysis were set up rather quickly; it took three years of comparative study to establish an evolution and a general chronology of the various rock art styles in the area. But it took over twenty years for this methodology to become generally accepted in the field.

It is necessary to distinguish two fundamental phases in the chronological analysis: the relative chronology and the absolute

chronology. The succession of styles makes it possible to establish a relative chronology; that is the sequence of phases within a certain pictorial group. The study of archaeological and ethnological elements included in each phase leads us to establish the absolute chronology; the dating in terms of years of the phases that have been recognized. To this end, each phase of figures - whether weapons, tools, wild and domestic animals, or pictures of particular rituals and habits - are analyzed in each rock. All of this data is compared to archaeological elements known from the excavations and discoveries of material culture, thereby establishing a correlation between rock art phases and archaeological periods. The archaeological periods in turn are dated with the help of carbon 14 analysis and a large number of other dating techniques now available.

These results can be verified by going back and comparing them to those obtained directly from the rock engravings. For example, a picture of a species of animal that has become extinct and that is part of the fauna of a certain period can help us place the group of elements associated with that animal. Rock art figures representing rituals or customs that are characteristic of a specific cultural or technological level, certain ways of burying the dead, particular hut or pile-dwelling shapes, specific types of wagons, plows, and tools, which are identifiable as specific to certain cultures or periods, can all serve as "guide fossils" or as indicators to the epoch to which they belong. They allow us to complete the chronological structure obtained by analyzing all the other available data. Conclusions reached from a single category of factors or from a limited number of elements might not be valid at times on a general level, so the results of chronological analyses must always be cross-checked. Consequently, it is important to have sufficient data samples and to make sure that they are of varying types.

Today we are in an experimental period of new techniques of direct dating of rock art, through dates obtained by the patination process, or from lichens and other organic elements. But existing archaeological methods cannot as yet be replaced by these new systems.

The results achieved through analyses, which even in the first years of research took into account a great many engraved rocks, have been verified by those found later, over a period of more than thirty years. By using this method we have been able to establish a

succession of styles and phases of Camunian rock art. The general framework consists of six principle periods: the Proto-Camunian period, which is characterized by a hunter-gatherer cultural level; the four periods of the actual Camunian civilization, which represent the stages and evolution of an economically complex food production lifestyle with a relatively simple social structure; and the Post-Camunian period, Roman and post-Roman, which illustrate a new way of life that was led after contact with urban civilization. Between one period and the next there can be recognized technical, thematic, and stylistic variations, through which Camunian rock art undergoes a notable series of subtle changes. Each one of the principal periods, with the exception of the first, can be further sub-divided into phases, and this specific chronology is further refined each year.

The oldest figures belong to the Proto-Camunian period, which has a style typical of hunting societies, characterized by delicately drawn large figures of animals. A drastic change occurs in the first Camunian period (Neolithic), when the Camunians begin to manipulate nature and to produce their own food by means of agriculture and the domestication of animals. In this period we find a totally different conceptual and figurative dimension. In some cases the figures are made up of combined ideograms while the human figure, previously absent, becomes the main subject. And more than being just a figure or an anthropomorphic type, the human form, when represented in this context, can be seen almost as an ideogram.

The Camunian art of this period is schematic, static, and rather coarsely executed. Later, it gradually becomes more and more realistic, dynamic, and descriptive. During period II, also part of the Neolithic, the subjects become more varied. At the beginning of period III, in the Chalcolithic, complex compositions appear. Symbols and objects often take the place of human figures as the dominant element.

During the Bronze Age, in the developed phases of period III, true scenes become more and more descriptive, and the human figure becomes the principal subject once again. In the Iron Age, in period IV of Camunian rock art, the range of subjects and interests grows immensely. People, monstrous beings, animals, and pictures of huts and other buildings make up complex scenes. Towards the end of the pre-Roman Camunian cycle, we find a decline in realism and in the dynamism of the figures and the workmanship becomes poor. During

the last phase of period IV, in the late Iron Age, both the pictorial style and the workmanship indicate the decadence toward which the art is heading. The human figure, in small fighting scenes, remains the dominant and nearly exclusive element. In late period IV, the number of pecked engravings diminish proportionally, and thread-like, filiform engravings increase to then make up the majority of the illustrations of the Post-Camunian Period; from the Roman, Medieval, and most recent phases.

This simplified, schematic sketch can hardly do justice to the history of an art which spans ten thousand years. Despite the apparent homogeneity of the stylistic progression, the evolution of Camunian art does not follow a steady, linear process, which can be recognized in all its stages with the same ease. In every phase, minor developments take place which overlap with the general process mentioned above.

Some characteristics, not necessarily connected to preceding or subsequent developments, appear without warning at a certain point in a given phase and then disappear without a trace in subsequent periods. The level and type of symbolism, for example, vary constantly, with no apparent law guiding their development. The very character of this symbolism can be extremely different from period to period, ultimately revealing motivations which reflect different ideological and psychological states, as well as certain economic, social, and political situations.

Remains of settlements, tombs, agricultural terracing, mines, and, in more recent periods, visible traces of roads and bridges, and other types of archaeological finds have been found in the Camonica Valley and the surrounding areas, but what characterizes the valley archaeologically and historically remains its rock art. While each single find is a relatively limited historical source, combining all of them makes it possible to reconstruct the development of Camunian culture. The engraved surfaces are found in the open air and some of them reach lengths of more than fifty meters and have more than a thousand figures. Many engraved rocks appear on the surface, others have come to light during excavations; and many others remain underground.

The Camonica Valley rock engravings are pictures that man carved on rock. They represent the work of generations who found a way to express their existence, beliefs and feelings in a form that has



Fig. 57.

The "Idol of Sonico." Idol form figure accompanied by two "solar discs" and palette symbols. Within the "body" of the idol are found other symbols, among which would seem to be a bull-horn motif, an axe and a solar disc.

At first glance it was thought that this was a baby in some kind of bundle: "the God

child," but the decorations which cover the body are strangely reminiscent of the topographic representations which were being developed in the same period.

That is to say the idol form is, in a sense, cosmological. Coren delle Fate, Sonico. End of period II (Late Neolithic: about 3400 B.C.).



Fig. 58.
 Symbolic compositions from the Great
 Rock of Naquane. Ideograms and
 pictograms form groups that make up a
 visual language. Such associations,
 considered to be a type of proto-writing,

are especially frequent in the Late Bronze
 and Early Iron Ages. Various hypotheses
 have been put forth for the reading of
 single compositions, but a codified
 decoding system still eludes us.

remained intact until our time. The rock art of the Camonica Valley constitutes a series of historical discoveries which document the formative phase of European history. As a source of history, they are among the most extraordinary finds that man has found to date. They could become the very emblem of Europe which, with the discovery of the Camunian civilization, can now be placed in a historical perspective dating back ten thousand years.

During these thousands of years, clans of Stone Age hunters and gatherers gradually transformed themselves into tribes with more and more complex activities and structures, until they became the multifaceted society familiar to us today. The levels of cultural differentiation were also growing to the point where these tribes were acquiring quite distinct local traits. When, after the evolution of four hundred generations, they became part of the rising Roman empire, the Camunians, just like the other tribes of the same time, were already a nation. They had a social and economic structure as well as labor and class divisions which, since that time, have characterized European civilization.

Modern European society was formed during those eight millennia which the finds in the Camonica Valley have added to our version of history. The roots of contemporary reality stretch back to the events of the Camunian epoch, to those eight-thousand years through which the Camunians maintained their identity. They finally disappeared as an ethnic group when they were swallowed up by the Roman Empire.

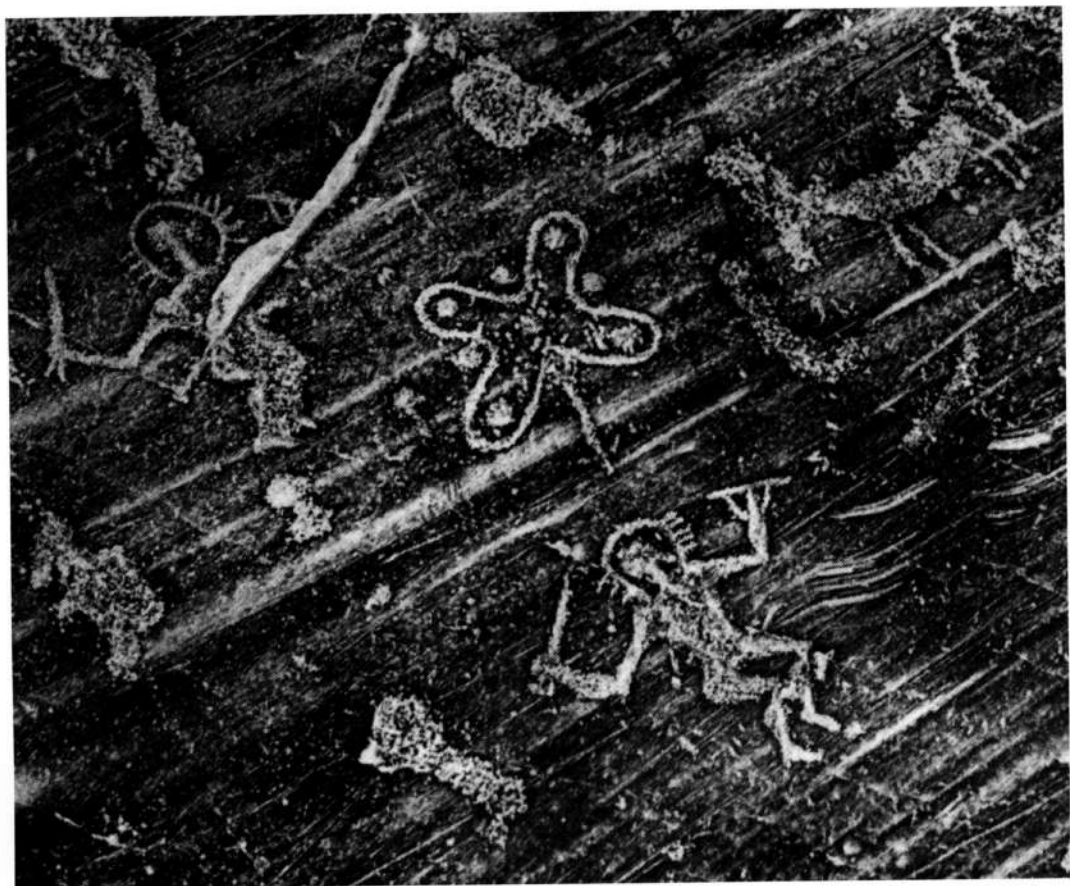
Attempts have been made to unite Europe, to subdue it beneath a dominant civilization, from the time of Julius Caesar to Napoleon, and later by more recent totalitarian regimes. In spite of this, the local characteristics of each valley and each zone have survived. Even today, with Europe more united than ever, the diverse cultures, in preserving their specific traits, represent the multifaceted identity of an organic whole. The relationships between populations which have each their own personality can be the source of reciprocal enrichment. Conflict and mistrust survive where attempts have been made to subjugate one group or the other. What inspiration can the Europe of tomorrow draw from the Europe of yesterday?

Fig. 59.

Scenes of a deer hunt using a bow and the help of dogs. Seradina III, rock 18, period IV/A-B.

Transitional phase between the Bronze and Iron Ages. About 1000 B.C.





*Fig. 60.
Group of pictograms and ideograms.
Middle Iron Age. At the center is a
"Camunian rose" with an arrow pointing
towards one of the two armed, dancing*

*figures. On the right side is an animal,
probably an ass. The ideograms found
between one pictogram and the next would
seem to hold the key for the reading of the
group.*



Fig. 61.

Luine, rock 30-B. One recognizes on this rock at least five phases of engraving, three of which are visible in the section above. The latest phase, composed of two sub-phases, is that characterized by the meandering figure of the "Camunian rose," from the end of Period III. Earlier than this is a phase in which we see rectangles with diagonals, and on the right side the depiction of several axes. As is sometimes seen, a head and collar have

been added to this criss-crossed rectangle, seeming to give to it an idol form. Period III / B-C. The oldest phase visible in this section, which again contains at least two sub-phases, holds numerous forms of axes and, in the lower left, a vaguely anthropomorphic figure that appears to hold in its hand two axes. An analogous figure, higher up and just beneath a "Camunian rose" appears to have three arms on its left side, each one of them holding an axe. Period III / B.

Chapter 5

INTELLECTUAL PROCESSES AND ARTISTIC CREATIVITY

Visual art stands as a major historical record of the periods before the invention of writing. For the archaeologist, visual art is also a formidable tool with which to make the journey backward in time from effect to cause, from the creative act to its motivation, from the product to the man, to the mind and to the spirit which produced it.

The human adventure finds its maximum expression in the spiritual manifestations that derive from it, and pictorial art is certainly one of the major expressions of such manifestations. Its most immediate effect is that it projects outward the emotions and experiences of the spirit. Of other forms of artistic expression, such as music, only indirect evidence remains, mostly made up of rock art figures that depict musicians, musical instruments, or dance.

Of the oldest type of art, that of diction and language, the only hints we have to its form preceding the invention of writing come to us from modern groups of peoples who do not use writing. Visual art remains, without a doubt, the most important testimony to the intellectual and spiritual life of humans in the remote past.

The process implicit in the progression from the elementary stage of simple association to the more complex one of constructing scenes implies not only an evolution in the art of knowing how to see, but also an essential change in the mental process of association. The evolution of visual art can pass from the composition to the scene, but also from the scene to the composition. This is seen not only in prehistory, but in successive periods as well. Composition and scene today can exist together even if they reflect two different intellectual processes.

In the case of prehistoric evolution, the scene came later than the composition, in fact much later, but afterwards the two formulas have often been found existing together. In contemporary art, famous artists

such as Picasso or Matisse have moved in the opposite direction, from the scene to the composition, rediscovering within themselves always more hidden aspects of their submerged memory by making the same journey as did prehistoric man, only in reverse.

The representation of an individual figure requires some notion of reality, plus the spirit of observation and abstraction necessary for the hand to represent on a single plain what the eyes see three-dimensionally, or what the mind conceives in abstraction. This can often mean giving symbolic value to a single figure in which a concept is synthesized. The simple association of various subjects into a unique group implies a different analytical skill, surely less absolute, but more articulate and detailed. The descriptive scene requires a complex but less abstract thought, capable of concrete, conscious association; it also implies the ability to conceive of and arrange an action or an event. The scene is also proof of the artist's ability to realistically and/or symbolically connect the subjects which are contained therein.

The question often arises whether connections can be found to exist between the stages in the process of pictorially conceiving a scene and other aspects of cultural development. In answer it has been found that among various populations, in different periods and at different levels of material culture, analogous synchronization of these processes are evident. It should be noted that the evolution of art has never followed a linear course. Examples of composition and attempts at scenes have been found in the rock art and objects of the Old Stone Age. Nonetheless, actual scenes are almost nonexistent in the art of ancient hunters. They appear, in various parts of the world, in the figurative syntax more or less contemporaneously with the first use of the bow and arrow. Although such a coincidence of events has been found on at least three continents, the reason for it is still difficult to understand.

Graphic expressions in which we, as citizens of the twentieth century, are not able to discover a conceptual content recur in all epochs and at all levels of artistic creativity. In many cases there can be little doubt that it is the connections themselves that still escape us, but it should not be overlooked that signs of free and extemporaneous aestheticism have existed at all times. With the discovery of Camunian art and its evolution, it has been possible to identify the actual process of development of the syntactical and associative concepts of composition in art after the Palaeolithic Age.



Fig. 62.
Composition of plows and bull-horn motifs from Campanine near Cimbergo. These are the oldest figures of plows yet found in the Camonica Valley and for now constitute the oldest testimony to the presence of the plow in Lombardy. Period II/A-B (Neolithic: IV millennium B.C.).

Fig. 63.
Scene of plowing and hoeing from period IV/C (Early Iron Age). Seradina 1, rock 8-B. The person wielding the hoe at left is being sodomized as he tills the soil. It is most likely that this scene involves a fertility cult of the earth.



Two other European areas have brought us parallel, though not identical, sequences of evolution in the visual arts. In the rock art of eastern Spain, the common use of descriptive scenes as a figurative means developed between 6,000 and 3,000 B.C. The first phases of Levantine art, so called because it is found in the eastern provinces of the Iberian peninsula, were inspired by the previous Franco-Cantabrian art, and they include "naturalistic" figures of animals. At Albarracin, La Minateda, and other sites, the figures in these first

phases of the Spanish Levant appear in groups in which each figure seems to have its own absolute value, without being part of a descriptive scene. Various animals are pictured on the same wall, and there are abstract signs next to them, but if a connection exists between them, it must be a symbolic one (A. Beltran, 1983). It is a type of intellectualization which is different from ours, different from that of the twentieth century industrial world. Yet this does not mean that it is less developed nor more refined; but simply different, and therefore less accessible to us.

Subsequently, the slow process of association which draws nearer and nearer to our associative model then takes place. The figures of animals become part of hunting scenes in which the human figure acquires more and more importance. The previously static figures gain a certain dynamism, and scenes begins to show action. There is a search for the expression of a particular moment; the descriptive representations of everyday life replace the compositions of universal values and global concepts. It is not clear if this is a progression or a regression in the skills of synthesis and abstraction. In any case there is a new way of seeing and referring to the facts; it is perhaps more reportage and less history, more feelings than ideas, or possibly different values, which the absolutism of our indoctrination prevents us from understanding.

The exact dates of these various phases are still, in part, under discussion, but the figurative representations show a lifestyle which had its economic base in hunting and gathering wild fruit. For this reason, in terms of European prehistory, they represent a cultural level which precedes that of the Full Neolithic, the period in which the production of food, by means of agriculture and livestock, modified the foundations of economic structure. The use of the dynamic scene coincides here, as in other regions, with the first representation of the bow and arrow.

A parallel process has also been detected in Scandinavia and in several nearby zones of Russia. In the north of Sweden and Norway, an artistic cycle showing the life of hunter-fishermen reaches its last phases without ever producing an actual descriptive scene, while in the south of Scandinavia and in the regions near Lake Ladoga, Lake Onega, and the White Sea, another artistic cycle takes place. In its initial phases, it is characterized by abstract symbols and groups of schematic figures which are very similar to the decoration on the

megalithic monuments of Ireland and Britain. It has been suggested that southern Scandinavia may have been colonized by Neolithic navigators coming from Britain some time around 4,000 B.C.

These symbols gradually acquire realistic forms and are grouped in compositions which are nearer to our "logic". This happened, it seems, when the artists were in a Late Neolithic cultural phase after 3,000 B.C. Thereafter, throughout the entire Bronze Age, the same figurative concept remained in force: realistically drawn subjects were part of static, non-narrative scenes and compositions. The "modern" dynamic and descriptive scene was reached only in relatively recent times; towards the end of the Bronze Age or at the beginning of the Iron Age, in the first centuries of the first millennium B.C.(E. Anati, 1959).

The dynamic process of evolution found in the rock art of the Camonica Valley gives meaningful analogies. As in both the cycles described above, here too it seems possible to find a greater attachment to absolute, universal values in the older phases. In the Iron Age, rather, we can detect a sort of "parochial" concern for tribal episodes and values of local, specific interest. Such a process is likely to indicate the individual's conditioning to the particular events and concerns of his own narrow group in his particular generation. It can also be noticed that, at the same time, the material culture is acquiring local characteristics while those patterns of much vaster geographical distribution which had characterized the previous cultures are disappearing.

At Mount Bego in the French Maritime Alps, the artists who carved an important group of figures followed, through the same periods, a conceptual line in which they never found it necessary to use dynamic/descriptive expression and in which they made only infrequent use of the scene, preferring to express their ideas through the composite association of symbolic characters. At this site are found rock engravings which roughly correspond to period III of Camunian art. They cover a period of almost 2,000 years, but nevertheless one cannot find among them significant stylistic variations.

The concept of symbolic composition displayed in the rock engravings was successful in the Camonica Valley and reached exceptional heights during Period II in the fourth millennium B.C. It developed afterwards under various aspects, from monumental

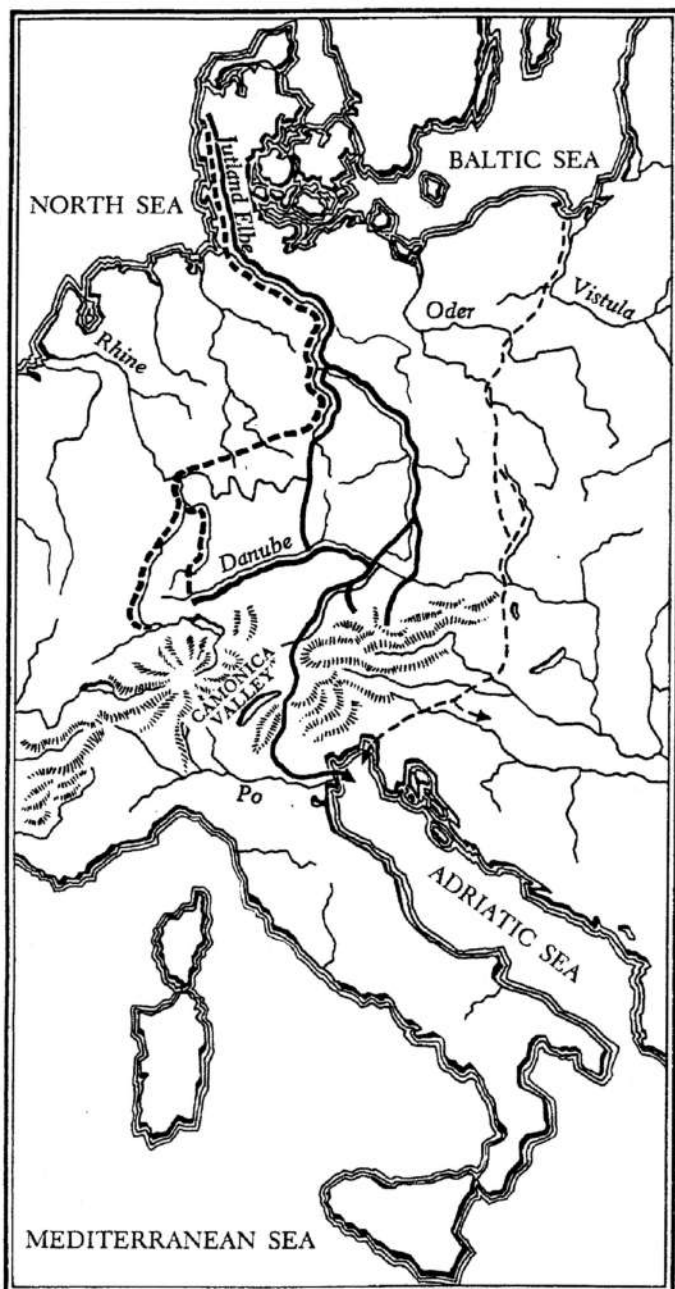


Fig. 64.

The "Amber Road." The continuous line indicates the route during the Early Bronze Age; the heavy broken line, that of the Middle Bronze; and the fine broken line

shows the route of merchants during the Early Iron Age. These ancient roads have been reconstructed on the basis of finds of Baltic amber in archaeological strata.

compositions to ideographic ones. The static scenes began during Period II, but the descriptive scenes did not appear until the end of Period III, and then became prominent after 1,000 B.C., in the beginning of Period IV.

In the centuries that followed, the Camunian artists produced a veritable manna for today's archaeologists and historians, describing in their scenes thousands of details, habits, and happenings from their lives. For the archaeologist, these scenes of daily life, of economic and social activity, furnish far more data of immediate historic interest than do the absolute hermetic compositions of the preceding periods. But, in fact, this preference for the particular over the absolute marks the beginning of the Camunian civilization's decadence from which it will not be able to recover; it marks the beginning of the end.

The Camonica Valley reveals a sequence that is fundamentally important for the history of art and for the process of conceptualizing. The Proto-Camunian Period, an expression of an Epi-Paleolithic culture, has not yet revealed any true compositions, but by Period I of Camunian civilization, in the Neolithic Age, simple symbolic groups and figure pairings are found, such as the solar disc with a worshipper next to it, or a male figure with a female one, or an animal with a symbol. In the large static groups of Period II, in the evolved Neolithic, the engravings do not generally portray actions, but rather abstract concepts. The rare scenes are static and idealized, as if outside of time. For example, there are groups of worshipping figures such as those on Naquane rock number 50, where thirty four of them cover an area of four square meters. It is not yet known whether such groups of figures can be considered a scene as such. They are, however, harmonious, well organized figurative groups, with elements which lead us to believe that some attempt was made to establish an intentional association between the various figures and the general conceptual vision.

Realistic composition, already well developed at this stage in the evolution of art in the Camonica Valley, appears above all in the large groups composed of lines, dots, and areas that are entirely textured by pecking. Based on what we were able to discover from later, similar figures, they seem to be topographical maps of fields and villages, representing contexts that may be real or imaginary.

Large figures of idols, characteristic of the end of Period II, are often found associated with compositions of interdependent figures,

which have extremely organic graphic values, even if sometimes their meaning is indecipherable. The compositions of solar discs with paddles on which the idol of Sonico has been represented, or those of discs and lines surrounding the idol of Sellero, are both typical examples.

Composition reaches its highest level of harmony - a harmony which responds to our sense of aesthetic and therefore can be accepted as such - in the beginning of Period III. There was an artistic-conceptual wave which was exceptionally vigorous and homogeneous over a very widespread area in this period, and which profoundly influenced, among other zones, the entire Alpine area, who's populations came to emulate, no doubt along with other intellectual areas of life, the rock art of the populations of the Camonica Valley and Valtellina.

The syntax of composition acquired new characteristics during phase III/A. This phase marks the monumental composition stage and the greatest production of menhir-statues. The monumental compositions, in the perfection and harmony of their general effect, show a planning, a sense of order, of discipline, and a structural



Fig. 65.

Luine, rock 46. Large composition formed by discs with internal rays and scutiform shapes that are completely textured, which recall the forms on the menhir-statues. The

rectangular area at the extreme left seems to have lines indicating a face, a type of collar and perhaps even an arm. Transitional phase between periods II and III (Late Neolithic).



Fig. 66.

Luine, rock 34-K. Groups of scutiforms and other signs. On the left is a large scutiform with the diagonal motif and parallel lines accompanied by a smaller rectangle with parallel lines. At right is another pair of ideograms: an internally rayed disc and a rectangle. Within the rectangle is another

scutiform. Occupying the center of the panel is a presumed anthropomorphic figure. Flanking this are two vertical lines which begin at cup-marks. The central rectangle is partially damaged by a later decoration and light hammering. The entire surface of this section is dotted with cup-marks.

organization never before found. It appears evident when studying the Ossimo menhirs, the Cemmo and Borno rocks, the Bagnolo stele, and the *Capitello dei Due Pini* rock, that each figure has a well defined and essential function within the whole; each subject is found exactly in its proper, suitable position. These compositions are not symmetrical: there are repetitions of the same figure, but in different positions; so much so that they could be called "regularly asymmetrical." There is certainly a conceptualization which establishes rules of association within which the artist is allowed a certain freedom of movement.

At Paspardo, on the *Roccia dei Cinque Pugnali* (The Five Dagger Rock), two daggers are engraved opposite the other three. At Borno a



Fig. 67.

The monumental composition: the first documentation of the presence of Indo-European concepts in the Canonica Valley, from front side of the stele-statue Ossimo II. At center one sees anthropomorphic signs

of a brow ridge and nose. This "face" has above an aureole of parallel lines. Below are two "spectacle pendants," a typical adornment from period III/A (Chalcolithic: 3200-2500 B.C.).

sun with sheaves, which is the dominant subject, appears to one side and not in the center of the monumental composition. Also there are two spectacle-spiral pendants engraved asymmetrically. This, however, does not prevent each figure from having its own value and its own well defined position within the composition, for a particular aesthetic sense can be appreciated in these compositions, even from a distance of five thousand years (E. Anati, 1982).

In phase III/A, Camunian art takes the form of both in the form of symbolic monumental compositions on vertical surfaces of considerable dimensions, and as more modest "descriptive art" (especially plowing scenes) for which horizontal and sloping surfaces were used. With this descriptive art, an attempt was made for the first time to freeze movement, albeit in an idealized fashion. We are now approaching a "realism" more similar to our own, and we can recognize a process of conceptual evolution which will continue to develop through the ages.

In the previous phases, human figures were portrayed almost exclusively in the conventional, static position of worship. But at this point, dance scenes, depictions of men plowing, and some armed human figures appear. In these pictorial illustrations of groups, the human figure is often executed almost as a line drawing, but there are some cases in which the old stylization, with its rigid, almost frozen figures, gives way to more and more active figures and forms.

The scenes acquire an increasing amount of rhythm at the beginning of Period IV. The art is beginning to come alive. Now the artist portrays human intent in a much larger variety of activities and positions of figures. Gradually, man comes to be shown in all his daily activities: hunting, at war, focused on his crafts, plowing, and building huts. Religious ritual and prayer cease to be the main subjects of inspiration. The portrayal of the occupations and events of the times becomes the main theme of the engravings. Composition is often neglected; a dynamic rhythm now breaks the static posture of the compositions as this new figurative, descriptive/narrative concept continues to search for a path of expression.

The spirit of observation which the artists show at the end of Period IV, and their sense of what is "real" or held to be so, will lead them to discover the rules of perspective. Up to now, subjects such as the hut or the plow were portrayed mainly as ground-plans or as if seen from the air. For modern man, these earlier figurative

representations appear to be more abstract, with a greater sense of synthesis, and more "intellectual". In comparison to those of later phases, however, we are led to deduce the contrary, given their positions in the sequence of art in the Camonica Valley. In other words, they seem to be the product of a mode of thought and vision that is more immediate and instinctive. Nevertheless, it is doubtful that we can confidently arrive at any conclusions one way or the other. It is a question of a different way of transferring information from the cognitive to the visual stage, from the preconceived pattern to an analysis of every day happenings.

In Period IV, carts, plows, and pictures of buildings are portrayed face on, and huts and their roofs are at times seen from a three quarter perspective. These images reflect a way of seeing that is much closer to our own. There is an appreciation for detail which was previously missing; every drawing now acquires its own precise personality. Undoubtedly, there is less of a sense of synthesis and more interest in the specific.

The first attempts at "personalized" figurative representation had already appeared several centuries before in a very common subject which, even though it showed a strong sense of abstraction, by its very nature perhaps required representation in a manner which conformed to subjective "reality". These are the topographical pictographs which are held to be maps of fields, houses, and settlements. They are found mainly in the central Camonica Valley, around Pescarzo of Capo di Ponte, and at Nadro, Cimbergo, and Paspardo. Perhaps not all of these "maps" represent actual territorial tracts. It is thought that some could actually depict "the topography of the hereafter," a description of the landscape beyond the tomb as described in myths, maybe similar to those found in Homer. However, some "maps" seem to show real fields, gardens, courtyards, wells, streams, paths, and huts. They are the oldest known topographical documents in Europe.

At the time of maximum artistic creativity, in the Iron Age during phase IV/C, the size of animals depicted under a yoke which unites them varies at times according to their position in respect to the observer, and the animal that is furthest away is smaller as well. Likewise, the diameter of the wheels of carts and the distance between them also vary. There are other entertaining details, such as the huts' staircases which turn back upon themselves as they ascend. Nothing similar had ever been seen before. One can sense the coming of a new



*Fig. 68.
Scene of plowing and hoeing. Bedolina,
rock 17. Period IV/C. At lower right is
perhaps the "artist's signature".*

*One thinks of a type of trademark of the
artist or rather of the clan to which he
belonged.*

way of thinking, based more on facts and figures, bound more to the specific appearance of forms, and less to the universal. The synthetic and symbolic concepts of the Bronze Age have been almost completely abandoned. One could say that the artist has fewer dogmas and much more freedom of expression.

Through the study of the artistic expressions, of the styles and the themes, we discover changes in the mentality from generation to generation, changes in behavior and in interests. Thus we piece together other aspects of this story which we work to reconstruct, one fragment after the other.



Fig. 69.
 An elk and another deer or wild goat
 figure from the Proto-Camunian period
 (VIII millennium B.C.). Luine-Crape, rock
 6. Base of relief about 80 cm.

Fig. 70.
 Large deer or elk from rock 6 at Luine-
 Crape. Proto-Camunian period. The animal
 is pierced by several spears. The collar and
 the cross above the head are later
 additions. The series of discs is also from a
 later period. Base of relief about 1.85 m.

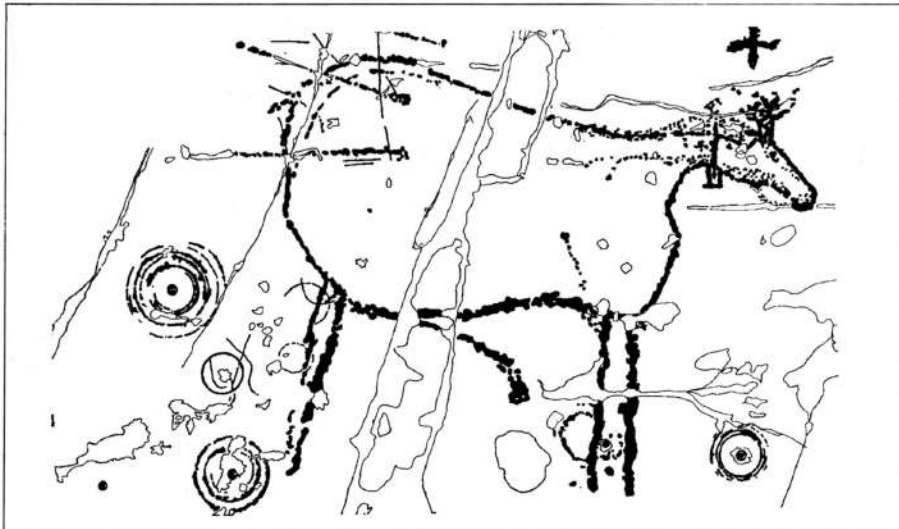
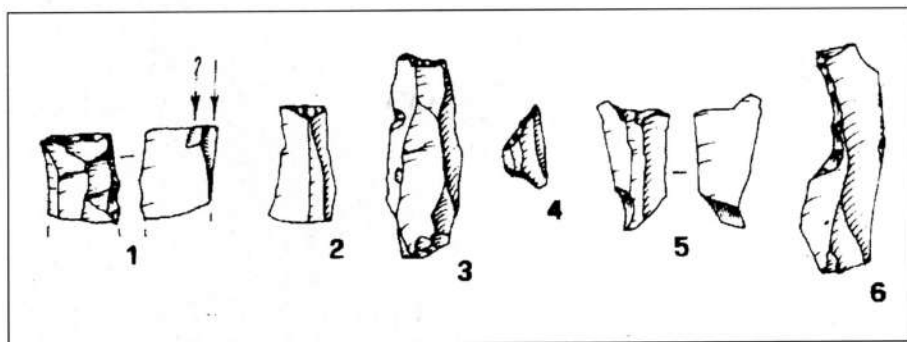




Fig. 71.
Reconstruction of a hunting scene from the
Proto-Camunian period. Painting by A.
Molino for the exhibit "I Camuni" at Milan
(1982).

Fig. 72.
From shelter 2 at Foppe di Nadro. Epi-
paleolithic stone industry: 1. burin; 2,3.
truncated blades; 4. trapezoid; 5. micro-burin;
6. notched blade (P. Biagi, 1983).



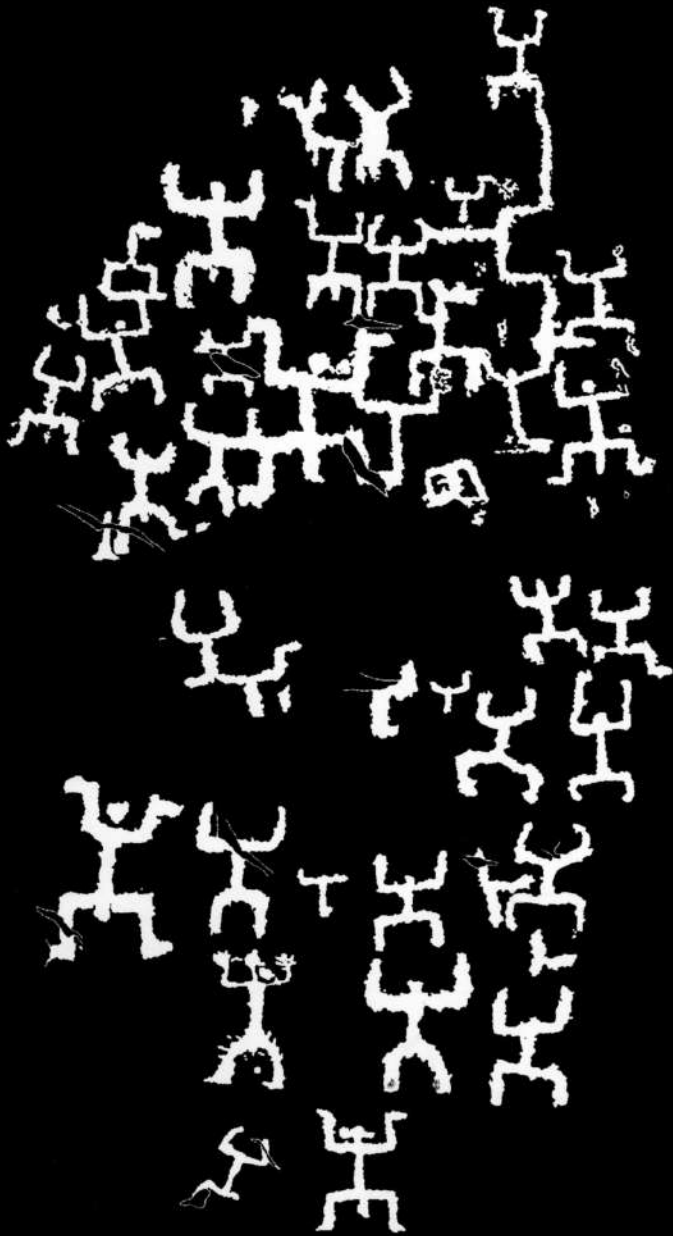


Fig. 73.
Composition of schematic anthropomorphs. Naquane, rock 50. End of Period I or II/A (Neolithic: V-VI millennium B.C.). There appear to be couples made up of two different human

forms: one with a head and one without. At lower left is a figure with large hands and rays emanating from his body; both attributes are signs of great energy. The lowest figure seems to be masked with the head of an animal.

Chapter 6
FROM THE EFFECTS TO THE CAUSE

One of the first questions that comes to mind when thinking about the rock art of the Camonica Valley is that of the motivations, whatever pushed man to produce hundreds of thousands of figures on the surfaces of rocks in the course of a multi-millenary tradition. While many groups of carvings from Periods I and II, in the Neolithic, appear extremely simple, others, such as the large composition of human figures on Naquane rock number 50, reveal considerable commitment and planning, even to the nearsighted eyes of twentieth century citizens. The act of expressing himself through art was obviously more than a mere whim, rather it was a true need. Looking at the Camunian rock engravings, it is clear that different amounts of care and attention were given to the graphic and artistic qualities of the iconographic creations, even within works from the same period, and that in certain periods there were undoubtedly individuals who dedicated themselves to engraving rocks.

In Periods II and III there are topographic representations that cover entire rock surfaces, such as the famous "Mappa di Bedolina" (Map of Bedolina), which entailed considerable planning. These and other engravings show persistent traditions and very precise rules.

Behind the large monumental compositions of phase III/A was a school with specific laws of composition and aesthetics, and with a symbolism that reflects a true catechism; it reveals study and clear-cut programming before the actual execution of the work. Technically, they show great skill and are undoubtedly the work of artists who knew their craft. In modern terms, they would be considered "professional artists," though they might have been shamans, prophets, priests, chiefs, or inspired plebes. Nevertheless, the term "professional artists" probably had a different meaning than it does today. While it is difficult to hypothesize whether their works had any

commercial value, it is probable they were important in a social, cultural, and educational context, as well as holding some significance for status within the tribe. In this case, it probably refers to artists of recognized talent who executed the work, maybe by "commission" but for the most part on immovable surfaces, which then would have been difficult to put in a "museum" or in a private collection.

The numerous pertinent parallels with ethnology as well as the conclusions reached from the analysis of the Camunian rock engravings seem to indicate that creating *art for art's sake* never existed in Camunian civilization. The figurative representations had magical, religious, and functional implications and executing them was considered a part of the indispensable activities that ensured economic and social progress of the group, as well as relations with their ancestor's spirits and with the forces of nature.

The figurative styles change from period to period, as do the repertory of subjects, the type of symbolism, and the associations. Each time they reflect the mentality and concerns of individuals who are part of a certain historical context, of a specific society, who have a particular economy, and who express the beliefs and practices of their day and age. Whether the creators were conscious or not of being "artists" cannot be established with certainty, though in certain periods it would seem to be so. They certainly had an aesthetic sense that can still be appreciated today, after thousands of years.

Religious inspiration for rock art and menhir statues has been widely accepted and recognized; however, no sufficient attempt has been made to go beyond this notion and explain their profound meaning or why they exist. Remains which make it possible to recognize the type of belief or cult connected with the figures, because of their relation to the engravings, have rarely been found. Even the common assertion, which has now become a kind of axiom, that this type of art is an expression of religious faith, cannot be demonstrated in every case. Take for example the rock art paintings of the Spanish Levant. Hunting and war scenes, descriptions of honey gathering, and groups of people doing other activities are found in some of its phases. Perhaps, as it has been suggested, the scenes were propitiatory, but if we free ourselves from the preconception that they must have a religious meaning at all costs, it is not simple to find one interpretation that convincingly explains all of the themes that are portrayed.

In the rock engravings of the Camonica Valley, some phases have

an abundance of narrative-descriptive scenes: fighting and hunting scenes, scenes from daily life, erotic or sexual scenes, figures of huts, plows, carts, other objects, maps of fields, and settlements. Many of these figures do not seem to have been produced for any specifically religious reasons. Some of them may well be commemorations of epics, myths and legends, or even descriptions of dreams or dream-like tales. In other pictures, however, the religious connotation seems obvious because they portray worship scenes or images which are believed to be idols. But why were they produced? With what type of religious procedure were they affiliated?

It seems necessary to begin with a question nearer to the source: what was the ancient Camunians' concept of "religious"? Was there a distinct separation between the sacred and the profane in their conceptual make-up, a separation that characterizes the *forma mentis* of urban civilization?

Those who want to understand the meaning of a rock engraving must set two important analytical goals for themselves: the first is to understand what it physically represents, and the second, then, is to determine why it was made. One can often be convinced of knowing the answer to the first question. The initial hypothesis should not be taken for granted, however. The second question is even more difficult.

Consider, for example, an image that is rather frequent in the Camonica Valley, especially in periods I and II, of a person with his arms raised, addressing a disk which at times has rays. Its meaning seems evident: it is a worshipper next to a disc. Children and archaeologists think that this disk is a picture of the sun. There are psychologists, however, who consider the disk a symbol of the ego. Therefore, it may not be a "sun disk" at all, but an emblem of himself that the worshipper is adoring. Others see the disc as a female symbol, and in that case, the interpretation would be different again.

We know that for certain tribal populations the disc can have many different meanings: a place, a water hole, a hut, an egg, as well as the sun, the moon, or a star. Then there are examples from the Pacific in which the circle indicates an island. For the Sinai Bedouins, it is a tribal identification emblem; and for some Central American populations it is the all-seeing eye of God. In fact, it is the specific context of the figure that can help us to determine the figurative meaning.

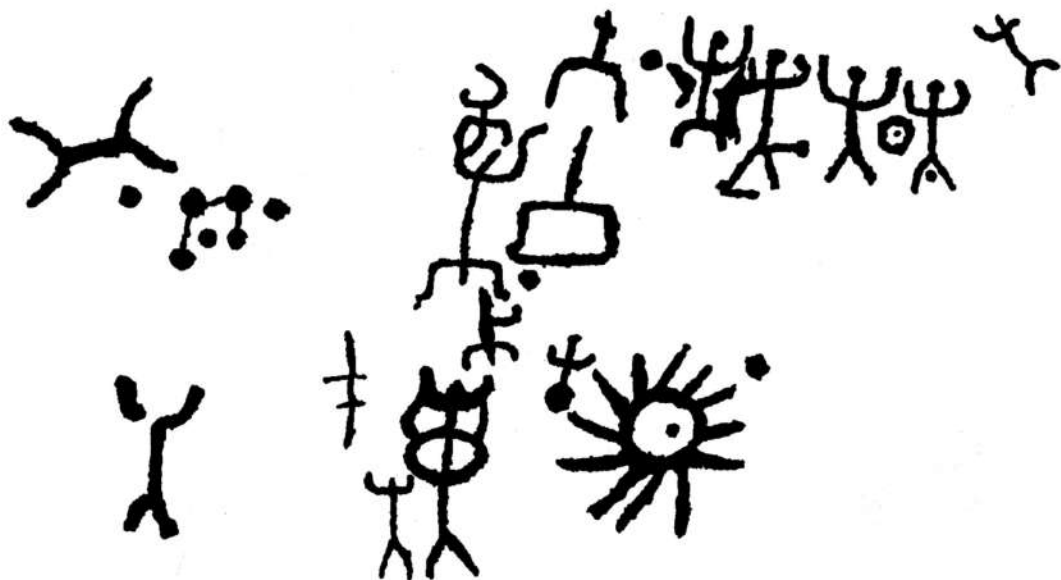


Fig. 74-75.
Schematic tracing and photo. Coren del
Valento, rock 59. Scene of a solar cult?

On the sides of the rayed disc are two smaller
discs. Period II/A-B.
Size of relief: 1.75 x 0.90m.

The disk shape with rays actually seems to represent the sun in most cases. However, when we want to know more about it, things become complicated: why was this figure made? What was its cultural purpose? What is its meaning? We can make some guesses, but often reliable data is not available. For various scholars, such a scene seems to illustrate an initiation, a propriety act, or a magic rite, while others choose to define it simply as a "sun worshipping scene," without being any more specific.

The example regards one common type of scene. But the Camonica Valley figurative inventory is immense, and there are a great many types of scenes; a number of which one could philosophize about. Without understanding the spirit in which this art was conceived, interpreting it often boils down to a pleasant intellectual game, the game itself being an end. Finally, it is only a comprehensive, systematic, thorough analysis of the associations and their rules that can lead us to the solution. The themes and syntax of rock art are modified over the course of the millennia, and therefore their messages have sudden variations as well. Nevertheless, there are some Camunian themes that are persistent from the beginning to the end. Ever since *Homo sapiens* started producing art, rock art has been a means of communication, and throughout the ages man has chosen rock surfaces to commit his messages to writing. These are possibly the premises for understanding the causes of this art form.

We know that among populations of various continents who still today use rock art as a medium of expression, certain fundamental associations are repeated. The images depicted are a means of communication with the spirits which are found within the rock. They are also a means of canonizing the rock and therefore of increasing its power or testifying to the sacredness of the place. They can be an instrument for the evocation of myths and the extolling of the deeds of the dead. They are a means of education, used to instruct the young during the process of initiation. Not all of the decorated rocks hold these specific types of significance, but all of them must have fulfilled functions of communication and socialization. The messages which they contain vary and are modified from period to period. Each group clearly requires its own reading, and as our capacity to read these messages grows so does the mass of historical information provided by this "prehistoric" literature.

Another question arises spontaneously. Can this so-called "rock

art” really be considered art, according to our contemporary methods of thought? It certainly does not always correspond to our aesthetic rules, nor does it always fall within the scope of pictorial values that range from Giotto to Picasso. But to answer this question, we must ask ourselves another; whether or not it contains the four fundamental ingredients of art: identity, communication, emotion, and discovery. The answer is that it undoubtedly does. We can see then, that rock art, including that of the Camonica Valley, is amply qualified for the title. Of course in every period there is ART and art, depending on variations in quality, and this pattern holds true in prehistory as well.

The rock engravings are part of our world cultural patrimony; they make up part of our heritage. Why is it so difficult to read a language that we invented and used thousands of years ago and that any child at the time would have been able to understand without effort? Although several steps have been made in reading and interpreting these graphic messages, there is still a long way to go to recover the knowledge that we previously had and that we probably still have within us. The process is based on our inherent tendency to follow any new acquisitions of our intellect through to three degrees: to realize, to understand, and to know.



Fig. 76.

*The so-called "Butterfly Idol" scene.
Representation of a stylized praying figure
beneath a mythological being with wings.
On one of the wings are five points forming*

*a pentagon around a larger central one. On
the other wing, rather, there is only one point.
Foppe di Nadro, rock 27. Period II/A-B. Size
of relief: 40 x 60 cm.*

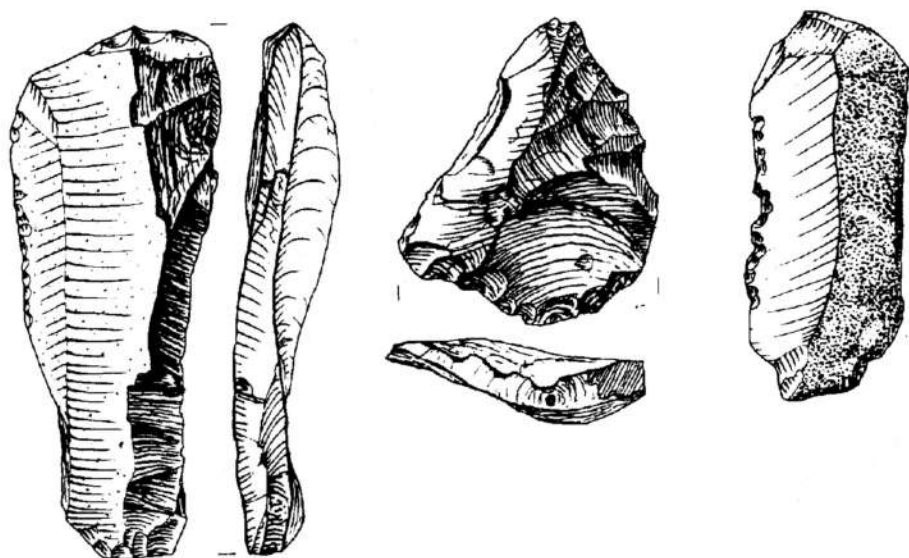


Fig. 77.
Foppe di Nadro, Shelter 2. Three flint instruments with heavy patina, from the Middle Paleolithic Age.

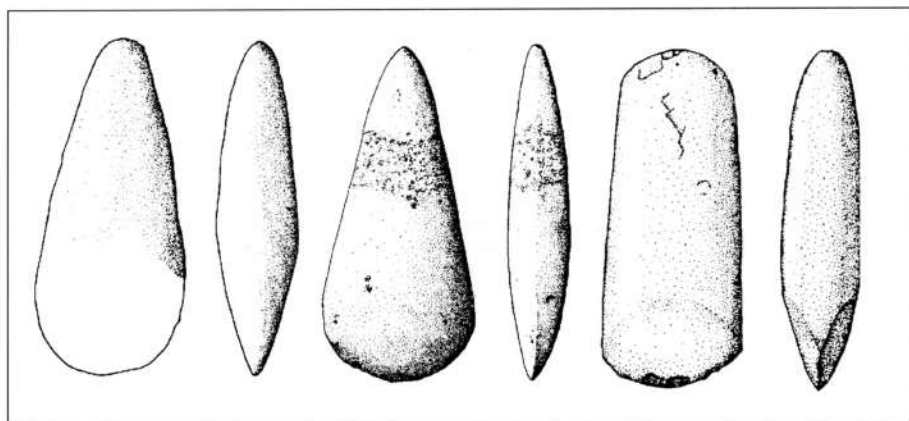


Fig. 78.
Neolithic axes of polished stone from Monte di Berzo, Provaglio and Lava at Malonno.

Chapter 7

TOWARDS HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTION

Even now, after forty years of research in the Camonica Valley, new discoveries are made almost every day: new details of one period or another emerge, enriching our knowledge. History, by its very nature, is not and never will be complete. There will always be something to add, and doubts about the interpretation of evidence will never be lacking. Still, it has been possible to reconstruct in an outline form, and with numerous details, the history of a people who were unknown just a few years ago; liberating them from the darkness which had enveloped them for two thousand years, from the time they ceased to be an autonomous culture. Through the history of a single people, thousands of years of European history emerge. The Romans called them Camunni, but who were they? Where did they come from? How did they become a people? What happened before the Roman conquest?

When the earliest rock figures known in the Camonica Valley were engraved, the creation of Paleolithic art in the famous caves like Altamira and Lascaux had ceased in continental Europe. That world was approaching its decline with the great climatic changes which marked the passage from the Pleistocene to the Holocene, between 10,000 and 12,000 years ago. Some human groups outside the Franco-Cantabrian area maintained this artistic tradition in the periphery: in the Iberian and Italian peninsulas, in the north of Scandinavia, and in Russia, in the desert zones of the Near East, and in the Saharan desert massifs. In particular, figurative rock art flourished on rocks in the open air and in small rock shelters in various European zones and in the Mediterranean area during the post-glacial periods.

Figurative rock art in that era was already widespread throughout the world, and phenomena typically comparable to those of the Alps have been recognized in Siberia, in Central Asia, in the Near East, and

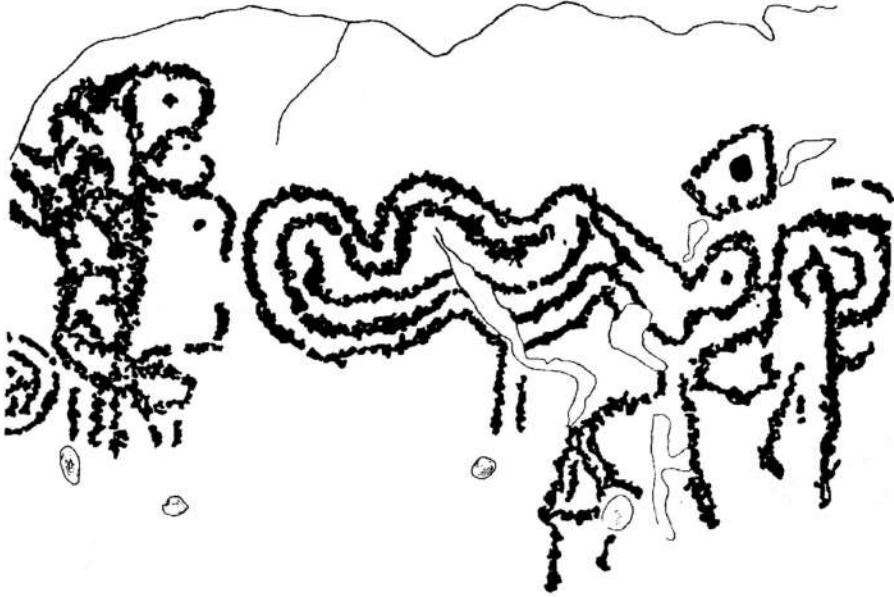
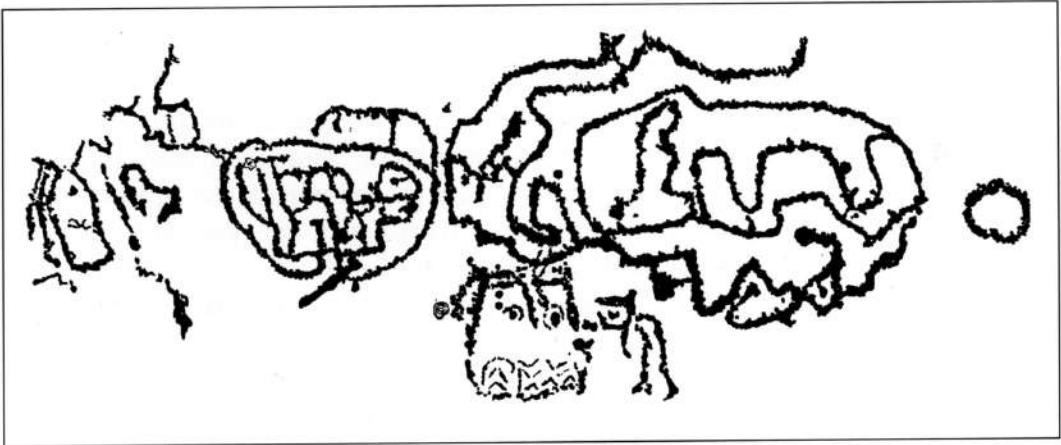


Fig. 79.
Luine, rock 91/C. A meander motif
accompanied by various symbols. On the
left is probably an idol form next to a
series of concentric discs. Period II/C or
final. Base of relief: 1.35 m.

Fig. 80.
Large, anthropomorphic meander figure.
The head, body and arms are formed by a
series of meanders; below the figure, at
center, idol form images with zigzag
decorations. Period II/C or final. Luine,
rock 34. Size of relief: 2.3 x 0.90 m.



in North Africa. These cultures are attributable to the Epi-Paleolithic period, this being a term which is used in the European-Mediterranean area for a type of archaeological culture contemporary with the Mesolithic, and which means the continuation, with some technological, stylistic, and structural changes, of older Paleolithic traditions. The horizon of Proto-Camunian rock art is included in this context.

Proto-Camunian rock art is similar to that of other contemporary populations in Europe in its style, in the ideas it expresses, and in the motivations it reflects. It is probable that some ties and common traditions existed among them. The sub-naturalistic style of rock art in various parts of Europe and the Near East was created by clans of hunters and gatherers who gradually learned animal husbandry. They were semi-nomadic groups who wandered from valley to valley in search of wild fruit and game, and it is likely that the first inhabitants of the Camonica Valley were just such small groups or clans. The population of Europe at this time was shallow and scattered, estimated by some to have been no more than 400,000 from one end of the continent to the other. Remains left by the first Camunians reflect this; campsites and rock shelters have been found, with microlithic instruments and fireplaces, that could have hardly sheltered no more than 5 or 6 people.

For the most part, however, the other rock art clusters known in the Alpine zone began during the Neolithic period, in the fifth and fourth millennia B.C. This was a period of adjustment and of cultural and ethnic restructuring for Europe. There were great human migrations caused by changes in the climate and in the flora and fauna, which resulted in a transformation of the environmental context. There were also ethnic groups who were moving onto the continent from outside of Europe, including populations of Asiatic origins looking for new land to cultivate, as well as groups shifting from one area to another within Europe itself.

The stylistic and thematic changes in rock art throughout the centuries reveals a spectacular picture of an epic, which, in essence, is the history of Europe in the form of a cartoon strip, seen through the eyes and the minds of the protagonists themselves.

The Camonica Valley rock engravings encompass a range of abstract, symbolic representations as well as realistic, descriptive works. In the initial phases one finds the constant association between

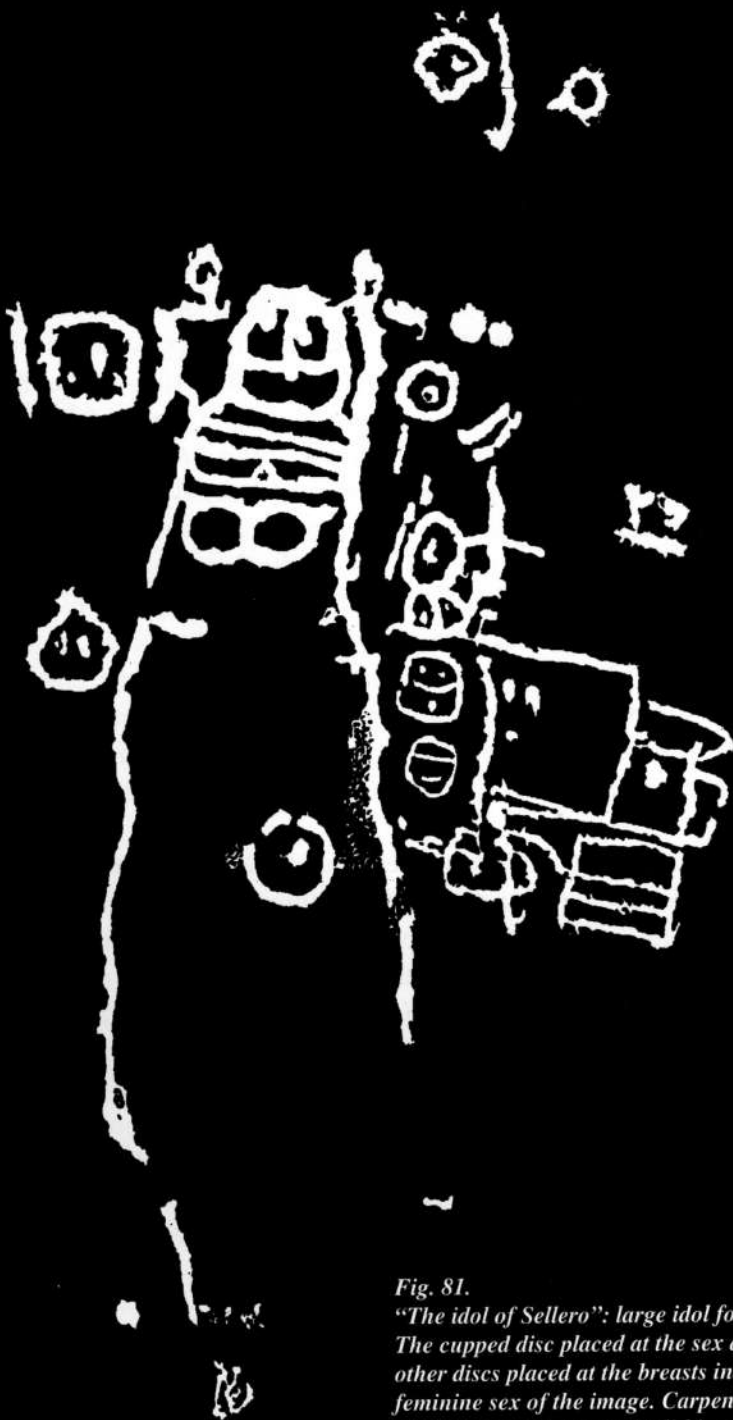


Fig. 81.
"The idol of Sellero": large idol form figure.
The cupped disc placed at the sex and the two
other discs placed at the breasts indicate the
feminine sex of the image. Carpeno di Sellero.
End of Period II (Late Neolithic; circa 3300
B.C.). Size of relief: 1.2 x 2.4 m.

image and symbol, in archaeological terms, between pictogram and ideogram. The subject of rock art, the principal source of attention, is the large animal, surrounded by symbols. In successive periods there is an alternating preference for either pictograms or ideograms.

Among the symbolic groups are included the monumental compositions of the Chalcolithic, characterized by their size and their particular kind of subject composition. The same subjects are found also in other types of abstract and/or symbolic compositions in the Bronze Age. In both cases each of the figures has a very definite ideological character. Often they are pictograms, such as arms or necklaces, which come to be used as ideograms. In other words, there are realistic images which acquire a symbolic significance. The dagger stands for force, the axe for power, the spectacle/spiral for fertility, and so on.

Towards the end of Period III, in the late Bronze Age, the inventory of figures, in which strictly symbolic conceptual images had prevailed earlier, shows more variety. The anthropomorphic figure returns to dominance, and there are fewer symbols, while descriptions of daily life increase, in the form of anecdotal, descriptive, or commemorative scenes. A great emphasis is given to various aspects of life and work. Such developments in iconography mirror a new mental process, and the rock art reflects these changes.

In the Iron Age, there are numerous mythological scenes, descriptions of worship, figures of spirits, and imaginary creatures whose introduction probably indicates a mutation in the old religion and reveals a considerable change in the psychology and spiritual values of the ancient Camunians. Symbols for supernatural forces, which up to the Bronze were absolute and universal, are replaced by specific anecdotes which depict the miracles or qualities of the spirits and divinities, of the ancestors and mythic heroes who form a pantheon of anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, and monstrous beings.

After having gone through the expressions of conventional religion through pictures spanning several centuries, from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age, in which the forces and energies of nature such as the sun, stone and metal are exalted, Camunian civilization passes within a short lapse of time to a different vision of the divine - to an imaginary, polytheistic world, inhabited by creatures of all types. Gods have human and super-human powers, attributes and vices. These beliefs characterize the Iron Age, and in the first

millennium B.C. we find them in other European regions as well, among people with different cultures. Some parallels to Camunian styles have been found in other clusters of rock art and in tool and instrument decorations. They are expressions of a mythology which grew richer through time, continued throughout the classical period, and in part still survives in popular beliefs today.

There are innumerable scenes which describe daily life as well. This enrichment of the iconography, besides indicating the birth of a previously unknown mythology, also indicates the rise of new problems and interests in life, as well as an interest in "laymen's" occupations, in commonly used objects, and in men's activities and movements, which previously had not attracted the Camunian's spirit of observation and had not been part of the rock art inventory.

Technological progress and a growing awareness of the material world are reflected in the engravings and indicate profound innovations in the way the irrational was seen. Changes in the themes and styles seen in the figures are expressions of an evolution of thought and culture. The abandoning of conventional scenes of worship and contemplation in favor of those taken from everyday events seems to indicate that people are acquiring a different awareness of themselves as individuals, a curiosity about their own existence on earth, and that their minds are opening to new experiences in daily, concrete reality. But perhaps the loss of a universal vision, and an increasingly frequent concern with specific periods of time and personal life, serves to illustrate a world in transformation.

The figurative representations of obviously religious inspiration do not disappear completely; they continue to be engraved along with the "realistic" scenes, but they occupy a more modest position in the iconography of the Iron Age. Anecdotal scenes in which men and women are seen in particular moments; working, dancing, hunting, or at war, constitute an enormous body of documentation. The Iron Age Camunians were socially minded, depicting ceremonies and large gatherings. The question of what "spiritual" content there is in the many realistic/descriptive scenes, which are likely to recall legendary events, could be raised. They are indications of more diversified interests and less concentration on absolute themes concerning the relationship with the irrational.

Another interesting aspect of the evolution of Camunian culture is



Fig. 82.
Idol form figure or mask which utilizes two
natural holes in the rock, partially
smoothed by man, for eyes. Luine, rock

49-B. Period II/C (Late Neolithic: circa
3300 B. C.). Size of relief: 60 x 45 cm.

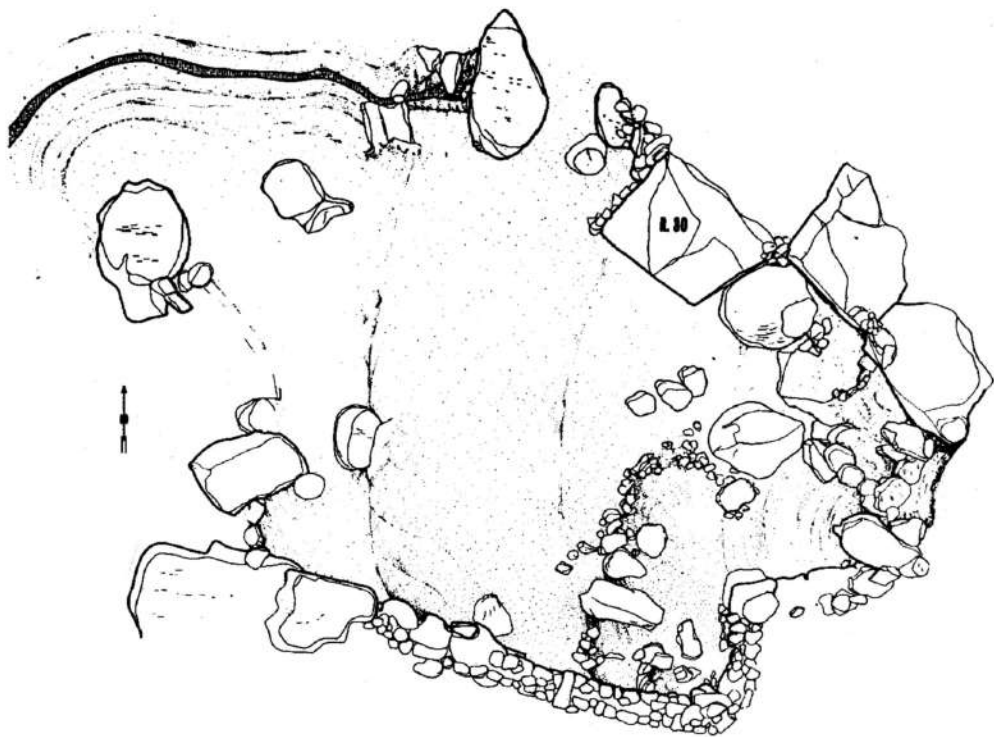
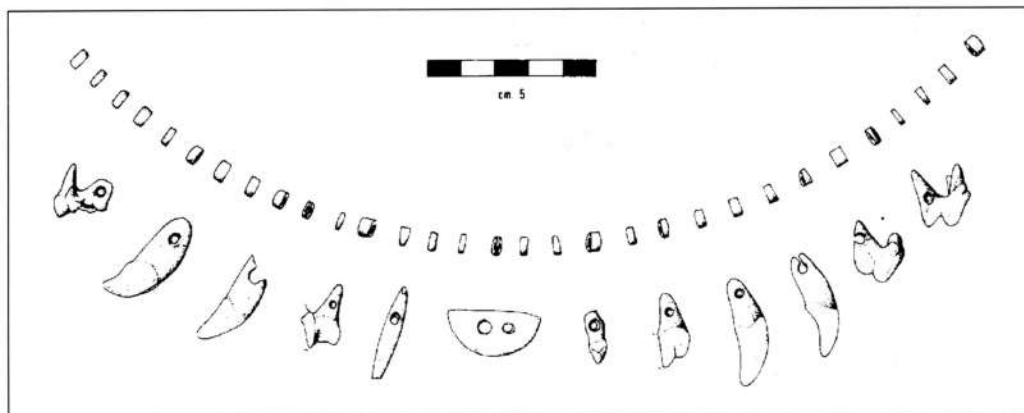


Fig. 83.
Foppe di Nadro. Plan of the enclosure in front of rock 30 on which there is a monumental composition from period III/A. To the left of the rock is a spring from which issues a small stream. A few meters in front of the rock there was a semi-oval structure of which remain the

outlines of the foundation. Perhaps a hut. Several large boulders have fallen into the remains from the steep cliff to the east of the site.

Fig. 84.
Foppe di Nadro, shelter 2. Rough beads from a necklace found in a Chalcolithic grave.



reflected by a progressive transformation in the depiction of divinities, which are at times represented by symbols, or objects, and in certain periods take on the appearance of animals and humans. Even in the Neolithic, we find the eye-like "oculi-face" figures with their great wide open eyes, as well as figures incorrectly called "idol-like," which represent large anthropomorphic images. In the Iron Age, supernatural figures in anthropomorphic form became more numerous, and indeed ever since that period man has created gods in his own image. This too, is far more than a simple thematic change, and seems to indicate, among other things, that man's attitudes toward himself and the real or imaginary world to which he felt he belonged are being reshaped.

Why were these works created? As we have seen, the motivations behind the prehistoric engravings are numerous. To be understood, each figure must be examined in its own context, in its own period and phase. It must be considered an expression of its time, and a consequence of whatever preceded it.

As mentioned above, analyses of the engraving techniques, styles, differences in patina, superimposition, and figurative elements making up each style have made it possible to establish that Camunian rock art went through a stylistic and conceptual evolution. Changes found in the art in any culture are of great importance, since they reveal new chapters of culture and the history of religions and art. The development of symbolic art and the birth of figurative art can thus be followed. The study of the various artistic styles goes far beyond these initial aims, however. It reveals the conceptual and philosophical evolution of a people, shows the contacts it had with other populations, and illustrates the events that decided its destiny. These fragments of the Camunian people's history contribute also to the knowledge of other human groups related to the Camunians who lived in the same periods.

Presumably, it can be said that many of the Neolithic tribes who created rock art in Central Europe and its surrounding regions have a common origin. They probably came from the ancient populations occupying Western and Central Europe in the late Paleolithic and in the Epi-Paleolithic. It is probable that they were expelled from those fertile plains which were then occupied by new, stronger, and more dynamic populations in search of fertile land to cultivate.

A hypothesis can be made for the presence of two large ethnic groups in Neolithic Europe, one descending from indigenous

Paleolithic populations, the other arriving from the east. The latter was principally concerned with the arable soil of the great plains, while the former was prevalently concentrated in the mountainous valleys, in peripheral territories, and other remote refuges, and had a mixed economy of hunting, gathering, agriculture, and animal husbandry.

Various areas of rock art have common thematic, figurative, symbolic and ideological elements, indicating the existence of common beliefs and traditions which perhaps had already taken root in prototypical models. In fact, in the Epi-Paleolithic period, there was a cultural unity in Europe which has not occurred on the same level since then, not even during the golden age of the Roman Empire. The next generation might see, in the twenty first century, a return to that unity.

The history of Europe is part of an even larger picture. The art of the ancient hunters' who lived in the Old Stone Age displays characteristics that are very similar throughout the world. Towards the end of the Pleistocene, very broad cultural provinces were formed. At the beginning of the Holocene, these were becoming more diversified. The more time passed, the more the local characteristics of rock art became clearly defined, revealing a process of regionalization.

In the course of this story narrated on the engraved rocks, the cultural areas shrink remarkably and the processes of further fragmentation takes place within them. The first Epi-Paleolithic hunters to arrive in the Camonica Valley had the same material culture and figurative style as analogous populations from the Iberian peninsula to Turkey and beyond. The first Neolithic food producers were part of a cultural area which ranged from the Po Valley to the plains of the Rhone and the Danube. Camunian material culture in the Bronze Age was an Alpine culture, limited to the Alpine area. The Iron Age Camunians had a material culture found only in the Central Alpine area. During the Iron Age, further fragmentation took place, carrying us to the apex in a process in which culture became regionalized, then provincialized, and finally extremely localized. In fact, each valley acquired local cultural characteristics and seems to have been influenced very little by the others. In this way various groups gradually acquired distinct personalities.

A parallel process which can be defined as colonization can also be followed. Human groups of Balkan origins arrive in the Padana area, and similar groups install themselves on various other areas from



*Fig. 85.
Foppe di Nadro. Engravings on rock 30,
above the spring. This monumental
composition from period III/A has been the
object of deep hammer blows from the*

*Medieval age, done with the clear intent of
disfiguring it. Next to this group has been
incised a cross and other Medieval
decorations.*



0 5 cm 10

OSSIMO 10

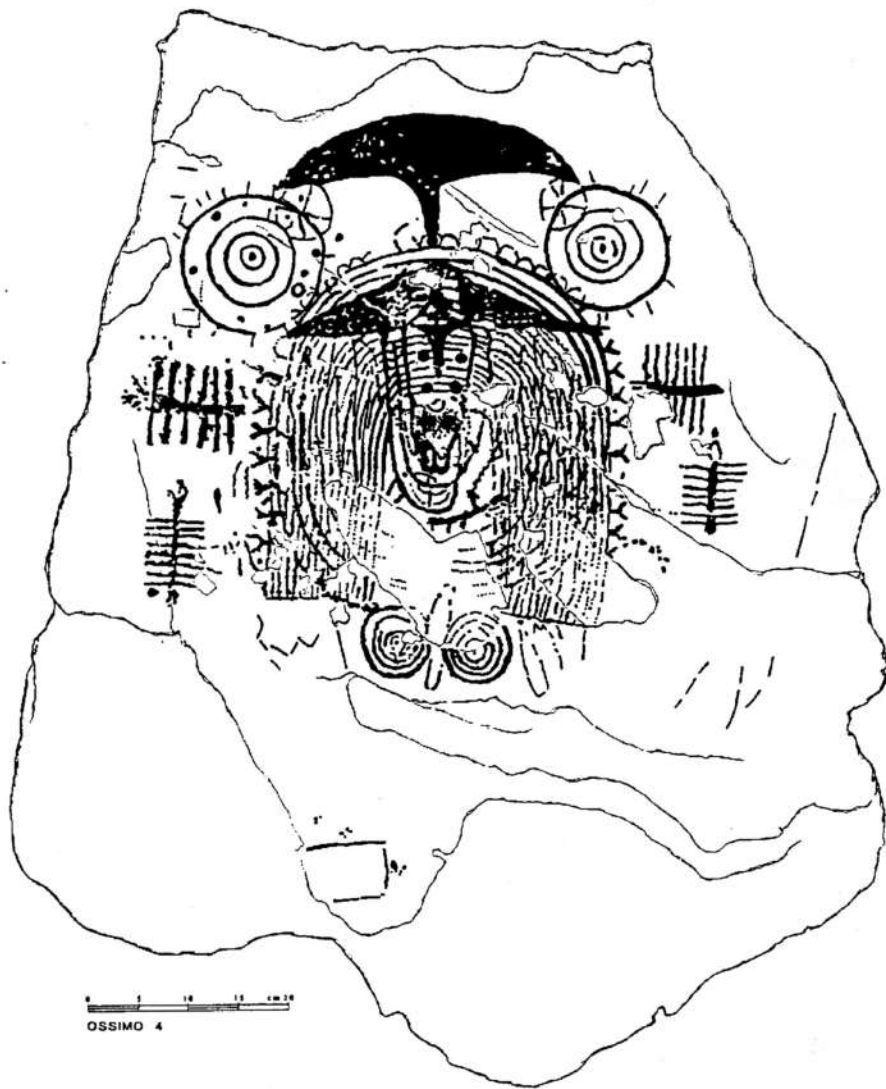


Fig. 86.
Menhir-statue 10 from Ossimo, found in
the excavations conducted by F. Fedele at
the site labeled OS4.

Fig. 87.
Menhir-statue 4 from Ossimo, found next
to stele 10 along with fire-pits and various
anthropic remains.

southern France to the Iberian Peninsula. New populations reach the south of Scandinavia, each settling and pushing the native populations towards peripheral areas in the north. Other immigrating populations push from the east towards Central Europe. Europe acquires, from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age, a complex ethnic composition. Other populations are added to the native ones, who arrive primarily in expansion movements from the east to the west and from the south to the north. These migrations, like the development of commercial relations, seem to indicate a complex trend of movements in diverse directions. Europe as an identity is in flux, still in the process of developing the complex linguistic and ethnic mosaic which we will then meet with the beginning of written history.

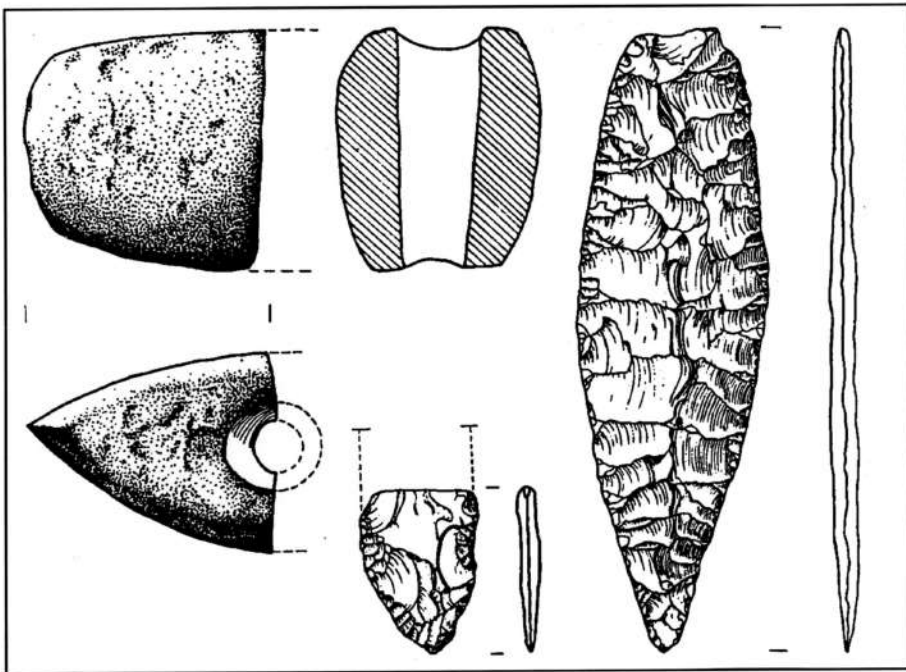


Fig. 88.
Chalcolithic finds from Colombara at
Cortefranca (Brescia). Flint dagger blade
and point, sandstone axe.

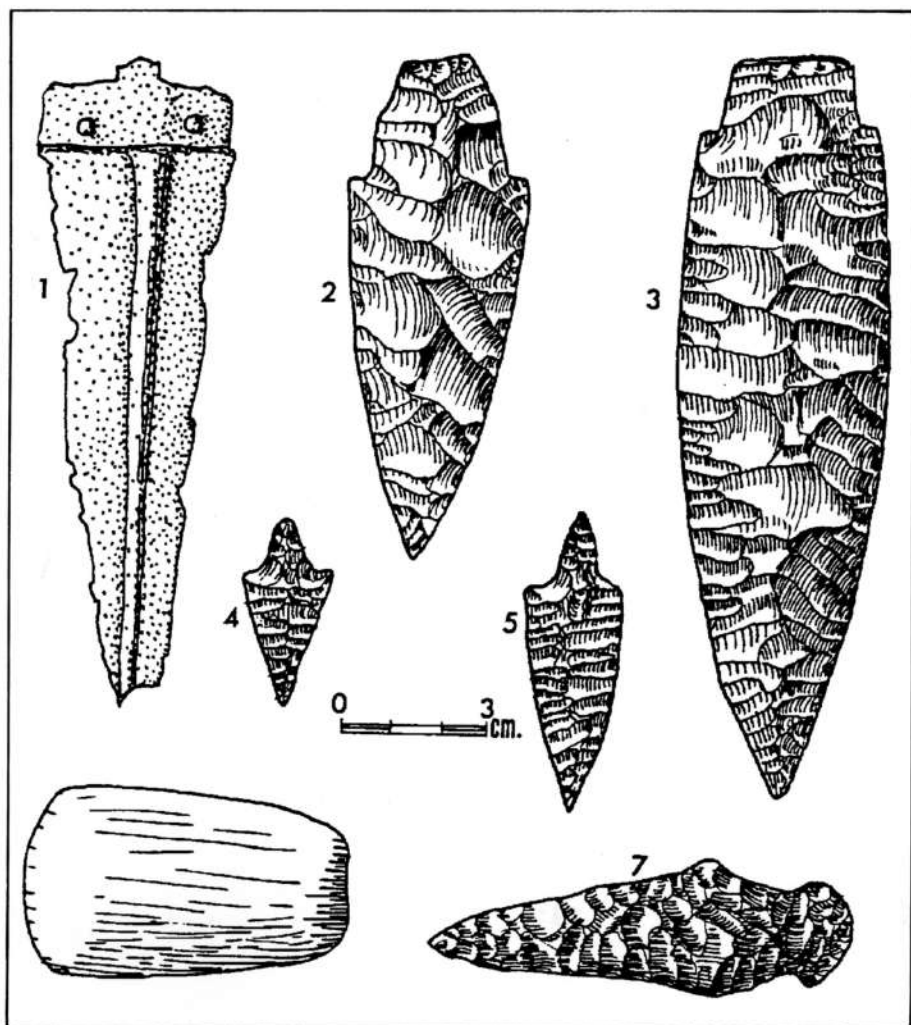


Fig. 89.
Chalcolithic finds from Fontanella Mantovana, Remedello culture. Triangular blade in copper, dagger blade, spear and arrowheads in flint, axe of polished stone and hammer-axes in flint. The use of metal instruments began in this period.

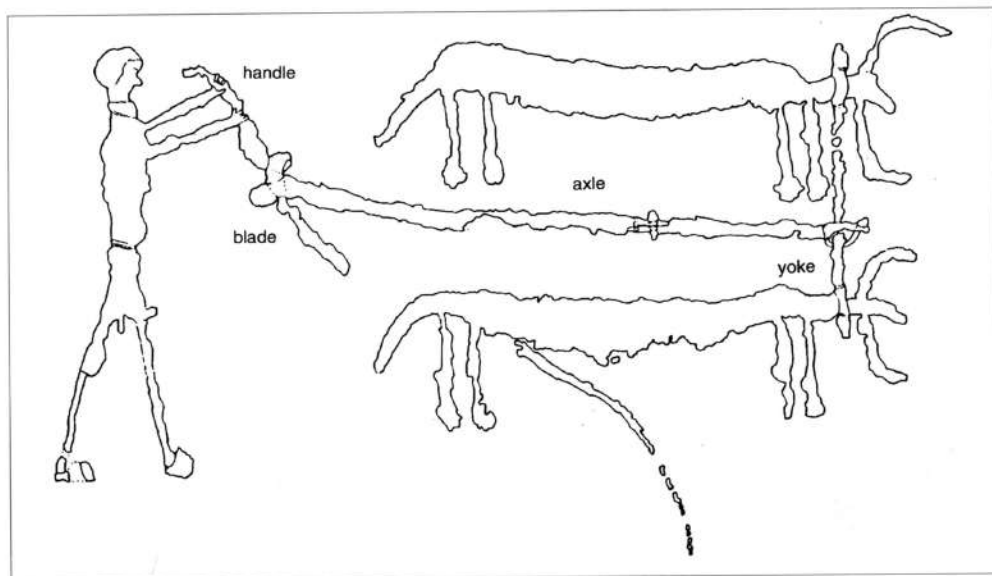


Fig. 90-91.
 Photo and relief of a plowing scene from
 menhir-statue Bagnolo 2.

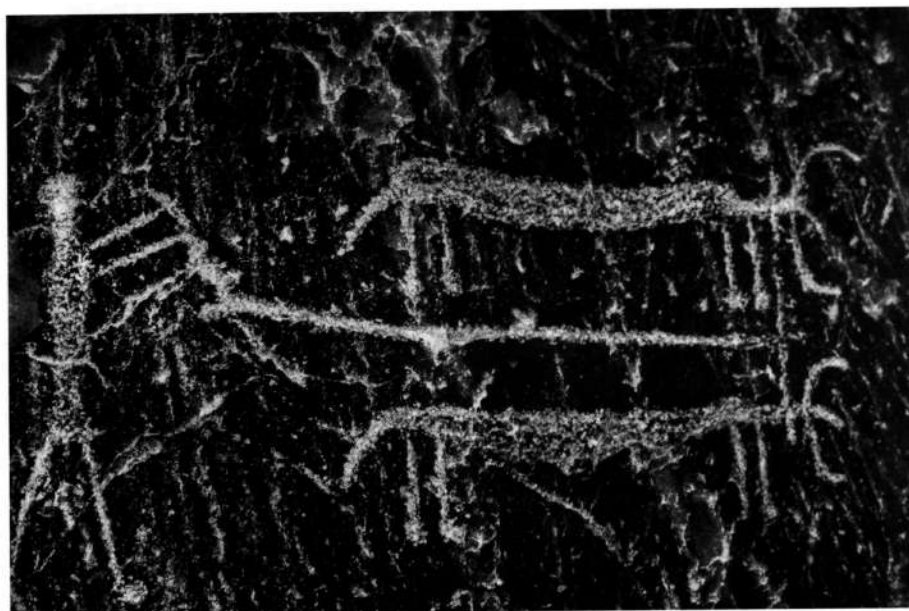


Fig. 92.
 Relief of menhir-statue Bagnolo 2, period
 III/A. Size of relief: 0.80 x 1.3 m.





Fig. 93-94.
Menhir-statue Bagnolo I. Religious /
symbolic composition, a classic example of
the monumental compositions of the
Camonica Valley. The solar disc appears
as the face of a divinity, to the sides are
two axes which seem to represent arms. In

the center are eight figures of daggers,
while below are three parallel lines which
serve to indicate both a belt and the river.
The double rectangle in the upper half of
the engraved surface dates from an earlier
period. Below, a reconstruction by Antonio
Molino for the Milan '82 exhibit.