



## Articolo

# The protohistoric site at Fondo Squaratti (Valcamonica, BS): rocks 2, 3 and the archaeological context

 Paolo Rondini<sup>1\*</sup>, Alberto Marretta<sup>2</sup>, Cristina Brocca<sup>1</sup>
<sup>1</sup> Università degli Studi di Pavia, Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici.

<sup>2</sup> Parco Archeologico Comunale di Seradina-Bedolina, Capo di Ponte.

## Parole chiave

- Valcamonica;
- Incisioni Rupestri;
- Iconografia;
- Cultura Materiale;
- Età del Bronzo;
- Età del Ferro

## Keywords

- Valcamonica;
- Rock Engravings;
- Iconography;
- Material Culture;
- Bronze Age;
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\* Autore per la corrispondenza:  
[paolo.rondini@unipv.it](mailto:paolo.rondini@unipv.it)

## Riassunto

Il contributo prende in esame le ultime novità dal Progetto Quattro Dossi, avviato dall'Università di Pavia all'interno della macroarea archeologica dei Quattro Dossi, nel territorio comunale di Capo di Ponte in media Valcamonica (BS). Tra le attività del progetto, in aggiunta allo scavo archeologico dell'insediamento di Dos dell'Arca, vi è la documentazione e lo studio integrale delle superfici rocciose incise rinvenute nell'intera macroarea, fortemente incrementata dalle più recenti scoperte. Fondo Squaratti è il terzo dei Quattro Dossi che compongono l'area di studio, procedendo da sud verso nord. Le sue evidenze di cultura figurativa e di cultura materiale, prova tangibile di una frequentazione stabile nel corso della protostoria, sono ad oggi quasi del tutto inedite. Il testo a seguire esamina quindi alcuni filoni tematici delle incisioni rupestri protostoriche di Fondo Squaratti e il loro contesto archeologico materiale, secondo una metodologia d'analisi che prevede l'edizione critica delle rocce incise in modo sistematico, organico e completo. Le rocce nn. 2 e 3 qui presentate forniscono alcuni spunti interpretativi e cronologici di notevole interesse, che permettono di giungere a conclusioni innovative e a un'analisi stilistica coerente offrendo un primo contributo alla comprensione del sito nel suo contesto più ampio.

## Summary

This paper examines the latest results of the Quattro Dossi Project, launched by the University of Pavia within the Quattro Dossi archaeological macro-area in the territory of Capo di Ponte in middle Valcamonica (BS). Among the activities of the project, in addition to the archaeological excavation of the Dos dell'Arca settlement, there is the documentation and comprehensive study of the engraved rocks found in the macro-area. These have been greatly enriched by the most recent discoveries. Fondo Squaratti is the third of the four hills (Quattro Dossi) from south to north, and its iconographic evidence, paired with material structures and artefacts which testify that it was the location of a stable settlement in protohistory, is almost completely unpublished to date. The present contribution outlines some of the essential features of the protohistoric rock engravings of Fondo Squaratti and their archaeological context, according to a methodology of analysis which involves the critical edition of engraved rocks in a systematic, organic and complete manner. Rocks no. 2 and 3 provide some interpretative and chronological hints of considerable interest and offer a first contribution to the understanding of the site in its wider context.

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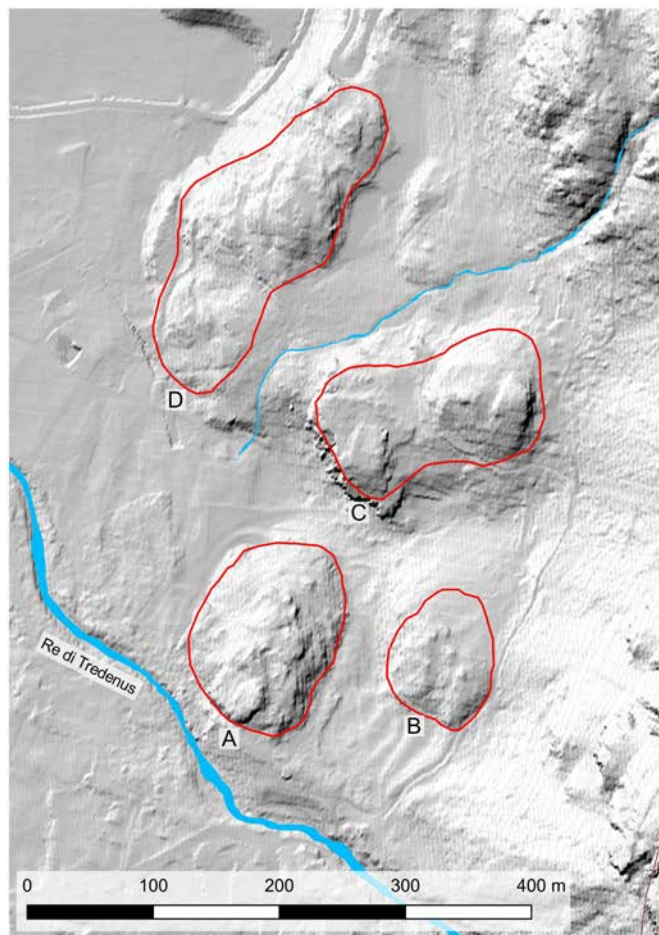
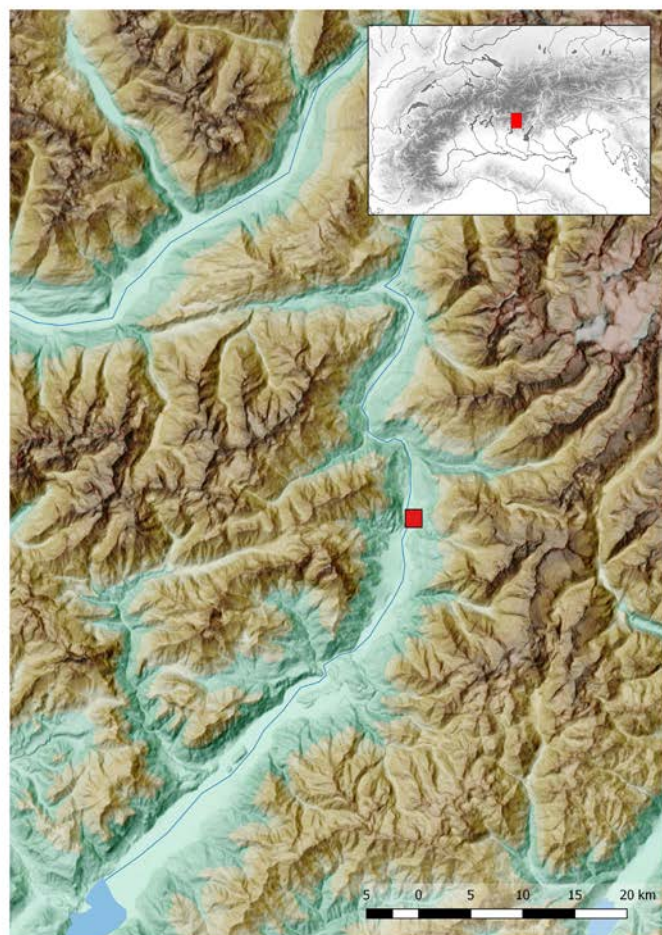
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## Introduction: the “Quattro Dossi Project” (PR)

In late 2016 the University of Pavia initiated a research project focused on an archaeological area defined as “Quattro Dossi”<sup>3</sup>. Placed in the territory of Capo di Ponte, at the centre of the UNESCO Site n. 94 “Rock Drawings of Valle Camonica”<sup>4</sup>, the area consists of four rocky hills similar in physical characteristics and located a short distance from each other, on the hydrographic left side of middle Valcamonica, at the central part of the southern Alpine region (Fig. 1). Past and present research have shown that these four sites also share major archaeological features, such as characteristic rock engravings and, in two cases, the presence of material culture and structures, proof of a stable protohistoric frequentation<sup>5</sup>. From south to north, the hills are named Dos dell’Arca, Pié, Fondo Squaratti<sup>6</sup> and a still unnamed fourth and last site, which lacks historical denomination and is therefore temporarily referred to as “Fourth Hill”.

The first step of the project included a thorough screening of archival documentation and subsequent on-site survey of the whole

area (“Quattro Dossi Project” – stage 1), a task which led to the discovery of many new carved rock surfaces (Rondini et al. 2018). The subsequent stage 2 is still ongoing and involves the excavation of the protohistoric remains at Dos dell’Arca, the documentation of the engraved rock surfaces found so far at all four of the hills and the first analyses and preliminary dissemination (Rondini & Marretta 2019). The final stage of the project will be dedicated to the study of the excavation data and to all the necessary chemical, faunal and anthropological analyses, while the project will reach its conclusion with a complete publication of the results. As this venture is part of the training programme of the Department of Humanities at University of Pavia, Master’s students are taking part in both fieldwork activities and, usually as part of their master’s thesis, in the studies, under the supervision and support of the coordinators. The present research is the first published article regarding the site of Fondo Squaratti, a relatively new and very promising area, almost completely overlooked in the otherwise intensive research carried out in Valcamonica over the last 60 years.



**Fig. 1:** The Quattro Dossi area (Capo di Ponte, Valcamonica): A. Dos dell’Arca; B. Pié; C. Fondo Squaratti; D. Quarto Dosso (Lidar DTM 1 m, GIS elaboration: PR). / L’area dei Quattro Dossi (Capo di Ponte, Valcamonica): A. Dos dell’Arca; B. Pié; C. Fondo Squaratti; D. Quarto Dosso (Lidar DTM 1 m, elaborazione GIS: PR).

<sup>3</sup> The project is directed by Maurizio Harari, with the field direction by Paolo Rondini and Alberto Marretta. It is part of the fieldwork activities of the Department of Humanities at the University of Pavia, in the project “Dipartimenti di Eccellenza 2018-2022” (Ministero dell’Università e della Ricerca), and it is conducted in collaboration with Soprintendenza ABAP BG-BS. This paper is the outcome of shared work between the three authors and includes part of the results of Cristina Brocca’s master’s thesis (title: “La Roccia n. 2 di Fondo Squaratti nell’area dei Quattro Dossi (Capo di Ponte, BS)”), discussed in Pavia in 2020, under the supervision of Maurizio Harari and Paolo Rondini.

<sup>4</sup> Also abbreviated as “Valcamonica”.

<sup>5</sup> For the first recognition of the area as an archaeological site, see Rondini 2016: 158-159.

<sup>6</sup> Formerly known as “Piciò”/ “Picciò”. See Ruggiero & Poggiani Keller 2014.



### Fondo Squaratti: description of the area (PR)

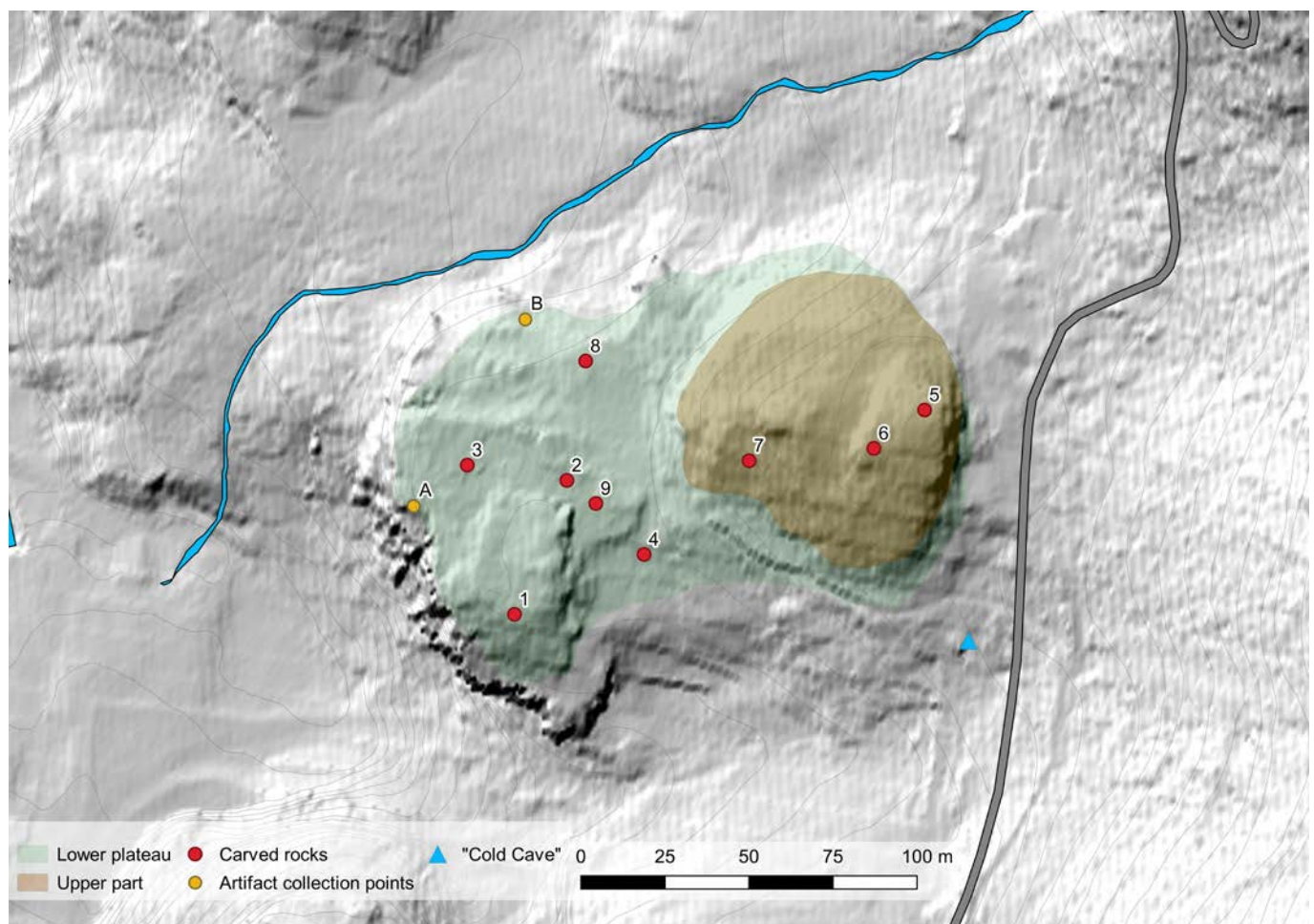
As mentioned, Fondo Squaratti<sup>7</sup> is the third hill in a northward walkthrough of the Quattro Dossi area, and it's just at a short distance (around 100 m) from both Dos dell'Arca and Pié. This compact sequence of hillocks emerges from a massive conoid of sediments formed by the "Re di Tredenus" stream, which flows impetuously from the upper valley-side to its bottom (roughly E-W), where it joins with the Oglio river<sup>8</sup>. The local bedrock is a Permian sandstone known as Verrucano Lombardo, the usual backdrop for Valcamonica rock carvings, but the northern flanks of the hill mark the transition to schist, which instead characterizes the northern part of the valley. The whole Quattro Dossi area is rich in water: in addition to the already mentioned Re di Tredenus there are several other small streams and springs, one of which is located directly at the northern foot of Fondo Squaratti.

The hill protrudes about 200 m from the eastern side of the valley, to which is linked by a low saddle, close to a massive heap of accumulated debris fallen from the nearby cliffs. Its northern and western flanks are steep and almost inaccessible. Morphologically it is formed by an elevated rocky eastern part and a main lower and wider plateau, crowned by outcropping rock surfaces and raised up to 4-5 meters above the general level of the area (439 m above sea

level). This description also fits Dos dell'Arca (Rondini et al. 2018: 4-5 and fig. 7), which is very similar to Fondo Squaratti in this respect. On the flanks of this upper part a great abundance of scattered stones can be found, probably the remains of collapsed structures, but in several spots the presence of dry-stone masonry still in place can be easily detected. The site has an irregular oval shape, with a total area of 1,15 ha, and offers plentiful room for a medium-small settlement. Rock engravings have been identified both on the outcrops emerging on the wider plateau, as well as on those on the upper elevated part (Fig. 2).

Other structures found in the area deserve a short mention. On the eastern flank of the hill there is a sort of cave formed by two large landslide blocks, known as the Grotta Fresca ("cold cave") due to the constant billowing of cold air (Fig. 3). Around the entrance of this cave, two low walls were built with great blocks of dry-stone which form a hemicycle 5 meters long and 2 meters wide, believed to be dated to protohistoric times<sup>9</sup>.

The area is now almost completely occupied by bushes and trees (fir, birch and chestnut), although it was certainly cultivated until about thirty/forty years ago, as is testified by the owner of the land. A private house and some short dry-stone wall sections, certainly contemporary and partially covering some of the engraved rocks, are also present.



**Fig. 2:** Fondo Squaratti: plan of the carved rocks and the significative points (Lidar DTM 1 m, GIS elaboration: PR). / Fondo Squaratti: planimetria delle superfici istoriate e dei punti significativi (Lidar DTM 1 m, elaborazione GIS: PR).

<sup>7</sup> The site is on private property and accessible only by explicit permission of the owner.

<sup>8</sup> For a general presentation of the area, see Rondini & Marretta 2018: 5-7.

<sup>9</sup> Priuli & Bertocchi (1982: 594) mention the finding of "protohistoric" pottery sherds, but the artefacts are still unpublished nor is their actual location known, and the structure has not been further excavated.



### Fondo Squaratti: previous research and the archaeological context (PR)

The site is referred here by the owner's surname, but in the last decades the hill has been locally known mainly as "Piciò/ Picciò / Dos Picciò"<sup>10</sup>. The decision to reassess the site name is motivated by the need to rationalize and clarify the toponymic confusion that characterizes the entire history of research in this area<sup>11</sup>. The first mention of the site can be traced back to a private letter dated March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1956, written by Emanuele Süss to Battista Maffessoli<sup>12</sup>. Among other topics, Süss writes "[...] *Sooner or later we ought to excavate at Piciò, because I was recommended to do so by Altheim, Bertolone, Rittatore and Zorzi: if they found out that we have already discovered something and haven't yet talked about it, they will kill me! [...]*"<sup>13</sup>. In the humorous and surely overexaggerated conclusion we detect an urgency to proceed with archaeological excavations, but this aim was to remain unfulfilled. Luckily enough, some of the artefacts uncovered by Süss were kept in the storage of the Civic

Museum of Natural Sciences of Brescia and afterwards collected in the warehouses of the Heritage Office<sup>14</sup>. Later on, renovations carried out to make the area cultivable led to the discovery of other materials, supporting the high archaeological value of the site<sup>15</sup>.

In a brief note about the outcome of their fieldwork of 1971, the *Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici* reported five new engraved rocks in the area of "Pié"<sup>16</sup>, but the only tracing published at the time instead refers to the surface of what we now call Rock n. 3 of Fondo Squaratti. This toponymic confusion hints to a current misunderstanding between the area of Pié and the nearby, but topographically separated, area of Piciò, now Fondo Squaratti. After many years of abandonment, the Quattro Dossi area was once again partially explored in 2014, when a research group led by the University of Firenze performed a survey on the hills of Pié and Dos dell'Arca for a project devoted to the census of all the engraved rocks in Valcamonica. Unfortunately, Fondo Squaratti was left out due to the still nagging toponymic mix-up in the area<sup>17</sup>. Only during the activities of the "Quattro Dossi Project" was the site finally surveyed and new discoveries led to a total amount of nine engraved rocks<sup>18</sup>.



**Fig. 3:** The "Grotta Fresca" in the Quattro Dossi area (photography: PR). / La Grotta Fresca nell'area dei Quattro Dossi (fotografia PR).

<sup>10</sup> This name was probably derived from some sort of a late owner's nickname.

<sup>11</sup> For a more detailed history of research see Rondini et al. 2018: 6-12.

<sup>12</sup> Emanuele Süss was a scholar from Brescia particularly involved in the archaeological research carried out in Valcamonica, especially during the 1950 and 1960s. Battista Maffessoli, a carpenter from Capo di Ponte deeply attracted by the carved rocks, discovered many new decorated surfaces on his own and served as a guide for scholars and archaeologists coming to see the local rock art. Marretta 2009b: 49-52.

<sup>13</sup> This excerpt was translated from the original document kept in the Raccolta Museale "Battista Maffessoli", owned by the Municipality of Capo di Ponte. The epistolary archive, which refers to a series of letters sent to Battista Maffessoli by his many correspondents in Italy and Europe (especially archaeologists interested in Valcamonica), is still mostly unpublished (Marretta 2009a).

<sup>14</sup> The study of this material is ongoing and will be included in a forthcoming publication by the author.

<sup>15</sup> Priuli & Bertocchi 1982: 591-596, and further personal communication by the land owner.

<sup>16</sup> Redazione BCSP 1971: 205-207.

<sup>17</sup> The first phase of the Project "Monitoraggio e Buone Pratiche di Tutela del patrimonio del sito UNESCO n. 94 Arte Rupestre della Valcamonica" was directed by the Soprintendenza (Ruggiero & Poggiani Keller 2014: 97-98).

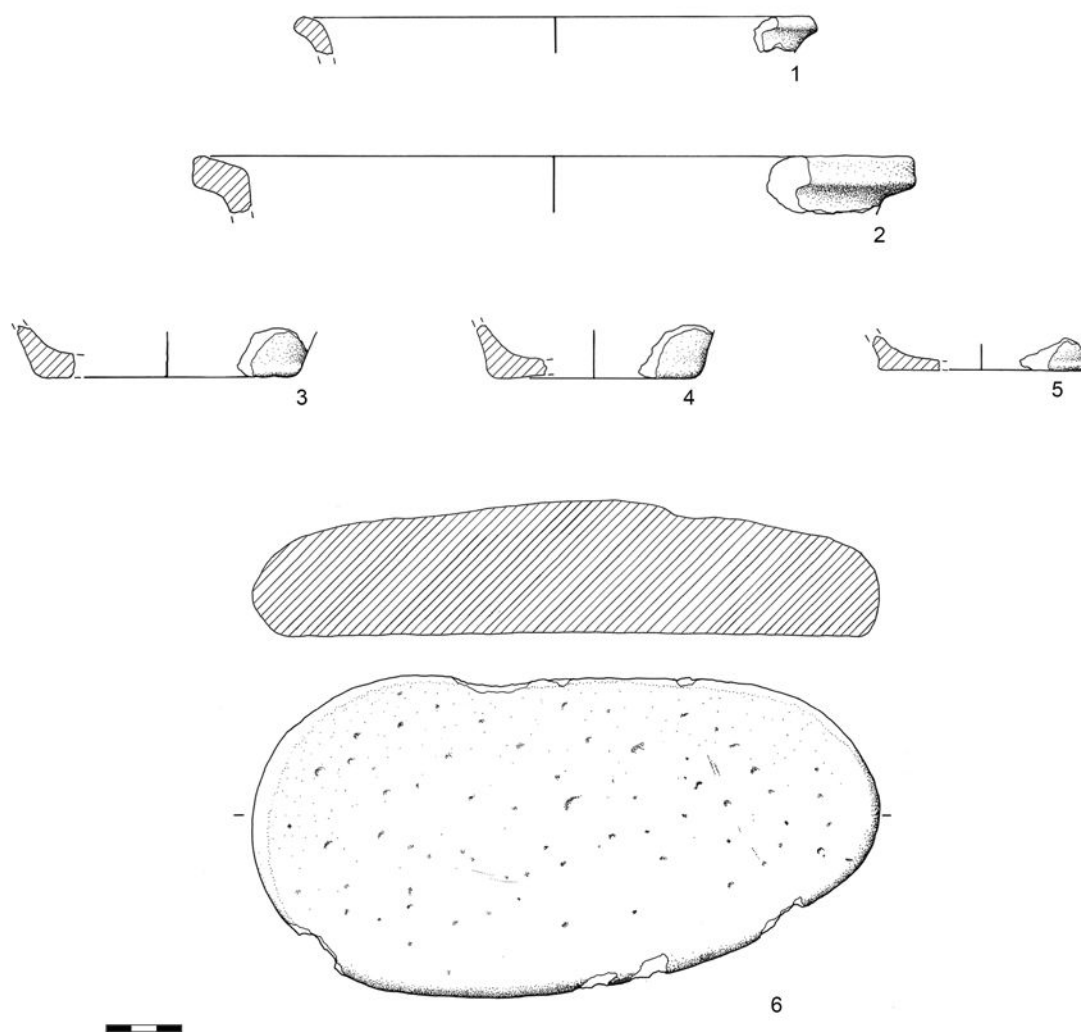
<sup>18</sup> The rocks have been recorded in the IRWeb system, an online inventory of Valcamonica rock art managed by the Soprintendenza (<http://www.irweb.it/>).

Furthermore, few superficial artefacts, both ceramic and lithic, were recovered during the surveys and can now avail a concise, though still preliminary, definition of the material culture present at Fondo Squaratti. This site is of great importance for the possible physical connection between the material traces of human presence and the engraved rock surfaces, an exceptionally rare occurrence in Valcamonica shared with the first hill of the Quattro Dossi Area, the previously mentioned Dos dell'Arca.

The first spot where archaeological items were collected is located on the westernmost edge of the plateau, close to an erosion front (Fig. 2, A). Here, the progressive dispersion of the superior deposit, mainly caused by atmospheric precipitations and natural erosion, has exposed part of an anthropic layer of black organic soil, which contained the ceramic sherds (Fig. 4, nn.1-5). These are all fragments of hand-shaped vessels, created with no evident use of a potter's wheel and formed with a coarse ceramic mixture containing lithic inclusions of millimetric size. Their colours range from a light grey to dark brown. Two different types of pots are recognizable: one with a short-everted rim (Fig. 4, n. 1), the other with a slightly thicker edge and internal angular fold (Fig. 4, n. 2). Both these objects have close connections to the alpine contexts of Trentino-Alto Adige, such

as Castelar de la Groa near Trento (Marzatico 1997: 907-908) and the fortified settlement of Ganglegg near Schluderns (Steiner 2007) and can be dated to the late Recent Bronze Age or the beginning of the Final Bronze Age (around the 12th cent. BC)<sup>19</sup>. Along with these artefacts, a sandstone grinder with evident traces of use on the flat side was also collected (Fig. 4, n. 6). Although stone grinders are widely attested in many protohistoric contexts and retain a very low chronological value, its presence among these first finds at Fondo Squaratti is still an element of great cultural interest, because it's a testimony to the stability of a settlement in the area. Objects like these are, in fact, tools for daily use in the production of food, like the grinding of cereals, while its almost intact condition could indicate a primary housing context, instead of a rubbish dump.

The second location of superficial findings is positioned at the feet of a dry-stone wall of uncertain age, built as a delimitation/terracing fence on the northern flank of the area, about 40 m from R. 3<sup>20</sup> (Fig. 2, B). The only significant fragment from this area is part of the bottom of a small pot or perhaps a mug (Fig. 4, n. 5), created from a more refined brownish ceramic mixture, slightly different from the others, but still not sufficient to adjourn or adjust the chronological framework already proposed.



**Fig. 4:** Material culture from the surveys: 1-5 pottery; 6 sandstone (drawings 1:3 scale; PR). / Cultura materiale dalle raccolte di superficie: 1-5 ceramica; 6 pietra arenaria (scala disegni 1:3; PR).

<sup>19</sup> The "old" findings from the site mostly share this same chronological and cultural framework.

<sup>20</sup> From now on the surfaces with engravings identified in the area will be addressed substituting the term "Rock n." with its usual short form "R.", followed by the attributed number.



## Engraved rock surfaces at Fondo Squaratti: presentation and methodological guidelines (PR, AM)

The engravings identified thus far at the Quattro Dossi area can be easily divided into two main thematic blocks. The first is comprised of many examples of the geometric compositions usually referred to as the late Neolithic/early Copper Age schematic production, while the second consists of the classic Iron Age set of warriors, houses, animals and symbols (e.g., the shovels, the “huts” or the so called “Camunian Roses”). Among the two groups it is certainly the latter which benefits more from the new discoveries, given their originality and a surprisingly widespread distribution. The representations of armed horsemen, giant anthropomorphic figures, weapons (spears, a sword) and new kinds of symbols are in fact among the most striking results of the recent research at Dos dell’Arca (Rondini et al. 2018; Rondini & Marretta 2019). Likewise, the supposedly more ancient compositions of large and fully pecked areas, whether geometric or more abstract in shape, seem to be much more frequent and typologically mixed than what was suggested by the previous research. Overall, the iconography of the Quattro Dossi area now shows a stronger connection to, for example, the rich imagery of Naquane on one side and, especially, the specific themes found in the many sites of the Paspardo territory (Fig. 21). In this latter case, the relationship can be found both in the frequency of the geometric complex images of the early phase and in some subjects of the Iron Age.

Fondo Squaratti follows this general pattern. There are large and fully pecked compositions of rectangular areas on the still unpublished R. 1, as well as the articulated scenes with humans, symbols and cup-marks on the R. 2 and 3, while other images of the like are also present on the remaining rocks. The majority of the engraved rock surfaces of the site are distributed in the lower part of the hill, on a rocky outcropping that crosses the centre of the plateau. R. 1 and 8 are located respectively on the southern and northern borders of the area, the former consisting in a rocky promontory facing directly the hill of Dos dell’Arca, and the latter on a smooth surface emerging from the soil. R. 5-7 are simply engraved panels part of the upper,

elevated part of Fondo Squaratti, which is a mostly rocky hilltop with many other smooth rock surfaces which, on the contrary, have not been selected for engraving. As demonstrated by the study of Dos dell’Arca (Rondini & Marretta 2019), it is highly probable that the continuation of the research in the site will lead to the discovery of new engraved surfaces, that now may lay covered by the soil accumulated – either artificially or naturally – after their creation.

The surfaces we present in this study were recorded and analysed according to the documentation protocol established for the Quattro Dossi project.

The procedure includes

- surface cleaning with soft brush and water;
- 3D photogrammetric modelling (Fig. 5);
- georeferencing of the rock with Total Station;
- photographic recording of the engraved panels both with natural light and artificial oblique lighting (night photography);
- contact tracing on transparent plastic sheet of the recognisable iconography.

When deemed necessary, the traditional contact tracing was complemented with the use of rubbing (*frottage*) and 3D detail enhancements (mesh treatment with radiance scaling and depth-map filters) in order to achieve a better understanding of the pecked figures and the finer details of their execution<sup>21</sup>. The final outcome is a combination of the long-established practice of the contact tracing (now transferred through scanning in digital form for cleaning and correction) and the full-digital tracing executed on the orthophotography from the 3D model, from which profiles and sections of the rock surface were also extracted.

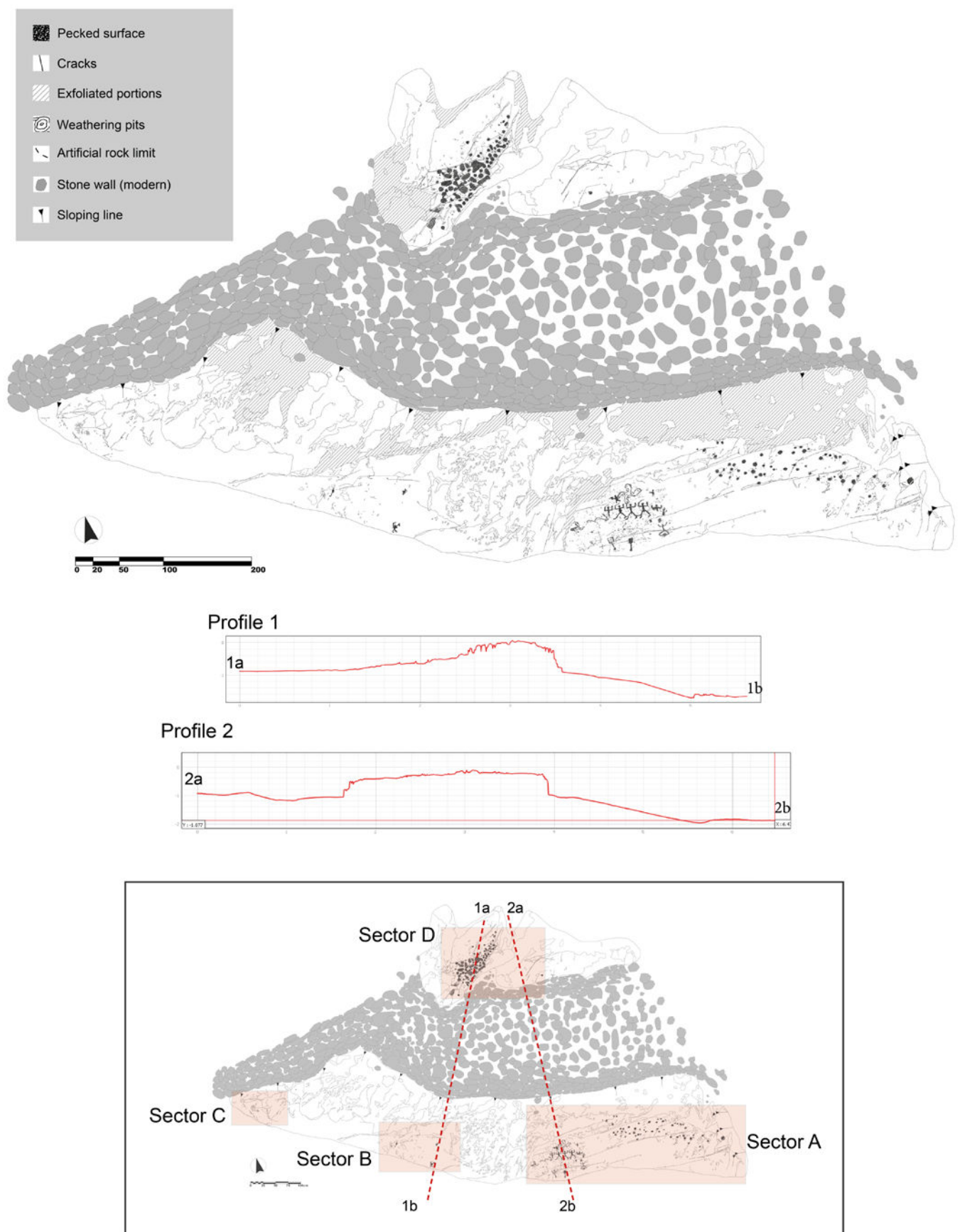
The iconographic appearance of each rock is organized in a general catalogue by compiling an online relational database, shared with all the members of the Quattro Dossi project and linked to the GIS-based general plan of the site<sup>22</sup>. This allows extraction of each individual figure, and a comprehensive record of morphological descriptions and first interpretation. The documentation of the bigger rocks was organized, as usual, by dividing the carved areas in different panels (also referred to as “sectors”) in order to rationalize their content and have a clear overview of the main aggregation of figures for subsequent analysis (Marretta 2014: 11-15; 2018: 63-88).



**Fig. 5:** R. 2: photogrammetric 3D modelling of the whole rock surface, 30° view from west. / R. 2: modello 3D dell’intera superficie (PR).

<sup>21</sup> For a history of the documentation techniques of rock engravings, with special regard to the Valcamonica area, and further considerations regarding current methodological trends, see Marretta 2014 and Rondini 2018, with previous cited literature. The procedure adopted for the project is a modified version of the “Digital Rocks” workflow (ibid.), but while there the primary source of physical recording is rubbing (*frottage*), as the protocol was explicitly tailored around the problems of the engraved Copper Age monoliths, here that role is absorbed by contact tracing, which is more time-efficient for bigger rock surfaces. Rubbing and digital enhancing were implemented here only on selected, problematic details and superimposing figures.

<sup>22</sup> For another methodological and GIS-based approach on rock engravings documentation and studies, see Pedergrana & Cavulli 2021.



**Fig. 6:** R. 2: general view of the rock with profiles and carved sectors (contact tracing: CB; digital elaboration: PR). / R. 2: vista generale della roccia con sezioni e settori istoriati (rilievo a contatto: CB; elaborazione digitale: PR).



## R. 2 & 3: description (AM, CB)

*Rock n. 2 (CB)* R. 2 consists of a large outcrop of the local sandstone known as Verrucano Lombardo. It has an irregular sub-rectangular shape and its state of conservation is generally good, except for some deteriorated aspects like localized fractures, the growth spots of vegetation and the presence of a contemporary dry-stone wall, directly built on its summit sector (Fig. 6). The rock is 10.5 m long, with a major NW-SE axis, while its minor axis is 5.3 m wide. Its main sector (A) is a markedly smooth surface, inclined at a 33% angle from NE to SW and with very shallow superficial undulations (Fig. 7) which form an interesting optical effect under oblique lighting. R. 2 finds a natural prosecution in R. 9, located just a few metres to the east and distanced only by particularly invasive vegetation. The various carved portions on R. 2 are very well preserved, yet the visibility of the engravings in natural lighting is quite poor due to their general shallow pecking, as well as because of the presence of some lichens and mosses. Therefore, for a complete view of the engravings the use of enhancing methods such as oblique lighting is necessary.

Overall, on the rock 165 single figures have been identified and recorded. They are exclusively executed with the typical pecking technique. Of these, 13 (8% of the total) have been identified as anthropomorphs, while 5 were acknowledged as “icons”, a wide category of figures with strong symbolic character including the so called “Camunian roses” and the shovels (3% of the total). Except for three figures of dubious classification, the remaining 87% of the images consist of cup-marks of various size and depth.

The rock was divided into four sectors, named alphabetically from A to D. Within these, the images are well characterized, with

a mostly figurative repertoire of anthropomorphs and icons, densely grouped in the central portion (sectors A-B), while the majority of the cup-marks are in the right part of sector A and on the top sector D, which is almost completely covered in 78 very deep and wide cup-marks (which could be better defined as “small bowls”), and 8 other agglomerations of engraved dots.

Sector A is made up of a complex association of anthropomorphs and other iconographic elements, such as *swastika*-shaped Camunian roses and shovels (Fig. 9). It is separated from the western sector B by a large fracture and extends up to the north-eastern edge of the rock, where the remaining 57 cup-marks are placed, all arranged in a long uneven band. Sector A is particularly rich in images, while B shows a sporadic and mostly incomplete set of human figures, with the sole exception of a single warrior in the lowest part, seemingly armed only with a short sword and small shield.

A sparse and indefinite pecking texture is the only trace of human activity on sector C, on the extreme left (west) of the rock. On the top of the rock the portion called sector D contains a high number of large and deep cup-marks and rectangular shaped bowls, some of which are of considerable size and connected to each other by short grooves.

One of the most interesting subjects of R. 2 is undoubtedly the collective scene of sector A, both for its uniqueness in the wider Valcamonica repertoire and for the clear associations with the other most significant iconographic categories of the rock (Fig. 9). Four armed men are depicted with orthogonal arms and reverse V-shaped legs in the pose of marching westwards, while raising their small circular shields and brandishing short, thin, curved swords or daggers. One of these is incomplete, a second one shows an unusual feature, a peculiar roundness of the belly, while the three complete



**Fig. 7:** R. 2, sector A: the armed anthropomorphs and the big “Camunian Rose” on top (night photography with oblique lighting: PR). / R. 2, settore A: gli antropomorfi armati e la grande “Rosa Camuna” in alto (fotografia notturna a luce radente: PR).



figures display male sexual parts. Another detail must be noted: the marching humans appear joined at the ankle by a line, a rare, but not new, form in Valcamonica figurative culture, used to stress some sort of connection or ceremonial detail between warriors (see below). On the right side of the composition some anthropomorphs in the “praying” pose (*orante*)<sup>23</sup> are arranged without any particular order or respect to the main scene. These latter humans appear quite unrefined, with the only complete one realized through very sparse and deep pecking with small body size<sup>24</sup>.

Other two human figures, one of which is holding an item which is not easily identifiable, seem to have a strong relation to a Camunian rose of the swastika type, significantly placed in a dominant position over the entire representation. A second, incomplete, Camunian rose is also present on the left portion of the panel, while next to the collective scene a serpentine line with small cup-marks likely represents the same motif, once again incomplete. These Camunian roses here are presented for the first time, and they integrate the only existing studies on this subject (Farina 1998, 2001).

Finally, two shovels can be observed in the lower part of the composition. The one on the left has a circular pommel and a blade rendered only by a contour line, while the other one has a more common appearance, i.e. a ring-shaped pommel and a fully pecked rectangular blade.

Sectors B and C do not offer much in the way of being able to

make a proper iconographic analysis, but a few words can be said for sector D (Fig. 8, 10). As previously mentioned, it consists of numerous deeply carved circular depressions, which cannot be strictly referred to as “cup-marks”, at least not in the same sense as those of sector A. The sector A cup-marks are always circular, shallow and finely pecked, while the small bowls and grooves in sector D are usually much bigger, deeper and sometimes roughly polished, as evidenced by their smooth inner surface. Furthermore, their shape is not exclusively circular, but can also be oval or sometimes rectangular. These differences are also mirrored by the different locations on the rock: the cup-marks of sector A are engraved on an oblique surface, while the ones in sector D sit on top of the rock, on a flat and horizontal surface cut through by a very visible change in the external aspect of the rock surface<sup>25</sup> (Fig. 8).

*Rock n. 3 (AM).* R. 3 is located about 30 m west of R. 2, at the base of the same dry-stone wall which marks the boundary of a wide flat area nowadays dominated by thick vegetation. The rock is 7.3 m long, on a E-W axis, while its minor axis measures 5.4 m (Fig. 11). The surface, very well preserved in the smooth portion bearing the engraved figures, shows a modest slope in the S-W direction and a clear change of lithology on the northern side, where a layer of very fine-grained sandstone (Verrucano Lombardo) is replaced by a coarse conglomerate of different colour and composition.

The surface has been carved in a unique layout of 57 images.

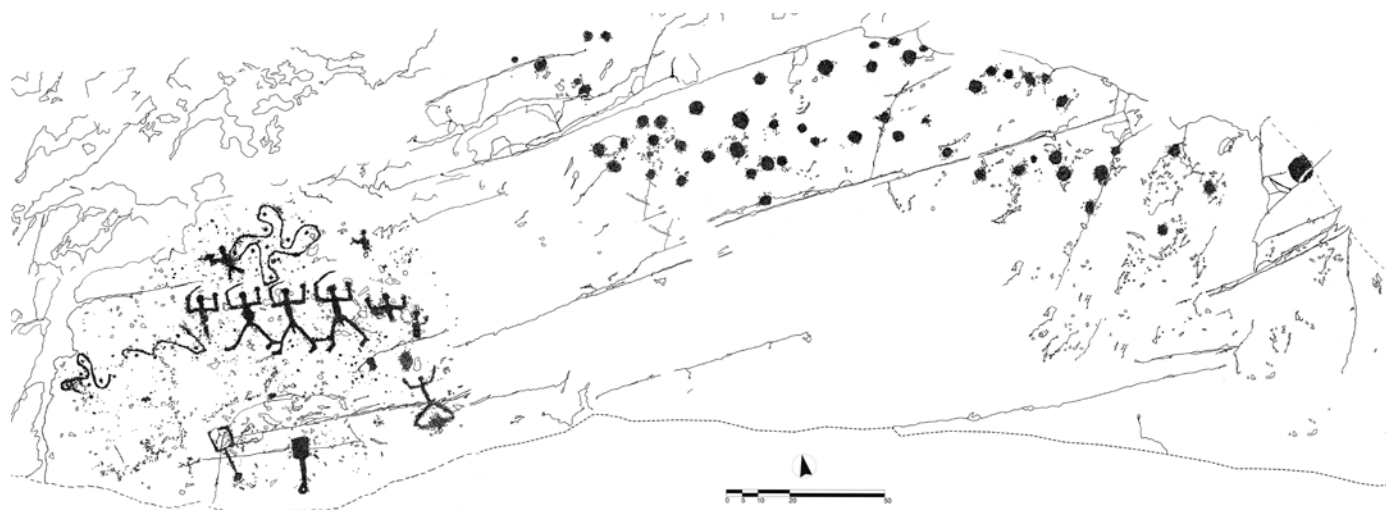


**Fig. 8:** R. 2, sector D: the “bowls and grooves” on top of R. 2 (night photography with oblique lighting: PR). / R. 2, settore D: le “vaschette con canaline” sulla cima della R. 2 (fotografia notturna a luce radente: PR).

<sup>23</sup> This figure is one of the most significant and widely attested in the whole rock-art phenomenon, both in Valcamonica-Valtellina and in other contexts, but its chronology is debated. For a discussion see Arcà 2001 and Sansoni 2001. For a general and up to date chronological analysis also concerning its representation on real objects: Poggiani Keller et al., in press.

<sup>24</sup> This technical data, shared also by the figures in sector B, is in strong contrast with most of the figures in sector A, which are bigger in size and realized with a light, accurate pecking.

<sup>25</sup> The shift seems to involve the usual Verrucano Lombardo and another type of sandstone, or a portion of Verrucano Lombardo with a finer grain and a lighter shade of grey.

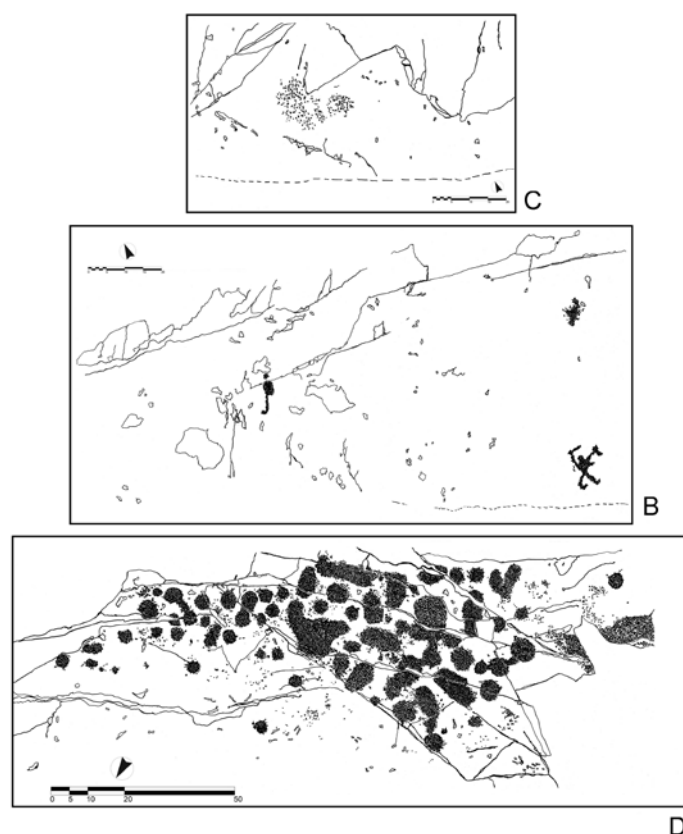


**Fig. 9:** R. 2, sector A: contact tracing (CB). / R. 2, settore A: rilievo a contatto (CB).

Only 15 have a definable figurative character, namely 12 anthropomorphs (only two armed) and three icons belonging to the shovel iconography. The remaining 42 figures identified in the cataloguing part of the workflow consist of clusters of pecking which are not immediately recognisable as specific images. For the sake of completeness, it is worth mentioning a convoluted sinuous line that partly overlaps with two human figures and a series of thin lines produced with the scratching technique (Fig. 12).

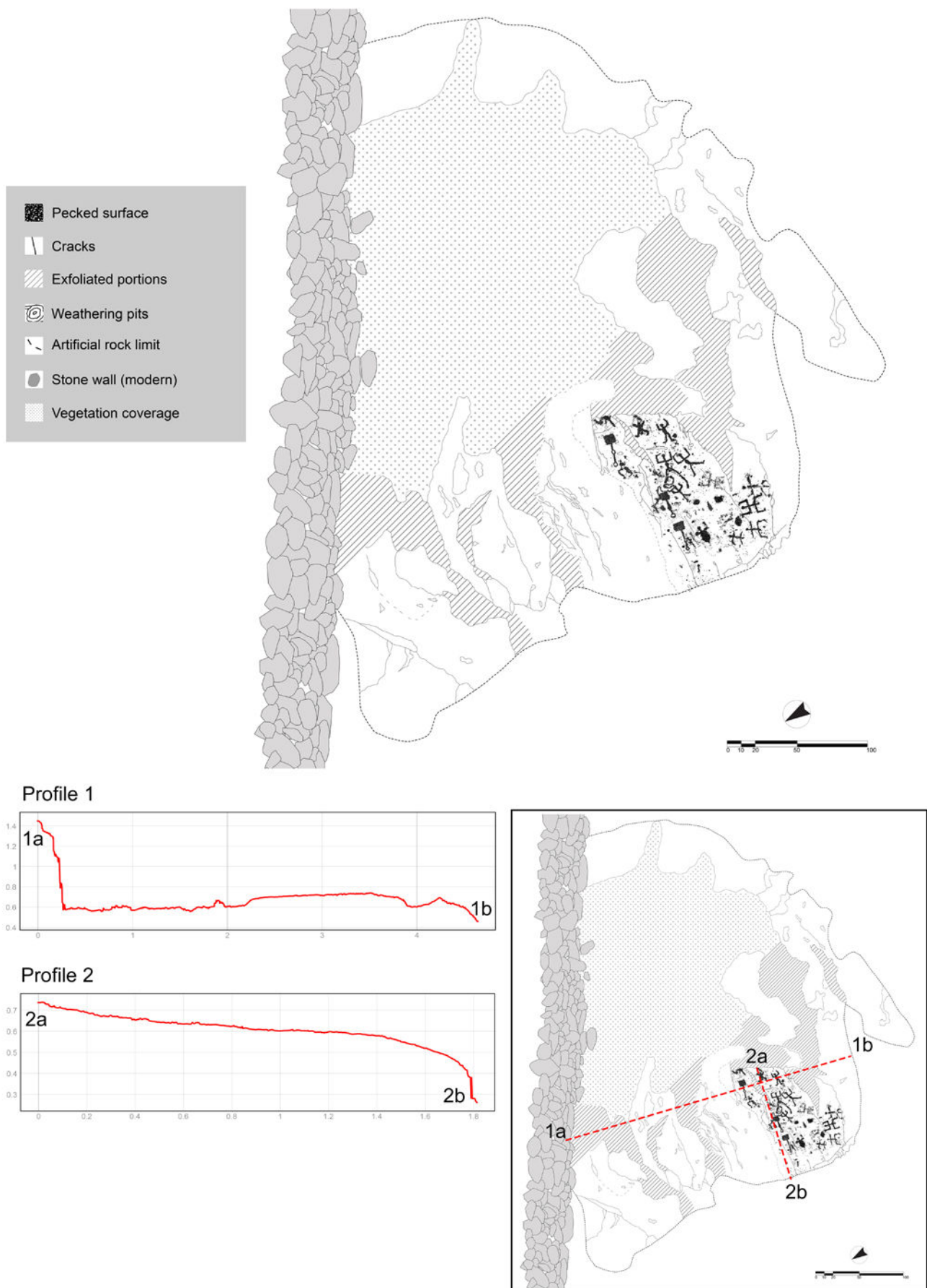
The anthropomorphs can be subdivided into three groups: the first and most important assembly consists of a pair of figures with linear bodies, arms raised at a 90° angle and legs in a reverse V/U shape (Fig. 13). The figure on the right has its feet pointing outwards and thus seems rendered in a frontal position, while the one on the left has one of its legs obliterated by the already mentioned serpen-

tine figure, which therefore prevents us from recognizing its orientation. Both images show a distinct bulge at the level of the belly which appear almost identical to the observed phenomena on the anthropomorphs in the collective scene of R. 2. As on R. 2, the figures are holding a short sword in their right hand, but at the end of their left arms the tiny expansion, usually suggesting a small round shield, is not present. The second group is concentrated in the lower right-hand corner and consists of linear figures attributable to the category of the schematic praying figures with orthogonal limbs (*oranti*; Fig. 14). However, the figures, mostly rendered in a sparse and poorly executed pattern of pecking, are shown in two cases with tentative reverse V-shaped legs and, in a third isolated case, with the arms unusually pointing downwards.

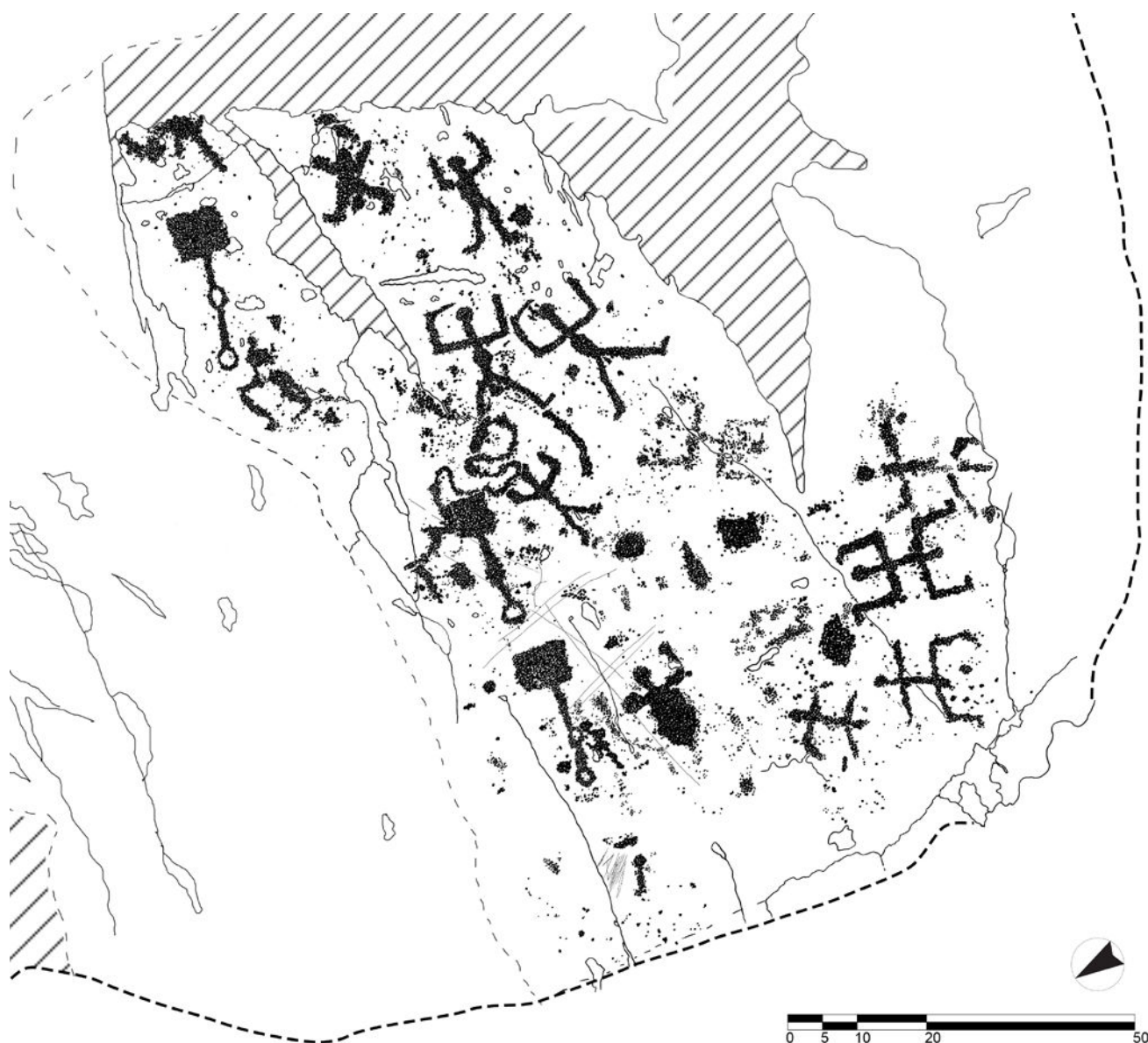


**Fig. 10:** R. 2: contact tracing of sectors C, B and D (CB). / R. 2: rilievo a contatto dei settori C, B e D (CB).





**Fig. 11:** R. 3: general view of the rock with profiles (AM). / R. 3: vista generale della roccia con sezioni (AM).



**Fig. 12:** R. 3: contact tracing (AM). / R. 3: rilievo a contatto (AM).

One of the most interesting subjects is the series of three shovels in the left margin of the panel. They are characterized by a square blade and a very elongated handle ending in a ring-shaped pommel. Two shovels have the central part of the handle elongated into a second circular eyelet, while the third shovel, located at the centre of the sector, has the same feature fully pecked. This minimal difference notwithstanding, these shovels refer to the same typology, which can offer interesting hints about the connections of Fondo Squaratti with other areas and at the same time, are good elements to include in a discussion about chronology.

### R. 2 & 3: analysis (PR, AM, CB)

*Comparisons:* For several concurrent reasons – i.e., their proximity and the evident similarities in figurative composition and style – as well as to offer an organic analysis, we will treat the two rocks as one. Starting from the collective scene of R. 2, undoubtedly one of the most striking elements in the whole iconography of Fondo Squa-

ratti but with few comparisons in Valcamonica, the two rocks show many common traits. Two of the armed human figures of R. 3, for example, can be easily related to those of sector A of R. 2, not only due to their overall appearance, to the same positioning of the arms and legs, but also to the remarkably characteristic “belly bulge”. This anatomical detail is a feature of considerable interest because, far from being an exclusive prerogative of female and unarmed anthropomorphs as previously hypothesized<sup>26</sup>, it is in this case an evident attribute of warriors, one that probably added a symbolic element of specific status beyond that of the possession and exhibition of weapons.

A hint to a specific ritual or some sort of ceremony, symbolized in the collective scene of R. 2, is the joining of the warriors at the ankles. This detail has so far only been recognized in scenes depicting duelling, like at Seradina I R. 12 (Marretta 2018: 209 and fig. 41) or Naquane R. 1 (Fossati 1991: 28), where the general interpretation is that of a ligature between the two warriors, deliberately emphasized in order to highlight a specific/unique type of duel among the many

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, the praying figures on R. 16 at Campanine Bassa as well as the “sex scene” on R. 27 at Foppe di Nadro, where the figure is interpreted as a pregnant female. Sansoni 2009a: 267.





**Fig. 13:** R. 3: detail of an armed anthropomorph (photography with oblique lighting: AM). / R. 3: dettaglio di un antropomorfo (fotografia a luce radente: AM).

depicted on the rocks. Except for these peculiar details, the general morphology of the human figures with orthogonal arms – with or without weapons – and reverse V-shaped legs find comparison not only in Valcamonica, but also in many sites of the nearby Valtellina, like in the Rupe Magna-Dosso Giroldo complex in Grosio (Fig. 15, f)<sup>27</sup> or in the western sites of La Ganda (Castione Andevenno) and Ca' Bongiascia-SO (Arcà et al. 1995; Sansoni et al. 1999; Pace 2012).

The similarities between R. 2 and 3 are accentuated by the recurrent association of different subjects and specific stylistic details, such as the peculiar warriors mentioned above, the praying figures with orthogonal limbs (*oranti*) and the same types of shovels, especially the ones with ornamented handles. If we also add the Camunian roses of R. 2 the result is a combination of selected iconographic elements and precise stylistic choices that point to a compact and almost unique repertoire, one that links Fondo Squaratti with other (though very few) sites where these also appear, and that may well have belonged to a single executioner.

It is in fact of great interest to note that the same association between this particular type of warriors, the praying figures and the shovels is also observed in two areas of Paspardo situated just over 1000 m above sea level, at the upper limit of the engraved rocks distribution in this portion of the valley. They are Dos Costapeta R. 1

(Fossati 2007: 23) and especially Dos Sulif R. 1 (Fusco 1972: 34, tav. I), on which 13 Camunian roses of swastika type are also depicted (Fig. 14, a-d). While this complete iconographic set only appears in Fondo Squaratti and Dos Sulif, so far, the single association between the Camunian rose and the warrior is quite usual in Valcamonica (Farina 2001: 213). The most common combination includes a single human figure, but two or more warriors seemingly interacting with this symbol are also known, for example, at Bedolina R. 16, Zurla R. 3 or Foppe di Nadro R. 24. Among several areas of Paspardo, the Camunian rose is known to have occurred in at least 32 instances (Fossati 2007: 28-29) and follow a recurrent pattern: the swastika types and the quadrilobate types are mutually exclusive and never show up on the same rock<sup>28</sup>. Furthermore, besides Dos Sulif the swastika type is only found at Vite R. 57 (three instances), a rock surface located on the path that connects Fondo Squaratti to Dos Sulif, about halfway. The examples of Fondo Squaratti are thus far the roses at the lowest altitude identified in middle Valcamonica.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the incomplete Camunian roses of R. 2 are now the second recurrence known in Valcamonica, the first being that of Luine R. 38 (Fig. 15, e)<sup>29</sup>. In both cases two of the arms of the rose are unfinished, despite the fact that the nine dots are correctly arranged in the usual cross formation.

<sup>27</sup> At Dosso Giroldo similar armed figures are found in a unique mirrored composition of four humans and four circled cup-marks, where the anthropomorphs' arrangement recalls a sort of "Camunian-rose"-styled composition. A scientific study of this scene is still lacking, but an anticipation can be found in Arcà et al. 1997 [online].

<sup>28</sup> This notable trend is confirmed also in the other sites of Valcamonica having Camunian roses, with the unique exception of Sellero, where at Carpena R. 2 and Preda Mòla R. 1 the two types are carved on the same panel. For these occurrences see Sansoni 1987: 51, 56, 81.

<sup>29</sup> Farina 2001: 216, fig. 5. Again, Camunian roses left incomplete – that is, with all the nine dots marked but with the line not closing around them – are well-known, but this has been observed only among roses of quadrilobate type. See for example Sansoni & Gavaldo 1995: 50.



**Fig. 14:** R. 3: detail of a schematic "praying figure" (photography with oblique lighting; AM). / R. 3: dettaglio di un "orante" schematico (fotografia a luce radente: AM).

*Chronology.* Regarding the chronological attribution of the carved figures, we must first underline that the absence of useful superimpositions between the images on both rocks<sup>30</sup> hinders the formulation of a relative chronology. The only observation possible in this respect involves the shape of the complete Camunian rose on top of R. 2 A, which places its execution after the creation of the four marching warriors. Its lower arm, in fact, does not have the canonical circularity nor the size of the other three, and therefore seems intentionally deformed to avoid physical overlap with the underlying short blade held by one of the warriors (Fig. 16).

As far as the absolute chronology is concerned, some considerations regarding the main figurative subjects on both rocks bolster the dating to the early Iron Age, while other series of images, like for example the cup-marks on the right side of R. 2 sector A, would seem to elude specific chronological attribution due to their manifest simplicity and universality. Elements in support of this dating can be deduced from the strong association of the three principal subjects, namely the human figures with raised arms and short swords, the Camunian roses in the swastika type and, especially, the shovel figures, which constitute the only feasible archaeological comparison with known artefacts from material culture of Northern Italy.

The human figures of R. 2 and 3 offer an interesting case study, both chronologically and methodologically. They have mostly linear bodies, except for the "belly bulge" on some of them, arms orthogonally bent 90° upwards and lower limbs arranged in a reverse "V"

shape. All these morphological traits would cause some scholars, following one of the traditional chronological grids based on stylistic analysis, to interpret these figures as somewhat modified "praying figures" and therefore to date them to sometime in the Neolithic (Anati 1975), the Medium Bronze Age (Sansoni 2001), or the Final Bronze Age (Farina 2001: 212)<sup>31</sup>. On the other hand, Angelo Fossati in one of his latest stylistic reviews of the anthropomorphic figures dates this type human figure to the style IV-2 (between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC), mainly due to the body arrangement and the incipient naturalism of the general rendition (Fossati 2010: 132; de Marinis & Fossati 2012: 17-18).

It is undeniable that relying on stylistic analysis alone for the chronological assessment of a carved rock can be a risky choice. This kind of investigation is a useful tool for our field of study<sup>32</sup>, but needs constant verification and calibration, through the employment of all the tools at hand, such as context analysis, an associative organic evaluation of the engraved complexes and, especially, a flexible, non-dogmatic approach. Indeed, the case of Fondo Squaratti is a lucky one: the anthropomorphs, still partially "schematic" in their morphological appearance, possess a whole series of distinctive characteristics, such as proper body proportions, light armament, a slightly thicker bust (again, with the exception of the "belly bulged men"), feet arranged in the same direction and, most important of all, their organization as a coherent, elaborate scene<sup>33</sup>. All these elements would indicate the later dating to be preferable, falling somewhere

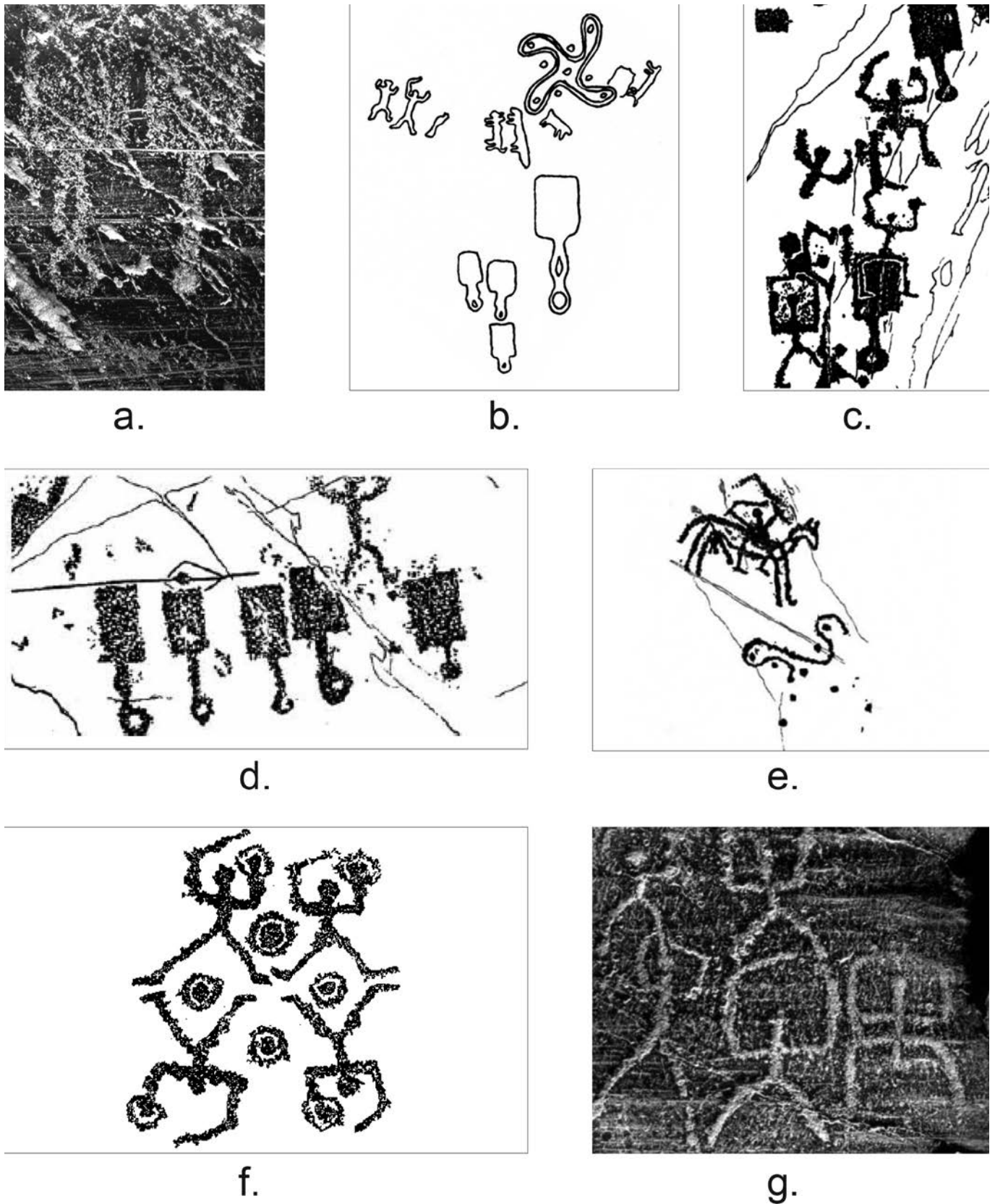
<sup>30</sup> On R. 3 a whirling line partly covers two human figures and touches the blade of a shovel, but this only occurrence of superimpositions evidently doesn't add any crucial information to the chronological issue.

<sup>31</sup> This is based on a modified version of the classical chronology of the praying figures as established by Anati 1975, after the "late chronological framework" of this figure from the Neolithic to the Final Bronze age as was first proposed in Ferrario 1994: 228 and later reprised with even more supporting elements in Arcà 2001.

<sup>32</sup> For a contrary position on this matter, see Bednarick 2002: 1214-1215.

<sup>33</sup> For an analysis of the scenes and compositions with a narrative intent in Valcamonica figurative culture, whether it be clear or only hinted at, see Marretta 2018: 277-289.





**Fig. 15:** Comparison with other sites: a., c., d., g. Dos Costapeta R. 1 (after Fossati 2008: 37, fig. 3.12; Id. 2007: 23, fig. 14; Id. 2016: 41, fig. 14; Id. 2007: 24, fig. 16), b. Dos Sulif R. 1 (after Fusco 1972: 34, Tav. I), e. Luine R. 38 (after Farina 2001: 216, fig. 5), f. Dosso Girollo, Grosio (after Arcà et al. 1997). / Confronti con altri siti di arte rupestre: a., c., d., g. Dos Costapeta R. 1 (da Fossati 2008: 37, fig. 3.12; Id. 2007: 23, fig. 14; Id. 2016: 41, fig. 14; Id. 2007: 24, fig. 16), b. Dos Sulif R. 1 (da Fusco 1972: 34, Tav. I), e. Luine R. 38 (da Farina 2001: 216, fig. 5), f. Dosso Girollo, Grosio (da Arcà et al. 1997).





**Fig. 16:** R. 2: detail of the point of convergence of the armed right hand of the anthropomorph and the lower arm of the "Camunian Rose" on top (night photography with oblique lighting; PR). / R. 2: dettaglio del punto di convergenza tra il braccio armato di spada dell'antropomorfo e il braccio inferiore della "Rosa Camuna" in alto (fotografia notturna a luce radente: PR).

between the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. This chronological reference for these anthropomorphic figures is all the more likely if we take into consideration their recurrent association with the accompanying figures.

The representations of shovels on the rocks of Valcamonica can effectively support this chronological framework, even if this figure has often been indicated as one of the markers of a transitional phase between the Final Bronze Age and the beginning of the Iron Age. This "high" chronology<sup>34</sup> was motivated mostly on the basis of their recurrent association with other figures, namely the anthropomorphic praying figures with orthogonal and/or V/U shaped limbs (Fossati 2008; Borgonovo 2009; Martinotti 2009)<sup>35</sup> and by their presence in fairly problematic engraved ensembles such as the one at Sonico-Coren delle Fate (Priuli 1999)<sup>36</sup>. The shovel, often referred to as "ritual", is a well-known northern Italian protohistoric artefact, one which has sparked speculation regarding its function (Ferri 1975; Sacchetti 2016), but also solid analyses in respect to typology and chronology (Zuffa 1956-1957; Gambacurta 1994; Sacchetti 2016: 321-325). Its origin as a real object can effectively be traced to the final phases of the Bronze Age, but it must be noted that its widespread diffusion incontrovertibly happened between the late 7<sup>th</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, when it is mostly found in funerary contexts of the Golasecca Culture, the Orientalizing phase of Bologna and especially the Venetic area (Fig. 18)<sup>37</sup>.

The images on the rocks of Valcamonica largely depict these la-



**Fig. 17:** R. 3: detail of one of the shovels with long ornated handle (photography with oblique lighting; AM). / R. 3: dettaglio di una delle palette con lungo manico decorato (fotografia a luce radente: AM).

ter Iron Age artefacts. They match with these productions both in the quadrangular shape of the blade, which is instead markedly rounder in the few known Bronze Age cases, and in the thick, long handle with pommel, which, again, is considerably thinner in the oldest examples found in the material culture<sup>38</sup>. Furthermore, the specific typology of shovels represented on the rocks at Fondo Squaratti, Dos Costapeta and Dos Sulif have ring-shaped eyelets in the middle of the handle (Fig. 17), a feature of fine metallic craftsmanship which is very similar to the shovels of Venetic (or Este) Type B, which are dated around the 6<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century BC (Zuffa 1956-1957; Gambacurta 1994).

<sup>34</sup> In some cases, following debatable associative relations, the first appearance of the shovel in Valcamonica rock engravings has even been dated to the Middle Bronze Age (Fossati 1997: 53-54; 2008: 37), yet it is somehow noted that the shovel also reappears in a practically identical shape (i.e. quadrangular blade and long handle with round pommel) during the 7<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> BC (Fossati 1997: 55-56).











<sup>35</sup> But the chronology of the praying figures is itself one of the most debated and uncertain topics in the Valcamonica figurative culture (Poggiani Keller et al. in press) and therefore its use as a chronological standpoint to establish further chronologies should be discouraged.

<sup>36</sup> It must be noted that the "shovel" ('paletta' in Italian) is a typical symbolic figure of the eastern side of Middle Valcamonica. Outside this main area of diffusion, which includes sites like Naquane, Foppe di Nadro, Campanine, Quattro Dossi or Paspardo and where it is widespread on many rocks, there is only the unusual concentration at Sonico-Coren delle Fate, at the northernmost part of Valcamonica, and only three isolated occurrences at Sellero, on the western side of the valley (Sansoni 1987: 32, 68). So far, no figure of the shovel has been identified on the many engraved areas around Seradina-Bedolina, or south of Breno.

<sup>37</sup> In this area bronze and iron shovels have been found also in settlements and cult sites (Gambacurta 1994).

<sup>38</sup> See for example the shovels from Badia Pavese in Zuffa 1956-1957: 122-125.



<i>Zuffa's geographic type</i>	<i>Zuffa's morphological Type</i>	<i>Morphology</i>	<i>Zuffa's dates</i>	<i>Geographic diffusion</i>	<i>Image</i>
<b>N Alpine and N Italian Group</b>	PAVIA–N ALPINE TYPE (Zuffa fig. 1.A)	Twisted handle with a fixed ring (round eyelet) with a triangular section. Flattened elliptical blade.	c.900–800 B.C.	Pavia–Switzerland–Austria	
<b>Villanovan + Bologna Group</b>	VILLANOVAN TYPE B (Zuffa fig. 1.G)	Open handle with elliptical gaps in the bulging central part and upper part, between 2 terminal round eyelets ("scissors handle"). Quadrangular blade [pan] with rounded angles.	c.700/700–650 B.C.	Bologna–Vetulonia	
<b>Central Italian Group</b>	CENTRAL TYPE (Zuffa fig. 1.D)	Flat rod handle with 2 pierced lobes bearing 2 mobile rings. Sub-quadrangular blade with rounded angles.	650–500 B.C.	Civita Castellana–Sovana–Belmonte Piceno	
	CHIUSI TYPE (Zuffa fig. 1.C)	Handle with round eyelet turned up perpendicularly towards the exterior. Quadrangular blade with rounded angles.	c.500 B.C.	Chiusi territory	
<b>N Italian Group</b>	COMO TYPE A (Zuffa fig. 1.B)	Twisted decorated handle with round eyelet. Sub-quadrangular blade with rounded angles.	c.600 B.C.(?)	Como	
	COMO TYPE B (Zuffa fig. 1.E)	Open handle with rhombus gap in the upper part, between 2 terminal round eyelets. Sub-quadrangular blade rounded on the lower side.	600–550 B.C.	Como	
	COMO TYPE C (Zuffa fig. 1.H)	Open handle with rhombus gap in the bulging central part and pentagonal gap in the upper part, between 2 terminal round eyelets. Sub-quadrangular blade rounded on the upper and lower sides.	550–500 B.C.	Como	
<b>N Italian Group</b>	ESTE TYPE A (Zuffa fig. 1.F)	Open handle with sub-circular gap in the upper part, between 2 terminal round eyelets. Quadrangular blade with rounded angles.	c.600 B.C.(?)	Venetian territory	
	ESTE TYPE B (Zuffa fig. 1.I)	Open handle, made by 2 joined rods forming an elliptical gap in the central part and a pentagonal gap in the upper part, between 2 terminal round eyelets. Quadrangular blade with rounded angles.	500–300 B.C.(?)	Venetian + Bologna territory	
	ESTE TYPE C (Zuffa fig. 1.L)	Massive flat rod handle with pierced sub-quadrangular termination. Trapezoidal blade with turned-up edges on the upper side (axe shape).	400–300 B.C.(?)	Venetian territory	

**Fig. 18:** Typo-chronological chart of the ritual shovels according to M. Zuffa and further elaboration by F. Sacchetti (after Sacchetti 2016: 316). / Tabella tipocronologica delle palette rituali secondo M. Zuffa e successiva rielaborazione di F. Sacchetti (da Sacchetti 2016: 316).

The generally accepted chronology of the Camunian roses proposed by Farina (1998, 2001), who identifies a major diffusion of the symbolic association between warriors and the swastika type roses to the 7<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC<sup>39</sup>, confirms the same timespan hinted at by the shovel images and the armed humans of Fondo Squaratti. Our analysis suggests that the strong scenic interdependence of the complete rose on R. 2 with the neighbouring warriors is clearly an intentional association due to the fact that it comes up again, almost identically, at Paspardo-Dos Sulif, a completely different site which is located 1,5 km up in the mountain from Fondo Squaratti.

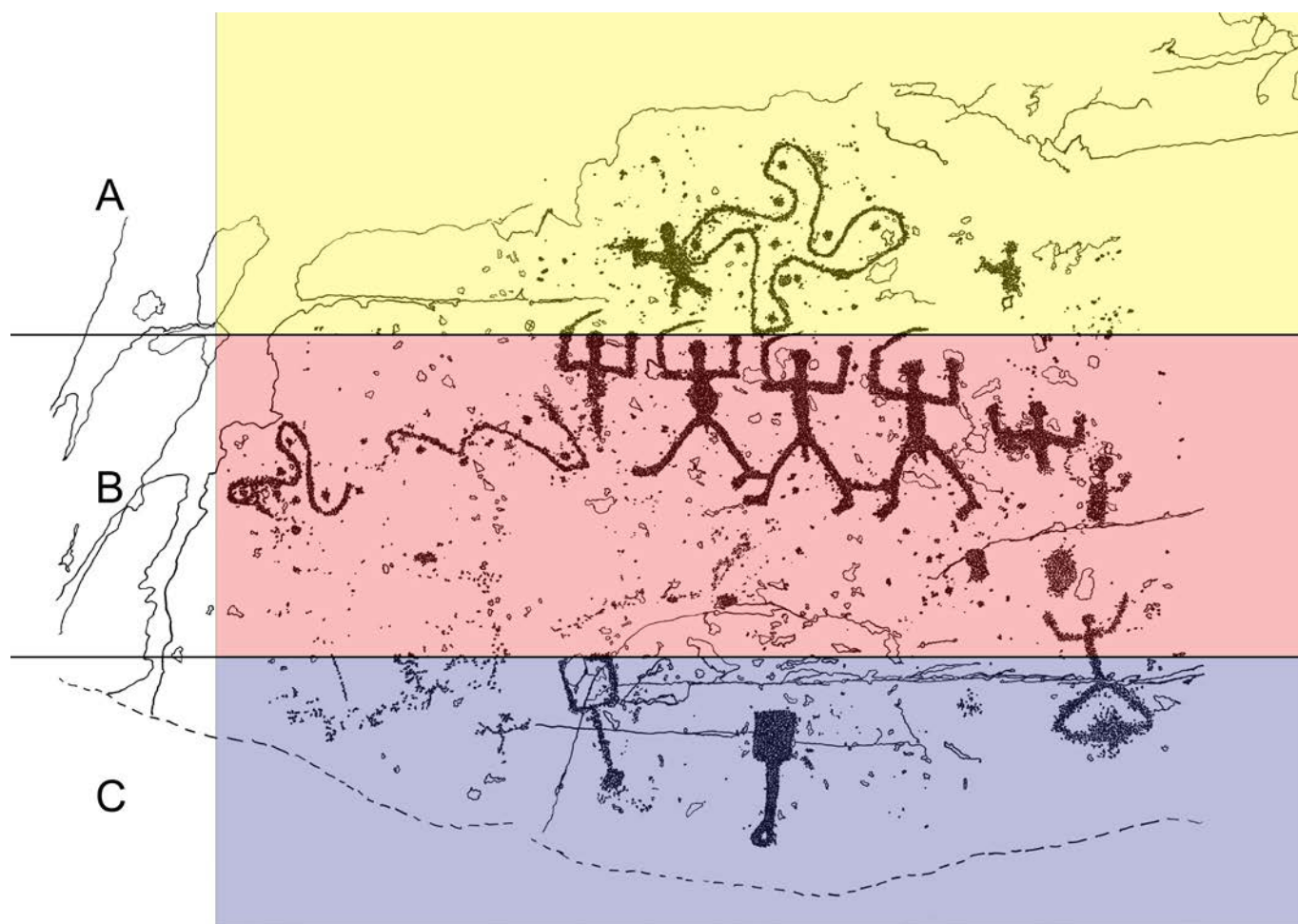
Finally, few observations must be devoted to the deep “bowls” of R. 2 sector D. As far as we know, there are limited possible comparisons. The first is located at Dos del Pater R. 5 and R. 9<sup>40</sup>, circa 600 m south from Fondo Squaratti, where carvings of the same sort (mainly deep cup-marks, with short connecting grooves and several quadrangular shapes) appear associated with linear humans in the “praying figure” pose (*oranti*). The second one can be observed at Grosio-Dosso Giroldo R. 11 and 14 (Valtellina)<sup>41</sup>, where the top portion of the rocks appear almost completely punctuated by deep cup-marks and small elongated basins, while the side is dominated by geometric compositions of rectangles which can be attributed to the same trend of “topographic” images found also in Valcamonica

and, as said, in the Quattro Dossi area.

*Interpretation.* From an interpretative point of view, it is clear that some degree of speculation can be put only on the more elaborate combination of images, which is represented by the scene on sector A of R. 2. The arrangement of humans and symbols in three horizontal bands grant an undoubtedly strong symbolic and possibly ritual value to the whole composition (Fig. 19). The location of the swastika rose on top could be decoded through its solar explanations, as one of the main interpretations of the Camunian rose underlines, on one side, its “protective” halo among the male concepts of power, strength and prestige showed by the frequently associated armed warriors (Farina 2001: 213).

A viable interpretation of the four warriors as active subjects of an armed dance – possibly part of an initiation rite or, more generally, a contest or a ritual match – can be formulated following the agonistic reading conjectured by Fossati for the fighting scenes of Naquane R. 1 depicted in association with the famous labyrinth (Fossati 1991: 63).

This interpretation can also be corroborated by iconographic evidence external to Valcamonica, among which is the decoration found on an *olpe* from Caere on display at the Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia in Rome and dated to the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC. It



**Fig. 19:** R. 2, sector A: triple vertical partition according to the interpretative analysis (elaboration CB, PR). / R. 2, settore A: tripartizione verticale secondo l'analisi interpretativa (elaborazione CB, PR).

<sup>39</sup> According to the same study, the Camunian rose in the quadrilobate variant substitutes the swastika variant around the 6<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century BC, becoming the dominant and more common type during the Late Iron Age (5<sup>th</sup>-1<sup>st</sup> cent. BC) (Farina 2001: 212).

<sup>40</sup> The engraved rocks known in the area are still unpublished. For a preliminary overview see Sansoni 2009b.

<sup>41</sup> For R. 11 see Pace 2019: 30, 44-45. For R. 14 see Pace 1972, Tav. II-III.



represents, along with other figures, a paramilitary scene featuring a soldierly duel reminding a peculiar exercise during which the fighter's movements are voluntarily inhibited, due to a possibly ritualistic context. In this *olpe's* side frieze two male characters recognizable as boxers face each other while oddly wearing a single shoe. According to Rizzo and Martelli (1993: 41-42) this scene could refer to the funeral games performed by the Argonauts in Lemnos.

It can therefore be cautiously assumed that these kind of representations among the pottery of Central Italy and the Valcamonica examples signal some similar sort of competitive contests of dexterity, in which the detail of the individual shoe or, for our part, the impediment of the tied legs epitomize different ways of deliberately hindering the fighter's movements. In the same interpretative framework, the "praying figure" on the central-lower part of the scene along with the "busts" and the incomplete anthropomorphs with raised upper limbs may enforce the ritual/ceremonial value of the collective scene<sup>42</sup>.

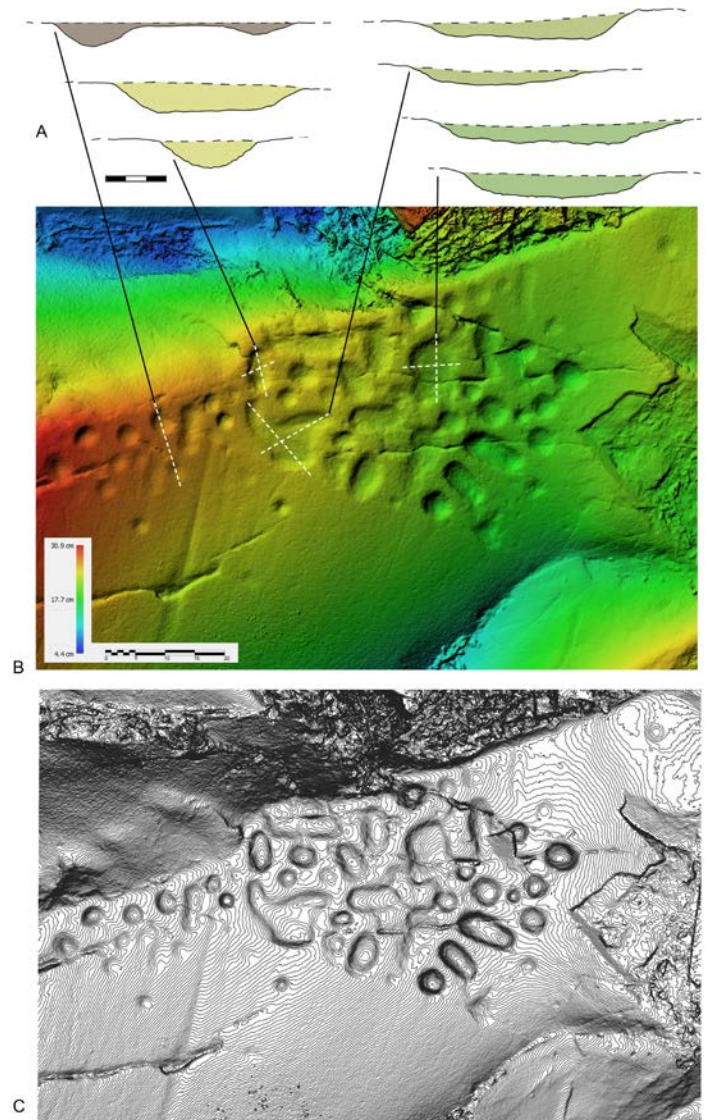
The presence of the shovels – on R. 3 even with three cases of unique typology and thus possibly connected to selected uses/situations – add more evidence in favour of the same ritual interpretation of this panel. Indeed, the shovels can be considered strong indicators of a precise social status as well as ritual tools possibly used in collecting the ashes of the deceased after the cremation rite (Fusco 1972: 32-33; Sacchetti 2016)<sup>43</sup>. On R. 2 their location close to the ground level, and in general in the lowest part of the scene, could perhaps hint to the funerary/underworld realm, in contrast to the uranic/celestial element represented by the Camunian rose positioned at the top<sup>44</sup>.

A substantial symbolic value could even be hypothesized for the shallow cup-marks on the right side of R. 2 sector A (Fig. 9), although their uneven arrangement seemingly weakens their already limited exegetic possibilities. Among the interpretations proposed by the scholars who focused on this specific subject (Arcà & Rubat Borel 2015; Sansoni 1995), the one which identifies some degree of concordance with the geometry created by constellation of stars (Milstreu & Dodd 2018: 6-11) is in this case particularly fascinating, albeit highly speculative. On R. 2A this idea would seem to gain support, given that the cup-marks in this portion of the rock are not only unusable as containers (the panel is markedly oblique and they are too shallow) but also associated with other possibly "celestial" figures, such as the "swastika" rose on top of the collective scene.

On the other hand, the hypothetical purpose of the carvings on sector D of R. 2 seems quite different due to their peculiar morphology and their noteworthy placement on a horizontal portion of the rock (Fig. 20). In fact, as recently proposed for this type of particularly large and deep bowls, also found in other parts of Europe (Milstreu & Dodd 2018), we could interpret them as proper containers, maybe for liquids or combustion materials. This latter interpretation was proposed, for example, for the "rocce coppellate" of the Val Viaschina (Piemonte region), where the rocks marked by many cup-marks have been seen as sacred boulders, in which small ritual fires were lit for propitiatory purposes (Astini 1972).

Furthermore, their possible use as "offering tables" dedicated to specific divinities is also reported by a Roman inscription of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD found in the sanctuary of Panóias (Portugal). The text, which is still the only direct mention of "ritual" activity on carved rocks in Roman times, describes how certain parts of the sacrificial victim were manipulated and each placed in a specific "bowl", and more precisely that the entrails had to be burned in the square ca-

vities while the blood had to be poured into the round ones<sup>45</sup>. Of course, this mention is evocative, but the different context to which it belongs, both chronological and cultural, suggests caution. In any case, their different physical features distinctly separate these cup-marks (or "bowls") from all the other figures on the two rocks, as does their position, and links them more to a functional interpretation than to a symbolic and iconographic one, to which all the other figures respond.



**Fig. 20:** R. 2, sector D: the deep cup-marks and bowls with grooves. A. Profiles (particular); B. DEM and C. Level curves (elaboration of 3D photogrammetric modelling: AM, PR). / R. 2, settore D: le profonde coppelle e vaschette con canaline. A. Sezioni (particolare); B. DEM e C. Curve di livello (elaborazione da modello fotogrammetrico 3D: AM, PR).

<sup>42</sup> The incomplete human figure often identified as "busts" have occasionally been associated with the underworld. See Ragazzi 1994; Ghilotti 2015.

<sup>43</sup> For uses more linked to the female realm and especially the "cooking" of special food for fertility rituals on the border of crops and cultivated fields see Gambacurta 1994: 158. This is especially evident in the Venetic area, where, for example, the shovel of Venetic (or Este) type B is said to belong to female burials of high social status (ibid.: 157). A relatively new interpretation which read the shovel as a tool implemented during rituals involving the prestigious consumption of meat is in Martinotti 2009.

<sup>44</sup> A similar interpretation was also proposed by V. Fusco for the combined presence of swastika roses and shovels at Dos Sulif (Fusco 1972: 38). Quite isolated at the time, now this idea finds strong reinforcing arguments in R. 2A of Fondo Squaratti.

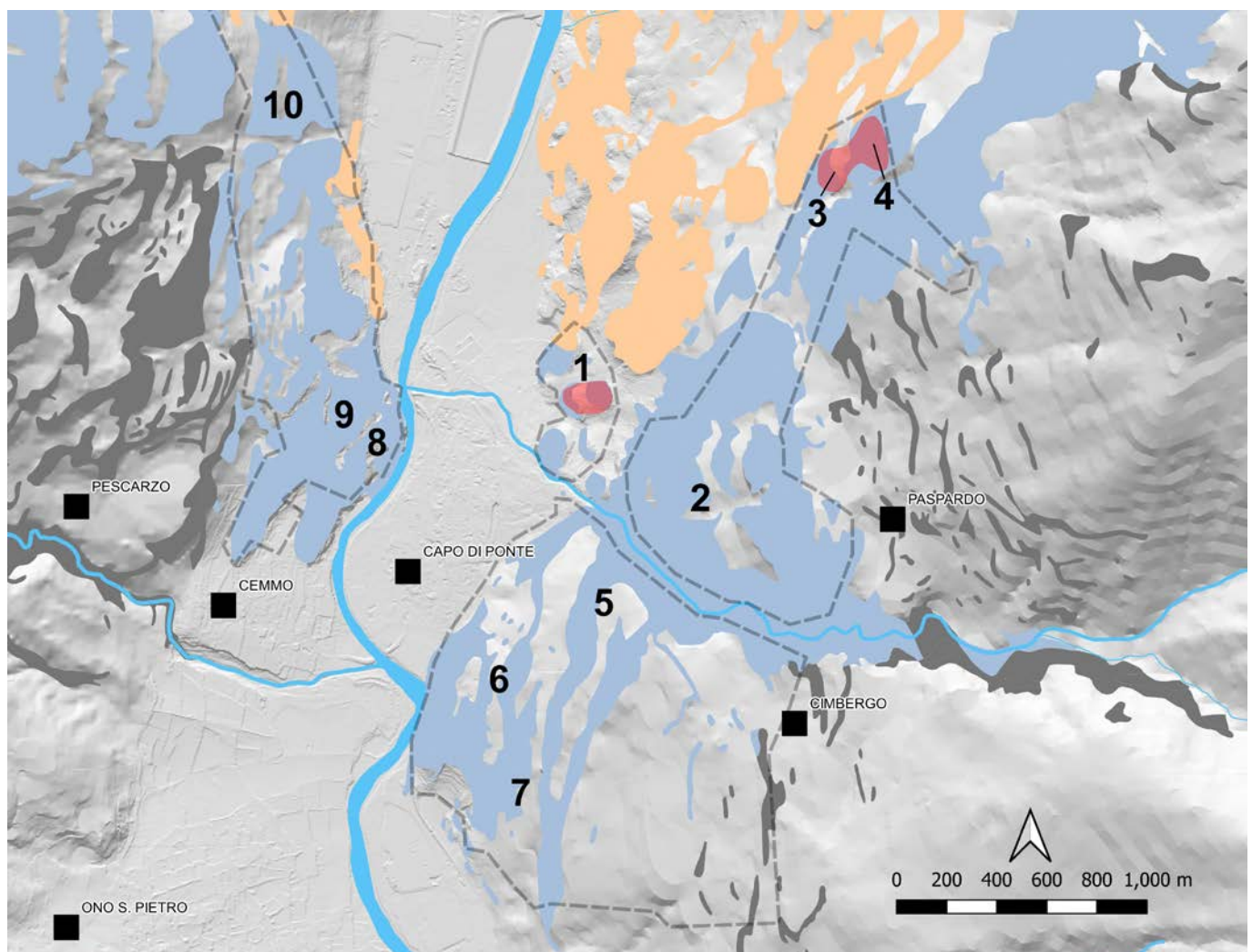
<sup>45</sup> CIL II, 2395e: Diis [deabusque templi]/ huius. Hostiae, quae ca/dunt, hic immolantur. / Exta intra quadrata / contra cremantur. Sanguis / laticulis iuxta/ superfunditur. / [G(iaus) C(.) Calp(urnius) Rufinus v(ir) c(larissimus)]. See Alföldy 1995: 252-258 for this proposed reading. The text is cited with a different reading in Sansoni 1995: 186.

### Discussion and conclusion (PR, AM, CB)

The new data from Fondo Squaratti allow for the presentation of a series of topics of great interest, but also raise a few questions that will need to be clarified in the future.

As we have seen in the iconographic analysis, some recurrent elements point toward the identification of a compact and well-defined “shared package” of figures and style, geographically distributed in a precise area of the eastern side of middle Valcamonica during the Early Iron Age. It is not for us to say whether this “shared package” could have had some obscure ritual meaning, maybe as a formal conditioning, or if it was the personal style of a specific executioner, a sort of local “author”<sup>46</sup>. What we can instead point out is that the same geographical affinity had already been highlighted for other categories of images (Rondini et al. 2018: 25), such as the com-

positions of geometric elements often interpreted as “topographic”, which belong to a much older period (Late Neolithic/Copper Age). These same iconographical and geographical recurrences across the millennia would therefore seem to echo some sort of communality between the Quattro Dossi area and the Paspardo sites. One possible explanation involves the hypothesis that these places worked dynamically together, as the “lowest outpost” (around 400 m asl) and the “upper instalments” (around 1050 m asl) for the same group of people, and therefore also shared the same distinctive rock manifestations. Given the absence of proof of stable frequentation in Paspardo, we could also infer a different use of the land between the lower part (settlement) and the upper part (cult? Pasture? Both?). Today our limited and biased knowledge of the landscape forces us to perceive the two sites as separate, but we need to assume that vertical movement of people in the mountains during prehistoric times must have been widespread and frequent, and therefore the



**Fig. 21:** The area of Capo di Ponte with rock art distribution areas (dashed lines), the localization of the “shared iconographic package” (red) and underlying geology (light blue = sandstone; light orange = schist; dark gray = limestone): 1. Quattro Dossi; 2. Paspardo, Vite; 3. Paspardo, Dos Costapeta; 4. Paspardo, Dos Sulif; 5. Campanine; 6. Naquane; 7. Foppe di Nadro; 8. Seradina; 9. Bedolina; 10. Pià d’Ort (Lidar DTM 1 m and geological data by Regione Lombardia, GIS elaboration: AM). / L’area di Capo di Ponte con le aree incise (linea tratteggiata), la localizzazione del “pacchetto iconografico condiviso” (rosso) e il substrato lapideo (azzurro=arenaria; arancione chiaro=scisto; grigio=calcarei): 1. Quattro Dossi; 2. Paspardo, Vite; 3. Paspardo, Dos Costapeta; 4. Paspardo, Dos Sulif; 5. Campanine; 6. Naquane; 7. Foppe di Nadro; 8. Seradina; 9. Bedolina; 10. Pià d’Ort (Lidar DTM 1 m e dati geologici forniti da Regione Lombardia, elaborazione GIS: AM).

<sup>46</sup> The issue of the possible authorship assessment of the rock carvings in Valcamonica has been explored especially in Fossati 2011 and, with a different theoretical and methodological position, in Marretta 2018: 243-256.



two sites could easily have been perceived as the same land.

By all means, the Quattro Dossi area occupies a strategic location. The lowland but dominant position of these hillocks grants them easy control on both the crossing of the Re stream, the main half-altitude pathway running S-N along the valley and the probable ford on the Oglio river, which must have been just a few hundred meters away (Marretta 2018: 295-302). By a territorial perspective, the Quattro Dossi are also the gateway to the path which leads to the higher territories along the trail known as *"Bial do le Scale"* (a dialectical expression which could roughly be translated as "the path of the stairs"): the distribution of rock carvings marks the entirety of the territory crossed by this path, a testament to its ancient tradition.

A dedicated consideration must be devoted to the concept of liminality. The geographical location of the mentioned sites (Fig. 21) evidences their alignment along the northern "border" of the engraved area of this part of valley. The number of carved rock surfaces north of the ideal line that links Fondo Squaratti (at the lower part of the valley) to Paspardo-Dos Sulif (at the medium-high valley) dramatically decreases to almost none. This borderline placement certainly finds a viable solution in the geological change, as in these two places the sandstone abruptly gives way to the much rougher schist. A strong connection between the execution of rock engravings and the underlying sandstone is clearly perceivable on both sides of Middle Valcamonica, where images and smooth bedrock seem to match exactly on an impressively extended area. On the other hand, it must also be considered that while the preference of sandstone surfaces is clearly the most successful in Valcamonica, it is certainly not exclusive, as the northern sites of Sellero, Edolo and Sonico demonstrate. The "marginality" of the figurative shared package here identified,

and its relationship with the other more "central" areas, such as Nacquane and Campanine di Cimbergo, is a theme on which it will be necessary to return when our knowledge of the iconographical and archaeological aspects of this area will be more substantial. It would not be too surprising to find the "borders" of the areas marked by a special range of images, which instead would rarely or almost never appear in the core locations.

On the archaeological side, the presence of both material culture and figurative culture at the same site includes Fondo Squaratti in a very short list of special places in Valcamonica, but the material data we possess are still very much preliminary. As far as we can tell, at Fondo Squaratti a manifest synchronicity between the carving of the two rocks, dated to the end of the Early Iron Age (somewhere between the late 7<sup>th</sup> and the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC), and the stable frequentation of the site is still lacking. The artefacts we collected until now seem to belong to approximately five centuries earlier, thus marking a visible asynchrony between dwelling and rock carving. A working hypothesis could indicate a general comparison with Dosso Giroldo, a rocky hill at Grosio, in Valtellina, where some figures of deep bowls and grooves, much similar to the ones on Fondo Squaratti R. 2D, were found on some rocks in the proximity of a settlement with housing structures dated to the Bronze Age, mostly to its later stages (Poggiani Keller 1995: 59-63).

The prosecution of the Quattro Dossi project, which will certainly involve the expansion of the research on the site and the complete documentation and study of the carved rocks of the area, will also follow these leads, for a better understanding of the rock engravings as an archaeological phenomenon.



**Fig. 22:** The Quattro Dossi area from the *"Bial do le Scale"* path, around halfway to Paspardo (photography: PR). / L'area dei Quattro Dossi dal sentiero di *"Bial do le Scale"*, circa a metà percorso verso Paspardo (fotografia: PR).

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