

The rock carvings of RocceRè.....A message coming from 4000 years ago...

To-day Valle Maira, Varaita, Grana and Po, rich in typical natural beauties, situated in the province of Cuneo, are also known thanks to their heritage of rock carvings, above all Valle Maira with its rock area of RocceRè. Down the ages, man expressed his religiosity communicating with his divinities by painted, engraved or shaped figurations, making use of all sorts of materials: stone, wood, ceramic, metal.

What rock carvings are.

Rock carvings are marks intentionally made by man on rocky surfaces. One can find them especially on horizontal or slightly inclined rocks, even if some rare examples on vertical face are known.

How cup-shaped rock carvings (= coppelle) were made.

The most ancient "coppelle" – Bronze Age – (without small canals of junction) were made using two simultaneous techniques of execution: percussion and rotatory rubbing by means of quartz tools.

Where most one can find rock carvings in Italy.

Rock carvings generally were found in mountain environments, in dominating areas, exposed to the sun and often near water springs.

Val Maira, with its site RocceRè (Comune di Roccabruna) is to be considered one of the most important rupestrian art deposits in Italy. After Valcamonica and Valtellina, it can be said the third most important Rupestrian Art site of Bronze Age in Italy.

We can find other important national sites in Lunigiana (between Liguria and Toscana), on Baldo Mountain (between the provinces of Trento and Verona), in Alto Adige and in Aosta.

Minor sites concerning the number of carvings, but not less important for this reason, are placed in the West Alps: in the valleys of Pinerolo and in four valleys of Cuneo: Valle Po, Varaita, Maira and Grana.

How many rock carvings there are in the site of RocceRè.

A global census has not yet finished. In 1991 Riccardo Baldi, the finder of the cup-shaped rock carvings, counted 3249. They represent: a splendid one of the kind anthropomorph, another gigantesque figure still under examination, several cross-shaped iconographies, "triscele", arch and spiral. At the present time we can reckon that carvings are over 5000.

When rock carvings were made on RocceRè.

When the Wurmiana Glaciation came to the end, Valle Maira, as well as almost all the alpine valleys, saw the first human presences between 12.000 and 8.000 years ago.

Relative to this period (for the moment), there do not seem to be any provable traces.

From 3000 to 1000 B.C. about a strong temperature rise with Mediterranean climate encouraged human settlements considerably at much higher altitudes (it is significant that in Scandinavia vine was grown in that period). These were the centuries of the conquest (considered in its broadest sense of large migrations) of the Alps from Indo-European peoples.

This period lies within the Bronze Age (2200-900 B.C.). The dating was established through two parameters: a) comparison of carvings with others already dated ; b) test by C. 14 on ancient dated over 4000 years ago camp-fires.

The presence of "coppelle" which are very abraded and other ones which are much more intact, let us presume that the site was frequented for several hundred years. Therefore carvings were already in the early Bronze Age.

Who were the ancient authors of the rock carvings ?

The ancient authors of these carvings were men generally devoted to agriculture. They grew barley, oats, millet. They usually harvested fruits of the forest such as strawberries, blackberries and raspberries. During this period hunting became less and less important as far as to be economically insignificant. They were mainly sheep and goats farmers because they could obtain not only meat but also and above all wool and milk from them. Most of them were Indo-European, that is coming from the east of the present-day Europe.

At the beginning of the Bronze Age the settlements were placed above all on the top of hills in order to defend themselves better. RocceRè is a classic example of an ideal position for that period.

The houses were built with wooden stakes and thatched roofs.

For what purpose rock carvings were made?

On the basis of the representations on "petroglifi" and of the archeological findings of this period, the dominant religion seems to be centred on the worship of a sunny god (the cross is a sunny symbol). Sun and fire worship, the custom of cremating bodies by the fire, are probably cultural features correlated among them.

During the Bronze Age magic practices are entrusted to a new figure: the priest (Maybe the anthropomorph of RocceRè ?). The "coppelle" represent sunny symbols in many cases; in others they may be also the product of an excavation to obtain the powder of these rocks, who knows.....perhaps it was considered to be thaumaturgical; in some other cases they may be interpreted as an offer to the divinities, a prayer of thanksgiving, or a prayer of intercession (to give a recent example, we can also compare them to the present "ex voto" or "voto richiesto" that we can find as icons in so many sanctuaries of ours..)

Experts agree in thinking that rock carvings were made on the occasion of celebratory, commemorative, initiatory or propitiatory rites, on special occasions, under the direction of priests-shamans-medicine men-chiefs.