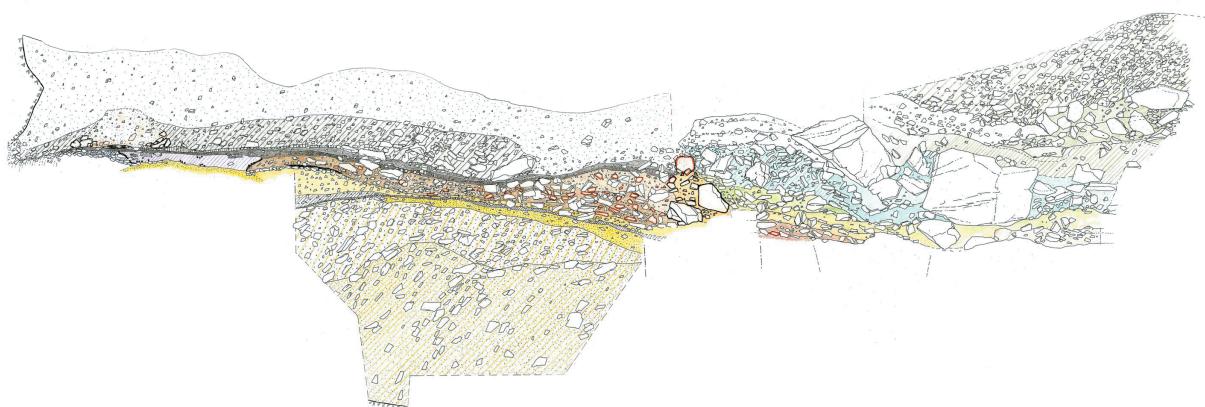


**STUDI SU RIPARO  
DALMERI  
(GRIGNO - TRENTO)**

**RITUALITÀ E FREQUENZA UMANA**

a cura di G. Dalmeri e A. Cusinato





## Introduzione

La Sezione di Paleontologia Umana e Preistoria del Museo Tridentino di Scienze Naturali, secondo gli accordi stabiliti con la Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici della Provincia Autonoma di Trento, da circa trent'anni è impegnata in ricerche sistematiche che hanno permesso di delineare un quadro articolato sulle culture e sulle modalità di vita dei primi colonizzatori dei territori alpini dopo il definitivo ritiro dei ghiacciai würmiani dalla regione atesina. Tali dati hanno messo in luce la stretta relazione che intercorre tra i modelli di sfruttamento del territorio e dell'organizzazione sociale dei gruppi umani e la ricostruzione degli antichi paesaggi. Particolare attenzione è stata dunque prestata all'analisi dei processi di adattamento dell'uomo al progressivo mutare dell'ambiente.

In questo quadro viene proposto un aggiornamento delle ricerche condotte nel sito epigravettiano di Riparo Dalmeri, che rientra in un progetto di grande entità e rilevanza scientifica (Altopiano dei Sette Comuni-Marcèsina, Grigno). Gli scavi nel sottoroccia, iniziati nel 1991, continuano tuttora sotto la direzione del dott. Giampaolo Dalmeri del Museo Tridentino di Scienze Naturali, con la collaborazione di una *équipe* di studiosi di varie università e istituti scientifici.

Nel 1997 a Trento ebbe luogo la XXXIII Riunione Scientifica dell'Istituto Italiano di Preistoria e Protostoria dal titolo *Preistoria e Protostoria del Trentino AltoAdige/Südtirol* in ricordo di Bernardino Bagolini, durante la quale vennero esposti, tra le altre relazioni, i primi risultati delle indagini a Riparo Dalmeri. Gli atti del convegno vennero pubblicati nel n. 34.1998 di *Preistoria Alpina* e come Atti dell'I.I.P.P., Firenze 2002.

Nel 2003 venne organizzato a Verona il simposio *Pitture paleolitiche nelle Prealpi Venete - Grotta di Fumane e Riparo Dalmeri*. In quell'occasione venne fatto il punto sui recenti risultati degli scavi a Riparo Dalmeri.

Gli scavi hanno messo in luce una sequenza di livelli intensamente antropizzati riferibili all'Epigravettiano recente. Riparo Dalmeri è uno dei rari insediamenti di montagna dove i resti faunistici si sono conservati, contribuendo in modo significativo alla ricostruzione delle modalità dello sfruttamento delle risorse naturali e del paleoambiente da parte dei cacciatori-raccoglitori epigravettiani. In quattordici anni di ricerche, le indagini svolte hanno consentito di acquisire una notevole quantità di informazioni sull'organizzazione dello spazio abitativo, sulla produzione artistica, quale l'arte mobiliare su pietra calcarea, e su alcuni aspetti della spiritualità.

L'aggiornamento proposto si riferisce ad alcuni momenti della ricerca inerenti l'arte e la ritualità; segue un'analisi relativa alla problematica funzionale dei manufatti litici connessa all'area ovest del riparo sottoroccia; si esaminano, quindi, i manufatti in materia dura animale, con un lavoro di base, l'industria litica, in particolare le armature, e i resti antropologici.





## The discovery of a painted anthropomorphic figure at Riparo Dalmeri and new insights into alpine Epigravettian art

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**SUMMARY -** *The discovery of a painted anthropomorphic figure at Riparo Dalmeri and new insights into alpine Epigravettian art* - The interpretation and the significance of the Palaeolithic rock and mobiliary art are an open widely discussed question. In the case of European Palaeolithic mobiliary production, one of the key barriers has been the scarcity of accurate contextual documentation. The Epigravettian site of Riparo Dalmeri offers a rare opportunity to study a portable art assemblage in a well-preserved archaeological context. The present work is aimed at reporting the discovery of the painted stones recovered in 2003 and 2004, focusing on the art and the ritual behaviour of the hunter-gatherers, who occupied this site. The anthropic deposit, dated by <sup>14</sup>C to the Allerød interstadial, can be divided in two main settlement phases. The earliest of these is strictly linked to the presence of the 187 red-ochre painted stones. Radiocarbon dating of a charcoal fragments associated with the painted stones indicate an age of c. 13,200 cal BP. These recent discoveries permit us to hypothesize that the hunters marked out an area in which a number of ritual actions took place. Even if we cannot specify the complexity of this ritual, we can suggest 3 major actions. First, they selected the stones from the host rock rubble; second, they painted the stones with ochre, using wax as a paint binder; and finally they deposited these art-works upside-down hiding the images. In this setting, the human figure on the RD211 stone which differs greatly from the other paintings in the type of figure depicted, its size and its position on the top of an artificial pile so as to be higher than the others, could have played a central role.

**RIASSUNTO -** *La scoperta di una pittura antropomorfa a Riparo Dalmeri e alcune osservazioni sull'arte epigravettiana dell'area alpina* - L'interpretazione e il significato dell'arte mobiliare e parietale dei cacciatori-raccoglitori paleolitici è un tema ampiamente dibattuto. Nel caso della produzione mobiliare paleolitica europea, una delle difficoltà attuali consiste nell'assenza di documentazione accurata sul contesto di rinvenimento della produzione artistica. Il sito epigravettiano di Riparo Dalmeri offre la rara possibilità di studiare un insieme di arte mobiliare all'interno di un contesto archeologico ben conservato. Il presente lavoro rappresenta un aggiornamento delle scoperte sulle pietre dipinte venute in luce negli anni di scavo 2003-2004 e vuole offrire una riflessione sull'arte e la ritualità espressa dai cacciatori-raccoglitori che hanno frequentato il sito. Il deposito antropico, attribuibile tramite <sup>14</sup>C all'interstadio dell'Allerød, può essere suddiviso in due principali fasi di occupazione, la più antica delle quali è legata alla deposizione e strutturazione delle 187 pietre dipinte. Le date <sup>14</sup>C ottenute da frammenti di carboni associati alle pietre dipinte collocano questa prima fase di occupazione attorno ai 13.200 anni cal BP. Le recenti scoperte suggeriscono che sulla più antica superficie di calpestio del riparo sia stata delimitata un'area dove venivano svolte azioni di tipo rituale. Sebbene la complessità del rito ci sfugga, è possibile ipotizzare che almeno tre azioni venissero compiute: la scelta delle pietre dal deposito di crollo, l'atto pittorico, realizzato con l'utilizzo di un pigmento (ocra rossa) e di un legante organico (cera d'api), e la deposizione delle pietre con la faccia decorata rivolta verso il basso. All'interno di quest'area "sacra", la figura umana rappresentata sulla pietra RD211, che si distingue nettamente per la postura ieratica della figura, per le dimensioni del dipinto e per la collocazione su di un accumulo artificiale di blocchi calcarei in posizione più elevata rispetto alle altre pietre dipinte, potrebbe aver svolto un ruolo centrale.

**Key words:** Sette Comuni plateau, recent Epigravettian, mobiliary art, anthropomorphic figures, spirituality

**Parole chiave:** Altopiano dei Sette Comuni, Epigravettiano recente, arte mobiliare, figura antropomorfa, spiritualità

## 1. THE SITE

The Dalmeri Rockshelter is located on the north-eastern edge of the Sette Comuni Plateau in the eastern Italian Alps ( $45^{\circ}59'37''\text{N}$ ,  $11^{\circ}36'8''\text{E}$ ), 1240 m above sea level. From 1991 a long-term research project has been undertaken and co-ordinated by the Human Palaeontological Department of the Museo Tridentino di Scienze Naturali (Trento, Italy). Excavations brought to light a sequence of anthropic levels with Recent Epigravettian remains, which were dated to the Late-Glacial interstadial by radiocarbon ages.

The shelter opens at the head of a small periglacial valley facing north-east. It is c. 30 m long according to the NNE-SSW axis, c. 7 m deep and c. 4 m high. The morphogenesis of the shelter is the result of the differential erosion of the stratified limestone bedrock (oolitic lithofacies of the Jurassic Rotzo Formation), due to the combined action of carbonate dissolution and cryogenic processes which acted after the Last Glacial Maximum.

The 4 m-thick investigated stratigraphic succession spans from the Late-Glacial to the Holocene and includes a pre-settlement phase consisting of series of cryogenic deposits referable to cold climatic conditions. The lowermost deposit (LU – lower units, US 54), associated with karstic and/or colluvial carbonatic silt, lies on the bedrock (Fig. 1a). Towards the top, the finer fraction records a variable content of eolian silt in the units 51, 52, 53 (UES, units with eolic sediments) (Fig. 1a). This group of units, dated to  $13,590-13,250\text{ }^{14}\text{C cal BP }2\sigma$  (Tab. 1), is overlapped by open-work deposit (PSU – pre-settlements units, UUSS 15b, 50; Fig. 1a).

The earliest human occupation is tied with the painted stones structure (PSS, Fig. 1a) and is subdivided into the units UUSS 74, 15a, 65, 26d-e. The structure US 74 consists of piled stones, on the top of which the largest painted stone RD 211 was recovered (Fig. 1a). US 74 is partially covered by another deposit (US 65), rich in organic matter and anthropogenic components such as lithic artefacts, faunal remains, charcoals and other remains associated with numerous red-ochre painted stones. Near the piled stones, US 65 thickens up to 45 cm and gradually decreases towards the inner shelter zone. Most of the painted stones were recovered from this unit (Fig. 1b). By contrast, few of them are scattered in the cryoclastic deposit of US 15a. The distribution pattern of these stones draws a 30 sqm-belt more than 4 m wide, running east-west and inclined towards the rockwall (Fig. 1b). Human occupation during this

phase is proved by the painted stones structure, two hearths and the first evidence of a dwelling structure with a diameter of 4 m (Fig. 1b-c). This phase is dated by 3 ages  $13,410-13,210$ ,  $13,300-13,120$  and  $13,300-12,940\text{ }^{14}\text{C cal BP }2\sigma$ .

The overlying Epigravettian dwelling floors (EDF – UUSS 26c, 26b-14) define a sequence of Ah horizons connected to anthropic activity. They develop on the US 15a and are characterised by micaceous silty loam sediment with high organic matter content, associated to anthropogenic components (Angelucci & Peresani 2001). The two main archaeological levels 26c 26b-14 have been excavated over an area of 84 sqm (Fig. 1a-b). There, a large amount of lithic industry, faunal remains, bone artefacts, five human decidual and one adult tooth, ornamental objects and engraved cortical flakes were recovered. The structures in the 26c and 26b-14 units identify a central and a western zones in the rockshelter. In the central zone 2 hearths have been brought to light, whereas in the western area a dwelling structure including a combustion area and a cumulus of faunal remains were recognised. In this stratigraphic complex, the archaeozoology (Cassoli *et al.* 1999) reveals evidence of specialised hunting of *capra ibex*, which represents the 90% of all the identifiable faunal remains. This analysis allowed the interpretation of the site as a seasonal mountain camp occupied during summer and autumn. The chronological phase of the dwelling floors, dated to  $13,310-12,940$  and  $13,130-12,900\text{ }^{14}\text{C cal BP }2\sigma$ , is consistent with the lithic artefacts typology (Tab. 1).

The upper sequence is formed by stratified deposits (UU – upper units, UUSS 2-21) mainly complete or partial clastic support (Fig. 1a).

## 2. THE MOBILIARY ART

Before the year 2000, the research project focused on the palaeoeconomy and the spatial organisation of the site. Following the discovery of 217 red ochre painted stones, which took place from 2001 to 2004, the interpretation of the Dalmeri Rockshelter began to touch the artistic-religious sphere (Dalmeri *et al.* 2004, 2005). The red ochre naturalistic silhouettes were painted on oolitic grainstone, taken from the pre-settlement deposits. The average size of the stones is c.  $15 \times 11 \times 6\text{ cm}$ . The majority of the painted stones (73.5%) had their decorated side face-down and in contact with the ground. The paintings were almost completely hidden by calcium carbonate patina. Restoration revealed different types of figures: 9 anthropomorphic, 2 handprints (one positive and one

figurative), 25 zoomorphic, 23 signs and 165 marked red ochre traces (Figs. 2-4). Twenty-five stones also preserved a minute red ochre mark on the opposite side. The zoomorphic figures, mostly representing

herbivores, are characterised by similar modes of representation (Fig. 4). We here report only two examples: the use of the natural features of the stones to increase the plastic effect of the images and the

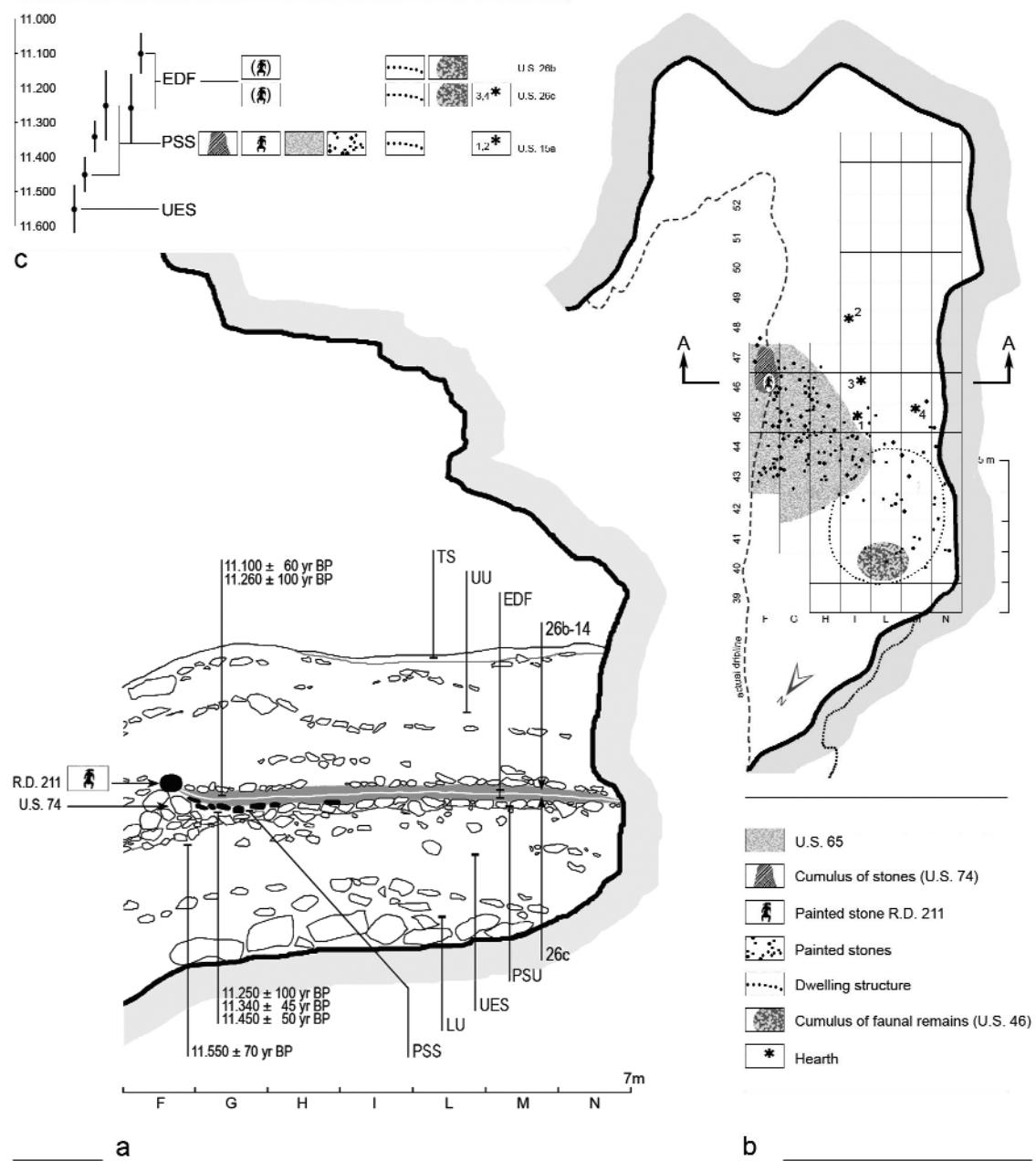


Fig. 1 - a. Stratigraphic schematic section A-A showing radiocarbon dates and layer relations of the Dalmeri Rockshelter (LU = lowermost units, UES = units with eolic sediment, PSU= pre-settlement units, PSS= painted stone structures, EDF= Epigravettian dwelling floors, UU= upper units, TS= top soil); b. Site plan depicting the location of the principle anthropic structures identified in the site; c. Age ranges of the layer phases, showing the relationship between the painted stones structure (PSS) and the dwelling floor structures (EDF).

*Fig. 1 - a. Sezione stratigrafica schematica A-A che evidenzia le datazioni radiometriche e i rapporti stratigrafici tra i livelli di Riparo Dalmeri (LU= lowermost units, UES= units with eolic sediment, PSU= pre-settlement units, PSS= painted stone structures, EDF= Epigravettian dwelling floors, UU= upper units, TS= top soil); b. Pianta del sito che indica la localizzazione delle principali strutture antropiche identificate nel sito; c. Diagramma che evidenzia la relazione tra le diverse fasi di frequentazione del sito, in particolare il rapporto tra la strutturazione a pietre dipinte PSS e le strutture in fase con i suoli d'abitato.*

Tab. 1 - The radiocarbon dates, measured on charcoals coming from the layers of Dalmeri Rockshelter, were obtained in the following laboratories: UtC (Faculteit der Natur- en Sterrenkunde, University of Utrecht, Holland); Rome (Dipartimento di Scienza della Terra, University of Rome, Italy); KI, KIA (Leibniz Labor, University of Kiel, Germany). Calibration was carried out by using the OxCal v.3.10 software program (Bronk Ramsey 1995).

*Tab. 1 - La date radiometriche su carboni di focolare provenienti dai livelli di Riparo Dalmeri sono state ottenute nei seguenti laboratori: UtC (Faculteit der Natur- en Sterrenkunde, Università di Utrecht, Olanda); Rome (Dipartimento di Scienza della Terra, Università di Roma); KI, KIA (Leibniz Labor, Università di Kiel, Germania). La calibrazione è stata ottenuta tramite il seguente programma: OxCal v.3.10 software program (Bronk Ramsey 1995).*

Layer (phase)	Laboratory number	Dating method	Age BP 1 σ range	Calibrated Age BP 2 σ range	Material dated
26b (edf)	UtC-6777	<sup>14</sup> C	11,100±60	13,130-12,900	Charcoal
14 (edf)	KI-3634	<sup>14</sup> C	11,260±100	13,310-12,940	Charcoal
26e (pss)	Rome-657	<sup>14</sup> C	11,250±100	13,300-12,940	Charcoal
26d (pss)	KIA-20345	<sup>14</sup> C	11,340±45	13,300-13,120	Charcoal
65 (pss)	KIA-20341	<sup>14</sup> C	11,450±50	13,410-13,210	Charcoal
51 (bes)	UtC-5040	<sup>14</sup> C	11,550±70	13,590-13,250	Charcoal

depiction of simplified forms of the animals to represent certain behaviour or a lively movement.

The anthropomorphic stone RD211 greatly differs from the other paintings as for the type of figure depicted, its size (34 x 23 x 14 cm) and its position on the top of an artificial pile so as to be higher than the other painted stones (Fig. 1a, 2). The subject (28 x 15 cm) is shown with legs wide apart, arms spread and it has a head covering, represented by two symmetrical circles linked by a narrow band. Its right side coincides with the lateral edge of the calcareous support and consequently the right arm and a part of the head-covering overlap onto the side of the stone (Fig. 3). Taking into consideration RD211, the spatial distribution of all the other painted stones, distinguished by a typological criterion, reveals the following pattern. Within a circle of 1 m from RD211, only anthropomorphs or signs were found. However, between 1 and 4 m from RD211, the zoomorphic images outnumber the signs and the anthropomorphic figures (Fig. 2).

Mineralogical-petrographic and chemical-stratigraphic analysis (Rosanò & Pellizzaro 2005) was carried out on a sample from 15 painted stones. The X-Ray Fluorescence analyses identified the composition of the red pigment as iron oxide, possibly hematite ( $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3$ ). The coloured film of variable thicknesses (15-80  $\mu\text{m}$ ) was covered with calcite layers, ranging from 0.4 to 1.5 mm, that were removed during the restoration. The Fourier Transform Infra Red analysis on 4 stones revealed the presence of bee's wax, which we infer to have been the colour binder.

### 3. CONSIDERATIONS

During the last 40 years there has been a wide debate about the meaning of rock paintings. Nougier (Nougier & Ageorges 1985) and others stressed the functional role of this art as hunting magic. Leroi Gourhan (1965) and Laming-Emperaire (1962), influenced by the structuralism approach, saw each cave essentially as a homogeneous composition. Lewis Williams (2002) argued that Upper Palaeolithic groups practised a form of shamanism. Mobilary art, however, has remained on the margins of this debate (Graziosi 1973; Villaverde Bonilla 1994), as few detailed descriptions of the archaeological context of the art objects were available. This lack of information, which was highlighted in the 60's by Leroi Gourhan (1983), still exists today. The Late Glacial open-air site of Gönnersdorf (Bosinski 1990) in northern Germany and the Enlène Cave (Clottes 1999) in the Ariège region of France are among the rare settlements where the context was well preserved. An interpretation of the mobilary art is consequently difficult. Abbot Breuil's hypothesis, later supported by Lorblanchet (1995), gives to portable art a function similar to that of rock paintings or in other words of representing "mobile wall sanctuaries". By contrast, Conkey (1980) argued that the sites, well endowed with painted or engraved plaquettes, represent seasonal aggregation sites, where hunter-gatherer met for social or economical reasons, activating a complex system of communication.

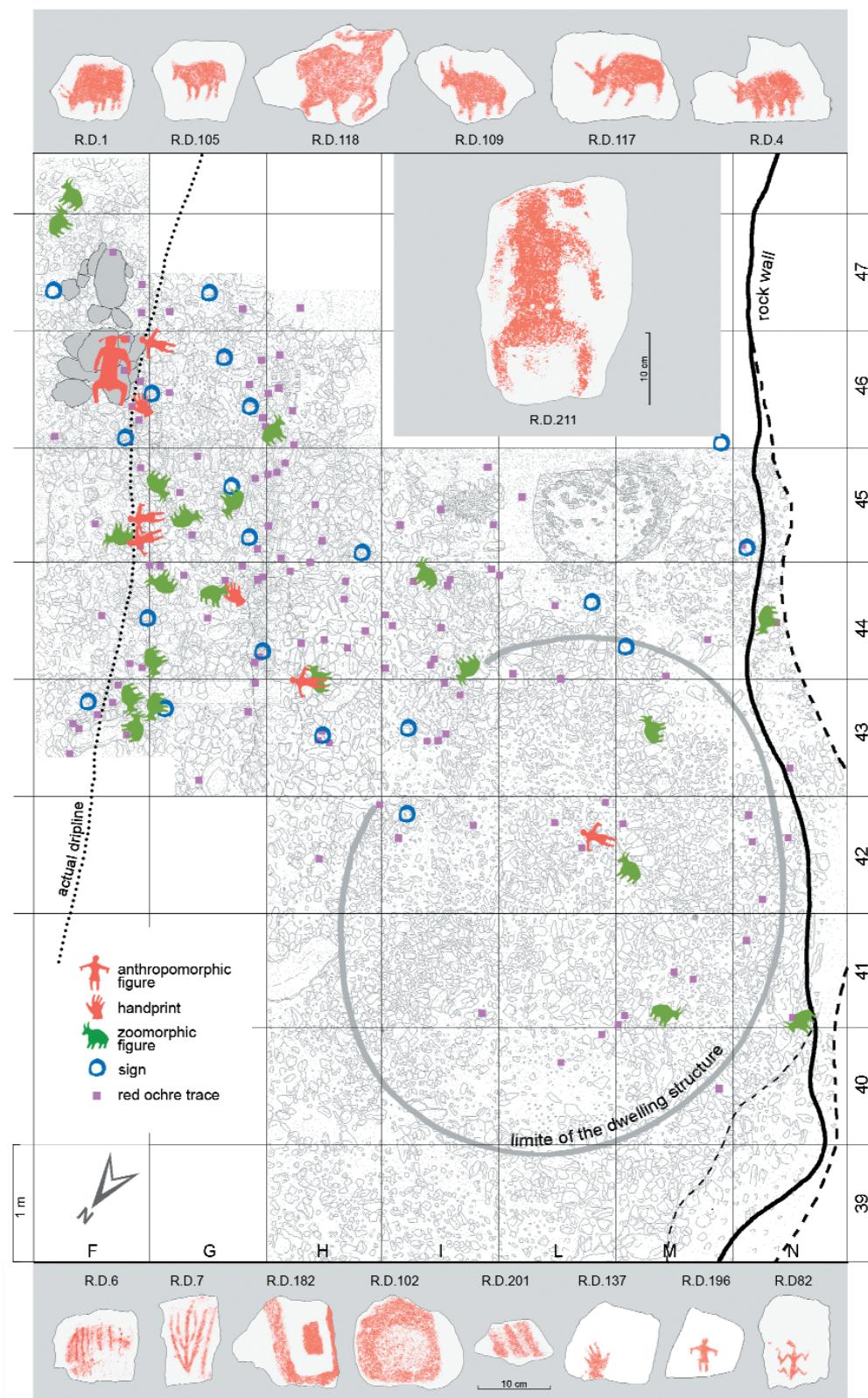


Fig. 2 - Map of the western zone of the site, representing the location of the painted stones, distinguished by a typological criterion and the position of the painted stone RD211 on the top of the piled stones (US 74) (graphic design by M. Hrozny Kompastcher).

Fig. 2 - Pianta relativa all'area ovest del sito con la localizzazione delle pietre dipinte distinte sulla base di un criterio tipologico e la posizione della pietra dipinta RD211 al tetto dell'accumulo di pietre (US 74) (elaborazione grafica di M. Hrozny Kompastcher).

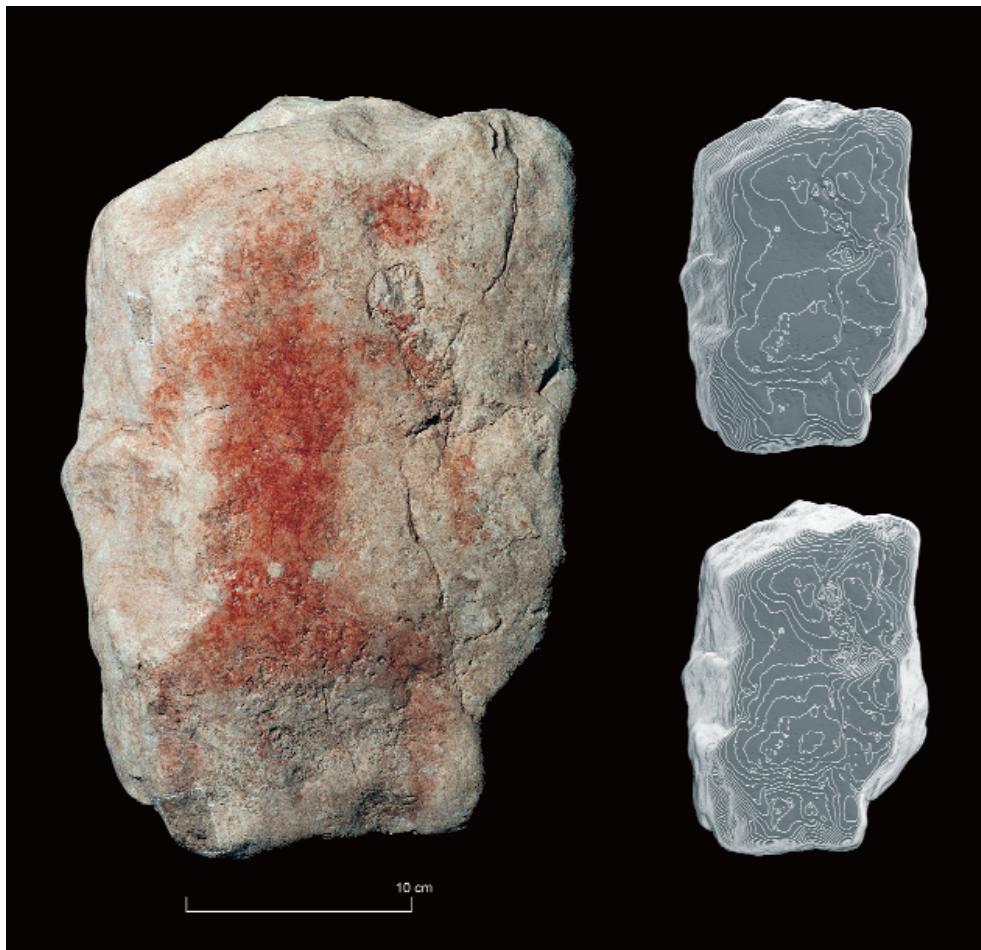


Fig. 3 - Red ochre painted stones from Dalmeri Rockshelter: the anthropomorphic figure RD211. On the right the 3D model with 2 mm and 1 mm isopise (3D model by Stefano Girardi, Lorenzo Gonzo, IRST-ITC).  
*Fig. 3 - Pietre dipinte di Riparo Dalmeri: la figura antropomorfa RD211. A destra il modello tridimensionale della stessa trattato tramite curve di livello di 2 mm e 1 mm (modello tridimensionale a cura di Stefano Girardi, Lorenzo Gonzo, IRST-ITC).*

The well-preserved Dalmeri Rockshelter deposit allows us to assume that the hunters marked out a sacred area on the most ancient dwelling level of this site, by placing, face down, the painted stones. We suggest that the hunter-gatherers practised a ritual that included at least 3 major actions. Firstly they selected the stones from the host rock rubble, second they painted the stones with ochre, using wax as a paint binder, and finally they deposited these artworks hiding the images. The physical superimposition of the stones could indicate a repetition of the ritual gesture and suggests that the hiding of the images was an integral part of the rite. Particularly illuminating is the presence of the human figure RD211, which had a central role in the sacred area. This interpretation is based on the following considerations: the large size of the figure, the dignified attitude and its elevated position. Furthermore, only this particular stone was still visible during the following occupations (Fig. 1a). This suggests that this human image was a reference to the dwellers who came after and that this relation was preserved until the site was abandoned (Fig. 1c).

We emphasize the ritual function of Dalmeri Rockshelter and support Lorblanchet's hypothesis

that both portable and parietal art are the graphic expression of a mythology or religion. However, the original aspects of the Dalmeri Rockshelter artistic phenomenon seemed to have developed locally. In the Villabruna Rockshelter (Aimar *et al.* 1994), located in the same geographical area and also dated to the Late-Glacial interstadial, two, out of the five painted stones recovered, depict red ochre human figures. One of these has stylistic similarities with the RD82 of the Dalmeri Rockshelter (Fig. 2). The occupants of these two shelters could be members of the same cultural group and the Villabruna archaeological record suggests that the hunters marked a burial with the deposition of painted stones (Broglio 1998, 1992). By contrast, at Dalmeri Rockshelter, where the research is not yet finished, we cannot specify the complexity of the pictorial manifestation and we cannot draw a detailed and interpretative hypothesis. However, from the information available, this ritual could be seen as a representation of a specific conception of the universe of this hunting community. We underline that in this spatial transcription of their spirit world, in which various natural elements had their place, a human being played a central role.

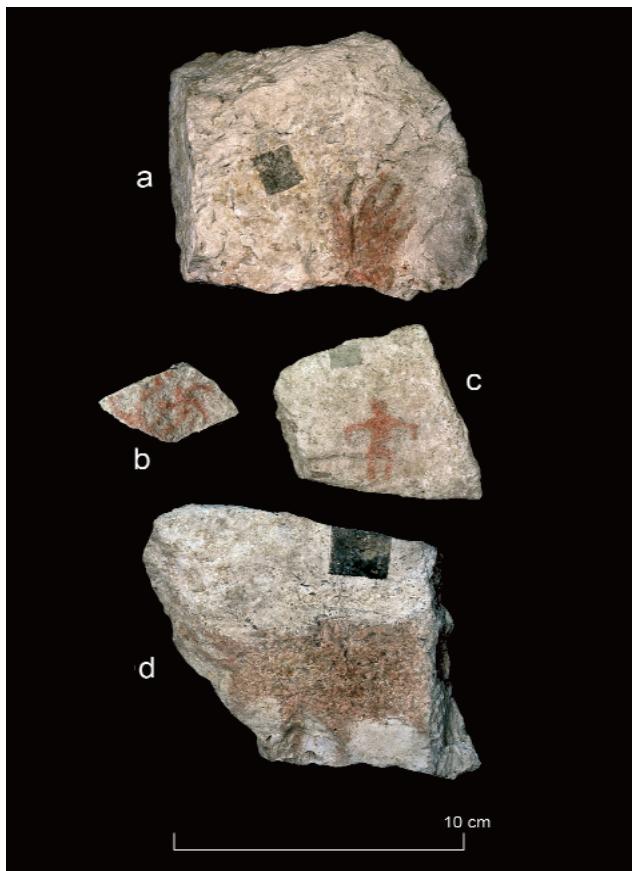


Fig. 4 - Red ochre painted stones from Dalmeri Rockshelter: a. The hand representation RD137; b. The sign RD97; c. The anthropomorphic figure RD196; d. The zoomorphic figure RD124.

Fig. 4 - Pietre dipinte in ocre rossa da Riparo Dalmeri: a, Rappresentazione di una mano: RD137; b, Rappresentazione schematica: RD97; c, Figura antropomorfa RD196; d, Figura zoomorfa: RD124.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Dalmeri Rockshelter research project is supported by the Museo Tridentino di Scienze Naturali, Trento. We thank the Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici of Trento for the excavations permission. We thank Nicoletta Martinelli, Lorenzo Gonzo, Stefano Girardi, Elena Munerati and Francesca Nicolodi for technical assistance. We thank Silvia Frisia and Marco Peresani for the comments.

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