

The geometrical figures of Riparo Dalmeri (Eastern Trentino) of the Recent Epigravettian period

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ABSTRACT - The "graphic" display in the recent Epigravettian site of Dalmeri rockshelter (dating back to around 11200 years BP in non-calibrated chronology) is abundant and represents quite simple, linear and network geometric drawings; linear motifs drawn with red ochre were also found on a purposely preserved calcareous stone.

Key words: Final Upper Paleolithic, Recent Epigravettian, Rockshelter, Geometrical figures, Graffiti

Parole chiave: Paleolitico superiore finale, Epigravettiano recente, Riparo, Figurazioni geometriche, Graffiti

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1. INTRODUCTION

The large rockshelter is situated on the Sette Comuni Plateau in the Comune of Grigno (Eastern Trentino), at 1240m a.s.l.. Excavations were carried out from 1991 to 1996 on the pedo-sedimentary fill-up deposit consisting of different stratifications, mainly breccia. At the depth of about 2m the excavations brought to light a sequence of anthropic levels of max. 40cm. It is ascribed to the various phases of human occupation of the site during the Recent Epigravettian period, Alleröd interstage. Radiometric dates place the occupation of the site around 11000-11250 years BP, also confirmed by the typology of the lithic industry and the dates of the faunal remains.

The anthropic stratigraphic unit 14/26, together with the relative sub-units, distinguishes the Epigravettian presence on the site. For the moment, it covers a sub-horizontal area of about 45m², evidencing intense anthropization with abundant, exceptionally preserved lithic industry, fauna and dwelling structures (DALMERI & LANZINGER, 1989; BASSETTI & DALMERI, 1993; BASSETTI *et al.*, this volume).

The object matter of this short preliminary communication, is a series of flint and bone finds with geometrical-linear engravings and a particularly interesting stone painted with ochre.

2. THE GRAFFITI FIGURES

The graffiti objects regarding the 1991 to 1996 researches are hereby examined. The "graphic" display of Dalmeri rockshelter is abundant and represents quite simple geometrical drawings; linear motifs drawn with red ochre are also found on an exceptionally well preserved calcareous stone.

Three categories of geometrical-linear figures were singled out and found on 95 objects (67 flint cortexes and 28 bone fragments) (Fig. 1-2):

category A - well-organized, regular network motif;
category B - partly irregular network motif, partly simple linear motif;
category C - simple motif with parallel lines.

The network-type (A) is repetitive and found on 24 flint cortexes, but not on bone. The most significant specimen of this kind of engraving is represented by about 10 corticated surfaces, on which the network or reticulate effect is obtained by a dense sequence of intersecting parallel lines and by precise and regular lozenges or oblongs. The signs are engraved in the same fashion: defined, continuous, clear and well impressed, and are perfectly parallel. The corticated part of a point with simple marginal retouching emphasizes in full the typology of the drawing.

The motif of category "B" appears on 17 cortexes (including one fragment of an implement) and on 5 bone fragments. Here, the network is irregular, less rigid and articulate than the preceding one and features simple, linear rectilinear engravings.

"C" is registered on 26 silica flakes, (including one tool) and 23 bone fragments. It is the simplest motif, featuring linear engravings with more or less straight lines. The category also included bands of fine, parallel and well-defined short lines, present on 4 bone fragments, which probably had some practical use such as counting.

These various types of linear signs, which are more or less coordinated, have a precise meaning even though it is difficult to interpret.

3. THE PAINTED STONE

A flat, painted, calcareous stone recovered at the foot of the rockwall, in the anthropical US28 (sq.46/M/g) is of particular interest. It is oblong-shaped (max. dimension 10x9x1.5cm) with sharp edges (Fig.4).

Due to its sharp edges and particular shape, it is probably a piece of wall painting fallen down from the rock wall. This suggests that this part of the wall of the rockshelter was probably decorated. Unfortunately, other traces of colouring or engraving have not been found due to the deterioration of the calcareous rock, which has crumbled and presents abundant superficial karst disintegration.

After having accurately cleared the rockshelter, the state of preservation can be considered as good¹. A geometrical motif painted with ochre is partially preserved on the slightly irregular and rugged rockwall: 7 parallel lines of various lengths painted with red ochre crossing an ochre-coloured disk (max. diameter 7.5cm). It should be noted that ochre and especially red ochre is abundant at Dalmeri rockshelter (Fig.5).

The well-preserved part of the coloured disk has a darker reddish-brown outline. The 4 lines, which are 3-5mm apart, are max. 5.5cm long, while the three shorter lines (3cm) are more than 1cm apart and the exter-

nal one is slightly curved. They are all about 2mm thick and the outlines are drawn with the same intensity as the outline of the disk.

There are only faint traces of these lines and of the ochre disk on the deteriorated part. The emphasis of the motif is accurately carried out and obtained by contrasting the two shades of colour of the background and the clear-cut parallel lines than "section" it.

The motif painted with particular ochre lines suggests some type of schematic representation.

4. CONSIDERATIONS

The graffiti objects of Dalmeri rockshelter and particularly the ochre-coloured stone with well-defined motif, are of great interest for the information they pass on to us and open new horizons as to the spirituality of hunters of the end of the Würmian Tardiglacial period.

Among the geometric, linear engravings found on rather small bones and on the cortex of flakes or lithic implements, there are also specimens with network or reticulate effect, sign of great sensitiveness. In the Epigravettian deposits of Tagliente rockshelter, this type of geometric engraving is quite frequent (LEONARDI, 1972; MEZZENA, 1964).

The stone painted with a schematic motif obtained by contrasting the two shades of reddish-brown colour, is a unique finding. There are technique-working parallels with another stone of Villabruna rockshelter featuring a reddish-brown hyperanthropic motif applied in relief on the coloured background. The painted stones of the Epigravettian site of Villabruna (Val Cismon-Val Rosna) and the Dalmeri rockshelter stone represent the most ancient paintings of Northern Italy (BROGLIO & VILLABRUNA, 1991; BROGLIO, 1992).

NOTES

- 1 - The calcareous encrustation was removed from the stone by the "Società di Restauratori Velluti di Feltre"

SUMMARY - The "graphic" display in the recent Epigravettian site of Dalmeri rockshelter (dating back to around 11200 years BP in non-calibrated chronology) is abundant and represents quite simple, linear and network geometric drawings; linear motifs drawn with red ochre were also found on a purposely preserved calcareous stone.

RIASSUNTO - Nella nota vengono presentati una pietra dipinta con ocra rossa e una serie di oggetti graffiti, provenienti dal sito dell'Epigravettiano recente di Riparo Dalmeri nel Trentino sud-orientale, relativi agli scavi 1991-1996. Sono state individuate delle figurazioni geometrico-lineari graffite, riscontrabili su 95 oggetti (67 cortici di selci e 28 frammenti ossei). Le incisioni degne di rilievo sono quelle a reticolato o graticcio. Un ritrovamento del tutto nuovo e di notevole interesse è una pietra calcarea con un motivo schematico dipinto, ottenuto mediante il contrasto tra due tonalità di colore rosso, del fondo e di una serie di linee nette sub-parallele che lo "sezionano". Su una faccia è ben visibile il complesso motivo geometrico eseguito con l'ocra, parzialmente conservato. Con le pietre dipinte del sito epigravettiano di Villabruna (Val Cison), fa parte delle più antiche pitture nell'Italia settentrionale.

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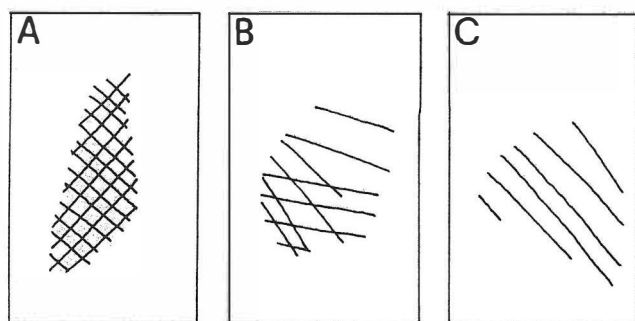


Fig. 1 - Dalmeri rockshelter. Category of graffiti figures

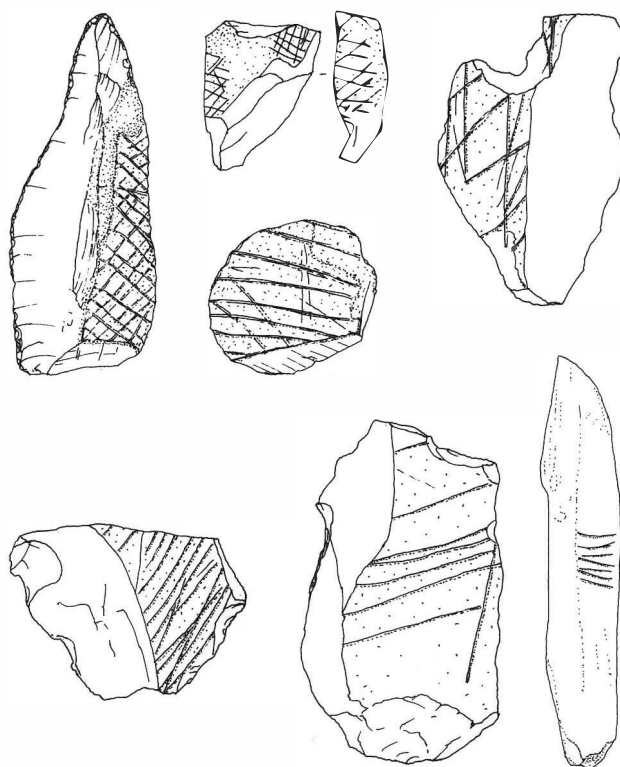


Fig. 2 - Linear-geometric engravings on flint cortexes and on fragments of long bones (natural size) (drawing by G. Dalmeri)

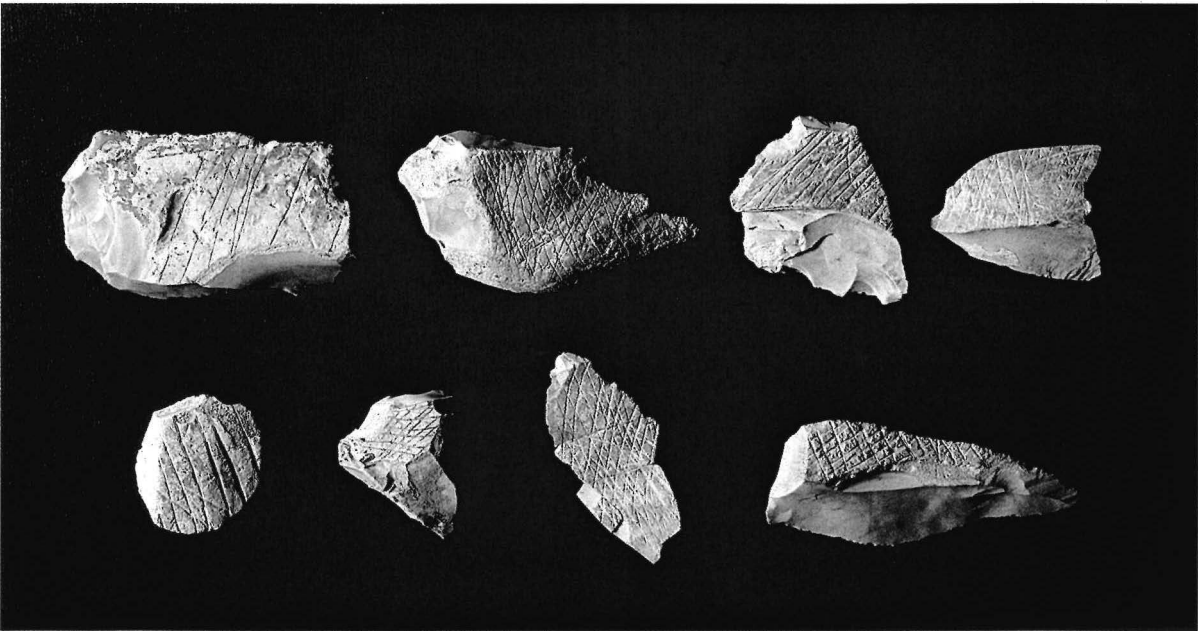


Fig. 3 - Dalmeri rockshelter. Series of graffiti on cortexes



Fig. 4 - Dalmeri rockshelter. The motif painted on the stone



Fig. 5 - Relief of the motif painted on the stone (drawing by G. Dalmeri)