



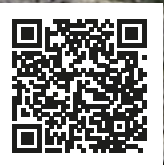
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# ROCK DRAWINGS IN VALCAMONICA

*“Rock art is the greatest archive of knowledge regarding the past that mankind has. Rock drawings were not made just to decorate rocks, but for mankind’s need to communicate.”*

From *Valcamonica* 1957, short film by Emmanuel Anati  
Anati is the founder of Valcamonica Centre of Prehistoric Studies.  
Thanks to him the rock drawings of Valcamonica were put forward for designation as UNESCO World Heritage.

The “Rock drawings in Valcamonica”, 94<sup>th</sup> in the world list, was the first Italian site to be inscribed as UNESCO World Heritage in 1979, beating illustrious rivals such as the Historic Centre of Rome. Located in the northernmost area of Brescia province, less than 70 km from the Swiss border, Valcamonica large rocks, extending on both sides of the valley, were smoothed by the glacier melting erosive action, thus becoming perfect “boards” where, from the 10<sup>th</sup> millennium BC until modern age, hundreds of thousands of signs were engraved, later hidden in time by musk, earth and plants. Hunters, deer, men standing on galloping horses, dancers, daggers, prayerful women, looms, wagons, villages of huts, ploughs pulled by oxen tilling the fields, funeral processions, shamans, religious feasts, fighters, but also sequences of signs and ideograms which are the first evidence of abstraction and representation of concepts in the history of mankind. The rock drawings of Valcamonica, preserved in eight archaeological parks and a national museum of prehistory, show vivid images about the origins of our civilization, thus taking us to that moment, deep inside our collective history, when someone, for the first time, came up with the idea of leaving a graphic sign and changed the way we communicate for good.



**SERIAL CULTURAL HERITAGE**  
UNESCO DOSSIER: **94**  
PLACE OF INSCRIPTION: **CAIRO, EGYPT**  
DATE OF INSCRIPTION: **1979**

**CRITERIA FOR SELECTION:** Valcamonica prehistoric site, still not completely explored, stretches along 70 km. These petroglyphs, whose examples can be found also in Spain, Hesse, Sweden, and Great Britain, have a symbolic meaning and depict scenes connected to sailing, dancing, war, ploughing, magic...





*“We lunched at a little hotel in a bare meadow, among a crowd of Italians enjoying the villeggiatura in their shrill gregarious fashion; then we began the descent to Edolo in the Val Camonica. The scenery changed rapidly [...] There was no longer any great extent of landscape [...] but a succession of small park-like views: [...] rounded clumps of trees interspersed with mossy glades, water-falls surmounted by old mills, bell towers rising above villages hidden in foliage.”*

**Edith Wharton visited Valcamonica in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the same years when Walther Laeng described, in the Touring Club guide (1914), two engraved rocks in Cemmo. Very soon the engravings drew the researchers’ attention, especially considering they are the first testimonies to the human beings’ impulse to create ways to define themselves and communicate, to pass down knowledge, and to represent abstract concepts that can be found in rock art culture all over the world.**

The rock drawings in Valcamonica are protected by eight archaeological parks. The best time to visit them is in the morning, when the grazing light highlights the rock engravings. Moreover, the rocks can be better seen when they are wet, therefore also autumn and winter are a perfect time of the year to visit the parks. **1 Luine Archaeological Park** is the first you will find when arriving from south. It includes over 100 rocks with the typical purplish colour and around 10,000 engraved figures, the oldest notes of the Camunian ancient population, (10<sup>th</sup> millennium BC). Not far, in Monticolo, **2 Corni Freschi**

archaeological site is famous for the “Roccia delle Alabarde”, whose name derives from the engravings of nine halberds. **3 Naquane National Park of Rock Engravings** is surrounded by a forest of chestnut trees, firs, birches, and hornbeams which emphasise the primeval beauty of the 104 grey-purplish sandstone rocks. The engravings date back to the period between the Neolithic (5<sup>th</sup> millennium BC) and the Iron Age (1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC) and represent symbols sometimes easily decipherable, which raise several questions about mankind’s expressive needs, but often mysterious too, making one

fantasise in search of the most creative interpretations. **4 Seradina-Bedolina Archaeological Park** offers five routes through a charming natural area full of engravings. The largest engraved surface is Rock 12, with around 1,700 drawings depicting naturalistic and symbolic scenes, such as deer hunting, duels, ploughing, dogs, birds, and erotic scenes. Along the blue route, you cannot miss Rock 1 or “Bedolina map” which represents a landscape of ploughed fields and huts in a sort of actual projection of the valley floor as it looks today, as well as the legendary Camunian Rose, symbol of the valley and Lombardy.



## NATURE AND DIVINITIES

*“In the valley where he was born – cradle of the ancient Camunian people – he bought a rundown stone house ignoring the rumours about the spirits of the dead that were said to be wandering around. The site was right in the middle between Pizzo Badile, the natural pyramid where the sun rose, and the female-named mountain, the Concarena, that at sunset welcomed the star in the deep crevices of its limestone ridge.”*

*Occhi di Luna: il romanzo della Valle della Luce, Franco Gaudiano*

Pizzo Badile and Concarena, two of the most iconic mountains in Valcamonica, stand out opposite to each other, majestic like two divinities, a god and a goddess. At equinoxes, the shade of Pizzo Badile penetrates the rocky crevices of Concarena – a hierophany linked with fertility rites that, according to many scholars, can be considered at the basis of the Camunian theological system.





"QUATTROSSI IS A LITTLE VILLAGE OF A FEW HUNDRED INHABITANTS, LOST IN A VALLEY FULL OF ENGRAVED ROCKS AND COPPER MINES. IT IS CALLED THE VALLEY OF SIGNS BECAUSE YOU CAN FIND VERY ANCIENT ROCK ENGRAVINGS ON ALMOST EVERY ROCK."

That's how Daniel begins the story of his adventure in Valcamonica in the book *Daniel Ghost e le anime erranti* by Nicola Lucchi. This wonderful valley, full of mountains, wild rivers and thick woods, is home to the long smooth stones that, throughout millennia, were used as boards by the Camunian people living in this land on which they drew their history.

In **1 Luine Archaeological Park** pay a visit to the impressive Rock 34, a sort of summary of the Camunian rock art, with engraved warriors, arms and animals.

Then go to the **2 Archaeopark**, a spectacular outdoor interactive museum offering the reconstruction of a pile-dwelling settlement and a neolithic farm. The park organises many educational workshops. Before leaving Boario Terme, go to **3 Lake Moro Park**. As it is so close both to the Mediterranean climate of Lake Iseo and the glacial climate of Adamello mountain, the area around the lake has the highest concentration of biodiversity in Europe. Come here for a winter trip or maybe a pedal boat ride in the summer. Heading north, pay a visit to **4 Bienno** and walk along its cobbled lanes full of art studios, admire the ancient stone buildings with their wooden balconies and visit the Mill Museum. Still now, as in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the mill is operated by the waters of Vaso Rè, the canal running along the hamlet streets. Once you reach Capo di Ponte, visit **5 Naquane National Park of Rock Engravings**, the site with the highest concentration of engravings: deer chased by dogs, warriors fighting near a maze, wagons pulled by oxen, pile-dwellings, shamans dancing with large feathered headdresses. Naquane Park engravings really look like pictures of a distant past, the origins of our civilization. Carry on with your visit and go to **6 MuPre – The National Prehistory Museum of Valcamonica** which organises guided tours, readings and interesting workshops. The **7 National Archaeological Park of Massi di Cemmo** hosts two large stones covered with engravings dating back to the Iron Age: deer, chamois, wolves, ibexes, carriages pulled by oxen ploughing the fields. Opposite, the Museum of Prehistoric Art and Life Education organises experimental archaeological workshops teaching how to read rock engravings and understand the surrounding nature.



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## VALCAMONICA in books

Reading suggestions to get to the heart of the Valley of Signs.

• **Italian Backgrounds**, Edith Wharton (1905). The author of *The Age of Innocence* went on a tour in Italy starting from Switzerland, crossing the Alps nearby Valcamonica, and visiting Milan until reaching Tuscany.

• **Come la mappa del cielo**, Lucio dall'Angelo (1994). Rebecca meets Francesco while on holiday in Valcamonica to visit her grandmother. Francesco is on a wheelchair after a terrible accident. They will get involved in an adventure with a researcher gone missing after making an important discovery about Camunian people.

• **Occhi di Luna: il romanzo della Valle della Luce**, Franco Gaudiano (2000). An archaeologist, an anthropologist and a young native American travel in time to trace the history of the ancient Camunians, the engravings in the Valley of Signs, the archaeological evidence and magic rituals.

• **Gli uomini dai rossi coltelli**, Ausilio Priuli (2000). Historical novel set in

Valcamonica, among the Camunian communities of the Iron Age.

• **Segni come parole. Il linguaggio perduto**, Ausilio Priuli (2013). The signs engraved on Valcamonica rocks are part of a universal language common to rock art systems all over the world. These signs represent the materialization of concepts, ideas, feelings, emotions, knowledge, theologies, and epics – the graphic expression of the most ancient human vicissitudes.

• **Il mistero del popolo del serpente**, Anna Zanibelli (2017). Journalist Andra Vincenti is sent to Valcamonica to cover the discovery of a Camunian rock which shows new and mysterious engravings. In her paternal grandfather's home village, Andra will live an adventure full of emotions and unforeseen events surrounded by ancient symbols, worship places and rock engravings.

### Children's books:

• **La roccia magica e le avventure di Alcino e Giulia**, Serenella Valentini (2005). Giulia, a young girl from Brescia, thanks to a nursery rhyme recited close to one of Valcamonica engraved rocks, opens a portal into the past and meets Alcino, her companion in adventures.

• **La roccia magica e il giardino degli dèi**, Serenella Valentini (2006).

Giulia, on her second time travel, goes back to see her Camunian friends celebrating the Feast of the Sun, but a mishap during the initiation rites will take her on a journey with her friend Alcino to save his father.

• **Daniel Ghost e le anime erranti**, Nicola Lucchi (2022). After his parents' death, Daniel moves to his uncle and aunt's house in Quattrossi, a small village surrounded by Valcamonica mountains. He is a very shy kid that no-one notices, as if he were a ghost. Just like a ghost, in this story inspired by Valcamonica mythology and legends, he will meet real spirits haunting his school.

• **Daniel Ghost e il segreto delle miniere**, Nicola Lucchi (2023). The saga of Daniel's legends in the Valley of Signs continues. Together with his ghost friend Diana, Daniel will find a flock of mauled sheep at the entrance of a mine, an unknown boy in a forest, a stain on a stone very similar to the birthmark on his chest. Despite his uncle and aunt's warnings to stay away from the mine tunnels, he will soon realise that that's where all the valley's secrets are kept.