



LA GROTTA DEL ROMITO
STORIA E PREISTORIA DI UN PAESE PROTESO AL FUTURO
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THE “ROMITO” CAVE-SHELTER



It was discovered in the spring of 1961 by Agostino Miglio, Director of the Town Museum in Castrovillari, after being sighted by two locals, Gianni Grisolia and Rocco Oliva. Really, in 1954, an amateur archeologist from Laino Bruzio, Luigi Attademo, had already pointed out to Mr Miglio the existence of the shelter with a no better defined bullengraving. Diggings, begun in the summer of 1962, were carried out by Pr. Paolo Graziosi of Florence University.

The discovery is of a great moment as it enables us to trace the evolution of the Mediterranean Paleolithic Art more precisely and to improve our knowledge about the ethnicanthropological conditions of the peoples who lived at the end of the Glacial Era.

The cave consists of two parts: the actual cave (approximately 20 m. in length) which, once, was certainly well-illuminated by day-light and the shelter which stretches for about 34 metres.

The deposits in the cave and the shelter used to be part of one large sedimentary formation, at least in the oldest section, and the basic layer was made up of great blocks which probably gave way when the cave had no communication with the outside.

The section of the mine, found still intact, was formed by the Pre-historic layers of the Neolithic, the Eneolithic and the Bronze Age, carbon dating gave 4.470 years B.C., whereas for the Upper Paleolithic layers, very rich in industries of that age, the oldest one, so far datable, goes back to about 16.800 years B.C..

In the highest levels, three graves were found (9.200 years old), each containing a couple of human beings, laid according to a well-established procedure, in epipaleolithic layers. One of these graves was in the cave, the other two in the shelter a short distance from the bull-engraved stone.

The shelter deposits were brought to light first: a man and a woman lying on top of each other, in a small oval grave; about one metre away and on a level with the man's left shoulder and the nape of her neck rested on her companion's cheek.

The man's left arm surrounded her shoulder, the right stretched along his body. The burial equipment consisted of a big horn splinter belonging to a “Bos primigenius” and resting of the man's left thigh-bone; a second splinter was found on his right shoulder. All around the skeletons there lay some wrought flintstones.

Both individuals, about 15/20 years of age, are smallbuilt: 1,40 m. showed clear signs of dismorphia and osteoporosis. Two human skeletons, of different sex, also lying on top of each other, made up the second dual burying contained in an oval grave too. They are individuals about 30 years old, 1,46/1,55 m. tall, both of them buried with bent legs.

Some of the second body's bones were no longer in their right place (the man on the right, in fact, was found to be without the thigh-bones and with the epiphysis placed in the pelvic pit); this is probably because, after the first individuals had died and the likely to have been displaced and the first man's thigh-bone removed.

The third grave was found within the cave deposits, almost on the same level as the shelter's. They were two individuals, lying on their backs, side by side, their arms outstretched, the right resting on the pelvis, the left within the pelvis. Both were males, under 20, about 1,59/1,60 m. in height.

Of the left skeleton, there remained only the pelvis, the lower limbs and the bones of one arm. Part of the brain-case and half of the face were discovered later, as the deposit had been upset, at an undetermined time, by some digging to level the ground. The man on the right, however, was intact. Apart from the pathological case of the others are mesocephal, with a longer skull, a rather low forehead, a narrow face and strong, triangular protruding jaws.

The eye-sockets are low and the nose is neither too long nor too large. Two of them bear resemblance to the "Cromagnon" race, traced back to the beginning of the Upper Paleolithic.

A couple of these skeletons are displayed at the "Pre-historic Museum" in Florence, together with the stone splinters found (around 280) and a plaster mould of the bull.

A second couple is displayed at the "National Museum" in Reggio Calabria, and a third is still a subject of study by the "Italian Institute of Pre-history and Proto-history" in Florence.

In the tunnel of the cave a beautiful wrought-bone tool was found with a geometrical pattern engraved on it, showing a rectangle inscribed in another, sheaves of parallel lines, straight and zig-zag and decorations in the shape of wolf tooth, on the edge of the tool. Such drawings can be related to the geometrical patterns, typical of the art in the Mediterranean Paleo-Epipaleolithic area. They remind, moreover, of analogous geometrical patterns of the furnishing art in the Polesini Cave, near Tivoli, and of Spanish art, in Parpallò, near Valencia.

The bull figure, about 1,20 m. long, is engraved on a rock about 2,30 m. in length, leaning on a 45 degree angle. The figure, of perfect proportions, is engraved with a sure hand, which is characteristic of the Paleolithic art. The horns, both sun sideways, shoot forth in a closed profile. Some details are well-represented, such as the nostrils, the mouth, the eye and, barely sketched, the ear. The neck-folds are greatly emphasized and the cleft feet very precisely depicted.

A segment cuts the animal's body in the kidney region. One gets the impression, according to Mr Graziosi, that at least some of these lines existed before the whole bull was drawn and that a few of them may even have been used to make up the large neck folds.

Beneath this main figure, there is another sketching of a bull, much more lightly engraved, where there appear only the head, the breast and part of the back. This, too, shows projecting horns, but in open profile and splitting in the second half, whereas in the first half only one horn is visible, repeating a pattern which is typical of the same rock a third small bull-head is engraved. Next to this rock, there is a horse-shaped stalagmite, with no head. Behind it, in a crack, several potsherds were discovered, dating back to the Neolithic Age.

In front of it, there is a 3,50 m. long mass, bearing some linear inscriptions, whose meaning is apparently unintelligible. The stratigraphic analysis of the deposit which

covered the engraved masses of rock, enabled us to establish that this section of the mine and, therefore, at least one part of the bull-engraving brings us back to the Romanellian Culture, which marks the end of the Paleolithic.

According to Mr Graziosi, the discovered of the graves in the area around and between the two big engraved masses allows us to think of one or two steles (the one with the bull) limiting a burial site.

The inside of the cave reveals two rooms, the second of which, closing in a narrow tunnel, is more interesting because of its stalactical and stalagmitical formations, fringed and cone-shaped, mainly white in colour.

Papasidero 16 maggio 2010