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# Shepherds Who Write

*Pastoral graffiti in the uplands of Europe from  
prehistory to the modern age*

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COVER IMAGE *Shepherds' writings on Mount Cornón in the Fiemme valley  
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## Preface

*Michael J. Rowlands*

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To study graffiti as rock art is an unusual way to legitimise their illicit value. Urban graffiti, once treated as products of vandalism and as a form of visual pollution, is now taken seriously by the art establishment or shall we say the art market. A double sense of illicit value can also be attached to rock art graffiti. In many cases, as described in this seminal volume, the underlying rock art on which 'graffiti' is inscribed, Upper Palaeolithic in the case of Rouffignac, is 'Art' in a classical representational sense. Whilst this super positioning maybe be seen as evidence of the polluting character of graffiti, it is worth considering that their physical association maybe intentional. Rock art in its consistent association with hunter-gather and nomadic peoples of the past is invariably interpreted as religious in efficacy. Totemism and shamanism are the two dominant anthropological explanations for the widespread occurrence of rock art over the historical long term, as in the earliest known human inscription in red ochre on a chunk of rock in the Blombos cave, South Africa, dating to 73,000 years ago. The value of contemporary rock art graffiti, currently viewed as an unusual form of blasphemy when superimposed on rock art, can be reversed within a logic of the sacred. Several contributors in this volume encourage us to think more deeply on a shared value for graffiti as rock art.

To inscribe (tagging) on an 'already' significant rock surface, names, events, family glyphs and devotional symbols may all be inspired by possibilities of recognition. Our editors describe these inscriptions as tags of permanence. A politics of recognition creates identity; it does not presuppose it. So, if there is a sense of permanence established through superlayering on older rock art, is it because the aura shines through? Is this enough for shepherds and the trouble they take to do their work in difficult and remote places, described by our editors as shepherds (male) wanting pride to be taken in their dangerous, solitary and downgraded trade? Recognition in the world of classical music is there already in Franz Schubert's 1830 lieder *Shepherd on the Rock* expressing the loneliness and isolation of the shepherd's world

When, from the highest rock up here,  
I look deep down into the valley,  
And sing,

I am consumed in misery,  
Happiness is far from me,  
Hope has on earth eluded me,  
I am so lonesome here.

A paradox lies in the remoteness of the shepherds' graffiti as rock art. Who else except other shepherds are going to

see their art? Others would struggle to get to their location in remote sites, often difficult of access in caves and rock shelters. The aim of visitors anyway might well be to void or even remove the polluting contamination of the real rock art underneath. Part of the attraction of the graffiti is their eruptive and spontaneous character. Often repetitive, limited in form and scarcely constituting a graphic writing system, they would probably not have appealed to rock art experts, at least until now. This suggests they are produced by shepherds without an external audience in mind. The act of inscribing has something more to do with shepherds communicating with each other about their conditions, their hopes and feelings. An anthropological study of shepherds in Crete articulated their male cultural acts of sheep stealing and card playing as a 'poetics of manhood' (Herzfeld 1985). The 'others' may then be other shepherds inscribing over the graffiti of each other in competitive and rivalrous terms. None of which need be violent in intention; rather acts of mutual recognition in their desire to leave 'tags of permanence'. Schubert's *Shepherd of the Rock* was based on two poems expressing a masculinity of labour and isolation with the hope for return to domesticity. Who needs to know how ideal the Romantic movement would be if instead the emphasis was on escape from the domestic world of obligation to the wild freedoms of the mountains and their sheep?

Another paradox lies in the trouble taken to inscribe or tag on a rock surface. Rock art is rarely if ever art inscribed on stone as a blank surface. The rock, its texture, shape and colour, fissures in it, are treated as living agents, sites or portals to spirits residing within or behind it. Upper Palaeolithic cave art, for example, is now widely recognised to be chosen as more than a convenient rock surface but actively sought out for their spiritual qualities. If the artwork of contemporary shepherds is seen as graffiti, all this suggest that the long term presence of shared values may be implied in their historical linkage. Nor is this of local origin and meaning alone. One of the largest concentrations of rock art in prehistoric Europe is in the region of Bohuslan in Southern Sweden. Many examples of figures show animistic transformations of wild forms into human form, connected it appears with seasonal gatherings at socio- ritual sites. Parallels have been drawn on this theme with rock art at Valcamonica and elsewhere in the central Alps (Ling 2013). What gradually is emerging is a consensus on the broadly central European unity of cosmology with intense interactions and borrowings by the Later Bronze Age. The rock art graffiti of Alpine shepherds may not therefore be as isolated as might be thought.

A seminal volume elicits ideas from readers sometimes much to their surprise given the subject matter. Some may

approach these studies of shepherds' graffiti in the rock art of the Alps in this way and be glad of their pleasant surprise.

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## Introduction

### Shepherds who write. A new frontier for ethnoarchaeology

*Marta Bazzanella and Giovanni Kezich*

*Museo degli Usi e Costumi della Gente Trentina,  
via Mach 2, I-38010 San Michele all'Adige (Trento)*

Among the celebrated Palaeolithic caves of the Dordogne, that of Rouffignac is specially well known among prehistorians for the great host of mammoths, bison, horses, ibexes and rhinos which are outlined in black on the cave's walls, dated at around 13,000 BP. The cave is also well known for the abundant evidence of the habitation of cave bears, who left the imprint of their claws in the soft rock, soon to be emulated by humans, possibly children, who left their squiggles alongside. Besides bears' scratchings and human finger flutings, a third conspicuous layer of scrawls welcomed the prehistorians upon rediscovering the Rouffignac cave in 1956, and these were the innumerable tags scribbled in charcoal by local shepherds over a span of approximately 200 years, from the early 1700s to the late 1800s: so many of them, in fact, that the mammoths and the other Palaeolithic animal figures had to be 'painfully teased out from the obscuring overlay of modern graffiti'. These were in fact painstakingly removed since, it is said, they 'had no intrinsic interest save that of compiling a regional list of patronyms' (Brunet *et al.*, 1997), of which, however, to the best of our knowledge, no record has been published, if at all preserved.

There is no point in discussing here whether this modern graffiti might have deserved a little more attention, if only out of respect for the many adventurous individuals who braved their way into the depths of the dark cave, about half a mile from the entrance, to leave a sign of their own. What matters, rather, is to recognise that the modern graffiti at Rouffignac can be identified as part of a widespread custom of the wandering shepherds throughout the Old World, often competing with the prehistoric artists for the same surfaces, within very similar strategies of graphic expression, and are thus in some respects worthy of interest for their own merit.

An interesting passage of Giorgio Vasari's *Lives* (1550) takes us to the core of this custom as we see the celebrated Florentine painter Cimabue, sometimes around 1280, accidentally make the acquaintance of shepherd boy Giotto while he marks a rock with the image of an ewe:

Cimabue, going one day on some business of his own from Florence to Vespignano, found Giotto, while his sheep were browsing, portraying a sheep from nature on a flat and polished slab, with a stone slightly pointed, without having learnt any method of doing this from others, but only from nature; whence Cimabue,

standing fast all in a marvel, asked him if he wished to go to live with him.

The double ability to draw and to write in calligraphy, in fact, is but one of the distinguished capacities which was and still is traditionally ascribed to shepherds, alongside those of woodcarving, calculating, music and poetry. Fostered in our world since time immemorial by a specific ideology of pastoralism, such as leaning shepherds towards the fine arts, as well as religious enlightenment and philosophical speculation, has in fact been recorded in a number of European ethnographic settings, such as the Pyrenees (Fabre, 2005) and the Apennines (Trinchieri, 1953; Kezich, 1999).

The exercise of some kind of calligraphy, with the impression of name tags and symbols, engraved or more rarely painted on the rocks, is thus part and parcel of the pastoral culture of Europe: a custom often found to emulate and protrude into the modern world as the engraving traditions of prehistory. In the Valcamonica (Central Alps), for example, the ancient custom of incising *pitoti* on the giant surface slabs of the valley slopes continued well beyond the Iron Age throughout Roman and medieval times (Chippendale *et al.*, 2012), whilst in the Vallée des Merveilles on Mont Bego (Western Alps), modern shepherd engravings freely mingle on the rocks with incised testimonies of the Bronze Age (Giusto Magnardi, 1996).

In Europe, a number of sites bearing witness to the custom of pastoral tagging have been identified and adequately studied: noticeably, so far, the Eastern Pyrenees (Martzluff, 2019); the lowlands of Crau near Marseille (Lebaudy, 2006) and the Col di Tenda in the Western Alps (Giusto Magnardi, 1990); the Abruzzi (Micati, 2000) and the Lucchesia in the Apennines (Bonaventuri and Sani, 2019). To these, we must now add the Fiemme Valley in the Eastern Alps (Bazzanella, *et al.*, 2013; 2014; 2016), where a spectacular repertoire of nearly 50,000 graffiti has been discovered (Vanzetta, 1991). These are painted in red ochre, rather than engraved as is most common, thanks to the abundance of pigment known as *ból*, or *ból de besa* (stamp or sheep stamp), which is quite easily quarried out of the pastoral uplands.

Besides specific functions, such as marking the territory, and giving proof of one's own presence in a specific

place at a certain moment in time, these writings seem to represent the individual shepherd's wish to exhibit his own literacy as a sort of prestige item which, as has been noted elsewhere in regards to primitive or incipient literacy (Macdonald, 2018), can be also considered an end in itself, rather than a means towards a communicative end.

In this book, through a collection of often groundbreaking essays, we contend that such repertoires of pastoral graffiti, which are often grafted into significant pre- and protohistoric traditions of their own, can be considered in their own merit and profitably studied in at least two important respects.

First is the amount of information they provide about the community of writers who have inscribed names, dates, cattle counts, family glyphs and devotional symbols, as well as short messages and diary notations, thus providing us a glimpse into their daily life, their social world and their belief system.

Second is the way in which modern graffiti projects into the future a set of conventions established in prehistoric times, so that they can be used with caution, as valuable touchstones for interpreting prehistoric rock art. Not unlike their prehistoric forebears, modern pastoral tags are invariably found to be 'remote', 'random' and 'conventional':

- remote: Tags are positioned in forbidding sites, difficult to access and to reach out for. These can be the depths of caves or, as in Fiemme, the boulders of distant cliffs, hidden in the middle of steep woodlands, at a distance of some hours' walk from the village, and up to eight or ten metres high. Evidently, the tags increase in value and prestige according to the relative difficulty of accessing their location.
- random: Tags are evidently positioned at random on each chosen surface, which reveals the extemporaneous, unplanned nature of their inscribing, as the outcome of some completely casual, unwarranted drive to write. Tags freely conglomerate close to one another, or even over each other, on certain portions of the surface, while other portions are left void or almost void, for no evident reason.
- conventional: Tags are highly conventional in style. Given some wide-ranging, catch-all stylistic conventions, the gamut of individual variations and/or innovation is very limited, and can be recapitulated with hindsight into very broad categories, covering huge time spans.

Despite such parallels between prehistoric and modern graffiti, there is, however, one important difference, that is the use of 'alphanumeric signs', which makes modern tags accessible in their literal meaning, and is of course unthinkable in a prehistoric context. Also, on rare occasions, as in the case of Fiemme valley, writers may be still alive and willing to cooperate and shed some light on to the concept and the specific motivations behind

their graffiti, while attending to their own individual acts, performed in a random sequence at different moments in time.

The forbidding locations of the sites, as well as the specific skills of the art of writing, handed down from generation to generation of shepherds, have enabled a shroud of secrecy to be constructed around the act of tagging, which is only open to initiated members of the pastoral fraternity. In writing a tag, the individual shepherd crosses over a specific social boundary, endowing himself with a kind of ability which is purportedly superior. In that, his act is 'transgressive', breaking social as well geographical limits, and entering a world for initiates in which only himself, the 'shepherd who writes', is master. On such grounds, he is free to impress on the rock, as against the surrounding stratified social world, the pride of his own difficult, dangerous, solitary, downgraded trade, expressing his own unease, regret and revenge. An admixture of guilt and pride, which often has come to the surface when the few surviving informants have been called upon to comment on their art, referred to sometimes as a 'sin' *tout court*.<sup>1</sup>

This book collects the essays of authors from different countries presented at the session *Pastoral Graffiti: Old World Case Studies in Interpretative Ethnoarchaeology* of the 20th International Rock Art Congress, IFRAO2018 entitled 'Standing on the Shoulders of Giants' held in Valcamonica, Darfo – Boario Terme (BS) – Italy from 29 August to 2 September 2018.

The aim of the session, chaired by Giovanni Kezich, Marta Bazzanella and Silvia Sandrone, was to investigate the figurative expression of wandering shepherds from ancient to modern times. These signs that we call 'graffiti' can often be fully alphabetic as well as drawing upon ancient symbolic repertoires. In all their forms, they can aid in the interpretation of rock art as a whole genre of human expression, and can be projected back, in their significance and their mode of appearance, to the earliest prehistoric times.

Starting from groundbreaking research on the shepherds' writings of the Val di Fiemme (Trentino, Italy cf. <http://www.scrittedeipastori.it>) the session intended to bring together evidence from similar cases in other Eurasian settings, so as to further the specialists' acquaintance with this still largely unplundered terrain.

What binds together all these contributions is their being set in a context of vertical transhumance, i.e. the movement of livestock between higher pastures in summer and lower valleys in winter, a context which over the past fifteen years has increasingly come into the archaeologists' focus. On this specific topic, this book provides new material from recent surveys, together with studies on the whole

<sup>1</sup> 'Here it is, my sin!', shepherd Ferruccio Delladio, 'Fero cursòr' (1928-2016), said half-jocularly, handling a slab bearing his name tag inscribed in 1940, at age 12 (Delladio, 2015).

range of art on rocks and wood from the Neolithic to the mid-twentieth century.

The papers have been arranged keeping the Val di Fiemme in the Eastern Alps as a focal point, and in geographical order, from the farthest sites (Armenia, Abruzzi . . .) to those in the Alps, running across the mountain range from the West (Mont Bego) to the centre (Valcamonica, the Lessini . . .) and finally to the East (Val di Fiemme).

Following this order, Franziska Knoll presents a contribution about the petroglyphs and the graffiti of the Syunik highlands in Southern Caucasus, Armenia ('Petroglyphs and graffiti in the Syunik highlands/Armenia – summer pasture for thousands of years'). The investigated area includes 3493 basalt rocks decorated since Neolithic times. On almost 193 of these rocks, recent graffiti have been detected. The shepherds left on the rocks their names or initials and the year of their visit. Names were written in Cyrillic or Latin alphabet and the dates range from the 1930s to the 1980; portraits, pastoral scenes and objects related to the area also appear. The graffiti provides an immediate insight into local history, when the border between Azerbaijan and Armenia was still open. The aim of the project presented in this paper is to understand the relationship between rock art and landscape. A full record of all natural and man-made features, as well as all petroglyphs, allows for an integrative analysis and interpretation of land use in the context of transhumant pastoralism through the ages.

A further contribution outside the alpine range is that of Edoardo Micati ('Caves and shepherds' engravings on the Majella mountains'), who presents the engravings left by shepherds on the rocks of the Majella Mountains in the Apennines of Central Italy, and informs us about 300 years of exploitation of this land. On the Majella there existed a double system of transhumance: short distance transhumance of the local communities aiming at the highest pastures looming over the villages, as well as long distance transhumances of big herds, coming from afar and crossing over the mountains on their way to the Apulian coastal plains, who passed through the same places. The engravings that these shepherds left on the rocks represent personal names, often accompanied by dates, village names and various symbols such as the cross, or the monsters they admired on the marble capitals of their village churches, or even the ships they saw at sea once the much-longed-for Apulian shores had finally been reached.

Two papers introduce us to the region of Mont Bego (Alpes-Maritimes, France), where more than 36,000 engravings are concentrated between 2000 and 2700 m of altitude. The signs of man on this mountain date back to the Neolithic, protohistory, classical Antiquity and the Middle Ages, but also to early and late modern times, when shepherds left their names, dates and messages on the same rocks inscribed by their prehistoric ancestors. Here, as Nathalie Magnardi of the Musée Départemental

des Merveilles tells us in her contribution ('Trial of the distribution of the shepherds' writings in the Mont Bego region (Tende, Alpes-Maritimes, France)'), the amount of superimpositions between modern shepherds' inscriptions (about 5500 drawings and texts, dated since 1836) and picked engravings is very high. To explain this proximity, Mont Bego's engravings have been analysed in the light of the history of local pastoralism.

Jules Masson Mourey and Nicoletta Bianchi in their article 'Moving beyond the Bego God: Some new remarks about the interpretation of the prehistoric engravings of the Vallée des Merveilles and the Val de Fontanalba (Tende, Alpes-Maritimes, France)' present an overview of the main explanatory propositions of the prehistoric engravings in the Mont Bego region. However, in view of the intrinsic features of the site (isolated, difficult to access, inhospitable), and of its eminently pastoral vocation since the Neolithic, together with some regional ethnographic comparisons, the authors support the idea that the act of engraving might have been connected to the rites of initiation of young boys, which were most likely performed, as it is customary in tribal contexts worldwide, in great remote outdoors such as the summer high-altitude pastures.

The contribution of Giorgio Chelidonio ('Igniting fire under mobile conditions and other Late Neolithic-Bronze Age shepherding traces') also takes care of some rock engravings of Mont Bego, generally recognized as 'ritual' in character, such as those of the 'Sorcerer' or the 'Tribal chief', starting from a recent finding of a flint tool used as an igniter on the Monte Baldo ridge just north of Verona, at 1734 meters of altitude.

Almost every mountain in the Alps bears traces not only of material culture, settlements, equipped shelters and organized spaces, but also of graphic expressions in the form of engravings, scratchings and paintings, sometimes even in monumental form. This art, as Ausilio Priuli tells us ('Rock art in relation to pastoral villages in medium and high-altitude sites, in Valcamonica and in the Alps'), is the outcome of a ritual necessity to establish a relation with the world of superior beings and spirits that dwell in the mountains, in the rocks and in everything that surrounds the human being.

The evidence of the shepherds' expressiveness in the Alpine region is indeed quite rich. In the Western Alps, in particular in the Valgrande National Park and in the nearby Natural Park of Veglia Devero, in Piedmont, Fabio Copiatti and Elena Poletti ('Pastoral graffiti in the Val Grande National Park and in the areas of Natural Parks of Ossola valley: Results of a first mapping') have tried to trace the chronology of the evidence starting from their mapping of engravings and paintings on rock or wood. The collected examples document the shepherds' desire to leave traces of their permanence on the mountains through names, dates and diary notes, accompanied by symbols, especially the cross.

In all these cases, it would appear that the degree of literacy acquired by the villagers was sufficient to allow them an extended usage of writing. Painting is occasionally opted for in presence of hard stones, together with the availability of pigment. Haematite, where available, was in fact used in the Alps not only for graffiti, but also for practical purposes, such as marking livestock or decorating houses with simple patterns.

Moving towards the Eastern Alps, we find another well-known prehistoric and protohistoric rock-art complex, that of Valcamonica and its surroundings. In this area ethnographic and ethnoarchaeological researches have been conducted by Gastaldi, Troletti, Bezzi and Migliavacca, who tackle the interpretation of the signs on rocks and not just rocks, on the basis of field observations and the analysis of high-altitude anthropisation in its various forms. In many cases, and for a long time, analysis of stone engravings and depictions from historical times has been poorly regarded by archaeologists, due to the fact that these signs were 'recent'. Alternatively, in a grossly reductive, sensationalist interpretation, these signs, always overtly Christian in character, were thought to represent a re-sacralisation of pre-existing pagan sites: a very attractive interpretation for the wide readership interested in witchcraft and pre-Christian cults. While such aspects of the fruition of these ancient sites can certainly not be ruled out, they cannot become the key to understanding all engraving phenomena of the Christian era.

Along such lines, Federico Troletti in his contribution ('Pastoralism and quarrying: possible typological divergences in the production of historical rock art in accordance with the sites intended use') envisages a clear-cut distinction between engravings of shepherds and those of miners in the Valcamonica, which can be represented in terms of 'figurative' versus 'schematic' rock art.

In 'Beyond cup-marks: Writings, engravings and ethnography in Val Malenco: a first glimpse (Sondrio, Italy)', Cristina Gastaldi tells us about the development of research on the engravings in some miners' villages and mountain pastures of the Val Malenco and shows us how engravings are intimately bound to everyday life, to the local crafts and to the social recognition of property.

The work of Jessica Bezzi and Mara Migliavacca ('Ethnoarchaeology of pastoralism in Valcamonica high pastures') focuses on the archaeological traces of pastoral exploitation detected on the high pastures of Vione in upper Valcamonica, where it has been possible to outline the history of pastoral activities and that of landscape transformation, from the end of the Middle Ages. These data have been compared with those that have emerged from the Lessini highlands north of Verona. In this area, as Mara Migliavacca points out in her contribution ('Pastoralism without writing? The case of Monti Lessini'), a systematic field survey was carried out and more than 600 pastoral structures were discovered, recognised and recorded in databases, collecting their geomorphological location and

architectural features. Archaeological findings dating to the final phases of Bronze Age and to historical times were also found and put in connection with pastoral dwellings. Except for a few cases found on the edge of the Lessini highlands, where significant traces of mining activity have been recorded, no traces of writings have been found: this absence, probably due to several reasons, is compared with archaeological and ethnographic data from nearby areas.

Francesco Carrer and Fabio Cavulli, on the bases of documentary sources on spatial distribution, land use and other information, analyse the alpine pastures between the Giau pass and Mondeval, a region with some significant evidence of human activity from Mesolithic to present times ('Compass-made circle engravings from Giau Pass and Mondeval (S. Vito di Cadore, Dolomites, Veneto region, NE Italy)'). The main reason for the intense occupation of this area, located between 1900 and 2700 m above sea level, is related to the exploitation of ore resources (galena mining), as well as faunal, forestry and other environmental resources such as animal husbandry and hay-making, replaced today by Alpine hiking. In this area, particular engravings have been detected: compass-made circles, with variable grooves (from large and deep to shallow), often concentric, sometimes organized in geometric patterns or lacking any geometric organization. This type of evidence, which is difficult to date, has few comparable examples and might have been used as boundary markers within the commons of San Vito di Cadore.

Lastly a group of four papers deals with the theme of the shepherds' writings of the Val di Fiemme (Trentino, Italy), which is the specific case study underlying the whole session, after twelve years of research conducted by the Museo degli Usi e Costumi della Gente Trentina (Trentino Folklife Museum). In the Fiemme valley, on a limestone ridge, Mount Cornón, between the mid-fifteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, shepherds made more than 47,500 writings in red ochre. Over time, sheep farming has profoundly changed the natural landscape of these highlands and over 2000 limestone walls bear traces of this economic activity. The writings or 'tags' consist of initials, dates, cattle counts, family symbols, pictographs and short messages. The resulting visual effect of this painting activity is that of a kind of rock art reminiscent of other well-known sites such as Mont Bego or Valcamonica. The archaeological investigations carried out on Mount Cornón in two rock-shelters with documented evidence of pastoral activity show the presence of man on this mountain since the Copper and Bronze Ages, a long time before the oldest evidence of pastoral writing on the rocks. To clarify this aspect, more than 5500 depictions have been analysed to find some drawings dating back to more ancient times. Marta Bazzanella discusses these results in her paper ('A painted mountain: the figurative rock art of the shepherds of the Fiemme valley'), which aims to provide an interpretative model for the shepherds' figurative art in this as well as many other parietal art contexts in the Alps.

Giovanni Barozzi and Vanya Delladio ('A sign for every shepherd, for every shepherd a family: The signs of the house in the inscriptions of the shepherds of Mount Cornón in Val di Fiemme) focus their contribution on a specific class of symbols, known as the *noda* or the 'family sign', which is frequently featured within some of the graffiti, making it possible to identify unambiguously each of the community lineages.

The most represented symbols among the depictions of the shepherds of the Fiemme Valley are sacred ones. Mainly they are representations of the cross, but also of the Holy Heart, as well as monograms of Christ and Mary, aedicules and monstres, all of which express a strong radicalisation of the valley's devotion. Within settled areas, on the sides of mountain roads and pathways, at crossroads, bridges and stopping stations, there were always erected sacred aedicules, tabernacles and small shrines, to provide reassurance to believers. Therefore, in most cases, the crosses depicted on the rocks of Mount Cornón have been interpreted as gestures of extemporaneous devotion, probably emulating crosses drawn by other shepherds with auspicious intents. The cross is depicted in many different shapes, and Giacomo Fait, Desirée Chini and Marta Bazzanella ('The symbol of the cross on the rocks of Mount Cornón in the Fiemme Valley') offer in their contribution an in-depth study of its typology.

A particular shape of the cross symbol, evoking Mount Calvary with a cross on its summit, is widespread from the sixteenth century in Primiero in Eastern Trentino, as Gianfranco Bettega tells us in his paper ('The mountain and the cross as centre of the maso'). The symbol is positioned in the centre of the *milèsimo* – i.e. the date of the construction or re-construction of the *maso*, the mountain farmstead – and it is carved into the doorframe of its barn. The symbol also finds numerous comparisons with depictions present in the shepherds' writings of the Fiemme Valley.

The wish of the editors is that, spurred on by the growing interest in 'writing in public spaces' worldwide, other case studies may follow, bringing more light to this conspicuous, rich and grossly underestimated field of human expression.

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In a number of significant sites of the vast ancient pasturelands of the Old World, generations of wandering shepherds have left their testimony in the form of graffiti drafted on the rocks, sometimes in their tens of thousands, over a period of hundreds of years from ancient to modern times. The phenomenon is a conspicuous one and has considerable significance for two reasons. On the one hand, the study of such pastoral graffiti may convey fresh ethnoarchaeological information as to the circumstances of the pastoral activities and the pastoral economy of the past. On the other hand, these signs, which can be often fully alphabetic as well as drawing upon ancient symbolic repertoires, can be of some aid in the interpretation of rock art as a whole genre of human expression, and projected back, in their significance and their modes of appearance, the earliest times of prehistory.

'This volume will be of great interest to researchers in many parts of the world, including rock-art specialists, ethnographers and ethnoarchaeologists.'

*Michael C.A. Macdonald, University of Oxford*

'This volume is an important contribution to the study of iterative and dialogical forms of writing and drawing. It is the most comprehensive treatment of these types of graffiti to date.'

*Professor Karen B. Stern Gabbay, Brooklyn College CUNY*

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