

A POSSIBLE MEGALITH IN VELMAIO NEAR ARCISATE - THE BEVERA VALLEY **(VARESE – WESTERN LOMBARDY, ITALY)**

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Summary

The Authors describe the Monolith, its orientation that, on the basis of archaeoastronomical observations and proximity to other possible megalithic sites, could indicate a pre and / or protohistorical attendance of this site.

An analysis of the potential research perspectives concludes this paper.

Introduction

The described formation (Photo 1) it is located in Velmaio, near Arcisate (Varese Province, North Western Lombardy). The town, like the whole Ceresio Valley, is a part of the "Regio Insubrica" a Cross-Border Community with the status of Euro region, founded in 1995, which also includes the neighboring Canton Ticino (TI), a Republic of the Helvetic Confederation (CH).

The megalith, located on the valley floor of the Bevera River (Lat .: 45.830610 ° N; Long .: 8.880160 ° E; Alt .: 319 m asl), rises to about 2 meters in height above the surrounding ground (Photo 2) and is enclosed by a ring of markedly smaller stones (20 to 40 cm in diameter) at a distance by 50 to 100 cm from its base (36).



Photo 1



Photo 2

Description

The Megalith, looks like a block of stone with unique characteristics, very different from the surrounding rocks of the same geographic location that appear schist (with frequent presence of oil shale) and dolomitic limestone, predominantly formed in the Triassic and Jurassic Periods. The described rock appears, in fact, formed by angular fragments of a diameter greater than 2 mm. The space between them is filled by smaller fragments and by a "mineral cement" (Photo 3) which binds the whole as in the conglomerates (40).



Photo 3

It has a shape of a truncated triangular pyramid with steep faces. The cross section is, i.e., roughly triangular with rounded vertices. The base of this triangle is located to the East. The bisection is in East-West direction and here the vertex appears more acute throughout its height.

From a personal reconnaissance of August 10, 2013, it was observed the decline of the New Moon right towards the West (azimuth: 263.8°) at around 09:57 p.m., following the direction of the line segment bisector. This would not seem random orientation, because of the size of this megalithic formation it can, that has the characteristics of a oriented Menhir, well planted with its larger base in the ground in the manner of a “Baetylus” (6), (7), (8), (9), (10).

In subsequent daytime reconnaissance, was evident that the entire exposed surface was covered with petroglyphs that appear to represent filiforms and fern leaves patterns. There are also branched drawings that could symbolize deer antlers and bucrania (Photo 4), (Photo 5).



Photo 4



Photo 5

In addition to these rock engravings, there are cruciforms (Photo 6) and, at the top, on the minor base of this truncated pyramid there is a surface, easily reachable by the observer, which presents, in

addition to the before mentioned types of petroglyphs (38), (39), also gutters, rhomboid basins (with major axis oriented towards East-West) and cupmarks (Photo 7), typical of the megalithic altars (11), also described by our study group in other sites of Ceresio Valley (30) and near Finale Figure (21), (22), (23), (24), (25), (26), (27), (28), (29), (30), (31), (32), (33), (34).



Photo 6



Photo 7

The base of the megalith is surrounded by smaller stones of local origin, irregular dolomitic limestone (from 20 to 40 cm in diameter), to a variable distance (50 to 100 cm) from the base of the Monolith, partially buried and hidden by the infesting weeds (1), (36). Such stones not appear to have the function to support this big rock, but rather to delimit the area of this likely Menhir (Photo 8).



Photo 8

Discussion

The dating of the probably Menhir described in this study is quite difficult. It is located, in fact, outdoor and is subject to the meteorological and anthropogenic influences.

The human presence in this area of Ceresio Valley is attested since the Neolithic Age (which in North Western Italy developed from 5800 to 3800 BC) because of the discovery of ruins of stilt houses in a wetland area of a nearby location, named Cattafame (2).

However, the Ceresio Valley and the District of Mendrisio (i.e.: Mendrisiotto - CH) are rich in evidences of these prehistoric times. Neighbors Hillforts in Tremona and Melano (Ticino, CH) dated back to the Iron Age (900-180 BC), are altitude fortifications constructed on Neolithic sites, used and also expanded in later periods.

The megalithic remains and the petroglyphs found in Velmaio (Photo 9), similar to those previously studied in Porto Ceresio (30), can be traced back to the Neolithic and the Bronze Age (2200-900 BC).

From the end of the fifth millennium at the end of the third millennium BC (a period covering the Neolithic and the Bronze Age), appeared the megalithic constructions and the petroglyphs.

The megalithic culture came to North Western Italy presumably through the mountain passes of the Great and Little St. Bernard, Simplon, Gotthard, Splügen and San Bernardino, but also, probably by sea, from Provence (35).

Between the Middle Bronze Age (1600 BC) and the beginning of the Iron Age, in North Western Italy developed the Golasecca Culture, probably of Celtic origin. It was a bridge between the Cisalpine peoples (e.g.: Celtic-Ligurians, Etruscans, Greeks, Italic peoples of central and southern Italy and of the Islands) and the Celts settled in the north of Alps and, therefore, with Northern and Central Europe. Ceresio Valley was in the middle of the Golaseccian land and of the lines of communication and exchange between the peoples of the Mediterranean (4), (12), (13) and Transalpine Europe (14), (15), (16), (17), (19). The linguistic affinities of the Celts-Golaseccians and Celts-Ligurians are evident by some names of Ceresio Valley and of the Mendrisiotto: Ligurno (Ceresio Valley), Ligornetto (near Mendrisio - TI) derived from the ancient Greek Λίγυς (by which the Greeks indicated the Ligurians), with the meaning of "light", "bright", "sound." This word is of uncertain origin, perhaps derives from the Celtic *lugh ("bright") and therefore would be of Indo-European origin. According to other authors (37), it would originate, however, from the linguistic pre-Indo-European root *liga, meaning "marshy place", "swamp", corresponding to the Akkadian

item lihmû (lihwû), luhmû (marshland), perhaps in reference to trade and cultural relations between the peoples of the Mediterranean Sea (including the Middle East) and the inhabitants of the coastal area, that would take place right on the marshy shores of the mouths of the rivers of Liguria and Provence.

The hydronym Bevera is derived, instead, from the Celtic-Ligurian "beura" and, in turn, from the Indo-European *bhebhru- with meaning of "beaver" (3), (18), (20).



Photo 9

Conclusion

From these preliminary and necessarily partial data, it is possible that the described finding was part of a complex of megalithic structures referring to the Monte San Giorgio, whose peak, located in the Helvetic territory to an altitude of 1097 m asl, could have a sacral meaning for the populations of these places that left these megalithic and rock art artifacts (3).

Further investigations, including "on-site" researches, could lead to the discovery of other artifacts of prehistoric origin that confirm the sacredness which was attributed to the examined area.

Therefore, more archaeometrical and archaeometallurgical researches, with not invasive and / or microinvasive, now available, exploration techniques, as already considered appropriate in previous articles (30), would be desirable.

This study confirms, moreover, the importance of Ceresio Valley as a way of exchange between the North and the South of the Alps and the close relationships with the Ligurian peoples, also residents on the coast, further supporting the hypothesis that the transit areas, like the Finalese (3), (4), (5), have had a considerable importance in these trade routes and cultural exchange from the Early Neolithic.

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Dedication: This work is dedicated to Giorgio Pirondini, our dear father and grandfather that made us to discover the beauty of Ceresio Valley.

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