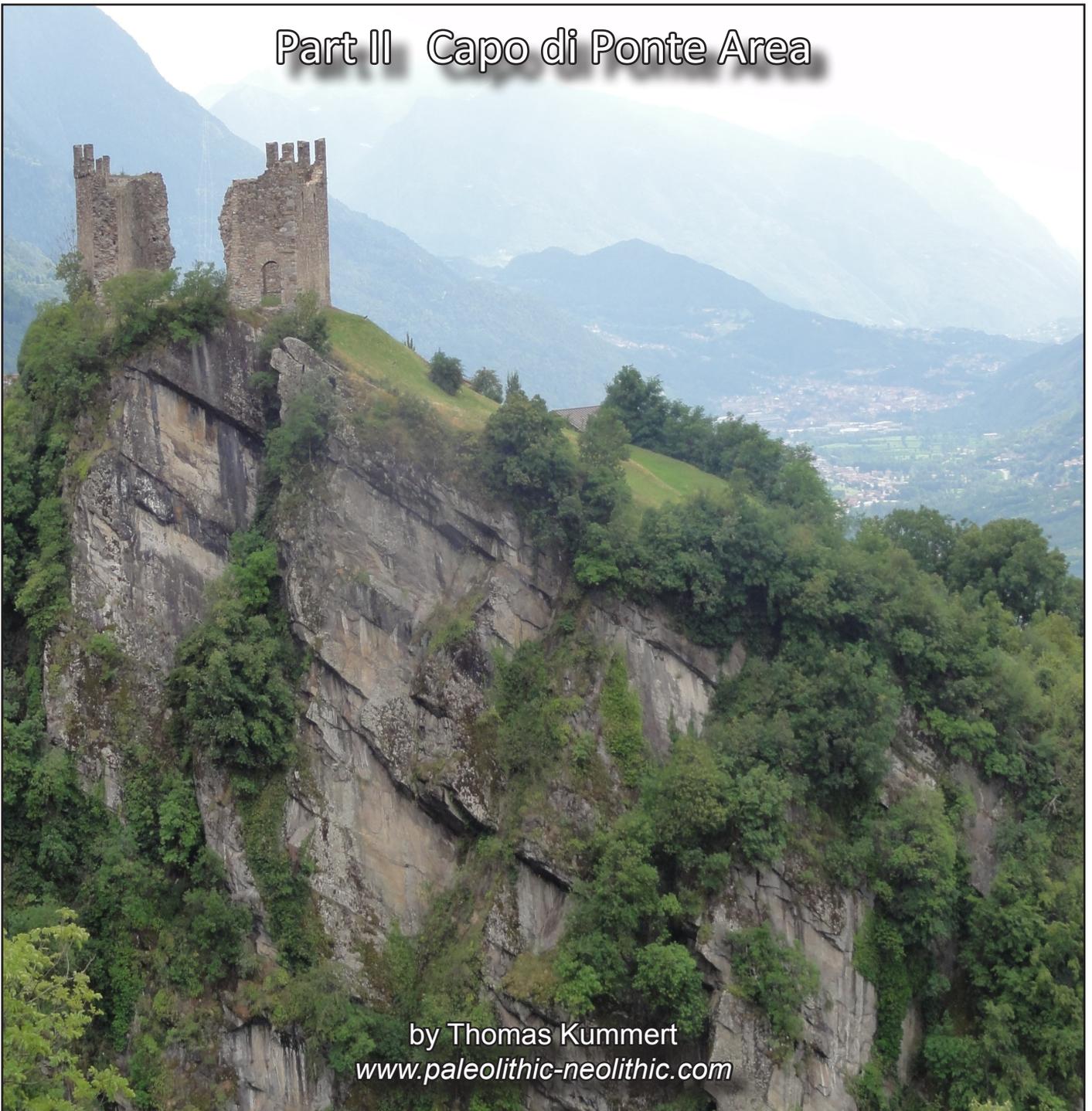


Amazing Italian Neolithic Engravings in Val Camonica

Part II Capo di Ponte Area



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Naquane National Park

This park is definitely a must see item on the agenda of every Val Camonica rock art visitor. It is also a good starting point to get an idea about animal and human representations to be seen at the numerous sites in the valley. The park is situated on the eastern outskirts of Capo di Ponte. Here you find the highest density of rock art. In the park's area of 300,000 m² there are a total of 100 engraved rocks.

Many carved bedrock surfaces are rather large, for example the so-called "big rock" is densely covered with over 800 motifs. The most amazing images for us are always human depictions. We find various male and few female images here. Next to warriors, there are men with horned headgear or phallus symbols. Dancing scenes which we can see all over the world at rock art sites are not missing here neither.

Some of the most fascinating images you can find

here include a four wheeled wagon, numerous warriors, deer hunting scenes, different forms of buildings, solar boats and also inscriptions and various stelae in a special area called "aquarium". Four wheeled wagons are preferred motives and indicate an active farming community during the Iron Age in the valley. The engravings at Naquane were created between 4,000 - 1,000 BC. So they belong to various periods from Neolithic, Copper-, Bronze- to the Iron Age and the latter are of Camuni tribal origin.

Cemmo - Amazing Cult Sanctuary

When you look to the opposite valley side, you will find on the western outskirts of Capo di Ponte the first pre-historic discovery in Val Camonica. The Cemmo Cult Circle consists of various large engraved sandstone boulders and stelae. This megalithic sanctuary was constructed for ceremonial purposes. It was first used about 10,000 years ago and was extended several times.



The semi-circular stone wall in front of two engraved boulders was erected during the Copper Age. 2,000 years later the circle was again extended with more stelae plus a raised wall during the Late Bronze Age. In total over 20 intact or fragmented vertical stone monoliths were erected. They were decorated with various telling motifs, such as solar signs, weapons, animals, ploughing scenes and even garments.



Ploughing Scenes

For example six ploughing scenes on one rock only show yoked horses and not the typical oxen we know from other sites in Europe. So they could be dated to the Iron Age, because horses arrived in Italy only towards the end of the Late Bronze Age.

The oldest plough scene at Val Camonica with oxen originates from the Copper Age. Some of the engraved figures possibly were painted, as minimal rests of ochre color have been attested on these stone stelae.

Astonishing Cemmo Boulders

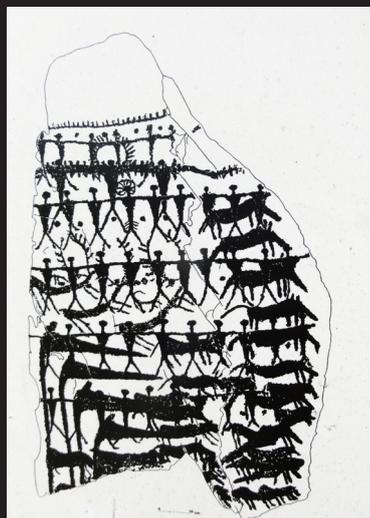
But let's look closer at some of the famous and richly decorated Cemmo Boulders. Monolith "Cemmo 1" for example, also called the "puppet rock", because it is covered with puppet like motifs. The rock has a triangular shape and measures 260 by 310 cm. Its 150 motifs include figures, animals, numerous daggers and ploughing scenes.

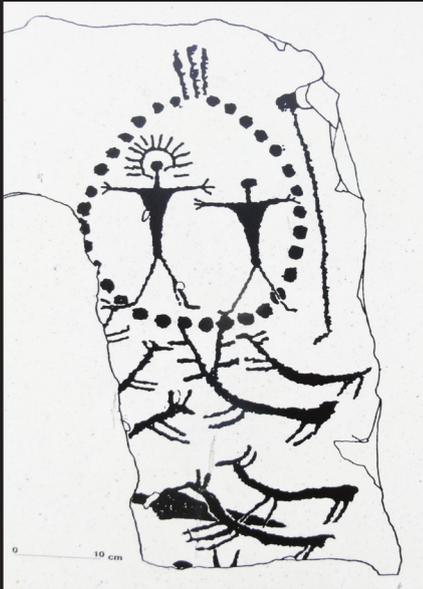
The animal images include

deer, fawns, chamois, ibex, pig or wild boar, cattle, plus a group of dogs or wolves. Some depictions are even superimposed. The engravings are dated to the Copper Age.

The "Cemmo 2" boulder or menhir has a similar size and shows animals including ibex, fawn, canid, wolf, dogs and weapons like axes, halberds and daggers. It also shows human figures working with ploughs and a four wheeled wagon. All engravings are done in regular fine pecking technique, giving the images a fine homogeneous look.

"Cemmo 3" is a hewn stone slab or stele type monolith with decorations on three sides. The main face has a





solar image, dogs, deer, pigs, halberds, daggers plus the typical line of human figures with fringed skirts. This stele is exhibited at the Naquane Park "aquarium".

"Cemmo 4" is a fragmented stele. Its main face displays an interesting composition of an oval form with 32 mini cup marks plus three short vertical lines at the top, inside the oval circle two human figures are depicted with triangular upper body, their arms and legs stretched out.

Recent research shows that a total of 27 menhirs were erected at Cemmo. Not all were found in situ. For Cemmo the "T" shaped face with eyebrows and nose is typical in comparison to the fringed rectangle motif found at the three Ossimo monolithic sites.

Various Theories Debunked

The taller figure has what one can call a "solar halo", the smaller figure has an engraved small cup mark or hole in the pubic area indicating it to be of female sex. It is worthwhile to mention, that at other rock art sites these small holes were often created at a later stage.

In pre-history female sexual organs were either shown in

oversize with huge breasts or in case of a vulva accurate with a line or slit. Some experts believe ancient engravers did not use holes to depict female figures.

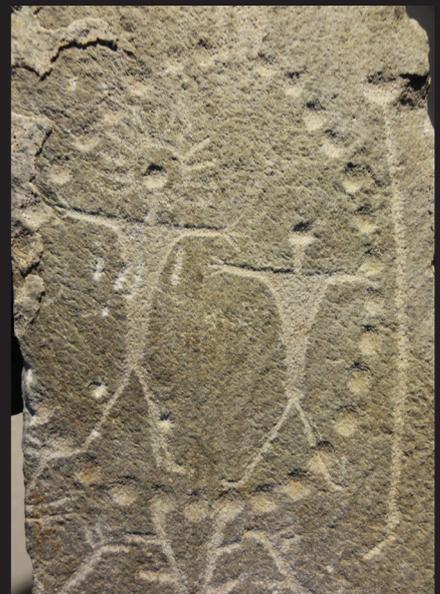
We have also heard of many thought provoking interpretations with regard to the "solar halo" including extraterrestrial interpretations. Rock art is very mythical, but also much more basic like pre-historic life was. The "solar halo" has possibly many other explanations. Please remember pre-historic human depictions never show a specific person, that changes only very much later.

They are motifs of goods, shamans shown in trance or ancestors, but always as a figurative depiction and symbol. At a later stage I will explain the helmets and hairdos. Still talking about the "Cemmo 4" stele, outside the oval circle an ax and dagger is shown. At a later stage deer and six fawns were added. This stele is also exhibited at the Naquane Park "aquarium".

Male & Female Monolith

First figurative rock art engraved on monolith goes back to the Copper Age starting in 2,900 BC. Some were erected in a row whereby the main engraved side is pointing east.

Various experts have studied the motives depicted on monolith and came to an interesting conclusion to divide them into male and female. In their opinion male monolith



are engraved with weapons like daggers and halberds, solar disks, wild animals and ploughing scenes.

Female monolith motifs include "T" face forms with eyebrows and nose, double spirals eyes and stylized breasts plus necklaces, collars, pendants and concentric circles. Cemmo and Anvoia for example have the "T" shape face motif in common.

Good examples for male monolith are stele 1 at Bagnolo Ceresolo, stele 9 Ossimo Plasagrop and stele 8 at Ossimo. And typical female monolith are stele 4 and C20 at Ossimo Anvoia, stele 6 and 10 at Cemmo and stele 1 at Cevo.





Monolith with both male and female images exist too. In the first phase from 2,900 BC daggers were engraved and after 2,500 BC halberds, sun disks and ploughing scenes. This was followed after 2,200 BC by anthropomorphic human figures some also crowned by a sun disk.

The form of monolith also show huge differences. Boulders with flat surfaces were engraved, as well as carefully hewn stelae with flat surfaces on all four sides with images carved on three sides.

Megalithic Sanctuaries

In the whole valley there are various megalithic sanctuaries. Some only have been discovered in recent years. Next to Cemmo there is Ossimo Anvoia made up of various stelae.

In the neighborhood Pat is a large site with 4,000 m² including 30 stelae some of which were still standing in their original place.

They were erected between two stone mound areas and engraved with solar symbols.

Recent excavations brought to light that the site is far larger and richer in findings than previously thought. In addition they discovered fireplaces, stone circles and votive offerings. But no burials or bones were found instead grave gifts were uncovered. These included arrow heads for male funerary rituals and vase, necklace, copper pendant and a wooden box for female burial rituals.

At Bagnolo Ceresolo only two monoliths were found so far. Most of the monoliths can be seen at the new museum in Capo di Ponte.

Seradina-Bedolina Park

As a third highlight around Capo di Ponte I would select this amazing site. Situated higher up at an altitude between 400 - 600 meters on the western slopes

above Capo di Ponte, this area has again a high concentration of rock art.

In the five different sections you will find about 150 engraved rocks. Seradina offers many armed human figures from the Iron Age and Camuni Period. Including also musical instruments from the more recent Roman Period and again ploughing scenes plus an ancient alphabet and the Val Camonia unique hut like images in various forms. Which are explained more in detail further on.

The huge Seradina Rock 12 for example has over 1,000 engravings, including an outstanding long line of horse men armed with spears going for a deer hunt with their trained dogs.

At Bedolina you can see one of the famous Val Camonica maps, the possible origins



which I have described at the beginning. That is what experts think the topographic compositions represent - a regional map of the area.

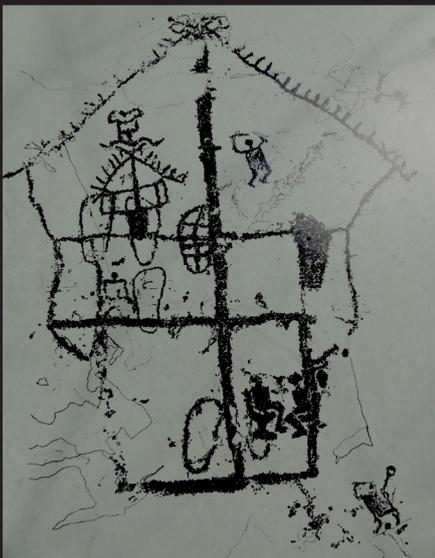
This huge bedrock is covered with many irregular and crossed lines, including also depictions interpreted as huts and squares with precisely lined small hollow cup marks or points representing fields. The 50 m² flat rock surface next to the map has similar motifs and hundreds of figures including warriors, animals and further geometric elements.

Easily one can recognise the so-called "Camunian Rose", which became the official logo of the Lombardy Province at a later stage.

House Like Images Analysed

Everybody has quickly the same interpretation at hand, when they first see the house like depictions unique to Val Camonica. The image has everything a house needs, various floors and a pitched roof with gable.

But does it really represent a pre-historic house people lived in? We think not, because Val Camonica



rock art has a strong ideological and symbolic expression. Therefore we have analysed about thirty or more house depictions all created in the Capo di Ponte area. What is common to all of them?

First they were created during the Iron Age. All structures have two floors and an attic or roof room plus a pitched roof and gables. The roof surface is marked with three to ten vertical holders of the roof coverage possibly stone plates. There are always the same number left and right, but the maximum could be up to twenty for larger structures.

The lower floors are smaller in width and a central line runs up to the pitch of the roof. This might indicate wooden poles holding the heavy stone plate covered roof. But we also see variations and special features too.

For example further vertical divisions of the lower floors might show the wooden structure. And a solid ground floor might indicate a stone built base. But we also found decorative features like a stepped enforcement from the smaller ground floor walls to the wider base of the second floor.

We discovered one interesting depiction with a double lined roof, which points clearly to what we think these house like structures

really were meant to be. This is supported by the extended roof holders starting at the roof room base.

A few examples have round openings at the top storage floor or are marked with crossed lines. Now image this was all done for easy air circulation on the upper floor and you now realize that this could

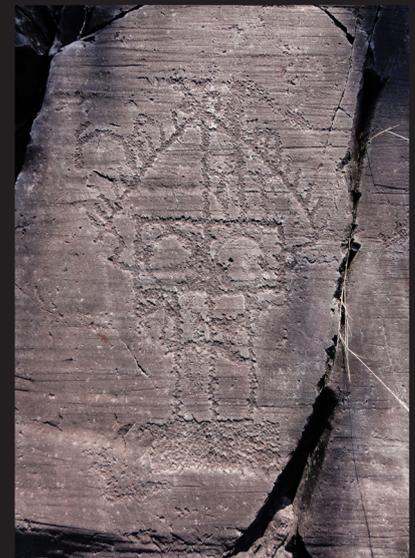
be a granary or food storage building on poles similar to those which can still be found in old villages in the Alps today.

House of Souls?

Another interpretation experts have come up with is that of the house of souls. They base this on the fact that warriors and water birds with special symbolic value are shown together. Nevertheless we doubt that for various reasons.

First the human figures and animals in the house structures are really the result of superimpositions common also to Val Camonica rock art. They result from earlier engravings and the houses were superimposed.

But the most obvious objection





to the house of souls theory is an important connection of the house like structures we see. Most house depictions are found on the west side of the valley.

The few houses on the east side were engraved on the famous "Bedolina Map" next to what experts believe to be fields, wells and roads. These five to six houses differ in structure from the rest, they are straight and have three to four floors for more storage volume. And one even has a ladder to reach the raised storage floor. So the theory of being a granary structure is the most closest for us.

Ceto – Cimbergo – Paspardo Complex

There are so many amazing rock art sites in the valley, that I cannot describe them all, but just mention some of the most important, which I have visited during my week there.

Foppe di Nardo is part of the Ceto Reserve and has a high concentration of engravings with some large bedrock surfaces and a Copper Age cult site also belongs to it.

Paspardo has four main sites and Cimbergo two, both again with some large

engraved rock surfaces. The latter two are mountain sites close to villages with the same name. All are easy to be reached by car and with a short distance on foot.



Heroes or Warriors?

We have already heard that the Camuni tribe was described by Roman historian and writer Strabo as having strong warriors with special social status. Was this a real warrior class society or just a depiction and story

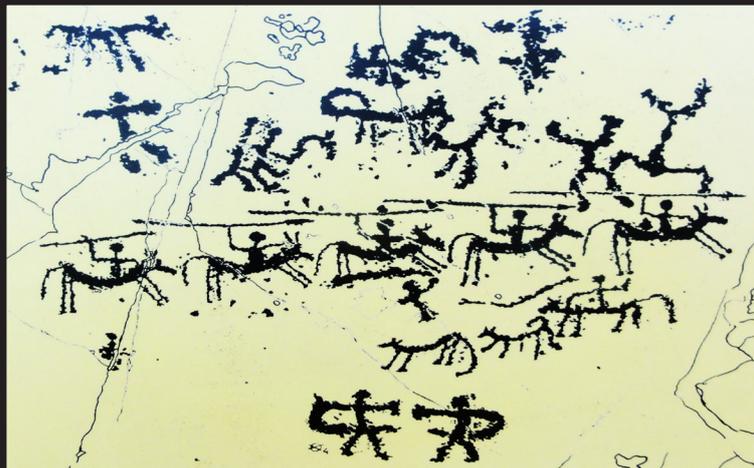
about an important ancient myth of legendary heroes or war gods typical to the Iron Age? But we think the first is more possible, but might not contradict the second idea and be based in its development on it.

This might have introduced a local tradition of ritual or training duels based on ancestral sagas. So let's look at it more closely. Warriors are shown alone with defensive weapons such as helmets and shields or interacting with one another with aggressive weapons such as spears and swords.

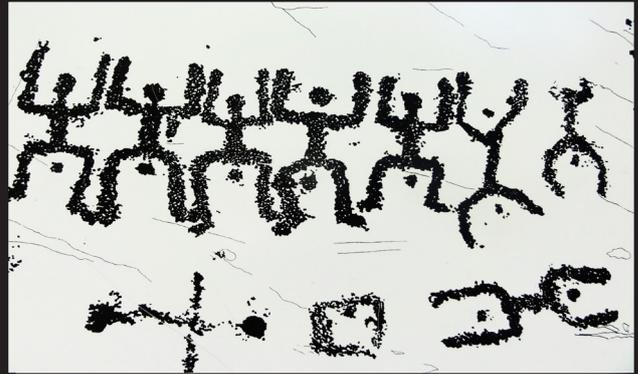
Please remember warriors in rock art are unique to Val Camonica and mostly found at Paspardo, Foppe di Nardo and Zurla.

Horsemen Images

As already explained horses were introduced to northern Italy rather late during the Iron Age and represented social status of their owners. Again we have a regional site differentiation in horse depictions.



On the western valley side horse riders were engraved in hunting scenes armed only with long spears. On the eastern valley side riders are



depicted with different weapons and engraved more as single images and seldom in a hunting scene.

But we also see so-called acrobatic images with riders standing on their horses. These engravings are interpreted by experts in various ways, either as part of the warrior story including sportive actions, or as initiation test and finally as myth.

This is the interesting part of rock art interpretation. Due to the missing writings and missing archaeological evidence from settlements, which were not yet found, we know close to nothing about the creators of Val Camonica rock art.

Conclusion

Val Camonica is the largest and most interesting site in Europe and definitely worthwhile visiting when spending holidays in northern Italy. It is just north of Brescia and close to Lago di Garda.

Visiting the Naquane National Park will take you only an hour. But if you are really interested I would also visit the local museum and Cemmo cult ring all in Capo di Ponte. The sites are well indicated from the main road. And at the entrance of the Naquane National Park you will find Sara Rinetti, who is always helpful with any information you need and you can book a guide to take you around.



Travel Tips

Whoever is planning his next Italian holiday and considers a stopover in Val Camonica should get in touch with Archeocamuni in Capo di Ponte.

The owner Sara Rinetti speaks English and will organize everything for you from private tours with expert guides, museum visits, books, to hotels and restaurants. You can also book an all-inclusive tour, which I did and can only recommend.

We appreciated the bookings at the best local often hidden away restaurants in the valley. The food is typically local, definitely non-tourist, surprisingly varied and always excellent. And you are certainly the only non-Italian guests, which for me is proof enough as Italians know their chefs.

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