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978-1-108-08258-7 - A Guide to the Prehistoric Rock Engravings in the Italian Maritime Alps

Clarence Bicknell

Frontmatter

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The discovery of material remains from the recent or the ancient past has always been a source of fascination, but the development of archaeology as an academic discipline which interpreted such finds is relatively recent. It was the work of Winckelmann at Pompeii in the 1760s which first revealed the potential of systematic excavation to scholars and the wider public. Pioneering figures of the nineteenth century such as Schliemann, Layard and Petrie transformed archaeology from a search for ancient artifacts, by means as crude as using gunpowder to break into a tomb, to a science which drew from a wide range of disciplines - ancient languages and literature, geology, chemistry, social history - to increase our understanding of human life and society in the remote past.

A Guide to the Prehistoric Rock Engravings in the Italian Maritime Alps

In the mountainous border region between France and Italy lies the Vallée des Merveilles. Still surprisingly remote, and dominated by Mont Bégo, it contains alpine meadows, rare flora and fauna, spectacular glaciated rock formations, and over 35,000 Bronze Age rock engravings that are only free of snow for a few months of the year. Though this major archaeological site was mentioned in print around 1650, the first thorough guidebook was published in 1913 by Clarence Bicknell (1842–1918), a Cambridge graduate and Anglican clergyman who had settled on the Riviera around 1880. Bicknell published several books on the botany of the region, but it was not until the 1890s that he began in earnest to explore the petroglyphs, a project he continued into his seventies. He built up a collection of over 12,000 drawings, rubbings and photographs, which form the basis of the 46 plates that illustrate this book.

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C. BICKNELL

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A GUIDE

to

THE PREHISTORIC

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in

The Italian Maritime Alps

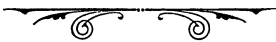


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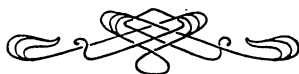
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PREFACE

So much has lately been written about the Prehistoric Rock-Engravings in the Italian Maritime Alps, that an apology seems to be needed for publishing anything more; but as I am now, after twelve years of almost continuous explorations, pretty well acquainted with the whole region, and think that there is not much more to be discovered, I wish to say my last word upon the subject, and gather together the substance of what I have already printed in many pamphlets, taking advantage of what has been written by others, and especially by those scientific visitors who under our guidance have seen some small portion of the vast region where the engravings are to be found. It is not at all likely that anyone will ever be able to devote so many years as we have done to the neighbourhood, and we therefore hope that this book will serve as a guide to those who may come in the future, and enable them to find without great loss of time what is most worth seeing. Though I am alone chiefly responsible for the following pages, I use the word 'we' in speaking of our explorations and discoveries, because I have nearly always been accompanied by my Italian friend Signor Luigi Pollini, for very many years my faithful assistant at home, and my helpful companion when travelling and botanizing in Europe, Africa and Asia. Without his quicker eyes, nimbler feet, and indefatigable assistance, very many of the rocks most difficult of access, and of the figures cut upon them, would not have been discovered. He has climbed steep and slippery places where I was loth to go, and taken copies and made photographs of the figures there, and has never been weary when I could walk or work no more. I therefore take this opportunity of thanking him for the great service he has rendered me,

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without which a large part of what follows could not have been written. I also desire to thank my friend Professor Arturo Issel for the encouragement he has always given me to continue the explorations, and to publish from time to time some account of them.

As the figures on the rocks vary greatly in size, from a few centimetres to a few metres, and we have been obliged to place the copies of those which we have chosen for our plates in close juxtaposition, we have drawn them by eye, not always as well as we could have wished, but we believe accurately. The labour of reducing so many by means of a pantograph would have been very great, and we should have been obliged to use a great number of different scales. We have therefore given, for those of our readers who care to know the actual dimensions of the original rubbings, their vertical and horizontal lengths in centimetres. By this method we think it is easier to grasp at once what is the real size of the originals, than if one is told that the figures of the plates are 1/8, 1/10, or whatever it may be.

We have to thank Signor Benigni of Bordighera for the large photographs; the small ones were taken by ourselves.

Since the following pages were written we have spent another summer in Val Casterino. In Val Fontanalba we have copied about a hundred more figures, chiefly small or indistinct ones, but in the Meraviglie region we have discovered some engraved rocks on the slopes of M. Bego high above Laghi Lunghi and others above the right bank of the Vallone, some of them very interesting ones, and have added some 250 figures to our collection, so that our total amounts to nearly 5150 for the Meraviglie, over 7000 for Val Fontanalba, about 130 for Val Valauretta and 20 for Col Sabbione, in all more than 12,000.

CLARENCE BICKNELL.

Bordighera, 1913.

