

A Gönnersdorf-style engraving in the parietal art of Grotta Romanelli (Apulia, southern Italy)

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Abstract: *Gönnersdorf-style figurines and silhouettes are well known at over 40 sites in western and central Europe and are found in association with Magdalenian or Azilian lithic industries. We describe an engraving of this type discovered at Grotta Romanelli in south-western Italy, in association with a Romanellian industry, a local facies of the Italian Late Epigravettian. This find considerably extends the known geographical distribution of Gönnersdorf-type figures.*

Keywords: *Italy, Late Paleolithic, Romanellian, Parietal art, Engraving*

Eine Figur des Typs Gönnersdorf in der Wandkunst der Grotta Romanelli (Apulien, Süditalien)

Zusammenfassung: Die Grotta Romanelli im südlichen Apulien wurde bereits 1900 als archäologische Fundstelle entdeckt und bis in die zweite Hälfte des 20. Jhs. hinein in zahlreichen Grabungskampagnen untersucht. Früheste Hinweise auf die Anwesenheit von Menschen gehören in das Mittelpaläolithikum. Auf eine stratigraphische Lücke folgen dann wesentlich jüngere Ablagerungen mit einer nach der Grotta Romanelli als Romanellien bezeichneten spätpaläolithischen Industrie, einer lokalen Ausprägung des späten italienischen Epigravettien. Unkalibrierte Daten geben für diese Schichten ein Alter zwischen etwa 9.000 und 12.000 vor heute, das entspricht einem Alter zwischen etwa 10.000 und knapp 15.000 vor heute in kalibrierten Daten. Dabei liegen die meisten der kalibrierten Daten bei einfacher Standardabweichung innerhalb eines Zeitintervalles zwischen 11.200 und 13.500 vor heute.

Bei den älteren Ausgrabungen wurden mehrfach Kalksteinblöcke und -platten mit sowohl figürlichen und schematischen als auch abstrakten Darstellungen gefunden. Darüber hinaus fanden sich an mehreren Stellen Gravuren an den Höhlenwänden, die z.T. noch unpubliziert sind. Unter den Wanddarstellungen im Inneren der Höhle wurde eine nur etwa 2 cm hohe eingravierte Darstellung identifiziert, die wahrscheinlich den Umriss einer stilisierten Frauenfigur des Typs Gönnersdorf darstellt und die im vorliegenden Beitrag beschrieben wird. Erkennbar sind der Oberkörper, die Gesäßpartie und die Beine. Vergleichbare Darstellungen kennt man sowohl in der Wandkunst als auch in der Kleinkunst von inzwischen mehr als 40 jung- bis spätpaläolithischen Fundstellen vor allem in Mittel- und Westeuropa. Herausragend ist dabei der Namen gebende Fundplatz Gönnersdorf am Mittelrhein mit mehr als 400 Darstellungen. In der Wandkunst waren Figuren des Typs Gönnersdorf bisher auf Westeuropa westlich der Rhône beschränkt. Der Fund in der Grotta Romanelli würde damit die bisher bekannte geographische Verbreitung dieses Typs beträchtlich erweitern.

Schlagwörter: Italien, Spätpaläolithikum, Romanellien, Wandkunst, Gravur

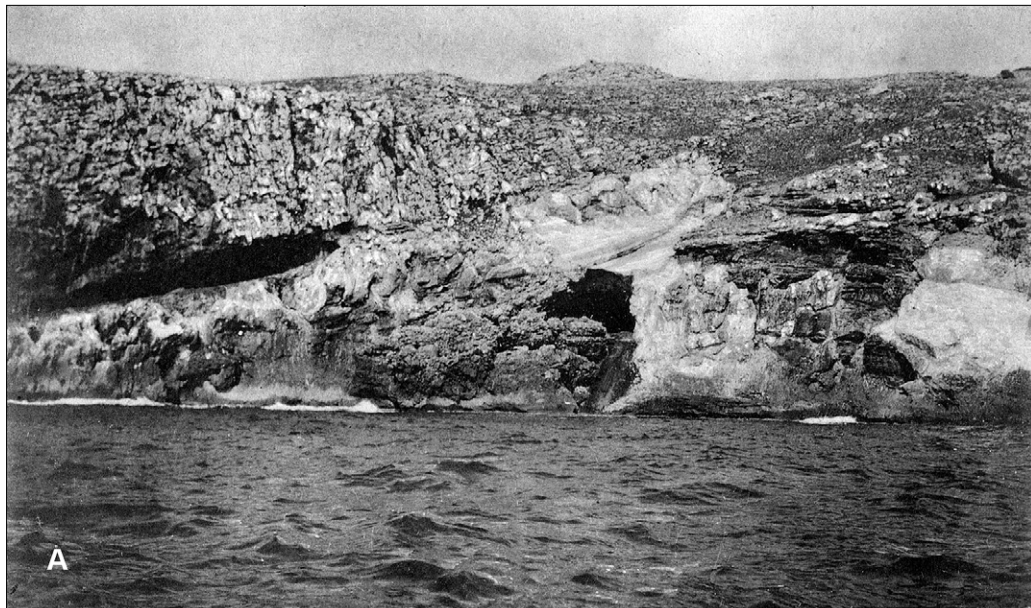


Fig. 1: A Grotta Romanelli seen from the sea (after Blanc 1930). B The entrance of Grotta Romanelli, seen from the inside of the cave (photo M. Mussi). The Gönnersdorf-style silhouette was discovered in the dark area on the left, while the deeply engraved freeze is in full light, on the ceiling just beyond the grate.

Introduction

Grotta Romanelli is located in southern Apulia at 40°N, at a few meters above sea level on a limestone cliff facing the southern Adriatic Sea (Fig. 1A). The archaeological site was discovered in 1900 by Paolo Emilio Stasi (1840-1922), a local scholar, who started digging there with Ettore Regalia, a palaeontologist. Major excavations were directed from 1914 to 1938 by Gian Alberto Blanc, who introduced a modern interdisciplinary approach and published the results in some detail (Blanc 1920, 1930). Later, during the second half of the century, Luigi Cardini also directed several digging seasons.

Overlying a basal Tyrrhenian beach deposit of last interglacial age, the stratigraphic sequence includes two distinct deposits: the lower *terre rosse* (“red earth”), which produced remains of pachyderms and Middle Palaeolithic tools (Piperno 1974; Spinapolice 2008); and, after a stratigraphic gap, the upper *terre brune*, (“brown earth”), of much later age, with abundant Late Palaeolithic industry, the so-called Romanellian. The Romanellian, which includes small-sized endscrapers, burins, points with bilateral retouch, and backed elements, has been discovered at a few more sites of Apulia, where the later Epiromanellian also developed (Mussi 2001). This industry is a regional facies of the Italian late Epigravettian, only found in a restricted area, in the southwest of the peninsula. In the past, industries including many small endscrapers and backed tools, from elsewhere in southern Europe, were improperly also labelled as Romanellian. The rich faunal assemblage is dominated by wild ass, aurochs, and red deer, but other animals, such as red fox and birds, were also intensely exploited (Cassoli et al. 1997, 2003; Compagnoni et al. 1997; Fiore 2003; Fiore et al. 2003; Tagliacozzo 2003).

The *terre brune* layers are subdivided into layers E-A, from bottom to top. They were radiocarbon-dated in the 1960s, at an early stage of the development of this dating technique, both at Rome and at Groningen. The results are to some extent contrasting (Table 1) (Bella et al. 1958-1961; Vogel and Waterbolk 1963; Alessio et al. 1964, 1965). There is little doubt, however, that within the overall range of 10,000-15,000 cal BP, most of the dates cluster between 11,200 and 13,500 cal BP.

Level	Laboratory	Conventional Date BP	Calibrated Date BP	68% range calBP
A	R-54	9,050 ± 100	10,174 ± 169	10,005 – 10,343
A	GrN-2056	9,880 ± 100	11,401 ± 162	11,239 – 11,563
A	GrN-2305	10,320 ± 130	12,155 ± 30	11,852 – 12,457
A	R-58	11,800 ± 600	14,057 ± 844	13,213 – 14,901
B	R-56	11,930 ± 520	14,179 ± 759	13,419 – 14,938
C	GrN-2154	9,790 ± 80	11,203 ± 72	11,130 – 11,275
C	GrN-2153	10,390 ± 80	12,310 ± 198	12,111 – 12,508
D	GrN-2055	10,640 ± 100	12,556 ± 157	12,399 – 12,713

Table 1: The ¹⁴C dates of Grotta Romanelli. Calibration made using the curve CalPal2007_HULU at <http://www.calpal-online.de>. Dates are arranged in a conventional way within each level, except for R-54 which is the nearest to the surface of the deposit.

Engraved limestone blocks and slabs were discovered, mostly at the base of level C, with both schematic and naturalistic engravings (most notably bovids, a doe, a small felid, and a possible wild boar) (Blanc 1930; Graziosi 1932-33; Acanfora 1967). A block, with rows of arch-shaped patterns painted in red, was also found in levels B-C.

A number of deeply engraved motifs at a larger scale, forming a kind of frieze, were recognized at the cave mouth and in full light, some meters above modern ground-level (Blanc 1930). They include linear and fusiform patterns, some of which could be vulvas and anthropomorphs, as well as a schematic bovid (Fig. 2). According to Blanc (1930, 410, table XLI), a few of the engraved blocks of level C had broken off the ceiling. Panels with fine engravings also exist inside the cave, but were never described or illustrated. We discuss below one of the inner engravings that we recognized as a Gönnersdorf-type silhouette.

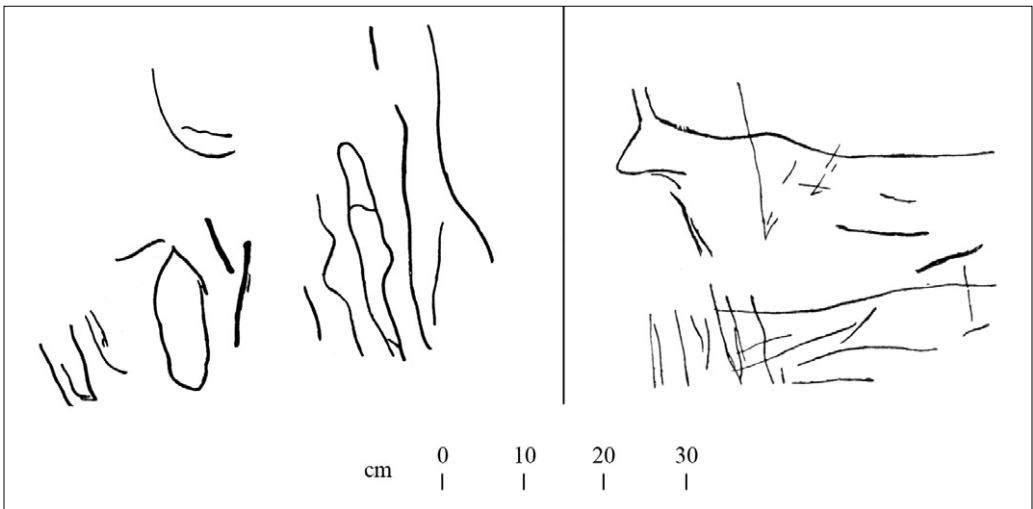


Fig. 2: Two different groups of deep engravings, in full light at the mouth of Grotta Romanelli (after Blanc 1930).

The Gönnersdorf-style engraving

An engraved panel can be seen inside the cave just above modern ground-level, i.e., above the artificial level left after excavating the *Terre brune*. During our research, it was not possible to test if the *Terre brune* had been thoroughly excavated in this part of the cave. The panel is in a dark area, rarely if ever reached by direct sunlight, on the left when looking toward the entrance from within (Fig. 1B). It includes naturalistic bovids and schematic patterns, that have yet to be deciphered.

To the left and above a bovid figure, a small anthropomorphic silhouette, 2cm in length, was discovered (Fig. 3). The upper part is damaged by lichen growth, while the lower part is sharply engraved and well preserved. It is a right profile, which makes partial use of an oblique fissure in the wall to outline the upper back. The anterior part of the trunk is also suggested by a natural pattern of the rock, while the lower body is carefully engraved. Overall, it is symmetric, with an upper body oriented forward, protruding

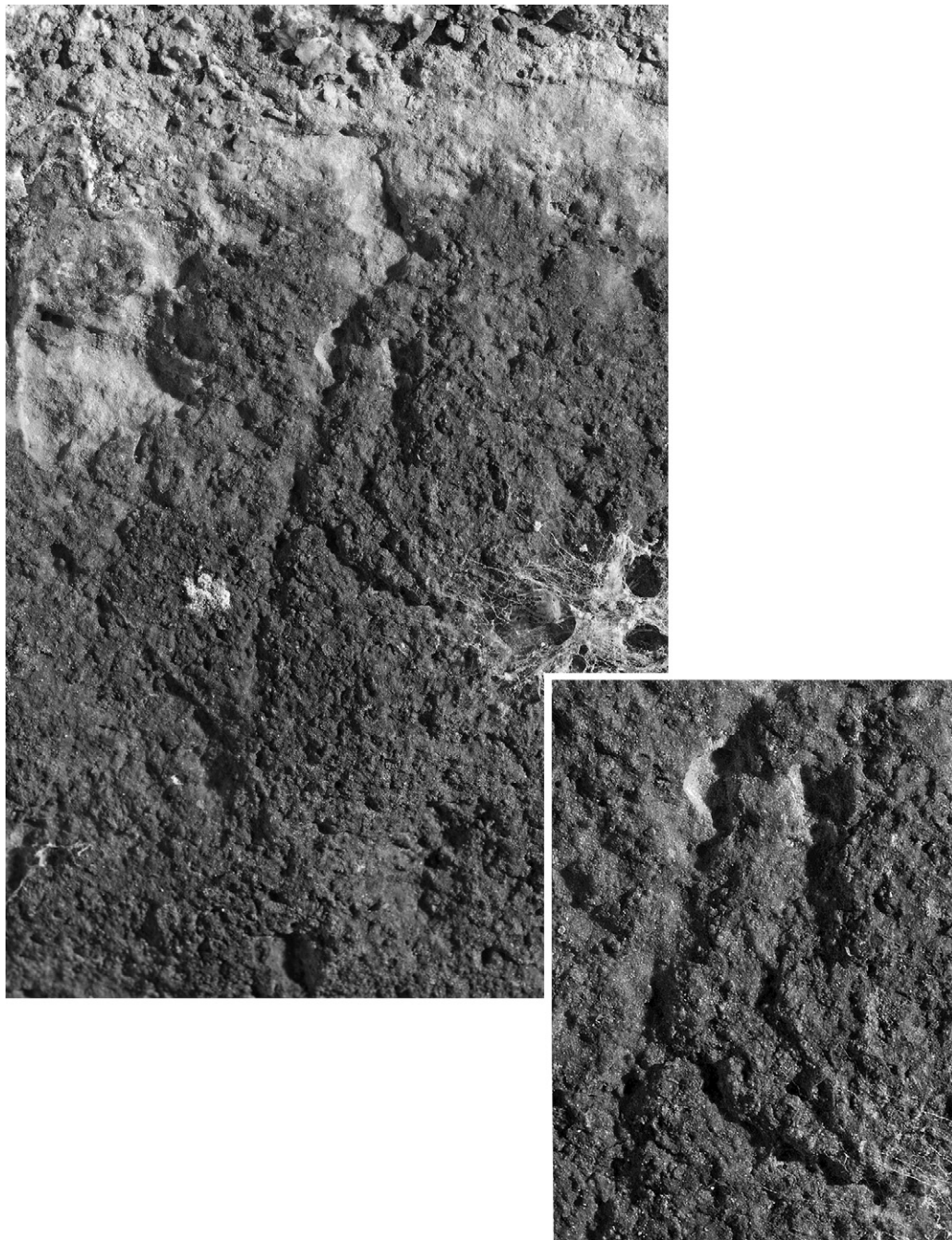


Fig. 3: The Gönnersdorf-style silhouette discovered inside Grotta Romanelli (photo F. Pino). Maximum length 2 cm.

buttocks, and legs directed forward, mirroring the thorax. The head is possibly evidenced by the slightly more vertical posture of the upper thorax, but this is not certain due to poor preservation. The thorax or head is left open at the top. An elongated breast is possibly suggested by a natural depression, without any artificial modification. There is no evidence of an arm. On the lower rear, a rounded buttock is accurately engraved. A fold divides the latter from the united thigh and calf, ending in a point. The abdomen is flat.

Concluding remarks

The silhouette discovered at Grotta Romanelli fits well within one of the variants of the Gönnersdorf or Gönnersdorf-Lalinde-style (Bosinski 1991; Delporte 1993; Bosinski and Schiller 1998; Bosinski et al. 2001). The closest analogies are to engravings discovered at sites in south-western France, such as Lalinde, Le Courbet, Fontalès, Pestillac: the upper part is left open, the lower one is pointed, there are no arms, and in some examples the breasts are outlined. Although engraved, the Romanelli silhouette is also similar to some statuettes, notably the figurine from Le Courbet. The new discovery strengthens the hypothesis made by Mussi and Zampetti (1988), who suggested that some of the anthropomorphic engravings at the mouth of the cave, which are rather large, over 20cm in height, also recalled the Gönnersdorf style (Fig. 2).

Altogether, Gönnersdorf-style female representations have been discovered at over 40 Magdalenian or, less frequently, Azilian sites, as portable as well as parietal art, as single representations or as multiple ones, with more than 400 examples known from the eponymous site (Fig. 4). The geographic distribution encompasses most of western and central Europe, from Cantabria to Moravia and Poland; however parietal art was restricted, up until now, to an area west of the Rhône Valley. Variants of the type are also known in the Ukraine, at Mezin and Mežirič – sites which are earlier than those in central and eastern Europe. Gönnersdorf-style female representations had not been previously reported in Italy at any Lateglacial site, in association with Late Epigravettian industry. Grotta Romanelli, with a Romanellian lithic industry, considerably expands the previously known distribution beyond the area of the Magdalenian and Azilian sites. Furthermore, while a figurine, if found in southern Italy, could well have been the outcome of hand-to-hand exchanges, the silhouette must have been engraved on the cave wall by an artist who had seen similar ones at a distant location. This suggests people freely moving over long distances, beyond both geographical boundaries and boundaries established on the basis of the modern classification of lithic tools.

Acknowledgements

The permit to visit Grotta Romanelli and study the engraving was granted by Soprintendenza archeologica della Puglia, and we are specially grateful to Dr. Maria Antonietta Gorgoglione for the assistance given. The research of MM was funded by a grant MIUR – Ricerca scientifica (Facoltà di Lettere - Università di Roma "La Sapienza"). The pictures were graphically processed by Filiberto Scarpelli (Laboratorio di Paletnologia, Dipartimento di Scienze dell'Antichità, Università di Roma "La Sapienza"). During the first visit to Grotta Romanelli we were greatly helped by Paul Bahn and Nadine Rhodes, who accompanied us. ADM was in charge of the local documentation, and MM of the overall research.

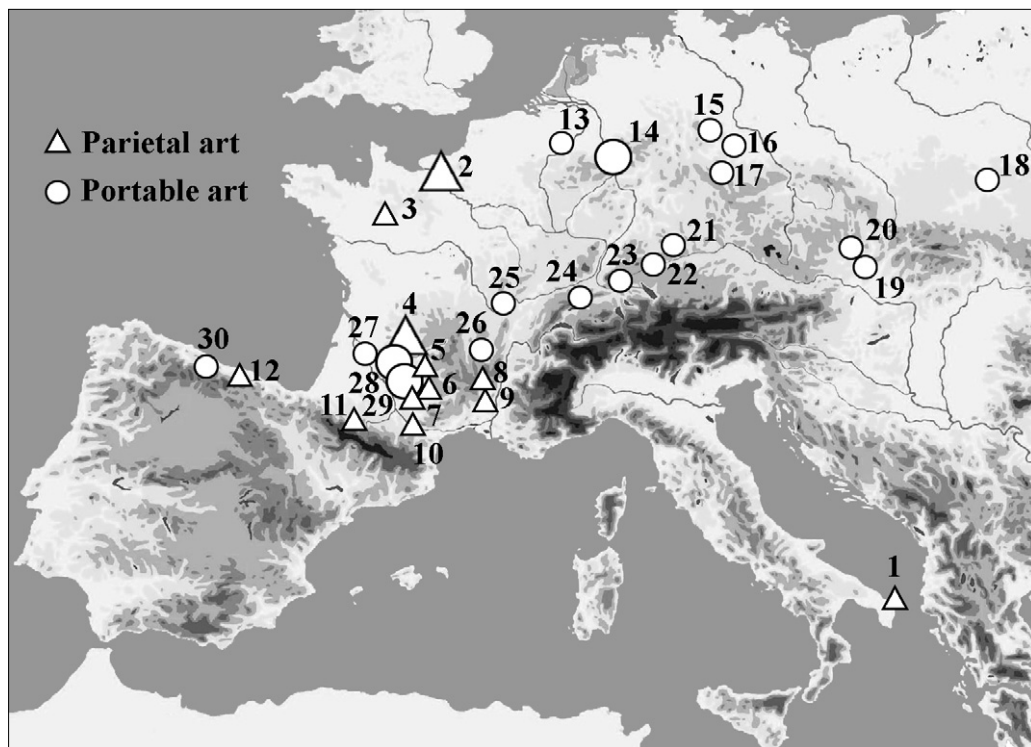


Fig. 4: Distribution map of Gönnersdorf-style engravings and figurines. Parietal art (at some sites with parietal art portable art was also discovered): 1 Romanelli – 2 Gouy and Orival – 3 Margot – 4 Les Combarelles, Saint-Cirq, Comarque, Vielmouly II, Fronsac, La Font Bargeix – 5 Carriot – 6 Lagrave – 7 Pestillac – 8 Planchard – 9 Deux-Ouvertures – 10 Gazel – 11 Gourdan – 12 El Linar. Portable art: 13 Megarnie – 14 Gönnersdorf, Andernach, Niederbieber – 15 Nebra – 16 Oelknitz – 17 Teufelsbrücke – 18 Wilczyce – 19 Pekarna – 20 Byčí Skála – 21 Hohlenstein bei Edersheim – 22 Felsställe – 23 Petersfels – 24 Neuchâtel-Monruz – 25 Goutte Roffat – 26 Rond-du-Barry – 27 Faustin – 28 Lalinde, Gare de Couze, Rochereil – 29 Murat, Le Courbet, Fontalès – 30 Las Caldas. After Bosinski et al. 2001, with additions from Sacchi 1986, Egloff 1995, Ipiens et al. 2000, Sentis 2003, Pigeaud et al. 2006 and Fiedorczuk et al. 2007.

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