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# Offerings consumed by fire. A proto-historic cult site in Vione - Tor dei Pagà (Upper Valcamonica, Brescia, Italy)

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## Abstract

The high-altitude site of Tor dei Pagà (2236 m asl) in Vione (Brescia) has been the focus of a multi-year archaeological project focused on a Late Medieval (13th-14th century) fortified complex, composed of two towers and several associated structures. Below the walls and floor surfaces of Tower B, the traces of an older, protohistoric, phase of use were identified, preliminarily dated between the 10th and 5th/4th centuries BC. The deposit consists of the remains of repeated episodes of burning: charcoal, burned bone, and (often fragmentary) metal objects – amongst which were fibulae, pendants and small "bullae" in bronze sheet – damaged by the fire. Amongst the fragments of ceramic vessels, with finely smoothed surfaces and sometimes decorated with linear incisions or cord impressions, there are large and small mugs, of a form that recalls those of nearby Trentino, along with cups and bowls. The context seems to fit well into the so-called Brandopferplätze type – Alpine cult sites characterised by ritual fires that developed between the Middle Bronze Age and the Iron Age and that in many cases continued in use into the late Roman era. This particular manifestation of ritual activity at the site of Tor dei Pagà (Upper Valcamonica) exhibits both differences from, and similarities to, other known Brandopferplätze. On the side of difference: the site has a relative lack of burned bone and those that there are tend to be extremely fragmented. On the side of similarity: the ritual fires occurred repeatedly, bronze objects were offered to the flames, the site is at high elevation, visually dominant and visible from afar. Of particular note is the continuity with successive occupation manifested in the towers of the Late Medieval period. Visibility, control, inaccessibility: these key words seem to define an "ideological landscape" that has, at differing times, met various needs: firstly religious but then also economic and politico-military.

**Keywords:** Brandopferplatz, Valcamonica, Bronze/Iron Age, ceramics, metal objects, animal bone

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