

Zone 2: Colombia

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Since the Colonial period (16th to 19th centuries) there has been incomplete data collected on the existence of pre-Columbian rock art sites, where Colombian Indian communities left their thoughts, and with them the language they used to represent them, painted or engraved on rocks in their territorial lands. It was not until the 19th century that the Chorographic Commission-1850-59 made an attempt to document the republic and some Indian monuments (rock art) which were included as one way of getting to know the territory. It was also the government's way of showing official interest (*Watercolours of the Picturesque Album of New Granada*) in knowing and valuing their territory. Nevertheless, this first effort at registering, studying and interpreting was abandoned in the face of violence and political disputes that continue today. This attitude largely determined the type, level of knowledge and a few stages of the scientific activity involved in the study of these pre-Columbian cultural manifestations, as well as, the precariousness of the language studies, the thought and the ways of representation in pre-Columbian times. Existing references about rock art studies correspond essentially to isolated individuals (Isaacs 1883, Triana 1924, Cabrera Ortiz W. 1942, Gipri 1970-2006) who, in distinct stages of the national history, have been interested in Indian themes and have reported and registered some zones with paintings and engravings. When the limited bibliography is reviewed, gaps are found in the data from certain periods, as well as the repetition of the classic works which have deficient documentation. Without adequate training, those who did the graphics and registrations of the 19th century and of the beginning of the 20th century left incomplete descriptions, which resulted in inadequate proportions or scales. Also they omit motifs or make them into geometric figures, producing a document of rock art motifs, with drawings in forms very different from the original.

It was under these circumstances that the Gipri group began their investigations (1970-2006) in various territories of different departments, showing that there exists a high density of pictographs and petroglyphs in various areas of Colombia. Data presented here, nevertheless, correspond to a wide group of references that exist from previous investigations done during different points in time which demonstrate different levels of quality and seriousness in the registration and study. In many cases, these works correspond to simple reports, sometimes accompanied by a few graphics, paintings (watercolours) and photos. This report corresponds essentially to the data in works done by Gipri-Colombia as well as research from diverse sources that have been collected during the past 35 years.

Using accumulated data, the stable Gipri investigative group has been able to systematically register some regions, and at the same time, has been able to gradually formulate criteria and methodological structures to register and study the alterations to be used as a proposed model for future studies which preserve and administer rock art sites. Based on Cartesian criteria and the objective of correcting errors in previous works, during different stages of evolution, the

¹ The Spanish version is in Annex II of the Thematic Study.

working group has developed systems of organizing documents and has made important progress in the formats used to document motifs, their context in picture groups and their characteristics within that context. Documentation to date should be viewed as a complex methodological model, and as a practical theoretic structure that includes graphics (cartographic recording system), as well as a description of the rock art motifs (standardized field note form for the rock) and a parallel record for registering alterations that graphically discriminate different themes with a percentage of colors and a color table (CMYK and RGB). This registry format includes the petroglyph characteristics in relation to the drawings, and also complements its description with information about other conditions relative to the alterations (Bednarik 2001). The object of this task is to be able to simultaneously evaluate the group of drawings, the conditions of alteration and the agents responsible for deterioration.

Investigation and the zones:

Experience working, searching and registering during these past years has made us aware that there are many unstudied high-density rock art zones, such as the one we studied in the 1996-2005 municipal project around the town of El Colegio, Cundinamarca. In this municipality 2,000 rock art sites were found and registered in 44 areas representing 50% of the total township. If this tendency is the same for zones near other high plains towns (Anolaima, Viota, Cachipay, Nilo, San Antonio de Tequendama, Tibacuy), at least in the Cundinamarca department, then it is possible that the number of reported sites could be multiplied by at least four or five times.

It is important to say that the data that are available for these documented Colombian departments, towns and local neighbourhoods correspond to certain regions where a road network exists along with a high-density population, while other territories, not visited but mentioned in this report, do not have the same density of petroglyphs and pictographs. Eventually the zones not studied may show that they have the same number of rock art sites, since the information was gathered from scarce reports and expeditions. This seems to demonstrate that rock art was done in many territories, was the product of different people or cultures, and was something possibly done by ethnic groups that have not yet been studied. Then probably, in the group of departments not mentioned here, there exist an unknown number of rock art sites, such as those discovered in the past few years (Chiribiquete). In order to explain why this occurs, it is necessary to understand the history of the population.

Long periods of occupation have been proven by studies on hunter-gatherer communities (Correal, Van der Hammen-1970) permitting us to construct a complete image of the ethnic groups who lived in Colombia as far back as 12,000 B.P. During this investigation, Colombian archaeologists have worked in some of the study areas and have been able to describe the climatic history (flora and fauna), as well as the conditions encountered by local ethnic groups, some of whom possibly made rock art. Nevertheless, connections between the archaeological studies and the documents about rock art in those areas do not exist yet, so there is nothing to allow us to widen paths into the study of rock art and its interpretation.

In summary, we have been able to compile diverse data about an important number of rock art sites (5,899 sites), and simultaneously we have pursued new investigative themes relating to the history of rock art, which has made it possible to restudy the history of documentation and the stages in which the country has lived, the context of which has produced some interpretations relating to its meaning and function.

Unfortunately, it is important to underline the fact that many of the sites registered during the first years of our work (1970) are now in danger, and some have been destroyed by advancing urbanization (Suacha, Facatativa, Bojacá), whose accelerated growth coincides with the process of rural population displacement towards the urban centres. The situation of violence in Colombia has, without a doubt, increased deterioration of zones in which displaced populations invaded territories and caused severe deterioration and disappearance of some rock art sites. The current situation of the sites reported here is a simple example of many others that make it difficult to manage, and it generates severe problems to guarantee their protection, much more when management is performed with a minimum of training, and poorly planned, in spite of the fact that there exists a legal norm that is usually not followed. So, controlling the destruction or the deterioration is more complicated than a simple strategy of education. In addition to these examples there exist others that also makes one change one's view concerning the significance of what makes a work serious and scientific. After the 1991 Constitution, Colombia once again changed its official philosophy to take a modern stance relating to the necessity of knowing that the territory had a long history of diverse ethnic groups, of stages of population that modelled their systems of perception (pre-Columbian periods), and that were constructing their uniqueness as a country. This atmosphere permitted a new look at the nation's culture and showed that it was not simply built on a Colonial base. In spite of these initiatives, the tendency today seems to stimulate serious study, but also opens a space for activities with purely commercial tendencies. Today, pre-Columbian heritage including rock art does not appear to be a theme specifically correlated to scientific investigation, but more like an object of tourism, a tendency that seems to be also found in other countries.

Finally, regarding possible nominations to UNESCO and the idea of converting some of these places into international heritage sites, and identifying potential heritage sites, it is necessary to say that there does not yet exist conditions that would allow this country to seriously consider what is necessary to dedicate sufficient funds and civil activities to protect and administer rock art sites. The political situation and the increasing violence have left many areas without study, abandoned, and just a mental note that they should be seriously studied in the future. In order to pursue these activities, international assistance is necessary. Groups in conflict need to be contacted for permission to enter territories to do the initial registration work and systematic documentation. Finally, it is Gipri's philosophy to impede the massive distribution of detailed information about rock art sites until they are sufficiently protected, and until the delegated governmental agency responsible for rock art sites completes the education and integration of the local community in the conservation project. The first essential step to take is to push for the creation of rock art studies departments in private and public universities and cultural institutions, so that it will be in the midst of an academic and scientific environment which it is not at the present moment. We must hurry to propose that zones in conflict are registered national or international heritage sites.

1 Profile of the Zone:

Colombia has examples of three of the four rock art categories (pictographs, petroglyphs and mobile artefacts associated with rock art). References to rock art correspond basically to those found in the central-eastern zone, with some exceptions in the Sierra Nevada (Isaacs J., 1883), in Antioquia (Arcila G. 1950), and in the Colombian Amazon region. In the past, the presence of pictographs has been reported in some areas of the southeast part of the country. Within the past ten years others have been added to the list: Guayabero-State of Guaviare, Chiribiquete-State of Guaviare and Caqueta. Also, new references have emerged referring to the presence of pictographs and petroglyphs in the states of Huila, Tolima, Putumayo and Narino.

Nevertheless, the majority of the existing data and the more detailed registers correspond to the central-eastern part of the country (Cundinamarca and Boyacá) recorded within the past thirty years. In general, for all the country, there are no archaeological works that permit rock art to be dated, and neither is it possible to designate one or various ethnic groups as the rock artists. Furthermore, no information exists about the age of the rock art itself, or the duration and dissemination of it throughout time as a cultural tradition.

The complexity of the motifs and the differences in their representation, lend one to ponder the possible presence of diverse ethnic groups and the development of rock art during the time it was done in that territory. What is certain, is that most of the rock art motifs reported up to this point in time, are simplifications of complex thoughts, and very rarely appear in the form of animals or identifiable human forms. They are, in all cases, synthetic structures, some of which are repeated throughout widely spread territories from the north to the south of the country (triangular head figure, hands with spirals and spirals).

2 Links with other zones:

There are no studies that associate rock art representations with specific areas of the country. Nevertheless, some conjectures have been presented with formal analogies that may eventually lead to new knowledge about rock art. Some zones seem to have formal structures that are seen in widely spread areas. Bent over monkeys, triangular heads, frog like figures and lizard like figures (frogs and lizards), painted hands with spirals in their palms, and heads with painted feathers, appear as petroglyphs or in gold offering figurines (Reichel-Dolmatoff-“Shamanic Flights”) as spirals. The most plausible explanation for this is that pre-Columbian ethnic groups moved around within wide regions and did the rock art (pictographs and petroglyphs) in territories of other ethnic groups (Ann Osborn) who had loose relationships with them, and in a cultural and ritual environment unknown to us. In the eastern part of the country (Santander), there exist myths (Uwa-macro-Chibcha linguistic family) that are found in wide areas of the Cundinamarca-Boyaca highlands (The Flight of the Scissortail Birds). Indigenous families, for ritualistic reasons, travel long distances today to sacred places (from the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta to Guatavita Lake in the Cundinamarca-Boyacá highlands). In general, one can say that the ethno-history, along with the oral traditions investigated, permit some general conjectures that perhaps in some years can be confirmed with registrations and archaeological studies. But, as of now, these areas have not been seriously recorded, which is necessary before a comparative study of different areas in Colombia can be done.

3 Known sites:

Actually, there are references to 5,899 rocks in 26 states of the country, and in regards to documents, there exist in the various archives, about 16,912 diverse materials in different repositories (drawings, watercolours, photographs, graphics) of varying quality and documental value. The majority of these references correspond to zones which have been worked during the past thirty years (Caquetá and Cundinamarca).

Work by Gipri has significantly increased the number of known rock art sites. From 1970 until today, it has worked in the Cundinamarca-Boyacá highlands, locating more than 2,500 rocks (42% of all recorded) with pictographs or petroglyphs in distinct townships near the Bogotá savanna and in “hot country” zones. During the period between 1996-2005, 2,000 rocks were recorded in the El Colegio township that had petroglyphs, stone tool manufacturing marks, cupules and metates. It has become known as one of the best documented sites in the country

(documents of the zone, the rocks, conservation, GIS-Arc-View). This data shows, provisionally, that the area contains 5,151 rocks with petroglyphs and only 712 rocks with pictographs. This data corresponds only to the actual archives and it is thought that if more study is done in this area, that the number of known pictograph and petroglyph sites in Cundinamarca might be significantly increased. This situation is not limited to this region, but also includes other zones that seem to have a similar density and concentration of rock art that have not been investigated.

It's necessary to explain the difference between known sites and studied sites. The first one refers to reports about their existence which may include some photos or graphics of the motifs. This level of knowledge contrasts with serious studies that include a detailed description of the motifs and their current state of conservation. The Gipri group has worked at this second level, slowly improving methods of registration, including field note cards and strategic methodologies of documentation to completely reconstruct site characteristics. Field recording cards, sheets to register the zones, rock art design cards, division into pictorial groups, motif details, cards corrected digitally, and forms formatted to determine the state of conservation of the rocks are all a fundamental part of the registration process (Methodological Model-Munoz, et. Al.-1998. Ministry of Culture grant).

4 Significant Rock Art Sites:

Noting the variety of ethnic groups and the qualities of rock art sites, it would be interesting to choose some sites from various regions and use various representational systems that permit us to better understand the qualities of the human languages and the variety shown in the procedures used to represent them. The proposal should be to organize in the future a study of distinct sites in Colombia that represent variations in the art, and relate to different thoughts and languages, with the object of supporting the study of variations in the world of human thought. Many sites could be nominated for a world heritage project. Each and every one of those has some characteristics and some particular conditions that should be shown. Nevertheless, it is possible now to list some in-country sites that could eventually fall into the classification of heritage sites: the Sasaima-Cundinamarca rock; the Aipe rock-Huila; the Pandi-Cundinamarca murals; some sites in El Colegio-Cundinamarca; the Guaybero paintings; and Chiribiquete-Guaviare and Caqueta; the Saboya rock and Gameza in Boyaca; the Poma Park in Suacha, Cundinamarca, the Vinculo and Panama pictographs in Suacha; the Putumayo petroglyphs; the La Pedrera petroglyphs in Caqueta; the Une-Cundinamarca pictographs; the Itagui petroglyphs in Antioquia; the Piedra de la Risa in San Antonio de Tequendama-Cundinamarca; the stone tool sites in Anapoima, El Colegio, Viota, the Ramiriqui murals; the Sachica-Boyaca pictographs, the Media Luna-Nilo Cundinamarca, and others.

5 Documentation:

In 1970 Gipri initiated studies in rock art. Since that time various formats have been designed to systemize the documents that have slowly grown in volume with new discoveries that have been documented each month from field work. In order to correct the errors of previous studies, organize data bases, and systematically register discoveries, many different methodological structures were developed to register rock art sites: mapping, photography, sketching details and conditions. In the past few years not only have descriptions of the motifs been done, but also some forms have been designed to register the characteristics and the condition of the sites in context. Gipri has used these forms and improved on them to be able to standardize serious documentation during the process of describing rock art sites.

Most of the zones studied by GIPRI include the following data in their folders:

- Cartography of the site (eventually an aerial photo of the sector);
- Photography and digital material of the sites in different time periods;
- Field cards of the zone and rock (showing the pictorial groups);
- Sketches of the site;
- History of the investigation (different versions);
- Digitalization of the materials;
- Data bases of the townships and rock art sites;
- Photographic archive (70,000 photos in Gipri files);
- Publication of the site in the *Rupestre* magazine and methodological model (deposited in the Luis Angel Arango Colombia Library) and in international publications;
- National and International presentations about the registration topic and bulletins about the zones studied (highlands and valleys towards the Magdalena River). All these materials are located in organized files in the Bogotá headquarters of Gipri;
- Studies about archeoastronomy and rock art alignments in relationship to the spatial location of the site.

6 Research:

Unfortunately the little attention paid to the theme has not permitted the university community to allocate the time needed to study the language, the thought and the pre-Columbian methods of producing rock art murals. This explains why there are no archaeological studies dealing with these aspects. Actually, a good part of their time is used simply to search and document. Gipri's investigations are usually done in areas where no native peoples are now living (Cundinamarca-Boyaca highlands). They are areas where country folk continue to maintain some traditions in regards to sacred sites, maintain a history of fear, pass down local kitchen recipes, practice traditional folk medicine, and maintain ancient objects and practices, some of which appear to be based in pre-Columbian traditions of the Muisca, Panches and Pijaos (Highlands, States of Cundinamarca, Huila and Tolima). Noting these practices, Gipri designed some forms used for oral tradition, with the object of enhancing the study of local thought and language using these aesthetic traditions. Other investigations have been done in areas where traditional ethnic groups live today. There, studies were done with the local communities in regard to the themes of rites, myths and petroglyphs (Urbina).

Studies of Colombian rock art in general are found in the National Archives (AGN) and in works published by historians which give us an idea of the meaning and cultural function of rock art. However, these investigations are problematic due to the narrow-mindedness of the authors (Spanish historians) and for the censorship of these documents that always occurred. Knowing the limitations of existing documents, the Gipri group made a study of the history of rock art in Colombia.

7 Protection:

There exists a general law regarding heritage, but basically it only covers excavations and statuary. The law is not applied to rock art and the State has not dedicated anything more than a few expeditions to a few superficially known sites during the past few years. These are usually sites that have been previously recorded. There are no legal provisions for rock art with the necessary precise details, and the State does not have the necessary experience with the theme

and their advisory groups don't have the necessary training to be effective. It is enough to take a look at the San Agustín rock art in Huila in order to understand what we are talking about. In spite of the fact that this part of the country has been designated world heritage, the petroglyphs there do not have the same protection as the statuary and the associated archaeological materials at the site. As of today, there are no plans to manage rock art zones. What do appear to motivate the State are Ecotourism projects, that in the majority of cases, move ahead without any investigation.

8 Conservation:

There is no history of rock art conservation in Colombia. The only method used is to slow the release of precise site location information to the general public, while no planning is done to protect the rock art sites. However, some State organizations have begun to promote the necessity that the public knows the sites. This conflict between investigative groups and State politics has generated some reservations concerning the methods used by the ICANH (chalking petroglyphs) and for the publication of site access instructions to rock art sites, without previously studying how to protect them.

Regarding scientific aspects of the study of conservation, Gipri has developed some forms that can be used to evaluate the deterioration and alteration of the rock and its context. These can be used to graphically describe the actual conditions necessary for future decisions about the best methods to conserve the rock (Bednarik 2001-Rock Art Science) *“The principle of micro-geomorphic mapping of rock art panels is simple: whereas traditional recordings are almost universally limited to the perceived rock art motifs, Soleilhavoup and Munoz include also information on other features of the rock panel, such as areas of exfoliation, lichen presence, taphonomic rock markings, patination, mineral accretions and salt efflorescence”*.

These forms permit the visualization of the condition of the sites and besides describing the rock art motifs, they permit the observation of different small aspects of the rock. Digitized works and digital manipulation have permitted the observation of various themes and problems in the description of the conditions of rock art in some study zones. *“The benefits of this cartography are not limited to those for the scientist, who is likely to refer to such micro-topographical information for a variety of analytical reasons, they are also of great significance to issues of rock art conservation. Indeed, in the latter area it seems self evident that this form of recording is essential. The neglect hitherto of such an important tool of rock art research is symptomatic of a field dominated by non scientific, humanistic preoccupations, such as what is depicted and why. It is part of the general pattern that has led to the shortage of empirical information about rock art, and the abundance of meaningless claims about meaning”*. (Bednarik 2001)

9 Management:

There is no experience or management philosophy regarding rock art zones. In the past three years there has been some work done cleaning graffiti in the Facatativa Archaeological Park (ICANH). Nevertheless, complications of management of the said park have resulted in it being turned into a recreational park (picnicking and barbecuing) and it has neither the funds nor clear ideas to avoid its deterioration. All the rest of the sites close to populated areas have been left abandoned without protection and have been altered and some permanently damaged (Bojacá, Suacha, Suesca, Aipe). The same State ICANH organizations have been criticized for

the use of invasive techniques and inadequate recording (use of chalk) to better show the petroglyphs grooves.

Many rock art sites are threatened or have now been destroyed by the invasion of displaced persons coming to areas surrounding the cities, where there have been rock art sites previously protected to some degree. Holes in the rocks and the floor, and lettering with oil and water based paints, are some of the alterations seen at these sites, when destruction is not total.

One of the reasons for such severe damage is that the theme is not known in the nation's history. For many years Colonial politics pointed to rock art sites as places of the devil and in the Republican era these ideas continued to pressure the Indians to forget their heritage. Universities and governmental cultural centres have no idea of the number of sites or the cultural importance of the theme: there is no department of rock art that would allow teaching of rock art to professional archaeologists and neither have they accompanied investigators so that they would continue with this work and create a tradition for it.

Conclusions:

Work presented in this paper can be considered information relevant to **ten percent (10%)** of the complete list of rock art zones and a minimal example of the formal differences in rock art throughout the entire country. The privately financed effort of Gipri to accumulate various materials during the past thirty years is interesting, but not sufficient, so it is necessary to push for more recording work. During researches for rock art zones, the group has come across a group of archaeological sites that correspond to tool manufacturing. These are sites where pre-Columbian tribes, and probably country folk of the Colonial period, made different tools. Some finds in other areas (States) have demonstrated a high density of pictograph, petroglyph and tool manufacturing sites that have yet to be seriously recorded.

Intents to discover the state of conservation of the sites and seriously describe them contrast with the abandonment and neglect of the zones in which they are found. Until a very few years ago, the pertinent State organizations had not even noticed the theme and, only under some pressure, began a few investigations. Their inexperience has resulted in a series of international debates (ICANH y GIPRI Colombia-Rock Art Research 2005) that shows that the rock art theme is still a stranger to official government organizations.

Some deteriorated rock art zones could receive the advice of international advisors that would permit them to be saved or at least lower the chances of total destruction. It is urgent that the international community be informed and that Colombian cultural organizations are requested to:

- Push for a rock art department in universities organized by scientific academic authorities, with international assistance.
- Generate politics to record and seriously study rock art.
- Undertake serious evaluations of the state of conservation of zones in danger.
- Organize the territory in sections (Parks-Reserved Zones) and try to find ways to organize different ways to administer the rock art sites using the local community.
- Work with universities to study the archaeology of the sites and therefore be able to complete studies along with dates to directly date the pictograph pigments (C14, Plasma).

- Organize international investigative groups (ICOMOS – Car (Rock Art Committee), Ifrao) to provide assistance and cooperation in order to continue investigations done to date.
- Organize the rock art department with the objective to train university students to become rock art investigators.
- Raise funds to finance trained and interested groups wishing to study Colombian rock art.
- Organize museums and exhibitions of local rock art in universities and in the *Casa de la Cultura* of the townships of each region. This project would be to publicize the theme, train investigators, and generate investigations to show the variety of Colombian rock art. This proposal could lead to the creation of spaces that in the future could be converted eventually in heritage sites for humanity.

The greatest threat that rock art suffers is due to the deterioration from local inhabitants and occasionally from some investigators, when they conduct tests that deteriorate the sites. However, there are some examples of mining companies that have deteriorated some sites (Tunja-Boyacá, Suacha-Cundinamarca, Sachica-Boyacá). Another major threat is the tendency to convert the zones into tourist attractions with the help of different entities that do not appear to understand the necessity to protect the sites, of doing serious investigations and of not doing a discrete job of administering to protect the regional sites for future generations. This theme is seen as a curiosity in each zone and is usually converted into a place to visit, without any administration of the sites and no idea of the need to protect them.

Recommendations for the future

It is recommended that international institutions and organizations be careful to encourage the progress of the theme in Colombia and provide cooperation with initiatives which aid scientific endeavours in this field of international heritage, and assist when possible with publications, exhibitions and works produced that contribute to stimulate national and international interest in the theme. The magazine *Rupestre: Rock Art in Colombia*, is interested in receiving assistance to continue its work, since Gipri is publishing it with very limited internally generated funds.

Potential of the zone to contribute to the sites on the World Heritage List

All of the sites could eventually be inscribed on the World Heritage List, but there exist some preferences that can be enumerated. The Sasaima rock, the Aipe rock, the Pandi murals, some sites in El Colegio, Cundinamarca, the Guayabero pictographs, and Chiribiquete, the Saboya and Gameza rock, the Poma Park in Suacha, the Putumayo petroglyphs, the Pedrera petroglyphs in Caqueta, the Une pictographs, the Itagui-Antioquia petroglyphs, the Piedra de la Risa in San Antonio de Tequendama-Cundinamarca, the stone tool manufacturing sites in Anapoima, El Colegio, Viota, the Ramiriqui murals, the Sachica-Boyaca pictographs, the Media Luna –Nilo Cundinamarca, and others.

However, everyone should keep in mind the current conditions of a country at war that basically destines its funds for that task and that places little value in pre-Columbian rock art sites that barely appear in national history books and that occasionally are shown by some investigators in an eccentric academic atmosphere or in a fireside discussion of culture.

See illustrations Annexe IV: page 220

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