

**A) IDENTIFICATION**

Nomination : Serra da Capivara National Park  
Location : State of Piauí  
State party : Brazil  
Date : 24 October 1990

**B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION**

That this cultural property be included on the World Heritage List on the basis of Criterion III.

**C) ICOMOS OBSERVATIONS**

The World Heritage Bureau in June 1991 wished examination of this site to be deferred pending receipt from the Brazilian authorities of fuller information on the dating of the rock paintings of Serra da Capivara.

The Brazilian authorities have provided a considerable quantity of documentation concerning the site in response to the Bureau's request. While it should be borne in mind that dating of prehistoric archaeological sites is still a controversial subject - and no less so for this site - the bulk of written evidence seems to confirm the early dating of the site proposed in the nomination.

**D) BACKGROUND**

The nominated site is a national park established in 1979 in the southeast part of the State of Piauí, bordering two geological formations: the Maranhão-Piauí sedimentary basin and the peripheral depression of Rio São Francisco. The main interest of this site is the many shelters hewn in rock which are decorated with rock-art paintings. These shelters, which were discovered in the 1960s, were not examined systematically until the 1970s. This research resulted in the establishment of the park.

The site must have been inhabited by the early men who populated the American continents. Fragments of broken wall found in the Pedra Furada shelter appear to be the oldest traces of rock art in South America; with C14, they have been dated 26000 B.C. to 22000 B.C.

In spite of the value of the rich archaeological elements discovered thus far, this site is especially remarkable because of the rock-art paintings that decorate the shelters. The oldest panels with decipherable painted images date back to 12000 B.C., but most of the rock-art ensembles in Serra da Capivara National Park date back to 10000-4000 B.C. and belong to the Nordeste and Agreste cultures.

The Nordeste culture, which appears to have originated in the region, though it is also known elsewhere in the territory which is now Brazil, features a figurative repertory (anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, vegetal and geometric designs) that provide a rather good understanding of the society's spiritual organization. Part of this iconography remains incomprehensible (human bodies heaped in the form of a pyramid), but four main cultural themes have been observed: dance, sexual practices, rituals performed around a tree, and rituals associated with hunting. The dominant color is red.

The Agreste culture seems to have existed alongside the Nordeste culture for a certain period of time, then replaced it completely in about 5000 B.C. Agreste culture features a preponderance of anthropomorphic figures and is known in a good part of the north of the South American continent. Based on the investigations carried out thus far, other cultures may be discovered in the Serra da Capivara National Park and our understanding of the dominant cultures may be increased.

- **Criterion III.** The shelters in Serra da Capivara National Park bear exceptional testimony to the oldest human communities that have populated South America and preserve the oldest examples of rock art on the continent. Moreover, the deciphering of the iconography of these rock-art paintings, which is being carried out gradually, reveals major aspects of the religious beliefs and practices of these peoples.

A management plan for Serra da Capivara National Park was established in 1990 by the Brazilian Institute for the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (IBAMA) and the FUNDHAM Foundation of the United States.

ICOMOS, November 1991