

**Identification**

<i>Nomination</i>	National Archaeological Park of Tierradentro
<i>Location</i>	Municipality of Inzá, Department of Cauca
<i>State Party</i>	Colombia
<i>Date</i>	10 October 1994

**Justification by State Party**

Underground tombs with side chambers have been found over the whole of Nuclear America, from Mexico to north-western Argentina, but the largest concentration is in Colombia (followed by Ecuador). However, it is not only the number and concentration of these tombs at Tierradentro that is unique. These hypogea comprised of a vertical shaft, helicoidal stairs, entrance hall, and side chamber with central and surrounding columns on a large oval floor-plan, and, in particular, carved anthropomorphic representations and polychrome paintings are unique in America. These underground funerary structures of great architectural complexity are exceptional testimony to a prehispanic society that has disappeared. **Criterion iii**

The symbolic symmetry achieved between the houses of the living above ground and the underground hypogea for the dead, by means of a limited but elegant number of elements not only conveys a pleasant aesthetic sensation but also evokes a powerful image of the importance of the new stage into which the deceased has entered and the continuity between life and death, between the living and the ancestors. Those entering the hypogea enter the primeval soil and are sensitized to the codes and values of the builders, over time, through the dignity achieved in the chambers. **Criterion i**

**Category of property**

In terms of the categories of property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, Tierradentro is a *site*.

**History and Description***History*

The present state of archaeological and anthropological knowledge suggests that the builders of the hypogea (underground tombs), in the period AD 500-900, lived on the mountain slopes and valleys in the area. In the valleys they established small settlements whilst on the hillsides the settlement was dispersed, close to the fields. The oval-plan buildings were built on artificial terraces, with rammed earth floors. The wooden frames were filled with wattle-and-daub (using maize canes) and the roofs were thatched. There were no internal divisions and a single centrally located hearth, with wooden benches for sleeping.

The basis of the economy was agriculture, especially maize, pumpkin, and beans, with yucca in the warmer regions and potatoes in the colder; coca was planted for use in certain communal activities, as is the custom in latter-day Paéz communities. This diet was supplemented with fish, wild fruits, deer, rabbits, armadillos, and birds. Salt was obtained by evaporation of saline spring water.

The economy must have produced surpluses to enable some of the population to be specialized in the construction of hypogea and the production of specialized artefacts, used for trade with neighbouring communities for luxury goods in gold and sea-shells. There is archaeological evidence for the manufacture of

textiles, and the pottery was very varied in form and decoration. Tools such as axes, hatchets, and hoes were made of hard stone and hafted in wood.

The magnitude of the underground works and the way in which human remains were disposed inside the hypogea indicate the existence of a hierarchical social and political structure, based on chiefs with priestly functions. Burial rites involved two stages. Primary burial in simple graves was followed by secondary deposition of the bones, often after cremation, or mixed with red earth, inside the hypogea, either in elaborately decorated urns or in graves on the floor of the burial chamber.

#### *Description*

The National Archaeological Park of Tierradentro comprises several zones of prehispanic underground tombs: Alto del Aguacate, Loma de San Andrés, Alto de Segovia, and Alto del Duende, covering in total (and including the El Tablón site, where sculptures have been grouped together) over 19,000 m<sup>2</sup>.

The hypogea were excavated below mountain ridges or into flattened hills on rocky subsoil. Their uniqueness lies in their large size and the staircases (straight, zigzag, or spiral), which in some cases gives access to a hall. The vaulted ceilings, walls, and columns of the burial chambers are often decorated with geometric, zoomorphic, and anthropomorphic linear designs, painted in red and black mineral pigments on a white background. The smaller hypogea vary from 2.5 to 7 m in depth, with oval floors 2.5-3 wide, whilst the chambers of the larger examples may be 10-12 m wide. Most impressive of the latter are those with two or three free-standing central columns and several decorated pilasters along the walls, with niches between them.

The stone statues of the Tierradentro region are of great importance. They are carved from stone of volcanic origin and represent standing human figures, with their upper limbs placed on their chests. Masculine figures have banded head-dresses, loincloths, and various adornments whilst female figures wear turbans, sleeveless blouses, and skirts. They are 1-2.5 m high with heads that are disproportionately large; the features are rigid, symmetrical, and frontal. This statuary is very similar to that of San Agustín in form and technique, but it does not achieve the same level of perfection. None of these statues has yet been found in a hypogeum: most have been found at the bottoms of ravines, with the heads broken or disfigured.

The cultural material from the Tierradentro region has been intensively studied and classifications established for the hypogea and the statuary.

### **Management and Protection**

#### *Legal status*

Since 1918 all prehispanic cultural properties have been owned by the Nation. In the new (1991) Political Constitution of Colombia, articles 63 and 72 gave an inalienable character to the Nation's archaeological heritage, which is declared to be national property under the protection of the State (though the regulations for the implementation of these articles have not yet been agreed).

The National Archaeological Park of Tierradentro is owned on behalf of the Nation by the Ministry of Education. It was officially established in 1945 following progressive acquisition of individual sites from 1938 onwards. It was nominated by the Council of National Monuments in 1992 as a National Monument, and this was confirmed by Governmental Decree 774 of 1993.

#### *Management*

According to the Code of Natural Renewable Resources and the Protection of the Environment, a National Park is defined as an area with exceptional value in terms of national heritage, where the historical-cultural evidence has scientific, educational, aesthetic, and recreational features that justify their perpetuation and for which a management based on integrated planning is required. The only activities allowed are those of conservation, research, education, recreation, cultural, recovery, and control.

The Colombian Institute of Anthropology (ICAN), which is part of the Colombian Institute of Culture (COLCULTURA), is directly responsible for the Park, though its Division of Promotion of the Cultural Heritage. The

administrative structure within the Park itself consists of twenty-two employees, supervised by a coordinator, who is directly responsible for the proper operation of the Park, its staffing, and the care and protection of the archaeological sites.

There is no specific management plan for this Park, but there is an overall plan for the National Archaeological Parks in the care of ICAN. There is no buffer zone for the locations that make up the Park. However, they are entirely surrounded by Indian reserves, where non-members of these communities are not allowed to establish themselves and all economic activity is forbidden.

## **Conservation and Authenticity**

### *Conservation history*

Conservation of the Tierradentro monuments began as early as 1936, when the first systematic study of them was initiated by the German geologist, Georg Bürg, who pointed out the need to roof over the opened tombs of Alto de Segovia to prevent rain infiltration. This work was carried out using local materials (bamboo and thatch). With the establishment of the Park in 1945 these were replaced with metal structures.

In 1953 this form of protection was adjudged inadequate by German archaeologist Horst Nachtigall, who proposed that the floors of the burial chambers should be covered with cement to make them waterproof and reduce humidity; alternatively, doors should be installed on the entrances. He also recommended the installation of electric heaters. Although these measures were not implemented, various other preservation measures were introduced in 1960.

In the 1970s, as part of their complete study of the hypogea in the Park, anthropologists Alvaro Chaves and Mauricio Puerta cleaned and repaired a number of the tombs and sealed others that were considered to have deteriorated too badly to allow conservation. Roofs were built over all the tombs that remained open, the floors were covered with layers of sand and cement, and drains were dug. The statues were treated chemically to remove vegetable adhesions.

Some years later a comprehensive conservation, restoration, and protection plan was prepared for the Alto de Segovia group of hypogea by a museum specialist, Patricia Rojas de Leunda, hired by the Fundación Hispanoamericana Santiago de Cali. This study reported that humidity was still a major problem, causing damage to wall paintings and also structural instability. The plan proposed documentation and analysis in an initial stage, followed by a conservation phase directed both to the rock itself and the paintings, and finally a restoration phase. Proposals were made for permanent control of humidity, temperature changes, lighting, and pollution. This was followed by a technical evaluation and report by a commission from the Workshop on Mural Paintings of the National Restoration Centre and ICAN, which confirmed the views of the Alto Segovia report and recommended the need for a professional engineering study on how to eliminate humidity. The report of the engineering consultancy Ingeniería e Hidrosistemas recommended the installation of flat covers in wood or cement for the tombs of the Alto del Aguacate, adequate sealing of closed tombs (following drainage where necessary), and an efficient rainwater evacuation system.

The problems were exacerbated by the 1994 earthquake in the region. As a result ICAN and the Heritage Sub-Directorate of COLCULTURA have drawn up the following list of conservation actions, in order of priority:

- Establishment of an interdisciplinary team (national and international experts in restoration of rock and rock paintings) to prepare plan of action.
- Removal of water inside tombs by pumping.
- Treatment of humidity and eradication and control of bio-pollutant micro-organisms.
- Shoring of structures in danger of collapse and inventorization of fallen elements.
- Analysis and evaluation of pressure exerted by roofs on vaults and columns.
- Installation of an adequate "cold" lighting system to facilitate restoration work.

- Structural stabilization.
- Study and treatment of consolidation of supporting rock.
- Evaluation of poor earlier interventions, extraction of detrimental materials, and restoration.
- Study and consolidation of frescoes.
- Redesign of protective roofs.
- Installation of inspection box for channelling of waters and redesign of drainage network.

#### *Authenticity*

The hypogea are entirely authentic, although this level of authenticity has been modified in some cases by inappropriate earlier interventions.

### **Evaluation**

#### *Action by ICOMOS*

ICOMOS consulted its International Committee on Archaeological Heritage Management, and also two experts on Andean archaeology, Dr Margaret MacLean (Getty Conservation Institute, USA) and Dr Wolfgang Wurster (Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Germany). An expert mission visited the property in February 1995.

#### *Qualities*

The archaeological area of Tierradentro, with its subterranean tombs (hypogea), is important principally because of the evidence that the carvings and paintings inside the tombs represent replicas of the interiors of dwelling houses of the period. As such they provide a great deal of information about the living conditions of the people who built them and who were buried in them.

#### *Comparative analysis*

Along with San Agustín (also nominated for the World Heritage List), Tierradentro provides the most significant testimony to the high level of artistic and social culture of the northern Andean region over its long prehispanic history.

#### *ICOMOS recommendations for future action*

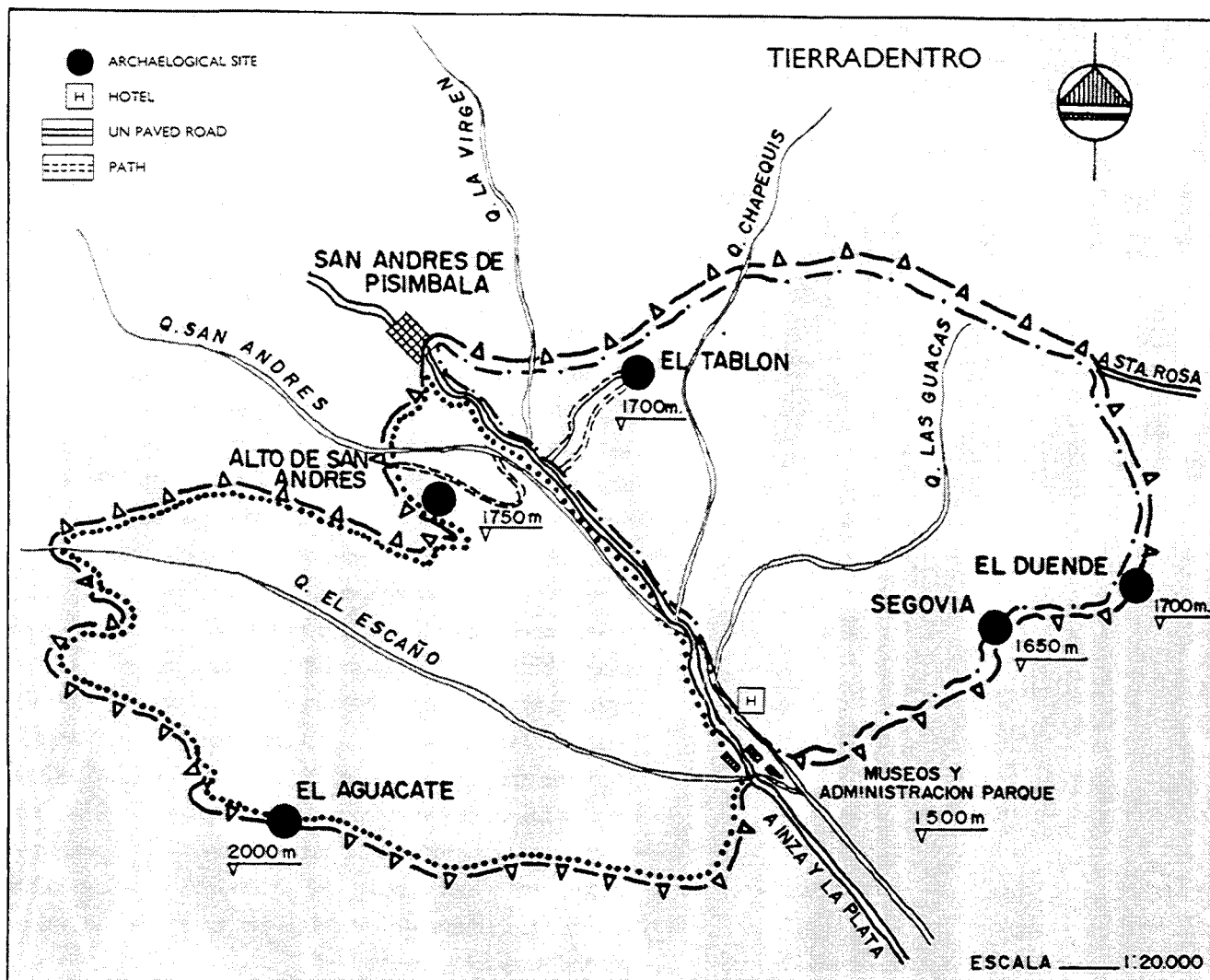
Whilst the ICOMOS expert mission was convinced on the ground of the viability of the areas proposed for inscription on the List, it is recommended that more detailed proposals be submitted relating to the commitment of the Colombian authorities to the implementation of the priorities for conservation listed above, in the form of a management plan. ICOMOS also recommends that the Colombian authorities give urgent consideration to the appointment of a full-time, permanent site archaeologist at Tierradentro.

### **Recommendation**

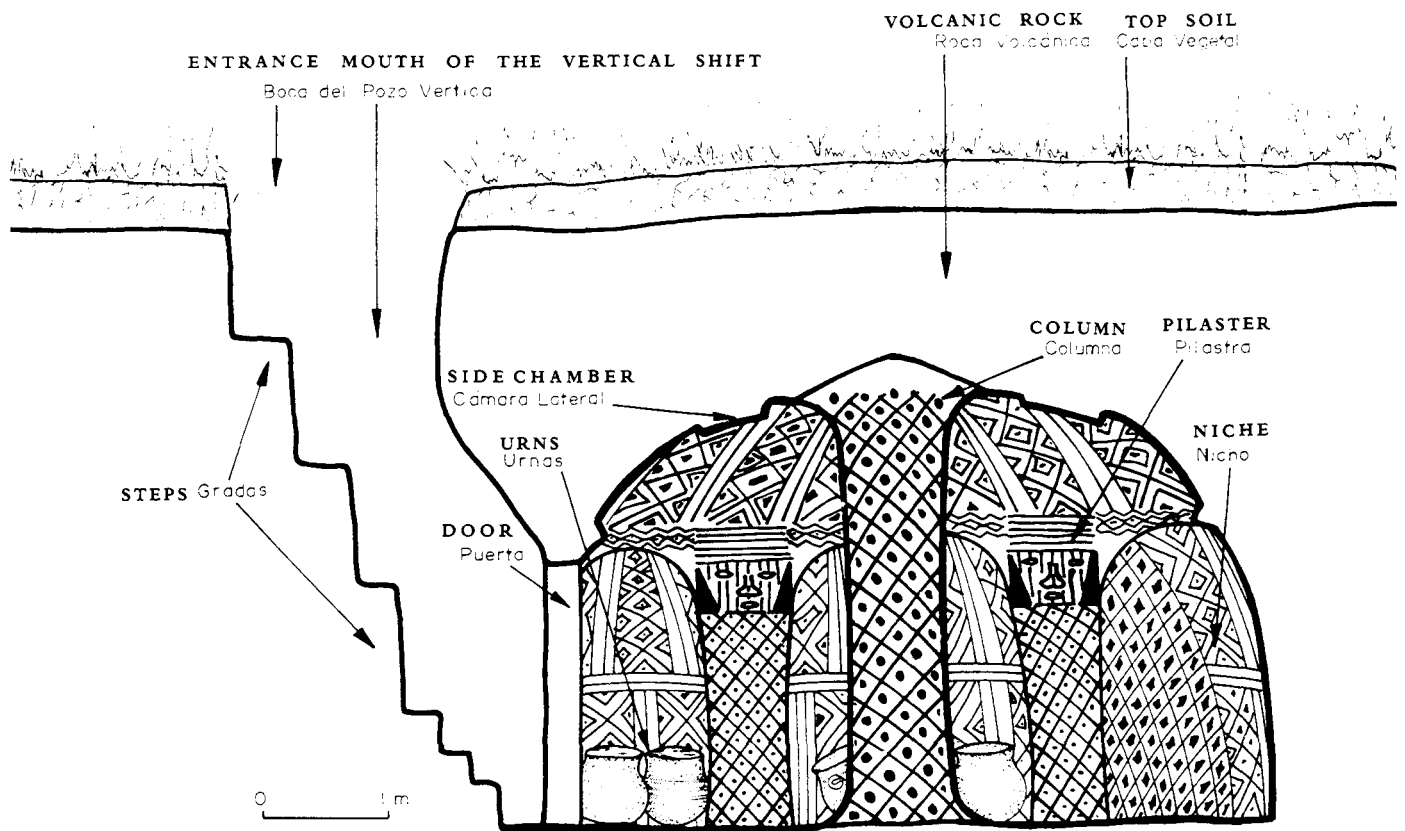
That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *critterion iii*.

The hypogea of the Tierradentro complex are unique testimony to the everyday life, ritual, and burial customs of a developed and stable prehispanic society in the northern Andean region of South America.

ICOMOS, September 1995



Tierradentro : carte du parc archéologique /  
Map of the archaeological park



Tierradentro : schéma d'hypogée, d'après M. Puerta /  
Schematic of hypogeum (based on Puerta)