

Rupestrian Paintings

What are rupestrian paintings?



Rupestrian representation of a cervid; roof of Lapa Ponciano, Guartelá State Park.

The rupestrian paintings found in the State of Paraná are symbolical representations left by the first populations that lived here between 10,000 and 300 years ago. Geometric forms are also present, possibly related to ceramist ancestors of Jê indigenous groups. Some of the places with rupestrian paintings were actually sacred burial sites.

Besides its esthetical functions, the rupestrian art also served for cultural identity affirmation and territorial delimitation as it was clearly based on conventions that related people and time. However depicting symbols, myths, and rites, the real meaning of the representations was eventually lost in time.



Rupestrian paintings made with red iron oxide pigments from sandstone representing animals, mythical beings and geometric forms have remained protected from weathering on the walls and roof of Lapa Ponciano, Guartelá State Park.

General aspects

Two fundamental forms of human relationship are depicted in the rupestrian art: the one between individuals (as interpreters of their own time and culture), and the one between individuals and life itself, through representations of sexuality (human beings and other animals) and intellectual representations (space and pure abstractions). These are the representation systems that allow symbols to become established within societies.

In central-eastern parts of Paraná such as Ponta Grossa, Tibagi, Pirai do Sul, and Guartelá, the paintings are usually in reddish and brownish tones, and rarely in black. They represent mostly cervid profiles, frontal and lateral views of birds, and, less frequently, lizards, snakes, frogs and toads, and fish. Human representations are even less frequent, normally associated to animals and geometric forms. There are representations of animals in rows, piled up, or fenced, and fishery scenes too. In several sites, younger superimposed abstract geometric signs, usually in red, consist of successions of points and grids occasionally associated to emblematic geometric forms.

In the northwest of Paraná, especially in countryside areas of Sengés and Jaguariaíva, many shelter sites with geometric representations in red and in brown are found. Circles, whether radial or not, arcs, points, and, in some places, elaborate geometric forms are present. Tints alternate between red and brown. The paintings had been made on the walls and roofs of caves, especially on the higher parts of sandstone scarps and their borders.

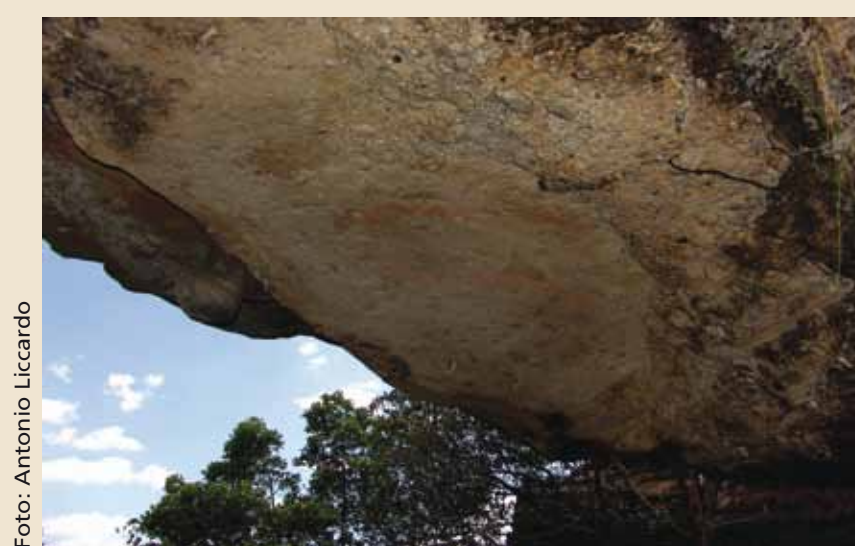
Radial circle on the roof of Abrigo da Janela, in Sengés. This archaeological site dates to 1,790 ± 210 years before present (i.e. before 1950).



Superimposed successions of points on a wall at Lapa Ponciano on representations of animals and mythical beings.



View of the Iapó River gorge from Lapa Ponciano, on whose roof many paintings in red are found.



Mirante I Shelter, one of the protected sites in the Guartelá State Park. Its roof corresponds to a remnant conglomerate level of pebbles cemented with silica.



View of the Iapó Canyon (Guartelá Park), with the Iapó River on the background. On the sandstone wall is Lapa Ponciano, with rupestrian paintings on the fallen block that formed it.

Location of the main sites

Seventy shelter, footwall (Lapa) and/or, caves with rupestrian paintings are known in the State of Paraná. Most of them are located on the Second Plateau along the Iapó, Tibagi, Cinza, Jaguaricatu, and Itararé river valleys, and also on the São Luiz do Purunã Scarp. They are also present, however less frequently, on the First Plateau, along the Alto Ribeira River, and on the Third Plateau, on magmatic rocks of the Serra Geral Formation.

The lithological substract of these archaeological sites corresponds to Furnas sandstones and conglomerates, Itararé sandstones and diamictites; granites, and magmatic rocks. Most of the rupestrian paintings in Paraná lie near outcrops of Furnas Sandstones, like in the shelters along the Guartelá Canyon.



At the lower parts of São Jorge Fall, in Ponta Grossa, a small number of animal representations can be seen on the walls of a sandstone shelter. The repeated use of fire at these places has damaged the paintings. To the right, animal figures in a sandstone shelter in Jaguariaíva.

Forms of representation

Rupestrian representations can be figurative or geometric abstractions. They can be grouped in three main categories: human, animal, and geometric. Signs are geometrical representations regardless of their meaning. There are also simple signs such as points, arcs, bars, and elaborate ones formed by groups of the former. The elaborate ones are repetitive, which helps delimiting different cultures, territories, and epochs. Their motifs are unique and emblematic, hence the definition of an archaeological site.

Territories can only be fully delimited from comparison of data recovered from rupestrian paintings, their archaeological contexts, the technologies by use of which lithic or ceramic artifacts were made, their chronological relationships, and stratigraphy.



In several sites along the Chapadinha Canyon, near Pirai do Sul, sandstone shelters with paintings representing animals and mythical beings are found (see pictures above). These paintings could only be completely interpreted if the rites and myths of those who made it were fully understood.

Preservation

For vandalism or ignorance of how historiographically important rupestrian art is, large part of these sites has been damaged with scratches, inscriptions, and even by being hit with pickaxes.

Do not allow our past to be destroyed! Help preserve the archaeological patrimony! The paintings should only be observed or photographically recorded. Avoid touching them, for their beauty and relevance reside in the fact that they are relicts of times gone by, that mankind will have learned to leave for eternity.

Realization:



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