



It is another highly interesting petroglyph site in South America and again, it is in Brazil. We have already reported on the rock paintings in the Serra Capivara region, as well as Chiribiquete in the western lowlands of Colombia.

Oldest Rock Art

Surprisingly, the oldest rock paintings and engravings in the so-called New World have been found in the southern part of South America, even though the prevailing theory suggests that this continent was initially settled from North to South via the so-called Beringia Land Bridge from Asia.

Northeast Brazil

Pedra do Inga is not a large petroglyph site, but one of the most mysterious with rather diverse engravings. The small site is located directly on the banks of Rio Inga near the town with the same name.

Isolated Location

It is situated approximately a hundred kilometres west of Joao Pessoa, the capital of the state of Paraiba, on the Brazilian Atlantic coast. The engravings are easily accessible by road and are situated in a semi-arid region with moderate rainfall in the southern hemisphere's summer.

Serra Capivara

The extremely rich rock paintings in Serra Capivara are a thousand kilometres further west and are scattered across a remote, uninhabited area with many mountain ranges and valley with endless cliffs. The rock paintings are also much older, providing evidence of active settlement in northern Brazil.

Inga Rock Size

The wall like rock formation is approximately fifty metres long and four meters high, consisting of three richly engraved panels. The engravings were created on naturally flat but hard granite rocks.

Rather Small Site

The total area measures around 250 square metres. In a forty-hectare area along Rio Inga, there are also several smaller rocks with engravings. In the native Tupi language, this rock is called Itacoadiaras, meaning "stone script."

Engraved Motifs

The motifs make this site so unique. They are unlike any other petroglyph site worldwide. Many symbolic motifs represent fruits, stars and possibly animals and humans.

Cuo Holes

Additionally, there are cup-shaped holes, which are associated with religious significance. These cup-like holes are a motif found worldwide at petroglyph sites. But see for yourself.

Special Symbols

To this day, scientists do not unanimously agree on the meaning of these unique motifs. Some resemble fruits and could be associated with fertility. However, most are highly aesthetic, abstract and very expressive creations. Anthropomorphic and zoomorphic symbols, common in many other rock art sites worldwide, are not present here. You already realize the uniqueness of this petroglyph site.

Possible Comparison

Some of the motifs remind us of the first written characters seen in several locations on rock walls in the deserts of the Arabian Peninsula. There are theories and findings suggesting the possible arrival of pre-Columbian seafarers over 2,000 years ago. Which is a realistic possibility we will look at later.

Three Main Panels

The large vertical rock wall is eighteen metres long and up to two metres high, completely engraved with motifs that surprisingly show little repetition. It does not give the impression of being a written script.

Symbol Collection

Rather, it appears to be a collection of symbols which meaning still remains unknown. The complex composition is delimited at the top by a narrow line of dot-like mini cups. Which at other rock art sites have a ritual meaning. But this might be different here.

Horizontal Panel

This panel is part of the same rock and the flat top surface of the vertical main panel. It has a nearly square surface measuring thirteen metres on each side. It features only a few symbols, which are less deeply engraved and we see here many motif repetitions.

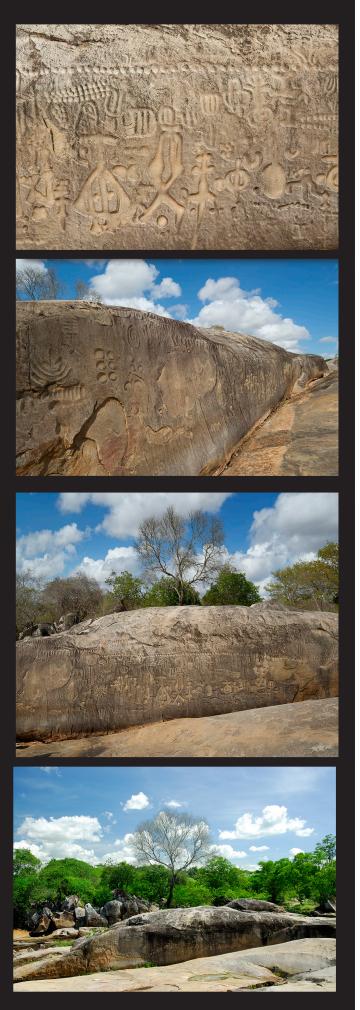
Third Panel

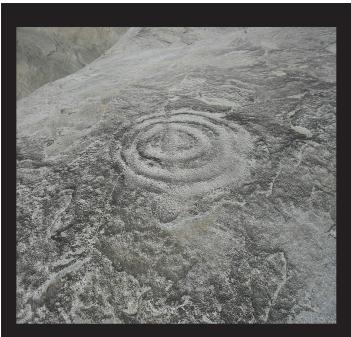
This horizontal rectangular surface measures thirteen by two metres. It also has only a few motifs, with less depth in their engravings. The most prominent motif here is a spiral with a crossing line. So far, no expert was able to come up with a meaning full explanation.

Engraving Technique

The engravings are on average three centimetres wide and precisely executed, with a maximum depth of one centimetre. Surprisingly, remnants of ancient colours have been discovered.

Creators & Indigenous Inhabitants Unfortunately, there is insufficient information about the creators or indigenous inhab-





itants along Rio Inga. Thus, details about social structures, cultural practices, rituals and technical skills remain unknown. Archaeologists have found 12,000-year-old settlement sites in this region. But the engravings are certainly not that old.

Stone Tools

Sites for the production of stone tools have also been discovered. However, these cannot be linked to the petroglyphs in an archaeological context and their age is unknown.

Petroglyph Age

Unfortunately, the age of engravings cannot be determined using scientific technologies. In the case of paintings, this is different if organic materials are present. Or if stone tools are excavated on-site and can be linked to it in an archaeological context.

Age Estimation

In this case, estimates are based on motif research and comparisons of iconography. Experts estimate the age of these engravings to be between 3,000 and 1,000 years, although nearby settlement sites date back up to 12,000 years.

Settlement History

South America, with its vast uninhabited rainforest areas, is the last continent where unknown places with unique Stone Age rock paintings and engravings can be discovered.

Important Questions

With each discovery, important questions resurface in all important scientific discussions.



When was the American continent first settled? And where did those first Americans come from?

Many Open Questions

When examining these intricate and diverse engravings with hundreds of motifs on large rock surfaces, additional questions arise. How advanced was the indigenous local population when they created these fascinating images? And more intriguingly, why did they create this astonishing variety of symbols?

Population Development

To better understand the messages embedded in their rock paintings, let's explore the intellect developed in the Stone Age. Our ancestors lived in harmony with nature, highly dependent on the climate, flora and fauna around them. We can call this their perfectly developed environmental intelligence, focused entirely on nature.

Detailed Knowledge

They also possessed detailed knowledge of plants as a source of food and medicine, as well as an understanding of animal behaviours to successfully hunt them. Additionally, they had a good understanding of various weather events.

Vital Water

People always lived near freshwater sources like lakes, rivers, or springs. They, like animals, depended on sufficient water. Therefore, the best hunting grounds were always near water like river banks. Was water, therefore, a factor in their paintings and had a symbolic significance? Do the plant-like motifs represent water-based fertility, a sort of engraved harvest ritual?

Beliefs & Survival

The lifestyle of indigenous people led to certain belief systems to explain weather phenomena such as thunder, lightning, rainfall and floods. Thus, the sun, moon, stars, as well as the sky, water and earth must have played an important role, if not a mythical significance. It was form them a matter of survival.

Mental Capacities

Even before our ancestors entered the American continent, they were mentally more advanced than we previously assumed. They had a well-developed prefrontal cortex, could think and plan systematically, argue and make well-informed decisions.

Planning Ability

This included the ability to plan well-organized hunts or engrave numerous motifs into a complex scene or important ceremony on rock walls as a comprehensive composition. The rock motifs revolved around rituals and signs, directed either towards gods, spirits, the tribe, or educating the next generation.

Artistic Abilities

At that time, our ancestors could express themselves well in language, images and even music. They possessed a high level of creativity to create motifs with imagination and abstraction.

Important Messages

While not all these abilities are realized here, there is still enough to convey expressive messages through their images. Additionally, they crafted various tools from flint, bone, teeth and plants for specific purposes.

Rewriting American History!

Until now, US archaeologists have preached their so-called Clovis First theory like a mantra. It claims that the entire American continent North, Central and South America was only settled 15,000 years ago from Asia via Alaska.

Much Lower Sea Level

At that time, the sea level was a hundred metres lower and both continents were con-









nected by a land bridge called Beringia. But can these scientists maintain their theory after the fascinating finds in South America? We don't think so.

Similar Sites

Several years ago, another area with numerous Palaeolithic rock paintings was discovered over three thousand kilometres southeast in Brazil. At that time, local archaeologists' dating was questioned by US experts. It was only when French specialists dated the paintings in Serra da Capivara to 30,000 years that their Clovis First theory collapsed. And this location is not the only one in South America with such early human activities. In the Chilean Andes in the Atacama Desert, at an altitude of four thousand metres, several mummy bundles with an age of 28,000 years were discovered long ago.

Much Earlier Immigration

Today, we can say that America was settled much earlier in waves at different times via Alaska. An ice-free corridor in Alaska existed as early as 45,000 years ago. This timeframe gave our ancestors enough time to traverse over 15,000 kilometres and populate the entire continent in small groups. Recent research suggests that our ancestors spread much faster along coastlines, possibly covering this immense distance in only a few hundred years and a small number of generations. And perhaps, they also arrived from Africa across the Atlantic, possibly over thousand years before Columbus.

Atlantic Immigration?

The Phoenicians possessed the skills, being the first early seafarers who could navigate on the open sea and not just sail within sight of the coasts. Homer wrote about them and though it may be hard to believe. But he reported it because that is what he was told. Suddenly, the sun turned to the other side of the ship, as they had rounded Africa at the Cape of Good Hope and were sailing now north.

Ancient Scripts Comparison

We have added some images of the first letters and script development for you to compare. But judge for yourself whether you can discover any similarities with the motifs from Pedra do Inga. For your information, you can read articles on this website about the corresponding topics of Serra Capivara, Chiribiquete, First Writings, as well as many other fascinating rock art sites.

Translation Note

The translation from the german original text was done with the help of OpenAI.

Picture Credits

We thank the museum and photographers for making available some of their pictures.



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