

## COMMENT ON THE GRAVE AT TOCA DOS COQUEIROS, SERRA DA CAPIVARA NATIONAL PARK, BRAZIL.

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**A**n adult grave was discovered at the Toca dos Coqueiros Site (also known as the Toca do Raimundo Velho Site) in July 1997.

Toca dos Coqueiros is a rock shelter situated in a valley of the Serra da Capivara National Park (fig.1) known as Baixão das Mulheres in the Coronel José Dias Municipality, Piauí State, 8 50.290' south and 42 33.739' west. The large rock wall is only slightly inclined which makes the sheltered area very narrow (30 m long by 2.70 m wide). The site is exposed to sunlight for a good part of the afternoon.(fig.2)

The shelter is positioned 14 m above the valley floor which is 50 m away. The back wall is adorned with paintings in the northeast tradition. The tallest are 2 m high with respect to the present ground level and the smallest just 10 cm high.

The present floor is covered in sandstone blocks which fell from the rock wall. As the site is situated in an area near a village, domesticated animals used it for shelter.

The vegetation in the immediate vicinity was caatinga arbórea (scrub made up of small trees). Today all the native vegetation has been destroyed. There is a clearing in front of the shelter where corn, beans and squash are grown.

This site was picked for excavation in 1995 taking the following points into consideration:

- the shelter's small dimensions which led us to believe that it would be fully excavated in the months of August and September 1995;
- the acquisition of data for defining the context in which the site paintings form a part, as well as establishing a chronostratigraphy of the same;
- the richness of the lithic material which we found in the present floor and at the base of the incline.

The team from the Fundação Museu do Homem Americano and a group of UFPE students worked for two months. By the end of that time, a layer about

40 cm deep, in two sections, in total around 36 m<sup>2</sup>, had been excavated. The excavation was extremely slow due to the large amount of remains and their variety.

The sediment that forms the main part of the top layers is sand coming from the disintegration of the shelter walls mixed with ashes and organic remains.

The material found is made up of lithic industry, similar to the Holocene material at Toca do Boqueirão in Pedra Furada, micro-fauna bones, vegetable remains and human hairs, one of which contained a flea larva. 10 structured hearths were discovered along with vast combustion areas. Carbon-14 dating established the chronology of the upper part of the site:

	Dates	Reference	Listed Remains
1	235 ± 50 BP	LY - 7481	Human coprolite
2	5.300 ± 50 BP	Beta 104570	Block paintings
3	7.410 ± 50 BP	Beta 84409	Combustion area
4	7.490 ± 60 BP	Beta 84410	Combustion area
5	8.870 ± 60 BP	Beta 104572	Hearth structure
6	9.870 ± 50 BP	Beta 109844	Grave 1
7	10.640 ± 80 BP	Beta 104571	Hair with flea

The human coprolite dated (date 1) was found next to the hearth. The unstructured hearth, corresponding to dates 3 and 4 (7,410 ± 50 BP / Beta 84409 and 7,490 ± 60 BP / Beta 84410), was found outside the dripline. Some splinters were found in a simple combustion area. In spite of being more recent it was much deeper than the layer containing the grave. A fact which still needs to be clarified.

The excavation was interrupted at the beginning of October 1995. It was only in 1997 that we had the opportunity to return to our work at the site.

A series of brief excavations culminated in a longer campaign in July.

At the very beginning of the excavation just as the sixteenth scaling was being carried out, the first part of a human skull started to appear in quadrant 16. It was there in the 1995 excavations that the human coprolite had been found in the first scaling. The skull was about 23 cm below the hearth near the coprolite.

The excavation of this grave required 28 working days.

Initially superficial cleaning was carried out to determine the position of the body. It was verified that it was in the foetal position, left side recumbent.

The right hand was in front of the face (a later excavation, in a laboratory, showed that the left hand was placed on the left side of the face). The skull was very fragmented due to the shallowness of the grave and the large numbers of

animals and people at the site before it was isolated by FUMDHAM.

A floor made of sandstone slabs covered a hollow in which the skeleton lay. A block containing traces of red pigment was found amongst them. It is currently being analysed.

Around the skeleton, larger blocks marked the grave area (Fig. 3). A large lump of charcoal encrusted the right anklebone and gave a date of  $9,870 \pm 50$  BP / Beta 109844.

The data collected during the excavation has produced the following findings:

- a pit hadn't been dug, the area was simply cleaned creating a shallow hollow;

- the area was covered in sandstone slabs;

- the body was deposited in the foetal position, lying on its left side;

- fires were lit around the grave, in which animals were roasted, such as hamsters (*Galea spixii*) and armadillos of as yet undetermined species (*Dasyopus novemcinctus?* *Euphractus sexcinctus?*). The animals were eaten and then the leftovers and the ashes from the fires were spread over the body.

The grave was removed in its entirety, in exactly the same position as it had been found. The procedures for this were as follows:

- the upper part of the grave and its edges were fully excavated (fig. 4);

- the skeleton and the sediment were treated with *Rhodopax*;

- toilet paper was placed on the uncovered part and then bandages covered in plaster were applied covering everything;

- it was left to dry for 48 hours;

- following that, excavation under the feet and head was started. After every five centimetres, toilet paper and pieces of bandages covered in plaster were laid down. It was left for 3 hours to dry and for the excavation to continue. In those areas where the bones were in direct contact with the rocks, the scaling continued on the block and it was plastered together with the skeleton.

From the moment in which we hit the pelvis and at the opposite end, the thorax, we wedged the skeleton by placing stone blocks under the feet and the skull. This allowed us to continue so that the two excavations met. When this happened and the whole skeleton had been plastered, we reinforced the cocoon by wrapping all of it in bandages covered in plaster, no longer in pieces but in whole strips which went round the body a number of times. We allowed it to dry for 72 hours. Next we wedged the middle section of the body and the lower and upper sections were wrapped in long strips of bandage, going fully round the legs, pelvis, shoulder blades and skull. After drying for 4 days, everything was removed and transported to the FUMDHAM laboratories.

Next, the cocoon was opened and fully excavated so that the bones could

be thoroughly analysed. A replica of the grave was made, *in situ*, currently on exhibition at the Museu do Homem Americano.

The following lithic items were found alongside the skeleton:

- four slugs;
- fifteen flakes;
- two arrowheads (Fig. 5).

Tip (a), is made of hyaline quartz. It has an isosceles triangular body, convex edges and a slightly concave base. The longitudinal cross-section is concavo-convex, the transversal one is intentionally asymmetrical with helicoidal trend (top section). It is 51.5mm long, 36 mm wide and 9 mm thick.

The production sequence of this tip is:

- unidentified initial débitage block;
- bifacial retouches of the mesial and proximal portions, produced by a soft mallet;
- tapering at the distal end produced by alternate retouching;
- marginal retouches on the edges.

Tip (b), made of chert, is stemmed. The distal portion is broken. The mesial and distal portions may have a lanceolate shape, with convex, asymmetrical edges. It is 48 mm long (broken), 37 mm wide and 8.5 mm thick.

The production sequence of this tip is:

- undefined initial débitage block;
- the shape was produced by broad centripetal percussion using a soft mallet;
- marginal retouches on the edges.

Since the beginning of our work in the region, in 1970, arrowheads had never been found. We are unaware of any discovery in an archeological context of tips of this type in the northeast of Brazil. Bifacial projectile tips from either spears or arrows are uncommon in the northeast. There are a large variety of finely retouched bifacial tips, sculpted from hyaline quartz, chert, chalcedony and silicified sandstone in Rio Grande do Norte, but none were found in archeological excavations. They make up part of private collections or are exhibited in museums without any stratigraphic reference. In the most recent periods of the Itaparica tradition, around 4,000 years BP, a number of attempts to produce stemmed unifacial tips appear. In the São Francisco region we have registered chance findings of triangular tips with stems and wings or filiforms without wings however without any chronological reference. (MARTIN, 1996).