

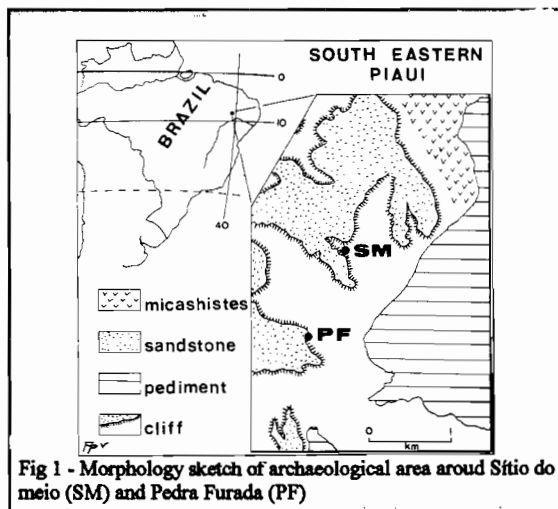
# RECENT DISCOVERIES ON THE HOLOCENIC LEVELS OF SÍTIO DO MEIO ROCK-SHELTER, PIAUI BRASIL<sup>1</sup>

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## RESUMO

A Toca do Sítio do Meio é um abrigo arenítico decorado com painéis rupestres da tradição Nordeste (12000/6000 BP), localizado a 1500 metros ao nordeste da Toca do Boqueirão da Pedra Furada. Escavações recentes evidenciaram a presença de cerâmica e instrumentos de pedra polida datados em torno de 9000 anos BP.

*Palavras-chave:* registro pré-histórico, cerâmica, pedra polida.



Toca do Sítio do Meio is a sandstone rock-shelter decorated with rock paintings belonging to the class of prehistoric records known as the Nordeste tradition (12000/6000 BP). It is located in Brazil, about 1500 m north-east of the Toca do Boqueirão da Pedra Furada (cf. *Nature* 321, 769-71 and 362, 114-5) (fig. 1). Recent excavations have led to the discovery of pottery

and polished stone dating to quite remote periods.

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A first test pit carried out in 1978 provided C14 dates of 12200 and 13900 years. In 1980 an excavation was broken off when it encountered some enormous blocks that had fallen from the cliff, and which covered archaeological layers. A date of  $14300 \pm 400$  BP (GIF 5399) was obtained from a sample of charcoal collected from a hearth structure found in level XVIII.

In 1991 the excavation was resumed with the help of heavy machinery: a tractor and a mechanical shovel to pull out the blocks.

The upper layer of blocks, the most recent, rested on an archaeological floor that was rich in hearths. The lithic industry discovered there includes some excellently made pieces, and others of pebble-tool type; red pigment, some animal bones and plant remains also appeared. The upper part of these hearths was dated to  $8800 \pm 60$  BP (BETA 47494).

Two other layers of blocks, between which were hearths and industry as well as faunal remains, were uncovered and their respective charcoal samples are currently being dated.

The excavation reached base rock in part of the site (in sector 2) in september 1993. This enabled us to understand the site's formation:

- In a first, very humid phase, a torrential river flowed through the valley. It eroded the base of the cliff, creating the rock-shelter. The end of this humid phase, when the river had already dug the shelter out quite deeply, dates to  $20280 \pm 450$  BP (BETA 65350).

- Subsequently, the vast overhang gave way and collapsed, thus isolating the shelter from the valley.

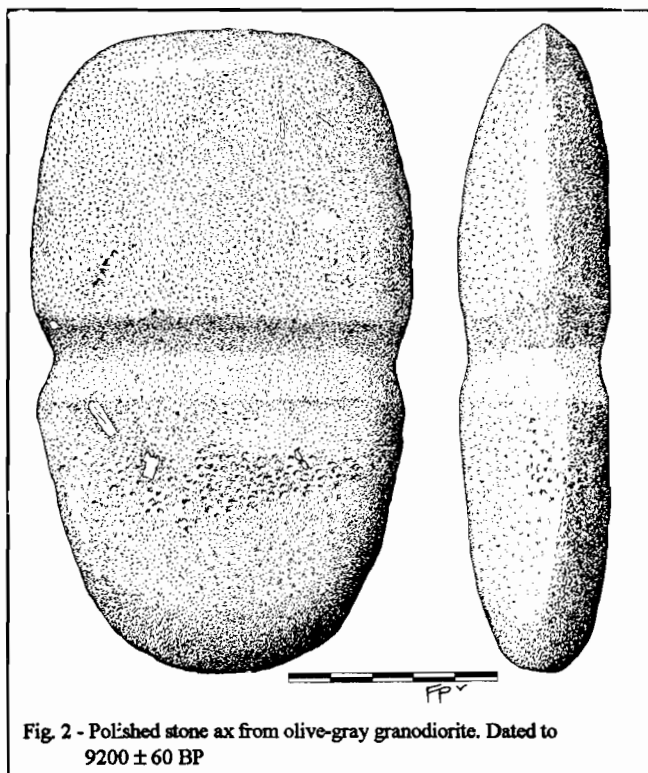
- Man took up residence in the protected part of the shelter, between the blocks and the backwall (the charcoal samples from this layer - whose sediments come exclusively from the disintegration of the vault - are being dated).

- After 12000/10000 BP, the rains came to an end a semi-arid climate became established.

- Human occupation of the shelter was sporadic during the Pleistocene; in contrast, the Holocene layers display traces of a more regular presence, as demonstrated by structured hearths containing two or three superimposed layers of blocks and big pebbles. The Holocene levels

are characterized by an abundant lithic industry and remains of fauna and plants.

The excavations of 1991 and 1992 enabled us, in two sector dug (2 and 4) to discover potsherds that were well stratified, datings to  $8960 \pm 70$  (BETA 47493). Other dates are currently awaited.



In August 1993 a polished stone axe with a groove for hafting (figure 2) was found in sector 4, in layer dated to  $9200 \pm 60$  (BETA 65856).

The presence of this ancient pottery and polished lithic industry confirms the discoveries of Anna Roosevelt and A.T.C. Veiga in Amazonia. These results demonstrate that, in America, not only does the

Pleistocene require some new research and fieldwork but the Holocene holds some surprises too.

At present, the excavation has been halted and the site protected by wooden structures that allow it to be visited without risk to the archaeological layers and the rock paintings. The different sectors enable one to see remains of different occupations: the present-day, the Holocene, the Pleistocene, and the period of the shelter's formation.

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