



## Petroglyphs of the River basin of Estelí River and its surroundings<sup>1</sup>

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### Summary

This research presents a detailed description of 55 volcanic rock pieces on which

Pre-Hispanic dwellers of the River basin of Estelí River engraved 147 drawings carved in bas-relief. The thematic motives of the drawings are related with the elements of nature, cardinal points, and reflect in a symbolic form, traits of dwellers' Cosmo vision. The actual condition of the pieces, and the recommendation for conservation of the petroglyphs, are taken into account. Finally, there is a linkage between the iconography and the discernments of cultural identity of Estelí region.

### Introduction

The northern territory of Nicaragua, surrounded by most ancient hills and

mountains originated by effects of tertiary and quaternary eras. Archeological remainders have been found in different sites, sometimes by chance, and sometimes by prospecting or excavations researches; such remainders are: Grinding stones, volcanic glass, three-legged dishes with zoomorphic drawings, and fragments of orange ceramic which is typical in the northern region of Nicaraguan; all of them found in excavations for wells, latrines, ditches for aqueducts, or in plowed fields in different communities or neighborhoods.

The research about the petroglyphs has as a main objective to contribute to the national and local knowledge about the archeological patrimony of the zones and sub-zones of La Trinidad, Estelí, Condega and San Juan de Limay, as elements that conform the cultural identity in Las Segovias region.

Besides, it presents an archeological record about the characteristics of the supports,

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on the results of the research entitled: Archeological record on the petroglyphs of the river basin of Estelí river, it was carried out by the archeologist Bayardo Gámez, researcher of the Center of Research and Social Communication, SINSLANI, and financed by ADESOS. The period of execution was November 2003 through May 2003.



relation with the surrounding landscapes, bas reliefs, kinds of drawings, thematic units, and possible interpretations; actual condition of the petroglyphs, and recommendations to avoid the loss and deterioration, in order to contribute to the preservation and conservation of the cultural patrimony of the region.

In this article is made a brief bibliographical revision about the researches that have been made on the petroglyphs in Las Segovias. The importance of the petroglyphs as discernments of cultural identity is remarked. The methodology used to carry out the research about the archeological record, the principal conclusions, and some recommendations for the preservation of these petroglyphs are also presented.

### **1. Petroglyphs in Nicaragua and In Las Segovias<sup>2</sup>**

Since ancient times Nicaragua has been a territory of transit of aborigine migratory people coming from north and south, which made possible the transmission of cultural values, and the interrelation of different

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<sup>2</sup> Las Segovias region is formed by Estelí, Madriz, And Nueva Segovia. In terms of politics and administration it is formed by 29 towns. Its boundaries are: North: with Honduras, South: with Leon and Chinandega, East: with Jinotega and Matagalpa, and West: with Chinandega and Honduras. Its surface is 8017 km<sup>2</sup>; According to Nicaraguan Institute of Statistics and Census, (INEC) 1995. The region has 430,953 inhabitants, a 41.33% of them live in urban areas, and 58.67 in rural areas.

groups by means of invasions, wars, submission, and interchange of objects.

The cultural inheritance is printed in the archeological objects found through prospecting in the surface or through underground excavations; this objects are considered goods of Nicaraguan cultural patrimony. As for the northern region of Nicaragua, the archeological researches on the topic of petroglyphs are not enough.

All this due to the former researches have been carried out in just a few sites of the zone. This sites are: Las Animas, Las Pintadas in Estelí (Hidelberto Maria<sup>3</sup>), La virgen in Pueblo Nuevo (Fletcher, Salgado<sup>4</sup>), in the same way, the issued numbers expired, and there is a scanty divulgation of this researches.

The researches on the petroglyphs can be classified into two categories: Descriptive works or exploratory ones. For a long time several researchers in their exploratory tours in Nicaraguan territory, make reference about some pictography and petroglyphs that were found.

In 1868 a rock with circles, and round and curve characters was seen in Plaza de Acoyapa Chontales; it was depicted by the Naturalist Thomas Belt (Belt, 1868: 43).

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<sup>3</sup> MARIA, Hno, Hidelberto. These stones speak, 1965. Editorial Hospicio. Leon, Nicaragua.

<sup>4</sup> FLETCHER, LARAINÉ; SALGADO, RONALDO. November, 1990. Preliminary prospecting report, region1 Pueblo Nuevo, Estelí. Managua: Department of anthropological Research, National Museum of Nicaragua. Managua, Nicaragua.



In the years 1872, 1876, and 1877, the archeologist Bransford<sup>5</sup> makes prospecting and archeological excavations near Lake Nicaragua. This research describes 20 petroglyphs of Ometepe Island; He draws them, presents hypothesis, and their relation with other regions of the continent. More over, 28 engravings drawn in black and white are presented, among them: 1 zoo morph, 9 faces, 2 crosses, 9 spirals, 3 geometrics, and 5 abstracts; based on the petroglyphs found on a hill south of Ometepe Island, they had a tough surface because of the effects of the exposition to raw weather. The researcher makes an interpretation about the possible age of the petroglyphs, and also a similarity to others described by Seeman in Panama and those described by Hartt in the Amazon (Bransford, 1979:82).

On the other hand the traveler, researcher and chronicler Squier<sup>6</sup>, while visiting Nicaragua in 1852, describes the pictography of Lagoon Asososca of Managua, adding new drawings. He also takes into account the engravings found on a one hundred meter rocky wall with figures engraved in a ditch, of lagoon Masaya, known as Bajada de Cailagua; they have anthropomorphous, zoomorphous, ornamental and capricious representations.

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<sup>5</sup> Bransford, M. F. 1881. Archeological Researches in Nicaragua supported by Smithsonian Museum and through the army of the United States carried out this prospecting before the project of construction of the Inter-oceanic canal in Nicaragua.

<sup>6</sup> SQUIER, EPHRAIM, GEORGE 1989. Nicaragua, its people and landscapes

In Nicaragua, in the years 1870-1890, the archeologist Earl Flint carries out other archeological researches promoted by the Peabody Museum of Harvard University (USA). In his writings he refers to rupestrian art found in the cave Montelimar, department of Managua.

In 1887 Karl Bovallius makes a trip in Central America discovering several petroglyphs in the Island La Ceiba, in the archipelago, Zapatera, later this discovery was confirmed by Felipe Pardinás from Mexico, 1938.

The archeologist Luis Cuadra Cea makes a brief reference about the petroglyphs and pictography in the grotto of Montelimar, Managua.

Karl Sapper shows some references in his research work about petroglyphs in the Caribbean Coastal region of Nicaragua (1900 trip along Rio Coco); Eduard Conzemius writes about observed petroglyphs in his ethnographical research about Miskitos and Sumos Indians from Honduras and Nicaragua, he also writes about the original words to name them. Hebert J. Spiden mentions the petroglyphs of Chagüitillo, Sébaco.

The petroglyphs from La Trinidad and Estelí have been a motive of research for different indianists and anthropologists like Dr. Alejandro Dávila Bolaños (Dávila, 1990:54), Hermano Idelberto Maria (H. Maria 1985) and the Frenchman Girard (Girard, 1978: 500), where the number of observed petroglyphs, their location, and possible graphical and symbolic interpretation is mentioned.



According to the linguistic interpretation of Dávila Bolaños, based on the Indian toponymy of Estelí, there are representative names that are inheritance of three linguistic branches of Matagalpa origin: Cutacayán, Guasgualí, Apagüají, yarculí, Moropotente; Sumos (Mayangnas): Yucusama; Nahuatl: Cacala, Tomabú, Cuajiniquil, Colocondo, Zacualpa, Guasuyuca, with transmission of a vision or confluence of aboriginal cultural origin.

Bolaños (1990: 54): "Near the capital city of Estelí, there are three places, rich in archeological ruins. The first one named Piedras Pintadas, where they once existed, there are just a few now a day, more than 25 petroglyphs with representations of men, women, and kids; animals like deer, hares, dogs, eagles etc; a fruited tree, and several undefined drawings without any precise representation."

Girard (1978: 500) writes: "in wraving three, there is a reproduction of an omnipresent motive of the American art, the bird and the snake, engraved in a petroglyph of Las Pintadas Estelí, north-west of the country. The snake is a wavy line coming out the eagle's tail."

Girard also refers to: "a rare specimen of the tree of life that can be seen in figure 18 illustrates a petroglyph of Las Pintadas, Estelí". Three branches come out of the stem (María H., 179) sacred number. Fruits, leaves, symbols and a schematized human face hang on its branches. This allegoric number might illustrate the myth of Xibalba tree that instantly produced fruits and leaves when the CAME placed on a dry tree the head of one HUN HUNAHPU (Girard, 1978: 504).

(Girard, 1978: 505) refers to other petroglyphs of the same area where "there are engravings that represent the upside down head of a human being who boast colorful feathers. In another rock there is an anthropomorphous figure upside down. Brother Hedilberto thinks that those rocks are inverted. It is not the stones the ones that are inverted, but the human beings illustrating the well known Pan-American motive of the lord of heaven."

Edilberto's research (1965:174-177); describes the geographical aspects of Las Pintadas. The characteristics of 17 stones; texture, size, groups, engraved traces; he analyzes the engravings and interprets the zoomorphic, anthropomorphic, and plant figures.

It is not sure that the zoomorphic figures are hares, jaguars or simian; the anthropomorphous are interpreted as Cacique or Indian chief, priest, (shaman) in ceremonial dress. The engraving in shape of plant is related with the tree of the world, finding cultural similarities with the Maya, Aztec and Toltec iconography.

He also describes the characteristics of 6 engraved rocks that were placed in Central park of Estelí, (1965:178-179) with the same methodology of analysis about the graphics, among which the most important are the anthropomorphic drawings with triangular round face or rectangular head, dots indicating eyes and mouth, visible ears; in others he interprets the figure of a magician or a dancer performing a ceremonial dance (H. Maria, 1965:179).

A rock in shape of a pyramid with beautiful zoomorphic drawings in different poses



together with other symbols calls his attention (H. Maria: 1965:179). Edilberto's research includes the petroglyphs of Las Animas, La Trinidad (180-182.).

In 1980s the Ministry of Agriculture promoted a sociological research (1984). It refers to archeological remains of the petroglyphs in the dry areas of Northern region of Nicaragua.

In March 1988 an archeological and iconographical inventory was carried out in the northern region. It was done together with the Center of Popular and Traditional Medicine, and the House of Culture of Estelí. This work was carried out by Bayardo Gámez and the photographer Hermont Reibold.

Actually this material is patrimony of the Center of Popular and Traditional Medicine Foundation (FCNMPT), Estelí.

In 1990 Laraine Fletcher, Ronald Salgado and Bayardo Gámez<sup>7</sup> carried out archeological prospecting research in Las Segovias (1990:5), in this research and by preference of local informants the site La Virgen, is found. In this site there is a huge rock that contains several bas relieves on the surface of one of its sides.

Archeologists of the National Museum, professors and students of the UNAN (Managua) have continued the prospecting research in the North of Nicaragua, especially in Pueblo Nuevo (2000), Condega, Las Tapias (Madriz-1995), and Mirafior, in summertime 1998-1999. These studies have shown some evidence of

ancient settlements through archeological remains of rock and ceramic which are analyzed in laboratories.

## **2. Importance of petroglyphs as a criterion of cultural identity**

The petroglyphs are evidence of existence of ancient aborigine settlements and of a certain organization that allowed their survival, the creation and development of their culture.

The common characteristics that contribute to recognize the petroglyphs as identical or different to others are considered as a cultural identity. This identity strengthens the social and cultural development of the peoples.

The knowledge about these petroglyphs is an element that contributes to the strengthening of the National, regional and American identity, since it rescues the scattered information about aborigine culture. They may also be a projection of the petroglyphs as an element of public exhibition in museums.

The cultural patrimony is formed by tangible and intangible values inherited from our ancestors. They are the natural and spiritual properties that are exceptional values for history, art and science.

The archeological patrimony is formed by pieces of ceramic, carved stones, jade and golden objects. And also by those cultural properties that can not be moved; objects like hillocks, caverns, buildings, cemeteries, graves, and roads.

The areas where the archeological remains are located are ancient territories that were

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<sup>7</sup> Fletcher, Salgado, idem.



shared by their people, among them are: Las Animas, La Laguna, Mechapa, El Tamarindo, where now is La Trinidad; Las Pintadas and La Joya in Estelí; La Virgen in Pueblo Nuevo, and Los Encuentros, La Sirena, El Chorro in Limay.

Petroglyphs are an expression of human being in his environment, in the comprehension, organization and transformation of nature; they are a significant and communicative manifestation of peoples, that is carried out in different parts of the world before the writing forms of communication appeared: India, China, Africa, Australia, Oceania, Europe and America are a legacy for the historical, social and cultural reconstruction of peoples.

Nevertheless, the archeological sites are deteriorated by natural causes such like erosion, lichens proliferation, fungus, and human actions that have caused damages in stones, with bars and large hoes, construction of stone fences, and roads; plundering, they are moved out of their original territory, out of their context and cardinal orientation.

Actually, there is not enough systematic information about the existence of petroglyphs. This lack of knowledge also includes the geographical location, environmental conditions, quantification, dimensions and supports, also the characteristics of the engravings, their respective assessment, classification of type, thematic and interpretation of graphics, social and sociopolitical dynamic of the context, peoples who produced these artifacts as well as their physical conditions.

### **3. A research on archeological record of the petroglyphs of the River basin of Estelí River.**

The geographical territory selected for this research was the river basin of river Estelí, because it was an ancient territory populated by ancient Indian groups who left evidence of their presence in the region. The universe of the research is limited to 4 archeological zones with a sample of 19 sub-zones which are the sites of the River basin of Estelí River, where there are petroglyphs. The territories are.

Zone1. Petroglyphs of La Trinidad: Archeological sites: Las Animas, La laguan, Mechapa, El Tamarindo, and central park of La Trinidad.

Zone2. Petroglyphs of Estelí: Las Pintadas, La Joya and the petroglyphs that were moved to Estelí were also analyzed. These petroglyphs are in: The House of Culture, City Hall, Central park, Dr Alejandro D. Bolaños' house, neighborhood Orlando Ochoa, and the Museum of History and Archeology of Estelí.

Zone3. Petroglyphs of Condega and Pueblo Nuevo: petroglyphs of the archeological museum Julio César Salgado. In Pueblo Nuevo, La virgen.

Zone4. Petroglyphs of San Juan de Limay which embraces the sites: Los Encuentros, La Sirena, El Chorro (A) and (B), and Central park of Limay.

The different components for the analysis of each petroglyph were: technology, stylistic variety of lines and forms, iconography, thematic, possible interpretation, level of



physical deterioration, and possibilities of preservation and conservation.

A critical route with problematic questions that make possible the theoretical and methodological synthesis of the researching problem was defined in order to develop this research. Five aspects were taken into account: 1) localization of the petroglyphs; 2) variety of techniques used in the petroglyphs; 3) Variety of iconography; 4) conditions of conservation; and 5) priorities for their preservation.

The research embraced four stages. The first stage was the documental and bibliographical research; the second one, was the work in the archeological sites; the third, the processing of information, and the final stage was the writing of the research report.

#### **How was the research carried out? The method of archeological prospecting**

The main method was the archeological prospecting, known as previous surveying in the site. It is the most important method to observe and recognize the possibilities of location of the archeological potential.

To start the work in the field, a surveying of recognition and a verification of the selected sites was carried out. The steps in the work of field were the next:

- Localization of supports
- Technical and archeological file for each site
- Cleaning the surroundings
- Detection of texture
- Astronomical location

- Measuring the width, depth, and continuity of the engravings, the supports and the lines.
- Chalking<sup>8</sup>
- Tracing
- Hand made drawings
- Graphical record based on paper photographs, and color photographs. The natural context, the form of the supports and the bas reliefs were taken into account.
- The plastic tracings were transcribed on a blanket, and they were painted in acrylic to give them color and documentation.

The frottage was used as a data collecting technique in order to obtain the drawings in the stones, using news papers and carbon paper. This technique is not precise; therefore it was no longer used.

Then we used transparent plastics to get the drawings, and made a differentiation of natural damages from those caused by humans. Hand made drawings is another technique used as a criterion of control. They were traced in bond paper, projecting the types of drawings.

In order to make graphical documentation we used photography, compass, and location according to the cardinal points.

The principal tools to compile the information were: Daily report of field, thematic guide for ethnographic interviews, archeological files that include graphic notes

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<sup>8</sup> This technique was used knowing that it was not the most appropriated, but it was only used in most difficult cases, and later the drawings were cleaned with paintbrushes and water.



and drawings, notebooks and drawing blocks.

The daily report of field was used to make systematic notes and reflections about the discoveries. We took note about the geographical and environmental particularities, flora, fauna, supports, graphics and customs of actual settlers.

The thematic guide was used for the ethnographic interviews, to record other kinds of collateral data. This is the origin of the organization of ethnographic and ethnologic data obtained through the semi structural interviews, and of the legends that were compiled through the oral history about the archeological sites and the petroglyphs. The geographical data, flora and fauna as well as the historical background of the researched town were taken into account.

The file of archeological prospecting was used to obtain information about the sites: Name, village, town, owner, size, characteristics of the discovery, and conditions of conservation of the site and of the support, possibilities of research, advisable administrative treatment, weather and topographic characteristics, water sources, type of rock, ancient and actual vegetation and fauna, rock and ceramic mixed material.

#### **Use of techniques in the records of petroglyphs:**

Some cartographic sheets of INETER that interested us were studied; these sheets are those belonging to the River basin of Estelí River and its surroundings. The maps are: Somoto 2856 II, Condega 2956 III, San Juan de Limay 2855, Estelí River 2955 IV,

Sébaco 2954. The geographical territory was also observed and analyzed (elevations, ravines, basins, effluents, and vegetation).

The Indian toponymy is located, selected, classified and ordered in the map, making differences between those that belong to Nahuatl and Matagalpa dialects. There is a list of geographical location with its possible linguistic interpretation that was written with the help of some researches made by Dr. Alejandro D. Bolaños, Carlos Mántica, Rafael Urtecho, and Jaime Incer Barquero, as basis of information to know possible areas of aborigine cultural influence in territories near the sites of the petroglyphs. A classification and arranging of qualitative and quantitative data of every archeological site was made to analyze all the information. The classification and arrangement was made based on: raw material of the supports and location, used technologies, characteristics of drawings, possible interpretations; ethnic cultural group as possible authors of the petroglyphs; actual state of deterioration or conservation of the petroglyphs and suggestions for their conservation and preservation.

#### **4. Principal conclusions on the archeological record of the petroglyphs of the river basin of Estelí River**

There are a total of 55 petroglyphs in the department Estelí: 21 in La Trinidad, 24 in Estelí, 3 in Condega, 1 in Pueblo Nuevo and 6 in San Juan de Limay.

The studied petroglyphs are located in mountainous geographical areas, near



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rivers, streams, flora and fauna, with similar characteristics.

We can say that the settlements in pre Hispanic times were located near the rivers and fertile plots, with access to zones of forest, where they could hunt and recollect fruits. These areas are: Estelí River, River La Trinidad and Los Quesos.

It is possible to see territories of cultural and peoples expansion; these areas are: Rio Los Quesos in San Juan de Limay, Las Animas in La Trinidad, Las Pintadas, La Joya in Estelí, San Diego in Condega, Rio Abajo in San Antonio, Pueblo Nuevo.

We can see the high cultural development of the ancient population in this territory through the analysis of petroglyphs and ceramic remains found in the river basin of Estelí River, this development can be seen in the variety of designs of ceramic; the different topics that are a result of the observations of nature, daily life, and the set of cosmogonic ideas of their creators.

Other discoveries took place in the sites where there was previous information about the existence of petroglyphs; La Laguna, Las Animas, Mechapa, El Tamarindo in La Trinidad, La joya in Estelí, Los Encuentros and El Chorro in San Juan de Limay. The majority of the raw material where the petroglyphs are drawn are volcanic rock, basalt, and in less amount calcareous stone.

A monumental rupestrian art is perceived, due to the dimensions of the supports and because of the continuity, and composition of the engravings, as in El Chorro in San Juan de Limay, La Mina in Las Animas, La Laguna in La Trinidad and Las Pintadas in

Estelí. It is interesting to see the use of big platforms and basalt rock surfaces make the engravings, for example El Chorro in San Juan de Limay.

Based on Dr. Davila Bolaños<sup>9</sup> anthropological and linguistic studies it is possible to say that in the northern region of Nicaragua lived the Sumos and Matagalpas which are now called Mayangnas. Based on archeological researches of prospecting and excavations carried out by Edgar Espinoza, Laraine Fletcher and Ronald Salgado in different summer seasons, we can assure that this territory was populated by uluas-matagalpas- chontales.

Based on the linguistic and ethno-historical studies of Stone, and in the decorative patterns (1941), Newson (1987), Incer (1992), Ibarra (1944), Larsa Pinto (1991), Constela (1994), Werner and Espinoza (1995), a crossed date is suggested with other nearby areas in the years 400 AD and 800 AD.

The process of elaboration of the petroglyphs is a result of the knowledge about the supporting rock and the instruments that were used; the width and depth of the lines and their desired shapes were achieved through percussion and friction beats. The shapes are fashioned as a result of the observation of nature and cosmological thoughts of their creators.

These engravings were made on basaltic and granitic rocks of hard consistency with different size and weights. The observation of the forms and texture of the rocks was

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<sup>9</sup> Dávila Bolaños, Alejandro. 1990-Nicaragua prehispanica. Estelí. Centro Nacional de la Medicina Popular Tradicional.



one of the motives; they adapted the engravings to the natural forms of the supports.

For example: La Sirena, El Chorro, Limay, El Tamarindo, Mechapa, and Las Animas. They used chisels made out of granite, and flint. The used techniques were percussion beats with hard stone chisels, rocks uncovering, observation of the procedures, and rubbing. They probably pictured a scheme with calcareous stone on the rock in order to start the lines. The lines present different depths and widths.

The petroglyphs of Las Animas and La Trinidad are different from the petroglyphs of Estelí because the first ones are wider and deeper. Those of Estelí have thinner lines and better styles regarding the shapes.

These zones in ancient times had aborigine settlements near rivers and streams. They had relations among communities; this is the reason why there are stylistic similarities of shapes, drawings, and width of engravings in the elaboration of the petroglyphs of this area as in other territories of Nicaragua; like those in La Quebrada de Chagüitillo, River of Bocana de Paiwas in Matagalpa, and in the southern part of the country with the petroglyphs in the island Zapatera, and Balgües in the Ometepe island. All this makes us think that these works were made under the same symbolic Cosmo vision.

The drawings of aborigine artists in the petroglyphs show the observation of nature: flora, fauna, a knowledge learned by the accumulation of experience by ancient settlers and creators of these engravings.

Realistic representations are perceived in these bas reliefs, representations such as animals, insects, human beings, geometrical forms, abstractions, cosmogonic, astronomic, magic and mythic conceptions, and possible representations of deities.

The engravings may also integrate a system of language between the creator of several signs and symbols, transmitter, emitter, and several receptors for their reading, decoding, and assimilation of meanings that there were in relation and transformation of the natural surrounding, means of survival, food, hunting, family, social relation, and hierarchy, all this judging the representation of attire on the heads, and metamorphosed drawings between the figurative and the abstract that represent the Cosmo vision and mythical thought where the anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, and geometrical abstraction are overlapped.

Several petroglyphs might have a relation of mythical representations, ritual signs that propitiated the natural and cultural elements: rain, sun, wind, thunders, water, fertility, cardinal points, the influence and power of some animals or naguales covered with totemic symbols. There are engraving that Dr. Alejandro D. Bolaños interpreted as solar symbols, cardinal points, moon and rain (Gámez: 1970).

Some of the drawings on these rocks have different topics like: anthropomorphic drawings with faces or masks with attires on the heads. Stylizations of human bodies with customs or mythical attires, zoomorphic drawings of aerial and terrestrial animals: peacock, squirrels, deer, ocelots, simian and snakes.



Some stylistic differences have been found in the studied petroglyphs; those that are in Las Animas, El Tamarindo and El Chorro of San Juan de Limay, are wider and deeper than those in Las Pintadas and La Joya, in Estelí.

The shapes are simple styling of the observations. They present drawings of the natural context in which they lived; many representations of mammals, birds, reptiles, insects, there are also faces, masks, bodies, and plants; a lost tree of life recorded by A.D. Bolaños and Hedilberto María<sup>10</sup>, and a stylized flower in Las Animas, La Trinidad, located in the Central Park. In Las Animas, La Joya, La Mina and El Tamarindo, there are also geometrical and abstract forms. In Las Pintadas and in El Tamarindo There are combinations of anthropomorphic drawings of two or more components.

In the studied drawings we can distinguish the following elements of difference.

#### **Anthropomorphic drawings**

Faces or masks with attires on the heads. Styling of human bodies dressed in mythical attires; styling of human drawings, possible drawing accompanied by an infant; Characters with hierarchical representation.

#### **Zoomorphic drawings**

Aerial and terrestrial animals: peacocks, squirrels, deer, ocelot, simian and snakes.

#### **Drawings of plants**

According to Hedilberto's study it is a fruited tree, a unique sample in Central America. Unfortunately this sample got lost during the

construction of the road Estelí-El Sauce, and the only records we have are some pictures. A rare sample of the tree of life can be seen in picture 18 that illustrates a petroglyph of Las Pintadas, Estelí. Seven branches come out of the stem (María, 1965:179) sacred number. Fruits, leaves and a human schematized face hang on the branches of the tree. This allegoric number might illustrate the mite of xibalba tree that instantly produced fruits and leaves when the CAME placed on a dry tree the head of one Hun Hunapú (Girard, 1978: 504).

#### **Figurative, abstract and mythical symbiosis**

In the studied petroglyphs there are metamorphosed characters, between the anthropomorphic and zoomorphic. Some of them have head of feathered snakes, and also overlap with abstract characteristics.

Several petroglyphs might have a relation of mythical representations, ritual signs that propitiated the natural and cultural elements: rain, sun, wind, thunders, water, fertility, cardinal points, the influence and power of some animals or naguales covered with totemic symbols.

The petroglyphs of the River Basin of Estelí River were formerly motive of anthropological and archeological<sup>11</sup> studies. In these studies the observed petroglyphs, their location and possible graphical and symbolical interpretation, are mentioned.

The situation of conservation of the petroglyphs is deplorable, the majority of them do not have protection against natural phenomena; very important information of

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<sup>10</sup> In the book These stones speak.

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<sup>11</sup> Dr. Alejandro Dávila Bolaños.



their natural context and cardinal orientation has been lost when these petroglyphs have been moved out of their place of origin.

The most deteriorated petroglyphs are those that have had alterations on their supports and carvings, for example the ones that are placed in Central Park of La Trinidad, all they are covered of coloring carbide of atmospheric residues, a long time has to pass before the white layer is removed.

The petroglyph that is part of the basis of Dr. Alejandro D. Bolaños House is another case of deterioration of petroglyphs. The whole support is forming part of the wall of the house and is covered by acrylic paint.

## 5. Recommendations

The research deepens on the meaning of the petroglyphs as cultural patrimony and makes an interpretative approach about the characteristics of the lines and the shapes showed in the petroglyphs of the River basin of Estelí River.

This archeological record has as an objective to contribute to the inventory of petroglyphs as national patrimony and is meant to be a contribution to the strengthening of the local, regional, and Nicaraguan cultural identity, as well as to the elaboration of policies and strategies in regard to the cultural patrimony, as personal training, preservation, restoration and conservation of the cultural material.

There fore, the recommendation mean to achieve a wider sensitization and education of the population about the value and importance of the petroglyphs that lead to take actions for conservation, preservation,

popularization, tourism, self sustainability and appropriation of the cultural patrimony of the region as a supporting element of cultural identity.

- To sensitize the Municipal authorities about the importance of the petroglyphs as municipal, cultural, and tourist patrimony aiming to contribute to their care, conservation and preservation.
- It is necessary to issue laws at municipal levels, with actions for the defense, protection and spreading of the cultural patrimony, to prevent the destruction, plundering of archeological pieces.
- It is necessary that the municipal authorities provide the construction of an infrastructure and proper space to place the rocks that are under the action of natural deterioration.
- It is urgent to build a roof with economical material, wood or straw, to preserve the petroglyphs, and to stop their deterioration.
- To carry out presentations and explanations about the results of this research in different schools and to all those who are interested in this topic.
- It is important that the ministry of education and its branches promote educational campaigns at national level aiming to inform children, young people and all citizens about the importance of the cultural patrimony, this way they will be able to know the historical background of ancient settlers, how they lived, their relations and social organization, Cosmo vision and artistic creation, inherited values that contribute to the reaffirmation of the local, regional, national and cultural identity. In this sensitization and conscience it will be possible to come to respect, and



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- promote actions for conservation and preservation for the future generations.
- To organize tours for primary and secondary schools in order to know the sites where the petroglyphs are located, as a way to reaffirm the historical knowledge and the strengthening of the cultural identity.
  - To avoid the alteration of the supports and the engravings: To avoid the use of chalk, acrylic paint, carbide, stains, graffiti, political parties propaganda on the bas relieves or surfaces of the stones, so they have a better preservation and conservation of the engravings.
  - To continue the archeological researches in the region, making excavations in San Diego, Condega; and El Tamarindo in La Trinidad, coordinated with the archeological Center of Documentation and Research (CADI) of the UNAN, Nicaragua, previous permission of the owners of the lands, and of the authorities of National Patrimony, aiming to deepen in the social, historical, and cultural aspects of the ancient settlers.
  - It is important that municipal authorities take steps in the ministry of tourism and its departmental branches so that the sites that have evidences of petroglyphs be taken into account for the National tourist routs.
  - It is necessary that the different types of designs of the petroglyphs be reproduced by the artisans who work with ceramic. Reproduced and recreated in the production of pottery in the workshops of La Naranja in Limay and Ducuale Grande in Condega.
  - To spread the designs through massive printings in post cards, posters, T-shirts, clothes, bulletins, magazines etc. for a better knowledge of the local, cultural and regional patrimony.
  - To issue the results of this research in a book in order to bring this information to the citizens, aiming to encourage people to value the petroglyphs of the River basin of Estelí River.
  - It is necessary that the institutions involved on the topic of cultural patrimony issue notebooks, or brochures containing the petroglyphs of the river basin of Estelí River, for primary schools of the population that are near the sites that have petroglyphs so that the population learn about their cultural and natural patrimony.



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