

EUROPEAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE PRIZE

Decision

The EAA Committee for the European Archaeological Heritage Prize, consisting of Teresa Marques, Portugal, Anna Maria Bietti Sestieri, Italy, and Kristian Kristiansen (chairperson), Sweden, has decided to award the first Heritage Prize of the European Association of Archaeologists to the Portuguese Minister of Culture, Manuel Maria Carrilho, as a worthy representative of the many individual and institutional efforts behind the extraordinary decision taken by the Portuguese Government, elected in October 1995, to safeguard the open air rock art of Côa Valley, with thousands of engravings, from the Upper Palaeolithic to the Iron age and later periods, threatened by the construction of a dam.

The decision of suspending that construction, after 10 months of public discussion allowed, in 1998, the nomination of the "Prehistoric Rock Art Sites in the Côa Valley" for inclusion in the World Heritage List, which was accepted by the Executive Committee in December 1998, justified by **critterion i** " *The Upper Palaeolithic rock- art of Côa valley is an outstanding example of the sudden flowering of creative genius at the dawn of human cultural development*" and **critterion iii** " *The Côa valley rock art throws light on the social, economic, and spiritual life of the early ancestor of humankind in a wholly exceptional manner*"

Brief description and importance

The Côa valley has, along 17Km, prehistoric and historic rock art in an artistic sequence that began 20.000 years ago and the exceptional concentration of rock engravings from the Upper Palaeolithic period from 20,000 to 10,000 BC, is the most outstanding example of the early manifestation of human artistic creation in this form anywhere in the world.

This discovery represents a new understanding of the meaning of the most ancient artistic manifestations of mankind, not only a religious art attached to the deepness of the earth, connected with the caves, but a sign in the landscape of a symbolic meaning.

The art of Côa shows a high esthetic level of representations, is the first proof of a technic of movement, only reinvented in the XX century and the integration of the engravings in a rare beautiful landscape, with other archaeological and architectonic remains, allows the possibility of an integrated exploitation of the natural and cultural values of that region.

Justification for the Prize

The several descriptions about the discovery of the rock art of Côa valley, published in the press all over the world, showed the high touristic potential of this heritage, and how other countries would be proud to own such treasures, "*the greatest site in the world of palaeolithic rock art in the open air*" by the words of Henry Lumley, after his visit to the valley.

At the Annual Assembly of EAA, held in Santiago de Compostela on 23 September 1995, the European Association of Archaeologists called upon the Portuguese government, according to the spirit of the Malta Convention, “to suspend all further construction work on the planned dam in the Côa valley to permit the remarkable series of rock carvings and the surrounding cultural landscape to be comprehensively studied and analysed by means of a coordinated multidisciplinary survey, under the supervision of an international expert commission, in order to develop a project for the future management and conservation of this exceptional archaeological landscape”

On 7th November 1995, during the submission to Parliament of his Government's program, the new Prime-Minister, António Guterres promised that the Foz Côa dam would be immediately stopped, that the studies for building a dam for the same purpose in another tributary of the Douro river would begin immediately, and that archaeologists would be given all the time necessary to study the valley exhaustively and establish its real status. Although the existence of a controversy on the relevance of the engravings, he hoped those studies would confirm the world-wide importance of the heritage preserved in the valley, in which case the dam would be definitively abandoned.

The decision followed upon a period of international, national and local debate as to the importance and future of the Foz Côa rock art, in which many individuals, scientists, interest groups and institutions were engaged.

This public debate was a remarkable example of conscience of citizenship, that contributed to a unique, intelligent and brave decision of the Portuguese political power, preserving the rock art, notwithstanding the high financial cost of that decision, and allowing new institutional possibilities for the study of that valuable heritage. (Resolução do Conselho de Ministros nº 4/96, de 17 de Janeiro).

In recognition of this the EAA Nomination Committee decided to award the first European Archaeological Heritage Prize to the Minister of Culture in Portugal, Manuel Maria Carrilho, as a representative of the many individual and collective efforts behind this truly remarkable decision in the history of archaeological heritage.

Kristian Kristiansen

Teresa Marques

Anna Maria Bietti Sestieri