

Bowl, 1000-1500 A.D.
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico

Taíno Treasures:
The Legacy of Dr. Ricardo E. Alegría
February 4 - May 2, 2003

Organized by Irvine Rafael MacManus

The word Taíno is used to identify the inhabitants of the Greater Antilles (Cuba, Jamaica, Hispaniola, and Puerto Rico) who first met Christopher Columbus during his first overseas exploration to the New World. Taíno means “good” in the Arawak language.

Towards the end of the 19th century, historians and archaeologists developed an interest to identify this group of other Native Americans. Taíno is not an ethnical term for the Arawak groups (whose ancestors came to the Antilles from South America since pre-historic times). Some archaic groups like the horticultural “Huecan,” “Saladoid,” and “Barrancoid,” arrived to the Antilles from South America before the Taíno period.

The Taíno culture flourished between the 10th and 15th century A.D. (1000-1500 A.D.), having its epicenter in the islands of Puerto Rico and La Hispaniola. During that time, this group migrated to the nearby islands of Jamaica, Bahamas, Vieques, Virgin Islands, and lastly, eastern Cuba,

half a century before Columbus’ arrival. They reached a high level of socio-economic development that influenced most of the Caribbean. The presence of a great number of villages of chiefdoms that ruled over expansive regions, of active commerce between islands and of agricultural techniques (i.e., irrigation systems, cultivation of elevated lands) tells us of a complex society; one whose evolution was cut short by the Spanish Conquest.

They were a hierarchical society: the Taíno head chief was called *cacique*, followed in power by the shaman or *bohique*. Next were the *nitainos*, composed of high-class members and warriors; and in the lower level of this social pyramid, the *naborias*—the common citizens and workers. Agriculture was the base of the Taíno economy, but hunting and fishing thrived as well.

Taínos believed in the existence of many deities, immortals who lived in heaven. Standing out among them is Yocahú, the creator of all things, and his mother Atabei or

Atabeira. Besides mythical gods, the Taínos paid homage to their ancestors believing that they became protective spirits, also called *zemís*, upon death. In fact, many of these protective spirits were past chiefs. *Zemís*, which are made with stone, wood, shell or bone, and vary in size considerably, are perhaps among the best examples of pre-Columbian sculpture of the New World. The principle art manifestation of the Taínos is the rock art or petroglyphs with stylized anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, and abstract motifs. They were made by engraving walls of caves, large rocks in riverbeds, as well as on the monoliths that were arranged as a "fence" for the *bateyes*, or multi-purpose courts, where they celebrated *areytos* (rituals) and played a ball game.

Their art reflects highly inspired artisans by the "icons" associated to culture and environment. The pictorial representations embody what that society revered and respected. Stylized depictions of the elements of nature, along with related icons, reflect their belief in magical forces in nature. In many cases, Taíno artifacts correspond to ceremonial paraphernalia. The *zemi*, or idol, is the iconographic object that represents the power of nature and was highly used in sympathetic magical rituals. Their magic-religious worldview was a factor in the high-volume of artifacts produced. Some artifacts, for example, were believed to make chiefdoms dominate the powers of nature (in the case of objects that represented the elements). With that panorama, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic *zemís* were made to represent spirits that control different aspects of nature. *Zemís* were used not only in religious and ceremonial activities—of oracles, and activities like shamanism and funeral practice—but also in music, dance, ball game, pottery, and domestic activities.

Some objects, like the *dujos*, or ceremonial stools, display the majesty of the artistic treatment of finely polished wood—like the Antillean Guayacán (guaiacum)—and of engraving. Only chiefs and shamans had the privilege of using the *dujo*. This nourishes the idea of power in a hierarchical society: both characters (*cacique* and *bohique*) became the controllers of nature and society. The icon and the power associated to it and its bearer, reflect the dichotomy that artifacts serve as political and religious purposes. During warfare, it was believed that the acquisition by force of the idols that protected certain *cacique* and his village bestowed more ruling power to the prevailing chief, "upgrading" his level of chiefdom. The more idols, the more power.

Artifacts carved in stone, wood, shell, and bone point to certain aspects in Taíno life, especially about social stratification, or hierarchy. And many modeled clay vases decorated with intricate lineal incisions and dotted motifs reveal much about their abundant artisan production.

From the hands of Taíno master crafters come the richest works for ceremonial purposes, with intricate decorative motifs of a unique aesthetic quality. Among the most significant pieces are the three-peaked stones with human (anthropomorphic) and animal (zoomorphic) motifs, anthropomorphic stone daggers, stone masks, amulets massive stone collars, elbow stones, ceramic vases, stone mortars and pestles, bone vomit spatulas for magic ceremonial activities, wooden *dujos*, and sculptures. The solid stone collars are the most impressive handiwork of the ritual objects of the indigenous Taíno art of Puerto Rico. The great amount of time employed to create each one of them indicates that there was some sort of power ritual involved.

Other objects of special interest are the amulets. They reveal many fundamental aspects of Taíno mythology and craftsmanship. The magic realm is the basis for their aesthetic explanation of reality, because it is by wearing these amulets that represent the gods, the forces of nature, and those intangible forces beyond day to day experiences, that the Taíno try to take control of their environment.

The importance of the Taíno art objects lies in the symbolic part they play in their religion and daily needs. The Taíno "cosmovision," or worldview, comes from an ancient myth about creation of men and women, of the flora and fauna, of day and night and about life after death. Taíno objects were manufactured with this worldview in mind: influences of animistic power, and with specific beliefs and guides that rule their lives. All prime materials—stone, wood, clay, shell and bone—were always given a special treatment, keeping harmony with nature. That extended a distinctive sign for that culture.

Since the 1980's Taíno art exhibition at Seville, Spain, and then in 1992 at Centro de Estudios Avanzados de Puerto Rico y el Caribe (The Center of advanced Studies of Puerto Rico and the Caribbean) in San Juan, Puerto Rico, the international appeal for Taíno art grew exponentially. In a matter of years, the interest for its aesthetics and values, and the study of the meaning behind Taíno objects was no longer within the Antillean frontiers. Institutions like the Musée du Petit Palais in Paris, France; El Museo del Barrio in New York; Instituto Latinoamericano in Rome, Italy; and the Lehman College Art Gallery in New York, presented exhibitions of Taíno art in the 80's, 90's, and, more recently, in 2003. Those exhibits marked the beginning of a Taíno "revival" in the art world, where handcrafters, sculptors, engravers, printmakers, jewelers, and tattoo artists incorporated Taíno motifs in their work. On the other hand, the academic world paid attention as well. Archaeologists, anthropologists, historians, and art historians conduct extensive research and new studies on the complex Taíno culture.

In the past three decades of studies, the Taínos have become a rich model of a culture. Their objects roused a deep interest in themes that relate to their way of life. A closer look to Taíno art is an invitation to discover, know, and appreciate the marvelous heritage from this Antillean culture.

Iván F. Méndez-Bonilla
Curator of Archaeology
Museum of History, Anthropology and Art
University of Puerto Rico



Large Petroglyph, ca. 1200-1450 A.D.
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico

Checklist

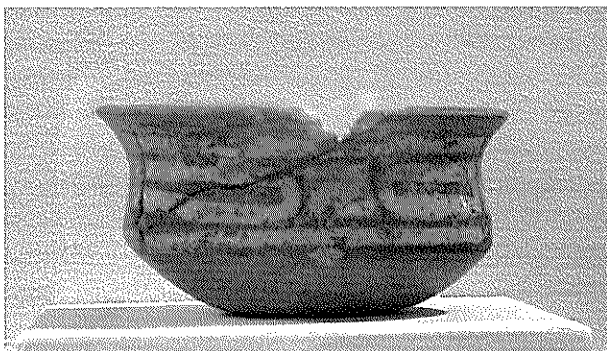
1. **Stone Collar, slender type, 1000-1500 A.D.**
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico
stone
José L. Montalvo Guenard Collection, Museo de Historia,
Anthropología y Arte, Universidad de Puerto Rico

Monolithic belt (slender type) used during the ball games.

2. **Pestle, 1000-1500 A.D.**
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico
stone
Adolfo de Hostos Collection, Museo de Historia,
Anthropología y Arte,
Universidad de Puerto Rico

3. **Duho, 1000-1500 A.D.**
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico
stone
Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte, Universidad de
Puerto Rico

Ceremonial stool.



Bowl, 100 B.C.-600 A.D.
Saladoid Culture, Puerto Rico

4. **Bone with carving, 1200-1500 A.D.**
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico
William Figueroa Collection, on loan to Turabo University
Museum; Carmen Archaeological Site, Salinas, Puerto Rico

Ceremonial artifact.

5. **Bowl, 1000-1500 A.D.**
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico
ceramic
Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte, Universidad
de Puerto Rico

Ceramic bowl with incised design.

6. **Bowl, 1000-1500 A.D.**
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico
ceramic
Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte, Universidad de
Puerto Rico; Hacienda Grande Archaeological Site, Loiza,
Puerto Rico, 1973



Amulet, 900-1200 A.D.
Saladoid Culture, Puerto Rico

7. **Bowl, 1000-1500 A.D.**
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico
ceramic
Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte, Universidad de
Puerto Rico

Ceremonial vessel with anthropomorphic adornments.

8. **Small Duho, ca. 1200-1450 A.D.**
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico
stone
Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueño

Small ceremonial stool.



Duho, 1000-1500 A.D.
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico

13.
Round Zemí, ca. 1200-1450 A.D.
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico
stone
Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueño

Three-pointed sculpture representing a deity.

14.
Stone Collar, ca. 1200-1450 A.D.
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico
stone
Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueño

Monolithic belt used during the ball games.

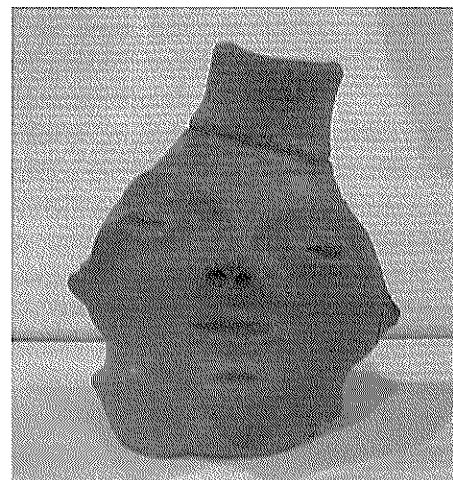
15.
Bowl, 100 B.C.-600 A.D.
Saladoid Culture, Puerto Rico
ceramic
Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte, Universidad de Puerto Rico; Hacienda Grande Archaeological Site, Loiza, Puerto Rico, 1948

Small ceremonial vessel painted white on red with geometric designs.

16.
Carved face, 1200-1500 A.D.
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico
stone
Angel Colón Collection; on loan to Turabo University Museum; found at Los Indios Archaeological Site at Santa Isabel, Puerto Rico

17.
Stone Dagger, 1000-1500 A.D.
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico
stone
Adolfo de Hostos Collection, Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte, Universidad de Puerto Rico; from Añasco, Puerto Rico

Ceremonial dagger with anthropomorphic figure.



Vessel, 250 A.D.
Saladoid Culture, Puerto Rico

9.
Bowl, 100 B.C.-600 A.D.
Saladoid Culture, Puerto Rico
ceramic
Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte, Universidad de Puerto Rico; Hacienda Grande Archaeological Site, Loiza, Puerto Rico; dug by Dr. Ricardo E. Alegría in 1948

Early Saladoid bowl in Hacienda Grande style.

10.
Small Petroglyph, ca. 1200-1450 A.D.
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico
stone
Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueño

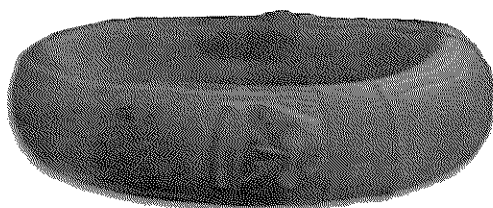
Petroglyph carved in limestone with a humanoid face.

11.
Ceramic Fragment, 100 B.C.-600 A.D.
Saladoid Culture, Puerto Rico
ceramic
Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte, Universidad de Puerto Rico; Hacienda Grande Archaeological Site, Loiza, Puerto Rico, 1948

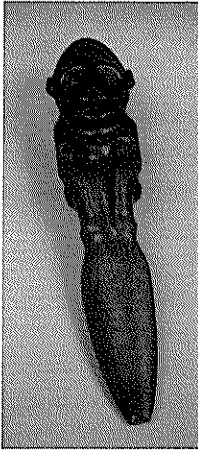
Fragment of a vessel painted white on red with geometric designs.

12.
Vessel Fragment, 100 B.C.-600 A.D.
Saladoid Culture, Puerto Rico
ceramic
Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte, Universidad de Puerto Rico

Clay fragment of a vessel showing the typical "D" shaped handle, painted white on red.



Stone Collar, ca. 1200-1450 A.D.
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico



Stone Dagger, 1000-1500 A.D.
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico

18.
Zemí, 1000-1500 A.D.
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico
stone
Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte, Universidad de Puerto Rico

Three-pointed sculpture representing a deity.

19.
Chisel, 1000-1500 A.D.
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico
stone
Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte, Universidad de Puerto Rico

Chisel, n.d.
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico
stone
Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte, Universidad de Puerto Rico

Chisel, n.d.
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico
stone
Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte, Universidad de Puerto Rico

20.
Necklace, 100 B.C.-600 A.D.
Saladoid Culture, Puerto Rico
quartz and amethyst beads

Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte, Universidad de Puerto Rico; Hacienda Grande, Loiza, Puerto Rico, 1948

Necklace of quartz and amethyst beads (Hacienda Grande style).

21.
Zemí, 1000-1500 A.D.
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico
stone
Carmen Marrero Collection; Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte, Universidad de Puerto Rico; excavated at Hatillo, Puerto Rico

Small three-pointed anthropomorphic sculpture representing a deity.

22.
Zemí, ca. 1200-1450 A.D.
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico
stone
Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueño

Three-pointed sculpture representing a deity.

23.
Tool, ca. 1200-1450 A.D.
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico
Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueño

Stone artifact used as a working tool.

24.
Pestle, 1000-1500 A.D.
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico
stone
Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte, Universidad de Puerto Rico

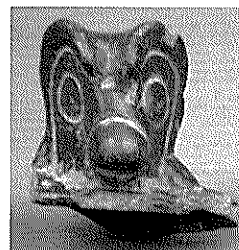
Anthropomorphic stone pestle.

25.
Zemí, 1000-1500 A.D.
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico
stone
Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte, Universidad de Puerto Rico

Small three-pointed sculpture representing a deity.

Zemí, 1000-1500 A.D.
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico
stone
Dr. Carlos de Castro Collection, Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte, Universidad de Puerto Rico; from Monserrate Archaeological Site, Luquillo, Puerto Rico

Small three-pointed sculpture representing a deity.



Vessel Handle, 100 B.C.- 600 A.D.
Saladoid Culture, Puerto Rico



Small Petroglyph, ca. 1200-1450 A.D.
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico

Zemí, 1000-1500 A.D.
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico
stone
Carmen Marrero Collection, Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte, Universidad de Puerto Rico; excavated at Hatillo, Puerto Rico

Small three-pointed sculpture representing a deity.

26.
Stone Collar, 1000-1500 A.D.
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico
stone
José L. Montalvo Guenard Collection, Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte, Universidad de Puerto Rico; excavated at Barranquitas, Puerto Rico

Monolithic belt used during the ball games.

27.
Amulet, 900-1200 A.D.
Saladoid Culture, Puerto Rico
bone
Turabo University Museum

28.
Canine God Figure, 250 A.D.
Saladoid Culture, Puerto Rico
terra cotta
Turabo University Museum; excavated at Punta Candelero

Clay figure of a dog.

29.
Pendant, 100 B.C.-600 A.D.
Saladoid Culture, Puerto Rico
ceramic
H. 8.5 cms. x W. 8.3 cms.
Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte, Universidad de Puerto Rico; Hacienda Grande Archaeological Site, Loiza, Puerto Rico, 1948

Clay pendant representing a human head.

30.
Amulet, 1200-1500 A.D.
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico
conch shell
William Figueroa Collection, on loan to Turabo University Museum; Carmen Archaeological Site, Salinas, P.R.

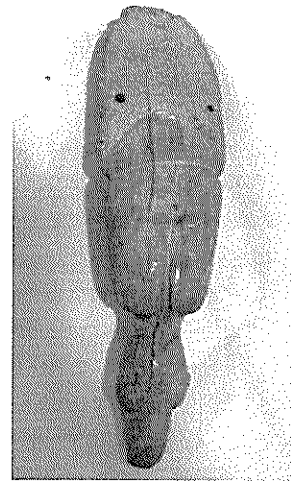
Conch shell ornament representing a humanoid face.

31.
Vomit Spatula, 1000-1500 A.D.
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico
bone
Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte, Universidad de Puerto Rico; Monserrate Archaeological Site, Luquillo, Puerto Rico, 1947

Vomit spatula made of manatee rib in the form of a bird that was used for purification as part of religious rituals.

32.
Vessel, 250 A.D.
Saladoid Culture, Puerto Rico
Fragment of an efigy vessel
terra cotta
Turabo University Museum

Clay vessel with anthropomorphic figurine.



Vomit Spatula, 1000-1500 A.C.
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico

33.
Pendant, 1000-1500 A.D.
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico
shell
José L. Montalvo Guenard Collection, Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte, Universidad de Puerto Rico

34.
Vessel Handle, 100 B.C.- 600 A.D.
Saladoid Culture, Puerto Rico
ceramic
Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte, Universidad de Puerto Rico; Canas Archaeological Site, Ponce, Puerto Rico



Fragment, 250 B.C.
Figure with multiple representations

35.
Vomit Spatula, 1000-1500 A.D.
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico
bone
Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte, Universidad de Puerto Rico; Monserrate Archaeological Site, Luquillo, Puerto Rico, 1947

Vomit spatula made of manatee rib that was used for purification as part of religious rituals.

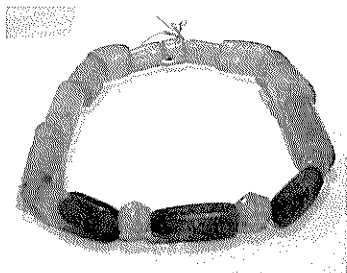
36.
Vessel Handle, 100 B.C.-600 A.D.
Saladoid Culture, Puerto Rico
ceramic
Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte, Universidad de Puerto Rico; Canas Archaeological Site, Ponce, Puerto Rico

Clay adornment.

37.
Bowl, 250 B.C.
Saladoid Culture, Puerto Rico
clay
Turabo University Museum

38.
Vase fragment with woman's face, 250 B.C.
Saladoid Culture, Puerto Rico
clay
Turabo University Museum

Fragment of a clay vessel with a humanoid face.



Necklace, 100 B.C.-600 A.D.
Saladoid Culture, Puerto Rico

39.
Cassava Bread Burner (Buén), 100 B.C.-600 A.D.
Saladoid Culture, Puerto Rico
ceramic
Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte, Universidad de Puerto Rico; Hacienda Grande Archaeological Site, Loiza, Puerto Rico

Miniature representation of a burner with tripod base, used for making cassava bread.

40.
Fragment, 250 B.C.
Saladoid Culture, Puerto Rico
Figure with multiple representations
clay
Turabo University Museum

41.
Bowl, 100 B.C.-600 A.D.
Saladoid Culture, Puerto Rico
ceramic
Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte, Universidad de Puerto Rico; Hacienda Grande Archaeological Site, Loiza, Puerto Rico

Ceramic plate painted white on red.



Bone with carving, 1200-1500 A.D.
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico

42.
Large Petroglyph, ca. 1200-1450 A.D.
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico
stone
Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueño

Petroglyph carved on cave wall, represents a humanoid face.

43.
Axes
2 stone axes with wood handles
Adolfo de Hostos Collection, Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte, Universidad de Puerto Rico

Stone axes with contemporary wood handles to illustrate their use.

44.
Mortar, ca. 1200-1450 AD
Taíno Culture, Puerto Rico
stone
Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueño

Stone mortar used to pound corn.



Vase fragment with woman's face, 250 B.C.
Saladoid Culture, Puerto Rico

This exhibition and related programs have been made possible through the generous support of The Rockefeller Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, The New York Council for the Humanities, The Reed Foundation, Con Edison, The Max and Victoria Dreyfus Foundation, and the New York State Council on the Arts. Additional funding from New York National Bank.



New York Council for the Humanities



Lehman College Art Gallery exhibitions and education programs are made possible with the generous support of the Bronx Council on the Arts Cultural Venture Fund Program; the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs Cultural Challenge Program; the Institute of Museum and Library Services/Leadership Initiative; the National Endowment for the Arts; the New York State Council on the Arts; the Milton and Sally Avery Arts Foundation; Citigroup; the Edith and Herbert Lehman Foundation; the Greentree Foundation; JPMorgan Chase; and Friends of Lehman College Art Gallery.

Bedford Park Boulevard West
Bronx, New York 10468
(718) 960-8731 fax: (718) 960-6991

<http://ca80.lehman.cuny.edu/gallery/>