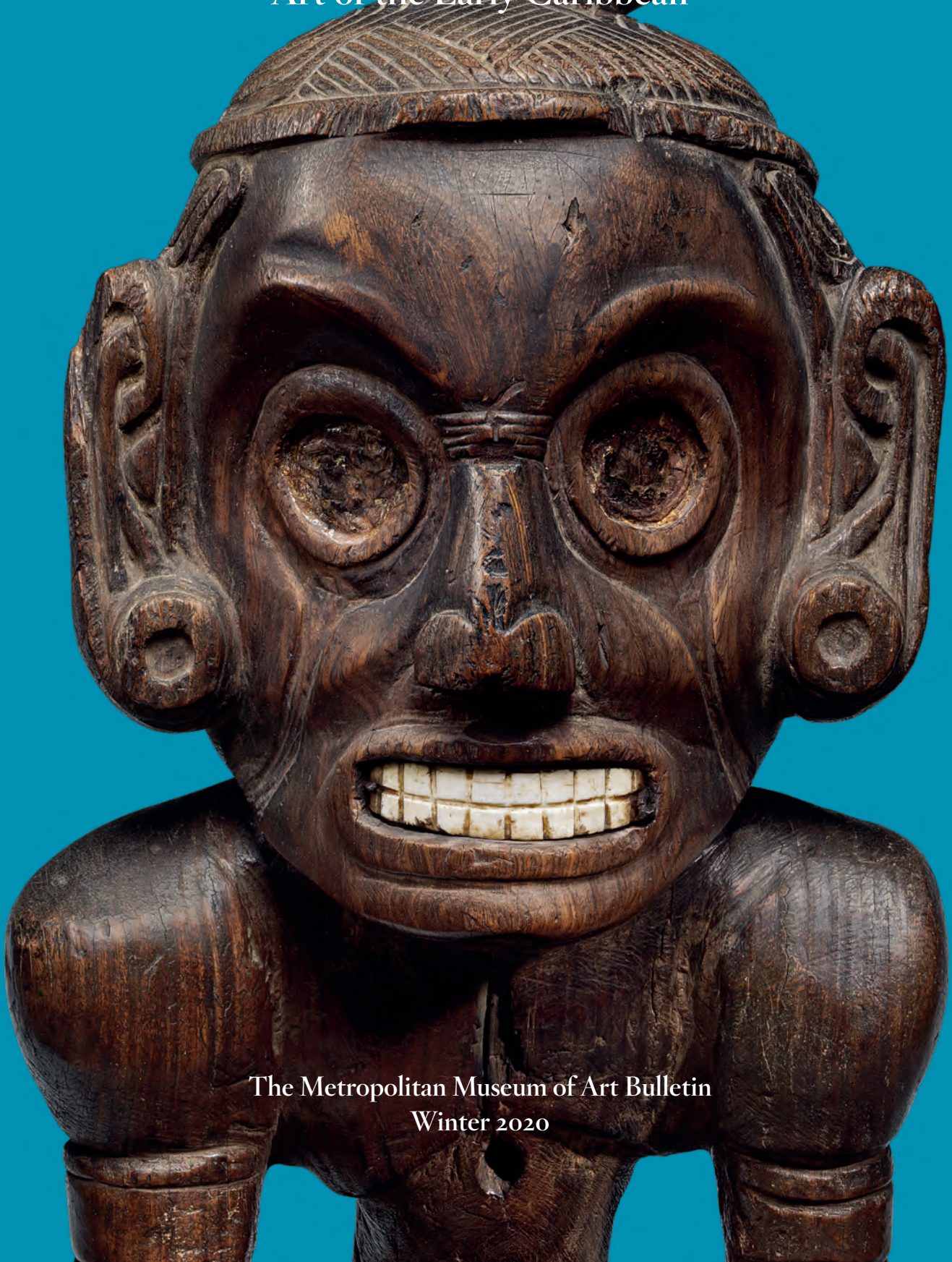


Arte del Mar

Art of the Early Caribbean



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James A. Doyle

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THE
MET

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Director's Note

Arte del Mar explores the diverse, interconnected history of the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean, where the sea was a vital source of cultural exchange. This *Bulletin* and the exhibition it accompanies provide the first-ever holistic look at art from the region, drawing on The Met collection and a variety of remarkable loan objects to feature masterworks from the early first millennium to the present.

As The Met embarks on its 150th-anniversary year in 2020—as well as a major renovation and reinstallation of the galleries of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas—*Arte del Mar* celebrates and builds upon the Museum's long-standing commitment to telling the story of Caribbean art. That commitment was initiated in 1973 by *The Art Heritage of Puerto Rico*, a groundbreaking collaboration with El Museo del Barrio, in East Harlem, and the first survey of art from an island that has profoundly shaped New York City's cultural identity. Nearly ten years later, The Met's Michael C. Rockefeller Wing opened, establishing a home for the Museum's collection of indigenous art of the Americas, including the Caribbean. In 1985, the exhibition *Taino Art of the Dominican Republic* explored the artistic traditions of the peoples of the Greater Antilles, extending awareness to scholars and visitors alike.

Today, the Rockefeller Wing remains home to numerous Taino works, including the iconic wooden *zemí* figure, a hallmark of The Met collection. This *Bulletin* begins with that masterpiece (on the cover) and elaborates a regional history of connection, foregrounding the diversity of the Caribbean peoples and their rich artistic production. Following the example of *The Art Heritage of Puerto Rico*, which was a bilingual exhibition, some of the texts in the *Arte del Mar* exhibition are displayed in both Spanish and English, and all are available in Spanish on the Museum's website, presenting the narrative in the dominant language of the Caribbean today.

Arte del Mar is a story without end. Ancestral traditions that thrived for thousands of years before Spanish colonization continued through artistic exchange that expanded to encompass European and African cultures after 1492. Caribbean artists engaged with Afro-indigenous legacies into the twentieth century, when artists such as Wifredo Lam made extraordinary contributions to modernism and the global history of art. Today, dynamic contemporary artists continue to practice in the region and among diaspora communities.

We are grateful to the longtime champions of Taino art who contributed to the exhibition, including Vincent and Margaret Fay, Brian and Florence Mahony, and José Roméu and Sidney Babcock. The Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History and the Saint Louis Art Museum, fellow institutions committed to the ancient art of the Antilles, lent important works. We extend our thanks to our colleagues at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, who made it possible to bring Lam's monumental *Rumor de la tierra* to our visitors. We express our gratitude to the members of the Friends of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas: Art of Five Continents, whose contributions made this exhibition possible. Thanks go to The Reed Foundation, whose gift allowed us to offer educational programming associated with *Arte del Mar*. We also acknowledge the Lila Acheson Wallace Fund for The Metropolitan Museum of Art, established by the cofounder of *Reader's Digest*, for its support of The Met's quarterly *Bulletin* program.

We are confident that *Arte del Mar* will inspire New Yorkers and visitors from all over the world to appreciate the history of the peoples surrounding the Caribbean Sea, which, much like The Met, remains an important nexus for global cultures.

Max Hollein

Director, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

According to the traditions of the Warao peoples, at the beginning of time a swallow-tailed kite emerged into the world holding a bow and arrow in one wing and a maraca in the other (fig. 1).¹ This powerful migratory raptor had a magnificent frigate bird for a female companion. With their forked tails, dazzling courtship rituals, and aggressive behavior, the pair inspired the stories of the Warao, who inhabit Venezuela's Orinoco Delta, as well as artworks of many other civilizations populating the lands within and surrounding the Caribbean Sea (fig. 2).

Synonymous with tropical paradise, the Caribbean connected a range of diverse societies for thousands of years before Europeans infamously arrived in the late fifteenth century (see map on pp. 18–19). The story of the indigenous Caribbean peoples is a shared artistic narrative of ritual knowledge, ceremony, and political power. Just like the raptors prominent in their mythology, these peoples migrated throughout the region, trading materials and ideas from island to coastline and back again across a rich network of maritime exchange.

Arte del Mar, or “art of/from the sea” in Spanish (the dominant language of the region today), explores connections between the Caribbean islands and the mainland from about A.D. 200 to 1500 through a close examination of the region's surviving ancestral art and artifacts.² Historically, scholarship in this area has focused on the sculptural traditions of the societies known collectively as Taínos, who inhabited the Greater Antilles.³

Expanding on this knowledge, new archaeological, ethno-historical, and art-historical research has deepened our understanding of the rise of Taíno civilizations as well as their long-standing connections with peoples along the coast, from Venezuela to Mexico.⁴

Despite scarce documentation and limited context, recent scholarship has begun to uncover the stories of the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean from beneath the complex layers of the region's long history. Although the boundaries of modern nation-states and the tropical climate have adversely affected our understanding of the region's archaeological and art-historical past, transnational collaborations among experts in different fields have begun to yield new discoveries.⁵ We now know, for example, that before Europeans arrived, Caribbean societies formed a vast, interconnected, multilingual network characterized by complex relationships among neighbors and distant contacts alike. Alongside their better-known Taíno peers, societies such as the Tairona from Colombia, the diverse kingdoms in Veraguas, Panama, and the communities in the Ulúa Valley, Honduras, have begun to come into clearer focus.

Beginning with Christopher Columbus in 1492, European colonizers vied for territorial claims in the Caribbean, devastating indigenous populations in their quest to extract valuable resources. Infectious diseases and orchestrated violence demolished native communities, silencing their rich oral histories before Spanish chroniclers could record even the



1. Swallow-tailed hawk [kite] (*Falco [Elanoides] forficatus*) from John James Audubon's *Birds of America* (1827–38)



2. Eagle pendant, Veraguas, Panama, 11th–16th century. Gold, H. 5 ½ in. (14 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Jan Mitchell and Sons Collection, Gift of Jan Mitchell, 1991 (1991.419.8)

most basic information, such as the peoples' names for themselves.⁶ Subsequently, the forced mass migration of enslaved peoples from Africa further contributed to the heterogeneous culture of the Caribbean islands.

Arte del Mar reveals the history of a region shaped by loss and resilience, one traditionally filtered through the lens of the colonial powers that dominated the Caribbean for centuries. As new research has begun to counter misinformation about the indigenous presence in the region—perpetuated through colonial rule and beyond—contemporary peoples from Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and diaspora communities have advocated for the recognition of their claims to Caribbean indigeneity.⁷ Consideration of the region's contemporary artistic practice yields further insight into this unique ancestral legacy. Certain recurring themes cross linguistic boundaries in the present, for example, bringing to light a regional aesthetic, born from artistic exchange, that echoes the visual arts of the precolonial period.⁸ The masterworks presented in *Arte del Mar* share a formal grammar linked to politics, mythology, and ritual performance. These themes, in turn, form part of a distinctly Caribbean approach to creativity that emerges from the broader context of art of the ancient Americas.

Tairona, Colombia

The dramatic landscape of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Colombia, is dominated by a snowcapped mountain range that lies close to the Caribbean coast. Societies in this biodiversity hot spot, known collectively as Tairona, thrived for thousands of years and cultivated innovative artistic traditions. By the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, architects and engineers had created a distinctive urban infrastructure of earthen platforms lined with cut-stone blocks and superstructures of wood and thatch (fig. 3). These buildings were arranged around plazas, which, at places like Ciudad Perdida and Pueblito, were constructed on hundreds of terraces along the slopes of the mountains.⁹ Just as “Taíno” refers to a number of interconnected societies within the Greater Antilles, “Tairona” functions as a general term for diverse groups living in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Sixteenth-century Spanish chronicles indicate that multiple societies with mutually unintelligible

languages inhabited the region.¹⁰ Today, one major group of Tairona descendants, who speak the Kogi language, still inhabits the area.

Tairona societies were especially proficient at goldwork using both hammering and lost-wax casting techniques. Ten thousand gold objects from the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta represent more than a third of the collection of the Museo del Oro in Bogotá.¹¹ In contrast with other Colombian gold regalia, Tairona works appear to have been worn extensively, possibly by multiple generations, before burial. Symbols of people and animals are depicted consistently across the many examples of Tairona gold, suggesting that such regalia held a broadly shared meaning for the region's inhabitants.

One type of anthropomorphic pendant shows richly adorned male figures holding ritual implements in their hands and gazing intensely, suggesting that gestural performance was used by political authorities in Caribbean Colombia.¹² A gold pectoral, cast using



3. Stone-lined terraces that once supported monumental wood-and-thatch structures, Ciudad Perdida, Colombia



4. Figure pendant, Tairona, Colombia, 10th–16th century. Gold, H. 5 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (13.7 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Gift of H. L. Bache Foundation, 1969 (69.7.10)



5. Labret, Tairona, Colombia, 10th–16th century. Gold, H. 1 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (4.8 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Gift and Bequest of Alice K. Bache, 1974, 1977 (1974.271.62)



6. Bird pendant, Tairona, Colombia, 10th–16th century. Gold, H. 5 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (13.3 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Gift and Bequest of Alice K. Bache, 1974, 1977 (1974.271.12)



7. Winged pendants, Tairona, Colombia, 10th–16th century. Stone, W. 10 7/8 in. (27.6 cm); W. 9 7/8 in. (25.1 cm); W. 3 1/2 in. (8.9 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Bequest of Arthur M. Bullowa, 1993 (1994.35.606, .609, .614)

the lost-wax method, depicts an idealized leader whose exaggerated yet harmonious proportions focus the viewer's attention on his head and mouth (fig. 4). The ruler's power is underscored by the birds and grimacing crocodilians in his headdress, represented in both two and three dimensions by the master sculptor. The fine braided details in his headdress and on his shoulders and hips hint at the sophistication of Tairona textiles. Ornaments also appear on the figure's ears and nose, and his lower lip is pierced with a labret, emphasizing his power in persuasive speech. Some full-size gold labrets, which would have been worn by prominent community members, represent stylized reptilian creatures exhaling mirrored volutes (fig. 5).

Winged creatures, depicted in both gold and greenstone, feature prominently in Tairona imagery (fig. 6). As part of gold body ornaments, elaborate bird imagery conveyed religious concepts, amplified political power, or signified membership in an important clan lineage.¹³ Spanish chroniclers recorded that winged gold pendants were among the regalia worn by political leaders in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. Such objects with diplomatic value held significance as political symbols well into the sixteenth century. For example, in 1526, Spanish authorities seized gold bird pendants as part of a lawsuit.¹⁴ The symbolic power of birds and bats was also expressed by sculptors who distilled the majesty of flight in the abstract form of creatures with spread wings (fig. 7).



8. Eagle pendant, Veraguas, Panama, 11th–16th century. Gold, H. 3 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (9.8 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979 (1979.206.540)

Veraguas and Coclé, Panama

Gold bird ornaments, a popular medium of exchange throughout the Caribbean, made their way into Venezuela and as far east as the Atlantic coast of Guyana.¹⁵ In the Isthmus of Panama, a profusion of gold pendants in the form of eagles appears in the archaeological records of both the Caribbean and Pacific coasts, especially in the region of Veraguas.¹⁶ Political leaders in Veraguas were quite powerful at the time of Spanish arrival, so much so that even into the eighteenth century, certain valleys or regions were named after them.¹⁷

One consistent feature of the bird pendants from Veraguas is the fanciful, hybrid nature of the birds themselves, which are not recognizable species but, rather, creative interpretations of avian anatomy that never occur in nature. The leaders who commissioned the pendants likely collaborated with the artists to create a specific vision for a supernatural bird, with features salient to the pendants' use in ceremonial regalia. Sometimes the sculptor adorned the birds with neck ornaments

or elaborate crests and other zoomorphic protuberances (fig. 8, and see fig. 2). The sound effects of the pendants were also important; some birds have bells for eyes, while in others, the body itself is a bell chamber (fig. 9). In both private and public ceremonies, audiences may have heard rulers before they saw them.

In addition to highly sophisticated metal arts, societies in Panama produced some of the most innovative ceramics in the ancient Americas, reaching new creative heights with elaborate imagery, distinct color palettes, and imaginative vessel forms (fig. 10).¹⁸ Panamanian ceramic painters embellished the surface of pottery vessels by experimenting with shifting viewpoints, showing figures of deities and creatures in both frontal view and in profile within the same passages. Painters also represented pulsating energy in two dimensions, with vivid red and purple volutes and stingray spines. Images of standing anthropomorphic figures represent deities or masked impersonations, underscoring rulers' connections to powerful predators like crocodiles and felines.¹⁹



9. Double-headed eagle pendant and bell, Veraguas, Panama, 11th–16th century. Gold, H. 5 ½ in. (14 cm); H. 2 ⅞ in. (5.4 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979 (1979.206.907, .491).

Other depictions of humans in Panamanian ceramics employ a more minimalist aesthetic, such as a group of two-tiered jars painted with people carrying a large vessel or litter attached to poles (fig. 11).²⁰ In both tiers, the cream ground is covered in black dots and asterisk-like ovals. In the upper register, six individuals strain against the red-orange burden, conveyed by black lines that emanate skyward. In the lower register, the lines spill to the ground, as if the burden has been upended, suggesting a sequential progression of action.²¹

Research on two major burial sites in the Coclé region of Panama has revealed the complexity of ritual

activities and political governance there. In those burials, the descendants of leaders interred them with sacrificed individuals and large quantities of luxury goods, including objects made of gold, greenstone, agate, bone, and shell, as well as some materials, such as emeralds, that were foreign to the region.²² This would seem to indicate that the powerful groups in this region were pivotal nodes in the network of exchange among Caribbean societies throughout the late first millennium. Indeed, metal objects cast and hammered by Panamanian artists were found as far away as the Sacred Cenote of Chichén Itzá, a major Maya pilgrimage center in the Yucatán Peninsula.



10. Pedestal plate, Coclé, Panama, 9th–12th century. Ceramic, Diam. 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (29.8 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Bequest of John B. Elliott, 1997 (1999.47.122)



11. Double-tiered jar, Tonosi style, 3rd–4th century. Ceramic, H. 8 in. (20.3 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Purchase, Arthur M. Bullowa Bequest, 2007 (2007.297)



12. Bird pendant, Central Region, Costa Rica, 1st–5th century. Jadeite, H. 2 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (6.7 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979 (1979.206.1138)



13. Pendant, Central Region, Costa Rica, 4th–7th century. Jadeite, H. 3 $\frac{3}{16}$ in. (8 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979 (1979.206.837)



14. Pendant, Central Region, Costa Rica, 4th–7th century. Jadeite, H. 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (7 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Gift of Carol R. Meyer, 1996 (1996.81)



15. Flying-panel metate, Central Region, Costa Rica, 1st–5th century. Stone, H. 28 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (73.6 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979 (1979.206.426)

Central Region, Costa Rica

Societies in Costa Rica had even more contact with the Maya region to the northwest than those of ancient Panama.²³ In the late first millennium B.C., Costa Rican artists and their patrons developed a taste for regalia in jade and greenstone, which they imported from Mesoamerica, the culture area ranging from central Mexico to northwestern Honduras. Sculptors often reworked the jade objects created by the Maya (or earlier cultures) into distinct forms that resonated with local leaders, including celtiform (axe-shaped) pendants featuring anthropomorphic figures and birds. Several of those pendants illustrate the theme of the ritual taking of trophy heads, suggesting that the threat of violence and capture loomed large in ancient Costa Rica.²⁴ A translucent blue-green jadeite bird with a long beak, for example, is no innocuous toucan plucking fruit from the trees high in the canopy, but rather a raptor,

possibly the king vulture (*Sarcorampus papa*), clutching a stylized trophy head tightly between its talons (fig. 12). Another pendant represents a decapitated body, nude except for the incised ligatures on the arms and legs that indicate some kind of bound fabric, an attribute shared among depictions of leaders throughout the region (fig. 13). This headless figure could represent a conquered rival, immortalized in jade and worn by the victor. Close inspection of another pendant, this one circular, reveals that its scalloped edges depict ten stylized, disembodied trophy heads (fig. 14).

Costa Rican sculptors worked on a large scale as well, creating exceptional works out of softer, porous volcanic-stone boulders. Elaborate metates—ritual grinding stones that may have functioned as ceremonial seats—were crafted from a single rock. One example features three of the same long-beaked birds seen in the jade pendants, each perched on one of the three legs (fig. 15).



16. Incense burner, Central Region, Costa Rica or Nicaragua, 7th–12th century. Ceramic, H. 23 $\frac{7}{16}$ in. (59.5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979 (1979.206.378)

A fourth bird, with a curved beak and prominent caruncle, poses with its wings spread as if ready to attack. These predatory birds may have served as a symbol of a particular lineage or a single leader, chosen to reinforce his or her political prowess. Deadly birds are a widespread theme across Costa Rican art forms, perhaps representing the notion of predation as a part of governance at that time.

Reptiles, amphibians, felines, and bats all inspired sculptures in volcanic stone and clay. A monumental incense burner, for example, is crested with a mythological crocodilian (fig. 16). The appliqué decoration mimics the smoke that would have billowed from the vessel, swirling around the head of the animal. In the Caribbean region, as throughout the Americas, burning incense signaled the relationship between humans and the divine. Scent and smoke formed a ritual offering that connected the earthly and supernatural realms.

Honduras, The Maya Frontier

The people of ancient Honduras have traditionally been associated by scholars with Mayan-speaking groups in Mesoamerica. Recent archaeological discoveries, however, have identified a distinct culture in this region that may have been equally connected to societies in southern Central America, especially the Caribbean coast.²⁵ Evidence for this comes from a specific style of white marble vase that has captivated scholars and collectors alike since the nineteenth century. One reason for their interest is that while such vases have been found in the Maya region, they are virtually without formal precedent there. Indeed, stone vessels in the region are rare. Even rarer are objects made of white limestone marble, which became prized possessions after about the seventh century. New research shows that these vases, in fact, originated from sites near Travesía in the Ulúa Valley, in the Gulf of Honduras, and were exported as luxury goods not only to the heart of the Maya lowlands but also to islands in the



17. Bat bowl, Ulúa Valley, Honduras, 9th–10th century. Marble, Diam. 5 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (13.3 cm). The University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia; Purchased from L. G. Valentine, 1914 (NA5529)



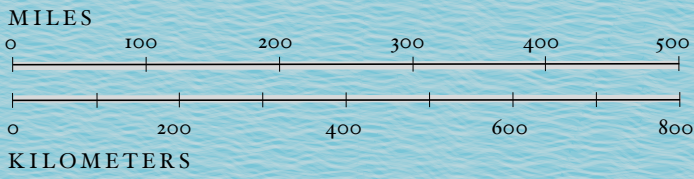
18. Pedestal bowl, Ulúa Valley, Honduras, 9th–10th century. Marble, H. $5 \frac{7}{8}$ in. (14.9 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1972 (1972.64)

Belizean Caribbean and Costa Rica.²⁶ Local artists must have developed these vessels, which were then made by subsequent generations for wider circulation in Mesoamerica and the coastal Caribbean. Prominent motifs in Ulúa-style vases, as they are known, include snarling bats, felines, and birds as well as geometric volutes and woven designs, all of which share certain characteristics with decorative elements from the rest of the Caribbean (fig. 17). The iconography of Ulúa bats, furthermore, is more consistent with depictions produced farther south—in Costa Rica, Panama, and Colombia—than with those produced by Maya artists to the west.²⁷

An Ulúa vase in The Met collection features two handles, each in the form of a snarling bat with an upturned nose and a protruding torso (fig. 18).²⁸ The lower portion of the vessel, a hollow pedestal base, bulges slightly in profile and is drilled with openwork linear designs. The upper and lower borders of the body give the appearance of overlapping scales or feathers, while the main ground

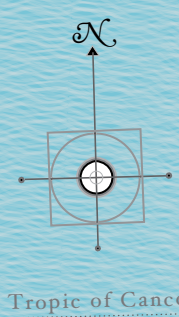
is covered with volutes, stylized eyes, and limb motifs carved in low relief.²⁹

The ancient Maya viewed the Caribbean Sea—the great eastern horizon—as a watery underworld from which the sun emerged every dawn.³⁰ Islands there, such as Cozumel, Mexico, were attributed mythic significance by Maya rulers, and their inhabitants enjoyed special status. Although scarce, some archaeological evidence suggests that traders made journeys across the Yucatán Channel from modern-day Mexico to the Cuban archipelago. A simple but graceful work, possibly a Taíno ritual spoon carved from the rib of a manatee, was uncovered at Altun Ha, Belize, at the burial site of an eighth-century Maya lord, along with shell and bone regalia.³¹ The spoon attests that Maya traders traveling along the coast of the mainland, from Yucatán to Costa Rica and Panama, may have known of their seagoing island and coastal neighbors, though no explicit depictions or references to them have survived.





ATLANTIC OCEAN



(LUCAYAN) ARCHIPELAGO
Caicos Islands
Turks Islands

Taíno
HAITI
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

ANTILLES
Puerto Rico
Virgin Islands

LESSER ANTILLES
Anguilla
Barbuda
St. Kitts and Nevis
Montserrat
Guadeloupe
Dominica
Martinique
St. Lucia
St. Vincent
The Grenadines
Grenada
Tobago
Barbados
Trinidad

Aruba
Curaçao

Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta
Tairona

COLOMBIA
VENEZUELA
SOUTH AMERICA

Orinoco River

GUYANA

The Origins of Antillean Artistic Traditions

The Caribbean is a geologically active region and its islands are the product of tectonic interaction between the Caribbean plate and adjacent landmasses. Some islands, such as Martinique, Montserrat, Dominica, Saint Lucia, and Saint Kitts and Nevis, were formed by volcanoes, many of which are still active today. The Antilles archipelago—the arc of islands between Cuba and Trinidad and Tobago—and nearby Atlantic islands, such as the Bahamas, the Turks and Caicos Islands, and Barbados, form what is traditionally known as the West Indies, a region famous for the striking blue-green color and warm temperatures of its seawater. Because of this combination of geological formations, volcanic activity, and ocean currents, the Caribbean is home to numerous biodiversity hot spots for both marine and terrestrial plant and animal species.

People first traveled to the Antilles archipelago as early as the fifth millennium B.C., arriving on massive seagoing canoes engineered by accomplished woodworkers. Archaeologists have recovered a few fragmentary examples of such boats as well as paddles, and sixteenth-century documents include illustrations of them (fig. 19).³² Demonstrating the boats' notoriety and influence, the word "canoe" is adopted from indigenous Caribbean languages, as are other commonly used English words, such as hurricane (a distinctly western Atlantic weather phenomenon), barbecue, potato, hammock, savannah, and tobacco. Although these first settlers left behind mounds of discarded shellfish, turtle, and fish remains—evidence of their presence,

and diet—determining other aspects of their culture has proved difficult. As is true for most early Caribbean societies, stone implements and ceramics provide the only surviving material clues.³³

Successive waves of people continued to migrate to and from the islands over millennia. In the first millennium B.C., a culture known to archaeologists as Saladoid arrived from the mainland Orinoco Delta, in eastern Venezuela. Saladoid societies brought innovative agricultural techniques and ceramic production. While their predecessors on the archipelago had lived in natural outcrops or temporary shelters, the Saladoid established more permanent dwellings and, along with them, ceremonies and culture that permeated the Antilles and distinguished them from the mainland.

The material culture of these agricultural villages includes objects made from bone, wood, clay, stone, and shell. Ceramic vessels—a preferred medium for artistic expression—as well as personal adornments and more functional objects like canoes and hammocks were crafted with skill and care.³⁴ Stone and shell pendants and many types of beads were also imported from the mainland. Little evidence of the fiber arts survives, but early Caribbean settlers likely created complex woven and painted or embroidered textiles, as did their contemporaries in other parts of the Americas.

Ceramic vessels from the Antilles exhibit a variety of colorful surface decorations and abstract container and handle forms. The significance of their imagery is largely unknown, but the abundance of effigy human or animal forms suggests that the containers were seen as analogous to the bodies of living or supernatural entities.³⁵ Saladoid white-on-red pottery is adorned with mostly geometric or curvilinear abstract motifs (fig. 20). A different style of



19. Seagoing canoe with indigenous *cacique* and rowers, in *Histoire Naturelle des Indes* (ca. 1586). Chalk, pen, and brown ink with watercolor on paper, folio 11 ½ x 7 ¾ in. (29.3 x 19.7 cm). The Morgan Library & Museum, New York; Bequest of Clara S. Peck, 1983 (MA 3900, fol. 44r)



20. Bowl, Saladoid, Saint Croix, 5th century B.C.–A.D. 5th century. Ceramic, Diam. 14 in. (35.5 cm). Peabody Museum of Natural History, New Haven (YPM ANT 237762)

ceramic, known as Barrancoid, is distinguished by a greater diversity in modeled forms and incised geometric motifs that may have developed from a figural tradition of woodworking. Both styles seem to have originated on the mainland, as the imagery in these early ceramics is also found on pottery from Venezuelan sites.³⁶

In the 1980s, further evidence of connections to the mainland was found by archaeologists at the site of La Hueca, in Vieques, Puerto Rico.³⁷ In addition to identifying a new ceramic style with distinct modeled forms, which they termed Huecoid, they discovered greenstone and jadeite raptors shown clutching disembodied human heads, a pervasive motif in areas of the Caribbean mainland (fig. 21, and see fig. 12). Expert carvers created these small but striking objects, possibly from imported stone. Interestingly, the raptors they depict are not native to the islands, highlighting the connections between the coasts and the Antilles that must have increased after about 500 B.C.³⁸ By the first century A.D., as parallel histories evolved among the civilizations of North, Central, and South America, a thriving artistic exchange was well established in the Caribbean.³⁹



21. Bird pendant, Huecoid, Puerto Rico, 2nd century B.C.–A.D. 5th century. Jadeite, H. 2 ¼ in. (5.7 cm). Universidad de Puerto Rico, San Juan



22. Deity figure (*zemí*), Taíno, Dominican Republic (?), ca. A.D. 1000. Guaiacum wood, shell, H. 27 in. (68.5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979 (1979.206.380)

In the Land of *Zemí*

A rare and well-known ceremonial stand in The Met collection is one of the best-preserved wooden Taíno sculptures (fig. 22). The anthropomorphic figure, known as a *zemí* (or *cemí*), was sculpted in the round and forms the central part of the stand, which was created for ritual use in ceremonies involving the hallucinogen cohoba, probably derived from the *Anadenanthera* (or *Piptadenia*) *peregrina* plant. The artist or artists, who lived about A.D. 1000, began with an aged trunk of tropical hardwood (guaiacum or ironwood, known as *guayacán* in Taíno) and then framed the figure with a cylindrical base and a hemispherical surface above its head.⁴⁰ The upper surface is supported by a buttress that connects with the figure's spine. The figure squats on the base as he grabs his shins with his hands. Aside from a woven skullcap, earflares, and banded ligatures on the biceps and ankles, he is nude, although he may have originally worn a loincloth.⁴¹

The sculptor enlarged the figure's head for emphasis, paying special attention to the modeling of the grimacing face, the ears, the head covering, and the gouged-incised pattern above the ears that may represent hair. The eyes, sculpted in high relief, are the most prominent feature. An area of lower relief extends down the cheeks and creates the appearance of streams of tears. A section of banded relief between the eyes may represent a facial adornment or a wrinkled brow, mid-sowl. A shell inlay forms the figure's teeth, and the eyes, which have visible residue of adhesive resins, would also have once held inlays, probably shell, that formed the irises and pupils; this type of encrustation is visible on other wood, stone, bone, and fiber sculptures.⁴² A historical repair is visible in the two metal nails on either side of the mouth. The ribcage, spine, and pelvis are carved in detail on the reverse, indicating that the sculpture was meant to be seen from all sides (fig. 23). Its skeletal posterior contrasts with its muscular front, where prominent pectoral and shoulder muscles are visible. This *zemí* is exceptionally well preserved, which suggests that it was carefully housed and revered for centuries, perhaps later deposited in a cave, as there is no evidence of burial. Many of the surviving Taíno wooden sculptures have been recovered from caves.⁴³

The cohoba ceremonies in which this *zemí* was used were likely performed at prescribed times throughout



23. Side view of *zemí* showing ribs, pelvis, and canopied support for upper surface



24. Cohoba stand, Taíno, Dominican Republic (?), 12th–13th century. Wood, H. 25 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (65.5 cm). British Museum, London (Am,MI.168)

the year. During these ceremonies, the ground-up hallucinogenic powder or paste would be placed on the top of the stand, and participants would inhale it through snuff tubes.⁴⁴ The physical effects of the ritual act are visible in the *zemí* itself; the emaciated look of the figure may indicate fasting, and its watering eyes may signal a symptom of inhaling the cohoba. Several other wooden cohoba stands survive, including others with *zemí* images. A stand in the British Museum, created a few centuries after The Met's example, depicts a stylized bird perched atop a turtle, their touching beaks hinting at a story that has been lost to time, perhaps an origin narrative (fig. 24). Another later example from Jamaica features a *zemí* with tears streaming down its cheeks, possibly a similar identity to the one represented in The Met stand (fig. 25).⁴⁵

The artistic process of creating a *zemí* representation, from conception to activation, was a collaboration among political leaders, ritual practitioners, and master artists. Sculptures began with a call from the medium itself; for example, a tree would frighten a person walking through the forest by moving its roots.⁴⁶ The person would ask the tree spirit (*zemí*) who it was, and the spirit would demand that a ritual specialist reveal its identity. When the ritual specialist arrived, the spirit's specific bodily form would be revealed during a hallucinatory trance. Once the identity became known, an artist would sculpt the tree (or stone) invested with divine power into a figure. That figure, in turn, would become inextricably linked to an assigned caretaker, who would protect the living entity within. In expressing the *zemí*'s identity in wood, sculptors may have been seen to be reenacting a Taíno creation story in which an entity named Inriri Cahuvial creates humanity by pecking wood like a woodpecker.⁴⁷

This inherent identity, revealed to humans only through ritual, distinguishes *zemí* figures from other categories of global sculpture. Under particular conditions, beings, things, and other phenomena in nature could be imbued with the quality of *zemí*, which linguistically relates to a concept of "sweetness." *Zemí* in the Taíno language refers not to an object or image but to a spiritual and vital force pertaining to deities and ancestors. *Zemí* is thus a condition of being: a drive that compels action.⁴⁸ Leaders and specialists were seen as

caretakers of *zemís* rather than owners because the figures were not viewed as property.

Knowledge of *zemí* identities and representations derives primarily from late fifteenth-century Spanish accounts. On September 25, 1493, about fifteen hundred people on seventeen ships departed from the Andalusian port of Cádiz, in Spain. Their destination was known as Española (later, Hispaniola), where Christopher Columbus had landed in 1492 during his first transatlantic voyage, an island in what the Spanish believed was “las Indias” (the Indies), in Asia. They sought to establish a firm base of power for the Spanish Crown and to bring the indigenous populations, numbering in the hundreds of thousands, into submission. To these ends, they would employ physical violence and Christian evangelization.⁴⁹

At least a dozen religious men accompanied the mission, including the papal nuncio and Catalan friar Ramón Pané, who initially lived with the invading Spanish. After about a year, Pané was sent by Columbus to live among the indigenous population and learn their language and customs. He stayed for two years with the leader known as Mayobanex in the northeastern part of Hispaniola (Aiti, in the native language, and Haiti and the Dominican Republic today), before moving in early 1495 to a region governed by Guarionex, whose subjects were thought to speak a more widespread language.⁵⁰

Pané’s resulting treatise, *Relación sobre las Antigüedades de los Indios* (*Report on the Antiquities of the Indians*), written in Catalan in 1498, was lost, either through circumstance or through purposeful action by the Columbus family.⁵¹ Nevertheless, it survives in Spanish, Italian, and Latin translations and is considered the first ethnography of the Americas.⁵² Surviving translations state that Pané’s objective was to “understand and know the beliefs and idolatry of the Indians and how they observe their gods.”⁵³ To that end, he undertook studies of their material culture and works of sculpture, especially the representations of *zemís*:

All or the majority of the people of Hispaniola have many *zemís*, of different types. Some have the bones of their father, their



25. Cohoba stand, Taíno, Jamaica, 15th century. Wood, H. 15 3/8 in. (39 cm). British Museum, London (Am1977.Q.1)



26. Snuff tube, Taíno, Dominican Republic, 10th–16th century. Bone, H. 3 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (8.6 cm). Fundación García Arévalo, Santo Domingo

mother, relatives and ancestors; others are of stone or wood; many have both forms; some that speak and others that bring to life things that they eat; others that make rain, others that make wind.⁵⁴

Pané documented a variety of specific *zemí* identities, some of which scholars have linked to certain objects that survive in contemporary collections.

Dialogue with the deities or ancestors represented by or embodied within the *zemís* was mediated through ceremonies involving cohoba. Snuff tubes, used in conjunction with the cohoba stands, survive in wood and bone. A forked inner tube conveyed the snuff to both nostrils. A bone example in the collection of the Fundación García Arévalo takes the form of an acrobatic figure raising its legs, which form the tubes, behind its head (fig. 26). Taíno sculptors also created other



27. Seat (*dubo*), Taíno, Dominican Republic, 14th century. Guaiacum wood, H. 16 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (42.4 cm). Musée du Quai Branly, Paris (71.1950.77.1 Am)



28. Seat (*dubo*), Taíno, Dominican Republic, 13th–14th century. Wood, gold, H. 8 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (22 cm). British Museum, London (Am1949,22.118)



29. Seat or platter (*dubo*), Taíno, Dominican Republic, 14th–15th century. Wood, H. 7 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (18.7 cm). Saint Louis Art Museum; Friends Fund and Primitive Art Society Fund in honor of Morton D. May (168:1981)



30. Seat or platter (*dubo*), Taíno, Dominican Republic, 14th century. Wood, H. 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (21 cm). British Museum, London (Am.9753)



31. Seats (*dubos*), Taíno, Turks and Caicos Islands. Left: 1407–45, wood (*Carapa* sp.), L. 32 ½ in. (82.5 cm). Right: 1413–55, guaiacum wood, L. 42 ¼ in. (108.5 cm). National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; Gift of William M. Gabb, 1877; Gift of David R. Frith, 1877 (A30053-0, A30052-0)

objects—known variably as spoons, spatulas, or *vomitivos*—for use in cohoba ceremonies. These implements took the form of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic figures whose features, such as exposed rib cages and strained facial expressions, signal their use in purging and fasting. Such activities induced a weakened physical state and affected the psychology of the participants. Alongside ritual use of cohoba, they were integral to the ceremonies performed by specialist healers known as *bebique* (or *bobite* or *buhuittibu*).⁵⁵

Ritual knowledge was fused with political power in Taíno culture, and both men and women held the highest office, known as *cacique* (see fig. 19). Consequently, sculptors also revealed *zemí* identities in *dubos*, or ceremonial seats for leaders. Well-preserved examples survive in the Musée du Quai Branly and the British Museum (figs. 27, 28). The seat of the ritual stool merges gracefully with the body of the *zemí* figure in these and other seats from the Bahamas, Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Jamaica.⁵⁶ In two examples from the Dominican Republic, one in the Saint Louis Art

Museum and the other in the British Museum, the team of leader, healer, and sculptor collaborated to reveal the identity of oddly branched trees to be *zemí* images in the form of unusual *dubos* (or, according to another interpretation, feasting platters). One seems to lie supine, while the other crawls forward on its forearms (figs. 29, 30). When in use during a ceremony, the *zemí* on its back would have been seen to writhe in agony, a pained expression on its face. Other examples, such as two found in caves in the Turks and Caicos Islands, embody simpler, graceful forms that mimic the long stretch of a fiber hammock adorned with elaborate, two-dimensional incised designs (fig. 31).

Zemí images from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries also survive in fiber and beadwork, many of which were sent to Europe as curiosities during the colonial period.⁵⁷ The skulls of ancestors became the base for cotton reliquary sculptures that venerated their identity and reconstituted them into oracles. Today, only one example of such a skull reliquary survives (fig. 32). Made between 1439 and 1522, and found, prior to 1891, in a cave



32. Reliquary, Taíno, Dominican Republic, 1439–1522. Cotton, anterior human skull including mandible, wood (*Gossypium* sp.), cane, stone, resins, shell, gourd, pigments, H. 21 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (55 cm). Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, University of Turin

in the Dominican Republic, it survives in the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography, University of Turin. The figure's right eye is made of a perforated white shell, while the left eye is a solid black shell.

Other remarkable works of Taíno art in fiber include an extraordinary cotton belt covered in detailed shellwork and European materials such as jet, brass, and glass, now in the Weltmuseum, Vienna (fig. 33).⁵⁸ Belts like this one formed part of a system of indigenous “woven wealth,” which incorporated cotton, beadwork, featherwork, and other adornments made of a gold-copper alloy, known as *guanín*. Depictions of these belts were often incised onto *zemí* figures and bore mythological symbolism. The Vienna example, created with more than 11,000 beads, contains at its center a bat-like figure, palms raised, wearing a headdress and earflares. A related example, possibly made by the same workshop, is a *zemí* image in the Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico Luigi Pigorini, Rome. At some point between 1492 and 1523, artists fabricated two separate beaded cotton creations, a belt and a three-dimensional headdress, with European glass and a face carved out of African rhinoceros horn. The two were later combined into a votive sculpture on a wooden base (fig. 34).⁵⁹

For the Taíno peoples, creative sculptural expression was intertwined with sacred concepts such as *zemí*, ceremony, and rulership. Spanish accounts describe how *zemí* figures were used as stands, reliquaries, or personal



33. Belt, Taíno, Dominican Republic, 1475/92–1531. Cotton, shell, jet, brass, glass, L. 45 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (116.5 cm). Weltmuseum, Vienna (10.443)



34. Deity figure (*zemi*), Taíno, Dominican Republic, 15th–early 16th century. Wood, bone, cotton, shell, rhinoceros horn, H. 12 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (32 cm). Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico Luigi Pigorini, Rome (4190)



35. Three-pointed stones (*trigonolitos*), Taíno, Puerto Rico, 10th–16th century. Stone, H. 3 1/8 in. (7.9 cm); H. 3 1/8 in. (8 cm); H. 5 1/2 in. (14 cm). National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; Gift of George Latimer, 1869 (A16980-o, A16989-o); Gift of Jesse W. Fewkes (A220621-o)

adornment. Pané described how the portable sculptures known as *trigonolitos*, or three-pointed stones, are symbolically connected to yuca or cassava, a staple root crop in the Caribbean (fig. 35). They come in various sizes, from handheld to large and quite heavy, and feature diverse human and animal imagery. *Trigonolitos* derive mainly from the Greater Antilles, but examples have been found as far south in the Windward Islands as the Grenadines.⁶⁰ Stone and shell *zemí* images also appear in small-scale amulets worn by leaders and healers as part of necklaces or collars (figs. 36, 37).

In recent years, the archaeology and ethnohistory of Puerto Rico has revealed a more profound understanding of Taíno engagement with stone as a medium. For example, a recent study of radiocarbon dates associated with cave pictographs has shown that rock art was a long-lived tradition in Puerto Rico, even extending into the colonial period.⁶¹ Archaeologists have investigated stone-lined civic-ceremonial centers such as Tibes and Caguana and combined the data with Spanish chronicles to untangle the complex political networks of Taíno societies.⁶² The artists of pre-contact Puerto Rico also created distinctive stone sculptures for their patrons,



36. Figure amulet, Taíno, Dominican Republic, 10th–16th century. Stone, H. $2\frac{1}{16}$ in. (5.2 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Gift of Ron Nasser, 2010 (2010.177)



37. Necklace, Taíno, Dominican Republic or Haiti, 10th–16th century. Shell (*Tridacna gigas*), L. $9\frac{1}{2}$ in. (24 cm). Ex. coll. Medici, before 1631. Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology, Museum of Natural History, Florence



38. Head, Taíno, Puerto Rico, 13th–15th century. Stone, H. 5 ½ in. (14 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979 (1979.206.611)



39. Effigy belt or collar, Taíno, Puerto Rico, 10th–15th century. Stone, L. 19 1/16 in. (50 cm). National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; Gift of George Latimer, 1869 (A17095-0)

including categories of objects such as stone collars (known, erroneously, as “yokes”), “elbow” stones, blades, ceremonial axes, small *zemí* masks known as *guaízas*, and other rounded heads (fig. 38).⁶³

Elliptical stone collars are most likely effigy belts, a component of regalia that would have affirmed and projected political power when worn in public ceremonies or in rituals restricted to leaders and specialists (fig. 39).⁶⁴ One example of a public ceremony was a game played with rubber balls (*batey*), which was described by Spanish chroniclers in both the Antilles and the Mesoamerican mainland. Closed “yokes” are also known from Veracruz, along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, although their general oblong shape is about the only formal similarity they share with the Antillean collars. The latter may contain abstracted or simplified representations of *zemí* figures, or other piscine spirits that featured in Taíno mythology. No stone collars are known to have been found with funerary remains, suggesting that they were inherited by the descendants of the original caretaker and not buried with the deceased.⁶⁵

The most numerous polished stone sculptures emerging from the Taíno world are ceremonial axes and blades, which take many forms. Axes feature abstract zoomorphic forms carved in stone or wooden handles with stone blades hafted to them. Stone axe-handle-shaped figures, including an example in The Met collection, may have been ceremonial scepters (fig. 40). Anthropomorphic stone daggers may hint at the forms of wooden blade handles that no longer survive. Ceremonial blades made of different types of more durable greenstone, both local and imported, have been recovered in large numbers (fig. 41). These axes, or celts—known as “petaloid,” for their resemblance to flower petals, or “amygdaloid,” meaning almond-shaped—could have served as dedicatory offerings, which have a long history on the mainland in Mesoamerica. They may also have been an important medium of exchange.⁶⁶ One Caribbean axe in The Met collection is encrusted with deposits from having spent a considerable amount of time in the water, suggesting that it was perhaps lost while being transported across the sea.

Throughout the Caribbean, interaction and exchange among peoples were occasioned by large gatherings, such as ceremonial feasts, convened by major leaders. Containers created for community



40. Axe, Taíno, Dominican Republic, 10th–15th century. Stone, H. 21 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (55 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979 (1979.206.1210)



41. Celts, Taíno, Dominican Republic, 7th–15th century. Stone, H. 5 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (13.7 cm); H. 5 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (13.7 cm); H. 6 in. (15.2 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. David Heller, 1983 (1983.543.2); Gift of Vincent and Margaret Fay, 1982 (1982.77.1, .2)

feasts also carried *zemi* imagery, such as an exquisite wooden example in the Museum of Natural History, Florence (fig. 42). The sculptor of this shallow vessel created a smooth ellipse surmounted by a crouching, grimacing figure raising its arms behind oversize ear-spools. The shell inlay that forms the figure's teeth would have been complemented by similar inlays in the eyes and earflares; remnant pine resins from within the eye sockets date from the late fifteenth to early sixteenth century.⁶⁷

Most surviving feasting containers are ceramic vessels. Although Taíno ceramics rarely feature painted designs, early examples sometimes retain the forms and geometric surface decoration common to Saladoid or other earlier traditions (see fig. 20).⁶⁸ Some depict whole or partial anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures, but many show Taíno artists' ability to distill figural imagery into abstract and geometric motifs. Hands, eyes, gaping or grimacing mouths, and stylized linear passages appear in modeled ceramic bottles and bowls (fig. 43). Large bottles in a style known as Boca Chica ("small mouth"), named after their purported region of origin in the Dominican Republic, feature phallic spouts, hinting at an association with reproductive fertility (fig. 44).



42. Detail of platter, Taíno, Dominican Republic or Haiti, 15th–early 16th century. Guaiacum wood, resins (probably *Pinus caribaea*), L. 19 $\frac{1}{16}$ in. (50.6 cm). Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology, Museum of Natural History, Florence (308)



43. Bowls, Taíno, Dominican Republic, 10th–15th century. Ceramic, H. 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (14.6 cm); H. 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (12.1 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Purchase, Mary R. Morgan, Mary O'Boyle II and Mr. and Mrs. Frederick E. Landmann Gifts; The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Gift of Nelson A. Rockefeller and Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, by exchange, and Gift of Nathan Cummings, by exchange, 1982 (1982.48.2); Gift of Vincent and Margaret Fay, 1993 (1993.523.2)



44. Heart-shaped bottle with phallic spout, Taíno, Dominican Republic, 10th–15th century. Ceramic, H. 19 ½ in. (49.5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Promised Gift of Brian and Florence Mahony

Perhaps the least well-known medium of Taíno art is gold and other metals, although hundreds of metal adornments belonging to political leaders and their families are mentioned in Spanish chronicles.⁶⁹ In the Antilles, gold was collected locally and hammered, rather than cast. According to Spanish records, *guanín* was the most common medium for such works. Finished *guanín* objects were probably imported from the mainland. Rare traces of gold leaf appear on certain objects, such as the *dubo* in the British Museum (see fig. 28), but very few gold objects survived the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the Spanish melted down almost everything in their efforts to extract resources and convert indigenous peoples to Christianity.

Pané is also a crucial source on fifteenth-century conversion efforts. In 1500, he appeared as a witness in the trial of Christopher Columbus, conducted by the Crown-appointed governor of the Indies, Francisco de Bobadilla, to investigate allegations of brutality. Pané claimed that Columbus oversaw the conversion of more than 100,000 indigenous residents of Hispaniola:

... and it is known because the leaders and their subjects would come to importune that they be converted into Christians, and they would burn their *zemís* and idols that they had to and would as Christians, and that they would not venture to convert to Christianity out of fear for the Admiral.⁷⁰

Christopher Columbus died in 1506 without learning that the Taíno peoples were part of a long legacy of sophisticated indigenous American civilizations, including their neighbors in the Lesser Antilles, known to scholars as Carib or Kalinago. Subsequent authorities, however, described the indigenous political structure of the Caribbean in the early years of colonization. Bartolomé de las Casas, a Spaniard who came to the Americas as a landowner but was later ordained as a Dominican friar, was an early advocate for native peoples. Las Casas referred to the divisions of Hispaniola as “kingdoms” (*reinos*) and their leaders as “very powerful kings, whom almost all the other lords, who were numerous, obeyed, since some lords of distant provinces did not recognize anyone superior to themselves.”⁷¹



45. Paddle, Maroon, Suriname, 20th century. Wood, pigment, H. 51 1/8 in. (129.9 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Gift of Robert Mylers Miller, 1963 (1978.412.101)

Later colonial accounts diminished the significance of “chiefs,” downplaying their status as part of the case for colonization and religious conversion.⁷² Today we know that these powerful leaders ruled throughout the Caribbean and employed talented artists to create architectural spaces, regalia, ritual implements, and *zemí* images. By the mid- to late sixteenth century, indigenous Caribbean creativity was being redirected and prohibited by the colonial authorities through a variety of measures, which included threats of violence through idolatry campaigns, *reducciones* (forcible relocations of native peoples to Spanish-constructed towns), and *encomiendas* (forced communal labor systems).⁷³

Epilogue: Artistic Legacies

From the sixteenth century on, the story of art in the Caribbean was part of a broader global narrative, one transformed by European types of expression, foreign materials, and traditions brought by enslaved African peoples.⁷⁴ Since the early colonial occupation, indigenous artists had incorporated stories that developed from a distinctly Afro-Caribbean experience. Such artistic exchange also occurred among autonomous communities descended from populations of escaped African and indigenous peoples, such as the Garifuna and Miskito groups throughout Caribbean coastal Central America. Other Afro-indigenous or Maroon communities, as some became known, resisted colonial authority and created distinctive art forms, even as far as the Atlantic coast of the Guianas and Brazil (fig. 45). In the nineteenth century, some artists from the Caribbean also trained in Europe or the United States, including Puerto Rican painter Francisco Oller (1833–1917), who became influential in the Impressionist movement.⁷⁵ Non-native painters, meanwhile, drew inspiration from the region, such as American artist Winslow Homer (1836–1910), who painted many scenes in the West Indies, including the Bahamas and Cuba (fig. 46).

Countries such as the United States, France, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands still govern territories throughout the Caribbean, though some former colonies gained independence, such as Haiti in 1804. The nineteenth century also saw the emergence of independent republican governments in Venezuela, Colombia, and Central America as well as in island nations such as the Dominican Republic

and Cuba. Throughout the centuries of European and outsider governance, indigenous traditions of creative expression lived on through sculpture, painting, song, dance, food, and personal adornment.

Into the twentieth century and the present, Caribbean artists have often focused their practice on diverse Afro-indigenous cultural roots and critiquing or breaking with colonial culture.⁷⁶ Cuban artist Wifredo Lam, who was of Afro-Chinese descent, became renowned in the 1930s and 1940s for fusing modes of representation that drew on European Cubism and Surrealism with Afro-Caribbean religious iconography in works that former Met curator Lowery Stokes Sims has argued “transcend





46. Winslow Homer (American, 1836–1910), *The Gulf Stream*, 1899. Oil on canvas, 28 1/8 x 49 1/8 in. (71.4 x 124.8 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Purchase, Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Collection, Wolfe Fund, 1906 (06.1234)

47. Wifredo Lam (Cuban, 1902–1982), *Rumblings of the Earth* (*Rumor de la tierra*), 1950. Oil on canvas, 59 3/4 x 112 in. (151.8 x 284.5 cm). Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Gift, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Cantor, 1958 (58.1525)





48. Martin Wong (American, 1946–1999), *Taíno Invasion from Outer Space*, 1993. Oil on canvas, mixed media, 62 x 104 in. (157.5 x 264.2 cm). Bronx Museum of the Arts; Gift of Yasmin Ramirez

nationality and race.”⁷⁷ Lam developed an early interest in the historical arts of Africa from his time studying in Madrid and observing the work of friend and peer Pablo Picasso. Upon returning to Cuba during World War II, he reconnected with Santería (or Lucumí), a religion with West African origins, like Voodoo (or Vodou), that may have incorporated indigenous Caribbean practices as it spread in the region.⁷⁸ Around that time, Lam refined his treatment of female forms, merging them into the Caribbean landscapes. Just as the trees in the Antilles spoke to the Taíno peoples, the ecology and agricultural production of his birthplace inspired Lam’s artistic practice during the war years, including one of his most celebrated works, *The Jungle* (*La Jungla*), from 1942–43.

In *Rumblings of the Earth* (*Rumor de la tierra*), (fig. 47), Lam references the monumental canvas *Guernica* (1937), Picasso’s famous indictment of the violence induced by the Spanish Civil War. Upending notions of victim and aggressor, Lam transformed Picasso’s central victim, symbolic of the Spanish people, into the attacker, providing a potent commentary on

the nature of violence in the context of colonialism in the Americas.⁷⁹ In this dramatic composition, dismembered body parts press against one another and around a central figure wielding a knife. Lam called some of these figures “diabolical birds,” emphasizing the connections between flying creatures and violence in Afro-Cuban religious narratives, which further recontextualized Picasso’s representation of the horror of war into a Caribbean story.⁸⁰

Other artists in the Caribbean or in diaspora communities more directly quote art of the ancient Caribbean societies in their contemporary practice. In fact, The Met’s groundbreaking display of Taíno works, on view since the opening of the Michael C. Rockefeller Wing, in 1982, inspired the New York art scene to draw upon ancestral Caribbean traditions. In 1993, for example, the U.S.-born painter Martin Wong composed a diptych titled *Taíno Invasion from Outer Space* (fig. 48).⁸¹ On the left panel, flying saucers are interspersed with constellations behind two museum pedestal vitrines. The vitrine on the left features the Rockefeller wooden *zemí* (see fig. 22), while the vitrine on the right features



49. Pendant mask, Taíno, Dominican Republic, 10th–15th century. Bone, H. 3 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. (9.2 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Purchase, Oscar de la Renta Gift, 1997 (1997.35.1)



50. Jorge González (Puerto Rican, b. 1981), *Ayacabo Guarocoel*, 2017. In *Pacha, Llaqta, Wasichay: Indigenous Space, Modern Architecture, New Art*, July 13–September 30, 2018, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York



three other Met works, including a face pendant (fig. 49) that is magnified and transformed, in the panel at right, with what seem to be crystal inlays. Wong saw these objects installed in the Rockefeller Wing and addressed their presence in a museum setting.

One of the Met works that Wong depicted also played a role in the 2018 exhibition *Pacha, Llaqta, Wasi-chay: Indigenous Space, Modern Architecture, New Art* at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. In part of his installation, titled *Ayacabo Guarocoel* (2017), Puerto Rican artist Jorge González created a wall of woven reeds, similar to indigenous wood-and-thatch constructions in the Caribbean region (fig. 50). The wooden framework of the wall supported ceramic sculptures that resemble in profile asymmetrical goblets or other vessels. The artist later revealed that these ceramic creations were inspired by a sandstone *zemí*, a cohoba stand in The Met collection (fig. 51).⁸² González formed a conceptual link from ancient to contemporary, re-creating the platform of the cohoba stand in the installation, which celebrated the traditional fiber arts of Puerto Rico. In this way, *arte del mar* continues to engage both artists and Museum visitors who can appreciate the way the Caribbean Sea has inspired artistic practice for generations.

51. Deity figure (*zemí*), Taíno, Dominican Republic (?), 13th–15th century. Sandstone, H. 24 in. (61 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979 (1979.206.1209)



1. Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Goldwork and Shamanism: An Iconographic Study of the Gold Museum* (Bogotá: Editorial Colina; Medellín: Compañía Litográfica Nacional, 1988), pp. 81–82.
2. For example, Angus A. A. Mol, "Studying Pre-Columbian Interaction Networks: Mobility and Exchange," in *Oxford Handbook of Caribbean Archaeology*, ed. William F. Keegan et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 329–46.
3. Taíno is a term coined in the nineteenth century from the indigenous word *taíno*, meaning goodness, or *nitáino*, referring to an elite social stratum. On the use of this term, see L. Antonio Curet, "The Taíno: Phenomena, Concepts, and Terms," *Ethnohistory* 61, no. 3 (Summer 2014), pp. 467–95; see also William F. Keegan and Lisabeth A. Carlson, *Talking Taíno: Essays on Caribbean Natural History from a Native Perspective* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008). Major exhibitions occurred at El Museo del Barrio (1997–98) and the Musée du Petit Palais (1994); see Fatima Bercht et al., *Taíno: Pre-Columbian Art and Culture from the Caribbean*, exh. cat. (New York: El Museo del Barrio; The Monacelli Press, 1997); and Jacques Kerchache et al., *L'art des sculpteurs Taínos: Chefs-d'œuvre des Grandes Antilles précolombiennes*, exh. cat. (Paris: Musée du Petit Palais, 1994). See also Elizabeth Kennedy Easby and John F. Scott, *Before Cortés: Sculpture of Middle America*, exh. cat. (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1970), pp. 236–65; Ricardo E. Alegría, "The Art of the Taíno Indians of Puerto Rico," in *The Art Heritage of Puerto Rico: Pre-Columbian to the Present*, exh. cat. [in English and Spanish] (New York: El Museo del Barrio and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1973), pp. 25–31; and Irving Rouse et al. in Jay A. Levenson et al., *Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991), pp. 509–13, 575–81, nos. 409–23.
4. See, for example, William F. Keegan and Corinne L. Hofman, *The Caribbean before Columbus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).
5. See, for example, Colin McEwan, John W. Hoopes, and Bryan Cockrell, eds., *Central American and Colombian Art at Dumbarton Oaks* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, forthcoming); and McEwan, Hoopes, and Cockrell, eds., *Towards an Archaeology of "Greater" Central America* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, forthcoming). See also Joanne Pillsbury et al., *Golden Kingdoms: Luxury Arts in the Ancient Americas*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum and The Getty Research Institute, 2017); and Benoît Bérard and Catherine Losier, eds., *Archéologie caraïbe*, Taboui, 2 (Leiden: Sidestone Press, 2014).
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