

Stone carvings from the Lucayan archipelago: anthropomorphic celts, monolithic axes and zoomorphic figures/pestles

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Abstract

A small assemblage of stone carvings – monolithic axes, figural celts and pestles – were recovered from the Lucayan archipelago (The Bahamas and Turks and Caicos Islands) during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and are now held in museum collections. The majority have very little associated information, but “excavating” museum archives, consulting historic publications, and building a corpus of surviving examples can expand their interpretive value. They were imported to the islands, most likely as finished objects from neighboring Hispaniola and/or Cuba in the period ca. AD 800 to 1500. They may have been used to consolidate alliances and support mutually beneficial exchange within an expanding economic and political network.

Key words: anthropomorphic celts, monolithic axes, museum collections, collection histories, The Bahamas, Turks and Caicos Islands.

Resumen

Tallas de piedra del archipiélago lucayano: celtas antropomorfos, ejes monolíticos y figuras zoomorfas

Un pequeño conjunto de piedras talladas – hachas monolíticas, hachas figurativas y morteros – se recuperaron en el archipiélago de Las Lucayas

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(islas Bahamas e Islas Turcas y Caicos) entre finales del siglo XIX y comienzos del siglo XX, las cuales hoy día se conservan en colecciones de museos. La mayoría de ellas tienen muy poca información asociada, pero “excavando” archivos de museos, consultando publicaciones históricas y la construcción de un corpus de ejemplos sobrevivientes pueden ampliar el valor interpretativo de estos artefactos. Estas piezas fueron importadas a las islas, muy probablemente como objetos terminados, desde las La Española y/o Cuba en el período comprendido entre el 800 d.C. y el 1500 d.C. Es posible que se hayan utilizado para consolidar alianzas y apoyar intercambios mutuamente beneficiosos dentro de una red económica y política en expansión.

Palabras clave: *hachas antropomórficas, hachas monolíticas, colecciones de museos, historias de colecciones, Bahamas, Islas Turcas y Caicos*

Résumé

Sculptures sur pierre de l'archipel Lucayan: celtes anthropomorphes, haches monolithiques et figures/pilons zoomorphes

Un petit assemblage de sculptures sur pierre – haches monolithiques, haches anthropomorphe et pilons – a été récupéré dans l'archipel Lucayen (Bahamas et îles Turques et Caïques) à la fin du 19e et au début du 20e siècle, et est maintenant conservé dans des collections de musées. La majorité dispose de très peu d'informations associées, mais «fouiller» les archives de musées, consulter des publications historiques et constituer un corpus d'exemples survivants peuvent accroître leur valeur interprétative. Ils ont été importés dans les îles, très probablement sous forme d'objets finis en provenance des îles voisines d'Hispaniola et/ou de Cuba au cours de la période de ca. 800 à 1500 après JC. Ils peuvent avoir été utilisés pour renforcer des alliances et soutenir des échanges mutuellement bénéfiques au sein d'un réseau économique et politique en expansion.

Mots clés: *haches anthropomorphe, haches monolithiques, collections de musées, histoire des collections, Bahamas, îles Turks et Caicos.*

Resumo

Gravuras em pedra do arquipélago Lucayan: celtas antropomórficos, eixos monolíticos e figuras/pilões zoomórficos

Um pequeno conjunto de esculturas em pedra - machados monolíticos, machados figurativos e pilões - foi recuperado do Arquipélago das Lucaias (Bahamas e Ilhas Turcas e Caicos) durante o final do século XIX e início do

século XX, e estão agora conservados em coleções museológicas. A maioria possui muito pouca informação associada, mas “escavar” arquivos de museus, consultar publicações históricas e construir um corpo de exemplos sobreviventes pode expandir o seu valor interpretativo. Estes objetos foram importados para as ilhas, muito provavelmente como objetos acabados, vindos da vizinha Ilha de São Domingos e/ou Cuba no período de aproximadamente 800 a 1500 d.C. Eles podem ter sido usados para consolidar alianças e favorecer trocas mutuamente benéficas dentro de uma rede econômica e política em expansão.

Palavras-chave: machados antropomórficos, machados monolíticos, coleções de museus, histórias de coleções, Bahamas, Ilhas Turcas e Caicos.

Pre-Columbian Caribbean stone carving has taken its rightful place as among the most accomplished artistic traditions in the Ancient Americas. Some artifact categories, such as trigoliths (three-pointed stones) and stone collars, always feature in museum exhibits (e.g., Kerchache, 1994) and have garnered much interest and study (e.g., Walker, 1997), while other stone carvings remain less well known, particularly examples recovered from islands outside the Greater Antillean core of Hispaniola, Puerto Rico and Cuba. This overview of the stone carvings from the Lucayan archipelago (today’s Bahamas and Turks and Caicos Islands) – here focusing on anthropomorphic celts, monolithic axes and a small, select group of other anthro/zoomorphic stone carvings (pestles, figures)¹ (Figure 1) – is part history, part museology and, ultimately, part archaeology. Through this small group of artifacts, it is possible to chart the emerging local interest in the prehistory of the region from the mid-19th century, explore the role played by museums in securing collections just as anthropology and archaeology arose as fields of academic enquiry, and integrate “lost” historic finds back into local prehistories in order to explore their relevance to how we can better understand the people who settled the region from ca. AD 800. This small, but important assemblage augments the broader study of these artefact categories in the wider Caribbean, and better positions the Lucayan archipelago within the context of prehistoric networks that connected the region.

¹ Bahamian/TCI anthropomorphic pendants – as ornaments, as opposed to functional (e.g., pestles) or ‘pseudo-functional’ artifacts (e.g., anthropomorphic celts, which cannot be used as celts) – are discussed elsewhere (see Ostapkowicz, 2023:217-223).



Figure 1. Distribution of anthropomorphic celts, monolithic axes and zoomorphic stone carvings within the Lucayan archipelago (The Bahamas and Turks and Caicos Islands). Base map by John Pouncett, adapted by Joanna Ostapkowicz.

Within The Bahamas and Turks and Caicos Islands, growing local interest in prehistory emerged from the 1850s, coinciding with a more intensive development and commercial exploration of the islands. Commercial guano mining had a brief, but intensive period in the mid- to late-19th century, particularly in the Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI), where caves were entirely cleared of their contents, including Indigenous artifacts. The emerging local middle class, with aspirations to document the quickly disappearing island heritage, amassed artifacts that took pride of place in the home, or were displayed in the first museums and libraries established on the islands as well as being loaned to regional exhibitions. International researchers travelling to the islands, often funded by major US institutions such as the Smithsonian and the Heye Museum/Museum of the American Indian, would seek out these local collections, circulating information about them upon their return. Those institutions with resources at their disposal, and the aim to amass “comprehensive” collections of Americas archaeology, would then pursue acquisition. These institutions also funded fieldwork in the Caribbean, led by their curators, who were tasked with surveying local collections and purchasing choice pieces, if not entire holdings (e.g., the work of Jesse Walter Fewkes on behalf of the Smithsonian’s Bureau of American Ethnology, from ca. 1890s, particularly in Puerto Rico, is a good example –

see Schiappacasse, 2019; 2021). They were to conduct archaeological surveys of massive regions, often for months on end, and to excavate promising sites (e.g., Mark Raymond Harrington of the Heye Museum in Cuba, 1915). Upon return, and once the artifacts were accessioned into the museums, fieldwork reports (e.g., Harrington, 1921) and catalogues would be generated and published, documenting the expanding regional holdings. These were among the first systematic efforts to categorize the archaeological material culture of the Caribbean region, and they remain key references. The histories of the artifacts discussed below chart some of these early efforts in The Bahamas and TCI. Aside from this historical context, the select corpus of artifacts (figural stone carvings, including anthropomorphic celts and monolithic axes) more importantly provide insights on the material culture that was circulating in the region during prehistoric times, and how it connected communities.

Legacy collections need to be grounded in the context of their acquisition, in efforts to trace their provenance – from find location, to the hands that circulated them, to the interpretations surrounding them – in order to better situate them in (pre)history. That these artifacts are still relevant is self-evident when one considers the significant heritage that has been lost on these islands – from damage sustained by ever increasing development through to hurricanes and rising sea levels (Ostapkowicz, 2023). Notably, anthropomorphic celts and monolithic axes have not been recovered in the region during archaeological investigations since Theodoor de Booy's fortuitous find of an axe at Juba Point Cave, Providenciales in 1911. This goes to the point that museum legacy collections have great potential to fill gaps in our understanding of the past; we cannot hope to build understanding of the past without integrating them into current and future investigations of the islands.

Anthropomorphic celts

Anthropomorphic celts (Figure 2) are a rare artifact category both within the Lucayan archipelago and the wider Caribbean. There are but a handful of examples known – Fewkes (1915:4) documented 13 spanning the Caribbean, two of which were from The Bahamas; most now reside in international museum collections, while others have disappeared from public record. Though this is unlikely a reflection of their true numbers, it goes to the point that even Caribbeanists with an extensive knowledge of the region's material culture in both public and private collections were only able to document a few examples (Figure 2-3). Their characteristic form features a carved face and, occasionally, shallowly depicted arms and legs, carved to one side of the celt. Very

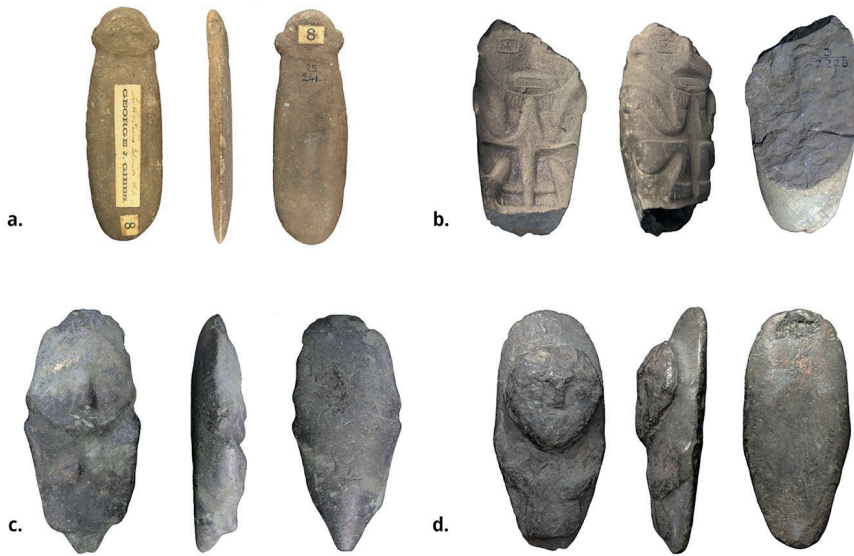


Figure 2. Anthropomorphic celts (three views of each) recovered in the Lucayan archipelago, not to scale. a. “Mummiform idol,” greywacke, Gibbs collection, “Caicos Islands,” ca. 1860, L: 19cm; W: 6cm; D: 1.8cm, Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History, 25/241. b. Anthropomorphic celt, meta-tuff, Betsy Bay, Mayaguana, L: 14cm; W: 7cm; D: 4.4cm, National Museum of the American Indian, 032228. c. Anthropomorphic celt, meta-basalt, Great Inagua, L: 24.5cm; W: 11.2cm; D: 5.2cm, National Museum of the American Indian, 113518. d. Anthropomorphic celt, mafic schist, “The Bahamas,” ex-Benjamin W. Arnold collection, L: 20cm; W: 9cm; D: 5.2cm, Peabody Museum of Natural History, ANT. 137362. Material identifications by Gareth Davies and Alice Knaf (Ostapkowicz, Knaf and Davies, 2022). Photos: Joanna Ostapkowicz, courtesy institutions listed.

rarely, zoomorphic examples have been recovered (e.g., Cuba - Fewkes, 1915:12).² They have been variously known as “engraved,” “ceremonial,” “sculptured,” and “effigy” celts and, most recently “celtiforms,” to distinguish them from the more frequently recovered petaloid celts that feature smooth and finely polished surfaces; the latter were hafted to wooden handles, largely functioning as carving tools (see Figure 8d) (Ostapkowicz, Schulting and Davies, 2023). Despite retaining the celt shape, the engravings on the effigy

² <https://www.cultura.gob.es/museodeamerica/coleccion/america-prehispanica/hacha-ta-na.html>. Note that this example is not a petaloid celt, but an axe.

celts rendered them difficult to haft, and so largely useless as tools³ – but the alignment of the body within the celt shape was clearly significant, implying a connection between the figural depiction and the petaloid shape. As no hard stone occurs within the limestone islands of the Lucayan archipelago, all examples were imported into the region, most likely from Cuba and Hispaniola, where the majority have been recovered historically, though rarely with any contextual information (see below).

The earliest reference currently known to a surviving anthropomorphic celt from the Lucayan archipelago comes from the collection catalogue of George J. Gibbs, a resident of Grand Turk in the mid- to late 19th century. Gibbs amassed a large and important collection of prehistoric artifacts from the Turks and Caicos Islands, including one anthropomorphic celt (Figure 2a). He identified this as a “mummiform idol” in his catalogue, noting that it had been “found at [the] Caicos about the year 1860” (Gibbs ms 1). It was listed separately as a “ceremonial stone” in the correspondence related to the collection’s acquisition by the American Museum of Natural History in 1900, clearly among the highlight pieces. Its shape – an elongated oval “body” surmounted by a head with prominent ears – conforms to the anthropomorphic celts category (though with the head at the butt or proximal-end of the celt, as opposed to the blade). Carved of greywacke, the only surface elaboration is the presence of coffee-bean shaped eyes, a line for the mouth and the ridge denoting the hair and chin line.

The next find of an anthropomorphic celt in the Lucayan archipelago was documented by Frederick Ober (1894:276), who noted a “remarkable specimen, which was discovered in a field... in 1892, and brought to Nassau during my stay there[. It is] ten and one-half inches [27cm] long, three and one-half inches [4cm] broad, and has carved upon it a face, as in a moon, with oblique, oriental eyes. This is also of dark-green stone, probably jade or serpentine, and is the only one of the kind I have seen.” It is notable that Ober, who was doing a survey of the wider Caribbean region in efforts to secure collections for the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893, saw this as “one of a kind.” That it was “brought to Nassau” suggests that it likely came from the “out” or “family islands” (the wider Bahamas); Nassau being the capital, quite a number of finds on the neighbouring islands made it to the city (e.g., Ostapkowicz, 2023:89). The so-called “Rae specimen,” named after the owner (Mr. C. S. Rae of Nassau, New Providence), would be studied by Theodoor de Booy, who visited the region

³ Fewkes(1907:96)notesthat“therecanhardlybeadoubtthat[thisstype]ofceltwasneverhafted,asno signs of its attachment to the handle are to be seen, and as the presence of a handle would conceal part of the figure cut upon it. [These ceremonial celts were] probably carried in the hand.”



Figure 3. Jesse Walter Fewkes' illustration of an anthropomorphic celt, documented during his visit to the Archbishop Meriño collection in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic in 1902. Photo: Joanna Ostapkowicz, courtesy Jesse Walter Fewkes papers, National Anthropology Archives, Smithsonian Institution, 4408/45a.

in 1911, undertaking the first dedicated archaeological survey of the Turks and Caicos Islands, and returning in 1912 to work in The Bahamas on behalf of the Heye Museum, New York (Ostapkowicz, 2023:92-95). Although his assessment of the carving was never published, his sketches of it were shared with Jesse Walter Fewkes of the Smithsonian Institution, who made a quick note of it in his 1912 field notebook (Figure 4a), and later referenced it in his 1915 article, *Engraved celts from the Antilles* (see also Fewkes, 1922:177). Within the broader corpus of anthropomorphic celts Fewkes was able to study, he considered the "Rae specimen" to be "similar, almost identical" to an engraved celt recovered from Haiti and now in Berlin's Ethnologisches Museum (Figure 4b, c), and concluded "it seems probable that [the Nassau] specimen was brought to the Bahamas from the neighboring islands," most likely Haiti (Fewkes, 1915:5; 1922:177). The carving has since disappeared, leaving only Fewkes' cursory sketch (the de Booy sketches have not been found) and his suggestion that it shared stylistic similarities to the Haitian anthropomorphic celt. This is the furthest north that



Figure 4. The anthropomorphic celt in the Rae collection, Nassau, (left) and the Haitian example in the Berlin collections (center and right), which Jesse Walter Fewkes considered stylistically “almost identical” (Fewkes 1922:177). a. Notes, ca. 1912, by Fewkes (Field Notebook 59a, Manuscript 4408) discussing the “ceremonial celt” from the Rae collection, likely based on sketches made by Theodoor de Booy. b. Haitian anthropomorphic celt, L: 34cm; W: 8.9cm; D: 2.9cm, Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, IVCb 84. c. Fewkes notes on the Haitian celt, consulted during a visit to Berlin in 1913 (Field Notebook 59d, Manuscript 4408). Images of Fewkes notes courtesy Jesse Walter Fewkes papers, National Anthropology Archives, Smithsonian Institution; image of Haitian celt, courtesy Ethnologisches Museum, Berlin; photos by Joanna Ostapkowicz.

an effigy celt has been documented in the Caribbean, though this is not to say that other examples may not have been present in the northern Bahamas – they simply have not been documented in the published literature or made it into museum collections with their provenance information intact.

Two Bahamian anthropomorphic celts/carvings, then part of the Benjamin W. Arnold collection, were featured in Warren K. Moorehead’s (1910) *The Stone Age in North America* (Figure 5). Arnold’s collection was reportedly amassed over 30 years prior to his death in 1932, and, according to Froelich Rainey (1934ms:7) was considered to be “the largest [private] collection of Bahamian Archaeology in existence.” And while part of the Arnold collection entered the Peabody Museum of Natural History in 1945, the two anthropomorphic celts featured in Moorhead’s book unfortunately did not; their current whereabouts are unknown. Another effigy celt, however, was donated to the Peabody, and

the original Arnold catalogue lists it as a “celt from the Bahamas, with carving of face, arms and legs. This celt has evidently been in much better condition and shows that [several] efforts have been made to destroy the effigy figure” (Figure 2d). The carving does indeed feature numerous chips and striations to the surface, particularly around the figure itself. The head is quite prominent, both in size – taking up roughly half of the carving – and in raised height, while the body likely featured both arms and lower legs, only remnants of which now remain. Unfortunately, like much of the Arnold collection, more detailed provenance is lacking for these carvings, apart from their attribution to The Bahamas.

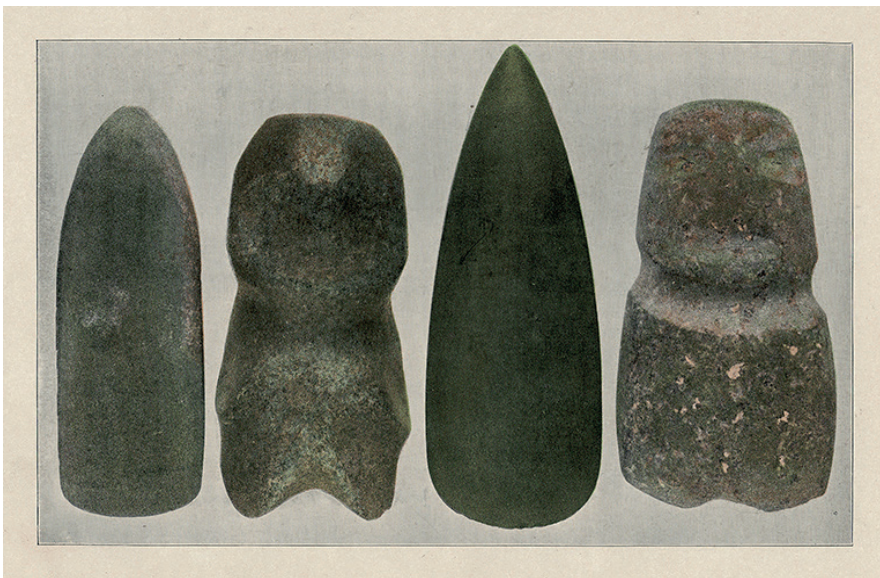


Figure 5. Frontispiece (Figure 223, S. i-ii) from Warren K. Moorehead’s (1910) *The Stone Age in North America*, with the caption “Two grooved effigies and two celts, from the Bahama Islands... [from the] B. W. Arnold collection, Albany, New York.”

One of the best known anthropomorphic celt examples from The Bahamas is that documented by de Booy, who secured it during his 1912 survey for the Heye Museum (Figure 2b). De Booy (1913:6) notes:

although in fragmentary condition, this object shows clearly what the original outlines must have been, and it may be included among the best examples of prehistoric stonework from the Bahamas.... [It] is petaloid and is made of a green, slate-like stone, possibly volcanic in origin. It was found by a... farmer in the bush in the vicinity of ‘Betsy Bay’ settlement on the west coast of [Mayaguana],

and was taken home by the finder. It seems to have reposed in his cabin for several years and... was finally given to his infant daughter as a toy, with the inevitable result that it was broken. With the aid of a few children the author was successful in discovering two of the fragments in the... yard. It is regretted that the remaining pieces could not be recovered.

The carving features coffee-bean shaped eyes, a slightly raised ridge for the triangular nose and rectangular mouth. The body, which appears to be in a seated position, is clearly depicted, from the circular shoulder blades and hip joints to the rounded elbows and knees to the hands, which come to rest below the chin. Clearly these elements were important for the carver to portray on this piece – unlike the “Rae” effigy celt discussed above, where the focus appears to be solely on the head. Fewkes (1922:183) agrees with de Booy that this is a ceremonial celt, “but it has certain features that impart to it an interest apart from its resemblance to an engraved petaloid. One of these features is the manner in which the hands are brought to the body, as the grooves representing fingers are longitudinal instead of horizontal.” Although he does not expand on this point, it is possible that he was considering the Mayaguana anthropomorphic celt as bearing similarities to the stone heads and masks recovered from the wider region (Fewkes, 1922:183-186); for example, he noted similarities between the Mayaguana celt and a Haitian carving in Paris’ Trocadero Museum (now in the Musée du quai Branly; presumably accession 71.1887.156.1; see Lovén 2010 [1935]:Plate XV, 1): “the outlines of the faces of both are similar and the details of the carving of the nose almost identical.” He provides no further details, and the assumption is that he may have considered the carving potentially Haitian in style. Other Haitian examples featuring a prominent triangular nose and coffee bean eyes are known from the wider literature (e.g., Mangonés and Maximilien 1941:Planche XIXc-d); this possible Haitian connection merits further evaluation.

In 1921, George Pepper, of the Heye Museum, was in correspondence with Great Inagua resident Charles Arthur Sargent (b., 1865, d. 1939) about ceramics from Salt Pond Hill, which the latter considered historic rather than prehistoric, when Sargent mentioned something much more valuable which was found on the North side of the Island in the neighborhood of a cave.” He continues, “...[it is] in the shape of an Idol, it’s carved out of the same hard stone that the Indian hatchets are made of, it’s about a foot [30.5cm] long and seem[s] to be perfect with the exception of a few chips around the edges. If you think this is of any value, possibl[y] I could get it to you through a friend of mine in [New York]” (Sargent to Pepper, 22 November 1921, Folder 8, Box OC 288, NAA).

The museum would come to acquire the piece in 1922. It would turn out to be the largest effigy celt recovered from the Lucayan archipelago. The features appear quite worn with only the raised ridges of the brows, nose and jawline evident on the face (Figure 2c). The right arm, bent sharply at the elbow, comes to rest on the chest and a ridge above the pointed base of the carving suggests a kneeling posture.



Figure 6. “Sword (of guayacan wood)” found together with an effigy celt in a cave near Enriquillo Lake, DR. According to Boyrie Moya’s notes, the celt is 26cm long, 9.5cm wide and the sculpted face is 7.6cm high and 7.6cm wide; the “sword” is 81cm long. See also Herrera Fritot (1964:Lam. XVIb) who attributes this to the Manuel de Moya Alonso collection, Santo Domingo, DR. Figure compiled by Joanna Ostapkowicz from archival images in the Herbert William Krieger papers, National Anthropology Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

Found as they were in the 19th and early 20th centuries prior to the emergence of archaeology as a discipline, any associated context information

for the anthropomorphic celts discussed above has been lost to us. However, some comparative insights can be gleaned from other examples recovered from the wider Caribbean more recently – though again, we must rely on archival documentation to flesh out these finds. An example from the Dominican Republic emerges from correspondence between Emile de Boyrie Moya (b. 1903; d. 1967), a prominent Dominican archaeologist and Director of the Instituto Dominicano de Investigaciones Antropológicas de la Universidad de Santo Domingo, and the Smithsonian’s Herbert Krieger. In a letter dated 5 July 1945, Boyrie Moya discusses the recovery of a “wooden sword (of guayacan wood) found in a cave near our Enriquillo Lake. It was found a few weeks ago by a countryman, side by side with a ceremonial stone ax (very beautiful green petaloid ax with an engraved face on one side)...” (Figure 6). This anthropomorphic celt was later described and illustrated in Herrera Fritot (1947:134-135; Lamina VI; 1964:Fig XVIb). Another anthropomorphic celt was reportedly recovered from “Cueva de Mulañé,” part of a cave complex located 14 km on the road from Cabrera (Abreu) to Rio San Juan (Veloz Maggiolo and Ortego 1980:28). Across the Caribbean, caves are centers for ritual and funerary deposits, including caches of important artifacts, from anthropomorphic and petaloid celts to monolithic axes (parallels can be drawn to the deposit that de Booy excavated at Juba Point, Providenciales, which yielded a monolithic axe together with burned wood and shells – see further details below).

In sum, seven anthropomorphic celts are known from the Lucayan archipelago – the northernmost example documented in New Providence (though likely from one of the neighboring “family” islands), the southernmost from Great Inagua (Figure 1). These span three styles: celts featuring 1/ a depiction restricted to an anthropomorphic head (Figure 2a; Figure 4a); 2/ a head and schematic body depicted on a slightly raised anterior surface (Figure 2b-d) and 3/ grooves to the sides of the celt outlining the body’s frame, but little facial or body details (Figure 5). These appear consistent with the stylistic range of anthropomorphic celts elsewhere in the circum-Caribbean, though elongated “blade” versions (Figure 7c) and the most complex form – that of the stone “baton” (as seen in Figure 7d; Figure 15), where the body is most fully developed and “fleshed,” – are not present in the Lucayan archipelago, at least based on the examples deposited in museums. With the exception of an unverified “jade or serpentine” example in the Rae Nassau collection (Ober, 1894:276), all anthropomorphic celts recovered from the archipelago are carved of softer rocks, including greywacke, meta-tuff, meta-basalt and mafic schist – all materials foreign to The Bahamas/TCI.



Figure 7. Anthropomorphic celts from Greater Antilles. a. Puerto Rico (?), L: 29cm; W: 11.1cm; D: 4.3cm, Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels, A.Am 5615. b. St Thomas, L: 21cm; W: 7.5cm; D: 3.5cm, Ethnologisches Museum, Berlin, IV CB 30. c. "Amérique Centrale," L: 32cm; W: 7.5cm; D: 2.9cm, Musée des Confluences, Lyon, acquired 1916, MHNL.81001583. d. "St Domingo" [Hispaniola], L: 45cm; W: 9.2cm; D: 6.9cm, accessioned 1861, Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen, ODI.g5. Photos: Joanna Ostapkowicz, courtesy institutions listed.

Monolithic axes



Figure 8. Monolithic axes from the Lucayan archipelago. a. Monolithic axe, greenschist, Blue Hills, Providenciales, TCI, recovered May 1874, George Gibbs collection, L: 25cm; W: 11.9cm; D: 4.6cm, Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History, 25/235. b. Monolithic axe with anthropomorphic finial, amphibolite, Conch Bar Caves, Middle Caicos, TCI, Lady Edith Blake collection via Murphy, L: 19.7cm; W: 8.7cm; D: 2.3cm, National Museum of the American Indian, 059138. c. Monolithic axe, meta-siltstone, Juba Point, Providenciales, TCI, Theodoor de Booy excavations, 1911, L: 19.1cm; W: 9.1cm; D: 2.3cm; National Museum of the American Indian, 031913. d. celt with wooden haft, impure omphacite-jadeite jade blade, North Caicos (?), TCI, Guaiacum sp., calAD 1032-1174 (95.4%, OXA-19172: 932 ± 26, recalibrated uses OxCal v4.4, IntCal20), handle L: 55.5cm; w: 6cm (max); celt (omphacite-jadeite jade) L: 15.2cm; W: 5.8cm, National Museum of the American Indian, 060000. Photos: Joanna Ostapkowicz, courtesy institutions listed.

Monolithic axes (also called “stone scepters” or “axe-scepters” in early writings – see Hamy 1906; discussion in Gendron, 2016:33) – comprise a celt hafted to a handle, carved as a single piece in stone. They are as rare as anthropomorphic celts, with only three documented in museum collections from the Lucayan archipelago, mainly provenanced to the Turks and Caicos Islands (Figure 8a-c). Reference to other examples, long since disappeared, do exist, however: Daniel McKinnen (1804:132-133), who toured The Bahamas

and TCI in 1802 and 1803, noted that “various traces of the aborigines... have been discovered at the Caicos [including] ... a hatchet of stone curiously embossed with a dolphin’s head.” It is likely that there were others, but these disappeared into private hands or entered museum collections without associated information (e.g., Lovén [2010 [1935]:155] attributes a monolithic axe in the collections of the British Museum to The Bahamas, though there is nothing in the records of that institution to support this link; it has been in the collections since 1830 [Saville, 1916:9]). But judging from relatively small numbers of these artifacts even from “source” islands – such as Hispaniola and Cuba (e.g., Saville, 1916 documents 13 examples; Herrera Fritot, 1938, 15 examples) – these were unlikely to have been significant quantities. Fewkes (1907:95-96; Plate XIV) illustrated only three from the Dominican Republic, acquired by the Smithsonian from the collection of Archbishop Meriño, and mentions that monolithic axes are “seldom found in existing collections.” A rare glimpse of other monolithic axes is provided in a manuscript containing illustrations of private collections, dating to ca. 1903, held at the National Anthropology Archives, Smithsonian Institution (Jesse Walter Fewkes papers 4408/107) (Figure 9).

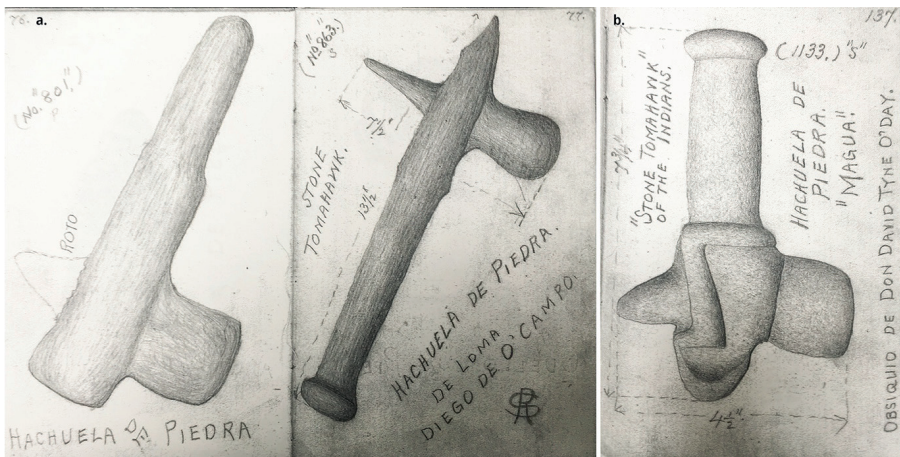


Figure 9. Monolithic axes from the Dominican Republic, as illustrated in a 1903 manuscript held in the Jesse Walter Fewkes papers, National Anthropology Archives, Smithsonian Institution, ms. 4408/107. a. pages 76 and 77 from the manuscript showing two monolithic axes, one attributed to Loma, Dominican Republic (center). b. page 137, showing a monolithic axe attributed to Magua, Dominican Republic. Photos: Joanna Ostapkowicz, courtesy National Anthropology Archives, Smithsonian Institution.



Figure 10. Correspondence related to the monolithic axe in the George J. Gibbs collection. a. copy of a letter dated 16 October 1875 Gibbs sent to John Evans, illustrating the monolithic axe that had recently (May 1875) been found at Blue Hills, Providenciales, National Anthropology Archives, Smithsonian Institution (Gibbs’ manuscript, MS 7173). b. monolithic axe, greenschist, L: 25cm; W: 11.9cm; D: 4.6cm, Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History, 25/235. c. illustrations of Gibbs collection that accompanied the letter dated 2 February 1900 from Dr. Oliver Crosswell, Government Medical Officer on Grand Turk to the Curator, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Boston (now in the AMNH archives, accession 1900-45), discussing the potential sale of the collection. The monolithic celt is described as “a unique specimen of a Carib stone handled celt of large size and of great value.” Photos: Joanna Ostapkowicz, courtesy institutions listed.

The earliest monolithic axe from the Lucayan archipelago to enter museum collections was acquired by Grand Turk Island resident, George J. Gibbs in the late 19th century (Figure 8a). He described it in his catalogue as “Indian handled celt, the blade and handle being in one solid piece, and all of stone, found at the Blue Hills Caicos [Providenciales] on the surface of the land in May 1874” (Gibbs ms 2:212) (Figure 10). In an extract from his 1874 journal (in Gibbs ms 2:38), he notes “March 29th... received a present of an Indian hatchet and a piece of broken pottery with a face on it” – this implies that it was acquired rather than excavated. Gibbs was known to undertake excavations – such as that at “Indian Camp,” Middle Caicos on 1 April 1874, with some 24

workmen from the neighboring Lorimers settlement.⁴ Note the discrepancy in Gibb's reference to the "find" date (May in his catalogue, March in his journal); the best that can be said is that the monolithic celt was acquired in 1874.

Word quickly spread of the find and of Gibb's wider collection, reaching the Smithsonian Institution; Otis Mason (1877b:373; see also 1877a:626) was the first to publish a brief description and illustration of it, calling it a most "interesting and precious relic... [representing] a celt in the handle, the whole being gracefully carved out of a single piece of jadeite [greenschist - see below]." Hamy (1906:154) called it the most beautiful example among the corpus of known monolithic axes. Joseph Henry, the Smithsonian's Secretary, got in touch with Gibb to enquire whether he would consider parting with his collection:

...you have in your possession a collection of very interesting stone implements from certain caves and elsewhere in the Bahamas, and I write to ascertain whether it may not be possible for us to obtain possession of them for the use of the National Museum. We are endeavoring to bring together a complete collection of objects of antiquity, and find in the series we have already... from the West Indies, specimens of the highest interest, and greatest importance. Such articles as stone implements in wooden handles are particularly desirable and... you have one in your possession, which has excited my interest strongly.
Henry to Gibb, 23 January 1877 (Gibb ms 2:8).

Gibb's declined to part with his pieces, noting that "relics of this kind possess a local interest particularly to a native of the island far superior to their intrinsic value. I have been collecting for about twenty years and have some celts that my deceased father obtained years before" (Gibb ms 2:10). He was also initially disinclined to Henry's request of a loan, noting that "as these articles are such that cannot be replaced, I am afraid to risk them on a voyage across the ocean and back (as you suggest to obtain plaster casts)" (Gibb ms 2:10).

⁴ "April 1st... having mustered the men and tools, started for the [Indian Camp] burial mounds at 8am, which we reached at 9:10am followed by twenty four of the inhabitants of the village at Lorimers. We dug about five or six feet drop on the summit of one of the smallest mounds, found therein almost free from stones, and every now and then came to spots of a different coloured earth, these patches were small in size and appeared to be of decomposed animal matter, we found in every instance in them, either fish, turtle or bird bones and some that we thought might be human small bones - no skulls or large bones; one [dog tooth], both roots of which were perforated artificially [accessioned AMNH 25/257; see Ostapkowicz 2023:Fig 4.30], also a piece of pearl oyster shell drilled similarly with two holes [AMNH 25/256]; these I think were bored to be used as a necklace or bracelets, the intermediate spaces being composed of briars or seeds, or other destructible matter, have in the course of time become decomposed..." (Gibb ms 2:43-46).

But Henry persisted, and eventually persuaded Gibbs to loan the monolithic axe (and Gibbs persuaded Jeremiah Murphy to loan his hafted celt with wooden handle – Figure 8d, see below), something that would bring the pieces to wider scholarly attention. Upon receipt at the museum, Henry confirmed the pieces were “exceedingly interesting... we have only to regret that the originals cannot remain in the National Museum” (Gibbs ms 2:78); they were studied, with illustrations made and casts taken, and then they were duly returned in July. But by late August, Gibbs’ fears regarding the safe transfer of the artifacts “across the ocean” had been realized: the precious cargo could not be found aboard the ship tasked with its safe delivery. There ensued anxious months of waiting for news, with correspondence between Gibbs and Henry turning to a valuation of the loaned artifacts, in anticipation of a claim against the shipper. Henry considered the monolithic axe and the hafted celt

entirely unique and [they] are of such character as to be valuable in a money point of view. This is estimated by persons connected with the Institution at the lowest figure at [US \$] 500 each and we are assured that were they offered for sale to the museums of Europe there would be a spirited competition for them at that price. To the best of our knowledge and belief no museum in the world possesses similar articles, and in the important bearing they have upon the aboriginal history of the West Indies their loss would be considered almost a calamity. Henry to Gibbs, 25 September 1877 (Gibbs ms 2:109-110).

Fortunately, the box turned up on 4 December 1877, over three months since it was secured as cargo for the return voyage from Washington to Grand Turk (Gibbs to Murphy, 4 December; Gibbs ms 2:133). But the scholarly attention the monolithic axe garnered during this time (not to mention the valuation – which exceeded by several magnitudes the values achieved by other significant artifacts from the Turks and Caicos that did enter the Smithsonian – see, for example, Ostapkowicz 2015) secured it as an iconic artifact from the region. It featured in the Jamaica Exhibition of 1891 (Pusey, 1897:89), and was consulted by visiting scholars such as Ober (1893:83), who illustrated it in his *In the Wake of Columbus* volume, noting that “The Spanish Consul at Grand Turk [Gibbs]... has a very rare thing in the shape of an Indian axe, in stone, the head and handle being of one piece.” Ober would later play an intermediary role in the American Museum of Natural History acquiring the Gibbs collection in 1900, shortly after Gibbs’ death (Saville, 1916:6).⁵

⁵ Three museums, through various intermediaries, appear to have been involved with discussions over the Gibbs acquisition: the Smithsonian, the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, and the American Museum of Natural History.

The carving material was first identified as jadeite by Mason (1877b:373), though Saville (1916:6) cautioned, “as no analysis has yet been made, the material is uncertain”; it has been reassessed as part of project SIBA (*Stone Interchanges in the Bahamian Archipelago*) as meta-volcanic greenschist (Ostapkowicz, Knaf and Davies, 2022).

In profile, the monolithic axe appears to show raised ridges around the depiction of the hafted celt, suggesting the efforts made to feature, in stone, the perishable binding that secured the celt to the haft. Notable is the protrusion at the extreme top of the haft, which echoes that seen in the complete axe with a wooden handle, though the latter is two-pronged (Figure 8d). Might this be an abstract allusion to the more anthropo/zoomorphic depictions seen at the tips of other monolithic axes (Hamy, 1906:154, who describes these as “crests”; see also Gendron 2016:34), and could this be a feature unique to the archipelago? None of the recovered wooden hafts from Los Buchillones, Cuba (Jardines Macías 2013:12) or La Aleta, Dominican Republic (Conrad *et al.* 2001:9) feature such details. The upper tip of the haft also bulges much wider than the base, perhaps a feature that weighed the balance of the axe heavier at the head, again echoing the functioning implement (compare with Figure 8d). The base of the haft is rounded with a slightly larger bulge to one side – a feature that appears in other, more elaborate monolithic axes (Herrera Fritot 1938:Figure 12, 15). These often have anthropo/zoomorphic imagery, and in some the base appears as a “foot” complete with the depiction of toes, the bulge forming the ankle bone. It is as if the hafted celt morphed into a creature, the celt emerging from the chest, the long legs the handle, the feet at the base. The Gibbs monolithic axe perhaps references these elements in a more abstract representation. A clearer depiction of this “anthropomorphization” is seen in the monolithic axe from Conch Bar Caves (Figure 8b, discussed in more detail below).

Shortly after Gibbs acquired the monolithic axe in 1874, his colleague, Jeremiah Denis Murphy, an entrepreneur also residing on Grand Turk, secured an equally unique artifact: a complete hafted celt with wooden handle (Figure 8d). It has frequently been used as a direct comparison to the monolithic axes, given that this was the functional “inspiration” for the stone skeuomorphs. Murphy, together with his commercial partner, Josiah A. Frith, worked the caves at Conch Bar, Middle Caicos in the extraction of guano, the “black gold” of the island in the mid- to late-19th century (Sadler, 1997:135; Dodge, 2020:75). It is perhaps here (rather than North Caicos, as suggested by museum records) that the hafted celt was found.⁶ Gibbs (ms 2:21-22), in describing Murphy’s find to

⁶ Museum records note that the hafted celt “was found by the late Mr. William Murphy in a Cave on North Caicos when prospecting for guano. Numerous other pre-Columbian specimens were found in this and in adjacent caves together with a quantity of skeletal remains. This was about 1882 and, according to local reports, Mr. Murphy preserved this specimen and presented the

Joseph Henry of the Smithsonian, notes that “this relic was found embedded in the bottom of a cave at the Caicos Island. The laborer who was removing the deposit therein (to be shipped abroad as a fertilizer of land) struck the handle of the celt with the spade or jack he was using unfortunately broke it.” Murphy’s own account, dated 28 April 1877, provides more detail:

The celt was found in a cave at the Caicos Islands which contains a large quantity of ‘Bat’s dung’ and which we are shipping to England and the United States as fertilizer. The deposit is in many places more than 8 feet [2.4m] deep – it is generally quite soft but in one or two places shows unmistakable signs of having been very much trampled by the Indians hiding from the Spaniards in the days of Columbus when they were much in demand for slaves in St. Domingo. We only commenced shipping the deposit late last year and had to discontinue it during the winter months owing to the nature of the labor. We hope to commence again next month and I am in hopes that as we get further with the cave we will find more.”

Jeremiah Murphy (in Gibbs ms1:24-25).

This would suggest that the hafted celt was recovered in 1876/early 1877, a time when Murphy was working in the Middle Caicos caves (Sadler, 1997:135). It was also at this time that the Smithsonian was in communication with Gibbs, and the latter convinced Murphy to loan the hafted celt to the Smithsonian alongside his own monolithic axe. In Gibbs’ (ms 2:21-22) own words “...it was some time before I could induce [Murphy] to... risk sending it across the ocean and back” and he no doubt debated the wisdom of having done so when the returned container of “Aboriginal Relics” was reported lost between August and December 1877. For their part, the Smithsonian made casts and commissioned an artist to carve a replica of Murphy’s hafted axe in wood, inserting a celt from the Latimer collection “so that after staining the wood we hope to have a very close resemblance to the original” (Henry to Gibbs, 2 July 1877). Resulting illustrations of the hafted celt, alongside

greater part of them to Lady Blake when she visited the Caicos Islands during the time her husband was Governor of Jamaica [1888-1897].” Herrera Fritot (1938:8), however, gives the provenance of this artifact as Middle Caicos, and Cundall (1894:plate between 68 and 69), who illustrates the hafted celt in his *The Story of the Life of Columbus and the Discovery of Jamaica*, notes that it was “found in a cave at a village in Middle Caicos, under some five feet of cave earth, and was broken by the labourer in digging it out. The accumulation of the cave earth is of very slow growth, and, possibly the hatchet is several hundreds of years old, especially when we remember that the native Indians were all removed by the Spaniards soon after their discovery of these islands” (Cundall, 1894:73). The plate is an illustration of “Native stone implements in the possession of Lady Blake”; it is clear that Cundall had direct access to her collection, and associated documentation. The description conforms to that provided by Gibbs and Murphy himself regarding the circumstances of the find and lends more credibility to the find spot being Middle, rather than North, Caicos.

Gibb's monolithic axe, first appeared in Mason (1877b:Figure 12), and he (Mason 1877a:626) considered both as providing excellent insights into a lost technology: "many archaeologists have been astonished at the beauty of form and the exquisite finish of the jadeite celts found in the West Indies, and have often wondered how they were hafted and put to use. The problem has been solved recently by two celts sent to the National Museum from the Turks' and Caicos islands, by Mr. George Gibbs. One of them is a light jadeite, oval-sectioned celt set in a mortised handle of hard wood...." The hafted celt has subsequently been illustrated and discussed widely, including by Cronau (1892:240), Cundall (1894), Ober (1893:83), Duerden (2008 [1897]:255), Saville (1916:Plate II, 4) and Herrera Fritot (1938:15).

Murphy's prized object was also loaned to the Jamaica International Exhibition of 1891 (Pusey, 1897:89), and at some point before 1894, when it was illustrated by Cundall (see footnote 6), entered the collections of Lady Edith Blake, the wife of Henry Arthur Blake, Governor of Jamaica (1888-1897), when the Turks and Caicos Islands were a dependency of Jamaica. Lady Blake facilitated access to her collection for researchers, both during her time in the region (e.g., Brooks, 1889; see Ostapkowicz, 2023:132) and later, after her return to Ireland, by continuing to provide information or photos.⁷ By 1916, however, with the First World War raging in Europe, the Blakes decided to sell the collection to the Heye Museum: Henry Blake wrote to Heye (5 September 1916, Archives of the National Museum of the American Indian) that "under the present circumstances in Ireland I approve of my wife's disposing of the collection, the acquisition of which brings back many happy memories."⁸ The hafted celt, together with other significant artifacts from The Bahamas, TCI and Jamaica, were accessioned into the Heye Foundation's Museum of the American Indian collections in 1917. It would be a highlight in future displays: a 1922 guidebook notes that in a display case dedicated to Bahamian archaeology, amidst the "amulets, some of [which] are better than any we have from Cuba, and an excellent series of typical wooden seats, or *duhos*... best of all is a fine petaloid celt with a wooden handle still intact" (Hodge, 1922:24). It remains the only complete example recovered from the Caribbean; the waterlogged sites of Los Buchillones, Cuba and La Aleta, Dominican Republic, have yielded wooden hafts, but are missing their celts (Jardines Macías *et al.*, 2013:12; Conrad *et al.*, 2001:8-9). The wooden handle has been radiocarbon dated to calAD 1032-1174 (95.4%, OxA-19172: 932±26 BP) (Ostapkowicz,

⁷ For example, her correspondence with Theodoor de Booy specifically mentions "the celt in the wooden handle and the small all stone axe were found in the Caicos Islands (the former in a cave)" (Blake to de Booy, 22 February, 1913, Archives of the National Museum of the American Indian) and she sent a photograph of the hafted celt to Saville for inclusion in his 1916 article (Saville, 1916:7).

⁸ The specific reference to Ireland was likely a reference to the Easter Rising of April 1916.

Ramsey *et al.*, 2012), and the celt has been identified as an omphacite-jadeite jade (Ostapkowicz, Knaf and Davies, 2022:107).

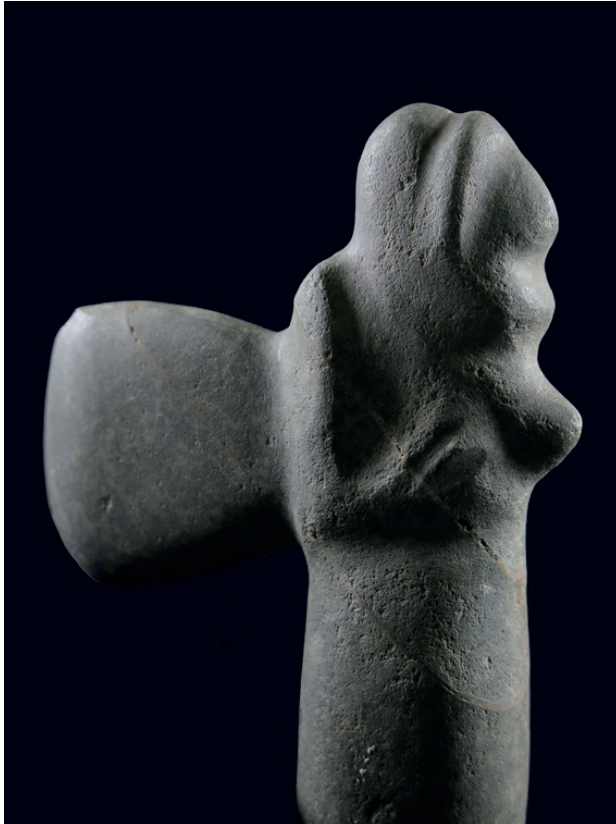


Figure 11. Detail of monolithic axe with anthropomorphic finial, Conch Bar Caves, Middle Caicos, Lady Edith Blake collection via Murphy, L; 19.7cm; W: 8.7cm; D: 2.3cm, National Museum of the American Indian, 059138. Photo: Joanna Ostapkowicz, courtesy National Museum of the American Indian.

Lady Blake's collection also held a monolithic axe provenanced to Conch Bar Caves, Middle Caicos (Figure 8b; Figure 11), another piece possibly acquired via Murphy given his work at the caves. There is less information about this piece than either of the Caicos finds discussed above, which is unfortunate, given that the iconography is the most complex of the monolithic axes recovered from the Lucayan archipelago. Carved of amphibolite (Ostapkowicz, Knaf and Davies, 2022), the axe features an anthropomorphic finial, best seen in profile (Figure 11). The domed head, complete with prominent nose and a raised ridge that encircles the forehead and chin, emerges from above the

celt. The bent arms frame the proximal (butt) end of the celt, their bulging appearance perhaps a reference to the perishable binding used to secure the stone to the wooden handle in the functioning tool. The hand comes to rest close to the pointed tip end of the hafted celt, adding emphasis and echoing the placement of the hands on the chest, belly button or phallus on larger-scale Taíno wood sculpture (e.g., Kerchache, 1994:114; 120; 133; 135). It is as if the celt pierces through the body of the figure – the raised ridge of its spine aligned with the celt blade and the butt end morphed into bulging belly button or phallus. These regions of the body appear to be foci in figural depictions in the wider archipelago (e.g., Kerchache, 1994:173; 175; 77; 179). They also appear to consistently feature in other anthropo/zoomorphic monolithic axes (e.g., Herrera Fritot 1938: Figure 7, 13-15).

The final monolithic axe was recovered by Theodoor de Booy in 1911 from a cave at Juba Point, Providenciales, Turks and Caicos Islands (Figure 8c), on the opposite side of the island to the Blue Hills area, where Gibbs' example was found in 1874. De Booy's excavations at the Juba Point cave yielded turtle and other bones, some fragments of ceramics (Meillacoid⁹ in style, ca. post-AD 800) and, below roughly 46cm of guano, the monolithic axe, associated with burned wood and three conch shells (de Booy 1912:91). Surprisingly little is made of this find in de Booy's (1912) publication – indeed, the ceramics are discussed at greater length than the stone axe. But at least we have this much: the other axes from the Lucayan region were chance finds, some made during guano mining operations, and so no further details about their context or association with other artifacts are available. This conforms to the situation in other regions: even the few monolithic axes recovered in the wider Caribbean – such as the find made by Paul Barker at the site of Balladé, Haiti in the 1950s, reportedly as part of an archaeological investigation (Barker, 1961:25, Figure 3) – are less well documented than de Booy's brief notes. Subsequent writers, such as Saville (1916:5-6; see also Herrera Fritot, 1938:13), would include the Juba Point example in their comparative studies of monolithic axes, and this wider context brings to light the schematic nature of this axe, namely the absence of ridges that in other monolithic axes echo the different materials

⁹ Meillacoid (named after the type-site of Meillac, Haiti) is a term for a distinctive type of ceramic, which emerged ca. AD 800 predominantly in northern Hispaniola, expanding to Jamaica, Cuba and The Bahamas/TCI. The nomenclature for ceramic styles is grounded in typologies established by Irving Rouse (1992, for most recent overview), though there is considerable on-going debate about its usage (for more detail see, Keegan *et al.* 2013:12-15; Keegan and Hofman, 2017:21). I opt here to use the widest, most general 'series' terms, ending in 'oid' – such as Meillacoid and Chicoid – rather than the sub-series designations, ending with 'an' because the latter assumes a direct descent between the styles (e.g., Meillacan Ostionoid – Meillacan is a direct stylistic descendant of the Ostionoid series/culture). Too little is currently known about the interconnections between the styles, particularly the influence of Archaic traditions (e.g., Keegan and Rodríguez Ramos, 2007), to assume a simple linear evolution.

brought together in functioning examples, the positioning of the celt in the wooden handle or the elaboration of carving at the distal (head) end of the shaft (Figure 12). This “shorthand” depiction is also seen in several examples from Cuba and Dominican Republic (Herrera Fritot, 1938:1-2, 4-6). While Saville (1916:6) identified the Juba Point piece as being carved from “serpentine (not jadeite),” subsequent research has identified it as jadeitized meta-siltstone (Ostapkowicz, Knaf and Davies, 2022:110).



Figure 12. Comparative monolithic axes from the wider Caribbean region. a. monolithic axe with upward angled celt, “Antilles”, L: 20.1cm; W: 10.2cm; D: 3.2cm, Musée des Confluences, Lyon, 2010.0.165. b. Anthropomorphic monolithic axe with “foot”, “Antilles”, L: 25.3cm; W: 13.3cm; D: 4.4cm, Musée des Confluences, Lyon, acquired 1916, MHNL.81001582. c. Siemian monolithic axe with upward angled celt, S. Tomas de Jánico, Dominican Republic, L: 23.5; W: 11cm; D: 4.5cm, Musée du Quai Branly, Paris, 71.1884.4.1. d. monolithic axe with downward angled celt, “Hispaniola,” L:14.6cm; W: 4.9cm; D: 2.6cm; National Museum of the American Indian, 143685. Photos: Joanna Ostapkowicz, courtesy institutions listed.

In sum, and as spartan as the corpus may be, the monolithic axes from the Lucayan archipelago feature both figural forms and those more abstract in nature. The celts are depicted perpendicular to the haft rather than angling up

or down as per Greater Antillean examples (Figure 12). The carving materials are greenschist, amphibolite and meta-siltstone.

Zoomorphic stone carvings

Gibbs' manuscript held at the Smithsonian's National Anthropology Archives (MS 7173) includes a partially illustrated catalogue of his collections, documenting other stone carvings recovered from the Lucayan archipelago. Among these is a bird-headed pestle that is provenanced to the vicinity of Bombarra, Middle Caicos, TCI (Figure 13a); Gibbs identifies this as "probably an idol or... pestle," and describes it in more detail in another part of the manuscript (Gibbs ms 2:23-24), noting "the two round rings in the diagram which I call eyes represent indentations, [and] are only on one side of the stone...; at a little distance, you can imagine that it is intended to represent an owl and at first I thought this article was... an idol but since then I have changed my opinion and conclude that it was intended as a pestle for grinding with and that the two indentations were made to secure the thumb and fore-finger to ensure a grip whilst using it."



Figure 13. a. Bird-headed stone pestle, H: 12.4cm; W: 8.9cm; D: 8.3cm, AMNH 25/238 and George J. Gibbs' collection catalogue illustrating the pestle and listing it as "found at Bombarra, Caicos in 1864." b. Zoomorphic stone carving, L: 16cm; H: 5.4cm; W: 7cm, AMNH 25/239 and Gibbs' catalogue illustrating the same, "found at Bombarra, in the Caicos Islands in December 1873." c. Bird-headed pestle, "Belle Vue," North Caicos, December 1889, H: 15.4; W: 8.9cm; D: 8.2cm, AMNH 25/240. Photos: Joanna Ostapkowicz, courtesy Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History (artifacts) and National Anthropology Archives, Smithsonian Institution, (Gibbs' manuscript, MS 7173).

Another pestle, again with bird iconography, was "found on the surface of the land at Belle Vue [Bellevue] estate on the island of North Caicos in the month of December 1889" (Gibbs ms 1) (Figure 13c). Both these were

likely imported to the Caicos from neighboring Hispaniola, where bird-headed and other anthropo/zoomorphic examples are not uncommon (García Arévalo, 2019:180; 222-223; Fewkes 1907:99-105; Plates XXIV-XXVII) (Figure 14). Indeed, bird-headed pestles predominate this artifact category (García Arévalo, 2019:221). Given the likelihood that these elaborately carved objects were used for the grinding of medicinal and/or hallucinogenic substances, it is perhaps not surprising that birds would be appropriate symbols for paraphernalia associated with spirit flights to other worlds. Fewkes (1907:99-100), who describes the variety of pestles, carefully avoiding over-interpretation on meaning, notes that “a considerable amount of speculation has been indulged by various writers to explain the significance of the carvings of these objects... [but] it seems unnecessary to consider these objects anything more than decorated pestles.... Their decorations undoubtedly represent certain mythic human or animal personages, but we can hardly believe that the objects served as idols.”¹⁰



Figure 14. Bird-headed pestles from the Dominican Republic. a. Bird-headed stone pestle as illustrated in Jesse Walter Fewkes field notes, 1902. Jesse Walter Fewkes papers, manuscript 4408/45a, National Anthropology Archives, Smithsonian Institution (see also Fewkes 1907:Plate XXVII). b. Stone pestle, H: 11.7cm; W: 6.8cm; D: 8.3cm, National Museum of Natural History, A220521. c. bird-headed pestle in the “Mr. Jas. Gracesqui” collection, labelled “Isabela” and ca. 15cm in height. Illustrated by an unknown hand and dated ca. 1903. Jesse Walter Fewkes papers, manuscript 4408/107, 1903, National Anthropology Archives, Smithsonian Institution. Photos: Joanna Ostapkowicz, courtesy institutions listed.

¹⁰ Just a few years previously, however, Fewkes (1903:119-120) made the following comment “The skill of the Antilleans in stone working is nowhere better shown than in the carvings on the handles of their pestles. These carvings are so well executed that the pestles are sometimes called idols, and it is indeed possible that some of them may have served as such.”

Bambarra was also the source of another sculptural carving which Gibbs' lists as an "Indian idol of a dark greenish stone, not polished, in the form of a Lizard or Crocodile, the head and tail is broken off, found... in December 1873" (Figure 13b). In other places, he also suggests it represent an "iguana" (Gibbs ms 2:23). This does not appear to be a pestle, but rather a sculpture fully in the round.

Discussion

The above presents a synopsis of a select group of stone carvings from the Lucayan archipelago. As far as current information allows us to judge, TCI appears to have the highest concentration of these rare objects, though it is also apparent from historical accounts that these artifacts also circulated more widely within The Bahamas (Figure 1). All are exotics in the region, carved of non-local hardstones – which begs the question of whether they were imported with migrants moving to settle the region, and so reflect traditions of the homeland, or if they were desired objects that were imported and integrated into Lucayan modes of value and prestige. It is, however, difficult to position these objects culturally and chronologically, as they were chance finds and – with the exception of the Juba Point monolithic axe – we have no context for them. This is, however, not unusual in the wider Caribbean. Most such artefacts are part of legacy collections, recovered well before the modern (post-1960s) archaeological standards required today. The assumption has been that these categories of artifacts emerged post-AD 800; elaborate examples marked the apogee of carving in the Greater Antilles, most often associated with the "Taíno" and constrained by researchers to post-AD 1200 (e.g., El Caribe Precolombino 2008:cat. 14, 27, 44; Walker, 1997:80; Rouse, 1992; see more detailed discussion below). The earliest dates for the proposed emergence of these artifacts align with evidence for the earliest settlements in the Lucayan region, starting from around AD 700 in the Turks and Caicos (seasonal procurement sites; Keegan and Hofman, 2017:171) and ca. AD 800 in the central Bahamas (permanent settlement sites; Berman and Pearsall 2000:225; see also Berman and Gnivecki 1993, 1995); this serves as a useful *terminus post quem*. These early settlements, however, were small in scale, and some only temporary – current understanding suggests that the region was sparsely populated until after ca. AD 1000 (Sinelli 2013:225, 226). Indeed, the earliest site currently known, Coralie, Grand Turk (caAD 700-1300), seems to have been a seasonally occupied site, targeting the island's maritime resources for export to the Hispaniolan homeland (Carlson 1999; Keegan and Hofman

2017). These Ostionoid¹¹ migrants brought with them only “the items they needed to sustain themselves for a period of time, but only the bare necessities” (Carlson 1999:209). Status or ceremonial items were unlikely to be among the limited supplies, though small, highly portable pieces, such as the nacre ornament from Coralie (see Ostapkowicz, 2023:Figure 2.23c), have been recovered. The expectation, therefore, is that the comparatively heavier, ceremonial stone artifacts here discussed were more likely to relate to later, larger, and more established settlements.

While permanent Lucayan settlements were emerging in the central Bahamas from AD 800 (Berman and Gnivecki, 1995), and a local ceramic style (Palmetto Ware) developed as settlers adapted to the local environment, exotic ceramics and other materials and artifacts continued to be imported, whether by new settlers or by Lucayans maintaining connections to the homeland. For example, more intensive colonization, particularly of the Turks and Caicos by northern Hispaniolan migrants bearing Meillacoid ceramic traditions, is in evidence from ca. AD 1100 (Sinelli, 2013:225-226). Settlements appear to have expanded, reflecting a broader range of domestic activities, and a degree of social stratification evidenced by the disparity of recovered cultural material between individual households (Sinelli, 2013:227); some sites, such as Middleton Cay, also featured plazas, considered one of the hallmarks of a socially organized and stratified societies. Trade between these northern settlements and Hispaniolan communities intensified, with local resources such as fish, conch and salt being used as export commodities against a return of material goods (Sinelli, 2013:228; see also Morsink, 2012). The expectation is that some of these imported items extended to ceremonial or status items, such as monolithic axes – as suggested by de Booy’s (1912:91) excavations at Juba Point cave, where both a monolithic axe as well as Meillacoid ceramics were recovered.¹²

Anthropomorphic celts, monolithic axes and zoomorphic pestles and carvings are most often ascribed to the Chicoids (“Taino”¹³) who, until recently,

¹¹ Ostionoid refers to a distinctive ceramic tradition – and the bearers of that tradition (see also footnote 9 for wider context). The thin red ceramic style extended through Hispaniola ca. AD 600-1200, eventually entering eastern Cuba, Jamaica and the Turks and Caicos Islands (Rouse, 1992:95).

¹² Granberry considers the Juba Point ceramics as “Carrier” (Chicoid) based on the image that appears in de Booy (1912:Figure 4). However, this appears to be an error in the publication, as the ceramic featured in de Booy’s Figure 4 is provenanced to Dead Man’s Skull Bluff, Conch Bar, Middle Caicos in museum records (NMAI 031943). The ceramic fragments provenanced to Juba Point are Meillacoid in style (NMAI 031928; 031944; 031954, 031961), featuring oblique lines and punctates.

¹³ Indeed, broadly speaking, the material culture studied here is most often attributed to the “Taino” of the Greater Antilles, falling within an estimated AD 1200-1500 time frame (Rouse’s Period Iva; Rouse 1992:Fig 26). As early as the 1920s, Harrington (1921:Fig 8, 9 and 24) identified pestles

were thought to have displaced the Meillacoids (Rouse, 1992), the latter “disappearing” by ca. AD 1300 – though this is increasingly being questioned (Keegan and Hofman, 2017:127; Sinelli 2013). According to Rouse (1992), the apogee of artistic expression within the Caribbean was reached by the “Classic Taíno,” associated with the Chican Ostionoid/Chicoid ceramic styles, namely the “Boca Chica” style of the Dominican Republic and what used to be called the “Carrier” style of Haiti (Rouse, 1992). It is perhaps for this reason that Rouse (1941:173-174) assigned both a monolithic axe and an anthropomorphic celt recovered as surface finds near Savanne Carrée, Haiti to the “Carrier,” rather than the “Meillac” (Meillacoid) cultures.¹⁴ However, as argued by Keegan and Hofman (2017:127; 135) and Sinelli (2013), some Meillacoid cultural practices paralleled those seen at Chicoid sites, and their connections and common ideas merged in what we currently understand as “Taíno” (see also Wilson 1997:55). Chicoid and Meillacoid communities co-existed in the wider Caribbean region, and there was a mixing of styles with a select adoption of ceramic techniques and motifs (Ulloa Hung in Keegan and Hofman, 2017:149). If ceramic styles could have intermingled, to a degree, could other forms of material culture (e.g., monolithic axes)? Petaloid celts, for example, occur at almost every Meillacoid and Chicoid site in Haiti (Rouse, 1941:94), with Rouse finding “no appreciable differences between [them].” Rouse notes that the Meillacoids also had religious ceremonialism and paraphernalia, including cemís, though these were “simpler” than among the “Taíno” (Rouse, 1948:514; 1992:98-99; Sullivan, 1981:400). On Jamaica, dominated as it is by Meillacoid (and notably no Chicoid) settlements, a possible monolithic

with carved finials and anthropomorphic celts from various Cuban sites as “Taíno” (as opposed to “Ciboney” which glossed stone age culture – see Keegan 1989 for a critique). These, alongside monolithic axes, have been featured in more recent catalogues of Taíno art (Brecht *et al.*, 1997:Fig 38; 40; 83, 96; García Arévalo, 2019:180; 222-223); sculpted petaloid celts and monolithic axes are among the “classes that may be said to represent the Tainan culture proper at its height of development” (Kay 1976:189), and some suggest that monolithic axes found in the Lesser Antilles may be “Taíno trade items” (Waldron, 2019:228). Taíno is a vague classification, much critiqued recently (e.g., Curet 2014; Keegan and Hofman 2017:115), and if it is used, works best in its fullest and broadest sense – encompassing a mosaic of cultures (Curet, 2003; Wilson, 2007). Indeed, as noted by Keegan and Hofman (2017:195) in their overview of Jamaica, complex carving (whether free-standing sculpture, personal ornaments, etc.) is “too often... explained by simply adding the adjective ‘Taíno.’ However, at least in Jamaica, there is no evidence for the Chicoid influence that mark the arrival of ‘Taíno’ elsewhere in the region. Detailed studies of ceremonial objects are needed to better define their origins, distributions, associations, exchanges and especially their meanings.”

¹⁴ The anthropomorphic celt, 28.5cm long and carved of sandstone with concentric eyes and a nose at mid-section, suggests to Rouse (1941:173) a ceremonial object which was deposited in a cave rather than a refuse heap (and hence why comparable examples have not been found in excavations). The monolithic axe, also a surface find from the same township, is carved of dolerite and 22.2cm long, with two anthropomorphic heads emerging above the petaloid celt, and carving at the base of the handle suggestive of the digits of a foot. Rouse (1941:174) also considers this to be Chicoid in style.

axe fragment was recovered at Green Castle, a site dating ca. AD 1024-1645 (Allsworth-Jones and Wesler, 2012:189), stone pestles with figural finals have been documented on the island (Duerden, 2008 [1897]:259; Plate IV) and a fragment of an anthropomorphic head in sandstone was found at Harmony Hall (Allsworth-Jones, 2008:73; Fig 14.10). This simply goes to the point that our understanding of Meillacoid material culture is still nascent, particularly as regards artifacts such as monolithic axes and anthropomorphic celts that are rarely recovered from archaeological contexts. As Curet (2014:237) noted only a decade ago, the Meillacoid are “poorly studied and little is known about their social and political organization, settlement patterns and subsistence strategies.” We cannot, as yet, discount the possibility that these artifacts may have also been part of their repertoire.

No purely Chicoid sites are in evidence in the Lucayan archipelago (Keegan, 1997:38); rather, Chicoid ceramics are typically found associated with Palmetto Ware, indicating ongoing contacts with the Greater Antilles. For example, the site of Palmetto Junction, Providenciales, dating to AD 1280-1455, was dominated by Palmetto Ware (90%), with the remaining styles comprising both Chicoid and Meillacoid ceramics (Ciofalo and Graves, 2018). MC-12 (AD 1044-1406), on the northern coast of Middle Caicos, was settled by Lucayans who were involved in “intensive trade and visitation with Taino kin and trading partners” including those on northwestern Hispaniola bearing Chicoid ceramics influenced by Meillacoid motifs (Sullivan and Freimuth, 2017:34). And if ceramics were being imported at this and other sites, the assumption is that other objects – e.g., both raw and finished hard stone (e.g., jadeite celts, chert flakes) – were also imported at this time, reflecting an intensification of economic and political engagement with the Taino communities in the southern islands in, presumably, mutually beneficial exchange (Berman, Gnivecki and Pateman, 2013:268). The important site of MC-6, which Rouse included as part of the “Classic Taino” culture area on the basis of the plazas and other features (astronomical alignments and a road linking the settlement to a salt pond), had a high incidence of Palmetto Ware (92%; Sullivan, 1981:142), identifying it as a Lucayan site rather than a Taino outpost settlement. It also yielded a variety of Chicoid imports, including a “*cemi*” made of igneous stone recovered from Plaza II (Sullivan, 1981:143; 150). This site, dating to ca. AD 1400-1600, is considered an emerging Lucayan center consolidating both resources and power – an entrepôt through which goods circulated both north and south. Another stone “*cemi*” pendant fragment, featuring an anthropomorphic face, was recovered from CC-1 (West Beach site), Cotton Cay, a small island south of Grand Turk, along with Palmetto Ware ceramics (Keith and Davis 2018:1-2), again suggesting exotic stone *cemís* in the hands of Lucayans. Given the long-standing assumption that the stone artifacts under discussion sit late in the chronology of the region, aligning in

iconographic terms with “Taíno” material culture (viewed broadly), the most parsimonious expectation is that they were among the goods that circulated within interaction spheres linking the Lucayans with their southern neighbors. Different regions likely engaged within different interaction spheres – the central Bahamas with northern Cuba and Hispaniola while the Turks and Caicos with eastern Cuba and Hispaniola (Berman, Gnivecki and Pateman 2013:270) with the intensity of interaction likely affected by island propinquity (Berman, 2011:132). Yet we cannot discount the possibility that non-local stones were carved by local hands – that raw material was imported, and that the Lucayans (as opposed to Mellacoids or Chicoids) were creating some of these carvings; certainly, other elite artifacts, such as *duhos*, were being made locally (Ostapkowicz, 2015).

Could the style of the artifacts themselves hint at possible chronological placement? Fewkes conceived of a “development” of the petaloid celt into the anthropomorphic celt and finally into what he called the ceremonial baton (Figure 15a). This evolution progressed from an undecorated petaloid celt (Figure 15a, Fewkes’ number 1), through those featuring engraved and carved heads (2-3), to those depicting the schematic body within the confines of the celt (4) and finally to the body coming to the fore, and



Figure 15. a. Fewkes’ sketch charting the “development of the elaborate baton (ceremonial) from a simple petaloid” Jesse Walter Fewkes papers, manuscript 4408/59d, National Anthropology Archives, Smithsonian Institution. b. Two views of stone “baton,” L: 45cm; W: 9.2cm; D: 6.9cm, “St Domingo,” accessioned 1861, Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen, ODI.g5. c. Fewkes’ illustration of “stone figure,” made during his visit to the museum in October 1913. Jesse Walter Fewkes papers, manuscript 4408/59d, National Anthropology Archives, Smithsonian Institution. Photos: Joanna Ostapkowicz, courtesy institutions listed.

expanding beyond the petaloid form (5). His ultimate example was the stone carving in the collections of the National Museum of Copenhagen (Figure 15b-c). If perceived as an elaboration of a celt, this is among the largest examples currently known, measuring 45cm (see also Herrera Fritot 1964:Fig XIXa for another also measuring 45cm in length). This would have more of an appearance of a stone anthropomorph carving were it not for the celt blade that emerges from the head of the figure, conforming to the typical alignment of the body within the petaloid form (the head appears at the widest point, directly below the blade, with the proximal tip below the feet). Herrera Fritot (1964:62, Fig. VIIa) expands this evolution to include “stone daggers” – where the human figure essentially becomes the handle above an ovate “blade”; as the figure is not confined to the petaloid shape, the celt connection is not as obvious as in other examples. In any case, it is unlikely that this progression from simple to complex marks a strictly linear chronological development; all varieties are likely contemporary and, based on our current knowledge, spanned post-AD 800.

Aside from the question of an insular Caribbean “evolution” of anthropomorphic celts, discussions have recently returned to evaluating their possible deeper histories, proposing mainland sources for both anthropomorphic celts and monolithic axes. “Axe-gods” or “celtiforms” (Mora-Marín, 2021:60) – pendants carved as zoomorphic or anthropomorphic figures confined to a celt-like form – were not uncommon in the wider region, being particularly prominent in Costa Rica between 500 BC and AD 500, and even earlier, as evidenced by the votive axes among the Mesoamerican Olmec (ca. 1200-400 BC). There is a long history of assessing stylistic similarities between these anthropomorphic celtiforms (summarized in Mora-Marín 2021), with some proposing that they were a product of long-distance networks connecting Mesoamerica, southern Central America, northern Colombia, and the Antilles, through “indirect diffusion” (Mora-Marín, 2021:60) or “macro-regional interactions” (Rodríguez Ramos, 2010:38; 2011:150-151). This is not an entirely new argument for the Antilles: Lovén (2010 [1935]:164), writing in 1935, argued that the “pedigree of the figure-axe is of ancient origin in Mexico, wherefrom it radiated in different directions and even made its way to the Tainos.” More recently, Rodríguez Ramos (2010:38; 2011:150-151), in evaluating exotic jade and “social jade” artifacts featuring a celtiform in Huecoid and Saladoid contexts (ca. ~500 BC-AD 500/700), has argued for Isthmo-Colombian connections and influences spreading into the Caribbean, following on from a much deeper (pre-)history of connections that brought cultivars (e.g., maize, manioc, sweet potatoes) from the mainland ca. 2500 BC (e.g., Rodríguez Ramos 2010:28; Rodríguez Ramos and Pagan Jimenez 2007). The celtiform example used to illustrate this connection is a nephrite anthropomorphic pendant from Antigua, said to “echo stylistically” the anthropomorphic celtiform theme

common in Costa Rica (Rodríguez Ramos, 2011:152; 2013:164).¹⁵ This, together with the depiction of raptorial birds, curly-tailed animals, frog-shaped figures and winged pendants in select insular Caribbean contexts, alongside the practice of string sawing (a technique not documented in the Caribbean outside of Puerto Rico [Rodríguez Ramos 2010:30]), transverse drilling and Central American materials (e.g., jades), suggest an Isthmo-Colombian connection and a “package” of iconography (Rodríguez Ramos 2010:24-25; 33), one that “continued to be produced long after their heyday in Costa Rica..., depicted in... vomit spatulas... celts, and adzes” (Rodríguez Ramos and Hoopes, 2021:314).

According to Rodríguez Ramos (2010:44) the increasing use of local (Caribbean, as opposed to Central American) jade sources from ca. AD 1000 spurred “a tradition of celt making... that [in turn] emphasized the representation of axe gods” (Rodríguez Ramos, 2010:44). More substantive anthropomorphic celts emerged in Hispaniola, Cuba and Puerto Rico, though Rodríguez Ramos (2010:38) suggests that these are still reminiscent of the Costa Rican celtiforms. Even in these later years both “monolithic axes and decorated celts continue to show significant concomitances between the two regions” (Rodríguez Ramos, 2013:166). This implies long-term connections, or perhaps a local development of the style into large, hand-held implements, though other iconographic elements, such as raptorial bird pendants, were not scaled similarly, nor continued in a recognizable form. There are, however, notable differences among the Antillean anthropomorphic celts and the celtiforms of the mainland, including the Antillean examples having the facial features depicted towards the blade, or distal, end of the celt form¹⁶ (as opposed to the butt or proximal end, as common in Costa Rican examples) (e.g., Rodríguez Ramos, 2010:38). Nor are they perforated for suspension, split in half, or found in funerary contexts like their Costa Rican counterparts (Kuboyama-Haraikawa, 2023: 31). Further, jade was not the choice material for these artefacts: the Bahamian/TCI examples are carved of relatively soft imported stone (greywacke, meta-tuff, meta-basalt, mafic schist), as opposed to jades, nephrites or “social greenstones.”

¹⁵ The ca. 10cm pendant features a shallowly carved anthropomorphic body confined to an elongated oval shape of the stone, and is drilled transversely for suspension (Rodríguez Ramos, 2010:Fig 2a; 2011:Fig 1h) – though apart from these features, there are few concrete stylistic similarities to link it strongly with Costa Rican examples. In fact, Mora-Marín (2021:60) suggests that the “compositional scheme of the Antillean celtiform objects is more like the Mesoamerican examples than the Costa Rican examples” – though this is equally debatable. There are only so many ways one can depict an anthropomorphic body within the confines of a pendant or celt; an abbreviation is required, often limited to only salient features (head, arms, legs).

¹⁶ The only exception to this ‘rule’ is the anthropomorphic celt from the ‘Caicos’ Figure 2a, which features the head at the proximal end of the celt form.

A similar proposition is set forth for monolithic axes, another artifact class with a “heavy ideological load” and thought to resemble Isthmo-Colombian examples (Rodríguez Ramos, 2010:38). Alternative scenarios have also been proposed: Gendron (2016:39), basing his assessment on several monolithic axe “eccentrics” (flaked from flint and obsidian) recovered from Mesoamerican archaeological contexts, is of the opinion that monolithic axes first emerged among the Maya from ca. AD 600, spreading north to the southeastern US and south to circum-Caribbean cultures. In contrast, Lovén (2010 [1935]:161) suggested that monolithic axes first appeared among “the complex of the late cultures of higher development in the Southeastern States rather than among the Tainos,” as he considered the former to be “superior.” But while there may be broad similarities between the mainland examples and those of the Caribbean, such uni-directional influences (typically from the presumed “higher cultures” of the mainland) cannot be assumed; such arguments, where they are based mainly on subjective stylistic similarities, hinge largely on “abductive reasoning” (see Curet and Oliver, 2021:322-323; also Curet and Oliver, 2022:373-374) – i.e., best prediction based on incomplete observations. Broad stylistic similarities and island/mainland propinquity do not necessarily support long-term foreign influence/connection. For example, aside from the iconographic set highlighted by Rodríguez Ramos (2010:Figure 2; 2011:Figure 1) largely from La Hueca-Sorcé contexts, only rare, isolated finds of diagnostic Isthmo-Colombian artefacts in the Caribbean, and vice-versa, have been reported.¹⁷ And while there is the occasional convincing find, isolated artefacts do not a pattern make: whether and to what extent the contact that facilitated their circulation was sustained over longer periods is unclear.

While this broader view – towards the mainland and across the islands – is certainly thought-provoking, and while I fully agree with the call to “deinsularize” Caribbean archaeology, establishing these connections, and their scale and impact, must be evidence-based (Rodríguez Ramos and Pagan Jimenez, 2007; Curet and Oliver, 2021; 2022). Over the last decade,

¹⁷ Most of these stylistic comparables remain vague on details - Mora-Marín (2021:48), for example, mentions the “potential presence of Antillean-style jade pendants in Costa Rica,” though does not engage with what these are and how they are identified. There is a need for better-documented examples if such arguments are to be taken forward – e.g., Curet and Oliver (2022:376-377) point to two trigoliths recovered from sites in Colombia and Venezuela, providing references and illustrations. Further, with the exception of examples of good archaeological context (e.g., an imported *guanin* fragment found at Maisabel, Puerto Rico and dating to ca. AD 70-374 – as reported in Siegel and Severin, 1992:77), some pieces may have been transferred to the respective regions historically, whether by collectors (for legacy collections) or early colonial-period trade (e.g., the *guanin* bird-headed pendant associated with Burial 57 at El Chorro de Maita, Cuba, featuring iconography with strong stylistic parallels to Colombian examples, may have been acquired via colonial period Spanish sources, Martinon-Torres *et al.*, 2011:450; Valcárcel Rojas, 2016:215). Given this, it is necessary to have as thorough a background as possible on the artifact in question.

groundbreaking archaeobotanical, geochemical and petrological research have provided in-roads into assessing long-distance connections within the circum-Caribbean; from the introduction of domesticated plants to the circulation of jadeite materials, these studies have confirmed connections between the South and Central American mainland and islands going back some considerable time (e.g., Harlow *et al.*, 2006; Hofman *et al.*, 2007; 2010; 2011; Pagán-Jiménez, 2013; Rodríguez Ramos, 2010; 2011; Rodríguez Ramos and Pagán-Jiménez, 2007; Rodríguez Ramos, 2024). What we need is equally quantifiable investigations of the stylistic and iconographic connections based on tangible examples. If the proposed connections involving Caribbean “celtiforms”/anthropomorphic celts and monolithic axes are to be assessed, what is needed first and foremost is a thorough investigation of Caribbean examples as well as their mainland counterparts. Without this foundation or baseline, there is currently little understanding of the corpus as a whole and the stylistic variation within it, let alone what may have spurred the development of these artifact styles. As Saville (1916:13) noted over a century ago, the spread of stylistic influences via a definitive “route” from the mainland (whether Central or South American) seems impossible to establish conclusively: “we feel forced to... leave the matter undetermined until we know more of the archaeology of the Antilles, northern South America, and the Caribbean coast of Central America.” Despite the significant amount of research that has taken place in the region since the early 1900s, and the resurgence of interest in investigating stylistic links, this remains the case today.

In conclusion, and pending a much wider study of these artifact categories, chronologies of individual carvings must remain rather broad, and the cultural affiliation equally wide-ranging (e.g., Meillacoid, Chicoid). Whether certain stylistic features link some examples to a Haitian homeland (e.g., Figure 2b) or whether the “crests” at the top of hafts are abstractions of anthropo/zoomorphs that may be stylistically unique to the archipelago (e.g., Figure 8a, d), are aspects that need further investigation. Function and meaning remain equally elusive. The paradox is that these “tools” are essentially ineffectual as tools – neither a monolithic axe nor an anthropomorphic celt can be used for chopping or carving (figural pestles still have a functional capacity, however). In the case of monolithic axes and anthropomorphic celts, why was an essentially functional form turned into something that no longer functioned as originally intended? This would suggest a transition to the symbolic, where a shape or form comes to signify the original, and through it, the actions linked with it. Thus, a petaloid form, whether carved with an anthropomorph or incorporated into a monolithic axe, may have come to symbolize the undercurrent of actions that established its symbolic currency, e.g., a tool used to create the canoe that travelled the waters to facilitate the acquisition of more celts, or materials for their creation.

Over the years, these objects have been interpreted in a variety of ways, but consistently subsumed under the “ceremonial” (e.g., Fewkes, 1922:176; Herrera Fritot, 1938:9-10). Herrera Fritot (1938:9-10) noting their infrequency in the archaeological record (in comparison to petaloid celts), considered that their use was “limited to certain individuals of a certain social hierarchy... and probably only used by them at festivals or ceremonies, as a symbol of superiority or command.” Monolithic axes, for example, have sometimes been interpreted as weapons – but ones which were “probably intended primarily for ceremonial use” (Wilson 1997:52). Waldron (2019:227) notes that if used as weapons, “human bones would easily break under their assault” – yet, for all their potential force, they are fragile items, easily chipped or broken if swung against an immovable object, mishandled or dropped. If these are symbols of “prowess in war,” they were rather delicate symbols, requiring careful curation, handling and storage (cf. Waldron 2019:227-228; indeed, this is no different to other power objects elaborated from a functional form, such as a European king’s ceremonial mace). Waldron (2019:227, 228) further suggests that monolithic axes could be the accoutrements of *behiques*, used in healing or blessing ceremonies – though does not clarify on what this interpretation is based. This finds support more broadly, on the South American mainland, where monolithic axes have been used to channel supernatural forces: ancient Tairona monolithic axes have been used in current Kágaba (Kogi) solstice and equinox ceremonies, with green stone examples used specifically to call for rain (Reichel-Dolmatoff in Bray 2003:312).¹⁸ Anthropomorphic axes, according to Fewkes (1907:96), were carried in the hand (presumably on ceremonial occasions) rather than being hafted to a wooden handle, given that the latter would obscure their carving. Given their elaborate carving, many consider them to have been used as insignia of rank (Fewkes, 1922:176). Indeed, all these artifacts were “expensive” objects – from the labor involved in their manufacture to the time invested in their circulation via long-distant networks, which themselves took time and effort to maintain by those affluent enough to have the ambition and reach. Like the equally enigmatic stone collars and trigoliths, which still elude understanding despite nearly a century of study, it is argued (e.g., Oliver, 2009:129) that monolithic axes and anthropomorphic celts “functioned” in the ritual theatre of chiefly power and regalia.

Many consider the anthro/zoomorphic carvings on these artifacts to be representations of *cemis*, spirits or mythic beings. Fewkes (1922:176) notes that “the most highly ornamented [anthropomorphic celts] bear a morphological likeness to idols, and their forms imply more than the term ‘decorated celt’ would indicate.” Lovén (2010 [1935]:163) draws particular

¹⁸ They are carried by the *mamas*, who are not shamans per se, but part of an institutional priesthood (Reichel-Dolmatoff in Bray, 2003:320).

attention to the two depicted in Moorehead's volume (Figure 5), noting that these Bahamian examples "resemble engraved celts but are completely perfected idols, seeing that in place of a cutting-edge below there is a little notch so that two short legs appear." An intriguing variant within the anthropomorphic celt range is the mummiform carving recovered from the Caicos ca. 1860 (Figure 2a), featuring a head above a tightly bundled form. The absence of arms and legs evokes the impression of a wrapped body, echoing the "wrapped ancestor" imagery that spans the Caribbean – from pictographs at Cueva la Mora, Puerto Rico and petroglyphs at Hartford Cave, Rum Cay to shell ornaments from Baracoa, Cuba and Coralie, Grand Turk (Ostapkowicz, 2023:Figure 2.23). Given the prevalence of ancestral imagery and the practice of keeping ancestral remains close – whether skeletal remains bundled into gourds and hung from the house rafters, as documented by the early cronistas (Colón, 1992) or encased in cotton sculptures (Ostapkowicz and Newsom, 2012) – it is quite possible that ancestors were also channeled within these stone carvings, alongside the imagery of *cemís* and mythic beings. Waldron (2019:228) suggests that such depictions on pestles channel "spiritual forces" in the service of *behiques*. Petitjean Roget (1997:107) considers that certain monolithic axes may reference Hispaniolan myths: to him, those topped with a figure above the blade suggest a hunch back in profile, evoking the impregnated Deminan Caracaracol who bears a female turtle on his back which is born when his brothers use an axe to open the hump. These various interpretations highlight the seemingly ambivalent nature of these artifacts – part tool, part spiritual being.

At a basic level, petaloid celts are the core components of anthropomorphic celts and monolithic axes. They had a clear practical and symbolic resonance for Caribbean cultures. With these artifacts, canoes, houses and *duhos* could be carved and fields cleared of trees for horticulture – in other words, the physical and, arguably, spiritual supports of the community were constructed. It is perhaps in this capacity that the depiction of anthropomorphic celts and monolithic axes can be understood – they morphed the elegant petaloid shape of a clearly functional object into something that merged with the numinous, functioning in completely different realms of status and ceremony. Laboriously carved in stone, they lent even greater "weight" to the tasks (ceremonies, events) at hand. Such objects became symbols rather than tools, yet clearly still confined the "being" within the tool's form, suggesting a conceptual link and equivalency that will continue to challenge interpretations.

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