Gifts, Goods and Money

Comparing currency and circulation systems in past societies

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New wealth from the Old World: glass, jet and mirrors in the late fifteenth to early sixteenth century indigenous Caribbean

Joanna Ostapkowicz

Abstract

One of the most momentous cross-cultural collisions occurred in the Caribbean in 1492, heralding a period of rapid change in both 'New' and 'Old' Worlds. During the early years of the colonial period, when new relationships were being established, material objects became active agents in the interactions between the indigenous Taíno and the Spanish. The Taíno gifted the Spanish with objects that had significance in their own world, in an attempt to enmesh the Spanish into Taíno socio-political and economic networks. In turn, Spanish objects entered into Taíno value systems. Glass and jet beads, mirrors and brass ornaments were integrated into prestigious objects, such as the two surviving Taíno cotton sculptures that form the focus of this paper: a belt in the collections of the Weltmuseum Wien and a composite sculpture in the Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico 'Luigi Pigorini', Rome. These pieces offer a glimpse into how Old World exotics were reinterpreted and integrated into indigenous value systems during a period of cultural transition and change.

Keywords: Caribbean, early colonial period (AD 1492–1550), Taíno/Lucayans, European 'exotics', indigenous value systems

Résumé

Nouvelles richesses du Ancien Monde : verre, jais et miroirs à la fin du XV et au début du XVI siècle dans les caraïbes indigènes

Une des plus importantes collisions interculturelles s'est produite en 1492 dans les caraïbes, annonçant une période de rapide changement au sein du Nouveau et de l'Ancien Monde. Pendant les premières années de la période coloniale, quand les nouvelles relations s'établissaient, les biens matériels devinrent des agents actifs au sein des relations entre les indigènes Taïno et les Espagnols. Les Taïnos ont donné aux Espagnols des objets qui avaient une signification dans leur monde dans le but d'emmener les Espagnols dans les systèmes socio-politique et économique Taïno. A leur tour, les objets espagnols entrèrent au sein des systèmes socio-politiques et économique Taïno. Les perles en jais et en verre, les miroirs et les ornements en laiton furent intégrés comme des objets prestigieux à l'image des deux sculptures de coton Taïno qui sont l'objet de cet article: une ceinture issue des collections du Musée du Monde de Vienne et une sculpture composite dans le Musée National de Préhistoire et d'Ethnographie 'Luigi Pigorini', Rome. Ces pièces donnent un aperçu de la façon dont les produits exotiques de l'Ancien Monde ont été réinterprétés et intégrés dans les systèmes de valeur indigènes pendant une période de transition culturelle et de changement.

Mots-clés: Caraïbe, début de la période coloniale (AD 1492–1550), Taïnos/Lucayens, produits exotiques européens, systèmes de valeur indigène

Zusammenfassung

Neue Reichtümer aus der Alten Welt: Glas, Gagat und Spiegel am Ende des 15. und Beginn des 16. Jahrhunderts in der indigenen Karibik

Zu einer der folgenträchtigsten Kollisionen zwischen verschiedenen Kulturen kam es 1492 in der Karibik, womit eine Zeit rapiden Wandels sowohl in der „Neuen" als auch in der „Alten" Welt eingeleitet wurde. In den Anfangsjahren der Kolonialzeit, als neue Beziehungen Gestalt annahmen, wurden materielle Gegenstände zu aktiven Medien im gegenseitigen Umgang zwischen indigenen Taíno und Spaniern. Die Taíno beschenkten die Spanier mit Gegenständen, die in ihrer eigenen Welt als Bedeutungsträger agierten; damit versuchten sie, die Spanier in ihre eigenen soziopolitischen und wirtschaftlichen Netzwerke zu verstricken. Im Gegenzug hielten spanische Gegenstände Einzug in die Wertsysteme der Taíno. Perlen aus Glas und Gagat, Spiegel und Messingschmuck wurden in Prestigeobjekte eingearbeitet, wie zum Beispiel in die beiden erhaltenen Taíno Baumwollskulpturen, die im Mittelpunkt dieses Beitrags stehen: ein Gürtel in den Sammlungen des Weltmuseums Wien und eine Kompositskulptur im Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico 'Luigi Pigorini', Rom. Diese Gegenstände gewähren einen Einblick in die Praxis der Reinterpretation und Integration altweltlicher Exotika in indigene Wertsysteme während einer Zeit kulturellen Übergangs und Wandels.

Schlüsselwörter: Karibik, frühe Kolonialzeit (1492–1550 n. Chr.), Taíno/ Lucayan, europäische Exotika, inidigene Wertsysteme

Introduction

1492 marked a critical turning point in history, when two worlds collided and a truly global economy began. During the early years of this new trans-Atlantic world, when languages failed to connect people, material culture was an immediate means of communication and negotiation, initially carried out via mutually beneficial transactions. The 'Taíno' (the problematic umbrella term that has come to represent the indigenous people of the Caribbean Greater Antilles, but glosses over their cultural and linguistic diversity; Curet 2014) were enthusiastic in their acquisition of introduced Spanish goods such as brass, glass beads and mirrors. Crucially, these 'exotics' had resonance with their own valuables, such as the lustrous surfaces of gold and *guanín* (a gold-copper alloy), the iridescent qualities of shell and bird feather ornaments, the rich tones of hardwoods and the deep greens of jadeites. The allure of such materials has been termed the 'aesthetic of brilliance' (Oliver 2000; Saunders 1998; 1999; 2003), binding circum-Caribbean cultures in a network of exchanges that spanned the vast region and stretched into the surrounding mainland. Vibrancy, brilliance and iridescence — whether in materials, artefacts or natural phenomena

— were qualities understood to have cosmological force, tapping into the numinous. Valuables central to Taíno elite status, such as *guiazas*, or masks, ceremonial chairs known as *duhos* and elaborate cotton belts, were specifically gifted to the Spanish by *caciques*, or chiefs, in efforts to draw the foreigners into indigenous socio-political and economic networks, and in so doing build long-term reciprocal relationships. In turn, the objects the Spanish exchanged entered into Taíno systems of value. Glass beads, mirrors and brass ornaments were integrated into high-value objects, such as the two surviving Taíno cotton pieces that form the focus of this paper: a composite zoo/anthropomorphic sculpture in the Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico 'L. Pigorini' in Rome (Figure 1), and a belt in the collections of the Weltmuseum Wien (Figure 2), both attributed on stylistic grounds to Hispaniola (Haiti/Dominican Republic; for ease of reference, the two pieces will be referred to in the remainder of the text as the 'Pigorini *cemi*' and 'Vienna belt').

Figure 1. Three views of the Pigorini *cemí*, showing the two faces of this janus-like figurine: the human side featuring a rhinoceros horn mask, and the animal face — possibly that of a bat — covered lavishly with green glass beads. This composite sculpture consists of an elaborate, figural top (*cemí*) positioned over an adult-sized belt, wrapped around a wood base (a later display mount). Its history in Europe can be traced back to the 1680 inventory of Fernando Cospi's collection in Bologna. Cotton, shell and glass beads, mirrors, gold, vegetable fibre, feathers(?), resin, pigment, wood base; AD 1492–1524 (Bayesian modelled), Hispaniola. H: 31.5cm; Diam: 20.5cm (max). Photograph: Ostapkowicz; courtesy of the Polo Museale del Lazio - Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico "L.Pigorini", su concessione del Mibact, acc no. 4190.

These objects provide insight into the value systems of the indigenous Caribbean during the early years of contact, and this paper serves as an introduction to ongoing work on their manufacture, context and meaning.[1]

The early colonial period, when interactions between the Spanish and Taíno were at their most sustained and intense, is generally thought to have ended *c.* 1520 on Hispaniola, with Taíno demographic and cultural collapse due to forced labour, disease and religious conversion (e.g. Deagan 1987b: 343). However, there are suggestions that some cultural traditions persisted: in 1517, many *indios* were escaping into the mountains and other regions outside Spanish control (Guitar 1998: 249) and, left 'unsupervised', were reverting back to traditional ways, to 'do those things that their parents and ancestors had done' (Guitar 1998: 226–7). By 1534 the Spanish were reporting the return of some *indios* to 'idolatry, vices, sins and other abominable customs' (Guitar 1998: 132). Archival documentation suggests that indigenous rebellions, with *cimarron* (escaped African slaves) support, continued into the 1540s (Guitar 1998: 391), that some cultural practices, such as *areítos* (ceremonies involving dance and songs), were still being practised at this time, and that cacical authority was still recognised by the Spanish as late as 1547 (though not on the scale of influence seen during the first two decades of the colonial encounter; Guitar 1998: 115, 207). However, the use of elite accoutrements, such as belts and elaborate *cemís* (a representation of a spirit, deity or ancestor), which required skilled, intensive labour and an intact cultural context, could not be maintained for long. As Guitar (1998: 423) acknowledges, 'after 1492, the privileged groups of Classic Taíno artistic specialists who designed and produced prestige goods for *caciques* [...] disappeared' and only domestic artistry survived (see also Deagan 2004). Given the above, and the uncertainties pertaining to this turbulent period of indigenous history, a date of 1550 seems a reasonable chronological marker for the demise of Taíno 'traditional' elite material culture (Ostapkowicz 2013). However, this in no way implies an end point to colonial interactions, nor to the ongoing merging of cultural traditions (cf. Guitar *et al.* 2006; Hayes and Cipolla 2015).

[1] As the study of these pieces is as yet incomplete, one caveat is necessary: there is still some uncertainty over the security of association between the European materials on the Vienna belt, given that they are not fully integrated into the belt's weave (Ostapkowicz 2013). In contrast, while the Pigorini *cemí* features European beads woven tightly into its structure, some have questioned whether the entire piece is an early sixteenth century pastiche made for a princely *Kunstkammer* rather than an indigenous creation (Scalini 2001: 129–32, 142). While there are clear interventions — the cotton structure being nailed to an early wooden display mount — there are many other features that argue for both the Pigorini and Vienna pieces being the work of indigenous hands, conforming to Taíno aesthetics and demonstrating stylistic parallels with depictions of such artefacts in other media (i.e. ceramics). Given this, while suggestions raised in this paper are in some instances speculative and must await confirmation through further work, they are based on a firm foundation of comparative studies and contextual ethnographic documentation.

Figure 2. Cotton belt with indigenous shell beads and European jet, brass and mirror additions, featuring a central zoomorphic *cemí* with upturned hands, AD 1475–1635 (95.4% probability; three radiocarbon dates combined). Full length, with straps, 116.5 cm (beaded strap only, 85.5cm), height 70mm. Photograph: Ostapkowicz; courtesy of the Weltmuseum Wien, inv. no. 10.443.

The two artefacts described in this paper are the only surviving Taíno elite objects from this relatively short period of initial interaction currently known. As such they are a critical starting point for assessing how 'valuables' such as European exotics resonated with the value systems of the peoples of the New World.

Capturing foreign wealth

From their very first encounters, the Spanish and the Taíno were bound together by gift giving, exchange and barter (Keehnen 2011; 2012; Mol 2007; Oliver 2000; 2009). Each had ample experience in far-flung trade — the Spanish within Europe, North Africa and, albeit less directly, Asia (indeed, the aims of the Columbian enterprise were to establish direct trade with Japan and China; Kagan 1991: 56; Kamen 2005) and the Taíno (as well as other Caribbean peoples) throughout the length of the Caribbean chain (Siegel 2011), into the South American mainland (Hofman *et al.* 2007; 2011) and possibly the Isthmo-Colombian region (Rodriguez 2011). Neither, therefore, was new to the allure of the exotic (Helms 1988). Worth was quickly established by both parties, initially fuelled by the desirability of the new, but as interaction increased, there was a growing understanding of what the 'Other' valued most: gold was clearly the focus of Spanish interest while for the Taíno (who also valued gold), it was other highly coveted luminous materials (whether glass or brass). These valuables — or rather their qualities — were long appreciated on both sides of the Atlantic and each side interpreted the transactions in terms of their own value systems, setting the terms of trade accordingly (cf. Keehnen 2012). The Taíno were not, as often implied, ignorant of worth (a highly biased view that

privileges Western aesthetics and value systems above all others); they simply had their own concepts of what was important, desirable and valuable. And it is this context that is of interest here.

On 12 October 1492, Columbus's first day on San Salvador, Bahamas, the admiral's log noted a multitude of transactions: 'they brought us parrots, spun cotton [...] javelins, and many other things; and they traded them to us for other things that we gave them, such as small glass beads and bells' (Lardicci 1999: 48). Columbus used his trade commodities from the start as gifts: 'in order that they might feel great amity towards us [I] gave to some among them some red caps and some glass beads, which they hung round their necks, and many other things [...]. At this they were greatly pleased and became so entirely our friends that it was a wonder to see' (Parry and Keith 1984: 29). To the Lucayans (inhabitants of the Bahamas, and culturally linked to the Taíno), this magnanimity was expected given Columbus's role as leader — or *cacique* — whose high status required generosity and reciprocity. In this way, Spanish exotics quickly entered into indigenous trade networks: only three days after their initial exchanges on San Salvador, Columbus encountered a man travelling in a canoe between the Bahamian islands of Rum Key and Long Island, carrying with him a basket containing a string of small glass beads and two Spanish coins (Dunn and Kelley 1989: 85). News of the foreigners — and their trade goods — was preceding them via the long-established indigenous networks that bound these island communities together.

But it was not until his arrival in Hispaniola in December 1492 that Columbus entered into the realm of politicised gift exchanges with the local *caciques*. Indigenous wealth in the form of belts, stone bead necklaces and gold were presented to Columbus in a series of formalised offerings. As recorded by the early *cronistas* (Spanish chroniclers), belts were among the first gifts offered by Taíno elite to Columbus. On 18 December 1492, for example, a Hispaniolan *cacique* presented Columbus with his first native belt, prompting Columbus to reciprocate with a variety of gifts, including red shoes, amber beads and a flask of flower water (Parry and Keith 1984: 40–1). Four days later, on 22 December, Columbus was sent a belt featuring a mask inlaid with gold by *cacique* Guacanagari's emissaries. It is this example that the historian Bartolome de Las Casas delights in describing, clearly having handled the original:

> the ambassador was sent with a belt that, instead of a purse, had a mask, which had two large ears, a tongue and nose of hammered gold; this belt was made with something like fine stones, very small and pearl-like, made of white fish bones [shells], interspersed with some coloured ones, like a kind of needlework; [it was] worked in such a way, with the cotton thread so

> tightly sewn and with such beautiful skill, that both the front and back of the belt appeared beautifully made [...] all in white, that it was a pleasure to see, as if it was woven on a frame and in the way that the weavers make the edges of chasubles in Castile; and [it] was so hard and so strong that without doubt I believe an arquebus could not shoot through it, or only with difficulty; it was four fingers in width, in the manner of those used by the kings and great lords of Castile, embroidered or made of gold thread (de las Casas 1951: 272).

It is noteworthy that belts were the first official presents to the Admiral in recognition of his status, as they were among a select group of objects that distinguished members of the Taíno elite. Their production was labour-intensive — from the manufacture of the shell beads to the weaving of the cotton — reflecting the wealth and affluence of the *cacique* in being able to accrue these valuable materials and in securing the labour of skilled artisans to transform them into wearable works of 'art' (Ostapkowicz 2013).

The Vienna belt

One such belt is held in the collections of Weltmuseum Wien (Figure 2). It was originally part of the Schatzkammer, the imperial treasury of Vienna established in 1556, though it is not known when the belt first entered the collection (Ostapkowicz 2013: 295–6). Framed by a band of geometric designs and executed in nearly 11,000 drilled conch (*Strombus gigas*) and jewel box (*Chama sarda*) beads, it features a central maskette depicting the hands and face of a *cemí*. The sheer quantity of shell beads underscores the labour that went into this belt, when one considers that each tiny bead (c. 5mm diameter) was made using stone tools — from cutting, grinding down and drilling to the final polishing. One seventeenth-century account of bead manufacture by the neighbouring Carib/Kalinago notes that they 'could not make one [bead] to perfection and pierce it with the tools that they use in less than three days' (de la Borde in Roth 1924: 119). Replication studies suggest that a skilled specialist may have made as many as five beads in a day, with 300 over a period of two months (Carlson 1993: 70); at this rate, 11,000 beads would represent six months' labour for ten specialists. This does not take into account the labour involved in making the cotton framework — from picking, processing and spinning to weaving. If this one belt entailed such work, then Guacanagari's gift of 12 belts to Columbus on his return voyage in 1493 not only highlighted the affluence of the *cacique*, but his desire in forging links with the Spanish (Ostapkowicz 2013).

Amidst the wealth of indigenous shell beads featured on the Vienna belt are a number of European imports: two flat mirrors for eyes, a pair of jet beads at the top of the head secured with brass pins, as well as one small facetted jet

bead in the right earflare. These have been placed precisely where traditional inlays of gold or shell would normally be featured, echoing the qualities of these bright, reflective surfaces and maintaining the Taíno aesthetic while extending it to include foreign materials. However, these items appear to be surface additions rather than directly woven into the framework of the belt, suggesting that they were added some time after the belt was woven, possibly when it was repaired or modified to accommodate the new foreign valuables (for more detailed discussion, see Ostapkowicz 2013). As the symbol of cacical authority, belts offered an appropriate medium for capturing the reflective allure of new materials in the service of indigenous symbolism and meaning.

The Pigorini cemí

If the Vienna belt selectively features a few choice foreign valuables, integrating them subtly and in accordance with traditional Taíno aesthetics, then the Pigorini *cemí* is a tour-de-force (Figure 1). Often presented as a single object, it is actually made of two entirely separate pieces: a full-sized adult belt (Biscione 1997: 158), made entirely of indigenous shell beads, and a separate Janus-figure *cemí* that could have been worn as an elaborate headpiece. One side of the *cemí* features a prognathic face, variously identified as a bat (Biscione 1997: 162) or a human skull (Roe 1997: 165); the other shows a human face. The Pigorini belt and *cemí* share the same geometric designs, materials and manufacture techniques, suggesting that they were made as a set. They also exhibit many similarities with the Vienna belt, and these three objects have long been linked, potentially suggesting the same source, or even the same maker, as well as a shared history in European collections prior to being separated (Biscione 1997; Feest 1991; Roe 1997; Schweeger-Hefel 1952; Vega 1987).

Nearly 1700 glass beads have been incorporated into the design of the Pigorini *cemí*: approximately 1200 small green beads are used on the face and back of the head, roughly 450 deep blue corner-faceted beads are featured at the shoulders and originally 10 small turquoise/white Nueva Cadiz beads, of which only one remains, would have adorned the head. When these European beads are added to the sheer volume of indigenous beads, the piece exudes sixteenth century Taíno wealth. Over 20,000 shell beads are woven into the surface, suggesting a year's full time work for ten specialists. In addition, six cut mirrors feature in the eyes and ear flares. But the most exceptional aspect of this astonishing sculpture is the use of rhinoceros horn for the human mask (Biscione 1997: 162) — whether of Asian or African origin is the subject of future investigation. Yet the mask again conforms to Taíno aesthetics. The Pigorini *cemí* is thus a lavish display of Old World exotics harnessed within the confines of an indigenous prism, in the service of the *cemí* it represents and the *cacique* who had the power to wield it.

'Dividuals': defining the web of connections

In the following discussion, the Vienna belt and Pigorini *cemí* are deconstructed to their component parts in an effort to understand how their different materials were perceived, appreciated and valued, and particularly how the European materials may have echoed or complemented indigenous valuables. The aim is not to treat them so much as isolated objects but as nodes in a web of interaction between the Taíno and the Spanish. They are, in a sense, the material equivalents of Strathern's dividuals (1988), in which persons are not discrete entities, but rather are extended in space and time through their interactions and connections with others, and indeed are defined by them. In order to engage with these aspects, and using these two objects as the foci, six early colonial period materials are explored through *cronista* references to their use, combined with archaeological evidence:

1) Spanish *cuentas/abalorios* (glass beads) and indigenous shell and stone beads (the latter known by the Taíno term *cibas* or *sibas*);

2) jet (Spanish: *azabache*) and lignite/fossil woods, a less well-known indigenous valuable that nevertheless likely had a deep history in the circum-Caribbean region;

3–5) metals, both indigenous and Spanish: *caona*, the Taíno term for gold; *guanín,* the indigenous name for a gold-copper-silver-alloy; *turey,* a term used by the Taíno to refer to the sky but which also came to identify brass (copper-zinc) imports;

6) *espejos,* a Spanish term denoting mirrors, which were highly prized by the Taíno, both in their indigenous form (gold/*guanín*) and in their new manifestation: European glass mirrors.

These materials were undoubtedly graded both within and between each category; nevertheless the parallels between them provide a point of departure for discussion. One aspect to their value was their colour and brilliance: green, black and warm gold, together with their shining, reflective surfaces coalesced in objects that were not only aesthetic and desirable, but spiritually charged. Individually and collectively these categories of objects provide a clearer picture of indigenous value systems, and of the role of exchange in the process of social change in the indigenous Caribbean (cf. Appadurai 1986; Gosden 2004).

The approach taken here focuses on the role of the Vienna belt and Pigorini *cemí* as active intermediaries in social relationships (Appadurai 1986; Gell 1998) and investigates how their materiality may have shaped identity and social action

(Gosden 2004). Their divisible nature (cf. Strathern 1988) reflects the socio-political and economic interconnections being forged in early colonial Caribbean history, a perspective refreshingly 'scripted' by the Taíno, as opposed to the reliance on historical documents that provide an overwhelmingly Eurocentric view of this period. These objects also reflect social ontologies, the webs of connection between materials and people (Gosden 2008), specifically through an active focus on both indigenous and introduced valuables. In integrating foreign goods into the structure, the creator/s of the Pigorni *cemí* interwove the Spanish into the history of not only the piece, but into every future use, display and interaction with it: the foreigners were thus assimilated into the community's perceptions and understanding of this object. In this capacity, the European 'Other' became intimately entangled with Taíno representations of their own ideology, and ultimately themselves (cf. Gosden 2004), influencing people's understandings of this shifting, transitional period and their place within it (cf. Gell 1998).

Cuentas for *cibas* and the allure of emerald colours

Both shell and stone beads (*cibas*) were prized by the Taíno as personal ornaments and as exchange valuables. Early *cronista* accounts document their use: from strands worn at the neck, arms and/or wrists, to the hundreds, if not thousands, woven into elite belts, caps and *naguas*, or women's skirts (Alegria 1995; Bernaldez in Jane 1967: 162). The large quantities of beads required for the Pigorini *cemí* and Vienna belt meant that shell was the dominant medium, given that stone beads were far more laborious to make. Necklaces of stone *cibas* strung with gold or *guanín* were the prerogative of *caciques* and were understood to have a mythical source, originally gifted by the ancestress Guabonito to the culture hero Guahayona at the sacred mountain Cauta, where the first people emerged (Colón 1992: 155; see Oliver 2000: 205–13). Martyr D'Anghera, recounting this myth in the early sixteenth century, notes that 'the kings [*caciques*] hold these necklaces sacred even today' (in Arrom 1999: 48). Stone *cibas*, which had the appearance of marble (Colón 1992: 155), were thus fitting gifts between high-ranking individuals, such as the 'eight hundred small, figured white, green and red stone beads together with one hundred figured gold beads' presented by the *cacique* Guacanagari to Columbus upon his return to Hispaniola in 1493 (Colón 1992: 120). Particularly significant examples were incorporated into high-status artefacts, such as the stone *ciba* inlaid into the chest cavity of a wooden Jamaican *duho* (Ostapkowicz 2015: 98, fig. 5). Yet others were gifted or traded across the archipelago: such sites as Hope Estate, St Martin and La Hueca, Vieques, Puerto Rico feature exotic stone beads and pendants that suggest long-distance networks stretching to South America (Chanlatte-Baik 2013: 179; Haviser 1999: 202). In this sense, imported beads were in circulation in the Caribbean well before 1492.

Quantities of shell beads have been recovered from Caribbean archaeological sites, including the manufacturing site at Governor's Beach (GT-2), Grand Turk, where 1600 complete and 7000 incomplete beads were recovered together with 13,000 pieces of production waste (Carlson 1995). As burial offerings, beads could also be taken out of circulation completely, as seen for example in the 1100 conch (*Strombus gigas*) shell beads found on the pelvis of a female skeleton in a burial at Anse à la Gourde, Guadeloupe (Hofman and Hoogland 2004: 51), suggesting a *nagua*. It is likely that beads were graded on a scale of increasing value, based on the material, investment of labour, acquisition history (e.g. via long-distance exchange) and other aspects of their biography (e.g. the renown of previous owners).

The Pigorini *cemí* and Vienna belt both feature small shell beads of 3–5mm diameter and 0.6–2.5mm thickness (Figure 3), comparable in size to those found at such sites as GT-2, suggesting a fairly standardised system of manufacture within the region. This distinctive shape — a small, perforated disk with slightly bulging sides — is also seen in the gold microbeads (2mm diameter) from the site of Chorro de Maita, Cuba (Martinón-Torres 2012: fig. 8), suggesting a preference for this specific shape, regardless of raw material. Thus, when European glass beads — particularly the small, wire-wound beads, with their doughnut shape and bulging sides — were introduced in 1492, they fit neatly within the established canons of indigenous beadwork. Other early glass beads, such as Nueva Cadiz, were more similar to the stone *cibas*, with their longer, cylindrical shapes, and so also had an indigenous precedent. Within this context, glass beads had an immediate impact: not only were they exotic yet familiar in form, but their unfading colours and reflective properties had deep resonance, as will be seen below.

The indigenous reception of beads during the earliest exchanges cemented their popularity as a trade commodity in the Caribbean. To Spanish eyes, the exchanges appeared most favourable. Columbus himself noted that '[they] would barter with some pieces of gold hanging from the nose [...] which they would willingly give [...] for glass beads' (in García-Arevalo 1990: 271). Glass — and particularly glass beads — were sought out in trade, as documented by Foresti da Bergamo: '[the Indians] exchange gold for glass, because nothing is more valuable among them than glass' (Symcox 2002: 30). The Taíno also viewed this as a favourable transaction in terms of their own value systems: as noted in the myth, *cibas* originated from distant lands (and were certainly circulated over long distances in trade), and so the exoticness of Spanish beads was fitting, and, coupled with their brilliant appearance, highly desirable. Las Casas notes their swift incorporation into local ornaments: 'The beads, having the further merit of novelty and rarity, were added to the conch disks and to the

Figure 3. Stylistic and material similarities in the layout and use of indigenous shell beads on the Pigorini *cemí* (left) and Vienna belt (right). Note the raised, double-layered ridge of white shell beads in both and the black framework around the white geometric designs (two deep in the Pigorini, vs. three deep in the Vienna belt). Photograph: Ostapkowicz; courtesy of the Polo Museale del Lazio - Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico "L.Pigorini", su concessione del Mibact, acc no. 4190; courtesy of the Weltmuseum Wien, inv. no. 10.443.

cibas, colored stones, [the latter] held in high regard, a gift worthy of a *cacique*' (Biscione 1997: 163, italics added).

Surviving shipping records indicate that between 1511 and 1526 roughly 179,000 beads were exported to the Spanish colonies, as compared to 10 million in 1583–1613. The comparatively small quantities available in the first decades of contact suggests that glass beads were not as common as often assumed, and their absence from such important indigenous colonial period sites as En Bas Saline in Haiti[2] appears to confirm this: the site was occupied by the Taíno to about 1515 (Deagan 1987b; 2004: 613). Only a few examples have been recovered from early colonial indigenous sites, such as the three compound (blue/green/white) Nueva Cadiz and two cobalt blue faceted beads from El Cabo, Dominican Republic, occupied until 1504 (Samson 2010: 284), or a tubular cobalt bead from Playa Grande, DR, a site abandoned in 1505 (Keehnan 2012: 150). Deagan (2004: 621) suggests that the paucity of such artefacts might reflect a Taíno 'indifference to and rejection of Spanish cultural elements and values'; conversely, the rarity of these beads in the archaeological record may reflect both their relative scarcity and their value during the early colonial period, and hence their curation.

Abalorios — a Spanish term for small beads 'of little value' (Deagan 1987: 157) — feature abundantly on the Pigorini *cemí* (Figure 4). Columbus himself gifted

[2] Guacanagari's village, close to La Navidad, the first Spanish colonial outpost, established 1492, and 2km away from Puerto Real, established 1503.

Figure 4. The 'bat' face of the Pigorini *cemí*, featuring 1200 green glass beads, and cut mirrors for the eyes. Photograph: Ostapkowicz; courtesy of the Polo Museale del Lazio - Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico "L.Pigorini", su concessione del Mibact, acc no. 4190.

the Táino with green and yellow *abalorios* during his first voyage, and over 100,000 beads in these specific hues were sent to the Caribbean during the early voyages between 1511 and 1526, though they are not listed in subsequent inventories (Deagan 1987: 110, 157). Thus, they are understood to be reliable chronological markers for the first quarter (M. Smith in Hoffman 1987: 242) or, more conservatively, the first half of the sixteenth century (Deagan 1987: 169). Of course, their 'currency' (use/circulation) could have extended past this. Six complete and three fragmentary green *abalorios* have been recovered from the site of Long Bay, San Salvador, Bahamas, along with several other European goods, including a *blanca* coin dating between 1471 and 1474 (Hoffman 1987: 241). These wirewound beads (c. 3.5mm in maximum diameter) are distinguished by their emerald green colour, and have an unusually high lead oxide content (65–75%). This is higher than any other category of early European lead glass and suggests a specific region and tradition of manufacture (Brill 1987: 251), although no source has yet been identified. Another set of small green beads were recovered from a cave in Quebradillas, Puerto Rico in the 1980s, held within an intricately carved wooden bowl (Figure 5). Analysis of one of these beads

showed strong parallels to the San Salvador *abalorios* in terms of size, colour and lead content (Brill 2012: 544–8). Puerto Rico was 'discovered' in 1493, but the Spanish only settled the island 15 years later, in 1508. It is not clear whether the Quebradillas beads were in circulation on the island prior to Spanish settlement — potentially traded from Hispaniola via indigenous channels — or whether they were acquired subsequently, directly from the newly settled foreigners, though their material parallels to the Bahamian examples suggest a potentially early date.

The more than 1200 green *abalorios* on the face and back of the head of the Pigorini *cemí* not only support a pre-1550 manufacture of the *cemí* (Roe 1997: 164; Vega 1987: 28) and highlight the investment of beads in a single artefact, but also raise the question of specific colour preferences within indigenous value systems. The colour green had a deep resonance among the Taíno, from the iridescent splendour of green parrot feathers to the highly prized 'greenstone' artefacts circulating via exchange routes spanning the circum-Caribbean (Boomert 1987; Rodriguez Ramos 2011). The vibrant emerald glass

Figure 5. Wooden vessel recovered from a cave in Quebradillas, Puerto Rico, containing 30 deep green, three blue and two yellow glass beads, together with two dog canines. Vessel: *Guaiacum* sp., AD 1297–1406, L: 12.2cm; W: 80mm; H: 70mm (max). Photograph: Ostapkowicz; courtesy of the Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte, Universidad de Puerto Rico, Recinto de Río Piedras, 1.2008.0671-2.

beads must have echoed this quality.[3] Further, they came in a diminutive size (c. 3.5mm diameter) that would have been almost impossible to replicate in greenstone: jadeites, for example, are extremely difficult to work, and objects made from these materials were frequently on a larger scale as a result. Small, drilled greenstone *cibas* (<10mm in diameter) are rarely encountered in the archaeological record (Figure 6) and, given the work needed to shape and drill them, must have been of significant value. They would have been the purview of *caciques* and were likely the focal points of pendants or other body ornaments. One account of Columbus's first visit to Jamaica in 1494 notes that amidst the spectacle of regalia worn by the welcoming Taíno envoys sent out in three canoes to the ship, a *cacique* wore stones of 'high value' and on his head a 'garland of small stones, green and red, arranged in order, and intermingled with some larger white stones, producing a pleasing effect'; he also wore a matching belt 'of the same workmanship as the garland' (Bernaldez in Jane 1967: 162). But given the level of difficulty in producing small greenstone *cibas* and the need for large quantities of beads for belts and headdresses, it is possible that the 'green stones' were in fact green shell beads, specifically selected for their desirable, natural colour.

Given the cachet of such prized green materials, glass beads of emerald hues, gifted or traded from the start of Columbus's initial voyages (and part of the cargo on subsequent voyages of the first half of the sixteenth century; Deagan 1987: 156–7), must have had an immediate resonance within indigenous value systems. Undoubtedly, their use — whether strung on a necklace or integrated into a composite artefact — followed swiftly on from initial exchange. *Caciques* with access to large quantities of beads would have had them integrated into objects befitting their status. A belt belonging to Caonabó with a 'green face and two leaves of gold' may be a case in point. This belt was inventoried by the Spanish on 9 July 1495 (Torres 1868), shortly after they captured Caonabó and imprisoned him at La Isabela. This was over two years after Caonabó's purported sacking of the first Spanish settlement, La Navidad, and his (unsubstantiated) threats on Fort Santo Tomás which lead to the Spanish march on the Vega Real in

[3] Certainly, this was the case in the wider circum-Caribbean: during the Spanish expeditions into Mexico, green glass beads were also distributed in great quantity (Smith and Good 1982: 3) and in their specific choice of green, the Spanish had stumbled upon a colour resonant with one of the prime valuables in the region. Montezuma himself ordered that his governors welcome Spanish interests in bartering indigenous gold for green beads, because they were similar to *chalchihuites* (jadeites), which are valued 'as highly as emeralds' (Smith and Good 1982: 4). In just one example, the expedition led by Juan de Grijalva reached Rio de Tabasco in 1518, where it was greeted by canoes full of warriors: '...and we showed them strings of green beads and small mirrors and blue cut glass beads, and soon as they saw them they assumed a more friendly manner, for they thought they were *chalcihuites* [...] which they value greatly' (Smith and Good 1982: 4).

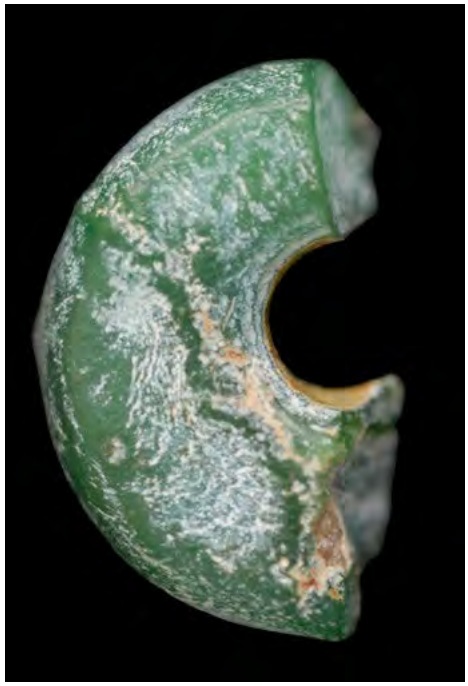

Figure 6. A small, broken jadeite (?) bead, recovered from the site of Morel, Guadeloupe. Diameter: 9mm; thickness: 4mm; hole diameter: c. 4mm. Photograph: Ostapkowicz; courtesy of the Direction des Affaires culturelles, Guadeloupe, 5801.

an effort to pacify the situation (Colón 1992: 127; Wilson 1990: 83) — events that made him a notorious enemy of the Spanish. Whether the green face of Caonabó's belt was made from a single piece of carved greenstone, quantities of greenstone (or shell) beads — as worn by the Jamaican *cacique* — or, potentially, newly imported green glass beads is not clear from the records, but given Caonabó's status as one of the principal *caciques* of Hispaniola, it is likely that he had access to glass beads. Although an enemy of the Spanish, he may not have rejected their imports. Indeed, the inventory, on 19 February 1496, intriguingly links him to a stone cross and two *latón* (brass) pieces (Torres 1868), which were only acquired via the Spanish — and the legend of his capture recounts how his interest in *turey* (in this instance, foreign metals) led to the Spanish offering him a 'gift' of metal handcuffs, which were quickly snapped shut as he tried them on (Wilson 1990: 84–7). Given the green glass beads incorporated into the bat face of the Pigorini *cemí*, it is an intriguing possibility that the centrepiece of Caonabó's belt may have been similarly constructed.

It is clear from the above that Spanish *cuentas* were but an addition to a long-established category of ornament within the Caribbean: shell beads and *cibas*. These new imports, in a range of vibrant and unfading colours, were easily appropriated in the existing framework. Fortuitously, some of them, such as the small green *abalorios,* also echoed the colours and qualities of 'greenstone' ornaments — some of the most spiritually and socio-politically important indigenous valuables, and often themselves exotic. It is small wonder that *cuentas* were so successfully adopted in the circum-Caribbean, and what the Spanish thought were favourable exchange terms (beads for gold), the Taíno likely also viewed as equally satisfactory, given the qualities of these new-yet-familiar valuables and the distance they had travelled.

Dark materials: jet and rhinoceros horn

Glass beads were not the only imports valued by the Taíno: the dark matt finish of jet also held allure. Black beads, ornaments and ceremonial items have a deep history within the circum-Caribbean region; dark, fossilised terrestrial plant material (e.g. lignite) was used prior to European contact, though this is largely an unstudied medium of artistic expression. Carvings in these materials tend to be on a small scale, ranging from c. 3 to 15cm. One example is the composite snuff tube in the form of a bird and monkey recovered from Charlotte Parish, St Vincent, prior to 1870 (Figure 7) (see also Arroyo *et al.* 1971: 233 for two similarly complex carvings found along the Arauca river, Venezuela). At least six small (<3cm), dark brown/black pendants with stylistically similar anthropo/zoomorphic imagery have previously been identified as wood, but may actually be carved of lignite, a soft stone related to coal and similar to jet (Ostapkowicz 2016; in press). Three are from the sites of Morel and L'Allée Dumanoir, Guadeloupe (Etrich *et al.* 2002: 26; Petitjean Roget 1995) and three from Sorcé, Vieques, Puerto Rico (Chanlatte Baik and Narganes Storde 1984: fig. 24c); those with good contextual information all appear to fall within the Early Ceramic Age period (c. 400 BC – AD 600) and come from deposits rich in exotics (e.g. amethyst beads; Chanlatte Baik and Narganes Storde 1984; Etrich *et al.* 2002). Another small carving recovered from St Vincent features a ventral surface in the form of a frog and has long been assumed to be made from manjack or pitch (analyses are under way).

The wide-ranging use of these black materials in the circum-Caribbean, their association with other valuables and their use in ceremonial contexts (e.g. snuff tubes for the ingestion of hallucinogens) suggest significance beyond the merely decorative. Black — like the colour green — may have had complex and deeply rooted meanings (cf. Helms 1986). The use of black by the Taíno was frequently commented on by the *cronistas*: Taíno wood sculpture — particularly elite, ceremonial artefacts — was to Spanish eyes 'black as jet' (Las Casas 1967b: 174; Helms 1986; Martyr D'Anghera 1970: 125). Black was also used in body painting, to enhance features on carvings (such as the black pigment outlining the mouth, nostrils and eyes of the Pigorini *cemí*'s rhinoceros horn mask) and as a dye for cotton and basketry weaving (Las Casas 1967a: 75; Cuneo in Symcox 2002: 58). Indeed, it is possible that the black beads that frame the red and white designs on the Vienna belt had been specifically dyed that colour to enhance the patterns (Figure 8; Ostapkowicz 2013: note 55).

Within this indigenous context, imported Spanish jet may have fortuitously echoed established local values for black materials, like the greenstones/green *abalorios* explored above. The three surviving jet beads on the Vienna belt may

Figure 7. A composite snuff tube from St Vincent, depicting a bird above a monkey. Accession records note that it was '[f]ound (prior to 1870) in a cane piece [plantation] in Charlotte parish to the N.E. of the Id. of St Vincent, W. Indies'. Height: 86mm; width: 53mm; diameter: 67mm.
Photograph: Ostapkowicz; courtesy and copyright of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, 1900.44.1

have originally been part of religious Spanish ornaments: two six-sided beads placed at the top of the central *cemí*'s head may have served as *veneras* (literarily, items of 'veneration'; symbols of saints, religious orders etc.) and a single small, faceted jet bead placed in the right earflare may have come from a rosary (Figure 9; cf. Deagan 1987a: 72–4, 182–3). Though jet is not documented as an exchange commodity during the early colonial period, the use of jet for *veneras*, amulets and rosaries by the Spanish is known from at least the thirteenth century, and personal jet ornaments likely featured from the first voyages, as amulets, religious objects and rosaries (Deagan 1987a: 73). Unlike glass beads, which the Spanish viewed purely as a trade item and brought with them in bulk, jet was understood to have strong protective and magical qualities, and as such may not have been so easily parted with in what were primarily viewed as economic transactions (though diplomatic negotiations may have been different, see below). Indeed, at its height in the sixteenth century, the church had the monopoly on jet production via guilds in Compostela, Spain (Deagan 2002: 73); jet carving was in the service of, and sanctioned by, the church. Where records exist, they document that only small quantities of jet were imported into the colonies prior to 1526, in contrast to the late sixteenth and early seventeenth

Figure 8. A damaged black bead (inset right), in the context of where it is located on the Vienna belt. It features a black surface, but white interior, suggesting a possible surface dye or colourant. Photograph: Ostapkowicz; courtesy of the Weltmuseum Wien, inv. no. 10.443.

century (Deagan 1987a: tab. 6.1). But even the cumulative quantities of jet imports over the first century of the colonial enterprise were insignificant in comparison to the glass bead imports for the years 1511–1526 alone (Table 1). Jet was therefore an extremely rare material in the early colonial period, making the incorporation of three jet beads into the Vienna belt exceptional.

What is not known is whether the Spanish belief that jet had protective and magical qualities held any significance for the Taíno. It is intriguing in this respect that the jet beads at the top of the *cemí*'s head are in the style of Dominican crosses (cf. Deagan 2002: 73), with St. Dominic being frequently represented in Catholic iconography by a star on his forehead or above his head. Assuming that the jet was incorporated into the belt within an indigenous context (see footnote 1), then might the placement of these particular jet beads on top of the *cemí*'s head reflect Taíno awareness of their meaning to the Spanish, and an integration of some elements of Christianity into their own belief systems

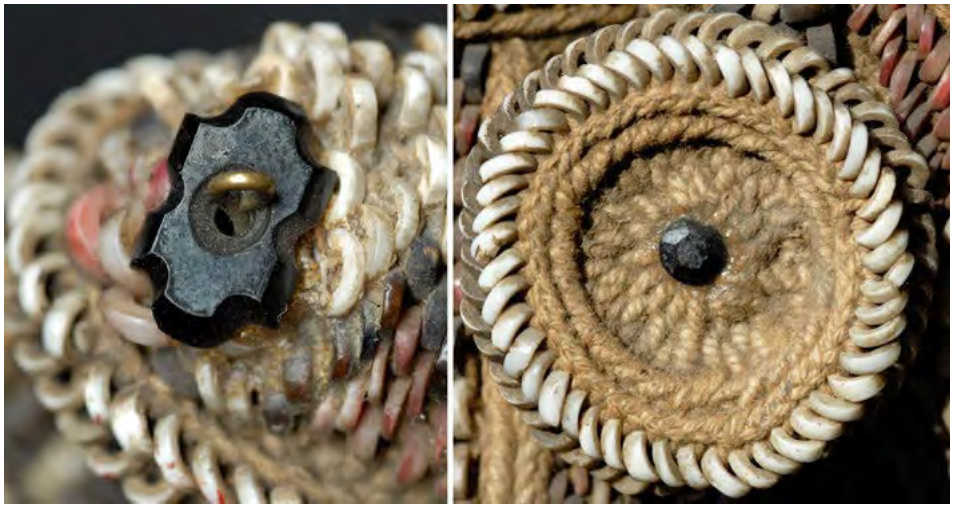

Figure 9. The two styles of jet beads featured on the Vienna belt. Left: one of two large, six-sided beads (length: 12.5mm; width: 7.3mm), secured with a brass pin (possibly from a belt buckle) placed at the top of the *cemí*'s head. Right: a single small faceted bead (max. diameter: 4mm) inserted into the *cemí*'s right earflare. Photograph: Ostapkowicz; courtesy of the Weltmuseum Wien, inv. no. 10.443.

Date	Jet	Quantity
1511–1526	200 finger rings of jet	200
1583–1613	7365 jet rings; 38,000 cut stones of jet; 12 strings of jet; 578 strings of jet rings; 928 necklaces of jet; 7,000 pieces of jet for necklaces; 600 necklaces of jet medallions; 648 earrings of jet and glass; 44,000 small jet beads; 24 small jet chains	99,515
Date	**Glass beads**	**Quantity**
1511–1526	102,000 green and yellow beads; 60,000 necklace beads; 17,000 bunches of beads; 9 strings of necklace beads; 18 strings of glass bangle bracelets	179,027

Table 1. Jet (*azabache*) imported to the Spanish Colonies, 1511–1526 (compiled from Deagan 1987: tab. 6.1. Note the disparity between jet and glass imports for 1511–1526).

and iconography? Could this belt be part of a 'fluid world of spiritual exchange' (Tuer 2003: 78)? Although speculative, there are a number of aspects of the early colonial period that could support this scenario. As well as the presence of missionaries in the colonies from 1493 (with the first Native baptism taking place in 1496), the Spanish *encomienda* system, established in 1503, was an overt policy to acculturate indigenous populations by teaching them Christian doctrine in exchange for their labour. Indeed, the early *cronistas* documented that the Taino selectively adopted Christian elements, including certain saints, whose lives, replete with miracles and explicit material symbolism, may have sat comfortably alongside equally legendary and powerful *cemis* (Oliver 2009: 221–44). That the belt may embody the transition between traditional Taíno iconography and an emerging religious syncretism opens new avenues of exploring its meaning and this critical period in the New World.

Another dark material is — quite remarkably — rhinoceros horn, carved as the human face of the Pigorini *cemí* (Figure 10; Biscione 1997: 162). Its incorporation into the sculpture raises many questions: how did rhinoceros horn, an extremely valuable commodity in sixteenth century Europe and Asia, enter into the Caribbean, when even basic supplies (clothing, food and wine, livestock) for the fledgling colonies were hard to come by? If indeed the horn is original to the piece (rather than a later addition by a European artisan), it may have entered the Caribbean from Europe, or alternatively via the slaving routes that post-1502 brought occasional African materials via the colonies, ultimately destined as luxury goods for the European ports.[4] Contrary to those who — understandably given the material — would see the Pigorini *cemí* as heavily influenced by west African rather than Taíno conventions (Roe 1997: 165), to the degree that it is an 'adumbration of the cultural and spiritual significance of African forms in the shaping of American art' (Sullivan 2006: 40), the facial features are entirely compatible with Taíno aesthetics (Biscione 1997: 162–3; Vega 1987: 26), and certainly wood and shell masks — or *guaízas* as the Taíno called them — were important elite accoutrements, so this resonates with Caribbean traditions in more ways than one. At the same time, it expands these traditions in the use of a unique and exceptional material. Ongoing research aims to resolve these questions, addressing the significance and provenance of this material.

[4] The rhinoceros horn may not be the only potentially African exotic featured on the Pigorini *cemí*: it has also been suggested that the shells used for the *cemí*'s teeth are west African *Prunum monilis* (Feest 1991: 581, based on the original identification by Strouhal in Schweeger-Hefel 1952: 210, 214–5), although it is unclear on what basis this attribution was made. Comparable small white shells also occur in the Caribbean (such as *Volvarina lacteal, Hyalina lucinda*), hence it will be necessary to revisit this issue.

Figure 10. Left profile of the Pigorini *cemí*'s human face, carved of rhinoceros horn, with shell eye inlay and facial lines enhanced with black pigment. Photograph: Ostapkowicz; courtesy of the Polo Museale del Lazio - Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico "L.Pigorini", su concessione del Mibact, acc no. 4190.

Brilliant surfaces, heavenly entities: *caona* (gold), *guanín* (gold-copper-silver alloy) and European brass (*turey*)

Two indigenous metals were highly valued in the Caribbean prior to European contact: *caona* (alluvial, unrefined gold), typically used as inlay for ritual artefacts or attachments to cacical cotton belts or caps, and *guanín* (a gold-copper-silver alloy), used as a high-status trade item and body ornament (Martinón-Torres *et al.* 2012: 442; Oliver 2000).[5] High-temperature metallurgy (smelting and alloying) was unknown in the Caribbean; the manufacture of gold ornaments involved cold-hammering nuggets into small, flat sheets, enhanced occasionally through repoussé. *Guanín* was imported into the Caribbean from South America via the Lesser Antilles, and possibly via more direct links (Oliver 2000: 199–200; Valcárcel Royas and Martinón-Torres 2013: 506, 516, 518).

[5] Indigenous silver was also known — first described by Columbus after seeing a nose-ring ornament while in northern Cuba — but no artefacts have been recovered to date, and it was likely not as important as gold or *guanín* (Oliver 2000: 198).

Gold was a recognised valuable across the Caribbean, referred to by various indigenous names — from *nozay* in the Bahamas and Cuba, to *tuob* in the north-east to *caona* in the west, the Taíno heartland (Lardicci 1999: 116; Valcárcel Royas and Martinón-Torres 2013: 505). The practice of collecting gold involved ritual purification, including physical deprivation such as fasting and sexual abstinence (Oviedo 1959). This imparts a social significance to the material extending far beyond its surface aesthetic. Such ritual preparation was a requirement for other potent substances, such as *cohoba,* a hallucinogenic drug that was only ingested once participants had purged themselves (Las Casas 1967b: 174). Gold was to become the eyes of a *cemí*, the ornament of a *cacique* and the desired treasure of the Europeans — yet it also transcended these charged loci as a substance of both culturally inherent value and numinous power.

Gold soon became the focus of mediations between the Taíno and the Spanish: it was both a means of engaging with and appeasing the strangers, as well as accessing their trade valuables (Martinón-Torres *et al.* 2012: 507; Oliver 2007: 47). Spanish inventories, compiled after the Taíno uprisings of 1494/1495 and detailing objects brought in tribute (and possibly as ransom, Ostapkowicz 2013) provide insight into the diversity of items lavishly inlaid with gold — particularly those that mediated between the natural and supernatural worlds (vomiting spatulas, *cemís*, *guaízas* etc.; Torres 1868). These inlays did not last long once in Spanish hands: the amount of gold present was carefully described and weighed, suggesting that shortly after their collection, they were prised away (e.g. nine gold leaf inlays from two masks collected on 19 February 1496 weighed 4 1/8 ounces, five *tomines* and six grains; Torres 1868: 9). There are only a handful of wood and cotton artefacts now in museum collections that still retain their gold inlays, most famously the Hispaniolan high-back *duho* in the British Museum (Figure 11).

Given their highly charged potency, and their ancestral links to the mythical cultural hero and primordial *cacique* Guayayona, gold and *guanín* were a chiefly prerogative and a divine symbol of chiefly power (Oliver 2000: 205). *Caona* was literarily the root of chiefly names: Caonabó ('He who is like gold') and the honorific title of Bohechio (*Tureygua Hobin* — 'King as dazzling and heavenly as *guanín*') echo the qualities of the materials (Oliver 2000: 205; Whitehead 1999: 881). It is clear that chiefs had control over its distribution, including organising the payment of gold tribute to the Spanish. They wore it as nose rings, or had it inlaid into high-status items (Caonabó's belt featured two gold inlays and his vomiting spatula had 29 pieces of gold; Torres 1868: 9). The sixteenth century Italian historian Scillacio notes that among Guacanagari's gifts to Columbus upon the latter's

return in 1493 were twelve belts 'of marvellous workmanship [...] several of them were notable for nuggets of gold worked very artistically into the [cotton]' (Symcox 2002: 43).

Gold was prized for all these properties, but it was not as esteemed as the gold-copper alloy *guanín* (Martinón-Torres *et al.* 2007: 202). *Guanín* had a distinct, reddish hue and, reportedly, a unique scent that the Taíno prized highly (Oliver 2000: 198). This, combined with its mythic associations and distant South American origins, made it the preeminent valuable (Oliver 2000; Valcárcel Royas and Martinón-Torres 2013: 506). Las Casas notes that *guanín* was used as bride price (Oliver 2000: 198–9), and in the early days of colonial expansion on Hispaniola it was used as a type of currency (Valcárcel Royas and Martinón-Torres 2013: 508). The Spanish were quick to manipulate the local desire for *guanín* to their advantage, importing it directly from South America to leverage favourable exchange rates for higher-karat gold: at one stage, the going rate for one piece of *guanín* was 200 pieces of gold (Bray 1997: 49; Martinón-Torres *et al.* 2012: 446). Sued-Badillo notes that archival documents in the Casa de Contratación in Sevilla document the presence of *guanín* ornaments in the form of eagles and frogs (suggesting South American sources) held in storehouses in Santo Domingo, DR, specifically for exchange with the local natives for gold dust and nuggets (in Bray 1997: 50). Its sale was prohibited by royal degree in 1501, so that it could be used specifically in bartering with the Taíno, as it yielded such favourable rates (Valcárcel Royas and Martinón-Torres 2013: 508). *Guanín* is listed in Spanish inventories, such as that compiled by Cristóbal de Santa Clara, of material brought in by the Taíno, potentially as tribute, between 1505 and 1508 (Mira Caballos 2000: 81–104). By 1527, however, it was being melted down by the Spanish, presumably to extract the gold due to the declining amount of the metal being produced on the islands (Valcárcel Royas and Martinón-Torres 2013: 509).

Guanín is rarely encountered in sites of the Caribbean's pre-contact and early colonial period: of the over 60 examples of precious metals found across both the Greater and Lesser Antilles only 15 are *guanín* (Valcárcel Royas and Martinón-Torres 2013: 509–14; Vega in Oliver 2000: 200). The earliest known example, found at the Puerto Rican site of Maisabel, dates to c. AD 70–374 (Oliver 2000: 197), though it is possible that *guanín* may have been among the other items of South American material culture imported into the islands as early as 400 BC (Valcárcel Royas and Martinón-Torres 2013: 517). The majority of pieces, however, broadly date between AD 1200 and 1500 (Martinón-Torres 2012: 440). Thin sheets tended to be the preferred medium, some with embossed designs, though rare anthropo- and zoomorphic figures have also been recovered, suggesting a Colombian origin (Martinón-Torres 2012: 514).

Figure 11. Hispaniolan *duho* (ceremonial seat) featuring gold inlay at the mouth, eyes, ear and shoulders. In Caribbean sculptures, body orifices and joints were frequently embellished with inlays, emphasising their importance. Photograph: Ostapkowicz; by kind permission of the British Museum, Am1949, 22.118.

To this repertoire of indigenous metal valuables were added the most highly prized European imports: copper and zinc alloys (brass) — what the Spanish called *latón*; to the Taíno, it was *turey* — literally 'of the bright sky', a heavenly entity. Las Casas notes: 'Anything made of *latón* was esteemed more than any other [metal]. They call it *turey*, as a thing from the sky, because their name for sky was *turey* [or *tureyro, tureygua*]; they smelled it as if by doing so they could sense it came from the heavens' (Oliver 2000: 198). The first mention of the exchange of European metals is via Columbus, who, after being lavished with gifts by Guacanagari, reciprocated by presenting the *cacique* with 'a large hand-basin made of yellow copper, and several tin rings' (late fifteenth/early sixteenth century Italian historian Scillacio, cited in Symcox 2002: 43). During this exchange, Scillacio continues:

> it was not permitted for all the Spaniards indiscriminately to take gifts from the Indians, but only those who could give back gifts in return: little gifts like pins, glass objects, bronze bells like the ones which are tied to the tinkling talons of hawks (indeed, Ethiopians and Arabs have been very taken with these kinds of gifts, and we often read in histories of their being exchanged in commerce). So it happened that, in exchange for very cheap gifts, the Spaniards received more than thirty *besses*[6] of gold that day. The Indians laughed at how cheaply they got bronze, and our people laughed at exchanging yellow copper for gold, since the Indians would part with an immense quantity of gold for each bronze pendant. This should surprise no one, since *rarity dictates price* (in Symcox 2002: 43–4, italics added).

Scillacio's insight — unlike those of many other historians who documented the indigenous groups as ignorant of value — ascribes as much agency to the Taíno as it does to the Spanish: each got what they desired most — that which was, in their eyes, the most rare and hence, valuable. Scales of value are invariably subjective and culturally prescribed.

This indigenous desire for European metals was not something anticipated during the earliest voyages, but to accommodate trade, even brass aglets from clothing (used to stop lace ends from fraying) were traded. Over 30 examples are known from archaeological contexts, particularly from Chorro de Maita, Cuba, where they are associated with elite burials and would have been worn as ornaments in life (Martinón-Torres *et al.* 2007: 199, 203). In the Vienna belt, two brass pins are used to secure the jet beads on the head of the *cemí*. These may have come from belt buckles, perhaps of the 'ring and pin' buckle style that was common in the first half of the sixteenth century on Spanish colonial

[6] A *bes* was a measure of eight ounces, and 30 *besses* would imply 240 ounces of gold.

sites (see Figure 9; Deagan 1987: 180–1). The jet beads held by the pins appear to cover areas of previous damage, where the belt originally may have held another material, perhaps gold (as the Spanish clearly documented in other belts). Given that the Taíno were known to refurbish important curated objects (Ostapkowicz *et al.* 2012; 2013), it is possible that the jet and brass pins replaced gold or some other material. If so, the original context (the belt) and its use as an elite accoutrement remained unaffected, it was simply modified to facilitate the display of new forms of wealth and status.

Interest in foreign metals stemmed in part from how easily they fit into indigenous understandings of value, not simply their newness or exoticness, but how they integrated into a pre-existing scale of worth, subscribing as they did to the 'aesthetic of brilliance', linking to distant lands and people, and touching upon the numinous. Gold, the most coveted of European materials, while still highly valued by the Taíno, did not have the same resonance as *guanín*, and especially *turey*.

Reflective worlds: *espejos* (mirrors)

Indigenous Caribbean 'mirrors' (*espejos* in Spanish) of highly polished gold or *guanín* sheets (see Martinón-Torres *et al.* 2007: 202) are known from the Spanish inventories (Torres 1865), with 24 listed in that of 1495/1496 (Table 2), clearly distinguished from the gold sheets (*hojuelas*), pieces of gold leaf (*hoja de oro*) and/or gold (*pintas*) also collected from the Taíno at this time. They are described as *espejos de oro* or '*espejos, las lumbres de hoja de oro*', with clear reference to gold or a gold-like material — the term *lumbres* referring to a reflective surface, and so analogous with mirrors. *Lumbres* also refers in some contexts to the embers of a dying fire (Fernández-Crespo 2015, pers. comm.), perhaps evoking the warm glow of the material in a double meaning. The reference to reflective surfaces indicates that the material must have been polished to a high degree. In some instances *espejos* are noted as being backed by cotton, suggesting that they were worn, possibly as neck or head ornaments. There are numerous early references to the presence of gold sheets on cotton body ornaments, including belts and caps, but these are described using other terms, such as *hoja de oro*.

The use of the word *espejos* is significant here: these objects are not simply described in Spanish as disks of gold or flat gold sheets, but are instead identified as mirrors. Though the term may have been used to distinguish large ornaments of flattened gold, it may also reflect nascent Spanish understandings of the Taíno worldview and value systems. As discussed above, gold was associated with cacical power while *guanín* and *turey* were considered gifts of the sky (Saunders 2011: 96) and hence embodied spiritual power (Oliver 2000). Across

Date	Description
10 March 1495	*'dos espejos, las lumbres de hoja de oro [...] que trujo un hermano de Cahonabo'* [sic]; i.e. 'two mirrors, [with] reflective surface[s] of gold leaf [...] that a brother of Caonabó brought'
18 December 1495	*'tres espejos de oro'*, i.e. 'three gold mirrors'
2 February 1496	*'é diez y seis espejos de oro'*, i.e. '16 gold mirrors'
19 February 1496	*'tres espejos de algodon, las lumbres de hoja de oro'*, i.e. 'tree mirrors of cotton, the reflective surface(s) of gold leaf'

Table 2. Gold *espejos* ('mirrors') listed in the 1495/1496 inventory.

the Americas, mirrors were viewed as conduits to a supernatural realm and as such were spiritually active entities that maintained the world, capturing cosmic energy in solid form (Saunders 1998; 2011: 95). By trapping light in their reflective surfaces, they possessed healing, energising and fertilising qualities (Saunders 2005; 115). These surfaces did not need to provide a clear reflection, as the use of the term mirror might imply; rather, recognisable but distorted images provided views into the otherworld (Saunders 1998: 18). For the Tukano of Colombia, for example, a thin shell (*gahsíru*) separates the physical and spiritual worlds, a gateway that can only be breached through hallucinogen-induced altered states of consciousness (Saunders 1998: 7). Shells, with their links to water (standing pools which provide natural mirrors), may have been conceptually linked (Saunders 1998: 15), and these naturally brilliant, reflective surfaces paralleled the qualities of those of other (super-)natural materials such as gold and *guanín*. Shells and gold were used by the Taíno as inlays for the eyes of *cemís*, emphasising the links between vision, reflective surfaces and the numinous. European mirrors (which themselves had only recently become capable of faithfully reflecting an image) were simply an extension of this understanding. Perhaps it is in this sense that the layering of reflective materials in the eyes of the Pigorini *cemí* bat face can be understood: the gold underlying the mirrors may well underscore the connection between the two in Taíno thought and how both were understood as mirrors/*espejos* of other worlds (Figure 12, left).

When gold mirrors were worn, the sunlight reflected in them was dramatically intensified, setting the metal alight. At night, firelight would catch in their

surfaces, accentuated by the movements of the wearer. These ornaments were part of the pomp and circumstance of major events, focusing spectator attention on those who had privileged access to them, marking their every movement. Among circum-Caribbean groups, wearing such gold ornaments in quantity was particularly important for chiefs during raiding parties or battles 'in order to be known to their own men and also by their enemies' as Oviedo noted (in Saunders 2011: 109). Perhaps this offers another perspective on the Jamaican *cacique*'s regalia during the momentous meeting with Columbus in 1494, particularly his large *guanín* pectoral: during the tense moments of initial encounter, the Jamaican *cacique* donned his finest *espejos* in order to intimidate his potential adversary or impress a possible ally. European mirrors may have come to fill this role, held within the cotton belts, caps and ornaments worn by *caciques*, as seen in the Pigorini *cemí* and Vienna belt.

Mirrors were introduced as items of exchange from the time of Columbus's first voyage, when the Admiral himself presented the *cacique* Guacanagari with 'many things from Spain, such as glass beads [...] and mirrors' (Biscione 1997: 163). Mirrors are exceptionally rare in the archaeological record from sixteenth century sites in the Americas, suggesting that not only was their export relatively limited, but that they were carefully curated items (Jeffrey M. Mitchem 2012, pers. comm.). The Pigorini *cemí* incorporates six relatively large circular disks featured in the eyes of the bat mask and in the earflares of both faces. In the eyes of the bat, the backing of the mirrors has been scraped back, revealing a secondary eye and pupil, highlighted in hammered gold sheet and dark resin. This parallels the shape of the human eyes on the opposing rhinoceros horn mask, suggesting a link between both animal and human masks and possibly a transformative element between the two (as often seen in Taíno art). The Vienna belt also features cut circular mirrors as the eyes of its central *cemí* maskette (Figure 12, right). This prominent placement of mirrors in both pieces — substituting gold and shell inlays in the eyes and ears of the *cemís* — suggests that mirrors may have been viewed as portals through which to be seen and heard by the numinous (as well as the means to see and hear them), much as the original indigenous substances may have been viewed. Further, their presence in these elite objects quite literarily reflected upon the wearer's ability to harness the tried and tested foundations of power in the form of *cemís* through new sources and materials.

Discussion and conclusions: the role of exchange in processes of social transformation

Until recently, little was known about how European valuables were adopted, adapted and incorporated into indigenous contexts in the Caribbean: the

Figure 12. Glass mirrors in the eyes and earflares of the Pigorini *cemí* (left) and the eyes of the Vienna belt (right). The edges of the disks remain quite rough and are clearly made to the exact dimensions of each aperture. The concoidal damage to the mirrors in both pieces was likely sustained during the cutting process and suggests that cuts were made along the upper side of the mirror, likely to avoid the thin veneer of lead or mercury at the back.
Photograph: Ostapkowicz; courtesy of the Polo Museale del Lazio - Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico "L.Pigorini", su concessione del Mibact, acc no. 4190.

favoured, ahistorical view perpetuated the myth of traditional, unadulterated and unchanging indigenous society (cf. Wolf 1982). The peoples first encountered in the New World — the Lucayans, the Taíno and Carib described in sensational accounts and depicted in illustrations thanks to newly established printing presses — remained frozen in perpetual nakedness (Figure 13), be it 'noble chieftain' or 'savage cannibal', lacking any but the most stereotypical accoutrements: feather headdress, war club or a bow and arrow. Although early accounts describe how indigenous people actively bartered for European trade goods such as glass beads, mirrors or metals, the suggestion that they incorporated these into their own material culture, or adapted them for their own purposes, rarely enters the equation (but see Keehnen 2012; Valcárcel Rojas and Martinón Torres 2013).[7] The assumption of a swift demise in the face of European encroachment and newly introduced diseases, and a complete social and cultural collapse in the face of enforced assimilation practices, perpetuated the impression of a people unable to adapt to change. This long-held myth has

[7] For example, both the Vienna belt and Pigorini *cemí* were not identified as Caribbean artefacts until the 1950s (Schweeger-Hefel 1952) and it was not until the 1990s, particularly as a result of the exhibits and events marking the Columbus quincentenary, that researchers began to engage with the materiality of the Pigorini *cemí* and its interconnections to both European and potentially African sources (Biscione 1997; Feest 1991; Roe 1997).

Figure 13. The first European depiction of 'New World' inhabitants, one of whom offers a gold nugget to Columbus. The illustration accompanied Columbus' letter announcing his discoveries. From Columbus, *De Insulis nuper in mari Indico repertis*, Basel, 1494 (fol. IV), woodcut. Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.

in many ways hindered work on early contact period indigenous (as opposed to Spanish colonial) archaeology in the Caribbean until recent years (for an overview see Deagan 2004: 601–5), though excellent archival studies have provided a more nuanced picture (Anderson Córdova 1990; Guitar 1998) and recent archaeological work on post-contact indigenous sites is set to challenge these assumptions (e.g. Valcárcel Rojas 2012). Now, a broad-scale study of this critical period — Nexus 1492, led by Corinne Hofman, Leiden University (http://nexus1492.eu) — aims to look specifically at this 'historical divide' to better understand indigenous responses and adaptations to the fifteenth to seventeenth century Caribbean.

Artefacts bridging this divide are rare and all the more important for their contribution to the emerging emphasis on indigenous agency at a time of tremendous cultural change and upheaval. The two artefacts anchoring this discussion — the Pigorini *cemí* and Vienna belt — have enabled us to explore Taíno use and perceptions of newly introduced goods such as glass and jet beads, mirrors and brass pins. It is clear that the Taíno were intrigued by Spanish imports and desired their luminous qualities for their own purposes. It is not, as is often perceived, that the Taíno were overwhelmed by the 'sophistication' of European goods; rather, they recognised them as exhibiting qualities paralleling those of their own valuables, and this re-contextualisation speaks to their active involvement in the transformative process of social change.

There may be several levels to Taíno appreciation of the value of European materials. Initially, their exoticness — the distance they had travelled and embodied and their links to the newly arrived foreigners — ensured an audience (cf. Helms 1988). Many were bright, shiny objects that fortuitously recalled indigenous valuables, smoothly aligning with the latter's pre-existing significance (e.g. green glass beads/jadeite ornaments). To gain greater meaning and value, these new materials needed to be integrated into local socio-political and economic systems. Once captured within native networks and incorporated into ornaments or high-status objects — such as seen on the Pigorini *cemí*, for example — the value of these materials transcended the merely 'exotic', absorbed into the service of indigenous meanings and aesthetics. In this sense, meaning and value were accretional and transformative (cf. Gosden and Marshall 1999: 172), ever deepening in New World significance the further integrated the Old World goods became.

Body ornaments were few and select among the Taíno, each carrying information about the wearer's connections and social position, their cultural affiliation, and status. The language of these social signifiers would be carried

in a variety of subtle (and not-so-subtle) ways — from the style of woven cotton ornaments to the placement and quantity of shell and stone beads or the size and shape of a gold or *guanín* pendant. One can well imagine the impact of Old World goods on this repertoire of refined, well-understood classifications and meanings: it was the allure of the new, embodied in vibrant, un-fading materials, brought by foreigners from distant lands. Beyond this, it echoed the qualities of materials difficult to acquire, and more difficult to work (jadeites), or captured the elusive, ever-brilliant iridescence of the sun, with its links to the numinous.

The 'aesthetics of brilliance' ruled the world of the Europeans as well — perhaps consumed them is a more appropriate term, given the circumstances and exploitation of indigenous groups post-1492. Quite apart from the use of gold, pearls and precious stones in their own body ornaments, they were far from averse to using gold, mirrors and ornamentation to adorn their own religious icons. The *Virgen de la Estrella*, displayed in the very centre of the massive cathedral of Sevilla, is a case in point: already lavishly 'dressed' in gold leaf when she was created in 1566, the figure was then encased in an ornate Rococo *retablo* in 1770, replete with mirror inlays of various sizes and shapes (Figure 14). This display, in the heart of Catholic Spain and in the very cathedral to which the Taíno were brought during Columbus's triumphant return in 1493 (Las Casas 1951: 332; Parry and Keith 1984: 66), suggests that the use of such ornaments to visually enhance objects of religious veneration was not so different between the Old World and the New.

On the one hand, the Vienna belt and Pigorini *cemí* reflect Taíno traditional aesthetics, valuables and sources of indigenous power; on the other, they ingeniously interweave newly introduced European, and potentially African or Asian, wealth into that powerbase. It is a marriage of worlds, consummately harnessed through an indigenous prism. Here, the 'aesthetics of brilliance' tradition seamlessly substitutes newly introduced mirrors, jet and glass beads for traditional gold, *guanín* and polished shell beads and inlays. It appears to embrace the foreign, yet integrate it within its own milieu, structure and agency. The strategy may have been to tap into this new source of wealth, to link across to foreign lands and peoples and to understand these 'others', ideally integrating them into local social and political systems and thereby gaining insight, power and affluence. As far as we know, this is the first — and last — glimpse of hybrid elite objects made on Taíno terms, before Spanish assimilation policies undermined the cacical authority that was the impetus for such cultural masterpieces.

Figure 14. The *Virgen de la Estrella* (1566) is encased in an ornate Rococo retablo (1770), heavily inlaid with mirrors. Photograph: Ostapkowicz; Sevilla Cathedral.

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