

INTRODUCTION TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

In the twenty-five years since I prepared the Spanish edition of Ramón Pané's *Account of the Antiquities of the Indians*, interest in the issues raised by his text has increased considerably. As the first book written on American soil in a European language, it is an important document for those who study Latin American literature. Completed around 1498, it is one of the few eyewitness accounts of the initial encounter between Spaniards and Amerindians. Based on Pané's several years of living among the native inhabitants of Hispaniola (today the island shared by Haiti and the Dominican Republic), it is the best source of information on the culture of the Taínos, as the people who greeted Columbus have come to be known.¹

In the opening of the *Account*, Pané declared that he was "a humble friar" sent by Christopher Columbus to live among the natives to report on whatever he might "discover and understand of the beliefs and idolatries of the Indians." His report fulfilled Columbus's mandate but also went much further. In addition to recording the Taínos' myths and religious ceremonies, Pané described some of their language and daily cus-

1. Many of the names of the indigenous peoples of the Americas (beginning with the term Indian) are European constructs. The term *Taino* for the native inhabitants of the Greater Antilles and some smaller islands is based on the word that both Columbus and Dr. Diego Alvarez Chanca (a physician who traveled on the second voyage) reported that the natives used when differentiating themselves from the Caribs. For the evolution of the term, which is widely used in Spanish, French, Italian, English, and other European languages, see Ricardo E. Alegría, "El uso de la terminología etno-histórica para designar las culturas aborígenes de las Antillas," *Cuadernos Prehispánicos* (Valladolid, 1981), pp. 3-29; and Irving Rouse, *The Taínos: Rise and Decline of the People Who Greeted Columbus* (New Haven, 1992). The Taíno language refers to what Columbus called the "universal language" of Hispaniola, one of many languages in what we now term the Arawak family. On the other languages of the region, see Douglas M. Taylor, *Languages of the West Indies* (Baltimore, 1977).

toms. He related details of the evangelization of Hispaniola as well as of the natives' resistance to the Spanish colonization. In a dramatic scene culminating in the murder of some of the first converts, he revealed the conflicts among the indigenous people about how to deal with the Spaniards. Our "humble friar" thus produced a document of great value to anthropologists, historians, linguists, and literary critics, as well as to the general reader interested in this pivotal moment of the American past.

By the middle of the sixteenth century the Taíno world had largely vanished from the Spanish Antilles, victim to the Conquest and the European diseases that decimated the native population. Numerous Taíno words have survived, such as *huracán*, *canoa*, *hamaca*, and *barbacoa* borrowed by Spaniards to describe the unfamiliar hurricanes, canoes, hammocks, and outdoor cooking method that they first encountered on Hispaniola.² The new colonial society assimilated such Taíno customs as the smoking of tobacco, the construction of palm-thatched dwellings (*bohíos*), and the preparation of the staple food *yuca*, better known to us as *cassava* or (in a processed form) tapioca. The many Taíno women who married Spaniards passed part of their culture on to their *mestizo* children. A few Taíno communities survived in isolated areas, as did others close to the Spanish settlements, designated by the new authorities as *pueblos de indios*, or Indian villages.³ Yet the Taíno society as such had disappeared.

Luckily, Pané preserved some of their culture for posterity. Although we cannot know how well he understood what he heard, Pané appears to have been an attentive listener. His commission from Columbus required him to record the Taínos' beliefs and ceremonies as accurately as possible. Much of what he reported has since been corroborated by artifacts discovered in the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Jamaica. These include numerous *zemis* (religious images) with the physical characteristics of the gods in the myths he recounted, as well as the bifurcated inhalers for the hallucinogen *cohoba* (not the same as tobacco) that he described. In addition, some of the myths he recounted bear strong resemblances to the Amazonian myths of the Taínos' South American relatives, further proof of the reliability of his

2. The best dictionary to document Taíno word survivals remains Alfredo Zayas y Alfonso, *Lexicografía Antillana* (Havana, 1914). See also José J. Arrom, *Estudios de lexicología Antillana* (Havana, 1980).

3. Some of the *pueblos de indios* frequently referred to in seventeenth-century documents include Guanabacoa, next to the city of Havana, and others near Bayamo, Santiago, and Guantánamo, Cuba. See, for example, Felipe Pichardo Moya, *Los aborígenes de las Antillas* (Mexico City, 1956).

account.⁴ Nonetheless, some Taíno concepts may have been distorted as they were translated into Spanish and, for this edition, retranslated into English. For example, the term “heaven” in the second paragraph of the current edition was originally “cielo,” by which Pané may only have meant “sky” rather than the Christian heaven.

Of course, unlike a modern ethnographer, Pané’s goal was to convert the Taínos to Christianity. A fervent missionary, he labeled them “heathen” and “idolaters.” Yet he was respectful enough of their culture so that when he described the healing rituals of their priests, or *behiques*, he called them “physicians” rather than “sorcerers” or “charlatans.” Indeed, he appears to have developed a sympathetic relationship with the people among whom he lived, for his *Account* repeated their complaints against the Spaniards, who “were wicked and had taken possession of their lands by force.” This criticism of his countrymen makes Fray Ramón the first of many priests to expose the abuses committed against the Indians by the new settlers, proof of the complicated nature of Spanish colonialism, which contained several contradictory tendencies. For the desires to acquire land, wealth, and power, to spread Christianity, and to create a utopia in what Europeans considered a new world coexisted in the colonial enterprise, thus pitting the Church, the Crown, and the settlers against each other.⁵

Ramón Pané remains an obscure figure. In the twenty-five years since I edited his *Account*, little new biographical information has become available. We still do not know when he was born or when he died, only that he came from the Spanish region of Catalonia, where he entered the priesthood as a “humble friar of the Order of Saint Jerome.” In 1992, on the occasion of presenting the translation of my edition into his native Catalan language, I was able to confirm my original hypothesis about the date when he traveled to America. When I visited the Convent of San Jerónimo de la Murtra in Badalona, near Barcelona, I was told that Pané was a young brother there when the “Catholic Kings,” Ferdinand and Isabela, received Columbus in that convent on his triumphal return to Spain in 1493. Inspired by the astonishing news of Columbus’s first voyage beyond the Atlantic, Pané joined the second expedition and sailed

4. Some Taíno myths also resemble those of Europe, a suggestion of the universality of myth. I have studied the Taíno myths and reproduce images of numerous *zemis* and ceremonial objects in my book *Mitología y artes prehispánicas de las Antillas* (Mexico City, 1975; rev. 2d edition 1989). For excellent reproductions of these objects, see *Taíno: Pre-Columbian Art and Culture from the Caribbean*, ed. Fátima Bercht, Estrellita Brodsky, John Alan Farmer, and Dicey Taylor (New York, 1998).

5. See Charles Gibson, *Spain in America* (New York, 1966).

for the Caribbean on September 25, 1493. By early 1494 he had settled on the north of the island in the province of the *cacique* (Indian chief) Mayobanex. In the spring of 1495, following Columbus's instructions, he moved on to the land of Guarionex, where he lived for several years. There, with the help of a native interpreter, he learned the "universal language" spoken in Hispaniola and wrote his *Account*. After he gave Columbus his manuscript, probably in 1498, we lose all trace of the friar, who "wore himself out in order to learn all this."

The fate of Pané's *Account* after that is still shrouded in mystery. The long-lost original manuscript has not yet appeared. The full text survives only because Columbus's son Fernando included it in the biography he wrote in defense of his father, who had fallen into disfavor with the Spanish monarchs. Because of a hostile political climate in Spain, Fernando was unable to publish his *History of the Admiral don Cristopher Columbus by his son don Fernando* during his lifetime. It is only known in Alfonso de Ulloa's poor Italian translation of 1571, on which I have based my edition. Because of the many inaccuracies of Ulloa's transcriptions of Taíno words, which I explain in the introductory study, I compared them with those given by three of Pané's contemporaries and used these to try to determine the original Taíno terms.

I originally included appendixes of the relevant excerpts of these works as an aid to scholars who wished to check the references from my footnotes in context. I now realize that the appendixes will also be of value to the general reader. As the earliest European writings on the beliefs and customs of the inhabitants of the New World, they reflect the learning process that Europeans underwent as they began to understand the culture of the Taínos. Appendix A reproduces three selections from the writings of Christopher Columbus. The last excerpt, written after he became familiar with the friar's investigations, shows how the Admiral changed his initial mistaken impression, revealed in the first two selections, that the Taínos had no religion. The other two appendixes reproduce selections from the works of two men who handled Pané's manuscript and used it as the source for some of the information they provided on the inhabitants of the Antilles. Appendix B is by Pietro Martire d'Anghiera, also known in English as Peter Martyr. An Italian humanist who served in the Spanish court, he paraphrased parts of the *Account* in his own book on the discovery and colonization of America, a collection of letters he wrote from 1494 on and published in Latin in 1516 as the *Decades of the New World*. Although his information was secondhand, since he never set foot in America, it was one of the earliest reports on Spain's new possessions widely diffused throughout Europe. Appendix C, by Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, shows how much more

Europeans knew by the middle of the sixteenth century. Las Casas, the great “Defender of the Indians,” wrote three histories of the Spanish conquest of the Caribbean. In his *Apologetic History of the Indies*, finished near the end of his life in 1566, he used Pané’s *Account* to supplement what he himself had seen in Hispaniola and Cuba, where he had lived intermittently between 1502 and 1547, first as a settler and then as a priest who mounted a vigorous critique of Spanish colonialism. In addition to documenting the changing state of European knowledge about native Americans, these appendixes reveal the difficulties of studying long-lost texts as well as those of understanding long-lost cultures.

For those who wish to explore these issues further, I recommend the following works. For the most complete study of the Taínos, see Irving Rouse, *The Taínos: Rise and Decline of the People Who Greeted Columbus* (New Haven, 1992). For the most recent, see Fátima Bercht, Estrellita Brodsky, John Alan Farmer, and Dicey Taylor, eds., *Táino: Pre-Columbian Art and Culture From the Caribbean* (New York, 1998). On the myths of the Taínos, see José Juan Arrom, *Mitología y artes prehispanicas de las Antillas* (Mexico City, 1975; rev. 2d ed. 1989), which expands on this study of Pané’s *Account*. An excellent collection of articles by several authors on the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean, with an up-to-date bibliography, is Samuel M. Wilson, ed., *The Indigenous People of the Caribbean* (Gainesville, Fla., 1997). For recent approaches to the encounter between Europeans and Amerindians, see especially Alfred W. Crosby, Jr., *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport, Conn., 1972); Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492–1797* (London, 1986); Peter Hulme and Neil Whitehead, eds., *Wild Majesty: Encounters with Caribs from Columbus to the Present Day* (Oxford, 1992); and Stuart Schwartz, *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge, 1994).

With regard to the notes, when the changes have consisted of a slight retouching, they have been added without altering the number of the note; when the additions have constituted a major contribution, however, they have been incorporated in a separate paragraph and indicated by the addition of the letter *a* to the corresponding number. Likewise, I have thought it would be more convenient to move the notes to the bottom of the page to eliminate for the reader the annoyance of having to flip between the text and the endnotes.

When their source is not indicated, the quotations from Pietro Martire d’Anghiera and from Bartolomé de Las Casas included in the footnotes are to be found in their respective sections in appendixes B and C.

