

# TAINO

TAINOS. A History of the Indians of Puerto Rico and Santo Domingo. By Federico Ribes Tovar. Illustrated by Walter Velez. Book describing the most significant facts pertaining to the aboriginal people of Puerto Rico and Santo Domingo, its customs and beliefs, dwellings and apparel, folklore, etc., as well as the biographies of its most outstanding personalities.

English version

## I



The Island of Puerto Rico Is Born

In the Palaeozoic Era, from 1,000,000,000 to 500,000,000 years ago, Puerto Rico formed part of a continental mass or land bridge linked to the American mainland and possibly at one time to Europe.

The Palaeozoic Era covers the unimaginable eons during which life on this planet gradually developed, from the simple, single-celled organisms in the tepid primeval seas of the Protozoic Era (the age of the earliest life) into more complex forms of animal and vegetable life. It was toward the end of that era that plants, amphibians and reptiles appeared upon the face of the earth.

The continent of which what would one day be Puerto Rico formed part, covered the entire Caribbean region, and geologists have given it the name of Antillia. The record of the rocks—the fossils found in strata laid down in that unthinkable remote period—indicates that America and Europe were linked at one time, either by a continental bridge or a chain of islands. In any event, Puerto Rico then formed part of a solid land mass joined to the American continent.

During the Mesozoic Era 200,000,000 B.C., the age of giant reptiles, the vast continental shelf of which Puerto Rico was a part was convulsed by cataclysmic

earthquakes and eruptions. Tremendous geological upheavals and intense volcanic activity split the very bedrock, opening up vast chasms into which rushed the waters of the primeval seas, causing even more violent disturbances as they came in contact with the incandescent lava.

The stricken continent of Antillia was separated from the American mainland and began to submerge. Only peaks and volcanic cones were left above the surface of the surging waters. Puerto Rico began to assume something resembling its present shape, but much of it was a great plain covered by the invading ocean.

During the Cenozoic Era, 70,000,000 B.C.—12,000,000 B.C., marked by the evolution of birds and mammals, another vast geological convulsion rocked the Caribbean area. Shifts and pressures within the earth's surface gave birth to mountains and valleys.

Puerto Rico was now linked to Santo Domingo and the Virgin Islands to form one big island. But later, deep rifts opened in the sea bottom and Puerto Rico was separated from Santo Domingo, the Virgin Islands and the nearby isles of Vieques and Culebra, gradually acquiring its present familiar shape. The age-long labor was over, and a new island had been born.

## THE ORIGINS.

In prehistoric times the name "Taíno" was already being used to designate a branch of the Arawak people inhabiting the entire island of Borinquen (Puerto Rico) and predominating in the populations of La Española (Santo Domingo-Haiti) and Cuba in the era of the Discovery. These Taíno Indians had been the principal settlers of the Antilles, although it is true that they supplanted another, older group (of aborigines of the pre-ceramic age who travelled all over the Antilles as hunters and fishers since about 2,500 years before the Christian era).

"Taíno" is a word which in the language of the Antillean aborigines means "noble" or "reputable man".

The Taínos were a neolithic people—belonging, in other words, to the Late Stone Age—that had arrived in Borinquen and Santo Domingo from Venezuela and Guayana and especially from the mouth of the Orinoco River where its Arawak relatives still lived at the time of the Spanish conquest.

It is impossible to determine when exactly the first Taínos came to Borinquen; but research in the last fifty years has led scientists to conclude that it was in the first 300 years A.D. The migration started with the island of Trinidad; and it took the Taínos at least 1000 years to hop from one island to the other to finally arrive at the shores of Cuba at the end of the Antillean chain.

The Spaniards used the Taínos to communicate with the Arawaks who lived on the South American coasts. The large Arawak family apparently hailed from the Bolivian highland; but its first origins seem to have been located more to the south and east, in Paraguay and the southern part of Brazil where the Guarano-Tupí tribes lived.

This is how an ancient legend explains the origins of these Indians: "Tupí and Guarano were two brothers who came to the Brazilian jungle from a mysterious land across the sea. In their new homeland they pitched their camp and sowed the soil. They lived in peace for some time until the arguments between their wives made it impossible for the two brothers to continue living in the same place. The older of the two, Tupí, remained in the Mato Grosso area. Guarano migrated to the south where he founded the new people that was subsequently spreading over today's Paraguay."

In this form the Guarano himself explains his being related to the Tupí, pointing to the unquestionable affinity of the two peoples of the vast jungle zone of South America. Both linguistic branches, Tupí-Guarano and Karaivé-Guarano characterize the Arawak peoples which were later to settle in the island of Borinquen and Santo Domingo.

This Arawak people named Taíno were through their agriculture the most important ones in the Greater Antilles. According to historians of Antillean culture, their advent in the area was marked by three cultural periods: IGNERIS or Arawak Indians who settled in Trinidad and made painted pottery; SUBTAINO or Arawak Indians, culturally primitive but with the Taíno's characteristics and his language; TAINO, considered the most advanced culturally in the Arawak world, flourishing with the appearance of the Boca Chica pottery in Santo Domingo and its variants in Puerto Rico.

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### LOS TAINOS

Indios de Puerto Rico

By Federico Ribes Tovar.

Illustrated by Walter Vélez.

(Reviewed by

Elena Padilla PHD Anthropologist.)

History, customs and patterns of life of the TAINO INDIANS in Puerto Rico.

Content: (1) The Island of Puerto Rico is born.— 2 The Origins.— 3 Racial and Cultural Characteristics.— 4 Villages and Dwellings.— 5 Nourishment and Way of Life.— 6 The Taíno Culture.— 7 Taíno Crafts.— 8 Political and Social Organization.

Excellent series for elementary and secondary grades students, and for Puerto Rican Studies in general.

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## RACIAL AND CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS.

Christopher Columbus describes the Taínos as "the most favorably proportioned people I have ever seen". Other chronicles of the Discovery portray them as people of cinnamon-olive color and medium height, fleshy and well proportioned. Their noses were short and flat, their nostrils wide; and they had slanting eyes and bad teeth. Their foreheads were narrow and their heads flat because they practiced deformation of the skull by pressing the heads of the newborn between two boards, in front and rear, tied together with cotton cords, until the child was three years old. The Taínos' hair was black and coarse; they were wearing it short in front and long in the back but had neither body hair nor beard.

According to authorities, the Taíno Indian had his five bodily senses well developed. His eyesight was excellent; and he had a fine sense of touch. He had a good memory; for he cultivated it for the recitation of his historical areytos. Goodness predominated; and he was not much given to rancor and vengeance. He was strong and manly, a good archer; and at the time of the colonization he was able to carry loads of 75 to 100 pounds without difficulty. However, the depressing influence of the tropics on his organism, which did not enjoy the advantages produced by ethnic mixture, somewhat affected his development by making him more susceptible to any disease.

The Taíno woman was handsome and very fertile. She could spin cotton (sorobey) quite well and weave the little skirts for the married women and breechcloths for the chiefs. From cotton they also made hammocks and bandages that were used for the arms and ankles. The Taíno woman also devoted herself to cultivating the soil, preparing food, fetching water and participating in pottery work. Taíno women were used to fighting alongside the men in the wars against the Carib Indians; and some were distinguished by being elected chiefs, Anacaona in Santo Domingo and Yuisa in Borinquen having been the most famous among these.

All the men and the unmarried girls went totally naked but painted their bodies with viscous resin and vividly colored oil in elaborate and painstaking designs. Tattooing was also much practiced; and all this ornamentation had a religious or symbolic meaning. Red was the color of war.

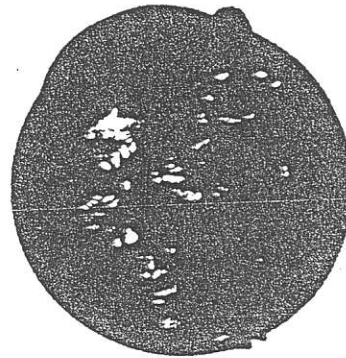
Body painting which they considered their clothing also protected them from the insects through its smell and from excessive heat, humidity and exposure to wind.

Ocasasionally they wore nose ornaments and earrings made of small snail shells, sea shells or colored stones. Arms, feet and other parts of the body were adorned with cordage bracelets and collars from which shells, fish scales, animal teeth and whatever objects their imagination suggested to them as being beautiful were dangling, among them always amulets carved with the figure of a cemi or tribal idol. Sometimes they also wore beautifully colored feathers on their heads and gold disks on their cheeks.

They also had painted masks covered with gold, like those they gave to Columbus as a present. It is believed that these were reserved to persons of high rank.

Married women girded themselves with an apron of white cotton fabric, which they called "nagua", sometimes not larger than a grape leaf, sometimes leaving

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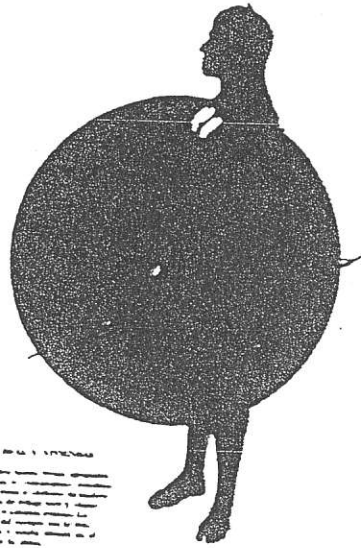


THE TAÍNO  
INDIAN  
BY  
J. H. HARRIS  
NEW YORK  
1908

them only partly covered. The women chiefs wore their naguas at ankle length but used the short one when they played the ritual ball games.

Chastity was not necessary; for sexual experience was considered important. Incest was unknown among the Taínos. Married men had no intercourse with their wives for 15 to 20 days before collecting gold in the rivers, since they were afraid that otherwise their eyesight would be impeded and they would be unable to see the metal.

The chiefs were allowed to have several wives, and one of these used to be the favorite or principal wife. They all lived together without showing jealousy, served their husband, taking care of his comfort, of the children and of all domestic labors. When the chief died, one or two of his favorite women had to travel with him—voluntarily—to the other world to keep him company there. The grave was a very large excavation covered with sticks and foliage before being filled with earth; for the earth was not permitted to touch those who were buried there.



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## VILLAGES AND DWELLINGS.

The Taíno Indians lived together in villages or "yuca-teques" consisting of houses or "bohíos" of wood covered with dry leaves and of "baraheques" or conical huts. Several families sometimes lived in one large house.

The chief's residence was the largest and was located in the hamlet's center. In front there always was a plaza (the "batey") for public and ritual ceremonies.

The Taínos built their houses upon posts or tree trunks driven into the ground at two or three steps distance from each other. On the posts they placed the floor of canes or twigs, and around it they erected the walls which were also made of cane stalks, interlaced with palm leaves to bind them together. The cane stalks came together at the apex in the center of the house which could have an oval, square or rectangular form; and where they were joined they formed something like a pavilion. The houses had no windows, all the light entering through a narrow door.

Inside there were an "altar" upon which the idols or *cemis* were being deposited, gourds for drinking and other utensils of daily living, vessels of clay or wood, knives and spoons. The Taínos also had mortars of wood or pestles, baskets and fishing equipment hanging from the walls and axes of several types.

The hammock or Indian bed, made of agave fibre or *juco*, was an important object. It had its origins in the Amazon jungle and must first have appeared as a device for protection, since it isolated the Indian from the humidity of the soil and from the insects.

In the residence of the chiefs (*caciques*) "duhos" could be found: sumptuous seats of *lignum-vitae* with sculptured ornaments.

The Taínos used torches for lighting, made of "go-anax" wood which the Spaniards called "balsam wood" because injuries were cured with its resin. The Taínos made a fire with three thin sticks, two being tied together at the ends and the third, which was pointed, being rotated by hand on the two connected ones.

Their weapons were bows, arrows, clubs, spears and blowtubes. Bows and arrows were generally made of flexible and hard wood. The arrows ended in a bone or fish-tooth tip or one of fire-hardened wood. The star-apple tree, because of its light and resistant wood, was used to make arrows. It should be indicated that in the case of the Taíno Indians most of these instruments had a twofold function; for the spears and arrows were also utilized for fishing and the clubs and axes for cutting wood in the forests.

It seems to be established that the Taíno chiefs engaged in commerce; but we do not know whether they used money, although it has been assumed that this consisted of the cylindrical stone objects forming the crowns and necklaces of the chiefs, which were the more valuable the more lively their colors. Blues and greens were being preferred, and jade was the most appreciated stone.

The Taínos had middle-sized canoes for fishing; very small ones for short trips by sea or for crossing rivers; and pirogues accommodating about fifty men for long voyages and war. They all were made of one piece from tree trunks hollowed out with fire and with flint hatches.



### NOURISHMENT AND WAY OF LIFE.

They subsisted on agriculture, fishing and hunting. Agriculture was well developed; and their cultivated fields astonished the Spaniards who described the island as "a large table-land covered with plantations of all sorts of farming products, especially pumpkins which are so well grown that one feels satiated just looking at them".

They tilled the soil in small garden beds, which they called "conucos", to get nourishing and medicinal plants. Generally they sowed tubercles in "blocks" over extensions that sometimes went up to 100,000 feet. This was a technique of making small earth mounds with the help of the "coa", a pointed stick of fire-hardened wood, or with stone hatches and picks. The main staple was yucca. The second in importance was corn. They were not unacquainted with animal fertilizer; and it is very probable that they carried out irrigation work.

Yucca or manioc was the basis of their alimentation. These are shrubs whose roots were being scraped up and down a "gayo", a kind of board of rugose, generally volcanic stone with sharpened edges. The pulp thus obtained was passed through the "habíz" (sieve) in order to extract from it the poisonous juice; and then the "cazabi" or large cakes were baked on immense round ceramic griddles (40 inches in diameter).

They also ate other tubercles, the sweet potato or yacaba, corn, and tropical fruits like papaya and pineapple. Papaya and "ananás", the word for pineapple in Spanish and other languages, actually are Taino words.

Fishing was a vital necessity for this insular people descended from great sailors; but it also was a pleasant pastime. The Tainos were skilful fishermen, at sea, on the shores and in the rivers, with nets and harpoons.

They reserved the latter for the big prey, especially the manatees (seacows) whose skulls, scattered along the beach, were believed to belong to some species of cows when Columbus landed.

The turtles were being fished with nets, and their meat was much appreciated. Since the larger mammals were lacking, the meat of dogs, iguanas and parrots provided delicious meals for feastedays. The Tainos knew how to smoke these foods for preservation by means of a technique that they taught the island's first colonists.

They prepared three meals a day: in the morning, at noon and in the evening. After dinner they took an emetic, went to the river and vomited. Hence the vomiting sticks that have been found in the currents of rivers and are masterworks of Taino art.

In recent years, research has produced evidence of the Tainos having also been earth-eaters, having mixed earth with various foods in times of flood and other catastrophes of nature.

It seems that the women took charge of making food in the form of balls the size of an orange. These consisted mainly of clay earth which they had mixed with corn meal or tortoise oil. They made a hole in the middle and then placed a quantity in the oven until the balls had become rather solid. It is important to point out that earth eating was practiced by the Otomaco Indians of the Orinoco River. Scholars hold the opinion that this belongs to a Central American heritage related to the ritual of putting earth in the mouth for some ceremonies and that it became a custom linked to subsistence when it was imposed by the environment. On the other hand, Christopher Columbus mentions in his diary that earth eating was already disappearing at the time of the Discovery.

## THE TAINO CULTURE.

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The themes of life and death dominated the customs, the religion and the art of the Tainos, and this gave a certain cohesion to their culture.

Their joy of living, which astonished the Spaniards, manifested itself above all in their religious and secular festivities. They loved music, song and dance. The Tainos had various musical instruments. The most characteristic ones were the flute, the large conch shell, the ocarina, the drum called "maguey", the maracas, the reed trumpet and the fife. The Taino song was a monotonous recitation with a few discordant notes and a chorus refrain.

They made music when they had a religious festivity and in the "areytos", meetings of many people where their traditional songs and dances extolled the victories of their war heroes and narrated the outstanding events of their history and in this manner conveyed to new generations the lessons of the past.

Sad or joyous events were celebrated with an "areyto". It served to explain the reasons for a war, to appease the anger of a "cemi", to mourn the death of someone important or to celebrate the birth of a son. And for each occasion the Tainos had the appropriate dances and songs. Dancing also was considered a way to cure a sick person; and if that person could not dance himself, the "buhúti" (or buhiti), the medicine man, danced for him.

The dances were very expressive, above all the war dance which vividly depicted the various actions of a campaign.

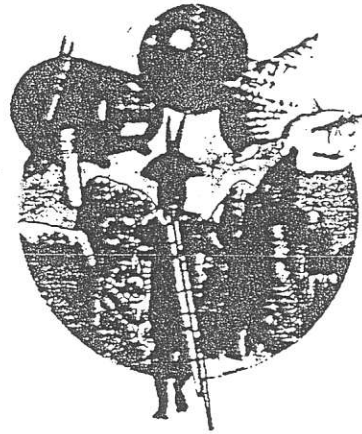
The men could dance alone, or the women alone; and they also danced together, holding each other by the hand and forming two lines. A leader intoned the song and was beating time, and all the others repeated in unison the story which he was singing.

The dancers got drunk until they fell down drunk; and others then joined the dance and took their place. The areyto used to end in general drunkenness. They were drinking "uiku" and "xixa", alcoholic beverages which the women prepared with corn masticated by young Indian girls, the saliva causing fermentation.

Outside the villages the Tainos had places for the "batey" or ballgame. The ball was made of fibers extracted from certain roots and mixed with resin. They boiled the mixture; and with the paste thus obtained they formed balls so hard that they could not throw them back with their hands but used the shoulder, the head or the thigh. There were games of women alone, men alone, men against women, and also with mixed teams.

Basically the Taino religion was a nature cult or totemism. They adored plants, animals and birds, although they recognized a superior deity called "Yucahú" (or Yocahu) who lived on the summits of Luquillo and was the good god. Another deity was an evil spirit called "Huracán". The first one did not need the prayers or supplications which were being addressed to the evil one in order to calm his ire.

They also adored the "cemis" or idols representing other, minor deities. These were sculptured or painted with diverse figures. They worshipped them in their



houses, adorned themselves with their figures; and outside the village they had a large house of worship where the cacique (chief) and the priests spoke to the people through its cemi's mouth. The people brought the cemi food which served to feed the priests.

They also believed in the resurrection of the deceased to another marvelous world where an eternal spring reigned and all the good things of life were available in abundance; but their spirits would return to Earth periodically, and in their imagination this was the cause for all sorts of apparitions and ghosts.

Each act of daily living had a religious implication. In the sacred ceremonies reserved to the nobles and the priests they held smoking sessions which intoxicated them; for they inhaled through the nose a mixture of tobacco with narcotic herbs. The priests then consulted the cemi which decided on war or peace or other important questions. This ceremony was called the "cohoba".

Death cohabited amicably with life. The practice of euthanasia was common; and when the sick were dying they were being drowned. Afterwards the body was cut open and dried by means of a fire before it was buried.

They believed that the spirits ("hupía") of the dead went out at night to eat wild fruits and to communicate with the living. For the day they returned to their world, a place called "coaibay".



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## TAINO CRAFTS.

The activities that might come under the heading of crafts were pottery, the carving and polishing of stone and wood, the weaving of cotton or "sorobey", the making of cords from mayagua or maguey for hammocks or fishing nets and also the transformation of sisal or cabuya fibres to be used for cutting and much sought after for the engraving of rocks and hard woods. The Taínos also made bows and arrows, axes and clubs in accordance with certain rules. The women actively participated in this work.

While Taíno art eschewed the monumental, it showed in stone, wood and ceramics a surety and elegance setting it apart in the history of art.

Taíno civilization was marked by the use of polished stone, though the Taínos also conserved some of the more primitive utensils of chipped stone. Made of stone were their axes, knives and small figures of idols called "cemis". They also worked the wood, sometimes carving primitive sculptures, and made vessels of baked clay, which, together with sea shells, constituted their household goods. The vessels were styled with an accomplished expressionism that might be compared to that of the most advanced continental ceramics. The Taínos' bone carvings are equalled only by those of the Eskimos.

The stone carvings known as three-pointed stones, the so-called cemís, and the stone collars have been the major unresolved mysteries encountered in studying the Taínos.

The three-pointed stone or cemi was an important god of the Arawak tribes of Puerto Rico and Santo Domingo in the Taíno era. The symbolism of these

stones has been much discussed by the chroniclers of the Indies. Fray Román Pané tells us that the cemi's three-cornered profile has some connection with the harvest, the rains and everything favoring the growth of the yuca, the Taínos' principal nourishment. It seems that the Taínos in the times preceding the Spanish conquest converted the root into an enormous cultural symbol embodying something like a unifying godhead of the various tribes.

They carved it in different sizes on a basis varying between four and eighty inches. The god of manioc or fertility had a strange form and was being made of all the natural stones found in Puerto Rico: Madrepora, diorite and especially marble. The cemís sometimes bear animal, sometimes human features; and without ornamentation they could be modern sculptures. The cemi is a unique object in the world history of religions to be found only in Taíno culture.

The stone collars have been defined as a circle of life, instruments to help women when they give birth, belts to be used during the ball games, or protectors of important persons who, when they had died, were buried with one of these collars on their body. Some ethnologists and archeologists affirm that the collars were something like the tribes' coats of arm.

The Taínos also made refined wood carvings, especially the "duhos", ceremonial seats for important occasions. They were curved chairs with four legs, in many cases with animal or human images, and were used in the games, rituals and all the activities in which the chief participated.

The best "duhos" are made of lignum-vitae wood and are richly carved. The empty parts may have been inlaid with gold leaf in their time.

In ceramics the Taíno Indians were unique in the Antilles. Most of the styles found in Puerto Rico and Santo Domingo have a common origin and make it possible to determine the influence of the so-called saladero style of Venezuela. People from these shores started to leave in the first three centuries of our era and, according to a chronology established by Yale University, had definitely arrived in the Lesser Antilles and Puerto Rico before the start of the second century.

Beginning with the saladero style of Venezuela, the following styles subsequently developed in Puerto Rico:

Cuevas style, discovered at the Barrio Cañas in Ponce, showing white-on-red drawings on ceramics well finished with surface color.

Ostiones style, derived from the Cuevas style which has a fine, hard ceramic texture and soft, well-finished surfaces.

Santa Elena style: coarse, thick and soft material and an irregular surface that looks as if the polishing had been left unfinished.

Capá style, to be found on Puerto Rico's west coast. Hemispherical vessels distinguished by the incision of fine and relatively deep lines.

Esperanza style, identified with the east of Puerto Rico and named after the site Esperanza on the Island of Vieques: an intermediary form between the Capá style and the Boca Chica style of Santo Domingo, with uncommon decorations of the structure and surface. In this style the handles represent decorative heads.

Through the classification of pottery styles the scholars doing research on the Taíno culture have been able to arrive at certain conclusions as to population movements, reconstruction of the society and the duration of the different periods.



## POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The socio-political organization of the Taíno Indians resembled a primitive communism insofar as their economic system was based upon collective property. The land belonged to all. However, the State was headed by a hereditary nobility led by a principal cacique who lived surrounded by subjects. The local chiefs recognized his authority and had to obey his orders.

The local chiefs' rule was based on a village and generally extended through the entire valley. It also could extend to an entire island. The caciques "ruled their people like good fathers guiding their children".

In Taíno society a hierarchy of political power thus existed but could not really be called feudalism. The village chief simply represented the principal cacique as the local authority.

In principle, the oldest son of a cacique succeeded his father upon the latter's passing, no matter who his mother was. If the cacique left no sons, he was succeeded by the son of his sister—not his brother's—because paternity was less certain in the scheme of consanguinity than motherhood. Exceptionally, the cacique could delegate his authority to a sister; but the status of women in matters of succession is not well known.

The social divisions of the Taínos were simple. First came the caciques who used a crown of green feathers and a large gold disk called "guanín" on their chest as symbols of authority. They were followed by the nitáinos. The caciques were recruited from this group; and they acted as deputy chiefs. The next category consisted of the priests or "behiques" who were both oracles and medicine men. The working class people were called naborias. They tilled the soil and did various jobs or became soldiers under the command of the nitáinos.

Compulsory taxation did not exist in Taíno society; but they were obliged to participate in communal labors to ensure the village's subsistence. The distribution of goods was carried out in a communitarian manner; and the idea of private property seems to have been restricted to certain possessions and ritual circles.

The cacique judged crimes and imposed the death penalty in cases of theft or adultery. A thief was executed by impaling him: A stake was introduced into his anus until it ended in his head.

According to the chroniclers of the Spanish conquest and the numerous words that have survived, the language of the Taínos was a sonorous and complex idiom, going far beyond the simple juxtaposition of syllables in completely primitive languages. In the entire archipelago a general Taíno language was in existence; but owing to the isolation of the islands and to neologisms, dialects were formed. Today only remnants of the general language remain. Many Taíno words have been conserved in the names of rivers, mountains, bays, places, harbors, capes, birds, fishes, musical instruments and household utensils.

When Christopher Columbus arrived in Borinquén, two important caciquedoms marked the political, social

and religious division of the Taíno Indians, wrote his son Diego de Colón. These were the caciquedom of Guaynia (Guayanilla) under the principal cacique Aguebana and the caciquedom of Otoa, ruled by Guarionex.

Later research has revealed that at the time of the Discovery 18 caciques governed in Puerto Rico as principal and local chiefs: Aguebana, cacique de Guaynia; Guarionex, cacique of Otoco; Aymamón, cacique of Aimaco; Urayoán, cacique of Yaqueca; Mabodamaca, cacique of Guajataca; Abacoa, cacique of Arecibo; Arabaná, cacique of Toa; Cuacabo, cacique of Sibuco; Mabó, cacique of Guaynabo; Mahagua, cacique of Bayamón; Yuisa, female cacica of Aymainio; Canobana, cacique of Cainabón; Caguax, cacique of Turabo; Guacara, cacique of Guayaney; Guamani, cacique of Guayama; Orocobix, cacique of Hatibonico; Humacao, cacique of Macao; Yuquibo, cacique of Daguao.

When Aguebana, the supreme cacique of Borinquén, died, the caciquedom of Guaynia was inherited by his sister's son Aguebana II who led the Taíno rebellion of 1511 and was therefore called Guaybana the Brave. He died fighting for his people's liberty; from then on the Taínos were to gradually die out.

They disappeared, destroyed largely by smallpox, lung edema and other diseases which they caught from Whites who carried the germs that had been unknown there and were doubly lethal in that virgin land.

The Taínos also committed collective suicides by means of the poisonous manioc juice in order to escape the serfdom imposed upon them by the Spaniards who changed their traditional way of life. They also knew methods to make their women sterile.

Some Taínos, in despair because of the loss of their freedom under the Spanish government which did not recognize their social system, enslaved them—or scourged by hunger, moved to the neighboring islands of Mona, Monico, Vieques and others, mostly inhabited by the Carib Indians, their traditional enemies. There they occupied small zones, fishing and cultivating small seed fields. But after a few years they no longer could subsist without enough space and they asked for land in Puerto Rico. They were granted land in the mountains of Añasco and San Germán, where they lived for a long time, often separated from the Spaniards.

Not all of them died out. The Spaniards never were adverse to interracial unions and these flourished especially in the beginning of colonization before a sufficient number of white women had arrived. Later the Indian girls in the mountains also started to marry Whites and Blacks of the island. There still exist some Indian features in today's Puerto Rican population owing to the survival of Indian blood. If the Taínos have become almost extinct as a race, some of their blood still runs in the veins of many Puerto Ricans.

Many techniques inherited from the Indians have been conserved: that of the mounds in agriculture and others like braiding and cordmaking, which have hardly been altered.