

The Sculptural Legacy of the Jamaican Taíno

PART 1: THE CARPENTER'S MOUNTAIN CARVINGS

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JAMAICA HAS A REMARKABLE ARTISTIC heritage, its ancestral roots stretching back in time to the original inhabitants of the island. A small group of Taíno wood sculptures have survived centuries in dry caves, where they were placed for ceremonies or for safekeeping. Some of these carvings have long been held as prime examples of Taíno artistry – the centrepieces of museum displays and catalogues. Unlike the stylised conventions of Taíno carvings from Hispaniola (Dominican Republic/Haiti) and Puerto Rico, the Jamaican examples have a unique impact, featuring an innovative style that incorporates and

enhances the natural features of the wood. They reveal a rich artistic legacy that has much to contribute to our understanding of Taíno ritual, belief and aesthetics. Each also has complex stories to convey – from the debates about their symbolism and meaning to issues of cultural patrimony.

Some Jamaican Taíno carvings, such as the three sculptures recovered in 1792 from the Carpenter's Mountain, have a long history of display and interpretation,¹ while others are almost completely unknown. Given the calibre of surviving examples, Taíno artistry undoubtedly flourished on the island – yet only twelve

sculptures are currently known: nine in museum collections, and three documented solely through archival records. Discussion of these pieces extends over two articles in sequential issues of this journal, focusing first on perhaps the best known of the early finds – the Carpenter's Mountain group; the second article will explore other eighteenth-century discoveries, as well as carvings brought to public attention in recent decades, such as the Aboukir sculptures. Together, the articles aim to provide an overview of some of the recent directions in the study of these sculptures, including their historiography, iconography,

chronologies and material studies (Figure 1).

CARPENTER'S MOUNTAIN SCULPTURES: HISTORIOGRAPHY AND MUSEUM DISPLAYS

On the evening of 11 April 1799, three Jamaican sculptures were displayed at the Society of Antiquaries, London, comprising a large free-standing anthropomorphic figure, a smaller anthropomorphic carving with a canopy, and a zoomorph with outstretched arms (now popularly known as the "Birdman"). The minutes of the meeting are brief, but provide what is still the most detailed information on provenance:

Our worthy member Isaac Alves Rebello, Esq; exhibited to the Society three figures, supposed Indian Deities, in wood, found in June 1792, in a natural cave, near the summit of a mountain, called Spots,² in Carpenter's Mountain, in the parish of Vere, in the island of Jamaica, by a surveyor in

measuring the land: they were discovered placed with their Faces, one of which is that of a Bird, towards the East.³

The account concludes: "The Society returned thanks to Mr Rebello for this highly curious and very interesting Exhibition." The term 'curious exhibition' was often used to denote an engaging session at the society, where members often brought their own collections for discussion. In 1803, an illustration entitled "Ancient Wooden Figures found in Jamaica" was published in the society's journal *Archaeologia*, along with the above brief description.⁴ Rebello died shortly thereafter, in 1805, and it is unclear as yet whether he donated the carvings to the British Museum during his lifetime, or whether they remained with his family after his death; in either case there is no mention of them in his will.⁵ Equally, no mention is made of such an accession in the British Museum records at this time,⁶ so it remains unclear when the carvings first entered the collection. They were formally

accessioned over a century and a half later, in 1977, when they were found during a documentation review, and given the qualifier Q, indicating that exact information pertaining to their date of entry into the collections was unknown.⁷

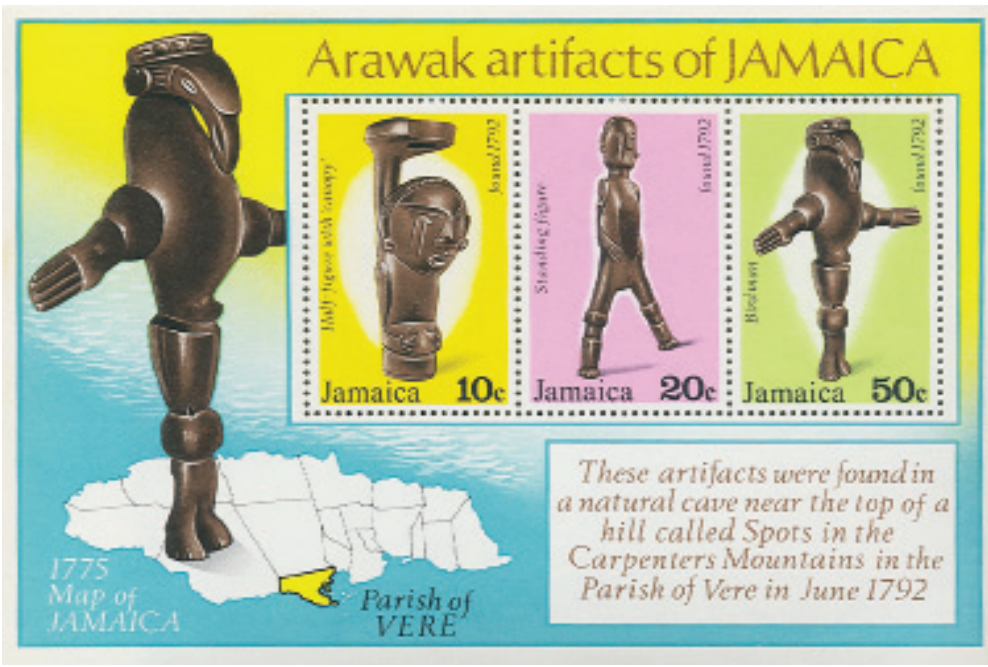
Although the "Synopsis of the Contents of the British Museum" mentioned the display of "antiquities" from the Americas since 1808, the earliest reference to Caribbean "idols" is a note describing the 1847 displays in the Ethnographic Room. Here, amidst sealskin clothing, wampum belts and birch bark boxes are "two ancient Carrib [sic] idols and celts from Jamaica". It is not clear from the description whether these idols were

OPPOSITE PAGE Figure 1: Distribution map of the nine surviving pre-colonial sculptures from Jamaica, with their AMS radiocarbon dates. The Carpenter's Mountain group (lower left) is the focus of this article, with the Aboukir group (upper left), two duhos and anthropomorph (right) to be discussed in the next issue of Jamaica Journal. The numbers in brackets cross-reference with the tables in both articles.

BELOW Figure 2: A photograph of the Carpenter's Mountain sculptures on their plaster mounts with strategically positioned labels, taken c.1870 by W. A. Mansell and Company.



COURTESY OF THE ROYAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL INSTITUTE PHOTO ARCHIVES, RA1 38682



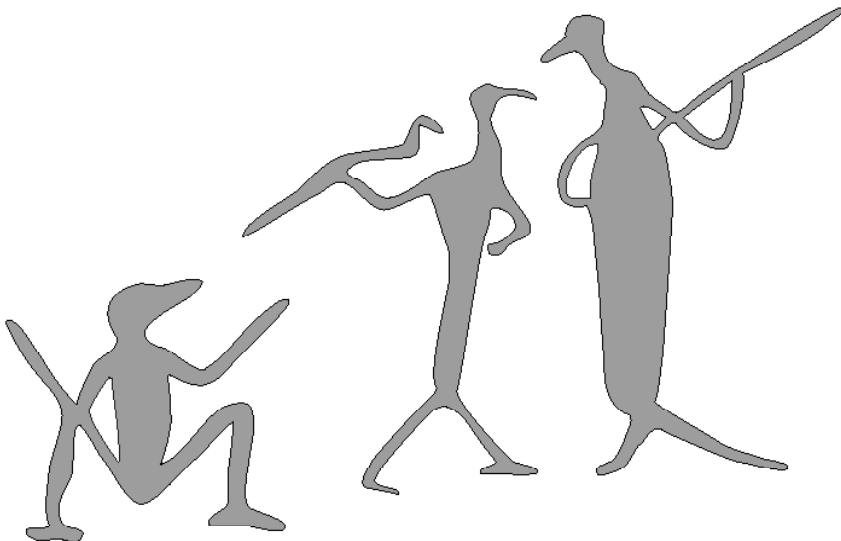
two of the Carpenter’s Mountain pieces, but the Jamaican provenance is suggestive. Our first image of them is a photograph published c.1870 by W. A. Mansell and Company, where they appear on their massive display bases,⁸ complete with carefully positioned labels to save the blushes of the visiting Victorian public (Figure 2).⁹ Through the following decades, the British Museum’s “West Indies” displays are briefly mentioned in the guidebooks, with an occasional note made of “wood carvings”, suggesting that the figures may have been a long-term feature in the exhibits. By 1886, due to the museum’s acquisition of the massive

Henry Christy collection, a major reorganisation of the displays took place, with the ethnographic materials featured in a series of connecting rooms along one wing. The Caribbean material now had dedicated cases which featured “chiefly stone implements. A few carvings in wood; and three remarkable stone rings, the use of which is not known.”¹⁰ By 1895, some of the wood carvings are displayed “on top of the case”,¹¹ and in 1899, the guide notes: “Wall cases 7–9 are occupied by stone implements, including some of superior make, and wood carvings from the West Indies.”¹² Interest in the Caribbean collections had clearly

grown, concomitant with the increase of the museum’s holdings and their display, and, in 1907, a dedicated article by T.A. Joyce, “Prehistoric Antiquities from the Antilles in the British Museum”, appeared in the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, prominently featuring the Carpenter’s Mountain sculptures.

Plaster casts were made and presented to the Institute of Jamaica in 1939.¹³ George A. Aarons suggests that this was in response to a repatriation request

from the Jamaican government,¹⁴ although Wayne Modest notes that “no formal request has ever been made by, or on behalf of the Jamaican people, for [their] restitution”.¹⁵ The casts were on display in the White Marl Arawak Museum from 1965¹⁶ until its closure, and most recently appeared in the *Xaymaca* exhibit at the Institute of Jamaica. In 1994, the National Gallery of Jamaica requested the loan of the originals from the British Museum for the exhibit *Arawak Vibrations: Homage to the Jamaican Taíno*, but the stipulated conditions were too prohibitive to proceed.¹⁷ The presence of such historically important carvings in foreign institutions remains a source of controversy on the island.¹⁸ But despite their absence from the island for over two hundred years, they have become icons for Jamaica’s indigenous history, providing a frequent point of reference for artistic expression and national identity. The National



ABOVE Figure 3: “Arawak artifacts of Jamaica” stamp sheet featuring the Carpenter’s Mountain sculptures, originally issued 10 July 1978. SGM5451.

BELOW Figure 4: Bird pictographs in the Mountain River Cave, St Catherine. Redrawn from J.W. Lee, “Petroglyphs and Pictographs”, *Archaeology-Jamaica* 74, no.4 (1974), and Lesley-Gail Atkinson, “Sacred Landscapes: Imagery, Iconography and Ideology in Jamaican Rock Art”, in *Rock Art of the Caribbean*, ed. Michele H. Hayward, Lesley-Gail Atkinson, and Michael A. Conquino (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009), 41–57, Fig. 4.2.



Gallery's 1994 *Arawak Vibrations* exhibit featured seventy works by nineteen artists inspired by Jamaica's indigenous heritage, including works depicting the Carpenter's Mountain pieces specifically – such as Judith Salmon's *Bird Man* (1994). Subsequent work by Jamaican artists on Taíno themes, such as Gaston Tabois' *Taíno Cave Rituals* (1996), features these sculptures prominently in a rich underground landscape. This focus on indigenous artistry has been part of the nationalist movement in contemporary Jamaican art, whereby artists have turned away from external influences to local cultural history for

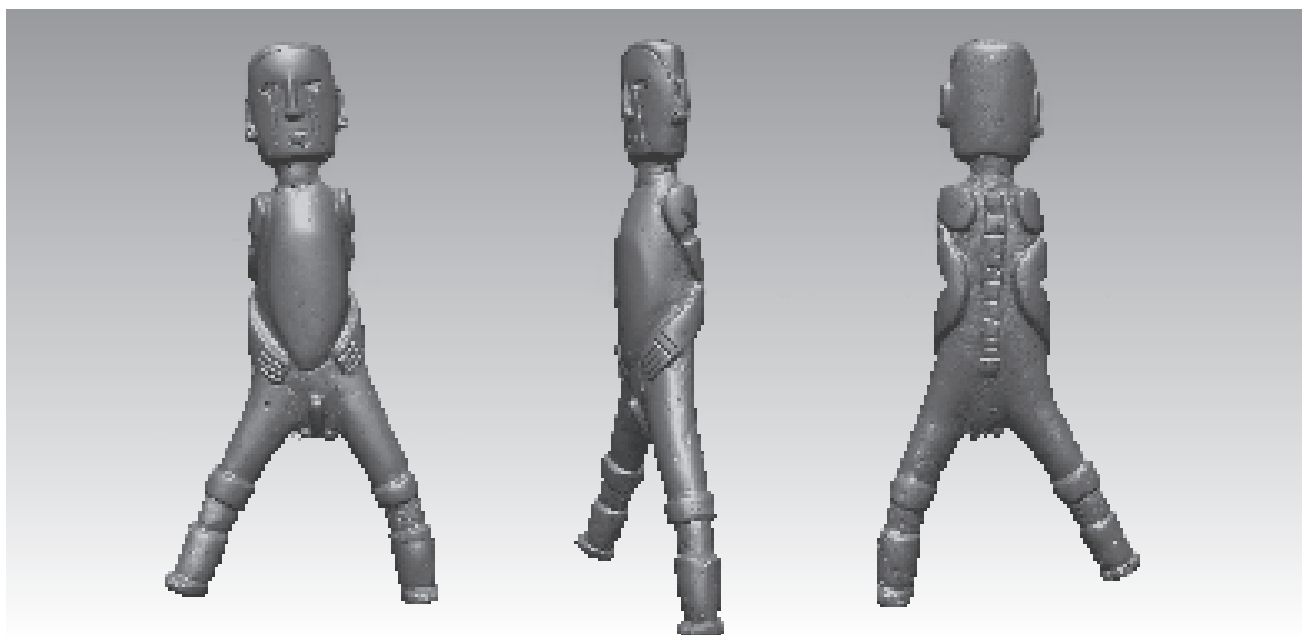
inspiration.¹⁹ Notwithstanding recent critiques on the direct impact of such "primordial" sculptures on colonial and contemporary fine arts,²⁰ it is clear that the Carpenter's Mountain carvings have recently become potent images not only of Jamaica's pre-Hispanic past, but also of its colonial legacies and emerging national identity.

The visual impact of these sculptures also had resonance with international artists: the British sculptor Henry Moore, who was a frequent visitor to the British Museum as a student in the 1920s, took inspiration from them, sketching them in his notebooks alongside other non-

Western sculptures, as he developed his modernist style.²¹ So influential was non-Western art on his early development as an artist that pieces which particularly inspired him often feature in his retrospectives, as was the case when the Birdman figure was loaned to the Sainsbury Centre for

ABOVE Figure 5: *Cohoba stand*, *Guaiacum sp.*, resins; wood date: AD 1028–1156; resin date: 1416–1464, Carpenter's Mountain, Jamaica [1]. H: 385 mm; W: 160 mm; D: 183 mm.

BELOW Figure 6: *Anthropomorphic cemí*, *Guaiacum sp.*, shell, resins; wood date: AD 1256–1382; resin date: 1426–1487, Carpenter's Mountain, Jamaica [3]. H: 1050 mm; W: 490 mm; D: 145 mm. Image from 3-D model scanned as part of the *Pre-Hispanic Caribbean Sculptural Arts in Wood* project.





Visual Arts for the 1998 exhibit *Henry Moore: Friendship and Influence*. Moore was particularly struck by how the Birdman was built up in divisions “as though it were breathing in matter, up from the toes, along the arms . . . into the great swelling chest”²² – aspects which later took root in such sculptures as *Upright Motive* (1955–56). This growing appreciation of the dramatic sculptural qualities of Taíno art were later expounded by William Fagg, curator of the British Museum’s 1970 exhibit *The Tribal Image*, which opened with the three Carpenter’s Mountain sculptures.²³ In this review, selected from what were considered the finest sculptures in the British Museum ethnographic collections, Fagg noted:

It is remarkable, since rather few figures in wood have been found in the Americas, that this one tribe, the Arawak, has produced so many works of supreme sculptural merit, fit to be compared with the best tribal works of the other continents, and, so far as surviving works allow us to judge, probably the finest works of wood sculpture produced in the Americas before or since Columbus.²⁴

Since the turn of the twentieth century, when the first detailed photographs of the Carpenter’s

Mountain sculptures were featured in Joyce’s article,²⁵ they have been a mainstay of publications dealing with the art and culture of the pre-Columbian Caribbean. Following the Columbus quincentenary, their images featured among the select highlights of Taíno artistry in glossy museum catalogues.²⁶ They have rarely been off display: recently, they toured Asia as part of the British Museum’s *Treasures of the World’s Cultures* exhibit in 2005; were featured in a small display dedicated to the Taíno in 2008 in the very heart of the British Museum – a gallery flanking the main entrance; and in the same year travelled to Spain as part of the touring *Caribbean before Columbus* exhibit.²⁷ From 2012 until 2013, the Birdman travelled on loan to Paris, Bonn and Madrid as part of the *Masters of Chaos* exhibit, while the large anthropomorphic carving was featured in the British Museum’s *Shakespeare: Staging the World* (linked, predictably, to *The Tempest*), and served as one of the highlights in the *London Evening Standard*’s “London, a World City in 20 Objects” (a weekly series which “examine[d] an artefact from the British Museum with origins in one of the capital’s diverse cultures”).²⁸ They now have their own Wikipedia entry.²⁹ With such sustained international exposure, they are set to remain iconographic milestones of Caribbean – and specifically Jamaican – (pre)history.

ICONOGRAPHIC INTERPRETATIONS OF THE CARPENTER’S MOUNTAIN GROUP

The Carpenter’s Mountain group have had a long history of study, particularly their intriguing iconography.³⁰ Briefly, the group differs in size, subject matter (zoomorphic/ anthropomorphic), elaboration and finish. The configuration of the two largest figures clearly takes advantage of the natural features of the wood: the legs of the large anthropomorph and the ‘wings’ of the Birdman are carved from bifurcated branches stemming from the main trunk/branch which forms the bodies. The Birdman – as this zoo/ anthropomorphic sculpture has been known since Handler popularised the title in 1977³¹ – has become perhaps the most recognised of the three, featured prominently on national stamps (Figure 3), as a symbol for learned societies (Association of Caribbean Historians), and a favourite puzzle in Taíno iconographic studies. Most recently, José Oliver has constructed a compelling argument for the merging of bird and man in this single sculpture: the figure is both a representation of masculine potency (bared teeth, erect penis, testes) and

ABOVE Figure 7: Anthropomorphic stone pestle depicted with hands positioned below the tear tracks, as if for emphasis. Note the circular scapula depicted at the back, which is also seen in the Carpenter’s Mountain anthropomorph. ‘West Indies’ provenance. H: 155 mm; W: 93 mm; D: 99 mm.

a depiction of *Iniriri* (*Yahababel*), the mythic woodpecker who created the first reproductive women.³² The myth, recorded by Ramon Pané in the fifteenth century, when he stayed in the Macorix cacicazgo on Hispaniola, recounts how the woodpecker used his beak to “manufacture” (initiate) the first reproductive women from the sexless beings that fell from trees.³³ *Iniriri* also means ‘husband’, another link to socially sanctioned sexual partnerships.³⁴ It thus captures both the mythic source of, and the physical desire for, women as marriage partners and mothers in a complex layering of meanings. Oliver identifies the woodpecker (*Melanerpes* sp.) by the depiction of the stylised feathers on either side of the head, and the raised head crest, which recall the distinctive positions of the bird’s red head feathers. In contrast, the Jamaican ornithologist Catherine Levy suggests that the carving represents a Jamaican crow (*Corvus jamaicensis*), based on the coracoid shape and curve of the beak, with the stylised forehead feather designs representing the narial feathers that cover the base of the bill, protecting the crow’s eyes.³⁵ Indeed, it will be many years yet before we exhaust the possible interpretations of this enigmatic sculpture.

Intriguingly, combinations of bird and human imagery have appeared in other media in Jamaica – such as the pictograph depicting “bird beaked humanoid figures facing each other with spears or throwing sticks” seen in Mountain River Cave, St Catherine (Figure 4),³⁶ northeast of Carpenter’s Mountain. James W. Lee interprets this as a bird hunting scene,³⁷ while Karl Watson suggests that this motif had more religious/ceremonial overtones.³⁸ Lesley-Gail Atkinson, in discussing this scene, suggests that the figures hold ceremonial staffs, and notes the proximity of another figure, sitting or squatting, who is potentially observing the two ‘birdmen’.³⁹ The scene may also be interpreted in another way: the group are participants in the *cohoba* ceremony, with the squatting figure adopting the posture often seen in anthropomorphic figures on cohoba

paraphernalia,⁴⁰ while the ‘birdmen’ are about to purge themselves with long vomiting spatulas. In neighbouring Hispaniola, birds are frequently depicted on the carved handles of vomiting spatulas⁴¹ – perhaps a fitting allusion to narcotic flight. Pictographs depicting the ingestion of narcotics, and potentially the use of long vomiting spatulas, have also been documented in various caves on Hispaniola.⁴²

A link between the Carpenter’s Mountain figures and the cohoba ceremony has long been assumed: the smallest of the carvings is an anthropomorphic *cemí* (representation of a spirit, deity or ancestor) with a round platform above its head – a feature associated with ‘cohoba stands’, whereupon the drug was placed to be inhaled (Figure 5). The figure is intriguing on a number of levels, not least the ambivalent representation of its sexual organs, in stark contrast to the two larger figures, which each have a clearly represented phallus and testes. On the canopied *cemí*’s central base, between its two engraved hands, is, in Joyce’s words, “a projection of uncertain meaning”.⁴³ On the one hand, the deeply grooved feature may represent a penis, with the two engraved circles as two-dimensional representations of the testes.⁴⁴ On the other, this feature – in its excavated oval shape – may be a representation of the vulva. If the latter, it would be the only canopied *cemí* thus far known to do so, and would present a potent contrast to the two associated male figures, especially if the three carvings functioned as a ‘set’ during the ritual. Intriguingly, Oliver notes that the hands of the figure have three digits that terminate in circular punctures, suggestive of the hand formation of the coqui frog (*Eleutherodactylus* sp.):⁴⁵ frogs, especially coqui with their rich vocals before a rain, have long been associated with fecundity – especially with female fertility and children.⁴⁶ It is intriguing to think that in positioning the frog-like hands around this physical ‘core’ of the carving, the artist was underscoring the ‘femaleness’ of the sculpture. But the combination and details of this carving – just as in the case of the Birdman –

will undoubtedly keep us guessing for some time to come.

The largest of the carvings is an anthropomorphic figure with erect phallus and outstretched legs. It shares with the canopied *cemí* the deeply engraved tear trails running down the length of the face (Figure 6). These cheek furrows, identified in José Juan Arrom’s iconographic study as a diagnostic feature of the *cemí* Boinayel (“Bringer of the Rains”),⁴⁷ are thought to allow water to flow as “tears”, and “symbolise the course of the magical tears that created rainfall”.⁴⁸ However, the figure’s cheek grooves still feature a resinous substance in the furrows, presumably used to adhere a colorant, or shell, or perhaps gold inlays, and are therefore not channels for water. Further, the original myth collected by Pané only mentioned that the twinned *cemís* Márohu and Boinayel were carved of stone, and that they “seemed to be sweating” (i.e., no explicit link to tears). Thus, the simple equation of tears being diagnostic to Boinayel – as logical as it first appears – subdues us into thinking that we have reached a certain level of ‘understanding’ in Taíno iconography, which is at best misleading. There are still too many unknowns, especially in attributing Hispaniolan myths, collected by a cleric who lived for a short time among a Macorix (i.e., non-Taíno) community, to the material culture of other islands. Others have begun to interpret this figure in different ways: according to Oliver and Colin McEwan, the figure, carved as it is of “jet black” guaiacum, is associated with the “domain of the dead spirits (*opiya* or *opía*) of the ancestors and with the darkness of caves . . . [and] is likely a *cemí*-ancestor; his erect, exaggerated penis may suggest his fecundity and prowess as a progenitor”.⁴⁹

Image Cave (MC3), in Carpenter’s Mountain, Manchester is considered by some to be the original find spot of the figures,⁵⁰ and intriguingly, there are a number of petroglyphs in Manchester parish that feature large faces with vertical lines below the eyes,⁵¹ as do some ceramic lugs from sites such as neighbouring Clarendon



parish's Round Hill, C-1.⁵² The image also appears on other Caribbean islands, including Cuba,⁵³ Puerto Rico⁵⁴ and the Dominican Republic.⁵⁵ In some cases, these 'tear' lines are given extra emphasis – for example, an anthropomorphic maul in the British Museum collections features the figure's hands raised to the vertical cheek lines (Figure 7). Such iconographic details have clear importance but are, as yet, poorly understood. Some have argued that the streaming tear lines, together with clenched teeth of the Carpenter's Mountain anthropomorph, could represent the physiological consequences of ingesting cohoba.⁵⁶ Another possibility is that they represent a form of body painting, where the eye is encircled in colour with lines drawn down to the chin, which may have signified participation in a certain ceremony, a particular status, or regional affiliation – indeed, mention is made of facial and body painting adorning the cacical entourage that came to greet Columbus's first visit to Jamaica in 1494.⁵⁷ It would be useful to review the corpus of artefacts that feature this element to better understand its possible significance. Indeed, much work still needs to be done to more firmly place these objects within both island and wider circum-Caribbean contexts.

CHRONOLOGIES: PLACING THE CARPENTER'S MOUNTAIN GROUP IN TIME

The three sculptures underwent a series of analyses as part of a wider project aimed at better understanding pre-Hispanic Caribbean wood sculptural traditions,⁵⁸ including radiocarbon dating to determine their age and when they were last modified ('refurbished'

with new inlays). This involved the removal of small wood samples from the sculptures: for the radiocarbon dating, this was ideally sapwood, or where this was not available, the outermost edge of the trunk or branch used in the carving, to ensure the dates reflected a period as close as possible to the felling time of the tree. Resins, used to adhere inlays in the eyes and mouth, were also sampled where available, providing an indication of the final manufacture stages, and, in some cases, subsequent refurbishments.

The wood dates indicate that the earliest carvings are the Carpenter's Mountain canopy and Birdman, which both overlap at AD 1028–1156 (see Table 1, entries 1.1, 2.1). Their resin dates, however, indicate that they were last refurbished post-AD 1400 (see entries 1.2, 2.2). Although the wood date from the associated anthropomorph is not quite so old at AD 1256–1300 (see 3.1), it indicates that this *cemí* was carved at least a century after the canopy and Birdman, but its resin date (AD 1426–1487) (3.2) overlaps very well with those for the associated carvings.⁵⁹ Thus all three had some centuries of use prior to being refurbished, most likely at the same time in the fifteenth century, when they came to function as a 'set'. What is significant is that there is a deep history of use for these carvings, suggesting important, long-lived *cemís* that likely accrued greater power the older they became.

CONCLUSIONS

The Carpenter's Mountain sculptures, together with the surviving corpus of Jamaican Taíno carvings (to be discussed in the next issue of *Jamaica Journal*), are the foundation – the ancestral roots – of the island's history

and art. The excellence of Jamaican wood carving has led many to argue against the relegation of the indigenous inhabitants to the 'sub-Taíno' or 'Western-Taíno' classification first imposed by Irving Rouse,⁶⁰ but rather place them on equal footing with the 'Classic' Taíno of Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic.⁶¹ Such works as the Birdman suggest a style both comparable to the most significant artistic examples from the northern islands, yet also an expressive step beyond. It should come as no surprise, then, to see Jamaican carvings featured in catalogues and displays as prime examples of pre-Columbian Caribbean art. Yet what we aesthetically appreciate today is but a glimpse of the full impact of these sculptures, originally inlaid with bright white shell or shining gold, covered with cotton ornaments and feathers, placated with offerings of food and beverage, and positioned to preside over important ceremonies.

Even outside their culturally specific ceremonial context, the sculptural impact of these carvings has been recognised since the Carpenter's Mountain carving caused a sensation at the Society of Antiquaries exhibit in 1799. Each of the Jamaican carvings – including those that will be explored in the second part of this article – is unique within the wider Caribbean corpus, expanding our understanding of the region's iconography. The Birdman's "smoothly bulging surfaces and balanced asymmetry",⁶² for

Figure 8: Impressions left by different woodworking tools (not to scale), when working *Guaiacum* sp.: left and centre, signature adze cut marks on the Carpenter's Mountain Birdman; right, the back of the Carpenter's Mountain anthropomorph, showing heavy scarring from adzing and scrapping tools.

example, stand in sharp contrast to the typically angular and stylised conventions in the wood sculpture from neighbouring Hispaniola and Puerto Rico. The incorporation of branches as the figure's appendages animates the pose, suggestive of a moment in mid-flight – an active element rarely seen in Taíno sculpture.

These sculptures were investments of time, labour and skill. The sheer effort of carving guaiacum, one of the world's densest woods, with stone and shell tools is only partially evident in the thousands of working scars still present on the surfaces (Figure 8). The choice of such a material undoubtedly added layers of meaning: it is associated even today with life-giving, curative properties, its lush, ever-green foliage a vibrant contrast to the arid environment in which it thrives, and its wood highly resistant to decay. Success with such a difficult material required a certain level of knowledge that could only be achieved with experience: these sculptures were the work of skilled artisans intimately aware of the material's strengths and limitations.

Wood – this most ubiquitous of materials – was undoubtedly carved into objects that were both useful and aesthetic since the island's first

settlement ~AD 650. The earliest dates on Jamaica's large-scale, ceremonial sculptures extend back to at least ~AD 1028–1156, when two of the Carpenter's Mountain pieces were carved. That one of these is a cohoba stand indicates that the ceremony had evolved into an event that required specialised, elaborate accoutrements. This parallels the chronologies of other cohoba stands from neighbouring regions⁶³ suggesting that ceremonial practices were broadly similar across the larger Greater Antillean islands at this time.

These were valuable, carefully curated objects, some spanning centuries of use. Based on multiple radiocarbon results on both the carved wood and resin inlays from the Carpenter's Mountain group, it is now possible to suggest that all three had some centuries of use prior to their last refurbishment in the mid-AD 1400s. In this sense, these objects had 'lives'. As would be expected of highly valuable heirlooms, they were carefully stored and curated by various custodians, who periodically mended or refurbished them. We can now better gauge their continued importance to subsequent generations, and how they accrued greater potency over the passing years – right up to the present. ❖

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Unless otherwise noted, all photographs are by J. Ostapkowicz, courtesy of the museums listed.

NOTES

1. For example, Anonymous, "Ancient Wood Figures found in Jamaica", *Archaeologia* 14 (1803): 269; Thomas A. Joyce, "Prehistoric Antiquities from the Antilles in the British Museum", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 37 (1907): 402–19; José Juan Arrom, *Mitología y artes prehispanicas de las Antillas*, 2nd ed. (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno editores, 1989); Jerome S. Handler, "The 'Bird Man': A Jamaican Arawak Wooden 'Idol'", *Jamaica Journal* 11, no. 3 (1977): 25–29; Irving Rouse and José Juan Arrom, "Weeping Male Figure" (no. 409), in *Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration*, ed. Jay A.

- Levenson (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1991), 575; Jacques Kerchache, ed., *L'art des sculpteurs Taïnos: Chefs-d'œuvre des Grandes Antilles précolombiennes* (Paris: Musée du Petit Palais, 1994); José R. Oliver, Colin McEwan and Anna Casas Gilberga, eds., *El Caribe precolombino: Fray Ramón Pané y el universo taíno* (Barcelona: Museu Barbier-Mueller d'Art Precolombí, 2008); Nicholas Saunders and Dorrick Gray, "Zemis, Trees and Symbolic Landscapes: Three Taíno Carvings from Jamaica", *Antiquity* 70, no. 270 (1996): 801–12.
2. There has long been confusion over the 'Spots Mountain' attribution. James W. Lee

- notes that "although local residents are well acquainted with 'Spot's Savannah', we could find no one that knew of a place called Spot's Mountain" (Lee, "British Museum Exhibition – Amerindians, etc.", *Archaeology-Jamaica* newsletter 86, nos. 1&2 [1986]: 4); see further discussion on the find spot in footnote 49. See also Peter Hulme, "Islands of Enchantment: Extracts from a Caribbean Travel Diary", *New Formations* 3 (1987): 86.
3. Society of Antiquaries Minute Book from 8 February 1798 to 13 February 1800, vol. 27, Society of Antiquaries, London, 302.
 4. Anonymous, "Ancient Wood Figures

- found in Jamaica”, *Archaeologia* 14 (1803): 269.
5. PROB 11/1431/98, Will of Isaac Alves Rebello alias Isaac Rebello de Mindora of Hackney, Middlesex, dated 12 September 1805, National Archives, Kew.
 6. BM Index 1-4.
 7. Jim Hamill, personal communication, 1998.
 8. At some point in their history, and undoubtedly due to their frequent display, a decision was taken to create mounts for all three figures – but due to their size and weight, this took the form of large plaster bases. Each sculpture was sunk partially into the plaster for stability; in the case of the Birdman this extended some 10 cm along the lower carved portion. These bases were made prior to c.1870, when the Mansell and Company photograph was taken, but were removed prior to Joyce’s publication of 1907, which shows the carvings in their entirety again, with only a thin white line to indicate the level of the plaster base.
 9. Surprisingly, such censorship continued well into the 1990s in the Museum of Mankind, Burlington Gardens, where the anthropomorph was displayed with a barkcloth wrapped around its waist – see Arrom, *Mitología*, Plate 20.
 10. Trustees of the British Museum, *A Guide to the Exhibition Galleries of the British Museum* (Bloomsbury: Trustees of the British Museum, 1886), 218.
 11. *Ibid.*, 276.
 12. *Ibid.*, 101.
 13. Philip M. Sherlock, *The Aborigines of Jamaica* (Kingston: Institute of Jamaica, 1939), 11.
 14. George A. Aarons, “The Jamaican Taino: The Aboukir Zemis, Symbols of Taino Philosophy, Mysticism and Religion”, *Jamaica Journal* 25, no. 2 (1994): 15.
 15. Wayne Modest, “Material Bridges: Objects, Museums and New Indigeneity in the Caribbean”, in *Anthropology, Indigenous Scholars and the Research Endeavour: Seeking Bridges towards Mutual Respect*, ed. Joy Hardy and Laara Fitznor (New York: Routledge, 2012), 186–87.
 16. Handler, “Bird Man”, 26; Aarons, “The Jamaican Taino”, 15.
 17. Modest, “Material Bridges”, 2012; Gregory O’Young, “Cultural Artefacts and Our Past”, *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday*, 10 July 2009, <http://www.newsday.co.tt/commentary/0,103524.html> (accessed 12 December 2013). A previous request by the National Gallery for the loan of the Carpenter’s Mountain for the *Five Centuries of Arts in Jamaica since Discovery* exhibit (1976), was also unsuccessful – see Sharon Chacko, “Museum Representation of the Taino and Cultural Power in the Columbian Quincentenary”, in *Jamaica in Slavery and Freedom: History, Heritage and Culture*, ed. Kathleen E.A. Monteith and Glen Richards, 194–221 (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 2002), 217n9.
 18. Petrine Archer-Straw, “Many Rivers Crossed”, in *New World Imagery: Contemporary Jamaican Art*, ed. David Boxer (London: National Touring Exhibitions, 1995), 40; Veerle Poupeye, *Caribbean Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998); Modest, “Material Bridges”, 2012.
 19. David Boxer, “Introduction”, in *New World Imagery*, 8; Archer-Straw, “Many Rivers Crossed”, 15. Most recently, the ‘foundational’ Taíno influence has been explored in the National Gallery exhibit *Explorations II: Religion and Spirituality* (December 2013–April 2014), through the work of Osmond Watson’s *Secret of the Aravaks* and Norma Rodney Harrack’s *Taíno Heritage*. The latter also had a solo show at the University of West Indies in 2014 entitled *From Taíno to Contemporary*.
 20. Chacko, “Museum Representation”, 203, 217n9.
 21. He particularly recalled that in the 1920s, when he visited the displays as a student, the Caribbean sculptures were exhibited high on a shelf, making it difficult to view them in the full (Henry Moore, *Henry Moore at the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1981), 112; Alan G. Wilkinson, “Henry Moore”, in *“Primitivism” in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, ed. William Rubin and Kirk Varnedoe (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984), 595–614, see 601.
 22. Moore, *Henry Moore at the British Museum*, 116–17.
 23. William Fagg, *The Tribal Image* (London: British Museum, 1970), Cat. nos. 1–3.
 24. Fagg, *Tribal Image*, Cat. no. 1.
 25. Joyce, “Prehistoric antiquities”, Plates 48–51.
 26. Kerchache, *L’art des sculpteurs Taínos*, 122–29, 19, 74, 144; Fatima Brecht, Estrellita Brodsky, John Alan Farmer and Dicey Taylor, eds., *Taino: Pre-Columbian Art and Culture from the Caribbean* (New York: El Museo del Barrio and The Monacille Press, 1997), 18, 54, 114.
 27. Oliver, McEwan, and Casas Gilberga, *El Caribe precolombino*.
 28. Rebecca Allen, “London, a World City in 20 Objects: No. 5 – The Taíno Sculpture”, *London Evening Standard*, 1 November 2012, <http://www.standard.co.uk/goingout/exhibitions/london-a-world-city-in-20-objects-no-5-the-tano-sculpture-8273207.html>
 29. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zemi_Figures_from_Vere,_Jamaica.
 30. A detailed overview of some of these interpretations is beyond the remit of this article – so the following will focus only on recent directions in their study.
 31. Handler, “Bird Man”.
 32. José Oliver, “El universo material y espiritual de los taínos”, in Oliver, McEwan and Casas Gilberga, *El Caribe precolombino*, 191; José R. Oliver, *Caciques and Cemí Idols: The Web Spun by Taíno Rulers between Hispaniola and Puerto Rico*, Caribbean Archaeology and Ethnohistory Series, L. Antonio Curet, Series Editor (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009), Fig 16.
 33. Antonio M. Stevens-Arroyo, *Cave of the Jagua: The Mythological World of the Taínos* (Scranton, NJ: University of Scranton Press, 2006), 167.
 34. Oliver, “El universo material y espiritual de los taínos”, 192.
 35. Catherine Levy, “The Bird Man: What Bird Was Its Inspiration?” *Jamaica Journal* 34, no. 3 (2013): 24–29.
 36. Karl Watson, “Amerindian Cave Art in Jamaica: Mountain River Cave, St Catherine”, *Jamaica Journal*, 21, no. 1 (1988): 19.
 37. James W. Lee, “The Petroglyphs of Jamaica”, in *The Earliest Inhabitants: The Dynamics of the Jamaican Taíno*, ed. Lesley-Gail Atkinson (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 2006), 177–86, see 184. See also P. Allsworth-Jones, *Pre-Columbian Jamaica* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, 2008), 172.
 38. Watson, “Amerindian Cave Art”, 19. See also Aarons, “Jamaican Taino”, 64.
 39. Lesley-Gail Atkinson, “Sacred Landscapes: Imagery, Iconography and Ideology in Jamaican Rock Art”, in *Rock Art of the Caribbean*, ed. Michele H. Hayward, Lesley-Gail Atkinson, and Michael A. Conquino, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009), 41–57, see 55.
 40. For example, see Kerchache, *L’art des sculpteurs Taínos*, 110.
 41. Brecht et al., *Taino: Pre-Columbian Art and Culture*, Fig. 14; 107.
 42. José Gabriel Atilés Bidó, “Rock Art Studies in the Dominican Republic”, in Hayward, Atkinson, and Conquino, *Rock Art of the Caribbean*, 90–101, see 99–100.
 43. Joyce, “Prehistoric Antiquities”, 405.
 44. An alternative interpretation is presented by Oliver, McEwan and Casas Gilberga, who suggest that the round objects held by the hands are maracas (*El Caribe precolombino*, 248).
 45. Oliver, “El universo material y espiritual de los taínos”, 180–81.
 46. Stevens-Arroyo, *Cave of the Jagua*, 160–65.
 47. Arrom, *Mitología*, 39–41.
 48. Rouse and Arrom, “Weeping Male Figure”, 575.
 49. José R. Oliver and Colin McEwan, “The Caribbean before Columbus”, *Arts and Cultures* (2009): 92–101, 100.
 50. James W. Lee, “Site Survey Progress: MC-3, Image Cave, Manchester”, in *Archaeology Jamaica* newsletter 66, no. 11 (1966), 1; Lee in Aarons, “The Jamaican Taíno”, 15. Lee’s description of the cave, and its link to the three carvings, is as follows: “MC 3, Image Cave, Manchester (MC-3) . . . despite a thorough search of all the rock exposures within about 200 ft. of the cave, not a trace of any carvings was found. Potsherds from many vessels were scattered on the steep slope of the ‘door-step’ of the overhang [of] a rock shelter about 50 ft. long and 10–15 ft. deep with a 20 to 30 ft. span to the roof.

<p>A proper cave leads off from the innermost part of the overhang and has a short oblique shaft dropping about 15 ft. from the entrance and another irregular chamber extending about 30 ft. from the entrance more or less at the same level. At the extremity of this room a crudely whittled hardwood spindle was found which may be of Arawak manufacture and which would have been used for spinning cotton . . . Since no petroglyphs were found, it seems reasonable to suppose that the cave name originates from the finding of a carved image which has been removed. The district 'spots', from which Rebello's wooden images were taken in 1792, is barely two miles away. It may be possible, therefore, that this cave is the one in which the surveyor found the three wooden images now in the British Museum."</p> <p>51. Atkinson, "Sacred Landscapes", 56.</p> <p>52. For example, Allsworth-Jones, <i>Pre-Columbian Jamaica</i>, cover.</p> <p>53. Brecht et al., <i>Taíno: Pre-Columbian Art and Culture</i>, Fig. 55; Pedro Godo, "Mythical Expressions in the Ceramic Art of the Agricultural Group in the Prehistoric Antilles", in <i>Dialogues in Cuban Archaeology</i>,</p>	<p>ed. L. Antonio Curet, Shannon Lee Dawdy, and Gabino La Rosa Corzo (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005), 157–60, see 145–62.</p> <p>54. Kerchache, <i>L'art des sculpteurs Taínos</i>, 85.</p> <p>55. <i>Ibid.</i>, 114–15.</p> <p>56. Oliver, <i>Caciques and Cemí Idols</i>, Fig. 17; Oliver and McEwan, "The Caribbean before Columbus", 101.</p> <p>57. Andres Bernaldez, in <i>Select Documents Illustrating the Four Voyages of Columbus</i>, vol. 1, 2nd ed., ed. and trans. Cecil Jane and E.G.R. Taylor, Hakluyt Society Series (New York: Kraus Reprint, 1967), 162.</p> <p>58. Joanna Ostapkowicz, Christopher Bronk Ramsey, Fiona Brock, Caroline Cartwright, Rebecca Stacey, and Mike Richards, "Birdmen, <i>Cemís</i> and <i>Duhos</i>: Material Studies and AMS 14C Dating of Pre-Hispanic Caribbean Wood Sculptures in the British Museum", <i>Journal of Archaeological Science</i> 40 (2013): 4675–87; Joanna Ostapkowicz, Christopher Bronk Ramsey, Fiona Brock, Tom Higham, Alex C. Wiedenhoeft, Erika Ribechini, Jeannette J. Lucejko, and Samuel Wilson, "Chronologies in Wood and Resin: AMS 14C Dating of Pre-Hispanic</p>	<p>Caribbean Wood Sculpture", <i>Journal of Archaeological Science</i> 39 (2012): 2238–51; Joanna Ostapkowicz, Alex Wiedenhoeft, Christopher Bronk Ramsey, Erika Ribechini, Samuel Wilson, Fiona Brock, and Tom Higham, "'Treasures . . . of Black Wood, Brilliantly Polished': Five Examples of <i>Guaicum</i> Sculpture from the 10th–16th Century Caribbean", <i>Antiquity</i> 85, no. 3 (2011): 942–59.</p> <p>59. See extended discussion of the radiocarbon dates in Ostapkowicz et al., "Birdmen, <i>Cemís</i> and <i>Duhos</i>".</p> <p>60. David Boxer, <i>Arawak Vibrations: Homage to the Jamaican Taíno</i> (Kingston: National Gallery of Jamaica, 1994), 3–4; Basil Reid, "Arawak Archaeology in Jamaica: New Approaches, New Perspectives", <i>Caribbean Quarterly</i> 38, nos. 2–3 (1992): 17.</p> <p>61. See also discussion in Allsworth-Jones, <i>Pre-Columbian Jamaica</i>, 37; P. Allsworth-Jones and Kit W. Wesler, <i>The Taíno Settlement at Guayguata: Excavations in St Mary Parish, Jamaica</i> (Oxford: BAR International Series 2407, 2012), 8.</p> <p>62. Poupeye, <i>Caribbean Art</i>, 26.</p> <p>63. Ostapkowicz et al., "Chronologies in Wood and Resin".</p>
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Table 1. AMS radiocarbon and wood and resin ID results for the Carpenter's Mountain carvings

The Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit lab numbers (OxA) are provided alongside the material and sample site (e.g., terminus: sapwood or outer growth rings, to indicate when the tree was felled and likely carved; resins: when the carving was finished, or re-used).^a Dates BP and calibrations at 95.4% are listed, the most likely calibration ranges highlighted in bold. All dates are calibrated using the IntCal09 dataset^b and OxCal v4.2.2.^c The wood and resin identifications were carried out, respectively, by Dr Caroline Cartwright and Dr Rebecca Stacey, both of the British Museum's Scientific Research Laboratory.

Artefact	Provenance	Institution/Donor/Accession	Material/OxA	¹⁴ C BP	Calibrated date range
1.1 Canopy/cohoba stand [Fig. 5]	Near the summit of "Spots" Carpenter's Mountain, Manchester Parish	British Museum, London; UK; Am1977, Q.1	<i>Guaicum</i> sp. (terminus: outer edge) OxA-21113	943 ± 26	AD 1028–1156 (95.4%)
1.2			Resin (ID pending) OxA-21114	455 ± 25	AD 1416–1462 (95.4%)
2.1 Cemí ("Birdman") [Figs. 2–3]	Near the summit of "Spots" Carpenter's Mountain, Manchester Parish	British Museum, London, UK; Am1977, Q.2	<i>Guaicum</i> sp. (terminus: sapwood) OxA-21146	941 ± 25	AD 1029–1156 (95.4%)
2.2			Resin (ID pending) OxA-21147	345 ± 24	AD 1466–1635 (95.4%)
3.1 Cemí ("anthropomorph") [Fig. 6]	Near the summit of "Spots" Carpenter's Mountain, Manchester Parish	British Museum, London, UK; Am1977, Q.3	<i>Guaicum</i> sp. (terminus: L foot) OxA-21142	718 ± 26	AD 1256–1300 (91.6%) AD 1368–1382 (3.8%)
3.2			Resin (Burseraceae) OxA-21143	432 ± 24	AD 1426–1487 (95.4%)

a. See also Ostapkowicz et al., "Birdmen, *Cemís* and *Duhos*" and "Chronologies in Wood and Resin".
b. P.J. Reimer et al., "IntCal09 and Marine09

Radiocarbon Age Calibration Curves, 0–50,000 Years Cal BP", *Radiocarbon* 51, no. 4 (2009): 1111–50.
c. Bronk Ramsey, OxCal Program, V4.2.2.

Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit, University of Oxford, c14.arch.ac.uk/oxcalhelp/hlp_contents.html (14 July 2013).