A000-AM,C-Taino-Cemi-Birthing Figure-Marble-1000 CE



Figs. 1-2. AM,C-Taino-Cemi-Birthing Figure-Marble-1000 CE

Case No.: 18

**Accession No.**

**Formal Label:** AM,C-Taino-Cemi-Birthing Figure-Marble-1000 CE

**Display Description:**

This birthing scene is representative of the Taino spiritual entity YaYa. YaYa, who was believed to be an immaterial spirit and whose name is a double superlative of the Arawak *Ia*, “spirit, essence, primary cause of life” or IaIa or YaYa, which can be translated as Spirit of Spirit (C. H. de Goeje, *The Arawak language of Guiana,* Amsterdam, 1928, pp. 45, 142, 204), and whom Father Pané says his “name is a name they do not know” (Pané, Account, ch IX). This is a sophisticated approach to a metaphysical entity that simultaneously exists as a primary cause and is unknowable. The Taíno believe that this entity “is in heaven [an Indo-European, Roman Catholic concept which has no immediate cognate in Taíno] and is immortal and that no one can see it and that it has a mother [which means a genesis] but no beginning” (*Relación* 21). This last statement if put in its stark simplicity it would be: “YaYa has a genesis but no beginning.”

While this entity, YaYa, is unknowable and hidden, Like O‘ Theos or YHWH, it can be known simultaneously through the effects it has on the material world. Cemi, Maquetaurie Guayaba- Lord of the Dwelling Place of the Dead *Maquetaurie Guayaba* with wide-open eyes and a mouth without lips, one of *Maquetaurie Guayaba’s* distinguishing features, made of andesite from the Dominican Republic.

According to Fray Pané, the Taino “believe there is a place where the dead go, which is called Coaybay, and it is located on one side of the island called Soraya. They say that the first person in Coaybay was one who was called Maquetaurie Guayaba (Makitori-Guarana.), who was the lord of the said Coayabay, house and dwelling place of the dead (Pané, ch. 12, 1999: 17-18). José Juan Arrom suggests Maquetaurie may be translated “without life” (ma being a negation and quetaurie “life”) and Guayaba may be translated as the fruit from the tropical tree *Psidium paniferum*. The face of the first person in Coaybay was one who was called Maquetaurie Guayaba. Because he is the Lord of the Dark recesses such as cave or of the dark forest he has wide eyes and a mouth usually without lips, and no navel, which signified him being of the nether regions and death (Arrom in Pané 1999: 18, n. 80, n. 81).

For instance, Pané indicates that the effects of this entity could be considered as manifestations of Yucahuguamá or Lord of the Yucca plant, the chief crop of sustenance of the Taíno (*Relación* 48, n. 141). This can be imaged as a Tripointed stone that resembles the canucos or mound of earth as it rises to expose the plant within it. Other images can be of natural objects like birds or animals. In Taíno religion, therefore, just as in Hebrew religion or Roman Catholicism there is need for intermediaries between the known and the unknowable, and these are the *cemís*, which are known and have been represented in their material form, providing another very important window on the spiritual world of the Taíno.

**LC Classification: F1909**

**Date or Time Horizon: 1000 CE**

**Map:**



Caribbean c 1500 after http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/maps/Ciboney-Taino-Carib-

GPS coordinates:

**Cultural Affiliation:** Dominican Republic

**Medium: conch shell**

**Dimensions:**

**Weight:**

**Condition:**

**Provenance: Provenance:** John Therien Estate- New York City date of 6/25/68 Collected on tag,

from theDominican Republic, i.e. eastern Hispaniola.

**Discussion:**

Pané was a Catalan a Hieronymite monk of the Order of St. Jerome. These hermit monks lived according to the Rule of Saint Augustine, which stresses chastity, poverty, obedience, worldly detachment, physical labor, fraternal charity, common prayer, fasting and abstinence. Saint Jerome, a fifth-century hermit and biblical scholar, formulated the rules of the order. In the eyes of the Spanish church hierarchy, Pané was a poor Hieronymite hermit, a Catalan peasant not of Castilian origins and was dismissed probably for these social reasons by the Spanish Dominican Bartolomé de Las Casas (ca. 1484– 18 July 1566) as a “simple man” with “limited faculties” (Pané p. 57), whose efforts, “amounted to nothing more than to say the Ave María and Pater Noster to the Indians, and some words about there being a God in heaven who was the creator of things, according to what he was able to teach them with abundant flaws and in a muddled way” (Pané p. 57). However derogatory Las Casas’ criticisms of Pané are, Pané’s *Account* is still the best source of information on the Taíno.

According to Pané there were twelve orders of spiritual entities that exemplified energies of a Supreme Being. These energies were encompassed in *cemís* which were intermediaries, much like Judaeo-Christian angels or Roman Catholic Saints. Since the repertoire of stone artifacts has now been relatively exposed to scientific scrutiny, each of the cemís spirits can be paired with its wood, stone, shell or textile material representation (Arrom 1975). The Taino also had a tripartite cosmos recorded by Pané which encompassed the sky, the earth and a lower world. These layered divisions are indicated on their most prominent artifact, the Three-pointed Sculpture.

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