

A close-up photograph of a pre-Columbian stone mask, likely from the Antilles. The mask is carved from a dark, textured stone and features a large, circular eye socket and a prominent, curved nose. The background is a light, neutral color.

LANGUAGES OF THE PRE-COLUMBIAN ANTILLES

JULIAN GRANBERRY & GARY S. VESCELIUS

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JULIAN GRANBERRY
GARY S. VESCELIUS

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Preface

The chapters in this volume, originally written as separate essays at different times over a period of years, have been re-edited together to suggest the formulation of a testable language-based hypothesis concerning the origins of the Pre-Columbian cultures and peoples of the Caribbean Antilles. Unlike *Languages of the West Indies*, written in 1977 by the dean of Antillean language studies, the late Douglas Taylor, or the perceptive articles by contemporary researchers such as Arnold Highfield of the University of the Virgin Islands (Highfield 1993, 1995, 1997), which concentrate largely on matters linguistic per se, the present volume is oriented toward the analysis of language forms not for their own sake but, instead, as a pragmatic tool toward elucidation of the physical, ethnic, and linguistic origins of their users.

Rather than include the islands of the entire Caribbean region, only the Antilles have been considered in the present study: Cuba, Jamaica, Hispaniola, and Puerto Rico (the Greater Antilles); the Commonwealth of the Bahamas and the Crown Colony of the Turks and Caicos (the Greater Antillean outliers of the Lucayan Islands) and the Cayman Islands; the Virgin Islands and the Leeward and Windward Islands (the Lesser Antilles); and Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago. The peoples and languages of the southern Caribbean islands (Los Testigos, Isla Blanquilla, Margarita, Cubagua, Coché, La Tortuga, Islas los Roques, Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao) and the western Caribbean islands (Cancún, Cozumel, the Bay Islands, Islas del Maíz, San Andrés, and Providencia) have not been included primarily because they did not play a major role in the settlement of the Antilles proper, that stepping-stone chain of islands that leads from the northeastern littoral of South America and Trinidad northward and westward through the Caribbean Sea toward the Florida and Yucatán Peninsulas. Those southern and western Caribbean islands were, of course, important in their own right in pre-Columbian times, but their peoples and languages derived from sources largely different from those of the Antilles proper

and their energies directed more toward their adjacent mainlands than to the vast arc of islands to their north and east.

More attention has also been devoted to the peoples of the Greater Antilles, the Taíno and their predecessors, than to the Eyeri of the Lesser Antilles simply because Eyeri origins, both archaeologically and linguistically, are considerably clearer and more straightforward than the linguistic and archaeological origins of the Greater Antillean peoples. This is not, of course, to imply that the archaeological picture of cultural developments in the Lesser Antilles is one of crystal clarity, for it certainly is not, but at least the problem of ethnolinguistic origins is relatively uncomplicated (see Allaire 1977, 1990, 1991; Rouse and Allaire 1979; Taylor and Hoff 1980).

The emergent hypothesis concerning the aboriginal settlement of the Antilles, outlined in Chapter 5 for the Greater Antilles and summarized in Chapter 11 for the entire Antillean region, is based on both archaeological and linguistic evidence. No new archaeological information is introduced, but the bulk of the language evidence, particularly for the Greater Antilles, while available for nearly 500 years, has been neither fully nor critically examined. The latter evidence is, therefore, the primary focus of the discussion. The conclusions presented, it should be constantly kept in mind, are decidedly not a statement of formal theory but simply the correlation of a body of data not looked at before as a unit, data that are in need of considerable further investigation and examination to help elucidate Antillean cultural origins.

It is unquestionably the case that the conclusions reached in this volume, and perhaps some of our methods of data-treatment, may not be endorsed by all archaeologists and linguists. This, we hope, is not because of any mishandling of the data or peculiar theoretical and methodological biases on our part, but, rather, because some of the language data dealt with are so extremely scanty and the language-culture relationships proposed are so very distant in time. We are well aware of this, yet the data are there and should be handled in some manner. The interplay of language and the rest of culture is part of the unsolved warp of the Antillean past, and rather than simply leave it at that, as has generally been the case in the past, it seems justifiable and desirable to look at it with the premises and methods of modern archaeological and linguistic analysis. Testing of the hypothesis would, beyond doubt, help toward an ultimate reliable definition of population movements in the pre-Columbian Antilles, something we do not have at present.

The first and primary assumption made (one not palatable to some trained solely in archaeology nor to practitioners of the many nontraditional, non-empirical brands of linguistics so popular nowadays) is that language plays a delimiting (but not determining) role with regard to culture content, including a society's choice of artifactual inventory and its typological and stylistic ex-

pression. Language provides a kind of cultural filter which seems to set boundaries outside of which its speakers are unable to go, perhaps unable even to imagine, without, at the same time, constraining or dictating the specific social-cultural choices that members of the group may make within the bounds of its language/cultural filter.

Such a premise is well borne out by substantive research spanning the period from at least the 1940s through the 1980s by the sociologist Bengt Danielssen (1949); the physical anthropologist W. W. Howells (1966); the physical anthropologists H. Gershowitz, J. V. Neel, F. M. Salzano, and Richard S. Spielman, together with the well-known South American linguist Ernest C. Migliazza (Spielman, Migliazza and Neel 1974; Salzano, Neel, Gershowitz and Migliazza 1977); the ethnologist Ernest Burch (1975); and the archaeologists Betty J. Meggers and Clifford Evans (1980) among others. That research repeatedly indicates that within any well-defined geographical area the expectation and norm is that people speaking the same or closely related languages tend to intermarry, that is, to participate in a common, highly specific gene pool, and consequently, as well, to show similar socioeconomic and related nonmaterial culture traits and common artifactual preferences. Conversely, archaeologically defined artifactual inventories within such well-defined sociogeographical areas are most likely to have been created and developed, including the adaptation of diffused traits, by speakers of the same or closely related languages. It is, regardless of the details of the phenomenon, the exception which needs explanation.

Because of the above points, not only have copious quotes from the referenced Spanish documentary sources been included, but the original Spanish texts have also been used, so that the basis of the assumptions (and also the translations) may be checked. This is a courtesy due the reader when such a small database is involved, with apologies for the length this sometimes entails.

The statements in the chapters of this book are the result of both individual and joint research. Both authors began their work in the years between 1947 and 1951, when they were classmates in the Department of Anthropology at Yale University under Irving Rouse and Wendell Bennett in archaeology; George Murdock, Ralph Linton, Raymond Kennedy, Clellan Ford, and, from time to time, Margaret Mead in ethnology; and Leonard Bloomfield, Bernard Bloch, Julian Obermann, Albrecht Goetze, and, later, Floyd Lounsbury in linguistics. In Granberry's case, Antillean work has continued from that date to the present; in the case of Vescelius, from then until his untimely death in 1982. The statements are particularly the result of joint research by the authors during the 1970s.

While the individual chapters as they appear here were written by Granberry after Vescelius's death, they were prepared from outlines, copious notes,

and partly formulated or completed essays written separately or jointly by Vescelius and Granberry over a period of many years, bringing together the considered, data-based, consensus archaeological, and linguistic analysis and opinions of both authors.

The senior author would like to thank many individuals who have over the years listened to earlier versions of the materials presented in this volume, volunteered helpful data and information, and offered various kinds of criticism. Most important is Linda Sickler Robinson, without whom Vescelius's valuable notes might have vanished into oblivion. Her friendship and kindness have been most appreciated. Paul and Joan Albury, Sandy Alexiu, Peter Barratt, Mary Jane Berman, Ellen Bethell, Ripley Bullen, Alfredo Figueredo, Heinz and Kitty Fischbacher, Don and Kathy Gerace, Perry Gnivecki, John Goggin, Charlie Hoffman, Melu Holdom, Dame Doris Johnson, Bill Keegan, David Knowles, Anne and Jim Lawlor, Ian Lothian, Jim MacLaury, Lady Eunice Oakes, Kim Outten, Froelich Rainey, Bill and Patty Roker, Richard Rose, Ben Rouse, Gail Saunders, Bill Sears, Edward and Lady Henrietta St. George, Sean Sullivan, Grace Turner, John Winter, Ruth Durlacher Wolper, and many others (all colleagues in the field of Lucayan and general Antillean research) have all patiently listened to elements of the hypothesis as it grew, and I am forever in the debt of all these good friends and colleagues.

I am most grateful to Patricia Lewis, Gary Vescelius's widow, and to Tom Vescelius, his son, not only for permission to use Gary's notes and to publish the results of our joint work on Antillean linguistics, but, most importantly, for their enthusiasm in seeing this venture come to fruition for the benefit of other Antillean scholars.

The volume has particularly profited from the insightful, astute, and reasoned editing of Judith Knight of the University of Alabama Press, and of Sue Breckenridge, my copyeditor. Without their common sense and logic, it is doubtful that the book would have emerged from the gestation stage, and I thank them greatly for their forbearance, kindness, and, especially, that intelligent common sense.

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The Pre-Columbian Antilles

An Overview of Research and Sources

The Caribbean Antilles have been home to a kaleidoscopic series of human societies since 4000 B.C. To most people, the very word 'Antilles' summons up visions of heavily jungled, mountainous islands jutting from sapphire seas under azure skies, lulled by the waves which lap their sandy shores, or of serene low-lying atoll-like isles, their beaches covered in forests of swaying coconut palms. Those from less fortunate climes have looked at the Antilles as they looked at the Pacific, as Edens, in which staying alive is the simplest of endeavors and in which work as work is an alien concept. The stepping-stone arc of the Antilles, spanning the eastern Caribbean from Venezuela to Florida, does have some of the most ruggedly mountainous rain forests on earth as well as some of the world's most beautiful beaches, and the outsider's vision is indeed geographically and environmentally accurate, but the rest of the vision is woefully off the mark, for Antillean peoples, again like the peoples of the Pacific islands, have found their homeland beneficent at times and fraught with the usual dangers of everyday life at others. Geography has played a role in forging the fabric of Antillean life, but, as elsewhere, it has been the human factor which has framed the events of history.

Crucial to a definition of history is language, one of the most obvious facets of all human lifeways, for all our thoughts and deeds are, sooner or later, expressed and implemented verbally. Any approach to portrayal of a people, who they are and where they came from, must eventually take into account the language they use, its nature, its structure, and its source and development, but the approach must also take into account the customs and mores the people exhibit and the artifacts they make. We can describe the artifacts dispassionately, and we can through archaeology define the ways in which they are distributed in space and time, gaining a vast amount of inferential information about the implementation of the customs which underlie such artifactual activity. But artifactual data is usually not enough in itself to provide a full pic-

ture of a people's lifeways, particularly if those people no longer exist or have been so changed through the passage of time that they no longer practice the lifeways they once had.

This is the situation in the Caribbean Antilles, for though the lifeblood of earlier peoples does indeed flow through the veins of present-day Antillean peoples, with rare exceptions their earlier cultures and languages have disappeared over the passage of time, and it is not possible to extrapolate from the present toward the prehistoric past. Generations of historians, ethnohistorians, and archaeologists have worked toward a definition and description of the pre-Columbian peoples of the Antilles, using documentary evidence from the period of initial contact between the native peoples and Europeans and the large amounts of data gathered laboriously by the spade from archaeological sites. The emergent picture is increasingly more refined and focused, and it will become yet more so in the future, but relying on ethnohistoric and archaeological data alone still allows some of the more puzzling problems of lifeway characterization and explanation to persist.

Among these problems is that of origin—where did the peoples of the Antilles come from, and when and how did they reach their ultimate island destinations? Once there, how did they interact with one another, and why did they interact in the ways that they did? Archaeological and ethnohistorical data have given us partial answers and some very good hints, but language data has only rarely been brought to bear, and professional linguists have only infrequently coupled their knowledge and data with that of archaeologists, ethnologists, and historians, for until recently fewer than half a dozen linguists have been interested in that part of the world, and only two archaeologists practicing in the Caribbean arena have purposely trained themselves in the niceties of both archaeological and linguistic data-gathering, synthesis, and analysis. The same is, of course, true of many other parts of the world, but the fact of the present-day academic separation of the subdisciplines of anthropology does affect problem-resolution in instances of this kind. There is a great need today both for closer cooperation between ethnologists, linguists, and archaeologists in the examination of no longer extant societies and for cross-disciplinary training of new professionals in the field, something which was required until the 1950s in anthropology but, regrettably, is no longer the academic norm.

It is for these reasons that the present book was written—not as a description of the languages of the Antillean peoples, though some has been provided for the lesser-known languages, but as the presentation of added data which may help elucidate the origins and movements of peoples within the archipelago. For that reason, it is also necessary to put such a presentation in its perspective with other work, primarily archaeological, which has been done and which is ongoing in the Caribbean region today. This summation may be of particular

use to the reader who is unfamiliar with pre-Columbian Caribbean research and who wishes to garner additional information from other published sources of archaeological, linguistic, and ethnohistorical data. It is also hoped that it will not appear too simplistic to the professional in the field.

There is a great amount of published contemporary documentation as well as unpublished archival information from the time of European contact, 1492 through the 1700s, primarily in Spanish and French, but also in English and Dutch. Unfortunately perhaps, very little has been translated into English, and the serious researcher must regrettably learn to read sixteenth-century Spanish and seventeenth-century French and Dutch with some fluency in order to be able to work from these sources effectively. The major works are those of Bartolomé de Las Casas (1875, 1909, 1951), Ramón Pané (Arrom 1974), and Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdez (1851) in Spanish and Raymond Breton (1647, 1665, 1666, 1667) in French. These are all listed in the References section of this volume.

Of easier access to the general reader are the substantive studies on the pre-history of the Antilles, which are usually quite accessible in larger libraries. Again a reading knowledge of at least Spanish, French, and Dutch in addition to English is helpful, though not absolutely necessary.

Interest in the Antillean pre-Columbian past did not really show itself until the year 1876, when *Naturaleza y Civilización de la Gradiosa Isla de Cuba*, the work of Miguel Rodríguez Ferrer, an amateur Cuban archaeologist, was published. It was not, however, until the early 1900s that professional archaeologists, at first largely from the United States but increasingly from Caribbean and Latin American countries as well, began to interest themselves seriously in Caribbean research. Of these, the first and most important was Jesse Walter Fewkes of the Smithsonian Institution, whose work *The Aborigines of Puerto Rico and the Neighboring Islands* was published in 1907. This and his other publications still have value almost a century later. In 1921 M. R. Harrington's *Cuba before Columbus* was published by the Heye Museum of the American Indian in New York, further defining the pre-Columbian cultures of the Antilles, and in 1935 Sven Lovén's *Origin of the Tainan Culture, West Indies* was published. Those three volumes set the stage for subsequent archaeological work in the area, for all of the important questions which needed clarification and resolution were discussed at length in these volumes.

This burgeoning interest was continued during the following decades and strongly reinforced by the decision of the New York Academy of Sciences in the 1930-1940s to fund an archaeological survey of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, led by Froelich Rainey and Irving Rouse, which culminated in the publication of an extremely thorough, well-done four-volume final report (Rainey 1940, 1952; Rouse 1952). That project almost single-handedly stimulated suffi-

cient academic interest in Antillean pre-Columbian research that a number of prestigious universities and museums, led by Yale, began to train graduate students specifically in Caribbean archaeology. During the period from 1940 through the 1960s the number of PhD candidates submitting dissertations in the field of Antillean archaeology more than quadrupled, and by the 1960–1970s a significant number of professional associations devoting themselves largely or exclusively to Antillean research were founded, including particularly the Centro de Estudios Avanzados de Puerto Rico y el Caribe, the Fundación de Historia y Arqueología, and the Center for Archaeological Research in Puerto Rico, the Museo del Hombre Dominicano in the Dominican Republic, the Virgin Islands Archaeological Society, the Musée Régional d'Histoire et d'Ethnographie in Martinique, the Service Régional de l'Archéologie in Guadeloupe, the Institute of Man in Jamaica, the Bahamas Historical Society, the Centro de Antropología and the Instituto de Arqueología of the Academia de Ciencias de Cuba in Havana, and similar institutions in Antigua, Haiti, Curaçao, and elsewhere. These institutions increasingly funded or conducted archaeological site surveys and serious professional excavation throughout the Caribbean and are still very active at the present.

The result of such a surge in professional interest in the Antilles has been an ongoing series of important publications from the 1950s to the present, including articles in professional journals as well as individual monographs and books, on archaeological research and investigation on almost all of the islands of the Caribbean. Chief among these publications is Irving Rouse's 1992 book *The Tainos: Rise and Decline of the People Who Greeted Columbus*, which summarizes Antillean pre-Columbian research from the earliest days of the last century to the present in a manner comparable to that of Sven Lovén's 1935 *Origins of the Tainan Culture, West Indies*. A second important volume, extending the coverage of Rouse's book and summarizing current research to the year 1997, is *The Indigenous People of the Caribbean*, edited by Samuel Wilson.

Accompanying these excellent coverages between the early 1940s and the present are literally hundreds of technical articles on site surveys, excavation reports, and data analysis in the professional journals, the most important of which are, in English, *American Antiquity* in the United States and *Antiquity* in Great Britain, and, in French, the *Journal de la Société des Américanistes* in France. Many of these articles stem from presentations of data at the two most important regular get-togethers of Caribbean archaeologists, the Congress of the International Association for Caribbean Archaeology (Alegría 1993) and the International Congress for the Study of Pre-Columbian Cultures of the Lesser Antilles. Both Congresses bring together most of the practicing professionals in Caribbean archaeology on a regular basis for the reading of data-based papers and the comparison of interpretations and opinions on every

facet of the prehistory of the region. The papers presented at these conferences are always published and readily available to the interested reader at any large public or university library.

Only very recently, within the past several decades, has professional work in historical archaeology been undertaken in the Antilles, but that field, too, is gaining rapid momentum and both accomplishing rapid miracles of data recovery and interpretation and in relating the pre-Columbian native American past in those islands to the European and African present through the study of what is known as Contact Period archaeology. An excellent very recent volume on this topic, which should at least be looked at by anyone interested in the Antillean past, is *Island Lives: Historical Archaeologies of the Caribbean* (2001), edited by Paul Farnsworth.

Besides this growing number of well-researched papers and monographs on Antillean archaeology and archaeologically defined prehistory, little has been published during the past century on other aspects of pre-Columbian Antillean cultures. There has been only one substantive work on Taíno ethnohistory, by José Guarch of the Academia de Ciencias de Cuba (Guarch Delmonte 1973). There have also been some excellent ethnographic works on the Taíno religious system (or what we would call a religious system, though it is moot whether the practitioners would have thought of it as a belief system separated from the other aspects of their lives). Antonio M. Stevens-Arroyo's *Cave of the Jagua*, published in 1988, is by far the most thorough study in English, and José Juan Arrom's commentary on the writings of Fr. Ramón Pané (Arrom 1974) is the most thorough study in Spanish. José Oliver (1992a, 1992b, 1993, 1997), Henry Petitjean-Roget (1997a, 1997b), and Miguel Rodríguez (1997) have written important papers on the topic as well. Bill Keegan and M. D. MacLachlan have written on the putative kinship and political system of the Taíno (Keegan and MacLachlan 1989), though their interpretations are based on such tenuous data as to render their final statements more a hypothesis than the empirically demonstrated theory they consider it to be. Publication on the languages of the Antilles, not including a number of articles by researchers untrained in the techniques of data interpretation and analysis of modern linguistics, has been limited to the work of a single professional, the late Douglas Taylor of Dominica, and, with the exception of two articles, been devoted to strictly descriptive materials (Taylor 1951a, 1951b, 1953, 1954, 1955, 1956a, 1956b, 1977). The two exceptions are an article co-authored by Taylor and Berend Hoff, a Dutch specialist on Carib languages on the Island Carib "Men's Language" (Taylor and Hoff 1980), and an article co-authored with Irving Rouse on the correlation of linguistic and archaeological data to determine time-depth in the West Indies (Taylor and Rouse 1955). Additionally, two full studies have been published on Antillean languages—C. H. De Goeje's *Nouvelle Examen des Langues*

des Antilles (1939), and Douglas Taylor's *Languages of the West Indies* (1977). Both volumes, while containing a vast amount of well-organized data, concern themselves with an examination of the languages themselves.

Thus Caribbean pre-Columbian research in general and Antillean pre-Columbian research in particular have been largely—at least 98 percent—focused on the gathering of archaeological data and its relatively isolated analysis and interpretation. While this has produced excellent, highly important results, as pointed out earlier, thorough comparative ethnographic-archaeological studies remain to be carried out, as do comparative linguistic-archaeological studies.

A beginning point for such studies could and should be what might be called a concordance of the works of the Spanish, French, Dutch, and English chroniclers, listing every item and event discussed in a cross-referenced index. This onerous, complex, and time-consuming task has yet to be undertaken, though the junior author of this volume had begun such work some years before his death. Once completed, such a concordance should be correlated, item by item, with our known archaeological and linguistic data. Then, and probably only then, will we begin to have a truly balanced view of the data of the Antillean past. From that data should emerge a coherent view of all the facets of the lives of the pre-Columbian Antillean peoples, and most of the interpretive problems still confronting us today might be resolved.

So it is hoped that readers will bear with the unanswered questions many of the chapters in the present volume will leave in their minds, and that they will find some possible clues toward solutions of origin problems in the language data and the suggested archaeological correlations provided here. Readers should bear constantly in mind that what is being written about here provides a *hypothesis*, a data-based guess, not what in science is called a *theory*, a fully substantiated set of facts based on years of satisfactory data-checks. The present volume provides a beginning, not an end, to language and archaeology studies of the pre-Columbian Antilles.

The Languages of the Greater Antilles

A Documentary View

In referring to the Greater Antillean islands of Puerto Rico, Hispaniola, Cuba, and Jamaica, Bartolomé de Las Casas, primary sixteenth-century chronicler of the Indies, reiterates many times in his epochal *Historia de las Indias* (1875:I:326, among others) that “*en todas estas islas hablaban una sola lengua*”—“in all these islands they speak a single language.” This statement has, out of context, been taken literally to mean that only one language was spoken by all the inhabitants of the Greater Antilles. That assumption has been followed and the phrase uncritically quoted by almost every researcher of Antillean prehistory who has set pen to paper, generation after generation. The only two exceptions that come to mind are Douglas Taylor and Arnold Highfield (Highfield 1993, 1997), both of whom have been aware of the linguistic complexity of Greater Antillean speech.

Las Casas and the other writers of the early 1500s clearly distinguished four aboriginal languages in the Greater Antilles, *Taíno*, *Macorís*, *Ciguayo*, and *Guanahatabey*, and for two of those—*Taíno* and *Macorís*—he noted a number of geographically distinct dialects.

Such blind-faith acceptance of the *una sola lengua* dictum as the delimiter of Greater Antillean aboriginal languages is unquestionably due to the fact that the phrase has with almost no exception been quoted out of context, largely by researchers who have been working from poor English translations, who have not consulted the original Spanish texts, or—strangely very common among non-Hispanic Caribbean specialists until very recent years—who could not read Spanish. This has regrettably led to the perpetuation of a myth quite undeserving of being perpetuated, for when viewed in context in the originals the *una sola lengua* phrase has a meaning totally different than the literalism accorded it.

The language in question is, of course, Classic *Taíno*, but the contexts more frequently than not add the qualifying phrase “*porque cuasi* [emphasis added]