The Fountain: An Amerindian Ceremonial Cavern on Anguilla, Its Petroglyphs and other Finds, Related to Surface Archaeology of Anguilla’s Major Beach Sites

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Over the past three years I have been studying the pre-Columbian heritage of the Lesser Antilles from my island home on Anguilla. Few people are aware that tiny Anguilla, the most Northern of the Leeward Islands, has many archaeological sites, some at least as early as the second millennium B.C. More than 85 field-trips have been completed under the auspices of the Anguilla Archaeological and Historical Society, of which I am Secretary. These field-trips have revealed some 30 Amerindian sites, with dense sherd or stone artifact scatters over at least 50 acres. Because Anguilla is still largely undeveloped, most of these sites remain intact.

On our field trips we have gathered and documented hundreds of stone tools, including axes, awls, chisels, scrapers and flints, as well as numerous grinding stones and some 25 "Three-pointed" objects carved in plain, "feathered", anthropomorphic and zoomorphic forms in various materials including grey conglomerate igneous rock, fine white limestone, coral, crystalline rock, clear crystal and conch. We have also collected very many conch tools, beads, tinklers and some carved ornaments as well as hundreds of kilos of pottery sherds and over 100 Kgs of rim sherds, comprising mainly cassava griddles, large water jars and open bowls. All these collections have been made from the land surface after heavy rain, which tends to wash away the alkaline soil, leaving artifacts exposed. We have yet to commence excavation of any site, but have made repeated visits to the fields, walking over the same areas after each rainfall.

In addition to our surface collections we have focussed on Anguilla’s caves and are happy to report that one of them, known as The Fountain, contains a large stalagmite carving and a number of interesting petroglyphs. It was undoubtedly a major ceremonial center, possibly a place of pilgrimage serving the entire Lesser Antilles, as evidence by imported Amerindian artifacts associated with this cavern and nearby beach sites.

Millions of years ago Anguilla was part of a large continent covered with swamps and forests. At some point this continent broke up, sinking under the sea, later on to become encrusted with coral. Fragments rose up to form the islands of the outer limestone shelf, Anguilla, Barbuda and possibly Anegada, as distinct from those islands of the inner volcanic arc, such as Saba, St. Eustatius, St. Kitts and Nevis. Some 50,000 years ago Anguilla, St. Barthelemy were one large territory which became separated into three parts as the sea level rose from the melting of enormous masses of ice in the North. Geologically, and perhaps, archaeologically, these three
neighboring islands belong together. It may well be that when man first reached this region it existed as a single island, with the pyramidal shape of Saba to the South West and the huge Saba Bank exposed as flatlands. Our Figure No. 1 shows Anguilla, St. Martin and St. Barthelemy with the 40 meter (120 feet) depth contour clearly marked to show how the single territory might have looked. We know that the sea level of the Lesser Antilles region was lower by at least 100 meters (300 feet) during the last glacial climax, approximately 13,000 B.C., and that it gradually rose to its present level circa 3000-4000 B.C. This fact is particularly relevant to the archaeology of the region, and implies that the earliest sites may well be under water.

Anguilla is long and thin, having a length of almost 16 miles and a widest point of just 3 miles. Its 36 square miles of territory now consists of a flat cap of fissured limestone resting on an ancient weathered base of igneous rock, with the highest point, Crocus Hill, just over 65 meters (200 feet). We are located 115 miles East of Puerto Rico and in a direct line midway between Anegada and Barbuda. Early voyagers from Puerto Rico travelling East into the rising sun would have touched Vieques and the Virgin Islands and if not turned back by the expanse of water, would have their outermost landfall on Anguilla. From Anguilla it would have been relatively easy to move down through the Lesser Antilles, with each island visible from the next.

It was either the French or Spanish who first called our island "Anguilla", after its eel-like shape. The earliest English accounts refer to it as Snake Island, for the same reason. From Father Breton's Carib-French dictionary, published in 1665, we know that the Amerindians called the island "Malliouhana", probably pronounced "Mayou Wana". This name may be derived from the Amerindian word "alliouana", meaning "arrow". Anguilla, "arrow-shaped", "eel-like", "snake-like", all expressing the same special feature...a very long, thin island.

Anguilla's first English settlers of around 1650 made no mention of Indians living on the island, yet by 1656 we have documentation of a violent Carib attack. Southey, quoting Father du Tertre wrote: "The Caribs went to Anguilla where they killed almost all the men, plundered and burned the houses but kept the women and children for slaves". The only Anguillian place-name associated with Indians is Indian Bottom Hill, facing French St. Martin, though legend has it that several of the island's wells, especially those at Sandy Ground, The Valley and The Quarter, were first made by Indians. Our surface archaeological survey suggests extensive stone-working on the beach sites at Maundays Bay, Cove Bay, Rendezvous Bay, Lockrum Bay, The Forest and Sandy Hill Bay—all sites with views of St Martin and mostly with Saba visible in the distance. Interestingly the large numbers of stone tools are of igneous rocks found only in St. Martin, whereas the "Three-pointed" objects or Zemis are mostly of grey conglomerate rock found only on Saba. The sites along Anguilla's Northern coast, such as Barnes Bay, Sandy Ground, Flat Cap Limestone Bay, The Fountain, Shoal Bay East and Island Harbour seem to be sparser in imported stone and chippings and richer in the range of ceramic sherds. As far as we can determine, many of these ceramic sherds were from vessels of the Terminal Saladoid type, with occasional examples of the Barrancoid White-on-Red pottery and some incised Ostionoid types. Our Figure No. 2 shows Anguilla's principal sites, with a brief summary of finds from each location.

Anguilla has many natural salt ponds and the salt harvest must have been a big attraction for the early settlers. There are also other ponds where fish can be easily bred and sandy land behind the beaches, well suited to cassava cultivation. Inland there are many bright red fertile hollows,
known as "bottoms", filled with ocher soil, good for growing corn, for use as dyes and for ceramics. Cotton and tobacco still grow wild in parts of the island. In pre-historic times Anguilla was covered by dense forests and its offshore banks must have been a rich source of sea-food. The whole island is riddled with caves, most of which are sinkholes formed in the limestone. The most well-known of these is called The Fountain, which has a constant source of fresh water, until 1953 reached by climbing down the roots of a tree (Figure 3).

The first recorded archaeological find from Anguilla was made in 1868, when a cargo of phosphate-bearing rock dug from Cavannah Cave was found to contain a ground conch tool closely associated with bones from an extinct giant rodent (Amblyrhiza), both deeply stained red from ocher earth. This find generated speculation that man lived on Anguilla when its area was large enough to support such giant rodents, said to be the size of a Virginia Deer, perhaps as far back as 5000 B.C. The conch artifact and rodent bones were placed in the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, and a detailed article on them was published by Edward Cope, in 1883. Since then, no archaeological finds have been reported from the Cavannah Cave, though The Fountain has attracted much attention and proved to be rich in sherds and artifacts. Figure No. 4 shows the location of The Fountain, on Anguilla's North East Coast.

The Fountain is a dome-shaped limestone cavern located on a ridge at a height of about 25 meters (75 feet) above sea level, overlooking the South Western end of Shoal Bay, located on Anguilla's most beautiful North Eastern coast. The fine sandy beach just below this ridge is an important turtle nesting place and the reefs close off-shore are rich in many kinds of sea food. Ceramic finds from the cave include examples with turtle motifs and two stone carvings recovered from the site at Sandy Hill Bay, only three miles due South of the cave, are parts of Zemis with turtle heads, carved in reddish igneous stone found in St. Martin. Figures No. 5 and No. 6 show drawings of these turtle zemis.

A large "Gum Apple" ("False Mamie" or Clusia) tree marks the entrance to the cave, the roots descending through a 2 x 3 meter (6 x 9 feet) "window" in the limestone to a pile of debris some 10.5 meters (33 feet) below. From this pile of debris one can walk down a 45° slope to main fresh water pool at a depth of about 22 meters (66 feet) from the cave entrance. There are many stalagmites and stalactites within the cavern. Legend has it that the Fountain water-source never runs dry.

The Fountain cave was first surveyed by P. Wagenaar Hummelinck in July 1973, whose book "Caves of the Netherlands Antilles" shows the cavern with a longitudinal section of approximately 60 meters (180 feet) and a width of nearly 25 meters (75 feet). Three pools are located within the cave, each containing drinkable water with a mineral content in (1973) of 790 mg chlorine salts/litre. The maximum water depth in the main pool is approximately 3 meters (9 feet) and this pool has the peculiar feature of a warm spring rising from a vent within it. As far as we can determine, volcanic activity is not reported in this region, so this water may be rising from great depths and may have some special properties. Several species of cave shrimp can be found in the waters, including the rare Stygiomysis (also found in Devil's Hole Cave, St. Martin) and the type Typhlatya, together with Macrobrachium and Metaniphargus, which can be seen crawling among the rock debris on the bottom. Our Figures No. 7 and No. 8, after Hummelinck's publication, but with several additions, show the longitudinal section of The
The Fountain: An Amerindian Ceremonial Cavern on Anguilla

Fountain Cavern and a view from above, looking down, with all features clearly marked, including the location of the petroglyphs and carved stalagmite.

There are many references to the Amerindian belief in the sacredness of caves. Ramon Pane wrote of Taino Indian myths of the first humans originating from caves and of the sun and moon emanating from caves. The Cubans had a tradition of a "Fountain of Perpetual Youth", said to exist on an island. In 1516 a writer tells of an island: "In whiche is a continual sprynge (spring) of runnynge (running) water of such marvelous virtue, that the water thereof beinge dronk (drunk), perhappes with sume (some) dyete (diet) maketh owld (old) me younge (young) ageyne (again)." Ponce de Leon sought such a spring or fountain in the Grenadines, in the Bahamas and finally met his death searching for it in Florida. Some legends placed the marvelous Fountain on an island called Bayuca or near the Babuca reefs. In the Bahamas island of Bimini there is a cavern with a fresh water spring but it is not associated with Amerindian finds and has no special properties. Other Taino myths tell of the entrance to the underworld in a cave on the island called Suraia or on another island called Coaibai. From this it can be understood that to the Taino people, a cave site associated with an unusually steady source of water on a remote dry island would be a special place, easily to become a ceremonial center.

We read of Zemis or Power Objects kept in caves and worshipped there, sometimes for the control of the weather. Ramon Pane refers to a cave Zemi that "perspired" and was much honored when there was a desire for rain. The atmosphere of The Fountain cavern is generally very humid and the main carved stalagmite is often wet with condensation. In Taino culture, access to caves was limited to the shaman-priests and to the chiefs (caciques). Furthermore it has been recorded that the Amerindians believed that bats represent the spirits of the dead, and rays of light entering caves imply a mystic connection between heaven and earth. The deeper recesses of The Fountain cavern are heavily populated by bats, mostly of the type Tadarida brasiliensis, and their high pitched squeaks do suggest something unreal. Rays of light enter the cave whenever the sun is high and even strike the petroglyphs in turn, reaching to the main pool very briefly. All this suggests that Anguilla's Fountain Cavern may well have had a major ceremonial role in the life of the Amerindians who came to know it.

In November 1979 a team of archaeologists led by Alfredo Figueredo made a brief survey of possible archaeological sites on Anguilla, including The Fountain at Shoal Bay. This team, mainly drawn the Virgin Island Archaeological Society, was sponsored by the Island Resources Foundation of St. Thomas. Though the team spent only five days on Anguilla, some 19 Amerindian sites were recorded, three of them major. Figueredo's unpublished report to the Government of Anguilla, dated May 1980, states: "16 of the 19 sites appear to date from 500 to 1500 A.D.; the other 3 are pre-ceramic sites, possibly dating as early as 2000 B.C. From the collective evidence, Anguilla was heavily populated during pre-Columbian times, more so apparently than neighboring St. Martin. In sum, Anguilla has one of the richest archaeological heritages in the region, which it should strive to protect and develop."

Figueroedo's report refers to The Fountain as: "A cave containing a fountain, wherein were found petroglyphs and an Indian midden. A very important site worthy of further investigation." In his summary Figueredo adds: "The Fountain Cave site, in particular, promises to be a site of substantial regional importance." Unfortunately Figueredo's report does not describe or illustrate any of the petroglyphs noted by him at this site, nor does he mention the most impressive
archaeological feature of the cavern, which is a large stalagmite carved in the likeness of Jocahu, the main deity of the Taino/Arawak Indians.

This main feature is a large, approximately 5 meters or 15.5 feet high, stalagmite, conical in shape, the upper part clearly carved in the typical likeness of Jocahu the Creator. Early sources refer to this deity’s full name as Jocahu Bagwe Maorocon, probably meaning "Creator-giver of Cassava". The impressive carving is located close to the main pool (see Figure No. 8, Detail 2), between the uppermost midden and the lowest petroglyph (Detail 1 of the same Figure). Viewed from the main pool, this stalagmite looks remarkably like a seated elderly cone-headed man, the face wrinkled and his hands resting on his knees. Naturally back-lit from the rays of light entering through the small aperture above, the effect is dramatic. Figure No. 9 shows a side view of the Jocahu image. Color slides show the image from several different angles.

What appears to be traces of burnt offering (possibly resins) can still be seen in man-made depressions on the body of the Jocahu stalagmite. Recently a large quantity of pottery sherds, about 5500 pieces in total, including the bases of about 40 jugs and large bowls, were recovered from under a pile of fallen rocks close to the base of this stalagmite and from the floor of the main pool. Most of these sherds are from the Terminal Saladoid period (circa 1100 A.D.) though fragments of the earlier Barrancoid White-on-Red and other types have been recovered, together with some stone axes, scrapers, conch and other shell remains and minute pieces of bone. This particular area of the cave is much compacted with crushed rock, earth, charcoal, tree-roots and debris trodden in by innumerable feet passing over to the fresh water source. It is an area much in need of proper excavation.

The main Fountain pool has an interesting petroglyph (see Figure No. 8, Detail 1) carved on a rock slab close to the point for collecting water or bathing. This petroglyph seems to represent a face wearing a feathered headdress and is shows in the Figure No. 10.

This petroglyph may be a solar symbol or possibly an astronomical/calendrical device, since rays of the sun do enter through the cavern window and I have witnessed them briefly pass over this symbol.

A group of interesting petroglyphs is to be found on two large rocks capped by several small (about 30 cms/1 foot high) stalagmites, just below and to the west of the entrance window. These are the first archaeological features seen as one enters the cave and the sun’s rays pass over these petroglyphs most days, as if by design.

This first group of four petroglyphs starts with a rainbow-shaped arc with a central "solar" circle over the apex of chevron motives to each side. This whole symbol is located immediately below a small stalagmite, now mostly missing. The Figure 11 shows the petroglyph in detail.

This very unusual petroglyph may represent the Zemi Juluca, the feathered "Rainbow Deity", with the sun shown producing the rainbow arc radiating feather like colors. According to Father Breton, this Zemi "feeds on fish, lizards, wood-pigeons, humming-bird and all animals with shimmering colors". Amerindian shamans are known to associate feather and magical flight with the journey to the gods. Interestingly, three separate "Three-pointed" stone objects or Zemis,
shown as Figures No. 12, No. 13 and No. 14, are deeply carved with a similar chevron or "feather" motifs. Viewed from the side they look remarkably similar to this petroglyph. Similar Zemi stones are reported from other sites in the Antilles, notably those from Guadeloupe of the period 560-800 A.D., published and illustrated by Edgard Clerc.

Immediately adjoining petroglyph Detail 3 are three carved petroglyph faces (Detailed as 4, 5 and 6), each carved on the conical form of a small stalagmite. The Figure No. 15 shows the three petroglyphs in a line.

The first of these faces (Detail 4) is a head accented by a surrounding ovoid. It is very similar to one recently discovered carved on a rock located near the lower Maho or Moho Spring on French St. Martin, below Paradise Peak, where there is an Amerindian site and cave from which there is a spectacular view of Anguilla (Figure 16).

Petroglyph 5 is a face showing marking on the cheeks, possibly indicating tribal affinities. Petroglyph 6 is a plain face with eyes and mouth wide open.

The second group of petroglyphs are to be found on a larger rock slab, close by, towards the South West. A pair of encircled eyes (Detail 8) is deeply carved in the rock at the base of a small stalagmite (Figure No. 17).

Above this petroglyph is another set of encircled eyes (Detail 7) carved below a larger stalagmite (Figure No. 18).

I interpret both this sets of eyes as "Spirit Eyes", "Ancestor Eyes", possibly the eyes of Taino Dog-headed deity of the dead, known as Opiyel Waobiran. This ringed eyes motif if found throughout the Antilles and, in fact, throughout the ancient world, generally as petroglyphs. It can be found in the rock art of Amerindian North America, in the Pacific Islands, in Japan in the third millennium B.C., in the Amur region of Siberia and in the Northern Europe. It is usually associated with the cult of the dead. We know that the Amerindians often painted the surrounds of their eyes in this manner.

Finally, there is an unusual and enigmatic petroglyph (Detail 9) on the South East of the same large slab as the spirit eyes petroglyphs. This petroglyph depicts a head with a line possibly representing the body or backbone and two surroundings arcs which can be seen in a number of ways, either as the front legs of the "lizard", or forming a jar which encloses the head or "snake head", the snake being implied from the line attached to the head. Figure No. 19 shows this petroglyph as clear as it can be seen.

If it is a lizard with front legs extended, then it probably is a fertility symbol. If representing a jar with a snake entering it, the conclusion must be that it is a sexual symbol. And if it is a head attached to the thread and resting in a jar, then it is a rebirth symbol, or an indication of a jar burial. Possibly a jar containing a skull.

Other unclearly defined petroglyph depicting faces are to be seen carved on a small stalagmite at various locations around the Western side of the cavern. All the petroglyphs in Anguilla's Fountain cavern has been made by pecking at the rock or stalagmite surface, sometimes to a
depth of nearly 1 centimeter. We can only speculate that they may once have been painted or stained, with red ochre, roucou (bixa) dye, white lime or charcoal, to enhance visibility. When chalked up, these petroglyph are very dramatic. The uppermost ones can be seen from above, looking into the cavern through the natural window opening.

I am happy to report that the Government of Anguilla has recently acquired 4 3/4 acres of land on which The Fountain Cavern is located, for use as a National Park, placing the Anguilla Archaeological and Historical Society in the role of the advisor/developer. We also have an Antiquities Law, forbidding the illegal export of archaeological artifacts.

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Captions of figures

Figure No. 1: Map showing Anguilla, St. Martin & St. Barths, with 40 meter depth contour marked and Saba visible to the South West.

Figure No. 2: Map of Anguilla showing principal sites and brief summary of finds from surface collections.

Figure No. 3: Photograph of the roots of the tree, leading to the water source.

Figure No. 4: N.E. Coast of Anguilla, showing The Fountain.

Figure No. 5: Fragment of Turtle Zemi from Sandy Hill Bay.

Figure No. 6: Another Turtle Zemi fragment from Sandy Hill Bay.

Figure No. 7: Longitudinal Section of The Fountain.

Figure No. 8: Overview of The Fountain, with location of petroglyphs, carved stalagmite and pools. Map of the site.

Figure No. 9: Drawing of main Jocahu image in The Fountain.

Figure No. 10: Fountain Pool, with Petroglyph Detail 1.

Figure No. 11: "Rainbow" petroglyph Detail 3.

Figure No. 12: Three-pointed Zemi of conglomerated grey stones with chevron markings, recovered from Barnes Bay, on Anguilla's North Coast.

Figure No. 13: Three-pointed Zemi of white stone with "feathered" markings, recovered from Lockrum Bay, on Anguilla's South Western coast.

Figure No. 14: Part of a Three-pointed Zemi of crystalline rock, showing "feathered" markings, recovered from Lockrum Bay, on Anguilla's North coast.

Figure No. 15: Three petroglyphs faces in The Fountain.

Figure No. 16: Petroglyph rock at Maho Spring, St Martin.

Figure No. 17: Small Eyes Petroglyph, in the Fountain.

Figure No. 18: Larger Eyes Petroglyph, in the Fountain.

Figure No. 19: "Lizard", "snake" or "Head in Jar" Petroglyph.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SITES IN THE SOUTH COAST OF ANGUILLA</th>
<th>Type of Site</th>
<th>Main Finds</th>
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<tr>
<td>Eustatia Bay</td>
<td>Pre-Ceramic</td>
<td>Beads, conch tools, stone tools, 1 Kg.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capitola Bay</td>
<td>Pre-Ceramic</td>
<td>Beads, conch tools, stone tools, 1 Kg.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Bay</td>
<td>Pre-Ceramic</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Site of the North Coast of Anguilla**

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<th>Location</th>
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<tr>
<td>St. Philip</td>
<td>Ceramics</td>
<td>Sherds, 3 Zemls.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shoal Bay East</td>
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<td>Sherds, 3 Zemls, axes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Island Harbour</td>
<td>Ceramics</td>
<td>Sherds, 3 Zemls, spindle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Captains Bay</td>
<td>Ceramics</td>
<td>Sherds, conch tools.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Ceramic sherds**

- Eustatia Bay: Sherds, 3 Zemls.
- Capitola Bay: Sherds, 3 Zemls, axes.
- White Bay: Sherds, 3 Zemls, axes.
- Shoal Bay East: Sherds, 3 Zemls, axes.
- Island Harbour: Sherds, 3 Zemls, spindle.
- Captains Bay: Sherds, conch tools.