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REVIEWS

An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians. By Fray Ramon Pané, José Juan Arrom et al. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999. 76 pages. \$29.95 cloth; \$12.95 paper.

In July 1995 I had the delightful privilege of accompanying José Juan Arrom to the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian in New York City, where the venerable maestro of Caribbean scholarship spent two days interpreting several ancient Taino pieces in the museum's collections. Arrom was then ninety-two years old, but adventuresome as ever. When the opportunity to view the pieces arose, he insisted on traveling with me by car to New York City from his home in Connecticut. For two days, we were hosted by the staff of the National Museum of the American Indian, who graciously brought out piece after piece for Arrom to study and interpret while being videotaped.

Arrom, editor and indefatigable annotator of the present English-language version of his classic volume *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians*, has been detective and guide over the past fifty years to the fullest possible understanding of Caribbean culture, and particularly its ethnogenesis in the people known as the Taino of the Greater Antilles. A Cuban from the country's eastern mountains, the Yale professor emeritus describes himself "with no small amount of pride" as a "guajiro from Mayarí." As a scholar, Arrom attributes his great perspicacity and doggedness in search of Caribbean cultural origins to his "Cuban heart" (Jose Juan Arrom, "Aportes Antillanos al español de América," *Arvito Magazine* 7:27 [1981]: 10).

It was Arrom who in the 1940s took up the task of rescuing from linguistic obfuscation this earliest historical account of the cosmology of an American indigenous people. Commissioned to a Catalan friar named Ramón Pané by the Admiral Christopher Columbus in 1494, the "antiquities" record several important cycles of Taino cosmology and prophetic tradition. It was the first book in America written in a European language. Friar Pané, a modestly educated scribe, learned the Taino or insular Arawak language and lived for four years with the people of Guarionex, a major cacique from the island of Bohio or Kiskeya, and renamed Hispaniola (now Haiti/Dominican Republic) by the Spanish. The resulting treatise that Pané turned in to Columbus has been hailed for centuries as the first ethnological

work of the Americas. That it was the result of a specific assignment by Columbus to find out what the Taino believed about spiritual matters and that it succeeded in describing the Taino creation story and other cultural foundations make it particularly special. As Arrom points out in his meticulous notes, Pané was a modest friar, making his manuscript all the more credible. Although dedicated to the Christian conversion of the Natives, Pané was simple enough to only write down the Indian version of what he was told, perhaps not in proper sequence, but at least without undue Christian embellishment. Pané notes and describes the names and attributes of the main Taino cosmological personalities and spirits. The Taino belief system of the *cemies* (main spirits), who belonged in particular places and territories (*cacicasgos*) is detailed; the ceremonies of medicine people (*behikes*) are respectfully described in part, including approaches to the dead and beliefs of the afterlife; and Pané even records the fateful prophecy of Caicijú, a grandfather cacique from a previous generation who foretold the coming of “clothed men” who would kill and enslave future generations of his people.

But Pané’s manuscript traversed an exceedingly confusing translation history. The original manuscript, likely carried back to Europe by Columbus in his later voyages, has been lost for five hundred years. Several early chroniclers refer to it—Father Las Casas quotes it extensively—assuring its authenticity. Ferdinand Columbus inserts it whole in his biography of his famous father. But even this biography survives in a poor and often misleading Italian translation (Ulloa 1571), an effect which, upon re-translation to Spanish and other languages, often completely alters the meaning of the text. The resulting confusion previously hindered the proper study of Caribbean indigenous origins, and particularly the connection between popular Taino cultural expression and this fascinating and fortuitous written record, which both academics and cultural revivalists have now come to study.

Arrom picked up the linguistic trail of the Pané manuscript as a young professor, and in 1974 published the first Spanish language version of his polished edition of Pané’s *Account*. An expanded Spanish-language edition appeared in 1988. It is this work that is aptly and faithfully translated by professor Susan C. Griswold of Duke University. The *Account*, as edited by Arrom, is a masterful work of scholarly research, and Arrom appears to have learned and intuited most of what can be known about the ancient Taino language and sets out to explain the meanings that give Pané’s primordial text its crucial importance as a rich and unique lode of Caribbean cultural identity.

Thus we can know more about the Taino creation stories and can confirm the people’s presence in contemporary belief systems. We know the names of creator beings—Atabex, the Mother of the Waters; Itiba Cahubaba, the Great Bleeding Mother; Yucahu Bagua Guama Baorocoti or Taino Great Spirit, Lord of the Yuca (*manioc*). Through Pané’s scribbles (and Arrom’s meticulous literary rescue), we can name the leader of the double set of twins whose misadventures in the Skyworld create the waters and fish of the oceans, bringing time and sustenance, fire and medicine to the people. Thus we confirm the beliefs of present-day *guajiros*, *jibaros*, and *indios* who speak about the turtle representing the earth; about frog (*toa*), who calls the rain; about how the

spirits of the dead (*opía*) love *guayaba* fruit and still dance with the living in the ancient *areito* (present-day Danza del Cordón). We can reconfirm the traditional use of sacred tobacco and copal-pom among contemporary Cuban *campesinos* and about the continuing practice of burying tri-cornered icons in the four corners of cropping fields to call forth the fertility of the yucca crop.

Duke University's Latin American Studies Program provides a valuable service through its Latin America in Translation series, which produced this classic text for the first time in English. As a result, scholars, as well as Caribbean indigenous descendents living abroad, will have improved access to a fundamental reference work on Caribbean Native origins.

Arrom—scholar, teacher, elder—is the twentieth century's gift to the understanding of Caribbean origins. Everything this maestro has studied and analyzed he has clarified. Arrom's scholarly career has been one of vigorous purpose for over half a century. Duke or some other publishing company should consider translating his other classic Caribbean work, *Mitología y artes prehispánicas en las Antillas*, which further corroborates much of his linguistic and historical research on the *Account* to many of the exquisite Taino pieces found in major museums.

I am ever thankful to have Arrom on tape discussing some of these pieces at New York's National Museum of the American Indian. I can report that he handled the ancient statuettes with great care and respect; even with a spiritual *carino* or tenderness. He sat for a session with the Deminan, main creator twin; he cradled his mother, Itiba Cahubaba, Great Bleeding Mother, explaining common elements. "It is a great honor," Arrom said, "to be with these Taino ancestors" (National Museum of the American Indian, video collection, 11 July 1995, videocassette).

For some people, Pané's *Account of the Antiquities of the Indians* may simply represent an old piece of writing about the primitive indigenous inhabitants of the Antilles. Others who are more studied appreciate the work for its ethnological and historical quality and launch increasing scholarship in its wake. In a generous and sincere collaboration across time, space, and language, Pané and Arrom are great cosmic partners, appreciated by ongoing generations for deciphering the key to the origins of our diverse Caribbean cultures and peoples; original intimations of who we are and who we need to be.

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American Indians in the Marketplace: Persistence and Innovation among the Menominees and Metlakatans, 1870–1920. By Brian C. Hosmer. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999. \$35 cloth.

Brian C. Hosmer's book is one of the better studies I have read in the past decade. Hosmer, assistant professor of history at the University of Wyoming, has made good use of the records of the National Archives, the Public Archives of Canada, and the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. He also