Caciques Represented in Cave Engravings: Exploring the Coventry and Clapham Cave Petroglyphs

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The Parameters

This research is part of a broader study of markings in caves, on pottery and other surfaces. In this presentation we see engraved figures which appear to be Caciques.

We do not know if drawings of Caciques in these caves were earlier or later than or contemporaneous with those of mythological anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures. What is evident however, is that these caves have been in continuous use for a long time.
The Parameters

In Coventry we see anthropomorphomorphic grotesque as well as realistic engraved figures, a cross with the semblance of a person on it, and an 1807 engraved date as well as present day graffiti.

In Clapham, there is are engravings of what appear to be Caciques and a European figure indicating contact period.
The Parameters

In the future, we shall seek to understand the nature and importance of these markings, to derive a date from absolute and relative dating methods and to explore current thinking in rock art theory and position our findings within a theoretical framework appropriate to the cave markings of Jamaica.
Definition

I have used the word ‘markings’ as a generic term to identify surfaces which have been altered by ‘deletion’ such as scoring, inscribing, pecking, punctates, and other such means of removing parts of the surface.

The term also applies to surfaces altered by ‘addition’ such as using appliques, painting, and other such means of emplacement on the surface.
Considerations – Absolute dating

Burial caves where faunal material and grave goods have been observed can be reliably dated from the bones, using radiocarbon dating, and ceramics through thermoluminescence (or by context).

Caves with drawings which contain pigment that include charcoal and other organic ingredients are datable by radiocarbon methods.

Caves with petroglyphs are more problematic however, and there have been no reliable means of absolute dating although AMS has been used with some success. [Stefan to discuss]
Considerations – Relative Dating

Use of seriation by documenting changes in form and style of engravings in Jamaican caves and attempt to discern a sequence.

Associate such changes with known events within the indigenous community.
Creating a Profile of Jamaican Cave Art Sites - Location

Engravings are often seen in shelter caves or rock overhangs. The markings are usually within the drip-line and visible in the twilight zone. Light from the cave entrance usually illuminates these petroglyphs.

The surface used for these engravings is often the fairly soft re-depositional limestone which forms the speleothems.

Nonetheless, engravings are sometimes located deep within the cave where they may be seen only with artificial light.
Conflicting Theories of Rock Art

1. Recording visions - visions of a shaman – a spiritual leader and healer (neuropsychological theory).

2. Reflective of changes in style of markings over time (theory associated with seriation).

3. “middle range” theory as this latter theory allows for the inclusion of data subject to quantification and statistical analysis within the more testable neuropsychological hypothesis.
Determining Purpose of Drawings - towards development of a theory of socio-political development from styles of cave engravings

Descriptive, Pedagogic, Spiritual

1. Depicting mythological figures
2. Describing mythological story (a record that allows transmission of information to future generations)
3. Recording changes within the community (socio-political implications)
4. Records of personal visions of individuals (spiritual experiences while in altered state of mind and emotion)
Towards a Theory of Socio-political Development Derived from Styles of Cave Engravings

In my PhD thesis I provided evidence from stylistic variation in pottery to suggest a socio-political emergence from groups to chiefdom circa 1100 AD. A simple but impactful filleted band around the outer circumference of the rim of vessels marked the Montego Bay Style pottery and possibly a new era in sociopolitical development in Taíno culture in Jamaica.
Towards a Theory of Socio-political Development Derived from Styles of Cave Engravings

We would expect that this period was likely marked by significant changes and upheavals. While not a violent overthrow, symbolic changes would be of paramount importance and value in educating the communities and highlighting the new thrust and new developments. The leaders of this new thrust would have been the regional caciques.

Could they have been instrumental in having their figures engraved on speleothems for posterity as did other leaders in antiquity?
Towards a Theory of Socio-political Development Derived from Styles of Cave Engravings

Within this period of change, there may have been a shift away from petroglyphs of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic grotesque figures to petroglyphs of Regional Caciques – the new leadership in the new government.
Coventry Cave
Coventry Cave Location
Coventry Cave
Entrance
Coventry
Anthropomorphic mythical figure
Coventry Cave Cacique Engraving

Engraving showing upper part of headdress

Depth of groove: Head outline channel - 2 mm; Headdress outline channel - 4 mm; Width of groove: outline channel - 5 mm
Coventry Cave Cacique
Illustrated by Dianne Golding-Frankson from photographs

Caciques Represented in Cave Engravings: Exploring the Coventry Cave Petroglyphs
Coventry Cave Petroglyph – Another Cacique?

The area to the left of the face is outlined and appears to have been prepared for the for a headdress.

Caciques Represented in Cave Engravings: Exploring the Coventry Cave Petroglyphs
Coventry Cave

This much weathered image appears to have markings above and around the head in keeping with a head-dress.
This engraving on a boulder outside of the drip line of the cave does not belong to the usual location of petroglyphs which are protected from the elements by being placed within the drip-line. Neither is this boulder composed of re-depositional limestone, a common surface of engravings. It appears to belong to the ecosystem outside of the cave. Its presence in this exposed environment is more in keeping with that of stone artefacts located on the boundaries of ball courts where the Taíno game of batey was played.
Coventry petroglyph outside drip-line

Why is this boulder in this location?
1. Boulder moved from inside cave
2. Boulder moved from level field about 40 metres away
2. Boulder part of chamber collapse
Coventry Cave 1807 Graffiti
Clapham Cave
Clapham Survey Map – prepared by Jamaica Caves Organization 2016
Implications for angle of light entering cave.
From the survey diagram, it is evident that the cave entrance is located northeast of the rock face on which the petroglyphs were engraved. It is expected that natural light (from the sun) would illuminate this rock face. However, for this to be so, light would have to enter the opening of the cave at an appropriate angle.
During the equinoxes (March and October) light would travel due east and not impact directly on the relevant rock face. Around the time of the winter solstice (December), the sun would have a southeasterly bearing and so would not impact the rock face. However, sometime close to the summer solstice (June), the sunlight would enter the cave from a northeasterly bearing therefore impacting the rock face.

The orientation of the petroglyphs vis-à-vis the source of light angle from the entrance of the cave implies that these petroglyphs were engraved at this time and to be seen at this time of the year - spiritual significance?
Clapham — *Engraved* figure with head-dress depicting Taíno Cacique
Clapham Taíno Cacique

Depth of groove – 1.5 mm
Width of groove – 2 mm
Flowstone speleothem
Height – 175 cm
Width – 140 cm
tapering to 30 cm at base

Height of engraving – 90 cm
Clapham – This figure appears to be that of a European - based on the aquiline nose and the depiction of a beard. (None of the Taíno engravings show beards.) Should this be so, it would mean that engraving was done during the contact period.
Jamaican Caves Organisation
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