

LUCAYAN ARTIFACTS FROM THE BAHAMAS

By THEODOOR DE BOOY

SEVERAL noteworthy artifacts were found on the Bahama islands during the year 1912 by the expedition sent out by George G. Heye, Esq., of New York City, in the interest of the Heye Museum. This expedition was in the Bahamas from June until December, 1912, investigations being carried on chiefly from a sailing vessel, through which medium the various islands were visited. It is not the purpose of this brief article to describe the manner in which the work was conducted, but it may be well to state that it is practically impossible in the Bahamas to cover the many islands and cays unless one either owns or charters a sailing craft of some description, as the voyages of the mail schooners from Nassau are uncertain and at intervals of from two weeks to two months, and even then one cannot visit the uninhabited cays.

To date, practically the only wooden objects found in the Bahamas and in the Greater Antilles are idols and the well-known and characteristic stools (*duhos* or *sillas*), no wooden objects of a strictly utilitarian character being in any collection from these regions, if one excepts two bowls or platters now in the library at Grand Turk (Turks and Caicos islands). The writer is not inclined to classify *duhos* other than as ceremonial objects, despite the many contentions to the contrary. From the accounts of Las Casas and Herrera, these objects were held in high esteem by the Ciboneys and other pre-Columbian tribes, and it is hardly to be believed that the

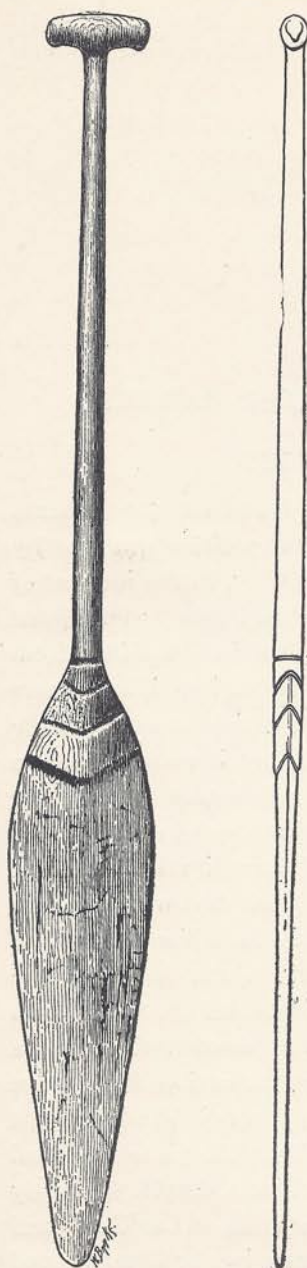


FIG. 1.—Wooden paddle from Mores island.

aborigines would have given so much care to the fashioning of a piece of wood when a burnt-out log would have served the purpose of a seat equally well. The few duhos in existence are made of madeira, a species of wood related to mahogany, hard to work and undoubtedly valuable to the Ciboneys, considering the few large madeira trees that are found in the Bahamas. In fact, it is more than likely that the duhos were imported from the larger islands (Haiti and Porto Rico), as it would be difficult to find a tree of sufficient size in the Bahamas to permit the manufacture of one of these stools. A few wooden cassava-graters and a planting dibble have been found in Haiti and Santo Domingo, and while all these objects and the many references made to them by the early chroniclers assure us that the pre-Columbian inhabitants were expert woodworkers, it is to be regretted that so little material of this kind has survived. Taking the climatic conditions into consideration, however, it is not surprising that so few artifacts of wood have survived the ravages of time, and it would appear safe to state that such objects as have survived are invariably fashioned from madeira, cedar, and *lignum-vitæ*.

In view of the fact that so few wooden objects are known from these regions, or even from the Greater Antilles, a canoe-paddle, found on Mores island, deserves first mention. While working in the Bahamas, the author visited Mores island,

one of the cays on the Little Bahama bank. This cay is inhabited by about twenty negro families, who are engaged in the sponge industry. The Mores islanders have the reputation of being the worst negroes in the Bahamas, and their destitution is most abject. Mores island is literally honeycombed with caves, some of which are being regularly worked for guano, which is sold to the neighboring islanders for fertilizer. The author visited several of these caves, some of which had not hitherto been entered. In one of them it was his good fortune to find the canoe-paddle referred to, a specimen of special anthropological value as it is the only one of its kind known to the author.

The paddle (fig. 1) is fashioned out of a single piece of cedar, and may be described as consisting of a crosspiece, a shaft, and a blade. The paddle is in good condition, and the workmanship as a whole is excellent. It was found on a shelf in the cave and was covered only by a slight deposit of guano dust. The fact that the paddle is of cedar accounts for it not having been attacked by wood-boring insects, and as the cave in which it was found is a dry one, it was not subjected to decay. The crosspiece is $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches (11.5 cm.) long and $1\frac{3}{8}$ inch (3.5 cm.) thick. There is a small knob on the underside of the crosspiece, near each end, evidently designed to afford a better hold. The shaft is 2 feet (61 cm.) long and thickens toward the blade-end, the diameter being $\frac{15}{16}$ inch (2.4 cm.) at the top and $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch (3.8 cm.) at the point where the shaft broadens into the blade. The blade has a length of 2 feet $\frac{3}{4}$ inch (62.8 cm.), is $6\frac{1}{4}$ inches (16 cm.) broad at the widest point, whence it tapers gradually to a width of $1\frac{1}{4}$ inch (3.2 cm.) at the extremity. The end of the blade is rounded, but whether or not the paddle originally had a sharp point cannot be determined. The blade is $\frac{5}{8}$ inch (1.5 cm.) thick at the widest point, and $\frac{1}{2}$ inch (1.2 cm.) at the tip. The shaft merges gradually into the blade, and four simple, angular lines are shown on each side as ornamentation, which also serve to let the thickness of the shaft taper down by even steps to the thickness of the blade. The total length of the paddle is 4 feet $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches (129 cm.).

In Mallery's monograph on Picture-writing of the American

Indians¹ there is an illustration of some petroglyphs found in a cave on Rum cay in the Bahamas and figured by Lady Blake. In this group of petroglyphs (fig. 2) is one that appears to be an



FIG. 2.—Petroglyphs on Rum cay. (After Mallery.)

exact representation of the type of paddle found on Mores island. Mr L. G. K. Brace, a botanist of Nassau, has visited the Rum Cay cave and mentioned the picture of the paddle to the writer, who had no opportunity to visit the island in order to inspect it. The



FIG. 3.—Indian paddling a canoe. (After Oviedo.)

size of these petroglyphs is not given in the memoir referred to. An old illustration from Oviedo also figures one of the aboriginal canoes and paddles (fig. 3), and he mentions that the canoes were

¹ *Tenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology*, p. 139.

propelled by wooden oars (*nahos*) that were provided with a cross-piece at one end and a blade at the other.

Another wooden artifact was added to the Heye Museum by the gift of a duho, or wooden stool, found in a small, open cave at Spring point on Acklins island, covered by the débris of a large slab of limestone that had fallen from the roof of the cave. A negro hunter had taken shelter in this cave during a rainstorm, and observing one of the legs of the duho protruding from the débris, recovered it and carried it to the nearest white man, a Mr Darrell, who in turn presented it to Dr F. A. Holmes, a physician of Nassau.

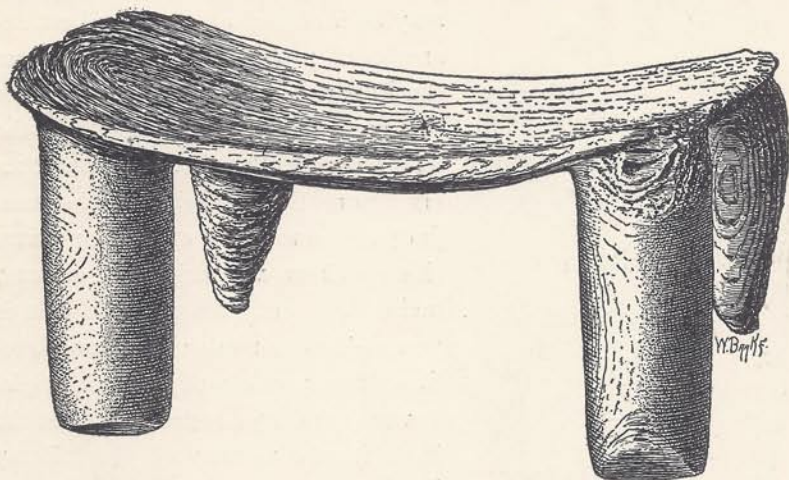


FIG. 4.—Wooden duho from Acklins island.

Dr Holmes gave it to the author, who, accompanied by Mr C. V. Spicer, a member of the expedition, visited the cave in which the specimen had been found, but they were not successful in finding any more material.

The duho (fig. 4) stands $5\frac{1}{4}$ inches (13.3 cm.) high, is 9 inches (22.8 cm.) wide at one end and 8 inches (20.3 cm.) at the other. Both ends are broken off near the legs, and judging from the stools of like type in other collections, the broad end may have sloped upward as a back, while the narrower end probably terminated in the representation of the head of a turtle or a human being. The aggregate length of the seat is $9\frac{1}{4}$ inches (23.4 cm.); the legs

are 5 inches (12.6 cm.) high. Two of the legs are in good condition, but the other two are partly destroyed. The bottom of the seat is smooth and shows excellent workmanship; the top is very rough and has evidently been exposed to the weather and to the ravages of ants and other insects. The diameter of the two perfect legs is 2 inches (5.1 cm.).

A third object of interest is a fractured ceremonial celt (fig. 5) from Mariguana island. Although in fragmentary condition, this



FIG. 5.—Ceremonial celt from Mariguana island.

object shows clearly what the original outlines must have been, and it may be included among the best examples of prehistoric stonework from the Bahamas. The celt is $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches (6.4 cm.) at the widest point, and the length of the figure is $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches (11.4 cm.) from the forehead to the toes. Judging from celts of similar form, this specimen was originally about 7 inches (18 cm.) long. The celt is petaloid and is made of a green, slate-like stone, possibly of volcanic origin. It was found by a negro farmer in the bush in the vicinity of the "Betsy Bay" settlement on the west coast of Mariguana, and was taken home by the finder. It seems to have reposed in his cabin for several years, and the "Indian baby," as the negro called it, was finally given to his infant daughter as a toy, with the in-

evitable result that it was broken. With the aid of a few children the author was successful in discovering two of the fragments in the negro's yard. It is regretted that the remaining pieces could not be recovered.

The figure on the celt is shown in a seated posture and is carved in low relief. The knees and arms point inward and the hands

rest under the chin. The body itself is not shown. The fingers and toes are represented by shallow grooves. The head is indicated by a carved circle, of which, owing to the fact that the top of the celt is missing, not more than half can be seen. However, the right ear is still shown outside the circle. The eyes and mouth are cut in intaglio; the nose and the right eyebrow are in low relief. It is especially regretted that the top of the head is broken off, for it would be interesting to ascertain whether or not a feather head-dress of any kind had been represented. This would have served as a valuable basis of comparison with the two or three similar specimens known.

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