

The Legacy of the **FIRST PEOPLES**



Mabrika...

Welcome ... to our exhibition on the first inhabitants of Trinidad and Tobago. Now celebrated as the First Peoples, they once occupied land without borders, over 7000 years ago.

Although now fewer in numbers, their rich legacy has survived the test of time and contributed to the rich cultural diversity of Trinidad and Tobago.

**NATIONAL
ARCHIVES**
OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

THE FIRST PEOPLES



Banwari Burial, UWI Zoological Museum, UWI
Photo courtesy the Department Life Sciences, UWI, St. Augustine

Contrary to popular belief, Trinidad and Tobago was inhabited by several groups or First Nations. These groups belonged to three language families – Arawakan, Cariban and Warao.

They included the Chaguanes, Warao, Shebayo, Nepuyo, Yaivos, Lokono, Karina, Kalinago or Island Carib of Tobago, Carinepagoto and Garifunas.

They had unique cultures and lived in harmony with the land and nature. Shellfish collecting, hunting and fishing were their main livelihood.

In 1969-70, Trinidad's oldest inhabitant was unearthed at Banwari Trace, south Trinidad, dating back to about 5000 BC.

HISTORY



Well-known midden sites in Trinidad

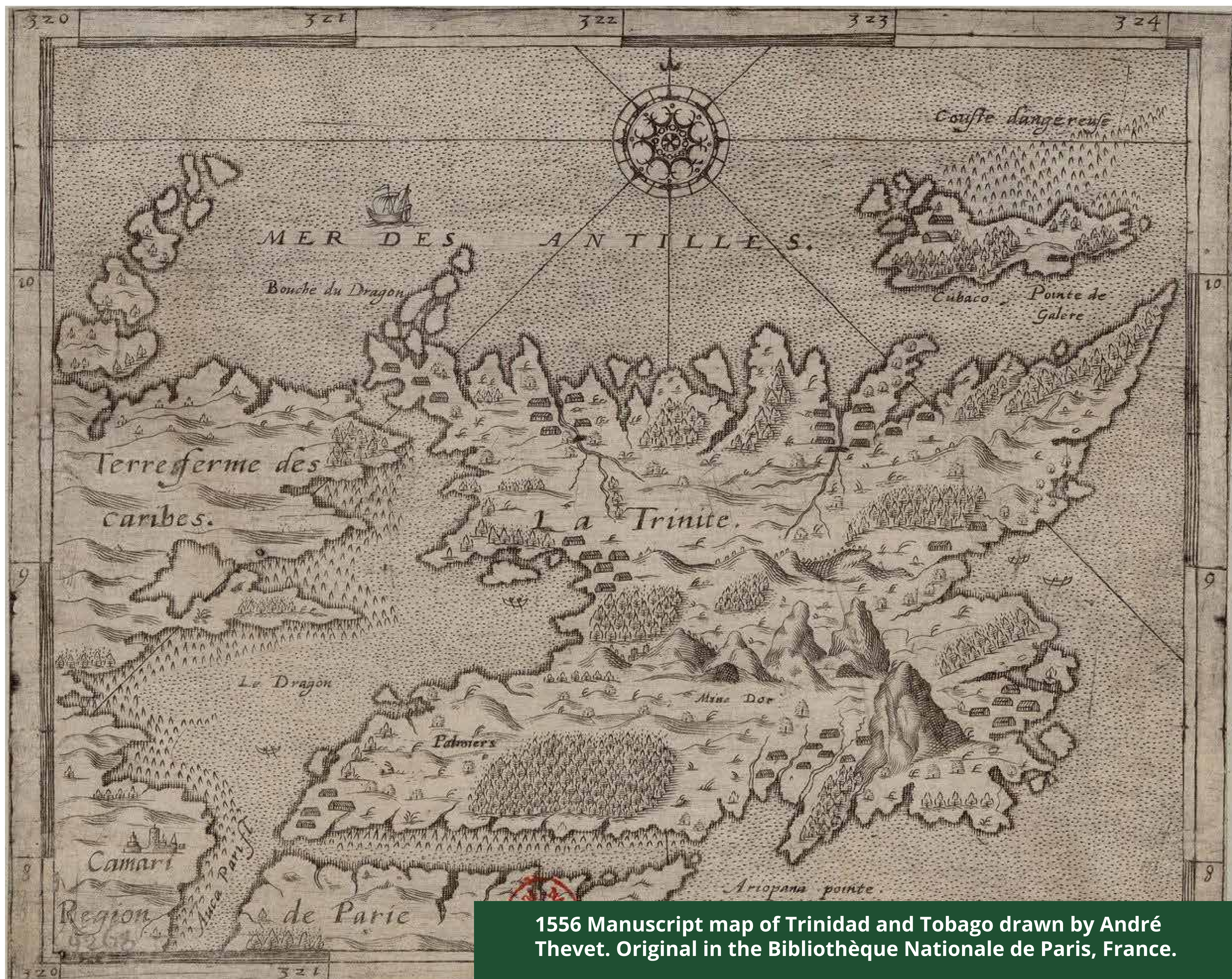
Caurita Petroglyph showing Amerindian etchings

Photo courtesy Feroze Omardeen

Middens or refuse sites comprising mounds of fragments of shell, pottery, animal bones, tools made of stone or bone, are the main source of archaeological historical information on the First Peoples. Some 300 registered archaeological sites are known in Trinidad and Tobago.

Through detailed scientific study of the middens, we are able to learn about the life of the early inhabitants. Scientists confirm that our two islands were once joined to Venezuela until after the Ice Age. As a result, there were early periods of migration of the First Peoples into the Caribbean from South America.

HISTORY



1556 Manuscript map of Trinidad and Tobago drawn by André Thevet. Original in the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris, France.

In addition to archaeological evidence, Spanish and other European written accounts of the First Peoples provide further information on their life and settlement. In 1498, when Columbus encountered Trinidad, he noted the many gardens and villages that he had seen along the south coast.

Other travellers subsequently referred to the island as being highly populated, some estimating numbers as high as 200,000. The first official census of the population was taken in 1593 by Antonio Berrio, the first Spanish Governor, providing an estimate of 35,000 First Peoples.

PLACE NAMES



Map showing place names with First Peoples' origin.

Ortoire River, Mayaro
Photo courtesy Jeffrey Wong Sang

First Peoples' words and place names survive into the present. In Trinidad in particular, there are over 200 place names, such as Caroni, Aripo, Siparia, Chaguanas, Mucurapo, Icacos. A majority of the islands' main geographical features, and flora and fauna also carry First Peoples' names, e.g. El Tucuche, balata, mapepire.

In addition, there are English and Spanish names which remind us of First Peoples' presence such as Indian Walk and Carib Street, or have been adopted from their languages eg. manicou, agouti, pacro, pirogue, cassava.

RESISTANCE BY THE FIRST PEOPLES



Hyarima Statue in Arima

Traditional First Peoples' society was disrupted after the Spanish and other Europeans got a permanent foothold on Trinidad and Tobago. But it was not without resistance. Chief Hyarima is one of the heroes of the First Peoples. He is known for his military prowess and his determination to rid his land of Spanish control.

On 14 October, 1637, he and his warriors with help from Dutch forces in Tobago, attacked and sacked St. Joseph, then the Spanish capital. He continued to raid Spanish outposts along with his Dutch allies.

October 14 is recognized annually by the Santa Rosa First Peoples Community.

BELIEFS



Smoke Ceremony, Santa Rosa First Peoples Community
Photo courtesy the Culture Division, Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts.

The First Peoples carry a unique world view of life. They believe that there is a supreme force that energizes the earth, water, air and fire to create and perpetuate life forms. Everything is interconnected and to disturb one element is to disturb the life force. Like other First Peoples around the world, they are regarded as nature worshippers.

Natural landmarks take on special significance, as is the case of the

Naparima or San Fernando Hill for the Waraos. The Smoke Ceremony is an integral part of First Peoples' practices, and normally coincides with the rising of the sun.

As a result of their beliefs, they live harmoniously with the land and support environmentally sustainable practices.

FESTIVALS



Santa Rosa Festival, Arima
Photo courtesy Catholic Media Services Ltd.

Organized by the Santa Rosa First Peoples Community, the Santa Rosa Festival in Arima is the oldest continuously celebrated festival in Trinidad and Tobago. Its beginning can be traced back to 1786 when Arima was a mission village. It is held annually at the end of August in honour of the former mission's patron saint, St. Rose of Lima, the first saint of

the New World. The celebration includes a procession of the statue of St. Rose through the streets of Arima. Traditional food of the First Peoples such as cassava and corn-based meals, are prepared for the occasion. La Divina Pastora in Siparia, celebrated a few weeks after Easter, is another festival which grew out of the former mission village of Siparia.

TRADITIONS



Handicraft by the Santa Rosa First Peoples Community, Arima
Photo courtesy Roma Wong Sang

The Amerindians developed the canoe, bow and arrow, and ajoupa, and produce unique handicraft using natural materials. Their knowledge of medicinal plants and their use in the treatment of injuries and in the preparation of 'bush teas' for curing illnesses has been passed on through the generations.

Their cuisine is enjoyed by many Trinbagonians: cassava bread and farine; warap; barbecued wild game; corn pastelles; coffee; and cocoa.

Sources:

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Boomert, Arie. *The Indigenous Peoples of Trinidad and Tobago*, Leiden, 2016.
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Therese, Marie, *Parish Beat, Trinidad and Tobago*, 2003.
Website of the Santa Rosa First Peoples Community [http://www.santarosafirstpeoples.org/Warao Community](http://www.santarosafirstpeoples.org/Warao%20Community)

Parang music, which is popular at Christmas time, is a hybrid of Spanish and Amerindian musical styles. Although small in numbers, the First Peoples' influence has now been integrated into the cultural fabric of Trinidad and Tobago and lives on today. Two communities, the Santa Rosa First Peoples Community and the Warao Nation are actively involved in efforts to continue their cultural practices and safeguard their heritage.