



Taino Cohoba Pounder

An important ceremonial pestle used in preparation for the ritual of the cohoba – the inhaling of a psychotropic powder made from the ground seeds of the *Anadenanthera peregrina* tree, one of the most powerful hallucinogens of the pre-Columbian world, or the very toxic *Datura* and related species. The powder was inhaled by the shaman to promote the entry into trance – thus opening the world of the spirits and ancestors. Two stylized and powerfully carved *Zémi* heads are sculpted back-to-back and while they are certainly skeletal, they also have a distinct feline esthetic. They evoke the duality of the universe: life & death and the need for the shaman to maintain balance in all things. Through these rituals the shaman ensures the link between humans, ancestors, and spirits in order to preserve the harmony of the universe.

Taino, Santo Domingo, Caribbean Sea. Basalt?. 800 – 1492 AD. 15.5 x 16 Ø cm. Ex private collection, France.

Literature:

Cohoba is a Taíno Indian transliteration for a ceremony in which the ground seeds of the *cojóbana* tree (*Anadenanthera* spp.) were inhaled ; the Y-shaped nasal snuff tube used to inhale the substance, and the psychoactive drug that was inhaled are known as cohoba as well. Use of this substance produced a hallucinogenic, entheogenic, or psychedelic effect. The *cojóbana* tree is believed by some to be *Anadenanthera peregrina* although it may have been a generalized term for psychotropics, including the quite toxic *datura* and related genera (*Solanaceae*). The corresponding ceremony using cohoba-laced tobacco is transliterated as *cojibá*. This was said to have produced the sense of a visionary journey of the kind associated with the practice of shamanism.

The Zemi or Cemi is a god-like or better yet ancestral spirit figure as well as the representation of the spirit. The zemi possess a supernatural strength or force that can intercede for the shaman in his/her transcendental quest – it also serves as the container or vessel of the said spirit.