

Summary

The Taino culture had the largest indigenous population of the pre-Columbian Antilles. This group of docile people found in the Caribbean a seemingly endless food source. The proximity and biodiversity of the Caribbean Sea were fundamental for the Taino diet. The Taino had a diverse food profile, which was supported by their innovating agricultural techniques. This work represents an approach to the Taino's distinct nutrition and how they achieve it.

History and Development

The Taino were not native to the Caribbean; they migrated from South America to the Antilles. The Taino agro-ceramic societies introduced to the Antilles a horticultural production system supported by a set of sophisticated tools (*cibucán*, *guayo*, *burén*) that allow them to expand their cropping. The pinnacle of their agroeconomic production system was the development of raised fields (agricultural mounds) and the subsequent incorporation of irrigation and terracing. The slash-and-burn was the main technological component of the horticultural system. This technique was centered around the creation of burned plots to produce mainly cassava, a staple food crop destined almost exclusively for cooking *casabe*. (Image 1) *Casabe* making use to be a laborious process for which many tools were needed. (Images 1 and 2) Furthermore, the gains from hunting, fishing, and collecting provided the Taino with a diverse nutrient source rich in complex carbohydrates and proteins. (Image 4) Of these secondary activities, the most important was fishing. The Taino were avid fishermen, and fish were indispensable in their cuisine. A way of preparing fish, created by the Taino people, was the barbecue cooking. (Image 3)



Image 1 shows parts of the cassava root and a small bowl with grated cassava. This is the first step of the *casabe* making.



Image 2 shows different types of *burenas* where the *casabe* was cooked.

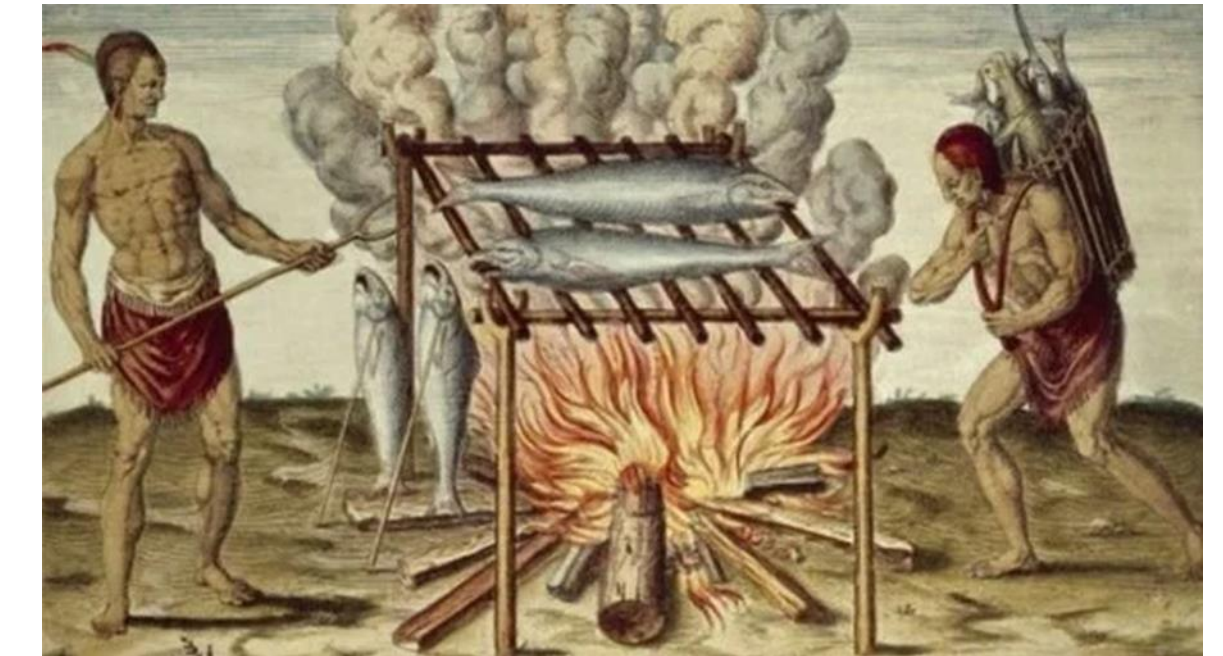


Image 3 shows a traditional way of cooking created by the Taino. Barbecue cooking is a Taino invention that has transcended borders and time.

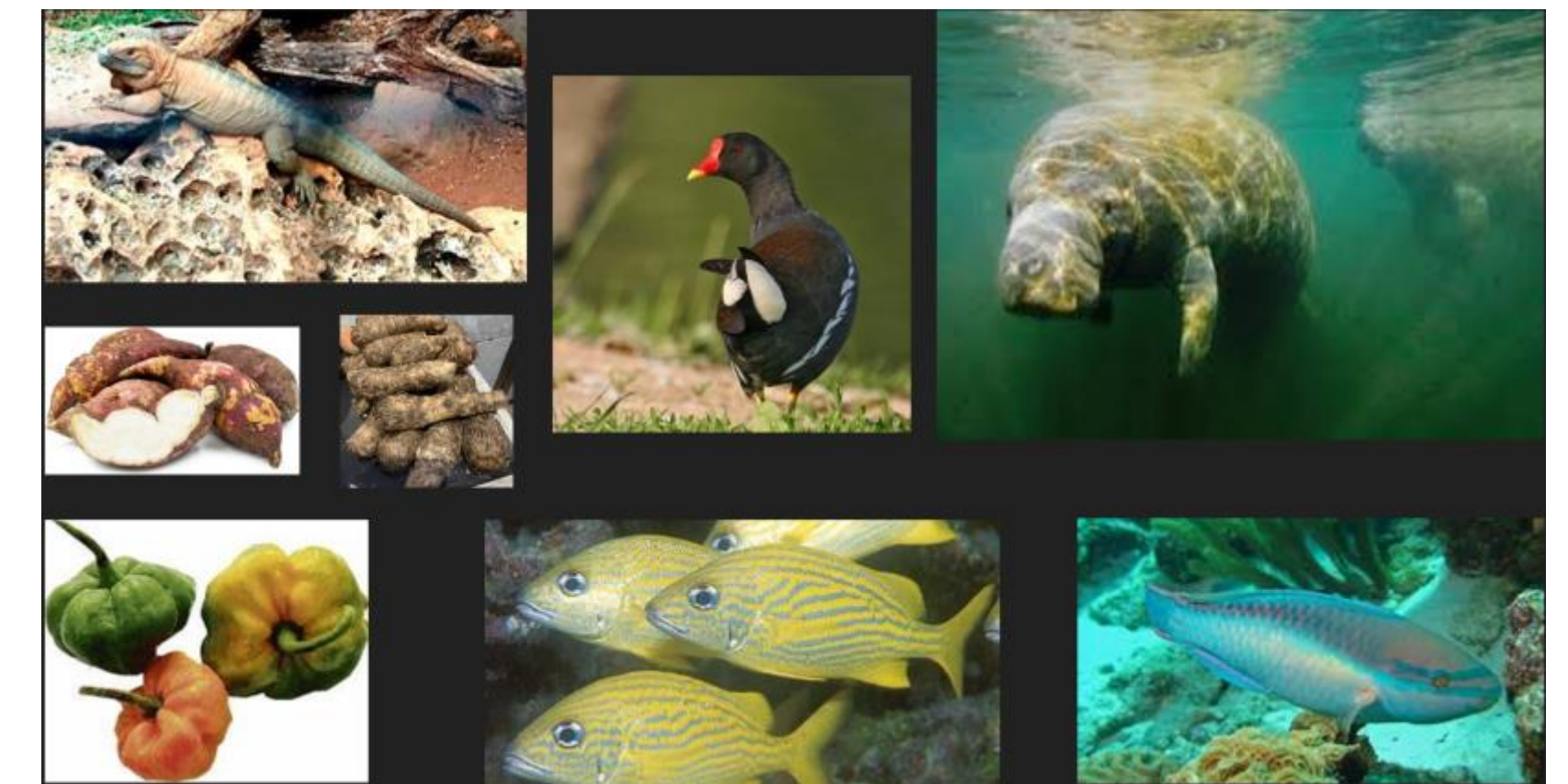


Image 4 shows examples of the wide diversity of species consumed by the Taino.

Dietary Diversity

- The Taino were the cassava people.
- Other crops included squash, peanuts, and beans. Among the fruits, the most cultivated was pineapple.
- In the Caribbean forest, the Taino found other fruits rich in vitamins and minerals, such as guava, sugar apple, soursop, star apple, *mamey*, etc. Interestingly they domesticated many of these wild fruits.
- The capture of the manatee was of fundamental importance for the Taino. Hunting for *hutia*, other minor mammals, and small birds supplemented the Taino diet with a lean protein source. (Image 4)

Conclusions

There is no doubt that the Taino people made use of the great natural treasure available to them. Their effective methods of agriculture, hunting, fishing, and gathering provided them with the opportunity to have a diet rich in protein and carbohydrates. Nowadays, the Taino diet can be seen as exotic and unconventional; many of the species, they consumed (manatee and *hutia*) are not part of the regular Caribbean cuisine. The cassava, as their primary source of carbohydrates, allowed them to have a productive life; and fish as their main protein source was crucial in maintaining a balanced diet.

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