

Anacaona was a Taíno cacica (female cacique or chief), religious expert, poet and composer of Xaraguá, in what is now Haiti. Born into a family of caciques, she succeeded her brother as ruler of Xaragua after his death in 1500. Although she was famous for her poetry, songs, oral histories and traditional dances, little remains of her work today.

In 1493, the Spanish had established a colony to mine for gold and other precious metals. The Taíno were kidnapped and enslaved; many Taíno women were raped and those who resisted the Spaniards were murdered. Anacaona had a political marriage to Caonabo, cacique of Maguana. In 1493, he was arrested for ordering the destruction of a Spanish colony and the slaughter of its people. He was sent to Spain and died in a shipwreck during the journey. When her husband was captured, Anacaona returned to Xaraguá and served as an advisor to her brother, Bohechío.

In 1498, he was confronted by Spanish troops who wanted to conquer his territory to acquire gold. With his power weakened, Bohechío, advised by Anacaona, decided to accept the sovereignty of the Spanish monarchs. Instead of fighting, he committed to paying the tribute levied by the Spaniards with items like cotton, bread, corn and fish. Under Anacaona's rule after his death, the Spanish settlers and the Taínos of Xaraguá coexisted and intermarried.

In 1503, Spanish governor Nicolás Ovando suspected an insurrection was brewing among the Taíno chiefs, including Anacaona. He gave the order for the caciques to be captured. Wanting to make an example of her, Ovando brought Anacaona to Santo Domingo and put her on public trial. Having tortured the other caciques to betray her before killing them, Ovando the "evidence" he needed to execute her. Anacaona was hanged in a public square in 1503.

Anacaona is remembered in contemporary art and literature across the Caribbean.