

**LIKE TURTLES, ISLANDS FLOAT AWAY: EMERGENT DISTINCTIONS
IN THE ZOOMORPHIC ICONOGRAPHY OF SALADOID CERAMICS
OF THE LESSER ANTILLES,
250 BCE TO 650 CE**

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New
York

September 2010

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Art History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

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The late first millennium BCE to early first millennium CE saw the beginning of the Ceramic Age in the Caribbean islands. The ceramic culture that effected this transition was the Saladoid, members of which departed from northeastern Venezuela and the northwestern Guianas and settled the Antilles from Trinidad to Puerto Rico. As the hunting, gathering, fishing, and non-intensive horticulture of the older Caribbean peoples gave way to the intensive agriculture and full-fledged pottery industry of new migrants from South America, Caribbean culture was transformed. This study explores the ceramic indicators of cultural change, not for the obvious differences they trace between older “Archaic” peoples and newer Ceramic ones in the Caribbean, but for the differences they evince between the Ceramic peoples that settled the islands and the ones they departed in South America. This study demonstrates the emergence of a new regional identity.

The study presents three kinds of evidence of this regional distinction. First, it presents quantitative surveys of over two thousand ceramic objects in sample collections and compares incidence counts of zoomorphic motifs between the mainland and the Caribbean islands. Zoomorphic iconography adorns much of the pottery of the Saladoid and other early Ceramic cultures of the Caribbean. Ceramic zoomorphs appear as effigy vessels, incised and painted details on vessel walls, and most commonly, as *adornos*, the modeled handles and lugs of vessels. Secondly, the study tracks qualitative differences between islands and the mainland, chief of these being morphological changes in ceramics, particularly as relate to technique, style and iconography. Finally this study attempts to decipher the cultural meanings assigned to these zoomorphic ceramics, particularly as they relate to known traditional narratives, ritual and daily life. This iconographic and iconological analysis gives insight into the ethos that drove the changes in ceramics and also illuminates some of the motives behind migration to the Antilles.

Through an analysis of formal types, an exploration of aesthetics and iconography, and a partial reconstruction of iconology and cultural context, this work approaches the first Ceramic peoples of the Antilles as curious explorers, deliberate pioneers and shrewd architects of a uniquely Caribbean culture.

PREFACE

Islands and Turtles

The title of this dissertation, “Like Turtles, Islands Float Away” makes reference to a parting of ways. For millennia, people of the Arawakan linguistic family and others had lived on or near Venezuela’s Orinoco River, its upper delta and estuary (figure 1.4).¹ In the first millennium BCE, some of them struck out in canoes for the Antilles, a string of islands extending from Trinidad in the southeast to Cuba in the northwest (figures 1.1 and 1.2).² Today, we also know these islands as the West Indies or the Caribbean islands.³

As they floated away from the mainland, the brave canoeists put increasing physical, temporal and conceptual distance between themselves and their cousins in South America. Once having settled the islands from Trinidad to Puerto Rico, they were urged by conditions there to make a series of technological, psychological and cultural adjustments. Surrounded by water on all sides they became more and more oriented towards the sea not only as a source of sustenance but also as an important trope in their

¹ From the Arawakan linguistic group is derived the term “Arawak” to describe particular peoples inhabiting the Guianas and the West Indies at the time of Columbus. The Ceramic Age people of the Antilles were probably predominantly Arawakan speakers but there remains some uncertainty about this.

² Ruggiero Romano, “The Initial Linkage with America: A General Framework,” in *General History of the Caribbean: New Societies*, ed. P.C. Emmer (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 1999), 43-44. While scholars in the natural sciences tend to exclude Trinidad and Tobago from discussions of “the Antilles” *per se*, this dissertation considers the Antilles as an insular cultural zone and takes the position that regardless of their geographical location on the South American shelf, or for that matter, the position of Barbados off the main archipelago, these islands cannot be excluded from the region named collectively “Antilhas” (Ante-ilhas, meaning “islands beyond”) by Iberian explorers after a mythical Atlantic territory.

³ While the term “Antilles” is one that designates only the islands in the Caribbean Sea, the term “the Caribbean” used to refer to the archipelago is imprecise since it sometimes denotes the Circum-Caribbean, which includes mainland countries such as Guyana and Belize, and islands far off the archipelago such as Bermuda and Islas Providencia and San Andres off Nicaragua. In this dissertation, use of the term “the Caribbean” will be less common than “the Antilles” since, regardless of the latter’s original reference to mythical Atlantic islands, it is more precise in its contemporary reference to only the arc of islands in the Caribbean Sea.

spirituality. Thus, with one foot in their *conucos* (agricultural plots) and the other in their canoes, it is no wonder that for these people sea turtles and amphibians emerged as iconic species, central motifs in their art and religion. The turtle was but one of the zoic emblems in island art, oral tradition and ritual. Over a dozen animal symbols were used to represent vital aspects of Antillean life, from diurnal and seasonal cycles to birth, death and the afterlife. Some symbols originated in mainland tradition, others were new.

The meaning of animal species in the aesthetics and ideology of ancient Antilleans is the central concern of this dissertation. Images of fauna abound in the art of the Pre-Columbian Caribbean, occurring with particular frequency on pottery. The Amerindians of the Antilles painted, incised and sculpted zoomorphic figures on the lids, handles, spouts, and surfaces of their ceramic vessels. The use of these adornments on containers for food, beverages, medicines, intoxicants and other ritual substances speaks of the significance of certain species in the daily and ceremonial life of the ancient Antilleans and provides this dissertation with an ethnozoography of their culture.

Emergences

The subtitle of the dissertation refers to an “emergence” of distinctions in the zoomorphic iconography of Antillean ceramics.⁴ Most dictionaries define emergence as an arising or revealing of something, usually for the first time. This is a useful concept to scientists who speak of “emergent properties,” that is, the arising of complex systems from unique combinations of simpler pre-existing factors. Emergence is a key concept in

⁴ Iconography here is defined as the symbolic language of images and the identification and description of this pictorial language. Iconology is defined as the symbolic thought informing iconography and the study of that symbolic thought.

my study, which involves demonstrating the initial arising of certain artistic and cultural traditions as a result of a unique combination of historical and environmental factors.

The emergent traditions in question are those of the Caribbean branch of an important South American Ceramic culture. Both mainland and Caribbean branches of this culture are often referred to by the name of their ceramics, Saladoid, but we do not know whether the potters perceived themselves as all belonging to one culture or many, or what they might have called themselves. Certainly, their ceramic forms indicate they were somewhat diverse among themselves, even while united by a set of ideas and techniques divergent from that of their contemporaries in tropical America. For over a millennium in their homeland on the Orinoco, the Saladoid ceramicists had developed a diverse and sophisticated zoomorphic symbolism.⁵ When some of these potters migrated to the Antilles, they continued to develop and manifested emergent distinctions in their art, ritual and culture.

Ceramic zoomorphic iconography is a primary indicator of these emergent distinctions between the island and mainland Saladoid. In the reassignment, rarifying and replacement of zoomorphic motifs, a new symbolic language took shape. The emergence of unprecedented zoomorphic categories, likely with their own attendant oral traditions and ritual contexts, also marked the transition to insular Saladoid ceramics and culture. Emergence itself seems to have been a prominent concept in the ethos of Saladoid Antilleans, with themes of migration, birth and transformation evident in their ceramics and sculpture but, as this study infers, their traditional narratives and rituals as well. Thus

⁵ Irving Rouse and José M. Cruxent, *Venezuelan Archaeology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 112-116.

the emergence of new Saladoid pottery in the Antilles suggests the emergence of new people.

Artifacts and Ideas

Artifacts could have no greater function than to tell us about the people who produced them. Understanding people is the point of studying art. This is not to say that history or anthropology are more important than art, for both history and anthropology are selective, interpretive and aesthetic processes as much akin to art as not. Rather, visual culture is often a fundamental factor in the compilation of historical records and these together give insights into the events, ideas, ideals and anxieties of any culture.

Visual expression is key to recovering a few droplets of the ancient Antilleans' culture. This study considers the visual culture of native people of the Caribbean, during a crucial phase of their development. It approaches one key surviving class of artifacts, ceramics, as a reliable reflection of people's aesthetics. Among these ceramics, it attempts to decipher zoomorphic motifs as expressions of a culture's mentalité.

Who's in a Name

Who were these people, whose minds we are trying probe? Anglophone and Francophone literature on the Pre-Columbian Caribbean has referred to the non-Carib indigenes of the region, including those of the ancient Lesser Antilles, as Arawaks. Controversy has long plagued this word being that "Arawak" is a term that designates presumably related Amerindian peoples living on the Atlantic and Caribbean coasts of northeastern South America. For these mainland relatives of the ancient Antilleans,

“Arawak” was a name given them by Amerindian neighbors, meaning “traders of cassava flour.” This did not seem to be the name by which Antilleans, even at the Spanish conquest, would have referred to themselves.⁶ The Spanish-speaking Caribbean has referred to their indigenous people as the Taíno, a name one Hispaniolan group called itself when they first met Spanish explorers. The term meant “the good people.”⁷ But it is unlikely that all related chiefdoms from the Bahamas to Jamaica and Cuba to St. Croix called themselves “Taíno.” The island of Hispaniola alone is reported to have had three native languages.⁸ It goes without saying that the terms “Indian” and “Amerindian” are absurdities, handed down to us by a critical mistake in Columbus’ geophysical calculations. And even to call the ancient Antilleans “indigenous” raises the issue of Paleo-Indian and Archaic people having lived in the West Indies before them. Paleo-Indians themselves are tainted by Columbus’ aforementioned misnomer, and “Archaic” implies some early stage in a teleological trajectory from one imagined level of “development” to another, which does not consider that “Archaic” people might have excelled at technologies later people did not.

We do not know what to call the ancient Ceramic peoples of the Antilles. They are not here to tell us their cultural, regional, town and village names. The name Arawak or Taíno would be as meaningful to ancient Antilleans as the name “Medieval” would be

⁶ Irving Rouse, *The Taínos: Rise and Decline of the People Who Greeted Columbus* (New Haven: Yale, 1992), 5; Neil Whitehead, “Arawak Linguistic and Cultural Identity through Time: Contact, Colonialism and Creolization,” in *Comparative Arawakan Histories: Rethinking Language Family and Culture Area*, eds. Jonathan D. Hill and Fernando Santos-Granero (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 67-73.

⁷ Philip M. Parker, ed., *Webster’s Taíno-English Thesaurus Dictionary* (San Diego: Icon Group International, 2008), 5; Rouse, *The Taínos*, 5.

⁸ Ramón Pané, *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians*, ed. José Juan Arrom, trans. Susan Griswold (London: Duke University Press, 1999), xxiv.

to a twelfth-century Frenchman. These exogenous taxons, by which people call others as expedient signifiers, do not ring with the voices of their ancient referents.

For want of any better terms, throughout this work, I will refer to the first Ceramic peoples of the Lesser Antilles as the Saladoid when discussing their pottery; as Arawaks or Arawakans when referring to their likely linguistic group; as insular or island Saladoid when distinguishing them from the mainland peoples of the same ceramic culture; and generally as Amerindians or ancient Antilleans when there is no apparent danger of misinterpretation.

On the subject of naming, there is an interesting question regarding the pronoun by which we might denote the individual Amerindians who made the ceramics of the Pre-Columbian Antilles. We do not know whether the potters were male or female. Citing the religious significance of figural adornments on Antillean ceramics, and that in Amazonid cultures “religion is typically the domain of men,” Arie Boomert has suggested that the Saladoid potters were male.⁹ However, potters throughout the tropical lowland cultures of South America are overwhelmingly female. In fact, ceramics are often considered female, as receptacles made of earth.

Before making their pots, female Amazonian potters from Brazil to Colombia to Guyana observe somber rituals related to their reproductive cycles and other normal roles as women. These include making sure they are not menstruating or pregnant, observing celibacy and vows of silence, removing themselves from the company of children, restricting their hair and working under the supervision of shamans as they gather clay, coil and fire pots. All of these rituals symbolically and culturally suppress their gender, so

⁹ Arie Boomert, “Agricultural Societies in the Continental Caribbean,” in *General History of the Caribbean: Autochthonous Societies*, ed. Jalil Sued-Badillo (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 2003), 154.

they might make pots that do not crack or cause illness.¹⁰ Yet even while socially “neutered” they maintain a primordial symbolic femininity in the material (i.e., earth) and art form (i.e., pottery) with which they work. Thus Saladoid and Taíno potters might have been overwhelmingly female, makers of the most sacrosanct ritual pottery and devising ceramic iconography in conjunction with shamans and chiefs.

Finally, again on the topic of naming, the reader will notice my tendency to use pronouns and possessives such as “he” and “hers” instead of “it” and “its” when referring to important mythical zoomorphs. This is my deliberate observance of Amerindian narrative conventions in honoring no qualitative divide between humans and animals as might be imagined in traditional Western thought. These are not “anthropomorphized” pronouns to many Amerindian tradition bearers but rather normal, natural grammar.

Discoveries

It is too late to meet the original Ceramic peoples of the Antilles in an equitable, mutual discovery. We cannot encounter them as full-fledged social entities, whether in rapid transition or in some tentative equilibrium with their environment and time. Anything like a contemporaneous understanding of the ancient Antilleans is certainly impossible. Their genes lived on in the conquest-era Amerindians and persist in diminished measures in current Caribbean inhabitants. Vestiges of their Arawak language also persist in hundreds of conquest-era place names and the apothecary of the region. But the institutions, rituals, music and visual arts of all the Pre-Columbian Antilles have been savagely disarticulated by microbes, viruses, metallic shot and cannonballs, swords,

¹⁰ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Jealous Potter*, trans. Bénédicte Chorier (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 23-28.

chains, mission churches, storms, cloying roots, burrowing creatures and biochemical processes in the ground. A jumble of artifacts faces us now, from which I propose to pick some zoomorphic ceramics for analysis.

Despite the ravages of the Spanish, French and British conquests of the region, rumors of the “extinction” of the indigenous Antilleans, replicated in countless travel books, web sites and even some Caribbean classroom textbooks, are greatly exaggerated. The surviving Taínos in Cuba, Puerto Rico and Hispaniola as well as the communities of Island Caribs in Dominica, St. Vincent and Trinidad are sometimes shocked to find out that they no longer exist! So study of the Caribbean’s ancient peoples does in fact fall on the ears of their living descendants. It also provides West Indians of mixed African, European and/or Asian extraction with a much-neglected part of their own history. For Caribbean history begins with the Amerindians and if one admits to being a West Indian, then Amerindian history is the font of any such identity.

It is under silver-blue Caribbean skies that we roast or stew fish in pots of boiling, peppery manioc and it is with indigenous herbs that our grandmothers treated everything from our rashes and bruises to toothaches and first menstrual cramps. It is the same leaden nimbus clouds that tumble over our houses in the hurricane season as over the *bohios* of the ancient Arawaks, whether Saladoid, Igneri or Taíno. We can say we are “from” a place only after the wavelength of its sunlight, the lilt of its winds, the biochemistry of its soils, waters, endemic flora and fauna have shaped our bodies and our minds. And if we share these phenomena with the Amerindians, then are they our forbears in some way.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A community of scholars has sustained this work merely by the proximity of its members, but sometimes by direct action. These are the Pre-Columbianists and Latin Americanists in the CUNY Graduate Center's Art History Department. Good company has sustained my interest even in this loving endeavor. I must thank Keith Jordan for blazing trails and setting bars that are like a subconscious kick in the pants, and for being a font of research sources; Penelope Ojeda de Huala for ideas, inspiration and the always-sympathetic ear; Ananda Cohen Suarez for reminding me that there is no slipping in standards after Keith; Renee McGarry for the questions, challenges and tough love; Taína Caragol and Miguel Arisa for their generosity and effortless translations of my abstracts; Jeremy George, Elena FitzPatrick, Julia Clapp, and Arden Decker for their unflappable examples; and Elizabeth Morán, like a beacon on the other side of the Ph.D. process.

I thank Dr. Eloise Quiñones Keber for imparting her knowledge and enthusiasm for Pre-Columbian art and architecture, not to mention her encouragements, insights and obsidian-keen editorial pen, under which many an awkward phrase has died a less than "flowery death." Each candidate presents a unique combination of abilities, limits and idiosyncrasies to their advisor. Dr. Quiñones has suffered the vestigial "Britishisms," split infinitives, runaway parentheses and poetic flourishes of this dissertation's myriad drafts with heroism and even a measure of indulgence. I am grateful to the other CUNY members of my dissertation committee, Dr. George Corbin and Dr. Judy Sund, first for having imparted and/or organized my knowledge of the dizzying range of arts and cultures beyond the West during coursework and examinations; and secondly, for their patient interest in reading this research, even when editing threatened never to end. I was

honored that Dr. Reinaldo Morales of the University of Central Arkansas saw in my preliminary research some spark of promise and volunteered to be a reader back in 2007. I have tried not to disappoint.

In all my schooling, I have never attended so genuinely international an institution and had such interesting cohorts as at the City University of New York. Additionally, CUNY Graduate Center has supported my studies with funding from the Dean K. Harrison Fellowship and President's Dissertation Year (MAGNET) Fellowship; tuition waivers throughout my happy years teaching at CUNY's LaGuardia Community College and during my final year of dissertation writing; and a Student Travel and Research Dissertation Support stipend from the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs.

My field research was met with great enthusiasm and interest in the Caribbean. For their unexpected kindness and generosity with time and resources during my 2008 fieldwork, I thank Dr. Reginald Murphy in Antigua, for driving me to various collections and archaeological sites around the islands. My work with the staff of the Museum of Antigua and Barbuda was facilitated by Reg as was my introduction to local archaeology enthusiast and avid surface collector, Judge John Fuller, who kindly allowed me to photograph much of his ceramic collection and key objects in stone and shell he thought were of interest in my zoomorphic research. I also express my deep gratitude to History and Archaeology Curator Kevin Farmer at the Barbados Museum; Peter Harris and the staff of the Pointe-à-Pierre Wildfowl Trust in Trinidad for facilitating my expedited visit to the Harris collection; Dr. Basil Reid and his assistant Alexandra Sajo at the Archaeology Centre of Trinidad's University of the West Indies, St. Augustine campus;

Trustee-Curator Edward Hernandez and his young, enthusiastic staff at the Tobago Museum, the museum whose magnificent collection first inspired this dissertation.

For invaluable assistance on 2009 fieldwork, I extend countless thanks to Joost Morsink and Dr. Bill Keegan, both at the University of Florida and the Florida Museum of Natural History; Assistant Curator Lorraine Johnson and staff member Nigel George who facilitated my visit to Trinidad's National Museum and Art Gallery upon my return to the island; Susana Guimarães and her staff at Musée Edgar Clerc in Guadeloupe and Christian Stouvenot at the neighboring Direction Régional des Affaires Culturelles for sorting through their substantial collections during my visits and making sure I always took a civilized lunch; Director Cécile Celma and staff member Peggy DeRoze of Musée Départemental d'Achéologie in Martinique, and Research Technician Thierry Dorival at Martinique's Direction Régional des Affaires Culturelles. I also thank my friend Ilka Hilton-Clarke for driving me to and from some of the collections in Trinidad and to Josiane Ranguin for doing the same in Martinique, but also for being my translator in some crucial discussions with the keen and knowledgeable Mme. Celma.

From late 2009 to the early months of 2010 I concluded fieldwork in the Caribbean and the U.S. I am indebted to Museum Assistant Maureen DaRos, Senior Collections Manager Roger Colten and staff member Becky DeAngelo for enabling multiple, successful visits to the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History Anthropology Department collection at West Campus; to Collections Manager Patricia Nietfeld, Collections Specialists Janet Pasiuk and Linda Greatorex, and Conservator Emily Kaplan for facilitating my visit to the National Museum of the American Indian's Cultural Resources Center; and to Kathy Martin of the St. Vincent and the Grenadines National

Trust Museum who welcomed me to the museum collection and important archaeological sites in St. Vincent.

Additionally, I would like to thank my friend Chief Charles Williams of the Dominica Carib Territory for insights, inspiration and lodgings during my second visit there in 2008, on the way to Barbados; Dr. Benoit Bérard in Martinique for research advice; Dr. Henry Petitjean Roget in Guadeloupe, Dr. Arie Boomert and Dr. Corinne Hofman of Leiden University, Dr. Jay Haviser in the Netherlands Antilles, Joe Moravetz and all other members of the International Association for Caribbean Archaeology (IACA) who have encouraged or facilitated this project by sending me their publications, engaging me in discussion and debate, and offering suggestions on research.

My greatest debt of gratitude is to my wife, Erneslyn Velasco, for her bodhisattva-like patience with the duration of this research; her often prescient and attentive support of my labors and travels; and a certain imaginative and intelligent interest in animal symbolism that sometimes effected breakthroughs in my own thinking about, say, the meaning of a frog or an opossum. She remains my greatest study.

Finally, I must lay this project at the feet of the Saladoid ceramicists whose clever, meaningful, modeled adornments inspired this study. I am also apologetic to these ancient potters and the zoic forces represented on their vessels. For out of the corner of my eye, while writing, gazing, sleeping and waking in thoughts of these ceramic creatures, I glanced things that were afforded no place in this very finite, structured and imperfect study. I am apologetic too for any misapprehensions I may have unwittingly purveyed herein for poverty of evidence and surplus ambition.

To my grandmother,
who enquired daily about my learning,
And referred me often to the geographies of Thomas Pickles;
To the bats who flew out of her ceiling at dusk,
The owl that gazed back from her mango tree,
And the hummingbird in her garden who mistook my ear for a flower;
And to all the island people

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INTRODUCTION

Previous Study of the Early Ceramicists of the Antilles

Fifty years ago some scholars were still uncertain about the origins of the Amerindians of the Antilles. In the 1967 book *Indian Art in South America*, the Museum of the American Indian's Frederick Dockstader suggested that "evidence recovered thus far supports a theory of Antillean origins for most of the early cultures" of the Guianas.¹ But in 1963, just a few years earlier, in their first major published work on the subject, *Venezuelan Archaeology*, Irving Rouse and José M. Cruxent established that the opposite was the case. Relying chiefly on ceramic artifacts they had excavated in northeastern Venezuela, the two archaeologists concluded that people from the South American mainland had settled the Antilles sometime in the first millennium BCE. They called these settlers Saladoid people, after the important site of Saladero on the Orinoco River.

Since the 1960s, scholars have fine-tuned and/or modified the Rouse and Cruxent findings, among them, Mario Sanoja, Iraida Vargas, Arie Boomert, Anna Roosevelt and Louis Allaire excavating and studying collections in Venezuela and the Windward Islands; Desmond Nicholson, David Watters and Henry Petitjean Roget working in the Leeward Islands; Marcio Veloz Maggiolo, Peter Siegel and Ramón Dacal Moure in Hispaniola, Puerto Rico and Cuba respectively; and dozens of other linguists, archaeologists, anthropologists, historians, ethnobotanists and zoologists working throughout the region.

¹ Frederick J. Dockstader, *Indian Art in South America: Pre-Columbian and Contemporary Arts and Crafts* (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1967), 42.

Most now agree that ceramic-making Amerindians of the Lower Orinoco River in Venezuela settled the Lesser Antilles in the late first millennium BCE, and over a six hundred-year period went on to inhabit the rest of the archipelago.² But there is debate over how many distinct peoples were involved in this Antillean expansion, what to call them, which language(s) they spoke, and the order in which they settled the islands.³

Rationale for this Study of Ceramic Antilleans

By virtue of pottery's durability in the tropics, ceramic analysis has been a common method of tracking cultural developments in the Pre-Columbian Caribbean. The region's Ceramic Age spans some 2,000 years from the Saladoid to the conquest-era Taíno. Saladoid ceramics in the Lower Orinoco of Venezuela and the Lesser Antilles display three major categories of adornment: polychrome, incision, and modeling. Many vessels feature modeled animal and/or human imagery on their handles, knobs or spouts, features called *adornos*. These adornos make pottery as much aesthetically sculptural as utilitarian. In the art of ancestral South America zoomorphic and anthropomorphic representations of this type have usually had symbolic importance. Likewise, adornos and effigy vessels are standard bearers of mainland and island Saladoid iconography. For this reason, my dissertation is chiefly concerned with modeled figural ceramic adornments.

Despite the preponderance of animal images in the countless ceramic adornos in Caribbean museums and their evident symbolic content, no art historian has studied them systematically. In fact, art historians are in short supply in the study of the Pre-Columbian

² Louis Allaire, "Agricultural Societies in the Caribbean: The Lesser Antilles," in *General History of the Caribbean*, ed. Jalil Sued-Badillo (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 2003), 195-227.

³ Samuel M. Wilson, *The Archaeology of the Caribbean* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 70-88.

Antilles. Rock art specialist Reinaldo Morales of the University of Central Arkansas and curator Dicey Taylor are the only Anglophone art historians who have worked on extended projects in this young field of study. Morales has studied the highly symbolic cave art of the Antilles, and Taylor curated one of the two acclaimed Taíno exhibits at New York's El Museo del Barrio in 1998 and 2000. No art historian has consistently presented or published research on the sculpture or ceramics of the Pre-Columbian Antilles. Scholars in other humanities and the social sciences have led the study of Pre-Columbian Caribbean art. Several anthropologists have worked to interpret the ceramic iconography of the ancient Lesser Antilles. Henry Petitjean Roget's detailed essays on figural and other motifs on early Caribbean ceramics have led the way in the iconographic analysis of Saladoid imagery. His studies and those of Arie Boomert, Iosif Moravetz, Peter Harris, Basil Reid and others are antecedents of my own work here.⁴

While the Saladoid, the Antilles' premier Ceramic period, occurred circa 450 BCE-650 CE, I have chosen to focus my analysis on the more sculptural Saladoid pottery that characterized the period between 250 BCE and 650 CE.⁵ In this period, sometimes called the Cedrosan Saladoid, modeled, incised and painted traditions combined to produce a rich figural iconography not always apparent in the older, more abstract painted and incised Saladoid traditions.⁶

⁴ See the Bibliography for works by these authors. Scholars such as Bullens, Kirby and Mattioni have also conducted important early studies of motifs, objects and collections on individual islands. However, there is not yet a holistic study or database of Lesser Antillean ceramics.

⁵ Chronologies and styles of Saladoid pottery are discussed in Chapter Two.

⁶ Saladoid un-modeled polychrome ceramics, the very first Saladoid ceramics to appear in the Antilles, are often exquisite, but their motifs are subject to aesthetic impulses and visual conventions beyond mere iconography. I have reserved in-depth research of those ceramics for later projects.

On these later Saladoid figural ceramics, the heads and limbs of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic figures emerge from the walls of vessels or protrude off their rims and spouts as handles. Zoomorphs outnumber anthropomorphic depictions on most islands, but often the two are combined in hybrid or transformational creatures. My concentration on zoomorphic representations is a function of both the frequency with which these occur and the interest that this frequency creates in the meaning of such popular imagery.

The Saladoid potters settled the Antilles from Trinidad in the south to Puerto Rico and the eastern tip of Hispaniola in the north. But while Puerto Rican publications on the Saladoid ceramics of Vieques and Puerto Rico are well researched and amply illustrated, this is not the case for the Lesser Antilles. My study thus surveys and illustrates objects from major collections of Saladoid modeled ceramics from islands throughout the Lesser Antilles with a focus on zoomorphic iconography,

Zoomorphic imagery is not the only indication of Saladoid iconographic thinking or the regional distinctions alluded to in the title and Preface. Abstract, floral, and as mentioned above, anthropomorphic, symbols all appear in Saladoid art. I have chosen only one small but important aspect of island Saladoid visual culture to gain a glimpse of ancient Antillean thought. It may seem that even this small attempt is overly ambitious, and that I have chosen to go far outside the bounds of the discipline of art history. But art history necessarily encompasses the other humanities and social sciences, and in the case of my zoomorphic study, some natural sciences as well. The academy's promise of "inter-disciplinarity" is made good here.

Contributions of this Dissertation

Even as they maintained trade ties with the ancestral mainland, Saladoid-era Amerindians in the Lesser Antilles eventually became uniquely “island people” at once related to and distinct from their continental forbears. My study presents evidence and analysis of the development of an iconography that was uniquely Antillean in its emphases and the range of its subjects. It does this by comparing some 2,000 adornos, vessels and modeled shards unearthed in the Lesser Antilles with some 500 from the Saladoid heartland in Venezuela to trace the growing cultural distance from the mainland.

Since zoomorphic imagery featured as prominently in the new island iconography as it did in that of the mainland, animal iconography can be used to trace the development of new ideas about the environment, the ancestors, the afterlife and the social order across comparable systems. Tracking the disappearance and appearance of zoomorphic motifs from the mainland to the Antilles is one of several strategies employed in my study. Another focus is the evident modification or reassignment of certain animal symbols common to both the islands and the mainland such as bats, turtles, dogs, frogs and others.

Early conquest-era reports confirm the existence of Antillean zoomorphic iconography and its relation to folklore and ritual, but with little explanation of these.⁷ It falls to archaeologists, historians, linguists and art historians to decipher the many species and symbols left unaccounted for by these spotty, initial accounts of Amerindian culture and religion on the eve of their near extinction. I intend that my dissertation should contribute a methodological framework for studying the Ceramic Age iconography and iconology of the Pre-Columbian Caribbean. As it fills in vital areas in the art history of the region by starting at the much-understudied beginning, my ceramic study also reveals

⁷ Sources such as Columbus, Ramón Pané, Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo and others are referenced in Chapters Four, Five and Six on “Zoomorphic Iconography.”

the emergence of artistic and cultural distinctions between the alluvial mainland and the maritime insular environment in which a new mindset was bound to take root among the people.

The legacy of the conquest has sundered the Caribbean into four major linguistic zones (i.e., Spanish, French, English and Dutch) so that national and cultural borders create methodological and even political divisions among scholars who then sometimes draw unsound conclusions based on knowledge of only parts of the region. For example, a common idea among Greater Antillean scholars that the ascendance of frog iconography in the Caribbean was an insular substitution for the larger, more ferocious reptiles in South American iconography seems to overlook that the forests and swamps of Venezuela and Trinidad, where incidences of frog iconography first came to prominence, are both populated by anacondas, boas and caimans today as they were during the time of the Saladoid expansion into the Antilles.⁸ Thus the idea of the Caribbean as an “impoverished faunal environment” where frogs became a symbolic and “mythical substitution” for crocodilians is founded on a misconception that results from skipping over the Lesser Antilles in a flying leap from the Amazon to Puerto Rico. Of course, such leaps are made because the iconography of the Greater Antilles and South America are better studied than that of the Lesser Antilles. Closer observation of the ascendancy of frog motifs in the Lesser Antilles reveals a purposeful and appropriate fascination with the frog in its own right, a fascination typical of hurricane-swept Caribbean cultures. Far more than mere caiman substitutes, frogs are reliable predictors of the storm.

⁸ Peter G. Roe, “Just Wasting Away: Taíno Shamanism and Concepts of Fertility,” in *Taíno: Pre-Columbian Art and Culture from the Caribbean*, ed. Fatima Bercht (New York: El Museo del Barrio/Monacelli Press, 1997), 124-125.

Institutions in the Lesser Antilles do not always make use of the Spanish scholarship in the Greater Antilles. In museums in the Lesser Antilles, I have found incised shell and bone objects unlabeled or mislabeled “shell object” or “shell tool” when they are in fact the inlaid dentures from grimacing wooden icons (*zemi*) sometimes found fully intact in Hispaniola. These bars of clenched teeth, carved from a section of shell or bone, have fallen away from rotting organic (probably wooden) *zemis*, to be unearthed later out of context. Without comparison to Greater Antilles models, the museum staff in Lesser Antilles museums have no frame of reference by which they might identify such an object or understand its significance. Thus my dissertation surveys Saladoid objects from the predominantly Anglophone and Francophone Lesser Antilles, and integrates my findings with Spanish and English research from the Greater Antilles and South America.

Outline of this Dissertation

Maps, charts, line drawings and photographs taken at museums and other collections of Saladoid ceramics support the chapters of my study. These clarify not only the analysis of adorno forms, vessel shapes and zoomorph incidence counts, but also potential migrations and trade patterns. I treat methods of manufacture and ceramic pastes only briefly, since this study’s main interest is the analysis and interpretation of zoomorphic motifs, narratives and natural histories, and the iconography that links these.

Chapter One, “Antillean Horizons,” briefly elucidates current migration theories for Ceramic peoples into the Antilles. Chapter Two, “Early Ceramic Series and Phases of the Lower Orinoco and Antilles,” discusses important Lower Orinoco and Lesser Antilles ceramics, describing motifs, common materials, methods of manufacture, aesthetics, and

styles. This chapter introduces many of the concepts and much of the vocabulary for the discussion of ceramic iconography in Chapters Four, Five and Six on “Zoomorphic Iconography.” Chapter Three, “A Theoretical Framework for Studying Pre-Columbian Antillean Zoomorphic Iconography,” delineates my methodology for the dissertation.

Chapters Four, Five and Six categorically focus on the decipherment of Saladoid zoomorphic iconography: “Mammals,” “Birds,” and “Reptiles and Amphibians” respectively. Each of these chapters gives brief zoological descriptions of species, descriptions and analysis of ceramics that reference them, and relevant oral traditions featuring the species. The progression from Mammals to Birds to Reptiles and Amphibians might seem to reflect a steady climb in ceramic evidence but while this is generally true because there are more, say, turtle ceramics than avian ones, and generally more avian adorns than mammalian ones, there are more bat and dog adorns than crocodilians. What the order of these chapters really represents is a transition from more narrowly distributed motifs to more widely distributed ones. There is simultaneously an overall progression from motifs with similar incidence counts in both South America and the Antilles to ones with higher Antillean incidences. These progressions illustrate a shift in frequency, content, and style of zoomorphic imagery. Since Chapter Six also presents some of the strongest evidence of distinctions between the mainland and islands, it is fittingly the third of three iconographic chapters. Within the iconographic chapters themselves the study progresses from species to species in a more organic way, based on the thematic relationships between motifs of creatures of the same class.

Chapter Seven, “Island People,” is the concluding chapter. There, the natural history, traditional narratives, aesthetics and iconography of the Pre-Columbian

Caribbean, combined with archaeological, linguistic and ethnographic evidence, supports my argument that in the Caribbean Saladoid ceramicists developed iconographic traditions distinct from those of the mainland. I posit that far from just upholding mainland ceramic traditions and symbolic archetypes, and perhaps introducing a new Caribbean motif here and there, Saladoid ceramics of the Lesser Antilles manifested the shrewd and willful decision of an emergent insular culture to develop unique oral traditions, religion, and visual language distinct from that of their mainland forbears. As it commences a new field in art history—Pre-Columbian Caribbean ceramic iconography—my dissertation also argues for the self-consciousness and self-determination of the Pre-Columbian Antilleans.

Research Methods of this Study

My fieldwork for this dissertation consisted of visiting museums and storage facilities in the Lesser Antilles and North America from summer 2008 to winter 2010. Chronologically, the collections visited were the Tobago Museum; the Peter Harris Collection at the Pointe-à-Pierre Wildfowl Trust in Trinidad; the Museum of Antigua and Barbuda, Nelson's Dockyard Museum and the John Fuller collection in Antigua; the Barbados Museum; the Florida Museum of Natural History in Gainesville, Florida; the National Museum and Art Gallery in Trinidad; Musée Archéologie Edgar Clerc and Direction Régional des Affaires Culturelles in Guadeloupe; the Musée Départemental d'Archéologie et de Préhistoire and Direction Régional des Affaires Culturelles in Martinique; Yale's Peabody Museum of Natural History Anthropology Department; the Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C.; and the St. Vincent

and the Grenadines National Trust. While these are not all the collections with Saladoid ceramics, they are the majority of large and/or accessible sample collections.⁹ These usually provided representative selections of objects from archaeological excavations and surface collections. Islands not visited in the survey (including St. Martin, St. Kitts and Nevis, the Virgin Islands and Vieques) were studied from published sources.

Since incidence counts are one indication of the relative importance of any given motif, my study gives the frequency and distribution of Saladoid zoomorphic motifs for islands where entire sample collections were catalogued. For most of the 15 collections visited in this study, I photographed and counted the entirety of their zoomorphic ceramics. However, in some collections such as the vast ones at Direction Régional des Affaires Culturelles in Guadeloupe and the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, I was forced to be selective. There I singled out important sites or particular islands otherwise poorly represented in my survey and photographed and counted all or most available zoomorphic, and many anthropomorphic, ceramics.

Archival research was conducted primarily in North American libraries as well as from my personal library. I also received generously donated publications from several members of the International Association for Caribbean Archaeology. My ethno-historical analysis of zoomorphic motifs draws upon several sources including early conquest and colonial-era texts on the Caribbean, ethnographies of analogous tropical lowland cultures, and archaeological studies. Histories, linguistic studies and exhibition catalogues also provided key comparative data.

⁹ Large collections of objects from Grenada and Montserrat at the National Museum of the American Indian were used to track material and iconological trends in those important islands in lieu of visits to the small and sometimes inaccessible collections there; and the fairly large island of St. Lucia was not visited since this island came to prominence as a ceramic center only after the Saladoid period.

CHAPTER ONE

ANTILLEAN HORIZONS: EARLY CERAMIC MIGRATIONS INTO THE ANCIENT
ANTILLES

In the last centuries before the dawn of the Common Era, some intrepid South Americans piled into their dugout canoes and, as they were already masters of the mighty Orinoco River and the Atlantic coastal surf, they became masters of the open Caribbean Sea as well.¹ They had loaded their baskets, pottery and tools, their children and pets, a few seeds, a few joints of manioc and some heads of small livestock, and thence set out for a new life. On their journey, island after island appeared on the horizon. As they advanced along the archipelago, a few settled, others moved on. They sped through the archipelago from Trinidad to Puerto Rico (figures 1.1 and 1.2). And in less than a 1,000 years, they and those who followed them had filled in the smaller islands in between, then moving on to the largest islands in the archipelago: Hispaniola, Cuba and Jamaica.² Disparate island communities kept in contact. They may have sometimes encountered each other on fishing expeditions, or visited each other in commerce or for festivities. Some communities also maintained contact with relatives in South America despite increasing cultural distance.³

¹ Irving Rouse, *The Taínos: Rise and Decline of the People Who Greeted Columbus* (New Haven: Yale, 1992), 77-79.

² Luis A. Chanlatte Baik, "Agricultural Societies in the Caribbean: The Greater Antilles, and the Bahamas," in *General History of the Caribbean*, ed. Jalil Sued-Badillo (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 2003), 241; Samuel M. Wilson, *The Archaeology of the Caribbean* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 71-80.

³ Rouse, *The Taínos*, 84-85, 104.

In these Antilles, a sprawling, forested Orinokian floodplain traversed by myriad tributaries gave way to the wide Caribbean Sea dotted by forested islands, volcanic islets and coral reefs. While paddling on the massive Orinoco had prepared them somewhat for voyages on the open sea, alluvial valleys and temporary islands of silt created by yearly river floods hardly presaged the permanent, stony, often-precipitous Antilles. In these islands, a smaller initial population would have had no need for the social divisions settlers might have left behind on the mainland. In the maritime environment, daily rituals were modified in response to new resources. New foods and flavors came from the cooking fire, syllables fell off of words and new ones were added, and new words sprang up for new phenomena. Characters reversed their roles in narratives, were slowly transformed into others or fell out entirely, and new heroes and villains also took their place in a vibrant new pantheon. New ideas required a new symbolic language for chanted legend and fashioned image alike, depositories of these emergent ideas.

Who were these people before they left the Orinoco? Why did they leave? And just who did they become thereafter? The forces that drove their migration out of ancient Venezuela have been for years a matter of much scholarly conjecture. Were these ancient explorers also refugees, exiles or outcasts? Did they leave as a result of dwindling resources or some internal squabble? Were they one branch of a clan, polity or moiety chased out by another who sought to replace them? Or did other groups expanding into their territory push them out? Compelling theories propose to answer some of these questions but they are neither simple nor singular. As a matter of course, this dissertation assembles evidence that approaches some of these questions. Such evidence comes from the most current research on the ancient Antilleans, their environment and culture.

A Brief Introduction to the Peoples of the Pre-Columbian Antilles

The history of human settlement in the Antilles does not begin with Ceramic peoples. Archaeological evidence found at opposite ends of the Caribbean archipelago indicates that Pre-Columbian migrations in the region took place in several waves. The first and second major migrations were far in prehistory, spanning some 4,000 years. Beginning as far back as the fifth or sixth millennium BCE, small numbers of Paleo-Indian hunter-gatherers dispersed from South America and Mesoamerica into the southernmost and northernmost islands of the archipelago respectively.⁴ We know of their arrival primarily from the stone implements they left, such as blades, projectile points and axes. From the third to early first millennia BCE more hunter-gatherers began to arrive in the islands from the surrounding mainland. For their experiments with agriculture and even pottery, we distinguish these newer peoples as Archaic Indians.⁵

Only in the third major migration into the Antilles did Ceramic peoples first arrive, beginning sometime in the mid to late first millennium BCE.⁶ Probably of the Arawakan-Maipuran language family, these late arrivals came to the archipelago from their heartland in northern South America, departing from the Lower Orinoco and the Guianas.⁷ They were not the last Amerindians to arrive in the islands. A final injection of Ceramic people of the Carib language family from the Guianas (Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana), along with other Arawaks from that same area, continued to migrate to

⁴ Wilson, *The Archaeology of the Caribbean*, 27, 39, 56-58.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 36-42, 56-58.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 60-65.

the Antilles up until the arrival of the first Europeans in the fifteenth century (figures 1.1, 1.2 and 1.6).⁸ Each wave of Paleo, Archaic and Ceramic migration contained multiple “ripples” in which separate, though sometimes related, peoples arrived within the same general period.⁹ By the fifteenth century the Caribbean islands had been inhabited for some seven millennia or more and comprised multiple cultural zones of coexisting Archaic and Ceramic peoples, living in various states of interaction (figures 1.2 and 1.3).¹⁰ Today, the chiefdoms of the Taíno are the most well known of these groups. While this dissertation indicates in many ways that the Taíno were descendants of the first major Ceramic cultures of the Antilles, its primary concern is the most wide-ranging of those pioneering Ceramic cultures, the Saladoid.

Earliest Ceramic Arrivals in the Antilles

The arrival of Ceramic peoples in the Antilles in the mid to late first millennium BCE from Venezuela and the Guianas represented the arrival of a qualitatively different culture in the ancient Caribbean.¹¹ Ceramics indicate a level of sedentarism based on predictable means of food production: agriculture. Hunter-gatherers cannot cover large

⁸ Wilson, *The Archaeology of the Caribbean*, 145-150.

⁹ Louis Allaire, “The Lesser Antilles Before Columbus,” in *Indigenous People of the Caribbean*, ed. Samuel M. Wilson (Tallahassee: University Press of Florida, 1997), 25-28; Louis Allaire, “Archaeology of the Caribbean Region,” in *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas*, vol. 3, pt.1 of *South America*, eds. Frank Salomon and Stuart B. Schwartz (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 696; A. Gus Pantel, “The Archaics,” in *General History of the Caribbean: Autochthonous Societies*, ed. Jalil Sued-Badillo (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 2003), 120; Rouse, *The Taínos*, 51-70.

¹⁰ Arie Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco Interaction Sphere: An Archaeological/Ethnohistorical Study* (Alkmaar, Netherlands: Cairi Publications, 2000), 1, 11; Rouse, *The Taínos*, 8.

¹¹ Louis Allaire, “Agricultural Societies in the Caribbean: The Lesser Antilles,” in *General History of the Caribbean*, ed. Jalil Sued-Badillo (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 2003), 199; Rouse, *The Taínos*, 79.

distances carrying heavy, breakable pots. Chief among the evidence marking the arrival of Ceramic people in the Antilles are the finely painted ceramics of the Saladoid series (*ca.* 500 BCE-650 CE), a style of pottery named after the type-site of Saladero at the apex of the Orinoco Delta. The first Saladoid pots employed bold figure-ground reversals in white and red slip-painted areas (figure 1.8).¹² By 250 BCE, new Saladoid forms began to appear in islands such as Trinidad and St. Vincent (figures 1.9, 1.10, 2.39). This highly modeled and painted style is sometimes referred to as the Cedrosan Saladoid, after the Cedros type site in southern Trinidad (figure 1.4). By any name, this style became the defining ceramic of the Lesser Antilles in the first millennium CE.¹³

It is my opinion that the uniqueness of Saladoid pottery represents a distinct intellectual background and therefore a distinct culture *per se*. My dissertation demonstrates that iconography, and differences in iconography, indicate the intellectual differences that inform distinct cultures. Cultural distinctions can even be drawn between different branches of the Saladoid, as between the makers of the earlier painted pottery in the Antilles and the later modeled and painted Cedrosan Saladoid ceramics. Certainly if my aim in this dissertation is to demonstrate cultural differences between the mainland and island Saladoid, I must perceive some cultural difference between the Saladoid vanguard that first explored the islands in the mid-first millennium BCE and the Cedrosan type potters who eventually settled all the Lesser Antilles. The best place to begin the study of these intra-Saladoid and inter-Saladoid cultural distinctions is perhaps not with pottery but with the lifestyle these potters introduced into the Antilles.

¹² Wilson, *The Archaeology of the Caribbean*, 59.

¹³ Archaeologists working in each island of the Lesser Antilles have given this “Cedrosan” type local names based on discernable regional differences.

The Culture that Accompanied Early Ceramic People

The Saladoid potters living at or near Cedros in southwestern Trinidad effected an even greater expansion and cultural transformation in the Antilles than earlier Saladoid settlers in Trinidad and Puerto Rico. Rouse notes that “Cedrosan Saladoid pottery was accompanied into the West Indies by the first sedentary villages” and adds that the “Cedrosans” moved away from the shellfish gathering of the original Paleo-Indian and Archaic people to a more inland, riverine settlement and subsistence pattern.¹⁴ Indeed, these explorers, though they came by sea, were at first far more oriented towards the land than their long-acclimatized, maritime Archaic neighbors. Their original preference was horticulture over widespread hunting and fishing.¹⁵

They often built their round and oblong houses on rises near rivers so that they had both a commanding view of their surroundings and a ready source of fresh water. They probably planted “dooryard gardens” that transitioned into areas of useful anthropogenic or managed forest and swidden plots.¹⁶ Middens and cemeteries were designated in a certain part of the settlement by decree or custom.¹⁷ While agriculture was their preference, Cedrosan Saladoid potters had familiarity with a maritime

¹⁴ Rouse, *The Tainos*, 34.

¹⁵ Boomert, “Agricultural Societies in the Continental Caribbean,” 155; Wilson, *The Archaeology of the Caribbean*, 5.

¹⁶ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 94. Unlike the specialized, cultivated plot, or swidden, the Amerindian dooryard garden consists of dozens of domesticated, semi-domesticated and transplanted wild and naturally occurring wild species. “This species diversity and multi-storied configuration obviously resembles that of the Tropical Forest itself. Biotically these polycultural dooryard gardens form structurally as well as functionally complex, inherently stable ecosystems.”

¹⁷ Boomert, “Agricultural Societies in the Continental Caribbean,” 155; Rouse, *The Tainos*, 81.

environment. They had lived in littoral parts of northeastern Venezuela, perhaps for centuries, before expanding to the islands. This is why some Cedrosan sites were close to reef-sheltered shores and mangroves where there was ready access to placid sea fishing.¹⁸

Different combinations of horticultural and maritime subsistence persisted throughout the roughly 1,200 years of the Saladoid in the Antilles. Following the first Saladoid vanguards into the islands, the Cedrosan Saladoid settlers made themselves at home in every Antillean environment, from small, flat, relatively dry islands like Anguilla to precipitous ones like Dominica, islands which earlier Saladoid settlers had originally skipped over. They also continued to settle islands with varied environments favored by earlier Saladoid explorers and Archaic people such as Martinique and Antigua but widely settled Guadeloupe and Grenada as well. Saladoid artifacts have been found on all these islands, with older finds in preferred territories.¹⁹

The Cedrosan Saladoid Antilleans showed a remarkable variety in their diet once they had adjusted to their island environment. Hunting slowly diminished in favor of more cassava (and other root crops) cultivation and shellfish gathering.²⁰ Midden refuse shows this change in subsistence and signs that they were settling into their new environment. Of the dozens of varieties of domesticated cassava Saladoid-era people grew, a division can be made between “sweet” and “bitter” varieties, the latter containing high amounts of hydrocyanic acid when the edible root is broken and exposed to the air.²¹

¹⁸ Rouse, *The Tainos*, 79.

¹⁹ Boomert, “Agricultural Societies in the Continental Caribbean,” 155; Lennox Honychurch, *The Dominica Story* (London: Macmillan Education, 1995), 16; Pantel, “The Archaics,” 121; Rouse, *The Tainos*, 79.

²⁰ Boomert, “Agricultural Societies in the Continental Caribbean,” 158.

²¹ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 96.

This bitter variety was peeled, grated on a board inlaid with small stone chips, and with the grated pulp loaded into a long, tubular basket (called a *cibucan* in Taíno/*couleve* in Island Carib). In the *cibucan*, the pulp was squeezed until all of its moisture was removed, and caught in a calabash or ceramic pot. This toxic juice was sometimes used as fish poison to render fish unconscious in artificially dammed-up parts of rivers, easy pickings for fishermen.²² Sweet cassava, by contrast required very simple preparation, in that it was only to be peeled, boiled, roasted or dropped into a stew as a high yield carbohydrate.²³ Sweet potato (*batata*), tannia and arrowroot were also essential starches in the ancient Antillean diet as they are still today in Caribbean cooking.²⁴

Fruit varieties abounded in the Antilles with the hog plum, pineapple, avocado (aguacate), genip, guava (guayava), mamey, sapodilla, papaya and soursop (guanábana) among the more common fruits cultivated by the Ceramic Amerindians. While the Amerindians had introduced cassava and perhaps some other root crops, it appears that many of the fruit species were indigenous to the Caribbean islands.²⁵ Several indigenous and introduced legumes were grown to accompany the tubers and seafood, as a supplemental protein source: kidney beans, lima beans and jack beans were boiled, but peanuts may have been prepared in a variety of ways.²⁶ In addition to edible crops, many species were grown for medicinal, industrial and other uses. Cotton, probably introduced

²² Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 96-97; Wilson, *The Archaeology of the Caribbean*, 86.

²³ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 96.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 97.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 98.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

by Saladoid or Archaic settlers, was the most important utility crop, for making clothing and trade items. Other plants such as annatto (*roucou*) were grown for providing dye for body paint; calabash trees for their useful gourds; various wood trees for making tools, sculpture and weapons; and wild herbs gathered for medicines, unguents and poisons.²⁷

From ceramic evidence and village layout, we receive indications that the Cedrosan Saladoid Antilleans developed a ceremonial life unlike what they may have known in South America. It was in the Antilles that they apparently first fashioned censers for burning aromatic tree resins or hallucinogens and designed snuff bowls for snorting vegetal mind-altering substances, perhaps the *cohoba* used by the Taíno shamans (figures 2.40 and 4.11). In the Lesser Antilles there also emerged an enigmatic class of lithic, shell and coral trigonal zemis (icons), which would later develop into the ornate zoomorphic and anthropomorphic trigonoliths of the Taíno chiefdoms (figures 2.41 and 6.35).²⁸ Even if the Saladoid trigonal zemi in figure 6.35 *left* were made at the very end of that period (seventh century) and the one in figure 6.35 *right* were made at the very beginning of the Taíno (*ca.* twelfth century), these two quite similar objects would be separated by some 600 years. In fact, it is more likely they were made a millennium apart. Elements of Taíno art and religion have evident roots in the Saladoid.

The layouts of Saladoid settlements also seemed to reflect at least a part-time ritual function. The Saladoid sites of Maisabel in northern Puerto Rico, Golden Rock in St. Eustatius and possibly Indian Creek in Antigua each contain an open central area with

²⁷ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 99.

²⁸ Rouse, *The Taínos*, 83-84. I have coined the terms “trigonal zemi” and “trigonolith,” the latter anglicizing their Spanish name “trigonolito,” to denote these much-discussed objects often clumsily called “three-pointers.” Their exact ritual function remains unknown.

dwellings and/or middens ringing that area (figure 2.7). At Maisabel this central area contains a cemetery so that the ancestors were interred at the *axis mundi* of the community. At Golden Rock, a dwelling was found at this center. Excavations at Indian Creek were done long before the growing interest in the connections between Saladoid settlements and cosmology, so the somewhat circular “plaza” area visible in Fred Olsen’s aerial photographs may be one such ceremonial center.²⁹ Additionally, early ceremonial ball courts have been located in Leeward Islands such as St. Croix, and in Puerto Rico at Tibes, dating to the Ostionoid period, which in those islands followed the Saladoid.³⁰

Inter-island trade was an important part of the Cedrosan Saladoid economy. “The surrounding ocean acted as an aquatic highway linking their islands and cultures rather than as a water barrier,” says David Watters, echoing the perception of many scholars that the sea could be used to unite certain Antillean territories rather than separate them.³¹

One of the best indications of the range of Cedrosan Saladoid trade contacts is the distribution of that culture’s lapidary products: stone beads, pendants, tools and other objects. Discoveries of certain types of stone at a given site, when the geological sources of those stones are known to be foreign, are how archaeologists trace the trade routes of the Saladoid Antilles. Tobago, Grenada, Montserrat and Antigua seemed to have been important sources of un-worked semi-precious stones as well as centers of specialized stone working. They may have acted as hubs of widespread inter-island trade in these

²⁹ Fred Olsen, *On the Trail of the Arawaks* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974), 48-51; Irving Rouse and Birgit Faber Morse, *Excavations at the Indian Creek Site, Antigua West Indies* (New Haven: Yale University Publications in Anthropology, 1999), 10-11.

³⁰ Rouse, *The Tainos*, 80, 113; Wilson, *The Archaeology of the Caribbean*, 93.

³¹ David Watters, “Maritime Trade in the Prehistoric Eastern Caribbean,” in *Indigenous People of the Caribbean*, ed. Samuel M. Wilson (Tallahassee: University Press of Florida, 1997), 88.

commodities as well.³² Lapidary evidence on these islands has given proof of their trade contacts with areas beyond the Lesser Antilles, including amethyst and diorite from the Greater Antilles and turquoise and jade, materials found nowhere in the Antilles but in South America.³³ In a recently celebrated discovery, jadeite axes found in a third-to-sixth century CE Saladoid site in Antigua have been traced back to the Motagua Valley in Guatemala, from the same quarries as were used by the Mesoamerican Olmec and Classic Maya of the first millennium BCE and first millennium CE respectively.³⁴ Saladoid trade evidently encompassed much of the Circum-Caribbean.

Conclusions

In the Caribbean Ceramic Age, Amerindians moving through the islands ran into people who were already well “settled-in.” Trade, intermarriage, displacement and conflict were likely consequences of these encounters. Migrations of distinct technologies and pottery styles can sometimes be used to infer the movements of these newer people and their interactions with others. Not all ceramic styles represent the arrival or departure of separate ethnicities but for Saladoid ceramics, it seems they do. The various waves of Saladoid settlers were but the first in an Antillean Ceramic trajectory that would end two millennia later with the conquest-era Taíno in the Greater Antilles. By then, Saladoid iconography and spirituality, grown distinct from those on the ancestral mainland, had permeated Caribbean culture. Thus early Caribbean ceramics are a crucial area of study.

³² Rouse, *The Taínos*, 85; Watters “Maritime Trade in the Prehistoric Eastern Caribbean,” 92, 98.

³³ Watters, “Maritime Trade in the Prehistoric Eastern Caribbean,” 96.

³⁴ George E. Harlow et al., “Pre-Columbian Jadeite Axes from Antigua, West Indies: Description and Possible Sources,” *Canadian Mineralogist* 44, no. 2 (April 2006): 305-321.

CHAPTER TWO

EARLY CERAMIC SERIES AND PHASES OF THE LOWER ORINOCO AND
ANTILLES

When studying the Pre-Columbian heritage of the Antilles, the case for focusing on ceramics is strong. Ceramic phases are the means by which some Antillean cultures can be dated and tracked. Pottery was certainly not the only artistic expression of the Ceramic Antilleans. Rock art, textiles, featherwork, jewelry and a range of reductive and additive sculpture were all part of the visual culture of the ancient West Indies. But among these, only examples of the more persistent arts, such as rock art; sculptures in wood, stone, shell and bone; and pottery survive in any number (figures 2.1 to 2.5).

Other ancient Caribbean arts have left only their impressions, as is the case of cosmographic village plans apparent today from the positions of middens and postholes; and textile and basketry imprints on pottery (figures 2.6, 2.7 and 2.8). Yet other arts have perished altogether in the moist, corrosive soils of the Antilles. These more ephemeral expressions of culture are known mostly from records of them in other media, as in the case of anthropomorphic sculptures or cave pictographs depicting textile designs, featherwork, beadwork or body adornment (e.g., figures 2.9 *left* and *right*). Some of these arts survive only in conquest-era accounts or in the analogous arts of living Amerindians.

For its resistance to the biochemical, climatic and faunal ravages of the tropics, pottery is one of the most constant physical reminders of the Caribbean's ancient people (figure 2.10). Only lithic and shell objects last as long. For their practical and ritual place in ancient culture, ceramics also are an important indicator of early Antillean ideas about

form, function, aesthetics, oral tradition and religion. Coiled and pressed by the potters, rubbed red by paint-drenched hands, a bowl or jug was an important part of the life of its owner.¹ Its body held life-giving meals, socially lubricating brews, mind-altering potions and ritual ablutions.² In so being, it was a natural effigy for the sacred bodies of ancestors and mythic beings. The ceramic pot performed both mundane and ceremonial functions simultaneously. It sat on the hearth as a familiar locus of daily labors, and rested on the altar or hung from the rafters as a sacred heirloom. It was buried with the deceased.³

Early Antillean Ceramics

Before the conquest, Arawaks were the most widely distributed Amerindian language group in South America (figure 1.6).⁴ The majority of people in the Caribbean at the time of the conquest also spoke some form of Arawakan.⁵ Thus, if the Antilles are

¹ Arie Boomert, "Agricultural Societies in the Continental Caribbean," in *General History of the Caribbean: Autochthonous Societies*, ed. Jalil Sued-Badillo (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 2003), 154; Arie Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco Interaction Sphere: An Archaeological/Ethnohistorical Study* (Alkmaar, Netherlands: Cairi Publications, 2000), 131-132, 142; Henry Petitjean Roget, "Les petroglyphes des Petite Antilles: Mediateurs entre la secherese et l'inondation," *International Newsletter on Rock Art* 50, (2008), 12. Petitjean Roget suggests that pottery was a female occupation, a common occurrence among South American Amerindians, but Boomert counters that the spiritual iconography on both Saladoid and Barranoid ceramics indicates that it was probably a male initiative, given the leading role of males in ritual life of most tropical lowland cultures.

² Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 136-139; Irving Rouse, *The Taínos: Rise and Decline of the People Who Greeted Columbus* (New Haven: Yale, 1992), 12-14; Antonio M. Stevens-Arroyo, *Cave of the Jagua: The Mythological World of the Taínos*. Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2006), 61-62.

³ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 158-159; Boomert, "Agricultural Societies in the Continental Caribbean," 164, 170; Elizabeth Righter, "The Ceramics, Art, and Material Culture of the Early Ceramic Period in the Caribbean Islands," in *Indigenous People of the Caribbean*, ed. Samuel M. Wilson (Tallahassee: University Press of Florida, 1997), 78.

⁴ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 116; Douglas Taylor, *Languages of the West Indies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 13.

⁵ *Ibid.*

included as part of their range, Arawaks were the most widespread indigenes in the Americas. Believed to have been of this language family, the Saladoid ceramicists produced works that were distributed over an area spanning more than 1,500 miles (i.e., from the Middle Orinoco to eastern Hispaniola), and persisting for over 2,500 years (i.e., from *ca.* 2000 BCE to 650 CE).⁶ Saladoid ceramics may evince the Arawak wanderlust.

These ancient Arawaks began expanding into the Antilles in the mid-first millennium BCE and brought with them an ancient and evolving kit of ceramic ideas. At first, their painted and modeled pottery was quite similar to that of the mainland so that ceramics in both regions was essentially a single style. However, from the first two centuries of the Common Era differences emerged in the manufacture, style and especially the iconography of these ceramics. To understand these divergences, we must first understand the range of ceramic forms that characterized “the Saladoid” at the time of the expansions into the Antilles, their mode of interaction and their possible origins.

Early Mainland Saladoid Ceramics—2000 BCE-600 BCE

The mainland origins of the Saladoid series of ceramics remains unclear even after almost a century of study.⁷ The Museum of the American Indian’s Theodoor de Booy discovered the Saladoid ceramic series in 1915 on Margarita Island off Venezuela’s north coast. Yale University’s George D. Howard’s and Cornelius Osgood’s work on the mainland site of Ronquín in the early 1940s brought to light even more characteristic

⁶ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 105; Rouse, *The Taínos*, 74-77. This date spans the entire length of the Saladoid in South America, which was already 1,500 years old or more by the time of the expansion into the Antilles.

⁷ Rouse, *The Taínos*, 33-34. A ceramic “series” is a group of closely related styles and its line of development. Within a series, styles are regional and temporal variations of the series. Styles may also be referred to as phases but the term “phase” is looser, and can also refer to a sub-style.

specimens of the Saladoid series.⁸ It was through the analysis of these findings that Yale University's Irving Rouse determined the Saladoid series as "the key" to the problem of "the sources of the Neo-Indian (i.e., Ceramic) culture of the Antilles."⁹ Rouse's own archaeological work in the Caribbean, and what he perceived as the stylistic links to the Venezuelan Saladoid, were the reason for his original visits to Venezuela. From the 1940s to the 1970s, Irving Rouse and Venezuelan archaeologist José Maria Cruxent published their joint research on the Saladoid, using the Saladero site on the Lower Orinoco as the type-site and namesake of the series. They distinguished seven different variations, or styles, of the series in Venezuela and noted the overlap of two of these styles into Trinidad, the most proximate island to the Saladero type-site.¹⁰

At the time, the two archaeologists admitted that the Saladoid series' role in the ceramic development of the Lesser Antilles was yet poorly understood but Rouse's and Cruxent's excavations and analyses have since been chief facilitators in the research of the origins of the Antilles' Ceramic cultures.¹¹ Their Venezuelan research has been augmented, nuanced, and challenged by that of Universidad Central de Venezuela's Mario Sanoja and Iraida Vargas, who began excavations at Venezuelan sites in the 1960s

⁸ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 101. The National Museum of the American Indian and Yale's Peabody Museum of Natural History both possess impressive collections of Pre-Columbian Caribbean artifacts assembled from these early expeditions.

⁹ Irving Rouse and José M. Cruxent, *Venezuelan Archaeology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), 112.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* Rouse and Cruxent identified the seven styles of the Saladoid as the Cotua, Ronquín and diagnostic Saladero style on the Orinoco River; the Irapa, El Mayal and Chuare on the Venezuelan coast; and El Agua on Margarita Island just off the northern coast of Venezuela. The two Trinidadian styles were dubbed the Cedrosian (or Cedrosan as Rouse would later call it) and Palo Seco.

¹¹ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 107; Irving Rouse and José M. Cruxent, *Venezuelan Archaeology*, 112.

and early 70s, and Alberta Zucchi among others.¹² The usual controversies have ensued, even among a relatively small number of dedicated scholars of Venezuelan archaeology, over such issues as names for individual series and styles; terminology for features and style phases; and questions of which affected or descended from which, and how.¹³

However, there is a general consensus about certain ideas regarding eastern Venezuela's Saladoid ceramic culture. Rouse's and Cruxent's assertion some fifty years ago that the Saladoid series of ceramics developed between the Middle and Lower Orinoco sometime in the late second millennium BCE is still held today.¹⁴ Saladoid ceramics and the culture identified by this name are still believed to have been the product of multiple interactions between earlier, different peoples from Venezuela's interior.¹⁵ However, in recent decades the presumed sites of Saladoid origin have moved upriver from the type-site of Saladero to Ronquín and perhaps nearby La Gruta, both Middle Orinokian sites (figure 1.4).¹⁶ The earliest dates for Saladoid settlement on the Middle Orinoco have also been pushed back from sometime in the late second to early

¹² Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 105, 107.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 105-106; Samuel M. Wilson, *The Archaeology of the Caribbean* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 18-23.

¹⁴ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 100-101; Rouse and Cruxent, *Venezuelan Archaeology*, 112.

¹⁵ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 100-101; Wilson, *The Archaeology of the Caribbean*, 62-63.

¹⁶ Rouse and Cruxent, *Venezuelan Archaeology*, 112-115; Wilson, *The Archaeology of the Caribbean*, 62.

first millennium BCE to sometime in the mid to late third millennium BCE.¹⁷ These shifts were acknowledged by Rouse in the 1970s and became part of his own research.¹⁸

The La Gruta-Ronquín origin area and the type-site of Saladero provide important examples of early Saladoid pottery, but these evince few protomorphic features from which more complex ones could be developed. Rather, the Saladoid pottery at the type-site and others is mature in its technology and adornment, leading Rouse and Cruxent to comment that “by the time we pick up the development, pottery is already at the peak of its perfection.”¹⁹ Thus, the Saladoid was a ceramic series that could be adapted to local conditions and interests but not refined. It could be elaborated, but hardly “improved.”

Arie Boomert cites some possible ancestry of the Saladoid series in the Puerto Hormiga ceramic tradition of the fifth millennium BCE Lower Magdalena Valley of Colombia, and the Taperinha and Alaka cultures of fourth millennium BCE Amazonia. Though direct links are yet unproven, Boomert does point out that many features of Middle Orinoco ceramics are shared by these cultures of the “early Formative” ceramic complexes of northern South America. Such features include zone-incised, zone-punctated, linear incised and puncto-linear (i.e., lines ending in dots) ornamentation.²⁰ Also shared, and perhaps most important for this study, are modeled-and-incised and punctated biomorphic adornos depicting amphibians, rodents and anthropomorphs. Even

¹⁷ Louis Allaire, “Agricultural Societies in the Caribbean: The Lesser Antilles,” in *General History of the Caribbean: Autochthonous Societies*, ed. Jalil Sued-Badillo (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 2003), 200.

¹⁸ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 107.

¹⁹ Rouse and Cruxent, *Venezuelan Archaeology*, 111-112.

²⁰ “Puncto-linear” is my coinage for expedient referrals to this feature of Barranoid ceramics in particular.

in their use of shell and fiber temper, early Formative Colombian and Amazonian ceramics are similar to Middle and Lower Orinokian ceramics.²¹

Mature ceramic traditions existed all over the Amazon and Orinokia by the fourth millennium BCE.²² Current researchers such as Alberta Zucchi, Michael Heckenberger and others are considering complex questions about the technical and intellectual ferment in Amazonia and Orinokia that would have brought all these ceramic traditions into existence more or less during the same epoch.²³ “Diffusion” and “influence” may not be adequate frameworks for studying this ferment. Rather, some kind of evolutionary adaptation or cross-cultural threshold theory may accounts for the multiple, similar cultural developments in several different areas of the Amazon at once.

Boomert admits “it is difficult to determine the influence of primeval pottery traditions such as Taperinha, Alaka and Puerto Hormiga on the ceramics of the fully horticultural societies which crystallized in northern South America.”²⁴ For now, we can maintain simply that the Saladoid is a ceramic tradition originating on the Middle Orinoco, perhaps in the La Gruta-Ronquín area, just over three thousand years ago.²⁵

Characteristics of Saladoid Pottery

²¹ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 100-101.

²² Ibid. “It is generally accepted that the earliest Tropical Forest Indians of the Orinoco Basin were fully Ceramic, i.e., that a sophisticated tradition of pottery manufacture formed an integral part of their material culture.”

²³ Jonathan D. Hill and Fernando Santos-Granero, eds., *Comparative Arawakan Histories: Rethinking Language Family and Culture Area* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Anna Roosevelt, ed., *Amazonian Indians: From Prehistory to Present* (Tucson and London: University of Arizona Press, 1994).

²⁴ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 101.

²⁵ Rouse and Crucent, *Venezuelan Archaeology*, 114, 127.

Bold slip painting is the diagnostic feature of Saladoid ceramics. While the entire surfaces of some early Saladoid vessels are slip-painted red, it is the white-on-red or WOR-ware that is instantly recognizable as Saladoid. In this distinctive bi-chrome style, white slip is applied over a reddish or buff clay body or atop a red slip-painted surface. The white and red areas interact with each other in dynamic figure-ground reversals: where sometimes the white slip forms the motifs and at other times serves to frame red (i.e., drop-out) motifs (e.g., figure 2.11). Some vessels feature tricolor combinations of white, red and black. The pigments used to color the slip paint are usually derived from hematite for the rusty red, kaolin for the white, and carbon, organic resin or asphalt for the black (the asphalt applied after firing). Examples of these minerals have been found in excavations and surface finds at Saladoid sites on the mainland and in the islands.²⁶

While I have seen far more elaborate and numerous motifs in Antillean WOR-ware, the basic vocabulary of this style originated in the early mainland Saladoid. These designs consist of geometric, curved and hourglass-shaped motifs bordered by thin lines, groups of parallel lines or outlined crosshatched zones of red on white, but occasionally with the roles of those two colors reversed. There also are various curviform and geometric emblems either slip-painted or executed in a reductive, sgraffito-like method whereby red polychrome is applied then removed in some areas to expose a white painted layer underneath.²⁷ The interest in figure-ground reversals (and slip-layer reversal) in these abstract decorations expresses a possible concern with the resemblances and potential harmonies between opposing bodies or forces.

²⁶ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 142.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 106; Rouse and Cruxent, *Venezuelan Archaeology*, 116-117.

Vessel shapes vary but circular bowls are the most common Saladoid type, along with a variety of dishes, jars and bottles. Many bowls have the shape of an upturned bell with a keeled profile, tapered rims and often with vertical strap handles or “wishbone” handles, like cursive < and > on either side of the pot. These everted bowls became a standard form throughout the Saladoid world, from Saladero to the Virgin Islands and eastern Puerto Rico, but often without handles (figure 2.12). Early mainland Saladoid vessels (and many late ones as well) typically have thin, compact walls and fine, smooth surface texture largely as a result of the fine clay, tempered with sparse grit, from which they are made. For Saladoid vessels, the clay is usually tightly coiled and densely pressed into shape so that the thin vessel walls give a metallic ring when struck.²⁸

At the time that Rouse and Cruxent first began publishing on Saladoid ceramics, they gave the impression that modeling, punctation and even incision were not important features of the early Saladoid styles, noting only some simple, parallel incisions. While polychrome was identified as the distinguishing surface feature of early Saladoid ceramics, later studies have suggested that there was always a plastic element, if less frequent, to Saladoid ceramic decoration. Boomert asserts that even in early (i.e., La Gruta-Ronquín) Saladoid times, some potters employed broad-lined incisions and modeled motifs on their vessels.²⁹ He describes the incisions as short, parallel lines in curves or waves, usually on the rims of bowls. The modeling usually takes the form of

²⁸ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 106; Rouse and Cruxent, *Venezuelan Archaeology*, 116-117.

²⁹ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 107. Boomert relies not only on his own observations but also on later studies by Rouse and Anna Roosevelt at La Gruta-Ronquín and other sites from 1978 and beyond.

simple tabular lugs and small ambiguous, biomorphic adornos with “knob-like features” surmounting vertical strap handles on the sides of bowls (figure 2.13).³⁰

Barranoid Ceramics—1500 BCE-500 CE

The Barranoid series of ceramics was quite distinct from that of its Lower Orinoco neighbor, the Saladoid. For its vital contribution to the development of the Antillean Saladoid ceramics that are the focus of this study, the Barranoid series is of crucial importance in this chapter’s survey of early Ceramic series. The original homeland of the Barranoid potters is still in question, with Venezuela’s Central Llanos and the Colombian highlands representing the most easterly and westerly ranges of this hypothetical origin place respectively.³¹ Whatever their origin, the Barranoid potters are often regarded as “intrusive” to the Lower Orinoco, where they seem to have encountered the Saladoid potters in a dynamic cultural exchange.

Barranoid ceramics displayed several stylistic developments over their 2,000-year long course (*ca.* 1500 BCE-*ca.* 500 CE).³² An early Barranoid phase emerged at Barrancas, near Saladero (*ca.* 800 BCE), a diagnostic or “Classical” Barranoid at the type-site of Los Barrancos (*ca.* 300 CE), and a late Guarguapo phase (early second millennium CE) which can be seen as an epi or post-Barranoid series, beyond the scope of this study.³³ Each period comprises a series of distinguishing vessel forms, adornment techniques and motifs. But overall, early Barranoid (i.e., Barrancas) pottery is easily

³⁰ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 106.

³¹ Wilson, *The Archaeology of the Caribbean*, 63-66.

³² Rouse, *The Tainos*, 35, 77.

³³ Rouse and Cruxent, *Venezuelan Archaeology*, 83.

distinguishable from the coeval Saladoid series by its coarser ceramic paste and surface quality, highly modeled and incised adornment, and much greater variety of vessel forms.

Characteristics of Barranoid Ceramics

Within the variety of Barranoid vessel forms, there are important differences. Although bowls with annular bases and flanged rims are a diagnostic form throughout the series, in the early Barranoid there is a preference for oval bowls, navicular (canoe-shaped) and biconical vessels, jars, flanged cylindrical vessels, and double-spouted pots with bridge handles (e.g., figure 2.14).

Unlike the painted adornment of the Saladoid series, early Barranoid (i.e., Barrancas) vessels were decorated primarily with incised lines and motifs, and modeled elements. Incised motifs often take the form of curvilinear and rectilinear designs, spirals, parallel and/or hooked lines (figure 2.15 *left*). Singular or groups of puncto-linear marks also occur, as do incised and/or modeled representations of animal and human limbs, and faces (figures 2.16 *left* and 2.17). Modeled figuration, whether stylized or naturalistically expressive, sometimes protruded off the rims and spouts of vessels (compare figures 2.18 *left* and *right*). Overall, Barrancas phase ceramics exhibited a highly resolved, attractive style that was obviously the inheritor of a developed figural tradition in this mode.

The sophisticated Barrancas ceramics were joined in the Los Barrancos phase (i.e., fourth century) by an even greater variety of vessels and elaborations of form. This included a range of carinated bowls (i.e., bowls whose profiles feature sudden changes in direction), various kinds of bottles but also other vessels with necks, flat-bottomed shallow bowls, and rectangular plates. There also were single-spout variations on bridged

double-spout vessels from the Barrancas phase (with the bridge spanning the body and the spout instead of the two spouts), vessels sometimes described as “cone-shaped,” and “pumpkin-shaped” globular bowls with restricted-mouths.³⁴ The vessel in figure 2.19 is a combination of the restricted-mouthed globular and conical vessel.

Incised motifs on these Los Barrancos phase vessels displayed increasingly varied arcs, circles, singular and double spirals, semi-circles (“horseshoes”), ovals, volutes, and crossbars activating the surfaces of vessels (compare Barrancas style figure 2.15 *left* to Los Barrancos style figure 2.15 *right*). Protruding mammiform hemispheres and bosses from the sides of vessels also emerged as important forms of adornment (compare Barrancas style figure 2.16 *left* to Los Barrancos style figure 2.16 *right*). The rims and flanges of vessels varied greatly as well, from externally thickened rims, usually with a triangular cross-section, to hollow ones. Bases are not only annular or flat but can sometimes be pedestaled (as in figure 2.19), concave and even rounded, requiring that the vessel be placed on a separately made pedestal ring, or perhaps pushed into the earth as to stand independently. Many Los Barrancos vessels have vertical strap handles like their Saladoid counterparts, good locations for the placement of modeled nubbins and adornos.

The adornos during the Los Barrancos phase are quite elaborately modeled and incised, with features emphasized by incision and punctated knobs and involving composite and sometimes stacked figural representations in the manner of a Pacific Northwest totem pole (figure 2.20).³⁵ It may just be that more effigy vessels survive from the later Los Barrancos phase than the Barrancas, but in the later phase there seem to be

³⁴ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 119.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 120.

more vessels produced with large faces on their exterior walls as if the pots themselves were the heads or rotund bodies of these characters (figures 2.21 and 2.22). The Los Barrancos phase of the Barranoid represents a period of great interaction with the site of Saladero as reflected in the many Los Barrancos style objects found at Saladero, some of them painted in red and orange slips (figure 2.22).³⁶ Thus, by the Los Barrancos phase, the elaborate Barranoid modeling had had a sustained presence in the Lower Orinoco for centuries and was actively interacting with the slip-painted conventions at Saladero.

Polychrome was not an important element in Barranoid adornment before the encounter with the Saladoid, although the pottery's naturally tan, ruddy, grey or black ceramic was often smoothed or burnished, as were Saladoid polychromes. Burnishing with a smooth river stone (called *guijarro* by today's Venezuelan Amerindians) was done when the drying clay vessel had hardened to a leathery texture, and served to seal the clay's pores and render the pot watertight once fired.³⁷ But in many cases the grittiness of Barranoid ceramics was readily apparent, a result of their being tempered by quartz sand, mica and silica particles, grog (crushed recycled pottery, which might indicate a sustained ceramic tradition at any particular site) and even ground soapstone, depending on the location and phase of development.³⁸ Barranoid vessels and shards make a dull sound when struck, resulting from their coarser paste, than that of ringing Saladoid vessels, and their lower firing temperature, as evinced by the black cores of some shards.

³⁶ In the collection of Saladoid and Barranoid objects at the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History's Anthropology Department Collection, many Los Barrancos type objects are indicated as having been excavated by Rouse and Cruent at Saladero, rather than at Los Barrancos itself.

³⁷ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 132.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 106, 119.

Burnishing pots seem to have led some Barranoid potters to the idea of polishing discreet zones of their ceramics, which are often offset by linear incisions. The two most characteristic of these techniques are zone-polishing and zone-incised crosshatching. These are executed on unpainted ceramic or on blackware, the only wholly Barranoid painted ceramic. The zone-incised technique involves incising the borders of a geometric or biomorphic zone on the face of a leather-hard black-painted vessel and then filling that shape with incised lines. These lines are often crosshatched, hence the name “zone-incised crosshatched,” or ZIC-ware (figure 2.26 *left*).³⁹ Zone-polished areas were often combined with ZIC to create pots with matte crosshatched zones punctuated by burnished and brightly shining zones or nubbins. This combination of zoned techniques became increasingly complex from the Barrancas to Los Barrancos phases, and both phases appeared throughout the Lesser Antilles from Trinidad’s Erin site to Antigua’s Indian Creek (figure 2.27).⁴⁰

Barranoid Adornos

Though it had precursors in the early La-Gruta Ronquín Saladoid style, the figural adorno that would become so predominant in the Saladoid ceramic arts of eastern Venezuela and the Antilles seems primarily a Barranoid development. Barranoid figural motifs were characterized by a flexible but established program of stylization. Barranoid potters could render features as schematic components or as a mix of these

³⁹ The Saladoid series had a painted equivalent of zone-incised crosshatch as illustrated in figure 2.26 *right*.

⁴⁰ In their number and diversity, Antillean Barranoid artifacts give evidence of both brisk trade between the islands and the mainland and possible Barranoid settlement in the Lesser Antilles. The Barranoid series also manifested throughout the Antilles in hybrid forms with the Saladoid series, chiefly the Cedrosan Saladoid style. Some of these hybrid forms are discussed in this chapter.

and more naturalistic elements, all with a degree of artistic license. But despite a tendency towards selective stylization, many adornos depict specific kinds of animals, birds and humans (figures 2.23 and 2.25).⁴¹ In my survey of adornos from the sites of Barrancas, Los Barrancos and Saladero at Yale's Peabody Museum of Natural History, I observed first-hand the growing complexity in adorno design from Barrancas to Los Barrancos noted by Boomert. I also appreciated the beginning of the diversification in the species being portrayed in these adornos from the former to the latter site and continuing through to the Barrancoid-Saladoid interaction strata at Saladero. This diversification also was marked by a growing interest in connoting those species more clearly, if not always through naturalism then by featuring some distinguishing aspect of a species, selected to function as a kind of metonym for that creature. A stylized caruncúla atop the vulture's beak, a vertical slit-like eye for the leatherback turtle, an upturned leaf-like nose for a bat are examples of this visual metonymy (figures 2.31 *left* and *right*, and 2.32).

A peculiar and striking convention also takes hold in the transition from the Barrancas to Los Barrancos Barrancoid: double-ended noses. The noses of many adornos are given bulbs on each end, making them double-faces along a latitudinal axis (figures 2.21 and 2.36). Employing such visual devices the Los Barrancos phase seem to have been taking on both a more sophisticated visual aesthetic and a more charged iconographic content: one based on reflections, inversions and, ultimately alter egos.

Where Barrancoid potters located adornos on their pots seems to indicate that adornos had more than aesthetic significance. The points at which the vessel could be "activated" were marked by adornos. The user touched adornos on their handles, which

⁴¹ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 120.

activated the contents behind the incised or modeled figuration on their walls, and poured the contents past the adorno on their spout. Touch, agitation, filling and emptying, and the gaze were merged into one ritual that brought the pot to life, or awakened its spirit.

Not only the pots had these nexus points. Similar points marked the figures on them. In their figural ceramic imagery, joints and other points on the body where energies meet and either change direction or effect some transformation are often marked with an incised and/or modeled medallion (figure 2.24 *left, center, and right*). These medallions mark the spot where one bone meets the other in a pivot, and the spot where the hand, foot, paw or flipper touches the external world. Medallions also mark the stomach, receptacle where nourishment, introduced from the outside world, comes to rest and transform (figure 2.25). This receptacle medallion is a feminine counterpart of the joint medallion and bespeaks a common masculine/feminine dyad in tropical lowland thought that is applied to sets such as bones (male) vs. blood (female), day (male) vs. night (female), and a host of other elemental and phenomenological opposites.⁴² Following from the complementary, punctuating placement of medallions on the body parts of ceramic figures, the spots that mark the interface between the warm, vigorous human body and the cool, inert pot, or the spot where the living owner touches the ancestral heirloom, also were marked by an emblem, the adorno. Adornos therefore marked nexus points charged with symbolic meaning.

The Saladoid-Barranoid Collision—800 BCE-300 CE

⁴² Peter G. Roe, *The Cosmic Zygote: Cosmology in the Amazon Basin* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1982), 127-263. These dualisms are explored in Chapters Four, Five and Six.

A wide-ranging encounter between Barrancoid and Saladoid ceramics took place in eastern Venezuela from 800 BCE to 300 CE. The first detectable Barrancoid artifacts at Saladoid sites were described as “intrusive.”⁴³ This is because in excavations of middens and other deposits at Saladero, Ronquín, the Peninsula of Paria, and Trinidad, Barrancoid refuse is located above the Saladoid layer (figure 1.4).⁴⁴ Stratigraphically, shards of pottery get thicker and coarser as one rises through the levels of ceramic remains at the Ronquín and Saladero deposits. The decoration of these shards also changes with the ascent through the strata. Punctuation increases, flanges are added to rims, incised designs become more complex and, most distinctively, modeled adornos become numerous in the upper levels, signaling the arrival of, or intense interaction with, Barrancoid ceramicists.⁴⁵

On the Venezuelan coast, at Saladoid sites such as Irapa and El Mayal (figure 1.4), later deposits of ceramics exhibited more Barrancoid traits. Vessels at these two sites as well as at Saladoid El Agua on Margarita Island started out having simple lugs and no flanges but their adornments became increasingly elaborate, eventually developing distinctly Barrancoid adornos.⁴⁶ With the rise of Barrancoid involvement in pottery trade and manufacture in the Saladoid Middle and Lower Orinoco, dispersed incised patterns on vessel walls migrated to enclosed, concentrated zones on flanges.⁴⁷

⁴³ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 123; Rouse and Cruxent, *Venezuelan Archaeology*, 88.

⁴⁴ Rouse and Cruxent, *Venezuelan Archaeology*, 113.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Rouse and Cruxent, *Venezuelan Archaeology*, 118.

Within an area flanked by sites such as Ronquín on the Middle Orinoco and the aforementioned sites on Venezuela's eastern coast, Saladoid pottery also transitioned from a finely wrought to a coarser, heavier construction replete with figural depictions.

The effect of the Barrancoid and Saladoid series on each other was profound. It is difficult to prove, however, whether it was a collision of distinctly separate peoples, a confluence of two different pottery traditions within a single culture, a hostile Barrancoid takeover that nevertheless resulted in a Barrancoid adoption of Saladoid traits, or for that matter, a benevolent Saladoid acceptance of refugee Barrancoid potters, and their ceramic elements, fleeing some upriver conflict.

It is evident that following this early first millennium BCE encounter, groups of Saladoid potters parted ways as if dispersed. One group from the Middle Orinoco seems to have moved upriver to Cotua, leaving some pottery evidence there, while the rest of the population, represented by a new Saladoid-Barrancoid interaction pottery, seemed to start moving downriver towards the Lower Orinoco.⁴⁸ This apparent downriver displacement continued throughout the rest of the last centuries before the Common Era, with characteristically Barrancoid ceramics trailing typically Saladoid ones in the stratigraphic record, all the way down into the Orinoco Delta. The movement did not stop there. The hybrid pottery migrated across the Peninsula of Paria, the Gulf of Paria and out to the island of Trinidad (figure 1.5).⁴⁹

Throughout most of its course, the Barrancoid series in Venezuela maintained a close relationship with the Saladoid. From the Barrancas exchanges with early Ronquín

⁴⁸ Rouse and Cruent, *Venezuelan Archaeology*, 115-116.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

to Los Barrancos' contacts with Saladero, Corozal and various other Lower Orinoco and coastal Saladoid sites, the Barrancoid stuck close to the Saladoid like a prodigious ceramic sibling. But at various Caribbean sites, the Barrancoid and Saladoid were so inextricably linked that they became new mixed styles, from Cedros in Trinidad to Indian Creek in Antigua, and beyond. So connected were the Saladoid and Barrancoid that even the twilight of these two series are roughly coeval, with the epi-Barrancoid Guarguapo style absorbed along with the late Saladoid into the Arauquinoid series of the Orinoco Valley and Venezuelan Llanos in the seventh to eighth centuries CE (figure 2.50).⁵⁰

The Cedrosan Style of Saladoid Ceramics—250 BCE-650 CE

Cedrosan Saladoid Origins and Expansions

The Cedrosan Saladoid style of ceramics emerged on both sides of the Gulf of Paria. The site of Cedros on Trinidad's southern coast is the type-site.⁵¹ The northeast coast of Venezuela and the southwestern coast of Trinidad (the part of the island closest to the Orinoco Delta) both possess a concentration of Cedrosan artifacts in both middens and burials, but occasionally emerging to the surface near beaches, rivers and swamps.⁵² From various points along the southern coast of Trinidad, the Cedrosan style of ceramics

⁵⁰ Louis Allaire, "The Lesser Antilles Before Columbus," in *Indigenous People of the Caribbean*, ed. Samuel M. Wilson, (Tallahassee: University Press of Florida, 1997), 24; Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 113; Rouse, *The Tainos*, 85-87.

⁵¹ "Type-sites" are somewhat arbitrarily designated, based on the order in which sites were discovered, not the order in which cultures developed. Thus, like Saladero, Cedros may not be the origin site of the style named after it but merely a site with a strong representation of diagnostic specimens. The origin place of this style may be Venezuela or Trinidad but the seeming simultaneity of its emergence on both sides of the Gulf of Paria serve to obscure the exact place of origin.

⁵² Allaire, "Agricultural Societies in the Caribbean," 200; Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 145-148.

seems to have migrated in mostly one direction: further into the Antilles. While the Saladoid period as a whole dates back to the end of the third millennium BCE, the Cedrosan Saladoid period, beginning in the late first millennium BCE, coincides with the beginning of widespread Saladoid activity in the Antilles.⁵³ By 250 BCE the Ceramic Age in the Antilles was well established.⁵⁴

Styles of the Cedrosan Saladoid then appeared throughout the Windward and the Leeward Islands, suggesting a complex set of migrations and interaction spheres far less linear than Rouse and Cruxent had originally proposed. The earliest radiocarbon dates for Saladoid settlement in the Antilles are at Cedros in Trinidad, Tecla and Punta Candelero in Puerto Rico, Trants in Montserrat, Hope Estate in St. Martin and Fond Brulé in Martinique. These were all settled sometime between the fifth and third centuries BCE.⁵⁵ This would seem to indicate that Saladoid seafarers conducted a reconnaissance of the Lesser Antilles, reaching beyond to Puerto Rico and only then commenced a series of settlements, moving back southwards among the Lesser Antilles. Thus, Rouse and Cruxent were correct in suggesting that the Saladoid ceramicists went up the island chain from the Lesser to the Greater Antilles, but the stepping-stone model of settlement they proposed was mistaken. Instead, Saladoid explorers doubled back and settled islands they already knew were there, having passed them on the way to Puerto Rico.

We might surmise that the reason they by-passed the relatively small islands between Trinidad, Martinique and Puerto Rico was that they were coming from the

⁵³ Rouse, *The Tainos*, 34.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Jay B. Havisier, "Settlement Strategies in the Early Ceramic Age" in *Indigenous People of the Caribbean*, ed. Samuel M. Wilson (Tallahassee: University Press of Florida, 1997), 60-63; Wilson, *The Archaeology of the Caribbean*, 70-76.

loamy, silty expanses of the Orinoco drainage and looking for similar swathes of cassava-friendly lowland. Finding small and often mountainous islands on their way, they made note of these and barreled ahead. When they reached Puerto Rico, significant populations of Archaic Indians may have checked them in any further expansions, and at that point, they began conserving, and investigating further, the islands they had already reconnoitered but left unsettled.⁵⁶ From around the beginning of the Common Era up until the seventh century, ceramicists making various Cedrosan-type Saladoid pottery settled the rest of the Lesser Antilles. Eventually Ceramic people from Puerto Rico continued expanding into the Greater Antilles.⁵⁷ But by then, though Saladoid forms and motifs were engrained in the Caribbean's ceramic culture, the Saladoid era was ended.

Two or three centuries into the Cedrosan Saladoid expansion, the Palo Seco sub-style of Trinidad; the Courland, Mount Irvine and Friendship sub-styles of Tobago; the Pearls and Grande Anse sub-styles of Grenada; the Indian Creek Saladoid phase of Antigua; and a host of other sub-styles and phases developed as insular variations and subdivisions of the Cedrosan Saladoid.⁵⁸ These regional Antillean phases of the Saladoid

⁵⁶ I would point out, however, that Guadeloupe presents large swathes of arable land but was bypassed in the original exploration, while tiny Montserrat was settled early. Despite the richness of Montserrat's volcanic soil, manioc is not a fussy crop and for volume would favor Guadeloupe. In the end, many carbon dates are yet to be acquired so migration theories remain protean, and as discussed in Chapter Seven, we cannot discount the role of religious sanction in the selection of islands to settle. Also, the presence of Archaic peoples in the Lesser Antilles may have also complicated Saladoid migration patterns.

⁵⁷ Wilson, *The Archaeology of the Caribbean*, 70-76.

⁵⁸ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 161, 169; Irving Rouse and Birgit Faber Morse, *Excavations at the Indian Creek Site, Antigua West Indies* (New Haven: Yale University Publications in Anthropology, 1999), 23, 46-48.

fall within the Cedrosan Saladoid period, that is, between *ca.* 250 BCE and *ca.* 650 CE.⁵⁹ Each variation manifests different mixes of Saladoid and Barrancoid morphologies.

Characteristics of Cedrosan Saladoid Ceramics

The Cedrosan Saladoid is the hybrid offspring of the Saladoid and Barrancoid collision. It was in this style, sometime around the third century BCE, that those two major ceramic series of the Lower Orinoco began to truly coexist in a new ceramic style all its own. Here, patterns and protrusions began to emerge from the polychromed walls and handles of vessels, ambiguous at first but unmistakably biomorphic.⁶⁰ Once combined, seldom did these hybrid adornments ever again disentangle.⁶¹

Most Cedrosan ceramics tend to take the form of bowls, dishes and jars. Within this preference, there are many variations in body shapes, bases, rims and handles. Vessels often have convex bodies that gracefully transition to concave necks, which flare outwards but without flanges on their rims. Others have radically carinated profiles, changing direction suddenly a third of the way or halfway up their sides. Yet others adopt the familiar inverted-bell shape so common in the Saladoid family of vessels. Bases can

⁵⁹ Allaire, "Agricultural Societies in the Caribbean," 208.

⁶⁰ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 131-146; Wilson, *The Archaeology of the Caribbean*, 75.

⁶¹ Rouse, *The Tainos*, 86. A rare example of a post-collision style separation would be at the site of La Hueca in Puerto Rico where Barrancoid zone-incised cross-hatching can be observed in vessels bearing no polychrome, though paint is sunk into the grooves of the ZIC patterns, a technique with no Saladoid precedent (see the "Huecoid Phenomenon" section of this chapter).

be flat, annular or concave. Handles are usually D-shaped vertical straps, often with a lug or simple adorno at their top, some adornos with hollow backs (figure 2.28).⁶²

Cedrosan pots are generally thin-walled, unless they are very large, with a characteristically Saladoid dense, hard construction, which gives them the typical ring when struck.⁶³ Potters tempered the golden-brown to grey clay body with finely ground shell or grog. The finished pots, once burnished with a smooth stone or old potsherd, probably were fired in the open.⁶⁴ Clouds of dark and light areas on unpainted vessels of this style result from unequal oxygen supply during the open or semi-enclosed firing.

The modeled decoration on Cedrosan vessels appears on their rims, shoulders and handles. Painted adornment employs the diagnostic white-on-red (WOR) technique, but also black, across the exterior walls. WOR and other polychrome designs are mainly geometric but can be curvilinear as well (figure 2.29). By the Cedrosan Saladoid period, Saladoid polychrome was combined not only with Barrancoid modeling but with Barrancoid zone-incised crosshatching (ZIC) as well (figure 2.30).

The Palo Seco Phase of the Cedrosan Saladoid

A phase of the Cedrosan Saladoid warrants special mention here, the Palo Seco. From its type-site in southern Trinidad, this phase seems to have swept that island at the turn of the first century CE and accompanied certain important cultural ideas to other

⁶² Allaire, "Agricultural Societies in the Caribbean," 202; Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 131, 132-142; Rouse, *The Tainos*, 81-83.

⁶³ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 131-132.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 132.

islands thereafter.⁶⁵ Several of the adornos discussed in Chapter Four depict mammal species that do not appear in the zoological or ceramic record beyond Trinidad, and since many are depicted in the Palo Seco mode this sub-style ought to be briefly described. The Palo Seco adopted all of the previously mentioned Cedrosan traits of the painted, modeled, incised form but in unique combinations and with a few special features. For one, the Palo Seco can be quite distinctive in preference for certain vessel types, including a growing interest in asymmetry in vessel shapes (figures 5.40 and 6.46).⁶⁶ In the Palo Seco, ZIC-ware wanes in favor of increasingly complex modeling, so that adornos are more recognizable as faunal or anthropoid. Not only do the adornos become clearer in terms of animal classes but in terms of actual species, so that, in some cases, these can be readily identified. Bats, dogs and other mammals are clearly discernible but also birds, turtles and frogs (figures 2.33, 4.1, 4.28).⁶⁷ These adornos appear, like their simpler Erin and Cedros predecessors, on rims, handles and sometimes on vessel walls.

Even as species are more closely observed in the sculptural treatments of adornos, the Barrancoid stylizations that could be observed in objects from Los Barrancos and Saladero in Venezuela to Erin in Trinidad were synthesized into a distinctive mode in the Palo Seco phase: cranial protuberances, spiral and concentric nostrils, what I call “migrating” noses (i.e., noses located high on the forehead), double-ended noses, and “coffee bean,” semi-circular and crescent-shaped eyes (e.g., figures 2.17, 2.25 and 2.34).

⁶⁵ Allaire, “Agricultural Societies in the Caribbean,” 208; Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 128, 153-154. The Palo-Seco phase spans the beginning of the Common Era and the end of the Saladoid around 650 CE.

⁶⁶ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 128, 153-154.

⁶⁷ Allaire, “Agricultural Societies in the Caribbean,” 206; Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 164.

With regard to the cranial protuberances, many anthropomorphic and zoomorphic depictions seem to have topknots or mounds on their foreheads and the crowns of their heads. But many of these projections are actually secondary, smaller adornos pushing through the surface of their visages in the manner of what Arie Boomert calls “alter egos” (figure 2.39 *left*).⁶⁸ These alter egos would seem to represent the spirit of the main figure, taking flight out of the head, as might a spirit guide. The alter egos are commonly zoomorphic. Many of the noses on adornos also are moved to a position higher on their head, creating a more zoomorphic appearance for anthropomorphs and/or giving the optical effect of tilting the heads back (figure 2.35). Others are given bulbs or nostrils on both ends of the nose (as discussed above), causing them to look the same upside down as right side up or to become a different face when flipped (figure 2.36).⁶⁹ The spiral and concentric target-like nostrils are located on the sides of noses, where the nostrils of New World monkeys would be located, encouraging the viewer to consider the resemblance between humans and simians (figures 2.34 and 2.38).⁷⁰

So while the speciation of adornos became more explicit in the Palo Seco, noses became more stylized and migrated up the anthropomorphic faces to give the adornos a new ambivalence. Eyes too were sometimes rendered in an early (i.e., Barrancas) Barrancoid stylization whereby they became horizontal crescents dangling off the bowl-cut hairline of sleepy-looking anthropomorphs (figure 2.34 *left*).

⁶⁸ The alter ego concept is discussed in Chapters Four, Five and Six on Zoomorphic Iconography.

⁶⁹ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 164; Iraida Vargas Arenas, “La Tradición Cerámica Pintada del Oriente de Venezuela,” in *Proceedings of the VIII International Congress for the Study of the Pre-Columbian Cultures of the Lesser Antilles* (Tempe: Arizona State University, 1980), 278.

⁷⁰ This Saladoid citing of resemblances is discussed more fully starting in Chapter Four.

The mobility of noses, eyes and other “component” facial features is a distinguishing aesthetic of most sub-styles or regional phases of the Cedrosan Saladoid, a mobility of component forms inherited from the Barrancoid. For want of a better term, I call this Barrancoid and Cedrosan Saladoid concept “modularity,” as a means of handily denoting it in more complex descriptions. This modularity is a visual device that forms the core of the harmonizing and transformational visual language used in hybrid adornos of the late (Cedrosan) Saladoid in the Antilles. Facial features are standardized into discreet emblems. This renders their design internally rigid but externally, they are highly adaptable. These schematized components form a kind of syllabary than can be rearranged from adorno to adorno to denote or connote different animals, or to combine multiple representations in a single image. Thus, a coffee bean lozenge or a punctated button, basically a hemispherical bump with a hole in the top, can be used by the potter as a mouth or two of these can be used as eyes or even ears (figure 2.37). Around each feature can be placed a variety of other stereotyped components to constitute any number of faces, distinguishable by the shape of the head and the position of the appliqué components. One can imagine a master potter teaching the syllabary to a novice, and, only after this training, allowing the protégé to fashion an entire adorno for attachment to a coiled pot. Certainly, quality differences are discernible among Saladoid and Barrancoid pots, but even as skills range the syllabary is consistent.

The Palo Seco was selective in its synthesis of other Saladoid and Barrancoid elements. As with ZIC, WOR motifs occur with less frequency in the Palo Seco phase.⁷¹ But some of the most masterful examples of WOR can be observed in the Palo Seco

⁷¹ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 155.

(figure 2.38). In fact, yellowish and pink slips were added to the red, white and black Palo Seco palette on rare occasions, such as at the site of St. Bernard in southeastern Trinidad.⁷² Black lines are used to enclose red and white areas, black-on-white designs appear for the first time, incised lines are filled with color; and red-and-black painted motifs in a Barrancoid variation particularly associated with the site of Erin all emerge as Palo Seco alternatives and complements to WOR. Boomert notes that in the Palo Seco sub-style it is interesting that “paint is often applied to accentuate certain plastic elements such as features of faces.”⁷³ Thus, in the early first millennium CE, a collision of polychrome and polymorphic adornments, which had first occurred almost a millennium earlier, achieved a reciprocity where modeled adornment was conceived as something to be painted and the painting was conceived of as lending dimensionality to the modeling (figure 2.39). Alongside what might be called this “chromo-plastic” symbiosis was the obvious fact that the Palo Seco sub-style had out-Saladoided the Saladoid in its range of polychrome, and in its explosion of complex and diversified modeling had similarly outdone the Barrancoid. The Palo Seco was a creative nexus in which the component elements of Lower Orinoco and Antillean ceramics reached their collective apogee.

The Palo Seco phase of the Cedrosan Saladoid also engendered a certain curiosity and playfulness in its aesthetic approach to ceramics, alongside a seemingly growing interest in the ceremonial use of vessels. Several important Palo Seco finds in Trinidad were recovered from funerary deposits in which vessels were placed alongside flexed

⁷² Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 155.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

bodies, not in middens as in some earlier Saladoid interments.⁷⁴ In this late Cedrosan sub-style, zoomorphic snuff-bowls for inhaling hallucinogens also took their place among new, common ceramic forms, but ceramic effigies and the enigmatic trigonal zemi in a variety of materials also emerged at this time (figures 2.40 and 2.4).⁷⁵ These ritual objects evince a burgeoning spiritual life alongside, but also involving, the making of the distinctive Palo Seco ceramics.

One variety of pot found in Palo Seco graves seems rather whimsical in that the hollow rims of vessels sometimes contain small pebbles or ceramic pellets so that they rattle when shaken.⁷⁶ Always uncommon, rattling vessels are found throughout the Saladoid sphere from Venezuela to Martinique and beyond (figure 2.42 and 2.43). The rattle pellets are usually located inside the hollow of medium to large adornos, between two and four inches long.⁷⁷ The fact that it is the modeled, usually zoomorphic, portion of the vessel that contains the rattle is noteworthy, and possibly symbolic. Rattling rims and adornos are not a practical adaptation of a vessel, for they do not rattle as loudly as maracas and there is always a risk of dropping the vessel and shattering it while attempting to use it as a musical instrument proper. Instead, rattling vessels appear to be either a creative flourish or a ritual device designed to both delight and fulfill some ceremonial function. The funerary context for some of these rattling Saladoid pots, as at the type-site of Palo Seco, strongly suggests the latter.

⁷⁴ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 13, 83, 158-159.

⁷⁵ Rouse, *The Tainos*, 34, 83-84.

⁷⁶ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 158, 164.

⁷⁷ Larger adornos are often hollowed for better firing anyway, so the potters sometimes took the opportunity to put rattling pellets inside them.

Rattling pots, increased use of pottery in burials, ceramic snuff bowls, trigonal zemis in stone and other materials, modular facial components, diversified polychrome (including “chromo-plastic” augmentation) and diversified zoomorphic speciation all make the Palo Seco phase the main canal of the Cedrosan Saladoid watershed in the Ceramic Antilles. The potters themselves may not have been driving the cultural revolutions that took place during the Palo Seco phase but they were certainly involved to a great degree. Their manufacture of ceramic items intended for ritual use (one cannot use a snuff bowl for much else!) gives testimony to this. The importance of this Cedrosan phase is further reinforced by the presence of ceramic and non-ceramic Palo Seco-type objects in the Antilles as far north as Montserrat. A tiny anthropomorphic head collected on this volcanic island appears at first to be made of some polished, black, igneous stone, but its light weight and a running fissure under its nose indicates that it may be a worked piece of hardened asphalt from Trinidad’s Pitch Lake (figure 2.34 *right*).⁷⁸ Unusually colored chromo-plastic augmentations on incised figural vessel fragments from St. Vincent and the Grenadines seem to be local variations, not on the greater Cedrosan Saladoid, but directly on the Palo Seco (figure 2.39 *right*).

As an augmented, dynamic phase of the Cedrosan Saladoid, and as an important phase among many simultaneous and subsequent others from island to island, the Palo Seco reinforces the central position of the former. The Cedrosan Saladoid seems to have provided the greater part of the morphological, iconographic and ritual framework of the early Ceramic West Indies. This makes the Cedrosan Saladoid of central importance in this dissertation’s analysis of Saladoid zoomorphic ceramics. In its *mélange* of Saladoid

⁷⁸ This minute sculpture may have been a trade item from Cedros or Palo Seco, both sites fairly close to the Pitch Lake in southern Trinidad.

and Barranroid elements the Cedrosan Saladoid increasingly articulated animal species through polychrome-enhanced modeling and became the *lingua franca* of early ceramic expression in the Antilles. On a range of vessel forms, it recorded a menagerie of sometimes fantastical but often real creatures. Since for some part of their lives these heirloom vessels were evidently ritual utensils, the adornos on their earthen bodies were thus icons, giving voice to a symbolic language at once aesthetic and religious.

Nevertheless, Cedrosan Saladoid ceramics were not the only early ceramics in the Antilles as evidenced by all the Ronquín/Saladero type WOR and Barrancas type ZIC ware found throughout the region. Separate, more “pure” Saladoid and Barranroid elements seem to have migrated there too (figures 2.44 and 2.45). The Antilles experienced several Saladoid-Barranroid collisions. The islands made fertile incubators for the emergence of new Saladoid-Barranroid style mutations, as this study demonstrates. It is worth considering whether those insular variants might not have cross-pollinated the Venezuelan mainland, through trade or other contacts, with new Caribbean morphologies and styles. Ideas seldom flow in only one direction.

The Huecoid Phenomenon—250 BCE-1050 CE

A startling reminder of the richness and complexity of the Ceramic period in the ancient Antilles comes to us from the island of Vieques, off the eastern coast of Puerto Rico. Beginning in 1977, archaeologists Luis Chanlatte Baik, Yvonne Narganes Storde and their colleagues from Universidad de Puerto Rico made a series of momentous discoveries in Vieques. In the district of La Hueca, the Puerto Rican teams discovered ceramic, lithic and other artifacts that clearly indicated that the Ceramic period in the

Antilles began with at least two separate and distinct South American migrations into the islands.⁷⁹ Carbon dating, stratigraphic and stylistic evidence all indicate that this Huecoid culture was coeval with the Saladoid and outlasted the Saladoid by many centuries, with a formative phase alongside the Saladoid followed by later ones that stretched into the conquest-era.⁸⁰ Since the Vieques discoveries at Sorcé and other sites, Huecoid deposits have been located to the east, on St. Martin at Hope Estate and at Prosperity in St. Croix, as far south as Trants in Montserrat and Morel in Guadeloupe, but also to the west at Maisabel in Puerto Rico.⁸¹ To Chanlatte and Narganes, the Huecoid sphere seems confined to Puerto Rico and these Leeward Islands.⁸² But I have found isolated, perhaps traded Huecoid ceramic objects as far south as St. Vincent.

Huecoid ceramics give strong evidence that their makers were from the same general area in Venezuela as the Saladoid and Barranoid ceramicists. Zone-incised crosshatching (ZIC), a chief indicator of the appearance of the Barranoid series in the Lower Orinoco, also is a defining feature of Huecoid ceramic adornment (figure 2.47). But Huecoid ZIC-ware commonly features white pigment sunk into the hachure to emphasize the designs. These hatched zones are often rectilinear maze-like shapes. Since Saladoid potters sometimes painted crosshatched patterns on their white-on-red vessels and Barranoid potters were masters of ZIC-ware, Huecoid pottery seems to be at once related to and distinct from the Saladoid-Barranoid ceramics. Sam Wilson suggests that

⁷⁹ Luis Chanlatte Baik and Yvonne Narganes Storde, *Cultura la Hueca* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte, Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2005), 11-13.

⁸⁰ Chanlatte Baik and Narganes Storde, *Cultura la Hueca*, 92; Wilson, *The Archaeology of the Caribbean*, 76-78.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Chanlatte Baik and Narganes Storde, *Cultura la Hueca*, 17.

the Huecoid culture, with its elevated numbers of “shamanistic” artifacts (e.g., mortars and pestles for grinding herbs and medicines) may have constituted a group of ritual specialists, embedded within but separate from the surrounding Saladoid peoples.⁸³

From the viewpoint of this study, the most outstanding comparative feature of Huecoid pottery is not its zone-incised decoration but the unique style, placement and role it has for adornos (figure 2.48). Adornos are as important here as they are in the Barrancoid and Cedrosan Saladoid. But quite unlike the Cedrosan menagerie of both keenly observed species and stylized zoomorphs, Huecoid speciation is very narrow and is treated with a distinctive, deeply incised tracery. These Huecoid adornos, some of which have been found in otherwise Saladoid sites in the Leewards, provide important comparisons and contrasts with Saladoid ones and are mentioned throughout this study.

Huecoid artisans from Vieques exhibit a more expert handling of chert and other lithic materials than any of their Ceramic neighbors.⁸⁴ This might suggest a deeper level of contact between the Huecoid settlers and pre-existing Archaic inhabitants of the Antilles than between Archaic and Saladoid settlers. In fact miniature stone carvings in jadeite and serpentine of king vultures clutching human heads in their talons are today the most famous and fascinating Huecoid objects (figure 5.22). The iconography of the non-endemic king vulture, the apparent depiction of trophy head-taking and novel style has caused Chanlatte to propose possible northeastern Andean origins for the Huecoid.⁸⁵

⁸³ Wilson, *The Archaeology of the Caribbean*, 80.

⁸⁴ Chanlatte Baik and Narganes Storde, *Cultura la Hueca*, 17.

⁸⁵ Luis Chanlatte Baik, “Agricultural Societies in the Caribbean: The Greater Antilles and the Bahamas,” in *General History of the Caribbean: Autochthonous Societies*, ed. Jalil Sued-Badillo, (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 2003), 231.

The Huecoid ceramic culture remains mysterious. It is attracting increasing attention as it re-writes the migration theory first developed by Rouse and Cruxent. In the future, even the simple statements made here may be called into question as a result of expanded excavations in Vieques, further discoveries in the Windward Islands and the Greater Antilles, and the excavation of new classes of Huecoid objects.

Conclusions

With the exception of the occasional, isolated trade object I have found in regional museum collections, Huecoid ceramics remain confined to Puerto Rico, Vieques and the Leeward Islands. By contrast, the Saladoid and Barranoid series appear throughout Lesser Antilles. From Trinidad to Puerto Rico, they are the foundation of the early Ceramic period. The Cedrosan Saladoid and Barranoid series can be characterized overall as a polychrome tradition with modest modeling and an unpainted or monochrome modeled and incised tradition respectively. Both series have origins deep in pre-history, stretching back to the second millennium BCE. And both evince an interest in figure-ground reversals and a certain modular approach to arranging and rearranging a set syllabary of motifs. Ultimately this design scheme of these seemingly dissimilar forms of ceramics, one chromatic and the other plastic, may have been a uniting factor.

From the fifth century before the Common Era to the mid seventh century CE, a full range of South American Saladoid ceramics spread throughout the Lesser Antilles and Puerto Rico. Brilliantly designed white-on-red ceramics appeared across the archipelago with impressive examples in the Leeward Islands, Puerto Rico and even in otherwise Huecoid Vieques (figure 2.46). Beginning in the third century before the

Common Era, the polychromed, modeled and incised tradition known collectively as the Cedrosan Saladoid became the dominant ceramic mode in the Lesser Antilles and Puerto Rico. It was loaded with symbolic imagery and accompanied by related, likely equally sophisticated ritual functions. There it persisted until giving way to later less ornate ceramic traditions in the seventh to eighth century.

Cedrosan Saladoid ceramics in the Antilles were sometimes accompanied by what might be called purely Barrancoid pottery, evidence of either Barrancoid trade or physical settlement. Since the Cedrosan Saladoid ceramicists themselves brought so much of the Barrancoid ceramic vocabulary with them on their migrations, it is not easy to guess when Barrancoid potters themselves may have arrived in the archipelago. The modeled Barrancoid ZIC dish in figure 2.45 could easily have been made by a Saladoid potter. However, by the fourth century CE, direct Barrancoid settlement in Trinidad, Tobago and Antigua seems likely to have taken place, and from there, Barrancoid trade expeditions may have been launched throughout the Windward and Leeward Islands.⁸⁶ Barrancoid ZIC-ware especially, can be found throughout the Lesser Antilles.

The older mainland collision between the Saladoid and Barrancoid was reenacted in most parts of the archipelago, with the two series fused in a slightly different way on each island and sometimes coexisting separately as well. The role of Archaic people in helping to mitigate, accelerate or arrest these Saladoid-Barrancoid interactions is yet unknown.⁸⁷ Archaic interactions notwithstanding, the Saladoid and Barrancoid series shared similar fates in the Antilles and South America. They both eventually dissolved into various ceramic phases where pottery was decreasingly adorned and increasingly

⁸⁶ Rouse, *The Tainos*, 85.

⁸⁷ The role of Archaic art in the development of Cedrosan iconography is likewise unknown.

coarse. This late first millennium CE “epi-Saladoid” phenomenon was virtually simultaneous from Puerto Rico to the mainland. Series such as the Ostionoid and Meillacoid in the Greater Antilles, the Troumassoid and Suazoid in the Lesser Antilles, and the Arauquinoid and other series in the Guianas and Lower Orinoco mark the transition to a simpler pottery (figures 1.11, 2.49 and 2.50).⁸⁸ Though impressive individual ceramic objects can be found in these series, post-Saladoid aesthetic attentions were evidently elsewhere: perhaps in personal adornment.⁸⁹ The near simultaneous dissolutions of the Saladoid-Barrancoid forms, on opposite ends of their range, is perhaps evidence that they had run their course as a related set of ideas, functions and aesthetics. However, many of the motifs and several of the zoomorphic icons that characterized the Cedrosan Saladoid can be seen in the later Taíno pottery and sculpture of the second millennium, proof of their lasting relevance.

⁸⁸ Rouse, *The Tainos*, 35, 53.

⁸⁹ Allaire, “Agricultural Societies in the Caribbean,” 210. There is possible evidence of increased textile manufacture and diversified cassava products during the Troumassoid series of the Windward Islands (in the archaeological record there is the sudden appearance of easily manufactured, clay spindle whorls and the invention of the footed and rimmed cassava griddle, a more stable, enclosed griddle for making farina, a coarse all-purpose flour) indicating a greater interest in trading well-made cotton and cassava-related surpluses.

CHAPTER THREE
A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR STUDYING PRE-COLUMBIAN
ANTILLEAN ZOOMORPHIC ICONOGRAPHY

Species and Speculation

Animal symbols are the most prominent feature of Saladoid adorned ceramics in the Antilles.¹ Seeking the possible meanings of zoomorphic iconography, the species themselves must first be identified to some degree of assuredness. The identification of species can be problematic. There is a Saladoid penchant for citing the resemblance of one species to another in a clever, aesthetically (and also philosophically) driven system of visual puns, redundancies, mirror-images (so-called Janus-faces), overlaps that create tertiary images, alter egos emerging from foreheads, and other composite images.² Yet, the Saladoid ceramicist often chose some distinguishing feature of a species so that, even when combined with others, that creature would be recognizable.

More difficult than identifying a species is the business of deciphering its possible meaning to the artisans who fashioned its likeness. Ancient Amerindians would have organized their knowledge of animals in different ways than we. It is likely they used taxonomies based not just on the known usefulness of these species to humans, but also on the human desire to catalogue the environment by naming and categorizing each aspect of it.³ Ancient Amerindians, once settled into their Caribbean environment, would

¹ Throughout the remainder of this study, I expeditiously refer to all styles of the Saladoid in the Antilles simply as “Saladoid” or “island Saladoid” rather than articulating the individual sub-styles, such as the Cedrosan-type Saladoids in individual islands from which the majority of adornos come.

² These visual devices are discussed in the “Zoomorphic Iconography” chapters of this study.

have compiled rich ethnozoological (and ethnobotanical) knowledge of local species. Their catalogue of species may have been as exhaustive as that of today's Amazonians, known to have native names for thousands of species, including ones they never use.⁴

Categorical Questions

In the case of zoomorphic imagery, we must consider animal species and motifs together. Any aspect of a species is a potential repository of symbolic value. Much of this iconographic cache would derive from the Amerindians' observation of and/or interaction with the species in question. Encounters with the species would form the foundation of practical knowledge about it but would also inform the mythology and iconography of the species. Within these two categories (i.e., empirical observation and cultural responses to the animal), there are several aspects of the animal to consider:

1. Appearance
 - (a) outstanding features
 - (b) resemblance or lack thereof to other species considered to be related
 - (c) gender and age disparities in the appearance
2. Habitat and/or environment (including seasonal changes in habitat and the larger environment)
3. Behaviors, especially as relate to
 - (a) gender and reproduction

³ Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Chapter 1: The Science of the Concrete" and "Chapter 2: The Logic of Totemic Classifications," in *The Savage Mind*, trans. George Weidenfeld (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 1-74.

⁴ Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Chapter 2: The Logic of Totemic Classifications" and "Chapter 4: Totem and Caste," in *The Savage Mind*, 34-74, 109-134.

- (b) habitat creation/destruction/occupation/modification
 - (c) eating habits and food sources, especially those that the animal might share with people
 - (d) diurnal/nocturnal or seasonal variations in appearance, behavior or habitat, and the species' reactions to celestial or terrestrial events
 - (e) directionality (e.g., migrations but also cultural associations between the species and certain cardinal directions)
 - (f) shedding, growth, self-modification or other transformations in coating, plumage and/or configuration
 - (g) perceived relationship to the elements of fire (including the sun and stars), water (including sacred rivers, lakes and the sea), earth (including cosmographic ideas and toponymy) and air/wind (including storms and hurricanes), especially if the species changes its relation to these over its lifespan
4. Uses to which the species may be put, whether as food, shelter, regalia, tools, musical instruments and/or other ritual implements
 5. Name of the species in the culture's language, especially if the linguistic composition of the name bears potentially symbolic content through (a) synonyms with important cultural concepts (b) puns and rhymes with symbolically or ritually important words (c) roots, prefixes and suffixes that link the species name with other important terms and titles
 6. References to the animal in oral traditions, especially as a player in important events that forge peculiar associations not addressed in the above categories

Of these six potential keys to assessing the symbolic role of animals, the first three would derive mostly from Amerindians' observations (i.e., a natural history) of the species and the latter three from their cultural responses to the animal. I have organized these keys to lead the analysis through some common associations for animal motifs including: men, women and children; earth, sea, sky and cosmology; life and the afterlife; the living, ancestors and the realm of spirits; ancient time and present time and other themes evoked by symbols and motifs chosen from the natural world. I have conceived of these six categorical questions to guide my search not only for categorical answers but profounder or ancillary questions, which ultimately may combine or dissolve some of these categories.

Archives and Analogies

There is no “primary” textual source on the Saladoid ceramicists. We are, however, fortunate to have some conquest and colonial-era accounts of the ritual life and lore of the Amerindians of the Antilles. But these accounts are balefully incomplete and none of them relates to the first ceramic-making people of the Lesser Antilles. For these eastern islands, Father Raymond Breton recorded some early colonial-era Kalinago narratives with animal references.⁵ However, the Kalinago (Island Caribs) claimed to have been relatively recent arrivals to the archipelago even if they may have had some ancestry from older Eastern Caribbean peoples by inter-marriage with earlier groups, linking them to the Saladoid era.⁶ For Arawakan peoples, there are many more accounts

⁵ Breton, Révérend Père Raymond. *Dictionnaire Caraïbe-Français* (1664; repr., Paris: Éditions Karthala et l'IRD, 1999).

of zoomorphic imagery in culture and ritual from Fray Ramón Pané, Bartolomé de las Casas, Fernández Oviedo and Christopher Columbus himself.⁷ But these report on the conquest-era Taíno, a related group based in the Greater Antilles.

Colonial or conquest-era accounts can still assist obliquely in the reconstruction of the zoomorphic symbolism of these most ancient Ceramic people of the Lesser Antilles. Later Amerindians of the Antilles, whose cultures were partly derived from that of the Saladoid, conserved, innovated and renovated many of the forms and motifs first coined in Saladoid pottery.⁸ If they also retained parts of the Saladoid oral traditions and religion that related to these motifs, perhaps Pané, las Casas and other early conquest sources are of use in deciphering Saladoid zoomorphic imagery.

We must also rely on archaeologists, linguists, and natural and social scientists to gain greater understanding of the symbolic zoomorphism of the ancient Lesser Antilles. Ethnographic analogy, if handled carefully, can also afford useful comparisons with latter-day cousins of the ancient Saladoid such as the Arawakan groups still living in the Guianas (the easternmost part of the Saladoid homeland), and the Warao who may have

⁶ Louis Allaire, "Archaeology of the Caribbean Region," in *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas, vol. 3, pt.1 of South America*, eds. Frank Salomon and Stuart B. Schwartz (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 722; Lennox Honychurch, *The Dominica Story* (London: Macmillan Education, 1995), 21-22.

⁷ Some of these sources include: Bartolomé de las Casas, *Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, trans. Anthony Pagden (New York: Penguin Classics, 1999); Samuel Eliot Morison, *Admiral of the Ocean Sea: A Life of Christopher Columbus* (New York: Book-of-the-Month Club, 1992); Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, *Natural History of the West Indies*, ed. and trans. Sterling A. Stoudemire (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959); Fray Ramón Pané, *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians*, ed. José Juan Arrom and trans. Susan Griswold (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

⁸ Antonio M. Stevens-Arroyo, *Cave of the Jaguar: The Mythological World of the Taínos* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2006), 44.

coexisted with the Saladoid ceramicists in coastal Venezuela.⁹ One of the most crucial concerns in the use of ethnographic analogy is with cultural and linguistic changes over time. Comparisons between an extant and an ancient culture require us to constantly guess how and why some intellectual and technological trends might have remained unmodified, and how and why others might have diachronically shifted to produce the present culture. Indeed significant changes may have taken place between the isolated snapshots we gain of a culture from archaeology, archival texts, linguistics or ethnography. But in some cases combined disciplines indicate that the passage of time has had little effect on certain structural features. Additionally, some technologies and traditions reemerge after hiatuses, suggesting they are provisional but never discarded. My study is greatly dependent on ethnographic analogy but confines its comparisons to tropical lowland South America, a region known to be ancestral to the Caribbean peoples.

Each Adorno in its Place

Understanding the place that key zoomorphs occupied in the intellectual framework that informed Saladoid ceramics is a crucial concern of this study. Ceramic adornos are the most common, best-preserved bearers of Saladoid zoomorphic iconography. These ornate lugs, handles, rim and spout adornments are supplemented by the occasional ceramic effigy vessel found intact or in part and a small host of shell and stone items bearing comparable figural imagery. Together, these objects provide indispensable insights into the symbolic thinking of the Saladoid ceramicists.

⁹ Irving Rouse, *The Tainos: Rise and Decline of the People Who Greeted Columbus* (New Haven: Yale, 1992), 5.

Each zoomorphic motif exists among others so we must consider the relationships between these. Saladoid pottery's penchant for composite imagery mandates comparative (rather than totally discreet) discussions of zoomorphic imagery. There are definitely ensembles of like or related species in Saladoid zoomorphic iconography, such as nightbirds (i.e., owls, oilbirds and nightjars), which seem to meld these into a single, ocular, hook-beaked motif. Anthropomorphic imagery too must sometimes be discussed here in cases where adornos depict people in states of transformation into animals wearing zoomorphic regalia or donning zoomorphic masks.

We might ask how these symbols affect/effect human ritual behavior. My study necessarily regards the relevance of zoomorphic iconography to the household and ritual utensils on which it appears. Why are these particular animals on the pottery? In addition to gathering information on animals and birds and how they came to be signifiers, motifs, icons, totems or talismans, it is necessary to consider why they were associated with the domestic and ritual functions of pottery. The function and context of a symbol can serve to infer its meaning, or the meaning and context can help to determine the ritual function. Natural history, iconography, oral tradition, archaeology, linguistics, aesthetics and ethnography all assist in this reconstructive effort. Observation, reason and conjecture are all necessary in reaching across time and space to spy Saladoid life ways, thought processes, and meaning.

CHAPTER FOUR

ZOOMORPHIC ICONOGRAPHY: MAMMALS

Tunneling their way into subterranean burrows, dangling from trees by their prehensile tails, rustling across the forest floor in pursuit of minute and distant scents or patrolling the water's edge and the village's boundaries for scraps and leavings, Antillean mammals can be terrestrial or arboreal, wild or domestic. Mammals inhabit every natural sphere and prevail in every time and season. Millions of years ago, some even took to the seas and yet others to the skies. Mammals are not all covered in fur or hair. They are not universally diurnal or nocturnal, neither are they all gifted with keen vision or even a sharp sense of smell. But they are all warm-blooded and lactate to feed their young from their own bodies, the behavior that earns them their zoological classification.

Island mammals often originate on the nearest mainland. While mainland mammals vary in size and typically diversify over large distances, their insular cousins are seldom famous for their variety or size. This is not simply due to the small size of most islands, but to the narrow ecological diversity of many of them, to which size may or may not be a contributing factor. A small island with an ecologically diverse environment can have greater mammal diversity than a larger island with less varied ecology. Likewise, a small island with diverse ecology far off the coast of a mainland will often have more diverse mammals and other classes than a larger, less ecologically

diverse island near the mainland. In this way, smaller, farther Grenada, has almost twice as many bat species as sparsely forested Curaçao just off the South American coast.¹

Island mammals may originate on nearby mainlands but occur in distributions quite different from those of the mainlands, and in different distributions from island to island. Human islanders sometimes reflect this uneven distribution in the relative popularity of arts, symbols and narratives that reference these beasts.

Incidences and Aesthetics of Mammal Images in the Saladoid Antilles

The cultural connections between the Saladoid Antilles and South American mainland are best demonstrated by the many ceramic depictions of mammals. Species, and the style in which they are portrayed on either side of the Gulf of Paria, are remarkably similar. However, the frequency with which mammals are depicted differs dramatically between the islands and the mainland, reflecting both the disparate incidences of actual species and the divergent interests of potters in the two areas. The Caribbean is not wanting for bats, rodents, whales and other cetaceans but many iconic terrestrial mammals familiar to South Americans do not occur in the islands at all. Conversely, mainland Saladoid potters showed no interest in the aquatic mammal species familiar to Antilleans. In this study the characteristic feature used to designate mammals in ceramic depictions was their ears, excepting aquatic mammals, of course.

While the overall incidence of mammal species depicted in Saladoid ceramics mirrors their incidence in the natural and cultural environment, a few species enjoy disproportionate emphasis in ceramics and yet others are unexpectedly rare. Land

¹ Robert H. MacArthur and Edward O. Wilson, *The Theory of Island Biogeography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 19-20; Robert J. Whittaker and José María Fernández-Palacios, *Island Biogeography: Ecology, Evolution, and Conservation* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2007), 69.

mammals figured among the most important terrestrial prey of Amerindian hunters, who likely grouped them together into a class of hairy, terrestrial, usually forest creatures.² As food sources, many mammals were bound to earn a place in the visual scheme of Saladoid ceramics, but evidently this was not their prime relevance to pottery. Across the collections of zoomorphic ceramic objects from the Lesser Antilles, mammals are the most varied in speciation and style (Appendix 1, Chart 1). This is surprising, given the low variety of actual mammals in most islands.³ Despite the variety of Saladoid mammals, the distribution of these mammal images is restricted to the southern-most islands. In Trinidad, Tobago, Barbados, Grenada and the Grenadines mammal imagery defies the normal Caribbean trend wherein reptiles usually dominate by large margins (Appendix 1, Charts 1 and 2).⁴

The prominence of mammal imagery in only the southern Windward Islands directly relates to an even greater mammal majority in the iconography of the mainland Saladoid. Among ceramics from the three Venezuelan sites of Saladero, Los Barrancos and Barrancas, mammals roughly doubled the incidence of any other class (Appendix 1,

² Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Amazonian Cosmos: The Sexual and Religious Symbolism of the Tukano Indians* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 203.

³ This low mammal variety is perhaps better reflected in the very narrow range of mammals (i.e., mostly dogs and bats) depicted in the later Greater Antillean art of the Taíno.

⁴ Peter L. Drewett, *Amerindian Stories: An Archaeology of Early Barbados* (St. Michael, Barbados: Barbados Museum and Historical Society, 2002), 3-4. Samuel M. Wilson, *The Archaeology of the Caribbean* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 56. While the Barbados Museum collection, upon which my counts for that country mostly depend, is too small to accurately represent incidence ratios for Barbados, this is the only collection I visited in which anthropomorphic depictions (not included in the mammal counts of this study) also outnumber reptiles and amphibians even in a small, random sample. Barbados' ceramic record is atypical in many ways, perhaps owing to that island's location off the main Lesser Antillean archipelago. Samuel Wilson notes that the arduous, eastward journey of almost a hundred miles directly into the tradewinds partially isolated Barbados from the mainstream activities of the Lesser Antilles. But Peter Drewett indicates that Barbados possesses every phase of ceramic development in the region, from an early Saladoid starting circa 200 BCE to a Troumassoid style that reached up to the eve of the conquest. The island's geographic position seems to have engendered unique emphases in iconography, including a greater interest in anthropomorphs and mammalian fauna.

Chart 2). Thus, between the mammal-dominated mainland and usually reptile and amphibian-dominated islands are Trinidad, Tobago, Barbados, Grenada and the Grenadines, where majorities begin to shift.

Ceramic depictions of mammals in the islands often strike a delicate balance between the mimetic observation of an animal order and the “modular aesthetic” of Saladoid style. This modularity, as discussed in Chapter Two, reduces each feature of the figurative subject to a self-contained emblem which can then be located in different positions from image to image to produce different species depending on the module’s placement. Saladoid potters used modular assemblage to fashion individual animals, composite species, and animals that changed species depending on the angle from which they were viewed. Modularity bespeaks an Antillean preference for evoking interconnectedness and mystical transformation through visual and verbal resemblances in art and lore respectively. The movable visual modules of Saladoid zoomorphic and anthropomorphic depictions deliberately produce a degree of ambiguity between and across species. But the slippery speciation is often punctuated by keenly observed characteristics and visual metonyms of specific animals, facilitating identification. Sometimes, because two or more species are identifiable within a single depiction by way of these metonymic features, that depiction can be considered at once singular, plural and transitional. It should be noted that this multiple speciation also causes overlaps in the incidences and percentages of species in this study.

In the Lesser Antilles, felines are rare and stylized. Most other mammals outnumber them by far, even anteaters, which also are more clearly depicted (compare figures 4.41 and 4.43). Armadillos are often observed with great interest, making them

some of the most easily recognizable, but the details captured seem to vary from island to island (figures 4.12 to 4.14). Some potters seize on the shape of the body, others on the animal's banded armor, and yet others, in its prominent ears. Anteater ceramics occur in Tobago, Trinidad and Venezuela but their incidence quickly fades beyond this area. They can be easily identified in long-nosed depictions but can sometimes be confused with a long-nosed raccoon-like animal, the coati (compare figure 4.43 *right* and 4.48). Images of procyonids (coatis and raccoons), however, while quite rare, sometimes retain slip-painted markings that distinguish them clearly from anteaters (figure 4.47). Depictions of agoutis, the common rice rat and other rodents are exceedingly rare but some are quite clear when they do appear (e.g., 4.45 and 4.46). Depictions of marine mammals are less uncommon, and in some cases, are tellingly observed (e.g., figures 4.37 and 4.52).

Of all the mammal species appearing in the ceramic record of the Lesser Antilles, bats are among the most widely distributed and abundant (Appendix 1, Chart 1). For all their differences from the rest of the mammal kingdom, bats should perhaps have a chapter here by themselves. The Saladoid Amerindians would not have considered them as closely "related" to dogs, anteaters and opossums as we do, just because they suckle their young. They evidently saw closer resemblances between bats and birds because of their flight, seeing bats (and owls) as "anti-birds" in the reversed night world. Chapter Five demonstrates this conflation.

However, in Amerindian traditions, bats were mythologized as bearing physical and behavioral resemblances to people and other land mammals as well. In fact, despite the clarity of many Antillean bat depictions, identifying these creatures of the *Chiroptera* order is often complicated by a common Amerindian tendency to combine them with

people in visual representation (e.g., figure 4.1) but also in traditional narratives. Thus, counting the number of bat depictions among the thousands of adornos in the collections of the Lesser Antilles is as challenging as identifying some of the monkeys, which as we shall see, present the same problem of close associations and interchangeability with humans in oral tradition and visual culture.

Bats

We have inherited from the early, unfortunate years of the conquest a partial mythology of bats from Hispaniola. Since the art and culture of Ceramic peoples in the Greater Antilles have some roots in the Saladoid, their oral traditions too is likely to be closely analogous to that of the Saladoid. Throughout this dissertation, I give indications that aspects of Taíno-era lore and iconography are variations on that of their southern ancestors in the Lesser Antilles and South America. This is not surprising, given how little some visual devices and elements (though often not the details) of a mythic narrative can vary within a single ecological region.⁵ So in the case of bats, we have the rare opportunity to study Antillean ceramic depictions alongside Antillean narrative, however removed from each other in time. Combined with an ethnozoology of the bat and ethnographic comparisons to some surviving Amazonian cultures whose ideas about

⁵ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 84-86. A study of traditional South American narratives illustrates that characters and tropes change very little among related groups of Amerindians, while details vary widely from region to region. Even among unrelated groups, similar episodes and players sometimes appear in local traditions. As an example, Lévi-Strauss relates three different versions of a narrative about the origins of peccaries from the Tenetehara, Munduruku (both from different branches of the Tupian language family) and the Kayapo-Kubenkranken (from the Gê language family). Despite language and regional differences within Brazil the main elements of the story are constant: a culture hero and his son (or godson in the Tenetehara version) part ways, only to be reunited later; the little boy reports that he has been mistreated by the hosts with whom the hero left him; and so his parent and he proceed to corral the uncouth hosts in their village and by use of magic, turn them into grunting beasts, the ancestors of wild peccaries. Lévi-Straus also points to an analogous story among the Warao of the Guianas fairly far to the north.

the bat are known, the effort to formulate some well-informed theories about the significance of bats in the Saladoid stands on firm ground.

This relative wealth of information on bats urges me to begin my discussion of mammal iconography with these unusual members of the mammal class. In many ways that will become obvious, bats are a special and exemplary case in the iconographic analysis of the Saladoid. An analysis of bats can help to establish a theoretical baseline for the analysis of other mammal motifs. If we can ascertain how actual bats related to the ancient Antillean visual representation and mythology of them, we are in a better position to deduce how, say, actual armadillos related to their known visual motifs and their now-lost mythic associations in the Antilles.

Bats in Nature

At dusk they issue from their caves in dark clouds of fluttering wings, to rule the night sky. Their clicks, chirps and squeaks comprise an inscrutable, often inaudible, language. Furry like most four-legged animals but winged like birds, these nocturnal creatures with their hairless faces sometimes have curiously simian, even human, behavior, including the ability to climb trees and, in the case of the vampires, briefly stand upright. Perhaps their most beguiling aspect is their daytime sleep cycle in which they dangle upside down from their perches in caves, rock ledges and hollowed old trees, a temporal and physical inversion of the nighttime, horizontal slumber of humans. By virtue of their amazing traits bats were an essential subject of Antillean art and narrative.

Incidences and Aesthetics of Pre-Columbian Antillean Bat Ceramics

Throughout pre-conquest Caribbean ceramics, bats appeared in a variety of forms and styles, differing by region, period, and individual ceramicists' hands. Bat imagery was an important part of ceramics on the Saladoid mainland and islands. In my survey of over a dozen collections in the Caribbean, only the Antigua Saladoid seems to have showed no interest in bats. This is odd, since Antigua has a wealth of excavated and surface-collected ceramic adornos and at least six endemic bat species.⁶ All other Lesser Antilles collections visited possessed impressive bat ceramics in a variety of modes, representing a significant percent of the mammals depicted (Appendix 1, Charts 2 and 3).

Interest in bat imagery is a pan-Saladoid phenomenon, constant from the Lower Orinoco to the Leeward Islands (Appendix 1, Chart 1).⁷ From the early to late Saladoid, on both the mainland and the islands, bat heads were featured as adornos on the rims of various containers. Their wings also were rendered on vessel walls and their bodies were sometimes incorporated into the bodies of pedestals, bowls and dishes with the handles of the vessels often resolving into the head of the animal (figures 4.1 and 4.2). Of these three, adornos are the most diagnostic category of bat imagery in ceramics.

Bat features on adornos were captured with varying degrees of naturalism. There is only the most general speciation in Saladoid bat imagery. The usually round heads with turned-up, slit snouts evoke the Caribbean leaf-nosed varieties especially (compare figure

⁶ Gary S. Morgan, "Patterns of Extinction in West Indian Bats," in *Biogeography of the West Indies: Patterns and Perspectives*, eds. Charles A. Woods and Florence E. Sergile (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2001), 369-407.

⁷ At the Peabody Museum of Natural History's Anthropology Department, where most of the Venezuelan materials excavated by Rouse and Cruxent (and many collected by Fred Olsen) are stored, I found only 11 ceramic depictions with the diagnostic features of bats: round faces with upturned noses and incised nostrils. But the 11 Venezuelan bats among over 500 adornos and zoomorphic fragments from the sites of Saladero, Los Barrancos and Barrancas is a comparable number to the nine bat adornos among a similar total of 500 adornos and zoomorphic fragments in Guadeloupe. At the Musée Edgar Clerc and Direction Régional des Affaires Culturelles in Guadeloupe, 5 and 4 bat adornos were found respectively.

4.11 to figure 1). From the side, these bat heads have a pug-nosed appearance with the line of the forehead suddenly interrupted by an almost perpendicular upward sweep of the nose (figure 4.3 *left* and 4.10). Bat ears could be pinched to a point, or modeled in a variety of ways. Often, they were not pointed but the kind of ears given to anthropomorphs, consisting of the standard Cedrosan Saladoid/Palo Seco traced almond-shape with a circular nubbin on one end as in figure 4.1.

Unlike bat faces, bat wings can be so radically abstracted as to seem mere geometric patterns with no natural referent (figures 4.4 and 4.5). This abstraction of bat wings also was a feature of later Taíno pottery in the Greater Antilles where the creature's silhouette in flight was geometricized into triple triangular or zigzag shapes.⁸ These Taíno V-shaped motifs had more curvilinear Saladoid ancestors in the Lesser Antilles and thus persisted throughout the entire Ceramic period in the Caribbean. Many adornos and vessel walls feature inwardly scrolling wings with a third shape, often smaller and triangular with a central dot, in the center to represent the bat's body (compare figures 4.4 *left*, and 4.6). This curled V-motif, which persisted over the thousand years and thousand miles that separated its first appearance in the island Saladoid and re-emergence in the Taíno period (*ca.* 300-500 CE to *ca.* 1200-1500 CE), illustrates the sustained relevance of some Saladoid symbols.⁹ By the late Saladoid in the Lesser Antilles (mid first millennium CE) when new collisions with the Barrancoid were

⁸ Manuel A. García Arévalo, "The Bat and the Owl: Nocturnal Images of Death," in *Taíno: Pre-Columbian Art and Culture from the Caribbean*, ed. Fatima Bercht (New York: El Museo del Barrio/Monacelli Press, 1997), 115.

⁹ Louis Allaire, "Agricultural Societies in the Caribbean," in *General History of the Caribbean: Autochthonous Societies*, ed. Jalil Sued-Badillo (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 2003), 208. I refer to a re-emergence of Saladoid symbols in the Taíno era because of the evident decline of ceramics as ritual and elite items during the intervening Troumassoid period where pottery was relatively unadorned.

occurring in the archipelago, the representation of bat wings had reached an advanced state of abstraction. In a particularly Barranoid-looking example from Trinidad, multiple bat motifs appear on the same adorno (figure 4.7). Bat wing scrolls arch above the forehead of the anthropomorphic face following the hairline. The two downward curls of the wings resolve themselves into the eyes of the anthropomorph. Between these “wing-eyes” of the figure is a nose, which comes to protuberances on both ends, the nose-bridge and the tip. Thus, between the “wing-eyes” is a third element that completes the bat emblem from figures 4.4 and 4.6. The image simultaneously represents a bat in flight, the face of a bat (with prognathous mouth and turned-up nose) and the face of a human.

Anthropomorphized Bats in Antillean Lore

Anthropomorphized bats are found in both Antillean ceramics and lore. Close associations between bats, humans and the Amerindian spirit-world were integral to legends recorded by Fray Ramón Pané on the island of Hispaniola in the sixteenth century.¹⁰ In one narrative bats are believed by Amerindians to be the corporeal hosts of visitors from the land of the dead. In another, caves, the known abodes of bats, are described as the sacred origin-places of an ancestral band of early humans.¹¹

In the first narrative, nightfall brings the spirits of the dead, the *opía*, out of their kingdom, Coaybay, on the mythical island of Soraya in the middle of the sea. They cross

¹⁰ For an account of comparable references to owls in Antillean oral tradition, see the “Nightbirds” section of Chapter Five.

¹¹ Fray Ramón Pané, *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians*, ed. José Juan Arrom and trans. Susan Griswold (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 6, 18. In the late fifteenth century, at the request of Admiral Columbus, Fray Ramón Pané recorded several oral traditions of the inhabitants of Hispaniola. His accounts are cited throughout this study.

the darkening waters and upon entering the world of the living, take the form of bats.¹² In this incarnation they feed on succulent fruit, frolic in the air and “accompany the living.”¹³ These chiropteran (i.e. bat-like) *opía* can easily metamorphose into humans in whose form they enjoy carnal pleasures with the living. Seduced humans occasionally discover the deception when, in their amorous explorations, they fail to find navels on the abdomens of these lascivious changelings. In this way, they come to their senses and head off the spiritual and physical afflictions that result from the unnatural union.

The preferred food of these nocturnally feeding *opía* is noteworthy, fruit. Some Antillean bats feed on insects (insectivorous bats), some on animals (carnivorous bats), and yet others on blood (sanguivorous bats).¹⁴ But many Caribbean bats feed on pollen, nectar and fruit (nectarivorous and frugivorous bats). Some species also are omnivorous, eating animals and fruit or insects and fruit in varied nightly or seasonal combinations.¹⁵ The bat species referred to in the *opía* narrative related by Pané is obviously frugivorous, the species that are inordinately fond of the guavas (guayaba, *Psidium guajava*), which Pané mentions by name, and other sweet and pulpy fruits such as soursop (*Annona muricata*), sapodilla (*Manilkara zapota*), hogplum (*Spondias mombin*) and papaya

¹² Actually, the recorded version of the narrative does not specify whether the *opía* cross the waters already in the form of bats or take on this form after they arrive in the land of the living.

¹³ Pané, *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians*, 18; García, “The Bat and the Owl,” 112.

¹⁴ Ronald M. Nowak, Thomas H. Kunz and Elizabeth D. Pierson, *Walker’s Bats of the World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 93-99; Brock Fenton, *Bats* (New York: Facts on File, 1992), 151; Michael R. Gannon et al., *Bats of Puerto Rico: An Island Focus and a Caribbean Perspective* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2005), 23-25. While there are several species of each of these in the Antilles, sanguivorous bats are the most rare, confined to the islands nearest the South American mainland.

¹⁵ Nowak, Kunz and Pierson, *Walker’s Bats of the World*, 140.

(*Carica papaya*).¹⁶ In the same Antillean bat narrative, the kingdom of Coaybay is ruled by a great cacique named Maquetaurie Guayaba and, as indicated by this king's name, the dead are as fond of eating guayaba (guava) as their winged incarnations.¹⁷ Thus bats and the dead share a key habit and habitat (i.e., feeding on fruits at night in the forests but within earshot of the living people who planted those fruit-bearing trees or located their settlements near them).¹⁸ Bats and *opía* were mythically and visually synonymous. We can assume that the feeding habits of endemic fruit bats such as Antillean and Jamaican fruit bats (*Brachyphylla cavernarum* and *Artibeus jamaicensis*, respectively) were the inspiration for the dietary preference of the *opía* in the legend.¹⁹ Frugivorous bat-like *opía* seem uniquely Antillean, with intimate connections to Caribbean natural history.

The symbolic conflation of humans with bats seems to have persisted in Antillean lore throughout the Ceramic period.²⁰ Traditional narratives would have established connections between the dead and the living but also warned of potentially inappropriate attractions between them based on their resemblance, though the *opía* are without signs of natural gestation or birth, having no navels. Bats here were the intermediary stage by which the dead entered and departed the world of the living nightly. The narrative also

¹⁶ Gannon et al., *Bats of Puerto Rico*, 86, 94; Pané, *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians*, 18.

¹⁷ Pané, *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians*, 18; Jeffrey B. Walker, "Taíno Stone Collars, Elbow Stones and Three-Pointers," in *Taíno: Pre-Columbian Art and Culture from the Caribbean*, ed. Fatima Bercht (New York: El Museo del Barrio/Monacelli Press, 1997), 87.

¹⁸ García, "The Bat and the Owl," 115; Jacques Petitjean Roget, *Contributions à l'étude de la préhistoire des Petites Antilles* (Fort-de-France, Martinique: Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, 1975), 257.

¹⁹ Gannon et al., *Bats of Puerto Rico*, 31.

²⁰ Similar conflations took place in the visual culture of the same period and are discussed in the sub-section "Anthropomorphized Bats in Antillean Art" below.

bespeaks cultural associations between bats, seduction and deception. Bats are both mounts of the dead and alter egos. Some of these associations possibly trace to archetypal bat narratives in the Antilleans' distant South American past but legends on the mainland seem to express a quite different, though related, set of concerns with the bat.

Anthropomorphized Bats in Mainland Traditional Narratives

In mainland lore, bats are mischievous, often deadly foils of humans. In a legend from the Kayapo, a Gê-speaking people of northern Brazil, a man who has stayed behind from his hunting party follows a bat back to its cave, a strange upside down palace, naturally formed, but with beautifully painted walls and a ceiling bustling with bats. But the floor is littered with guano and the citizens of this kingdom have no pots, tools or weapons. The man cannot understand the speech of the strangely human-faced bats but they tickle him incessantly with their wings until he passes out from hysterical laughter. In some Amazonian warrior cultures like that of the Kayapo, uncontrolled laughter is considered effeminate.²¹ He eventually awakens feeling ashamed and violated by his bat-induced laughter and runs back to his village. He reports his misadventure to his kinsmen and the hunters take vengeance on these corrupting bats by setting fire to the mouth of their cave. Most of the bats are suffocated to death by smoke but some escape the cave. The men capture one young escapee, take it back to their village and attempt to raise it like a child. It learns to walk but still sleeps upside down. It eventually dies before reaching maturity, evidently exhausted by the effort of being human.²²

²¹ Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 122.

²² *Ibid.*, 121-123.

This narrative speaks of inappropriate behaviors on the part of both diurnal men (who should be out hunting) and nocturnal bats (who should be home sleeping). When the bats and the men associate closely, the results are disastrous.²³ A man falls unconscious (after laughing like a woman) from a kind of cultural and moral collapse, and a young bat falls dead in a natural one. Despite some intriguing similarities, their differences are insurmountable and each is best left in its place. The bats and their natural gifts are creatures of nature and the men are creatures of culture.

The association between laughter and bats in this narrative is neither whimsical nor solely related to gender roles but rather has its roots in the cackling sound some bats make when gathered in trees or caves, especially the larger species.²⁴ Amerindian oral traditions, from the Warao of Venezuela to the Tacana of Bolivia, also feature laughing bats.²⁵ The social behavior and facial features of bats, who often have fur-less faces with human or simian proportions, also seem to have been observed in this narrative that seems to assume the resemblances between humans and bats as a given.

Comparably, Antillean anthropomorphic depictions spanning the Saladoid through Taíno periods acknowledge and reproduce the same resemblances between people and bats, albeit with a different rationale. While the bats and humans in the

²³ Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 122. Lévi-Strauss reports other similar Amazonian narratives from as far away as eastern Bolivia (among the Guarayu) wherein this same futile encounter is played out between men and monkeys, the result being the same loss of civility: in peals of (effeminate) laughter.

²⁴ Rexford D. Lord, *Mammals of South America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 83-85. Bat societies center around dominant males who maintain a harem of numerous females with upstart bachelor males waiting their turn for dominance on the fringes of said harems. These aggressive, libidinous males are constant troublemakers, adding to the cacophony in bat roosts.

²⁵ Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 122; Walter E. Roth, "An Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore of the Guiana Indians," in *Thirtieth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, 1908-1909* (Washington D.C.: Bureau of American Ethnology, 1915), 276.

Kayapo story are mythic and therefore not corporeal, they do function as instructive archetypes of corporeal bats. By contrast, the bats of the Caribbean lore represent the departed but returning spirits of the dead. In both narratives, humans are admonished to avoid these creatures if they are to prevent temptation and misfortune.

Anthropomorphized Bats Across the Antillean Ceramic Period

As illustrated by bat wing motifs in figures 4.4 through 4.6, spanning a millennium, Saladoid visual conventions seem to have informed the entire Ceramic trajectory of the Antilles, up to the conquest-era Taíno. We might look to some Taíno sculptures to help interpret the role of bats in Antillean visual culture in general. Alongside the familiar bat wing motifs, Taíno sculptures featuring chiropteran anthropomorphs sometimes feature a skeletal face with enormous hollow eyes. While these are quite unlike the incised “coffee bean” eyes so common in mainland and island Saladoid art, coffee bean eyes also are known in Taíno art so that hollow eyes do not create too large a disparity between these two Antillean art periods. In several Taíno sculptures with the hollow eyes, the figure’s lips are fixed in a grimace with teeth clenched, the teeth made of bone and inlaid like dentures into wooden examples. Their noses are at once like the twin nasal cavities of a skull and the gaping nasal slits of leaf-nosed bats, (i.e., the *Phyllostomidae* family of bats common in the Caribbean). Taíno examples of these skeletal/chiropteran anthropomorphs have been identified as either shamans or the spirit entities with whom they commune (figure 4.8). Peter Roe attributes the facial expression on these wood, stone, ceramic and bone images to the discomfort of the cohoba ritual performed by Taíno ritual specialists (*behiques*). In the ceremony these

behiques, with bodies grown cadaverous from fasting and ritual vomiting, gnash their teeth and weep from dilated eyes as they receive visions through the hallucinogenic cohoba.²⁶ The grimacing face therefore represents the shaman's transcendence of his body and his flight into the spirit world.

Manuel García Arévalo notes the deliberate conflation of skeletal and bat imagery to connote the *opía*, one of several classes of other-worldly beings with whom the behique seeks to converse in his cohoba-fueled flight.²⁷ Antonio Stevens-Arroyo concurs with José Arrom in the latter's description of the expressive but skeletal appearance of these images as denoting Maquetaurie Guayaba himself, the cacique of the afterlife and thus the representative entity of that realm.²⁸ Images that combine human and bat traits could also represent the formerly human soul (*goeíza*) of the ancestors in the moment of transformation, through death, into the mutable afterlife *opía*, who favors the form of a bat in its visits to the land of the living.

Were-bats can be traced back as far as the Palo Seco phase of the Cedrosan Saladoid in Trinidad. In the turned-up and migrating noses noted by Boomert, anthropomorphic adorns are increasingly bat-like (figure 4.9).²⁹ Many of these Palo Seco noses bear vertical slit nostrils and other elaborations like those of frugivorous and insectivorous bats, and their new position, with nostrils level with or above the eyes,

²⁶ Peter G. Roe, "Just Wasting Away: Taíno Shamanism and Concepts of Fertility," in *Taíno: Pre-Columbian Art and Culture from the Caribbean*, ed. Fatima Bercht (New York: El Museo del Barrio/Monacelli Press, 1997), 132-133, 138.

²⁷ García, "The Bat and the Owl," 114.

²⁸ Antonio M. Stevens-Arroyo, *Cave of the Jaguar: The Mythological World of the Taínos*. Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2006), 228.

²⁹ Arie Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco Interaction Sphere: An Archaeological/Ethnohistorical Study* (Alkmaar, Netherlands: Cairi Publications, 2000), 164.

gives the anthropomorphs a far more bat-like profile (figure 4.9 *left*). So despite the transition from “coffee bean” eyes to the widely dilated eyes of Taíno images, the leaf-nosed morphology of bat imagery has some roots in the Saladoid. These increasingly chiropterized anthropomorphs in the early Common Era might indicate an increased privileging of the bat not only in visual depictions but also in lore and ritual.

Time and Directionality in Antillean Bat Symbolism

Many Antillean bats are endemic species, existing only in the Antilles and seemingly confined by large stretches of water to their particular islands. Their parent species, however, arrived from Central and South America over sea in the Pleistocene (2.5 million-12,000 years BP).³⁰ So while some bats have evolved in place to fit particular niches in the Antillean ecology, they possess a proven, if diminished, ability to cover long distances within the Antilles.³¹ Some species, such as the Antillean Fruit Bat (*Brachyphylla cavernarum*) continue to range so widely in their nightly feeding that they may eat on one island and roost on another.³² If Amerindians observed inter-island migrations of bats such flights would have informed the idea that the *opía* arrived from the far-off island of Soraya, having flown over expanses of water in the form of bats.

In connection with their regional, nightly ranges, bats may have held seasonal or directional associations. While they are denizens of the night and appear in the Hispaniolan tradition as such, bats could have also been associated with the west, as the

³⁰ Armando Rodríguez-Durán and Thomas Kunz, “Biogeography of West Indian Bats: An Ecological Perspective,” in *Biogeography of the West Indies: Patterns and Perspectives*, eds. Charles A. Woods and Florence E. Sergile (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2001), 355-359.

³¹ Gannon et al., *Bats of Puerto Rico*, 30-31.

³² *Ibid.*, 93.

place of the setting sun and, therefore the dead. However, it is more likely they were thought to issue from the ghostly east as appears in both Taíno and Warao legends about the Lesser Antilles.³³ It is uncertain whether the mythic island of Soraya was believed to be in eastern waters. From Pané's account of Greater Antillean lore, there is no clear evidence of the directionality found in other indigenous cosmologies of the Americas.³⁴

Bats, Caves and Ancestors in Ancient Antillean Symbolism

Associations between bats, ancestors and fruit are established, but there may have been symbolisms linking bats, fruit, certain flowers and fertility as well.³⁵ Many Antillean plants affect the seasonal feeding habits of fruit and nectar-loving bats, having evolved in response to the bats' needs. Some plants use bats as agents of fertilization or germination in that the bats pollinate their flowers and/or distribute their seeds.³⁶ The sight of a bat visiting plants which later bore fruit, and the seeds sprouting from bat guano would have

³³ Peter O'Brien Harris, "Nabarima: A Warao Sacred Place in South Trinidad," in *Proceedings of the XXI Congress of the International Association for Caribbean Archaeology* (Port-of-Spain, Trinidad: International Association for Caribbean Archaeology, 2005), 489-90; William F. Keegan, *Taíno Indian Myth and Practice: The Arrival of the Stranger King* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), 38-44; Antonio M. Stevens-Arroyo, *Cave of the Jagua: The Mythological World of the Taínos* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2006), 175, 157. The actual inhabitants of the Eastern Caribbean (rather than those to the south and north who mythologized these eastern islands as spiritual realms) may have looked yet further east as the mythic home of ghosts and/or ancestors.

³⁴ Lord, *Mammals of South America*, 76, 93; Pané, *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians*, 17-18. One might also inquire whether there were Antillean ceremonies for the dead held only at certain times of the year to coincide or contrast with increases and decreases in bat populations as the creatures migrate throughout their accustomed habitats with the seasonal availability of different species of fruit, pollen, nectar or insects. It is also uncertain whether the return of the ancestral spirits to the realm of Coaybay after their nocturnal festivities was inspired by the morning migrations of bats back to their caves or their seasonal return to other islands.

³⁵ For a brief exploration of fertility and gender in bat lore and symbolism, see the section on "Bats as Possible Fertility Symbols in the Antilles" in Appendix 2.

³⁶ Virginia Barlow, *The Nature of the Islands: Plants and Animals of the Eastern Caribbean* (Dunedin, Florida: Chris Doyle Publications, 1993), 62; Lord, *Mammals of South America*, 77.

made these creatures fertility symbols. But in Pané's report, which accounts for no more than a page of writing, we find bats only as the ghostly consumers of fruit, not as agents of fertility, except perhaps in their role as reincarnated souls of ancestors (i.e., progenitors of the living generation).³⁷

Just as bat behaviors may have spawned or modified mythic elements, bat habitats, none of them unfamiliar to the ancient Amerindians, were bound to command some place in Arawak lore and ritual. Since some bats roost in trees, caves or even in the ceilings of human habitations, there would have been opportunities for ancient Amerindians to observe their habitats and activities closely: the occasional stretching of a wing; encounters between neighboring or rival bats; perhaps even the sight of a female suckling her young; and the bats' coordinated departure for the evening. These would all have lent cultural significance to the various bat habitats, especially caves.³⁸

Cave art in the Greater Antilles and the Eastern Caribbean indicate that the ancient Antilleans used caves for rituals related to both fertility and ancestor veneration.³⁹ The bats in some of these caves would have been observed at length and related to the ritual goings-on. An Antillean association between bats and caves, and between ancestors and caves makes this most typical bat habitat a locus of multiple symbolic ideas about

³⁷ Roe, "Just Wasting Away," 124-157. Peter Roe makes a strong case for the links between the dead and fertility in his descriptions of skeletal Taíno shaman images with erections.

³⁸ Lord, *Mammals of South America*, 94.

³⁹ Peter G. Roe, José Rivera Meléndez and Peter DeScioli, "The Cueva de Mora (Comerio, PR) Petroglyphs and Pictographs: A Documentary Project," in *Proceedings of the XVII Congress of the International Association for Caribbean Archaeology* (St. George, Grenada: International Association for Caribbean Archaeology, 1999), 27; Christian Stouvenot and Gérard Richard, "Un Nouveau Site à Pétroglyphes en Guadeloupe: L'Abri Patate en Grand-Terre," in *Proceedings of the XX Congress of the International Association for Caribbean Archaeology* (Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic: Museo del Hombre Dominicano and Fundación García Arévalo, 2003), 597.

bats and ancestors. A Taíno narrative tells of two ancient caves in the mountain of Cauta. In one cave, called Cacibahagua, live the ancestors of the Taíno, and in a neighboring cave, Amayaúna, live an uncouth people with whom the former group does not associate. Being the first humans, Cacibahagua people do not know what lies in store for them beyond the cave. So they appoint a watchman, Macocáel, whom they post at the entrance and charge with surveying the world beyond. But so fascinated is he by the plants and animals and other wonders of the world beyond the cave, that he forgets himself and is caught by the sunrise on a ramble away from his post. In Taíno narratives, the time when the sun first rises or sets is a kind of “witching hour,” a time of transformation and reversed polarities, where objects, people, animals and spirits can change their regular shape. And so the scout-watchman Macocáel is seized by the rising sun on the road back to Cacibahagua, and turned to stone just outside the cave. Without Macocáel’s counsel, Cacibahagua’s people have to issue into the world unknowing.⁴⁰

The proto-people in this story live in a cave for an unknown period of time before first encountering the world. No bats are mentioned in this narrative but the Taíno storytellers were obviously aware that bats roosted in caves. Since they did not mention that Cacibahagua was a cave without bats (and this may be their or Pané’s omission), we might assume that the cave is like any other cave, where bats come in or out at twilight. Macocáel was first sent to the mouth of the cave to be a night watchman, so that his “shift,” as it were, began at sunset. Misfortune befalls him at the time that bats might return to their caves: sunrise. As in the Kayapo story, men are unlucky when they behave too much like bats, wandering at night and coming home by morning light. Conversely,

⁴⁰ Pané, *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians*, 5-6.

in this legend, ancestors issue from the same place as bats, establishing parity in their origins. But ancestors issue from caves by day, not night, veritable anti-bats.

The Punitive Role of Bats in Mainland Narratives: An Important Contrast

Vampire bats (*Desmodus rotundus*) would be expected to have no relevance to Antillean lore since this species does not occur in most islands. However, vampires are a feature of the Caribbean nights on at least one island, Trinidad. Vampire bats figure in the colonial-era folklore of Trinidad's blood-sucking *soucouyant*.⁴¹ Similarly, vampire bats would not have escaped the myth-making of Pre-Columbian Amerindians on that island, the northernmost frontier of this primarily South American species.⁴² Sanguivorous and carnivorous bats feature more prominently in South American narratives than other bat species and provide the starkest contrast with the Taíno-era lore known from Pané.⁴³ In South American narratives sanguivorous and carnivorous bats are sometimes conflated into a single punitive species.

An Arawak oral tradition collected at the turn of the twentieth century by Walter E. Roth, gives a clue as to what coastal Arawaks thought about carnivorous and vampire bats.⁴⁴ In this narrative, a band of Arawak males leaves their wives to launch a years-long

⁴¹ Gérard A. Besson, *The Angostura Historical Digest of Trinidad and Tobago* (Port-of-Spain: Paria Publishing Company, 2001), 25. These glowing, spherical succubi are believed to enter the chambers of their sleeping victims at night, leaving discolored holes on their ankles or elsewhere. The wounds left by the *soucouyant* are easily attributable to a more corporeal being, namely *Desmodus rotundus*.

⁴² Louise H. Emmons and François Feer, *Neotropical Rainforest Mammals: A Field Guide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 80.

⁴³ I found no references to fruit bats in recorded South American narratives, whereas in the Antilles, frugivorous species are the only ones mentioned.

⁴⁴ Roth, "Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore," 121.

search for stone axes.⁴⁵ They get into a series of misadventures on their journey. Most of the disasters that befall them come as a direct result of disobedience and treachery among their ranks so that the episodes are clearly morality tales. In one such story, the travelers reach the land of the Bat Tribe and set up camp. As night falls, they intend to string their hammocks between the trees and go to sleep after their meal. It is the dry season and there is no apparent need for any shelter. But their leader, an old shaman, advises the group to build a proper enclosure so that they might sleep safely. He warns that the bats in this region are as large as swamp birds and feed on men. The team gets to work on building a *banab* (a temporary dwelling) in which they can all take shelter for the night, but one young man lags behind in the work. Disbelieving the tale of giant bats and disregarding the old man's entreaties to sleep in the shelter, the young man strings his hammock in the open and contentedly falls asleep.

Later that night, the men inside the *banab* are awakened by screams from the defiant young man, who begs them to let him come inside. They refuse, not wanting to let in whatever is evidently attacking their obstinate compatriot. "You must bear what comes on you!" they call back somewhat vengefully, through the slats of the *banab*, and nervously return to their slumber. They emerge next morning to find only a few bones of the youth.⁴⁶ "The Bats had sucked him dry indeed" concludes Roth's report of the story, a detail which may be a literary flourish on his part but which may indicate a conflation on

⁴⁵ David Watters, "Maritime Trade in the Prehistoric Eastern Caribbean," in *Indigenous People of the Caribbean* (Tallahassee: University Press of Florida, 1997), 98-99. Since the hard stones needed for making quality tools are not available everywhere, the peoples of Amazonia, Orinokia and the Antilles would have sometimes had to embark on long journeys to locate sources of suitable volcanic and/or metamorphic rock. The trade and manufacture of lapidary objects (tools, beads, pendants) has been suggested as a driving force behind inter-regional and intra-regional commerce, and thus cultural exchange, in the Lesser Antilles.

⁴⁶ Roth, "Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore," 121.

the Arawaks' part between carnivorous and sanguivorous bats. Either way, there is a South American and Caribbean bat that embodies this conflation of sanguivorous and carnivorous traits in its very name, Linnaeus' False Vampire Bat. In fact this species is not vampyric but hunts small animals (or perhaps heedless clansmen as well!), snatching them from the ground. It also fits the Arawak description as gigantic, being the largest of all American bats, with an average wingspan exceeding three feet.⁴⁷

Unlike Linnaeus's false vampire, *Desmodus rotundus* is a small bat and the true vampire. Yet in Amerindian narratives its unusual sanguivorous behavior is often attributed to the larger predator.⁴⁸ Encounters with both carnivorous and sanguivorous bats in the southernmost Antilles of the archipelago certainly would have elicited an awed, perhaps fearful response. Saladoid bat imagery originated on the mainland so we can assume that Saladoid bat images came to the Antilles with a partially punitive mainland mythology of their own (compare figures 2.32 and 4.10). But somewhere between the mainland Saladoid and the Taíno, a mischief-making image of the bat, perhaps more like that of the Gê-speaking Kayapo, came to dominate in the Antilles. In the Caribbean night, where fruit-eating, nectavorous and insect-eating bats dominated,

⁴⁷ Fenton, *Bats*, 132; David M. Guss, *To Weave and Sing: Art, Symbol and Narrative in the South American Rainforest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 117; Roth, "Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore," 259. A narrative of the Makushi (a Cariban culture) is equally punitive, and it tells of a giant bat, also physically similar to Linnaeus' False Vampire Bat, that abducts people every night and retreats to a hidden mountain. A selfless and cunning old woman volunteers to be the next victim and manages to get herself abducted while carrying a hidden "fire stick," which she ignites upon reaching the perch of the giant bat. From their village, the Makushi can see the light of the fire and the following morning hunt down the bat in his mountain hideaway. A Yekuana (another Carib group) narrative collected several generations later is virtually identical.

⁴⁸ Lord, *Mammals of South America*, 73, 90. Vampire bats never really "suck" blood but rather puncture or shave the victim's skin with their razor-sharp incisors (their saliva containing a local anesthetic and anticoagulant) and lap up the painlessly steady flow of blood. In order to do this, the bat must land, crawl to its query, perform the incision, and after feeding, stand on its hind legs in an uncannily anthropomorphic gesture before springing into the air to effect its retreat.

the bat symbolism was one of mischievous ancestors longing for the sweet nectar of life's pleasures rather than the wrathful spirit devouring the transgressor.

The differences between Antillean and South American bat lore illustrate just how much can change in a migration over distance, time and water. Such contrasts are important to note because they inform us of the ways in which we can and cannot trust ethnographic analogies with nearby South American peoples. Since there are no bat legends reported from the early conquest-era for the Eastern Caribbean, the status of the bat in Saladoid, or even the later Eastern Caribbean, lore is unclear. In Saladoid times, could there have been Trinidadian vampire bat narratives with the same themes of retribution as in South American legends? Was the bat lore of the Leeward Islands somewhere in between the fearsome South American narratives and the somewhat lusty Taíno-era ones, or were vampire bat stories suddenly dropped somewhere between Grenada and Guadeloupe as people migrated? The thematic shift between blood and fruit, and between the wrathful mainland bat and the celebratory Antillean one, likely first occurred in the mythology of the Saladoid-era Lesser Antilles. But across the mainland and the islands the underlying symbolism of the incompatible and hazardous spirit world remained imprinted on the bat's webbed silhouette.

Possible Ritual Contexts and Functions of Saladoid Bat Ceramics

Vessels adorned with bat imagery varied in shape, size and apparent function.⁴⁹ Bat wings were a featured motif on the rims of pots made to contain liquids.⁵⁰ It is

⁴⁹ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 470.

⁵⁰ García, "The Bat and the Owl," 114.

uncertain why the bat would be used to adorn domestic containers as it sometimes appears to have done in the early Saladoid, but bat vessels have been excavated in funerary contexts, as with the dish in figure 4.1.⁵¹ In light of the considerable mythological evidence of the bat as an afterlife symbol, bat-adorned pottery would have been ideal mortuary vessels. In the vessel from the burial at Atagual in Trinidad's Central Range of mountains, a bat's face with its characteristic pug nose appears on only one side of the circular vessel's flanged rim. Two legs and a tail appear on the opposite end of the rim as if the bat has extended its wing into the vessel's circular shape, a shape struck by real bats in the minute fraction of a second as they reverse from the downward flap of their wings to the upward. In this instant captured in ceramic, the hollow of the down-flapping bat becomes the concavity of a shallow dish. This low, flat-bottomed vessel would likely have been used for solid foods but could also have been used to hold liquids. If the contents were solid, these may have been succulent fruit, perhaps ritual offerings to ancestors in their bat form. If this were a ceremonial water vessel, it may have symbolized the afterlife itself.

As in many Amerindian cultures, the Antillean cosmos comprised three levels with the dome of the heavens arching above the earth disk, with a watery underworld below and around that (figure 2.6). Water itself evoked the underworld, a place inhabited by spirits, departed ancestors and other supernatural forces.⁵² The clear water in a bat vessel might have symbolically reflected the land of the dead for the vessel's living

⁵¹ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 149. Excavated by Peter O'Brien Harris and Arie Boomert in the early 1980s.

⁵² Peter Siegel, "Ancestor Worship and Cosmology Among the Taíno," in *Taíno: Pre-Columbian Art and Culture from the Caribbean*, ed. Fatima Bercht (New York: El Museo del Barrio/Monacelli Press, 1997), 108-109.

owner, connecting that owner symbolically to his or her ancestors, even more so if one of those ancestors was the former owner of the vessel before it was handed down.

Ceremonial liquids such as “tobacco water,” used to “create a bridge between the behique (shaman) and the spirits,” and cassava-water, used to bathe zemis, may also have been contained in bat vessels, sealing their association with Coaybay.⁵³ In the conquest-era Antilles, both freshwater and the sea were associated with the “place of the ancestors,” with the goddess Atabeyra, “Mother of the Waters” presiding over rivers and ponds, and several deities inhabiting and activating the sea depths.⁵⁴ Given a bat vessel’s iconographic and possible ceremonial associations with ancestral lore, it would be suitable as: a funerary offering for its evocation of the dead; a part of a ritual specialist’s kit used to contain shamanic potions or other infusions used to commune with the spirit realm; or a rarely used heirloom commemorating an ancestor in remembrance rituals.

The Atagual bat dish in figure 4.1 was the only elaborately adorned vessel in a group of four Palo Seco Saladoid vessels (and one polished stone axe) accompanying a single skeleton.⁵⁵ Certainly there is no way to know if the dish was full of water when it was interred. If fresh guava, papaya or even ripe hog plums were placed in the dish, those too might be difficult to detect some 1,700 years later.

As with other zoomorphic vessels discussed in this chapter, it is unclear whether the use of bat vessels contracted over time from a more loose and diversified affiliation with ancestral spirits in the early Antillean Saladoid to a more restricted ceremonial use in later times. Further archaeological excavations of bat vessels and fragments may

⁵³ Stevens-Arroyo, *Cave of the Jagua*, 189. Stevens-Arroyo describes the use of these liquids.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 221, 224.

⁵⁵ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 149.

indicate changes in the relative religiosity of bat symbolism. But a large, polychrome bat censer from the late Saladoid would indicate that there was a rich and articulated religious tradition associated with bats by the fifth century CE (figure 4.11). We can imagine the red embers glowing inside the hollowed, rimmed eyes of this censer, with tree resin incense smoke emerging from its toothy mouth. The teeth, as savage as they might appear, represent those of a fruit bat, who would use them to puncture the skin of ripened papayas and such. The bat censer's attenuated leaf nose also indicates it is of the family Phyllostomidae. The bottomless cylinder of the censer was placed over an incense-burning fire and that aromatic flame was probably used to heat the contents of a second pot placed atop the everted rim of the censer. One can only speculate what kind of vessel would have been placed atop the leaf-nosed bat's head. This second vessel would have functioned as a stopper, letting out smoke only through the bat's mouth and eyes, eerily. The incantations accompanying the smoke from this bat censer likely celebrated the deeds and qualities of revered ancestors.

Discussion: Bats and the Theoretical Framework of this Study

Antillean bat imagery comes down to us in more ceramic forms than any other material. Many bats are depicted in a generic way but when species is approached, the Phyllostomidae family of which fruit bats are members is privileged. The more generic bat features lend themselves well to the stylized modularity of Saladoid ceramic imagery. In a visual language that is more concerned with signification and transformation than any taxonomic realities, it is enough to evoke an animal order or even a combination of orders. With bats, as with any other species, the animal, its mythology and its image are

each treated somewhat differently. Yet there is always a link between the conventions by which the creature is classified. In the case of the bat, the link is an anthropomorphic description in both lore and imagery. The animal's simian, almost human countenance (its bare face especially), its flight, nocturnal habits, feeding preferences and its cacophony while roosting all have been the stuff of visual and/or mythical representation. In this way, aspects of bats became canonized signifiers, carrying meaning in origin legends and morality tales. We cannot know whether other aspects of Caribbean bats and their environment were as significant as their nocturnal frugivory. And we can only guess what our chief ethnographic source, the early colonial-era accounts from Hispaniola, have missed and how much had changed in bat symbolism since the Saladoid era.

Through an exploration of the bat's natural history and lore, we have explored briefly almost all six of Chapter Three's categorical questions for deciphering zoomorphic imagery. The appearance, habitat and behaviors (i.e., questions 1, 2 and 3) all have been discussed here, though not in the order they are listed in Chapter Three. Rather, the order in which they have been explored was dictated by thematic connections between the evidence I uncovered. To attempt to adhere to the order of the questions for each animal would require I ignore such thematic connections or else greatly lengthen the analysis by returning to reconnect thematic threads severed to maintain format.

With respect to the Saladoid-era word for bat (i.e., question 5), it was probably related to the mainland Arawak and Island Carib word "bouhiri."⁵⁶ While knowledge of this word satisfies some part of the fifth question (i.e., naming) I have found no puns, prefixes, suffixes or roots in the surviving Arawak language that give any insight into

⁵⁶ Roth, "Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore," 274. This word is also briefly discussed in Note 5 of Appendix 2's section on "Bats as Possible Fertility Symbols in the Antilles."

iconography or iconology of the bat. Question 6, namely lore, has been the primer, or key question, through which the other questions have been accessed, but one question remains unanswered: the uses to which the bat's body or body parts were put. I have found no evidence that the fur, bones or flesh of bats were ever put to any ritual use.

The image of the bat's body, however, was of great ritual utility. The bat was an emblem widely employed to invoke the spirit world throughout the Ceramic Caribbean. Increased interest in were-bat depictions, beginning in the Palo Seco phase of the Saladoid, might well have marked the emergence of an ancestral bat cult in Saladoid religion, which in turn informed the conquest-era *opía* narratives of the Taíno. The bat censer from St. Vincent and other elaborately modeled and painted vessels certify the bat's role as a religious image in the late Antillean Saladoid.

Judging by the numerous traits of the bat that have turned up in Arawakan narratives from the mainland to the Antilles, we see that the distinguishing behaviors, habitats and appearance of an animal played an important part in its "mythologization." Thus we might look to the distinguishing characteristics of other iconic mammals to reckon what place they might have occupied in the culture and art of the ancient Antilles. Few Antillean zoomorphs present as much evidence of their cultural importance as the bat, with ceramic, mythic and natural history records all available from the Caribbean itself supporting the iconographic analysis. The bat sets a standard in interpretive possibilities not afforded by all the zoomorphic motifs in this study, hence its forward placement in this chapter. However, since some terrestrial mammals appear almost as often as bats in the ceramic adornment of the Lesser Antilles, they must have enjoyed

some comparable importance in Saladoid art, symbolism and narrative. Thus, they must be deciphered, however imperfectly, along the same lines as employed here for bats.

Armadillos

The Armadillo in Nature

Few mammals would contrast more sharply with bats than armadillos. Completely terrestrial, except for the occasional swim across a river, these members of the uniquely American *Cingulata* family have an inextricable relationship with the earth.⁵⁷ They are clawed, “armored” creatures that nest in burrows beneath the ground.⁵⁸ They usually feed nocturnally, perhaps the only behavior they share with bats.⁵⁹ Armadillos’ backs are covered in an armored shell with moveable plates, which enable them to bend as if dressed in chain mail (figure 2). Though their bellies are not similarly accoutered, the tops of the heads, legs and tails of some species also are protected by a series of reptilian-looking scales. Though leathery in appearance, the armor of the animal covers bony scales underneath. The unusual covering of the armadillo is obviously defensive. Many species curl up when attacked. In so doing, they protect their more vulnerable underside as best they can, exposing mostly impenetrable armor. Some

⁵⁷ Lesley Suttly, *Fauna of the Caribbean: the Last Survivors* (Oxford: Macmillan Education, 1993), 45.

⁵⁸ Lord, *Mammals of South America*, 10-14.

⁵⁹ Tom Jackson, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Animals of America* (London: Lorenz Books/Anness Publishing, 2006), 196.

species, such as the Brazilian three-banded armadillo, can roll up into a tight, almost perfect ball when startled or attacked, leaving no soft flesh exposed.⁶⁰

These armored mammals forage about, grunting all the while, looking to feed on insects, worms, grubs, fruit and starchy tubers, but also carrion. Armadillos locate their food using a strong olfactory sense, which can detect edibles through many inches of earth. With noses buried and breath held for up to six minutes, armadillos dig with their triple-clawed forefeet at incredible speeds. They also burrow to make their nests, and if attacked close to home, will opt to burrow away from a predator rather than curl up.⁶¹

Nine-banded armadillos (*Dasyus novemcinctus*) are known to share their burrows with others of their species, only of the same gender, but also with other animals.⁶² It is interesting to note that this species observes a kind of gender-purity in cohabitation, a social arrangement of some Orinokian, Amazonian and Antillean human groups, including both Caribs and Island Caribs. An Arawak narrative from the Guianas mentions that the venomous bushmaster snake also shares armadillo burrows, making these holes perfect refuges where an armadillo's enemies fear to follow.⁶³

In the Eastern Caribbean, the nine-banded armadillo appears to have been introduced from South America as a domesticated or captive wild species by Amerindians.⁶⁴ Some animals may have then been accidentally or intentionally released,

⁶⁰ Lord, *Mammals of South America*, 10-11.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 10-12; Lesley Suttly, *Fauna of the Caribbean*, 45.

⁶² Jackson, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Animals of America*, 196-199.

⁶³ Roth, "Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore," 122, 182.

⁶⁴ Elizabeth S. Wing, "Native American Use of Animals in the Caribbean," in *Biogeography of the West Indies: Patterns and Perspectives*, eds. Charles A. Woods and Florence E. Sergile (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2001), 493-494.

to breed naturally and be hunted later. The distribution of the armadillo in the Antilles coincides roughly with its distribution in the ceramic record. Neither the creature nor its icons are found north of Grenada and St. Vincent.⁶⁵ If the Saladoid-era people were among the human distributors of this species, it is unclear why they would not have brought the animal any further north. Certainly the species would have thrived in the other islands, especially in larger, forested ones where they could hide from predators.⁶⁶

Despite the armadillo's absence in the faunal and ceramic record of the Leeward Islands and Greater Antilles, and the similar lack of any direct reference to it in the known Antillean narratives, we shall see that the armadillo may have been a leitmotif present throughout the symbolism of the Ceramic Antilles, from the Saladoid onward.

Incidences and Aesthetics of Saladoid Armadillo Ceramics

While the selective stylizations on Saladoid zoomorphs can make some species difficult to identify, armadillo images are sometimes clearly discernible. Armadillo imagery is primarily a Windward Island phenomenon, appearing in modest numbers from the mainland to the Grenadines (Appendix 1, Chart 1). Depictions of what appears to be armadillos were made in Trinidad, Tobago and Grenada (figure 4.12 to 4.14). Interesting hybrid images also have been found on these islands and in Barbados (figures 4.13). A Grenadian adorno takes care to capture the likeness of the animal by evoking the banded armor on its head (figure 4.12 *left*). The Barbadian example in figure 4.13 seems to be an

⁶⁵ Suttly, *Fauna of the Caribbean*, 45; Wing, "Native American Use of Animals in the Caribbean," 493-494.

⁶⁶ Suttly, *Fauna of the Caribbean*, 45. Environmentalist Lesley Suttly describes armadillos as forest dwelling in the Caribbean where there are no large savannahs.

adorno representing a stylized turtle-head (compare figures 4.13 and 6.58). But the turtle's strange, large nose appears to turn into the head of an armadillo when the adorno is seen from above (figure 4.13 *left*). The round head of the turtle would then become the body of an armadillo seen from the front.

This armored, burrowing creature appears in the ceramics and oral traditions of South America, and has remained an Arawak favorite in ceramic adornment. In the pottery of the Waurá, a contemporary group of Arawak people, an armadillo appears as an effigy vessel as in an ancient Saladoid fragment from Tobago (compare figures 4.14 and 4.15). In the polychromed Waurá example, the armadillo, lying on its back, forms the main body of a pot so that the food contained seems to come out of its belly. The animal's head forms a naturalistic adorno and its legs and tail forming five modeled lugs on the pots circumference.⁶⁷ Saladoid armadillo and turtle vessels featured comparable head, legs and tail adornos as seen in a Venezuelan turtle vessel in figure 6.38. Perhaps not by coincidence, both the Waurá armadillo pot and the Saladoid turtle bowl are painted red on the exterior and black on the interior.⁶⁸

The large fragment of a Saladoid armadillo vessel from Tobago does not seem to have been polychromed. The armadillo's head does not face up in the manner of a creature rolled onto its back to incapacitate it, but rather is portrayed with its head affixed to the exterior wall of the vessel, looking down. Nevertheless, the overall use of the armadillo's shelled body as a receptacle is comparable to Saladoid turtle vessels and the

⁶⁷ Peter Roe, "Pottery: Forms that Endure," in *Arts of the Amazon*, ed. Barbara Braun (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 26.

⁶⁸ The symbolic association between armadillos and turtles is discussed in this chapter's section, "Armadillos, Obstetrics and the Number Four," and Chapter Six's section, "Turtles, Shamans and Male Fertility in Antillean Narrative Symbolism."

Waurá armadillo pot. In the Tobago example, there is no attempt to represent the armored sections of the creature's shell, but the texture of the armadillo's back, neck and even its head is often captured by potters as in figure 4.12.

Among the ritual and mythological meanings of this animal that may have earned it a place on ancient Arawak pottery, from the Lower Orinoco to the Caribbean, are those related to the underworld, agriculture and the assignment of gender. But certain aspects of armadillo reproduction and the folk beliefs about armadillo diseases and medicines may also have appeared in Antillean lore from the Saladoid, and perhaps the Taíno.

The Excavating Armadillo and the Assignment of Gender

Their digging holes in the ground causes armadillos to appear in mainland legends about the creation of women from Arawak, Gê and other language groups, from areas as disparate as the Guianas and Argentina. In this strange but widespread legend a group of primal men put various animals to guard their dried meat or fish stores after the men find themselves the repeated victims of theft. They do not yet know of the existence of women. With the help of the animals, the men finally discover that the thieves are voracious feminine creatures who descend nightly on woven cords from the heavens and devour whatever meat they find. But the celestials hunger not only for food. When they are confronted, they eye their earthly captors with a keen desire to make husbands of them. This is a frightening prospect as these ravenous females have *vaginas dentatas*.

The men conspire to capture these females nevertheless. With the assistance of the animals, the heavenly tethers of the celestials are cut and they plummet into the burrows made ready by Armadillo, becoming ensconced there. Armadillo claims one

female for himself after extracting her from one of his burrows. The animals and men each take a captive and wed them.⁶⁹ But the version of the narrative recounted by Lévi-Strauss has no mention of how these lusty creatures are “de-fanged.” The answer may lie in a related Hispaniolan narrative recorded by Pané. In it beguiling sexless creatures descend on cords through the tall trees and salacious men capture them. In order to make proper women of them, the men ask a woodpecker to excavate a genital orifice in each.⁷⁰

Despite the reversal of the randy dispositions of the main characters, and the omissions and substitutions of certain supporting zoomorphs, most of the elements of this story remain consistent in the mainland and Antillean versions. I have found no woodpecker in the mainland lore but there is an armadillo who digs passages.⁷¹ In fact mainland narratives note that Armadillo’s frenzied digging injures some of the captured celestials as he extracts them from his burrows.⁷² The solution for *vaginas rasas* is the same as for *vaginas dentatas*. Before birds (i.e., woodpeckers for the Taíno) came to fulfill the role of excavator, armadillos may have held this position not only in Saladoid lore, but also in related rites of passage and adorned objects accompanying such rites.⁷³

⁶⁹ Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 112-114.

⁷⁰ Pané, *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians*, 11-12.

⁷¹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *From Honey to Ashes*, trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (New York: Harper and Row, 1973). 215-223, 242-243. There are, however, narratives of the Cariban Makushi of the Guianas and the Lower Orinoco Warao, of a man who employs various birds, including a woodpecker to excavate a genital orifice in his wooden bride, thereby making her a real woman.

⁷² Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Origin of Table Manners*, trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 43-44. A Puelche narrative from the far southern (Argentine) Amazon likewise attributes the marks on the face of the moon to the scratching of an armadillo.

⁷³ Stevens-Arroyo, *Cave of the Jagua*, xxxiii-iv. Stevens-Arroyo illustrates and describes the use of a Taíno “*ave pico*” from Puerto Rico, which was effectively a ceremonial dildo (with what appears to be a parrot, not woodpecker, handle) used to deflower virgins in a pre-nuptial ritual that initiated them into womanhood and fertility.

In the Amazonian version of the legend, armadillos are linked to a series of ideas about women, culture and fertility. Brought to earth as they have been (i.e., plugged into holes from which they must be removed), the doubly dentate females are symbolically reborn of the earth, no longer creatures of the heavens. Armadillo is both their excavator and the facilitator of their parturition, delivering them into their new earthly life. This establishes Armadillo as both a symbol of the earth and of birth. In fact armadillo tails are used in traditional indigenous Brazilian medicine to accelerate parturition, inducing labor.⁷⁴ The perilous (i.e., “fanged”) cavity of the armadillo burrow, sometimes home to the venomous bushmaster, is mirrored in the narratives of celestial women with toothed vaginas.⁷⁵ Finally, the armadillo story culminates in the “domestication” of wild women, making of them proper wives, and presumably mothers. This process is analogous to the Taíno “*ave pico*” ritual, which seemingly re-enacted the domestication of the sexless celestials in the Antillean narrative by breaking the hymen of the bride-to-be.⁷⁶

Armadillos, Disease and the Antillean Caracaracoles

Folkloric accounts in South America that eating armadillos can cause leprosy are of unknown age with unverifiable Amerindian origins. Reasons for the prohibition of armadillo meat (along with that of caiman, anaconda and monkey) among the Pomeron Caribs are not entirely clear, but a fear of “serious sickness or death is indicated by either

⁷⁴ Rômulo Alves et al., “Animal-based Remedies as Complimentary Medicines in Santa Cruz do Capibaribe, Brazil,” *BioMed Central* (July 2008). <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1472-6882/8/44> (accessed January 15, 2009).

⁷⁵ Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 112-114.

⁷⁶ Stevens-Arroyo, *Cave of the Jagua*, xxxiii-iv.

small or large species of armadillos (*yeshi* and *monoraima*, respectively)” seems also to govern the Arawak armadillo taboo.⁷⁷ But is the “sickness” leprosy? For all the South American restrictions on the consumption of this animal, armadillo remains in Pre-Columbian Trinidad middens indicate that they were either part of the Saladoid-era diet or apothecary.⁷⁸ They are today considered a “wild meat” delicacy on that island, where they are still called by their Amerindian name, “tatou.”

Folk beliefs linking armadillos to leprosy have been scientifically proven. The leprosy *mycobacterium* has been successfully grown in these mammals and has been found naturally occurring in some.⁷⁹ Leprosy and syphilis have an unusual symptom in common, namely that they cause circular lesions to break out in the palms of the hands.⁸⁰ Scaly palms are a distinguishing feature of the *caracaracoles*, syphilitic elders of the Taíno. These *caracaracoles* appear in several Taíno narratives, including the same Hispaniolan story of sexless celestials wherein they are the only ones who can seize and arrest the slippery asexuals. Of course, the origin of any association the *caracaracoles* might have had with armadillos would have been the former’s rough, scaly skin, which gave them a physical resemblance to the armored, scaly creatures.

Armadillos, Obstetrics and the Number Four

⁷⁷ Roth, “Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore,” 295.

⁷⁸ Arie Boomert, “Agricultural Societies in the Continental Caribbean,” in *General History of the Caribbean: Autochthonous Societies*, ed. Jalil Sued-Badillo (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 2003), 156, 158.

⁷⁹ Lord, *Mammals of South America*, 12.

⁸⁰ Donald Venes, ed., *Taber’s Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary* (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis Company, 2005) 1224, 2132.

The armadillo relation to feminine gender assignment directly relates to the *caracaracoles*. Nine-banded armadillos usually give birth to four identical young, and after four months, the young finally leave their mother.⁸¹ The number four is a sacred number that recurs in the narratives of the Pre-Columbian Antilles, often related to *caracaracoles*. The scaly men that first assign gender to the neuter nymphs are four in number. And in the birth of Deminán, the most famous Taíno *caracaracol*, the culture hero is one of four brothers, the sons of Itiba Cahubaba, “Ancient Bloodied Woman.”⁸² In primordial time, these four brothers “from one womb and identical” were pried from the lifeless, bloodied husk of their mother who died in childbirth.⁸³ The brothers grew up and embarked on a series of adventures, culminating in Deminán’s dorsal pregnancy. Having developed a painful, scaly protuberance on his back (which, for a time would have caused him to resemble both a turtle and an armadillo), Deminán’s brothers eventually pry open his back with a stone axe only to uncover Turtle Woman gestating there. Eventually, the four brothers marry her and their offspring are the Antilleans.

Here is a tradition of four identical (armadillo-like) brothers, one specifically described as a *caracaracol* or “scaly one,” and their turtle bride. The comparison/union between armadillos and turtles is readily made. An Arawak penchant for seeking commonalities in iconography is borne out by the Saladoid tendency to create visual puns in the depiction of multiple species at once. While this citing of commonalities is

⁸¹ Suttly, *Fauna of the Caribbean*, 45.

⁸² Stevens-Arroyo, *Cave of the Jagua*, 93, 106-107.

⁸³ Pané, *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians*, 13-14.

explored in Chapter Seven of this study as an important aspect of Saladoid and pan-Arawak culture, a telling example from Arawak lore can be recounted here.

Armadillos, Shells, Chambers and Cures

A Guyanese Arawak narrative collected by Roth most ably demonstrates the Arawak proclivity for resemblances. In it, a monstrous forest spirit sends a man on a series of errands from which the man returns unsuccessful. When he asks the man for cassava cakes, he means giant mushrooms; by firewood, he means entire felled trees; by a cooking pot he means a great coiled serpent; and by black land crabs, he means armadillos. The comparison of armadillos to black land crabs because of their “shells” is consistent with this forest spirit’s gift for understatement. Finally the little man runs off when the forest spirit expresses concern that a “tiger” (i.e., jaguar) will come and steal their leftovers, for the Arawak doesn’t want to meet the creature that this forest spirit understates as a great cat.⁸⁴ In this narrative, we have a direct Arawak comparison of armadillos to crabs, creatures that have nothing in common with armadillos except that they are both creatures with what might be called a “shell.” Our comparison of armadillos with turtles is thus within the realm of Arawak similes. It is possible that Itiba Cahubaba, the mother of the four identical brothers, was envisioned as an armadillo in more complete, older, more easterly versions of the Taíno-era narrative. It would be a tale of four brothers with a shelled woman at either end, one of the land and the other of the sea.

As a possible ancestral symbol, iconographic device and food source, all within an ethos that saw qualitative similarities between humans, animals and the spirit realm,

⁸⁴ Roth, “Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore,” 193.

armadillos may have occupied multiple positions in Saladoid-era art and ritual. For their burrowing into the feminine earth, they were likely the assigners of gender as they were in South America, until a pecking bird in the Taíno Greater Antilles replaced them. We must leave a margin for the inclusion of local details and thematic variations in the traditional narrative surrounding armadillos, but the series of associations between armadillos and gender-assignment, *caracaracoles* and turtles seem evident.

It is also important to consider that the armadillo was part of a whole separate ritual tradition in which the animal was a curative. As is the custom with South American indigenous peoples, the medicinal use of an animal is usually related to the creature's appearance or the appearance of anything it makes or eats.⁸⁵ After its armored appearance, the armadillo's long nose and tail, its funnel-shaped ears and its tubular burrows are its most outstanding aspects. Sir Walter Raleigh reported that the ground tail of the armadillo was used by Amerindians to cure earaches and deafness.⁸⁶ Centuries later, Roth specified that it is the last joint of the armadillo's tail which actually carries the earache remedy for Guyanese Amerindians.⁸⁷ Rômulo Alves and his colleagues report that the ground tips of armadillos' tails also are used by Amazonian Indians in accelerating parturition and to treat cases of diarrhea, whooping cough and tuberculosis.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Roth, "Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore," 282. For example, a variety of caladium is cultivated by Amerindians in the Guianas as a "bina" or spirit attractor for armadillos because its leaves resemble the ears of that animal. There is a prevailing belief that the plant that attracts a species of animal usually bears some physical resemblance to some part of that animal.

⁸⁶ Sir Walter Raleigh, *The Discovery of Guiana* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008), 87.

⁸⁷ Roth, "Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore," 368.

⁸⁸ Alves et al., "Animal-based Remedies as Complimentary Medicines in Santa Cruz do Capibaribe, Brazil" *BioMed Central* (July 2008). <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1472-6882/8/44> (accessed January 15th 2009).

All these relate armadillos to the tubular chambers of the body and their outward orifices (i.e., the vagina, birth canal and uterus; the ear canal; the mouth, esophagus, bronchial tubes and lungs; and the anus and intestines) and to no other organs.

Possible Functions of Armadillo Vessels

No armadillo pots survive in entirety and the original context of armadillo vessels is unknown. As with other ceramic zoomorphs in this study, we can only infer the function of armadillo pots from zoology, lore and ethnography. The fact that the armadillo is a “shelled” creature made it a natural “vessel” whose (feminine) form is evoked in any pot. Some Saladoid armadillo pot fragments indicate they were effigy vessels. The associations with female gender assignment might suggest that the ritual context for any armadillo vessel was female initiations, including pre-marriage ceremonies and childbirth. Armadillo vessels might have been heirlooms handed down at such rites of passage. The animal’s medicinal applications might also imply an armadillo vessel’s use in healing rituals, perhaps to hold gender-specific remedies for treatment of feminine afflictions or conditions affecting tubular organs deemed symbolically feminine.

Opossums

The Opossum in Nature

Opossums are members of the *Didelphimorpha* family, which are mostly nocturnal marsupials with prehensile tails. Suctioned toes and sharp claws make them well suited to arboreal life. While their skill is in climbing, they also are accustomed to

waddling across land.⁸⁹ Erect ears, pointy faces, bulbous noses, and beady eyes give them distinct features, easily referenced in art and oral tradition (figure 3).

Opossums have a gestation period of nine to 24 days. The numerous young are born in a very fragile, almost larval state, after which they blindly migrate to the marsupial pouch. Since the mother has a maximum of 15 nipples, always an odd number, many of her three dozen or so young perish in the competition for food. In the marsupium, the successful competitors feed until they reach greater maturity. Then they leave the marsupium to cling to their mother's body or tail instead. With the larger youngsters latched tightly to their mother, the family often forms a "ball of opossums" (figure 3 *right*). After four months, four or five surviving adolescents finally disentangle themselves and go off on their own.⁹⁰

Opossums are "generalists" in both their choice of habitats and food sources. They live in trees or burrows and scavenge all manner of food. They often encounter humans while rummaging through garbage or even ransacking homes.⁹¹ With their brazen disregard for the boundaries of human habitation and their readiness to be hand fed, they are easily domesticated. This indicates to some scientists that opossums were introduced to the Antilles by humans.⁹² But with limbs and tails built for tenacious clinging, opossums could have easily washed up on Antillean shores on logs or branches from points far away. Despite their naïve disregard for dangers from humans, when attacked,

⁸⁹ Lord, *Mammals of South America*, 2-3; Sully, *Fauna of the Caribbean*, 46-47.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Sully, *Fauna of the Caribbean*, 47.

⁹² Wing, "Native American Use of Animals in the Caribbean," 493; *Ibid.*, 46.

opossums will exhibit their patented panic reaction. They suddenly fall over, feigning death and emitting a foul smelling secretion to the point of even attracting carrion insects. Fifteen minutes later, they awaken as if from a fainting spell and quietly walk away.⁹³

The opossum is native to some of the southern Antilles where it is called “manicou,” a word of evident Amerindian etymology. It once ranged more widely in the archipelago before being hunted to extinction on some islands.⁹⁴ Such a trusting animal would easily have been depleted on smaller islands. Faunal remains at Saladoid and Barrancoid sites confirm that Ceramic settlers of the Eastern Caribbean ate both black-eared (*Didelphis marsupialis*) and bare-tailed woolly opossums (*Caluromys philander*).⁹⁵

Incidences and Aesthetics of Saladoid Opossum Ceramics

The shape of the opossum’s head appears in adornos in the Windward and Leeward Islands but more so in the former Appendix 1, Chart 1). The style of these adornos has evident origins in Saladoid and Barrancoid Venezuela. Faces are pointed and come to a bulbous nose at the tip. Eyes are clearly incised or modeled in slight relief. Mouths are located on the underside of the head but are visible in profile, almost like a wincing smile (figures 4.16 through 4.18). The lines of the nose and brows combine to arch over the eyes and thereby divide and frame the face, evoking the color markings of black-eared opossums (figures 4.16, 4.19 and 4.20). Generally, in a collection with many mammal adornos, smaller ears and the features described above seem to distinguish

⁹³ Lord, *Mammals of South America*, 2.

⁹⁴ Suttly, *Fauna of the Caribbean*, 46.

⁹⁵ Arie Boomert, “Agricultural Societies in the Continental Caribbean,” in *General History of the Caribbean: Autochthonous Societies*, ed. Jalil Sued-Badillo (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 2003), 156.

opossum adornos from some similar ones depicting dogs (compare figures 4.20 *right* and 4.25). Opossum adornos are among the smallest in Caribbean museum collections, sometimes no more than an inch long, so the vessels to which they were connected may have been proportionately small. As seen in the accompanying figures, the stylizations of opossums vary widely but usually retain the recessed mouth and facial markings. Depictions of opossums, like those of armadillos, are not numerous and are mostly confined to the Windward Islands. However, I found two specimens in Antigua. Their low numbers imply that opossums represented a symbolic category that was either replaced or phased out in the rest of the Lesser Antilles.

Opossums, the Pleiades and Precipitation

As did the armadillo in the legend of the captured celestial “females,” the mythic opossum may have transmuted over time and space. The inversions, substitutions and omissions of mythic elements between the mainland and islands are phenomena that are easily explained by the migration of people and their traditions over large distances and periods of time. Mytho-symbolic changes seem to have occurred between symbolic opossums and frogs. Sebastián Robiou-Lamarche suggested a symbolic link between frogs and the Pleiades in his 1984 essay, “Astronomy in Taíno Mythology,” but in tropical South America opossums are often a chief signifier of the Pleiades.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Sebastián Robiou-Lamarche, “Astronomy in Taíno Mythology” *Archeoastronomy* 9 (1984): 112-114. Far from disagreeing with Robiou-Lamarche, I rely on his astute interpretations of the associations between the Pleiades, frogs/tadpoles, the Taíno narrative of Anacacuya and the Antillean agricultural cycle. In Chapter Six, I recount the Taíno narrative of the Anacacuya and the children that cried “toa, toa,” giving supporting evidence to Robiou-Lamarche’s claims about the Pleiades as a rain signifier, and explore that signifier’s connection to opossums and other zoic Pleiades symbols.

The Pleiades are a cluster of hundreds of stars, only six of which are visible to the naked eye from earth, in the shape of a small hook. They appear in the Northern Hemisphere throughout the winter months.⁹⁷ In the Caribbean and the northern Amazon (both in the Northern Hemisphere), where live many Amerindian cultures that associate these stars with the opossum, the “winter months” manifest as the dry season.

For the Arawakan Baniwa and the Tukanoan Barasana of the northwestern Amazon, the “death” and resurrection of the Pleiades herald the beginning and end of the rainy season respectively. Barasana mythology sets up a clear equivalence between opossums and the Pleiades. One legend tells of a battle between Opossum and Tinamou Chief over a bride, in which Opossum is defeated.⁹⁸ As he falls dead from a tall tree, the first rains of the wet season begin to fall. The Barasana call these first showers “Nyokoare Hue,” or the “Pleiades Rains,” and declare “Opossum has died” as they begin to fall.⁹⁹ The labors of farming commence in earnest at the wet season’s arrival.¹⁰⁰ Thus the Pleiades Rains signal the beginning of the agricultural cycle and the opossum symbolizes both precipitation and ensuing planting.

Now, the Baniwa live on the opposite (north) side of the Vaupes River from the Barasana, and one of the Baniwa clans is named “Oaliperi Dakeni,” or “Descendants of

⁹⁷ Linda K. Glover et al., *National Geographic Encyclopedia of Space* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2005), 73-74.

⁹⁸ Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Amazonian Cosmos*, 102. The tinamou is a species of bird, often yellow, associated with the sun, and so this battle between Tinamou Chief and Opossum suggests that opossums, which are nocturnal, are stellar or perhaps lunar (night) symbols.

⁹⁹ Ann Bingham, *South and Meso-American Mythology A to Z* (New York: Facts on File, 2004), 84; Stephen Hugh-Jones, *The Palm and the Pleiades: Initiation and Cosmology in Northwest Amazonia* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 169-171, 300.

¹⁰⁰ Napoleon A. Chagnon, *Yanomamö: The Fierce People* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), 35; Stevens-Arroyo, *Cave of the Jaguar*, 43.

the Pleiades.” But the neighboring Barasana refer to this same clan as “Nyokoa Oa,” which means both “Star Opossum (People)” and “Pleiades Star (People).” The Barasana and Baniwa both use the same root word “oa” to refer to the Pleiades, with the Barasana using the same word for the opossum.¹⁰¹ This play on words and the related opossum narrative affirm the opossum as a nexus of ideas about the Pleiades, rain and horticulture among some northern Amazonian peoples, including Arawakans.¹⁰²

The origin of the association between the opossum and the Pleiades is lost in South American antiquity. The curled appearance of the Pleiades might be likened to the prehensile tail of the (nocturnal) opossum as it hangs from a tree branch. Some 2,500 years ago, during Saladoid migration into the Antilles, the star cluster looked much like it does today. The Pleiades exist together in space rather than being arbitrarily organized by the human imagination into a constellation. But more convincing a referent than any “opossum tail-curl” is the summer disappearance then winter reappearance of the Pleiades reflecting the seeming death and re-awakening of an opossum, complete with the rotting smell that follows the “death” of both: the moldiness of the damp forest after the rains begin is easily likened to the secreted stench of the opossum playing dead.

Opossums have even more direct mythical links to agriculture: the growing of sweet, starchy crops. This is natural given the tendency of these scavengers to turn up near human habitations looking for such foods. Several narratives from the tropical

¹⁰¹ See my discussion of the word “oa,” in Chapter Six, in conjunction with Robiou-Lamarche’s treatment of frogs and the Pleiades in Taíno lore.

¹⁰² Stephen Hugh-Jones, *The Palm and the Pleiades: Initiation and Cosmology in Northwest Amazonia* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 169-171, 300.

lowlands describe Opossum as having taught people the fundamentals of staple and fruit cultivation. These narratives frame the opossum as a signifier of the agricultural cycle.¹⁰³

Opossums and Mainland Gender Symbolism

Beyond its horticultural symbolism, the Antillean opossum also could have been a gender signifier as it is on the mainland. South American opossum narratives seem to go past the animal's distinguishing marsupial pouch to the deeper implication of it. The marsupium continues the safe development of the almost larval offspring. It is this detail that South American narratives seizes upon. In a Tacana story, a scavenging opossum eats the ticks off a tapir and is cursed by a jealous tick-eating bird to give birth to tick-like offspring, which will in turn be eaten by that bird. However, the same tiny offspring are a blessing in Xerente and Munduruku legends where the opossum is rewarded with the gift of painless childbirth for lovingly suckling abandoned orphans who grow up to be culture heroes.¹⁰⁴ There are many such traditions that feature this maternal animal, who carries her young on her back until they are almost her size, styling her as the selfless mother or wet nurse. To seal the association with motherhood, Roth reported that when an Arawak woman's friends and family discovered that she wanted to conceive a child, they secretly mixed the powdered claw of an opossum into her drink to facilitate impregnation.¹⁰⁵

Quite to the contrary, the masculine opossum in Amerindian narratives, from the Tucuna of the western Amazon to the Yekuana of the Guianas, is often a duplicitous,

¹⁰³ In Appendix 2, the section "Star Bride, Opossum and the Origins of Agriculture" recounts an important Apinaye version of this tropical lowland narrative series.

¹⁰⁴ Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 179, 181.

¹⁰⁵ Roth, "Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore," 238.

violent character, and a rapist. The forked penis of male opossums then becomes a weapon.¹⁰⁶ Still, in the majority of tropical lowland lore, opossums are selfless mothers.

Possible Functions of Opossum Vessels

It is unclear how mainland stories of the male opossum might have related to ancient pottery. By contrast opossum maternity might have related to the role of pots as live-giving vessels. Perhaps most iconic of the opossum's behaviors is its feigning death. The dead or catatonic opossum is represented in an effigy vessel from a private collection in Trinidad (figure 4.21). The kidney-shaped, or perhaps kidney-bean-shaped, pot has the modeled head of an opossum and, as the body of the vessel curls inwards bringing the creature's head closer to its incised and modeled tail, the pot resembles the coiled body of the marsupial playing dead. We cannot know how many opossum vessels took this shape, because only adornos of the heads of opossums are usually found in Caribbean excavations. Based on the varied angles at which opossum head adornos are broken off from their pots, some faced downwards and others upwards from their vessels, not in a position that would connect to a curled body.

As for the symbolism of a pot portraying the deceptive death-coil of the animal, the theme of rebirth and renewal might dictate that such pots were used in rituals marking the beginning and end of particular agricultural cycles. Given the relation opossums had to cultivated foods in mainland lore, the pot's contents may have been manioc foods. But its kidney bean shape might infer that its contents were legumes of the varieties cultivated in the Antilles by Ceramic people. Either way, these vessels would have held

¹⁰⁶ Guss, *To Weave and Sing*, 111; Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 171-173. Also see Appendix 2's "The Uncommon Masculine Opossum" for links between the opossum, weapons and twins.

horticultural fruits of human labor. The opossum's links to the agricultural cycle, motherhood, and thus both maternal and horticultural fertility, might also suggest that the vessel held prenatal medicines for administering to expectant mothers. The opossum and imagery of it were mostly confined to the southern Windward Islands. Any reverence for the animal motif and its implications that may have existed there does not seem to have gained footing beyond the area. However, Chapter Six explores the replacement of the opossum as a rain-fertility symbol with a ubiquitous Caribbean amphibian, the frog.

Monkeys

Monkeys in Nature

New World monkeys, or *Platyrrhini*, have several features that distinguish them from primates in Africa and Asia. They have prehensile tails and laterally located nostrils (figure 4). These unique traits speak of their divergence from a very old family of primates before the continents separated.¹⁰⁷ Most endemic Caribbean species of monkeys were long extinct by the arrival of Ceramic peoples to the archipelago.¹⁰⁸ Based on their population distribution in northeastern South America and Trinidad, I would assume that the monkeys best known to Saladoid islanders were the red howler monkey (*Alouatta seniculus*), weeping capuchin (*Cebus olivaceus*) and white-fronted capuchin (*Cebus albifrons*).¹⁰⁹ I would also suggest squirrel monkeys (genus *Saimiri*) were favored by

¹⁰⁷ Lord, *Mammals of South America*, 22.

¹⁰⁸ Francisco Watlington, "The Physical Environment: Biogeographical Teleconnections in Caribbean Prehistory," in *General History of the Caribbean: Autochthonous Societies*, ed. Jalil Sued-Badillo (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 2003), 41-45.

¹⁰⁹ Boomert, "Agricultural Societies in the Continental Caribbean," 156; Emmons and Feer, *Neotropical Rainforest Mammals*, 124-125; Lord, *Mammals of South America*, 150.

early island Saladoid potters, based on their similar northeastern mainland distribution (though they are absent from Trinidad) and physical resemblance to some adornos. The outlined mouth and face, framed by the simian hairline is a diagnostic feature of monkey adornos. But some primate adornos easily pass for human.

Incidences and Aesthetics of Saladoid Monkey Ceramics

As with other land mammals discussed so far, Saladoid monkey imagery is mostly local to the southernmost islands and seems to refer to South American species, perhaps introduced to those islands.¹¹⁰ Monkey imagery has been reported, all over the Antilles but many of the images identified earlier by scholars as monkeys may in fact have been bats, whose faces were treated with a similarly anthropomorphizing style.¹¹¹ In my survey of zoomorphic adornos, I also noticed that many “monkey” adornos could easily be anthropomorphs treated with Saladoid stylizations. The lateral nostrils of the *Platyrrhini*, depicted as disks, concentric circles or sometimes a cylinder across the vertical axis of the nose, often help to distinguish monkeys from bats, which usually have upturned noses (compare figures 4.11 and 4.22). Heavy brows and prognathic jaws can also be an indication of monkeys, but these features also appear on anthropomorphs. Using only these features as diagnostic, the incidence of “monkeys” from my field notes was drastically reduced. These were all concentrated around the mainland and the

¹¹⁰ Watlington, “The Physical Environment,” 44.

¹¹¹ García, “The Bat and the Owl, 115; Francisco Watlington, “The Physical Environment: Biogeographical Teleconnections in Caribbean Prehistory” in *General History of the Caribbean: Autochthonous Societies*, ed. Jalil Sued-Badillo, 30-92 (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 2003), 41.

Windward Islands, with more in Trinidad than in Venezuela unexpectedly (Appendix 1, Chart 1).

The single monkey image from Barbados is a geometrically incised vessel shard with an adorno that clearly exhibits all the diagnostic simian features suggested above (figure 4.23). Single objects are often difficult to interpret in that we cannot guess whether they were trade items acquired as curiosities or vestiges of an aesthetic departure driven by a local group or individual. If their style is absolutely unique the latter hypothesis might apply. The almost pursed mouth of the Barbadian adorno and flat head seem to depict a howler monkey, the largest primate known to the Saladoid potters (figure 4 *left*). The mildly expressive face of this adorno seems on the brink of making the howler monkey's booming call. The geometric incisions on the pot rim may have been placed as to suggest a necklace, thus anthropomorphizing the monkey adorno. Monkey depictions in the Antilles are seldom this mimetic. But in most cases, the Saladoid ceramicists choose to blur the speciation between humans and simians, as is done here. Tropical lowland narratives do much the same thing.

Similitude and Seduction in Mainland Simian Lore

As trickster agents of chaos, monkeys in Amerindian lore are instructive alter egos of human beings. In South American narratives, monkeys compete with humans for food, sexual partners and culture itself. They are convincingly human but always manage to offend or undo human culture. Monkey narratives often are morality tales warning

humans that tables can be turned.¹¹² In Arawak and Carib narratives from the Guianas, monkeys are mischief-makers unleashing great floods or the first night on the world from a culture hero's basket or a shaman's medicine bag respectively.¹¹³ In other tales, they assist people, out of a natural affinity for humans.¹¹⁴ However, more often than not, monkeys are equivalents, rivals and/or antecedents of human beings.

In a legend, collected by Betty Mindlin in the late twentieth century among the Tupi-speaking Aruá, a woman left alone with the corpse of a monkey her husband has killed is seduced by the handsome ghost of the monkey.¹¹⁵ The monkey spirit carries her off to the world of the monkeys, where she learns simian ways, becomes increasingly hairy and is just beginning to envy the tails of the monkeys when her husband is told by a wise old sloth of her whereabouts.¹¹⁶ Together the man and the sloth strategize her rescue. But the wife protests to her husband and the accompanying village shaman/exorcist that the monkeys are real people to her and refuses to return to the human realm.¹¹⁷

In a Mundurucu legend, it is the man who falls in love with a monkey-woman (i.e., a female monkey who is convincingly human). This tale abounds in broken taboos

¹¹² Bingham, *South and Meso-American Mythology A to Z*, 66-67; Guss, *To Weave and Sing*, 97-101, 115; Lévi-Strauss, *The Origin of Table Manners* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 98; Lévi-Strauss *The Raw and the Cooked*, 260, 310.

¹¹³ Guss, *To Weave and Sing*, 55; Roth, "Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore," 148.

¹¹⁴ Lévi-Strauss, *From Honey to Ashes*, 61, 131; Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 203.

¹¹⁵ Betty Mindlin and Indigenous Storytellers, *Barbecued Husbands and Other Stories from the Amazon*, (London: Verso, 2002), 236-238.

¹¹⁶ Hugh-Jones, *The Palm and the Pleiades*, 193-195, 236. In some narratives, sloths and monkeys are seen as related, with the sloth as the ruler of all monkeys. In others, the sloth is a revered elder of the monkeys. However, sloths are also seen as the inverse of howler monkeys especially since the former is silent and the latter startlingly sonorous.

¹¹⁷ Mindlin, *Barbecued Husbands*, 236-238.

in that the man proposes to marry outside his kind (bestiality), he laughs at her monkey parents even though she has warned him not to do so for fear of their bad tempers (disrespecting future in-laws), and he kills her parents for punishing his impudent laughter (patricide).¹¹⁸ And when he finally has a child with his monkey-bride, the fruit of his transgression is that his wife has an incestuous relation with their semi-simian son, giving birth to the howler monkeys of today.¹¹⁹ In these two narratives, the monkey as the “anthropologous” tempter who draws humans into inhuman, antisocial acts is similar to the role of bats in the Kayapo narrative treated in the “Bats” section.¹²⁰ We also might consider that these “bestial,” “inhuman” and “antisocial,” relations are in fact analogies of failed attempts at human exogamy. The animals in question can be symbols of foreign clans and ethnicities. This idea about the potential disasters of exogamy is again taken up in the “Vultures” section of Chapter Five.

The Hyper-Masculine Monkey as Nemesis in Mainland Lore and Symbolism

¹¹⁸ Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 273-274; Roth, “Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore,” 150. A Kachuyana narrative from northeastern Brazil likewise involves a revenge killing of monkey in-laws. A solitary hunter falls in love with a female howler monkey after removing her hair in preparation for eating her. He cannot bring himself to eat her, marries her instead, visits her family and then finds himself stranded in a tree by them after they reclaim her and retreat through the treetops. He kills the entire family except a small infant who is the parent of all howlers today. In a Warao man-monkey-marriage narrative collected by Brett and retold by Roth it is the monkey-woman who takes off her own hairy skin to reveal her anthropomorphic form underneath and it is she who takes revenge on the man, grabbing her child and retreating to the monkey kingdom when her fickle husband eventually grows bored of her and takes to taunting her and calling her “monkey” all the time.

¹¹⁹ Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 121.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 122. Lévi-Strauss uses an aspect of Guarayu eschatology to illustrate this resemblance to mythical bats: after they die, men’s souls are passed through a ritualized ordeal in which spider monkeys try to emasculate them by tickling them with their claws, thus making them laugh. Guarayu men, like Kayapo men, consider most laughter effeminate.

Seductive, salacious monkeys are common mythological characters. Roth describes the monkey “grown in [the Amerindian] imagination to man’s size” as “the dread of unprotected females” for their unfettered sexuality.¹²¹ Among the Desana, the monkey is a phallic symbol, expressed in its name *uaiú*, which is a synonym for “penis.”¹²² In the eastern Amazon, capuchins especially occupy this phallic role, with the males sporting the almost perpetual erection of their nailhead-shaped penises.¹²³ As antipodes of restrained, civilized society, monkeys are an uncanny inversion of humanity.

A Bororo narrative tells that monkeys were once hairless like men who practiced agriculture, ignited their own cooking fires, negotiated the rivers with canoes and slept in hammocks.¹²⁴ In line with this idea that monkeys were once more like humans, the Carib-speaking Yekuana tell of a battle between ancient people and the Warashidi, a race of terrible, “cannibalistic” monkeys.¹²⁵ In the legend, the people assemble and pick off the monkeys from the trees, one by one, finally cornering their chief. When they kill the chief of the Warashidi and take his possessions, they learn how to weave a certain class of baskets (which still bears the name “Warashidi” today) by reverse-engineering the ones they find in his collection. The monkeys in this legend function as “anti-people” (or perhaps “ante-people” in that their culture is prior to humans’): bestial, immoral, and

¹²¹ Roth, “Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore,” 363.

¹²² Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Amazonian Cosmos*, 165.

¹²³ Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 266.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 126-127.

¹²⁵ Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 260, 310; Lévi-Strauss, *The Origin of Table Manners*, 98. Cannibalistic (or man-eating) and murderous monkeys occur in other narratives, such as those of the Karaja, Mundurucu and Tacana, as keenly symbolic of the mythic and actual rivalry between humans and their primate counterparts, a life-and-death rivalry ultimately.

chaotic; but also possessing technologies and traditions of their own, which when subdued or seized by humans become the cornerstones of true culture.¹²⁶

Possible Functions of Monkey Ceramics

As with most zoomorphic pots, the precise use of monkey ceramics is unknown. But as in Amazonia and Orinokia, monkeys were a food source for the Antillean Saladoid settlers.¹²⁷ Since the human-monkey resemblance is a theme in so many narratives, and in Saladoid ceramics, eating monkeys may have been viewed either as exo-cannibalistic (i.e., eating people from outside one's own community) or purely as meat. In either case, the eater might still have been understood as acquiring the monkey's cleverness, agility and sexual prowess, but not its unreliability and promiscuity.

Monkey adornos tend to appear on the rims of bowls, but no whole vessel has been found. Bowls can be used to hold either liquid or solid, dry or cooked materials. The Barbadian monkey adorno in figure 4.23 has a thin, hard paste with fine temper and in the part that remains of this pot, seems evenly and thoroughly fired. From this fine manufacture and the apparent lack of cooking burns, the implication is that this and perhaps other monkey vessels were ceremonial heirlooms like most other adorned pots. On the handles or rims of such vessels, monkeys may have either referenced the symbolic vanquishing of enemies or embodied the superior abilities and originating powers of the simians. In all these cases, the simians relate to ancestry and sexuality.

¹²⁶ Guss, *To Weave and Sing* 97-101, 115.

¹²⁷ Boomert, "Agricultural Societies in the Continental Caribbean," 156. Boomert reports at least two species of monkey bones in Saladoid-Barranoid middens in Trinidad: red howler and white-fronted capuchin monkeys.

Dogs

The Dog in Nature and Culture

During Columbus' first explorations of the Greater Antilles, the people he encountered kept a species of small non-barking dog. The Spaniards complained that this common yellow canine was completely useless as a guard dog but they had no qualms about eating it, as did the Amerindians who reared it for just that purpose.¹²⁸ The population of this Antillean branch of *Canis familiaris* declined greatly after the arrival of Europeans. Feral varieties had always existed, no doubt descended from escaped domesticates, and they too were negatively impacted by the conquest. Their population slowly increased again and by the late colonial period they came to be viewed as a nuisance on some islands.¹²⁹

Throughout the Americas, dogs have a long history as domesticated animals. There are two domesticable species of canine endemic to South America, the bush dog (*Speothus venaticus*) and the short-eared dog (*Atelocynus microtis*). Both are "exceedingly rare" in the wild, but coyotes, wolves and foxes are even more rare.¹³⁰ Amazonians probably domesticated the bush dog and short-eared dog deep in prehistory.

¹²⁸ Samuel Eliot Morison, *Admiral of the Ocean Sea: A Life of Christopher Columbus* (New York: Book-of-the-Month Club, 1992), 255-256; 457.

¹²⁹ Morison, *Admiral of the Ocean Sea*, 255-256; 457.

¹³⁰ Emmons and Feer, *Neotropical Rainforest Mammals*, 134-135; Lord, *Mammals of South America*, 106-108.

In their wild form both are quite capable of barking so the “bark-less” species encountered in the Antilles may have been bred to be so.¹³¹

Unlike any other animal in the tropical lowlands, the dog was a unique symbolic intermediary between the complimentary and opposing spheres of culture and nature.¹³² Ritual objects give evidence that in the Antilles, the dog was an intermediary on several other levels as well.

Incidences and Aesthetics of Dog Imagery in the Antilles

In the Taíno era, the dog was of great importance in the sculptural iconography of the Greater Antilles, but does not seem to have played any major role in ceramic iconography. However, in Saladoid ceramics of the Eastern Caribbean the dog appears with irregular frequency: occasionally on some islands and often on others. Huecoid ceramics in the Leeward Islands greatly enhance the number of dog images there.¹³³ There are also many dog adornos on the Saladoid mainland (Appendix 1, Chart 1).

Since I support the position of Chanlatte Baik, Narganes Storde and many others that the Huecoid series of Vieques, Puerto Rico and the Leeward Islands represents a separate Ceramic culture, it may seem I have erroneously included Huecoid objects in my

¹³¹ Emmons and Feer, *Neotropical Rainforest Mammals*, 134-135; Lord, *Mammals of South America*, 106-108.

¹³² Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Naked Man*, trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 522. Lévi-Strauss writes “half-way between humanity and animality.”

¹³³ Trinidad, Martinique and Montserrat have canine adornos in the high single digits, but other islands have only one or two in institutional collections. Only Guadeloupe defies the trend with some 40 canine adornos. The reason for this is the Huecoid presence in Guadeloupe at sites such as Morel and Gare Maritime. Most of the canine adornos I encountered in Guadeloupe were from these sites, sometimes from discreet Huecoid strata within them. Labels and lists at Direction Régional des Affaires Culturelles and Musée Edgar Clerc in Guadeloupe indicate the stratigraphy and provenance of many Guadeloupian objects.

count. But as indicated in Chapter Two, the Huecoid and Saladoid Ceramic cultures co-existed in the Leeward Islands. And these Huecoid dogs occur at sites where almost every other zoomorph is Saladoid in style. In short, within the Guadeloupien Saladoid there is a dominance of Huecoid dog images. Indeed the dogs show varying levels of a stylistic *mélange* between a voluminous “Cedrosanesque” Saladoid modeling and deeply incised Huecoid linearity (compare figures 4.26 and 4.35).

Diagnostic features for the dog in both Saladoid and Huecoid ceramics are a short, round head that comes quickly to a frontal point, as opposed to the elongations of opossums and anteaters. The Saladoid potter distinguished land mammals from other stylized forms by the prominent placement of ears, either on the top or side of the head. Dogs are among the few zoomorphs that can be identified even when their ears have broken off (figures 4.27 and 4.28). Depictions can be hieratic or mimetic (compare 4.25 to 4.28). Throughout the Saladoid and Huecoid world, the body of the dog was depicted rather than just the face customarily observed in adornos, making the animal even more identifiable (compare figures 4.29, 4.30 and 4.31). Only bat symbols seem to share this common interest in representing the body of the animal, even though in the case of bats, that body is often incised rather than fully modeled as with many dogs.

Dogs and the Underworld in Antillean Lore

Coincidentally, dogs are the only other mammals beside bats for which we have a surviving Antillean oral traditions. According to Pané, the Taíno revered a canine zemi, called Opiyelguobirán.¹³⁴ This zemi was considered the guardian spirit of the dead.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Pané, *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians*, 28; Philip M. Parker, ed., *Webster's Taíno-English Thesaurus Dictionary* (San Diego: ICON Group International, 2008), 5; Stevens-Arroyo, *Cave of*

Companions in death as well as in life, dogs were believed by ancient Amerindians to guide the deceased to the underworld.¹³⁶ Such beliefs are found from Aztec and Maya Mesoamerica to cultures spanning the Amazon and Antilles.¹³⁷

As a devotional icon, a zemi of the canine spirit Opiyelguobirán existed outside the normal category of animal symbols, far removed from the partly utilitarian sphere of ceramics. No other mammal has such a clear zemi-status as the dog spirit that led the dead through haunted forests to the watery underworld.¹³⁸ It may be that an early version of this icon was worshipped in Saladoid times, removing it from the domestic sphere and causing the low incidence of canine adorns in most islands. So then, where are the wood, stone and shell dog amulets and sculptures from the Eastern Caribbean that would have been made instead, as have been found in the Greater Antilles and the Bahamas?¹³⁹

There is no clear evidence of a canine deity in the Saladoid Lesser Antilles. But the concept of a dog as guardian through the afterlife seems to have informed the burial practices of both mainlanders and the Ceramic people of the Eastern Caribbean. Dogs buried by Saladoid-era Antilleans have been found from Indian Creek in Antigua to Silver Sands in Barbados to Sorcé in Vieques. In the latter two cases, human remains

the Jagua, 228, 232. Linguists have translated this Arawak word in many ways. The overall gist of the name is “Soul Son, Our Spirit of the Darkness.”

¹³⁵ William F. Keegan, *Taino Indian Myth and Practice: The Arrival of the Stranger King* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), 38-39; Stevens-Arroyo, *Cave of the Jagua*, 232, 237.

¹³⁶ Bingham, *South and Meso-American Mythology A to Z*, 37.

¹³⁷ Mary Miller and Karl Taube, *The Illustrated Dictionary of the Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 80; Pané, *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians*, 28; Roth, “Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore,” 157.

¹³⁸ Pané, *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians*, 28.

¹³⁹ Keegan, *Taino Indian Myth and Practice*, 38-39; Fred Olsen, *On the Trail of the Arawaks* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974), 110-118; Roe, “Just Wasting Away,” 129-131.

accompanied the canines.¹⁴⁰ Roth's report that the Warao were buried with their hunting dogs, expecting that the dogs would continue to lead the way as they did on hunting expeditions, suggests an ancient origin of this practice in the Lower Orinoco.¹⁴¹

The mainland Saladoid for their part, having produced many more canine adornos than the islanders, are likely to have assigned even greater significance to the dog than their insular counterparts. The scope and substance of this mainland concern with canine imagery is unknown. Conversely, I know of no Saladoid dog burials on the Lower Orinoco that might liken the insular canine iconology to the mainland's in mortuary context. The dog evidently had a slightly different importance on the mainland as in the islands. The many canine adornos in the Saladoid Lower Orinoco indicate that the dog was not simply a "minor variant of the jaguar in the South American lowlands" or a replacement for that creature from the "impoverished Antillean fauna" as has been suggested by Roe, Walker and others.¹⁴² Rather, the dog entered the Antilles as a beloved motif on ceramics and evolved there into a full-fledged icon, an object of worship.

A Universal Canine Cult: Canine Iconography in Saladoid, Huecoid and Taíno Art

¹⁴⁰ Irving Rouse and Birgit Faber Morse, *Excavations at the Indian Creek Site, Antigua West Indies* (New Haven: Yale University Publications in Anthropology, 1999), 57; Wing, "Native American Use of Animals in the Caribbean," 493. I have also seen dog burial remains from St. Martin.

¹⁴¹ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 88-91; Roth, "Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore," 157. While the Warao are not Arawaks, and in fact their language is an isolate, they are a people of great antiquity in the Lower Orinoco and Trinidad. It is likely that the Arawakan people of the Antilles and the Lower Orinoco spent many centuries, perhaps even millennia, living near these people whose roots in the region go back to Archaic times. As close neighbors, the Warao and the Saladoid ceramicists would have come to share ideas about various animals as natural, spiritual and symbolic forces.

¹⁴² Jeffrey B. Walker, "A Preliminary Report on the Lithic and Osteological Remains from the 1980, 1981 and 1982 Field Seasons at Hacienda Grande (PSj7-5)," in *Proceedings of the X International Congress for the Study of Pre-Columbian Cultures of the Lesser Antilles* (Montreal, Canada: Centre de Recherches Caraïbes, Université de Montréal, 1985), 201.

Both zemi sculptures and modeled ceramics depict figures of ritual significance. However, adorned ceramic pots cannot be rightly considered icons alongside zemis. Ceramics were ritual objects but not likely objects of worship. The Taíno canine zemi cult probably had Saladoid antecedents. But Taíno dog zemis may have arisen partly from Saladoid sculpture rather than from Saladoid ceramics.¹⁴³ The drop in Saladoid canine ceramic incidences from the mainland to the Lesser Antilles indicates that some transformation of the dog's symbolism occurred in the latter.

Several wooden zemis have survived in Hispaniola and Jamaica, where the karst caves in which the Taíno hoarded them from Spaniards have preserved them well.¹⁴⁴ Some of these icons are wholly or partially zoomorphic and at least one has been identified as a hybrid image of Opiyelguobirán (figure 4.32 *left*). While there are no known wooden zemis in the Lesser Antilles, their shell inlay dentures have been recovered there. These bars of carved teeth were affixed to the grimacing mouths of wooden zemis, giving evidence that such objects once existed in the Saladoid Lesser Antilles as they did further north (figures 4.32 *right* and 4.33). We can only guess whether some Lesser Antillean wooden zemis were dogs as in Hispaniola and Jamaica.

Although they shared an interest in inlaid, perhaps canine, zemis, the Saladoid Lesser Antilles and the Taíno Greater Antilles apparently differed in the former's preference for canine adornments on utilitarian ceramics and the latter's preference for miniature stone and shell canine icons. The difference in materials reflects another shift

¹⁴³ Huecoid canine imagery is discussed in the following pages.

¹⁴⁴ Wendy A. Lee, "Notes on the Natural History of Jamaica," in *Earliest Inhabitants: The Dynamics of the Jamaican Taíno*, ed. Lesley-Gail Atkinson (Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2006), 91-93; Irving Rouse, *The Taínos: Rise and Decline of the People Who Greeted Columbus*, (New Haven: Yale, 1992), 118.

in the status of the dog as a symbol over time and space: always of ritual importance but moving from a more diverse set of positions in the domestic and religious spheres of the Saladoid Eastern Caribbean to a more iconic state in the Taíno Greater Antilles.

An important link between the disparate treatments of canine images in the earlier eastern and later northern cultures may be found in Huecoid ceramics. In Huecoid pottery, which may have similar mainland origins to those of the Saladoid, the great majority of adornos seem to be dogs. The canine concern at Huecoid Morel and Gare Maritime in Guadeloupe is replicated throughout the Huecoid sphere. These canines are usually located, in the manner of Saladoid ones, on the handles of the vessels or constitute the entirety of the pot handles. But unlike Saladoid figural adornos, which can face outwards, upwards or inwards from the pot rim, Huecoid canine bodies almost all double-back to peer over the pot rim into its interior, forming in-curling horn-like projections off the sides of typically round or oblong vessels (figure 4.34). With squat legs, cylindrical bodies, and often a series of protuberances on their backs, they sometimes tilt their heads back to gaze upwards through ringed eyes.

Some Huecoid zoomorphs are not located on the exterior walls or the rims of vessels but are placed on the inside, just below the rim (figure 4.36.). In this position, just above the water level in the bowl's interior, these figures do not constitute the usual Antillean (i.e., Saladoid and Barrancoid) nexus between the practical handle and the symbolic adorno, between the catalyzing user and placid contents as described in the Chapter Two. Instead, these in-facing adornos, whether on the vessel rim or the interior, enter into a closer relation with the vessel contents: presumably water and other liquids; and the meanings of those liquids. Oriented as they are towards the vessel's contents,

even when gazing up at the vessel's owner, and sometimes having no apparent functionality as handles, the Huecoid canine adornos are either pure decoration or pure iconography. The potential mythological and ritual relations between Huecoid dogs, water, the underworld and thus the world of *zemis* is explored in the following section on "Manatees." Reasons for the unlikely association between dogs, water and manatees also are revealed therein. But first we might speculate about the functions of dog pots.

Possible Functions of Early Ceramic Canine Pottery

The underworld association shared by both Saladoid and Huecoid canine pottery would suggest that these were funerary vessels. The naturalistic, painted adorno in figure 4.28 is from Vivé in Martinique, a site where canine adornos have been found in middens, in the same strata as dog mandibles, which were used as pendants by Saladoid and Huecoid Antilleans.¹⁴⁵ For the other adornos illustrated here, the context in which they were discovered is unknown. I found no Saladoid canine pots intact and cannot guess to which vessel types most canine adornos belonged. I have presented various data that clearly indicate the funerary significance of dogs throughout Antillean Ceramic cultures from the Saladoid onwards. It remains unverified whether canine pots were part of the burial cache of the dead or simply were part of funeral ceremonies then kept by surviving family members. I suggest that the contents of these vessels was probably water, the element of the underworld.

Manatees

¹⁴⁵ Walker, "A Preliminary Report on the Lithic and Osteological Remains from the 1980, 1981 and 1982 Field Seasons at Hacienda Grande (PSj7-5)," 201.

The Manatee in Nature

As they fished the shallower coastal waters, Saladoid-era canoeists would have grown accustomed to the sight of smooth, rotund manatees slowly submerging beneath the waters' surface. After centuries in the Caribbean, Ceramic Amerindians eventually made the docile manatees part of their marine diet as had Archaic people before them.¹⁴⁶ The thick skin, fatty flesh, and strong bones of the creature were all part of the Ceramic Antillean toolkit as well, used to make oil, leather, tools and musical instruments.¹⁴⁷ With a whiskered snout like that of a land mammal, grey but sometimes brown skin with a texture like a human's, but the overall shape of a fish, the manatee is likely to have struck the early Ceramic seafarers as an uncanny and significant being (figure 5). It is possible that manatees were likened to whales and dolphins, which also were familiar sights in the Caribbean waters. But the slow movement of this gentle, inquisitive herbivore, its whiskered snout and forays into the swamps and estuaries where people waded and could swim alongside it, made the manatee somehow more like a marine equivalent of some familiar terrestrial creature.

Incidences and Aesthetics of Manatee Imagery in Saladoid-Era Ceramics

¹⁴⁶ Francisco Moscoso, "Chiefdoms in the Islands and the Mainland," in *General History of the Caribbean: Autochthonous Societies*, ed. Jalil Sued-Badillo, (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 2003), 299; Rouse, *The Tainos*, 4, 13, 58.

¹⁴⁷ Fatima Bercht, ed. *Taíno: Pre-Columbian Art and Culture from the Caribbean* (New York: El Museo del Barrio/Monacelli Press, 1997), 137, 140; Lord, *Mammals of South America*, 8-9; Edwin Miner Solá, *Diccionario Taíno Ilustrado* (Puerto Rico: First Book Publishing, 2002), 64; Suttty, *Fauna of the Caribbean*, 20-21.

Previous scholars have mentioned the incidence of manatees in Saladoid iconography.¹⁴⁸ But I remained unconvinced of the seeming intuitive identification of Saladoid “manatee” adornos. A snout did not a manatee make. Purported manatee images were definitely mammals, as established by those snouts, but they could be land mammals with large, or exaggerated, noses. I ignored the temptation to identify otherwise ambiguous snouted zoomorphs as the sea cow. My uncertainties about the presence of manatees in the ceramic record were dispelled when I encountered a clear and naturalistic depiction of the West Indian manatee (*Trichechus manatus*) in Guadeloupe, excavated at the Saladoid/Huecoid site of Morel in 1999; and in the same collection, stylized Huecoid adornos from Gare Maritime (also in Guadeloupe) that likewise seemed to portray the manatee (figures 4.37. and 4.38.).¹⁴⁹ Then it was obvious, these adornos were certainly mammals, but unlike all other Saladoid (and Huecoid) mammals, they had no ears. Hence, earless + snouted = possible manatee.

Once established by more naturalistic examples in the Leeward Islands, the features of the manatee become more recognizable in previously uncertain Windward Island ceramics (figures 4.39 and 4.40). The bent or extended snout of many adornos indicates the flexibility of this aquatic forager’s most distinguishing feature. Whiskers are sometimes indicated by conventionalized incisions and punctations.

¹⁴⁸ Boomert, “Agricultural Societies in the Continental Caribbean,” 154; I. A. Earle Kirby, “The Pre-Hispanic Peopling of the Antilles,” in *Proceedings of the VI International Congress for the Study of Pre-Columbian Cultures of the Lesser Antilles* (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1976), 15-16; Iosif Moravetz, *Imaging Adornos: Classification and Iconography of Saladoid Adornos from St. Vincent, West Indies* (Oxford, U.K.: British Archaeological Reports International Series, 2005), 64.

¹⁴⁹ These adornos are both from the collection of Guadeloupe’s Direction Régionale des Affaires Culturelles, whose inventory indicates that the Saladoid manatee was excavated at Morel by Tom Hamburg in 1999, and the Huecoid composite figure was excavated by Thomas Romon at Gare Maritime in 2006.

I have found no mainland Saladoid manatee pottery. Indeed, the insular Saladoid use of manatees in ceramic iconography, and the use of manatee bones in Taíno sculpture (figure 2.5) establishes that Antilleans had symbolic and aesthetic categories distinct from those of South Americans. The apparent peak in incidences of manatee depictions in the Leeward Islands (Appendix 1, Chart 1) warrants discussion of the animal as a ceramic and cultural motif. With manatee images in many of the Lesser Antilles, we are chastened by the dearth of manatee narratives there or, as might be expected, on the mainland.¹⁵⁰ This is an important challenge to my study's interpretive framework for zoomorphs.

The Maternal Manatee in Antillean Symbolism

The manatee would have had maternal associations. Its very name “manatí” means “breast” in Taíno Arawakan.¹⁵¹ The extended and affectionate rearing of its young reinforced this association with motherhood.¹⁵² With this manatee-maternity in mind, and in the absence of any historical or ethnographic sources, we can still gain a glimpse of the animal's significance. Additionally, feminine associations with the sea and a physical and behavioral resemblance to and familiarity with people might render the manatee a virtual sea-mother. Given the sea's cosmic significance as the place of ancestral spirits, the manatee might have taken on some of the symbolism of the most important of marine

¹⁵⁰ Lord, *Mammals of South America*, 7-9. Although manatees (like dolphins) are more so a marine species, they can also be found in the larger river systems of South America. Thus, it is possible for manatees to figure in mainland lore and symbolism but such references are exceedingly rare.

¹⁵¹ Solá, *Diccionario Taíno Ilustrado*, 92.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 64; Suttly, *Fauna of the Caribbean*, 20-21. Manatees can nurse and rear their young for up to two years.

motifs, the turtle.¹⁵³ But artifacts and a single mythic fragment may indicate that the manatee had a closer symbolic analogue than the turtle.

Links Between Huecoid and Saladoid Manatee Adornos

In southwestern Guadeloupe, at the site of Gare Maritime, numerous vessel fragments and adornos of the Huecoid culture have been found, bespeaking Guadeloupe's importance in the Huecoid sphere apparently centered at Vieques. As discussed in the "Dogs" section, Huecoid adornos often depict the entire bodies of dogs and direct them inwards towards the bowl's contents. Sometimes peering upwards at the owner, these quizzical canines do not directly jut off the rim of their bowls like other adornos. Rather, their hind legs, even while alertly extended, are often more vaguely rendered than the front ones, seeming to coalesce into the vessel walls. Sometimes, there is another biomorphic element behind and beneath them on the vessel rim. This second biomorph is sometimes a manatee and this is discussed in the following sub-section on "Water-Dogs."

The protuberances on the dog's backs usually are a series of punctated buttons, which resemble the flexed suction cups on an octopus's tentacles or the oral hollows of sea anemones. This is a texture quite unusual for dog imagery and gives the canine the appearance of some bizarre marine creature, a "sea dog" *per se*. These "anemones" form linear colonies of polyps that run from the dog's shoulders or forehead to its hindquarters (figure 4.35), but are sometimes cleverly used to constitute the dog's eyes or a Cedrosan Saladoid-type hybrid creature as well (figure 4.38 *center and right*). As the canine coalesces into the pot or the secondary biomorph at its posterior, the line(s) of punctated

¹⁵³ Pané, *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians*, 16. The turtle is discussed in Chapter Six of this dissertation as the mythic mother of the Antilleans.

buttons continue(s) across both surfaces, uniting the two forms. In the notable fragment from an oblong Huecoid pot found at Gare Maritime in Guadeloupe (figure 4.38), the biomorphic root into which the canine dissolves has the precise shape and dimensions of the Saladoid manatee head in figure 4.37. This manatee form is complete with a jaw line that merges into the characteristic “triple” chin creases so characteristic of the animal itself and the Saladoid manatee adorno in figure 4.37. The down-turned snout of this Huecoid manatee becomes the cylindrical body of an alert canine. And the manatee is given eyes and nostrils in the form of pairs of strategically placed Huecoid “anemones.” Thus, a manatee’s snout transforms into a dog before our eyes, and the two are linked by lines of marine polyps, esoteric references to undersea invertebrates.¹⁵⁴

Before we ask “what could possibly be the link between manatees and dogs as to warrant this deliberate visual conflation?” we should first note that such visual conflation is typically a Cedrosan Saladoid device of using a stylized feature that two forms have in common as a node around which both forms are pivoted. But Huecoid potters employ this Saladoid device in figure 4.38, evidence of either cultural interactions with or relatedness to the Saladoid potters of the Leeward Islands. Also, it is noteworthy that alert little dog-like adornos perched on the rims of vessels, looking inwards, is a convention harking all the way back to the Saladoid on the Middle Orinoco and stretching across the Saladoid and Huecoid Caribbean (compare figures 2.13, 4.31 and 4.34). Noting the Huecoid-Saladoid pedigree of the canine adornos in the Leeward Islands, and the mainland origins of Antillean dog imagery, the links between these adornos and those of manatees are more approachable, especially through water.

¹⁵⁴ A similar but coarser manatee-dog hybrid adorno, employing these same conventions was also found in the Huecoid levels at Morel.

Manatees and “Sea Dogs” in Antillean Lore

“The zemi Opiyelguobirán has four feet, like a dog, they say, and is made of wood, and often at night he leaves the house and goes into the jungle. They went to look for him there, and when they brought him home, they would tie him up with rope, but he would return to the jungle. And they tell that when the Christians arrived on the Island of Hispaniola, this zemi escaped and went into a lagoon; and they followed his tracks as far as the lagoon, but they never saw him again, nor did they hear anything about him.”

This was the account of Fray Ramón Pané concerning a wooden Taíno sculpture of the canine deity, Opiyelguobirán. As discussed in the section on “Dogs,” this important dog-like zemi is the guardian through the underworld, which is entered through the water.

In Pané’s account, the carved zemi, bound by its wooden (i.e., tree-spirit), intermediary nature must always return to the forest. From there it is captured by day and forced to return before it escapes again at night. But when the Christian Spaniards arrive, the canine zemi exiles itself forever, not to its proximate home (determined by the material from which it’s image was fashioned, wood) but to the ultimate abode of Antillean spirits, the waters. It is interesting that Opiyelguobirán enters the waters not through beach surf or from a flying leap off some cliff but by wading into a lagoon, a sheltered body of shallow, coastal waters: a characteristic haunt of manatees.

So from zoological and linguistic evidence, we surmise that the manatee was a maternal symbol, and from iconographic evidence we see that this creature was visually conflated with dogs in the Huecoid series, perhaps part of a canine-sirenian dyad related to water in the northern Lesser Antilles. Finally, from the Taíno narratives of

Opiyelguobirán, the dog spirit ultimately takes refuge in the littoral waters, confirming an aquatic haunt of the dog spirit, completing the link between dogs, water and manatees. But can we say that the *manatí* is a “sea-dog zemi” as it is a “sea-mother”? Is the connection between the spirit world of this sea-dog zemi and the role of mothering one that speaks of ancestors (i.e., spirits and parents)?¹⁵⁵ Huecoid manatee-dog adornos (as in figure 4.38 and others I have seen in Guadeloupe) would seem to affirm these sea-spirit-ancestor concepts. If we knew with any assuredness what these manatee-dog vessels once contained we might have a yet more convincing hypothesis.

Possible Functions of Saladoid Manatee Vessels

As with dog ceramics, there is very little indication of the type of vessels to which Saladoid manatee adornos were once attached. These mostly knob-like adornos have neatly snapped off of their respective pots, providing not even a wall fragment that might indicate part of a vessel’s depth, angle or shape. Huecoid manatees seem to have been attached to oblong bowls. As with dogs, to which they seem symbolically and perhaps mythically related, manatees may have adorned water vessels. The difference between these two zoomorphic ritual water containers might have been their gender associations, with dogs (especially hunting dogs) being ancestrally masculine and manatees, feminine.

¹⁵⁵ Pané, *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians*, 9-10. There may be a secondary mythic reference suggesting manatees as ancestral spirits. In the narrative of the itinerant culture hero, Guahayona, a woman beckons to the protagonist from the bottom of the sea. Perhaps she is an anthropomorphized manatee. The protagonist longs for her and must enter a prenuptial exile at her request for which she gives him medicine to cure his syphilitic lesions (for Guahayona is a *caracaracol* like Deminán). During their brief marriage, Guabonito, the marine bride plies her husband, Guahayona, with stone, shell and gold ornaments before they part ways. He finally continues on his journey to his home in Hispaniola and she returns to the watery deep. This rich tale is longer than reported here, with episodes before and after the encounter with Guabonito. Other parts of the narrative are briefly treated in Chapter Six.

The Twilight of Felines in Saladoid Ceramics

Felines are exceedingly scarce in Saladoid ceramics in both the Antilles and the Lower Orinoco. Quite unlike most other tropical lowland cultures, the Saladoid potters seem to have ascribed little symbolic importance to felines in their ceramics. At the large collection of Lower Orinoco ceramics at Yale's Peabody Museum of Natural History, I found only two identifiable feline adornos and one great ceramic claw, perhaps of a jaguar (figures 2.17 *right* and 4.42 *left and center*). Cats were not an important part of the Caribbean's faunal environment so, unsurprisingly, were not reflected in the iconography of most islands. But the Saladoid mainland is more anomalous in that its visual culture as a whole affords no importance to its endemic felines. The reasons for this are not the focus of this study but a fascinating subject.

The roles of awesome cats as the unruly spirits of the rainforest; solar symbols and the powerful, man-eating originators of fire and hunting weapons; protector shamans of the forest; and the original masters of the earth before human ascendancy were abrogated culturally on the Saladoid mainland and both culturally and naturally irrelevant in the Saladoid Antilles.¹⁵⁶ Trinidad did have an endemic ocelot (*Felis pardalis*), a smaller wild cat, and maintained cultural and trade contacts with the mainland.¹⁵⁷ But on this island, even in the presence of a smaller wild cat that was still bigger than most dogs, the wan Saladoid interest in South America's feline iconography was the same.

¹⁵⁶ Bingham, *South and Meso-American Mythology A to Z*, 57-59; David M. Jones and Brian L. Molyneaux, *The Mythology of the Americas* (London: Lorenz Books, 2001), 182-187, 208-209; Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Amazonian Cosmos*, 101.

¹⁵⁷ Boomert, "Agricultural Societies in the Continental Caribbean," 156.

The few ceramic felines found in Trinidad and Tobago may have even been trade items from the Lower Orinoco. These rare cats do not hail from the early Antillean Saladoid but rather a period of increased, direct Barrancoid contact with the Lesser Antilles around the fourth to sixth centuries CE (figures 4.41 and 4.42 *right*).¹⁵⁸ The absence of ceramic cat imagery north of Tobago is not automatic proof of that animal's lack of importance. The case with canines suggests that a zoomorphic symbol might lead a full life outside the ceramic arts. Yet, throughout the Antilles, and from the Saladoid to Taíno period, there is apparently no sustained interest in depicting felines in any material. Cats are absent also from any recorded oral tradition of the Antilles. Neglected since Barrancas, felines took no place in the mythic imagination of the Saladoid islanders.

Trinidadian, Tobagonian and Grenadian Saladoid potters from Palo Seco to Pearls seemed to have turned away from some iconic South American mammals while retaining some unlikely candidates. As with armadillos, a mainland zoomorph with savage claws, rivaling the absent felines, unexpectedly persisted in the Windward Islands Saladoid, even if this zoomorphic retention had neither a fang nor even a tooth in its head.

Anteaters

The Anteater in Nature

Of the four species of anteaters unique to the Americas, all are from South America. Only two are native to any part of the Antilles. Trinidad is the one island with

¹⁵⁸ From labels of the “Barrancan Saladoid” display of the Peter Harris Collection at Trinidad and Tobago’s Pointe-a-Pierre Wildfowl Trust, where the jaguar vessel illustrated here is exhibited. In the collection’s labels, the jaguar pot is described by archaeologist Peter Harris as having a crushed quartz temper, which suggests importation from the Orinoco Delta.

archaeological remains and an extant population of these unique edentates (animals with no teeth), the *Tamandua longicaudata* (also known as *Tamandua tetradactyla*) or lesser anteater and the giant anteater (*Myrmecophaga tridactyla*).¹⁵⁹ Anteaters are of the mammal families *Myrmecophagidae* and *Cyclopedidae*, but they also are called *vermilinguas* for their long, thin tongues. They appear to walk precariously on the knuckles of their three and four-toed feet.¹⁶⁰ From species to species, anteaters vary widely in size. The small silky anteater (*Cyclopes didactylus*) weighs only 3.1 to 9.2 ounces while the giant anteater can weigh as much as 86 pounds. The latter sports bold stripes up its face and body, giving an aerodynamic streamline to its otherwise shaggy appearance (figure 6).¹⁶¹ The tail of a tree-climbing anteater (i.e., a silky anteater or tamandua) is pre-hensile, functioning as an extra limb. The giant anteater, by contrast, is terrestrial and has no need of such a tail. Its hulking size, from neck to tail, is covered in long, salt-and-pepper colored hairs.

Anteaters forage for food both by day and early evening. Their diet consists of ants and termites, but giant anteaters feed on beetle larvae and bees as well. Their powerful claws are used to rip open the walls of insect nests, and as they insinuate their conical noses into the broken nest, they dart their long, sticky, spiny tongues further inside to extract the succulent prey.¹⁶² As insects are too small to chew, anteaters need no

¹⁵⁹ Lord, *Mammals of South America*, 148; Suttly, *Fauna of the Caribbean*, 64.

¹⁶⁰ Lord, *Mammals of South America*, 17-18. The Latin names of these species can sometimes contraindicate the number of toes they actually have with, say, the *Tamandua tetradactyla* species actually possessing five toes on its hind legs and the *Myrmecophaga tridactyla* possessing four toes, but with one radically smaller than the other three and not prodigiously clawed as are those.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² Lévi-Strauss, *From Honey to Ashes*, 134. The rough tongues of anteaters are used by Amerindians as files.

teeth. As toothless insectivores, giant anteaters seem surprisingly unconcerned with predators in their daily activities. They are known to carelessly sleep in the open savannah in the middle of the day, shading themselves from the blazing sun with their big, bushy tails. They are sometimes mistaken for clumps of grass.¹⁶³

One of the reasons anteaters sleep often is to conserve energy. Sucking out their prey from broken nests, they ingest a great deal of those earthen nests, which are of no nutritional value. They have evolved to burn fewer calories than animals of comparable size as they digest their food and the accompanying detritus. A slow metabolism with a low body temperature to match (ranging from 91-95°F, some 5 degrees under that of mammals of comparable size) compensates for the low nutritional intake.¹⁶⁴ The reason they are so unconcerned with predators is that few would dare to attack them. Zoologists explain that when these toothless insectivores are attacked, they rear up on their hind legs and with deadly claws swipe at or seize even the mightiest predators, including jaguars and pumas, sometimes disemboweling them.¹⁶⁵

Incidences and Aesthetics of Saladoid Anteater Ceramics

The depictions of anteaters in Saladoid pottery are largely confined to Venezuela, Trinidad and Tobago (Appendix 1, Chart 1). In the two islands, they are an obvious extension of the Saladoid iconography of Venezuela as they are an extension of the South

¹⁶³ Lord, *Mammals of South America*, 19, 21.

¹⁶⁴ Jeffrey P. Cohn, "The Allure of Anteaters," *Américas* 59, no. 6 (November/December 2007): 8-9.

¹⁶⁵ Lord, *Mammals of South America*, 19, 21; Peter G. Roe, "Art as Performance," in *Arts of the Amazon*, ed. Barbara Braun (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 108. For a discussion of the anteater as a symbolic nemesis of the jaguar see the section "The Anteater as the Anti-Jaguar" in Appendix 2.

American faunal range that occurs in Trinidad (figure 4.43). Tobago seems to have kept up the Lower Orinoco anteater iconography through trade or circuitous travel either with Trinidad or directly with the mainland, since it has no endemic anteaters of its own. The anteater adornos found in collections in Trinidad and Tobago seem to depict the native Trinidadian anteater species that includes the giant anteater.¹⁶⁶ The portrayals capture the animal's most striking facial feature, its elongated, downward curving nose. Adornos from Venezuela to Tobago consistently incorporate this long, arching snout into the D-strap handle of vessels (compare figures 4.43. and 4.44.). All other anteater traits seem interchangeable between species of anteaters. Anteater D-strap handles can feature the animal looking down from the rim or up towards it. While I have located no intact anteater pots, the vessels in question are evidently bowls, perhaps of the type seen in figure 2.28. Some scant indication of this bowl-shape can be seen in the anteater D-strap and vessel fragment in figure 4.43 *right*. Compared to the smoothed and once painted Saladoid adorno in figure 4.43 *left*, this adorno is rough with crushed shell temper plainly visible. In both these adornos and others, the anteater head is located just at the rim of the bowl, causing the round vessel to approximate the body of the animal.

Inebriation and Somnambulation in Mainland Anteater Narratives

We have no Trinidadian anteater narratives collected by Raleigh or others who visited that island in early colonial times. However, in many South American legends, as in Saladoid depictions, anteater species are generalized except when giant anteaters are

¹⁶⁶ These collections are: University of the West Indies Archaeology Centre, the National Museum and Art Gallery in Trinidad, and the Tobago Museum.

singled out by name. So any mainland anteater legend might help elucidate the symbolic value of these unique creatures in the Lower Orinoco and southernmost Windwards.

Throughout the mainland, anteaters have a recurring association with the acts of inhaling hallucinogens and aimlessly wandering, which are often related to each other. A Barasana legend about the origin of the anteater's tail links the creature to the aforementioned themes: primordial demigods of thunder (called *Ayawa*), unable to separate night from day, found Anteater laughing at their ineptitude. Angered by his insolence, they addled his mind with spiked tobacco snuff and chased him off.¹⁶⁷

A narrative of the Arawakan-speaking Iranxe people again couples the anteater with the snorting of laced tobacco, this time intended as an instrument of revenge. A man abandons his enemy in a tall tree, running off with the ladder. Stranded there, the victim runs out of food and becomes emaciated and thirsty. A monkey gives him water and a vulture finally lifts him out of the tree, flying him off to the heavenly vulture realm. There, the man is given the first tobacco snuff, which is separated into a sweet (enlightening) and toxic (maddening) variety, one for meditation and the other for poison. With the vulture's blessings, the human returns to his village and punishes his betrayer.¹⁶⁸

Like the Barasana "Thunders," he stupefies the insolent enemy with poisonous tobacco. But in this narrative, it is after inhaling the tobacco that the enemy turns into an anteater. With his head spinning, the anteater lumbers away from the village and eventually passes out. While sleeping in broad daylight he is found by his pursuer and

¹⁶⁷ Hugh-Jones, *The Palm and the Pleiades*, 267-268.

¹⁶⁸ Lévi-Strauss, *From Honey to Ashes*, 61.

slain.¹⁶⁹ The fact that the Iranxe live in the Southwestern Amazon near the Brazilian-Bolivian border, almost a thousand miles away from the Barasana, seems to confirm the anteater's position in the mythology of tobacco.¹⁷⁰ Of course, relating the act of inhaling one's poison or sustenance to the behavior of anteaters is no great feat.

In the narratives of the Iranxe and Barasana (above) but also the Timbira and Tacana, anteaters sniff the wrong snuff and wander around confused and inebriated.¹⁷¹ Both the inhaling and the bumbling about are based on the animal's haphazard foraging.

Anteaters and Gender

Reichel-Dolmatoff describes the anteater as a phallic symbol of some Tucuna-speaking people of the northwestern Amazon. However, anteaters actually have very small penises with internal testes, and so, from mere observation, they seem to have no genitals at all.¹⁷² This is one reason they are widely considered genderless and parthenogenic by South American indigenes. A Tacana narrative tells of an errant father-in-law who is cursed by the tribal guardian spirit, Chibute, to a life of solitary, endless wandering, one in which he would even bear children by himself.¹⁷³ In other narratives

¹⁶⁹ Lévi-Strauss, *From Honey to Ashes*, 61.

¹⁷⁰ Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 66-69; Lévi-Strauss, *Honey to Ashes*, 61. Tobacco in these tales is a cultural boon, a civilized attribute, a sustenance for the mind. The idea of a cultural gift brought back by an avenging hero from his mysterious, lonesome sojourn in nature (which starts with an ordeal, imposed by an enemy, in an elevated place) is a common one in Amazonian narratives. Kayapo and Apinaye lore renders this cultural gift as fire, given by the jaguar who rescues the hero from a high cliff. In the Iranxe narrative, however, it is the vulture (another fearsome carnivore, but in this case from the sky realm) that rescues and instructs the human, and his cultural gift is tobacco. Thus the jaguar gives fire for cooking and building up the body, and the vulture gives tobacco for deepening the mind/spirit.

¹⁷¹ Lévi-Strauss, *From Honey to Ashes*, 126-127.

¹⁷² Cohn, "The Allure of Anteaters," 8; Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Amazonian Cosmos*, 198.

¹⁷³ These are anteater behaviors coupled with a belief about anteater gender.

the parthenogenic protagonist is considered slightly more female.¹⁷⁴ It is possible then that anteaters represented either a union of male and female principles or a pre-gender/post-gender absence of both. “Anteater parthenos” raises some interesting possibilities as to the ritual use of vessels bearing their likeness. Since gender roles among tropical lowland cultures are usually quite clearly defined, the sexless anteater is not likely to have been a role model of any sort. But it may have been seen as an originator or arbitrator of gender, as the possessor of both sexes.

This sexual selection seems confirmed in a practice of the southern Brazilian Kaingang-Coroado ethnicity. When a woman is pregnant, her relatives use a species of small anteater to divine the gender of her unborn child by holding out a wooden club to the animal. If it grasps the club, the child will be born male.¹⁷⁵ Likewise, in the Kayapo autumn naming ceremony, gender roles are reversed as the women don the elaborate feather headdresses of their men-folk and many of the men enter the settlement dressed in anteater costumes, swiping at women and children with sharp “claws” made from the mandibles of piranhas lashed to their hands. The ceremony ends with the assignment of names, and therefore proper gender roles, to the initiated children after which the men reclaim their feather headdresses from the women.¹⁷⁶ Anteaters therefore preside over a gender-bending festival, which culminates in the final establishment of gender identity.

Possible Functions of Anteater Ceramics

¹⁷⁴ Lévi-Strauss, *From Honey to Ashes*, 132-133, 346-347, 357.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 350. Lévi-Strauss describes the ritual as not so much intended to divine which gender the child will be as whether or not it is male.

¹⁷⁶ Roe, “Art as Performance,” 108.

The mythic associations between inebriated wandering and gender assignment raise interesting interpretational problems. Since mythic anteaters snort hallucinogens and go doddering off, the appearance of anteaters on Saladoid ceramics made by people known to have used ceramic vessels to hold their hallucinogens piques interest. Might anteater pots have been shamanic paraphernalia for some Saladoid hallucinogenic ritual? The act of sniffing would liken the shaman to an anteater. The anteater's confused wandering may have been part of both oral tradition and actual shamanic practice for the Saladoid-era potters. Saladoid shamans or chiefs may not have only fallen unconscious or sat staring in the manner of Taíno ones (figure 2.2), but also physically wandered off into the forest in a treacherous Saladoid combination of "walkabout" and "vision quest."

On the other hand, the neuter symbolism of anteaters may have related them closely to children or adolescents before the latter's proper initiation into their adult gender roles of fishing, gardening, hunting, weaving and so on. Like its *Xenartha* cousin, the armadillo, the anteater's appearance on mainland, Trinidadian and Tobagonian pottery could have related to gender divination. Perhaps anteater vessels held prescribed foods or narcotics used in gender assignment rituals. The vessels may also have been heirlooms given on the birth of a baby of a particular gender. These are all speculations based on the cultural association between anteaters, intoxicated wandering and "pre-gender." It might be suggested that armadillo vessels were associated with feminine initiations and anteater vessels with masculine ones.

Anteater Ceramic Iconography in Isolation

In Trinidad and Tobago, the anteater seems to have been a popular holdover from South America, even as the other large species so central to Amazonian and Orinokian art and lore were abandoned in favor of other Antillean species. The question then is why

was the anteater retained in Trinidad and Tobago while its important South American counterparts, such as the feline, were neglected? The animal here was obviously not part of some anteater-jaguar binary as discussed in Appendix 2. While a few narratives of the anaconda may have been retained, it too was eclipsed by other reptiles and amphibians in the Antilles. In the shifting emphases from crocodilians to turtles, and from jaguars, pumas and ocelots to opossums, armadillos and others, and then the ultimate whittling down of some of these zoomorphic characters too, the anteater seems a lone holdout.

On the other hand, depictions of the anteater would not be carried any further than Saladoid Tobago, so its iconography did not hold out very far. Insular anteater ceramics might have been retained for quite different reasons. They may have been a singular retention of a South American and Trinidadian motif standing stubbornly against the tide of the transition to a more Antillean iconography. They may give evidence of a unique island cult local to Trinidad and Tobago coexisting with, rather than resisting, the overall transition to the large marine reptiles, aquatic mammals, and other new zoomorphs that we encounter in this chapter and Chapters Five and Six.

The local focus on anteaters in Trinidad and Tobago is mirrored in similarly peculiar interests, and disinterests, of other islands. There was apparently an inversion of the reptile-mammal majority in Barbados; a lack of interest in bats in Antigua; a preoccupation with owls in Martinique and other variations in the incidence of species from island to island. Perhaps these are variations not just in ceramic adornment but mythological themes as well, which gives a complex impression of the Lesser Antillean iconographic, cultural and religious landscape during the Saladoid period.

Rodents and Procyons

The Antilles has been home to many kinds of rodents, from spiny rats and guinea pigs to agoutis and pacas. Over sixty endemic species have lived in these islands, many persisting through the predations of various Amerindian arrivals. Only thirteen species have survived to this day.¹⁷⁷ Contrasting with their variety and regular appearance in the natural environment, rodents were virtually absent from the iconographic program of the Antilles throughout all Ceramic periods. Ironically, the only rodent image I have discovered more than once are of a species that is not found in the archipelago. Singular adornos from Trinidad and Tobago have the narrow face, rectangular profile and high nose of the capybara (figure 4.45). These seem to be fragments of vessels brought from the Lower Orinoco by traders or migrants. Matching the dearth of rodent imagery, there are no known narratives of these animals from the Pre-Columbian Antilles. In fact rodents, even enormous ones like the capybara, also are quite uncommon as important characters in South American legends, relegated to ancillary or supporting roles.¹⁷⁸

The one incontrovertible rat adorno I found, with the mouth diagnostically tucked far below and behind the nose was quite naturalistic and approximately life-sized if intended to represent the endemic rice rat or spiny rat (*Oryzomyini* or *Mesomys* species) of the region (figure 4.46). This Antiguan specimen raised a question about the role of secularity and creative license in the Saladoid, not in the style of the depiction but in the

¹⁷⁷ Watlington, "The Physical Environment," 34-41; Charles Woods, Rafael Borroto Paéz and C. William Kilpatrick, "Insular Patterns and Radiations of West Indian Rodents," in *Biogeography of the West Indies: Patterns and Perspectives*, eds. Charles A. Woods and Florence E. Sergile (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2001), 338.

¹⁷⁸ Lévi-Strauss, *From Honey to Ashes*, 113.

potter's choice of a subject with little apparent mythological or ritual cachet. This singular Antiguan rat may be the first of others yet to be excavated but is probably a unique expression of an individual ceramicist working in a naturalistic mode outside iconographic canons of the Saladoid.

It is not that people of the Antilles and South America had little interest in rodents. Amerindians introduced several species of rodents to the Antilles.¹⁷⁹ But seemingly more than any symbolic value rodents may have had, they were primarily a food source throughout the mainland and the Antilles.¹⁸⁰ This is perhaps their only relevance to ceramic food vessels.

Like rodents, raccoons and coatis seem to make only cameo appearances in Saladoid ceramics, incommensurate with their presence (albeit in low numbers) in the faunal environment. Objects like the ones illustrated in figures 4.47 and 4.48 show the distinctive eye-markings of raccoons (genus *Procyon cancrivorus*, figure 7) and coatis (*Nasua nasua*) but, like the Antiguan rat, these are singular specimens with no known cultural context. From their general configuration, they might even be dogs or opossums of the kind illustrated in figures 4.18 *right* and 4.28. Research into traditional narratives of these more rare mammal zoomorphs is collected in Appendix 2. Legends suggest them as zoic clan symbols, a concept investigated for parrots in Chapter Five.

Other Mammals

¹⁷⁹ Boomert, "Agricultural Societies in the Continental Caribbean," 156; Wing, "Native American Use of Animals in the Caribbean," 493.

¹⁸⁰ Rouse, *The Taínos*, 13.

There are other Antillean mammals that were part of the Saladoid-era natural environment, but most of these are not featured in ceramic adornos. Most notable of these land mammals are Trinidad's red brocket deer (*Mazama Americana*), lowland tapir (*Tapirus terrestris*) and Brazilian porcupine (*Coendou prehensilis*). I have located no examples of adornos that might represent the handsome features of deer but Arie Boomert mentions the depiction of porcupines in some Trinidadian adornos.¹⁸¹ The unusual acute angle at the juncture of its round forehead and upturned snout makes the profile of the porcupine more distinctive than a bat's. These features were found in only two of the hundreds of adornos I surveyed throughout the Lesser Antilles. One was from Trinidad and the other from Tobago (figures 4.49 *left* and *right*). Boomert also mentions possible peccary and tapir adornos in Trinidad, and certainly, such imposing and, in the case of peccaries, dangerous creatures might very well have figured as part of Saladoid lore and symbology as they still do in the Amazon. But I found none of the former and few that might be clearly identified as the latter (Appendix 1, Chart 1).¹⁸² Adornos I originally identified as peccaries turned out to be more likely bats and manatees, their snouts being leaf-noses and their lack of ears being diagnostic of manatees. The adornos with long, pointed and down-turned noses usually bear stronger resemblance to anteaters than tapirs, but if more are discovered, especially with more conspicuous ears, they will warrant re-investigation.

With manatees and sea turtles (discussed in Chapter Six) as a rich and multivalent addition to their pantheon of divinities and symbols, the insular Saladoid potters seemed

¹⁸¹ Boomert, "Agricultural Societies in the Continental Caribbean," 154.

¹⁸² See "The Peccary in Nature, Narrative and Ceramics" in Appendix 2 for possible significance of that animal during the Saladoid era.

to have had little iconographic interest in other marine creatures, including spectacular mammals such as dolphins and whales. Riverine species of dolphins can be found in South America, but very few mythic or artistic allusions to them can be found.¹⁸³ In the Antilles, there are indeed rare and unusual adornos that might represent dolphins and other cetaceans but they are usually ambiguous. Some could easily be reptiles or even land mammals (figure 4.50 and 4.51). Only a single adorno from the island of Mustique in the Grenadines is unmistakably a dolphin (figure 4.52). Though simply rendered, this little dolphin adorno suggests that dolphins might have had some symbolic importance to Antilleans. It is complete with all its fins, including the horizontal flukes of a cetacean's tail, unlike the vertical tail of a fish (compare to figure 8). This single adorno also helps to establish a morphology against which other possible dolphin images might be compared if discovered in the future. At such time it would become necessary to interpret the meaning of this interesting zoomorph.

Conclusions

The reader will note in this chapter, a general confinement to the Windward Islands. The southern Windward Islands present far more mammal imagery than any other area in the archipelago (Appendix 1, Chart 2). This is the iconographic buffer zone of mammal species native only to the islands closest to South America. Images of terrestrial mammals illustrate both a connection with South America and the emergence

¹⁸³ John Kricher, *A Neotropical Companion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 206; Lord, *Mammals of South America*, 7-8, 137-138. Rexford Lord notes the existence of Amazonian manatees and river dolphins in South America and John Kricher mentions widely held Amazonian folk beliefs that the pink river dolphin (*Inia geoffrensis*) or "boto" seduces young women in nighttime trysts, leaving them pregnant by fathers they cannot name, and that men who wear an ear of this creature on their wrist are endowed with prolonged erections. Thus dolphins would seem to be a most masculine symbol contrasting with the feminine symbolism of the doting mother manatee.

of distinct emphases within a corpus of symbols established there. The Windwards are the only islands where mammal motifs occur with comparable frequency to those of birds and reptiles. This is a ratio they share with the mainland Saladoid, where mammal prominence is even more pronounced, spelling mammal dominance, in fact. But north of Trinidad, feathered and scaly creatures immediately began to gain.

Among the Windward “buffer zone zoomorphs” are the moderate numbers of Saladoid opossum and armadillo images. These seem to have been Windward representations of perennial Antillean ideas about rain, agriculture, mythic mothers and quadruplets. These ideas would be transmuted into other zoomorphs and narratives with the passage of time and inter-island travel. Bats were an Antillean universal, retained across various ceramic phases, reassigned to frugivorous island eschatology from their punitive mainland role. In the interactions between the Saladoid and Huecoid Lesser Antilles, the dog begins its own transmutation from what appears to have been a more secular ceramic adorno to the deified zemi it would become in Taíno culture. This seems a departure from Venezuelan Saladoid applications of the dog motif.

Despite such departures, few species better illustrate the lingering, though precarious, connections to the South American mainland as the retention of the anteater in the iconography of Saladoid Trinidad and Tobago in similar numbers to those in Venezuela. The reassignment of dog motifs and the retention of anteater ones might suggest that the Saladoid in the Windward Islands and beyond was merely a variant of the mainland’s. But ceramic manatees, though they are not numerous on any island, are completely unprecedented in mainland iconography. These manatees indicate the emergence of new interests of Saladoid potters in the Caribbean islands.

In the imagery of mammals, perhaps more than in any other zoomorphic class, the island-mainland transitions are evident. Some mammal motifs were retained, even beyond their habitat and their relevance, as with the anteater. Others were transformed from visual motif to mythic trope as with the armadillo from Saladoid to Taíno periods. Yet others, such as bats, became widespread motifs throughout Antillean ceramics. Even when mostly confined to the southern Windwards, land mammal imagery provides the most varied range of symbolic ideas and the most varied set of transformations thereof from mainland to island iconography and thought. In the case of birds, reptiles and amphibians we see increased modifications of and departures from the mainland's artistic and cultural framework. And we see these transitions across a much broader area of the Lesser Antilles. What began as some relatively modest divergences in familiar mammal iconography became full-fledged cultural distinctions in the iconography of birds, reptiles and amphibians.

CHAPTER FIVE

ZOOMORPHIC ICONOGRAPHY: BIRDS

The Caribbean pulses with beating wings and birdsong. Yet, the voices of hundreds of bird species today is a relative hush compared to those ancient times before the widespread deforestation that established colonial-era sugar cane, tobacco and other plantation economies. Still, the major forest species that caught the attention of Saladoid-era potters and sculptors still are extant in some number; many marine and swamp bird species have survived the catastrophe that befell their inland counterparts; and there are spectacular species that seem never to have been adopted into Saladoid ceramic imagery at all, causing us to wonder just what makes a particular bird a good Saladoid symbol.

As representatives of the heavenly realms, specific celestial bodies, and/or the somnolent, entranced or post-mortem soul in flight, birds have always appeared in the Amerindian arts.¹ Bird images are numerous in Saladoid ceramics throughout the Lesser Antilles and the Lower Orinoco. Although some adornos that appear bird-like could easily be turtles, lizards or other reptiles, clearly rendered parrots, pelicans, owls and others birds are common. Bird imagery, particularly that of non-endemic vultures, also extends to the contemporaneous Huecoid culture of the Leeward Islands and Puerto Rico. Also, beyond these early Ceramic cultures, the Taíno and Island Caribs accorded birds important roles in their ceramics, sculpture, narrative traditions, and probably song.² Only

¹ Peter G. Roe, *The Cosmic Zygote: Cosmology in the Amazon Basin* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1984), 89-90, 115, 122-123, 132, 183, 211-212, 260.

² Fatima Bercht, ed., *Taíno: Pre-Columbian Art and Culture from the Caribbean* (New York: El Museo del Barrio/Monacelli Press, 1997). Mainland Carib songs about the swallow are mentioned in the section on "Songbirds and Other Avifauna in Saladoid Imagery."

a few, but telling, narratives featuring birds survive from the Taíno era Antilles. Comparisons between these and mainland narratives, and between Saladoid, Taíno and mainland arts, are an important part of this chapter. Since there was always a Pre-Columbian Antillean interest in avifauna, regional preferences in style and species can indicate environmental and cultural differences within the Saladoid sphere.

Incidences and Aesthetics of Avian Images in the Saladoid Antilles

Bird ceramics enjoyed greater prominence than those of mammals in the Saladoid Antilles beyond the southern Windward Islands. Overall, birds were the second most numerous zoomorphic class in the pottery of the Saladoid Antilles (Appendix 1, Chart 2). The variety of Caribbean birds provided inspiration for both the ceramicist and the ritual specialist. But colorful and spectacular birds were not necessarily the species that interested Saladoid-era symbolic thought.

Depicting birds in clay can sometimes strain the limits of that medium. The long legs and needle-like beaks of swamp birds are not likely topics for a potter. Likewise, the long tail streamers of many Caribbean birds present some difficulty in a material that if worked too finely will simply snap off. Elongated bird features were sometimes abbreviated, beaks remained closed, and attenuated features were often incised rather than modeled (figure 5.27 to 5.30, 5.32, 5.42 and 5.43). But occasionally a long pointed bill was delicately rendered, and cleverly looped into a strap handle by the ceramicist in brazen defiance of the fired clay medium (figures 5.5, 5.44 and 5.46).

Ceramics, however finely decorated, are utilitarian by nature, even if that utility is ceremonial. So delicate appendages seemingly push the ceramic beyond the sphere of

mere functionality into the realm of the aesthetic and symbolic. Thus we see avian adornos, pots and pot fragments that are less adventurously, more functionally rendered, perhaps with long beaks tucked into their feathers, towering necks accordion-folded against bodies or spindly legs flexed beneath them (figure 5.32). But we know that these vessels are just modest, hardier examples of a wider aesthetic tradition that lends such great significance to the winged that it is sometimes willing to risk the structural integrity of the pot in favor of its symbolism (figure 5.44).

It is probable that birds and bats, winged creatures, also are represented in the two-dimensional imagery of Saladoid polychrome vessels. I will investigate these motifs in later research as they are beyond the admitted sculptural interest of this study. The symbolic importance of birds is unambiguous in modeled Saladoid pottery. This is no surprise as birds are an essential part of the zoic pantheon of the American tropical lowlands. Birds accompany the shaman's spirit on its ethereal journeys, guiding him through hierarchic celestial spheres. Different species of birds can signal different trance states, and birds often figure in narratives as messengers or winged benefactors who bring sacred tools and cultural knowledge to humanity from far-off places accessible only through physical or psychic flight. Among these winged celestial emissaries, few were considered more intimate with the unseen noumenon than the birds of the night.

Nightbirds: Owls, Oilbirds and Nightjars

Isomorphic Nightbirds in Nature

Among the squadrons of webbed bat wings occluding the stars of the Antillean night, larger wings beat with slower, feathery concussions. Against the dark foliage, palid

faces and splayed wingtips glide, lift and alight on a tree branch. Above folded wings, the owl's large eyes survey the darkness, discerning a world invisible to most mortals.

Occasionally on that tree branch, it is a lifeless bat that the owl clutches in its talons.

Unlike the bat's iconic silhouette, the nightbird's large eyes and round, sometimes heart-shaped face are its emblems.³ Above the clicks, whirrs and otherwise inaudible repertoire of bats, owls shatter the din of the tropic nocturne with a terrifying screech.⁴ Combined with its swooping predation of bats and all manner of night crawlers, that piercing shriek heralds the owl as lord of the night sky.

Different species of owls inhabit different parts of the Lesser Antilles. Among them are Puerto Rican and tropical screech owls (*Otus nudipes* and *Otus choliba*), which are found in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, and Trinidad respectively, and the barn owl (*Tyto alba*), endemic to several islands from Dominica to Trinidad.⁵ Lesser Antillean oilbirds and nightjars (including nighthawks), all nocturnal birds with resemblances to owls, would likely have been classed together as "nightbirds" by ancient Antilleans.

Several species of Caribbean nightbirds might have been perceived by Ceramic Amerindians as an overall single class of ocular, owl-like beings: owls themselves, nightjars (which includes poorwills) and night hawks, and oilbirds, but also species such as the potoos and pauraques of Trinidad. Saladoid pottery seldom distinguishes between

³ Martyn Kenefick et al., *Field Guide to the Birds of Trinidad & Tobago* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 144; Herbert Raffaele et al., *A Guide to the Birds of the West Indies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 318-321. For example, large, startling yellow or orange colored eyes and a pale heart shaped face are traits of the barn owl (*Tyto alba*).

⁴ Peter Evans, *Birds of the Eastern Caribbean* (Oxford, U.K.: Macmillan Caribbean, 1990), 81; Kenefick et al., *Field Guide to the Birds of Trinidad & Tobago*, 144; Raffaele et al., *A Guide to the Birds of the West Indies*, 318-321.

⁵ Evans, *Birds of the Eastern Caribbean*, 81-83. Richard ffrench, *Birds of Trinidad and Tobago* (Oxford, U.K.: Macmillan Publishers, 2004), 118-119.

species of ocular nightbirds with decurved beaks. In all these avian families the nocturnal bird's face is somewhat round, with a sharp and down-curved beak and either large, reflective eyes or markings around the eyes that mimic the ocular appearance of owls.⁶ At night the reflective eyes of owls and oilbirds would be virtually indistinguishable, especially to a startled observer. Consequently, depictions of nightbirds in Saladoid art tend to minimize any differences between them even if oral tradition and culture might have made those distinctions clear. Interestingly, unique aspects of each species seem to have contributed to a composite nightbird mystique, mythos and symbolism.

The barn owl (*Tyto alba*) nests in the hollows of trees, caves, and as its name suggests, abandoned or unfrequented man-made structures. This is a large owl, standing at 12-15 inches. Its flat, heart-shaped face, beaming white against its brown, speckled body or the dark night and its relatively short curved beak distinguishes it from other owl species in the region (figure 9). It hunts over open ground, feeding on rodents and other small animals but also bats. Its call is a deafening scream but it also makes loud clicking noises.⁷ The endemic screech owls of the Lesser Antilles are the Puerto Rican screech owl (*Otus nudipes*) in the north and the tropical screech owl (*Otus choliba*) in the south, the former distinguished by its uncharacteristic lack of ear tufts. Screech owls are half the size of barn owls. Their habitats vary from low-density woods and the edges of forests near open ground, to scrubland and even coastal thickets. They have circular, flattish faces and, in the *choliba* species, the heavy, arched brows swoop upwards into their ear tufts (figure 10). Their feathery faces can almost totally obscure their curved beaks. They

⁶ Kenefick et al., *Field Guide to the Birds of Trinidad & Tobago*, 144-151.

⁷ Evans, *Birds of the Eastern Caribbean*, 81-82.

are of a grayish brown color with dark vertical streaks. They feed on rodents and insects beginning at dusk and ending at dawn.⁸ Their name derives from their piercing, unnerving screech.

There are three extant species of nightjars in the Lesser Antilles. These are the St. Lucia nightjar (*Caprimulgus otiosus*) confined to that island today; the rufous nightjar (*Caprimulgus rufus*) found today in Trinidad only; and the white-tailed nightjar (*Caprimulgus cayennensis*) found in Martinique, Barbados and Trinidad.⁹ Nightjars are a little larger than screech owls, between nine and 11 inches long. The distribution of these species may have been different in Pre-Columbian times, explaining why one of the clearest ceramic depictions of a nightjar, not conflated with owl imagery, occurs in the Guadeloupien Archipelago (figure 5.7). Nightjars are mostly brown birds. Species differentiate by various kinds of black and brown horizontal banding and barring on their plumage. Like owls, nightjars have large heads with arched brows over their eyes joined in the middle by the beak. But their bills curve downward only slightly, and their faces recede in two planes from that bill, unlike the flatter faces of owls (figure 12). Nightjars inhabit dry scrubland and grassy slopes. Their nesting is directly on the ground. They feed from dusk into the night on a mainly insect diet. The St. Lucia nightjar has a percussive four-part call with a trailing note at the end, unlike other *caprimulgidae* such as the white-tailed species, which has a plaintive whistling call.¹⁰

⁸ Evans, *Birds of the Eastern Caribbean*, 83; French, *Birds of Trinidad and Tobago*, 118-119.

⁹ Evans, *Birds of the Eastern Caribbean*, 83-84; Kenefick et al., *Field Guide to the Birds of Trinidad & Tobago*, 148.

¹⁰ Ibid.

As fairly large, goggle-eyed hunting birds of the night, nightjars and owls share many similarities, which might make them seem like variants of a single species. Behaviorally, each species seems to overlap with another. For instance, nightjars nest on the ground, unlike in hollows like owls, but they share an insect diet with screech owls. And while tropical screech owls' ear tufts distinguish them from both barn owls and nightjars all three of these species, and indeed all Caribbean owls, feed on rodents. The nightbirds are thus shades of a spectrum, united by their common overall appearance and a range of calls from piercing screeches to mournful cries. The oilbird extends this spectrum yet deeper into the night, across faunal classes into the realm of bats.

There exists only a single species of oilbird, *Steatornis caripensis*. These are relatives of nightjars with some important distinctions. Unlike solitary and sometimes paired owls and nightjars, oilbirds nest in colonies, as do bats. And unlike the greater family of nightjars who nest on the ground, the social oilbirds do so in caves, as do barn owls and bats. Thus the oilbird's distinctions from its own relatives, the nightjars, unites it with owls and bats instead. But oilbirds are a unique species with yet another and unexpected difference from other nightbirds. They are completely frugivorous. The fact that they feed on fruit, instead of insects like nightjars and screech owls, may have caused their original evolutionary separation from insectivorous nightjars proper. In fact, oilbirds are the only frugivorous nightbirds in the world.¹¹ Thus, emerging from caves to dine on fruit by starlight, oilbirds occupy the same habitats and ecological niche as fruit bats. This means they also exhibit the behavior of the nocturnal, chiropteran *opía* in Pané's account

¹¹ ffrench, *Birds of Trinidad and Tobago*, 116-117; Kenefick et al., *Field Guide to the Birds of Trinidad & Tobago*, 148; John Kricher, *A Neotropical Companion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 141.

of late Ceramic eschatology (as discussed in the “Bats” section of Chapter Four).¹²

Uncannily, oilbirds also use echolocation to navigate at night, and are again unique birds in this respect, more bat-like than bird-like.¹³ The close association between nightbirds, as a composite taxon and/or motif, and bats is explored more fully following the discussion of the incidences and aesthetics of nightbirds as a single image set.

Incidences and Aesthetics of Antillean Nightbird Imagery

By far, nightbirds are the most commonly depicted avifauna in Saladoid-era ceramics of the Lesser Antilles (Appendix 1, Chart 1). Trinidad and Tobago show lower numbers of nightbird images than the other major islands of the Lesser Antilles. As a result of its Huecoid sites, such as Morel and others, Guadeloupe’s nightbird counts are more than quadruple that of any other island (Appendix 1, Chart 1).

The Huecoid ceramicists from Vieques to Guadeloupe seem to have had a keen interest in owl iconography, one even greater than that of the Saladoid. Not all of the nightbird ceramic objects found at Morel were Huecoid. Impressive Saladoid nightbirds have been found there as well (compare figures 5.3, 5.4 and 5.6 with figures 5.5, and 5.7). Interestingly, while the Huecoid culture was centered in the north around Vieques, the species of owl commonly referenced in the Huecoid adornos in Guadeloupe is one with

¹² French, *Birds of Trinidad and Tobago*, 116-117; Fray Ramón Pané, *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians*, ed. José Juan Arrom and trans. Susan Griswold (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 99, 17-19.

¹³ Kenefick et al., *Field Guide to the Birds of Trinidad & Tobago*, 148; Kricher, *A Neotropical Companion*, 140-141; Raffaele et al., *A Guide to the Birds of the West Indies*, 318. Echolocation of either bats or owls may not seem an observable behavior to the ancient Amerindian but some echolocation noises are just barely audible without scientific equipment and repeated observation of night creatures by specialists (especially ritual specialists who dwell outside the common night travel taboos of the layman) over millennia would have revealed the purpose for which these sounds are used. Oilbirds are not alone in using sound to locate food. Barn owls listen for their prey with a keen sense of hearing, but this is quite apart from “seeing with sound” as do bats and oilbirds.

ear tufts, most likely the tropical screech owl. Today this bird lives only in Trinidad, far south of Guadeloupe, which indicates either a southern origin for the Huecoid potters, a once wider distribution of the owl species or some Huecoid fascination or familiarity with the south. While I have found isolated Huecoid objects as far south as St. Vincent, I have found none in Trinidad. With no known Huecoid presence in the southern Windwards, the interest of Huecoid potters in a southern bird species outside their territory might bespeak ancestral connections to the Saladoid or adoption of the motif from Saladoid potters.

The pretty birds of the daytime Caribbean were not as important in Saladoid and Huecoid ceramic iconography as the mysterious nightbirds. It might seem surprising that the preponderating species in ceramics were nocturnal ones that were relatively seldom seen. This speaks of the internal life of Saladoid-era ceramicists and the symbolic imperatives of that psycho-spiritual world which bade them and their Huecoid counterparts to fashion nightbirds in such prodigious numbers.

The nightbirds in Saladoid-era ceramics are mostly owl-like, bearing in mind that owls might carry within them the full owl-nightjar-oilbird symbolic conflation, and take the form of adornos or modeled features on vessel walls. These symbols of the afterlife, fashioned on to the rims and faces of vessels referenced the *opías* as ably as any bat imagery. García Arévalo gives a shamanic dimension to Antillean “owl” iconography, describing the bird’s oculate appearance as resembling the skull-like faces of entranced, ascetic shamans, the only humans who conversed with the dead.¹⁴ The almost unnatural,

¹⁴ Manuel A. García Arévalo, “The Bat and the Owl: Nocturnal Images of Death,” in *Taíno: Pre-Columbian Art and Culture from the Caribbean*, ed. Fatima Bercht (New York: El Museo del Barrio/Monacelli Press, 1997), 120.

200-degree rotation of owls' necks would have also given the impression that they surveyed all existence from some transcendent perch between earth and Coaybay, land of the dead. The implied feminine significance that owls have in Amazonid cultures, for their association with the mysterious darkness, would have been appropriate ancestor-symbolism to a matrilineal society as many Arawak communities have been.¹⁵

For creatures well known in South American narratives, owl/oilbird/nightjar symbols are shockingly absent in the Saladoid ceramics of the mainland. Quite the opposite, in the Antilles, nightbird imagery rose to a position of high prominence in the latter half of the Antillean Saladoid (i.e., during the Barrancoid encounter with the Cedrosan phase). At Yale's Peabody Museum of Natural History Anthropology collection, in a survey of over 500 adornos from Barrancas, Los Barrancos and Saladero, I encountered numerous avian adornos that were readily identifiable as vultures, parrots, a few aquatic species and even one harpy eagle (figures 5.16, 5.24, 5.26 and 5.56). But no adorno (except perhaps the harpy eagle) even vaguely recalled an owl's features or body.

It is possible that there were rare owl depictions in the Saladoid Lower Orinoco. At the Museum of Antigua and Barbuda, I found five owl adornos among objects donated by Fred Olsen presumably after his trip to Saladero (figure 5.1).¹⁶ But in their reddish and grayish coloring, and in their style they appear to be from the Lesser Antilles. Their

¹⁵ Fernando Santos-Granero, "The Arawakan Matrix: Ethos, Language, and History in Native South America," in *Comparative Arawakan Histories: Rethinking Language Family and Culture Area*, eds. Jonathan D. Hill and Fernando Santos-Granero (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 46-47; Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Amazonian Cosmos*, 209; Roe, *The Cosmic Zygote*, 260, 303.

¹⁶ During my Antigua field research in summer 2008, archaeologist Reg Murphy mentioned Fred Olsen's visit to one of Rouse's Saladero excavations when I enquired about the contents of an un-labeled drawer at the Museum of Antigua and Barbuda. In this drawer were certain yellowish adornos (compared to the more orange and grayish pastes of Antiguan adornos), which Murphy attested were not from Antigua. Some of these un-catalogued vulture adornos were identical to drawings of mainland adornos that appear in Olsen's *On the Trail of the Arawaks* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974), 231, 252.

rounded heads and slightly raised, perfectly circular eyes, constitute a Lesser Antillean Saladoid sub-style used to depict owls and turtles from Grenada to Vieques (compare figures 5.2 and 5.10 to 6.39 and 6.58). This Saladoid phase does not appear in South America. Their isolation in an Antiguan museum and the fact that no owls have been found among the bulk of the excavated materials from the Lower Orinoco indicates that these nightbird adornos are not from the mainland. Few other species depicted in this survey are entirely absent from the South American Saladoid ceramics. This complete lack of owl-like avian imagery is one of the most important differences between the Antilles and the mainland. Nightbirds seem a uniquely Antillean ceramic motif.

In Saladoid and Huecoid adornos and vessel shapes from the Antilles, nightbirds are instantly recognizable. Antillean Saladoid potters seized upon several features of the owl especially as iconic. There is a high incidence of owl and nightjar imagery in the Leeward Islands, and in Guadeloupe and Martinique, there is considerable variation in how ceramicists chose to typify these birds: the circularity of the eyes; the size of the eyes in relation to the head, eyes often exaggerated further; the distinctive bifurcation of the face by a brow ridge that creates a heart-shaped design surrounding the bird's visage; the protruding, often down-curved beak, even when the ceramicist anthropomorphized the bird with pronounced nostrils located above, below or on the beak; the protruding ear tufts of a screech owl species; and in polychrome examples, color markings in red, black and white that emphasized the plastic qualities of the modeling but which also approximated the brown, black and white marking of many owls, nightjars and oilbirds (figures 5.7 and 5.10). In a few cases, the nightjar (perhaps the St. Lucia nightjar as in figure 12) is identifiably different, though only by a smaller, narrower beak (figure 5.7).

These distinguishing features are not used all at once but are singled out in different depictions, indicating an extended period of interest in Caribbean nightbirds.

Anthropomorphized nightbirds also occur in the ceramics of the Saladoid Antilles. And at least one adorno from Tobago suggests a person wearing an owl mask (figure 5.8). This is quite unlike the typical hybrid adorno in which human and animal features are combined to evoke some state of transformation. The mouth and the eyes of the Tobago anthropomorph are executed in a Barrancoid style (i.e., with eyes like upturned crescents and a pod-like mouth with a single lateral incision) with a beak where a nose might otherwise be, but perhaps a bit higher on the face. A second pair of eyes are located above the crescent-shaped human eyes, but pushed out to the sides of the crown of the head. These owl eyes are circular spirals. Two ear tufts complete this owl head that seems to sit atop the human head in the manner of a cylindrical helmet mask.

This is not a composite of human and nightbird features as, say, in a vessel spout from Guadeloupe (figure 5.9). Rather, the owl face is a superstructure atop the human's head. This image raises an important question about the role of masking in Antillean cultures. Unfortunately there are only passing mentions of Antillean masks in conquest-era records, so brief that it is difficult to ascertain even which materials may have been used to fashion or construct them.¹⁷ Andrés Bernáldez, a royal curate, Archbishop's chaplain and friend of Columbus reported that the admiral returned from his second voyage to the Americas with "crowns, masks, girdles, collars, and many woven articles of cotton, and in all of them the devil was represented in the shape of a monkey or owl's head, or other worse shapes; some carved in wood, some made of cloth of the same

¹⁷ Samuel Eliot Morison, *Admiral of the Ocean Sea: A Life of Christopher Columbus* (New York: Book-of-the-Month Club, 1992), 507.

cotton, or of a precious stone.”¹⁸ Thus, we know that somewhere in the Amerindian inventory that Columbus intended to present to the Spanish Crown were owl and either monkey or stylized anthropomorphic images.

Adjusting for cleric Bernáldez’s religious chauvinism, his diabolical description of the zoomorphs correctly perceived them as artifacts of a competing religion. But we do not know whether these zoomorphic objects were the masks, crowns, belts, “girdles,” collars or pectorals in the inventory. On his first voyage, Columbus himself mentioned “many head-shaped masks, very well carved,” speculating whether they were kept as objects of beauty or actually performed, and noting that some masks were inlaid with gold.¹⁹ His description of masks as “head-shaped” implies they fit over the entire head in the manner of the owl mask in the Tobago Saladoid adorno. Owl maskers might have performed mythic journeys to the land of the dead or owl-shamans may have divined the future accoutered thus. As birds of the night, the time when the world and time itself are inverted, nightbirds might have seemed transformations of the daytime birds (anti-birds), reflected in the dark waters of the underworld.

Nightbirds in Antillean and Mainland Narratives

It might be suggested that the synonymy between nightbirds and death is mostly a colonial folk tradition introduced after the conquest, since even today, the West attributes a certain eeriness to the owl. But owls have borne an eschatological and divinatory symbolism in Amerindian cultures over many centuries and across many regions of the

¹⁸ Samuel Eliot Morison, *Admiral of the Ocean Sea: A Life of Christopher Columbus* (New York: Book-of-the-Month Club, 1992), 505-507.

¹⁹ Bercht, ed., *Taíno*, 170.

Americas. Millennia-old cultures such as the Andean Moche and the Mesoamerican Maya saw these birds as messengers from the underworld, presaging deaths and births.²⁰

Among the native people of the Guianas, as in modern day West Indian folklore, the sight or sound of an owl can portend the death of a loved one or acquaintance.²¹ Roth reported that among the Maruca, Pomeroun and Demerara River Arawaks of Guyana, owl calls were taken to mean that someone was either sick or dying. But Demerara River Amerindians differentiated the quick and long calls of the owl as predicting the birth of a child and the death of an affine respectively.²² Thus the owl's calls served as the arbitrating voice of the fates, announcing life and death. García Arévalo describes owls as heralds of the Lord of Coaybay, the land of the dead, in Taíno eschatology and links them with the bats that function as the mounts of the *opías*, Coaybay's denizens.²³ As haunters

²⁰ Mary Miller and Karl Taube, *The Illustrated Dictionary of the Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 128; Peter G. Roe, *The Cosmic Zygote: Cosmology in the Amazon Basin* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1982), 303.

²¹ French, *Birds of Trinidad and Tobago*, 120; Raffaele et al., *A Guide to the Birds of the West Indies*, 320. The barn owl (*Tyto alba*) is called the "jumbie bird" (i.e., ghost-bird) in Trinidad, Grenada and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and the sight of its eyes gleaming from a tree branch in the darkness (reflecting the lights from human dwellings), its screech rending the silence of the night, and the flapping of its pale wings, all combined with the rarity of such encounters unnerves even modern West Indians who wait restlessly for the news next morning of who might have died recently. French identifies the ferruginous pygmy owl (*Glaucidium brasilianum*) as the "jumbie bird" but from Raffaele and my own personal experiences in the Lesser Antilles, I believe that barn owls and screech owls are the traditional jumbie birds.

²² Walter E. Roth, "An Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore of the Guiana Indians," in *Thirtieth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, 1908-1909* (Washington D.C.: Bureau of American Ethnology, 1915), 274.

²³ Manuel A. García Arévalo, "The Bat and the Owl: Nocturnal Images of Death," in *Taíno: Pre-Columbian Art and Culture from the Caribbean*, ed. Fatima Bercht (New York: El Museo del Barrio/Monacelli Press, 1997), 122.

of the nocturne, heralds of the Lord of the Dead, and emissaries from the noumenon, owls and owl-like nightbirds are thus Arawak symbols of the unseen afterlife.²⁴

The Natural and Cultural Isomorphisms of Nightbirds and Bats

From the Saladoid Lesser Antilles to the conquest-era Greater Antilles, nightbirds and bats were close associates in oral tradition and art. The similarities between nocturnal birds and bats far outweigh their differences and any natural competition between them. These similarities are particularly profound when oilbirds are folded into the conception of nightbirds. Ecologically, (as nocturnal fructivores, with insect-eating cousins no less), behaviorally (in being cave-dwelling, colonial, echo-locating night fliers), and mytho-culturally (as the mounts and/or voices of departed souls), oilbirds are veritable bats. And with round faces, hooked beaks, and shining eyes they are at the same time virtual owls.²⁵ Thus, oilbirds as “bat-owls” may have provided as much to the symbolic correlation between bats and owls as any true owl species. In the Saladoid world, oilbirds were only native to Venezuela, the Guianas and Trinidad.²⁶ But the owl-nightjar-oilbird-bat (more simply, “owl-bat”) symbolism this bird contributed to the nightbird archetype of the Saladoid Antilles extended far beyond this southern sphere.

²⁴ William Henry Brett, *Legends and Myths of the Aboriginal Indian of British Guiana* (London: Gresham Press, 1880), 30. In fact, Brett cites the owl as the very cause of night (in the Guyanese Arawak narrative of the vulture maiden recounted in the “Vultures” section). Searching among the spoils of a battle waged against the king vultures by a hunter and the other birds, a primordial owl finds a neat package in the burnt house of the king vultures. Believing its contents to be some kind of treasure, the owl quickly unravels it only to release a cloud of darkness over the world. Ever since, owls have been unable to get out from under the darkness and cannot bear the glare of day.

²⁵ Their owl-like white-flecked brown plumage with black barring also contributes to this strong resemblance to owls. For a Guianian tradition that relates oilbirds (in their appearance) to nightjars, and to owls (in their symbolic significance) see “The Arawak Cave of Guacharo Legend” in Appendix 2.

²⁶ French, *Birds of Trinidad and Tobago*, 116.

While only insular Saladoid ceramics depict nightbirds, mainland Arawak legends of nightbirds are comparable to what we know of Antillean belief. Walter Roth described owls, “goat-suckers” (i.e., nightjars) and other nightbirds as embodied bush spirits “which must not be killed under any pretense whatever,” these birds being to the Amerindians (Arawaks) in the Guianas not so much bringers of ill or auspicious events as prescient creatures that proclaim these. Roth also described these large-eyed nightbirds as “receptacles of departed souls who come back to earth” either because their transgressions when alive will not let their departed spirits rest, or because they have returned to torment the sinful living.²⁷ Scholarship of the culture of indigenous South America has often confirmed this *opía*-like, bat-like relation of nightbirds to the dead.²⁸

A familial connection between bats and owls is made explicit in the Warao legend of Boku-boku, an owl related to a family of bats by marriage. Boku-boku is ultimately asked to accompany his bat in-laws on nightly raids of a human village. Without him, the bats had been unable to distract the humans from the meat they were drying on their *babracote*.²⁹ But accompanied by Boku-boku, who lets out a terrifying screech that sends the humans scurrying, the bats are able to carry off sizeable portions of dried meat from the village. The bats and their owl-in-law carry out several more raids but the humans eventually discover the plot and retaliate. It isn’t long before bat meat is being dried on the *babracote* alongside the catch of the day. Vanquished, the bat/owl gang ceases their nightly raids. Only a single bat and Boku-boku come away unscathed from the skirmishes

²⁷ Roth, “Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore,” 174-175.

²⁸ Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Amazonian Cosmos: The Sexual and Religious Symbolism of the Tukano Indians* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 102; Roe, *The Cosmic Zygote*, 260.

²⁹ This is a mainland pronunciation of the Taíno word “barbacoa,” from which comes the term “barbecue.”

with the humans. Today, their descendants take revenge on humans by being the harbingers of misfortune and death as night falls.³⁰

Possible Functions of Nightbird Ceramics

Like bats, nightbirds would have linked ceramic heirlooms with the realm of the ancestors. However, while many bat images from the Saladoid era are so fragmentary that we cannot always guess the shape of the vessels to which they were once attached, there are numerous nightbird adornos that are located on vessel spouts (figures 5.9 to 5.11). Spout vessels were made to hold liquids and since several nightbird vessels seem to have been bottles, they were likely water containers. The watery underworld has already been discussed in the “Bats” and “Dogs” sections of Chapter Four, but I would add here that in later Taíno ceramics bat and owl images were placed on the same parts of water vessels as Saladoid bottleneck nightbirds (compare figures 5.10 to 5.12 and 5.13). This position for night fliers at the nexus of the vessel’s body and its rim (i.e., at the juncture of the cool, dark, still, watery interior and the warm, illuminated, catalyzing, airy exterior) was evidently of perennial importance in Antillean ceramics.

With the avian head atop it, the rounded body of the vessel implies the perched nightbird. But the spout always extends beyond the top of the bird’s head, in some examples evoking the shape of a shaman’s or cacique’s headdress. As mentioned earlier, owls were anthropomorphized in different ways in Saladoid imagery (compare figures 5.8 and 5.9), recalling their role in mainland and Antillean narratives as embodiments of the dead. Ceramic vessels with “crowned” nightbirds at their spouts suggest the birds

³⁰ Roth, “Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore,” 276.

were both incarnate ancestors and intermediaries between those and the living.

In an excavation of the Taíno site of Cinnamon Bay on St. John in the U.S. Virgin Islands, archaeologists found the remains of a screech owl (*Otus nudipes*) among what seemed like ceremonially interred animal materials (i.e., a bat, turtle and snake). Noting that the post hole evidence around the faunal remains suggested that the interments were made indoors, archaeologist Ken Wild linked these and other biological deposits to a practice witnessed by Columbus wherein the Taíno would ceremonially offer the proverbial “first fruits” in a caney (i.e., a shrine, usually with a circular floor plan and conical thatched roof).³¹ One cannot be sure that the earlier Saladoid-era people would have sacrificed owls and bats in the same way as these Leeward Island Taínos seem to have done. Indeed taboos about killing or even capturing and keeping owls may have come and gone from period to period, and these symbolic, predatory birds were not likely ever eaten as food by any Antillean culture.³² But their presence in a ritual offering context in the Virgin Islands is in keeping with spirit-messenger symbolism and is one more indication of the synonymy of owls, bats, and certain reptiles with the afterlife.

From the scant evidence offered here, owl and other nightbird vessels may have been used to hold liquid offerings in harvest ceremonies and other such rituals in honor of, supplication to, communication with ancestral and other spirits with the power to affect the fates of the living. Nightbird iconography seems to have arisen in Cedrosan

³¹ Ken S. Wild, “Investigations of a “Caney” at Cinnamon Bay, St. John, and Social Ideology in the Virgin Islands as Reflected in Pre-Columbian Ceramics,” in *Proceedings of the XVIII International Congress for Caribbean Archaeology* (St. George, Grenada: International Association for Caribbean Archaeology, 1999), 306.

³² J. Christopher Crocker, “My Brother the Parrot,” in *Animal Myths and Metaphors in South America*, ed. Gary Urton (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1985), 27-28. J. Christopher Crocker notes a general avoidance of eating birds of prey, macaws, most “water birds” and owls among some Amazonian people as these birds carry deep meanings in their practical and ritual taxonomies of the natural world. If offered in a ritual, even one for first fruits, Virgin Island owls were probably not meant as food.

Saladoid Trinidad and Tobago on one end of the Lesser Antilles, and the Huecoid Leewards on the opposite end. Considering the elevated incidences of Saladoid nightbird motifs from the Windward to Leeward Islands, and with the highest numbers of these being in Saladoid-Huecoid Guadeloupe, it seems this imagery gained momentum as settlement intensified and different groups interacted in the Lesser Antilles. Nightbird iconography persisted in the Antilles up to the conquest, in both the Greater and Lesser Antilles.³³ On the mainland, owls and other nightbirds may have appeared in narratives as comparatively “minor underworld symbols.”³⁴ But in the Antilles they became icons, in ceramics, masking and perhaps other arts, beginning in the Saladoid.

Vultures and Other Raptors

The Vulture in Nature

Circling high on thermal air currents, mighty wings held rigidly in a distinctive V-shape against the blazing sun, vultures are sighted only in the most southerly skies of the Eastern Caribbean. In the islands just off the mainland, they are a stark reminder of the death and predation that is as natural in the tropics as the blossoming of nectar-dripping flowers or the bursting of ripened fruit. Turkey vultures (*Cathartes aura*) are the most common species seen in the Lesser Antilles, but black vultures (*Coragyps atratus*) are

³³ García, “The Bat and the Owl: Nocturnal Images of Death,” 112-123; I. A. Earle Kirby, “The Pre-Hispanic Peopling of the Antilles,” in *Proceedings of the VI International Congress for the Study of Pre-Columbian Cultures of the Lesser Antilles* (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1976), 17. Kirby reports owl and bat motifs on the post-Saladoid Cayoid pottery from St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

³⁴ Arie Boomert, “Raptorial Birds as Icons of Shamanism in the Pre-Historic Caribbean and Amazonia,” in *Proceedings of the XIX International Congress for Caribbean Archaeology* (Aruba: Archaeological Museum, 2001), 123.

also endemic to Trinidad and sometimes vagrant in the nearby Windward Islands. The massive king vulture (*Sarcoramphus papa*) visits Trinidad rarely from South America but is not found in the rest of the Caribbean.³⁵

Whichever the species, these large, darkly colored birds haunt areas where a carcass can be spotted or smelled from on high, for black vultures have astounding vision, and turkey vultures the keenest sense of smell.³⁶ They frequent places where food is habitually discarded, often congregating in large numbers, especially on overcast days.³⁷ In Pre-Columbian times, village middens and places where the catch of the day was cleaned, must have been stalked regularly by these *anoána* as they are called in the Arawak language. Fish offal is a favorite of theirs.³⁸ Vultures' heads are bare of feathers, with a ruff around the base of their heads or necks, depending on the species (figures 13 and 14). The turkey vulture's skin is red in the exposed area and the black vulture's appropriate to its name. Their bald heads are sometimes thrust deep into the cavity of a rotting carcass with powerful, pointed beaks, slightly bent at the tip, snipping away bits of flesh. Usually silent as they strut somewhat anthropomorphically up to a carcass with hunched shoulders, and as they hop and sidle among the putrefying remains, vultures might occasionally hiss or make other unexpected noises.³⁹ Their nesting locations in

³⁵ ffrench, *Birds of Trinidad and Tobago*, 107; Martyn Kenefick et al., *Field Guide to the Birds of Trinidad & Tobago*, 60-61; Herbert Raffaele, *A Guide to the Birds of the West Indies*, 248.

³⁶ ffrench, *Birds of Trinidad and Tobago*, 108.

³⁷ Raffaele et al., *A Guide to the Birds of the West Indies*, 248.

³⁸ Sheri Amsel, "Aves," Vulture (Turkey). Exploring Nature Educational Resource. (2005 – 2009). <http://exploringnature.org/db/detail.php?dbID=43&detID=766> (accessed June 15, 2009); ffrench, *Birds of Trinidad and Tobago*, 107; Douglas Taylor, *Languages of the West Indies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 111.

³⁹ Raffaele et al., *A Guide to the Birds of the West Indies*, 248.

rock crevices, cliff faces and other high places fits well with the numerous folk beliefs in their issuance from a heavenly abode beyond the glare of the sun.⁴⁰

Incidences and Aesthetics of Saladoid-era Vulture Ceramics

Commensurate with their narrow natural distribution, vultures are absent in the Pre-Columbian art of most of the Caribbean. However, in those islands where I found vulture ceramics, I observed some attention paid to speciation. Turkey vultures are the overwhelming majority of depictions in adornos. The prominent nostrils of this species are metonymically featured in Saladoid ceramics, as are the wrinkled curuncúlae atop the beaks of king vultures in Huecoid lapidary objects (figures 5.19 and 5.22). Other vulture depictions are not as clear because their large beaks and other facial features can be mistaken for those of parrots. Though I have encountered avian adornos in Antiguan and Guadeloupean collections that might be stylized vultures, there is a concentration of unambiguous but varied Saladoid vulture ceramics between Venezuela and Grenada (Appendix 1, Chart 1, and figures 5.14 to 5.21).

While the Saladoid vulture adornos would seem to reflect the natural incidence of these large carrion birds in the Lower Orinoco, Trinidad and Grenada, the appearance of the king vulture in Huecoid amulets from Vieques and Puerto Rico is highly anomalous. These South American birds are not endemic to Puerto Rico, Vieques or any country near there. Huecoid king vulture images have been the subject of much interest since their

⁴⁰ Boomert, "Raptorial Birds as Icons of Shamanism," 121-132; French, *Birds of Trinidad and Tobago*, 108.

discovery in the 1970s and 80s.⁴¹ These are amulets, many apparently showing king vultures holding trophy heads in their talons in an almost Andean fashion (figure 5.22).⁴²

In discussing early ceramic vulture iconography, I leave aside any analysis of the Vieques king vultures. I do this because they are rather small stone amulets, not ceramics, and because they originate in a cultural complex that is at once related to but distinct from the Saladoid. However, I do not bar myself from referring to these superb stone vultures when they potentially cast light on Antillean vulture iconography in general. In this dissertation, Huecoid objects are appropriate for iconographic comparisons between contemporaneous Caribbean cultures, and between insular and mainland ceramics.

For their part, Saladoid vulture adornos, even within their limited geographic range display great diversity. They appear in a variety of positions on vessels, are modeled in a range of strongly Barrancoid-inflected stylistic schemes, and sometimes go far beyond the two to three inch size of the average adorno (e.g., figure 5.21). An adorno from the Barrancoid dominated site of Erin in Trinidad is highly geometric, with an almost rectangular eye and a sharp right angle roughly halfway along the length of its beak. A cylindrical hat or crown atop the head also fits this geometric style (figure 5.15). Hemispherical buttons mark the eyes' pupils, the top of the cylindrical crown, like abstract alter ego protuberances, and the back of the head, almost in the manner of

⁴¹ Luis Chanlatte Baik and Yvonne Narganes Storde, eds. *Cultura la Hueca* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte, Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2005), 11-25; Samuel M. Wilson, *The Archaeology of the Caribbean* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 67-77.

⁴² Boomert, "Raptorial Birds as Icons of Shamanism," 133; Chanlatte Baik and Narganes Storde, eds. *Cultura la Hueca* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Museo de Historia, Antropología y Arte, Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2005), 11-25; Samuel M. Wilson, *The Archaeology of the Caribbean*, 67-77. Boomert singles out the Nasca (contemporaneous with the late Saladoid) religious depictions of condors and eagles devouring human trophy heads as bearing a strong resemblance.

cardinal points. The cylindrical root of the adorno suggests it struck abruptly out from the side of a vessel in the manner of an L-shaped handle.

This angular adorno is quite unlike the more curvilinear ones that once were part of a variety of vessel types throughout the Lower Orinoco and Trinidad.⁴³ One adorno from Saladero is almost entirely curvilinear in its form and incised markings (figure 5.16). It even features an open looped nostril, a slightly regularized version of the actual perforated beak of the turkey vulture. From the finished edge running under and perpendicular to its beak the bird seems to have looked up from the rim of a bowl.

A Saladero vulture adorno once formed the spout of a bottle (figure 5.17). There was a late Saladoid tendency to place the heads of owls, vultures and parrots, birds with large and powerful beaks, in this position (compare with figures 5.10 and 5.54). This painted vulture spout is notable for its balance of naturalistic form and stylized incised markings delineating the bill, looped nares (nostrils), eye and nape ruff. The angle of this vulture's neck suggests that the spout was not vertical but at an angle to the vessel's top, perhaps making it a life-like effigy or even a Barrancoid style double-spouted vessel.⁴⁴

Ironically, one of the least finely crafted Saladoid vulture adornos suggests the most skill. Seemingly dashed off by a confident potter in grainy shell-tempered clay, this adorno from Golden Grove in Trinidad is the most naturalistic in form (figure 5.18). It is clearly a turkey vulture, from the narrow head, slightly curving beak and the nasal hollow. The deft modeling on what was evidently a leather-hard clay surface, was never

⁴³ In my observation, this contrast between stylized and naturalistic vulture adornos does not correspond to any regional difference between Trinidad and the mainland, since both kinds of adornos can be found on either side of the Gulf of Paria, rendering the Lower Orinoco and Trinidad a contiguous style zone for the depiction of vultures.

⁴⁴ For a discussion of the important motif of the double-headed vulture of which this vessel spout might be an example, see Appendix 2's section "The Double-Headed Vulture in Iconography and Lore."

retraced, retouched or polished as in the vulture spout in figure 5.17. Despite the quick hand of the potter, there is an assured naturalism in this adorno that captures the turkey vulture's essential aspects. This is no strenuous attempt by a middling potter but a rough sketch by a masterful ceramicist, an impressionistic vulture adorno.

Vulture depictions in Saladoid and Barrancoid ceramics are often elaborated to include decorative motifs and secondary figures (as in figures 2.20 and 2.31 *left*). A vulture emerging from the head of an anthropomorph is notable and the ideas informing this composite image become clearer in the analysis of tropical lowland vulture narratives that follows in this section. Vultures also appear in combination with other birds, which often are cleverly disguised as parts of their beaks as in a strap handle adorno from Mt. Irvine, Trinidad (figure 5.20). Halfway along the overall length of this vulture head is that of a smaller unidentifiable bird. The turkey vulture's nares form the eyes of the smaller bird. Such combinations of one discreet creature within another occur not only with the narrowly distributed vulture images but also with other birds, mammals (as explored briefly in Chapter Four) and reptiles. This is an important issue to explore in the overall Saladoid range of hybrid creatures and is briefly analyzed in Chapter Seven.⁴⁵

Geographically, Saladoid vulture imagery is confined to the Lower Orinoco and the southernmost islands, and temporally it is a feature of the late Saladoid period of strong interaction with the Barrancoid in the Lower Orinoco. The artistic variety of these Barrancoid-inflected Saladoid vulture adornos may in fact indicate great doctrinal continuity among the potters using this motif. In such a case, potters familiar with the symbolic meaning of the bird, might have sought to distinguish themselves or their communities in the variance of motif, like denominations within a single church. The

⁴⁵ See the section "General Concerns of Saladoid Zoomorphic Iconography and Aesthetics."

variety of vulture depictions may also indicate the great antiquity of the symbol. The vulture may have been so established that different styles of depicting it had evolved over centuries. Aside from the “impressionistic” vulture in figure 5.18, these varied vulture adornos can easily be classed into those with crowns and those with spouts where the crowns would otherwise be, incised and modeled in curvilinear or geometric styles with numerous examples of each. These are variations on a set of components available from a fairly stable canon reserved for the vulture.

Given the importance of this imposing carrion bird in Venezuelan and Trinidadian Saladoid iconography especially, vulture narratives from the general environs of the Saladoid homeland might afford a sidelong glance of this bird’s meaning to people in the ancient Lower Orinoco. Within these traditions may also lay the reasons why people migrating into the rest of the Lesser Antilles discarded the vulture as a central motif.

Conflicting Symbolisms of the Vulture

Synthesizing various studies of tropical lowland oral traditions and symbolism, Arie Boomert categorizes the sky, the sun, the colors yellow and white, the east, the eagle, crocodilian, (yellow spotted) jaguar, fire, culture, order, aggressiveness, verticality, semen and saliva as masculine.⁴⁶ Conversely, the sea is feminine, along with the night, the moon, the colors green and black, aquatic reptiles, nature, mystery, chaos, passivity, subtlety, horizontality, and blood.⁴⁷ Within these categories, no creature embodies so

⁴⁶ Boomert, “Raptorial Birds as Icons of Shamanism,” 122-123.

⁴⁷ Ibid. Many Huecoid vulture amulets are made from green stones, perhaps in deliberate adherence to this feminine symbolism.

many contradictions and complexities, and as Boomert describes, evokes so many “mixed feelings,” as the vulture.⁴⁸ This raptor short-circuits the symbolic dyads that often govern Western studies of Amerindian narrative and iconology. The vulture is a black “death-bird” that rules the day, not the night. Since on the South American mainland the harpy and other eagles occupy the rulership of the day sky, the vulture complicates the position of eagles as well. Raptors play no major role in the iconography of the Antillean Saladoid so we are not compelled here to tackle this vulture-eagle problem. However, aspects of the vulture, including the paradoxical ones, that made it a viable symbol for southern Windward Saladoid potters are worth exploring.

Mortality, Putrefaction and Time in Mainland Narratives of the Vulture

Rotting and healing, death and immortality, the Sun and the Milky Way, flight and abandonment in high and mysterious places are seemingly conflicting associations shouldered by the vulture in tropical lowland oral traditions. In Karaja lore Vulture whispers the key to immortality only to the hero that would ascend to within earshot of him.⁴⁹ In an Arecuna tradition a man’s infidelity to the Sun’s daughter, committed with Vulture’s daughter, ushers in the age of mortality all humanity suffers today.⁵⁰ Thus vultures can grant immortality or cause its loss.

⁴⁸ Boomert, “Raptorial Birds as Icons of Shamanism,” 122-123.

⁴⁹ Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 161. The idea that the vulture speaks in hushed tones may have been derived from the fact that corporeal vultures lack a syrinx (which other birds use to make their calls), and thus make only low, non-vocal and infrequent noises.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 264; Lévi-Strauss, *The Origin of Table Manners*, trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 139-140.

The relation to death and decay is a common theme within these narratives of life and death in proto-time. In many narratives, including the Arecuna one just mentioned, vultures spatter protagonists with their feces, either by accident or as an insult, giving them the stench of putrefaction.⁵¹ But more often mythic vultures are attracted by the stench of death or to those who would appear to be dead to entrap them. Their attraction to foul smells, but also their own foul-making actions, make them punishers of the unworthy but also victims of theft by cunning humans. What the humans steal from them are, as with many symbolic birds discussed in this chapter, the boons of culture. Chief of these gifts is fire. For their flight high in the heavens, at the peak of the day, vultures are seen as lords of the fiery daylight and associates of the Sun as supreme or creator deity. God of all fires, the Sun is the source of the cooking hearth, of which vultures are often the stewards. Thus, for their link to the Sun, the highest levels of the sky and, by implication, various celestial cycles, these darkly plumed daytime masters of death and immortality are chief arbitrators of the fates and originators of culture. But the gift of culture goes hand in hand with the advent of mortality (for the order provided by culture is necessitated by the finite-ness of life) so that in proto-time vultures are agents in the fall from pure, timeless nature and the rise of aging, death and culture. Like opossums, which also are associated with rotting smells, vultures are originators of time.

Clan, Gender and Spirit Relations in Mainland Vulture Narratives

Intimately related to the mystery of mortality, the process of dying and putrefaction, vultures often carry feminine symbolism in the South American tropical

⁵¹ Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 264; Lévi-Strauss, *The Origin of Table Manners*, 139-140; Betty Mindlin and Indigenous Storytellers, *Barbecued Husbands and Other Stories from the Amazon* (London: Verso, 2002), 132.

lowlands, even as they inhabit a masculine realm, the sky: home of the Sun. There are many tales of feminine vultures.⁵² As mortality emblems, they are paradoxically associated with the night, even while patrolling the skies in the blinding noonday sun.⁵³

Guyanese Arawak lore describes king vultures as only having the form of great birds on earth, but taking anthropomorphic form while in their own celestial kingdom, where they take off their feather cloaks.⁵⁴ As in legends of monkeys, bats and opossums, an inappropriate union ensues when a human hunter sees a female king vulture in her true aspect (i.e., without her cloak). They marry and the hunter is borne up to the vulture kingdom by his new bride. The union troubles Anuanima, the lord of the king vultures.⁵⁵ His concerns are soon justified as the human husband begins to yearn for his earthly family, especially his aging mother. Disgusted, the vultures descend from the heavens and deposit the man on the closest part of the earth, a high precipice. Eventually, he climbs down and, after visiting his mother, swears vengeance against his grudging in-laws. In the ensuing war, the hunter enlists other birds to help sack the vulture kingdom

⁵² Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Amazonian Cosmos*, 98-101, 209; Roth, "Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore," 208-212. Their appearance in multiple oral traditions from Orinokia, the Guianas and Amazonia as beguiling females and their association with decay make vultures feminine symbols throughout much of these regions.

⁵³ Roe, *The Cosmic Zygote*, 260-261.

⁵⁴ Vultures are among the most anthropomorphized of all animals in tropical lowland lore. Their featherless heads, and the downy ruffs around their necks after which commences full plumage, gives the appearance of a bird impersonator wearing a feathered cloak or coat. Since vultures look like they can put on and remove their avian persona, transformations of people into vultures are as common in mainland narratives as vultures who turn into people.

⁵⁵ The name of the Vulture lord, Anuanima, and the Arawak word for vulture, anoána, being related of course.

and regain his wife. But the hunter is killed by a king vulture with a striking resemblance to himself. It is his own son, born in his absence in the king vulture's realm.⁵⁶

This parable offers critiques and admonitions about exogamy and inter-clan/inter-ethnic relations. As in other oral traditions where people marry anthropomorphic animals, the result is conflict and chaos. In this case, patricide seems the unholy but inevitable end to a tale in which a man marries outside his clan, phratry or tribe, and instead of taking up his responsibilities with his in-laws, reverts to his mother's house in a show of unmanly fickleness. In the Arawak worldview, the vultures have the reasonable expectation that since their realm is so far away from the human's and he has married one of them that he will consider himself a member of their society and not divert resources to his old family. This arrangement reflects marriage customs of Amerindians from the Amazon to the Antilles whereby one does not return to one's mother's house after becoming the son of another.⁵⁷ The hunter's transgression of these customs causes hardships, and ultimately his death.

I stress here that the hunter married outside his "clan" or ethnicity rather than his species because, as in many animal narratives, the zoomorphs themselves are symbolic categories and perhaps clan emblems, not just corporeal animals. The vulture bride episode suggests this interpretation by describing the vultures as birds in the realm of humans but humans in their own realm. They are strangers to the hunter but more like

⁵⁶ Brett, *Legends and Myths of the Aboriginal Indian of British Guiana*, 29; Roth, "Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore," 212.

⁵⁷ William F. Keegan, *Taíno Indian Myth and Practice: The Arrival of the Stranger King* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), 118-121. Certainly, one can physically visit one's mother after marrying (perhaps even from a distant village) but in a mythical context, where every act is symbolic rather than mundane, the hunter's return to his mother's house represents a dereliction of his new responsibilities as the son-in-law/son of Anuanima.

him when among themselves.⁵⁸ Their “vulture-ness” is merely a trope whereby they are established as exogenous to the hunter’s society but with a culture of their own, equivalent, distinct, and potentially incompatible. Chapter Seven of this study relates the Arawak practice of never returning once exogamously married, as the errant hunter does in this narrative, to Saladoid migrations into the Antilles and relations with the mainland.

Exogamy rules and analogies notwithstanding, the mythic hunter also has married into a people who live beyond the sky. The king vultures are not just corporeal vultures, and they are not just a foreign clan or ethnicity either. Their home beyond the sky locates them in the spirit realm. Thus the hunter, by going back to his mother, violates not only the restrictions on the movement of married people between their in-laws and blood relations but also the religious restrictions on movements between the living and the spirit world. It is the shaman’s prerogative only to travel in between the corporeal and spiritual, earthly and celestial planes, not that of love-struck (or lusting) hunters. This “hunter” may be an errant shaman or an actual hunter usurping the role of a shaman as he does a maiden from a foreign realm. Whether heretical shaman or smitten hunter, he ends badly.

The Celestial, Cathartic Vulture in Mainland Narrative and Symbolism

It often happens in Amazonian lore that primordial characters who exhibit a particular vice are doomed to adopt that vice as a permanent behavior and in the form of

⁵⁸ Roth, “Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore,” 208. A Warao legend reported by Roth is strikingly similar to this Arawak tale of bride-capturing a king vulture and the trouble with the in-laws that ensues. In the Warao version, the vulture bride is distinguishable from her human in-laws only by her nose-ring which is actually the king vulture’s curuncúla transformed into an ornament. But in the Warao version, the vulture bride stays with her husband’s family, is beaten repeatedly by him when she refuses to cook fresh meat (preferring it rancid, herself) and is avenged by her father who sends yellow-headed vultures (specifically *Cathartes burrovianus*: the only vultures that actively hunt in addition to scavenging) over whom the king vulture is seen as “governor,” to kill him.

the animal that most embodies that behavior.⁵⁹ In a Mbya narrative cannibalistic sorcerers are turned into vultures. A hero wishing to steal the secret of fire from them pretends to be dead. As the sorcerers start their fire to cook him, he absconds with the flame and the knowledge of how to start fires. Without their fire, the cannibal sorcerers (i.e., carrion-eating spirit-fliers) become the first vultures.⁶⁰ In traditions of this type, from the Guianas to Brazil, anthropomorphic vultures (especially black vultures) are the original possessors of fire who must be tricked out of their cultural treasure by men feigning death.⁶¹

Mythic vultures hold or withhold many cultural secrets. The central Amazonian Karaja belief that the king vulture is not only the original owner of fire but whispers the secret of immortality is shared by the Shipaya (Shebaio) of the northeastern Guianas. The Karaja version extends this mastery of fire to that of celestial lights, which are understood as fiery: the stars, the sun and even the moon.⁶² The Desana extend this celestial association even further to make vultures symbols of the Milky Way.⁶³ In fact Reichel-Dolmatoff points to a rather complex web of Desana analogues between vultures and the Milky Way. The celestial spray of stars is likened to both a wash of semen and a “skein of palm fibers,” which both represent decay for them, which thus connect to vultures (and sometimes harpy eagles) as carrion birds. In the end, vultures emerge from the seminal

⁵⁹ For an example of this sympathetic zoanthropy in oral tradition, see “The Peccary in Nature, Narrative and Ceramics” in Appendix 2.

⁶⁰ Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 141. In the legend they are called “vulture-sorcerers” in retrospect since they did not become true vultures until after their attempted cannibalism of the hero.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 140-141, 187. Lévi-Strauss recounts Mbya, Tembe and Guarayu versions collected in the early twentieth century and states that the myth of stealing fire from vultures “was known to almost all the Tupi tribes of Brazil.”

⁶² *Ibid.*, 161. It is not simply that the moon is not fiery but that it carries a feminine connotation, unlike other celestial bodies.

⁶³ Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Amazonian Cosmos: The Sexual and Religious Symbolism of the Tukano Indians* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 101.

Milky Way to consume putrefaction and are thus eaters of sickness.⁶⁴ Desana lore describes the Milky Way as “the zone of communication and of hallucinatory phenomena where the divinities that serve as intermediaries between the Sun and mankind are located.”⁶⁵ Thus linking the Sun, the Milky Way, spirit flight, fertility and healing, the intermediary vulture is an emblem of the shaman as doctor.

Cautionary vulture tales warning against the breaking of taboos, especially ones regarding illicit social contacts, make vultures as much seekers of moral decay as physical rot. As sentinels on the border of health and sickness, they seem to guard the shaman/healer’s prerogatives, including spirit flight, against dabblers and sorcerers (as in the Arawak hunter narrative) and establish punishment of taboo-breakers as the charge of the shaman. The shaman is not then just a ritual specialist removing spiritual decay, and a doctor removing physical decay but a policing instrument countering societal decay. The vulture, a creature emblematic of the shaman’s power to cast out physical and cultural impurity lives up to its Linnaean family name “Cathartidae.”

Possible Functions of Saladoid and Barranoid Vulture Ceramics

The cathartic role of vultures seems to provide the strongest suggestion of their role in Saladoid and Barranoid ceramics. Certainly, vulture pots were not used for the presentation of spoiled meats as might be suggested by the diet of these birds. Most likely, ceramics bearing the likeness of vultures contained medicinal substances, liquid and solid, cooked on fire (given the vulture’s solar association) and used for either cures

⁶⁴ Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Amazonian Cosmos*, 98-100.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

or protection against sorcery. The apatropaic use of vulture imagery might relate to foreign threats, casting the vultures as sentries, seeing in every direction, guarding against these external forces. However, given the limited distribution of vulture ceramics in the southernmost islands, it seems the vulture was eventually eclipsed, replaced or otherwise discarded as a healing symbol for most Saladoid potters.

The Twilight of Vultures and Other Mainland Archetypes in Antillean Iconography

It may seem that a lot of study has been dedicated to vulture iconography in this dissertation even though vulture imagery is so isolated in the Antilles. The reason for this is to understand precisely what the insular Saladoid ceramicists left behind and to suggest the reasons for this iconographic “editing.” The emergent distinctions between the Antillean and the mainland Saladoid are demonstrated as much by what is missing from the ceramic and cultural record as by what is emphasized. Having established the importance of the vulture in mainland culture, and noting the spillover of this culture into the islands from Trinidad to Grenada we see that the vulture in this chapter, like the feline in Chapter Four, is a hallowed mainland archetype that falls into disuse in the Antilles. The vulture and other raptors are an iconographic lacuna in the Antilles that warrants a return to the question of what is missing in the Caribbean Saladoid ceramics and why.

In the Lesser Antilles, there are no great raptors such as eagles. After all, there are few medium to large-sized mammals there on which they might prey or scavenge. They would have to content themselves with snakes, lizards, frogs, small rodents and even smaller invertebrates or with other birds, as do smaller Caribbean raptors such as kestrels,

kites, falcons, hawks and ospreys.⁶⁶ Falconidae (i.e. eagle-like raptors) have distinctive features that would make for identifiable adorns despite any stylization. Since raptors are supreme birds in most mainland symbolism, the absence of all raptors besides vultures in Antillean imagery is noteworthy. The ospreys (*Pandion haliaetus*), broad-winged hawks (*Buteo platypterus*) and peregrine falcons (*Falco peregrinus*) of the Caribbean were certainly impressive enough to inspire art and legend. So why do they not dominate the avian imagery of the islands?⁶⁷

In the same way animals and birds compete for territory, animal symbols can jostle each other for dominance, so that in each territory only one symbol remains per zoomorphic niche in the overarching mytho-aesthetic framework.⁶⁸ We might look to the natural history of a species for some of the reasons its corresponding symbol comes to dominate. In the case of raptors on the mainland, it is definitely their size, speed, keen vision, aerial maneuvers and rapaciousness that elevates them above all other avian icons. They are models of “vitality, power and male prowess,” heraldic emblems of rulers and conquerors in South America as they are the world over.⁶⁹ But they also are symbols of the all-seeing divine eye sought by ritual specialists.⁷⁰ These predatory and cathartic lords

⁶⁶ Evans, *Birds of the Eastern Caribbean*, 39-44.

⁶⁷ Of all the adorns of the Lesser Antilles, only one from Guadeloupe seemed reminiscent of a raptorial bird but could in fact be a parrot (figure 5.25).

⁶⁸ It is important to note that from region to region these symbolic niches are comparable but not interchangeable, because a region (which might be represented by a distinct culture) may exhibit a symbolic need that is unique and therefore might possess a unique niche.

⁶⁹ Boomert, “Raptorial Birds as Icons of Shamanism,” 123.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

of the sky survey the world from on high, seizing what they will as winged incarnations of penetrating insight and the will to power.

Cathartic and Falconid masters of the sky are, in fact, part of a tropical lowland symbolic suite that is missing most of its modules in the Caribbean islands. All three complimentary power creatures are absent from most of the Antilles: the great cats of the forest; the great reptiles of the rivers; and the great raptors of the sky. The view of raptors especially as “jaguars of the sky” and concordantly caimans and anacondas as jaguars of the water inextricably links cats, serpents and raptors in a predatory triad.⁷¹ Each set of these creatures is linked to a primary natural element (i.e., stalking, pouncing felines with the earth; coiling/death-rolling, sinking reptiles with the water; and soaring, swooping raptors with the sky) but is able to cross the boundaries of the other’s realms. The jaguar can swim and climb trees, associating this master of the earth secondarily with water and air. And the anaconda can crawl out the water and up into a tree, dangling in the air above its victims, overlapping its associations with earth and air. Raptors land to devour their prey and many are able fishers, linking them with earth and water as well.

There are no jaguars in the islands so how much relevance would a “jaguar of the sky” have there? Even the jaguar’s rival, the anteater, did not go far as a symbol in the Antilles, confined as it was to Trinidad and Tobago.⁷² We know that raptors played no major part in insular Saladoid ceramics but were raptors’ dyadic nemeses missing as well? The section “The Frigatebird as the Pelican’s Nemesis” in Appendix 2 illustrates

⁷¹ Boomert, “Raptorial Birds as Icons of Shamanism,” 123.

⁷² In Chapter Four and Appendix 2, I describe the anteater as a killer of jaguars and point out that anteater symbolism began to dissipate beyond Trinidad. It is demonstrated that neither Jaguar nor his nemesis, Anteater, commanded any importance in insular Saladoid symbolism beyond the natural buffer zone in the southernmost Lesser Antilles.

that frigatebirds in Caribbean ceramics and shell art (figures 5.35 and 5.36) may have kept their antagonistic role to a supreme bird as in Guianian raptor narratives. But the supreme bird the frigatebird encountered in the Caribbean was not a raptor. And what of reptiles and their nemeses? Chapter Six explores the checkered presence of crocodilians and the rare incidence of snakes in Antillean Saladoid ceramics. The nemeses of great serpents, the colorful forest birds, are only treated briefly in this “Birds” chapter because with the exception of parrots, they too pale in importance as Saladoid ceramic motifs. Many a mainland archetype and its nemesis went un-cherished in the islands.

The rarity of vulture sightings, the absence of eagles, large reptiles and felines combined with the intimate association between these three predatory classes served to outmode the whole mainland triad in the Saladoid Lesser Antilles. Thus the vulture, winged master healer, lancer of catarrhs on the soul, the body and the body politic, fell out of use in island iconography. Small island settlements may have required little of the spiritual or social policing symbolized by the vulture. Maybe Saladoid shamans were too oriented towards a new maritime aviary to bother disentangling a complex (and thus unstable when separated) vulture symbol from its tripartite mainland matrix.

On the mainland, the dominance of Barrancoid elements, such as geometric stylization of beaks and a crowning motif of some sort atop the bird’s head, suggests that the vulture iconography and its cult may have been originally Barrancoid. Perhaps Barrancoid vulture iconography encountered a relatively less robust pre-existing Saladoid vulture iconography and dominated it even in hybridizations.⁷³ If it is, as many have

⁷³ One might suggest that the diversity of vulture depictions indicates instead that late Saladoid vulture adornos show a burgeoning new vulture iconography, experimental, imaginative and unstable, trying out new vulture motifs from time to time. But this would run contrary to the fact that Saladoid

suggested, that the Barranoid potters arrived on the Lower Orinoco from somewhere deep in South America, it would be no wonder that they brought such strong interest in the vulture, a bird revered throughout the interior. On the coast of Venezuela, the vulture would have met competition from the less symbolically ambiguous, far more appropriate iconography of acrobatic and rapacious sea birds. Even the vulture's great size would have been challenged by the pelican. Among Saladoid ceramics, it is evident that there was a growing interest in aquatic birds from the mainland to the islands, and a diminishing interest in vultures following the same trajectory. So in the Lesser Antilles the heavily Barranoid vulture iconography of the mainland was submerged.

Aquatic Birds

The Natural Symbolism of Caribbean Aquatic Birds

The shores, swamps and waterways of the Eastern Caribbean team with avian residents. Pelicans, laughing gulls, frigatebirds, herons, ibises, egrets, brown boobies, ducks, terns, ruddy turnstones, sandpipers, tropicbirds, brown noddies, black skimmers, and ospreys are among the more distinctive species of the aquatic environment.⁷⁴ Though some of these birds, like the ruddy turnstones are relatively small, the birds living near water are often distinctively large and instantly recognizable. In fact, some of these birds, such as the pelicans and frigatebirds, have among the largest wingspans in the world.

vulture imagery fizzles out north of Trinidad, begging the question, "where did these exciting new vulture ideas go, fresh after their invention?"

⁷⁴ Virginia Barlow, *The Nature of the Islands: Plants and Animals of the Eastern Caribbean* (Dunedin, Florida: Chris Doyle Publications, 1993), 12-24; French, *Birds of Trinidad and Tobago*, 97-106. Note that the last bird mentioned is an aquatic raptor but one that does not play any part in Saladoid iconography.

By virtue of their habitat, aquatic birds were bound to have occupied an important position in the culture of the Saladoid-era Antilleans. Soaring above blue expanses, they gazed down into the shadowy, aqueous depths of the spirit realm. Plunging into those depths as some of them do, before taking again to the sky, and nesting in swamps and offshore islets, they united the living earth, the underworld and celestial universe. In moving between the realms, they were superlative intermediaries, and revered or feared associates of the shaman in his own “flights” into the spirit realms. Returning from distant, ineffable planes, both the shaman and his avian familiar would bring the boons of the journey: esoteric knowledge far outside the rote solutions of the mundane world. In many tropical lowland oral traditions, aquatic birds are chief helpers of humankind. In mainland Arawak narratives they are obliging grandchildren of a great Serpent from whom they help steal the colors of nature and the implements of culture.⁷⁵

For their often-distinctive, large beaks and body shapes, unmistakable silhouettes against the sky, artful flight, skillful predation, large feathers, and even their hollow bones, used in making ritual paraphernalia, aquatic birds were the shaman’s crucial avian associate. If owls were sometimes his messengers, birds were just as often the shaman’s mounts. So it is to be expected that aquatic birds would be featured on the most sacred of surviving Antillean artifacts, including amulets, pendants, ceramic incense burners and pots (figures 5.31, 5.33, 5.34, 5.36, 5.41 and 5.46).

Incidences and Aesthetics of Saladoid Aquatic Avian Ceramics

⁷⁵ Roe, *The Cosmic Zygote*, 90, 183.

Several aquatic birds share certain key features. These include long beaks and long, flexible necks. These physical similarities might complicate the interpretation of aquatic avian imagery because one can misidentify a species from a ceramic depiction, infer certain distinct behaviors of the misidentified species, and thereby misdirect research into the image's possible iconography.

The species depicted in Saladoid pottery seem to be herons, ibises, egrets and pelicans. They can only be partially sorted out from each other. In this study, large, broad, fairly straight, and incised bills have been used to identify pelicans (e.g., figures 5.28, 5.29 and 5.32). A long, narrow and curved beak has been considered the diagnostic attribute of a group of aquatics consisting of ibises, herons and/or egrets (figures 5.43 and 5.44). Together, these might be called stilt birds or wading birds for their long legs and foraging habits. A long beak with a sudden downward turn on the tip has been considered diagnostic of the frigatebird (figure 5.35) but I have found only one such ceramic object. Ducks are readily identified from their unmistakable bills protruding from both adornos and modeled vessel walls and the bodies of ducks floating on water seem to have inspired the form of some vessels (figures 5.37 to 5.41). Pelicans, ducks and wading birds are the aquatic species favored in the modeled and incised adornments of Saladoid ceramicists.

Proportionally, pelicans are the most common aquatic bird in the ceramics of the Lesser Antilles but they are not nearly as numerous as suggested in museum records, excavation reports and the general perception among scholars.⁷⁶ This in my opinion is due to the misidentification of wading birds as pelicans. Lesser Antilles collections typically have no more than five pelican adornos each.

⁷⁶ I have noticed a tendency to identify long-beaked avian adornos as pelicans in my personal communications with Caribbean archaeologists and anthropologists.

Stilt bird ceramics equal or outnumber those of pelicans in some islands, including the Grenadines, St. Vincent and Guadeloupe. However, stilt bird ceramics are absent from several of the larger Lesser Antilles so that overall, pelican ceramics outnumber them in the region, albeit by a narrow margin (Appendix 1, Chart 1). Frigatebirds are virtually non-existent in ceramics, but an impressive vessel fragment from Martinique (figure 5.35) indicates that the ceramicist was well versed in modeling, incising and painting this bird and that there were probably others.⁷⁷ Duck ceramics are a Windward Islands phenomenon only (Appendix 1, Chart 1). In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, duck adorns are quite common, and there and in Trinidad, they are sometimes combined with turtle imagery.

Pelicans

The Pelican in Nature

In the Eastern Caribbean the brown pelican (*Pelicanus occidentalis*) is a fairly common sight at the shore and in more sheltered waters.⁷⁸ This is an enormous bird, one of the largest species in the world, standing some three feet tall with a wingspan sometimes exceeding six feet (figure 15). Its brown feathers are sometimes darker on its

⁷⁷ This single ceramic specimen relegates frigatebirds to the margins of this study. However, the frigatebird appears more often in shell amulets. For research on this potentially important avian symbol see “The Frigatebird as the Pelican’s Nemesis” in Appendix 2.

⁷⁸ Barlow, *The Nature of the Islands*, 21; Evans, *Birds of the Eastern Caribbean*, 24; Kenefick et al., *Field Guide to the Birds of Trinidad & Tobago*, 39. Raffaele et al., *A Guide to the Birds of the West Indies*, 224. The incidence of pelicans today is greatly diminished from what it was in Pre-Columbian times. Today, while pelicans are quite common in the Bahamas, the Greater Antilles, Trinidad and Tobago, their incidence is spottier in the Leewards and Windwards.

back and adult males often have a white crown.⁷⁹ The most striking characteristic of this large sea bird is, of course, its enormous bill with the distensible pouch beneath it for catching fish. In the Caribbean, brown pelicans can be seen alone or flying in single file formations of a dozen or more. Upon discovering their piscine quarry, they exhibit a spectacular flight maneuver. They climb to a great height above the water then go into their infamous corkscrew dive-bomb. Just before violently rending the surface of the water, they tightly tuck their wings to their sides, making a missile of their body. Emerging from beneath the water with a pouch full of sprat or sometimes one large fish, they are often harassed by other seabirds come to steal their prodigious catch.⁸⁰

Pelicans nest in great numbers, each nest at least one neck's-length away from the other, in mangrove swamps and on small offshore islands.⁸¹ Islets, nearly or wholly unfrequented by humans are quite numerous in the Caribbean, occurring throughout the archipelago from those in the "the Bocas" between Venezuela and Trinidad to the smaller Grenadines between Grenada and St. Vincent; from some in the Guadeloupe archipelago to the islets between the Virgin Islands. Each mother lays two eggs, which are incubated by both mother and father for four weeks, a full lunar cycle.⁸²

During the months of November to February, dry months in the Caribbean, large numbers of pelicans arrive from North America to augment the local populations.⁸³

⁷⁹ Barlow, *The Nature of the Islands*, 21; French, *Birds of Trinidad and Tobago*, 99-100; Leslie Suttly, *Fauna of the Caribbean: The Last Survivors* (Oxford, U.K.: Macmillan Caribbean Publishers, 1993), 59.

⁸⁰ Barlow, *The Nature of the Islands*, 21; French, *Birds of Trinidad and Tobago*, 99-100.

⁸¹ Suttly, *Fauna of the Caribbean*, 59.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 59.

⁸³ Raffaele et al., *A Guide to the Birds of the West Indies*, 224

Young pelicans are hatched and bred mostly between March and July, their departure from the nest coinciding with the hard, short precipitations of the rainy season.⁸⁴ Color changes in the plumage of the adults, especially the blanching of the head and wings, as they hatch and feed their chicks marks the transitions to this important season.⁸⁵ Today's Caribbean folk belief that pelicans are suicidal derives not just from their kamikaze plunge into fishing waters but also from the clumsiness of young pelicans, which causes them to get their large beaks entangled among the mangrove branches where they are sometimes found dead, seeming to have hanged themselves. Such a formidable beak requires an extended period of acculturation to the use of one's primary fishing tool.⁸⁶

Pelicans remain somewhat clumsy throughout their lives, but only on land. As adults their enormous wingspans make it difficult to walk. Quite to the contrary, these wings, expertly handled in flight, give pelicans the ability to turn on the proverbial dime into their patented dive position. Pelicans use their throat pouches like a Pre-Columbian or present-day fisherman might a hand net, scooping up to two gallons of fish and water from below the surface in a single dip. The birds then expel the water from partially open beaks, transfer the catch to their esophagus and, with some ungainly flapping at first and some skirmishes with poaching seabirds, again manage to go airborne.⁸⁷

Incidences and Aesthetics of Antillean Pelican Iconography

⁸⁴ Evans, *Birds of the Eastern Caribbean*, 24.

⁸⁵ Kenefick et al., *Field Guide to the Birds of Trinidad & Tobago*, 38-39.

⁸⁶ Raffaele et al., *A Guide to the Birds of the West Indies*, 224.

⁸⁷ Barlow, *The Nature of the Islands*, 21; Evans, *Birds of the Eastern Caribbean*, 23.

Pelicans appear throughout the ceramics of the Saladoid world, from Barrancas to the northernmost Leeward Islands (figures 5.26 to 5.30). They also are subjects of some of the most impressive works of Taíno art (figure 5.33). Saladoid ceramic images of pelicans most often feature the distinctive head of the bird with its large, grooved bill. There is seldom an attempt to capture the distinguishing pouch beneath the bird's huge beak distended with fish. Rather, the head of the bird is usually pressed against the body or, more often, against the strap handle of the vessel on which it has been attached as an adorno (figures 5.27 and 5.29). This is in direct imitation of the bird's behavior, it having the tendency to hold its massive head down, pressed against its neck as if tucking in its chin. One adorno from St. Vincent does show a measure of distention beneath the beak as the bird looks out from the rim of what seems to be a shallow bowl or dish (figure 5.30). A very late Saladoid rim fragment from Trinidad works the tucked beak of the pelican into a graceful S-shaped motif that functions as the pot handle (figure 5.32).

An outstanding adorno from Barrancas in Venezuela seems to feature the only pelican I found for the mainland (figure 5.26 *left* and *center*). In this clever adorno, the bird seems to descend and alight upon the rim of the vessel, probably a deep bowl for liquids. Its main body does not touch the pot but rather its wings are spread and connected to the vessel rim by their tips, while its tail and feet are merged into a conical nubbin that joins the bird to the vessel's strap handle. Shadowy openwork created in the negative space beneath the bird creates an anthropomorphic or second bird face with heavy brows and deep eye-sockets (figure 5.26 *center*). Secondary, partially obfuscated figurations lurking in the negative spaces of the more primary images are the trademark of modeled and painted ceramics in the Barrancoid and late Saladoid. The clever

connecting and combining of species was employed by potters of varied skill levels, indicating this was a fundamental aesthetic, taught to potters early in their training.

I located another alighting bird adorno in the same style as the apparent pelican. This one was found at Saladero and though it is less well preserved, its typically Saladoid smoothed surface and lack of protruding shell temper particles distinguishes it from its rougher Barrancas counterpart (figure 5.26 *right*). This adorno demanded a comparably high skill level but is a bit more stylized. It is less convincingly a pelican. In fact, it seems to depict two birds at once, the tip of one beak coalescing into the longer beak of another, perhaps a vulture, given the protuberance created on the longer beak. Openwork adornos may have depicted various large bird species, judging by their powerful wings, or the bird usually depicted was a large raptor. This would leave us with no pelican adornos at all for the mainland Saladoid, an even starker contrast with the Antilles than I mean to portray here (Appendix 1, Chart 1). But if the bird in figure 5.26 *left* and *center* is indeed a pelican, this would suggest that pelicans were an established motif on the main, evidently given much thought in design. Once established on the Lower Orinoco, this maritime symbol then would have increased in popularity among the Antilleans.

Pelican ceramics are found in most Lesser Antillean collections. Since I found almost no pelican ceramics from the mainland, the disparity demonstrates an increased interest in the pelican as a ceramic motif once Saladoid potters crossed into the insular Caribbean. Surrounded by water on all sides, Antillean Saladoid potters seem to have turned their attention to this sea bird as a symbolic repository appropriate to their maritime world.

Despite their evident symbolic importance, there is a lack of ethnographic data about what pelicans might have meant to the people of the Antilles or South America. Saladoid pelican iconography presents us with a corpus of imagery that has an obvious and prominent referent in the natural environment of the Caribbean but for which no ethnographic data, oral tradition or related ritual is known, whether there or on the mainland. This situation, as with manatees in Chapter Four, urges a complete reliance on my theoretical framework for deciphering zoomorphic iconography. Already introduced to the natural history of the pelican, we must now attempt to reconstruct the potential cultural value of the pelican from a theoretical framework alone.

Masculine Pelicans, Canoes and the Marking of Time

When not flying alone, pelicans fly in an almost military formation. Caribbean naturalist Virginia Barlow observed that pelicans “fly to their fishing grounds in single file with coordinated wing strokes.”⁸⁸ She may not have envisioned the analogous image of a row of ancient Amerindian fishermen, sitting single file in their canoe, rowing in unison. Indeed pelicans often strike this tight, single file formation just above the water’s surface, connoting a canoe-full of fishermen or warriors. As pelican wings repeated their terse locomotion, so did the paddles of Amerindian men, each reflected in the water on their way to their fishing grounds. And as wings were held level, gliding on the wind, so too did paddles, held just above the water as arms deservedly rested. Held out in front of

⁸⁸ Barlow, *The Nature of the Islands*, 21; Evans, *Birds of the Eastern Caribbean*, 23; Raffaele et al., *A Guide to the Birds of the West Indies*, 224-225.

them, the beaks of pelicans also must have recalled the attenuated prows and gunwales of canoes and their downward cast wing tips, the paddle blades of the boatmen.

The resemblance between things, a theme so often cited in Arawak arts and traditional narratives, must have been immediately seized upon when first pelicans were observed flying in these straight lines across the water. The fact that today's fisherman regard pelicans as pests who compete for their food reminds us that pelicans and people eat the same varieties of fatty, protein-rich fish, thus providing another analogue between them and the ancient fishermen.⁸⁹ Their plummeting technique also may have been likened to some kind of projectile fishing, such as with arrows and spears.

Despite some general resemblance between the pelican's high capacity gular sac and the canoe, the pelican's connection to this Pre-Columbian aquatic craft is not so much to the canoe's body as to its occupants and their activities therein. A canoe's crew is a community, ideally moving in unison with skill and, when necessary, swiftness across the waves. The cooperative aspect of the canoe, bastion of culture floating on the primordial ocean, streamlined, purposeful and staffed by men only might most closely relate to the pelican as an ancient Antillean symbol of masculinity, discipline and culture itself. The boatmen, located at prescribed equivalent distances from each other are at once reminiscent of the pelican's flight in a similar formation but also of nesting pelicans (who are as often male as female), sitting one-neck's distance apart.

Fred Olsen describes the making of an Amerindian canoe as the "occupation involving the closest cooperation among the men."⁹⁰ This lends canoes, which are always

⁸⁹ And as a mythologized motif, the pelican was far more than just a competitor to ancient Amerindians as it is to West Indian fishermen today.

⁹⁰ Olsen, *On the Trail of the Arawaks*, 159.

made by men and are usually staffed by them, an overall masculine connotation. The pelican, synonymous with coordinated efforts, precise rhythm and placement, and overall regularity also is worth considering here. Lévi-Strauss considers the equidistance and rhythmical rowing of canoe-men to be a symbol of the regular cycles that govern Amerindian culture. He writes of “the canoe whose course regulates the passage of time, the alternation between day and night and the return of the seasons, provided the travelers remain at a reasonable distance from each other” thereby establishing “an internal interval inside their boat.”⁹¹ Thus the canoe embodies the clockwork of the days and seasons and the order of an organized society. The rhythmic, equidistant pelicans are the spirit of that time-keeping and the order it imparts.⁹²

In the lowland tropic traditions from which Saladoid narratives originated, canoes could be considered islands floating on the water. The closely coordinated goings-on inside the dry and finite interior of a canoe as it floated on the infinite waters would have been analogous to island culture itself in the midst of nature and the sea.⁹³ As lines of pelicans patrolled the chaotic deep, their wings beating in lockstep, they were embodiments of articulated order, persisting stubbornly in the midst of chaos. As isolated modules of culture, not unlike the Antilles themselves, floating on the open sea, canoes floated on the face of the mysterious underworld, occasionally seizing what they might,

⁹¹ Lévi-Strauss, *The Origin of Table Manners*, 456.

⁹² Additionally, the sudden November upswing in brown pelican populations (as local groups are joined by migrating North American ones) marks the beginning of the dry season, and the end of the phase in which pelicans rear their young (March to June) marks the beginning of the rainy season. This would make the fertility cycle of pelicans a seasonal marker.

⁹³ Lévi-Strauss, *The Origin of Table Manners*, 446.

like pelicans, from the secrets of the deep. Since canoes could be used in war as well as fishing, canoe-synonymous pelicans might have been seen as both fishers and warriors.

In accordance with Boomert's synthesis of the genders, elements, colors and other symbolic categories, the sea, for all its darkness and mystery, pungency and richness is feminine.⁹⁴ As a bird of the day, capable of agile and acrobatic flight, the pelican's masculinity is again affirmed in a mythological sense. The bird's impressive, protruding bill, with gular pouch beneath, would seem to inform a certain phallic, vertical symbolism, especially as it dives down or holds its head up to swallow against the horizontal (feminine) surface of the water. But the fact that the pelican, like other aquatic birds spends its days upon, near to, or flying low above the water, makes it a mitigating agent between the masculine skies and the feminine seas. The largest, most powerful hunting, fishing and poaching birds in the Antilles are the ones that live nearer the sea, so associations between such masculine birds and the fisher, hunter, and warrior would have always been nuanced by their links to the often feminine mysteries of the deep.

As birds of prey, pelicans would seem to be an Antillean equivalent of the eagle, revered masculine-hunter-warrior-sky symbol throughout most of the American mainland.⁹⁵ But the pelican does not simply replace that king of birds in the Antilles. For pelicans seize their prey from the sea, not the land. They do so by their beaks, not their talons. They dispatch and consume their prey by swallowing them whole, not ripping and parsing them into morsels, and with the plummeting act of penetration that is the

⁹⁴ Boomert, "Raptorial Birds as Icons of Shamanism," 122-123.

⁹⁵ Ibid. Boomert's article (beyond the specific sections on harpy eagles cited here) holistically treats the topic of raptors in Amazonid lore, based on the author's synthesis of previous studies by other scholars and his own research.

pelican's dive (from the masculine sky into the feminine water), even the agile Caribbean ospreys, hawks and falcons cannot rival the reckless, masculine thrust of the pelican. There is a sexual symbolism here alongside the inherent links to warriors and fishers.

The pelican was a different kind of supreme bird. Hardly an eagle-substitute in some rigid mythic structure originating in the Amazon or Andes, the pelican was a new archetype, a "lord of the marine sky" that re-wired the structure, rendering it more so a workable armature.⁹⁶ Perhaps appearing first on the watery Lower Orinoco, the symbolic pelican emerged as the supreme Caribbean bird in the Saladoid, possibly the ruler of all the blue vault above the earth but specifically of the marine sky that surrounds all creation on the island. This was an unprecedented category in Saladoid art and lore.

Possible Functions of Pelican Pottery

For what then would a pelican pot have been used? Were they masculine vessels, used only by warriors, symbolic of time, order or other canoe-related ideas? As masculinized pots, because pottery was otherwise seen as inherently feminine, pelican ceramics may have been used in male initiations in lieu of outmoded anteater vessels or other mammalian adorned vessels related to gender assignment, divination and initiation. But since pelican imagery coexisted with mammal ceramics in the southernmost islands, the ceramic pelican probably had a unique symbolism linked to male ventures, especially canoe-related activities. Unfortunately none of the navicular vessels (i.e., oblong, canoe-

⁹⁶ Gerald McMaster and Clifford E. Trafzer, eds., *Native Universe: Voices of Indian America* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2004), 39. In some parts of the Americas other birds outrank the eagle, such as the raven among the Tlingit, Haida and other North American peoples of the Pacific Northwest and Arctic. There the raven is an important trickster-Creator and a major figure in various narratives while aspects of the eagle are lent to the rare Thunderbird but otherwise receive only minor mention. The eagle is not an indispensable archetype.

like vessels) I have seen exhibit pelican imagery. It is likely that pelican vessels related to canoes and the masculine pursuit of fishing by being used to prepare or present marine foods in ceremony. The St. Vincent adorno in figure 5.30 indicates it was part of a low dish, good for holding fish. However, many pelican adornos run down the middle of D-strap handles, which were often affixed to bowls designed to hold liquids. These liquids may have been the fish soups and stews that are still part of Caribbean cuisine today.

Ducks

Ducks in Nature

There are over a dozen common species of ducks in the Eastern Caribbean today. These include masked ducks (*Nomonyx dominicus*), black-bellied and black-billed whistling ducks (*Dendrocygna autumnalis* and *Dendrocygna arborea*), fulvous whistling ducks (*Dendrocygna bicolor*), ruddy ducks (*Oxyura jamaicensis*), white-cheeked pintails (*Anas bahamensis*) and blue-winged teals (*Anas discors*). These live mostly on vegetable matter growing in the water but some species also eat small insects and crustaceans. They fly away when molested but some species dive or sink submarine-like beneath the water. Ducks may nest on the ground, in trees or in dense marsh growth on the water.⁹⁷

Incidences and Aesthetics of Saladoid Duck Imagery

The variety of duck species was probably even greater before the introduction of firearms after the conquest. Despite the wide distribution of these birds, duck iconography was a Windward Islands phenomenon during the Saladoid. Duck imagery,

⁹⁷ Evans, *Birds of the Eastern Caribbean*, 33-38; French, *Birds of Trinidad and Tobago*, 82-84.

though not numerous in most islands, was of evident importance judging by the size, function and quality of the objects bearing the likeness of these birds (figures 5.37 to 5.41). They appear from Trinidad to Martinique and are entirely absent from the mainland, a uniquely Antillean motif. St. Vincent and the Grenadines have the highest concentration of duck images (Appendix 1, Chart 1). Ducks appear as adornos but entire vessels also were shaped like their heads or bodies. Their distinctive bills are clearly depicted but otherwise they are highly stylized, even fanciful.

Among the species of ducks that seem to appear in Saladoid adornos, the preference seems to be for a bird with a broad bill that extends around to the sides of the bird's face. These are traits of whistling (the *Dendrocygna* species) and ruddy ducks (*Oxyura jamaicensis*). The large nares of the whistling ducks were perhaps the inspiration for a duck adorno from Guadeloupe with a nasal loop (compare figure 18 to figure 5.37). The central crest-ridge given this adorno might represent the slightly prominent feathering along the middle of the head of black-billed whistling ducks (*Dendrocygna arborea*). This species would have been privileged in Saladoid symbolism for its nocturnal and partially arboreal habits.⁹⁸

The ruddy duck, though it only breeds in Grenada now, once may have been a common sight throughout the Lesser Antilles.⁹⁹ It may be the species depicted in a special class of adornos identified by Moravetz as crested turtles.¹⁰⁰ I agree that these are turtles, at one end. But only when laid on their backs and viewed from the side, do the fanciful

⁹⁸ Evans, *Birds of the Eastern Caribbean*, 34-35.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁰⁰ Iosif Moravetz, *Imaging Adornos: Classification and Iconography of Saladoid Adornos from St. Vincent, West Indies* (Oxford, U.K.: British Archaeological Reports International Series, 2005), 41-42. In Moravetz's alpha-numeric classification system, these are adornos type IB1a and IB2.

“crests” of these turtles evoke something from the natural world.¹⁰¹ When viewed from this secondary direction, these turtle adornos become ducks with large bills that are slightly turned up at the ends (compare figures 5.38 and 6.65). This broad, snubbed bill would seem to evoke the ruddy duck. The adorno in figure 5.38 hails from Bequia in the Grenadines, just north of the bird’s last corporeal stronghold in the Lesser Antilles today.

An enigmatic slip-painted vessel fragment from Martinique depicts a duck with a narrower bill (figure 5.39). While polychromed in white-on-red, it also is expertly modeled to immediately evoke the shape of a duck’s head. Yet it possesses almost no other modeled or painted details that might articulate the eyes and cheek or cap markings that could help identify a species. Only its narrow bill suggests it may be a white-cheeked pintail (figure 17). A single hook-shaped element, modeled in high relief on the cheek of the bird and painted red also recalls the cheek markings of the white-cheeked pintail but in shape, not color. Abstract, curviform white-on-red motifs on this vessel do not correspond to the dark and light markings of the pintail. However, females of many duck species have prominent markings extending back from the rear corners of their eyes and curling down around their cheeks, as does the modeled element in this Martiniquian ceramic. So this need not be a white-cheeked pintail. The relatively narrow bill also is painted red, further complicating identification with any particular species.

Several Caribbean duck species seem to be connoted here, as no one of the extant seventeen species I have investigated bears these markings. We cannot dismiss the possibility that there was once an Antillean species, endemic or vagrant, that bore similar

¹⁰¹ Of course, animals are anthropomorphized in Saladoid art and so these crests might be read as crowns atop the heads of “en-turtled” spirits or ancestors, or as Moravetz suggests, may stylistically represent the accumulated folds of fatty neck skin above the turtles’ heads.

markings, but it is likely the polychrome patterns on this vessel fragment represent some separate visual system, specific to the white-on-red scheme of decoration, that situates this duck within a symbolic program now lost to us.¹⁰² These markings seem to be cultural ones painted and appliquéd onto the profile of an otherwise generic zoomorph.

A vessel from Trinidad bearing the shape of a duck's body, rather than its head and bill, is inscribed with motifs similarly having no referent in any natural bird markings (figure 5.40). Viewed from above, the incisions are vaguely anthropomorphic, forming a face with two eyes and the dark interior of the spout suggesting a mouth held open in an "O." The combination of these incised motifs and the duck-like body of the vessel are yet indecipherable. Four nubbins on the circumference of the vessel also suggest the legs of a turtle, implying that the duck's body also is a turtle's shell, rendering the vessel's iconography even more complex. Certainly, ducks and turtles are creatures that occasionally leave their aquatic environment for the land, perhaps most notably, to lay eggs. A symbolic connection between mythic turtles and ducks may have been imagined in the Saladoid Windward Islands, linking the two by their motherhood and edible eggs but opposing them as floaters (ducks) on the water and sinkers (turtles) beneath.

Perhaps the most interesting of the ceramic duck vessels in this study is the polychrome duckbill censer from St. Vincent (figure 5.41). This apparently late Saladoid object is painted not in white-on-red but in white on brown with a third, golden brown slip. Many of the curvilinear painted motifs are recognizably Saladoid but other, more geometric ones seem like white-painted versions of black post-Saladoid (usually

¹⁰² As I stated in the Introduction to this dissertation, I have deferred the study and decipherment of white-on-red motifs for post-doctoral research as it presents a quite different range of problems than painted and modeled figural images.

Troumassoid) motifs.¹⁰³ The censer features a vertical strap handle on its back end, atop of which is another, smaller loop. The function of this loop is unknown. Possibly it was used to hold some soft, fibrous piece of ritual paraphernalia, such as a cloth, a bundle of feathers, sticks, reeds or grasses. This is my own subjective interpretation of this undetermined but evidently utilitarian feature. The precise ritual function of the censer itself also is unknown. However, if we consider this fascinating object alongside tropical lowland duck narratives, some likely ritual associations for ducks can be theorized. In the absence of Antillean duck lore, we might rely on the duck-related legends and practices of living peoples of the Lower Orinoco and the Guianas instead.

Ducks and Canoes in Mainland Narratives

The Warao say, “each duck has its own particular kind of boat.” This saying stems from a narrative of their folk hero, Haburi. Captured, along with his mother and aunt, by a witch who is hopelessly smitten with him, Haburi repeatedly tries to escape. In his attempts to steal away across the waters to Trinidad, Haburi clandestinely makes a series of canoes, each of which is stolen by a different species of duck.¹⁰⁴ First, a black duck absconds with his beeswax canoe, then another makes off with his clay canoe, and so on with canoes made from several varieties of wood. Only the canoe made from the

¹⁰³ There are other censers of this type that are more typically Saladoid white-on-red but less duck-like, including one from Martinique illustrated in M. Mattioni and M. Nicholas, *Art Précolombien de la Martinique* (Fort-de-France, Martinique: Musée Départemental de la Martinique, 1972), 66.

¹⁰⁴ Peter O’Brien Harris, “Nabarima: A Warao Sacred Place in South Trinidad,” in *Proceedings of the XXI Congress of the International Association for Caribbean Archaeology* (Port-of-Spain, Trinidad: International Association for Caribbean Archaeology, 2005), 489-490; Lévi-Strauss, *From Honey to Ashes*, trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 183.

silk-cotton tree (i.e., the sacred ceiba, *Ceiba pentandra*) is not lost to thieving waterfowl. In primordial time, ducks are eager to acquire the ability to float buoyantly on water.¹⁰⁵

The Warao tradition confirms, “it was Haburi who first made a boat and who first taught ducks to float on the surface of the water.” Lévi-Strauss describes the ducks as “fusing” with the canoes they acquired from Haburi.¹⁰⁶ They become veritable canoes as they gain the ability to swim and float. Thus buoyancy is an ancient human legacy illicitly acquired by ducks, culture appropriated by nature. This is an inversion of the usually Promethean narratives of the lowland tropics where heroes steal the secrets of culture from primordial zoomorphs. Here the canoe is temporally and conceptually prior to the floating, swimming duck.

These ducks cause us to consider more deeply the concept of the canoe as a bastion of culture in the midst of the chaotic waters, as described in the sub-section on “Pelicans.” Like a village, a canoe thrives as a human sphere amid the animal and ghostly worlds. “For what is a canoe, if not a means of overcoming the wet with the dry?” asks Lévi-Strauss rhetorically, suggesting the insulating, artificial aspect of the canoe.¹⁰⁷ Ducks, with their waterproof feathers, likewise overcome the wet with the dry, their bodies descended from a mythic proto-canoe. They have an aspect of impenetrability of which the canoe is the exemplar. Ducks and their referent canoes also might be emblems of resistance to the potentially culture-eroding effects of spiritual and natural forces.

¹⁰⁵ Lévi-Strauss, *From Honey to Ashes*, 183.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 183, 208.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 293.

A synonymy between ducks and manned canoes is set up in a narrative from clear across the tropical lowlands from the Warao, in the southern Amazon. In this Tupi narrative, servants are sent by their mistress to fetch the nut of a tucuman palm (*Astrocaryum tucuman*) from the stores of a great serpent. They are returning in their canoe when they hear the sound of tiny creatures, sounds that we now recognize as those of crickets and nocturnally mating frogs, coming from inside the nut. They gather in the center of the canoe, start a fire, melt the resin that naturally seals the nut and pry it open. Their mischief releases the first night upon the world. As darkness blankets all creation a series of spectral transformations mark the birth of the day-and-night cycle.¹⁰⁸ Inanimate objects turn into animals, including a basket that becomes a jaguar, and a fisherman in his canoe who fuses with the latter to become a duck. The canoe forms the body of the bird, the paddles become the bird's legs, and the body and head of the man, the head and bill of the bird.¹⁰⁹ Here again ducks' bodies are canoes, but this time resembling my pelican-canoe analogy more closely: the canoe is manned.

There is a noteworthy detail in this Tupi narrative that is not in the Warao one: the mention of a fire in the middle of the canoe. In fact, canoes as they float on water are products of the land and sky, as implied in the upward growth of the trees felled to make them. And at several points along the line of production of a canoe, fire would have been used. A tree would be prepared for felling over a period of up to two months. Fires would be set around its base, the spread of the flame controlled by wet moss. As the wood

¹⁰⁸ Again, as with pelican symbolism, time is born in a canoe.

¹⁰⁹ Lévi-Strauss *From Honey to Ashes*, 211, 213, 416-417. Also, in a great flood narrative from the Vapidianas, a duck's bill changes into a canoe inside which a family takes refuge from the boundless waters. Thus, in some narratives, ducks are turned into canoes and others canoes (sometimes with their crewman) into ducks.

turned to brittle charcoal, it was removed with petaloid celts and other stone tools. When the tree was finally felled, fires were set along its length where, again, charcoal was then removed using stone and shell axes and adzes to produce the dugout hollow. Fires were continually set in the middle of the boat until the hollow was complete.¹¹⁰

It is known from the Caribs of the Lesser Antilles that the hull of the vessel was then filled with water and fire-heated stones were placed in that water. The hot water rendered the hardwood fibers elastic, causing the canoe to bow outwards in the middle. Leeboards then were inserted across the pot-bellied hull to help retain the bulge in the vessel, which was now wider than the tree from which it was carved.¹¹¹ Olsen suggests that final smoothening on the canoe may have been done with the sandpaper skin of a “man-killing shark” (such as the great white, *Carcharodon carcharias*) or coral rasps, both marine resources, obviously.¹¹² The harmonization of earth, fire and water in the making of a wooden canoe would have required a full cycle of rituals from felling to construction to launching. For months after launching, the canoe would still have had the fading odor of the fires that served to put it to sea.

Having once stretched toward the airy heavens, tall trees were felled by fire, stone and moss; fashioned by fire, stone, coral and sharkskin; then blessed and cast off to sea. There, they became like smoky, wooden land, afloat on the water. Canoes were veritable mandalas of natural elements with water at their periphery and with fire at the heart of their production. It is in the relationship between fire, canoes and ducks that a ritual

¹¹⁰ Fred Olsen, *On the Trail of the Arawaks* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974), 31, 145, 159, 166-167.

¹¹¹ Lennox Honychurch, *The Dominica Story* (London: Macmillan Education, 1995), 24-25. Also from my observations of traditional Amerindian canoe-making and personal communications with canoe makers in the Carib Territory of Dominica.

¹¹² Olsen, *On the Trail of the Arawaks*, 167.

connection to the duck censer from St. Vincent becomes perceptible. Ceramic duck objects might have been used in canoe-making and canoe-blessing shamanic rituals.

Olsen's recounting of Friar J. Gumilla's eighteenth-century account of Otomac Indian canoe-making on the Orinoco (from which derives some of the details of the process described above) does not mention any religious rituals that may have accompanied the slow, repetitive felling process. However, it is likely that the application of fire to a wooden object intended for use as a watercraft would have necessitated some harmonizing ritual. Large hardwood trees like the ceiba, of which canoes often were made, are believed to be the primordial tree, being both axis mundi linking heaven, earth and underworld and font from which the oceans were first released.¹¹³ Amazonian shamans today still oversee the making of canoes, even determining the time of year when a tree should be felled for one.¹¹⁴ Given the aforementioned spiritual connotations of these watercraft, they were probably carved, like a zemi, from carefully chosen wood, and the entire process of carving also must have been made auspicious by rites, tobacco smoke and herbal potions. The St. Vincent ceramic censer bears the likeness of the creature most closely associated with the origin and making of canoes, so far as we know. This duck censer is bottomless, suggesting that it was cupped over ritual fires. I suggest here that this strap-handled duck censer was used to kindle, control and/or sanctify canoe-making fires. Whether these were the fires used to fell the tree, hollow the dugout, or bulge the hull is indiscernible.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Roe, *The Cosmic Zygote*, 140.

¹¹⁴ Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Rainforest Shamans: Essays on the Tukano Indians of the Northwest Amazon* (Dartington, England: Themis Books, 1997), 17, 261.

Floating, Diving, Healing, and Gender in Mainland Duck Narratives

From legend, ethnography and zoology there is a clear symbolic similarity between ducks and pelicans as relates to canoes and water. But unlike ducks, pelicans lend a masculine aspect to the shamanic and zemiistic act of plunging beneath the uppermost levels of the underworld and returning with secrets thereof. Given the feminine fertility connotation of fish in many tropical lowland traditions, the pelican's fishing might hold a promise of continuity with the ancestors. The defensive diving of herbivorous ducks might seem feminine by contrast.¹¹⁶ Pelicans and ducks might represent masculine and feminine aspects of a contiguous "plunging/sinking" principle, with aggressive warrior pelican magic on one end and defensive healing duck medicine on the other. Each avian motif would derive its medicine from the aqueous underworld.

For proof of the feminine status of the ducks we might look to today's northwestern Amazonian Desana where these birds have been a female sib symbol since Pre-Columbian times. The Desana's matrilineal social structure was even more stable before the conquest and the duck made for an appropriate icon. Reichel-Dolmatoff notes the aquatic names of the sibs such as Fish Women and Duck Women, again, water being generally feminine.¹¹⁷ A maritime people such as the island Saladoid potters (probably

¹¹⁵ It may be possible in the future to test the soot rings on the inside of this and other censers for residue from specific materials burnt therein. Detectable wood types may indicate or contra-indicate canoe woods.

¹¹⁶ Roe, *The Cosmic Zygote*, 99. The brownness of most ducks also links them to a mythic series throughout the Amazon wherein neutral colored aquatic birds dive to the bottom of the water to steal cultural secrets for humans and/or colored plumage for the forest birds from a great, often malevolent serpent that lives in the depths.

¹¹⁷ Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Rainforest Shamans*, 83.

matrilineal themselves) also may have feminized the various duck species in their aquatic environment, and the legends and motifs that referenced these birds as well.¹¹⁸

In Desana and other Tukanoan healing rituals, people are meant to “float” like ducks emerging from beneath “the waters of illness.” Not just disease, but also drunkenness, sorcery and other forces and conditions that cause one to lose control of one’s body or faculties are all likened to the cloying, blinding watery depths. “Floating on” these dark currents is the ability of a duck.¹¹⁹ The waterproof body of the duck, and specifically its waterproof feathers, are invoked during healing ceremonies to make the patient impermeable to any continued or future disease and/or sorcery.¹²⁰ Thus the prophylactic function of the duck’s feathers, like the impermeable hull of the canoe, overcomes sickness and its unseen causes with the conceptual “dryness” of medicine.

Possible Functions of Saladoid Duck Ceramics

The link between ceramic vessels, canoes and ducks might be imagined in the resemblance of their bodies. Their appearance on censers in St. Vincent and Martinique suggest that ducks were the patron zoomorph of canoe-making, a tedious, ritualized, noisy process filled with billowing smoke, incantations and rattling, whirring maracas. The buoyancy and impenetrability of ducks also suggests that vessels bearing their likeness held medicinal foods for lifting the sufferer out of fevers, spirit-possession,

¹¹⁸ The fact that Saladoid ceramicists combined the duck with turtle imagery in some adornos may support this idea, since turtles are proven to be feminine symbols throughout Chapter Six.

¹¹⁹ Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Amazon Cosmos: the Sexual and Religious Symbolism of the Tukano Indians*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 102; Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Rainforest Shamans*, 195.

¹²⁰ Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Amazon Cosmos*, 180-181.

paralysis and madness. More widespread in the Antilles than images of healing vultures, duck imagery and the impenetrability of ducks were likely invoked in these curative rites. We can only guess whether ducks also were featured in the carved iconography on the calabash of the shaman's maraca or if duck feathers were among his/her implements and personal adornments. Such materials have long since dissolved in the tropical soils.

Ibises, Herons and Egrets

Stilt Birds in Nature

Beside pelicans and frigatebirds, the largest aquatic birds in the Caribbean are the ciconiiformes. These are birds that wade on stilt-like legs, prying and pecking in the shallow water with elongated, needle-like beaks. Depending on their species, the ibises, herons and egrets of the Eastern Caribbean can be pristine white (such as the common egret, *Casmerodius albus*), powdery blue-gray (such as the great blue heron, *Ardea herodias*) and even startling red, such as the scarlet ibis (*Eudocimus ruber*).¹²¹ Their long-beaks, looking like precision instruments or weapons, combined with their skeletal legs, the S-shape in which some (e.g., herons) hold their necks as they fly, and the tendency of some to go completely motionless when detected all potentially contribute to wading bird folklore (figures 19 to 22). Among their favorite foods are frogs, crabs and crayfish, creatures that multiply in the rainy season.¹²² This associates these stilt-legged birds

¹²¹ Raffaele et al., *A Guide to the Birds of the West Indies*, 235, 275-276. Perhaps the smaller curlews and whimbrels (species *Numenius*) and more rare roseate spoonbills (*Ajaia ajaja*) can also be included here as iconic long-beaked, long-legged swamp birds but there is little evidence that theirs are the likenesses on Saladoid pottery, since they are mostly vagrant mainland birds. I found only one adorno from St. Vincent that bears any resemblance to a spoonbill but these are Greater Antillean birds very seldom seen that far south. There are no likely flamingo adornos in the collections surveyed in this study.

¹²² Barlow, *The Nature of the Islands*, 52-54.

treading high water with the enhanced dampness of that time. Their habitat skirts the islands. They are littoral and liminal, inhabiting the frontier between water and land.

Incidences and Aesthetics of Stilt Bird Imagery in the Antilles

Most Caribbean egrets and herons range throughout the entire Caribbean archipelago. Likewise, these and other stilt-legged birds appear in ceramics throughout the Saladoid Lesser Antilles. Historically there has been a tendency to regard all long-beaked birds in Pre-Columbian Caribbean ceramics as pelicans.¹²³ But the deliberate narrowing and curving of beaks in many adornos is not likely to be a mere stylization of the straight, large beaks of pelicans (compare figure 5.29 to figures 5.42 and 5.43). One might argue that the curved beaks of these “pelican” adornos are caused by the potter following the contour of strap handles or bulging vessel walls. But several adornos feature curved, narrow beaks that depart the surface of the vessel (e.g., figure 5.44).

I propose that many curved beaks do not merely follow the line of the strap handles or vessel walls on which they appear but consciously represent an aquatic bird other than the pelican, perhaps the ibis. However, today ibises have limited distribution in the Lesser Antilles, and it is uncertain whether they were more widespread in Pre-Columbian times.¹²⁴ Also, the narrowness of some adorno beaks, especially when not as

¹²³ Peter O'Brien Harris, “Excavation Report: Lovers’ Retreat Period IV, Tobago” in *Proceedings of the VIII Congress For the Study of the Pre-Columbian Cultures of the Lesser Antilles* (Tempe: Arizona State University, 1980), 527, 545, 549; I. A. Earle Kirby, “The Pre-Hispanic Peopling of the Antilles” in *Proceedings of the VI International Congress for the Study of Pre-Columbian Cultures of the Lesser Antilles* (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1976), 15; Desmond V. Nicholson, “A Ceramic Shell Midden with Ceramic and Archaic Components” in *Proceedings of the VI International Congress for the Study of Pre-Columbian Cultures of the Lesser Antilles* (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1976), 259, 262. The “crudely modeled” bird on page 262 of Nicholson is one such questionable “pelican.” Peter Harris has suggested for some thirty years that these may not all be pelican adornos but rather herons.

drastically curved, may indicate herons. In these would-be ibises and/or herons, there is a Saladoid tendency to create a planar or linear separation between the beak and the head. This emphasizes the appendage in a different way than is commonly seen in the pelican adornos where a linear incision along the length of the beak, usually a straight one, emphasizes the separation between upper and lower mandible and gular pouch (compare figure 5.28 to 5.43). If we separate stilt bird imagery out from pelicans using the criteria described here (i.e., long, narrow, curved beaks made distinct from the rounded head of the bird), the former outnumber pelicans on several islands, including St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Guadeloupe (Appendix 1, Chart 1). Stilt birds are of no apparent importance in the ceramics of the mainland Saladoid. In the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History's Anthropology collection, I found only two adornos with ciconiid traits, one damaged right where a vulture's curuncúla may have been (figure 5.49).

Both Peter Harris and Peter Roe have argued for the presence of herons in Pre-Columbian Caribbean imagery, the former for Lesser Antillean ceramics and the latter for petroglyphs in Puerto Rico.¹²⁵ Roe notes the tropical lowland tendency to regard the largest species of a particular class as a “paragon” of that entire class. He proposes that as in South America, the great blue heron, which stands at some four feet tall, is this

¹²⁴ Raffaele et al., *A Guide to the Birds of the West Indies*, 235. Scarlet ibises (*Eudocimus ruber*) are limited to Trinidad, Tobago and rarely, Grenada; and glossy ibises (*Plegadis falcinellus*) are largely confined to the Greater Antilles. These stilt bird adornos with the particularly curved beaks may be ibises, species for which there are no known narratives but symbolism comparable to that of other stilt birds. The symbolism of ibises is treated in Appendix 2, in the section entitled “Beyond Herons and Cranes.”

¹²⁵ Harris, “Excavation Report,” 549; Peter G. Roe, “Cross-Media Isomorphisms in Taino Ceramics and Petroglyphs from Puerto Rico,” in *Proceedings of the XIV Congress of the International Association for Caribbean Archaeology* (Barbados: International Association for Caribbean Archaeology, 1991), 647.

important exemplar and is probably the long-legged bird depicted on a petroglyph at the Taíno ballcourt in Caguana, Puerto Rico.¹²⁶ Stilt birds had importance in Antillean art.

Stilt Birds as Storm Birds in Antillean and Mainland Narratives

In an article in the 1980s, Peter Harris suggested that Sauacou, the Great Blue Heron hurricane spirit of the Island Caribs, may have had some earlier analogue in the Ceramic Lesser Antilles, including among the Saladoid ceramicists.¹²⁷ Peter Roe also regards the Caguana aquatic bird as a great blue heron and a rain symbol, mentioning Father Breton's seventeenth-century account of the Island Carib "Sawáku" narrative as well.¹²⁸ Throughout tropical lowland lore, ciconiiforme birds are in some way related to rain, storms and the opposing forces that drive those storms. As with many aquatic avian narratives, and bird lore in general, the elemental powers of birds are revealed in the human quest and acquisition of secret knowledge.

In these narratives, long-legged aquatic birds are enlisted by heroes and shamans to assist in the acquisition of the most important cultural gifts: ritual implements. It is not that the stilt birds are always culture-bearers *per se* but rather that they assist in the acquisition of culture, under the direction of humans. In various tropical lowland narratives, egrets, ibises, "cranes" and particularly herons fly off to far-away places to

¹²⁶ Raffaele et al., *A Guide to the Birds of the West Indies*, 228-229; Roe, "Cross-Media Isomorphisms in Taíno Ceramics and Petroglyphs from Puerto Rico," 647.

¹²⁷ Harris, "Excavation Report," 549.

¹²⁸ Roe, "Cross-Media Isomorphisms in Taíno Ceramics and Petroglyphs from Puerto Rico," 648, 661.

return with religious materials. But occasionally, the magic they carry is not good medicine and they leave catastrophe in their wake.

A Kayapo-Gorotire narrative features a phoenix-like stilt bird that seems to be at once the source of and an attractor for the opposing forces of water and fire. In this legend, an egret or heron is captured, tamed and kept in a village, presumably for some unspoken benefit. The villagers make a home for it in an old wooden mortar, filling the hollow of the mortar with water. In this way, the aquatic bird can perch on the mortar's edge or wade in the water as if it were a pond. But the egret's "mysterious nature is revealed in a storm." Lightning strikes the mortar, and in so doing, causes the water to boil. From the burning mortar rises steam and smoke and yet, in the midst of this watery conflagration, the tall bird stands untroubled and unharmed.¹²⁹

Keeping in mind this powerful image of an egret/heron/bittern (i.e., some bird of the family *Ardeidae*) standing peacefully at the center of a nimbus of smoke and steam (i.e., evaporating water) emerging from a hollowed tree, we must search tropical lowland stilt bird lore for an interpretation. In this motif are several implicit and explicit associations between stilt birds and still or dammed water, evaporating water, sparks/lightning, hollowed wood, as represented here by a mortar, and substances most often prepared in a mortar: medicines, potions and poisons. We might also consider the feminine connotation of water, the masculine connotations of fire and lightning and the transformational nature of smoke in much of Amerindian lore and ritual practice.¹³⁰ The

¹²⁹ Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 257-258.

¹³⁰ Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Amazonian Cosmos*, 98-100.

stilt bird thus perches at the nexus of these forces, not rotating its position between these but rather being the fire that is in water, the water that is in fire, the alchemy of storms.¹³¹

In the same Kayapo-Gorotire tradition, the villagers go on a fishing expedition wherein the men dam up a river, thus creating still water contained by logs and other tree parts, then walk upstream and drop fish poison in the river, an ancient method of fishing throughout the tropical lowlands.¹³² The suffocated fish flow lifelessly down into the dam where the women prepare to gather them up. But the women notice the stilt bird perched on a tree instead of his customary mortar, eyeing them. He suddenly swoops down and flies past them. In his wake, all the women collapse at the river's edge, as dead as poisoned fish.¹³³ The apparent link between lifeless fish and dead women seems confusing at first. In anthropological collections of oral traditions, transitional parts of stories are sometimes missing. Despite such missing details, when the story is viewed in relation to similar ones, the meaning can become more easily grasped, if partially.

The women are about to gather dead fish when they are themselves struck dead by some magical force emanating from the stilt bird. In fact, as they gather these fish they are imitating egrets, herons, ibises, spoonbills and other similar wading birds who eat suffocated fish that perish as the blazing sun dries up their water. Shallow ponds often evaporate in the dry season, leaving stranded, then gasping, fish behind.¹³⁴ I can attest that in the American tropics, the rainy season literally ends with a bang as the greatest storms

¹³¹ Harris, "Excavation Report," 549.

¹³² The parts of this narrative that reference water trapped behind or inside wood are constituent of many tropical lowland traditions in which the first waters are released either from a tree or a calabash.

¹³³ Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 257.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 278.

gather, full of terrible thunder and lightning. These storms strafe the land between September and November after which the dry season commences.¹³⁵ This is the time when wading birds can be seen harvesting great numbers of crabs and crustaceans caught out by the shrinking edges of ponds. Finally some tributaries and small bodies of standing water dry up entirely leaving patches of dead or spasmodic fish ready for the picking. In the Kayapo-Gorotire narrative, the women are set to harvest trapped, suffocated fish in an anthropogenic version of this isolation-fishing, not long after the lightning that hits the mortar heralding the evaporating dry season. But the women are punished for usurping the isolation-fishing prerogatives of the jealous stilt bird, who strikes them dead.

The Kayapo-Gorotire storm-bird theme involves a body of water confined by wood; lightning strikes on wooden objects; a resultant cloud of smoke and steam; and the benevolent and malevolent forces embodied in a single creature. Far to the north of the Kayapo homeland in southern Brazil, Warao and (Cariban) Makushi lore of northeast South America tells of stilt birds sent on errands to acquire ritual technologies related to fire, smoke and evaporation. The Venezuelan, and Guianian traditions tighten the loose links mentioned here between these elemental forces.

Stilt Birds and the Acquisition of Jealous Secrets

In one Warao legend, three small children go missing as their six parents talk among themselves. The frantic parents search unsuccessfully for their children. As time passes, they abandon the search, two by two. Yet the parents who first noticed their child was missing carry on and eventually find their son, Kurusiwari and the other two children

¹³⁵ John Macpherson, *Caribbean Lands* (Essex, U.K.: Longman Caribbean, 1982), 7-11, 15-18, 35.

as well. The children are already coming of age, knowledgeable about the forest, and as feral children, they have an ability to communicate with the creatures there. Kurusiwari, vows not to return to his neglectful family, even when his parents tearfully implore. He and the other two youths retreat to a far off island in the middle of the sea. The Warao today speculate whether this island might be Trinidad. But in ancient times, the island in question was called Nibo-yuni (“Man-without”), for it was peopled only by women.

Before leaving for the island Kurusiwari offers his parents one consolation: that they should built a “spirit-house,” and in it burn tobacco so that they might sometimes summon his spirit. His father sets about building the spirit-house but has no tobacco. He tries burning papaya, cotton and other leaves instead, but these have no power to conjure his son. Finally, he sends a heron across the sea to acquire tobacco from the island to which his son has fled. But the bird never returns, struck down by the keen watchwoman of the island. Again and again he sends birds to fetch seeds with which he might grow his own tobacco, but they never return. Ultimately, a crane agrees to assist him in this desperate errand. A hummingbird swears to the crane that he can better infiltrate the tobacco fields of Nibo-yuni undetected. But doubtful Crane resists the idea.

As the stilt bird rests before his journey in the morning, Hummingbird wakes early, as is his custom, and takes to the sky. He is determined to prove his ability to Crane. But the winds are against him and Crane comes along and finds him struggling in the water, on the verge of drowning. Crane hoists him unto his thigh and continues on the flight to Nibo-yuni. Hummingbird is glad for a rest on Crane’s legs but as those legs trail behind him as he flies, every time the mighty stilt bird relieves himself, it soils the face of Hummingbird. Disgusted, but rested, the tiny bird takes to the wing once more and is able

to complete Crane's mission, despite the watchwoman's attempt to pick him off with her darts. He is too small a target. Together the birds return from Nibo-yuni with tobacco.

In the building of a spirit house and the prescribed use of the tobacco from Nibo-yuni, the distraught father becomes the first "piai man" or shaman. He uses fire, smoke, the rhythmic language of the maraca and other implements in his spirit house to speak to unseen beings near and far.¹³⁶ This Warao tradition, which has several variants in the Orinoco Delta region and Guianas, presents a stilt bird and a hummingbird, perhaps appreciable as storm and solar symbols (by way of hummingbird iridescence) respectively, as partners in the acquisition of tobacco for the first shaman. One is celebrated for his ability to travel to the far spirit realm and the other for his ability to do the fine, stealthy work of acquiring the first ingredient of religious ritual, tobacco seeds. Interestingly, the narrative creates an unexpected juncture between the tiny hummingbird of the forest and a large aquatic bird, the long beaks of both species as a point of affinity.

A white-on-red pot from Guadeloupe infers just such a partnership between two unlikely birds (figure 5.45). When viewed in profile, the strap handle and primary adorno of the pot seem to depict a heron with its neck held in the distinctive S-shape as it flies. But on what would be the hind end of this heron vessel is a little bird nubbin peeking upwards. The little bird does not appear to be a hummingbird, however. Instead it bears the overall shape of a smaller member of the parrot family, perhaps a parakeet. This pot is an iconographic masterpiece of the Antillean Saladoid also becoming anthropomorphic when viewed from above, at which point, the strap handle disappears behind the main adorno, which becomes a human face. And, when viewed from a high angle but slightly

¹³⁶ Roth, "Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore," 334-336.

from the side, the human face becomes a turtle facing away from the pot, its flippers becoming the human's adorned ears. The anthropomorph-turtle aspect of this adorno is a well-known convention in the Saladoid and is illustrated in figures 6.60 and 6.61 as part of the discussion on turtles in Chapter Six. But viewed only from the side, this pot would seem to reference a Saladoid version of the Warao "journey across the waters" narrative.

In a Makushi tradition, the stilt bird is not a courier of the secret knowledge but the donor of it. Crane teaches the Cariban hero twins Pia and Makunaima the secret of making fire from sparking flints together. With this fire the brothers are able to cook and smoke tobacco. Even as students of Crane, the prodigious humans quickly surpass the bird in fishing by damming up the river with large stones (serendipitously creating the first great waterfalls in the Guianas).¹³⁷ In this Makushi narrative we see the origin of dam-and-poison fishing and a cause (including jealousy) for possible resentment between stilt birds and humans as between, say, jaguar and men for stealing his fire, or between the storm bird and the Kayapo-Gorotire women he kills.

There is eventually a schism between the two brothers in which Makunaima leaves with his stilt bird tutor while Pia remains with his mother and his people. Pia keeps for his people the boons of culture he has acquired on his quest under Crane's tutelage. The term "piai," the Cariban name for shaman, derives from Pia's name. Pia is the first shaman in Makushi and other Cariban legends, from whom culture and religion are first learned.¹³⁸ Thus in Makushi, Warao and other traditions of northeastern South America,

¹³⁷ Lévi-Strauss, *From Honey to Ashes*, 242. Versions of this story are told by the Warao and Caribans of the Guianas and Venezuela, indicating either that it is of some antiquity (as to have spread among different language groups) or is a common Pre-Columbian belief in that region and the Antilles.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 222, 244-247.

stilt birds are instructors in the cultural adaptation of fire, fire-starting and ritual tobacco use, with whom there is an eventual separation. They are jealous tutelary zoomorphs.

The stilt bird as donor of shamanic knowledge and materials does not end there. The hollow leg bones of egrets are used by the Yekuana and other tropical lowland people as snuffing tubes. Images of these birds in basketry and other arts of the Yekuana are associated with and inspired by the ritual use of narcotics.¹³⁹ From their hallucinogen-related artifacts, such as snuff bowls (some bird-shaped) and hollow bone inhalers, we know that the ancient people of the Antilles also related birds to ritual narcotics.¹⁴⁰ The Saladoid bird bone snuff tubes I observed at the Tobago Museum and in other collections have not been tested for species. They were probably from egrets, herons or ibises.¹⁴¹

Two Unusual Saladoid Storm Bird Vessels

A Saladoid censer from St. Vincent features a ciconiiforme with a very long beak curving down a strap handle. The strap itself springs from the hole in the top of the censer and connects to the side of the vessel (figure 5.46 *left*). The censer is bottomless, like the previously discussed duck and bat censers from this same island, intended to be cupped over the ritual fire. Here is a stilt bird presiding over sparks, fire, ritual smoke (and perhaps steam), the combined forces of the storm. This broken censer is polychromed in a white-on-red scheme whereby the white slip paint is used to create figure-ground

¹³⁹ David M. Guss, *To Weave and Sing: Art, Symbol and Narrative in the South American Rainforest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 238.

¹⁴⁰ Arie Boomert, "Agricultural Societies in the Continental Caribbean," in *General History of the Caribbean: Autochthonous Societies*, ed. Jalil Sued-Badillo (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 2003), 153.

¹⁴¹ There is a brief discussion of ceramic snuff bowls in this chapter's section on "Songbirds and Other Avifauna in Saladoid Imagery."

reversals with the darker surface underneath. However, this darker surface is not painted red as in most pots but is rather the unpainted, orange clay.

As damaged as the censer is (with half of its circumference missing), its polychrome depicts part of a face on the remaining side. Two eyes and large, round ears seem to emerge from the horizon of a register running around the almost cylindrical censer (figure 5.46 *right*). The painted face is damaged and not easily identifiable at first. But when compared to a similar zoomorph, modeled as part of an elaborate adorno on a vessel from Guadeloupe, it seems more convincingly an animal face with eyes, ears and nose (figure 5.47). The Guadeloupean vessel has the shape of a seed pot, having a squat, carinated profile and a restricted mouth, which is connected to the convex side of the vessel by an impressive stilt bird adorno. At the circular mouth of the vessel, the long-beaked bird here seems to hold up a mask-like face with the tip of its beak.

Flat and un-worked on the back and modeled and incised on the front, this second face-mask-like object has a similar shape to that of the big-eared painted motif on the side of the censer from St. Vincent (figure 5.47 *right*). The face is round overall with large, round ears much like those on the censer from St. Vincent but instead of painted hollows for the center of those ears (and for the eyes) as in the Vincentian painted zoomorph, the hollows are punctated and much smaller proportionally. The features are those of a land mammal, almost like that of a bear but of course, there are no bears in the Caribbean. An M-shaped incision over the punctated eyes gives the little “bear” a somewhat sinister look. The only Caribbean mammal whose facial markings correspond to this M-shape on the brow is the raccoon, an animal that once existed in at least three species in the Lesser and Greater Antilles but is now reduced to near extinction. It so

happens that a small, protected population of raccoons (*Procyon lotor minor*) is still extant on the island of Guadeloupe (figure 7).¹⁴²

This peculiar link between ciconiiformes and a land mammal is difficult to interpret without any mythic references to such an association. I can only mention here that, first, raccoons have a similar diet to swamp birds, favoring crabs especially and so they and other land mammals might have anecdotal and folkloric connections to swamp birds, especially as rivals or alter egos. Secondly, the strange juxtaposition of the two species, one ciconiid and the other procyonid, might reference a pair of star constellations separately designated but forever associated as bringers of the storm season. Both frequenting the liminal zone between land and sea (i.e., realms of the living and the spirits respectively), stilt birds and raccoons may share some link to the spirits, forces and celestial bodies associated with this borderland. In fact the last mythical stilt bird theme to explore is the conjunction between the bird, the storm, and rising constellations.

The Stellar Stilt Bird in Antillean and Mainland Symbolism

From cultures as far apart as the Toba of the Gran Chaco and the Caribs of the Antilles there can be found references to the constellation Ursa Major and Orion as representing stilt birds. One of the large stars in Orion is called “Boatbill” (a species of heron) by the Island Caribs. And the Pleiades, Hyades (forming the V-shape in the constellation Taurus) and the three stars in “Orion’s belt” are combined into a constellation the Mataco call “Great Stork.” The movements of these stars, as part of Amerindian constellations, are used to predict rain and evoke thunderstorms by their very

¹⁴² Sully, *Fauna of the Caribbean*, 49-51.

appearance. Part of Ursa Major especially bears a striking resemblance to a long-necked bird floating on the water, once we suspend our own concept of it as “the Big Dipper.”¹⁴³

Breton’s studies of Island Caribs confirms a conquest-era Antillean tradition wherein the Ursa Major constellation is conceived of as the vessel of a stilt bird deity called “Sauacou” (phonetically spelled “Sawáku” by Roe). This celestial “canoe-of-the-heron,” in its seasonal “leap” across the underside of the world, from one side of the north horizon to the other, was believed by the Island Caribs to bring the thunderstorms of the rainy season.¹⁴⁴ Deafening reports from Sauacou’s conch shell trumpet announced the storms.¹⁴⁵ The great blue heron’s longer calls are not unlike a conch trumpet’s bellow.

Wading at the crossroads between the rainy and dry seasons, and leaping across the boundaries between them, the heron deity was a tropical “thunderbird” or, more appropriate to its association with the spark within the rain cloud, a “lightning-bird.” Clothed in smoke and steam, sound and light, it stood, knee deep in water, reflected on the mirror surface but also in the stars on the darkening horizon. Quickly, constellations were occluded by storm clouds, flashing fiery lightning bolts, felling trees and houses as they rolled across the land. With first winds they blew in one direction then with second winds in the opposite, and with a hot stillness in the eye of the hurricane. On the other side of the tempests and floods, was another less humid heat: the dawn of the dry season

¹⁴³ As for the raccoon-like zoomorph that accompanies the storm bird on Saladoid vessels previously discussed, we do not know whether nearby stars were attributed any zoomorphic (i.e., raccoon) symbolism by ancient Antilleans.

¹⁴⁴ Roe, “Cross-Media Isomorphisms in Taíno Ceramics and Petroglyphs from Puerto Rico,” 661-662. The constellation and the Great Blue Heron deity have the same name and are the same entity. This “leap” is the submergence and re-emergence of the Big Dipper between March and August in the north sky.

¹⁴⁵ Jacques Petitjean Roget, “The Caribs as Seen Through the Dictionary of the Reverend Father Breton” in *First International Convention for the Study of Pre-Columbian Culture in the Lesser Antilles* (Fort-de-France, Société d’Histoire de la Martinique, 1961), 63.

and a new year. At the fork of these forces of wind, vapor and smoke like the quiet core of the hurricane, the ciconiids stood motionless and unaffected.

A Saladoid Ceramic Depiction of Shamanic Stilt Bird Regalia

One adorno from Tobago suggests a shamanic use of stilt birds or effigies of them. This anthropomorphic head has two protuberances, one a raised feature on its forehead and the other, an aquatic-looking bird lying atop its crown with beak facing forward (figure 5.48). The bird lies somewhat limply atop the human's head, its body following the contour of the latter. Could this be a bird killed, preserved and placed atop the head of a shaman, or worn as a clan emblem by a leader of some sort? The human's face is framed in the heart-shaped manner of an owl and divided down the middle by the plane of the nose and the aforementioned raised feature. This feature narrows to a point from a semi-spherical protuberance on the anthropomorph's forehead to the tip of its nose, creating a long, beak-like shape sitting atop the human nose. This subtle, raised feature seems to also represent an aquatic bird. Thus, an owl-man, with a subtle stilt bird emblem down the middle of his face, is regaled with a second, clearly modeled stilt bird atop his head. There are two rectangular tabs protruding from the sides of the bird-man's head, where the horn-like ear tufts of a screech owl might otherwise be. But these tabs are held out stiffly, in the manner of wings, perhaps of the bird head down the center of the bird-man's face. The incisions on these two protruding tabs are not the usual curvilinear markings on Barrancoid and late Saladoid ears, but rather a geometric Z-shape. These tabs are at once unlike ears, ear tufts or wings but simultaneously reminiscent of all these.

This rim adorno is unpainted but the more subtle bird down the anthropomorph's face may be meant to represent a painted bird on a real person. The bird atop the human's head is the primary avian motif given its emblematic prominence. The position of these birds on the head of an anthropomorph necessarily situates them within the established Saladoid-Barranoid convention of the alter ego protuberance. Here the anthropomorph would seem to have two alter egos: a sagittal one subtly represented on the face and a crowning one more tangibly rendered.

A shaman might conceivably have more than one zoic alter ego or be simultaneously zoomorphic and anthropomorphic.¹⁴⁶ Since both birds in the adorno relate to water, these birds might represent different aspects of a single mythical and ritual theme. But despite some deft modeling, the bird atop the anthropomorph's head is too compact to be identified by species. As aquatic birds, both may relate to storms and rain. On the vessel rim, this complex adorno may have had a counterpart on the other side of the pot. An identical counterpart might represent the opposite positions of the Ursa Major/storm deity constellation in the north sky. This adorno alludes to the ritual mediation of the opposing forces of water and fire, steam and smoke within the storm.

Possible Functions of Saladoid Stilt Bird Ceramics

While Saladoid knowledge of stilt birds was probably meticulous, it is also probable that in symbolic thought, stilt-legged wading birds were used interchangeably as narratives crossed from river to llanos to coastal estuary to island (and from island to

¹⁴⁶ Roth, "Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore," 260. This head might be an anthropomorphic representation of a storm-related deity, not just a shaman. In the mainland version of the later Island Carib legend of Sauacou, the avian spirit was human before taking on his eternal stellar form.

island). All the stilt birds treated here wade and feed together in swamps, marshes, littorals and riverbanks. In the Amerindian view, they may have been different clans of a single race of stilt birds, with distinct rules of conduct and internecine conflicts and covenants. They may also have represented different aspects of the wet season or different kinds of storms. I have lumped the mytho-symbolism of these birds together, seeing evidence that Amerindians did the same, but also for lack of evidence that clearly separates them.¹⁴⁷

Many ciconiiforme adornos are attached to strap handles, and strap handles are often attached to bowls. As liquid containers, the association these birds have with water is sustained. Not much more can be read into the connection between aquatic birds and bowls but the storm symbolism of stilt birds may relate the vessels on which they were modeled to particular times of the year. The approach of the rainy season might be something to celebrate but the approach of season's end when the storms and hurricanes ravaged the island environment might have been the cause of great anxiety.

The function of "Stormbird" imagery on ceramics is as ambiguous as the avian symbol itself in that the bird occupies a nexus between opposing forces that might either be harmonizing or catalyzing that clash. It can be assumed that people are not praying for natural disasters to befall them so that the "double-edged" Stormbird must have been invoked to some beneficial end. But did Stormbird pots carry offerings used to propitiate, honor and suppress the forces represented by the bird or were they used to harmonize those deadly powers for, say, agricultural and fishing gains? Did pots and tobacco censers

¹⁴⁷ Lévi-Strauss, *From Honey to Ashes*, 247. The language used by re-tellers and translators can also conflate or misidentify species themselves and occasionally, authors relating the same story do not agree on the species in question, e.g. Lévi-Strauss may suggest that what Roth means by "crane" is actually a heron.

sit quietly on altars inside “spirit houses” or were they part of some sonorous spectacle? Perhaps they were used for seeding slash and burn fields (i.e., fired, then watered fields) hoping they would spark the seeds to life.

Parrots and Macaws

Parrots in Nature

Parrots and their fellow members of the psittacid family were as familiar a sight in the forests of the ancient Antilles as on the mainland. Parrots, macaws and parakeets were probably also held in captivity for their feathers and cherished as pets. They may have even been clan emblems. Endemic Caribbean psittacids are mostly green but with a great range of coloration on different sections of their bodies.¹⁴⁸ They typically have large heads and powerful, curled bills (figures 23 to 25). Even the normal clamor of the daytime forest is rent by the raucous calls of parrots and macaws. Nesting in the hollows of trees, paired or single psittacids are seen in brief bursts of flight between trees in the forest canopy, their short wings flapping somewhat stiffly. The variety of fruits, seeds, nuts and flowers in the Antilles provide ample food sources for these birds but on some islands, parrots can reach pest proportions as they feed on domesticated species.¹⁴⁹ Caribbean parrots are not particularly good talkers compared to some mainland species, but are still collected for this uncanny ability, as they may have been in ancient times.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Raffaele et al., *A Guide to the Birds of the West Indies*, 306.

¹⁴⁹ French, *Birds of Trinidad and Tobago*, 45-46, 88-90.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* Still, since many animals speak in Amerindian mythology, the fact that parrots and macaws can actually speak does not necessarily set them apart in traditional narratives or ritual.

Being short-range forest fliers, parrots (genera *Amazona*), macaws (genera *Ara*) and parakeets (genera *Aratinga*) often evolved separately on different islands of the Caribbean. Thus, in Pre-Columbian times St. Croix, Montserrat, Antigua and Barbuda, Guadeloupe and Marie Galante, Martinique, Dominica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and other islands of the Lesser Antilles each boasted their own species of parrots.¹⁵¹ The larger islands of the Greater Antilles were each home to multiple endemic species, but the parrots of Aruba, Curaçao, Bonaire, Margarita, Trinidad and Tobago were extensions of South American populations.¹⁵² Trinidad is large enough to have produced at least one endemic macaw species, the red-bellied macaw (*Ara manilata*).¹⁵³

Even in the Pre-Columbian Caribbean not all psittacids were endemic. Some were brought by Amerindians, adding to an already diverse population, or perhaps throwing that population out of balance. And from Pre-Columbian times to present, humans have had a detrimental effect on the psittacidae of the Antilles so that of a total of 50-60 endemic species that have possibly existed there, only a dozen or so remain.¹⁵⁴

Incidences and Aesthetics of Saladoid Psittacid Imagery

The differences between the endemic psittacid species and those introduced by their ancestors from the mainland were not necessarily the concern of Saladoid ceramic

¹⁵¹ Raffaele et al., *A Guide to the Birds of the West Indies*, 313-316; Matthew I. Williams and David W. Steadman, "The Historic and Prehistoric Distribution of Parrots (Psittacidae) in the West Indies," in *Biogeography of the West Indies: Patterns and Perspectives*, eds. Charles A. Woods and Florence E. Sergile (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2001), 175-189.

¹⁵² Raffaele et al., *A Guide to the Birds of the West Indies*, 313-316.

¹⁵³ French, *Birds of Trinidad and Tobago*, 88-90.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.* All parrot, parakeet and macaw extinctions in the Antilles appear to have been caused by humans.

artists. Occasionally, the peculiarities of a particular species might be glimpsed in the relative thickness or curl of a ceramic beak, the placement of eyes, or the shape of a head. It also is rather conspicuous just how many psittacid adornos are painted red (e.g., figures 5.50 and 5.51), even when considering the limited Saladoid palette (essentially white, red, some browns, oranges and black). Red adornos may be the potters' treatment of a particular species, perhaps a macaw, which was unlike the mostly green endemic parrots.

Parrot adornos are found throughout the Lesser Antilles in moderate numbers, and even when not painted solid red, are usually deeply incised, and sometimes polychromed (figures 5.52 and 5.53). In most islands, only one or two parrot adornos have made their way into museum collections, but in larger islands the numbers climb slightly (Appendix 1, Chart 1). Outstanding examples can be found from Tobago to Martinique. They show an accustomed skill that suggests that far more parrot adornos were made than have been found. Only tiny Montserrat has yielded relatively many parrot adornos, more than doubling the counts of any other island and rivaling an area on the Lower Orinoco 10 times its size.¹⁵⁵

Mainland Saladoid potters evidently shared this parrot fascination as did a great many Pre-Columbian peoples. A resemblance with vultures caused by the powerful beaks of parrots is compounded by the fact that, just like ceramic vultures, parrot adornos are sometimes placed on the spouts of vessels (figure 5.54 and 5.55). It appears that parrot spouts on water vessels are a Venezuelan and Trinidadian phenomenon but most other conventions for depicting these birds are consistent throughout the Saladoid realm. The symbolic function of psittacids cannot be discerned from their positions on pots, as say

¹⁵⁵ These are all in the collection of the National Museum of the American Indian.

with Saladoid owls or Huecoid manatees, because their positions are too varied. They appear as rim or wall adornos, with necks and bodies extended, facing outwards or downwards (e.g., figure 5.56). Finial-like psittacid nubbins also appear on the sides and tops of vessels (figure 5.57).

One such nubbin looks up from the lower extremity of the Morel white-on-red pot in figure 5.45 *right*. In this possible Saladoid variant on the Warao narrative of the crane and hummingbird who acquire tobacco for the first shaman, a heron and parakeet seem to have been substituted. Perhaps in Guadeloupien Saladoid lore, parakeets infiltrated the tobacco fields of some far off island (or, in a reversal, the mainland) and, with heron, brought back this most sacred of substances to their original shaman.

Psittacids and Solar Symbolism

A shared interest in psittacid iconography between the mainland and the islands likely indicates some shared narrative elements as well. For insight into what psittacids might have meant to Saladoid-era people, there is again recourse to the legends of their mainland neighbors' descendants. Here we are relatively safe in our assumptions because the countless parrot and macaw narratives of the tropical lowlands are remarkably consistent. Luminously colored birds, sought after for their feathers, parrots and macaws are considered solar symbols, invoked and implied in ritual.¹⁵⁶ Psittacids are sometimes differentiated, sometimes even seen as rivals to each other. Usually they are male symbols (except for often-feminine parakeets) for their being active in the day, the

¹⁵⁶ Crocker, "My Brother the Parrot," 23. Macaws, parrots and various species of forest birds are classed as "white-feathered birds" in Bororo symbolic thought. This "whiteness" can be understood as "luminosity" or "brightness" in a physical sense from which is constructed the symbolic class, "white."

colorful sunlit realm.¹⁵⁷ They can also connote fertility, again linked to the life-giving power of the sun, and are sometimes seen as protectors. Only a few, significant traditions are treated here for the key insights they offer into the importance these birds may have had for Saladoid ceramicists.

A comparison of the beliefs of the Tukano-speaking Desana (in the northwestern Amazon) and the Bororo (of the central Amazon) provides a litmus test of Amazonian macaw symbolism. For the Desana the macaw is a solar symbol not just because of its flight but also by virtue of its red and orange feathers specifically, symbolism shared with the brightly colored tinamou, another common solar bird in the Amazon. Since the sun is the prime deity, regarded as a male creator, macaws are characterized as masculine in both Desana and Bororo society.¹⁵⁸ Thus the macaw possesses the fertilizing, animating spirit of the sun, and is courted by the Desana shamans in their desire to control the elements effecting hunting, gathering and agriculture.¹⁵⁹ Indeed macaws are among the species into which Bororo shamans and spirits are believed to transform.¹⁶⁰

Psittacid Symbolism in Mainland Clan, Totem and Family Culture

Ceremonial macaw feather crowns, and the rituals in which they are worn, reference the solar symbolism of a bird whose feathers are not always obtained in the wild, as with other birds. Macaws are often reared in captivity as pets, where they are

¹⁵⁷ Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Amazonian Cosmos*, 62, 102, 187. Parakeets' nests (like those of oropendolas and hummingbirds) are likened to a uterus. Perhaps because of their uterine nests, parakeets are seen by the Desana as protectors of small children.

¹⁵⁸ Crocker, "My Brother the Parrot," 38-39; Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Amazonian Cosmos*, 98, 102.

¹⁵⁹ Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Amazonian Cosmos*, 48, 199. The color yellow is also associated with semen according to Reichel Dolmatoff's study of the sexual symbolism of the Desana.

¹⁶⁰ Crocker, "My Brother the Parrot," 29-31; Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 318.

well fed and their skin regularly rubbed with special resins that cause their feathers to be more brilliant as they grow.¹⁶¹ On this domestication of psittacids, the field research of Christopher Crocker is invaluable for understanding the relationship people can have with these birds. The Bororo assertion that “we are red macaws,” says Crocker, has been a matter of controversy since the 1920s when scholars first started trying to decipher this belief. He critiques Lucien Levy-Bruhl and Lévi-Strauss, who respectively proposed that the Bororo think they are anthropomorphic macaws and see macaws as ethnic “totems.”

Crocker proposes instead that the Bororo use the macaw as a complex metaphor for a series of relationships between the bird, themselves and the spirit world. In Crocker’s interviews with Bororo informants and in his observations of their religion and ritual, the macaw is the locus of a circuit of temporary transmutations between humans, macaws and the spirits of the ancestors. The Bororo believe that these winged creatures can sometimes be the vehicles of ancestral spirits (*aroes*) who inhabit their forms in order to partake of their favorite pleasures: fruits, nuts and copulation.¹⁶² The resemblance to Antillean fruit bat folklore is uncanny. But in addition to their occasional indulgence in corporeal pleasures, the Bororo *aroes* also prefer to take the form of macaws for the pleasure of possessing their beauty for a time.¹⁶³

Crocker goes on to tell us that as the Bororo *aroe* spirits imbibe succulent fruit while possessing the macaws, their vegetarian preference translates into a dietary restriction for Bororo shamans who, in order to be worthy of communicating with the

¹⁶¹ Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Amazonian Cosmos*, 165, 187

¹⁶² Crocker, “My Brother the Parrot,” 35-36, 41-42.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

spirits, eat only fruits and nuts.¹⁶⁴ Lévi-Strauss, for his part situates these vegetarian birds in a mytho-symbolic triad with carnivorous raptors and omnivorous toucans.¹⁶⁵

Reichel-Dolmatoff reports that macaws are totemic symbols along with several other creatures such as the anteater, coati, squirrel and various birds including the quail and oropendola. But Crocker insists that as a totemic symbol *per se*, the macaw is relatively “trivial” in Bororo society where animal symbols do not provide any important distinctions between different sub-groups (such as clans and vocational groups). In fact the Bororo organize their society by other matrilineal, exogamous, uxori-local structures and groups often lend their clan emblems to members of other clans in ritual performances.¹⁶⁶ The primary importance of macaws in Bororo society then is not derived from their totemic value but from the nexus of ideas about the cultural, spiritual and natural realms. The Desana sib that takes the macaw as its symbol calls itself Mahá-porá (i.e., Sons of Yellow Macaw) and, as was the duty of their legendary progenitor, the members of this group are the keepers of the feather crowns for their community.¹⁶⁷ But in Bororo society, any family can keep macaws. The keepers of macaws are usually women who treat the birds, say the Bororo men somewhat satirically, “like children.”¹⁶⁸

What can comparisons between the Bororo and other contemporary Amazonians suggest about ancient Antillean symbolic significance of psittacids? It is possible that the

¹⁶⁴ Crocker, “My Brother the Parrot,” 29-31. In a bargain with the spirits, certain species of fish and immature animals are allowed to supplement the otherwise meatless diet.

¹⁶⁵ Lévi-Strauss, *From Honey to Ashes*, 37-38, 366-367.

¹⁶⁶ Crocker, “My Brother the Parrot,” 23-26.

¹⁶⁷ Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Amazonian Cosmos*, 199.

¹⁶⁸ Crocker, “My Brother the Parrot,” 33.

Bororo's loose "totemic" affiliations to the parrot are the result of many centuries of a kind of "totemic decay" in which the institution of the parrot totem (and others) has been eroded. It also is possible that the complexity of the parrot's spiritual, social and ethno-zoological symbolism has accrued over that same time span. But with millennia of native history in which such evolutions and dissolutions might have occurred, it is just as likely that while one Amazonian group was totemizing parrots and macaws, another was de-totemizing them; and while one group was developing ever greater complexity in their psittacid symbolism, another was simplifying it.

Dualism in Mainland Lore and Saladoid Ceramics

The red color of the Saladoid "parrot" adornos might signify the solar aspect of scarlet macaws, a species introduced to the islands perhaps just for this symbolism. Unsurprisingly, modeling or painting a solar and/or fertility symbol on a receptacle for food is a decision that any ancient potter from any part of the world might make. The image would essentially amount to a toast to good health, and good harvests and hunts in the future. But the dietary restriction on shamans and, perhaps other devotees, is of interest too in the connection between psittacids and ceramic vessels. The psittacine vegetarianism of the self-purifying shaman, preparing himself to commune with the celestial realm, suggests a ritual function of parrot/macaw vessels. In these vessels, only fruits, nuts and tubers could be presented.

Lest we consider that all the psittacid adornos in the Saladoid Antilles represented imported macaws, it is worth noting that not all psittacid adornos were painted "macaw red" and that Amerindians make clear distinctions between parrots and macaws in life

and in oral tradition. A Tucuna narrative from the border regions between Brazil, Colombia and Peru tells of an exogamous demiurge named Monmanéki who marries five zoomorphic brides. One is a macaw and another a parrot. His wild, unspeaking macaw bride runs away, but the parrot bride, having once been one of Monmanéki's people, now transformed into a bird, has the gift of speech. As with ducks that became canoe-like, parrots derive their speech from people. Their nature was derived from culture. In this narrative with two female psittacids, the parrot bride is considered domesticated (or domesticable) by her speech, while the macaw bride is seen as an elemental, mercurial, unreliable creature of nature.¹⁶⁹

The dichotomy between unspeaking macaws and speaking parrots, both female, is not as widespread as the male macaw and female parrot. But one manner of dualistic symbolism or another is likely to have been part of Saladoid understanding of psittacids. In nature these birds are even seen flying or perching in twos (figure 24). Twin psittacids are featured in countless Amazonian "bird-nester" narratives. In these traditions two men go hunting and while one is trying to acquire two psittacid eggs or two parrot chicks in some high tree or precipice he is abandoned by the other man as punishment for some earlier offence.¹⁷⁰ Dualistic themes of separation may have caused macaws and parrots to have appeared on different vessels to be used at different rituals or times of the year, the former to invoke the sun during excessive precipitation and the latter, in drought to call

¹⁶⁹ Lévi-Strauss, *The Origin of Table Manners*, 29-33. Both parrot and macaw are female in this narrative, contrasting with the solar, and therefore male, macaw that aligns with the realm of culture.

¹⁷⁰ Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 66-68, 71-72.

the rains. Amerindians in the Guianas wear feathers of the red macaw to call out the sun in just this way during extended periods of cloudy weather.¹⁷¹

Possible Functions of Saladoid Psittacid Ceramics

Of the iconological possibilities described above, which might have applied to Saladoid ceramics? We can infer from the ethnography of the Bororo and others that subtle and varied meanings would have always been assigned to such a colorful, vocal bird as the psittacid, associated with the upper storeys of the rainforest. The solar symbolism of psittacids is noteworthy as is the “psittacid vegetarianism” of shamans who invoke these birds as familiars or guides. If the dyadic opposition between wild macaws and cultured parrots applied to Saladoid ceramics, we could imagine psittacid vessels being used for the ritual presentation of cooked (cultured) vegetables, and raw (wild, collected) fruit in honor of some solar deity. Either way, psittacid vessels probably held vegetal foods.

Songbirds and Other Avifauna in Saladoid Imagery

A class of rather generic looking birds appear in Saladoid pottery, appearing as adornos on pots and ritual implements. The general appearance of these birds suggests that they may represent songbirds and other birds of the forest (figures 5.58 and 5.59). Some are even depicted in flight (figure 5.60). These adornos are unidentifiable, not only because of their generic shapes but for the sheer multitude of species to which they might refer. These include the ubiquitous bananquits and mockingbirds; the multicolored

¹⁷¹ Peter G. Roe, “Featherwork: Gift of the Birds,” in *Arts of the Amazon*, ed. Barbara Braun (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 60-61.

tanagers, honeycreepers and finches; the anis, oropendolas and grackles, all black-feathered; hummingbirds, kingfishers and cuckoos; and in Trinidad, large and unusual birds such as the purple gallinule, wattled jacana, cocrico (or rufous-vented chachalaca), toucan, and the endemic piping guan.¹⁷²

As an example of the generic appearance of these birds, a damaged snuff bowl in the Tobago Museum seems to represent a bird's head on one end, opposite the twin spouts that fit into the user's nostrils (figure 5.61). Could these spouts then also represent the forked tail of a bird? Some important forked-tailed birds in Amerindian symbolism include the frigatebird, swallow-tailed kite and the swallow itself, a beloved subject of Carib songs.¹⁷³ I have found no ethnographic references to the other spectacular birds with bifurcated tails such as fork-tailed and scissor-tailed flycatchers (*Tyrannus savana* and *T. forficatus* respectively) or motmots, twilight-singers with connections to morning-singing bird narratives and hallucinogen-induced spirit flight; nor have I found references to twin-tailed hummingbirds such as the streamertails or doctorbirds (*Trochilus* species).

Most Saladoid songbird and/or forest bird adornos protrude off the sides and rims of pots. They are usually peering up at the viewer and often are no more than an inch or so long (figure 5.62). Others form loops with their beaks in the manner of an aquatic avian strap handle (figure 5.63). Yet others emerge as alter egos from the foreheads of

¹⁷² Species of these birds in the Lesser Antilles including Trinidad and Tobago: the bananquit (*Coereba flaveola*); mockingbirds (*Mimus* species); tanagers (*Tangara* species); honeycreepers (*Chlorophanes* and *Cyanerpes*); finches (*Loxigilla* and *Sicalis*); the ani (*Chrotophaga ani*); the oropendola (*Psarocolius decumanus*); the grackle (*Quiscalus lugubris*); hummingbirds (*Eulampis*, *Orthorhyncus* and *Cyanophaia* species); kingfishers (*Ceryle* species); cuckoos (*Coccyzus* species); the purple gallinule (*Porphyryla martinica*); the wattled jacana (*Jacana jacana*); the rufous-vented chachalaca (*Ortalis ruficauda*); the toucan (*Ramphastos vitellinus*); the Trinidad piping guan (*Pipile pipile*).

¹⁷³ Guy Remy, "Sololia" of *Guyane: Chants des Amérindiens Kalina*, Buda Musique du Monde 92705-2 (CD), 1996; Peter Kloos, "Song of the Swallow" of *The Maroni River Caribs of Surinam*, Royal Tropical Institute KCD 4005 (CD), 1996. Frigatebirds and Swallow-tailed kites are briefly discussed in Appendix 2's section, "The Frigatebird as the Pelican's Nemesis."

anthropomorphs (figure 5.64).¹⁷⁴ These are clearly not parrots, pelicans, owls or vultures. Still, some might be stilt birds.

Ironically, this broad category of birds for which there is such scant and indecipherable evidence is the one for which there is a known Antillean traditional narrative.¹⁷⁵ The presence of Antillean oral traditions about birds that appear with neither definitiveness nor frequency in the ceramic record demonstrates that there was probably a wide range of narratives that went beyond pottery's range of subjects. The cultural value of fauna and avi-fauna is not discernible from any one art form.

Conclusions

In the Saladoid Antilles, a broad range of human concerns seems to have been borne on the carved wings of bird motifs, both to the heavens and the watery beyond. From the ancestors, ocular nightbirds brought auguries of future births and deaths. The round hollows and buttons of nightbird pottery seems to invoke this passage between worlds. As doctors of the physical and spiritual and punishers of sorcerers, vultures may have shared at least their curative mandate with ducks. But ducks would have eventually come into their own as motifs in the islands, censers and pots bearing their likeness perhaps conferring blessings on maiden canoe voyages, a heretofore-unknown function

¹⁷⁴ Birds in figure 5.63 and 5.64 may in fact be either stilt birds or hummingbirds, the latter adorn depicting an avian alter ego placing tobacco or some other narcotic into the nose of a shaman. The association between stilt birds and hummingbirds in the acquisition of tobacco in northeastern South American lore (recounted in the sub-section "Stilt Birds and the Acquisition of Jealous Secrets" of this chapter) might be the referent here. For a brief discussion of the lore, symbolism and possibly Saladoid iconography of hummingbirds, see the "The Question of Hummingbirds in Saladoid Ceramics and Culture" section of Appendix 2.

¹⁷⁵ See Appendix 2's section "Forest Birds in Antillean Lore" for brief accounts of morning-singing birds and woodpeckers in Taíno-era oral tradition and art.

among mainland Saladoid zoomorphs. Pelican motifs may have inspired discipline and perhaps deadly precision in those canoe voyages, from which men returned with fresh catch or plunder. Red and green psittacidae may have invoked the sun in rituals imploring it to rise or re-emerge from oppressive cloud cover. The wading stilt birds had a seemingly boundless set of associations with the elements and perhaps a pantheon of other animals. Herons, ibises and/or egrets seem to have portended the tumbling storm clouds and the explosive lighting and earth-rending floods within those clouds. Their connections to the lithe hummingbird, the conch of the coastal shallows, the raccoon of the littoral forest and perhaps the maternal parakeet is yet unknown.

Each bird seems to have had a pivotal function, related by its behavior, habitat, color or call to a particular time, season, cosmic realm, natural element, barometric and climatic phase, cultural process or religious ritual.¹⁷⁶ But unlike spirit-messenger owls, canoe-blessing ducks, martial pelicans, solar parrots, stormy stilt birds, the songbirds of the witching hour (i.e., twilight) went mostly unsung on Saladoid earthen pots. There is a legendary rivalry between little multicolored birds and neutral-colored great serpents in South American lore.¹⁷⁷ But since there are no great snakes in most of the Lesser Antilles, this oppositional bird-serpent dyad rung hollow there. Songbirds were never important in mainland Saladoid ceramic iconography either.

In a survey of Saladoid ceramics, iconographic and stylistic consistency between the mainland and the Antilles is discernible. Just as there are parrots in the mainland

¹⁷⁶ Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, *Natural History of the West Indies*, ed. and trans. Sterling A. Stoudemire (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), 44. Each bird may have related to yet others, so that, for example, the conch-blowing storm bird may have also been a warrior deity comparable to the pelican. Oviedo observed that Caribs blew conches to announce wars.

¹⁷⁷ Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 302.

Saladoid, there are parrots too in the insular Saladoid. The same vocabulary of forms and lines used to depict eyes and beaks, the same conventions for the hybridization of species, including the symbolically charged alter ego protuberances, are extant in the islands as on the mainland. But among the adornos and vessels, we are struck by the sudden importance of pelicans and stilt birds to the Saladoid islanders. The pelican seems to become the king of birds and perhaps a primary masculine symbol in the islands. Ducks seem to come from nowhere, seemingly absent on the mainland ceramics, and wading birds, almost absent as well from the mainland Saladoid and Barrancoid ceramics, take a central position in the storm-swept islands. In the presence of ducks and pelicans, vultures quickly fell out of use as a ceramic motif.

The distinction between the mainland and the islands in avian iconography is both one of emphasis on species present in both areas and the emergence of unprecedented species in a new mytho-symbolic program. The apparent popularity of avian censers, linking aquatic birds especially with fire, smoke and scent, appears as entirely without antecedent in the riverine Saladoid homeland as the unique duck imagery that sometimes appears on these censers.

In the case of forest birds, these are present in both mainland and island narratives, but the Saladoid of both the mainland and the islands show little interest in speciating these small, pretty birds in their pottery. One terrestrial bird comes to dominate all others in insular ceramics and presumably in lore as well: the ocular nightbird, mainly the owl. The many owl-like adornos in the Saladoid Antilles (and well beyond the Saladoid as well) illustrate that a bird physically present on both sides of the Gulf of Paria was of no consequence in the Lower Orinoco pottery but supremely important in that of

the islands. The nightbird at the neck of the vessel and thus at the nexus of the living and the dead, was apparently a uniquely insular symbol. This most striking distinction cannot be attributed simply to the maritime environment as in the case of pelicans, ducks and stilt birds. The presence of nightbirds was not novel in the islands but the presence of their motifs was. The ascendant importance of the ocular nightbird, bespeaks a symbolic need of the insular Saladoid potters that had less to do with their new environment and evidently more to do with their new oral traditions, religion and ritual.

Though the Saladoid reckoning with the novelty of the Antillean environment seems an important factor in the development of, say, the pelican into an important Caribbean ceramic motif, Antillean nightbird imagery illustrates an intellectual shift towards a new mythos and iconography irrespective of the environment. This was no mere evolutionary reaction to the surroundings. The “internal life” driving this and other new Saladoid symbologies and mythoi is explored further in Chapters Six and Seven.

CHAPTER SIX

ZOOMORPHIC ICONOGRAPHY: REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

The bark of a tree seems to come alive when a basking creature opens its eyes. The dappled forest floor ripples as another moves amongst the curling leaf litter. Sunset begins a night-long chorus of amorous vowels. And like islands emerging on the horizon, smooth shells and jagged scutes break the silver meniscus of the sea and wash ashore. While downy feathers may float on the breeze, and the ground may be littered with the hair, teeth and bones of unnumbered little mammals, the passage from tree to land to water is worn by the clawed and suctioned feet of reptiles and amphibians. These are among the Antilles' most ancient inhabitants and most revered symbols.

Reptiles are distinguished for their “cold” blood and consequent reliance on the sun's heat to regulate their body temperature. They are often seen sunning themselves before returning to their hunting or their lairs. Amphibians bear some resemblance to reptiles, especially in their low body temperature, but they exhibit the unique ability to live or breed in water while spending most of their life on land. Their crossing between natural spheres affords them symbolic value in many ancient cultures of the world.

Incidences and Aesthetics of Reptile and Amphibian Images in the Saladoid Antilles

Without question, reptiles and amphibians were the most common zoomorphic subject of the Saladoid potter. In a typical collection of Lesser Antillean ceramics, ceramic reptiles and amphibians can double the number of any other zoomorphic class (Appendix 1, Charts 1 and 2). Only the southernmost Windward Islands defy this trend

with their large collections of mammalian imagery. In the Lesser Antillean collections where reptile and amphibian ceramic motifs dominate, turtles are by far the most numerous species. The incidence of frog images usually runs a distant second to turtles. Still, in Chapters Four and Five, when species occurred in ceramics as often as frogs do, they were considered common. So it is not that ceramic frogs are rare but that they and all other ceramic zoomorphs occur not nearly as often as turtles. And contrasting with turtles and frogs, crocodylians occur in extremely low numbers and snakes are virtually absent.

Reptiles and amphibians are depicted with a variety of levels of interest in both mimesis and design. A metonymic feature or posture might be stylized into an emblem at the behest of some visual orthodoxy, while taxonomic details of a species might pique the interest of a ceramicist suddenly turned zoographer (compare figures 6.22 and 6.56). Some depictions approach expression and even movement, while others seem concerned with manipulating an established regional vocabulary (compare figures 6.50 and 6.51).

Snakes

Snakes in Nature

With the lack of medium-sized and large mammals on which they might prey, there are very few large snakes in the Lesser Antilles and those are confined to only a few islands. Venomous snakes are scarcer still. Only Martinique and St. Lucia possess endemic pit vipers (genus *Bothrops*). For its mainland proximity, Trinidad has a complement of South American constricting and venomous species, such as boas (*Boa constrictor*), anacondas (*Eunectes murinus*) and coral snakes (genus *Micrurus*).¹

Incidences and Aesthetics of Saladoid Snake Imagery

Mirroring their low incidence in the natural environment, snakes are quite rarely depicted in Saladoid ceramics. Individual snake adornos have been found in Trinidad, Tobago and Martinique collections only (figures 6.1 to 6.3). The one from Tobago represents the whole body of a snake as a discreet adorno that emerged from the wall of a vessel (figure 6.1). This snake is coiled in the manner of a viper or constrictor but raises its head as if just disturbed. The other snakes encountered in my survey form the rims of what appear to have been low dishes. Most of these rims are hollow and tubular (figures 6.2, 5.4 and 6.5). In examples from Trinidad and Venezuela, these serpentine motifs are deeply and beautifully incised with abstract patterns, representing scale markings (compare figure 26 and figure 6.5). All the snake adornos surveyed raise their heads off the vessel rims (figure 6.2 to 6.4).

The convention of a rim in the form of a snake might originate at Saladero, where all the South American specimens I have seen are from, but stylistically the snakes seem to have Barranoid origins. The extruded tongue in figure 6.2 is not just an attempt at serpentine naturalism but a feature identified by Boomert as a Barranoid convention for depicting shamanic transformation into animals with such tongues, including rare panting felines and, of course, snakes (compare figures 2.20 and 6.2).² I would also suggest that

¹ Tom Jackson, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Animals of America* (London: Lorenz Books/Anness Publishing, 2006), 120-130; Anita Malhotra and Roger S. Thorpe, *Reptiles and Amphibians of the Eastern Caribbean* (London: Macmillan Education, 1999), 3; John C. Murphy, *Amphibians and Reptiles of Trinidad and Tobago* (Malabar, FL: Krieger, 1997), 158-165, 199-202, 206-212.

² Arie Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco Interaction Sphere: An Archaeological/Ethnohistorical Study* (Alkmaar, Netherlands: Cairi Publications, 2000), 463.

the extruded tongue is that of the shaman himself in the discomfort of the hallucinogenic trance. Either way, the protruding tongue of the snake is a shamanic reference.

The Saladero vessel fragments surveyed in this study (figures 6.4 and 6.5) are broken in such a way as to render the identification of a snake just a little uncertain, but by the example from Erin in Trinidad (figure 6.2), it can be inferred that these are fragments of snake rims. In my survey of Venezuelan Saladoid and Barrancoïd ceramics, I found only two such vessel fragments and both are illustrated here.³ In fact, so rare is Saladoid snake imagery, both on the mainland and the islands, that the ceramic snakes I have illustrated represent almost the entirety of snake ceramics found in this survey.

It is truly remarkable that the snake, a creature so evocative of coiled pottery itself, was so unimportant in Saladoid ceramics. Also intriguing is the fact that the few snakes that do appear are expertly and stylistically rendered as if there is an accustomed habit of carving snakes. The slight scratchiness in the incisions on many Saladoid vessels indicates that they were incised at the leather-hard stage of clay drying, when the clay is more like wood. We might infer that Saladoid artisans were master wood carvers, perhaps fashioning snakes more often from wood than clay.

Snakes in Mainland Symbolism

Even with their low incidence in Saladoid ceramics, snake symbolism still warrants a brief discussion. Certainly, the ancient symbolism of coiling a pot, before modeling and smoothening it, would have invoked the snake's form.⁴ The Arawak

³ These are at Yale's Peabody Museum of Natural History Anthropology collection.

⁴ Peter G. Roe, "Pottery: Forms that Endure," in *Arts of the Amazon*, ed. Barbara Braun (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 24-26.

narrative recorded by Roth (and recounted in the “Armadillos” section of Chapter Four) involves a forest spirit who bids a man fetch him a pot, by which he means an enormous, coiled serpent. This tradition shows a direct connection between a people believed to share ancestry with the Saladoid potters and the widespread snake-as-pot/pot-as-snake symbolism of the Guianas.⁵ The iconic snake in question might be the gigantic anaconda or the boa constrictor. The circular, zone-polished nubbins on the rim fragment from Saladero in figure 6.5 evoke the large spots on the green anaconda (*Eunectes murinus*).

Snakes in South American lore, especially aquatic ones such as anacondas and boa constrictors, are ferocious, powerful water spirits. Perhaps the most relevant aspect of the snake’s water spirit symbolism is the belief that the myriad birds received their bright and varied coloration from these greenish, brownish, and otherwise neutral-colored creatures of the dark, chthonian deep. In a plethora of mythic variations on a Rainbow Serpent theme, birds attack and kill a great snake who lives beneath the water. These gaily-colored solar creatures often enlist the assistance of ducks or other brown birds to mortally wound the beast. They choose the duck because it is of the serpent’s aquatic world, close in color to an anaconda, but a fellow bird. The birds either bathe in the blood of the dead snake, which dyes them all the pretty colors they are today, or they divvy up bits of his skin, each bird getting a unique color combination. The rest of the serpent’s corpse floats away and becomes the rainbow.⁶

⁵ Peter G. Roe, “Pottery: Forms that Endure,” in *Arts of the Amazon*, ed. Barbara Braun (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 24-26; Walter E. Roth, “An Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore of the Guiana Indians,” in *Thirtieth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, 1908-1909* (Washington D.C.: Bureau of American Ethnology, 1915), 193.

⁶ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 302-304; Peter G. Roe, *The Cosmic Zygote: Cosmology in the Amazon Basin* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1982), 182-184.

These narratives make the serpent the ancestor of the rainbow, which originates either in his blood or on his iridescent body. As the birds cart off their new colors, they might be imagined as doing so from the different wavelengths of the serpent's iridescence or the different stripes of the rainbow. Thus, before his murder, the snake is a fleshy band of colorlessness below the glistening surface of silty river water. After his death, he becomes a ghostly band of colored vapor, the spirit of all water.

The snake's association with flowing, still and evaporating water is apparent throughout the oral traditions of the Guianas and Lower Orinoco, where snakes also can connote precipitation. Amerindians there observe the behavior of the anaconda in order to predict rain or drought.⁷ In addition, they practice various rituals in which parts of the anaconda are prepared as burnt offerings to the unseen forces that bring rain.⁸

The Twilight of Snakes in Saladoid Ceramics

The virtual absence of the snake in Saladoid imagery is significant. As with the jaguar, eagle and vulture discussed in Chapters Four and Five, the great snake goes missing. On the Saladoid mainland but especially in the islands, the earth/feline-sky/raptor-water/serpent triad so common in South American symbolism, seems put to rest once and for all. Even the colorful songbirds that derive their varied plumage from the water serpent are largely absent in the Antillean Saladoid. One is tempted to search about for replacements for all these iconic species. How could Amazonid culture survive

⁷ Roth, "Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore," 269. For example, Roth reports that the sight of a "camudi" in a tree is a sign of impending dry weather, long or short depending on the size of the snake.

⁸ Ibid., 267. Both Arawaks and Waraos burn the carcass of an anaconda as "an inducement for the rain to fall."

without these symbolic staples? But before we can answer this question, we might look to another crucial South American “serpent,” one which, like the vulture, enjoyed some limited and isolated popularity in the southern Windward Islands.

Crocodylians and Lizards

Crocodylians in Nature

Crocodylians appear in the Windward Islands but only as vagrants from Trinidad and Venezuela.⁹ The two species encountered in these southernmost Antilles are the Trinidad speckled caiman (*Caiman sclerops*) and the Orinoco caiman (*Caiman intermedius*).¹⁰ They have been known to wash up as far north as Grenada, carried by storms and currents, aided by their expert swimming, tolerance for brackish and salty water, and an ability to cling to flotsam.¹¹ With no crocodylian encounters north of the southern Windwards, this iconic mainland animal still managed to eke out a checkered iconographic existence in parts of the archipelago.

Incidences and Aesthetics of Saladoid Caiman Ceramics

Crocodylian imagery of the Antillean Saladoid has a remarkable stylistic consistency in islands where the animal is not endemic. In Trinidad and Venezuela, crocodylian imagery is not particularly common, but even in the six examples I

⁹ Malhotra and Thorpe, *Reptiles and Amphibians of the Eastern Caribbean*, 9.

¹⁰ Lesley Suty, *Fauna of the Caribbean: the Last Survivors* (Oxford, U.K.: Macmillan Education, 1993), 62-63. A Trinidad subspecies of the speckled caiman is illustrated in figure 27.

¹¹ S. Blair Hedges, “Biogeography of the West Indies: An Overview,” in *Biogeography of the West Indies: Patterns and Perspectives*, ed. Charles A. Woods, and Florence E. Sergile (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2001), 19-21; Suty, *Fauna of the Caribbean*, 62-63.

encountered in collections there is some variety in how those caimans' features are treated (figures 6.6 to 6.8).¹² However, when made by people further north who may have seen a caiman rarely or never, adornos stick close to one program of stylizations that makes for a peculiar rendition of the animal. The diagnostic features are a long, somewhat tabular shape of the adorno, with a mouth located along its leading edge. The nose is located atop the long, flat head, but the eyes are located at the sides of the adorno, near where it connects to pot. Of the nine such caiman adornos I counted in various collections, all the eyes were composed of a lunette-type shape, usually centered by a punctuation. The flat bottoms of these eyes seem to represent the crocodilian's eyes as they emerge from the water. There is also an attempt to capture the somewhat flat, rectangular crown of the animal but often the eyes are located near the back of this pate rather than the front where they are located on actual caimans. The adornos do not immediately look like crocodilians because their muzzles are not particularly pointed. Long, vertical, anthropomorphic noses meeting at right angles to their rectangular pates cause their upper surfaces to resemble the colossal Easter Island moai. But upon closer inspection, considering the top, sides and front edge of each adorno, they bear all the features of crocodilians, albeit run through a battery of unique, extreme stylizations.

Single specimens of these stylized caimans have been found as far north as Montserrat and Guadeloupe (figures 6.9 and 6.10). But one of the most striking discoveries in my survey was the anomalous concentration of caiman adornos on the small island of Carriacou just north of Grenada (Appendix 1, Chart 1). If the provenance information at the National Museum of the American Indian is correct, five such caiman

¹² In institutional collections four adornos for Venezuela and two for Trinidad could be identified as crocodilians with any certainty.

adornos have been found in Carriacou, all with the diagnostic features described above. One of them is boldly polychromed in white-on-red (figure 6.11). Another bears rows of punctations evoking rows of scutes on the caiman's head (figure 6.12). Astoundingly more crocodilian adornos have been found in Carriacou than in Venezuela.

Perhaps these caiman adornos are South American retentions by Saladoid potters recently arrived or constantly in contact with the mainland. After all, Carriacou is only the second island on the horizon after departing Venezuela from Carúpano. And just as the Tobago Museum displays a Venezuelan canoe that washed up on Tobago's south coast in the 1979, people in Carriacou and Grenada have reported both live and dead Orinoco caimans washing up on their shores.¹³ The Carriacou crocodile adornos thus could indicate a yearly marooning of the caimans back in Saladoid times when Orinoco and speckled caimans were not on the brink of extinction as they are today.¹⁴ Several caiman adornos similar to those from Carriacou have been produced in Grenada and St. Vincent also (figures 6.13 and 6.14). Grenada last reported a caiman landing in 1910.¹⁵ Beyond these southern islands, caiman adornos are almost non-existent, the few examples in Guadeloupe and Montserrat being the rare exceptions. These are similar enough in style to be trade items from further south.

¹³ Sully, *Fauna of the Caribbean*, 62-63. Landings have historically happened around September when the Orinoco is in rainy season flood, pushing silty freshwater far out to sea, and when currents sweep objects and animals northwards.

¹⁴ Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, *Natural History of the West Indies*, ed. and trans. by Sterling A. Stoudemire (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), 75-77. Sir Walter Raleigh, *The Discovery of Guiana: And Related Documents*, ed. by Benjamin Schmidt (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008), 78. In the late sixteenth century, Walter Raleigh reported that the Orinoco was swarming with "thousands of those ugly serpents," testifying that his ship lost a crewman who went overboard and was eaten by one such creature. Previously in that century, circa 1526, Oviedo had also reported that these musky-smelling "dragons" were man-eaters, growing to some 15 feet in length and inhabiting the coast, which they entered and left from rivers and streams that met the sea. He declared "in some places these animals are so numerous that they present a terrifying spectacle."

¹⁵ Sully, *Fauna of the Caribbean*, 62-63.

Of all the features of these Antillean caimans, I found only the lunette-shaped eye in a mainland specimen (compare figures 6.6 and 6.11). Even in that case, the incised eye of the Saladero caiman was not punctated. Quite the opposite of reflecting a yearly encounter with marooned crocodilians, stylized caiman adornos in the Lesser Antilles might represent an insular convention for depicting a creature the ceramicist seldom saw. Their mannered quality might be based on fixed descriptions (i.e., drawn, chanted or recited accounts) of the caiman. Thus, a crocodilian canon would have crystallized somewhere between Trinidad and St. Vincent and become a revered tradition.

If descriptions of the caiman were verbal, we might look to narrative traditions to find them, particularly ones of northeastern South America. This is the silted riverine zone of the Saladoid motherland, which is united with the Windwards, where most of the caiman adornos have been found, during one part of the year. As the great Orinoco floods in the rainy season, the Delta and southernmost islands form one ephemeral ecology.

The Caiman as Grudging, Banished Ancestor in Mainland Narrative

There is a long-standing animosity between crocodilians and mythic heroes in the Lower Orinoco and Guianas. Roth says the bumpy caiman bears the marks of a thrashing given it by a culture hero in both Guianian Carib and Arawak lore.¹⁶ In a Carib version, the Sun, having discovered that somebody is stealing his fish, leaves the caiman to guard his fishponds. Caiman is soon discovered devouring his charges. Infuriated, Sun slashes the reptile repeatedly, whose skin still bears all the marks today. Desperate to stop his

¹⁶ Roth, "Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore," 211-212. Roth also recorded that Waraos used to flay crocodilians to recover suspected human remains, which they ceremonially buried. And Akawai Indians believed that caimans once had long, snaking tongues which were pulled out by an ancient hero, hence the flat, fleshy bottoms of their mouths today.

beating, Caiman promises his beautiful daughter to the Sun. But he has no daughter, and is hard pressed to produce the Sun's bride. He hastily fashions a woman from wild plum (hog plum?) wood and hopes that Sun will not notice the difference. As his sculpture is a woman in form but not in function, he asks a woodpecker to excavate a genital orifice to activate her, as it were. We have seen this solution in other narratives from the Amazon to the Antilles. The Sun dallies with the Wooden Bride but ultimately rejects her, even though she has become pregnant. From Wooden Bride the Hero Twins issue, with the Sun as their unwitting father. They are never quite born. Their mother does not carry them to term but rather is killed by a jaguar before she gives birth. Jaguar discovers them inside her corpse, and advised by his mother Rain Frog Woman, raises them as his own. But the Twins discover that their mother was actually killed by Jaguar and kill him and his mother in revenge. In search of their true father, they embark on many adventures, sometimes defeating enemies and betrayers but sometimes ending up in mortal danger. These Hero Twins, Pia and Makunaima, are commemorated in the constellations Orion and Pleiades respectively and are mentioned in a stilt bird tradition in Chapter Five.¹⁷

Several details of this tradition seem related to the few known narratives from the Antilles. An arboreal creature made into a functional woman by a woodpecker and twin heroes (though in the Antilles they are quadruplets) born from a dead mother are among the more striking themes shared with Caribbean lore. But there are no surviving traditions from the islands involving crocodiles. At the very font of many versions of the mainland Hero Twin legend is the caiman. In a way, the crocodilian is an ancestor of the heroes for he and the woodpecker created their mother, Wooden Bride. Her creation is a perfunctory

¹⁷ Roth, "Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore," 133-135.

apology for an offense committed by the caiman, an offense for which he is always battered by Sun(light) and sinks beneath the water to hide in the darkness.

Caimans, Water and Fire in Mainland Narrative and Symbolism

In other oral traditions from the Guianas and Venezuela, the crocodile is actually the originator of fire, as is the jaguar further inland. He suffers a reversal at the hands of men. As is often the case in tropical lowland traditions, the animals we see today are either contemporary examples of temporally and conceptually prior exemplars in mythic time or they are the contemporary inverses of their ancient forbears after some reversal. The Yanomamö say that once caimans ate cooked food and walked on land, but after humans stole the secret of fire out of their mouths they retreated to the water, where they now eat uncooked and rancid meat.¹⁸

From its watery realm, this great saurian is not always a threat and is sometimes quite useful to people. As with anacondas, crocodilian behavior is read as a series of portents about weather. A noise uttered by a caiman, likened to a “bark” by Amerindians living on the Moruka River of Guyana, predicts rain.¹⁹ As lords of the water world, crocodilians are the bringers of precipitation. Various rituals involving the use of their body parts to call rain have been recorded. Roth mentions a ritual in which scrapings from the largest teeth of a crocodilian are ceremonially washed in water to bring

¹⁸ Napoleon A. Chagnon, *Yanomamö: The Fierce People* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), 46; Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 66-69; Claude Lévi-Strauss, *From Honey to Ashes*, trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 61. There is a similarity here with some Kayapo and Apinaye jaguar legends mentioned in Chapter Four. In these it is the jaguar, who some say kept the fire in his eyes (as opposed to his mouth), from whom men steal fire.

¹⁹ Roth, “Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore,” 269.

showers.²⁰ There is a bridge between the menacing crocodilian and the useful one, for in some narratives the caiman is enlisted by one character to take revenge on another. In a Warao narrative, the fisher hero Nohi-abassi asks his gluttonous mother-in-law to help haul in his massive catch from the water. He has also enticed a caiman to wait near the catch for a special meal: an old woman grown fat on his prodigious fish harvests.²¹

Possible Functions of Caiman Ceramics

Saladoid potters commemorated the caiman's flat semi-submerged head in their adornos but I have found no other part of a caiman vessel as to infer function from vessel form. Did pots bearing the caiman's likeness ever hold food, given the creature's Pre-Columbian and early colonial associations with man-eating, and its tendency to sometimes scavenge floating cadavers, like an aquatic vulture?

The distribution of caiman adornos, centered at Carriacou as it was, might represent a crocodilian cult brought by a separate denomination of Saladoid immigrants from South America with some mythologized ancestral connection to this animal. The caiman adorno in figure 6.11 is elaborately polychromed in a late Cedrosan style (i.e., a Palo Seco-like style of the early Common Era), possibly indicating the late arrival of this "caiman cult" after the settlement of most of the Lesser Antilles. But in the Antilles, these late settlers would have observed a curious inversion with respect to the caiman. In Venezuela, thousands of caimans bred on sandy riverbanks at the height of the dry

²⁰ Roth, "Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore," 267.

²¹ Ibid., 264.

season, between November and February.²² On the Orinoco, they were most visible at this time as they laid their eggs, their multitudes filling the air with musk and thereby constituting a startling seasonal marker for observers. A mainland Saladoid immigrant to Carriacou might have noted that the only time caimans were seen in the islands was in the rainy season, the exact opposite time of year from their greatest visibility in Orinokia.

Thus Saladoid caiman vessels, with related, ancestral caiman-clan significance, may have held seasonal foods, harvested during the time when exhausted crocodilians washed up on the beaches of the Windwards, the rainy season. Hog plums and mameys come into season around this time, and also freshwater fish washed out to sea by the flooding Orinoco would have become available just offshore.

Lizards

The Lesser Antilles boasts many varieties of lizards of widely ranging sizes. But these seldom appear in ceramics. I have never seen a whole or even partial lizard pot, only neatly broken adornos as in figures 6.15 to 6.18. Of the several species of ground lizards, iguanas, skinks, anoles and geckos in the region, it seems to be the ubiquitous anoles and geckos that appear, rarely, in Saladoid adornos. Anoles (*Anolis* species) are smaller, mostly arboreal cousins of the iguana (figure 28). The iguana for its part is not depicted in Saladoid ceramics. With characteristically large, bulging eyes, and shorter muzzles and tails, geckos are readily distinguishable from anoles. The adorno in figure 6.18 would seem to depict this only Caribbean lizard with an audible voice. Of apparent minor importance in ceramics, these rare lizard adornos might be whimsical creations of

²² Sully, *Fauna of the Caribbean*, 63.

Saladoid potters. But anoles and geckos have impressive behaviors that would easily inform oral tradition and symbolism. Even their Linnaean taxonomic names carry references to ancestral spirits. Their natural history and possible lore, symbolism and iconography are treated in Appendix 2's section on "Ghosts and Lizards."

Frogs

Frogs in Nature

In the Caribbean rainy season the nights are more sonorous than the days. The whirring of insects in the forest and swamps fades to background noise behind incessant cheeping, hooting, whistling and croaking. This is not the song of a motley flock of night birds. These are frogs and toads at their breeding cycle's apogee.

Today, the islands from Grenada northwards host some 10 naturally occurring species of the order *Anura*, that is, frogs and toads. Including the species Trinidad and Tobago share with the mainland, the number of anuran species virtually triples.²³ Perhaps most remarkable of Lesser Antilles frogs are the seven species of small singing frogs of the genus *Eleutherodactylus*, resembling mainland tree frogs in their arboreal behavior and filling the night with more sound than their 60 millimeter-long bodies might be expected to make (figures 31 and 32). These are mostly brown frogs with various black and white markings. Frogs' moist, absorbent skins make them a barometer for climate change and pollution so it is possible that other species existed before industrialization. A recently discovered species of brightly colored "poison arrow" frogs (*Dendrobatidae* species) from Martinique hints at this lost diversity. One edible species (*Leptodactylus*) is

²³ Murphy, *Amphibians and Reptiles of Trinidad and Tobago*, 57.

also endemic to the Lesser Antilles, which the locals today wryly call “mountain chicken.” True tree frogs (family *Hylidae*) and the commonly encountered marine toad (*Bufo marinus*) were probably human introductions from South America.²⁴

Anurans are mainly insectivorous, active both by day or night, depending on the species, but with a marked preference for nighttime. The Eleutherodactylus (i.e., singing or piping frogs) prefer moist, vertical surfaces covered in moss, which provide constant contact with moisture through their absorbent skins. A favorite haunt, besides trees themselves, is the bromeliads that grow on them, whose funnel shape, filled with rainwater makes a perfect nest for a clutch of eggs. The soft, translucent eggs need only this cupful of water to hatch. The young go through a modified tadpole stage right within these small bodies of water and two weeks after the clutch is laid, in March or April, tiny froglets cut their way out of the eggs with a small horn on their noses and crawl out.²⁵

Singing frogs are not totally arboreal. They can also be found under rocks, discarded vegetable matter near human dwellings, especially flaking, curled or cupping materials like cut leaves and cacao husks; and have even been known to crawl into empty shells and crab holes where the forest comes close to the shore.²⁶ When startled or molested, they leap from their daytime retreats into nearby freshwater.²⁷ But at less than an inch long, they are far more often heard than seen. And in Pre-Columbian times, when

²⁴ Malhotra and Thorpe, *Reptiles and Amphibians of the Eastern Caribbean*, 7-9.

²⁵ Virginia Barlow, *The Nature of the Islands: Plants and Animals of the Eastern Caribbean*, (Dunedin, Florida: Chris Doyle Publications, 1993), 140; Albert Schwartz and Robert W. Henderson, *Amphibians and Reptiles of the West Indies: Descriptions, Distributions and Natural History* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1991), 73, 85.

²⁶ Malhotra and Thorpe, *Reptiles and Amphibians of the Eastern Caribbean*, 7, 45; Schwartz and Henderson, *Amphibians and Reptiles of the West Indies*, 34, 72-75.

²⁷ Schwartz and Henderson, *Amphibians and Reptiles of the West Indies*, 34.

wandering around in the nighttime forest was probably anathema, they were seldom observed at night. Eleutherodactylus frogs sing in response to rain, so that their chorus is a kind of anthem of the wet season. They sing even in daytime if humidity is increased by showers or nearby rivers.²⁸ In the dry season, a sudden cloudburst will be met with a burst of frog-song.²⁹ During the rainy season, there is for the most part a constant din of calls from the amorous and competing males. But in the midst of this cacophony, the frogs can suddenly stop, and this ghostly, “unnatural” silence is an evil portent. Within a few hours of this sudden hush come the first wracking winds of the hurricane.³⁰

Incidences and Iconography of Saladoid Frog Ceramics

The frog was already an established mainland Saladoid symbol when it swept the Antilles by storm. It may have embodied profound and nuanced aquatic, climatic and barometric meanings even before mainland Saladoid potters reached coastal Venezuela.³¹ Then, from Saladero to Trinidad, there appears to have been a marked increase in frog imagery (Appendix 1, Chart 1). From Tobago to Antigua, the popularity of frog imagery seems to have exceeded that of the mainland by even greater margins, considering the small size of these islands in relation to the area of the Saladoid Lower Orinoco and the number of frog motifs surviving from each (compare figures 1.1, 1.5 and Appendix 1, Chart 1).

²⁸ Schwartz and Henderson, *Amphibians and Reptiles of the West Indies*, 85.

²⁹ Barlow, *The Nature of the Islands*, 140; Schwartz and Henderson, *Amphibians and Reptiles of the West Indies*, 73.

³⁰ Suttly, *Fauna of the Caribbean*, 34.

³¹ See the sub-section “Frogs, the Pleiades and the Rainy Season.”

Images of frogs are among the most diverse in the ceramics of the Saladoid Antilles. Frogs are depicted, represented and evoked in a variety of forms, styles and ceramic techniques. They may be closely observed, mimetic adornos perched on pot rims or minimal tabs that only remind the viewer of the aspect of a frog seen from above (figures 6.19, 6.20 and 6.21). Yet other ceramics feature modeled frog forms that are then decorated, almost to obscurity, with fanciful and perhaps iconographic plastic features (figure 6.22). Frog motifs may be incised on a vessel's body, may emerge gently in low relief, be polychromed or some combination of these (figures 6.23 and 6.24).

Judging by the shards to which some adornos are still attached, frog vessels seem to have been mostly low, oval dishes (compare figures 6.19 *left* and 6.23 with 6.25 and 6.26). These may have been effigy vessels mimicking the general shape of the frog as evidenced in a rare intact bowl from Montserrat (figure 6.27). Otherwise they were round bowls with the aforementioned abstract frog-like tabs or incised patterns (e.g., figure 6.28). One interesting vessel from Barbados is deeply incised with an abstract motif (figure 6.29). This particular motif can only be described as Pan-Antillean, appearing in the Saladoid Lesser Antilles and the Taíno Greater Antilles with comparable frequency and in very similar style. It had looser precursors in the Venezuelan Saladoid but became a deft, tightly compacted emblem in the Antilles (compare figures 6.30 with figures 6.29, 6.31 and 6.36). Pressed within its circular borders is a series of lines that scroll back and forth towards the center of the circle. These lines cleverly resolve themselves into the flexed legs of a frog on the circle's border, giving the general sense of a frog seen from above, just below the water's surface, at the center of the spreading rings of a ripple.

Henry Petitjean-Roget has closely studied this frog “labyrinth” and its attendant symbolism.³² His analysis and drawings demonstrate that the labyrinth forms a rotating quincunx with a circle at its axis, and with the frog’s four legs scrolling tightly from it (figure 6.32). He suggests the circular labyrinth was a metonym for the mytho-symbolic frog so that even when it appeared without a frog’s contour it still was read as a frog.

The frog labyrinth also appears on many non-ceramic objects. Frogs, rivaled only by turtles and bats, are the species most commonly depicted across art forms and media from the Saladoid to the Taíno (compare figures 6.35 *right* and *left*). Amulets, pendants, trigonal zemis and objects of unknown function all bear the familiar flexed, quadrate motif of a frog seen from above (figures 6.29, and 6.33 to 6.35).³³ Some objects present what might be considered the side of the frog, but in these cases, half of the aerial labyrinth view is given to be the side view (figures 6.31 and 6.35 *left*). This stylization of the frog to the point of a veritable hieroglyph, with all the regularization that implies, seems to have elevated the animal’s image beyond that of a motif. In the study of this iconic frog, one discovers that the smallest of creatures may have borne the weightiest implications, those of what Antilleans would call a zemi.

Frogs, the Pleiades and the Rainy Season

In singing through the night during the rainy season and whenever and wherever water flows, unseen frogs are the disembodied voice of the inland waters. Rainwater,

³² Henry Petitjean Roget, “Notes sur le motif de la grenouille dans l’art Arawak des Petites Antilles,” in *Sixth International Congress for the Study of Pre-Columbian Culture in the Lesser Antilles* (Pointe-à-Pitre: Société d’Histoire de la Guadeloupe, 1975), 177-180.

³³ The shell object in Figure 6.35 exhibits three holes, one of which is in the center of the frog motif but the other two seeming to be arbitrarily placed. My suspicion is that these were spy holes for sighting the positions of particular stars, given the astronomical associations I cite for frogs in this chapter.

spring water, cave water and indeed all potable water. Filling the funnels of bromeliads, dripping from heliconia leaves, pooling in the hollows of trees or depressions in the earth, freshwater is represented by the frog. This is not the briny surf that washes the shore but the water that is the lifeblood of agriculture and culture in general.³⁴

Throughout much of this dissertation, I have had recourse to South American narratives for oblique glimpses into the cultural meanings of animals in the Saladoid Antilles. But in the case of frogs (and turtles), assistance with the partial recovery of Saladoid zoomorphic symbolism comes from the Caribbean itself. Fray Ramón Pané's late fifteenth-century accounts of the Hispaniolan oral traditions, and published studies of them, are crucially important here for the meaning they help construct for frogs. Also, important anthropological studies on Antillean frog and turtle iconography have preceded mine, as my recourse to Petitjean Roget, Robiou-Lamarche and others suggests.

In a telling migration narrative, the upstart Guahayona departs his homeland, taking all the women with him. He tells the women to gather a sacred plant called *güeyo*, nothing more, and to come with him in his canoe. The plant in question would seem to be tobacco.³⁵ Somehow, the women are convinced to defy their chief, leave even their children behind and depart with Guahayona on this journey, starting a new lineage.

³⁴ José Juan Arrom, "The Creation Myths of the Taíno," in *Taíno: Pre-Columbian Art and Culture from the Caribbean*, ed. Fatima Bercht (New York: El Museo del Barrio/Monacelli Press, 1997), 78.

³⁵ Ramón Pané, *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians*, ed. José Juan Arrom and trans. Susan Griswold (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 7, 23. I have noticed that Taíno words beginning with "gua" or "gue", if spelled with "wa" and "we" respectively, have the same spelling and meaning as mainland Arawak words. Arrom demonstrates this in his notes in the Pané text, where he indicates the use of "weya"/weyo among the Arawaks of the Guianas. This is chewing tobacco, mixed with the ashes of an algae species to enhance its narcotic properties.

Guahayona pushes off in a canoe full of güeyo, accompanied by all the women and his brother-in-law Anacacuya. On the sea, Guahayona points to a conch shell visible on the bottom through the clear water. And as his brother-in-law leans over the gunwale of the canoe, Guahayona grasps him by the feet and tosses him into the water. The canoe continues on its journey, leaving Anacacuya behind.³⁶ Guahayona eventually deposits the women on an island called Matininó, and continues on his journey to the isle of Guanín, the Taíno word for hammered gold. This isle of Amazons that Guahayona establishes on his way to Guanín bears a strong resemblance to one in the Warao stilt bird narrative I recounted in Chapter Five, where women rule, and guard the secrets of tobacco, if güeyo is indeed tobacco. There is another similarity with the Warao traditions in that just as the Warao vaguely locate the Amazon isle in some very distant, eastern location nearer the rising sun, Matininó too is in some far-off, undisclosed eastern location.³⁷ The most important similarity is that the Warao isle of women is called Nibo-yuni, meaning “Man-without” and the word Matininó means “without fathers.” But what does this legend of migration, masculine rivalry, Amazons and tobacco have to do with frogs? We must look first to the children left behind as their mothers depart.

The motherless children grow hungry. They gather by a stream and cry for their mothers gone across the sea. No one in their village can comfort them for there are no nursing women there, or any women at all. The little ones bawl “asking for the teat.”

³⁶ Pané, *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians*, 7.

³⁷ Peter O’Brien Harris, “Nabarima: A Warao Sacred Place in South Trinidad,” in *Proceedings of the XXI Congress of the International Association for Caribbean Archaeology* (Port-of-Spain, Trinidad: International Association for Caribbean Archaeology, 2005), 489; Antonio M. Stevens-Arroyo, *Cave of the Jagua: The Mythological World of the Taínos* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2006), 175. 157. I describe the Warao isle of women as “eastern” because of the common contemporary Warao speculation I cited in Chapter Five that the island may have been Trinidad, and because the sacred Warao mountain of the eastern quarter, Nabarima (i.e., Naparima Hill), is in Trinidad. The east, of course is the place of the rising sun, moon and season-marking constellations.

“Toa toa” they cry pleadingly, the meaning of which is unknown and some suggest this refers to liquids or, specifically water.³⁸ As their voices grow soft and hoarse, they slowly transform, on the banks of that (freshwater) stream, into “little animals like frogs which are called *tona*,” still beseeching their mothers to return from across the (salty) sea.

In an archaeo-astronomical analysis of the Guahayona legend, Sebastián Robiou-Lamarche suggested that the frogs into which the children transform represent the Pleiades. From Lévi-Strauss, he cites mythic traditions from the Gran Chaco south of the Amazon to the Orinoco of plaintive children who are transformed into the Pleiades. This much-mythologized star cluster is often likened to a group of crying children. Robiou-Lamarche convincingly demonstrates the equivalence between the crying children and the Pleiades and also between the Pleiades and frogs, the creatures into which the Taíno children are transformed.³⁹ His analysis also cites the same connections between the Pleiades and the first rains, as I demonstrated in the “Opossums” section of Chapter Four. When the Pleiades dip beneath the horizon for the last time, disappearing for a season, the rains begin.⁴⁰ But for Robiou-Lamarche, the Pleiades are frogs not an opossum.

There is no real conflict here. For just as I suggested the scaly, shelled Saladoid armadillo is an ancestral symbol to the mythic turtle of the Taíno (which I continue to demonstrate in the section on “Turtles”), I propose here that the opossum, a medium-sized mammal for the most part restricted to the southernmost Windwards, was slowly

³⁸ Pané, *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians*, 7-8. José Arrom’s commentary in the footnotes of Pané point out that “tona” is the word for water in Carib and several other Amerindian languages of northern South America.

³⁹ Sebastián Robiou-Lamarche, “Astronomy in Taíno Mythology.” *Archeoastronomy* 7 (1984): 112-113.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

out-competed by the ubiquitous piping frog, a creature which had shared its rainy season symbolism since before the Saladoid departure for the West Indies. In so many ways, the piping frog is a far more appropriate symbol of the rainy season in the Antilles. It is found on most islands, exhibits far more behaviors related to the availability and proximity of useful water, and its neatly composed emblem relates easily to other water-related icons in the Antillean scheme of designs, symbols and meanings.

Frogs, Shells and Stars in Antillean Narratives and Ritual

Perhaps unknowingly, Robiou-Lamarque relates other details in the narrative of Guahayona to frogs. He admits that his groundbreaking 1984 article was merely a primary analysis and so it was not necessary to explore every anuran permutation of the story at that time, especially since it was published in an astronomy journal. He relates Anacacuya (whose name means “Central Star,” implying Polaris), grasped by the feet, thrown overboard and presumably sunk in the water, to the Big Dipper. This constellation, imagined as a one-legged man by many Amerindians (but as a stilt bird to others), rotates around Polaris and sinks beneath the horizon in late April, not to return until August at the beginning of hurricane season. But as part of his relating Anacacuya to Polaris, the Big Dipper and the hurricanes, Robiou-Lamarque’s decision to dwell briefly on the detail of the shell in the water seems prescient. The spiral cross-section of the “cobo” (as *Strombus gigas* was called by the Taíno) he relates to the shape of the hurricane. And the use of ground shell to activate the hallucinogenic properties of the powdered *piptadenia peregrina* (i.e., cohoba) seeds is also considered.⁴¹ But it goes

⁴¹ Robiou-Lamarque, “Astronomy in Taíno Mythology,” 114.

unnoted or unnoticed that the *Strombus gigas* (i.e., conch) shell is one of the favored materials for fashioning frog emblems (figures 6.33, 6.35 *left* and 6.36). I would also suggest that given the astronomical significance that Robiou-Lamarche rightly assigns to frogs, many of the incised frog objects made of conch shell that are drilled with off-set holes or circular indentations (e.g., figures 6.35 and 6.36) may have actually been used for sighting, fixing and predicting the movements of constellations or particular stars (perhaps the Pleiades) and may have also been used for agro-calendar counts.

Frogs, Opossums and Star Children in Antillean and Mainland Narratives

I must address one important lacuna in Robiou-Lamarche's important article. On the subject of the cries of the hungry children, he falters, having precious little previous research on which to rely. Citing Arrom, he suggests that the exclamation "toa toa" might just be onomatopoeiaic and therefore, essentially meaningless, except perhaps as a frog voice. But otherwise, he leaves this throaty noise untreated. In fact Stephen Hugh-Jones' 1979 *The Palm and the Pleiades* gives insight into this seemingly nonsensical exclamation. As noted in the "Opossums" section of Chapter Four, Hugh-Jones reports that the Tukanoan-speaking Barasana and Arawakan-speaking Baniwa both use the same root word "oa" to refer to the Pleiades and the Barasana also use the same "oa" to refer to opossums. The "oa" root appears as part of other words designating "Children of the Pleiades," "Star People," and such. So the crying children in Taíno-era oral tradition are actually invoking the Pleiades before turning into frogs. This strengthens Robiou-Lamarche's position that the ancient Antilleans, and perhaps their mainland relatives too, had set up a metonymic and synonymic equivalence between the Pleiades, rain, frogs and

mythologically, weeping hungry children at the end of the dry season. I also suggest that in their Saladoid past, the Taínos and other people of Hispaniola also had a Baniwa-like equivalence between these and opossums. In Chapter Four, I made a tenuous comparison between the opossum's tail and the curl of the Pleiades, but the cluster of children, "little animals like frogs" (i.e., tadpoles) and in some Amazonian narratives, fish, bees and swarming parakeets, is even more reminiscent of the star cluster in the dry season sky.⁴²

Frogs and Fertility in Antillean Symbolism

Frogs, these slimy, often nocturnal heralds of the rainy season read like a primer in Antillean iconography, with references to transformation, fertility and agriculture. The scores of eggs laid by frogs in their aquatic and terrestrial habitats is a ready fertility symbol that could not have escaped any Amerindian observer. The transformation of these eggs from frothy orbs to fish-like, then lizard-like (by virtue of tadpole tails and legs), then frog-like creatures would have made them symbols of transformation for the shaman, possessor of secret natural knowledge. Traversing the aquatic underworld, the land of the living and the trees above the world made the frog itself like a shaman.

As an embodiment of seasonal change the frog was an emblem of the agricultural cycle. As the frogs sang in the first rains, it would be time to plant the manioc.⁴³ The planted manioc stalks would take between six and 18 months to mature depending on

⁴² Lévi-Strauss, *From Honey to Ashes*, 132, 264, 270; Stephen Hugh-Jones, *The Palm and the Pleiades: Initiation and Cosmology in Northwest Amazonia* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 168.

⁴³ Stevens-Arroyo, *Cave of the Jagua*, 42-43; Robiou-Lamarque, "Astronomy in Taíno Mythology," 114.

whether they were slow-growing bitter or fast-growing sweet varieties.⁴⁴ The frog's egg-laying association with fertility would be doubled within a year of those planting rains, as many of the dozens of manioc varieties were harvested and a number of babies were born. After planting, the increasing rains kept many couples confined to their dwellings, during which many wives become pregnant. Thus the rainy season and its frog emblem represented a "convergence between the generation of yuca and human procreation."⁴⁵

Human fertility is connected to frog symbolism in Taíno images of the Mother Goddess Atabeyra, as in the famed petroglyph on one of the monoliths lining the Caguana ballcourt in Puerto Rico (figure 6.37). In this iconic image, the crowned Atabeyra, whose name has been translated as "Mother of Waters," is depicted with arms and legs flexed in the position of the frog motifs discussed in this study, with hands and feet like the webbed ones of frogs. This is not only a frog position, but so far as we know, the position in which women gave birth.⁴⁶ Taíno Atabeyra images can be found from Haiti to the Virgin Islands, some of them actually giving birth.⁴⁷ Columbus and las Casas also reported that Taíno women desiring pregnancy cherished frog-like Atabeyra zemis.⁴⁸

If as I have already suggested Trinidad was the jumping off point for the escalation in anuran imagery, then a certain species of frog found there and nowhere else

⁴⁴ Samuel M. Wilson, *The Archaeology of the Caribbean* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 86; Stevens-Arroyo, *Cave of the Jagua*, 42.

⁴⁵ Stevens-Arroyo, *Cave of the Jagua*, 224.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 221-224.

⁴⁷ C. N. Dunelaar, "Petroglyphs in the U.S. Virgin Islands: A Survey," in *Proceedings of the XIII International Congress for Caribbean Archaeology* (Curacao, Netherlands Antilles: Reports of the Archaeological-Anthropological Institute of the Netherlands Antilles, 1991), 949-950; Fred Olsen, *On the Trail of the Arawaks* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974), 132-134.

⁴⁸ Stevens-Arroyo, *Cave of the Jagua*, 224.

in the islands is worth noting as the possible origin of a certain mythic pregnancy concept. The Suriname toad (*Pipa pipa*) is a variety of completely aquatic frog. It has the curious habit of carrying its eggs on its back (figure 34). The eggs embed themselves there during rainy season mating. Some four months later, dozens of froglets crawl out of spherical cells on their mother's back, leaving a field of craters.⁴⁹ This strange, quasi-marsupial "pregnancy," whereby offspring develop in the dorsal dermis rather than inside the abdomen or outside the body, defies all zoological norms. And yet, in one of the few surviving traditions of the Pre-Columbian Antilles, it finds an analogue.

Astonishingly, the Taíno narrative of the culture hero and primordial ancestor Deminán Caracaracol involves precisely one such pregnancy. Among his adventures with his three identical brothers are the stories of Deminán in the houses of Yaya and Bayamanaco. From a gourd in Yaya's house they unleash a great flood upon the world that leaves only the Antilles above water.⁵⁰ After the flood the brothers continue on to the house of Bayamanaco. This is probably in some remote location for the man is a shaman, apparently living alone and baking his own *casabe* (i.e., making cassava/manioc bread without the assistance of a woman or apprentice of any sort). The cassava bread is tempting and Deminán Caracaracol boldly enters the house of old Bayamanaco, to ask the old "grandfather" for some. Taken aback by this impudence, Bayamanaco blows a wad of mucous at him from his nose in an expression of disgust. The mucous is laden with cohoba, for the shaman Bayamanaco has probably only just come out of the fast shamans observe when they take cohoba. The laced mucous lands on Deminán

⁴⁹ Jackson, *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Animals of America*, 78; Murphy, *Amphibians and Reptiles of Trinidad and Tobago*, 95.

⁵⁰ For the narrative of "Yaya and the Great Flood," see Appendix 2.

Caracaracol's back as he tries to escape and this sets a most unusual process in motion. An infected lump develops on the back of Deminán Caracaracol, becoming increasingly painful. When the agony threatens to kill him, his brothers use stone axes to pry the swelling open. From the lump emerges a female turtle. The four brothers marry this "Turtle Bride" and, in the post-diluvian island world, they father the Antilleans together.

The *Pipa pipa*-like gestation of Turtle Bride is remarkable. And the fact that delivery was induced by prying stone axes, and that she sprung, Eve-like from her husband's ribcage (and spine) do not detract from her *Pipa pipa*-like birth. But this unusual hatching of Turtle Bride from a pock-crater in Deminán Caracaracol's back leads us to the intimate links between frogs and turtles, like strings of mucous, joining fresh and saltwater, amphibian and reptile. I suspend my discussion of Antillean frog mythosymbology here but will take up that sticky, connecting tissue between the frog and the turtle in an integrated analysis of both zoomorphic icons after the discussion of turtles.

Possible Functions of Frog Vessels

The majority of vessels and vessel fragments bearing the likeness of the frog have been low bowls and dishes. Across a variety of adornment styles and vessel shapes, the presence of frog motifs was almost a guarantee that the vessel would be wider than it was tall and would have a somewhat oblong or circular shape. This shape connotes the shape of the frog's body, of course. But while some frog pots are clearly effigy pots, others bear frog imagery only in the adornos attached to them (compare figure 6.27 and 6.28).

The low bowls and dishes do not seem likely to have held liquids for drinking (perhaps with the exception of the Barbadian example in figure 6.29). Rather, they seem

designed to hold solid or semi-solid foods. In the very low dishes such as the ones in figures 6.23 and 6.26, these contents would probably not have been of the spherical variety, such as fruit, nor of a granular variety, such as manioc farina or other powdery products easily dislodged or spilled from the dish. I would suggest that low, frog-adorned pottery was for the presentation of pasty foods, stews, and bread, all containing manioc. The reader will note that I proposed much the same contents for opossum dishes. It is not only the vessel designs that suggest this but also the close association frogs have with the manioc planting cycle. The fruit of the harvest might then be presented in these frog dishes, in honor of the anuran harbingers of soil fertility.

Turtles

The Turtle in Nature

Marine turtles appear throughout Saladoid and other Antillean visual arts.⁵¹ There are four marine turtles that frequent the Lesser Antilles. These are the green sea turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*), hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) and leatherback (*Dermochelys coriaca*) turtles (figures 35 to 39). These all are characterized by extended necks that they cannot retract like other turtles, and large, backward sweeping flippers that make them expert swimmers but ungainly on land.⁵²

The leatherback turtle is the largest living sea turtle with a ridged, grayish carapace over six feet long. The longitudinal ridges on the shell are actually bony

⁵¹ Occasionally, I have also found on occasion turtle adornos from the Saladoid islands and the mainland with cylindrical snouts and unique head shapes that might represent the region's endemic semi-aquatic terrapins and single terrestrial tortoise species as well.

⁵² Malhotra and Thorpe, *Reptiles and Amphibians of the Eastern Caribbean*, 10.

remnants with the leathery connective tissue extended between them. This species ranges more widely and deeply than other tropical turtles because its massive size allows it to conserve heat longer. This deep sea turtle feeds on jellyfish mostly.⁵³ Loggerhead turtles have large bulbous heads and a humped reddish brown carapace. They are carnivorous, feeding on crabs, mollusks and fish. Hawksbill turtles are the most commonly encountered turtle in the Lesser Antilles today, easily recognized by their beak-like mouth. Their yellow and brown meter-long carapaces are the ones sought after as “tortoiseshell.” They are omnivores, feeding on sponges some of which are toxic, mollusks, and invertebrates living on the sea bottom. The green sea turtle is sometimes mistaken for a hawksbill for a similar, though more blunted, beak-like mouth. It has an oval, greenish carapace that can be almost five feet long. While its young are carnivorous, adults are herbivores, feeding on seagrass in shallow water.⁵⁴

All four species of sea turtles nest in the Caribbean, though with different frequency depending on the species. They come ashore at night to lay their eggs, often by moonlight and in response to the rising tides. Leatherbacks and loggerheads do so after the beginning of the rainy season, between late March and July or August. Hawksbill and green sea turtles come ashore between July and October after the midsummer precipitation lull that builds again to the hurricane season.⁵⁵ There are many differences between these turtles in the shape of the nesting pit they dig, average number and average size of eggs, specific behaviors as they lay their eggs, and the time to hatching (though

⁵³ Malhotra and Thorpe, *Reptiles and Amphibians of the Eastern Caribbean*, 10.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

⁵⁵ Peter C. Pritchard and Pedro Trebbau, *The Turtles of Venezuela* (Athens, OH: Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles, 1984), 264, 295, 314, 330.

roughly two months in most cases). However, sea turtles are similar in seeking out a spot slightly above the highest reach of the tide on a quiet, preferably smooth beach. There they painstakingly excavate a pit, lay a clutch of dozens of spherical eggs in a lubricating stream of mucosa, and then covering the eggs by again filling up the pit with sand, they return to the sea.⁵⁶ It is usually sunrise by the time their exhausting task is done.⁵⁷

Within a range of similar turtle behaviors, leatherback turtles still distinguish themselves from the others. They do so in some ways that are appropriate to key mythological and ritual concepts. Unlike the other sea turtles mentioned, nesting leatherback turtles are not wary or easily startled when they come up on the beach. Rather, they come ashore in a trance. The laborious task of making their way up the slope of the beach and of digging the pit in which they will lay a clutch of 100 eggs or more, causes them to grunt audibly. When they finally settle into their pits, they lie still, eyes staring blankly as eggs drop from their ovipositor. This is the deepest part of their trance, when they react to no outside stimuli. Long streams of mucous issue not only from their cloacae but their eyes. Eventually, their faces are streaming with mucous in “swinging strands 10-15 cm in length,” often with sand grains sticking to the gelatinous flow.⁵⁸

Incidences and Iconography of Saladoid Turtle Ceramics

One of the most distinctive features of turtle vessels are their elaborated rims, found from Saladero to Puerto Rico. They feature the upturned head of the creature and

⁵⁶ Pritchard and Trebbau, *The Turtles of Venezuela*, 263-266, 292-297, 314-316, 329-332.

⁵⁷ Suttly, *Fauna of the Caribbean*, 23.

⁵⁸ Pritchard and Trebbau, *The Turtles of Venezuela*, 264-265.

the four flippers gently curving outwards, breaking the contour of the otherwise oval rim. Sometimes a tail makes for a sixth projection of the rim (compare figures 6.38 and 6.39). These incised rims often come from the most characteristic vessel types of the Antillean Saladoid, everted and flanged bowls, the latter giving opportunity to make the flange into a turtle rim. However, turtles adorned a host of other vessel types (figures 6.40, 6.41, 6.42). Everted, or bell-shaped, bowls and dishes were used both in the domestic and ritual spheres, including as funerary vessels. But the more finely decorated ones, especially ones bearing zoomorphic iconography were likely used only in the ritual context.⁵⁹

A snuff bowl from St. Bernard in Trinidad indicates a clear association between turtle imagery and the administering of hallucinogens (figure 2.40). When this Trinidad example is considered alongside the zone-incised Huecoid snuff bowl from Vieques (figure 2.47), the figure evoked in the latter is confirmed as a turtle. Thus the turtle spanned the entire Lesser Antilles, across ceramic series, as a ritual icon, linked to the hallucinogenic ritual of the shaman.

Many vessels mimic the shape of a turtle's carapace in a regularized, circular, oval or even rectangular way. When the vessels are turned upside down, they look like a turtle, crawling away. However, it often happens that the rim, made strong by all the pressing and modeling during the manufacturing process, is all that is left of a vessel (compare figure 6.41 with 6.43 and 6.44).

Moravetz suggests that a well known but highly ambiguous incense burner from Martinique might depict a turtle (figure 6.45). Smoke would have emerged from the hole atop the head of the uncertain zoomorph. The tabular lug located across from it on the top

⁵⁹ Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco*, 158; Iosif Moravetz, *Imaging Adornos: Classification and Iconography of Saladoid Adornos from St. Vincent, West Indies* (Oxford, U.K.: British Archaeological Reports International Series, 2005), 67.

of the vessel resembles the turtle's tail lug in figure 6.39. If a turtle, this zoomorph may be a young hatchling coming out the sand, a symbolic act of emergence. This ambiguous creature has a counterpart on a duck-shaped vessel from Trinidad, but one that has four turtle flippers as well. This is one of several such enigmatic vessels from that island that conflate (floating?) ducks and (diving?) turtles (compare figures 5.40, 6.45 and 6.46).

In my survey, I found many rim fragments with legs perhaps of turtles. I excluded these from my count of turtle vessel incidences since turtles have four legs each. It was more prudent to count heads as indicators of single animals. Turtle vessel counts for Venezuela amounted to 41. The Venezuelan heads are often round and simple in form, though deftly incised in a well-established convention (figure 6.47). They appear to be the round heads of green sea turtles, an accustomed sight in Venezuelan, Trinidadian and Tobagonian waters.⁶⁰ One adorno seems to depict a turtle with anthropomorphic hands holding up its chin in the way a shaman might during a hallucinogenic ritual (figure 6.48). Another adorno is part of a larger vessel fragment and while mimetically rendering a turtle, employs a scheme of well-defined lines and enclosed forms (figure 6.49). The high number of Venezuelan turtle adornos and their diversity is remarkable, and is indicative of a mainland Saladoid predisposition towards the turtle as a symbol. Still, in the marine environment of the Lesser Antilles, both the high incidence and variety of sea turtle images of Saladoid Venezuela were matched and exceeded.

Trinidad has an unusually low turtle count of 16, seeming to contradict Pritchard and Trebbau's findings of low-density nesting in Venezuela for some sea turtles versus high rates in Trinidad. Nearby Tobago, however, exceeds the count of the much larger

⁶⁰ Pritchard and Trebbau, *The Turtles of Venezuela*, 287.

island of Trinidad, and the numbers climb from there. The islands of the central Lesser Antilles surpass all islands north or south of them and far outstrip the mainland in the use of turtle iconography. In fact, Guadeloupe almost doubles the number of turtle adornos found on the Saladoid Lower Orinoco (Appendix 1, Chart 1). This is no surprise, as sea turtles coming in from the open Atlantic are bound to encounter the Caribbean islands before the South American mainland and so Antilleans would likely encounter far more sea turtles than mainlanders would. Leatherback turtles especially show a preference for nesting sites that they can reach quickly from the deep sea.⁶¹

Turtle imagery in the Antilles encompasses a full range from expressive naturalism to hieratic stylization. While one turtle may be frozen in a moment moving its flippers and turning its heads as if to regard the viewer, another is fully frontal and subjected to the rigid canon of Saladoid modularity (compare figures 6.50, 6.51 and 6.52). These latter schematic turtles also appear in painted imagery on the walls of white-on-red vessels (compare figure 6.52 to 6.53).

A large number of Antillean turtle adornos observe the species of the turtle closely and make it so that the different turtle taxons can be clearly discerned by the viewer. The hooked nose of the hawksbills and loggerheads and the thick neck of the leatherback closely link these adornos with the natural turtle (figures 6.54 to 6.57). Many turtles have collars, sometimes punctated seemingly to imply scales, possibly representing folds in the skin around their necks.

Despite the selective naturalism shown by so many adornos, it is the various stylizations of the turtle that are most typical of the region. Moravetz has identified some

⁶¹ Pritchard and Trebbau, *The Turtles of Venezuela*, 262.

common geometric stylizations in St. Vincent.⁶² These turtle adornos feature a spherical head or hemispherical face, circular or semi-circular eyes and an appliquéd mouth. These emblematic turtles are seen throughout the islands from Grenada to Vieques and are in fact unique to the Antilles (figures 6.52, 6.58, 6.59, and 6.62 to 6.68). They are often painted contrastingly in white and red, and sometimes highlighted with black (figure 6.58). Their modular forms are easily combinable to create hybrid creatures, sharing identities along axes and planes (figure 6.59).

Mimetic turtle imagery may refer to turtles in the flesh but these formal ones might represent the turtle as an enshrined member of the zoomorphic pantheon of the insular Saladoid. The tendency to combine this painted turtle emblem with other species, especially anthropomorphs, points to a relationship between the turtle and the transformational aspirations of the ritual specialist (figures 6.59 to 6.62). Images of partially anthropomorphized turtles holding up their chins in trance also seem to be shamanic references (figures 6.48 and 6.59).

The turtle adornos of the Antilles have enough fundamental resemblances to those at Saladero in Venezuela to be clearly of the same Saladoid series. But turtle adornos in the islands vary far more widely from each other than ones in Venezuela. In several key styles of turtle adorno, there seems no mainland precedent. If we compare the relatively spherical turtle adornos of the mainland with the many spherical adornos of the Lesser Antilles, we see some ancestry of the latter in the former (figure 6.47 and 6.58). But while the adornos of the main are deeply incised and usually unpainted, the island adornos are often lightly incised around the eyes, and more extensively appliquéd instead.

⁶² Moravetz, *Imaging Adornos*, 33-44.

The raised mouths match the often-protruding button eyes, and are often painted in white-on-red, sometimes with black, emphasizing planes and lines (figure 6.58, 6.60 and 6.62). While the insular style also diverges from the mainland's in giving punctated collars to the naturalistic turtles (figure 6.55 to 6.57), the most outstanding insular distinction is in a kind of regalia adorning the stylized turtles. In many examples, elaborate crowns extend above their heads by as much as three times the height of the head itself (figures 6.62 to 6.68). These crowns can be incised, punctated, pinched, appliquéd or some combination of these (figures 6.63 to 6.66). This crowned turtle is so common in the Lesser Antilles, and so varied in the central islands, it is discussed in depth and separated into a range of subgroups or "types" by Moravetz.⁶³ None of these types appear on the mainland.

Moravetz interprets the "crowns" as the view of the partially "retracted" necks of the turtles, especially when seen in profile.⁶⁴ This is an interesting hypothesis, but these crowns might also be the turtle head viewed from the front, with the hollow between the neck and the carapace making their typically arched shape. This would mean that the Saladoid potters were modeling in positive space an area that exists in reality as negative space, and decorating it no less (figure 6.66). The Saladoid taste for figure-ground reversals and multiple views makes these "subjective" interpretations plausible.

Clearly of a static variety that lends itself not to the profane reality of the turtle but to the animal's symbolic importance, these crowned turtles possibly represent the genesis of a turtle cult in the islands. With the turtle we see an animal that is at once a favorite topic of the mainland Saladoid but which has ascended to such symbolic

⁶³ Moravetz, *Imaging Adornos*, 33-44. These are Types IA1, IA1a, IA1b, IA1c, IA2a, IB1a, and IB2.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 57. Sea turtles cannot retract their necks into their shells but are known to pull back their heads to the point of creating a large bunching of skin above and behind the head.

profundity in the islands that it is almost unrelated to the mainland model. Unlike, say, the owl iconography that suddenly rose to prominence in the islands while seemingly unknown to the mainland Saladoid, turtles were a familiar symbol in both regions: a motif on the main but an icon in the islands.

Turtles and Female Fertility in Saladoid Iconology

Antilleans saw themselves as “Children of the Turtle,” inculcated in Deminán’s marriage to Turtle Bride. As a mother provides and protects, the turtle provided food and shelter to the Saladoid-era people. Archaeological evidence indicates that ancient Antilleans ate sea turtles.⁶⁵ We can also assume that today’s Amerindians’ slaughtering of turtles and eating their unlaidd eggs is also an ancient Pre-Columbian tradition.⁶⁶ How can we deify something that we eat? The response to this question comes from any number of substitutions, transmutations and transubstantiations that might be familiar to the Paleolithic cave painters of sacred bovines at Altamira in Spain, ancient Puebloan and Mesoamerican worshippers of maize gods, or Roman Catholics at the Eucharist. If these comparisons are yet unwieldy or unwelcome, we might simply consider ourselves, eating from “Mother Nature.” And the idea of suckling infants should be natural enough.

Both Taíno narrative and Saladoid iconography implicitly liken the Antilleans to young turtles. Strange protuberances occur on the abdomens of many tabular turtle adornos. These adornos extend laterally off the rim of the pot, not as flat tabs but rather gently folded on their outer edges and terminating in a turtle-head, one that is often crowned (figures 6.63, 6.67 and 6.68). The upper corners of these folded tabular adornos

⁶⁵ Moravetz, *Imaging Adornos*, 70.

⁶⁶ Suttly, *Fauna of the Caribbean*, 23, 26-27.

are sometimes marked by nubbins or incisions ending in nubbins that represent the large, front flippers of the turtle. The rest of the “torso” of this tabular turtle is unadorned except for a central button, looking much like an umbilical hernia (figure 6.67 and 6.68). Moravetz suggests this feature is one exhibited by turtle hatchlings. On their plastrons (i.e., the flat underside shells of their bodies) is a spherical yolk sac that continues to nourish the young turtles for a brief period after hatching. Moravetz states, “it is therefore tempting to speculate that the perforations, excisions and pellets observed on the torsos of St. Vincent adornos might be representations of this particular biological phenomenon in immature sea turtles.”⁶⁷ I am inclined to agree. I would also suggest that for the Ceramic inhabitants of the Antilles, the turtle was not just the all-giving mother but also the sheltering mother, with the Antilleans inside her body.⁶⁸

If stylized, crowned, anthropomorphized turtles are in fact hatchlings whose most distinctive behavior is their determined exodus to the sea, we must definitely take up a discussion of the turtle cult and concepts of migration. I relate purposeful migration and cultural distinction to turtles in my final analysis in Chapter Seven.

Turtles, Shamans and Male Fertility in Antillean Narrative Symbolism

In the Taíno-era legend of Deminán Caracaracol’s dorsal pregnancy, Bayamanaco’s cohoba-laced mucous can be likened to both semen and the ocular excretions of the turtle, thus making him a father of Turtle Bride, or perhaps her co-father, considering that Deminán, however feminized in his dorsal pregnancy, is also

⁶⁷ Moravetz, *Imaging Adornos*, 59.

⁶⁸ This is an idea expressed in Saladoid and post-Saladoid architecture (see “The Sheltering Turtle in Saladoid Architecture” in Appendix 2).

male. And let us not forget the parent of Deminán and his three identical brothers. Itiba Cahubaba died in childbirth and her four identical children were excavated from her lifeless body. I have suggested that the four identical children have only one analogue in nature, the quadruplet clone offspring of the armadillo, a zoomorph appearing in the iconography of the Saladoid Windward Islands. Armadillos have shells and in Arawak oral tradition, as I have also shown (in Chapter Four), the shell is a metonym that classes them with turtles and crabs. Thus four identical children from a shelled mother (i.e., the armadillo) can be retained and transmuted over a millennium and 1,000 miles into the narrative of Itiba Cahubaba with no mention of armadillos. With no armadillos in the Greater Antilles, the four identical children are kept in oral traditions of Deminán and his brothers, but the familiar turtle is substituted as the mother figure and she is placed on the opposite end of the generational cycle from the armadillian mother Itiba Cahubaba: as wife to the quadruplets and mother of the Antilleans. The transition from the armadillo to turtle matriarch, with the four men between them, is only one of several kinds of iconographic conflation that occurred between the Saladoid south and Taíno north.

The Trinidadian and South American *Pipa pipa* with its offspring hatching from its back is the one and only natural analogue for Deminán's dorsal birth of Turtle Bride, a process with marsupial (i.e., opossum) overtones.⁶⁹ Deminán, an "armadillian" quadruplet pried from his mother's lifeless shell (like a turtle egg from the corpse of its mother) gives a *Pipa pipa*-like birth to Turtle Bride (who herself is pried from Deminán's back) from whom comes the Antilleans. A Taíno ceramic effigy vessel of Deminán seems to confirm the partial iconographic conflation of turtles with frogs. On the grimacing

⁶⁹ Hence: Pleiades/opossum=Pleiades/frog=marsupial/frog and (*Pipa pipa*)=Deminán Caracaracol. Alternatively, we can see the turtle/armadillo Itiba Cahubaba as ancestral to *Pipa pipa*-Deminán Caracaracol who in turn is ancestral to the Turtle Bride, thus turtle>frog>turtle are mutually causal.

Deminán's back is the recognizable turtle hump (figure 2.9, *right*). It is particularly visible in profile but when the effigy is viewed from behind, the turtle hump is incised with the unmistakable frog labyrinth motif.

The grunting and entranced staring, the fitful movements and sudden stillness, and most of all, the nose and eyes dripping with mucous are behaviors of the leatherback turtle but also the wincing shaman. The turtle is in her ritual of becoming an ancestor, the shaman in a ritual that is ancestral to Turtle Bride, the cohoba rite, for it was cohobalaced mucous from Bayamanaco's nose that impregnated Deminán.⁷⁰ After they take hallucinogens into their noses, shamans are known to lunge, writhe, and walk about clumsily. But then they settle into their journey, eyes red and dilated, streaming steady tears, confluent with the mucous running from their noses.⁷¹ In this slimy stream, the Antillean shaman joins the complex web of turtles, frogs, armadillos, opossums and mythic ancestors. His role is one of catalyst and slippery communicator between these beings, as much an agent as a predictor of events and generations to come.

Turtles and Frogs as Co-Progenitors in Antillean Nature, Narrative and Symbolism

In some ways, turtles and frogs are complementary opposites. The turtle's laying of spherical eggs on the beach inverts frog ethology, for while frogs lay eggs in freshwater, saltwater turtles lay theirs on land. Frog eggs when seen in a pool of water are a viscous, sometimes frothy mass with certain analogous properties to mucous and

⁷⁰ In a personal communication with Peter G. Roe (2007), he encouraged me to consider the phallic symbolism of noses across the Pre-Columbian Americas. However, in this study I restrict my focus to South American and Caribbean traditions only, and as yet have located only some oblique nose/phallus associations in Amazonian Bolivia and the Guianas (Lévi-Strauss, *The Origin of Table Manners*, 83).

⁷¹ Napoleon A. Chagnon, *Yanomamö: The Fierce People* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), 23-25, 52; Stevens-Arroyo, *Cave of the Jagua*, 122.

semen, both symbolically masculine liquids.⁷² When the young hatch in their abundance, if they are turtles they make for the sea, if frogs, they take to the land and trees. The frogs and the leatherback turtle especially are linked by the early rainy season, when they both breed and by the night when they both lay eggs. Hawksbill turtles might present an added inversion of frogs in having all the same relationships to them as leatherbacks, but breeding on the opposite end of the rainy season. Turtles and frogs are both feminine symbols as confirmed my images of Atabeyra and the narrative of Turtle Bride but also for their connotation of water. This polar femininity is enhanced further in the turtle by her carapace, which is a vessel, and vessels too are female.⁷³ But the slimy frog and turtle with its gelatinous tears are most inextricably bound, and laced through Antillean culture by their mucosa. Primordial slime makes them consorts of the tearing, dribbling shaman, descendants of Deminán and Turtle Bride, and co-mothers of the human race.

Possible Functions of Turtle Vessels

As with frog vessels, many turtle pots are in fact low dishes. However, with turtles, the preponderating vessel type seems to be bowls. The turtle head adornos that protrude from pots seem to be intended to work with the pot in evoking the shelled body of the creature, either rolled on to its back in the manner of a captive or a turtle crawling on its plastron. Thus, turtle bowls are often effigy vessels. As with frog vessels, these

⁷² Arie Boomert, "Raptorial Birds as Icons of Shamanism in the Pre-Historic Caribbean and Amazonia," in *Proceedings of the XIX International Congress for Caribbean Archaeology* (Aruba: Archaeological Museum, 2001), 122-123.

⁷³ Roe, *The Cosmic Zygote*, 191. Roe proposes the feminine connotations of all containers in Amazonian mytho-symbolism, from the natural calabash, turtle shell and insect nest to the cultural woven basket, string bag and fired pot. There are feminine implications to a vessel holding the viscous substances that catalyze life: in the preparation of meals, the insemination of wombs, the production of turtle/frog/fish eggs, even the production of honey in beehives.

ceramics probably contained prepared foods rather than more inedible ceremonial materials. Certainly the turtle itself is a food source and this, combined with its status as a maternal symbol, would make its body a source of sustenance and an appropriate model for a vessel. The folded tabular adornos featuring baby turtles with the yolk sac protrusions on their bellies probably stood up vertically from the rims of bowls. I have seen such bowls with similarly folded tabs vertically projecting from their rims but they did not bear the turtle's likeness. Bowls more easily hold liquid so these may have held cooked foods such as soups or fermented spirits. Both of these substances are thick and gelatinous, given their starchy content when made with manioc. Soups with turtle eggs would be even more viscous. We know that turtle meat and eggs have been part of the Amerindian diet for millennia.⁷⁴ The idea of symbolic "Children of the Turtle" eating turtle foods can, as I have previously suggested, be likened to so much "suckling." Lower turtle bowls and dishes may have held these meats, but also bread and vegetables. Cooked foods were likely transferred to these sacred vessels from cruder, utilitarian pots. Naturally, water was an important ingredient of these soups and stews. The ritual significance of water as the origin place of the maternal turtles, the reflection of the self in this ancestral substance, and the essential quality of water in agricultural fertility made it the lifeblood of all other foods. Still, the association with agricultural foods seems more that of frogs and the sanctification of foods from the ancestral sea, the turtle's.

Conclusions

⁷⁴ Moravetz, *Imaging Adornos*, 70; Suttly, *Fauna of the Caribbean*, 27.

In the Saladoid Antilles, revered Amazonid motifs such as the snake played no significant role in ceramic iconography. But in truth, they had been unimportant in mainland Saladoid ceramics as well. Snakes were not missed in the transition to island living. In islands such as Carriacou, however, there seems to have been a cult of the caiman, even though this reptile occurred as an exhausted vagrant to the Windward Islands only during the Orinoco's flood time. Windward Island potters, some of whom may have never seen an actual caiman, replicated the likeness of this exotic serpent from prescribed canons that appear to have been formulated in the Antilles themselves, since there is no evidence of these conventions from the mainland. Caiman veneration, whether Antillean in authorship or not, bespoke a lingering cultural connection to South America.

Quite the opposite of the cultic caiman, frog and turtle images seems to have become icons of what might be likened to a pan-regional religion. These zoomorphs had their genesis as motifs in the Saladoid mainland but appear to have blossomed into full-fledged religious icons in the Antilles, where they were more appropriate than ever before. With their domed backs and aquatic associations, they may have even been symbols of the island itself.⁷⁵ Frogs and turtles reigned supreme over all other zoomorphic ceramic motifs in the Saladoid Antilles. Covered in slime and laying eggs in the rainy season, corporeal frogs and turtles seem to have become intertwined in mythic narrative and iconography. As motifs, their close symbolic relationship makes them hard to distinguish at times. Engendering the mystery of sprouting, gestation and all life's transformations, they seem separated only by saltwater and freshwater. We cannot say

⁷⁵ For an important discussion of turtles and frogs as symbols of the island in conjunction with trigonal zemi iconography, see "Turtles and Frogs as Islands in Saladoid Sculpture" in Appendix 2.

which is the other's ancestor given their apparent cyclical mytho-history and apparent symbolic symbiosis.

The frog might be singled out for its shamanic liminality, bounding freely from the star-lit trees to dappled, dewy earth to gurgling, pebbled water. Its nocturnal calls presage the cries and laughter of next year's babies but also warn of the hurricane's impending disaster. The grunting sea turtle was shamanic as well, with the dripping face of the hallucinating ritualist, but also that of the mother in labor. Every meal of her eggs, in a pot bearing her likeness, every breath under a roof that approximated her carapace was like a bounty from the turtle. Every child born was a continuance of her gelatinous line stretching back to mythic ancestors first born in these islands.

Judging by the thousands of shards and hundreds of turtle adornos housed in museum storage, countless Saladoid turtle pots were made. Sleeping in turtle-shaped houses, and eating from these turtle pots, even being buried with them, Saladoid potters seem to have invoked symbolic turtle ancestry in multiple iconographic conventions. By the time Pané scribbled down the Taíno-era Turtle Bride episode, turtle adornos, with their swollen neonatal plastrons, were already of some antiquity in the Antilles. Perhaps this revered notion of turtle ancestry had some precursor on the mainland millennia before. But the vision, evoked by the countless turtle adornos, of equally numberless hatchlings hurriedly fleeing terra firma suggests that this was a unique symbolism that viewed the mainland in temporal and conceptual hindsight.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ISLAND PEOPLE: CULTURAL DISTINCTIONS REVEALED BY CHANGES IN
THE ZOOMORPHIC ICONOGRAPHY OF THE ANTILLEAN SALADOID**Parameters of the Study**

There are many remarkable creatures in the Caribbean that do not seem to appear in the Saladoid ceramic record. I have found no adornos that might be definitively identified as the Caribbean's ubiquitous hummingbirds, Barbados' flying fish, or the monk seals and colossal cetaceans that seasonally frequent the waters between Dominica and St. Vincent. One impressive fragment of a ceramic shark vessel peers out from a vitrine at the Barbados Museum, blank eyes, grim mouth, gills and all (see figure 7.1). This fragment leaves one wondering whether the rest of the vessel resolved into another shark face symmetrically located on the other side or depicted the entire body of the great fish. As I have suggested before, perhaps there was a whole iconographic world of the Saladoid in wood or other perishable materials, of which these lone specimens were peripheral expressions. We do not know which zoomorphs were omitted entirely from Saladoid art but, from ceramics, we have good indications of which were favored.

The Barbadian shark is definitely an extension of the marine iconography of which the wealth of sea turtle imagery is the representative class. The striated, triangular tabs sometimes found in collections among the more identifiable adornos seem to be the tails of a colorful reef species such as the butterfly fish or angelfish (figure 7.2). Again, we are left to wonder what we might be missing of the iconography by having only ceramics. While I have no ceramic evidence of this, I suspect that insects played some

role in the folklore of the Saladoid ceramicists as they still do for the Warao of the Orinoco Delta.¹ But butterfly adorns with gossamer thin wings and curling antennae would be out of the question (though certainly possible in white-on-red slip paint).

When such wonderful creatures that might fire the imagination of an artist, storyteller or shaman go unsung in material culture, their absence suggests that there were other forces at work in the selection of species, than simply how impressive they were physically. Not every species needs be treated in a pantheon that has particular iconographic categorical requirements. It has been evident throughout this study that Saladoid zoomorphs were motifs and icons in a deliberate, though sometimes flexible, symbolic program. Islands could emphasize certain species more than their neighbors did, such as the Carriacou obsession with caimans or Trinidad's retention of anteaters as an important motif. Islands could also vary considerably in their use of certain zoomorphic motifs, such as the wide range of stylized and naturalistic turtle depictions in St. Vincent versus the relatively narrow range of stylized ones in Martinique. But these were all variations on canons established throughout the Lesser Antilles.

Some of the thematic categories of Saladoid iconography, as explored in this study, related to the interacting symbolisms of water, earth, air and fire, and the energies of living bodies versus those of the spirit realm. There also was some privilege given to certain celestial bodies, the number four, and words with multiple meanings linking animals and other aspects of Antillean life, such as "oa" as a single root relating frogs to the Pleiades and rain. Symbolic categories and the animals that came to represent them related to critical phases in the natural cycle and important cultural ideas about gender,

¹ Peter O'Brien Harris, "Nabarima: A Warao Sacred Place in South Trinidad," in *Proceedings of the XXI Congress of the International Association for Caribbean Archaeology* (Port-of-Spain, Trinidad: International Association for Caribbean Archaeology, 2005), 489.

ritual, ancestors and the afterlife. Only one symbol was necessary for each of these categories. Occasionally, a comparable ceramic symbol, whether pre-existing or secondary, nuanced the meaning of a particular symbolic category, such as the pan-Antillean frog imagery that existed alongside the Windward Island opossum, both symbols of the sinking Pleiades and approaching rainy season. However, variant symbols were often phased out, leaving one, more orthodox icon. In the case of Pleiades/rain symbols, the frog subsumed the opossum. Likewise, the turtle with her streaming eyes in her egg-laying trance took over many aspects of the snorting, shamanistic, parthenogenic anteater symbol and the shelled, scaly, maternal armadillo. Generally, symbols whose natural referents were more broadly distributed out-competed symbols with more narrowly distributed referents. This means that Windward mammal symbolism was often folded into a greater, more widespread reptile, amphibian and avian iconology.

I must advocate for this study's use of ethnographic analogy, especially with the seemingly unrelated peoples living in the western parts of Orinokia and Amazonia, for the decipherment of ceramic zoomorphs. I believe my comparisons of the Amerindians of the Guianas with Venezuela's Orinoco Delta would be acceptable even to critics of ethnographic analogy. After all, the Saladoid departed for the Antilles from this area and many of the people still living in this part of the mainland have been there for millennia. But the reader will note my constant recourse to the peoples of the northwestern Amazon, groups such as the Baniwa, Barasana and Tukanoans studied by Hugh-Jones and Reichel-Dolmatoff. I studied the narratives and rituals of these peoples not so much for their possible shared ancestry with the people who came down the Orinoco and "became" the Saladoid and Barrancoid potters but because I find their narrative traditions and

symbolism to have some fascinating structural and cosmetic similarities to the conquest-era oral traditions and symbols of the Antilles. I cannot speak here to any similarities they may or may not share in visual culture. Art usually changes faster than oral tradition.

While the precise ancestral homeland of the Saladoid ceramic culture is not known, the region of Western Venezuela and eastern Colombia is one of those proposed fonts of the Saladoid.² Whether the ancestors of the Saladoid potters originally hailed from the west rather than elsewhere in Amazonia needs not be proven in order to cite similarities in zoic lore shared by the Hispaniolan Taíno and, say, the Colombian Desana. I have had to calculate a “Saladoid hypotenuse” from the symbolical conjunctions between these far-flung, non-contemporaneous Amazonid peoples. Admittedly this makes for some gross approximations. Still, I am heartened by the stubborn retentions of what seem to be Orinokian and western Amazonian lore among the conquest-era Taíno and even the contemporary folklore of the Caribbean.

Presumably inherited from colonial and conquest-era Europeans and Africans, the folklore of the Windward Islands especially bears striking resemblance to that of west-Orinokian/west-Amazonian peoples. The characters that haunt the bedtime stories of West Indian children, such as *douens* (spirits with backward feet), Papa Bois (anthropo-zoomorphic Father of the Forest) and Mama D’Leau (serpentine Guardian of the Waters) all bear uncanny resemblances to the forest guardian Vaí Mahsë and the semi-serpentine *boraro* of Desana lore, who transform into people with backward feet. In both the West

² Michael J. Heckenberger, “Rethinking the Arawakan Diaspora: Hierarchy, Regionality and the Amazonian Formative,” in *Comparative Arawakan Histories: Rethinking Language Family and Culture Area*, eds. Jonathan D. Hill and Fernando Santos-Granero (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006) 99; Samuel M. Wilson, *The Archaeology of the Caribbean* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 61.

Indies and the western Amazon, only by walking backwards can we evade these forest spirits once they've detected us!³ These contemporary commonalities illustrate the distances over which Amerindian narrative elements traveled before and perhaps after the conquest. It seems that in Pre-Columbian times, people shared common or related narratives spanning the entire Amazon and the Caribbean Sea.

Though I have been willing to cite analogues between South America and the Antilles, I have excluded Mesoamerican and North American cultures from any substantial comparison. I did so even when I found uncanny similarities, such as the narrative from the Wichita people of North America involving a Frog Woman who must be removed from a hero's back with the help of a turtle.⁴ The rationale for this conservative, categorical exclusion of the northern continent was to demonstrate and maintain cohesion among the tropical lowland Amazonid narratives. Beyond this area, oral traditions have other components that could have easily caused by study to be diluted by un-connectable details. The comparisons could have become "fuzzy."

In the end, the peoples of the Pre-Columbian Americas are all "related" by their genetics, perhaps common continental crossings deep in prehistory, and perhaps in their narrative construction of meaning, which we call "myth." But since this study argues for the emergent distinctions between peoples known to be related (i.e., the mainland and insular Saladoid ceramicists), it certainly must observe environmental and developmental

³ Gérard A. Besson, *Folklore and Legends of Trinidad and Tobago* (Port-of-Spain, Trinidad: Paria Publishing Company, 2007), 11-19, 49-58; Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Amazonian Cosmos: The Sexual and Religious Symbolism of the Tukano Indians* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 87.

⁴ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Origin of Table Manners*, trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 58.

boundaries between people of Kansas and the Caribbean. The relative depth to which an archetype has sunk into the “Indian mind” is beyond the scope or interest of my study.

Not every point of the dissertation’s framework for deciphering zoomorphic imagery has been applied to every animal. In some cases, few narratives and rituals were known relating to a particular animal symbol. Pelicans, manatees and sea turtles especially are rare in the mythos of the tropical lowland South Americans. These species have tested the boundaries and applicability of the dissertation’s theoretical framework for deciphering zoomorphs. It is precisely these Caribbean animals that give proof of the expansion of the Antillean symbolic repertoire into heretofore unknown territory.

For many zoomorphs, related lore was only known from the South American main, and sometimes the sheer number of narratives required a keenly selective process based on the key iconographic features and incidence of the zoomorphs being deciphered. Hence, the study takes interest in parrot iconography and cultural context, while showing little interest in that of parakeets and forest birds, which are unimportant in Saladoid ceramics. In yet other cases, Antillean narratives were known and it was at my discretion whether I would compare these with mainland traditions to aid in the analysis of zoomorphs. For example, in the case of bats I made such a cross-regional comparison, but for frogs I did not.⁵ The general natural history of zoomorphic referents was always known even when the natural distribution of the species during Saladoid times was not.

⁵ I made these decisions based on the complexity of the known context of Antillean symbols. The known symbolic context for frogs in the Pre-Columbian Antilles is, in my opinion, better understood than that of bats, though we have late Ceramic lore for both. Thus, I relied on ethnographic analogy more with bats than with frogs. Also, bats were the first zoomorphs treated in this study, so a more holistic approach was required to establish certain key symbolic categories that would be used throughout the dissertation, such as animals as equivalent “anti-people” (with corresponding “anti-cultures”), rivals, spirits, seducers.

Zoomorphic adornos usually correspond to known species.⁶ Different animals were related to different odors, colors, directions and forces of nature and, for lack of data, these correlations have not been evenly addressed in this study. Reconstructing context for a 1600-year old pot fragment is nearly impossible but we cannot cover from the attempt to recover some part of it.

An analysis of the relative importance of iconic zoomorphs during the Saladoid is best conducted across art forms not covered in this study: a possible manatee petroglyph from Rivière Bananier in Guadeloupe, a wooden *duho* with apparent canine imagery from Pitch Lake in Trinidad, or a gyno-phallic body stamp with an possible owl face from Barbados. Zoomorphs cannot easily be sorted out from anthropomorphs, especially in an iconographic system that frequently combines these. And the Amerindians did not sort their zoomorphic motifs into “Mammals,” “Birds,” and “Reptiles and Amphibians” like some nineteenth century amateur naturalist. They demonstrably thought of “night-fliers,” “sea beings,” “sun birds,” “shell creatures” and such. But in writing and researching this material, I selected categories that did not assume I had the indulgence of a mixed assortment of readers. Hence, I resorted to some familiar taxons and frameworks.

Mirroring their journey into a new insular environment, with new geology, new barometrics, new resources and new dangers, but also with many familiar and introduced species, the Saladoid settlers at once retained many elements of mainland culture and developed many distinctions as well. In essence they remained similar enough to their mainland counterparts to demonstrate a cultural connection with them, but became distinct enough to stress a certain stubborn, perhaps competitive difference as well. They

⁶ In the sample collections surveyed for this study indecipherable adornos and fragments numbered between five and 20 percent of total adornos and fragments.

were distinct people, probably with new social structures, and certainly with new folk heroes, narratives and religion. The indications of this can be found in their visual culture and the related lore of the late Ceramic people who came after them.

General Concerns of Saladoid Zoomorphic Iconography and Aesthetics

The profound connection between animal imagery and the religions of the ancient peoples of the Antilles has been firmly established by studies long before this one. The turtles and owls on ceramic funerary vessels are corroborated as ritual iconography by the bats and aquatic birds that appear on vessels used to burn incense. Creatures of the night, that realm of spirits, are the zoomorphs that occur most often on Saladoid ceramics, be they bats, owls, night-singing frogs or nocturnally nesting turtles. From the fiery hearth to the smoky altar to the dusty grave, zoomorphic pottery was at the center of the ceremonial life of the Saladoid-era cultures of the Caribbean.

Given the role of ceramic animal imagery, I propose that we consider animals as existing in the following four capacities for Saladoid potters: as species in nature, catalogued by the taxonomic mind of humans; as utilitarian resources for those who would eat, wear or otherwise employ them; as signifiers for the symbolic kits that conceptually pre-exist them, in that there is always a need for, say, a bringer of fire, medicine, tobacco or storms; and as signifiers of regional identity with specific cults, moieties, clans and territories that also employ them as emblems. Thus the mythologization of an animal starts with an anthropogenic kit of symbols, which is then assigned to a local and sometimes unique species, natural feature or phenomenon about

which there is curiosity but also incidental and/or practical knowledge. An animal becomes emblematic of a place, a culture and the people thereof.

The symbolic kit is moveable to other animals in different places if the people themselves should move (or others should cart off parts of this kit after encountering it among its authors). As they move, people might assign the pre-animal kit to new animals and natural phenomena or they may have a strong enough reaction to their new environment as to modify their kit, even dashing parts of it. It seems that all of these happened in the Antilles, engendering a reassignment of categories in a symbolic system and the modification of the requirements of the symbolic set. I am unable to make sweeping claims about the order in which these reassignments and modifications occurred since dates are unknown for many of the Saladoid ceramics studied here. So in this study, I have usually not made the distinction between various phases of the Antillean Saladoid, whether Cedrosan vs. Palo Seco, Indian Creek vs. Mill Reef when describing an object, even when I had confirmed data on it. Suffice it to say, most adornos discussed here are of the Saladoid from *ca.* 100-650 CE except where it was necessary to clearly distinguish an object as early, Venezuelan or purely Barrancoid.

A late Saladoid and Barrancoid penchant for combining zoomorphic symbols into hybrid images has been noted often in this dissertation for the complexity that it brings to the study of Saladoid aesthetics and symbolic thinking. Saladoid hybrid images come about through several different processes. There are many hybrid images where features of one species are placed below, beside or above the features of another to form a fanciful combined species or masked anthropomorph (figures 5.8, 5.9 and 5.48). Other images are composed of one figure super-imposed on another, the second figure placed on the crown

or forehead of the first as if emerging out of its head, or mind (figures 2.20 and 2.39 *left*). These have been called “alter egos” here, after Boomert. These alter egos appear even in elaborately carved trigonal zemis from later Taíno Hispaniola (atop the main face in figure 6.35 *right* is a second face whose mouth and left eye are just visible), testament to this important concept in Antillean thought across great time and distance.⁷ Images have also been compounded, whereby a whole figure forms a single body part of another or one figure’s head forms a facial feature of another (figures 5.11 and 6.61). Finally, Saladoid adornos exhibit what I would describe as a perspectival emersion, whereby they change from one animal to another depending on the direction from which they are viewed (figure 4.13). They sometimes do this in conjunction with the vessel body to which they belong (figure 5.45). Thus one species becomes quite another as the vessel is turned or inverted.

These component substitutions, alter egos, figural compounds, and perspectival emersions and concealments constitute an elaborate visual language. In many ways, they function like a set of visual homophones, homonyms, antonyms and synonyms, all derived from stereotyped metonyms of the various creatures. This language has a distinct aesthetic, ritual and social pedigree stretching back to the early first millennium BCE Venezuelan Barrancoid. Sometimes sweepingly called “Janus-faced” images, their tendency towards “kenning” or “visual puns” is understood by scholars to be a language of transformation. But I would also propose that these “puns” speak of a cultural need of the potter, story-teller, shaman and ruler to look for the similarities in things.

⁷ Arie Boomert, *Trinidad, Tobago and the Lower Orinoco Interaction Sphere: An Archaeological/Ethnohistorical Study* (Alkmaar, Netherlands: Cairi Publications, 2000), 463; Shirley McGinnis, “Zemi Three-Pointer Stones,” in *Taíno: Pre-Columbian Art and Culture from the Caribbean*, ed. Fatima Bercht (New York: El Museo del Barrio/Monacelli Press, 1997), 101.

In ceramic iconography and oral tradition alike, this searching for and citation of the similarities between phenomena seems to start with a system of creating metonymic symbols for natural or corporeal referents (e.g., animals) based on their behaviors and/or the functions to which they are put. Thus one metonym for turtle would be “shell.” Then one metonym can be combined with others by joining them along their most similar edge or axis. This joinery, or bricolage, of the like components in different symbols is as common to the legend told by the fireside as the *adorno* fashioned from clay. One stereotyped reptile’s head becomes the beak of a bigger bird in art (figure 5.11), and in traditional narrative the metonym “coil” can stand for snakes or ceramic pots. Arawak armadillo vessels from Brazil to Tobago (figures 4.14 and 4.15), Saladoid turtle vessels from Venezuela to Vieques (figures 6.38 to 6.40) and a Guyanese Arawak narrative in the section “Armadillos, Shells, Chambers and Cures” of Chapter Four all connect through the metonym “shell.”⁸ The Waurá armadillo vessel in figure 4.15 and the Saladoid turtle vessel in figure 6.38, shell-creature effigy vessels both painted red on the exterior and black in the interior over two millennia apart, might indicate this metonymic connection.

Many have assumed from a combination of archeological, ethnological and linguistic evidence, that the Saladoid culture was an Arawakan-speaking ancestor to the Taíno.⁹ I support this theory. If the theory is true then it is the characteristic Arawak citing of similarities in vision and verb, art and narrative, that we see in the Saladoid-era potters. It seems Arawak interest in similitude does not end with the symbolic spheres of

⁸ A further comparison between these armadillo ceramics and both Saladoid and Taíno turtle ceramics (after the established turtle-armadillo equivalence) as in figures 6.38 and 6.39 would lend further evidence of a common iconography of shelled creatures (often flipped unto their backs) as bowls with 5 and 6 appendages extending from the pot.

⁹ Heckenberger, “Rethinking the Arawakan Diaspora,” 106-107; Wilson, *The Archaeology of the Caribbean*, 65, 95. Of course, the Taíno had other ancestry as well, including that of earlier Archaic people.

art and legend. In fact, certain cultural features of speakers of the Arawakan language have repeatedly emerged over time and space relating to a cultivation of political similitude as well. This and other features of what might be called a distinguishing Arawak “ethos” were closely studied at the 2000 conference, and in the subsequent 2006 book entitled *Comparative Arawakan Histories*.¹⁰ In its careful and critical investigation of the history, language and culture of Arawaks, this book’s contributors cast at least some oblique light on what might be called a “Saladoid ethos.”

Arawak Similitude

Comparative studies of the scholarship on the Arawaks of South America and the Caribbean have produced a 3000-year long history of Arawak culture and a list of its uniting characteristics. Amazonian and Orinokian scholars including Michael J. Heckenberger, Alberta Zucchi and Fernando Santos-Granero have traced language, artifacts, ancient settlements and road systems of the Arawaks back to what they believe is the font of their culture. These scholars have proposed that sometime in the first millennium BCE, Arawak-speaking people began a grand diaspora out of northwestern Amazonia, largely along the rivers and littorals of northern South America. Thence they became the most widespread language group in South America and all the Americas.¹¹

In their various migrations, the Arawak peoples have repeatedly manifested certain traits. For Michael Heckenberger, this is because in the South American lowland

¹⁰ Jonathan D. Hill and Fernando Santos-Granero, eds., *Comparative Arawakan Histories: Rethinking Language Family and Culture Area* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

¹¹ Heckenberger, “Rethinking the Arawakan Diaspora,” 99; Fernando Santos-Granero, “The Arawakan Matrix: Ethos, Language, and History in Native South America,” in *Comparative Arawakan Histories: Rethinking Language Family and Culture Area*, eds. Jonathan D. Hill and Fernando Santos-Granero (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 49.

tropics, Arawaks are among the originators of those traits. Arawaks generally have had in common that they develop agricultural village life, have hierarchical social structures, often led by a sacred chiefly line, and typically show interest in establishing social organizations that unite far-flung Arawak groups. This overarching sense of unity Heckenberger calls “regionality.”¹² In fact he puts the Arawaks at the “root” of what he calls the Amazonian Formative (circa 1000 BCE), a “rank revolution” in the region whereby hierarchical village chiefdoms, affiliated through diplomatic contacts, using a common language, co-maintained and co-supported their floodplain settlements.¹³

Close to clean running water surrounded by fertile soils, these floodplain chiefdoms had the necessary resources to stimulate developments in agricultural production, technological innovation, trade, and population growth. But their settlements, insists Heckenberger, were never so large as to produce the “population pressures” often cited as the cause of the sudden and large-scale migrations evident in the region’s archaeological record.¹⁴ Heckenberger points out that Arawaks have historically and archaeologically shown interests in moving, and moving widely, and that “not all groups so visibly carried so much of their past, their cultural heritage forward through time.”¹⁵

The way this hierarchical agrarian regionality generally works is of some interest for understanding how Arawak regionality persists over time and how it might disintegrate as well. Heckenberger more closely describes the system as being large

¹² Heckenberger, “Rethinking the Arawakan Diaspora,” 100.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 102.

agriculturally-based villages with well developed communication routes between them, which, of course, requires navigation skills of various kinds. Agriculture is intensive depending on available resources and usually focused on a diversification of crops around the core staple, manioc. But Arawaks are adept at the use of aquatic resources as well. There is a formalized system of contact and exchange with other Arawak groups, which manifests as intermarriage, expected and ritualized visits, and inter-settlement ceremonies. This is the core of Arawak regionality, a system at once practical and aesthetic, rooted in shared heritage or some material resource available only to the people in a certain area. This Arawak “in-ness” as Heckenberger calls it, extends Arawak ties across vast regions of Amazonia today as it probably did in ancient times.¹⁶

In fact, Arawaks have showed that they are not averse to admitting neighboring non-Arawak groups to their “in-ness” if the arrangement is mutually beneficial, which also implies that Arawaks may have special arrangements with far away non-Arawak groups as well.¹⁷ Field specialists have observed a certain “non-predatory” ideology among Arawak groups, also noting the use of defensive military strategies, ranging from diplomacy to physical structures protecting settlements.¹⁸ The firm rejection of internal warfare among Arawaks across northern South America also is a noteworthy feature that often distinguishes them starkly from their immediate neighbors such as the atomistic Jívaro in the west and the Caribs in the east.¹⁹ Arawak settlements are concentric with central public and sacred spaces, a feature of Ceramic Antillean settlements as well.²⁰

¹⁶ Heckenberger, “Rethinking the Arawakan Diaspora,” 110-111.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Heckenberger discusses the institutional hierarchy of the Arawaks with a characteristically hereditary system of sacred leaders of “large permanent villages.” However, he does not contrast this with the Arawak tendency towards expansion and the “cultural predisposition to exploration” he mentions in the same article.²¹ Indeed “permanent” villages often move. According to Heckenberger himself, Arawaks have been moving throughout northern South America and the Antilles for millennia. Yet Arawaks never forget to take the key institutions discussed above “on the road” as it were. Heckenberger and Alberta Zucchi also indicate the persistence of certain items of Arawak material culture, due to their relative portability. These include hammocks, adorned ceramics, wooden benches (the duhos of the Antilles), ball games, icons, masks, atlats, sacred flutes, and bullroarers.²² In the Caribbean flutes and bullroarers have not survived, if they were ever used. All other artifacts listed here are evident in the Antillean historical and/or archeological record, at least their non-perishable parts.

All this constructs a picture of the Arawak peoples as itinerant but persistent, diverse in their respective environments and relations with non-Arawak neighbors but singular in their “ethos.” Heckenberger admits that the Arawaks are not the only Amazonid culture to have developed the cultural features listed above, rather they evidently were among the pioneers of this sort of Amazonid civilization.²³ Fernando

¹⁹ Heckenberger, “Rethinking the Arawakan Diaspora,” 115.

²⁰ Ibid.; Wilson, *The Archaeology of the Caribbean*, 88-94.

²¹ Heckenberger, “Rethinking the Arawakan Diaspora,” 111, 118.

²² Ibid., 111; Alberta Zucchi, “A New Model of the Northern Arawakan Expansion,” in *Comparative Arawakan Histories: Rethinking Language Family and Culture Area*, eds. Jonathan D. Hill and Fernando Santos-Granero (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 209-216.

²³ Heckenberger, “Rethinking the Arawakan Diaspora,” 116.

Santos-Granero critiques earlier scholarship that pronounces an “Arawak Way” uniting all the people of this language group but suggests that lurking in Arawak history and to a secondary degree, Arawak language, are the seeds of the system described by Heckenberger. Still, Santos-Granero insists that the link between language and culture is “historical not ethnic” and subject to the “broad fluctuations of political and economic interests.”²⁴ Thus any Amerindian can partake in the Arawak ethos if he has come into close proximity with the language and the people speaking it. Obviously, there are aspects of the Arawak culture that are subject to the vicissitudes of cultural development, migration and encounter, but many of those listed above remain constant.

Santos-Granero indicates the many historical cases in which Arawaks seemed to have emphasized regional commonalities among themselves precisely when they came into contact with Tukano, Pano, Carib and other peoples.²⁵ They entered into complex cultural negotiations with these neighbors so that the result was a process of Tukanoization and Panoization. Yet this was a process in which the Arawaks picked and chose among the cultural elements they were adopting, sometimes even changing their minds about which elements they would adopt. In one case, northwestern Arawaks switched to a Tukano language and then switched back to their own so that two generations of them spoke two different languages.²⁶ It is as if the ethos of Arawak internal similitude is triggered by external encounter (in the manner of a biotic antibody), allowing adjustment but rejecting certain competing and/or conflicting ethea.

²⁴ Santos-Granero, “The Arawakan Matrix,” 49.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 48-49.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 49.

So when the Arawaks started out some 3000 years ago from somewhere in the northwestern Amazon, they were of a common language and that language had, as all languages do, a set of concepts peculiar to it. As they dispersed, many regional distinctions among Arawaks became the norm whether by adaptation to other cultures or to new environments. But in encounters with other societies, with different social and ritual structures and intellectual concepts, they evinced a tendency to assert a certain centrality, hierarchy, agrarianism, iconolatry, adorned pottery, and trans-regional unity. Thus a culturally based concept of similitude among individual Arawaks nevertheless developed into a disparity of classes reinforced by hereditary leaders. But then these hierarchic figures sought out a macro-similitude with relatives and neighbors within distinct regions. From internal populist similarity came internal rank differences, which sought regional similarities, especially when stimulated externally by dissimilar groups.

The evidence presented by Heckenberger, Santos-Granero and others indicates that while language is not blood or culture, it carries or supports many of the ideas that organize thought, and therefore culture. Language has a subtle and complex effect on the shape of an “ethos.” The Arawak wanderlust seems to have had no adverse impact on Arawak institutions such as agriculture, ritualized contacts with related groups and hierarchical social structure. These always seem to emerge or reemerge. Of these Arawak traits, the interest in promoting commonalities among people who are related by blood, region or special access to resources, and the almost conspiratorial “in-ness” of which Heckenberger speaks is of most interest here. The intermarriage that it takes to establish some of these commonalities, the cleverness it takes to maintain a “non-predatory,” defensive military orientation as to not be snuffed out by fierce neighbors, and the

foresight it takes to anticipate the forces that might rend the culture are all aspects of that Arawak culture. The Arawak ethos that seeks commonality has been a success. Thus the similitude-promoting “visual puns” and other syncretic devices of Saladoid ceramics and Arawak lore have analogues in spoken Arawak language and the symbolic and social thinking that precedes and proceeds from that lingua franca. In the tropics, pottery gives some of the hardest proof of the wisdom and longevity of the Arawak unity ideology.

This study has demonstrated many links between the Antillean Saladoid and the Saladoid homeland on the Orinoco: from the iconography of the Windward Islands with its South American fascination with anteaters, armadillos, opossums and caimans to the shared Warao and Taíno lore of Amazons on far-off islands; from the universal Saladoid concern with bats, parrots and turtles to the reverence for dogs as companions and guides through the underworld. At many points along the study, I have presented ceramic and ethnohistorical evidence of the prevailing Saladoid Arawak interest in commonality, resemblance and cohesion. But I have done so in order to demonstrate internal Arawak distinctions more ably. The question may have occurred to the reader by now “But how do these peaceful, cohesive Arawaks resolve the inevitable internal conflicts?” Addressing this question allows me to present my concluding thesis.

Arawak Fission

A century of scholarship in Pre-Columbian Caribbean studies has produced only the vague hypothesis that “population pressures” caused the Saladoid ceramic culture to move down the Orinoco and then out into the Antilles. I have been unsatisfied with this idea as have been some of today’s preeminent scholars in Amazonian and Caribbean

archaeology. For years I have considered the question of what would have made those first Saladoid settlers pick up and leave for the islands. Constantly the idea of a social schism has occurred to me, not one based on scarce resources, disease or anything environmental, but some political or spiritual force that either caused people to flee or to see the world in some strange, new way and thus strike out on their own.

Permutations in the few remaining Taíno narratives gave me the first glimpse of the possibility that a social schism was in fact at the heart of the migration. For the Taíno narratives are replete with Promethean acts of defiance against sacred authority figures, like itinerant Deminán and his brothers mischievously stealing Yaya's fish or demanding Bayamanaco's cassava bread, and in the process haplessly creating the sea and giving birth to the mother of the human race. These Antillean episodes tell of youthful upstarts exiled across the sea, like ambitious, patricidal Yayael cast out by his father for four months.²⁷ Willful protagonists like Guahayona pack up and leave with all the chief's women!²⁸ What are these narratives re-telling and what are they inculcating?

When sometime in 2005 I read *Amazonian Indians*, edited by Anna Roosevelt, I was struck by the activities of the Pre-Columbian and colonial-era crisis cults of South America. The demanding austerities and ritual visions of Tupis, Arawaks and other groups had evidently led to some shocking migrations. In 1539, a band of hundreds of Tupi Indians set out from the Atlantic coast of Brazil on a great pilgrimage. For ten years they walked across South America, eventually arriving in the Chachapoyas region of the Peruvian Andes seeking the western "land of immortality and eternal rest." We do not

²⁷ Recounted in the "Frogs and Fertility in Antillean Symbolism" section of Chapter Six and "Yaya and the Great Flood" in Appendix 2.

²⁸ Recounted in the "Frogs, the Pleiades and the Rainy Season" section of Chapter Six.

know how often this sort of thing happened in Pre-Columbian times and with the introduction of Christianity it seems to have only increased, turning into various millenarian movements, some still seeking eternal western lands, but others, second comings and even political overthrows of criollo and mestizo rule.²⁹

Michael Heckenberger confirms my long held suspicion that for Arawak people around the time of the Saladoid “the pressure to prompt large scale residential movements (i.e., large portions of communities) was competition between the powerful, framed in terms of control over symbolic (history, knowledge, sacred space, ritual, prestige goods) and human (labor and loyalty) as well as economic resources.” He stresses that “symbolic resources, prestige, and control over human labor” were the contentious issues in a stratified society where rituals, social structure and even the architecture and village layout were used to create hypernormative restrictions on the would-be hero, rival, heretic or rebel.³⁰

The Arawaks are not, nor were they ever pacifists. Living downriver from Andean city states who often tried to conquer or raid them for slaves and being uneasy neighbors with various lowland neighbors reputed for their battle skills, “Arawak leaders derived much of their authority from their capacity as warriors.”³¹ Yet even as some Arawaks actively engaged in war with neighbors, endo-warfare has been historically suppressed. There is even a lack of evidence for the widespread Amazonian practice of exogamic

²⁹ Michael F. Brown, “Beyond Resistance: Comparative Study of Utopian Renewal in Amazonia,” in *Amazonian Indians: From Prehistory to Present*, ed. Anna Roosevelt (Tucson and London: University of Arizona Press, 1994), 289-304.

³⁰ Heckenberger, “Rethinking the Arawakan Diaspora,” 117.

³¹ Santos-Granero, “The Arawakan Matrix,” 30.

bride-capture. Blood feuding is prevented by regular meetings between regional leaders, and when it cannot be avoided is met with aggressive countermeasures such as “intersettlement quarantine” and other more extreme forms of “geographic distancing.”³²

One would imagine that the exiles produced by sanctioned distancing might either humbly join some other village while always longing for home, or if they were sufficiently angry, unite with some enemy and help attack their old village. In the latter case the exiles might run into some difficulties. In what Santos-Granero describes as the “ever-increasing spheres of solidarity” wherein each Arawak village cultivates a network of allied villages all around it, how far would the outcasts have to go to round up a sufficient mass of enemies? And wouldn’t they have to march these motley foes through miles of friendly territory before reaching the village that had the nerve to expel them? It seems the exile’s only solution was to strike out on some new project in some new place.

While in ancient times some contenders may have been expelled for feuding, others may have exiled themselves. The centripetal institutions that brought unity among related Arawak settlements and thereby maintained order may have been the very cause of top-down fission. In a theocratic chiefdom, struggles over hereditary ascendancy rights would be likely reasons to pick up and leave. Heckenberger suggests as much.³³ But I would add to his hypothesis the struggle over doctrine. The visions of shamans who thought themselves chiefs or of chiefs/would-be chiefs/chiefs-in-waiting/erstwhile chiefs who thought themselves shamans could sunder a chiefdom. Perhaps it would not be all religio-politics. There is always the sincere, undoubting prophet, returned from his

³² Santos-Granero, “The Arawakan Matrix,” 30.

³³ Heckenberger, “Rethinking the Arawakan Diaspora,” 117.

visionary ritual, who must take his/her people in a new direction, at least the people who will listen. The shaman prophet might have even physically visited the far away place of his intentions in a search for “esoteric knowledge.” In theocratic societies such as that of the Arawaks, such knowledge/foreknowledge is an important “symbolic resource.”³⁴

The mechanics of the vision-driven or political fission-driven expansion into the Caribbean islands can be inferred from Arawak history in northern South America. From a combination of linguistic, ethnological and archaeological evidence consisting of mostly ceramic and stone artifacts, and collected oral traditions, Alberta Zucchi has re-evaluated the hypotheses of earlier scholars such as Donald Lathrap, Irving Rouse, Curt Nimuendajú and others. Her comparative study has revealed that Arawaks of the Baniwa, Piapoco, Curripaco, Baré and Warekana ethnicities have different versions of a similar narrative cycle that locates the Hípana Rapids on the Aiarí River in northwestern Brazil as the “navel of the world.” From there, different brothers were sent out in different directions, with different cultural gifts to populate the world. Each became the revered ancestor of one of the different Arawak groups that tell the story, privileging him.³⁵

The mode of these migrations provides some important insights into Arawak migrations. Citing Sylvia Vidal’s fieldwork among the Piapoco Arawaks, Zucchi provides a model of Arawak mytho-historic migration that while explaining archaeologically proven north Amazonian migrations also seems to explain the uneven way in which the Antilles were settled. This is a three-part migration appearing in the oral

³⁴ Heckenberger, “Rethinking the Arawakan Diaspora,” 118. Heckenberger in fact identifies the accumulation and retention of both “symbolic resources” and “esoteric knowledge” as commodities over which schisms have occurred.

³⁵ Alberta Zucchi, “A New Model of the Northern Arawakan Expansion,” in *Comparative Arawakan Histories: Rethinking Language Family and Culture Area*, eds. Jonathan D. Hill and Fernando Santos-Granero (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 201-202.

traditions of northwestern Brazilian Arawaks. Under the direction of a mythologized ancestor, there is a period of exploration, followed by a settlement in earnest, then a period of adjustment.³⁶ The leader chooses a group of men to launch a series of reconnaissances. Thereby they “evaluate the local conditions, establish contacts and negotiate permits with local groups, select possible settlement sites, open the first agricultural plots, and build the first houses.”³⁷

One is struck by the strategic rationalism, foresight and downright politeness of this process and wonders if angry Antillean exiles like the scheming Yayael or bold parvenus like Guahayona would have followed this procedure to the letter.³⁸ Upon final settlement, the Arawak tradition of “adjustment” dictates that the construction of a new cosmic model follows, with the new place at the center. From the center of this new cosmogram, a whole new cosmology is constructed, blessed and reified. A new narrative is “molded into the landscape,” a kind of “topographic writing” linked to the mytho-history of the pilgrims/refugees/pioneers.³⁹ Thus migration is a process of becoming, in the exploration, expectation and adjustment that is the migrant’s transformation.⁴⁰ The journey would be sung, the heroes of the journey deified. The land would be marked with sacred glyphs, for later pilgrims.⁴¹ The positions of celestial bodies and the weather too

³⁶ Zucchi, “A New Model of the Northern Arawakan Expansion,” 202.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ The narrative of Guahayona is treated in Chapter Six’s section “Frogs, the Pleiades and the Rainy Season” and that of Yayael in Appendix 2’s section “Yaya and the Great Flood.”

³⁹ Zucchi, “A New Model of the Northern Arawakan Expansion,” 206-208; 218.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 203.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*; Santos-Granero, “The Arawakan Matrix,” 47.

would be noted and assigned symbolic and practical value. In the Arawak citing of resemblances, mountains (and constellations) might be likened to the faces, limbs, breasts and genitals of deities.⁴² Each territory would have its own sacred toponymy not just for stars and mountains but for rivers and lakes, and linked to a taxonomy of sacred trees, caves, and most assuredly, symbolic birds and beasts.

In Zucchi's research, a Piapoco informant noted that once ancient migrants founded their new cosmic center, with its attendant lore and motifs, they sometimes returned to the ancestral lands for visits but never again went back to live there.⁴³ Thus, from their migration, they were reborn and the people they left behind were as ancestors, and perhaps even pre-cultural beasts, separated by space and time. Indeed some of the narratives recounted in this study have suggested that certain zoomorphs were ethnic emblems so that the relations between humans and mythic zoomorphs were actually analogies of the relations between a person from the locality that originated the narrative (represented by the human, of course) and the foreign clan or culture (represented by the pre-cultural/anti-cultural zoomorph). The reaction of the human to his or her peculiar, sometimes zoomorphic in-laws can be the cause of some disaster, often a war.

In Chapter Four, a Munduruku monkey narrative and a Kayapo one about bats illustrate this cultural incompatibility.⁴⁴ In Chapter Five, the Arawak hunter's falling out

⁴² Osvaldo García-Goyco, "Nuevas Interpretaciones en Torno a La Iconografía de los Taínos: Posibles Representaciones del Árbol de los Alimentos" in *Proceedings of the XX International Congress for Caribbean Archaeology* (Museo del Hombre Dominicano and Fundación García Arévalo, 2003).

⁴³ Zucchi, "A New Model of the Northern Arawakan Expansion," 205; Santos-Granero, "The Arawakan Matrix," 47.

⁴⁴ In Appendix 2, the "Coati People" of Kayapo, Kraho, Timbira and Apinaye Hero Twins lore (in the section "Procyons and Clan Symbolism") illustrates a successful acceptance of a "human," but more symbolically, a member of the aforementioned cultures that tell the legend, into a foreign culture. But also

with his in-laws over his desire to keep his King Vulture Bride but also live with his mother in his home village makes clear the prohibition against returning to one's blood relatives after exogamous unions in both foreign and numinous realms. Thus in the mythos, and therefore in the ethos as well, of the Arawak, Kayapo, Munduruku and a host of other tropical lowland peoples, exogamous marriage can be successful provided it is understood as a form of exile. Presumably, marrying exiles is itself a form of exogamy and exile in itself. To marry an Arawak who left, one would also have to leave, if there was no permanent returning to the place of origin. This would have caused ever-new settlers to arrive in the xenogeneic community, including through exogamy, while members of the latter community would not have re-settled the former. As with the Piapoco, one went off to join the outlying community, but one did not return.

Island People

If Arawaks inscribed a psycho-spiritual environment in response to and upon their new physical surroundings, they would have been amply assisted by the dramatic vistas of the Caribbean islands. If like mainland Arawaks, the Saladoid pioneers constructed identity in response to landscapes imagined and real, in this endeavor too, they would have been aided by the Antilles, for it was unlike anywhere on the mainland. On a marine diet and spending far more time at sea, even their physiognomy would have transformed. To the sacred landscape would have been added the sacred seascape. For Saladoid settlers arriving by canoe, perhaps the most iconic feature of the new environment was the vision

in Appendix 2 are brutal, stingy in-laws turned into grunting, fierce, smelly peccaries for their transgressions against Kayapo, Munduruku, Bororo and Tenetehara protagonists. Thus, the zoomorph may represent a pre-existing counter-culture or may be the result of counter-cultural behavior.

of the island itself, emerging out of the sea, a trigonal locus of three potent and profound elemental forces, the sea, the earth, the sky.

Ceramic evidence indicates that turtles and pelicans especially (but also manatees and even dogs) were zoomorphic ciphers in the toponymic neology to which Zucchi's research refers.⁴⁵ But here, much of the topographic naming related to the sea. Bats too, as they flew out of Coaybay, on the Antillean mythic island of the afterlife, might have been emblems of the watery crossing from the island of ancestors to the island of the living. Bat ceramics holding water referenced this crossing. Stilt-legged "storm birds" on the strap handles of Saladoid pots extended the toponymic owning of the environment to its barometrics, weather and climate. Likewise owls and other ocular nightbirds, with their bat relatives, staked a claim on the Antillean night by incorporating it into a framework of cultural meaning. Although terrestrial mammal adornos on southern Windward Island ceramics may have been original symbols of "the land," they were essentially mainland zoomorphs whose natural referents had only limited distribution in the Antilles. So the frog emerged as the toponymic signifier of "the island," appearing on dishes, perhaps holding life-giving cassava bread and other agriculturally-produced foods, but also in shell and stone zemis that distinguish the region's art from all others.

The insular Saladoid toponymy might manifest a frog-land dampened by rivers, under a stilt-bird lightning-scorched sky, fed and defended by sniping pelican-canoes on a turtle-sea that once brought their ancestors to island shores. The bat-nights and parrot/macaw days were locked in cycle by owls and other zoomorphic intermediaries between land, air and sea, times, seasons and realms. New toponymic motifs, however

⁴⁵ Zucchi, "A New Model of the Northern Arawakan Expansion," 206-208; 218.

subtly they differed from ancestral ones, rendered their users forever distinct. In insular Saladoid ceramics, the elevation of turtles, frogs, pelicans, and stilt birds, the waning of vultures and most land mammals, and the novel ascendance of nightbirds and ducks as motifs were part of a newly constructed symbology and ritual life. Through iconological innovation and invention the island Saladoid ceramicists remade themselves.

For scientists, islands are either places where genera dwindle or where strange and wonderful mutations occur. Both the genetic doldrums of insularity and the spontaneous mutations of the “natural laboratory” occur on islands.⁴⁶ These two seemingly opposing trends are the result of islands being smaller in size but greater in number than mainlands. Islands interest evolutionists for this simultaneous simplicity and complexity. Each island threatens stagnation while offering an opportunity to diversify in unprecedented ways, isolated from the normative forces of the main.

The Antilles were indeed an opportunity to diversify for the bands of Saladoid-era people that began settling there 2,500 years ago. The fact that the new settlers remained in contact with South America does not mean that they remained mere satellites of the American main. South Americans and their narratives did not evince a knowledge or understanding, whether conscious or subconscious, of what it is like to be surrounded by water on all sides in one’s home. Likewise, the hurricane season would have lent a completely different punctuation to the island Saladoid year. The settlers may even have changed when they considered the turn of the new year as a result of it.

This study has demonstrated many of the differences in iconography, aesthetics and inferred narratives that distinguished these island people from the mainland Saladoid.

⁴⁶ Robert H. MacArthur and Edward O. Wilson, *The Theory of Island Biogeography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 3; Robert J. Whittaker and José María Fernández-Palacios, *Island Biogeography: Ecology, Evolution, and Conservation* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3.

The ballooning number of depictions of aquatic birds, frogs and marine turtles demonstrates clearly a reorganization of the pre-existing zooic pantheon that informed and expressed the symbolic thought of the people. The diversification of styles in the depictions of turtles especially, far outnumbering the discernible styles of the mainland, is a classic case of island mutation. In turtle imagery, the Saladoid islands were more diverse than the Saladoid mainland.

We might suspect that the divergence of the insular Saladoid from its mainland counterpart is merely an evolutionary response to a novel island environment but we are disabused of this notion by the owl and its ocular nightbird cousins. These birds are not particularly “Caribbean birds,” since they are endemic in both the islands and the mainland. Yet, they are absent from mainland Saladoid ceramics while being the most numerous birds in Antillean pottery. This was not a new species from the insular environment but rather a new icon assigned by a new culture. Nightbirds, and for that matter ducks, thus demonstrate that the islands did not just inspire and (externally) drive the mutations into new ceramic styles but also were the receptive incubators of new ideas and icons, hatched (internally) in the minds of new people, irrespective of the natural environment. In other words, the island environment provided convenient isolation for the development of new thought, which it sometimes inspired but sometimes did not.

The first Saladoid settlers in the Antilles had come from an alluvial environment in which, there was sometimes no good stone source within many miles of a settlement. The Arawak narrative in Chapter Four’s “Bats” section tells of men’s wives giving them stalks of manioc to plant on their way to acquire stone axes. So expansive was the soft earth where they lived that there was no stone quarry within walking distance equivalent

to the months it took for manioc to grow. Perhaps the story exaggerates (as legends are wont to do) the length of the quest, but the “long journey to find stone” is an essential truth in a forested floodplain. From these alluvial plains, Saladoid explorers went to a place where many of the islands were volcanic, others even made of coral. That new environment was at once a catalyst, laboratory and receptacle for cultural innovation.

The three-part settlement process described by Zucchi for mainlanders also is applicable to the way the Antilles appear to have been settled. In his 2007 survey of current findings in Caribbean archaeology, Samuel Wilson considers the confusing radiocarbon dates of the earliest Saladoid settlements in the Lesser Antilles. The earliest known dates for insular Saladoid settlement come from a strange selection of islands. Trinidad, Martinique, Montserrat, St. Martin and Puerto Rico vary in size and geological composition. Yet theirs are the earliest carbon dates, between the fifth and fourth centuries BCE. Apparently, only after these were settled did the explorers double back, settle the others and commence most of the developments treated in this study.⁴⁷ Needless to say, the uneven distribution of the earliest dates has caused some disagreement among archaeologists. But Wilson proposes that “the earliest Saladoid strategy in the Caribbean was one of exploration and isolated, small-scale, and possibly intermittently occupied settlements.”⁴⁸ Thus the mytho-historic mainland strategy of reconnaissance and negotiation, followed by migration and settlement, followed by naming and becoming fits

⁴⁷ Irving Rouse and Birgit Faber Morse, *Excavations at the Indian Creek Site, Antigua West Indies* (New Haven: Yale University Publications in Anthropology, 1999), 46; Wilson, *The Archaeology of the Caribbean*, 70-71. I must point out that carbon dating has not been applied to all archaeological finds and so these data are incomplete. And some dates have been dismissed as anomalous, such as Rouse’s ninth century BCE date for Indian Creek in Antigua.

⁴⁸ Wilson, *The Archaeology of the Caribbean*, 70.

the commonly cited, beguiling radiocarbon dates. Saladoid seafarers explored the entire Lesser Antilles before settling them fully.

In the Lesser Antilles, the Saladoid ceramicists, not particularly numerous, settled into what seems like a series of egalitarian political structures. Houses were built around central plazas in which the dead were buried, often with grave goods including pottery. Wilson describes the regional differences but general cohesion of Saladoid archaeological artifacts as evincing “a relatively stable mosaic of cultural difference.”⁴⁹ The internal relations of egalitarian societies are unsung complexities with each individual negotiating his/her place among others. Knowing what we know now about the recurrent properties of Arawak culture, the egalitarian Saladoid settlements of the Antilles were almost certain to develop into hierarchy once again. By the time of the Spanish conquest, such a prediction was coming true. Chiefs were on the cusp of outright kingship, surrounded by nobles, served by commoners, and there may have even been a vassal class.⁵⁰ Alliances were forged over land and sea, so that a cacique in Haiti might have better relations with another in the Bahamas or Jamaica than one on the other side of Hispaniola. By that time, the Lesser Antilles seem to have been relegated to a mysterious origin place about which legends were told and with some trade contacts existing between them and the Taíno world. Post-Saladoid fissions and yet newer topographic naming likely had made this so.

Taíno ceramic iconography was not as diverse as that of the Saladoid. With the increased social inequalities developed in Taíno culture, certain clans, chiefs, rituals and symbols seem to have out-competed others.⁵¹ So the innovative period of assigning

⁴⁹ Wilson, *The Archaeology of the Caribbean*, 81, 92-94.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 110.

meaning to diverse zoomorphic and other symbols in the insular Saladoid gave way to the orthodoxy of centralized authority, institutionalized inequalities and institution-sponsored meaning assigned to the symbols that had survived (or been sorted out of) a competition among motifs. In the pioneering Saladoid Lesser Antilles no less than 15 zoomorphs made regular appearances on the modeled, incised and painted bodies of ceramics. By contrast, only four appeared regularly on Taíno ceramics: owls, bats, turtles and frogs. Interestingly, the prominence of these species in ceramics had a Saladoid precedent.

However, the rates and incidences of the species represented in Saladoid and later ceramics tell of each species' relative importance, or lack thereof, only in ceramic iconography. There is so very much missing from the archaeological record in the way of wood, cloth, feather and other objects, all of which may have related to zoomorphic iconography. So it is mostly through ceramics that I have been able to trace the growing psycho-spiritual distance between the islands and the mainland, and the reorientation of people to their new environment by way of developing a new symbology and aesthetic.

Far from being pendants of the Saladoid South Americans, the Saladoid Antilleans distinguished themselves in a number of ways. Just as Amerindians on the mainland went for millennia without manatee, sea turtle and pelican narratives, Amerindians in the Antilles could do just fine without snake, jaguar and eagle symbolism. One can argue that coming from a mainland where large felines, raptors and serpent symbolism was so ubiquitous, it would be difficult for them to wean themselves off these important archetypes. But these were never particularly important icons even in

⁵¹ For a study of evidence of social inequality in the ritual burials of the Taíno, see Roberto Valcárcel Rojas and César Rodríguez Arce, "Chorro de Maíta: Muerte y Desigualdad Social," in *Proceedings for the XX International Congress for Caribbean Archaeology* (Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic: International Association for Caribbean Archaeology, 2003), 507-514.

the mainland Saladoid. And across frozen wastelands, evergreen and deciduous forests, deserts, mountains, pampas, rainforests, llanos, swamps and finally the insular maritime Caribbean, there has never been an Amerindian archetype that was not reversible, collapsible, and ultimately dispensable. Even as iconic serpents and felines were relegated to relative obscurity, sea turtles, owls, bats, pelicans and frogs took on a much greater importance in the islands. Opossums, armadillos, ducks, anteaters, vultures, manatees, frigatebirds, monkeys, ibises, egrets and others had some place as well.

We can only surmise what the perception of distance between the insular and mainland Saladoid ceramicists would have been. Analogies with the Warao and Taíno infer that the mainland may have been mythologized as a faraway and perhaps even dangerous place. The Warao cosmic plan of the four quarters, for instance, makes of Trinidad a faraway eastern place (even though on a clear day, one can just make out Trinidad from the northern Orinoco Delta).⁵² Likewise, the Taíno seem to have thought of the Carib Lesser Antilles as a forbidding eastern domain from which many never returned, hence the conquest-era rumors of the cannibals there.⁵³

There was trade between the mainland and the islands, but the evidence given usually indicates South American exports to the region rather than vice versa. Many of the purely Barrancoid objects found in Tobago and the raw and worked gemstone items in Montserrat, St. Croix and Vieques speak of a lively trade network linking the main and the islands.⁵⁴ I would be pleased to hear of, say, Antiguan Indian Creek Saladoid pottery

⁵² Harris, "Nabarima," 489-490.

⁵³ William F. Keegan, *Taíno Indian Myth and Practice: The Arrival of the Stranger King* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), 38-44.

being found at Saladero, but even then it would not prove that the exchange with the mainlanders was evenly bilateral. Rather, there seems to have been a real perception of distance between islanders and the mainland. I have tried to demonstrate here that such a perception was intentionally cultivated.

Their zoomorphic *zemis* had established them on the green islands of their blue universe. They were now eternal in this place. Perhaps only in their folklore, did the Saladoid Antilleans remember leaving a vast upside-down place where the land was bigger than the water. The reasons they left might have made for some profound and colorful mythic cycle. Perhaps, like the Taíno's, Saladoid lore was peppered with brazen acts of defiance, floods that left only the Antilles peeking above the waters, but also flights to the sky to bring back fire, sacred caves that led to the sea, and a nurturing mother who hid her children safely underground. In each telling, singing or performance of the origin story, the people were assured of their central place in the world. Hardly a song of estrangement and exile, theirs was an affirmation, a song of self-determination.

As for the Saladoid mainlanders back on the Orinoco, they might have had much less mythological, but no less beguiling, recollections of that extraordinary island exodus. After all, living on the Orinoco, one sees many things come down that river and wash out to sea, especially in flood time: a perfectly good waterproof basket, an exhausted caiman, an unmoored canoe, part of a house. But every now and then an entire piece of the riverbank gives way, and with grasses, small animals and even trees still growing upright on it, floats downstream. It's quite a thing to watch whole islands float out to sea.

⁵⁴ Irving Rouse, *The Taínos: Rise and Decline of the People Who Greeted Columbus* (New Haven: Yale, 1992), 84-85, 104.

APPENDIX 1

Motif Incidences in Sample Collections of Saladoid-Era Ceramics

Chart 1: Species Motif Incidences in Sample Collections of Saladoid-Era Ceramics¹

	Venezuela	Trinidad	Tobago	Grenada	Carriacou/ Grenadines	St. Vincent	Martinique	Barbados	Guadel'pe	Antigua	Montser't
Turtles	41	16	22	51	72	48	66	1	73	38	58
Frogs	8	11	15	25	10	8	16	2	10	12	3
Caimans	4	2	2	3	6	3	1	0	2	0	1
Lizards	7	5	0	1	0	0	2	0	4	1	0
Snakes	2	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	1
Nightbirds: Owls/ Oilbirds/ Nightjars	0	7	3	14	9	9	14	0	56	12	13
Pelicans	1	4	3	1	3	7	3	0	1	5	1
Stilt Birds: Hérons/ Ibises/ Egrets	2	1	0	0	5	8	2	0	4	0	3
Parrots	8	3	2	2	3	1	2	0	2	1	8
Ducks	0	2	2	0	6	6	2	0	0	0	0
Vultures	13	5	2	3	0	0	1	0	2	1	1
Frigatebirds	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Dogs	52	9	0	2	2	0	6	1	40	1	8
Bats	11	9	4	7	13	8	5	2	9	0	3
Anteaters	9	8	7	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Opossums	7	7	2	3	1	0	1	0	0	2	0
Armadillos	2	2	5	4	2	0	1	1	0	0	0
Rodents	4	1	1	0	4	0	1	0	0	2	1
Manatees	0	1	0	0	0	4	0	0	4	0	0

¹ Identifiable species are listed by classes (Reptiles, Avians, Mammals) in descending order of incidence for Antilles only (i.e., excluding Venezuela).

Monkeys	3	5	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
Procyons: Raccoons/ Coatis	0	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	0
Peccaries	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Felines	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Others		1 porcupine			1 porcupine; 1 dolphin				1 dolphin	1 snail	

Chart 2: Class Motif Incidences in Sample Collections of Saladoid-Era Ceramics²

	Venezuela	Trinidad	Tobago	Grenada	Carriacou Grenadines	St. Vincent	Martinique	Barbados	Guadeloupe	Antigua	Montserrat
Reptiles/ Amphibians	62	36	40	81	88	67	86	3	98	53	67
Birds	53	25	26	41	34	53	25	0	123	19	51
Mammals (non-Human)	117	47	35	68	45	21	15	5	77	11	17
Fish	0	1	2	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0
Anthropo-morphs	62	23	20	31	29	41	39	6	69	26	13
Others: Insects/ Arthropods/ Crustaceans	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1

² Differences in animal class totals between Charts 1 and 2 indicate unidentified species of each class referenced in Saladoid ceramics (e.g., 25 out of 45 ceramic mammal motifs from Carriacou and the Grenadines have been identified as representing particular species while the others remain unidentified).

Chart 3: Species Motif Percentages in Sample Collections of Saladoid-Era Ceramics³

	Venezuela	Trinidad	Tobago	Grenada	Carriacou/ Grenadines	St. Vincent	Martinique	Barbados	Guadel'pe	Antigua	Montser't
Turtles	66%	44%	55%	63%	81%	72%	77%	33%	74%	72%	86.5%
Frogs	12%	30.5%	37%	39%	11%	12%	19%	66%	10%	22%	4%
Caimans	6%	5.5%	5%	4%	7%	4%	1%	0%	2%	0%	1%
Lizards	11%	14%	0%	1%	0%	0%	2%	0%	4%	2%	0%
Snakes	3%	3%	2.5%	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	4%	1%
Nightbirds: Owls/ Oilbirds/ Nightjars	0%	28%	11.5%	34%	26%	17%	56%	0%	45.5%	63%	25%
Pelicans	2%	16%	11.5%	2%	9%	13%	12%	0%	1%	26%	2%
Stilt Birds: Hérons/ Ibises/ Egrets	4%	4%	0%	0%	15%	15%	8%	0%	3%	0%	6%
Parrots	15%	12%	8%	3%	8%	2%	8%	0%	1.5%	5%	15%
Ducks	0%	8%	8%	0%	18%	11%	8%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Vultures	24.5%	20%	8%	7%	0%	0%	4%	0%	1.5%	5%	2%
Frigatebirds	0%	0%	0%	0%	0	0%	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Dogs	44%	19%	0%	3%	4%	0%	40%	20%	52%	9%	47%
Bats	9%	19%	11%	10%	29%	38%	33%	40%	12%	0%	17%
Anteaters	8%	17%	20%	1%	0%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Opossums	6%	15%	6%	4%	2%	0%	7%	0%	0%	18%	0%
Armadillos	2%	4%	14%	6%	4%	0%	7%	20%	0%	0%	0%
Rodents	3%	2%	3%	0%	9%	0%	7%	0%	0%	18%	6%
Manatees	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	19%	0%	0%	5%	0%	0%
Monkeys	2.5%	11%	3%	0%	2%	0%	0%	20%	0%	0%	0%
Procyons: Raccoons/ Coatis	0%	4%	3%	0%	0%	0%	7%	0%	1%	18%	0%
Peccaries	0%	6%	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	9%	0%
Felines	2%	2%	6%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0	0%

³ Totals represent approximate percentages of respective classes (reptiles and amphibians, avians, mammals). For example, 12% of Saladoid reptile and amphibian motifs in St. Vincent represent frogs.

APPENDIX 2

Supplemental Zooc Narratives and Symbolism*Bats as Possible Fertility Symbols in the Antilles*

For all their relatedness to the world of the dead, bats may have had a seemingly opposite association with fertility. As they flit from flowering plant to flowering plant bats are important pollinators. Nectarivorous bats accidentally pick up pollen on their fur and redistribute it. In the exchanges they facilitate between male and female plants, bats are the agents of germination in several species. The century plant, though it attracts many kinds of insects and hummingbirds, clearly evolved (or “co-evolved”) to attract bats first and foremost. It may have also driven some nectavorous bats to learn how to hover in midair. Century plant pollen has an unusually high protein content tailored to the unique dietary needs of bats and also contains butyric acid, which mimics the musky odor of bats as to attract them. The fact that the flowers of this plant and several others open at night also indicates an evolutionary responsiveness to the nocturnal habits of their chief pollinators.¹ Thus, bats may have been associated with certain flowers, which in turn would have their own symbolic content and expanded the symbolism of bats.²

Unlike their hovering nectavorous relatives, some bats can be observed grabbing entire fruit on the fly in order to consume them safely elsewhere, outside the reach of

¹ Virginia Barlow, *The Nature of the Islands: Plants and Animals of the Eastern Caribbean*. Dunedin, Florida: Chris Doyle Publications, 1993, 62; Michael R. Gannon et al., *Bats of Puerto Rico: An Island Focus and a Caribbean Perspective*. Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 42.

² This combined faunal-floral symbolism may prove a worthy topic of investigation in the future. Floral symbols themselves, as might be perceived in some white-on-red motifs, might articulate links between seemingly unrelated animals and perhaps other aspects of nature and culture.

predators.³ Bats carrying fruit either in their grasp or their bowels are distributors of fruit seeds throughout their territory and many species of trees have come to depend on them (and birds) for this service. Defecated seeds and discarded portions of fruit are thereby chief means by which many bats fertilize the forest by night.

It would be imprudent to underestimate the capability of ancient Antilleans to observe these bat features and behaviors, including the aforementioned fertilization processes, and for such observations to work themselves into local narratives. The sight of a bat flying off with a piece of fruit would have definitely been within the normal experiential range of the Caribbean Amerindians, even if their taboos against being caught away from home at night might have limited the number of these incidences.⁴ Fruit seeds in the feces of bats would have also been duly noted. In fact, seed laden droppings may have been left alone to germinate, as implied by a 19th-century Guyanese Arawak belief that the sight of bat droppings in one's path was a bad omen.⁵ One might avoid accustomed routes of fruit bats as a result. To horticulturalists such as the Arawaks, the real and symbolic role of seeds, even in guano, in growing new fruit trees are implicit

³ Rexford D. Lord, *Mammals of South America*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 83, 93.

⁴ Fray Ramón Pané, *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians*, ed. José Juan Arrom and trans. Susan Griswold (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 6-7. Various narratives about characters who had misfortunes when they were carelessly caught away from home at sunrise or sunset appear in Pané's accounts of Hispaniolan oral traditions, suggesting that the ancient Antilleans confined themselves to their dwellings at night. One of these narratives appears in the section "Bats, Caves and Ancestors in Ancient Antillean Symbolism" of Chapter Four and another in the section "Forest Birds in Antillean Traditional Narratives" of this Appendix.

⁵ Breton, Révérend Père Raymond. *Dictionnaire Caraïbe-Français* (1664; repr., Paris: Éditions Karthala et l'IRD, 1999), 48; Roth, "An Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore of the Guiana Indians" in *Thirtieth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, 1908-1909* (Washington D.C.: Bureau of American Ethnology, 1915), 274. The word for "bat" in this particular tradition collected by Roth is "buhirri." Father Raymond Breton's Carib-English Dictionary gives the Kalinago word for a small bat as "boíliri," suggesting the Arawakan heritage of so-called Island Caribs.

in any avoidance of areas known to be patrolled by frugivorous bats. But the origin of the bad luck bat droppings belief was not reported by Roth and is perhaps altogether unknown. Regardless of its origin, this mainland Arawak “superstition” would have enabled new fruit trees to grow undisturbed.

The bat’s fertility associations might raise the question of which gender bats were assigned in oral tradition and symbolism. Chapters Four, Five and Six of this study identify many species that have symbolically assigned genders in lowland tropical culture. In the case of bats, gender is not fixed across the whole Amazonid world as for some other species. The mainland Kayapo narrative recounted in the “Anthropomorphized Bats in Mainland Traditional Narratives” section of Chapter Four involves the diminishment of a man’s masculinity in the company of bats, suggesting that bats might represent a feminizing force. Pané’s description of the seductive *opía* suggests that these navel-less beings are temptresses, but in his sixteenth-century Latin translation of Pané’s account, Peter Martyr d’Anghiera mixes genders in the description of these amorous ghosts, so that they are first described as male spirits who seduce women but then are discovered as women in the hammocks of men as well.⁶ Citing a 1571 Italian translation of Pané by Alfonso de Ulloa, Henry Petitjean Roget locates a detail about mytho-symbolic bats missing from the translations of Pané I have seen. In the Ulloa version of the narrative recounted in the following “Bats, Caves and Ancestors” sub-

⁶ Peter Martyr D’Anghiera, *De Orbe Novo: The Eight Decades of Peter Martyr D’Anghera*, trans. Francis Augustus McNutt, (1912; repr., Charleston, SC: BiblioBazaar, 2008), <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/12425/12425-h/12425-h.htm> (accessed April 8, 2010). Pané’s 1498 account of Hispaniolan customs, rituals and lore was never published in its original Catalan but was studied by Martyr, Ulloa and Fernando Colon (Christopher Columbus’ son) and translated into Latin and various Romance languages. These translations have supported and enriched each other over the centuries as they all possess or lack something the others do not, and they are particularly invaluable since the Catalan original by Pané is now lost (see José Juan Arrom’s commentary on these translations in Pané, *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians*, xiv, xxvii).

section, the first people emerged from caves. But before they came out into the world, they had existed in the earth's cavernous womb in a state indistinguishable from animals. In fact the men were bats and the women were frogs.⁷ This vestige of a conquest-era Antillean tradition assigns masculinity to bats. Their fertilizing of flowers and distribution of seeds might have made bats catalysts in this masculine sense.

Star Bride, Opossum and the Origin of Agriculture

In an Apinaye version of the Star Bride narrative, a young widower falls in love with a star (perhaps a reference to one of the Pleiades) and wishes he could have it as his wife. The star comes to earth in the form of a beautiful, tiny bride who teaches him and his family all the secrets of agriculture.⁸ While bathing with her mother-in-law one day, Star Bride turns into an opossum, climbs unto the old woman's shoulder and points to a great, magical tree from which sprout numberless ears of corn. She climbs up the tree and shakes the cobs off for her adopted people. Some careless boys are sent to fetch axes with which the tree might be felled and brought back to the village but they stop to kill and eat an opossum on the way. They quickly become old men, ushering mortality into the world by eating the zoomorphic symbol of Star-Bride.⁹ Thereafter, corn no longer grew

⁷ Henry Petitjean Roget, "Les petroglyphes des Petite Antilles: Mediateurs entre la secherese et l'inondation," in *International Newsletter on Rock Art* 50 (2008): 12-14.

⁸ Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 182-183. In this Apinaye Star Bride narrative, the Star/Opossum is the bringer of corn, yams, and sweet potatoes. In a version from the Karaja (a neighboring group of the same Macro-Gê language family), where the genders of the Star and its lover are reversed, Star Husband adds manioc and several seed plants to the list of cultivars given by the tutelary celestial.

⁹ Alfredo López Austin, *Myths of the Opossum: Pathways of Mesoamerican Mythology* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 230; Ann Bingham, *South and Meso-American Mythology A to Z* (New York: Facts on File, 2004), 83; Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 164-170, 182. In South America, various ethnic groups within the Macro-Gê language family, including the Kayapo, Xerente, Apinaye, Timbira and Kraho maintain narratives featuring an ancient taboo against eating the flesh of opossums. When characters in the story defy the prohibition, the offenders begin to age and as this

naturally on enormous trees but rather on small stalks tended by humans who had to tediously plant individual kernels in the ground.¹⁰

The Uncommon Masculine Opossum

The masculine opossum in Amerindian lore is often a duplicitous character, and sometimes a rapist, using his forked penis as a weapon. Lévi-Strauss cites the bifurcated member of the opossum as a mythologized feature throughout the Americas in regard to unusual and inappropriate sexual relations. In a Tucuna narrative a rapist's sperm bursts through the nostrils of his victim, which Lévi-Strauss compares to North American Indian beliefs that female opossums copulate with their mates through the nostrils and give birth through that (feminized) orifice as well. He also mentions unspecified Amerindian beliefs that the cleft penis of the male opossum conceives twins.¹¹ But in the Tucuna story, it is one of the primordial twins who takes the form of an opossum and rapes the wife of his benevolent brother. In South American lore twins might be seen as much the cause as the effect of the opossum's forked penis.

The rapist opossum appears as well in the oral tradition of the Yekuana, a Cariban group of Venezuela. In a legend about the origins of their weapons, the Yekuana say that there was once a fierce tribe of cannibals who used to terrorize their neighbors, including the Yekuana. The chief of these cruel warriors was Opossum, "Yawade." The cannibal raids only ceased when the Yekuana succeeded in capturing Opossum's most fearsome

happens the irreversible process of aging and death begins for all humankind. As in some Mesoamerican narratives, the opossum here is the master/mistress of time's cycles and bringer of old age.

¹⁰ Lévi-Strauss, *From Honey to Ashes*, trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 73.

¹¹ Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 171-173.

weapon, the *yaribaru*, a two-pronged spear. Today, this double spear is the centerpiece of the Yekuana war kit while the opossum is reduced to a small, innocuous creature.¹² The double pointed weapon attributed to the opossum seems an obvious reference to the unusual anatomical feature of the males of that species.

The Anteater as the Anti-Jaguar

In South America, the powerfully clawed, excavating anteater is not symbolically opposed with the excavating armadillo but with a large, fanged creature. Folklore from the Guianas to southern Brazil fix the jaguar and anteater in an oppositional dyad and view them as natural born enemies.¹³ As with the sun and moon, the often-diurnal anteater and nocturnal jaguar seldom encounter each other on their rounds. A domain cannot have two masters.¹⁴ But in those rare and deadly encounters, the Amazonian saying goes, in the open savannah, the jaguar always prevails, but in the close quarter forest fight, the anteater is supreme.¹⁵ The jaguar's gnashing on its victim's jugular is matched by the disemboweling embrace of the anteater.

This archetypal standoff has a stellar reference in much of lowland South America. The narratives of the Mocoví, Timbira, Kayapo, Bororo and others in the Amazon and Gran Chaco regions between southern Brazil and northern Argentina say that the anteater and its inverse, the jaguar, are the two dark, starless areas located one

¹² David M. Guss, *To Weave and Sing: Art, Symbol and Narrative in the South American Rainforest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 111.

¹³ Lévi-Strauss, *From Honey to Ashes*, 134-135; Lord, *Mammals of South America*, 19, 21; Roe, "Art as Performance," in *Arts of the Amazon*, ed. Barbara Braun (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 108; Roth, "An Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore of the Guiana Indians," 225.

¹⁴ Lévi-Strauss, *From Honey to Ashes*, 63; Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 189. In that anteaters and jaguars are both land mammals, each of them is sometimes seen as half of an alternate terrestrial-aquatic binary with the crocodilian, their aquatic counterpart.

¹⁵ Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 190.

above the other in the Milky Way. Just after sunset and just before sunrise, these two dark patches switch positions so that, in the evening, the jaguar-void dominates but in the morning, the anteater-void subjugates the former.¹⁶

The Peccary in Nature, Narrative and Ceramics

Possible depictions of peccary adornos have been found in Trinidad, Tobago and Antigua, with an ambiguous example from Grenada. No more than three such adornos have been found on each island and I have seen none from Venezuela. These are small adornos and certainly no whole vessels have ever been located with a peccary likeness. These peccary images are characterized only by a combination of round snouts and round faces but since they do not have prominent ears, they might just as easily be manatees. I conclude that peccaries were not an important part of Saladoid ceramics. This is not to say that the creature did not figure in culture or oral tradition.

Peccaries appear so rarely in Saladoid ceramics that their decipherment as motifs is not necessitated in the main text of my dissertation. I began interpreting the potential meanings of these animals expecting to find more than single specimens. If newly discovered ones should join the small, uncertain specimens I have seen thus far, the following paragraphs will become more relevant. The treatment of peccaries in traditional narratives also gives important insights into the sympathetic zoanthropy concept (i.e., the transformation of people into the animals that embody their most distinguishing vice or behavior) so common in Amazonid lore.

¹⁶ Lévi-Strauss, *From Honey to Ashes*, 134-135.

In South America, wild peccaries are more feared than jaguars, roving by the dozens, wrecking property and even injuring and killing people. The overall appearance of a peccary is that of a wild pig, but this native South American animal, in fact, has many differences from pigs. Instead of giving birth to large litters of piglets, which must feed for months before they can walk, peccaries only give birth to one or two young at a time, who are ready to travel with their mother immediately after birth. The tusks of a peccary grow downwards in the manner of fangs, in the opposite direction to those of a wild pig and it has a much shorter tail than one of a pig.¹⁷ Every time the animal opens and closes its mouth, it sharpens its tusks, which are sought after by Amerindians who use them as cutting tools.¹⁸

Peccaries are opportunistic eaters, consuming mostly plant matter but capable of consuming animal flesh when it is available. They have a complex digestive system for breaking down the stubborn cell walls of the cellulose they consume in many grasses, and their teeth behind their downward tusks exhibit the wear of constantly masticating vegetable matter, their preferred food source. Peccaries are noted for their bristly appearance, with color variations around the neck and mouth distinguishing the collared (*Pecari tajacu*) and white-lipped (*Tayassu pecari*) species respectively. But most distinctive is their odor, secreted from a gland located on their hindquarters near their tail when they are alarmed or “excited,” gaining them the nickname “musk hog”.¹⁹

¹⁷ Lord, *Mammals of South America*, 125-126.

¹⁸ Napoleon A. Chagnon, *Yanomamö: The Fierce People* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), 21.

¹⁹ Louise H. Emmons and François Feer, *Neotropical Rainforest Mammals: A Field Guide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 158-159; Lord, *Mammals of South America*, 125.

Substantial collared peccary remains have been found in Trinidadian middens as evidence that they were a coveted food source for Amerindians, even if the species itself was not numerous there.²⁰ As such, the peccaries that appear rarely on Saladoid pottery might simply refer to the elite contents of the vessel.

These pig-like creatures were probably introduced to the islands by the Saladoid-era people and would have remained in low numbers, confined within the watery borders between Caribbean territories. Catching a wild peccary, especially a member of the fierce white-lipped species, would have been a rare, perhaps ritualized, show of hunting prowess or at least good fortune. Over-hunting peccaries may have been prevented by tradition, consensus or outright prohibition, as is sometimes the case in South America, and would have served to maintain a peccary population.²¹

Some peccaries may have been domesticated, but even then, there were no sprawling peccary farms, so eating one would still have been an uncommon event. The rich, heavy peccary meat was possibly reserved for rituals or celebrations. The peccary's mythological meaning, if any, in the Saladoid context is uncertain, both for the rarity of the depictions and the absence of related, contemporaneous Antillean lore.²² Among South American groups such as the Desana of the northwestern Amazon, these animals are a zoomorphic army guarding the forest by chasing or killing intruders and those who

²⁰ Arie Boomert, "Agricultural Societies in the Continental Caribbean," in *General History of the Caribbean: Autochthonous Societies*, ed. Jalil Sued-Badillo (London: Macmillan Caribbean, 2003), 156.

²¹ Roth, "An Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore of the Guiana Indians," 297. Roth reports that the Zaparo Indians of the Upper Amazon eschew the consumption of tapirs and peccaries as heavy meats that make them bulky and plodding after eating.

²² Perhaps the cloven feet of the Pan-like Papa Bois, mythic protector of the forest in today's traditional Windward Islands folklore, have their origin in northern Amazonian oral traditions.

would take more than their fair share of game. In Desana legend too, wild peccaries are sometimes the embodied spirits of the forest (*boraro*), who lure hunters to their deaths.²³

The treacherous reputation of peccaries is a common theme in South American lore. Tenetehara, Kayapo, Munduruku, Bororo and other legends describe peccaries as having once been humans whose stinginess, gruffness and/or inappropriate sexual activities with fellow family members caused them to be transformed into these animals.²⁴ These narratives are moral tales abjuring the uncouth behavior of peccaries and espousing the finer qualities of human society: kinship, friendliness and generosity.²⁵

The feral peccaries might have been seen as captured forces of nature, subdued by force and savored as they were eaten at hunting initiations and, perhaps, wedding ceremonies.²⁶ Peccary vessels may have held foods or herbal preparations used in hunting to mask the smell of hunters, make them brave, or protect them from harm. In the context of marriage, a peccary vessel might have served as a cautionary object imbued with ideas of kinship responsibilities. The peccary, after all, can be seized from the natural realm and initiated into cultural functions through capture, domestication or eating.²⁷ As with monkeys, acquiring and suppressing the peccary would thus be a sublimation of the bestial impulses that threaten the family and society at large.

²³ Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Amazonian Cosmos*, 82, 87-88.

²⁴ These ethnicities represent a broad area of the central and eastern Amazon.

²⁵ Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 84-87, 94-95; Lévi-Strauss, *The Origin of Table Manners*, trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 123.

²⁶ Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Amazonian Cosmos*, 200. Reichel-Dolmatoff reports a sexual connotation of peccaries' musky odor in the northwestern Amazon.

²⁷ Peter Roe, "Arts of the Amazon," in *Arts of the Amazon*, ed. Barbara Braun (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 21.

Procyons and Clan Symbolism

The coati (*Nasua nasua*) is seldom mythologized but appears more often than raccoons (*Procyon cancrivorus*), which for all their colonial folk name “osito lavador” (little washing bear) are virtually absent from South American indigenous narratives. The Kraho, Timbira, Kayapo and Apinaye all have an oral tradition of a surviving brother of a pair of Hero Twins who marries into an ancient tribe called the “Coati People.”²⁸ Among the Coati People, the despondent hero twin, after losing his brother in a battle, is hailed as a great hunter and warrior. While he had always expected to die in battle, lives to a ripe old age among his Coati in-laws.²⁹ In this episode, the “Coati” is a totem of a sociable people who welcome a heroic stranger. Sociability is a trait of coatis, which travel in troops of fifteen or more, unlike their solitary or paired raccoon cousins.³⁰

Dwarf Owls and Nightjars

In a narrative from the Vilela of the Bolivian Gran Chaco, dwarf owls fly to a hero’s rescue as he begins to succumb in his battle against an enormous serpent.³¹ The

²⁸ Lévi-Strauss *From Honey to Ashes*, 125. The Kraho who give this account of the Hero Twin and the “Coati People” call themselves the “Paca People” by contrast, confirming the use of animals as ethnic signifiers.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 124-126.

³⁰ Even the red coati’s Latin name, *Nasua socialis*, indicates this unusual procyonid behavior.

³¹ Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 304; Peter G. Roe, *The Cosmic Zygote: Cosmology in the Amazon Basin* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1982), 182. The Vilela language is poorly documented and the language group to which this nomadic people belong is unclear. But regardless of their unlikely relation to any ancestral group of the ancient Antilleans, their owl narrative adds an important dimension to the symbolism of that creature. The owls here are benefactors of both culture and nature as they defeat an important forest/Underworld demon (great serpents with an antipathy to birds constitute a class of demons in tropical lowland legends, that live either in the forest or underwater) and thus become characters in a widely distributed theme of the bird-as-helper to the human hero or shaman.

serpent is a former human who compulsively used to collect birds as his only occupation and consequently made enemies of them. Transformed to a giant serpent by a magic necklace of colored stones, the bird collector wreaks havoc in the forest, destroying villages and devouring their inhabitants. Many birds come in their family (clan) flocks to aid a single human hero who finally decides he must slay this great serpent. But they all fail. Only a clan of “dwarf owls” (*Glaucidium nannum*) manages to avenge the humans, birds and other forest creatures who have fallen victim to this terrible serpent.³² The pygmy owls peck out the serpent’s eyes and only then can the man and his avian allies kill and disembowel the creature. They free many undigested, living victims from the serpent’s belly and splay out his carcass. A rain soon falls and at the end of the downpour, the serpent’s skin floats into the sky, becoming a rainbow.³³

Thus, while many lowland tropical narratives tell of the origin of bird plumage in the colorful skin of serpents, this Vilela tradition implies that perhaps the man-turned-serpent got his colorful scales from collecting birds in the first place. Either way, a common Amerindian link is reiterated here between birds and snakes (even with its polarity seemingly reversed), and snakes and rainbows, as possessing a multitude of banded colors. It is also noteworthy that the fierce hunting birds who peck out eyes are precisely the birds known for their huge eyes. Thus the collector and possessor of luminous bird colors has his eyes extracted by relatively colorless, usually brown, birds of the dark night with big piercing eyes.

³² Owls of the *Glaucidium* genus are more commonly referred to as pygmy owls, small birds with wingspans of no more than 6 or 7 inches.

³³ Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 304; Roe, *The Cosmic Zygote*, 182.

Fierce nightbirds are not universally friends of the Amerindian hero. In the Timbira narrative of the Hero Twins Akrei and Kenkunan, the former is beheaded by a killer bird that is, in fact, of the genus *Caprimulgus*, a nightjar.³⁴ Nightjars are also mythologized as being the original bride of both Sun and Moon, who came to loggerheads over the primordial polyandry.³⁵ Some species of this bird are not just nocturnal but in fact crepuscular, coming out at dusk to feed on insects.³⁶ This may have caused the nightjar to be considered a bird that inhabits the border between night and day when humans should be safely in their villages lest they suffer strange and terrible fates.

The Arawak Cave of Guacharo Legend

As attacking birds, nightjars (often called “goatsuckers” from the false folk belief that they suckle from goats with their gaping mouths) have a rich symbolism quite comparable to that of owls (see “Dwarf Owls and Nightjars” above). Roth reported that in a province of eastern Venezuela called Curoana by his Amerindian informants was a tall mountain called Tumeriquiri within which was a deep cave called the Cavern of Guacharo. From the cave issued a river but also the “doleful cry” of the nightjars therein. The native people who lived near the Guacharo cave believed that the cries of these birds

³⁴ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *From Honey to Ashes*, 126; Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Origin of Table Manners*, 92, 99; Roth, “An Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore of the Guiana Indians,” 176. In fact nightjars are associated with a series of Amerindian narratives about beheadings, rolling heads, and decapitated heads that talk. In a Temb  version, the cannibalistic head of a decapitated hunter turns into an enormous nightjar-type bird and is finally killed by a shaman whose arrow enters one eye and exits the other. This blinding and killing might suggest a thematic link between nightbirds of all types and the symbolic act of losing sight. An Arawak (but also Carib) tradition related by Roth also describes nightjars as bewitching birds born from the spilled brain matter of a forest demon’s crushed head.

³⁵ Lévi-Strauss, *The Origin of Table Manners*, 77.

³⁶ Peter Evans, *Birds of the Eastern Caribbean* (Oxford, U.K.: Macmillan Caribbean, 1990), 83; Martyn Kenefick et al., *Field Guide to the Birds of Trinidad & Tobago* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 148.

were actually those of the departed dead who had to pass through the cave to reach the afterlife.³⁷ The nightjars in the Cavern of Guacharo would seem to be very much like owls in their synonymy with the disembodied dead.

But these mournful nightbirds are, in fact, neither owls nor nightjars. Roth describes the avian inhabitants of the Cavern of Guacharo as nightjars but he reports that their fat was the source of the “oil of Guacharo.”³⁸ I believe that Roth was unknowingly referring to a relative of nightjars, the oilbird. This large, frugivorous nightbird is still called “guacharo” in Eastern Venezuela and Trinidad today.³⁹

The Frigatebird as the Pelican's Nemesis

The pelican's supreme position in the marine sky may not have gone unchallenged. If the pelican had an avian nemesis, as mythologized creatures often do, it would be the frigatebird. The magnificent frigatebird (*Fregata magnificens*) is a natural rival, in size and behavior but also in the direct confrontations that the two species sometimes have with each other. The enormous wingspan of the frigatebird, some eight feet wide, and its resultant clumsiness on land, immediately liken it to the brown pelican. Its acrobatic skill on the wing would also make it a challenger to the pelican's position even if the two seldom ever encountered each other. But they most certainly do encounter each other as frigatebirds earn their name by pilfering food from pelicans and other birds.

³⁷ Roth, “An Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore of the Guiana Indians,” 161-162.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 161.

³⁹ Richard ffrench, *Birds of Trinidad and Tobago* (Oxford, U.K.: Macmillan Publishers, 2004), 116.

Frigatebirds almost never descend to the water because they find it even more difficult to take off again than do pelicans. But compensating for this absent pelican ability, they can hover almost motionlessly in the air, low above the water, or high up looking for prey in the water or airborne birds with fresh catches to steal on the fly.⁴⁰ Certain peculiar features at once liken these black pirates to brown pelicans and distinguish them dramatically. Male frigatebirds have a gular sac, immediately recalling that of the pelican. But these are not for catching fish. During courtship, the male frigatebird inflates this membranous sac into a great, red balloon.⁴¹ This behavior, combined with several others such as its role as sniper pilot, lends the frigatebird its own symbolic kit, quite apart from the pelican.

Frigatebirds, in fact, are not common in the Saladoid ceramic record but isolated depictions of these birds occur unambiguously in various materials. They are usually expertly crafted. A single ceramic vessel spout survives in part at Musée Départemental d'Archéologie Précolombienne et de Préhistoire in Martinique (figure 5.35). Its masterful execution in incised and polychrome slips implies that there were other frigatebird vessels. A frigatebird amulet in shell from Guadeloupe would seem to confirm this accustomed artistic interest in the species (figure 5.36). This is one of two shell frigatebirds I have come across in the museum collections while searching for ceramic frigatebirds, the other being a broken amulet from St. Kitts at the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural history Anthropology Department.

⁴⁰ Barlow, *The Nature of the Islands*, 21; Evans, *Birds of the Eastern Caribbean*, 24.

⁴¹ Herbert Raffaele et al., *A Guide to the Birds of the West Indies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 227.

The almost complete lack of recorded lore about the frigatebird in the lowland tropics and Antilles gives this marine species an unfortunate similarity to the pelican as a focus of study. The near absence in oral traditions might seem in keeping with the frigatebird's relative rarity in Saladoid visual culture. But the one tradition I found that does feature the frigatebird casts this bird in a function important enough to cause wonder as to why it does not appear more often in the Antillean arts. This one tradition also casts oblique light on pelican symbolism. As might be expected, in this narrative the frigatebird is a rival to a chief bird but the bird in question is not a pelican.

In Warao lore, the frigatebird is the rival of the swallow-tailed kite (*Elanoides forficatus*), a "shamanic tutelary spirit of highest rank."⁴² The swallow-tailed kite is also a symbol of the sun at zenith, and the tireless hunter with his bow.⁴³ The silhouettes of frigatebirds and swallow-tailed kites are quite similar, with backward swooping wings and a forked tail much like a swallow's, both shapes evoking the shape of a drawn bow. Hardly ever alighting while on the incessant prowl and assailing other birds for all they need, kites are quite like frigatebirds. But kites kill the birds they attack, for the birds are the prey, whereas frigatebirds run them down until they give up their catch out of fatigue and fear. Nevertheless, their attacks on other birds link these two species of aerial plunderers in a competitive and/or oppositional dyad. And the sight of a frigatebird stealing sticks from a swallow-tailed kite's nest, like warriors stealing others' weapons,

⁴² Johannes Wilbert, "The House of the Swallow-Tailed Kite: Warao Myth and the Art of Thinking in Images," in *Animal Myths and Metaphors in South America*, ed. Gary Urton (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1985), 151-153.

⁴³ Ibid.

locks them in a perennial rivalry.⁴⁴ Thus the frigatebird can be considered a classic nemesis to the dominant bird in the maritime environment. For the present-day Lower Orinoco Warao people, ancient neighbors of the Saladoid-era people, the mainland maritime sky-lord is the swallow-tailed kite. For the ancient people of the Antilles, the besieged monarch of the skies was evidently the pelican.

Symbolism derived from the aforementioned mating behavior of the male frigatebird has some prominence in the narrative tradition and ritual of the Warao.⁴⁵ The incessant, rather wooden-sounding clacks of frigatebird beaks as they spar with each other over nesting grounds, and their fitful movements while they inflate their gular sacs all relate the species to the shaman's healing rituals. The convulsive behavior of the male is reminiscent of the seizures of ill and tobacco-poisoned patients who are healed by shamans in rituals where rattles (maracas) are shaken over their bodies.⁴⁶ The round, red pouch, plus the rattling and trembling of the male frigatebird, associate the species not only with the shaman's craft but specifically with one of his or her most important instruments, the round, painted or incised maraca.⁴⁷

Besides its maraca-like gular sac and "rattling," the frigatebird's ungainly movements on the ground might have been compared to the unsure gait of the inebriated

⁴⁴ Wilbert, "The House of the Swallow-Tailed Kite," 167.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 155. As mentioned in Chapter Four, the Warao have lived on the Lower Orinoco for many millennia and their close contact and cultural exchange with the Saladoid-era people in ancient times is almost assured. Their sharing an environment with the Saladoid potters in the Orinoco Delta and Trinidad makes their oral traditions and culture particularly relevant in ethnographic analogies with the Saladoid.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 166-167.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* In primordial time, Swallow-Tailed Kite was healed of his tobacco-poisoning by the wife of First Bahana (shaman) who appears in her Frigatebird form to still the seizures. Shamans can be of either gender.

shaman, not to mention the equally clumsy ambulation of the pelican. Patrolling the seas and never alighting on it might have made them symbols of uninterrupted, unobstructed spiritual flight or constant vigilance. Finally, their aggressive, aerial dogfights would have been likened to the shaman's ability to outmaneuver and vanquish the black magic of sorcerers. This is the role of the swallow-tailed kite in Waraoland and the likely role of vultures in narratives discussed in Chapter Five. But in the modifications that sometimes occur in the physical and diachronic intervals between different South American regions, and between South America and the Antilles, it is possible that the healing swallow-tailed kite's nemesis may have taken on this prophylactic function instead. In short, the convulsive frigatebird itself may have become a healing bird in the Antilles.

The Double-Headed Vulture in Iconography and Lore

There are signs that the vulture did not suffer the same confinement to Trinidad and Grenada in other arts as it did in Saladoid ceramics. Besides the contemporaneous Huecoid stone amulets that depict these birds, many axes found in the Lesser Antilles seem to capture their profile in stone. Though almost all of these axes have turned up in museum collections with very little provenance, at least one was excavated in a context just beyond the end of the Saladoid, the Suazoid period in St. Vincent.⁴⁸ From Lovén in the 1930s to Harris, Boomert and others today, scholars have identified the curled "ears" on the back ends of these stone blades as the heads of two birds facing in opposite

⁴⁸ Boomert, "Raptorial Birds as Icons of Shamanism in the Pre-Historic Caribbean and Amazonia," in *Proceedings of the XIX International Congress for Caribbean Archaeology* (Aruba: Archaeological Museum, 2001), 139.

directions (figure 5.23 *left*).⁴⁹ The large beaks and apparent protuberances on their foreheads evoke the profiles of king vultures.

It so happens that there is a widespread oral tradition throughout South America involving double-headed vultures. It is part of a larger tradition of autonomous, severed human heads that re-attach themselves not only to their original owners but sometimes also to other people and vultures. In some episodes women's heads detach at night as their husbands sleep and the voracious heads raid the food stores, especially the meat, of other villages. In these myths, the heads seem to symbolize the unsated appetites of their owners. Before dawn, the heads return to their bodies and presumably swallow the contents of their mouths. It is at this time that they are inevitably discovered, often by aghast in-laws who have awakened early for one reason or another only to find a headless body lying next to their son or brother.⁵⁰ The restlessness of living away from one's blood relatives with in-laws seems to be referenced in these narratives alongside a theme of the insatiable desires of outside (and therefore, not properly civilized) women.

Several versions of this rolling, devouring head legend told in the Guianas and Brazil are combined with the tale of the human who flies to heaven with his vulture bride. These versions highlight the bride's father and a detachable head. In a Taurepang rendition from the border region between Brazil, Venezuela and Guyana, the King Vulture is already a formidable "cannibal" in ancient time when he has only one head. But events on the earth, far beneath his lofty kingdom, will greatly impact him forever. A man with a magical collection of hunting tools and weapons discovers that his brother-in-

⁴⁹ Boomert, "Raptorial Birds as Icons of Shamanism in the Pre-Historic Caribbean and Amazonia," 138.

⁵⁰ Lévi-Strauss, *From Honey to Ashes*, 451; Betty Mindlin and Indigenous Storytellers, *Barbecued Husbands and Other Stories from the Amazon* (London: Verso, 2002), 54-56, 160-162, 183-187, 234-235.

law has stolen them. He transforms into a wrathful devouring skull and rampaging through the village, eats all of his in-laws, including his wife. Yet unable to sate his gluttony, he attaches himself to the body of a tapir and like a parasite, consumes everything the tapir tries to eat with its own mouth. Soon the tapir dies of starvation and the insatiable head detaches itself and lays in wait for vultures to come for the rotting carcass. By nighttime the stench of the dead tapir finally attracts some vultures.⁵¹

Eventually, the King Vulture appears and as he takes his place at the head of the pecking order, and with his powerful beak begins to break pieces from the tough carcass of the tapir, the conniving head of the hunter emerges from hiding and attaches itself to the monarch's left shoulder. The King Vulture flies off to his heavenly abode with two heads, doubly the fearsome devourer he once was.⁵²

The bald heads of vultures are the evident inspiration for the detachable head idea but there is no immediate explanation for why vultures appear in so many narratives with double heads. From my own observations of vultures, I have noted their tendency to stand shoulder to shoulder, facing in opposite directions with their white shoulder feathers obscuring just which head belongs to which bird. The two vultures create an "X", each forming a single diagonal line as it faces the opposite direction to the other. Could the "V" of vulture necks created in the upper half of this "X" be the inspiration for the double-headed vulture in oral tradition?⁵³ This speculation about double-headed

⁵¹ Since vultures are day fliers but black carrion birds, which would otherwise associate with night, the fact that they gather at night to eat the tapir carcass may have some significance for the people who tell the legend.

⁵² Boomert, "Raptorial Birds as Icons of Shamanism in the Pre-Historic Caribbean and Amazonia," 131.

⁵³ I have also observed black vultures striking the same position as they dip their heads to the ground, forming an upside down V.

vultures may seem inapplicable to my ceramic study, since I found no double-headed Saladoid ceramics in my survey. However, Boomert illustrates a vessel shard from Los Barrancos that seems to be from a small oval dish, and it has two vulture adorns facing in opposite directions with the backs of their heads separated by a small circular motif (figure 5.23 *right*). This is a ceramic counterpart to Saladoid and post-Saladoid vulture head axes in the Antilles. The proximity and position of these two vulture heads, in essentially a single ceramic adorno, mirrors that of actual vultures as they pause and strike the V-shape with their necks (figure 13).

Beyond Herons and Cranes: Possible Saladoid Ibis Iconography

Roe's description of the tropical lowlander iconographic preference for the largest bird in a class or order is incontrovertible, what with the dominance of eagles, vultures, crocodiles, jaguars and the like in mainland narratives.⁵⁴ My own description of the pelican as a chief marine bird takes into account that bird's impressive wingspan, and massive, pouched beak, but the color of the bird could be equally important. It would have been a sight to behold: a flock of scarlet ibises taking off and flying to their roosts at sunset, the dusky sky bathed in shades and tints of their crimson, vermilion and pink feathers as the sinking sun lit the undersides of their bellies and black wing tips. This scarlet flock would have easily annexed established lowland stilt-bird lore to that of the Antilles.

⁵⁴ Peter G. Roe, "Cross-Media Isomorphisms in Taíno Ceramics and Petroglyphs from Puerto Rico," in *Proceedings of the XIV Congress of the International Association for Caribbean Archaeology* (Barbados: International Association for Caribbean Archaeology, 1991), 647.

A scarlet ibis addition to the wading bird pantheon would certainly explain the adornos from Guadeloupe, Martinique, St. Vincent and Trinidad with long, narrow curved beaks that are often painted red (figure 5.44). But this stunning bird is endemic only to the lattermost of these islands. And, while most islands have one or two ibis-like adornos, the highest incidence of them is in Guadeloupe where I found a total of five in the collections of Direction Régional des Affaires Culturelles and Musée Edgar Clerc. Storm-birds in the accustomed path of hurricanes, as Guadeloupe is, make sense but Guadeloupian scarlet ibises do not. There is no evidence of ibises ever having lived there.

I have found no Venezuelan or Guyanese legend of the scarlet ibis.⁵⁵ However, Roth reported in the early 20th century that the call of a species of river ibis (the *kurri-kurri* or *Ibis/Phimosus infuscatus*) is believed by the Guyanese Amerindians on the Cuyuni River to portend night rains.⁵⁶ The whispering or bare-faced ibis, as it is also called, is a bird with an identical profile and beak shape to that of the scarlet and white ibises of the same area and southern North America. It is not uncommon to see these bare-faced ibises in mixed groups with scarlet ibises as if they were different colors of the same species. In fact, dark brown juvenile scarlet ibises look more closely related to mature bare-faced ibises than to their own parents. The fact that a wading bird predicts rain may be at the crux of the associations between ciconiidae and storms in the first place. But it remains uncertain whether, for the Saladoid potters, the scarlet ibis shared rain-augury functions with its fellow bare-faced ibis and storm associations with its fellow ciconiids.

⁵⁵ These are the other parts of this bird's habitat.

⁵⁶ Roth, "An Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-Lore of the Guiana Indians," 269.

The Question of Hummingbirds in Saladoid Ceramics and Culture

Two adornos from Montserrat and Carriacou might possibly be hummingbirds (figure 5.63). Another from Manzanilla in Trinidad depicts an anthropomorph with an alter ego bird emerging from its forehead (see figure 5.64).⁵⁷ The bird's long beak curves back and connects to the nose of the anthropomorph, creating a symbiotic loop between human and bird. If a hummingbird, the bird could be inserting tobacco into the nose of a shaman. This might refer to a mythic connection between hummingbirds and the acquisition of tobacco as in the Warao tradition recounted in Chapter Five's sub-section "Stilt Birds and the Acquisition of Jealous Secrets." But the long, decurved beaks of these would-be hummingbirds may, in fact, be diagnostic of ibises and other wading birds discussed in the section on "Aquatic Birds." Other than these dubious adornos, there is a conspicuous absence of hummingbird imagery in Saladoid or any other Antillean ceramics and this particular absence warrants some discussion.

So unique is this bird that its Arawak name, the colibrí, was adopted by the Spaniards for want of any name they might imagine on their own.⁵⁸ These incredible hovering birds, whose wings beat at an impossibly rapid rate, appear in several South

⁵⁷ Marc C. Dorst. "The SAN-1 Site at Manzanilla: Creating a Site-Scale Pottery Classification at a Multi-Component Ceramic Age Site in Trinidad" in *Proceedings of the XXI Congress of the International Association for Caribbean Archaeology* (Port-of-Spain, Trinidad: International Association for Caribbean Archaeology, 2005), 336.

⁵⁸ Kathleen Ann Myers, *Fernández de Oviedo's Chronicle of America: A New History of a New World* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007); Miguel de Asúa and Roger French's *A New World of Animals: Early Modern Europeans on the Creatures of Iberian America* (Hants, England: Ashgate, 2005). Spaniards often replaced indigenous terms for local flora and fauna if they previously had a name for a comparable plant or animal. These new terms often caused the indigenous names to fall out of use so that many such words are now lost. The retention of certain indigenous terms is often testimony to the uniqueness of the species they describe.

American narratives. It is therefore difficult to believe that hummingbirds played no part in the zoic pantheon or symbolic vocabulary of the Saladoid-era Antilleans. As with other birds such as the frigatebird, it may be that hummingbirds played a vibrant role in arts other than ceramics, perhaps as a source of feathers for personal adornments. Conversely, they may have played no role in the arts at all. But an absence from the arts would not have precluded them from having a rich mythology.

Hummingbirds occupy an unusual niche alongside insects, and some bats, as they hover in mid air suckling nectar from flowers, bromeliads and heliconias. Many of these small birds have long, decurved bills, for probing down inside the corollas of flowers, beyond the reach of most insects, and sometimes feeding on the insects that do reach that far.⁵⁹ Although most hummingbird males are capable of monotonous calls during mating season, and some perform physical repertoires to impress females, sometimes battling each other for the right to mate with her, hummingbirds are not known for their song.⁶⁰ Rather, it is their flight that is most remarkable to the observer with the sheer speed of their beating wings, which are almost invisible as they hover. In fact, this impressive, but massively energy-expending manner of flying is the only way in which these birds propel themselves, as they cannot glide as do other species.⁶¹ Nevertheless, hummingbirds are all the more impressive for their lifespan of up to ten years, even with metabolic rates that

⁵⁹ Barlow, *The Nature of the Islands*, 84; Lesley Suttly, *Fauna of the Caribbean: the Last Survivors* (Oxford, U.K.: Macmillan Education, 1993), 60. Hummingbirds range from 6-23 cm, most on the lower end of that range, and the others only measuring larger because of long, impressive tail feathers.

⁶⁰ Barlow, *The Nature of the Islands*, 84; French 2004, 53-57; Suttly, *Fauna of the Caribbean*, 60.

⁶¹ Suttly, *Fauna of the Caribbean*, 60.

race beyond credibility, wings beating up to fifty times per second in figure-eight motion.⁶²

All of these behaviors would have been noted by the Saladoid-era observer, and may have contributed to the mythologization of the hummingbird. Their tiny size may have made them as myth-worthy as the largest of birds. Their incessant flitting from flower to flower from early morning and throughout the day, and their iridescent feathers would have been particularly symbolic of the industry of the sun-dominated, human world, particularly agriculture.⁶³

Yet, with these impressive traits, hummingbirds do not seem to have struck the interest of the Saladoid potters. It is possible that the shape and color of these birds inspired chromatic, two-dimensional (painted) depictions rather than sculptural ones in ceramic earth tones. It might be suggested that the delicacy of the long, surgical beak of the hummingbird was off-putting to the ceramic artist working in clay, but we have seen the clever way in which Saladoid ceramicist handled similar protrusions in aquatic birds. With their insect-like behavior, perhaps hummingbirds are linked to the question of why insects themselves are seemingly not represented in ceramics either. Certainly the Caribbean is teeming with spectacular insects. Again, I would suggest that such creatures

⁶² Barlow, *The Nature of the Islands*, 85; Raffaele et al., *A Guide to the Birds of the West Indies*, 332. Naturally, their high calorie sugar intake from flowering plants and trees makes for a long and active life.

⁶³ Barlow, *The Nature of the Islands*, 84; French, *Birds of Trinidad and Tobago*, 53-57; Raffaele et al., *A Guide to the Birds of the West Indies*, 332; Suttly, *Fauna of the Caribbean*, 60. Hummingbirds do not derive their colors from pigmentation but rather from the refraction of light through their feathers. Most appear black in poor light but take on colors as light passes through the reflective barbs of their feathers. This blackness that becomes a range of colors may have in itself figured in lore. Hummingbird habitats may also have had some symbolic value. These birds often make their tiny, fragile nests in shadowy places, such as the undersides of leaves, out of rootlets, moss and even stolen spider webs. There, the female usually incubates two eggs for sixteen days at a time in the first half of the year. A range of symbols may have derived from the varied associations between hummingbirds and web-like structures, leaf-like shapes, the first half of the year, twilight (when darkness and light invert) and the number two.

as hummingbirds and insects might have been represented in other visual arts of the Saladoid period, perhaps in more ephemeral materials.

Forest Birds in Antillean Lore

Forest birds had two major manifestations in Pané's account of Taíno oral tradition. One species was called Yahubabayael after a careless sentry, Yahubaba, who was transformed into a bird that sings at the morning's first light. He was caught tarrying on the road, away from his post at the mouth of the ancestral cave of Cacibahagua by the sunrise, and was consequently metamorphosed by the witching power of this event.⁶⁴ The other mythic bird was a woodpecker species, called Inriri Yahubabayael. This is the instrumental bird in the narrative of the androgynous celestials who were turned into women by its pecking (mentioned in Chapter Four).⁶⁵ While the woodpecker variety has been identified (*Melanerpes portoricensis*), and is still called Inriri today, the species of twilight-singing bird remains obscure. Since the incidence of dawn-singers can vary by island, a narrative template brought from island to island might incorporate whichever local species sang in the morning, from the blue-crowned motmot (or wootootoo, *Momotus momota*) in Tobago to the various kingbirds (*Tyrannidae*) of Puerto Rico. The woodpecker and twilight-singing bird that appear in the Taíno-era lore represent two categories (i.e., piercing, gender-assigning birds and twilight heralds) worth noting should any ceramics artifacts be found in the future bearing their likeness more definitively.

⁶⁴ Pané, *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians*, 6-7.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

Ghosts and Lizards in Antillean Ceramics and Symbolism

Lizards in Nature

The Lesser Antilles boasts many varieties of lizards of widely ranging sizes and colors, but these seldom appear in ceramics. Of the species of ground lizards, iguanas, skinks, anoles and geckos in the region, the anoles and geckos seem to be the species that make rare appearances in Saladoid adornos. Iguanas are absent in the ceramics and most other arts of the ancient Antilles.

Anoles (*Anolis* species) are actually much smaller, mostly arboreal cousins of the iguana (figure 28). Compared to iguanas, they have proportionately larger heads; their muzzles are pointier than those of iguanas; and they have no ridge of impressive scutes down the center of their backs. However, their long tails and imposing dewlaps, semi-circular flaps of skin under the chins of males, which they fan out in anger at the sight of competitors, relate them to iguanas. Male anoles can be seen performing a warning display with dewlaps extended and heads bobbing up and down in ritualized hostility. Direct confrontation between males results in a short and frenzied chase, leaving one male as either the reigning incumbent or new ruler of the tree in contention.⁶⁶

Anoles have a remarkable ability not shared by their fellow iguanids. They can change their color, chameleon-like, both as a way of regulating their body temperature and as a spontaneous expression of their emotional state. Stressed anoles turn dark and overheated ones go pale to reflect heat-bearing sunlight. Otherwise, these lizards blend

⁶⁶ Barlow, *The Nature of the Islands*, 87-89; Malhotra and Thorpe, *Reptiles and Amphibians of the Eastern Caribbean*, 13-16.

into the color of wood and foliage, visible only when they move a limb or turn their eyes.⁶⁷ There is tremendous diversity among these lizards in the Antilles. Each island has one or two endemic species of anoles alongside more widely distributed ones, and there are some 150 species throughout the entire Caribbean. Despite the “depauperate” snake fauna of the Lesser Antilles, many of the islands have among the highest reptile biomass (amount of living tissue measured by estimated weight) in the world by way of their lizard and frog populations.⁶⁸

Unlike all other Caribbean lizards, the gecko has a voice, which it uses in chirping mating calls but also in defense and aggressions. This is also the lizard species with the perplexingly detachable tail, which continues to wiggle even after amputation, distracting the often avian predator as the gecko makes its escape. The gecko’s astounding adhesiveness to any natural surface, including their patented crawling overhead on the undersides of branches and the ceiling of dwellings, derives not from a sticky substance but rather the microvilli or tiny hooks on its feet which seize on any irregularity of a surface. Like anoles, geckos feed on insects, but the gecko is seen performing its gravity-defying crawl by the light of dusk, dawn and firelight on its search for edible insects. The greatest difference between geckos and other lizards is that this cold-blooded creature is nocturnal and all others are sun-worshippers.⁶⁹

Incidences and Concerns of Saladoid Lizard Imagery

⁶⁷ Barlow, *The Nature of the Islands*, 87-89; Malhotra and Thorpe, *Reptiles and Amphibians of the Eastern Caribbean*, 13-16.

⁶⁸ Malhotra and Thorpe, *Reptiles and Amphibians of the Eastern Caribbean*, 14, 17, 21.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 13-16; Albert Schwartz and Robert W. Henderson, *Amphibians and Reptiles of the West Indies: Descriptions, Distributions and Natural History* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1991), 544-547.

Many islands can claim only a single saurian looking adorno if at all and some of these are sufficiently ambiguous as to be considered small birds or even simplified mammals. Only the islands of Guadeloupe and Trinidad have multiple lizard adornos, with at least four in institutional collections for the former and five for the latter (figures 6.15, 6.16 and 6.17). As with cetaceans and hummingbirds in Chapters Four and Five respectively, the iguana's absence is conspicuous, almost seeming a taboo subject for not even getting the limited attention other lizards received in Antillean arts. The much smaller anoles and geckos, far less edible species, seem to have been accorded some minor regional importance and are represented in rare adornos from Antigua, Guadeloupe, La Désirade and Trinidad (figures 6.16 to 6.18). These are small adornos that required little modeling to achieve a measure of naturalism. The proportions of their pointy faces indicate that they mostly represented the aggressive, mercurial anole.

The Ghostly Lizard in Linguistic Vestiges and Post-Conquest Folklore

Both a species of nocturnal gecko and diurnal Caribbean skink have come to bear Latinized Linnaean taxonomies based on the Carib word "maboya." These are the *Hemidactylus mabouia*, a house gecko that was probably introduced only in colonial times by trans-Atlantic trade, perhaps from Africa, and a coppery endemic skink catalogued as *Mabuya bistrriata*.⁷⁰ These species have borne versions of this "maboya" nomenclature for roughly two centuries already, having been named in a time when Amerindian populations in the Caribbean were decimated but still greater than they are

⁷⁰ Malhotra and Thorpe, *Reptiles and Amphibians of the Eastern Caribbean*, 15, 34-35, 48-49.

today, and when Amerindian words were in greater usage.⁷¹ The Arawak word “opía” is related to the Carib “maboya” (spelled “mapoya” in Breton) and “oupoyem,” all of these being words for spirits, particularly malignant ones.⁷² The ghostly meaning of the word maboya potentially associates lizards bearing this name with some Pre-Columbian lore now lost. But I have been unable to determine whether late colonial-era scientists took their taxonomic cue from Amerindian folklore in attaching the word maboya to their nomenclature for the two species of Caribbean lizards.

It is remarkable just how many lizards have retained some part of their Amerindian taxonomy, from the Arawak-named iguana to the Carib-named anole.⁷³ In the Lesser Antilles, tree lizards are commonly called “zandoli,” which is an obvious corruption of the Carib “anaoli.” In the folklore of Grenada and Tobago, I have heard stories of “goumangala” entrapment, whereby a woman places ritualistically prepared parts of the gumangala lizard (*Anolis richardi*) into a meal she has prepared for a man in order to render him helpless to her charms. I have found neither proof nor contradiction of the possible Amerindian origins of this practice. But the fact that Amerindian terms sometimes out-competed European ones during and after the conquest is testament not only to the uniqueness of these animals but perhaps the rich cultural value that was once invested in them.

⁷¹ Schwartz and Henderson, *Amphibians and Reptiles of the West Indies*, 414-416, 456-459. Schwartz and Henderson report the first naming of these species as by Alexandre Moreau de Jonnès in 1818 and Bernard Germain de Lacépède in 1788, respectively.

⁷² Breton, *Dictionnaire Caraïbe-Français*, 211; Pané, *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians*, 19. Breton also mentions (p.128) a species of tree called *máboya ámouche* by the Caribs, which he described as being frequented by large lizards.

⁷³ Breton, *Dictionnaire Caraïbe-Français*, 20; Edwin Miner Solá, *Diccionario Taíno Ilustrado* (Puerto Rico: First Book Publishing, 2002), 97.

There is no anole or gecko legend from the islands themselves and collected mainland traditions make little reference to lizards except as minor supporting characters.⁷⁴ It is for the combined reasons of this lack of ethnographic evidence and the rarity and simplicity of lizard adornos that I do not fully apply this study's deciphering methodology to these species. Anoles may have been some kind of male symbol due to their hyper-masculine posturing and fanned dewlaps, likening them to pelicans with their gular sacs. Geckos may have been their feminine, nocturnal counterparts given their tendency to haunt human dwellings at night, like the visiting spirits of ancestors. But beyond this point, I cannot speculate responsibly.

Yaya and the Great Flood

Yaya is a somewhat tragic figure in a Taíno-era lore. He must exile his son for plotting to kill him and eventually has to kill the young man anyway upon ending his exile because the youth has not reformed. In accordance with Antillean custom, he keeps his son's bones in the house, in a calabash (gourd) suspended from the rafters. After a time he and his wife find to their wonder that the bones have produced their own water and turned into fish. Upon entering old Yaya's house while the old man is away, Deminán Caracaracol and his brothers partake of the swarming fish in the calabash. But as they hear Yaya returning from farming his *conuco* (manioc field), they flee. Clumsily, Deminán tries to replace the gourd on its hanger but drops it. And from this fallen gourd

⁷⁴ Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, 20-22. Lizards are a back-up food source in several narratives of a hunter alone or stranded in the forest, as in the vulture narrative recounted in Chapter Five. Only in one legend from the Xerente does the usual bundle of rotting lizards come undone from a hunter's belt as he crosses a river and then coalesce into a fierce crocodilian. But again, the lizards are mere bit players before the main action starts.

comes a flood that covers the world.⁷⁵ This narrative has obvious counterparts in the mainland Arawak traditions cited in Chapters Four and Five of monkeys and owls who unleash great floods and the first night respectively. But this narrative also explains the origin of the sea and implies the origin of the Antilles. For it is not long after this deluge that Deminán Caracaracol and his brothers are back to their adventurous journeys, on dry land that has somehow survived the flood: islands.

Turtles and Frogs as Islands in Saladoid Sculpture

There is a class of object, enigmatic but universal in the Pre-Columbian Antilles. Appearing from Tobago to Hispaniola in unnumbered variations, and yet never studied as a single corpus: the trigonal zemi, or “three pointer.” It is a paramount problem in Pre-Columbian Caribbean iconology. It is cut and fashioned from the shell tips of the conch, painstakingly worked from chunks of nephrite, jadeite, and serpentine or blocks of limestone (figures 2.41 and 6.35). It is abstractly notched and drilled or otherwise incised, pocked and sculpted with the hollows of eyes, the grimaces of broad mouths and the flexed limbs of amphibians. Some were perhaps augmented with *guanín* (a hammered gold alloy); others were inlaid with manatee bone dentures. They were placed in fields to make the crops grow, prayed to for pregnancy, rain and sunshine. They were likened to sacred mountains and believed to be the spirit of manioc.⁷⁶ But still, no one knows exactly what they are.

⁷⁵ Pané, *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians*, 13.

⁷⁶ Fatima Bercht, ed. *Taíno: Pre-Columbian Art and Culture from the Caribbean* (New York: El Museo del Barrio/Monacelli Press, 1997), 25-27, 92-105; Osvaldo García-Goyco, “Nuevas Interpretaciones en Torno a la Iconografía de los Taínos: Posibles Representaciones del Árbol de los

Trigonal zemis are, as my description suggests, triangular (though sometimes with rounded corners) when viewed in profile. But when viewed from above, they are oval. There are no objects like them anywhere in the Americas except five small, plain ones found in a few sites in northern South America and objects that resemble them by accident.⁷⁷ But in the Antilles they number in the hundreds, are widespread across the islands, and constitute a deliberately created class of objects. In the Saladoid Lesser Antilles they are small, no more than two or three inches at the base and made from a variety of exotic minerals and animal materials. In the Taíno Greater Antilles, they are almost invariably of stone and can be much larger, reaching 10 inches at the base. They are sculpted in a variety of figural representations that resolve themselves into the triangular form. So from Saladoid to Taíno times, they go from greater material diversity in smaller sizes to larger sizes in less material diversity, and with an increase in figuration (figure 6.35).

The figuration on the trigonal zemis is quite varied with anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, hybrid and abstract motifs appearing separately or all together. Reptiles appear on many I have seen, with the flexed legs of frogs being the most recognizable. But Moravetz suggests that the flexed legs of some trigonals, with those legs compressed against their bodies as to adhere to the trigonal matrix, might just as easily represent the backward turned flippers of turtles.⁷⁸ What is of most concern here is the humped shape

Alimentos,” in *Proceedings of the XX International Congress for Caribbean Archaeology* (Santo Domingo: Museo del Hombre Dominicano and Fundación García Arévalo, 2003), 49-58.

⁷⁷ Shirley McGinnis, “Zemi Three-Pointer Stones,” in *Taíno: Pre-Columbian Art and Culture from the Caribbean*, ed. Fatima Bercht (New York: El Museo del Barrio/Monacelli Press, 1997), 98. It has not been determined whether these objects, dating from circa 200 BCE to 900 CE were originally from these sites in Colombia and Venezuela or were traded in from the Antilles. Their comparative lack of diversity and rarity on the mainland indicates to me that they originated in the Antilles.

of the trigonal zemi. This rounded triangle at once recalls the centrally ridged dome of the turtle's shell, the arched spine of the frog's back, and the crown of an island's highest mountain. It is the view of the sacred turtle mother coming in with the surf, the moon lighting her way to her nesting place. It is the glistening body of the frog, breaking the surface of the water after laying her eggs in the water. It is an evocation of sacred mountains and volcanoes, as some have suggested, with rivers and magma flowing from their mysterious orifices.⁷⁹ But the trigonal zemi is also an effigy of the island itself slowly looming on the horizon as we approach by canoe, and secondarily the triangular piles of *cumulonimbus* clouds that amass on its windward side.⁸⁰ In many texts, the trigonal zemi is attributed to the Taíno deity Yucáhu, or some earlier concept of him, giver of manioc and patron god of the agricultural cycle.⁸¹ But a manioc deity naturally works in concert with the deities of the waters, winds, rains etc. Given the Arawak tendency to cite iconographic and mythological resemblances between species, hinging them at their shared module or motif, I would suggest that the flexed frog and humped turtle motifs were folded into a single vision of the fertile island.

The sea turtle was an animal with an emergent iconographic status, stemming partially from the beguiling impression it made on early Ceramic migrants to the Antilles, and then patented by them as an emblem of their uniqueness. I propose here that some trigonal zemis were, as custom and needs dictated at different times, evocations of all of

⁷⁸ Iosif Moravetz, *Imaging Adornos: Classification and Iconography of Saladoid Adornos from St. Vincent, West Indies* (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports International Series, 2005), 66.

⁷⁹ García-Goyco, "Nuevas Interpretaciones en Torno a la Iconografía de los Taínos," 50-58; Olsen, *On the Trail of the Arawaks*, 6-101, 118-119.

⁸⁰ Lennox Honychurch, *The Dominica Story* (London: Macmillan Education, 1995), 19.

⁸¹ García-Goyco, "Nuevas Interpretaciones en Torno a la Iconografía de los Taínos," 50-58; Honychurch, *The Dominica Story*, 19; Olsen, *On the Trail of the Arawaks*, 6-101.

these features of the island environment (i.e., frog, turtle, mountain, island) and indeed powerful symbols of an accumulated “island consciousness” but with the turtle at its ancestral font.

The Sheltering Turtle in Saladoid Architecture

Turtle iconography permeated the domestic sphere of the Saladoid, from the pots on the hearth to the roof over the people’s heads. In the early 1990s, Aad Versteeg and Kees Schinkel began publishing findings from their excavations on the Netherlands Antilles island of St. Eustatius in the Leewards. Postholes at that island’s Golden Rock site indicated that Saladoid malocas there (large houses) had a round floor plan of a type still seen in some mainland malocas today. However secondary structures connected to the main round house suggest the head, large front flippers and back legs of a turtle. After comparisons between the unusual posthole patterns of the dwelling and skeletons and carapaces of turtles, Veersteg and Schinkel published in 1992 that the house was indeed meant to evoke a turtle, not only in its floor plan but also in its thatched shape (figure 6.69).⁸² The fact that remains of several sea turtles were also found ritually buried at this site supports the importance of turtle iconography in Saladoid and post-Saladoid St.

Eustatius.⁸³

⁸² Moravetz, *Imaging Adornos*, 67-70; Kees Schinkel, “Golden Rock-1, St. Eustatius, Updated: The ’88 and ’89 Excavations,” in *Proceedings of the XIV Congress of the International Association for Caribbean Archaeology* (Barbados: International Association for Caribbean Archaeology, 1991), 578, 583-585; Aad H. Versteeg, “Archaeological Records from the Southern and eastern Caribbean Area. How Different and How Similar are They?,” in *Proceedings of the XVII Congress of the International Association for Caribbean Archaeology* (New York: Molloy College, 1997), 96-97.

⁸³ *Ibid.* The most definitive “turtle house” (i.e., Structure 6) of St. Eustatius has been dated for a period of occupation from the 7th to 9th centuries, thus spanning the Saladoid and post-Saladoid period but not reaching up to Taíno times (circa 1200-1500). Moravetz also surveys the Saladoid sites of Golden

The oval houses of late Saladoid and post-Saladoid Lesser Antilleans would have later analogues among the Taíno who lived in rectangular houses (*bohios*) but built round structures for their caciques, and as places of worship (*caney*s). Stevens-Arroyo likens the oval house to the turtle shell. “The Tukano believe that the *maloca*, or lodge, is a womb,” he says, citing Reichel-Dolmatoff’s study among that western Amazonian people, “and I would apply this religious thinking to the Taínos as well.”⁸⁴ As it happens, the Taíno *caney* design may have derived from earlier houses as at Golden Rock purposefully built to evoke the sheltering dome of the sacred turtle’s shell.⁸⁵

Rock, Punta Candelero in Puerto Rico and Grande Anse in St. Lucia where humans have been interred, with heads pointed east, that have overturned vessels on top of their faces and bodies or beside them that are of the common everted bowl (i.e., inverted bell-shaped) and dish types identified with turtles. Thus he tentatively attributes to turtles a funerary association.

⁸⁴ Antonio M. Stevens-Arroyo, *Cave of the Jagua: The Mythological World of the Taínos* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2006), 129.

⁸⁵ Malhotra and Thorpe, *Reptiles and Amphibians of the Eastern Caribbean*, 12; Suttly, *Fauna of the Caribbean*, 22. The word “maloca” is of some interest here in that it is probably related to the Guianian Arawak “morrocoy,” the word for land turtles (tortoises). Considering that sea turtles lie flat on their plastrons but morrocoys stand up tall (figure 40), might the turtle house (a domed roof on posts) not have derived from the sea turtle’s terrestrial cousin, *Geochelone carbonaria*? This species of tortoise is found throughout the Caribbean and South America, possibly as an introduction from the latter. It is an egg-laying, carrion eater, most active in the early morning and late afternoon. Thus it may have had a somewhat different symbolism not treated in this study.

GLOSSARY

adorno. Modeled or tabular ornamental addition to the handle, spout, rim or stopper of a ceramic vessel; often figural in Saladoid and Barrancoid pottery.

Amerindian. Indigenous peoples of the Americas; commonly used in Anglophone Caribbean literature for the region's Pre-Columbian inhabitants.

annular. Ceramic term designating a ring-like formation on the bottom of vessel that acts as its base.

Araquinoid. Pre-Columbian ceramic series that followed the Saladoid in the Lower Orinoco Valley around the 7th-8th centuries CE.

Arawak (Arawakan). Member of a large language family originating in Lowland Tropical South America, and now found throughout that region and the Antilles. Includes the Lokono of the Guianas, the Taíno of the Greater Antilles and some or most of the Saladoid-era peoples of the Lesser Antilles and Puerto Rico.

Barrancoid. Ceramic series of the Middle and Lower Orinoco River with distinctive, complexly modeled and incised pottery; from Rouse's classification system.

behique. Taíno term for ritual specialist or shaman.

cacique. Taíno term for ruler at the level of a chief, chieftain or king.

carinated. Ceramic term denoting a sudden turn in the profile of a vessel, sometimes making the vessel concave in one part and convex in another.

cauxi. Shell temper added to clay paste in pottery of the Lower Orinoco and the Guianas.

Chicoid. Ceramic series associated with the Taíno cultures of the Greater Antilles, *ca.* 1200-1500 CE; from Rouse's classification system.

Eastern Caribbean. The Lesser Antilles, especially from Antigua to Trinidad.

grog. Crushed pottery particles from old broken pots used to temper the clay for new ceramics

Huecoid. Ceramic series in Vieques, eastern Puerto Rico and the northern Leeward Islands, characterized by highly stylized, deeply incised, unpainted adornos; zone-incised markings; associated with a rich lapidary culture that employed the non-endemic king vulture as an important symbol.

icon. An image that is venerated either as an embodiment of or a vessel temporarily or permanently housing a spirit or deity.

Igneri. Presumably Arawak people preceding and co-existing with the Island Caribs in the Lesser Antilles at the time of Columbus.

incision. Line pressed into the surface of a moist or leather-hard ceramic, usually with the V-shaped or U-shaped edge of a stylus or other tool; can be considered engravings.

Leeward Islands. Islands of the Lesser Antilles from Dominica to the Virgin Islands. With prevailing winds blowing east to west, and the more westerly Leeward Islands are downwind of the Windward Islands.

Lower Orinoco. Delta region of the Orinoco River in Monagas and Delta Amacuro states of eastern Venezuela.

Lucayo. A people living in the Bahamas at the time of Columbus; related to the Taíno by marriage, political connections and language.

lug. Tabular or cylindrical protrusion on the ceramic vessel that enables it to be handled or lifted.

medallion. Incised, modeled or indented circular motif that appears frequently in Barrancoid, Cedrosan Saladoid and other later Saladoid ceramics, often marking the joints of modeled or incised figures.

Middle Orinoco. Portion of the Orinoco River where the river's northward course in central Venezuela turns eastwards; marked by the early Saladoid site of Ronquín in the state of Guárico.

navicular. Ceramic term describing a canoe-shaped vessel.

nubbin. Small, usually semi-spherical protrusion on a vessel in the same placement as adornos; a smaller, simpler type of modeled adornment.

Ostionoid. Ceramic series of the early second millennium CE in the Greater Antilles, ancestral to the Chicoid series of the Taíno; from Rouse's classification system.

Palmetto. Ceramic series created by the Lucayo; a ceramic term sometimes used to designate the Lucayo people.

phase. Period, or the style local to that period, in the overall development of a ceramic series; variant of a ceramic series associated with a particular period.

punctuation. Small, circular indentation made into the surface of moist or leather hard clay.

puncto-linear. Ceramic term for a line ending in a punctated dot.

Saladoid. Ceramic series of the Middle and Lower Orinoco, the Lesser Antilles and Puerto Rico characterized by boldly painted white-on-red polychrome and modeled and painted elements; from Rouse's classification system.

series. The unique morphology of a ceramic culture (such as the Saladoid, Barrancoid or Ostionoid), including various local and temporal styles of that series (such as Cedrosan-Saladoid, Los Barrancos Barrancoid etc.); from Rouse's classification system.

style. Variant of a ceramic series but possessing overall similarities with its parent series.

Taíno. An Arawakan people living in the Greater Antilles during the last three centuries before the conquest, divided into the Classic Taíno of Puerto Rico and Hispaniola, Western Taíno of Cuba, Jamaica and the Bahamas, and Eastern Taíno of the northern Leeward Islands.

Troumassoid. Ceramic series that immediately followed the Saladoid in the Lesser Antilles, characterized by more simply adorned pottery and the invention of legged griddles for cassava bread preparation; from Irving Rouse's classification system.

Windward Islands. The most easterly islands of the Lesser Antilles stretching from Trinidad to Martinique, named for the prevailing trade winds that reach their shores first, blowing east to west.

WOR (white-on-red). Polychrome slip decoration on Saladoid ceramics, involving elaborate curvilinear motifs painted white on red or buff backgrounds, creating figure-ground reversals.

zemi. An icon or other object of veneration in the Pre-Columbian Antilles, believed to have magical properties and functions.

ZIC (zone-incised-crosshatched). Enclosed zones of crosshatched incisions on Barrancoid and Huecoid ceramics.

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