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Everything has its Jaguar. A narratological approach to conceptualising Caribbean Saladoid animal imagery

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Chapter 1. Everything has its jaguar

The Arawakan proverb: “*Hamáro kamungka turuwat*” (roughly translated as “Everything has its (own) jaguar”²), which caught my eye three years ago, inspired me while writing the present dissertation. As with most sayings, it is powerful because it phrases simply yet vigorously a deep understanding of the world. This proverb does not describe (nor transmit) any knowledge, it *is* knowledge. I will not elaborate on these four words at this stage but hope they may continue to linger in your mind as they still do in mine.

The above figure of speech expresses a human assumption on ontology, whereby it not only negotiates what constitutes being “human”, or “animal” but also shapes relations with others (both human and non-human, e.g., animals, spirits). The present study deals with Amerindian³ ontologies and how they form the perception of material culture, specifically in relation to “animal imagery”.

Through a comprehensive narratological analyses the present research examines Caribbean iconography which, in our Western perspective, features esoteric and/or fantasy animals. I aim not only at improving our understanding of the social functions of these images and the items on which they are displayed, but also the native perceptions of them as expressed in

² Although this is a translation based on an Arawakan dictionary, a more accurate translation ought to be: All things and creatures have their own Jaguar.

³ Throughout this dissertation the term “Amerindian(s)” denotes indigenous populations as is general practice among the English-speaking residents of the Caribbean and the Guianas.

Amerindian narratives. To this goal, the latter are analysed as expressions of indigenous worldviews.

From c.400 BCE on, the (Early) Ceramic Age in the Caribbean is marked by the beginning of a comprehensive cultural local tradition called Saladoid. Its material culture is characterized by extensive animal imagery depicted on ceramics, encountered as amulets and carved in stone, shell or bone. This zoomorphic imagery can be quite naturalistic, but is also intermingled with anthropomorphic elements, resulting in examples of human-animal in-betweenness. Many of these images have been identified as a specific animal or bird, that is as zoomorphic motifs. Whereas previous studies include identified trends and preferences displayed in these motifs, the present research seeks to answer the question: why are certain animals more prominently encountered in Saladoid material culture than others?

Comparative analysis of modelled and incised ceramic animal figurines, or head lugs (*adornos*), serves as a case study in order to determine the most prominent motifs. However, Saladoid animal imagery is also depicted or portrayed by means of mediums other than pottery, e.g., shell, bone, stone amulets, and petroglyphs. Animal teeth and bones are also applied as tools, instruments or means of adornment, hereby facilitating several additional avenues of research. This wide variety of mediums provides an opportunity to explore whether specific zoomorphic motifs and their ways of display are correlated. Moreover, possibilities to extrapolate social functions of animal imagery and (in our view “decorated”) goods are opened.

A story to tell: objectives and research questions

This study thus examines the Caribbean Saladoid iconography identified elsewhere either as being zoomorphic or anthropo-zoomorphic. The indigenous perceptions and (social) functions are problematized in the present publication. It questions that the identification of zoomorphic motifs in Saladoid iconography could reflect the perceptions of the researcher and less those upheld by the creator, the indigenous audience and those who utilise these examples of material culture. This research also aims at further improving our understanding of other ontologies as the analysis of narratives, being considered expressions of indigenous worldviews, is a means to conceptualise zoomorphic motifs. This study further explores possible social functions by correlating specific narratological motifs to the varied manners “animals” (probably) are portrayed (e.g., as modelled figurines on pottery, stone amulets, included in songs/narratives or rituals).

The main objective of this research is: to provide a frame of reference and conceptualisation of ancient (Saladoid) Caribbean animal imagery. How can the conceptualisation of animal imagery inform us about the socio-cultural behaviour of indigenous Caribbean societies? The following additionally specified questions have become key:

- (a) which animals are most prominently encountered in ancient (Saladoid) material culture of the insular Caribbean and Venezuela?
- (b) which attributes and roles are ascribed to specific animals in South American oral tradition and with what or whom are they associated within the narratives, and in which context?
- (c) why are certain animals more prominent in the iconography than others?

As the Saladoid archaeological record is especially rich in *adornos*, they will serve as a case study in order to explore the most prominent animal motifs. These identified motifs are then contextualised and conceptualised through an analysis of the narratives. The methods utilised here are based on narratology and focus on specific animal actors. In the narratives, the animal actors are staged in specific temporal and spatial settings, in which they are not only ascribed specific attributes and roles but also interact with other actors. The methods of narratology contribute to establishing patterns, trends and deviations. The theory of perspectivism is applied as an indigenous conceptual framework in order to explore the “meaning” of the narratives and the animal actors. To further enrich our understanding of indigenous perceptions ethnographic as well as historical references are included.

Now the main objectives and research question are set, the remaining sections of this first chapter will provide us with a general eco-cultural framework, considering: (a) the mainland of South America as the largest source of narratives, and (b) the Caribbean archipelago from which the archaeological/iconographical materials scrutinised hail from. This duality of geographical areas, to be exact mainland vs. islands, lies beneath this research. Defining these areas as part of a single cultural region justifies this amassing of the Caribbean and South American data. It further contributes to understanding how South American narratives can serve to conceptualise Saladoid Caribbean imagery because they narrate meaning and embody indigenous ontologies.

1.1 Interconnected relationships of the Island peoples

Unfortunately, very few indigenous communities still populating the insular Caribbean possess a direct line of descent with the Early Ceramic Age peoples, whose imagery is investigated here. The facts that: (a) South American migrants most probably inhabited these islands (see 1.1.1), and (b) the insular communities have always been part of a broad (multi-regional) sphere of interaction (see 1.1.2), result in it being justifiable to utilise mainland Amazonian narratives for a study on ancient Antillean imagery. Therefore it is imperative for this particular research to comprehend the (cultural) interrelatedness between the insular Caribbean and (in particular) the South American mainland. As will be discussed below, the Caribbean islanders have never been isolated from other islands or from their counterparts residing in the surrounding American mainland areas. Peoples, ideas, forms of knowledge, goods and animals were mobile and/or exchanged (Bright 2011; Curet 2004, 2005; Curet et al.

2005; Hofman & Hoogland 2011; Hofman & Van Duijvenbode 2011; Hofman et al. 2007, 2010, 2011; Isendoorn et al. 2008; Mol 2013; Rodríguez Ramos 2010).

1.1.1 Populating the islands

The storyline of this dissertation starts off with the development of ceramic-making horticulturalists (associated with the Saladoid ceramic series) who migrated to the islands in c.800-200 BCE. Nevertheless, the populating of the islands began much earlier.

It is generally agreed upon that the first settlers in the Caribbean archipelago originated from various parts of Central and/or South America to reach these islands as early as between 7000 and 5000 BCE. This first wave is referred to as the “Lithic Age”. Their exact migration routes and the places of departure are still a matter of debate (Callaghan 2001; Fitzpatrick 2013; Hofman & Hoogland 2018; Hofman et al. 2011; Keegan & Hofman 2017: 25-7; Roksandic 2016: 7-16; Rouse 1992; Siegel 1992; Wilson et al. 1998).

As yet we know very little about this Lithic Age. The earliest sites are located on Trinidad, Cuba, and Hispaniola (Keegan & Hofman 2017: 23). These first settlers have been correlated with the Banwarioid and Casimiroid series in Rouse’s taxonomy (Antczak et al. 2018; Keegan & Hofman 2017; Pagan Jiménez et al. 2015; Rouse 1992). Very recent research indicates that early migrants may not only have developed pottery skills even before the arrival of the Ceramic Age peoples (<800/200 BCE) but also managed and modified the landscape (e.g., by means of growing cultivated plants, “home gardening”) even further than previously assumed (Chinique de Armas et al. 2016: 146; DeFrance & Newsom 2005: 126; Hofman et al. 2011: 73; Pagan Jiménez et al. 2015; Rodríguez Ramos et al. 2008; Roksandic 2016: 126; Wilson 2007: 84). In addition, ongoing research indicates the coevality of the Late Archaic and Early Ceramic Age, hereby opening the possibility of the transfer of knowledge, skills and expertise between Archaic groups and Early Ceramic migrants (Chanlatte Baik 2013: 174-5; Curet 2005; Hofman et al. 2011: 73; Siegel 2005: xvi).

These Archaic Age travellers were apparently mobile and moved across islands while exploiting a variety of resources (Hofman et al. 2006). This migrating involved seasonal activities as, for instance, has been suggested with regard to the (inland, elevated) Plum Piece site on Saba (3300 BP). This Archaic site which was probably seasonally inhabited between February and July, could have been utilised for manufacturing dug-out canoes and/or gathering plants for consumption and medicinal purposes (Hofman & Hoogland 2003: 17, 21, 23; 2016: 42-3, 48, 52, 2018; Hofman et al. 2018a/b).

The material culture associated with the Archaic Age comprises a variety of woodworking and food processing tools, e.g., grinding stones, mortars, axes and blades (Hofman & Hoogland 2016: 47; Wilson 2007: 31-55). The raw materials applied to produce such items are diverse and include coral, conch shell (*Lobatus gigas*), and stone from which blade and chert flake

tools were made. Certain decorative artefacts have been recovered, too (e.g., shell and stone pendants, polished stone beads) (Wilson 2007: 48, 50). Noteworthy is a coral artefact hailing from Fort Bay Hill (Saba) dated 800-400 BCE which has a bat- or feline-shaped face (Hofman & Hoogland 2016: 66). This object may well be (one of) the first zoomorphic images found in the Lesser Antilles.

The fact that ceramic-making horticulturalists (associated with the Saladoid ceramic series) migrated to the islands in c.400 BCE is generally agreed upon. The region(s) of origin and the routes are nevertheless as yet debatable. Associated theories are, for instance, the “stepping-stone theory” (Keegan & Diamond 1987), whereby one moved northwards progressively, or the “direct jump” theory (Callaghan 2013; Fitzpatrick 2013). The latter suits better with archaeological evidence and accepts that the first settlers arrived directly on northern islands and the Greater Antilles (see 2.1). However, the most established theory maintains that (Arawakan) ceramic-making horticulturalists rode a wave of migrations in order to enter the Caribbean archipelago from South America between 800 and 200 BCE. Next, they interacted with the Archaic Age peoples residing on Puerto Rico and the northern Lesser Antilles (Haviser 1997; Hofman & Hoogland 2004; Hofman et al. 2011; Keegan 2004; Keegan & Hofman 2017; Wilson 2007). See 2.1 for a more elaborate description of this subject.

It is assumed that these Amerindians set off from Venezuela and north-western Guyana, travelled down the Orinoco River to settle down in the Lesser and Greater Antilles in an area stretching from Trinidad to Puerto Rico. The sudden appearance of Saladoid culture, the intensification of horticulture and ceramic manufacture as well as the establishment of large sedentary settlements on Puerto Rico and the northern Lesser Antilles marks the beginning of the Ceramic Age (Bérard 2013; Fitzpatrick 2013; Keegan & Hofman 2017: 51-4; Rouse 1986, 1992; Siegel 2005). Alternative models give rise to opinions that divergent and/or multiple origins of the various cultural and ethnic groups are more probable (Bérard 2013; Fitzpatrick 2013; Hill & Santos-Granero 2002; Hofman et al. 2007, 2010, 2011; Laffoon 2012; Rodríguez Ramos 2010; Rodríguez Ramos & Pagán Jiménez 2006).

These new models depict an image of a diversity of communities over space and time, all with strong interaction spheres, exchange networks and a continuity of long-distance voyaging across the islands and including mainland areas of both South and Central America (Boomert & Bright 2007; Bright 2011; Curet 2004, 2005; Hofman & Hoogland 2011; Hofman & van Duijvenbode 2011; Hofman et al. 2007, 2010, 2011; Mol 2013, 2014; Rodríguez Ramos 2010). Especially innovative techniques such as multiple isotope analyses have recently supported these models (Hofman et al. 2007, 2008, 2010, 2011; Hofman & Hoogland 2011; Keegan & Hofman 2017; Laffoon 2012, 2013, 2014; Laffoon & Hoogland 2012; Mol 2013, see 1.1.2).

1.1.2 Unity through diversity

In the course of recent decades, Caribbean archaeologists have been able to broaden their field by incorporating the coastal regions of Central and South America, while referring to the pan-Caribbean paradigm (i.e., the Circum-Caribbean cultural area). The pan-Caribbean has proven to be a valuable perspective when studying the complex, multi-faceted archaeological records of the indigenous Caribbean peoples, hereby disclosing broad networks of interactions. The archaeological record shows the interchanging of goods as well as the mobility of peoples between the islands and the mainland. Even from the very beginning of island colonization, the exchange of peoples, goods and ideas indicates a continuity in relative long-distance voyaging (e.g., Hofman et al. 2010; Mol 2013).

The trading of goods through contact with other regions becomes visible when, for instance, non-local materials are discovered at sites. A connection with mainland areas is also clear when considering the iconographical display of mainland fauna, e.g., on ceramics and in the form of pendants made of shell, wood, or precious stone. In addition, bone and the (perforated) teeth of mainland (not native to the Caribbean islands) species (e.g., jaguar, caiman, peccary) are found in the Caribbean islands (e.g., Boomert 2000; Grouard et al. 2013; Hofman et al. 2007; Laffoon et al. 2013, 2014; Plomp 2013; Roe 1989; Siegel 1991).

Moreover, archaeologists have come across other items with a presumed non-local provenance. For instance, Early Ceramic Age jadeite artefacts found on Vieques, Antigua, St. Eustatius with a tentative (even probable) Guatemalan or Dominican provenance (Garcia-Casco et al. 2013; Harlow et al. 2006; Shertl et al. 2018). Links to South America have been suggested based on the evidence of: (a) artefacts, often carved green stone, “frog”-shaped pendants (*muiraquitã*), and (b) the *kwepi* tree (*Licania* sp.) the burned bark of which is applied to temper ceramics on Saint Vincent (Boomert 1987, 2000; Crock & Petersen 2004; Hofman et al. 2007, 2011). A number of these “exotic” goods could indeed have become “social valuables”, even increasing in value as they move from hand to hand (Boomert 1987; Knippenberg 2006; Mol 2007, 2010, 2014; Oliver 2009).

Innovative techniques, such as DNA and isotope analysis, enable archaeologists to better grasp patterns of mobility (i.e., movement of peoples). These studies reveal the presence of non-locals, both human and animals, among local populations (Hoogland et al. 2010: 149; Laffoon 2012; Laffoon & Hoogland 2012; Laffoon et al. 2013, 2014; Plomp 2013; Schroeder et al. 2018). Moreover, they disclose that migration is not a one-directional movement, but rather a diverse, complex, dynamic process (Curet 2005; Curet et al. 2005; Laffoon 2012). These analyses have shown that Caribbean migrations involved small and large-scale movements of groups with various origins (Hofman et al. 2010; Hofman & Hoogland 2011; Laffoon 2012; Rodríguez Ramos 2010).

A number of general mechanisms could underlie the both extensive and complex exchange networks, such as lifeline exchange networks whereby the availability of goods and (marriageable) individuals is ensured (Moore 2001; Walter et al. 2010: 510). Considering the Caribbean, these “lifelines” could interconnect islands as well as link certain islands to the mainland (Hofman et al. 2011; Keegan 2004, 2010). Nevertheless, exchange was and still probably is more than a necessity. It is, in fact, a dynamic social process (Hofman et al. 2007, 2008) as well as a conscious strategy aimed at impacting interaction and regional integration (Hofman et al. 2007: 247; Mans 2012).

The aforementioned studies on ancient mobility and exchange show that migrations and interactions are not only variable, diverse and complex, but also that they reach specific archipelagos to include interactions with mainland areas. Trading (foreign) goods and the movement of peoples also entail an interaction between communities as well as the exchange of information and beliefs, resulting in what we now refer to as the Pan-Caribbean paradigm.

1.2 Geographical boundaries

It is unlikely that prehistoric occupants recognised the same boundaries and responded to the same political forces that operated in the formation of current states, or cities (Siegel 2005: xv).

Defining cultural and/or geographical boundaries whenever any form of research is carried out implies choices and therefore limitations, i.e., which “ethnic groups” and which areas are to be included and which ones excluded? Regardless of the set boundaries, these dividing lines are not likely to reflect actual patterns of past human movement and interaction within the region (Hofman & Bright 2010; Keegan & Hofman 2017; Mol 2014; Rodríguez Ramos 2010). Nevertheless, as arbitrary limitations form a necessity for all scholarly studies, these have been selected to correspond best with the goal of the present research. A broad, inclusive region constrained by extensive spheres of interaction is required, because South American narratives are examined here in order to contribute to our understanding of the Saladoid animal imagery of the insular Caribbean.

The Circum-Caribbean culture area forms a starting point for considering the geographical boundaries dealt with in this research. The concept of the Circum-Caribbean⁴ concerns a broad geographical area, including all the archipelagos located in the Caribbean Sea, the Bahamas, and parts of the adjacent continental mainland, namely, the coastal zones of South, Central and North America, from the Guianas to the Florida peninsula, see Fig. 1.1 (Keegan & Hofman 2017; Rodríguez Ramos 2011).

⁴ The concept of the Circum-Caribbean was introduced in Julian Steward (1947). Steward postulates that the original hunting and gathering groups that populated South America, developed a culture with pottery, a priest class, and territorial governments (which he describes as “formative”), in the central Andes. From here it spread northward into Central America, northern Colombia, Venezuela and the Antilles, the cultures of which he refers to as Circum-Caribbean.

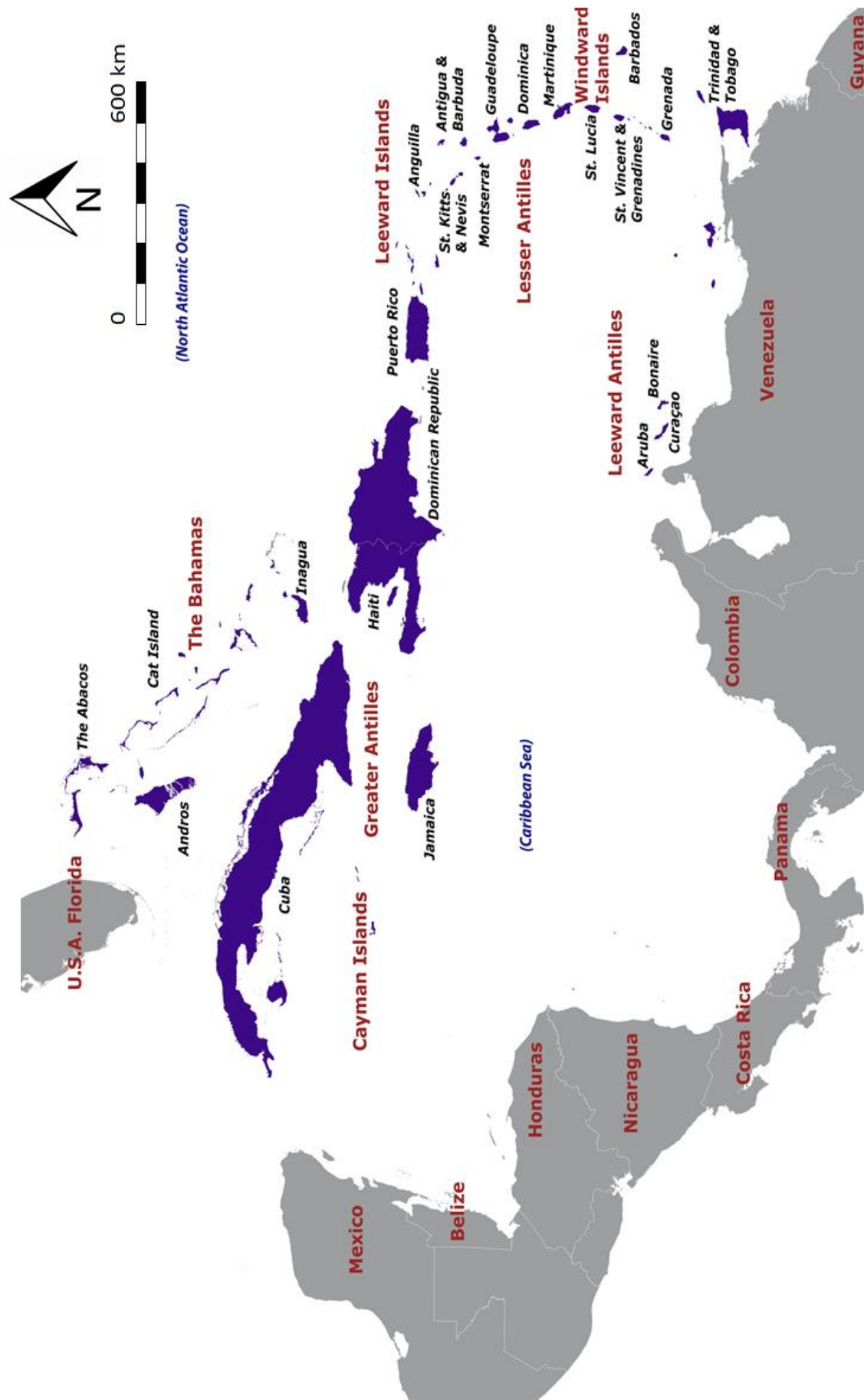


Fig. 1.1. The Circum-Caribbean with the insular Caribbean marked; courtesy of P. van der Linden; modified by the author.

The insular Caribbean, a region that partly overlaps with that of the Circum-Caribbean region, comprises a series of large and small islands and archipelagos. However, within the present study, the term “Caribbean archipelago” refers to the insular Caribbean as a whole which includes: (a) the Bahamian archipelago, (b) the Greater Antilles (Puerto Rico, Hispaniola, Cuba, Jamaica), (c) the Lesser Antilles (the northern Leeward Islands, and the southern Windward Islands), (d) the South Caribbean islands (including Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, the Los Roques archipelago and other Venezuelan islands). Trinidad and Tobago are sometimes considered part of the Windward Islands, but being closest to the South American mainland (see Fig. 1.1) these islands were connected to the mainland as recently as 6000 BCE, resulting in a more continental fauna and flora (Boomert 2014; Hofman & Hoogland 2018; Keegan et al. 2013; Rouse 1961, 1964; Wilson 2007).

The numerous islands of the Caribbean vary as to landforms and geological features. They include volcanic and limestone islands, which mainly are tropic (i.e., with a wet and a dry season). The vast majority lies within the North Atlantic Hurricane Belt. One of the smallest isles is Saba (13 km²) and the largest island is Cuba (110,922 km²) on which the highest peak measures 1,972 m. Certain isles are relatively flat, others hilly or even mountainous. Trinidad and Tobago closely resemble the mainland conditions and are home to the largest number of mammals. Moreover, Trinidad is the only island with an autochthonous feline species (i.e., ocelot, *Panthera pardalis*). As this research does not focus on (a) specific island(s), this variety of animals is too extensive to discuss here.⁵ Several models and theories on the presence of animal species in the Caribbean archipelago which explain their extinction as well as their dissemination across this region nonetheless have been provided.

However, the reader should be aware of this huge variety of environmental conditions, and therefore of the flora and fauna, too. Whenever the mainland is taken into consideration, the number of dissimilarities is even larger. As this research focusses on zoomorphic iconography, the animals dealt with here are also discussed while placed within their natural contexts (see Chapters 5-7). This survey includes the presence of species, their absence and diversity in the mainland of South America (i.e., the original location of the narratives) and the Caribbean archipelago (i.e., the provenance of Saladoid iconography referred to in this study).

1.2.1 Study region and core area of narrative collection

Unfortunately, very few narratives have been handed down to us by the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean islands (the Greater and the Lesser Antilles). During the 15th century, Fray Ramón Pané wrote down “Taíno” “myths” originating from the Greater Antilles (Pané 1999 [1498]). In the course of the 20th century, Douglas Taylor recorded narratives from the Island

⁵ For further information on this region’s biogeography and on its origin, biodiversity, flora and fauna, see Williams 1989, Woods 1989, Wood & Sergile 2001.

Carib of Dominica (Taylor 1938, 1946, 1952).⁶ Therefore, narratives from mainland South America have also been incorporated into the present research to complement the limited available insular ones.

The map (see Fig. 1.2) of South America and the Caribbean indicates the study region for the present research, the core area is indicated by means of an ellipsoid. In total 431 (61%) narratives hail from this core area.⁷ The core area includes the northern parts of South America which form part of the Circum-Caribbean: Guianas (Guyana, Suriname, French Guiana), Venezuela, Northern/Central Colombia, and parts of Northern Brazil. Narratives originating from Central and North America have not been added to this survey (with the exception of a few stories from Panama).

The majority of the narratives studied here stem from written sources acquired by missionaries, anthropologists, linguists and other researchers. This research thankfully profits from the work not only carried out by predecessors but also by other passionate researchers such as Johannes Wilbert and Karin Simoneau, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Theodor Koch-Grünberg. The hundreds of narratives presented in examples of their extensive research⁸ provided me with very accessible data.

Part of the data applied in the present study originates from outside the designated core area i.e., Southern Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay and even Argentina (see Fig. 1.2). Narratives from these regions are only incorporated when C. Lévi-Strauss, J. Wilbert and K. Simoneau suggest a strong affinity with narratives known from the core area. Such an affinity stems from similarities in motifs or general themes encountered in the narratives (see also 2.2.1). These conformities are thus incorporated in order to reveal any (regional) continuity of motifs and themes within a broader perspective than the study area. As I did not focus on these areas located outside the designated core area, the selection of incorporated narratives from these other countries/regions is rather arbitrary and in no sense exhaustive. Narratives with similar motifs, or themes, could (and presumably were) part of the repertoire of indigenous peoples not included in this study, such as communities established in North and Central America, or even further afield.

⁶ During the 16th and 17th centuries, missionaries, historian/priests (e.g., Father Raymond Breton, Jacques Bouton, Jean Baptiste Du Tertre) documented general beliefs and customs of the Island Carib. These records do not include (entire) narratives, but provide us with references to “myths” as well as with general indigenous ideas which are added to the present research whenever the animal icons are taken into consideration as to a broader discussion on animal symbolism.

⁷ For a complete map with an overview of all narratives, see 4.1.2, Fig. 4.1 (p. 109).

⁸ E.g., scholarly publications on the folktales of the South American Amerindians (Wilbert 1974, 1975, 1985; Wilbert & Simoneau 1970, 1978, 1991, 1992) and on the mythology of South America (Lévi-Strauss 1973, 1983, 1990 [1968], 1990 [1981]: see 2.2.1). Theodor Koch-Grünberg, the noted German explorer-cum-anthropologist (1872-1924), studied the Pemon Amerindians of Venezuela, the indigenous peoples of Brazil as well as other South American Amerindians (Koch-Grünberg 1921, 1916-1928).



Fig. 1.2. Study region with the core area marked (based on iStock/PeterHermesFurian)

Utilising the South American mainland communities as a means to conceptualise Caribbean archaeology is not a new approach. Since the mid-20th century, the concept of Tropical Forest cultures has widely served to interpret both Amazonian and Caribbean pasts (Steward 1947; Steward & Faron 1959; Viveiros de Castro 1996: 180). Originally these cultures are characterized as being nurtured by slash-and-burn manioc cultivators who inhabit autonomous, small-scale villages numbering between 20 and 50 individuals. However, more recent studies indicate that the Amazon region was potentially able to sustain substantially larger populations, also in the (ancient) past. This assumption, once supported by historical references and by the discovery of larger sites (Isbell 2008: 1147; Lathrap 1970: 46-7; Roosevelt et al. 1991; Roosevelt 1999: 19-28), has led to the opinion that the Tropical Forest cultures are in actual fact a more recent development.

Tropical lowland cultures also formed part of broad interaction spheres occupied by peoples from other (more southern) regions. Cartographic knowledge regarding these long-distance (trade) networks is even today preserved in ritual chants and oral histories of Arawakan speakers residing in the north-western part of the Amazon rainforest (Hill 2011: 261-5). Moreover, these broad networks of exchange are also reflected in the oral narratives which display similar motifs and themes as encountered throughout Amazonia and beyond. This is the reason why such a wide variety of narratives is incorporated in the present research (see also 2.2).

What I hope to have shown in sections 1.1 and 1.2 is that setting regional boundaries is problematic, and that the Pan-Caribbean region concept is best understood as multiple-cultural area in which peoples were interconnected through broad interaction spheres. The core area as defined in this study are the regions part of the Circum-Caribbean, but the study region, from where narratives have been collected, stretches even further to establish cross-cultural and regional patterns.

1.3 Languages, cultures and communities

The Circum-Caribbean has been described as “a cultural and linguistic mosaic with group boundaries constantly being renegotiated and shifted through time within a multitude of networks that were being formed” (Hofman & Carlin 2010: 107). This region includes a vast variety of communities and cultures. Although languages do not equal ethnic groups, within this research, spoken languages serve as “ethnic” markers (i.e., a means to differentiate). Attempts to explain the distribution of languages and indigenous communities in especially Amazonia are often based on the essentialist assumption that ethnolinguistic groups are more or less bounded, comprising genetically distinct populations that reached their current domiciles by means of migrating (Hornborg & Hill 2011: 1). More recently, researchers identified a much more fluid relationship between ethnic identity, geography, the use of language and genetics (Carlin & Mans 2015; Heckenberger 2002, 2011; Hofman & Carlin 2010; Hornborg & Hill 2011).

When the Europeans arrived they observed a large degree of linguistic homogeneity in the Antilles. Only a few distinct languages were noted: (a) so-called “Taíno”, which stretched from the Bahamian Islands to the Leeward Islands north of Guadeloupe, (b) Macorís which is native to parts of Hispaniola, (c) Ciguayo spoken in the northeastern coast of Hispaniola, (d) Guanahatabey spoken in western Cuba, and (e) Eñeri/Island Carib spoken in the Windward Islands. We read: “Certainly from A.D. 1 until about A.D. 500, Taíno was the language of the realm and a lingua franca understood and used by all throughout both the Greater and the Lesser Antilles, regardless of their native tongue” (Granberry 2013: 64).

Taíno is identified as an Arawakan language. The language of the Island Carib, although considering themselves as “Carib”, is characterized by two variants of Northern Arawakan: female and male. The latter includes numerous lexical borrowings from the Kaliña (Cariban) language (Taylor 1977). A relatively large corpus of information is available on the “Taíno” and the Island Carib languages (e.g., Breton et al. 1665, 1929 [1609]; de La Borde 1886; Du Tertre et al. 1667; Granberry 2013; Granberry & Vescelius 2004; Pané 1999 [1498]; Taylor 1938, 1946, 1952, 1977; Taylor & Hoff 1980).

Three of the aforementioned languages are discussed, namely Ciguayo, Macorís and Guanahatabey. Links to the Tol language of Honduras, Chibchan and Waroid⁹ (Granberry 2013: 62, 68; Roksandic 2016: 12-3) have been suggested. It is further claimed that the earliest arrivals, during the Archaic Age (7000-5000 BCE), were Warao speakers (Boomert 2000: 88; Granberry 2013: 62-3). Their language is an isolate and thus differs from the Arawakan and Cariban languages spoken by the Amerindians during the Contact Period and the contemporary horticultural inhabitants of the Guianas and the Venezuelan coastal zone. This fact is thought to imply that Warao formed the language of the Archaic Age peoples of the Caribbean (Boomert 2000: 88; Granberry 2013: 63-4; see also 1.1.1).

By and large, languages share words. It can thus prove to be very difficult to determine from which language family a word was borrowed. As an example of this take the Warao word for white heron (*wara*), which, however, also occurs in Cariban languages (Hofman & Carlin 2010: 115). Establishing linguistic provenances for toponyms can be problematic, too. For instance, the name for Saint Lucia, *Ioüanalao* (Island of the Iguanas) is a term which has a Cariban locative (*-lao*) attached to an Arawakan noun *ioüana-* (iguana) which could indeed stem from the Cariban language (Hofman & Carlin 2010: 116). Especially names given to the flora and fauna are similar across the Cariban and the Arawakan languages spoken on the Guiana coast. It is possible that these terms go back to a very early shared (perhaps Tupian) layer (Hofman & Carlin 2010: 116, note 16).

⁹ Presuming that, along the Venezuelan coastline, a number of Warao-related languages were spoken, these early Warao communities residing in Venezuela are referred to as Waroid, see Granberry 2013: 63.

Of importance to this research is the realisation that the majority of these identified “Antillean” languages belong to the Arawakan, Cariban, Warao and Chibchan language families. The designated core area of this investigation concerns these four languages. Languages from mainland Amazonia are even more diverse, while the Cariban and Arawakan languages belong to the major Amazonian language families. As the present dissertation includes narratives expressed in a huge variety of languages and (sub)groups, they are discussed here briefly. The main reason of this is: spoken languages serve as “ethnic” markers (i.e., means to differentiate), even though it is acknowledged that languages do not equal ethnic groups (Carlin & Mans 2015; Heckenberger 2002, 2011; Hofman & Carlin 2010; Hornborg & Hill 2011).

Comparative research has revealed a broad linguistic diversity of Amazonian languages. It has been suggested that there are more than 50 linguistic stocks and some 300 languages (Everett 2010; Nichols 1990). The main Amazonian language families are Tupian, Macro-Gê, Cariban, and Arawakan, each of which number approx. 30 languages (Everett 2010: 320). Communities are connected and boundaries are thus, culturally and linguistically, in constant negotiation. The rivers in Amazonia function as means of communication and not as boundaries and the sea provides an “aquatic motorway” (Carlin & van Goethem 2009; Hofman & Carlin 2010: 7-8). Therefore, although the communities differ linguistically and culturally, they also share many cultural traits. Their ways of life were very similar as a result of a shared history, living in similar environments and intensive contacts between the varied linguistic communities.¹⁰

In this research, the five language families encountered in the core area are: (a) Cariban, (b) Arawakan, (c) Warao, (d) Tupian, and (e) Guajiboan.¹¹ The families (a-d) are present in the Guianas, the northern (bordering) parts of Brazil and Venezuela. On the other hand, the Guajiboan languages (Sikuaní and Cuiva) are spoken on the Venezuelan border with Colombia (see Table 1.1). The “Taíno” and Island Carib (both Arawakan) speakers are also dealt with in this research.

Many Cariban languages (estimated to number between 39 and 60) are now extinct (Carlin 2007: 7, note 4). The 25 extant Cariban languages are mainly to be found north of the Amazon, in the Guianas and on the Caribbean coasts of Venezuela and Colombia (Boomert 2000: 116; Carlin 2007: 7, note 4).

¹⁰ See Hornborg & Hill 2011 for an example of how the Arawakan communities demonstrate a remarkable coherence and persistence with regard to their specific, characteristic cultural repertoires over time (Heckenberger 2011: 57-74; Hornborg & Hill 2011). See Hill & Santos-Granero 2002 for further information on this subject.

¹¹ A single Chibchan (Cuna; source: Colombia/Panama) narrative is included in this research, see Fig. 4.1. Apparently “Taíno” terms may have been borrowed from Cariban, Arawakan, Warao or even Chibchan languages (Hofman & Carlin: 2010: 115).

The Arawakan language family numbered 65, of which 31 are now extinct. Those still spoken today are encountered in the western part of the Amazon Basin, the Venezuelan and Colombian Llanos, along the coast of the Guianas and, formerly, in the West Indies (Boomert 2000: 116).

Tupian is the third major language family of the northern parts of South America, preceded by Cariban and Arawakan. Tupian languages are predominately distributed in south-east Amazonia. The Tupian narratives included in this research all originate from outside the core area. Tupian languages are, however, currently spoken in French Guiana (see Table 1.1 and Fig. 4.1 (p. 109) for a map of all the narratives).

Warao is a language isolate of which c.5,000 speakers can be found in Guyana. It has become (nearly) extinct in Suriname. As many as c.28,000 Warao speakers still live in Venezuela (Source: Ethnologue April 2017) (Carlin & Van Goethem 2009: 8; Lewis et al. 2016; Simons & Fennig 2017).

Table 1.1. Language distribution in the core area based on (the major) language families encountered in Colombia, Venezuela, the Guianas and northern Brazil.¹²

Language family	Colombia (northern)	Venezuela	Guyana	Suriname	French Guiana	Brazil (northern)
Cariban	Yukpa	Kaliña/Kari'na	Kaliña	Kaliña/Kari'na	Kaliña	Kachuana
		Yukpa	Waiwai	Wayana	Wayana	
		Macushi	Akawaio	Akurio/Akuriyo		
		Pemon	Kapon	Trio		
		Akawaio	Macushi	Sikiiyana		
		Arekuna	Pemon	Tunayana		
		Taulipang	Kachuana	(Katuenta)		
		Uapes				
		Yabarana				
Arawakan	Tariana (extinct)	Lokono Baré	Lokono Wapishana	Lokono Mawayana	Lokono Palikur	Tariana
Guajiboan	Sikuani	Sikuani				
	Cuiva	Cuiva				
Tupian					Wayãpi (Oijampi)	
					Teko (Emerillon, Merêyo)	
Warao		Warao	Warao	Warao (nearly extinct)		

¹² Table 1.1 is not a complete list of all languages or of language families encountered in these regions. It merely mentions all languages referred to in this research. The additional languages mentioned here

The two Guajiboan languages (Sikuani and Cuiva) are not found in the Guianas, but their speakers inhabit the Orinoco River area located in Colombia and Venezuela. Three more languages form part of this language family: Macaguane, Guayabero and Churuya (Adelaar & Muysken 2004). All in all, there are currently c.37,000 Cuiva and Sikuani speakers.¹³

All in all, five language families originating from the core area are encountered among communities spread across Colombia, Venezuela, Suriname, Guyana, French Guiana and beyond. Table 1.1 presents the language distribution in the core area based on (the major) language families in Colombia, Venezuela, Guianas, and northern Brazil.

Nevertheless, this study incorporates narratives as well as anthropologic references linked to peoples from beyond this core area, including speakers of other Arawakan and Cariban languages. Focusing on the included material alone, Arawakan narratives not originating from within the core area were shared by Apurinã, Chané, Münkü, Machiguenga, Mojo and Tereno speakers (i.e., from Central/South Brazil, Bolivia, Argentina and Peru). Three Bakairí narratives are the only examples hailing from Cariban-speaking peoples residing outside the core area (i.e., Central Brazil).

In addition, certain peoples border(ed), or live(d) relatively near the core area. For instance, several Tupian narratives were provided by Tembé and Shipaya speakers, who are from the north of Pará and Amazonas, two states located in northern Brazil. The Tucanoan narratives from central Colombia were provided by Cubeo, Tanimuca, and Tucano speakers residing either relatively close to or immediately next to the core area.

Another point to stress here is the fact that the majority of the languages have alternative names, which on occasion are similar (e.g., Macushi, Makusi), whereas others differ (e.g., Kariña, Galibi, Kari'nya). When referring to other authors, I have adopted the name(s) they use and will add them as provided here between brackets (see also 4.1.2).

1.4 General outlines

This first chapter has started out with a short introduction to this dissertation, leading to the description of the main objectives and research questions. Next, the geographical and cultural parameters of this research were laid out by introducing the study region and core area, an area covering the Caribbean archipelago and the bordering South American mainland. This

and *not* included are italicised. The languages listed for Brazil are located just inside the core area (i.e., encountered in the most northern parts of Amazonas, Pará, Roraima and Amapá). See 4.1.2, Fig. 4.1 (on p. 109) for a plot displaying all the narratives. Glottolog has served to map the languages (Hammerström et al. 2017).

¹³ See *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* (Sikuani is “Guahibo” and Cuiva is “Cuiba”), accessed 13 December 2017; Lewis et al. 2016. <https://www.ethnologue.com>.

island-mainland link is important because it supports the assumption that the Amazonian narratives can contribute to our understanding of insular Caribbean animal imagery.

Chapter 2 comprises an overview of the current state of affairs, reflecting on the work of scholars interested in both Saladoid (zoomorphic) iconography and narratological studies. Here, the most common Saladoid animal motifs are identified. Chapter 3 introduces the theoretical and methodological framework, based on narratology and perspectivism. The studied narratives are presented as a dataset in Chapter 4. This broad overview provides a general backdrop in order to compare the specific (narratological) datasets introduced in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. Here not only the roles and attributes of the animal actors but also each animal based on its role in nature, its presence in Saladoid iconography and its place in indigenous cosmologies are examined. In the latter three chapters, two research questions are focussed on: (a) which attributes and roles are ascribed to specific animals in the South American oral tradition and with what or whom are they associated within the narratives, and in which context? and (b) why are certain animals more prominent in the iconography than others? The outcome of this analysis is dealt with in Chapter 8 which also includes a discussion on the presented data, conclusions and the opportunities for further research.