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

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## Chapter 8. Discussion: Everything has its jaguar

The present study, which sets out to enrich our current understanding of the abundant Saladoid (identified) zoomorphic *adornos*, is not merely all about an iconographical survey, but also attempts to reveal the traits of depicted “animals” by way of the roles they play in narratives. Having addressed the four central research questions, the results will now be discussed in terms of their benefit to archaeologists in general whereby the focus also lies on further research.

Section 8.1 starts out by not only looking back but also by readdressing premises that underlie this research. Next, 8.2 is dedicated to answering the four posed questions. As two of them have been discussed in previous chapters, their key elements are now provided along with references for further reading while the others, not yet discussed questions, are discussed in detail (8.3). The final section (8.4) looks forward in order to explore new avenues.

### 8.1 Looking back

To put the conclusions and subsequent discussion of the present study into perspective, certain underlying fundamental premises need to be readdressed. Shaping and limiting the presented results, they cannot remain untouched.

#### 8.1.1 Meeting, or understanding whom?

This dissertation treats descriptions of an “animal”, or “animal” personages, as a (pre)defined category as opposed to “other” protagonists (e.g., humans or spirits). This is a conscious choice

as this study specifically targets zoomorphic iconography, in an attempt to shed light on the reason why certain “animals” are more prominent in iconographical display than others. Although this distinction, or dichotomy, served and serves when categorising, analysing and communicating data, it is not suited for the discussion on the indigenous conceptualisation of “animal imagery”. This predefined category of “animals” is not meaningful because understanding what (or rather who) an “animal” is, is, in fact, the very subject of the present inquiry.

Arguably, it would be much better to avoid the term “animal” completely, because it does not fit any discourse pertaining to indigenous perceptions. The Trio (Cariban) language, for example, indeed lacks one single term for “animal” as applied in the West. Instead, the Trio have words for tree-dwellers (differentiating between edible and inedible varieties), feathered fauna, etc. However, replacing the term “animal” (or for that matter the name given to any particular animal, e.g., “jaguar”) is problematic as it would not only obscure the focus of this research, but probably also estrange the (targeted) Western audience. Therefore, inverted commas were, and are, applied in order to indicate this discrepancy regarding the conceptualisation of “animals” (see 3.6 for a more elaborate discussion on this subject). Indigenous collective knowledge feeds the native perceptions of “animal” imagery or “animal” actors. For example, any “jaguar” imagery is not conceptualised as a *sign\**, or as a *symbol\** for something (e.g., strength), it merely is Jaguar, framed as a multiplicity of identities (see also 8.2.2).

The human-animal dichotomy is based on Western epistemologies, conceptualised in our Western notion of nature-culture opposition (Corbey 2005), rooted in other premises when compared with Amerindian ontologies (see Descola 1994, 1996; Descola & Pálsson 1996; Viveiros de Castro 1996, 1998, 2004, 2012). Adopting the term “animal” in the present study reflects the (Western) identification as well as a differentiation of anthropomorphic, zoomorphic and anthropo-zoomorphic *adornos*. At the heart of this research lies zoomorphic iconography, hereby focusing on “animal” personages in the narratives e.g., on the “bat”-personage.

However, these contrasting ontologies are or can be, problematic.<sup>186</sup> Projecting our own assumptions and discourse needs to be avoided. Moreover, it should be acknowledged that as a result of this regard we tend to perceive “animals” as metaphors, analogies, or fancy replacements of a human actor (i.e., as *sign\** or *symbols\**). However, the narratives central to the present research provide us with a multitude of contexts in which each “animal” actor is framed and on occasion placed: (a) in a secular setting (when hunted as game, or acting as predator), (b) in a shamanic setting as an assistant, a shaman or as a Master/Owner, and (c) in a spiritual setting when serving as a spirit’s pet or assistant, or as a spirit. Within all these

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<sup>186</sup> For an elaborate discussion on perspectivism and Amerindian ontologies, see 3.4.2.

contexts, each “animal” is ascribed specific roles, associations and attributes, while relating to and communicating with other actors (human and non-human). Thus, within the narratives, the interrelatedness between actors, events and settings (spatial and temporal) were and can still be studied (see 4.2 and 4.3; Chapters 5-7 (all sections pertaining to the “animals” in the narratives), or Appendix D for a full description per story cluster).

Perhaps a unique trait of tales is each actor, or point of view, is/can be described from his or her own perspective as well as from the perspective of others, a phenomenon which could be termed “Perspectivism in action”. For instance, “Jaguar”, who resides in a village and drinks *cassiri*\* is “human” when observed from its perspective. In the same narrative, when observed from the point of view of the Amerindian (shaman) protagonist, it becomes clear that, in “Jaguar’s” perspective, *cassiri*\* is in fact blood when viewed from the shamanic (i.e., Amerindian) perspective. The Amerindian shaman protagonist, in this case, becomes aware of the fact that the “human being” standing in front of him is in fact “Jaguar”. This awareness arises *because*, being a shaman, he can change perspective and “see/perceive” the world as “Jaguar” “sees” it. He therefore identifies the *cassiri*\* consumed/served by “Jaguar” or the knives, or coat, with which “Jaguar” has donned itself (i.e., from a “Jaguar’s” perspective) for what it pertains to in a human perspective: blood (i.e., *cassiri*\*), claws (i.e., knife), and its fur (i.e., coat). Moreover, it is *because* the Amerindian shaman protagonist identifies “Jaguar” by means of its attributes, that he realises that if, for instance, he should drink the “*cassiri*” presented to him, he himself would transform into a “Jaguar”.<sup>187</sup> Drinking blood (aka Jaguar’s *cassiri*\*) is just one example of an ontological boundary that should not be crossed.<sup>188</sup>

Narratives are thus a way to become acquainted with these “animals”, albeit not the only way. Humans can also get to know “animals” by means of narratives based on hearsay, (shared) experiences and encounters in nature. Or, on their plates as food, through iconographical display, songs, rituals, etc. All these “encounters” contribute to, what I would like to refer to as “identities”, all intricately interwoven with ascribed attributes and associations, i.e., indigenous conceptualisation. For that reason, each “animal” has been discussed based on its role in narratives, in nature, in iconography and in Amerindian cosmologies (see Chapters 5-7).

Reconstructing an “animal’s” status within indigenous cosmologies, and even in iconography or any other ways of the display, involves the incorporation of historic as well as anthropological accounts. As the archaeological record merely discloses certain parts of (material) culture, it is deprived of, for instance, perishable goods. These sources thus

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<sup>187</sup> Here “becoming” or transforming means: losing one’s own (human) perspective and adopting that of the “Jaguar”. The blood then becomes *cassiri* to the Amerindian shaman, implying, however, that a Jaguar’s food is now his food. Having turned into a predator, the (former) human is no longer able to recognise his human next-of-kin.

<sup>188</sup> For an elaborate discussion on perspectivism, see 3.4.2; details as to the applied terms, e.g., interiority, physicality, and subjectivity are dealt with there, too.

supplement and contextualise all the archaeological record has to offer. The sources included in this research predominantly stem from: (a) the peoples inhabiting the South America mainland, (b) the (15<sup>th</sup>- and 16<sup>th</sup>-century) “Taíno” communities of the Greater Antilles, and (c) the 17<sup>th</sup>-century and later accounts concerning the Island Carib of the Lesser Antilles (see also 1.2.1 and 3.5.2).

Readers must keep in mind that neither the narratives nor any anthropological or historic sources are applied to suggest a direct analogy. They are a(n) (additional) means to “reconstruct” the possible identities of the “animals” discussed here in order to better understand the prominence of specific zoomorphic *adornos* and their social significance.

### 8.1.2 Understanding pottery through narratives

The propositions (re-)addressed in this section are whether, and if so how, (contemporary mainland) lore can serve to better comprehend the (ancient) mainly Island *adornos*. In this section, only the highlights are re-enacted. References for further reading are provided, too.

#### *“Making special”*

In my opinion, storytelling and iconographical display are connected, because both are examples of “making special”, as defined by Ellen Dissanayake (2006, 2008; see also 3.1). As such they express, revive or channel feelings, reiterate social values and mirror social codes. In this sense, storytelling and depicting represent yet another means for mankind to comprehend and consequently control the world (see 2.3.1 and 3.2).

In the present study both the “animal” actor in the narratives and Saladoid zoomorphic imagery are considered mental objects and referred to as *signs\**. This perception evokes a shared recollection of sentiments and thus a means to communicate ideas (see 3.1). This, in turn, implies that imagery: (a) was invested with indigenous knowledge, and (b) cannot be literally translated, but as cultural *signs\** were understood by all sectors of that culture. In sum, within their own cultural contexts, an (animal) image has a “*meaning\**”, often even an agency, mobilizing similar feelings, ideas and social values.

As discussed in detail (see Chapter 3), narratives are an effective way to share knowledge in the broadest sense, because they embody encyclopaedic and symbolic knowledge while disclosing a *meaning\**.<sup>189</sup> These forms of knowledge combined enable(d) humankind to “make sense” of the aforementioned cultural *signs\** (e.g., *adornos*). Narratives then are merely one means of sharing symbolic knowledge and of conceptualising cultural *signs\**, as they are framed within various narratological contexts.

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<sup>189</sup> In 3.2 all functions of narratives are discussed, in short: (a) ensuring and transmitting knowledge, (b) informing, (c) encoding social behaviour, (d) validating the world, and (e) establishing one’s group and personal identity.

This study targets narratological contexts in which (specifically) “animals” are placed. An attempt is hereby established to unravel at least part of the forms of indigenous knowledge lying at the core of the ascribed connotations and of the associations of “animals”. The goal is here: to better grasp the social function of any “animal” imagery, e.g., of zoomorphic *adornos*.

### *Integrity of written sources*

Accepting that narratives and depictions are products of the same “making special”-behaviour, the following two issues remain: (a) the utilised stories are written translations, and (b) the *contemporary* tales mainly hail from the South American mainland, whereas the ancient Saladoid imagery mainly stems from the Caribbean islands.

The once dynamic, orally transmitted narratives presented in this study have been translated and written down. The three implications of this are: (a) the loss of the dynamic setting of the storytelling itself, (b) the loss of dynamics in the contents and structure of the narratives, because storytelling is, and always has been, a continual process whereby certain (foreign) motifs and personages are either embraced or dismissed, and (c) an interlingual translation, which inherently entails an interpretation, and presumably, loss of information as one language cannot replace another (see 3.5).

The quality or integrity of the written accounts is therefore intermingled with those involved in their documentation. As a countermeasure, numerous cases put forth by a variety of researchers/collectors have been included in order to inverse any potential biases caused by the individual contributors. This approach is justified considering this particular research, as its focus lies not on (individual) narratives originating from a specific Amazonian culture. Instead, it involves a broadly shared contextualisation of “animal” personages as well as their ascribed attributes and roles.

In addition, many narratives from the core area have been brought together either by anthropologists with a profound understanding of indigenous cultures and languages (e.g., Trio (Cariban), Warao) and/or collaborators with those who had obtained such knowledge. However, other sources are either less, or not at all, explicit regarding the background or qualifications of the documenter and translator(s) of the provided narratives. I was fortunate enough to have recorded thirteen tales thanks to Sjaak Ebecilio, a knowledgeable, native-speaking, Lokono (Arawakan) elder and his daughter Yvonne Ebecilio, who orally transmitted them in Dutch. As a young man, Sjaak had been trained to teach the Dutch language. For the transcripts presented here in both Dutch and English, see Appendix A (see 3.3 under the sub-heading *Shared stories* for more details on this 2009 fieldwork in Suriname).

The provenance of the majority of the narratives discussed in this research is more or less contemporary, as they were acquired during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. They originate from the northern mainland of South America. This core area was defined on the basis of those

South American mainland areas from which the Early Ceramic Age migrants (c.800/200 BCE) most probably set off for the Caribbean archipelago (see 1.1.1). However, these narratives cover an even wider geographic range, thus pertaining to a variety of language families (see 1.2.1 and 1.3). In my opinion, this scope is justified because the language families found in the core area, spreading from the coastal areas up into the Caribbean, share numerous cultural traits. This is the outcome of a shared history, inhabiting similar environments and an intensive contact upheld between these communities (see 1.1). Stories in other languages and hailing from other regions illustrate strong continuities and similarities as to their motifs, themes and other cultural qualities. This inclusiveness contributes to the main objective of this particular narratological study: to establish the stable and most prominent motifs, as well as the ascribed attributes and roles related to the “animal” personages. Various indigenous communities share motifs and/or attributes which not only surpass linguistic and geographical boundaries but also most probably persist through time.

## 8.2 Which “animals” are prominent and how are they contextualised?

This survey pursues four goals, two of which were central to previous chapters.<sup>190</sup> In order to avoid any repetition, at this stage, the questions focussed in these chapters are now only answered briefly. However, the two other specific research questions not directly addressed yet are: “Why are certain animals more prominent in Amerindian iconography than others?” and “How can the conceptualisation of animal imagery inform us about the socio-cultural behaviour of a society?” The latter topic did, however, serve as a *leitmotif* throughout this investigation, whereas the former can be considered the central question to this research. Both are answered by means of a discussion of the data (see in 8.3.)

### 8.2.1 Beyond identification

The first research question: “Which animals are most prominently represented on Saladoid material culture” is addressed by means of a zoomorphic, iconographical approach. Saladoid zoomorphic *adornos* function as a case study, specifically *adornos* produced during the Early Ceramic Age (800/200 BCE to 400/600 CE) in the mainland (Venezuela) and the Lesser Antilles (see Moravetz 2005; Petitjean Roget 1975, 2015; Waldron 2010, 2016).

Especially L. Waldron’s broad comparative iconographical research proves useful. He identifies and compares 1,958 Saladoid *adornos* stemming from the Lesser Antilles with the known mainland Saladoid material, thereby establishing trends and shifts both in depictions and styles (Waldron 2010, 2016; see also 2.1.2 and 5.1). His study illustrates a discrepancy between island and mainland iconography in which the focus lies on the depictions of

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<sup>190</sup> The goals or questions referred to here comprise: which animals are most prominently encountered on Saladoid ceramics from the insular Caribbean and Venezuela? Which attributes and roles are ascribed to specific animals in the South American oral tradition, with what or whom are they associated within the narratives, and in which context?



mammals to then shift towards a dominance of reptile/amphibian and bird motifs in the islands (see 2.1.2 under the sub-heading *Comparing motifs*).

Waldron's quantitative survey results in the identification of 1,566 zoomorphic *adornos* which are next described according to the level of class and, wherever possible, to the level of genus (even species). In Saladoid ceramics "animals" are depicted in the form of effigy vessels, incised and painted details and, most often, as *adornos* (see 2.1.2). The most common zoomorphic *adornos* are identified per class, whereby Waldron distinguishes among the different Caribbean islands. For the purpose of the present research his data have been simplified thus merely differentiating between Venezuela, Trinidad and Tobago, the Windward and Leeward Islands (see Table. 8.1 (p. 364); for more details see 2.1.2 and Tables 2.2-2.4, pp. 34-36).

For each class, Waldron identifies the most recurrent zoomorphic representations on the level of specific "animals". Tables 8.2 to 8.4 (pp. 365-368) illustrate the incidences of all the identified "animals" per class.<sup>191</sup> In sum, the most prominent identified mammalian *adornos* are: "dogs", "bats", "anteaters", "opossums", and "armadillos". In the "bird"-category by far the most depicted "birds" are: the "nocturnal birds" (i.e., owl, nightjars and oilbirds), followed by "pelicans", "stilt birds", "parrots", "ducks", and "vultures". "Turtles", "frogs", and "caimans" are most prominent among the category entitled "Reptiles/Amphibians".

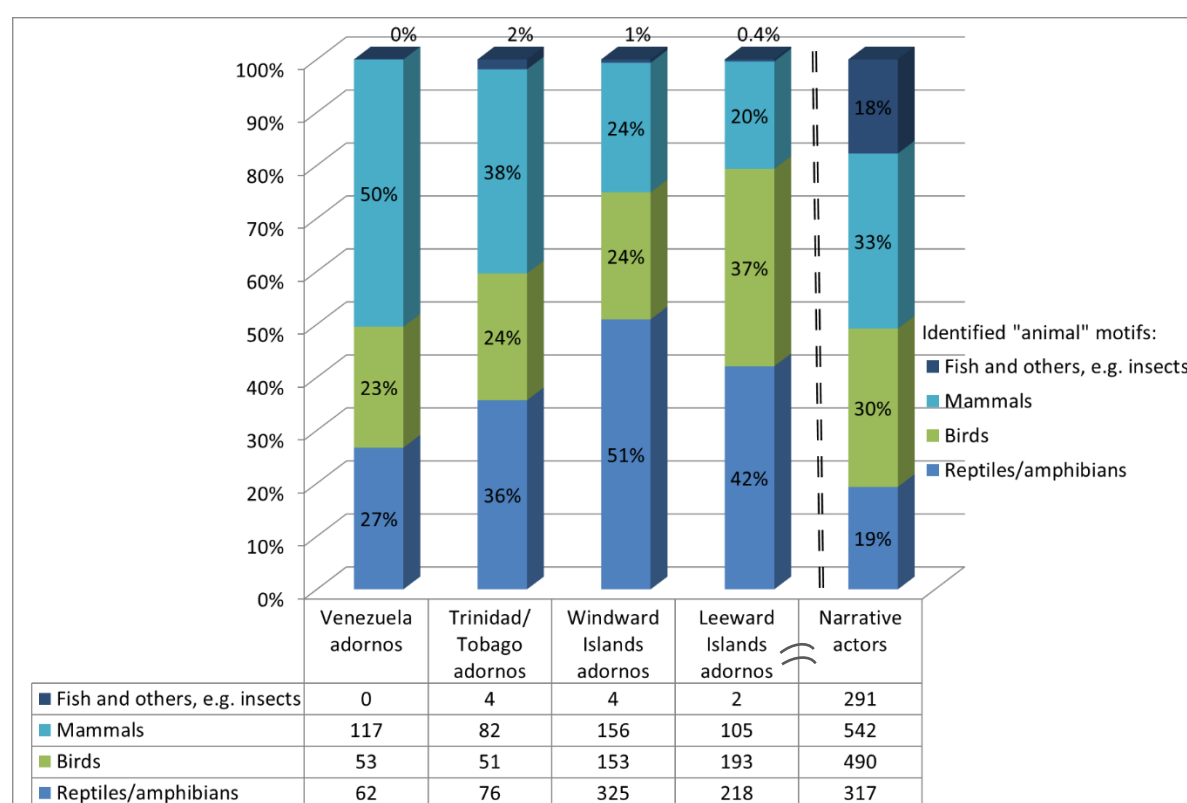
Waldron also applies South American and "Taíno" narratives in order to elucidate the interpretation of the (iconographic) data. The present dissertation introduces a more grounded analysis, including a high number of narratives (n=706) and a comparative narratological analysis (see 3.3). This research includes *all* cases featuring (or referring to) any "animal" (actor). This approach facilitates the quantification as well as a comparison of key "animal" actors (analogous to the comparative analysis of identified zoomorphic *adornos*). This more inclusive narratological method ensures that trends for each "animal" actor could be investigated in relation to other tales. Moreover, it demonstrates that specific motifs, associations and contexts are indeed related to specific "animals". Of equal importance is the fact that this method provides a rich, in-depth account of the roles and attributes of each "animal" whereby the multiplicity of their identities is revealed. Whereas those who utilise narratives in order to explain iconographical features often focus either on only a single or a small number of these identities to build their case (e.g., "vulture" as a shaman/healer), all ascribed associations encountered are described here. The resulting analysis provides a detailed contextualisation of "animals" based on indigenous tales, enriching our understanding of the multiplicity of "animal" identities.

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<sup>191</sup> These figures only distinguish between island and Venezuelan assemblages. For a comparison between islands, see 2.1.2 and Tables 2.2-2.4, pages 34-36.

We have thus moved beyond Waldron’s study by complementing it by means of a systematic comparative analysis of “animal” actors who play a role in the 706 Amazonian stories. How do the data Waldron acquired compare to the present data set? Relating Saladoid zoomorphic *adornos* to identified “animal” actors on the level of classes (see Table 8.1) discloses that the closest correlation occurs between the narratives and the iconography of Venezuela and of Trinidad and Tobago. This outcome is to be expected considering the fact that the narratives mainly originate from the mainland. In both Venezuelan and Trinidadian iconography (two most left graphics in Table 8.1) and the mainland narratives actors (far right graphic in Table 8.1) mammals are most dominant. Birds take in the second position in narratives actors, whereas in the aforementioned iconography reptiles/amphibians are second. However, the difference with birds is small: in Venezuelan iconography reptiles/amphibians take up 27 percent, compared to 23 percent for Birds. The category entitled “other” is relatively large when considering the narratives. It is a consequence of including all narratives with “animal” actors, or references to (specific) animals. The category “other” also includes tales containing references to “animals” of other classes (e.g., a protagonist who sets off on a fishing trip (Fish, 6 percent); flies hovering around a carcass (e.g., other insects 11 percent).

**Table 8.1.** Identified and classified zoomorphic *adornos* compared to identified “animal” actors.<sup>192</sup>

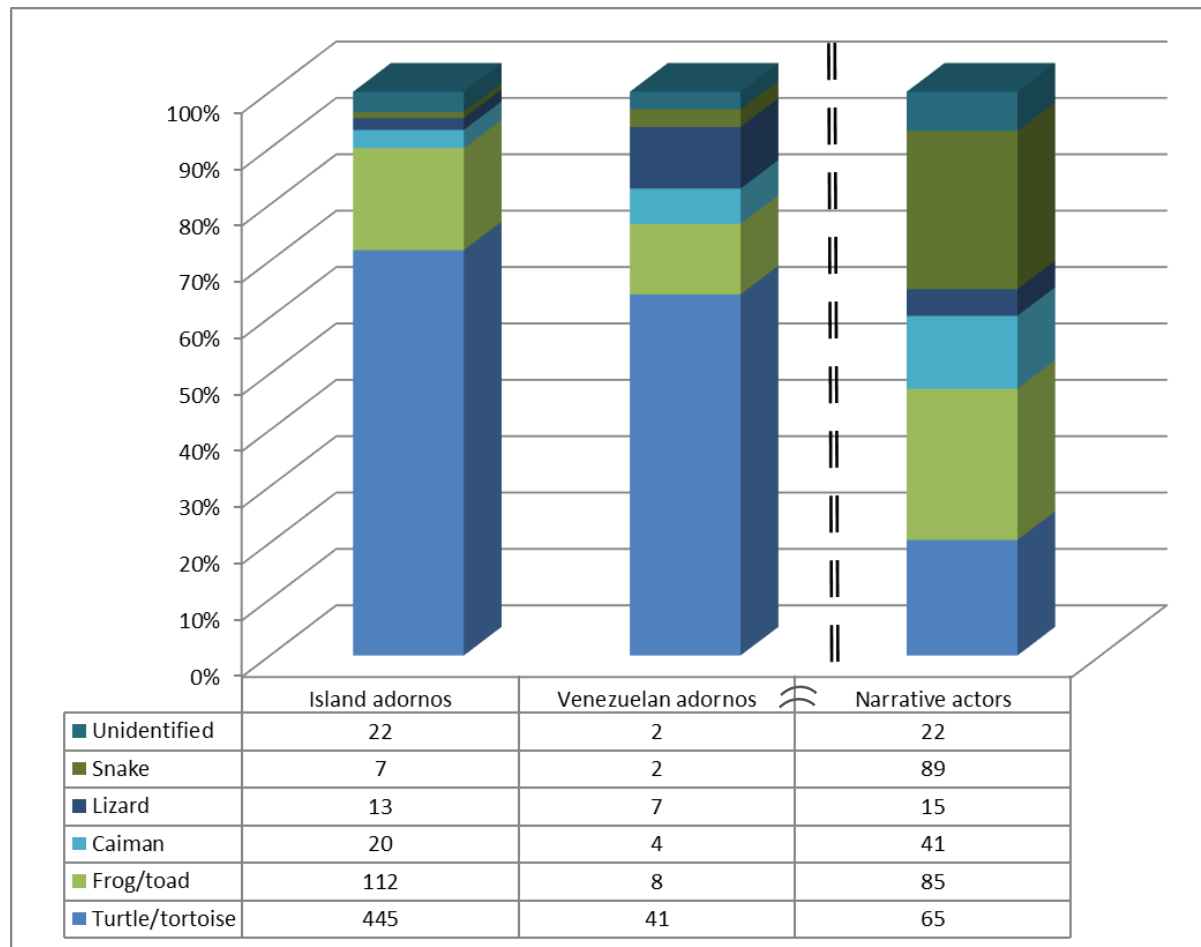


<sup>192</sup> Table 8.1 is based on Waldron’s Chart 2 “Classic Motif Indices in Sample Collections of Saladoid Era Ceramics”, which includes also unidentified animals/birds per class (Waldron 2010: 320). In this figure the data table displays absolute numbers, though identified anthropomorphs are not included, see 2.1.2, Table 2.1 (p. 33) which includes anthropomorphs.

## Incongruities

On the level of specific “animals/birds”, the resemblance of identified zoomorphic motifs and “animal” personages is striking, since all but one (i.e., “pelican”) are identified in the narratives. The majority of these personages are even listed in the Top 15<sup>193</sup> of most recurrent actors (see Tables 8.2-8.4).<sup>194</sup> Nevertheless, important incongruities surface when the data are compared. For each class, the main inconsistencies are shortly addressed below.

**Table 8.2.** Reptiles/Amphibians identified in Saladoid iconography and (mainland) narratives.



Of the identified reptile and amphibian *adornos*, all “animals” also feature within the narratological context (see Table 8.2). However, the most recurrent “animal” identified in the stories (snakes) is only the fifth (n=9) of the most identified animals included in Waldron’s

<sup>193</sup> The “Top 15” of most recorded “animals” in the narratives are: “Jaguar”, “Snake/Anaconda”, “Birds” (general), “Vulture”, “Tapir”, “Monkey”, “Turtle”, “Frog”, “Ants”, “Caiman/Alligator”, “Fish” (general), “Toad”, “Bat”, “Deer” and “Dog” (see 4.2.2).

<sup>194</sup> These figures only distinguish between Island and Venezuelan assemblages. For a comparison between islands, see 2.1.2; Tables 2.3 to 2.5, pp. 34-36). The percentages for “Narratives” in the displayed graphics are somewhat deformed as 165 “animals/birds” have been identified, resulting in a huge category of “other”. Therefore the data extracted from narratives could best be compared to the iconographical data according to order (e.g., for Reptiles/Amphibians: no. 1, “Snake”, no. 2 “Frog”, no. 3 “Turtle”, etc.; see also 5.1).

study. The “caiman” *adornos* take in the fourth position of the most identified reptile and amphibian, on both the mainland and Caribbean islands. While only four Venezuelan “caiman” *adornos* were identified, this number is low even when considering the (small) total 62 Venezuelan reptile and amphibian *adornos*.<sup>195</sup>

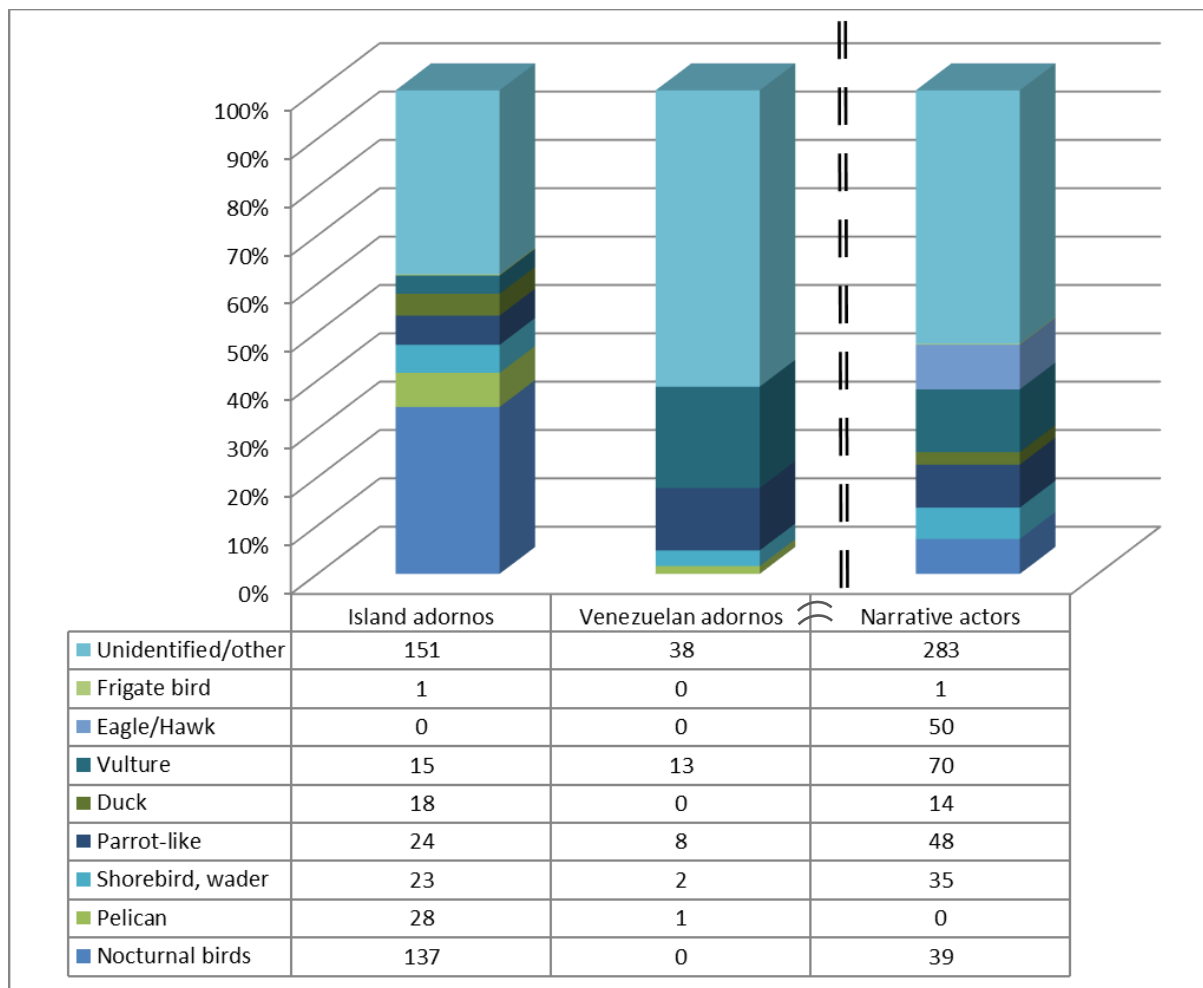
This observation of “caiman” occupying the fourth place of most identified reptile/amphibian *adornos* on **both** the Caribbean islands and the South American mainland seems anomalous, because caimans are hardly ever encountered in these islands, but are abundantly present in the mainland and thus prominent in folklore. I would, therefore, have expected “caiman” to play a more notable role in mainland iconography. Nevertheless, when comparing reptile/amphibian motifs in iconography and the narratives the “Top 4” (comprising “turtles”, “frogs”, “caimans”, “lizards”) are also often identified in both categories. In the mainland and the isles, when considering this particular case, the “turtles” remain the most dominant, followed by “frog” *adornos*. They are also prominent in the narratives. Apparently the main aquatic predators, “anacondas” and “caimans” are significantly outshone by their role played in Amazonian narratives when compared with their display as an *adorno*.

The most notable shifts in the mainland vs. island iconography occur among the identified “bird” *adornos* (see Table 8.3, p. 367). An increase of “aquatic birds” in the island iconography (e.g., “pelicans”, “stilt birds”, “ducks”) is presumably the result of environmental changes. Nevertheless, “owls” and “nightjars” *adornos* were not identified by Waldron in Venezuelan assemblages, nor can their absence be explained by any environmental conditions. In addition, although “vulture” *adornos* were identified throughout the Lesser Antilles, they are the most dominant of the identified “bird” *adornos* in Venezuela (n=13), only to be surpassed by several native “birds” to the islands. In the island assemblages, various “aquatic birds” remarkably surpass “vulture” *adornos*.

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<sup>195</sup> Waldron identifies 62 amphibian and reptile *adornos* hailing from Venezuela, compared to the 325 identified as being from the Windward Islands alone, see 2.1.2, Table 2.2 (p. 34) for a comparison per class.

**Table 8.3.** ‘Birds’ identified in Saladoid iconography and (mainland) narratives.

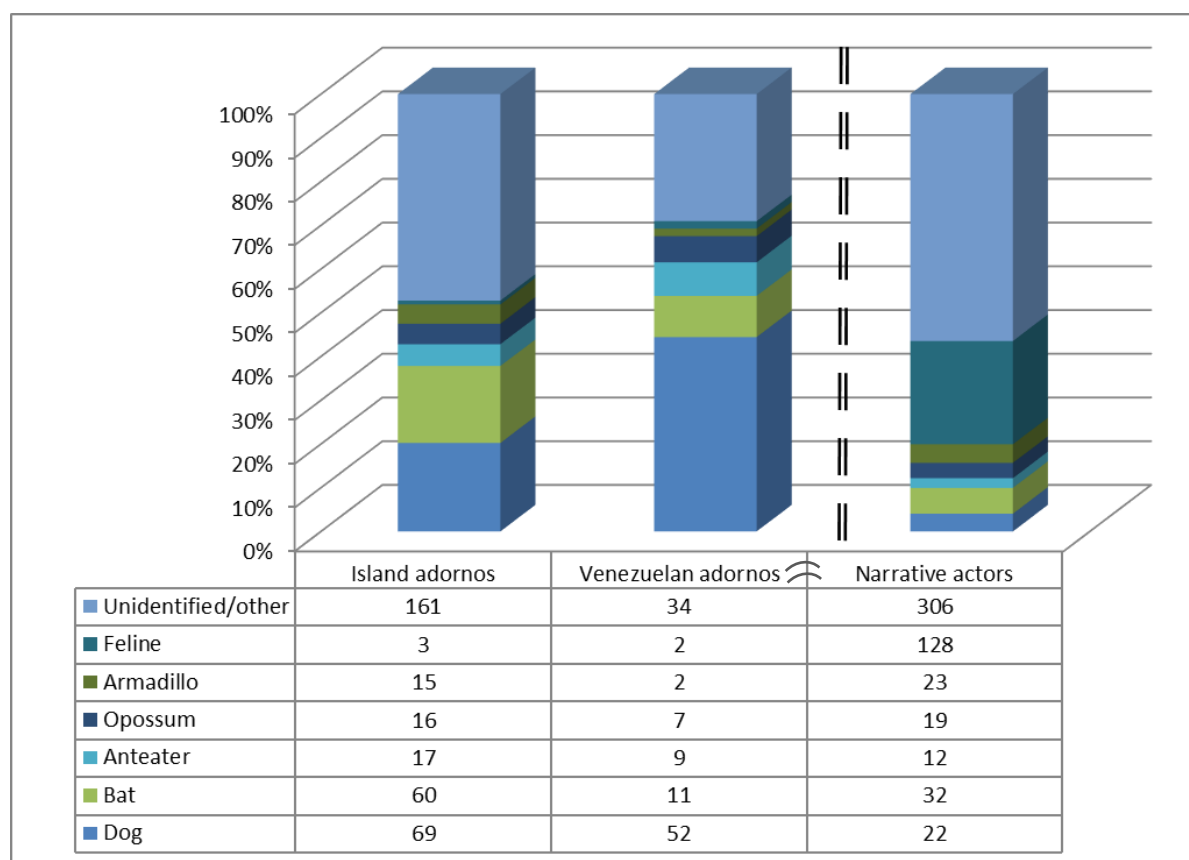


Moreover, as with aquatic predators, the apparent absence of “birds of prey” *adornos* is noteworthy. These “birds of prey” are recognised as key actors in a number of narratives. Many such birds frequent the skies of Venezuela and of several Caribbean islands. As Waldron points out: the island species are smaller but nonetheless “... [Falconidae] ... have distinctive features that would make for identifiable *adornos* despite stylization” (Waldron 2010: 183).

Considering the identified mammal *adornos*, “dog” and “bat” are recognised as the two key motifs encountered in Venezuela as well as in the islands. Important differences in mammal display (see Table 8.4) have been noted. The “bat” *adorno*-related incidences increase significantly in the Caribbean islands, especially in the Windward Islands. Although “dog” *adornos* are present on each and every island they have been identified as a dominantly Leeward Island phenomenon (Waldron 2010: 120-1; see 2.1.2). Noteworthy, too, is the almost complete absence of positive “jaguar” (or feline) *adornos*. Especially considering the mainland, this is a remarkable observation, as “Jaguar” is the most common (n=127) “animal” actor in the analysed narratives. The main predator is once again not identified as a key zoomorphic *adorno*. Nevertheless, the “Top 5” of the most identified mammals to be found in

the iconographical record, which all also feature prominently in the tales are: “dogs”; n=24, “bats”; n=33; “anteaters”; n=12, “opossums”; n=19, and “armadillos”; n=23.

**Table 8.4.** Mammals identified in Saladoid iconography and (mainland) narratives.



Finally, certain “animals”, several of which also inhabit the insular Caribbean, play leading roles in the narratives but were not identified as Saladoid iconographical motifs. Therefore, environmental conditions are apparently not a likely factor regarding the iconographical scarcity (or absence) of “Ant”, “Birds of prey”, “Woodpecker”, and “Hummingbird”. This foursome is included in the present study, as their absence/under-representation in iconography forms a point of interest. Only “Birds of prey” are (re)discussed in this section. The remaining “birds” are dealt with in 6.2 and “Ants” are discussed in 7.2.

In sum, although the iconographical and narratological data match quite well, especially the discrepancy could be of interest to our understanding why certain “animals” are more prominent than others. The low number, or even absence, of any identified “feline” (jaguar), “snake”, “birds of prey”, and “nocturnal bird” *adornos* pertaining to Saladoid mainland iconography is striking. The same applies to a number of other personages which are (as yet?) unidentified. Could they remain unidentified as a result of abstractification? Were they considered unsuitable or inappropriate for display on ceramics, for practical/aesthetic and or spiritual (i.e., tabooed) reasons? Are they perhaps depicted by other means, and if so, why? Explanations for this inconsistency as to the narratological data could be plentiful. This issue

will be further explored by answering the question: “Why are certain animals more prominent in iconography than others?” (see 8.3).

Selecting the central “animals” for the present research is based on the most recurrent iconographical zoomorphic motifs, and as well by means of the aforementioned discrepancies. This approach results in the analyses of mammals listed according to class: “Jaguar”- (n=127), “Dog”- (n=24) and “Bat”-narratives (n=33) and when considering the reptiles/amphibians only to the “Caiman/Alligator”-narratives (n=41), see also note 94 on p. 145. Narratives clustered in the avian class are: “Birds” in general (n=81; i.e., references to “bird(s)”). “Birds of prey” (n=54; e.g., eagles, hawks), “Scavenger birds” (n=70; e.g., vultures, buzzards) and “Nocturnal birds” (n=40; i.e., owls, nightjars) were also looked into. Moreover, “Ant”-narratives (n=45) are analysed as they apparently occur frequently and are ascribed very specific roles and attributes.

As to the “Birds” cluster in general, certain additional specific “birds” have been introduced. I chose to include these “birds” because: (a) they have been identified as a recurrent zoomorphic iconographical motif, or (b) they played prominent and/or remarkable roles in the tales, even though their imagery has not been identified in the iconographical record. These categories are for (a): “Parrot-like birds” (n=45; e.g., macaws, *Ara* species, parakeets), “Ducks” (n=14), “Shorebirds and waders” (n=30; e.g., herons, egrets), and for (b): “Hummingbirds” (n=27), and “Woodpeckers” (n=31).<sup>196</sup>

### 8.2.2 Meeting the “animals” through narratives

The second research question addressed here is: “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?” This issue is discussed in Chapters 5-7 (see all sections under the headings “*Animal in the narratives*”) and see Appendix D, for further elaboration on the analysis of the stories.

The methodology applied when analysing the narratives was based on the research into their structure and the way they influence our perception (see 3.3 and 3.3.1). Here all the cases featuring a specific “animal” are not only combined but also studied as a single dataset, to then be further categorised in sub-clusters based on recurrent motifs and themes. These sub-clusters are next subjected to a narratological analysis. For example, the 127 “Jaguar”-narratives are divided and studied in five sub-clusters such as: “Jaguar and the origin of fire” (see Appendix D, section E). The results of this are compared to the outcome of the overall analysis of the 706 stories (see Chapter 4) in order to detect any significant variations in the “animal” narratives.

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<sup>196</sup> These specific “birds” were not dealt with as a separate cluster in Appendix D, but the identified differences are focused on in the section entitled “General birds”. All these “birds” are discussed separately (see Chapter 6) according to their roles in the tales, in nature and in native cosmologies.

### *A multiplicity of identities*

As stated previously (see 8.1.1), the importance of the story world for this research is: it not only embraces but also parades the Amerindian worldview, resulting in multiple points of views. In the narratives, each viewpoint (e.g., “human”, “jaguar”, “spirit”) is not only staged within a specific chronotope of space and time but also framed in relation to each other. I thus suggest that, in the narratives, each personage (i.e., “animal”, “human”) is described departing from its own perspective and from the perspective of others.

The 706 narratives provide us with a multitude of contexts in which the interiority, as well as the physicality and attributes of each featured personage, are described. All actions and encounters take place against a specific backdrop of space and time and in relation to “others” i.e., subjectivities meet and interact within specific settings. This framing of personages/subjectivities may well support, or contribute to, the conceptualisation of these personages as subjectivities amongst the audience. Consequently, through these narratives, we become acquainted with the multiplicity of identities of all the personages/subjectivities, which are considered “cultural signs” in the present research.

Another example rendering this statement more tangible and understandable comprises “Jaguar”, in certain cases, being portrayed as the Owner of Fire (see 5.4.1), which it keeps in its own village. In a number of instances, “Jaguar” willingly supplies, or shares its fire, whereas in other cases this fire is stolen. In a warrior song, “Jaguar” is called upon as the “spirit of violence” (see Story no. 707; Cariban). Yet, in other cases, it is portrayed as a dangerous predator that slays many Amerindians and is killed in revenge. In various trickster narratives, “Jaguar” is framed as a gullible fool (see 5.4.1).

However, I propose that the identities and interrelatedness between these numerous subjectivities (human and non-human) are also communicated by means of, for example, encounters in nature as well as by cultural displays (e.g., iconography, ritual, dance, song). Through all these varied “encounters” humans are acquainted not only with the multitude of identities but also with the main attributes and associations of each subjectivity. When applying the term “multiplicity of identities” I suggest that the identity of “jaguar”, for instance, is shaped and framed by the above “encounters” through which people become acquainted with “jaguar”. As a result, this “animal” is feared but also seen as equal to a hunter, but also sometimes ridiculed. These “encounters” take place through stories as “Jaguar” as a protagonist in displayed both as a fool and a powerful shaman, but also when “jaguar” is part of rituals, songs and dances.

Part of this framing of “animal” personages in the narratives comprises the spatial and temporal context i.e., the chronotope in which the subject acts. This chronotope forms the backdrop against which a personage is staged. It probably influences the way it is conceptualised as both the temporal and spatial setting are intertwined with their own sets



of connotations. A narrative that unfolds in the water-layer of the cosmos has inherent, varied connotations when compared with encounters in the sky world. Moreover, a narrative unfolding in an Amerindian village differs from one staged in the forest or in “Jaguar’s” village. Several personages are mainly portrayed in the shamanic realm, for instance, because a shaman visits them in the sky or the underworld. Other personages are linked to the realm of spirits, met in the forest at night, or spirits visited in the water realm. A more “mundane” context, e.g., village life, a field (or village garden), a bathing place is a common setting, too.

The temporal setting can vary as well. It can include the “Before time”, or “mythical” era, when humans and “animals” still spoke to each other to extend to the “present” time, which still can be divided into day, night, dusk, and dawn.<sup>197</sup> Conversely, in Amerindian worldviews, time itself is not only linear but is also cyclic in which the “Before time” and the “present” are related in a continuum (see 2.3.1). Several tales explicate how “animals”, humans and “things” came into being, informing us from where they originated or how they reached their current state of being to still affect us today.<sup>198</sup>

As shown in Chapters 5-7, the majority of “animals” are found in a variety of temporal, spatial and cosmological contexts. For example, in Story X, a “bird” is hunted as game or for its eggs (within a forest context), whereas in Story Y the same “bird” is described and portrayed as the Master of all “Birds”, a transformed hunter itself (within a shamanic setting). In the first abovementioned context, the “bird” is conceptualised as a (game) animal, but in the second context, it is a subjectivity as well as a powerful agent with its own point of view. This multiplicity of settings and actions shape the identity rendering the “identities” of the subjectivities/“animals” i.e., “jaguar”, “bat” etc. more accurately. Observed from a Western perspective, these identities are relevant to conceptualising these subjects as *signs*\*.

### ***Roles and contexts: shamanic, spiritual and mundane***

This research focuses on the contextualisation of various “animals”. They are portrayed either as (powerful) agents with subjectivity (e.g., masters, shamans) and/or as *significant other-than-human-persons*\* (i.e., spirits), or as lacking any agency whatsoever and described as a (prey) animal. This phenomenon is, however, always related to one’s personal perspective, as all creatures and things have their (own) “jaguar”: Amerindians are the prey of “jaguars”, while “water snake” is “jaguar” of “frogs”, see 3.4.2.

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<sup>197</sup> A description provided by the Kaliña (Cariban) chief Ricardo Pané concerning the Before (or “mythical”) time is freely translated as: events that occurred when everything still spoke to each other or did so in narratives dating from the time of our beginning (Carlin 2018: 332).

<sup>198</sup> On how, in the past, “animals” lost key attributes, to become animals and now seek revenge by causing diseases, see 2.3.1 under the heading “*World making*”). Pertaining to the Tukuna people, their origin myths and how the human body is made up of cultural artefacts, we read: “the Instruments of Life and transformation are not human productions but divine bodies existing as bone and crystal...” (Hugh-Jones 2009: 49).

Tables 8.5 and 8.6 divide the “animals” discussed here into the following categories, or contexts: (a) spiritual realm, which in turn can be subdivided into Spirit (S), the spirit’s Helper or pet (H), and the Ancestral realm (A), (b) a shamanic realm, split into Shamans (S), the Master/Owner (M), the shaman’s Helper/assistant (H), and (c) the secular context, subdivided into Helpers (H), and Game, prey (G). The column to the far right summarises the main associations and attributes ascribed to the “animals” featuring in the narratives.

Spirits, shamans and Masters/Owners are considered powerful agents (see 3.4.2 under the heading *Nature and intensity of subjectivity*). The “animal” shamans are: (a) linked to multiple spatial/cosmological contexts (e.g., underworld, the water and sky realms), (b) ascribed the ability of transformation, and (c) associated with the duality of life (i.e., they are givers and takers of cultural attributes, or life itself). This observation holds true for “Jaguar”, “Caiman”, “Birds of prey”, and “Scavenger birds”. However, “Woodpecker” is also contextualised as a shaman, but is less linked to the duality of life, nor is it described as a traveller between realms. This “bird” is more contextualised as a culture giver, intermingled with “origin myths” as the carver of the “wooden bride” (see 6.2.5 under the heading “*Woodpecker in the narratives*”).

Other “animals” are less directly associated with shamanism (i.e., not described as shamans). “Birds”, “Woodpecker”, “Hummingbirds” as well as various “Shorebirds and waders” come to the shaman’s help on his demand. “Ants”, “Caiman” and “Jaguar” are also contextualised as the assistant of a shaman.

In section 3.4.2, the concept of mastery has already been elaborated upon. In the narratives, various “animals” (e.g., “Caiman”, “Jaguar”, “Birds”) are described as the Master of Water and everything it contains, the Master of Immortality, the Master of Game, the Master of Food/Drink, etc. These Masters/Owners often introduce themselves or are introduced, as a Master/Owner to the protagonist (through direct characterization).

Other powerful agents (e.g., “Nocturnal birds”, “Bats”) are not or to a lesser degree linked to a strictly (or ritualistic) shamanic realm and more linked to the spiritual. They are often closely associated with the night and repeatedly portrayed as embodiments of ancestral souls/spirits and/or malevolent spirits. As such they are depicted as powerful agents lacking certain “civilised/human” traits, causing them to be *significant other-than-human-persons\**.

As with most categorisations, the distinctions between classes can be ambiguous, as is the case with the difference between the shamanic and spiritual realm. Shamans and spirits are considered powerful agents. Both can enter the perspectives of others when transforming. Shamans also interact with the spirits. Auxiliary spirits are consulted or called upon to assist. Shamans protect against malevolent spirits, who for instance cause diseases. However, the shamanic realm is intertwined with (shamanic) rituals, whereby a shaman who fulfils the role

of the negotiator between realms, healer and protector and forms a danger to “others” (see 3.4.2).

The third category consists of “animals” that are more contextualised in every day (village or forest) life, such as “Dogs” and (various) “Birds”. These “animals” offer help in daily life, for instance, as a guard, messenger, or advisor. Interestingly pertaining to “Dogs” in particular is: they connect the forest with the village context. Especially hunting dogs act as hunters (i.e., predators) within the forest setting, and return to the village with game. In sum, “Dogs” can be pets, spouses, potential killers, and predators.

Able to fly and cross natural boundaries, “birds” are messengers *pur sang* rendering them perfect assistants to Amerindians, shamans and spirits. Some “birds” such as “Hummingbird” are strongly linked to the shamanic realm and consequently to the origin of shamanism and/or shamanic paraphernalia.

Secular is the last category mentioned (i.e., in Tables 8.5 and 8.6) and pertains to “animals” referred to as being hunted. This catalyser function is, for example, visible in the narrative describing how: “a man went hunting macaws in the forest”, after which the events unfold. What, or whom is considered food or game also depends on the perspective of the hunter, or of the one eating. “Caiman” (*Iewoo* in Matacoan) is, for instance, considered the game “animal” of the Sun.

Tables 8.5 and 8.6 (pp. 374-375) indicate that the categories are not strictly mutually exclusive and thus that “animals” can be part of more than one category. These categories do not cover all the contexts as trickster narratives are not included. Perhaps more importantly, these categories are ambiguous: should “Caiman” (the Sun’s game) be also part of the “game” category? However, the sole purpose of this categorisation is to illustrate that, although all personages act in the narratives with at least a certain autonomy, the narratives contextualise each and every personage, hereby providing an indication as to the nature of subjectivity (i.e., the level of intentionality and agency). Consequently, Tables 8.5 and 8.6, for instance, reveal that: (a) not all “animals” are portrayed as powerful shamanic or spiritual agents, and (b) different roles and attributes are ascribed to different “animals”, both relevant to our understanding of “animal” imagery.

**Table 8.5.** “Animals” in the narratives categorised according to main contexts, ascribed attributes and associations.

|                       | Narratological contexts |   |   |          |   |   | Main associations and attributes encountered in narratives |   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|---|---|----------|---|---|------------------------------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                       | Spiritual               |   |   | Shamanic |   |   |                                                            |   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|                       | S                       | H | A | S        | M | H |                                                            |   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|                       | S                       | H | A | S        | M | H | G                                                          |   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 1.Caiman              | -                       | + | - | +        | + | + | -                                                          | - | Able to transform; a powerful shaman (life giver and taker); rules the water realm also linked to the sky world. Framed as the Master/Owner of Water and everything that lives in it and of Rain/Thunder; an excellent diver.<br><b>Attributes:</b> notches/scales as punishments, short or absent tongue.                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 2. Birds<br>(general) | -                       | - | + | -        | + | + | +                                                          | + | First to roam this world, linked to sky world; helper (of shamans and human protagonists) as guardians, messengers, advisors, rescuers. Described as embodiments of ancestral, auxiliary spirits; associated with the origin of various goods, especially with “food”, even as Master of Food or Drink. Contextualised in a mundane setting, associated with family affairs, adultery, thievery, and quarrelling siblings.<br><b>Attributes:</b> feathers, beak, colouring (i.e. caused by blood).                    |
| 3. Bat                | +                       | - | - | -        | + | - | -                                                          | - | Guardians of cosmic realms (i.e., gatekeepers living in caves), rulers of the night, ascribed the quality of transformation; avengers of broken taboos, associated with sickness, death and the dead.<br><b>Attributes:</b> long-snouted bloodsuckers with distinctive vocalisation (i.e., laughter); wings with long nails (i.e., wearing finger bones), nose patches and large ears.                                                                                                                                |
| 4. Dog                | -                       | - | - | -        | - | - | +                                                          | - | Contextualised as a secular, helpful animal, closely associated with people and Amerindians village life, as a wife and/or hunting companion. Associated with game (i.e., bridging the forest and village); a protector and guide (even after death).<br><b>Attributes:</b> fearless, excellent sense of smell, hunting skills, and food provider.                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 5. Jaguar             | +                       | - | - | +        | + | + | -                                                          | - | Able to transform, powerful shaman (life giver and taker). Framed both as protector, rescuer and provider (important factors such as fire, festivals, ceremonies, bow and arrow, tobacco, spinning, and even humankind itself, but also as predator <i>par excellence</i> (i.e., dangerous killer) and traveller across realms).<br><b>Attributes:</b> strong claws, fangs, spots, illuminating eyes, and a thunder-like voice. Ascribed qualities: strength, agility and great hunting, climbing and digging skills. |
| 6. Ant                | +                       | - | - | -        | - | + | -                                                          | - | Powerful, ascribed with the quality of transformation and the ability to perform extraordinary tasks. Linked to both the sky world and underworld.<br><b>Attributes:</b> numerous, strong, mighty and wise. Their nests are gateways to other realms, especially to the underworld.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |

**Legend:**

| Spiritual: |                                  |  | Shamanic: |                             |  | Secular: |            |  |
|------------|----------------------------------|--|-----------|-----------------------------|--|----------|------------|--|
| S          | Spirit                           |  | S         | Shaman                      |  | H        | Helper     |  |
| H          | Helper or pet of spirit          |  | M         | Master/Owner (see Glossary) |  | G        | Game, prey |  |
| A          | (Embodiment) of ancestral spirit |  | H         | Helper of a shaman          |  |          |            |  |

**Table 8.6.** “Bird” personages in the narratives studied by means of main contexts, ascribed attributes and associations.

|                          | Narratological contexts |   |   |          |   |   | Main associations and attributes |   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|---|---|----------|---|---|----------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                          | Spiritual               |   |   | Shamanic |   |   |                                  |   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|                          | S                       | H | A | S        | M | H |                                  | H | G                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| a. Parrot-like birds     | -                       | - | - | -        | + | + | +                                | + | Described as helpful “birds” and pets, even wives; often related to food (i.e. Master/Owner of Food), certain types of fruit, <i>cassiri</i> * and maize beer.<br><br><b>Attributes:</b> pet, game, talkative.                                                                                                                                                                |
| b. Ducks                 | -                       | - | - | -        | + | + | +                                | + | Associated to the water realm, as helpful “birds” they assist people crossing bodies of water (i.e., bridging land and water). Masters, and teachers, of canoes.<br><br><b>Attributes</b> float, associated with boats/canoes (i.e. their bodies as boat).                                                                                                                    |
| c. Shorebirds and waders | -                       | - | - | -        | + | + | +                                | + | Associated with the shamanic realm, Masters or containers of Water and Master of Storm; linked to both the sky and water realm; bringers of cultural goods (e.g., fish poison, earthenware, bow and arrow).<br><br><b>Attributes:</b> strong or weak beaks, utilised to hide people, fish poison, intoxicating (i.e., their hunting technique mimics the use of fish poison). |
| d. Humming-birds         | -                       | - | - | -        | + | + | -                                | - | Associated with the shamanic (and sky) realm, as an important aid and bringer of shamanic paraphernalia, i.e. tobacco, rattle, knowledge etc. Associated with the origin of important gifts like fire, childbirth and cloth making.<br><br><b>Attributes</b> hardworking, fast flying and brave.                                                                              |
| e. Woodpeckers           | -                       | - | - | +        | + | + | -                                | - | Associated with the shamanic (and sky) realm and important cultural gifts. A rescuer, guard and messenger and provider of food, especially honey. Master of Axes and Honey.<br><br><b>Attributes:</b> strong beak (i.e., his axe), short tail and beautiful crest (i.e., the headdress of Sun) and excellent food provider.                                                   |
| f. Birds of prey         | +                       | - | - | +        | - | - | -                                | - | Rulers of the sky realm ascribed the quality of transformation; life-takers (i.e., devastating birds) as life givers (i.e., the origin of things and healing practices).<br><br><b>Attributes:</b> large claws, powerful beak, excellent vision, invisibility.                                                                                                                |

|                    |       |       |     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|--------------------|-------|-------|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| g. Scavenger birds | - - - | + + - | - - | Ruler of sky world; ascribed the quality of transformation, powerful, shamanic rulers of the sky world; associated with smelliness, death and immortality; Master/Owner of the Sun/Fire, Tobacco; teacher of shamanic practices and healer; beautiful women, when feathers are put down.<br><br><b>Attributes:</b> wattle on the nose (i.e., nose ornament), two-headed, carrion-eating, smelliness. |
| h. Nocturnal birds | + - + | - + - | - - | Guardians of the night, i.e., Master/Owner of the Moon. Often as embodiments of malevolent, cannibalistic spirits. Their distinctive sounds are associated with the origin/coming of the night.<br><br><b>Attributes</b> wide, vulva-like mouth, howling at the moon (= nightjar); Their sounds scare people and predict ill fate.                                                                   |

| Legend:           |                                  |                 |            |
|-------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|------------|
| <b>Spiritual:</b> |                                  | <b>Secular:</b> |            |
| S                 | Spirit                           | H               | Helper     |
| H                 | Helper/pet of spirit             | G               | Game, prey |
| A                 | (Embodiment) of ancestral spirit |                 |            |
| <b>Shamanic:</b>  |                                  |                 |            |
| S                 | Shaman                           |                 |            |
| M                 | Master/Owner, see Glossary       |                 |            |
| H                 | Helper of a shaman               |                 |            |

### 8.3 Discussing the data: so who is who?

Let us now set out to answer the yet untouched research questions: Why are certain “animals” more prominent than others? And what does this research tell us about the socio-cultural behaviour of the Early Ceramic Age Amerindian islanders? The presented data will, therefore, be analysed on a meta level, which discloses general observations on how “animals” are contextualised, in order to establish a better understanding as to why certain creatures are more prominent than others.

#### 8.3.1 Establishing a hierarchy

In 8.2.2, all “animals” were framed within spiritual, overtly shamanic and, or secular settings as well as in accordance with their ascribed attributes and associations. The next step is: to establish a relative hierarchy of prominence in order to answer the question: why are certain “animals” apparently more significant than others? This issue will be analysed in relation to how these creatures are portrayed, primarily as *adornos* and actors in tales, but also by (potential) other ways of depiction. This approach is preferred because I assume that the Amerindians of the (early) Ceramic Age became familiar with the “multiple identities” of all

humans and non-humans either by means of personal, or hear-say, encounters as well as through cultural displays (e.g., iconography, ritual, dance, and song).

Identity here should be defined as a set of associations and attributes ascribed to a subjectivity within a specific context. These associations and attributes next become mental constructs, or high order representations, communicated through *signs\** (e.g., zoomorphic *adornos*, personages in stories, pendants, ritual and dance). Therefore, that *what*, or which identity, is communicated depends on the context. For instance, “Jaguar” as a subjectivity embodies a multitude of identities, conversed through “jaguar” pendants, *adornos*, rituals, dances, encounters in the forest, etc. It would thus be feasible that the identity expressed differs by means of the display and the context(s) in which it is presented, whereby “jaguar” called upon during a warrior song could comprise a different identity (with specific connotations and associations) than “jaguar” portrayed as an *adorno*.

The fact that (zoomorphic) *adornos* are abundantly present in the Saladoid archaeological record does suggest they are more than *l’art-pour-l’art* and indeed serve an additional function. However, several studied “animals” are also prominent, or solely prominent, in other forms of art and ritual. As shown throughout this research, certain “animals” stand out in the analysed narratives but are absent in ceramic iconography. Then again they could have been part of rituals, or (also) displayed as for example pendants, petroglyphs and benches. Can this variety, and perhaps even preference, contribute to our understanding of the reason why certain “animals” are more prominent than others?

### ***The ways of depiction in relation to what is indicated***

The form chosen to depict and to display the various “animals” presumably was and still is, interconnected with the way they have been conceptualised. This process works both ways. Firstly, their conceptualisation may well have resulted in a preferred way of display (e.g., iconography, dance, oral narratives). Secondly, the way they are depicted as *signs\** also contributes to their indigenous conceptualisation.

It was indeed an erroneous assumption to hope to answer the research questions merely from a (ceramic) iconographical perspective, i.e., by means of identified zoomorphic *adornos*.<sup>199</sup> Although the iconographical identifications matched *quite* well with the identified “animal” personages featured in the narratives, the discrepancies could even be of more value when answering these questions than the “perfect” matches. It was only during the present research that I realised that we are more likely to open our eyes to the full extent of these “animals” as a high-order representation when studying them from a much broader perspective. Hereby I am not only focusing on zoomorphic *adornos* but also on their presence on other materials as well as the role they fulfil in ceremonial life. By studying the “animals”

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<sup>199</sup> The research question referred to here is: Why are certain “animals” more prominent than others?



encountered in these various contexts, we should acquire a better understanding of their indigenous conceptualisation.

Of course, from an archaeological perspective, many of these contexts are lost if consisting, for example, of perishable, long since disintegrated goods. In addition, only limited direct historical references are available concerning the ritual/ceremonial life of the so-called “Taíno” and Island Carib. Even these references most likely do not completely correspond to the ceremonial life of the Ceramic Age peoples. Considering the available archaeological findings, ethnographical research, the narratives and historical accounts at our disposal, we can only catch a glimpse of what could have been. Equally important, as I have hopefully shown, too, is the relevance of our ability to alter our ontological perspective.

In my opinion, singling out zoomorphic *adornos* would limit our view. Therefore additional data have been introduced in the discussion on “animal” iconography. They pertain to other means through which the “animals” as *signs*\* were, or may have been, displayed. The data dealt with here are displayed in Table 8.7. Firstly, their quantitative presence in the narratives is indicated. Next, two iconographical contexts are distinguished: *Adornos* and “Other”. The latter is a broad category including (e.g., stone, teeth, bone) pendants, petroglyphs, benches and decorated tools. The two columns on the far right of Table 8.7 contain references in relation to “animals” being part of, or displayed in specific rituals or ceremonies. For instance, a “caiman” bench used at a marriage ceremony, or plumage applied during a trance/healing ritual, or human and dog burials. However, this category also includes references to (what has been referred to as) “symbolic knowledge”, such as taboos associated with specific “animals”, or certain associations related to these “animals” (e.g., bat droppings as a bad omen) or food taboos for hunting dogs.

In Table 8.7, too, the incidences of the zoomorphic motifs are more precisely indicated, including the narratives and *adornos* by means of symbols (</-/+ , M/I, see legend). All “animals” occur frequently (+/++) in the narratives, as they would not have been mentioned in this study if absent. The “pelican” is excluded as it plays no role at all, although “pelican” *adornos* have been identified. The number of their occurrences in “iconography” is quantified and based on Waldron’s identification of zoomorphic *adornos* (see 2.1.2.). However, examples of other forms of art and ritual are less accurately documented with regard to the present research. They are, therefore, only indicated with a “p” (i.e., positive) whenever a positive identification has been recorded and discussed (see Chapter 5-7, under the headings: (a) *The iconography of “animal”*, and (b) *“Animal” in Amerindian cosmologies*).

The reader is reminded of the fact that the various columns, or categories, are also obscured by the differences in the time span they refer to. The *adornos* from Venezuela and the Caribbean Islands are identified as Saladoid (800/200 BCE-400/600 CE, see 2.1). The sources used for the narratives are (mainly) contemporary (see 3.3 and 3.5), as are the references



found with regard to ritual/ceremonial issues. The category of “other” forms of iconography/art includes references to Saladoid material as well as 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup>-century references to “Taíno” or Island Carib art/tools and contemporary references concerning perishable goods. For instance, jaguar skin, and bird feathers are presumably not retrieved from archaeological records, whereas other materials are rare, e.g., delicate bone material.

Whether these perishables or ceremonies were part the Ceramic Age peoples’ (ceremonial) lives can therefore not be confirmed with certainty. However, the absence of these materials, or “eye-witness” accounts, does not deliver any proof they were not part of the ritual/ceremonial life of these Amerindians. Whatever archaeologists recover is only a fragment of all that once existed.<sup>200</sup> These references are not meant as a direct analogy but serve to reveal the (likely!) possibility that elements of the insular Ceramic Age peoples’ ceremonial traditions are more inclusive than can be reconstructed through archaeology alone.

Thus combining a varied set of data, Table 8.7 illustrates that any absence, or subordination, of certain zoomorphic motifs (e.g., *adornos*) does not imply their absence within other contexts or their display by other means. Without entailing a direct analogy, this could help to understand several discrepancies encountered in the data. For instance, how can we or should we understand the subordination in the identified *adornos* of the powerful, shamanic rulers of land and sky i.e., “jaguar” and “birds of prey”? How did “nocturnal birds” and “caiman”, not depicted on any mainland ceramics, nevertheless become prominent features on island ceramics? Could this fact be a direct reflection of a shift in their conceptualisation? Could these discrepancies, or anomalies, further contribute to finding an answer to one of the main research questions: Why are certain “animals” more prominent than others?

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<sup>200</sup> Readers interested in this bias in the archaeological records and how more contemporary archaeological research could help to fill this hiatus are referred to the PhD study of Jimmy Mans (Mans 2012) who researches the movements of both peoples and objects of the Trio, an Cariban community of Surinam.

**Table 8.7.** Frequency of zoomorphic display in narratives, iconography and ceremonial contexts.

|                          | Narratives | Iconography/art |        |          |          | In ritual** |          |
|--------------------------|------------|-----------------|--------|----------|----------|-------------|----------|
|                          |            | Adorno          |        | Other*   |          | Mainl.      | Island   |
|                          |            | Mainl.          | Island | Mainl.   | Island   |             |          |
| 1. "Caiman"              | +          | <               | ++     | p        | p        | p           | <i>n</i> |
| 2. "Birds (general)"     | ++         | ++              | ++     | p        | p        | p           | p        |
| a. "Parrot-like birds"   | +          | <               | +      | p        | p        | p           | p        |
| b. "Ducks"               | +          | -               | +/-    | p        | <i>n</i> | <i>n</i>    | <i>n</i> |
| c. "Shorebirds & waders" | +          | <               | +      | p        | p        | p           | P        |
| d. "Hummingbirds"        | +          | -               | -      | p        | <i>n</i> | p           | P        |
| e. "Woodpeckers"         | +          | -               | -      | <i>n</i> | p        | p           | <i>n</i> |
| f. "Birds of prey"       | ++         | -               | -      | p        | P        | p           | P        |
| g. "Scavenger birds"     | ++         | +/-             | +/-    | p        | P        | P           | p        |
| h. "Nocturnal birds"     | +          | -               | ++     | p        | p        | p           | P        |
| 3. "Bat"                 | +          | +/-             | ++     | <i>n</i> | p        | p           | P        |
| 4. "Dog"                 | +          | ++              | ++     | p        | p        | p           | P        |
| 5. "Jaguar"              | ++         | -               | -      | p        | p        | p           | P        |
| 6. "Ants"                | +          | -               | -      | <i>n</i> | <i>n</i> | p           | p        |

\*Examples of other forms of "art": petroglyphs, pendants, use of feathers, teeth, bone.

\*\*References relating specific "animal" to rituals or ceremonies, but also references in relation to ritual knowledge (e.g., taboos, or associations related to the 'animal', e.g., a sign of strength, omen for good/bad luck).

| Legend:       |                                   |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|
| -             | No records                        |
| <             | < 10 records                      |
| +/-           | 10-20 records                     |
| +             | 20-50 records                     |
| ++            | > 50 records                      |
| p             | Positive (references recorded)    |
| <i>n</i>      | Negative (no references recorded) |
| Mainl./Island | Mainland/Islands                  |

### 8.3.2 Narrative contexts related to iconography and ways of depiction

A multitude of contexts in which “animals” act are framed by means of the setting as well as by the ascribed attributes and qualities. This procedure has resulted in three main categories: spiritual, shamanic, and secular which are further subdivided (see 8.2.2). In order to ascertain if these contexts can be related to ways of display of “animals”, they are not only combined with identified *adornos* but also with other ways of depiction and with their display within ceremonial contexts. Table 8.8 combines all these data. In order to simplify the information, the narratological and iconographical data are not quantified, as was the case in Table 8.7. Table 8.8 simply indicates whether zoomorphic *adornos* have been identified in Mainland (M) and/or Island (I) Saladoid contexts, but not how frequently they occur.

The first column of Table 8.8 displays the context(s) in which the “animal-actor” is identified in the narratives (see 8.2.2). The narratives contexts are subdivided into: (a) spiritual contexts, i.e., Spirit, Helper/pet and Ancestral, (b) a shamanic context, i.e., the “animal” as a (transformed) Shaman, Master, or as Helper, and (c) a secular context, subdivided into Helper and Game. The next column concerns the two iconographical contexts: *Adorno* and “Other”. For their presence or absence, within any ritual contexts, see the column to the far right. As to the two columns at the right, only the “animals” identification within a Mainland (M), or Island (I) setting is provided, yet again without quantifying the data.<sup>201</sup>

Table 8.8 combines each and every type of data presented in this research. The aim is to demonstrate if any narrative context corresponds to any specific iconographic or ritual display. For instance, are “animals” contextualised within the spiritual context expressed by other means when compared with “animals” contextualised within a secular setting?

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<sup>201</sup> “Jaguar” is not indicated in Table 8.8 as identified *adorno*, because Waldron only identified “feline” (not further specified).

**Table 8.8.** Narrative contexts in relation to iconographical and ritual contexts.

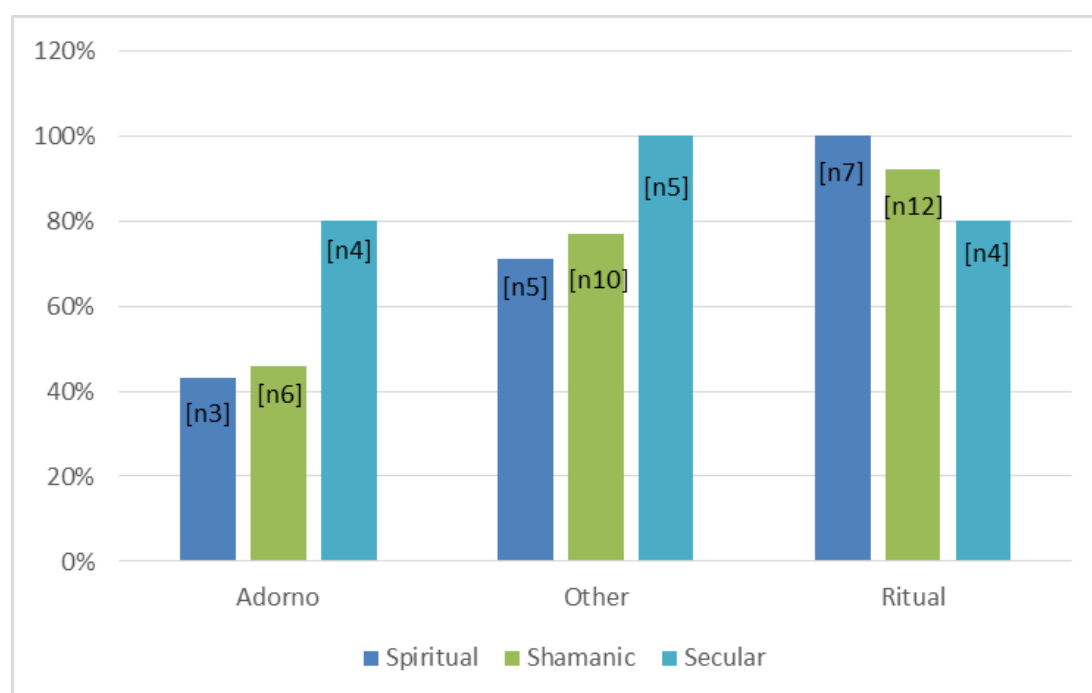
|                          | Narrative contexts |            |           |          |        |        |         |      | Iconographical context |       | In ritual context |
|--------------------------|--------------------|------------|-----------|----------|--------|--------|---------|------|------------------------|-------|-------------------|
|                          | Spiritual          |            |           | Shamanic |        |        | Secular |      | Mainland/Island        |       | Mainland/Island   |
|                          | Spirit             | Helper/pet | Ancestral | Shaman   | Master | Helper | Helper  | Game | Adorno                 | Other |                   |
| 1. "Caimans"             | -                  | p.         | -         | p        | p      | p      | -       | -    | M/I                    | M/I   | M                 |
| 2. "Birds (general) "    | -                  | -          | p         | -        | p      | p      | p       | p    | M/I                    | M/I   | M/I               |
| a. "Parrot-like birds"   | -                  | -          | -         | -        | p      | p      | p       | p    | M/I                    | M/I   | M/I               |
| b. "Ducks"               | -                  | -          | -         | -        | p      | p      | p       | p    | I                      | M     | -                 |
| c. "Shorebirds & waders" | -                  | -          | -         | p        | p      | p      | p       | p    | M/I                    | M/I   | M/I               |
| d. "Hummingbirds"        | -                  | -          | -         | -        | p      | p      | -       | -    | -                      | M     | M/I               |
| e. "Woodpeckers"         | -                  | -          | -         | p        | p      | p      | -       | -    | -                      | I     | M                 |
| f. "Birds of prey"       | p                  | -          | -         | p        | -      | -      | -       | -    | -                      | M/I   | M/I               |
| g. "Scavenger birds"     | -                  | -          | -         | p        | p      | -      | -       | -    | M/I                    | M/I   | M/I               |
| h. "Nocturnal birds"     | p                  | -          | p         | -        | p      | -      | -       | -    | I                      | M/I   | M/I               |
| 3. "Bats"                | p                  | -          | -         | -        | p      | -      | -       | -    | M/I                    | I     | M/I               |
| 4. "Dogs"                | -                  | -          | -         | -        | -      | -      | p       | -    | M/I                    | M/I   | M/I               |
| 5. "Jaguars"             | p                  | -          | -         | p        | p      | p      | -       | -    | -                      | M/I   | M/I               |
| 6. "Ants"                | p                  | -          | -         | -        | -      | p      | -       | -    | -                      | -     | M/I               |

\*Other forms of "art" include petroglyphs, pendants, use of feathers, teeth, bone.

\*\*References relating specific "animal" to rituals or ceremonies, but also references pertaining to ritual knowledge (e.g., taboos, or associations related to the "animal" e.g., a sign of strength, omen for good/bad luck).

To further address this question, the data are simplified in Table 8.9. It depicts the relationship between the narrative context (i.e., Spiritual, Shamanic, Secular) to a way of display (i.e., *Adorno*, Other and Ritual). Excluding the island iconography, merely the mainland iconography has been utilised for this comparison because the stories applied in order to establish the narrative contexts almost entirely hail from Amazonia. Shifts in the display resulting from a change in the indigenous conceptualisation in the islands may obscure this comparison, especially as establishing *if* shifts between mainland and islands have occurred is indeed a subject of investigation.

**Table 8.9.** Relatedness between ways of display and the context of “animal” encountered in narratives.<sup>202</sup>



Although the quantities, placed between square brackets, are low, Table 8.9 reveals that “animals” contextualised within the spiritual and shamanic realms are less likely to be depicted as *adornos* and indeed more likely to be displayed within a ritual context. As indicated, 100 percent of the “animals” contextualised within the spiritual context are identified within a ritual/ceremonial setting and 71 percent is also displayed by other means (e.g., petroglyphs, pendants). However, “animals” contextualised within a secular context are more evenly dispersed across the various categories pertaining to means of representation: 80 percent of those “animals” is depicted as *adorno*, 80 percent is encountered in a ritual context, whereas 100 percent is also displayed by other means.

<sup>202</sup> Multiple records within a single narratological context have been counted as one, e.g., “Nocturnal birds” have been recorded twice for the “Spiritual”, respectively as “spirits” and “ancestral”, but only counted once as to the ways of display and, in this example, once for the categories “Other” and “Ritual”.

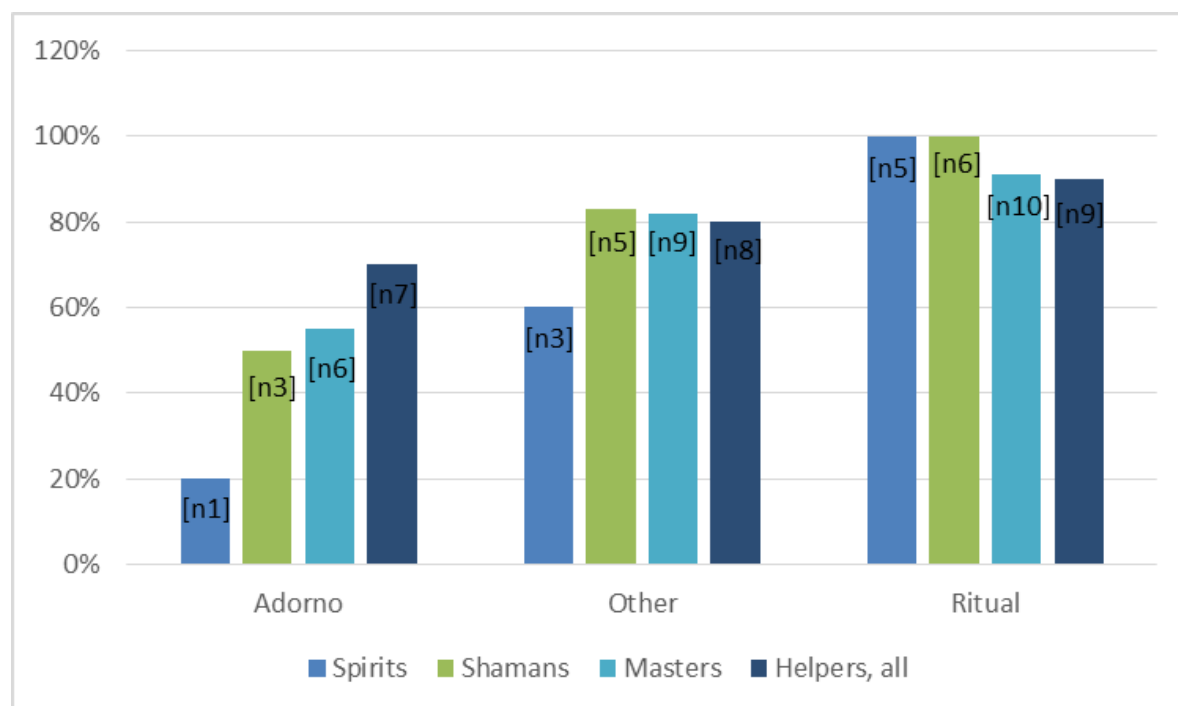
Table 8.9 illustrates the accumulation of all “animals” joined by a shared narratological setting, which results in very broad categories. For instance, the shamanic context now includes all “animals” with the exception of “Dog”. All narratological settings were also further subdivided to end in more precise categories. It is feasible here that Amerindians differentiate, not only in ascribed attributes but also in qualities, between a shaman, a Master/Owner or a shaman’s assistant. As described in 3.4.2. (under the sub-heading *Nature and intensity of subjectivity*), shamans and spirits are the only subjectivities with the ability to “change clothes” (i.e., to transform). Moreover, they are probably the most powerful subjectivities to express a high degree of agency and animacy.

Masters/Owners take in a conceivable high position on the “scale of subjectivity”, but this category is more ambiguous. Presumably, there was and is a difference in ascribed subjectivity between the various masters. Several of those masters are conceived as being more powerful than others (e.g., “caiman” as a Master of Water and its entire contents for instance compared to “woodpecker”, the Master of Axes, or “duck”, the Master of Canoes). In my view, any distinguishing between Master/Owners would be ambiguous, indeed arbitrary if based on this research alone. However, several masters are also contextualised as shaman and/or spirit (e.g., “caiman”, “nocturnal bird”), thus differentiating them from the masters who are not shamans or spirits (e.g., “parrot-like birds”, “ducks”).

Table 8.10 draws distinctions between “animals” contextualised as spirits, as shamans and as masters and also shows how they are displayed. The category “helpers” concerns all assistants (spiritual, shamanic, secular) simply because the shamanic assistants include all others (e.g., “caiman” assists both a shaman and a spirit. “Birds” help in a secular as well as a shamanic setting. It becomes apparent that a spirit is not often imaged as an *adorno* (n=1; 20 percent). Only half of the ascribed shamans is portrayed as an *adorno* (n=3; 50 percent). Masters are only slightly more frequently encountered as *adornos* (n=6; 55 percent), but especially “helpers” are pictured in this manner. Moreover, spirits and shamans are more regularly displayed by others means and/or utilised in a ritual setting.

However, the present study is rich in both narratological data (n=706) and iconographical data (i.e., zoomorphic *adornos* (n=1599), as identified by Waldron (2010, 2016; see 2.1.2). The data presented in the categories entitled “Other” and “In ritual” are arbitrary and therefore inconclusive. Nonetheless, I hope to have pointed here at an opportunity for further research (see also 8.4.2).

**Table 8.10.** Specific narratological roles related to iconographical and ritual contexts (mainland).



### 8.3.3 Explaining anomalies and shifts

Interrelating narrative contexts and ways of display can contribute to our conceptualisation of “animal” imagery, especially when zooming in on “anomalies” and shifts. Zoomorphic motifs shift whenever Venezuelan mainland and Lesser Antillean zoomorphic *adornos* are compared (Waldron 2010, 2016; see also 2.1.2). The preference of depicting mammals in the South American mainland paves the way for dominance of reptiles and amphibians, and to a lesser extent of birds. In addition to this transition of depicted classes of “animals”, other or additional, “animals/birds” have been identified in the islands, such as *adornos* imaging “manatee”, “owl”, “nightjar”, and various aquatic “birds”, e.g., “duck”.

A number of the suggested modifications in identified motifs of *adornos* are apparently the direct outcome of the changed environment of the Amerindian islanders. When the Saladoid communities migrated to the Caribbean islands they came across a very different environment, deprived of various (especially mammal) species, but relatively rich on aquatic species such as amphibians (see 2.1.2). The vista of an (almost) ubiquitous body of water sharply contrasts the dense forests or savannas in the mainland. This unfamiliar environment leads to new or supplementary subsistence strategies, enhanced by everything the sea, swamps and wetlands have to offer. Nevertheless, the diets of these Amerindians included local (and imported) mammal and avian species.

These “new” environments and ways of life must surely have impacted indigenous lore and art. As worlds are built on worlds at hand, it only makes sense that if one of these worlds (i.e., environmental) transforms, the world built upon it will follow (see also 2.3.1 under the sub-

heading “*World-making*”). These habitat changes, therefore, probably contribute to an emergent display of both avian and reptiles/amphibians in the shape of *adornos*. Conversely, these changes do not explain the significant increase or seeming abrupt appearances, of species also native to the Venezuelan mainland i.e., bats, caimans, nocturnal birds, and ducks. Nor could these changes explain the seeming absence, or inferiority, of the main predators as *adornos* considering the fact that “jaguars”, “birds of prey” and “caimans” have not (yet) or scarcely been identified in Venezuelan Saladoid assemblages. Moreover, in the case of “raptor birds”, even their absence as *adornos* on the island assemblages cannot be accounted for whenever solely based on habitat.

Thus, three types of anomalies cannot be contributed to any environmental conditions because: (a) the recurrence of “animals” in the stories, which are either not or rarely, identified as Venezuelan *adornos* (i.e., jaguars, caimans, birds of prey, nocturnal birds, ducks), (b) the evidence of an increase (appearance) in zoomorphic motifs in Saladoid island assemblages of “animals/birds” also present in the mainland (i.e., bats, nocturnal birds, caimans), and (c) pertaining to entirely unidentified *adornos* of “animals/birds” present in both the mainland and Caribbean islands (i.e., birds of prey, woodpeckers, hummingbirds, and ants, see 5.1).

### ***Embodied identities***

Interrelating the narrative contexts and ways of display (see 8.3.2) indicates that “animals” framed as helpers and/or as Masters/Owners and “animals” associated with ancestry (e.g., as the embodiment of souls) in the narratives are most likely to be depicted as *adornos*. Those ascribed full attributes and qualities of shamans or spirits (i.e., potentially our (i.e., human) “jaguars”, our predators) are more likely to be imaged by other means and/or through display in ceremonial contexts. This would imply that a way of display in itself signifies, perhaps even contributes to, the ascribed roles, attributes and associations of the portrayed “animals”. What will happen when the identified modifications and anomalies are reassessed with this implication as a starting point?

Initially the above would presuppose that powerful, potentially predatory shamans or spirits that “suddenly” emerge in the Caribbean islands in the shape of Saladoid *adornos* are no longer (solely) conceived as such. This conclusion entails that “bats”, “nocturnal birds” and “caimans” would have had varied connotations because they are (more prominently) displayed as *adornos* in the islands than in the South American mainland. Moreover, they would have been framed differently, at least as *adornos*, rather as a helper, Master/Owner or an ancestral spirit.

Both “Bats” and “Nocturnal birds” are ostensibly of more relevance to the Saladoid potters of the Caribbean islands because their numbers as to identified *adornos* increase significantly. Waldron does not identify any Venezuelan “owls” and “nightjars” whatsoever. He makes a strong case of a transition in “symbolic meaning” for bats and nocturnal birds (see also 5.3.4,



Waldron 2010: 164-5; a shared contextualisation pertaining to “owl-nightjar-oilbird-bat” or “owl-bat” is mentioned). In various stories “nocturnal birds” and “owls” are either brothers or brothers-in-law. They apparently share a set of ascribed associations which are also present in the Caribbean islands. I am inclined here to agree with Waldron, and many before him, that the manner in which Amerindian islanders connotate the “owl-bats” altered. For the Islanders, their connotations probably moved more strongly towards ancestry and to the gatekeepers/guardians of various realms (see 5.3 and 6.5).

This modification in associations directed away from malevolent, dangerous predatory spirits and ill omens, but moving towards (embodiments) of the ancestral realm may have contributed to the increase of “bat”, “owl” and “nightjar” *adornos*. Their dominance could even indicate the growing importance of ancestry and ancestor worship. Their association with the nocturnal hours, serving as guardians, bringers and signallers of the night may well have remained significant. However, the large variety of display of “owls”, “nightjars” and “bats” renders a differentiation between depicted “animals/birds” quite feasible.

In short, the dominant mainland associations of “bats” and “nocturnal birds” are presumably more linked to bloodsucking bats (a species absent in the islands) and to malevolent, predatory spirits. However, their association with ancestry and departed souls has also been identified in the mainland (see 5.3.4). These connotations and ascribed attributes seem to have become more and more important to the Saladoid Amerindians islanders, which next contributed to an increasing number of depictions, even a dominance, on Saladoid *adornos* from the Antilles.

Similar discrepancy concerns the following. The “caiman” was only marginally identified as a Venezuelan zoomorphic *adorno*, whereas “Caiman” was identified as a common actor in the narratives. Furthermore, in spite of their presumed absence in the immediate proximity of the Antillean potters, the number of identified “caiman” *adornos* in the Antillean assemblages increases. Can a similar change in ascribed attributes and associations explain their increase in being depicted as an *adorno*? If so, this would implicate that “caiman” is contextualised differently, less as a powerful, potential predatory, shaman *per sé*, but more as a helper or Master/Owner. Attributes and associations identified in mainland narratives to stay on are: the wet season, thunder and storm. Especially these associations make sense. For, caimans mainly wash ashore during the rain and hurricane seasons. The potential implications for Amerindian Islanders only recently have become obvious, after Hurricane Irma (Sept. 2017) brought about destruction and desperation on various islands.<sup>203</sup> These connotations could have interrelated “caiman” with these natural forces, especially relevant for activities such as travelling overseas (including going on fishing trips). In that sense, “Caiman” could have

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<sup>203</sup> The consequences of the hurricane season involved, for instance, the resilience and flexibility of the Saladoid islanders to protect themselves from destructive forces perhaps by seeking refuge in caves, or constructing stilted dwellings behind protective mangrove islands (Bright 2011: 33-4).

remained the one to ask for help whenever crossing large bodies of water was required. This role is repeatedly ascribed to “Caiman” (see 7.1).

Conversely, I would suggest that the connotation of “Caiman” as a Master of Water, and all living in it, was lost as a result of this creature’s absence on most Caribbean Islands. None of the animals dealt with in this research is a likely candidate for this more all-inclusive connotation. “Sharks” could have occupied this role as main sea predator. As to local island rivers, or creeks, any present local predator would do so, too. An alternative could comprise replacing this overall Master of Water and everything in it, with a variety of “animal” specific Masters, for instance, the Master/Owner of Fish, of Crab, etc. Likely candidates for Masters of Fish are aquatic birds, especially because otters, the Masters of Fish according to the mainland lore (see 7.1), are also absent on most of the islands. The dominance of “pelican” and “stilt bird” *adornos* in the island assemblages is undeniable, hereby disclosing their relevance to the Amerindian islanders. Caimans once infested the mainland waters, but now these two abovementioned aquatic birds pervade the shores, marshes and swamps of the Caribbean islands. Here one would continually witness their excellent fishing skills, a theme that also dominates the studied narratives.

As discussed above, “Shorebirds and waders” in various mainland stories are related to fishing techniques (e.g., fish poison), and containers (Masters/Owners) of Water and Fish (see 6.2.3, under the sub-heading “*Shorebirds and wader in the narratives*”). I would suggest that as “otter” and “caiman” have lost (at least in part) their associations as the Master of Fish, “shorebirds and waders” could have gained significance in this aspect. One can only wonder if the large variety of these “birds” (e.g., heron, ibis, flamingo) has led to a differentiation, whereby one specific “shorebird” or “wader” is associated to a (specific) fish and another to “sea creatures” e.g., shellfish, crab. Even a variation between islands is feasible here. The great variety and details observed in the identified *adornos* (i.e., referred to as “stilt birds” by Waldron) could then reflect a differentiation.

The “duck” is clearly an aquatic bird with its own associations and attributes, which differ from the studied “shorebirds and waders”. Could a “duck’s” dominating associations with boats contribute to our understanding of its imagery? That gives rise to the question: where is “duck” to be encountered on the mainland Saladoid iconography? Canoes/boats were *also* important to the mainland Saladoid Amerindians, as the Amazon rivers were and still are the highways of the forest. Even if, as suggested in 8.2.2, “ducks” are depicted by other means in the mainland (e.g., in the form of pendants, motifs on canoes, parts of canoe-related rituals), then why are they (also) displayed as *adornos* in the Caribbean islands? I suggest that “duck’s” association with overcoming wetness, the bridging of land and water grew even stronger in the Amerindians’ new habitat. This development may have led to an extended arsenal of attributes, not necessarily solely interconnected with “boats” but also with long sea voyages and/or perhaps even periodic floods. Still possessing the important qualification of being able

to float, “ducks” could have become even more relevant helpers when crossing, or overcoming, vast bodies of water.

### Predatory agents

The supposition suggested here is: powerful, predatory “animals”, that is, those ascribed the attributes and qualities of shamans, or spirits, are not likely to be imaged as *adornos*. Conversely “vulture” is repeatedly identified among Saladoid *adornos*, both within mainland and island contexts, although their frequency evidently drops in the northern assemblages (see 6.4.3). As discussed in 8.2.2, “vulture” is closely related to the shamanic realm, and regularly described as a shaman itself, i.e., as a powerful agent and ruler of the sky world. Conversely, although “vulture” is associated with death and immortality, it is less described as a murderer, kidnapper or destroyer (the “life-taking” aspect of the shaman). “Vulture” is deprived of any dominant predatory (i.e., killer) qualities, which are ascribed to most other shamans and spirits. For instance, “jaguar”, “caiman”, and “birds of prey”, as well as malevolent spirits (including “bats” and “nocturnal birds”) are all characterized as potentially dangerous killers, kidnappers, or otherwise destructive agents. Conversely, “vulture” is powerful and holds sway over decay and death which is a precursor of transformation, i.e., this is the creative aspect of death. It is thus more a benefactor and not so much portrayed as the cause of destruction.

The absence of the aforementioned predatory attributes generally speaking mainly distinguishes “vulture” from other powerful shamans or spirits such as “owls”, “jaguar” and “birds of prey”, which are presumably not imaged by means of *adornos*. Likewise, other ways of displaying “vulture” have been recovered (e.g., pendants, axe blades, see 6.4.3). Could this variety in ways to display “vultures” reflect a discrepancy in signalled connotations which is perhaps related to the setting in which this “bird” was applied or featured? I would suggest this to indeed be the case, especially as the Huecoid pendants presumably portray “king vulture”, whereas Waldron mainly identifies “turkey vulture” as *adornos* (Waldron 2010: 170).

The identification of secondary figures or motifs in relation to the depicted “vulture” comprises contextualising the depicted “vulture” as a *sign*\*. Waldron (and others) have identified various such motifs, e.g., another bird, frog or an anthropomorphic creature (see 6.4.3; Waldron 2010: 173). The “vulture” in combination with the other “animals” or other alter egos could, in my opinion, indicate that the identity displayed possesses the ascribed attributes and qualities of the “vulture” as a shaman/spirit (i.e., powerful life giver/taker (immortality), Master of Tobacco). Other “vulture” imagery may perhaps be more linked to its associations with the Sun, fire, or as a healer. More contextual information on the object portraying a “vulture” would be essential for establishing which identity was displayed. However, the number of *adornos* featuring images of “vultures” evidently decrease in the Caribbean islands. In fact, only four positive identifications pertaining to “vultures” encountered on both the Windward and Leeward Islands are known.

This difference in connotations, in addition to function, when considering *adornos* or pendants also contributes to our understanding of “dog” display. As discussed in 5.2, “dog” imagery and display varies. “Dog” *adornos* are identified in Venezuelan and Antillean assemblages (although mainly as a Leeward Island phenomenon). The vessels adorned with “dog” *adornos* have not only been recovered as burial paraphernalia but within other contexts, too. In the Caribbean Islands, dog graves and canine teeth pendants have been found. As to those vessels encountered within burial contexts projecting the posed hypothesis implies that the “dog” *adornos* probably signal its qualities as a protector and a guardian, for instance, of the deceased (see 5.2.3). The pendants made of dog teeth could then be linked to a canine’s “predatory” qualities as hunting dog being “(like-)Jaguar” to those it catches, i.e., its prey. The hunter adorned with canine teeth would wish to own these jaguar-like qualities in order to secure (or contribute to) success, perhaps even as a means to improve his hunting skills. The “dog” (teeth) pendant then becomes a way to become or appear to be “like-jaguar” to the hunted prey (see also 8.2.4).

My conclusion is: “animals” depicted as *adornos* are mainly contextualised as (shamanic) helpers, Masters/Owners or as ancestral spirits and guardians. Hence I infer that establishing an order of relative significance of “animals” based on their occurrences as *adornos* leads to incomplete results. The question concerning the relative significance of “animals” should be studied from a much broader perspective, whereby the full repertoire of “animal” display includes its utilisation and its relationship to humans and other beings. Nevertheless, numerous examples (e.g., oral narratives, songs, rituals, forms of display by means of perishable ware) are sadly forever lost. Now contemporary analogies can amplify our perspective of what *could* have been or at least function as a reminder of the fact that all we archaeologists are able to recover is merely a glimpse of what once was. In that sense contemporary narratives, ethnographies, as well as historic sources, are relevant to framing all we do reveal, as I hope to have achieved here.

Let us now return to the identified zoomorphic *adornos* in an attempt to determine why certain “animals” are more prominent than others. Waldron’s comparative research in my opinion clearly shows that the Early Ceramic mainland and Island potters had clear preferences. Waldron’s data also indicate a shift in motifs between the mainland and the Caribbean islands. This modification impels a dominance of reptile/amphibian and avian motifs, in favour of the imagery of mammals which is dominant in Venezuelan and Trinidadian assemblages. It also seems, at least partly, to reflect the changed environment with its varied, but now deprived flora and fauna. This transition was probably also influenced by incoming social dynamics, with a great reliance on sea voyages, new challenges such as recurrent hurricanes, and the ostensibly growing importance of ancestry. The latter phenomenon may have been a consequence of saying farewell to the mainland which implies a direct, physical departure from ancestral grounds and roots, even despite the fact the colonists and settlers remained in contact with their mainland “cousins”.

I suggest with regard to “animals” depicted as *adornos*: attributed to important attributes and qualities, they are mainly powerful helpers and not only the Master/Owners of Food, Game, Water, Tobacco or important events (e.g., rainfall and storms), but also the guardians or even the embodiments of ancestral spirits. The vessels adorned with these “animals” were thus a means to communicate with these other (like-)humans, non-humans and possibly *significant other-than-human-persons*\*. The adorned vessels hereby present a means to communicate with a multitude of identities and relationships constituting the cosmic web of which the islanders formed a part.

The *adornos* reveal (even embodied) a segment of the identity of the “animal” displayed. However, each “animal” can potentially express a multitude of identities. The context in which the “animal” is portrayed (i.e., as additions to graves, a utility, during a ceremony) is part of its identity as well. The means by which it is imaged (e.g., *adorno* vs. pendant) must have contributed to the framing and the conceptualisation of the “animal” as a *sign*\*. Although the display of, for instance, “dog”, “caiman”, “heron” includes a large number of identities (i.e., sets of ascribed associations, attributes and qualities), it is through the context of display that we make sense of the image and grasp who or what it portrays. Who the Amerindians met/saw when utilising a specific adorned pot, we will probably never completely be able to ascertain, but when the context is known (after analysing its content or analysis or positioning in a grave) the portrayed identity can be reconstructed more closely (see also 8.3.1).

#### 8.3.4 What about the islanders themselves?

It might seem that the objective of archaeology as a discipline, namely the study of people and human activity through material culture, was no longer in the foreground. The reason for this is: the present research was, and is, very much focussed on “animals” and becoming acquainted with them. Therefore, I would like now to return to the aforementioned objective by means of discussing the final question: What does this research tell us about the socio-cultural behaviour of the Early Ceramic Age Amerindian islanders?

This study provides us with a glimpse of the inclusive world which Ceramic Age Amerindian islanders shared with numerous other humans, non-human and *significant other-than-human-persons*\*. In this world, identities are fluid because shamans and spirits can transform into others by changing clothes. Identity seems fluid, too, because discerning who or what is human (or not) is problematic, at least from our Western point of view. “Jaguar” can be like-human, a shaman, a spirit or predator. However, Amerindians live apparently intermingled with all these “others”, and necessitate various strategies and ways to communicate with them. A number of these strategies are presumably direct and include the responsibility of the shaman, for instance, to restore the order, deflect diseases and (potential) death. Nevertheless, everyone in the community probably has his/her responsibility to sustain “cosmic balance”, e.g., by not crossing ontological boundaries, not breaching social contracts, acknowledging the Masters/Owners of this world, etc. One condition would be: everyone not

only knows of these rules, boundaries, their responsibilities but also of the various “identities” of the other with which they share their world. Artistic behaviour would have been a means through which this collective knowledge is transmitted and put into effect. It is through lore, as well as iconographical display, that the Amerindian communities become acquainted with a variety of “animals” whereby their ascribed attributes and associations are reinforced in their ideas.

The (Early) Ceramic Age potters, both mainland and island, apparently have preferences in displaying specific zoomorphic *adornos*. This research indicates that zoomorphic *adornos* are cultural *signs*\* that convey numerous, needless to say, always modifying and variable identities (Barth 1987). They are framed and understood by means of their respective contexts and ways of display. This is hardly a differentiating feature of “animals” when we compare their identities with our own. My name is Eva, a mother of two, employed at DICTU, a self-funded PhD student, a (grand) daughter, a wife, a friend, and perhaps (but hopefully not) a foe. I can assure you that the attributes, qualities and associations ascribed to me, can vary (quite significantly!) if compared with the contexts in which “Eva” is framed. However, the main difference is here: I am not a cultural *sign*\* (i.e., I do not evoke similar recollections of sentiment).

My research aims to illustrate that zoomorphic *adornos* are presumably a specific means to “communicate”, a means to an end whereby the ascribed attributes and association of the displayed helper, or Master/Owner, or ancestral guardian are addressed. The identity depicted was then linked to either what was once contained in the vessel or to the context in which it is utilised (e.g., assuring success during a fishing trip). The very purpose of vessels is to contain “something”. This could subscribe the likelihood that Masters/Owners are depicted and/or attached to these vessels. Especially Masters/Owners are conceptualised as containing and attributed with what they own or master.

Moreover, pendants embellished with a similar “animal” could, in fact, express another identity and have even fulfilled a different function in communicating with the “animal” on display. An interesting perspective on the adornments of the (human) body comprises the indigenous conceptualisation of “transforming”, that is, changing clothes (see 3.4.2). Especially fur or teeth could have been considered either elements of an (incomplete/partial) transformation or the inclusion of several attributes and qualities of one’s identity. This would imply that these pendants and adornments are more than a display of male prowess, but indeed a means to “become”. Dog teeth contribute to developing into an excellent hunter when chasing the prey animals of dogs (i.e., turning into their “jaguar”). However, this “becoming” is presumably not without danger, one could become one’s own “jaguar” (i.e., one that predates Amerindians). Should restrictions and/or precautions therefore perhaps not

manage the dressing in the “clothes” of shamans, spirits or predators?<sup>204</sup> What I do suggest, based on this research, is: the “identity/identities” encountered here probably vary with regard to the context of their display and use, as well as to deciphering an identity (e.g., specific *adorno*, pendant, axe). Therefore it can only be carried out after a study and appreciation of these (social) contexts concerning use and display has been established (see 2.3.1).

Interrelating iconography and stories results in interesting avenues along which to better understand the Early Ceramic Age communities. We can safely assume that oral narratives, iconographical display, and other “art” forms fulfilled similar functions for those who, independent of their locations, told/listened, created/witnessed these narratives during the Ceramic Age. From that perspective the questions rise: (a) what can the material culture (i.e., Saladoid zoomorphic *adornos*) inform us on the communities in which they were created and applied, and (b) which forms of knowledge do they presumably share through narratives as well as other means of “animal” display?

Would the same narrative clusters have been identified? I personally doubt it. Could the same motifs and themes be part of Ceramic Age folklore? Probably! Motifs and themes are specifically linked to the functions oral narratives served, and to date serve, in the lives of humans: validating the world, encoding social behaviour and informing (see 3.2 and 4.1.1). Narratives would have provided an avenue to explain why things are as they are, thus providing insights into social etiquette as well as practical information on everyday life. Moreover, Ceramic Age folklore mirrors a worldview, perhaps framing humans and non-humans, helpers, masters, shamans, and spirits not only in relation to each other but also within their respective spatial and temporal contexts. The “arts” (e.g., iconographical display) remains a means to share forms of encyclopaedic and to what has been referred to as “symbolic knowledge”.

The transformed way of life of the Early Ceramic Age islanders, migrating from the South American mainland to the Caribbean Islands, required new forms of knowledge, both encyclopaedic as well as symbolic, including *signs*\* (both iconic and symbolic) in order to easily transmit and share any recently acquired insights. This transition not only includes the incorporation of new themes played out by new or altered actors but also motifs which most probably assist the island communities the most when dealing with their natural, social and cosmological realities. In this respect, I consider the following three themes to be most probable: (overseas) travelling and trade as well as seasonal and geographical information.

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<sup>204</sup> The way Ceramic Age Amerindians conceptualise teeth pendants can only be conjectured. Perhaps a pendant was deprived of its most deadly/dangerous qualities through ritual or social restrictions? Was its utilisation only available to shamans, and perhaps to other appointed “powerful” men? Or, was it restricted to “controlled” contexts? See also 3.4.2 under the sub-heading *Nature and the intensity of subjectivity*.

Extensive exchange networks characterize the Saladoid cultural era. They interconnect the entire insular Caribbean as well as the surrounding mainland (see 1.1). I, therefore, would have expected to come across more narratives on oversea voyages which would, for instance, entail motifs describing the best (or worst) time to travel and associated actors that signify this moment. Other motifs related to this topic could have concerned: (a) the best routes and places to visit in search of specific goods or raw materials, and (b) entering unknown areas, for instance, hereby describing how to find fresh water (e.g., frogs as indicators of water).

As a second point of interest, I would expect to encounter motifs related to either seasonality with associated dangers or to opportunities (e.g., warnings regarding the hurricane season, floods, strong currents, winds). This theme would also include motifs dealing with the arrival of migrating species (e.g., crabs). Thirdly, narratives with a geographical element pertaining to finding the right direction at sea assisted by navigation and the constellations. These narratives would involve motifs concerning identifying specific islands, fishing grounds, hunting places, and sources for raw material (e.g., wood, clay) in order to produce certain goods.

Throughout place and time, communities have remained interconnected. Islanders liaise with residents of the mainland and other isles, exchanging narratives, expressions of belief and examples of material culture. Therefore, in addition to local variations, broadly shared themes and motifs would have existed. All aspects of (local) Amerindian life (i.e., social, natural, cosmological) are, and were, embodied in folklore, iconography and ceremonial life. Narratives would thus mirror the high variety as well as the homogeneity of South American mainland lore. They reflect the identified *adornos*, which notwithstanding local preferences also present a high degree of consistency.

The identified *adornos* in the islands reveal transitioning motifs, whereby overall reptile/amphibian and aquatic “animals” and “birds” become more prominent, whereas the incidences of mammals decrease. These changes are presumably also reflected in their lore, which as always portrays “animals” in various contexts. Whenever incoming creatures are incorporated, a number of them are contextualised differently, while others may have disappeared from lore as is the case pertaining to iconography. I reject the assumption that one-to-one replacements, whereby one “animal” substitutes another, occurred. It is more probable that certain associations and attributes are transferred, or actually ascribed, to other “animals”. The reason for this is: each “animal” as a cultural *sign*\* embodies a unique set of identities, intertwined with their roles in nature, in indigenous cosmologies, in iconography and lore, rendering a one-to-one substitution unlikely.

Initially, this study aimed at quantifying the narratives, their motifs, actors and themes which we, Caribbean archaeologists, tend to turn to quite frequently. Facilitating any future Caribbean archaeologists to forward more grounded statements in relation to (mainland)



narratives, I propose a means to test: (a) if supposed motifs, attributes and association of an “animal” are indeed linked to that specific “animal” or if they are overall very often independent of a specific actor, and (b) if a specific narrative or theme is either an isolate or broadly shared (e.g., restricted to one language or dispersed). As has hopefully become clear throughout the present research, it was never my intention or suggestion to apply the studied narratives as a direct analogy to any interpreted specific archaeological, iconographical features. As a means to frame, or contextualise, the archaeological material, especially the iconographical display, we should embrace the various narratives available to us.

These final paragraphs have disclosed that we do not necessarily have to look for, or at, mainland stories as a source for a direct analogy to interpret archaeological findings. We can, however, safely assume that all expressions of “making special-behaviour”, i.e., narratives and iconographical display are and were built upon the worlds at hand. This implies that the Ceramic Age islanders’ “new” social, natural, material and cosmological reality is reflected in all forms of “art”. As Caribbean archaeologists, we continually improve our knowledge of all these realities, and therefore implicitly also expand our understanding of imagery, such as zoomorphic *adornos*.

## 8.4 So what?

Some final thoughts now on the relevance of this particular research as well as on its limitations and avenues for further research. For instance, how can this study contribute to the interpretation of a specific *adorno* or pendant or any other comparable remains we may (have) come across?

### 8.4.1 A means to an end

I would now like to reflect on the methodologies, theories, conclusions, and results. In which manner did the methodologies and theories contribute to the results presented here? And more importantly, how do these results contribute to our current understanding of the ancient Saladoid iconography and its creators.

The 706 stories investigated in this dissertation served as a means to contextualise and conceptualise “animals” motifs. Narratological methods (focusing on the fabula- and the story-layer) have been applied in order to target the spatial as well as the temporal contexts in which (specifically) “animals” are positioned within these tales. These 706 narratives were studied as an integral dataset, clustered by means of “animal” actors. Moreover, they were further sub-categorised on the basis of specific themes and motifs linked to “animal” actor. This approach has unravelled indigenous forms of knowledge which lay at the core of the ascribed connotations and associations pertaining to these “animals” personages. This in-depth analysis demonstrated that specific motifs, associations and contexts are not only related to specific “animals” but also revealed a multiplicity of identities of each “animal”.

A unique trait of tales is: each actor is described based on its, his or her own perspective as well as on the perspective of others, a phenomenon also referred to as “perspectivism in action”. Especially this trait renders tales a valuable expression of native ontologies, and therefore highly suitable as a framework with which to study native perceptions on “animals”. Hence this research indicated which “animal” personages are portrayed either as (powerful) agents with subjectivity and/or as the *significant other-than-human-persons\** (i.e., spirits), and/or as lacking agency, for instance when described as prey animals (see 8.2.2). Considering that stories parade “perspectivism in action”, this study has shown that the abovementioned outcome is linked to the personage who perceives. For example “dog” is perceived a helper (or wife, paramour) from Amerindian-protagonist’s perspective, as he assists him, whereas he is also perceived as “jaguar” by the (prey) animal it kills.

As part of this research, the narratological data were compared to other sets of data. Here, Saladoid zoomorphic *adornos* served as the (main) case study. These data were next supplemented with ethnographic and historical references pertaining to other forms of “animal” display and (ceremonial) use. This comparative analysis disclosed that: (a) the most common “animal” personages are also most commonly encountered in other forms of display, and (b) the existence of several discrepancies when compared with identified Saladoid zoomorphic *adornos*. Especially these discrepancies proved interesting when conceptualising “animal” imagery. Moreover, they indicated that the “animal” on display cannot be studied independently from the (social) context in which it was displayed. A “Dog” (tooth) pendant and a “Dog” *adorno* therefore presumably display a different identity as well as ascribed different sets of associations and attributes. The multiplicity of identities of “animals” recognised in the stories thus helps to conceptualise this variety of “animal” display.

Contributing to the field of Caribbean archaeology, this dissertation comprises a quantitative and qualitative analysis of stories whereby our understanding of “animals” in Amerindian worldviews is enriched. A quantitative approach enables trends for each “animal” actor to be investigated in relation to other tales. The qualitative approach provides a rich, in-depth account of the roles and attributes of each “animal” hereby disclosing the multiplicity of their identities. These identities are useful when conceptualising the variety of “animal” display we encounter in the field of Caribbean archaeology. This dissertation, therefore, shows that a more thorough understanding of native ontologies and of those narratives which express these ontologies does indeed serve the conceptualisation of “animal” imagery.

#### **8.4.2 It is all about context(s)**

The present dissertation does not entail a full contextual iconographical study, but focuses merely on the “understanding stage”, by contributing to the re-creation of the social context and social reality of zoomorphic *adornos* (see 3.1.1). Moreover, re-creating this reality is conducted from a dominant narratological perspective. This study does nonetheless pose an interesting hypothesis that opens possibilities for further avenues comprising: (a) ways of

display (e.g., pendant vs. *adorno*) is linked to the imaged identities and to the context(s) in which it is applied. This hypothesis is further concretized in: (a.1) *adornos* which are more likely to feature helpers, Masters/Owners, or (embodiments of) ancestral spirits, and less likely to display predatory, powerful shamans and spirits, and (a.2) predatory, powerful shamans and spirits which are more likely to form parts of ritual and ceremonial acts as well as to be portrayed by other means, including (tooth) pendants, fur/skin, ritual paraphernalia (e.g., axes).

This hypothesis now, for instance, suggests that “caiman” *adornos* and “caiman” teeth pendants would reflect another identity i.e., a different set of attributes and associations. However, more contextual data on a particular ornament are required in order to establish which identities were most probably expressed.

Only further research can shed more light on the contexts in which zoomorphic *adornos* were created, used and dispersed. This should entail a holistic approach and comprise a formal iconographical study, whereby attention is paid to morphological analysis, object positioning within the site and image position on the vessel (see for instance Wauben 2018). This complementary analysis could then lead to a better understanding of which identity/identities are presumably displayed by means of the studied object(s). Similar research on (teeth) pendants, benches, ritual axes, and other items portraying “animals” can then be compared in order to test the hypothesis, followed by it being either accepted or rejected.

This is not a futuristic prospect as, for instance, the interest of many of my peers in the “biographical approach” (Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986) indicates. This approach results in thorough studies on, for example, beads, *threepointers*\* (i.e., objects of worship, with three cardinal points), and ceramics. Each study focusses on these archaeological remains departing from every step of their owner’s “lives”, ranging from chosen raw materials to production stages, ways they were utilised or functioned, the context of dispersal, the inner context, and to the context of the archaeological site itself.

However, even in these aforementioned studies, the focus tends to lie on one particular material culture category (e.g., ceramics, lithics, glass or shell). This monolithic approach limits our view significantly. For a more adequate understanding of “animal imagery”, we require broad comparative studies that include multiple categories of material culture. These classifications can provide additional qualitative data, holistic contextual information as well as quantitative information on other materials (e.g., which “animals” are prominent in shell and which in stone?). This assessment will not only substantially add to our comprehension as to why certain “animals” are more prominent in display, but also further enrich our appreciation of their indigenous significance.

### 8.4.3 Unravelling identities

In addition to this more long-term avenue, other prospects follow from the present research. They should contribute to our understanding of zoomorphic *adornos*, even of zoomorphs not dealt with in this study. Firstly, as to the general frame, that is as an *adorno*, it is presumably ascribed attributes of a helper and/or Master. Secondly, this investigation has also revealed that many attributes and associations were rooted in natural qualities (both physical and behavioural), as well as in social and cosmological contexts which reinforce each other.

Therefore, it would make sense to at least study these contexts in an attempt to reconstruct their specific identities. Does the “animal” here display any noteworthy behaviour? For instance, are its hunting or fishing skills impressive? Is it a possible marker for seasonal changes (e.g., rainy season, the best time to sow)? Can it be linked to any specific temporal or spatial settings, i.e., serve as a marker of night, day, nearby bodies of water, specific (useful) plants or materials? What is its most likely function in Amerindian cosmology? And, how then could the posed association(s) be related to the social reality and to challenges presented to the indigenous communities who not only create but also interpret these identities?

And while doing so, we must keep in mind that the world is full of humans, like-humans, non-humans and *significant other-than-human persons*\*. All are intricately interconnected with the perspective of the differentiator. We ourselves are (like-)jaguar when assessing that which ends up on our plate. Others may turn out to be (or are) our (like-)jaguar, the ones that hunt us down, even kill us. So, please remain careful when you meet somebody else, because everything indeed does have its jaguar!