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

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Citation

Paulsen, E. R. (2019, September 5). *Everything has its Jaguar. A narratological approach to conceptualising Caribbean Saladoid animal imagery*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/77630>

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Issue Date: 2019-09-05

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Glossary

adorno

A modelled and incised ceramic animal/human figurine, or head lug.

behique

An indigenous (“Taíno”) term meaning “shaman” (see below).

cacique

An indigenous (“Taíno”) term for a village chief.

cassava

An edible starchy root (*Manihot esculenta*) aka *yuca*. Raw cassava is toxic. Amerindians cultivate both sweet and bitter cassava. It is commonly used to make bread and *cassiri*, an alcoholic liquor.

cassiri

An alcoholic liquor consisting of cassava juice produced by steeping, boiling and fermenting cassava.

cemí, see *zemí*.

cohoba

An indigenous (“Taíno”) ceremony (aka *yopo*) in which the ground seeds of a tropical tree (*Piptadenia peregrine*) are inhaled in order to create a mind-altering effect. Shamans apply it to enter into a trance. Bilateral tubes serve to deeply inhale this substance.

demiurge

The autonomous deity and creator of the material world.

kenaima/kanaima

A Carib term referring to a vengeful spirit, an assassin, which can possess humans and cause them to murder others. A *kenaima* turns them into deadly animals. One can “invite” this malevolent spirit by means of drug-induced rituals, for instance, in a quest for vengeance.

meaning

That which is evoked by (a) symbol(s) or sign(s) i.e., a shared recollection of emotions.

motif (in narratology)

Within the narratological discourse, motifs are the smallest recognisable parts of the narrative (e.g., an evil stepmother, a helpful animal, a magic arrow).

motifs (in iconography)

In this research, motifs pertain to visual renditions of a sign (see below). They can take the shape of abstract dots, lines, incisions and patterns. More naturalistic depictions of animals, such as zoomorphic *adornos*, are also encountered

opías

A “Taíno” term meaning souls/spirits of the deceased.

Saladoid

A ceramic series named after its type site Saladero which is located on the Lower Orinoco River (Venezuela). This pottery style serves to mark the comprehensive cultural tradition of the Early Ceramic Age (c.800/200 BCE to 400/600 CE). This specific style and shared material culture enable archaeologists to “identify” the Early Ceramic Age Amerindians of the Caribbean archipelago. The Saladoid ceramic series is characterized by means of thin walled, elaborately painted, incised and modelled ceramic vessels and *adornos*.

shaman/shamanism

Shamans are able to enter the point of view of other beings (but still re-enter his or her own perspective), because they are, or can be, conductors of perspectives. Shamans transform and travel through time. **Shamanism** is a practice that involves entering into altered states of consciousness, facilitating shamans to perceive and interact with all “others” in this world, to travel across various cosmological layers, and through time. Shamans protect their communities and maintain the cosmic balance.

sign

Anything that stands for or signifies something, i.e., a signifier to a given signified. The relationships between signifier and signified are: (a) iconic signs, whereby a connection is established by means of resemblance: the signifier looks, smells or sounds like the signified, (b) indexical signs whereby a connection is established through contiguity, e.g., cause and effect, and (c) symbolic signs whereby the connection is artificial and arbitrary, i.e., imposed by humans (see also **symbol**).

significant other-than-human-person, see **spirit**.

spirit

A spirit is a “significant other-than-human-person” that can transmute and therefore appears as (i.e., wear the coat of) an animal and a human being. However, these significant other-than-human-persons lack a key aspect of “being human”. For instance, according to Trio (Cariban), spirits do not speak a “human-language”, because they have a speech impediment.

Symbol/symbolism

For symbols the relation between signifier and signified is arbitrary. A symbol cannot be defined in words, but all it evokes is both culturally and personally determined. In this study iconographical features are considered symbols because their meaning cannot be literally translated as if it were a “visual language”. Iconography is, however, invested with indigenous knowledge. Within their own cultural context, they have significance comprising a shared recollection of emotions.

Taíno

This term serves to denote the (Arawakan) indigenous peoples of the Caribbean, populating the Greater Antilles, when Columbus arrived in the late 15th century. On his second journey, Columbus was greeted with “Taíno, taíno”, which was translated as meaning “noble” or “good”. Since the 19th century this term is applied to the inhabitants of a large territory, assuming they all spoke the same language and shared a common culture (see Keegan & Hofman 2017: 12-4).

threepointer

This object of worship has three cardinal points, see also *zemi*.

yopo, see *cohoba*.

yuca, see *cassava*.

yucuta

A beverage made of cassava.

yuruma

Palm starch produced from the moriche palm (*Mauritia flexuosa*), an ingredient of baked bread.

zemi/cemí

An “object²⁰⁷” embodying a deity or spirit, which formed part of “Taíno” ceremonial life. *Zemis** are identified as formal deities, e.g., Yúcahu (the supreme spirit), Atabey (his mother), whose images are included in the Caguana ballcourt in Puerto Rico (Saunders 2005: 321). The term *zemi/cemí* is applied to a wide variety of artefacts, which differ in both form and materiality. This term also serves to refer to the cult of which these embodied “objects” are part.

²⁰⁷ Oliver (2009: 59) states that a *zemí* is not a thing, but a state of being and thus a numinous power as well as a driving force that compels action.