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Author: Paulsen, E.R.
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A narratological approach to conceptualising Caribbean Saladoid animal imagery.
Eva Renée Paulsen.

Propositions.

1. The study of (zoomorphic) iconography in the pre-Columbian Caribbean requires a multi-disciplinary and a holistic approach which should include a comparative analysis as well as taking into account the contexts in which the object was created, applied and discarded.

2. “Decorating” ceramics and telling stories form part of the same behaviour (i.e., “making special”-behaviour) which both involve processes of world-making, by means of which new worlds are created based on the worlds at hand.

3. (a) The great variety, large distribution and number of (zoomorphic) adorns is a clear sign they served a purpose beyond “beautifying” the object to which they were once attached. (b) However extracting examples of adornment (e.g., adorns, other modes of “decorations”, iconography) as the main research focus thus not only limits our view but also narrows our understanding of the manufacturers of such pottery.

4. Preferences in Saladoid zoomorphic adorns clearly existed. However, they could blur the varieties in preferences between materials and other means of display (e.g., ceremonial dances, songs, adornments/clothing).

5. A fixed description and/or translation of an iconographical (zoomorphic) motif (e.g., “jaguar”, “dog”) does not exist and never did.

6. Differentiating between anthropomorphic and zoomorphic iconography is either the outcome of or a reflection of our Western worldview and thus problematic in the light of Amerindian ontologies and worldviews. Avoiding the human-animal (culture-nature) dichotomy is equally problematic.

7. A structuralistic approach is powerful and useful but its value diminishes when considering interpretative purposes which pertain to non-Western datasets.

8. Setting geographical boundaries presents a necessary evil to researchers who are either interested in or deal with social, political and cultural interaction. One must always keep in mind that these boundaries are artificial and were never “experienced” by native communities.

9. The study of native Amerindian narratives should be compulsory for all students with an interest in Amerindian culture, because narratives educate us by means of (shared) experiences. Allow Amerindians to school us through their stories, and not teach them through ours.

10. Present-day issues related to a sense of loss of cultural - even personal - identity experienced by many Dutch and Europeans are at least partly due to the fact that we seem to have lost our (communal/shared) stories.