Lawrence Waldron, *Pre-Columbian Art of the Caribbean*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2019. xxi + 406 pp. (Cloth US\$125.00)

This is a most welcome, detailed, amply illustrated, and insightful discussion of the visual art of the pre-Columbian Caribbean, not written by an archaeologist but an art historian. As such it shows an at-times refreshingly novel perspective in its treatment of the archipelago's past Amerindian artistic production and its societal and religious context. Lawrence Waldron, an assistant professor of art history at Queens College of the City University of New York, has published widely on the spiritual aspects of the anthrozoomorphic iconography in the ceremonial pottery of the Early Ceramic Caribbean, especially that of the Lesser Antilles and Puerto Rico.

Of course, it is well known that our archaeology-based impression of past Amerindian materiality in the Caribbean and beyond is highly skewed; comparison of the archaeological record with the rich variety of artifacts made formerly by the indigenous peoples of the Guianas and Amazonia clearly shows that perhaps as much as 80 percent of the prehistoric Antillean material culture has decayed in the soil; that includes implements, weapons, ornaments, domestic requisites, clothes, musical instruments, and ceremonial objects—things made from organic materials such as cotton, plant fibers, bamboo, feathers, leather, bark, skin, wood, and calabashes. Other aspects of material culture are similarly unretrievable such as Caribbean decorative patterns of Amerindian body painting. Consequently, the pre-Columbian objects of artistic value that have survived are typically made of pottery, stone, bone, shell, and coral. In addition, a small number of wooden artifacts have been preserved under exceptional circumstances such as in Trinidad's Pitch Lake or the protective climatic ambiance of the limestone caves mainly in the Greater Antilles. In addition to these prehistoric items of visual art there are numerous sites throughout the Caribbean that have yielded intriguing specimens of Amerindian rock drawings and paintings, as well as the impressive late-prehistoric ceremonial centers of the Greater Antilles and (some of the) Bahamas and Virgin Islands.

Dividing the artistic development of Antillean prehistory into a sequence of three periods, Waldron distinguishes the Antillean Archaic (6000–500 BC), Early Ceramic Florescence (500 BC–AD 650/700), and Late Ceramic Florescence (AD 700–1500). Although he asserts that the artistic achievements of the Archaic period, especially its stonework, may have been more well developed than that of the first Ceramic Age Amerindians, there is little to sustain this position except for individual finds of some ceremonial stone artifacts of unknown age and essentially undated cave pictographs. More convincing, elucidatory, and indeed perceptive is Waldron's analysis of the spiritual

associations of the (partly Barrancoid-inspired) Saladoid and Huecoid pottery iconography, notably that of effigy vessels and shamanic paraphernalia such as incense burners and nostril bowls, as well as small three-pointed stones and the often zoomorphically sculptured bodily accoutrements of the Early Ceramic Florescence. Discussing the imagery shown by the latter and the pottery of this era, Waldron points to the strong continuity in the zoomorphic species (and their symbolism), favored for modeling throughout the Antillean Ceramic from the first Saladoid potters to those of Chican Ostionoid (“Taíno”) times, meaning the Arawakan-speaking Amerindians who encountered and not long after clashed with Columbus. Apart from hybrid creatures or anthropo-zoomorphic images, these species include mainly bats, frogs, dogs, owls, and turtles—all icons reflecting the Antillean transformation of the animistic repertoire of mythological themes from the lowland forests of the South American mainland.

The most imaginative part of Waldron’s study deals with the Late Ceramic Florescence of the Greater Antilles, which has yielded the majority of items of visual art that have survived the ages—pictographs, and practically all monumental plazas and ball courts embellished with petroglyphs. Characterized by a societal evolution toward multivillage hierarchical polities of chiefdom type, the material culture of this final episode in the pre-Columbian Greater Antilles shows an outburst of highly spiritually charged artistic creativity, focusing on typically elite-associated stone, shell, and bone sculpture, ceramics, and even small objects made of hammered *guanín* (a gold-copper alloy). Chiefly regalia of often ancestral heritage and imbued with powerful spirits (*cemís*) associated with deities known from the “Taíno” pantheon, such as monolithic axes, stone belts, elbow stones, and elaborately sculptured three-pointed stones (trigonoliths), are typical. This applies also to shamanic paraphernalia such as intricately decorated wooden, bone, or stone rattles, pestles for grinding hallucinogenic drugs, inhalers, vomiting spatulas, and statues or drug pedestals of deities or culture heroes, as well as rare examples of cotton or beaded *cemís* and chiefly belts. All in all, Waldron’s discussion of the spiritual impregnation of the “Taíno” artistic achievement is admirable.

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