COMMENT

COMMENT ON BOOK REVIEW

Lawrence Waldron

In reading the recent *LAQ* review of my 2016 work, *Handbook of Ceramic Animal Symbols in the Ancient Lesser Antilles* (Roosevelt, review of Waldron, *Latin American Antiquity* 29:413–414), I was reminded how neglectful my own profession of precolumbian art history has been of ancient Antillean studies. Recognizing this important lacuna in the research, the University Press of Florida approached me with the possibility of writing two books on precolumbian Caribbean art. As pioneering works in this area, these books will be read by scholars mostly outside this area. They are bound to run afoul of readers who might think *zoic* (for formless animal spirits) is merely an overwrought version of *zoomorphic* (for physical representations of them), *realistic* means the same as *mimetic* or *naturalistic*, and *trigonal* ought to carry a meaning derived from geology rather than biology (e.g., trigonal clam shells) or the standard dictionary definition (i.e., "triangular in cross section"). Just two complaints in the *LAQ* review about my term usage could improve the book. Several times I used the word *endemic* instead of *native* inappropriately, and the word *rectilinear* should have been used more often than the vaguer *geometric*. The rest is quibbling. For example, my use of the term *Amazonid* (used similarly by preeminent Caribbean archaeologist Irving Rouse) to describe the culture of both Antilleans and Amazonians, is consistent with my insistence throughout the book that Antillean cultures, while partially derived from Amazonian ones, are not themselves Amazonian.

The divide between the natural sciences and liberal arts, or between Amazonists and Caribbeanists, might vex us into ignoring important evidence-based methodological commonalities that bridge disciplines. For example, my methodology chapter offers detailed criteria for identifying animal species represented in early Caribbean ceramics, invites researchers to modify these criteria as more artifacts come to light, and discourages arbitrary identifications.

Finally, the review has several errors, including my purported lengthy discussion of groups who are not even mentioned in the book. I will leave it to the *LAQ* readers to locate my article on the gender of Saladoid potters (cited in the book) and decide for themselves whether or not I have been neglectful of this issue.

As precolumbian Caribbean art history takes its place alongside the archaeology of Caribbean and South American antiquity, but also the study of colonial, modern, and contemporary Caribbean art, hopefully we can read across the various disciplines with mindfulness of the different aims of each discipline. Perhaps as we see the familiar rendered in unfamiliar terms, we might take some deeper understanding back to our own fields.

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