



Boletim do Museu Paraense Emílio
Goeldi. Ciências Humanas

ISSN: 1981-8122

boletim.humanas@museu-goeldi.br

Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi
Brasil

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Boletim do Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi. Ciências Humanas, vol. 4, núm. 1, enero-abril,
2009, pp. 39-56

Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi
Belém, Brasil

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The Palikur Potters: an ethnoarchaeological case study on the Palikur pottery tradition in French-Guiana and Amapá, Brazil
As Oleiras Palikur: um estudo de caso etnoarqueológico sobre a tradição cerâmica dos Palikur na Guiana Francesa e no Amapá, Brasil

Martijn van den Bel¹

Abstract: Ethnographic fieldwork (1994-1998) by the author among the Palikur of French-Guiana and Amapá State, in Brazil, provided a description of the actual state of their pottery tradition. It shows how the last Palikur potters manufacture ceramics and how they decorate their pottery. The Palikur decoration motifs reflect the organisation of Palikur society which is embedded in their oral tradition. They play an important role during public (ritual) events such as marriage, initiation and death. This information can be used as a tool for archaeologists to gain a better understanding of pre-Columbian ceramic complexes.

Keywords: Ethno-archaeology. Palikur. Pottery tradition. Decoration motifs.

Resumo: O trabalho de campo etnográfico (1994-1998) realizado pelo autor entre os Palikur da Guiana Francesa e do estado do Amapá, no Brasil, forneceu uma descrição do estado atual de sua tradição cerâmica. Mostra como as últimas oleiras Palikur manufaturam e decoram sua cerâmica. Os motivos decorativos dos Palikur refletem a organização da sociedade Palikur, que é imersa em sua tradição oral. Desempenham papel importante durante eventos (rituais) públicos, tais como o casamento, a iniciação e a morte. Essa informação pode ser usada como uma ferramenta para que os arqueólogos ampliem a compreensão sobre complexos cerâmicos pré-colombianos.

Palavras-chave: Etnoarqueologia. Palikur. Tradição cerâmica. Motivos decorativos.

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Wenn man die Graburnen und den Perlentopf der alten Palikur mit den keramischen Leistungen der heutigen vergleicht, so kann man nicht umhin, der Verfall der Töpferei und besonders die Verrohung der Ornamentik zu bedauern. Und auch das Wenige, was die jetzigen Palikur noch an Keramik anfertigen, ist offenbar im Absterben¹.
Curt Nimuendaju (1926, p. 41).

INTRODUCTION

The most widespread use of ceramics by archaeologists lies in formulating typologies which form the basis of cultural chronologies. In their simplest form, these chronologies are just temporal sequences of types, but more importantly, they are believed to reflect cultural relationships through time. They are based on the similarities and differences between types, styles or attributes that are relatively continuous in time and/or space (Willey and Sabloff, 1980, p. 143). The recognition of these cultural relationships rests on two major assumptions. First and foremost, archaeologists believe that pottery can reflect the culture of a people in such a way that the main forces of cultural change that affect a society are shown in its development between ceramic assemblages. Secondly, typological similarities are believed to be the result of cultural contact or diffusion. In the Guianas, the Caribbean region and elsewhere, these types of culture complexes form the basis for archaeological synthesis.

The main emphasis is on the technical, visual and utilitarian aspects of ceramics, and generally not much attention is given to the meaning they might have had in the broader context of the culture in which they were made. However, ethnographic data from the South American lowlands show clearly that artefacts are deeply interrelated with the non-material aspects of culture. This relationship is difficult to distil by studying archaeological remains alone, but a better understanding of this relationship can provide the archaeologist with a useful tool to comprehend

archaeological data (Arnold, 1993; Dietler and Herbich, 1998). This tool can be obtained by ethno-archaeological studies among contemporary Amerindians.

The 'New Archaeology' that sprouted in the decade of 1960 placed great emphasis on the explanation of the processes underlying the formation of the archaeological record but also on the meaning of artefacts and structures in terms of human behaviour. Ethno-archaeological studies have since become an important means for understanding the complex relationships between material culture and human behaviour (Gould, 1978; Kobylinski, 1989; Skibo *et al.*, 1989; Longacre, 1991).

It is evident that there exists no one-to-one relationship between the present day and archaeological societies, even if there is a direct historic relationship. In nearly all cases it is true that contemporary societies are different from their archaeological predecessors. However, the study of historic documents tries to bridge this gap by identifying the cultural changes which may have taken place, thus leading to a better understanding of the archaeological record. The Amerindian populations of the Guianas show a certain degree of cultural continuity with the past, which is also documented by historic accounts, that makes this area a good setting for ethno-archaeological research. But when conducting fieldwork in the Guianas, the researcher is often confronted with the social struggle of a poverty-stricken people, suffering from discrimination and oppression. One should proceed with integrity and responsibility in the racial and cultural conflict which is going on in numerous countries, not only using living culture to generate scientific hypotheses, but also employing his or her privileged position to combat colonial thinking.

The goal of my 1994 fieldwork, conducted mainly in the Palikur settlement of *Kamuyune*, French-Guiana, was

¹ "If one compares the grave urns and bead pots of the Ancient Palikur with the ceramic achievements of the present [Palikur], that one can not ignore the decline and in particular to regret the brutalization of the ornamental art. And also the few ceramics that the present Palikur manufacture is obviously dying." (translation by the author). Bead pots or pearl pots are ceramic pots decorated with beads which are knitted in strings together to adorn the pot. When Nimuendaju mentions the Old Palikur pots and especially the grave urns he is probably referring to the highly decorated Aristé urns.

to conceive a detailed description of the Palikur pottery manufacturing process. But more importantly, the fieldwork also revealed that Palikur material culture can be viewed as a carrier of cultural identity. The Palikur store their cultural and social identity in oral tradition and is represented in the artistic/aesthetic expression of objects such as basketry, woodcarving and pottery. Especially the decoration motifs of the latter objects reflect a clear relationship between Palikur material and cognitive culture. Other ethnographic research in the Guianas already shows that this relationship is common among Amerindian groups (Ahlbrinck, 1931; Butt Colson, 1961; Guss, 1989; Wilbert, 1970).

In fact, the social organisation of the Palikur is expressed by various decoration motifs. Every social unit or clan is represented by a specific motif. The German-Brazilian archaeologist Hilbert (1957) was the first to make an artistic parallel between the Palikur clan motifs and pre-Columbian Aristé urns found in the Palikur culture area (Figure 1). His idea was based on the ethnographic fieldwork of Nimuendaju (1926) and Fernandez (1948) and presented a crude link between present and past Amerindian societies in the area. This article will explore the available historic, linguistic and ethnographic data to show how archaeologists can use the actual Palikur pottery tradition to gain a better understanding of the relationship between social organisation and material culture in a wider context and past societies.

THE PALIKUR

The Amerindian population of French-Guiana is statistically the smallest indigenous population of the Guianas (less than 4%). The coastal area is inhabited by the Palikur in the eastern part of French-Guiana and the Kali'na and Lokono in the western part of this French DOM (*Département d'Outre Mer*). The interior is populated by Wayana and Apalai on the Upper Maroni River and the

Teko (Emérillon) and Wayapi on the Upper Oyapock River (Hurault, 1989, p. 6-26).

Nimuendaju (1926) already notes that the Palikur as well as all other Amerindian groups of the coastal plain of the Guianas, have been in contact and influenced by the Europeans since the arrival of the first colonists in the beginning of the 16th century. He also states that Vincente Yañez Pinzón was the first to record the name Palikur, as in 1513 he identifies *Provincia de Paricura* to the north of the Amazon River. By the end of the 16th century, the English, notably Walter Raleigh, Lawrence Keymis and Robert Harcourt, had recorded the names of various Amerindian populations of the Guiana coasts². Noteworthy are the detailed descriptions of this early period by the French Huguenot Jesse de Forest (1623) and the Zealander Lourens Lourenszoon (1618). The first spent one year establishing a colony in the estuary of the Oyapock River and Lourenszoon was taken captive by the *Arocouras* of the Cassiporé River (de Forest, 1914; Lichtveld and Voorhoeve, 1958)³.

The Palikur call themselves *Paykweneh* and are viewed by historians as a melting pot of various historic indigenous groups with the original Palikur clans from north-eastern Brazil (Grenand and Grenand, 1987; Passes, 2002). The Palikur population is represented by some 1600 individuals situated in various villages in both French-Guiana and Brazil on the coastal fringe of the Guianas (Davy, 2007). Their presence in French-Guiana dates back to early 1960's. The Palikur language is part of the Arawak linguistic stock (90% of the population still speaks Palikur). Their villages are located mainly next to fresh water creeks on high riverbanks (Oyapock and Comté River), sand ridges (Macouria) or islands in wet savannahs (Uruçaua River). The latter river is considered by the Palikur as their ancestral territory which is confirmed by historic documents (Nimuendaju, 1926; Grenand and Grenand, 1987). The villages vary in size but range between small hamlets of 40

² The Spanish already visited this region throughout the 16th century but no historic documents have survived of these voyages.

³ The Dutch, and especially the Dutch West India Company (WIC), were highly interested in the area between Cayenne and the Amazon River (Edmundson, 1903).

persons (Favard or Trois Palétuviers) to large villages of 400 members (Kamuyune, Kumene; Figure 1). The Palikur have a patrilineal and exogamous clan structure according to which a man marries into his wife's family (Arnaud, 1968).

The Palikur practice slash-and-burn cultivation with the bitter manioc as their staple crop. The principal products are *couak* or *farinha de mandioca* and to a lesser extent *tapioca*, manioc juice (pepper sauce), and manioc beer. They also

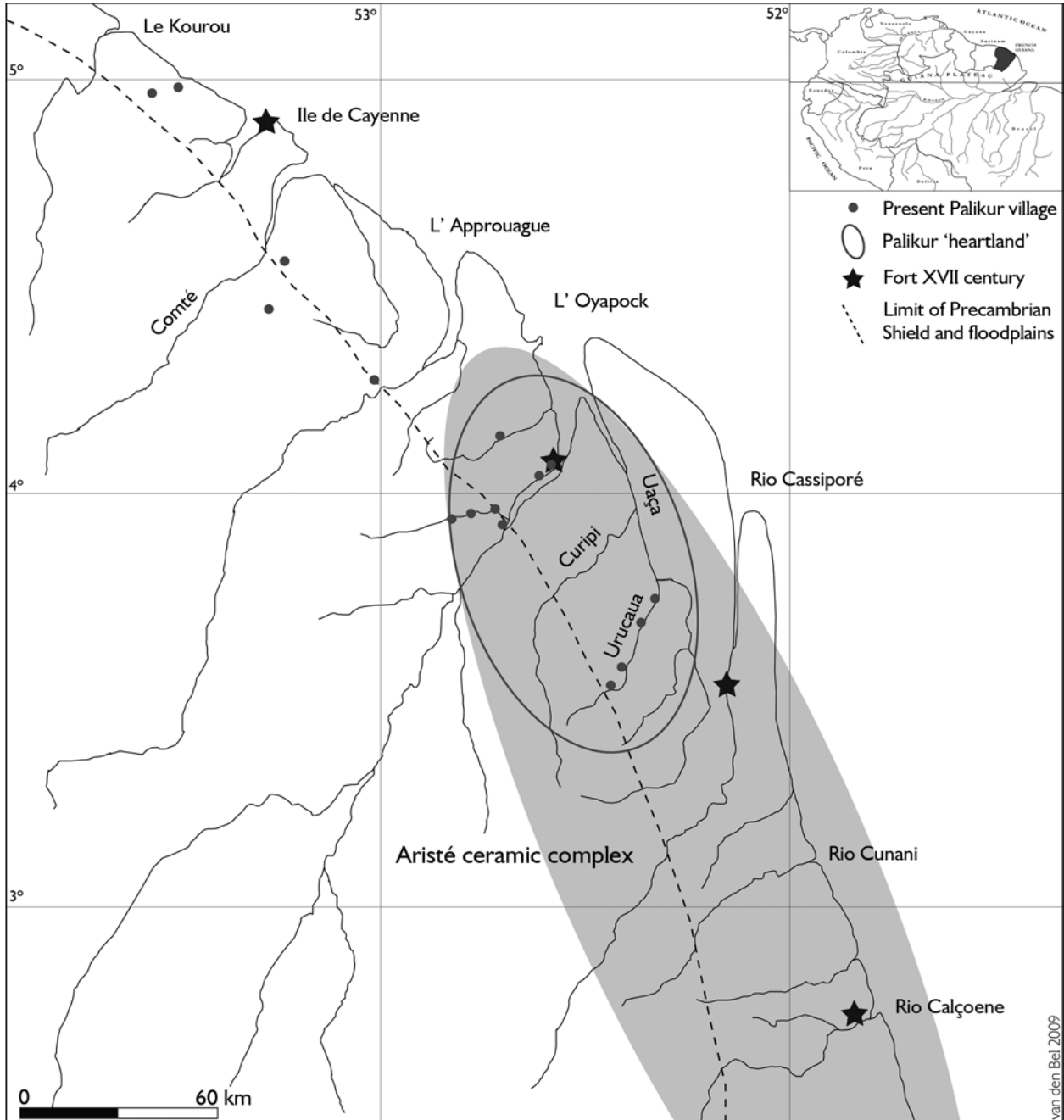


Figure 1. Map of eastern French Guiana and northern Amapá, Brazil.

hunt, fish and collect fruits and shellfish in the forest and savannahs. The food is boiled in a pot, roasted or smoked (*boucané*) over a fire and served with *couak*.

The manufacturing of basketry and bead collars is the chief activity of the adult Palikur members. This craftsmanship is a vivid cultural tradition since money can be earned to buy food or luxuries. The manufacturing of pottery is on demand and not a daily activity. Other principal means of revenues are hunting game for restaurants, serving as a tracking guide for forest missions, house construction or simply depending on national welfare.

In Brazil, the Palikur live in an Indigenous Reserve controlled by the Fundação Nacional do Índio (FUNAI) while in French-Guiana they live close to Creole villages and part of the public French establishment. Both national governments try to enhance social comfort and integration of the Palikur but in practice they are the lowest segment of society on an economic, social and juridical level. During the 1960's the North American Summer Institute Linguistics (SIL) penetrated Palikur society in Brazil. Members of the SIL translated the Holy Bible into Palikur and converted a large part of the population to Evangelists. Christian Palikur is told to reject traditional rituals such as feasting (dancing, *kashiri* drinking and bark smoking) and to go to church every day.

THE PALIKUR POTTERY TRADITION

Only two Palikur women still make pottery. Other women have this knowledge too, but do not practice it anymore for different reasons. Although the men have complementary tasks, such as collecting clay or *kwepi*, solely the women actually make pottery. I worked with Elvira Ioão and her husband Paulo Orlando Noriño in the village of Kamuyune in French-Guiana. Pottery was never made in this village

before the arrival of Elvira from Brazil. The other potter is Elvira's sister, Luisa Ioão, who still lives in Kumene on the Uruaqua River, Brazil. The husband of Elvira was one of the great spiritual leaders of the Palikur nation until he passed away a few years ago. He was a leading personality for the Christian Palikur members but he also had an encyclopaedic knowledge of pre-Christian Palikur traditions.

When compared to the observations made by Nimuendaju in the decade of 1920's, the whole chain of pottery production has hardly changed (Nimuendaju, 1926, p. 41-48). Although pottery was manufactured regularly in those times, the Palikur pottery tradition declined dramatically during the last 70 years. The observations made by Rostain (1991, p. 95-110; 1994) confirm this impression.

PREPARATION

The potter was asked by the Captain of the Palikur village of Favard (a non-Christian village) to produce several *kashiri* (*wohska*) recipients for the forthcoming Easter feasts. Furthermore, she was asked by Hugues Petitjean Roget to manufacture a Palikur urn⁴.

A little *carbet* behind the potter's house functioned as a workshop where she could work alone and store the clay, pots and tools. One was not allowed to eat in this particular place and hence one week was used to fill the *couack* stock, so there would be no shortage of food while working. A trip into the coastal forest was scheduled to search for *kwep* tree bark, the traditional clay temper material. The bark was tested by the potter by chewing on the freshly cut flakes. After her sign of approval, more bark was collected by her sons. *Kwep* is the siliceous bark of the *Chrysobalanaceae* spp. tree which grows mainly in the inundated coastal savannahs of the Guianas (Grenand *et al.*, 2004)⁵.

⁴ Hugues Petitjean Roget was at that time a primary school teacher in French-Guiana. In 1979, he founded together with a few other avocational archaeologists the Archaeological Association of French-Guiana (Association Guyanaise d'Archéologie et d'Ethnographie, AGAE).

⁵ The use of *kwep* as a temper material is probably determined in a cultural way (van den Bel *et al.*, 1995). Analysis evidenced that the advantages between the *kwep* and other forms of temper, such as sand and/or shell, are too small to be considered significant in order to explain the choice of *kwep* over the other tested materials. Technically, the desired porosity of the vessels may indicate a preference for *kwep*. Nowadays, *kwep* is the principal temper used by all Amerindians groups of the coastal plain in the Guianas.

The tree bark was gathered in old rice sacks and yielded two sacks each of 50 liters. More trees followed. Once back in the village the *kwep* was put down in the sun to dry. When the flakes had dried, a certain quantity was collected on a heap and set on fire on corrugated iron plates. The next morning the heap of bark had changed into ashes and $\frac{3}{4}$ of a rice sack was filled with these ashes and charcoal.

In the nearby Crique Macouria good clay had been found⁶. A clay sample was gathered in order to test this clay. The potter made a few little finger pots and put them into an open fire. If the pots would break or burst it was a sign that the quality of the clay was not good enough to make pottery. The potter explained that she would fetch more clay at the next full moon. This fact may have an (unknown) traditional background but at full moon the tides in these savannah creeks are generally much lower which makes it easier to fetch the clay.

As these little finger pots did not break, the clay was considered to be of good quality. Over 100 kilos of clay were extracted from the creek and stocked in buckets and *maripa* tusks (*Maripa maximiliana*). The collected clay had a reddish-grey yellow colour and is called *hibug*. It felt just like butter and stuck to the hands. This type of clay is of medium quality, hence the potter preferred to work with the superior *pauwkam*, a white kaolinitic clay. When both types of clay are lacking, she settled for *atamnah* or red clay, which is also used for red slipping.

Before mixing the bark with the clay, the burnt bark was pounded and sieved. The sieving eliminated the larger particles of charcoal and unburnt bark. It is difficult to tell the exact proportions of *kwep* ashes and clay, but an estimate of 40% of ashes is certainly not exaggerated. The potter feels and 'sees' when the clay is ready for fabrication. She

pinches and slaps the lump of clay and rolls it through the ashes. Sometimes a bit of water is added. While kneading and mixing the last possible rootlets and small stones are removed from the mixture. To check the workability of the clay, the potter tears the lump apart a few times and checks for a greyish-blue colour. The mixed and moist clay is formed into a big ball and is now ready for making vessels⁷.

COILING

First the base is conceived. A ball of prepared clay is pressed against a little plank and shaped into a circle, being slightly convex on the inside and flat on the outside. Sometimes, a palm leaf is put on the plank to avoid the vessel from sticking to the wooden plank.

To make the vessel body, a clay ball is rolled into a fairly thick coil on a wooden bench. With her thumb the potter presses the coil onto the base. With the use of a calabash shard the surface is smoothed to reinforce the joints. The potter does not make one large coil that will meet both ends, but a few coils form one rim. When finished coiling a rim, the pot is put aside to dry for half a day and another one is started. Once dried, another level of coils is attached by wetting the body and another coil is pinched down over the first coil, pulling it up and smoothing its surface.

The characteristics of the vessel (size, base, body, diameter, wall thickness etc.) depend on the vessel type which is defined by Palikur oral tradition. According to the potter, a good vessel serves its function and is symmetrical. The wall thickness is regularly checked by sticking a thin reed into the moist body. The inflection angles and the symmetry of the vessel are also checked by measuring the length of the reed from base to the highest coil. The diameter is also measured with a reed. Drinking cups have a base with a large

⁶ Crique Macouria is an intertidal creek having its course in the marshy coastal plain. This coastal plain is divided into a high situated Pleistocene plain consisting of ferrallitic kaolin mottled clays (*les argiles bariolés*) at its base and white marine sand ridges on top (Coswine Series). The low situated Holocene plain consists of grey-bluish soft clay at its base on top of which sandy ridges have been deposited (Demerara Series; Cautru, 1994).

⁷ Chamotte or pounded shards were not added by the potter as has also been mentioned by Nimuendaju during the 1920's (Nimuendaju, 1926, p. 42). As described, the Palikur mix fairly wet clay with burnt and pounded *kwep*. The Kaliña mix dried and pounded clay with pounded *kwep* in a different manner (Jean de la Mousse, 2006; Ahlbrinck, 1931; Collomb, 2003; Vredenburg, 2002, p. 116). The present Wayana do not add temper to their clay at all (Duin, 2001; Barone *et al.*, 2002). This is probably the most important technical difference between the two pottery traditions.



diameter and thin walls. The large *kashiri* vessels (*daivrit*) have thick bases with a relative small diameter but a rather thick-walled body. The potter continues to work on a few vessels simultaneously. At dawn, she attaches a series of coils to each vessel and waits for the vessels to dry until the afternoon, when she will attach another series. The body of large vessels is supported by lumps of clay.

Once part of the vessel is leather hard, the potter scrapes the body with the edge of a calabash shard. She moves the shard up and down, perpendicularly to the coils, in order to strengthen the vessel body. Now she also polishes the body with a *maripa* nut to harden the surface and to increase its permeability. For the latter reason, *kashiri* vessels are polished extensively. Next to this functional aspect of polishing, it also increases the aesthetic appearance of the pot. Lumps of clay are attached to serve the lower parts of the *kashiri* vessels as handles to lift the vessels. A cord of plaited leaves can also be put around the attachments to carry the vessel. This type of vessel is partially dug into the ground to assure its balance (for Palikur vessel types, see Nimuendaju, 1926, p. 42-45; Rostain, 1992, p. 96).

Paul Noriño remembers that the Palikur manioc graters (*tyma* = tooth) were also made of clay. The present wooden boards with iron nails are Creole inventions. He

further mentions that the ancient Palikur lived in large houses the walls of which were made of clay (*daub*). According to him, the houses had a beehive shape and their wooden interiors measured ten arms lengthwise, seven arms wide and three arms in altitude. There were two entrances above which an idol was attached to chase away the evil spirits⁸.

As noted above, the potter was asked to produce an urn (*atyti*). She made a rectangular box with rounded edges measuring 50 cm in length and 30 cm in height. An oval shaped lid could be placed upon the rectangular box. This funerary box has a wide part which is called the head (*agik*) and a narrow part which represent the feet (*abu*). The lid shows a thickening at the top which is called *aduhyamin* or spine, and the lid itself is called the back (*avinbumin*). The Palikur denominations of this 'coffin' correspond to the human body and are the embodiment of the deceased. The potter also mentions the striking similarity between such an urn and the Palikur houses as described by her husband; the urn symbolises the house of the deceased. The latter also added that the particular shape was also the shape of the ceramic canoe (*gimun dayvrit*) in which the First Palikur survived the Deluge (this Palikur myth is told in the next paragraph)⁹.

There are a few ceramic objects known to the Palikur such as hunting flutes (*senekeneh*), children's flutes and

⁸ Grenand and Grenand (1987, p. 59-62) collected a Palikur story on the origins of the iron grater introduced by the *Kamuyune* clan during colonial times. Before this grater was introduced, the Palikur used ceramic graters of which Nimuendaju (1926, p. 47) found some shards: "Ein anderes Produkt der Palikur-Töpferei, die flache, geriffelte Schüssel, in der man die Mandioca rieb, findet sich heute nur noch in Bruchstücken auf den alten Wohnplätzen und Friedhofen dieses Stammes und ist durch ein rechteckiges Reibbrett mit eingesetzten eisernen Topfsplitten ersetzt worden". Graters or grater like dishes are known in archaeological context from the Lower Amazon and Amapá (e.g. Hilbert, 1957, p. 15; Rostain, 1992, p. 114; Ryden and Stenborg, 2004, p. 181, 187). Dish shaped bowls with wide grooves applied to the interior may have served as graters but chemical residue analysis is lacking. Today, *daub* house walls have never been encountered during archaeological excavations.

⁹ The rectangular shape of the urn may have European origins (coffin shape) although recent excavations at a Pre-Columbian necropolis in French Guiana revealed rectangular shaped 'tombs' (van den Bel, 2009). Nevertheless, the fact of depositing (burnt or bundled) bones in ceramic recipients is most certainly of pre-Columbian origin. Four similarly rectangular ceramic containers with rounded edges and lid have been found in a cave named Trou Delft at the Montagne Bruyère situated at the mouth of the Oyapock River. The containers were polychrome painted and have been attributed to the Late Aristedé period. Their contents are composed of European glass beads and faience; hence the cave's name (Petitjean Roget, 1993). This faience was probably manufactured in the second half of the 17th century. A charcoal sample (GrN-20.167) taken from the content of the Trou Delft urn was dated 160 ± 25 BP but was estimated to be contaminated. An adjacent funerary cave site, Trou Reliquaire, yielded a C14 date of 530 ± 60 BP (PARIS-413) or calibrated at 2 sigma (100%) AD 1296-1453 (Cornette, 1985). This information suggests that the Amerindians situated near the Oyapock River continued their funerary practices well into the colonial times. It is also possible that pre-Columbian urns were re-used by Amerindian groups in colonial times. A recent ceramic typology of funerary urns of the Lower Amazon showed that particular forms are to be found in north-western Amapá and eastern French-Guiana, corresponding to the historic Palikur culture area (Rapp Py-Daniel, 2004, figure 15).

tops for children. The flutes have a zoomorphic appearance and are usually made by the hunters themselves. Alas, nobody is still able to manufacture such a flute nor had one in his possession. The children's flutes (*makuk*) consist of a hollow clay ball. They are egg-shaped and have an opening just below the top for whistling. The pointy top of the flute is provided with two little ears. Hugues Petitjean-Roget also mentions the spinning top for children or *kekeh* (personal communication, 1994). This top is usually a discarded shard showing round edges and a perforation in which a pointed stick is stuck. The potter is still able to make cassava griddles but nobody commanded need them anymore. This ceramic object has been abandoned in the last five decades, and being by metal discs or plates. Nevertheless, Nimuendaju (1926, p. 49) does record the manufacturing of ceramic griddles:

Die Arbeiterin schnitt einen Radius aus einem Blattstiel, steckte ein Hölzchen in die Mitte der Tonplatte und maß mit dem Radius rund herum, den Abstand vom Mittelpunkt bezeichnend; der überstehende Ton wurde mit dem Messer Abgeschnitten. Auch stellte sie durch Einstechen eines dünnen Hölzchens die Dicke der Platte fest und kratzte das überschüssige Material mit dem gezahnten Schaber (*kalan*) aus einem Cuyascherben ab¹⁰.

FIRING

The next morning, the potter's husband puts a few wooden planks on the ground. No pit is dug. The hardened light grey pots are placed on the planks. The firewood is piled around the vessels but the wood is not allowed to touch the vessels. In between and in the vessels firewood is stacked. When the rim of the

vessels is reached, the vessels are partially covered with fire wood, but not entirely closed. In the afternoon the fire is lit. After a few hours the wood turns into charcoal and the potter gathers the glowing charcoal around the ceramics with a stick. The vessels remain all night in the glowing charcoal and hot ashes. The next morning she takes the vessels, which have turned into an ochre yellow colour, out of the ashes and knocks with her knuckles on the outer walls to hear whether the ceramics were properly fired.

DECORATION MODES

The potter applies various decorations to the vessels. Before firing, punctuations were applied with a pointed stick on the lip of a *wanamyuh*. Incisions are made with a sharpened reed and applied when the vessel is in a leather hard condition. The incisions are sometimes filled with red clay (*atamnah*). Painting is applied after firing (Table 1).

Resins are rarely used and the use of this surface treatment will most certainly disappear within a few years. A resin is extracted from the *carapa* tree or *tiviru* (*Carapa guianensis*). After boiling the substance is sun dried. A hard transparent ball is waxed over the exterior face of the vessel to acquire a coating¹¹.

DECORATIVE MOTIFS

Palikur decoration motifs are called *ahinbak* and each one has a proper name. Although the author is not a fluent Palikur speaker, the potter's husband explained the names of every motif. They represent the names of various animals such as birds, snakes, turtles etc. What is depicted is often a characteristic feature of the animal¹². Most of these animals

¹⁰ "The potter cut a radius out of a branch, stuck a little wood into the center of the clay disc and measured approximately around with the radius, designating the distance from the center; the excessive clay is cut off with a knife. She also determined the thickness of the plate by sticking in it a thin wooden branch and scraped the surplus away with the dented scraper (*kalan*) made from a calabash sherd." (translation by the author).

¹¹ More ethnobotanical information on the use and preparation of colouring plants among the Palikur (and other Amerindian groups), can be found in "Les plantes colorantes utilisées en Guyane française", by Grenand and Prévost (1994).

¹² Ahlbrinck (1931, p. 275-289) also mentions that the Kali'na in Surinam gave names to their drawings on vessels, basketry, woodcarvings and body paintings. The drawings consist of various main characters but also a few minor characters but they all represent animals derived from Kali'na oral tradition.

Table 1. Palikur colouring.

Palikur name	Scientific name	Description
<i>Lansam</i>	?	A milky substance is extracted from this unidentified tree and burnt in an open fire. The soot is collected by holding a recipient upside down above the fire. The residue is scraped from the vessel and mixed with powdered red clay.
<i>Ti</i>	<i>Symphonia globulifera</i> L.	A milky substance is extracted from this tree and burnt in an open fire. The soot is collected by holding a recipient upside down above the fire. The residue is scraped from the vessel and mixed with powdered red clay. <i>Ti</i> or <i>mani</i> is normally used for painting calabashes and considered to be of lesser quality for pottery. It is mainly applied to the inside of a kashiri vessel to keep the acid beer from 'biting' the interior of the vessel.
<i>Kuwasi</i>	<i>Myristicaceae</i> spp.	The bark is pounded and mixed with water (infusion) and distilled. <i>Kuwasi</i> is used for both calabashes and pottery. Its red colour is clear.
<i>Pusuma</i>	?	The fruit of this unidentified tree is crushed and stirred into water. The liquid is boiled until the substance yields a beautiful red colour.
<i>Adamna</i>	<i>Rubiaceae</i> spp.	The bark is pounded and mixed with water and boiled.
<i>Ixapa</i>	<i>Bixa orellana</i>	The seeds are squeezed and boiled in water. Manioc juice is added to reddish the residue and to enhance its colour.

are part of Palikur life since they are the creatures they hunt for or to which they attribute a symbolic meaning as being part of their oral tradition (Table 2)¹³.

Another group of motifs, and maybe the most important one, is the one which refers to the Palikur clans. The origins of the Palikur clans are rooted in oral tradition and reveal a better understanding of the linguistic and symbolic meaning of these motifs. This version of the Palikur Creation Myth was told by Paulo Noriño, recorded by the author in 1994 and transcribed into Palikur and translated into French by Emiliano Narciso (van den Bel and Narciso, 1995). This version shows similarities with the creation myth collected by Grenand and Grenand (1987, p. 57-59). Although, this version is less explicit on the birth of the clans, it is clearer on the reason of the fatal deluge. The Palikur text is written according to the SIL spelling (see Launey, 2003, p. 26).

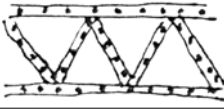

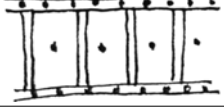
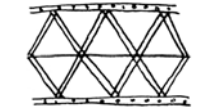

Nikwe nah kinetiwenen amin initit gimin wohawki pagikwene minikwak ku samah kenesminate akapuska. Hawkih ig wohawkih paykwene ig kenneh gimun manitya. Pahaye adahan pahapwi sikuh bat apitmun. Ig sikuh bat, pisenwa nikwe ig tihenen, ig ti-in: "senkwan". Kuri igme ig wohawki pagikwene hiyamnih henen. Ig awna git sikuh: wake pis hiyegibe pi(s) akih nuthu pay mbeyne nemnikkupiye (= danun nuthu), payye pihipan. Ayteke nikwe ig tinohew kanipwiye. Kanipwiye ay puguneh gimantak pahaye adahan ig sagay gipeggi gihapgatak pahapwi awayg. Kahnxima hiyeg kakamsapunad kaw gikamsah hiyuw akak giyako(t). Ig awna git: mmanih pin kasah, ig awna: kawa nahwa awnakepye gikak sikuh. Ig tihenen ay, nahme awna pay pihipan wake pis hiyegibe pi(s) ku akinut ku payye pihipan mbeyne nemnik. Ig awna: ka agikonamah awaku wigwiy uhumten igme digiswasepwiye inin waxgih akak un. Ig wagkiswiye muwok inugitak.

Nikwe ig digiswensemnih adahan il pisenwepye gikakis negas hiyeg ku payye kaneh kiyatig kene ihan giwn. Nikwe ig hiyapkih git iggwa paykweneh wakowkih giwtyapey. Ig awna: bayta iwasah mbeyne

¹³ Davy (2007, p. 199) recorded ten Palikur motifs which still adorn four types of basketry today: boxes (*yamat*), fire fans (*awagi*), drinking sifters (*hu sabugie*) and small baskets (*matut*). Although the weaving technique has its constraints, the main basketry designs are boa constrictor (*datka waxiyune*), land turtle (*wayam*), vulture (*makawem*).



Table 2. Palikur animal motifs.

Animal	Motif	Identification
<i>watkala</i>		Heron (<i>Herodias egretta</i>): feather pattern on its throat
<i>datka waxiyune</i>		Boa or <i>couleuvre de terre</i> (<i>Boa constrictor</i>): skin
<i>tiyuyu</i>		Stork (<i>Jabiru mycteria</i>): feather pattern on its throat
<i>wayam</i>		Land turtle (<i>Geochelone carbonaria</i>): scutcheon
<i>suyawakap</i>		Plover: its tracks in the mud

Fonte: All drawings by Paulo Noriño and Elvira Íoío (1994)

ku payye nemnik. Ig hiyapkis waguwatrik. Ig ipeg agimkanit inin waxgih akak muwok aka(k) bobo madèh waxgih digiseh, yumah hiyeg aymuhwenen. Ig awna: inin kamax ada(ha)n madikawkubu kamukri akak pohokubu agawnih ku pi(s) hiya. Igkis ka ihan nunhun. Enbe nikwe nah digisaseh pismet amowka pis batak dagipwit nopsad. Dagipwit adahan pis bataku kasabwatip. Ayteke nikwe kohadbe pis katapek gugikut gukak pihayo akak pikamkahupwiy, pihipwipiy pase. Nah waykisne muwok.

Henewa ig kehen. Ig bateke dagipwit kanopsimhad ayye. Pahaye danun ahawkanappik muwok wayk. Pahaye hawkanawa inute kamuw. Ig ipeg agimkanit tuwexu kakat seyno. Ig tagakwa wahamaptak pahayye adahan egu tuwexu tagakwa muwok wayke nopsensa se-ih, se-ih, se-ih, se-ih juktan kipuseh. Hawki ateke muwok wayhneh. Nikwe muwok waynen. Kahnxima muwok wayk, muwok wayk juktan digise madikté waxgi. Juktan digise ku pay pi imutehneneh.

Nikwe igme misekwe abetpi pagaw agikuh dagipwit. Ig sabutip lureh danun adahan kuwis adahan pugunkunah kayg. Ig timah bobo kahyswehwe ka binw akiw. Nikwe ig mawasapthwa woke gisabatu pagaw ka kihawpa akiw heme padakanteh. Nikwe egu pagaw gaku padekwig huwiteh gipitit bakibeh. Ig miyah gikamkay miyah heneme ig ka miyah kamax ada(ha)n pahak kamukri akak madikawka

hawki un makagap akiw un magakap. Ayteke nikwe ku aysaw un makagap ig pesse agigutak.

Nikwe ig ay, ig kapusa mutun amutri. Ayteke ig timah mpuseh aygete hiyeg kadukman. Kahnxima aygete hiyeg kadukman, hiyagepnen, pekneh, batekye, kayneh ta ku hewkanawa. Ig iwasa yumah. Aygete akiw. Mpuseh amegemnit kayg kahnxima hiyeg ken kadukmankah. Kada(ha)n pigikna, mpameku, paskeku. Pahaye ig awna: nah tan iwasateh ken kuwis pasnika kayg. Ig ta iwasa ku kitak ignebis hiyeg kadukman. Ig iwasa kahnxima itey borikis (= bowwa ignekis) itey ignekis waypeyeneh. Ig atak iwasa. Ig hiya kahnxima kawapuwad ku kitak hiyeg kadukmah kawapuwad bowwa ignekis kawah egnekis kawah se kawakuyeneh... hiyeg. Ayteke ig tan iwasah ku kiney kahnxima kadukmankah iwasah ig danun atere. Ig iwasa ig utiy wakapneh bowwa ignekis hiyeg ku payye wakapneh wakapunyeneh. Embe nikwe pissenwa nikwenih ku kitak kadukman. Ig atak iwasah. Ig utih ignekis hiyeg kahnxima wadak, wadahnyaneh igenekis. Enbe heneh gihumwenikis negas paykweneh ku pay waypeyeneh, wakapunyeneh, kawakuyeneh, paraymyuneh, wadahnyaneh. Heneh gihumemnikis. Aytere nikwe i(gki) s kapusah kibihweh juk kupikneneh akak inin kahawke. Wixwiy ayte paykweneh asemneh.

Free translation by the author:

I am going to tell you a story from a long time ago, from the time of the beginning of the world, of the first Palikur. One day ancient Indian was building a canoe and high up in the trees a cuckoo (*sikuh*)¹⁴ was sitting and waiting on a branch. The cuckoo started screaming "senkwan", so the Indian wondered what was happening. He asked the cuckoo: "Does your people resemble mine, as you told me by screaming 'senkwan', and who is bad and coming towards me, who do you see?". Then the Indian does not hear the sound of working and is going to continue to build his canoe. The cuckoo waits, he turns his head to the other side and a man and a lot of people wearing a loin-cloth (Fr. *calimbé*) and the man had his loin-cloth under his arm together with his arrows. He tells the man: "What did you hear before?". He responded: "Nothing, I wanted to talk with you cuckoo". He answered by screaming and told him: "Who you see, resembles your people and I tell you that evil is coming". He says: "No, there is no such thing, because the Grandfather who watches us, is going to end this earth with water, he is going to let it rain from the skies and he is going to exterminate all the people that does not respect nor obey him".

Now he is giving the ancient Indian a sign to get up and he says: "Come and see what a bad thing is going to happen". He shows him a vision and he looks over the people of this world where it is raining heavily and turning it into a big sea. The earth is filled with water and nobody is going to survive. He says: "This will be for ten suns and five more as they do not listen to me. Now I am going to let it rain, but you have to build a big vessel, then you crawl into the vessel with your wife and children and you take also with you a flute because I will let it rain".

It is true, he did so. The Indian built an enormous vessel and one day the Time of the Rain came. One morning at dawn when the sun came up, He

looked up over the people and saw the rainbow with his white leg which had come from the East. Suddenly the rainbow appeared and the rain slowly began to fall white, white, white until the world was filled. One day later the heavy rain fell and fell, plenty rain fell, rain fell, rain fell until it had filled the whole earth and until it had reached the highest mountain tops.

Now the Indian was floating on the water in his vessel. He closed it and finally the 'moment' had come. He stayed in there for sixty moons. He heard that the sea did not make noises anymore and removed the lid but the sea threw water on his child and they were dead but the Indian was not killed. He waited again for one sun and sixty days before the earth was dry.

He got out of the vessel and started to plant. Every evening he hears every people making noise, a lot of noise: they talk, drink *kashiri*, chant and dance¹⁵. The next day the Indian goes over there but sees nothing. The following evening there was a lot of noise again. Every full moon people make a lot of noise and this continued for two, three, four moons. The Indian says: "I am going to have a look because it takes already four moons". He takes a look where the noise is coming from and when he looks he sees plenty caterpillars (*itey*) which had changed and became *Waypeyene*. He continues and sees a lot of pineapples (*kawapuwad*) where the people had made the noise. These pineapples became the Pineapple People (*Kawakyuyene*). The Indian visits another place where a lot of noise was coming from and finds a lot of house posts. These are the people of the *wakap* ants (*wakapheh*) or Ant People (*Wakapunyene*). He continues to another spot where noises were coming from and takes a look and finds a lot of *wadak* lizards. They are the Lizard People (*Wadayune*). These are the Indians that are the neighbours of the same race: the *Waypeyene*, *Kawakukyene*, *Paraymyune* and *Wadayune*, but they have changed. They made a change which they still do up until now with the Grandfather. We are their descendents.

¹⁴ Cuckoo species (*Piaya Cayana*). *Sikuh* or *skua* according to Nimuendaju (1926, p. 134).

¹⁵ The version recorded by the Grenands tells they were dancing *Mayapna*. This is the Palikur Paddle Dance and refers to the deluge. There exist various dances (*kaika*) for different occasions. The shaman knows the calendar for every event to be held. The men and women dress up and body paint themselves (Nimuendaju, 1926, p. 60, 62-70). *Wawapna* is the dance with the stick (*wawu*) and maraca, *Kuwapna* is the dance of the butterfly (*kuhu*), *Sabugman* is the dance with the tambourine made of monkey skin (*sabug*) and *aremteman* is the dance with bamboo flutes (*amtem*). Large quantities of cassava beer (*wohska*) are prepared and served in small calabashes or a double-headed ceramic recipient (*tugutku*) while dancing. Mourning-feasts (*kisepka*) are held to commemorate the death after one year: the bamboo *senal* is danced and roasted meat is served (fish is forbidden). The burnt and crushed bones suspended in a calabash to the roof are removed and put in an urn. The urn is placed on the family (clan) burial mound of the clan. Other dances are the *Karawekykman*, *kuhumukman* (dance of the long-eared Indians) and *puruti arignimna* (Dance of the Galibis). The latter dances are only performed by the men.



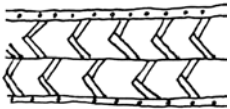
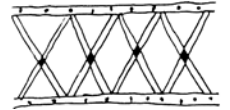
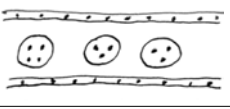
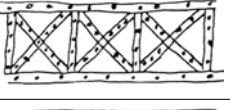
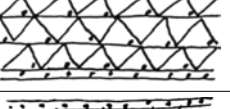
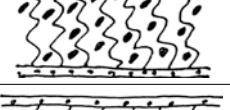
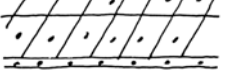
This creation myth explains the birth of every people or clan and shows that they were all formed after the same event, stressing that they are all one people now. As mentioned before, the present Palikur clan system may have originated during the colonial period, being a melting pot of various different ethnic groups. From this point of view, this myth refers to a specific moment in colonial times when various dispersed Amerindian groups re-united to finally become the contemporary Palikur.

As mentioned in the creation myth, the clans sprouted from pineapples, ants, caterpillars, etc. Specific characteristics, such as the skin, scales or beak of these animals and plants, are depicted and occasionally the whole subject is drawn (Table 3). Paul Noriño still remembers the names and motifs

of a few extinct Palikur clans and other Amerindian groups closely related to Palikur history (Table 4). For example, the *Kamuyune* introduced the manioc grater with iron nails to the Palikur (Fernandez, 1948, p. 212). The *Mahamrayune* revealed the cultivation of manioc to the Palikur (Grenand and Grenand, 1987, p. 26).

Historical documents show that Amerindian groups along the Guiana coasts have been in contact with European traders since the late 16th century. From this moment onwards, colonists were frequently trading with these populations and often confronted with warfare among these groups. Soon, these groups were decimated by enslavement as well as diseases and nearly wiped out. The remnants of the different ethnic populations unified themselves in order

Table 3. Present Palikur clans.

Clan	Motif	Family	Identification
<i>Wadayune</i>		Yapara	Gecko or <i>wadak</i> (<i>Thecadactylus rapicaudus</i>): beak
<i>Wakapuyene</i>		Bautista	Ant or <i>wakap</i> , <i>wakapen</i> dwells on the <i>wakapu</i> tree (<i>Vouacapoua americana</i>); this tree is used for houseposts which are depicted
<i>Waxiyune</i>		Îoio	Mountain or earth <i>waxi</i> . The word <i>was</i> or <i>abattis</i> belongs to the same stem. The potters are members of this family
<i>Waypuyene</i>		Noriño	Caterpillar or <i>itey</i> that walks way on the <i>iteysan</i> tree (<i>Himathantus articulatus</i>): scales
<i>Kawakyuyene</i>		Labonté	Pineapple or <i>kawak</i> (<i>Ananas comosus</i> L.): skin
<i>Kawokwine</i>		Felício	Jaguar or <i>kawokwi</i> (<i>Felis</i> spp.): skin
<i>Pagayune</i>		Martin	<i>Couman-couman</i> fish or <i>pagay</i> (<i>Arius couma</i>): scales

Fonte: All drawings by Paulo Noriño and Elvira Îoio (1994)



to strengthen their number and to survive on a cultural level (Grenand and Grenand, 1987; Whitehead, 1993; Green *et al.*, 2003, p. 384; Grenand, 2006). This particular moment in history is probably situated in the middle of the 18th century which is possibly also the case for other Amerindian groups in the coastal region of the Guianas. For example, the same demographic process is also known of the historic Galibi in western French-Guiana. The *Epa'nokono* is a feast where the actual Kali'na commemorates this moment of ethnic and cultural renaissance (Collomb and Tiouka, 2000, p. 73).

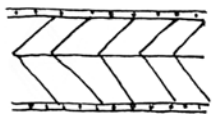
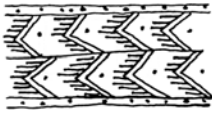
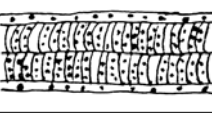
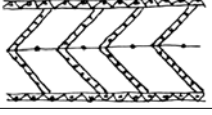
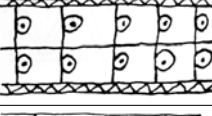
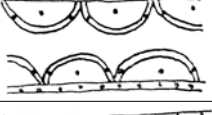
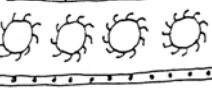
THE APPLICATION OF PALIKUR MOTIFS

The motifs are applied to pottery, basketry and calabashes that are mainly used in daily activities. The choice of which

motif is painted on a particular object depends mainly on the role of this object: will it have a domestic or a public function. As to ceramics, specific vessels such as *kashiri* vessels, *kashiri* drinking bowls and urns, are often specially decorated for communal festivities such as marital or funerary ceremonies. For example, the clan signs of the couple to be married are applied to vessels used during the ceremony or the clan sign of the deceased is painted on the urn. According to Paulo Noriño, very few Palikur are still continuing these traditions since they have largely been abandoned due to Evangelist and other sectarian influences.

Nevertheless, ethnographic studies among the Palikur during the first half of the 20th century recorded communal events in which the clan motifs were painted

Table 4. Extinct Palikur clans.

Clan	Motif	Identification
<i>Kayuyene</i>		<i>Attipa</i> or <i>kayu</i> (<i>Hoplosternum littorale</i>): scales
<i>Sahuyune</i>		Otter or <i>sahu</i> (<i>Lutra brasiliensis</i>): beard and snout
<i>Mayune</i>		Savannah quail or <i>mayu</i> (<i>Laterallus</i> spp.): reed blowing in the wind
<i>Mahamrayune</i>		<i>Mata mata</i> turtle or <i>mahamra</i> (<i>Chelus fimbriata</i>): snout
<i>Wakuyene</i>		Monkey or <i>wakukwa</i> (<i>Cebus fatuellus</i>): monkey in a tree
<i>Kukuyene</i>		Mouse or <i>kuku</i> (<i>Cricetinae</i> spp.): bulging back
<i>Kamuyune</i>		Sun or <i>kamu</i> : sun

Fonte: All drawings by Paulo Noriño and Elvira Íoio (1994)



on the bodies of clan members when undergoing their puberty rites:

A iniciação das jovens obedece a um verdadeiro ritual. Quando aparecem os sintomas da puberdade a mulher é afastada das demais pessoas, por ser considerada impura; seus lábios são fortemente esfregados com pimenta, o rosto é pintado com urucum com os desenhos característicos do clã e somente as velhas podem dela se aproximar, levar-lhe comida e falar-lhe (Fernandez, 1948, p. 204)¹⁶.

It is also stated that, as still is the case today, every Palikur clan has his own distinctive sign to adorn objects and their body and that the Palikur painted their clan-designs on their faces in order to make a distinction between the dancers:

Cada clã tinha o seu distintivo, com o qual se marcavam os seus objetos e armas de guerra, bem como as urnas funerárias. Os mesmos desenhos usavam na pintura do rosto. Esses distintivos, entretanto, não são mais bem lembrados, muito embora alguns ainda se conservem (...). Durante as festas não há impedimento para as danças entre membros de clãs diferentes. Estes podem, do mesmo modo, permanecer juntos, conservando sempre no rosto, porém, a diferenciação característica dos desenhos dos clãs (Fernandez, 1948, p. 216)¹⁷.

Over time, different motifs may have changed stylistically, some may have disappeared and others have been invented, but their function as social identity markers did not change¹⁸. Until fifty years ago, the Palikur clan motifs were painted on the body of clan members who were participating in the ceremony. Finally, we can actually consider the motifs as pictograms since they represent a Palikur concept that functions as a means of communication in Palikur society. Most often they are used during ceremonies where the social affiliation of each participant plays an important role.

ETHNOARCHAEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

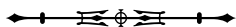
The reflection of social organisation in material culture among the Palikur is an important key for archaeologists in order to obtain another hypothetical angle of how to view (highly) decorated archaeological vessels. The German-Brazilian archaeologist Hilbert (1957, p. 34) made a stylistic comparison between the Palikur clan motifs and decoration motifs on the (proto) pre-Columbian Aristé ceramics (Figure 1). According to him, some Palikur clan signs (eg. *Waywuyune* and *Wakawuyene*) show remarkable resemblances with motifs on Aristé vessels from Ilha das Igaçabas, Vila Velha and Gruta do Ucupí, all archaeological sites situated in Amapá. To my opinion, this direct comparison is misleading and ignores the fact that the actual Palikur (as well as their pottery tradition) are an ethnic melting pot of various ethnic groups during historic times, but a cultural affiliation between pre-Columbian and present Amerindian pottery traditions remains undeniable.

The Palikur Origin Myth revealed that their social organisation is rooted in oral tradition. This implies that clan motifs are not only artistic expressions which can be separated in time and space but must be understood in a wider context. They state social identity and represent cultural markers. For example, numerous anthropomorphic Aristé funerary vessels show decorative elements referring to cultural attributes such as masks, hair style, clothing, and body-painting which can be seen as identity markers for ethnic groups. The Aristé archaeological record shows that these decorative elements are repetitive in specific geographical areas which may reflect cultural markers such as ethnicity, kinship and social status of the deceased (Guapindaia, 2001, p. 167).

¹⁶ "The initiation of the youngsters is subjected to a true ritual. When the signs of puberty arrive the woman is taken away from the crowd, for she is considered impure; her lips are heavily rubbed with pepper, her face is painted with the characteristic clan motifs in *urucum* [*Bixa orellana*] and only the old women may approach her, take her food and speak to her." (translation by the author).

¹⁷ "Each clan had its own marker, with which they marked their objects and weapons, as well as funerary urns. The same motifs were used in the face painting. However, these markers are not always remembered, but some are still conserved (...). During the feasts there is no restriction for dancing between different clan members. In a similar way these members can be together but always featuring the facial painting with the characteristic differentiation of clan motifs." (translation by the author).

¹⁸ See Nimuendaju (1926) for comparing the different motifs.



For instance, various anthropomorphic urns found by Goeldi (1900) at the Rio Cunani sites showed recurring decorative elements (Figure 2). First of all we observe horizontally zoned decorations such as crescent shapes (urns 9, 14 and 19), intertwined spirals (urns 5, 9, 10, 14 and 17), 'gregas' (urns 5 and 14), semi circles (urn 19), and a sort of volutes (urns 10, 14 and 15a). Furthermore, we can observe ornaments representing clearly the human body such as a head with a modelled face, hair dress, facial painting and pierced earlobes (urns 9, 15a, 18a, 17 and 19), a neck with an ornament below the mouth (urns 9, 10, 15a and 17) and arms (urn 17)¹⁹. Various urns have a red band around the head which may represent the colouring of the hair with red dye²⁰.

Urn 9, 18a and 19 may represent a smaller and less elaborate version of urns 15a and 17. The upper and lower parts of the first three urns are separated by a clear body angle and painted lines forming a division. This separation is clearly observed just below the arms of urn 17. The frontal upper part of the latter urn and 15a is decorated with a sort of mosaic that may represent a garment of cloth, woven bark, reed or other fibre material. Urn 9 and 18a may also feature such a garment yet in a less elaborate manner. In this way, urn 19 may have a jaguar skin as garment since this design is located at the same position as urn 9. The lower part of most urns, except for 15a and 17, is decorated with spirals, volutes and circles where as the base is left

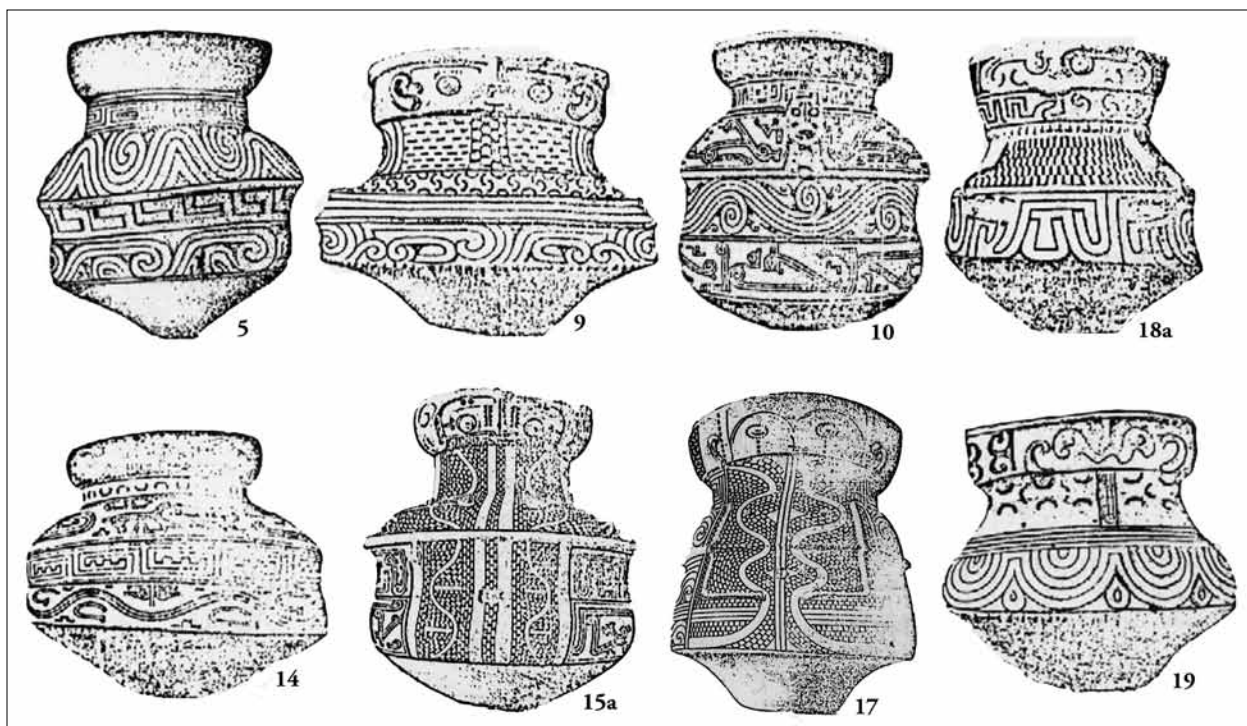


Figure 2. Examples of Aristé urns excavated by Emil Goeldi in 1895.

¹⁹ These types of decoration are characteristic for most Aristé urns and can be observed at different funerary sites in eastern French-Guiana and Amapá. For example, the urn found at Trou Réliqueire at the lower Oyapock features the same decorations as the Rio Cunani sites: 'gregas', intertwined spirals and volutes (Rostain, 1994, p. 826; 2008, p. 296).

²⁰ For example, the dyeing of the hair is described by the De Vries among the Caribs at the Island of Cayenne: "The Indians, who dwell upon this coast, run almost naked. Their hair is black, but sometimes painted red; eyes black; holes in tips of their ears, and generally holes in the nose and the lips; and the whole body painted with the paint that the Caribs call *contsuewe*, and the Jaos, *anoty*." (De Vries translated by Murphy, 1853, p. 80).

undecorated. Urns 5, 10 and 14 are totally covered in geometrical designs and are therefore visually less 'human' but they are also divided in a lower and upper part.

This analysis may give way to identify social status by the size of the vessel, the presence of a modelled face or mask and the 'garment' design. The vessels without these features may contain the ashes or bones of an individual with a different status. Most of the geometric designs are repeated on different vessels, sometimes in a slightly different manner, and may represent social, political or even ancestral affiliation. It is important to state that most of these urns were found in the same funerary chamber (*poço*) and therefore must be treated as a whole. These particular funerary sites may also represent social organisation where every clan has its own burial ground (Ryden and Stenborg, 2004, p. 43).

CONCLUSIONS AND FINAL REMARK

This Palikur case-study describes the actual state of the Palikur pottery tradition. Today, only a few women are still capable of manufacturing ceramics but again they mainly produce ceramics for economic purposes such as tourism. In the decade of 1920, Nimuendaju already mentioned that their pottery tradition was deteriorating, as for today it is nearly extinct.

It is important to state that modern Palikur society is an ethnic mixture of various ethnic groups that reunited during colonial times in northern Amapá. The Palikur pottery tradition is therefore also a convergence of various pottery traditions which again were already under European influence since the beginning of the colonial period. It is possible that the colonial trade has stopped and slowed down further innovations within these traditions. Furthermore, the cultural assimilation of the different ethnic groups may have changed their pottery traditions converting them into one new but homogeneous pottery tradition. For example, the use

of *kwep* as a temper in all present pottery traditions is emblematic for this assimilation of various pottery traditions. When comparing these pottery traditions, one observes actually few differences in fabrication method and ceramic typologies. Collomb (2003, p. 134) already mentioned that most contemporaneous pottery traditions along the coastal area of the Guianas have hardly changed since the 19th century²¹.

Whereas fabrication methods are fairly homogenous, the decoration modes vary considerably and may reveal a certain degree of ethnicity. Amongst others, one of the most eminent Palikur decorations is the representation of clan signs. A clear correlation between clan name and motif is recorded in Palikur oral tradition. Although the Palikur clan system may have sprouted from ethnic assimilation during colonial times, the fact that kinship is painted on the material culture is clear evidence that ethnic identity plays an important role in their society. These clan motifs were used during public events such as marriage, initiation and funeral rites. The discussion on the Aristé vessels showed that this Palikur concept behind their decoration motifs is an important asset for archaeologists when studying pre-Columbian ceramic complexes.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper is an adaptation of my 1995 Master Thesis (University Leiden). Since 2004, the author is conducting archaeological fieldwork in French-Guiana for the French National Institute of Preventive Archaeological Research (Inrap). The author would like to thank Elvira Ioão and her husband Paulo Orlando Noriño (†) to whom I would like to dedicate this paper. Thanks also go to my 'Palikur parents' Roberto and Elza Bautista and to Emiliano Narciso for his translation of the Palikur recordings into French. And thanks to Arie Boomert for his corrections and comments on the previous draft.

²¹ This process of homogenisation has also been witnessed in the basketry tradition (Davy, 2007). Multiple Carib loan words referring to material culture are found in the Palikur language revealing an important cultural relationship between both groups.



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Recebido: 13/01/2009
Aprovado: 30/03/2009

