The *Cocorícamo* of the Dominican Republic: Aesthetic Journeys between America and Europe through a Zoomorphic Mask

Emelin Quevedo Márquez
University of Valladolid, Spain

Emelin Quevedo Márquez is a predoctoral research fellow at the University of Valladolid. She specializes in social anthropology and cultural history, with research interests in cultural heritage and Ibero-American history.

Correspondence: emelinqm@uva.es

Quevedo Márquez, Emelin. 2026. "The *Cocorícamo* of the Dominican Republic: Aesthetic Journeys between America and Europe through a Zoomorphic Mask." *Martor* 31, 59-73. [DOI: 10.57225/martor.2026.31.04]

ABSTRACT

The *Cocorícamo* is a traditional character in Holy Week performances in San Juan de la Maguana (Dominican Republic), characterized by a mask made from the complete skull of a cow. Drawing on the *Cocorícamo* mask, this article proposes a comparative analysis of zoomorphic masks made from the complete skulls of bovines and equines in the Americas and Europe. Besides outlining the uncertain origins of the *Cocorícamo* mask, the study highlights aesthetic journeys spanning both sides of the Atlantic through a type of mask that has been documented—with local variations—in the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Jamaica, the Lesser Antilles, the British Isles, and the Iberian Peninsula between the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries.

KEYWORDS

Zoomorphic mask; winter masquerades; bovine masquerade; *Cocorícamo*; Dominican Republic.

Introduction

In the Dominican Republic, the *Cocorícamo* is remembered above all for its mask: the complete skull of a cow worn over the face of a performer who roamed the streets of the town during Holy Week. A character bearing the same name, and a mask of the same kind, was recorded by Fernando Ortiz in the Cuban carnivals of the 1950s. Masks built in this way—from the entire head of a bovine or an equine, frequently with jaws articulated so that they open and close—are far from being a local peculiarity: comparable objects are documented in Jamaica and the Lesser Antilles, in the carnival of Recife, in Castile and León, and in the British Isles.

Carnival and masquerade travelled to the Americas as European practices and were reworked there over centuries, giving rise to a transcultural phenomenon (Burke 1996). Within that broad field, however, the *Cocorícamo* belongs to a narrower and more precisely defined type, the winter masquerade, whose traits it reproduces closely: a calendar running from Christmas to Epiphany, the sound of cowbells, sheep bells, or small bells, the use of whipping or threatening instruments, the collection of gifts or alms, and performance in the streets and public squares of the community (Calvo Brioso 2012). Both the masquerade and the mask are described in detail in the third section of this article.

Zoomorphic masks are abundant on both shores of the Atlantic, and donkeys, bulls, and cows are among the figures most frequently represented. Masks made from the complete skull of the animal, however—masks that cover the performer's face entirely—constitute a

much smaller and more distinctive set. It is this restricted corpus, rather than zoomorphic masquerade in general, that the present study addresses.

The existing scholarship has tended to weigh African against European inheritance, and has done so chiefly on the evidence of dance, music, and collective performance. Robert W. Nicholls (2012) attributes the masquerades of the Lesser Antilles and Jamaica to a fusion of traditions from Upper Guinea—from Senegal to Côte d'Ivoire—and from the southwest of the United Kingdom, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, in keeping with the origins of the enslaved populations and the colonists who migrated to the Caribbean during the colonial period. For the *Cocorícamo* in particular, Fernando Ortiz (1981) and Dagoberto Tejeda Ortiz (2008, 2010, 2013; see also Hernández and Tejeda Ortiz 2007) have emphasized African heritage, Tejeda Ortiz counting this mask among those in which such heritage is most strongly marked in the Dominican Republic (Tejeda Ortiz 2008, 513-4).

Comparatively little attention has been paid, by contrast, to the mask as an artefact: to the material from which it is made, the technique by which that material is prepared, and the economic and ecological conditions that make it available in one place and not in another. It is at this level that the present analysis operates, and it is what allows the *Cocorícamo* to be set alongside the Horsehead and Cowhead of Jamaican *Jonkonnu*, the *boi* and the *babau* of the Recife carnival, and the winter masquerades of the Iberian Peninsula and the British Isles.

Taking the *Cocorícamo* mask as its jumping-off point, this article proposes a comparative analysis of zoomorphic masks made from the complete skulls of bovines and equines in the Americas and Europe. The aim is to demonstrate aesthetic journeys spanning both sides of the Atlantic through a type of mask that has been documented—with local variations—in the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Jamaica, the Lesser Antilles, the British Isles, and the Iberian Peninsula between the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries.

The first section of the article summarizes socio-economic aspects of the colonial history of San Juan de la Maguana, emphasizing the region's connection to cattle ranching following the European conquest of the Americas. It then examines the historical development of masquerades and carnivals in the Americas between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as the recurring conflicts between these cultural practices and civil and ecclesiastical authorities. The third section focuses on a description of the *Cocorícamo* mask and on a comparison of this mask with similar masks in the Americas and Europe.

Cattle Ranching on the Island of Hispaniola and in San Juan de la Maguana (16th-17th Centuries)

The island of Hispaniola was the first colony of the Spanish Crown in the Americas and remained the only one until 1509. Today, the island is shared by two countries: the Republic of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. San Juan de la Maguana is an inland province of the Dominican Republic, located in the southwest of the country, approximately 190 kilometres from the capital, Santo Domingo.

San Juan was founded in 1503 by Diego Velázquez de Cuéllar, later governor of Cuba (Rodríguez Demorizi 1938). The origins of the settlers who initially populated the area were diverse. They came from Burgos, Soria, Segovia, Madrid, Salamanca, Zamora, Valladolid, Cáceres, Santander, Logroño, Seville, Cádiz, and Guadalajara, among other places (Benzo de Ferrer 2000, 586-600).

In 1509, San Juan had 150 residents; in 1514, 45; and by 1528, barely 15 (D'Esposito and Jacobs 2015). This rapid demographic decline is not surprising. After the socio-economic boom of the first two decades of the sixteenth century, a less favourable period followed. The mines appeared to have become exhausted, Indigenous populations forced to work in mining and agriculture declined dramatically, and an exodus of the Hispanic population to other parts of the Americas took place. As the native population decreased, wealthier settlers began to acquire enslaved people from Africa as labourers (Arranz Márquez 1991; Benzo de Ferrer 2000; Otte 1984; Rodríguez Morel 2007).

From that time onward, the socio-economic life of San Juan de la Maguana became closely linked to cattle ranching. There were no livestock on Hispaniola prior to the European conquest of the Americas. Livestock were introduced in the late fifteenth century, and their breeding and trade were consolidated during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Owing to the absence of natural predators and the abundance of grazing land, livestock reproduced rapidly, both on *haciendas*[1] and in the wild. Justo del Río (2012, 104-5) classifies the stages of cattle ranching on the island into three phases. The first, from 1503 to 1507, is characterized by the export of equines from the Iberian Peninsula to Hispaniola. The second period, between 1507 and 1510, was marked by the large-scale export of cattle, sheep, and goats. From 1511 onward, regional trade within the Caribbean—originating from ranches established on Hispaniola—gained greater economic importance, while the export of livestock from the Iberian Peninsula declined in significance.

Cattle ranching positioned itself as an economic alternative to the declining mining industry. A notable specialization in livestock production emerged in non-mining settlements such as San Juan de la Maguana (del Río 2012, 61). In addition to meat for consumption, hides were in high demand for the manufacture of clothing, equestrian equipment, furniture, tools, and various domestic implements.

Cowhides were sold legally through Santo Domingo and illicitly to foreign merchants along the northwestern and southwestern coasts of the island. In 1605, the persistent practice of contraband trading on Hispaniola led the Spanish Crown to decree the depopulation of several towns in the western part of the island, the area with the highest levels of contraband activity. San Juan was among the towns depopulated, and its inhabitants were forced to relocate closer to Santo Domingo (Burset Flores 2018).

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, San Juan de la Maguana also frequently served as a refuge for enslaved people fleeing the colonial system, owing to the large mountain ranges that surround the region. This phenomenon intensified in the context of the depopulations, as the area became even more isolated. As royal roads ceased to receive proper maintenance, the forests reclaimed them (Deive 1996).

It was not until the eighteenth century that San Juan de la Maguana was officially repopulated with settlers from the Iberian Peninsula and from other parts of Hispaniola. Exquemelin, a French surgeon who was on the island in the second half of the seventeenth century, described San Juan as a community inhabited by mulattos and mestizos skilled in hunting and tanning, which were the principal occupations in the area:

> [...] another village, situated in the heart of the island, called San Juan de Goave [Maguana], surrounded by a magnificent landscape of gardens, forests, and meadows; its territory extends for more than twenty leagues, where many wild bulls and cows graze. Within this village live only skinners of beasts and hunters, who are of mixed bloods, that is, white and black, from which comes the word mulatto; those born of Indians and whites are called mestizos [...] From this village great abundance of tallow and hides is obtained, and no other trade or labour is practiced

there, because the land in this region cannot be cultivated due to its great dryness. (Exquemelin 2021, 42)

The socio-economic trajectory of San Juan de la Maguana during the colonial period—marked by cattle ranching, demographic fluctuations, relative isolation, and limited institutional control—provides a framework for understanding the persistence and transformation of local cultural practices. These conditions not only facilitated the availability of materials such as bovine remains but also allowed for the survival and adaptation of festive and ritual expressions at the margins of colonial authority.

Popular religiosity emerges as a key sphere in which such practices were articulated, negotiated, and transmitted over time. In a comparative study conducted by Jan Lundius (1993), similarities are observed between the popular religiosity practised by the Brotherhood of the Holy Spirit of San Juan de la Maguana and certain beliefs and cults of the European Middle Ages that disappeared following the reform movements of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Lundius argues that the survival of these practices in San Juan de la Maguana is largely attributable to the geographical, social, and historical conditions that allowed its inhabitants to live relatively at the margins of the ecclesiastical and civil control system, which was concentrated in Santo Domingo. This hypothesis may be extrapolated to carnivals and masquerades.

Carnivals and masquerades, far from being merely recreational, must be understood as part of a broader system of social and symbolic expression, shaped by ongoing tensions between regulation and transgression, as well as by the interplay of European, African, and local traditions. The available documentation makes little mention of carnivals and masquerades in Santo Domingo, and does so only briefly. Even so, it is clear that these practices remained in force throughout the colonial period, despite legislation banning them. As the following section will show, these practices were frequently the locus of tension between the popular stratum of society and the civil and ecclesiastical authorities; this reveals both the resilience of local traditions and their central role in the cultural life of the colonial Americas.

Conflicts and Public Amusements: Carnivals and Masks (16th-18th Centuries)

Numerous legal provisions aimed at curbing public disorder suggest a sustained concern with regulating social life in the Spanish overseas territories throughout the colonial period. Nevertheless, cultural practices such as carnivals and masquerades displayed a constant tendency to elude these regulations (Núñez Sánchez 2006). Much of the information available to us today derives precisely from the tensions generated by these conflicts.

As a festive period marked by greater permissiveness—during which people were allowed to engage in both minor and major excesses normally subject to censure, such as eating and drinking to excess, dancing, gambling, and fighting (Calvo Brioso 2012)—carnival frequently brought social conflict with the authorities to the fore.

Moreover, in the Americas, carnival provided an ideal occasion for the much-feared blurring of boundaries between sexes and social classes (Garavaglia 2002). During the festivities, wealth and poverty, nobility and commoners, black and white people took to the streets and shared the same ludic space, while voices, songs, and bodily expressions intermingled the cultural legacies of Europe, the Americas, and Africa (Núñez Sánchez 2006).

According to Deive (2017, 396), the principal carnival activity in Santo Domingo consisted of boat processions along the Ozama River, during which participants threw oranges and wax balls filled with scented water. In 1538, according to the testimony of Francisco de Espinosa, even Archbishop Alonso de Fuentemayor was seen throwing oranges at passersby in the Plaza de Armas (Tejeda Ortiz 2008). Masks and revelry were, naturally, not absent during carnival time, although masquerades were by no means confined exclusively to carnival.

For example, Deive (2017) notes that priests donned masks to mingle anonymously with the crowd during the cavalcades held annually on the night of St John the Baptist. Likewise, some university students wore masks when celebrating the feast of St Thomas Aquinas, and, also in disguise, "people from all social classes, Blacks and mulattoes, joined them" (Deive 2017, 273). In addition, records attest to the use of masks during a parade commemorating King Charles I's victory at the Battle of Pavia in 1525, as well as at events marking the accession to the throne of Ferdinand VI (Deive 2017, 390, 397) and the conquest of Terceira Island in 1583 (Julián 2013, 22). The royal decree of 1554 prohibiting royal officials from participating in revelries, and the proclamation issued in 1577 by Governor Gregorio González—who condemned carnival-type expressions, including masquerades, as contrary to good morals—proved largely ineffective (Deive 2017; Tejeda Ortiz 2008).



Beyond Hispaniola, similar events are recorded as having taken place in other Spanish territories. Around 1600, in Santiago de Cuba, governors and the bishop attempted to prevent attacks or mockery directed at religion and its ministers during the *mamarrachos,*[2] imposing fines of up to sixty pesos or punishments of up to twenty-five lashes (Brea López 2012). In 1779, the customary masked carnival dances became a major source of conflict between the governor and the Church in the Río de la Plata region (present-day Argentina), as masks and disguises were used to ridicule decorated or prominent individuals (Garavaglia 2002, 410). Likewise, in Quito (Ecuador), mock masquerades targeting officials or members of the elite were among the aspects of carnival that caused the greatest irritation to the authorities well into the eighteenth century:

> There are natives who stand out for their skill in making masks, and with only a few hours' notice one can purchase the exact representation of any local face; thus it often happens that people are doubled—one sitting very solemnly on the grandstand while their double dances in the plaza—to the annoyance of the person being imitated and the amusement of the spectators. (Núñez Sánchez 2006, 15-6)

The situation in Castile was no different. By 1582, in the diocese of Palencia, Álvaro de Mendoza[3] was advising that clergymen should neither wear disguises nor take part in masquerades, as such practices diminished their dignity. During his pastoral visit to Ávila in 1731, Fray Pedro de Ayala[4] harshly criticized those who went about in disguise, as masked figures and *mamarrachos*, during the festivities of San Sebastián, calling for the prohibition of such practices. In 1827, the precentor of the Cathedral of Zamora, Pedro Tiburcio Gutiérrez, likewise argued against theatrical performances inside churches (Calvo Brioso 2012, 48-9).

Attempts to limit or eradicate masquerades and carnivals on both sides of the Atlantic extended over several centuries, without success. The total prohibition of carnivalesque activities proved impossible, as it risked provoking popular discontent that would lead to protests. At times, royal officials themselves defended carnivals against religious persecution, in which cases civil and ecclesiastical authorities became openly antagonistic toward one another.

Burke (1996) draws a parallel between the trajectory of carnivals in the New World over the past two centuries and that of European carnivals between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, interpreting this development as a process that unfolded in four phases. He terms the first phase one of participation, characterized by the fact that "high and low, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, all found masking suits for the Carnival" (Burke 1996, 16).

The second phase is that of reform, when certain members of the ruling classes demanded the partial or total abolition of carnival. This was followed by a third stage marked by the withdrawal of elites from public participation, as they began to organize their own private festivities—a form of closed or exclusive carnival. Burke bases his argument primarily on the cases of Brazil and Trinidad. Regarding Trinidad, he explains that following the abolition of slavery in 1833, the white elite ceased to participate in carnival while Afro-descendant populations gained visibility by using the festivities to commemorate their freedom and to mock whites. The fourth phase corresponds to the present and is linked to the commercialization of carnival and the rediscovery of popular culture (Burke 1996).

Today, masquerades tend to be socially organized through associations or institutions and to form part of the cultural policies of local, regional, national, and transnational administrations (Panero García 2020). More specifically, the challenge faced by contemporary carnival masquerades lies in reconciling their cultural functions with commercial imperatives, without undermining processes of heritage-making or patrimonialization (Panero García and Pinelo Tiza 2023).

The *Cocorícamo* in Relation to Other Masks

During the twentieth century, the *Cocorícamo* was a common character in Holy Week performances in several localities in the province of San Juan de la Maguana, Dominican Republic, for example Mesopotamia, Chalona, Pandié, Jinova, and Sosa. A character bearing the same name was described by Fernando Ortiz as appearing in Cuban carnivals during the 1950s (Ortiz 1981; Tejeda Ortiz 2013, 203-5; Tejeda Ortiz 2008, 513-14; Hernández and Tejeda Ortiz 2007, 97).

Like other European practices, carnival and masquerades were brought to the Americas, where they spread, were reworked, and transformed throughout the continent during the colonial period. The interaction of European, African, and Indigenous traditions, among other cultural contributions, gave rise to the transcultural phenomenon of Caribbean carnivals and masquerades (Burke 1996).

Masquerades are festive manifestations characterized by the use of masks. The most prominent context in which they occur today, though not the only one, is carnival. As is well known, carnival is a festive tradition associated with Christianity, the celebration of which precedes Lent.

Another type of masquerade is the winter masquerade, characterized by the season in which it takes place (from Christmas to Epiphany); the sound of cowbells, sheep bells, or small bells; the use of whipping or threatening instruments; the collection of gifts or alms; and its performance in the streets and public squares of the community, among other features. Over time, many winter masquerades became absorbed into carnival celebrations (Calvo Brioso 2012). The performance of the *Cocorícamo* corresponds to that of a winter masquerade, as it was customary for the character to roam the streets of the town in search of grocery

stores where he would demand money or other goods, while children were intimidated with a whip.

> [...] they used to move about the town [...] obtaining money by visiting grocery stores; certain mothers would wait for the masked figures with misbehaving children [...] they would seize them and make them kneel on the ground, draw a cross with the handle of the whip, and force the child to kiss it, after which the child had to promise to behave well. (Tejeda Ortiz 2008, 513-4)

The most striking characteristic of the Cocorícamo is its mask, composed of an entire horse's, cow's, or donkey's head (Figure 1), often featuring articulated jaws that open and close (Ortiz 1981; Tejeda Ortiz 2013, 203-5; Tejeda Ortiz 2008, 513-4; Hernández and Tejeda Ortiz 2007, 97). In the Dominican case, the costume consisted of rags or a woman's dress worn over men's trousers, a *higüero* (*Ficus citrifolia*) placed at the throat, stockings used as improvised gloves, and a staff employed to frighten children (Tejeda Ortiz 2013, 203-5; Tejeda Ortiz 2010, 45).

By contrast, the attire of the Cuban *Cocorícamo* (Figure 2) included:

> [...] old clothing worn inside out and generally in tatters, with weeds, palm fibers or guano (Coccothrinax), and numerous strips of fabric or colored ribbons [...] The kokoríkamos wore bells or cowbells on their waists and ankles [...] In some cases, these cowbells were replaced by simple old cans. (Ortiz 1981)



Figure 1. Photograph of a Dominican *Cocorícamo* with a horse skull (20th century). Photograph by Odalis Rosado. Source: Tejeda Ortiz (2010).



Figure 2. Drawing of a Cuban *Cocorícamo* (1951). Source: Ortiz (1981).

Researchers Fernando Ortiz (1981) and Dagoberto Tejeda Ortiz (2008, 2010, 2013; see also Hernández and Tejeda Ortiz 2007) agree in identifying a certain degree of African cultural influence in the *Cocorícamo*. Indeed, Tejeda regards the *Cocorícamo* mask as one of the masks that incorporate the greatest number of elements of African heritage in the Dominican Republic (Tejeda Ortiz 2008, 513-4).

Today, horse and donkey skulls are no longer used for making the Dominican Republic *Cocorícamo.* Currently, only cow skulls with their horns are employed, and these are coated with tar. Decoration varies, but crosses are frequently drawn on the surface, while the teeth are painted white and the palate red. In addition, horsehair is attached to the eye sockets,



Figure 3. *Cocorícamo* mask made by Rafael, San Juan de la Maguana (2025). Photograph by author.



Figure 4. *Cocorícamo* mask made by Vicente Camilo Suero, San Juan de la Maguana (2025). Photograph by author.

the upper part of the skull, and/or the sides of the muzzle, depending on the creativity of the artisan or mask maker (Figures 3 and 4).

In Dominica and Trinidad, a mask known as the *Burroquite*[5] is worn. In Barbados, Trinidad, and the Virgin Islands, a related figure known as the Donkey Man can be found. Both masked characters wear a wooden frame around the body, suspended from the waist and covered with fabric, creating the illusion that they are mounted on a donkey or a tournament horse (Burrowes 2013, 44). At the front of the frame, there is a donkey's head made of paper. There was also a simpler type of Donkey Man that did not use a frame but instead wore only a tail made of old rags (Nicholls 2012).

By around 1950, reports indicated that the *borricos* (donkeys) of Dominica and Trinidad no longer appeared in major cities, although they were still seen in rural areas such as Arima in Trinidad (Crowley 1956, 216). Likewise, from the 1980s onward, the use of the mask for the Donkey Man of Barbados declined, as it came to be regarded as unattractive and crude within the context of the national carnival. Today, the character is performed without a mask. Some authors have noted similarities with the British Hobby Horse and the Spanish *Borriquito* (Figures 5 and 6) (Burrowes 2013, 48).



Figure 5. A carnival character dressed up and wearing a donkey head. Marés (1864). Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, object number 1978.643.54(4).[6]



Figure 6. Two carnival characters dressed as a donkey and a cow. G. M. Foruny Lithography (1880).[7]

A variant on the tournament horse is the pole horse, whose structure consists of a horse's head mounted on a pole and carried by a costumed performer. Variants of the pole horse made from an actual horse skull are found in Guyana and Jamaica. These masks also feature articulated jaws; they are painted, fitted with eyes, and covered with a piece of cloth. Nicholls (2012, 123-4) notes that, given the weight of an adult horse's skull, performers in Jamaica often preferred the smaller skull of a mule, or even that of a cow. In this context, Bettelheim (1988) likewise indicates that the Horsehead of Jamaican *Jonkonnu* is made from the decorated skull of a mule.[8] Similarly, in Cheshire (England), the Horsehead, regarded as a traditional character, is manufactured using a horse skull attached to a pole and equipped with movable jaws (Bettelheim 1988, 55, 202).

At the same time, representations of bulls or cows account for the largest number of zoomorphic masks in the insular Caribbean. There are a number of different bovine representations, such as the Wild Bull and Jam Bull in the Virgin Islands; the Red Bull in

St Kitts and Nevis; the Cowhead *Jonkonnu* in Jamaica; *Junkanoo* in the Bahamas; and the John Bull in Antigua (Burrowes 2013; Crowley 1956; Hill 1985).

According to Nicholls (2012), African and European influences in taurine, bovine, and equine masquerades of the Lesser Antilles and Jamaica were shaped primarily through a fusion of traditions from Upper Guinea, ranging from Senegal to Côte d'Ivoire, and southwestern Britain, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. This dynamic is closely linked to the origins of the enslaved populations and the colonists who migrated during the colonial period. The author documents the use of animal skulls as masks in the Christmas bulls of the Scottish Highlands and the Outer Hebrides; in Tetbury, in England's West Country; and in certain localities in Sweden, Denmark, and Germany, among others (Nicholls 2012, 189-90).

The British and Irish evidence deserves closer attention, since it provides the nearest European parallels to the Caribbean pole horses. The best-documented case is the *Mari Lwyd* of southern Wales, and above all of Glamorgan: a horse's skull, whitened and decked with ribbons, is mounted on a pole and carried by a performer concealed beneath a white sheet, while the lower jaw, worked by a string or a lever, is snapped at the onlookers (Cawte 1978; Hutton 1996, 83-4). To these may be added the Christmas bulls of the Scottish Highlands and the Outer Hebrides and the masquerade of Tetbury, in England's West Country, in which Nicholls (2012, 189-90) records the use of animal skulls as masks, as well as the Cheshire Horsehead noted above, built from a horse skull fixed to a pole and fitted with movable jaws (Bettelheim 1988, 55, 202). Taken together, these cases share with the *Cocorícamo* the winter calendar, the ambulatory performance through the streets and houses of the community, the soliciting of food, drink, or money, and the use of the animal's own skull, with articulated jaws, as the central element of the disguise.

Regarding possible African influence, Nicholls (2012) mentions masks from Mandinka, Jola, Igbo, and some Senegambian groups. However, these are not made from bovine skulls, nor do they fully cover the wearer's face in the manner of the *Cocorícamo*. In this respect, the National Museum of Anthropology in Spain houses twentieth-century examples of bovine masks from Guinea-Bissau, known as *Dugn´be*, which are made of wood (inventory nos. CE11859 and CE11093).[9] Another example of a wooden bovine mask from Cameroon is documented by Paul Germann (1911).

In his study of Carnival, Caro Baroja devotes a section to what he terms *vaquillas*[10] (heifers) in the Americas, reproducing excerpts from two correspondents of the French magazine *L'Illustration*, Charton and Alluys, dating to 1853 and 1854 respectively. Charton describes a taurine masquerade in Quito, while Alluys makes mention of what appears to be a masquerade in La Paz (Bolivia), featuring horns and constructed from a wooden frame suspended from the waist of the masked performer,[11] as in the Donkey Man, for example. Caro Baroja (2006, 259) draws attention to the similarity between European *vaquillas* and those of Quito, Bolivia, and other parts of the Americas.

Rodríguez Pascual divided the masquerades of Zamora into diabolical and bovine masquerades (Panero García 2017). For Castile and León more broadly, Calvo Brioso (2012, 37, 59, 77) identified zoomorphic masquerades in which the central role is played by an animal-shaped mask and distinguished two main subgroups: taurine and bovine masks. He also noted the exceptional presence of horse masks. Relevant notable examples in Spain include the cows of Almeida, Carabelino, Peruela, San Martín de Castañeda and Abejar (Panero García 2017; Calvo Brioso 2012); the horses of Villarino Tras a Sierra; and the bulls of Sardoneo and Velilla de la Reina (Calvo Brioso 2012).

The use of animal bones or skulls as the principal element of the mask is less frequent in Spain, although examples do exist. One such case is *the Vaquilla* of Palacios del Pan, which

features a dry cow skull on its frontal section. Similarly, the *Gomia* of Llamas de la Ribera incorporates a horse skull with articulated jaws (Calvo Brioso 2012, 311-4, 456). Both *the Vaquilla* and the *Gomia* are supported by frames carried by one or more individuals, with the skull resting on a wooden structure. By contrast, the *Cocorícamo* is a mask designed for a single performer, whose face is completely covered by it.

During the twentieth century, some representations of the bull in the Antilles featured horns and were accompanied by a face mask, a cloth mask, or a textile hood. In other cases, the performer's face was simply painted black. Nevertheless, there is evidence of a *Jonkonnu* character described in 1839 by Michael Scott as being "clothed in an entire bullock hide, horns and tail … the whole of the skull being retained" (Nicholls 2012, 58). Preparing a bovine skull for use as a mask was a labour-intensive process, as it required thorough cleaning, whitening, and sanding until it could be fitted to the wearer's head. For this reason, it was more common to opt for a headdress made from a quarter section of the skull with attached horns, or a semi-spherical cap with horns, rather than using the complete skull.

> They clean it out, they get it, they sun it, they do everything to it, burn it out, sit down on it every day, sandpaper, every single day… When they finish, it comes out white, white, white, white, because the chemical is there, the system you call lime. They soak it in lime, throw a lot of lime on it and leave it there a couple of days. And there's meat—whatever meat—because they get it fresh from the market. They throw lime all over, inside every crevice, and that lime gets everything out. So, when they reach a point, they just carry it to water, the cattle drinking trough, and wash it out right there, then get sandpaper and scrub it well. They remove all the sharp edges of the bone and then fit it. (Nicholls 2012, 58)

Jonkonnu is a street festival characterized by the presence of groups of masked male dancers accompanied by musical bands. This practice dates back at least to the early eighteenth century. Variants of this festival exist in Jamaica, Belize, St Kitts and Nevis, Guyana, and Bermuda, among other locations. In contemporary Jamaica, Jonkonnu groups generally fall into two categories: *Roots Jonkonnu* and *Fancy Dress*. *Roots* masks include characters such as the Cowhead and the Horsehead. Indeed, these zoomorphic masquerades constitute one of the most significant distinctions between *Roots Jonkonnu* and *Fancy Dress*. They are typically found in eastern, peripheral, and rural regions of Jamaica—such as St. Elizabeth, Westmoreland, and Hanover—whereas *Fancy Dress* bands are mainly based in major urban centres.

According to Judith Bettelheim (1988), Roots *Jonkonnu* masquerades display a pronounced neo-African style, particularly in the case of the Cowhead. In popular Jamaican interpretations, the Horsehead and Cowhead characters of *Jonkonnu* embody African ferocity rather than British restraint, a quality clearly expressed in their dances. Bettelheim further suggests that the Cowhead may derive from a similar type of masquerade widespread in West Africa (Bettelheim 1988, 53-5).

By contrast, Katarina Real argues that popular theatrical representations such as *Bumba-meu-boi* (Beat my ox) are among the most significant medieval European traditions preserved in the carnival of Pernambuco, Brazil. These dramas are performed at Christmas, from southern Brazil to the Amazon, with regional variations, and revolve around the misadventures of an ox while simultaneously satirizing colonial society. Notably, in the Carnival of Recife (Pernambuco), the head of the ox is made from a cow skull, and the monstrous figure known as *babau* uses a horse skull (Real 2004, 230). The emergence of bovine and equine masquerades in Brazil is therefore understandable, as is the existence of

parallels with numerous masquerades of this type in Trás-os-Montes (Portugal) and Castile and León, such as the cow of Sayago and the cow of Santulhão (Calvo Brioso 2012, 59, 77; Panero García 2017).

Jeroen Dewulf (2021), who examines parallels between the earliest accounts of Jonkonnu and European *calendas*, proposes adopting an Afro-Iberian perspective in the analysis of Caribbean performative traditions to better understand their historical development. Many of the African groups forcibly transported to the Americas had already incorporated cultural elements deeply rooted in Iberian traditions prior to their arrival in the New World.

Dewulf (2021, 1-3) emphasizes Iberian dominance in the Atlantic world during the Early Modern period, particularly Portuguese influence in Africa from the fifteenth century onward and questions the traditional use of the terms "syncretism," "hybridization," and "creole" as phenomena that emerged only after Africans arrived in the Americas. On the contrary, processes of cultural integration had begun much earlier, in Africa and Iberia. According to Dewulf (2021, 16), a crucial factor in the formation of the cultural identity of enslaved Africans in the American colonies was the system of brotherhoods or confraternities, which constituted one of the principal mechanisms for transferring European social structures to other parts of the world. He concludes that the hypothesis that *Jonkonnu* represents the oldest and most enduring non-European cultural form in the Caribbean is untenable, since Iberian festive traditions form a significant component of the multiplicity of cultural influences that shaped *Jonkonnu*.

Masquerades encompass multiple voices, as they combine music, dance, performance, craftsmanship, and oral tradition. Given the heterogeneity of these cultural expressions, a wide range of analytical approaches is possible.

The most widely accepted explanations in the academic literature for parallels between European and American carnivals and masquerades are twofold and mutually complementary: diffusion, and parallel evolution. According to the paradigm of parallel evolution, similar circumstances produce similar outcomes; in other words, the selection of comparable materials or garments for mask-making arises from pragmatic decisions and considerations of convenience.

In San Juan de la Maguana—where a significant cattle-ranching economy existed during the colonial period—it is logical that bovine skulls were used to make masks, as they were readily available and, unlike hides, did not have a priority economic use. The same reasoning applies to localities in Cuba, Jamaica, Castile and León, and other regions whose economies were similarly linked to livestock raising and pastoralism. Likewise, pragmatic considerations can be observed in the preference for mule skulls over those of adult horses, since the former are lighter. This reasoning has been noted by Nicholls (2012, 123-4) and Bettelheim (1988) with reference to the Jamaican Horsehead.

It is likely that the *Cocorícamo* has undergone changes over time for similar reasons. Specifically, during interviews conducted in September 2025 with two *Cocorícamo* band directors from San Juan de la Maguana, Camilo and Rafael, both explained that, in order to create a new mask, it is customary to visit local farms in search of the remains of a cow that has died or is close to death. Horses are less frequently found, as they are less common than cattle in the Dominican Republic, more expensive, and closely guarded by their owners. In the second half of the twentieth century, when the photograph of the *Cocorícamo* with a horse's head shown in Figure 1 was taken, donkeys, mules, and horses were common means of transportation in rural areas of the Dominican Republic. Today, however, horses are more often regarded as luxury items. As a result, it has become increasingly difficult for artisans to obtain horsehair to decorate *Cocorícamo* masks, leading some to opt for synthetic hair instead.

About diffusion and American carnivals and masquerades, including the *Cocorícamo*, it is indisputable that these practices have European origins and were transported to the Americas, where they spread, and were reworked and transformed throughout the continent during the colonial period. At the same time, it is evident that it was interaction among European, African, and Indigenous traditions, along with other ethnic contributions, which gave rise to the transcultural phenomenon that characterizes Caribbean carnivals and masquerades today (Burke 1996). The debate surrounding this issue centres on the fact that some authors see a greater or lesser African or European influence in specific masquerades, without entirely excluding either pole.

Some scholars who argue for a stronger African influence on the *Cocorícamo* (Ortiz 1981; Tejeda Ortiz 2008, 2010, 2013; Hernández and Tejeda Ortiz 2007) and on the Cowhead *Jonkonnu* (Bettelheim 1988) emphasize particular components of the masquerade, such as dance, as well as the fact that in the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Jamaica, and the Lesser Antilles these performances are carried out predominantly by people of African descent. Burke (1996) and Flores Martos (2001) likewise maintain that African cultural elements associated with dance are among the defining features of American carnivals. However, for masks that fully cover the face and are made from bovine or equine skulls, such as the *Cocorícamo*, the available evidence points to a closer affinity with European winter masquerades.

Conclusions

This article has examined the *Cocorícamo* mask of San Juan de la Maguana, Dominican Republic, situating it within a broader corpus of zoomorphic masks from the Americas and Europe, specifically bovine, taurine, and equine forms. The aim was to trace the aesthetic connections that link the two shores of the Atlantic through a single type of face mask, one whose material basis is the complete skull of a bovine or an equine. Masks of this kind are documented, with local variations, in the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Jamaica, the Lesser Antilles, the British Isles, and the Iberian Peninsula between the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries. The comparative analysis was based primarily on a review of secondary sources.

Throughout the study, it was established that the *Cocorícamo* mask shares very close aesthetic features with the Cuban *Cocorícamo*, the Cowhead and Horsehead of Jamaican *Jonkonnu*, and the *boi* and *babau* of the Recife Carnival. These similarities include the use of the complete skull of bovines or equines as a mask, articulated jaws, and the continuing use of these masks within popular festive contexts, particularly in rural or peripheral areas.

Likewise, significant parallels were identified with European winter masquerades, especially those of the Iberian Peninsula and the British Isles: the *Vaquilla* of Palacios del Pan and the *Gomia* of Llamas de la Ribera, the *Mari Lwyd* of southern Wales, and the Horsehead of Cheshire, all of which take the complete skull of the animal as the central element of the disguise. While several authors have emphasized African cultural influence on the *Cocorícamo* and the Cowhead *Jonkonnu*, particularly with regard to dance, the available evidence indicates a stronger European influence in relation to masks made from the complete skulls of bovines and equines. Nevertheless, the *Cocorícamo* as a masquerade cannot be assigned a single cultural origin, nor can it be interpreted simply as a local or isolated tradition.

Finally, the study found that the performance of the *Cocorícamo* corresponds closely to that of a winter masquerade, as it takes place in the streets and public squares of San Juan de la Maguana and incorporates elements such as cowbells, whipping or flogging instruments, and the soliciting of gifts. Future research could examine the *Cocorícamo* in dialogue with the concept of the winter masquerade and with a broader corpus of bovine, taurine, and equine masquerades from the Americas, Europe, and Africa.



NOTES

1. *Hacienda*: a large colonial rural estate devoted mainly to cattle raising and mixed agriculture.

2. A *mamarracho* was anyone who dressed up in old clothes and sacks and covered their face during Carnival, usually involving satirical and grotesque characters who playfully subverted social norms.

3. Roman Catholic prelate, Bishop of L'Aquila (1622-1628) and Bishop of Jaca (1628-1631).

4. Apostolic Nuncio, Collector General, and *Legate a Latere* for Spain (1727-1738).

5. The *Burroquite* (also spelled *Burokeet, Burokit, or Burrokeet*) is a carnival masquerade in which the performer dances inside a donkey-shaped framework.

6. The caption at the bottom of the image reads: "Don Perico walks around with a donkey's head."

7. The caption at the bottom of the image reads: "Many dress up as what they are."

8. See Horsehead from the Spanish Town Road Jonkonnu Band, Kingston, Jamaica in Bettelheim (1988, 55).

9. *Dugn´be*. 20th century. Wood, 37 × 40 cm. Madrid: Museo Nacional de Antropología, inv. nos. CE11859 and CE11093. https://ceres.mcu.es/pages/Main.

10. Masquerade of Iberian origin in which a performer carries a small bull- or cow-shaped framework and playfully charges the crowd during carnivals and processions, combining dance, mock aggression, and comic interaction.

11. See Charton's drawing of a bullfighting masquerade in Quito (left) and Alluys' drawing of a masquerade in La Paz (right) in Caro Baroja (2006).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Arranz Márquez, Luis. 1991. *Repartimientos y encomiendas en la Isla Española: El repartimiento de Alburquerque de 1514*. Madrid: Fundación García Arévalo.

Benzo de Ferrer, Vilma. 2000. *Pasajeros a La Española, 1492-1530*. Bogotá: Biblioteca Banco de la República.

Bettelheim, Judith. 1988. "Jonkonnu and Other Christmas Masquerades." In *Caribbean Festival Arts: Each and Every Bit of Difference*, ed. John W. Nunley, Judith Bettelheim, 39-83. Seattle: University of Washington Press; Saint Louis: Saint Louis Art Museum.

Brea López, Rafael. 2012. "Santiago de Cuba: Carnaval y guerras de independencia (siglo XIX)." *Batey: Revista Cubana de Antropología Social* 3 (3), 98-113.

Burke, Peter. 1996. "Carnival in the Old World and the New." *Revista de Dialectología y Tradiciones Populares* 51 (1): 7-18.

Burrowes, Marcia. 2013. "Losing Our Masks: Traditional Masquerade and Changing Constructs of Barbadian Identity." *International Journal of Intangible Heritage* 8, 37–54.

Burset Flores, Luis Rafael. 2018. "Contra el exclusivismo imperial: El contrabando en el Caribe entre los siglos XVI y XVII." *Clío* 87 (196), 27-53.

Calvo Brioso, Bernardo. 2012. *Máscaras de Castilla y León: Tiempo de fiesta*. Valladolid: Junta de Castilla y León, Consejería de Cultura y Turismo.

Caro Baroja, Julio. 2006. *El carnaval: Análisis histórico-cultural*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial.

Cawte, E. C. 1978. *Ritual Animal Disguise: A Historical and Geographical Study of Animal Disguise in the British Isles*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, for the Folklore Society.

Crowley, Daniel J. 1956. "The Traditional Masques of Carnival." *Caribbean Quarterly* 4 (3–4), 194-223. https://doi.org/10.1080/00086495.1956.11829671

Deive, Carlos Esteban. 1996. *Tangomangos: Contrabando y piratería en Santo Domingo, 1522-1606*. Santo Domingo: Fundación Cultural Dominicana.

Deive, Carlos Esteban. 2017. *Bibliotecas privadas y vida cotidiana en la colonia de Santo Domingo*. Santo Domingo: Archivo General de la Nación.

Del Río, Justo L. 2012. *Ganadería, plantaciones y comercio azucarero antillano, siglos XVI y XVII*. Santo Domingo: Academia Dominicana de la Historia.

D'Esposito, Francesco, and Auke P. Jacobs. 2015. "Auge y ocaso de la primera sociedad minera de América: Santo Domingo, 1503-1520." *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos*, March 10. https://doi.org/10.4000/nuevomundo.67723

Dewulf, Jeroen. 2021. "Rethinking the Historical Development of Caribbean Performance Culture from an Afro-Iberian Perspective." *New West Indian Guide* 95 (3–4), 223-53. https://doi.org/10.1163/22134360-bja10012

Exquemelin, Alexandre Olivier. 2021. *Piratas de América*. Madrid: Editorial Verbum.

Flores Martos, Juan Antonio. 2001. "Un continente de carnaval: Etnografía crítica de carnavales americanos." *Anales del Museo de América* 9, 29-58.

Garavaglia, Juan Carlos. 2002. "Del Corpus a los toros: Fiesta, ritual y sociedad en el Río de la Plata colonial." *Anuario IEHS* 17, 391-419.

Germann, Paul. 1911. "Abb. 24. Maske, Bafut (1/13 n. Gr.). [Index:] Nr. 24 M Af 12836 Hölzerne Rindermaske. Bafut." In *Das plastisch-figürliche Kunstgewerbe im Graslande von Kamerun*. Ross Archive of African Images, Yale University Art Gallery. https://jstor.org/stable/community.36727274, last accessed on 10 September 2026.

G. M. Litografía Foruny. 1880. *El carnaval.* Madrid: Biblioteca Nacional de España. Call number 17685. Online at: http://bnedigital.bne.es/bd/es/card?id=e3d7d477-7709-4352-87a4-8bc3f9b6bd75, last accessed on 23 Sept. 2026.

Hernández, Mariano, Dagoberto Tejeda Ortiz. 2007. *Carnaval popular dominicano*. Santo Domingo: Banco Popular Dominicano.

Hill, Errol. 1985. "Traditional Figures in Carnival: Their Preservation, Development and Interpretation." *Caribbean Quarterly* 31 (2), 14-34. https://doi.org/10.1080/00086495.1985.11829397

Hutton, Ronald. 1996. *The Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Julián, Amadeo. 2013. "Diversiones públicas en Santo Domingo: Las corridas de toros y el juego de cañas en los siglos XVI y XVII." *Clío* 82 (186), 235-83.

Lundius, Jan. 1993. "Rural Cofradías: A Comparative Study of Syncretism, Fertility Beliefs and Communal Worship among Peasants in Medieval Europe, the Dominican Republic and the Mayan Regions of Central America." *Iberoamericana: Nordic Journal of Latin American Studies* 23 (1-2), 39-88. https://doi.org/10.16993/ibero.237

Macías Mora, Ramón. 2023. "Regocijos y fiestas de toros en las posesiones españolas de ultramar: Siglos XVI, XVII, XVIII y principios del XIX." *Revista de Estudios Taurinos* 52, 59-84.

Marés, José María. 1864. Broadside with 48 Scenes Depicting Carnival in Spain. Wood engraving, sheet 44 × 31.5 cm. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, object no. 1978.643.54(4). https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/760607, last accessed on 10 September 2026.

Nicholls, Robert Wyndham. 2012. *The Jumbies' Playing Ground: Old World Influence on Afro-Creole Masquerades in the Eastern Caribbean*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

Núñez Sánchez, Jorge. 2006. "Regulaciones de la vida urbana colonial." *Procesos: Revista Ecuatoriana de Historia* 1 (24), 7-23. https://doi.org/10.29078/rp.v1i24.203

Ortiz, Fernando. 1981. *Los bailes y el teatro de los negros en el folklore de Cuba*. Second ed. Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas.

Otte, Enrique. 1984. "La despoblación de La Española: La crisis de 1528." *Ibero-Amerikanisches Archiv* 10 (3), 241-65.

Panero García, María Pilar. 2017. "Cambio semántico en una mojiganga: La vaca bayona de Almeida de Sayago." In *Maschera e alterità*, edited by Pietro Sisto, Piero Totaro, 179–207. Bari: Progedit.

Panero García, María Pilar, António Pinelo Tiza, eds. 2023. *Máscaras y patrimonio: Etnografía del carnaval en el s. XXI*. Urueña: Fundación Joaquín Díaz.

Real, Katarina. 2004. "Evoé! The Carnival of Recife and Olinda in Pernambuco, Brazil." In *Carnival!*, edited by Barbara Mauldin, 203-37. Santa Fe: Museum of International Folk Art.

Rodríguez Demorizi, Emilio. 1938. "Blasones de la Isla Española." *Boletín del Archivo General de la Nación* 1 (1), 38-40.

Rodríguez Morel, Genaro. 2007. "Desarrollo económico y cambio demográfico en La Española: Siglos XV–XVII." *Boletín del Archivo General de la Nación* 32 (117), 79-145.

Tejeda Ortiz, Dagoberto. 2008. *El carnaval dominicano: Antecedentes, tendencias y perspectivas*. Santo Domingo: Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia.

Tejeda Ortiz, Dagoberto. 2010. *Máscaras e identidad: Imágenes del carnaval dominicano*. Santo Domingo: Secretaría de Estado de Cultura.

Tejeda Ortiz, Dagoberto. 2013. "Descolonización e identidad del carnaval en Dominicana y en Haití." In *Pensar en carnaval: Memorias del Primer Encuentro Internacional de Carnavales*, 162-67. Barranquilla: Universidad del Atlántico. Online at: https://hdl.handle.net/11323/5676, last accessed 23 September 2026.