

MEMORY IN THE QUILOMBO ALCANTARENSE DE ITAMATATIUA-MA: the focus on religiosity¹

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ABSTRACT

The narratives about the development of the territory that comprises Itamatatiua are imprecise, as the historical data contrasts with the oral reports. Nevertheless, it is clear, both in the memory of the community and in the historical documentation, the direct link of this village with the Order do Carmelite (Carmelite Order), which had several projects in Alcântara, such as farms, potteries, salt pans, first hospitals for people with mental disorders, convent and church. The approach adopted in this article focuses on the religiosity present in the formation of the quilombola community in Itamatatiua, located in Alcântara/Maranhão. In the methodological track, field research was used, conducted in the place where people live and socialize, with due survey through data collection and an inductive method (descriptive accumulation in detail).

Key-words: History; Memory; Religiosity; Formation; Quilombola Territory from Itamatatiua.

1 Introduction

The Quilombola Community of Itamatatiua is one of the largest rural villages in the municipality of Alcântara, located on the coastal portion of the Maranhense Amazon, on the borders between the Maranhense Gulf, Cumã Bay and the Maranhense Recesses. An important feature of the municipality is the fact that it has a much larger rural population than the urban population, with around 6,400 people living in the city's headquarters and 15,452 living in the rural area of the city. The territory of Itamatatiua is located in the northern portion of the municipality of Alcântara, forming the "Lands of Santa Tereza D'Ávila", encompassing the portion of the former farm that gave rise to this quilombola territory.

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Currently, the territoriality and the quilombola way of life are the most striking features of Itamatatua, with the existence of a cult of saints, circles of people playing drums and other celebrations and enchantments, as well as subsistence agriculture, such as the shift farming, the collection of babassu and the creation of small animals for their consumption.

The cultural assets of the community are formed by knowledge, forms of expression, festivities, traditional knowledge, sacred places and spaces (cemetery, church, flour houses, “Source of water fountain Chora”, “Enchanting Stone” and others). However, in this article, in addition to relevant points such as history, the memory of this quilombola population, religiosity and devotion to Saint Teresa of Ávila will be the focus to be worked on.

The celebrations, prayers, blessings, beliefs, feasts of saints, drums, among others in the sphere of the intangible, stand out. The Church of Santa Teresa de Ávila and the Documental Stone are milestones in the foundation of the village in honour of Santa Teresa de Ávila and material heritage of land ownership carved in a block of limestone, which is under the protection of the ceramist leaders.

2 Method of the Research

This research has an interdisciplinary character since it requires a dialogue with categories from different areas of knowledge, such as Geography, Tourism, Archaeology and History. Therefore, the dynamization of religiosity as memory and daily life, and as a feeling of belonging of the Quilombo de Itamatatua will be studied, to understand the importance of the religious creed in the formation of this quilombola community.

According to Minayo (2013) there is no one method that is better than another. What exists is an addendum to the methods used. In this sense, the methodological strategy adopted was that of ethnographic research, through field research (conducted in the place where people live and socialize), with a multifactorial survey (use of two or more data assemblage techniques), a holistic view (a portrait as complete as possible of the group under study, considering the vision of the researcher and the researched), in addition to the production of photographic and audio-visual documentation, systematization, organization and evaluation of the information collected in the field and the documentation gathered and produced in the research process, with the proper filling of forms, complementation and verification of the inventoried cultural property, and at the end, validation of the information with the Itamatatua community. The production of this work will lead to a wider comprehension and understanding of historicity as a precursor to the formation of this community, due to the strong religiosity that had been present there.

3 Results and Discussions

The study of quilombola historical formation, individual and collective cultural enrichment, community empowerment and the strengthening of feelings of identity and belonging around their main occupation, the way of making ceramics and the strong relationship of the community with its Saint Patron were the important topics gained in the study. Still, the territory of Itamatatua has its origins in the indigenous, Afro-descendant, quilombola and European legacy, which over time, through Religious Orders, acquired these lands on which the community now resides, with an emphasis on celebrations,

cultural expressions, cuisine, ways of doing things and arts, parties, and in particular the religiosity of devotion to Santa Tereza D'Ávila.

3.1 Religious orders and slavery in Alcântara – MA

With the eyes of Portuguese colonization fixed on the sugar Northeast and the Southeast coast, the northernmost portions of Portuguese territory were at the mercy of navigators of different flags, especially from France, Spain and Holland. These sporadic navigations were intensified throughout the five hundred years, as trade with the indigenous people, especially the Tupinambá, was strengthened, a fact that created several trade and barter routes, with the foundation of trading posts, such as the old village of Tupinambá in Vinhais Velho, also called “Migan Ville” (BANDEIRA, 2018).

In the meantime, other trading posts were also created throughout the 16th century and in the first decades of the 17th century, where exotic animals, wood, feathers and skins and many spices were traded (BANDEIRA, 2018). In the expedition led by Daniel de La Touche, four Capuchin priests and, later, a larger number of Franciscans were responsible for the catechesis of the indigenous population and the process of Christianization of the colony.

Throughout the Sixteenth and Part of the Seventeenth Centuries, São Luís served much more as a military outpost of Maranhão and Grão-Pará, as it had been a state administratively separated from Brazil since 1621. Nevertheless, between 1616 and 1658, when the free population did not reach 600 inhabitants, the colonial policy of Maranhão and Grão-Pará already had four religious orders: Franciscan Capuchins, Carmelites, Mercedarians and Jesuits. These orders, at first, were in charge of the pacification and conversion of indigenous peoples, the implantation of the first churches and the services of the faith:

Governed by the Padroado, the Religious Orders were bound by the relationships of favour imposed by that system. On the one hand, they benefited from the direct link to Portuguese colonial policy; on the other hand, they were subject to the norms of this same policy, restricting their free action. [...]. The exploration of the faith allowed the regulars to accumulate a great quantity of material goods, bequeathed by the faithful in testaments or promises to the saints (of which they were custodians of the land). The farms, plantations and similar utilized abundant indigenous labour, generating large profits or, at the very least, guaranteeing the livelihood of the Convents in the capital (BOGÉA et al. 2008, p. 8).

After the disputes for the dominion and pacification of the Island of Maranhão, the Portuguese Crown focused its activities on the continental lands that were in front of its main occupational nucleus, known as "Tapuitapera" or Terra dos Tapuios. It was also a highly populated Tupinambá settlement in Cumã Bay. According to Lopes (2002), long before Tapuitapera was elevated to a village, under the name of “Santo Antônio de Alcântara”, a parish and a small village were established with the construction of the parish church in 1630.

Viveiros (1999) documented, based on the reports of Sebastião de Lucena, the development of the city after 1648, when the old village was elevated to the category of city, with the name of Alcântara. The construction of the first sugar mills and the increase of the population, which in 1650 totalled around 300 residents, date from this same period. In just over 100 years, as a result of the importation of enslaved

African peoples to act as a compulsory labour force, Alcântara grew exponentially, to the point where Governador Melo e Póvoas, in 1764, reported that among the parishes of the Kingdom, Alcântara was “the richest and best dressed” among all the others in Maranhão. Along the same path, Gaioso (2008), in the “Historical-political compendium of the principles of farming in Maranhão”, published posthumously in 1818, described Alcântara as the second settlement after the city of São Luís, being the “head” of the former captaincy of Cumán.

In this context, we highlight the role of Religious Orders in the evangelization of the indigenous population, in the establishment of Portuguese settlers concerning the services of the faith and in the establishment of the first productive centres in Alcântara. It is worth highlighting the process of arrival of these religious people and their strengthening as the Church's arm as the economic engine of Maranhão, due to the relationship that religious orders had with the occupation of the territory, with the exploitation of slave labour and the development of quilombos.

According to Bogéa (2008), the first Carmelites who arrived in Maranhão accompanied the Portuguese squadron that expelled the French in 1615. These are the Friars André da Natividade and Cosme da Anunciação, who received from Jerônimo de Albuquerque a Date Letter granting the Order the Ilha do Medo or Boqueirão where they built a hermitage under the invocation of Nossa Senhora da Guia in Ponta do Bonfim, in addition to an extension of two leagues of land, probably discontinuous, in an unspecified location. According to Lopes (2002), these friars returned to Pernambuco and, only in 1624, Friar André da Natividade, together with Friar Antônio de Santa Maria, returned to São Luís, where they founded the Igreja do Carmo in the vicinity of what is now Rua do Egypt and a convent under the prelatore of the first one.

According to Marques (2008), the church and convent of Nossa Senhora do Carmo in Alcântara were founded in 1655. Lopes (2001) stated that between 1627 and 1647, the Carmelites received land as a donation from Antônio de Albuquerque Coelho de Carvalho for the construction of the convent of Alcântara. In addition to this property, were part of the capital of the Carmelites, hospices, missions and farms. The three convents in the State of Maranhão formed the Vicaria do Maranhão integrated into the Province of Lisbon and not that of Brazil.

In this regard, Viveiros (1999, p. 40) pointed out:

According to Friar Manuel de Sá, simultaneously with the construction of the Convent of N^a S^a das Mercês, the Convent of the Carmelite Order was erected in Alcântara, which was done 'at the request of the grantee of the same village', Antônio Coelho de Carvalho, judge do Paço, who, by the priest Friar Joseph de Santa Teresa, the first novice there was in the vicar of Maranhão, sent orders and the most necessary for the foundation.

The cultivation of cotton, based on slave labour, raised the village of Alcântara as the most prosperous in the entire Amazon region of Maranhense, also involving the religious orders present there. In fact, the lands occupied by the Church, especially after its abandonment, will be fundamental for the constitution of a peculiar form of a post-slavery peasantry that so well defines the different processes of territorialisation in the Baixada Maranhense, where the environment is interspersed with varied relationships (SÁ, 2007; ALMEIDA, 2006).

Maranhão can be considered a late slave society. Although the first Africans arrived in the region since the 17th century, it is only in the last quarter of the 18th century that the region will present all the traces of a fully developed agricultural slavery with the intensification of trafficking (ASSUNÇÃO, 1996). According to Reis and Gomes (1996), the slave trade to America was one of the biggest commercial and cultural undertakings that marked the formation of the modern world and the creation of a global economic system.

About 40% of the slaves that disembarked in America came to Brazil and of these, 12 thousand slaves were sent to Maranhão at the time of the Companhia de Comércio do Grão-Pará and Maranhão, between 1755 and 1777, culminating with the arrival of 41 thousand slaves, between 1812 and 1820 (ASSUNÇÃO, 1996). These statistics left as a legacy to Maranhão, on the eve of Independence, the highest percentage of slave population in the Empire, with around 55% enslaved living in rural areas, mainly on cotton and rice farms and, later, sugar farms situated in the Itapecuru, Mearim, Pindaré valleys and in the Baixada Maranhense (ASSUNÇÃO, 1996). Africans and their descendants constituted the main labour force for over three hundred years, the duration of slavery in Maranhão.

This historical context is also addressed by Faria (2012), who recognized that enslaved labour was the basis of an agro-export system in Maranhão, from the mid-eighteenth century. This system was maintained for almost two centuries, fully supported by the labour of enslaved Africans, to the point where the economy of Maranhão, after the abolition of slavery, in 1888, collapsed with the agricultural crisis.

According to Viveiros (2014), the abolition of slavery in Brazil profoundly shook the Alcantara economy, resulting in the downfall of the last land-owning families and religious orders, who were gradually withdrawing from the city to invest what was left of their fortunes in commercial activities in São Luís. For the author, the decadence began in the five-year period from 1865 to 1870, due to several factors, with emphasis on the increase of the sugar industry in the Province, the displacement of large properties to the Pindaré, Mearim and Baixo Itapecuru valleys, whose lands were more favourable to the cultivation of sugar cane. They even are added to the economic aspect:

[...] the weakening of the Religious Orders caused by the prohibition of the entry of novices in them and by the great secularization of friars that took place after independence, left Maranhão an orphan of spiritual assistance. [...]. What was verified in practice was the insufficiency of the secular clergy, mainly in the interior of the State, and great difficulties in building and preserving the temples, in addition to maintaining the enterprises (BOGÉA et al. 2008, p. 12).

In 1848, ten religious lived in the Convent of Carmo de São Luís and six religious in the Convent of Alcântara and even with the weakening of the Order in the Maranhão province, these religious people still owned land, slavery, the pottery of Itamacaca, the best in Maranhão, in addition of many laces. Furthermore, even in the crisis, still in the decade from 1850 to 1860, Alcântara had 81 cereal farms, 22 sugar cane mills, 24 cattle farms and more than 100 salt flats (VIVEIROS, 2014). Therefore, it is in this historical context that the abandonment of lands by religious orders occurred, especially in Alcântara, creating the conditions for the permanence of descendants of slaves and indigenous peoples from different regions, featuring varied sociological situations (FILHO, 2008).

Dos Anjos (2016), while working with communities in Alcântara, narrated that many descendants define themselves as quilombolas without any association with an ancestry of "runaway slaves", whose families resisted and remained within the domains of plantations, contradicting the classifications inherited from the period colonial. This is the case of Itamatatua, whose territory is considered as "Land of the Holy Lady", since the population recognizes in their narratives of origin that a couple who received from Teresa de D'Ávila, through the Carmelite Order, the lands of quilombo, which were once part of the Tamatitua farm.

Besides the farms, the Carmelites still owned a pottery factory and 370 slaves in Itatinga. One of the farms, Tamatitua, was already part of the parish of Santo Antônio e Almas and had a branch church. The old rural establishment cultivated cotton, rice, manioc and the other agricultural products of the province, except for sugar. In the first half of the 19th century, the decline of the Carmelite Order reached the Alcântara Convent (LOPES, 2002). In 1853, in another report of bishop D. Joaquim it was registered the existence of only two religious in Alcântara, proposing as a palliative measure for the terrible situation of the Order, they suggested to sell the remaining slaves to pay the debts (BOGÉA et al., 2008).

3.2 The devotion to Saint Tereza D'ávila

Before the end of the 19th century, the Order of Carmel entered into decadence in Maranhão and one of the factors was the adhesion of the Maranhenses to the independence of Brazil. Some Portuguese-born monks preferred to remain faithful to Portugal, some repatriating themselves and others secularizing themselves. It is in this context that the slave population remained occupying the lands of the old Tamatitua farm and inherited from Santa Teresa de D'Ávila, through the Carmelite Order, their ancestral territory (LOPES, 2002).

Because it was a donation understood as an inheritance from the Saint, "the inhabitants of Itamatatua" consider themselves "children of the saint", for living on "the lands of the saint", as reported by Ms. Neide de Jesus, guardian of the goods of Saint Teresa. This recognition is evident in the surname Jesus, since almost all the inhabitants of Itamatatua who have lineages with the oldest inhabitants of the Quilombo carry the word Jesus in their surname.

It is worth mentioning an element considered essential by the community as it proves the donation of the Santa Teresa land by the Carmelites. It is the "Documento Stone", a stone with writings engraved in bas-relief, kept by the "Guardian of the Stone", Mrs. Heloisa de Jesus. According to Ms. Neide de Jesus' accounts, the stone was from the old church and was kept when they built the new church.

Another structuring element about the historical bond of the Itamatatiuenses with the Carmelite Order is the devotion to the feast of Saint Teresa of Avila. In her research on the peasant festivals, Prado (2007) discoursed that the inhabitants of Itamatatua build their own logic, in which the Saint is the legitimate owner of the land where the Carmelite enterprises functioned.

As an example of devotion, the author cited the act of the "removal of jewelry" for the feast of the Saint by the "people in charge of the Saint's lands". Nowadays, the family of Ms. Neide de Jesus is responsible for the administration of the "goods of the Saint" and for the collection of a contribution from its residents both for the feast and for the improvement of the church and other collective goods.

In these cases, the collection works as a kind of offering to pay a symbolic debt to the saint, in gratitude for her gifts, the promises fulfilled, the cures obtained, and the right to live and cultivate her land. In return, the community offers her the celebration and recognition through the festivities.

In this regard Prado (2007, p. 104) narrated:

Therefore, every year, at the time preceding the patronal festivities, a group of people, under the control of those in charge, go out on pilgrimage in order to collect the saint's jewel. And the residents do not refuse to give it away. On the contrary, they make a point of giving it away, [...]. These particularities are explained because the saint represents a special kind of owner. Even though she manifests distinctive features of the dominant class - she is rich, has lots of cattle, lots of land, has slaves, and employees for herself, which make her similar to the common owners, she is, above all, 'the white woman we have here for us'.

Although she is white, she uses her 'whiteness'" in favor of the peasants, manipulating all her strength to enforce the villagers' rights to occupy their land. The saint reverses the usual behavior of the oppressive landowner and presents herself as the ideal model of landowner in this model of peasantry.

Pereira Junior (2012) also highlighted this aspect in his studies, when noting that the residents of Itamatatua self-identify as residents of the land of Santa Teresa, with emphasis on the social role of the 'encarregados', who coordinate the management of the use of land and other resources, as well as the guardianship of the Saint and what belongs to the Saint, a function created since the disintegration of the Carmelite farm.

4 Conclusion

As discussed throughout the text, the referential landmarks for understanding the history of the Quilombo of Itamatatua are related to the presence of the Carmelite Order in Maranhão, especially in the Alcântara region, playing in the formation of the quilombola territory, a great devotion to Saint Tereza D'Ávila.

Throughout this article, we tried to show how much religiosity is dynamic with space and with the individual, and how it also becomes a way of life widely related to their culture, and creeds, and even to lead (in devotion) a quilombola territorial formation process. Nevertheless, as we search for other sources of information and try out other methodological approaches, new possibilities are opening up for us to understand this social fact from new problematics, such as cultural exchanges, interchanges, displacements, cloning, and diffusions.

It would be too much to demand from the ceramists that their oral narratives embrace the indigenous presence in the ceramic production process more than four centuries after the arrival of the European colonizers in Maranhão. Colonial policy was fruitful in erasing indigenous and African history from official documents, in addition to the strong presence of Catholicism in the territory. Therefore, sources of this nature will hardly be the most adequate to know the long term history of the territory of Itamatatua.

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