

E-ISSN : 2581-8868
Volume-03, Issue-05, pp-15-24
www.theajhssr.com

Research Paper

Open Access

The Charmed Bull In The Night Of Times: Dom Sebastião, The Sacrament Of King Arthur

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ABSTRACT

ABSTRACT: The purpose of this little essay is to address one living medieval aspect pertaining to the Northeast region of Brazil. It shall be a matter of comprehending the myth of the apocalyptic return of Dom Sebastião, the king of Portugal (1554-1578), who would not have properly passed away during the Battle of the Three Kings (1578). As a matter of fact a very different sort of bane would have come about. After having been defeated in the typically Crusade battle of Alcácer-Quibir, in Marocco, the king would have vanished from the battle field, to loose his human shape and, by dint of a mysterious charm, acquire the form of a bull. Furthermore, there is a huge eschatological hope still cherished by the poor population dwelling on the islands inhering the location of Lençóis, in the Brazilian state of Maranhão. On the islands of Lençóis, the so charmed king expects the day of his return, when a millennial kingdom of justice shall be installed. Such intriguing presence of a medieval heritage concerning the hopes and devotional practices of very poor portions of Brazilian population shall be the matter upon which we cast historiographical doubt in this paper. Actually, though not completely or being the only historical explanation, Portuguese colonization in America features a profound medieval impregnation in terms of the imaginary regarding the colonial society, which continues to take effect in nowadays Brazilian society, specially behooving historically excluded strata of the population.

KEYWORDS: King Sebastian of Portugal; King Arthur of Camelot; Maranhão

RÉSUMÉ: La cible de ce petit essai, c'est d'adresser un aspect moyen-âge en ce qui concerne la région nord-este du Brésil. Il s'agit de comprendre le mythe du retour apocalyptique de Dom Sebastião, le Roi du Portugal (1554-1578), qui ne serait guère décédé dans la Bataille des Trois Rois (1578). En vérité, un destin très différent se serait produit. Après avoir été vaincu dans cette bataille typique des Croisades à Alcacer-Quibir au Maroc, le Roi aurait disparu du champ de bataille, perdu sa façon humaine et, grâce à un enchantement mystérieux, il aurait acquis la forme d'un toureau. En outre, il y a un gros espoir eschatologique concernant le retour du Roi, ce qui est chéri par la population pauvre des îles des Lençóis, dans l'état fédératif de Maranhão, au Brésil. Sur les îles, le Roi enchanté attend le jour où il pourra retourner pour déclencher un royaume millénariste de justice. Cette présence si intrigante d'un héritage médiéval touchant les pratiques dévotionnelles et les espoirs de la population des régions pauvres du Brésil, sera justement ce que l'on problématise dans cet article. En effet, quoique non complète ou non incarnant la seule explication historique, la colonisation portugaise en Amérique présente une profonde imprégnation moyen-âge au sujet de l'imaginaire signalant la société coloniale, ce qui continue toujours de prendre effet dans la société brésilienne des nos jours, en particulier les couches historiquement exclues.

MOTS-CLÉS: Roi Dom Sebastião du Portugal; Roi Arthur de Camelot; Maranhão

Rei, Rei, Rei Sebastião

Quem desencantá Lençó

Bota abaixo o Maranhão.

Oh quem desencantá Lençó,

Bota abaixo o Maranhão.

There might possibly be no better synthesis, from a pitoresque description to a structuring dimension, of the spirituality of popular culture pertaining to the Brazilian state of Maranhão than King Sebastian of Portugal, who would have become enthralled and vanished in the Battle of Alcacer-Quibir, on August, 4th, 1578. In his present form of a bull, King Sebastian (Dom Sebastião) comes to light on moonlight nights, especially in September and, as a solemn prophetic herald, on June, 24th. The stage of such mysterious play is the remote location of Lençóis, which is under the jurisdiction of the town of Cururupu, a much cherished tourist target for its ecological traits. Not less than 3% of the local population is composed of albinos, which represents the largest albino amount within a locality all over the world. Sebastian and some virgins coming from the islands are the parents of this albino people, whose act of conception is thought to take place on moonlight nights, and the whole population regards him as their authentic king.

Maranhão's sociologist Pedro Braga has brought about a monographic research about this myth by having acted out an extensive ethnographic investigation. His piece of work, entitled *The Charmed Bull on the Island of Lençóis – Sebastian's myth in Maranhão* (2001), informs us that on moonlight evenings, Dom Sebastião exhales fire through his nostrils and features a white star on the forehead. He shows up firstly near some magical plants like *jurema* or *emburataia* (BRAGA, 2001: 29). The myth goes that the king shall reacquire his human fashion, by the end of times, when he gets struck on his forehead's star by an arrow. In this time, there shall befall the eschatological annihilation of the Island of Maranhão, upon which the capital city of São Luís is situated. The whole isle shall be upraised by the serpent (at times also called dragon) that sustains the urban formation. In its place, the Court of Queluz will emerge and a plentiful kingdom of justice and equity will be prophetically grounded. One messianic kingdom for the rule of Dom Sebastião himself (BRAGA, 2001: 47).

Notwithstanding its European background, the mytheme of Dom Sebastião has permanently been regrammaticalized in Brazilian popular culture, within a tense context of conflict and cultural negotiation which has always characterised Portuguese colonial experience in America and is named *transculturality* by some scholars such as Fernando Ortiz and the German historian Wolfgang Welsch. Such historical phenomenon, featuring what we may denominate *Atlantic Civilizations*, has engendered Brazilian culture in the long duration and, if we take the concept developed by Serge Gruzinski into account, the Sebastianic myth has been appropriated by a new cultural merged synthagma (GRUZINSKI, 1988: 338-342) As a matter of fact, not at all by chance, King Sebastian of Portugal turns out to be a very present and effective spirit whose manifestations occur during the rituals of *Tambor de Mina* or *Terreiro de Cura*, which is a popular spiritual belief scattered throughout Maranhão. This specific spirituality dates roots back in time to the former kingdom of Daome (nowaday Benin) in the Western Coast of Africa. Moreover, this spiritual conception of life and the Divine is endowed with some indigenous elements called *Pajelança*, which is as well to be found in *Terecô*, a much specific spiritual expression of Maranhão's town named Codó. On these occasions, Dom Sebastião does not come up as a bull, yet in his anthropomorphic guise, demanding homages and reverence from his subjects.

The *Enthralled One* of Lençóis and all Maranhão has nevertheless been already heralded and promised in other regions and within distinct historical contexts throughout the country. The myth has continuously been associated to agrarian riots and other manifestations regarding popular agency. Such was the case of the upheaval of Canudos, led by a popular, itinerant preacher named Antônio Conselheiro, under whom an entire agrarian village was raised. The camp was annihilated on October, 5th, 1897. This messianic leader conceived the village shape under his representation of medieval tiny towns, which were shared by his companions. He stated that Dom Sebastião would come up from the Vaza-Barris river at the end of all time to reign in plentiful justice for one thousand years. In a similar way, in the uprising of Contestado (1912-1916), by the border between today states of Santa Catarina and Paraná, there was also a mystical, itinerant popular leader, Beato José Maria (Miguel Lucena de Boaventura), who commanded the construction of a holy citadel where Dom Sebastião would return to rule eschatologically. Indeed, the stronghold of Contestado was to be destroyed by Brazilian still incipient Air Force (FAB), inaugurating the use of airplanes for warlike purposes.

Should we be allowed to follow the paths of the great work of Ana Paula Torres Megiani, entitled *O Jovem Rei Encantado – Expectativas do Messianismo Régio em Portugal, séculos XIII a XVI* ("The young, charmed king – Expectations of Royal Messianism in Portugal from the 13th to the 16th centuries", 2003), we shall be enabled to investigate the very stem of Sebastianic incantation. The messianic and klystic tonic surrounding Dom Sebastião take their roots back to very pristine Christian texts of the 4th century known as *Christian Sybillines* (BRAGA, 2001: 17-18). These writings retrieved biblical excerpts announcing the advent of the Messiah, the Prince of Peace and Justice, who was destined to establish the thousand year state of bliss on Earth. We mainly refer to Chapter 11 of the *Book of Isaiah* and the 72nd Psalm, both belonging to the *Old Testament* and, concerning the *New Testament*, Chapters 19 and 20 of the *Book of Revelation (Apocalypse)* (MEGIANI, 2003:

34-36). The aforementioned excerpt of the *Book of Isaiah* seems to be of central interest for the correct specular interpretation of *John's Revelation*. It is worthy reading, as quoted underneath:

And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root.

And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: the spirit of wisdom, and of understanding, the spirit of counsel, and of fortitude, the spirit of knowledge, and of godliness.

And he shall be filled with the spirit of the fear of the Lord, He shall not judge according to the sight of the eyes, nor reprove according to the hearing of the ears.

But he shall judge the poor with justice, and shall reprove with equity the meek of the earth: and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked.

And justice shall be the girdle of his loins: and faith the girdle of his reins.

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb: and the leopard shall lie down with the kid: the calf and the lion, and the sheep shall abide together, and a little child shall lead them.

The calf and the bear shall feed: their young ones shall rest together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

And the sucking child shall play on other hole of the asp: and the weaned child shall thrust his hand into the den of the basilisk.

They shall not hurt, nor shall they kill in all my holy mountain, for the earth is filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the covering waters of the sea.

In that day the root of Jesse, who standeth for an ensign of the people, him the Gentiles shall beseech, and his sepulchre shall be glorious.

And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand the second time to possess the remnant of his people, which shall be left from the Assyrians, and from Egypt, and from Phetros, and from Ethiopia, and from Elam, and from Sennaar, and from Emath, and from the islands of the sea.

And he shall set up a standard unto the nations, and shall assemble the fugitives of Israel, and shall gather together the dispersed of Juda from the four quarters of the Earth.

And the envy of Ephraim shall be taken away, and the enemies of Juda shall perish: Ephraim shall not envy Juda, and Juda shall not fight against Ephraim.

But they shall fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines by the sea, they together shall spoil the children of the east: Edom, till Moab shall be under the rule of their hand, and the children of Ammon shall be obedient.

And the Lord shall lay waste the tongue of the sea of Egypt, and shall lift up his hand over the river in the strength of his spirit: and he shall strike it in the seven streams, so that men may pass through it in their shoes.

And there shall be a highway for the remnant of my people, which shall be left from the Assyrians: as there was for Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt.

In terms of medieval biblical exegesis, this writing bears a notorious and specular sacred intertextuality with Psalm 72, which presages and depicts the future kingdom of the fair ones with the Messiah, as promised to the People of the First Alliance. We quote once again:

A psalm for Asaph. How good is God to Israel, to them that are of a right heart!

But my feet were almost moved; my steps had well nigh slipped.

Because I had a zeal on occasion of the wicked, seeing the prosperity of sinners.

For there is no regard to their death, nor is there strength in their stripes.
They are not in the labour of men: neither shall they be scourged like other men.
Therefore pride hath held them fast: they are covered with their iniquity and their wickedness.
Their iniquity hath come forth, as it were from fatness: they have passed into the affection of the heart.
They have thought and spoken wickedness: they have spoken iniquity on high.
They have set their mouth against heaven: and their tongue hath passed through the earth.
Therefore will my people return here and full days shall be found in them.
And they said: How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High?
Behold these are sinners; and yet, abounding in the world they have obtained riches.
And I said: Then have I in vain justified my heart, and washed my hands among the innocent.
And I have been scourged all the day; and my chastisement hath been in the mornings.
If I said: I will speak thus; behold I should condemn the generation of thy children.
I studied that I might know this thing, it is a labour in my sight:
Until I go into the sanctuary of God, and understand concerning their last ends.
But indeed for deceits thou hast put it to them: when they were lifted up thou hast cast them down.
How are they brought to desolation? they have suddenly ceased to be: they have perished by reason of their iniquity.
As the dream of them that awake, O Lord; so in thy city thou shalt bring their image to nothing.
For my heart hath been inflamed, and my reins have been changed:
And I am brought to nothing, and I knew not.
I am become as a beast before thee: and I am always with thee.
Thou hast held me by my right hand; and by thy will thou hast conducted me, and with thy glory thou hast received me.
For what have I in heaven? and besides thee what do I desire upon earth?
For thee my flesh and my heart hath fainted away: thou art the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion for ever.
For behold they that go far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that are disloyal to thee.
But it is good for me to adhere to my God, to put my hope in the Lord God: That I may declare all thy praises, in the gates of the daughter of Sion.

During the Central Middle Ages (11th-13th centuries), various discordant interpretations hatched concerning orthodox Patristic exegesis on the *Parousia* (the second coming of Jesus Christ). From the point of view of clerical culture couched in Latin, it was the doctrine of Saint Augustine that came about as the official reading of the Church on the forthcoming Apocalypse, having this writer been accorded the title of *Doctor Gratiae* for the whole of his vast work. In the first book of *The City of God* (*De Civitate Dei*, 413-426), Augustine postulates an alegorical-rational exegesis of the *Parousia*, which he identified with the christening of the Roman Empire.

In fact, it was Emperor Constantine's conversion to Christian faith in 312, after the outstanding Battle of Milvia Bridge against Maxence, the key to this reading strand. In this fray, which befell during the administrative vigour of the Tetrarchy set up by Emperor Diocletian in 305, according to the narrative of the courtly Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea's *Historia Ecclesiastica* (c.325), Constantine received a Christic sign under the form of a cross wafting high in the sky, which granted him the victory over his opponent. Henceforth, under the emblem *In hoc signo vinces*, the Caesar becomes a Christian and is able to reunify the crumbling Roman Empire.

The upshot of these events, in the field of symbolic and christological representation about power, would be the virtual overlapping of the Roman Empire and the Christian Church, being Constantine cognomined "the 13th. Apostle" in the writings of Eusebius of Caesarea. In turn, the Christian Church was defined by the Fathers of the Church as the *Mysterium Lunae*, the visible sacrament of Christ Himself, who was conceived as the *Mysterium Solis*. As a sacrament, the Church-Empire is a sensuous manifestation of the eternal Grace in human History, corresponding to the guise in which the incarnated God could continue to be present in human History after the Mystery of the Ascension of His glorious body (BACCEGA, 2015: 243-245). Figured out as a dual mysteric reality, the Christian Church is at once the *Corpus Mysticum Christi* and the *Populus Dei*. On the condition of the Holy Spouse of the Lamb, the Church maintains a special type of relation with her Beloved, which Saint Paul named *mysterion* (*μυστήριον*) in the *Epistle to the Ephesians* (5,32), and translated by Saint Jerome in the *Vulgate* (c.384-420) under the word *sacramentum*. The first use of such vocable dates back to Tertulian's treatise *Apologeticus* (c.195). It is on this ballast that Saint Augustin affirms that the *Parousia* would already have come about with Christic shew in the form of His ecclesial *Corpus Mysticum*, having shaped the kingdom of justice and plenty by means of the christening of Rome. It is about time we read the *Book of the Revelation*:

And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.

And he laid hold on the dragon, the old serpent, which is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.

And he cast him into the bottomless pit and shut him up and set a seal upon him, that he should no more seduce the nations till the thousand years be finished. And after that, he must be loosed a little time.

And I saw seats. And they sat upon them: and judgment was given unto them. And the souls of them that were beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God and who had not adored the beast nor his image nor received his character on their foreheads or in their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

The rest of the dead lived not, till the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.

Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection. In these the second death hath no power. But they shall be priests of God and of Christ: and shall reign with him a thousand years.

And when the thousand years shall be finished, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison and shall go forth and seduce the nations which are over the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog: and shall gather them together to battle, the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.

And they came upon the breadth of the earth and encompassed the camp of the saints and the beloved city.

And there came down fire from God out of heaven and devoured them: and the devil, who seduced them, was cast into the pool of fire and brimstone, where both the beast.

And the false prophet shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

And I saw a great white throne and one sitting upon it, from whose face the earth and heaven fled away: and there was no place found for them

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing in the presence of the throne. And the books were opened: and another book was opened, which was the book of life. And the dead were judged by those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

And the sea gave up the dead that were in it: and death and hell gave up their dead that were in them. And they were judged, every one according to their works.

And hell and death were cast into the pool of fire. This is the second death.

And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the pool of fire.

Following the exegesis of Saint Augustine, the millenium of joy, plenty and justice brought about by the first resurrection would already have been consumed by dint of the parity between the Roman Empire and the Church of Christ. Although this was acclaimed an official doctrine for the Church, Augustine's point of view was to be confronted, mainly in Central Middle Ages, by clerics also authorized to interpret the *Apocalypsis of Saint John*. Behold is the case of a Cistercian monk from Calabria, Joachim of Fiore (c.1132-1202), whose meditative revelations between 1190 and 1195, duly permitted beforehand by Pope Lucius III (1144-1145) and renewed by Pope Eugene III (1145-1153), were to be appropriated and reframed by the Spiritual Franciscans in the late 13th and 14th centuries. According to Joachim of Fiore's really heterodox interpretation of the *Apocalypse*, the History of Salvation, which matched the concept of World History, would be divided into three periods. The first era had been the Time of the Father, corresponding to the Old Testament and to a rather punitive feature of God, whilst the second period, in which contemporary human History did find itself, was the Time of the Son, marked by the rule of the New Testament under the sign of a loving and forgiving God, incarnated in Jesus Christ. The last world age before the eschatological end of time, from 1260 on, would be the Time of the Holy Spirit, who would directly inspire the Eternal Gospel into the heart of every person. Such a period would be the millenium of happiness for those who were destined to partake the first resurrection of God. In this era a predecessor of the Messiah would come as a leader and champion of Earthly Jerusalem.

Actually, this prince of peace would be an *Alter Christus* pertaining to the Millenium, whose task was to prepare the pathway to the *Parousia* and put the original order of everything right again before the 8th day of Creation, the everlasting consumption of the universe and the return of each creature to the bosom of God. That is to be read in the *Gospel of Saint Mathew* (17,10-11) and as well in the *Gospel of Saint Mark* (9,9-12): And they asked him, saying: Why then do the Pharisees and scribes say that Elijah must come first? Who answering, said to them: Elijah, when he shall come first, shall restore all things; and as it is written of the Son of man that he must suffer many things and be despised. But I say to you that Elijah also is come (and they have done to him whatsoever they would), as it is written of him.

The unveiling of this Mystery by the time the *Logos* of God was transfigured on Mount Tabor provides us with the key to understanding the charmed monarchs of medieval tradition, such as King Arthur (*illo tempore*), Holy Roman Emperor Frederick *Barbarossa* (1152-1190) and, *last but not least*, Dom Sebastião of Portugal. He stands for the monarch who was desired, overcast, enthralled yet destined to found the Fifth Empire, the evergreen one. The study of Ana Paula Megiani leads us to the coeval belief, kept up from the end of the 16th century on, that Dom Sebastião would eventually return from his incantation, whereby he remains safe and hidden, paying penitence until the proper time to come back and restaure Portugal's former glorious days. We can certainly come to the statement that, in terms of a mythological grammar, King Sebastian represents a myth-poetic update of King Arthur. Having as well been wounded in the Battle of Camlann, counting on his sister Morgan's support, the monarch of Logres is taken to the Isle of Avalon (The "Isle of the Dead" in Celtic tradition, at times translated as the "Island of the Apples") in order to be magically healed, where he should eventually return from to retrieve Celtic glorious days once again.

The transmission of this myth to a still strongly medieval period, the 16th century, finds its explanation in the fact that the multiple and at times dissonant romanesque and poetic versions about King Arthur, the Holy Grail and the Knights of the Round Table do compose what the Brazilian Arthurian specialist Heitor Megale regards as a true *Scriptura Virtualis*, based upon the works of Paul Zumthor (MEGALE, 2001: 49). It is in effect an allusion to the Holy Scriptures referring to the fact that its diffusion was unique and unparalleled during the Middle Ages ever since the Normans settled down in Britain by the time of the Battle of Hastings in 1066. Thereby Arthurian and Grail mythemes of Celtic extraction, coming from Ireland and Wales, have penetrated in the Continent. As Megale highlights, on the eve of battles, practicing the typical vigil, warriors used to tell Arthurian tales to each other (MEGALE, 2001: 31). Once the conceptual archeology acted out by Megiani allows us to apprehend the making of the Sebastianic kylastic matter in the Portuguese metropolitan context, we assert that an utter category underpinning medieval way of reasoning and fabulating narratives should now be brought to light in order to understand the mythic fortune of Dom Sebastião in nowadays Maranhão. As previously stated on other occasions, we propose the medieval category of sacrament as a possible key to decipher this enigma of the Charmed Bull on a remote Island near the Equine Line.

The **category** – here taken in the sense of a way of being of medieval imaginary – of the *sacrament* was firstly fostered by the Roman Apologist Tertullian (c.160-212) as a diaphanous manifestation of God's Grace in human history during the celebrations (*Apologeticus*, c.195) and achieved a Scholastic system of doctrines and explanations with Aquinas' Sacramentology in the Third Part of the *Summa Theologiae* (q.60 et ss.). Such culminating central-medieval sacramentology was officially sealed in the IV Council of Latran (1215). However, in order to strictly apply the aforementioned **category** to the study of Dom Sebastião and its long-term permanence in popular culture, in the bosom of a transcultural imaginary such as the Brazilian one, we should justify our use of it as a **concept**, or else our research efforts could crumble to anachronism. This justificative pathway can be accomplished, in our view, once we consider the idea of **transduction** – rather than “translation” itself – regarding the apportion of medieval sacramental transcendence as an interfused grammar element which takes part in the cultural *synthagma* longly forged in Portuguese America.

As a matter of fact, *transduction* is a newly-born concept arising from the field of Physics, having witnessed ample application to Acoustics and opened up the way to constructing a great number of recording devices, which are enabled to storing and transmitting sound data, during the second half of the 19th century. Some examples are the Phonograph by Leon Scott (1857), the Cylinder Phonograph (1877) or the Gramophone itself (1887). This concept gets into the sphere of post-colonial philosophic reflections during the last two decades of the 20th century, having been drawn with accuracy from the works of the French philosopher and technologist Gilbert Simondon (1924-1989), especially two books dating to 1958, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques* and *L'Individuation: à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information*. The actual apportion to Philosophy is mainly due to the works of Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) and Félix Guattari (1930-1992), specifically in book *Milles Plateaux* (1980). Originally, *transduction* is the passage of energy from a physical ambience to another one of different type, whereby, for instance, mechanical energy becomes acoustic, or thermic, or chemical energy. There can also be the transformation of sound energy into brain stimuli through the human spandrel. In the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, the word *transduction* obtains a specific meaning: it is the logical and psychological procedure whereby the people of a particular historical community interact with the huge amount of conscious and unconscious stimuli, pieces of information, of new knowledge, affection, and moral, religious and ethical codes they are exposed to. As from their internalization and the reactions of people to these stimuli, the human mind finds its historical constitution as a fluid, always transmuting matter.

We plead that this idea of *transduction* can be rigorously brought into our present analysis, whereby we intend to propound a hypothesis of sacramental explanation for the long-term historical phenomenon welding Dom Sebastião of Portugal, the *Matter of Britain* (Arthurian Cycle) and the popular culture of Maranhão. Actually, we aim at retrieving an analytical perspective of historical totality (Marx), which was named *Total History* up to the dawn of the Third Generation of the “École des Annales”. We do not refer to any ingenuous methodology or conception of History, the tee of which would be to achieve every little detail of every single social process within the potentially unending *repertoire* of social practices and representation. We deal with the historical-dialectical idea of **synthesis** out of a conception of History in which singular facts – already the upshot of language representation operating on material events – cannot be correctly understood but by dint of the perception that a totality grammar is in the background of any possible singular analysis. It is indeed a matter of taking François Dosse's *L'Histoire en Miettes* (1987) into account in terms of a serious methodological alert to those seeking to come up with an accurate historiographical piece of work.

The so-called Second Generation of the Annales has much insisted on the pursuit of historical totality, mainly in the intellectual production of Fernand Braudel and Georges Duby, “two ogre-historians in search for totality”, in the excellent expression of Mário Jorge da Motta Bastos (BASTOS, 2010: 217). Totality, which might be looked upon as the very dialectical foundation of Historical Materialism by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (*Die Deutsche Ideologie*, 1845), is far from sheer wishful thinking, or speculative dreaminess. In effect, its logical assumption and validity criterium for understanding every peculiar being: **singularity** and **concrete universality** do compose a dialectical dyad. Both categories forge a **concrete binomial**, which can be traced back to the Latin etymology of *concrete*: the verb *con-cresco* (infinitive *con-crescere*) means “growing with”, which hints at a permanent process of mutual conditioning (MARX, 2010: 78-82). It is about time we discussed the reason why the *sacrament* may be the core of a coherent global explanation for the medieval imaginary (as a semiotic system) and, by means of its *transduction*, a relevant element to define the blended cultural *synthagma* of nowadays popular culture of Brazil. The medieval imaginary evoked a sort of indicatory paradigm of existence, having shaped an essentially symbolic mentality. Should we once again take the lesson of Saint Augustine, the world would be made of **res** (things) and **signa** (signs and symbols), being the essence of things-themselves impervious to human senses (Neoplatonic influences). They only become cognizable to the conjunction of faith and reason.

What the human mind can look upon in the sensory world is the **signa** (BACCEGA, 2015: 243-244). This idea can be summed up by a very notorious phrase by Saint Augustine in *De Trinitate* (386), 10,11: *credo ut intelligam, intelligo ut credam*. Not by chance, the Holy Scripture is composed of a system of symbols to be decoded with the mediation of the theologians pertaining to the Tradition of the Church. Medieval people were, so to say, evergreen deciphers of signs and indexes, the same ones that turn the Church into a Sacred Mystery, the *Mysterium Lunae*. This symbolic mindset entails a grand arc going from poetics and epics to public ceremonies, configurating the Middle Ages as the age of alegory, the era of the *significabilia*. The famous medievalist Hilário Franco Júnior also conceives an analogical hallmark in the medieval *logos*, which would be a common trace of pre-industrial social formations in the Western World (FRANCO JÚNIOR, 2003: 81). The analogical thinking is simultaneously rational and emotional, establishing correspondences, based upon common traits, between two or more elements, facts or actions. It is, in fact, a spontaneous kind of thinking that remarks similarities between phenomena and considers the whole universe as a huge web of connections.

Besides, the analogical “definition” of *sacrament* begins with the primordial times of doctrine formulations of the Roman and Greek Apologetics and the Patristic philosophy of Late Antiquity and, as previously mentioned, attains its systematic outlines in Central Middle Ages, for instance, in the opposed theologies of Aquinas and Bonaventura de Bagnoregio (prior to the Franciscan Order from 1257 to 1274). We shall now follow the pathways of the historical building up and changes in the semantic field of the *sacraments*. We have as well addressed the fact that the oldest definition for *sacrament* stems from the work of Tertullian, for whom it is a liturgical rite of sanctification of people and glorification of God. The sacrament begets a culminating moment of the Christian cultural celebration of faith and expectation about the *Parousia* (the second, glorious advent of Christ). As a matter of fact, Tertullian reshaped the vocable *sacramentum*, which came from the Roman *ius honorarium* (pretorian law in the Roman Republic and Early Empire), in the domain of which it signified a fee due by the party of a process who was eventually defeated. *Sacramentum* was hence a Roman name for what we today call burden of succumbence. Otherwise, the Patristic reflections would create a synonymy between the Latin word *sacramentum* and the Greek notion of *mysterion* (μυστήριον). Saint Ambrose of Milan (340-397) conceived it as a sanctifying liturgical experience that was transcendent to the human mind and could only be seized in terms of Divine Revelation. Surpassing human natural capacities, it was properly the liturgical *locus* of anagogy (*De Sacramentis*, c.380), which premises the *vita contemplativa* bestowed by Faith and mystical cognition of the essences (*essentiae rerum*).

In Book X of *The City of God*, Saint Augustine, having been a disciple of Ambrose, offers a semiological conception of *sacrament*, defined as “the visible sacrifice, sacred *Signum* of the invisible sacrifice” granted by the Passion of Christ. Besides, the *sign* itself is outlined in the philosophy of Augustine, since Book II of *De Doctrina Christiana* (c.396) assigns that it is what, besides impressing our senses through images, leads us to the knowledge of a distinct being. This is why the Bishop of Hippo affirms that the sacraments are visible words in the Book XIX of *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* (c.400). This inceptive semiological theology would turn out to be the very base for Scholastic reasoning on the matter of sacraments. Still approaching the Patristic thought, we should like to stress the conceptual framing for *sacramentum* in the work of Isidore of Seville (Book VI of *Etymologiae*, c.620). It would be a secret, a sort of sacred logogryph taking place in the liturgy, which resorts to the first Apologetical definitions and consecrates the Patristic idea of *sacramentum* and *mysterion*, though not in a systemic way. This apportion of a sacramentology thought to be a systematic doctrine only comes about within the Scholastic thinking. This way, the Central Middle Ages witness a great shell-work of systematization, the *Libri Sententiarum* (c. 1150) by Petrus Lombardus (c.1100-1160). Along with *De Sacramentis Fidei Christianae* by Hugh of Saint-Victor, dating to the year 1134, it lines out the seven major sacraments, which were to be officialized by the IV Council of Latran (1215).

In reality, with the advent of the Scholastic philosophy, said to have been founded by Anselm of Canterbury, with *Cur Deus Homo* from 1098, the emphasis is once again laid upon the *Signum* and the nature of sacred Mystery marking the sacraments. Therefore, Augustine’s reasoning on this subject was retrieved, furnishing the philosophical and theological base for Scholastic doctrines still to come. It is the case of Saint Bonaventura’s *Breviloquium* (1257), which stresses the curative character of the *medicina sacramentorum*. Since mankind essentially features the stain of the Original Sin and its manifold consequences, the sacraments would be God’s pawn for our redemption and sanctification. As we can infer, the doctrine of the General of the Franciscan Order displays a strong Augustinian influence, which was the main trait of the Franciscan theology and its recovery of all sacramental lectures begotten in the previous centuries. In clear opposition to Bonaventura’s view of the sacraments, there was the Aristotelian perspective of Aquinas, a rational attempt to comprise the sacramental nature of the miracles and wonders perceived by the medieval thinking. In the work of Aquinas, some Augustinian appropriations are to be found, specially the idea that the sacrament was a signum that acts as a

vehicle of God's Grace, a formal, operative cause engaged to the final cause of God's presence as the Holy Ghost itself. Through the reading of the Aristotelian *Organon*, Aquinas comes to the conclusion that the sign itself is a sensuous thing that allows the human mind to know the intelligible things. Thus, Aquinas' conception that one can just achieve the cognition of the *res intelligibiles* or *significabilia* by means of the sensory stimuli arising from the *res sensibiles* is as well a clear allusion to Augustine's theology. Not at all disregarding the fact that the sacraments are indeed a means of sanctification, Aquinas also asserts that by dint of its analogical nature, all sacraments, specially the Eucharist, acquire the same nature as the Grace, which the sacred sign diffuses throughout the History of Salvation. The sacrament, this way, is the **cause** of our sanctification due to the Passion of Jesus Christ and the **form** of such sanctification, owing to the Grace and theological virtues it communicates, aiming at the Eternal Life (ST, III. q.60). This surely implies that the sacraments are performed sensuous things afforded for the same sanctification effect, thus being in the service of Grace, which is the main cause, since the finality of things measures and penetrates their essence (*substantia*) (ST, I. q.05). In such semiological spectrum, words are the form (*morphé*, μορφή) while the sensory elements, including ritual gestures, make up the substance (*ousia*, ουσία) of the sacraments (ST, III.q.61).

Should we consider the ideas of *sacrament*, *sacramental*, couched by Berengarius of Tours in 1078, in *De coena altaris*, to define sacred realities not comprised by the idea of the seven *maiora sacramenta*, and *sacramentality* as the essential predicate of the medieval wondrous imaginary, we may be enabled to clarify the puzzle of Dom Sebastião within the mingled imaginary of a transcultural ambience like Maranhão and the whole of Brazil. As we have previously underlined, the grammar of the transcultural imaginary weaved during the Portuguese colonization in America does not beget a *paradigm*, yet rather a *synthagma*. In reality, the intertwining of cultural heritages of European, African and Amerindian matrixes did not occur in an abstract dimension where they would all be graced with equal political strength. The power relations constituted in Portuguese America have conditioned the merging of the imaginary about the Sacred. It implies that African heritage of mainly Yoruba and Mandingo origins and Amerindian cultural elements basically arising from the Jê and Tupi peoples, concerning the popular culture of Maranhão, have been grammaticalized under the conceptions, prejudices and categories of European matrix. We can begin to understand this hierarchical assortment that still grammaticalizes the intertext of Maranhão's transcultural expressions under the notion of *coloniality*, as propounded by the British *Cultural Studies* of Marxist extraction and the interconnected *Subaltern Studies* of Indian provenance.

Nevertheless, for all we should not be enticed by an ingenuous idea of a peaceful "melting pot" in Portuguese America, the cultural features of African and Amerindian descent can be seen as a social *locus* of resistance and of the possibility of reinventing the imaginary. Power tensions still take place nowadays, presenting the scenery of European elements attempting to subordinate the other heritages, but the process is absolutely never accomplished. Within this interlarded textuality, the medieval category of the sacrament and, particularly, the idea of sacramentality, marking the existence and the imaginary, plays an important role in Brazilian intermingled cultural synthagma. One indicatory feature to be hinted at is precisely how some European mythemes were regrammaticalized by the aforementioned transcultural synthagma. We could provide the example of the manner how the Christian God was interweaved in some African traditions, not without bearing elements of Amerindian culture, in the *Tambor de Mina* and, mainly, in the *Tambor de Criola*, in which Indigenous traits of *Pajelança* and the Yoruba deities called *orixás* find themselves at times hierarchically subordinated to the figure of Jesus Christ or the Virgin, specially as Our Lady of Aparecida. This is a common trace also evident in the myth-poetic grammar of *Umbanda*, *Candomblé* (though with a clearer and more discernible African dimension) and Maranhão's *Terecô*.

This is the fashion in which the mytheme of Dom Sebastião, being a sacrament of King Arthur, in a kylastic long-term heritage, can finally act as a merged, regrammaticalizing factor of profound change in the transcultural popular culture of Maranhão. By continuously fostering the messianic expectations and hopes of the very poor people of Lençóis, along with the spirituality of the Tambor de Mina, the sacramental agency of the Charmed Bull may render the synthagma into a paradigm that effectively builds up a culturally diverse and equitable, complex culture for a really plural and democratic society. This is certainly the reason why Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) argues in his 14th thesis *On the Concept of History* (1940) that "History is the object of a construction whose place is formed not in homogenous and empty time, but in that which is fulfilled by the here-and-now [Jetztzeit]". Benjamin here refers to one main utopic *primum mobile* for "exploding out the continuum of history", which may foreshadow the tiger's "leap into the open sky of history [which] is the dialectical one, as Marx conceptualized the revolution".

It will be the sacrament of the *Enthralled Bull* in the nights of times still to come.

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