LUMEN ET VIRTUS

The frown: Apotropism or a materialized desire of the San Franciscan elite?

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to problematize the figurehead, the figurehead of vessels in the middle region of the São Francisco River. Understanding it as a materialization of the political yearnings of the local elite to reach the post of Comarca do São Francisco, configuring the carranca as a figure of power. Finally, it discusses the figurehead, which from a historical point of view, was established as a kind of national insignia. In addition, the artistic conception itself, about the choice of animals for the process of creating the figurehead, proposes a dialogue with the figurehead signs of other European nations. As for the methodology, we used bibliographic research, which uses books and articles as a basis for its elaboration. It is concluded that for the poorest, they were associated with fear. This characteristic was due to the anthropozoomorphic imagery construction and the aspect of amazement, which deals with the ugly, had the power to remove what is represented, that is, it had an apotropaic power to scare away the evil beings that would inhabit the river. As theoretical support, we used authors such as Pardal (1981); Brandão (2009); Santaella (1983).

Keywords: Carranca, Art, West Bahia, São Francisco River.

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INTRODUCTION

This text is based on the reflective process of two residents of the territory of the western region of Bahia, specifically in the city of Santa Maria da Vitória, popularly known as Samavi, being one of the main cities in western Bahia, and the main one in the Corrente River Basin, composed of 11 municipalities. It is 866 km from Salvador. When dealing daily with representations of an anthropomorphic figure at various points and understood as the identity of that city, the need to understand the historical trajectory of such representation is urgent. It is important to clarify that the problematization of the figureheads, the figurehead, is limited to the inquiry of its genesis, that is, of its history, therefore, the discussion about the figure of the figurehead in today's perspective is not part of this construct.

In the same vein, it is emphasized that the biography and relevance of the name with the greatest projection of the carranqueira production, Francisco Biquiba dy Lafuente Guarany (1884-1987), will not be addressed in depth, because the scope of this writing is to reflect on the frown of the middle São Francisco as a materialization of a discourse in force at the genesis, such a choice does not have the purpose of discrediting the aforementioned artist. But, we cannot avoid telling a little of its history and creation process. The distinctive features of the frown sculptures created by Mestre Guarany, as shown in figures 01 and 02, include long locks, prominent and pointed dentition, intense looks and the application of red, black and white tones.

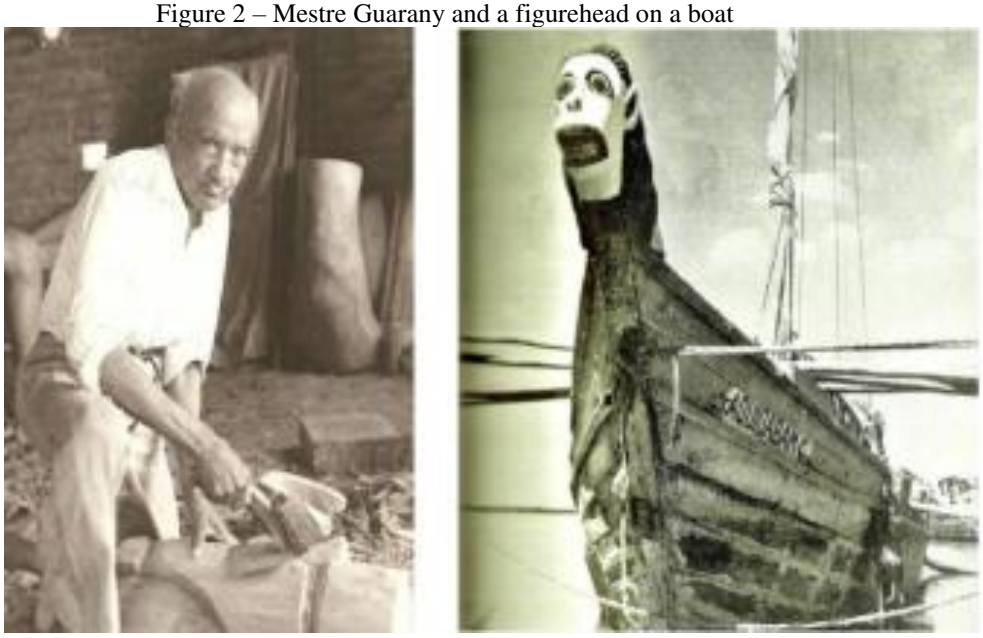
Currently, certain self-taught artists perpetuate the legacy of sculpting figureheads, especially the carranqueiros João Souza, Josenilton and Branco, for whom this process of creation transcends a hobby, also constituting a viable source of income. However, most of the requests do not come from Santa Maria da Vitória, as reported by the sculptors themselves to Cortes and Vieira (2009, p. 4): "Despite the limited recognition by the local community, the aforementioned carranqueiros remain faithful to their commitment to preserving the tradition of carrancas, underlining the value of this artistic work for the cultural identity of the region". On a specific occasion, when receiving a compliment for one of his figureheads in the process of creation, Guarany (quoted by MOURA, 2015, p. 34) expressed: "It will be the waters to judge, my son! The quality figurehead, when reflected in the waters, takes on a life of its own".

Figure 1 – Figurehead on the boat anchored in the tamarind tree, Santa Maria da Vitória – BA



Source: Uillian Trindade Oliveira's record 2023.

Figure 2 – Mestre Guarany and a figurehead on a boat



Source: Francisco Biquiba dy La Fuente Guarany Memorial (S. d.). Available at: https://oficinafranciscodlafuenteguarany.blogspot.com/. Accessed on: 30 Jun.2024.

Since Pierce, according to Santaella (1983), it has been known that the sign is the phenomenological condition of representation made possible from the context of the interpretant. In other words, the sense of representing is anchored in the social fabric of individuals. Therefore, time and space are inalienable characteristics in the representational condition. It is from this premise that the objective is to problematize the figureheads present in the vessels of the middle region of the São Francisco River.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE SÃO FRANCISCO

> [...] The terms Western Bahia Region and Western Bahia should not have conceptual equivalence. If the first, with its 22 constant municipalities, refers to one of the component regions of the economic division of the state, as state agencies of the caliber of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics and the Superintendence of Economic and Social Studies of Bahia want, the second designates the entire territory to the left of the São

> Francisco River, where 35 municipalities in Bahia are located, in an area of just over 183 thousand km (BRANDÃO, p.04, 2009).

The term in dispute that proposes to name the river that runs through the Oestina lands of the State of Bahia, the São Francisco River, is presented by Brandão (2009) from a first period marked by undifferentiation, which begins in 1501 (idem, p.07) with the discovery of the São Francisco River by Vasconcelos and Vespucci and is characterized by a period of few significant changes. The aforementioned author equates this moment with the first stage of Milton Santos' (2004) "Theory of Geographical Means", the natural environment, where there are techniques, however, there is no capacity to interfere radically in nature, and the domination of the natural environment still prevails over man.

In 1534, according to Brandão (2009), through the charter of Évora, the captaincy of Pernambuco received the right of possession over the left region of the São Francisco, making it the Comarca of São Francisco. It is at this moment that economic agents such as the Garcia d'Ávila family decide to invest in such a territory. Thus, one fact is clear: the formation of the ecumens took place in a "dendritic logic", that is, in a linear way following the course of the river aiming at its access.

From that moment on, it is understood that it is important to "open the way", aiming at the formation of ecumental spaces with the hiring of bandeirantes and entradistas and concomitantly the Church sent its missionaries aiming, according to Brandão (2009) at the catechization of the so-called wild gentiles, who were the original peoples who inhabited this territory before the Luso-Brazilian groups, a moment in which they were plundered, expropriated and even "tamed" by the Jesuits and Franciscans, leaving them with a passive posture and acceptance of the process of acculturation, sometimes by coercive forms, sometimes by theological narratives that naturalized expropriation, genocide and epistemicide to meet hegemonic interests.

> [...] When new practices take place in history, however, there is a rupture in the established order, imposing political, social, economic and cultural changes, producing reflections on the modeling of the space addressed. Such a rupture would be a "dense period" (VASCONCELOS, 1999, p. 191 apud BRANDÃO, p. 04, 2009).

Thus, as exposed by Vasconcelos (1999) cited by Brandão (2009), the year 1827 is important, as it marks the end of the first picture of reality pertinent to the territory of the São Francisco River marked by indifferentiation. In the same year, the Oestina lands were once again the right of the Province of Bahia, and thus, based on Brandão's (2009) analysis, the second phase was configured. This moment is marked by the growing implementation of techniques, equating this period with the second stage of the geographical means of Milton Santos (2004), called the technical period,

characterized by the subversion of nature by the techniques applied by man, such an assumption is notorious in the lands of Oestina with the shipping companies from 1865 onwards.

The end of this century is marked by the consolidation of the colonels in this space, who contributed to territorial expansion, based on authoritarianism and subservience, contributing from all arbitrariness, an urbanization of the territory.

It can be concluded that the primary interest in developing the Oestina lands, called according to Brandão (2009), until 1827 "Beyond São Francisco", consolidating its indifferentiation as a space beyond the soteropolytrancentric logic, was based on the "[...] interiorization of the colonial/imperial economy, notably through the search for new spaces for agricultural activity and exploration of minerals and precious stones" (Brandão, 2009, p. 07). In other words, the existence of such a territory was only possible as a means for the gain of the crown and its elite.

Still on the São Francisco River, it is worth noting that according to Pardal (1981), it is the "fifth largest river in Brazil [...] with about 3,000 square km" understood as "[...] connecting the south and the northeast of the country." (p. 44). The aforementioned author elucidates that the São Francisco River is based on three major divisions, namely: the Lower, the Middle and the Upper São Francisco.

Figure 3: map containing the extension of the São Francisco River



Source: Google Maps. Available at: https://www.google.com.br/maps. Accessed on June 30, 2024

In the author's words:

> [...] the upper São Francisco was almost nil, due to the small volume of its waters, the difficulty of navigation, and the fact that this stretch connected by roads to Rio de Janeiro, the main outlet for its production. But in the lower São Francisco, especially in the stretch from Foz to Piranhas, with 128 km of navigation from Franca, there was equally intense traffic of large canoes, similar to the boats, which however never showed a figurehead. (...) In the lower São Francisco the social environment was different, because "the coastal influence lychees the social characteristics of sertanejo rivers, the São Francisco that we studied ends up in the great waterfall". (...) The lower and middle São Francisco were practically two distinct rivers, being, in the middle stretch, "very difficult to communicate with the coast". (p.142)

On the other hand, the middle region of the São Francisco River, according to Clarival Valladares (undated) cited by Pardal (1981) is characterized by a defining element of its culture: "the boat of vareiros and sailing" (p. 142). It is known from the writings of Pardal (1981) and Brandão (2009) that the urban development of the territory of the West was only possible due to the São Francisco River. Therefore, navigation was an important economic viability and locus of its cultural identity.

According to Pardal (1981), the middle São Francisco suffered a type of isolation "that led to a type of culture that was at least two centuries outdated, which practically brought the remnants of the Middle Ages in oral tradition, in Catholicism with a messianic tendency, and in the attitude of extreme submission to the supernatural" (p. 142). Thus, this territory is configured by its "archaic behavior". In other words, the cultural isolation linked to the river economy engendered a culture centered on the São Francisco River.

Thus, the navigational structures, in this case the barge, in addition to making the economic configuration viable, materialized the *ethos* of its time. Such materialization has as a *sine qua non* sign the figurehead, known as: the frown.

INCORPORATION OF THE FIGUREHEAD

The figurehead, which in the middle region of the São Francisco River was called the figurehead, is present in many civilizations. Sparrow (1981), elucidates that since ancient Egypt there have been boats containing an eye in reference to Osiris, or Ramses III's vessel containing a lion to the island of Crete. From Mesopotamia, specifically with the Phoenician vessels containing a horse in the figurehead to the Roman vessels with figureheads in animal form praising Isis in the second century, showing until that moment that such pieces were limited to a zoomorphic representation. From the medieval Viking drakkars with serpents and dragons, one fact can be perceived: the manifestation of identity was materialized in the figurehead.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Pardal (1981) points out, that the evolution of rounded or oval naval architecture caused the retreat of the platform, causing the figurehead to return in the sixteenth century.

The ships of "Spain use figures of saints" (p. 34), while in the ships of the United States of the nineteenth century "[...] the figureheads had Chinese and Oriental influence, perhaps to impress the peoples of the East, where trade was being developed" (p. 34).

AN AMULET OR A MATERIALIZATION OF THE SANFRANCISCAN ELITE?

In 1860, according to Pardal (1981), the engineer Halfeld dealt with navigability and described the types of vessels used. The boats only appeared on the São Francisco River (p.58) in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

> (...) The first boat on the lower São Francisco was built in Penedo, after independence, the model was taken to the middle course of the river where, due to the lack of equipped shipyards, the structure of the brands became rough and heavy. "They added, however, a strange ornament that did not exist in the lower São Francisco - the figurehead". (p.68).

The type of vessel that had the figurehead on the São Francisco River was specifically the barge, which for information is worth emphasizing, was a structure of significant monetary value, obstructing a resident of low purchasing power in this territory from acquiring it. Thus, through the writings of Pardal (1981) it can be affirmed that the barge was a vessel of a certain class residing in the territory of the middle São Francisco, the dominant one. In 1947 "the term carranca" was established[3] due to its "insoluble connotation with something ugly, misshapen" (p.88).

Clarival Valladares, quoted in Pardal (1981), is responsible for consecrating "the apotropaic character" (p.100), of the figureheads of the middle São Francisco, called carranca. This characteristic was due to the anthropozoomorphic imagery construction and the aspect of amazement, read as ugly, it had the power to remove what is represented, in the words of the aforementioned author "[...] one fights more of the devil through his own visible similarity" (p.100). This assumption synthesized the thought present in such a territory.

Arnold Hausser in Introduction to the History of Art, elucidates that "[...] " The art of the people has been, most of the time, a reflection of the higher art"[4] (p. 453). Such an affirmative coadunates with the writings of Pardal (1981), because,

> [...] The figurehead was a symbol of the vessel of rich lords. This supposed great lord imitated the ships that came to the capital of the province or empire, some boat owners wanted to imitate the great lord, and found that his boats engaged in provoked a certain curiosity, which is admiration, leading to an increase in his business. (p.104).

This fact is claimed to be tacit in reality, since the boats were constructions of a small resident layer of the middle of the São Francisco River. The imagetic construction of the figurehead, like the

[3] "(...) According to a small Brazilian dictionary of the Portuguese language, it is a dark face with a frown, an ugly face, an aspect indicative of a bad mood (...) The dictionary of the Portuguese language, by Francisco Fernandes, says that it is "face or head, usually shapeless, made of stone, metal, etc., which serves as an architectural ornament." (PARDAL, p.85, 1981).

[4] "The art of the people has been, for the most part, a reflection of the higher art."

long hair alludes to the mane of a lion "[...] perhaps by order of some owner of the São Francisco who was impressed by figureheads representing the king of animals, which was very common on European ships" (idem, p.107).

Figure 4: Land Exposure and Temperature



Source: Almeida and Dale, São Paulo, SP, Brazil, 2021.

The figureheads, in their genesis on the São Francisco River, appear "in imitation of the figureheads of ocean-going ships, possibly motivated by the frustration of the lords and merchants of the middle São Francisco for not being able to pass from the condition of a comarca to the privilege of a province" (p.145).

In other words, there was only the emergence of carrancas in the middle region of the São Francisco River due to competition "from the centers of culture [...] and the sense of regionalism resulting from the desire for emancipation" (p.145) biased and desired by the local elite.

One of the biggest names and pioneer in carranqueira production, according to Cortes and Vieira (2019), is Francisco Biquiba dy Lafuente Guarany, who sculpted his first figurehead in 1901 for the "Barca do Tamandaré" (p. 02).

> [...] Mestre Guarany's figureheads are easily identifiable by their thick hair, a plastic element that characterized most of his sculptures, which are subdivided into three phases: "in a first phase, Guarany sculpted his hair in a style that I will call rope, as it resembles a set of thick, juxtaposed ropes (...)" and "in the second phase, his sculptures presented a break or wave, in the longitudinal direction of the neck, at the height of each ear, when it is in its correct position on the human head (...)", these two phases characterize the sculptures produced for navigation, the third, however, characterizes the phase of sculptures produced for collectors in which, "(...) The hair always kept the style in wave". (PARDAL, 1981, p. 154-155).

Figure 5: *Carranca, 1976, Wood sculpture* 92 x 22 x 27 cm. Author: Mestre Guarany.



Source: Estação Gallery. Available at: http://www.galeriaestacao.com.br/pt-br/artistas/ Accessed on: 30 Jun. 2024.

Returning to Lúcia Santaella (1983), when he treats the sign as a representation and the maxim of the German philosopher Theodor Adorno when he says that the artistic object is the form of a decanted emerging culture, it is clear that the frown materializes a discourse of power, political aspirations about the local elite that resorts to the aesthetic resource to propose homology with the other regional elites of Brazil through the figurehead.

What was left to the poor community, soon deprived of power and decision-making in the middle region of the São Francisco River, was to incorporate the figurehead into its culture. It is not surprising that a dominated people, devastated by vampire oligarchies, residents of a space that since its genesis has only existed as an object of extraction for the metropolis, uses such a figure as an amulet, or an apotropaic resource.

Figure 06 – Sculpture of a figurehead in the square of São Félix do Coribe – BA



Source: record by Uillian Trindade Oliveira (2023).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

We conclude this text with the awareness that cuts were made in the scope of the representation of the carranca in western Bahia, and there may still be limits and gaps that can be overcome by other researchers based on this premise. An evident fact in these writings is that the figurehead, from the historical point of view, was established as a kind of national insignia. Each civilization announced its culture and even its identity from the presence of each figure on the bow of its vessels.

Such evidence is verified from Pardal's considerations and his herculean effort to clarify the significant changes that this figure has undergone over time and space. Thus, it is at least curious to understand the process of obliteration of the pertinent political issues in the process of creation of the figurehead, the figurehead, in the middle region of the São Francisco, and on the other hand the exaltation of the presence of such an object as an amulet and as a creation of the popular and poor mass.

It is thanks to the objective of engendering an identity to the middle São Francisco that the figurehead emerges. The carranca has as its mother the conceptions and aspirations of power of the elites, a fact proven, according to Pardal, by the choice of vessel to receive the aforementioned ornament: the boat.

If in fact such an object came from popular and massive belief, in the person of the fisherman or any individual working in the range of river services, its presence should be made in popular vessels such as the canoe, for example. In addition, the artistic conception itself, with regard to the choice of animals for the process of creating the figurehead, proposes a dialogue with the figurehead signs of other European nations.

It is clear that in the face of the figurehead placed and given on the vessels there is a popular appropriation of such an object. The mediating relationship between the people of the middle region of the São Francisco River and the carranca is fear. And it could not be otherwise. What to expect from a poor people, forgotten and whipped by an agrarian elite and owner of the means of production, which with no way out bends to the available underemployment, such as the profession of rower that according to Pardal was only above the condition of slave, and that the only escape it has is to imagine a divine and throw to the metaphysician its laments and material miseries impossible to be solved?

The only assistance of the poor is to imagine a god, a guardian, an amulet, in this case of the figureheads "a friendly devil" who does what he, the poor man, cannot do. The frown is the materialization of the solution of what the human hands of the poor cannot do.

The idea of the figurehead, as an object of protection by the poor masses, revolves around the phrase by Alois Riegal (undated) quoted in Pardal (1981) *"devil facing the devil",*[5] to combat figures understood as the monsters of the residents of the São Francisco River, that is, the diabolical ugliness of the figurehead can scare away the possible devils of the San Franciscan waters.

It can then be concluded that in a certain way a fact is given: popular production found in an elitist representation the possibility of protection from the evils residing in the river, whether it is the nego d'agua, and the minhocão or those who relegated it to suffering by the river.

[5] "Diabo facing diabo".

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