

Writing and its Functions in Sixteenth Century Jesuit Missions in Brazil

A escrita e as suas funções na missão jesuítica do Brasil quinhentista

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Abstract: What was the importance of encouraging writing in the context of Jesuit missionary duties during the early days of colonial Brazil? The descriptive-narrative record of nature and of men (Indians, blacks and whites) that were subject to (re)Christianization, became mandatory (quarterly and then yearly) for all officers of the “Society”. The most concerned writers left letters of a narrative nature, while the most contemplative and curious of them described landscapes, plants, animals and men with great pre-scientific interest. Having become the “Language of Empire”, Portuguese was, however, insufficient for missionary activity, and the “Brazilian language” was studied and annotated, promoted as the “language of culture”. Internally, to the Jesuits, writing was a way of representing the “Companion” (overcoming homesickness) and thus contributing to the formation of a mystical (institutional) body that went beyond the Portuguese Empire and reinforced the Christian Republic.

Keywords: Language of the Empire; language of culture; annual letters; pre-scientific legacy.

Resumo: Qual a importância da perenidade da escrita e das suas funções no quadro da missão jesuítica, durante os primeiros tempos do Brasil Colonial? O registo descritivo-narrativo do ambiente natural e dos homens (índios, brancos e negros), que eram objecto de (re)cristianização, converteu-se em obrigação (quadrimestral e depois anual) para todos os agentes da “Companhia”. Os mais preocupados com a acção deixaram, sobretudo, cartas de carácter narrativo; os mais contemplativos e curiosos descreveram paisagens, plantas, animais e homens com grande interesse pré-científico. Convertido em “língua de Império”, o português era, contudo, insuficiente para a acção missionária, pelo que se estudou e registou a “língua brasileira”, promovendo-a a “língua de cultura”. Internamente, para os jesuítas, escrever era a forma de representar o “Companheiro” (matando a saudade) e, deste modo, concorrer para a formação de um corpo místico (institucional) que extravasava o Império Luso e reforçava a República Cristã.

Palavras-chave: língua de Império; língua de cultura; carta ânua; legado pré-científico.

1. Portuguese as the Language of Empire

In 1492, the year that Christopher Columbus laid the first stone of the Overseas Empire of Spain, in the service of the so-called “Catholic Kings”, António de Lebrija or Nebrija wrote the following

assertion in the prologue of his first *Gramatica Castellana*: “[...] una cosa hallo y faço por conclusion mui cierta: que siempre la lengua fue compañera del imperio; y de tal manera lo siguió, que juntamente começãrõ, crecieron, y florecieron, y despues jũta fue la caida de entrambos” (NEBRIJA, 1909). The assertion was not politically empty of meaning and foresight. Admittedly, as Juan Contreras, among others, would recall, to organize a modern Empire “territory-world” inhabited by multicultural human communities, it became necessary to have a powerful regular and capable military force that would impose the recognition of the ruler’s sovereignty (CONTRERAS, 1966). Therefore, this military force would have to be mobilized and technically equipped by modern means. However, it did not always need to intervene on the ground, as it was normally enough for the threat of intervention to loom. In addition to reducing the oppression of the dominated group, human and technical expenses would also be reduced; therefore, it was necessary for domination to be achieved through more peaceful and durable means, such as language, religion, law or the customs of the conquerors.

As for the power of language, in the wake of Nebrija, Fernão de Oliveira understood this very well by registering the following appeal in the (first) *Grammatica de Linguagem Portuguesa* (published in 1536):

[...] e comtudo apliquemos nosso trabalho a nossa lingua e gente e ficará com mayor eternidade a memoria delle, e nam trabalhemos em lingua estrangeira, mas apuremos tanto a nossa com boas doutrinas [gramaticais] q[ue] a possamos ensinar a muytas outras gentes e sempre seremos dellas louvados e amados por[que] a semelhança he causa de amor e mays em as linguas. E ao contrayro vemos em Africa, Guine, Brasil e India não amarẽ muyto os Portuguezes q[ue] antrelles naçem so polla diferença da lingua, e os de la nacidos querẽ bem a os seus portuguezes e chamamlhes seus por[que] falão assi como elles (OLIVEIRA, 1871, p. 16).

In this work, Oliveira of course showed that he was aware of the importance of language (oral and written), arguing that it would allow knowledge to be passed on to new generations, would allow knowledge to spread, would further the formation of a more robust, collective and perennial memory, and would draw in (i.e. represent) the distant or invisible, providing a more prompt and effective intervention on reality. Thus, the interest that power (as we will further explain), especially Central Power, invests in organizing and imposing a “language of civilization” as universally as possible becomes comprehensible. We use the term “Language of Empire” in this sense, making Nebrija de Oliveira’s position clearer in the knowledge that he copied and even altered parts of *Gramatica Castellana*. However, we will put forward other considerations regarding language and speech.

Of course, the standard of written language is not the same as that of spoken language, even if we refer to the speech of the dominant social strata (as a rule, the more educated). In addition, the consensus on standard writing is stronger than it is on standard spoken language, a situation that is not superfluous (but not essential) to the role of grammars and established grammatical standards,

even though Nebrija had argued that the grammatical “art” or “artifice” of the Spanish language would essentially compete to “entender en toda la duración de los tiempos que está por venir”. As a side note, we recall that the works of so-called classic authors also compete (and very much so) to ensure that proper language would carry over long periods of time. But let us look at some of the facets of thinking of the main Portuguese grammars of the time.

In 1536, Fernão de Oliveira wrote that, as a habit, “[...] muitos [portugueses] falão muito mal”. In turn, João de Barros regretted the fact that, in the main towns and cities of Portugal, “[...] qualquer idiota e nam aprovado em costumes de bom viver poer escola de insinar meninos”, thus resulting in considerable deficiencies in speaking and writing Portuguese (BARROS, 1959, p. 86). By the end of the 16th century, it would be Duarte Nunes de Leão’s turn to verify that his *Orthographia da Lingoa Portuguesa* would be well-received and would contribute to “[...] se muito melhorar a scriptura que entre nos andava mui depravada” (LEÃO, 1606).

In this regard, the question can be raised as to whether the Jesuit missionaries of 16th-century Brazil wrote (a lot or a little) in Portuguese and taught it in schools in order to also compete for the affirmation of the Portuguese Empire. First, however, before attempting an answer, let us consider whether the grammars referred to above were open or not to the issue of language inculturation, in particular to the contributions of the so-called exotic languages such as Tupi – Guarani.

Fernão de Oliveira seemed to be the most chauvinistic in this aspect by proclaiming “[...] and we shall not work in a foreign language”. Yet Barros, by confessing his taste for classic archaisms (“a my muito me contentam os termos que se conformam com o latim, dado que sejam antigos”) and for provincialisms (like the “muitos que se usam antre Douro e Minho”), would call for linguistic acculturation, particularly with overseas peoples. Thus, in his opinion, importing *Gentile* words should not be reason for shame or a sign of weakness before the vanquished, as it would further the lexical enrichment of the conquerors and, ultimately, impose Portuguese sovereignty (BARROS, 1959, p. 81-85).

As to whether the early Jesuits in Brazil used more or less correct Portuguese, the answer is difficult because a considerable percentage of their letters were either translations or apographs, much of the original having been lost. On the other hand, the socio-cultural status of the various recipients of their epistolography also forced them to use other languages in use in Europe such as Latin and Spanish. Specifically, Manuel da Nobrega predominantly used Portuguese; although he also knew Spanish, having studied some years in Salamanca, and would often quote the Scriptures in Latin. In turn, Francisco Xavier recommended that foreigners of the Society of Jesus, before heading east, learn to speak Portuguese well if only to make it possible for local interpreters to do their respective translations. By knowing Latin, even as foreigners, Jesuit priests could express themselves more easily in cultivated Portuguese and, when corresponding with major dignitaries in the Portuguese História (São Paulo) v.34, n.1, p. 109-127, jan./jun. 2015 ISSN 1980-4369

court (as we shall explain below), it would only be natural for them to make the effort to write well. Thus, Francisco Xavier, being aware of this requirement, would use Latin (and not Portuguese) to correspond with King João III. Regarding the role of the court in the evolution of the Portuguese language, it is noted that grammarian Duarte Nunes Lion considered it to be “[...] a officina onde os vocábulos se forjão e pulem, e donde manão [dimanam] pera os outros homens” (LEÃO, 1606, fl. 32). The court was considered by Sixteenth Century contemporaries as the main center for spreading “civility”, including language.

Regarding the political importance of language, let us not lose sight of the fact that Renaissantists such as Lorenzo Valla had long been remembering and defending the Roman Empire which, albeit politically unsuccessful, was still alive due to its ongoing cultural heritage, and in particular its language. As for the Portuguese and other intangible cultural components, so much could happen, as João de Barros would recall in 1540, “[...] as armas e padrões portugueses postos em Africa e em Asia e em tantas mil ilhas fora da repartiçam das três partes da Terra materiaes sam e pode-as o tempo gastar; però [contudo] nam gastará doutrina [religião], costumes, linguagem que os Portugueses nestas terras leixarem” (BARROS, 1959, p. 85).

2. But Portuguese was not enough

Pragmatic and seeking to be effective and rapid in catechizing the Gentiles, the first Jesuits to reach the Orient soon felt the need to resort to local languages, while acknowledging the advantage of having Portuguese as the “Language of the Empire”. Therefore, in early 1545, Xavier (having arrived in India three years before) informed his colleagues in Rome that he intended to learn the languages of the “others”, so they could say prayers and be confirmed in the tenets of Christianity.

Portuguese was not enough, clearly, and even less so Latin. With regard to Spanish, 16th-century educated Portuguese used it as a second language, though the opposite was less common. It is known that Loiola knew Spanish but not Portuguese while Manuel da Nóbrega only wrote in Spanish for the Superiors. Either way, Portuguese-Spanish bilingualism overtook the Iberian Peninsula in the 16th and early 17th centuries (TEYSSIER, 1967).

If it is true that Portuguese, as a language, was not enough for the Jesuits to communicate with the outside world and much less so for them to communicate with the natives of other cultures on the missions, this did not mean that it was given little importance. Francisco Xavier clearly defended the teaching of Portuguese in schools (where possible) and colleges of the Society of Jesus, thus working within the interests of the Imperial power. To this end, “booklets” in Portuguese, sent from Lisbon by the Crown government, became a very useful means to educate the “others” in the rudiments of

the Portuguese language as in the times of Afonso de Albuquerque. Learning along with the children of the Portuguese was, however, another very fruitful method.

Let us here recall the Nobrega missionary plan designed in his writings and particularly in a letter dated July 5, 1559 which was addressed to the former Governor of Brazil, Tomé de Sousa:

Des que nesta terra estou, que vim com Vossa Mercê, dous desejos me atormentaram sempre: hum, de ver os christãos destas partes reformados em bons costumes, e que fossem boa semente transplantada nestas partes que desse cheiro de bom exemplo; e outro, ver disposição ao gentio para se lhe poder pregar a palavra de Deus, e eles fazerem-se capazes da graça e entrarem na Igreja de Deus (LEITE, 1955, p. 316-360).

Referring to the objective of converting the Indians, it required the creation of socio-cultural skills unique to the Christian catechesis and the adoption of sedentary lifestyles with an interest in agriculture and some arts and crafts in addition to the pacification of tribal relations, extirpation of cannibalism, and the formation of monogamous families...

This plan required the use of the Brazilian language to communicate with the Indians and the use of Portuguese to communicate with those of Portuguese blood, which resulted in the Jesuit schools in Brazil teaching to read and write the language of the colonizers, while indoctrinating the Indian children in Tupi. Some missionaries took charge of this work, directly or through translators (“tongues”), with Fr. Juan de Azpilcueta Navarro being appointed the first Jesuit to register the Tupi language grammatically. He himself says in a letter from Porto Seguro dated September 19th, 1553, to his companions in Coimbra:

Dexo al Pe. Ambrozio Perez e al Hermano Brasques todas las oraciones en lengua de Brazil con los mandamientos y peccados mortais etc, con una confesión general, principio do mundo, incarnación y do juízo, y fin do mundo para se mandar allá [Europa]. Quanto a modo de arte [gramática] no alcancé aún para se hazer, ni me parece tienen [os índios] sino ciertos vocablos que sirven en general, que para otro tiempo dexo que [quando] estuvier más devagar que agora (LEITE, 1957, p. 9-10).

In 1555 José de Anchieta would elaborate the Tupi Art or Grammar though it would not be printed until 1595 by Antonio de Mariz in Coimbra. In turn, Fr. Leonardo de Vale, who was a Brazilian language teacher at the Colégio da Baía from 1572-1574 (he passed away in 1591), wrote *Um Vocabulário da Língua Brasileira* for practical use, which was not printed until 1937 and in 1952 but omitting the author’s name.

The contributions of some missionaries were compiled in the first catechism in Tupi, as is stated on its cover page:

Catecismo na Lingoa Brasilica, no qual se contem a summa da doctrina christã. Com tudo o que pertence aos Mysterios da nossa Sancta Fé e bõs costumes. Composto a modo de Dialogos por Padres Doctos, e bons linguas da Companhia de Jesu. Agora novamente concertado, ordenado, e acrescentado pello Padre Antonio de Araujo Theologo, e lingua da mesma Companhia. Em Lisboa, por Pedro Crasbeeck, ano 1618. À custa dos Padres do Brasil.

Besides writing or adorning the catechism with music, theater played an important role in the missionary for whites, Indians, and blacks, and was written for the first time or adapted as writs, eclogues, comedies, tragicomedies, dramas, or dialogues in Portuguese, Spanish, and Tupi. Some of these productions were bilingual or even trilingual, and in some cases referred to the theater of Gil Vicente. Anchieta, in particular, distinguished himself as a writer in the theatrical genre. *O Auto da Pregação Universal*, written in Portuguese and Tupi between 1567-1570 under the initiative of Manuel da Nobrega and Jose de Anchieta is considered the first piece of Brazilian theater.

This “catechism” literature, of course, did not appear only in Brazil. In this regard once again Francisco Xavier may be called a pioneer, since he wrote a compendium of doctrines or catechism in Portuguese for use mainly by Oriental children. It was printed by the Society in 1557 (posthumously), though only one copy of it remains – a handwritten manuscript in the Biblioteca da Ajuda. In 1561 the *Compendio Spiritual da Vida Christã* also came out, written by D. Gaspar de Leão Pereira, Archbishop of Goa, and between 1556 to 1578, the Jesuit António da Costa wrote a *Tratado de como se hão de catequizar os novamente convertidos* in Portuguese, which was handwritten and has also since been lost. We could also provide other examples from the writing of the Society of Jesus agents for use in missions worldwide.

3. Perennial representation through writing

In the prologue to his first “Decades of Asia” work, *Decada Primeira (Parte Primeira) dos feitos, que os Portuguezes fizeram na conquista, e descobrimento das terras e mares do Oriente*, author João de Barros considered that “for the benefit of the hereafter” writing is better than speech, “porque esta, sendo animada, não tem mais vida, que o instante da sua pronunciação, e passa à semelhança do tempo, que não tem regresso”; while “as letras, sendo huns caracteres mortos, e não animados, contêm em si espírito de vida”, conferring upon it all that is human (BARROS, 1778).

So it is, in fact, that the speaker or transmitter had a great capability of representation or, in the words of sixteenth-century Jesuits, could be a “living letter”. In other words, the message could be transmitted as well but would disappear over time. However, he insisted on the possibility of speech replacing part of the function of writing, as documented by this excerpt from a letter from Fr. Manuel da Nobrega to Fr. Simon Rodrigues in Portugal:

[...] polla 1ª via [epistolográfica] escrevi a V.R. e aos Irmãos largo [extensamente], e agora tornarey a repetir algumas cousas, ao menos em soma [sumário], porque o portador desta, como testemunha de vista, me escusará de me alargar muito, e algumas cousas mais se poderam ver polla carta que escrevo ao Doutor Navarro, em Coimbra (LEITE, 1956, p. 119).

In conferring upon writing the function of preserving the memory of human works in the sixteenth century, the Portuguese nation was “tão descuidada de si, quão prompta, e diligente em os feitos militares”, that is to say, it was delighted “to do, to say”, which is why João de Barros, writing on the achievements of the Portuguese in the Orient, “quiz nesta parte usar ante do officio de estrangeiro, que da condição de natural” (BARROS, 1778). Finally, touched by European modernity, Barros was aware of the future importance of societies with memories which were essentially written. Moreover, maybe he was convinced that the loss, voluntary or involuntary, of the heroic memory of the Portuguese could cause serious disturbances in their collective identity, thus committing to the furtherance of the Imperial project.

The neglect of the written record of history and the memory of the 16th century was understandably associated with scarce printing resources to divulge the *monumenta*. However, not much happened with the letters of Jesuits from Brazil. In addition to their intense circulation, in the form of copies and translations into European languages, fulfilling express orders from Inácio de Loiola, Serafim Leite states that towards the end of 1551 printing Brazilian Jesuits’ letters was already under consideration (LEITE, 1956, p. 53-54).

The letters were written, but because logically the messenger and the recipient were physically separated, questions were raised about the arrival of message. Thus, in the 16th century (or later) by using ships powered by sails communication was often hindered by shipwrecks, delays in ports of call, and route changes (at times due to threats of attacks by pirates and Corsicans). It should be kept in mind that adverse sailing conditions were not a factor only in the Atlantic or Indian Oceans, with the same happening in the Mediterranean while on land, transportation difficulties were not any less of an issue. This is made evident by the following excerpt from a letter sent by Irmão José de Anchieta to Fr. Diego Laynes in Rome, which alludes to much of what has just been stated:

El año passado de 61 en el mes de Julio se escribió largamente por la 2ª via en este mesmo navio, aviendo ya sido la primera [via] enbiada por outro [navio] antes dele. Mas este no pudo llegar por los ventos contrarios y por esso tornó a arribar. Lo que después acaesció [sucedeu] escribiré brevemente, más por complir con el mandamento de la sancta obediencia que por aver cosa digna de ser escrita (LEITE, 1958, p. 452).

The danger of losing written correspondence or of it being intervened led the Jesuits to use figures and stamps, along with other established standards, as we will see, by the Secretariat of Lisbon. Nonetheless, many letters would be lost, which in addition to meaning loss of a historical source, the news of its loss always caused displeasure. Let us document this with an excerpt of a letter from Nóbrega, dated July 5th, 1559 in Baía and addressed to his confreres in Portugal:

[...] a desconsolação que caa temos de não poderemos ter reposta [sic] das muitas cartas que são escritas, porque as que trazia este navio de João Gomez nam nos derão, porque o principal maço em que devião de vir se perdeo ou alguém as tomou, de maneira que não vierão a nossa mão; as que trazia o navio de Domingos Leitão tão pouco, porque o navio não aportou caa (LEITE, 1958, p. 50-51).

The first written manifestation of Jesuits in Brazil was not epistolographic in nature, and the first name to appear was that of Fr. Manuel da Nóbrega. His letters addressed to different recipients outside of Brazil stand out due to the curiosity of first-hand information about a “New World”, but also because of concern as to the efficacy of the Catechesis and the good governance of its religious Institute. Regarding the latter, Nóbrega revealed sufficient objectivity and argumentative capacity, as we shall explain below; however, a single letter could cover several subjects, depending on the main purpose of each letter: to share news and encourage Brothers or to deal with internal issues on mission management.

Regarding the first type of letter, at least in the early days, it was fitting that due to the novelty and to the recruitment of Society agents the letters were frequent, concrete, exemplary and long. Regarding business letters, it is obvious that they depended more on the circumstances, that is, the need to solve problems which is why they were formal, more specific and “brief”. The nature of these two types of writing resulted in general or long letters being almost always addressed to more than one recipient, that is, they were more public or written to be read by some cultural circles in Europe through translations, and naturally, they were welcomed by the leaders of the Society of Jesus. This intention, together with their uplifting nature, through regular writing in the name of obedience and good practice led the Society to rejoice and draw together as a large body that was at the same time human and mystical.

But would Society leaders have come to the conclusion that the requirement of writing could disrupt the missionary work each agent was responsible for? Or would it cause, in the name of obedience, the narration-description to become so often repetitive? We do not know but without mentioning reasons Serafim Leite, in the Introduction to Volume IV (1563-1568) of *Monumenta Brasiliae*, expressed the following: “A 2^a Congregação Geral (1565) examinou o ponto das cartas de notícias ou de edificação e, pelo decreto 37 (*post electionem*) determinou que para o futuro em vez de ‘Quadrimestrais’ se escrevessem ‘Ânuas’” (LEITE, 1960, p. 52).

Serafim Leite recalled that it was Visitor Christopher de Gouveia, “o grande edificador e legislador da Companhia de Jesus no Brasil” between 1583 and 1589, who dictated very precise rules for epistolography writing, particularly the “annual” letters. Specifically, he determined that the most interesting events of the week should be recorded in schools every Saturday in order to draw up a general letter at the end of the year; in turn, the person in charge of each village of the Jesuit mission would make a similar record. The end product, once brought together, would be “the Annual Letter of the Province of Brazil” (LEITE, 1938, p. 491 and 536-539). We will refer to the probable genesis of these suggestions below.

Apart from these mandatory “official or unofficial” letters, the Jesuits were not prevented (quite the contrary) from writing brief and spontaneous letters as a way of overcoming loneliness and homesickness. Such letters circulated abroad and also within the “Province of Brazil”. We document the need for the Jesuits to correspond with each other, citing a letter from Fr. Brás Lourenço to the Priests and Brothers of Coimbra:

[...] y secundariamente me causa estos deseos [de receber correspondência] por estar solo sin mis compañeros y sin Padre ni Hermano con que me pueda consolar, y estaremos tan remotos que más prestes puedo oír nuevas de allá [da Europa] que de los de aquí, por causa de las monciones que cursan medio año de un cabo, y medio del outro, de manera que de 7 ó de 8 en 8 meses tenemos nuevas unos de otros, y aun se acierta a venir algun navio; lo qual es para mi muy gran desconsolación (LEITE, 1957, p. 39).

Naturally, these “letters of consolation” or “nostalgia” were read and re-read by their recipients throughout the year and this need was related in a written response to Brás Lourenço from Brother Pêro Correia: “Tengo experimentado las cartas de los Hermanos ser un pan de mucha sustancia y un fuego que mucho calienta a los friorentos [...] y pués que en ellas se halla tanto bien, no devriamos de faltar con ellas unos a otros” (LEITE, 1957, p. 65).

But in a general assessment, what emerges from reading the writings of the sixteenth century Jesuits? We would answer that it was often a pessimistic or even negative view due to the intervention of adverse abiotic and biotic agents; but also a hopeful or even wonderful view, especially when the divine or miracles intervened. Either way, this wonder was more real than medieval, which is not surprising because the sixteenth century scribe tended to achieve credibility, without neglecting the glimmer of curiosity that he deemed to exist in the recipient, whether individual or collective. In other words, without minimizing the news, especially when it came to purpose, he sought to build a narrative-descriptive discourse as close to reality as possible. Even from this perspective, it is obvious that not all the writings of the sixteenth century Jesuits (including of course those from Brazil) were literary, but almost all are important historical sources.

As for the “business letters” (including those letters expressing questions about the catechesis and the Society of Jesus’s management in Brazilian territory), they *required* a response more than the others did, lest the information chain stop. An example of this was the observation-complaint set forth in a letter from Manuel da Nóbrega to Fr. Miguel Torres, in Portugal: “Agora não há que escrever, porque temos já escripto muito e de nada temos visto reposta [sic], e em muitas cousas estamos suspensos por tardar tanto o recado que esperamos” (LEITE, 1955, p. 252). Keep in mind that Nóbrega understandably had many doubts about the strategy to be adopted in the Jesuit mission in Brazil, being a “Provincial” mission. As he himself confessed: “[...] e noutras [cousas] duvidava e comunicava-as a Portugal, e dava a informação que havia [sobre elas], e respondiam-me, tanto de Roma como de Portugal, e este caminho seguia depois” (LEITE, 1956, p. 52).

The spiritual and temporal growth of the Society of Jesus, particularly in the Portuguese Empire, imposed (and this is another type of writing) in 1559 the determination that each “Residence” send to Rome “copies of contracts, royal appropriations, deeds and other documents of material goods, and [that] were authenticated by a notary public in order to be kept in the Company’s general archives as something important to the universal well-being of the Company; and in case the original was lost, to ensure the availability of an authentic copy at all times” (LEITE, 1960, Introduction). Such determination and others, of course, contributed to adjust the secretarial service that was assigned to the post of “Provincial de Portugal”. Indeed, August 8th, 1561, Fr. Francisco Henriques then sworn in as Provincial secretary based in Lisbon thus clarified the functions of the post:

Al officio de secretario pertenece escribir toda las cartas del Pe. Provincial asi para personas de la Compañia como [para] otras de fuera della, respondiendo o de otra manera; sacar extratos de las que vienen, copiar en libros las que se enbian. Acordar lo que se ha de consultar, embiar las que se escriben, cobrar las que vienen, leer al Padre las suyas y las más que el quiere, distribuir las de caza, hazer que se enbien las que son para personas de fuera. Ver las quadrimestres y cartas de nuevas y las ordinarias de los collegios y Províncias, quitar y añadir lo que parece, copiar e embiar las que vienen de fuera, scilicet: a Roma a lo menos una via [a] cada Provincia de Europa otra, a la India tres o quatro, al Brasil otras tantas, a Angola dos. Hazer instrucciones y patentes a los que se embian fuera, copiar todo esto en libros (LEITE, 1958, p. 384-385).

Although concise, this secretarial report of the activities of the Province of Portugal clarified quite a bit about the functions, worldwide, of the Society of Jesus after a few years of existence. With regard to the persistence of writing and its representational function, it was revealed that the Jesuits themselves considered it a palliative tool to shorten distances. But even better was the physical contact, as, for example, Francisco Xavier confessed to his companions in Rome: “Dios nuestro Señor sabe quanto más mi ánima se consolara em veros, que en scrivir estas tan inciertas cartas” (SCHURHAMMER; WICKI, 1944, p. 272).

4. *The annals and annual letters or the narrative function*

From Rome on August 13, 1553 and by commission of Fr. Inácio de Loiola, Fr. Juan de Polanso recommended to the Provincial of Brazil, Manuel da Nóbrega:

Hasta aqui tienéense informaciones muy imperfectas de las cosas de allá [isto é, do Brasil], parte por que se dexa a los que estan en cada parte [região] el cuydado de scrivir, y asi unos lo hazen y otros no, que son los más, parte porque aún los que scriven dan información de algunas cosas, y déxanse otras que convendría se supiessem.

Thus, in addition to the obligation that all the Company had to write, they were required to fulfill certain requirements – Polanso concluded (LEITE, 1956, p. 519-520).

It is easy to see that the annual letters are inserted in the historical sources known as “Annals”. These, contrary to “Chronicles”, were ordered for years while the latter were ordered by reigns with *Crónica Universal* by Eusébio de Cesareia (drafted in 324) serving as a model. Pierre David explained that the annals date back to the eighth century and constituted notes or news, registered then on “Easter tables” (DAVID, 1947, p. 258-259). What were these tables? They were tables listing the successive dates of Easter Sunday established by Bede for the period between 725 and 1063, later extended to 1256. In particular, some monasteries developed the custom of recording the two or three of the most important news events from each year on the Easter tables. It was not until the nineteenth century, however, that the methodical distinction between Chronicles and Annals was verified.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, with the formation of overseas empires the peculiarity of political and social function of writing and its perennial temporality was asserted, as registered in the “Prologue” of Barros’ First Decade. Still, the distinction between Annals and Chronicles is unclear, thus necessitating the use of historical sources including the collection of epistolaries. Do we want a testimony as to the importance of the epistolaries? In reconstructing the invitation of King Manuel to write the Portuguese events in Asia for decades, Barros would clarify:

[...] porque correndo o tempo, e achando eu antre algumas cartas, que Elrey Vosso Padre tinha escrito a D. Francisco de Almeida e a Affonso de Albuquerque, que conquistaram e governaram a India, encomendando-lhe[s] que miudamente lhe escrevessem as cousas, e feitos daquelas partes com tenção de as mandar poer em escrito, e que Vossa Alteza [D. João III] com a mesma tenção o anno de quinhentos trinta e hum também escreveo a Nuno da Cunha, que naquelle tempo a [Índia] governava [...] (BARROS, 1778).

It should not surprise us then that the same care in writing about the East was recommended to Francisco Xavier by D. João III: “El Rey me dixo quando dél me despedi, que por amor de nuestro História (São Paulo) v.34, n.1, p. 109-127, jan./jun. 2015 ISSN 1980-4369

Señor le escribiesse muy a largo de la disposición que allá [na Índia] hay para la conversión de aquellas pobres ánimas [...]” (SCHURHAMMER; WICKI, 1944, p. 81).

Certainly, the political power was more interested in the confidentiality of information than how devout and ardent the missionaries were in their Christian proselytizing. Thus, the annual letters and other major or general letters of a descriptive and narrative character that Xavier would draft in the early years of his ministry, even when they were addressed to a single recipient, should be disclosed if considered useful: “Aas cartas que screvo a Roma mando-as abertas, para que as leaes e saibaes as novas de quaa, e provejaes de mandar muita gente [missionária] todos os anos [...]” – he would recommend to Simão Rodrigues, assuming that a letter “quando a lerem muitos será muytas cartas” (SCHURHAMMER; WICKI, 1944, p. 279-280). However, Francisco Xavier himself would address others to individuals or very small groups. For clarification in this regard by using standard one-way communication Xavier’s epistolary suffered huge wear with numerous losses: it is estimated that 89 of his texts were lost. However, he wrote prolifically: in 1549 alone he wrote twenty-five texts; and in the year of his death (1552), 52.

Let us go into more detail about the political and social function of narration-description.

“Narrative behavior” is characterized primarily by its “social function” as the essence of narration is the communication of information to another person. Speech (spoken or written) is an utterance that involves a speaker and a listener with the former intending to influence the latter, verifying as a rule that when language is spoken the discourse or form of language is colloquial, that is, spontaneous; in writing, more reflection takes place.

As mentioned above, given that the main intention of the language is to say something about anything, it turns out that the speaker and the listener immediately understand that intention as often it is the recipient of the message who had previously made such a request. As an example, remember that King João III himself asked Francisco Xavier to write him about the situation in India. Was there any special interest, beyond any established power, in requiring that information? In other words why did King João III call the Society of Jesus to India?

It is not hard to see the geo-strategic shift that King João III was forced to make in the 1540s. The Portuguese Empire was experiencing great difficulties in many of its possessions. For example, on May 8, 1538, the kings of Portugal and Fez, through their prosecutors, celebrated a peace treaty in Asilah (Morocco) which was valid for eleven years because both countries were in the midst of political and military difficulties (RICARD, 1984, p. 158-165); on March 12, 1541 with the fall of Santa Cruz do Cabo de Guer, some of the Portuguese strongholds in North Africa were abandoned; in 1538 and 1546, the Ottoman Turks unleashed fierce attacks against the fortress of Diu, India; in 1538, the Ottomans took Adem, thus blocking Red Sea passage between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean... Finally, in the 1530s, King João III had to come up with alternatives for the military

attrition in North Africa and decided to concentrate his forces in the Orient. However, this strategy failed mainly with the Turks, and therefore, convinced that an empire is built not only with weapons, King João III turned to the Society of Jesus and on April 7, 1541, Francisco Xavier, with two Priests and a Brother, embarked from Lisbon, on the fleet on which the Governor of the State of India Martim Afonso de Sousa would sail. On the first day of the following year, Xavier wrote to his Superior General, Ignatius of Loyola, from the island of Mozambique: “El señor Gobernador me tiene dicho [durante a viagem] que tiene esperanza muy grande en Dios nuestro Señor que adonde nos ha de mandar se han de convertir muchos cristianos” (SELECTAE, 1887, p. 5).

By choosing to recognize Brazil as a colony, in the face of the great difficulties experienced in India, King João III remembered the role of the Jesuits and on February 1, 1549, Manuel da Nobrega, with two priests and three brothers, formed part of the fleet that carried the first Governor of Brazil, Tomé de Sousa. In Pernambuco, on August 11, 1551, Nobrega would inform his Provincial in Portugal, Simão Rodrigues: “o Governador determina de ir cedo a correr esta costa e eu irei com ele, e dos Padres que Vossa Reverência mandar, levarei alguns comigo, para deixar as Capitánias providas. El-Rei nosso Senhor escreveu ao Governador que lhe escrevesse se havia já Padres [da Companhia] em todas [as Capitánias]” (LEITE, 1955, p. 88).

Let us recall that an empire cannot be built solely on the force of arms, in order to better understand why for political purposes the Portuguese Crown State also mobilized religious institutions such as the Society of Jesus for missionary work in the colonies, clearly confirmed by the recommendation of Prince Louis (brother of D. João III) to the Viceroy of India, Pedro Mascarenhas: “Sua Alteza vos manda este anno [de 1555] doze Padres da Companhia de Jesus que são para converter o mundo, e certo que os deveis mais de estimar que muita gente de guerra [...]” (REGO, 1951, p. 22):

In most epistolographic examples, the political and military narrative is also combined with the descriptive, the predominance of one or the other varying, obviously, depending on the nature of the object. But the interests of the informant are also important. Clarifying and giving examples, Francisco Xavier and Manuel da Nobrega were more men of action, so the eyes of both were turned more toward people than toward landscapes. In other words, their writings are predominantly narrative and express a minor literary bent. Others stood out for other reasons, i.e. favoring naturalistic descriptive writing, entering the pre-scientific domain.

5. The function of (pre)scientific writing of the first texts on Brazil

In the 16th century, seven collections of letters by the Priests and Brothers of the Society of Jesus, written in Portuguese and Spanish, many of which referred to Brazil (ALONSO ROMEO,

2000, p. 80) were published. By integrating this Portuguese colony or “Mundus Novus”, it was natural for Europe to be interested in what came back through the various viewpoints of informants in different fields, such as geographical, anthropological (physical and cultural), ethnographic, botanical, zoological, mineral and even gastronomic fields. We will summarize some references, taken mainly from the Jesuit collection of letters in the field of naturalism.

Pero Vaz de Caminha opened up a well of interesting facts about the “Brazils”; they were good and naked indigenous people who were very close to Mother Nature; focusing on what he saw near Monte Brasil in a geological setting, sometimes red barriers, sometimes white, but populated by large trees. Thus, it was “graciosa [a terra] que querendo aproveitar darsa neella tudo per bem das agoas que tem” (COSTA, 1940, p. 91). There was interest in whether there was metal (in particular, gold, silver and iron) and the presence of domesticated animals was not detected. He was able to observe, however, green parrots, pigeons and other black birds “casy como pegas senõ quãto tiinham o bico branco e os rabos curtos [...]” (COSTA, 1940, p. 91 e 84). Observations by zoologists or even watchful ornithologists that would give evidence of, logically and understandably, the description of the naked bodies of men and women, dyed with redwood. Here they are portrayed in a literary register:

[...] e hũa daquelas moças era toda timta de fumdo a cima daquela timtura a qual certo era tã bem feita e tam redomda e sua vergonha que ela nom tiinha tam graciosa que a muitas molheres de nossa terra vendo-lhe taaes feiçõis fezera vergonha por nom teerem a sua como ela (COSTA, 1940, p. 73).

How were bodies so slender and so nourished fed? Despite our people (“nossos”) having found, on the beach, “alguñs camarões grosos e curtos”, the naturals “[...] nẽ comẽ senõ dese inham [leia-se mandioca] que aquy ha muito e desa semente e fruitos que a tera e as arvores de sy lançam” (COSTA, 1940, p. 75 e 87).

Caminha’s curious and numerous descriptive and narrative details about the strange people and the new land of the king of Portugal would lead him to apologize for being so long-winded, “ca [porque] o desejo que tiinha de vos tudo dizer mo fez asy poer pelo meudo” (COSTA, 1940, p. 92).

After Pero Vaz de Caminha, there would follow a host of attentive observers and proficient sixteenth-century writers who provided an invaluable source of information and ideas of a wide variety, as has been said. An intuitive, practical, but also intellectualized awareness of Brazil would emerge from close observation of the real world. Some would be anthropologists, ethnographers, others geographers, cartographers or simply sailors; few would be philosophers or psychologists, preferring to be almost all naturalists, i.e. connoisseurs and lovers of this amazing new face of mother nature (DIAS, 1973; LEITE, 1938; PINA, 1946). Among these were a few renowned Jesuits.

Many annual letters from Brazil prove this naturalistic interest but it is fair to highlight the names of sixteenth-century writers Manuel da Nobrega, José de Anchieta, Fernão Cardim and Francisco Soares. They were associated, through writing, with other renowned men such as Pero Magellanico Gandavo, Gabriel Soares de Sousa or Ambrósio Fernandes Brandão (the latter as the purported author of *Diálogo das Grandezas do Brasil* [...]).

As laymen or clerics, who were more or less attentive, almost all of these authors did not hesitate to add the imaginary to their invaluable reports on reality. However, it was a fantastical passage and was moving away, as stated, from the medieval fable. We document the following text, collected in Pero de Magalhães de Gandavo, in his History of the Santa Cruz Province, commonly called Brazil under the title “Do monstro marinho que se matou na capitania de São Vicente no ano de 1564”, in a nocturnal setting (as is befitting) and referring to a story of haunting (GÂNDAVO, 1989, p. 69-128). Fr. Fernão Cardim, in the treatise titled *Do Clima e Terras do Brasil e de algumas cousas notáveis que se achão assi na terra como no mar*, would also include a reference “aos homens marinhos e monstros do mar” (CARDIM, 1939, p. 31-95). In 1590, also in the epistolary form Jesuit Francisco Soares, author *De Algumas Cousas mais Notaveis do Brasil e de Alguns Costumes dos Índios*, would do the same by alluding to the “Homens-marinhos” (SOARES, 1989, p. 133-187).

Chronologically, the first major writing by Jesuit Fr. Fernão Cardim is, of course, known as *Narrativa epistolar de uma viagem e missão jesuítica [...] desde o anno de 1583 ao de 1590, indo por visitador o Padre Cristovão de Gouvea* (CARDIM, 1939, p. 250-326). It contains two letters written by Cardim addressed to the Provincial of Portugal, dated October 16th, 1585 and May 1st, 1590, the writer being in the Baía. Indeed, due to the brief observation time, information about the naturalistic reality of Brazilian land (Baía, Porto Seguro, Pernambuco, Rio, São Vicente, Piratininga, Santos...) was rather scarce.

Also in the treatise titled *Do Princípio e origem dos índios do Brasil e de seus costumes, adoração e cerimónias*, as the title itself suggests, anthropological and ethnographic observations overlap the observations of nature (CARDIM, 1939, p. 142-181).

It would therefore be mainly in the treatise *Do Clima e Terras do Brasil e de algumas cousas* [...], that in 25 texts, Fernão Cardim would reveal all his descriptive capacity with regard to Brazilian flora and fauna using an already systematic exposition, subject to a template. We can reconstruct it in this way, both for animals and for plants: the designation of each species, size or shape, likenesses or similarities (when possible, taking Europe as a reference), quantities, uses, domesticity or not, subspecies... Some titles were self-explicative, such as, “Snakes with or without poison”; “Trees that serve as medicine”; “Herbal remedies that serve as medicine”; “On rubbing oils”; “Trees that provide wood”; “On shellfish”; “On freshwater fish”; “On animals, trees, herbs, that come from Portugal can grow in Brazil”...

His contemporary and colleague Francisco Soares would use a similar record. The description “On fruit”, “On animals”, “On birds”, “On various fish, whales and sharks”, would be associated with: “Herbs that neither Dioscorides nor other authors had knowledge of nor mentioned”. Obviously wanting to complete their information on medicinal plants and drugs, Amato Lusitano or Garcia da Orta, among others, recorded and released many of them related to the East Indies, without straying from the precious Greek-Hellenistic and Islamic pharmacological legacy.

Luís de Pina, in the article referenced above, would classify Gabriel Soares de Sousa as “o Garcia da Orta do Brasil”, with his *Tratado Descritivo do Brasil*, offered 1587 to D. Cristóvão de Moura, considered superior in its detailed information, Cardim’s treaties and the writings of Francisco Soares.

The first Jesuits did not limit themselves to describing the flora and fauna that they came across in Brazil. Noticing also by experience (especially among the Indians) the potential of some plants and even animals, they would eventually send samples to their European companions in order to contribute to the cure of certain ailments but also to attract missionaries to Brazil. As an example, this excerpt from a letter from Manuel da Nobrega dated June 12th, 1561 to Fr. Francisco Henriques in Portugal:

Ho mestre [da embarcação em que ia a correspondência] leva estas conservas para os enfermos [da Companhia de Jesus], scilicet, os ananazes pera dor de pedra, os quais posto que não tenham tanta vertude como verdes, todavia fazem proveito. Os Irmãos, que lá (em Portugal) ouvese desta enfermidade, deviam vir pera quá, porque se achariam quá bem, como se tem por esperiencia. Vão também marmeladas de ibás, camucis e araçazes para as camaras [...] (LEITE, 1957, p. 350-351).

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