

Foreword

A picture is worth a thousand things...and erases other thousands...! This affirmation should be also extended to the observer who selects and adds meanings to images, who (re)-construes them as he or she connects them to a myriad of elements, factors, conditions and cognitive operations not always clear. This is how he cuts out and reshapes the historicities and temporalities of, and by means of, the images observed. This endless movement (for it is possible to be resumed at any time in the future) between the created thing, creator and observer is our main concern here, our guide as we examine, from today's perspective, images created long ago.

If, in general, images raise suspicion when examined by the historian (what should happen to any other testimony), the iconography on slavery and mestizos, in particular, causes even more apprehension. Because they deal with subjects surrounded by controversies spread over the decades (some still very much alive), with condemnations and defenses of all sorts, these sources not only inform us about the past, sometimes through silences, but also depict (perhaps, better said shout) perceptions typical of certain periods and groups of people. In this case, obviously, we include historians, *latu sensu*, chroniclers, intellectuals, politicians, scientists, clergymen and, also, free and mestizo slaves.

This mistrust common among the experts has become the center of reflection and motivation in this Dossier. The image constitutes the crux of our interest here. Here, they are more than pretty illustrations; they are sources, even though the authors did not grant them the same level of importance. Albeit the treatment given, the texts make it clear how significant iconography is in the renewal of current historical studies, especially, because of its potential to renew the historiography on slavery and mestizos.

The unpublished picture on the cover of the current issue of *Varia Historia* instigates and, I believe, provokes reflection. At least, that is what I felt when I paid an unpretentious visit to the exhibition *El sueño de um Império; la colección mexicana del duque de Montpensie*, at the *Archivo General de Indias*, in Sevilla, 2007. I could not help but feel curious and perplexed when I saw the objects shown inside a glass case and, especially, when I read the information written in a small card placed next to them: "Pareja de estribos del

tipo llamado 'de cajón' con forma de cabeza de negro. [Brasil. Siglo XVIII]. Madera. 17 X 12 cm. ARCHIVO GENERAL DE INDIAS. Colección duque de Montpensier". I had never seen anything like it either in Brazil or anywhere else. Not even in my wildest dreams did I imagine finding something so special for my work and pleasure among scattered objects related to the art of horse breaking and horsemanship. Joyful mistake. It is not only possible to find surprises in unusual places, but also imperative that we take these occasions as examples on the importance of walking through and among collections apparently remote from our immediate interests. When it comes to images, especially, this last warning is worth considering.

Immediately, I set off to enquire about the duke of Montpensier and how he gathered the objects, how the collection ended up in *Archivo de Indias* and, especially, how the "Brazilian" stirrups were incorporated to it. As to the first three questions, I did not have difficulty going beyond the information provided on the pamphlet handed out to visitors. Unfortunately, I could not find an answer to my last inquiry. No one at the *Archivo de Indias* knew anything about the history of such specific objects; neither could they provide any information on the existence or not of documentation regarding the duke's collection. What they knew was that Antonio de Orléans, the duke of Montpensier, assembled the collection in his palace "Castilleja de la Cuesta", Sevilla (where Hernan Cortés died in 1547) around 1854. Orléans (maybe here is the reason why he possessed the Brazilian artifacts – kinship with the Brazilian royal family, which extends, as a matter of fact, to our current days) aspired, in fact, to be the Emperor of Mexico, inspired by Napoleon Bonaparte who intended to establish a French colony in that country. Thus, the collection was assembled under Bonaparte's imperial aura, which helps to explain the duke's passion for equitation and objects related to this sport. The collection was donated to *Archivo de Indias* in 1933, but for space reasons, they transferred it to *Museo de America*, in Madrid, where it remained until 2006, when it was sent back to the *Archivo*.

The two black men's heads are really impressive and also very different from most stirrups used at that time. For clarification's sake, stirrups are objects horse riders use as footrest to help with stability and gain control of the animal. Silver and even gold stirrups were commonplace. Open sided and closed stirrups, like the ones presented here, were made of metal, leather and wood. Horse riders certainly used them for distinction purposes, which explains the wide variety of shapes and materials employed to make them. Some stirrups were designed for everyday use and some for specific posts and occupations such as the military, businessman and cattle dealers, transporters, muleteers and watchmen. There were special stirrups for women and stirrups to be displayed in festive events, commemorations, weddings and funeral processions. Yet, the pair bearing black men's heads is definitely difficult to classify. Who would have them made? When would

they use them? Before whom? Were they conceived, manufactured and used as a power symbol by some slave holder in need to display absolute control over his captives? What kind of impact did these stirrups might have caused on slaves and emancipated Negroes? These are questions in need of an answer. To start with, let us stress that in documents that usually record such things, e.g., wills and *post-mortem* inventories, they rarely appear. After several years investigating and reading these documents in archives in the state of Minas Gerais, I never came across anything similar to what is here presented. Well, at least, not in seventeenth-century Minas Gerais, although new readings with this question in mind may reveal other realities. Although I doubt that these stirrups were manufactured in Minas, given the huge quantity of slaves living in this state, the number of craftsmen who might have conceived them and the existence of similar wooden pieces (see for example, the black magi – Balthazar – attributed to Aleijadinho, part of the *Museu da Inconfidência*'s collection, in Ouro Preto; the “afro-brazilian” oratory door containing anthropomorphous black figures, Museu do Oratório's collection, Ouro Preto), no evidence exists to exclude the possibility that these objects were created in Pernambuco, Rio de Janeiro, or in any other part of Brazil, if we trust the information (plausible, keep in mind) made available by the exhibitors.

In fact, the form of negro representation utilized by the stirrup sculptor(s) was already old and widely copied in Europe and the New World. It was not the only standard available, either. Countless sculpted, chiseled, painted and drawn images were displayed in strong black color, bearing very white eyes with sometimes red contours, for contrast, and thick carmine lips. This type of idealization so widespread along the centuries (since, at least, the fifteenth century) reinforced, especially, the image of a strange, barbarian and heretic people, naturally wild and animal-like, associated many times to simians. This image was also associated to the moors, multifaceted characters, black Muslims from Mauritania, who over the years got mixed up with Islam and later became synonymous with it. The anthropomorphous stirrups mix all these signs and symbols, if not like they were originally idealized, at least, in the reaction they provoke for their singularity and novelty. After all, historical sources are products of both the past and the present in which they are observed. In this sense, like in History, they are children of time – the time of their conception as well as the time when they are studied. The two black men's heads sculpted in wood perhaps inspired respect and fear in the past, but, in this Special Issue, they trigger important questions regarding the use of images by historians. Inspired by both, we hope our readers feel provoked when researching this topic and use iconographical sources more often in their studies.

Slavery and mestizajes are the two key issues in this Special Issue. As to the first topic, widely studied over the centuries, I say there is still much

to be investigated and iconography is, without a doubt, an important ally in this continuous enterprise. Yet, when it comes to mestizajes, some remarks and a few warnings are necessary.

First of all, I want to make it clear that, in our view, mestizajes encompass biological and cultural dimensions. They are not taken separately, unless there is a need to privilege methodologically some of these aspects in special circumstances. Therefore, our perspective is far from the scientific racism, eugenism and 19th century social evolutionism, frequently and unduly associated, sometimes captiously, to the idea of mestizaje. It is important to stress that hybrid, half-beast, mixed, mestizos are terms denoting cultural and biological crossings, and existed well before the 19th century. It is possible to go back, at least, to the first years of the Christian era and find some of them. These words were often used to invoke cultural and biological “purity” so that hybrids could be identified and (de)-classified.

Nevertheless, the term mestizaje seems to have appeared in the 19th century, probably as a result of applying scientific approaches in the study of miscegenation, especially in the young American nations. This perspective would provoke a great deal of commotion among intellectuals in the 20th century, and has been combated even since. It is this evolutionary, eugenic and racist perspective that is still elicited today, countless times, when the History of mestizajes is evoked, as seen in this presentation. This is, obviously, a regrettable misunderstanding.

It is still in the 19th century that the old meanings attached to term hybrid also alternated (hybridism and hybridization are variables probably created still in the 19th century). Influenced by genetic views then in vogue, hybrid turned out to mean unfruitful, sterile mixture. This definition was used to describe animals, plants and seeds, but, quite often, implicitly and explicitly, associated to human mestizajes. They often used it as well to project the future of those young nations which had recently abandoned slavery and had been strongly, indelibly marked by biological and cultural mixing. Intellectual, scientific and political views condemned the past and present of these nations by questioning their capacity to become civilized in the future. Thus, hybrid and mestizo became synonymous with degeneration and barbarism, a dangerous and unprestigious place in the evolutionary chain. These new meanings attached to the old terms and subsequent lexical derivations were very convenient.

Of course, the many terms that elicited mestizajes before the 19th century came from the need to distinguish and classify people, albeit not in the same manner as in the 19th century. But these two moments are not different for this reason. Other motives exist. Among them, we should stress that the large terminology existing and used by all social groups was not always imposed “upside down”, but was also construed and inflexibly employed “in the bottom”, that is, among less-privileged groups. It is wrong to think, for

instance, that no forms of distinction existed among slaves and ex-slaves, that they perceived each other as equal, and that slaveholders, authorities and whites did not accept and see these differences. Add to this the fact that, over the centuries, the hybridization process was so widespread that many mestizos joined the elite, took important social positions and became (along with many ex-African slaves) slaveholders themselves. Therefore, up to the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century, mestizo societies were not believed to be doomed to cultural degeneration and barbarism, at least not in the way people believed from half of the 19th century on.

Another important point of comparison has to do with the criteria and elements of classification. Up to the middle of the 19th century, the definition of “quality”, that is, blacks, negroes, creoles, mulattos, “*cabras*”, “*caboclos*”, etc., varied enormously according to the region and the convenience of those embracing this social practice. In sum, these forms of distinction had no “scientific” pretensions and one could not easily set up a hierarchy separating the “inferior” types, mestizos and “pure” who constituted societies in America.

Finally, we need to explain what kind of mestizaje we are talking about here. In an arbitrary manner, we privilege the mestizajes occurred in the New World and, especially, construed in it. These processes of mestizaje experimented new and old dynamics, generated new rhythms, colors, agents, objects, rites; they fomented new forms of living, thinking, knowledge and world representation. Mestizajes, from this point on, became more complete, abundant and even more complex; also, more intense, faster and more impacting. For the first time, people from the four corners of the world would live together, share the same space and mix among themselves. Cities in the Americas, more than in those of old, had the native element, the “Indian”, very influent in the re-configuration of the world and his own universe (from America), even though he had been dynamic and complex well before the arrival of the first *conquistadores*. This intense process would not occur without an unprecedented global displacement. Around twelve million African negroes landed on American shores in less than four hundred years. Millions of Europeans would follow suit. Asians, although fewer, also composed the cultural-biological mosaic which transformed the New World from the 16th to 18th century; these figures increased drastically in the 19th and 20th century. It is this mestizaje that we privilege here, which in this period generated the largest mestizo population ever known. Even though mestizajes and slavery/forced labor are not necessarily associated, they were closely related throughout the process of historical formation of American societies up to the 19th century. It is possible to affirm, then, that without slavery and forced labor by Indians, Africans and mestizos, this biological miscegenation would never have reached the proportion and contours we have today; neither would it impact the whole planet as it did.

Finally, let us talk about “purity”, the “natural” opposite of mixture. Biological purity, cultural purity is not the equation here. We are not approaching mestizajes from the perspective of pretentious original purity. However, it is important to stress that these purities exist! Yes, they do exist in the realm of discourses, representations and the imaginary, in the dimensions of historical reality; they conform and are historical reality. We should not forget this important aspect of history, or we will distant ourselves too much from the past, even the present, besides projecting a future fraught with artificiality and idealization.

This Special Issue, from the cover picture to the last essay, stands as a contribution to help scholars better understand the themes and potentialities of iconographic documents. It was important, in this sense, to add an essay on ancient slavery, depicted from the perspective of archeological documents, sepulchral stones and literary sources, crossed, compared and subjected to historiographical criticism (Andrea Binsfeld). It is stunning how continuities exist between ancient – set so far in the past by past historians – and modern slavery, now examined under new perspectives which even utilize iconography as a source. These similarities appear several times in the text. In fact, the documental descriptions the author presents even “smell” these traces, although that was not probably the author’s original intention. To start the Special Issue with this essay and right after disembark in the New World was not a random procedure. On the contrary, this sequence corroborates the potential use of iconographic sources, even facilitating the (re)approximation of realities unduly set apart.

Convenient representations and self-representations seem to have been common practices among slaveholders, free and emancipated slaves, as well as scribes and artists. Mestizos pretending to be Indians, Indians behaving as creoles, mulattoes becoming Indians, who could not be slaves (Joanne Rappaport). The borders separating these qualities (term used back then) are very blurry. The historian should then be very suspicious of records, as well as overcrossings to slavery in the ancient world.

The flexibility of mestizo categories and descriptions can be noticed all over the American coast; this is what Joanne Rappaport and Maria Regina Celestino de Almeida show in their essays. As Maria Regina concludes, these societies produced plural identities and the historian today should not immobilize a historical process marked by mobility in the full sense of the world, including identity. Again, not only the fragility of borders between Indians and mestizos, but also between “savages” and “civilized” appear, now corroborated by the famous paintings of Jean-Baptiste Debret, equally denounced by recent historiography.

Mariza de Carvalho Soares examines Frans Post’s pictures in order to better understand the universe of 17th century sugar-cane mills, at that time the “world” of African slaves and Indians. The author teased out of these

pictures forms of work and dynamics of mestizajes in Dutch Brazil and crossed them, as it should be done, with existing historiographical literature and manuscript/printed documentation available. This exercise gave us a better understanding of this region's environment and the slave, colonial setting already marked by mestizajes during the 17th century.

Ana Cristina Nogueira da Silva Fonseca analyses photographs of “*deaffricanization*” promoted in the Portuguese colony of Mozambique, during the XIX and XX centuries. The photo albums were initially displayed to portray the “civilized mission” among the “barbarian” natives, whom were mestizos and racially inferior, in view of the time. They were trying to prove to turn Mozambican population toward European culture, which obviously failed. Ana Cristina in the text indicates the potential possibilities of comparison between the pictures of Mozambicans as Europeans and the more realistic images of blacks and mestizos produced in Brazil eighteenth and nineteenth, which opens up space for important studies that are needed, but not yet made.

In the last essay, Ana Lúcia Araújo approaches imagetic representations produced recently from a perspective inexistent in the past – Slaves' Route – and attempts, pedagogically, to teach the history of slave traffic in the Atlantic to “*benienses*” and observers coming across these huge monuments in Ajudá. Therefore, the Special Issue which started with a text on slavery in antiquity and then dealt with mestizajes taking place in slave colonies and post slave societies ends, as it examines images in the form of sculptures and architectonic monuments, with a meditation on the projection of present concepts, values and expectations over the past.

As usual, we hope the reader enjoys reading the material as presented. But, above all, we hope they feel provoked, as mentioned before, by the Special Issue's proposal. We hope they let themselves be seduced by the wealth as well as exceptional potential of the iconographic sources and, in the process, embark in a new revision of the history of slavery and mestizajes.

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EDUARDO FRANÇA PAIVA

(editor)

Professor do Departamento de História e do
Programa de Pós-graduação em História-UFMG
edupaiva@ufmg.br



Pareja de estribos del tipo llamado 'de cajón' con forma de cabeza de negro.
[Brasil. Siglo XVIII]. Madera. 17 X 12 cm.
ARCHIVO GENERAL DE INDIAS. Colección duque de Montpensier