WHAT DO BIRD FEATHERS TELL US ABOUT THE HISTORY OF SÃO PAULO? GLOBALIZATION AND THE WORK OF TUPI WOMEN IN THE 16TH CENTURY

O QUE AS PENAS DAS AVES NOS CONTAM SOBRE A HISTÓRIA DE SÃO PAULO? GLOBALIZAÇÃO E TRABALHO DAS MULHERES TUPIS NO SÉCULO XVI

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Abstract: This article discusses the historical agency of Tupi-Guarani women through the interpretation of chronicles, maps, and paintings. Studying these representations, I reflect about the material culture regarding the use of feathers of birds of the South American fauna, especially by Tupi women. In this sense, both local birds and animal goods were items highly used in exchanges between European and native peoples during the sixteenth century. It is established at San Vicente, in Portuguese America, as the focal point of the commerce of animals and feathers goods in the southern portion of the continent. On the other hand, based on recent research, I point out the participation of indigenous women in exchanges relations, in the production of goods and the dismantling of the birds.
Keywords: Tupi Women; Material Culture; Birds; Feathers; Sixteenth Century.

Resumo: Este artigo defende a agência histórica das mulheres tupis-guaranis através da interpretação de crônicas, mapas e pinturas. Estudando essas representações, reflito sobre a cultura material no que tange ao aproveitamento das penas das aves sul-americanas, especialmente pelas mulheres tupis. Nesse sentido, tanto as aves quanto as mercadorias de origem animal eram itens muito utilizados nas trocas entre europeus e populações nativas durante o século XVI. Localiza-se a capitania de São Vicente, na América portuguesa, como ponto focal do comércio de animais e mercadorias de penas na porção meridional continental. Por outro lado, baseando-me em pesquisas recentes, destaco a participação das mulheres indígenas nas relações de trocas, na produção de mercadorias e no amansamento das aves.
Palavras-chave: Mulheres Tupis; Cultura Material; Aves; Penas; Século XVI.

Introduction

The so-called Tupi-Guarani peoples that Europeans encountered in the south of America from the end of the 15th century had a plastic and fluid social structure,

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characterized by the association between nature and their divinities (Viveiros de Castro, 1986, p. 115). In his well-known thesis, *Araweté: the cannibal gods*, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro studied how these indigenous populations related to external groups and individuals, and how they integrated foreigners into their communities of origin.

In this sense, the author highlights the historical role of Tupi women in the environment and adaptation of captives (prisoners of war) and animals (considered 'pets') that were introduced into the daily life of the villages. According to Viveiros de Castro, analyzing the Tupinambá peoples during the 16th century, 'from the moment they entered the village, the enemy was subordinated to the female sphere', he comments on the captives. Furthermore, the women treated the captives like the birds they bred, such as macaws and parrots, naming both by the term *xerimbabos* (Ibid., p. 661). According to the author, for the Yawalapití indigenous people, present in the Upper Xingu region, of Arwak origin,

> *Kutipíra* [...] means both 'bird' and 'xerimbabo' [...]. The relationship between the *kutipíra* and their owners is formulated in the language of filiation: a xerimbabo is raised and fed by its owner like a child by its parents. Some myths tell how deceased birds help travelers to heaven, in return for the care they received on earth. The relationship thus persists after death, since heaven is for birds and souls (Viveiros de Castro, 2002, p. 52).

Both captives and animals were components of Tupi-Guarani societies, becoming important commodities as a result of relations with Europeans. Captives destined for rituals (outsiders) and animals (sometimes outsiders too) were integrated into indigenous communities through women.

As an example of poultry, I cite the article written by Felipe Vander Velden about the domestic chickens taken by Christopher Columbus to the Antilles in 1493, but also by Pedro Álvares Cabral, in the squadron that docked in Porto Seguro in 1500. On the coast of Brazil, they were quickly bred by Tupi women in coastal communities who traded with merchants. Although the indigenous populations did not control the reproduction of these birds, as the Europeans did, they exchanged chickens for goods (Vander Velden, 2012, p. 114).

According to Viveiros de Castro, societies of Amazonian origin, including the Tupi-Guarani and Arwak populations, used to marry politically, establishing economic and kinship ties. Allies constantly changed position according to their interests, just as

animals, plants, spirits and deities influenced alliances between villages (Viveiros de Castro, 2000, p. 14). According to Elisa Garcia's studies on first contacts, these indigenous populations were not necessarily unprepared for globalization. In addition, they set out to exchange knowledge and goods with various groups of Europeans on the Atlantic coast (Garcia, 2021, p. 114).

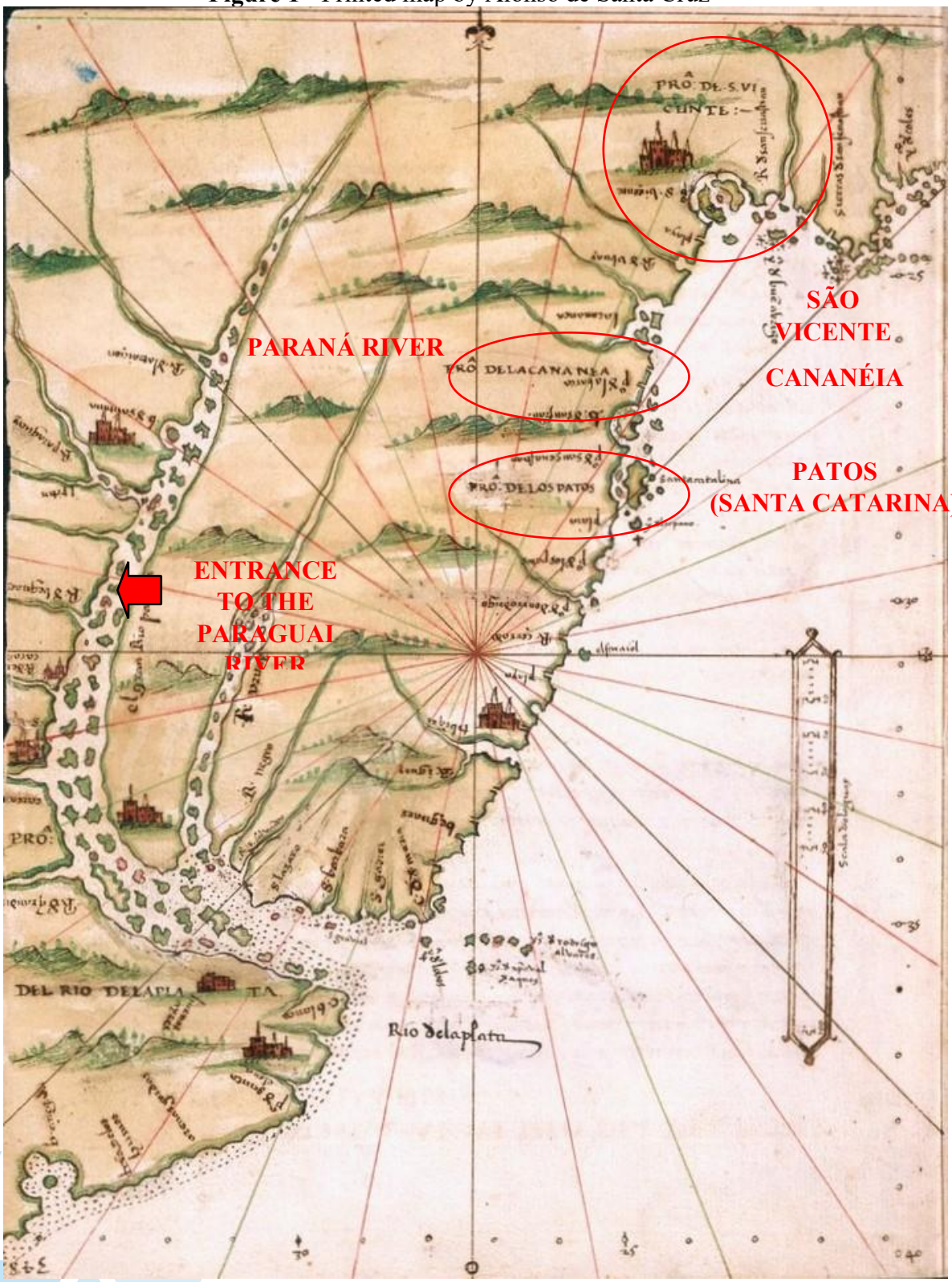
The Tupi-Guarani linguistic family, which named these peoples before the Europeans, stood out in South America for the 'remarkable territorial expansion over which their languages were distributed' (Rodrigues, 1986, p. 32). According to Aryon Rodrigues, during the 16th century, languages originating from the Tupi-Guarani linguistic trunk were spoken all along the eastern coast of Brazil (Tupi) and in the Paraná river basin (Guarani).

The trafficking of wild animals from the Atlantic Forest, located near the coast, to Europe was intense in this early period of globalization. So was the trafficking of enslaved indigenous people, mainly by the Portuguese and Spanish. There are recognized works in historiography that address the issue of the concomitant trade in tropical birds and indigenous captives to the European continent. These works will be mentioned later in the text.

The aim of this article, however, is to highlight the close relationship between the animal trade and the history of Tupi women's work. As well as taming the birds, I wonder to what extent they didn't start manufacturing goods from the feathers of these birds to trade with merchants in São Vicente during the 16th century. In fact, I use travelers' chronicles as well as maps and paintings as sources to create hypotheses about this question. Based on the information contained in the sources produced by the Europeans, I cross-reference them with the material culture of the Tupi-Guarani peoples. In this sense, the historical data corroborates the thesis of the association between women and local birds in a cultural sense, capable of influencing the economy of these societies.

The extensive southern coastline of the captaincy of São Vicente: the domain of the Guarani peoples

Figure 1 - Printed map by Alonso de Santa Cruz



Source: '*Islario general de todas las islas del mundo*' (1541).

Alonso de Santa Cruz, treasurer of Captain Sebastián Gaboto's expedition (1526–1530), mapped the idea that the entrance to the Plata basin was via São Vicente, in the area he visited between 1527 and 1530. However, his work, *Islario general*... was part of a broader project to gather knowledge about history and geography during the 16th century, according to Heloisa Gesteira. As the author writes, Alonso de Santa Cruz values global travel, representing all the islands known to Europeans on routes and maps, including the Patos region, which Captain Gaboto baptized as Santa Catarina Island (Gesteira, 2021, p. 41).

Alonso de Santa Cruz's map, published in 1541, reveals the captaincy of São Vicente and the Paraná River as important transit routes for European incursions between the Iberian domains in southern America. It draws attention to the long stretch of coastline that extended from the current states of São Paulo, Paraná and Santa Catarina. The map shows the territory of the southern coast of the former captaincy, delimited between the current municipalities of São Vicente and Cananéia.

The geographer's work contains passages that elucidate the Europeans' dependence on hunting and fishing by the indigenous Carijós, in Cananéia and Patos, from whom they obtained food. As Alonso de Santa Cruz writes,

> [...] within the port of São Vicente, there are two large islands inhabited by indigenous people from the eastern to the western band, where we stayed for more than a month. On the western side, the Portuguese have a settlement called São Vicente, which has ten to twelve houses [...] and a tower to defend themselves against the Indians. In times of need, they are provided with things from the land [...] on these two islands they have the means to raise pigs, as well as large fisheries of good fish (ONU, 'Islas into a las províncias de San Vicente i Cananea i Río de la Plata', p. 346).

We can see that in this southern region of the captaincy, the Guaraní people managed the natural resources needed for the merchants to survive. According to Tiago Bonato's thesis, in an analysis of the cartographies produced in the 16th century, the perceptions of Europeans constructed the idea of the Plata basin through a notion of the border between the Paraná and Paraguay rivers. According to the author, the imperial borders were fluid and delineated according to the movement of the Tupi-Guaraní peoples in the south of America. (Bonato, 2019, p. 205) I would like to point out, in the passage written by Alonso de Santa Cruz, that although hunting and fishing were

activities generally concentrated by men, the preparation of food refers to domestic work and the history of indigenous women. We'll see more about this later.

Decolonizing thought: in search of Tupi women in historical paintings

Figure 2 - Oil on canvas by Benedito Calixto.

Source: *Fundação de São Vicente*, 1900.

Close-up detail of the painting with the sharp point of view.

Martim Afonso de Sousa founded the town of São Vicente on January 22, 1532, with the assistance of the chiefs Tibiriçá, Caiubi, and Piquerobi. The painting above was created by Benedito Calixto (1853-1927), a member of the São Paulo Historical and Geographical Institute, inaugurated on May 31, 1900, in celebration of the IV Centenary of the Discovery of Brazil. This celebration included the participation of significant artists and intellectuals of the time, such as the historian José Capistrano de Abreu, the writer Machado de Assis, the poet Olavo Bilac, and the jurist Rui Barbosa. According to Marcelo Wanderley, the event aimed to popularize the past, present, and future of the country, relating different historical periods (Wanderley, 1997, p. 87).

However, the 'Foundation of São Vicente' painting was commissioned by the Commendadora Society in 1898, and there is strong evidence that it was being planned by Benedito Calixto beforehand. The artist seemingly saw the 'Fourth Centenary' event as an opportunity for visibility by exhibiting it at the Museu Paulista (Polidori, 2019, p. 10). According to Eduardo Polidori, who extensively studied the painting and its relation to the event, the elites of Santos and São Vicente were not concerned with competing with the federal government's celebration in Rio de Janeiro or even with other capitals. One of their primary objectives was to reinforce the local participation in São Paulo's colonial history (Ibid., p. 5-7).

Returning to the theme of the 16th century depicted in the painting, Benedito Calixto portrayed the founding pact between the Portuguese and Tupis regarding the construction of the first Portuguese town in South America, which in 1534 became the captaincy of São Vicente. It's noteworthy that it depicts a gathering of men, with the painter forgetting to represent the native women, assuming their absence in this context.

In reality, these women were the pillars in the construction of colonial society. José Carlos Vilardaga recalls that: 1 - Salvador Pires, one of the founders of the town of São Paulo in the 1550s, married Mécia Açu, baptized as Mécia Fernandes, daughter of the chief Piquerobi; 2 - Domingos Luís, known as 'Carvoeiro,' married Ana Ramalho, the great-granddaughter of João Ramalho, with one of Tibiriçá's daughters whom the author does not mention. It might have been Bartira (Vilardaga, 2014, p. 97-98). 3 - Captain Jerônimo Leitão, with a native woman, had a son named Simão Leitão (Ibid., p. 107).

Silvana Alves de Godoy mentions that: 4 - Pedro Dias, a Jesuit layman who came to Portuguese America, left the Society of Jesus after marrying Terebê, another daughter of Tibiriçá, baptized as Maria da Graça; 5 - Lopo Dias, a councilman of the

São Paulo town council in the 16th century, married Beatriz, it is not known if she was a daughter or granddaughter of Tibiriçá. Thus, the author discusses how in the captaincy of São Vicente, there was the emergence of a mestizo elite that also shared local powers (Godoy, 2016, p. 93-97). According to Elisa Garcia, the local power of women descended from the chiefs Tibiriçá and Piquerobi, like Mécia Açu, Teberê, and Beatriz, besides the central character studied, called Bartira, explains how their Portuguese husbands and mestizo children became the main organizers of the slave trade (Garcia, 2020, p. 37).

Until the 1530s, according to Nancy van Deusen, a large portion of the indigenous captives trafficked to Europe lacked legal documents related to their captivity. Due to the lack of strict laws against indigenous slavery in Portugal, the Portuguese usually trafficked slaves from the ports of Lisbon or directly from São Vicente to Seville, in the kingdom of Castile. In Seville, they illegally sold captives, even after the restriction of this practice in the Leyes Nuevas promulgated by Emperor Charles V in 1542 (Deusen, 2015, p. 69-102).

Building Colonial Society: Gender Issues in Dealing with Iron and Wood

> That the colonial society was a society of wood is an undeniable fact, almost a truism. Almost every mental image we forge of the daily life of this society will have, in its subtlest substrate, several material elements whose archaeology leads us to an inexorable starting point: the tree. Ironically, even its own tool for felling it - the axe - was needed from its body (Cabral, 2012, p. 64).

Prior to the 1530s, the exploitation of the Brazilwood tree was exclusively for the purpose of exporting timber to Europe. According to Diogo de Carvalho Cabral's brilliant thesis, the woods of the Atlantic Forest began to be used as fuel and pipeline after the arrival of Martim Afonso de Sousa, founder of the captaincy of São Vicente, in 1531. Additionally, wood assisted merchants in producing the biomass necessary for building ships and for the export of goods such as sugar and brazilwood (Ibid., p. 84). Thus, the author highlights colonial investment in the shipbuilding sector, responsible for fostering the devastation of coastal and tropical forests.

Stuart Schwartz explains that obtaining iron tools among the Tupi men was linked to their interests because with iron, they could cut wood faster, leaving more time for their rituals (Schwartz, 1988, p. 45). In the book 'Internal Secrets,' studying the

construction of sugar mills in colonial Northeast Brazil, Schwartz concludes that the role of agriculture among the Tupi peoples was traditionally feminine, explaining one of the cultural factors related to the decline of indigenous slavery. According to the author, the Portuguese assumed that farming was a male function when, in reality, it was a role designated for women. However, the impact of European diseases on the immune system of indigenous populations was the main factor leading to the substitution by African labor (Ibid., p. 40-56).

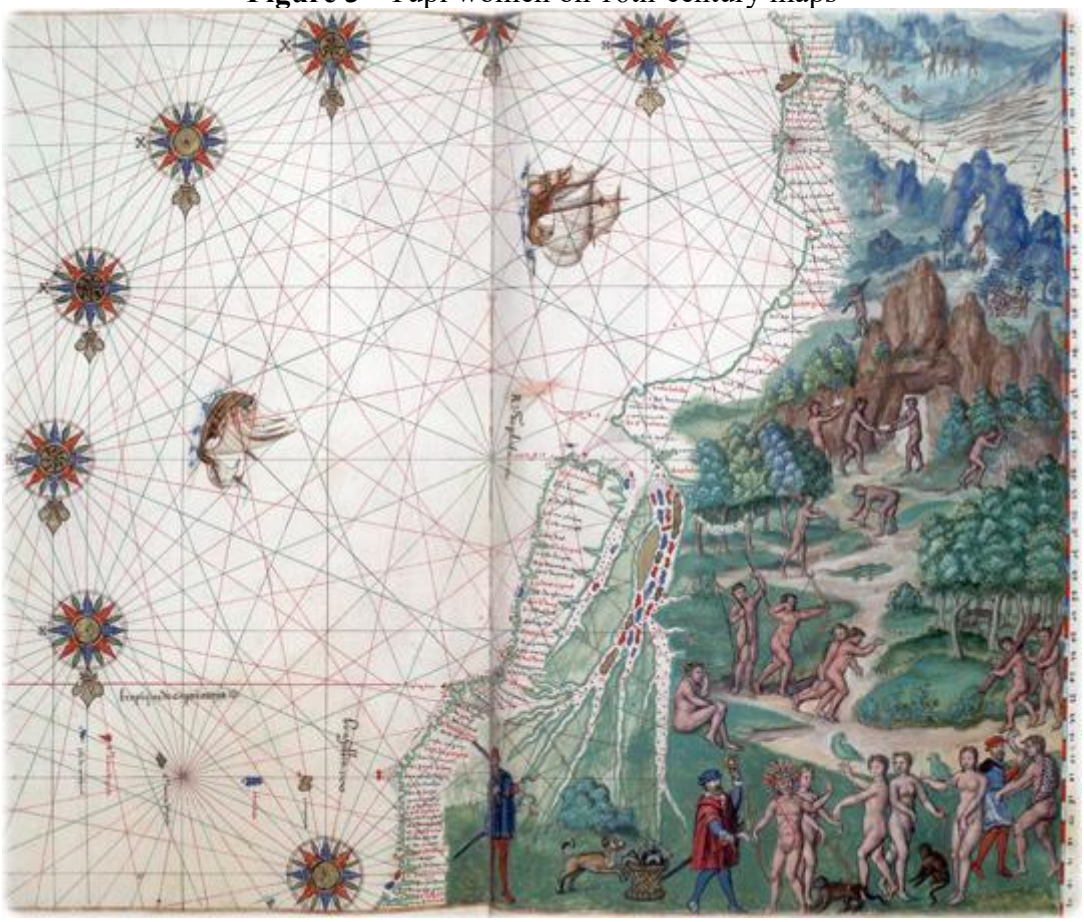
Considering the gender issue in the construction of colonial society in Tucumán, in the province of Paraguay, during the 18th century, Ramora Zeimundi produced a concise analysis on the importance of the role of indigenous women in domestic production. According to the author, local women manufactured cloths, sweets, candles, soaps, and grease, extracted tallow from cattle, besides planting, harvesting, and cooking food in general - commodities and practices essential for material culture and daily life in Tucumán (Zamora Reimundi, 2004, p. 104-105).

However, the paradigm shift occurred with the book published by Susan Sleeper-Smith in 2018, titled 'Indigenous Prosperity and American Conquest.' In it, the author argues for a greater involvement of indigenous women in trade relations. Sleeper-Smith highlights the interest of native women in trading with Spaniards and French in the Ohio River Valley, in the region of New France (present-day Canada), on the borders of North America during the 18th century. According to the author, they started exchanging furs of small mammals they manufactured for goods they were interested in, especially iron items they used in the domestic environment, obtaining economic gains. In her words: 'When European traders arrived, women likely demanded the incorporation of iron tools and cooking utensils into the exchange process' (Sleeper-Smith, 2018, p. 31).

Understanding that women participated in trade relations, the author also highlights the production of goods of animal and plant origin, such as animal skins and cotton cloths. Cotton, however, is linked to the persistence of indigenous slavery in the societies of São Paulo and Paraguay. It was an important trading commodity used in commercial relations with the Tupi-Guarani peoples, primarily produced by indigenous women. Similarly to the Ohio River Valley, studied by Sleeper-Smith, the Tupi-Guarani societies also had cotton plantations cultivated by local women (Alcântara Machado, 1980; Monteiro, 1994; Vilardaga, 2014).

Prioritizing the reading of the cited books, I consider that something similar happened in South America, i.e., contacts between Europeans and Tupi-Guarani women favored the exchange of goods locally produced by them in the 16th century, such as cotton cloths. In turn, cloths made from bird feathers also became highly sought after in the global market, drawing the attention of French traders who began to engage with native women in both North and South Americas."

Figure 3 - Tupi women on 16th-century maps



Source: *Atlas Vallard*, 1547.

Close-up of the map with sharpness.

Figure 4 - Trade in monkeys and tropical birds to Europe in modern times

Source: *Arch of the Mint,* 1635.

The northern coast that belonged to the captaincy of São Vicente encompassed the current states of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. In this region, it wasn't just the Portuguese who interacted with indigenous peoples. Gradually, native groups living on the coast, especially the Tupi peoples, took advantage of relations with European merchants to benefit economically from the exchanges. In this way, the indigenous people also began to trade with the Flemish (from the Netherlands) and the French, as they were interested in the circulation of goods brought from Europe, fostering exchange networks and the development of the global market (Almeida, 2013; Garcia, 2021).

Analyzing the Tupi peoples that the Europeans interacted with in Guanabara Bay, Maria Regina Celestino de Almeida showed that the indigenous Tamoios alternated their alliances between the Portuguese and the French, depending on the historical circumstances and their particular interests (Almeida, 2013, p. 189). From these relationships, we are left with a set of paintings that are particularly important for demonstrating the trade in native animals trafficked to Central Europe.

A study organized by Renate Pieper, among other authors, shows that the trade in monkeys and parrots was part of the transatlantic exchange network and the process of globalization, as well as the historical literature produced in Europe during the modern era (Pieper et al., 2019, p. 3-5). For example, the painting *Arch of the Min*t by Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1644) was presented to Cardinal Infante Ferdinand of Portugal and Spain in 1635. Produced in Antwerp, the painting illustrates the trade that took place between Europeans and Tupi Indians in the south of America (See fig. 4). In fact, Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1644) was one of a group of Renaissance painters, especially from Antwerp, in the Flanders region, who depicted birds from the South American fauna. Other painters who took this approach were Frans Snyders (1579–1657) and Jan Fyt (1611–1661), known for their paintings called *Concert of Birds*.

As Surekha Davies writes, there is an intimate relationship between the representations of Renaissance cartographies and the disputes of European empires. Comparing the *Vallard Atlas,* studied by the author, with the painting by Paul Rubens, we can deduce that there was a clear intention on the part of cartographers and painters in Central Europe to demonstrate the trade networks developed in the 'New World'. In this way, they drew the attention of European markets to the continent and its native

inhabitants (Davies, 2016, p. 126–132). On the other hand, the map dated 1547, present in the atlas, suggests the participation of Tupi women in the animal trade (See fig. 3).

In favor of the Portuguese, Fernão de Noronha's expedition to Cabo Frio in 1511 earned the captain around five thousand logs of brazilwood, thirty-five indigenous captives and a number of native animals (Marchant, 1943, p. 45–46). In 1530, the aforementioned expedition of the Venetian Sebastián Gaboto to the Plata basin returned to Castile with around fifty to sixty captives, including men and women of Guaraní origin. But the captain also owned a parrot, claiming to the Court of Seville that he had acquired them in São Vicente, according to the case studied by Toribio Medina (Medina, 1908, p. 249–250).

In favor of the French, there are the chronicles of Hans Staden and André Thevet. Staden remained a captive of the Tamoios for nine months in Ubatuba, a town located in what is now the state of São Paulo, on the border with Paraty, in the state of Rio de Janeiro. In 1557, when he published the chronicle *Warhafitge Historia,* Staden described practices that the French had developed through their historical experience with the Tupi peoples, in particular the goods they obtained and exchanged with them. These included brazilwood, pepper and wild animals. According to Staden,

> [...] a French ship arrived at a port about eight miles from Ubatuba, which the Portuguese called Rio de Janeiro and the savages called Niterói. There, the French used to carry brazilwood. They also arrived in our village on a boat and traded pepper, monkeys and parrots with the savages (Staden, 1998, p. 50).

Narrating about a Frenchman who didn't help him get out of captivity, named Cariatá-uára, Staden says that the man was looking for peppers and feathers, items used in trade with the local populations (ibid., chap. 35). We deduce that bird feathers were used by the Tupi peoples, as they also came to be used by Europeans in the captaincy of São Vicente.

The Franciscan friar André Thevet, in turn, published the chronicle *Singularités de la France Antarctique*, also in 1557, referring to Antarctic France, a project that the French tried to establish in Guanabara Bay. For Thevet, Tupi women tamed certain birds by teaching them to repeat words and ask for flour in their local language. He makes a comparison between the local birds and the ‘verdellons’ of France, revealing his perspective on introducing South American birds to the European market. In this sense, Elisa Garcia notes that Thevet collected items he obtained from Tupi subjects,

such as wooden tacapes and cloaks made from bird feathers, which are still in museum collections in France and Denmark today (GARCIA, 2021, p. 127). The chronicler writes that the 'Indians',

> [...] In particular, they raise some birds, similar in size and color to the greenfinches of France; they hold them in such high esteem that they call them, in the native language, their friends. Moreover, they teach them to speak, that is, to ask for flour (the kind made from roots), or to incite men to war in order to trap enemies and then devour them. And so on and so forth (Thevet, 1944, p. 293).

In favor of the Tupi women, both the representations contained in the chronicles and the paintings indicate that they tamed animals, such as monkeys and parrots, which they began to trade with Europeans for glass goods, such as mirrors, but mainly for iron (See fig. 3). As we have seen, these iron tools could be used by them for agriculture and domestic production.

Elisa Garcia also recalls that, both visually and in writing, the French used to associate Tupi women with the trade in monkeys and parrots, using as an example the figures published in François Deserps' book in Paris in 1567. In them, while the Tupi man is represented as the one who cuts and sells brazilwood, the Tupi woman is represented as the one who tames and sells wild animals. Through these figures, the author demonstrates the considerable circulation of ethnographic information in modern Europe, in particular the spread of the press and the interest of Europeans in the goods produced by the indigenous people (Garcia, 2021, p. 116).

Although there are no records of Tupi women making items of animal origin, such as feather cloaks, there are other sources that lead us to believe that they took care of animals that were treated as 'pets' by their groups of origin, such as birds. According to the aforementioned book by Susan Sleeper-Smith, the encounter with European merchants in the Ohio River Valley gave native women 'more material items, greater status, and more power as intermediaries', precisely from the exchange of animal goods that the French were so interested in (Sleeper-Smith, 2018, p. 99). Can we start to assume from this that Tupi Guaraní women were also involved in the production of animal products in southern America? Probably, only a more in-depth study of material culture will provide more answers. However, the involvement of local women with birds gives us concrete clues that these cultural relationships were later responsible for involving these same animals in the extensive transatlantic trade networks. Therefore,

the cultural factor that related them to the domination of nature in their groups of origin, became an economic factor that possibly added up to economic gains for them.

Final remarks

According to Enrique Leff, in defense of an environmental rationality as opposed to an economic rationality, we should think of the environment 'as a potential for alternative development that integrates nature and culture as productive forces' (Leff, 2006, p. 464). Nevertheless, the theme of the 2022 ENEM essay was 'Challenges for the Valorization of Traditional Communities and Peoples in Brazil'. In this way, the agenda based on Law 11.645, enacted on March 10, 2008, on the compulsory teaching of African, Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous History in Basic Education, was fully complied with. In defense of an environmental history of São Paulo, I highlight the need to study the formation of the plateau in correlation with the material culture experienced by traditional peoples. This material culture seems to me to be closely linked to the history of the work of Tupi Guaraní women.

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