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# “Sweet Masters”: The Order of Saint Benedict and the “Good Treatment” of Slaves, Brazil, Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries<sup>2</sup>

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**Abstract. Objective/Context:** This article aims to discuss the idea of “good treatment” given to slaves, as well as the concept of benevolence and paternalism in rural Brazilian properties, by using data on the Benedictine Congregation of Brazil, as it was the richest and most influential religious order in the country in the nineteenth century. **Methodology:** The documentation was analyzed based on the concept of “antidiscipline” coined by Michel de Certeau. The sources highlight a complex and efficient control network imposed on the enslaved; nevertheless, it is necessary to assess these documents (produced by the monks themselves) from a different perspective, as the daily life of slaves was marked by appropriations, tactics, bricolages, and other surreptitious forms constructed by the subordinates. This concept helps to rethink the manorial strategies of the Benedictines, which has caught the attention of many writers. **Originality:** Although historiography has already demonstrated that there was no such thing as “mild” slavery, several authors highlighted the “soft” treatment experienced on Benedictine properties. In this context, this article discusses how and why a religious institution used discourses and practices that aimed to improve the living conditions of slaves on their farms, highlighting the role of paternalism and Christian ideals in building an efficient and long-lasting “model” of slave management, which was described by many as an example of “benevolence” and “good treatment.” **Conclusions:** Although writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries underlined and valued the “good treatment” experienced by Benedictine captives, this study demonstrates that this “sweeter” treatment was part of their slave management strategy, ensuring vegetative growth and the smooth functioning of work, with the expectation of producing obedient, disciplined, and loyal slaves. In a way, they contributed to perpetuating the image of “softer” slavery in Brazilian lands.

**Keywords:** Brazil, Christianity, good treatment, slavery, Order of Saint Benedict, Paternalism.

## “Dulces amos”: la Orden de San Benito y el “buen trato” de los esclavos, Brasil, siglos XVIII y XIX

**Resumen. Objetivo/Contexto:** este artículo tiene como objetivo discutir la idea de “buen trato” dado a los esclavos, así como los conceptos de *benevolencia* y *paternalismo* en las propiedades rurales brasileñas, utilizando información sobre la Congregación Benedictina de Brasil, por ser la orden religiosa más rica e influyente en el país en el siglo XIX. **Metodología:** la documentación se analizó a partir del concepto

<sup>2</sup> This article is part of the project entitled “‘Escravos da religião’: paternalismo, doutrinação e resistência, 1750-1871,” funded by the Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq), selected through the process of *Chamada Universal 2018*.

de *antidisciplina* acuñado por Michel de Certeau. En las fuentes sobresale una compleja y eficiente red de control impuesta sobre los esclavizados. Sin embargo, es necesario evaluar estos documentos (elaborados por los propios monjes) desde una perspectiva diferente, ya que la vida cotidiana de los esclavos estuvo marcada por apropiaciones, tácticas, estrategias y otras formas subrepticias desplegadas por los subordinados. Este concepto ayuda a repensar las maniobras señoriales de los benedictinos, que han llamado la atención de muchos autores. **Originalidad:** aunque la historiografía ya ha demostrado que no existía una esclavitud "suave", varios autores han destacado el tratamiento "apacible" que se ponía en práctica en las propiedades benedictinas. En este contexto, este artículo analiza cómo y por qué una institución religiosa utilizó discursos y prácticas que tenían como objetivo mejorar las condiciones de vida de los esclavos en sus haciendas, y destaca el papel del paternalismo y los ideales cristianos en la construcción de un "modelo" eficiente y duradero de administración de esclavos, lo cual fue descrito por muchos como "benevolencia" y "buen trato". **Conclusiones:** aunque los autores de los siglos XIX y XX subrayaron y valoraron el buen trato recibido por los esclavos de los benedictinos, este estudio encontró que el trato "más dulce" era parte de su estrategia de administración de población esclavizada, que aseguraba un crecimiento vegetativo y la operatividad del trabajo, con la expectativa de producir esclavos obedientes, disciplinados y leales. De alguna manera, contribuyeron a perpetuar la imagen de una esclavitud "más suave" en las tierras brasileñas.

**Palabras clave:** buen trato, Brasil, cristianismo, esclavitud, Orden de San Benito, paternalismo.

### "Doces amos": a Ordem de São Bento e o "bom tratamento" dos escravos, Brasil, século XVIII e XIX

**Resumo. Objetivo/Contexto:** o objetivo deste artigo é discutir a ideia de "bom tratamento" dado aos escravos, bem como os conceitos de "benevolência" e "paternalismo" nas propriedades rurais brasileiras, a partir de informações sobre a Congregação Beneditina do Brasil, por ser a ordem religiosa mais rica e influente no país no século XIX. **Metodologia:** a documentação foi analisada com base no conceito de "antidisciplina" acunhado por Michel de Certeau. Contudo, é necessário avaliar esses documentos (elaborados pelos próprios monges) sob uma perspectiva diferente, já que a vida cotidiana dos escravos esteve marcada por apropriações, tácticas, estratégias e outras formas ocultas desenvolvidas pelos subordinados. Esse conceito ajuda a repensar as manobras senhoriais dos beneditinos, que chamaram a atenção de muitos autores. **Originalidade:** embora a historiografia já tenha demonstrado que não existia uma escravidão "leve", vários autores destacam o tratamento "ameno" que era posto em prática nas propriedades beneditinas. Nesse contexto, neste artigo, é analisado como e por que uma instituição religiosa utilizou discursos e práticas que tinham como objetivo melhorar as condições de vida dos escravos em suas fazendas e destaca o papel do paternalismo e dos ideais cristãos na construção de um "modelo" eficiente e duradouro de administração de escravos, o qual foi descrito por muitos como "benevolência" e "bom tratamento". **Conclusões:** ainda que os autores dos séculos XIX e XX tenham destacado e valorizado o bom tratamento recebido pelos escravos dos beneditinos, neste estudo, constatou-se que o tratamento "mais doce" fazia parte de sua estratégia de administração de população escravizada, que garantia um crescimento vegetativo e a operatividade do trabalho, com a expectativa de produzir escravos obedientes, disciplinados e leais. De alguma forma, contribuíram para perpetuar a imagem de uma escravidão "mais leve" nas terras brasileiras.

**Palavras-chave:** bom tratamento, Brasil, cristianismo, escravidão, Ordem de São Bento, paternalismo.

## Introduction

Blacks from Brazil live better than blacks from Africa.<sup>1</sup>  
Slavery was terrible, but beneficial for the descendants.<sup>2</sup>

The quotes above were made by journalist Sérgio Nascimento Camargo, appointed in 2019 to be president of one of the most important institutions in Brazil, responsible for promoting public policies for the black population: the Palmares Cultural Foundation (Fundação Cultural Palmares). His appointment provoked indignation and rejection from several institutions and leaders who defended racial equality and the rights conquered by people of African descent. For a long time, he has publicly criticized the struggle of black people in Brazil, minimizing racism that persists in the country until this day. For Camargo, Black Awareness Day (November 20) should be extinguished, because it propagates “victimization,” hatred, resentment, and racial division.<sup>3</sup>

Due to numerous controversies on social media and a clear incompatibility with the position he was about to occupy, a judge determined that the appointment should be suspended. However, in the beginning of 2020, the Supreme Court of Justice authorized the appointment of the journalist, who had provoked new controversies by divulging a negationist perspective on the inheritance of slavery.

Nevertheless, this type of controversy is not restricted to Brazil. On the other side of the American continent, tourists who visited the former McLeod Farm in Charleston<sup>4</sup> (South Carolina) protested, via social media, against the “politicization” of the history of people of African descent. Many people registered their indignation after they heard from the tour guide about the horrors experienced by the property’s slaves. One tourist described her experience:

I do not recommend this tour, because it is very politicized and focused on civil rights and the suffrage of slaves. Our guide Olivia was very biased and only spoke about handpicked facts that fit her narrative and most were not suitable for a farm visit.<sup>5</sup>

The most common idea expressed by the visitors is that “slavery was not that bad” because “they had a place to sleep. They had meals, they had vegetables.” Therefore, “radical” and “realistic”

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- 1 G1, “Após decisão da Justiça, governo suspende nomeação do presidente da Fundação Palmares,” *G1.Globo*, December 12, 2019, <https://g1.globo.com/politica/noticia/2019/12/12/governo-suspende-nomeacoes-dos-presidentes-da-fundacao-palmares-e-iphan.ghtml>. Direct quotes extracted from texts published in Portuguese were translated by the author.
  - 2 Tom Phillips and Dom Phillips, “‘Unqualified, dangerous’: the oddball officials running Bolsonaro’s Brazil,” *The Guardian*, January 2, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/02/bolsonaro-brazil-government-oddball-officials>.
  - 3 Guilherme Mazui, “Dia da Consciência Negra ‘propaga vitimismo,’ diz nomeado para Fundação Palmares após reunião com Bolsonaro,” *G1.Globo*, October 12, 2019, <https://g1.globo.com/politica/noticia/2019/12/10/dia-da-consciencia-negra-propaga-vitimismo-diz-chefe-da-fundacao-palmares-apos-reuniao-com-bolsonaro.ghtml>.
  - 4 The McLeod Plantation Historic Site was established in 1851, with “an important 37-acre Gullah/Geechee heritage site that has been carefully preserved [...]” This whole area was “built on the riches of sea island cotton—and on the backs of enslaved people whose work and culture are embedded in the Lowcountry’s very foundation.” Charleston Country Parks, accessed February 20, 2021, <https://www.ccprc.com/1447/McLeod-Plantation-Historic-Site>.
  - 5 Ritu Prasad, “‘Escravidão não foi tão ruim assim’: os controversos comentários de turistas no sul dos EUA,” *BBC*, October 4, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/internacional-49914833>.

explanations not only shocked tourists who visited the farm, but also caused a certain embarrassment when they felt "attacked" and "criticized" by the way masters treated slaves.<sup>6</sup>

Nowadays, we often see that the "past runs over the present,"<sup>7</sup> bringing up images we want to forget.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the "bridge" built at the beginning of this article (between the past and the present) is extremely important in these times of denial and revisionism regarding subjects so dear to the History of the Atlantic World. For instance, we have recently seen the development of a narrative that insisted (and still insists) on blaming Africans themselves for the slave trade, accusing them of handing over their own people to colonizers. According to the then Brazilian presidential candidate, Mr. Jair Bolsonaro, in 2018: "If you look at the true history, the Portuguese did not set foot in Africa, it was the blacks themselves who delivered the slaves."<sup>9</sup> Through this statement, Mr. Bolsonaro aimed to question the rights of *quilombolas* to the land, besides attacking those who defend a division between white and black citizens.

Statements like this—which reached in seconds thousands of people—have become increasingly strong and present in the voice and writing of "right-wing" thinkers and popular politicians. Consequently, reflections on this type of narrative are urgent, as historian and anthropologist Lilia Moritz Schwarcz demonstrated in her recently published book, which also evidenced the impossibility of a "softer" slavery in Brazil.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, considering the large number of studies on the subject, this article does not intend to deny the existence of measures aimed at improving the living conditions of the enslaved. Nor does it intend to confirm that there was no "good," "benign" form of slavery. That would be a mere fallacy. The objective of this article is to understand how and why a religious institution used discourses and practices that aimed to improve the living conditions of the slaves on their farms, highlighting the role of paternalism and Christian ideals in building an efficient and long-lasting "model" of slave management, which was described in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as an example of "benevolence" and "good treatment." In numerous occasions, the monks resorted to the press to show that they had different attitude compared to other slave masters, influencing contemporary politicians, travelers, and thinkers to resonate their actions, thus contributing to perpetuating the image of "milder" slavery in Brazilian lands.

Nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers, such as Oliveira Lima and Roberto Simonsen, played an important role in the construction of this view. But, without a doubt, the most important writings on this "sweetened" version of slavery were produced by Gilberto Freyre and Frank Tannenbaum. Already in 1922, in his master's thesis, Freyre stated that slavery in Brazil was nothing

6 Prasad, "Escravidão não foi tão ruim assim."

7 Expression borrowed from Lilia Moritz Schwarcz and Hélio Menezes Neto, "Quando o passado atropela o presente: notas de um Brasil que insiste no racismo," *Cadernos de Campo* 25, n.º 25 (2017): 31-35, doi: <https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.2316-9133.v25i25p31-35>

8 Lilia Moritz Schwarcz, *Sobre o autoritarismo brasileiro* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2019), 22.

9 This speech had national and international repercussions; see Deutsche Welle, "O negacionismo histórico como arma política," *CartaCapital*, April 3, 2019, <https://www.cartacapital.com.br/politica/o-negacionismo-historico-como-arma-politica/>; Laurence Blair, "History of free African strongholds fires Brazilian resistance to Bolsonaro," *The Guardian*, September 20, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/20/history-of-free-african-strongholds-fires-brazilian-resistance-to-bolsonaro>; Katy Watson, "The racism denier in charge of defending black rights in Brazil," *BBC*, February 15, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-51501111>.

10 Schwarcz, *Sobre o autoritarismo brasileiro*, 27.

cruel. Compared to the life of English workers, the enslaved had an almost angelic life. Tannenbaum (in 1947), quoting Freyre's *Casa-Grande & Senzala*, intended to demonstrate that slavery in the United States was more oppressive and segregating, while Brazilian blacks—especially mulattos (due to the miscegenation process)—had more opportunities to develop their culture.<sup>11</sup>

Later, Freyre improved his thesis, defending a harmonious and patriarchal vision of Brazilian society; a perspective dominated by an evident erudition that carried with it “a certain sense of command, the marks of distinction and prestige, a manorial view of the world, softened by general living conditions created in the wake of the transformations of social and political policies focusing on the crisis of 1930.”<sup>12</sup> Gilberto Freyre, the most emblematic figure of this “generation” of explainers of “Brazilian culture,”<sup>13</sup> highlighted the “docility” with which Benedictine monks treated the enslaved, by appropriating the books of travelers like Henry Koster and Tollenare.<sup>14</sup>

Other authors, with a more critical perspective as a result of the debates of the 1970s and 1980s, appropriated differently the writings of these travelers. The “benign” view of slavery was replaced with the deconstruction of the pillars erected by the Freyrian “generation.”<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, despite the importance of these studies, many scholars used the diaries of travelers<sup>16</sup> without due criticism and without understanding that they were produced by a foreign gaze, with their own prejudices and worldviews. There is often no comparison with other—more empirical—sources of information to complement the reports.

This article aims to contribute to this debate through the analysis of a voluminous documentation available in the Archives of the Monastery of Olinda (Pernambuco). In addition to sources referring in general to the construction of the Benedictine slave management principles, it will analyze documentation related to their four main rural properties in Pernambuco (Northeastern Brazil). In this province, at the end of the eighteenth century, the Order of Saint Benedict had 408 slaves spread over their four estates: Mussurepe, São Bernardo, Goitá (*engenhos* or sugar mills), and the Jaguaribe farm (see Map 1). In 1866, the monks had approximately 298 slaves.<sup>17</sup> The number dropped drastically in the 1860s, as they increased the number of manumissions, mainly due to pressure from the Imperial

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11 Flávio Rabelo Versiani, “Escravidão ‘suave’ no Brasil: Gilberto Freyre tinha razão?,” *Revista de Economia Política* 27, n.º 2 (2007): 164-167, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0101-31572007000200001>

12 Carlos Guilherme Mota, *Ideologia da cultura brasileira (1933-1974): pontos de partida para uma revisão histórica* (São Paulo: Editora 34, 2008), 94.

13 Mota, *Ideologia da cultura brasileira*, 94.

14 Gilberto Freyre, *Sobrados e mucambos: decadência do patriarcado rural e desenvolvimento do urbano* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1998), 605.

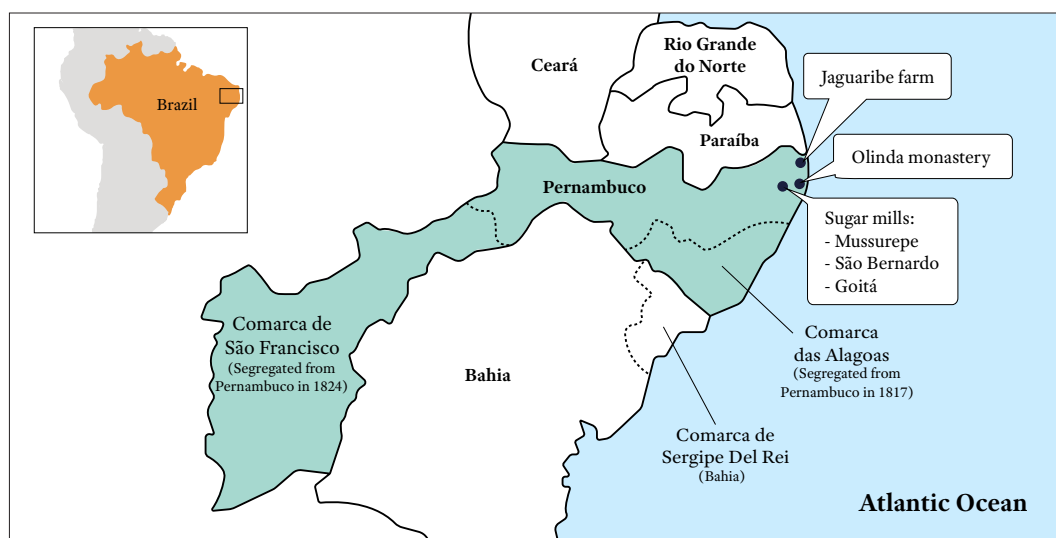
15 See Jacob Gorender, *O escravismo colonial* (São Paulo: Ática, 1992), 344-355; Manuela Carneiro da Cunha, *Negros, estrangeiros: os escravos libertos e sua volta à África* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1985), 46.

16 In general, these “diaries” were written by travelers from different parts of the world, mainly from Europe and the United States. They traveled long distances, some from the south, others from the north, from the coast to the backlands (Sertão region) of Brazil. Through the foreign gaze of the travelers, these diaries described the daily life of the slave and free populations, as well as the landscape, food, religiosity, and many other aspects, becoming extremely valuable documents for the study of various themes in the history of Brazil. For an analysis of these “gazes,” see Ilka Boaventura Leite, *Antropologia da viagem: escravos e libertos em Minas Gerais no século XIX* (Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG, 1996).

17 Information extracted from the expense books (Livro de provimentos) of the Arquivo do Mosteiro de São Bento de Olinda (AMSBO) (Olinda-Brazil): São Bernardo-Mussurepe, 1862-1873, Códice 140, f. 11; Mussurepe: 1863-1874, Códice 143, f. 01; Goitá: 1863-1869, Códice 148, f. 01; Jaguaribe: 1854-1870, Códice 51, f. 54.

Government and Parliament, which, on numerous occasions, questioned the possession of slaves by religious orders.<sup>18</sup> In this context, the Benedictine Order began a process of mass liberation of slaves, until all were freed in 1871.<sup>19</sup> It is estimated that the Benedictines owned about 2,100 slaves (in the middle of the nineteenth century) across Brazil, who were managed by their eleven monasteries located in the following provinces: Rio de Janeiro (1833), 1,097 slaves; Bahia (1854), 546 slaves; São Paulo (1827), 108 enslaved,<sup>20</sup> and Pernambuco, 350 slaves.<sup>21</sup> It is unknown how many slaves were in the Paraíba monastery in the nineteenth century, given that the only available data are from the late eighteenth century, pointing out 66 enslaved.<sup>22</sup> The number of slaves dropped dramatically after 1866 on all of the Order's properties due to the process of mass liberation.<sup>23</sup>

Map 1. Location of the Benedictine Estates of Pernambuco



**Note:** Between 1817 and 1848, the province of Pernambuco lost a large part of its territory, as a consequence of the liberal and separatist revolts, <http://www.multirio.rj.gov.br/index.php/leia/reportagens-artigos/artigos/11641-revolu%C3%A7%C3%A3o-pernambucana-de-1817>.

**Source:** Adapted from Jeanne Abi-Ramia, "A Revolução de 1817," *MultiRio*, November 16, 2016, "Mapa de Pernambuco, 1817" (map by Danna Artunduaga).

- 18 Sandra Rita Molina, *A morte da tradição: a Ordem do Carmo e os escravos da Santa contra o Império do Brasil (1850-1889)* (Jundiaí: Paco Editorial, 2016).
- 19 *Jornal do Commercio* (Rio de Janeiro), October 1, 1871. Fundação Biblioteca Nacional (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil), Section: Periódicos.
- 20 Luiz Gonzaga Piratininga Jr., *Dietário dos escravos de São Bento: originários de São Caetano e São Bernardo* (São Paulo: Hucitec Editora/São Caetano do Sul: Prefeitura, 1991), 32.
- 21 Crossing of data from nominative lists and information on freed slaves.
- 22 Joaquim José da Silva Castro, "Chronica do Mosteiro de N.S. do Mont-Serrat da Parahiba do Norte," *Revista do Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro* 27 (1864): 136, 145.
- 23 "Revista Diária (Bens dos Conventos)," *Diario de Pernambuco*, July 29, 1869, <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00011611/11902/1x?search=diario+%3dpernambuco>.



This study also seeks to demonstrate that despite being surrounded by a doctrinal discourse based on paternalism and granting benefits, slaves used different strategies to break the cycle of control and violence to which they were subjected. The article is divided into four parts. In the first section, a brief historiographical review is presented on the relationship between the Catholic Church and slavery. Subsequently, important aspects and peculiarities of the Benedictine slave management will be discussed. The third section examines some questions regarding the monks' strategies to improve the lives of the enslaved, highlighting the difficulties of the Benedictines in maintaining the "good treatment" of slaves during the nineteenth century. Finally, based on data on slave escapes and examples of insubordination, the last section will discuss the limits of manorial power and the difficulties of imposing discipline on the Congregation's farms.

## 1. The Catholic Church and Slavery

Before presenting our data, this study will introduce the reader to the peculiarities of slavery on Benedictine properties, in addition to presenting some classic and current debates about the treatment given to the enslaved, mainly regarding the role of Christian churches in the construction of modern times. It will also discuss the ideological support that shaped the Benedictine monks' view on slavery.

Firstly, it is important to note that when Benedict of Nursia wrote his Rule in the sixth century, African slavery was not part of his reality. Therefore, he devoted merely a few lines to servitude, emphasizing only that the Abbot should not let "a free-born be preferred to a freedman, unless there be some other reasonable cause."<sup>24</sup> However, with the reforms of the Benedictine monasteries in the sixteenth century and the creation of "houses" in Portuguese America,<sup>25</sup> slavery was gradually incorporated into the rhetoric and practices of Saint Benedict's disciples, who quickly adapted to the reality they found.

Historians such as Robin Blackburn, David B. Davis, and Rafael Marquese have analyzed different aspects of slavery in the New World, highlighting also theoretical and legal elaborations that were often guided by Christian principles. According to these authors, jurists and theologians helped to build ideological support for the construction of modern slavery.<sup>26</sup> Alberto da Costa e Silva demonstrated that it was in the Modern Age that a direct association between slavery and black color was definitively established. If the enslavement of people was common before, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries transformed African men and women into natural slaves, based on different justifications, but mainly on biblical ones.<sup>27</sup>

Nine centuries after the implementation of the Benedictine Rule, the Catholic Church was engaged in a new Crusade, allying itself with the modern state still being formed. In the words

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24 Chapter 2: What Kind of Man the Abbot Ought to Be, in *The Holy Rule of Saint Benedict*, translated by Rev. Boniface Verheyen, OSB (n.p., 1949), <https://www.ecatholic2000.com/benedict/rule.shtml>.

25 Oliver Kapsner, "The Benedictines in Brasil," *The American Benedictine Review* 28, n.º 2 (1977): 113-132.

26 Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800* (London: Verso, 1998); David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Rafael Bivar Marquese, *Feitores do corpo, missionários da mente: Senhores, letrados e o controle dos escravos nas Américas, 1660-1860* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2004).

27 Alberto da Costa e Silva, *A manilha e o libambo: a África e a escravidão de 1500 a 1700* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Nova Fronteira, 2011), 849.



of Charles Boxer, an indissoluble union between the Cross and the Crown was consolidated through the *Padroado Real* (Royal Patronage).<sup>28</sup> With the support of the Pope, the Portuguese and Spanish Empires were able to expand their domains under the protective blessing of Christianity, a fundamental element for maritime conquests.<sup>29</sup>

According to Hebe Mattos, "as the Portuguese expansion was consolidated, the 'naturalization' of slavery was established and integrated" in the "conception of corporate society that was then being built," guided by "a set of legal concepts that contributed to define the function and social place of new groups that were then incorporated into the Empire."<sup>30</sup> A whole legislative body was developed based on these new slave relationships, which occupied an important place in the theological-legal thinking of the Portuguese Empire. This notion was heir to a set of theories that were consolidated then, but had originated in the medieval period. Scholasticism would provide a basic support for explaining the subjugation of others.

Other authors have specifically analyzed writings about slavery that were published by religious and other authors who lived in America. The bibliography on these colonial writers is vast and it reveals several important aspects about slavery, mainly about the Christian and manorial thinking of slave society.<sup>31</sup> This approach (largely based on texts produced by priests, administrators, moralists, and travelers) helps to understand the daily routine of violence and the strategies used by the masters to control the enslaved.

The first religious congregation to write "manuals" on slavery were the Jesuits. The most famous authors of this order include Jorge Benci, Nóbrega, Antonil, Antônio Vieira, Manuel Ribeiro Rocha, and Alonso Sandoval. According to Ronaldo Vainfas, they all share common ground. Considered as "black heirs of Ham, Ethiopians elected by God, black well-taken people or simply hands and feet of the master, the legitimate slaves" were Africans.<sup>32</sup> Many of these writings contributed to legitimizing slavery, as demonstrated by Luiz Felipe de Alencastro, who analyzed "the Jesuit theory of the slave trade." The defense of the slave trade by the Jesuit missionary Baltazar Barreira and the sermons of Father Antônio Vieira played an important role in the process of justifying the slavery of Africans, uniting earthly arguments and theological principles. Baltazar Barreira, consecrated by Jesuit chronicles as the "Apostle of Africa," joined the Society of Jesus in 1556. He acted as an evangelizer in Cape Verde, Angola, and Guinea, building churches and converting Africans.

28 Charles R. Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415-1825* (London: Hutchinson, 1977), 228.

29 Silvia Hunold Lara, *Campos da violência: escravos e senhores da Capitania do Rio de Janeiro, 1750-1808* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1988), 41-42.

30 Hebe Maria Mattos, "A escravidão moderna nos quadros do Império português: o Antigo Regime em perspectiva atlântica," in *O Antigo Regime nos trópicos: a dinâmica imperial portuguesa (séculos XVI-XVIII)*, edited by João Fragoso, Maria Fernanda Bicalho, and Maria de Fátima Silva Gouvêa (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2001), 144-145.

31 Roberto Hofmeister Pich, "Religious language and the ideology of black slavery: Notes on Alonso de Sandoval's *De Instauranda Aethiopum Salute*," *Filosofia Unisinos/Unisinos Journal of Philosophy* 18, n.º 3 (2017), 213-226, doi: <https://doi.org/10.4013/fsu.2017.183.13>; Ana Carolina de Carvalho Viotti, "Da obrigação de alimentar os escravos no Brasil colonial," *Estudos Históricos* 32, n.º 66 (2019): 5-32, doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S2178-14942019000100002>

32 Ronaldo Vainfas, *Ideologia e escravidão: os letrados e a sociedade escravista no Brasil colonial* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1986), 100.

Nevertheless, he understood that “everywhere, a slave [...] was the currency of the conquered.”<sup>33</sup> In the seventeenth century, Father Antônio Vieira gave several sermons to slaves on different farms in Bahia, revealing his thoughts on slavery. Like so many other members of religious orders, he severely criticized violence against the enslaved. However, he did not question slavery, contributing thus to legitimizing the slave trade between Brazil and Luanda.<sup>34</sup>

One of the peculiarities of the Benedictines is that they did not produce “manuals,” nor express their opinion, in a public way, on issues such as trafficking or slavery, like the Jesuits did. However, when they arrived in Brazil in the sixteenth century, they quickly appropriated such justifications. The new guidelines were recorded in the minutes of the General Chapters.<sup>35</sup> As in the farms managed by Jesuits, slaves became fundamental pieces on the Benedictine properties, essential for the functioning of the entire productive system and daily life, from production in sugar mills to domestic services and handicraft activities.

When Christianity was implanted in America, all religious orders justified the use of African slaves by the lack of labor force in the colonies. Nonetheless, when appropriate, these explanations were supported by theological and legal principles, as previously stated. Eduardo Hoornaert claims that, in the context of maritime expansions, the Church had become an institution totally reliant on the Portuguese Crown. It is within such logic that religious orders in Brazil had to set up their own support structure in an attempt to become economically independent from the Portuguese State—hence the need to own farms, as the author points out. And, ultimately, “there were no farms without slaves.”<sup>36</sup>

The Order of Saint Benedict was involved in this great expansionist project, being a part of the plans and interests of the Portuguese Crown and the Tridentine Church in the New World. But, unlike other religious orders, Benedictines did not excel in missionary and evangelizing actions. The Benedictine monks who came to Brazil followed a Rule that mainly sought a contemplative life “outside the world.”<sup>37</sup> They shared, however, the idea that the evangelization of African slaves should be part of their monastic routines, without the typical “warrior discourse” of evangelizing orders.

According to Hoornaert, religious orders, in general, when transferred to Portuguese America, came to form part of “the class of large landowners.”<sup>38</sup> Through donations and, later, purchase, they established countless cattle farms and sugar mills, accumulating great wealth. Many friars, including Benedictine monks,<sup>39</sup> bought lands, slaves, and farms at their own name and cost. However, for the author, the treatment given to captives belonging to different orders was quite distinct. The

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33 Luiz Felipe de Alencastro, *The Trade in the Living: The Formation of Brazil in the South Atlantic, Sixteenth to Seventeenth Centuries* (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 2018), 168.

34 Alencastro, *The Trade in the Living*, 183, 229, 448.

35 In an assembly format, the monks met at the headquarters of the Congregation to elect new officials and discuss new guidelines. The results of the debates were recorded in minutes.

36 Eduardo Hoornaert et al., *História da Igreja no Brasil: Ensaio de interpretação a partir do povo. Primeira época* (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 2008), 40.

37 Hoornaert et al., *História*, 56.

38 Hoornaert et al., *História*, 40.

39 Fr. Miguel Arcanjo da Anunciação, *Crônica do Mosteiro de Olinda até 1763* (Recife: Imprensa Oficial, 1940), 116.

slaves who were incorporated into religious associations were considered "of the saints," which meant that they did not belong to a master of flesh and blood, but to the patron saint/protector.<sup>40</sup>

However, what are some of the peculiarities of the Benedictine slave management? The next section will examine other aspects in order to better understand the Christian manorial discourse that helped to lay the foundation of slavery on the properties of the Order of Saint Benedictine.

## 2. More like "Children Than Slaves"

Benedict of Nursia had established in his Rule a conception of community led by an Abbot, whose essence should seek to follow the example of Christ. Therefore, the roles of an Abbot should resemble those of a father. The *Abba* ("Father") should "always observe that principle of the Apostle in which he saith: 'Reprove, entreat, rebuke' (2 Tm 4:2)," that is, merging "gentleness with severity," demonstrating "the severity of the master and the loving affection of a father." The "undisciplined and restless" should be reprimanded harshly, while the "obedient, meek, and patient" should be motivated to progress ever more in virtue. The "negligent and haughty" should be rebuked and punished, and those considered "the wicked and the hard of heart, and the proud and disobedient" should be chastised with "stripes and other bodily punishments, knowing that it is written: 'The fool is not corrected with words' (Prov 29:19)." "Strike thy son with the rod, and thou shalt deliver his soul from death (Prov 23:14)".<sup>41</sup>

Thus, the relationship between family, obedience, and punishment was the basis of the Benedictine community. According to Jorge Souza, the monasteries were spaces that congregated a kind of "brotherhood," a family governed by a spiritual father, an elected *paterfamilias*, the Abbot.<sup>42</sup> Thereby, the legitimation of Benedictine slavery had the peculiarity of being based on the concept of a "big family," in which the captives were "considered" more like "children than slaves," according to the monks themselves.<sup>43</sup> The Benedictine religious ideal gradually incorporated the treatment of slaves, with the purpose of transforming them into passive and useful subjects in the life of the monasteries, through a moralizing discourse about their daily practices.

David Brion Davis had already highlighted the problem surrounding the legitimacy of manorial power and the ideal of servant as a member of the Christian family. According to Davis, this ideal sought to harmonize the notion of spiritual equality and the need for obedience and external authority, which would allow the construction of a model of fraternal relationship between those who were unequal. Thus, the act of violence—so characteristic of slavery—would present itself in

40 Hoornaert et al., *História*, 40.

41 Chapter 2: What Kind of Man the Abbot Ought to Be, in *The Holy Rule of Saint Benedict*.

42 Jorge Victor de Araújo Souza, "Monges negros: trajetórias, cotidiano e sociabilidade dos beneditinos no Rio de Janeiro, século XVIII" (master's thesis, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, 2007), 27.

43 "Livro dos Conselhos do Mosteiro de São Bento de Olinda," July 11, 1870, in "Manuscritos do Arquivo do Mosteiro de São Bento de Olinda," *Revista do Instituto Arqueológico, Histórico e Geográfico Pernambucano* 42, n.º 1948-1949 (1952): 229-231. With the permission of the abbot Fr. Bonifácio Jansen, several series of manuscripts related to the history of the Monastery were transcribed and published in the journal, among them: "Livro dos Conselhos do Mosteiro de São Bento de Olinda" (1793-1875) and "Os Estados do Mosteiro de São Bento de Olinda desde o ano de 1828 até 1893."

a milder form, with a balance in the conception of a friendly (or even benign) servitude, which was rooted in Christian precepts.<sup>44</sup>

This relationship between Christianity, slavery, and “mildness” is easily identified in the writings of nineteenth-century travelers. Many of them visited religious establishments and described the peculiarities of these farms. Several historians and thinkers of Brazilian culture were “seduced” by the fascinating narrative of these chroniclers. Many authors have reproduced—without due empirical investigation—the descriptions and views of these travelers. The Englishman Henry Koster left one of the most important “diaries” on the daily life of slaves on Benedictine properties. He recorded in his book the “excellent” administration of the Jaguaribe farm, located in Pernambuco. When addressing practices of violence, he stated that “corporal punishments are resorted to contrary to the custom of the St. Bento and Carmo estates, and though great cruelties are not often committed.”<sup>45</sup> These words echoed over time and were reproduced by several authors, like the sociologist Gilberto Freyre.

Freyre, who defended the existence of a “soft” slavery, stated that the slaves of Saint Benedict were very well treated by the “monk masters of the *engenho*.” Based on some passages written by Koster, he stated that “mulequinhos” (referring to black children) could play most of the day. The elderly received the necessary care, while the “girls at fourteen and fifteen years of age and boys at seventeen or eighteen” had their marriages established, besides manumission being facilitated for the “diligent.”<sup>46</sup> When comparing the Benedictine administration to that of the Carmelites, Freyre stated that the latter “did not always excel in the good treatment given to slaves.”<sup>47</sup> In *Sobrados e mucambos*, he claimed that Benedictines were, perhaps, “the sweetest slaveholders that our country had.”<sup>48</sup>

Another traveler who certainly influenced Freyre was Tollenare, also mentioned in his books. According to the Frenchman, the “rich Benedictines and the Carmelites” had “good *engenhos* that they managed with great docility and moderation.” According to the chronicler, these “friars” moderated “their needs” and made “their slaves as happy as” possible “in the irons of captivity.” “Every year they release some.”<sup>49</sup>

In fact, the Benedictines built strategies for the “good treatment” of their slaves, but that does not make them “sweet masters.” Everything was part of the manorial logic, impregnated with violence, discipline, and the maximum exploitation of his subordinates. Stuart Schwartz noted that Benedictine properties in Bahia devoted 50 to 60% of their resources to expenditures on slavery (“Roughly 30 percent of expenditures to the purchase of food”). The author also noticed that the rate of slave acquisition had reduced, due to the good living conditions of the enslaved and slavery’s vegetative growth.<sup>50</sup> Schwartz also states that “Benedictine success appears to have been the result of

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44 Davis, *The Problem of Slavery*, 193.

45 Henry Koster, *Travels in Brazil* (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1816), 263.

46 Koster, *Travels*, 263-265.

47 Gilberto Freyre, *Casa-Grande & Senzala* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2000), 422.

48 Freyre, *Sobrados e mucambos*, 605.

49 Louis-François Tollenare, *Notas dominicais* (Recife: Secretaria de Educação e Cultura, 1978), 121-122.

50 Stuart B. Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations in the Formation of Brazilian Society: Bahia, 1550-1835* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 222.

good management, better treatment of slaves resulting in lower mortality and higher fertility rates, combined with reduced expenditures."<sup>51</sup>

This study seeks to contribute to this debate, going beyond the economic analysis proposed by Schwartz, who basically only used triennial reports, which mainly offer information of an administrative nature. In addition to exploring a more diversified documentation, this article aims to analyze changes in slave management throughout the nineteenth century, as a difference with Schwartz who was limited to the colonial period. Issues such as Brazil's independence, debates on the slave trade, pressure on religious orders, and discussions on the "free womb" had a major impact on the Benedictine management "model." These changes will be examined on the following pages.

### 3. "Reprove, Entreat, Rebuke"

Throughout the nineteenth century, the number of monks gradually decreased. Since the end of the eighteenth century, several restrictions were imposed on the country's religious orders, which aimed to prevent the entry of novices, making it difficult to renovate monasteries and convents. The final blow came in 1855, when the Imperial Government decided to prohibit, for an indefinite period, the entry of new candidates to the novitiate. The remaining monks were aging and dying. As a result, their daily needs increasingly depended on the slave arm.<sup>52</sup> Acquisition of new captives was not a recurring practice, making it necessary to build a material and moral apparatus that would ensure the perpetuation and reproduction of available labor. Based on the principles established by the Rule of Saint Benedict and the need to maintain slavery, the Benedictines continually invested in better material and health conditions for their slaves. These practices contributed to the longevity of their slaves and to vegetative growth.

The "Livro de mordomia"<sup>53</sup> (AMSBO, 1828-1835) shows that the Benedictines spent part of their income on food and clothing, as well as to cover other daily needs of the monks and all the slaves on the properties, as Schwartz had already demonstrated. Meat was not part of the daily diet for anyone, including slaves, who had to share the same Rule as their monk-masters.<sup>54</sup> In order to avoid excessive expenses by purchasing food, the Benedictines owned a farm to produce their own subsistence. According to English traveler Henry Koster, the Jaguaribe farm had crops of cassava, corn, and rice, as well as other food to supply the needs of the monks and their slaves. When describing the property, he did not hide his admiration for the management style of the Benedictines.

In addition, the monks encouraged their captives to cultivate small plots of land (*roças*), where they produced food for their livelihood and sold the surplus.<sup>55</sup> This was a common practice throughout Brazil and other parts of America. According to Eleanor Marie Brown (referring to

51 Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations*, 235.

52 Estevão Bettencourt, OSB, "A restauração dos mosteiros beneditinos do Brasil em fins do século XIX," in *Coletânea Tomo II: 400 anos. Mosteiro de São Bento, Rio de Janeiro*, edited by Emanuel de Almeida, OSB (Rio de Janeiro: Lumen Christi, 1991), 11, 137.

53 The stewardship book recorded all daily expenses in the Monastery, such as repairs in physical structure, food, alms, canoe rentals, etc.

54 Chapter 39: Of the Quantity of Food, in *The Holy Rule of Saint Benedict*.

55 Koster, *Travels*, 378.

southern United States and the British Caribbean Islands), this was a strategy of the masters to “‘outsource’ the job of feeding the slaves to the slaves themselves.”<sup>56</sup>

Another recurrent issue in the analyzed documentation is the conditions of the slave quarters (*senzalas*). A concern regarding their conservation and the construction of new structures had become persistent in the management of several Abbots in Olinda. Between 1734 and 1736, the São Bernardo mill had two slave quarters built.<sup>57</sup> At the beginning of the 1740s, the Abbot ordered “a street of slave quarters for the slaves to live in.”<sup>58</sup> In the triennium 1753-1756, four new slave quarters were built in the same mill.<sup>59</sup> In the Goitá mill, ten houses were built for the captives. In Mussurepe, in 1739, the Abbot had the slave house fixed with roof tiles and wood, because it was “ruined.”<sup>60</sup> In Jaguaribe, at the end of the 1750s, “15 houses were built for the slaves to live in.” In the following three years, the Abbot had “houses for the slaves” built. In the period 1757-1760, more new houses were built.<sup>61</sup> However, throughout the nineteenth century, the monks had great difficulties in keeping the slave quarters in good conditions. The costs of operating the mills were very high, in addition to maintaining numerous slaves. Therefore, the housing conditions of the enslaved were precarious or insufficient.

In 1845, Fr. Galdino de S. Ignez (Abbot in the Monastery of Olinda, Pernambuco, between 1842-1845) reported that the situation of slave quarters was unfortunate. In the Mussurepe mill, there were no *senzalas* and the slaves were “exposed to the weather.”<sup>62</sup> In 1866, Fr. Antônio do Patrocínio (Abbot of the Monastery of Olinda between 1863-1866) informed that the refurbishment planned for the Mussurepe slave quarters had to be postponed, as part of the wall was cracked and almost falling. According to the “opinion of some doctors” (as pointed out by the Abbot), the “slave system” used in this mill was “harmful to their health.” The slave houses were located on the side of a mountain, “almost in a circumference and with no air communication inside the houses.” In his words, this format looked more like a greenhouse in the summer, not a place for humans. In the winter, these dwellings turned into very cold pits. According to the monk, over eight years, there was an “extraordinary” increase in illnesses and deaths among the slaves. He stated that the room was a “*espelunca*,”<sup>63</sup> and he hoped his successor would find a healthier place for the slaves to live in.<sup>64</sup>

Apparently, these *senzalas* resembled the models found on different farms and mills throughout Brazil. At the beginning of colonization, these constructions were simple ranches or thatched huts

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56 Eleanor Marie Brown, “On the Evolution of Property Ownership Among Former Slaves, Newly Freedmen,” *gwu Legal Studies Research Paper No. 2016-22* (2016): 101-159, doi: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2799648>

57 Anunciação, *Crônica*, 104.

58 Anunciação, *Crônica*, 116.

59 Anunciação, *Crônica*, 129.

60 Anunciação, *Crônica*, 111.

61 Anunciação, *Crônica*, 118, 125, 133.

62 “Os Estados do Mosteiro de São Bento de Olinda,” 1842-1845, in “Manuscritos do Arquivo,” 288-289.

63 Filthy place, miserable house.

64 “Os Estados do Mosteiro de São Bento de Olinda,” 1842-1845, in “Manuscritos do Arquivo,” 288-289.



(*sapê*). Over the centuries, "they started to be built in *taipa de mão* or *pilão*,<sup>65</sup> covered with channel tiles and divided into several cubicles." When they were not made of *taipa*, they were made of wood. In general, single captives were in "slave quarters without partitions," while couples were in "windowless cubicles."<sup>66</sup> According to Marquese, in the Brazilian Empire, *senzalas* followed a model that aimed to "adjust to paternalism" and its "manorial ideological values." In the farms in Vale do Paraíba (Rio de Janeiro), for example, "slaves were seen as part of the extended family or even as a physical extension of their masters. Therefore, it was necessary to bring the blocks of slave quarters closer to the houses."<sup>67</sup>

In 2001, Brazilian archaeologists, supervised by Cláudia Alves de Oliveira (a researcher at the Federal University of Pernambuco), started an excavation and research project on the former Jaguaribe farm, which belonged to the Benedictine monks.<sup>68</sup> Due to this important work, it was possible to understand more details about the life of the slaves who lived there. Archeologist Fabíola Amaral Jansen da Silva wrote her master's thesis based on the evidence found, highlighting some aspects of the slave quarters on that property. According to her research, the slave quarters in the Jaguaribe farm formed "a large pavilion of 9.20 m x 28.20 m (259.44 m<sup>2</sup>), consisting of seven sets of two cubicles, all of them with different but similar dimensions," that extended "from the main façade, facing northeast, to the posterior façade." Each cell measured about 23.6 m<sup>2</sup>, with evidence indicating that they were ventilated only by an entrance door.<sup>69</sup>

These cells were probably occupied by families from the same household, in order to maintain morality and marital ties according to the Catholic Church's rules. In the words of Fabíola Silva, despite the lack of "a direct view to the rivers that surrounded the farm, the slave quarters were in a privileged position in relation to the position of the other buildings, forming a semicircle."<sup>70</sup>

Another daily issue was concern for the sick. The Rule of Saint Benedict deals with this matter in Chapter 36 ("Of the Sick Brethren"). The Patriarch wrote that the sick should be treated in the mercy of Christ. They should be cared for with patience and without neglect, in a specific space designated for this purpose, under the care of a "God-fearing, diligent, and careful attendant." Benedict of Nursia also wrote that meat should be given to "the sick and to the very weak," so that they could recover more quickly. But as soon as they got better, they had to abstain from meat again, as was customary.<sup>71</sup>

65 This process consists of "the construction of walls with the use of compacted earth in wooden shapes. The earth is being compacted, with the aid of a pestle, approximately every 10 cm, and the shapes are being repositioned, to continue the process," see Portal Virtuhab, "Taipa de Pilão," accessed March 21, 2021, <https://portalvirtuhab.paginas.ufsc.br/taipa-de-pilao/>

66 Robert W. Slenes, *Na senzala, uma flor: Esperanças e recordações na formação da família escrava (Brasil Sudeste, Século XIX)* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1999), 149-175.

67 Rafael de Bivar Marquese, "Revisitando casas-grandes e senzalas: a arquitetura das plantations escravistas americanas no século XIX," *Anais do Museu Paulista: História e Cultura Material* 14, n.º 1 (2006): 51, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0101-47142006000100002>

68 "Engenho Jaguaribe e Acessibilidade," accessed March 21, 2021, <https://engenhोजaguaribe.wordpress.com/>.

69 Fabíola Amaral Jansen da Silva, "O cativo rural colonial: reconstrução arqueológica da senzala da fazenda de São Bento de Jaguaribe, município de Abreu e Lima, Pernambuco" (master's thesis, Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, 2006), 114.

70 Silva, "O cativo rural colonial," 122.

71 Chapter 36: "Of the Sick Brethren," in *The Holy Rule of Saint Benedict*.



Therefore, the Rule was to be applied to all members of the monastic body, including slaves. Thus, in addition to discipline, punishment, and obedience, all “brothers” (monks and the enslaved) were supposed to benefit during difficult times. With this in mind, an infirmary was built for the slaves next to the Olinda Monastery. In 1845, Fr. Galdino reported in his *Estado*<sup>72</sup> that one of the first precautions he took was to improve the “fate” (*sorte*) of the captives who were in the infirmary. The doctor working in this space was not “skilled” and only visited the sick a few times. Faced with this problem, it was necessary to bring a doctor from Recife (a neighboring city and capital of the province) to replace the previous one, whose management resulted in extra expenses. According to the Abbot, this measure ensured a better service to the captives, so they did not die helpless.

According to the doctor consulted by the Abbot, the infirmary for slaves was not appropriate to accommodate the sick, which could even worsen their situation. The monk also pointed out that it was necessary to increase the rationing of the sick with a “meager meal of bread,” as the food was often not enough for everyone.<sup>73</sup> A concern with death was also documented in the Abbot’s report. There are records of spending on the *viaticum* of slaves, a sacrament designed to prepare the dying for the “final union of the elect with God, through Christ.”<sup>74</sup> Thus, slaves were helped both at the time of death and after their death. In 1845, Fr. Galdino reported that masses were held in memory of the slaves who had died in his triennium, as were other suffrages.<sup>75</sup> The Sacristy books in the Monastery of Olinda confirm this information, providing evidence on “masses for the souls of the slaves and the rent of a coffin for their burial.”<sup>76</sup>

In 1857, the municipality of Olinda asked the monastery for permission to use some land belonging to the Order. It was to be used as a cemetery, due to a cholera epidemic that caused several deaths in the region. The monks accepted the proposal, with the following conditions: 1. Six catacombs free of charge for the religious of the Monastery; 2. Free grave for the slaves and monks (servants) of the Monastery; and 3. Twenty thousand *reis* annually.<sup>77</sup> Burying the dead was one of the principles stipulated by Saint Benedict in his Rule, an integral part of Chapter 4 entitled “The Instruments of Good Works.”<sup>78</sup>

It is clear from these sources that there was a permanent concern of the monks to offer basic conditions of subsistence, health, housing, and after-death assistance to their slaves. However, there were countless difficulties in maintaining the quality of these “obligations” established in the Rule of Saint Benedict, which had to be extended to all members of the community. Not all the monks followed meticulously the sacred rule; others at least tried, but lacked structure, institutional support, and, of course, money.

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72 Report produced by the Abbot at the end of his government, which lasted three years.

73 “Os Estados do Mosteiro de São Bento de Olinda,” 1842-1845, in “Manuscritos do Arquivo,” 288-289.

74 Arnaldo Schüller, *Dicionário Enciclopédico de Teologia* (Canoas: Editora ULBRA, 2002), 477.

75 “Os Estados do Mosteiro de São Bento de Olinda,” 1842-1845, in “Manuscritos do Arquivo,” 283.

76 Piratininga Jr., *Dietário dos Escravos*, 37.

77 Processos escravos, AMSBO, March 23, 1857.

78 Chapter 4: The Instruments of Good Works, in *The Holy Rule of Saint Benedict*.

## 4. Ungrateful, Lazy, and Rowdy

This part of the article aims to demonstrate that the Benedictine "sweetness" was similar in many ways to the paternalism found on other slave properties. It reflects on the reactions to "good treatment" and manorial strategies to keep the enslaved within the management "model" built institutionally over the centuries. It also examines the hidden face of insubordination, which does not explicitly appear in the Benedictine paternalistic discourse.

The study does not claim that escapes and other forms of resistance shook the Benedictine slave management system. However, these "tiny" maneuvers helped the enslaved to face the harsh routine of slavery, opening spaces for negotiation, small conquests, and personal/familiar favors. A good example to illustrate this argument is the fact that the Congregation advised monasteries to sell slaves considered as "incorrigible."<sup>79</sup> The persistence in "confirming" this orientation in almost every General Chapter of the nineteenth century demonstrates that "insubordination" was not to be tolerated, but it was certainly something that was present in the institution's internal debates.

Between 1812 and 1869, we located thirty-two captives fleeing the Benedictine properties of Pernambuco. Some of them were recaptured, others maintained an escape routine, while others were sold and change in ownership and even in province took place.<sup>80</sup> In 1812, captives João and Ladislau displayed a "terrible conduct" and would often flee. Therefore, the Council decided to sell them.<sup>81</sup> José Hermano (1818) was considered "incorrigible in his vices." He was a fugitive for a long time and, when captured again, he was sent to Bahia. However, the Council decided that it would be best to sell him and, with the money they receive, buy another slave. Some of these escapes were published in the newspapers, as it was common in the Brazilian slave society.

Other slaves did not run away, but they disturbed order and discipline on the Benedictine properties. In 1794, slave Luiz was sold due to his "bad habits."<sup>82</sup> Slave Francisco tried to kill the overseers twice and for that reason he was also sold.<sup>83</sup> But the list of "incorrigible" captives is even longer. For example, Felipe (1813)<sup>84</sup> and Marcolino (1814), among other slaves, had to be sold due to their "incorrigible" character, some of them to "out of the land."<sup>85</sup>

It is important to understand that not all cases of insubordination and escape were recorded. But archival documents reveal that these were common practices. When they exceeded the limits tolerated by Benedictine paternalism, the matter was referred to the Council or registered in other official documents, such as the *Estados*. When an Abbot included these cases in the triennial report, he sought to justify the difficulties faced during his administration to the superiors of the Congregation. A similar case was reported by Fr. Galdino also, who recorded in detail the behavior of slaves, emphasizing that he had inherited a general framework of insubordination from his predecessors.

79 "Capítulo Geral de 1829," AMSBO, Livro 1829-1848.

80 Information extracted from the database built from the crossing of sources ("Processos escravos," "Os Estados," "Manuscritos de Arquivo").

81 "Livro dos Conselhos," March 10, 1812, in "Manuscritos do Arquivo," 157.

82 "Livro dos Conselhos," January 13, 1794, in "Manuscritos do Arquivo," 128-129.

83 "Livro dos Conselhos," February 20, 1844, in "Manuscritos do Arquivo," 181.

84 "Livro dos Conselhos," February 25, 1813, in "Manuscritos do Arquivo," 158.

85 "Livro dos Conselhos," February 25, 1813; March 30, 1814; November 2, 1818, in "Manuscritos do Arquivo," 158, 259, 165-166.

In 1822, the *Mordomo* (“Steward”)<sup>86</sup> in the Monastery of Olinda stated that the slaves “lived in a very insubordinate way.” One reason for this was that some “farmer priests” were protecting favorite slaves who should have been punished. In addition, they received runaway slaves from other farms, thus allowing the captives to choose the property on which they wished to live.<sup>87</sup> There was an evident conflict between Benedictine institutional paternalism and interpersonal relations involving enslaved people and monks. When they moved from one property to manage another, the paternalistic ties that benefited everyone were broken. Thus, many captives fled to a different “slavery,” one they considered more favorable to their interests. But there were also those who wished to break definitively the “irons” of captivity.

In some historical moments, the enslaved perceived that there were better opportunities for them to achieve a definitive escape. This might explain the repeated escapes and “insubordinations” of the Benedictine captives, given that between 1817 and 1824, Brazil experienced a period of great political and social turbulence. In Pernambuco, two great revolutions caused disturbances in various parts of the captaincy/province, involving various sectors of the society, including farmers. The Revolution of 1817 and the Confederation of Ecuador (1824) were the main upheavals against absolutism in the country in this period, against D. João VI and D. Pedro I, respectively.<sup>88</sup>

Still in this context, the process of independence of Brazil (1820-1822) had a direct impact on the organizational structure of the Order of Saint Benedict. When celebrating the General Chapter of 1825, the Portuguese Congregation<sup>89</sup> omitted the election of Brazilian prelates, leaving them to occupy their positions in an interim manner. The political tension between the two countries certainly left the Portuguese monks in a complicated situation, anticipating an inevitable separation. As the Brazilian monks had a long-standing interest in autonomy, in 1827, after the Pope’s recognition, they asked for the support of Emperor D. Pedro I to found their own Congregation, and succeeded.<sup>90</sup> Thus, between 1817 and 1827, the Benedictine management “model” was shaken due to issues that went beyond the limits of the monks’ local power.

It was also at this time that the Quilombo de Malunguinho<sup>91</sup> reached its peak. According to Marcus Carvalho, “the expansion of the quilombo is one of the results of the fights among white people between 1817 and 1824, which opened loopholes in the system, facilitating the escape of

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86 “According to the law, he will be the buyer and spender, both of the kitchen and of everything else, that belongs to the mills, farms, etc.,” “Livro dos Conselhos,” March 1822, in “Manuscritos do Arquivo,” 169.

87 “Livro dos Conselhos,” May 14, 1822, in “Manuscritos do Arquivo,” 169-170.

88 Flavio José Gomes Cabral, “Instabilidades políticas em Pernambuco no tempo da Independência do Brasil (1817-1822),” *Anos 90*, n.º 27 (2020): e2020007, doi: <https://doi.org/10.22456/1983-201X.90820>

89 The monastic reform was completed in 1569, bringing together all Benedictine monasteries in Portugal in a single Congregation, based in the city of Tibães, where the Abbot General lived. With the creation of the first monasteries in Brazil (1580-1595) and later brought together in a “Province” (with headquarters in Salvador, Bahia), the Luso-Brazilian Congregation was formed. The “Province” had a certain autonomy, but remained under the authority of the Abbot General and the Chapters; see José Lohr Endres, *A Ordem de São Bento no Brasil: quando Província, 1582-1827* (Salvador: Beneditina, 1980), 26-29.

90 Endres, *A Ordem de São Bento*, 141-142.

91 Quilombo: name given to communities formed by escaped slaves in Portuguese America/Brazil. Its inhabitants were called *quilombolas*. In the Spanish-American world, these settlements were known by several names, such as *cumbes*, *palenques*, *mainels*, etc. Its inhabitants were called *cimarrones* or *marrons*. See Manolo Florentino and Márcia Amantino, “Uma morfologia dos quilombos nas Américas, séculos XVI-XIX,” *História, Ciências, Saúde-Manguinhos* 19, n.º Supl. 1 (2012): Note 1, 294, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/S0104-59702012000500014>

slaves." It was located close to the main rural properties of the Benedictines, "beginning almost at the gates of the twin cities of Recife and Olinda, in the hills and forests of the suburbs to the northwest of them." Carvalho also indicates that "the mocambos were spread throughout the forests that scattered between the mills in the zone of the north forest, known by the name of the Catucá forest."<sup>92</sup>

Certainly, this almost uninterrupted period of political and social unrest had created numerous difficulties for the monks to manage their farms and mills, many of them far from the Monastery where they lived. Only in 1831 did the Benedictines of Brazil hold their first General Chapter. In that same year, the enslaved Emiliano and Luiz, Bernardino, Maria da Anunciação (his wife) and their young son fled the properties of Pernambuco.<sup>93</sup>

Later on, when the Order of Saint Benedict of Brazil was already consolidated and restructured, new reports of "insubordination" were revealed. Abbot Fr. Galdino also recorded in his triennial report of 1845 the escape routine of slaves from various properties.<sup>94</sup> Many captives took advantage of the internal disputes between the Abbots of neighboring monasteries to seek the protection of monks who offered special treatment. For example, captives João dos Santos and João Antônio fled the Goitá mill (in the province of Pernambuco) towards the neighboring province (Paraíba), resorting to the protection of another Abbot, Fr. Antônio de S. Bento Nunes dos Reis. The escape was directed towards the Maraú mill, located within approximately 130 km from Goitá.

According to Fr. Galdino, slaves fled due to whatever cause. Among the captives who fled "without a reason" was Brizado, known for his "bad deeds." According to Fr. Galdino, he ran away after being "beaten" to correct his behavior. The Abbot argued that the captive had treated him with disrespect in front of other people, behaving in an "insolent" way. Like the others mentioned above, Brizado also left for Paraíba, in search, perhaps, of a "fairer" captivity. In this very report, Fr. Galdino registered five other fugitives: Virgínio, Bernardo, Thomé, Boaventura, and Estevão.<sup>95</sup>

Through his account, it is evident that his conception of "good treatment" included "fair" punishment, an idea not always shared by the enslaved. From his perspective of slaveholder and religious authority, hitting a captive was part of his right and duty as master and "father" (*Abba*) of the monastery. Everything seems to indicate that Brizado had a different understanding from that of the monk.

Another emblematic case helps to illustrate the manorial view and the unexpected reactions of enslaved people, who appropriated the "good treatment" offered by the monk-masters. In 1853, Fr. José de S. Júlia Botelho, administrator of the Mussurepe sugar mill, reported that, despite having given special attention to slave Júlio (who was facing a serious illness), the captive responded with ingratitude and disrespect. Despite being "lazy," "disorderly," and a "thief," the monk had granted the captive a piece of land to produce for his livelihood. However, due to his bad behavior, the monk decided to punish him with one of the most characteristic instruments of the violence of slavery: the spanking paddle (*palmatória*). Júlio received twelve blows to the hands. In response, the slave decided to flee to the neighboring province (Paraíba), where there were other

92 Marcus Carvalho, "Rumores e rebeliões: estratégias de resistência escrava no Recife, 1817-1848," *Tempo* 3, n.º 6 (1998): 7.

93 "Escravos fugidos," *Diário de Pernambuco*, January 5, 1831, <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00011611/01068/4j?search=diario%3dpernambuco>; "Escravos fugidos," November 24, 1831, <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00011611/01463/3j?search=diario+%3dpernambuco>.

94 "Os Estados do Mosteiro de São Bento de Olinda," 1842-1845, in "Manuscritos do Arquivo," 291-293.

95 "Os Estados do Mosteiro de São Bento de Olinda," 1842-1845, in "Manuscritos do Arquivo," 293.

Benedictine properties.<sup>96</sup> The monk asked the Abbot of the Monastery of Paraíba not to give protection to the slave, as he intended to punish him exemplarily, which would serve as a lesson for “other useless slaves like him,” helping thus to moralize the captives.

Several pertinent elements can be extracted from this document, mainly on the Benedictine manorial character, the role of “good treatment,” as well as the actions/reactions presented by the slaves. Not an “institutional” character, standardized and promoted by the Order’s general chapters, but the most “pure” and direct form of paternalism, between a master (of flesh and blood) and a slave. In a way, Fr. José felt obliged to protect the captive. The fragility of the slave’s health and, perhaps, the desire to “correct” his “vices” must have led the monk to embrace such a difficult undertaking. However, Júlio did not live up to Fr. José’s expectations, as he maintained or disguised a huge list of “defects”: laziness, vagrancy, stealing, villainy, and disorder.

Júlio, who presented himself (in the monk’s view) as the ideal case for a paternalistic mission, played all the time with the weapons offered by his masters. The land (*roça*), granted to all who wished to work, was one of the fundamental instruments to establish a control policy by the Congregation and was justified as part of the “good treatment” offered to the enslaved. With this, Júlio was expected to behave in a loyal, obedient manner and be a good servant in order to receive new benefits.

Júlio, like many others, accepted (at least temporarily) the Christian doctrine and punishment—also important elements in the Benedictine slave management. Nevertheless, when he had the opportunity (created by himself), he did not think twice before leaving his masters. From the monks’ point of view, it was all just staging, a trampoline to achieve his goal: escape.<sup>97</sup> As attested by sources of the time, Júlio’s case was not an exception: for example, slaves Cipriano (1852) and Cosme (1854) also fled in these same years.<sup>98</sup>

Even at the risk of suffering physical punishment, being transferred to another property, or even being sold, many slaves preferred to take a chance on the unpredictable escape. In some historical moments, the enslaved took advantage of internal disputes, local conflicts, and contexts marked by national events. In 1864, when Brazil declared war on Paraguay, there was a significant increase in the flight of slaves across the country. According to Dale Torston Graden, many of them fled with the objective of being enlisted in the Army. The increase in escapes and the climate of tension in some locations had alerted the Parliament, who feared that possible slave insurrections would be triggered, as had occurred in Demerara (1823), Bahia (1835), and other regions.<sup>99</sup>

Some slaves from the Congregation were also part of these “statistics,” seeking military enlistment as an escape strategy. On January 14, 1864, slave Cassiano fled the Monastery of Olinda to join the Companhia dos Voluntários da Pátria (a platoon of volunteers for the Paraguayan War), under

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96 “Carta ao Abade da Paraíba,” *Processos escravos*, AMSBO, 1831-1871, Livro 160.

97 Alicia Duhá Lose et al., *Dietário (1582-1815) do Mosteiro de São Bento da Bahia: edição diplomática* (Salvador: Editora da Universidade Federal da Bahia, 2009), 312-313, 329. This book, with information about the life of several monks, presents some reports that reveal how some Benedictines excessively punished the captives who did not follow their commands.

98 “Escravos fugidos,” *Diário de Pernambuco*, February 27, 1852, <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00011611/04429/4x?search=diario+%3dpernambuco>; “Escravos fugidos,” July 24, 1854, <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00011611/01513/4x?search=cosme>.

99 Dale Torston Graden, *From Slavery to Freedom in Brazil: Bahia, 1835-1900* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 68-72.

the assumed name of João Francisco das Chagas.<sup>100</sup> The same fate was chosen by captive Silvério, who "left" the Mussurepe mill in 1865. Like Cassiano, he also enlisted himself in the Army, to "serve in the war theater." It is important to highlight that Silvério was one of the slaves who benefited from the Benedictines' "good treatment." On June 19, 1863, his request for "free" manumission was approved by the Council. However, the decision stipulated one condition: he should work as a slave for another three years. Apparently, he preferred to take a chance in the War.<sup>101</sup>

In this same historical context, slave Cirino was sent to the Monastery of Bahia, as he, despite being "disorderly and a source of insubordination among his partners," was subject to amendment.<sup>102</sup> Having fled months before, he was described as "very ladino"<sup>103</sup> in an advertisement of the *Diário de Pernambuco* newspaper. The newspaper also mentioned that he also used another name:<sup>104</sup> Salviano.<sup>105</sup> Of course, not all fugitives were sold, as there was always hope for "correction." For example, between 1864 and 1869, slaves João Damasceno, Benedicto, Pascoal, Laurentino, Tito, and José had also fled the property. The latter, of 18 years of age, had taken "all the clothes he had." According to the newspaper, as he was a servant (*criado*) of the Abbot, "he had many clothes and was therefore treated well."<sup>106</sup>

In this context, more specifically from 1868 onwards, abolitionist debates gained momentum. Several projects were written, proposing gradual solutions to the problem of slavery. Brazil was lagging behind in this debate and had to wait for the end of the Paraguayan War to implement its first anti-slavery law (after 1850). Nevertheless, the Benedictines were the first institution to create a gradual emancipation mechanism in the country. In fact, they were the first to enact a "free womb" law, becoming pioneers in the emancipationist process. On May 3, 1866, the Benedictine Congregation of Brazil decided, in a General Chapter, to give freedom to all children born to enslaved women from that date on.<sup>107</sup> According to historians and sources of the time, this act might have contributed to intensify debates about the future of the Free Womb Law.<sup>108</sup> Several newspapers, supporters of the abolitionist cause, and intellectuals of the time also highlighted in

100 Arquivo Público Estadual Jordão Emerenciano (APEJE), Assuntos Eclesiásticos, Vol. 12, April 1, 1865, f. 55.

101 APEJE, Assuntos Eclesiásticos, Vol. 12, June 19, 1863.

102 "Os Estados do Mosteiro de São Bento de Olinda," 1863-1866, in "Manuscritos do Arquivo," 347.

103 Smart, cunning.

104 In the "Estados," we find reference to other captives who changed their name, a fact recognized by the monks. For example, Matilde, "who changed his name to Micaela" or Luiza, "later she was called Tereza;" see Anunicação, *Crônica*, 119, 130. However, historiography has already shown that it was common for a slave to change his name during his flight, with the aim of pretending to be free or freed. Florentino and Amantino, "Uma morfologia," 270; Carvalho, "Rumores e rebeliões," 8.

105 "Escravos fugidos," *Diário de Pernambuco*, August 23, 1866, <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00011611/11050/7x?search=mosteiro>.

106 "Escravos fugidos," *Diário de Pernambuco*, January 10, 1864, [http://memoria.bn.br/DocReader/DocReader.aspx?bib=029033\\_04&pesq=Br.%20galdino&pagfis=10419](http://memoria.bn.br/DocReader/DocReader.aspx?bib=029033_04&pesq=Br.%20galdino&pagfis=10419); "Escravos fugidos," April 18, 1865, <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00011611/10645/7x?search=olinda>; "Escravos fugidos," July 21, 1866, <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00011611/11023/3x?search=diario+%3dpernambuco>; "Escravos fugidos," January 18, 1867, April 21, 1869, <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00011611/11821/7x?search=diario+%3dpernambuc>.

107 "Capítulo Geral," AMSBO, Livro 1848-1866, May 3, 1866.

108 Sylvana Maria Brandão de Vasconcelos, *Ventre livre, mãe escrava: a reforma social de 1871 em Pernambuco* (Recife: Editora Universitária da Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, 1996), 48.



their writings and speeches the “remarkable” behavior of the Benedictine monks. According to these authors, this measure should have been imitated by other citizens.<sup>109</sup>

However, this measure must be understood as part of a strategy to control former slaves who were released in mass in the 1860s. It was neither a “benevolent” nor a patriotic act. These measures were also a way for the Benedictines to respond to pressure from the Government and the Parliament, who were very critical of religious orders that owned slaves.<sup>110</sup> The last act, applauded even by Emperor Pedro II, was carried out one day after the enactment of the Free Womb Law, on September 29, 1871. The Benedictines, nationwide, determined the release of all their captives (about 1,500) spread over five provinces (Pernambuco, Paraíba, Rio de Janeiro, Bahia, and São Paulo).<sup>111</sup> As the last card of their “good treatment” policy, former slaves were expected to remain on the old properties, working according to the familiar rules of Benedictine paternalism, now in a new guise.

Nevertheless, as reports from the 1880s demonstrate, the former captives refused to maintain the old relations, not accepting the mandonism and the new “rules” imposed on them in their new condition.<sup>112</sup> Many abandoned the land, rejecting the old title of “children,” so often repeated by their former masters. In fact, all these cases and reports demonstrate that there were different forms of “insubordination.” In addition to escapes, there were other, less visible, “hidden” reactions, marked by daily acts of “antidiscipline.”<sup>113</sup> The report prepared by Fr. Galdino (1842-1845) contains other elements that contribute to a better understanding of the general behavior of the slaves of Saint Benedict. The “tone” used by the Abbot is quite revealing, and very much resembles that of the lay manorial elite, while also showing many peculiarities, impregnated by religious morality, corporatism, as well as internal disputes about moral power over the enslaved.<sup>114</sup> In his words, “slavery” on the Benedictine properties had gone off the “rails.” The Abbot claimed that among the captives “the uses and customs” of “former slaves” had disappeared. Religious education (so “severe and respectful”) was abandoned, replaced by “the most unrestrained license and all vices,” practices that were passed on from parents to children.

Even the “state of marriage” came to be viewed with disgust by both men and women, with a significant reduction in its numbers. The few marriages that were celebrated were preceded by concubinage, a practice experienced by most enslaved people. Another problem the Abbot mentioned was prostitution. According to Fr. Galdino, this was a situation lived by many female young slaves, who sought to support themselves and to dress “more comfortably.” As he explained, this would constitute one of the main reasons that led many mothers to despise their children, even to “enjoy their death.” Despite the “good treatment” offered by the monks, the enslaved continued

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109 “A emancipação: breves considerações” (Bahia: Typ. Constitucional, 1871), 23-24, <http://www2.senado.leg.br/bdsf/handle/id/174448>; “Carta aos fazendeiros e commerciantes fluminenses sobre o elemento servil, ou, Refutação do parecer do Sr. Conselheiro Christiano Benedicto Ottoni ácerca do mesmo assumpto” (Rio de Janeiro: Typ. Nacional, 1871), 39, <http://www2.senado.leg.br/bdsf/handle/id/174461>.

110 Molina, *A morte da tradição*.

111 “Revista diaria (Bens dos conventos),” *Diario de Pernambuco*, July 29, 1869, <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00011611/11902/1x?search=diario+%3dpernambuco>.

112 “Os Estados do Mosteiro de São Bento de Olinda,” 1884-1884, in “Manuscritos do Arquivo,” 392.

113 Expression used by Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 18.

114 “Os Estados do Mosteiro de São Bento de Olinda,” 1842-1845, in “Manuscritos do Arquivo,” 281-295.



to bypass vigilance and take advantage of the weaknesses of the Benedictine "model," practicing "orgies," polygamy, and going out at night to find lovers and partners of misfortune, having fun to the sound of the drums ("bataques"), as described by Fr. Galdino himself in his report, which highlighted his unsuccessful attempts to combat such practices.<sup>115</sup>

## Conclusions

Historians have paid little attention to the strategies of the Benedictines as slave owners, often limiting themselves to reproducing the myth of "good treatment" and their almost "heroic" role in the context of emancipation. In the minds of many authors dedicated to study, the history of the Church, religious orders and their agents were often prevented from carrying out more forceful actions in defense of the enslaved. According to these scholars, the Church needed to adapt to each context, especially when there was no moral condemnation of slavery. Almost all authors highlight the important role of the Church at decisive moments, such as the abolition period. In general, properties managed by members of religious institutions were often considered less violent, less traumatic, with less "slavery."

The Order of Saint Benedict lived with slavery throughout its history and viewed it from different perspectives. There were efforts to highlight good management practices, emphasizing the provision of a place to sleep, food, and vegetables for the enslaved. But there were also negative aspects, such as negligent monks or disputes over power and paternalism that favored "this" or "that" slave over others. Nevertheless, contrary to what we might imagine, the "good treatment" given to slaves did not guarantee Benedictines "peace in the *senzalas*." An analysis of documents of the Order of Saint Benedict has evidenced that escapes were constant and complaints against the enslaved were present in several reports made by the Abbots. In addition, other confrontations between slaves and monk-masters demonstrate that corporal and psychological punishments were common practices on the Benedictine properties.

Cases of slaves like Júlio, Brizido, Cassiano, and others described in this article indicate that, even in the face of control mechanisms based on the most rigorous system of domination (Christianity), they knew how to bypass manorial strategies and deceive their "protectors." They used the weapons they had at hand, small daily maneuvers, a certain "trampoline" art, as Michel de Certeau would say, that can be associated "with the acrobatics of the mountebank and his art of jumping on the trampoline." For Certeau, "in these combatants' stratagems, there is a certain art of placing one's blows, a pleasure in getting around the rules of a constraining space. We see the tactical and joyful dexterity of the mastery of a technique."<sup>116</sup>

It became clear, throughout the text, that the "benevolent" and "benign" practices of the Benedictines had to adapt to the circumstances, the pressures of the government and civil society, and, of course, to the corporate needs of the Congregation. In the mid-nineteenth century, changes in treatment were made evident by Abbot Fr. Galdino, who did not spare any ink of his quill. According to him, food, health, and house care were neglected by his predecessors who abandoned religious discipline and doctrine. As a reaction to the "insubordination" and "incorrigible"

115 "Os Estados do Mosteiro de São Bento de Olinda," 1842-1845, in "Manuscritos do Arquivo," 281-295.

116 Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 18.

acts of the captives, the monks attributed to the enslaved “qualifications” that reveal the limits of the management “model” and the “good treatment” strategy. Those who did not live up to the monks’ expectations were called tramps, lazy people, thieves, and worthless.

Undoubtedly, masters and enslaved people attributed quite different meanings to the benefits and favors available. Many slaves did not accept being physically punished or losing any of the benefits gained/granted. In addition, no matter how “sweet” the masters were, the bitter taste of slavery was impossible to forget; it remained always present in the life of slaves, even among the most peaceful and orderly. The bitter taste of captivity could not be erased with long-term prizes and promises in exchange for blind and unconditional obedience.

Even when the promise was freedom, mistrust, threats, and insecurity prevailed among the enslaved even after changing their condition. Undoubtedly, the idea of benevolence, good treatment, and mild/gentle slavery was always constructed from the master’s perspective. The slaves reacted for “whatever reason” in order to shape this perspective and to force new concessions.

This paternalistic perspective is not quite different from the vision promoted by the president of the Fundação Palmares or the tourists who visited the old slave farm in the United States. There will always be people capable of seeing positive aspects in slavery and in the “good treatment” performed by some of the masters. In these times of negationism, historians will always have important “opportunities” to counter such a persistent and recurring fallacy today: “Was slavery not so bad?”

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