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Uses of Money in the Early Days of Colonial Brazil: The Coins and their Stories

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Introduction- What history of colonial period Brazil can coins, medals, and decorations tell? Could it tell us more than Official History has offered? What memory can we preserve or rescue?

Carlos Drummond de Andrade, in his book *Claro Enigma*, when referring to memory, tells us that finished things, much more than beautiful, yes, of course, must remain.[1] As Drummond's poem suggests, coins preserve memories, purposes, rescues homelands, physical places, mental places. This small but powerful object that has existed for over two thousand and five hundred years[2] emanates power, disseminates intentions, reveals cultures, and identities. These same identities and cultural history that, decoded in the choices of the signs of power (Chartier, 1990: 220), reveal themselves in monetary iconography. For that matter, Karl-Joachim Hölkeskamp[3] explains that cultural memories need spaces and places to happen, not only physically but also rituals, festivals, commemorative dates, images, and texts. And all these places, all these cultural manifestations, somehow, are displayed in coins, they are in the coins. Jacques Le Goff (2003) also believes that memory is a crucial element of what is understood by identity, whether individual or collective, and the search for identity is one of the essential activities of individuals and society itself.

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USESOFMONEYINTHEEARLYDAYSOFCOLONIALBRAZILTHECOINSANDTHEIRSTORIES

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Uses of Money in the Early Days of Colonial Brazil: The Coins and their Stories

Vagner Carvalheiro Porto [α] & Juliana Figueira da Hora [σ]

What memory loves, remains eternal

Adélia Prado

I. Introduction

What history of colonial period Brazil can coins, medals, and decorations tell? Could it tell us more than Official History has offered? What memory can we preserve or rescue?

Carlos Drummond de Andrade, in his book *Claro Enigma*, when referring to memory, tells us that finished things, much more than beautiful, yes, of course, must remain.[1] As Drummond's poem suggests, coins preserve memories, purposes, rescues homelands, physical places, mental places. This small but powerful object that has existed for over two thousand and five hundred years[2] emanates power, disseminates intentions, reveals cultures, and identities. These same identities and cultural history that, decoded in the choices of the signs of power (Chartier, 1990: 220), reveal themselves in monetary iconography. For that matter, Karl-Joachim Hölkeskamp[3] explains that cultural memories need spaces and places to happen, not only physically but also rituals, festivals, commemorative dates, images, and texts. And all these places, all these cultural manifestations, somehow, are displayed in coins, they are in the coins. Jacques Le Goff (2003) also believes that memory is a crucial element of what is understood by identity, whether individual or collective, and the search for identity is one of the essential activities of individuals and society itself.

Coins are born metallic, round[4], and is produced by hand, hammered into one fixed and one movable die, with images on the obverse (heads) and reverse (tails) sides. It is an object that combines all the functions of money, i. e.: it serves as a trading instrument, as a means of payment, a measure of value, and a means of accumulating wealth (Florenzano, 2004: p. 69-70). That is, coins, in its early days, emerges as universal money. Over the centuries, in addition to monetary, economic, and military functions, coins were used as a vehicle for political instrumentalization (Carlan and Funari, 2012), with images of kings, emperors, local leaders, and laudatory and glorifying inscriptions mainly on the obverses., On the reverse, there were scenes of prominent agricultural activities, peculiar animals, protective deities, architectural structures, and other elements and intentions that transcended time and can be seen in recent monetary productions.

Writing about the use of coins and medals as propaganda, Humphrey Sutherland (1983) presents two important discussions about the functions of coins: (1) the above-mentioned purpose about the two roles of coins: economic and as propaganda, the former more important than the latter; and (2) and the dissemination of messages and ideas to ancient peoples through monetary iconography as a practice profoundly different from the modern concept of propaganda (Sutherland 1983, p. 73-74).

Coins were initially minted to enable economic trades, tax collection, and the payment of soldiers, a characteristic very evident in the first coins minted by Rome (Porto e Cruz, in press). However, throughout Antiquity and the Medieval and Modern periods, the issue of propaganda became an integral part of monetary production. Many emperors, for example, gathered coins in circulation from particular places and re-minted them with their own representations, since they had to reinforce and legitimize their political status (Duncan-Jones 1995, p. 212).

Sutherland's second idea states that a series of mistakes in studies of monetary iconography is the

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[1] ANDRADE, Carlos Drummond. *Claro Enigma*. Afterword Samuel Titan Jr., 1st ed., São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2012.

[2] It is believed that the coin was invented in Lydia, Asia Minor, around the 7th century BC and was quickly appropriated by the Greeks (Cf. Florenzano, 2004, p. 67)

[3] According to Gisele Oliveira Ayres Barbosa (2017), Hölkeskamp (2004) uses the concepts of "cultural memory" by Jan Assmann (2006) and "places of memory" by Pierre Nora (1992) (cf. Barbosa, p. 37).

[4] However, there are monetiform objects with different shapes from the round coin, such as coins shaped like animals (for example, the proto-coins in the shape of a dolphin from ancient Olbia), or agricultural tools, from the Eastern world, for example, or square coins like those of ancient Bactria.

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result of the misuse of the word "propaganda". According to the author, "propaganda" as a modern concept means "the systematic dissemination of false report with the pretence of truth" (Sutherland 1983, p. 74). A strategy used by totalitarian governments, such as the Nazi party during World War II, it has acquired a highly pejorative meaning.

The idea of "propaganda" in Antiquity came from the Latin word *propagare*, which had two meanings: in the metaphorical sense "to procreate" and the figurative sense "to extend, expand, spread" (Sutherland 1983, p. 74). Sutherland argues that the spread of "false propaganda" would not be possible, since coins would be used as a means of transmitting the emperor's conquests, a kind of self-justification, which would pass through a "filter" symbolized by the population of the Empire, which could judge the veracity of the information.

Academic debate around the concept of propaganda involved numismatists, historians, and archaeologists and was characterized by different approaches throughout the 20th century (Porto and Cruz, in press). With the influence of new terminologies and meanings that emerged from the creation of mass media in order to disseminate information, such as the press, cinema, radio, and, later, television, many authors appropriated the modern concept of propaganda. The term was introduced in studies about coins and medals from older periods, including from Portugal and colonial Brazil, focus of our analysis.

When Portuguese settlers arrived in Brazil[5], their notion of money was quite different from the natives. The Portuguese brought with their imaginary God, a taste for wonder and mystery (Roy, 1974), a fascination "almost inseparable from travel literature in the era of the great discoveries" (Holanda, 1959, p. 3), and also the dream of *Eldorado*. The European economic worldview was based on mercantilism, metallism, and fiduciary money[6] of coins. Therefore, it was very different from the notion of value of the first inhabitants of this territory, ruled by the magical-religious aspects of their culture. These values were much more related to honor, heredity, and reciprocity.[7] The forms of trade between the indigenous people before the arrival of the Portuguese were made in those terms. For the indigenous people, the notion of value was understood in its pre-cabraline[8] forms in which colored feathers, *muiraquitãs* (amulets made of jadeite or nephrite), pottery pots, as well as cocoa seeds, among others, were linked to the social, religious, and cultural values of their society. On the other hand, for the Europeans that arrived in Brazil prevailed mercantile monetization.. In this case, trades carried out between the Portuguese and indigenous people – known as *escambo*[9] – taught in textbooks, makes no sense.

These trades characterizes the natives as naive or even foolish, people who are content with trinkets such as small mirrors or other utensils that the Portuguese deceitfully gave them. Neither this nor that. Among the Europeans, mercantilist values prevailed, as we said; among the indigenous peoples, connected to the magical-religious sphere in which collective exchanges should prevail, the exchanged artifacts should be objects of prestige (rather than exchanges out of necessity, which characterized capitalist exchanges).

About the arrival of the Portuguese, it is interesting to mention a very important coin that was certainly well protected in the fleet led by Pedro Álvares Cabral when he arrived in Porto Seguro. Known as *O Português* (The Portuguese), this was the largest gold coin ever minted in the western world (Amato, Neves and Russo, 2004). The piece weighed 35.5 grams and praised King Dom Manuel I (1495-1521), ruler of the most powerful nation of the Age of Discovery. Countries like Holland, Poland, and Denmark sought to emulate these coins that became known as "Portugaloids". Manufactured just like the Portuguese originals, their use and circulation facilitated trade between the Iberian region and northern Europe. The coin's reverse displayed the Latin inscription *In hoc signo vinces* (under this sign you will win), which could be seen in Portuguese-Brazilian coins until the Proclamation of the Republic in 1889 (Galas and Gallas, 2007).

At the beginning of Brazilian colonization, besides the coins brought by Portuguese ships, food or objects with a market value was used as money like brazilwood (Dias, 2018), sugar, cloves, and tobacco. Official records from the 16th century also cite cotton cloths as a measure of value (Ravena and Marin, 2013, p. 404).

> *Só resta saber qual será o preço destes que chamamos meios cativos, ou meios livres, com que se lhes pagará o trabalho do seu serviço. É matéria de que se rirá qualquer outra nação do mundo, e só nesta terra se não admira.* ***O dinheiro desta terra é pano de algodão***[10]*, e o preço ordinário por que servem os Índios, e servirão cada mês, são duas varas deste pano, que valem dois tostões! Donde se segue,*

[5] We are calling this territory Brazil even though we are aware that there was not yet a "Brazil" as we understand it a *posteriori*. Professor Laura de Mello e Souza reminds us that "when Pedro Alvares Cabral and his men arrived on the coast of present-day Bahia in 1500, there was, of course, neither Brazil nor Brazilians" (Souza, 2001, p. 1).

[6] Coin as an abstract value, of universal money, which is worth much more than what was spent on its raw material and labor (Florenzano, 2004, p. 71). Unlike in Antiquity, when money was valued for its metal and its weight, in the modern period money is increasingly moving away from its intrinsic value and becoming fiat money.

[7] On "primitive" forms of exchange, see Marcel Mauss, Essay on the Gift. Form and reason for exchange in archaic societies. *In*: MAUS, M. *Sociology and Anthropology*. v. II. São Paulo: Edusp, 1974 [1923-24].

[8] We call pre-cabraline the period before the arrival of the Portuguese in Brazil in 1500.

[9] Perhaps the closest concept in the English language is "bartering".

[10] Our emphasis.

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que por menos de sete réis de cobre servirá um índio cada dia. Coisa que é indigna de se dizer, e muito mais indigna de que por não pagar tão leve preço, haja homens de entendimento, e de cristandade, que queiram condenar suas almas, e ir ao Inferno. (Vieira, 1959, p. 16-7) [11].

It is interesting to note that Maranhão was a politically separate state from the rest of Brazil at this historical moment. Its main currency was cotton which was established as a currency in the whole territory in 1712. Because of the great distance and the difficulties of communication between the state and the rest of Portuguese Brazil, the King of Portugal, D. João V, ordered the minting of provincial gold, silver and copper coins exclusively for the State of Maranhão and Grão-Pará in 1748. Minted by the Lisbon's Mint in 1749, these coins had the same denominations and the same weights as the other Brazilian provincial coins that were already in use[12].

The enslaved Africans who arrived in Brazil used the *zimbo* in their exchanges, a clam shell found on Brazilian beaches that was used as money in Congo and Angola (Cruz, 2010). Even after the introduction of metallic coins many of these currencies were kept in use, demonstrating that monetary value is not always what prevails in these dealings.

There are many coins and medals that address the discovery or political and cultural elements of Brazil since the arrival of the Portuguese. Resuming the political instrumentalization of currency, i. e., propaganda, it is interesting to observe the iconographic and textual information in the Commemorative Series of the 4th Centenary of the Discovery of Brazil (1532-1932), produced in the early 1930s, beginning of the Vargas period in Brazil. This series stands out as one of the most appreciated by collectors for its rarity, historical significance, and design. The *Vicentina* series, as it is called, consists of coins of 100 réis, 200 réis, 400 réis and 500 réis. Among these, the first and last of the series draw our attention for displaying prominent characters from the initial contact between Portuguese and indigenous people. The 100 réis coin bears the image of Tibiriçá. A respected leader among indigenous and Portuguese people, Tibiriçá was an ally to the Portuguese who had settled in Piratininga and was baptized by Father Anchieta with the name of Martim Afonso[13], in honor of the grantee of the Captaincy. Indian chief Tibiriçá played a significant role in the struggles of the Portuguese against the so-called "Confederação dos Tamoios"[14], an alliance between the natives who inhabited the Paraíba Valley and the French who occupied Rio de Janeiro[15]. Tibiriçá's daughter, Bartira, was named Isabel and married João Ramalho (Caffarelli, 1992). About indigenous elements coins, the 1 real coin was issued from 1998 onwards. It has indigenous *grafismos* on the rim of both sides, the effigy of the Republic on the obverse field and the value, date and a reference to the National Flag on the reverse field.

The 500 réis coin from the same commemorative series displays the figure of João Ramalho on its obverse and a *gibão*[16] on its reverse. João Ramalho (1493-1580) is connected not only with the first contact between the Portuguese and indigenous people but also with the foundation of the city of São Paulo. The exact date of João Ramalho's arrival in Brazil is unknown, but it is most likely that he was part of Martim Afonso de Sousa's fleet (1530). We know that, in 1531, he was given a large allotment on the plateau above São Vicente and it was unavoidable to cross paths with the tupiniquins to get there (Nogueira, 2020).

João Ramalho was the mayor and councilor of Vila de São Paulo de Piratininga, founded in 1554 by the Jesuits. Seeking a pact with the indigenous people, he married the daughter of the Chief Tibiriçá, baptized with the name of Isabel, as mentioned above (Ellis Junior, 1944, p. 209-210).

Over the decades and with the increasing presence of the Portuguese, invaders, and pirates around Brazil, several coins such as Spanish American reales were introduced and they had to be stamped to be able to circulate in Brazil. For example, the coin *Carimbo Coroado* of 600 réis over 8 reales was produced by Potosi in 1655. This coin was introduced in Brazil during the reign of the king of Portugal D. Afonso VI. In this context, several coins received stamps to update their value due to the great devaluation at that time. Another example is the rare coins with a Minas Gerais stamp over 8 reales of Carlos III of Santiago de Chile (Prober, 1960).

Portuguese coins such as the *tostão* of King Manuel I and the ten *reais* of King João III, for example, were also introduced. Therefore, it is relevant to mention the silver trail piece from 1695 that that has the inscription: TERRA SANTA CRVSIS (Santa Cruz land).

[11] Free translation: It only remains to be seen what will be the price of these so-called half-captives, or half-free, with which they will be paid for their service. It is a matter that any other nation in the world will laugh at, and only on this land there is no wonder. ***The money of this land is a cotton cloth***, and the ordinary price for which the Indians serve, and will serve each month, is two rods of this cloth, worth two pennies! It follows that for less than seven reis of copper an Indian will serve each day. A thing that is unworthy to say, and far more unworthy that for not paying such a light price, there are men of understanding, and Christianity, who want to condemn their souls, and go to Hell. (Vieira, 1959, p. 16-7).

[12] Cf. https://www.bcb.gov.br/htms/odinheiro.asp?frame=1

[13] According to Benedito Prezia (2008), the encounter between Tibiriça and the Portuguese must have been very important to him since he asked to adopt the name of Martim Afonso when he was baptized.

[14] Free translation: Tamoios confederation.

[15] Cf. http://www.dplnumismatica.com.br/brcomemo.html

[16] Typical clothing of the Portuguese explorers (known as *Bandeirantes*) from the beginning of Brazilian colonization.

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This rare specimen displays one of the first names that this land had received. The names *Ilha de Vera Cruz* (Vera Cruz Island), and *Terra dos Papagaios* (Parrot Land) – in addition to the aforementioned name *Terra de Santa Cruz* – were also names that preceded the name Brazil (Souza, 2001).

According to Alfredo Gallas and Fernanda Gallas (2007), two hundred years after the production of the silver trial piece, Portugal still referred to Brazil by that old name. The trial piece *Terra Santa Crvsis*, from 1695, is the only occasion that the old name of Brazil appears on a coin (Gallas, 2007). It is believed that the imprint was made at the Lisbon's Mint (Coimbra, 1965). The inscription suggests that the name was maintained for decades in Portugal. Currently, there are only two known copies of this coin, which has a face value of 640 réis (equivalent to 2 patacas). One of them belongs to the Herculano Pires Museum, while the other is in Lisbon, in the Banco de Portugal collection (Gallas, 2007).

After stamping coins produced in other locations so that they could circulate in Brazil, the king of Portugal, Pedro II, decided to create the first Mint of Brazil, in Bahia. The minting of coins, trials pieces, and proofs and the transformation of metals – gold, silver, or bronze – allows us to discuss the issue of coin technology. Therefore, it is important to highlight the basic differences between the Monetary Factories and the Mints. The Monetary Factories have a simpler conception and activity, it is nothing more than an establishment for the execution of certain monetary work. It is also characterized by the possibility of roaming due to its mobility. The Mint is more extensive, it is a group of workshops – *Casa das Feituras*, *Casa das Fieiras*, *Casa do Cunho* – with very different and specific functions that interconnect to manufacture currency. Briefly, the foundry, lamination, cutting, engraving, and minting workshops formed a Mint (Gonçalves, 1984). While the Mints were being developed in Brazil, the "Foundry Houses" were losing their purpose and were gradually extinguished until their definitive closure in October 24th, 1832.

Lastly, the Dutch obsidional coins. These were the first coins produced in Brazil (which is quite significant), and the word Brazil is displayed on their reverse. The metals used to manufacture these coins were gold and silver. Their names, respectively, are florins and soldi and were coined by the Dutch, between 1630 and 1654, during the Dutch occupation of Northeastern Brazil. According to Maldonado, these coins continued to circulate in the Dutch territory, overshadowing the Portuguese and Spanish coins that used to circulate there (Maldonado, 2014, p. 27).

The intensification of the battles fought with the Portuguese-Spanish troops for the maintenance of possession of the Brazilian Northeast and given the need for cash to pay suppliers and troops, GWC, the Privileged Company of the West Indies, authorized the issuance of the aforementioned florins and soldi which became known as obsidional coins, that is, coins minted in an extraordinary situation of war, produced during a military siege (Maldonado, 2014, p. 28). This situation occurred, mainly after the loss of the Battle of Tabocas by the Dutch who, besieged by the Portuguese-Brazilian troops in Recife, found themselves cash-strapped to pay the troops. Thus, they ordered the minting of these coins on an emergency basis between the years 1645 and 1646. It is noteworthy that the precarious conditions provided by the war resulted in coins regarded as obsidional (or emergency). They were made in a rough way, with gold from Guinea, to pay suppliers and mercenary soldiers. Brazilian florins (or duchies) weighed 20 to 30% less than Dutch coins. Upon returning to their country of origin, the surviving soldiers exchanged the coins made in Brazil for the original. A considerable part of the rare examples that exist today were found in the debris of Dutch ships from the 17th century.

II. Final Thoughts

In this article, we approached aspects regarding coins and the notion of value in Brazil in the early days of Portuguese colonization, as well as conceptual aspects involving the first coins that circulated in Brazil.

We have tried to show, right from the start, that coins had both an economic function and the intention to circulate the will of the issuing authority. The economic perspective has prevailed over the centuries since coins, from the beginning, served primarily this purpose. As for the perspective of propaganda, we must pay attention to the dangers of anachronism. From this perspective, it must be understood that currency has always been an effective instrument of political instrumentalization. For that matter, we have seen that coins perpetuate memories, intended memories, memories of a particular period, and memories of the period in which it was produced. This process of integration of several periods, several memories, from the same starting point is what we call the term *allelopoiesis*. This term derives from the Greek *allelon* (reciprocal) and *poiesis* (make/create). This indicates that, at each moment we create an interpretation for a given circumstance, it is no longer what it used to be, because we establish a new way of seeing that transforms and creates new modulations for the various ways of perceiving that same phenomenon (Faversani, 2013, p. 149). Likewise, this moment creates and recreates different moments from a common matrix.

We have discussed the initial contact between the Portuguese and indigenous people and, in this context, we presented the *O Português* (The

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Portuguese) coin, an important coin produced by D. Manuel, the Fortunate, which was among the most significant in the late 15th and early 16th centuries – for its intrinsic value and representativeness. We also have seen that at the beginning of colonization the Hispano-American reales were chosen by the king of Portugal to be the official currency of Brazil. These coins were allowed to circulate in Brazil after receiving stamps on both sides.

We have observed that even after the introduction of currency made of metal, products and other objects such as shells, tobacco, sugar, or cotton circulated as money in Brazil. The circulation of these and so many other products reveals that the spheres of society were encrusted.[17].

We have presented the *Vicentina* series, coins commemorating the fourth centenary of the Discovery of Brazil. These coins are a good example of the application of the term *allelopoiesis*, as they reveal a double aspect: they honor figures from the beginning of Brazilian colonization such as João Ramalho and Cacique Tibiriçá, and at the same time show how the Brazilian government in the 30s of the 20th century gained from the propagation and recall of these figures and events.

We have presented a debate around the names that Brazil had in the past. The settlers at the very beginning, when imagining that they landed on an island, called these lands *Ilha de Vera Cruz*. Afterwards, they realized that the land was more extensive, without knowing exactly what it was, they started calling these lands *Terra de Santa Cruz*, exotic names were given as *Terra Papagalli*, which means land of parrots. What does the historical construction get by rescuing all these names? What is significant about simple names? The diversity of names that Brazil had makes us wonder about the cultural diversity of these people, the different identities we had and that we have, the great beauty and wealth of material and immaterial heritage that exists in these lands in the Southern Hemisphere.

Finally, we have approached the Dutch presence in Brazil. The various armed conflicts with Portugal did not prevent the Dutch from imposing their cultural, politicaĺ, and economic impose on the areas they dominated. Pernambuco, the province with the greatest Dutch presence, had an unprecedented strength. The arrival of the Dutch ruler Johan Maurits of Nassau-Siegen (1604-1679) to Brazil completely transformed these domains. Dutch Brazil was rich, both materially and culturally. The presence of the Dutch in Northeast Brazil lasted little more than twenty years, but it left a historical, cultural, and economic legacy that still arouses the interest of scholars and fascinates those interested in Brazilian colonial history. Also noteworthy is the pre-scientific legacy left by the Dutch who were in Brazil. They provide the first evidence of the observer's historical construction, which took place in the 17th century, when it was sought to apprehend the visible structure of beings, knowing them one by one, in their uniqueness from the visible dimension (Belluzzo, 1996, p. 17).

The history of Brazil has always been told in different ways, here we chose to present and reflect on the beginnings of Colonial Brazil based on coins and their histories. Knowing about the beginning of Brazilian colonization from the perspective of value and these small and rich objects is not conventional and allows us to delve into the entrails of the instigating and fascinating Brazilian culture.

[17] Karl Polanyi (1944) coined the term *embeddedness* in order to, among other things, emphasize that, in the ancient world, the political, religious, and social spheres should not be dissociated from the economic sphere.

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