

ARTIGOS CIENTÍFICOS -

MÚSICA EM GERAL

The *maracá* in the beginning of european contact: its role in tupinambá society as a religious token and musical instrument

Eduardo Sola Chagas Lima (University of Toronto, Ontario, Canada)
info@eduardosola.com

Abstract: This study draws upon three sixteenth-century primary sources that describe the first-hand impressions of the land and people of Brazil by European travellers. In discussing the religious and social system of the Tupinambá, this study explores the role and significance of music and of the *maracá* rattle for this peculiar coastal society, as described and depicted by Hans Staden, André Thevet, and Jean de Léry. Although these travel accounts differ in style, approach, and empiric context, they frequently intersect and complement one another, thus helping modern approaches to reconstruct some of the musical idiosyncrasies pertaining to Tupinambá ritual practices. Finally, in analyzing the narrative and iconography in these sources, this study searches for a place for music and the *maracá* within this complex social system, thus aiming to shed light on its purpose and usage at the time.

Keywords: *Maracá*; Tupinambá; Ritual music; Travel account; 16th century.

O *maracá* no princípio do contato europeu: seu papel na sociedade tupinambá como símbolo religioso e instrumento musical

Resumo: Este estudo baseia-se em três fontes primárias do século XVI que descrevem as impressões em primeira mão da terra e do povo do Brasil por viajantes europeus. Ao discutir o sistema religioso e social dos tupinambás, este estudo explora o papel e a importância da música e do chocalho *maracá* para esta sociedade costeira peculiar, tal qual descrita e ilustrada por Hans Staden, Jean de Léry e André Thevet. Embora esses relatos de viagem difiram em estilo, abordagem e contexto empírico, eles frequentemente intersectam-se e complementam um ao outro, ajudando portanto abordagens modernas a reconstruir algumas das idiosincrasias musicais relacionadas às práticas rituais dos tupinambás. Finalmente, ao analisar a narrativa e iconografia dessas fontes, este estudo busca localizar a música e o *maracá* neste complexo sistema social, visando, assim, elucidar sua finalidade e utilidade na época.

Palavras-chave: *Maracá*; Tupinambá; Música ritual; Relato de viagem; Século XVI.

El *maracá* en el principio del contacto europeo: su papel en la sociedad tupinambá como símbolo religioso e instrumento musical

Resumen: Este estudio se basa en tres fuentes principales del siglo XVI que describen las impresiones de primera mano de la tierra y la gente de Brasil por los viajeros europeos. Al discutir el sistema religioso y social de los tupinambás, este estudio explora el papel y la importancia de la música y del *maracá* para esta sociedad costera peculiar, tal como ha sido descrito e ilustrado por Hans Staden, Jean de Léry y André Thevet. Aunque estos relatos de viaje difieran en estilo, enfoque y contexto empírico, ellos a menudo se cruzan y se complementan entre sí, permitiendo así una reconstrucción de algunas de las idiosincrasias musicales relacionadas con las prácticas rituales de los tupinambás. Por último, al analizar la narrativa y la iconografía de estas fuentes, este estudio pretende ubicar la música y el *maracá* en este sistema social complejo, con el objetivo de aclarar su propósito y su utilidad en el momento histórico en cuestión.

Palabras clave: *Maracá*; Tupinambá; Música ritual; Relato de viaje; Siglo XVI.

Introduction

The interest in this research topic is both a result of my appreciation for this historical native society and also of the necessity for a consistent study on the *maracá* rattle as a musical instrument in Tupinambá culture during the 1500s. The intention here is not to provide an exact reproduction of what music was or sounded like in the land of Brazil at that time, but rather to explore how it is depicted and dealt with in the travel accounts produced during the beginning of European contact. Because they offer invaluable information on music, there is no better place to look at than these historical primary sources. Secondary literature, though considerably limited, also provides a fair amount of general information on sixteenth-century travel accounts. However, music is rarely approached as a main subject – in fact it is often overshadowed by other prominent topics. Studies are usually con-

cerned with a variety of other themes, such as religion, war, or cannibalism. This could be a reason why the issue of music and musicality among the Tupinambá has often been overlooked. Yet, although these other themes may, at least at first glance, pose a more interesting and worthwhile topic for anthropology and other social sciences, music appears in these accounts as a fundamental aspect of Tupinambá social organization and religion. That being said, these historical works will be drawn upon as they shed light on the connectivity and interdependence between music and all other facets of Tupinambá culture. Tupinambá society comprises a complex collection of religious and social practices that invite a careful analysis of both their individual elements and their global connection with the entire social system. One of the main arguments permeating this study is that the *maracá* and Tupinambá music are indispensable aspects in making sense of the total socio-cultural system.

In this sense, the present research intendeds to analyse the value and significance of the *maracá* in light of its holistic context. It is intriguing that most available music histories on Brazil, as well as many specific scholarly articles, to some extent ignore rich historical material found in the first travel accounts. If music in early-sixteenth-century Brazil is mentioned in secondary literature it is only in passing and the small amount of evidence on the *maracá* (in the already short space dedicated to the beginning of European contact) is, at best, rather insignificant. With that in mind, I chose to limit this study to the 1500s and three voyage reports produced during this period. The first reason for this decision is the obvious need to mind this gap in Brazilian music literature, in spite of punctual instance of reference to the theme in question (KIEFFER, 1996). The second is the rapid colonization processes that followed the ‘discovery’ in 1500, as an immediate consequence of the conflict with colonizers, the trading relations between natives and Europeans, and Jesuit activity. These, among other factors, caused radical modifications in native practices and an overall change in the cultural scene¹. Thus, the earlier the documented data, the more distant it stands from the drastic transformations that took place towards the end of the century. Early travel accounts are more likely to contemplate Tupinambá culture in its most intact documented form².

The information on music and the *maracá* used in this paper has been in most part extracted from the travel reports of Hans Staden (1557), André Thevet (1557), and Jean de Léry (1578). These three accounts were also chosen because of their detailed depictions of Tupinambá Amerindians and their music, often containing a vivid narrative and rich iconography. The Tupinambá described in Staden, Thevet, and Léry occupied, from the sixteenth to the seventeenth century, the costal region where the modern state of Rio de Janeiro is now situated, sharing boundaries with other groups such as the Carajá, Maracajá, and Tupiniquim. The Tupinambá’s dominion extended for several kilometres along the Brazilian littoral. Their premature extinction is due to the relatively long conflict with the Portuguese, who from 1560 to 1575 finally took over the region, drove away their French competitors, and started exerting power over the local indigenous communities (FERNANDES, 1963, p. 28). This indicates that by 1557, the year in which both Staden and Thevet first published their voyage reports (in Germany and France, respectively), the war between the French and the Portuguese was still waxing hot, and the Tupinambá were still actively fighting for their own land.

The bellicose conflict between these two European groups was aggravated by the existing permanent conflict between two of the local indigenous societies – the Tupinambá and the Tupiniquim. The Portuguese promptly took advantage of this conflict and joined the Tupiniquim, in the hope to establish amicable relationships with the natives. The French, in turn, found amity in the Tupinambá by means of trade and other mutually beneficial re-

lations, ultimately moving to their villages and adopting their culture (LÉRY, 1990, p. xix). It is debatable to which extent these native communities were aware that in joining these two power-thirsty European groups in their strife for dominion over the littoral region, they were contributing to their own inevitable fate; a fate that was eventually shared by many other coastal societies: severe extermination of their original practices. Although the Tupinambá survive as an ethnic Brazilian community today, several ritual aspects that characterized the sixteenth-century people discussed in this paper disappeared.

With that in mind, although it is intimately connected to the Tupinambás' religion and social practices, the *maracá's* function cannot be contemplated outside this bellicose context. This scenario is approached in various ways in each of the three travel accounts discussed throughout this study. Staden, Thevet, and Léry offer unique overviews of their time spent in Brazil. While the former, natural from Germany, having been mistaken for a Portuguese, suffered many vicissitudes as a captive among the Tupinambá, the latter two, both Frenchmen, enjoyed the opportunity to observe their culture from a more peaceful standpoint. In this sense, in spite of their individual takes on Tupinambá culture, these three travel accounts complement each other in various ways, often resonating and intersecting with one another. While acknowledging this broad and complex historical context, this study will focus on some of these authors' perspectives on the *maracá* and Tupinambá musical manifestations as observed in the relation between their rich narrative and iconography.

1. The Maracá as a religious token

The *maracá* rattle's function among the Tupinambá is depicted in European sixteenth-century sources mainly as religious token. In fact, its role as a musical instrument seems subsidiary to its religious purpose. The *maracá* originates and gives momentum to a ritual cycle, which begins with a specific ceremony comprising the manufacture, decoration, and consecration of the rattle. Subsequently, the ritual consecration of the *maracá* triggers a hermetic chain of events that lie at the core of Tupinambá beliefs. This cycle embodies several ceremonial practices to do with conflict and war against neighbouring groups, including a unique engagement with the enemy that reaches its goal in their cannibalistic festivities – the ritual climax.

The religious system of the Tupinambá is complex and was directly related to their social life. Among their beliefs were specific themes such as the creation of the world and the existence of spirits and mythological entities; and among their religious practices were festivities to do with puberty and initiation, the treatment of the sick and the dead, continuous wars with neighbouring communities, and ritual anthropophagy. The religious cycle connected to the *maracá* comprises several of these practices. In fact, Jean de Léry's description and Europeanized conception of the *maracá's* purpose appears under a chapter explaining the Tupinambá religious system, entitled: "What one might call religion among the savage Americans: of the errors in which certain charlatans called *caraiibes* hold them in thrall; and of the great ignorance of God in which they are plunged" (LÉRY, 1990, p. 134).

Although there is some difference in terminology between Léry and Staden, both mention a religious leader, responsible for the consecration of the *maracá*. This leader (*caraiibe*, or *pajé*) was the soothsayer that traveled around the country once a year, going from village to village in order to consecrate the rattles. In essence it is through this consecration ceremony that the *maracá* becomes a religious token. Before this procedure the rattle is merely an ordinary object, being listed by Thevet among furniture artefacts (MÉTRAUX,

1979, p. 62). The *maracá* was made out of a hard fruit called *cabaça* in modern Brazilian Portuguese (calabash, in English). Its seeds and fibres were removed from the inside so that it was perfectly hollow. The natives would “put a stick through it and cut a hole in it like a mouth, filling it with small stones so that it rattles”³ (STADEN, 1928, p. 148). Prior to the aforementioned yearly ritual every man was expected to build, prepare, and decorate his own *maracá* by painting it red (STADEN, 1928, p. 149) and adorning it with the finest feathers (LÉRY, 1990, p. 145).

Subsequently, each man’s *maracá* was ‘given a spirit’ by the *pajé* (or *caraiibe*); a spirit that was believed to ‘speak’ whenever the rattle was shaken. Léry specifically states that, according to their belief, “whenever they make them [the *maracás*] sound, a spirit speaks” (LÉRY, 1990, p. 145). Gary Tomlinson associates this ‘speech’ to the actual *sound* of the *maracá* when shaken, thus suggesting that its very sonic quality symbolizes the spirit speaking (TOMLINSON, 2007, p. 111). Tomlinson also insinuates that the “maraca’s voice”, as he calls it, becomes an organic extension of the Tupinambá’s voice. What Staden proposes, however, does not concern the actual sound of the rattle, since only the *consecrated maracás* were to have a voice of their own, in that they were a receptacle to the speaking spirit. The non-consecrated instruments (which technically rattle as much as the consecrated ones) do not *speak* per se. Therefore, the “maraca’s voice” was believed to come from the *spirit*, rather than from the *maracá* itself. During the ceremony, the *pajé* would alternatively hide his face behind the rattling *maracá* and whisper words, thus deceiving the ingenuous Tupinambá – who thought the *maracá* itself was speaking⁴ (STADEN, 1928, p. 150). At least in Staden’s Eurocentric conception, the Tupinambá appear to be naïve and gullible. As for the spirit thenceforth inhabiting the rattle, Staden states, “the wise men command them to make war and take many enemies, since the spirit in the Tammaraka [*maracá*] craves for the flesh of prisoners, and so the people set off to war” (STADEN, 1928, p. 149). It is in this very ceremony that turns the *maracás* into ‘gods’ that the incentive for war seems to originate (STADEN, 1928, p. 149).

During the consecration of the *maracás*, the natives were encouraged to make war against neighbouring groups and capture as many of them as they can. Finally, after the call for war, the rattles were planted in the ground in a separate hut (STADEN, 1928, p. 149), where they were worshiped as gods and offered food and drink⁵ (LÉRY, 1990, p. 145). The ideology behind this ritual appears to be shared by other contemporary coastal societies as a religious call for war. It is a motivation for mutual hatred, strife, and conflict so that one community can assimilate the power of the enemy, thus becoming more powerful. At this point in the religious cycle, the enemy is captured. Cannibalism ultimately takes place: in capturing and literally ingesting the enemy, the group becomes stronger. As I will discuss below, it is clear from early travel accounts that the Tupinambá religious cycle is only complete by means of war, captivity, and anthropophagy.

The issue of war and cannibalism is also intimately related to the social organization of Brazilian coastal societies. Florestan Fernandes dedicates an entire volume (1963) to discussing the issue of social structures among the Tupinambá. His study is mostly based on early accounts and summarizes information on social roles and gender-specific activities. Females’ tasks were generally related to agriculture, such as planting, cultivating, and harvesting; manual work such as making baskets, cooking, as well as looking after the children were also among their duties (FERNANDES, 1963, p. 130). Central to their contribution towards the festivities (including the consecration of the *maracá*) was the confection of what Léry and Staden refer to as *caouin* – the alcoholic drink in whose preparation the men would never take part (LÉRY, 1990, p. 73). Activities reserved for the males entailed prepar-

ing the soil for sowing, hunting, protecting the women and children, and making war, to name a few (FERNANDES, 1963, p. 130).

Making war, capturing enemies, killing, and finally ingesting them are especially important within Tupinambá culture, and particularly significant for the male native. Catching as many foes as one possibly can was virtually the aspiration of every maturing Tupinambá man, as well as a general social expectation. The larger the number of captured enemies, the larger the honour (STADEN, 1928, p. 148). Seizing and executing an adversary for the first time also signified the emancipation of a man and his initiation into adulthood (FERNANDES, 1963, p. 268), which normally happened around the age of twenty-five. After taking part in this rite of passage, every male was given a new name and, along with it, a 'new personality' (STADEN, 1928, p. 148). Contracting a new name complements the main goal in this religious cycle: to absorb the enemy's strength by means of digestively assimilation after the sacrificial ritual (discussed in more detail below). Differently from the women, who also participated in preparing and ingesting the victim, only the men were allowed to kill the war prisoner. Consequently, only the men were given a new name and assigned a new personality. Staden observes that "for every foe a man kills he takes a new name. The most famous among them is he that has the most names" (STADEN, 1928, p. 148). Additionally, upon executing his first prisoner, the man was allowed to contract matrimony for the first time – being also granted a new female partner every time an enemy was caught and ceremonially executed (FERNANDES, 1963, p. 153).

Fernandes, in spite of the broad scope of his work on Tupinambá society, does not approach the *maracá* in detail. It is difficult to assume from his extensive collection of data whether women were allowed to play it or not. Alfred Métraux boldly states, in his thorough study on Tupinambá religion, that women were forbidden to use the rattle (MÉTRAUX, 1979, p. 62), although no citation is given from historical sources. Nonetheless, the accounts do suggest that at least some specific ceremonial events linked to the *maracá* rattle were strictly limited to men. The accounts also generally refer to those taking part in these ceremonies and playing the *maracá* as "the men" (*hommes*, in Thevet), literally indicating those of the male gender. However, from the standpoint of Staden's iconography, it is difficult to determine the gender of some of the human figures judging by their bodily shape, due to the lack of detail in his plates, although the women are usually portrayed with a long hair. As for the men, they were the ones whose presence was indispensable in the consecration of the *maracá* rattles and in warfare. Men are also frequently depicted holding the *maracá* in various situations. For that ceremony a hut was chosen and all the males gathered together for the consecration, while women and children were not allowed to take part (STADEN, 1928, p. 149).

It is undeniable that the series of practices – beginning with the consecration of the *maracá*, followed by the immediate command to make war, the capture of the adversary, the ritual sacrifice, anthropophagy, earning a new name, and the right to conjoin a spouse – were particularly important for the male Tupinambá and certainly all the more awaited by the younger men in their first experience of this process. Fernandes also deals extensively with the further issue of sexual tension and abstinence among the young males until the initiation process was completed⁶. According to him, the Tupinambá displayed heightened concern and anxiety towards celibacy and spent a considerable amount of time in conversation about it throughout the day (FERNANDES, 1963, p. 153). The women, in contrast, were allowed to be given in matrimony or have free sexual relations as of the time they reached puberty (FERNANDES, 1963, p. 156). To the Tupinambá man, these ceremonies signified sexual emancipation. This is to say that the *maracá*'s consecration ceremony, as the first

step and trigger of a chain of events, must have carried a particularly important meaning for the young male in that it symbolized an ultimate switch into adulthood.

Ritual anthropophagy – probably better termed as *exocannibalism*⁷ in this context – is doubtlessly one of the most salient and intriguing attributes of Tupinambá society, at least as far as anthropological studies on this culture are concerned. The main belief behind this practice is the idea of permanent assimilation of ones strength, energy, and power by means of literal ingestion. In this sense, the energy assimilated by a man does not die with him, but is passed on to his children and, similarly, to all coming generations, thus strengthening not only the one who eats but granting vitality to the future community as a whole. In other words, every Tupinambá carries the strength of countless previous generations in his blood. One of the most interesting perspectives on the continuous, permanent power of assimilated strength is found in Michel de Montaigne’s analysis of Tupinambá ritual anthropophagy, in “Of Cannibals” (MONTAIGNE, 1811, p. 257). Montaigne quotes from a song that captures the very essence of this transgenerational strength transference. According to him, the captive from a neighbouring indigenous group sings before his execution:

“These muscles,” says he [the prisoner], “this flesh, and these veins, they are your own. Poor souls, as you are, you little think that the substance of the limbs of your ancestors is here still. Do but mind the taste, and you will perceive the relish of your own flesh” (MONTAIGNE, 1811, p. 257).

This prisoner is arguing that, in the past, his own people has also eaten some of the Tupinambá and, therefore, he embodies their vitality. In ingesting the enemy, the Tupinambá assimilated the strength of their adversaries as well as their own strength – once stolen by the neighbouring community.

Cannibalism thus becomes the goal and one of the concluding stages in the religious cycle the *maracá*’s consecration ceremony initiated – for it was the *maracá*’s spirit that originally craved for the enemy’s flesh. Yet anthropophagy in this context has little to do with hunger, or dietary habits. Rather, it signifies the fulfillment of people’s necessity to grow in power not only by means of eliminating their enemies, but also by ultimately taking over their strength. Hence, in addition to its religious significance, the *maracá* also bears social and political implications: it is responsible for the communities’s growth and strength.

2. Tupinambá music

In this section, I first discuss a potential case of Tupinambá song within religious ceremonies, drawn from secondary literature; and later explore in more detail the specific role of the *maracá* in the rituals. I begin this analysis with an evaluation of the iconography available in early sources and how it relates to the accompanying narrative, finally turning to some of the few but invaluable examples of music notation.

Visual representation is recurrent throughout the three sixteenth-century sources drawn upon throughout my research. Staden’s book stands out for its originality of perspective, as an outcome of his own momentous and eventful experience as a war captive among the Tupinambá. He was forced to learn their practices and to participate in their ceremonies – some of which included music. Léry’s and Thevet’s accounts, in turn, reflect the authors’ friendly relations with the Tupinambá, and have more similarities to one another than they would like to admit (LÉRY, 1990, p. xxi). Not only do they share analogous perspectives,

due to the amicable relationship between the French and the Tupinambá, but they also display a similar narrative and wording. Still, Léry's more logical, meticulous approach and Protestant background, as well as the long time spent in Brazil, counterbalances Thevet's Franciscan background, the short time he spent in that country, and his less concerned treatment of the facts he witnessed. Hence, although it is likely that both experienced similar situations while in Brazil, they both offer complementary information. It is also possible that Léry borrowed extensively from Thevet – especially because Léry's account was published several years after Thevet's. Yet, in spite of the apparent rivalry between both authors as to their narratives' veracity and reliability, both are to be valued in that they complete one another.

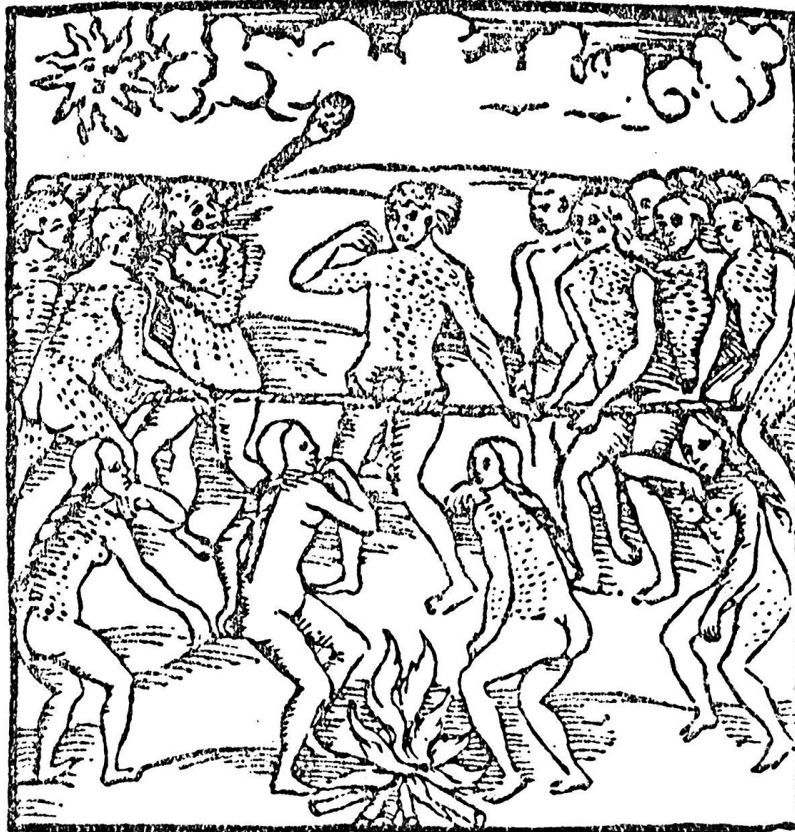
Interestingly, similarities in iconographical examples can also be traced between the two French accounts and Staden's report, not only in the *thing* represented but in *how* it is represented. Certain scenes and occasions are reproduced in basically the same way in all three accounts, suggesting potential consultation among the authors or, perhaps, a mutual endeavour to publish the same idea. The positioning of the subjects depicted is very similar throughout the engravings, and their action and posture are also frequently analogous. The most obvious example is the depiction of the speech exchange between the executor and his war captive immediately before the deathblow (shown in Ex. 1, Ex. 2, Ex. 3, and Ex. 4), whose accompanying text I reproduce here in virtue of its dramatic connotation for Tupinambá ritual practices. In Staden's words:

Then the slayer seizes it [the death club] and thus addresses the victim: "I am he that will kill you, since you and yours have slain and eaten many of my friends." To which the prisoner replies: "When I am dead I shall still have many to avenge my death" (STADEN, 1928, p. 161).

Tomlinson, in elaborating on Montaigne's *Essays*, erroneously affirms that the prisoner is allegedly singing (TOMLINSON, 2007, p. 100), whereas there is no evidence of that in any of the three accounts used in this study, in describing this scene. André Thevet mentions how the captive would sing and mourn while lying in bed during the day *prior* to the execution (THEVET, 1558, p. 76), but the verbal exchange with his executioner during the moments before his death were likely to entail *spoken* language only.

Gary Tomlinson also dwells extensively on the issue of mandatory courage in war and in the face of impending death, suggesting an economy of flesh exchange between groups (TOMLINSON, 2007, p. 98). In this sense, war, captivity, and implied death are to be regarded as part of a natural process in the coexistence of native communities along the Brazilian coast. The individual is to accept this economy as ordinary to his/her existence as a Tupinambá. For this reason, the ceremonial dialogue between the sentenced and his murderer is as straightforward as it sounds – and that is because war, captivity, and cannibalism are part of a natural and mutual process kept for generations. This *spoken* acknowledgement is a formality, a procedure between the captor and his victim. If a prisoner is to die today, tomorrow his own people will avenge him. Their descendants are expected to keep this practice alive⁸.

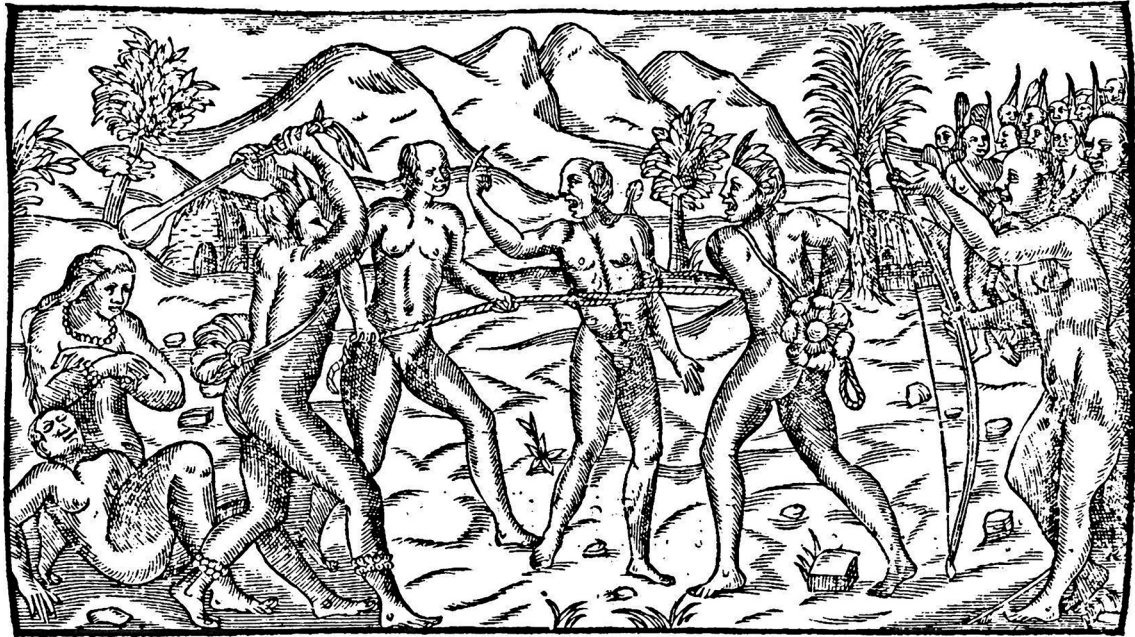
Finally, "the slayer strikes from behind and beats out his brains" (STADEN, 1928, p. 161). The club (*Iwera Pemme*, held by the executor in Ex. 1, Ex. 2, Ex. 3, and Ex. 4) used to kill the prisoner was, similarly to the *maracá*, carefully manufactured (STADEN, 1928, p. 157), richly decorated, and consecrated before the execution ritual, after which the anthropophagous procedures began⁹.



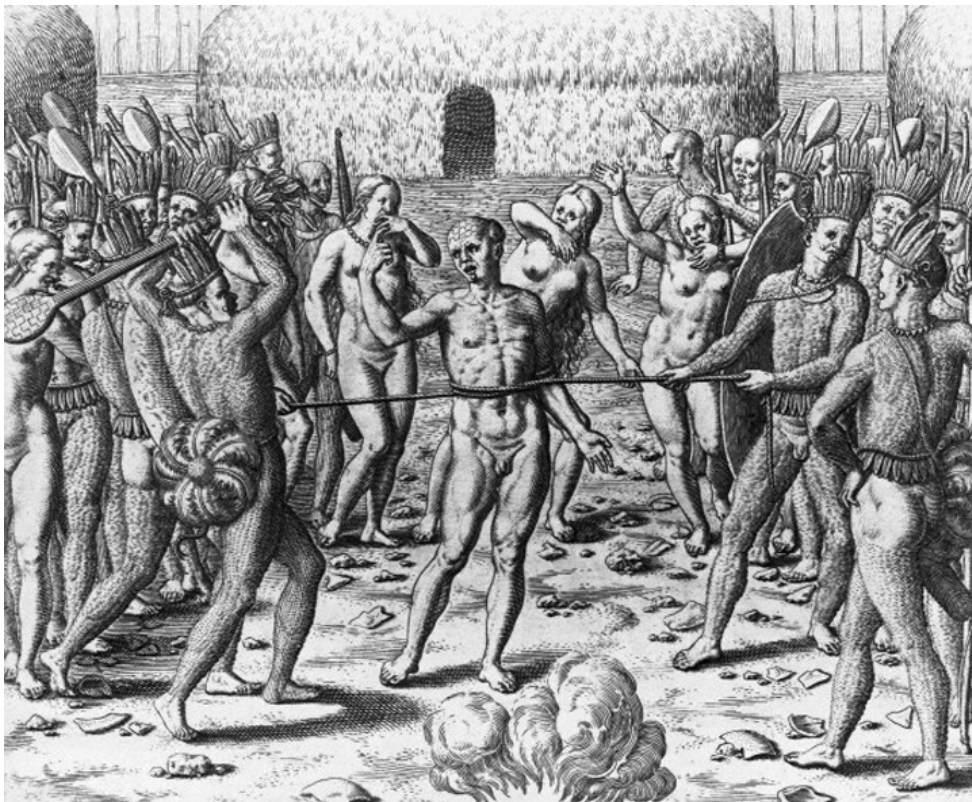
Ex. 1. Speech exchange and execution Staden (1557).



Ex. 2. Speech exchange and execution in Thevet (1558).



Ex. 3. Speech exchange and execution in Léry (1585).



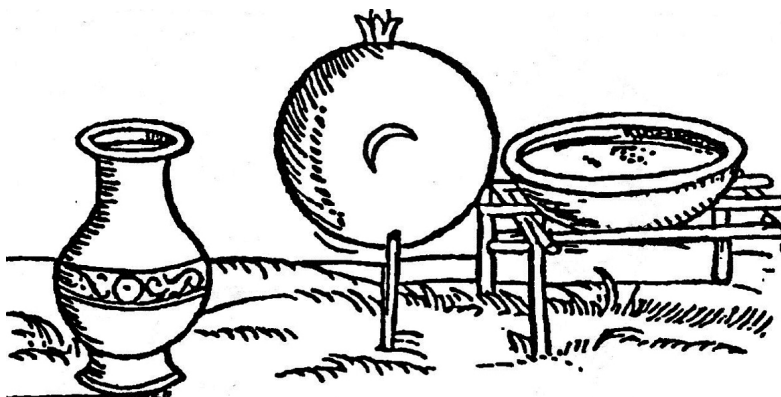
Ex. 4. Theodorus de Bry's version of the execution based on Staden's account (1592).

In all three accounts the *maracá* is depicted in conjunction with musical occasions (such as ritual dance and singing) as well as with non-musical ones. Léry states that the *maracá* is an instrument “which the Brazilians usually have in hand” (LÉRY, 1990, p. 61), suggesting that it is a tool they may always have had at their disposal, carrying it around at what seems to be any time of the day, regardless of the circumstances. In one of the plates

in Staden shows natives carrying their rattle in an essentially non-ceremonial and non-musical scene (STADEN, 1928, p. 106). This opens to question whether these specific rattles were, as opposed to the ones depicted in exclusively ritual circumstances, consecrated by the *pajé* or not, since the ones which had ‘received a spirit’ and ‘speak’ would have a special religious and social purpose, as we have seen.

Furthermore, the plates in these accounts are, expectedly, to a great extent ‘Europeanized’, as it were. The represented bodily shapes of the natives are similar to contemporary Renaissance paintings. The women are robust, with wide hips, and have a long, wavy, and what seems to be light-coloured hair. Their facial features often bear no resemblance whatsoever to the genetic attributes characteristic of Amerindian natives. South American indians, including those among the few ‘untouched’ communities today, are dark, red-skinned, with dark, perfectly straight hair. The posture in which the natives are portrayed is markedly characteristic of European customs as well, especially the ones in which they are shown posing. Albert Eckhout (c.1610-65), the Dutch painter in activity in Brazil between 1636 and 1644, nearly a century after the publication of Staden’s account, depicted these indigenous genetic features more accurately. His realistic paintings show the idiosyncratic, distinctive features of Amerindians that were most certainly overlooked in the engravings accompanying the sixteenth-century sources discussed at present. Whether or not Staden, Léry, and Thevet supervised the illustrations of their narratives is also open to question, especially because the artists they had at hand in Europe were likely not to have ever seen a native South American in reality¹⁰. Therefore, it is expected that the representation of objects, artefacts, ornaments, rituals, dance, music, singing, and the *maracá* itself could have been substantially biased and inaccurate as well.

In the third volume of his edition of Hans Staden’s and Jean de Léry’s text, Theodor de Bry provides beautiful, detailed engravings based on their original plates (DE BRY, 1952). Although the scenes and events are nearly the same and the human figures are also Europeanized, so to speak, general elements such as ornaments and objects are more carefully illustrated. De Bry was never in Brazil, though, and his reference to the works of Jean de Léry and André Thevet are evident throughout his rich engravings, in that some of the peculiarities such as feather ornaments and body painting (not clear in Staden’s simple and stylized plates) seem to have been copied from the two French accounts. When it comes to the visual representation of the *maracá*, the mouth-shaped incision, mentioned and portrayed but once in Staden (Ex. 5) – and never in Léry and Thevet – is included in several of De Bry’s illustrations of the rattle (Ex. 6) (DE BRY, 1592, p. 59, 112, 135, 174, 258). That attests to his consultation of Staden’s engravings.



Ex. 5. *Maracá*, in the center, in Staden (1557).

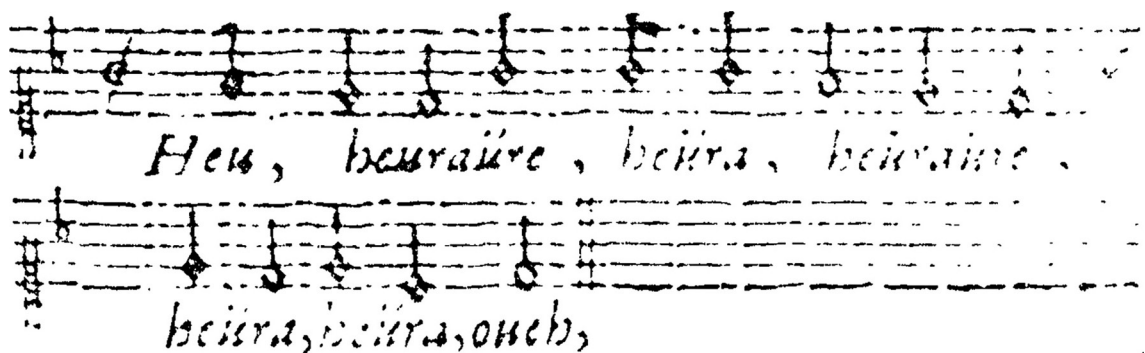


Ex. 6. Detail from one of De Bry's illustration (1592) of the *maracá* featuring the mouth-shaped incision mentioned in Staden's account.

The only examples of music notation are found in Léry. They first appear in the third edition of his *Historie d'un voyage* (1585), suggesting that his readers at the time may have requested to know what native Brazilian music sounded (or looked) like (Ex. 7 and Ex. 8). It is noteworthy that most of the transcribed music has no apparent periodic rhythm; and the very lack of periodic meter must have been more difficult to understand for Léry (and the contemporary sixteenth-century mind) than it is to the listener today. As a reformed pastor, Léry was likely to have had basic education in music and to be well acquainted with the complex metrical theories that were fundamental to late Renaissance music (which included the concepts of *tactus*, *prolatio*, metrical proportions, etc.), although it is not clear whether he notated the melodies himself or if someone else did. In referring to one of the indigenous songs in the chapter where he describes the ritual use of the *maracá* and the singing that goes along with it, he says: "Whenever I remember it, my heart trembles, and it seems their voices are still in my ears" (LÉRY, 1990, p. 144). This indicates that he recalled vividly, upon arriving in Europe, how Brazilian singing sounded like.



Ex. 7. Example of notated Tupinambá song in Léry (1585).



Ex. 8. Example of notated Tupinambá song in Léry (1585).

If he did not notate the melodies himself, he at least recalled it accurately enough to have dictated it to a music copyist. It is also noteworthy that there is no clear explanation of what sort of rhythm or pattern the *maracá* players used in accompanying these songs. Nonetheless, we know that the *maracá* and other types of rattle provided the metrical framework for Tupinambá ritual song. One curious instance is found in Staden, who was forced to accompany their singing: “then the women commenced to sing all together, and I had to keep the time with the rattles on my leg by stamping as they sang” (STADEN, 1928, p. 73). These rattles are distinct from the *maracá*, and Léry refers to them (Ex. 9) as “little dried fruits... that rattle like snailshells – tied around their legs” (LÉRY, 1990, p. 76).



Ex. 9. Tupinambá dancing and playing the *maracá* in Léry (1585).



Ex. 10. Tupinambá manufacturing leg rattles; Tupinambá dancing and playing the *maracá* in Thevet (1558).

To “keep time”, as Staden puts it, probably meant to maintain a periodic, metrical beat, and may invite the notion of cyclic tempo – at least in light of how Europeans understood meter at the time. André Thevet provides an illustration in which a Tupinambá is shown engaged in manufacturing the small chain of rattles under a tree possibly full of similar fruits along with another individual playing the *maracá* and dancing in the opposite side of the picture (Ex. 10). The Tupinambá were also reported to wear a chain around their ankles throughout the day in various non-musical situations¹¹ (STADEN, 1928, p. 117, 124). To be sure, the mere act of walking around with these percussive objects attached to one’s ankles resulted in a periodic rattling pattern, since walking is naturally metrical.

One of the most compelling descriptions of ritual music is also found in Léry’s text. Not only does he carefully narrate the scene to the minute detail, but he also provides the beautiful engraving shown in Ex. 9, accompanying his notated examples of Brazilian song (Ex. 7 and Ex. 8). He does not devote an independent chapter to music and it is not at all intriguing, for the reasons discussed above, that some of these notated musical examples are found in the section on Tupinambá religion. The *maracá* is alluded to and mentioned throughout these accounts in different occasions, however, due to its presence and usage in a wide range of situations; but it is the *maracá*’s religious implications that seem to have caught the attention of these authors. Léry’s report begins as follows:

The men little by little raised their voices and were distinctly heard singing all together and repeating this syllable of exhortation, *He, he, he, he*; the women, to our amazement, answered them from their side, and with a trembling voice; reiterating that same interjection *He, he, he, he*, they let out such cries for more than a quarter of an hour (LÉRY, 1990, p. 141).

It is possible to clearly distinguish between the specific participation of men and women in this example. He goes on to say:

However, after these chaotic noises and howls had ended and the men had taken a short pause, we heard them once again singing and making their voices resound in a harmony so marvellous that you would hardly have needed to ask whether, since I was now somewhat easier in my mind at hearing such sweet and gracious sounds, I wished to watch them from nearby (LÉRY, 1990, p. 141).

...such was their melody that – although they do not know what music is – those who have not heard them would never believe that they could make such harmony. At the beginning of this witches’ sabbath... I was somewhat afraid; now I received in recompense such joy, hearing the measured harmonies of such multitudes, and especially in the cadence and refrain of the song... (LÉRY, 1990, p. 144).

The European reaction to this indigenous music – alternately perceived as utterly bestial as well as pure and sublime – reflects a dichotomy in their reading of Brazilian musical manifestation. Léry’s indecision between how barbaric and how beautiful and harmonious their ritual music sounds within a few paragraphs of prose is certainly worth noting. It is clear from his text that his conception of what constitutes music is primarily rooted in the sixteenth-century European understanding of what music is, or should be. Even though Tupinambá music-making *sounds like* music, it *is not* music; even though their performance *sounds like* song, it *is not* song. Tiago Oliveira Pinto (2008) discusses the nature of this acoustic phenomenon, calling it “tropical sound” – albeit in another historical context – with attention to the obvious complex interaction between the art of the tropics with the canonized understanding of Western artistic manifestations on the part of European colonizers (PINTO, 2008). His discussion concludes with a valid emphasis on the volatility

of tropical musics, thus automatically denouncing the limitations in European readings of musical sound in the tropics as observed in historical sources (PINTO, 2008, p. 111).

What is especially contradictory in this passage is the fact that Léry recognizes elements of what he believes to be music in their expression by using terms such as “measured” (*mesurez*) and “cadence and refrain of the song”¹² (LÉRY, 1585, p. 285), suggesting the presence of musical form, shape, and structural organization, which are known attributes of European music. On one hand, he uses expressions such as “harmony so marvellous” or “measured harmonies”¹³ (LÉRY, 1585, p. 281). On the other, he states that “they do not know what music is” (LÉRY 1990, p. 144), thus creating a dichotomy between the essence of the sounds he heard in Brazil and what he believed to be music. His undecided posture towards Tupinambá performance (or, rather, his inability to classify the music he heard) entails but one of the many paradigms that years of subsequent colonialism would be forced to deal with: the European unpreparedness in engaging with the ‘other’; as well as the obvious, inevitable aspects of ‘otherness’ found in societies of the ‘New World’.

3. Final thoughts

While from the standpoint of organology the *maracá* has survived essentially intact among Brazilian natives until today (due to its simplicity in the manufacturing process and the natural material with which it is built), the precise way in which it was used can only be approximated. The amount of information offered in these early travel documents on *how* exactly it was played is fairly limited and does not allow for a precise reconstruction. Accurate rhythmic patterns and other percussive attributes are never provided in the music notation, let alone in the text. On one hand they are likely to have been just as simple as the instrument itself; on the other, given the anti-metric nature of the notated examples from Jean de Léry, they could have been quite sophisticated rhythmically. This lack of strictly *musical* information on the performances they witnessed could well be one of the reasons why the *maracá* is ignored and often overlooked in early Brazilian music history. Fortunately, at least a generous amount of light is shed on the *maracá*’s significance for Tupinambá society and religion.

Notes

- ¹ In the late sixteenth century and early seventeenth century, this state of ethnocide was especially aggravated by Jesuit activity. The Society of Jesus, upon arrival in Brazil in 1549, spread rapidly and their influence on indigenous culture and music was already astonishing towards the end of the sixteenth century. Jesuit methods such as *inculturation* and *adaptability* contributed enormously to the dramatic changes taking place in this native social organization.
- ² Pedro Álvares Cabral’s description of the natives (COSTA, 1998), although one of the earliest documents on Brazilian people and their land, lacks the richness of detail on indigenous groups and is not, for this reason, used as one of the main sources throughout this study.
- ³ This procedure has been kept to present times among some Brazilian Tupi-Guarani groups, and the rattle still serves as a religious tool and musical instrument, although religious practices largely differ now from those of sixteenth-century Tupinambá society.
- ⁴ Staden, in commenting on this ceremony, seems to be amazed at the ingenuity of the natives because they believe in such obvious nonsense. His astonishment speaks to the European clouded perception of ‘otherness’ and raises some of the important socio-cultural issues that start to become more evident and prominent to the humanist European mind in the so-called ‘Age of Discovery’, such as identity and the concept of self.

- ⁵ The *maracá* is occasionally referred to as a Tupinambá god or idol. In the frontispiece of third volume of Theodor De Bry's *America* (1592), where he paraphrases Staden's and Léry's narrative and illustrations, the *maracá* is depicted at the top and in the center of a monument. Two male Tupinambás are portrayed on their knees, extending their arms towards the *maracá*; their expression conveys awe and adoration (DE BRY, 1592, frontispiece, p. 135). This shows that De Bry understood the centrality of the *maracá* for the Tupinambá as a god-like object.
- ⁶ Fernandes discusses sexuality and its role in Tupianmbá society. He remarks on the issue of male abstinence and the few escapades – supervised and controlled by the adults – which they were granted throughout their youth so as to temporarily relieve their sexual urges (FERNANDES, 1963, p. 153). He also discusses the consequent and recurrent issue of homosexuality among young males.
- ⁷ Exocannibalism – as opposed to endocannibalism – entails the consumption of an individual from outside the society and is frequently associated with warfare and hegemony over the enemy. Endocannibalism, in turn, involves the consumption of an individual from within the ethnic group. Other extinct indigenous societies were also said to practice exocannibalism, such as the Aztecs in Mexico. Shirley Lindembaum discusses various theoretical approaches to the role of cannibalism within these societies (LINDEMBAUM, 2004, p. 481). She accounts for suggestions that some instances of exocannibalism among pristine indigenous societies could have served economic, dietary, and nutritional purposes. Similarly, Nilson Yamauti, in discussing functionalist and materialist approaches to Tupinambá society, analyzes the role of cannibalism specifically within that group and its potential connection to their religious and economical system (YAMAUTI, 2006, p. 99). In any case, according to the travel accounts analyzed in this study, the motivation for cannibalism seems to be connected both to their cosmological beliefs and to their strife for political hegemony.
- ⁸ Fernandes calls this ongoing process a “*vendetta complex*” (FERNANDES, 1963, p. 282).
- ⁹ Similarly to the *maracá*, the death club also has to be prepared and ritually consecrated. However, differently from the rattle's consecration process, women were reported to participate actively in the confection and decoration of the death club (STADEN, 1928, p. 157, 159; DE BRY, 1592, p. 124). In any case, the club's ceremonial prominence is secondary in relation to the salient role of the *maracá*.
- ¹⁰ The preface to the 1928 translation suggests that Staden may have supervised the illustrations in his account (STADEN, 1928, p. 9).
- ¹¹ Thevet also suggests a similar usage in his account (THEVET, 1558, p. 61, 83, 89).
- ¹² Léry uses the expression “*cadence & refrain de la balade*” in the original French of the 1585 edition.
- ¹³ Here Léry uses the expressions “*accord si merueilleux*” and “*accords si bien mesurez*”, respectively (also in the 1585 edition).

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Eduardo Sola Chagas Lima - mestre em musicologia (M.A.) pela *University of Toronto*, Canadá, onde também atuou como professor assistente de História da Música. É bacharel em violino barroco (B.Mus) pelo *Koninklijk Conservatoire Den Haag*, Holanda, e em violino (B.Mus.) pela EMBAP, Brasil. Seus principais interesses acadêmicos no momento envolvem temas relacionados à musicologia sistemática, como cognição, fenomenologia e percepção musical. Eduardo atua internacionalmente como pesquisador, palestrante e concertista.
