Mythic Origins: Caramuru
and the Founding of Brazil

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The story of Diogo Alvares or “Caramuru,” one of Brazil’s first white inhabitants, is a recurring theme in Brazilian historiography, literature, and imagination. Probably from the town of Viana do Castelo in Minho, Portugal, it is suspected that Diogo Alvares arrived in a wrecked ship at the beginning of Portuguese colonization. He resided in Bahia for many years (between three and six decades), in sporadic contact with the Portuguese. During this period Diogo Alvares may have maintained relations with French corsairs who were on the Brazilian coast. He learned the languages and customs of the Indians and participated in local wars. According to some sources, he earned the respect of Indian chiefs, and evidence shows that he had chil-

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1. Scholars are not sure about Diogo Alvares’s place of birth; however, it is evident that he was Portuguese, and some authors claimed that his full name was Diogo Alvares Correia.

2. The exact date of his arrival in Bahia is unknown. Archival documents offer contradictory information, leading historians to cite different dates. Most sources refer to the years immediately following 1500, but some suggest that Diogo Alvares arrived in Bahia during the 1530s.

The story of his shipwreck is very popular, but few scholars have questioned its veracity. Gabriel Soares de Souza refers to a shipwreck off the coast of Bahia, when Diogo Alvares was accompanied by Francisco Coutinho, on a voyage between Ilhéus and Vila Velha. Simão de Vasconcellos’s version, however, claimed that Diogo Alvares was shipwrecked on a voyage from Portugal. Vasconcellos and other writers repeated this information, without citing any sources. In the seventeenth century, Santa Rita Durão dedicated a heroic and tragic verse to the shipwreck incident, implying that Caramuru was shipwrecked.

3. Caramuru was able to command the respect of the indigenous peoples after discharging a firearm into the air. Such weapons were unknown to the Indians, who terrified, prostrated themselves at his feet. They began calling him then, or shortly thereafter, “Caramuru,” variously translated as “son of fire,” “son of thunder,” “man of fire,” “sea dragon,” “Brazilian river fish similar to the moray eel,” “great moray eel,”
herent with either the “many indigenous women” attributed to him by certain chroniclers, or with Paraguaçu, the daughter of a great warrior and the Tupinambá chief in Bahia.4

The narratives about Caramuru analyzed in this article illustrate how each story interweaves history and fiction. Regardless of the proportion, they all locate the Caramuru episode within the history of the Portuguese colonization of Brazil; what varies is the timing of the episode. My principal argument is that narratives about Caramuru can be considered to be Brazil’s myth of origin. The myth of Caramuru dramatizes some of the most fundamental historic and symbolic experiences of Brazil and Portugal.

In order to contextualize the story of Caramuru, let me present the characteristic features of myths of origins. Myths “dramatize the world vision in a constellation of powerful metaphors” by expressing the fundamental experiences of a specific human group.5 They represent one of the possible ways for a community to reveal and share emotions, hopes, fears, and collective dreams, to delineate and resolve conflicts, to transmit and reelaborate experiences; consequently, myths exhibit an intimate relationship with the sacred. Myths

“great river,” “he who can speak the Indians’ language.” The incident of the firearm first appeared in Simão de Vasconcellos’s book, but it was included in almost all the narratives about Caramuru until the mid-1800s. Varnhagen was the first to question the incident and to ironize it. Yet, several historians continued to refer to it as fact.

4. Some sources report that during the reign of Henry II and Catarina of Medici, Caramuru and Paraguaçu traveled to France aboard a French ship that had docked along the Brazilian coast. The exact date is not known, but Paraguaçu was probably baptized as “Catarina,” in honor, according to some, of the French queen of the same name, or according to others, in honor of Catarina of Portugal.

group fundamental elements called “archetypes,” with which the majority of a group identifies.6

Myths, like dreams, have a distinctive structure. They do not follow reason; instead, they symbolize a large number of events and emotions in a single scene, generally allowing for several versions.7 Myths are transformed more slowly than societies for three main reasons: (1) they revolve around few crystallized elements; (2) they operate on the symbolic level, diffused but protected from changes on the material level; and (3) they rearrange their internal elements, adapting them to new situations without losing their essential attributes. No person, group, or nation creates a myth based solely on the desire to do so. In order to exist, a myth must correspond to profound social needs.

Often times myths are socially constructed because they represent a potential source of power. Many myths are consciously reinforced, attenuated, propagated, “aged,” or embellished because they benefit a particular social grouping, government, or nation. A group that identifies or is identified with a positive myth transfers the symbolic authority conferred by the myth and this determines who will or will not share this identity.

Sometimes a myth transforms the birth of a group or nation through metaphor: “The myths of origin of the nation, in the original meaning of the term, are the result of its application to the collective, by an analogic extension of the biological process of the birth of an individual. . . . A child’s birth biologically supposes the existence of a mother, the act of a father (but not always his recognition) and generally the union of the parent couple. . . . The third case of the trope concerns the history of a symbolic parent couple that engenders a people. This creates for itself a double inhabitable space, in a concrete

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6. According to Carl Jung, archetypes are part of the collective unconscious. Carl Jung, Oeuvres Complètes (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1984). For a reinterpretation of Jungian theory arguing that archetypes are socially constructed, see Mario Trevi, Per un junghismo critico (Milan: Bompiani, 1987).

form (a territory) and in a symbolic form (a culture). This combination of lands and traditions is called parents’ heritage or patria.\textsuperscript{78}

In Brazil’s myth of origin, Caramuru and Paraguaçu represent the symbolic parent couple; this explains why all narratives are replete with references to their many descendants. The couple also represented the many ways in which a colonial nation could resolve its challenges and become integrated “proudly” into the empire of which it was a part. Therefore all the narratives point to a continuity between Portugal and Brazil, and always refer to Brazil as part of Portugal. As “heir of the Tupinambá empire,” Paraguaçu not only converted to Christianity, but was chosen by God through her visions of our Lady; it is here that the sacred link, essential for a myth, is established. Diogo Alvares was the human bridge between two cultures; he carried a fish, a dragon, the sea, and fire in his sobriquet. From the interethnic and intercultural couple emerged a promising positive future for Brazil, expressed in the “gilded cities” and the “viceroy” of Paraguaçu’s vision.

If the myth establishes the origin of Brazil, then it is important to ask, which Brazil? All the texts refer to a country that finds itself at a crossroads between a long and influential indigenous past and a present that is marked by the physical and cultural influence of white, European Catholics (who brought Africans with them). Every narrative highlights how Brazil’s future fundamentally depended on the interaction of all these different elements. In other words, it was this nation, surprised at the crossroads of history, that is expressed as a metaphor in the narratives of Caramuru.

The texts, however, did not deal only with Brazil. Set in the sixteenth century, the texts also referred to Portugal, the Portuguese, and their project of consolidating the Portuguese empire. In fact, the plot of Caramuru was created by Portuguese authors and was, for a long time, disseminated by and among the Portuguese. Thus it was not surprising that after Brazil became independent, two Portuguese writers, João de Barros and Arthur D’Avila, revived the topic. The narratives about Caramuru, then, were also metaphors for Portugal. But which Portugal? The texts refer to a civilized Catholic nation united around a king, whose vassals went around the world with the glorious but extremely difficult mission of conquering, civilizing, and catechizing barbarians of all sorts. They (including Diogo Alvares) abandoned home and

country, exposed themselves to dangers (there are two shipwrecks in the story), battled desperately to survive in the midst of the savage barbarians (some succumbed), but never abandoned their high mission, conferred by God and king, to evangelize and educate the world by extending the faith, culture, and arms of the Portuguese empire.

The story of Caramuru deals with some of the most significant and cherished moments in the collective memory of the Portuguese and Brazilians, and was extremely important for the formation of the idea of a nation and thus strongly debated within history, literature, and popular culture.

**The Legend of Caramuru and Paraguaçu**

When the first Portuguese civil authorities, such as Grantee Francisco Pereira Coutinho, Governor General Tomé de Souza (in 1549), and Jesuit father Manuel da Nóbrega arrived in Bahia, Diogo Alvares assisted them by providing invaluable information about the region's land and Indians and often served as *lingoa* (interpreter) and mediator with the Indians. His name, the services he provided to the Crown and to the church, and his offspring were applauded in the civil and religious correspondence sent from Bahia during this period. Tomé de Souza rewarded him with thanks and with recommendations to the king, and Manuel da Nóbrega, with whom he lived, praised him in more than one letter. Upon his death, Diogo left half of his *terça* to the Jesuit Order. After the start of systematic colonization, Caramuru lived as much in urban centers as among the Indians. All indications are that he died in Bahia; however, that date is uncertain and he may have died in 1557.  

Few figures in Brazilian history have earned so many enduring references from such varied sources at such an early age. Since the sixteenth century the story of Diogo Alvares or Caramuru has been retold by chroniclers as well as civil and religious authorities. Since the seventeenth century it has been narrated also by historians, military officers, and dilettantes; since the eighteenth...
century learned poets have joined the list of narrators; in the nineteenth
century the story received rigorous historical revision. In addition, the Restora-
tion Party, which after the abdication of Dom Pedro I in 1831 called for his
return to the Brazilian throne, became known as the “Caramurus”; since at
least the beginning of the twentieth century, the subject has been taken up by
popular poets, playwrights, textbook authors, novelists, and journalists.10 The
story of Caramuru and Paraguaçu has been appropriated politically at various
times for different purposes by creating narratives that interweave the history
of two nations with imagination and desires. Although it has not been the sub-
ject of whole books, the theme continues to be relevant, and is mentioned in a
variety of recent publications in Brazil and Portugal. Authors of narratives
about Caramuru have been of various nationalities and their works have been
published in Brazil, Portugal, France, and England.11

Scenes of Diogo Alvares firing his weapon, his wedding to Paraguaçu in
France, and the Indian maiden Moema throwing herself into the sea after her
beloved Caramuru left for France were also favorite topics of Brazilian iconog-
raphy since the sixteenth century. In Brazil, especially in Bahia, oral traditions
were another important source of information about Diogo Alvares, and
scholars collected or mentioned popular poetry and prose found around Bahia
de Todos os Santos and in Cruz das Almas.12 In 1999 during the celebrations
commemorating 450 years of the founding of the city of Salvador, public
agencies chose to stage the arrival of Governor Martim Afonso de Souza and
his entourage; in the play, staged on a beach in Salvador, the governor was
received by the Indians and Caramuru.

10. For popular poetry, see João Gonçalo, Do naufrágio, das lutas e vitórias de Diogo
Álvares Correia, dito ‘O Caramuru’, nas sagradas terras da Bahia (Feira de Santana:
n.p., 1931); for journalistic reports, see José Hildebrando, “O Caramuru,” in A Tarde,
Salvador; for textbooks containing references to the first years of Portuguese colonization
in Brazil and the story of Caramuru, see Jorge Couto, A Construção do Brasil (Lisbon:
Ed. Cosmos, 1995), and Avanete Pereira Sousa, Salvador, capital da colônia (São Paulo: Atual
Editora, 1995); for novels, see Arthur Lobo D’Avila, Os Caramurus: Romance histórico
da descoberta e independência do Brasil (Lisbon: João Romano Torres, 1900).

11. Many of these non-Luso-Brazilian authors were either contemporaries of Diogo
Alvares or historians. See, for example, Claude d’Abbeville, Histoire de la Mission des Pères
Capucins en l’Isle de Maragnan et terres circonvoisines (Paris: Imp. de François Huby, 1641);
and Roberto Southey, História do Brasil (São Paulo: Univ. de São Paulo, 1981). These
publications are extremely important in Brazilian historiography, but they do not add to
our understanding of the construction of memory of Caramuru.

12. Edson Carneiro, Pesquisa de folclore (Rio de Janeiro: Comissão Nacional
do Folclore, 1955); and Donald Pierson, Cruz das Almas (São Paulo: Ed. Nacional, 1938).
Lastly, the character of Caramuru became so popular in Brazil that during the 1950s he became the theme of a popular Carnival march, whose refrain repeated: “Caramuru / Uhuhuhuu / Caramuru / Uhuhuhuu / Son of fire / Grandson of thunder.” The story of Caramuru was sung, acted, and displayed on floats of the samba schools whose lyrics sang of related “historical events,” such as Brazil in the French courts, the discovery of Brazil, the settling of Brazil, and “the three races” that formed Brazil. And finally, when colored stars, mandalas, and gorgeous patterns light up Brazil’s skies, it also recalls our main character, in a way, because the most famous Brazilian fireworks factory is called, precisely, “Caramuru.”

The story of Caramuru has moved easily from the realm of popular culture to centers of higher education; from prose to poetry; from oral tradition to written and pictorial forms; and from tradition to innovation. My objective is to highlight moments of the fascinating trajectory of the construction of collective memory concerning Caramuru, through an analysis of some of the most significant versions of the story that were published in either book or article form.

Mythic Origins

The Caramuru of the First Chroniclers and the Poet

With the exception of the few documents written by Portuguese civil and religious authorities who lived at the time of Diogo Alvares, the first narrative known to deal with the story of Caramuru was Gabriel Soares de Sousa's *Noticia do Brasil*. Beginning in 1587 copies of his manuscript circulated throughout Europe. It is a detailed account, based on the direct observation of the author who lived in Brazil for many years and contains lengthy descriptions of the territory, resources, fauna, flora, indigenous peoples, and events.

13. Gabriel Soares de Sousa was born in Portugal, probably in 1545. Around 1569 he arrived in Bahia, where he settled for almost twenty years, and served as head of a sugar mill and held public office. During the Iberian Union, he went to Lisbon and Madrid with his brother to obtain a permit and financial aid to explore the mineral riches at the headwaters of the São Francisco River. At that time he took the manuscript of *Notícia do Brasil* with him to Portugal, and offered it to Cristóvão de Moura. In 1591, together with more than 360 settlers, he returned to Bahia, but he lost most of the passengers in a shipwreck. He led an expedition in the direction of the São Francisco River, and died en route. Ferdinand Dénis, the French intellectual who wrote about Brazil in the first half of the nineteenth century was aware of this oral tradition in Bahia of the period. He wrote, “Some 15 years ago, they showed me still, at the far end of Corredor da Vitória, a tree almost bare of foliage, that was designated the ‘Discovery Tree.’ It was behind it that Diogo Alvares had hidden when, after the shipwreck, he saw the savages capture his companions.” See Ferdinand Denis, *Brésil* (Paris: Firmin Didot Frères, 1837).
from the early years of Portuguese colonization. In this priceless source of Brazilian history, Caramuru is a secondary figure, and he is referred to in only two passages in the entire book. The first reference appears in a story whose protagonist is the first donatory of Bahia, Francisco Pereira Coutinho, who, following several defeats with the Indians, sought refuge in Ilhéus. Recalled by the Indians, Pereira returned to Vila Velha, the settlement he had founded in Bahia, taking aboard one of his ships “Diogo Alvares, nicknamed Caramuru, great interpreter of the pagans.” The armada, however, was shipwrecked, with all aboard (including Coutinho) having perished at sea or been devoured by Indians. The only one to escape was “Diogo Alvares, with his good language skills.”

Gabriel Soares, however, did not disclose any additional information concerning Diogo Alvares's childhood or his arrival in Brazil. He focused on Caramuru's life as an interpreter among the Indians and settlers, and showed how his knowledge of the indigenous language saved his life, and enabled him to earn the support of the Portuguese authorities in order to pacify the Indians.

Simão de Vasconcellos's *Chronica da Companhia de Jesu do Estado do Brasil*, published in Lisbon in 1663, was the first book to focus on the “brief notable story of the celebrated Diogo Alvares.” In four pages, inserted in the history of the first donatory in Bahia, Francisco Pereira Coutinho, the Jesuit stated...

15. Vicente do Salvador's general history of Brazil was the first historical account written by a Brazilian scholar (completed in 1627). He briefly repeats the version of Gabriel Soares de Souza, but explained that the Indians called Diogo “Caramuru” because “he knew how to speak their language,” affirming that his knowledge of the language might not have been sufficient to save him from cannibalism, “if one of the daughters of an important Indian had not been in love with him and took it upon herself to defend him.” Thus was timidly born the future Paraguacu. Written in the seventeenth century but published for the first time in 1889, Salvador's work does not shed light on the construction of memory of Caramuru. Vicente do Salvador, “História do Brasil (1500 – 1627),” *Anais da Biblioteca Nacional* 13 (1889).
16. Simão de Vasconcellos was born in Porto in 1596. As a young man, he traveled to Brazil, where he joined the Jesuit Order, professing in 1636. With the exception of the year 1641–42, when he was in Lisbon, he lived until 1658 on Brazilian soil, where he was a teacher and rector of schools in Bahia, Rio de Janeiro, and the provinces. After one year (1662–63) in Rome, as solicitor for the province of Brazil, he returned to Rio, dedicating himself until his death (1671) to the study of the Jesuits in Brazil. His most important book, *Chronica da Companhia de Jesu do Estado do Brasil*, published in 1663, provides a detailed account of the activities of the first Jesuits and Portuguese colonizers. By virtue of his background and position, Vasconcellos had access to important personal information.
that Diogo Alvares (he did not include the surname “Correia”) was born in Viana, of noble birth. Sometime after 1530 he embarked for either Brazil or India, but was shipwrecked off the coast of Bahia. He was taken captive with others who survived the sea and cannibalism and dedicated himself to salvaging the remains of the ship (among the items were powder and matchlocks). The Indians “were pleased with him and agreed among themselves to spare his life.” Having repaired the matchlock, he fired into the air and probably killed a wild animal or bird; this struck considerable fear among the Indians, who cried that he was a “man of fire who wanted to kill them.” He fought alongside those Indians against others, earning fame with his matchlock “throughout the hinterlands and was considered an extraordinary man . . . and here they gave him the name “the great Caramuru.” He made his home in Vila Velha, where he “had a large family and many wives . . . there were many sons and daughters, who in their time were the heads of noble generations.” He embarked for France on a nau loaded with brazilwood, taking with him “the most beloved of his women who was endowed with beauty, and she was the princess of those people . . . not without the envy of those who remained.”

The couple was received by the kings of France and the woman was baptized as Catarina Alvares, to which her Brazilian name Paraguaçu was added; they were married. The kings of France did not allow Diogo to return to Portugal, but he was able to send news about Brazil and about the need to settle the country to King Dom João III. He and Catarina returned to America with two ships loaded with artillery, after promising to fill the French ships with brazilwood. Diogo prospered, becoming “owner of many slaves.” He assisted a Castillian nau that had foundered and later received a letter of thanks from Emperor Carlos V. During the incident of the shipwreck, Catarina asked Diogo “to search again for a woman who had come on the nau and was among the Indians because Catarina had seen her in a vision. Catarina asked that she be brought to her and that a house be made for her.” After many attempts “an image of our Lady that an Indian had found on the beach and thrown in the corner of a house” was found. Catarina identified it as the image in the vision and the image was given a house and was “honored with the title of our Lady of Grace, and enriched with many relics and indulgences, that were sent by the Pope,” passing into the care of the Benedictines. The sons and daughters “of these two pious followers of our Lady” were baptized by clergy, with several of the daughters marrying noblemen (their names are recorded) and “from this trunk descended many of the best and most noble families of Bahia”; “where we say that Francisco Pereira Coutinho [donatory of Bahia] was the first settler by land
grant of the king and royal privilege; however, Diogo Alvares was the first settler by land grant of the native owners of the land and the people’s privilege.”

All of the principal elements that would later characterize the many versions of the story of Caramuru were present in Simão de Vasconcellos’s version: the voyage from Portugal, the shipwreck, the shot fired in the air, the respect of the Indians, the name Caramuru, Paraguçu’s love, the trip to France, the envy of the women who remained in Brazil, the baptism and the marriage, the return to Brazil, the shipwreck of the Spanish vessel, Paraguçu’s vision, the descendants of Caramuru, his support of the Portuguese authorities in their relations with the Indians.17

Simão de Vasconcellos’s narrative constitutes the kernel, the matrix, and the center of the plot of Caramuru.18 Since then no new facts or characters have been added to the story; however a number of changes were made by reordering the events in the story, emphasizing different passages and characters, targeting differing audiences, and altering the themes and uses of the story.

It is interesting to note that in the seventeenth century, when the enduring kernel of the plot of Caramuru was established, there arose, for the first time, a dissident satirical version of the story. Its author was none other than the poet Gregório de Matos, the “Mouth of Hell,” who, with his customary talent and irony, employed the figure of Caramuru to satirize the aristocratic pretensions of the Bahian elite. The title of his poem is Aos principais da Bahia chamados de Caramurus (To the leaders of Bahia called Caramurus). According to the author, this mixed-blood elite—that fact is important—prided itself on being descendants of whites and identified themselves with their Portuguese ancestor Caramuru. It begins:

There is nothing like seeing a Paiaiá
Very proud of being a Caramuru
Descended from the blood of Armadillo
Whose vulgar language is cobé pai.

17. Francisco de Britto Freyre was an admiral in the Portuguese armada who fought in Brazil against the Dutch. For the most his work presented all the events in Vasconcellos’s text, but he modified some details; for example, he claimed that the name Caramuru means “man of fire”; the women, distraught over Caramuru’s trip to France, threw themselves into the sea and one of them drowned. Freyre’s narrative, along with the majority of the others published in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, does not cite the book by Simão de Vasconcellos; the practice of writing notes and citing sources came later. Francisco de Britto Freyre, Nova Lusitânia: História da guerra brasilica (Lisbon: Oficina de Joam Galram, 1675).

18. The notion of “kernel” as a “central element in the plot” can be found in Frank Kermode, El sentido de un final: Estudios sobre la teoría de la ficción (Barcelona: Gedisa, 1983).
The female line is *carimá*
Moqueca, pititinga and caruru
Puba porridge, and cashew fruit wine
Stepping on a pestle from Piraguá.
The male is a Aricobé
Whose daughter Cobé a white Father
Slept on the promontory of Passé.
The white was a scoundrel who came here
She was an Indian of the Maré
Cobé pá, Cobé Paí.¹⁹

The poet ridiculed the Indian origins of these social leaders (although Paraguaçu was not mentioned in the poem), with their cashew fruit wines and their pestles, as well as their white heritage. In the poem, Caramuru is portrayed as a “scoundrel” and a shrewd sycophant. The original line of Matos’s interpretation was a precursor to the tone of the Modernists, particularly Mário de Andrade’s 1928 novel *Macunaíma*, but this interpretation did not predominate in the historical construction of Caramuru. On the contrary, Matos’s interpretation remained an isolated voice—a solitary cry of the poet’s conscience.

**Caramuru as Historical Object**

Published in 1730, a new narrative about Caramuru was included in Sebastião da Rocha Pitta’s book *História da América portugueza*.²⁰ Written in the Baroque style, Rocha Pitta described in detail the “most expressive deeds” of Portuguese colonization, as well as the country’s geography and resources. Following the custom of some books of this genre, it did not give sources, bibliography, or footnotes, nor was it concerned with confirming the veracity of what it asserted. The work of Rocha Pitta became a paradigm for the knowledge of Brazil’s his-

¹⁹ Gregório de Matos, *Obras completas*, 4:840.
²⁰ Sebastião da Rocha Pitta was born in Bahia in 1660 and was educated in Canon Law at the University of Coimbra. After a brief stint as a colonel in the Ordnance Infantry of Bahia, he retired to his plantation in Cachoeira, where he dedicated himself to research and writing. After an unsuccessful attempt at writing works of fiction, he decided to write a history of Brazil. For this, he conducted research for many years in archives and libraries in Brazil and Lisbon. In order to be able to read documents in the original, he learned other languages. His *História da América portugueza desde o ano de mil e quinhentos do seu descobrimento até o de mil e setecentos e vinte e quatro*, 2d ed. (Lisbon: Francisco Arthur da Silva, 1880) was praised at the time by important intellectuals and approved with distinction by the Academia de História Portuguesa, which made the author a supernumerary member. The work’s prestige helped Rocha Pitta to become a noble of the Casa Real and knight of the Ordem de Cristo.
tory and the model for the country’s historical narrative, keeping Caramuru alive while updating the style and plot to suit the taste and concerns of the educated public of the time.

Rocha Pitta set back the story of Caramuru by about 15 years, disconnecting it from the saga of Bahia’s first donatory and relating it to the exploratory expedition of Cristóvão Jacques. The narrative’s novel feature was that the protagonist was Paraguacu, not Caramuru. The important historical role of this “notable matron,” daughter of the leader of the province of Bahia,” was immediately explained. She “was the instrument by which Bahia was dominated more easily”; “and it would be neglect,” explained the author, “to exclude from the drama such an essential figure.” Paraguacu lived among her people until the shipwreck survivor Diogo Alvares arrived from Portugal. Her father gave Paraguacu as a wife, to “Caramuru-assu the Dragon who comes from the sea,” while other Indians were given to him as concubines. Paraguacu “lived in this barbarous union for some time,” until receiving in France “in the most solemn act, with the assistance of many princes,” baptism, and afterward, being married. Back in Brazil “Catarina Alvares . . . as mistress of these heathens convinced them to accept the Portuguese yoke with less repugnance.” At the time of the Spanish shipwreck, she had the well-known vision, with the previously reported consequences. Catarina and Diogo left descendants who “made most noble families.” Rocha Pitta continues by narrating “the glorious arrival of the apostle St. Thomas announcing the Catholic doctrine, not only in Brazil, but in all of the Americas.”

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21. Rocha Pitta does not date the expedition of Cristóvão Jacques. The existence of this exploratory expedition, little mentioned in earlier works, was debated by historians until the mid 1960s. Today, historians accept that Cristóvão Jacques led two expeditions to Brazil, one between 1516 and 1519 and another between 1526 and 1528. See Hélio Vianna, História do Brasil, 14th ed. (São Paulo: Ed. Melhoramentos, 1974). According to the information given in the text, Pitta’s account appears to refer to a date close to 1515. Cristóvão Jacques, as reported by Pitta and others, reached the Paraguacu River, (“great river,” in Tupi), in Bahia.


23. Ibid., 31. Throughout the eighteenth century much was written about the sermons of St. Thomas in Brazil. The Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo (hereafter ANTT) has an interesting eighteen-century manuscript on this topic, in which the author, perhaps based on the work of Pitta, describes St. Thomas’s trip to Brazil. ANTT, Papéis do Brasil, Códice 13: 1–26.
Rocha Pitta repeated, with new embellishments, all of the events in the narrative woven by Padre Simão de Vasconcellos, whose work, by this time, had become rare. In doing so, he contributed to the dissemination of this plot, at a moment in which, already in competition with many other powerful memories, it perhaps ran the risk of being diluted by neglect. The prestige of Rocha Pitta's work and the deference with which scholars treated it, conferred this historian's authority on the tale of Paraguaçu and Caramuru, legitimizing it with the audience. In addition, by replacing the protagonists and bringing Paraguaçu-Catarina to the center of his tale, Rocha Pitta inaugurated a new way to celebrate Portuguese colonization and the ties linking Portugal and Brazil. It enhanced the role played by Brazilians in the colonization, beginning with those who, like Paraguaçu, were native Americans.

In 1761 Antonio de Santa Maria Jaboatão published his *Orbe serafico novo brasilico*. The author explained that his objective was to write the history of the Franciscans in Brazil, a task undertaken, without success, by two other priests. Unlike Rocha Pitta, Jaboatão reveals his sources: the notes left by two predecessors and “papers scattered about the archives of the convents all over the Province and its Record Offices” to which he had access in the capacity of “companion and Secretary of the Provincial P.” Curiously, he confirms that because the sources had “so little to report . . . they served more to confuse the story than to guide and shed light on it.” The sources added “another serious difficulty” to the history he was writing, in which he intended to “understand not only the past, but also the present, the modern, and the old.” “The past is dangerous for lack of information, but commenting on the present is also risky, because it is venerated.”

Jaboatão asserted that the story of Caramuru was known “by the common
people” and by “all the writers of these conquests.” But he also wrote it because Diogo Alvares Correia was the “first settler” of the land (having arrived, therefore, before the first donatory of Bahia), and also because Jaboatão discovered “an ancient manuscript . . . in the archive of the Convent in Bahia that . . . appears to be written by a person who lived, if not at the same time, then at very near the same time.”27 In the Orbe serafico, the Caramuru episode took place (just as Rocha Pitta had written) around 1516. In this version, the episode was not connected to the expedition of Cristóvão Jacques. Caramuru was presented instead as a Portuguese nobleman on his way to India, shipwrecked at the mouth of the Vermelho River in Bahia.28 One innovation in the account by Jaboatão concerned the date of Diogo’s voyage to France which, according to the author, could not have occurred during the reign of Henry II and Catarina of Medici, which only began in 1547. At that time Martim Afonso de Souza as well as Francisco Pereira had already been in Brazil and met Diogo after he had returned from France. Jaboatão’s position, based on a careful comparison of dates, was that the voyage must have taken place in 1524, during the reign of Francis I, after Paraguaçu had been baptized as “Catarina.”

Jaboatão’s concept of history was quite different from that of Rocha Pitta’s, and it heralded a trend that came to dominate the historiography of Brazil in the late nineteenth century. Thus Jaboatão’s work presented a way of seeing and narrating the history of Caramuru that would crystallize in the country only two hundred years after its publications.

Caramuru as Epic

Caramuru and his story gained new currency and popularity at the end of the eighteenth century when the Augustinian friar José de Santa Rita Durão, a Brazilian educated and residing in Portugal, published a long epic poem on the theme.29 Printed in Lisbon in 1781, his Caramuru earned a respectful but

27. Ibid., 22.
29. José de Santa Rita Durão, the son of Portuguese parents, was born in Cata Preta, a village in the diocese of Mariana, Minas Gerais (1722?), and died in Lisbon in 1784. He was taken as a child to Portugal, where he entered the Order of St. Augustine and earned a doctorate in theology at the University of Coimbra, where later he was a professor. He held a high post in the university (some sources say he was rector), during the period of the Marquis of Pombal. There are indications that he may have fallen into disgrace with Pombal for disagreeing with the government position on the Jesuits, as enacted by Bishop Dom João da Cunha. He composed the epic poem in the last years of his life when, unable to write due to a serious illness, he dictated part of the work for which he is remembered, namely, Caramuru: Poema épico do descobrimento da Bahia (Rio de Janeiro: B.L. Garnier, 1845).
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tepid reception by the critics. With time, it gained an audience and admirers, although a good deal of the later criticism has viewed the author as a merely accurate versifier, lacking much literary ability. He was seen above all as a pioneer who narrated an historical event, inspired in Brazilian history, largely centered on indigenous figures, transforming it into an epic: “It is the most Brazilian poem we have... the most Brazilian of all of our works,” wrote literary historians Sílvio Romero and João Ribeiro at the end of the nineteenth century. “Caramuru survives the test of time because of its historical importance,” later added the critic Afrânio Coutinho. Caramuru was published in a number of editions and adaptations.

The poem was constructed entirely around the epic of Caramuru, the “sea dragon” (Diogo was also called “son of thunder” by the Indians). Divided into 10 cantos, each with around 80 strophes, the poem followed the plot structure laid out by Simão de Vasconcellos and repeated by Rocha Pitta. It moved chronologically, beginning with the departure from Caramuru’s birthplace in Portugal and ending with his descendants. The episode of the gunshot was highlighted: Diogo was wearing an iron vest and helmet, holding in his hand a spear (removed from the ship), when he fired for the first time. The episode was repeated several times throughout the entire poem. Caramuru formed an excellent interethnic friendship with the “good and just” Indian Gupeva, and assisted him in combating the terrible cacique Jararaca. Much of the poem was dedicated to local wars in


31. Durão, Caramuru, canto 2, st. 46.

32. The first reference to the episode appears in canto 1, st. 92. Subsequent references can be found in canto 2, sts. 8–12, 43, 50; canto 3, st. 90; and after canto 4, st. 66 and canto 5, sts. 42, 51, 68, 70.

33. The term cacique, of Tainá origin (Arawak, from the Antilles, later corrupted into Spanish as cacicazo), is not the best one to refer to the great Tupinambá warriors. Because the term became common, and is the one Durão used in the poem, however, it will be used here in references to this specific text.
which Caramuru participated. Santa Rita Durão showed himself to be an ardent defender of monogamy. From the beginning, Caramuru possessed only one wife, Paraguaçu. The other women were only in love with him, among them “the poor Moema,” drowned when she threw herself into the sea with the others after Diogo departed for France with Paraguaçu.34 The vision that Paraguaçu had of our Lady was preceded by a dream in which she saw, and later described to others, several moments of the historical future of Brazil. Many other historical events appeared in the poem.

But, being fiction, the narrative by Durão created characters. It was the first time, since the story was told, that Caramuru and Paraguaçu ceased to be references or descriptions and became human beings, with the right to individual physical characteristics, feelings, and an inner life. Diogo Alvares incorporated countless qualities, many of which were identified with the period, emblematic of a nobleman; he was aristocratic, fair, pious, brave, patriotic, handsome (the love object of almost all the “Brazilian maidens”), and civilized, not to mention tolerant, patient, and loving. These last essential attributes helped him to relate appropriately to the strange world where he was shipwrecked. The character’s name changes symbolized a constant transition among identities (the former name predating the experience, and the new name acquired while the events unfolded signified a veritable cultural transmutation. Mentioned at the start of the poem only by a Christian name, after the episode of the gunshot he is also called also “Caramuru,” the one who “denoted Brazil in his surname,” an epithet that became more frequent as the protagonist involved himself with the Indians.35 He reverted to Diogo in the episode of the voyage to France, and then upon choosing to return to Brazil, definitively became “Caramuru.” Only the last line of the poem again declared his Christian name, as well as his birthplace, in order to mark the continuity between his Brazilian adventure and his Portuguese origins: “Manda honrar na colônia lusitana / Diogo Alvares Correia, de Viana.”

In the poem, did the name “Caramuru” bestow an Indian identity on Diogo? No. It meant possessing a group of attributes conferred by the Indians, being a creature who, although profoundly transformed by his experience with the Indians, possessed characteristics that were distinct from them, some of

34. The description of Moema’s death is famous (and, according to some critics, a literary success). The existence of her character, as we have seen, had been in development for some time. Durão, Caramuru, canto 6, beginning on line 5 and canto 6, st. 36.
This particular scene was frequently portrayed in drawings, paintings, and engravings.
35. Ibid., canto 2, st. 46.
them avowedly superior, such as the power of fire. Caramuru was, thus, the hero capable of bringing white settlement, civilization, religion, language, and culture to America, by means of love, tolerance, respect, and experience. These qualities were reinforced or acquired in contact with the other civilization and, when necessary, also by means of war. Contact with alterity, many times painful and traumatic, profoundly transformed Diogo. The castaway, almost devoured by Indians, was forced to suffer, fall in love with a native, learn a foreign language with difficulty, adapt to strange customs, live many long decades far from his country, leave and return to Brazil in order to be transformed into Caramuru, the hybrid hero. Culturally a mestizo and founder of a biologically mixed-blood progeny, he was redeemed and ennobled by his experience with the “other.”

To be Caramuru was not only to survive the danger of cannibalism, a recurring topic in the poem, but also to show the ability to lead the Indians to reject that “heinous practice.” To be Caramuru, for Diogo, was to be able to combine the two cultural identities. He stood for and reaffirmed Portuguese colonization (at the end of the eighteenth century when pro-Independence movements were emerging in Brazil) and, at the same time, his familiarity with the Indians enabled him to acquire Portuguese culture and save their souls.

36. The creation of heroes, redeemed by suffering in remote places, has been common to the imagination of many peoples. The European arrival in America provided numerous narratives on the theme (such as those of Cabeza de Vaca or Hans Staden). Many of these accounts contained elements also present in the story of Caramuru. This is the case of the hero who is afraid upon arrival, inspires fear due to some knowledge that he has (the use of the firearm), is frequently identified with some divine quality by the natives, and the abandonment of the castaway or prisoner hero, who in this position begins to live a truly transcultural experience. See Alvaro Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, *Naufrágio e comentário* (Porto Alegre: L & PM, 1987); Jean de Léry, *Viagem à Terra do Brasil* 3rd ed. (São Paulo: Martins, 1960); and Hans Staden, *Duas viagens ao Brasil* (Belo Horizonte: Itatiaia; São Paulo: Ed. da Universidade de São Paulo, 1974). For an excellent analysis of the theme, see Edmundo O’Gorman, *A Invenção da América* (São Paulo: Unesp, 1992); and Tzvetan Todorov, *A conquista da América: A questão do outro* (São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1983). For a comparison of the theme set in the North American West, see Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1967); Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence*; and idem, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization* (New York: Atheneum, 1985).

37. “Do not tire in the generous endeavor / To instruct the ignorance of the savage . . . Who may be educated at the expense of the king / The neophyte, who embraces the Holy church.” Durão, *Caramuru*, canto 8, st. 2 and canto 10, st. 76.
Paraguaçu, a chief's daughter, was portrayed from the beginning with the ideal attributes of a European woman: this "gentle Brazilian lady," "of a color as white as the white snow / and where it was not snow, it was rose," with "a natural nose, a very small mouth." She covered her nudity "with a thick mantle" and could speak "a large part of the Lusitanian language" (learned from a "Portuguese slave" who had appeared in the area earlier). She was a good maiden, modest, delicate, submissive, and faithful in her love, qualities to which were added those perhaps inherited from her people, namely, courage and pride. This was demonstrated in episodes, such as the war with the hostile chief Jararaca, where "a thousand Amazons... / Gentle Paraguaçu commands." From the beginning, because she knew the Portuguese language, she was Diogo's interpreter with the Indians, at the same time that she transmitted their customs and ideas to him. She also underwent a name change in the poem. She represented a bridge between the two worlds; she was Paraguaçu. Her familiarity with the European, however, gave her an understanding and acceptance of his customs, including Catholicism, a process completed in France, in European space, where she lived at the court and was baptized. On her return to Brazil, when she had the vision of our Lady as she crossed the equator, attesting, therefore, not only that she was Catholic, but also a depository of divine grace, she was called only "Catarina" or "Catarina Alvares." As Catarina, having returned to Brazil, she offered the Indian empire what she had inherited from her grandparents to Diogo. As a character, she symbolized the possibility of the "redemption" of the indigenous Brazilians offered by the civilizing and catechizing project of the colonizers.

38. The citations are in, respectively, Durão, op cit., canto 1, sts. 78 and 77; canto 4, sts. 2, 3; and canto 4, st. 45. Representations of men and women from other continents with European characteristics were common in the literature and the iconography of Western Europe beginning in the sixteenth century.

39. "When Paraguaçu / Now Catarina" wrote Durão. See his Caramuru, canto 8, st. 13. In "Catarina's" vision of Our Lady—"more beautiful than this sun that the world orbits"—she asked that an image stolen from her be returned (canto 9, st. 1). The mystery of the unknown image remains during several cantos, until an image that had been stolen by a carijó Indian was located on land. "This is (she says) the great lady "Whom I saw snatched away in my sweet dream" (canto 10, st. 41), exclaims Paraguaçu (canto 8, st. 17). As others had done, Santa Rita Durão goes on to establish the same bridge between this miraculous episode and the history of Brazil, inasmuch as Our Lady is chosen the patron saint of Bahia.

40. Durão, Caramuru, canto 10, st. 50. The Indians serve as vassals to Caramuru who passes on that servitude to the king of Portugal (canto 10, st. 69). Needless to say, the concepts of "inheritance" and "vassalage," as Rocha Pitta and Durão used them, were unknown to the Indians.
In the poem, the Indians were divided into the “good and just” (such as Chief Gupeva, Caramuru’s close friend, and Sergipe, a more “gentle” chief, who appears at the beginning of the poem) and the “bad and cruel” (such as Jararaca, the great enemy, who is also in love with Paraguaçu). The “good and just” were also innocent, brave, and capable of surprising intellect, like the “singular philosophy” Gupeva demonstrates (“such elevated thought in such an uncultured soul,” marvels Diogo),41 while the “bad and cruel” were generally recalcitrant cannibals. All of the Indians had in common a taste for war (which makes them extremely dangerous), and, with the notable exception of Paraguaçu, unfamiliarity with the Portuguese language and Christian religion, a profound ignorance and such a complete lack of civility and sophistication that they often resembled animals. “Ferocious pagans,” “wild tribe,” “savages,” “crude people,” “wretched people,” “crude ignorance,” and “damnable gluttony” were expressions frequently applied to them.42 Because this was the nature of the Indians, Caramuru, and by extension the Portuguese people, had to carry out the evangelizing and civilizing mission reserved for him and for them by history.

Caramuru established a line of continuity between the period when Diogo Alvares lived in Brazil and the country’s history, as much in the years before the hero’s arrival, as in the years after. This line was constructed out of three moments. The first occurred during the voyage to France when Diogo related to Du Plessis, the ship’s commander, the history of the formation of the Portuguese empire, the Treaty of Tordesillas, Cabral’s discovery of Brazil, and the first exploratory expeditions, that is, the period before his arrival in the country. The second moment corresponded to a narrative by Diogo to King Henry II of France, in which he described in detail the importance of Brazil’s geography, fauna, flora, natural resources, and riches. The third moment was covered by Paraguaçu’s dream when she “saws” the future of Brazil and narrated it to the others. In the dream, the wars against the Dutch appeared with details of the battles, as well as the names of the Brazilian heroes who fought against the “inglorious Batavia,” including the black Henrique Dias, in an obvious effort to glorify them. The “golden cities” of Brazil, the “viceroys and illustri-
ous personages,” foreseen by a Brazilian woman, proclaimed a future. “So much success, so much variety / That only painted as in a dream / It confounds thought, amazes the eye.”

*Caramuru* was clearly a work of fiction, and this was the narrative’s greatest innovation, since the pioneering satirical poem by Gregório de Matos was by then forgotten. Meanwhile, *Caramuru* established such subtle and natural transitions between fiction and history that the reader was uncertain where one ended and the other began. As the subtitle states, it was an epic poem about “the discovery of Bahia.” The author based the poem on the texts of historians. In the verses, Moema, Gupeva, Taparica and other figures coexisted peacefully with Francisco Pereira Coutinho, Martim Afonso de Souza, Dom João III, Catarina of Medicis and others. Episodes invented by the friar were constantly mixed with historical events which themselves did not obey chronology, moving from the future to the past and the present. While nominally fiction, but in fact mixing fiction and history, *Caramuru* laid bare, while also reinforcing, that which may be the most marked characteristic of the collection of narratives written on the topic up to that time: the permanent transition from fiction to history, and vice-versa.

The poem by Santa Rita Durão contained great seductive power, in part by basing itself on vivid, colorful, and highly dramatic events, in part by repeating familiar episodes, retold innumerable times and set in the Luso-Brazilian imagination. By force of repetition they gained a magic similar to fairy tales. One hundred and twenty eight years after Vasconcellos’s *Crônica*, the Augustinian Santa Rita Durão, utilizing the same elements, established a new and powerful fictionalized version of Caramuru’s story. Despite the strong criticism it received and the attempts to implant other models, it continues to be powerful today.

**Caramuru Again Object of History**

Throughout nineteenth century Europe, with repercussions across the Western world, great transformations affected the manner in which history was written. The concept of history as science, the historian’s search for “impartiality,” the heavy reliance on documents in order to discover the “truth,” narration with the goal of “purifying” historical narrative of adjectives and suppositions, and the use of rationalist methods, were transformations that changed the historical narratives about Caramuru.

43. Ibid., canto 9, sts. 13, 78.
The most representative text of this new historiographic trend was Francisco Adolfo de Varnhagen's dense monograph, *O Caramuru perante a história*. As the winning essay in a competition promoted by the then newly-created and already very prestigious Brazilian Historical and Geographic Institute, the monograph concerning Caramuru established an intense dialogue with Varnhagen's predecessors and contemporaries, and it appropriated the topic for the field of history. For this really to occur, according to Varnhagen, it was necessary to conduct a search for new documents about Caramuru and to make a rigorous appraisal of both the primary sources as well as published works on the topic, including those written by historians.

The text began with a long lecture on “magical tales” of which “almost all nations have examples.” Classifying these tales as characteristic of the “earliest history” of a civilization when “the people . . . had very little to say about themselves,” he stated that in this type of narrative there was “almost always a core of authenticity.” At the same time that the tales were disseminated to new generations, however, their “authentic core” became disfigured in the “chaos” and the “Babel of different languages,” principally due to the effect of poetry and imagination, both mainly to the liking of women, the “sex that most inti-

44. Francisco Adolfo de Varnhagen was born in São João de Ipanema, São Paulo, in 1816, and he died in Vienna, Austria, in 1878. The son of an Austrian soldier and probably a Portuguese woman, he studied at the Colégio Militar in Lisbon, when he decided to enlist in the troops of Dom Pedro I, in defense of the constitutional restoration of the Monarchy. After he returned to Brazil, he was able to prove his Brazilian citizenship, and began a diplomatic career. He served in several countries, including Portugal and Spain. Varnhagen was the baron and viscount of Porto Seguro; in addition, he was a member of prestigious intellectual institutions, such as the Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro, Academia Brasileira de Letras, Academia Real de Ciências in Lisbon, and the Academia Real de Historia in Madrid, and soon became one of the most eminent historians of his time. His opus, composed of more than 100 works, is characterized by the use of large numbers of unpublished documents and for its methodological rigor, thus helping to erect the influential historiographic standard that characterized the production of the Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro at the time. In 1859 Varnhagen published a historical novel entitled *Caramuru*. For this article, I consulted Francisco Adolfo de Varnhagen, “O Caramuru perante a História,” *Revista Trimestral de História e Geografia ou Jornal do Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro* 10, no. 2 (1848): 129–52.

45. The competition held by the Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro focused on Diogo Alvares’s voyage to France. The conference organizers reproduced two paragraphs from the work of Sebastião da Rocha Pitta, because he concluded that Caramuru’s trip to France had never occurred.

mately gathers these experiences and later transmits them with its milk." Due precisely to their increasingly fantastic nature, the stories contained an enormous emotional power "to touch the hearts" and "to capture the imagination."

Then, according to Varnhagen, since the historians would only appear much later ("when the people have formed and advanced its civilization"), they would find these first composed stories already "in a much more popular, and no less enduring, archive than documents written on parchment." To the body of these stories and beliefs, Varnhagen gave the name "tradition," which he claimed would persist even after the emergence of History for two reasons: first, its defenders were like "sectarians" of a "religion," who did not accept ideas opposed to theirs; and second, their stories possessed a seductive power (similar to that of mythology) that distinguished "the historical" from the "imaginative." And what was the source of tradition's power? Varnhagen's answer was that "it is the magic of the poet that is best able to touch us, vibrating our sentimental strings." The author thus concluded the first part of the monograph by stating that "It is our conviction that dispassionate criticism can produce no harm to dampen the enthusiasm for our Brazilian epic and the great desire to take up a subject for which the Institute has shown zeal . . . that gives us the strength to take it up."48

In his long and sophisticated introduction, Varnhagen established fundamental premises for the future development of the work. Based on an analytical model influenced by the theory of Positivism, he classified history in successive cumulative and evolving stages, placing the work of the historian in the phase of "advanced civilization."49 Varnhagen drew a parallel between historical stages and narrative models. By limiting "magical tales" to a first and distant stage in the evolution of a people—in Brazil's case, to the historical past—he could then compare the tales to historical narratives of "advanced civilizations," that is, his own times. The "magical tales" are ascribed characteristics, such as fantasy, imagination, and poetry, all of which he identifies

47. Ibid. "He who tells a tale / Adds a tail," recalls Varnhagen in n. 1, p. 130.
48. Part of this essay, originally published in the Revista do Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro in 1847, was later reproduced in the second edition of the poem by Santa Rita Durão.
49. A large part of Auguste Comte's conception of history was based on ideas that were popular during his lifetime. Those ideas, such as the classification of history in successive and evolving stages, the progression from mythology to science, the identification between history and civilization, and the attribution of a scientific character to the historian's work, greatly influenced Varnhagen, who was always well informed about European production in the areas of history, philosophy, and literature.
with the feminine figure who transmitted them to men “through her milk.”

The characteristics of the historical narratives, such as the use of “authentic” documents, “rigorous assessment,” the quotations from sources and bibliography, and the application of rational and professional research methods were considered to be rational, and Varnhagen felt that these attributes, when well utilized, enabled historians to reestablish “the truth of the facts.”

Varnhagen established a clear frontier between myth and science and between history and tradition. What is more, he also clarified the limits between “good” history and “bad” history, the first based on the “search for truth,” with the methodological and technical apparatus that accompanied it. One problem, however, remained. Even Varnhagen's reasoning could not overcome the enormous power of fable, tradition, and myth, which he recognized was much superior to that of science and history. The solution Varnhagen found for the problem was to identify the completely distinct natures of the two ways of knowing, so that fantasy and reason could not intersect. As a result, a work of history, such as the one Varnhagen undertook, could have no influence nor cause any damage, to a work of fiction, such as the poem by Santa Rita Durão. One approach sought the truth by means of reason and confirmation; the other, by means of imagination and fantasy. Separated (as their nature demanded), they were both legitimate; together, they were condemnable.

Varnhagen then presented the results of his research on Caramuru, particularly the numerous unpublished historical documents he had collected.50 A meticulous comparative examination of these documents, particularly of the dates when they were composed and the dates to which they refer, and an exercise in deductive reasoning allowed Varnhagen to arrive at the following principal conclusions about the theme: (1) Diogo Alvares existed (he rejects the surname “Correia,” attributing it, unjustly and incidentally, to an invention of Rocha Pitta). He was Portuguese, probably not of the nobility, and his birthplace was unknown; he was shipwrecked in Bahia around or before 1510 and he left a number of descendants;51 (2) Diogo Alvares lived in Bahia between 1510 and 1535, but he was also there in 1538 (the date of the arrival of Bahia’s donatory), in 1546 (when he was

50. Some documents quoted or reproduced in the monograph include a report by Francisco de Avila on the ship São Gabriel (1526). Also see report by Captain Diogo de Garcia (1526); letter from Pero Lopes to Martim Afonso de Souza (1531); deposition by Herrera (1535); letter from Pero de Campo Tourinho to King Dom João III (1546); and letter from Manuel da Nóbrega (1553).

51. “We gave formal existence to what before was perhaps no more than conjecture, embellished by a creative imagination.” Varnhagen, “O Caramuru perante a Historia,” 151.
messenger for Pero de Campos) and in 1549 (when he aided Martin Afonso de Souza). From that year until his death—and here Varnhagen, quoting Aires de Casal, set the date at 1557—Caramuru also lived in Bahia. Therefore, by deduction, Caramuru could only have gone to France between 1535 and 1538. Even this trip, however, is highly unlikely, due to the “complete lack of any news or information,” in Brazil and in France concerning the fact; thus, it is more probable “that the said voyage to France never existed;”52 and (3) Varnhagen also clarified some lesser facts. The name “Caramuru” signifies a Brazilian fish, similar to the moray eel, just as Claude d’Abbeville had explained in the seventeenth century. It is unlikely that the real Indian woman was named “Paraguacu,” a word that in Tupi, means “great river,” and was not usually a woman’s name among the Tupinambás. A letter from Carlos V to Diogo probably did not exist, since it “defies reason” that the Emperor would write to a common castaway.

Varnhagen widely praised the *Notícia do Brasil* by Gabriel Soares de Souza, who was a contemporary of the events and whose direct style and veracity Varnhagen saw as a precursor of his own work. He strongly criticized those whom he saw as his principal antagonists and competitors: Simão de Vasconcellos for telling a story that would appeal only to “the ardent imagination” of “a tropical people,” in a “novelized narrative”; and Sebastião da Rocha Pitta, a historian, for not citing sources and for being an author of a “handsome episode appropriate for novel and poetry,” filled with “colorful fragments appropriate to the Gongorists of the previous century.” Rocha Pitta and Vasconcellos were subjected to rigorous cross-examination in Varnhagen's court of scrutiny.53

Varnhagen's monograph was a watershed. During the next hundred years, historians wrote about Caramuru à la Varnhagen.54 From that point on, stories and invention surrounding Caramuru in Brazil fell definitively into the fertile area of popular culture. There, propelled by new means of communication, they flourished in an extraordinary way.

**Caramuru as Historical Novel**

In 1900 *Os Caramurus* by Arthur Lobo D’Avila was published in Lisbon with the curious subtitle of *Historical Novel of the Discovery and Independence of Brazil.*55

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52. Ibid., 140, 147.
53. Ibid., 144, 146–49. Varnhagen had no doubt that Pitta had consulted manuscripts, but he criticized him for not citing them.
54. This is true of practically all the general histories of Brazil published in the twentieth century. Marxist historians, for example, abandoned the theme.
D’Avila, after affirming that Brazil’s independence was the result of a lack of vision by the Portuguese constitutional representatives of 1820, who wanted to force Brazil to return to the status of colony, concluded that “Portugal, that had discovered, civilized and developed Brazil, also had the glory of transmitting to it the sacred fire of liberty . . . the historical fact of Brazil’s independence is a human and social triumph for the country that discovered and developed it . . . That is why, in our humble opinion, Brazil’s independence can and should be invoked as a badge of glory for Portugal, on a par with its discovery.”

The theme of Caramuru thus allowed D’Avila (who claimed to be a descendant of Diogo Alvares) to celebrate Brazil’s discovery and independence as Portugal’s achievements at a historic moment that seemed to him to be particularly propitious, that of the fourth centenary of discovery. How? By dividing the historical novel into two parts: the first tells the traditional plot of Caramuru, while in the second, a descendant of the first Caramuru aids José Bonifácio (his classmate at the University of Coimbra) and Dom Pedro in proclaiming Brazilian independence. History and fiction were once again combined in a narrative about Caramuru, but this combination was new.

The first part of the historical novel, about 60 percent of its 278 pages, adds a lengthy section set in Portugal to the traditional plot, in which Diogo Alvares, a Portuguese nobleman, has lively adventures with celebrated figures of Portuguese history, such as Dom João Telles, Queen Dona Leonor, Vasco da Gama, and others, until he embarks in the armada of Gonçalo Coelho and is shipwrecked off the Brazilian coast. The plot of the “man of fire” follows all of the familiar steps, with much action and dialogue. Paraguaçu, given by her father as Diogo’s favorite, shouts as soon as she sees him: “I am a Christian!” Her death was followed by Diogo’s own, but not before he managed for their son, still a child, to be transported to Europe by none other than Hans Staden. There his offspring “prided themselves on being called Caramurus.”

In the second part of the novel, the hero, “also called Diogo Alvares, like his ancestor, but known to everyone as Caramuru,” a Portuguese liberal in love with a young Brazilian Margarida (forbidden love) accompanies the royal family to Brazil. There, in the midst of a number of adventures,” he becomes a supporter of Prince Dom Pedro,” marries Margarida, goes to Portugal and returns to Brazil, all the while as a supporter of independence. When Dom João VI returns to Portugal, Diogo Alvares also returns there at Dom Pedro’s request, to continue to nurture the cause of separation and to inform his friend

56. Ibid., 179.
of events. Brazilian independence is imminent. After independence, Diogo, who had verified that the “Caramuru estate” in Viana do Castelo had been destroyed during the French invasion, travels with his wife to Brazil, to Vila Velha where, on the lands that still belong to his family, he will raise his children and establish “a Brazilian Minho.”

No narrative provides as well as this one the essential element found in all of the texts about Caramuru: the strong link between Portugal and Brazil, an indivisible link, since nothing—history, destiny, or the will of men—can ever alter it. By forever tying the two nations to a single plot, the theme of Caramuru solidified the historical links between Portugal and Brazil, causing one nation to be reflected in the other. Thus it helped to foment the ideology (not always directly bound to historical experience), expressed to this day, that conceives of Portugal and Brazil as “brother countries,” “nations with the same blood” and “twin souls.” The political uses of a narrative can be many.

The Caramuru of the Disseminators

In 1935, O Caramuru: Aventuras prodigiosas de um português colonizador do Brasil by João de Barros, a prose adaptation of the epic poem by Santa Rita Durão, was published in Portugal.57

Released in its seventh edition in 1993, this successful book rigorously followed the original that it proposed to adapt. It maintained the same characters and structure, the same plot, highlighting the episodes and aspects that Durão had also emphasized. Only the subtitles differed; Barros emphasizes the plot's adventure and wonder, calling attention to the protagonist as a Portuguese colonizer, and the origins of Diogo (a noble, according to Durão, and “a poor and needy man,” according to Barros). Barros created a kind of mediation in the story, referring to Brazil's Indians, who are virtually nonexistent in Santa Rita Durão, who saw them as savage and ferocious.58 In the “Epilogue,” Barros


João de Barros was born in Figueira da Foz, Portugal, in 1881. Educated in law at the University of Coimbra, he dedicated himself to education, as a teacher and director of secondary education and served as secretary in the Ministry of Instruction. In 1925 he was appointed as the secretary of foreign affairs. He was the author of a vast opus, which included poetry, fiction, adaptations of other texts and essays, the majority of which focused on education. He was an enthusiastic supporter of closer ties between Brazil and Portugal and wrote several volumes on the subject, which he grouped under the title “Luso-Brazilian Campaign.” He went to Brazil three times.

explained the meaning that the original poem had for him. The fundamental difference between the two works, however, rests on another issue: the language that the prose adaptation, clearly defining the audience to be reached, sought “currency and ease, in order to attract and hold the young people and the more or less cultured reader . . . to bring to the knowledge of all a work deserving of attention and respect.” The original episode of Diogo’s shipwreck, for example, that occupies sixteen strophes in the canto I of Santa Rita Durão, is transformed into a few lines in Barros’s book.59

Barros explained the reasons for his effort beyond those of the poem’s literary quality.60 The fact that the story constituted the “announcing anthem of a nation’s dawning,” and not of just any nation, but of the one that “is now one of the primordial factors of new modalities of civilization and culture,” resulting from the “prodigious and intelligent effort of the Lusitanian colonizers in the overseas lands.”61 In short, Barros wanted to contribute to a “better rapport” between Portugal and Brazil, nations united by a history. And the best way that he found to do this was to recall and disseminate Caramuru, whom he considered to be the symbol of the union: “Portuguese by birth and faith . . . he became so attached to the beautiful and hospitable land that is Brazil that we do not really know today whether the name Portuguese belongs more to him than that Brazilian, or whether the name Brazilian is more apt for him than Portuguese.”62

In his preface, epilogue, and chapter entitled “Life of the Author of Caramuru,” Barros accentuated some characteristics of the poem by Santa Rita Durão. By placing his text in a single volume together with that of the poet from Minas Gerais, Barros prolonged the historical connections that the poem already possessed, projecting them into the first half of the twentieth century, when the book was published. This new appropriation of Caramuru, with an enlarged audience due to linguistic modernization, reiterated the theme of Luso-Brazilian unity at a particularly difficult moment for Portugal. Barros had pointed the way to a union with the promised child, Brazil, for a nation whose glorious past at that moment was impoverished, and which held on tenaciously to its former empire. And for Brazil, the adolescent rebel, he indicated

59. Durão, Caramuru, canto 1, st. 1; and Barros, O Caramuru, 13.
60. “Not that you can or should compare it to Os Lusíadas or to the Odyssey,” Caramuru is “celebrated in the roll of the Great Books of Humanity.” Barros, O Caramuru, 9 and 10. In the biography of Durão, presented at the end of the volume, Barros transcribes the favorable opinions of literary critics about the poem.
61. Barros, O Caramuru, 10, 11. Interestingly, Barros states that “the three founding ethnic elements” of the Brazilian population are present in Caramuru.
62. Ibid., 157–58.
a return to tradition, to the solidity and maturity of Portugal, a country that “had so well conceived its dawning.”

Conclusion

Narratives about Caramuru and Paraguaçu blended elements from both history and literature. The historian, chronicler, novelist, and poet, all journeyed through plots where celestial visions, cannibalism, imaginary colloquies in foreign courts, and prophecies were united seamlessly with the facts and characters of Brazilian and Portuguese history.63 Fiction writers, such as Santa Rita Durão and Arthur D’Avila, mixed their characters with history, and shuffled the present, past, and future.

None of these narratives suggest any unidirectional continuity; in fact, the narrative trajectories, across time, show evidence of a constant overlap among genres, narrative models, and levels of complexity. After Santa Rita Durão’s epic poem, when everything indicated a growing fictionalization of the theme, Jaboatão’s history appeared, and was followed by the dry scientific prose of the historian Varnhagen. But this does not mean that after Varnhagen scientific narratives replaced fictional narratives; surprisingly, the carnivalization of Caramuru emerged. In other words, there was no detectable evolution or progression.

Sometimes, there are more differences between texts of the same genre than among those of different genres. Although both Varnhagen and Rocha Pitta declared themselves to be historians and wrote history, there are great differences between them. In order to legitimize himself before a scholarly nineteenth-century audience, Varnhagen chose Rocha Pitta’s text as one of his principal foils at the same time that he spared the fictional text of Caramuru by Santa Rita Durão from criticism, precisely because it belonged to another genre and did not represent a rival. Nevertheless, he left in obscurity the work that most resembled his in the field of history and one with which he was certainly familiar: Jaboatão’s Orbe serafico.

Opposite treatments of the same historical fact sometimes resulted in similar perspectives. Writing when the two principal separatist revolts had already exploded in Brazil (Minas Gerais in 1788 and Bahia in 1798), Santa Rita Durão did not even refer to the possibility of independence. His intention was exactly

63. The exceptions are the narratives by Gabriel Soares de Souza and Varnhagen that do not incorporate literary elements in their plots. Both, however, borrow other devices from fiction.
opposite, to reinforce the ties between Brazil and Portugal. But in his historical novel, Arthur D’Avila made considerable efforts to transform the plot so that he could address issues concerning the independence of Brazil. What was D’Avila’s objective? His intention was similar to that of Santa Rita Durão’s: to strengthen the ties between Brazil and Portugal. In D’Ávila’s case, this goal was achieved by the construction of a continuity between the early years of the history of colonization and the episode of independence, at a time when Portugal had not yet come to terms with Brazil’s separation. In Durão’s case, the goal was achieved by omitting the imminent separation.

Subtle changes in stylistic devices or the composition of plot and characters created profound differences in historical perspective. With the apparently simple replacement of protagonists, by centering on Paraguaçu rather than Caramuru, Sebastião da Rocha Pitta highlighted for the first time the indigenous role in the historical process of Portuguese colonization. Similarly, alterations in the narratives reflected the political and social conditions that influenced the authors. Simão de Vasconcellos, a Jesuit who spent many years with the Indians and colonizers at the beginning of colonization, was well acquainted with the customs of both. He recognized that Caramuru had several women, among them Paraguaçu who became his favorite. Rocha Pitta, writing in the seventeenth century, accepted Caramuru’s polygamy, but reserved the place of wife to Paraguaçu, and called the others concubines. It fell to the Augustinian friar Santa Rita Durão, at the end of the eighteenth century, to downplay the protagonist’s “sinful relations,” and create from the beginning of the narrative a monogamous Caramuru, the model that prevailed in later narratives. In sum, the multiple combinations of history and fiction in Caramuru can be explored almost indefinitely. History and fiction are both essential to the construction of the grand narrative of Caramuru. As in all other stories that we tell and histories that we construct, there is more fiction than our rationalist tradition normally admits.