

Communication

Crusade in the Hinterland: Mediaeval Heritage in Cavalhadas and Cheganças

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Abstract

This paper aims at analysing the mediaeval traits and long-term inheritances pertaining to popular feasts called *cheganças*, in the Northeastern part of Brazil, and *cavalhadas*, in the country's hinterland. These popular culture celebrations are annually held in some small and even somewhat pitoresque towns and villages throughout Brazil and evince the land's strong mediaeval bequest. In these popular culture events, two cohorts of knights act out a sort of scenic combat, performing a joust between Muslims and Christians, which sets forth the profound Crusade spirit in the conquest of Portuguese America. We as well endeavour to postulate a long-term historiographic explanation for this ancestral patrimony still flourishing in the countryside. Henceforth, Luis Weckmann's idea of a mediaeval heritage in Hispanic and Portuguese America, along with Werneck Sodré's concept of a late Feudalism shall be mobilized in order to explain such immaterial patrimony. The paper attempts to address this intriguing cultural phenomenon from the point of view of Cultural History, interlarded with long-term political and macroeconomic issues, which brings us close to Karl Marx's and Antonio Gramsci's idea of a total analysis. From this scientific point of view, symbolic elements shall be highlighted and deciphered in order to set forth Brazilian mediaeval heritage. Henceforth, we do not pinpoint some elements of potential interest, such as tourism around the *cavalhadas* and *cheganças*, or microeconomic aspects surrounding the ineluctable commerce developing in these areas of Brazil. This would indeed surpass our goals in the present text. Along the explanation, we approach the origin of the popular feasts, which first came about merged with the celebrations of the Holy Spirit in Portugal and Leon. As a matter of fact, we advocate that the conquest and colonization of Portuguese America was a late-feudal process. Lastly, we endeavour to evince the late-feudal background of these cultural manifestations, thus proposing an innovative regard concerning what we could name profound Brazilian culture and long-term remains. In this regard, we affirm the binding of the *cavalhadas* and *cheganças* to the chevaleresque ideal of Crusade in Late Middle Ages. After all, we may state that this research is relevant in terms of exploring the profound roots of Brazilian, and Latin American in general, genuine culture, which endows us with the necessary knowledge not only to understand the pathways of Brazilian historical process, yet also to build up a rather promising future, based upon the singularity of the region's past.

Keywords

Cavalhadas and *Cheganças*, Mediaeval Heritage, Brazil

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1. Introduction

Brazil appears to be a sort of historical conservatory of mediaeval traditions and beliefs, which are to be looked upon in some ingrained cultural practices, such as the chapbooks in the Northeastern part of the country, the myth of King Sebastian's return as a kind of reinstatement of King Arthur's return from the Isle of Avalon, in order to ground a kingdom of justice, glory and abundance on Earth. Ultimately, why do Brazil, and more generally South America, possess such a mediaeval bequest, should the colonial process be believed to have taken place in Early Modernity?

In this brief essay, we shall approach one of these mediaeval heritages occurring in almost all parts of Brazil, the so-called *cavalhadas*, or *cheganças*, or *mouriscadas*. Morphological and symbolic aspects concerning the *cavalhadas* shall be analysed, along with the reasons why this tradition has survived in Brazil and some remote parts of Portugal. It would be, nonetheless, impossible to seek the very roots of the *cavalhadas* without highlighting its bindings to the Feast of the Holy Spirit in Portugal and Brazil. Furthermore, the connections of the *cavalhadas* to the Crusade ideal of a holy war will be addressed in order to pinpoint the true mediaeval profound significance of the Conquest and Colonization of Portuguese America.



Figure 1. The beginning of the “holy war” between “Christians” and “Moors”. Both cohorts express their vows. (<https://curtamais.com.br/goiania/cavalhadas-goias-tradicao-cultural/> Access on October, 14th, 2024.)

The popular *cavalhadas* are, at first glance, organized as a theatrical battle between two very definite cohorts, that is, “Christians” in white and blue colours and “Muslims” wearing mostly red clothes. The colours pertaining to the clothing of both cohorts appeal either to Christ and His holy army or to the Antichrist, respectively. We can immediately perceive a symbolic reinstatement of the Reconquest Crusade battles in the Iberian Peninsula and the ideology underlying the Conquest and Colonization of the Southern parts of America. The jousts between “Christians” and “Muslims” are preceded by a religious service and games with big rings, fraterni-

zation and equitation processions and fireworks [8].

At the end of this article, we aim at proposing a theoretical key to fathom the historical grounds for the perpetuation of the *cavalhadas* throughout Brazil in the long duration. The core matter will be to unveil the deep levels of Brazilian popular culture and its binding to mediaeval popular culture in Portugal and Castille. As a matter of fact, the first celebration of the *cavalhadas* in the Portuguese domains in America took place in the town of Recife, in 1640, as a homage to the coming of the Bragança Dynasty to the Portuguese throne. It was ordained by the Viceroy, the Marquis of Montalvo, having been well described by Friar Manuel Calado, in *Valeroso Lucideno* [8]. This celebration evokes the recovery of Portuguese Sovereignty after sixty years under Castilian power, in a sort of synodal council of Iberian Crowns. Ever since, *cavalhadas* have never ceased to take place in the colonial realms of Portugal, which may uncover that America was indeed a territory for the projection of mediaeval utopias and the main features of European Christian imaginary. That is our very purpose in the following text.

2. The Advent of the *Cavalhadas* in Brazil and Portugal

First of all, it is necessary to catch a glimpse of the affiliation of the *cavalhadas* to the Feast of the Holy Spirit and its eschatological content. Whereas analysing the role of the *cavalhadas* inside the historical grammar of the *Contestado War* (1912-1916) in modern Brazil, Pedro Agostinho portrays the remembrance of a peasant and craftsman who took part in that riot, generally named “The Craftsman of Pirenópolis” (*O fabricante de Pirenópolis*):

“I remember, there was the time of the Father, the time of the Son and the time of the Holy Spirit. The time of the Father was gone, the time of the Son as well, and there would come the time of the Holy Spirit. This time of the Holy Spirit would be the time of love, solace and comfort” [1].¹

As it is widely known, this tripartition of History in a Time of the Father, a Time of the Son and a Time of the Holy Spirit puts down roots to the nearly heretical eschatology of Gioacchino di Fiore, a Calabrian Cistercian monk of the 12th Century. In turn, this theology is based upon the one postulated by the Irish monk John Scotus (815-877) in his *De divisione naturae* (867), written in the court of Charles the Bald (840-877), who would become the Roman Emperor in 875.

Actually, the eschatological doctrine of Gioacchino di Fiore was widespread throughout Europe and, according to

¹ “Eu lembro, tinha a época do Pai, a época do Filho e a do Espírito Santo. A época do Pai já passou, a época do Filho também, e viria a época do Espírito Santo. Essa época do Espírito Santo seria a época do amor, da consolação, do conforto”.

Pedro Agostinho [1], reached popular layers of Portuguese culture and mythology. This author states that there has never been a profound consciousness in terms of orthodox theology. The almost heretic thoughts of Gioacchino di Fiore have indeed been assimilated to the Christian myth regarding a kind of messianic millennialism. The latter, by the way, has given rise not merely to popular beliefs in the long historical duration, yet also to a highbrow political thought nurtured by Portugal's elite, which has originated the myth of King Sebastian's return at the end of time.

Under the condition of a myth, continues Pedro Agostinho [1], the references to the Holy Spirit beget a plastic set of beliefs and ritual practices that might even prescind the more elaborated language of formal theology. In this regard, the Feast of the Holy Spirit displays the most beneficial aspect of the Holy Trinity, without risking to forget the other two. Moreover, for the Cistercian hermeneut of the Apocalypse, the Era of the Spirit would entail the everlasting peace between Moors, Christians and Jews, after the defeat of the Antichrist. This epoch would correspond to the Eternal Gospel, directly inspired in the hearts of all people.

Besides, after the fall of the Antichrist, the Apostles would come back to Earth and rejoin the People of God. For such purpose, the Unfaithful would have to be defeated once for all times, as stated in the *Book of Apolcalypse*, Chapter 20. It is not at all hard to understand how mid-mediaeval theologians and popular preachers have associated the False Prophet to Mohammed, the very bearer of an apparently similar doctrine to Christianity, who would deceive and cause many crowds to be doomed. Therefore, it seemed to those Christians that protecting the advent of Christ's return in Glory, the *Parusia*, would inescapably imply that the Moors be crashed and the Jews converted to true faith.

Apart from that, Pedro Agostinho pinpoints that this eschatological doctrine of Gioacchino di Fiore has reached as far regions as England, Catalonia and the Iberian Peninsula, where the mythical material would be reshaped by very well-known writers such as Ramón Llull and Arnaldo Villanova. This dense ideology reached Portugal by the time of the wedding between Elizabeth of Aragon and King Dom Dinis of Portugal (1279-1325). The bride was a devout of the Holy Spirit and a votary of Gioacchino di Fiore's interpretation of the *Apocalypse*. Still in Aragon, as a matter of fact, Elizabeth's family used to guard and protect the so-called Spitual Franciscans, who opposed the Papacy and took the side of the Roman Emperor during the Investiture Crisis. In 1323, the first Portuguese "Empire of the Holy Spirit" occurred in the Franciscan convent of Alenquer, being this feast attributed to the initiative of Dom Dinis and the Queen.

Usually, the feast consisted of the crowning of an Emperor and two kings, with distinctive crowns, the three of them chosen among men of the Holy Spirit's Brotherhood. Along with the crown, the Emperor bore a wand symbolizing his power and was accompanied by three judges and two damsels of honour. The crowning used to be performed by a

Franciscan friar in canonicals, as a symbolic opposition to the Pope's supposed faculty to crown the Holy Roman monarch. There used to follow the sacrifice of an ox and the distribution of meat to all the population.

Concerning the celebration in Brazil and its linkage to the *cavalhadas*, one should be aware that the feast was mainly brought to the Portuguese colony in America in three different periods: firstly, during the 1500 years, when the colonies established near the coast and the tradition penetrated to the hinterlands by following natural ways; there were also two moments of Azorian immigration to Maranhão (1619) and to Santa Catarina (1748-1756); lastly, more atomized throngs during the 20th century, specially in Rio de Janeiro and Niterói [1].

At first, such tradition was considered potentially challenging to the orthodox Catholic faith, specially by dint of Gioacchino de Fiore's bond to an Apocalyptic defiant exegesis, and the celebration was persecuted and fought by the Church. According to the lecture of the Portuguese historian Jaime Cortesão, in the second half of the 15th century, the celebration was already entirely appropriated by the orthodox Catholic traditions, causing heretical traits to be annihilated. The same trend happened in Brazil, mainly where clerical influence was intense [3]. What draws our attention mostly is that, because of the elimination of heretic features, the feast eventually vanished from the European scenery. However, it still occurs in Brazilian places like Rio de Janeiro, Florianópolis, Ribeirão da Ilha, Santo Antônio de Jesus, Salvador da Bahia, Pirenópolis and Parati.

This everlasting occurrence of the Holy Spirit's and *cavalhadas'* traditions in America are due to the scarcity of the colonial settlers throughout *Brazil Continent* and mainly to the nearly complete absence of clerks in the hinterland, such as the *Contestado*.

Pedro Agostinho lectures that the local variations concerning the Feast of the Holy Spirit are owned to the geographical distribution throughout Brazil. In most of these places, there is still the crowning of the millennial Emperor and the presence of a white pigeon, symbolizing the Holy Spirit, yet other tokens pertaining to the other Persons of the Trinity do not show up. Westward of the Zêzere river in Portugal, in the region of Beira Baixa, the celebration contains no crowning, but a standart portraying an elder with a stick and a pigeon on it and a coronet, evoking the entire Holy Trinity. This is the variant taking place in Brazil, in some regions of the United States and the Azores. In each of these spots, the Feast of the Holy Spirit got merged with other rituals or ceremonial dramas, such as in Pirenópolis, in Brazil [1].

As a matter of fact, in the small town of Pirenópolis, in Goiás, there are still two different types of crowns, one for the two kings and one for the Emperor. The latter position is reserved for individuals pertaining to the highest social levels and the two others can be born by persons of lesser social layers. Here, the *cavalhadas* occupy the place of the bull or ox sacrifice, as well as they did in the region of Contestado.

Furthermore, one of the most prominent sociologists in Brazil, Professor Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz, has pinpointed the strict parallelism between the Feast of the Holy Spirit and the *cavalhadas* throughout Brazil. These cultural manifestations do come up interlarded to social insurgency, such as the agrarian uprisings in the Northeast of the country. Professor Queiroz poses an intriguing hypothesis: these outbreak tendencies, existing from the very beginning of social organization in Portuguese America, are bound to show up in times of crises and social trouble, such as the Republican epoch in Brazil [11]. There would be a “new” (indeed immemorial) cosmogonic ordination to overthrow and replace the unfair rule, underlying actual life in the Colony and in the Imperial epoch in Brazil.

We deal here with a strict correspondence of central elements pertaining to the Feast of the Holy Spirit and to the *cavalhadas* and Contestado’s rebellion dramatization. It has to do with the very dramatization of a sacred picture. Usually, in the Contestado region, four intercrossed wands sustain an altar, accompanied by four partygoers and preceded by scarlet pennants portraying a white pigeon, the Symbol of the Holy Spirit and by damsels wearing white clothing. Under the altar, the Emperor parades with his crown and silver scepter. By the *cavalhadas*, according to Pedro Agostinho, the coronation of the Emperor means a timeless point in which the Third Age of the World, that of the Holy Spirit, is established. This ritual would not actually be a commemorative one, but a sort of prefiguration, a historical update of the future, not a mythical point of beginning [1]. In this regard, the figure of the Emperor stands for a falling hierarchy, which is suppressed and reverted within the celebration, thus inverting everyday social structures.

In this popular “sacred” drama, the crowning of the two kings is subjected to the principal one, that of the Emperor. It represents the subsumption of all social and hierarchical distinctions and cleavages to the only truthful authority, that of the Emperor of the Holy Spirit. In this context, the coronation of two kings, one “Christian” and one “Moorish” betokens that the prophecy of Giocchino di Fiore, concerning a millennial peace between Christians and the Unfaithful, would finally come true, for both kings are subject to the millennial Holy Spirit’s Emperor. In the mid- and late-mediaeval case of the Reconquest, the ambivalence was that between Christians and Muslims. In Portuguese America, it had to do with the antagonism between slaves and lords, nobles from the Kingdom and American born Portuguese. Nowadays, so many oppositions come about when the *cavalhadas* are displayed. Such a contradiction is revealed in terms of economic and ethnic relationships, which claim to be overcome and vanish.

Specially in the Northeastern part of Brazil, where the *cavalhadas* and the Feast of the Holy Spirit are particularly strong, the celebration, besides the symbolic role played in the formulation of social utopias and the reinstatement of the mediaeval Reconquest wars in Iberian Peninsula, stands for a

continuation of the ancient jousts and tournaments of mediaeval courts, during which the participants exhibit their horsemanship and abilities with weapons. That is why there is the presence, at the *cavalhadas*, of runners, guidance participants, kings, princesses, pageboys, standard-bearers, spies, clowns and masked people, all of them interacting with the audience [8]. Therefore, in order to show their knightly skills, participants are made to endure some challenges, such as hurling spears at cardboard puppets or getting pending rings at high speed on horses. After both groups of “knights” have exhibited their skills, the combat ends up with the capture of a castle. Beside the armours, animals, specially horses, are also garbed with fine tissues and usually bear either stars, if “Christians”, or the crescent moon, if “Muslims”.

Moreover, the scenery is mostly set up in front of churches, as to draw attention to the “sacred” character of the drama being acted out. Weapons consist of wooden swords and spears, along with revolvers, the latter being progressively abandoned.

In spite of the fact that *cavalhadas* are waning in Europe nowadays, they can still be seen in Portugal and Spain, being performed by professional actors in mediaeval garments and very numerous cohorts, in a combination with the traditional *touradas* (bull rides) and solemn parades before the audience. All participants take part in the religious service when flowers are bestowed to the statue of the Virgin inside the temple. At the initial battle, “Muslim” warriors conquer the Christian castle and set a statue of Mohammed. Afterwards, Christians win the fight and destroy the statue, exploding its head or the whole body.



Figure 2. Christian kings and knights by the Pirenópolis *cavalhadas*.

(https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/7/72/2006_05_15_039.jpg/250px-2006_05_15_039.jpg. Access on October, 14th, 2024.)

3. The Idea of Holy War in Brazilian Popular Culture

Should the Iberian case come into light, the *cavalhadas*

can be considered an update, within the ritual, of the national identities themselves, re-presenting an outstanding event for the consolidation of Iberian modern States of Portugal and Spain. Christian victory would denote a presumed “superiority” of Iberian peoples if compared to Islamic ones.

Nonetheless, in the New World, according to Rivair Macedo, this old tradition plays two major roles. Firstly, the enforcement of social linkages of religious and cultural nature. Secondly, the denial of the *Other* in the shoes of the represented “Moors”, who, as well, have this symbolic role of the Enemy to be converted in America [8].

Resorting to the studies of Carlos Rodrigues Brandão (1978), Pedro Agostinho emphasizes that the *cavalladas*’ dramatization entails two distinctive phases: the properly ritualistic phase and the game. The first one involves the ritualistic joust between “Christians” and “Moors”, whose outcome is at first defined with the Christian victory and the conversion of the Moors [1].

As Professor José Rivair Macedo stresses, “Christians”, always dressed in white, blue or pearl colour, are identified to Emperor Charlemagne and his Twelve Peers of France [8]. In turn, Agostinho highlights that the ritualistic sequence of the fray is a symbolic reminiscence of the Carolingian feats relating to the battle between the Frankish knight Oliveiros and the Moor Ferrabras, occasion on which Roland appears and the Moorish princess Floripes is kidnapped and converted to Christianity [1].

As a matter of fact, there is a profuse presence of the narratives pertaining to Charlemagne and the Twelve Peers of France in Brazilian popular culture. Although not few scholars propose that this is the upshot of an intense diffusion of the Carolingian Matter in Portugal, we should follow the assertion of Pedro Agostinho and realize that the first Castillian edition came to light in 1525 and was published in Portugal (in Castillian) only in 1615. Notwithstanding the fact that this Carolingian Matter had been present to the Iberian imaginary for centuries, the published translation and adaptation to Portuguese came to light only during the 18th century [1]. The *Romance of Charlemagne and the Twelve Peers of France* has come to Portuguese America couched in two languages, Portuguese and Castillian, probably derived from a French novel dating to 1478, in turn based upon texts from Provence, from the 13th century [2].

According to the great Brazilian folklorist Luís da Câmara Cascudo, in his excellent *Dictionary of Brazilian Folklore* (1979), the Carolingian Matter reached Portugal long before the written expressions above, having been brought by French knights who took part in the Reconquest wars. The feats of Charlemagne and his knights have become the very model for war actions in the Iberian Peninsula. Following Câmara Cascudo, Pedro Agostinho poses a heart hypothesis with which we do strongly agree. The Carolingian Matter would have reached Portuguese America since the very outset of European Conquest and colonization, by dint of the fact that this Conquest process can be seen as a continuation

of the Reconquest combats in the Iberian Peninsula, bearing all their political, ideological and economic implications. For Pedro Agostinho, Carolingian narratives have acted out as a framework for structural opposition between the Christians and the heathenish populations to conquer and convert. This tradition was mainly transmitted by oral means, games and ritual dramatization, modelling an ubiquitous myth prone to incorporate new elements and to shape new fabulations [1].

As far as we ascertain, there was a late-mediaeval background to the Iberian *cavalladas*. For instance, it is the case of the English exhibition of the *Morris Dance* in 1458, which included two garbed groups with faces painted black, who executed a dance with stylized spades and lances. In the Italian city of Pisa, moreover, there was an annual dramatization of a combat between the citizens and Saracen pirates, in which the latter were defeated. Its name was *Il gioco del Ponte di Pisa*. In Naples, under the suzerainty of Aragon, there was once, in 1443, a play in honor of King Afonso, when a group of Catalonians with wooden horses simulated a fight against the Turkish. Finally, a traditional *cavallada* was played in Viseu, Portugal, in 1527 [8].

In the case of the Iberian Peninsula, Carolingian narratives furnish the ideological framework for the Reconquest Crusades. In fact, after the turning point that was the Battle of Navas de Tolosa (1212), a true Crusade commanded by King Afonso VIII from Castille and Pedro II of Aragon, Christians began reconquering more and more territories in Al-Andalus. Based on the Carolingian Matter, the 12th century gave rise to a famous song of deeds, the *Cantar de Mio Cid*, along with the *Historia Roderici*, both depicting the deeds of a crusader under the orders of King Afonso VI from Castille and Leon, the so-called *Imperator Totius Hispaniae*, as his Crusaders conquered the cultural centre of Toledo in 1084. In the Iberian Peninsula, after all, narratives are as ancient as the monastic – probably Cistercian – chronicle named *Historia Karoli Magni et Rotlandi*, assigned to the authorship of the Pseudo-Turpin. Closer to the Castillian context, we could mention the writing of the *Historia del Emperador Carlomagno y de los Pares de Francia, y de la cruda batalla que hubo Oliveiros com Fierabras, hijo del grande Almirante Balan*, ascribed to Nicolau de Piemonte [8].

With the progressive marches of Crusaders during the Reconquest wars, after the Battle of Navas de Tolosa and the Christian victory in the Battle of Salado (1340), under the command of King Afonso XI of Castille and Afonso IV of Portugal, Islamic domains in the Iberian Peninsula became restricted to the kingdom (“*tawaiif*”) of Granada. Finally, the Hispanic Crusaders succeeded in casting out the Moors from Granada in February, 1492. Moreover, the Decree of Cisneros imposed the Catholic faith to all remaining Muslims under Castillian rule in 1502. Religious tolerance to Jews and Moors from earlier times of Reconquest would vanish in the haze, should we consider that newly existing intolerance led to the Wars of Granada (1568-1571) and the final eviction of non-converted people in 1609 [8].

Would it be a mere stroke of luck that, in the same year, in October, Christopher Columbus arrived in the American Continent, which he still considered part of the Asian domains of the Great Khan?

Henceforth, one should not find it quaint that pieces of writing describing the Conquest of America contain so many mediaeval, chevaleresque references. For example, the Castillian chronicler Bernal Díaz de Castillo compares, in *Historia verdadera de la conquista de Nueva España*, the conqueror Hernán Cortez to El Cid or even to Roland, from the *Chanson de Roland*. Besides, the narrator tells that, from 500 Spanish camps, only five would have survived the rage of the Indians, “in order to serve God and His Majesty and give light to those who were in darkness”, along with acquiring richness, every man’s goal in the new continent. In the same chronicle, Castillians refer to Native Americans as “Moorish people”, which the *Historia del descubrimiento y conquista del Perú*, of Agustín de Zárate, attests for the Incan Empire [8].

Last but not least, it can be a convincing argument to remark that, in the mid-15th century, an anonymous book named *Fuero sobre el fecho de las cabalgadas* appeared, regarding the military rules for land and sea attacks on the Islamic territories, as well as the honour distinctions to be attributed to those standing out in the frays. In its preamble, the unidentified piece of work refers to having been influenced “by the Great Emperor Charlemagne”.

In terms of the *cavalhadas* taking place in Pirenópolis, in the Brazilian federal state of Goiás, the jousts between the “Peers” and the “Moors” last some days, being the two sides commanded by a “king”. At the first battle, speech oppositions and mutual discourses relating to the faith of each side are established, which betokens the symbolic antagonism between true faith and non-faith. Both sides do show up with their hierarchies and as equivalent sets of warriors, inviting the other group to conversion and submission. According to Rivair Macedo, the refusal by the “Moors” to convert themselves to Christianity gives rise to the battle. When the “Moors” are defeated, they are made to get hierarchically inferior and are forced to accept Christian Baptism. Therefore, the *cavalhadas* do exhibit an initial equivalence between “Moors” and “Christians”, which is related to the Reconquest wars. In different regions where *cavalhadas* are staged, they do represent the differences between the social cantles involved [1].

After the Baptism of the “Moors” before the Emperor of the Holy Spirit and the pennant of this Third Person of the Trinity, both cohorts become a single one, equalized by the newly common faith. Nevertheless, the outcoming pairs of knights present hierarchical signs, for the “Christian” knight always comes before the “Moorish” one, as occurs with both “kings”. All the knights become, at the end, the twenty-four knights of the Holy Spirit. This usage bears resemblance to the old Portuguese and Castillian costum of allowing conquered Muslim populations to maintain their religion, social

organization and language in reconquered regions. It is indeed an appropriation and adaption of the ancient Islamic habitude of granting religious freedom to conquered populations in *Al-Andalus*, the Arabic name for the *Hispaniae*, as long as the Christians and Jews remained subjected to the Muslims and accepted to pay taxes.

These subjected Muslim communities, named *aljamas*, used to be considered the home of the *mudéjares*, translated as “moros”, or “moros del Rey”, “moros de paz” and “vasallos moros” in Castillian territories [8]. Regarding the non-conquered Moorish lands, there used to be loots and military incursions in order to annihilate plantations and capture prisoners.

For Pedro Agostinho, indeed, as far as the symbolic opposition between the “Moors” and the “Christians” is concerned, both armies stand for two social orders in contrast, yet after the Baptism, they are unified in a totalizing order, under the Law of Christ and the Age of the Holy Spirit. In some dramatizations, such as in Pirenópolis, there is the apparition of masked persons among the knights, bringing an index of non-order or a kind of chaos, which differs from the anti-order represented by the “Moors” before Baptism. These masked partygoers, according to the lecture of Pedro Agostinho, are the only possible non-faithful ones before a unified order under Christendom [1].

We also consider very relevant to stress that all this mediaeval heritage of the *cavalhadas* and the Feast of the Holy Spirit has always been appropriated by subaltern social groups as a sort of “Petition of Rights”. It is the case of the *Canudos* utopia in the Northeastern hinterland of Brazil, where the hope for a new world of justice and peace under the monarch of the last days underlies the interweaving of the Carolingian Matter and the expectation about the glorious return of King Sebastian from a far charmed island. The same observation can be related to the wars in the *Costestado* region, in the South of Brazil. In both cases, in which the narratives about Charlemagne and the Twelve Peers of France and King Sebastian get interlarded, an imminent, vivid social crisis and the petition for agrarian redistribution do transmute the liminar state of the celebration into an also liminar state of social war, under which a new Chosen People intend to ground a new cosmological order, a new world of justice. In this context, the twenty-four knights unified by faith oppose the old, declining order. They are symbols and instruments of the new world to be established. In the context of the *Contestado* war, the twenty-four unified knights are called “Knights of Saint Sebastian”, also an allusion to the king who shall return.

Furthermore, for Pedro Agostinho, the unified knights also stand for an enlargement of the faith to the whole world through material and symbolic action, thus expanding the borders of the new society and imposing the true faith on more adepts and territories. In this regard, the holy framework of the *cavalhadas* and the Feast of the Holy Spirit becomes the elementary reference for life. The sacred drama

furnishes the ideological mould for the contrast of the rebellious peasants and official military forces [1].



Figure 3. Masked elements of chaos by the *Cavalhadas* of Pirenópolis (<https://curtamais.com.br/goiania/cavalhadas-goias-tradicao-cultural/>. Access on October, 14th, 2024).

4. What *Cavalhadas* Unveil About Profound Levels of Brazilian Culture

Perhaps, *Cavalhadas* do not have much to tell about erudite culture in Brazil, specially the constitution of modern Brazil, its plantation cycles and industrial outbreaks in the 20th century. For all this might be true for nowadays self-representation of the elites, the same reasoning cannot at all be casted upon popular culture and its oral ways of transmission. Even regarding the colonial elite, we must assert that they belonged to the European nobility, distinguished from the other colonies because they belonged to Chivalric Orders such as the Order of Avis, the Order of Calatrava and mainly the Order of Christ, the successors of the Templar Knights in Portugal.

All this complex phenomenon in Brazil, as we have already observed, has got very ancient roots, alluding to an inveterate matrix in mediaeval oral culture regarding the combat between the Twelve Peers of France and the Moorish armies of King Marcil, the monarch of Saragoza, firstly couched in written language by the very well-known *Chanson de Roland* (c. 1080). As we all know, this song of deeds ascribed to Tuoldus narrates the epic of the Frankish knight Roland, the nephew of Charlemagne, who is betrayed and handed over to the enemy by his companion and stepfather Ganelon. Accompanied by his mate Oliverios and the Bishop Turpin, Roland endeavours to resist the treacherous attack of the Moors by the ravine of Roncesvalles, situated in the *Marca Hispanica*. In the song's plot, after the murder of Roland, Charlemagne goes himself to Roncesvalles and fights Baligant, ruler of the region. Being successful in beating the Moors, the Roman Emperor enjoins the baptism of all

surviving enemies, including queen Braminonda, Marcil's spouse.

José Rivair Macedo pinpoints that Charlemagne and his Twelve Peers of France soon became martyrs and models for Crusaders in the Holy Land and in the Iberian Peninsula. The Emperor has even become the very *rex christianissimus* who was destined to relentlessly defeat the enemies of Christendom. Such Carolingian Crusade ideal got scattered throughout the European territory. In the South of France, as well as in Iberian regions, there was a heteroclitite appropriation of the myth, which is somehow contested or modified to a certain extent. This kind of certain rejection to the original story is due to the need for closer heroes who could personify the specific aspects of the Reconquest wars, such as El Cid (Dom Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar) [8]. In the case of Portugal, the ideal hero and martyr champion was incarnated by real warriors, like King Afonso Henriques and the knight Geraldo Sem-Pavor.

Nonetheless, the Carolingian Cycle was very well-known to Hispanic Crusaders, and in narratives dating back to the 13th century, Roland was awarded the designation of Saint and the plots went that Charlemagne would have reestablished the Christian cult in the Iberian Peninsula after having undergone a pilgrimage to Santiago of Compostela, becoming its tutor [8].

By the end of the Middle Ages, the characters of the *Chanson de Roland* were widely known to Iberian peoples, having been disseminated by Cluny and Cister's monks, along with knights from nowadays France, England and Germany territories, associating the Twelve Peers of France to the reconquest of Compostela. Roland was present to chronicles, romances and troubadours' ditties, and his narratives acquired new characters, like Bernardo del Carpio, Claros de Montalvão, Floresvento, Montesinos and the Marquis of Mantova [8].

The Carolingian Cycle, which has been very present in Portuguese America since the inception of the colonial process, was orally diffused in sugar plantation and cattle farms throughout the Portuguese territory in America, though almost absent from greater villages. Concerning the Iberian conquest of America, let us now give the word to Professor Fernando Carmona Fernandez, in his article *Conquistadores, utopia y libros de caballeria*:

The Moor has travelled in the memory of the Europeans towards the New World. The parents of the conquerors of America possibly took part in the last frays of that secular fight. It is not to admire that their behaviour was marked by the denial of that traditional enemy. It is thus explained that their attitude reproduced the behavioural pattern of the mediaeval knights, and that this pattern was built up from the binary opposition between identity with Christianity and the otherness represented by the followers of Mohammed [4]².

² O mouro viajou na memória dos europeus rumo ao Novo Mundo. Os pais dos conquistadores da América possivelmente participaram das derradeiras escaramuças daquela luta secular. Não admira que seu comportamento fosse marcado

At the proem of the colonization process in America, Portuguese settlers also displayed this Reconquest, chevaleresque – in one word, mediaeval – imaginary atmosphere, playing chevaleresque games such as the game of the rings and hunting, as well as reading and mainly listening to the declamation of mediaeval novels. As a matter of fact, already in the 16th century, there was the circulation, in the Colony, of romances like *Palmeirim de Inglaterra*, *Historia de Lamentor y Binnader*, *Tirant lo Blanc* and principally the very widespread *Amadis de Gaula*. It is not at all excentric to perceive why colonial chroniclers like Fernão Cardim, in the *Tratado da terra e gente do Brasil*, and Gabriel Soares de Souza in his *Tratado descritivo do Brasil*, refer to chevaleresque entertainments performed by the Portuguese settlers. It is asserted that Bahia and Pernambuco's nobilities were fond of the *cavalhadas* [8].

Furthermore, war cries with mediaeval words were usual among the conquerors of America. We should like to attest that the phrase *a eles, com Santiago* (“to them, with Saint Jacob”) was, for instance, used by Captain Francisco de Frias, referring to original peoples, at the conquest of Maranhão in 1615 [8]. This war cry used to be followed by an invocation of the Virgin, which is familiar to the miracle of Our Lady of Victory having appeared to the Portuguese warriors and transmuted gravel into powder in São Luís, granting the triumph to the Portuguese over the French. The same Virgin of the Victory used to be invoked by Portuguese Crusaders in the Iberian Reconquest wars.

Macedo also points that war actions against the Tupi on the coast used to be considered as holy wars or just wars. Concerning Hispanic America, iconography in Mexican churches display a picture of *Santiago Matamoros* on his white steed. In some temples, this image has been replaced by that of *Santiago Mataíndios*, drawn with the faces of Hernán Cortez [8]. Macedo resorts to the Portuguese researcher Mário Gonçalves Viana as to postulate that there were two kinds of mediaeval transposition to Portuguese America regarding the *cavalhadas*.

On the one hand, as a noble game, with rings and other playful targets, which appeal to the same practices in the Portuguese metropolis; on the other hand, as a ceremony acted out by subaltern colonial layers, having taken roots in rural areas and displaying the old wish for nobilitation [8]. Not only to the European settlers would the *cavalhadas* be of great significance, but also to black enslaved people and for Native Americans. One evidence is the fact that *cavalhadas* were played in the “Seven Peoples of the Missions” (*Sete Povos das Missões*), the most well-known Jesuit reduction in Colonial America. Another patency is that the mediaeval traditions pertaining to the *cavalhadas* soon got mingled to African-American traditions such as the coronation of the

King of Congo, which dates, at least, to the 17th century and is referred to very ancient African remembrances of the Bantu lineages [8]. They could represent, thus, a symbolic element of cultural, syncretic resistance of subaltern populations in the colonial world.

Whence, to our mind, the *cavalhadas* certainly stand for the symbolic “baptism” of Portuguese America, a new land of promise and conquest, destined to be the economic and symbolic marrow of the *Orbis Lusitanus* in Modern Times, as conceived by the Jesuit Simão Rodrigues de Azevedo (1510-1579). The very core of Portuguese colonization was ideologically legitimated by the idea of continuing the Iberian Reconquest in the newly-found continent, bringing the true faith and the Age of the Holy Spirit to pagans who dwelled in shades.

Along with the *cavalhadas*, chapbooks, the myth of King Sebastian's return from the charmed island, rather “material” features of the late-feudal structure of Portugal have also come to America. One of them is the symbolic wish for nobilitation in the new Colony. Since the *Statute of Toledo* (1449), Castille and Portugal have adopted a dual criterion to award noble titles to the arising urban Bourgeoisie, by the time monarchical States used to sell titles of lesser nobility in order to fund their regular armies, to acquire treasury and to mould a palatial *noblesse de robe* composed by legal specialists. The first criterion was the *purity of blood*, that is, the absence of Moorish or Jewish ascendants in someone's lineage. The other one was the *purity of hands*, that is, immaculacy in terms of manual work, the so-called *mechanical defect*. Were we to figure out a Portuguese peasant or urban craftsman of neither Moorish nor Jewish ascendants, he would not be able to be conceded a noble title by dint of his *mechanical defect*. However, having settled in America and having founded a sugar farm, his descendants would become manorial lords of the plantation system. This elite is simultaneously a capitalist one in terms of the international mercantile trade of primary products, such as sugar, tobacco, cotton, cocoa, and so on and so forth, and a typical feudal one in terms of familiar and inside behaviour, as well as concerning their imaginary, as we attempted to have meticulously analyzed in this paper.

Actually, everyday life in these farms was very similar to that in feudal domains. Specially sugar farms in Portuguese America were practically self-sufficient, containing chapels, mills, manufactories, vegetable gardens, plantations and livestock farming. Colonial farms were, indeed, protected by hundreds of men against the “savages” and foreign corsairs, as well as feudal realms were shielded by warriors against Saracen and Norman attacks, or from local opponents in the 10th-12th century. Apart from military aspects, in the image of feudal lords, Portuguese plantation lords in America used to bury gold and jewellery in the farms [5].

According to the lecture of Hilário Franco Júnior, Brazilian *coronelismo* would as well be a medieval legacy to Brazilian social life in the hinterland, reproducing feudal clien-

pela negação desse inimigo tradicional. Explica-se, assim, que sua atitude reproduzisse o padrão de conduta dos cavaleiros medievais, e que esse padrão fosse construído a partir da oposição binária entre a identidade com o cristianismo e a alteridade representada pelos seguidores de Maomé.

telism and protectorate. By dispensing favours and benefits, great land owners shape extended families in the feudal concept of the word. As a symbolic father (*senior*), the *coronel* is a commander and protector in return for loyalty, conceding to his “vassals” assets and means of survival. In mediaeval Europe, reciprocal bonds between suzerains and vassals prompted the existence of a pseudo-branch confidence, which gave rise to the typically feudal assimilation of public functions to private friendship [5].

In order to explain this contradictory phenomenon marking the History of Brazil and, by and large, of Latin America, Professor Hilário Franco Júnior, one of the very founding fathers of Brazilian mediaevistic, appeals to the metaphor once construed by the great historian Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, the “roots” of Brazil. Assaying that Buarque de Holanda has looked over his own image of the roots sustaining the tree, Franco Júnior attests our hypothesis of Brazil being endowed with mediaeval origins. By resorting to the possibility of nobilitation in Early Modern Times, Buarque de Holanda stresses that Portuguese bourgeoisie did not have to impose new merchant attitudes and a capitalist imaginary on the old feudal aristocracy. On the opposite, this bourgeois segments have adopted noble practices, games, and have endeavoured to be recognized as legitimate part of the noble layer. One of these features marking the late-feudal *ethos* of Portuguese colonial society in America is patriarchy [7].

We entirely agree with Franco Júnior as he stresses that the modern Portuguese experience of colonization cannot be seen in anyway but as a continuation of the mediaeval Reconquest wars, taking more and more lands from the pagans. Moreover, the conquest and colonization of Portuguese America was a deed of mediaeval layers of the society, not strictly modern ones. It is the opposite of the process which occurred in English America. Nevertheless, historical rupture and newborn civilization processes are not at all to be denied in the origins of Brazil as a historiographic enigma. This is the reason why both Hilário Franco Júnior [5] and José Rivar Macedo [8] bring us the paradox perceived in Brazil by the French anthropologist Roger Bastide. For him, some waning traits of culture and imaginary in the Metropolis, being on the brink of extinction, were vigorously introduced in the Colony, having even survived the political separation of Portugal and Brazil in the 19th century. For the Brazilian mediaevalist, the scattering of colonial population and internal migration would have caused mediaeval traditions to be preserved before modern cultural hegemony. In this regard, Brazil would be a land of contrasts, where different historical epochs get intertwined. Travelling throughout Brazil means not only a spatial but a time displacement [5].

The Mexican historian and diplomat Luís Weckmann avers, in his excellent *The mediaeval heritage of Brazil (La herencia medieval del Brasil, 1993)*, that the Iberian Peninsula was not endowed with a proper Renaissance in the 16th century and hence no proper modern transition. In Iberian America, the so-called “Autumn of the Middle Ages” (Jo-

hann Huizinga) did not take place before the 17th century [13]. Henceforth, Portugal and Spain continued to bring about a late chivalric literature, mystic writings and even their own war monks, the Jesuits [13] Let us grant the word to Hilário Franco Júnior:

We talk, therefore, not properly about Brazilian Middle Ages, yet of a mediaeval system of values in Brazil. As Mário Martins has noticed, “the mediaeval way of being and feeling his world experience and also its social and poetic contents [was prolonged] in the Brazilian Northeast, where central power has not always been able to impose itself, giving rise to a sort of feudal life and its respective psychology [5]³.

Reading Mário Martins, Hilário Franco Júnior observes that the Middle Ages would not properly be an epoch, but a manner of being in the world, which is the upshot of an asynchrony of social rhythms and times between different levels of social existence (political, institutional, economic, social, cultural, mental, religious) [5]. For Franco Júnior, Brazil would be best defined as a set of mediaeval structures with modern enclaves, as well as areas of modernity with mediaeval enclaves. To sum it all up, Franco Júnior stresses that the fundamental structures existing in Europe from the 4th to the 19th century are the same as those occurring in Brazil, from the 16th to 20th century [5].

Along with all this Brazilian feudality, there is still, in the hinterland of the country, a feudal conception of family as an extended community (*Gemeinschaft*), rather than an institutionalized society (*Gesellschaft*), in which the patriarch plays a vital role in deciding the destiny of the family members. By the time Sérgio Buarque de Holanda wrote his *Raízes do Brasil* (1936), it was really usual that the patriarch had authority over life and death of family members in the hinterland [7]. Besides, the still remnant traits of feudal particularisms do hinder – or at least weaken – impersonal application of general rules belonging to the democratic system [5]. This obviously constitutes an obstruction to the Rule of Law in Brazil, and, precisely like Classical Feudalism (Marc Bloch), there is an indistinction between “public” and “private” spheres, so that particular relationships of protection and mutual dependence clerally take over in areas where public power was mostly absent or simply innocuous. This situation fosters the private consciousness of belonging to small groups from which assistance can be attained, rather than from the State. It is no secret that, until nowadays, great land owners exert political power and huge influence over the citizens.

All in all, this is as well the explanation for the failure of so many Brazilian institutions, specially for professional corporations are likely to act out as a superior instance to

3 Falamos, portanto, não propriamente de uma Idade Média brasileira, e sim de um sistema de valores medievais no Brasil. Como Mário Martins percebeu, “a maneira medieval de ser e de sentir a sua mundividência e também o seu conteúdo poético e social [prolongou-se] no nordeste brasileiro, onde o poder central nem sempre conseguiu impor-se, dando origem a uma espécie de vida feudal, com a psicologia correspondente.

public powers, which is the case of the Judiciary Power and the Armed Forces throughout Brazilian History [5].

In terms of a total analysis of this late-feudal reality of Portuguese America in the first centuries of colonization, we hope to have asserted that there was a feudal *ethos* pertaining to higher social layers in colonial society. Should we pursue a Total History of Portuguese America, in the theoretical picture proposed by Karl Marx in his *For the critique of political economy* (1859), we would need to indicate that this feudal *ethos* of plantation lords have organized the plantation system as an agrarian reality of great farms producing primary goods, such as sugar, cotton, tabacco, cocoa, which was intended to be exported to the European metropolis, Portugal. As a matter of fact, Portugal exerted a monopolist control over the colonial production through the commercial exclusivism. Therefore, we can conclude that this late-mediaeval reality of colonial society has drawn a dialectic process of material plantation reality conditioning late-feudal mentality, as well as feudal mentality retroconditioning social and economic organization of colonial life [9].

Relying on Marx, we could advocate that there was a sort of historical *décalage* between material forces of social life production and ideological representations. Since productive forces building up the new capitalist order acted out inside the old ideal framework, there were still feudal representations, values and world views attached to the old, vanishing order [9].

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

We believe to have testified how strong mediaeval heritage in Brazil is, until present time. In this regard, the *cavalcadas*, inside a greater symbolic tradition of the Feast of the Holy Spirit, can be a powerful evidence that the Conquest and colonization of Portuguese America, a continuing process to the Reconquest in late-feudal Iberian Peninsula, are a mostly mediaeval happening, though marked by some really modern irruptions. What makes it possible?

By unveiling the mediaeval structures of Brazilian imaginary in the long duration, the cultural permanence of the *cavalcadas* testify the true nature of Colonization: the expansion of the Christian faith and the conquest of an *Orbis Lusitanus*, as conceived by the Jesuit secretary of King Dom João IV of Portugal, Simão Rodrigues de Azevedo. We could now pose a different – yet not less intriguing – question. If Portuguese, and more generally Hispanic America as well, have resulted from a feudal transposition (Luís Weckmann) [13], how it is possible that English America, from the achievement of Virginia by Sir Walter Raleigh in 1585, was born mostly modern and capitalist?

For traditional economic interpretation of the colonization, represented in Brazilian Historiography by the works of Caio Prado Júnior (specially *Formação do Brasil Contemporâneo*, 1942), the Portuguese Colony in America would have been formed as part of a Modern State, Portugal, connected to a mercantilist – hence commercial-capitalist – world economy as a huge source of agricultural raw material to serve as

input for the incipient European manufactures. In this regard, colonization would have been a totally modern enterprise, though occupying a subaltern position in capitalist world economy [10].

Agreeing to the lectures of Hilário Franco Júnior, José Rivair Macedo and Pedro Agostinho, we denegate this explanation, which would, in turn, be a satisfactory model for the Southern colonies of English America, even though the consolidation of an aristocratic *ethos* was to be observed in these realms. Yet, generally speaking, English America and its Puritan pilgrims comprise a really modern historical experience. Thus, English settlers in the Northern colonies were Puritan entrepreneurs, bound to ground a new society of free people, under the couplet of a “New Jerusalem”, the well-known appropriation of Christ’s *Sermon on the Mount* (Mt, 5, 3-5) regarding the source of light over a mountain, a “City upon a Hill”.

In terms of a syntax of historical rhythms and epochs, there seems to us to be a dual historical process in the Atlantic world of the mid-15th and 16th century. At the same time, a modern Northern Europe founds a modern America, whereas a late-feudal Southern Europe tends to ground a late-feudal colonization in South America. This is basically the conception of a great Brazilian Marxist intellectual, who has been mostly forsaken by Brazilian historians and sociologists: Nelson Werneck Sodré. In his provocative *Formação Histórica do Brasil* (1956), this author highlights that Portugal was effectively a late-feudal, corporative and patrimonialist kingdom in the 15th and 16th centuries. For Werneck Sodré, what actually took place in the Portuguese territory in America was definitely a feudal transposition. This is also our very point of view [12].

In our view, one structural explanation/interpretation for this dual historicity in early modern centuries lies in Antonio Gramsci’s theory of the “morbid landscapes”, which come to light when the old mode of production of human existence (Feudalism) has not yet completely vanished, whereas the new one (Capitalism) was not yet fully born [6]. This is, to our mind, the very mysterious nature of Brazilian History and hybrid colonization. According to Gramsci, morbid symptoms (*fenomeni morbosi*, “morbid phenomena”) are to be detected in situations of general social crisis, when the traditional hegemonic class is not any longer able to produce social consensus and political direction. Therefore, ascendant social layers, wishing to take part in the *ethos* of the old elites, become allies of the latter, reproducing, to some extent, the old social behaviours and ideologies. Is it not the political and cultural context in which the Modern State is born, out of the social crisis of Feudalism, precisely as an apparatus of enlarged feudal domination (Perry Anderson)?

To this process, at last, the *cavalcadas* seem to be a very privileged testimony and way of exegesis. They are the late-feudal “baptismal certificate” of the Portuguese colonial experience in the New World.

Author Contributions

Marcus Baccega is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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