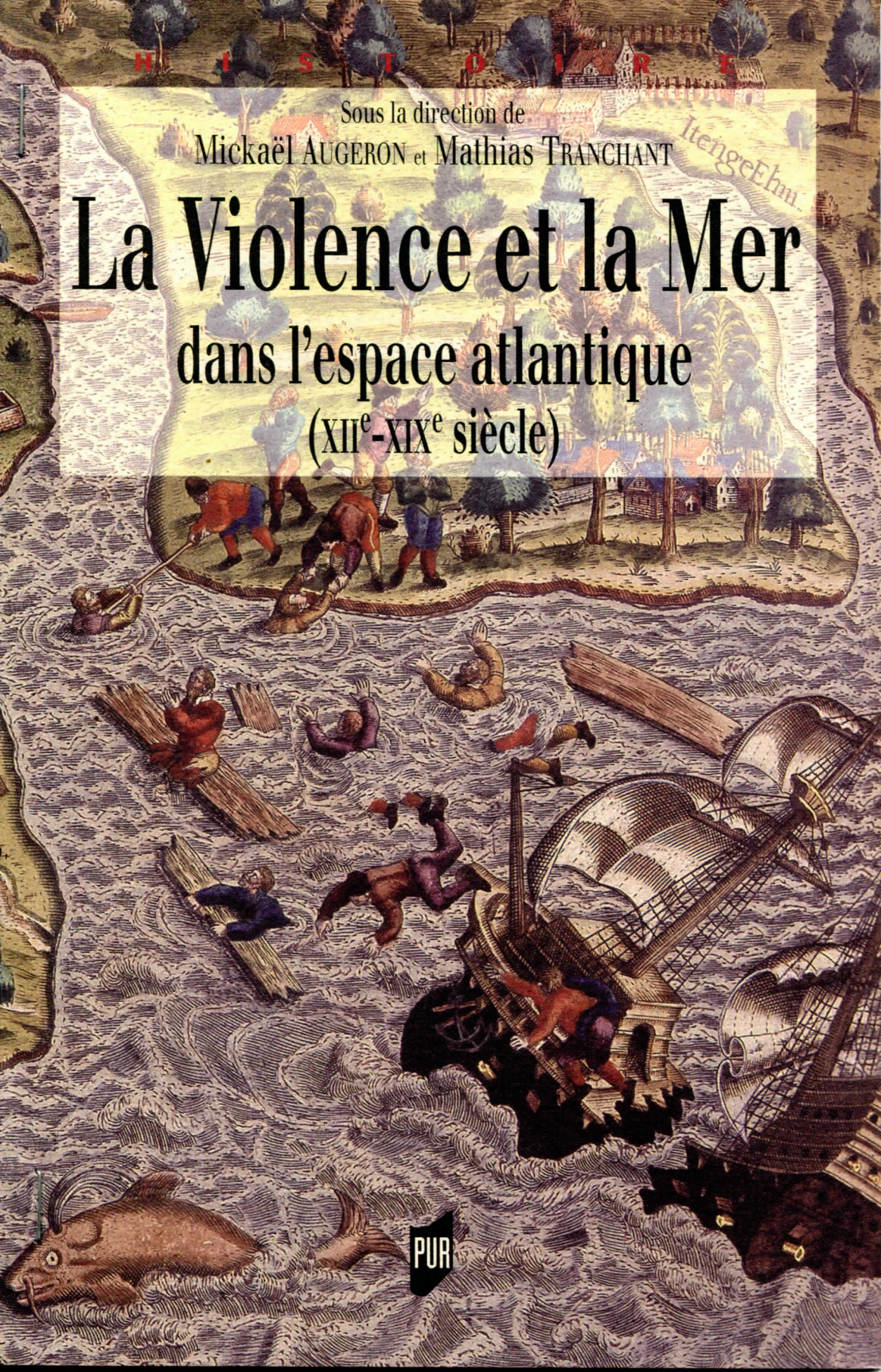


H I S T O I R E

Sous la direction de
Mickaël AUGERON et Mathias TRANCHANT

La Violence et la Mer dans l'espace atlantique (XII^e-XIX^e siècle)



PUF

The danger of the sea in Southern Brazil and the ex-votos in the Church of Good Lord in Iguape – São Paulo

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Introduction

Votive offerings are an important part of the traditional religious symbols and practices in many Brazilian Atlantic coastal regions and frequently are on display publicly in those churches that are holy places for pilgrimages. Ex-votos can be defined as objects associated with or religious practices dedicated to a saint in fulfilment of a vow or of a received favour.

Although ex-votos have been a focus of study in folklore since the 1930's in Brazil, maritime ex-votos have still not received much attention. The first studies on maritime votive offerings really began to appear in the 1970's in folklore research such as Câmara Cascudo's book (1971) documenting the presence of maritime ex-votos in the famous procession of the Holy Mother of Nazaré, in Belém. Jorge Amado, in his book *Todos os Santos Bay* (1970) describes the work of artisans who paint marine votive offerings ("riscadores de milagres") displayed in famous churches such as Nosso Senhor do Bonfim and Nossa Senhora das Candeias, in Salvador, Bahia.

This paper is a study of maritime ex-votos found in the Church of Bom Jesus de Iguape, a small coastal town of southern São Paulo State. These particular ex-votos symbolize religiosity of the coastal communities in southern Brazil. Iguape is a catholic worship center that attracts hundreds of thousands of pilgrims, particularly during the first week of August, when the feast of Our Lord is celebrated. Pilgrims come mainly from the southern States of Santa Catarina, Paraná and Rio Grande do Sul. Some of them lay their votive offerings in front of the holy image.

Dangers of the sea and religious feelings of coastal communities in Brazil

The primary religion of Brazil's coastal communities is Catholicism, although in many parts of the country there is a mixture of Catholicism with Afro-Brazilian beliefs which have various spirits (*orixás*) to counter dangers associated specifically with the sea.

Yemanjá is the most well-known goddess of the sea to whom the worshippers offer flowers and perfume, throwing these gifts in the sea during the festival of February Second. Yemanjá is the goddess who protects fishermen from storms and dangers at sea.

Most communities in southern Brazil are Catholics as result of Portuguese colonization, particularly influenced by migrants from Azores who are zealous Catholics.

Important manifestations of religious feelings and behaviours in the regions in question are linked to the sea. For many centuries, beginning with the discovery of the country in the Sixteenth century, Southern Brazil was very isolated from the capital sharing borders with countries colonized by the Spaniards. Note that the principal means of communication until the beginning of the 20th Century were maritime. In addition, it is important to bear in mind that the Southern Atlantic is highly changeable and perilous for navigation during the winter months.

South Atlantic Sea has long been feared by seafarers ever since the period of the Great Discoveries as the dwelling place of monsters and storms that cause frequent shipwrecks. The French traveller, Jean de Lery (1954) who visited Brazil in the middle of the Sixteenth Century was impressed by the violence of the storms threatening his ship. Catholic shipmates on his boat often asked for the protection of Saint Nicolas and threw overboard images of this saint hoping to calm terrible storms.

Portuguese ships were blessed by priests before leaving Lisbon for Brazil and saints were invoked by seafarers to protect them against the danger of shipwreck.

During the first three centuries of Brazilian colonization, the Portuguese were afraid not only of storms but also of pirates and buccaneers who attacked their ships along the Brazilian coast and hid their boats in isolated islands along the coast.

Piracy was an important and profitable activity from the late Sixteenth to the beginning of the Nineteenth century. In the middle of the Seventeenth century when the image of Lord Jesus of Iguape was found on the beach of Iguape, there are many references to the presence of English and French pirates along the São Paulo coast. In 1655, for instance, the King of Portugal sent a letter to the Governor of São Paulo, giving orders to reinforce the defenses of the harbour of Santos, assuring the safety of

the ships. In 1722 authorities of the coastal city of Iguape asked the Governor for military reinforcement as pirates were seen nearby. Attacks by pirates were so frequent that the King of Portugal ordered that merchant ships could only travel to Portugal in convoys, protected by military ships (Almeida, 1946)

Maritime ex-votos in Brazil

According to Mollat (1983), in a time of enormous fear, at the end of the first millennium Christians flooded roads in Europe carrying ex-votos to coastal churches. From the Fourteenth century onwards the popularity of votive offerings increased significantly in Europe and through the period of the Great Discoveries the offering of ex-votos expanded along with the fear of the unknown continents exacerbated by the natural perils of traversing the Atlantic Ocean.

Thus, the appearance of ex-votos in Portugal is documented from the Fifteenth Century onwards. In the convent of Santa Maria das Virtudes, there is a description of marine votive offerings in 1453 (Museu da Marinha, 1983)

It is difficult to know when the first ex-voto appeared in Brazil, but one can guess that due to the fact that the country was under Portuguese rule, the votive offerings promised in Brazil by seafarers were displayed in Portugal.

Religious centers of pilgrimage born from the waters

It is surprising that most of the important sanctuaries for religious pilgrimages stemmed from events linked to marine and aquatic domains. The image of Our Lady of Aparecida, protectrix of Brazil has origin in the riverine context of local fishing in eastern São Paulo State. In northern Brazil, Our Lady of Nazaré, in Belém, is also an important center of religious pilgrimage associated with the sea: her statue is thought to have been found by fishermen near a coastal fishing village, Vigia, in the Seventeenth Century. A religious procession and ceremony dedicated to Our Lady of Nazaré, in October, attracts more pilgrims than anywhere else in Brazil. More than a million people congregate in the streets of Belem for this celebration. During the procession many ex-votos carried by pilgrims are miniature boats.

The image of Our Lord of Iguape was also taken from the sea in 1647. Its discovery by three Indians on the beach at Jureia, in southern coast of São Paulo is marked by a miraculous event, described in the historical document of 1785 (*Livro do Tombo*) from Iguape: a Portuguese ship carrying the image of Our Lord from Portugal to Pernambuco was attacked by Protestant pirates. To avoid capture of the religious statue by pirates, the

ship's crew released it into the sea in a raft illuminated by six candles. Marine currents took the raft from the north to the south, and according to the legend, when the floating raft passed near Ilha Bela, the bells of the church rang miraculously during the night. Two hundred miles down the raft reached Jureia beach, where the statue was found by Indians and taken to the city of Iguape, one of the oldest settlements in Brazil (picture 2).

In the middle of the Eighteenth century there are indications that the miraculous statue attracted increasing numbers of pilgrims from southern Brazil. A larger church was built in the beginning of the Nineteenth century to receive the growing number of pilgrims flocking to Iguape to thank Bom Jesus for a favour or perhaps even a miracle.

Linkages between the city, the sea and river are important in understanding the history of the town. Iguape is located at the mouth of one of the most important rivers of southern Brazil: the Ribeira de Iguape, through which the first gold exploring expeditions started in the early years of colonization. Iguape was an important export center gold until the Eighteenth century, when larger gold deposits were found in Minas Gerais. Iguape once was one of the most important ports of southern Brazil, exporting various products, as rice, until the end of the Nineteenth century. Many ships made the journey from Iguape to Rio de Janeiro, Montevideo and Portugal.

In the beginning of the Nineteenth century a canal was built linking the river harbour to the estuary where the harbour was located. Subsequently, the sediment transported by the river filled up the main sea bar, hindering the entrance of larger ships. The eventual loss a navigable seaport was one of the causes of the subsequent impoverishment of Iguape.

Veneration of Our Lord of Iguape, only important locally, was enhanced by increasing numbers of Azorean immigrants who settled in the southern provinces of Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul in the Eighteenth century.

França (1972) notes that devotion to Our Lord was prevalent among fishermen of Azores. She also observes that the veneration of Our Lord existed in southern Brazil even prior to the substantial migration of Azorians to Santa Catarina State, although it is also recognized that small groups of Azorians participated in colonizing of the southern region before the State sponsored migration. One explanation may be that people from Iguape were involved in the colonization of the southern part of Brazil in the Seventeenth Century, when priests and missionaries proselitized among settlers in Santa Catarina.

Even now, significant number of pilgrims attending the religious feasts of Bom Jesus in early August are descendents of Azorian immigrants who in the early days sailed from the south to Iguape, carrying votive offerings. Maritime travel was hard and could take up to several weeks. Azorian com-

munities in Brazil produced skillful mariners and fishermen. At the end of the Nineteenth Century they gradually abandoned land-based economies and became full time fishermen.

Votive paintings were common until the 60's when they were totally replaced by photos and other forms of ex-votos. At the same time, sea voyages almost disappeared. Good roads were built linking Santa Catarina to São Paulo and the sea entrances in the Iguape-Cananéia estuary became too hazardous for coastal navigation.

Pilgrimages also occurred in August, after the peak of mullet fishing, an important economic activity in Santa Catarina. Cash from this fishery enabled pilgrims to travel and also to make market purchases during the August festival.

The maritime ex-votos in the Church of Iguape

The ex-votos of the Church of Iguape are placed in a large room, whose walls are covered with paintings, photos, miniatures and representations of parts of human bodies in wax, indicating various situations in which the divine intervention was requested and danger was removed. The majority of the votive offerings are related to healing of illnesses. Among the maritime ex-votos are eight votive paintings and a dozen of miniature boats displayed in wall cabinets. Some of them have been damaged by termites and humidity. All the painted votive offerings are from the 1930 to the 1960 and it is clear that they represent only a small proportion of maritime ex-votos offered by pilgrims over the past three centuries. Church authorities periodically discard some ex-votos which are replaced by new offerings. In recent years, according to Church authorities, some old marine painted ex-votos were stolen.

Shipwrecks and dangers posed by venturing into the realm of the sea are the main themes of the votive offerings. The intervention of Our Lord of Iguape was sought when the sea appeared to be particularly threatening, e.g. when storms and fires endangered the ship and the lives of the sailors and passengers.

Historical narratives indicate that shipwrecks and losses of vessels and crews occurred frequently in the southern region in the early period of the Brazilian colonization. Control of and claims to the coast were disputed by the Portuguese and Spanish until the early Eighteenth Century. As noted earlier the seas bordering the southern coast are known to be unpredictable, with rapid changes of weather.

The first narrative known to be associated with a shipwreck and a plea for intervention of Bom Jesus of Iguape occurred in 1714, in front of the entrance of the estuary, one of the most treacherous area of the coastal sea (Paulino, 1946).

The dangers of ships going down in various sea entrances and requests for divine intervention are represented in a number of votive offerings. Picture number three illustrates the threats to a fishing boat at the entrance of Cananéia. A crewmember kneels in the center of the boat, praying for protection of the saint.

The votive offering n. 4 shows a shipwreck which occurred in a sandbar in front of Paranaguá city. The painting is done in pencil and has been damaged by sunlight and humidity. It depicts the desperate situation of fishermen involved in a shipwreck. At the bottom of the painting the seamen beg the saint to intervene. This particular offering was made in 1967.

The picture n. 5 shows a large ship on fire in front of a harbour that appears to be that of Paranaguá, in Paraná State and the offering was offered in 1961.

The only painted votive offering known to represent the danger of a river flooding shows a mother and her children being saved by a branch after their canoe capsized in the Ribeira River (picture n. 6).

Among the various ship miniatures, it is worthwhile to point out a miniature sail boat from Tijucas, Santa Catarina (picture n. 7) that was released in sea as an ex-voto, in the hope that, taken by marine currents, it could reach Iguape, some 400 kilometres to the north.

The final ex-voto described here is a miniature of a local fisherman/farmer of the region of Iguape. The row and the axe represent the two most important labour tools of local inhabitants: agriculture and fishing (picture n. 8).

The maritime votive offerings of the Church of Our Lord of Iguape are symbols of the religiosity of the coastal people of southern Brazil as well as representations of the life dangers in the region's unpredictable sea. The maritime history of southern Brazil is embodied in and preserved by the pilgrimage center of Iguape, one of the oldest towns of Brazil and its collection of ex-votos. In the early days of the colonization, the discovery of a statue on a deserted beach, representing the Ecce Homo reflects the dangers posed by Protestant pirates in the Seventeenth century attacking Catholic Portuguese vessels in southern Atlantic.

The construction of maritime ex-votos symbolize and are a response to the dangers that coastal communities faced in their day to day lives: seafaring and fishing. In this context, the arrival of Azorian migrants in the early Eighteenth century reinforced the existing veneration of Our Lord of Iguape, whose statue was found in 1647. The descendents of Azorians became the most fervent pilgrims visiting Iguape church and the majority of the maritime ex-votos were offered by this group.

After the 70's, votive paintings became rare; and increasingly they were replaced by photos. Construction of major highways linking the southern

regions and Iguape in the 60' has greatly reduced the importance of the pilgrimages routes by sea, as most pilgrims choose to travel by road, shortening their trip.

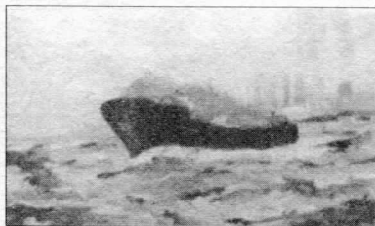
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Picture 1



Picture 5



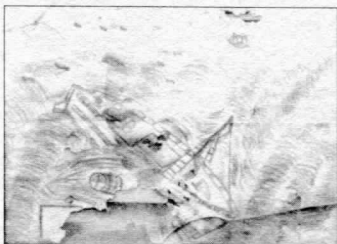
Picture 2



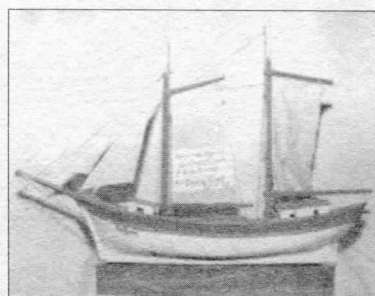
Picture 6



Picture 3



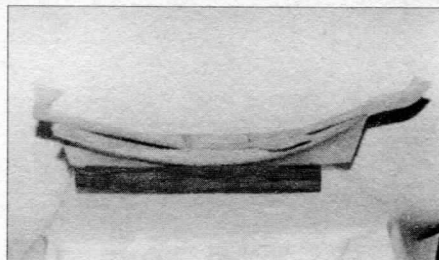
Picture 7



Picture 4



Picture 8





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La Violence et la Mer

dans l'espace atlantique

(XII^e-XIX^e siècle)



MER DE VIOLENCES, violences de la Mer : les rapports de l'Homme à l'Océan sont encore trop souvent marqués par la souffrance et la tragédie. Toujours craintes ou dénoncées, mais jamais totalement maîtrisées, ces violences maritimes n'en constituent pas moins une réalité omniprésente qui transcende les siècles.

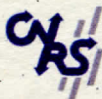
Comment les appréhender, les expliquer ou les caractériser ? Quel sens leur donner ?

Pour en définir les contours et les multiples expressions, pour en déterminer les enjeux et les motivations, pour en estimer la portée et les incidences, les auteurs de cet ouvrage se sont attachés à étudier tout autant les violences de l'environnement marin que celles produites par les hommes, à bord comme à quai. Ils se sont également penchés sur les moyens de contrôle, de canalisation ou d'exploitation de ces violences ; sur les remédiations qui leur ont été éventuellement apportées par les autorités civiles, politiques ou ecclésiastiques ; sur les représentations auxquelles elles ont donné lieu tant dans les arts que dans la littérature.

Mickaël AUGERON est maître de conférences en histoire moderne et contemporaine à l'université de La Rochelle. Il est également chargé d'enseignement à l'Institut d'études politiques de Paris. Ses recherches portent sur l'expansion maritime et coloniale européenne. Mathias TRANCHANT est maître de conférences en histoire médiévale à l'université de La Rochelle. Ses travaux portent sur l'histoire des sociétés littorales à la fin du Moyen Âge.

En couverture : gravure aquarellée de Théodore de Bry, dans *Americae tertiâ pars, memorabilem provinciae brasiliae historiam continens*, Francfort, 1592
(© Service historique de la Marine)

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