

Carlos Francisco Moura

Teatro a bordo de naus portuguesas

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A history of Portuguese theatre at sea, *Teatro a bordo de naus portuguesas* by Carlos Francisco Moura uses Early Modern literature as a social document to capture daily life in oceanic voyages and to portray how this enterprise was staged on land. In order to grasp this elusive dimension of the maritime expansion, Moura presents a comprehensive catalog of religious and profane *autos*, *entremezes*, *momos*, dialogues, comedies, *folias*, *chacotas* and *galhofas* performed by mariners, Jesuits and slaves, as they are referenced in the rich repository of nautical rutters, logbooks, and travel reports. Also including the plays performed in ship replicas at the Portuguese court, this corpus allows for the reader to take a glimpse at a subtle aspect of the Portuguese expansion—optimism. The historical moment here depicted, when technical control over the ocean made people perceive voyages as secure and stable, was one when mariners felt safe enough to play comedies in the vastness of the sea and people who stayed on land to turn these voyages into a symbol of power and glory. This confident gaze over the waters can be seen in a philological reconstruction of the social environment of the lived experience at sea and of the history of each voyage through these theatrical representations, as well as their influence on Portuguese theater.

Chronologically presented, the performances and dramatic texts on board, their editions and sources, allow for a clear overview of the history of the ships and their performances. Regarding the sixteenth century, Moura registers comedies and *autos* in the carrack *São Paulo* (1560); comic episodes in the carrack *São Filipe* (1561 and 1563); *Diálogo de Nossa Senhora* by Bartolomeu Vallone SJ, a Spanish *auto* by Pedro Ramón SJ, and *Auto de Santa Bárbara*, by Afonso Álvares, in the carrack *Santa Bárbara* (1574), the last one also represented in the carrack *Bom Jesus*, in 1578; *autos* about the Pentecost in the carrack *São Francisco* (1583); a representation of the temptations of Christ in the desert in the carrack *Santiago* (1585); and comedies and dialogues written by anonymous Jesuits in the carrack *São Cristóvão* (1591). Concerning the seventeenth

century, the author lists four ships that served as a theatre stage. Those being the carrack *Nossa Senhora de Jesus* (1610), where a comedy was enacted; carrack *Nossa Senhora de Belém* (1635), where the anniversary of St. Francis Xavier was celebrated by sailors performing a comedy and numerous *entremezes*; carrack *Bom Jesus da Vidigueira* (1655), where St. Anthony and St. John were celebrated in the same fashion; and galleon *São Francisco* (1655), where an unknown play was performed. About the eighteenth century, Moura lists theatrical performances in two ships—a comedy and an *entremez* in the carrack *Senhora da Nazaré* (1746); and the comedy *As preciosas ridiculas*, and the *Entremez do velho namorado impertinente e enganado* in the carrack *Santa Ana-Carmo-S. Jorge* (1771). While this corpus would allow for a more profound reading of each voyage, the schematic organization of information may prove to be quite useful for the historian of science, as it depicts this optimistic gaze and presence in the sea. Despite not making a literary analysis of the dramatic texts or problematizing their contents in relation to this scientific enterprise, this book provides a closer look at both daily life in oceanic voyages and the imperial thought behind it. Through these micro-histories, the reader is able to step into an Early Modern ship and observe what the crew did *to take the sadness out of the sea* (João de Barros, *Decades of Asia*, I), since crossing the ocean became such a monotonous activity. Some of the most interesting comedy acts were based in (para)theatrically challenging authority on board, whether by using rhetoric and dance to confront high rank individuals, such as the captain, pilot, boatswain, priests or noblemen, or by performing celebrations where the social order on the ship was inverted. Such was the occasion in the celebration of the Emperor of the Holy Spirit, when a young mariner elected emperor of the ship by the crew chose the captain to be his butler, and a nobleman for his dishwasher. Another sort of social transfiguration can be noticed in the *galhofa*, a celebration of crossing the Equator, where mariners who did not make offerings were punished in a theatrical fashion, as fellow sailors dressed as policemen and a judge and condemned the criminal to be tied to a rope and tossed in the water for mockery. Not only does the book provide access to these literary ways of bringing joy to spare time at sea, but also to the role of Catholic priests in theatre representations, either by their authorship (most of the plays onboard were written by Jesuits), or by their interest as audience members (sometimes facing great danger in order to watch a play performed on another ship).

Setting the stage to understand the connection between scientific mastery of nature and the Portuguese Empire, Moura's research also shows that maritime iconography was theatrically used on land as a political symbol, and theatre performances at sea and in ultramarine territories were promoted by kings. As the power of the Portuguese monarchy was engraved in deep blue, scenography invoked the sea in theatrical

representations on land since the fifteenth century. To watch a show played in a carrack floating in sapphire silk may have been surprising, but not astonishing for Early Modern Lisbon. Moura registers several situations where this happened. The first one was designed in 1491 by King John II of Portugal (1455–1495) to celebrate the marriage between his son Afonso, Prince of Portugal (1475–1491) to Isabella of Aragon (1470–1498), daughter of the Catholic Kings. This was a union of the Iberian empires theatrically performed using nautical elements and naval construction, in order to display the Portuguese and Spanish control of the seas. Ten carracks flaunting glorious symbols for both monarchies navigated the stage, while music made of boatswains' whistles and mariners' yells, that is, the soundtrack to these Empires, played. These scenography choices continued to be made by the successor King Manuel I of Portugal (1469–1521), who established a close connection between maritime imagery and imperial power. The representation of *momos* in a carrack on the Christmas of 1500 was but one of many events stating that Portuguese supremacy came from the ocean. This idea can be also found in the works of Gil Vicente (1465–1536), the forefather of Portuguese theater, and specifically in *Nau d' Amores* (1527), represented in a carrack, where actors were noblemen richly dressed as poor caulkers working the ship with golden pommels, during the reign of King John III of Portugal (1502–1557). The same notion is portrayed a century later, in the enactment of *Tragicomédia del Descubrimiento y Conquista del Oriente* (1619), by António de Sousa SJ, before King Philip III of Portugal and IV of Spain (1605–1665). This imperial strategy can be located not only on land but also at sea, given the fact that, as Father António Vieira SJ (1608–1697) states in his defense for theatre onboard (*Sermão Quinto*), King Manuel I of Portugal ordered for the ships to be equipped with musical instruments, such as violas, *adufes*, and tambourines, for the entertainment and relaxation of the crew. Moura adds a point of utmost interest regarding these instructions: theatre was a tool for colonization, a means to spread Portuguese traditions, cults and habits, like the Feast of the Holy Spirit, to the new-found lands. The result of such an ordinance can be found in the arrival of the Armada of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil (1500), where friendly contact with native Brazilians was accomplished with the help of actor and mariner Diogo Dias making comic acts, mariners playing bagpipes, rattles and drums, and by the Portuguese engaging with the indigenous people through the *folia* dance.

Shedding light on such vibrant episodes throughout the book, Carlos Francisco Moura outlines a general History of Portuguese theatre on board, where the mariners' daily life, filled with ways of creating joyful moments at sea, given their confidence in nautical science and technology, is highlighted. Furthermore, this book, the first academic publication of its kind, opens the way to investigate how Early Modern

literature confirms that Iberian empires optimistically considered the globe a masterable object.

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