PUBLIC ORATORIES: MONUMENTS BUILT FOR RELIGIOUS EXERCISE ON THE STREETS OF THE CITY OF SALVADOR, BAHIA, IN THE 18TH AND 20TH CENTURIES

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ABSTRACT

Our article studies four monuments oratories: Oratory Cruz do Pascoal, Oratory of São Benedito, Oratory of Mãe Rainha de Schöenstatt and Oratory of Nossa Senhora de Fátima, all of them in the city of Salvador, Bahia. It seeks to correlate their esteem as a material culture and visual memory that emerges from the places where they are located. The result allows for us to have knowledge about and an explanation for the association between what a monument is, Bahian religiosity, devotion to the saints, and constructions, which are fruits of popular devotion in Bahia.

Keywords: Public Oratory. Monument. Popular devotion.

RESUMO

Nosso artigo estuda quatro oratórios monumentos: Oratório Cruz do Pascoal, Oratório de São Benedito, Oratório da Mãe Rainha de Schöenstatt e Oratório de Nossa Senhora de Fátima, todos na cidade de Salvador, Bahia. Procura-se correlacionar sua estima enquanto cultura material e de memória visual que emerge dos lugares onde se localizam. O resultado permite ter conhecimento e explicitação da associação entre o que é monumento, a religiosidade baiana, a devoção aos santos e as construções, que são frutos da devoção popular na Bahia.

INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The first artistic manifestations, sometimes reinterpreted in erudite stylistics, sometimes following the tradition of local and foreign artists, coincide with the establishment of religious orders: Jesuit (1549), Benedictine (1581), as well as Franciscan (1584). In baked clay, they were first intended for wall niches, oratories and altarpieces in churches. As for the domestic cult, the statuaries gained, in the hands of saint-makers and anonymous popular artists, small dimensions and characteristics of the places from which they emerged. In the 19th century, religious experience was largely organized by brotherhoods, lay associations for the promotion of the cult of saints.

In former Bahia, devotion to the saints was the center of the people’s religion, and it had a dual aspect: it was celebrated collectively in families, brotherhoods and other meetings of the faithful, and it was addressed both to canonized people and to others, who were not, but people wished they were, in the official pantheon. This corresponds to the tradition of the Catholic Church, always focused on the vox populi when it comes to canonization processes. For Kátia Mattoso (1992), contrary to what some Church historians admit, the miracles performed and the fame among the people were the basis of the canonization process of all recognized saints, but, regardless of this, the devotion was always directed also to local saints and family members. “A child cruelly murdered, a person tragically killed or a pious leper could become saints and play the role of intermediaries for obtaining the graces asked for.” (MATTOSO, 1992).

But on the streets of the geographically enlarged city, beyond the doors of Carmo and São Bento, public oratories and niches on the facades of religious buildings were built with saints and votive lamps built with the purpose of devotional locus for passers-by. According to historian Edilece Couto (2013), until the 19th century, Salvador was divided into ten parishes, called districts. The parish of Sé was the administrative, political, judicial and religious center, where the government and episcopal palaces, the Town Hall, the jail, the Church of Nossa Senhora da Ajuda (first cathedral, before the construction of the Sé), the Santa Casa de Misericórdia, the Igreja da Sé, the Convent of the Franciscans, the old church of the Society of Jesus, the College of the Jesuits (Faculty of Medicine) and the third orders of São Francisco and São Domingos.

However, the dynamism of religious life was not fully revealed in the public spaces that the inquisitive eyes reached. According to Professor Cândido da Costa e Silva, some settlers used a space in the house intended for the worship of devotional saints. In the interior of the homes, family devotion throbbed in the saints’ room, in the corner of the house reserved for the oratory, or in the records of the saints in pictures on the walls. And even in the environments of public worship, in the reserved areas of exceptionally exposed images, shifting from the devotion that characterized the spirituality of clergy and laity, rooted in the select hagiology of every Catholic.

Everyday life unfolded under the sign of religion. In almost every house there were oratories that, at least three times a day, served as a meeting point for family, household members, and slaves: for morning prayers, vespers and evening prayers. In the cities, oratories placed at crossroads gathered passersby during the recitation of the rosary (MATTOSO, 1992, p. 395).

The term oratory is synonymous with niche, and basically the definition is similar in most researched sources. Regina M. Real (1962, p. 364) defines oratory as a niche or closet with religious images. Initially, they were small chapels attached to monasteries. In colonial Brazil, oratories were common on the corners of houses and churches. In addition to the devotion itself, the votive lamps, placed at the bottom of the oratory, served to illuminate a part of the street.
For Corona and Lemos (1989, p. 346-347), in the past, the term designated the compartment where sacred images were kept and where Holy Mass was said. It would be almost like a chapel inside a building: housing, hospital, jail, school, etc. There were also oratories in the form of external niches, on the facades of buildings, intended for publicly worshiped images. Nowadays the term practically only designates the small cupboard, or box, destined for the home keeping of small holy images. It is also the name of the room, provided with an altar, where, in the jails, the prisoners waited for the time of execution.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

Fruits of popular devotion, there are currently four monuments in the city of São Salvador da Bahia. Expression of the faith of one or more believers who built it on their own or with the help of friends and neighbors who are part of the local community. What is certain is that devotion to the saint enthroned in the “niche” was the starting point for building the sacred space, the space of prayers.

The oratories presented here are located in different squares of neighborhoods in the city of Salvador, Bahia, namely: Santo Antônio Além do Carmo, Rio Vermelho and Ondina, according to information from the identification sheets of the monuments found at the Gregório de Mattos Foundation. They are cared for by the Municipality of Salvador, currently managed by Antônio Carlos Magalhães Neto. However, on site visits and photographic records show that each of them has a group of janitors or a single janitor responsible for cleaning, painting, saints, rites, parties that take place in the vicinity of buildings, such as halls of buildings, parishes, churches. As it is a cultural, social and citizenship reference, its preservation is the responsibility of the government and the entire community.

The methodology proposed by Panofsky of iconographic analysis was also used to study the objects that make up the saint’s quarters. In this iconographic method, Panofsky (1986, p. 47) indicates the analysis of the theme through visual description of the object. And this description aims to identify the pure forms: the elements, colors, formats, as well as the expressions and psychological variations inherent to the images. At this first level of observation, a close look becomes fundamental and is one of the bases for a good contextual understanding of the object.

The second level of analysis of the method is based on the identification of images, stories and allegories that permeate the customs and traditions of certain times and civilizations. In this examination, the observer recognizes the personification of concepts and symbols in images. According to Panofsky (1986, p. 47), this stage of the analysis differs from the first for two reasons: first, because it is understandable rather than sensitive and, second, because the practical action by which it is conveyed has been consciously conferred.

ABOUT MONUMENTS

A monument is a structure or building built for different reasons and the most common are symbolic and/or commemorative, even more than for a functional use. The monuments we are talking about are as a rule designed with the dual purpose of celebrating an important event, or paying tribute to an illustrious figure and, at the same time, inventing an artistic object that will visually change the appearance of a city or place. Functional structures that have become notable for their antiquity, size or historical significance.

The concept of public monument has been reinterpreted in several ways, notably the concepts of the Venice Charter (1964) and the Amsterdam Declaration (1975), in which city public monuments reach new parameters and come to play more visibly the function of cultural heritage, without ceasing to believe that one of the main functions of the public monument, and perhaps the main one, is to constitute itself as a support for the memory of a place, society and/or social group.
According to historian Alois Riegl, in *Der moderne Denkmalkultus* (1903)\(^1\), a monument is:

in the oldest and truly original sense of the term [...] a work created by the hand of man with the precise intention of keeping the memory of an action or destiny forever present and alive in the consciousness of future generations. In this sense, the monument, in its original sense, is related to the maintenance of the collective memory of a people, society or group (RIEGL, 1984).

With this said, and in order to understand what a monument is, the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage also defines that:

For the purpose of this Convention, the following shall be considered as “cultural heritage”: monuments: architectural works, works of monumental sculpture and painting [...]groups of buildings: groups of separate or connected buildings [...] because of their architecture [...] sites: works of man or the combined works of nature and man [...] For the purposes of this Convention, the following shall be considered as natural heritage: natural features [...] the geological and physiographical formations [...] natural sites or precisely delineated natural areas [...] (UNESCO, 1972).

Nevertheless, in the post-revolutionary France of 1789, the monument became a strategic part in the formation of the nationalist identity. And, in this way, it was intended to designate a set of homogeneous character with values and customs, which would in turn serve as a foundation for the emergence of a certain type of social subject, a necessary process for the formation of a National State, where subjects shared not only the same language, but also the same feeling of belonging to a people and a territory\(^iii\).

The public monument thereby comes to delimit a specific point in the city, and starts to represent the memory that one wants to preserve, that one wants to be remembered through its material presence. Nelson Brissac Peixoto (1996) states that “the statue came to demarcate the city, attesting to what was done there, what happened there. The presence of someone or an event determines everyone’s destiny [...], they even guided those who pass through the streets, looking for their way.” (PEIXOTO, 1996).

In a commonplace way, it is possible to perceive that the monument is increasingly no longer relevant in the city by sharing space with advertisements and daily life, as many people admit not realizing and/or no longer identifying with old historical landmarks. With that, the monument is no longer a reference or landmark for those who live their routines in cities. What used to be loaded with symbolism and cultural values is now neglected and ignored, that is, due to lack of knowledge of the majority of the population, as well as the lack of a more particular look. In most cases of the monuments studied here, the same feeling does not occur, after all, there is affection, the religious feeling, if it can be mentioned in such a way.

Therefore, if we framed the monuments as belonging to an apparatus, with their specific and predetermined functionality according to the society at the time of their construction, one can support the proposition of the outdating of their memorial function. The building remains static and unchanging in the midst of a society that changes at every moment. Through one of the consequences of postmodernity, in which the passerby and the city in its contemporaneity constitute conflicting relationships, with the individual

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\(^1\) In this work, the French translation will be used: RIEGL, Alois. *Le culte moderne des monuments. Son essence et sa genèse* (The modern cult of monuments). Translation by Daniel Wieczorek. Paris: Seuil, 1984. All quotes presented here were translated from the original by the author herself.
concerned only with his daily tasks, he ends up establishing isolated and transitory relationships on a daily basis. Which does not apply in a generic way to the monuments presented here, mainly due to their fame and location, as is the case of the Oratory Monumento Cruz do Pascoal, located in the Santo Antônio Além do Carmo neighborhood, in the city of Salvador, Bahia.

Although cultural production is premised on its capacity for technical reproducibility, the singular and unique give way to the multiple, the uniformity of things and images ends up gaining originality value. The public monument is lost in the midst of this chaos and may end up becoming just a static symbol of a long-forgotten past, lost in the midst of meanings that no longer dialogue with what is being represented there from memory, as is the case of busts of politicians and statues of allegories, mainly in commercial neighborhoods and places, as is the case of the commercial district, in the city of Salvador, Bahia.

The exchange of codes in contemporaneity is achieved almost daily and the cult of the present is re-established in the historical acceleration provided by technological possibilities. According to David Harvey (2007), cultural production integrated with the production of merchandise in general ends up generating mass consumption and transforming daily life with capitalist aspects and emphasis on the ephemeral and on the hybridization of exhibition areas. However, the scope of national patrimonies is limited in a more selective, elitist and academicist area, since the legitimation of symbolic representations is conducted by a group of specialists and a large part of the population does not have the power of choice, not being able to decide in favor of what would really make sense for their group (FONSECA, 2005).

The citizen’s lack of assimilation with his locus of social coexistence can turn him into a mere spectator and lacking critical awareness. Art as a cultural product of a society can be a great instrument for this new look at the public monument, awakening in the spectator-passerby or cohabitant a new way of reading, aesthetic experience and also sentimental value to the monuments, given that in the case following the construction it also takes on an aura of sentimentality and, why not say, belonging. Therefore, we could bring to art a new possibility of mutual influence of the citizen with the monuments, proposing a restructuring of the population’s understanding of the inhabited space.

If we consider the monument as a significant urban locus, it is possible to sustain a possible particularity between the passerby and the symbolic power of the monuments in the city, in which the relationship of the work with its surroundings enables an interaction between spectator and monument, where “the space in which this discourse is presented becomes an essential component of it”. Anne Cauquelin (2006, p. 142) defines space by its use, thus, “space does not pre-exist to the use made of it; it is, on the contrary, the use that defines the place as a place, which takes the space from its ‘natural’ neutrality to artificialize it, that is, to inhabit it” (CAUQUELIN, 2006, p. 142).

Therefore, the intrinsic function of memory is not lost, as it is transformed through other values, updating and revitalizing the monument in contemporary times. The relationship that we seek to clarify is the strategy of preservation of public monuments according to the citizen’s subjective identification, awakening a relationship of affection and critical thinking that supports the possibility of preservationist actions.

**MONUMENT ORATORIES**

Article 216 of the Federal Constitution (1988) indicates that material culture is part, together with immaterial culture, of the cultural heritage that, individually or collectively, bear reference to the identity, action, and memory of the different groups that form specifically the Brazilian society. These include: forms of expression; the ways of creating, doing and living; scientific, artistic and technological creations; works, objects, documents, buildings and other spaces intended for artistic and cultural manifestations; urban sets and sites of historical and scenic value.
For the Gregorio de Matos Foundation linked to the Municipality of Salvador, public monuments are translated into symbols of the society to which they are concerned, serving as an indication of the memory and representative esteem of each place. Placed in the urban community, it seduces the spectator or passerby into different sensory experiences, often aroused merely by the contemplation of its aesthetics. Even if they sometimes lack functional understanding, they beautify the landscape, designating a landmark worthy of judgment in urban culture. They are erected for different reasons, whether symbolic, commemorative of a fact or to pay tribute to a historical personality. In this way, the institution classifies and divides public monuments into the following categories: memorial; statue; bust; sculpture; herma; landmark; light source; fountain; closing panel; monuments; mausoleum; as well as oratories. Therefore, in this work we adopted monument oratories as the objects of study now analyzed, now described.

The oldest monument oratory currently in existence is the “milestone” Cruz do Pascoal (figure 1), by Pascoal Marques de Almeida, who built the column in 1743 with materials that came from Lisbon, Portugal. It was built in Largo da Cruz do Pascoal, located in the traditional neighborhood of Santo Antônio Além do Carmo. As technical data, the material used is basically sandstone and brick masonry covered with tile with the technique of stonework, masonry and vitrification. It is 7.00 meters high with a base of 0.66 x 0.66 meters. It can be described as a monument composed of a sandstone stonework base supporting a Tuscan column built in masonry and covered with 18th century tiles. On top of the sandstone abacus there is the niche of Nossa Senhora do Pilar (figure 2), on whose corners miniature columns ending in earthenware spheres are applied, and, on top of the monument, a small cross. It has a wrought iron railing that surrounds the construction of Pascoal Marques, an old religious meeting point, with sui generis features and considered unique in the entire national territory.

The other oratories were built in the 20th century, as is the case of the oratory of São Benedito (figure 3), built at the behest of Argeu Miguel de Jesus, with the help of neighbors and friends from the neighborhood. This oratory is one of the simplest and originated in Salvador, Bahia, located in the Rio Vermelho neighborhood, more specifically in Praça São Benedito, and it has concrete, ceramic and glass materials and is 2.83 m high x 1.13 m long and 1.13 meters wide, with a larger base of 2.93 m in diameter, built by a bricklayer known to the local community of Rio Vermelho.
According to Mr. A. F. dos S., 68 years old, a friend of Mr. Argeu Miguel de Jesus (in memoriam), and who helped in the construction of the oratory of São Benedito, it has been more than 20 years since the oratory was built and, on the occasion of “inauguration”, there was even a mass in celebration, and until today, on October 5th or on the first Sunday of October, he and the community celebrate a dawn and soon after a feijoada.

The third oratory found was that of Nossa Senhora de Fátima (figure 4), without authorship reference, also built in the 20th century in Bahia. It is located on Nossa Senhora de Fátima street, in Ondina, right in front of Colégio Instituto Social da Bahia. It is built in concrete, marble, block, colonial tile and aluminum frame with glass in the concreting technique, block masonry and marble coating with a height of 2.90 meters by 1.00 x 1.00 meters wide on a larger base (2.66 x 2.66 meters) and a smaller base (1.62 x 1.62 meters) as support for the erection.

In May 1917, Pope Benedict XV, in the midst of World War I, called on all Catholics to unite in prayer and ask Our Lady to intercede in the war and bring peace. And it was from there that the story of Our Lady of Fátima began. So important are the secrets revealed by Our Lady of Fátima that she has become one of the most acknowledged ones, welcoming millions of people every year to her Sanctuary, in the Portuguese city that bears her name. The image of Our Lady of Fátima brings beauty, simplicity and strength, qualities that the hearts of the little shepherds felt in each apparition. That’s why it is important to know how this image was conceived.

The oratory of Nossa Senhora de Fátima, located in Praça de Ondina, is the locus of religious services, in which the faithful leave their tributes, such as flowers and candles. Basically it consists of a space enclosed by masonry, aluminum and glass frames with a slab cover topped with ceramic tile. Surrounded by three steps in white marble, the ends are supports for a chain that alludes to the Catholic rosary, and limiting the space is an aluminum railing.

It is stated in the booklet used in the Grupo da Imaculada by the devotees and those responsible for the construction that the monument (figure 5) has a registered patent so that everyone is equal, both in Portugal, where the devotion comes from, and in foreign countries, to avoid competition and vanity, as requested by the Message of Fátima. In that text it is written that the whole life of those who practice it, both in their overt behavior, avoiding extravagance, and in the care to remain vigilant, in the steps, or levels, which one has already managed to climb, with the help of Our Lady, who day and night, she is there in the Monument, to help and bring closer to Jesus Christ or God himself.
According to I. M. D. V., 60 years old, retired from the Bahia Court of Justice, we saw that the monument oratory to the Mother Queen of Schöenstatt was built on June 18, 2000 in a square formed between Rodrigo Argollo and Francisco Rosas streets (near Rui Barbosa College) at the behest of Wilson Guimarães Vieira (01/06/1927-06/13/2015) and Maria José Dórea Vieira (12/09/1922-09/20/2016), with a project by the architects Arnaldo Mariano and Roberto Vieiros, through Arquitetos Associados Ltda. For the couple’s daughter, the biggest wish came from her mother, who was very devoted to the Mother Queen and received support from the local community. It was built with concrete and glass, with a height of 2.33 meters and a diameter of 1.54 meters. The oratory consists of a marble altar with a bronze plaque containing a relief figure that depicts the Virgin Mary and the Child Jesus. The altar is surrounded by a solid circular construction, flat roof, with arcaded doors and windows and glass closure (figure 6), and lies in a well located point in the square.

According to the identification form of the oratory found at the FGM, the Schöenstatt Movement arrived in Brazil in 1935 through the Sisters of Mary who came here as missionaries. On the occasion of the visits of the founder Father José Kentenich to Brazil, from 1947 on the Shrine was created in Santa Maria, Rio Grande do Sul. In Brazil there are today 21 Schoenstatt Shrines. In the Northeast region there are three shrines: in Olinda, Pernambuco, in Salvador, Bahia, and in Garanhuns, Pernambuco. In Schöenstatt Shrines, Mary is worshipped as Mother, Queen and Thrice Admirable Victor of Schöenstatt. The one found in Salvador is located at Estrada do Curralinho, Stiep neighborhood, Salvador, Bahia, and is one of the biggest of the northeastern three.

Mircea Eliade (1992, p. 25) states that all sacred space implies a hierophany, a manifestation of the sacred that results in highlighting a territory from the cosmic environment that surrounds it and makes it qualitatively different. Theophany consecrates a place by the very fact of making it open to the sky, that is, communicating with Heaven, a paradoxical point of passage from one way of being to the other. We will not take long to find even more precise examples than the monuments oratories, which are shrines, parishes and churches that are the “Gate of the Gods” and, therefore, a gateway between Heaven and Earth. Space established for the connection between the human and the sacred.
For Eliade (1992, p. 27), the sacred is the real par excellence, at the same time power, efficiency, source of life and fecundity. The religious man's desire to live in the sacred is, in fact, equivalent to his desire to situate himself in objective reality, not to let himself be paralyzed by the endless relativity of purely subjective experiences, to live in a real and efficient world – and not in an illusion. This behavior is found in all the planes of his existence, but it is, above all, evident in the religious man's desire to move only in a sanctified world, in a sacred space.

However, still for the author, often enough there is even no need for a theophany or a hierophany proper: any sign is enough to indicate the sacredness of the place. It is because the sign bearing religious significance introduces an absolute element and puts an end to relativity and confusion. Anything that does not belong to this world has manifested itself apodictically, thereby tracing an orientation or deciding a course of action.

Given the end, Eliade (1992, p. 163) mentions that the religious man assumes a specific mode of existence in the world, and, despite the large number of historical-religious forms, this specific mode is always recognizable. Whatever the historical context in which he finds himself, the homo religiosus always believes that there is an absolute reality, the sacred, which transcends this world, but which manifests itself here, sanctifying it and making it real. He also believes that life has a sacred origin and that human existence actualizes all its potentialities insofar as it is religious, that is, it participates in reality.
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