

## *Escrava Anastácia: The Iconographic History of a Brazilian Popular Saint*<sup>1</sup>

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### **Abstract**

This article describes the transformation of an image depicting an unnamed, enslaved African man wearing a metal facemask, a common form of punishment in colonial Brazil, into the iconic representation of the martyred slave Anastácia/Anastasia, the focus of a growing religious and political movement in Brazil. The authors trace the image to an early 19th century engraving based on a drawing by the Frenchman Jacques Arago. Well over a century later, Arago's image increasingly became associated with a corpus of myths describing the virtuous suffering and painful death of a female slave named Anastácia. By the 1990s, Arago's image (and variations of it), now identified as the martyred Anastácia/Anastasia, had proliferated throughout Brazil, an object of devotion for Catholics and practitioners of Umbanda, as well as a symbol of black pride.

### **Keywords**

Brazil, Anastácia/Antastasia, slavery, folk Catholicism, Umbanda

### **Résumé**

Cet article décrit la transformation de l'image d'un esclave africain inconnu, portant un masque de métal, une forme courante de punition dans le Brésil colonial.

Cette représentation iconique de l'esclave martyr, Anastacia/Anastasia est devenue le noyau d'un mouvement politique et religieux d'importance croissante au Brésil.

Les auteurs font remonter cette image à une gravure du début du 19<sup>ème</sup> siècle, fondée sur un dessin du français Jacques Arago. Plus d'un siècle après, le dessin d'Arago a été graduellement associé à un corpus de mythes décrivant les souffrances, la vertu et la mort douloureuse d'une femme

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<sup>1)</sup> For their comments and assistance on earlier drafts of this paper we are grateful to John Burdick, James Sweet, Mary Karasch, and particularly David Haberly. Cynthia Futton, JoAnn Jacoby, Carroll Johnson, Benjamin and Monique Guichard, and Luis Nicolau Parés helped in locating and identifying sources; Stephen Palmie helped in other ways. Additional fieldwork in Rio was conducted by Kelly Hayes in 2006.

esclave appelée Anastacia. Vers 1990 l'image dessinée par Arago (et ses variations), à présent identifiées à la martyre Anastacia/Anastasia était répandue dans tout le Brésil, l'objet de dévotion de la part de catholiques et de fidèles de l'Umbanda ainsi qu'un symbole de la fierté noire.

### Mots-clés

Brésil, Anastacia/Anastasia, esclavage, Catholicisme populaire, Umbanda

From shrines dotted throughout Brazil to t-shirts, political banners and beauty salons, Anastácia gazes at the world through the prongs of the metal mask that encloses her mouth. Often a penetrating and preternatural blue, the eyes of the black slave woman seem to communicate that which her shackled lips cannot. For her advocates, the mute Anastácia speaks to the graphic horrors of chattel slavery: the sexual abuse and rape, hard labour and torturous punishment endured by generations of black slaves. Bearing silent witness to such suffering, the image of Anastácia confronts the viewer with a history whose painful details live on in folk memory if not in official versions of Brazilian history. Over the last thirty years the image of Anastácia has proliferated throughout Brazil as the martyred slave it is believed to represent has become the focus of both political and religious movements.

For some, like the members of the *movimento negro* or black consciousness movement, Anastácia is a symbol of black pride and heroic resistance: a reminder of the horrors of slavery and its continuing legacy of racism. For others, Anastácia is the object of Catholic devotional practices and has acquired a reputation as a powerful and saintly figure possessing the mystical power to intervene in the lives of her devotees. Statues of the masked Anastácia may be found amongst other popular Catholic saints in private homes and public chapels in Brazilian cities. There was even a petition drive requesting the Catholic Church to recognize her as a saint (Teixeira n.d.:7-9; Burdick 1998:71). Anastácia has also attracted a considerable following among practitioners of Umbanda, joining the eclectic pantheon of spirit entities whose aid and succour are the object of practitioner's ritual attentions.<sup>2</sup> Although her image has become iconic in Brazil, it is doubtful that Anastácia, as an historical figure, actually ever existed.

While there are many popular versions of Anastácia's life story, in this essay we trace the historical trajectory of the iconic image that contemporary devotees and advocates identify as the slave Anastácia, and the processes through

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<sup>2</sup> Umbanda originated in Rio in the 1920s, and combines elements of Brazilian Roman Catholicism, European spiritualism, and African-derived beliefs and practices as well as those of Amerindian origin. For a history of Umbanda, see Brown (1994 [1986]); Negrão (1996).

which a specific representation of an anonymous slave meant to illustrate the barbarity of slavery came to be associated in Brazil with a proliferating set of stories about a martyred slave called Anastácia. The case of Anastácia suggests how a particularly evocative and powerful image can function as the material ground upon which the processes of cultural imagination and folk memory coalesce, and how a popular image can serve as a repository of values and ideas quite different from those of its creation.

In what follows, we describe the background to the image and its original artist, and summarise several variants of the slave Anastácia's story before discussing the probable events through which this particular image became the centre of a burgeoning folk movement. The trajectory that we trace, although brief, suggests that careful study of images and transformations in their meanings can illuminate the historical processes through which distinctively diasporic traditions were formed and continue to evolve in response to local contexts of interpretation.

### **The Origin of the Image: Jacques Arago**

We begin with Figure 1. This enigmatic and somewhat androgynous picture of an enslaved Brazilian is an engraving based on a drawing created in the early nineteenth century by a Frenchman, Jacques Etienne Victor Arago.<sup>3</sup> An artist and writer, Arago initially sketched this unidentified slave, whom he referred to as a male, during his almost two month visit to Brazil from early December 1817 to late January 1818; or, possibly, during his subsequent three month visit from June to September, 1820. In 1817, when he was about 27 years old, Arago joined a major French scientific expedition as its draftsman ('dessinateur'). With its ultimate destination the Pacific islands and Australia, the expedition left France in September 1817 and, after two brief stops, landed at Rio de Janeiro in early December. It was on this visit that Arago first encountered enslaved Africans. Another brief stop was made at Rio in 1820 on the expedition's return trip to France, where it ultimately landed in that year, a little over three years after its initial departure.<sup>4</sup>

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3) Over the past several decades, the image has been reproduced in secondary works and websites on Atlantic slavery, sometimes with considerable embellishment, but usually no bibliographic citation or explanation is given, and the image is rarely identified correctly; in fact, it is often misidentified with misleading or incorrect captions and the context in which the image was created has been ignored. For a review and discussion of published works and websites that use this image, see Handler and Steiner (2006).

4) A detailed summary of the expedition's route, misfortunes, and major scientific findings,

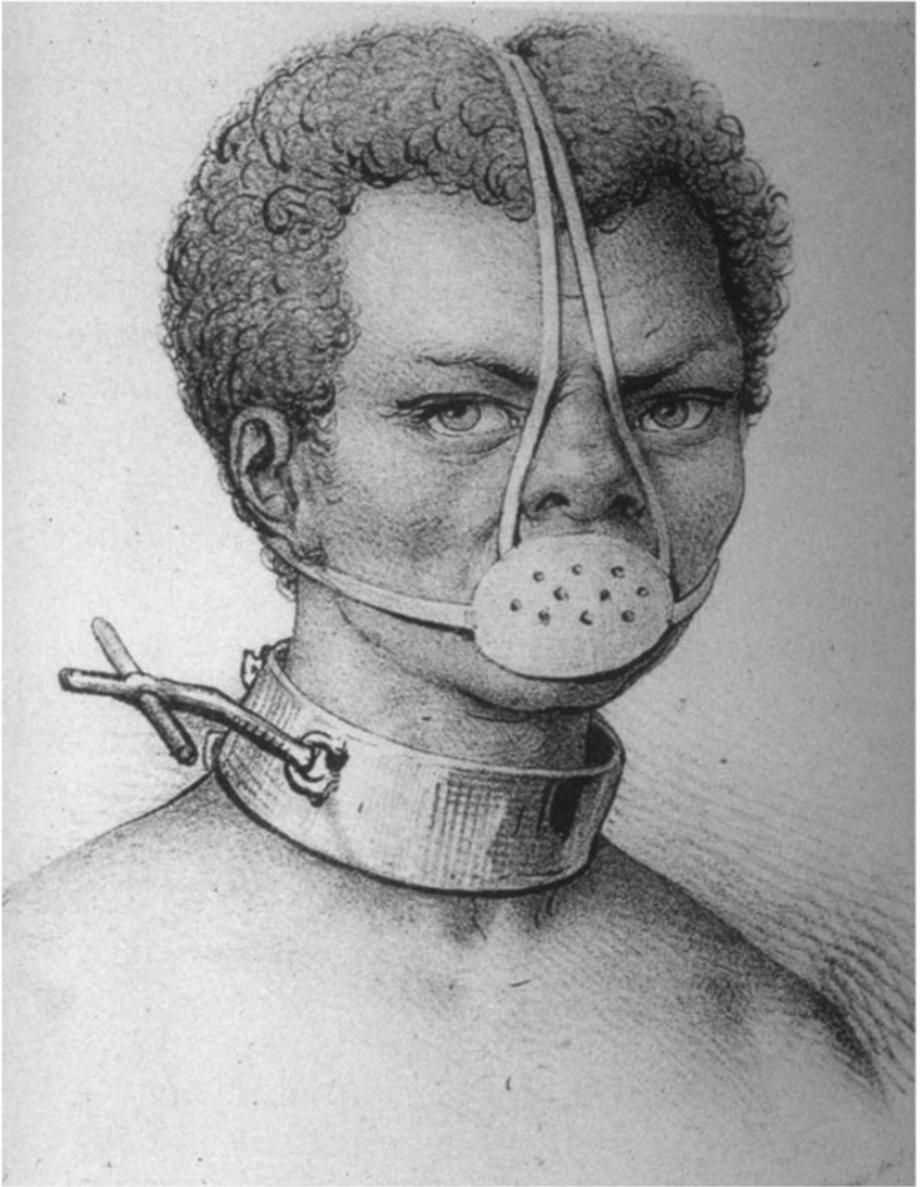


Figure 1: Enslaved Brazilian (Arago 1839: facing p. 119)

including an overview of Arago's role as draftsman, is incorporated in a report submitted in April 1821 to the French Academy of Sciences by an eight man group. Biographical details on Arago can be found in the 'Report' (Arago 1823), in his own account (Arago 1822), and in Sarda (2002:185-201) and Laureilhe (1952:96-102).

The full report on the Freycinet expedition is in Freycinet (1824-44). This multi-volume work includes a large *Atlas Historique* with 112 plates. Although some of the plates show Brazilian

In 1822 Arago published his first account of the expedition as *Promenade Autour du Monde Pendant les Années 1817, 1818, 1819 et 1820* (Paris 1822). In this two-volume work, he briefly recorded his observations on the plight of Rio's enslaved Africans. Witnessing the arrival of one of many slaving vessels in Rio's port, he expressed his dismay and indignation at the abject condition of the Africans aboard. He also visited Valonga (Val Longo, Vallongo), the slave market of Rio, and described the 'damp, dirty, and pestilential/pestiferous room, open on all sides, [where] they have thrown together men, women, children, and old people, all naked and bowed down by the most dreadful misery' (Arago 1822; 1:99-100).<sup>5</sup> Rose de Freycinet, the wife of the expedition's commander, was also disturbed and 'found the slaves even worse housed, even dirtier, even more the victims of disease than the lowest class of Brazilian,' but among the members of the expedition, it was Arago, she reported, who 'enter[ed] most deeply into the feelings of the slaves themselves' (Bassett 1962:33-4; also, Riviere 1996).

An Atlas of 26 plates (mostly of Indian Ocean inhabitants and Pacific islanders) accompanied Arago's 1822 work, but the picture of the enslaved Brazilian was not included. In the following years, despite increasingly failing eyesight brought on by diabetes, Arago continued to write and publish poetry, plays, literary essays, and newspaper articles. He also completed a revised and very much expanded version of his *Promenade Autour du Monde*. This new five-volume edition, finished when he was already blind, was published in Paris in 1839-40 as *Souvenirs d'un Aveugle* (Arago 1839-40), and, as with the 1822 volume, it also achieved considerable success. It was in Volume 1 of this work that the lithograph of the Brazilian slave – derived from a drawing executed years before Arago became blind – was first published with the brief caption 'Chatiment des Esclaves (Brésil)' [Punishment of Slaves] (Arago 1839:119).

Although the 1822 *Promenade* does *not* contain the 'Chatiment des Esclaves' lithograph, it does include a disapproving and reproachful discussion of Brazilian slavery, part of which briefly describes the use of the iron collar and mask that Arago illustrates:

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scenes (but not the slave discussed here), most depict areas in the Indian and Pacific oceans. Details on the de Freycinet expedition and Arago's participation are given in Handler and Steiner (2006). Arago visited Brazil several more times during his lifetime and ultimately died there in 1854.

<sup>5</sup> All translations from the French are Handler's. For a detailed discussion of the slave markets on this street, see Karasch (1987:29-54). Contemporary illustrations of the markets are shown on the website 'The Atlantic Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Americas: A Visual Record' ([www.slaveryimages.org](http://www.slaveryimages.org)) images 'vista05', 'GRA1', 'H015'.

A slave who attempts to escape is flogged and around his neck is placed an iron collar [anneau de fer] with a short sword attached; the tip of this sword is directed against his shoulder and he continues to wear this collar until his master thinks fit to remove it. I have seen two Negroes whose faces were covered with tin masks [masque de fer-blanc] with holes made for the eyes. They were punished in this manner because their misery caused them to eat earth to end their lives (Arago 1822; I: 102).<sup>6</sup>

In his 1839 *Souvenirs d'un Aveugle*, Arago provided a few more details on the illustration, which made its first published appearance therein:

... see this man who passes by [voyez cet homme qui passe là], with an iron collar [anneau de fer] to which is vertically attached a sword [épée] of the same metal . . . tightly squeezing his neck; this is a slave [c'est un esclave] who tried to escape and who his master identifies as a fugitive . . . And here is another [en voici un autre] whose face is entirely covered with an iron mask [masque de fer] which has two holes for the eyes, and which is locked behind the head with a strong padlock (1839:119).

Arago briefly indicated that the face mask was used to prevent dirt eating, a practice, he was told, followed by slaves in order to commit suicide and escape punishment by whipping.<sup>7</sup> This was a common reason given by slaveholders throughout the New World for 'dirt eating' or geophagy, a behavior that, in fact, was prompted by nutritional deficiencies (Higgins 2003; Handler 2006: 185-187). What is puzzling, however, is that although Arago illustrated and described the iron collar with the attached short sword or dagger, he *did not* describe the metal plate over the mouth that he illustrated; rather, he described *but did not* illustrate another type of facemask that slave masters used as punishment. What Arago was referring to in his 1822 and 1839 *written* descriptions of the mask – one that covered the face entirely – can be clarified by other illustrations of enslaved Brazilians around the same period.

Jean Baptiste Debret lived in Brazil from 1816 to 1831, and illustrated a man wearing such a tin mask (Figure 2). Of this illustration, he commented that slaves with 'a passion/compulsion for eating earth are forced to wear it' (Moraes 1994:93). Not many years later, in 1846, Thomas Ewbank visited Brazil for about seven months. He illustrated this type of mask (Figure 3), but explained that slaves were forced to wear it in punishment for drunkenness: '[It] is to hinder him or her from conveying the liquor to the mouth' (Ewbank 1856:437).

6) The tip of the sword was pointed toward the shoulder so that if the slave moved his head in the wrong direction, it would jab into the shoulder.

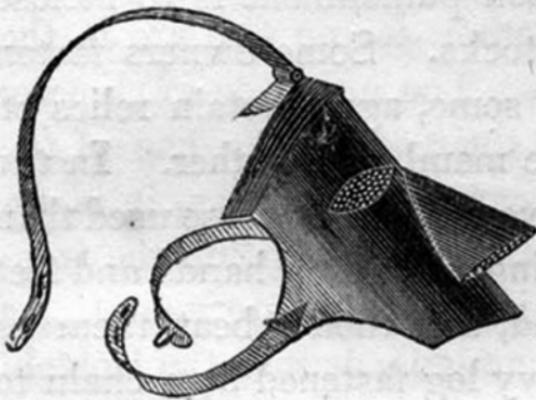
7) In the 1822 edition the mask is identified as made of tin ('masque de fer-blanc'); in the 1839 edition, of iron ('masque de fer'). We cannot explain this discrepancy, unless it was a printing error since, in French, 'fer' is iron, while 'fer-blanc' is tin.



Figure 2: Brazilian Slave with Face Mask (Debret, in Moraes 1994:93)



mask is to hinder him or her from  
 mouth, below which the metal is  
 which there is no opening.



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Figure 3: Brazilian Slave with Face Mask (Ewbank 1856:437)

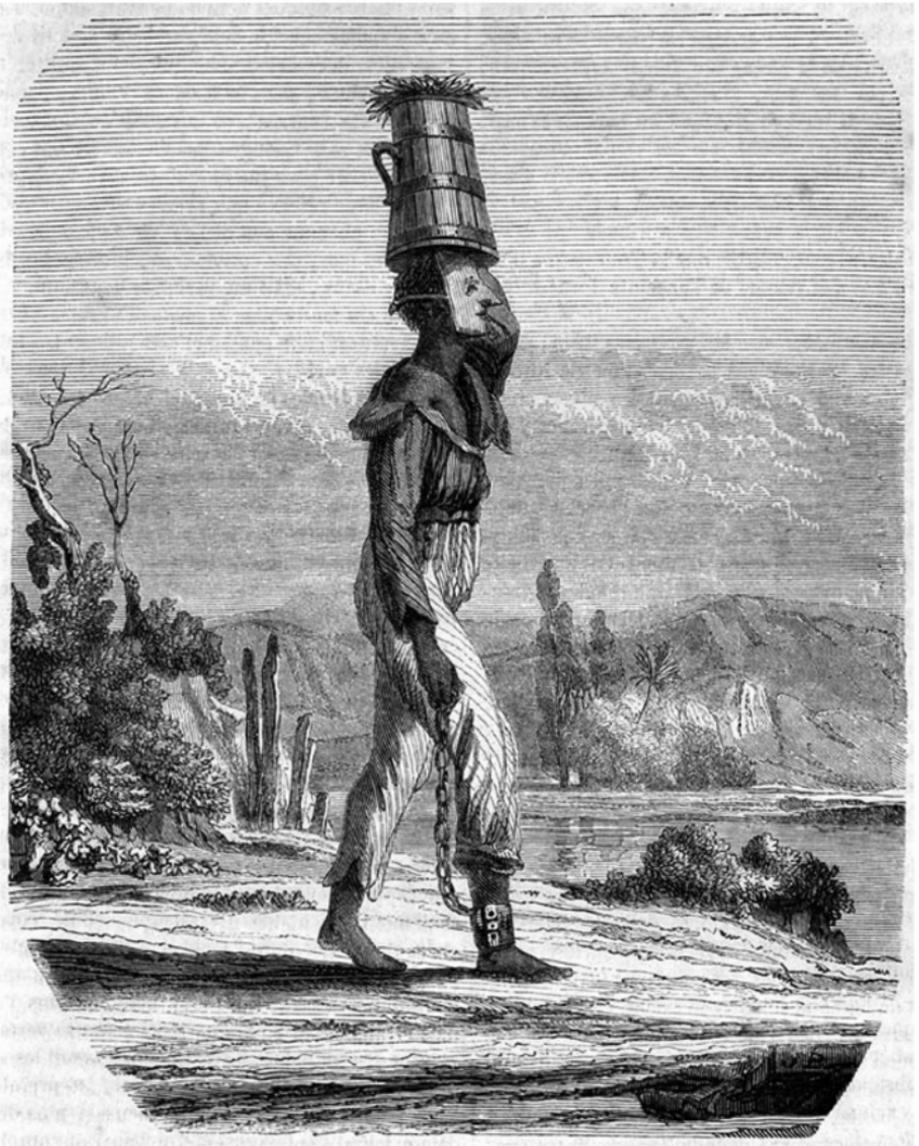


Figure 4: Brazilian with Face Mask (Le Magasin Pittoresque 1846; 14:229)

This type of mask was also shown in an 1846 issue of a French publication with the caption ‘Esclave Marron a Rio de Janeiro’. The picture (Figure 4) illustrates a brief article on Brazilian slavery. Captured runaways, the unidentified author wrote, are treated so brutally that their despondency inclines them to suicide. Thus, they ‘poison themselves’ by drinking large quantities of

alcohol at one time or by eating dirt. Slave owners affix the masks so as to prevent these behaviors (*Le Magasin Pittoresque* 1846; 14:229).

As this brief survey suggests, a mask covering the entire face and mouth was observed and described by nineteenth century travellers to Brazil, although different reasons were given for its use. It is interesting to note that diverse reasons are also cited today among Anastácia's devotees as explanations for her mask.

### **Anastácia/Anastasia**

More than a century after the 1839 publication of *Souvenirs d'un Aveugle*, Arago's illustration began to be associated in Brazil with the legendary narrative of a female slave named Anastácia/Anastasia. The anthropologist John Burdick, drawing on oral history interviews, concluded that sometime in the latter half of the twentieth century the figure of Anastácia began to be the focus of a grassroots devotional movement among lay Catholic women; they found in the tortured slave woman a source of succor for their particular sufferings (Burdick 1998:65-77, 215n14). Today the cult of Anastácia has a large number of adherents in Rio and elsewhere in Brazil; shrines to her are found in Rio, Salvador and other large cities and she is represented, often with startlingly blue eyes, in statuettes, figurines, paintings, prints, T-shirts, and even plays and other public performances.

Although it is questionable whether the saintly Anastácia ever really lived,<sup>8</sup> a number of versions of her life have been recorded, from accounts circulated in books, articles and the internet, to television and radio programmes. Various theatrical troupes have staged interpretations of her life story, including a dance piece choreographed by the Brazilian dancer Carlos dos Santos Jr. and performed by the company DanceBrazil in New York in 2000. The publicity for the performance described Anastácia as 'a tribal queen who taught captive Africans in Brazil to syncretize their *orixá* deities with the identities of Catholic saints as a religious survival tactic' (Dunning 2000). In Rio in 2008, the theatre group Nossa Senhora do Teatro performed 'O Auto da Escrava Anas-

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<sup>8</sup> See Dias de Souza (2005). In this brief article in a popular Brazilian history magazine, Dias de Souza reported on 'the cult of the black slave with blue eyes, turned into a saint by the masses' but stressed there is no historical documentation, e.g., official registries, parish documents, court cases and so forth to indicate that she actually ever existed. However, Dias de Souza incorrectly gives Arago's first name as Etienne and clearly errs with her claim that he visited Brazil in 1808.

tácia,' the story of her transformation 'from princess to slave, from heroine to saint of Brazil.'

While many variants of her life describe Anastácia as a tribal queen, Dance-Brazil's version was unusual in crediting Anastácia with the syncretizing process through which the orixás, the West African-derived deities of Candomblé, were correlated with Catholic saints. In the only extended, scholarly treatment of Anastácia to date, Burdick recounted four versions that are more typical of the genre. In one, Anastácia was a beautiful black woman of Angolan birth who, when enslaved in Brazil, was 'lusted after by men,' raped and tortured many times. Throughout these trials, Anastácia bore her sufferings stoically, almost serenely. The iconic facemask was put on her by a vengeful slave driver, whose attentions she had refused, as a punishment for stealing sugar.

Another version has her born in Bahia, the beautiful blue-eyed daughter of a slave and a plantation owner. For refusing the owner's (her father) sexual advances, she was 'cruelly subjected to a martyrdom that lasted years,' including being 'placed in a neck-iron and face-mask of leather.' In still another version, Anastácia was the daughter of her owner and one of his slaves. The slave owner's wife, suspecting that Anastácia received special treatment because the slave owner was her father, tried to banish Anastácia from the plantation. Anastácia resisted. The owner's wife convinced her husband that Anastácia was plotting a revolt against him, and Anastácia was ultimately tortured to death. A fourth version portrayed Anastácia as a blue-eyed Nigerian princess who was kidnapped and enslaved to a cruel master in Brazil. She refused his sexual advances, and repulsed his attempt to rape her; for these and other acts of defiance, she was tortured and 'confined to a face mask.' (See Burdick, 1998: 68-77 for a more complete account of these versions, with brief discussions of the sources on which they are based.)

Other variants of Anastácia's life story, containing similar elements to the versions recounted above, were described by Antonio Alves Teixeira, a popular Brazilian writer on spiritualist topics, and the Guadeloupean/French author Simone Schwarz-Bart. Teixeira's version (n.d.: 12-14) has Anastácia born in Angola, taken to Brazil, and enslaved to a Portuguese noble family. Upon the family's return to Portugal, Anastácia was sold to the owner of a Brazilian sugar plantation where she was raped by the overseer and other whites and had many children with blue eyes. Yet Anastácia was able to preserve her virtue despite these violations. Refusing her lips to the overseer's kiss, she was punished with the mask and iron collar as 'vengeance because Anastácia had never let him kiss her.' Remaining 'pure, innocent and chaste' to the end, she died of gangrene, mortally wounded by the iron collar which had pierced her throat.

She was manumitted posthumously by her remorseful master and was buried in a slave cemetery by other slaves.

In Schwarz-Bart's account (2002:17-30) Anastácia was born in Angola and taken to Bahia where her first master 'took a fancy to her limber body.' She became pregnant, and was sent to a plantation not far from Bahia where she had several more children by several fathers. She was sexually approached by the white overseers, was reduced to becoming a field slave, and eventually was initiated into Candomblé as a child of the female orixá Yemanjá. Yemanjá encouraged Anastácia to escape, for which she was punished by a beating and had 'an iron mask . . . fitted to her face to keep her from speaking.' She was 'eventually imprisoned by a spiked collar,' sold to a merchant in Rio, and was placed in a dungeon where she died – 'the iron collar had eaten away part of her throat and her shoulders.'<sup>9</sup>

Despite the differences in details in various accounts, Anastácia's story is invariably one of enslavement, sexual exploitation, great hardships, and brutal death. Such experiences are not unique to Anastácia or Brazil, but are descriptive of the experiences of enslaved peoples in other New World areas. It most likely explains why a brief article on Anastácia posted on a Brazilian website erroneously cites her as the inspiration for Jonathan Demme's film version of Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*.<sup>10</sup> For many of her devotees, however, what makes Anastácia special are not the circumstances of her enslavement, but her martyr-like qualities in reacting to slavery: her stoicism, serenity and virtuous suffering.

### **Arago's Image and the Cult of Anastácia**

While the stories told about Anastácia vary considerably, her image does not: whatever form it takes, it is clearly a version or copy of Arago's original picture

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9) Teixeira's small book (the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana library holds the only known library copy in the United States) is intended for a popular audience, only gives one version of the Anastácia story, and is primarily concerned with making a case that she ought to be beatified as a true saint. Schwarz-Bart (as with Teixeira) unequivocally accepts that the saintly Anastácia was an actual historical figure and without citing any source (oral or written) provides a long and highly dramatized version of her life. For other brief renditions of her life story, see Dias de Souza (2005).

10) <http://www.adrianavacanti.eti.br/tati/mulheresdobrasil/escravaanastacia.htm> (last accessed 1 December 2005). According to the website: 'The image with the mask became famous worldwide, inspiring the American director Jonathan Demme in his film *A Amada* [*Beloved*], made in 1999 and starring Oprah [sic] Winfrey' (translation, Hayes).

of an enslaved African man. For Anastácia's advocates, however, the image does not depict a man but a 'tortured, silenced woman'; an icon of the sufferings not only of slaves but of female slaves and black women in general. This iconic image, as Burdick observed in Rio, may be found in 'prayer cards inserted into wallets,' 'medallions stuffed underneath shirts,' 'loquets kept in glove compartments,' and 'prayer ribbons tied to rearview mirrors' (Burdick 1998:7, 77). Indeed, the small stores supplying ritual paraphernalia to Catholics and practitioners of Afro-Brazilian religions offer shelf after shelf of statues clearly based on Arago's original portrait, in addition to the prayer cards, medallions, loquets and other items bearing its likeness. The latter also may be purchased at corner kiosks, newspaper stands, luncheonettes, and other unlikely places (Dias de Souza 2005:26).

Although devotion to Anastácia seems to have emerged in the late twentieth century, its roots lie deep in the history of Brazilian slavery. The cult of Anastácia clearly is related to a range of Afro-Catholic practices first elaborated among the black lay Catholic brotherhoods (*irmandades*) of the colonial period. In addition to organising the processions and festal observances dedicated to their patron saint, these brotherhoods also provided for the funerals of slaves. In the context of a Catholicism that emphasised suffering, martyrdom and sainthood, the anguished deaths of virtuous slaves could be imbued with powerful religious meanings for those who remained in bondage (c.f. Burdick 1998:65-67). After the abolition of slavery in 1888, the suffering of the slave period lived on in the memories and oral traditions of the slaves' descendants. The contemporary cult to Anastácia, while related to Afro-Catholic practices of the colonial period and firmly rooted in the collective memory of slavery, also speaks to everyday struggles in the lives of her primarily female devotees.

Based on oral interview data with present-day devotees of Anastácia, Burdick suggested that as early as the late 1940s and early 1950s, 'the image of a female slave with a neck-iron, perhaps even a face-iron. . . . [was] the object of religious devotion.' The name Anastácia was not entirely unknown among Brazilian female slaves (probably derived from the martyred European St. Anastasia), and possibly was associated with some image at this time; however Burdick's field data led him to conclude that this image was not the one done by Arago (Burdick 1998:20, 67).<sup>11</sup> Burdick concluded that the association

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<sup>11</sup> Burdick's account of the history of the Anastácia cult was based on 'many dozens of interviews with all the key participants in the events, or their direct descendants, as well as all extant documents related to the story' (Burdick 1998: 215, fn.14). The occurrence of the name

between the Arago image and the figure of Anastácia did not become definitively established until the late 1960s, and did not become widespread in Brazil until the 1980s. Before the 1960s, there were relatively few devotees of Anastácia and it seems to have been a small movement. In 1968, however, Rio's 'Museum of the Negro' (a small museum annexed to the Church of the Rosary of the Blacks in downtown Rio) was preparing an exhibition to commemorate the eightieth anniversary of the abolition of slavery in Brazil. The museum's director found among a collection of family papers in Brazil's National Archives a page that had been removed from a later edition of Arago's 1839 *Souvenirs d'un Aveugle*. This page showed the slave with the metal collar and mask. The director chose the image as 'a good illustration of torture, and included it in the exhibition.' Since this was not a major museum, the 'engraving remained relatively unnoticed,' Burdick noted.

In 1971, however, something happened to attract notice to the image. The remains of Princess Isabel, 'the Great Liberator of the slaves' (who, in 1888, had signed the law effectively abolishing Brazilian slavery) were to be interred at the cathedral at Petropolis, the imperial summer palace in the mountains near Rio. Isabel and other members of the royal family were in exile in France when she died in 1921. In 1953 her remains were taken to Brazil with the intention of reburial; however, the reburial did not take place until 1972 (on the 150th anniversary of Brazilian independence). Prior to the interment, however, her remains were placed at the Museum of the Negro for a two-week vigil. This vigil attracted thousands of visitors and it was at this point, Burdick wrote, that 'a huge public saw Arago's drawing for the first time,' for it was located not far from Isabel's sarcophagus. And it was then, according to Burdick, that the association between the cult of Anastácia and the Arago

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Anastácia is a matter of disagreement among Brazilianists. James Sweet, although questioning the popularity of Anastácia as a name for slaves, confirmed that it did exist in the records 'going back to at least the first decade of the eighteenth century,' while Mary Karasch, in consultation with several Brazilian historians in Rio de Janeiro, suggested that Anastácia 'was a common slave name' in the nineteenth century. By the 1940s, Burdick noted, the name was widely associated with black women in Brazil. Mariza de Carvalho Soares disputed the popularity of the name Anastácia for black women, either in present-day Brazil or during the slave era (Burdick, personal communications to Handler, 1 June, 26 June, and 27 July, 2005; Sweet, personal communication to Handler, 27 July 2005; Karasch, personal communication to Handler, 28 July 2005; Soares, personal communication to Handler 19 March 2006).

For the black brotherhoods, their histories, maintenance of shrines, relations with the dead, honoring of black saints, see, for example, Karasch (1987:83-6, 271-72, 278-89 and *passim*); also, Russell-Wood (1982:129-60).

image became cemented.<sup>12</sup> In brief, the slave woman called Anastácia came to be identified with the Arago illustration, and by the 1980s and increasingly into the 1990s in the minds of many Brazilians that image is, indeed, a personification of Anastácia (Burdick 1998: 67, 68, 175).<sup>13</sup> Other scholars have questioned Burdick's historical account, which was based on interviews with a small number of informants and conducted well after the events that purportedly resulted in the fusing of Arago's image with the legend of Anastácia.<sup>14</sup>

Although it is difficult to pinpoint with accuracy the exact historical moment when Arago's image definitively 'became' Anastácia, by the 1980s, a grassroots devotional movement to the martyred slave with some version of Arago's image as its focus was firmly established (Augras 2006). According to Burdick, the movement received new impetus in 1986 when a Brazilian radio series dramatising one version of Anastácia's life reached 'thousands of listeners throughout the country.' With national publicity, Anastácia attracted new followers, including nurses who viewed her as 'an exemplar of selfless healing' and prisoners who regarded her as 'an inspiration to patience in captivity.' Arago's image, or variations of it, 'began to proliferate in black beauty salons, as a model of the beautiful black woman.' Followers of Umbanda 'seized upon her image, and offerings to her became incorporated into the cult of the *pretos velhos*,' that is, the spirits of Africans who had been enslaved in Brazil. By the mid-1980s, Burdick noted, 'devotees to Anastácia were proliferating in virtually every corner of Brazil' (1998: 72-74), and today, as Mary Karasch recently observed, Anastácia is 'especially popular in Rio among Umbandistas, where the 'pretos velhos . . . are especially honored.'<sup>15</sup> As a result, her image may be found in Umbanda stores alongside representations of numerous other preto velho spirits, most of whom, like Anastácia, have distinctive names and

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12)Burdick claimed that when several of Anastácia's admirers saw the Arago image, 'they made devotions to it, believed their requests were answered, and this led to the broader devotion' (personal communication to Handler, 16 September 2005).

13)Dias de Souza (2005) gave 1974 as the date of the exhibit and presented a slightly different version of the origin of the cult and its association with the Arago image. Burdick and De Souza agree on major details, however.

Princess Isabel and other members of the royal family were in exile in France when she died in 1921. In 1953 her remains were taken to Brazil with the intention of reburial at Petropolis; however, the reburial did not take place until 1971 (on the 150th anniversary of Brazilian independence). Burdick made an error when he wrote that her remains were transported from Portugal to Brazil in 1971 (see Barman 2002: 234 and passim).

14)Monique Augras, personal communication to Hayes, 15 September 2006. See also Augras (2006).

15)personal communication to Handler, 8 September 2005.

stories. For many Umbanda practitioners, Anastácia is an ancestral spirit or sanctified figure who, as a result of her stoic suffering in life, accumulated the wisdom to advance to a highly evolved plane of spiritual existence. Because of this Anastácia, unlike other *preto velho* spirits, does not return to the human plane to manifest in the bodies of her devotees in ceremonies of possession trance.

It must be surmised that the proliferating number of Anastácia's followers was accompanied by an increase in the number of images in various forms that were ultimately derived from the Arago engraving. And it is the Arago image, or some variation of it in figurines and statuettes, that is found in the Catholic and Umbanda shrines at which Anastácia is venerated (Figures 5, 6, 7).<sup>16</sup>

However interpreted, it is absolutely clear that the image produced by Arago was not of a slave he identified by name. In fact, because the image shows both a mouth-mask as well as an iron collar, it probably represents a composite of different slaves he observed in Rio. And in the brief descriptions in 1822 and 1839 that explicate the picture (see quotations, above), Arago made it plain that he was referring to at least several people. In any case, the male pronouns that Arago used in his references to this image (e.g., 'voyez cet homme,' 'c'est un esclave,' 'voici un autre'; see above) make it equally clear, despite its somewhat androgynous appearance, that the image was intended to depict a male, not a female. Whatever later identification has been made between Arago's illustration and the personage of Anastácia is a cultural invention that has nothing to do with Arago and his original drawing. It is, rather, a product of Brazil's particular history and contemporary realities. Accounts of martyred female slaves were in circulation long before the exhibition at the Museum brought Arago's portrait to the attention of a larger public. Regardless if it was, in fact, this event that indelibly forged the connection between Arago's image and legendary narratives about the slave Anastácia, the publicity surrounding the exhibition brought the image to the attention of large audiences. In providing these stories with a physical representation, Arago's image

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<sup>16</sup> 'To those who pray there,' Mary Karasch observed at the shrine of the Church of Our Lady of the Rosary in Rio in the 1980s, 'she is a saint who grants cures, graces, and miracles' (Karasch 1986:79; cf. De Souza 2005). For examples of how Anastácia's alleged intervention brought about positive results for her believers, see Teixeira (n.d.: passim); on the connection of Anastácia to *pretos velhos*, see Hale (1997).

For other photos of Anastácia images (including those on T-shirts and shrines) in contemporary Brazil see, for example, Burdick (1998:66, 78, 80); Jaguaribe (2001:83, 120, 121); Dias de Souza (2005).



*Figure 5:* Anastácia Shrine, Salvador, Bahia (Wood 2000: 227). Note Arago images in background, and feminised statuettes and figurines on the shelves.



*Figure 6:* Detail of Anastácia Shrine at Igreja da Nossa Senhora do Rosario dos Pretos, Salvador, Bahia. (Courtesy of Javier Escudero, July 2005). Note Arago image in background, sculpted bust in centre, and small figurines on either side.

facilitated the convergence of popular lore and a tradition of Catholic devotional practices, becoming transformed in the process into a religious icon.

While the use of Arago's illustration in Brazil is unusual, it is not exceptional. Versions of the Arago illustration have been published or reprinted in modern books and appear on current websites that deal with Atlantic slavery, where they are generally employed to illustrate the brutality of the slave regime; rarely is Brazil specifically identified (Handler and Steiner 2006). However Arago's 1839 book is seldom cited as the image's primary source. Moreover, although there are some pictorial variations between the lithograph that first appeared in that book (Figure 1), and the images that appeared in several of its nineteenth-century translations, e.g., Russian and Spanish (Figure 8), and later French editions, the original image has been transformed in some modern publications and websites (and particularly in figurines and statuettes found in Brazilian shrines devoted to her): it has been embellished, sometimes considerably, to make it appear more feminine. Although space precludes showing all such images here, at least three different but similarly feminised



*Figure 7:* Figurine of Anastácia in Shrine at Igreja da Nossa Senhora do Rosario dos Pretos, Salvador, Bahia. (Courtesy of Javier Escudero, July 2005). Note metal collar and mask over mouth. 'Escrava Anastácia' is inscribed on the base.



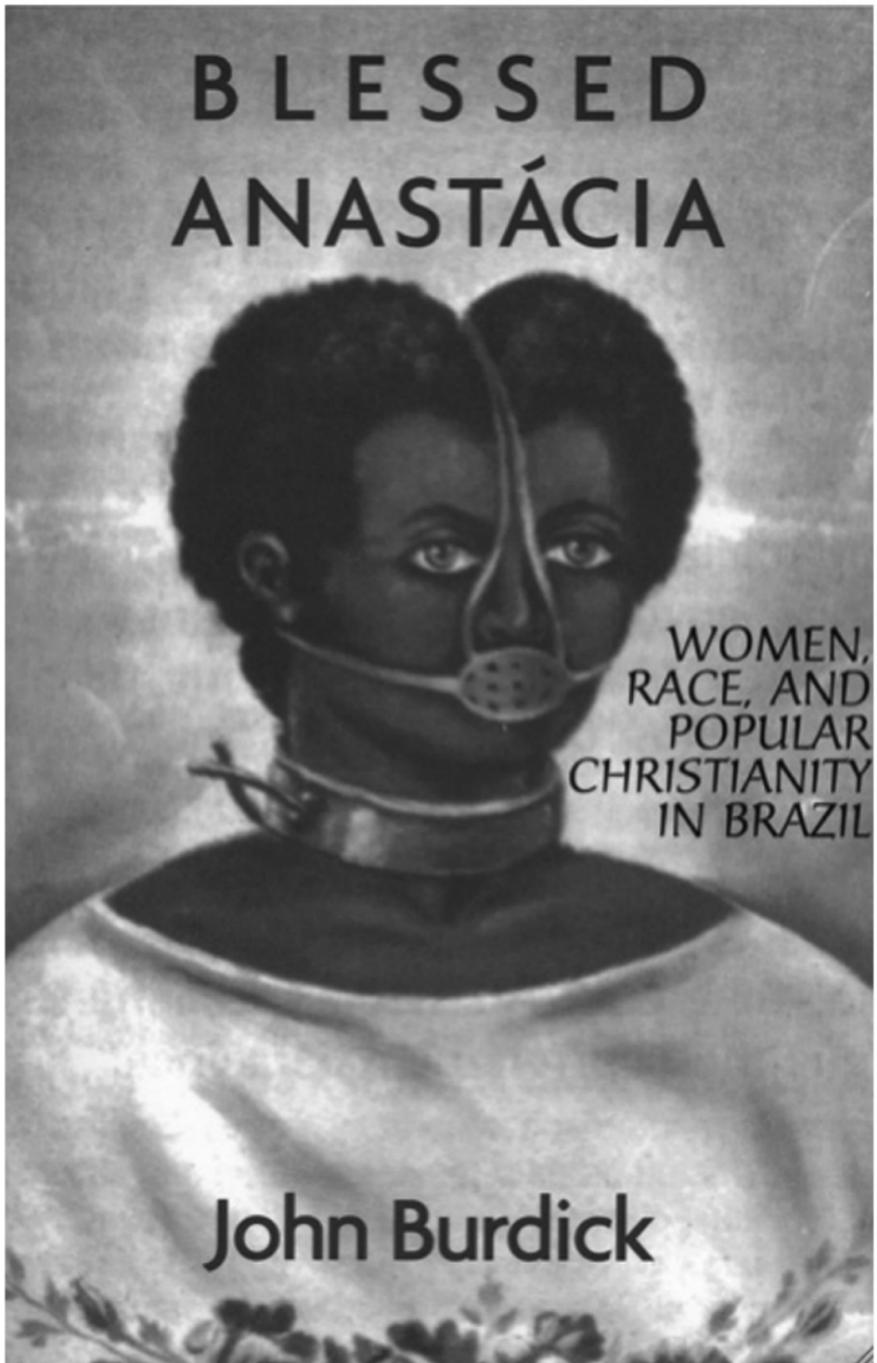
Figure 8: 'El Castigo de la Argolla' (Arago 1851: 32)

illustrations – all obviously based directly or indirectly on the Arago image – appear in recent works: the cover of John Burdick's study *Blessed Anastácia* presents one example (Figure 9).

Another version appears in Simone Schwarz-Bart's volume *In Praise of Black Women* (Figure 10);

The cover of Teixeira's monograph presents another feminised image (Figure 11).<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Schwarz-Bart (2002: 30) gives her source for the image as 'Musée du Noir,' in Rio de Janeiro; no artist is identified. The version on the cover of Teixeira's book also omits any reference to Arago as the original source. The cover artist, Mario Diaz, signs his name on the drawing



*Figure 9:* Anastácia shown on front cover of Burdick (1998)



*Figure 10: Anastácia as shown in Schwarz-Bart (2002:30). Artist not identified. Note padlock on metal collar.*

The deviation from the original Arago image (Figure 1) and its feminisation is even more pronounced in some of the images of Anastácia found in Brazil today, e.g., Figure 12.

The question of why Arago's image was read as female and modified accordingly cannot be answered definitively in an historical sense, but it touches on deeper processes of collective memory, visual representation, and the religious

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itself – just above the figure's right shoulder, by the iron collar – and is also credited as the artist on the book's copy right page.

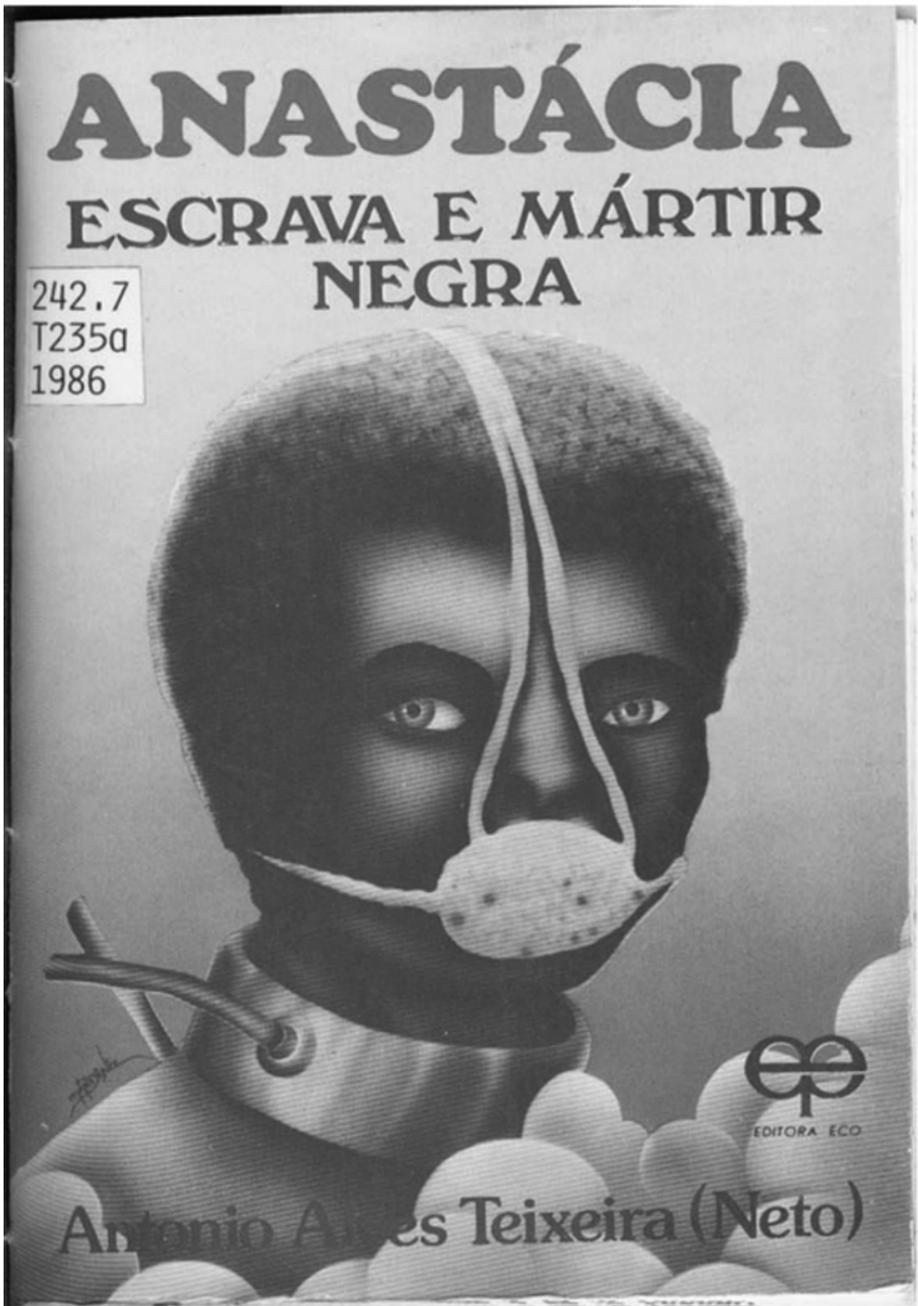


Figure 11: Anastácia, drawn by Mario Diaz (Teixeira n.d.)



Figure 12: *Anastácia* (photo by Kelly Hayes, October 2006)

imagination. At the most general level, we may observe that female images often function as allegorical representations of specific virtues and values. Catholic iconography and practice, for example, have long associated suffering with female sanctity, from the image of Mary as the bereft mother to the extreme ascetic practices of female saints. And, even more than a male slave,

the image of a muzzled female effectively conveys the suffering endemic to New World slavery, given women's vulnerability to rape and forced impregnation. In short, in an environment shaped by the historical experience of slavery and saturated with popular legends and devotions to martyred saints, the fact that Arago's image originally represented a male becomes irrelevant, as Monique Augras observed (2006:10), so powerful is the web of contextual referents within which the image is interpreted and becomes meaningful for those who behold it.

## **Conclusion**

Although the Arago image, with its powerful symbolism of slavery and its cruelties, and its modern incorporation into the cult of Anastácia in Brazil, are unique in their particulars, in general terms the image and its function as a personalisation of a 'sacred' figure conform to a wider pattern in religious movements: people create or adopt images of their venerated spiritual beings for it is easier to coalesce around a personalized image than an abstraction. The power of images to organise people and inform their collective identities is well known. Although it is problematic if the 'sainted' enslaved woman called Anastácia ever actually lived, oral tradition among her followers validates her authenticity; moreover, there is apparently no questioning that the Arago image, whose origins are unknown to most of Anastácia's followers, is anything other than an accurate representation of how she appeared in real life. The magnitude of stories about Anastácia, including various versions of her life and death as well as tales of her miraculous interventions, indicates a powerful and widespread mythologising process. The mute Anastácia has provided an opportunity for many Brazilians to narrate a painful era in their history and to reclaim a past that, in ways large and small, continues to affect the present.

But the phenomenon of Anastácia also speaks to larger issues of religious formation in diasporic settings, attesting to the importance of visual images in the processes through which individuals draw upon heterogeneous elements originating in disparate cultural contexts to create essentially new composite traditions that reflect local histories and needs. As our discussion shows, popular images derive their meaning not from their explicit content but from their interpretative context. The image that Brazilians recognise today as Anastácia has taken on different meanings for different groups of people: where some see a compassionate, suffering saint, others see an example of black pride and

resistance. None of these meanings are mutually exclusive, but all are quite different from what Jacques Etienne Victor Arago intended to convey when he made his original drawing.

It is well known that the visual dimension is central in Afro-diasporan religions: images of gods and spirits, elaborate ceremonies and costumes, complex altars, and multiple ritual processes designed to involve all of the senses, are essential media for manifesting and interacting with the spirit world. Very often these visual elements, like the images of Catholic saints that today adorn temples in Haiti, Cuba, or Brazil, or the *wanga* that Vodou specialists manufacture to harness and direct spiritual energies, originated in very different cultural and religious contexts. Much scholarship has been devoted to identifying the cultural origins of various Afro-diasporic phenomena, from the traditional patterns favored by African American quilt makers to the specific design elements utilized in Haitian Vévés. While this scholarship is important and valuable, it does not reveal much about the specific processes through which traditions originating in one cultural context were forged into new expressive complexes in another. Rather, it tends to perpetuate a vision of Afro-diasporan traditions as preserving or reconstituting a primarily African past. Our study of the distinctive image recognised today as that of the martyred slave Anastácia has convinced us that identifying the origins and tracing the historical trajectory of religious images is important, but we also should attend to transformations in the meanings of these images and the role that they play in devotees' lives. Such an approach not only counters the tendency to emphasise the African aspects of Afro-diasporan traditions, but also suggests new vistas for understanding the local processes through which these traditions were forged and continue to evolve.

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