

## **Benedictine bibliographical history: a study on the *Livraria de São Bento* - the Old Library of Saint Benedict's Monastery of São Paulo, Brazil, 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract:** The present work discusses the formation of the Old Library of Saint Benedict's Monastery of São Paulo (known as *Livraria de São Bento*) in the historical and cultural contexts of Benedictine monasticism. To this end, the theoretical-methodological literature comes not only from the historical bibliography but also the identification and analysis of the old books from 16th-18th centuries, which are part of the Library today. The research indicates the existence of a development policy for the collection guided both by the regulation of monastic life and the prevailing socio-cultural conditions, which were associated with broader objectives of the Portuguese Benedictine Congregation. In this context, the Monastery formed a library kept by monk-librarians and composed by various titles and themes. From this study, we understand that the historical and spiritual aspects of Benedictine monasticism constitute the bibliographical, cultural and informational identity of the *Livraria*. "A venerable, regular, dignified and religious place", the *Livraria de São Bento* is characterised by the dynamics of control and power - aspects that are rooted in its trans-medieval model, recurrent in cloistral libraries.

**Keywords:** *Livraria de São Bento*; Library of Saint Benedict's Monastery (History) - 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century - São Paulo; Benedictine Libraries; Benedictine Librarians; Monastic Culture; Historical Bibliography.

### **1. Introduction**

In the Middle Ages, monks and clergymen are associated with libraries for they are frequently represented among books, either copying or reading them. This image is evident in the monastic communities that observe *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, be it in the Old or in the New World.

It is possible to speak of a certain *intellectual tradition* among the Benedictines since it has its roots in the Sacred Scriptures and also because the *Rule of Saint Benedict* includes orientations on the possession of books. It is not possible, however, to speak of a real book tradition tracing back to Saint Benedict, but rather of a traditional way of interpreting the dynamics of books, including its reading, organisation, circulation and preservation.

Keeping fragments of its original characteristics along the years, the Library of Saint Benedict's Monastery of São Paulo today holds a collection of old books (16<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> centuries), of which few bear indications - reading or property marks (Fig. 1) - of having belonged to *Livraria de São Bento*<sup>2</sup> apart from revealing aspects of São Paulo's Benedictine culture.



**Figure 1** - Property mark from *Tractatus varii: Opusculum de maioratus possessorio interdicto*, by Manuel Álvares Pega, 1730. [*Livraria de São Bento* – Old Books Collection]. (Source: Araújo, 2008:173. Reproduced under permission by author).

Therefore, the *Livraria de São Bento* has a long history. Its origin is in the very foundation of the Monastery as a consequence of the Portuguese Benedictine Congregation's overseas expansion in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

From the studies of Benedictine monastic history (Leclercq, 1996), history of reading (Cavallo & Chartier, 1998; Chartier, 1998; Darnton, 1990), history of books (Febvre & Martin, 1992), history of libraries (Baratin & Jacob, 2000) and historical bibliography<sup>3</sup> (Mckenzie, 1999) it is possible to establish relations between Benedictine monasticism and cultural history, contextualizing the object of investigation in a privileged space. Thus, the aim is to verify the historical and cultural aspects that made the formation of the *Livraria de São Bento* possible, as well as to identify and analyse some of its old books.

## 2. Bases for the constitution of the *Livraria de São Bento*

It is assumed that there has always been a library, even if a small one, ever since the foundation of the Monastery in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

In this case, that is where the constitution of the book collection started, as it is prescribed in Chapter 48 of the *Rule of Saint Benedict*: “In the days of Lent, however, from morning till the end of the third hour, devote yourselves to your readings, and till the end of the tenth hour work on your assignments. In these days of Lent, receive respectively the books from the *library* and read them in the order and in full” (São Bento, 1980:102, emphasis added).

In the 1629 *Constitutions* – a set of norms that aimed to adapt the *Rule of Saint Benedict* to the Province's conditions – the care the monks should have with preservation, organisation and registration of the books is noticeable:

The Abbot should pass the direction of the Library on to a Monk, who should preserve it with dedication, clean it diligently and maintain the books orderly disposed and register them in an

Inventory or an Index disposed in alphabetical order and, under this same order, would bequeath it to his successor. By virtue of this, the Librarian (Monk) would have a private codex and no book or manuscript would be entered in/into the Library for the first time before it is registered in the above-mentioned codex. (Constitutiones..., MDCXXIX:192).

The presence of a librarian - elected by Congregation vote - and considered as a 'guard to this fortress' is, therefore, indispensable since "it will be his responsibility to guard the precious depository he is entrusted [...] and the place which the Index occupies in the Library should be indicated with exactitude." (Plano..., MDCCLXXXIX:139).

In the *Studies Plan and Regulations for the Saint Benedict Congregation in Portugal*<sup>4</sup>, from 1789, the many qualities of the librarian are enumerated – he should be well learnt in Literary History and Bibliography.

Another duty of the librarian is to update the collection and elaborate an extract of the literary news coming from foreign countries, those where the *belles-lettres* are best cultivated, and purchase the most useful works. (Johnson, 1975).

According to the same *Studies Plan*, the library should be one of the main dependencies of the Monastery, as the Capitol, the Vestry and the Refectory, which reminds the monastic *Constitutions* on the issue.

A strict recommendation from the *Constitutions*, which today would sound exaggerated, reveals the relation of the monks with books:

With the aim of preserving the Library, so that it dilapidated, we order, in virtue of sacred Obedience and under penalty of Excommunication "ipso facto incurrenda", that no Monk, from whichever category, should dare to remove any book from the Library, be it by himself, be it by the intermediation of another person, not even with the approval of Dom Monastery Abbot or of the Dom General Abbot. (Constitutiones..., MDCXXIX:192-194 quoted by Johnson, 1975:134).

More than revealing just a sense of care for books, such demand highlights the use of the *Livraria* and its emphasis on preservation rather than on circulation and dissemination. There is, consequently, an element of power and order to this.

According to the *Directions to Monastery Officials*, the librarian should devote himself so the library would always be regarded as "a venerable, regular, dignified and religious place"; in it, there should also be a crucifix of great proportion. The librarian should also remind the visitor that speaking was only permitted briefly and with submissive voice. (O Bibliotecário, 1900).

Based on these recommendations, the *Livraria de São Bento* is composed of various titles including acquisitions by purchase as well as by monks inheritance.

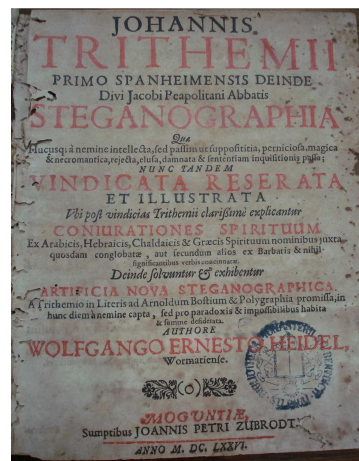
The *Livraria* has its origin in the need to promote the practice of reading and the monastic formation, even if its functions are specifically oriented and its access restricted. On the other hand, its decadence - at some moments in history - correspond to the level of study and interest on books of the monastic community itself.

### 3. The old books collection (16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries)

The Benedictine world in São Paulo is a book world and the characteristics of the *Livraria* follow the keynote of the composition of the libraries from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries: the progressive increase in quantity of acquired books and expansion in the areas of knowledge. A shift can be observed, from the practice of *intensive reading* to *extensive reading*.

From the collection of old books that can be found today in the Library of the Monastery, it is possible to map out some of the titles that might have been part of the everyday life of the monks in the ancient São Paulo.

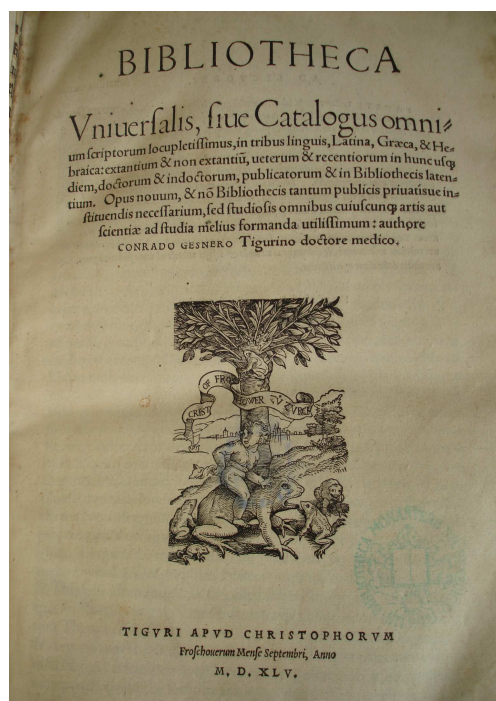
Among the works, *Steganographia* (Fig. 2), 1676 edition, by the Benedictine Johannes Trithemius (1462-1516) - Abbot of the Monastery of Sponheim - stands out. The book deals with the occultation of messages and establishes a dialogue with esoteric writings and codes. In contemporary terminology these areas would be characterized as suggestions, telepathy and hypnosis.



**Figure 2** - *Steganographia*, by Johannes Trithemius, 1676. [*Livraria de São Bento* – Old Books Collection]. (Source: Araújo, 2008:166. Reproduced under permission by author).

An indispensable source for the evaluation of the monastic and intellectual situation of the Pre-Reformation era, *Steganographia* – the most controverted work by Trithemius – was written circa 1500 and printed only in 1606, circulating initially as a manuscript. When it was printed for the first time, almost one hundred years after the death of Trithemius, the work was included in the *Index* by the September 7, 1609 decree. (Behrendt, 2000).

Another highlight is *Bibliotheca universalis* (Fig. 3), 1545, Conrad Gesner (1516-1564): a bibliography and, more precisely, an exhaustive catalogue, listing in strict orderly form around 10.000 titles of approximately 3.000 published authors in the first century of the Printing Press (prints or manuscripts) and writings in the three Sacred Languages - Greek, Latin and Hebrew.

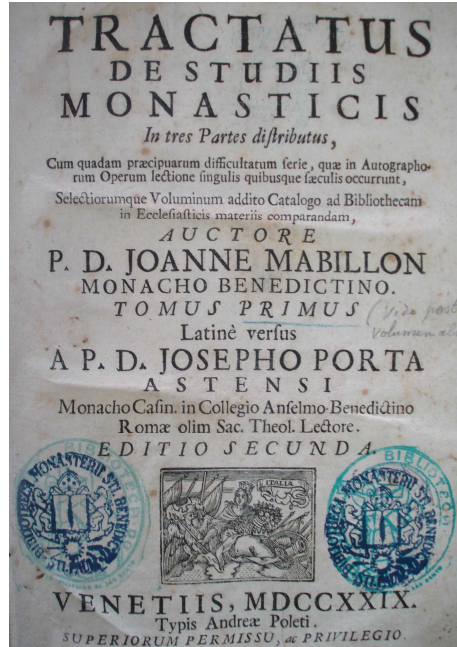


**Figure 3** - *Bibliotheca universalis*, by Conrad Gesner, 1545. [Livreria de São Bento – Old Books Collection]. (Source: Araújo, 2008:138. Reproduced under permission by author).

Among the philosophical works there are: *Operum: Aristotelis*, 1606, by Aristotle; *De Dignitate: et augmentis scientiarum tomus I et II*, 1779, the treatise on scientific methodology by Francis Bacon and *Dilucidationes Philosophicae*, the philosophy manual on logics, metaphysics and theology.

The 1617 biography of José de Anchieta, called *Iosephi Anchietae Societatis Iesu sacerdotis* and autographed by its author Sebastiano Beretario, also appears among the old books.

The works of Dom Jean Mabillon (1632-1707) - considered to be the father of Diplomatics - were also part of the universe of the *Livraria*. There are various works by the monk, among which there are the many parts of the *Annales Ordinis S. Benedicti*, from the 18<sup>th</sup> century and *Tractatus de Studiis Monasticis* (Fig. 4), from 1729, the work in which the author praises the intellectual life in the cloister.



**Figure 4** - *Tractatus de Studiis Monasticis*, by Dom Jean Mabillon, 1729. [Livreria de São Bento – Old Books Collection]. (Source: Araújo, 2008:168. Reproduced under permission by author).

Titles of practical and scientific use are also present, as the work on pharmacology called *Pharmacopea dogmatica medico-chimica, e theorico pratica*, 1772, by Fr. João de Jesus Maria, O.S.B. - a monk with the Portuguese Benedictine Congregation and the administrator of the old Saint Tirso Monastery Apothecary.

In this colonial Monastery, there are also signs of various interests such as works on botany and natural history. For example: *Historia Naturalis Brasiliae* (Fig. 5), 1648, by Guilielmi Pisonis, who was the official doctor/physician sent by the Dutch government to Brazil, under the auspices of John Maurice of Nassau.

The old book collection displays a variety of interests and, although it is possible to identify the predominant themes and editions, it is not possible to precise what the monks learnt from the readings performed at that time.





**Figure 5** - *Historia Naturalis Brasiliae* by Guilielmi Pisonis, 1648. [*Livraria de São Bento* - Old Books Collection]. (Source: Araújo, 2008:171. Reproduced under permission by author).

In this sense, the study of reading and property marks constitutes a fundamental clue in which the materiality of the book is essential. Articulating with the elements of historical bibliography, the reading practices can be related to the medium, confirming how materiality affects the modalities of use and appropriation of the texts by the reader with the passing of time.

#### 4. Conclusions

In spite of the documents and the materiality of the old book collection, the past of *Livraria de São Bento* reveals itself in an indiciary and fragmented way, in accordance with the nature of the historical work.

The old Saint Benedict Monastery of São Paulo has its policy regarding development, maintenance and use of the *Livraria* and its books. This policy is built on two bases: the first is associated to the documents that regulate monastic life, as the *Rule of Saint Benedict*, the *Constitutions*, the *Studies Plan*, *Directives*, among others. The second one is directly linked to the social, political, economic and material conditions of the Monastery in the period of the Lusitan Province of the Order of Saint Benedict in Brazil.

Another fundamental issue in the dynamic of the *Livraria* is in the circulation and access to books: they could not be lent under penalty of excommunication of those who did it.

The broader contexts of libraries in the colonial period, of course, cannot be overseen, mainly concerning the acquisition and control of the editions, since the Printing Press will only arrive in Brazil in 1808, with the arrival of the Portuguese Royal Family.

Therefore, the Saint Benedict's Monastery of São Paulo is not rid of being associated to the larger scale objectives of Portugal in relation to Brazil, for that same reason there was difficulty in composing an autonomous library.

In this sense, the books featured in the old Monastery belong to few persons. Closer to medieval manuscripts, the books are objects of restricted circulation, considering, still, the situation of São Paulo in the colonial period regarding the formation of readers.

The old books might not be a mirror of "reality" but they have authenticity by excellence for they were gathered in a similar context. In this perspective, we can think of the

*Livraria* as a *trans-medieval library*, due to the multiple temporalities of the Benedictine monasticism.

Coming from the historical trajectory and the institutional context in which it originated, the *Livraria* would be closer to the medieval model of libraries – in the sense that it was surrounded by walls and restricted to the monks – rather than to the model aimed at mediation and circulation of knowledge in large scale.

The *Livraria de São Bento*, “a venerable, regular, dignified and religious place”, is characterised by the dynamics of control and power - aspects that are rooted in its trans-medieval model, recurrent in cloistral libraries.

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## Notes

- 1 The present text brings partial results from the master thesis presented to the University of São Paulo's Program of Post-Graduation in Social History. It was developed with the advising of Professor Flávio de Campos and co-advising of Professor Giulia Crippa (USP-FFLRP). Cf. Araújo (2008).
- 2 Term that designated the Old Library of Saint Benedict's Monastery in the period of the Lusitan Province of the Order of Saint Benedict in Brazil (1592-1827).
- 3 In this study, historical bibliography is understood as the changing relations between books and the societies that produced and used them. It is also understood as the historical approach to bibliographical systems of organising information and registered knowledge.
- 4 Humanistic, philosophical and theological studies program.

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