

Forum

The Tapuia of Northeastern Brazil in Dutch Sources (1628–1648). By MARTIJN VAN DEN BEL AND MARIANA FRANÇOZO. The Early Americas: History and Culture 11. Leiden: Brill, 2023. 290 pages. LCCN 2023029767. \$142.00 hardback. Open Access E-book (PDF): <https://brill.com/display/title/64687>.

When Indigenous peoples are discussed in the history of early colonial Brazil (1500–1700), the focus is traditionally on the coastal Tupi-speaking peoples. Often neglected are the Indigenous peoples who lived in the Brazilian hinterland, referred to by the Tupis and the Portuguese as the *Tapuias*. The term *Tapuia* was a Tupi word for *slaves*, according to the Jesuit José de Anchieta. The Tarairius, one of the Tapuia peoples, were important military allies of the Dutch West India Company (WIC) during its conquest of northeastern Brazil from the 1620s to the early 1650s. The Tarairius also became the object of fascination for Dutch scholars and artists, most spectacularly through the life-size paintings of Tarairiu men and women by Albert Eckhout. Many (art-)historians have analyzed the famous images of the Tapuias made by Eckhout and others. Van den Bel and Françaço's collection of fifteen primary sources now brings together, in English, some of the rich written materials about the Tapuias from the WIC period.

The quality of this source publication is strong. After a brief general introduction examining the history of the Tapuia peoples and their relations with the WIC, each of the fifteen documents is briefly introduced, transcribed in the original language (Dutch, French, or Latin), and then translated into modern English translation with footnotes. A glossary of Dutch and Portuguese terms, as well as a bibliography, are also included. Overall, the editorial comments in the notes are helpful, except on one occasion, where a species of fish that is described in very similar terms (“Karsa” and “Carsva,” a fish resembling a pig) in two separate sources is identified by the editors in the first as a “cayman or manatee” (p. 123), and in the second as a piranha (p. 145).

The fifteen sources can be organized into two categories. Documents 1-7 are archival sources and manuscripts covering the period from 1628 to 1634, when the WIC was trying to gather intelligence about the Tapuia peoples, particularly the Tarairius who lived in the captaincy of Rio Grande. The period ended when the WIC established an alliance with the Tarairius “king” Nhanduí in 1634. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this group of sources is that Potiguar individuals played an influential role as interpreters and mediators for the WIC. The Potiguars are a Tupi people from northeastern Brazil who closely aligned themselves with the Dutch against the Portuguese. Some of the Potiguars had lived in the Republic in the late 1620s, where they learned Dutch. Surprisingly, the Potiguar interpreters had great difficulty communicating with the Tarairius, indicating that the linguistic divide was significant.

The WIC had great expectations of their alliance with the Tarairius because the latter had a fearsome reputation among the Tupis and the Portuguese. The WIC commander of the fort in Rio Grande entertained Nhanduí and his people, who had come down to the coast in great numbers in 1634. Nhanduí received European clothes appropriate for his status, including a hat with feathers and a rapier. Canons were fired from the fort, and trumpets were played to impress the Tarairius, who reciprocated with songs and dances. Despite the diplomatic pleasantries, it quickly became clear to the Dutch that the Tarairius were problematic as allies because they had hostile relations with many of the Tupi peoples in the region. Worse, the Tarairius frequently killed Portuguese settlers, which undermined the WIC policy of cultivating friendly relations with the Portuguese in Brazil. Finally, WIC officials were concerned about Tarairiu ceremonies which they perceived as devil worship. For these reasons, the WIC did not make much use of the Tarairius as military allies during the conquest of Brazil after 1634.

The second category of sources (documents 8-15) are for the most part proto-ethnographic accounts of the Tapuias/Tarairius based on observations from WIC officials and liaison officers. Some of the accounts were published by the officials themselves, but most were edited and published by Dutch scholars in the Republic. The descriptions of the Tapuias are similar in content and sometimes borrow from each other. Themes covered include physical appearance, gender roles, the status of Nhanduí, wedding ceremonies, tree trunk races, children's initiations through piercings, endocannibalism, and soothsaying or divination rituals. Surprisingly, the practice of endocannibalism is described in most accounts in a neutral manner. The divination rituals receive a lot of attention and are frequently referred to as devil worship. It would have been helpful if the editors had explained the Tapuia rituals and ceremonies from a modern anthropological viewpoint.

The editors could also have reflected more in this section on the scholarly fascination with the Tapuias in the Republic in the 1630s and 1640s. This is most evident in the description of the Tapuias in document 11 by Gerardus Vossius (1577–1649), a professor of philosophy and theology at Leiden University. He included a brief account of the Tapuias, based on information from a senior military officer of the WIC in Brazil, in a book on non-Christian religions which he published in 1641. The description is remarkable for its lack of strongly dismissive views of Tapuia culture and religion. Although Vossius argues that the Tapuia soothsaying practices are based on deceit and tricks, he admits that some of their predictions turned out to be accurate.

The most valuable primary source included in the collection is document 15, the English translation of the journal of Roelof Baro, a Dutch mediator who maintained diplomatic relations with the Tarairius on behalf of the WIC in the 1640s. Until now, the lengthy diary of his expedition to the Tarairius in 1647 was

only available in a French publication from 1651 (document 15's copytext, as Baro's original writing is lost) and in a twentieth-century Portuguese translation. The diary is the most detailed eyewitness account of a Tapuia people from the Dutch period in Brazil. Baro appears to have been one of a handful of Europeans who were fluent in the Tarairiu language. The diary details the four-month-long expedition that Baro made to the Tarairius in the hinterland of the captaincy of Rio Grande in 1647. Baro made this voyage to repair the strained relations between the Tarairius and the WIC. The WIC did not want to lose the Tarairius as allies because Portuguese rebels at this time threatened the survival of Dutch Brazil.

Baro's diary gives fascinating details about life in the sparsely colonized region of northeastern Brazil during the mid-seventeenth century. Travel conditions in the rough terrain were miserable, and Baro was unable to make any significant progress because of the rainy season for weeks. On his diplomatic mission, Baro was accompanied by a Polish-born WIC employee, one Tupi man, three Tarairius, and four dogs used to hunt wild boars. When Baro finally met Nhanduí, the latter argued that the Portuguese gave much more valuable gifts than the Dutch. Surprisingly, Baro did not carry any gifts with him, although two of his Black slaves later met the party with tobacco he gave to the Tarairius. For weeks, Baro traveled with Nhanduí and his people through the interior. During this time, Baro frequently witnessed ceremonies such as tree running, marriages, child initiations, and divination rituals. Baro found some of the ceremonies lengthy and tedious. Like the other eyewitness accounts, Baro also describes the practice of endocannibalism without casting any strong judgment. What stands out in the diary are the tense meetings between Nhanduí and Baro. The Tarairius were desperate to receive WIC military support in their wars against other Indigenous peoples in the region. Baro was sympathetic to Nhanduí, but he also explained that his superiors based in Recife, the capital of Dutch Brazil, had the final say in sending military aid to the Tarairius. The impression Baro's diary leaves of the Tarairius is of an autonomous people surrounded by hostile neighbors in a harsh environment. For the Tarairius, the Dutch-Portuguese war for Brazil was of secondary importance.

In the brief epilogue, the editors should have discussed a bit more the fate of the Tarairius and other Tapuia peoples after the Dutch were driven from Brazil in 1654. Arguably, this is not the book's main concern, but the reader feels confused after the abrupt ending of Baro's diary in 1647. Another issue the editors could have expanded upon is the role of the Tapuia slave trade. There is a brief reference to a Portuguese enslaver of Indigenous people in document 3, which contains the testimony of Andries Tacoe, a Tupi man instructed by the WIC to establish contact with the Tarairius in 1631. The Tapuia peoples were frequent targets of Portuguese slave raids. Not surprisingly, fierce Tapuia

resistance against the Portuguese was largely driven by these slave expeditions. But the WIC also participated in slave raids against the Tapuias, and there are frequent references in WIC archival sources to Tapuia slaves being held by Dutch officials and settlers in Brazil. The editors could have referenced the expedition into the northern interior captaincy of Ceará by the German scientist Georg Marcgraf in 1639. This expedition was made for scientific purposes but also to capture Tapuia slaves. The diary of this voyage, published by Ernst van den Boogaart and Rebecca Parker Brienen in 2002, does not contain many observations about the life of the Tapuia peoples but sheds important light on the widespread European enslavement of the Tapuias.¹

Overall, though, this collection will be valuable for ethnohistorians of early colonial Brazil, students of Dutch Brazil, and those interested in early anthropology.

Mark Meuwese
University of Winnipeg

¹ Ernst van den Boogaart and Rebecca Parker Brienen, *Information from Ceará from Georg Marcgraf (June–August 1639)*. Vol. 1 of *Brazil Holandês/Dutch Brazil*, eds. Cristina Ferrão and José Paulo Monteiro Soares (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Index, 2002).