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Iron Cosmology, Slavery, and Social Control: The Materiality of Rebellion in the Coffee Plantations of the Paraíba Valley, Southeastern Brazil

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Archaeological research carried out in the slave quarters of two coffee plantations in the Paraíba Valley, Southeastern Brazil, revealed a material scarcity that is highly contrastive with the material abundance found on slave quarters in sugar plantation regions. In this article, we first discuss the reasons for these differences, arguing that they are related to a tight control over the enslaved foodways. Although this control could have suppressed an important feature of the African cultural practices, we argue that these groups adopted other material resources that expressed values widely shared among the Central African societies from which most of them came. These items very likely recalled a general Central African cosmology regarding the role of iron and beliefs in supernatural powers associated with blacksmiths. In the final section, we discuss the crucial role that these belief systems played in the slave rebellions that arose in this region.

KEYWORDS Paraíba Valley, coffee plantations, slavery, material culture, cosmology

The study of slave quarters has characterized most of the archaeology of the African diaspora in the Americas. These studies began in the United States, during the 1960s (Fairbanks 1972; 1984). Their goal was to understand how African roots formed African-American culture, considering the potential of the archaeological record to reveal information that was absent in written records, regarding the daily lifeways and material culture of enslaved populations. Through time, the scope of the

research was widened, insofar as archaeologists became more interested in analyzing the internal dynamics of the enslaved communities, considering their economic, social, and cultural features. These studies included issues such as socioeconomic status and subsistence patterns (Adams and Boling 1989; Moore 1985; Otto 1984), practices of resistance to the dominant culture (Ferguson 1996; Thomas 1998; Wilkie 1994; Young 1997), the process of creolization (Delle 2000; Ferguson 1992; Wilkie 2000), and religious and ritual practices (Brown 1994; Fennell 2003; Leone and Fry 2001; Russell 1997; Wilkie 1997; Young 1996).

During the 1990s, some archaeologists, influenced mainly by the propositions of Scott (1990), started to give particular attention to the living spaces of the subaltern groups (McGuire and Paynter 1991). It is in these spaces, located in the interstices of the dominant groups' vigilance spheres that subaltern groups have the best possibilities of criticizing and resisting the impositions that regulate their public lives—the so-called public transcripts, in Scott's terms. He argues that significant resistance, expressed as conflicts and rebellions, emerges in the eruption of hidden resistance—hidden transcripts—enacted in subalterns' private spaces. According to Scott (1990: 36), what makes the study of these practices of resistance so difficult is precisely the fact that they are often structured with occultation and invisibility.

Among the enslaved groups, most of these practices might have had a non-material character, based on oral and corporal performance, involving histories, jokes, songs, and representations. These expressions frequently aimed at demoralization and subversion of the oppressive strategies of the powerful. Some verses of *jongo*, which aimed to demoralize the planters, are good examples. The *jongo* consists of African-Brazilian improvised songs created by the slaves in the Paraíba Valley, Southeastern Brazil, in the nineteenth century. Another example involved the use of a Bantu vocabulary to communicate that an overseer was arriving during the agricultural work, expressed through the phrase: “ngoma vem” (Slenes 1992: 61–62).

However, it must be taken into account that most of these practices not only could have left material records, but were also frequently performed with accompanying material culture. This is the case of cultural references and religious practices alternative to the dominant order, materialized in glass beads and other ornaments (Lima *et al.* 2014; Stine *et al.* 1996; Tavares 2006), in ceramic pipes (Agostini 1998; Emerson 1999), in low-fired earthenware vessels (Dias 1988; Ferguson 1992; Jacobus 1996; Souza 2002; Souza and Agostini 2012; Souza and Symanski 2009; Symanski 2006; 2012), and in buried caches (Brown 1994; Leone and Fry 2001), among several other objects. Therefore, the archaeological research in these spaces that have been barred, hidden, or disguised from the dominant gaze can bring to the surface the material evidence of these hidden transcripts. In doing so, archaeology can reveal aspects of the agency of subordinated groups rarely present in written accounts created in the past.

In this article we intend to approach a set of material items found in the slave quarter of a nineteenth-century coffee plantation in the Paraíba Valley as evidence of the maintenance of a Central African iron cosmology. To demonstrate the exceptionality of these findings, we start with an overview of the material content present in the slave quarters already studied in Brazil. Next we characterize the composition

of the slaveholdings in the Paraíba Valley during the first half of the nineteenth century, to demonstrate the massive presence of Central African males in those coffee plantations. We will argue that the unbalance of gender favoring men, most of them African, entailed the development of very restrictive domination strategies, related to a strong vigilance and control over important cultural features of those groups, particularly the foodways. In the last section of this article, we discuss a set of items found in the slave quarter of the Santa Clara plantation, particularly iron slag, white clay, and quartz flakes and a quartz nucleus (a large core or fragment from an aggregate of quartz). We argue that this material composed a constellation of references related to a general Central African iron cosmology and to supernatural powers often associated with the roles of blacksmiths. Finally, we discuss the crucial role that these belief systems played in the slave rebellions that arose in the middle of the nineteenth century in the Paraíba Valley.

The material content of slave quarters in Brazil

Archaeological research in slave quarters in Brazil, though yet incipient, has revealed a significant diversity in the enslaved groups' material culture (Figure 1). In the early 1990s, Lima *et al.* (1993) carried out the first research in this type of context, excavating the slave quarter of the coffee plantation São Fernando, in the Paraíba Valley, in the state of Rio de Janeiro. In this coffee production region, the slaves lived in pavilion buildings, which were elongated and divided into several cubicles (Slenes 1999: 149). Lima's goal was to study the socio-cultural practices that the captives developed under the oppression of the slavery system. Nevertheless, the scarcity of the material items found in the inner space of the rooms excavated—a few sherds of refined earthenware, glass, and building material—frustrated their expectations.

Almost a decade later, Symanski and Souza (2001; 2006) excavated the slave quarters of the sugar plantations Rio da Casca and Água Fria, located in the county of Chapada dos Guimarães, in the state of Mato Grosso, Western Brazil. Both contexts revealed informative assemblages, composed of low-fired earthenwares, refined earthenwares, glass bottles, ceramic pipes, and a small number of glass beads and copper ornaments. In this region, the slave habitations consisted of isolated cabins, made of wattle and daub, very different from the pavilion buildings that dominated in the Southeastern coffee plantations (Slenes 1999: 149–180).

More recently, Souza (2007; 2010; this volume) excavated two slave quarters of the sugar plantation São Joaquim, in Pirinópolis, in the state of Goiás, Central Brazil. Souza uncovered in one of the rooms a hearth space around which the slaves carried out daily practices related to feeding, resting, and leisure. Items related to the processing and consumption of food were dominant in the assemblage. These included low-fired earthenwares, refined earthenwares, knapped glasses, and glass bottles. Around the fire space there were many bone fragments. Other items included bullets and fragments of gun weapons, ceramic pipes, glass beads, copper ornaments, a copper cross, and a dark quartz crystal.



FIGURE 1 Map of Brazil showing the locations of the slave quarter sites on plantations discussed in this article: (1) Rio da Casca sugar plantation; (2) Água Fria sugar plantation; (3) São Joaquim sugar plantation; (4) Santa Clara coffee plantation; (5) Santa Tereza coffee plantation; (6) São Fernando coffee plantation; and (7) Colégio dos Jesuítas sugar plantation. *Image by the authors.*

Within the scope of a project called “Café com Açúcar,” Symanski and Gomes (2012; 2013) researched the slave quarters of a sugar plantation in Campos dos Goytacazes, in the Northeast of the state of Rio de Janeiro, and two coffee plantations in the Paraíba Valley, in the states of Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais. In Campos dos Goytacazes, we excavated the Colégio dos Jesuítas, a Jesuit sugar plantation. The study of two midden areas and one activity area associated with the slave quarters revealed a large number of artifacts and ecofacts. Faunal remains, related to domesticated and wild animals, dominated the assemblages. The most numerous artifacts were turned pottery, British refined earthenwares, Portuguese majolicas, and low-fired earthenwares. Less frequent items included bottles, knapped glasses, glass beads, ceramic pipes, and copper ornaments.

The material content uncovered in the slave quarters of the coffee plantations addressed in this article presented some specificities that will be discussed in detail. In order to better understand these spaces, it is necessary, first, to describe the general context of the Paraíba Valley.

Coffee plantations and African “nations” in the Paraíba Valley

During the first quarter of the nineteenth century, coffee plantations began to occupy the region around the valley of the Paraíba do Sul river, in the south of the Rio de Janeiro state. In the 1830s, these plantations already occupied an extensive territory, which included the Southeastern part of the state of Minas Gerais and the Northern portion of the state of São Paulo. The epicenter of this coffee economy was the city of Vassouras. In the middle of that century, this region had become the major producer and exporter of this commodity (Machado 1993; Stein 1990). The enslaved labor was the productive force behind this expansion, so that this region became one of the major destinations of the enslaved Africans who disembarked in the port of Rio de Janeiro (Stein 1990: 33–34).

Therefore, most of the population who worked in these coffee plantations was African. In Vassouras, Africans composed between 70 and 75 percent of the enslaved population in the period between 1820 and 1850 (Salles 2008: 184). Consequently, most of those captives who were born in the plantations, classified as “creoles,” had African parents (Slenes 1999: 42).

The vast majority of these Africans came from the regions of Congo and Angola, in Central Africa (Florentino 1995: 85–89; Karasch 2000: 35). In Brazil, these Africans were classified into “nations” as a device for reducing them to a limited number of categories, regardless of their particular places of origin or ethnic affiliations. These categories could refer to a wide geographical region, like Mina, Congo, Angola, and Benguela; to commercial outposts, like Cassange and Monjolo; to a wider ethnic-linguistic term, such as Nagô, broadly applied to all Yoruba-speaking peoples; and, in rare cases, to more precise ethnic designations, like Hausa (Curtin 1969: 184–185; Karasch 2000: 45; Nishida 2003: 32; Soares 1998: 4).

For the case of the Paraíba Valley, recent research carried out by Flavio Gomes by examining parochial baptism records and probate inventories presents a detailed picture of the African composition in the plantations of the county of Valença. From 146 Africans baptized between 1811 and 1850, Central Africans represented almost 61 percent, Eastern Africans 29.4 percent, and Western Africans 9.6 percent (Table 1).

Probate inventories furnish a more precise approximation. For the period between 1830 and 1860, these documents list 2,616 Africans. From these, 8.4 percent (220) were from Western Africa, classified as Calabar, Mina, and Nagô, and 24.4 percent (638) were from Eastern Africa, classified as Inhambane, Moçambique, Mucena, and Quilimane. The remaining 67.2 percent (1,765) were from 17 Central African nations, with the most frequent being Congo and Cabinda, from north Congo, and Benguela, from south Angola (Table 2).

The period between 1861 and 1880 presented some changes in this African demography. In a population of 1,347 Africans, the proportion of Western

TABLE 1
AFRICANS BAPTIZED IN VALENÇA BETWEEN 1811 AND 1850

African nations	Number	%
Central Africa		
Angola	16	10.9
Benguela	3	2.1
Cabinda	51	34.9
Cabunda	1	0.7
Cassange	1	0.7
Congo	1	8.2
Monjolo	5	3.5
Western Africa		
Calabari	12	8.2
Mina	2	1.4
Eastern Africa		
Moçambique	43	29.4
Total	146	100

Africans—now exclusively classified as Mina—nearly doubles, going from 8.4 to 16.05 percent. This figure is notable in comparison to those that Karasch (2000) and Florentino (1995) furnish, which oscillated, according to those sources, between 1.5 and 6 percent. Eastern Africans, in turn, decreased in number, dropping from 24.4 percent in the previous period to 18.3 percent. Central Africans presented a very subtle decrease, from 67.2 to 65.7 percent. North Congo nations (Cabinda, Congo, and Songo) still dominated, composing 49.4 percent of the population, followed by Southern Angola (Benguela and Guanguela), with 23.3 percent.

Therefore, Central Africans comprised, in both periods, the major group in the plantations of Valença, and certainly in the neighboring counties of the Paraíba Valley, like Vassouras and Santa Rita de Jacutinga. These Central Africans, coming from distinct regions of Congo and Angola, had not only to deal with the differences among themselves but, moreover, with the stronger differences presented by their captivity partners from Western and Eastern Africa. In this way, diversified cultural traditions, cosmologies, symbols, and signs had to be amalgamated and reinvented.

The coffee plantations Santa Clara and Santa Tereza: Material scarcity and domination strategies

In the Paraíba Valley, we excavated the slave quarters of two neighboring plantations: Santa Clara, in Santa Rita de Jacutinga, in the state of Minas Gerais, and Santa Tereza, in Valença, in the state of Rio de Janeiro (Figures 1 and 2). The Santa Clara plantation contained the best-preserved slave quarter site of the

TABLE 2

CENTRAL AFRICAN NATIONS LISTED IN PROBATE INVENTORIES FOR THE COUNTY OF VALENÇA, 1830–1860

Central African nations	Number	%
Angola	157	8.9
Baca	2	0.1
Benguela	356	20.1
Cabinda	362	20.5
Cabunda	20	1.1
Camunda	6	0.3
Cassange	88	5
Congo	511	29
Ganguela	16	0.9
Libolo	2	0.1
Luanda	2	0.1
Moange	21	1.2
Mofumbe	7	0.4
Monjolo	114	6.5
Quissama	11	0.6
Rebolo	76	4.3
Songo	14	0.8
Total	1765	100

region (Figure 3). This building consists of an L-shaped pavilion next to the planter's house, measuring 40 by 5 m on its north–south axis and 50 by 5 m on its east–west axis. It was formerly divided into separate rooms of 4 m² each. The Santa Tereza's slave quarter consists of a pavilion building measuring 60 by 7.5 m.

The first owner of the Santa Clara plantation was Francisco Tereziano Fortes de Bustamante, entitled Viscount de Monte Verde. He acquired the land title in 1824. After his death in 1854 his wife, Maria Thereza de Souza Fortes, inherited the property. The couple did not have children. After her death in 1868 his brother, Carlos Teodoro de Souza Fortes, inherited the plantation. Regarding the Santa Tereza plantation, its first owner was Francisco Dionísio Fortes de Bustamante, Viscount de Monte Verde's father. His daughter, Heleutéria Claudina de Souza Fortes, married to Cândido Xavier de Andrade, inherited this property (Lima 2002: 66–68).

In the Santa Clara slave quarter, the excavations involved one and one half rooms, totaling 24 m². The excavations revealed a sparse material culture, composed of a blue bead, a cowry shell, and a copper thimble. Besides these items, there was a large number of quartz flakes and cores, iron slag, a few iron nails, little chunks of white clay, and carbonized seeds. Close to the southeast corner there was a hearth space, which had, in its center, a small quartz flake and, around it, some carbonized seeds. No evidence of domestic ceramics was present (Figure 4).

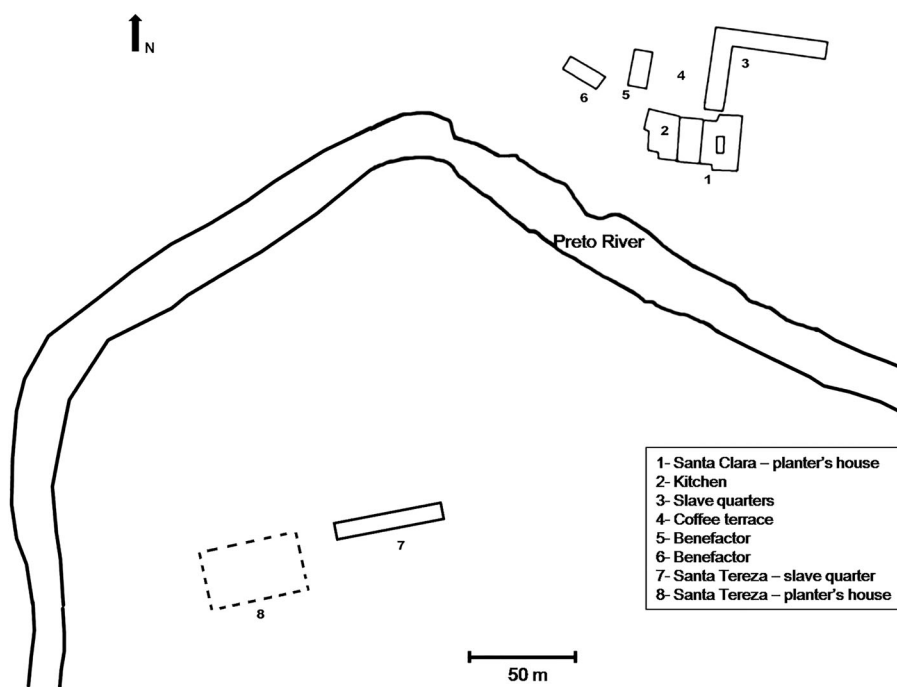


FIGURE 2 Plan of the Santa Clara and Santa Tereza plantations. *Image by the authors.*



FIGURE 3 Slave quarter structure on the Santa Clara plantation. *Photograph by the authors.*

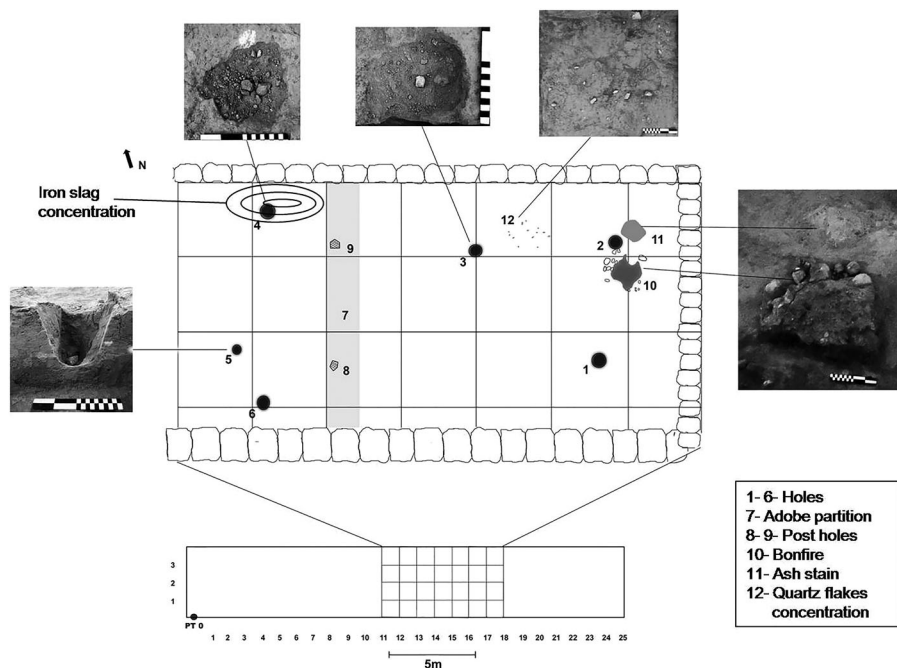


FIGURE 4 Plan of the area excavated in the Santa Clara slave quarter, highlighting main features. *Image by the authors.*

Our first impression regarding this scarcity of material culture was that most of the residue produced inside the slave quarter could have been transported for disposal to some external garbage area. However, if this was the case, the deposition area was not in front of the slave quarter, since this was a very restricted space. Prospection in this area did not reveal material culture remains. The backyard, in turn, was unviable for refuse deposition, because the slave quarters were on an elevation that made that area inaccessible. Thus, if there was some garbage deposition area specific for the slave quarters, it must have been located far away from the plantation nucleus.

The Santa Tereza slave quarter, in turn, is situated in a plain, close to the Preto River. During most of the twentieth century this building was still occupied, so that the original dirt floor was covered with a brick floor, and is nowadays covered with debris. For this reason, we carried out excavations in the back yard, searching for refuse disposal areas. The interventions included several shovel tests, test-pits, and trenches. Nevertheless, this area presented a scarce material culture, composed of four ceramic pipes, a few sherds of European refined earthenware, two fragments of low-fired earthenware vessels, a glass bead, a copper button, and two copper rings.

The scarcity of material culture in the slave quarters of both plantations strongly contrasts with the abundance of material remains found in the slave quarters of those sugar plantations studied in Chapada dos Guimarães (Mato Grosso), Pirinópolis (Goiás), and Campos dos Goytacazes (Rio de Janeiro). Nevertheless, this scarcity is consistent with the findings of Lima *et al.* (1993) in the slave quarter of the

coffee plantation São Fernando, located in Vassouras (Rio de Janeiro). Those authors suggested two possible explanations for the material scarcity in that context: perhaps the mechanisms of control were so tight that it was forbidden for the slaves to keep domestic personal belongings; or, alternatively, the planters, after abolition of slavery, intentionally destroyed all the remains related to the enslaved population (Lima *et al.* 1993: 187).

It is noteworthy that the slave quarters studied up to now in these regions of Brazil mostly received slaves during the last decades of the Atlantic slave trade (Salles 2008: 181–186; Silva 1984; Stein 1990: 33–34) and are precisely those that revealed the scarcest archaeological assemblages. This fact is even more striking when we take into account that slave quarters in other contexts that had a lower economic significance during the same period, such as the sugar plantations in Mato Grosso and Goiás, presented a much higher quantity and diversity of material culture.

The repetition, in the Santa Clara and Santa Tereza plantations, of the material scarcity pattern that Lima *et al.* (1993) identified in the São Fernando plantation supports the first explanation that these patterns resulted from restrictive controls over the enslaved lives. This control was, indeed, a fundamental domination strategy in a region demographically dominated by African males. It is necessary, therefore, to discuss the implications of this material scarcity, considering the extent to which such restrictions affected the practices and representations of those groups.

Slave quarters, material culture, foodways, and captive families

The material content of the slave quarters in the plantations located in Chapada dos Guimarães (Mato Grosso state), Pirinópolis (Goiás state), and Campos dos Goytacazes (Rio de Janeiro state), although qualitatively different, repeat a pattern common among historical households, which concerns the high frequency of material related to the preparation and consumption of food (for the case of Brazil, see Lima *et al.* 1989; Souza 2002; Symanski 1998; Symanski and Gomes 2015). Therefore, most of these slave quarters' material was directly linked to the foodways, represented by domestic ceramic vessels used for storing, preparing, and consuming foods, and by faunal remains. It is precisely this class of evidence that is absent or minimal in the slave quarters of the Paraíba Valley.

This negative evidence indicates that the captives who lived in these pavilion type slave quarters had little possibilities for preparing and consuming their food in those spaces. Indeed, Stein (1958: 161–168), in a very detailed study of the social history of this coffee production region, observes that the plantations had a centralized kitchen exclusively for preparing meals for the enslaved. It was in these kitchens that most of the enslaved gathered around big tables for their four daily meals. Five basic ingredients composed these meals: corn, beans, manioc, bacon, and sugar. Fruits like banana, orange, mangoes, and guava supplemented this diet (Stein 1958: 174–176). Those doing agricultural work had lunch in the fields, prepared on improvised fires, as depicted in contemporary images, such as Victor Frond's lithographs.

Foodways entail a critical domain, insofar as they involve more than mere subsistence and often engage fundamental cultural expressions. Considered as an essential component of individual and collective identities, culinary practices serve as much to indicate and build social relationships based on equality, intimacy, and sodality, as to sustain hierarchical and segmented relationships (Appadurai 1981: 496). Smith (2006: 480) asserts that even deprived individuals and groups have the ability to make choices concerning the preparation and consumption of food so that the foodways domain acts as a fundamental locus of identity, conformity, and resistance.

Singleton (1996: 142–143), discussing enslaved life on North American sites, distinguishes two aspects of the integrated whole that anthropologists define as culture: reality culture and value culture. The value culture concerns the customs, beliefs, and values influenced by African heritage. In contrast, reality culture involves those aspects of the captives' daily lives widely influenced by external forces, especially the social control strategies inherent to the slavery system. In this sense, she argues that the study of foodways can reveal important aspects of the slaves' value culture, regarding the ways they prepared and consumed their food. Nevertheless, she observes that most of their food was furnished by the planters, implicating in this way the reality culture. In this sense, the same material culture can be approached through both concepts. The production of colonoware pottery in African-American contexts could provide evidence that slaves prepared food according to their tastes, possibly incorporating aspects of African cuisines, and in that way maintained and further developed traditions related to the preparation and consumption of food (Singleton 1996: 146–147).

Indeed, according to Ferguson (1996), on South Carolina plantations slaves may have used colonoware in practices that actively resisted the dominant culture. This resistance expressed the rejection of the individualist and hierarchical values of the planters' class. Rather, these modest, low-fired earthenware vessels could have expressed, during the mealtime, inner group similarities, which reinforced their common heritage. This heritage concerned West African influenced foodways, related to the preparation of stews in the same pan, which were then eaten by hand. Thus, these vessels expressed values related to reciprocity and the maintenance of traditional links with the ancestors' cultures (Ferguson 1996: 260–263).

Returning to the coffee plantations of the Paraíba Valley, the evidence available strongly suggests that the enslaved who lived in the pavilion type slave quarters had little possibilities to express a value culture through foodways. In this sense, the control over the slaves' feeding consisted of a planters' strategy to dominate and domesticate the captive population.

Nevertheless, we must remember that the enslaved population was far from being a homogeneous group. There was, among them, a great diversity involving occupations, marital statuses, and origins, including those born in Africa or Brazil. Among those born in Brazil there were other dimensions of diversity, including skin color, with social categories such as mulatto, *cabra* (people with Amerindian and African descent), and Creole (Góes 2003; Karasch 2000: 36–41). Although all these variables could have been influential over the material content present in the slave quarters, in the case of the coffee plantations of the Paraíba Valley it was probable that the marital relationship was a decisive factor.

In an influential study on the enslaved family in the Southeastern coffee plantations of Brazil, Slenes (1999; 2011) emphasized the better life conditions enjoyed by married slaves, who could have access to their own houses and provision grounds. They attained, in this way, more autonomy over the management of their material lives and, in consequence, over their cultural practices, which involved the foodways domain. Slenes concludes that these enslaved families tended to follow Central African notions of lineage, maintaining extended family ties and wide parentage groups. Similarly, they built and inhabited their cabins according to a Central African model, which facilitated the maintenance and continuing development of domestic rituals from their homelands. These rituals acted as powerful instruments of social reproduction (Slenes 2011: 139–202).

Therefore, these enslaved families tended to live in family groups in wattle and daub cabins, rather than in the collective pavilion type slave quarters (Slenes 2011: 158–166). If we take into account Slenes's propositions, these family cabins should be the ideal spaces for searching for material evidence of the slaves' value culture. The major problem, in this case, concerns the low archaeological visibility of these areas, which tended not to be present in the documentary and graphic sources (such as paintings from the period), requiring very detailed prospection strategies in order to establish their locations.

Although it can be problematic not to take into account the family cabins, under the risk of creating an incomplete picture of the slave life in these plantations, we must also consider that married slaves composed a small minority living in these spaces. In a study on the slave demography in Vassouras, for the period between 1821 and 1870, Salles (2008) verified that the proportion of married slaves in the plantations slaveholdings varied between 7 and 12 percent. For the same period, the gender ratio ranged between 231 and 151 men to each 100 women (Salles 2008: 195–198, 219). Therefore, even in the most improbable scenario in which all the women in a slaveholding were married, there could still be left a considerable number of single males living in the pavilion type slave quarters. Consequently, single slaves always composed the vast majority of these plantations' slaveholdings. That fact makes the archaeological study of their living spaces—the pavilion type slave quarters—fundamental for understanding their daily lives and cultural practices. Indeed, the material culture recovered from the Santa Clara slave quarter, despite its scarcity, indicates that these captives also tried to have some level of agency over their lives. Their efforts were particularly expressed through the maintenance of a value culture founded on African references, as we will discuss next.

Iron slag, white clay, and quartz: The value culture of the Santa Clara slave quarter

The archaeological study of the African diasporic contexts requires a particular attention regarding the nature of the material remains for two reasons. The first regards the possible processes of reappropriation of the European or Euro-American material culture according to African sensibilities, reinvesting some items with uses and meanings very far from those originally designed for them. The second reason

concerns the cosmological significance attributed to some natural elements, like minerals, roots, shells, rocks, and bones, which could have played important roles in the religious practices of these groups (see examples in [Dorsey 1899](#); [Fennell 2003](#): 13; [Thompson 1983](#): 117–121; [Tucker 1940](#)).

For the case of the Santa Clara slave quarter, quartz flakes and small pieces of white clay were two recurring elements. A third one was an agglomerate of iron slag, concentrated in a circumscribed area, next to the front wall (Figures 4 and 5).

Let us first consider the implications of the iron slag, since its presence provides evidence of the practice of iron smelting in the plantation. What could be the motivations that impelled the captives to implant this material, which apparently had no utilitarian function, in this living space? Taking into account that during the second quarter of the nineteenth century, about 70 percent of the enslaved population in this

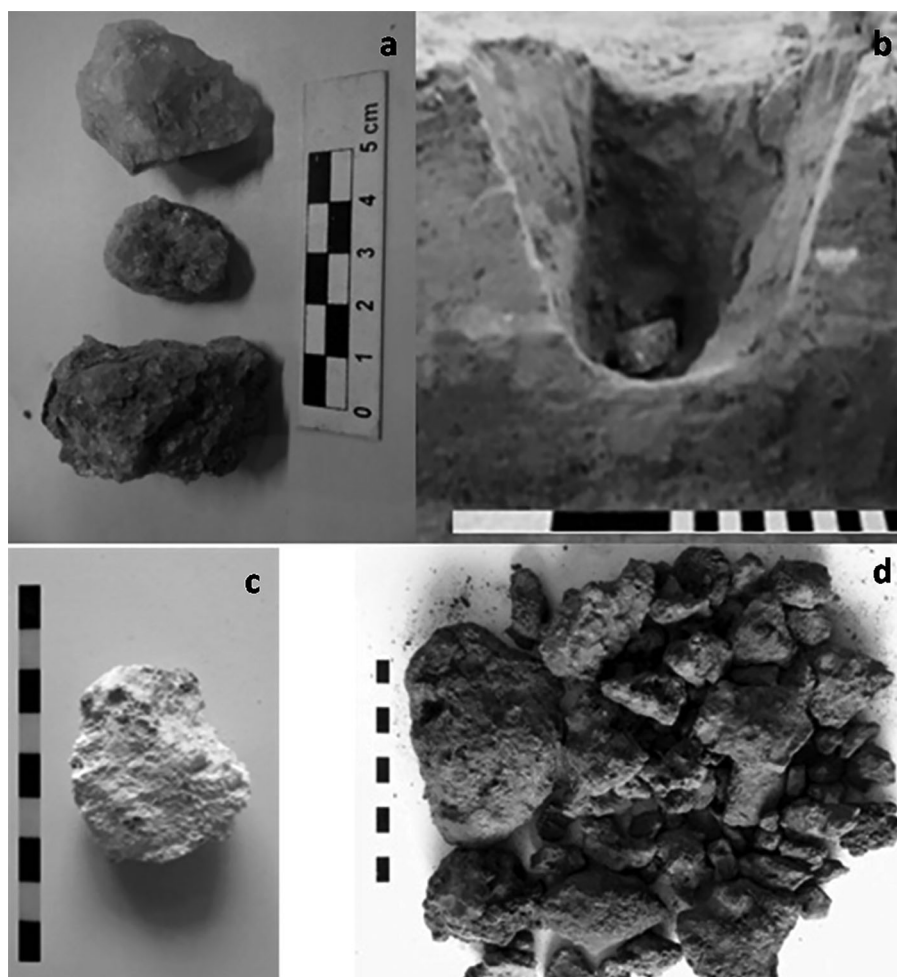


FIGURE 5 Material found in the Santa Clara slave quarter: (a) quartz pieces; (b) hole with a quartz core; (c) piece of white clay; and (d) iron slag. *Photographs and image by the authors.*

region was African, with the vast majority from Central Africa, it is necessary to consider the meanings that those African societies attributed to the iron and, more specifically, to the residue of its smelting.

In Africa iron-smelting technologies were developed starting three millennia ago. Africans who compulsorily migrated to the Americas during the Atlantic slave trade brought such technological traditions with them, as well as the universe of beliefs linked to those transformative methods of material production (Goucher 2004; Pena 2004; Ringquist 2008). In both native African and American plantation societies blacksmiths had essential roles. In Brazil, the presence of iron-smelting ovens and workshops was common in plantations and maroon settlements (Amantino 2008; Volpato 1996). Blacksmiths also exerted a central role in many resistance movements in the Americas, as producers of weapons and tools (Ringquist 2008: 14–15).

In Sub-Saharan Africa iron slag is used for repairing the iron-smelting ovens and for re-smelting to extract the remaining iron residues. It is also placed under the houses' foundations (Rehren *et al.* 2007: 215; Schmidt 1997). Sometimes the little iron spheres present in the iron slag nucleus are extracted to be used as iron bullets (Fowler 1990: 291). Indeed, in several Central African societies blacksmiths produced iron bullets for firearms (Bevilacqua 2011). In the case of the Santa Clara slave quarters, this last possibility is very remote, given the strong vigilance exercised over the enslaved population. The iron slag present in this slave quarter site is likely best understood by considering its possible relationship to the two other most recurring materials in this space: quartz flakes and white clay pieces.

Quartz flakes are the most popular material found in the slave quarters. This mineral came from local sources, as revealed some unsystematic prospection around the plantation. It is important to notice that the Santa Tereza slave quarters also presented two quartz flakes, suggesting that quartz knapping was a common practice among the enslaved population in the Paraíba Valley.

The production of quartz artifacts in these spaces suggests the maintenance of African technological traditions. Although quartz knapping was also a standard technology among pre-colonial indigenous groups, it is highly improbable that enslaved Africans had learned it from local Amerindians, since the indigenous component was absent in these coffee plantations. In the region of Angola, in turn—which was the primary provider of Africans to Southeastern Brazil—quartz knapping was a widely spread technology (Martins 2008).

In the Santa Clara slave quarters, quartz flakes were randomly spread on the floor. However, two quartz cores were buried in holes covered with sandy sediment. In the United States, quartz crystals have been found in African-American contexts, sometimes as components of possible ritual assemblages that included other items, like nails, glass fragments, buttons, bones, glass beads, and coins (Fennell 2003; Jones 2000; Leone and Fry 2001; Russell 1997). These assemblages have been interpreted as evidence of the continuing development of Central African religious practices—particularly from the BaKongo ethnic group—focused on containers of spiritual power. The content of these containers included mineral, vegetal, and animal elements, whose combined attributes attracted the spirit who powered them (Fennell 2015: 102–103; Thompson 1983: 117). Quartz crystals were common components in the BaKongo containers due to their reflective surface, which was

metaphoric of the permeable boundary between the living and the spiritual world, often represented by water surfaces (Fennell 2003: 13). It is, therefore, possible that the two buried quartz cores found in the Santa Clara slave quarter were items related to the enslaved laborers' spiritual beliefs.

The iron slag and quartz flakes present in the slave quarter point, at least, to the maintenance of Central African technological traditions. However, the co-occurrence of these two materials is very expressive of a slave value culture with African roots in this space. In fact, these two materials are usually found together in historical and late Iron Age sites in Angola, particularly in shelters used for iron smelting (Martins 2008: 211–212). Therefore, like the buried quartz crystals, it is appropriate to consider the occurrence of the iron slag as related to African systems of beliefs.

In several myths of origin of Central African societies—like the BaKongo, Lunda, Kuba, and Mbundu—blacksmiths were the founding heroes (Silva 2011: 60–75). In these Bantu-speaking societies, blacksmiths are seen as having high spiritual powers, because of their ability to transform, through the control of fire, a product of nature (iron ore) into a cultural product. This ability requires a long period of learning, as well as a process of personal transformation, reached through rituals which link them to the spiritual world. Thus, the blacksmiths' instruments frequently become associated with the spiritual powers (Childs 1991: 338–339).

For the case of the BaKongo, ethnohistorical accounts report that ironworking was an honored craft, which often involved the application of mystical powers for the transformation of materials (Balandier 1968: 224–225; Denbow 1999: 414–416). Yet, ironworking was not controlled exclusively by upper classes or guilds, but was, instead, a craft that anyone could undertake if they were capable (Balandier 1968: 107–108; Fennell 2007: 61). During the ritual process of the iron smelting, the blacksmith was in constant movement between the spiritual and material worlds. It was the manipulation of cosmological elements, like fire, charcoal, iron, and white clay, which permitted this spiritual contact. For this reason, blacksmiths could exercise a curative power, expressed by using their bellows to “blow” the peoples' diseases away (Ringquist 2008: 8–9, 17–18; Silva 2011: 79).

In most of these societies there developed an analogy between the iron-smelting process and human reproduction and fertility, such that several groups gave female shapes to the iron-smelting ovens (Childs and Killick 1993: 325–326; McCosh 1979: 164–165). According to McCosh (1979: 165), the central belief is that the oven is a female symbol that gives birth to the iron. The iron, in turn, is transformed into weapons, for protection against the enemies, and agricultural tools, for subsistence. In many of these societies iron slag is seen as analogous to the menstrual blood that failed to coagulate into a fetus. For this reason, women in the menstrual period are prohibited from getting close to the ovens, since they can put at risk the smelting process, with the result being only the production of iron slag (Herbert 1993: 86; McCosh 1979: 164–165; Schmidt 1997: 121).

Nonetheless, there are diverse beliefs regarding the power of the iron slag in Sub-Saharan Africa. In eastern Nigeria, it is believed that touching this material can bring death (Herbert 1993: 55). On the other side, for the Fipa from Tanzania iron slag is a

powerful medicine for infertility, being used as a charm or ground up to be used as a medicine (Schmidt and Mapunda 1997: 79–80).

The Fipa believe that the spiritual power that generates fertility and protection comprises all the elements involved in the iron-smelting process. For this reason, they keep iron slag fragments and pieces of iron-smelting ovens into their houses (Blakely 2006: 121). We have not been able to find similar reports about the iron slag meanings among the peoples of Angola. Nevertheless, archaeological research coordinated by Vitor de Oliveira Jorge, in 1973, in an Iron Age village from Catumbela, in Benguela, revealed a considerable amount of iron slag inside of a house, as well as in most of the houses' foundations (Jorge Sá Pinto, personal communication, February 10, 2013). Therefore, some groups in pre-colonial Angola also had the habit of keeping iron slag inside their houses, although probably attributing to it distinct meanings from those given by the Fipa to this material. Nonetheless, the presence of iron slag as grave goods in the post-sixteenth-century tombs of Quibaxe, in the north Kwanza, also indicates connections between this material and the spiritual world (Everdosa 1980: 416).

Returning to the case of the Santa Clara slave quarter, a third element that seems to be part of this set of material representations linked to spirituality consists of small pieces of white clay. The ritual use of kaolin, chalk, or white clay, is general among Sub-Saharan populations. In the BaKongo cosmology, the land of the living is seen as a mountain, called *ntoto*, which is mirrored in the land of the dead, called *mpemba* (white clay) (Thompson 1983: 108–109). John Weeks, in his book about the BaKongo beliefs and customs written at the end of the nineteenth century, referred to the *mpemba* as the sorcerers' source of power. For this reason, the white clay was a central component in spiritual charms and religious rituals. The ritual specialists applied it in their bodies as part of the conduct of rituals (Weeks 1914: 276–277).

For the same reason, in many of these societies, the blacksmiths used the *mpemba* as an important component for controlling the spiritual powers acting upon the ritual process of iron smelting. Among the Ovambo, from southern Angola, the blacksmith, after starting the oven fire with a charcoal brought from the village's bonfire, paints himself and his apprentices with white clay. He does the same to all the family members engaged in the iron mining. Their belief is that the white clay appeases the spirits' fury (Herbert n.d.). In the same way, the Tchokwe from eastern Angola rubbed white clay on the arms of those who entered the iron-smelting area to exorcize them from all the negative forces that could affect the smelting. For the same reason, the blacksmith regularly spread white clay over the iron ore during the fusion process (Bastin 1974: 125–127). In Rwanda, the Haya blacksmiths put white clay in the iron-smelting oven to impregnate it with the male fertility, a case in which the white clay is symbolic of semen (Schmidt 1998: 157–158).

In the Americas, enslaved Africans maintained the belief in the power of the white clay and its use in ritual contexts. This is the case of the African-Brazilian religions of Candomblé and Umbanda, in which the white clay, also called *pemba*, is used to draw sacred cosmograms on the floor of the ritual spaces (Fennell 2015: 103–104; Itaoman 1990). Similarly, Brown (1994: 108–110) describes a ritual kit

found in the slave quarter of the Levi Jordan Plantation in Texas, composed of pieces of chalk and other elements, such as the base of an iron cauldron, birds' skulls, claws, and iron nails.

Hence, these three elements—quartz, iron slag, and white clay—are strongly linked to African belief systems and ritual practices common in the regions of Africa from which the Santa Clara slaves came. In this way, these materials expressed cosmological elements that could have been easily recognized among individuals from diversified ethnic groups who shared the slave quarter's space. The engagement of this space with these sacred items could have the purpose of invoking spiritual powers to protect these captives from the arbitrariness and cruelty of the planters and overseers.

These material items, by acting as sacred elements mnemonic of African belief systems, could have been catalyzers in the building of a sense of community among those Congos, Angolas, Moçambiques, Benguelas, and creole slaves who lived in this space. The concept of “ethnogenic bricolage” proposed by Fennell (2007; 2015) is very adequate to approach this constellation of material references regarding the iron cosmology present in the Santa Clara slave quarter. According to Fennell (2015: 100), ethnogenic bricolage consists in “a particular form of ‘ethnogenesis’ and ‘creolization,’ which comprises broader labels for the myriad ways in which new cultures and sodalities are formed.” When discussing the process of social innovations in Afro-Brazil as an ethnogenic bricolage, Fennell (2015: 100–106) highlights how the blending of diverse African cosmologies gave origin to new symbolism that signaled the formation of new culture groups, as was the case of *Macumba*, a set of beliefs and practices developed through a blending of different African religions, Catholicism, and Native American religions.

The effort in the creation and maintenance of a distinct cosmology and belief system in this space of extreme control, coercion, and violence denotes the capacity of cultural resistance of these enslaved groups, and their remarkable effort in managing a highly significant dimension of their lives, which was the contact with the spiritual world. The maintenance of this value culture reveals that this living space was the stage of hidden transcripts. According to Scott (1990: 36), it is in these intimate spaces that subordinated groups have the best possibilities for criticizing and resisting the impositions that regulate their public lives. Scott argues that this hidden resistance can grow into open resistance, which hatches as conflicts, insurgencies, and rebellions. In fact, in the case of this coffee plantation region, two rebellion plans emerged in the slave quarters, both in Vassouras. The first, in 1838, was headed by an African named Manoel Congo. The second, nine years later, was led by a free mulatto, Estevão Pimenta. Although having distinct origins and social conditions, these two leaders had a common occupation: both were blacksmiths (Salles 2008: 189).

The upheaval headed by Manoel Congo had a great number of adherents, estimated as including almost 500 slaves in the uprising. These slaves pertained to the Captain-Major Manuel Francisco Xavier, owner of the plantations Freguesia and Maravilha, in Vassouras. The rebellion started in November 1838, when a group of captives ran from the plantation Freguesia and invaded the plantation Maravilha, killing an overseer, looting the plantation's houses and storehouses, and

freeing other slaves to join the movement. Soon, slaves from others plantations joined the group. The National Guard, a paramilitary institution subordinated to the Imperial Government, rapidly intervened, capturing most of the rebels, including the major leaders (Gomes 2006: 144–154). The investigations carried out suggested that the leaders had religious motivations. Some Africans from the two plantations involved were known as sorcerers, being seen by other captives as dominating the powers of nature and having the ability of making themselves invisible. These sorcerers were said to have persuaded other slaves into escaping to the forest where they could establish an invisible farm (Gomes 2006: 205–206).

Sixteen slaves, being 11 Africans and 5 creoles, were accused of heading the upheaval. Manoel Congo was pointed out as the principal leader of the rebels. Some slaves, being inquired about the tools that they carried with them, declared that Manoel Congo took with him his blacksmith tent. He was to be the king of the future maroon community that would be formed by the runaway slaves. Another head of the rebellion, a creole called Miguel, also a blacksmith, referred to Manoel Congo as the “master,” a term that the rebels used, conjointly with “father,” to refer to Manoel. The denomination of father is another clue about the spiritual power that the rebels attributed to Manoel Congo. In the Kimbundu and Umbundu languages, spoken in Central and Southern Angola, the word *tata/tate* means father (Gomes 2006: 184–186, 205–209).

In 1847, another rebellion plan, headed by the blacksmith Estevão Pimenta, a free mulatto, was repressed in this region. In this case, the leaders were called as *Tates Corongos*. According to Slenes, the respect for elders and the identification of advanced age with leadership is a feature widespread among African cultures. For this reason, the persons invested with authority are called *tatas*, even when they are not elders. This rebellion plan involved a secret society that had slaves from several plantations as members. The master, a holder of spiritual powers, was called *Kebanda* (Slenes 1992: 61).

It is important to notice that blacksmiths, principally of BaKongo origin, headed rebellions in others countries of the Americas, in part due to the supernatural power that Africans conferred to them (Ringquist 2008: 14–15; Usman 2008: 127). Therefore, the upheavals headed by Manoel Congo and Estevão Pimenta are far from being isolated cases in the history of Africans’ resistance to slavery. During the 1850s and 1860s, other upheavals plans were discovered in the Paraíba Valley, some of which involved enslaved groups from several plantations. These captives met at night in hidden places, where they staged occult practices, using poisonous herbs and receiving protective charms from their spiritual masters. These ritual gatherings were called *Cangerês* (Gomes 2006: 209).

Most of the coffee plantation enslaved communities likely had spiritual leaders. The planning of rebellions was just one of the facets of these communitarian organizations, which managed to have spaces of power, value codes, and cohesion rules of their own. The meeting spaces were not always located in the slave quarters, but also in hidden places in the forests around the plantations. In these meetings, a diversity of objects, like quartz flakes, iron items, iron slag, and white clay, could have been empowered according to ancestral memories and traditions that had been resignified in these diasporic contexts.

Conclusion

The slave rebellions that took place in the Paraíba Valley had as protagonists Africans with different origins. Although Central Africans composed the majority, Western and Eastern Africans, as well as creoles, also had active participation. These people, therefore, formed communities built over a diversified African background and a multiplicity of diasporic experiences. In this regard, cultural meanings involving cohesion and solidarity had to be reinvented. Ritual and religious dimensions played significant roles in this process.

In this context, blacksmiths likely attained the same mystique and power that people attributed to them in their past African societies. Coming back to the notion of hidden transcripts (Scott 1990), we must remember that the occult resistance emerges in private spaces, like the slave quarters and the forest clearings. It was in these spaces that open resistance germinated. The implantation of iron slag under the slave quarter's floor reproduced a cosmologically oriented practice of African societies, being, therefore, indicative of the maintenance of African-derived traditions and cosmologies. Moreover, its materiality, by invoking the spiritual powers for protection, acted as a powerful element in the maintenance of this cosmology. The conjunction of the iron slag with the white clay, the flaked quartz, and other elements, like cowry shells, formed a powerful constellation of references, probably activated in private rituals in which the celebration of African memories and the invocation of the ancestors' powers took place.

These items, aesthetically unexpressive and stripped of any apparent utilitarian function, had the power to nurture feelings of belonging to a universe distinct from external conditions of oppression. In this way, this constellation of objects, by actively acting in the maintenance of African memories and cosmologies, gave sense and consistency to the open resistance that arose in moments like the rebellion headed by the master blacksmith Manoel Congo.

Rather than perspectives that emphasize the plantations landscapes as the planters' domain of power, in which an enslaved population submissively carried out their daily tasks, we can consider the importance of that territory, invisible for the planters, where the captives performed hidden transcripts. When the slaves engaged with the power of invisibility of their spiritual leaders, they, in some sense, metaphorically referred to this territory, given the invisible nature of all the memories, beliefs, and knowledge that composed their cosmologies. The "silence" expressed in the material remains found in the Santa Clara slave quarter invoked this invisibility, and thus acted as a powerful critique of the cruel social order that had, in some way, to be demolished. This material constellation, in some sense, still resonates like the shout of an enslaved woman who was captured during the battle between the National Guard forces and the rebels headed by Manoel Congo: "Die, yes, give up, never."

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