

NOAH'S ARK

The Cariri, an Indigenous population after which the region in southern Ceará is named, believed the sea could invade the green portion of the northeastern backcountry at any time. They thought an enchanted serpent slept beneath the surface of the Cariri Valley. If it decided to move, the water would surge, causing a huge flood that would sweep away the wicked. As the waters receded, the land would turn fertile and be free again, allowing the Cariri people to start anew. This is the Noah's Ark of the Brazilian backcountry.

The prophecy dates back to the region's geological past: over 100 million years ago, the area had been a sea. At a time when the land of Brazil and Africa began separating due to tectonic movements, the plateau that now embraces Crato, the Araripe Basin, was the shoreline of a vast, calm, and highly saline body of water. Animals that fell into this water were quickly embraced by the soil, where decomposition agents were scarce. This led to their preservation through a sort of "Medusa effect". The region holds a massive collection of fossils, and it was here that the specimen later identified as *Ubirajara Jubatus* was discovered.

In 1995, the fossil was taken from Brazil in an irregular way and transported to the Karlsruhe Natural History Museum in Germany. On December 13, 2020, an article about the discovery of a Brazilian dinosaur species was published in the journal *Cretaceous Research*, identifying *Ubirajara* as the first non-avian dinosaur of Latin America.

The scientific community raised concerns about the irregular removal of the fossil from the national territory and called for its return. Almost a year later, in September 2022, the German museum announced that it would not return the item, as it had been acquired before the country became a signatory to international conventions for protecting cultural heritage. In its statements, the museum portrays itself as a sort of Noah's Ark, safeguarding the paleontological history of the planet with utmost responsibility and providing better conditions to preserve the fossil than Brazil. These statements perpetuate the practices of colonialism and extractivism, where museums remain repositories of knowledge and power.

Following a heated public debate, the fate of *Ubirajara Jubatus* was decided: it would return to Brazil. Fossils not only tell the story of life on our planet, including our own, but also serve as witnesses to climate change and environmental shifts over time. By understanding these stories from the past, we can identify recurrent patterns, accumulating insight in order to grasp the present and foresee the future. *Ubirajara* might well tell us the story of the first dinosaur that departed then returned.

BABEL AND MÁRIO DE ANDRADE

Among his many studies, Mário de Andrade dedicated himself to understanding the rhythmic and melodic patterns found in the musical expressions of the Brazilian people. In 1926, assisted by Carlos Drummond de Andrade and Luciano Gallet, he delved into the melodies of the Northeast Brazil and the rural regions of São Paulo, resulting in articles published in *Revista de Antropofagia* and the periodical named *Ariel*. His goal was to document this intangible cultural heritage. In 1927, he embarked on a journey through the northern region of the country, with his observations later published in the newspaper *Diário Nacional* under the title "O Turista Aprendiz" (The Apprentice Tourist). Mário was an enthusiast of what he termed "mechanical music", namely, music collected and reproduced through machines. He was familiar with the rare sound recordings created by Theodor Koch-Grünberg, which laid the foundation for the anthropological publication *Do Roraima ao Orinoco* (From Roraima to Orinoco, 1924). Captured on wax cylinders, these recordings were sent to the Ethnographic Museum of Berlin, Germany.

When Mário assumed the role of director of the Department of Culture of São Paulo in 1935, he introduced an initiative that sought to connect heritage with research in the sociological, historical, and ethnographic fields. This initiative included plans for creating a radio station, curating a record collection, and organizing expeditions to document popular traditions. However, only the first of these journeys, known as the Folklore Research Mission, was carried out. The mission took place between February and July 1938.

Coordinated by Luís Saia, Martin Braunwieser, Benedicto Pacheco, and Antônio Ladeira, the mission documented cultural and musical practices in states such as Pernambuco, Paraíba, Ceará, Piauí, Maranhão, and Pará. The mission resulted in a collection of audio, visual, imagery, and written records. By September of the same year, all the gathered materials had been organized and systematized by Oneyda Alvarenga, the director of the Municipal Record Library, who continued to oversee the ongoing studies.

The materials accumulated by these missions have played a significant role in documenting the intangible memory produced within the country. At the same time, there is an effort to comprehend, categorize, classify, and understand everything and everyone involved in these expressions, acknowledging their historical significance through their intelligibility within the realm of scientific ethnographic knowledge. However, the limitation of undertakings like these lies in the potential for embedded violence within their processes of recording and/or collecting. To a certain extent, the missions attempted to build a Tower of Babel of national culture. Similar to the story in the Old Testament, the Tower of the Missions collapsed as it tried to ascend. The rhythms, songs, and objects gathered during the journey hold secrets and speak different languages.

THE NEW NOAH'S ARK

Visiting the website — which has not been updated since 2015 — of the environmental program "The New Noah's Ark" is quite an experience. Aesthetically, there are visual elements from past decades that have become obsolete; however, the most intriguing aspect is navigating through the library of animal sounds compiled there, where you can discover numerous recordings, particularly of birds.

Antonio Silveira Ribeiro dos Santos, who founded the program in 1995, is a birdwatcher who has conducted surveys of avifauna in various regions of Brazil. He focuses on bioacoustics as a central tool in conservation practices. The "Birds/Ornithology" section of the website provides lists of birds by location along with related information. The program also conducts studies and publishes articles to promote birdwatching as a less disruptive option for ecotourism. "The New Noah's Ark" was an educational environmental project conceived by an individual and developed in collaboration with other volunteers. Its activities included publishing articles in journals, magazines, and newsletters, giving lectures, participating in interviews across various media outlets, and engaging in social and environmental projects and initiatives.

The project is akin to an online open-source natural history museum, offering the opportunity to listen to distant soundscapes and creatures that may no longer exist. Aiming to emulate a Noah's Ark, a biblical symbol of a preservation approach that views the conservation of nature as a form of selection, the library is, in reality, marked by some misunderstanding. Our focus is less on deciphering the messages conveyed by the birds in their songs and more on recognizing that the preservation of nature and its elements requires allowing them to remain enigmatic to human comprehension.

BENDEGÓ AND THE RESILIENCE OF STONE

Originating in the cosmos, Bendegó is a meteorite that dates back approximately 4.6 billion years. Primarily composed of iron and nickel, it originated from an asteroid located between Mars and Jupiter. Following an extensive journey through space, it eventually collided with Earth. Although its initial weight was 60 tons, its mass decreased to approximately 7 tons upon entering the atmosphere.

Its existence remained unknown until 1784 when Domingos da Mota Botelho discovered it in Bahia, near what is now the city of Monte Santo. In 1785, an attempt to transport it to Portugal failed, and the meteorite fell into the stream known as Riacho Bendegó, thus gaining its name. For nearly a century, it remained in the same location, attracting the interest of researchers from various countries who traveled to visit it.

In 1887, on Brazil's Independence Day, the transportation of the meteorite to the then capital of the country began. The arduous journey took 126 days to cover 113 kilometers to reach the Jacurici station, where it was transferred to a train headed for Salvador. Soon after, it continued to Rio de Janeiro and was received by the royal family. Fragments were extracted from Bendegó and sent to international museums.

In the same year, it was placed in the entrance hall of Dom Pedro II's grand project, the National Museum, which until then had operated from a building in Campo de Sant'Anna, downtown Rio, the site of the Proclamation of the Republic (1889). Following the subsequent exile of the imperial family, the museum was relocated to the São Cristóvão Palace in Quinta da Boa Vista. In 1900, the National Museum's permanent exhibitions were opened to the public in its new location. Bendegó garnered widespread attention and, despite all the museum's management changes throughout the 20th century, it remained associated with it.

On the night of September 2, 2018, a devastating fire struck its home – the National Museum in Rio de Janeiro. The flames consumed nearly the entirety of the collection, which contained about 20 million items, and had celebrated its 200th anniversary in June of that year. When the fire was finally brought under control and the building's door opened, a remarkable sight emerged: the Bendegó meteorite remained intact. Against all odds, like a symbol of resilience, it was there, showing that not everything had been lost. Bendegó proved to be a true survivor, containing within itself the memory of an extraordinary journey through times and spaces that are hard to imagine.

Since then, Bendegó has borne witness to the museum's rescue team's efforts to identify and catalog items that managed to resist the flames. At the same time, it has witnessed a significant shift in the reconstruction of the collection, which used to mainly follow arbitrary acquisition practices. For instance, the ethnographic collection is being revitalized through the donation of objects selected by the Indigenous communities themselves, who are actively participating in the processes of categorization and acquisition. The current state of the National Museum and the resilience of Bendegó demonstrate the importance of persistence and embracing transformation as a vital part of life. Starting anew can also offer the chance to reaffirm the aspects of partnership that empower all parties involved.

A NOITE NEWSPAPER

Founded on June 18, 1911, in Rio de Janeiro, the newspaper *A Noite* had a trajectory marked by distinct phases and significant political events. This Rio de Janeiro publication, which operated until the mid-1960s, was initially established by Irineu Marinho after disagreements with the management of *Gazeta de Notícias*. Right from its inception, the newspaper took a clear oppositional political stance, particularly critical of the government of Marshal Hermes da Fonseca and supportive of Rui Barbosa's presidential candidacy. It gained prominence by exposing government authoritarianism, which even led to the imprisonment of its directors and a temporary suspension of its activities.

Over the years, *A Noite* served as a platform for significant political disputes, such as those between Epitácio Pessoa and Rui Barbosa in 1918, and between Nilo Peçanha and Artur Bernardes in 1921. During the *tenentista* movements of the 1920s, the newspaper remained supportive. However, in 1925, the direction of the periodical changed significantly when Geraldo Rocha took control after the founder Irineu Marinho fell ill and traveled to Europe. Under Rocha's management, the newspaper underwent substantial changes, aligning itself with the dominant oligarchies.

In the 1930s, after being acquired by a foreign group, the publication entered a period of recovery. Two magazines were launched — *Carioca* and *Vamos Ler* — and a radio station, Rádio Nacional, was inaugurated. However, political uncertainties and fears of government takeover persisted, causing *A Noite* to face a major economic, administrative, and political crisis in the following years. Throughout its existence, the newspaper bore witness to Brazil's political and social transformations, playing a central role in the history of journalism, particularly in Rio de Janeiro. The newspaper ceased its activities in the mid-1960s.

GOLPEAR CON LA MANO ABIERTA

Objetos diversos llegan volando
al templo de babel
todos
juntos
conglomerados con vínculos intrínsecos
al llegar al museo
son divididos en tipologías
y catalogados a partir de afinidades aparentemente científicas
este grupo de petecas, que vuelan por los aires como parte de un juego
vienen de diversas regiones de la región amazónica
en cada una de ellas se habla una lengua distinta
y ahora conviven en el mismo espacio
una caja de cartón dentro de una vitrina en el depósito de un museo en Berlín
Ya no pueden volar
Las sacamos de vitrina y de la caja para fotografiarlas todas juntas
después las dibujé y las grabé en linóleo
En las impresiones parece que son libres y que están volando
el movimiento quedó grabado en sus fibras orgánicas
como un gesto congelado

PAPERMAKING

I am thinking of the body and its relationship with the format of a newspaper, in proportion to the size of our open hands and our fingers flipping through the pages. Recently, I learned how to make paper from scratch and realized that the frames used to gather the paper are also related to body proportions, designed to be carried by a person with both arms. In the process of papermaking, the sound of water is always present, as well as the sound of machines pressing the pulp to remove the water, in order to obtain the skin of a sheet of paper.

This is perhaps the beginning of the grid — the body.

This text was handwritten in a blank notebook, so the grid depends on my ability to write in a straight line. The initial pages are very tight and orderly, but I realize that emotions, which disturb my hand, alter my writing.

I don't have an eraser, so I just cross out certain parts and make notes for the future of this text, when it will be transcribed to my computer, by these very fingers.

Then, on the computer, all the words will suddenly have the potential to be replaced, rearranged, and deleted, and the result of this text will also be dictated by the suggestions of digital dictionaries, thesauri, and search engines. The text on the computer exists in a parallel grid, the grid of infinite variations and endless change.

The time when the news was first read on paper has come to an end.

MCD

THE TOWER OF BABEL

Pieter Bruegel the Elder's 1563 painting *The Tower of Babel* is the first painting in European art history, to feature a building as a protagonist. Benet writes: "It is plain from Bruegel's painting that the abandonment of the tower's construction, caused by the jumble of languages the godhead has introduced to censure the profane enterprise, did not take place in a single day, and that even after a lack of understanding among its artisans had condemned it to failure, the work went on for a long time, perhaps even for a period as long as when linguistic unity had reigned."¹

Berlin Babel is a kind of mirror double to the Babel tower, in the sense that in its case, its multiplicity of tongues were expected to inhabit one building, and through that architectural European encyclopedic gesture, amalgamate their voices—a project that is equally bound to fail—under the name of Alexander von Humboldt, a name that I have been avoiding throughout this text, in order to sidestep its power as a unifying symbol.

Benet draws an analogy between the tower and a warm-blooded body, envisioning society as an "amplified body (. . .) sharing the nature of man (. . .) but adopting the form of the first thing a man creates when he submits himself to its laws: a building."²

Babel means confusion, and now, when I think of this whole enterprise as a Babel construction, it is because I see it as an entity with political and cultural power that centralizes the energy of its interlocutors towards its own legitimation. I can describe my relation with this multi-tongued construction as one that leaves me tangled. For each tongue did speak differently, and corresponded to a different function. The architects, the museography team, the engineer, the logistics manager, the curator of the ethnographic collection, the friends of the museum, the director, and so on.

1. Juan Benet, *The Construction of the Tower of Babel*, trans. Adrian Nathan West (Cambridge: Wakefield Press 2017), 36–37.

2. Benet, 12