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Kurusu Kuatia

Written Culture and Indigenous Memory in the Reductions of Paraguay (Eighteenth Century)*

Eduardo Santos Neumann
Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul
([<Eduardosneumann@gmail.com>](mailto:Eduardosneumann@gmail.com))

Abstract

In the history of the Guaraní reductions, one of the themes that has attracted attention is the indigenous opposition to accepting orders to move after the Treaty of Madrid was signed by the Iberian monarchies in 1750. At this time, there was intense use of writing by the Guaraní, prompting a 'written reaction'. They wrote several texts, using arguments against the implementation of the exchange of eastern missions with the Colônia do Sacramento. The refusal of the indigenous people to abandon their reductions triggered a conflict known in historiography as the Guaranitic War. At the beginning of March 1756, about a month after the Battle of Caiboaté, in the place where the indigenous militia was defeated by the Iberian armies, some leaders of the Reduction of São Miguel erected a large cross with an inscription written in Guaraní (*Kurusu Kuatia*). It is an epitaph, in the Guaraní language, reporting episodes from that battle. The text, signed by Miguel Mayra, was only located three years after the events. This type of exposed writing is an indigenous memory of past events, episodes assessed by the rebel population as worthy of collective remembrance.

Keywords: Colonial Frontier, Guaraní Mission, Indigenous Memory, Indigenous Writing, Written Culture

1. *Introduction*

In recent decades, there have been important advances in ethnohistorical production regarding the indigenous reductions administered by the Jesuits in colonial Paraguay, with respect to traditional interpretations previously disseminated about the

* This article was translated from Portuguese to English by Mary Carvalho Walsh; the excerpts in Guaraní were translated from Spanish to English by the same translator in collaboration with the author.

past of the missions.¹ The appreciation of indigenous participation in the management of these communities, in addition to the originality of the political-administrative institutions,² has enabled a better understanding of the functioning of these Indian villages, especially from the perspective of historical anthropology, which has highlighted the active role played by the Guaraní (Wilde 2003).

These reductions, after overcoming a series of external and internal adversities, experienced a period of marked growth, both economic and demographic.³ In the middle of the eighteenth century, the Jesuit Province, whose borders were never clearly defined, had approximately thirty villages of Christianized indigenous people. The positive results obtained in these reductions were a result of political, social and cultural measures promoted by the Jesuits with the aim of co-opting the Guaraní to participate in this new colonial community.

In the history of the Guaraní reductions, one of the themes that is currently attracting the attention of researchers is the opposition of the indigenous peoples to accepting the order to migrate after the Treaty of Madrid (1750) was signed between the Iberian monarchies. This triggered a 'written reaction' from the Guaraní living in the reductions, who wrote several texts presenting arguments against the implementation of the exchange of the eastern missions with the Colônia do Sacramento. During this period, there was an intense use of writing by the indigenous people, which resulted in the Guaranitic War (1754-1756). The extensive circulation of messages, letters and notices, exchanged between indigenous people, Jesuits and the colonial authorities, is surprising. The appreciation of written communication by the Guaraní is the result of both the investment in documentary research and the new readings applied to this documentary corpus and, on the other, reflects the importance attributed to the capacity for action of the indigenous communities. In this essay, I intend to discuss the uses of writing by the Guaraní who agreed to live in the reductions under the Jesuit administration in colonial Paraguay.

However, even in the face of researchers' recognition of the importance of writing in the work of converting indigenous peoples in Hispanic America,⁴ historical research has not yet paid proper attention to the impact that the introduction of literacy had on the social organization of these communities. The traces of indigenous writing, which can be located in several archives, indicate that there is still much to be investigated with regard to the transformations caused by the 'domestication of the wild mind',⁵ in the face of the conquest of the alphabet by the indigenous population of the reductions.

Even in the face of evidence of indigenous alphabetic skills, some researchers have still insisted on the premise that the documentation produced by the Jesuits was the only testimony

¹ The first researches with this focus began to be published in the mid-1960s. These are the works of anthropologist Branislava Susnik (1966 and 1979-1980) and Maxime Haubert (1967), in addition to the research of Bartomeu Melià (1969, 1970 and 1986).

² Regarding the functioning of political-administrative institutions in reductions, see Kern 1982.

³ The population of these reductions in the mid-eighteenth century reached approximately 150,000 inhabitants. The demographic growth was related to the standard of living and resources enjoyed by the Guaraní missions, such as food, clothing and sanitary measures. For a description and detailed data about the general conditions of this growth, see Maeder 1992.

⁴ To find out more about the effects of writing on the colonization of the indigenous imagination, see Gruzinski 1991 and 1999.

⁵ Jack Goody was an English anthropologist who studied the effects caused by the introduction of alphabetic writing in traditional societies. According to him, writing is one of the tools responsible for the development of the human intellect – it is a personal experience capable of transforming cognitive processes and, therefore, of playing a role in the 'domestication of the wild mind' (1988).

of such an experience.⁶ However, contrary to this assumption, there is irrefutable evidence that the Guaraní of the reductions were actually able to write.⁷ This is why it is still possible to find many documents written in the handwriting of the indigenous people in the archives.⁸ Since the beginning of this century, researchers from various countries have been paying attention to the documents written by the mission Indians (Wilde 2001; Ganson 2003; Melià 2003 and 2005; Neumann 2005, 2008 and 2015; Boidin 2014; Couchonnal and Wilde 2014). These texts, located in various different archives, libraries and even collections, are being translated and their linguistic/idiomatic expression carefully analysed.⁹ The identification of a corpus of documents written in Guaraní has helped in making a break with the traditional and even colonial view of the history of the Guaraní reductions.¹⁰

Studies of written culture have been pointing out the impact of this technology on the way of thinking as well as on how sociocultural realities are translated (Goody 1987 and 1988; Charrier 1988; Bouza 1998 and 2001; Castillo 1999 and 2006; Petrucci 1999 and 2013; González Sánchez 2007). There seems to be constant friction regarding the assumption that the Guaraní were passive members of that society – as suggested by traditional historiography about the period – and the analysis of the actions promoted by the literate indigenous members of the reductions. Taking into consideration the strategic goals effectively assigned to writing by the Guaraní they no longer come across as indigenous populations at the mercy of mediators. They now appear to have been literate men who directly interacted as political subjects in the colonial society. In effect, writing ‘civilizes’, enabling them to gradually exert influence both on decision-making as well as in interactions with different social stakeholders, becoming protagonists of their own actions.

The set of documents, originally written in Guaraní (and later in Spanish), indicates the need to reassess current diagnoses regarding the dissemination of indigenous writing in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Graphic output from the missions, documented in a diverse array of supports and presenting different types of purposes, compels us to undertake a broad reappraisal of simplistic analyses that previously considered the ‘actuarial’ activity of indigenous mission populations to be a minor fact or even restricted to merely copying religious texts (Neumann 2005 and 2007).

Even in the present day, through analysis of the documents produced by the Guaraní, it is possible to identify some of the characteristics that shaped writing in the reductions, as they came

⁶ This is the stance of the German historian Félix Becker who, in the eighties, used to pose the argument that the letters written by the rebellious Guaraní had actually been dictated by the Jesuits. Such a perspective sets aside any sort of indigenous participation in negotiations once it regards the Indians as mere puppets in the hands of priests (1983).

⁷ The pioneers in the study of texts written in Guaraní were linguists such as Marcos Morinigo (1946) and Bartomeu Melià (1969). In recent articles, Bartomeu Melià devoted attention to the documents written by the Guaraní as actual mission and Paraguayan history sources (1999, 2000 and 2005).

⁸ The textual production of the Guaraní even aroused suspicion, as it was exceptional for Europeans to recognize the literacy skills of indigenous people, even those who were Christianized. As Barbara Ganson noted: ‘The Spanish officials were not convinced by these Guaraní letters. The Marqués de Valdelirios, the Spanish envoy in charge of the boundary commission, and others thought the Jesuits, not the Guaraní, had written them because they believed that Guaraní were incapable of composing such fine manuscripts’ (2003, 102).

⁹ Documents written by indigenous people in their own languages have been the object of attention by researchers from different countries. The localization and translation of these documents is one of the objectives of the LANGAS project – Langues Générales d’Amérique du Sud (Quéchua, Guaraní) XVI et XIX siècles – developed together with the Institute des Hautes Études de l’Amérique latine, at the University of Paris III/INALCO, coordinated by Capucine Boidin and Cesar Itier. Another initiative dedicated to research into the Guaraní language being development at the University of Kiel, PEKY Project (*Proyecto Kwatia ymaguare*) under the coordination of Professor Harald Thun, whose focus is linguistic changes in the Guaraní language.

¹⁰ For recent publications that used these documents, see Shawn 2020 and Owensby 2021.

up with new functionalities in favour of shared cultural models.¹¹ Hence, it is by focusing on indigenous clerical skills – in distinct material formats such as letters, notes, *cabildos* (minutes of local councils), diaries or historical overviews – that it is possible to gauge the range of usage that the Guaraní dedicated to their own literacy skills as well as the demands they were intended to meet.

In fact, in the beginning literacy was encouraged among the ‘main indigenous representatives’ of the Guaraní,¹² therefore promoting the necessary means for them to further elaborate new forms of graphical expression. From particular circumstances of contact with the ‘literacy universe’, written language gradually became regarded as valuable and consequently applied within the area of the reductions, mainly among those who were members of the mission ‘elite’.¹³ The sort of treatment accorded to the indigenous noblemen, as well as the appointment of skilled leaders to occupy specific social functions, was a constant theme present in the Hispanic-American colonial legislation (Wilde 2006).

It is well known that for several years the literate work carried out by these particular indigenous individuals was indeed focused on translating and adapting religious texts rather than activities of creative expression *per se*. Similarly, we are aware that the gradual increase in the number of individuals capable of registering their opinions through writing was an outcome of several generations of Guaraní whose literacy skills had been progressively cultivated, thereby favouring a modification in the relations among individuals and in the literacy universe itself – and this had visible repercussions on daily mission routines.

2. Kurusu Kwatia – *Inscribed Cross*

In the early phase of evangelization, priests used simple means of support to promote the transmission of fundamental Christian values to the Guaraní. In order to spread the values of Christian catechesis, the Jesuits resorted to the introduction of the *kurusu kwatia* (the inscribed cross), as pointed out by Ruiz de Montoya in his *Tesoro de la lengua Guaraní* (1639). The cross, besides being sacred, also became the holder of written words, and acquired a quite specific term in Guaraní to denote the object.

The writing of messages on crosses as used by the Jesuits holds an undeniable relation with the practice of what Petrucci calls ‘exposed writing’.¹⁴ In Europe inscriptions are widespread and these are now historic records which are currently being valued and analysed in several academic circles. In the period that ranged from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century, there was an expansion of this practice, which went beyond public epigraphs. It was a means of expressing

¹¹ I use the notion of ‘appropriation’ as formulated by Michael de Certeau, who sought to explain that the operations carried out by groups or individuals considered to be ‘subjected’ were actually inventive capacities (1998). I also draw on the contributions of the historian Roger Chartier, who invites us to reconsider the issue of cultural consumption, not only from the perspective of an uneven distribution of written objects but above all in terms of their differential uses (1988, 1993 and 2001).

¹² The ‘main Indians’ were those individuals who performed leading functions in a given community, as was the case with the *tuvichás* (chiefs). By accepting to live in a Reduction the most outstanding Indians were elevated to the role of leaders within these Christian villages, according to the needs of each Reduction (Wilde 2009).

¹³ For a thorough profile description of the members of the mission elite as well as the tasks performed, see Haubert 1990, 223-232.

¹⁴ The concept of ‘exposed writing’ was formulated by Armando Petrucci: ‘... by this term I mean any type of writing designed to be used in open or closed spaces, which allows a plural (in-group, massive) reading, from a distance, of a text written on an exposed surface. Its displayability and, therefore, the exposure itself, make it a medium for potentially massive communication, or, in any case, more numerically relevant than it would have been had it been a text contained in a book or on a piece of paper destined for individual reading’ (1999, 60).

the aspirations of semi-literate populations who, according to Petrucci, struggled to gain visibility for their own written productions and made a stand against the elite and power groups.

Written inscriptions with a cross as medium have been explored in the history of the missions. They could either signal territorial domains, *ervais*,¹⁵ or serve as guiding signs for external publics – that is, to be visualized by Iberian colonizers. In the location of *Campos de Cima da Serra*,¹⁶ the Guaraní made use of inscriptions on crosses, seeking to make a clear point regarding their early occupation of that territory. In 1727, when a Portuguese man named Francisco de Souza Faria was opening cattle routes in *Campos de Cima da Serra* the first thing he came across were significant herds of cattle. These animals pertained to the *Vaqueria de los Pinares*, an area which had been designated for cattle breeding by the Guaraní,¹⁷ where ‘crosses in a language blending Spanish and Tape were placed by the Indians’ – and that is the reason why these specific fields in *Campos de Cima da Serra* became known as *Cruzes dos Tapes*.¹⁸

Unfortunately, we do not know anything about what was carved on those crosses; nonetheless there is a considerable likelihood that they were warnings, signalling who the animals on that grassland belonged to. In the historic register of the City Council of Laguna, dated 1734, there is recorded information about another cross located ‘em cima da terra’,¹⁹ which bore an inscription ‘uma escrita pela língua da terra’.²⁰ The inscription was a warning from the Guaraní, ‘promising war’ in the event that it became necessary to defend the pathway, known as the *tranqueira* (insurmountable barrier). In both cases, the written language used by the indigenous group was recognized by the colonizer. It expresses a situation of precedence over these lands and, consequently, over the animals grazing on it. The warnings, in Latin-style writing, were addressed to the Portuguese who, during their work to establish a road to connect Southern America with the region of Minas Gerais, used to loot the *Vaqueria de los Pinares*, located in the middle of the route.

The practice of demarcating territories with crosses was also found in certain reductions whenever the possession of *ervais* was claimed, before some sort of litigation. A dispute over an *erval* (Paraguayan tea field) between San Miguel, San Juan and the Reduction of Conceição was resolved by Father Pedro de Cabrera, who ruled in favour of San Juan. To avoid any further doubt on the matter, he ordered the boundaries to be demarcated with several crosses and had a marker stone erected with the following inscription: ‘Year of 1742. These fields have been marked and these stone crosses laid, along with the lettering that may be seen on them, by order of Father Pedro de Cabrera, in the presence of the Commissioner Pedro Chaury, the Secretary Francisco Cuaracy and four other men of both peoples’ (Porto 1954, 338).

In that period, written language served to affirm the authority of a given power, in the

¹⁵ *Ervais* are places where a certain native plant, a Silvester tree from South America, is extracted or harvested. This plant is known by the name *yerba-mate*, scientifically known as *Ilex Paraquariensis*. *Yerba-mate* is a type of beverage, drunk by the Guaraní as an infusion, in recipients similar to gourds. With the Spanish colonization of the La Plata River this beverage became a popular consumption product throughout the entire region. In the South of Brazil this truly popular beverage is known as *chimarrão*.

¹⁶ High plateaus in the States of Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina.

¹⁷ A *Vaqueria de los Pinares* established in 1721, following an agreement among the Guaraní to ensure cattle supply. Due to the indiscriminate looting carried out by the inhabitants of Buenos Aires and Santa Fé, another *Vaqueria*, known as *Vaqueria do Mar* was set up as a preventive measure to guarantee meat provision for the indigenous populations (Mörner 1985, 123).

¹⁸ *Campaña del Brasil: antecedentes coloniales (1750-1762)* (1939), vol. 2, Buenos Ayres, Guillermo Kraft, 21.

¹⁹ Arquivo Público do Estado de São Paulo, C00257, March 25, Legajo 4, 25.4.18. I would like to thank my friend and colleague Fábio Kühn for having offered me the reference to this specific document. (On the high plateaus).

²⁰ *Ibid.* (written in the language of the land)

present case that of the *cabildo*, an institution recognized by the indigenous people of the reductions. The aim of this procedure was to put an end to disputes by defining, once and for all, whose dominium that territory was under.

The presence of indigenous authorities gave this meeting the solemnity of a ceremony, even deserving of public written witnessing, and therefore demonstrating the relation between written language and power in the reductions. In other words, it was by means of written language that decisions were displayed, demonstrating what Petrucci calls 'instrumentum publicum'. Resorting to an inscription on a marker stone demonstrates both a concern with the longevity of this manner of conflict resolution as well as signalling the spreading of the usage of written language as an acknowledged way of elevating a decision to the status of a sacrament.

These brief examples are indications that, in the reductions, exposed writing performed the role of a public epigraph. In the case of the marker stone mentioned by Father Cabrera, it was also an autonomous manifestation on the part of the Guaraní, as in the instance of the crosses placed in *Cima da Serra*. Despite being a disseminated and acknowledged practice among several stakeholders, the inscriptions on these crosses were apparently carved without the Jesuits being present. In other words, it was a free initiative by the Guaraní, stating their predominance over a given territory. The written language on wood also declares and signals the willingness of the indigenous population to engage in conflict if necessary. It was a way of issuing a warning, a message of dissatisfaction stemming from the presence of trespassers.

Likewise, other variations of exposed writing were also present in mission routines, such as inscriptions on wood planks. Literate inscriptions were commonplace in various spaces and aspects of life in the reductions, acting as a powerful catechetical tool and also serving as an indicator of the place assigned to each individual within the churches, according to a shared hierarchy in mission society. We are aware of the existence of such devices due to the instructions of Father Andrés de Rada, whose recommendations were as follows:

Las tablas que se ponen en la Iglesia en que se escriben los nombres de los varones estaran en el poste inmediato a la puerta del medio y las de las mujeres junto a la puerta principal con sus señales para que sin ayuda de lectos sepa cada una donde estan su nombre, y tengase cuidado que por dicha puerta principal ni al entrar ni al salir de la Missa, Rosario etc. haya indios mirones, y para cautelar lo se valdran los P.P Curas de los Indios más temerosos de Dios, y de quienes tenga satisfacción de que seran fieles en dar cuenta de los que se desmandaren.²¹

These inscriptions inside the churches, beyond determining the physical distribution of the faithful in the congregation and establishing a designated order in accordance with Catholic precepts, also aimed to stimulate the population to identify their own names.

The expediency of displaying written words in strategic places was a widely explored practice during the first years of evangelization, which remained active in other circumstances as well, mainly due to the collective profile of many of these procedures. For instance, in order to promote general knowledge and disseminate certain prayers, such as the one intoned during

²¹ BNE (Biblioteca Nacional de España). Cervantes Room. Manuscripts. *Cartas de los P.P. Carta Comun de Andrés de Rada*, 19th of December, 1667. Sig. 6976. (The boards which we place in Church where we write the names of the men must be located right beside the middle door while the women's ones must be placed by the main door so that, without the assistance of someone who can read, every individual can know where his/her name is written, and also, to be sure that there are no surprised Indians at the doors, both while coming in or out of masses or rosary prayers, etc. And to make sure that this happens may the priests count on the most pious Indians, whom we may be certain will be capable of performing such a task).

the novena of *San Francisco Xavier*, it was recommended that the following should be put in place: ‘en una tabla de Buena letra la Oración que está trasladada de modo que según las líneas, Son las pausas que ha de hazer el Indio que la dixesse para que respondan’.²²

There is another constant feature of epigraphy in the analysed documentation, that is, of the funerary inscriptions in mission cemeteries. Nevertheless, this was not a widespread practice among all the Guaraní – it was, most likely, some sort of mode of distinctiveness in memory of the fallen, conveying acknowledged Christian criteria for such occasions. In 1760, Juan de Escandón drew up a set of notes describing spiritual and temporal aspects relating to the Guaraní way of life in the reductions, also devoting a paragraph to what he referred to as mercifulness in the preparation for death and other things. In these notes, he recorded:

sobre las sepulturas de los suyos, aunque no siempre, suelen poner su genero epitafios. Y se reduce a gravar en una pequeña tabla ò tarjeta el nombre del difunto y el año en que murió, y esta tabla la clavan en el suelo con algunos tarugos, ò de otra manera la aseguran con la misma tierra sobre la sepultura: y assi en todos los cementerios ay muchas de estas tablitas al sol y al agua hasta que ellas se pudren al cabo de pocos años.²³

The available information regarding such mortuary inscriptions points to a Christianizing of funeral practices among the indigenous inhabitants, such as identifying tombs with the names of the deceased – indigenous writing practices filled the cemeteries of the reductions with lettering. Unfortunately, due to the action of time, we do not have access to details concerning the contents of such funerary inscriptions. Only the ones carved in stone have survived, such as those engraved on the tombstones of the clergy themselves when they were buried in church crypts (Furlong 1962, 260-261). In different literate societies, various types of materials served as supports for graphic recording, such as stone, leather or wood. In the reductions, clay also performed this function; we know of its use through the traces of inscriptions or drawings found on tiles inside the Trinidad Reduction church.²⁴

3. *Prior to War, Battling Through Paper*

As mentioned, the frequent use of writing by indigenous people is a consequence of the exchange agreement reached by the Iberian monarchies. According to the terms of the Treaty of Madrid, signed in 1750, seven reductions located on the East bank of the Uruguay River – out of a total of 30 – belonging to Spain were to be handed over to Portugal in exchange for the Colônia do Sacramento. There is not a shadow of doubt that this decision reverberated powerfully in South America, stimulating communication by epistolary means. It is already known that, in that period, writing practices employed as a communication tool for political negotiation were not restricted solely to the Iberian plenipotentiaries; it was a practice used equally and widely by the indigenous inhabitants of the missions. During this period, the Guaraní wrote several texts arguing against the carrying out of demarcation work to establish new borders.

²² BNE, Cervantes Room. Manuscripts. *Cartas de los P.P. Nusdorffer*, 1735. (Oración San Francisco Xavier). Sig: 6976. (on a board, in Good hand writing, have the words of the Prayer written in such a way that by following those lines the Indians come to realize the pauses they are supposed to make, which are the cues for their replies).

²³ AHN (National Historic Archive), *Clero-Jesuitas* Section, Legajo 120, Box 3, Doc. 84, Exp 1. (On the tombstones of their beloved ones, although not always, they tend to place their sort of epitaphs. That means, engraving on a small plank or board the name of the deceased and the year of death – this board is then nailed to the ground with some dowels, or otherwise they seek to hold it with dirt itself on top of the tomb: therefore, in all cemeteries several of those boards can be found under the sun and rain until they rot away in a few years).

²⁴ Historical archaeology work in the ruins of Reduções (archaeological sites) have revealed the graphical creativity of the Guaraní in charge of the construction of the buildings (Perasso 1986).

Given that, on the one hand, indigenous leaderships attributed political value to writing as an expression of their model of self-organized governance, it must also be said that, on the other hand, the crisis, which had been triggered by the beginning of boundary demarcation works, also enabled a diversification of indigenous textual production. The 'written reaction' statements are both documents found by the demarcation commission and other texts held in South American or European archives (that is, dispersed documents with no prior indexing), as well as news and reports present in the correspondence of Jesuits dwelling in the region.²⁵

Of all the indigenous correspondence, the responses sent to the governor of Buenos Aires, José de Andonaegui, deserves special mention. When they learned of the governor's threats of war, the *cabildantes* (indigenous chiefs) wrote to him. The Guaraní called their assemblies and decided that the *cabildantes* of each reduction would reply to Andonaegui separately.²⁶ In July 1753, seven letters were written and sent to the governor, in which the chiefs expressed their own political thoughts.²⁷ The seven letters, written in the Guaraní language, are the greatest, but not the only, articulation of indigenous political views and the historical notion of the moment they were living through. These letters present similar argumentation in terms of their content and, due to their meticulous writing, they were considered by Meliá to be paradigmatic texts of the Indians' political writings (Meliá 1970).

The novelty related to an indigenous *scriptophilia* – a manifested attachment to writing on the part of the Guaraní – which was the result of an autonomous graphic expression, beyond the control which had formerly been exerted by the priests. The breach of the alliance with the Jesuits marked the emancipation of indigenous writing once it began to serve the interests of the rebellious self-governed Guaraní (Neumann 2004).

One can affirm that the indigenous mission population did frequently write, setting off a real 'battle of paper' during the period of conflicts in the region. Such documentation records several instances of indigenous rebelliousness, in a period which came to be known in historiography as the Guaraní War (1754-1756) (Golim 1998; Santos 2000; Ganson 2003; Quarleri 2005 and 2009). This finding has been invigorating inquiries into the nature of the historic relations established by the Guaraní regarding both the past and the territory affected by the land exchange. Within this context writing acquired new uses in the light of the emancipation from Jesuitical guardianship, marking the moment when it ceased to be associated with periods of exceptionality in the history of the reductions. Furthermore, the documentation which has been consulted also points to a discussion little referred to by historiography; that is, the existence of an attempt to pose a defence, through the indigenous point of view, by means of writing. In short, texts written by indigenous mission individuals – and even their related translations – are currently arousing interest in terms of their contribution to the social history of written culture.

²⁵ For a sample of this correspondence, I recommend consulting the set of documents gathered together at the AHN, *Clero-Jesuitas* Section, Legajo 120j, Dossier 7. 'Relación de lo que la Compañía de Jesus há hecho y padecido en el Paraguay en cumplimiento de las ordenes de Su magestad'; likewise, in the Simancas General Archive (Valladolid), valuable samples of Guaraní literate expertise can be found amid the letters sent from the Jesuits to the Hispanic authorities; AGS State Secretariat, Legajo 7426, Page 60. [Letter from the General Officer (*Corregedor*) of the Reduction of San Juan to the commissioner Lope Luis Altamirano (original in Guaraní and version in Spanish)].

²⁶ The letters can be consulted in the AHN, both the originals in Guaraní and the Spanish translations made at the time. AHN (Madrid), *Clero-Jesuitas*, Legajo 120, documentos: 31, 32, 33, 34, 36, 37, 38. For a printed version, see Mateos 1949, 547-583.

²⁷ As seven letters were sent, they are easily associated with the so-called Seven Peoples of the Missions, however, among the eastern reductions affected by the Treaty of Madrid, the *cabildantes* of São Borja did not write any letter to the governor; one was written in the reduction of Concepción and signed only by the inspector Nicolas Ñenguiru. For an analysis of the content and idiomatic expressions contained in these letters, see Boidin and Neumann 2017.

The aforementioned letters sought to make contact with the colonial administration. They functioned as a diplomatic tool, both for making claims and for protesting, and mainly had external addressees. In this regard, indigenous correspondence moved in three main directions: some was addressed to the Hispanic authorities, in this case the demarcation commissioners as well as the governor of Buenos Aires; it was used as a means of communication between the Guaraní and the Jesuits; and it was a means of personal contact among indigenous individuals themselves.

Apparently, it was during circumstances of exceptionality – such as moments of contact with the Portuguese and in the light of the friction generated by the Treaty over boundaries – when the Guaraní felt the need to write their distress down and, whenever possible, record testimony of ephemerides. As an example, one may cite a particularly dramatic historical period when Guaraní writing activity peaked: the Iberian armies first campaign towards the mission territory in 1754.

In texts written by indigenous mission representatives, one may perceive an evident preponderance of an epistolary writing genre, both in official letters as well as in those with political-administrative content. These letters stand out as the most widely employed textual modality literate Guaraní people turned to in order to make their claims heard. Notes are a variation of such a modality of writing – recurrent in certain cases – despite not being covered by the same rules of cultivated epistolography. These messages were the means of communication between the indigenous people themselves and had a more restricted circulation.

In December 1755, a joint Iberian force advanced towards the eastern reductions, resulting in a few skirmishes with the Guaraní militia. In the following year, in the summer of 1756, one of those clashes took place. On the 7 of February, the main Guaraní leader, José Tiaraju, also known as Sepé, was riddled with bullets by a troop of soldiers under the orders of the governor of Montevideo of the time, José Joaquim Viana. After some assemblies, the Guaraní troops decided to engage the coalition army. Three days after the death of Sepé, a major clash occurred: the Battle of Caiboaté took place on Tuesday the 10 of February near Caiboaté Hill. According to the diary of Francisco Graell, a Spanish officer, the fight lasted for ‘an hour and a quarter’ (1892, 48). Approximately 1,500 Guaraní lost their lives in the battle.

4. *The Epitaph Cross Written in Guaraní*

Due to the high number of casualties at Caiboaté, one of the indigenous leaders designated the function of memory to writing. In the notes of the scribe in the service of the Lusitanian army are descriptions regarding the on-going work of the first demarcation commission. These include a statement that, in 1759, during a return expedition to the vicinity of the Battle of Caiboaté to complete the definition of the new boundaries, a wooden cross was found which carried an inscription written in Guaraní:

Año 1756. A 7 de febrero pipe omanô corregidor Jose Ventura Tiarayú Guarini pipe, sábado ramo. A 10 de Febrero pipe oya guarini guasu martes pipe, 9taba Uruguay rebeguá 1500 soldados rebehae beiaere. Murubichá retá omanó ônga ape. A 4 de marzo pipe oyapouca ânga co Cruz marangatú. Don Miguel Mayra soldados reta upe'.²⁸

²⁸ BN/RJ, Biblioteca Nacional do Brasil, Rio de Janeiro, *Continuação do Diário da Primeyra Partida de Demarcação*. Cod: 22, 1, 199 (Bound Manuscript/unpaginated). Contemporary copy. 15 Pages. (Year of 1756. On the 7 of February the General Officer [*Corregedor*] José Tiaraju died in a battle which took place on a Saturday. On the 10 of February, a Tuesday, a great battle took place where, on this very place, 1,500 soldiers and their officers died, all belonging to the 9 Peoples of Uruguay. On the 4 of March Miguel Mayra ordered the making of a cross for these soldiers).

For the Guaraní, this conflict was a major episode of warfare (*Guarini Guaçu*), given the high number of casualties among the community members, both warriors and mission leaders.

The text, a funeral narrative, had the characteristics of exposed writing (Petrucci 1999, 60). The message, written on the wood itself, was elaborated *in memoriam*, to pay homage to José Ventuta Tiarayu, known as Sepé, along with all the other soldiers and leaders (*muribichá retâ*) (Commission of Demarcation) who perished in battle. The inscription indicated, with precision, the date of Sepé's death and was 'signed' by Miguel Mayra, one of the main figures voicing the opposition of the missions. Incidentally, it must be mentioned that the identification of Sepé Tiarayu, who died in an episode prior to the Battle of Caiboaté, on the 7 of February, was only possible due to a letter, addressed to him, that was carried inside Mayra's pouch. There is not the slightest doubt that written culture was present among the Guaraní leadership, enabling both the exchange of information and the enlargement of the reach such correspondence could achieve once passed down to other indigenous community members through reading.

In the information written on the cross it is mentioned that nine reductions participated in the battle – besides the six directly involved in the exchange of territories, three additional settlements, located by the western banks of the Uruguay River, also supported the rebellious indigenous communities on the eastern side. Some reductions, although their urban nuclei were not directly affected by the Treaty, would end up losing their *ervais* and breeding land, which was located in the area affected by the exchange terms.

In this text, the mission Indians used the patterns of Western dating to record the dates of relevant events. They used the Spanish words for weekdays, though they did have words to describe days of the week in their own language, Guaraní, and they opted to inscribe the dates in the form of neologisms, as proposed by the Jesuits, to designate the seven days of the Christian calendar.

This text, spelled on a cross, is indigenous testimony of the last events on the battlefield. An epitaph written in their own language, remembering an event with a huge death toll among mission leaders. It is a record produced by a rebel indigenous Indian involved in the opposition to land demarcation, and it contains information elaborated from the viewpoint of the 'vanquished'.

Apparently, this cross fulfilled its memorial function. It was only located in April 1759, three years after its installation on the battlefield. That year, those responsible for the land exchange returned to the territory in question to complete the definition of the new borders between the Iberian monarchies in the region. It is through this information, available in the diary of the Commission of Demarcation, that we became aware of the existence of this great cross. The cross did not signal a mere epilogue to indigenous opposition, on the contrary, it was intended to pay tribute to those killed on the battlefield – a record of the many human losses through the lens of the indigenous mission inhabitants themselves.

In effect, by then, utilizing crosses with inscriptions had already been an habitual feature of life in the missions for a few decades. Undoubtedly, by resorting to this expedient in 1756, Miguel Mayra was adopting a customary strategy. Regardless of the obvious concern with how far that message could come across, this act did not serve as an epilogue to indigenous manifestations. Quite the opposite, most likely the gesture signalled the firm decision of the indigenous communities to keep on resisting.

The decision to clearly designate the territory where the battle took place, with an inscribed cross, was probably motivated by the desire to express that those human losses ought not to be forgotten. Having come to terms with the death of their main leaders, several indigenous members sustained the practice of inscribing messages on paper, leather or even wood. This strategy was adopted to clearly express the discontent of the indigenous people with the military presence of the Iberian armies in their territories.

5. *Alliances and Written Communication*

Epistolary communication remained active in the daily lives of the rebellious Guaraní even after having been defeated in Caiboaté – as evidenced by attempts to rearticulate mission activities. Sending messages back and forth was the means employed by leaders to recruit more soldiers and incentivize them to embark on new confrontations. The period between March 1756 and the occupation of the eastern reductions in May of the same year was characterized by an attempt to obstruct the march of the joint armies. As a strategy of war, the Guaraní disseminated warnings along the paths which had to be taken by the troops, messages which were regarded by the scribe in the service of the Iberian monarchies as holding ‘contenido bastante impolítico y sin ninguna sumisión’ (Graell 1892, 472).²⁹

In this sense, writing had become an instrument through which the mission elite sought to strengthen their claims and gather allies, seeking to be regarded as an autonomous protagonist in the colonial Hispanic-American world. Throughout different periods the indigenous leadership resorted to epistolary communication to inform their own comrades and even to forge relations with former rivals. In their writings they used to state that they could count on the support of the so called ‘unfaithful Indians’ – such support might have been a bluff given that they did not show up at Caiboaté, at least not to live up to the intensity announced; the assistance that was actually provided was quite discreet and non-reliable (Cabrera Perez 1989; Bracco 2004).

The theme of the support of the ‘unfaithful’ was recurrent among the Guaraní leadership and generated quite a lot of expectation regarding the arrival of soldiers who would join forces with the mission troops. On several occasions they expressed confidence in such collaboration because they believed that the mere presence of the demarcation commissions would lead to an automatic alignment of all the indigenous groups, who would then collectively revolt against the colonizers, regardless of their ethnicity or beliefs. The fact is that even after the unfortunate outcome of the Battle of Caiboaté the Guaraní leadership kept on expecting the collaboration of the ‘unfaithful’ in supporting and strengthening the mission forces. It is probable that some Guaraní leaders had kinship bonds with chiefs from indigenous communities not inclined to live in the missions. The statement of Miguel Mbaruari reveals that a mission chief named Gabriel Payaré sent word to his *Corregedor* mentioning that the ‘unfaithful’ had come to the region of San Javier. On that occasion they held a letter in their hands:

una carta escrita por los Indios de San Nicolas á los espresados Infieles para que el dicho Payare se la leyese y explicase contenia la tal carta una citación que hacian los Nicolaistas a dichos Infieles, para que viniesen abanzar este destacamento, á cuyo fin se juntaron todos.³⁰

This was about the statement of a Guaraní sending a notification regarding the despatch of a letter intended to raise support. On the one hand the deponent spoke of an attempt at co-opting, through the exchange of messages, thereby demonstrating the nexus between writing and power. On the other hand, the content of this message enables us to speculate about the scale of action of the Guaraní, taking into account the level of worth with which the written word was regarded within negotiations. After all they were familiar with receiving

²⁹ (hostile and unpolitical content).

³⁰ *Anais*, 419. (A letter, written by the Indians of São Nicolau to the aforementioned unfaithful, to be read and explained by the aforementioned Payaré, regarding the content of a letter where there was a quote, stated by the dwellers of São Nicolau to the unfaithful, calling on them to join this battalion, a request with which they all complied).

official documents – which was the method used by governors to draft mission soldiers. The fact is that the Guaraní adopted the very same procedure as the Hispanic authorities in order to seek support from allies.

The increasing proximity of the Iberian troops to the urban mission settlements determined the adoption of measures aimed at broadening the belligerent capability of the Guaraní, as a means to stand against the joint armies. It was through writing that they sought to retain an active military resistance capability against the occupation of their land and the reductions. On the 24th of March 1756 the reduction lieutenant Miguel Arayecha wrote a long letter to the *alcaide* (mayor), Simon Tiarayu, in the hope of incentivizing him to keep on resisting. In the letter he also informed Tiarayu of the latest preparations for a new attack against the combined armies and showed great confidence:

ahora despues de la averia no se les han mostrado nuestros soldados por eso estan mui confiados en si os mostrareis se han de estremecer, y temblar, y también Dios N.S los há de acovardar, por eso vosotros han de andar por San Juan y los de San Luis, San Juan y San Lorenzo, por San Lucas: tambien ya va Neenguiru a ayudarnos lleva 450 soldados el tambien os há de ayudar, no quieran desbariar en coger vacas, para comer en el Pueblo que ya las hay.³¹

Reading Arayecha's letter enables us to discern some of the military strategies used by the indigenous leaders. The first one was to halt the dispersion of soldiers. In order to achieve this goal, they worked to guarantee sufficient food provisions for the troops. The second related to keeping the existence of a Guaraní army secret, as it was believed that they would gain some advantage from this, for instance by being able to play the card of surprise when needed. Those with higher levels of confidence in the capacity of the Guaraní to mount an effective opposition remained seriously committed in standing against any movement from the joint army and, occasionally, they sent letters or placed threatening signs along the paths. At that given moment, writing offered a common identity in terms of how indigenous rebels engaged in politics by expressing their discontent with unfolding events.

The use of writing permitted a new logic in terms of how to manage conflicts and establish alliances. Writing became a form of action in the face of new challenges. The literate capability of the Guaraní put them in a position to organize their own experiences from recorded events and therefore to act in response to new challenges, functioning as a political stakeholder in the Hispanic-American world. The colonial authorities considered these indigenous reactions as a sign of hubris and insubordination. However, they were actually an expression of the autonomy of Guaraní self-governance, sustained, in turn, by the very existence of written communication among the indigenous rebels. By setting this political strategy in place they displayed confidence in the success of their claims precisely because they were taking initiatives that were in line with the colonizers' own rationale, that is, due to the fact that they were valuing *in scriptis* negotiations as much as the monarchies from the Old Regime.

³¹ AGS Secretaria de Estado, Legajo 7410 *Ynventario de los papeles que el comandante general Don Joseph Andonaegui entrego por medio de su secretario*, Document 2. (And now, after all that damage, our soldiers have not yet displayed their full might and therefore they are highly confident that when they do, their enemies will shiver and tremble, and also that our Lord will frighten them – and that is why you will walk through San Juan and San Luis, San Juan and San Lorenzo, and San Lucas: Neenguiru will assist us by bringing 450 soldiers who will also be of service to you, there is no need to go out of your way to catch cattle when there are already some available in the settlement).

6. *Indigenous Warnings and Threats: A Reencounter in May*

The body of historical information available to us indicates that, even with all these efforts, consensus was no longer feasible and some Guaraní, realizing how feeble their actual chances of standing up to the Iberian armies were, decided to abandon their positions. As a final gesture, a few of them resorted to any sort of available material to leave a warning, thereby revealing their concerns about stating their stances on the events affecting them. Desperately, they wrote brief messages on pieces of leather or wood, acknowledging the impossibility of posing resistance.

In his notes, Francisco Graell reports a warning, written on leather and located in San Fernando – an *entrepôt* of the Santo Angelo Reduction – on which the following was stated: ‘Ya nos vamos todos daos prisa a llegar a las tierras que han de ser vuestras’ (1892, 474).³² With this message those Guaraní who up until then had been firm in their decision to resist renounced their stance and acknowledged that their land would soon be occupied. There seems to be an implicit desire in this message to clearly affirm the reasoning behind their renouncement so that it did not get mistaken for defeat.

The sentiment of resentment stemming from surrendering was apparently appeased due to the fact that the occupying army was in the service of the king of Spain, the very same monarch of whom the Guaraní were vassals. Nevertheless, a quite different reaction was recorded by Jacinto Cunha, a scribe in the service of the Portuguese army. From his diary we learn of a warning on a wooden board, on which a few letters were written: ‘Vos vindes tomar nossa terras. No nos imos embora, e Deos sabe o que será’ (Cunha 1853, 277).³³

These warnings demonstrate how writing functioned both as a way of manifesting opposition and of expressing resignation before the unfolding of events, having already experienced the effects of facing one army and then another. Both warnings can be found in messages written on 2 of May 1756, when the armies marched towards the eastern reductions. The content of those messages enables us to assume that, after a few months of opposition, one of the Guaraní militia of rebel troops laid down their weapons and abandoned their will to resist while another group kept their intent and resisted. When, in the first days of May, the Iberian forces came within proximity of the San Francisco Xavier farm, they encountered a large crowd of Indians. And on 3 of May, a new confrontation occurred – the ‘reencountering’ – between the joint armies and the rebel Guaraní, at a crossing over the Chuniebi River. A mission troop tried to halt the advance of the joint armies by installing some cannons at the point where the Iberian forces intended to cross the river towards the eastern reductions. According to the records of the respective scribes, Francisco Graell and Jacinto Cunha, a significant number of indigenous troops – approximately 1,500 or 2,000 – were present.³⁴

Despite the large number of Guaraní soldiers in this new confrontation the action was compromised, in part due to their battle tactic, that is, screaming and shouting while approaching the enemy, thereby losing the element of surprise. On the same day, right after the ‘reencounter’, Christobal Eranda wrote a letter addressed to the soldiers, informing them about the latest events. The letter aimed to encourage the Guaraní soldiers to maintain their mobilization. The

³² (We are leaving, hurry up and get to the land that is to be yours).

³³ (You have come to take our land. We are not leaving, and God knows what will come about)

³⁴ According to Francisco Graell, ‘se presentaron como 1500 a 2000 indios, casi todos montados’ (1892, 475) (approximately 1500 to 2000 indigenous showed up, nearly all of them were mounted). In the notes of Jacinto da Cunha, there is no estimate of the number of indigenous troops who came to fight. He simply mentions ‘uma grande quantidade de Índios todos a cavallo, fazendo-nos cerco pela vanguarda e lado dos nossos exércitos’ (Cunha 1853, 279) (a large amount of Indians, all of them mounted, besieging our armies from the front as well as the flanks).

narrative of the latest conflicts, recorded by Eranda, tried to keep the soldiers who had left the battlefield motivated, highlighting what had been achieved:

Ayer lunes hicimos parar a los que nos aborrecen a la vuelta del camino Ybabiya, igualmente les hicimos guerra por todas partes; los Españoles murieron bastantes, y duro hasta la tarde, y Dios quizo que hacia el camino de la estancia de San Luis, llegasen los de la Cruz, y los de Yapeyu, S. Thomé y bastante de los Infeles que se pelearon contra ellos.³⁵

This letter, whose military content sought to provide the Guaraní with an assessment of their feats in battle over the previous few days, demonstrates a concern to prevent the dispersion of soldiers due to the latest casualties. The precise indication of the day on which the passage of the armies was obstructed indicates the willingness of the leadership to accurately record the news which was being spread. On the following day a fresh attempt was made to block the passage of the joint armies, with 150 indigenous troops, comprising a battalion, presenting themselves for battle. At the end of this new attempt, and this time according to a note written by the scribe Francisco Graell, there were ‘tres muertos, y entre éstos un indio de los principales de San Miguel, según una carta que se le halló’ (1892, 475).³⁶ As can be seen, the Guaraní had, as a recurrent practice, the habit of keeping their received correspondence. In general, such documents contained instructions or reports regarding the whereabouts of the soldiers. Pinpointing the reasons for carrying a letter is a complex task; nevertheless, within this particular context of expectations, amongst the reasons for doing so was the possibility of re-reading them whenever needed and also spreading news among comrades, in this way fulfilling a role of incentivizing other Indians to keep on fighting.

In the month of May, before the imminent occupation of San Miguel, Lieutenant Juachin Guaracuye, from La Cruz Reduction, drew on his literacy expertise in an attempt to reverse the course of negotiations. In a gesture of distress, he wrote a letter in the name of a group credited as ‘todos de los treinta Pueblo’.³⁷ The content of the message was addressed exclusively to the Spanish and had a threatening tone:

Nosotros hemos venido los de Yapeyu, de la Cruz, S. Thome, los de San Borja, y todos los de los Pueblos, y también todos los del Paraná. Por eso, los españoles Castellanos, apartense de los Portugueses, cuando nosotros lleguemos; para esto os escribimos, sabremos lo que determinais, nosotros no os hemos hecho nada, no queremos matar a los castellanos, a los Portugueses si, queremos consumirlos: esto és lo que hemos de hacer, y hemos de andar por aqui aunque pasen muchos años. Por eso escribidnos, para que sepamos lo que determinais.³⁸

³⁵ AGS, Legajo 7410. (Yesterday, Monday, we stopped those who hate us at the turn of the Ybabiya road, likewise we made war on all sides; the Spaniards were killed in large numbers, and the battle lasted until the afternoon, and God willed that towards the road to the ranch of San Luis, the people of La Cruz, and those of Yapeyu, S. Thomé and many of the Infidels who fought against them, arrived).

³⁶ (three casualties, and among them, one of the main indigenous leaders of San Miguel, according to a letter that has been found).

³⁷ AGS, Legajo 7410. Doc 9. (All of the thirty Pueblos).

³⁸ AGS, Legajo 7410. Document 9. Letter to Andonaegue and Zabala. 15th of May 1756. The letter was written by Theniente Juachin Guaracuye from the Pueblo de la Cruz. (We have come from Yapeyu, de la Cruz, S. Thome, also from San Borja and from all the other settlements – and there are also those of us who came from Paraná. Therefore, you, the Castilian Spanish, must set yourselves apart from the Portuguese when we arrive; that is why we write to you, so that we will know where you stand, we have not done anything, we do not wish to kill Castilians; but we do want to kill the Portuguese, we want to consume them: this is what we are going to do and we shall be around this land even after many years have passed by. That is why we write to you, to know where you stand).

The lieutenant took the opportunity to emphasize his hatred of the *Luzitanos*, pointing out a difference between both armies and channelling all the Guaraní's opposition to the Portuguese, enemies of the King of Spain and hence, invaders to be dealt with. This observation indicates the willingness of the indigenous population to preserve their bonds with the Catholic monarchy – a condition that hundreds of indigenous people broke when they accepted the offer of the Portuguese general, Gomes Freire de Andrade, changing their vassalage and settling in territory controlled by the Portuguese. After the end of the war, around 700 Indian families from the reductions were taken to the Portuguese domains and began to live in villages being formed in the far south of America (Garcia 2009).

Furthermore, within the text itself they expressed the reasons why they were writing the message and asked the Spanish to send them a written response informing them of their decision. The fact that they sustained an epistolary communication, trying to establish a negotiation with only one of the armies, highlights the strategic value granted to written words as a means to set out political negotiations with a party that they regarded as fellow subjects of Spain. To a certain degree, an agreement reached through the means of paper conferred on the literate Indians a new rationale in terms of ways to handle conflicts and establish alliances.

In the face of the experiences of intercultural contact, which took place during the demarcation works, the mission elite sought to inscribe on paper the events they had witnessed. One can perceive, through the remaining traces, that there was a remarkable willingness to write, both in terms of the amount of written production as well as the quality of the texts. Through the diversity of the texts that can be found in the written production of that time, it is possible to explore several indigenous writing modalities that took shape in the reductions. The intensifying of the negotiations cast a fresh set of expectations onto each new confrontation. These exceptional moments were considered worthy of being written down once they held the potential of being recalled.

7. *Writing and Indigenous Memory in the Reductions*

One of the functions acquired by writing, ever since its early days, has been to work as an antidote to oblivion. Since the beginning of the modern age this technology has been acclaimed as an artifice capable of overcoming the perennial nature of time itself; a resource able to reliably record past events and, therefore, establish memory – an epoch in which writing took on the role of being a faithful depository of remarkable experiences and relevant facts both for individuals and for the community.

The authors who have devoted their efforts to researching mechanisms of memory perpetuation have shed light on the importance of social games in the acts of remembering and forgetting, essential factors for the constitution of a collective identity (Halbwachs 1990; Le Goff 1996; Pollak 1989; Candau 2033). To a considerable extent, these researchers are unanimous in their view that memory, envisioned from these parameters, needs physical support and social space for its perpetuation. In this context, the attainment of writing provided the indigenous peoples in the reductions with elements to update the existence of a community, capable of remembering itself – as well as its territoriality.

Through contact with a considerable number of religious texts, used during the liturgy, the indigenous population gradually became familiar with the task of memorization once they were exposed to different modalities of writing. In colonial Paraguay it is well known that the Jesuits resorted to several methods of memorization, focusing on catechesis and making use of previous experiences in other colonial areas, such as Mexico, the Andes and Portuguese America. With these resources they sought to transmit the precepts of the Catholic faith to the indigenous population. In this way, they became acquainted with the potential of writing, enabling a new way of relating to means of remembering, which from then on was not only circumscribed within oral transmission.

We currently know that in the societies under the Old Regime the human capacity to create or establish memory was related both to writing and to images, as well as verbalized words. Nonetheless, writing is an act charged with symbolic significance, comprising the establishment of a memory of things, ideas and people through knowledge transmission. In fact, this was one of the main objectives of those who wrote in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While on the one hand such a trait is evident in the documental traces available for the work of historical investigation, on the other hand it is sensible to reflect on 'memory', as well as the actual meaning attributed to the act of remembering, and particularly the type of writing and the sorts of materials used for these recording practices.

The examined documents present evidence that the Guaraní were concerned with establishing collective memory, and consequently, gathering elements capable of promoting a sense of unity of a group before others. Every attempt to consolidate any given collective memory is a way to establish a metamemory (Candau 2003, 22). According to Jacques Le Goff, collective memory is vital for identity, be it individual or collective; nevertheless, it works not only as a conquest but also as an object of power. Societies whose social memory is mainly oral-based, or ones that are undergoing the process of erecting a writing-based collective memory, are those that best enable us to understand the struggle for the domination of recollection and tradition – that is, the very manifestation of memory (1996, 476). This situation is clearly present in the documentation produced by the indigenous inhabitants of the reductions regarding the exchange of territories.

In fact, the indigenous 'way of remembering' in the reductions, once based on music, dancing and drinking – in short, on feasting – was tremendously impacted by the dawn of writing, particularly before the possibility of a new modality to register facts, wishes and opinions. The Guaraní were in contact with countless instruction documents, from Royal Charts (which were, once in a while, mentioned by the Indians) to instructions of various kinds and lists of names drafted by the Indians to offer their services. As highlighted by Krzysztof Pomian, the accumulation of written texts since 'the invention of writing thus opens up the possibility of dissociating the past from the afterward and, consequently, of dissociating the remembrance of the past from the supra-sensorial experience which, supposedly, grants us the possibility of ascending towards it' (Pomian 2007, 183). In this context the written literacy which was taught to the indigenous population provided them with a new possibility of relating to the past, once, from then on, they shared the same codes as the colonizers, codes supported by a sociability based on memories which had been established through the 'world of text'.

In the documentation consulted for the present essay, clear evidence of such a practice can be found. I will now attempt to provide some instances in which writing played such a role. Soon after the Iberian armies occupied the urban mission settlements, records of a new text modality, which had been produced by members of the *Cabildos*, were found. As far as the habitual customs of that population were concerned, this was a new fact that possibly assisted in forging closer ties between the colonial authorities and the indigenous elite. These documents have been named *Atas de Cabildo* (Council minutes) and they were texts containing a summary of the meetings held by these urban councils.

The documents drawn up by the *cabildantes* comprised information regarding the final deliberations of each session – clearly recording the themes that were discussed. Nevertheless, from 1758 on, these documents began to present another characteristic. At that time, the Indians began to write texts presenting information which resembles a text modality that could be described as a 'summary of the facts'. According to Marcos Morinigo (1946), it is considered that the production of minutes began quite late in the reductions; indeed, when some documents with such characteristics began to be written, they recorded past events, which would indicate that, on the dates these events occurred, the members of the *cabildos* were not yet producing minutes of the sessions.

The Jesuit chronicles indicate that the mission *cabildos* had already been active, since the beginning of the seventeenth century, in sporadic sessions; however, there are no references relating to written records of such sessions prior to the early eighteenth century. Therefore, the question must be directed towards seeking to clarify why, from that moment on, the Guaraní felt the need to record these 'minutes'.³⁹

Given that they present similar themes, one may assume that the minutes were produced in response to some sort of request from the governor, while the indigenous leaders who were in office at those *cabildos* took the opportunity to further elaborate a correlation of past conflicts with other indigenous settlements.

This modality of writing was meant to inform the governor about the severity of an issue so that potential assistance against tenacious enemies would be made available thereafter. These four documents, written in 1758, demonstrate how, in that moment in time, the councillors took on writing as the chosen support to register past events, considered, by them, as being crucial – an example would be, for instance, attacks or invasions that they had suffered from nomadic indigenous groups from the Chaco.

It is always worth mentioning that the famous Treaty of Madrid, the cause of all the commotion in the region, was annulled after the completion of the demarcation work. In 1761, to be more specific, on February 12, once the Treaty of El Pardo was signed, all previous provisions were revoked. This new treaty consisted of just three articles rendering null and void the Treaty of Madrid that had been signed in 1750. Everything went back to being exactly as it was before the arrival of the demarcation commissions on the La Plata river. Nonetheless, even after the annulment of the exchange Treaty, the trust once bestowed upon the Jesuits remained shattered.

In this new context, the governor of Buenos Aires took the initiative of consulting the members of the *cabildos* about the military personnel of each one of the reductions, inquiring about how many men – and weapons – would be available. The positions taken by the indigenous leaders signalled an understanding of the power changes introduced into the 'places of power' as a result of the events that unfolded after the Treaty of Madrid. It is noticeable that the writing of documents assumed another pattern, indicating a new format of written communication established with the colonial administration. The indigenous members of these *cabildos* began to respond, in writing, to orders or queries received from the governor of Buenos Aires.

Reports were then prepared in response to the consultation, detailing the particular information that had been requested, although some information was also added about the presence of relatives from the eastern reductions – the coexistence with whom was a vivid reminder to several indigenous members of previous conflicts that had taken place on the land involved in the exchange. The very mention of these *agregados* (relatives) indicates how deeply the incorporation of new inhabitants, particularly those relatives, had altered the routine of some of the reductions. Let us look at an example: in the response sent by the Reduction of Santa Maria Maior in 1761 to a consultation carried out by the governor of Buenos Aires, inquiring about the number of men and weapons available, at the end of the document there is an annotation, with specific information 'Del aggregate Pueblo de San Lorenzo'. In that text they affirm that 'Pero debemos confesar Señor Exlmo, que estando para armar à toda esta gente, nos van sacando

³⁹ In this set, there are four texts written in 1758 containing records of the events which had taken place in the past decades, in the form of an overview. These documents comprise the *corpus* of documents in Guaraní (some of them with their respective translation into Spanish), which is held at the Mitre Museum / Buenos Ayres (MM/BA): *Colección de documentos en idioma Guaraní correspondiente a los Cabildos indígenas de las misiones jesuíticas del Uruguay desde el año 1758 al 1785*. Reference 14/8/18.

gemidos los alborotos passados'.⁴⁰ While undertaking the task requested by the governor the act of writing contributed to evoking sore memories which were the outcome of years of open conflict. This fact may explain the willingness of the indigenous leaders to collaborate with the governor, even when they did not have many men or proper weapons to contribute.

It is worth noting that, on this occasion, the indigenous Indians adopted a diametrically opposed stance to the previous one and were now unrestrictedly collaborative. They were, most likely, interested in ensuring a positive relationship with the colonial authorities, seeking to prevent the outbreak of any sort of conflict. These drafts also provide us with an opportunity to assess the dexterity and the familiarity of literate Guaraní in writing texts addressed to the outside world, whether through the way they organized information, emphasizing aspects of bookkeeping – the number of soldiers, for instance – or through their textual replies, objectively and punctually complying with orders that had been received. These are texts that reveal how writing was put to several types of use by the mission population in the Jesuit Province of Paraguay.

8. *Final Remarks*

Looking into primary documentation certifies the extent to which written culture reveals a determinate system of values and behaviours in a given epoch, representing a gauge of how far the imagination had been colonized. The strategic uses to which writing was put sought to sustain some level of unity in the actions carried out by the Guaraní and to support their self-governance. Therefore, the indigenous perspective was recorded through the initiatives of the elite and their efforts in the realm of political negotiation, and by doing so, they bequeathed to posterity an indigenous version of that period of conflict. The different documents seized – comprising a tiny fraction of the entire set of indigenous documents – demonstrate organizational and negotiation attempts by the Guaraní and make it clear that their claims could indeed be championed, through written evidence, in records attesting to the services rendered to the King, as subjects and vassals of Spain.⁴¹

On any feasible occasion the indigenous population of the reductions referred to their bond with the Spanish monarchy, pointing out that their *ñande reko* (way of being) was necessarily permeated by their insertion in the values and behaviour of Hispanic-American society. A process of missional ethnogenesis was underway, conjuring up an identity for the Guaraní who had been 'reduced' to Christian life (Wilde 2009). Within this context the impact of literacy promoted a new sociability, establishing channels of interaction with colonial society.

In fact, the familiarity manifested by some Indians when exposed to different textual formats was a factor which influenced new uses for their graphic expertise, broadening the possibilities in favour of more personal and direct relations with the world of texts and rendering the presence of intermediaries unnecessary.⁴² One may affirm that the changes observed on how to conduct negotiations were a result of the lengthy coexistence of these indigenous Indians with literate practices, mainly from the eighteenth century onwards.

⁴⁰ MM/BA: Colección de documentos en idioma Guaraní correspondiente a los Cabildos indígenas de las misiones jesuíticas del Uruguay desde el año 1758 al 1785. Reference 14/8/18. (We must confess, your Excellency, that while we are about to arm all these people, past grievances make us groan).

⁴¹ There is a detailed study of this event in South American history, focusing on the mobilization of the indigenous population in the reductions based on the notion of an 'insurrectionary ideology' (Quarleri 2009).

⁴² According to Roger Chartier: 'The greater a person's familiarity with writing, the more emancipated he was from traditional ways of life, which bound the individual tightly to his community and made him dependent on others to read and interpret the divine word and the commandments of his sovereign' (1991, 119).

The examined documentation indicates that writing became of greater importance during the crisis generated by the Treaty of Madrid, a moment in time when it was effectively used as a means of communication among indigenous rebels struggling to coordinate joint actions. We are therefore in the presence of a modality of political writing expressing genuine political reasoning – in Guaraní – before the then ongoing territorial transformation.

Over and above the clear political dimension of indigenous writing it must be mentioned that it also sought to meet another end, that is, safeguarding key information by recording facts which had been considered the most relevant – a circumstance for which writing acted as a memory archive, influencing both the survival of memories as well as defining what ended up being forgotten, but also presenting a new possibility to narrate those events. In this respect, the texts which had been elaborated by the Guaraní, regardless of their modality of support, have indeed produced a legacy, granting to posteriority information that enables us to establish a version of these episodes in the light of the indigenous standpoint.

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