


LIBRARY SCIENCE

TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY BRASILIANA



Digitization and the incorporation of objects will modernize collections comprising materials on Brazil's culture and history

Christina Queiroz

Over the last 15 years, Antonio Dimas of the University of São Paulo's Brazilian Studies Institute (IEB-USP) has studied a collection housed at the University of Texas in the United States. During his studies, he discovered the estate of American publisher Alfred Knopf (1892–1986), responsible for translating and publishing English versions of the earliest works of Bahian writer Jorge Amado (1912–2001) and Pernambucan writer Gilberto Freyre (1900–87). A perusal of the correspondence, published opinions, and contracts reveal, among other things, that these authors were well received by American readers, particularly given their alternative views of Brazil in relation to Afro-Brazilian culture in Salvador and Recife. “Present all over the world, collections such as Knopf’s should also be considered *Brasiliana*, despite not being strictly composed of books,” maintains the researcher. By proposing a broadening of the concept, originally restricted to collections comprising works related to Brazil and produced between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, Dimas’s thinking is indicative of a movement that has gained momentum in the last five years and was the topic of an event organized by the Guita and José Mindlin *Brasiliana* Library (BBM-USP) in February 2022.

The term *Brasiliana* is a neologism and is, according to historian Marisa Midori of the University of São Paulo's School of Communications and Arts (ECA-USP), rooted in bibliophilia, or, more specifically, collectors interested in Brazil. The phrase's use is similar to that of term *Orientalist* in reference to travelers and intellectuals who study the Orient. From the sixteenth century onward, particularly in Europe, we began to see the formation of collections of books and documents on the Portuguese and Spanish colonies in the so-called New World. “The first collections of this kind were called *Americanas*, while Brazilian works were considered a subsection,” Midori says. According to Midori, once Brazil began structuring itself as a nation state, following its independence in 1822, political leaders and their institutions attempted to identify and organize this bibliographic corpus. A milestone in this effort was the exhibition organized by physician and philologist Ramiz Galvão (1846–1938), then director of the Brazilian National Library, in 1881. “The exhibition catalogue, with a general inventory including more than a thousand sources, books, and documents about the country, marked the beginning of the *Brasiliana* tradition. However, despite the interest in amassing and outlining collections related to Brazil, the term *Brasiliana* was not used at the time,” he explains.

The Guita and José Mindlin *Brasiliana* Library at the University of São Paulo (USP) should incorporate indigenous work and marginal literature

Below, American editor Alfred Knopf and his wife, Blanche, who acted as informal sponsors for Brazilian authors in the English-speaking world



Above, the Constitution of the Empire of Brazil in 1881, one of the documents displayed in an exhibition organized by the National Library

Bibliologist Marina Garone Gravier of the National Library of Mexico (BNM) and the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) explains that, unlike in Brazil, “Mexican bibliography” encompasses all printed and published material about Mexico, including indigenous works, books, and documents from the twentieth century. She also highlights that the term *Mexicana*, which would be the equivalent of *Brasiliana*, does not exist. “Many of our printed materials from the colonial period were written in the indigenous language,” she states, mentioning that the oldest document stored by BNM dates back to 1554. She suggests that the concept of *Brasiliana* is tied to twenty-first-century book collecting in the United States, a country that allocates funds using this nomenclature. Behind the agreement to update the concept of *Brasiliana* is the idea that it must “reflect a country’s internal changes and correspond with the fields of study, which are dynamic.”

The National Library of Mexico is located at UNAM, where various networks of researchers study and disseminate its collection through the Bibliographic Research Institute, which has existed for over 50 years. “With books and documents from all over Latin America, published starting in the sixteenth century, BNM also houses documents subject to legal deposit in Mexico,” says Garone Gravier, who teaches courses at the National Library for graduate students in different departments at UNAM, including history, linguistics, literature, and the arts.

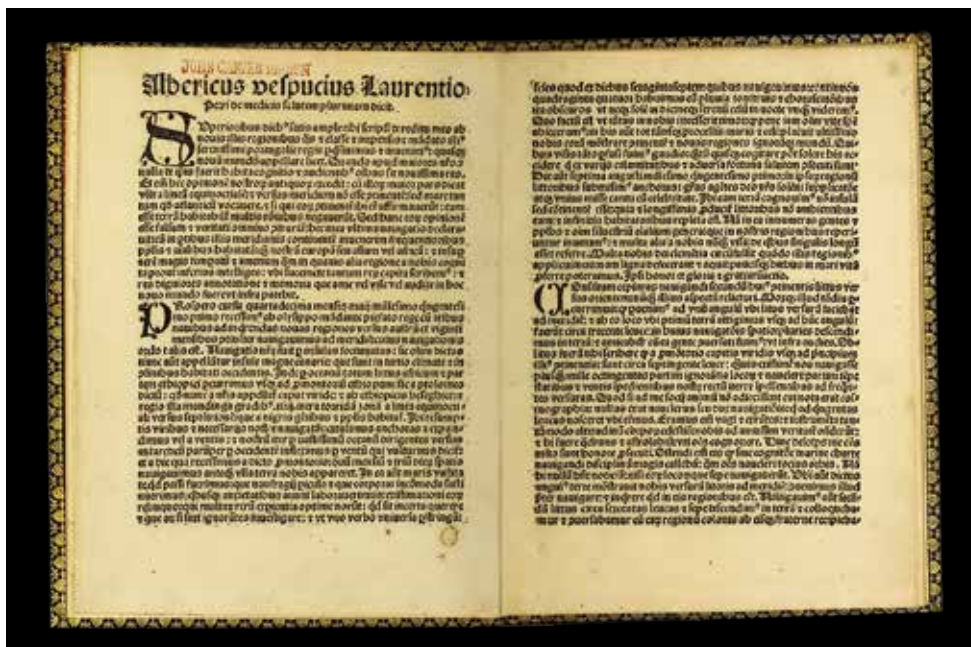
Although *Brasiliana* collections originated in the sixteenth century, the concept was not defined until the 1930s due to developments in the publishing market. Historian Eliana Regina de Freitas Dutra of the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG) analyzes the namesake collection published by Companhia Editora Nacional from 1931 onward. Sociologist Fernando Azevedo (1894–1974) was responsible for developing the editorial proposal. Over the course of *Brasiliana*’s existence, a total of 415 titles by Brazilian and foreign authors have been published. “The *Brasiliana* Collection published rare titles, such as those written by chroniclers and travelers from the colonial period, in addition to republishing out-of-print works and publishing new works on history, Brazilian social formation, education, geography, ethnology, and other fields of knowledge. It was even responsible for inaugurating the practice of editorial collecting in Brazil,” she says. The entire collection has been digitized through the *Brasiliana Eletrônica* project conducted by the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) under the coordination of historian and engineer Israel Beloch. In addition to Companhia Editora Nacional, other publishers, such as Difusão Européia do Livro (DIFEL), José Olympio, Civilização Brasileira, and Livraria Martins Editora, have released *Brasiliana* collections since the 1930s.

Another researcher of these editorial collections, historian Fábio Franzini of the Federal University of São Paulo (UNIFESP), states that José Olympio’s Brazilian Documents Collection has published works that have become classics in the country’s historiography and social thinking circles. Some works include *Roots of Brazil*, by historian Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (1902–1982), which inaugurated the collection in 1936, and *The Masters and the Slaves*, written by Gilberto Freyre

in 1933 and incorporated into the collection in 1943. In a study of the collection performed by BBM-USP between 2019 and 2020, the library analyzed the prefaces from several editions of *The Masters and the Slaves*, including three Argentine, two French editions, one North American, one Portuguese, one German, one Venezuelan, and one Polish. The objective was to understand why a book dedicated to the social formation process in Brazil was published in so many countries, including Argentina and the United States in the 1940s and France in the 1950s. “In the prefaces that Freyre wrote for the international editions, he tries to show that his interpretation of Brazil could be universally understood,” he states, justifying the foreign readers’ interest in the work.

In 1965, on the heels of publishers creating Brasiliana collections, historian and bibliophile Rubem Borba de Moraes (1899–1986), in his work *O bibliófilo aprendiz* (*The apprentice bibliophile*), first proposed a definition for the concept. According to his interpretation, Brasiliana comprises “books about Brazil printed from the sixteenth century to the late nineteenth century, and books by Brazilian authors printed abroad until 1808.” A letter from merchant and explorer Américo Vespúcio (1454–1512), written in 1504, is considered the starting point of Brasiliana. “In addition to Moraes, other intellectuals formulated definitions, including lawyer and historian José Honório Rodrigues [1913–87], who produced lists of books he considered essential to understanding Brazil,” details historian Carlos Zeron, who was the director of BBM-USP until the beginning of this year.

A letter by Amerigo Vespucci written in 1504, considered the starting point for Brasiliana collections



Regarding the first collections assembled by bibliophiles, historian Thiago Lima Nicodemo, professor at the University of Campinas (UNICAMP) and coordinator of the Public Archives of the State of São Paulo, recalls that the German naturalist Carl von Martius (1794–1868) was one of the first to amass this type of collection in the nineteenth century, alongside French historian and traveler Ferdinand Denis (1798–1890). The twentieth century saw an increase in the number of collectors interested in books about Brazil. Moraes and Yan de Almeida Prado (1898–1991) are part of this group of pioneers. Upon his death, Moraes left nearly 2,300 books to the lawyer, businessman, and bibliophile José Mindlin (1914–2010) and his wife Guita (1916–2006). For over 80 years, the couple has compiled a collection comprising 32,000 titles and 60,000 volumes of books and manuscripts about Brazil, all of which were donated to USP in 2005 upon the foundation of the BBM.

In his project titled “Memória digital: Arquivo e documento histórico no mundo contemporâneo” (Digital memory: Historical collections and documents in the modern world) initiated two years ago, Nicodemo works with the idea that Brasiliana collections are important to pooling knowledge to support the formation of public institutions. “Brasiliana collections also serve to promote projects aimed at modernizing the country, by providing a better understanding of its populations and borders,” he states. According to him, starting in the nineteenth century, various institutions began investing in these collections to establish connections between knowledge production and practical interventions. “The traditional concept of Brasiliana involves books

produced about Brazil by foreign travelers and works by iconic authors from our history. However, we now advocate for the inclusion of indigenous works and marginal literature, for example. We must seek new lenses through which to view Brazil,” affirms sociologist Alexandre Saes, current BBM director.

The idea of broadening the concept of Brasiliana, as proposed by Antonio Dimas of the IEB, involves including foreign collections about Brazilian culture that are do not strictly comprise books. One such collection is that of historian Simona Binková of Charles University in the Czech Republic, which includes iconographic



Businessman José Mindlin and his wife Guita in their home library

documents of Brazilian cartography produced in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, showing aspects of Czech naturalists' participation in a scientific expedition in Brazil in 1817. In the United States, collections exist that are maintained by geologist John Casper Branner (1850–1922), comprising manuscripts and maps from studies of Brazil from the late nineteenth century, and by historian Ludwig Lauerhass (1936–2020), comprising approximately 4,000 items related to Brazilian history, anthropology, and sociology from the last century. According to Dimas, like the Knopf collection, these and other collections are still obscure and could serve as a basis for new scientific discoveries. “For example, when working with the American publisher’s estate, I identified that Freyre and Amado had promoted our country’s culture in the United States, while Knopf was a type of informal sponsor for Brazilian authors in the English-speaking world,” he says.

Ana Virginia Pinheiro, of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro’s Library Science Program has reservations regarding incorporating items other than books into *Brasiliana* collections and extending the time frame originally proposed by Moraes. “Broadening without criteria could detract from these collections’ distinctive features,” argues Pinheiro, a librarian of rare books at the National Library Foundation (FBN) from 1982 to 2020. Broadening the concept, in her opinion, would include adding books that circulated within the colonies during Portuguese rule, such as works that were used by the Jesuits to instruct students or books about Portuguese coins and stamps. “There is important literature, for example, on education and economics, which, although not written by Brazilians or in reference to Brazil, was fundamental for its constitution as a nation,” she argues. Originally the Portuguese

Royal Library, the FBN houses collections of this kind that have not yet been researched. “In Brazil, interest in studying old books is recent, having started in the late 1970s,” says Pinheiro, advocating for establishing partnerships with universities to promote works in little-known collections. In fact, it was during his efforts to identify obscure documents and books that João Marcos Cardoso, a curator at BBM-USP, discovered a feminist treatise published in 1868 in 2015. “This document was written by an immigrant woman, in Imperial and slaveholding Brazil, claiming the right of women to participate in politics, the workforce, and education,” he recounts, explaining that this finding was the subject of his master’s thesis. Published by the same publisher as typographer Francisco de Paula Brito (1809–61), responsible for releasing the first Brazilian women’s magazine, the work was written by Anna Rosa Termacsics, a Hungarian woman who came to Brazil at the age of 7, where she remained until her death in 1886.

Digitization of a book from the BBM-USP collection: 15% of the collection is digitized



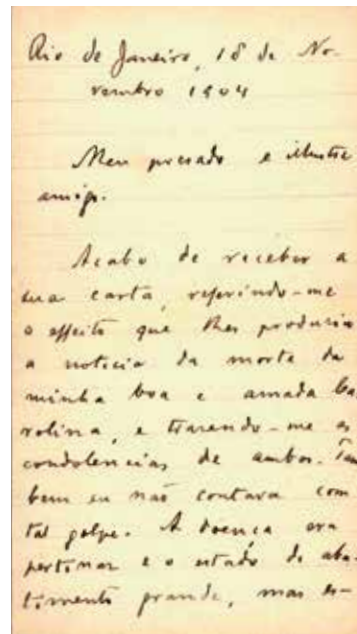
Today, 15% of the collection at BBM-USP is digitized. “BBM has a technical reserve to acquire over ninety thousand books and is in the process of defining new policies to guide the expansion of its collection, starting in 2023,” says Saes, director of the institution. The process of digitizing the collection began in 2007, with funding from FAPESP. As a result of this project, titled “Digital Brasiliana,” approximately four thousand items gathered by Mindlin have been made available online, including books, engravings, maps, manuscripts, and other documents. At FBN, the digitization process began in 2001 and involved rare works. Five years later, the Brasiliana Collection was incorporated into the project.

One of the largest collections of Brasiliana located outside of Brazil resides at the Oliveira Lima Library at the Catholic University of America in Washington, USA, which has successfully digitized part of its collection and recently made it available online free of charge. In an effort that began ten years ago, this group has now digitized 3,800 publications, letters, and pamphlets, totaling over one million pages. The oldest rare book dates back to 1507. “More than just a collection of Brasiliana, the Oliveira Lima Library can be characterized as an Ibero-American library, in that it comprises items related to the expansion of the Portuguese empire around the world and the history of the Americas, including the work done by the Jesuits and the history of slavery,” reports astronomer Duília de Mello, vice provost of the Catholic University of America. She emphasizes that because of this characteristic, the collection assembled by Manoel de Oliveira Lima (1867–1928), Brazilian diplomat and historian, differs from other Brasiliana collections. “Going forward, we plan to digitize the thousands of pages that are part of the extensive correspondence among Lima and Brazilian intellectuals, such as Machado de Assis [1839–1908],” relays Mello, mentioning a letter in which the disheartened Brazilian writer describes his wife’s death. According to her, only 10% of the correspondence has been digitized. Another goal, according to Mello, is to raise funds to translate the website, which is currently in English, into Portuguese (see *Pesquisa FAPESP issue no. 266*).

The Oliveira Lima Library collection mainly comprises books, documents, and objects acquired by the diplomat during his lifetime. There are other important Brasiliana collections in the United States, such as the collection at the Lemann Center for Brazilian Studies, at the University of Illinois, and the John Carter Brown



Left, a feminist treatise from 1869 discovered at BBM-USP. Below, two items from the Oliveira Lima Library at the Catholic University of America in the United States: a document from 1652 from the Order of the Discalced Carmelites (left) and a letter in which Machado de Assis writes about his wife's death



Library. “Foreign institutions with collections and libraries may have benefited from the initiatives developed by the Getúlio Vargas administration [1882–1954]. Gustavo Capanema [1900–1985], Education Minister from 1934 to 1945, established donation policies and sent books from Brasiliana collections, which were published by Brazilian publishers and the National Institute of Books (INL), to embassies, universities, and associations for artists and writers around the world,” recounts Dutra, of UFMG.

According to Midori of USP, European Brasiliana collections characteristically focus on works from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. “Institutions and collectors from the region were interested in these works not only for what they revealed about Brazil but also because they exposed the development of printing techniques from that period,” relates the historian, mentioning, for example, woodcuts made for travel reports. In a study of documents stored at Nostitz Palace in Prague, she identified navigation logs with folded paper, similar to modern-day pop-up books. “These documents are valuable because they display existing techniques for creating the world’s first picture books,” she concludes. ■

The project and the scientific articles consulted for this report are listed in the online version.