

MARACATU

The *maracatu-nação* is an African-Brazilian festival typically included in the Pernambucan carnival. Its characters and figures attest to its association with the crowning of African kings, a traditional custom in Afro-Brazilian popular culture.

In the past, the slaves, gathered in religious brotherhoods associated with a Catholic patron saint, used to crown their symbolic kings and queens and honor them on commemorative dates. The king and queen of the maracatu parade under a parasol, a traditional symbol of the African royalty, accompanied by princes, ladies, ambassadors, and other richly ornate nobles of their court. The ladies carry *calungas*, which are dolls symbolizing the African ancestors and/or the most important deities (*orixás*) within each group. Dressed in the traditional Bahian way, dancers join the parade, which can gather hundreds. Some groups of *maracatu* exhibit flags containing the visual marks and motives of each nation (*nação*). The drummers (*batuqueiros*) use the drums, rattles and other musical instruments (*agogô*, *caixa*) to play the *baque virado*, the typical rhythm of the *maracatu-nação*. On the other side, rural *maracatu* or *maracatu de orquestra* (“orchestral maracatu”) uses the *baque solto* rhythm, playing percussion and wind instruments. The *caboclo de lança* (spearman) is generally considered the greatest symbol of the *maracatu*. Once typically limited to the northeastern region, the *maracatu* has now conquered the entire country, with active groups in São Paulo, Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro, and Florianópolis.