

# DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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**CALMON [Moniz de Bittencourt], Pedro**

(Amargosa, Bahia, 1902–Rio de Janeiro, 1985)

Pedro Calmon, a Brazilian historian, was born on 23 December 1902 in Amargosa, Bahia, and passed away in Rio de Janeiro on 17 June 1985. Descended from aristocratic families from Bahia and Minas Gerais, he was the son of Pedro Calmon Freire de Bittencourt and Maria Romana Moniz de Aragão Calmon de Bittencourt. He entered the Law Faculty of Bahia in 1920. Two years later, he moved to Rio de Janeiro, then the capital of the Republic, where he continued his studies and graduated from the former *Faculdade Nacional de Direito* [National Law School]. At the same time, he began working as a private secretary to his uncle and baptismal godfather, Miguel Calmon, the Minister of Agriculture, during the administration of President Artur Bernardes (1922-1926). In 1925, he was appointed curator at the *Museu Histórico Nacional* [National Historical Museum], where he later created and was awarded the chair of History of Brazilian Civilisation on the museology course. He also taught this subject at the short-lived *Universidade do Distrito Federal* [University of the Federal District], founded by Anísio Teixeira. Pedro Calmon also pursued a political career, being elected to both the state and federal legislatures in Bahia and later serving as Minister of Education in the government of Eurico Gaspar Dutra (1950-1951).

As a teacher, he divided his time between teaching Brazilian history and public law. In 1934, he sat the exam to become a lecturer in public law at the *Faculdade Nacional de Direito*, and five years later, after passing a public examination, he was appointed professor in the same field. In 1955, again through a public competition, he was awarded the chair of Brazilian History at Colégio Pedro II, with his thesis *O segredo das minas de prata: novos aspectos da conquista* [The Secret of the Silver Mines: New Aspects of the Conquest]. He also taught at the *Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro* [Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro] and at the *Faculdade de Filosofia* [Faculty of Philosophy] at *Universidade Santa Úrsula* [Santa Úrsula University]. Simultaneously, he held significant administrative positions within academia: he was director of the *Faculdade Nacional de Direito* (1938-1948) and later appointed rector of the former *Universidade do Brasil* [University of Brazil], now the *Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro* [Federal University of Rio de Janeiro] (UFRJ), a role he held for eighteen years (1948-1966).

Pedro Calmon dedicated himself to historical research and was a member of several prestigious institutions, including the *Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro* [Brazilian Historic and Geographic Institute], of which he was president from 1968 to 1985; the *Instituto Geográfico e Histórico da Bahia* [Geographical and Historical Institute of Bahia]; and the *Academia Brasileira de Letras* [Brazilian Academy of Letters]. He was also involved with scientific organisations in Latin America and Europe, such as the *Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa* [Lisbon Geographical Society] and the *Academias das Ciências e da História de Lisboa* [Lisbon Academies of Science and History]. In



this regard, he played a pivotal role in strengthening Luso-Brazilian cultural ties. He made several study trips to Portugal, participated in congresses, and represented the University of Brazil at the celebrations marking the Fourth Centenary of the University of Coimbra (1937). He also contributed to collections published by Portuguese authors and co-authored the volume *Brasil* [Brazil] with Jaime Cortesão for the *Historia de América y de los pueblos americanos* [History of the Americas and its Peoples] collection, directed by Antonio Ballesteros y Beretta (1956). Calmon served as the Brazilian government's delegate at the inter-academic conference for the Orthographic Agreement (1945) and directed the *Instituto de Estudos Portugueses Afrânio Peixoto* [Afrânio Peixoto Institute of Portuguese Studies] at the *Liceu Literário Português* [Portuguese Literary High School] (1947). He often said, "Lisbon inside and out was Bahia (...) I had come to love Portugal, not for what it had to offer, but for what it had to offer Brazil" (*Memórias*, 1995, pp. 126-127). In 1987, two years after his death, Lisbon's *Comissão Municipal de Toponímia* [Municipal Toponymy Commission], at the suggestion of the *Academia das Ciências* [Academy of Sciences], renamed the old Rua Avelar Brotero in Alcântara after Pedro Calmon, in recognition of his contributions to Portuguese-Brazilian cultural relations.

The historian from Bahia left a vast body of work spanning literature, law, and history. His historical legacy is particularly diverse, encompassing biographies, educational compendiums, documentary studies, monographs, and comprehensive histories. Among his numerous biographies, the trilogy on King João VI (*O rei do Brasil* [The King of Brazil]), Pedro I (*O rei cavaleiro - Pedro IV, de Portugal* [The Knight King- Pedro IV of Portugal]), and D. Pedro II (*O rei filósofo* [The Philosopher King]) stands out. The latter would later be expanded and transformed into the classic *História de D. Pedro II* [History of King Pedro II].

Calmon's early works focused on figures and themes related to the colonisation of Bahia, his native state. Over time, however, his scope expanded to encompass the general history of Brazil, a shift likely influenced by the publication of *Peuples et Civilisations* in 1926, directed by Louis Halphen and Philippe Sagnac. His first foray into general history, *História da civilização brasileira* [History of Brazilian Civilisation] (1932), marked the beginning of his ambitious syntheses, culminating in the seven-volume *História do Brasil* [History of Brazil] (1959). Another hallmark of Calmon's methodology, inspired by the French collection, was his practice of issuing revised and expanded editions of his works.

Calmon adhered to a "romantic-erudite historian or historicist" conception of history (A. Wehling, "Apresentação" a Pedro Calmon, *História da civilização Brasileira*, 2002, pp. 17-18), rooted in the historiographical tradition established in Brazil by Francisco Adolfo de Varnhagen in the 19th century. He could perhaps be described as a late Romantic historian. However, in addition to this nation-state-centred approach, Calmon sought to integrate the perspectives of Capistrano de Abreu and other contemporary thinkers, including Lucien Febvre, whose work was then largely unknown in Brazil. By incorporating geographical, economic, and socio-anthropological aspects into his analyses, Calmon broadened the scope of his historiography, combining Romanticism with more modern approaches. In addition to examining the process of territorial formation and the evolution of the political-administrative organisation of the national state, Calmon's syntheses explore the economy, social life, literature, and the arts. In essence, they aim to capture what he called the "Brazilian spirit."

Calmon's works often reflect an empathetic—and occasionally sympathetic—view of Portuguese colonisation. For example, in a rhetorical flourish about the founding of Salvador, he praises the "Portuguese colonial genius," likely influenced by the analyses of Gilberto Freyre, an author he frequently cites. Nevertheless, he does not shy



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away from condemning the darker aspects of colonisation. He criticises the practices of the Inquisition, the absolutism of the kings, and the unrelenting despotism of metropolitan authorities, particularly in their exploitation of the colony's riches, such as the gold of the Gerais region, "from which Portugal drew petty resources for the astonishing expenses of King João V" (*História da civilização Brasileira*, 2002, pp. 157-158). Conversely, the Bahian historian presents a largely positive perspective on the actions of the Jesuits, aligning himself with the views of Nóbrega and Vieira regarding settlers and indigenous issues. He goes even further, asserting: "The Jesuits contributed intellectually to this 'Brazilianisation' of the settler by making themselves Indianists (...) Instead of Europeanising the savage, it was the white man who became Indianized (...)." In Calmon's view, the Jesuits had a unique capacity to foster unity, which, he argues, "explains part of the national evolution, at least this *mameluco*, mestizo Brazil, harmonious in its apparent ethnic confusion, ultimately balanced and—as we shall see—almost homogeneous" (*Idem*, pp. 49-50).

Upon their release, Pedro Calmon's major syntheses had a significant impact, perhaps due to their appeal to both secondary and university students. The *História da civilização brasileira* had three editions in Brazil during the 1930s alone and was also published in Spanish in Argentina in 1937. Nevertheless, Pedro Calmon's critical reception remains modest for such a prolific author whose works were translated into multiple languages and reprinted many times. In the later decades of the 20th century, his extensive historiographical output fell into relative obscurity, overshadowed by Marxist interpretations and the innovative approaches of the *Annales* school. Calmon was increasingly viewed as an outdated historian—labelled as "right-wing" and "nostalgic for the Empire" (REIS, 2008, p. 21, p. 85)—whose writings were often criticised for an overuse of rhetorical flourishes. However, revisiting his lesser-known works reveals some unexpected insights. These include explorations of thought-provoking themes that today might be classified within the domain of cultural history. One notable example is *História do Brasil na poesia do povo* [History of Brazil in the Poetry of the People], where he compiles street verses, songs, and popular critiques of political figures and pivotal events in Brazilian history. Similarly, in *Figuras de azulejo. Perfis e cenas da História do Brasil* [Tile Figures: Profiles and Scenes from the History of Brazil], Calmon presents texts akin to exercises in micro-history. Here, he illuminates facets of daily life in colonial Brazil, celebrates anonymous heroes and historical figures, and delves into religious customs and mundane traditions. He also comments on books and artworks while offering vivid descriptions of the Brazilian friends of the poet Bocage, among other intriguing subjects.

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