

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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SANTOS, Joaquim Felício dos (Serro, 1828 – Diamantina, 1895)

Joaquim Felício dos Santos, a historian, novelist, lawyer, politician, and industrialist, was born on 1 February 1828 in Serro (formerly Vila do Príncipe), Minas Gerais, Brazil. He was the son of Antônio José dos Santos, a former administrator of the *Casa de Fundição do Ouro* [Gold Foundry House], and Maria Jesuína da Luz. Santos was part of the local economic elite. His family traded in gold and precious stones and exerted great regional political influence in the 19th century. In 1838, his family moved from Serro to neighbouring Diamantina (formerly called Vila do Tejuco). Later, with the mining crisis starting in the 1870s, they invested in the textile industry. The historian completed his first studies in Diamantina. The elementary grades were completed in the municipality of Congonhas do Campo (now Congonhas). Then, in the city of São Paulo, in the neighbouring state, he studied law at the *Faculdade de Ciências Jurídicas do Largo de São Francisco* [Faculty of Legal Sciences of Largo de São Francisco]. On his return to Diamantina, Santos became a lawyer and taught Maths, Portuguese, French, History and Geography (at the *Seminário Episcopal* [Episcopal Seminary] and the *Ateneu de São Vicente* [Athenaeum of São Vicente]).

In 1860, he created the weekly paper *O Jequitinhonha* (named after an important river in the region). From 1860 to 1864, Joaquim Felício dos Santos mainly published comments critical of the Second Reign, veiled republican articles, historical narratives, and literary productions in the form of pamphlets. After four years out of print, the newspaper returned in 1868 with a more radical tone against slavery, against the monarchy, and more incisively in favour of the republic, until 1872, when it ceased to operate.

From two columns from the first phase of the newspaper, with few modifications, were published the texts: *Açayaca 1729* (1866), in which he mixed fictional romance and history based on an indigenous legend, and *Memórias do Districto Diamantino da Comarca do Serro Frio* [Memoirs of the Diamantino District of the Comarca do Serro Frio] (1868), Joaquim Felício dos Santos' most important contribution to historiography. In this work, the author examines the actions of the Portuguese Crown in controlling the extraction of resources in the diamond region from the 18th to the early 19th century.

In addition to using documents from public archives (regulations, communications, appointments, accounting records, criminal enquiries, prison records, and separation proceedings), Joaquim Felício dos Santos drew on pamphlets and oral sources to shape his writing. According to Joaquim Ribeiro's preface to



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the third edition, his style has been likened to that of the French historian Augustin Thierry *Memórias...* [Memoirs...] (1956). These traits ensured that the pages of the book also gave voice to actors from the lower social strata of Diamantinense society. The work explores local customs and conflicts, offering insights into the forms of resistance employed by the most impoverished sectors by portraying popular and marginal figures, such as small-scale miners, often black, who lived on the fringes of the law by extracting precious stones.

One of the figures depicted in the book is Francisca da Silva, a black former slave who rose to prominence in diamond society through her romantic relationship with João Fernandes de Oliveira, the wealthiest man in Brazil at the time and a prominent diamond contractor. Xica da Silva, whose descendants hired the lawyer Joaquim Felício dos Santos to settle property disputes, became one of the best-known figures in Brazilian literature, cinema, and television dramas from the 20th century onwards through various authors.

Another character from *Memórias...*, although much less well known than Xica da Silva, was Isidoro, the slave of a religious man who made his living from mining. Accused of smuggling, the owner had the slave seized and forced to work for the royal estate in mineral extraction. Isidoro, however, escaped from prison to lead a group of escaped slave miners who had the sympathy of the community. After years of illegal activity, Isidoro was arrested and killed in 1809 after suffering three days of torture for refusing to hand over accomplices. Thus was born the "martyr Isidoro" and the legend of a great treasure of diamonds yet to be discovered in Minas Gerais. Felício Santos' narrative was built on oral sources: "What we have just narrated was told to us by reliable, impartial, eyewitnesses" (J.F. Santos, *Memórias do Districto Diamantino*, 1868, p. 339).

In *Memórias...*, Joaquim Felício dos Santos' central thesis is that the Diamantino District was governed by very rigid legislation, something that would have been exacerbated by the 1771 regiment of Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo (Marquis of Pombal). The Crown, based on the intendencies, would govern the region in an absolute, despotic manner, which would paint the district as a kind of "colony within another colony", a term also repeated in the novel that mixes fiction and history, *Acayaca 1729*, inspired by an indigenous legend.

Raymundo Faoro (1925-2003) was one of the authors who used the thesis of this "venerable historian": "The Diamond Regiment (...) is perhaps the harshest, cruellest, and most tyrannical instrument of the three centuries of metropolitan rule. No one enjoys any rights; the movement of people is prohibited, and all are subject to arbitrary expulsion and imprisonment. Authority can do anything, without respect for anything or anyone (...)" (R. Faoro, *Os donos do poder* [The masters of power], 1975, p. 225).

Without disregarding Portuguese despotism, historian Junia Ferreira Furtado refuted the thesis of a "colony within another colony", and that the abuses and rigours of the administrators would affect everyone, indistinctly: "When it is said that the Regiment and the concentration of powers it made possible in the hands of the Intendant were the only causes of the arbitrariness and injustices committed within the District, the reality of the rest of the Colony is unknown. In the colonial administration, other officials had enormous



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authority and privileges, acting in a discretionary manner and committing countless arbitrary acts. Those who suffered most from this despotism were the poorest, since legislation was almost entirely geared towards repressing and controlling this mass of lowlifes and outcasts who prowled all the urban agglomerations of the Captaincy and generated instability" (J.F. Furtado, *O livro da capa verde...* [The green cover book...], 2012, p. 72).

The thesis put forward by Joaquim Felício dos Santos was grounded in the selection of authors whose works emphasised the abuses committed by Crown officials in enforcing the rules outlined in the Green Book: José Vieira Couto, an important resident of the village of Tejuco, author of *Memórias sobre a Capitania de Minas Gerais: seu território, clima e produções metálicas* [Memoirs about the Captaincy of Minas Gerais: its territory, climate and metal production], in 1799; the Englishman Robert Southey, *História do Brasil* [History of Brazil] vol. III, 1819; and the French naturalist Auguste de Saint-Hilaire, *Viagem pelo Distrito dos Diamantes e Litoral do Brasil* [Journey through the Diamond District and the Coast of Brazil], 1833. The framework of isolation and despotism of the district used in the narrative of Joaquim Felício dos Santos would be connected to the disputes of this author's political group in regional and national terms in the Second Reign, based on the political use of the past (E. L. Novaes, *Joaquim Felício dos Santos...*, 2014, p. 93). Still in *Memórias...*, the most important Brazilian historian at the time, Francisco Adolfo de Varnhagen, is described as biased when it comes to characterising rulers (Conde de Valladares) and the origin of iron smelting in Brazil.

Joaquim Felício dos Santos was a deputy in the Second Kingdom, a senator in the First Republic, and is the patron of chair no. 25 of the *Instituto Histórico e Geográfico de Minas Gerais* [Historical and Geographical Institute of Minas Gerais], created in 1907. Regarding *Memórias...*, historian Américo Jacobina Lacombe says that "the book has managed, above all, to achieve a tone of high seriousness, combined with extreme good taste. It is both a piece of history and a literary jewel. 'It combines the rigour of history with the charm of romance', said Capistrano de Abreu of it" (A. J. Lacombe, *Introdução ao estudo da história do Brasil* [Introduction to the study of Brazilian history] 1973, pp. 186-187).

With regard to writing that mixes elements of fiction and history, Joaquim Felício dos Santos published in *O Jequitinhonha*, from 1862 and 1868 respectively, the pamphlets *A história do Brasil escripta pelo Dr. Jeremias no anno de 2862* [The history of Brazil written by Dr. Jeremias in 2862] and *Páginas da história do Brasil escripta no anno de 2000* [Pages of Brazilian history written in the year 2000]. The latter is now regarded as one of the first works of science fiction in Latin America (R. H. Ferreira, *The emergence of Latin American science fiction* [The emergence of Latin American science fiction], 2011). In both works, in order to criticise the present (Second Reign)—the author imagined a future in which Pedro II was viewed with much negative criticism, which is reminiscent of Émile Souvestre's formula in *Le monde tel qu'il sera* [O Que Há-de Ser o Mundo no Ano Três Mil] (1846). A reader of E. T. A. Hoffmann, he also wrote short stories, among them *Os invisíveis* [The Invisibles] (1861), a kind of fantastic novella in which he recounts the turmoil of a citizen who suffers from what he believes are hauntings.

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This work is financed by national funds through FCT - Foundation for Science and Technology, I.P, in the scope of the projects UIDB/04311/2020 and UIDP/04311/2020.



SUPPORTED BY:



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