

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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LISBOA, João Francisco (Pirapemas, 1812- Lisbon, 1863)

João Francisco Lisboa was born in Pirapemas, Maranhão, in 1812, the son of João Francisco de Melo Lisboa and Gerardes Rita Gonçalves Nina. Coming from a traditional but impoverished family, João Francisco Lisboa began his studies in São Luís, the capital of Maranhão, where he lived until the age of eleven. After a brief return to Pirapemas, he was sent back to São Luís following the death of his father, when he was fourteen years old. During this time, although he was largely self-taught, he frequented some renowned scholars, including the Latin teacher, philologist, critic and journalist Francisco Sotero dos Reis (1800-1871), whom he would later become an intellectual and political dissident.

As a member of the liberal group, Lisboa worked in the press from the age of 20, editing newspapers such as *O Brasileiro*, *Farol Maranhense*, *Ecos do Norte* and *Cronica Maranhense*. Thanks to this work, he gained prominence in the Liberal Party and was elected to the Provincial Assembly between 1834 and 1837 and 1838 and 1841, during which time he also held the position of secretary of the government (1835-1838). In 1840, amid political upheaval caused by the resignation of Feijó and the Balaiada revolt (1837), with which he was accused of having ties, Lisboa faced political ostracism and disillusionment with political parties. This distancing from party politics was expressed in his scathing criticisms published from 1852 onwards in the *Jornal de Timon*, one of his best-known publications, which appeared in twelve volumes, the last two of which were published in Portugal.

In 1855, João Francisco Lisboa travelled to Rio de Janeiro, where he stayed briefly before leaving for Lisbon on a mission to collect documents relating to the history of Brazil from the Portuguese archives. In Portugal, while frequenting the Torre do Tombo and the archives of the Overseas Council, Lisboa came into contact with Portuguese scholars and historians, including Alexandre Herculano. It was during this period that he honed the skills that, at that time, were considered characteristic of modern disciplinary historiography and would later place him in the pantheon of Brazilian historiography. This late work is expressed both in the two final volumes of *Jornal de Timon* and in his unfinished biography of Father Antônio Vieira. After his death, his friend Antonio Henriques Leal took on the task of editing his *Obras Completas* (1864-1865) in three volumes, which would broaden the reception of Francisco Lisboa's work in Brazilian literary circles.

Between the 1830s and 1850s, the period in which Lisboa produced most of his writings, Brazil went from



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the phase of strong social and semantic instability of the regency period (1831-1840) to the process of political centralisation and stabilisation led by the conservative Saquarema project. It was during this period that Lisboa formed his literary persona, under the false pseudonym Timon - a reference both to Timon, the Misanthrope, from classical antiquity, and also, probably, to the French version embodied by the Viscount of Cermenin in his satires.

In the three decades during which his work was produced, it is also possible to identify the establishment of certain discursive boundaries that would define the protocols through which the Brazilian nation could be thought of historically, and which would find their great organising institution in the Brazilian Historical and Geographical Institute (IHGB), created in 1838. From his journalistic and partisan activities in the 1830s to his work in the Portuguese archives, through the criticism and political reflections of the first phase of the *Jornal de Timon*, João Francisco Lisboa's work was strongly marked by the political and intellectual vicissitudes that affected Brazil at that time. This makes it difficult to treat his writings as a homogeneous whole, seeking to extract from them some form of closed and coherent doctrine. His work must be understood, rather, in terms of the different genres in which he wrote and in relation to the different contexts in which he was inserted, revealing the deeply pragmatic dimension of his writing.

The main focus of reflection in his writings published in the *Jornal de Timon* revolves around the different political party experiences in Western history, from ancient to modern times, turning history into a kind of laboratory for politics. In these reflections, while attacking regional elites with his satirical tone, Lisboa developed a historiographical style that combined the study of the past with political reflection, analysing how different societies balanced the perennial vectors of "authority" and "freedom" – a theme that was central to national political thought at the time. In his later writings, when he replaced Gonçalves Dias in the mission to collect archives at the Overseas Council, João Francisco Lisboa adopted a distinct style, marked both by a greater scholarly investment in the use of historical documentation and by the sobriety and elegance of his narrative.

João Francisco Lisboa contributed to the debates that then guided Brazilian scholars in their quest to define how the history of Brazil should be written. His texts contain reflections on the best periodisation of national history, the meaning of Portuguese colonisation, the place of indigenous peoples and Africans, how to treat documents, and what objects a philosophical history should encompass. In his "Apontamentos, Notícias e Observações para servirem à história do Maranhão" (Notes, News and Observations for the History of Maranhão), published during the first phase of the *Jornal de Timon*, for example, it is possible to identify how Lisboa employs a series of principles for writing history based on his confrontation with colonial chroniclers. His criticism of Bernardo Pereira de Berredo's *Annaes* (1718-1722) is structured around an opposition between "chronicle" and "philosophical history," as these were understood in mid-19th century Brazil. According to Lisboa, Berredo sought to adopt a pompous and noble style, when his subject matter would have required a more dry and objective style, in accordance with the principles of verisimilitude of a new historical sensibility. The division of chapters in Berredo is also criticised for referring to the epic model,

far removed from what would be required of a historical narrative keen to understand the historical process of the formation of colonial society. Finally, for a correct understanding of history, instead of focusing on the great object that characterised the classical historiographical tradition, namely war, Lisboa affirms the need to thematise the objects proper to a philosophical history, namely agriculture, trade, population and customs.

Another topic that permeates his writings concerns the indigenous question, a politically sensitive and much-discussed topic at the IHGB. While Lisboa positioned himself in his early writings in favour of Portuguese colonisation and sceptical about the possibility of civilising the indigenous peoples, he later became one of the greatest accusers of historical violence against those populations, leading a famous dispute with the author of the General History of Brazil, Francisco Adolpho de Varnhagen (1816-1878). It was on the authority of the disciplinary protocols of historical criticism and his experience in Portuguese archives that Lisboa based his argument. The careful study of unpublished documents, therefore, allowed Lisboa to assert historical facts that proved the acts of violence that marked Portuguese colonisation. The dispute, however, was not limited to the definition of factual issues, but also to moral principles that should guide (or veto) the work of the historian. Just as important as defining the uniqueness of the facts was a certain recognition that the writing of history was also a moral act, whose implications could not be disregarded. In the case of the criticism of Varnhagen, this principle was expressed in the delegitimisation of a conception of state violence as a factor of civilisation, dear to the author of General History. For Lisboa, using a liberal argument, praising this type of political action would not only mistakenly associate “civilisation” and “violence”, but would also expose all citizens to the same logic: “If you want war and slavery to convert and civilise the savage, you will soon have to admit, willingly or unwillingly, the use of force, iron and fire to cultivate the spirit and regulate the conscience of civilised man” (*Crônica Política*, 1984, p. 241). For Lisboa, Brazil’s history was marked by harmful colonisation, with “confusing, incomplete, contradictory, oppressive laws”; in which officials and governors filled their time with “political and private intrigues and machinations” and whose citizens organised themselves around “rival and reluctant powers, useless for oversight and balance, admirable for conflicts, riots and revolts” (*Obras*, 1865, Vol. III, p. 172). Similarly, sharing the anti-Jesuit sentiment of his contemporaries, Lisboa viewed the actions of the Society of Jesus in a very negative light, marked by political and economic interests. Even Father Antonio Vieira, although recognised for his oratory and literary qualities, was strongly criticised for his secular ambitions for notoriety and power. Although Brazilian history had some positive experiences, such as the Beckman revolt, the harmful aspects of colonisation were much more decisive in shaping its political and social formation. Even the changes brought about after independence served more to ensure the continuity of that system than to promote the emergence of a new society. In this sense, the implementation of representative political forms, via the electoral system, could not find the conditions necessary for its full functioning.

By narrating how vices and virtues promoted the balance or imbalance of political institutions in different societies, and specifically in Brazil, João Francisco Lisboa sought to sharpen a form of reasoning and judgement about the national political reality. His writing of history, therefore, was part of as a form of moral

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reflection, establishing a series of bridges between the past and the present. The task of narrating history, according to Lisboa, required the historian to not only establish the facts through critical scholarship, but also to find the forces that gave them meaning. Only then could history become useful to the present. More than just offering moral examples, it was up to the historian to enable the reader to acquire a moral perception that would allow them to deal with different historical experiences in their differences and novelties.

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