DICIONÁRIO
DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES
DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO
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LISBOA, José da Silva (Salvador, 1754 – Rio de Janeiro, 1835)

José da Silva Lisboa was born in Salvador on 16 July 1756. His father, Henrique da Silva Lisboa, a native of Lisbon, was an "architect," and his mother, Helena Nunes de Jesus, a Bahian woman, was reportedly of mixed race (*parda*). The profession of architect at the time was considered mechanical and akin to other modest occupations, a "flaw" of his father's that would often be recalled during José's life, along with his mother's mixed heritage (Kirschner, 2009, p. 18).

In 1784, he married Ana Francisca Benedita, the daughter of Antônio Álvares de Figueiredo, a graduate from Pernambuco. According to a biography published by one of his sons, Bento da Silva Lisboa, in 1839, José da Silva Lisboa began studying Latin at the age of eight and later studied "Rational and Moral Philosophy" at the Carmelite friars' convent, where he also learned music and piano (Lisboa, Bento 1839, p. 186).

In 1773, he made his first trip to Portugal to study rhetoric and prepare for the entrance exams at Coimbra, with assistance from Pedro José da Fonseca's classes in Lisbon. He enrolled at the University of Coimbra in the legal and philosophical courses, dedicating himself to the study of Greek and Hebrew, and in 1778, he became a substitute professor for these subjects. Having been a student of Domingos Vandelli at Coimbra, Lisboa maintained correspondence and collaboration with the renowned naturalist on scientific matters (Kirschner, 2009, p. 45). In 1779, he earned degrees in Canon and Philosophical Law, and shortly thereafter, in 1780, he returned to Salvador, where he was appointed *ouvidor* (magistrate) of the district of Ilhéus, a position he held for a brief and tumultuous period. In 1782, he was appointed Royal Professor of Rational and Moral Philosophy and substitute professor of the Greek language, a role he held until 1787.

In 1793, he stepped away from teaching and returned to Lisbon with his family, ostensibly for health reasons. During this period, he became acquainted with Dom Rodrigo de Souza Coutinho, and in 1797, he obtained from the Prince Regent both his retirement as a professor and his appointment as deputy secretary of the Board of Agriculture and Commerce of Bahia. This period marked the beginning of the efforts that culminated in the publication of his first major work in 1801, *Princípios do Direito Mercantil* [Principles of Commercial Law], the first two volumes of which appeared in 1798. In 1804, he published *Princípios de Economia Política* [Principles of Political Economy], in which he advocated for free trade and introduced the

ideas of Adam Smith.

When the Portuguese royal family passed through Salvador in January 1808, José da Silva Lisboa is said to have influenced the decision to open Brazilian ports to friendly nations. While still in Bahia, he was appointed to a chair of "Political Economy" and invited to accompany the Court in its relocation to its new seat in Rio de Janeiro. From that point onwards, his influence on state affairs became enduring, marked by a prolific intellectual output across various fields. In particular, he excelled in "Political Economy," translating and popularising the ideas of Adam Smith and Edmund Burke, and producing original reflections that applied the principles of economic liberalism and Burkean conservatism to the Luso-Brazilian context.

Through Dom Rodrigo de Souza Coutinho, Lisboa was appointed in 1808 as a member of the Royal Board of Trade and a member of the governing and censorship body of the Royal Press. This institution became central to what can be described as the intellectual strategies underpinning the new Court. It is within this context that Lisboa's first two historical works were produced: *A Memória da Vida Pública do Lord Wellington* [Memoir of the Public Life of Lord Wellington] (1815) and *Memória sobre os Principais Benefícios del Rei D. João XVI* [Memoir on the Principal Benefits of King Dom João XVI] (1818). Throughout King João VI's reign in Brazil, Lisboa supported the strengthening of royal authority and the reformist project to establish a Portuguese—or Luso-Brazilian—empire, grounded in the notion of ending the colonial system and inaugurating a new governance model for the territory.

In 1821, during the revolutionary upheavals sparked by the Porto Revolution, Lisboa was appointed Inspector General of Literary Establishments, a position that involved overseeing the censorship of all published material in the Kingdom. During the debates surrounding independence, he was highly active in the press, publishing the journal *Conciliador do Reino Unido* [Conciliator of the United Kingdom] as well as numerous pamphlets advocating for the unity of the empire. Between 1821 and 1828, he published nine journals and 42 pamphlets (Kirschner, 2009, p. 207). He was among those who only belatedly embraced the project of Brazilian independence.

Lisboa served as member of the Constituent Assembly of 1823 and subsequently maintained a vigorous parliamentary career, becoming a senator in 1826. He gained the trust of Emperor Pedro I, who, as early as 1823, appointed him *Desembargador do Paço* [Magistrate of the Royal Household] and *Deputado da Mesa de Consciência e Ordens* [Deputy of the Board of Conscience and Orders]. During the crisis provoked by the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, Lisboa used the press to justify Pedro I's actions and to defend Brazil's efforts to gain recognition for its independence. In this contentious context, he was tasked by the government with writing an account of the principal events of the independence movement, leading to his most ambitious historiographical project: a general history of Brazil. Lisboa's services to the state and the Bragança dynasty were recognised with the titles of Baron (1823) and Viscount of Cairu (1826). The breadth of his intellectual activity is evident in his membership in various societies, including the Society for the Promotion of National Industry in Rio de Janeiro, the Bahia Agricultural Society, the Philosophical Society of Philadelphia, the Agricultural Society of Munich, the Society for the Promotion of Industrial Sciences, the

Historical Institute of France, and the Royal Institute for the Promotion of Sciences in Naples (Lisboa, Bento, 1839, p. 187).

Lisboa's reformist education at Coimbra and his exposure to the counter-revolutionary climate during his second stay in Portugal reinforced his admiration for British authors, notably Adam Smith in economics and Edmund Burke in politics. In 1812, he published a translation with excerpts from Burke's works, particularly the *Reflexões sobre a Revolução em França* [Reflections on the Revolution in France]. He cited and also demonstrated familiarity with the historical works of Gibbon, Hume, Robertson, and Southey. Among the classical authors, he admired Tacitus, whom he frequently cited in his historical writings.

The fields of intellectual history and the history of ideas in Brazil prioritised interpretations that framed José da Silva Lisboa as a precursor of economic liberalism, celebrating his contributions to political economy. This interpretive bias, however, overshadowed the historical reflections embedded in his works. Enlightenment narratives and a theory of history underpinned his understanding of economics as a branch of jurisprudence and morality. Even more critically, this focus on political economy contributed to diluting the significance of his explicitly historical writings—a domain that, while less prolific, was no less important.

For Lisboa, as with his other intellectual pursuits, history was a means to serve the nation, the monarchy, and the common good. His memoirs published during the reign of João VI in Brazil responded to the immediate political context. The biography of Lord Wellington celebrated the French defeat and the liberation of the kingdom, emphasising the aristocratic virtues of the great military leader as an example of moral edification and as proof of the superiority of these values over the revolutionary Napoleonic world. Across the two volumes, readers follow the meteoric career of the British military leader, detailed accounts of his campaigns, and anecdotes demonstrating his steadfast character, while encountering numerous denunciations of Napoleon and his ambition to become the tyrant of the world.

In this memoir, Lisboa cites authors such as Smith, Burke, and Montesquieu to legitimise the central role of the nobility. He claims not to seek to stifle merit but considers reverence for tradition a natural sentiment. At the same time, the British Empire is consistently portrayed as embodying a higher form of civilisation, whether through its respect for the defeated, its defence of free trade, or for having " [...] under its protection peoples who, as Montesquieu says, live in immemorial despotism" (p. 45). In his account, political upheavals are always caused by the rise of usurpers, illegitimate claimants, sometimes of obscure origin, in a direct allusion to Napoleon. The French emperor is described as "[...] an irreconcilable enemy of trading nations, clearly aspiring to universal monarchy" (p. 61). The flight of the royal family is justified by the loss of balance among European monarchies, which, before the revolution, formed a kind of republic. In this context, Brazil is depicted as the rock of resistance against the French, recalling the colonial episode of their expulsion from Rio de Janeiro in the 16th century.

In his analysis of Lisboa's memoirs, Bruno Diniz identifies what he calls a "language of restoration" of the kingdom and the values of an aristocratic monarchy as the organising force of these narratives (Diniz, 2010, p. 43ss). This restoration, Diniz argues, was underway through the liberalising policies and "liberation of

commerce" adopted by the monarch, who had brought an end to the dreaded "colonial system." This theme is a hallmark of what can be termed *joanino* historiography produced in Brazil, whose notable figures, alongside Silva Lisboa, include Luís Gonçalves dos Santos, Ayres de Casal, and Monsenhor Pizarro. The historical discourse of this period mobilised narratives of progress and civilisation to make sense of the royal court's relocation to the former colony and to project a future of unity between the European and American parts of the monarchy. The restoration of the kingdom depended on the end of the "colonial system" and the transition from a medieval, warlike world to one defined by commerce, civility, sociability, civilisation, and letters.

These illustrated narratives celebrating the monarch's liberality are abundantly explored by Lisboa in his second historical memoir, published in 1818 to commemorate the coronation of Dom João VI in 1815. In the context of local discontent, particularly the Pernambucan Revolution of 1817, the memoir served as an indirect political action. The book is structured into 12 thematic sections, each highlighting a major benefit attributed to the king: I. Favourable Legislation; II. Prohibition of Revolutionary France; III. Portugal's Defensive System; IV. The Court's Expedition to Brazil; V. Provisional Suspension of the Colonial System; VI. Establishment of the Court in Rio de Janeiro; VII. Encouragement of National Valour; VIII. Establishment of the Bank of Brazil; IX. Definitive Freedom of Trade and Industry; X. Declaration of the United Kingdom; XI. Promotion of the Sciences and Arts; XII. Diplomatic Freedom in Foreign Affairs.

The memoir opens with a particularly traditional eulogy of the prince's virtues, but its true purpose was to justify the policies undertaken by the monarch since his arrival in Brazil. Citing a lengthy excerpt from Robertson's *History of America*, in which the British author highlights Portugal's pioneering role and centrality in the Age of Discoveries despite being "one of the smallest and least powerful kingdoms of Europe" (p. 5), Lisboa implies that Dom João was completing the work of great figures from the Age of Discoveries, such as Prince Henry the Navigator and King Manuel I. In doing so, he reinforced a narrative of restoring the empire through a mission that was both providential and rational. The developments in Brazil were portrayed as the culmination of the history of the Great Navigations, a decisive step for European civilisation. According to Lisboa, the momentum of the Discoveries had been distorted by the "colonial system," a policy of secrecy and monopolies. Thus, the Portuguese presence in Brazil had been undermined by this "ancient colonial system," the very same system that Dom João VI began dismantling in 1808, effectively restoring the original principles of the Discoveries.

Lisboa would expand on this theme in his most important historiographical work, *História dos Principais Sucessos Políticos do Império do Brasil*, commissioned by Dom Pedro I in 1825 to narrate the immediate events leading to Brazilian independence. In this ambitious project, explicitly inspired by Robert Southey's *History of Brazil* but deviating from Pedro I's expectations, Lisboa sought to write a *General History of Brazil* divided into ten parts: Discovery, Division, Conquest, Restoration, Invasions, Mines, Viceroyalty, the Court, the States of Brazil, and finally, the Constitution (Diniz, 2009, p. 263). As the structure suggests, Lisboa intended to meet the monarch's objective of clarifying Brazilian and European public opinion regarding the closure of the Constituent Assembly in 1824 and the promulgation of the Constitution in 1825. However, he

sought to achieve this through an extensive, illustrated narrative demonstrating that independence was the natural development of Brazil's history—an heir to the same Portuguese spirit that drove the Great Discoveries and the opening of universal trade among nations.

The first chapter of the work is dedicated to the geographical contours of Brazil, immediately raising one of its many "wonders": the fact that such a vast territory remained united throughout a turbulent history, the most recent upheaval being the Revolution of 1820 in Portugal. The geographical description serves to highlight the supposedly grand destiny of the new empire and the providential action that preserved its integrity. Subtly, Lisboa begins to separate Portugal's history from Brazil's providential destiny. The chapter concludes in an untimely but deliberate manner with the transcription of the treaty recognising Brazil's independence, which Lisboa elevates to the status of a master key to its history.

Chapters II through VII address Iberian maritime expansion, recounting key events from Portugal's early efforts and navigation along the African coast to Columbus's discovery of the Americas. In this narrative, Portugal distinguishes itself by "[...] opening the legitimate trade of the world, abolishing, without force or injury [...] the monopoly of Eastern commerce" (Lisboa, 1825, p. 10). Here, the rhetoric of free trade, emerging from the anti-Napoleonic struggle, becomes a tool for reinterpreting Portuguese history. At the same time, maritime expansion is acknowledged to have produced unforeseen negative consequences, such as the global spread of African slavery—an effect Emperor Pedro I sought to reverse through treaties with England (Lisboa, 1825, p. 15).

The narrative develops a dual focus: on the one hand, Brazil emerges as the product of the free trade opened by the Navigations and the progress of a superior commercial civilisation; on the other, it suggests a persistent "providential plan" favouring the American empire. This providential element is not framed as a "prophecy," with the historian as the authorised interpreter of a revealed truth, nor does it describe miracles. Instead, successive "coincidences" are portrayed as evidence of a higher force. Hence, Lisboa's conceptual shift in referring to the "discovery" of Brazil as the "Finding of Brazil." While the term discovery could apply to deliberate expeditions like those of Columbus or Vasco da Gama, who sought specific objectives, Cabral's arrival in Brazil is depicted as fortuitous and accidental. In a lengthy note referencing Robertson, Southey, and William Roscoe, Lisboa defines chance as the operation of causes not yet fully understood, suggesting that the historian's role is to uncover them; only then can their study become useful for understanding great events (Lisboa, 1825, p. 48). Through this conceptual shift, Lisboa seems intent on framing Brazilian independence as an event embedded in a global history with profound reasons: the movement towards the opening and universalisation of trade and a providential plan to transplant European monarchical civilisation to the Americas.

Under renewed pressure from Emperor Pedro I, Lisboa interrupted his initial plan to address directly the events leading to independence. In the subsequent three volumes, published in 1827, 1829, and 1830, he examined the period from 1820 to 1823, entering the contentious realm of contemporary history. All these volumes are accompanied by introductions and appendices in which Lisboa reviews and responds to various

national and foreign authors who had written about Brazil's history and independence, making his work the first critical review of the historical literature on Brazil (Araujo, 2010).

Lisboa's plan for a general history of Brazil, outlined in *História dos Principais Sucessos*, at least in its ambitious original form, would remain unfinished. Even towards the end of Pedro I's reign, the project faced harsh criticism in the Senate, which voted to halt public funding allocated to pay a scribe who assisted Lisboa with the work (Araujo, 2015). Some senators deemed it inappropriate for the government to finance the writing of history, viewing it as a matter that should fall within the private domain. Following the abdication of the first emperor in 1831, the political and intellectual conditions necessary for the project appear to have been permanently disrupted, and they were not restored prior to Lisboa's death in 1835.

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