

# DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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**SOSA, Octavio Tarquínio de** (Rio de Janeiro, 1889 - 1959)

Octávio Tarquínio de Sousa Amaranto, son of Bráulio Tarquínio de Sousa Amaranto and Joana Oliveira de Sousa, was born on 7 September 1889 in Rio de Janeiro and died in a plane crash in the same city on 22 December 1959. In 1907, he graduated in Law from the School of Legal and Social Sciences of Rio de Janeiro, at a time when higher education in Brazil was strongly influenced by various scientific doctrines. He soon entered the Brazilian civil service, first as a second officer in the postal administration, then as director of the Postal Service of Rio de Janeiro (between 1914 and 1918). Between 1918 and 1932, he was Attorney General of the Federal Court of Accounts, and in 1924, he represented the Brazilian government at the International Conference on Emigration and Immigration held in Rome. In 1932, he became Minister of the Federal Court of Accounts, presiding over it between 1935 and 1936, and then serving as its vice-president, retiring in 1946. He wrote his first contributions to the press while still a student, his first book, *Monólogo das Coisas*

(Monologue of Things) – a volume of literary short stories laden with personal memories – was published in 1914 by Tipografia Besnard Frères, in Rio de Janeiro. He contributed regularly to *O Estado de São Paulo* between 1916 and 1917. In the following decade, he translated into Portuguese, with an introductory study, *Rubáiyát*, a classic work by the Persian poet Omar Kháyyám (1048-1131), published by José Olympio in Rio de Janeiro in 1928. In 1933, he was one of the founders of a literary association, the *Sociedade Felipe d'Oliveira*, of which he would be the director throughout its existence (from 1934 to 1945), editing its annual journal, *Lanterna Verde*. Between 1935 and 1937, he wrote on several occasions for *O Jornal*, in Rio de Janeiro; he would later write articles in many other newspapers such as *O País*, *A Noite*, *Correio da Manhã* and *Tribuna da Imprensa*, all in Rio de Janeiro, and also *Folha da Manhã*, in São Paulo.

Despite his literary activity and journalistic chronicles, it was in historiography that Octávio Tarquínio de Sousa would make his mark. His first work in this field was *A mentalidade da Constituinte* (The Mentality of the Constituent Assembly, 1931), a study of the first Brazilian Constituent Assembly, held in 1823. A few years later, a new book would introduce the author to the field of historical biography, which would soon earn him wider recognition. However, in *Ernesto Psichari, neto de Renan* (Ernesto Psichari, grandson of Renan), published in 1934, Octávio Tarquínio's style as a biographer was still in its infancy, which would only come to



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fruition with Bernardo Pereira de Vasconcelos e seu tempo (Bernardo Pereira de Vasconcelos and his time), published in 1937. His definitive conversion to the status of historian-biographer was partly due to the direct influence of Gilberto Freyre. The great Pernambuco sociologist directed the prestigious collection “Documentos Brasileiros” (Brazilian History, Brazilian Documents) by José Olympio, created the previous year, but which already had two notable authors: Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (with *Raízes do Brasil* [Roots of Brazil]) and Oliveira Lima (with *Memórias* [these are my reminiscences]); Freyre commissioned Octávio Tarquínio to write a biography of one of the most influential figures in the construction and consolidation of the Brazilian Empire in the 19th century. Brazil was then under the government of Getúlio Vargas in its phase known as the Estado Novo (New State, 1937-1945), characterised, among other things, by a dictatorial executive power and severe restrictions on individual freedoms. In reaction to this state of affairs, Octávio Tarquínio was able to assert his democratic and liberal convictions by highlighting Bernardo Pereira de Vasconcelos as a constitutional monarchist opposed to the extremes of what the author conceived as absolutist excesses, on the one hand, and revolutionary republicans, on the other, which dominated the political scene of the Brazilian Empire in its early years. From then on, this opposition to the Vargas regime would also find resonance in his broader literary activity, such as during his editorship of *Revista do Brasil* between 1938 and 1943, and with the founding of the Brazilian Writers’ Association in 1942, together with other important representatives of the Brazilian intellectual and literary landscape of the time, such as Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, Astrojildo Pereira, Graciliano Ramos, José Lins do Rego, Sérgio Milliet, Mário de Andrade, Oswald de Andrade, Paulo Emílio Sales Gomes, Antônio Cândido and Érico Veríssimo. With Octávio Tarquínio as its first president, the ABE held the First Brazilian Writers’ Congress in 1945.

Although it is possible to find traces of his political position projected in the characterisation of his biographees, historian Octávio Tarquínio sought to avoid excessive praise of such figures, which was so common at the time. Deeply influenced by the great biographers of the first half of the 20th century, especially the British Gilles Lytton Strachey (1880-1932), the German Emil Ludwig (1881-1948) and the French André Maurois (1885-1967), Octávio Tarquínio sought in the lives and works of his characters threads that connected broader historical processes, and in their psychological characteristics elements that potentiated the realisation of such processes. Through his writing style, he also sought to distance himself from what he considered to be the romanticised emphasis of many of the biographies of the time, ultimately approaching the standards of objectivity sought by a historiographical text. In this sense, he was also indebted to the reflections of the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) on the relationship between history and the individual – although, as the only scholar to have studied Tarquínio’s work in depth to date, Brazilian historian Márcia de Almeida Gonçalves has clearly demonstrated, this debt is often subtle. Since then, Octávio Tarquínio’s conception of biography has been based on a privileged form of writing political history in a broader sense, as the history of an era that is somehow condensed in the figure of a prominent individual (for that very reason).

And so it was that, starting with Bernardo Pereira de Vasconcelos e seu tempo, Octávio Tarquínio



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developed his project of writing a history of the Brazilian regency period (1831-1840) through the analysis of the actions of some of its main political protagonists. This was followed by three other books, two of which were biographies: Evaristo da Veiga (1939), now published by the Brasileira collection of Companhia Editora Nacional; *História de dois golpes de Estado* (1939), again published by José Olympio as volume 18 of the , Documentos Brasileiros, which he had begun editing the previous year, replacing Gilberto Freyre; and Diogo Antônio Feijó (1784-1843) (1942), volume 35 of the same collection. The favourable reception of these works by critics and the public, as well as his growing mastery of historiography and documentation relating to 19th-century Brazil, soon prompted Octávio Tarquínio to take a partial, but significant, chronological extension of his area of interest, taking his initial historiographical project to another level: he now set out to write a history of the very foundation of independent Brazil, in which the men he biographed would be perfectly placed in their time and social milieu. The process of Brazilian independence would thus be seen as only partially realised as a result of the will and actions of its main protagonists, since it was also influenced by the attitudes of the Cortes of Lisbon, which were supposedly contrary to the “interests of Brazil,” and the divergent interests between “Portuguese” merchants operating in Brazil, on the one hand, and large landowners, urban intellectuals and the lower strata of Brazilian society, on the other. In both cases, the traditional view of an antagonistic struggle between Brazil and Portugal underlies the narrative.

This chronological extension of Octávio Tarquínio's interests resulted in his co-authorship, with Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, of a school textbook on Brazilian history: *História do Brasil* (3rd series) (Rio de Janeiro, José Olympio, 1944), followed by a biography of José Bonifácio de Andrada e Silva: *José Bonifácio* (1763-1838), in 1945, as volume 51 of the collection Documentos Brasileiros (prepared by O pensamento vivo de José Bonifácio, São Paulo, Martins, 1944), also published in Mexico by Fondo de Cultura Económica, under the title *José Bonifácio, emancipador del Brasil* (1945). Shortly thereafter, he developed the section “Independence - First Reign - Regency” of the Bibliographic Manual of Brazilian Studies, under the direction of Rubens Borba de Moraes and William Berrien (Rio de Janeiro, Gráfica Editora Souza, 1949). Finally, in 1952, José Olympio published, as volume 72 of Documentos Brasileiros, Octavio Tarquínio's study of the man whom the most traditional view of Brazilian history considered (and perhaps still considers) its greatest exponent: *A vida de D. Pedro I*, in three volumes and with an impressive initial print run of 4,000 copies. In 1958, José Olympio would bring together almost all of Octávio Tarquínio de Sousa's historiographical work, duly revised by the author, in a collection that would definitively celebrate him: *The History of the Founders of the Brazilian Empire* came out in ten volumes, luxuriously bound and with a print run of 10,000 copies, which quickly sold out, prompting the preparation of a new edition that would come out in 1960, accompanied by a note of condolence for his death, which had occurred the previous year.

The ten volumes (the last of which is an index) of *História dos fundadores do Império do Brasil* (History of the Founders of the Brazilian Empire) provide a kind of summary assessment of various aspects of Octávio Tarquínio de Sousa's historiographical work. It should be noted that the number of references to documentary and historiographical sources increased throughout his biographies, reaching its peak in *A vida de D. Pedro I*



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(The Life of Dom Pedro I, volumes 2-4 of *História dos fundadores*). The same trend can be observed with regard to references to Portuguese authors, which are practically absent from Bernardo Pereira de Vasconcelos (volume 5), *Três golpes de Estado* (new title for the revised edition of *História de dois golpes de Estado*, 1939, now volume 8) and *Fatos e personagens em torno de um regime* (volume 9, a collection of thematic articles); very sporadic in José Bonifácio (volume 1), Evaristo da Veiga (volume 6), Diogo Antônio Feijó (volume 7); but abundant in *A vida de D. Pedro I*, including here great names from the 19th and 20th centuries such as José Liberato Freire de Carvalho, Almeida Garrett, Inocêncio Francisco da Silva, Alexandre Herculano, Simão José da Luz Soriano, Oliveira Martins and António José Saraiva. As for Portuguese themes not related to Brazilian history, volumes 6 and 8 contain practically nothing; volume 5 deals with the studies of Pereira de Vasconcelos in Coimbra, volume 7 deals with Feijó's work with the Lisbon courts, and volume 9 addresses various topics; while volume 1, dedicated to Bonifácio, contains several passages about his long years in Portugal, the biography of Pedro I devotes many pages to the prince's childhood and his activities in Portugal until his death in 1834. In addition, the "Introduction" to the collection (written in 1954 and published separately in 1957), besides discussing the relationship between biography and history, presents a historical summary of the period which, like any dissertation on the process of Brazilian independence – of which Octavio Tarquínio was one of the greatest historians – is also about the history of Portugal in the early decades of the 19th century.

Posterity would reserve a curious fortune for the work of Octávio Tarquínio de Sousa. Although interest in it declined in academic circles in tandem with the loss of prestige of histories considered "factual," as well as biographies of figures considered – not without a good dose of inaccuracy that accompanies this type of criticism – as "winners" of history, in non-academic circles his work continues to circulate, prestigious and easily accessible in libraries and bookstores in Brazil, and has even been reprinted several times. Part of its content has been widely used – sometimes almost copied – by various authors of historical works aimed at a broader and less specialised audience than academics. We would like to register our discomfort at the realisation that this use seems far from valuing the author's emphasis on characters as catalysts for broader historical processes; on the contrary, it values what was least innovative about his biographical work at the time: the chronicle of private lives in their anecdotal and superficial dimension. This is yet another reason for an academic revival of Octávio Tarquínio de Sousa, which has only just begun.

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