



• joão
capistrano
de abreu

Chapters of
Brazil's Colonial History
1500-1800

**CHAPTERS OF
BRAZIL'S COLONIAL
HISTORY**

1500-1800

LIBRARY OF LATIN AMERICA

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CHAPTERS OF
BRAZIL'S COLONIAL
HISTORY
1500-1800

CAPISTRANO DE ABREU

Translated from the Portuguese by

ARTHUR BRAKEL

WITH A PREFACE BY FERNANDO A. NOVAIS

AND AN INTRODUCTION BY STUART SCHWARTZ

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Series Editors'

General Introduction

The Library of Latin America series makes available in translation major nineteenth-century authors whose work has been neglected in the English-speaking world. The titles for the translations from the Spanish and Portuguese were suggested by an editorial committee that included Jean Franco (general editor responsible for works in Spanish), Richard Graham (series editor responsible for works in Portuguese), Tulio Halperín Donghi (at the University of California, Berkeley), Iván Jaksic (at the University of Notre Dame), Naomi Lindstrom (at the University of Texas at Austin), Francine Masiello (at the University of California, Berkeley), and Eduardo Lozano of the Library at the University of Pittsburgh. The late Antonio Cornejo Polar of the University of California, Berkeley, was also one of the founding members of the committee. The translations have been funded thanks to the generosity of the Lampadia Foundation and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

During the period of national formation between 1810 and into the early years of the twentieth century, the new nations of Latin America fashioned their identities, drew up constitutions, engaged in bitter struggles over territory, and debated questions of education, government, ethnicity, and culture. This was a unique period unlike the process of nation formation in Europe and one which should be more familiar than it is to students of comparative politics, history, and literature.

The image of the nation was envisioned by the lettered classes—a mi-

nority in countries in which indigenous, mestizo, black, or mulatto peasants and slaves predominated—although there were also alternative nationalisms at the grassroots level. The cultural elite were well educated in European thought and letters, but as statesmen, journalists, poets, and academics, they confronted the problem of the racial and linguistic heterogeneity of the continent and the difficulties of integrating the population into a modern nation-state. Some of the writers whose works will be translated in the Library of Latin America series played leading roles in politics. Fray Servando Teresa de Mier, a friar who translated Rousseau's *The Social Contract* and was one of the most colorful characters of the independence period, was faced with imprisonment and expulsion from Mexico for his heterodox beliefs; on his return, after independence, he was elected to the congress. Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, exiled from his native Argentina under the presidency of Rosas, wrote *Facundo: Civilización y barbarie*, a stinging denunciation of that government. He returned after Rosas' overthrow and was elected president in 1868. Andrés Bello was born in Venezuela, lived in London where he published poetry during the independence period, settled in Chile where he founded the University, wrote his grammar of the Spanish language, and drew up the country's legal code.

These post-independence intelligentsia were not simply dreaming castles in the air, but vitally contributed to the founding of nations and the shaping of culture. The advantage of hindsight may make us aware of problems they themselves did not foresee, but this should not affect our assessment of their truly astonishing energies and achievements. It is still surprising that the writing of Andrés Bello, who contributed fundamental works to so many different fields, has never been translated into English. Although there is a recent translation of Sarmiento's celebrated *Facundo*, there is no translation of his memoirs, *Recuerdos de provincia* (*Provincial Recollections*). The predominance of memoirs in the Library of Latin America series is no accident—many of these offer entertaining insights into a vast and complex continent.

Nor have we neglected the novel. The series includes new translations of the outstanding Brazilian writer Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis' work, including *Dom Casmurro* and *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*. There is no reason why other novels and writers who are not so well known outside Latin America—the Peruvian novelist Clorinda Matto de Turner's *Aves sin nido*, Nataniel Aguirre's *Juan de la Rosa*, José de Alencar's *Iracema*, Juana Manuela Gorriti's short stories—should not be read with as much interest as the political novels of Anthony Trollope.

A series on nineteenth-century Latin America cannot, however, be limited to literary genres such as the novel, the poem, and the short story. The literature of independent Latin America was eclectic and strongly influenced by the periodical press newly liberated from scrutiny by colonial authorities and the Inquisition. Newspapers were miscellanies of fiction, essays, poems, and translations from all manner of European writing. The novels written on the eve of Mexican Independence by José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi included disquisitions on secular education and law, and denunciations of the evils of gaming and idleness. Other works, such as a well-known poem by Andrés Bello, "Ode to Tropical Agriculture," and novels such as *Amalia* by José Mármol and the Bolivian Nataniel Aguirre's *Juan de la Rosa*, were openly partisan. By the end of the century, sophisticated scholars were beginning to address the history of their countries, as did João Capistrano de Abreu in his *Capítulos de história colonial*.

It is often in memoirs such as those by Fray Servando Teresa de Mier or Sarmiento that we find the descriptions of everyday life that in Europe were incorporated into the realist novel. Latin American literature at this time was seen largely as a pedagogical tool, a "light" alternative to speeches, sermons, and philosophical tracts—though, in fact, especially in the early part of the century, even the readership for novels was quite small because of the high rate of illiteracy. Nevertheless, the vigorous orally transmitted culture of the gaucho and the urban underclasses became the linguistic repertoire of some of the most interesting nineteenth-century writers—most notably José Hernández, author of the "gauchesque" poem "Martín Fierro," which enjoyed an unparalleled popularity. But for many writers the task was not to appropriate popular language but to civilize, and their literary works were strongly influenced by the high style of political oratory.

The editorial committee has not attempted to limit its selection to the better-known writers such as Machado de Assis; it has also selected many works that have never appeared in translation or writers whose work has not been translated recently. The series now makes these works available to the English-speaking public.

Because of the preferences of funding organizations, the series initially focuses on writing from Brazil, the Southern Cone, the Andean region, and Mexico. Each of our editions will have an introduction that places the work in its appropriate context and includes explanatory notes.

We owe special thanks to Robert Glynn of the Lampadia Foundation, whose initiative gave the project a jump start, and to Richard Ekman of

the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, which also generously supported the project. We also thank the Rockefeller Foundation for funding the 1996 symposium "Culture and Nation in Iberoamerica," organized by the editorial board of the Library of Latin America. We received substantial institutional support and personal encouragement from the Institute of Latin American Studies of the University of Texas at Austin. The support of Edward Barry of Oxford University Press has been crucial, as has the advice and help of Ellen Chodosh of Oxford University Press. The first volumes of the series were published after the untimely death, on July 3, 1997, of Maria C. Bulle, who, as an associate of the Lampadia Foundation, supported the idea from its beginning.

—*Jean Franco*
—*Richard Graham*

Preface

When, in 1876, a young man by the name of Capistrano de Abreu was making his way from the northern province of Ceará (by way of Pernambuco) to Rio de Janeiro, Francisco Adolfo de Varnhagen's *História geral do Brasil* had been published in its entirety. This important work brought together an entire generation of research that had begun with the founding of the Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro (Brazilian Institute of History and Geography) in 1837. One of Abreu's first undertakings as a journalist in the imperial capital was a series of articles that definitively situate and evaluate Varnhagen's work as the canonical and factual foundation of Brazilian history. This starting point is of extreme importance for the present endeavor—an attempt to evaluate Abreu's contribution to Brazilian historiography and to evaluate *Chapters of Brazil's Colonial History* in Abreu's lifelong production.

Indeed, beginning in 1876 and continuing until Abreu's death in 1927, this great historian's activity was always split simultaneously in three directions: historiographical criticism aimed at evaluating and integrating studies on Brazil; wide, persistent documentary research that yielded important discoveries as well as critical editions of basic texts; and historical work itself—be it in monographs, or be it in synthetic works. Studies on Varnhagen, Eduardo Prado, and Alfredo de Carvalho stand out among the works in the first vein, which were gathered and published (1931) in the three volumes of *Ensaio e estudos* (*Essays and Studies*). In the research

sector, of special notice are: Abreu's discovery and annotated edition of the 1618 *Diálogos das grandezas do Brasil* (*Dialogues on the Grandeurs of Brazil*); his critical edition of Friar Vicente do Salvador's 1627 *História*; and his sensational identification of the author of *Cultura e opulência do Brasil* (1711) as the Jesuit João Antônio Andreoni. Abreu's 1899 *Caminhos antigos e povoamento do Brasil* (*Old Roads and Brazilian Settlement*) is a masterpiece of monographical research whereas *Chapters of Brazil's Colonial History* (1907) was his main effort toward synthesis.

Seen in this light, *Chapters* occupies a high point in Abreu's total output, although chronologically speaking, it appears more or less at the midpoint of his career. Putting *Chapters* both in the center and at the apex of Abreu's output allows historians to apprehend the profound significance of this book within the author's work. It also facilitates the description of Abreu's career as a historian. Above all, one must point out this author's remarkable identification with his object of study.

Beginning with the critical evaluation of Varnhagen, Abreu immediately understood that Brazilian historiography was at an incipient stage, that the gathering of documents had not reached a point where synthetic work could be written. At the same time, however, Abreu understood that an overall vision of a country's history is indispensable in guiding topical research. This is the paradox that is expressed in the oft cited phrase from Abreu's correspondence with Lúcio de Azevedo—Brazilian history, so he maintained, was a "house built on sand." This explains the permanent tension among the different types of work Abreu simultaneously undertook. It also explains the essence of this book, which appears unfinished, as if it were the abandoned framework of a building. Yet, at the same time, this book is fundamental within the totality of Abreu's work. It is almost ironic that although Abreu (along with Rodolfo Garcia) provided dense annotation for all of Varnhagen's writing, he nonetheless left his own work unfinished. Only years later, in 1954, would José Honório Rodrigues supply the rigorous annotation for *Chapters of Brazil's Colonial History*—a book that reveals its author's greatness as well as his shortcomings.

In the same way that *Chapters* occupies a central position in Abreu's work, Abreu occupies a central position in the history of Brazilian history, i.e., in "Brazilian historiography" strictly speaking. Students of the history of Brazilian history, however, have not always taken certain indispensable premises into account concerning the limits of their endeavor. Thus, when Brazilian history is considered as a whole, there are two possible criteria for putting works into categories. If one considers the sub-

jects of this discourse (i.e., Brazilian historians and authors), one lumps together all the work of Brazilian historians—even if they happened to write about the European Middle Ages or about Egypt and the pharaohs. If, on the other hand, the criterion is the object of study (i.e., Brazil), the works by Brazilian historians dealing with other subjects are of necessity left out. However, to compensate for that exclusion, foreign historians' work on Brazilian history should be included. The vast production of foreign "Brazilianists" joins the cast in the latter case, but is absent in the former. When Brazilians speak of "Brazilian Historiography" strictly speaking they mean the body of work by Brazilian historians on Brazil, and it is in this context that Abreu sits at center stage. That is so if we take for granted the solution to another preliminary problem.

This extremely thorny problem is whether or not colonial chroniclers should be considered to belong to Brazilian historiography. There was no such thing as Brazil when they were writing, and for that reason those chroniclers should be left out. But Brazil was emerging as an entity, and in this sense the same chroniclers are expressions of that process.

While I tend toward the second point of view, it seems that, in the interest of pinpointing Abreu's importance, it would be most strategic to consider Brazilian historiography in its strictest sense, which includes only those writings on Brazilian history done by Brazilian historians once Brazil had become an independent nation state. In this strictest sense, Brazilian historiography begins with the 1837 founding of the Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro (IHGB)—itself a venerable institution which has recently become the object of some excellent studies.

The IHGB was created during a tumultuous period of the Regency, i.e., the period from 1831 to 1840, when Brazil's second monarch, Dom Pedro II, was still legally a minor. That is, it was founded at the crucial juncture in Brazil's consolidation as a nation state. Its legitimizing function can be seen in its name: it was intended to build national awareness on two foundations—geography and history. Or, in the words of the sixteenth-century chroniclers, on the "land" and on the "people."

Of course, the "sin" of anachronism is inherent in all historiographic discourse, but no historiographic subsection is more susceptible to anachronistic temptations than national history. In the famous words of Julien Benda, one always tends to tell the story of a people in order to demonstrate their "desire to become a nation." This was nowhere so explicit as it was in the case of Brazil. The IHGB, a government bureau supported by the Crown, began by sponsoring a contest to learn "how Brazilian history should be written."

The contest, won by the German naturalist K. F. Ph. von Martius, turned out to be a disaster. Martius maintained that Brazil's history could be seen as the result of contributions from white Portuguese, from native Americans, and from black Africans. One does not need much critical spirit to conclude that this absolutely sinister notion of "contributions" is aimed at obliterating the whole intrigue associated with domination, exploitation, and conflict—that together brought the Brazilian nation to term. The notion of "contributions" caused a particular, somewhat ill-mannered critic by the name of Pedro A. Figueira to claim that with the founding of the IHGB early Brazilian historiography rejected a commitment to the Truth and opted instead for a pact with the Throne.

To repeat, Varnhagen's monumental production distills and consolidates all the work in that first phase of Brazilian historiography. As is to be expected, his entire account emphasizes the sphere of politics and deals with the upper classes and the ruling elites. Abreu brought that phase to a close when he criticized Varnhagen and argued for getting beyond the latter's vision of history. Abreu cleared the way for what might be called modern Brazilian historiography, which began in the 1930s.

Critical observations such as Abreu's insistence that the monotonous spread of cattle up the São Francisco River Valley was much more important than the heroic battles to drive out the Dutch have become famous and have put him at the center of Brazilian historiography. But, still, historians do not pay heed to the deeper meaning of Abreu's critique, which can be apprehended in his work as a whole. Abreu did not merely suggest different themes; he argued for transcending sectional history in favor of global history, for going beyond purely narrative history, and for writing history that, while still narrative, would also be explanatory or, at least, comprehensive.

Comprehensive history, with its integrating dialogue with the social sciences, is the distinguishing trait of modern Brazilian historiography, which began in the 1930s with the work of a particular generation: Gilberto Freyre, Caio Prado Jr., and Sérgio Buarque de Holanda—as well as with the founding of universities. Capistrano de Abreu built a bridge between the first (IHGB) and third (university) phases of Brazilian historiography. His bridge precluded a break in continuity. This is the meaning of his work and his activity in all its grandeur and in all its shortcomings.

—*Fernando A. Novais*
University of Campinas, Brazil

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A House Built on Sand: Capistrano De Abreu and the History of Brazil

The history [historiography] of Brazil gives the impression of a house built on sand. If anyone leans on a wall, no matter how sturdy it seems, it crashes down in bits.

A história do Brasil dá a idéia de uma casa edificada na areia. É uma pessoa encostar-se numa parede, por mais reforçada que pareça, e lá vem abaixo toda a grampiola

—C. DE A. TO J. L. DE AZEVEDO

17 APRIL 1920

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Brazilians, like other Latin Americans in the nineteenth century, sought in the writing of their national history the foundations of their existence as a nation and the patterns of social, cultural, and economic life that had given their country its distinctive character. History would explain the past, legitimate the present, and plot the future. History's role in nation-building was serious business and in 1838 under the auspices of Brazil's young monarch Dom Pedro II, the Brazilian Institute of Geography and History (Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro) was established in Rio de Janeiro, the first such institution in the Americas. The study of history was not yet professionalized as an academic discipline and was written by amateurs, educated men (almost exclusively) who wrote history as a pastime or avocation. They assumed the task or,

some would say, they seized the opportunity to construct a narrative of Brazil's past that would make sense of the present.

The importance of history as a form of nation-building had been made clear in 1844 in a remarkable essay by a foreigner who knew the country well. In the previous year the Brazilian Institute of Geography and History, in order to promote the study of national history, had sponsored a contest on how to write the history of Brazil.¹ The winner was Karl Friedrich Philipp von Martius, a German naturalist and scientist with considerable experience in Brazil who had previously written on Brazilian linguistics, botany, and ethnography and had traveled widely in the country.² The account of his travels from 1817–20 in the company of another German scientist, Johann Baptist von Spix, is still read with profit today for its acute observations on social and economic conditions.³ Martius saw no benefit in localized chronicles of unimportant administrators and their actions. Instead, he suggested that the real history of Brazil was the mixing of its human elements: Indian, European, and African. He believed that each group had made a contribution and that each had a history worthy of study. He believed that: "The history of Brazil will always be primarily a branch of Portuguese history. However, if Brazilian history is to be complete and to deserve the name history, it can never exclude the roles played by the Ethiopian and Indian races." Here was a forward-looking formula that would wait almost a century before it was taken up again seriously in the works of Gilberto Freyre and other scholars of his generation.

But Martius's essay won not because of his novel emphasis on racial mixing but rather because while it recognized the centrality of the social and geographical diversity of Brazil it subsumed that diversity within a project to create an integrated nation and a national history. Brazil had just passed through a decade of violent provincial rebellions in which the centripetal forces of regionalism had threatened the monarchy and the unity of the country. Martius's project was a centralizing one. The object of his history would be to "spread noble patriotic sentiments" to Brazil's "politically immature population." While Martius's emphasis on the contributions of three distinct cultures was novel and seemingly radical, he was at heart a political conservative, very much a supporter of the Brazilian status quo of constitutional monarchy. He wanted a history that would show the dangers of republicanism, of an unrestrained press, and of irresponsible free speech about politics. This history would demonstrate that in a country based on slavery, monarchy was a necessity. The history of a Brazil entering an age of progress would serve to emphasize

its unity and to create a sense of conservative patriotism among all its inhabitants. Martius's objectives, if not his precocious multicultural approach, resonated among an elite hoping to create a national history as part of creating a nation. The challenge was accepted.

During the nineteenth century, Brazil was blessed with a number of talented historians, but two figures dominated historical studies and the role that history played in the creation of a national identity. Quite different in background, opinions, and accomplishments, the lives of the two chronologically overlapped and their lives and work became curiously intertwined. Together, they became the fathers of modern Brazilian historiography. One was Francisco Adolfo de Varnhagen (1816–1878), author of a factfilled, compendious, general history, and the other, João Capistrano de Abreu (1853–1927), whose classic outline of Brazil's colonial past is translated here in English for the first time.

Given their backgrounds and political sentiments, the two historians would have been somewhat unlikely companions. Francisco Adolfo de Varnhagen and João Capistrano de Abreu were quite dissimilar in many ways, but despite their differences, their desire to establish a firm basis for a national history, a passion to uncover lost, forgotten, or unknown sources on which to build that history, and an underlying sense of nationalism united them. Their work became inextricably braided together.

Francisco Adolfo de Varnhagen, born in Sorocaba (São Paulo), son of a German mining technician, handsome, privileged, argumentative, and proud, left Brazil at an early age, received his education and some military experience in Portugal, and then applied for Brazilian nationality in 1841.⁴ Always sensitive about his German father, he later claimed to be a Brazilian by both birth and choice. In truth, he spent most of his life abroad in the Brazilian diplomatic service where he was able to dedicate much of his time to investigation in foreign archives. A tireless researcher, influenced by the currents of nineteenth-century Romanticism and Liberalism, he eventually became very much an exponent of the critical methods being developed by German historians like Leopold von Ranke, and like him was a believer in facts as ascertainable entities that could reveal truth. He was later to claim that he wrote, “. . . with the love of truth which guides me above all other human considerations, and thus should be written all history which hopes to pass on to posterity.”⁵ He wrote a number of important historical studies but his great work, the *História geral do Brasil* was first published between 1854 and 1857. This was a national history in the positivist vein, crammed with information, revealing many previously unknown facts, and based on newly discovered sources, many

of which he had uncovered himself in European archives. No one before had ever produced such a complete history and none would equal it. This was especially true of the much improved second edition (Vienna, 1877), and of later editions that included Varnhagen's history of Brazilian independence (published posthumously), and even more so after Abreu edited Varnhagen's work with many notes, additions, and corrections.

The *História geral do Brasil* was a magnificent accomplishment and for it Varnhagen sought recognition from the monarchy almost as tirelessly as he had carried out his research. He became something of a sycophant at the Brazilian court. At one point he wrote to Dom Pedro II, "I fell on my knees, giving thanks to God . . . for having inspired in me an idea of such great service to the nation and to other nations. . ."⁶ Such appeals finally secured for him the title of baron and then later (in 1874), Viscount of Pôrto Seguro in recognition of his great achievement. The title of Pôrto Seguro was chosen because it was the place of the first European landfall on the Brazilian coast.

A treasure trove of information, Varnhagen's history was neither innovative in the way in which he divided the history of Brazil into periods, nor in his ability to synthesize that history into a cogent story. He did not write the kind of sprightly, popular, and colorful history that Martius had called for, but his political sentiments and proclivities would have pleased the old naturalist. Varnhagen, both because of his dependence on the monarch Dom Pedro II for patronage and because of his naturally conservative and centralist disposition, wrote a history with no sympathy for republicanism or democracy in which he saw, like Martius, the seeds of despotism. His treatment of the early elite movements for independence like that of Minas Gerais in 1788 or of Pernambuco in 1817 at first received slight and unsympathetic notice while those of the lower class were either completely ignored or condemned.⁷ He altered this attitude somewhat in the second edition.

Although sometimes thought of as an archconservative, such an evaluation of Varnhagen is not entirely fair. Varnhagen wrote against the slave trade and slavery as early as 1850, and while he shared the belief of many contemporaries that the hope for Brazil's future lay in European immigration and the "whitening" of Brazil, he did recognize the contributions of Africans to Brazilian history and culture and argued for the improvement of their social condition, although he believed that they would always remain dependent. He had certain populist pretensions. He signed the second edition of the *História geral* as a "son of the people (*filho do povo*)" and at one point, he advocated the creation of "a true *people*, free

and independent, instead of classes of rich and poor, plebeian and patrician, slaves and masters. . . .”⁸ Still, his was basically an upper-class vision of Brazil, one in which history was made from the top down by great men and leaders.

Above all else, Varnhagen was moved by a vision of Brazil based on its unity and progress, and any elements in the nation’s history that seemed to threaten these ends received his condemnation. Thus he wrote a history that defended what he considered to be “civilization:” the Europeans, the Portuguese colonial system, monarchy, law and order, and especially, the Bragança royal family in which he saw the key to the continuity of Brazilian unity. He had no patience for regionalism or separatism, which he saw as the bitter fruits of republicanism, and he was particularly negative toward what he called “*caboclo* Brazilianism,” the attempt to make the Indian the symbol of Brazilian identity. The Indians, he argued, “can in no way be taken as our guides in the present or past in sentiments of patriotism or in representation of our nationality.”⁹ Such attitudes led him into acrimonious debates with Brazilian Indianophiles just as his negative assessments of early republican movements also earned him the criticism of more radical nationalists who saw his attachment to Portuguese culture and the monarchy as retrograde beliefs.

Throughout his life, Varnhagen remained a conservative nationalist, or a patriot, as he would have it. In 1874 he published an important book on the Dutch occupation of Brazil (1630–54). He had begun the book in order to stimulate the patriotism and morale of his countrymen who at that time were engaged in a long and bitter war against neighboring Paraguay (1865–70). His historical judgments in the *História geral* were often made in relation to his sense of patriotism and his preoccupation with Brazilian unity, a unity that, whatever its failings, had been created by Portuguese government, culture, and colonialism. His history was the intellectual side of nineteenth-century nation-building, and it left little room for deviance or opposition, for voices from below, or for groups that refused to ride the tide of the mainstream. In terms of its method, its content, and its detail, the *História geral* became the baseline of Brazilian historiography for the rest of the century, but as the political and social context of Brazil began to change and as the context of monarchy and slavery were increasingly questioned, dissident voices were raised on how the nation’s past should be considered.

On Varnhagen’s death in 1877, João Capistrano de Abreu, a young man recently arrived in Rio de Janeiro from the provinces and already beginning to make a mark as a historian, was asked to write an evaluation of the

scholar's life and work.¹⁰ Abreu was a different kind of man and historian. Born in 1853 into a large family on a rural estate or *fazenda* near the cattle market town of Maranguape in the northeastern province of Ceará, his upbringing was rustic, among the cattle, the sugar mills, and the slaves. In his later years he could still recite the rhymes he learned in childhood from the slaves on the estate where he grew up.¹¹ Educated in provincial schools, a quick but irreverent student, his passion for reading soon became apparent. He continued his schooling in Recife in neighboring Pernambuco province in a more cosmopolitan atmosphere and then returned to Ceará where he spent much of his time involved in local intellectual life and writing for local periodicals.

It was also a time of incessant reading—philosophy, literature, history, and natural history—in English, French, and Portuguese (he later learned German, Dutch, Swedish, Latin, and Italian). Like many of his generation, he became an admirer of the social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), finding in Spencer's biological analogies a way of explaining Brazilian society.¹² The metaphor of Brazilian society as a developing organism becoming more complex as it matured stayed with Abreu for most of his life. Like Spencer, he was a strong believer in “progress,” but he was not greatly influenced by the evolutionary racial concepts of Spencerian thought. The Positivism of the French philosopher Auguste Comte (1798–1857) also attracted his interest in the 1880s. Its emphasis on the application of “scientific” principles to social development and on education caught his fancy. He was very friendly with some of the leading Positivists of his day, such as Miguel Lemos, but he eventually rejected Positivism as an intellectual “strait-jacket” when his own experience and judgments led him away from its deterministic theories. Above all, Abreu became a great admirer of German scholarship on natural history, economics, and society. The German school of human geography and natural science, especially as it related to Brazil, influenced Abreu for most of his life. He read books like J. E. Wappoeus's study of the physical geography of Brazil and A. W. Sellin's general geography of Brazil with admiration and translated some of their most important works into Portuguese.¹³ Their influence on his conception of history and human society was deep and he always placed great attention on the geographical setting and environment and its impact on human action.¹⁴

The historians who most influenced Abreu at first were men like the Frenchman Hippolyte Taine (1828–1892), and the Englishman Henry Thomas Buckle (1821–1862). They were the leading exponents of Comtian Positivism as applied to historical studies and both sought to apply

“scientific” principles to history.¹⁵ But by 1900 Abreu was far less interested in “laws” of history and far more attracted to the critical methods of Leopold von Ranke and German historical scholarship: the discovery, internal criticism, and interpretation of historical texts as a way of setting history on firm ground. This became his historical passion, but he continued to read incessantly, always seeking to find an interpretative framework for the new information his critical scholarship revealed.

He consumed books. We know he liked to read in a hammock. He later reported that his great accomplishment in Rio de Janeiro had been to learn German well enough that he didn’t have to get out of the hammock to look up words in a dictionary. He admitted toward the end of his life that he would be content to be buried in a hammock, like the poor folks of Ceará. One author believes that the hammock explains why Abreu read so much and wrote relatively little.¹⁶

In 1875, this erudite and enormously well-read twenty-two-year-old provincial had left Ceará for Rio de Janeiro, his voyage apparently paid for by the sale of a slave who had been willed to him by his grandfather.¹⁷ He fell in love with Rio de Janeiro almost immediately. He called it on first sight, “the fatherland of the sun (*pátria do sol*).”¹⁸ He lived there the rest of his life, traveling widely in Brazil, but never leaving the country. He thus watched the enormous changes in Brazil, lifting his eyes from his beloved historical documents and texts to witness from the vantage point of the capital the abolitionist movement, the end of slavery, the fall of the monarchy, a military coup, the establishment of a republic, and various political crises. His last trip to Ceará was in 1884 when he attended the celebrations of the province’s abolition of slavery. But he never forgot his provincial identity and roots. He treasured friendships from his boyhood and his northeastern upbringing. In his extensive correspondence with the Portuguese historian João Lúcio de Azevedo, he always called him *xarapim*, the Ceará term for someone with the same name. He once wrote in the midst of Rio’s heat, that as a *cearense* he could not complain.¹⁹ He had a strong sense of his origins and he valued them. He envisioned a Brazilian unity but always recognized its regional variations and he celebrated his own distinctive background.

Employed first as a journalist and tutor, he secured a position in the National Library in 1879 and then as a professor at the elite Colégio Dom Pedro II where he taught from 1883 to 1898. He tutored students privately and married one, a daughter of an admiral, in 1881. Throughout much of his life he supported himself as a journalist, translator, and editor in the fields of his interest: literary criticism, history, geography, ethnography,

and the natural sciences. He became a well-known and respected figure in the intellectual world of turn-of-the-century Rio de Janeiro.

When Abreu was asked to write that evaluation of Varnhagen's works on the occasion of his death, the essay he produced, rather than a typical laudatory necrology, was a balanced and critical evaluation. It recognized Varnhagen's great contributions, the fact that he had done his work without the aid of able generations of predecessors, his contribution in finding and using a wealth of new sources, and his dedication to establishing a factual basis for the Brazilian past; but he also chided the deceased Varnhagen for his lack of literary style, his jealousy and begrudging attitude toward contemporary historians, his colorless presentation, and his inability to synthesize or periodize the flow of the past. While doing this Abreu suggested his own vision of Brazilian history and the topics that lay unstudied: the expeditions that opened the interior and histories of the roads of Brazil, the municipalities, elite dynasties (such as the Casa da Torre of Bahia), the gold mines, cattle, and the Jesuits. He saw that archaeology, geography, linguistics, and anthropology were needed to make their contribution to historical studies. Varnhagen would remain the guide, said Abreu, only until a new generation changed the basis on which that history could be written.

Perhaps Abreu's most radical departure from Varnhagen was in terms of periodization. Instead of Varnhagen's plodding governor-after-governor approach and a periodization based on political and military events, Abreu suggested another plan to conceptualize Brazilian history within six periods: The first period, 1500–1614, encompassed the years from European discovery to the time the coast was fully under Portuguese control. The second phase, from 1614 to 1700, included the years of occupation of the interior, using the rivers as the routes of penetration. The third period, from 1700 to 1750, took in the years dominated by the discovery of mines and the settlement of Minas Gerais and the Brazilian west. The years 1750–1808, the fourth period, witnessed the consolidation of the colonial regime; and after the arrival of the Portuguese court in Brazil in 1808, the fifth phase began, the time of colonial “decomposition,” which lasted until 1850. The sixth period, from 1850 to his own day, Abreu saw as the age of the empire, a period of political centralism and industrial development.²⁰ Here was a way of thinking about the Brazilian past in which economy, settlement, and occupation of the national territory weighed as heavily as Varnhagen's view of administration and politics.

But if Abreu had ideas about how to write the great general history of Brazil and dreamed about doing so, his life during the next 30 years was

filled with other activities. Like his predecessor Varnhagen, he became fascinated with the discovery and publication of long lost sources of Brazilian history. He believed that the knowledge of the Brazilian past was incomplete and unstable. It was, in fact, like “a house built on sand” and, until its walls could be supported by a fuller record of the past, generalizations and syntheses were impossible. His correspondence with friends in Portugal is filled with petitions for copies of archival materials and inquiries that could help him identify authors or the provenance of manuscripts. He published many documents in short articles in ephemeral publications, such as the *Gazeta literária*, but any historian working on colonial Brazil today would recognize that some of the most important and extensive texts now considered indispensable were discovered, attributed, or edited by Abreu. A few important examples should suffice: Fernão Cardim’s *Do princípio e origem dos índios do Brasil* and his “Do clima do Brasil e de algumas cousas notáveis;” José de Anchieta’s “Informações do Brasil e suas capitanias;” Ambrósio Fernandes Brandão’s *Diálogos das grandezas do Brasil*, João Antônio Antonil’s *Cultura e opulência do Brasil*; and the records of the first Inquisition visit to Brazil, the *Primeira visitação*. Perhaps most important was his 1887 publication with extensive notes and long model introductions of the long-forgotten first history of Brazil (1627) by Frei Vicente do Salvador. It is hard to conceive what Brazilian colonial history would look like today without Abreu’s discoveries and contributions.

But with all his fascination for historical documents, Abreu was no pedant. His correspondence is filled with observations and judgments about contemporary politicians, events of the day, social customs, and even the regional variations of sexual slang. A bit near-sighted, a late-riser, a chain-smoker, enormously erudite but with a taste for a naughty story, he avoided using honorific titles, disliked giving or hearing lectures, and sought no membership in academies or institutes with the exception of the Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro in which he became a member in 1887. He was humble, sometimes signing his letters “João Ninguém (John Nobody)” and threatening his friends late in life that he would refuse to participate in any formality honoring his work. A bit lazy, he treasured the beach, a swim in the ocean, and the hammock. José Honório Rodrigues, a historian and Abreu’s most knowledgeable biographer and in some ways his intellectual successor, said Abreu loved “knowledge, his children, and his friends.” A man of simple tastes and pleasures, he celebrated the “delirium” of his discovery of the true authorship of the *Cultura e opulência do Brasil* with a few beers, a good dinner, and a long

conversation well into the night. He lived in the midst of Rio's belle époque and was a well-known figure but he had little to do with the style and cultural fashions of the time.²¹ Not really a bohemian, devoted to his family, and rather conventional in many ways, he nevertheless had a bit of the character of a person whom Brazilians today would call a *boa vida*. He knew how to live a good life and was comfortable with his priorities.

Meanwhile, Abreu continued to produce articles and essays on a variety of topics, to translate works, to write introductions to newly revealed documents, and to work and read in the areas of human geography, ethnography, political economy, and linguistics, fields in which he was especially influenced by German scholarship.²² His insights were sometimes profound. In his introduction to the Inquisition records of Brazil, he characterized the Brazilian family as, "taciturn father, a submissive wife, and terrified children," a phrase that has been often repeated. He gave attention to Brazilian society in a way that no one had done before. Some of the essays broke new ground. A series begun in 1889 later published as *Caminhos antigos e povoamento do Brasil* traced the history of the roads, the settlement of the interior, and the frontiers, themes that in his critique of Varnhagen he had shown were previously neglected. His emphasis on the backlands or *sertão*, its people and the changing history of both altered the way in which Brazilians came to think about their history. It has been suggested that Abreu's essay was to Brazilian historiography what Frederick Jackson Turner's *The Frontier in American History* (1893) was to the study of the United States.²³

We can tell a great deal about Abreu's developing vision of history and of Brazil from these writings and from the extensive correspondence he maintained.²⁴ Like Varnhagen, Abreu saw historical study as a way of creating a nation. He realized that Brazilians themselves had to invent Brazil, as the "Dutch had created Holland after God created the world." To do this, Brazil needed to know the reality of its past. Discovering this past was the most important role of the historian, but this invention had to be based on evidence.²⁵ As he put it: "the questions depend on the present but the answers depend on research, otherwise the historian would become tendentious and without scientific foundation."²⁶

A strong sense of nationalism informed his interpretation of the past and his fears for Brazil's present. He read Portugal's historical dependence on England as a cautionary tale that Brazil needed to remember in its relations with the United States. Abreu divided the history of Portugal after it had regained its independence from Spain in 1640 into two periods, the first characterized by gravitation toward England until the

Methuen Treaty of 1703 and the second by which Portugal had “sold its soul for a mess of pottage of colonies and enslaved itself to England.” “Next to Ireland,” said Abreu, “no nation had been as vilified by England and thus reduced to an absolute passive dependence.”²⁷ He feared that a similar relationship would exist between Brazil and the United States. When Brazil was allowed three representatives at the Paris Peace Conference after World War I, Abreu saw this as proof of a growing and dangerous United States patronage. He warned, “I believe as much in the friendship of the United States for Brazil as in that of England for Portugal.”²⁸ As Portugal had become the docks (*cais*) of England, he feared that a Brazilian foreign policy based on alliance with the United States would turn Brazil into the docks or springboard for North American penetration of South America. In this he was an opponent of the “unwritten alliance” between Brazil and the United States that was a cornerstone of the foreign policy forged in the period by the Baron of Rio Branco, Brazil’s great diplomat and Foreign Minister, whom Abreu knew well.²⁹ His respect for German scholarship and culture and his anti-English sentiments and fears led him to hope for a German victory in World War I.

Along with his nationalist sentiments, Abreu held beliefs like other authors of his age about national or ethnic characteristics that we might classify as prescientific racism. He spoke of the “taciturn” Portuguese, of the “melancholy” Indians, and of the good humor, sensuality, and affectionate nature of Africans as though these were inherent features. But race per se was not a major factor in his interpretation of the Brazilian past and he was far less inclined than many of his contemporaries to ascribe negative results to racial origins or to miscegenation. In fact, he believed that when mulattos combined daring with talent and good luck they could reach the highest positions and that the charms of mulatta women had made them the queens of Brazil. Here we see sexual and racial stereotypes that were part of a Brazilian national myth that Abreu both embraced and helped create.

Although sharing some of the ideas of his generation and social class about racial characteristics, Abreu was far from espousing the racism that many of his contemporaries had. This is shown clearly in his refusal to simply denigrate the Jews or to side with the forces of the church in historical interpretations of their role in Portuguese and Brazilian history. Here, too, he shared some of the prejudices of his time and ascribed to the Jews certain inherent characteristics. He could not believe, for example, that Jews had been among the pathfinders who had opened the interior