

# CAPISTRANO DE ABREU

Tentativa biobibliográfica By José Aurélio Saraiva Câmara. Rio de Janeiro, 1969. Livraria José Olympio. Coleção Documentos Brasileiros. Illustrations, Notes, Bibliography, Index, Pp. xviii, 234. Paper.

In 1887 João Capistrano de Abreu wrote to the Baron of Rio Branco that «the peopling of the zone between the São Francisco and the Parnaíba» was «the most important question» in Brazilian history. Capistrano was the first to recognize the historical significance of the cyclic efforts to occupy the vastness of Brazil. His research and writings attempted to correct the impression that throughout its history the Brazilian nation clung crablike to the coast leaving the interior vacant. Having grown up on a fazenda in Ceará, Capistrano was unwilling to concede the principal scene of Brazil's history to Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, or Bahia. Unhappily, documents concerning the people and events he wished to study either did not exist or lay molding in unorganized archives beyond his reach. Like the North American frontier historian, Frederick Jackson Turner, Capistrano never fulfilled the promise of his preparation (he taught himself to use sources in Spanish, Latin, German, Dutch, Italian, and English) or of his understanding. In both cases the men fell in love with research and were so humble that they never felt ready to write, and both seem to have been contemplative sorts who preferred the looseness of discussion and suggestive articles to the discipline of writing a major work. Capistrano wrote his *Capítulos de história colonial* only because he committed himself to do an historical section in a government publication and officials pestered him through a tortured year (1906-1907) to completion.

Curiously the object of José Aurélio Saraiva Câmara's study probably would have objected to its being written. He disliked tributes and eulogies to the extent that he once threatened to sever his ties with a group of friends rather than let them publish a set of onorific essays. Saraiva Câmara tends to be eulogistic rather than critical. Even so he adds to our knowledge of Capistrano and his thinking. But one cannot help but wonder when he describes Capistrano as a humanist to whom history was not only scientific method but feeling, whether his «sensing of things» (*adivinhação*) was based on humanism or necessitate by a lack of solid documentation.

Saraiva Câmara, former artillery officer, professor of mathematics, and Ceará state official, writes in a methodical style compressing considerable detail into the 183 pages of actual text. We learn that Capistrano attended positivist readings on Sundays, that his daughter entered the cloister at Santa Teresa (Rio) and became prioress, that he had a passion for hammocks and slept in one year around, that he worked six hours a day doing research in the National Library in 1890 that his travels in São Paulo, Minas Gerais, and Rio Grande do Sul were «a significant chapter» in his life, that he was influenced by German geographers, that he was a student of anthropology, and that Afonso de E. Taunay studied with him in the last imperial year, 1889. Such a book may, as the editor's note asserts, give Saraiva Câmara a place in the «contemporary Brazilian

intellectual panoramas», but it certainly provides a readable description of the «intellectual panoramas» of the late 19th century that produced the original mind of Capistrano de Abreu.

One of the most interesting sections for this reviewer described Capistrano's struggles to secure a chair at the imperial secondary school, the Colégio Pedro II. His success in 1883 was undone six years later when the chair of Brazilian history was absorbed into world history. Refusing this combined chair he resigned in protest. Was the republican government afraid of a national history that it probably saw as monarchist? Or was its submersion of national history the result of ignorance? Capistrano apparently thought it was the latter, because his approach to Brazilian history was certainly not a simple retelling of events at the court. The underdeveloped state of the historical profession in Brazil, with the attendant lack of libraries and research facilities, may have been one of the unnoticed results of the fall of the monarchy.

The author included a forty-three page section containing quotes from Capistrano's letters and articles on subjects ranging from friendship to Woodrow Wilson. The work has a name index and some poor-quality photographs.

Though Saraiva Câmara has written a useful study of Capistrano, he has also provided perhaps unintentionally, some intimate glimpses of cultural and social life in turn-of-the-century Brazil. For American scholars who are unimpressed by «bibliography» this may be the book's greatest value.

The Papers of Woodrow Wilson  
Princeton University

Frank D. McCann

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SARAIVA CAMARA (José Aurélio), *Capistrano de Abreu*, José Olympio, Rio de Janeiro, 1969, XVIII et 234 pages.

A côté des livres publiés par les historiens, en voici un publié sur un historien. Loin de nous l'idée de considérer que Capistrano de Abreu n'ait mérité cette «tentative bio-bibliographique» (comme le dit modestement le sous-titre) qui a obtenu le prix Tarquínio de Sousa en 1965. C'est un exemple remarquable du triomphe de l'intelligence sur les difficultés qu'opposaient l'immensité du Brésil et la faiblesse de ses moyens culturels, pour un provincial, au milieu du XIX siècle. On sent que l'œuvre de M. Saraiva Câmara est animée par la profonde mais indispensable sympathie intellectuelle du biographe pour son modèle. Ce n'est pas une tentative, c'est un succès et l'ouvrage contribuera non seulement à mieux faire connaître le visage de Capistrano de Abreu mais le mérite de son travail pionnier. Cependant sans qu'on puisse dire qu'il ait cédé à une tentation. M. Saraiva Câmara rejoint le courant auquel nous faisons allusion en consacrant son attention à un historien plutôt qu'à l'histoire. Ainsi fait-il œuvre d'historien au second degré et écrit-il sur un historien ou sur l'histoire un peu comme Tristão de Athayde écrit sur la critique. Nous souhaiterions que le temps et l'intérêt des historiens brésiliens aillent directement au domaine historique si riche dans lequel il reste tant à défricher.

Et nous pourrions leur citer en exemple la tâche accomplie par nos collègues M. le Professeur José Aderaldo Castello, Directeur de l'Institut d'Etudes Brésiliennes de l'Université de São Paulo et M. le Professeur Guilhermino Cesar, Professeur à l'Université du Rio Grande do Sul et à l'Université de Coimbra.

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