

BRAZILIAN NOBILITY

ESTUDOS DA NOBREZA BRASILEIRA. By RUI VIEIRA DA CUNHA. 2 vols. (Rio de Janeiro: Arquivo Nacional, 1966–1969.)

FIGURAS E FATOS DE NOBREZA BRASILEIRA. By RUI VIEIRA DA CUNHA. (Rio de Janeiro: Arquivo Nacional, 1975.)

Rui Vieira da Cunha is one of the leading authorities in Brazil on the subject of the nobility of the Old and New Worlds, in particular, its juridical and legal aspects. His earlier work, *Estudos*, is a study of the various laws and decrees that governed the life of the nobility as a system. The 1975 work, *Figuras*, is a collection of newspaper articles that unite a series of anecdotes about noble families with several case studies of bankrupt titles. Both works significantly broaden the data base for interested scholars.

Before Cunha's contribution is put in perspective, however, it is necessary to review briefly the historiographical development of the subject. Genealogical works have dominated the field, the best known being *Arquivo nobiliarchico brasileiro* (Lausanne, Switzerland, 1918), a biographical dictionary by the first Barão de Smith de Vasconcelos and the second Barão de Smith de Vasconcelos. Unfortunately, several factual errors were contained in the volume, and many of the titles have no biographical data provided. However, the format of the *Arquivo* was continued by the Instituto Brasileiro de Genealogia in São Paulo under the able leadership of the late Salvador de Moya, a colonel in the state military police and the founder of the National Federation of the Genealogical Institutes of Brazil in 1949. Three publications emerged from Moya's decades-long efforts: *Anuário Genealógico Brasileiro*, 10 vols. (1939–49); its successor, *Anuário Genealógico Latino*, 12 vols. (1940–52?); and the *Revista Genealógica Latina*, an official publication of the federation, with fifteen published volumes. All three, now defunct, deal with genealogy in the Latin world, that is, Spain, Portugal, Italy, France, and Latin America, with special emphasis on the Luso world. Genealogical data on the Brazilian nobility are also found in the *Anuário do Museu Imperial*, an official publication of the historical archives of the museum in Petrópolis, which first appeared in 1940. The principal focus is on the imperial family and their relations with other key personages in and out of the empire.

In addition to the national centers for the study of genealogy, each state maintains its separate institute and some even publish journals, though rather irregularly. It is often a single person or a small group of interested individuals who support such activities, as in the cases of the late Antônio de Araújo de Bulcão Sobrinho, the late Colonel Moya in São Paulo, and Carlos Rheingantz in Petrópolis. In fact, the São Paulo institute only retrieved the archival materials after Moya's death. The flaw with the extremely personalized styles in publications is obvious: the information frequently tends to be an unsystematic collection of names tracing pedigrees of the institutes' members. Worse, when the

principal supporter dies, the entire project either flounders, as in Bahia, or staggers on, as in São Paulo.

Although biographical dictionaries, genealogical periodicals, and their variations hardly constitute works of prosopography, descendants of premier families of colonial and imperial Brazil compiled reference works for many regional clans. Examples of such works that utilized primary sources include Bulcão Sobrinho's *Famílias baianas* (Salvador, 1961); Rheingantz' incomplete *Primeiras famílias do Rio de Janeiro*, 2 vols. (Rio, 1965–1967, thus far only surnames A to M); Carlos Xavier Pais Barreto's *Os primitivos colonizadores nordestinos e seus descendentes* (Rio, 1960) on major families of Pernambuco and its adjacent states; Francisco Klors Werneck's *História e genealogia fluminense* (Rio, 1947); and Luís Gonzaga da Silva Leme's massive *Genealogia paulista*, 9 vols. (São Paulo, 1903–1905) on colonial dynasties.

The lacunae of interpretive and analytical works still exist, but Cunha's works, especially *Figuras*, serve as a useful guide to social history. The earlier of the two treats the juridical bases and legal precedents for the creation, regulation, and maintenance of the Luso-Brazilian nobility by exploring its antecedents in the Portuguese and Latin systems. The first volume of *Estudos* is subtitled *Cadetes*, in reference to a 1757 royal *alvará* that created a special military school for the sons of the nobles to train officers for infantry, cavalry, dragoon, and artillery units; in fact, each company was required by law to include three nobles as cadets. In independent Brazil, some of the Portuguese practices were retained: while the practice that only those of noble birth were permitted to become officers of the imperial navy was dropped during the Regency era (1832), illegitimate offspring were still kept out of the ranks of first and second cadets under an 1848 law. It is also clear that the law was not rigorously enforced. In Bahia, for instance, an illegitimate son of a Brazilian general (the Barão de Cajuíba) rose to the rank of marshal during the Paraguayan War (1864–70) and was later ennobled as the Visconde de Itaparica by Pedro II. This was an unusual case and is probably an exception to the rule. Nevertheless, Cunha combines his expertise on Brazilian genealogy and legal history in the study of cadetism.

In the second volume of *Estudos* (*Fidalgos de cota-de-armas*), the focus shifts to the outward appearances maintained by the nobles. As early as the sixteenth century, Fernand Braudel reports, the Mediterranean nobility and aristocracy began lavishing themselves with "symbols of prestige": oriental silk, Flemish tapestries, thoroughbred horses, satins and velvets, opulently furnished palaces, gilded carriages, and a large retinue of household servants and hangers-on. More importantly, nobles were required by social custom and law to possess coats of arms, decorations, medals, and official papers to show that they were of an elect few in the empire. Cunha devotes this second volume to the use of such symbols. Although he does not treat the Brazilian part until later, he presents the variegated aspects of imperial practices in granting honors. Here we learn that cities and legal beings were equally eligible for imperial titles and honors. Such cities as Santo Amaro and Cachoeira in Bahia, and Niterói and Petrópolis in Rio province were given the titles of *imperial*, *leal*, and *heróica* for their respective service during the struggle for Brazil's independence and its difficult forma-

tive years. Existing documents in the Arquivo Nacional in Rio support Cunha's contention and go a step further. On one occasion, a Bahian cigar manufacturer in Cachoeira (*cidade heróica*) petitioned for the use of "imperial" as part of its brand name. Although the petitioner pointed out that Pedro II visited his factory in 1859 and smoked the product, the request was politely turned down.

In contrast to the legal-judicial emphasis that *Estudos* receives, *Figuras* is more readable and can be considered a work of social history. Among several case studies in the book is a counterinterpretation by Cunha of the legal validity of the title of nobility given to the father of the Duque de Caxias. Marshal Francisco de Lima e Silva was a member of the first Triune Regency and a senator of the empire. He was honored with the title of Barão de Barra Grande for his military and political services to the imperial state. His two brothers (both soldiers) were ennobled and all of his sons were also given titles. In fact, Barra Grande and Caxias were so honored on the same day. Thus, based on the family tradition, historians assumed that Barra Grande accepted the honor, but some of Caxias' biographers noted that the former imperial regent never used the title. Some argued that the title was recognized but the marshal refused to use it; others concluded that the regent rejected the honor from the outset. Cunha advances an alternative explanation, drawing on his extensive legal and heraldic knowledge, that Barra Grande did not reject the title but simply neglected (intentionally?) to formalize it by registering with the imperial chancery and paying the necessary fees. At the time (the 1840s), the registration of a barão title cost about 720\$000, or about US\$145. It was only after 1853 that military and naval officers were exempt from the fee. Under Brazilian law, the concession of honors must be followed up by paying the fee, taking a coat of arms, and registering with the chancery clerk. According to the surviving registries, such eminent nobles as Cotegipe and Sinimbu (both prime ministers) failed to formalize their titles either by not paying the fees or not taking out a coat of arms. This non-compliance among supposedly loyal imperial nobles alone provides an interesting aspect of the Brazilian aristocracy, the corporateness of which can be seriously doubted.

Cunha also provides a glimpse of the personal life-styles of noble families. Contrary to popular belief, not all Brazilian titleholders were rich, let alone opulent. Cunha documents case after case, based on treasury records, of well-known nobles living in abject poverty whose widows and offspring became public charges drawing pensions from the state, both the Braganza Monarchy and the Old Republic. Among them was a son-in-law of Pedro I (the second Visconde de Barbacena) who died at the age of 103, having lived out his last years on an annual pension of 500\$000 from the Republic. A sister-in-law of Marshal Deodoro da Fonseca (the founder of the Republic) obtained a pension of 1:800\$000 although her title (Baronesa de Alagoas) was barely two weeks old when her husband, also a general of the imperial army like Deodoro, died. Cunha simply demonstrates with other cases that the generalizations about the European nobility cannot, or at most, may with caution, be applied to the Brazilian situation.

One more case will suffice. In spite of the Republic's decree (22 March

1890) that abolished titles and honors, flagrant violation of the law ensued. Rui Barbosa as the minister of finance in the early 1890s signed certificates of ennoblement and accepted registration fees that had formerly gone to the imperial chancery. Thus the Barão de Novais, Barão de Ponte Nova, and Barão de Contendas, among others, took out their titles after the fall of the monarchy. Again, Cunha offers future social historians something to think about: the power to grant titles and honors was never constitutionally based but rather considered an imperial prerogative. As such, the fall of the Braganza monarchy in mid-November 1889 should have ended the concession of titles. The public use of the titles thrived, in fact, until the 1940s.

A good social history of this important Brazilian institution still remains to be written. The *Figuras* and *Estudos* go beyond the traditional biographical dictionaries and reference works by opening up ways to do social history and offering many valuable leads to the kinds of source materials available for future research. The books are well written and informative to this end. What remains to be done is the culling of the massive data in a series of archival sources and the writing of a collective social biography of the nobility; formal petitions to the crown, registries of titles and honors, official correspondence between provincial authorities and the imperial government, private papers of nobles and key political intermediaries, archival data from local notary publics and courts can shed new perspectives on the subject. Cunha's works are pioneering in their structure and sources and serve as an important point of departure for another kind of history in Brazilian studies.

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