

Monções (almost) rewritten

A new edition of the first book by the historian Sérgio Buarque de Holanda makes clear his preference for rewriting his works

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One of the most respected Brazilian intellectuals of the 20th century, Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (1902-1982) was almost never completely satisfied with what he had written. A literary critic who came into his own as an official historian between the late 1940s and the early 1950s, he liked to rewrite his books and often gave new forms and endings to old texts or texts still being written. For example, between 1957 and 1958, he was forced to dedicate six long months to the task of producing a thesis that would allow him to hold the History of Brazilian Civilization chair at the University of São Paulo (USP). To fulfill these academic obligations, he expanded the introduction to his book – already underway – on the Brazilian baroque period of the 17th and 18th centuries (some of these writings would become his posthumous work *Capítulos de literatura colonial* [Chapters in Colonial Literature], published only in 1991) and transformed it into *Visão do paraíso* (Vision of Paradise). Defended in 1958, the dissertation became a book the following year and was one of his most significant works, along with *Raízes do Brasil* (Roots of Brazil) (1936), *Caminhos e fronteiras* (Highways and Borders) (1957) and *Do Império à República* (From Empire to Republic) (1972).

The year 2015 marks seventy years since Buarque de Holanda launched his first book as a historian, *Monções* (Monsoons), which

discusses the river expeditions that departed from São Paulo and that moved westward during the colonial period. For a good part of his life, he attempted to rewrite the book, but he never managed to complete this goal. In early 2015, a new edition of *Monções* (*Companhia das Letras*) (Monsoons), 624 pages, arrived at bookstores. More than just commemorating the anniversary of the original, this revision allows the reader to glimpse the ongoing revisions the author made to his work. Compiled over the last two years by historian Laura de Mello e Souza and her former student André Sekkel Cerqueira, the new two-volume version presents, in a brand new way, Buarque de Holanda's most important findings on the westward expansion by colonists in São Paulo. The first volume contains the original text as it appeared in published form in 1945. The second, called *Capítulos de expansão paulista* (Chapters on the westward expansion from São Paulo), brings together three chapters of *Monções* that were rewritten by the author (probably in the 1960s and 1970s) with other texts, some of them incomplete, that made up the book *O extremo Oeste* (The Far West). *O extremo Oeste* was named in 1986 by historian José Sebastião Witter (who died in July 2014), a disciple and friend of Buarque de Holanda. "For decades, Buarque de Holanda dreamed of rewriting *Monções*, a work that was a companion to him throughout his life," says Mello e Souza, who retired from USP

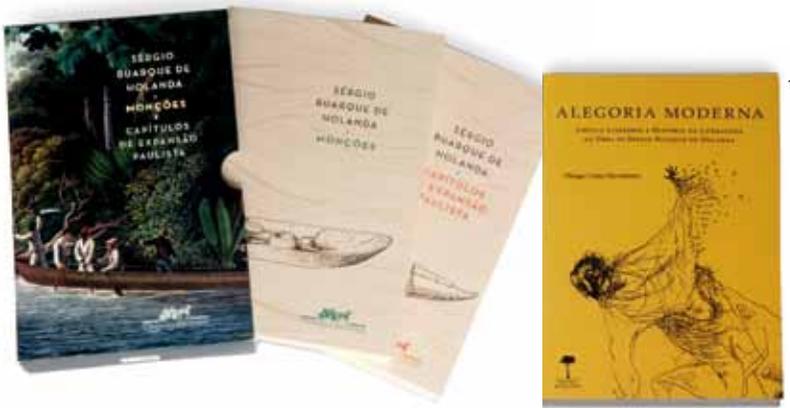


For decades, Sérgio Buarque de Holanda dreamed of rewriting *Monções*, his book on the westward expansion from São Paulo State during the colonial period

in 2014 and currently holds the the History of Brazil chair at the University of Paris-Sorbonne. “Probably because he was a perfectionist and held himself to a very high standard, he could never complete this task.” One less plausible hypothesis is that the historian became bored with the topic, and he gave up the task at the end of his life.

Of the six original chapters that make up *Monções*, Buarque de Holanda managed to rewrite the first (“*Os caminhos do sertão*” [Backland roads]), the second (“*O transporte fluvial*” [River transport]) and the fifth (“*As estradas móveis*” [Mobile highways]). In addition to undergoing changes in style, the three chapters were lengthened by the addition of new data and documentation collected by the historian; these chapters were lengthened by 40, 17 and 37 pages, respectively. Only the new version of the book’s first chapter, “*Os caminhos do sertão*,” published as an article in the journal *Revista de História* in 1964, was completely finished, including a full bibliography. In March 2014, as the research was almost complete, Cerqueira found the original versions of the two rewritten chapters of *Monções* among documents in the *Coleção Sérgio Buarque de Holanda* (Sérgio Buarque de Holanda Collection) at the Cesar Lattes Central Library of the University of Campinas (Unicamp).

Monções may be the most representative example of Buarque de Holanda’s incessant quest to update and improve his books in response to new documents or interpretations of historical events. Paradoxically, despite his best efforts, the historian was able to rewrite the book only partially. “In the 1970s, after having located a lot of material on the expansion westward from São Paulo and reworking some sections of *Monções*, Buarque de Holanda decided to write another book on the



Book on the formative years of Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (left) and the new edition of *Monções*: the scholar's writings revisited

and lodging for trips to Rio de Janeiro – the main location of important public archives such as the National Library and the Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro (Brazilian Historical and Geographical Institute) – and to Cuiabá, where he would do “meticulous research in the archive of manuscripts held in the Mato Grosso State Library and Public Archives.” With this new field research, Buarque de Holanda believed that he would have what he needed to produce a revised second edition of *Monções*. There was some urgency in producing an updated version of the book. In his request for support, the historian confirms that the first edition had been sold out for some time. He had only one copy of it himself.

In justifying funding for the project, Buarque de Holanda wrote in the script of the time “that the planned research, aimed at clarifying some of the more important aspects related to how Brazil was unified through the connecting of the Plata and Amazonas river basins, would also help to explain Brazil’s formation, illuminating the present through a study of the past.”

Buarque de Holanda’s timeline for the work is ambitious. He says that, “barring unforeseen events,” the fieldwork would be completed in 1965, and the new edition of the book would be ready by mid-1966. The second version of *Monções* would be published by Livraria José Olímpio, in its *Coleção Documentos Brasileiros* (Brazilian Documents Collection), according to the historian. In

topic instead of rewriting this one,” says Cerqueira. The draft of this other book included the incomplete and undigested texts that became the work cited above, *O extremo Oeste*.

PAGES OF WRITINGS FROM A NOTEBOOK

As the daughter of Antonio Candido and Gilda de Mello e Souza, who were friends of the Holanda family in São Paulo, Laura De Mello e Souza had frequent opportunities to visit the Holanda family thanks to this close relationship. She remembers once visiting the historian alone, and, in the course of their conversation, Buarque de Holanda, seated in his armchair in his living room, pulled out from his pocket several pages from a notebook that contained notes he had written and rewritten by hand over time. “He showed me the pages and explained that this was how he wrote,” Mello e Souza remembers. “I grabbed the chance and asked what he was writing. He answered that he was rewriting *Monções*.” Drafting was not an easy process for Buarque de Holanda, who might take up to a week before he was comfortable with the final version of a paragraph, as Mello e Souza recalls in the preface of the new edition of *Monções*.

Buarque de Holanda was obsessed with the idea of rewriting this book for approximately 40 years, according to Mello e Souza and Cerqueira. In 1965, the already famous historian and USP professor, at the age of 62, made a plan to move forward with this personal goal. He produced a proposal and sent a typed

two-page letter to FAPESP, which three years before had begun operations on the 14th floor of a building on the Paulista avenue. Mello e Souza and Cerqueira reproduce, in its entirety, Buarque de Holanda’s request for a new edition of *Monções* (FAPESP authorized this after obtaining the consent of Buarque de Holanda’s children). Dated January 29, 1965, the letter is a defense of his plan to collect more data and documentation on river navigation between São Paulo and Cuiabá during the colonial period, an undertaking that the historian estimated would take approximately 18 months.

The proposal was essentially intended to cover expenses related to travel, food

Printed invitation from the University of Rome to a lecture given by Sérgio Buarque de Holanda: the historian lived in Italy from 1952 to 1954



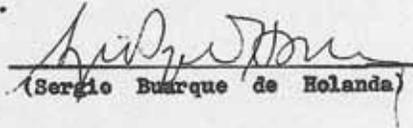
S. Paulo, 29.I.1965

Senhor Diretor

O projeto de pesquisa para o qual tomo a liberdade de pleitear auxílio da Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de S. Paulo tem em mira o levantamento e coleta de fontes visando ao estudo da navegação fluvial entre S. Paulo e o extremo-ocidente brasileiro nos séculos XVIII e XIX. Com esse fito é necessária a realização de acurada pesquisa no acervo manuscrito da Biblioteca e Arquivo Público do Estado de Mato Grosso, com sede em Cuiabá, assim como da Biblioteca Nacional -- "arquivo do Morgado de Mateus" --, do Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Bra-

cebidos em microfilmes, já foi iniciada há algum tempo. Tratando-se, por outro lado, de trabalho de cunho estritamente pessoal, torna-se impossível e aparentemente dispensável a indicação de um substituto ou mesmo de um auxiliar.

Encaminhando a Vossa Excelência o pedido de inscrição, devidamente preenchido, assim como a súmula do orçamento indispensável e um exemplar de obra acima mencionada, subscrevo-me com elevado apreço e consideração.



(Sérgio Buarque de Holanda)

Excerpts from the 1965 request for research funding sent to FAPESP by the historian: the proposal received the equivalent of R\$8,400

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Attn: To the Director of FAPESP

Dear Sir,

The research project for which I am taking the liberty of requesting funding from the São Paulo Research Foundation is focused on gathering sources of information that pertain to river navigation between São Paulo and the far west of Brazil in the 18th and 19th centuries. Toward this aim, meticulous research in the archive of manuscripts held in the Mato Grosso State Library and Public Archives, located in Cuiabá, as well as at the National Library – “Morgado de Mateus Archives” – and the Brazilian Historical and Geographical Institute will be needed (...)

(...) received in microfilm, begun some time ago.

As this is strictly a personal matter, however, it is impossible and seemingly unnecessary to indicate a substitute or even an assistant. I am attaching my request for registration, duly completed, as well as a summary of the necessary funding and an excerpt from the work mentioned above, and with sincere appreciation for your support, I remain Sincerely yours,

Sérgio Buarque de Holanda

response to his request, project number 65/0223-4 was approved in June 1965 and received funding from FAPESP in the amount of 550,000 cruzeiros, which is currently about R\$8,400 in reais, according to the conversion rate found on the Central Bank of Brazil's website.

However, certain unforeseen events occurred. For reasons that are still not completely understood today, Buarque de Holanda never managed to finish the new version of his book. He did produce some writings about the westward expansion from São Paulo, based on material collected not only during his trips to the former national capital and the State of Mato Grosso but also during visits to Paraguay and Portugal. Although the book was not rewritten in the way the historian initially wanted, new versions of *Monções* were published. A second edition, with almost the same content as the 1945 version, was published in 1976. A third version, yet another remix of the original version, with the addition of an appendix containing the three rewritten chapters, reached the market in 1990.

The current edition represents the fourth version of the original work. “When he died, I think he was working on some rewrites,” says Sérgio Buarque de Holanda Jr., known as Sergito, who is a retired professor from the USP School of Economics, Business Administration and Accounting (FEA), and one of the historian's seven children. “But, he didn't talk a lot about his work with his children.”

FORMATIVE YEARS AS A LITERARY CRITIC

Thiago Lima Nicodemo – who earned his undergraduate and graduate degrees from USP and, since 2014, has been a professor at Rio de Janeiro State University (UERJ) – is an historian of the new generation who has been studying the work of Buarque de Holanda for the last 15 years. He agrees that the professor was always extending, editing and amending his writings. “He wanted to create a coherent intellectual legacy,” says Nicodemo. “He was a true perfectionist.” According to Nicodemo, Buarque de Holanda tried to reinforce the historical nature of his oldest work, the

predominant tone of which had been influenced by his perspective as a literary critic and essayist, by including notes and documents taken from new publications and archives. “After publishing *Monções*, Buarque de Holanda rewrote *Raízes do Brasil* with this concern in mind,” he says. “In subsequent versions of the book, he attempted to water down the essay style of *Raízes*, generating more cohesion with his new perspective as a professional historian.”

In 2008, Nicodemo published a book on Buarque de Holanda's intellectual

journey over the course of the 1950s, after Holanda wrote *Visão do paraíso*. This month, he is publishing another book on Holanda, *Alegoria moderna – Crítica literária e história da literatura na obra de Sérgio Buarque de Holanda* (Modern Allegory – Literary Criticism and the History of Literature in the Works of Sérgio Buarque de Holanda) (Editora FAP-Unifesp, 384 pages). In this book, he focuses on the historian's formative years – it would be more accurate to say decades – that laid the groundwork for his works as a literary critic and steadily pushed him to the boundaries of history. *Alegoria moderna* grew out of research Nicodemo conducted for his dissertation at USP, supported by funding from FAPESP, in the early 2010s. "I analyzed the relationship between Buarque de Holanda's output of literary criticism and historical writings, using, as core documents, articles published in newspapers like *Diário de Notícias* and *Diário Carioca*, and works published between 1940 and 1961," says Nicodemo, who also works as a researcher at the Institute of Brazilian Studies (IEB) at USP.

Before he finally embraced the work of research in archives and the search for sources and documents on which he could base his historical research on

Brazil, Buarque de Holanda worked as a journalist, essayist and literary critic. Since the 1920s, when he was active as a militant in the modernist movement in São Paulo and became friends with Mário de Andrade, he had become interested in writing, an activity to which he would dedicate himself two decades later. "In the 1940s, he wrote literary criticism to survive, publishing the most between 1948 and 1952," says Nicodemo. When he accepted the History of Brazilian Civilization chair at USP in 1958, his activities as a literary critic, which had been decreasing during the preceding years, came to a definitive stop, according to Nicodemo.

While conducting research, Nicodemo spent some time in Italy, where Buarque lived between 1952 and 1954 and where he taught at the University of Rome. In Italy, the literary critic who was becoming a historian came into contact with archives and bibliographical sources that were useful to him in his work analyzing literary texts produced in the Portuguese colony. "Many of the poetic forms used by Luso-Brazilian authors in the 17th and 18th centuries originated in Italy, as is the case, for example, of the arcade movement," says the UERJ researcher.

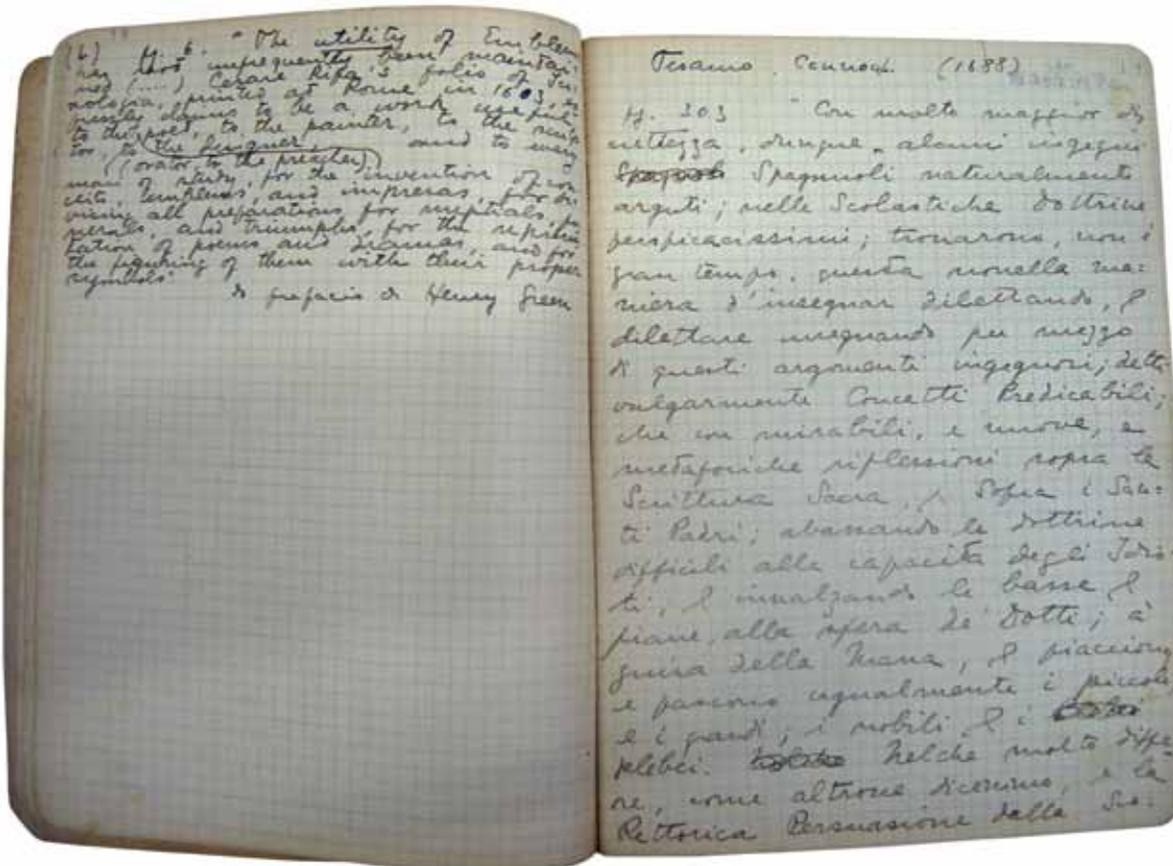
New editions of books by Buarque de Holanda, and more books about the lit-

erary critic and historian, are expected to appear soon. Pedro Meira Monteiro, a full professor at Princeton University, where he teaches classes in Latin American studies with a specific emphasis on Brazilian literature, is preparing a biography of Buarque de Holanda. Monteiro, who edited a book of correspondence between Buarque de Holanda and Mário de Andrade in 2012, is also working with anthropologist Lilia Schwarcz of USP on an annotated critical edition of *Raízes do Brasil*. Buarque de Holanda's most well-known work turns 80 in 2016. If *Monções* deserved a shiny new version when it reached its 70th birthday, the 80th birthday of the most classic work of one of the most important Brazilian thinkers of all time is a good reason to get reacquainted with his life and work. ■

Projects

1. *A sense of the past: history and literary criticism in the works of Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (1940-1961)* (2006/50659-5); **Grant Mechanism** Fellowships in Brazil – Doctoral; **Principal Investigator** Raquel Glezer (FFLCH-USP); **Recipient** Thiago Lima Nicodemo (FFLCH-USP); **Investment** R\$133,153.80.

2. *River navigation between São Paulo and Cuiabá in the XIX and XX centuries* (65/0223-4); **Grant Mechanism** Regular Research Grant; **Principal Investigator** Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (USP); **Investment** 550,000 cruzeiros, currently about R\$8,400.



Research notes of Sérgio Buarque de Holanda from his Italian period: an important phase in his life during which he came into contact with archival and bibliographical sources