

## Foreword

This dossier, "Reflections on Minas Gerais and the Modern Epoch," is centered on the parish as a methodological category and, specifically, on the jurisdiction and population making up the Parish of Our Lady of the Pillar of Ouro Preto. It results from the joint efforts of Professor Adalgisa Arantes Campos (responsible for the elaboration of the data bank covering the 18th- and 19th-century parish registers of Our Lady of the Pillar, Professor Douglas Libby (Director, Center for Studies of Minas Gerais) and of Renato Franco, a research assistant and graduate student who supervised the distribution of data to a number of the authors.

The objective here is to bring to light some of the information available in the data bank, a rich source for future research. The present publication is yet another result of a wider project financed by federal and state scientific agencies, as well as this University.

Work on the data bank began back in late 1998 at the Casa dos Contos in Ouro Preto which took on the enormous task of microfilming the printed and manuscript documentation produced by the city's two parishes. During the last six years the project has counted upon many participants, some temporary, others who still stick with it, among them colleagues, graduate students and undergraduates. At the moment the entire series of baptismal registers has been completed, while the death and marriage registers are still being processed.

The Parish Archive of Our Lady of the Pillar has been lent an institutional and legal home thanks to the Museum of Sacred Art of Ouro Preto. Its holdings, which are reasonably complete and well preserved, relate to the various activities carried out by the clergy responsible for the Parish over the centuries and can be considered among the most important of those relating to Colonial and Imperial Brazil. Particularly noteworthy are the baptismal, marriage and death registers which are nearly complete and, therefore, attract interested scholars.

Since they lend themselves to so-called 'serial interpretation, parish registers have been the focus of a number of recent historiographical tendencies. The wealth of information contained in the registers can be used in a variety of ways and tell us a great deal about individuals, family rela-

tionships and the social fabric of the community, about what is specific to and what is representative of a given period in history. The parish is thus a category which allows for the recuperation of both horizontal and vertical human relations. It is both closed and open to the outside world, functioning as an intermediate instance of political/administrative, economic and cultural/religious institutions. The parish lays down roots in a fixed geographical territory and in a space defined by social and symbolic relations. For that very reason the parish nurtures any number of approaches to the study of history, whether they be those based on historical demography or those focusing on the sacred practices and representations so dear to scholars of religious experiences or of the history of the Roman Catholic Church during the Modern Epoch.

Sources produced within or related to the jurisdiction of colonial Vila Rica or 19th-century Ouro Preto have long been central to writing the history of Minas Gerais. Rarely have studies dealing with Minas in the pre-Republican period been able to ignore the documentation produced and/or housed in the former capital. We expect that the Parish Register of Our Lady of the Pillar will now also become an important reference point for future studies.

Our thanks to the authors whose so generously contributed their time and energy and whose article are of excellent quality. The articles deal with diverse fields of historical knowledge: demography, politics, mentality and religion. They all had the parish as their starting point, even when the specific data base of Our Lady of the Pillar was not utilized. The parish, then, binds together this dossier.

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