BOOK CLUB | JOÃO DO RIO* | AS RELIGIÕES NO RIO | 19TH MAY, 6.30-9PM

JOÃO DO RIO* (1881-1921)
* pen name of PAULO BARRETO (João Paulo Emílio Cristóvão dos Santos Coelho Barreto)

As Religiões no Rio (1904?)
translated into English as
Religions in Rio (2015)

João do Rio’s ‘biography’ of Rio de Janeiro as a multi-faith hub is a must-read book!

João do Rio: a celebrated flâneur, cultural archaeologist, socio-cultural anthropologist, historian-reporter extraordinaire, novelist, playwright, essayist and literary translator.

Rio captures the essence of Rio's belle époque at a time of swift metamorphoses and its vibrant, relatively autonomous and creative popular culture.

As the 2016 Rio Olympic and Paralympic Games approach, read the best guide to the spiritual side of Rio: churches and temples, worshipers of nature in its many guises, religious movements featuring wizards, fetishists, exorcists, Swedenborgians, fortune tellers, Orishas, and pais-de-santo ....and many more along with its peddlers, marketeers and profiteers.

One of the earliest translators of Oscar Wilde’s The Portrait of Dorian Gray serialized in A Noite from 21st June 1911 & book format 1923 & also Salome.

DETAILS OF AVAILABLE PUBLICATIONS:

ENGLISH


New London Librarian: Hannover


PORTUGUESE

FREE DOWNLOADS:


Various editions available in Brazil.

SHORT HISTORY OF THE BOOK AND TRANSLATIONS

As Religiões no Rio appeared in book format in 1904. João do Rio had published a series of chronicles in the newspaper Gazeta de Noticias in Rio. Gazeta de Noticias was founded in Brazil in 1875, and in 1901 it was modernized becoming one of the leading newspapers reflecting aspirations of the Rio de Janeiro society at the dawn of the 20th century. Paulo Barreto was recommended by the then deputy Nilo Peçanha (1867-1924, a mulatto, later Governor of Rio 1903-6, Vice-President of Brazil in 1906 and President in 1909 following the
death of President Afonso Pena (1847-1909)). Paulo Barreto started his work for the newspaper revising the texts. From 1903 he edited columns for his newspaper, e.g. *A Cidade (The City)*, *Cinematógrafo (Cinematograph)*, *Os dias passam (The days go by)* and *As religiões no Rio (The religions in Rio)* under various pen names.

Paulo Barreto adopted João do Rio as his name from 26th November 1903, signing an article, *O Brasil Lê*, in the *Gazeta de Notícias*. The young journalist would walk the streets of Rio, which were undergoing a massive transformation instigated by the modern ideas of its mayor. Very much like Machado de Assis and Lima Barreto in Rio and Charles Dickens in London, he would walk in the city, enquiring and perceiving the multiple facets of his city and people in every nook and cranny in Rio urban areas. He would explore the entrails, the cavernous haunts of capital city of Brazil uncovering unexpected and curious features of the various religions, which coexisted with the official Catholic faith and thrived there at that time.

If one read the contemporary newspapers, the impression would be that Brazil was essentially a Catholic country with some mathematicians following the Religion of Humanity, a secular religion created by the founder of Positivism. However, there were swarms of religions, a vast diversity of sects and cults. If one cared to enquire at any bar on any corner of 1900s Rio, one
would be directed to a plethora of places of worship. One would be astounded by the findings: Swedenborgians, literary pagans, physiolaters, defenders of exotic dogmas, life reformers, future tellers, Devil lovers, blood drinkers, descendants of the Queen of Sheba, Jews, Muslims, Schismatics, Spiritualists, Babalawos from Lagos, female ocean worshippers, priests and priestesses dispensing potions and concoctions to sort any and every malady physical or spiritual.

The series As religiões no Rio (The religions in Rio) was allegedly partly inspired by his reading of Les Petites Religions de Paris (1894) by Jules Antoine Henri Bois (1868-1943) but also his own family’s Religion of Humanity.

The chapters in the book format contain an interlocutor, who acts as a guide for the author and there are exchanges between the narrator/author and the tour guide-like character, a very innovative device in chronicle narratives. The original also brings an introduction which begins with a quotation from Essays by Michel Eyquem de Montaigne (1533 – 1592) rendered as ‘Cecy est un livre de bonne foy’, the author’s manner of conveying the ‘C’EST icy un livre de bonne foy, lecteur’. Some scholars have pointed out that it was Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891), founder of Theosophy, born in Ukraine (under the Russian Empire), who quoted Montaigne in a similar way, Lecteur, ceci est un livre de bonne Foy.
In his introduction, João do Rio gives the reader a brief account of how he tried to unveil parts of the mystery in which religious beliefs in the city of Rio flourish and hastens to add that his work merely skims the surface. He highlights the fact that it should be possible to produce a large volume on this matter with further revelations. He describes his work as incomplete quoting Montaigne. He closes the introduction by repeating the same epigraph. He dedicates the work to ‘Manuel Jorge de Oliveira Rocha, my friend’, known as ‘Rochinha’, a Portuguese national that settled in Rio, who launched the evening newspaper A Notícia in September 1894.

The author opens his foreword with a question, ‘A religião? (The religion?)’ and proceeds to answer it pondering on the mysterious feelings, which faith and beliefs generate in humans, leading every preacher to say that his particular religion or confession has the real and only Truth. He adds that Rio, as every other city in those times of irreverence, had a temple on every street and every man had a different belief. In pursuing his journey of discovery of religions, he states that he encountered kindness, evil and the bizarre, which could be interpreted as a subtle hint regarding the content of the book. The introduction, regrettably, does not appear in the translation into English.

Unsurprisingly, this book generated considerable polemic at the time. It was received with huge acclaim by some and scorned by others in equal measure. The introduction seems to address this partially by making reference to reactions when it was published in newspaper series (see full text below). It became a publishing success with various reprints, but gradually fell into oblivion until a relatively recent renewed interest.
Recent interest focuses upon what João do Rio was recording, namely, histories of various religions practices at the start of the 20th century Rio de Janeiro, the most famous capital in South America as a social/cultural anthropologist and as a historian of ideas. It should be noted that little had been published on the matter in Brazil until João do Rio did.

For example, the legal-medical views of Raimundo Nina Rodrigues (1862-1906), regarded as the founding father of African-Brazilian studies in Brazil, was influenced by Italian thinkers and emerging views on race worldwide. Nina Rodrigues was a Brazilian psychiatrist, forensic medical doctor and anthropologist, ethnographer, who introduced anthropological criminology and Phrenology to Brazil and published *O animismo fetichista dos*
negros baianos in 1900 and Os Africanos no Brasil published posthumously in 1932.


As Religiões no Rio has been overlooked by translators. In 2015, a first English translation appeared thanks to the translation sponsorship programme of the National Library of Brazil (FBN), the seventh largest library in the world and the largest in Latin America with a fascinating history. Its origins date back to 1755, the fateful year Lisbon suffered a violent earthquake with much damage and huge losses (Voltaire’s Candide refers to it). At the time, the Portuguese Royal Library was regarded as one of the most important European libraries so a decision was made to move it to Brazil. Some 60,000 volumes were brought in three stages, the first being in 1810 and two in 1811. https://www.bn.br/

Translated into English as Religions in Rio by Ana Lessa-Schmidt, it was published by the New London Librarium, a small literary press in Hanover, Connecticut, US, in bilingual format in 2015. It contains an introduction by the sociologist and professor Reginaldo Prandi (1946) but omits the original foreword by João do Rio. Notes to the chapters appear at the end of the book.
Ana (Cláudia) Lessa-Schmidt, born in Rio, grew up in the Amazon, and has lived in the UK since 2004. She holds a BA degree in English Literature from the Federal University of Amazon, an MA in Contemporary British Society and a PhD in Brazilian Cultural Studies (Protest Music during the dictatorship) and also teaches at the Federal University of Amazon. She has been working as a Senior Editor Translator to New London Librarium (NLL) and Glenn Cheney since 2014. She is also translating another book by João do Rio Vertiginous Life. She translated of one short story Trio in A Minor in the Machado de Assis short story selection Ex-Cathedra as well.

Ana Lessa-Schmidt mentions the fact that it was Fábio Lima, from the Brazilian National Library, who convinced her to translate João do Rio and she chose As Relições no Rio ‘because of its theme and diversity of religions and perspectives offered of a Rio de Janeiro most Brazilian don’t recognise’.

The fact that the translated text appears side by side with the original has various advantages for bilingual readers or those who are learning Portuguese. The whole text would benefit from a thorough revision as various errors were not edited out. In addition, the splitting of syllables has probably been made automatically, which leaves the reader with a niggling feeling detrimental to the enjoyment of reading, as syllables are repeatedly split in the wrong place on the same page. The New London Librarium would need to engage a third party reader to weed out errors before printing the translations.

SHORT BIOGRAPHY

JOÃO DO RIO / PAULO BARRETO (1881-1921)
JOÃO PAULO EMÍLIO CRISTÓVÃO DOS SANTOS COELHO BARRETO
João Paulo Emílio Cristóvão dos Santos Coelho Barreto was born in Rio de Janeiro on 5th August 1881 and died in Rio de Janeiro at a young age on 23rd June 1921. He was a pioneering journalist, chronicler and historian, short story writer, novelist, playwright, essayist and translator.

His father Alfredo Coelho Barreto, a mathematics and astronomy teacher, from a traditional family from the State of Rio Grande do Sul, founder of the Apostolic Positivist Church and his mother was Florência Cristóvão dos Santos Barreto, a mulatta, daughter of the Director of the Santa Casa de Misericórdia Clinic in Rio. João do Rio was baptized as a positivist by his father in 1883 and his godfather was a famous philosopher and mathematician, a positivist Raimundo Teixeira Mendes (1855 – 1927), credited with creating the national motto ‘Order and Progress’. The author had a brother Bernardo, who died at the age 12.

João o Rio started his journalist career in 1899 and wrote for O Paiz, O Dia, Correio Mercantil and various other newspapers and journals under various pen names. As a mulatto or black, he becomes ‘whitened’ by the literary circles which he inhabits. A diatribe with the author Lima Barreto (1881-1922), also a blac, engaged, ends up portraying João do Rio as a caricature via the character Raul de Gusmão in his novel Recordações do Escrivão Isaías Caminha (1909).

João do Rio publishes his As Religiões do Rio in 1904. He was elected to the Brazilian Academy of Letters, patron of the Chair 26 in 1910. His A Alma Encantadora das Ruas (1908 The beguiling soul of the streets) is written from the perspective of a flâneur and innovates in merging report writing with chronicling recording the multiple facets of an imagined belle époque Rio de Janeiro. He also introduced interviews with the leading Brazilian writers from May 1905, published in O Momento Literário by Garnier in 1907.
Not only did João do Rio translate The Portrait of Dorian Gray (1890/1) by Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), one of the earliest translations serialized in A Noite from 21st June 1911, which appeared in book format in 1923 published by Garnier, he was a keen promoter of Oscar Wilde’s works in Brazil. He also translated Salome.

There is a translator’s note in his rendering of The Portrait of Dorian Gray in Portuguese (see highlighted below) in which he argues that translating is service and that it is always lesser than the original. The date is 1919 and he indicates that he was in London. Certainly, a most relevant source for the historiography of literary translations.
João do Rio travelled abroad extensively: France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, England, Germany, Greece, Turkey, Russia, Jerusalem, Egypt and Argentina. He also reported on Versailles Peace Treaty.

He founded various literary and cultural magazines and, in 1917, The Brazilian Society of Theatre Authors (Sociedade Brasileira de Autores Teatrais, SBAT) and served as its first chairman.

The author died in a taxi in the streets of Catete prematurely on 23rd June 1921 on the way to work. His funeral gathered some one hundred thousand people (a fifth of the Rio population at the time) – a true celebrity funeral. His mother donated his whole library to the Real Gabinete Português de Leitura, a most distinguished intellectual library in Rio de Janeiro founded in 1837, which received it and there is an excellent 2010 article by F. C. de Azevedo describing this (http://www.scielo.br/pdf/pci/v15n3/13.pdf).
Main works: As religiões do Rio (1904), Chic-chic (1906 comedy play); A última noite (1907 play); O momento literário, inquérito (1907); A alma encantadora das ruas (1908); Cinematógrafo (1909); Dentro da noite (1910, short stories); Vida vertiginosa (1911); Os dias passam (1912); A bela Madame Vargas (1912, play); A profissão de Jacques Pedreira (1913, novel); Eva (1915, comedy play, praised by Oswald de Anndrade); Crônicas e frases de Godofredo de Alencar (1916); No tempo de Wenceslau (1916); A correspondência de uma estação de cura (2 vols., 1918, novel); Na Conferência da Paz, inquérito (1919); A mulher e os espelhos (1919, short story); Rosário da Ilusão (1921, short story).

Further details on the following websites:
http://bndigital.bn.br/projetos/expo/decadentismo/joaodorio01.htm

Attendance is free, but booking is essential:
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