



JOAQUIM FERREIRA DOS SANTOS, A PORTUGUESE TRADER OF ENSLAVED AFRICAN PEOPLES

Aurora Almada e Santos

Joaquim Ferreira dos Santos was a Portuguese merchant whose fortune and social status increased as a consequence of his participation in the Atlantic trade of enslaved African peoples. Like many of his contemporaries, he emigrated to Brazil where he engaged in triangular trade, supplying enslaved Africans to the Brazilian market. After returning to Portugal, he donated his fortune, cultivating the image of a benefactor.

Emigration to Brazil

When he was born on 4 October 1782, in Porto, Northern Portugal, Joaquim Ferreira dos Santos, the son of modest farmers João Ferreira dos Santos and Ana Martins da Luz, was by no means a member of the Portuguese upper class. His involvement in the Atlantic trade of enslaved peoples would change this situation and by the time of his death on 24 March 1866, he held the title of First Count of Ferreira and was a man with close connections to the crown.

Joaquim Ferreira dos Santos' initial path did not differ from many other poor Portuguese, having attended a Catholic seminary, followed by a career as a shop assistant in Porto. From this city, he emigrated in 1800 to Brazil, then a Portuguese colony. With the help of a relative, in Rio de Janeiro, he engaged in consignment, shipping Brazilian goods (sugar, brandy, leather, coffee, and rice) to Porto and selling Portuguese products (wine, salt, hats, appliances, and adornments) in Brazil.

Triangular trade

This small-scale operation would evolve into a vast commercial network, involving other Portuguese cities like Lisbon, but also African territories, namely Angola. He headed a triangular trade network centred in Rio de Janeiro and, besides the exchange of Portuguese and Brazilian goods, dos Santos also dispatched merchandise (fabrics, hardware, gunpowder, brandy, wine, and appliances) to Luanda and Cabinda, where his ships embarked captives in order to supply Brazil with a servile labour force to ensure the country's plantation economy.



By the time the slave trade in the Portuguese colonies was affected by British attempts to end trafficking, dos Santos had traded an estimated number of over 10,000 captives. He secured high profits from his activity, investing in debt securities in countries like France, Belgium, Russia, and Spain, marine insurance, rental buildings, and plantations. As a direct consequence of his role in the trade of enslaved peoples, he received the *Hábito da Ordem de Cristo* (Habit of the Order of Christ), a high honorific distinction, from the Portuguese King D. João VI, who had been living in Brazil since 1808, after escaping Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion of Portugal.

With the proclamation of Brazil's independence on 7 September 1822 by D. Pedro, son of the Portuguese King D. João VI, dos Santos took Brazilian nationality. His wealth brought him social status and close connections with the inner circle of the Brazilian Emperor D. Pedro I, from whom he received additional honorific titles. However, the independence of Brazil would have an impact on dos Santos' activity as a trader since the new country and the United Kingdom signed an agreement according to which Brazilians could not, from 13 March 1830 onwards, engage in the trade of enslaved peoples. When the authorities found captives in his warehouse following abolition, and with increased hostility against Portuguese merchants in Brazil, dos Santos returned to Portugal on 8 September 1832.

The image as benefactor

In Portugal, the political situation had been unstable since the first French invasion in 1807. The widespread dissatisfaction with the royal family's relocation to Brazil, combined with the presence of British troops in Portugal and economic difficulties, led to the Liberal Revolution of 1820. The death of King D. João VI in 1826 triggered a succession crisis opposing the heir, the Brazilian Emperor D. Pedro I – who intended to abdicate to his daughter D. Maria –, and his brother D. Miguel. When dos Santos arrived in Portugal, the crisis was ongoing and he sided with D. Pedro I, giving monetary assistance to D. Maria who would rule Portugal from 1834 until 1853.

For some time, dos Santos continued to have business with Brazil, investing also in Portugal in agriculture, banking, and the export of Port wine to the United Kingdom, amongst other activities. In the context of new political upheavals in Portugal in January 1842, he supported the rise to power of António Bernardo da Costa Cabral, who became Minister of the Kingdom. His support of Costa Cabral earned him several titles, including Peer of the Kingdom, which allowed him to have a seat at the Chamber of Peers, the second chamber of the Portuguese parliament. Later, he received the titles of Viscount and Baron, culminating with the First Count of Ferreira in 1850. Under the



Costa Cabral government, he benefited from large investments in tobacco, soap, gunpowder, banking, and public works.

Dos Santos' participation in Portuguese political life faded with the replacement of Costa Cabral in 1851. At the time of his death in 1866, as he had no descendants, he donated his fortune, cultivating the image of a benefactor. His will allowed for the establishment of one-hundred-and-twenty primary schools, seventy of which still exist today, as well as donations to asylums, hospitals, confraternities, and houses of mercy in Porto and Rio de Janeiro. He also established a psychiatric hospital that still operates today, bearing his name.

Translated by Emma Lingwood



About the author

Aurora Almada e Santos is a researcher at the Contemporary History Institute of the New University of Lisbon, a leading institution in the study of Portuguese contemporary history. Her main research interest is Portuguese decolonization, namely the international dimension of the struggle for self-determination and independence of the Portuguese African colonies. Her current research activities include the publishing of articles and book chapters, the organization of publications and conferences, as well as the teaching of courses relating to African history.

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Illustrations



Portrait of Joaquim Ferreira dos Santos, Count of Ferreira, Museu da Misericórdia do Porto, Portugal, Wikimedia Commons.



Portrait painting of Joaquim Ferreira dos Santos, First Count of Ferreira, 19th century, The Picture Art Collection, Alamy Stock Photo.



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