

**Title: The Emperor's new clothes: Pedro I of Brazil in royal ceremonial dress**

**Author: Prof. Dr. Maria Cristina Volpi**

**Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil**

### **Abstract**

This paper presents a study of the great gala costumes worn by Emperor Dom Pedro I in the ceremonies of acclaim, consecration and coronation in 1822. The question that guided the analysis of these costumes was to understand the meaning of clothing as an expression of identity of the Brazilian nation during an important period of political transition.

By focusing on the symbolic dimension of court ceremonial dress as a symbol of imperial power, we highlight elements that enable us to question both the memory of monarchy and social practices and representations present in Brazilian society of the 19th century.

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### **Introduction**

This paper presents a study of the full gala dress worn by the Emperor of Brazil, Pedro I of Brazil (Queluz, 10/12/1798 - 09/24/1834) during his acclamation, ordination and coronation ceremonies in 1822, as represented in surviving iconography.

The question of the study of dress is related to the processes of civilization, as Gabriel de Tarde, Norbert Elias and Pierre Bourdieu each demonstrated, each in his own way (Tarde [1890] 1993, 348-372, Elias 1993, Bourdieu 1979). The understanding that dressed appearance provides evidence of subjectivities was the grounds for the analysis of the elements that comprise Brazilian court clothing, according to an approach to dress within a "culture of appearances," as proposed by Daniel Roche (1989, 12). Composing appearance is one of the essential purposes of clothing and, in addition to the understanding of its broader historical contexts, dress and its representations constitute expressive values in cultural and aesthetic terms. Thus, the art of dress occupies a strategic place in the court system, applied to the political discourse for varying purposes (Arizzoli-Clémantel, Gorguet Ballesteros 2009, 54-69). The meaning of dress is understood here as the expression of an identity of the Brazilian nation during an important period of political transition.

## The theater of the court and dress appearance

At the beginning of the 19th Century, the majestic dress and male livery of the Royal Court took after the French style (*habit habillé*) – comprising three items (collarless coat, vest and short, knee-length trousers), made of silk or velvet, embroidered with polychromatic silk threads, complete with silk stockings, black shoes and a bicorn hat. This outfit was used in the French court prior to the 1789 Revolution, denoting a certain level of conservatism in the dress sense of this court (Teixeira 1992, 220-225). However, by the latter years of the 18th Century, the more cosmopolitan portion of the Portuguese elite was following the English male fashion, as a result of the growth in parliamentary, military and business careers and a tendency toward simplicity (Mansel 2005, 63-65). Materially, this tendency was evidenced by the frock coat - a new form of male dress originating from the peasant repertoire - made of smooth, dark wool, with a collar, garnished with metal buttons, used over a white vest and woolen or animal hide culottes of another color. Frock coats used with boots, rather than silk stockings and shoes with metal buckles formed the basis of military uniforms that, with the advent of the military monarchy under Napoleon Bonaparte, grew in splendor (Mansel 2005, 78).

## Regal dress at the Imperial Court of Brazil



**Figure 1.** Acclamation of Dom Pedro I. Emperor of Brazil; at St<sup>a</sup> Anna camp, in Rio de Janeiro. Illustration by Jean-Baptist Debret, lithograph by Thierry Frères. Paris, France: Firmin Didot Frères, 1839, 22 x 35,4cm/ 52,6 x 34,6 cm. Collection of the National Library Foundation, Brazil. Inventory n° Icon393054\_180. Public Domain.

Created for the acclamation ceremony, held on October 12, 1822 (Rodrigues 1953, 15) Pedro I of Brazil's regal outfit comprised a full-dress uniform, mantle, sword and imperial insignia. The uniform was of the same style and color – dark blue – as that used by João VI of Portugal at his acclamation. However, the pattern of the embroidery had been altered to represent oak branches, rather than bay laurels – not a random choice, because oak was the symbol of wisdom and strength (Chevalier et al. 1999, 195; 561). White culottes and high riding boots completed the dress.



**Figure 2.** Dom Pedro I. Emperor, and perpetual defender of Brazil. *Engraving by Henrique José da Silva (1772, Lisboa, Portugal - 1834, Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil). 67,8 x 47,2 cm. Brasiliana Collection / Estudar Foundation. Collection of the Pinacoteca of the State of São Paulo. Inventory n° PINA06985. Public Domain.*

The unusual combination of riding boots and the royal mantle inaugurated by Pedro I of Brazil constituted an important break from the traditional Portuguese model. The choice revealed a lot about the personality of the young emperor, his original and active character, bereft of affect and formality. Here we again come across another military aspect represented in the royal dress, that of the vigorous and dynamic nature of Latin American leaders of the time. If this combination of high riding boots and royal mantle was initially regarded as strange, it later became a tradition among the kings of Portugal (Tesouros Reais 1992).

The large, rectangular velvet mantle, measuring 2.50 m by 1.20 m in length had a central opening for the head located four palms' distance from the narrowest edge and it was green with a yellow silk lining, the imperial colors. The colors of independence were established by Decree published on September 18, 1822, under the seal of His Royal Highness, the regent prince Pedro de Alcântara (Brazilian Legislative Chamber. Decree dated 09/18/1822, 9). This choice was due to Pedro I of Brazil's personal preference, but also possibly influenced by Jean-Baptiste Debret, a French bonapartist painter, responsible for drawings of the royal court clothing, since green and gold were also the colors of Napoleon's livery

(Brancion 2004, 247). However, if the two chosen colors unequivocally characterized the emblematic originality of the new nation, green can be at least indirectly attributed to the House of Bragança, as this was the color of the dragon, the heraldic animal symbol of this royal house (Ribeiro 1994, 88), and yellow was a reference to the House of Habsburg-Lothringen, to which Empress Leopoldina belonged (Jurt 2012, 482).



**Figure 3.** Crowns, scepters and coats. Illustration by Jean-Baptist Debret, lithograph by Thierry Frères. Paris, France: Firmin Didot Frères, 1839. 37 x 23,3cm / 52,6 x 34,6 cm. Collection of the National Library Foundation, Brazil. Inventory n° Icon393054\_145. Public Domain

The shape of the mantle, a *poncho* - 'a kind of quadrilateral cape, with an opening for the head, so that it is supported on the shoulders' - was intended to have the Brazilian imperial cloak considered as a typical South American dress, as opposed to the Baroque tradition, which dictated semicircular formats. The origin of this type of mantle and its nomenclature are still

controversial, because the term 'poncho' did not exist in Portuguese dictionaries at the end of the 18th Century. At the beginning of the 19th Century, a cape with this description was called "*berneo*," (Silva; Bluteau 1789, 179) a type of popular dress of Iberian origin, used by muleteers in the hinterlands and the southeast of the country. The mantle was embroidered with a gold decorative pattern of palm leaves and fruits – the symbol of victory and immortality (Chevalier et al. 1999, 680) - and studded with golden, eight-pointed stars about 4 cm across, representing the provinces of the empire.

Over the mantle, there was a ruffled collar with three turns in the Spanish fashion, used by European nobility during the 16th Century, an archaic element with a romantic nuance, complete with pelerine made of Toucan crops, a reference to the extraordinary indigenous capes made of feathers - an object of interest and fascination of the European elite since the era of the Discovery - that were still very common in the 1800s.

In addition to the royal dress itself, the imperial crown and scepter completed the regal dress. Elliptical in shape, as opposed to the Portuguese crown, whose decreasing-width arcs form a curve in S (Tesouros Reais 1992, 128), the crown was decorated with palm branches; the meeting point of the branches was enriched with an armillary *ajour* sphere and on it was a diamond-encrusted *Order of Christ's* cross. Its base was decorated with the arms of Brazil – including flowering coffee and tobacco branches – alternating with

ornamental floral designs. A green velvet cap garnished the inside of the crown. The scepter measured 1.80 m by eighteen centimeters in diameter, topped by the square pedestal mounting a dragon.



**Figure 4.** Crowning of Dom Pedro I. Oil on canvas. Painting by Jean-Baptist Debret. 1828. 390X636 cm. Collection of the Palácio do Itamaraty. Brasília, DF. Brasil. Photo Raylson Ribeiro/MRE.

## Conclusion

As we have seen, contrary to the emperor of the fable (Andersen 2007: 15-21) a vain man, obsessed with his appearance and, therefore, easy prey for opportunists, the strategies employed by Pedro I of Brazil in the elaboration of his royal dress had a well-defined purpose. The dress of the Brazilian royal court, a distinctive and visual element, was necessary for the composition of the ritual that guaranteed the perpetuity of the dynasty and imperial nobility. It is included in the institutional and ritual production of clothing developed for the spectacular functioning of the court microcosm, essential in order to legitimize the new Empire of Brazil, upon independence from Portugal.

The nexus between its uses in Brazil and its relationship with the traditions of the Portuguese Royal Court is clear in the dress of Pedro I of Brazil. The imperial dress articulates colors, material and ornaments, linking aspects of European fashion of the first quarter of the 19th Century, when archaic or exotic decorative elements with clearly recognizable symbology were chosen as a distinctive political strategy. The regal dress of Pedro I of Brazil, Emperor of Brazil, is the result of political and ideological discussions, involving the conservative forces of Portuguese society, refined with both absolutist and more liberal ideals, which believed in a new concept of a world associated with the onset of Modernity

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