

Brazilian Revolts: Tiradentes and Tailors' Rebellion

Joaquim Jose da Silva Xavier, Tiradentes, is known as Martyr of Independence, is one of the greatest heroes of Brazilian History.

Tiradentes was born in 1746, in a village then called Sao Jose (today the city is called Tiradentes), state of Minas Gerais; today, the flag of Minas brings the inscription "Libertas quae sera tamem", latin for "Liberty, even if late", which was the motto of the libertarian movement led by Tiradentes.

Born in a poor family, orphan at age 11, Tiradentes was raised by a tutor, who was a surgeon. The little formal education didn't stop him from working in several fields, including dental medicine; Tiradentes means "tooth puller", a pejorative denomination adopted during the trial against him.

Living in a State rich in gold, Tiradentes used the knowledge he acquired about minerals to enter the public service (he achieved the ranks of *alferes*, low in the hierarchy of the epoch); he was sent to missions in cities along the road between Vila Rica (the capital of Minas Gerais) and Rio de Janeiro; this road was the path followed by most of the gold sent to Portugal.

Tiradentes soon noticed the exploitation to which Brazilians were submitted; he was seeing how much gold was leaving Brazil, and he knew how valuable it was.

His trips to Rio put him in contact with people who had lived in Europe and brought from there the libertarian ideas (the American colonies had become independent in 1776, and France Revolution would be in 1789). In 1788, Tiradentes met Jose Alvares Maciel, son of the governor of Vila Rica, who had just returned from England; they could compare the British industrial progress with the Brazilian colonial poverty. They created a group of freedom aspirers, led by clericals and Brazilians with some social presence, like Claudio Manoel da Costa (staff of government and important writer), Tomas Antonio Gonzaga (staff of government) and Alvarenga Peixoto (eminent businessman); the group propagated their ideas among Brazilians.

At that time, Portugal was hungry for gold at the same time, the gold mines were entering into their decline period. The Brazilians were not meeting the yearly quota of gold which should be sent to the crown; Portugal was pressuring to collect all the due taxes. The days of payment of taxes were called *derrama*.

The plan of Tiradentes was, in a day of *derrama* (when the sentiment of revolt of Brazilians would be stronger), to take the streets of Vila Rica and proclaim the Brazilian Republic. The movement, however, was denounced to the governor, who cancelled the *derrama* scheduled for February of 1789 and ordered the imprisonment of the rebels. The person who denounced the movement was Joaquim Silverio dos Reis; he was a participant of the movement, and betrayed the group in exchange of waiving of his due taxes; his name is carved in Brazilian History as The Betrayer.

Tiradentes still fled to Rio, where he tried to reorganize the movement. Not knowing who had denounced the group, he went to meet Joaquim Silverio dos Reis in Rio; Tiradentes was arrested on May 10th 1789.

The trial lasted almost three years. Tiradentes assumed whole responsibility for the movement. Ten members of the group were sentenced to death; all of them - except Tiradentes - had the sentence, by mercy of the Queen, commuted from death to degradation.

On April 21st 1792 (today the date is national holiday in Brazil), Tiradentes was hung in Rio de Janeiro, where today is Praca Tiradentes. His body was broken apieces. With his blood, a document was written declaring his memory infamous. His head was exposed in Vila Rica. Pieces of his body were exposed in the cities between Vila Rica and Rio, in an attempt to scare the people who had listened to the independence ideas of Tiradentes.