



Reading about science in nineteenth century Brazil: *Revista Popular*, 1859-1862

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Abstract

The aim of this text is to analyze how issues relating to the communication of science to the public were treated in a Brazilian periodical, *Revista Popular*, published by Livraria e Casa Editorial Garnier between 1859 and 1862. The science-related sections are investigated, the prologues are analyzed, the topics included in the magazine's coverage of scientific commissions and expeditions around Brazil are examined, and the authors and editors are identified. The analysis indicates the importance of the periodical's role in divulging information about the potential development of a national science to a broader readership than those who had access to strictly intellectual circles.

Keywords: Livraria e Casa Editorial Garnier; *Revista Popular*; science communication; Brazil.

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On November 1st 1859, a Rio de Janeiro newspaper, *A Marmota*, contained the following advertisement:

Revista Popular
Published by Messrs.
Garnier & brother
69 – Ouvidor street – 69

This magazine appears on the 5th and 20th days of each month. They are combined in a volume, on good paper, typed, of 68 pages, with cover, etc.

The well-chosen articles, and of good quality give this publication the popularity it widely enjoys, especially amongst the ladies, who in its pages may find whatever they wish in terms of instruction and amusement.

Subscribe for 12\$000 rs for six months or 20\$000 for a year,
in the aforementioned shop.¹

Those who pay for a one-year subscription receive free of charge ten tickets for the prize of 600\$ rs. in books from the house as announced elsewhere.²

Launched in January 1859 by Livraria e Casa Editorial Garnier (Dutra, 2005, p.29), *Revista Popular*³ (literally 'Popular Magazine' or 'People's Magazine') served as a direct channel of communication between the publishing house and its customers as part of a strategy to broaden its readership. In a competitive publishing market, bringing out a magazine alongside the books it already published would provide an opportunity to publicize its other titles and give the general public a taste of its published authors (Medeiros, 2006, p.353).

The history of the Garnier bookstore in Brazil began in 1844 when Baptiste Louis Garnier, brother of Hippolyte Garnier, owner of Garnier Frères publishing house and bookstore in Paris, moved to Rio de Janeiro. Baptiste Louis started his activities in Brazil in partnership with his brothers' establishment in Paris, where the Brazilian editions were printed. Garnier gradually started to monopolize the top end of the book market in Brazil and had a central role in spurring the publication of works by its leading men of letters (Dutra, 2005, p.24). Upon creating the magazine, Garnier was investing in a genre that was popular in nineteenth century Europe, mainly for the "possibility of condensing subjects for the communication of encyclopedic knowledge" (Martins, 2005, p.248). At a time when the ideals of progress, the power of science, and the belief in the importance of reading for the people's education prevailed, popular, entertaining and informative publications started to burgeon in the country with the dual functions of instructing and entertaining. For the editors of *Revista Popular*, this was one of its key missions: to satisfy the people's thirst for least a minimum of knowledge in the most varied of subjects. Said they:

In the past, those who learnt to read and write and the four operations had a complete education ... Now it is not so ... One must know a little of everything and not be totally versed in any branch of knowledge. To have in-depth knowledge of all of them is impossible, but to be unfamiliar with the general principles of one is almost worthy of shame (Revista..., 1859c, p.4.)

Published fortnightly and sold by subscription, the magazine was distributed to Brazil's largest cities, as well as Lisbon and Paris. Every quarter, a special volume was edited, so after four years there were 16 such volumes whose pages were numbered sequentially.

The format of *Revista Popular* was 25x17cm. It was illustrated and also contained folded inserts of larger proportions, especially the fashion spreads, always with color illustrations by Anais Collin Toudouze, Jules David and Compté-Calix, well-known French artists (Abreu, 2008, p.22). Indeed, meeting the needs of female readers seemed to be a priority, with an offer of "specific sections such as fashion and home economics" (Miranda, Azevedo, 2009-2010, p.4).

In its first edition, *Revista Popular* had 17 sections: agriculture, chronicle, trade and industry, short stories and narratives, criticism and analysis, descriptions, political economics, emigration and colonization, short biographies, health, learning and education, geography, music, physics and poetry, romance and variety (Miranda, Azevedo, 2009-2010, p.3). Some of these sections related directly to scientific matters, such as industry, health and physics. As of volume two – from the seventh issue onwards – the magazine had a section entitled Natural Sciences, which acquired great significance, and again relates to the issue of education and self-instruction.

There were few advertisements, and only in volumes one and two were there pages set aside for trade in the court: "consultancies, schools, clock repairers, precious metal merchants, hairdressers, printers, bookkeepers, seamstresses, pianists, wine merchants, cobblers, book binders and, particularly, French fashion houses and fabrics" (Abreu, 2008, p.27). The cost of the magazine was not very low: subscription in the court was 6\$000 for three months, 11\$000 for six months and 20\$000 for a year, which indicates that though it touted the word 'popular', the magazine was not actually for a very broad public. It was probably more for the 'enlightened reader', people who might 'support and legitimize national scientific activity'.⁴ Indeed, Eliana Dutra (2005, p.24) argues that Livraria e Casa Editorial Garnier, like other publishers in Latin America, including Maucci in Mexico and Biblioteca de La Nación in Buenos Aires, had its sights set mainly on educated or semi-educated readers.

The rise in the number of educated people in Brazil in the first half of the nineteenth century came in conjunction with a number of institutions created after the arrival of the Portuguese court in Rio de Janeiro in 1808, fostering a favorable environment for the arts and sciences. These institutions, with their links to foreign missions in Brazil and voyages abroad by Brazilian intellectuals, were instrumental in consolidating a group of people keen to develop the country's history and science.

If we analyze the science-related sections of *Revista Popular* and its forewords, identifying the topics relating to commissions and voyages of scientific exploration to Brazil, and revealing "the human faces that gave body and soul" (Nunes, 2001, p.6) to the periodical, we can identify certain aspects of the reading of science in Brazil in the mid-1800s.

“About everything for everyone”: reading about science on the pages of *Revista Popular*

“We write about everything for everyone ... from the oyster that grows in the depths of the ocean to the star that crosses the wide skies, everything covered by human knowledge is our domain” (Revista..., 1859c, p.4).

With these words in the introduction to the first issue of *Revista Popular*, its editors set the tone for how they would address the subject matter in their publication: “about everything for everyone”. This encompassed all aspects of nature, because reading about science at that time meant, as João Luis Lisboa (1991, p.97) has noted, “having access to nature”, even if the definition of nature depended on “several factors of a mental or ideological nature and also of perspective, i.e. according to the peculiarity of each object.”

We can see by the contents of the 16 volumes published that only two contained no articles on science. All the others carried texts on ‘physical and natural sciences’, with many others on topics such as botany, astronomy, electrical light, water, the decimal metric system, microscopy, drought – a variety of subjects that could be classified as scientific.

With a view to divulging scientific news, the magazine reproduced articles published in foreign periodicals, as well as articles deemed of benefit to the Brazilian public translated by scientists or intellectuals. Such was the case of “Magic in the nineteenth century” by Adriano Delonde, included in the Natural Science section of volume two in 1859, reproduced from *Revue Contemporaine*.

There are some notable texts by Emmanuel Liais, a Frenchman who worked at the Observatory of Paris and who, upon the invitation of Emperor Pedro II, moved to Brazil in 1858 to join the commission established to observe the solar eclipse. He was subsequently appointed director of the Imperial Observatory of Rio de Janeiro in 1870. His texts in *Revista Popular* include “Astronomy: periodic variation in the brightness of stars” (Revista..., 1859a), “On the Earth’s atmosphere” (Revista..., 1859a), “Winds and especially general winds” (Revista..., 1860a), and “The latest comet” (Revista..., 1860b).

However, the aims of *Revista Popular* were not restricted to divulging encyclopedic knowledge. The editors were of the view that the world of science should be molded by the idea of ‘useful knowledge’, meaning a close association between theory and practice.

Upon publishing “The key to science” by E. C. Breuer in volume three (Revista..., 1859b), the editors touched on this issue in a footnote in which they introduced the text and reproduced the foreword to the English edition:

As science is the domain of *Revista Popular*, we believe we are rendering a service to our subscribers by offering them some extracts from the excellent work which Dr. E. C. Breuer published under the above title. It is an explanation of everyday phenomena, put within everyone’s grasp, but in which even those versed in science have encountered much that is useful and beneficial. To give an idea of the work, we here transcribe the preface to the English edition: “There is no science more interesting than that which explains the daily phenomena of nature. We see that the sun and the snow are both white, that the rose is of a more or less familiar color, that the leaves of plants are green; but how few are they who have wondered why! We know that a flute produces a musical sound, and a cracked bell a dissonant noise, that fire is hot, ice cold, flame

bright, that water boils under the action of heat, that cold makes things freeze. But when a child stares at us and asks the reason for these phenomena, how many times, unable to answer, do we tell them to be quiet, treating as silly the questions that demonstrate their guileless curiosity! The aim of this book is to resolve over two thousand questions of this kind (which are easier to ask than to answer) in a language that neither exceeds the grasp of a child, nor insults an educated intelligence (p.322).

Despite its length, this citation is justified for explicating the way the magazine defined science. The editors of *Revista Popular* saw it as something that should explain daily phenomena in a more in-depth yet simple manner. It is this perspective that they highlight in the editorial of the first issue when they state that “when we deal with a scientific subject ... and we venture into the domain of a particular science, we do so in terms that everyone will understand. We will have no mysteries reserved for the initiated” (Revista..., 1859c, p.4).

As such, even in its inaugural edition, the periodical published a section on “recreational physics”, containing suggestions of a few fun experiments to awaken scientific curiosity:

A rose that changes color: Take an ordinary rose in full bloom; light a fire and burn a little powdered sulfur in it; expose the rose to the smoke and vapor that rises from it, and it will turn white. Immersed in vinegar, it will return to its natural color.

A way to melt steel and see it in a liquefied state: Put a piece of steel on a fire until it turns red, then pick it up using tongs and use your other hand to move a sulfur candle towards it, and as the two bodies come into contact you will see the steel run like liquid.

How to make a bottle whose liquid leaks when it is uncorked: Make a few holes in the bottom of a bottle then put it in a bowl with water, immersing it up to the neck. Next, fill the bottle with water and close it before removing it from the basin of water. It will not leak, but if it is uncorked, even just slightly, water will come out of the holes in the bottom (Revista..., 1859a, p.185-186).

The editors seem to have been successful in meeting their stated goal of making science usable and of providing enjoyable instruction, because when the magazine celebrated its first anniversary in January 1860, *Jornal do Commercio* newspaper published an article by Alberico Werder in which he congratulated the editors and noted the periodical's importance precisely because of its breadth:

The magazine's board started well and has held firm, and after one year their book has become a veritable book of the people and families. In the court and in the provinces, in the larger homes and in the simplest, *Revista Popular* is the book in which men and women, old and young, statesmen and scholars, tradesmen and industrialists, farm laborers and artisans, seek out and find articles and news that instruct them, divert them and amuse them without tiring them. Indeed it becomes clear that there was a real need for such a book, because not everyone has the time to study the publications in libraries (reproduced in Revista..., 1860b, p.5-6).

Agreeable learning and useful entertainment for all kinds of readers are the most striking aspects of the magazine, according to the author. He sees it as having, in a short space of time, become indispensable reading for many, being embraced by ‘the people and families.’

Revista Popular's goals in the field of science were not limited to passing on news about the latest discoveries or spreading useful knowledge. The editors wanted to ally the use of science with the nation's progress.

A dear issue: national science

Declared in its subtitle as being “informative, scientific, industrial, historical, literary, artistic, biographical, anecdotal, musical, etc., etc.”, *Revista Popular* had the main objective of being a vehicle for informing and entertaining its readers. In the words of its editors, it should “instruct indirectly ... provide gentle instruction” (1859c, p.3). This had to do with the fact that the arts and sciences were understood at the time as a “diverse set of knowledge and activities ... a response to drawing-room curiosity, the entertainment and pleasure of society, but also as the cultivation of the spirit and progress of the nation” (Lisboa, 1991, p.87).

As its editors saw it, it was crucial for the periodical to attempt to build up and divulge national scientific knowledge. For such a young nation as Brazil, it was important to affirm its autonomy and constitute its political, social and cultural identity autonomously. From the perspective of the educated groups of society – *Revista Popular's* producers and readers – if the nation-building project was to succeed, a Brazilian perspective on Brazil must be developed. This is in line with Lorelai Kury's (2001, p.40) analysis that “in a context of affirmation of the imperial elites, the local institutions claimed for themselves the status of producers of knowledge.”

In the late 1850s, when *Revista Popular* was launched – a period of political stability after much internal strife – a movement was gaining ground in the press and literature that expressed the desire to conjure a harmonious image of the nation and to spread it through countless literary and other kinds of periodicals (Freitas, 2002). Brazil's romantic literature was emerging as a potential means for establishing the “very expression of a newly founded nation” upon developing concepts that both “enabled the affirmation of universality” and “particularities”. In Lilia Schwarcz's (1998, p.128) view, romanticism came in response to the “desire to manifest in literature the specificities of a young country against the canons inherited from the mother nation.” At this time, nature was taken “as an emblem of the nation” (Domingues, 2001, p.55) and voyages with different scientific goals were seen by Brazilians as a way of discovering and developing autonomy in the production of knowledge in the country.

As is often the case in nation-building processes, it was proposed that an original language and literature be fostered. However, was it possible to also build national science? It is worth asking, along with Hans Hauge (1996, p.159), whether a national science could exist.

In Brazil, as in France, a source of much inspiration, there was a great affinity between the Romantic movement and the reaction to the Old Regime (Ricúpero, 2004). The Brazilian Institute of History and Geography (Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro, IHGB), which had become the leading center of studies into Brazil, was the hub of this debate. Here, as Marcus Vinicius Freitas (2002) reminds us, there was a program to inscribe a national identity not only on literature and history, but also on the natural sciences. Science was a key element in this process, constituting “part of the discourse about the nation”, as is also proposed by

Heloisa Domingues (2001, p.57), who states that “the natural sciences were also a basis of the IHGB’s discourse in the nineteenth century”.

Indeed, it was amongst the ranks of the IHGB that in the mid-1850s a debate took shape that marked the scientific discussions and actions in the following years. On November 24, 1854, Guilherme Schuch Capanema presented a paper to the institute entitled “What traditions and geological remains lead us to the certainty that there have been earthquakes in Brazil?” Despite its technical nature, the article drew attention for its “emphatic” defense “of the need for greater knowledge of the country on the part of its incipient national science” (Porto Alegre, 2006, p.31). As Capanema (1859, p.139) said:

It is disgraceful that in Brazil, where so much that is good and great is thought, there is yet no attention paid to preparing the elements for scientific exploration, which would serve of such use, not least to be treated with consideration and not with contempt by foreigners, to whom to this day we still owe everything that has been discovered by science about this vast empire. I speak of preparing elements because to have explorers armed with scientific knowledge would be of little service, for these men have a different tongue, different habits and different ways that are very unlike ours ... Many examples we could cite to prove that scientifically the country should be studied by its own people as all cultivated nations have done.

The discussion about the constitution of a national science and the development of a Brazilian perspective on Brazil and its particularities galvanized the institute’s members during the following period. Since the beginning of the decade the institute had gone through a major restructuring, which had resulted in the amendment of its bylaws and an appreciation, within its circles, of the “study of archaeology, ethnography and indigenous languages” (Guimarães, 2001, p.19). It was thought that by so doing its “own people” – i.e. Brazilians – would gain a better understanding of their land. Brazil’s natural heritage “would come to serve as a pillar for the educated elite to define which things could be designated as national. At the same time that Brazil’s natural history and its direct representatives – the indigenous peoples – were defined as its national emblems, this same natural history started to be known as material and scientific learning matter” (Kodama, 2005, p.28).

With the aim of “putting into practice the ideas of what a national science might look like” (Kury, 2001, p.31), at a meeting on May 30, 1856, the institution’s third vice-president, doctor Manoel Ferreira Lagos, recommended the constitution of a scientific commission manned only by Brazilians to travel round and describe the nation and to collect material for the National Museum. Lago’s main argument, to convince his peers at IHGB, was that a commission organized by Brazilians would put an end to “the errors spread by foreign naturalists” (Kury, 2001, p.35), reinforcing the ideal of the creation of a national science and strategies for its organization. All the members present agreed to and signed the justification in the minutes of the meeting. In the very same year, with the support of the imperial government, the Imperial Scientific Commission and Exploratory Commission of the Provinces of the North was created. It was divided into five sections, each one headed by a member of the institute: botany, under Francisco Freire Alemão, also appointed chairman of the commission; geology and mineralogy, headed by Guilherme Schuch de Capanema; zoology, led by Manuel Ferreira Lagos; astronomy and geography, under Giacomo Raja Gabaglia; and ethnography and travel

narrative, under Antonio Gonçalves Dias. The group was also accompanied by an official expedition illustrator, José dos Reis Carvalho (Porto Alegre, 2003, p.15). The commission set off on January 26, 1859, on board the Tocantins steamship, headed for the province of Ceará, where they stayed for two and a half years.

Two members of the commission, Manuel Ferreira Lagos and Antonio Gonçalves Dias, were regular contributors to *Revista Popular*, which also received contributions by other noted members of the IHGB, including Manuel de Araújo Porto Alegre, Domingos José Gonçalves de Magalhães, Joaquim Norberto de Souza e Silva, Joaquim Manoel de Macedo and Francisco Adolpho Varnhagen. Indeed, it is worth remembering that the members of this IHGB group were the closest to the emperor, Dom Pedro II, dubbed collectively as the 'palatial' group by Lilia Schwarz (1998).

If one of the ways of measuring the importance of a periodical is the caliber of its collaborators, then it follows that *Revista Popular* was very important, because it called on some of the most respected figures engaged in thinking and writing about Brazil and its fundamental issues in the mid-nineteenth century (Dutra, 2005).

Although the magazine was of an informative nature, encompassing a huge diversity of subjects, the topics concerning the preparation of a national history and especially of a national science were highlighted precisely at a time when emphasis was being placed on building the foundations for the development of Brazilian science as a way of contributing to the invention of the nation. In this context, *Revista Popular* took on the task of spreading and communicating what it deemed to be the most significant scientific knowledge, news and progress in the country.

In October 1859, an article by João Baptista Calógeras (*Revista...* 1859a) entitled "Commission to explore some provinces of the Empire" covered precisely what the author considered the way "idea and action, theory and practice ... combine towards the progress of humanity." Analyzing the activities to be undertaken by the Imperial Scientific Commission and Exploratory Commission of the Provinces of the North, Calógeras believed that "Brazil could already be explored by Brazilians" (p.124) and that it was important for the writers to draw their readers' attention to this "significant and gratifying" (p.124) fact. At the end of his text, he noted what he believed to be the commission's most important mission:

the many subjects with which the Exploratory Commission is charged are not just of interest to the progress of science in general, but also have the purpose of contributing to the country's prosperity, placing at our disposal the resources that Providence has endowed upon us, and which are now unused for the most part, for lack of knowledge, and I dare even say incentives (*Revista...*, 1859a, p.129).

Calógeras therefore believed that science should be at the service of national progress, for which reason, it was "time that the work of European science, which is purely subordinate and therefore incomplete when it comes to us, be continued and expanded by national work" (*Revista...*, 1859a, p.124).

This job of finding out about Brazil and communicating this knowledge should, from the perspective of *Revista Popular*, derive from a national effort that combined the efforts of men of literature, scientists and the imperial government, incorporating the common citizen through the widespread diffusion of the prevailing topics in the intellectual debates of the day.

In this way, *Revista Popular* earned a central position in Brazil in the mid-nineteenth century as a dynamic space for debate and the spread of knowledge, which certainly helped get a wider public – beyond strictly intellectual circles – to perceive the significance of science, forming, alongside national literature and history, a set of ideals that contributed to the constitution and invention of the Brazilian nation.

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NOTES

¹ There may be an error here, given that the pages of the magazine we saw stated the price of 11\$000 per semester. The price for the provinces was 7\$500 for three months, 14\$000 for six months, and 26\$000 for 12 months.

² In this and other citations from non-English language, a free translation has been provided.

³ Some authors, like Hallewell and Wilson Martins, see this periodical as the precursor of *Jornal das Famílias*. However, Marcela Abreu (2008) draws a distinction between the features of each publication's editorial goals.

⁴ Moema Vergara (2003) draws attention to the fact that this was the kind of reader targeted by *Revista Brasileira*, published some years later. We suppose that *Revista Popular* was likewise geared towards such a readership.

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