

Brazilian Economic Historiography:

An Essay on Bibliographical Synthesis

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Resumo

Revisão analítica de obras brasileiras relevantes da história econômica, com base em uma síntese desconhecidos autores importantes, que trabalharam nos grandes temas desta área: sociedade escravista, o nacionalismo econômico e o desenvolvimento, industrialização e as crises econômicas. O ensaio relembra autores e suas obras, em uma sucessão linear. Recentemente, trabalhos de pesquisadores associados da Associação Brasileira de Pesquisadores em História Econômica e Negócios têm recebido muita atenção. A bibliografia lista autores clássicos, contribuições contemporâneas e obras bibliográficas disponíveis.

Abstract

Analytical review of relevant Brazilian works in economic history, based on a synthesis of well known authors, who worked on the great subjects of this area: slave society, economic nationalism and development, industrialization, and economic crises. The essay recalls authors and their works, in a linear succession. Recently, works by researchers associated with the Brazilian Association of Researchers in Economic and Business History have received much attention. The bibliography lists classic authors, contemporary contributions, and available

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A synthesis of relevant works in Brazilian economic history can draw upon important works in certain dominant areas of research, such as colonial domination, slavery, immigrant work force, commodity exports, industrialization, foreign capital, and so on; it can also be established by selecting relevant authors and their methodologies: Marxism and economic determinism (or historical materialism); the structuralism of the ECLAC school; Keynesianism, etc. This essay will consider great interpretative works, albeit selectively, according to a chronological and linear approach (ALMEIDA, 2012).

Previous historiographical work has already established lists of the most important works in this area. Nícia Vilela Luz's pioneer assessment (1977), despite being limited to the period of 1870-1930 still maintains its value for two simple reasons: the bibliography is almost complete up to the 1930s, and it organizes the titles according to the main strands of research. For references about economic history after 1930, there is a special volume of the Cambridge History of Latin America entirely dedicated to Brazil (BETHELL, 2008, vol. 9). Another good critical synthesis of works dealing with the various phases of Brazil's economic history is the historiographical review article by Tamás Szmrecsányi (2004), who also authored or co-organized many other works published under the seal of the Brazilian Association of Researchers in Economic and Business History (ABPHE).

According to Klaes (2003), the concept of historiography, on one hand, refers to historical description of the past, in contrast to the past in itself; on the other hand, the notion is used in a meta-theoretical sense, as a reflection on how historians describe past times. Historiography, in this second sense, has two aspects: it can refer to a specific historical methodology applied by

an historian, or to a more ample definition of a methodological component of historical research. In this essay, the concept will identify works—generally by professionals, but not always—about Brazilian economic history, albeit limiting itself to a great synthesis and main interpretative reflections on this subject.

From colonial past to financial crises

Prior to the 19th century, there was not an economic history of Brazil; a few Portuguese chroniclers described the state of natural resources, botanic or mineral, and envisaged the possibilities for exploitation in favor of the Portuguese Kingdom. Some of those descriptions were indexed by the authorities, had their publication forbidden and had to wait until the latter part of the 19th century or even 20th century to become publicly available.

That was the case, for instance, of the first History of Brazil, written by Father Vicente de Salvador (1564-1627), son of one of the founding families of the first Brazilian “capital”, Salvador, precisely to offer a testimony of the natural and economic riches of the new Portuguese colony. Finished the same year of his death, the work was victimized by the mercantilist policies of the Kingdom, and remained unknown for the next centuries; it was only published in 1888, by the Anais da Biblioteca Nacional, by initiative of João Capistrano de Abreu, one of the pioneers of modern research methodology in Brazil (2007).

It was also the case of the work by Father André João Antonil (the Italian Jesuit Giovanni Antonio Andreoni, 1649-1716), Culture and Opulence in Brazil by its Drugs and Mines (1982), which although authorized to be printed in Lisbon in 1711, was immediately sequestered and prohibited by the Portuguese Crown due to its very detailed description of the resources and

riches of the most important colony. The book would only go to print again in 1800 to help the cause of the sugar cane industry restoration, already experiencing a severe decline by the late 18th century.

Only a few Brazilian authors turned to economic history during the 19th century. When they dealt with it, it was to promote industrial activities in a country essentially agrarian (with a few mines after the gold boom of the 16th and 17th centuries). It was the case, for instance, of Senator Vergueiro, who published in Lisbon in 1821 his memoir about the first iron cast manufacturer in São Paulo (1979). To be fair, the earliest work which can be classified as a political description of an economic feature is an essay by the diplomatic envoy of the Belgian King to the Brazilian Emperor, Count Auguste von der Straten-Ponthoz, who in 1847 prepared a detailed analysis of the Brazilian budget: *Le Budget du Brésil ou recherches sur les ressources de cet Empire dans leurs rapports avec les intérêts européens du commerce et de l'émigration* (1854). In an absolutely contemporary manner, he already remarked the inclination of the financial authorities to establish the State's expenditures before determining its needs in terms of receipts.

Notwithstanding the sorrowful state of the Brazilian national accounts, the main problem in the 19th century was slavery; the institution was the main subject of a violent attack by one of the most important polemicists during the Empire, Joaquim Nabuco (later on an Ambassador of the Republic), who published in London in 1883 a collection of essays and speeches on the issue of Abolitionism (1949).

Many other Brazilian authors at that time had concern for the worrying state of public finances, like Tito Franco de Almeida, author of

Balanço do Império no Reinado Actual, estudo politico-financeiro (1877) or Liberato de Castro Carreira, who by the end of the monarchy, had written *História Financeira e Orçamentária do Império do Brasil desde a sua fundação* (1889). Others in that period prepared assessments of the Brazilian economy for the purpose of presenting the country at universal exhibitions, among them, one in Paris in 1889 in commemoration of the centennial of the great Revolution. To illustrate the economic condition of Brazil, Doctor Pires de Almeida prepared a volume on agriculture and industries (*Agriculture et les Industries au Brésil*, 1889). At the same time, the Brazilian Consul in Liverpool – and future head of the Brazilian diplomatic corps – Baron of Rio Branco drafted *Esquisse de l'Histoire du Brésil* for the big volume prepared for the same Paris Exhibition; however, he placed emphasis on political and military rather than economic aspects of the country (SANT'ANNA NERY, 1889). Rio Branco's chapter was published later in Brazil (1930; 1992).

Some foreigners also visited the land, studied its native people, the lands and forests, and prepared descriptive and interpretative works between the end of the monarchy and the beginning of the Republic; among them, a few French scholars deserve mention: Louis Couty, *L'Esclavage au Brésil* (1881); Pierre Denis, *Le Brésil au XX^e siècle* (1907); and Baron de Anthouard: *Le Progrès Brésilien: la participation de la France, étude sociale, économique et financière* (1911). Following the same trend during this period, a Brazilian educated in France, son of a diplomat from the monarchy who rejected the Republic, became a diplomé in Geography by the *École Libre des Sciences Politiques*, Carlos Delgado de Carvalho. He sustained, in 1910, a thesis titled “Un Centre Économique au Brésil: l'État de Minas”, and

prepared in the same year a very detailed monograph of economic geography, *Le Brésil Méridional* (1910).

The birth of a national economic history

Modern Brazilian economic history also begins during that period especially through efforts of João Capistrano de Abreu, a scholar influenced by the German historical school; he publishes his *Chapters of Colonial History* (1907) compiling studies about the discovery of mines in Brazil's heartlands and the processes of human occupation of the internal frontiers, prior to and independently of the studies by the American Frederick Jackson Turner. The same year, a diplomat, Brazílio Itiberê da Cunha, packed the results of his reflections into the conferences on economic and commercial promotion, *Expansão Econômica Mundial* (1907), stressing the importance of education in view to expand Brazilian progress. A little later, João Pandiá Calógeras, in response to a request by the head of Brazilian diplomacy, Rio Branco, finished a detailed report on *La Politique Monétaire du Brésil* (1910; 1960); written in French for the Third American International Conference, it was the first monetary history since colonial times up to the Republic.

That marked the birth of Brazilian economic history in its modern meaning, that is, with a proper methodology. A first overall assessment, with the results of the preliminary research, was done at the first Congress of National History, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1914; the annals were published in special deliveries of the official journal of the Brazilian Historical and Geographical Institute (1916). Up until then, studies and research were sectorial and limited, or resulted from compilation of previous works, like those of the pioneer Capistrano de Abreu. A new work of economic historiography, more like

a collection of sectorial studies, but already filled with primary data, was that of José Gabriel Brito, who, in 1923, published his *Departure Points* for an Economic History of Brazil (1980). At the same time, Victor Viana published the first "historical study" on the economic background of Brazil (1922), followed, four years later, by a history of the Banco do Brasil (1926).

The first comprehensive approach to the economic, social and cultural history of Brazil appeared in 1934, with the anthropological study by Gilberto Freyre, a sociologist from the North-East (Pernambuco) who attended classes with Franz Boas at Columbia University. Upon his return to Brazil, he produced the most original analysis of Brazilian traditional society, *Master and Slaves* (*Casa Grande e Senzala*; 1934). Freyre authored the thesis – which is rejected today – of the Brazilian racial democracy. Nevertheless, the most important aspect for the knowledge of Brazil's economic history was his analysis of sugar cane production on the grounds of the big slave plantation, the true basis of the social structure at the pre-industrial stage.

That same year, but with a diametrically opposed approach, Caio Prado Jr., the first Marxist historian in Brazil, published the first economic interpretation of Brazilian history, *Political Evolution of Brazil* (1933) according to its sub-title, a "materialistic interpretative essay of Brazil's history". It was followed, ten years later, by his greatly praised *The Background of Contemporary Brazil: Colony* (1942), which was in fact a very detailed study of the socioeconomic characteristics of the colonial society, certainly based on "materialistic" methodology, but free from the jargon and the Leninist simplifications that were the mark of the Marxist studies at that time. At the end of the Second World War, Prado Jr. published the book that still represents the greatest achievement of the Marxist school in

Brazil, *Economic history of Brazil* (1945); it has had dozens of reprints and re-éditions since then, with barely any corrections or additions to the first edition, except for matters of detail (IGLESIAS, 1982, 27).

Caio Prado's thesis, dominant to this day, is based on the absolute preeminence of the big plantation system, which produced export commodities with the fundamental factor of slave labor, leaving no room for the small independent farmer or for the internal market, marginalized in favor of the metropolis' interests. While recognizing the dominance of this approach in the academic sphere even up to our days, more recent studies have contested those premises and suggested a more pronounced role for the domestic markets and the circuits of capital accumulation under the control of national entrepreneurs, mainly linked to foreign trade (including slave) and mercantile networks, working even under a scarcity of currency (CALDEIRA, 2009).

Having also started his academic career during the 1930s (1936), Sérgio Buarque de Holanda undertook a very long itinerary in the realms of cultural and economic history, albeit in a much more Weberian than Marxist vein, with many investigations in economic history and the occupation of the new frontiers; he worked mainly with primary documentation, which was not exactly the case with Caio Prado, who built upon chronicles of voyageurs and "historians" of the colonial times. Holanda covered the whole universe of Brazilian history, including domestic politics during the Second Empire, and coordinated a huge collection, modeled upon a French series, the *General History of Brazilian Civilization* – published around the 1960s. He was, probably, the greatest of the Brazilian historians, even if he cannot be considered one of the patrons of economic history.

From the same generation, and working, as Holanda, essentially in an academic milieu – which was not the case of Prado Jr. – are two other high performing scholars: Alice Canabrava Pfiffer, from the University of São Paulo (heavily influenced by French scholars), and Francisco Iglesias, from Minas Gerais; she conducted archival research on trade and colonial exchanges with Southern La Plata region (1944); the second specialized properly in historiography, including a critical assessment of the economic studies written by other historians of the economy of Brazil, such as Caio Prado, Celso Furtado, among many others (1959, 2000).

Nationalism and the role of the State

Between Gilberto Freyre and Caio Prado Jr., and their differing approaches of the same economic and social realities, is to be found a self-made "historian", in fact an entrepreneur doubling as a professor: Roberto Simonsen. This peculiarity was no hindrance for a great achievement in Brazilian economic historiography: Simonsen prepared, to help his classes at the *Escola Livre de Sociologia e Política* of São Paulo, the first real synthesis of Brazilian economic history, from a global point of view, taking into account a wide range of statistical data from primary and secondary sources; his views were akin with the growing economic nationalism of the Vargas era (1930-1945). A São Paulo industrialist, well acquainted with the neomercantilist theories of Mihail Manoïlescu – of whose *Théorie du Protectionnisme et de l'Échange International* (1929; 1931) he ordered a translation and publication in Brazil – Simonsen preconized industrial policies à la Friedrich List for Brazil, at the same time that he presided over the Center of São Paulo Industry and lectured his course of economic history at the *Escola Livre de Sociologia e Política*, where his textbook was

born: *História Econômica do Brasil, 1500-1820* (1937; 2005).

Simonsen was concerned with the roots of Brazil's backwardness, which he attributed to the first commercial policy of the Portuguese Crown maintained during the first Empire in Brazil up to 1844. The liberal posture was to be replaced then, by a strong protectionist stance, coupled with an equally strengthened State intervention in economic life, which persists throughout our days. Like Prado Jr., he devised ways for Brazil to escape foreign dependence (financial British imperialism and U.S. industrial dominance), even though his world vision and his approach toward the Brazilian challenges were obviously much more sophisticated and pragmatic than the theoretical arguments of the Marxist intellectual.

The same Roberto Simonsen was at the center of one of the most important intellectual debates in the history of economic thinking in Brazil at the end of the Second World War when his nationalist, protectionist and statist ideas clashed against the liberal opinions and solid arguments of the economic conservative professor Eugênio Gudin. This debate has a bigger practical importance for applied economics and as a guide for economic policy for later Brazilian governments than for academic historiography, but it is relevant to stress its impact on the subsequent choices and orientations adopted in Brazil; this is true including for theoretical trends and lines of research taken in the Economics departments for the following decades, at a time when post-graduate studies in economics were scarce and limited to very few colleges (BIELSCHOWSKY, 2004; TEIXEIRA, 2010).

That debate, over the respective virtues of dirigisme and economic intervention by the State, on the one hand, and a policy of economic

freedom and opening to foreign capital, on the other, was not conclusive, but most of the public opinion, including that of the majority of professional economists and academic faculties, with the industrialists at the head, was inclined towards the State. Even if the monetary policy is essentially orthodox, at certain junctures even "monetarist" (BIELSCHOWSKY, 2004), this strong trend favorable to active action by the State had a profound influence over the minds and economic practices in Brazil; it was also the case with fashions and trends in historiographical research, which acquired an overall Keynesian dominance, still strong after so many decades.

The big push towards industrialization: Celso Furtado

It is within this mental framework that the greatest "classic" of Brazilian economic history and historiography emerges: the structuralist interpretation of Celso Furtado. He started with a doctoral dissertation in Paris, in the late 1940s, on the Brazilian colonial economy, and acquired soon afterwards a strong Keynesian outlook through his contact with the works of Raul Prebisch, then director of the U.N. Economic Commission for Latin America in Santiago, Chile. In the middle of the 1950s, Furtado was ready to offer a Keynesian interpretation of Brazilian economic history, with his *Formação Econômica do Brasil*, published in 1959. His early work also carried some French influences, from historians and economists, in special Henri Pirenne and François Perroux, among others, who were connected with his dissertation, finished in 1948 (2001), and whose liberal ideas and contributions were visible in his first works (ALCOUFFE, 2009).

Throughout the 1950s, Furtado comes to integrate many Keynesian elements into his works, many prepared in Santiago, the headquarter

ters of ECLAC. The big dilemma for Brazil at that juncture was how to accelerate the rate of industrialization, up to then limited to light industries and to some state companies, without scale economies or technological sophistication apt to catch-up to the more complex endeavors, like an automotive industry. It was also at that moment that Brazil gained awareness of its big social and regional inequalities, one of two pet subjects together with technological upgrade that are at the heart of Furtado's reflections, which would soon be materialized through State initiatives to industrialize the North-East.

Even if other historians – like Peláez (1979), for instance – have challenged his Keynesian interpretations, the fact is that Furtado's seminal work has remained up to our days the mandatory reference in Brazilian economic historiography. Not a single other synthesis, of such large scope, has been able to replace this influential book in the last half century (COELHO, 2009). No other economic history, even the one by Caio Prado Jr., although largely used in courses of history and economics, equals the impact of Furtado's book over the economic thinking and the conceptual framework of Brazilian economists, specially those who work in applied economics, planning and public policies. He remained largely dominant for decades for the very conception of the industrialization process and economic development, despite being ostracized by the military regime (1964-1985) and living in exile for most of his remaining life (up to 2004). His explanation about the coffee crisis and the development of industry in Brazil became a sort of paradigm, sometimes contested, but not yet surpassed.

The emphasis Furtado had given to the industrialization process would spread among innumerable researchers, stimulating them to write about many other causes for the develop-

ment and obstacles to industrial advancement in Brazil. Among them Wilson Suzigan (1986), who in collaboration with Carlos M. Peláez, produced a very well researched study on the monetary evolution of Brazil (1981), a subject already tackled by a professor of economic history at the University of São Paulo, Teixeira Vieira (1962).

Contemporaneous to the publication of Furtado's book, instantaneously a classic, another professor of economics in USP, Antonio Delfim Netto, presented his doctoral dissertation, also a "classic" though less known, on the subject of coffee in Brazil--that single product that defined an entire country for almost two centuries (1959; 2009). It was an essentially economic approach, heavily based on history, but also including some economic equations on the relationship between coffee prices, world markets and the productivity of the Brazilian plantations. Delfim Netto devoted himself, for the rest of his career to applied economics, becoming the "czar" of Brazilian finances during the "best" years of the military regime, those of high growth and huge infrastructure projects. He abandoned his works on economic history, although his many articles in the media always make references to Brazilian economic history and economic thinking in general.

Growth disequilibria and crises: the new historians

The end of the military regime and the democratization of Brazil are coetaneous with an "import substitution" in academia, in terms of economic building up: post-graduate studies which had been undertaken in foreign universities, started being accomplished entirely in Brazil. Thus, a new generation of economists pursuing an interest in history – rather than economic historians – who had completed their master's or PhD abroad began to renew, both

thematically and methodologically, research in economic history in and of Brazil.

Pedro Malan and Marcelo de Paiva Abreu, for instance, have coordinated many studies about the external disequilibria of Brasil and the industrialization process during the monarchy and Republic, with a special focus on the junctures of external crises – oil and debt, for example – as well as the eternal question of inflation. Many other economists have chosen to direct their work toward historical research, with strong links to their academic work, among them Neuhaus (1975, 1980), Gremaud (2004) and Giambiagi (2005).

Marcelo de Paiva Abreu got his Ph.D. at Cambridge with a dissertation on the foreign economic policy of the Vargas era, finally published some twenty years later (1999). He took part, with Malan (later president of the Central Bank and Finance minister) and other researchers, in a collective project dealing with the external constraints on Brazilian industrialization (1980), an undertaking that pushed other research programs, in Economic faculties, to focus on history, as told by economists. Abreu organized a collection of historical studies about the first century of Republican economic policy, almost entirely done by economists, and published at one of the worst moments of economic crisis in Brazil (1990). Some of those economists had already contributed to other important projects in historical research about Brazilian economy, among them the monumental series *História Geral da Civilização Brasileira*: Abreu, with a chapter about Brazil in the world economy from 1929 to 1945, and Malan, with a study on Brazil's international economic relations from 1945 to 1964 (1986). Abreu has also taken part in other projects on economic history of Latin America and Brazil, under the direction of foreign researchers, like Bethell, for the

enormous Cambridge undertaking (2008).

As regards economic history made by professional historians, modern changes in that field are also observable, with works that started to “correct” the old Marxist or structuralist approaches by the previous “historians”, in the line of Prado Jr. and Furtado. But even before more recent times, some “traditionalist” historians had already contested the vision and findings of the two hegemons, notably Peláez (1979), Peláez-Buescu (1976), Buescu (1974; 1985) and Buescu-Tapajós (1969); their work was much more based in primary data of the real economy than supported by some conceptual interpretation as in Prado Jr. and Furtado. A reference can also be made to some studies about economic diplomacy and international economic relations of Brazil, as well as its external economic policies, economic multilateralism, trade policies and essays on regional integration, among other issues covered in works by Abreu and Almeida (1993, 1999, 2005).

The “new” economic historians have conducted sophisticated archival research and offered new insights and interpretations about the colonial past and the transition to a modern economy under the independent State. To limit the list to the more representative works of the new trend, any record has to include the research of Luís Felipe de Alencastro on slave traffic (2000), and the works of Fragoso (1998) and Fragoso-Florentino (1998) about the accumulation of capital during the colonial society. Those advances are marked by methodological refinement and are probably the best contribution that economic research can offer to Brazilian contemporary historiography. Alencastro took the chair in Brazilian history that was created at the University of Paris (Sorbonne) by the Greek-Brazilian historian Katia de Queirós Mattoso, a specialist on empire and slavery (1979); she was

heavily influenced by the French Annales school, and the economic historian Fernand Braudel, applying their tools and vision to the investigation of the old slave society in Brazil.

Progress towards the institutionalization of research in economic history

Advancements in the institutional domain were also of great importance for the consolidation of the research in the area, as well as for the “professionalization” of the economic historians, and probably also for the specialization of the economists working with historical tools and subjects. Since 1993, the Associação Brasileira de Pesquisadores em História Econômica e Empresarial (<http://brasileiro.abphe.org.br>), organizes meetings and publications in the area, having joined, in 1996, the International Association of Economic History. ABPHE began the publication, since 1998, of the journal *História Econômica & História de Empresas*, the first – albeit currently not the sole – periodical dedicated specifically to this intellectual endeavor. ABPHE also organizes national congresses, coordinates the participation of Brazilian researchers in international or regional congresses and publishes books and CDs resulting from its meetings and seminars; among those, for instance, the French thesis of Celso Furtado (2001), some works by an economist-historian who also doubled as an applied economist – Annibal Villela, former director of the main Brazilian institution in the field, the Instituto de Pesquisas e Economia Aplicada, IPEA, a kind of NBER with plenty of researchers – and other works arising from its collective projects.

Among the founding fathers and active participants of ABPHE (a few already dead), as well as distinguished researchers who have

published many of the works that renovated the studies in economic history of Brazil, it is possible to identify Maria Barbara Lévy (monetary history), Ciro Flammarion Cardoso (economic historiography; Americas), José Jobson Arruda (colonial history and the first independent period), Eulália Maria Lahmeyer Lobo (immigration, monarchical period), Wilson Suzigan (monetary history, industrialization), Flavio Rabelo Versiani (slavery), Flavio M. Saes (finances), Pedro Paulo Z. Bastos (Republic; economic policies) and many others (total number of associates is above 300 and growing). A special mention is deserved in the case of Tamás Szmrecsányi, one of the founders of ABPHE, a multidisciplinary scholar covering a wide range of research including but not limited to businessmen, technology and actual economic historiography. He was tremendously active, working energetically up to his death (in 2009), and was at the origin, on his own or in collaboration with others, of the organization of various volumes in Brazilian economic history from colonial times up to the contemporary era (1996; 1997).

The development of economic history studies is under way nowadays in a large (albeit not enormous) number of history or economics departments in public universities (also in some catholic and a few private), and the publications have accumulated in this field, even though not in an exclusive manner (that is, they can serve conjointly some multidisciplinary programs). There are: the “old” *Estudos Econômicos*, in USP (with a heavy presence of economic history articles); the interdisciplinary journal *História e Economia*, a bi-annually publication by the Instituto de História e Economia, also in São Paulo; and *Economia e Relações Internacionais*, published by the private FAAP-SP, mainly focusing on globalization studies

and international economic relations, with some works in economic history.

Any assessment about Brazilian economic historiography would not be complete without mention, even briefly, to some foreign economists (less) and historians (many more) who have also contributed to strengthen and expand this field of research, either as “brazilianists” or “latin-americanists”. Stanley J. Stein is the first name to be remembered, as he published a great deal of economic research about Brazilian history or the entire continent (1957a; 1957b). Steven Topik is another American historian whose works have dealt with coffee, as well as the economic role of the Brazilian State during the old Republic (1987); Werner Baer, an economist, is a major reference among the interpreters of the Brazilian industrialization (1985, 2007). Many of the best works about the economic history of Brasil were inserted in collective volumes (Haber, 1997; Bethell, 1984-1996, 1995, 2008; Coatsworth-Taylor, 1998) or integrated into other works covering the entire region (Thorp, 1998; Bulmer-Thomas, 1994); but those are only a few examples. Finally, one cannot overlook the many investigative reports published as a result of an important colloquium held in France, in 1971, probably the only one abroad specifically dedicated to Brazil’s economic history, assembling great French, Brazilian, and other foreign specialists (Colloques, 1973), with the sole limitation that the chronological span did not go beyond 1930.

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[Brasília: 18/04/2012; Hartford: April 11, 2013; June 4, 2013]

