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The College Pedro II and the Modernization of the Secondary School Curriculum in Imperial Brazil

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Introduction

This paper discusses the role of the College Pedro II in the Central Government's attempts to modernize the secondary school curriculum in Brazil, from 1838 when the College was founded to 1889 when Brazil was declared a Republic. The College Pedro II was established by the Minister of the Empire, Bernardo de Vasconcelos, to attend to the children of the functionaries and the ruling elites of the Municipality of the Court, i.e. the city of Rio de Janeiro and its environs. Intended for the sons of the privileged class and conceived and organized along the lines of the best institutions in Europe, the Imperial College would quickly become the most influential public secondary school in 19th century Brazil.

The College Pedro II figured prominently in the Central Government's efforts to improve secondary education in Rio de Janeiro and the provinces during the empire and the first decades of the Republic. Under the reign of the monarch, Pedro II, the imperial Court viewed its mission as one of unifying the interests of the Central and provincial governments. As part of this mission, it sought to effect a degree of standardization of basic instruction throughout the realm, much as was in evidence in France. Provincial assemblies and educational institutions, however, remained impervious to its efforts.

The reasons for the Court's inability to directly affect education throughout the realm can be traced to circumstances pre-dating the formation of the Empire. In 1808, when Lisbon was threatened by the encroaching Napoleonic armies under Junco, King João VI and his Court fled to Brazil and transferred the seat of government to the city of Rio de Janeiro. João VI returned to Portugal in 1821, and a year later the prince regent, Dom Pedro, emboldened by colonial support and threatened by legislative sanctions from the House of Representatives in Lisbon, proclaimed Brazil's independence from Portugal. In 1822, Dom Pedro assumed the mantle of Emperor of Brazil, and officially made Rio de Janeiro his permanent residence. A constitution was drawn up, and in 1834 it was revised to confirm the autonomy of the provinces in all matters related to public primary

and secondary education, while delegating to the Court the responsibility for superior schools in Rio de Janeiro.

The provinces made little progress towards providing basic education for its populations during the first decades of the empire. The Court was aware that what actually passed for secondary education in Brazil was a conglomerate of independently functioning courses and a few private secondary institutions. The paucity of secondary institutions was the legacy of the Marquis de Pombal, the Prime Minister of Dom João VII, King of Portugal, who in 1757 expelled the Jesuit Order from Portugal and its colonies, including Brazil. The few colleges and seminaries operating in Brazil and administered by the Jesuits were closed or passed over to the less effective administration of other religious orders. The Portuguese crown filled the vacuum by creating independent courses, called “aulas regias.” Each course was taught by professor and treated a single subject such as Portuguese grammar, Latin, Greek, French, rhetoric and poetics, philosophy, history, geography, arithmetic and geometry. These publicly financed courses became the primary vehicles for preparing students for superior studies in Portugal, and they persisted during the years preceding the founding of the College Pedro II. When the College was inaugurated in 1838, there were approximately one hundred independent courses offered in the Municipality and the provinces, in addition to a few private secondary institutions scattered throughout Brazil.

Within this context, the Central Government searched for mechanisms to expand and standardize secondary education in the provinces while working within the restrictions set by the constitution. The founding of the College Pedro II was a landmark step towards this end. In the eyes of a few visionaries, including the Emperor, the march towards reform of secondary education in imperial Brazil would be led by the College Pedro II.

The College as a Model Institution

In 1837, the Legislative Assembly approved a project submitted by Bernardo de Vasconcelos that created the College Pedro II and installed it in the old Seminary of São Joaquim in the city of Rio de Janeiro. The Imperial College Pedro Segundo was named in honor of the future emperor of Brazil, Pedro II, of the house of Bragança. The following

year, Vasconcelos articulated his vision of the College to the dignitaries attending its opening ceremony. He noted that the College Pedro II was an alternative to the independent courses frequented by children of the nobles and the functionaries of the Court, and he suggested that it was model for other secondary schools in Rio de Janeiro and the provinces.¹ He left no doubt that the organization, curriculum, instructional materials and equipment of the new institution would be equal to that of the best secondary schools in Europe.

Vasconcelos had consulted the statutes of secondary schools in Prussia, Germany, Holland and France, but found himself most influenced by the French lyceums, which he judged to be the best models for the Imperial College. The statutes of the new institution contained numerous directives that were copied from the statutes of French lyceums.² The College was organized as a typical boys boarding school of its day, admitting youngsters between the ages of 8 and 12 who could read, write and perform the four arithmetic operations. Years later, day students were admitted to the College. The students were drawn from the privileged class, but a few scholarships were offered to poor students. The program of studies was similar to that found in French lyceums, and students who successfully completed their studies were conferred the degree of Bachelor's of Letters, which it was later determined, entitled them to admission to any of the superior institutions in the Empire without having to take the entrance examinations. The College officially opened on March 25, and the first form of 30 students began their classes on May 2.

During the empire, the College Pedro II was the pre-eminent secondary school of the realm, and exemplary on many levels. Its student body was largely drawn from influential families of Rio de Janeiro and the provinces, and its students routinely continued their superior studies in law, medicine, and military and civil engineering. Many of the students of the College became statesmen, politicians, men of letters, and teachers at institutions of higher learning. Even, the Emperor's grandson graduated from the College.³

The singularity of the College was also reflected in its faculty. An impressive number of professors taught in the military and naval academies, the faculty of medicine and the engineering school, and many contributed to the cultural and political movements

of Brazil: Joaquim Manuel de Macedo, professor of Brazilian history, was a congressman; Salles Torres Homem, professor of Philosophy, was Minister of Finances, and later a senator; Gonçalves de Magalhaes, professor of philosophy, was a plenipotentiary; Barão Homem de Mello, professor of history, was congressman for the Province of São Paulo and later Minister of the Empire. Franklin Doria, Professor of rhetoric, was a Minister of War, and Benjamin Constant, professor of mathematics, was named the first minister of public instruction in the new Republic in 1889.⁴

Yet, what most promoted the unique stature of the College was the attention that the Emperor Dom Pedro II lavished on all aspects of its organization and operation. Whereas the Emperor gave great latitude to his ministers of state in administering their affairs, he demonstrated a keen interest in all aspects of the College. It was well known that the institution was under the personal and immediate “supervision” of the Emperor, who once proclaimed, “I govern only two things in Brazil: my house and the College of Pedro Segundo.”⁵ The Emperor routinely visited the school, where he attended classes and examined the facilities – the classrooms, library, dormitories, kitchen. He continuously monitored the administration and program of studies, and was fond of communicating with the rector on almost a weekly basis through messages written in blue pencil on plane sheets of paper.⁶ He familiarized himself with the instruction received by the students, and regularly attended the College’s cultural and educational events, particularly the commencement ceremonies and the formalized competitions (concurso) of candidates for teaching positions. The Emperor reserved a special place for the College in his heart, which was, as one observer commented, his “little girl with the blue eyes.”⁷

The Curriculum as a Model

The College Pedro II was conceived as a standard of excellence, and its curriculum a model that would ultimately serve as a blueprint for private and public colleges throughout the country, both present and future. In a speech given before the Chamber of Deputies in 1837, Vasconcelos hinted at the nature of the College’s curriculum when he suggested that it would elevate the level of classical studies.⁸ As such, it was to be traditional and humanistic in emphasis, organized to prepare students in

oration and erudition, to inculcate a reverence for the classicists, and to instill a heightened moral sense as they prepared to assume their proper roles in society. At the same time, it was modern and progressive, extending the study of mathematics and introducing a full and integrated program of studies in the natural sciences, mathematics and the social sciences. The curriculum was modeled after that of the French lyceums, with the first year of study appearing in the program as the eighth year, and the final year of study, as the first year. The subjects comprising the curriculum were those taught in French lyceums, and included an array of twenty-two courses that encompassed all of the subjects taught in the aforementioned independent courses, and new subjects such as English, algebra, trigonometry, natural history (zoology, botany, mineralogy, and later geology), the physical sciences (physics and chemistry), astronomy/cosmography; and religious studies, design and vocal music. The courses would primarily rely on contemporary French textbooks to flesh out the content taught in the classroom.

The curriculum of the College was reformulated nine times between 1838 and 1889. This succession of reforms was driven by the Emperor's predilection for periodic reviews and reformulations of the College's program of studies, "for the purpose of harmonizing its with the spirit of the time and the interests of the country."⁹ The reforms preserved the humanistic orientation of the curriculum; and the emphasis given to the remaining content areas remained faithful to the pattern established in 1838: an average of 53 percent of the instructional time for the seven year program was devoted to the teaching of the humanities, 14 percent to the social studies, 9 percent to mathematics, and 8 percent to the sciences.¹⁰

The course content remained relatively consistent from one reform to the next. A high degree of uniformity characterized the substance of the curriculum, even though the curriculum was continuously modified to meet the requirements of the period. Yet, at different moments there were important changes, as in the introduction of new courses such as German, Italian, and hygiene; the history and geography of Brazil, as well as general geography, which had been part of the teaching of history;¹¹ the separation of chemistry studies into general and organic chemistry courses; the inclusion of sequenced programs in history and mathematics; the continued redefinition of the importance of

design, vocal music, and religious studies in the program; and the general redefinition of specific course content as new textbooks were adopted.

The Court was continuously inspired by educational practices, traditions and debates from abroad when redefining the scope and sequence of the secondary curriculum. For fifty years following the founding of the College, the Central Government proved to be attuned to developments in Europe and America. It sought to introduce into the College those policies and practices from abroad that would most contribute to the modernization of its program of studies.¹² This is most clearly illustrated in the mid-century reform of Minister of the Empire, Luiz Pedreira de Couto Ferraz, who as a response to an increasingly widespread interest in providing technical education in the College Pedro II, instituted an unprecedented reform that resulted in a curriculum reminiscent of the French curriculum model proposed by Salvandy in 1847. Influenced by the debates that questioned the role of the sciences in secondary education and the need for a bifurcated system for the French lyceums, the Minister José Ildefonso de Souza Ramos instituted a reform in 1862 that rejected the technical and scientific orientation of the curriculum and reemphasized the humanities in the program of studies. In 1878, the Minister Leonçio de Carvalho profoundly impressed by the American educational system, introduced the concept of “freedom of teaching” in the College Pedro II. Apart from sanctioning the founding of schools without the interference of the government, the reform also consecrated the student’s right to enroll in any course in College, regardless of its place in the curricular sequence. And in the final years of the empire, in the decade preceding the 1890 educational reform of Benjamin Constant, the positivistic philosophy of August Comte was influential in determining the sequence of science and mathematics courses in the curriculum of the College.

Textbooks

If there was a ubiquitous modernizing force of the curriculum, it was the textbooks that were adopted in the courses. The College adopted contemporary foreign textbooks, or national textbooks that were influenced by foreign authors in its drive to make the program of studies contemporary and relevant. The reliance upon foreign textbooks was evident from the first days of the College when the authorities resolved to

adopt French textbooks presented in the vernacular or translated into Portuguese. The first works included Portuguese translations of the Roman history text of Charles De Rozoir and Édouard Dumont, and the ancient history text of Simon Jean Poirson and Rene Jean Cayx. Also adopted was an 1824 translation of the widely disseminated elementary geometry textbook of Sylvestre Lacroix, and the un-translated work in the physical sciences by Etienne Barruel. The new curriculum and the supporting French textbooks clearly aligned the teaching in the Imperial College with the lyceum tradition in France, and this would continue for decades to come.

From 1838 to 1854 there was no central authority responsible for regulating the adoption of textbooks in the College; textbooks were chosen by the professors teaching the courses. However, in 1855 the reform of Couto Ferraz created the General Inspectorate of Primary and Secondary Instruction, and stipulated that as one of its responsibilities it approve all textbooks and Portuguese translations of foreign works used in schools in the Municipality of the Rio de Janeiro. Beginning in 1856, approved textbooks were referenced in the course syllabi presented in the College's programs of studies during the rest of the century.¹³ The Inspectorate clearly demonstrated an interest in the 1852 secondary program of studies approved by the French Ministry of Public Instruction when practically all of the first compendiums and textbooks sanctioned were of French origin. The practice of relying upon French textbooks continued throughout the rest of the empire. An example of this tendency is best illustrated by the fact that twenty-three of twenty-six science textbooks identified in the College from 1838 to 1889 were authored by French scientists and pedagogues. French textbooks were also adopted -- or influenced Brazilian authors -- for the teaching of mathematics¹⁴ and social studies.¹⁵ French texts were also copiously used in the teaching of modern and classical languages, philosophy and religious studies.¹⁶ Throughout the empire, the introduction of foreign textbooks in the College guaranteed the modernity of its program.

For its time and place, the curriculum of the College was unparalleled in its design and endurance. It presented a comprehensive program of studies, composed of classical and modern courses, organized in a sequential and hierarchical fashion, and supported with popular and contemporary textbooks. In the minds of its architects, the curriculum embodied the highest ideals and national aspirations for secondary schooling

in the empire, and through constant revision, sustained a level of instruction equal to that found in the best colleges in Europe.

Equivalency

When the College Pedro II was inaugurated, only a handful of colleges functioned throughout the empire. The number of private and public colleges grew steadily; by 1857 there were 32 secondary institutions,¹⁷ and by 1872, secondary institutions could be found in all twenty provinces. By 1878 almost 11,000 students were enrolled in independent courses and secondary schools throughout the realm.¹⁸

The quality of secondary instruction, however, was far less than desired, as demonstrated by numerous reports solicited by the Court. In a survey of public and private education in seven northern provinces conducted in 1848 and 1849 by the illustrious Brazilian poet, Goncalves Dias, and in a similar survey conducted in 1850 and 1851 in the Municipality of the Court by Justiniano da Rocha, professor of the College and the first political journalist of his time, serious deficiencies in secondary instruction were identified. A lack of books, a paucity of courses, an absence of administrative control and inspection, poorly organized programs of teaching, and a dearth of prepared and committed professors led both professors to call for centralized control of public education in the country.¹⁹ Furthermore, a survey of key provinces conducted in 1866 by Liberato Barroso, showed that none of 18 secondary institutions -- lyceums, athenaeums, colleges -- offered complete and sequential programs of studies, as that found in the College Pedro II, preferring instead, to offer courses primarily in the humanities.²⁰

The Court did not ignore these harsh statistics, and so it searched for ways to induce change in the provincial secondary institutions without violating the constitution. A first significant step was the taken in 1854 when the General Inspectorate of Instruction was created to supervise all primary, secondary and superior instruction in the Municipality of Rio de Janeiro; and to present reports on the state of education in the provinces and compare these with education in the Municipality. It was observed at the time that, "Present in these duties is the idea of the sovereign, and adopted by the Minister, to make the organization of public instruction of Rio de Janeiro a model for the provinces, and consequently, again attempt to form, by example, a national system of

instruction and of education.”²¹ The Central Government attempted to promote “a model that could be consulted and followed for the benefit of national unity.”²²

A constant topic of discussion in the Court during the empire, and especially in the decades of 1870 and 1880, was the manner by which the curriculum of the College Pedro II could be projected throughout the provinces. Suggestions ranged from establishing institutions that were modeled after the College Pedro II²³ to providing subsidies to schools that adopted the organization and curriculum of the College.²⁴ The proposals were vigorously debated, and then shelved. The most reoccurring solution to this conundrum, however, was to grant privileges to those colleges that adopted the organization and curriculum of the College Pedro II. The most coveted privilege would grant students who graduated from provincial schools with bachelor’s degrees the right to enter superior institutions without taking the entrance examinations, just as the students of the College Pedro II were allowed to do. It was a solution that enjoyed considerable currency during the empire, and continuously surfaced in debates both in the national and provincial assemblies.

Serious proponents advanced the concept of equivalency as a means for standardizing secondary education in 1840, 1843 and again in 1851.²⁵ The effects of these constant calls to equivalency contributed to the legislation that created the General Inspectorate in 1854. More vigorous support for equivalency legislation again surfaced in the 1870s and 1880s. The benefits of legislation that provided incentives for secondary schools to adopt the model for the College Pedro II was addressed by the Minister Carlos Leôncio de Carvalho(?) in 1870(?). Carvalho proposed a broad education reform, that among its proposals, reaffirmed the centrality of the College Dom Pedro II as a model institution in the empire, by stating that government would concede “the prerogatives that the Imperial College Pedro II enjoyed to those establishments of secondary education that adopted the same program of studies and, having functioned regularly for seven years, presented at least 60 graduates who received their bachelor’s of letters.” The prerogative alluded to was the right to enroll in the superior institutions without first taking the entrance examinations. This provision was never enacted.²⁶

Equivalency as a mechanism for standardizing secondary education continued to be supported by the Ministers João Alfredo Correia de Oliveira in 1871,²⁷ Rodolfo

Dantas in 1882, and the Barão de Marmoré in 1886.²⁸ However, initiatives towards this end were met with resistance by the national and the provincial assemblies, which rejected the attempts by the Central Government to impose its will in the provinces. A second reason for this rejection was founded in a practical consideration; few schools were able to finance and maintain a comprehensive and integrated program of studies that would lead to equivalency. Finally, the overwhelming disposition of Brazil's legislators was to maintain the status quo. These politicians were also parents and products of their time, who essentially agreed with the abbreviated programs of secondary studies that prepared students for the entrance examinations to the superior institutions. They were comfortable with the quick and expedient way the students could move through the program and onto superior institutions.

If the Central Government was unsuccessful in advancing the concept of program equivalency, it was more successful in promoting course equivalency; that is, the similarity of content taught in individual courses of the College and of other secondary institutions. Course equivalency was not as comprehensive as program equivalency, but it was effective in improving instruction in many private and public institutions.

Course equivalency was achieved in several ways. First, the Central Government exercised control over the entrance examinations that led to admission to the superior institutions of the realm. These examinations were open to the students from the provinces, who in anticipation of taking the tests, sought out courses in private and public institutions that prepared them for the test.²⁹ This of course encouraged many institutions to offer courses in the subjects tested in the examinations. The Central Government was aware of this chain of relationships, and correctly concluded that its decision about the content of the tests would influence the programs of secondary institutions and independent courses throughout the realm.

The subjects tested in the examinations remained relatively unchanged during the empire, being primarily Latin, French, English, rhetoric, rational and moral philosophy, history and geography, and arithmetic algebra, and geometry,³⁰ and in the 1880s, natural sciences. The Central Government exercised control over the content of the examinations and in 1854 decreed that the examinations would be based on the compendiums and the programs of secondary instruction in the Court, that is, in the College Pedro II. The

College would serve as a point of reference for the examinations, and indirectly the contents of its courses would affect the content in courses of secondary schools in the provinces and the Municipality of the Court. It was a creative approach that extended the curriculum of the College to other venues.

A second form of course equivalency was achieved through the preparatory courses offered by the superior institutions annexed to the superior institutions of the empire. The law faculties of Sao Paulo and Olinda, and the medical-surgical faculties of Rio de Janeiro and Bahia offered courses in subjects tested for entrance examinations to their institutions.³¹ The courses, however, were not part of a comprehensive curriculum, nor was their content standardized. In 1856, the Central Government passed legislation that regulated the preparatory courses annexed to the faculty of law³² by requiring that the syllabi and compendiums approved for secondary education in the Court, that is in the College Pedro II, be adopted in the preparatory courses. Later, Minister Jose Ildefonso de Souza Ramos in 1862, and Minister Costa Pereira in 1884 proposed tighter restriction on what was taught in the courses, again stressing that the course and examination syllabi be the same as those of the College Pedro II.³³

The third, and least commented upon method by which course equivalency was achieved was through the adoption of the textbooks of the College in courses offered external to the institution. The logic behind this form of equivalency is apparent: courses that adopted the same textbooks generally presented the same content and utilized the same methods. While the extent of the dissemination throughout Brazil of textbooks adopted in the College has not been thoroughly gauged, the publishing history of many of the textbooks suggests that they were extensively used in courses in the Municipality and in the Provinces. We have indications that a large number of science and mathematics textbooks of the College were re-edited and used in schools in Rio de Janeiro and the provinces.³⁴ The same was observed for textbooks of history and geography,³⁵ and to a lesser extent, the humanities.³⁶

Mathematics textbooks, like the arithmetic, algebra, geometry and trigonometry compendia of professors Ottoni, Coqueiro, Costa and Vianna were reedited multiple times, and used in secondary courses throughout the Municipality and even the provinces.³⁷ The same occurred for the cosmography text of professor Pedro de Abreu,

the Portuguese language work of Fernandes Pinheiro, the Brazilian history textbook of Manuel de Macedo, the geography of the provinces text of Moreira Pinto, and the rhetoric and poetics compendium of Costa Honorata.³⁸ All of these works adopted in the College were popular and widely disseminated. The dissemination of textbooks was not directly designed by the Central Government to be means for effecting equivalency, but it was a mechanism nevertheless.

The textbook in the grand scheme of secondary education in nineteenth century Brazil guaranteed to a limited extent the standardizing effect that Central Government desired. This understanding underlay its decision to require that the textbooks adopted in the College be adopted in the preparatory courses of the superior schools. The equivalency sought for by the Central government, while perhaps elusive on a grand scale, he level of was clearly manifest in a smaller sense in separate courses taught throughout the empire.

Notes

1. See the speech of Bernardo de Vasconcelos of March 25, 1838 reproduced in in journal, *Studia*, of the College Pedro II, Year I, December 1950, no. 1, p.178

2. See the speech of Bernardo de Vasconcelos to the House of Representatives on May 19, 1838, presented in the *Anais da Camara dos Deputados, T 1*, 1838, and quoted in Lourdes Mariotto Haidar, *O Ensino Secundário no Imperio Brasileiro* (São Paulo: Grijalbo, 1972) 99.

3. Luiz Gastão Escragnolle Doria, *Memória Histórica, Comemorativa do 1^o. Centenário do Collégio de Pedro Segundo* (Rio de Janeiro: Ministério da Educação e Saude, 1939) 164

4. Jose Ricardo Pires de Almeida,. Trad: Antonio Chizzotti. *Historia da Instrução Publica no Brasil (1500-1889)* (Sao Paulo: EDUC; Brasilia, INEP/MEC, 1989) 208

5. Doria, op. cit., 109

6. Ibid, 191

7. Ibid, 106

8. See Anais da Câmara dos Deputados, 1837, t, 2, sessão em 15 de julho de 1837, p. 117-118), referenced in Haidar, op.cit., 100.

9. Almeida, op. cit., 139

10. Karl M. Lorenz, “Science Education and the Imperial College of Brazil: 1838-1889.” Paper presented at the International Standing Conference on the History of Education (ISCHE 24), Paris, July 10-13, 2002.

11. Almeida, op. cit., 98

12. Karl M. Lorenz, “A Influência Francesa no Ensino de Ciências e Matemática na Escola Secundária Brasileira no Século XIX.” Paper presented at

13. Course syllabi with their lists of books are presented for each of the educational reforms of the empire in Aricle Vechia and Karl Michael Lorenz, *Programa de Ensino da Escola Secundária Brasileira 1850-1951* (Curitiba: authors, 1999).

14. Karl M. Lorenz, “Science and Mathematics Textbooks in the Secondary School of XIX Century Brazil.” Paper presented at the VI Congreso Iberoamericano de Historia de la Educación Latinoamericana. San Luis Potosi, Mexico, May 19-23, 2003

15. Ariclé Vechia, “L’Imperial Collegio de Pedro II au XIXe Siècle: Le Portail des Études Historiques Françaises au Brésil.” Paper presented at the International Standing Conference on the History of Education (ISCHE 24), Paris, July 10-13, 2002.

16. Maria H.C. Bastos, “Les Manuels Scolaires Français au College Imperial de Pedro II (1856-1892).” Paper presented at the International Standing Conference on the History of Education (ISCHE 24), Paris, July 10-13, 2002.

17. Haidar, op. cit., 173

18. Valnir Chagas, *O Ensino de 1^o e 2^o graus – antes, agora e depois?* (Sao Paulo: Saraiva, 1978) 14-15

19. Almeida, op. cit., 86-87.

20. José Liberato Barroso, *A Instrução Pública no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Garnier, 1867) 59-67

21. Almeida, op. cit., 90.

22. Ibid, 89

23. Ibid, 228

24. Ibid, 145
25. Haidar, op. cit., 25-27
26. Henrique Dodsworth, *Cem anos de ensino secundário no Brasil (1826-1926)*. (Rio de Janeiro: Instituto de Estudos Pedagogicos, 1968) 36
27. Haidar, op. cit., 33
28. Ibid, p. 137
29. Ibid, 203-205
30. Ibid, 82
31. Ibid, 47-48
32. Almeida, op. cit., 89
33. Ibid, 252
34. Lorenz, op. cit.
35. Vechia, op. cit.
36. Bastos, op. cit.
37. Lorenz, op. cit
38. Eugenio Barros Raja Gabaglia, *O Collegio Pedro II* (Rio de Janeiro: Impressões Artísticas, 1913) 159

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