

The Marquis of Tamandaré, the Old Sailor

Anapuena Havena

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Today, December 13, the calendar reminds us of Sailor's Day in Brazil, a date chosen because it is also the day we remember the birth of Tamandaré.

Official dates carry the risk of making us forget the human side of heroes, turning men into bronze busts. As I often say: one must know the soul behind every history.

And that is precisely why I shall not confine myself to presenting Admiral Tamandaré merely as Patron of the Navy — for to define a man by his rank or by the office he held is simplistic and even unjust.

After all, who was Joaquim Marques Lisboa, the Marquis of Tamandaré?

If the history of Brazil could be read as a novel, Tamandaré would be the character who crosses the decisive chapters of the nineteenth century without ever leaving the stage. He would be there, always present, always steady.

Born in 1807, he was only fifteen when he presented himself as a volunteer in the War of Independence. Imagine a young man on the deck of the frigate *Niterói*, crossing the Atlantic to pursue the Portuguese fleet as far as the mouth of the Tagus. And that would be only the beginning of a great military career.

Tamandaré took part in the important conflicts of the imperial period and became a true symbol and inspiration.

There is one particularly interesting episode in his life.

On August 24, 1848, off Liverpool, the ship *Ocean Monarch*, carrying 396 emigrants bound for Boston, caught fire. The scene was one of absolute panic. Tamandaré, in command of the frigate *Dom Afonso*, observed the blaze from a distance. He immediately threw himself personally into the rescue operation, facing the fire and the heavy sea. The British press of the day described the scene as terrifying. Hundreds of people were saved; reports of the time state that more than two hundred were rescued thanks to the action led by the Brazilian commander.

Below is a passage from the report published in *The Times* (London), edition of August 26, 1848. (*This passage reaches English through the author's Portuguese rendering; the original wording should be consulted in the newspaper itself, cited in the references.*)

"The Brazilian frigate was commanded by Mr. Marques Lisboa. Also on board were the Prince de Joinville, his wife and suite, the Duke and Duchess d'Aumale, the Minister of Brazil, the Chevalier de Lisboa, Admiral Grenfell and his daughters, besides other distinguished persons.

When the Affonso sighted the Ocean Monarch, she lost no time in making straight for her, and it was intended to anchor directly under her bow; but the wind shifted slightly and prevented this from being done.

Four boats were, however, immediately lowered, soon followed by the large paddle-box boat. Mr. Marques de Lisboa leapt into one of them, and Admiral Grenfell into another, and both were tireless in their efforts to save the poor wretches. The Prince de Joinville took off his coat and was particularly

diligent in helping the passengers aboard the frigate."

After the rescue, a substantial reward in money was offered to the Brazilian commander in token of gratitude. But he refused it. For Joaquim Marques Lisboa, human life had no price; he had merely done the duty that circumstance imposed on him. The British government understood the gesture. Instead of money, it sent him a gold chronometer bearing an inscription of recognition. He accepted the symbolic honor.

There is also a lesser-known detail attached to the name the Admiral would carry into history. The title "Tamandaré" was not chosen by chance. Years earlier, in 1824, his elder brother, Manuel Marques Lisboa, had died fighting against the Empire in the Confederation of the Equator — precisely on the beach of Tamandaré, in Pernambuco. And when Dom Pedro II granted him his first title, Baron of Tamandaré, he turned the place of grief into a mark of honor. The spot where one brother had fallen as a rebel came to name the brother who would become one of the Emperor's most loyal subjects.

That loyalty accompanied the Admiral to the end. At the time of the coup that proclaimed the Republic, Tamandaré asked permission to organize a reaction against it, but received a refusal from the Emperor. He then remained at Dom Pedro II's side until his departure for exile and, two months later, withdrew and requested his retirement.

The Marquis of Tamandaré died in March 1897, at nearly ninety, and made clear in his will that he wanted no military honors at his wake. After all, if Brazil had not paid the due funeral honors to Emperor Dom Pedro II, he, a simple subject, would not accept them either.

The Admiral's wish was granted. The *Jornal do Comércio* of March 21, 1897, describes well the simplicity of the wake.

References

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Anapuena Havena Castro S. S. Chaves — Historian, specialist in the History of Brazil.

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