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Commemorating the Sesquicentennial of António Austregésilo: Pioneer of Brazilian Neurology and Lusophone Humanist

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ABSTRACT: This article commemorates the sesquicentennial of António Austregésilo (1876–1960), a major figure in Brazilian medicine and a devoted Lusophone humanist. Born in Recife, Austregésilo overcame early adversities to become the founder of Brazilian neurology, leaving an indelible mark on medical education, clinical practice, and scientific research. His contributions – ranging from the Austregésilo-Esposel sign to his pioneering work in psychotherapy and neurotropic infections – contributed to the development and international visibility of neurological sciences in Brazil. His legacy endures through his scientific achievements, literary works, and the generations of physicians and scholars he inspired, particularly in fostering academic and cultural exchanges between Brazil and Portugal.

KEYWORDS: History of medicine, Neurology, Psychiatry, Diplomacy, António Austregésilo, Guerra Junqueiro

As we mark the sesquicentennial of the birth of António Austregésilo (1876–1960), it is with profound admiration that we reflect on the life and legacy of a man whose intellectual and humanitarian contributions transcended borders. Austregésilo rose to become not only the founder of Brazilian neurology but also a bridge between Brazil and Portugal, fostering a deep cultural and academic connection that endures to this day.

For Portuguese physicians who may not be familiar with his work, it is important to highlight that Austregésilo's early life was marked by challenges – his "mulatto" heritage, a stutter, and childhood tics – but his determination to overcome these obstacles became legendary. He "studied like a slave," a phrase that captures his relentless pursuit of knowledge. His journey from Recife to Rio de Janeiro, where he graduated from the Faculty of Medicine in 1899, is a testament to his perseverance and vision.

Austregésilo left an indelible mark on Brazilian medicine, particularly in neurology. During his tenure as Professor of Neurology at the Faculty

of Medicine of Rio de Janeiro (1912–1944) - and later as Professor Emeritus - he redefined the academic and clinical dimensions of the field. His leadership at prestigious institutions, such as the Pinel Section of Hospício Nacional and the Neurology Clinic at Santa Casa da Misericórdia's 20th ward, showcased his ability to merge clinical practice with transformative research. Figure 1, a commemorative medal designed for his sesquicentennial, depicts his portrait alongside these two iconic institutions, symbolizing his enduring institutional legacy.

Beyond his institutional contributions, Austregésilo founded Brazil's first neurology school, establishing the foundation for neurological education in the country. His mentorship also played a crucial role in advancing Brazilian neurosurgery, nurturing future leaders and solidifying his reputation as a trailblazer in both neurology and neurosurgery. Figure 2 presents a career timeline tracing his evolution from medical school graduation in 1899 through his retirement in the 1940s, highlighting the key milestones of this remarkable trajectory.

His scientific achievements include the Austregésilo-Esposel sign (1912), the concept of "Catafrenia" (1916), and his seminal three-volume *Clínica Neurológica* (1917, 1934, 1945). Austregésilo was also a pioneer in psychotherapy, advocating for the re-education of the will, and his research on neurotropic infections, movement disorders, and frontal lobe syndromes earned him global recognition.

For Portuguese physicians, it is worth noting that Austregésilo's connection to Portugal went beyond the intellectual - it was deeply personal. For him, Portugal felt like a natural extension of Brazil, bound by shared language, culture, and history. His admiration for figures like Guerra Junqueiro, whose final days he witnessed with profound respect, reflected this bond. In his biography of António Austregésilo de Lima, Mariz describes a poignant encounter in Lisbon between the Brazilian physician and the renowned Portuguese poet Guerra Junqueiro. Despite Junqueiro's failing health and the shadow of death on July 7, 1923, his indomitable spirit left a lasting impact on Austregésilo. The inscription in Austregésilo's copy of *Os Simples* - "To Austregésilo, with the author's admiration and affection" - was more than a literary tribute; it symbolized their shared patriotism, resilience, and artistic spirit.

Notably, Guerra Junqueiro was the first to occupy chair number 6 of the Sócios Correspondentes of the

Fig 1. Digitally generated commemorative medal design marking the sesquicentennial of António Austregésilo Rodrigues de Lima (1876–2026), featuring his portrait and the buildings of the Santa Casa de Misericórdia and the Hospício Nacional de Alienados, symbolizing his contributions to medicine and neurology in Brazil. *Source: Digital design by MMG.*

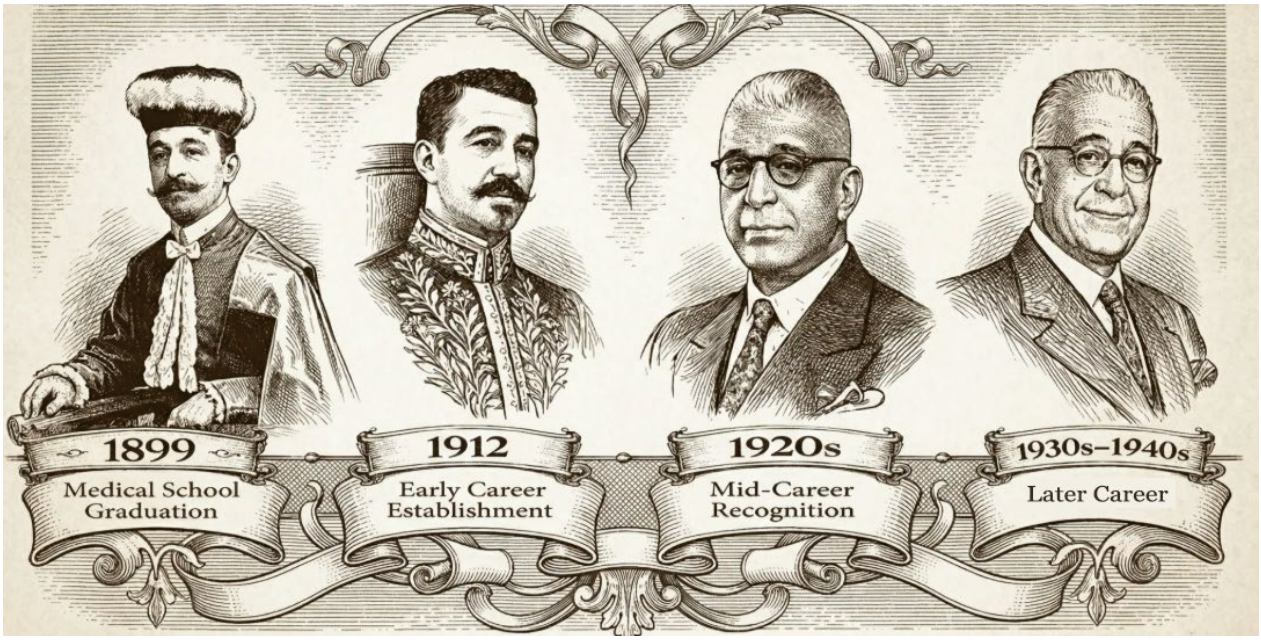

Fig 2. Digitally generated career timeline of António Austregésilo (1899–1940s), highlighting key stages in his professional trajectory: medical school graduation (1899), early career establishment (1912), mid-career recognition (1920s), and retirement (1930s–1940s). *Source: Digital design by MMG.*

Brazilian Academy of Letters, a position he held from 1898 until his death in 1923. Though separated by geography and time, both men were united by their embrace of Symbolism. Junqueiro's transition from biting social satire to the lyrical, mystical tones of *Os Simples* (1892) paralleled Austregésilo's own literary journey in Brazil. Their connection went beyond the personal, embodying a broader intellectual and emotional bond. Figure 3 illustrates Guerra Junqueiro with his masterpiece *Os Simples*, capturing the spiritual and symbolic phase that so deeply resonated with Austregésilo.

Austregésilo's literary works, such as *Perfil da Mulher Brasileira* (1924) and *Vidas Desgraçadas* (1950), reflect his humanistic approach, blending medical insight with philosophical and social reflection. Austregésilo's essays and novels continue to resonate, offering a window into the soul of a man who saw medicine and literature as complementary paths to understanding humanity.

Austregésilo's influence transcended the boundaries of medicine, marking his presence in both intellectual and political spheres. He was also decorated with Portugal's Military Order of Saint James of the Sword (Ordem Militar de Sant'Iago da Espada). In 1914, he joined the Academia Brasileira de Letras, later serving as its president in 1939. His contributions to the Academia Nacional de Medicina were equally distinguished: elected a full member in 1903, he led the institution as president across three terms (1934–1937, 1945–1947, and 1949–1951).

Beyond academia, Austregésilo engaged in politics as a Federal Deputy for Pernambuco from 1922 to 1930. Through his leadership in institutions like the Academia Nacional de Medicina and the Brazilian Academy of Letters, he emerged as a cultural bridge, fostering deeper ties between Brazil and Portugal, also as a member of the Sociedade das Ciências Médicas de Lisboa.

To provide a clearer overview for Portuguese physicians, table 1 presents a brief timeline summarizing key milestones in Austregésilo's career:

As we commemorate his sesquicentennial, let us celebrate António Austregésilo not only as a medical giant but as a symbol of intellectual curiosity, resilience, and Lusophone unity. His life reminds us that greatness is forged through vision, effort, and a commitment to bridging cultures and disciplines.

In celebrating Austregésilo, we pay tribute to the enduring legacy of collaboration and cultural kinship that unites Brazil and Portugal.

TABLE 1. Key Milestones in Austregésilo's Career

1876	*Born in Recife, Pernambuco, Brazil.*
1899	*Graduated from the Faculty of Medicine of Rio de Janeiro.*
1903	*Elected to the National Academy of Medicine; later served as its president (1934–1937, 1945–1947, 1949–1951).*
1912	*Co-described the Austregésilo-Esposel sign, a landmark contribution to neurology.*
1912 – 1944	*Served as Professor of Neurology at the Faculty of Medicine of Rio de Janeiro.*
1914	*Elected to the Brazilian Academy of Letters; later served as its president in 1939.*
1920s	*Gained recognition for his pioneering work in psychotherapy and neurotropic infections.*
1930s – 1940s	*Served as President of the National Academy of Medicine and retired from clinical practice.*
1960	*Passed away in Rio de Janeiro, leaving a lasting legacy in neurology, literature, and medical education.*

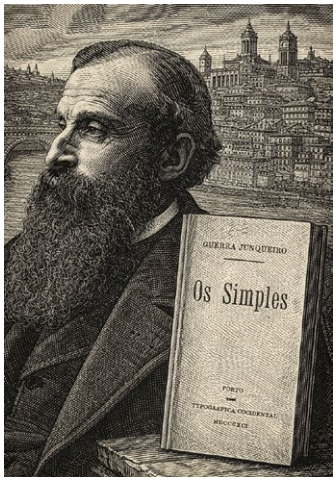

Fig 3. Digitally generated illustration of Guerra Junqueiro (1850–1923) with his work *Os Simples* (1892), representing the symbolic and introspective phase of his literary career that particularly resonated with Austregésilo. *Source: Digital design by MMG.*

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