



THE TRAJECTORY OF DR. BEZERRA DE MENEZES: THE DOCTOR OF THE INSANE AND OBSESSED



<https://doi.org/10.56238/levv16n47-115>

Submitted on: 03/30/2025

Publication date: 04/30/2025

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ABSTRACT

The character became a well-known politician in Rio de Janeiro, an eminent writer, a recognized scientist and is still revered today as a great disseminator of the Spiritist religion, having converted in 1875. Bezerra de Menezes became famous for his studies, publications and medical work in cases of madness, opposing hygienist medicine, coming to be identified as "the doctor of the poor". His publications are frequently republished and served as a basis for numerous Spiritist establishments that attend to madness during the twentieth century.

Keywords: Physicians. Madness. Spiritism.

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INTRODUCTION

[,,] Strange influences do not only determine cases of madness, which doctors send to asylums, in the conviction that it is a disease of the body – and that in asylums they have never been able to and will never be able to cure, no matter how well they are in the specialty [...]
[...] One is cured of an obsession, instead of cured of madness, and we will see how the asylums will have reduced to minimal proportions their liabilities of the incurables [...] (Max, 1893, p. 4).

The previous quote, taken from a column in a Rio de Janeiro periodical at the end of the nineteenth century, attributes most of the cases of madness, then considered as mental pathologies, whose patients should be removed from society to "strange influences", or, in other words, the result of the action of disembodied spirits on men. The author of the text is Bezerra de Menezes, a well-known doctor, writer and politician from the then capital of Brazil, at the time already converted to Spiritism.³

The article in question is part of a series of texts published in the newspaper *O Paiz*, a periodical of great reach in Rio de Janeiro. About the relevance of the newspaper, Bruno Brasil (2015, n.p.), one of the researchers at the National Library, informs:

Paiz was a daily newspaper of wide circulation launched on October 1, 1884, in Rio de Janeiro (RJ), by João José dos Reis Júnior, the Count of São Salvador de Matosinhos. Conservative and of great expression, considered the most robust governing body of the Old Republic, he was one of the greatest opinion makers in Brazilian politics and society between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century.

Bezerra de Menezes, using the pseudonym Max, published periodically in *O Paiz*, but also in *Reformador*, a Spiritist periodical that the doctor had helped found in 1883 (Klein Filho, 2020). In both, the declared objective was, obviously, to spread Spiritism. In the *Reformer*, as it was a matter of speaking to people who were already adept at Spiritism, the texts he wrote could deal with various subjects, including moral and ethical issues. However, in *O Paiz*, the themes dealt with subjects in vogue at the time, which would draw the attention of the general population, including non-followers of Spiritism.

In fact, the medical discussion about madness, its social consequences and public policies to alleviate the problem was one of the greatest debates in Brazilian society at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. The elites were forced to live with those identified as unwanted and maladjusted of all kinds – blacks, prostitutes, drunkards and the poor in general. From the perspective of the elitist public

³During his life, the doctor used three identifications: Adolpho Bezerra de Menezes Cavalcanti, Adolpho Bezerra de Menezes and the pseudonym Max.

powers, it was necessary to sanitize the country and get orderly, submissive and capable hands for the work and development of Brazil.

About the situation of the excluded and unwanted at the end of the nineteenth century, as well as of minorities during the twentieth century, Sandra Jatahy Pesavento (2001, p. 20) wrote:

Certainly, in Brazilian conditions, exclusion has a defined color, constituting the immense majority of blacks and mulattoes, in the diverse gradations that make up the country's population. On the other hand, exclusion can be sexualized and, centering on the female figure, even cross all social strata, then configuring itself in more subtle forms, but not safe from exclusion.

For those who did not adapt to the new demands of modern civilization, exclusion and, at the limit, alienation were appropriate.

In Brazil, it was from the 1830s onwards that doctors, especially alienists, began to claim primacy in the treatment and control of spaces intended for the insane. The first space destined for madness was the Hospício Pedro II, whose construction began in 1841 at the behest of the then emperor D. Pedro II. The establishment was inaugurated in 1852 (Costa, 1976, p. 33-34).

We are not unaware that many houses and institutions for the collection of undesirables were maintained by religious people, since there were few medical establishments (Source, 2012). Even so, the second half of the nineteenth century marks the affirmation of psychiatry in Brazil.

Several researchers have investigated the history of psychiatry in Brazil. Among them, Alexander Jarbet (2012, p. 2) drew attention to the fact that even before the inauguration of the establishment created by D. Pedro II in 1852, doctors were already showing concern about the treatment of insanity in the country. Psychiatry at that time sought to demonstrate the need for the State to assume responsibility for the insane and manage psychiatric hospitals, with the allegation that it would ensure the protection of both society and the individual with mental disorders.

The book *Condemnation of the Norm: Social Medicine and the Constitution of Psychiatry in Brazil* deals with the formation of social medicine and psychiatry in Brazil. The authors aim to understand the current essence of medicine, its impact on society and its purpose as a technical-scientific tool at the service of the State, whether directly or indirectly. The research covers the development of medicine from the nineteenth century onwards, highlighting it as a fundamental component to identify and control the causes of diseases. In this context, the doctor is considered a professional skilled in avoiding or hindering the emergence of diseases, promoting the control of pathologies. Finally, its

function in society was to rationally guide social transformations, guiding them towards civilization and development (Machado *et. al.*, 1978).

Thus, the formalization and medicalization of mental illness played a significant role in the scientific, social, and academic validation of psychiatry from the end of the nineteenth century onwards.

Psychiatry, in this scenario, emerged as an area of medicine dedicated to individuals seen as potentially dangerous and contagious due to madness. In the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, "public health and psychiatry" collaborated to sanitize the city, eliminating "dirt and disorder", in addition to the tenements, which represented foci of infection and disorganization, permeating the central streets and the areas adjacent to the port (Resende, 2012, p. 45). With the scientific backing of the time, the opinions of academic doctors were favored by public policies, whose objective was to shape daily life with a focus on normalization and control of individuals. Thus, this new medical science became prominent, aligning itself with public incentives and progressive ideologies related to urbanization and public health, which sought to build a more modern nation, thus requiring the imposition of discipline.

Psychiatry, therefore, established itself in the Brazilian scientific context by seeking to include a diversity of topics in the definition of the limits between "disease" and "health", beyond what is considered "normal" in relation to the "pathological" in the context of mental illnesses (Engel, 1999, p. 556). Among these topics, issues such as race, civilization, work, sexuality, crime, religion, alcoholism, and even politics stood out. These issues showed the restlessness and/or the need to eliminate these unwanted subjects from public and community environments, resulting in a clear connection between the threat to public order and mental illnesses.

The theme of madness and alienation establishments, much debated in the period, was encouraged by the numerous institutions that were intended to collect the unwanted. In the nineteenth century, in addition to the aforementioned D. Pedro II Hospice, the following were created specifically for cases of madness: the Provisional Hospice of São Paulo (São Paulo/1852); the Hospice of Recife-Olinda (or the Visitation of Santa Isabel) (Pernambuco/1864); the Provisional Hospice (Belém near the Lázarus/Pará/1873); the João de Deus Asylum (Salvador/Bahia/1874); the São Pedro Hospício (Rio Grande do Sul/1884); and the São Vicente de Paula Asylum for the Insane (Fortaleza/Ceará/1886) (Medeiros, 1997).

In this context, Spiritist medicine appeared. Fundamentally different in terms of the cause and treatment of madness, spiritism gained adherents among prominent physicians,

including members of the Rio de Janeiro School of Medicine. In this debate, the doctor Bezerra de Menezes stood out.

The objective of this article is to analyze the perceptions about madness, in the aspects of causes and treatment, of secular medicine and of Spiritism, through the trajectory of Adolpho Bezerra de Menezes Cavalcanti.

THE CHARACTER

Son of Antônio Bezerra de Menezes and Fabiana de Jesus Maria Bezerra, Adolpho Bezerra de Menezes Cavalcanti was born in 1831 in the interior of Ceará.

His father was a lieutenant colonel in the National Guard. Regarding the financial conditions and social position of the family, information is sparse and confusing.

Because Adolpho Bezerra de Menezes has become a prominent character in the history of Spiritism, there is an official version written by religious and Spiritist biographers, according to which his father would have been a man of means who went bankrupt because he was also honorable and "very charitable", having committed his entire fortune to assisting the underprivileged.

But Antônio Bezerra de Menezes made his life in Riacho de Sangue⁴, a parish in the interior of Ceará that would only achieve its emancipation definitively in 1873. In 1842 the family moved to Rio Grande do Norte, but returned to Riacho do Sangue in 1846. In this way, the place was not so wealthy to hold large fortunes.

Furthermore, it is known that it did not take much fortune to become a colonel, much less a lieutenant colonel. Micah Mugge (2012) argues that there were many activities expected from such posts and that, for this reason, it could be difficult to develop them simultaneously with other financial activities, such as plantation management, livestock and/or trade. This fact made these positions not so desired by the wealthiest men. Still on the payments corresponding to the posts of the National Guard, the author wrote:

The first observation [...] is that there are all sorts of values in the officers' montes-mor. There was the lieutenant, the lieutenant and the captain who, dead, added less than 40 pounds sterling to their inventory. On the other hand, we find some lieutenants, captains and lieutenant colonels whose sums exceeded 5 thousand pounds sterling (Mugge, 2012, p. 313).

⁴ It was from the Resolution of the Provincial Council on May 6, 1833 that the then parish of Riacho do Sangue achieved the status of village so that it could become the seat of the municipality of Jaguaribe and install its city council there. In 1850, the village was detached from the municipality and became part of the nucleus of Cachoeira. Riacho do Sangue returns to the nucleus of Jaguaribe, the following year the then village was renamed Jaguaratema. It was through Law No. 1567 of September 9, 1873 that the village achieved its definitive emancipation. Over time, the long extension of land that formed the municipality was dismembered, also giving rise to the municipality of Solonópoles. To learn more see: PONTES, Rafael Pinheiro; BRITO, Joé Jurailson Bezerra. Jaguaratema – The flower of the hinterland. History of the Blood Stream in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. **Revista Instituto do Ceará**, Fortaleza, p. 135-160, 2021.

It is true that Antônio Menezes could have had other sources of profit, but probably the idea that he was a man with a job in a village in the interior of Ceará gave the impression of possessions to a population with a poor and underprivileged life. Finally, if he had possessions, why did his son not receive a corresponding inheritance?

In another way, the death of his father worsened the situation of deprivation of the then young man, who left for Rio de Janeiro in search of work and training.

As for training, Bezerra de Menezes completed Latin studies while living with his family in Rio Grande do Norte and finished high school when they returned to Ceará. To do so, he had the help of his brother, Dr. Manuel Soares da Silva Menezes, who was already a well-known politician in the region (Arribas, 2008).

When he went to Rio de Janeiro in 1852, Bezerra de Menezes was employed as an intern at the Santa Casa de Misericórdia Hospital, as he needed to work to support himself.

The Holy Houses of Mercy were created during the colonial period and it is they who, during the Empire, take care of the incipient assistance to the sick of the country, having even created asylums to shelter the poor insane. A diverse number of workers worked in them, among them the clinical staff of which Bezerra de Menezes was a part. But he was not a doctor yet, so he had to get a job as a surgeon. The division between surgeons and doctors was explained by Laima Mesgravis as follows:

Surgeons, who were in charge of performing operations, dressing wounds, reducing fractures, and practicing bloodletting, could not diagnose diseases or prescribe drugs because their studies were not carried out at a university, but as a practitioner in hospitals. Only physicians had a doctorate and the status of liberal profession (1976, p. 153).

The aforementioned fun among the clinical staff dates back to the medieval period, as well as already existing in the Iberian Kingdom, landing in Brazilian lands. Brazil went through, still during the colonial period, the process of expansion of the Misericórdias, while even with the advent of Independence and, later, the beginning of the republican period, the process of diffusion of these institutions continued in the history of the country.

It was there that centuries later a 21-year-old young man, Bezerra de Menezes, got the position of practitioner among the surgeons. In this way, he was able to start his learning through activities developed on a daily basis, certainly with some supervision, at least at the beginning, of the profession he would choose for life.

In 1856, Bezerra de Menezes completed the course at the Faculty of Medicine of Rio de Janeiro under the defense of the thesis "Diagnosis of Cancer". Once he graduated, he no longer had to be just a practitioner. In 1857, the newly graduated doctor had his

candidacy approved for membership of the Imperial Academy of Medicine. At the time, it was necessary to present an entrance thesis, for which he took advantage of the work required to complete the Medicine Course. In the text, the author's argument caught our attention. It was common for the medicine of the period to associate some diseases with social minorities, including blacks, women, some professions, and the poor in general. "Cancer", the name given to cancer or malignant tumor, as well as madness, was one of them. Thus, it was common for the causes of cancer to be sought in what were then understood as moral degenerations of origin and/or formation. Bezerra de Menezes opposed such interpretations, writing that:

How much is it useful to know, which is more frequent in women than in men; more connected with a bilious or lymphatic temperament, and a weak constitution than with a sanguine temperament and strong constitution; more typical of hot climates, than of cold ones, of such professions; of this or that dwelling? What good is all these data, if none is absolute, if humanity in all ages, in every sex, in all temperaments and constitutions, professions and habitations, etc., can take tribute to this terrible evil? (Cavalcanti, 1857, p. 182).

It is noted that the doctor argued that cancer could affect anyone, regardless of their social condition, gender and political behavior, which was already contrary to the medical conceptions of the period, according to which skin color, poverty, gender, in short, characteristics of groups now identified as social minorities would make the person prone to acquiring various diseases. In Rio de Janeiro, the emphasis on keeping the poor and the miscegenated away was extremely strong, there was, in fact, the headquarters of the main Faculty of Medicine in the country.

The difficulties generated by the fragmentary and irresolute experience of urban reforms in Rio de Janeiro would have repercussions on the largest cities of the Republic, which tried to reproduce in the states the European or Rio models of spatial readjustment. And if it had already been laborious to obtain the immense financing that would pay for the Rio reforms, in Recife, Salvador and Porto Alegre the difficulties were even greater – both to implement interventions that would rid the cities of epidemics and "promiscuity" between public and private spaces, and to homogenize neighborhoods to ensure the exclusion of low-income housing from the center (Marins, 1998, p.162).

Already a trained doctor, Bezerra de Menezes was appointed lieutenant surgeon of the Army health corps, occupying the post of assistant to the then chief surgeon, Manuel Feliciano Pereira de Carvalho (Nobrega Filho, Machado, 2008).

In 1861 he joined the liberal party. Bezerra de Menezes was elected municipal councilor in the same year. When elected, there was an attempt to prevent his inauguration,

due to his connection with the Army: he was a military doctor. The doctor then opted for resignation from the Army Health Corps and pursued his political career.

Interested in holding political office, Bezerra de Menezes was re-elected councilman in 1864 and elected general deputy in 1867. However, the new deputy was forced to withdraw from political life after "the Chamber of Deputies was dissolved in 1868, with the rise of the conservatives to power" (Gurgel, 2020, p. 60).

DECREE NO. 4,226, OF JULY 18, 1868

Dissolves the General Assembly.

Using the authority conferred on Me by the Constitution in article 101 § 5, and having heard My Council of State: I will dissolution the Chamber of Deputies and convene another, which will meet on the third day of May of the next year:

Paulino José Soares de Souza, of My Council, Minister and Secretary of State for the Affairs of the Empire, has so understood and causes it to be executed.

Palace of Rio de Janeiro on the eighteenth of July of one thousand eight hundred sixty-eight, forty-seventh of Independence. and the Empire.

With the signature of His Majesty the Emperor.

Paulino José Soares de Souza (Collection of Laws of the Empire of Brazil, 1868, p. 491).

After five years away from political activities, Bezerra de Menezes was elected once again councilor of Rio de Janeiro in 1873. At the end of the decade, in 1878, the doctor returned to the position of General Deputy.

As a congressman and public figure, Bezerra de Menezes became involved with liberal debates and demands, including the defense of the abolition of slavery. In the 60s of the nineteenth century, he joined the group that, under the coordination of Imperial Counselor José Antônio Pimenta Bueno, studied and discussed, at the request of the Emperor, ways for the country to achieve the abolition of slavery without many "economic traumas".

To contribute to the debate around abolition, Bezerra de Menezes wrote a document in 1869, later published as a book, entitled "*Slavery in Brazil and the measures that should be taken to extinguish it without damage to the nation*". In the Senate Library, a collection of rare books, the general idea of the text is summarized as follows:

The author presents suggestions on how to achieve the emancipation of the servile element in Brazil without prejudice to society. In this way, he suggests that the abolition of slavery should happen slowly and gradually and that the "free womb" should be decreed, on the condition that the raising of children born to slave mothers would be under the care of the State, which in the so-called "houses of creation" would ensure the education and good moral formation of these children born free from slavery (Senado, 2024, n.p.)

In fact, the idea of the "slow and gradual abolition of slavery" was defended by members of the Liberal Party and seemed to have the sympathy of D. Pedro II (Carvalho,

2008). However, the debate was almost abandoned in the face of allegations that all political attention and national efforts should focus on the Paraguayan War, already underway (Deratioto, 2022). After the conflict, the issue was resumed, and the law was effectively signed in 1871 (Carvalho, 2008).

The participation in discussion groups and the interaction with members of the Liberal Party made Dr. Bezerra de Menezes a well-known and respected member of Rio de Janeiro society. This fact earned him important contacts, which would later be beneficial to ensure his participation in well-known periodicals, as well as bring him several opportunities for financial investments in the developing city.

In summary, during his life, Bezerra de Menezes was a surgeon, doctor, military, writer, politician, as well as dedicated himself to projects related to civil construction and railroads. Cirlei Gurgel (2020, p. 60-61) wrote on the subject:

During the period in which he was away from public life, he created the Companhia de Estrada de Ferro Macaé/Campos in the then province of Rio de Janeiro. He engaged in the construction of the Santo Antônio de Pádua Railroad, intending to extend it to the Doce River.

[...] was one of the directors of the Architectural Company of Vila Isabel, founded by João Batista Viana Drummond (Baron of Drummond) to undertake the urbanization of the neighborhood of Vila Isabel. In 1875, he was president of the Companhia Ferro-Carril de São Cristóvão, a period in which the company's tracks reached the neighborhoods of Caju and Tijuca.

Bezerra de Menezes converted to Spiritism in 1875, but before that, he already had notorious publications, among them: *Diagnosis of Cancer* (thesis for obtaining a diploma in 1856); *Cancer treatment* (between 1857 and 1858 in the *Journal of the Imperial Academy of Medicine*); *On the operations required by the narrowing of the urethra* (thesis for the competition for an opponent's chair in the Surgical Section of the Faculty of Medicine in 1853); *Curare* (between 1859 and 1860 in the *Journal of the Imperial Academy of Medicine*); *Opinion on Dr. Portela's memory regarding contact and infection* (between 1859 and 1860 in the *Journal of the Imperial Academy of Medicine*); *Tetanus* (between 1859 and 1860 in the *Journal of the Imperial Academy of Medicine*); *Accesses to hysteria depending on a gastric state* (between 1860 and 1861 in the *Journal of the Imperial Academy of Medicine*); *Periodical erycypelas* (between 1860 and 1861 in the *Journal of the Imperial Academy of Medicine*); *Influenza* (between 1860 and 1861 in the *Journal of the Imperial Academy of Medicine*); *Punishment of the Bladder* (between 1860 and 1861 in the *Journal of the Imperial Academy of Medicine*); *Slavery in Brazil, and measures that should be taken to extinguish it without damage to the Nation* (1869); among others.

THE CONVERSION

Adolpho Bezerra de Menezes converted to Spiritism in 1875. About his conversion, a series of reports, in the form of questions and answers, was published in the newspaper *Reformador*. This is how his conversion to Spiritism took place, according to himself:

[...] He gave it to me in the city and I lived in Tijuca, an hour's tram ride away. I embarked with the book and, as I had no distraction for the long trip, I said to myself: well, God! I won't go to hell for reading this... then, it is ridiculous to confess myself ignorant of this philosophy, when I have studied all the philosophical schools. Thinking thus, I opened the book and clung to it, as had happened with the Bible. Read. But I could not find anything that was new to my spirit. However, all this was new to me... I had already read or heard everything that was found in 'The Spirits' Book'. I was seriously concerned about this wonderful fact and said to myself: it seems that I was an unconscious Spiritist [...] (Menezes, 1892, p. 2).

When he said "it seems that I was an unconscious Spiritist", the doctor was referring, as he himself wrote in several articles later published in the journal *Reformador*, to his childhood and youth. He had a Catholic paternal education, but lived in the interior of Brazil, a universe full of mysticism, belief in lost souls, demonic apparitions, healers, folkloric characters and sorcery (Arribas, 2008). Now he could explain a lot that from what he saw and what he heard about the manifestations of spirits/disincarnates.

After becoming a Spiritist, Bezerra de Menezes strengthened relations with the Brazilian Spiritist Federation and, at the request of the institution then interested in disseminating Spiritism, he began to publish frequently in several periodicals, with emphasis on the two already mentioned: *O Paíz* and *Reformador*.

It is curious to note that he used the pseudonym Max in the publications in *O Paíz*, possibly because, as a public man and politician interested in votes and publications, he feared losing voters in Rio de Janeiro among non-Spiritists. In *the Reformador*, a Spiritist periodical, he often signed his own name.

Another analysis is possible. We were struck by the fact that there were two types of publications that Bezerra de Menezes wrote in *the Reformador*: the first of a scientific and argumentative nature, debating from the perspective of "Spiritist science" matters of the doctrine in a language, in a way, elitist; the second also spoke of Spiritist precepts, but did not bring conceptual assumptions, but sought to disseminate Spiritism through narrative. An example of this second type were the publications of "Folhetins" in the *Reformador*, such as the story entitled "Lazarus, the leper: Spiritist romance by Max" between the years 1892 and 1896. When Bezerra de Menezes published narratives, short stories and novels, he signed Max, probably because he wanted to be recognized as an imminent man of science and not as a writer of novels.

Although the scientific fashion "entered" the country through literature and not science more directly, some Brazilian intellectuals made an effort to move away from the idea that they were only literati, or "men of letters" (Schwarz, 2005, p. 36). These intellectuals tended to define themselves as "men of science" to the extent that they accused the latter of distancing themselves from the debates that would enable proposals to solve the nation's problems by publishing narratives that were not necessarily accustomed to the scientific advancement of the time.

After his conversion, the doctor did not stop publishing: *Breves considerations sobre as secas do Norte* (1877); *Biography of Manuel Alves Branco, Viscount of Caravelas* (1877); *Biography of Paulino José Soares de Souza, Viscount of Uruguay* (1877); *Spiritism: Philosophical Studies* (collection of articles originally published in *O Paiz* between 1877 and 1894, organized and published by Type in 1894); *The Haunted House* (originally published as a serial, in the *Reformador*, between 1888 and 1891, organized and published as a book by FEB in 1902); *The sheep of Panurgio: philosophico-political novel* (1890); *Lazarus, the Leper* (published as a serial between 1892 and 1896 in the *Reformador*); *The Story of a Dream* (originally published as a serial in the *Reformador* between 1896 and 1897 and organized and published by Madras in 2003); *Marriage and shroud* (unfinished serialization and published between 1898 and 1901 in the *Reformer*) and *Madness under a new prism: a physiological psychic study* (1920).

Bezerra de Menezes, because a doctor, politician and writer, considered himself a "man of science"; possibly for this reason he used a pseudonym when publishing novels and novellas in the *Reformador*, even though this was a Spiritist periodical.

THE DOCTOR OF THE INSANE AND OBSESSED

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, Bezerra de Menezes dedicated his time to research on madness. It is believed that his main motivation came from the illness of one of his sons, diagnosed as mentally ill by nineteenth-century hygienists. His son, apparently a "young man with an affable temperament (...) he became aggressive and withdrawn" (Klein Filho, 2020, p. 32). Bezerra de Menezes, in more than one publication, wrote that it was necessary for a doctor specialized in the subject to offer an alternative to the treatments of the time that imposed alienation and the loss of the loved one while still alive. What's more, he attributes himself to this mission:

[..] One day, we will publish a treatise (...) on this important subject: important for understanding with science, important for bringing the balm of consolation to hearts that bleed for the loss, worse than death, of the loved ones who are dear to them.

We therefore refrain from descending the test of the essential difference between madness and obsession (Max, 1893, p. 4).

There were many texts that Bezerra de Menezes published about madness, while organizing them for future publication. Bezerra de Menezes died in 1900. The book was published, posthumously, only in 1920. Even though it was a posthumous publication, the texts were already written and organized by the author himself.

Madness under a new prism: psychic-physiological study is a work organized in three chapters: *Is there a spiritual principle in man?*; *Of the Spirit in their relations*; and *Obsession*. In general, Bezerra de Menezes defended the thesis that most of the cases identified as madness by hygienist medicine were obsession, and therefore the diagnosis of mental illness and, consequently, the treatment were wrong.

The obsession was defended by Allan Kardec⁵, known as the codifier of the Spiritist Doctrine, as "the dominion that some [disincarnated / dead people] Spirits manage to acquire over certain [living] people" (Kardec, 2011, 317).

As a physician and man of science in the nineteenth century, Bezerra de Menezes was a rationalist and intended to defend his thesis by means of successive logical arguments. Thus, in order for him to be right, it was necessary to convince the reader that: 1) every living human being was composed of a material body and of something else, imperceptible to the eye, which animated matter and which, in the publication, he called the "spiritual principle" or spirit; 2) that this spirit would survive the death of the physical body, that it kept the individuality and memory that when it was alive and that it could communicate and/or influence the incarnates; and 3) that when the influence of the disincarnated on the living was negative, this spirit could torment its target so much that it would make him have actions that were confused with madness, in the eyes of a secular and/or non-Spiritist doctor.

Following the line of reasoning previously exposed, Bezerra de Menezes begins, in the first chapter, to argue about the existence of the soul.

Soul, in Spiritist terminology, is the incarnated spirit. Historian Artur Cesar Isaia (2024) has already drawn attention to the importance of the idea of "animal magnetism" for the affirmation of spiritism, a theory much debated in the eighteenth and nineteenth

⁵ Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail was born in 1804 in the city of Lyon, France, and died in 1869 in the city of Paris. He was a professor and researcher with notoriety. He decided on the pseudonym "Allan Kardec" when organizing and publishing his investigations — which he considered scientific — on supernatural phenomena and mediumship. The choice of the name came after an experience in which the familiar spirit had told him about a previous life among Celtic druids in the region of Gaul. Among his works, the following deserve to be highlighted: *Book of Spirits* (1857), *Book of Mediums* (1861), *The Gospel According to Spiritism* (1864), *Heaven and Hell* (1865), *Genesis* (1868). For more information see: DOYLE, Arthur Conan. **History of Spiritism**. São Paulo: Pensamento, 1995.

centuries, whose authorship is attributed to the Austrian physician Franz Anton Mesmer, so much so that some call it "mesmerism": "Animal magnetism, whose proposal attracted people from different social classes, was based on the belief that there are universally diffused fluids that could be transmitted between human beings, mainly for therapeutic purposes" (Neubern, 2007, p. 349).

In Spiritism, the belief in this universal fluid was the basis, and still although, of the Spiritist passes, a procedure in which members of centers offer individual prayers to anyone interested, most of the time with the imposition of hands above the head. A similar idea led many Spiritist doctors to defend homeopathy.

In spite of the debate between the possible interpretations of the terms "vital principle", "vital fluid" and "universal fluid" and their concepts, distinctions and approximations, the fact is that this impulse of life animates matter and ceases with death, according to Spiritism. What Bezerra de Menezes argued in the first chapter of the work in which he analyzes madness is that the soul survives the death of the physical body and that this entity, then called spirit, is the individual essence of each human being who, by the way, goes through successive lives, in different bodies, through the phenomenon of reincarnation.

Starting from the assumption of the existence of the soul, the author went on to argue that many of the afflictions and diseases of the human being do not come from the physical body, but emanate from the spirit itself.

In the specific case of madness, Bezerra de Menezes argued, it was important to understand if the incarnate really had some physical disability, or if he was just under the influence of backward spirits that approached him, arousing strange behaviors to that person. Obsession was, in fact, pointed out by the author as the main cause of the madness that filled medical institutions and asylums at the end of the nineteenth century.

It is in the sense previously exposed that the author defends the existence of the soul in the first chapter and its survival, now called spirit, in the second.

It is in the second chapter that Bezerra de Menezes deals with the influence that disincarnated people can exert on men. The idea is that in their various corporeal lives, the spirits, many times, acquire disaffection with other men and these, when disincarnated, can persecute them, causing various imbalances. There is also the case of spirits who approach incarnated spirits looking to satisfy carnal desires and addictions that when disincarnated would not be possible for them in other ways, such as drug use, sex and drinking.

In any case, the obsessing spirit is always backward and its action is the explanation of most cases of madness. In *The Book of Mediums*, one of the basic works of Spiritism,

there are at least three types of obsession: simple, fascination and subjugation, as well as their various causes, ranging from the taste for evil and ignorance to the desire for revenge (Kardec, 2011, 317).

Obsession is, then, the theme of the third chapter of *Madness in a new light*, an occasion in which the author described the causes of the problem, as we have already mentioned, and suggested solutions. Bezerra de Menezes even stated that conventional medicine called this whole phenomenon madness and recommended alienation, without any success in the treatment. He also stated, as we have already stated, that it would be necessary to identify cases of real physical pathology and those of obsession.

A tributary of nineteenth-century rationalism, Spiritism, including Bezerra de Menezes, interpreted the physical and social world in terms of cause and effect: "a physical cause is opposed to a physical force; to a moral cause it is necessary to oppose a moral force" (Kardec, Genesis, p. 259). Thus, once the cause ends, the consequence would end. It is because of the above, the idea of cause and effect, that Bezerra de Menezes suggested treatment for obsession (or "apparent madness") by avoiding the cause.

To avoid obsession, the author resorted to an idea similar to that of fluids, recommending "higher vibration" with the allegation that it would not be possible for inferior spirits to torment incarnates resolute in good and evolution: "In this case, their thoughts, feelings and works will be shaped by the norms essential to their reparative mission, and will not allow the approach of more spirits" (Menezes, 2021, p. 166).

Once the obsession is installed, the solution would be the process of disobsession, not discussed by Bezerra de Menezes in this publication. However, he wrote about the topic several times in the many articles he published in periodicals.

According to Spiritism, the process of disobsession is the result of the forwarding of the obsessing spirit to a treatment colony in the "spiritual plane", ceasing its action on the obsessed. In this way, both would benefit: the tormentor and the tormented.

In cases of simple or mild obsession, the treatment can be done at a distance, sometimes recommended by family and/or friends, without the need for the obsessed person to attend the spiritist session. In the others, with the presence of the obsessed, the obsessor is evoked, through the medium of the spiritist center and a member, called "indoctrinator", talks to the spirit with the help of the "mentors of the house" (kind of guides) until the disembodied spirit is convinced of its situation and accepts to "follow" for treatment, ceasing the process of obsession. To do so, sometimes, and still according to Spiritism, several sessions and a lot of time are needed. Once free from the obsessor, the Spiritist

theory recommends charity and good habits so that the once obsessed does not attract other obsessors (Kardec, 2011).

Bezerra de Menezes' writings on madness and obsession served as the foundation for numerous hospitals and psychiatric centers

Considering only the first half of the century, some of them were:

- Allan Kardec Health House, today Allan Kardec Psychiatric Hospital, founded in 1922, in Franca;
- Dr. Mariano Dias Sanatorium, today Casa de Convivência Dr. Mariano Dias, founded in 1926, in Barretos;
- Allan Kardec Spiritist Sanatorium, today the headquarters of the Spiritist Center Faith, Love and Charity, founded in 1930, in Araguari;
- Dr. João Viana Shelter, today the Dr. João Viana Psychiatric Hospital, founded in 1930, in Campos;
- Spiritist Sanatorium of Uberlândia, today the headquarters of the Spiritist Center Faith, Hope and Charity, founded in 1932, in Uberlândia;
- Spiritist Sanatorium of Uberaba, today Maria Modesto Institute, founded in 1933, in Uberaba;
- Pedro de Alcântara Spiritist Hospital, today Pedro de Alcântara Assistance Work, founded in 1933, in Rio de Janeiro;
- Disciples of Jesus Spiritist Hospital, today the Disciples of Jesus Spiritist Center, founded in 1935, in Campo Grande;
- Américo Bairral Spiritist Foundation, today the Bairral Institute of Psychiatry, founded in 1937, in Itapira;
- Bezerra de Menezes Sanatorium, today the Bezerra de Menezes Institute, founded in 1937, in Santo Antônio do Pinhal;
- Bom Retiro Spiritist Psychiatric Hospital, founded in 1938, in Curitiba, and deactivated since 2022;
- Spiritist Hospital of Porto Alegre, still in operation with the same name, founded in 1938, in Porto Alegre;
- Spiritist Hospital of Marília, still in operation with the same name, founded in 1939, in Marília;
- José Dias Machado Demented Hospital, today José Dias Machado Sanatorium, founded in 1942, in Ituiutaba;
- Sanatorium of Cáceres, today the Regional Hospital of Cáceres Dr. Antônio Fontes, founded in 1942, in Cáceres;

- Ivan Santos Albuquerque Spiritist Sanatorium, today the headquarters of the Ivan Santos Albuquerque Psychic Study Group, founded in 1942, in Sorocaba;
- São Vicente de Paula Spiritist Sanatorium, today São Vicente de Paula Spiritist Center, founded in 1943, in Morrinhos;
- Leocádio J. Correia Spiritist Institute, still in operation with the same name, founded in 1943, in Santa Maria;
- Felício Luchine Spiritist Sanatorium, founded in 1943, in Birigui, and deactivated since 2015;
- Vicente de Paulo Spiritist Sanatorium, today the headquarters of the Psychosocial Care Center (CAPS), founded in 1944, in Ribeirão Preto;
- Eurípides Barsanulfo Spiritist Sanatorium, today the Specialized Psychiatric Hospital "Casa de Eurípides", founded in 1947;
- Antônio Luiz Sayão Sanatorium, today Antônio Luiz Sayão Clinic, founded in 1948, in Araras;
- Instituto Beneficente Nosso Lar, still in operation with the same name, founded in 1948, in São Paulo;
- João Evangelista Sanatorium, founded in 1949, in São Paulo, deactivated since the beginning of 2024;
- André Luiz Spiritist Hospital, today the André Luiz Spiritist Assistance Institute, founded in 1949, in Belo Horizonte;
- Spiritist House Apostle Simon Peter, still in operation with the same name, founded in 1949, in São Paulo;
- Spiritist Sanatorium of Anápolis, today the Spiritist Hospital of Psychiatry, founded in 1950, in Anápolis;
- Sociedade Beneficente Paulo de Tarso, today Associação Beneficente Paulo de Tarso, founded in 1950, in Rondonópolis.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The intellectual, political and professional trajectory of the doctor Bezerra de Menezes fueled the debate on the madness between conventional and spiritist medicine, having legitimized the conversion of many professionals to spiritism.

The enormous amount of texts that he published periodically in newspapers and magazines, Spiritist or not, helped to spread the religion in Brazil, as well as propitiated, even today and posthumously, books are published in his name, bringing together scattered texts on the same theme.

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