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## Brief communication

## Did Father Cicero suffer from rheumatism?

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### ABSTRACT

Father Cicero Romao Batista is probably the most famous Ceará character of all time. An important protagonist of the Cariri region, situated in the south of Ceara State, in the late nineteenth century and the first third of the twentieth century, Father Cicero had great political and religious activity, as well as other less well-known achievements, for instance, his ecological teachings that led him to be awarded the title of "Patron of Forests", besides an enormous effort and personal sacrifice for the improvement of the conditions of human life. Inspired by reading his biography, we find that the "Padim Ciço" could have inflammatory spondyloarthropathy. In this article, we present the plausibility of this diagnostic hypothesis, seeking to emphasize that an attentive ear and clinical observation, albeit indirectly and without the privilege of a personal contact with the patient, are unparalleled tools for bringing forth a diagnosis.

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### Padre Cícero teria um Reumatismo?

### RESUMO

O padre Cícero Romão Batista é provavelmente o mais célebre personagem cearense de todos os tempos. Importante protagonista da região do Cariri, sul do Estado do Ceará, no fim do século XIX e primeiro terço do século XX, teve grande atuação política e religiosa, para além de outros feitos não tão conhecidos, como ensinamentos ecológicos, que o levaram ser agraciado com o título de Patrono das Florestas, bem como enormes esforços e sacrifício pessoal pela melhoria das condições de vida humana. Através da leitura de sua biografia, veio-nos à percepção a possibilidade de que o Padim Ciço tenha sido portador de espondiloartropatia inflamatória. A plausibilidade dessa hipótese diagnóstica é aqui apresentada, busca-se enfatizar que o ouvido atento e a observação clínica, ainda que de forma indireta, sem o privilégio do contato com o paciente, constituem ferramentas incomparáveis na propositura de um diagnóstico.

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Father Cicero Romao Batista lived for 90 years, was born in 1844 and died on July 20, 1934. Even today, such a long life is unusual. Thus, in addition to other personal gifts of the “Patron of Forests”, a title awarded by GreenPeace (<http://blogdocrato.blogspot.com.br/2010/02/greenpeace-adota-padre-cicero-como-o.html>), a non-governmental organization, this man was touched by divine providence. Despite the vast literature on political and religious aspects on Father Cicero,<sup>1-4</sup> details about “Juazeiro Patriarch” health are scarce.

Father Cicero did not leave dependents, because his sisters had no children. About his mother, Mrs. Quinô, it is known that she became “paralyzed” and would have presented an “eyelid inflammation” for many years.<sup>2</sup>

Amalia de Oliveira,<sup>2</sup> who enjoyed for several years a contact with Father Cicero, reports in his book that at about 50 years old Father Cicero had his head tilted and fixed to the right side. At least by the age of 41, Father Cicero already used a staff that, although maybe representing a pastoral symbol, may well have lent itself to support his walking.<sup>2,3</sup> In 1888, a photo of Father Cicero at the age of 44 with one of his sisters reveals a lateral deviation of his head, which can also be seen in later images (Figs. 1 and 2). In his most recent biography,<sup>3</sup> the author reports a “painful scoliosis,” neck tortuosity and



**Fig. 1 – Father Cicero and his sister, in a photograph from 1888 – at the age of 44, one can see a slight lateral tilting of the neck.**



**Fig. 2 – Father Cicero and doctor Luis Malzone, founder of Hospital São Lucas; photograph from the decade of 1920–1930, showing lateral tilting of the neck.**

back pain with a lifelong suffering.<sup>3</sup> In another book,<sup>5</sup> his postural problem and reclining ambulation are again mentioned, which are attributed to a scoliosis contracted early in his life, as well as a kyphosis that lent a “grotesque appearance” to “Padim Cico”. This latter report would refer to his looks in 1926; thus when the holy man was already at the age of 82. About this time, another book<sup>6</sup> by an author who visited Father Cicero describes his gibbosity and stooped posture. Interestingly, a very critical author of Father Cicero describes the man in 1926 as “being ankylosed and suffering frequent intestinal colic, which required a strict diet”.<sup>4</sup> An episode of arthritis (with no further details), when the holy man was at the age of 60, has been diagnosed as being the “first signs of a gout crisis” by Dr. Antonio Mariz, one of his doctors.<sup>3</sup> In several books on this holy man, episodes of strong abdominal cramps are reported, which would have occurred for several years (and that at times resulted in patriarch’s prostration).<sup>2-4,7</sup>

There are several reports that Father Cicero did not get much sleep, and at times was surprised napping during the day, in front of his interlocutors, and even when on the saddle of his donkey.<sup>2-5,7,8</sup> This holy man always slept in a hammock, despite having a bed in his bedroom,<sup>3</sup> fed sparingly and had a habit of fasting for long periods.<sup>1-4,6,8,9</sup> In 1910, assuming to be stricken with a kidney condition, and following the advice of Dr. Miguel Couto, Father Cicero has come to believe that his problem stemmed from drinking Juazeiro water; since then, he started to drink only coconut water or tea, and never returned to drinking clean water.<sup>3-5,10</sup> There are descriptions of hemoptysis in Father Cicero’s biographies, although in our opinion they were hemoptoic episodes, when at the age of 76.<sup>2,3</sup> While there is no report of other respiratory symptoms, and considering that Father Cicero would have smoked (certainly not commercial cigarettes) for a few years and even before his arrival at Juazeiro,<sup>4,10</sup> one cannot ignore the possibility that he has developed some respiratory problem of his lower airway tract, which could have led to hemoptoic episodes.

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