

The Book as a Cultural Artifact in Brazilian Spiritism

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Abstract: Spiritism is a religious doctrine of Christian spiritualism that emerged in the 19th century in France, but which achieved great expansion and consolidation in Brazil, becoming one of the main religious expressions in the country. Brazilian Spiritism places great emphasis on the role of study as a form of knowledge and development of the doctrine, which makes the Spiritist book an important artifact in the construction of a Spiritist cultural pedagogy. In our brief text, we will see some of the particular characteristics that construct the Spiritist book as a cultural artifact, and its functions in the continuous transformation of the Brazilian Spiritist movement.

Keywords: Cultural Artifact; Spiritism; Brazil; Allan Kardec.

It is no exaggeration to say that all religions are basically based on their sacred books. The religious traditions have their own literatures, which are almost always born with books revealed by the deities. In Spiritism, the relationship with the book acquired a singular character. Spiritist doctrine was born in the 19th century in France; its founder, Allan Kardec (1804-1869), was a scholar of the mediumistic phenomena (contact of incarnated spirits with disembodied spirits), and his research on this theme provided the fundamental material for the construction of the first five founding works of spiritualism. *The Book of Spirits* (1857), *The Book of Mediums* (1861), *The Gospel According to Spiritism* (1864), *Heaven and Hell* (1865) and *The Genesis* (1868) would have been written in direct contact with spirits, through Of the mediums, constituting a new type of religious literature.¹

¹ Some references: Arthur Conan Doyle, *The History of Spiritualism* (London: Cassel and Company, 1926); Victor Ribas Carneiro, *ABC do Espiritismo* (Curitiba: Federação Espírita do Paraná, 1996); Dora Incontri, *Para entender Allan Kardec* (São Paulo: Comenius, 2004); Paulo Henrique Figueiredo, *Revolução espírita: a*

Kardec's work expounded the scientific and moral questions concerning the existence of the soul, reincarnation, and the contact between the material and the spiritual spheres. Spiritism proposed to be a doctrine of threefold aspect: science, religion, and philosophy. In this sense, the Spiritists understood to have elaborated a method of rational, safe and constant contact with the disembodied souls, who continued to provide orientations and teachings on the immortal life. For this reason, Spiritist literature has acquired a special character. A great number of spiritist books were produced directly by the spirits, with the help of the mediums that psychographed them (they transcribed what was dictated by the spirits).

But it was in Brazil that Spiritism reached a remarkable expansion, since the end of the 19th century, practically becoming a Brazilian religion.² Although Spiritism is averse to the use of symbolic artifacts, the spiritist book has gained a special dimension as a legitimate form of expression of the Brazilian Spiritist movement. As we will present, "Cultural artifacts are concrete manifestations of culture, including objects, symbols, rituals and language that are observable and interpretable."³ Starting from this basic notion, we will discuss how the Brazilian Spiritist book became an important cultural artifact in the dissemination of the doctrine, and how this object serves for the continuous construction of a cultural pedagogy⁴

teoria esquecida de Allan Kardec (São Paulo: Feal, 2021); José do Carmo Rodrigues, *Espiritismo no Brasil: história, prática e conversão* (Curitiba: Appris, 2023); Jean Prieur, *Allan Kardec e seu tempo* (Niterói: Lachatre, 2016);

Jean Prieur, *Em torno de Rivail - O mundo em que viveu Allan Kardec* (Niterói: Lachatre, 2016); Dalmo Duque dos Santos, *Nova História do Espiritismo. Dos precursores de Allan Kardec a Chico Xavier* (Rio de Janeiro: Corifeu, 2007).

² José Santos, *Espiritismo - uma Religião Brasileira* (São Paulo: Moderna, 1997); José do Carmo Rodrigues, *Espiritismo no Brasil: história, prática e conversão* (Curitiba: Appris, 2023); Dalmo Duque dos Santos, *Nova História do Espiritismo. Dos precursores de Allan Kardec a Chico Xavier* (Rio de Janeiro: Corifeu, 2007); André Bueno, "Is Spiritism a Brazilian Religion?," *Intercultural Encounters* (2017), <https://interculturalencounters.blog/team/>.

³ Rodrigo Bastos, Marco Barón, Ravi Resck, *Hacking Cultural - Um guia prático para agentes de mudança* (Target Teal, 2023), <https://docs.targetteal.com/hacking-cultural/2-afetando-a-cultura-de-forma-intencional/dimensoes-da-cultura/2-3-3-desenhando-artefatos-culturais-para-mudanca-e-emancipacao-social/>.

⁴ Silmara Santos, "Artefatos culturais e letramento: pedagogias que (des) constroem sentidos," *Revista Catavento* (Junho, 2022), <https://www.unifeg.edu.br/revista-catavento/ed1-2022.html>; Paula D. Andrade, "Artefatos culturais midiáticos e pedagogias culturais: uma análise para explorar as qualidades pedagógicas da vida contemporânea," *Anais da 38ª Reunião Nacional da ANPEd: Pedagogias culturais*

related to the dynamization of the Brazilian Spiritist movement. This movement is traversed by tensions and critical discussions, which make the Spiritist book a mobile object of construction and interpretation.

The Spiritist book in Brazil

In Brazil, the production of Spiritist books has never ceased. They are not just commentaries or studies; the presence of mediumship as a mechanism for contact with the spiritual world has led to a gradual development of the Spiritist doctrine, in accordance with the guidance provided by the spirits. This becomes evident, for example, when we analyze Kardec's seminal work. The first version of the 'Book of Spirits' contained just over five hundred questions asked to the spirits, while the second edition – currently considered the definitive version – contained over a thousand questions.⁵ Although these books – as well as the others written by Kardec – have achieved the status of 'codification' (and many practitioners of Spiritism usually refer to Kardec's five books as the “Pentateuch”, incorporating a biblical language that is much criticized in the definition of the Spiritist doctrine) – a fundamental pillar of the development of Spiritism, especially in Brazil, was the continued receipt of communications from the spiritual world.

This material gave a series of new characteristics to the spiritist literature, taking on the characteristics of important learning and research instruments. This is the case, for example, of the book 'Nosso Lar' (literally, 'Our Home'), by the medium Chico Xavier⁶, published in 1944.⁷ Until then, spiritist texts were vague in their descriptions of what the spiritual world would be like, its contours, possibilities and limitations. According to André

(2017). Dora Incontri, *Kardec para o século XXI* (Curitiba, 2024), Comenius: 221-227. See include the site of “Associação Brasileira de Pedagogia Espírita,” *Brazilian Association of Spiritist Pedagogy*, <https://blogabpe.org/>.

⁵ Allan Kardec, *O Livro dos Espíritos - Edição Histórica Bilíngue*, trans. Evandro Noleto Bezerra (Rio de Janeiro: FEB, 2021).

⁶ The most prominent spirits' medium in Brazil, Francisco Candido Xavier (1910-2002) published more than four hundred works dictated by the spirits. His books are of the most varied genres; Novels, message books, poetry, short stories, reflections of doctrinal character, letters of disincarnating, among others. The great amount of works is marked by a remarkable quality and by great diversity, which caused great impression in the Brazilian public. See Marcelo Souto Maior, *As vidas de Chico Xavier* (São Paulo: Planeta, 2003).

⁷ Chico Xavier, *Nosso Lar* (Rio de Janeiro: FEB, 1944).

Luiz – the spirit who dictated the book to Chico Xavier – the spiritual world is organized into communities very similar to those we find on planet Earth. In fact, according to the book, the material world would be an imperfect copy of the spiritual world, limited by physical and natural conditions. The book caused surprise and controversy at the time of its release, largely because it clashed with the idealizations that were made about the spiritual world.⁸ In André Luiz's narrative, the spirits also lived with problems specific to their state of development, revealing that there were several levels of moral and physical evolution yet to be achieved.

'Nosso Lar' gradually became established as an authoritative narrative within Spiritism about what the Afterlife would be like, and served as a starting point for a collection of books that would continue to describe the world-wide experience that André Luiz would narrate from a spiritual point of view. In this sense – and taking as a basis our intention to understand books as cultural artifacts – it can be said that 'Nosso Lar' became an almost canonical reference on how to conceive and imagine the aesthetic dimensions of the spiritual world. It is not uncommon for many practitioners of Spiritism to claim to have begun their knowledge of the doctrine through this book, even before undertaking a more in-depth study of the conceptual foundations of Spiritism in Kardec's work.

In the same vein, another work that would become seminal within the Brazilian Spiritist doctrine is the book “O Consolador” (“The Consolator”, literally), dictated by the Spirit Emmanuel (considered the guide and spiritual protector of the medium Chico Xavier). Published in 1941⁹, the book encompasses the three dimensions of the Spiritist doctrine – religion, philosophy and science – organized into a series of questions that address the relationships between the spiritual world and human sciences such as chemistry, physics, history, sociology, art, among others. Repeating the procedure carried out by Kardec in the 'Book of Spirits', the group that assisted the medium Chico Xavier selected a series of questions, related to the contemporary world, so that Emmanuel (in the company of other expert spirits) could answer and point out directions on current human issues. The book sought to resolve, in some way, the almost always perennial conflict between science and the dimension of religious belief (usually understood as beyond natural laws). The aim of the work was to present the

⁸ Fabiano Vidal, *Em torno de Nosso lar: as controvérsias do espiritismo* (Curitiba: Appris, 2020); Dora Incontri, *Kardec para o século XXI*.

⁹ Chico Xavier, *O consolador* (Rio de Janeiro: FEB, 1941).

perspectives of the spiritual world on the advances and achievements of science, understood precisely as an expression of human spiritual development. On the other hand, it highlighted the ethical problem of the application of scientific and philosophical knowledge, something that would prove crucial in the following years, with the unfolding of the Second World War, the discovery of the Holocaust and the dropping of the Atomic Bombs. In this sense, “O Consolador” would become a crucial reference in the need for dialogue between the advances of science and the perspectives of a life ethically shaped by the Spiritist doctrine.

This issue would remain a turning point in the spread of Spiritism within Brazilian society. The importance given to written Spiritist texts as cultural artifacts reached prominence beyond the religious scope of the doctrine. Between 1973 and 1980, the medium Chico Xavier psychographed several letters from people who had died in tragic circumstances.¹⁰ In three cases, these letters were used as reliable messages in cases in which the people involved had died under suspicious circumstances. When presented at trial, the letters were responsible for the acquittal of the defendants in all cases, who were exonerated by the spirits who communicated through the medium.¹¹ Many of these psychographies became textual pieces of historical value within the doctrine, and are usually preserved as proof of the real action of mediumship in human existence.

Other works

It is important to emphasize that, as the book is the fundamental artifact of the Spiritist movement, other mediums contributed substantially to the construction of a literary body that would serve as a basis both for the study of the doctrine and for its epistemological and religious development.

This is the case of the medium Yvonne Pereira (1900-1983), an equally prolific author who made a crucial contribution to studies on mediumship through her books ‘Devassando o invisível’ (1963)¹² and

¹⁰ Chico Xavier, *Coleção Cartas Psicografada* (São Paulo: IDE, 2022); Márcia Bacell, *Cartas de Chico Xavier* (Catanduva: Leepp, 2020).

¹¹ Cintia Alves Silva, *As cartas de Chico Xavier* (São Paulo: Cultura Acadêmica, 2012).

¹² Yvonne Pereira, *Devassando o invisível* (Delving into the invisible) (Rio de Janeiro: FEB, 2012).

'Recordações da mediunidade' (1966).¹³ In them, the author explores various personal experiences, combined with systematized elements of the Spiritist doctrine, which help to understand the mechanisms of communication with spirits within what would be understood as a scientific prism. Like Chico Xavier, she also published novels and studies dictated by spirits, composing a vast and referential work within Brazilian Spiritism.

Another notable medium is Divaldo Franco (1927), an author still active and seen as a reference within the international Spiritist movement. Author of hundreds of lectures in several different languages, Divaldo also published a vast list of works dictated by spirituality (especially from her spiritual mentor, Joanna de Angelis), of which the so-called 'Psychological series'¹⁴ stands out – a collection of sixteen books, psychographed between 1989 and 2011 – which establishes a relationship between Spiritist thought and Carl Jung's psychoanalysis, providing a new dimension to the psychological and philosophical characteristics of Spiritist ideas. Another important book by this author is 'Atualidade do pensamento espírita'¹⁵, in which he proposes, precisely, an update on the questions raised by the book 'O Consolador' from 1941. Such consideration shows the constant concern that spiritist intellectuals have to continue in continuous dialogue with the sciences.

As we can see, these books added important interpretations to the central theoretical body of the works written by Kardec. In this sense, the analysis of his ideas is fundamental to contemplating the development of the Spiritist doctrine in Brazil and its polysemic interpretations. The book thus becomes a means of reworking Spiritist thought in a continuous and dynamic way, avoiding its rigidity in a dogmatic body of ideas. For a large part of Spiritist intellectuals, this is a central point inherited from Kardec's proposal: without continuous development, the Spiritist movement runs the risk of incorporating archaic religious elements, reproducing ancestral rituals and ideas, which could undermine the rationalizing systematization of Spiritist thought.¹⁶ For this reason, the book, even as an artifact, is also

¹³ Yvonne Pereira, *Recordações da mediunidade* (Records of Mediumship) (Rio de Janeiro: FEB, 2012).

¹⁴ Divaldo P. Franco, *Série Psicológica* (Salvador: Leal, 2014).

¹⁵ Divaldo P. Franco, *Atualidade do pensamento espírita* (Salvador: Leal, 2022).

¹⁶ Paulo Henrique Figueiredo, *Autonomia: a história jamais contada do espiritismo* (São Paulo: Feal, 2022); Figueiredo, *Revolução espírita*; Dora Incontri, *Para entender Kardec* (Curitiba: Comenius, 2004); Arribas, Célia da Graça, *Afinal espiritismo é*

a legitimate and powerful means and instrument of action for maintaining the vitality of the Brazilian Spiritist movement. As we have seen, it constitutes one of the central elements of a Spiritist cultural pedagogy, permeating the construction of training curricula.

Production and consumption of the Spiritist book

One aspect that should be highlighted is the importance given to the dissemination of books as a central element in the dissemination of the Spiritist doctrine, fulfilling a special role as a cultural artifact.¹⁷ For decades, Brazilian Spiritist publishers have made a point of producing publications that were easily accessible, low-cost, small in size and aimed at popularizing the doctrine. These books could be easily purchased by large sections of the population, had a simple finish, small print and a portable size that allowed reading in any environment. For a long time, this strategy worked well until the advent of the Internet. With the digitalization of books and the free dissemination of Spiritist works online, it is now possible to find most of these books available on the Internet, which has significantly reduced the consumption of physical books. For this reason, Spiritist publishers have changed the standard of their publications, with more refined finishes that dedicate special paper to the works. The use of hard covers aims to grant a status of importance to certain works, just as the visual programming has adapted to more modern aesthetic standards. In another sense, these books show a concern with reaching a specific segment of the public that usually has difficulty reading, or they seek to be more attractive to be given as gifts.

Thus, there is a change in the perspective of the book as a cultural artifact. The dissemination of works in hardcover and with higher prices reinforces the attempt to legitimize certain works considered seminal within the Spiritist movement. Although recent, this aesthetic change reveals the concern to give prominence to Spiritist productions, distancing them from the idea of 'cheap books with poor content'.

religião? A doutrina espírita na formação da diversidade religiosa brasileira (São Paulo: Alameda, 2010).

¹⁷ Ana Claudia Silva e Verônica Bemvenuto de Abreu Silva, "Quem lê livros espíritas?," *Estudos De Literatura Brasileira Contemporânea*, Brasília, no. 57 (2019): e5718, <https://doi.org/10.1590/2316-4018578>.

As a cultural artifact, Brazilian Spiritist books also have an important distinctive characteristic. They do not tend to become relics that hold some kind of sacred power, but rather become mobile elements for disseminating the doctrine. As we have seen, changes in the morphological character of books are intended to meet market demands, but their contents can also be discussed within the critical Spiritist world. Even some fundamental books, which serve as a theoretical basis or reference within the Spiritist movement, can be subject to philosophical or scientific questioning.

A clear example is the recent modification of the 'Book of Spirits' and the 'Gospel According to Spiritism'¹⁸ into anti-racist versions, carried out by Brazilian Spiritist groups who wish to adapt the work to the new context of biological and social sciences. Thus, the use of outdated terms such as 'race', 'color', 'inferiority' or 'evolution' were reviewed and changed, towards the essence of the Spiritist thesis that originally defends equality among beings and their possibilities for spiritual development. As we can see, this means, in practice, that "Cultural artifacts can also be used to challenge entrenched assumptions and promote a more critical perspective"¹⁹. This consideration is absolutely pertinent to the Spiritist book.

Conclusion

This means that, as a cultural artifact, the Spiritist book does not necessarily become a relic of worship, but rather plays a central role in the dissemination of the doctrine and the reproduction of knowledge. This issue becomes more evident when we also observe that in the early years of the Spiritist movement, there was limited concern with the preservation of the heritage of books or objects linked to the formation of the history of Spiritism, both in France and in Brazil. The search for and preservation of material elements of Kardec's life is ongoing, just as the movement to preserve historical materials linked to the great exponents of Brazilian

¹⁸Allan Kardec, *O livro dos espíritos (livro eletrônico): edição antirracista*, trans. Guillon Ribeiro (Salvador: Espíritas à Esquerda, 2023); Allan Kardec, *O Evangelho segundo o espiritismo (recurso eletrônico): contendo a Explicação das máximas morais do Cristo em concordância com o Espiritismo e suas aplicações às diversas circunstâncias da vida: edição antirracista*, trans. Guillon Ribeiro (Salvador:Espíritas à Esquerda, 2022).

¹⁹ Bastos, et.al., *Hacking Cultural - Um guia prático para agentes de mudança*.

Spiritism is recent.²⁰ It is noteworthy that, often, we have very few copies of the first editions of works that are today considered fundamental, which shows that the concern with the dissemination of the doctrine was much more important than the artifactualization of the book itself.

Although not a relic and lacking in sacralization, Brazilian Spiritist books constitute an open space for critical discussions about the development of the doctrine and its basic concepts.²¹ This has profound ethical and philosophical implications, with regard to the formation of Spiritist opinions on moral, social and political issues. Often, books continue to be important cultural artifacts because they are effective disseminators of ideas and proposals; and often, the success of a given publication can be understood, occasionally, as an index of importance and 'truthfulness'. Obviously, it is important to be aware that the fact that a work sells well does not mean that it is 'true'; but in the worldview of a majority of Spiritists formed by non-specialists, critical discussion of these works encounters limitations, with their 'truthful' character usually prevailing. For this reason, many Brazilian Spiritist book producers have a fundamental concern with the continuous construction of a Spiritist cultural pedagogy, focused on intellectual study, usually anti-canonical and anti-dogmatic. In this sense, the "Spiritist book-artifact" is the fundamental pillar, and the battlefield, of philosophical, scientific and religious ideas that develop within the Brazilian Spiritist doctrine.

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²⁰ Figueiredo, *Autonomia: a história jamais contada do espiritismo*.

²¹ Ibid.; Figueiredo, *Revolução espírita: a teoria esquecida de Allan Kardec*; Incontri, *Kardec para o século 21*; Incontri, *Para entender Allan Kardec*.

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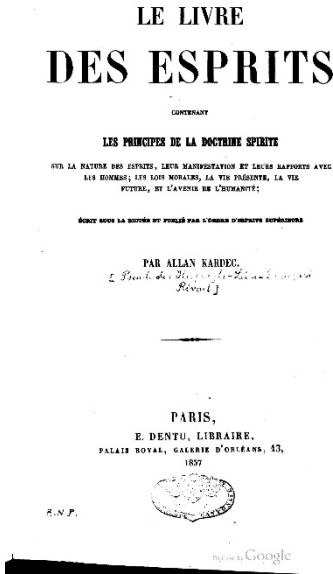
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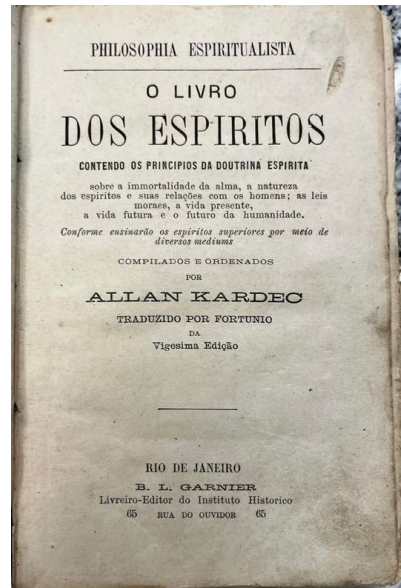
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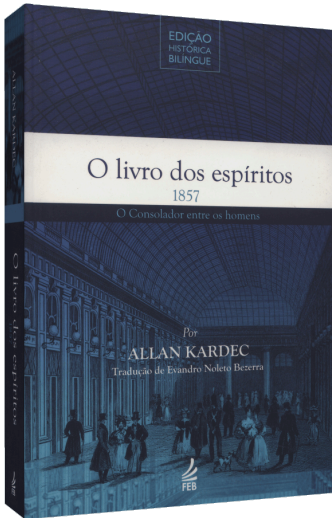
Spiritists Books in Brazil: Artifacts



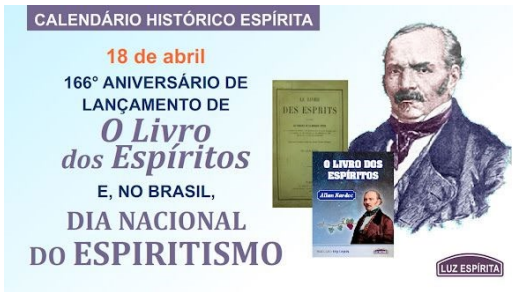
Cover of the first edition of the 'Book of Spirits' published on April 18, 1857. Few copies of the originals remain, but a movement to preserve the Spiritist historical heritage is being promoted, mainly by Brazilian practitioners of Spiritism.

Cover of the first translation of the 'Book of Spirits' published in Brazil. The reception of Spiritism in Brazil was rapid and intense; in less than three years, all five of Allan Kardec's main works were translated into Portuguese. They underwent successive revisions and adaptations, as we will see.



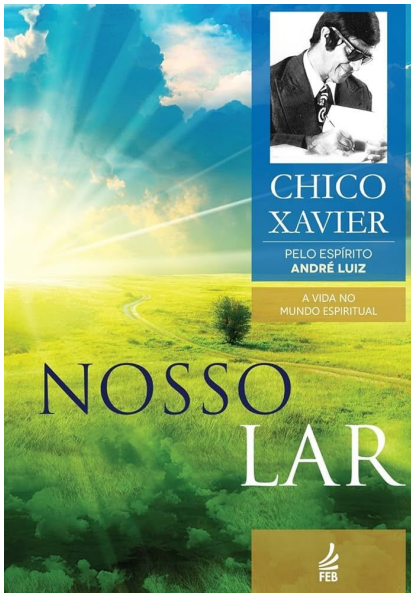
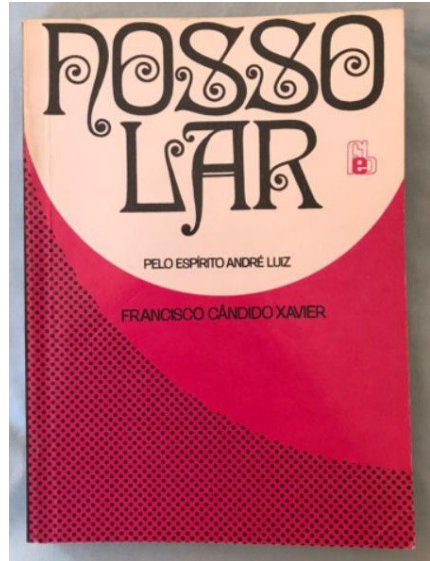
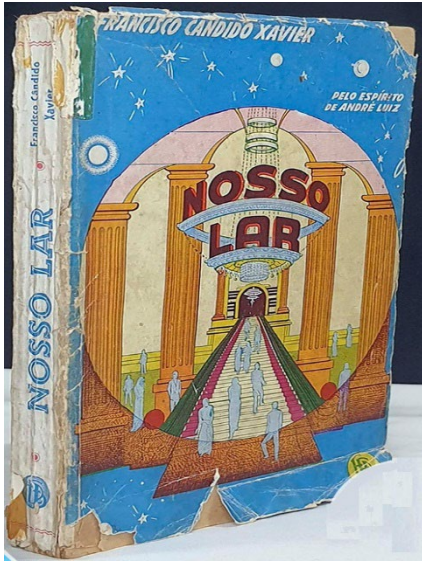


Cover of the commemorative edition of the Launch of the 'Book of Spirits'. By making a new translation comparing the first edition in French and a new one in Portuguese, the objective of the work was to analyze and understand the changes that occurred in the book, and their impact on the formation of Spiritist theories.



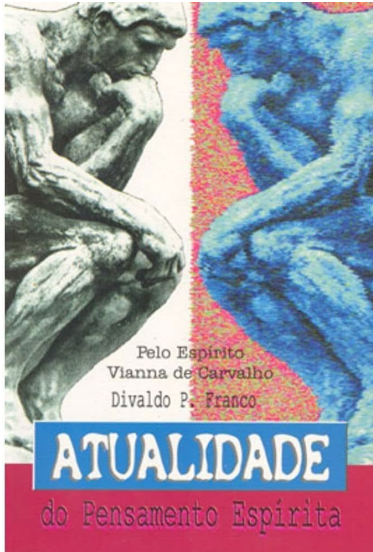
The importance of the Spiritist book as an artifact is evident in the celebration of April 18, the date on which 'National Spiritism Day' is celebrated. This day is also called 'National Spiritist Book Day', when several Spiritist book fairs are organized in the country to promote the publication of Spiritist literature.





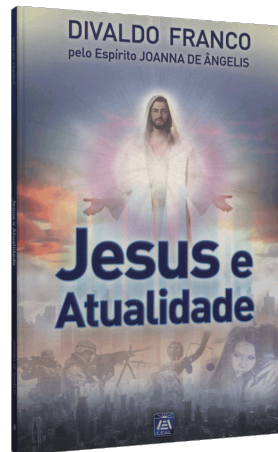
First edition of the book ‘Nosso Lar’, from 1944; initially the book was released in a relatively large version, but later versions sought to increase its dissemination in the market. Next, we have the pocket volume of ‘Nosso Lar’, an edition that prevailed for almost forty years and could be easily carried in a small bag. It contrasts with the edition released in the 21st century, which emerged after the internet phenomenon. With the dissemination of digital books, low-cost books lost their meaning; for this reason, the current version has returned to being large in size, larger letters (for people with visual impairments) and a modernized

presentation. It is common among spiritists to give books as gifts, thus valuing their aesthetic function.



First edition of the book 'O Consolador' from 1941 and 'Atualidade do Pensamento Espírita' from 2003. Both books reflect the spiritists' concern with maintaining a close connection between science and spirituality. Books like these were – and continue to be – important references on ethical, philosophical and epistemological issues among Brazilian spiritist thinkers.

Comparison between the second edition of the book 'Jesus e a atualidade' from 1989 and the hardcover version, released in 2014, and included in Divaldo Franco's 'Série Psicológica'. Although spiritists are generally very concerned with avoiding the creation of dogmas and rituals, it is common for some works to be almost 'canonized' as references on certain subjects. In this process, the valorization of the book's content, done through an elaborate presentation, often



adds a new type of imaginary value. It is not uncommon to find practitioners of Spiritism who believe that a work is ‘better’ because its presentation is more elaborate. This reveals a clear confusion between the material aspect of the books and their actual content. The ‘Psychological Series’ is considered a very important collection within Spiritist thought, but many people question its accessibility in terms of cost.



‘Book of Spirits – anti-racist edition’ and Gospel according to Spiritism – anti-racist version’. Published without digital media, so as to be accessible to the general public, these two publications also demonstrate the concern of various segments of the Brazilian Spiritist movement in modifying the scientific terminology used in the 19th century. With the advancement of science, it is necessary to modify certain terms and concepts that belong to outdated or surpassed theories. Allan Kardec himself defended that Spiritism should go hand in hand with scientific development; for this reason, periodic reviews of the fundamental books of Spiritism are a necessity, providing dynamism to the Brazilian Spiritist doctrine.