

# DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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**Lisbon Academy of Sciences I (1779-1820)**

From its foundation in late 1779, history played a major role in the activities of the Lisbon Academy of Sciences (ACL), both as a specific branch of study and as an academic discipline worthy of an institutional framework. The initial ACL Statutes plan laid down the distribution of its members into three classes: Natural Sciences (also known as the sciences of observation and natural phenomena), Exact Sciences (or sciences of calculation) and Literature (or moral sciences and fine arts). The former two classes would later merge into the class of Sciences and the third would be referred to as the class of Literature, a division that still regulates the internal organisation of this institution today. When establishing the core subjects of the class of Literature, the premise that "the language spoken by a people and their past history are their most specific and unique features" was taken into consideration and "therefore the Portuguese Language and History, in all its possible facets and relations, are the two branches of study that constitute what the Academy assumed as Portuguese Literature" (*Memórias de Literatura Portuguesa* [Memoirs of Portuguese Literature], Part I, 1792, p. ii). By claiming this mission for itself, the ACL, to some extent, sought to ensure the continuity of the aims of the *Academia Real da História Portuguesa* [Royal Academy of Portuguese History], founded in 1720 under the aegis of King John V, whose activity gradually diminished from the mid-century onwards, to become disbanded in 1776. Thus, the ACL became the pivotal institution for the development of initiatives promoting knowledge of the Portuguese language and history, pursuing the efforts initiated by other intermittent and ephemeral literary and erudite academies throughout the first half of the 18th century. By making history a matter of its institutional competence, the ACL reconstructed a legacy it transformed into its own, assuming an entire intellectual heritage from which the names of Raphael Bluteau, António Caetano de Sousa and Diogo Barbosa Machado emerged.

One of the first and principal initiatives promoted by the ACL in the field of history was the registration and inventory of manuscript archival sources. This was accomplished by means of a systematic survey of the kingdom's registries and libraries, in search of unpublished documentation or documentation at risk of falling into oblivion. The contribution of Abbot José Correia da Serra, one of the ACL founders, in this mission was



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key to the scope and establishment of ACL guidelines for the registration and copying of relevant documents that were scattered across the kingdom's registries.

The hard-core members of this commission established by the ACL were João Pedro Ribeiro, Joaquim José Ferreira Gordo and Friar Joaquim de Santo Agostinho. An indispensable condition for the accomplishment of this task was in-depth knowledge of diplomatics and palaeography and, therefore, several authors such as Friar Joaquim Forjaz, Friar Joaquim de Santa Clara, Friar Joaquim de Santa Rosa de Viterbo, José Anastácio de Figueiredo and José Veríssimo Álvares da Silva collaborated in the undertaking.

These ACL members reported on the information they themselves had collected in letters to Correia da Serra, between 1788 and 1794 (published by António Baião, *A Infância da Academia*[The Academy's Infancy], 1934). In their correspondence, they describe the vicissitudes associated with the demanding work of collecting sources, the difficulties and costs involved in hiring amanuenses and copyists to help prepare indexes and transcribe documents. João Pedro Ribeiro travelled around the North and Centre of the country. In his correspondence with Correia da Serra, where he confesses "I am having fun here going around these registry offices" (Baião, *op. cit.*, p.1), he mentions visits to monasteries and town halls in Minho (Ponte de Lima, Viana, Caminha, Valença), Vila Real, Coimbra, Lamego, Guimarães, Braga, Porto and Aveiro. He certifies the diversity of the inventoried and registered documentation, stating, in relation to Porto, that "all the registry offices in Lisbon together do not measure up to one in this province" (*ibid*, p. 6), and invariably complains about the poor conditions of their conservation. Since any attempt to publish selected or partial manuscripts that might be considered more relevant was either unjustified or totally impractical, João Pedro Ribeiro suggested to Correia da Serra that a detailed "Chronological Index" should be prepared by the academics conducting the survey to later be continued by the city councils of the kingdom, which would be responsible for preserving the information and documentation in their archives (*ibid*, pp. 8-9). In order to carry out the ACL's mission, João Pedro Ribeiro was released from his teaching duties at the University of Coimbra, which caused him some concern, as this would render him unable to fully exercise his duties and damage his career and academic power (*ibid*, pp. 34-35). However, despite these inconveniences, the ACL mission with which he was entrusted was of key importance to the subsequent creation of the chair of Diplomatics at the University of Coimbra and to enhancing his prestige and authority in the field of national history and the techniques inherent to the occupation of historian.

The ACL commission members were particularly interested in the documentation held by the monasteries, namely Arouca and Tibães, the visit to which fell under the charge of Friar Joaquim de Santa Rosa de Viterbo, who was also responsible for the registry offices of the Trás-os-Montes region and Viseu. Friar Joaquim de Santo Agostinho was in charge of the Algarve region, the monasteries of Alcobaça and Leiria and several colleges of Coimbra. The public registry offices and monasteries of Santarém were the responsibility of Friar Joaquim Forjaz. Joaquim José Ferreira Gordo was in charge of the registry offices and archives of Lisbon and Tomar, and also of Spain, as reported in detail in the Notes published in his *Memórias de Literatura Portuguesa*



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(Part III, 1792, pp. 1-92). He authored the most detailed policy document on this mission for the Academy, in a letter addressed to José Correia da Serra in July 1789 (ibid, pp. 120-128), explaining the type of public registry offices to be visited (including the court registry offices and the archives of the magistracies, recorders, stockrooms and customs), as well as the registry offices of the monasteries, clergy houses and collegiate churches. He also mentions the advantage of including, "if possible, those of the noblemen of manors, who brought their origin from the period when the lordships and jurisdictions they received from the crown were at their peak" (ibid, p. 121). He refers in particular detail to the tasks that were to be performed by the three people in charge of the Torre do Tombo archive and the other registry offices in Lisbon, describing in detail the operations and registration formalities to be observed. The only region of the country that was not expressly visited was the Alentejo, and it is plausible to suggest that this was due to the remarkable work of Friar Manuel do Cenáculo in the dioceses of Beja and Évora, whose inventory and safeguarding of historical documents and monuments was widely acknowledged and acclaimed. Correia da Serra would later make an extremely laudatory appraisal of these archival studies, considering them fundamental for the most ambitious, but meanwhile abandoned editorial undertaking from which "the true History of Portugal should emerge" (José Correia da Serra, *Coup d'oeil sur l'état des sciences et des lettres*, 1804, p. cccxlvii).

A second core area of the ACL's activity in the field of history, throughout the period under consideration of 1779-1820, was the compilation, publication and re-edition of unpublished sources. Of particular note is the *Colecção de Livros Inéditos de História Portuguesa* [Collection of Unpublished Books of Portuguese History], published in five volumes between 1790 and 1824. The mentor and driving force behind this initiative was also the Academy's secretary, José Correia da Serra, who was the author of an important prologue in which he laid down the main strands of the historiographical reflection of the ACL, as shall be seen further ahead. The collection includes, among other unpublished material, the *Livro da Guerra de Ceuta* [Book of the War of Ceuta] by Mateus Pisano and several chronicles of Portuguese kings by Rui de Pina (King Duarte, King Afonso V and King João II), Fernão Lopes (King Pedro I and King Fernando) and Cristóvão Rodrigues Acenheiro. The publication of the *Crónica dos Reis de Portugal* [Chronicle of the Kings of Portugal] by Acenheiro would later give rise to the implacable fury of Alexandre Herculano, which shows that the selection of works published under the ACL seal was susceptible to controversy.

Alexandre Herculano would also come to question and severely oppose the legitimacy and veracity of the myths and legends expounded in *Monarquia Lusitana* [Lusitanian Monarchy], one of the most emblematic works of Portuguese historiography of the modern era, and partially reprinted by the Academy in 1806. Published under the new title of *Colecção dos Principais Autores da História Portuguesa* [Collection of the Main Authors of Portuguese History], this new edition covers the first three parts of the *Monarquia Lusitana*, up to the end of the reign of Dom Afonso Henriques, the first two written by Friar Bernardo de Brito and the third by Friar António Brandão. In the prologue to the new ACL edition, D. António da Visitação Freire presents the life and work of Friar Bernardo de Brito, explaining the context in which the *Monarquia Lusitana* was



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produced at the end of the 16th century, and shedding light upon inaccuracies of analysis and document forgery, which does little to flatter the probity of the Cistercian monks. Special attention is given to the total absence of documentary evidence to support the veracity of the miracle of Ourique. Thus, long before Herculano's critique of the subject, the 1806 re-edition sought to maintain interpretative distance with regard to events that were not supported by authentic documentary sources, while at the same time fuelling a process of historical reconstruction that was not unrelated to the desire to exalt the virtues sustained in the most distant history of the Portuguese nation. It was by no means a coincidence that in the year (1806), when the threats to the integrity of the territory posed by the Franco-Spanish alliance became evident, the ACL published a work that asserted the longevity and perennity of the Lusitanian monarchy.

The editions of *Vida do Infante D. Duarte* [Life of Infante D. Duarte] by André de Resende (1789), *Soldado Prático* [Practical Soldier] by Diogo do Couto (1790) and the *Colecção de Notícias para a História e Geografia das Nações Ultramarinas* [Collection of News for the History and Geography of the Overseas Nations] (5 vols. initiated in 1812, the publication of which extended up to 1839) were equally relevant. By establishing this corpus of Portuguese historical sources, to which the work of registering and inventorying unknown or barely known documents in the archives and libraries was evidently related, the ACL demonstrated its clear priority to reconstruct and enhance the heritage of the country.

Indeed, without an inventory of archives and the publication of sources, the historian's occupation would not be possible. This is the third dimension that should be retained in this appraisal of the activities directly provided by the ACL during the first phase of its institutional existence, and one that represents one of the most important periods for an understanding of the contribution of the ACL to the construction of history as an academic discipline in our country.

All the authors who participated in the mission of the ACL of conducting a survey on the sources in the kingdom's registry offices and libraries also published accounts of their archival incursions in the collection *Memórias de Literatura Portuguesa*, of which eight volumes were published between 1792 and 1814. This collection, whose title is expressly identified as a reference to Portuguese language and history, is the main repository of the historiographical work of the ACL members throughout the period under review. Examples include the publication of a memoir on the unpublished chronicle of the conquest of the Algarve, found by Friar Joaquim de Santo Agostinho (*Memórias de Literatura Portuguesa*, Volume I, 1792, pp. 74-97), the detailed description by the same author of the manuscript codices of the Alcobaça Monastery, in which he corrects the errors of earlier inventories (*ibid*, Volume V, 1793, pp. 297-362), the brief news piece by Friar Joaquim Forjaz on the discovery of the unpublished memoirs of Diogo do Couto in the Convent of Graça (*ibid*, Book I, 1792, pp. 339-343), and also the several memoirs by João Pedro Ribeiro on the historical sources of the ordinances and Portuguese civil and canon law. The memoirs of António Caetano do Amaral on the history of legislation and customs in Portugal are equally relevant.



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In general, and for the full eight volume set of *Memórias de Literatura Portuguesa*, historical themes clearly dominate, including studies on civil, ecclesiastical and military history, the history of language and literature, and the history of the judiciary, law and legislation. The publication of various monographic and sectorial notes with incursions in the fields of social, economic and institutional history are also worthy of note. Many of the published memoirs were texts submitted to competitions launched by the ACL itself, with a view to awarding and acknowledging the merit of approaches to subjects deemed essential by the ACL's management for the creation of broad knowledge in the various areas of its intervention (natural sciences, exact sciences and literature, the latter subdivided into language and history). Among the themes put out for tender, which were awarded and published, subjects of a historical nature were a regular feature, namely related to the evolution of primogeniture law, the introduction of canon law and Roman law in Portugal, numismatics and the history of coins, the history of weights and measures from the foundation of the monarchy, the evolution of the population from the time of the discoveries, the history of diseases, etc.

In addition to the *Memórias de Literatura Portuguesa* collection, the ACL also published its own works by authors deemed outstanding for the quality and relevance of their historical research, especially with regard to sources and indexes within the scope of legislation and law, in their different areas of application. The works of Pascoal de Melo Freire, José Anastácio de Figueiredo and João Pedro Ribeiro are particularly noteworthy, due to the lasting influence they would come to exert.

A concern may be noted among many of the authors who collaborated in the historiographical production of the ACL to justify the need for a new understanding of the historical object and a new approach on the part of the subject interpreting the facts proven by archival documentation. Taking as an example João Pedro Ribeiro, one of the leading figures of this enlightened generation of ACL historians, it is possible to note the pains he takes in the prologue to the first volume of the *Dissertações Cronológicas e Críticas* [Chronological and Critical Dissertations](1810) to justify the publication of his work with the need to restore truth to the fabricated false documents or the misrepresented and misinterpreted historical facts. Thus, we are presented with a process of publication and interpretation of sources which is driven by a motivation of heuristic and hermeneutic reconstruction, in which the texts, and the narrative constructed thereof, are framed by the goal of constituting a memory which had either been abandoned or had undergone undue appropriation.

The short but incisive texts of José Correia da Serra, who was engaged in his role as secretary of the ACL at the time, allow for a comprehensive interpretation of the overall meaning of the history the ACL wished to practice. The first point at which he expresses his views on the relevance of history emerges in the foreword to volume I of the collection of *Memórias Económicas* [Economic Memoirs](1789), when he explains that a knowledge of the resources and productive potential of the kingdom and its dominions, with a view to improving their use, not only requires in-depth knowledge of the natural and exact sciences, which may contribute to this end, but also of the history which provides clues to why certain objectives are achieved while others are not. In his own words, there is no doubt about the mission that falls to historians: "It is up to those who delve into



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former successful achievements to conduct this analysis and to disseminate what has already brought us gains and losses, and the causes of why we have grown or declined in number, in strength, in light, in riches. The knowledge of what the nation is and of what it may be on the basis of what it has already been is the most conducive to its happiness, and can only be expected from the united efforts of such a body as the Academy" (José Correia da Serra, Foreword, *Memórias Económicas*, Part I, 1789, p. 10).

This view on the relevance of history in order to understand the present and to establish the most suitable procedures for political action so as to pursue specific objectives is resumed again in another foreword that opens the *Colecção de Livros Inéditos de História Portuguesa* in 1790. The evolutionary chain of circumstances and events bestows an irreplaceable position upon history in the knowledge of society. Therefore, as far as Correia da Serra is concerned, "The History of Portugal is not an indifferent study for us, or one based on mere curiosity (...) The laws that govern us, the classes of people into which the nation is divided, the forums, privileges and obligations of each one of us, the nature of the goods we possess, the forms of public administration, the customs we follow, the language we speak, are all consequences of past achievements, and in them we can only find the knowledge of their origin, and the explanation for their nature. If glory did not move us to study them, then pure need would". (José Correia da Serra, Foreword, *Colecção de Livros Inéditos de História Portuguesa*, Part I, 1790, p. vii).

According to Correia da Serra, the specific nature of the object of study of history does not allow for experimentation or the repetition of observations, but rather imposes additional demands on shrewd reasoning. That is why the traces of narratives and monuments are so important, hence the need to preserve primary sources. The interpretative risks, false representations and hermeneutic abuses meant that special attention had to be given to genuine records of the events that make history, as clarified in the following passage: "When these witnesses emerge from the dust, and a great number of unknown facts come to light, when work, patience, the spirit of criticism and of discourse have combined these materials and deduced the precise account of the points of interest (because not everything that happened is worthy of being History, although everything can serve to illustrate it), we will then unpretentiously be able to accept that we know what Portugal has been. Then, and only then, a quill guided by reason and good taste will be able to present us with the complicated series of past actions and explain to us, with certainty, the causes that motivated them and the effects to which they gave rise, so that they may be of benefit to us, and to the posterity of teaching" (ibid, pp. ix-x).

In the words of Correia da Serra, history emerges as an indispensable element in the formation of enlightened knowledge, sharing and partaking of the traces and trajectories of other scientific discourses. The constitution of archives and memory, the recording and preservation of sources and the interpretative reconstructions of history are research procedures, in which the observation and description protocols and instructions that confirm the importance of empirical methods are highlighted. In line with the rules laid down by the ACL for the natural scientists who collected samples and objects for museum collections, the members



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of the committee responsible for visiting the kingdom's registry offices and libraries were also meant to "receive a magnifying glass and an adequate dose of spirit in order to revive the letters of the manuscripts erased by time from the Academy Secretariat before initiating their work" (Letter from Joaquim José Ferreira Gordo to José Correia da Serra, July 1789, in A. Baião, *A Infância da Academia*, 1934, p. 126).

Similar to the sciences of the natural world, history was also expected to contribute to an understanding of the present, and not to be confined within the narrow limits of abstract reflection. Throughout the initial phase of the ACL, history was understood as an instrument and resource for the constitution, preservation and enhancement of memory, from a perspective no longer reduced to a grandiloquent praise of a glorious past, but rather that of an enlightened process of meticulous and critical verification of the roots and foundations that establish the conditions for understanding the passage of time to the present.

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