

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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COLEN, José Augusto Barbosa (Vila de Almeida, 1849 - Lisboa, 15 May 1917)

With the assistance of Emídio Navarro, José Augusto Barbosa Colen moved from Beira Interior to Lisbon, where he entered the world of journalism and politics. There he joined the founding members of the newspaper, *As Novidades*, and was considered the creator of investigative journalism in Portugal, through the section entitled 'Cases of the Day', which published news revealing in-depth research. Colen assumed the management of *As Novidades* on two occasions (1891-1895 and 1905-1907). With this publication he proved himself to be an active, engaged journalist, whose political articles brought him into conflict with certain personalities of the time. He would later leave this newspaper to begin working on the *Revista Quinzenal Illustrada: Brasil-Portugal* magazine.

In 1886, when Emídio Navarro rose to a position in the ministry of public works, he appointed Barbosa Colen as his private secretary. This appointment, of course, counted on his personal and political connections, which also materialised in the elections for deputy by the Progressive Party in the uninominal circle of Figueira Castelo Rodrigo (1887-1889 legislature). Barbosa Colen's reputation as a parliamentary chronicler assured his place as editor of the *Diário das Câmaras* (15 January 1890), later becoming head of the writing office of the *Diário das Sessões*, a position he occupied for several years.

Between 1890 and 1916 he was director of the Anglo-Portuguese Telephone Company. Among his writings, one of his most prominent works was *Entre Duas Revoluções* (Between Two Revolutions, 2 vols.), published in 1902. Another of his works, and perhaps his magnum opus, were the volumes IX, X and XI of *História de Portugal: Popular e Illustrada (continuada desde a chegada de D. Pedro IV à Europa até aos nossos dias)*, by Manuel Pinheiro Chagas published by the Empresa da História de Portugal between 1899 and 1909. These publications cover the period from 1832 (landing at Mindelo) to 1853 (death of Maria II) of Portuguese contemporary history, noting their similarity, since many of the issues addressed in *Entre Duas Revoluções* are reprised in *História de Portugal: Popular e Illustrada*.

With regard to the historical thinking of Barbosa Colen, his writing reveals cross-contamination between the journalist, politician and historian. This is clearly visible in all his work, from the liveliness of historical pictures he created and the psychological density attributed to the players, suggesting throughout the narrative the evolution of the characters' behaviour. Colen developed a critical historical method, emphasising in his research an attention to the concrete (describing the environment in which the action takes place and its details). He did not limit himself to reporting only great events of the past, but also the



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small *clichés* of the life of statesmen or other figures mentioned, which is clearly visible, for example, in his description of how Queen D. Maria II is presented in the discourse of the crown in 1848, alluding to the 'recollection of those who saw her then and the celebration conserved in memory' (*Entre Duas Revoluções*, Vol. I, p. 3).

Among his intellectual references as an author, the presence of gate-keepers, such as Alexandre Herculano and Oliveira Martins, is evident. Reference to the work of Luz Soriano must be noted, taking into account the time he portrayed. For Barbosa Colen, the influence of Herculano is evident from the importance given to the individual in the historical outcome. However, it should be noted that in his writings, the way people are characterised allows for the identification of a basic moral and psychological typology (*História de Portugal: Popular and Ilustrada*, vol. IX, p. 2). For instance, with certain significant figures, their weight is defined by defining their historical frameworks and their evolution. One of the people who stood out in Portuguese political history of the time he covered was António Bernardo da Costa Cabral (First Count of Tomar), pointing out his important role in public life and administration. Another person he emphasised was D. Maria II, identified as the 'most relevant figure of her dynasty' (*ibid.*, vol. XI, p. 605) stressing her intelligence, personal energy and politics. Another case is the Duke of Saldanha, who, in addition to his military qualities and political versatility, Colen also points out the 'puerile vanity of the Marshal' (*Entre Duas Revoluções*, vol. II, p. 414). The weight of these three characters in his definition of the time can be summarized by the following passage: 'D. Maria II, the Count of Tomar and Saldanha are, in the time we are depicting, the three great, dominant figures, expressing – the strength of will in he who leads, the power of initiative in he who governs, the strength of courage in he who battles' (*ibid.*, vol. II, p. 435).

However, Barbosa Colen did not just laud his subjects. He also harshly criticised the actions of certain politicians, such as the financial policy of António José de Ávila, charging him with "bankruptcy" (*ibid.*, vol. II, p. 102). Likewise, he did not shy from criticising certain behaviours of royalty of the time, surrounding the *questão dos adiantamentos* (advances) hotly debated during the reign of King D. Carlos I. Colen used the prevailing methods of the time in his historical writing. However, it is noteworthy that his explanations of past events was based not only on critical bibliography (including foreign works), but on abundant documentation from the era, combined with frequent value judgments. This aspect of the work of Barbosa Colen is particularly recurring. About an article written in the journal *A Revolução de Setembro* he wrote: «There is no need to underline the inconsistency of these comments, which on that occasion might have been taken seriously by those blinded by the same political passion, and who now, years later, leave, in absolute transparency, this ridiculous nonsensical argument» (*ibid.*, vol. II, p.126-127). Along the same line, another feature of his work is the importance of his observation as a journalist, in which the historical past is mobilised in the criticism of the present, with politicians being the most targeted, especially when it came to referring to the usual manoeuvres of the 'electoral court' (*ibid.*, vol. II, p. 101).

José Augusto Barbosa Colen was self-taught, a fact which makes his career and his body of work very expressive of his time. As Jorge Borges de Macedo noted, 'all major Portuguese writers of the nineteenth century were journalists!' (*Da história ao documento, do documento à história*, 'From History to the



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Document, from the Document to History', p. XXXV). The work of José Augusto Barbosa Colen was at the time widely read and has continued to be read until the present, used by historians of the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century.

Works by José Augusto Barbosa Colen: Periodicals: *Progresso*, *Correio da Noite*, *Novidades* and *Revista Quinzenal Ilustrada: Brasil-Portugal*.

CHAGAS, Manuel Pinheiro; COLEN, José Augusto Barbosa, co-author of *Historia de Portugal: Popular e Ilustrada*, Lisboa, Emp. da História de Portugal, 1899-1909; *Entre Duas Revoluções: 1848-1851*, Lisboa, Manuel Gomes, 1902; *O conselheiro António Maria da Costa e Fonseca: esboço biográfico*, Porto, Tip. do Jornal do Porto, 1872; *Um artigo de Barbosa Colen sobre Gomes Freire de Andrade*, Lisboa, Tip. de José Fernandes Júnior, 1932.

Works with references to José Augusto Barbosa Colen: "BARBOSA COLLEN, (José Augusto)", *Grande Enciclopédia Portuguesa e Brasileira*, vol. IV, Lisboa, Editorial Enciclopédia, [s.d], p.199; PEREIRA, J. M. Esteves e RODRIGUES, Guilherme, "COLLEN,(José Augusto Barbosa)", *Portugal: Dicionário Histórico, Chorográfico, Heraldico, Biográfico, Bibliográfico, Numismático e Artístico [...]*, vol. II, Lisboa, João Romano Torres, 1906, pp.1097-1098; SARDICA, José Miguel, "COLEN, José Augusto Barbosa", *Dicionário biográfico parlamentar: 1834-1910*, dir. de Maria Filomena Mónica, vol. I, Lisboa, Assembleia da República, Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, 2004, pp.812-813.

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APOIOS:

