

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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Lapa, Manuel Rodrigues (Anadia, 1897 - Anadia, 1989)

Manuel Rodrigues Lapa studied in Lisbon at Casa Pia from the age of 10. Before entering university, he attended Liceu Pedro Nunes and in 1912, he frequently visited the Biblioteca Nacional [National Library] where he read “mysterious manuscripts” from the Closed Reserve Section (he was an under librarian at the Biblioteca between 1920 and 1922). In 1914, as a research fellow of the Luz Soriano legacy, he entered the Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa [Faculty of Arts of the University of Lisbon] – where Adolfo Coelho, Leite de Vasconcelos and José Joaquim Nunes featured amongst his teachers– and in the following year he began his collaboration with the newspaper O Povo de Anadia [The People of Anadia], with an article on Camilo Castelo Branco. In 1919, after enrolling at the Faculdade de Direito [Law School], he completed his licenciatura [first degree] exam in Romance Philology with an overall mark of 13 out of 20; on the recommendation of Leite de Vasconcelos, he taught at the Faculdade de Letras first as a bacharel and later as a contract lecturer.

He taught at the Liceu Camões (Lisbon), Martins Sarmiento (Guimarães) and Gil Vicente (Lisbon) in the 1920s. Again, on the recommendation of Leite de Vasconcelos, in 1928 Lapa was hired as a contract assistant professor in the Romance Philology department, where he lectured subjects as diverse as Portuguese Philology, History of Portuguese Literature, History of French Literature, History of Italian Literature, and Compared Grammar of Romance Languages.

In late 1929, he went to Paris on an 8-month scholarship, where he enrolled at the Sorbonne for subjects lectured by great medievalists such as Antoine Thomas and Alfred Jeanroy (Medieval French); Clovis Brunel and Mario Roques (Provençal); Edmond Faral (Medieval Latin Literature).

He completed his doctoral thesis on Romance Philology, *Origens da Poesia Lírica em Portugal na Idade Média* [Origins of Lyric Poetry in Portugal in the Middle Ages] in Paris (before defending his thesis, he had already begun writing for the journal *Seara Nova*, which he directed between February 1973 and February 1974 as a substitute for Augusto Abelaira). Lapa faced harsh criticism from Oliveira Guimarães in his viva, on 11th December 1930.

This was the beginning of a controversy that continued in 1931 when Lapa published two highly critical articles on *Fonética Portuguesa* [Portuguese Phonetics], Coimbra, 1929, a book by Oliveira Guimarães



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(criticism presented with the “blunt honesty” of an effort against the “fluttering of extremely superficial erudition” (Lapa, *Miscelânea de Língua... [Miscellanea of Language...]*, 1982, 342). As a result of this controversy, Lapa advocated the academic specialisation of knowledge.

In 1931, he resumed his position as contract assistant professor and in the following year became co-founder of the Centro de Estudos Filológicos [Centre for Philological Studies] (today Centro de Linguística da Universidade de Lisboa [Centre of Linguistics of the University of Lisbon]). In early 1933, the bureaucracy of the Tribunal de Contas [Court of Auditors] (Diogo, Manuel Rodrigues Lapa. *Fotobiografia [Manuel Rodrigues Lapa. Photobiography]*, 1997, 49) did not permit renewal of the contract with Lapa, who had not been paid since October of the previous year; he was dismissed by the government that very same year on account of his article in *Seara Nova*, *A Política do Idioma e as Universidades [The Language Policy and Universities]*: “our University is a broken mechanism which will either be fixed shortly by replacing a great number of its parts, or must forever be cast aside as useless and bothersome” (Lapa, *As minhas razões [My Reasons]*, 1983, 51) [*Seara Nova*, 341, 1933, 67-76; conference held on the premises of “Ilustração Portuguesa” [“Portuguese Illustration”], on 15th February 1933 and again in Coimbra on 30th March 1933 in the Associação dos Artistas [Artists Association].

In the same year, Lapa submitted his work entitled *Livro de Falcoaria de Pero Menino [The Book of Falconry of Pero Menino]* (Coimbra, Imprensa da Universidade [University Press], 1931) to apply for the position of tenured assistant professor and was approved unanimously. Nevertheless, two years later a decree issued by Salazar’s government ordered his mandatory dismissal from public employment.

His political opposition to the regime became increasingly apparent thenceforth, although the first relevant signs date back to 1918, when he was a member of the board of the Associação Académica da Faculdade de Letras [Student Association of the Faculty of Arts]. It is worth noting that, in the wake of several student claims, a student strike was held between May and September. Almost thirty years later, his opposition to the regime would again be brought to the forefront with his endorsement of presidential candidate, General Norton de Matos. In an interview published in the *Diário de Lisboa* on 5th January 1949, he did not mince his words: “Now is the time to quietly put an end to a situation that embarrasses us as Europeans – we continue to be the kaffir of Europe, a term used to refer to us in the 17th century.” He was arrested the following day for “attacking national spirit and decorum and insulting the Government of the Nation” but was released on bail on 11th January.

As a historian of literature, Lapa spoke out against the determination to restrict historical explanation to the search for a single original cause (see Le Goff, “História” [“History”], 1984, 159) and often dealt with the issue of origins from a plural perspective. Although this was a subject of interest to him among several aspects of Portuguese medieval literature, he had first explored this phenomenon in Galician-Portuguese lyric poetry in his doctoral thesis, self-published as the first volume of the series “História da Língua e da Literatura Portuguesa” [“History of Portuguese Language and Literature”] (with *Seara Nova* as depositary). The title



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signals the relevance of the study of origins at the time, as evidenced in works such as *Origini della poesia lirica in Italia* [Origins of lyric poetry in Italy] (1899) by Giovanni Alfredo Cesareo and *Les origines de la poésie lyrique en France* [Origins of lyric poetry in France] (1904) by Alfred Jeanroy, which Lapa applied to the Galician-Portuguese lyric (but not solely, as shown through his participation in the discussion on the primacy of the Portuguese text of the *Demanda do Santo Graal* [Quest of the Holy Grail] [Miscelânea de Língua..., 1982, 303-340]. The aim was to determine how Romance lyric poetry had emerged and, within it, the lyric poetry of each country of Neo-Latin Europe.

Half of Lapa's doctoral thesis critically and circumstantially addresses each of the major theories surrounding the topic: the Arabic, the folkloric, the medium Latinist and the liturgical, the latter being his most favoured. Yet this preference never prevented him from appreciating a combination of factors at the root of lyric poetry, and in a paper presented at the international congress of writers sponsored by the committee for the 4th centennial celebrations of the city of São Paulo, Lapa argued, for example, that in respect of versification, troubadour lyric has no single origin (*Lições de literatura portuguesa* [Lessons of Portuguese Literature], 1981, 53). Liturgical theory, on the other hand, by enabling the study of parody, a relevant means of textual exploitation in the Galician-Portuguese lyric, encouraged Lapa to consider bilingualism phenomena in several poetries (a sign of confluence of diverse poetic traditions).

Additionally, with respect to the topic of origins, one of the aspects addressed by Lapa was that of popular poetry, which he sought to define, having set aside interpretations that advocated collective anonymity: "popular poetry in the Middle Ages (...) has an individual, literary or, say, semi-literary origin" (Lapa, *Origens da poesia lírica... [Origins of lyric poetry...]*, 1930, 202).

This does not mean that he failed to acknowledge the existence of a popular lyric poetry prior to the emergence of troubadour poetry, possibly visible indirectly in the latter by means of parallel verses and certain archaic language features. But from the outset Lapa refuted the view termed by Carolina Michaëlis as "the spontaneous creation of the home heathlands and mountains" (apud *Origens da poesia lírica...*, 1930, 197), that had influenced a line of notable scholars from Teófilo Braga to António José Saraiva. Several chapters of his doctoral thesis were re-published in the *Miscelânea de Estudos de Língua e Literatura Portuguesa Medieval* [Miscellanea of Studies on Portuguese Medieval Language and Literature], where the issue of the origins of Galician-Portuguese lyric is still addressed. In an article published in 1955, Lapa wrote: "None of the advanced theories can fully explain it [troubadour lyric poetry]; and each one of them per se contributes to enlighten some of its particularities", he argued that troubadour art was born first from competition and then collaboration between the popular (or folkloric) and the learned (or ecclesiastical) components (*Lições de literatura portuguesa*, 1981, 50-51).

Against the backdrop of his interest in Portuguese, Galician, and Brazilian literary culture, it was in Portuguese literature, particularly the literature of the Middle Ages, that his reflections gained major relevance. *Lições de Literatura Medieval* [Lessons of Medieval Literature] (1933) and the annotated edition of *Cantigas*



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d'escarnho e de mal dizer e dos cancioneiros medievais galego-portugueses [Mocking and Slandorous Songs and of the medieval Galician-Portuguese Songbooks] (1st ed., 1965; 2nd ed., 1970). A third revised edition of the Cancioneiro was announced but was not published although some of the revisions can be found in documents from Lapa's collection, part of which is in Centro Cultural da Anadia [Cultural Centre of Anadia]; another part in Fundación Penzol (Vigo, Galiza), linked to Editorial Galaxia [Galaxia Publishers] which houses books from his personal library and several boxes containing correspondence.

Lições [Lessons], undoubtedly Lapa's most influential work (judging from the number of editions) and his book with the widest scope, features a carefully selected, annotated bibliography per chapter. From the book's 466 text pages, around half are devoted to troubadour poetry.

The whole book, particularly the chapters devoted to Galician-Portuguese lyric, reflects an impulse for narrative history which collides with the scarcity, at the time of its publication, of archival studies enabling a perception of the chronological flow. This impulse is particularly remarkable in the way Lapa advances alternative explanations for the same phenomenon than in the summary listing of literary "facts".

It is mainly from the publication of Lições onwards that it is worth reflecting on one of the more constant issues in history, that of periodology. Seen as "the main tool to understand significant changes" (Le Goff, "História" [History], 1984, 178), periodisation has featured as a central issue in the reflection on a literary history somewhat crystallised by four procedures defined by Helena Buescu: the univocal classification of the author and his work; the clear distinction between successive periods; the homogenisation of the internal features of a specific period; the linearisation of the passage of time. Lapa was not insensitive to the problems raised by this view and on several occasions sought to describe and challenge the nature of change. The Arthurian cycle is thereby said to follow on from the Carolingian empire "as a more refined pleasure" (Lições de literatura portuguesa, 239) and in the late 14th century a renaissance of chivalry was seen, encouraged by the English presence in the court of Aviz, which should be borne in mind when reflecting on the knightly upbringing of Nuno Álvares Pereira and the existence of chivalric literature in Portugal. (Lições..., 1981, 272).

However, his latent reflection on change is evidenced particularly in the inclusion of several texts that are usually excluded from the histories of Portuguese literature due to the embarrassment they may cause regarding the period in which they were composed, the nationality of their authors and the features of the language used to write such texts. A pivotal time indeed, the so-called "Galician-Castilian" period comprehends the century between 1350 and 1450 and applies to the troubadour activity developed after the compilation of the Galician-Portuguese cancionero made by conde Dom Pedro de Barcelos [count Dom Pedro of Barcelos]. In its display of a certain decadence (and a sign of how art and politics do not go hand in hand), the assertion of the "strong vitality of the [Portuguese] nation" was, to his mind, accompanied by a weakening of the literary genius (Lições..., 1981, 321). A century and a half of linguistic unity in Peninsular lyricism would bring about a reaction to Castilian used as a vehicle for the poetic expression of love resulting in a "half-Portuguese, half-Castilian improvisation" (Lições..., 1981, 327), a tool to ensure the prolonged survival of the



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ancient troubadour lyric poetry, characterised during this period by rhetorical excesses camouflaging a lack of inspiration.

Moreover, in this confused period Lapa saw the strength of a Peninsular style that persisted despite the lack of talent of its followers and which, when well established, would be reluctant to adopt foreign metric schemes of versification, finding in Camões's redondilha its ultimate form (Lições..., 1981, 341).

The Portuguese society of the time responded to the mere publication of the monumental edition of *cantigas de escárnio* with unease, due to its salacious language. The difficulty involved in the compilation of this edition is even more apparent when considering that other editions of the same genre (*cantigas de amigo* and *cantigas de amor* had been compiled several decades earlier and, until Lapa had accepted the challenge, no one else had ever dared to do so. Monographs, undoubtedly a source of precious aid for an edition by genre, did not abound in 1965 (and had not yet become a usual form of work in the studies of Galician-Portuguese poetry). Lapa handled the enormous difficulties of understanding them (due to a less formulaic vocabulary than that used in the *cantigas de amigo* and *cantigas de amor*, and to the historical contingency of many hard-to-grasp references) with a remarkable use of editorial interventions, at times to a less than moderate degree, as noted by Ivo Castro.

In this regard, Lapa stood out as an accomplished cultivator of the kind of imagination “that consists in bringing to life what is dead in documents, which is part and parcel of historical work insofar as it unveils and accounts for men’s actions”, a laudable imagination since it makes the past tangible (Le Goff, “História”, 1984, 173). These difficulties in comprehension were surely what led him to include a summary of the contents of each *cantiga* in the individual edition prior to the annotation, which was typical of diploma edition, using the summary to provide a synthesis of what previous editors had said about the text. Even in matters of layout, such as this one, the structure of the questionable edition of Graça Videira Lopes (*Cantigas de Escárnio e Maldizer dos trovadores e jograis galego-portugueses*, Lisboa, Estampa, 2002) may indeed be perceived as the work of Rodrigues Lapa. As an editor, Lapa cultivated a demanding, relentless spirit when revising the work of others, aware nonetheless that a solution might never be found for some issues (on the edition of *cantigas de amigo* by J.J. Nunes, he writes: “Although at times the reading of the apographs is straightforward and self-evident, it is sometimes a problem, the solution to which is and will forever be pending” [Lições..., 1981, 141]).

Thus, he also acknowledged the validity of suggestions made by fellow historians such as S. Pellegrini, G. Tavani, L. Stegagno Picchio, V. Bertolucci, S. Panunzio, J. L. Pensado, J. M. Piel, W. Mettmann for improvement of his 1965 edition. This notion of belonging to a tradition of studies dates back to as early as 1930 in the analysis he makes of the *cantiga* attributed to D. Denis “*Pero muito amo, muito non desejo*” [“But much I love, much I desire not”] when he states that he is making endeavours to publish the “fourth edition of the elaborate *cantiga*” in the wake of similar works by Michaëlis, Lang and Nobiling (*Miscelânea...*, 1982, 205).



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A synthesis, forcibly of an economic nature, of Rodrigues Lapa's contribution to the delimitation of Portuguese medieval culture must surely highlight how his multilingualism mirrored a decentralised view of Portuguese literature in the Middle Ages. Particularly regarding Galician-Portuguese lyric, the boundaries defined by Lapa allow for linguistic permeability, since the language on which it is based is cultivated by authors of diverse nationalities and languages. Averse to interpretations grounded on identity self-sufficiency issues, he therefore tried to determine the result of historical, social, and linguistic tension movements.

In this regard, Lapa stands out as an exceptional cultivator of Romance philology, creating an unstable balance between the in-depth knowledge of the surviving documents and the use of a powerful critical imagination. He was probably the last comprehensive medievalist in whose work a balance was established between original research and sustained dissemination.

Indeed, besides his academic activity (as professor and author) it is worth noting that following his dismissal from Faculdade de Letras in 1935, Lapa took up publicism, namely as a journalist and editor of literary collections. Between 1935 and 1937, he directed the cultural weekly publication *O Diabo*, where he replaced Ferreira De Castro, and coordinated the collection of Sá da Costa classics and the Seara Nova collection *Textos Literários* [Literary Texts], in both cases contributing with some volumes he had organised himself. These two collections proved to be decisive for decades in the formation of literary canon and taste in Portugal. In the words of Lindley Cintra, "time alone will be the fair judge of what my generation of students [...] owed to his literary culture, to the remarkable teamwork of those who, under the supervision of Rodrigues Lapa, devoted themselves to the obscure task of preparing those small books, with a sound text and well drafted prefaces, that featured in all our small private libraries." (Prista, "Manuel Rodrigues Lapa", <http://cvc.instituto-camoes.pt/hlp/biografias/mrlapa.html>).

Notwithstanding his dismissal from Faculdade de Letras, he continued to collaborate occasionally with other universities or similar institutions. He lived in Brazil in the 1950s and early 1960s, where he taught and held conferences at several universities in Rio de Janeiro, S. Paulo, Salvador da Bahia, and Belo Horizonte. In 1964, he taught a course on the Galician troubadour Lopo Dias in Instituto Martin Sarmiento [Martin Sarmiento Institute in Galicia], a place he was particularly fond of. This was a practical way of trying to solve interpretation and edition issues, "in a friendly and free environment not often experienced at University" (*Miscelânea...*, 1982, 273-274). Proof of the relevance of his contribution to Galician studies is his admission to the Real Academia Galega [Royal Academy of Galicia] (Corunha).

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