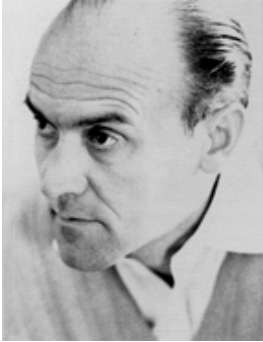


DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

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LEITÃO, Ruben Andresen (Lisbon, 1920 - London, 1975)

Ruben Andresen Leitão was born in Lisbon on 26 May 1920. In 1926, his father, Ruben da Silva Leitão, a law graduate and former legal advisor to the newspaper *A Mundial*, emigrated to Brazil (where he became an antiques dealer), and he was joined a year later by his wife, Gardina Andresen. For two years the young Ruben was looked after by his grandmother, Joana, at the Quinta do Campo Alegre, Porto. In 1931 he entered the Liceu Central do Porto. In later years, as a result of health problems caused by a disastrous accident with a shotgun that had been set up as a defence against burglars, he made successive changes in school (Colégio Universal, Liceu Rodrigues de Freitas and Colégio Almeida Garrett) having failed his exams in the seventh year of schooling. In 1939, he completed *liceu*, and returned with his parents to Lisbon. In 1940 he matriculated in Historical and Philosophical Sciences in the Faculty of Letters, in Lisbon, but two years later he failed the course unit in Psychology (taught by Matos Romão), in his second year, which strengthened his resolve to ask for a transfer to Coimbra. There he contributed to *Ala*, the journal of the Juventude Universitária Católica, and to *Via Latina*. In 1945 he graduated from Coimbra with a thesis entitled 'Cartas de D. Pedro V ao Conde de Lavrado', and in the academic year 1947–48 he obtained a scholarship from the Instituto da Alta Cultura which enabled him to study for an MA at King's College, London, and he later became a *leitor* in the same institution. He also became an external examiner for the universities of Cambridge, Ceylon, and Liverpool, and a director of examinations for the Civil Service. In 1949 he organized a staging of the *Farsa de Inês Pereira* by a group of students at King's College, and gave a series of talks on Britain for the Portuguese Services of the BBC, entitled 'Peregrinações Inglesas', and a public lecture entitled 'A Geração de Setenta'. In October of the same year, he began a series of columns in the *Diário Popular*, under the heading 'Carta de Londres'. (Between 1963 and 1974 he would again work with the same newspaper, reviewing works on Portuguese history and culture.) In 1950 he gave a public lecture at King's College on the 'Vencidos da Vida', and organized a staging of the play *Mar*, by Miguel Torga, and in the following year of the *Auto da Índia*, by Gil Vicente. In 1951 he gave public lectures in the universities of Cambridge and Oxford, entitled respectively 'Portugal Land of Poets' and 'As Correntes Modernas da Literatura Portuguesa'. Through these talks and theatre performances he promoted Portuguese culture in Britain (and British culture in Portugal, with his articles in the national press), and he explored ideas similar to those that would lead him to dedicate himself throughout his academic career to the study of D. Pedro V:



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cosmopolitanism, the connections between Portugal and Europe, the need for economic progress, and the analysis of underdevelopment (economic, social, cultural and intellectual) in Portugal. Notable amongst his efforts to bring the cultures of the two countries closer together were his invitation, in 1963, from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation to join the Consultative Commission for the Commemorations of the Fourth Centenary of William Shakespeare, and in 1973, when he joined the Commission for the Commemoration of the Sixth Centenary of the Luso-Britannic Alliance, as the representative of the Academia Portuguesa da História (to which he had been elected a member in 1959). It is worth emphasizing that many of his researches on D. Pedro V were made in Britain, so studies such as *Diário de D. Pedro. Viagem a Inglaterra* (1950), *Cartas de D. Pedro V ao Príncipe Alberto* (1958), *Documentos dos Arquivos de Windsor* (1958), *Novos Documentos dos Arquivos de Windsor* (1958), and his *Inéditos de D. Pedro V dos Arquivos Reais de Windsor* (1958), along with his translation into Portuguese of T. S. Eliot's play, *The Cocktail Party*, published in 1953, form part of his contribution to political and cultural relations between the two countries. In November 1950, after reading his *Páginas II*, Salazar deplored his surrealist prose style, remarking to his Minister for Education, Fernando Andrade Pires de Lima, that someone who did not know how to write good Portuguese could neither represent Portugal nor teach the language, and suggesting that he should be removed from his position in England. However, in June 1951 there was no objection raised to his continuing as *leitor* in London. In June 1952, though, after marrying Rosemary Bach (whom he would divorce in 1973) he resigned the *leitorado* at King's College to return to Portugal, a step that caused him many months of anxiety as he looked in Lisbon for the busy life he had led in London, and a job. In 1954, after just a few months teaching history in the Liceu D. João de Castro, in Lisbon, he gained entry to Brazilian culture: he was taken on by the Brazilian embassy in Lisbon, where he remained until July 1972, and started to edit the embassy's monthly journal *Brasil – Artes e Letras*. In 1962 he was appointed Conservador of the Instituto de Cultura Brasileira at Lisbon University's Faculty of Letters, a position he held until 1967. When the Brazilian President, Juscelino Kubitschek, visited Portugal, Leitão was made a Knight of Ordem Nacional do Cruzeiro do Sul. In early 1966 he intimated to his friend and colleague Charles Boxer that he would like to be considered for the Camões Chair of Portuguese at King's College when he vacated the position. However, a different professor was appointed without considering other candidates, and given the former attitude of Salazar, Leitão suspected political intervention. On 16 February of the same year he was promoted to Officer of the Ordem Nacional do Cruzeiro do Sul for services rendered as Conservador, and on 22 December he was awarded the Bayer Prize for Journalism, for his article 'Paixão de Cristo em Oberammergau', concerning a performance of the passion play that he had watched in that Bavarian village over Easter. In February 1967 he began work for his study *O Inventário dos Chafarizes Portugueses* [Inventory of Portuguese Springs], making journeys around the country with his friend Francisco da Silva Fernandes, charged with taking photographs. The inventory was concluded in December 1969 and delivered to the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, although it was never published. Despite his frustration at not being able to return to England his intellectual output continued unabated, as is demonstrated by the not only by journeys



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he made for this work, but also by his articles published in the press, the lectures he delivered, and the fiction that he continued to produce. In 1968 he was elected a corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of Lisbon (Classe de Letras – Secção de Ciências Históricas e Geográficas), and in 1969, when he celebrated twenty years of literary activity under the pen-name Ruben A. by giving a talk called 'Prosa da Prosa' at the German Institute, he became a numbered academic of the Academia Nacional da História, taking chair no. 9 from Afonso do Paço. On 6 July of the same year at the Festival de Ouro Preto, in Brazil, he gave lectures entitled 'O Escritor Português e a Sua Expressão' and 'O Solar dos Brasis', which were later repeated on 11 July, in Belo Horizonte, and on 23 July, in Rio de Janeiro. The high point of his engagement with Brazilian culture was his nomination, on 8 July 1975, as Honorary Lecturer of the Real Gabinete Português de Leitura, in Rio de Janeiro. Despite being a critic of a certain Portuguese mentality, narrow-minded, secluded from the rest of the world, and choosing for its heroes long-dead people such as Luis de Camões, the nation's greatest flag-bearer in the world, he was nevertheless invited, as representative of the Portuguese Academy of History, to take part in the National Commission for the Commemorations of the Fourth Centenary of the Publication of *Os Lusíadas*. He often felt, along with other writers who had lived outside Portugal (such as Jorge de Sena), that his works of fiction were undervalued by the public and by Portuguese publishers on account of his critical attitude. However, his nomination for the Conselho de Administração of the state publisher, Imprensa Nacional – Casa da Moeda, controverts any idea that he was not relevant to national culture. In this position he promoted editions of classic Portuguese literature, the opening of INCM bookshops in Lisbon, Coimbra, Porto and Rio de Janeiro (the Livraria Camões), and created Conselhos Executivos for numismatics and medallions. In 1974 he was, at his own request, released from his position with the INCM, and from June to October that year wrote the novel *Kaos*, which was published posthumously by the INCM in 1981, along with the *In Memoriam de Ruben Andresen Leitão* (a work that can be seen as a public recognition of his contribution to Portuguese culture). On 12 December 1974 he was elected a member of the Brazilian Academy of Letters, in the section for Portuguese Corresponding Members. Four days later he was nominated Director-General for Cultural Affairs at the Ministry of Education and Culture. In this capacity he worked for the creation of an Instituto de Restauo [Institute for Restoration], and for the extension of the Museu Soares dos Reis, in Porto; he acquired for the state the Quinta do Monteiro-Mor (now the National Costume Museum) and the papers of Eça de Queiroz from the Tormes Archive. As is evident from the positions he held, both with the INCM and the Ministry of Education and Culture, his contribution to Portuguese culture was not limited to his writings in historiography and fiction, and the public recognition he received from the Portuguese state was greater than he himself had ever expected. In 1975 a long-standing wish was fulfilled with an invitation to teach at Oxford University (St Antony's College). However, on 17 September of that year, just as he was beginning married life with Maria Luísa Távora, he began a journey to England which had damaging consequences for his health. On 26 September 1975 he suffered a heart attack and died in St George's Hospital (Hyde Park Corner), where



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he had been admitted earlier that day. He was buried on 8 October 1975 at the Carreço Cemetery, Viana do Castelo, in accordance with his own wishes.

As a result principally of the investigations he had made during his years in England, his historiographical work revolved around the reign of D. Pedro V. It was in Coimbra, with Damião Peres, that he started the study of what he called the first modern man in Portugal to record by his own hand what was important in his times, his country, and his people. In the British archives he found unpublished documents, letters and diaries. Amongst the most important were D. Pedro's correspondence with Prince Albert, and with the Marquis of Lavradio. In 1955, the Associação Comercial de Lisboa awarded him the Silva Martha prize for his book *Cartas de D. Pedro V ao Príncipe Alberto* (1954). Writing about these letters he would note, with an often human touch more normally used in historical biography, a genre much practised in England, that they gave him the feeling that he was in the presence of caring and hesitant D. Pedro, suspicious of his subjects, who sought advice from members of his family just like any other person. As a historian, Leitão described what he thought the monarch's views were on his country, while still leaving the impression that, a hundred years later, little had changed. In contrast with his somewhat heroic portrait of the young king, he described some of the main features of the national decline: the liberal regime was losing its way in unnecessary conflicts; successive finance ministers were unable to deal with the eternal problem of the deficit, and as often as not they aggravated the problem by taking loans from abroad; the press was controlled by the very rich, who used it as they wished; elections did not correspond to the national will; the elected parliamentary deputies were up for sale, often for a high price; there was no education for the common people; there was a lack of will to spread ideas that should be at the heart of all liberalism; and books were little read (*D. Pedro V – um homem e um rei*). Born on 16 September 1837, eldest son of D. Maria II and Prince Ferdinand of Saxe-Coburg (who held the regency for his son for a little under two years, on account of his age), D. Pedro was considered by Ruben Andresen Leitão to be not just a precocious talent, but a young man who had voluntarily deprived himself of his childhood out of a strong desire for knowledge. Solitary, and aware of the backwardness of his country, he felt the lack of fellow men with whom he could work on the task of modernizing the nation, since everything he attempted fell into the 'sticky' hands of his ministers (*ibidem*). By repeatedly characterizing D. Pedro using adjectives such as 'solitary' and 'aware' and his ministers as 'sticky-fingered', Leitão constructs a somewhat Manichean biography: on the one side the good men (D. Pedro and his uncle Albert, the Conde de Lavradio, and Herculano, men who understood him) and on the other the bad ones (the parliamentary deputies, his ministers, Loulé, Saldanha, and all that was stopping the intelligent young man from dragging his impoverished country in the direction of progress). The letters he sent to the Conde de Lavradio were a way of 'unburdening' himself, addressed to one of the few people who understood the king. The 'sombre' aspect evident in his physiognomy gave him a 'sad, taciturn appearance'. During his short reign (1855–61) he did not sign any decree presented to him at the Council of Ministers without first taking it to his private office and analysing it, regardless of the subject matter. His 'integrity of character' (in the face of the dominant corruption, led him to create a Green Box, placed at the gateway of



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the Palácio das Necessidades, where anyone who wished could leave their suggestions, along with a Blue Box, for receiving requests from those seeking alms (*ibidem*). In 1854 and 1855, during the regency of his father, D. Fernando, D. Pedro and his younger brother, D. Luís, made trips abroad. Ruben Andresen Leitão considered that these journeys, which put him in direct contact with the innumerable innovations in the mechanical world that were taking place in full view of the world, were fundamental in shaping his double wish for the moral and material reform that characterized the whole of his reign. Since, then, they recorded the projects he wished to put into practice in Portugal, he believed it was the Diaries that resulted from these journeys that were most relevant for studying his way of thinking (the notion of science, of direct application and of mechanical progress). Leitão tells us that at just sixteen years of age, D. Pedro read and studied everything, learning about the application of steam to agriculture, examining English libraries, admiring the pictures at Buckingham Palace, and allowing himself be captivated by the Natural Science Museum, the Royal Academy, the Royal Polytechnic Institution, by Samuel Colt's revolver factory. In his diaries he wrote down his reflections on, for example, the parliamentary bill for army promotions, the reorganization of the departments within the War Ministry, or opinions received on the need for extra field artillery (*ibidem*). He noted that the whole of D. Pedro's reign was distinguished by a spirit of reform, and gave examples such as the law of 14 July 1856 creating a provisional new disciplinary code for the army, which abolished flogging and blows with the flat of the sword. Despite all this, though, Ruben Andresen Leitão believed that the monarch's greatest achievements had to do with public education in Portugal. He points by way of example to the creation during this period of the Escola Normal and the Escola Modelo (1860), the inauguration of 436 schools for public instruction, and of the Curso Superior de Letras (1861). The historian's own opinions become confused with those of the monarch he is studying. One could even regard him as a disciple of the monarch on the importance of history and public opinion, the defence of liberty and equality, of progress and education, and of the broad public interest against those of the individual. They shared a great interest in travelling and knowledge, the same cosmopolitan taste for Europe, the same understanding of the importance of social and political progress in Portugal. Furthermore, it would be unfair not to acknowledge that the researches that he carried out at Windsor contributed to new readings of D. Pedro's reign. Despite his eulogies to D. Pedro, in his historiographical work Ruben Andresen Leitão was a careful scholar who tried to bring a critical approach to his work. He repeatedly states, for example, that despite being cultured and thirsty for knowledge, D. Pedro was too young to lead a country with so many problems. His travel diaries, considered highly relevant for an understanding of his reign, bear witness to a precocious intelligence, enabling him to write in French and English, but they also had the defects of excessive youth (errors and imprecisions in the writing, some naïve thoughts, etc.). As has been stated here, what Ruben Andresen Leitão saw in D. Pedro was the same desire to change Portugal, to learn, to travel, to understand what was modern in Europe, along with a cosmopolitanism, a struggle against national backwardness caused by the mediocrity of politicians such as the Duque de Loulé — a figure of whom Ruben Andresen Leitão would say, by way of epigraph, that he was worthless (*ibidem*).



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Ruben Andresen Leitão's literary work, signed in the pen-name Ruben A., ran in parallel with his historiographical writing, giving a pessimistic view, though without ignoring the comic or pathetic elements running through the tragedy of the Portuguese scene. In his prize-winning novel *A Torre de Barbela* (1964), he tells the story of the Barbela family from the foundation of the kingdom of Portugal to the present. This family is composed of ghosts of noble blood unaware of what has happened to them, deprived of a power that like the Portuguese glories of the sixteenth century has vanished into smoke. They start by aiding D. Afonso Henriques to expel the moors, and later travel in the caravels to Africa, India and Brazil, and arrive at the twentieth century in a state of profound decline. The Barbelas are the reflection of a country that has become backward-looking and provincial. The memory of glorious deeds is an increasingly faded mirage, and the most that these Lusitanian ghosts have in their hands is a mist that every day gives them up a little more to oblivion. In *Kaos* (1981), published posthumously, different characters take it in turns to describe the violent, extremist and often absurd atmosphere of the First Republic. It is insinuated, for example, in a parodic style, that republican men, in their hunger for meetings and decision-making, renounce the company of women in order to be with other men. Masonic rituals are described in the same humorous vein. And there is the violence and irrationality of the men who would rather destroy opposing factions than unite around a political project that could dignify the country. As early as *Caranguejo* (1954), Leitão had developed a narrative style that comprises an exercise in memory, a journey backwards in relation to what has already been experienced (*analepsis* or flashback). This method, that would persist throughout his later literary work, would also appear in *Páginas* (1949, 1950, 1956, 1960, 1967 and 1970) and in *O Mundo à Minha Procura* (1964 and 1968), autobiographies in a fictional style, in which we find memories of the Second World War, of school, of love affairs, of Porto, Lisbon, and Coimbra, of England and many other countries that he had visited for varying reasons. In these volumes of fictionalized autobiography, and in a certain way in *Um Adeus aos Deuses* (1960) — a book in which he describes what he saw during his stay in Greece — the beauty of his descriptions of youth, of girlfriends, of his grandmother, and of classes with masters such as Agostinho da Silva, relegate to the background a certain bitterness that the writer could never leave behind in relationship to his mother country.

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APOIOS:

