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VASCONCELOS [Pereira de Melo], José LEITE de (Ucanha, 1858 - Lisbon, 1941)

Leite de Vasconcelos attributed his interest in ethnography, archaeology and philology to his birthplace, and a childhood immersed in popular traditions. He was born into a noble family, the grandson of a wealthy doctor and a judge, and lived in Ucanha (Viseu district) until he was three and a half years of age. He attended primary school first at Mondim and then at S. João de Tarouca. He learned French from a relative and Latin from the local priest. He read the Portuguese classics from the family library and learned the basics of English and Italian. He buried himself in solitary readings near churches and ancient ruins.

His parents, José Leite Cardoso de Melo (1810-1881) and Maria Henriqueta Leite Vasconcelos Pereira de Melo (1815-1894) witnessed the decline of the family fortune during the first half of the century. In 1875, at 17, young Leite de Vasconcelos worked for the municipal administration of Mondim and was the only source of family income. He took up employment in Oporto to pay for his education, working intensively and living frugally. Notwithstanding this adverse context, Leite excelled as a student. He completed the Curso de Liceu [Secondary School] at the Colégio de S. Carlos [S. Carlos Private School] (1876-1879), the Curso de Ciências Naturais [Natural Sciences Course] at the Academia Politécnica do Porto [Polytechnic Academy of Oporto] (1879-1881) and the Curso de Medicina [Medical Course] at the Escola Médico-Cirúrgica [School of Medicine and Surgery] (1881-1886). But it was an activity he pursued while studying Medicine which would awaken his true scientific interests. He had cultivated a taste for the compilation of traditions, verses and popular novels since secondary school. In 1878, he penned his first study on ethnography, *O Presbitério de Vila Cova* [The Presbytery of Vila Cova]. He took up German, which was essential for access to updated bibliographical references.

He engaged actively in the foundation of literary and scientific dissemination journals. Together with Mont'Alverne de Sequeira, he founded *O Pantheon: revista de ciencias e letras* [the Pantheon; science and arts journal] (1880-1881). The journal targeted the student population of Oporto and shared both its contents and collaborators with other contemporary journals that disseminated positivism (See *Era Nova: revista do movimento contemporâneo* [see *New Era: contemporary movement journal*]. Lisbon, 1880-1881; *Positivismo: revista de philosophia* [Positivism: philosophy journal]. Oporto, 1878-1882). Leite published verses and began



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writing about popular history and language. He managed to enlist the collaboration of Fialho de Almeida, Antero de Quental, Teófilo Braga, Martins Sarmiento and Adolfo Coelho.

The fortnightly journal closed within a year of publication due to a lack of readership. Most of its contents fell within the scope of what was widely termed “sociology”, including archaeology, history, travels, mythology, religions and popular traditions, linguistics (Portuguese popular language and Galician subdialects), philosophy, political economy, bibliography, and biographies.

Initially, Leite was interested in both archaeology and dialectology, collecting contributions from each field for the ethnographical characterisation of the Portuguese people. Popular culture had traditionally been studied on the basis of literary testimony (songbooks, compilations of traditional songs and poems, tales), but Leite distinguished himself for the importance he attributed to collecting data directly from the population). He established relations with professors from the Curso Superior de Letras [former Faculty of Arts], who like him were motivated by ethnographical issues, albeit with a different focus: Adolfo Coelho (anthropology, linguistics, and pedagogy) and Teófilo Braga (philology and literary history). He devoted particular attention to the national identity issue based on the Lusitanian theory of Martins Sarmiento – with whom he corresponded regularly on ethnographical and archaeological issues – while developing autonomous ideas, visible in many situations, such as his rejection of the argument that the Lusitanians were Ligures (See *Religiões da Lusitânia*, [Religions in Lusitania] 1905, II, 53).

In 1882, he participated in archaeological expeditions with Martins Sarmiento and initiated the publication of ethnographical works, signed as a student of the Escola Médica do Porto. In *Tradições populares de Portugal* [Popular Traditions in Portugal] (1882, pp. IX-X), he established a set of methodological principles: without first questioning the people, the historian cannot know his country; the linguist, in turn, must study popular traditions to find natural processes and archaic and dialectal forms of language. He was so enthralled by linguistics that in 1883 he even considered giving up on his medical degree. He wrote and published *O dialecto mirandês* [The Mirandese Dialect] (1883), based on data collected from interviews with a speaker of Mirandese. This original work, introducing a language that had never been described before to the scientific community, was granted an award from the *Société des Langues Romanes*, conferring immediate international acclaim upon its author.

Before graduating in 1886, he published his first work of an archaeological nature (*Portugal Pré-histórico* [Prehistoric Portugal], 1885), in which he pushed back the roots of Portuguese society to a period prior to the country's political independence. This theory stood in stark contrast to that of Alexandre Herculano, according to which Portugal was “a modern nation” born from the will of Afonso Henriques and the aristocratic elite of his entourage. It was also in Oporto that he launched the *Revista Lusitana* [Lusitanian Journal] project, which shall be discussed further ahead.

Between 1887 and 1888, while working as a medical doctor in Cadaval, he also undertook archaeological



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excavations. He soon swapped his career as a medical doctor to take up public office in Lisbon, which enabled him to advance in his research projects. First, he was curator at the Biblioteca Nacional [National Library] (1888-1911), a position he accumulated with that of director of the Museu Etnológico [Ethnological Museum] (1893-1929). He resigned from the Biblioteca upon his appointment as professor at the Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa [Faculty of Arts of the University of Lisbon] (1911-1929), but kept his affiliation to the Museu.

During his first years at the Biblioteca Nacional, he focused equally on philology and archaeology. In 1888, he published *A filologia portuguesa: esboço histórico (a propósito da reforma do Curso Superior de Letras de Lisboa)* [Portuguese Philology: a historical outline (on the restructuring of the Lisbon Higher Arts Course)], where he suggested introducing the subject into university studies, prefiguring himself as a candidate to teach it. This ambition did not bear fruits and he thus went on to create his own area by teaching numismatics at the Biblioteca Nacional. In a letter to Martins Sarmiento, Leite explained that philology and archaeology were different approaches to the same issue: «I do not devote myself to philology merely for art's sake, but because I wish to contribute to the resolution of our ethnic problem with philology, that being also the reason why I devote myself as much as I can to ethnology: indeed, the study of old coins in general and particularly the study of the so-called Celtiberian coins should yield plenty of data» *Cartas de José Leite de Vasconcelos a Martins Sarmiento* [Letters from José Leite de Vasconcelos to Martins Sarmiento], 1958, p. 94).

In the early 1890s, he planned the establishment of an ethnographic museum in Lisbon with a view to compiling materials dispersed across different institutions and new archaeological findings. In this endeavour, he had the support of Bernardino Machado, the minister for public works, who founded the museum in 1893 and appointed Leite as director. The initial collection brought together the collections of Estácio da Veiga and Leite's private collection. The museum was installed in the building of the Academia das Ciências de Lisboa [The Lisbon Academy of Sciences] in 1894, but in 1900 Leite managed to have it moved to an area adjoining the Convento dos Jerónimos [Hieronymites Monastery], its definitive location. It opened its doors to the public in 1906 but had been disseminating news and archaeological studies in *O Arqueólogo Português* [the Portuguese Archaeologist], the museum's official journal, since 1895.

While working for the museum, Leite divided his time between archaeological excavations in Portugal and frequent trips to Europe. In those study trips, he managed to balance his institutional representation activities, intense philological research in ancient library collections and contacts with universities. He repeatedly visited Spain, France, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, Austria and Italy.

In 1896, he published a synthesis of his research orientations in the *Revista Lusitana* [Lusitanian Journal] in which he justified the confluence of ethnographical, archaeological and linguistics studies as the necessary basis for the elaboration of a plan of works «on the origins and traits of the Portuguese people». Despite the abundance of dialectological materials at his disposal, he kept postponing the publication of conclusions or results; for an overall characterisation of Portuguese dialectology, a systematic collection of data from all the



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regions of the country was essential, and it was this he endeavoured to accomplish in the following years. As regards popular language, he said that «[...] not only does it disregard rules, it often serves to explain many cultured speech phenomena ». His concept of the Portuguese lexicon comprehended different moments of the history of the language and its dialectal variety: «endless words and expressions that make up the idiomatic wealth that was lost» (Revista Lusitana, IV, 337-338).

It was also in the 1890s, that Leite began publishing his pivotal work in the field of archaeology, *Religiões da Lusitânia* [Religions in Lusitania] (1897, 1905, 1913). The study of religions was presented as a piecemeal contribution to a broader history of Lusitania. His analysis was divided into three periods: prehistory, on the peoples inhabiting Portugal in the Neolithic period; proto history, regarding the geography, ethnology, and ethnography of Lusitania; and history from the Roman conquest until the time of the Suevi. His study of more remote periods was anchored on archaeological data and the analysis of material remains, while his work on more recent periods was predominantly ethnological. A relevant topic in this work (indeed, already visible in his *Portugal pré-histórico*) is his criticism of Alexandre Herculano's theory on the non-continuity between the Portuguese and the Lusitanians. Leite argued that the peoples of Lusitania should also feature among the ancestors of the Portuguese for two main reasons: their territories partially overlapped; the origin of the Portuguese language could be considered a modification of the language used by the Luso-Romans, and traces of continuity in the peoples of that region could be found in their customs, superstitions and legends (See *Religiões da Lusitânia*, 1897, xxv-xxvi).

Between 1899 and 1901, he studied Romance Philology in the *École des Hautes Études* in Paris where he was awarded the Tenured Student Diploma in the Field of History and Philology. His doctoral thesis, *Esquisse d'une dialectologie portugaise* (1901), written in French, was submitted to Sorbonne University. It was published in Paris and widely disseminated and cited in Romance studies bibliography. Using the linguistic materials he had compiled since the 1880s, he advanced a systematisation of Portuguese dialects, making a distinction between continental, insular and extra-European dialects, the dialect of Portuguese Jews in Hamburg and Amsterdam and Portuguese co-dialects (Galician, Mirandese, Guadramilese and Riodonorese).

Assisted by updated bibliography, he greatly benefited from information supplied by Hugo Schuchardt, a Creolist he had met at the University of Graz in 1900. Leite then embarked on several trips to Europe where he visited universities in the Netherlands and Germany. Upon his return to Portugal, he taught an open philology course at the Biblioteca Nacional (1903-1911), which led to the publication of two handbooks, *Textos Arcaicos* [Archaic Texts] (1903) and *Lições de Filologia Portuguesa* [Lessons on Portuguese Philology] (1911). While working for the museum, he participated in archaeological conferences in Athens (1905), Mechelen (1907), Cairo (1909) and Rome (1912), in the latter two as head of the prehistoric archaeology department.

Following the establishment of the Republic, Leite de Vasconcelos found new areas of activity in the country's renewed institutions. In 1911, he was member of the committee entrusted with defining the basics



for orthography in schools and official documents, as well as orthographic vocabulary; in the Academia das Ciências, he was president of the committee responsible for the writing of a new dictionary (until 1916). In August of the same year, he was appointed professor of the new Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa, which had replaced the Curso Superior de Letras. However, he was not given subjects where his field of interests and research were reflected, and through which he might have been able to recruit disciples and establish a “school”. He taught classical philology, French language and literature, and comparative grammar, and occasionally archaeology, epigraphy, and numismatics. It was only in the last years of his academic career that he was offered the opportunity to teach Portuguese philology.

From the 1920s onwards, in poorer health and engaged in his work at the Faculdade, he reduced his participation in archaeological excavations and geared most of his research towards ethnography. In 1927, he published a lengthy introduction on ethnography in the *Revista Lusitana* (vol. XVI), and *De Terra em Terra - Excursões arqueológico-etnográficas através de Portugal (Norte, Centro e Sul)* [From Place to Place - Ethnographical and archaeological expeditions in Portugal (Northern, Central and Southern Regions)]. Having reached the official retirement age in 1929, he withdrew from public office. He remained as honorary director of the museum (which was renamed “Museu Etnológico do Dr Leite de Vasconcelos” [Ethnological Museum of Dr Leite de Vasconcelos]). In the ensuing years he worked diligently in his private library at his home on D. Carlos Mascarenhas Street to prepare decades of bibliographical and documental notes for publication. In 1929, he reedited an updated version of the dialectological map (*Opúsculos*, IV) [Booklets, IV]. In 1933, he published the first volume of *Etnografia Portuguesa* [Portuguese Ethnography] devoted to defining the scope of the discipline, explaining the research sources, the status of ethnological studies in Portugal and working plans in the scientific area. In 1938, he compiled a set of ethnological studies (*Opúsculos*, V) [Booklets, V], where he revisited topics such as origins, history and formation of the Portuguese people, superstitions, rituals, religions in Lusitania, legends, and songbooks.

A vast list of publications is just a part of the bibliographical legacy of Leite de Vasconcelos. Over a period of almost sixty years, he founded and secured the regular publication of a set of specialised periodicals, assuming the functions of what we nowadays acknowledge to be those of a scientific editor. He was responsible for defining the plans for the journals, for the selection of collaborators and for refining the model of scientific writing in Portugal.

The *Revista Lusitana* and *O Arqueólogo Português* contributed not only to the affirmation of Portugal in their respective disciplinary areas but also, and primarily, to the internationalisation of Portuguese scientists, by virtue of an exchange network that Leite had taken great pains to construct. The *Revista Lusitana* was published regularly between 1887 and 1941, in a total of 38 volumes. In the editorial, published in the first issue, Leite argued for a correlation between ethnographical and linguistic studies: philology being indispensable to the understanding of grammar and the language faculty; ethnology vital to the understanding of literary and historical facts. As an example of scientific guidelines, the journal opened with a study by Adolfo



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Coelho, in which linguistic data collected in fieldworks were analysed to sustain conclusions of a historical nature. The analytical index of the volumes reveal a preponderance of works from the area of ethnography (popular literature, superstitions, tales, traditions, and adages) and themes of a more linguistic nature (lexical compilations, onomastics, phonetics, and history of the languages) without strict boundaries between the two fields. It is precisely within this bracket that the innumerable dialectological works fall, where the data collection is used to characterise the ethnography of the speakers. The publication of editions of ancient texts imbued with philological rigour and, to a lesser extent, literary studies are also particularly noteworthy. The fact that Leite de Vasconcelos himself contributed to the journal with most of the articles in almost all the aforementioned themes, with the exception of literary studies, is proof that the journal reflected his preferred research areas. Pedro de Azevedo, Carolina Michaëlis de Vasconcelos, José Joaquim Nunes and Cláudio Basto were some of the journal's most regular collaborators. Foreign philologists such as Jules Cornu, Leo Spitzer, Wilhelm Meyer-Lübke, Wilhelm Storck and Max Leopold Wagner were occasional collaborators.

The *O Arqueólogo Português*, the official journal of the then Museu Etnográfico was published for the first time in 1895. Leite introduced it as a journal for those interested in archaeology, publishing descriptions of objects, archaeological sites, notes, sketches and photographs, biographies of archaeologists and museum-related news. Leite redacted the 30 volumes published until 1938 (1st series) and also authored most of their pages. The names of collaborators who also wrote for the *Revista Lusitana* (Pedro de Azevedo and José Joaquim Nunes) were among the collaborators of the *O Arqueólogo Português*, which is further proof of the contiguity between historical, ethnographical, and philological studies in areas such as palaeography and epigraphy. With a view to enhancing ethnographical studies, he also founded the *Boletim de Etnografia* [Ethnography Bulletin] (5 vols., 1920-1937), sponsored by the museum,

Leite de Vasconcelos strove to rapidly publish philological novelties and archaeological findings and to acquire valuable works for his museum. He frequently noted that he had been the first to publish on a given subject, with more and better information. As a result of this competitive spirit, he quarrelled with some of his contemporary archaeologists and linguists (see an example from his correspondence with archaeologist António dos Santos Rocha). In 1907, Rocha Peixoto, one of the writers of the *Portugália* (Porto, 1899-1908) journal, accused Leite of disseminating a biased view of Portuguese archaeology, by deliberately ignoring the work conducted by archaeologists close to the group of *Portugália* collaborators and overvaluing the work of the Museu Etnográfico.

The controversy surrounding Portuguese Language issues between Leite and António Cândido de Figueiredo (1846-1925) was fuelled by texts published in newspapers. In 1891 Leite published *O Dia* [The Day] in the newspaper, consisting of articles that criticised the *Lições práticas de linguagem portuguesa* [Practical Portuguese Language Lessons] of Cândido de Figueiredo. In the same year, under the pseudonym Caturra Júnior, Cândido published the booklet *Tosquia de um grammatico dedicada aos filólogos mirandezes* [The Shearing of a grammarian dedicated to the Mirandese philologists], to which Leite replied with *O Galho*



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depenado. Replica às Caturrices philologicas do sr. Candido de Figueiredo [The featherless rook. A reply to the philological obstinacy of Mr Candido de Figueiredo]. The issue came to an end in 1892 in O golpe de misericórdia. Execução litteraria de Zé Filólogo Leite de Vasconcellos, acusado de varios delitos contra a grammatica, o bom senso e a salubridade publica [The coup de grâce. Literary Execution of Joe Philologist Leite de Vasconcellos, accused of several crimes against grammar, good judgement and public salubrity]. Notwithstanding the reciprocal accusations, this is an important testimony of the opposition between the pre-scientific philological discourse of Figueiredo – more concerned with the concept of error and language vices – and modern linguistics, documented by dialectology and capable of accounting for the diversity and variation of the Portuguese language. Considering the oeuvre of Leite de Vasconcelos, the texts at the centre of this controversy represent a didactic discourse that is very close to scientific dissemination.

However, Leite was also criticised for encumbering some of his scientific works with a digressive style and excessive detail. In 1912, historian and philologist João Ribeiro (1860-1934) published a review of *Lições de Filologia*, where he criticised its superficiality and accumulation of facts without offering any new conclusions, establishing a parallel with the method used by Leite in ethnographic studies, listing facts and postponing a critical synthesis of the collected materials. (Rev. da Acad. Brasileira, [Journal of the Brazilian Academy] 1912).

Leite de Vasconcelos did not leave evidence of his political preferences in his work, nor can his public intervention be compared with that of his contemporaries such as Adolfo Coelho, who participated in the *Conferências do Casino* and who devoted most of his life to pedagogical and illiteracy studies, or Teófilo Braga, who had been a Republican activist since 1878. In Leite de Vasconcelos, a line of work connecting the progress of science and its direct application to the development of society and better living conditions is not visible, at least not in the form of an agenda. His notes criticising the contemporary social organisation were more indicative of a conservative than a protester: «When a people has fallen into decadence, due to the foolishness of its subjects or general and historical conditions, as has ours, those who love the land where they were born may at least be allowed to evade the misery of the present by considering and studying things of the past» (*Religiões da Lusitânia*, 1897, p. VIII).

In the long process of founding and establishing the *Museu de Etnologia* (1893-1906), a good relationship with both the ministries and the bureaucratic structure was evident – an example of this was the support of Bernardino Machado. He became part of the new Republican order and managed to secure a teaching position at the new *Universidade de Lisboa*. Despite an inquiry into accusations of his autocratic management in the last years of the monarchy, he continued as director of the Museum. In his defence he stated that «no one is more respectful than I am of the powers that be» (*Defensão* [Defence], 1913: 37).

In Portugal, Leite de Vasconcelos was a member of the *Sociedade de Geografia* [Geographical Society of Lisbon] (1890), where he was head of the field of ethnography from 1900 onwards. He was elected correspondent member of the *Academia das Ciências de Lisboa* in 1894 and full member in 1910. He held a seat in the *Academia Portuguesa de História* [Portuguese Academy of History] between 1937 and 1938, and



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it was, indeed, his affiliation with foreign associations that demonstrated his profile as an international scientist. The most important and long-lasting affiliations with foreign associations are listed as follows, with the respective date of admission: Société Suisse des Traditions Populaires (1896), the Istituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica (correspondent 1896, full member 1931), the Real Academia de la Historia de Madrid (1890), the Société d'Anthropologie de Paris (1899), the Academie royale d'Archeologie de Belgique (correspondent 1901), the Museum für volkskunde (correspondent 1909), the Société internationale de dialectologie romane (1909) the Hispanic Society of America (1904) and the Institut de France (1920).

Leite created a broad network of international contacts with whom he often exchanged information on the scientific areas that interested him. This was his way of keeping abreast of specialised bibliography and of encouraging the dissemination of research on Portuguese topics by way of exchange and offer. The epistolary collection of his received correspondence amounts to 24,000 letters from around 3,690 different correspondents. The exchange of correspondence with eminent figures in the field of historiography is particularly noteworthy, including names such as João Lúcio de Azevedo, Pedro de Azevedo, Aubrey Bell, Henrique da Gama Barros, Artur de Magalhães Basto, Fermín Bouza Brey, Teófilo Braga, Joaquim de Carvalho, Manuel Pinheiro Chagas, Francisco Adolfo Coelho, Fidelino de Figueiredo, Agostinho Fortes, Manuel Viegas Guerreiro, Manuel Domingues Heleno, Emile Hubner, Maximiano Lemos, David Lopes, Afonso do Paço, Consiglieri Pedroso, Edgar Prestage, Orlando Ribeiro, Amador de los Rios, Ricardo Severo, Carolina Michaelis de Vasconcelos and Joaquim de Vasconcelos.

In the linguistics domain, he corresponded with renowned researchers and university professors who were central figures in the history of Romance and Modern Dialectology: Louis Lucien Bonaparte, Gustave Cohen, Jules Cornu, Rufino Cuervo, Wendelin Förster, Raymond Foulché-Delbosc, Gustav Gröber, Konrad Haebler, Otto Klob, Fritz Kruger, Henry Lang, Antoine Meillet, Ramón Menéndez Pidal, Gustav Meyer, Wilhelm Meyer-Lubke, Ernesto Monaci, Alfred Morel-Fatio, Adolf Mussafia, Gaston Paris, Hugo Schuchardt, Leo Spitzer, Wilhelm Storck, and Max Leopold Wagner. In his library, Leite compiled a vast ancient collection with rare bibliographical items and manuscripts, as well as a modern collection of national and foreign monographs, periodicals, and booklets. In 1935, at the age of 76, he established in his will the distribution of his book and manuscript collections amongst the institutions to which he had always been linked — the Faculdade de Letras, the Academia das Ciências, the Museu de Etnologia and the Biblioteca Nacional — also distributing the conclusion and posthumous publication of his unfinished works. In his late life his eyesight deteriorated as did his capacity for work. He died on 17 May 1941, at the age of 82 years.

He left *Filologia Barranquenha* [Philology of the Barrancos Region] (published in 1955), volume III of *Etnografia* [Ethnography] (1942) and the beginning of volume IV (1958) ready for publication. Manuel Viegas Guerreiro, Alda da Silva Soromenho, Paulo Caratão Soromenho and Orlando Ribeiro were the main contributors to *Etnografia* (volumes IV to X, 1942-1988). In the field of linguistics and dialectological studies, the work of Leite de Vasconcelos was continued by Manuel de Paiva Boléo and Maria Helena Santos Silva



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(Mapa de Dialectos e Falares de Portugal Continental [Map of Dialects and Ways of Speaking of Continental Portugal] , 1958) and by Luís Filipe Lindley Cintra, who expanded the leitiana [referring to Leite] classification (Estudos de Dialectologia Portuguesa [Studies of Portuguese Dialectology], 1984; Mapa dos Dialectos de Portugal Continental e da Galiza [Map of Dialects of Continental Portugal and Galicia] , 1992) to a considerable degree.

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