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VASCONCELOS, MICHAËLIS, Carolina Wilhelm (Berlim, 1851 – Porto, 1925)

The high school Maths teacher Gustav Michaëlis took an interest in German Studies and specialist tachygraphic (Stolze System), orthographic and phonetic systems. It was in this context that he joined the teaching staff of the University of Berlin in 1851 - the year in which his daughter, Karoline Wilhelma, was born (D. Carolina de Vasconcelos..., 1958, p.10). His wife, Henriette Louise Lobeck, soon left the education of their four children to their father, although it is not known whether this was because she died or the couple divorced. It was with Gustav that the girls Henriette and Karoline had their first contacts with the Romance languages (Spanish, French, Portuguese). The elder of the two was to follow in her father's lexicographic footsteps, putting together various tomes of Dicionário Michaëlis for the Brokhaus publishing house. The younger, Karoline, became a self-taught philologist. From the ages of seven to sixteen, she attended the Luisenschule – an eminent Berlin girls' school whose headmaster was the philologist Eduard Maetzner. There she made at least two lifelong friends: her schoolmate Helene Lange, with whom she was to work on texts designed to publicise and intervene in the feminist cause; and, from the age of fourteen onwards, Carl Goldbeck, a teacher who was to guide her in her studies and later to become the father of Eduard Goldbeck, who lived in Porto and was a regular visitor to her home there. She grew up in a world of frequent contacts with leading figures like the storyteller Jakob Grimm, the geographer and naturalist Alexander von Humboldt and the writer Varnhagen von Ense. From 1867 onwards, she learnt Romance languages and studied the respective literatures of her own accord, plunged adventurously into Sanskrit and the Slavic and Semitic languages and literatures, and showed a growing interest in the peninsular languages, particularly Portuguese, Spanish and Catalan. She applied to take Arabic Studies at the University of Berlin as a visiting student, but her request was denied and Wetzstein started to teach her privately, perhaps thanks to his personal and academic relationship with Gustav Michaëlis (Carolina Michaëlis de Vasconcelos, 1985; Escritoras de Portugal, vol. II, 1924, p.395).

At the age of sixteen, Brokhaus in Leipzig hired Karoline as a Spanish and Portuguese reviser. She prepared a school edition of Herder's *Der Cid*, with a critical study by Julian Schmidt, which went to press in 1868. Later, in 1872, she became a sworn translator and interpreter in the field of peninsular, civil, criminal and political affairs for the Municipality of Berlin and the Prussian Foreign Ministry, a move she made under the influence of her father, who was the Parliament's Director of Tachygraphic Services at the time. She was also around seventeen when she began publishing in specialist Romance journals.



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It was as part of her usual practice of swapping critiques that in 1872 she found herself involved for the first time - albeit as a spectator - in a literary controversy. This was the romantic episode that led to her acquisition of Portuguese nationality as a result of her involvement with the art historian Joaquim de Vasconcelos, so the story deserves a short summary at this point. Karoline used to read and contribute to Bibliografia Crítica de História e Literatura, a Porto journal published by the Germanophile Adolfo Coelho, and from Berlin she followed the controversy that arose around Fausto - a version of Goethe's work that António Feliciano de Castilho "transferred" into Portuguese, despite the fact that he himself admitted he was not familiar with the original. Teófilo Braga, Joaquim de Vasconcelos and other literati launched a fierce attack on Castilho, but above all on those who defended him, a primary example being the work's learned publisher, José Gomes Monteiro, who also wrote Os críticos do Fausto do Sr. Visconde de Castilho (The critics of Fausto by Viscount Castilho, 1873). Vasconcelos spent part of his life in Germany, and as such proved to be not only the most intrepid but also the best informed of the combatants, even investing in the translation of a number of passages from the book. Our attentive philologist included this affair among the news items she was publishing at the time under the title 'Neues aus Spanien und Portugal' (News of Spain and Portugal), in the Berlin weekly Magazin für die Literatur Auslande (1873), while simultaneously keeping up a correspondence – especially heated in the case of Vasconcelos – with the Portuguese. Today, although the documents themselves have disappeared, this lively exchange of letters between the young Portuguese Germanophile and the German Romanist is talked about with airs of a romantic novel. The story of their marriage in Berlin, in 1876, increased this aura still further. The groom is said to have been forced to leave his train, which was held up by the civil war in Spain, and cross the Pyrenees on horseback. After the wedding, a long journey through Italy, Austria, Switzerland, Denmark, France and Spain only ended when the couple took root in the city of Porto. They probably also made other trips, albeit we do not have details of them.

In 1911, following the creation of the Humanities Course (*Curso Superior de Letras*, CSL) and the appointment of a teaching staff from scratch, the now Carolina Michaëlis de Vasconcelos was invited to hold the chairs of Germanic and Portuguese Philology. She accepted, but immediately asked to be transferred to the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Coimbra (FLUC), arguing that the distance between her original post in Lisbon and her home was too great. Awarded a chair in Romance Philology, she thus became the first woman to hold the position of university professor in Portugal. *Lições de Filologia Portuguesa* (Lessons in Portuguese Philology, 1946) give us an idea of some of her classes, although she also taught German Language and Literature. When she later asked to retire, the pretext was more the many projects she was involved in than advancing age, and the truth is that she was still teaching when she died. We know of at least one student's testimony of this final phase of her life ("À S.ª D.ª Carolina Michaëlis de Vasconcelos", *Dra. Carolina Michaëlis de Vasconcelos...*, 1926, pp.9-10). The General Library of the University of Coimbra has part of the former professor's personal books and papers in its collections, so, in addition to her manuscripts, we are also able to consult books containing her hand-written annotations.

Besides this work, which took up the last decade and a half of her life, Carolina maintained her links to a



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number of specialised European publications. Her first published text appeared in 1867, in the form of a short critical study on the Italian novelist Adolfo Mussafia in Archiv fuer das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen, a Viennese journal to which she contributed assiduously for more than a decade. Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie, which Gustav Gröber edited from its foundation in 1877, is another journal whose name can be found in her bibliography until 1905, and was the first place in which she revealed herself to be a student of Camões. In order not to drag out this bibliographic listing of her intense work as a writer of articles, let us limit ourselves to saying that her name featured in journals as varied as Bulletin Hispanique, Jahrbuch fur romanische und englische Literatur, Literaturblatt fur germanische und romanische Philologie, Romania and Revue Hispanique (inter alia, Eine Berliner Romanistin in Portugal...). Here in Portugal there appeared the studies published in Revista Lusitana and Revista da Universidade de Coimbra. Of particular note is her role at Lusitânia: Revista de Estudos Portugueses (1924-27), of which she was the first editor. This was a project that was markedly linked to the idea of a nationalist renewal, and was supported by figures such as Agostinho de Campos, Jaime Cortesão, José de Figueiredo and Ricardo Jorge. The fact that such a position was given to a German woman makes both this group and the broad spectrum of "Lusism" it represented rather peculiar (História da História em Portugal séculos XIX-XX [History of History in Portugal -19th/20th centuries], vol. I, 1998).

Carolina's contributions to encyclopaedic works, which addressed Portuguese and Iberian topics, show how her scholarship was recognised beyond the Pyrenean border. After a wait of nearly a decade, her short notes on Portuguese Language and Literature came out in the sixth edition of Meyers Grosses Konversations-Lexikon (vol. XVI, 1907). In addition to inviting her to take part in international feminist congresses, Helena Lange and Gertrudes Baümer asked Carolina to contribute to the first volume of Handbuch der Frauenbewegung (Berlin, 1901-1906). In September 1902, Duarte Leite adapted the Portuguese content of this feminist movement manual for publication in the Porto daily O Primeiro de Janeiro (republished 2002). Carolina took part in various collective works, but always as a contributor and never as editor. Her connections with a vast network of specialists, the two-way correspondence in which she was addressed as "douta senhora" (learned lady) and the visitors to her home and its library could serve as a study on European human sciences in their own right and would deserve to be the object of reflection on how to construct scientific knowledge in a community. The Portuguese historians in the latter included Joaquim de Vasconcelos himself, Alexandre Herculano, Oliveira Martins and Teófilo Braga. The people with whom Carolina pursued a polyglot correspondence would take a whole page to list (inter alia, Carolina *Michaëlis: Lista...*, 1912, pp. 29-49; personal papers of Oliveira Martins at the National Library of Portugal; collections of the General Library of the University of Coimbra). There was a constant exchange of material, news about documentation and critical texts between Carolina the scholar and other researchers, and references to a search for documentation are a recurrent topic. It was guite possible that the response to a query addressed to her would take the form of an in-depth study - the case, for example, of a question from Gomez Ocerin about a musical Intermezzo, which gave rise to A Saudade Portuguesa (1914). A habitual subject of both the letters sent to her and those she penned was that of delving into local archives (like the



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research she conducted in Holland, for *Uriel da Costa,* 1922). Over the course of her life she built up a history of literature that covered every period from the Medieval to contemporary authors. Biographers note a certain slowdown in Carolina's publications that coincided with the birth of the couple's first and only child, in 1877, but from May to September of the same year the young philologist made her first foray into a manuscript deposited at the Ajuda Library. She took full advantage of the invitation offered by the librarian, Alexandre Herculano, who was withdrawing to spend what would be the last months of his life at Vale de Lobos and who left his residence next to the Library empty. Europe had to wait until 1904, when Carolina was 53, for the publication of the colossal ensuing work, which was representative of her incessant activity as a critic, diplomat, linguist and historian of literature and language who also left us her contribution to toponymy, genealogy and the biography of historical figures (*Cancioneiro da Ajuda...*, 2 vols., 1904).

It would, however, be hard to see Carolina as a historian in the strict sense of the term, which is why she wrote no monographs in this respect. Her choice of subject matters is a fundamental reflection of the way in which she looked at things with the eye of a social scientist, and is in its own right enough to allow us to say that her secular, rationalist historiographical narrative falls within the framework of a liberal tradition made more sophisticated by idealism. The idea of 'nation' that was constantly present in her thinking was not linked to kings or dynasties, or even to an idea of will or reason - she saw the nation as something that became an essence and manifested itself in the people, via the language. The way in which she evaluated people, actions and movements, be they historical or of her own day, was based on her position with regard to knowledge - scientific knowledge, scholarship, reflection, interest, always modulated by a cultural and religious tolerance. In this respect her life and her work went hand in hand. Carolina's "Lusism" was idealistic, but she proved progressive and pragmatic in her relationship with the Portuguese language and the way it was used in public life - since 1903, she had argued in favour of the simplification proposed by Gonçalves Viana, which she immediately adopted, and she took part in the committee that prepared the 1911 orthographic reform. Her feminism was also set within the framework of a politically conservative progressivism, in which her learning and propriety, motherhood and family life placed her apart from the more inflamed wing of the movement (suffragism, socialism and free love). Her idea of history was not theorised; rather it was derived from intense work over years of study, in direct touch with documents and archives. Carolina employed this empiricism in conjunction with a way of working she brought from Germany, which was derived from her studies of philology and possessed a major historical dimension that involved critiquing documents based on a careful palaeographic transcription and the science of studying formal documents. Rationalism, and in particular positivism, may perhaps provide us with the first nexus here. She thought that rigorous method made it possible to uncover the truth, whose outlines had to be completely revealed - a scientific truth, which could be criticised and updated by a community of experts.

In Portugal her companions in this struggle were Teófilo Braga, who was the main proponent of linguistic positivism, and Adolfo Coelho. Carolina was closer to the latter and to Fidelino Figueiredo, in his role as the methodical and rigorous author and disseminator of *A crítica literária como ciência* (Literary criticism as a science, 1912). The positivist scientific canon formed an integral part of her philological work, especially in



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the shape of the categorisation operation – of the division into groups rendered homogeneous with resort to a rule-based taxonomy in which the *separation* of essences appears inevitable. Thus we come up against the problem of authorship, which surfaces in both her extensive works and her minutely detailed notes. In the late 19th century, the idea that only one person could be responsible for writing a given piece of literature was becoming fully accepted. From the moment she wrote what can be considered the first scientific study on literature to be produced on Portuguese soil (Poesias de Francisco de Sá de Miranda, [Poetry of Francisco de Sá de Miranda], 1885), Carolina set herself the task of discerning authorships and establishing dates. She looked for the truth by ruling out crass errors, eliminating from the supposed Camonian repertoire pieces that had been written before Camões was born, and facing up to some perfect mysteries, such as the anagrammatic Crisfal - was it an ecloque by Cristóvão Falcão? The same movement led her to discover and face homonymic problems that were commonplace in peninsular literature. Cases of two different people, such as the regent Dom Pedro, Duke of Coimbra, who was confused with his own son, who was in fact the real author of Tragédia de la insigne reina Doña Isabel (Uma obra inédita do Condestável D. Pedro de Portugal, 1899), or on the contrary of a single individual - one example being Gil Vicente, who turned out to be both a playwright and a goldsmith (Notas Vicentinas, vol. II, 1918) - were also unravelled using a literary criticism methodology. Carolina believed the truth can be found by looking at the very soul or psyche, which in turn leads us on to the existence of a collective being. For her, the question of authorship became one of whether a work was produced by a Portuguese, of whether it was an originally Portuguese form of expression or not; not just because many Portuguese authors wrote in other Iberian languages, especially Spanish, but also taking into account their literary style (usually imported and adapted) and the use of topics with an exclusively Portuguese nature. She would finish her investigation by looking at the act of writing itself - at the end of the day, looking at grammar as the last redoubt of the Portuguese cosmovision. This was one axis along which to interpret the Ajuda manuscript, which is a national heritage treasure from the 13th-14th centuries. Seen from this perspective, the possibility that a Spanish scribe was behind the centuries-old folios gradually lost weight in favour of the evidence that they had been written by various hands, which was supported by a comparative observation of the orthography as a representation of speech. Carolina advanced hypotheses of semantic evolution within a comparative framework of the Iberian languages. The very way in which the work was written was analysed with an argumentation that was logical, hard-fought, letter by letter, phoneme by phoneme, word by word, until she was peremptory: "I have no hesitation in considering the writing of the Ajuda Codex to be the original Portuguese" (Cancioneiro da Ajuda, vol. I, p. XIV, no. 5).

Carolina's "*Lusism*" can be seen in this historiography of the word, based on the idea of the expression of a Portuguese psyche, which is another way of saying a national soul – somewhat similar to what Teixeira de Pascoais tried to do for philosophy with "*saudosismo*". This feature is repeated in many of her studies, from the Portuguese production of *Palmeirim de Inglaterra* to the narrative mosaic of the loves of Inês de Castro and King Pedro in *Saudade Portuguesa*. Initially published in separate articles, the studies that together make up *A infanta D. Maria de Portugal e as suas damas, 1521-1577* (The Infanta Maria of Portugal and her



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ladies, 1521-1577) appeared as a single volume in 1902. The society in which Luís de Camões lived his life served as an opportunity "to analyse the Portuguese psyche in its female exteriorisations and outline the profile and recount the life of illustrious ladies" (A infanta D. Maria..., 1902, p.1). The way in which Carolina incorporated a new gender-based perspective in this scientific narrative is reflected in three major aspects of her analyses. It enabled her to ensure a greater veracity on the part of the historiographical account and to get closer to the truth, inasmuch as emphasising the female characters brought a series of interpersonal relations to the forefront when they would otherwise not have been addressed - the connection between Princess Maria and Camões, or the holding of royal literary evenings, for example, It also solidified a defence of individuation, which led on to a narrative linked to a theory of personality: "One notes with displeasure the tendency to make everything uniform, raising them all up to such a height that it is not possible to distinguish individual functions" (*ibid*, p.2). Finally, it made it possible to incorporate an increasingly sophisticated and verisimilar notion of the Portuguese psyche. Carolina sought to categorise the nation's soul by means of its complex manifestations, and she saw differentiation based on a person's female gender as an extension of this that ought not to be overlooked. In the absence of written documentation, she felt that one should pay attention to the women who stood out in history; "only in the light of more or less documented events, and as seen by other temperaments, are we able to distinguish their nature" (*ibid*, pp. 1-2).

The *feminist* tension led the "learned lady" and the intellectual *milieu* of the day to engage in a debate that Carolina waged with the sword of scholarship in her hand, for example with Oliveira Martins. On the subject of the vacuousness of education for girls, on which at the end of the day they both in fact agreed, she was incapable of not rising to the challenge: "One of the most prominent politicians of the time - the historian Oliveira Martins – has on several occasions described (...) the grotesque type of the 'emancipated' woman, a virago with short hair and glasses, a dark dress and large, stout boots, with her arm around a stack of books. In his eyes the supreme mission, the true role of the woman (...) can be summarised as first and foremost to be beautiful and 'adorn the man's life with the roses of love and tenderness': and then to make and darn socks" (O Movimento Feminista [The Feminist Movement], 2002, p.34). In a letter he wrote to Carolina (Correspondência de J. P. Oliveira Martins, 1926, p.163), Oliveira Martins said that in his Os Filhos de D. João I (The Children of King João I) he again attached due importance to certain female figures, although he did not make the same effort to restore the darker personalities to their place in history, because of a lack of information about them: "If I did not portray dame Isabeau, it wasn't because she was a woman; it was just because I didn't have a single element with which to do so. You cannot accuse me of that injustice, because you recognise the role I attached to Queen Philippa's influence over the moral education of the 'illustrious princes'. Princess Isabel - for whose biographical portrait, I repeat, I did not have any elements, except that which is to be found in the Portuguese chronologies, which is nothing - did not play an important role in Portuguese history, although she did have one - and a very noble one - in that of Burgundy. For the same reason I limited myself to a passing reference to Charles the Bold, and indeed failed to talk about Maximilian".

The working method which, in the land of Carolina's birth, was learnt from the cradle and strengthened at



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school seemed to be entirely lacking in her adoptive country. She left us a comparative picture of this difference in the articles she published about the methodology for teaching children to read, Cartilha Maternal (A Cartilha Portuguesa... 1976), which are an example of her comparative procedures. In any and every study signed by Carolina Michaëlis de Vasconcelos, on any and every type of documentary carrier, we always find that she cross-referenced the vertical and horizontal dimensions - for example, by clarifying the circumstances that existed before the document was produced and comparing it to coeval documentation, highlighting the relevance of its distinguishing characteristics both case-by-case and as a whole. Taken together, these procedures form a methodology that can be said to fall within the great positivist school headed by Leopold Von Ranke. Another feature of her work was her *practice* of publishing parts of ongoing projects, on the basis that making them available to the scientific community meant that they could immediately be critiqued. Periodical journals and correspondence formed an integral part of this system, which in the late 19th and early 20th centuries allowed the free circulation of ideas and books. Carolina herself constantly engaged in the exercise of critiquing other people's works. Thus it is that we find, during her lifetime, the publication and republication of works, very often in order to go deeper into partial conclusions she had previously published. A good example of this constant reflection process can be found in her own criticisms of her earlier work, which are presented in the set of "Estudos sobre o romanceiro peninsular" (Studies on the peninsular novels), which was published between 1907 and 1909 in Cultura Española (Romances Velhos em Portugal, 1934). In 1876, her Protestant credo, which was substantially dominated by rationalism, led her to say: "What we do is just to demonstrate that science, which we name judge of all ... ideas, cannot and must not construct ... without an absolutely sound base; it cannot and must not take account of intentions, even the most philanthropic ones, when they compromise its principles" (A Cartilha Portuguesa..., 1976, p.80). She did not leave any testimonies of her faith, except that it was pared down to a "natural religiousness", which she expressed when she wrote Uriel da Costa (1922).

The spirit that was present in so many works also left its mark on the cultural societies of Carolina's day. In 1877, she was made an *honorary member* of the Berlin Institute of Living Languages. The University of Freiburg was the first to award her the title of doctor *honoris causa*. This example was followed by the University of Coimbra, in Romance and Germanic Philology, and then, in 1923, by the University of Hamburg. Despite Carolina's great dedication to Queen Amélia, which was reciprocated with a feeling of great admiration, it was only in 1901 that the Portuguese monarchy awarded her the *Ordem de São Tiago* (Order of St. James). She was above all honoured by intellectual republicans, who were responsible for her appointment to the chair of Germanic Philology on the Humanities Course (CSL), followed by her acclamation at the University of Coimbra in her first year as a member of the teaching staff (Maria Manuela Delille, *Carolina Michaëlis de Vasconcelos...*, 1985). It is strangely ironic that, having come from the "metropolis of intelligence" (*Lições...* 1956, p.6), Carolina Michaëlis de Vasconcelos ended up being distinguished for her intelligence, erudition and body of work in a country in which, for women, "knowledge is seen as a useless and dangerous thing" (*Movimento...,* 2002, p.32). In 1911, the Lisbon Academy of Sciences (ACL) honoured her with membership, albeit only after a formal battle about the fact she was a



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woman. An issue of *Boletim de Segunda Classe* (literally, *Second-Class Bulletin*) appeared with various testimonies to her qualities from friends of both sexes and her peers. She agreed to be Honorary President of the National Council of Portuguese Women (CNMP), which was founded in 1914, despite practically not having taken part in its more active work, which was centred in Lisbon. Her death was followed by a series of public homages, the first of which was paid by the CNMP (1926). The University of Coimbra then organised a major event (1930-1933), which brought together a large number of people who had worked with Carolina and who came to pay homage to someone who was considered the "wisest woman of her time", in the words of her Camonian master W. Storck. Other forms of homage followed: the baptism of a Porto high school (now Carolina Michaëlis Secondary School) with the name of the city's eminent resident, the publication of facsimile editions from the 1980s onwards, the naming of streets all over the country, and recently the choice of a Porto Metro station to bear her name.

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