

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

<http://dichp.bnportugal.pt/>



SEVERO, Ricardo S. de Fonseca e Costa (Lisboa, 1869 – São Paulo, 1940)

Ricardo Severo, son of José António de Fonseca e Costa and Mariana da Cruz de Fonseca e Costa, was born on 6 November into a family that became wealthy as a result of his father's commercial business interests in Angola, where he was a supplier for military caravans and expeditions.

During his childhood, the family moved to Porto and he did his high school studies at the Porto Academic School [Escola Académica do Porto] where two of his classmates were Rocha Peixoto and Basílio Teles. His interest in the study of the ethnic roots of the Portuguese people grew when he came into contact with the archaeological work of Carlos Ribeiro, which led to his attending the *IX Congresso Internacional de Arqueologia e de Antropologia Pré-Históricas* [9th International Congress of Prehistoric Archaeology and Anthropology] in Lisbon in 1880.

In the academic year 1884-85 he enrolled in the Civil Engineering course at the Porto Polytechnic Academy [Academia Politécnica do Porto] where he was an outstanding student, twice winning the prize for best student of his course. He earned his diploma as a civil engineer first for Public Works (November, 1890) and later for Mining (March, 1891). At the Polytechnic Academy a positivist conception of Science dominated, with a teaching model that was markedly scientific-technical and focused on the field of the natural and exact sciences. This influenced the direction in which his scientific thought took him.

His student phase figures as a period of extremely intense scientific labour in the areas of Archaeology, Prehistory and Ethnology, all of which greatly attracted him. He was by nature very dynamic and developed projects and initiatives that gained the support of those he knew, ranging from fellow students, college teachers and old friends to well-known personalities in cultural and scientific circles. In 1886 he published his first scientific article, written in collaboration with Fonseca Cardoso and with supplementary comments by Martins de Sarmiento, in the *Revista de Guimarães* on the subject of an archaeological dig in the 'Cividade de Bagunte', the site of a fortified Iron Age settlement that he knew well and which he had explored during his visits to a family property nearby. Then in 1888, while still only 19 years old, he published his first individual work, *Paleoethnologia portuguesa*, a critical essay on the famous French archaeologist Émile Cartailhac's work on Iberian Prehistory. In this essay he did not shy away from adding further data of his own that he had been compiling from his own archaeological observations and surveys in the northern part of the country, and he highlighted new aspects and unpublished curiosities about megalithic culture and prehistoric



materials.

In the same year, he founded the Carlos Ribeiro Society (1888-1898) with some other students. Its mission was to disseminate knowledge of scientific studies in the areas of Anthropology, Archaeology, Ethnology, Geology and Botany and later gave rise to its own publication: the *Revista de Ciências Naturais e Sociais* (1889-1898). The review planned an interdisciplinary programme inspired by the idea of constructing the ethnological roots of the Portuguese people, a path already begun by the patrons chosen. It was edited by Rocha Peixoto, Wenceslau de Lima and Ricardo Severo with Leite de Vasconcelos, Alberto Sampaio, Martins Sarmiento, Basílio Teles and Júlio de Matos all collaborating with studies, articles and bibliographical news which enabled it to expand scientific horizons. Severo's articles focused on linking the archaeologist in the critical appreciation of his prehistoric investigations to the ethnologist who sought to disentangle the ethnic and anthropological traits of the Portuguese, thereby following the guidelines of the emergent French school of Prehistoric Archaeology. He also inaugurated a new area, one that studied archaeology in the Portuguese overseas provinces, with his analysis of prehistory in Angola for which he used some artefacts an acquaintance had sent him.

Although ready to begin a professional career in the area of his academic training, the debacle of 31 January 1891 in Porto led to a change of plan since, as he was a political militant in the Republican ranks, fears of reprisals for his association with the attempted revolutionary coup motivated his departure for Brazil. In São Paulo he set himself up as an engineer in the office of the architect Ramos de Azevedo and four years later, protected under the 1893 decree that gave amnesty for political crimes committed by civilians, he decided to return to Portugal. He settled once again in Porto where he devoted himself almost exclusively to archaeology, renewing the former contacts of his youth and planning with Rocha Peixoto and Fonseca Cardoso the embryo of his greatest project within the field of history - the review *Portugália* (1899-1908). Together they set up, ran and edited the review whose editorial line Severo defined in the introduction as providing "a national archive of materials for the study of the Portuguese people, their life and their character".

Although it was not published regularly, it became an outstanding and valuable publication culminating in two volumes of four instalments each, giving a dynamic boost to Portuguese Prehistory, Palaeontology, Archaeology, Anthropology and Ethnography. This was due not only to the value of the studies written by many of his former collaborators who accompanied the editorial team, but also to its material and artistic rigour using the most modern technical-scientific types of archaeological drawing: three-dimensional diagrams, schematic reconstructions, typologies of scale, morphology and decorative representations.

In addition to receiving a public accolade from the national government in 1903, the review was also widely praised in the international arena, meriting from the two French authorities on archaeology – Émile Cartailhac and Salomon Reinach – the attribute of "a review worthy of the most prestigious centres of culture" (*A Citânia de Sanfins*, 1985, p. 7).

In the pages of this much acclaimed publication, Severo showed his erudition and thirst for knowledge,



DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

<http://dichp.bnportugal.pt/>

putting his name to a wide variety of articles about different historical periods and constantly updating readers on the main international advances in archaeology. He put forward his own firm beliefs about ethnic nationalism and Lusitanianism in the debate surrounding the origins of the Portuguese people, using data from ethnology and prehistoric anthropology to illustrate the specificity and antiquity of the Iberian peoples of Indo-European origin in their autochthonous formation. For example, in his search for this connecting link, he cooperated with the British Archaeological Association on the recognition of the authenticity of the archaeological finds in Vila Pouca de Aguiar, especially the examples, rare in Iberian megalithism, of zoomorphic and/or anthropomorphic representations and of alphabetiform characters, establishing parallels with similar English archaeological finds. Although he was a prominent figure for his emphasis on the scientific development of Portuguese anthropology, essential for an understanding of national identity, Portuguese history and popular culture, when he later transposed this to the Brazilian experience he was accused of having a neo-colonial view in his speculation about local archaeological, artisanal and architectural subjects.

In 1908, struggling with financial difficulties, he decided to return permanently to São Paulo where he once again took up his former job as an engineer and a writer, relegating his historical and archaeological studies to second place. At the time of his death on 3 April 1940, he had won enormous intellectual and cultural prestige for his multiple interventions in Brazilian scientific bodies. Neither should we forget his links with Portugal through which he encouraged numerous cultural exchanges, as in the case of his own collaboration with *Seara Nova*, nor the fact that he was a member of the Lisbon Academy of Sciences, the Historical and Geographical Institute of São Paulo [Instituto Histórico e Geográfico de São Paulo] and the Portuguese Society of Anthropology and Ethnology [Sociedade Portuguesa de Antropologia e Etnologia]. In 1935, during a ceremony to pay homage to him, he offered the latter the whole of the documental archive belonging to *Portugália* in recognition of the masterly succession of a new generation of scientists led by Mendes Correia, who also believed the key to knowledge about the Portuguese people and their historical evolution lay in the transdisciplinarity of the human and natural sciences.

Works by the author: CARDOSO, A. Fonseca e SEVERO, Ricardo, “Notícia arqueológica sobre o Monte da Cidade”. *Revista de Guimarães*. Guimarães, vol.3, fasc. 3, 1886, pp. 137-141; *Paleoethnologia portuguesa: les ages préhistoriques de l'Espagne et du Portugal de M. Émile Cartailhac*. Porto, Typographia Occidental, 1888; *Revista de ciencias naturaes e sociaes: publicação trimestral (orgão dos trabalhos da Sociedade Carlos Ribeiro)*. Porto: Typographia Occidental, 1889-1895; “Primeiros vestígios do período neolítico na província de Angola”. *Revista de ciencias naturaes e sociaes*. Porto, vol. I, n.º 4, 1890, pp. 152-161; *Portugalia: materiaes para o estudo do povo portuguez*. Porto, Imprensa Portuguesa, 1899-1908; *Origens da nacionalidade portuguesa*, 2.ª ed. Coimbra, Imprensa da Universidade, 1924; *A sciencia náutica portuguesa e o descobrimento do Brasil*. São Paulo, Centro Republicano Português, 1931; *Origens e factos da expansão portuguesa no Brasil até 1530: quarto centenário da Fundação de S. Vicente*. São Paulo, Casa

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

<http://dichp.bnportugal.pt/>

Duprat, 1932.

Works with references to the author: PEREIRA, J. M. Esteves e RODRIGUES, Guilherme, *Dicionário Histórico, chorográfico, heraldico, biographico, bibliographico, numismático e artístico*. Lisboa, vol. VI, João Romano Torres, 1912; DIAS, Carlos Malheiro, *Homenagem a Ricardo Severo*. São Paulo, Companhia Melhoramentos, 1932; CARDOSO, Mário, “Cartas de Ricardo Severo para Martins Sarmento”. *Revista de Guimarães*. Guimarães, vol. 70, fasc. 1-2, 1960, pp. 5-20; BRANDÃO, Domingos de Pinho, *A Citania de Sanfins na história da arqueologia portuense*. Paços de Ferreira, Câmara Municipal de Paços de Ferreira, 1985; COIMBRA, Fernando A. Rodrigues, “Ricardo Severo e o desenvolvimento da Arqueologia no Porto”. *Portvgália*. Porto, Nova série, vols. XIII-XIV, 1992-1993, pp. 307-314; FABIÃO, Carlos, “Um século de Arqueologia em Portugal”. *Al-Madan*, Almada, II série, n.º 8, 1999, pp. 104-126; MELLO, Joana, *Ricardo Severo, da Lusitânia ao Piratininga: da arqueologia portuguesa à arquitectura brasileira*, 1.ª ed. Porto, Dafne, 2007; FABIÃO, Carlos, *Uma História da Arqueologia Portuguesa: das origens à descoberta do Côa*. Lisboa, CTT - Correios de Portugal, 2011.

Francisco Miguel Araújo



APOIOS:

