

# DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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**SORIANO, Simão José da Luz** (Lisboa, 1802 – Lisboa, 1891)

Luz Soriano was born into a humble family. His mother was a serving maid and his father a barber. His father abandoned his mother and moved to Brazil when Soriano was only two years old and so his mother left him at his grandmother's house near Alcobaça.

At the time of the French invasions, Luz Soriano returned to Lisbon to be with his mother. Thanks to the help of a religious uncle, he entered the Lisbon Casa Pia school in 1811. In 1816 he started an apprenticeship to learn to be a goldsmith. His vocation for studies, though, led him to enrol in the first year of the Royal Naval Academy in 1823. In 1825 he managed to achieve the highest goal of a poor student: to obtain the necessary financing to be able to enrol in the University of Coimbra. His sponsor was the Baron of Rendufe, the Intendant-General of Police. He matriculated in the Faculty of Mathematics and in the Faculty of Philosophy but the political agitation the country was experiencing prevented him from devoting his time to his studies.

In the 1827-28 academic year, when he was 26, he enlisted as a volunteer in the academic corps, taking part in the anti-Miguelist revolt in Porto in May 1828. When the insurrection was defeated, the army - students included - led by Bernardo de Sá Nogueira fled to Galicia, and from there to Plymouth where they were held in a warehouse stocking timber for ships. Some months later, in February 1829, the young university students and the rest of the soldiers were transferred to the island of Terceira in the Azores where they remained until June 1832. Finally they set sail for Porto, at the time surrounded by Miguelist troops, where Soriano asked to be posted to the Serra do Pilar, the most dangerous defensive position in the city. He spent some time there until Sá Nogueira, Minister of the Navy in D. Pedro's government, requisitioned him in December 1832 to work with him as a "first-class amanuensis".

After the war ended, he stayed on at the Ministry until 1837. In that year he returned to Coimbra to study Medicine, taking advantage of the provisions of the Charter of Law of 20 October 1834 under which university students who had emigrated were allowed to conclude their training at the state's expense. He finished his course in 1842 at the age of forty.

In 1843, he returned to the Navy Secretariat and was appointed Head of the Angola Office but he resigned with the Regeneration. Between 1853 and 1854, he was deputy for the colony of Angola. In 1856 he was appointed Head of the Mozambique Office and then in 1858, he moved up to become Head of the

Navy Section. In 1865 Sá da Bandeira appointed him, by decree, to be an extraordinary member of the overseas provinces council as a reward for services rendered during his professional life in the field of overseas policy. He was responsible for some important decisions such as extending the Portuguese territory in Angola to the south (Moçamedes) and to the north (Ambriz), thereby thwarting the ambitions of the British. In 1867, he retired at the age of 65. Despite already having published some books, it was from this time on that he began to devote all his time to historical narratives, writing thousands of pages. He lived austere and must have amassed a large fortune. As he had no children, he left his worldly goods to various institutions and monumental works - Casa Pia, the Misericórdias [charitable institutions], the Tombs of Vasco da Gama and Luís de Camões, the Monument to Afonso de Albuquerque, and others ("Testamento" in Brito Aranha, *Dicionário Bibliográfico Português*, tomo XIX, pp.226-232).

Soriano started writing in 1830 as a journalist for the weekly periodical *Crónica da Terceira* at the service of the Provisional Junta set up in the Azores. It was he who was responsible for the first twelve issues until he was removed owing to certain misunderstandings with the Duke of Palmela. In 1832, still on Terceira, he became the editor and a collaborator of a 143-page publication called *Folhinha da Terceira*. The same year a small volume of poetry entitled *Poesias Diversas de Simão José da Luz, voluntário, emigrado e académico de Coimbra* (Diverse Poems of Simão José da Luz, volunteer, emigré and academic of Coimbra) was also published. This was a series of anti-Miguelist odes, songs and sonnets, some of which were dedicated to his companions or to persons of note such as Sá Nogueira.

As part of his duties as a ministerial functionary, he wrote two memoirs: *Memória sobre os sertões e a costa ao sul de Benguela na Província de Angola* (Memoir on the hinterland and the coast to the south of Benguela in the Province of Angola) (1846) and *Memória concernente a sustentar a opinião dos que julgam contagiosa a cólera-morbus epidémica* (Memoir to uphold the opinion of those who judge epidemic cholera-morbus to be contagious) (1848).

His first historiographical work was the *História do Cerco do Porto* (History of the Siege of Porto), published in 1846 when he was forty-four. The government had commissioned this work as part of the liberal power's promotion of historical studies (Sérgio Campos Matos, *Historiografia e Memória Nacional no Portugal do Século XIX*, pp.491-493). Soriano puts himself in the place of someone who lives through the events from the inside as a member of the liberating army in the lowest rank of the military hierarchy alongside the ordinary soldiers. It is from this position that he analyzes and evaluates the civil war and the characters of the main protagonists. He nurtures a pet hate for some figures, in particular for Saldanha whom he accuses of being a "turncoat". As for the leaders, Palmela is seen as "timid and weak" and D. Pedro as "inconstant and unstable". The only person who deserves his unconditional admiration is Bernardo Sá Nogueira, the future Marquis of Sá da Bandeira. In a letter to Joaquim Martins de Carvalho dated 1881, the writer unburdens himself: "apart from the Marquis of Sá, I take to my grave not the smallest jot of consideration for any of our rulers, past or present, but only a pungent distaste" (in Brito Aranha, *Op.Cit.*, p.218).

His later works can be divided into three types: (1) History - *História da Guerra Civil* (History of the Civil War) (1866-1890), *História do Reinado de El-rei D. José e da Administração do Marquês de Pombal* (History of the Reign of King D. José and of the Administration of the Marquis of Pombal) (1867), *Vida do Marquês de Sá da Bandeira* (Life of the Marquis of Sá da Bandeira) (1887-1888); (2) a political reflection essay - *Utopias Desmascaradas do Sistema Liberal em Portugal* (Utopias of the Liberal System in Portugal Unmasked) (1858); (3) a memoir essay - *Revelações da Minha Vida e Memórias de Alguns Factos e Homens meus Contemporâneos* (Revelations of My Life and Memoirs of Some Facts and Some of My Contemporaries) (1860).

The *História da Guerra Civil* was his biggest undertaking. According to Inocêncio (*Dicionário Bibliográfico Português*, t. VII, p.279), this was also written and “paid for by the government” through an annual subsidy of 600 mil reis. It comprises nineteen volumes, five of which are devoted to documents. Writing and publication stretched over many years - Soriano started it in 1866, one year before he retired, and finished it in 1890, one year before he died. During these twenty-four years, besides publishing a book about the reign of D. José in 1867, he also edited a biography of Sá da Bandeira in 1887-88, his last work.

The *História da Guerra Civil* is the most important work in his life as a writer. Discounting the two hundred introductory pages dedicated to recounting the history of the territory that would later become Portugal from the time of Lusitania to Pombal’s consulship - a very common practice for 19<sup>th</sup> century historians - Soriano devotes the rest of the book to narrating events from the year 1777 to 1834.

He divides the study into three periods. The first takes us from the time of the mythical Lusitania up to the departure of the royal family for Brazil in 1807. The second is devoted to the “Peninsula War”, covering the chronological period from 1807 to 1813. The third covers the years between 1814 and 1834 with the title “Establishment of parliamentary government”. This last part takes up seven volumes in addition to two volumes of documents. From the year 1826 on, the author enters that phase of his own life when he was an actual participant in the central events surrounding the implantation of the liberal regime.

His aim, already expressed in *História do Cerco...*, was “to pass from the oral tradition to the written the universal proclamation of the illustrious actions and glorious victories with which the liberating army crowned itself” (*História do Cerco...*, 1846, p.122). The fundamental truth that Soriano wanted to leave for the readers and for posterity was this: the civil war was won thanks to the courage, dedication and spirit of sacrifice of the soldiers of the liberal army – “it was a small army that resisted all the might of an army of forty thousand men” (*Op. Cit.*, p.122) – despite the character flaws of its elite. The episode of the May 1828 defeat served to reveal the nature of the liberal leaders. While the liberal soldiers fled on foot to Galicia, facing the adversities of the climate and pursuit by the Miguelist forces, the elites showed their lack of courage and dignity by fleeing on the British ship “Belfast” to England. The upshot of this was that the soldiers, including the group of students from Coimbra University, were billeted in the Plymouth “warehouse”. The “impartiality”, the “correctness” and the “pure zeal of truth” (*Op. Cit.*, p.282) that the author proposes constitute a mere declaration of intent in the context of this view of the civil war wherein the legitimate hero was the whole

collective group of liberal soldiers. This was a very different view to that of Herculano for whom the liberating army was intimately linked in both action and spirit to the tutelary figure of their foremost leader, the Emperor D. Pedro.

In *Vida do Marquês de Sá da Bandeira* (1887-1888), Soriano pays homage to the man by whose hand he entered and advanced in his career as a state functionary. Belonging to the liberal elite, Sá da Bandeira was the only one to reject the “bunk” that Palmela had reserved for him on the Belfast, opting instead to accompany the troops to Galicia. This gesture revealed a humanity in Sá Nogueira that the others did not have, thereby winning Soriano’s admiration and loyalty.

The *História do Reinado de El-rei D. José...* he wrote was also commissioned by the state. Pombal appears as the great saviour of a nation that was in a “deplorable” state, a state that had become drastically worse as a result of the 1755 earthquake. The historian condemns the despotic regime at the same time as making a very positive judgement of Pombal’s governance, which was responsible for bringing the country out of the “state of ignorance and barbarity in which it had lain until then” (p.192). This fascination with Pombal, not very common in liberal historiography (although Pinheiro Chagas is another of Pombal’s admirers), would be taken up again some years later by republican historiography with José de Arriaga and Teófilo Braga.

In *Utopias Desmascaradas...* and *Revelações da Minha Vida...* Soriano reveals and justifies his true feelings. In the first work, it is the liberal doctrine that is submitted to the writer’s evaluation. He shows, somewhat vehemently, his disillusionment with liberal politics in Portugal and with the liberal doctrine itself. In the second work, he presents the reader with the most important moments of his life intercalated by chapters of a very different nature (the history of Coimbra and its university, a geographical description of the archipelago of the Azores). In the *Revelações...*, Soriano complains that publication of the *Utopias...* merited him the accusation of “liberticide” (*Revelações...*, 1860, p.533). He refuted the accusation saying that he had on the contrary fallen into the “most extraordinary scepticism” in relation to politicians – whether they be “chartists” or, and above all, “demagogues or progressives” (*Op. Cit.*, p. 545). For him, thirty years of representative government constituted a “strong denial” of the “garden of delights” promised by the liberal revolution. What triumphed was not “merit” nor “virtue” nor “patriotism” nor “zeal for the public cause”, but instead a battle of interests, “a bitter and fratricidal struggle between the two big parties” (*Utopias...*, p. 12).

Soriano also wrote several obituaries since, given his own long life, he witnessed the passing of many friends and acquaintances.

In his brief passage through the Chamber of Deputies, he made a speech about the need to rapidly occupy the port of Ambriz in the north of Angola (12/7/1853) which caught the public’s attention and was translated into English as part of the British government’s publications on the slave trade. This made him feel very proud. The British government was sounded out about not opposing the occupation, which was successfully accomplished in May 1855 (*Revelações da Minha Vida...*, pp. 431-432).

In all his works, Soriano shows great difficulty in accepting the inevitable rupture with the historical past

that occurs in revolutions. This creates a great tension in him, evident in his narrative, between his liberal convictions that were cemented in his youth and to which he seems to have remained faithful all his life and the historical reality of the process to establish the liberal regime in Portugal that started with the 1820 revolution and ended in 1834. In this process he condemns the “general dismantling of the old institutions” (*História da Guerra Civil...* tomo XVII, p.366), in line with the conservative criticism of liberalism. He even admits there was no alternative in 1820. However, he believes the Vintista politicians went too far, finding their support in the “rabble” as opposed to “the more moderate voices of the Cortes”. Soriano mistrusts, above all else, the revolutionary mentality which believes in the need to break with the old in order to build a new society. While Herculano, Garrett and José Liberato looked at the past with horror, given the abuses committed by absolutism, and considered the revolution essential in order to bring down all the structures of the hated regime, Soriano understood that the absolute regime had simply become “incompatible with the lights of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and with the social status of the middle class” (*História da Guerra Civil...*, 1866-90, vol. XI, p. IX). Nothing more than this. The revolution, on the other hand, should have proceeded with caution to avoid unnecessary destruction. The opposite happened: the new liberal elite demolished the old without looking back.

In his discourse the following aspects should be highlighted: a love of tradition, his contempt for the “rabble”, the defence of strong government by elites and a belief in natural inequality. With regard to tradition, this is not a question of tradition as theorized by Herculano’s pen. For Herculano, there was a legitimate tradition (the Middle Ages) and an illegitimate one (absolutism). For Soriano, tradition assumed the linear direction of the history the country had been building over the centuries since its foundation, but which was abruptly interrupted by the liberal revolution. In his discourse, he says that in political action priority should be given to a consideration of reality and experience, and not “to the abstract theories of parliamentary government”. He accepts the need for reforms, which he prefers to call “wholesome improvements”, but on condition that “the reforms are not worse than what already exists”. In his view, liberalism did not follow this precept. The middle classes perpetuated the “old abuses” (*História da Guerra Civil...*, 1866-90, vol. XVII, p.361), and he even claims that he prefers “the learned despotism of kings to the despotism of certain liberals” (*Op. Cit.*, vol. XI, p. XIII).

His contempt for the “rabble” is another constant in his pages. This is a sentiment that is shared by many of his contemporaries, beginning with Herculano (Fátima Sá, “Pueblo”, p.1234). Soriano differentiates between two categories: the “middle class”, the main supporter of the liberal system – the object of scathing criticism since it is from here that the majority of liberal politicians spring - and the “rabble”, “lower class”, “plebeians” or even the “bottom classes”. Contempt for these is justified as they are the holders of the “worst vices”, in particular their innate appetite for the anarchization of society. To prevent this, the only antidote is a strong government composed of men belonging to the “learned classes”. Soriano’s call to form strong governments appears very early on in his work (*Utopias...*, 1858, pp. 93-94). Moving towards the end of the century, he once again advocates the same need for governments of “men of knowledge, of fortune, of



experience" (*História da Guerra Civil...*, 1866-90, vol. XII, p.18). Underlying his contempt for the "rabble" is the idea that natural inequality is an immutable fact. If liberals like Herculano and others conceive of inequality not as an irremediable evil, an innate given, but as something that can be changed, notably through education, Soriano has no expectations about eliminating it or even reducing it (*Op. Cit.*, vol. XI, p. XI). There is in him a resentment against the world, allied to an inability to understand modern societies, that leads him to confuse the growing intervention of increasingly broader sections of the population in political life with disorder and anarchy. This view is fed by his anthropological pessimism, according to which perverse passions dominate all human beings, but with a tendency to get worse the lower down the social scale you go (*Op. Cit.*, 3ª época, tomo II, parte I, p.18).

He was involved in various controversies, some triggered by things he had said in his works about various people who felt wronged by the way in which he had portrayed them. Palmela praised his work, although pointing out some errors, to which Soriano responded that he did not think the work was sufficiently "laudatory" (*História do Cerco do Porto*, Porto, A. Leite Guimarães Editor, 1889-90, 2ª ed., p.831). He engaged in a discussion about José Seabra da Silva with his grandson, António Coutinho Pereira de Seabra e Sousa (*Resposta ao Senhor Simão José da Luz Soriano acerca de José Seabra da Silva por seu neto António Coutinho Pereira de Seabra e Sousa* [Response to Senhor Simão José da Luz Soriano regarding José Seabra da Silva by his grandson António Coutinho Pereira de Seabra e Sousa], Lisboa, Imprensa Nacional, 1868). General Augusto Xavier Palmeirim complained that Soriano had reproduced the accusation of treason brought against him by the Miguelists when he moved over to the liberal camp in 1833 (*Carta do General Augusto Xavier Palmeirim ao Exmo Senhor Simão José da Luz Soriano a propósito de duas páginas da sua História do Cerco do Porto* [Letter from General Augusto Xavier Palmeirim to Senhor Simão José da Luz Soriano on the subject of two pages in his History of the Siege of Porto], Lisboa, Tipografia Universal, 1869). His experience as a deputy in the years 1853-54 also involved him in controversy. He felt persecuted and libelled, in particular by António Rodrigues Sampaio, over an episode concerning the sale of copies of his *História do Cerco...* in Angola. Soriano replied with a venomous pamphlet (*A Quadrilha dos Senhores António Rodrigues Sampaio, Francisco Tavares de Almeida e António dos Santos Monteiro ou duas Cartas ao Redactor da Imprensa* [The Gang of Senhores António Rodrigues Sampaio, Francisco Tavares de Almeida and António dos Santos Monteiro, or two Letters to the Editor of the Press], Lisboa, 1854) which led to his being hit on the head with a walking stick by a friend of Sampaio's (*Revelações...*, 1860, pp.434-438).

Soriano did not see himself in any of the political families of liberalism. *Setembrismo* was "a true public calamity" (*Revelações...*, 1860, p.421), the Regeneration was "ominous" (*Op. Cit.*, p.430) and indeed all the ministries since 1834 had been marked by "immorality, egoism, dissipation, contempt for the law" (*Op. Cit.*, p.545). Despite his constant complaints about 19<sup>th</sup> century constitutionalism, Soriano remained a liberal, complying with the figure of a conservative liberal, along the lines of Burke, for whom liberal values are, despite everything else, preserved but liberal hopes are dashed. Soriano rejects outright the liberal hope in

the progress of humanity inherited from the Enlightenment and later the idea, updated by the liberal revolutions and labelled “utopian”, according to which the happiness of the people depends on the destruction of the past so that in its place a new respectable and orderly society can be built.

Despite having achieved a remarkable climb up the social ladder, Soriano never ceased to feel he was still, and above all, the plebeian soldier imprisoned in the Plymouth warehouse, light years away from the liberal elite of aristocratic descent. This identity of a man “born in the obscure ranks of the people” (*Revelações...*, 1860, p.627) did not prevent him from enjoying a very successful career as a senior state functionary or from being nominated by the new power to write the story of the liberal army’s battle against Miguelism for the future. If the liberal rulers hoped to get a story exalting the deeds of their heroes, what they in fact got was a narrative that discredits the ideals of men in order to point out their “pettiness”, “passions” and “vices”. Despite this, however, his work still remains that of “a patient laborious scholar, compiling facts day by day, commenting on them one by one with fastidious prolixity”, in the words of Fidelino de Figueiredo (*História da Literatura...*, p.269). Although he was fastidious, he remains a historian who is essential for our knowledge about the civil war and the process that led to liberalism being established in Portugal.

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APOIOS:

