

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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



VASCONCELOS, António Garcia Ribeiro de (S. Paio de Gramaços, 1860 – Coimbra, 1941)

António Vasconcelos was a Doctor of Theology (1886) and a Doctor of Letters (1916) of the University of Coimbra, a lay priest and a “liturgist, philologist, canonist, archaeologist and historian” as it says on the engraved memorial tablet placed in 1944 on the house where he was born. He was a notable personality in the diocese and at the University of Coimbra, where he taught from 1887 to 1930, first in the Faculty of Theology and then, when this closed down, in the Faculty of Letters where he became Emeritus Professor.

His parents were Serafim Garcia Ribeiro (1823-1912) and Maria José Cândida Coelho Freire de Faria da Cunha e Vasconcelos (1825-1865). His father, who married twice, had known Coimbra in his youth and still had old friends there in 1850 and 1867 who are mentioned in his son’s “memoirs”. His father’s older brother, Dionísio Garcia Ribeiro (1821-1886), had lived in Coimbra, entering the Seminary in 1840 and frequenting the Ecclesiastical Course in the Faculty of Theology. He was ordained a priest in 1844. Serafim though remained in São Paio de Gramaços (Oliveira do Hospital) where he devoted his time to managing his farms. His brother, Father Dionísio, “a son of the leading family in the area”, had “sufficient patrimonial goods to support him”, as his own nephew mentioned, thus identifying his social position. He added that his paternal grandfather had been “a great administrator and an active farmer”, from whom he had most likely inherited his own qualities as an organizer and man of action. What is more, the witnesses who were heard before the ceremony at which Father Dionísio took Holy Orders made it clear that both his parents and grandparents “served the honourable employments of the state and public order” and were a respectable middle-class family.

António Vasconcelos lost his mother when he was five years old and owed “his education and social situation” to his uncle, a debt he explicitly recognised throughout his work in multiple references that showed his deep gratitude. In fact, Father Dionísio moved to the parish of São Paio de Gramaços in 1851 shortly after his brother became a widower. There he undertook a large amount of pastoral and pedagogic work. When António was 8 or 9 years old, his uncle Dionísio, “wishing to personally direct the literary education of his nephew in Coimbra” as he himself put it, applied to move to the parish church of São Martinho do Bispo near Coimbra. He was appointed to the parish in 1869 and lived there until his death in 1886, ending up as an archpriest and later as an archdeacon.

António Vasconcelos went to live with his uncle in São Martinho do Bispo where he continued his first

studies, or 'started' them as he put it in 1937, and maybe rightly so. According to him, he had begun to study Latin with his uncle but he perfected it with the priest from Oliveira de Hospital. Nor did he prepare the other subjects at the *liceu* (high school) as his name does not appear in the yearly registers as an internal student. However, he did sit his exams there at a time when the high school regime that was organized according to subject (*regime liceal por disciplinas*) was still in force. His name appears as a student who was awarded distinction in Geography and Introduction to Natural History in the 1877-78 school year. He finished his preparatory studies with Philosophy (1st and 2nd part), which was obligatory to enrol in Theology. He matriculated in the Theology course as an ordinary student in the academic year 1878-79, and so moved to Coimbra and went to live in a private house like so many other students. He lived first in Rua dos Anjos, nº 6, moving the following year to Estrela, a healthy area with stunning views. He did not finish the first year because of illness (typhoid fever) but he did the next five years of the course as normal and was awarded the "prize" or honour of "*accessit*" (or runner-up) in the 2nd year. He graduated with a mark of 17 out of 20 (the same mark as for his bachelor's) in 1885, the year when he also celebrated his first mass, and finished his doctorate in 1886 (with a grade of 18). He lived an academic life about which he wrote some delicious sketches in 1936. He obtained his first nomination as a lecturer on 26 May 1887, thus starting his career as a professor at the Faculty of Theology.

António Vasconcelos, who showed the serenity and goodness so characteristic of priests, was marked by the landscape and environment of where he had been born (and even of where he lived as a young man in São Martinho do Bispo and Estrela), having inhaled "the ancestral purity of a villager's blood" (Maurício Santos) since childhood. He was a lover of simplicity, although delighted by liturgical splendour, sensitive to the landscape of the *serra* and to the tranquillity of the August nights, nature and the sky he observed with an astronomical telescope in search of "knowledge of the creator, of the visible rising up to the invisible"; he was a priest who celebrated an open-air mass in the very heart of the Serra da Estrela at sunrise one day in 1888; he was a man of faith, with an artistic sensitivity and possessing a shrewd intelligence and a ready and retentive memory; he was also a fount of knowledge which he expressed in class in a well-timbred voice. He cultivated friendship, truth, rectitude and obedience to his prelate, which also provided the subject matter for the 'Special Christian Ethics' course he taught. He was the calendarist for the diocese (and beyond) and for the University itself; he was a sacerdotal and academic liturgist, and no-one knew better than he did, or could mark with greater precision or detail, the ceremonial and everyday rites. This gave him a huge advantage in the interpretation and understanding of the historical themes he devoted himself to.

He was also a man of political and social action. Until the coming of the Republic he was a militant in the Progressive Party, where he became a member of the executive committee, jubilantly celebrating their victories. He was an admirer of Sidónio Pais (at the time of the review of the separation of Church and State) and played a decisive role in local politics related to the "the 28th of May" in the opinion of Belisário Pimenta. He was a member of the District Committee of Coimbra, and there are notable traces to be found in the existing documentation of his path through this important administrative body. He was secretary of the

Misericórdia of Coimbra, he reorganized the Confraria da Rainha Santa Isabel (Brotherhood of the Holy Queen Isabel), the patron saint of Coimbra, and “was the soul behind the foundation” of its Women’s Refuge in 1930. The setting up of the Faculty of Letters and the construction of its first building owes much to his dynamism and influence when he was its first Dean (1911-1920). He was also the organizer of the University Archive from 1897 on and its first director after it became an independent division of the general secretariat (1902-1927). He held the post of director of the University Chapel for several years, almost until the coming of the Republic, which allowed him to preserve many of the chapel’s religious objects and adornments in the Museum of Art, which he was able to transform and annex to the Archive after the 5th October revolution. He was the Reitor (Head) of the Coimbra *liceu* (high school) where he was part of the examinations jury, establishing a reputation as a demanding examiner, as António Sardinha found out in July 1906 when he sought some indulgence through the mediator, Eugénio de Castro. He collaborated on various reviews and newspapers, especially and assiduously on the *Correio de Coimbra*, the diocese’s paper, and on *O Instituto*, of which he even became part of the editorial board.

At the time of his training and when he began as a teacher, the Faculty of Theology was going through a grey period in its history – it was in conflict with the Bishop, there were only a few students attending at a time of anticlericalism and there were no theoretical theologians as some of them leant, maybe for these very reasons, more towards historical and philological studies. It was here though that António Vasconcelos, already with a propensity for historical studies when he was at high school, worked as a history teacher and researcher, later continuing at the Faculty of Letters (1911) when his first school was closed. Here he exerted a decisive influence until he retired in 1930 – a moment when new directions for historiography were being inaugurated in France – an influence that lasted even after his death in 1941.

His work as a historian was initially marked, as it naturally had to be, by his cultural experiences at the end of the 19th century when the idea was growing of history as a science (like linguistics) served by a method of rigorous investigation of the facts. In addition, the historical topics he worked on were linked to his religious background, taking as their starting point the local ecclesiastical and/or university history. When he travelled to Italy in 1926 “on a gratuitous study mission”, what attracted his attention most were the religious houses.

These characteristics, as well as his reluctance to be a theoretical theologian, were revealed by António Vasconcelos in his first major writings, such as his doctoral dissertation on *Divórcio* (Divorce) (1886) or the biblical-linguistic work for his application to become a teacher, *Pluralismo da linguagem* (1887), and especially when, at the age of 34 in 1894, he edited his first “historical attempt” as he called it, although it was the work of an “already established historian” in the opinion of Damião Peres in 1940. This is his work *Evolução do culto de D. Isabel de Aragão* (Evolution of the cult of D. Isabel of Aragon), which was preceded and accompanied by other studies of a historiographical nature as the bibliographic list published in the first volume (1940-1941) of *Revista Portuguesa de História* clearly shows. Out of some three hundred works of a diverse nature that he published, a total of 223 items were historiographical. Although he was prone to

sickness throughout his life, he was a man of “rare energy and tireless activity”, as Mendes dos Remédios described him in 1894.

The figure of the professional historian barely existed at that time in Portugal, or at any rate “the university did not yet train historians” (A. L. Carvalho Homem), and history was studied in the University in the Faculties of Theology and Law in relation to what was pertinent to the their fields of knowledge.

In the Faculty of Theology António Vasconcelos taught various courses, the programmes of which are known. Among these are the programmes for ‘Dogmatic Theology’ (1890), which by necessity dealt with the history of the world and of man, and ‘General Isagogics and Archaeology’ (1902) which was the first part of ‘Biblical Studies’ in which, under Archaeology, he taught topics relating to the history of the material, social, economic, religious and cultural life of the Hebrews. In the second part of ‘Biblical Studies’, the Faculty taught Special Isagogics, hermeneutics and heuristics, methods of interpretation and criticism, all of which Vasconcelos never ceased to adapt to profane texts.

His conception of history was already evident in the talk he gave in the University Chapel in 1890 on the subject of the funeral rites of D. João III and it became well established in his “first historical attempt” (1894), later spreading throughout the critical reviews he wrote of historical works (1896). His entry into the Faculty of Letters in 1911, devoting himself exclusively to the teaching of history and to historical research although he remained an active priest, cemented and expanded in the cultural context of the time a method and a theory of history that had prevailed for generations in the Faculty, as mentioned above. He also devoted much time to developing the activity of the Institute of Historical Studies (IEH), an institution for historical research that came into being in 1911 in all the Faculties of Letters, but this was later reduced in Coimbra after 1925 to the activity of the History Group. It was António Vasconcelos who introduced the programme of Seminars that he led and which were held in the Archive. Both here and in the IEH the students under his guidance prepared multiple works that were later published by those who supervised them

In history, truth is sought but is not always found, no matter how many traces there might be, traces which, for António Vasconcelos, were never only the written ones. It was he who not only instituted “the teaching of Epigraphy and Numismatics, and restored the teaching of Palaeography, Diplomacy and Sphragistics, renewing the brightness of those times when, over a century ago, the great João Pedro Ribeiro taught them here” (Damião Peres, “Prof. Doutor António de Vasconcelos”, 1941, p. 7), but he also did Archaeology (having been the president of the Archaeology section of the Institute), as so many new facts found in his works reveal. These sciences were at that time known as auxiliaries of history, and he used them to bring new life to historical studies as they allowed him to know the facts with detailed accuracy, reminiscent at times of the ceremonialist that he also was.

“The rigorous exposition of the facts, as the supreme law of the historian,” had already been attributed to L. von Ranke (1795-1886). António Vasconcelos knew the methodology of ecclesiastical history well and so, when he decided to work on history after philology, he could not help but be influenced by the German currents of the day (encountering Carolina Michaëlis in Coimbra as a colleague) and by positivism. This was

already widely contested when he began his larger publications. At the same time, he evokes Cicero and uses the lesson of Herculano (1810-1877) as to historiographical truth.

This addiction to “truth” and documental accuracy begins with a criticism and the exact publication of the document, without falsification or errors. His scruples in this matter were clearly recorded in the volume *Dr. Francisco Suárez, doctor eximius* (1897), a work that consists of a large number of documents preceded by a long prologue of a biographical nature. This was requested after he had presented the compilation of documents that had been commissioned by the Council of Theology to commemorate the third centenary of Suárez’ incorporation into the University, a ceremony that had in fact been proposed by Vasconcelos himself. In effect, as all the documents in the work were transcribed by his own hand, at the end of the work he drafted a certificate of responsibility together with the Secretary of the University after they had jointly checked the printer’s proofs to ensure “their perfect accuracy”. Later, Mário Brandão considered this work to be a milestone for the study of the history of the University, giving continuity to the work already undertaken in the first half of the 18th century by F. C. de Figueiroa, “the worthiest of all João Pinto Ribeiro’s precursors” (“Biografia”, 1948, p. 40).

The nature of the 1897 study and the responsibility assumed before the international scientific community could justify António Vasconcelos’ precautionary measure. However, the notion of certified accuracy was a part of him. In effect, on publishing the two oldest documents in the University Archive, dating from 1030 and 1090, of great importance to philologists, António Vasconcelos, as Director of the Archive, wrote that the documents “were scrupulously checked against the respective originals and their perfect accuracy was verified”. This was a standard of meticulousness that he passed on to his disciples, together with another principle enshrined in how science was validated: the accurate indication of the source so the reader could verify it, as he wrote in the prologue to *Brás Garcia Mascarenhas*.

António Vasconcelos was always considered by his colleagues as a meticulous discoverer of facts with an obsessive eye for detail, in the words of Torquato Soares or in the similar critical appreciation of Manuel Gonçalves Cerejeira or Eugénio de Castro. Already in 1912, at a session of the University Senate, his “spirit, long proficient and secure in the field of historical research” had been recognised. And in 1927, at the time when he was preparing the first edition of *Inês de Castro*, he informed the Lisbon Academy of Sciences through his friend José Maria Rodrigues of the exact location where Inês de Castro had been decapitated and “where the final period of the lovers had been spent”. As he said, “years of searching in archives and investigating *in situ* put me in a position whereby I could specify the location, and say, in all security: It was here”. (*António de Vasconcelos*, 2000, p. 152). Observation *in situ* also led him to indicate “the exact place” where Pier Maria Baldi placed his work table to draw the well-known panorama of Coimbra (*A Sé Velha*, vol. II, 1935, p. 172). Historiography in Coimbra did not lose the illusion of seeking the accuracy and certification of facts again until the 1974 Carnation Revolution and the post-modernist revolution.

Precision and impartiality were aspects of António Vasconcelos’ scientific methodology and characteristic features of his nature, marked by a vigorous and persistent critical spirit. His criticisms did not spare

ecclesiastical institutions, whether the Inquisition or the Canons of the Order of the Holy Cross (the Crosiers) or the Sé Cathedral, for example, when he found they were unjustly blocking his path to history, whether past or present.

When history became a science, it eliminated from its narrative “all literary ornamentation and unproven facts”, as Frederick Teggart explained in 1918. António Vasconcelos had proceeded like this back in 1894 but his style, “of an incommensurable dryness”, was criticized from the start by Mendes dos Remédios who considered that the object of study itself imposed “the harmony of historical accuracy and the artistic-verbal form” («D. Isabel de Aragão», *O Instituto*, 41, 1894, p. 916-917). This criticism by the young theologian did not make António Vasconcelos deviate from his ideas, and he continued to consider rhetorical history as being incapable of becoming scientific. As a precaution, however, when he published the opusculum entitled *Real capela da Universidade* (Royal University Chapel) (1908), he warned at the start that “it was not written with any literary pretensions”. Later critics considered António Vasconcelos to be “a consummate master of the language” (M. T. Salgueiro, «Discurso», 1936, p. 20) and in 1996 the president of the Lisbon Academy of Sciences, when re-editing *Brás Garcia Mascarenhas*, said he had been right and praised him “for the clarity of the writing and even for the simplicity of style, so appropriate to historical studies” (p. VII)). He did in fact have a profound knowledge of the Portuguese language, which is where he had started before becoming a historian.

As to the “incommensurable dryness”, Soares immediately calls attention, for example, to the concise way in which António Vasconcelos describes the death of the Holy Queen, the moment when the narrative of his “first historical attempt” begins, considering that her religious cult had not been previously documented. This “dry style”, however, is not found in all Vasconcelos’ writings, many of which were written with linguistic rigour, simplicity and charm. He even dared to give value judgments, starting in his first historical attempt, ethical judgements that were disapproved of in 1943, which was a time for writing history with no moral judgements and using no qualifying adjectives as in neopositivism. This is something Vasconcelos luckily remained immune to while sometimes even painting moral pictures in flights of creative imagery.

António Vasconcelos had a special liking for biographies, which allowed him not only to provide detailed descriptions but also give a colourful reconstruction (Soares). This is clearly visible in *Brás Garcia Mascarenhas*, which he began publishing in 1912, and in texts that had originally been formal, such as the lecture on which *A Sé-velha de Coimbra* (The Old Cathedral of Coimbra) (1930-1935) was based. This was a work that Soares classified as being “more than a serene and cold study of historical reconstitution, but a true and splendid hymn of praise to the Cathedral of Coimbra” («Prof. Doutor», 1943, p. 17). However, the text about Inês de Castro, initially written for his ‘History of Portugal’ classes, is totally dry following the style of his 1894 work, thus “armouring himself against sentimentality with an impartial and austere coldness, necessary to historical studies”. Virgílio Correia considered it “the culmination of his literary career” («Inês de Castro», *O Instituto*, 75, 1928, p. 642).

In his works, he was a critical unraveller of legends, a priest with an open culture who made value

judgements about institutions and religious acts of the past, but who was reserved as to transcendental issues. He had moral and intellectual virtues subsumed in an “individualizing methodology” of history (Carreras), talents that he knew how to instil into the research centre he directed and that Pierre David, who arrived in Coimbra in 1941, internationally prominent and grieving for his homeland, reconstituted some years later (1947) in a heartfelt text.

From his collected historical research, it is apparent that António Vasconcelos inherited much from the Coimbra archaeologists, historians and antiquarians who had come before him and who focused on items of local history. In 1939, Octaviano de Sá, hailing the appearance of the first volume of *Escritos vários* (Various Writings), recognizes his authority “in everything that represents erudition and precise knowledge of our city’s academic life, its monuments, documentaries and artists, from both the past and the present” (*António de Vasconcelos*, 2000, p. 524). In effect, it was in Coimbra, and about Coimbra, that António Vasconcelos wrote and researched all his life, giving birth to local history professionally and accurately described, even when nostalgia for his country’s roots led him to write a biography, albeit still a local genre, of the rebellious life and literary path of *Brás Garcia Mascarenhas*. According to Virgílio Correia, who also focused on local places in his Archaeology and History of Art studies in the same Faculty, all António Vasconcelos’ work “exalted in their love of the Conimbrigan annals” («Inês de Castro», *O Instituto*, 75, 1928, p. 642). This was the local history where there was much to improve before attempting to elevate and edify it, which had become urgent after the archives were opened to the public and the Faculty of Letters was created. António Vasconcelos made a significant contribution to this local history by tracing guidelines through religious and university representations of it, giving it unity and direction through monographs that became identity markers of the city he always loved and liked to appreciate from the site of Nossa Senhora da Esperança, the chapel from which the missionaries departed and to which the old Brazilian students returned.

As the Archdeacon of the Vouga, he was the capitular dignitary of the Sé Cathedral in Coimbra. He was a member of the Institute (Coimbra) from 1887, the Lisbon Academy of Sciences (from 1897), the Royal Academy of History (Madrid) and the Portuguese Academy of History, founded in 1937, of which he was the first president though already nearing the end of his life. To honour his scientific, literary and artistic merit, he received the insignia of the Grand Cross of the Order of Santiago da Espada in 1936.

Works by the author: VASCONCELOS, António de, *Theses ex universa Theologia atque Inauguralis Dissertatio, quas pro Laurea doctorali obtinenda in Conimbricensi Academia propugnabat Antonius Garcia Ribeiro de Vasconcellos*, Coimbra, Imprensa da Universidade, 1886; [the dissertation is entitled *De divortio quatenus sociali progressui adversatur*]; idem, *Evolução do culto de Dona Isabel de Aragão esposa do rei lavrador Dom Dinis de Portugal (a Rainha Santa)*, Coimbra, Imprensa da Universidade, 1894, 2 vols. The work was reprinted in facsimile by the Coimbra University Archive (AUC), 1993; idem, «D. Isabel de Aragão: Carta ao licenciado na sagrada teologia, sr. Joaquim Mendes dos Remedios, a propósito do seu artigo crítico, publicado sob esta epigraphe em o número precedente do Instituto», *O Instituto*, 41, 1894, pp. 984-

996. Há separata. [Uma lição de hermenêutica]; idem, *Francisco Suárez: Doctor Eximius: colecção de documentos publicados por deliberação da Faculdade de Theologia da Universidade de Coimbra, para comemorar o terceiro centenário da incorporação do grande Mestre e Príncipe da sciencia teológica no professorado da mesma Universidade: oito de Maio de 1597- oito de Maio de 1897*, Coimbra, Imprensa da Universidade, 1897; idem, *O mysterio da Imaculada Conceição e a Universidade de Coimbra*. Memoria histórica apresentada ao Congresso Universal Mariano, Coimbra, Imprensa da Universidade, 1904; idem, *Brás Garcia Mascarenhas. Estudo de investigação histórica*, Coimbra, Imprensa da Universidade, 1922. Facsimile reprint with presentation by José V. de Pina Martins, Lisboa, FCG, 1996. [Work originally published in *Revista da Universidade de Coimbra*, vols. I (1912), II (1913) e VIII (1922)]; idem, *Inês de Castro. Estudo para uma série de lições no curso de História de Portugal*, Porto, Marques Abreu, 1928; 2ª ed., revista, Barcelos, Portucalense Editora, 1933 (ed. de luxo), reproduced in facsimile in 1983 by Sólivros de Portugal, Trofa; idem, *Sé-Velha de Coimbra (Apontamentos para a sua história)*, Coimbra, Imprensa da Universidade, 2 vols., Coimbra, Imprensa da Universidade, 1930-1935. [The text was followed by a supplement published in *Biblos*, XI, pp. 305-328. Work reprinted in facsimile by the AUC, 1993, with the supplement and other additions]; idem, *Escritos vários relativos à Universidade de Coimbra*, vols. I e II, Coimbra, Coimbra Editora, 1938-1941. [Reprinted in 1987-88 by the AUC, with one article added]; *António de Vasconcelos perpetuado nas páginas do «Correio de Coimbra» 1922-1941*, Coimbra, AUC, 2000. Editorial coordination by Manuel Augusto Rodrigues.

Works with references to the author: BRANDÃO, Mário Mendes dos Remédios de Sousa, «Biografia do Doutor António de Vasconcelos», in *À memória do Dr. António de Vasconcelos primeiro presidente da Academia Portuguesa de História*, Lisboa, APH, 1948, p. 32-53; CORREIA, Virgílio, *Inês de Castro: nota bibliográfica sobre o livro do doutor António de Vasconcelos*, Coimbra, Imprensa da Universidade, 1928, sep. de *O Instituto*, 75; GIRÃO, Aristides de Amorim, «Dr. António de Vasconcelos: primeiro Director da Faculdade de Letras: (1-VI-1860-2-IX-1941)», Coimbra, Coimbra Editora, 1945, sep. de *Biblos*, vol. XX; MENDONÇA, Manuela, «António de Vasconcelos – 1º presidente da Academia Portuguesa de História (1937-1944)», *Revista Portuguesa de História*, 42, 2011, pp. 263-283. [António Vasconcelos died in 1941; the 2nd president of the APH was elected in 1944]; OLIVEIRA, António de, «Seis décadas de História na Faculdade de Letras de Coimbra (1911-1970). Um esboço das suas tendências», *Revista Portuguesa de História*, 42, 2011, pp. 11-60; PERES, Damião, «Prof. Doutor António Garcia Ribeiro de Vasconcelos», *Revista Portuguesa de História*, 1, 1941, pp. 7-47 e adenda; [contains the bibliography (incomplete) of António Vasconcelos]; RODRIGUES, António Luís da Costa, «Doutor António de Vasconcelos», in *Doutor António de Vasconcelos Homenagem*, Coimbra, [s. n.] [Tipografia Gráfica de Coimbra], 1937, pp. V-XXI; SALGUEIRO, Manuel Trindade, «Discurso», in *Doutor António de Vasconcelos Homenagem*, Coimbra, [s. n.] [Tipografia Gráfica de Coimbra], 1937, pp. 13-21; SANTOS S. J., Domingos Maurício Gomes dos, «‘Sacerdus Magnus’ O Doutor António Garcia Ribeiro de Vasconcelos», in *À memória do Dr. António de*



DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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

Vasconcelos primeiro presidente da Academia Portuguesa de História, Lisboa, APH, 1948, pp. 8-31;
SOARES, Torquato de Sousa, «Prof. Doutor António Garcia Ribeiro de Vasconcelos», *Revista Portuguesa de História*, 2, 1943, pp. 7-23.

António de Oliveira



APOIOS:

