

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

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HERCULANO, Alexandre (Lisbon, 1810 - Azóia de Baixo, Santarém, 1877)

Alexandre Herculano played a major role in the intellectual, artistic, and political fields. He authored a remarkable collection of history texts, as well as poems, short stories, plays, novels and political essays. Besides being a writer and historian, he was also an archivist, a journalist, the editor of documents and a farmer. In politics he was a member of parliament, and later President of the Council of Ministers for a short period of time, but his main influence was felt as a historian, polemicist, and ideologist. He was renowned as a liberal public intellectual who pioneered the application of romantic historical fiction to the Portuguese national past, becoming a hallmark both in the 19th-century history of political thinking and literature in Portugal. Herculano has likewise featured and still does nowadays – sometimes in an exaggerated, blurred but highly significant manner nonetheless - as the founding father of the “scientific” method of researching and writing history in Portugal.

It may therefore be said that from the mid-1840s onwards, Herculano became a kind of celebrity who was widely known and acknowledged in the Portuguese-speaking world. “Even ships were named after him” – evangelical theologian Rudolf Baxmann wrote in 1863, upon his return from a missionary journey to Lisbon (“Ueber den gegenwärtigen Stand”, 115-116). “In Portugal, there was a man who was listened to as if he were an oracle” – acknowledged Teófilo Braga in 1880 (*História do Romantismo em Portugal*, 219-220 [History of Romanticism in Portugal]). It would be quite easy to make a list of similar statements. Suffice to say that the postmortem significance attributed to the persona of Herculano clearly shows that he was raised to the category of those who are glorified in the Portuguese memory and culture (on this general theme, see Lilti, *A invenção da celebridade* [The invention of celebrity], 13-17; 145-165). Conclusive proof of this is the transfer of his remains to an impressive tomb in Mosteiro dos Jerónimos [Monastery of Jerónimos] in 1888, the same monastery that houses the tombs of 16th-century monarchs, as well as those of Vasco da Gama, Luís de Camões and Fernando Pessoa.

Alexandre Herculano has become known by his two forenames while his surnames “de Carvalho e Araújo” are usually omitted. This may be linked to his rather modest, petty-bourgeois family origins, although marked by some degree of cultural literacy and upward social mobility. On his mother’s side, his ancestors were in the



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business of civil construction, since his great-grandfather had worked as a foreman in the construction of the Palace and of the Convento de Mafra [Mafra Convent]. In turn, Herculano's father, the son of a grain trader, had been a civil servant acting as a warehouse manager to the government department in charge of public loans (Godinho, "Herculano", 13-14; Nemésio, *A mocidade de Herculano* [The Youth of Herculano], 83-94).

It may be said that Herculano's formative years do not follow the usual pattern of the Portuguese social elite of his time. He was born in 1810 in Lisbon. Upon learning to read with his father, he attended Colégio dos Oratorianos [Congregation of the Oratory] when he was between 10 and 15 years of age and then, most likely in 1825-26, he attended Academia Real de Marinha [the Royal Naval Academy], where he studied mathematics. His plan to enter Universidade de Coimbra [University of Coimbra] did not materialise due to family circumstances: his father became blind in 1827 ("Autobiografia", 25 ["Autobiography"]). Such misfortune left the family in straitened circumstances, which most probably influenced Herculano's choice of the commercial instruction offered by the Aula do Comércio [Commerce Lectures]. The same misfortune may also have been the reason why Herculano attended the diplomatic course in Torre do Tombo [National Archives at Torre do Tombo] between 1830 and 1831, which was then a prerequisite for professions such as the archivist and notary. In this latter course, Herculano acquired knowledge and techniques that proved fundamental to his later intellectual work. (Nemésio, *A mocidade de Herculano*, 107-109; 145, 187-200; 335-342).

Far more than the formal instruction obtained in those different institutions, Herculano's intellectual and aesthetic knowledge was marked by some extent of self-instruction, in so far as it was mediated by the contact with the literary world he had managed to establish in his early years. In a way that his biographers have never been able to fully explain, Herculano had already managed to befriend relevant figures of Lisbon's cultural milieu before he had turned 18. He was part of the bohemian literary circle around the poet and theatre man Francisco de Paula Cardoso, a nobleman who went by the name of Morgado de Assentiz. Within that circle, he met personalities such as António Feliciano de Castilho, who along with Herculano himself and Almeida Garrett, became a pivotal figure in the so-called first generation of Portuguese romantic writers. Herculano also enjoyed the patronage of veteran poet Leonor de Almeida Portugal, the Marquesa de Alorna [Marchioness of Alorna], who he once likened to Germaine de Staël for her Germanophile inclinations and for the literary circle that gathered around her ("D. Leonor de Almeida", 123).

Under the aegis of these and other figures, Herculano matured with the assistance of eclectic readings, the traces of which can be discerned in the texts he wrote or translated in the 1830s. In addition to several of the main authors of the classic and Christian canons, and Renaissance writers such as Ariosto, Tasso, and Camões, he was influenced by the historical fiction of Walter Scott, as well as by the Catholic-liberal essays of François-René de Chateaubriand and Hughes de Lammenais. He was also captivated by the lyric poetry of Alphonse Marie de Lamartine and particularly the lyric poetry of German authors of the second half of the 18th century associated with the so-called Sturm und Drang movement, such as Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock,



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Gottfried August Bürger and Friedrich Schiller (Nemésio, *A mocidade de Herculano*, 236, 302-307; Reynauld, “Herculano, poeta-profeta” [“Herculano, poet-prophet”], 29). His affinity with Romantic aesthetics was also seen beyond the field of letters, for instance, in his predilection (voiced in his later years) for the paintings of John Martin and for the music of Vincenzo Bellini (“Herculano por ele mesmo”, [“Herculano by himself”] 29).

As for the formation of Herculano’s political convictions in his youth, the accounts and remaining traces are, however, more oblique than those regarding his literary-aesthetic education. The mature Herculano was a major example of Chartist Liberalism, albeit a *sui generis* Chartism, organic and monarchic yet simultaneously markedly anti-Centralist (Alonso, “Las plumas”). His political initiation began on the opposing side, on the side of D. Miguel’s Absolutism. A contemporary adversary, bibliophile Inocêncio Francisco da Silva, spread the rumour that Herculano had joined a group of violent political agitators at around 18 years of age and had been paid to write poems in honour of Miguelismo, [the political ideology of D. Miguel’s partisans] (Silva, “Aleixo Fagundes Bezerra”). For well over a generation of interpreters, this paved the way for discussions that ranged, on the one hand, from the search for the factual truth and the construction of a positive memory of low empirical density; to, on the other hand, the advisable demolition of memorial myths and an unjustifiable character assassination. Even though Inocêncio da Silva may have been driven by the urge to damage Herculano’s reputation, he was right about young Herculano’s sympathy for D. Miguel’s ideology. But most of his detailed accusations – later spread and amplified by Teófilo Braga (*História do Romantismo em Portugal* [The History of Romanticism in Portugal], 229-243) – lack adequate proof. Conversely, the first lines of the poem “A Semana Santa” [“The Holy Week”], most likely written in the spring of 1829, provide ample evidence that, at 19, Herculano had positioned himself in the liberal field. (Nemésio, *A mocidade de Herculano*, 213-215).

In the political field however, his adherence to liberalism did not drive him away from what may be referred to as “extreme situations.” In August 1831, probably after becoming a freemason, Herculano took part in the failed uprising of Regimento de Infantaria no. 4 [4th Infantry Regiment] led by one of his former instructors in Academia Real da Marinha (Nemésio, *A mocidade de Herculano*, 342-346). In his old age, Herculano would look back on his short-lived freemasonry experience as one of his “boyish exploits” (*Cartas*, I, 10), but his political impetuosity would give rise to serious consequences. He would have to flee the country, first to Plymouth and later to Rennes, joining the network of liberal exiles who would shortly after play a decisive role in the fight against D. Miguel’s partisans. In March 1832, Herculano arrived in the Azores and joined the Batalhão dos Voluntários da Rainha [the Queen’s Volunteer Battalion], and in July he disembarked on mainland Portugal together with 7,500 men led by D. Pedro, in a move which proved to be decisive for the fate of the liberal movement.

With the liberal government established at the end of the Civil War, Herculano was appointed librarian of the newly founded Biblioteca do Porto [Library of Oporto], where he acquired major skills as an archivist and where he participated in projects with a view to publishing historical sources, particularly *Crônica de D. Sebastião* [Chronicle of King Sebastião], authored by Friar Bernardo da Cruz and edited in 1837 as a result of



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the comparison of six handwritten versions. Herculano had shortly before published two theoretical essays on Portuguese literature and literary aesthetics, the first works on his path to becoming a polemicist, where he formulated a political-aesthetic intervention agenda in the national culture, in line with the general precepts of Romanticism and liberalism. (Macedo, A. Herculano: polémica e mensagem, [A. Herculano: Polemic and Message] 34-35). Herculano resigned from his post as librarian in Oporto in 1836, unhappy with the political line followed by the government which had stemmed from the Revolução de Setembro [the September Revolt] and which had reinstated the 1822 Constitution. This Constitution was more restrictive of royal powers and more welcoming of democratic principles, when compared to the 1826 Carta Constitucional [Constitutional Charter] which Herculano did not wish to renounce – at least until the compromise solution reached in 1838. (Canotilho, “As constituições” [“The constitutions”]) He voiced his dissatisfaction and restated his loyalty to the Carta in a political-poetic irate pamphlet that resonated strongly with the public of the time: A voz do profeta [The voice of the prophet] (Reynaud, “Herculano, poeta profeta” [“Herculano, poet prophet”], 29-35).

The popularity that writing afforded him most surely facilitated the invitation in 1837 to head the newsroom of the weekly newspaper O Panorama [Panorama], edited in Lisbon under royal patronage and inspired by the London Penny Magazine, by the Sociedade Propagadora dos Conhecimentos Úteis [Society for the Dissemination of Useful Knowledge]. In 1838, he was director and writer of the unofficial part of Diário do Governo [the Government Gazette] (Baptista, A. Herculano Jornalista [A. Herculano Journalist], 15; 22; 77). In the same year, he compiled part of the poetic writings of his youth in A harpa do crente [The Believer’s Harp] (1838), a work edited by the above-mentioned Sociedade. Herculano received the support of king consort Fernando II, which assisted in his being appointed director of the Real Biblioteca do Paço da Ajuda [Royal Library of the Ajuda Palace]. This post would provide him with financial stability for the rest of his life while allowing him at the same time to reside in the vicinity of his main place of work. (Santos, “A. Herculano e a Biblioteca da Ajuda” [“A. Herculano and the Ajuda Library”]; Serrão, “A. Herculano”, 434).

With Panorama as his main publication platform, coupled with his easy access to documents and books from the royal libraries, in the late 1830s Herculano launched himself as a versatile historical consciousness agent. He authored a vast number of short essays on historical and historiographical topics, in addition to short sketches of political and cultural figures from different times. However, his educational and recollection work was not confined to the usual patterns of factual writing, and he experimented with the new horizons opened by new historical fiction, already popular in other languages. (Catroga, “A. Herculano e o historicismo romântico” [“A. Herculano and Romantic historicism”], 42-44). In the ten year span between 1838 and 1848, he wrote historical tales which were later collected into Lendas e Narrativas (1851) [Legends and Narratives], besides three broader and more complex historical novels: O bobo [The Jester] (1843; only published as a book in 1878 – if the widely circulated counterfeit edition in Brazil is disregarded), Eurico, o Presbítero [Eurico, the Presbyterian] (1843-1844), and O Monge de Cister [The Monk of Cister] (which he began in 1839-40, but only finished and published in 1848). He also engaged with drama, considerably encouraged by Setembrismo



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[September Revolt], writing two short historical plays while working collaboratively within the scope of several initiatives of the newly created Conservatório Nacional [National Conservatory] (Cruz, “Política, resistência e arte” [“Politics, resistance and art”], 4-5).

Herculano’s literary, essay and newspaper production dating from the mid-1830s to the mid-1840s was mainly written against the background of profound political and social changes. After the Civil War, the clergy’s given position as the main agent of national culture and education began to falter. Herculano, aware of this shift, saw a new window of opportunity to promote new sensibilities and practices on which the values and institutions of the new liberal order could be firmly grounded. The adoption of the novel form, as well as its use to write about bygone experiences was instrumental in such undertaking. New material support and editorial practices such as the gradual publication of texts in regular instalments and the partial sale of books in the form of issues were formal innovations that fostered an unprecedented boost in the possibilities of historical knowledge dissemination. Thus, the historical novel became an effective tool to educate the middle classes in the values of political liberalism (Matos, *Historiografia e memória nacional* [Historiography and national memory], 131-163). However, Herculano embraced that literary genre not so much to promote something along the lines of a cultural revolution but rather to facilitate a conciliation between liberalism and Christianity. Perhaps for that reason, his fiction and contents, although presented innovatively, often reflect retrograde values and views of traditionalist-Christian or aristocratic provenance. (Saraiva, *Herculano e o Liberalismo* [Herculano and Liberalism], 44-49; 148-152).

In addition to the intention of attuning Christianity and liberalism, Herculano also felt that the public’s sense of belonging to the nation called for renewal. Characterized, as already mentioned, by manifest educational goals, this renewal effort culminated in a significant reconfiguration of the close and distant relations between past and present to which Portuguese historical culture had hitherto been accustomed. Historical attention and aesthetics were removed from the classic past, so beloved by previous generations and exalted as exemplary in Arcadian pastoral poetry. In the same tone of anti-Classicism, the importance of political and cultural events from the Renaissance was challenged (Herculano, “Elogio histórico” [“Historical eulogy”], 111-114). By contrast, in the wake of the medieval example of authors such as James Macpherson and Walter Scott, Herculano contributed to the promotion of a novel enhancement of what was commonly viewed as the initial centuries of the Portuguese nation. Such constellation of elective affinities with the past is a feature not only of fiction but also – as will be addressed further ahead - of the historical writings of Herculano.

The enhancement of the Middle Ages, however, did not stem merely from mimicry of aesthetic ascendancy, but also from Herculano’s perception that there were revealing analogies between medieval Portugal and the cultural and political scenario triggered by the Civil War. In both instances, historical experience was characterized not only by violence, excessive passions, and civilizational hazards, but also associated with a certain sense of childish purity, a creative openness to the modelling of practices and institutions. Notwithstanding all such negativity, these times were favourable to the construction of collective identities, of



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historical beginnings and resummptions. As for the Portuguese Middle Ages, in Herculano's opinion, such dichotomies were grounded on a fundamental ambivalence of the chronicles of that period, representations of the past where aesthetic imagination blended intricately with factual truth pretensions. Originating from a historical constellation implicitly understood as being analogous to that of the Middle Ages, Herculano's historical fiction creatively emulates the medieval historiographic tradition and explores the potential resulting from a hybridisation, self-conscious now of factual and fictional records (Alonso, "Historia, conocimiento y narración" ["History, knowledge and narrative"], 67-68). One of its distinctive features is the aim to characterize the social and cultural conjuncture, ways of thinking and feeling and the typical beliefs and customs of distant pasts in a truthful, quasi-realistic manner. Herculano saw himself as a chronicler, but not of specific events; he strove to represent the general "spirit", the essential traits of "intimate life" at a given time in history, instead of attaining the factual truth in external, episodic details (Alonso, "Historia, conocimiento y narración", 56-59). He could thus associate his relatively strong desire for objectivity with contextual characterisation, while allowing himself a certain degree of fictional freedom, incomparably greater in his handling of characters and plot.

The success of his literary and journalistic activity made Herculano a celebrity in national public life, leading to his appointment, at the age of 33, as correspondent of the Academia Real das Ciências de Lisboa [Royal Academy of Sciences of Lisbon]. *Pari passu*, he was a member of parliament for a short period of time, between 1840 and 1841, during which period he made note of the disagreements and frustrations. The disagreements, related to the popular education project he had co-authored and to his opposition to the government's intention to extinguish the Escola Politécnica [Polytechnical School] finally culminated in his involuntary removal from the Comissão de Instrução Pública [Public Instruction Committee] (Saraiva, *Herculano e o Liberalismo*, 17-18; 115-132). Herculano then decided to leave the Câmara de Deputados [Members of Parliament Chamber] and later exposed his defeated positions in the press, eventually taking refuge in historical research and imagination, seeking to find solace in the national past— for his hopeless disbelief in the tumultuous politics of Portugal in the 1840s. It was in the context of this self-exile of sorts from politics that his historical novels were created, as well as the four volumes of what would come to be his *magnus opus*, *História de Portugal* [The History of Portugal]. Years later he compared his experience as a parliamentarian to a "bestly sin" further explaining that he had sought penance for that sin in the "sheer obstinacy of writing the history of this land with loyalty and conscience" (O monge de Cister, II, 340).

História de Portugal was preceded by a more episodic publication where Herculano described the guiding principles of his interpretation of Portuguese social and political history: *Cartas sobre a História de Portugal* [Letters on the History of Portugal], published in 1842, in *Revista Universal Lisbonense* [the Lisbon Universal Review]. The most elementary feature of this interpretation is the division of Portuguese history into two major cycles, the former of which ranges from the foundation of the kingdom up to the sixteenth century, when the latter cycle begins. Overall, Herculano views the former cycle as positive, particularly in terms of what he regards as the decentred nature of the distribution of medieval political power, where royal prerogatives are



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balanced by the presumed power of the local councils. His argument, largely related to such specificity, that feudalism did not exist in Portugal, is already apparent in this text and is sustained right up to his last writings. On the other hand, Herculano views the latter cycle from a very negative perspective. He disapproves of the centralisation of powers in the monarch, a figure he perceives as being at the root of proceedings that point to political and cultural decadence, such as the advance of the Inquisition and colonialism. He even suggests that the study of post-medieval Portugal of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries is worthless in that it was not much given to the historiographical extraction of “social wisdom”, and it might even be better forgotten than remembered (“Cartas sobre a história de Portugal”, 162-163).

From a methodological point of view, it should be noted that in that very same text Herculano voices his criticism of an overly fact-based understanding of national history. Strongly inspired by the arguments of Augustin Thierry, Herculano highlights the need for accounts that go beyond the narration of political events and the biography of prominent figures to comprehend institutions and other phenomena of a social character in their scope of interpretation. (“Cartas sobre a história de Portugal”, 138-142). Since his *Cartas*, Herculano had devoted most of his attention to individual personalities and unique events. However, his approach was marked by the enhancement of primary sources and the increased use of different critical and documental interpretation techniques, often putting him on a collision course with traditionalist and mythical interpretations of the Portuguese past (Matos, *Consciência história e nacionalismo [History, conscience and nationalism]*, 18-20).

Herculano saw himself as the continuer of a tradition whose origins he himself projected onto the second half of the seventeenth century, in the works of Benedictine scholars, the most renowned of whom was Jean Mabillon – a landmark figure in the history of diplomatics and palaeography (“*Solemnia verba*”, 69-77). He also believed that the vanguard of that intellectual development had moved from the France of Mabillon to the Germany of Leopold von Ranke, of Friedrich Carl von Savigny and of so many other historians who are frequently cited in his writings. (Catroga, “A. Herculano e o historicismo romântico”[“A. Herculano and Romantic Historicism”], 54-55) – and of Heinrich Schäfer, the author of the book he referred to as “the best book ever on the history of Portugal” (*História de Portugal*, II, 618). However, it should not be inferred from the above that Herculano was a unilaterally Germanophile historian since his work also documents numerous praises and references to supporters of critical history from different national traditions such as the Italian Michele Amari and Luigi Cibrario, the Spanish Francisco Martínez Marina, Pascual de Guayangos and Tomás Muñoz y Romero, the British Thomas Macaulay, as well as several other French authors (“*Solemnia verba*”, 71; Bernstein, *A. Herculano*, 83 nt. 31, 90-91, 95-96). Furthermore, the vast continuity between Herculano’s critical-philological efforts and those that marked the paths of Portuguese scholars from previous generations should be noted, such as the cases of António Caetano do Amaral, João Pedro Ribeiro and the Visconde de Santarém [Viscount of Santarém]. At least from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, the Real Academia de História and also the Academia das Ciências, as of 1779, with which all the above-mentioned authors had



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had connections, in addition to Herculano himself, had been particularly important institutions for the advance of studies, debates and publications related to documental research. Therefore, the critical pattern behind Herculano's approach to his sources from *Cartas sobre a História de Portugal* onwards should not be understood as a radical inflexion in Portuguese historical culture; that is, it should not be viewed as the result of a single individual's innovative efforts inspired exclusively by foreign accomplishments. Instead, it represents the maturity point of a scholarly undertaking of a collective and multi-generational nature (Macedo, A. Herculano: polémica e mensagem, 13-21).

In 1842, a substantial interpretation guideline and a set of methodological ideals and methodical practices were already in place, which *História de Portugal* would try to materialize some years later. Herculano published the four volumes of his major work in 1846, 1847, 1849 and 1853, respectively. In the first two volumes and in most of the third, his writing is structured classically in a diachronic history of events. Upon reviewing features of the Iberian experience before, during and after the Roman dominion, covering the Visigoth and Muslim invasions and the attempted reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula by entrapped Christian forces, Herculano presents in great detail a chain of events which, in his opinion, had been decisive for the country's formation, beginning with the gift of the Condado Portucalense [the County of Portugal] by Alfonso VI, king of León and Castille, to Henry of Burgundy in 1096. From then onwards, the text is quite intensively grounded on documental sources. This corresponds to a paratextual innovation: in addition to footnotes and endnotes with references, Herculano introduces explanatory notes at the end of each volume. In these notes, he adds details regarding the authenticity, reliability, and interpretation of the mentioned sources, without hindering the overall readability of the text. Herculano's narrative ranges from events culminating in the independence from León and Castille and the coronation of Afonso I in 1139, to the end of Afonso III's reign in 1279. His narrative ends there, never to be resumed, contrary to what he had initially intended – proof of this is the title of the work and the periodisation in *Cartas sobre a História de Portugal* (Mattoso, "Prefácio" ["Preface"], x-xi).

Herculano announced on several occasions that he would resume his work on that book. According to the notes of the Emperor of Brazil, taken shortly after a meeting with Herculano, most of the fifth volume of this work had already been written in mid-1871 (D. Pedro II, *Diários* [Diaries], XI, 19.06.1871). That volume was never to be completed but the volumes that were published comprehend more than a diachronic narrative of events ending with the death of Afonso III. In two thirds of the third volume and in the entire fourth volume, the dominant perspective of *História de Portugal* is synchronic, and the narrative focus shifts from specific events to socio-political patterns of a more general and repetitive nature, identifiable mainly in legal documents. It was now, first and foremost, a resolve to never again narrate what had happened in the past from a singular viewpoint but rather to compose, with the direct assistance of historical imagination, what was termed by the author as a "social topography" of 12th and 13th century Portugal (*História de Portugal*, III, 401). (Insightful parallels might be drawn here with the opening passages of many of his historical fictional writings where



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imagination is summoned to characterise not just the physical and architectural environments, but also the socio-cultural).

One of the guiding purposes of the second part of Herculano's book is to offer a history of the middle classes in Portugal, understood broadly as a social cluster situated "between aristocracy and the serfs" (*História de Portugal*, III, 382). This analytical shift leads to a history where the main characters are collective entities such as institutions and social classes. Therefore, to a great extent, it materialises the methodological innovation advocated in *Cartas sobre a História de Portugal* – even though the author was not fully able to connect the two main levels of his analysis successfully (Martins, *Portugal contemporâneo [Contemporary Portugal]*, II, 322-323). When viewed together with the texts on which it was largely inspired, such as the *Lettres sur l'histoire de France* (1820; 1827) of Thierry, a Saint-Simonian, and the *Histoire de la civilisation en Europe* (1828) of François Guizot, the synchronic part of *História de Portugal* is, nonetheless, a good record of how, in the first half of the 19th century, very important writers refused to understand the writing of history as an "exclusive narrative of two weddings, four funerals and six battles" (Herculano, "Apontamentos" ["Notes"], 217). Therefore, they do not fit in the model of "historiographical positivism" -, a term often misused even nowadays for the overall characterisation of 19th-century history writing.

Herculano, who once defined himself as a "steadfast bourgeois" and "staunch liberal" (*Cartas*, II, 221), wished to offer a history of the third state in Portugal (or, to be more precise, of the privileged segment of that social cluster) in *História de Portugal* and in his other writings around this theme. To this end, he highlights the political and geographical location where the bourgeoisie came to prevail, that is, the municipality –which, he states, quoting Alexis de Tocqueville, appeared "to have come directly from the hand of God" (*História de Portugal*, IV, 33-34). In fact, municipalism lies at the very heart of these identifications, the echoes of which simultaneously impact the ways of feeling the past, intervening in the present and looking to the future. This is a fundamental key to understanding Herculano's political world view. His focus on the Portugal of medieval councils derives from the reasoning that the experiences and inspirations that would best serve the agenda of the liberalisation of politics and social relations lay therein; an agenda with which, obviously departing from the present, an attempt to shape the future would be made. Herculano hoped for a gradual dissolution of the centralist order bequeathed by absolutism and the annulment of its drive to mechanically generate abrupt historical caesurae. He envisaged a political order that would guarantee individual freedoms and legal equality, to be implemented without having to pay the price of revolutionary violence. (*História de Portugal*, IV, 343; "Instrução pública" ["Public instruction"], 87). With strengthened local powers, that is, if the councils could be galvanised into action, it would be possible to proceed with an organic, gradual, and peaceful amplification of freedom and equality (Ledesma, "Las plumas", 195-200). In Herculano's view, these were the paths that Portuguese history had taken, with some degree of success, until the advent of absolutism, and to which it was necessary to return. To a certain extent, *História de Portugal* was planned to work on its readers like a railway signal box which would keep national politics on track.



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The apologia of municipalism, the main metapolitical component of *História de Portugal*, also voiced in many of Herculano's writings, is in fact the other side of the coin on which his criticism of centralism is engraved – focusing both on state policy and on the Catholic Church itself. It is this rebellious drive that underlies *A origem e o estabelecimento da Inquisição em Portugal* ["History of the origin and establishment of the Inquisition in Portugal"], the three volumes of which were published in 1854, 1855 and 1859, respectively. However, it is not possible to fully understand the purposes and meanings behind this work without recalling the controversy that marked the reception of *História de Portugal*. The first and second of Herculano's longest writings on history are therefore intricately interwoven and there is far more than pure epistemic curiosity in the threads that link them.

Factual issues were at the root of this controversy, mainly related to the historicity of the so-called miracle of Ourique – the historical myth of the apparition of Jesus Christ to Afonso Henriques on the most decisive battlefield for the political emancipation of Portugal, thereby legitimising the morally complicated line of action followed by Afonso Henriques who would shortly become the first king of Portugal. In his book, Herculano did not devote much of his attention to the battle of Ourique which, in itself, represented a position against the traditionalist view of national history. He referred to the event being surrounded by "fables no less absurd than brilliant" stressing that that event had not been mentioned in the Arab chronicles and had only been mentioned, albeit briefly, by the 12th century Christian chroniclers (*História de Portugal*, I, 429; 435). In the documental criticism included at the end of the volume, Herculano argues that the apparition of Christ in the battle was grounded on a "poorly forged" document (*História de Portugal*, I, 658): the supposed account of the battle by Afonso Henriques himself, was "discovered" only in the late sixteenth century (Cintra, "A lenda de Afonso I" ["The legend of Afonso I"], 73-74).

Growing criticism from the press and church pulpits placed Herculano in the line of fire of a cultural war sparked by the reactionary field following its dismantlement in 1834 (Saraiva, *Herculano e o Liberalismo em Portugal*, 161). In response to such provocation, in 1850 Herculano wrote *Eu e o Clero* [The clergy and I], a public letter to the cardinal-patriarch of Lisbon. He then published a great number of responses to his detractors, many of which were replicated and triplicated, all resulting in a hefty spiral of controversy (Buescu, *O Milagre de Ourique* [The miracle of Ourique]). The philological discussions underlying the controversy rapidly faded into the background, while Herculano geared most of his statements towards themes related to the national and ecclesiastical politics of the day.

It was in this context that Herculano resumed his position as political actor, but now under the guise of an eminent public intellectual who, in light of the distance of the ministries and legislative power, fought for a programme combining political-administrative decentralisation, agrarianism, and the promotion of small-scale land ownership. In 1851, in the wake of the socio-political conflicts of the late 1840s in Portugal, and of the 1848 European revolutionary wave, Herculano took part in the conspiracy that put an end to the second government of Costa Cabral. He turned down the post of minister of the kingdom, however some of his close



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contacts (Joaquim Filipe de Soure and José Ferreira Pestana) managed to form the subsequent government headed by Field-Marshal Saldanha, albeit for a short period of time. (Martins, *Portugal contemporaneo*, II, 294-295). From then on he became strongly opposed to the course taken by the “Regeneração” [“Regeneration Period”] which he had initially sponsored, but which now appeared to lead back to the old absolutist centralism. As far as Herculano was concerned, the reactionary impetus was disguised by a discourse that was liberal only in name; it was camouflaged by a frenzy of public works and material improvements, supported by wide offers of credit in the international capital markets. Herculano repositioned himself (and was repositioned) to the left of the political spectrum, moving closer to the remaining Setembristas, in alliance with whom the dissident chartists like himself supported the so-called Partido Histórico [Historical Party]. Nevertheless, Herculano continued to oppose the democratic ideals and universal suffrage, in line with what he had already sketched in *A voz do profeta* (Carvalho, *As ideias políticas e sociais de Herculano* [The political and social ideas of Herculano], 21-40) He continued to be controversial, at this stage in the political press, particularly against “liberal absolutism”, authoring opinion pieces for journals such as *O Paiz* [The Country] and *O Português* [The Portuguese Citizen], the foundation of which was linked to his name. In 1854, upon winning the elections as an anti-government candidate he became mayor of the newly created (extinct by the end of the century) Belém council, which provided him with the opportunity to attempt to put into practice the municipalism premises at the heart of his political positioning and historical interpretations. He resigned in October 1855, shortly after one of his many micro-political skirmishes with Rodrigo da Fonseca Magalhães, a minister of the kingdom (Ledesma, “Las plumas”, 191-193; Saraiva, *Herculano e o Liberalismo*, 19-25; 213-231; 264-266).

It should be noted that while he intensified his political activity, as a publicist and council administrator (he was also in charge of the royal libraries of Lisbon), Herculano worked arduously on the research and collection of historical documents. In 1844, in mid “self-exile” from political activity, he edited *Anais de D. João III* [Annals of King João III] authored by Frei Luiz de Sousa, a manuscript formerly presumed lost. But his major legacy in that field was the *Portugaliæ Monumenta Historica* [Historical Monuments of Portugal], the many volumes of which were published from 1856 onwards. Under the aegis of the Academia das Ciências, and linked to two long archive expeditions across the Centre and North of the country, such a collective venture absorbed most of his intellectual energy for around two decades (Coelho, “A. Herculano”; Serrão, *Herculano e a consciência do Liberalismo*, 121-133).

Herculano would combine the complex manner of his anti-Centralist political intervention with his ability to work with historical documents in the three volumes of the book that would come to be known, from its second edition onwards, as *História da origem e estabelecimento da Inquisição em Portugal* [“History of the Origin and Establishment of the Inquisition in Portugal”]. This work must be read as an extension of the heated controversy initiated in 1850 (Buescu, *O Milagre de Ourique*, 95-96). It is, after all, a transmutation of the controversy into a long-term inquisitive research effort which does not seek to conceal the traces of the political



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stance with which it is affiliated. Herculano admitted this himself in the preface to the third edition of *História de Portugal* (1863), a work he deemed strictly impartial, when stating that “after the book with no political agenda, came another which had one” (*História de Portugal*, I, 5). That very same difference was clearly evident in the subtitle of the first edition, “historical endeavour” which, when compared with the emphatic claims of the impartiality of *História de Portugal*, signalled the more precarious condition of an openly politicised and politicising interpretation. (Assis, “A. Herculano entre a imparcialidade e a parcialidade” [“A. Herculano between impartiality and partiality”], 310-316; Macedo, “A tentativa história” [“The historical endeavour”], lxxii-lxxiv; c).

The target audience of Herculano's book on the Inquisition was not the public at large or his political adversaries, but rather those who shared some of his fundamental liberal beliefs. He intended, in his own words, “to strengthen the liberal faith of the field's half-hearted and alert them to the deceptions of the defectors.” (*História da Inquisição em Portugal*, I, 9-10). He was deeply concerned about a possible coalition of two trends with which he associated serious risks of a political retrocession in the mid-19th century: the ecclesiastical centralism advocated by Pope Pius IX and the parliamentary neo-centralism followed by the architects of the Regeneration in Portugal. (Macedo, “A tentativa histórica”, xxxv-xxxvi). Both politically and historiographically, his intervention was structured around the choice of a past theme he deemed particularly embarrassing for the contemporary reactionary partisans. Herculano then dived into the first decades of the 16th century to bring to present awareness what had formerly been the worst outcomes of the free deployment of the political principles he sought to combat. Thus, his main idea was to use historiography to bring political and religious centralism, understood as a major threat to his times, before a kind of history court where everything would be done to ensure its conviction and the annulment of its effects on future history.

In line with such purpose, the main narrative focus of the book seeks to account for the intricate negotiations between Lisbon and Rome which, after over twenty years, led to the establishment of the Inquisitorial Court in 1536. In Herculano's view, the Portuguese Inquisition was the result of the contentious and adverse encounter between generalised corruption in the Roman Curia and the moral decadence imposed on the Portuguese monarchy by the advance of absolutist centralisation in the first decades of the 16th century. In his book, various historical figures are presented as villains but none receives the extent of negative criticism as king João III. Herculano exposes the establishment of the Inquisition as the product of the personal intention of this political actor who, as he insists on reiterating or implying, had none of the virtues and talents one would expect from a good monarch. The book also highlights the attempts of the *cristãos-novos* [new Christians or forced converts] to hinder the diplomatic negotiations around the establishment of the Inquisitorial court, often with recourse to the payment of bribes. Furthermore, he lends an emphatic and damning tone to the recollection of innumerable cases of the popular and inquisitorial persecution of the Jews on the Iberian Peninsula. By bringing to the foreground deeply negative experiences linked to slaughter, fanaticism, tyranny, and corruption, Herculano produces an overabundance of historiographical moralisation which is not restricted to its effects



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on political arguments but also extended to the religiosity sphere. An excerpt from the text where this is evident is that in which the author suggests he might be acting as a “tool of divine justice” (História da Inquisição em Portugal, I, 11).

A significant shift in emphasis, most evident in the book on the Inquisition and, overall, in Herculano’s writings from the 1850s onwards, is his growing recourse to rhetorical forms and images which signal his disbelief in the future of the country. While Herculano as the writer of História de Portugal was more expository and optimistic about the future, in the 1850s, following the controversy surrounding the miracle of Ourique, his closer political group’s failure to set the tone for the Regeneration, his multiple controversies in the press, his personal skirmishes in the Academia das Ciências and Torre do Tombo, the advance of Ultramontanism, his short administrative experience as Mayor of the Belém Council, he became more reactive and pessimistic and geared his efforts towards criticizing centralism. Indeed, this troubled period marked Herculano’s consecration as a political intellectual (Saraiva, Herculano e o Liberalismo [Herculano and Liberalism], 23-24), to which his election in 1858 as an MP for Sintra clearly bears witness (although he did not accept this seat). However, his rise to central public figure in the political arena also resulted in a significant shift in tone of the criticism of his opponents, some of whom from the liberal field, who no longer constrained themselves within the limits of respect for Herculano’s literary authority (Macedo, “A tentativa histórica, xciii-xcvii). Coupled with this was the little intellectual influence he effectively had on king Pedro V and the early death of the monarch of whom he had often claimed to be fond (Cartas, I, 195-196; 203) - despite knowledge of some friction between them (Cartas inéditas, 87; 97; Mónica, D. Pedro V, 176-177). With such a decade of intense political activity (in stark contrast to his relative quietude between 1842-1850), Herculano began to experience a sense of boredom and weariness with literary and intellectual activities. In 1858, in the reign of Pedro V and while the Partido Histórico was in office, Herculano publicly announced that he had lost the drive that had inspired his previous historical studies and that he was looking forward to “the day when I can put down my quill and vanish into oblivion.”, further adding: “that will be the best day of my life” (“Do estado das classes servas” [“On the condition of the working classes”], 240-241).

Although all these experiences do not suffice to fully account for why Herculano moved to the countryside in his fifties, they provide a context for his decision. He had always had a somewhat anti-city and anti-Lisbon disposition and had always enjoyed being in contact with nature, having long acquired a taste for farming activities. In the late 1840s he had rented a small allotment near his house in Ajuda where he even produced some dairy products. Together with two friends, between 1855 and 1863 he became involved in a larger-scale farming venture in Serra da Arrábida [Arrábida mountain range]. In 1859, he purchased a rural property on the outskirts of Santarém, Quinta de Vale de Lobos where he would reside most of the time from the mid-1860s onwards and where he would engage more seriously in agricultural production (Nemésio, “O lavrador” [“The farmer”]). As noted ironically by Ramalho Ortigão, he stopped “making history to make olive oil” (cited in Nemésio, “O retiro” [“The exile”], xi). He styled this change as a kind of voluntary exile, thereby generating self-



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consciously a key reference for memories that would lead to his own mythification. But he also used this change as an opportunity to contribute, by way of example, to an agrarian, decentralised economic development model, which in the second half of the century had fewer and fewer advocates in Lisbon. This suggests that the “exile” did not sever his connections with the Portuguese public world, he merely altered his form of intervention in that world.

Nevertheless, in the last decade of his life, his appraisal of major national issues was tainted by a mixture of scepticism and disillusionment. In a letter dated 1872, he wrote that “the spectacle of a nation's most recent malaise is always a sad affair, but doubly so when that nation is our very own” (“Correspondência inédita” [“Unpublished Correspondence”], 292; see also: “A supressão das Conferências do Casino” [“The Suppression of the Casino Lectures”], 168; “Cartas sobre o casamento” [“Letters on marriage”], 35). Such pessimistic prognoses stemmed from decades of a political experience marked by the intransigent adherence to an “ethic of conviction” and an almost constant negative appraisal of what, from a different viewpoint, might fall under an “ethic of responsibility.” In Max Weber’s opinion, against such unilateral predominance of an ethic driven by absolute imperatives it would be virtually impossible to conduct efficient and sustainable political leadership. Without the patience to drill through the “thick planks” who were excessively vulnerable to the perception that the world was “stupid or too mean for what he had to offer it” (Weber, “A política como vocação” [“Politics as a Vocation”], 136-139; slightly edited translation), Herculano would soon step back whenever he got close to the hard core of Portuguese public life. That was exactly what happened on the two occasions he ventured into active politics in the early 1840s and later, at the beginning of the 1850s. His conversion to a historian resulted from his former retraction while his transmutation into an intellectual leader of the opposition resulted from the latter. When he grew tired of this position, he withdrew to Vale de Lobos to engage in agriculture. Ill at ease with being a direct political actor, averse to the daily procedures of party politics and unhappy about leadership concessions with fewer moral principles than his own, Herculano demanded too much from the governments and politicians, far more than politics in those times could achieve – a “government of angels”, as noted in patronising irony by Visconde de Algés [Viscount of Algés] (cited by Oliveira Martins, *Portugal contemporaneo*, II, 295). However, the very same principles and firm convictions that had frustrated him so much would prove decisive to laying the foundations of his future glory. To a large degree, it was his prophetic, ruthless and utopian approach to national problems that made him a “kind of moral reserve” for future generations in a variety of situations. (Pereira, “Alexandre Herculano”, 222-223).

It is a fact that, despite his reiterated statements to the contrary, Herculano pursued his literary and political activities even after he had moved to the Ribatejo. He continued to work, albeit not exclusively, on the reprint of his main books, the compilation of his *Opúsculos* [Pamphlets], on editing historical documents, writing vast quantities of letters, the contents of which often extrapolate a personal scope, in new opinion papers on political and religious issues, on the translation of the epic poem *The Frenzy of Orlando*, the essay on the “existence and non-existence of feudalism in Portugal”, as well as on the continuation of his *História de Portugal* (Serrão,



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Herculano e a consciência do Liberalismo [Herculano and the Conscience of Liberalism], 240). “I have no illusion” – he avowed in 1875 – “that it was useless to seek refuge here. My fate is to die tethered to an inkpot. I accept the inevitable.” (Cartas de Vale de Lobos [Letters from Vale de Lobo], I, 57).

There is perhaps too much pathos in the comparison between writing and the deprivation of freedom, but it must be acknowledged that Herculano never viewed his literary activity as pure and simple pleasure. This, among other possible reasons, was because it was no easy task to align the colliding demands imposed both on the scholar, whose discourse in relation to the past was strictly controlled by a critical analysis of historical material, and on the writer, whose imagination was not bound to comparable factual constraints. By the same token, the position of the historian, presumed to be impartial, who states that his main aim is to tell the truth about the past, contrasts with the situation of the polemicist, who is expressly partial and focused on the present, and who is given more freedom to steer away from the ideal of a disinterested search for the truth (Assis, “A. Herculano entre a imparcialidade e a parcialidade”, 319-322). One of Herculano’s major accomplishments was that he managed to play all of those (and other) roles with aplomb. Understanding how he was able to move between genres that interrelate so tensely is tantamount to understanding a pivotal feature of his intellectual biography.

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