

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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ARAGÃO, Augusto Carlos Teixeira (Lisbon, 1823 – Lisbon, 1903)

Of bourgeois origin, he was born on 15 June 1823 to José Maria Teixeira de Aragão and Mariana Hermogenes da Silva. He graduated in Medicine from the Lisbon Medical and Surgical School and began his professional career as a Surgeon-Physician in 1849, being promoted to Surgeon-Major in 1853. When he retired in 1896, he held the rank of General. Alongside his military career, Teixeira de Aragão held the positions of Secretary-General of the Government of India and Director of the Numismatic Cabinet of D. Luís I.

Teixeira de Aragão was one of the main figures in Portuguese numismatics, but his work, which ranges from popular to scholarly historiography, was not restricted to this area of knowledge. Teixeira de Aragão was, above all, a scholar influenced by the national historical interpretation of Herculano, whom he called his 'master'.

In 1850, he began his collection and study of ancient coins, perhaps inspired by the growing prominence that numismatics had achieved in Portugal during the 19th century, above all due to the positive repercussions of 1801, the date from which the Diplomacy course taught at the University of Coimbra, which was based at the Torre do Tombo, included numismatics in its syllabus. In addition, the Office of Coins and Medals was created at the Torre do Tombo in 1836, and the number of publications on numismatics was on the rise (*Dicionário de História de Portugal* [Dictionary of the History of Portugal], 1968, vol. III, p.170). Over the years, his collection of coins and medals grew in quantity and quality.

In 1867, he sold some of his valuable coins to D. Luís I and, with this gesture, 'fell into the good graces of D. Luís', leaving him in an 'excellent social position [...] as conservator of the Royal Office and friend of the King, which gave him influence and [...] placed him in a position where he could engage in fruitful scientific research' (*Da Numismática em Portugal* [Of Numismatics in Portugal], 1923, pp.157-158). In that same year, he was sent to Paris by the Ministry of Public Works with the aim of accompanying the royal collections on display in the History of Fine Arts sections of the Universal Exhibition. His stay in this city proved to be very fruitful. His command of French, English, and Spanish allowed him to interact with the great figures of European numismatics, with whom he exchanged correspondence and knowledge.

During his stay in Paris, he had his first work published, *Description des monnaies, médailles et autres*



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objects d'art concernant l'histoire portugaise du travail [Description of coins, medals and other artefacts relating to Portuguese labour history], when he was 45 years old. In 1868, his first work on archaeology appeared, entitled *Relatório sobre o cemitério romano descoberto próximo da cidade de Tavira em 1868* [Report on the Roman cemetery discovered near the town of Tavira in 1868], in which the author openly criticises the lack of support for archaeological studies and draws attention to the abandonment of Portuguese heritage, particularly built monuments (*Relatório sobre o cemitério...* [Report on the cemetery...], 1868, pp.3-5).

In 1871, Teixeira de Aragão published the first edition of *Vasco da Gama e a Vidigueira* [Vasco da Gama and Vidigueira]. Initially intended to be a newspaper article, it quickly reached book form and had three editions: 1871, 1886, and 1898. The revised and expanded editions reveal the author's concern for the pursuit of truth and his awareness of its limitations. For the author, '*the thoughtful writer studies and amends; criticism helps to investigate the truth, and this is the only foundation of history*' (*Vasco da Gama e a Vidigueira...* [(Vasco da Gama and Vidigueira...)], 1898, p. XIV). The truth can be found in documents, monuments, and artefacts. As such, he stated that the sources should be the target of a strong inquisition on the part of the researcher; however, always bearing in mind that the '*chroniclers mainly narrated the great deeds of princes and high-ranking figures, failing to mention many things that they considered secondary and that history today cannot do without*' (*idem*, 1898, p.X).

Between 1875 and 1880, the *Descrição geral e história das moedas cunhadas em nome dos reis, regentes e governadores de Portugal* [General description and history of the coins minted in the name of the kings, regents and governors of Portugal] was published in three volumes. Although the work is incomplete (*Antologia da historiografia portuguesa de Herculano aos nossos dias* [Anthology of Portuguese historiography from Herculano to the present day], 1975, vol. 2, 30), it is still one of the essential works in the history of numismatics in Portugal today. Of the three volumes published, the first refers to the study of the coins of the first dynasties (1128-1640) and those of the kingdom's governors; the second volume is dedicated to the study of the coins of the Bragança dynasty up to D. Luís (1640-1877); the last volume published is dedicated to the study of the coins of India and East Africa; a fourth volume should also have been published, which would have covered the coins of Brazil and West Africa (*Da Numismática em Portugal* [Of numismatic in Portugal], 1923, p.159). A portion of this volume was published under the title *Breve notícia sobre o descobrimento da América* [A brief account of the discovery of America] and is included in a compilation of studies called *Centenário do descobrimento da América* [Centenary of the discovery of America]. This work was produced as part of the commemorations of the IV Centenary of the Discovery of America, in which Teixeira de Aragão took part as Treasurer of the Portuguese committee and as the author of two texts contained in the aforementioned work.

His work was received with much appreciation by the intellectuals of his time. Among the many congratulations he received, Alexandre Herculano and Manuel Pinheiro Chagas stand out. The latter praised his abilities as a researcher, saying that '*it was necessary [...] for men like Mr Teixeira de Aragão to multiply*



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and for our archives to be searched by researchers of his calibre and judgement' (Vasco da Gama e a Vidigueira..., 1898, XVII). Alexandre Herculano recognised the value and relevance of Teixeira de Aragão's work, so much so that he said it would be 'a powerful aid' for his future research (*Descrição geral e história das Moedas...* [General description and history of the coins], 1877, volume II, p. IX).

For Teixeira de Aragão, History was not merely the study of kings and dynasties but the study of society as a whole from various perspectives. He believed in History as a science that reveals the past and its various realities, and he believed that it should utilise the results of other fields of study, cross-referencing information and thus taking advantage of History's full potential. He considered coins to be material evidence that, when analysed on their own, convey a limited amount of information. Aware of this limitation, he used coins as a source of study, integrating them into their historical context with the aim of achieving a greater breadth of knowledge, both of the object and the context.

He participated regularly in the Portuguese intellectual milieu, taking part in various cultural societies and scientific committees, including the Academia Real das Ciências de Lisboa [Royal Academy of Sciences of Lisbon], the Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa [Academy of Geography of Lisbon], the Real Associação dos Arquitectos e Arqueólogos Portugueses [Royal Association of Portuguese Architects and Archaeologists], the Instituto Politécnico Português [Portuguese Polytechnic Institute], the Instituto Vasco da Gama [Vasco da Gama Institute], the Instituto Geográfico Argentino [Argentine Geographical Institute], the Hungarian Academy of Paris, the Royal Numismatic Society of Belgium, the Real Academia de Historia de Madrid [Royal Academy of History of Madrid], the Instituto Histórico e Geográfico do Brasil [Historical and Geographical Institute of Brazil], and the Instituto Histórico de S. Paulo [Historical Institute of S. Paulo].

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