

# DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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**National Library of Portugal (1796-)**

Within a timeframe of approximately two centuries, marked by the vicissitudes inherent to Portugal's historical evolution, where the political dimension took precedence over cultural achievements, from 1796 to 1976, the National Library was managed by 18 directors, within 21 different administrations, each with their own varying durations and projects. The academic background and professional experience of some of the individuals at the foreground of the country's largest and most important library were quite distinct.

It is challenging and perhaps less relevant to identify a common ideological and political framework, particularly in view of the various political regimes that spanned this period. In contrast, there was a notable academic inclination towards literary, bibliophilic, and historical studies, coupled with public or political roles, such as in the case of teachers, MPs and journalists. This is in line with the public nature that was inherent to the library's constitution from the very start, influenced by similar institutions that had emerged in Enlightenment Europe, the cultural context that fostered these initiatives.

Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the deepest roots of the National Library were in the creation of the Real Mesa Censória [Royal Censorship Board] in 1768. This official institution was established to ensure the censorship of books while simultaneously serving as a repository for the libraries of the extinguished Society of Jesus, comprising over 60,000 volumes, and managing the literary subsidy to fund education. In this endeavour, the figure of Friar Manuel do Cenáculo Villas Boas is noteworthy. He combined his role as president of the Royal Censorship Board (1770-1777) with literary patronage. His efforts in promoting libraries led Raúl Proença to compare him to A. Carnegie, a prominent American figure of the early 20th century.

With the dissolution of the Royal Censorship Board, the literary institution gained autonomy, leading to the creation of the Royal Public Library of the Court on 29 February 1796, during the reign of Queen Mary I, under the tutelage of António Ribeiro dos Santos, a law graduate and renowned bibliophile, who had gained experience in organising the University of Coimbra Library. In a sense, it may be said that the public dimension of the National Library managed to override the censorship strand of the reading material made available to a broader audience. During this period, there were other similar libraries, such as the British Library (founded in



1700), the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (declared national property in 1792), and the National Library of Hungary (1802).

The appointment of the chief librarian and a second librarian for this institution, supported by other administrative staff, marked the beginning of the foundational cycle of the Library, which aspired to become the largest Public Library in the country. This goal was not achieved during the period of approximately 20 years that António Ribeiro dos Santos was at the forefront of the Royal Library, not due to a lack of initiative on his part, but owing to contingencies related to the country's political evolution, especially its separation from central power with the royal family's departure to Brazil following the French invasions.

Two notable aspects may be observed in the constitution of the initial branch of the first Portuguese Public Library: on the one hand, its establishment in Lisbon at Terreiro do Paço, and on the other, its organisation following the knowledge systems prevalent in contemporary European scientific society. The bibliographic classification system used, which underwent a number of nomenclature changes by way of the 1836 decree, was divided into 12 sections, also including the room numbers, namely: History (Rooms 1 and 2); Belles Lettres (Room 3); Natural Sciences and Arts (Room 4); Civil and Political Sciences (Room 5); Ecclesiastical Sciences (Rooms 6 to 9); Polygraphy (Room 10); Manuscripts and Antiquities (Rooms 11 and 12).

The consistency of the public purpose of this library was called into question by the organisation of another Royal Library, based in Ajuda. This created excessive competition during a period that facilitated the division of bibliographic heritage, especially due to the transport of the Royal Library to Brazil, which gave rise to the establishment of the Royal (public) Library of Rio de Janeiro (1809), comprising numerous works that did not come back to Portugal with the return of King John VI.

The significance of the benevolent actions of its founders is evident in the formation of the initial collection which, besides the books from the Royal Censorship Board and the library of the defunct Royal Academy of History, included donations from Friar Manuel do Cenáculo, and the books of Ribeiro dos Santos, along with acquisitions made during his tenure. However, this collection lacked modern books on Sciences and Geography.

Despite public recognition, legitimised by the involvement of prominent intellectual figures of that era, such as the visit by the Marquise of Alorna (16/10/1797), the National Library appeared to be compromised in its continuity due to the requirement to reconstruct the erudite library of Ajuda at the expense of its own collection, and to the evident competition from the Torre do Tombo Archive. The efforts of António Ribeiro dos Santos's successors, at the forefront of the Royal Public Library until the end of the Civil War, were crucial in ensuring the growth of its collection and the extension of its opening hours, despite the challenges with which they were confronted.

Similar to his predecessor, Monsignor Joaquim José Ferreira Gordo expressed a willingness to personally contribute to the Library's collection, becoming a donator, but on the condition that he would not be removed from his position. However, this effectively came to be and he subsequently diverted the collection to the



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(Royal) Academy of Sciences. This was one of the instances where the paths of this scientific institution, as well as that of the Geographical Society, intersected with that of the National Library. The role played by J. J. Ferreira Gordo was most noteworthy in organising the document collection of the Academy of Sciences, particularly in the research conducted at Torre do Tombo and other national archives, with the exception of the Alentejo region, which was controlled by Friar Manuel do Cenáculo Villas Boas.

The collection of the National Library was largely composed of the inheritance of the defunct convents, which began to be integrated in 1834, during the brief tenure of Joaquim Larcher. This process continued in a more structured manner under Vasco Pinto de Sousa Coutinho Balsemão, through the establishment of the DLEC service to this effect, based in the Convent of São Francisco building, where the National Library of Lisbon, as designated by the Decree of 7 December 1836, began to operate.

The directorships of José Feliciano de Castilho Barreto e Noronha (1843-1847), alternated by the brief administration of António de Oliveira Marreca (1846)—an expert in economic affairs and a former pupil of Alexandre Herculano in historical romance—were responsible for defining the action and development plan of the National Library. These efforts were geared towards expanding and organising the collection, involving an acquisition strategy funded by the sale of duplicate works and the subsidies received, considering the availability presented at auctions.

The experience gained at the Torre do Tombo, where the inventorying of problems resulted in a report that would serve as a model for that which was to be prepared at the end of the first year in charge of the National Library (1844), highlighted concerns regarding space and the catalogue of records. Additionally, efforts were made to reinforce the control of the Legal Deposit (established 8 June 1796), quadrupling the number of works for the National Library. Attention was also given to the functioning of the reading room: the public, the works consulted, and the preferred hours.

José da Silva Mendes Leal, considered "one of the greatest prophets" of his literary generation (Inocência Francisco da Silva, *Dicionário Bibliográfico* vol. 5, pp. 127-133), also served twice as director of the National Library, alternating his directorship with his political position as a member of the Courts and representation in scientific and cultural associations.

During the interim period, the directorship of the National Library was held by José Canaões de Figueiredo Castelo Branco (1851-1857), author of historical monographs, including a work on Portugal's relations with Syria, developed on the basis of the *Memórias da Real Academia de História de Madrid* [Memoirs of the Royal Academy of History of Madrid], and research on the early history of the Iberian Peninsula. He also conducted biographical studies on individuals associated with the history of the National Library. Despite the specific challenges it experienced, the library saw significant growth, doubling the printed collections from the "Balanço" ["Appraisal"] in 1843 by V. Pinto Balsemão until the end of his tenure, reaching 147,000 volumes, not including those from the Depository of Libraries of Defunct Convents (DLEC), which accounted for an estimated similar total.



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The composition of the National Library's collection was highly irregular, prompting an effort to inventory, catalogue, and assess all the documents. This task was undertaken by J. S. Mendes Leal during his second term, through a Commission appointed for this purpose, which mobilised librarians and bibliographers, known for compiling auction catalogues. This also facilitated a subsequent objective: promoting the sale of foreign language books (primarily in Spanish and Latin in particular—19,000 works), to invest in the purchase of new volumes for the National Library. Upon completion of the complex process of inventorying, cataloguing, and sale (in lots and by weight), the outcome was a significant reduction from the 183,000 works received in 1841 to the 13,000 remaining in the Depository by 1865.

However, Mendes Leal's tenure was frequently interrupted by other responsibilities, and in his absence, decisions were made by António da Silva Túlio. Túlio, a writer and historian, had been working at the National Library since 1844 in various capacities, including as an official, curator, and librarian, in succession, eventually serving as interim director in the absence of the chief librarian.

In organisational terms, the library did not undergo significant changes and was divided into three departments: Sciences and Arts, History and Literature, Manuscripts and Numismatics. Major changes came with António José Enes, who succeeded Mendes Leal as director in September 1886. During his tenure, the *Inspeção das Bibliotecas e Arquivos Públicos* [Inspection of Public Libraries and Archives] was established (29 December 1887), consisting of an inspector from the National Library and another from the Torre do Tombo. This body was responsible for creating a collective catalogue, promoting inter-library loans, and developing technical training for librarians and archivists.

Up to this date, the literary and economic administration of the National Library of Lisbon (BNL) had been overseen by a Council supervised by the chief librarian. This changed with the establishment of the *Inspeção Geral das Bibliotecas e Arquivos Públicos* [General Inspection of Public Libraries and Archives], and remained thus until the reorganisation introduced by the decree of 24 December 1901, which strengthened the supervisory power of the chief librarian, placing him directly under the Ministry of the Kingdom and granting him broad authority over public libraries. The position of director was created for the BNL, who was responsible for general administration, compliance with regulations, and executing all orders from the chief librarian, to whom he was required to report quarterly on the library's services.

The technical changes implemented during the brief tenure of António Enes resulted in a different organisational structure for Libraries and Archives, with new nomenclatures, as well as the establishment of the librarian-archivist course, in which he taught the bibliography module. A graduate of the *Curso Superior de Letras*, a journalist, playwright, and co-author of a History of Portugal, Enes was particularly known for his work in the field of colonial politics. He used this promotion, facilitated by his progressive comrades, to dedicate himself more to library science.

The mission of the National Library was clarified in the legislation of 31 December 1863 and further emphasised by the law of 29 May 1884, where two essential and interrelated aspects were notable: the



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recognition of "public reading" as one of the functions of the National Library, and its extension to all citizens, regardless of class, provided the formalities of careful book lending were observed. The offer of evening reading hours, even if limited to two and later three hours, highlights the public nature of the National Library. This operational approach was maintained until the end of the monarchical period and later experienced some fluctuation depending on the political orientation of the republican governments.

The continuity of the work initiated by A. Enes was ensured during the directorship of the scholar Gabriel Pereira, who held this position for 15 years. This was sufficient time to "straighten" the various sections of the National Library and conduct historical studies to promote the Library's collections, particularly those related to the Alcobacenses.

Admitted in 1887 to undertake bibliographic work at the National Library of Lisbon, Gabriel Pereira went on to succeed António Enes. He applied his extensive literary, bibliographic, and historiographical knowledge to the service of the National Library, profusely documented in numerous monographs on local history themes (such as Ericeira, Carnide, S. Domingos de Benfica, among others, in addition to substantial research on Évora, his birthplace) and various articles published in different periodicals. Within this scope, his role as director of the *Boletim da Real Associação dos Arquitetos Cívicos e Arqueólogos Portugueses* [Bulletin of the Royal Association of Portuguese Civil Architects and Archaeologists], was particularly noteworthy, earning him heartfelt tribute from this institution upon his death on 16 December 1911. Like his predecessor, Gabriel Pereira was later appointed Inspector General of Public Libraries and Archives (13 November 1902) and, by the decree of 18 March 1911, as *Inspetor das Bibliotecas Eruditas e Arquivos* [Inspector of Erudite Libraries and Archives]. Within the scope of these roles, he presented a thesis at the National Congress on National Archives, held on 23 May 1910, where he clearly expressed his criticism of the management of the Torre do Tombo Archive due to staff shortages, poor remuneration, and the inadequate logistical conditions of this national archive's collection. His proposals included the creation of district archives and the expansion of the librarian-archivist course. His critical stance indicated a desire to bring changes to the two major institutions under his oversight, namely the Torre do Tombo and the National Library, where he invested significantly in scientific development and specialised dissemination through the organisation of bibliographic exhibitions on prominent figures in Portuguese culture (such as Father António Vieira and Almeida Garrett).

This work was consolidated with the publication of the *Boletim das Bibliotecas e Arquivos Nacionais* [Bulletin of National Libraries and Archives], later known as the *Anais das Bibliotecas e Arquivos* [Annals of Libraries and Archives], and continued with the contributions of Xavier da Cunha, a naval surgeon who primarily identified as a journalist, writer, bibliographer, and poet, using the pseudonym Olímpio de Freitas. He joined the National Library in 1886 as the second curator, later becoming its director in 1902. His tenure was marked by a particularly intellectual and scholarly inclination, evident in his focus on enhancing the collection and improving the technical competence of the staff, whom he often accused of laxity. He also restricted access to those he deemed of lower intellectual status.



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He was of the view that the National Library should serve only researchers, scholars, and literary dilettantes, firmly opposing a broader vision of public reading dissemination. Consequently, Xavier da Cunha advocated for exclusively daytime hours, justifying security grounds for the library's closure at night, primarily due to its gas lighting system, as well as financial constraints, which he also cited to justify its closure during August and September when attendance was low. His ideas regarding a more selective use of the National Library did not imply a lack of interest in literary and scientific dissemination to the less privileged population. This is evidenced by his active role in one of the most important popular collections, the Biblioteca do Povo e das Escolas [People and Schools' Library], a project he helped launch in 1881, not only as a friend of the editor, David Corazzi, and his collaborator, but also as the literary director, applying the same meticulous care that he would later bring to his role as director of the National Library. Notably, the first booklet in the series was authored by Xavier da Cunha and titled História de Portugal [History of Portugal], although this was not his area of expertise. Likewise, the connection between this publication and the National Library was established through material published by Gabriel Pereira, who was the director at the time.

Augusto Pereira de Bettencourt Ataíde featured among the collaborators he retained at the National Library. He was selected for the position of 2nd Curator of the BNL in early 1903. His advocacy for public reading went beyond the guiding principles defined by Xavier da Cunha, as evidenced by his response to his superior, who he accused of “ultramontane rigours” regarding the restrictions imposed on what was termed the “invasion of barbarians.” This critique was published in 1905 in a text titled A Leitura Pública na Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa [Public Reading in the National Library of Lisbon]. Vivifying his convictions, Bettencourt Ataíde later became responsible for the creation of mobile libraries in 1915.

With the advent of the First Republic, the administration of the National Library took an entirely different direction. This shift was not only a consequence of the legislation published (decree of 18 March 1911) but above all due to the characteristics of the new director, Faustino da Fonseca, a republican with a more radical view on the policy of popularising reading and the role to be played by Portugal's foremost library. Driven by the ideal of cultural popularisation, he opened the National Library's doors to all potential readers, extended the opening hours, and promoted home lending, which resulted in a significant increase in readership: the number of readers practically doubled between 1910 and 1911, much to the delight of the director, who supported his measures with anti-monarchist rhetoric and examples from developed foreign countries.

Aside from the pamphleteering excesses dictated by Faustino da Fonseca's political radicalism, the clash of arguments accompanying the shift in power contributed to a better understanding of the actual state of the libraries and fostered debate on the meaning of the popular vs. scholarly duality that marked cultural development, particularly in libraries. It also allowed for a discussion on the true significance of public reading.

The historian and essayist Fidelino de Figueiredo succeeded Faustino da Fonseca in 1918, distinguishing himself as a man of letters and culture, blending literature with philosophy in his professional activities,



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especially during his self-imposed exile from 1927, which took him to the United States, Mexico, and Brazil, where he taught for an extended period. He was responsible for the creation of the National Society of History (later the Portuguese Society of Historical Studies) between April and May 1911, alongside Cristovão Aires, David Lopes, and José Leite de Vasconcelos, prior to his tenure as director of the National Library. He held this position twice, from 1918 to 1919 and again in 1927, with Jaime Cortesão serving as director in the interim.

His participation in the “coup of the Fifis” with Filomeno da Câmara on 12 August 1927, aimed at overthrowing the military dictatorship, left him at odds with the new regime, even though he did not have a perfect understanding with the liberal republicans, with whom he also had his disputes, especially with the so-called “Library Group,” in particular with Raúl Proença and Jaime Cortesão.

A doctor by training but primarily an intellectual, Jaime Cortesão was deeply committed to defending republican ideals and promoting culture. He combined the power of words with consistent action, engaging in various initiatives such as the creation of the journals *Renascença Portuguesa*, *Lusitânia*, *Seara Nova*, and the *Universidade Popular do Porto* [Popular University of Porto]. His participation in World War I as a volunteer doctor earned him the Military Cross. Upon his return, he was appointed director of the National Library, where he led an important debate on the purpose of this institution, allowing room for the opinions of his collaborators, particularly Raúl Proença, and other political comrades who, like Cortesão, had had to go into exile following the triumph of the Military Dictatorship on 28 May 1926, which paved the way for the Estado Novo regime under Salazar. Despite the significance of his political and cultural actions, it was Jaime Cortesão’s historiographical work that cemented his legacy, a vocation revealed during his tenure as director of the National Library, aligning his civic and political engagement with his worldview, amplified by his direct contact with the sources and documents he meticulously guarded in his role.

The revitalisation of the National Library under Jaime Cortesão’s directorship was particularly influenced by Raúl Proença, who had been familiar with the institution since his appointment as second curator in 1911. He had witnessed the contrasting administrations of Faustino da Fonseca and Fidelino Figueiredo, remaining steadfast in advocating for necessary reforms in the library’s technical services, including the standardisation of the cataloguing system, which was scattered across multiple different catalogues. Proença’s dedication to this technical aspect earned him the epithet “entry genius” and embroiled him in a series of controversies that, although focusing on his professional performance, had significant political undertones and various interlocutors, including Fidelino Figueiredo. Figueiredo succeeded Cortesão as director of the National Library when the latter, along with Raúl Proença, was forcibly removed from his position following his involvement in the revolutionary events of February 1927.

However, although political dimensions overshadowed the cultural nature of the debates in the so-called “Library Case,” it was indeed a way of bringing discussions to the forefront on the role of the public library and the technical organisation of its collections. The primary focus of the National Library was the clash of ideas regarding the bridge between the scholarly, popular, and public.



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The military dictatorship established by the coup of 28 May 1926, brought Lieutenant Colonel Augusto Botelho da Costa Veiga to the directorship of the National Library where he combined his role in military defence with historical research. His focus was primarily on military history, but he also conducted studies in the field of medieval history, particularly those on the actions of D. Afonso Henriques and the episode of the Battle of Ourique, about which he engaged in some controversy with the ideas defended by Herculano, earning him a place among the experts on the subject. Serving as director of the National Library from 1928 to 1950 facilitated his access to documentation, allowing him to write many of his works, the quality of which earned him recognition as an authority in medieval military history and an invitation to join the Lisbon Academy of Sciences as a full member in 1955, occupying the seat left vacant by António Ferrão, who had become an emeritus member. His activities included the publication of various works, bibliographies, catalogues, and the inventory of the National Library's collections.

During his term of office, the publication of Decree-Law 19.952 (27/6/1931) marked a significant reorganisation of libraries and archives, streamlining services and reducing costs. This decree reshaped the configuration of these institutions but, in practice, reinforced the concept of the National Library as a "heritage library," a "vault," a "reserve," contrasting with the popular notion of free and easy access for all and establishing a clear separation between administrative and technical services. The National Library of Portugal (BNL) was considered the "central and national repository" of the Portuguese Book Collection, centralising Portuguese bibliography and the registration of authors' property rights. Despite the grandeur of its mission, the National Library lacked the logistical conditions to ensure compliance with the mandates set forth by official legislation. This inadequacy was evidenced by photographic records showing some books and documents in the library's collection, partially damaged by insects and haphazardly arranged on disordered shelves—a grim inventory reflecting the institution's neglected state, similar to the situation revealed by Jaime Cortesão upon assuming the directorship of the Library.

The 1950s began with the brief administration of João Martins da Silva Marques. An archivist by profession and historian, he left the position after being appointed to the Faculty of Letters of Lisbon to teach Palaeography and Diplomatics, aligning with his primary inclination, as seen in his choice of successor: former pupil, Manuel Santos Estevens, would lead the BNL until 25 April 1974.

The regulation of public reading at the National Library, embodied in Service Order No. 1,060, signed by Silva Marques (16/10/1950), along with his farewell remarks upon leaving the directorship, highlight the challenges faced by the institution. These problems largely stemmed from the characteristics of the space and its operations, emphasising the scientific nature of its mission: an "austere place of study" serving the men of science. Criticism of deficient functionality were common among a certain group of intellectuals during this period, even as they tried to spare the regime and its leaders from blame.

Considering that the BNL maintained evening reading hours (8pm – 11pm), except during August and September, there appears to be some contradiction with previously defended positions, as evening reading





was likely to serve members of the working class. This is also evident in the concern for the physical appearance of readers, especially their attire.

As the Director of the National Library of Portugal (BNL) for over two decades, Manuel Santos Estevens, who modestly referred to himself as a "simple public servant" with the mission of defending and preserving Portugal's historical and artistic heritage, endeavoured to combine scientific training in history with the librarian-archivist course. He was directly involved in the inventorying of artistic and document collections. During his tenure, a significant issue facing the BNL was resolved: the relocation to a new building designed by architect Porfírio Pardal Monteiro, situated in Campo Grande, Lisbon. This project, which took over a century to design and around 17 years to build, culminated in the inauguration of the new National Library on 10 April 1969. The ceremony was attended by the President of the Republic, Admiral Américo Tomás, and received the blessing of Cardinal Cerejeira. The speeches were delivered by the Ministers of Public Works and Education. The latter, José Hermano Saraiva, would later play a significant role in communicating (and popularising) the History of Portugal.

The "Carnation Revolution" brought changes to the leadership of the National Library, with the appointment of A. H. de Oliveira Marques on 12 November 1974, during a period when another renowned historian, Vitorino Magalhães Godinho, was Minister of Education and Culture and later became the Director of the BNL in 1984. The turbulent post-revolutionary period, marked by political instability and frequent government changes, hindered Oliveira Marques' ability to fully accomplish his projects.

Once again, the organisation of the catalogue in its various sections became a primary focus for the BNL's administration. However, a notable innovation during this period was allowing readers direct access to the general catalogue, aligning with new library science orientations. Oliveira Marques, an esteemed scholar in medieval history and the history of the First Republic, had broader and deeper ambitions. He aimed to organise specific catalogues that would facilitate the identification of existing works. To achieve this, he managed to recruit more than twenty scholarship holders supported by the Institute of High Culture.

Reflecting the dominant spirit of citizenship, the National Library hosted an exhibition on elections for Constituent Assemblies during this period. This exhibition, curated by the historical expertise and pedagogical sensitivity of its director, highlighted the significant dates of 1820, 1836, and 1911, thereby drawing attention to other crucial moments in Portugal's history. This initiative fulfilled the stated purpose that "a national library should be a world of cultural activities," and it also aligned with the decentralised aspect of its policy, evidenced by the display of this exhibition in Porto.

The emergence of the Fifth Provisional Government led by Vasco Gonçalves, and the associated political interventions caused significant consternation and dampened the enthusiasm of Oliveira Marques as Director of the National Library (BNL). Consequently, he stepped down in July 1976, although he did not immediately request to be relieved of his duties, thus preventing an immediate replacement which only occurred in 1980. His successor, João Pedro Palma-Ferreira, criticised this delay and emphasised the political nature of the



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appointment, drawing parallels with the republican Faustino da Fonseca and a more populist vision of the BNL, which he deemed ambitionless and stagnant in problem-solving. Palma-Ferreira contended that the period between 1974 and 1979, which corresponded to the directorship of Oliveira Marques and the Management and Restructuring Commission created by Decree-Law No. 159/78 of 4 July, had left the BNL at the mercy of "internal and external disturbances and indecisions" due to a "lack of direction and organisational capacity." Despite his harsh criticism of Oliveira Marques, Palma-Ferreira acknowledged that the library's failures were structural, stemming from issues such as staff shortages, lack of administrative autonomy, and technical problems related to the poor organisation of catalogues, which hindered the National Library's integration into new trends in computerised library science.

In this reflection on two centuries of the BNL/BNP's existence, it is important to highlight some foundational aspects of its functioning, which has been characterised by the contributions of individuals with backgrounds in historical and literary knowledge, combined with practical skills in archiving and librarianship essential for the effective administration of the National Library. The management of successive incorporations of works from religious orders, including paper records and paintings, is documented by the first directors of the BNL, notably José Feliciano de Castilho. In his report, Castilho mentions a vast collection of 991 canvases, most of which were later destroyed due to their poor condition. Throughout various relocations in search of a more suitable space for this type of heritage, the BNL retained only portraits of personalities connected to the literary world. These portraits were the subject of reports by several directors up until the end of the monarchy. After the Republic was proclaimed, the majority of these portraits were sent to the Academy of Fine Arts in Lisbon but returned to the National Library a few years later (1915) under the intervention of the Inspector General, Júlio Dantas.

In the course of his duties as Inspector of Erudite Libraries and Archives, Júlio Dantas made several significant interventions, notably in relation to the incorporation service and the creation of a Book Sanitisation and Disinfection Station at the National Library of Lisbon (BNL) in 1914. This measure proved insufficient, as evidenced by the images presented by Jaime Cortesão, showing the deplorable state of the BNL's collection, destroyed by insects due to inadequate conservation conditions, leading him to call for a suitable room for public reading at the National Library. Despite Dantas' consistent and enduring efforts, the desired results were not achieved, and the logistical and organisational problems of the country's primary library persisted for decades.

The issue of public reading and the National Library's role in this matter divided the intellectual community into two distinct groups: those advocating for the full opening of the BNL, including the first republican director, Faustino da Fonseca, along with Bettencourt Ataíde and Álvaro Vicente Lial (BNL librarian), and those favouring the separation between the scholarly and popular, albeit with differing plans and projects, such as Júlio Dantas and Raúl Proença.



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Likewise, António Ferrão, serving in the Inspection of Libraries and Archives since the beginning of the First Republic, provided detailed and well-founded diagnoses of the situation in the libraries, particularly the BNL. According to the reports from those in charge, the BNL's collection had grown excessively without the necessary conditions for the proper treatment of the various documents or even the most basic maintenance of such a valuable collection. There was also a lack of a plan to make the existing works in the National Library accessible to the public, resulting in usage policies that fluctuated between concealment and popularisation, to the point of turning the library into an "androgynous organism," according to the aforementioned inspector.

The dichotomous policy, based on a strong sense of preserving the scholarly nature of the National Library, led to the creation of the Lisbon Popular Library (BPL) which, nonetheless, maintained an umbilical connection to the BNL, a fact that bothered those advocating for a clearer distinction of the functions of both libraries.

The direction of the National Library was always at the mercy of political whims, shaped by the successive changes in government during its establishment phase, when it had the significant task of incorporating bibliographic collections from the defunct convent libraries. Later, during the First Republic, the BNL became a battleground for political and ideological conflicts arising from differing views on its role in promoting public reading. This issue left a lasting impact that extended into the early 1980s, overshadowing the actions of the directors in the post-25 April 1974 period and delaying the necessary technical modernisation of the National Library's services.

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# DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

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