

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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BOURDON, Albert-Alain (Lisbon, 1932)

Albert-Alain Bourdon is the son of the French historian and professor Léon Bourdon, who served as director of the *Institut d'Études Portugaises et Brésiliennes* [Institute of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies] at the Sorbonne from 1953 to 1969. His mother, Hélène Marie-Louise Bourdon, was a primary school teacher. Albert-Alain spent his early years in Lisbon, where his father was director of the *Institut français au Portugal* [French Institute in Portugal]. He began his primary education in Poitiers, France, before his family moved to Toulouse, where he completed his primary schooling as well as his middle and high school studies. It was also in this city in south-west France that Albert-Alain Bourdon earned his degrees in History and Law (1949–1952), before moving to Paris to complete a master's degree in the same fields at the Sorbonne (1953–1955). He then prepared for the *Agrégation*, the most prestigious and demanding recruitment competition for middle and secondary school teachers in the French education system. In 1958, he successfully passed the History and Geography exam. That same year, he was called up for military service, which lasted until 1961 and was divided between Lyon and a posting in Algiers, Algeria, during the final phase of the Algerian War of Independence. Upon returning to France, he began his career as a secondary school history and geography teacher, working in various locations in central and southeastern France. In 1963, he took up a teaching post at the Lycée Français Charles Lepierre in Lisbon, where he worked until 1966. During this time, he also began teaching French civilisation at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities and was appointed Reader in French in 1966. In 1969, he left Portugal to become an associate professor of civilisation and modern and contemporary Lusophone literature at the Université de Provence-Aix-Marseille. He was promoted to full professor there in 1978 before moving to the Université Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis in 1988, where he remained until his retirement in 1998.

During his time in Lisbon from 1963 to 1969, Albert-Alain Bourdon embarked on in-depth research into contemporary Portuguese history, focusing particularly on the constitutional monarchy. This work culminated in his doctoral thesis, *Bibliographie critique de l'Histoire de la Société portugaise du XIX^e siècle*, which he defended in 1966 at the Université de Toulouse under the supervision of Frédéric Mauro. Mauro, an eminent French historian associated with the second generation of the *Annales* school and a distinguished former student of Fernand Braudel, was one of France's leading specialists in Latin American history. Bourdon then turned his attention to a critical study of the magazine *Seara Nova* [New Harvest]. On the advice of Joaquim Veríssimo Serrão, however, he quickly broadened his research to include the relationship between major ideologies and political life during Portugal's First Republic. At the same time, recognising the limited



awareness of Portuguese history among French university audiences, he published an abridged *Histoire du Portugal* (1970). This book was soon translated and published in Portugal in 1973. Notably, the final chapter, *La situation actuelle*, present in the French version, was omitted from the Portuguese edition. In the original version, Bourdon analysed the challenging political and international circumstances faced by the *Estado Novo* [New State] regime in the 1960s.

A few years later, Bourdon presented the findings of his research on the First Republic in a second doctoral thesis, *Idées et Politique au Portugal sous la Première République (1910-1926). La crise portugaise et l'idéologie de Salut national*. This thesis, supervised by Portuguese literature professor Claude-Henri Frèches, was defended in 1976 at the Université de Provence-Aix-Marseille as part of his application for the position of full professor. This seminal work examined the political and economic crises during the Republican regime, as well as the theories of "regeneration" or national "salvation" proposed by various Portuguese intellectuals of the time. What stands out, however, is the special attention Bourdon devoted to the Integralistas or Seafarers, including António Sérgio, Raúl Proença, António Sardinha, and Hipólito Raposo, who were a particular focus of his work. In addition to analysing the main political ideals espoused by these thinkers and examining the economic and institutional crises of the First Republic, Albert-Alain Bourdon provided a compelling account of the narrative of the crisis as constructed by the leading intellectuals of the period. He also argued that, despite the numerous "rationalist professions of faith" made by many of these intellectuals, they all remained "imprisoned" by a providentialist mystique of national history. This framework, he contended, was symbolically established by Luís de Camões in *Os Lusíadas* [The Lusiads], which continued to influence their outlook and rhetoric.

In parallel with his research on contemporary Portuguese history, Bourdon published several notable works, including studies on Pombalism and the history of the *Institut d'Études Portugaises et Brésiliennes* at the Sorbonne. These contributions included biographical articles on the "founding fathers" of the *Institut*, such as Raymond Cantel and Léon Bourdon. More recently, Bourdon authored a new *Histoire du Portugal* in 1994, a significantly expanded version of his earlier 1970 work. This updated edition, which has been reissued three times (2010, 2013, and 2015), has become a key reference for French scholars interested in Portuguese history. A fourth version, co-written with French historian Yves Léonard, was published in 2019. The book has also been translated and published in Portugal, where four updated editions (2011, 2012, 2013, and 2015) have mirrored the French editions. This enduring work has cemented Bourdon's reputation as a pivotal figure in the development of Portuguese historical studies in France over the past fifty years.

Beginning with prehistoric settlements, Romanisation, and barbarian invasions, the book focuses on the period between the Arab conquest and the end of the 1990s, with a brief final exploration of the early 21st century. In the introduction, Bourdon supports the thesis that Portuguese history is defined by two "fundamental traits": the country's pioneering spirit in its early centuries and its relative backwardness in more recent times. The narrative thus highlights the precocious achievements of the Portuguese, including the early establishment of national borders, the "bourgeois" revolution of the 14th century, and the initiation of maritime expansion. In contrast, from the 17th century onward, the country began to accumulate a general lag in comparison to other European nations. This "immobility" replaced the pioneering dynamism of the 12th to 16th centuries and is illustrated by events such as the slow pace of industrialisation in the 19th century and the delayed

democratisation and decolonisation in the 20th century.

In his analysis of key episodes in Portuguese history, Albert-Alain Bourdon drew on Martin's thesis that dynastic voluntarism was fundamental to the formation of the Lusitanian kingdom. At the same time, he highlighted the critical role of the Portuguese language, which he argued formed "a linguistic frontier" alongside the territorial borders. From the perspective of consolidating Portugal's independence within the Iberian Peninsula, Bourdon examined the country's maritime expansion. Focusing on the periods when Portugal moved away from the precocity of its early "achievements" and entered a less dynamic phase of its history, Bourdon examines the liberal revolution of 1820 as an unsuccessful extension of Spanish liberalism. Similarly, he views the First Portuguese Republic as a failed transposition of the French Third Republic. In turn, the emergence of the *Estado Novo* in the 1930s is linked by Bourdon to the influence of Italian fascism and the Spanish dictatorship of Primo de Rivera on Portuguese elites. Drawing on Salazar's "strength of character" and "exceptional personality," the *Estado Novo* is described in the *Histoire du Portugal* as an authoritarian regime whose initial efficiency was soon overshadowed by the gradual onset of a conservative "sclerosis." This sclerosis mirrored the ageing of its dictator and aligned with the "fixity" of the past that, according to the book's introduction, defined Portuguese history from the end of maritime expansion until at least the 1974 revolution.

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