

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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BOURDON, Léon (Mâcon, 1900- Paris, 1994)

Léon Bourdon graduated from the *École Normale Supérieure de Paris* [Normal Superior School of Paris], which he entered in 1920. He successfully passed the history and geography agrégation exams in 1923. Rather than teaching immediately in France, he chose to gain experience abroad, spending thirteen years in Italy, Spain, and Portugal. This period unfolded in the post-World War I context, during which France, despite its political and economic challenges, invested in ambitious cultural dissemination policies abroad. From 1923 to 1925, Bourdon studied at the *École Française de Rome* [French School of Rome], where his interests focused primarily on archaeology and art history. In 1926, he joined the newly established *Casa Velázquez de Madrid* [Velázquez House in Madrid]. Under the guidance of its director, archaeologist and historian Pierre Paris (1859–1931), Bourdon connected with other young scholars and future prominent Hispanists, including Paul Guinard (1895–1976) and Robert Ricard (1900–1984). In 1927, he moved to Portugal to become a lecturer in Geography at the *Universidade de Coimbra* [University of Coimbra]. However, he left this role in 1928 to take up the position of director of the *Instituto Francês* [French Institute] in Lisbon, newly established that year under the auspices of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Bourdon held this position until 1935, when he decided to return to France. As director of the *Instituto*, he also edited the Bulletin of the *Boletim do Instituto Francês de Portugal* [Bulletin of the French Institute of Portugal], contributing to various publications. In addition to overseeing the biannual *Boletim* (written in French), Bourdon worked to raise the Institute's profile by organising conferences featuring prominent intellectuals, including writers Georges Duhamel (1884–1966), Jules Romains (1885–1972), Jacques Maritain (1883–1973), and physiologist René Leriche (1879–1955). On the other hand, Bourdon also established, whenever necessary, close ties between French authorities and Portuguese Francophile circles. At the time, prominent figures in these circles included university professors Hernâni Cidade (1887–1975), Fidelino de Figueiredo (1889–1967), José de Figueiredo (1872–1937), and Moisés Amzalak (1892–1975).

Returning to France in 1935, Léon Bourdon became an assistant professor of Portuguese at the University of Poitiers, a role he held until the outbreak of the Second World War, which led to his mobilisation from 1939 to 1942. In that same year, he was appointed to the newly established chair of Portuguese at the University of Toulouse, where he successfully cultivated a significant group of Lusophile students. During his time at the University of Toulouse, he also worked with Joaquim Veríssimo Serrão, who joined as a lecturer in Portuguese in 1950. In 1953, Bourdon left Toulouse to take up the position of chair of Portuguese and Brazilian Languages and Literatures at the Sorbonne, as well as its Institute of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies. He succeeded Georges Le Gentil (1875–1953), a pioneering figure in Lusophone studies in France. Bourdon served as



director of the Institute until his retirement in 1969.

Bourdon's research in Lusophone studies spanned the 15th to the early 19th century, with a particular focus on Portuguese maritime expansion during the 16th and 17th centuries. He is credited with the French translations and annotations of the *Crónica da Guiné* [Chronicle of Guinea] by Gomes Eanes de Zurara (1410–1474) and two works by André Donelha (*Descrição da Serra Leoa* [Description of Sierra Leone] and *Rios da Guiné e de Cabo Verde* [Rivers of Guinea and Cape Verde]), who lived around 1560–1634. The first translation was published in 1960, followed by the other two in 1977. The Portuguese presence in Asia, particularly in Japan, held a prominent place in Léon Bourdon's work. He published several articles on the subject, most notably his seminal doctoral thesis, *La Compagnie de Jésus et le Japon (1547-1570)*, presented in 1949 at the former *Faculté des Lettres de Paris* [Faculty of Arts and Humanities] at the Sorbonne. This landmark contribution to the field was not published in near entirety until 1993, in a collaboration between the *Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses* [National Commission for the Commemoration of the Portuguese Discoveries] and the *Centro Cultural Português da Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian* [Portuguese Cultural Centre of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation] in Paris. It is worth noting that Bourdon maintained close ties with the Portuguese Cultural Centre from its inception in 1965. These connections were largely facilitated by his friendship with José Vitorino de Pina Martins (1920–2010), who directed the Centre from 1972 to 1983 and whose own doctoral thesis had been supervised by Bourdon. This special relationship between Bourdon and the Cultural Centre was honoured in 1982 with the publication of the 17th volume of the *Arquivos do Centro Cultural Português* [Archives of the Portuguese Cultural Centre], dedicated to him. Many of Bourdon's publications on Portuguese history and culture are now housed in the library of the former *Centro Cultural Português*, recently renamed the *Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian-Delegação* [Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation-Delegation] in France. Additionally, another volume stemming from his doctoral research, *Alexandre Valignan: visiteur de la mission japonaise de la Compagnie de Jésus (1573- 1583)*, devoted entirely to Alexandre Valignano (1539–1606), remains unpublished to this day. Some typewritten copies of Léon Bourdon's works are available for consultation in the library of *Sorbonne Paris I*.

His extensive historiographical output demonstrates his rigour and keen analytical skills, particularly in the study of Portuguese expansion and empire. His research covered religious, political, and cultural history, as well as technical subjects such as cartography and nautical science, which were of particular interest to him. In the realm of modern history, Bourdon also authored several works that examined and assessed the penetration of Humanism in Portugal. Among his notable subjects was Jerónimo Osório (1506–1580), who attracted his special attention. Drawing on unpublished documentation, Bourdon published six articles on Osório, in both French and Portuguese. Highlights include *Le voyage de Jerónimo Osório, évêque de Silves, en Italie (1576-1577)*, published in 1951, and *Novas investigações sobre a viagem de Jerónimo Osório à Itália* [New Enquiries into the Journey of Jerónimo Osório to Italy] (1576–1577), which followed the next year. Another significant contribution was his attempt to summarise the history of Humanism in Portugal in *O Humanismo e as suas relações europeias* [Humanism and Its European Relations] (1959).

From the 1970s onward, Bourdon extended his focus to the history of Portugal during the first quarter of the 19th century, particularly studying the influence of the Enlightenment on the country. The career of Abbot José Correia da Serra (1750–1823) was the subject of rigorous research by Léon Bourdon, culminating in the



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exhaustive volume José Corrêa da Serra, *ambassadeur du Royaume-Uni du Portugal et du Brésil à Washington (1916-1820)*. In the final phase of his career, Bourdon embarked on a new line of research in contemporary history, this time focusing on Brazil at the end of the colonial period. One figure, in particular, caught his attention: the French economist and industrialist Louis François de Tollenare (1780–1853). Bourdon published previously unpublished texts relating to Tollenare's time in Portugal and Brazil. These were compiled into a critical edition entitled *Notes Dominicales de L.F. de Tollenare, prises pendant son voyage en Portugal et au Brésil en 1816, 1817, 1818*, released in three volumes with extensive commentary and annotations. In addition to these contributions, which form a bibliography of forty-five titles, Bourdon's role as an indefatigable editor of the *Bulletin des Études Portugaises* is also noteworthy. Established in Coimbra in 1931, the journal was renamed *Bulletin des Études Portugaises et Brésiliennes* in 1972. Bourdon published thirty-nine critical reviews in Portuguese in this journal until the late 1970s. The Bulletin was published by the *Instituto Francês* in Lisbon, where Bourdon served as director—a role previously emphasised. As part of these responsibilities, he also directed the *Boletim do Instituto Francês de Portugal*, contributing twelve additional critical reviews, all written in French and published in 1932. Finally, it is worth emphasising that the historian's contributions to the two bulletins were not limited to the areas of research previously mentioned. French and Portuguese literature, spanning from the Middle Ages to the 20th century, also captured the curiosity and attention of this intellectual, who was deeply passionate about the history and culture of Portuguese-speaking worlds. His entire career, both institutional and academic, reflected his unwavering determination: to establish Portuguese studies as a permanent feature of French universities while simultaneously safeguarding the longstanding prestige of French culture in Portugal. The author of a substantial and influential body of work, Léon Bourdon was, alongside Charles Boxer, one of the foremost foreign experts on Portuguese maritime expansion throughout the second half of the 20th century, making a significant contribution to Portuguese-French historiography.

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