

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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BEAZLEY, Charles Raymond (Blackheath, 1868 – Birmingham, 1955)

Born on April 3rd, 1868, in Blackheath, Charles Raymond Beazley was the son of the Reverend J. Beazley. During his education, he attended prestigious British institutions, such as St. Paul's School, King's College London, and Balliol College (Oxford). He completed his bachelor's degree in 1890, his master's degree in 1893, and became D.Litt. in 1908. Shortly before finishing his bachelor, he obtained a Fellowship in History at Merton College (Oxford, 1889-1896). The following year, he became Research Fellow at the same institution, remaining there until 1909, when he joined the teacher's department of the University of Birmingham to teach subjects in the History field.

A large part of Beazley's teaching career was spent in Birmingham, where he lectured until 1933, although he has also joined other universities as visiting scholar. In 1894, he joined the University of Leeds for the summer semester. Already into the new century, he went to the United States of America, where he lectured in several institutions, such as the University of Massachusetts Lowell (1908). In 1913, he attended the Ilchester Lectures, at the University of Oxford, with lectures on Russian history. He went to France during the First World War, where he has worked for the Young Men's Christian Association, and, after the war ended, became a member of the University Delegations to France (1919), cooperating with several French universities. In the 1930s, before the emergence of the Second World War, he visited Germany multiple times as visiting scholar (1930, 1931, 1933, 1934, and 1937).

Raymond Beazley was also connected with academic societies. He became member of the Royal Geographical Society, based in London, in 1893, and joined its Council from 1919 to 1923. At the turn of the twentieth century, he became correspondent member of the Sociedade Geográfica de Lisboa (Geographical Society of Lisbon), and, in 1911, by the time of the implementation of the First Portuguese Republic, became correspondent member of the Academia das Ciências de Lisboa (Academy of Sciences of Lisbon). He also became correspondent member of the Hispanic Society of America and of the Société Archéologique de France (1913). Beazley was awarded on several occasions, not only during his education but also as an established historian, namely with the Gill Memorial prize, from the Royal Geographical Society, for his work



The Dawn of Modern Geography – perhaps his most acclaimed work – and for his contribution to the history of Geography.

Like other British historians who have shown an interest in the Portuguese history, there is still not a systematic study about the historiographical work and thought of Raymond Beazley. However, he has been considered a “historical geographer” because of having the articulation between History and Geography as the core of his work as a historian. He focused widely on the Medieval period and on topics connected to the era of maritime expansion and colonial exploration – especially in what concerns his works about the Portuguese historical past. Beazley also had an interest, already in a late stage of his career, in contemporary subjects. We shall mention in that regard *Nineteenth Century Europe and Britain* (1922) and *The Road to Ruin in Europe, 1890-1914* (1932). In the first work, the British historian considered the nineteenth century “a torch to light us forwards as well as backwards” and has highlighted the roles of the German and Russian spaces in the unfolding history of that century. He even refers that “this ‘Nineteenth Century’ time in Continental History from 1812 is, above all, German and Russian”, adding that the “German nationalism, directed by Prussia, gradually comes to lead the politics, as German intellect had already begun, in so many fields, to lead the thought of Europe” (*Nineteenth Century...*, 1922, pp. 5, 9-10). It is important, moreover, to underline his interest in the Russian historical past, visible not only in his collaboration in the extensive study *Russia from the Varangians to the Bolsheviks*, but also in the article “The Russian Expansion towards Asia and the Arctic in the Middle Ages (to 1500)”, published in *The American Historical Review*, and in multiple reviews of works about Russian history published in *The Geographical Journal*.

Among the works of the British historian, we can highlight, as we have previously mentioned, *The Dawn of Modern Geography*, published in three volumes between 1897 and 1906. This is a monumental work – perhaps the first major study of this kind –, in which Beazley addresses the history of the geographical exploration and knowledge during the Medieval period (fourth-fifteenth centuries), not only in the European space but also in a few Asian regions. In the work’s introduction, he has given a glimpse of how this is structured, dividing the Middle Ages into three different periods, and devoting a volume to each of them.

The first volume focuses on the period Beazley called “Dark Ages” (fourth-ninth centuries), as he considers that the Christian world had lagged in the geographical exploration, not only because of the “rapid, perhaps too rapid, development of the Arab mind” but also because of the work of the Buddhist propaganda. In his point of view, this period was marked by the prominence of religious conceptions in the scientific output, both at a theoretical and practical level, and by the pilgrimage and missionary journeys. He has emphasized, moreover, that religious fervour will have been the main cause of several important journeys in what concerns geographical exploration. However, that same fervour will not have allowed the acquired knowledge to be recorded scientifically because “the chiefs cosmographies or geographies are written for religious interests, and in a religious spirit” (*The Dawn...*, 1897, pp. VII, 2-3). Still in this volume, mention should be made to the chapter that Beazley has devoted to the Asian regions, focusing on Chinese and Arab geographies. The



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second volume centres on what the British historian has named Central Middle Ages (tenth-thirteenth centuries), having highlighted the voyages of the Nordics as a prelude to the Crusades and a starting point to the commercial, territorial, and spiritual expansion of the European peoples. That expansion, and a certain supplantation of the religious reasons by commercial and political motivations, allowed Christian Europe to reassume the position which had lost to the Byzantine world, and to operate a substantial change in multiple areas. We should stress, among others, the field of Geography in which will have made a significant progress.

Although these first two volumes cover an extensive chronology, especially when compared to the third and last volume, and deal with key topics in the characterisation of the medieval period, it is precisely the latter that is of more interest for the history of the Portuguese past. Taking the outcome of the Crusades as starting point of his analysis, Beazley has turned his attention to the unfolding of the fourteenth century and the beginning of the following one, focusing, on the one hand, on the journeys of some travellers in Asian territory, and, on the other hand, on the maritime campaigns undertaken by some European nations. It is in the context of these campaigns that Portugal becomes a matter of interest to the British historian. Placing the foundation of the Portuguese navy in 1317, during the reign of King Dinis – who, together with Italian navigators, led the first expedition to the Atlantic subsidized by European states –, Beazley pointed the first Portuguese maritime adventure to 1341. What is important to note, nevertheless, about the Portuguese history in *The Dawn of Modern Geography* is the role that the historian attributed to the Portuguese, namely to Prince Henry, in the transition to the modern era. According to him, the Portuguese explorations under the command of Prince Henry were “the point where «medieval» expansion really becomes a part of «modern» history” (Idem, 1906, p. 541). Subsequent events to the expeditions promoted by the prince, such as the rounding of the Cape of Good Hope and the voyages of Vasco da Gama and Christopher Columbus, define an era which, in his view, is unmistakably distinct from the Middle Ages.

Such a perspective on the Portuguese historical experience and on Prince Henry was not new in Raymond Beazley’s historiographical panorama. In an article published in 1894, under the title “The Colonial Empire of the Portuguese to the Death of Albuquerque”, the historian had already given a glimpse of his interpretation of the role of the Portuguese in the early modern era, pointing out the beginning of the maritime expansion as the turning point from the medieval to the modern world. In this article, which will have been the first one being published by Beazley on the history of Portugal, he also addressed the subject of the building of the Portuguese Empire in India. He considered, on the one hand, that the Portuguese domain in the Indian Ocean regions has, in certain aspects – and much due to its pioneering –, superior value than the presence of other European nations in that region. On the other hand, he stated that the Portuguese presence in India only acquired a truly imperial shape with the action of Afonso de Albuquerque as governor of the Portuguese State of India. Francisco de Almeida, Albuquerque’s predecessor and first Viceroy, had already taken “a more political view of things than the discoverers and traders who had preceded him”. But it was, in Beazley’s view, the first Duke of Goa who was mainly responsible for the expansion of the Portuguese domain in the region, not only



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commercially but also, and above all, politically and territorially. With his death in 1515, the Portuguese empire, considered the first colonial empire of modern Europe by the historian, would see itself reverted “to the simpler, safer, smaller ambitions of a commercial empire” (“The Colonial...”, 1894, p. 125). Although he has acknowledged that great achievements always require several heroes, Beazley has reserved to Afonso de Albuquerque a prominent position in those he has claimed to be the times of glory of the Portuguese.

As far as the history of Portugal is concerned, topics related to the maritime expansion and the Portuguese presence in the Far East were frequent subjects of analysis among British historians and geographers of the second half of the nineteenth century and beginning of the following one. Richard H. Major brought out, in 1868, a biography of Prince Henry. Frederick C. Danvers studied the rise and decline of the Portuguese empire in India, having even dedicated his work to the memory of Prince Henry. The Rise of Portuguese Power in India 1497-1550 was published by Richard S. Whiteway, who has also translated to English and edited the work of Miguel de Castanhoso under the title The Portuguese Expedition to Abyssinia in 1541-1543. In The Story of Portugal, Henry Morse Stephens distinguished the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as Portugal’s golden age, having also published a biography of Afonso de Albuquerque. Considering the references to the Portuguese past in The Dawn of Modern Geography and the article published in 1894, it becomes clear that Beazley’s work integrates this tendency of the British historiography. However, his interest in this period of Portuguese history does not end with the two studies mentioned above.

He published, in 1895, as part of the Heroes of the Nations series, the biography Prince Henry the Navigator, in which he sought to analyse the life and thought of Prince Henry in detail. Although he has followed, within the British historiographic panorama, Major’s monograph, recognizing it as one of the main sources of this work, Beazley presented a distinct perspective on the Prince by interpreting him “within a long series of European antecedents [...], while, at the same time, analysing the specific Portuguese historical time” (Jorge Borges Macedo, A Historiografia Britânica..., 1973, p. 26). Conscious of the inherent connection between eras, he advocated the idea that the life and, more importantly, the work of Prince Henry could only be entirely understood when also considering its antecedents and subsequent. It is not surprising, therefore, that the first chapters of this biography have been dedicated to the precedents of the maritime exploration of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, going back to the beginnings of the medieval geographical knowledge, the expeditions of Nordic peoples, the first Christian pilgrimage journeys, and the Crusades. All these questions would be further explored later in The Dawn of Modern Geography.

Just as Beazley stated that Prince Henry’s action could not have been accomplished – and cannot therefore be understood – “without each and every part of that many-sided preparation in the history of the past”, he has also recognized that the achievements of the following generations could not have been reached without the impetus Prince Henry gave to the maritime exploration, and without the knowledge his labour provided in the field of navigation. But the historian goes further. Although he has highlighted the achievements of Prince Henry, such as having taken the first steps in the discovery of the maritime course to India, and in the



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conversion of the indigenous peoples to Christianity, Beazley stated that the historical importance of the Prince does not lie so much in the deeds themselves, but rather in the repercussion that his action had on later generations. Admitting accepting the mythical tradition of the School of Sagres (Escola de Sagres) – present in the Portuguese historiography of the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century, and to which Beazley dedicated a chapter of the biography –, the historian considers that it was that “school of thought and practice” that enabled the navigators of following generations to achieve their deeds.

In his perspective, it was the “infinitely suggestive” character of Prince Henry’s maritime project that made him the leader of “a true Renaissance and Reformation”, and a historical figure whose work goes beyond the national borders. It is thus understandable that the life of Prince Henry comes up in Raymond Beazley’s interpretation as “the turning-point, the central epoch in a development of many years”, and that he is considered the main figure of the Portuguese past.

Throughout the book, the historian described and analysed the most remarkable events in Prince Henry’s life, and consequently in his maritime project, distinguishing different motivations to its development. He identified, on the one hand, the aspiration of discovering the maritime course to India – an idea that had been widespread in the Portuguese historiography since the sixteenth century but was questioned by Duarte Leite in the 1930s – as the primary motivation for that project. For Beazley, that plan was conceived not only “for the sake of the new knowledge itself” but also because of the power that would arise from it. Connected to this discovery, it will have been the Prince’s intention to obtain income from the explorations made along the African coast, and, later, in Asian territory. According to the historian, “the chief hope of Henry’s captains was that the wealth now flowing by the overland [...] would in time [...] go by the water way”. He underlined, on the other hand, the missionary character of the maritime enterprise of Prince Henry, considering it to be a Crusade, since that, aside from discovering and trading, the Portuguese navigators will have had the conversion of peoples to Christianity and the war against Muslims as motivation. (Prince Henry..., 1895, pp. 139-142).

Although Prince Henry is clearly the core of this biography, Beazley has presented in it an interpretation of the Portuguese past that is worth noting. The formation of Portugal and the maintenance of its independency throughout time are, as it is well known, aspects that aroused interest among foreign historians in the second half of the nineteenth century and in the first decades of the following one. Framed in the British historiographical trend of his time, Raymond Beazley advocated a “kind of social Darwinism applied to national histories”, upholding the idea that nations are among the best examples of the survival of the fittest (Jorge Borges de Macedo, *A Historiografia Britânica...*, 1973, p. 27). Portugal is, in his opinion, one of those examples, not only because it managed to keep its autonomy during the first centuries of its existence, but also because it has demonstrated resistance and a “stubborn restless independence of the people”. Such development of Portugal during the Middle Ages and the staunch defence of its independence will have enabled the Portuguese kingdom to become, according to Beazley, the most developed of all Christian kingdoms when reached the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. During this period, Portugal made use of its maritime instinct



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and took over a central position in the European transition from the Medieval to the Early Modern era, not only because of having transformed the maritime exploration into a “systematic and continuous” project, but also by making the Portuguese the “founders of our commercial civilisation, and of the European empire in Asia” (Prince Henry..., 1895, pp. 125-126, 144).

We mentioned earlier that Major’s biography, published in 1868, was one of the main sources in the making of Prince Henry The Navigator. Aside from this work, the historian has also resorted to other international studies, such as *Untersuchungen über die geographischen Entdeckungen der Portugiesen unter Heinrich dem Seefahrer* (1842), of Johann E. Wappäus, and *Henri le Navigateur et l’Académie Portugaise de Sagres...* (1890), published by Henri E. Wauwermans. However, what is important to note here is Beazley’s knowledge of Portuguese historiography on this subject, and, more importantly, of the sources from Prince Henry’s time. As far as the Portuguese historiography is concerned, the British author has pointed to *Os Filhos de D. João I*, by Oliveira Martins, as one of his main references, having also made use of Herculano’s *História de Portugal* to put in context the medieval Portugal. Regarding the sources, he often used *Crónica do Descobrimento e Conquista da Guiné...*, by Gomes Eanes de Zurara, which was well known to him as he worked on its translation to English together with Edgar Prestage. From the same chronicler, he also used *Crónica de D. João I*, having also checked the *Crónica de D. Duarte* and the *Crónica de D. Afonso V*, both published by Rui de Pina.

Even though Prince Henry The Navigator is, perhaps, Beazley’s most complete work concerning the history of Portugal, the historian would publish two papers years later, in which he took up topics mentioned in the Prince’s biography. They are “Prince Henry of Portugal and the African Crusade of the Fifteenth Century” (1910) and “Prince Henry of Portugal and his Political, Commercial, and Colonizing Work” (1912), both published in *The American Historical Review*. In them he tried to emphasize some ideas he had already presented, such as the religious character of the Portuguese maritime enterprise, considering it a Crusade, and the decisive role Prince Henry had played in the elaboration of that enterprise and in the revitalization “of those energies which makes the fifteenth century so memorable” (“Prince Henry...”, 1910, p. 12). Beazley has also contributed to reference works and journals of the historiographical and geographical fields. It should be noted the twenty-one entries he wrote for the *Dictionary of National Biography*, with emphasis on the text about Philippa of Lancaster, as well as the contribute to the renowned *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Notorious is also his participation in *The Geographical Journal* – which remains the leading journal of the Royal Geographical Society –, having published several papers and critical reviews.

Prolific author, Raymond Beazley integrated the period of the British historiography that has established itself as “a truly reliable, well-founded research trend, justified on scientific grounds and not by circumstance”, and in which elements that had not hitherto had much relevance in the British historiographical work about Portugal were highlighted. Borges de Macedo emphasized, in that regard, the “need of Portuguese documentary evidence”, and the perception that knowledge of the history of Portugal would be indispensable



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“to analyse the background of English colonial expansion”. He has also highlighted that for these historians the “function of history is not consistent with generalizations”, being recognized the need of studying the Portuguese history in its own pace, distinct from the any other reality, and, in the case of Beazley, of “defining a perspective about an European culture where the Portuguese contribution proves itself useful to a comprehensible sequence” (Jorge Borges de Macedo, “A Historiografia Britânica...”, 1973, pp. 27-29). Charles Raymond Beazley was knighted by the British Monarchy in 1931 and died on February 1st, 1955, in Birmingham.

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