

# DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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**Coelho, José Maria Latino** (Lisbon, 1825 - Sintra 1891)

José Maria Latino Coelho was a Brigadier-General in the Engineering Corps, Minister of the Navy, lecturer at the Polytechnic School, member of the General Council of Public Education, member of parliament, peer of the realm, journalist, and writer. He was born in Lisbon on 29 November 1825 and died in Sintra on 29 August 1891. His father, who also had a military background, held the rank of lieutenant colonel when he emigrated to Spain due to his liberal beliefs, only returning to settle in Lisbon in 1834.

Latino Coelho studied French, English, and the basics of mathematics and other exact sciences. In 1837, he began studying Latin at the *Liceu Nacional de Lisboa* [National Lyceum of Lisbon], and in 1838, he studied Logic and Greek. After completing his preparatory studies, he enrolled at a very young age in his first year at the Polytechnic School. He later transferred to the Army School, where he studied Military Engineering. On 14 November 1843, he enlisted in the 16th Infantry Regiment, and soon after, was promoted to ensign cadet within the same regiment. His subsequent promotions included ensign on 12 December 1848, to lieutenant on 14 July 1851, lieutenant on 29 May 1878, and brigadier-general on 19 September 1888. In 1851, while still a lieutenant, Latino Coelho was appointed substitute lecturer in Mineralogy and Geology at the Polytechnic School, following a successful examination. He also became involved in politics, joining the Regenerator Party and was elected as a member of parliament for Lisbon in the 1854 elections. He was re-elected multiple times (1857, 1860, 1862, among others) and was also elected as a Republican candidate in 1889 and 1890.

A distinguished journalist, Coelho began his career in 1849, he made his debut in the *Revolução de Setembro* [September Revolution], where he published a series of articles on the issues stirring Europe at the time and the various phases of the development of democratic ideas, which he actively supported. As a key contributor to *A Revolução* [The Revolution], he strongly opposed the government. For a time, he also served as the chief editor of *A Emancipação* [The Emancipation], a newspaper aligned with his political views: In 1851, he founded *A Semana* [The Week], a literary newspaper featuring contributions from prominent writers of the time. Some of his best articles focused on notable literary figures. He had previously written a variety of biographies and a collection of national character sketches in the *Revista Peninsular* [Iberian Peninsula Magazine].



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In *Panorama*, Coelho published a detailed and comprehensive biography of Almeida Garrett. He also wrote for *Época* [The Era], *Pharol* [Lighthouse], *Civilização Popular* [Popular Civilization], *Discussão* [Debate], *Política Liberal* [Liberal Politics], *Jornal do Comércio* [Journal of Commerce], *Democracia* [Democracy], where his elegant style and the vigour with which he addressed a wide range of topics were highly regarded. He even wrote a biography of Almeida Garrett in Spanish, which was published in *Revista Peninsular* [Iberian Peninsula Magazine]. Virtually every literary journal of the time featured his work. Additionally, he served as the director of *Diário de Lisboa* [Lisbon Daily] during its restructuring in 1859, and for an extended period, he wrote editorials for *O Século* [The Century].

The Royal Academy of Sciences accepted Latino Coelho as a full member, and shortly afterwards, in 1856, he was unanimously appointed Secretary, later becoming Perpetual Secretary. The Academy entrusted him with overseeing the *Dicionário da Língua Portuguesa* [Dictionary of the Portuguese Language], using materials from Ramalho, which had been given to Alexandre Herculano and later sold to the Academy by the late historian.

Latino Coelho was also a peer of the realm and served as Minister of the Navy from July 1868 until August 1869. He participated in various committees, including one tasked with reforming the Lisbon Academy of Fine Arts. After distancing himself from the Regenerator Party, he drew closer to members of the Historic Party (1861-63) and later the Reformist Party. He even served as Minister of the Navy under the government of Sá da Bandeira and the administration of the Bishop of Viseu (1868–69). Eventually, he adopted republican ideals, believing they offered the best protection for various citizenship rights. He was also connected to the “*Clube dos Lunáticos*,” a group disillusioned with the traditional parties involved in the rotating system of government. During the First Spanish Republic (1873-74), Latino Coelho aligned himself with the Republican Democrat group, which included figures such as Oliveira Marreca, Sousa Brandão, and Bernardino Pinheiro. He co-authored a republican programme with Elias Garcia, which was published in the periodical *A Democracia* [Democracy] on 12 October 1873. He was affiliated with the Democratic Republican Centre, though he left it in 1878, and by 1883, he was a member of the Republican Party’s executive committee. In political assemblies, he was known for speaking with the utmost correctness and dignity, offering critiques while maintaining a noble demeanour — one of his most distinctive virtues. Respected by all the parties of the time, even within the monarchical regime he opposed, Latino Coelho had true admirers who praised both his human and intellectual qualities. He was a Commander of the Order of Christ, as well as a Grand Cross of the Tower and Sword and of Our Lady of the Conception.

His vast body of work includes numerous articles published in the previously mentioned magazines, showcasing his journalistic talent, as well as countless papers published in *Memórias da Academia* [Memoirs of the Academy]. In 1852, he anonymously wrote the prologue to *Memoria escrita em língua hespanhola por um philo-portuguez e traduzida na língua portugueza por um philo-iberico* [Memoir written in Spanish by a pro-Portuguese writer and translated into Portuguese by a pro-Iberian writer] (Lisbon, 1852), a memoir by Sinibaldo



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de Más, Spain's former ambassador to China, advocating for the peaceful union of Spain and Portugal. At the time, Latino Coelho supported the Iberian union in the form of a unitary, monarchical state. In 1859, he prefaced another Iberianist work, *A União Ibérica* [The Iberian Union], written by federalist Xisto Câmara, a radical democrat who had gone into exile in Lisbon. However, in a session of the Chamber of Peers in 1869, during which he faced significant criticism, Latino Coelho renounced this youthful ideal in a speech while serving as Minister of the Navy. In *Portugal Artístico* [Artistic Portugal] (1853), he authored most of the articles that accompanied the corresponding illustrations, written in both French and Portuguese. His writings also include numerous historical tributes, including works dedicated to figures such as D. Frei Francisco de S. Luis, Rodrigo da Fonseca Magalhães, and José Bonifácio de Andrade e Silva. He also published another biography of Almeida Garrett in *Panorama*. A substantial portion of his extensive body of work, encompassing both books and articles, reflects the ideology of a progressive thinker who, with the establishment of a republican regime, focused on advancing citizenship rights.

His most well-known work, which remains a crucial source for studying Portuguese pre-liberalism due to its informative value, is undoubtedly *História Política e Militar de Portugal desde os Fins do Século XVIII até 1814*, Volume I, 1874 [Political and Military History of Portugal from the Late 18th Century to 1814, Volume 1, 1874], with two additional volumes published later. Following a public tender, the author was officially commissioned by the Minister of War to complete this work. The aim was to "gather the sayings and examples of the collective defence effort" (Vol. I, p. XXI), which reveals a clear intention to highlight not only individual determination but also the collective efforts that helped shape what was then referred to as the national character. The first two volumes focus on the country's political and social landscape, considering both the domestic situation and international relations. The third volume delves into events related to the Peninsular War, offering a detailed account that intertwines political developments with military successes.

The information was largely sourced from the archives of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, the Navy, the former Ministry of War, the Ministry of the Kingdom, the ANTT (mainly papers from the Police Intendency and the Inquisition), the Royal Academy of Sciences, and the National Library. In the introduction, the author presents a rationalist concept of history based on the "harsh laws of induction and experimental criticism," even regarding it as a natural science (Vol. I, p. XXVII). Thus, his call for impartiality "without false patriotism" is unsurprising. However, he insisted on highlighting Portugal's "legitimate glories," which had often been overlooked by British historians. In Latino Coelho's work, the concept of history as a science — prevalent in European historiography at the time, as seen with Fustel de Coulanges in France — coexists with the classical Ciceronian notion of history as the teacher of life. He embraces this idea in a forward-looking sense, stressing the importance of learning from the moral examples and mistakes of the past for the collective good. His work features a predominant narrative dimension, and his eclectic approach to history is noteworthy, blending the scientific concept of history with an abstract notion of Providence as a unifying principle. Equally notable is how Latino Coelho embraced the legacy of the 18th century in his own time. It is no coincidence that he



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dedicated a study to the Marquis of Pombal, whom he regarded as a precursor of liberalism and democracy — a new man rewarded by merit (O Marquês de Pombal, Part I, pp. 7, 126). These foundational ideas were especially celebrated by the republican movement.

Latino Coelho also produced other studies that, although minor, set him apart among 19th-century historians. One example is his biographies of Camões and Vasco da Gama. In these two historical figures, Coelho saw ideal embodiments of "citizens of humanity" (Vasco da Gama, Vol. I, p. 21). An ecumenical ideal of fraternity and unity among peoples permeates his works, reflecting his alignment with the republicanism to which he adhered. Perhaps this is why he prioritized these figures in his project for the *Galeria de Varões Ilustres de Portugal* [Gallery of Illustrious Men of Portugal], which was to be published by David Corazzi. The goal was to inspire admiration for heroes and benefactors of humanity who had excelled in various fields. This project shows a clear positivist influence, especially when it attempts to explain national destiny by referencing a "fatal and necessary law" that claims all peoples living on narrow seashores become "fearless adventurers" (as with the Phoenicians, Portuguese, or Dutch) (Vasco da Gama, p. 72).

Additionally, there is a cultural nationalism rooted in Portugal's history of resisting external threats. This doctrinal influence is evident in his interpretation of *Os Lusíadas*, where he emphasises the poem's defence of the people and its critique of 16th-century monarchs and high-ranking officials as key elements (Luiz de Camões, 1880, pp. 174–175). Latino Coelho also translated plays by the popular French author Victorien Sardou. The plays he translated include the five-act comedy *Les vieux garçons*, staged as *Solteirões* at the Príncipe Real and D. Maria II theatres, as well as the four-act comedy *Les Ganaches*, staged as *Caturras* at the D. Maria II theatre. On 11 December 1898, a formal session was held at the Royal Academy of Sciences, during which a historical tribute was paid to Latino Coelho. Speeches were delivered by Tomás Ribeiro and Sousa Monteiro, with King Carlos, Queen Amélia, and Infante Afonso in attendance.

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