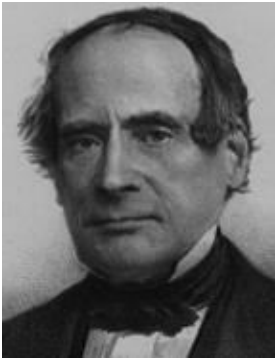


DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

<http://dichp.bnportugal.pt/>



DENIS, Jean Ferdinand (Paris, 1798 - Paris, 1890)

Ferdinand Denis was the son of Joseph-André Denis, a French civil servant whose mastery of languages had a great influence on his son. His father held the post of sworn interpreter at the *Conseil des Prises Maritimes* and, intermittently, in the political section of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (headed at that time by Talleyrand).

Denis studied Turkish at home in order to prepare himself to try to enter the *École des Jeunes de Langues* (future School of Oriental Languages). He did not win a place either in 1810 or in 1813. Léon Bourdon, one of his biographers, mentions that although the Denis family had limited financial resources, at that time they lived on the aristocratic Left Bank of the Seine (Léon Bourdon, *Lettres familières et Fragment du Journal intime de Ferdinand Denis à Bahia...*, 1957, pp. 145-148).

His father had a library that was well stocked with works of the Enlightenment. He also received both men of letters and of science, among whom was the Portuguese poet Filinto Elísio, who, according to Bourdon, gave the young Ferdinand Portuguese lessons. His intellectual training as a self-taught man of letters was marked by the confluence of different disciplines (including literature, history, geography, ethnography and linguistics), which was much in tune with the spirit of the age, and resulted in a wide-ranging critical perspective of the culture of his time. As has been mentioned elsewhere, although Denis was “destined for a diplomatic career, he preferred to study languages and to travel the World”, typical passions of the Romantic man although not very profitable in the short and medium term (A. de Oliveira, “Denis (Ferdinand)”, *Verbo – Enclopédia Luso-Brasileira...*, vol. 8, 1999, column 1238).

With the fall of the Empire, the young Ferdinand sought to make his own living in the East, and so left for Brazil in search of a ship that would take him to Portuguese Goa. However, what he had expected to be a stay of just a few weeks in Rio de Janeiro and Baía became a two-year long visit (1817-19), turning him into a passionate enthusiast of the stunning landscapes of the practically virgin territory. His letters and diary reveal his ideas and also show his first attempts to express himself in a literary manner. His contact with the realities of Brazil was hard in social and political terms (the Pernambuco republican uprising occurred at that time), but exciting as far as literature and history were concerned. This contact dictated the future of the

young man who, although aspiring to a diplomatic career, would instead dedicate a large part of his life to the discovery, study and publication of Portuguese and Spanish manuscripts.

With the enthusiasm of one who was experiencing cultural universes that were little known beyond the borders of the United Kingdom of Portugal, Brazil and the Algarves (and together with the wonder born of direct observation), even before he reached the age of majority Denis published *Le Brésil, ou histoire, mœurs, usages et coutumes de ce royaume* (in 6 vols., Paris, 1821-22) in collaboration with Hippolyte Taunay, son of the famous painter Taunay who was part of the French artistic mission in Brazil. Denis is also known to have been in Portugal and Spain, probably during the period of the liberal regimes in the two countries (1820-23). He published works about South America once again in 1823 (*Buenos Aires et le Paraguay*) and in 1825 (*Résumé de l'histoire du Brésil*, adopted shortly afterwards by Brazilian schools). As the young Brazilian nation was born, Europe's interest in its cultural and historical identity grew as did the literary career of Denis.

In 1826, when D. Pedro IV imposed the *Carta Constitucional* (Constitutional Charter) on Portugal, Denis published *Résumé de l'histoire littéraire du Portugal, suivi de l'histoire littéraire du Brésil*. Despite his youth, the author was already able to make informed comments about "the writing of European literary histories" and about the scarcity of various Portuguese works mentioned by Sismondi (which Heinrich Schaefer would also complain about a decade later), a difficulty which in his case he was able to overcome owing to some "amis des lettres" (pp. VII-VIII and XXII-XXIII). He ends his introduction with the wish that the book might prove useful to the readers: "puisse-t-il donner le désir d'étudier la littérature d'un peuple que ses institutions ont rendu en peu de temps si intéressant pour le reste de l'Europe!" (p. XXV).

The work is not divided into equal parts, which is logical if we compare the long history of Portuguese literature with the recent nature of its Brazilian counterpart. Thus, thirty-four chapters are dedicated to Portuguese literature and some very recent events are mentioned such as the founding of the Lisbon Academy of Sciences in 1779 (chap. XXX). The final eight chapters are devoted to Brazil. Portuguese literary history is divided into five periods, with the first covering the 14th and 15th centuries and the last one ending with the death of Filinto Elísio in the 19th century. The author considers this to be an innovation since an additional period immediately following the death of Camões is included, which is a period he considers had not yet been touched by the decadence of Portuguese poetry (pp. IX-XVIII).

Ferdinand Denis soon became a literary figure and writer who was fully integrated in Parisian intellectual life and the book publishing world. He collaborated on literary journals and their respective editorial projects, generally encyclopaedias or literary anthologies, some of which were dedicated to the Iberian Peninsula (for example, *La Péninsule: tableau pittoresque de l'Espagne et Portugal*). His name appears among the various well-known collaborators on this publication like the Duchess of Abrantes, Laborde, Nodier, Bory de Saint-Vicent, Merimée, Vigny, Dumas and Silvestre Pinheiro Ferreira (Visconde de Santarém, *Inéditos...*, 1914, p.

72). He does not appear to have had any other profession or way of earning a living until very late in life. In 1833 he contributed to the specialised collection *Chefs d'Oeuvres Étrangers... traduits en Français* with a volume dedicated to some Portuguese playwrights and then in 1837 he did the same for the *L'Univers Pittoresque* collection with a volume dedicated to Brazil. At the start of the following decade he was given the task of redrafting the volume on Portugal. It should be remembered that in the German-speaking world it was Schaefer who was responsible for the volumes dedicated to Portugal and Spain in a series on the history of European states.

In 1838 he was appointed librarian of the Sainte-Geneviève Library in Paris and three years later he was made curator, which was a significant professional change for him. He continued with his work as a document researcher and in 1837 reported the existence of Gomes Eanes de Zurara's manuscript *Crónica da conquista da Guiné* in the Royal Library of Paris. Two years later he also became the librarian at the Ministry of Public Instruction.

Publication of his two-volume *Chroniques chevaleresques de l'Espagne et du Portugal...* in 1839 had an unexpected impact on the historical studies and literature dedicated to Portugal and its cultural reality. This work is an anthology of original medieval and Renaissance sources of chronicles and dramas in the Romantic style, like those of Alexandre Herculano, Almeida Garrett and Castilho. Like Schaefer with his *Geschichte von Portugal* (1836-39), Denis sought to call Europe's attention to Portugal's rich institutional, political and diplomatic history. He succeeded in showing that there was an extremely rich body of literature in the Iberian Peninsula capable of quenching Europe's thirst for strong emotions and authentic narratives. He writes in the introduction to the work: "S'il est en effet une source nouvelle d'émotions ardentes, de sensations inattendues, de révélations curieuses, c'est dans les vieilles chroniques de la Péninsule qu'il faut aller les chercher. On parle sans cesse de ces livres à demi oubliés, on les cite chaque jour, on va même jusqu'à les admirer sur parole; on ne les connaît pas" (*Chroniques chevaleresques de l'Espagne et du Portugal...*, I, 1839, p. I).

Denis also caused a sensation in this work with his description of his (re)discovery of the *Crónica da Conquista da Guiné* manuscript which had been lost for centuries and which would ensure the figure and deeds of the Infante D. Henrique (Prince Henry the Navigator) would leave their mark on posterity (*Idem*, volume II, pp. 43-53). Although it was not Denis who published the work or wrote the commentary – this was done by the Viscount of Santarém – it was the discovery and other deeds of this "Frenchman by birth and Portuguese at heart", as his friend António Feliciano de Castilho said of him, that earned him well-deserved official recognition from Portugal for all his hard work which had lasted over a decade and through which he had spread knowledge of the riches and treasures of Portuguese culture (Henrique de Campos Ferreira Lima, *Cartas dirigidas pelo conde de Raczynski a Ferdinand Denis...* [Letters written by Count Raczynski to Ferdinand Denis...], 1932, p. 21).

It was for this reason that in both 1829 and 1835 Castilho tried to get Denis admitted as a correspondent member of the Lisbon Academy of Sciences, but this would only come about many years later in 1855. In the late 1820s and early 1830s, the Academy's work was practically stagnant and, in the middle of D. Miguel's reign, showed it was not capable of opening up to the outside world or to new types of cultural production. We should also remember that for a long time there were no important innovations in Portuguese historiography besides the erudite diplomatic tradition of the late 18th century: only in 1846 did Herculano publish the first volume of his *História de Portugal* (History of Portugal) whose subsequent volumes were in fact harshly criticized some years later by several members of the Academy itself in relation to the 'Miracle of Ourique'. Castilho also reported that a copy of the *Chroniques Chevaleresques...* had been offered to Queen D. Maria II in 1842, with a discreet suggestion that the author should be awarded an honour. This did in fact happen in September 1843 when he was decorated with the *Ordem da Conceição* (Order of the Immaculate Conception) (*Revista Universal Lisbonense*, vols. II, 18/8/1842, n° 46, pp. 544-45 e III, 14/12/1843, n° 17, p. 206).

On several occasions Denis entered on a collision course with a handful of Portuguese authors. One of these was Almeida Garrett, who the French writer accused three times of plagiarizing his ideas and texts. Two of these accusations were made in 1826 when Denis claimed that Garrett had copied his ideas, first in *Camões* (1825) with ideas taken from his work *Scènes de la nature dans les tropiques et de leur influence sur la poésie; suivies de Camoens et Jozé Indio* (1824), and then in *Bosquejo da história da poesia e língua portuguesa* (Outline of the history of Portuguese poetry and language) (1826), with ideas taken from his work *Résumé de l'histoire littéraire du Portugal...*

In 1839, Garrett apologized in the 2nd edition of *Camões* for what had happened. This did not prevent a third instance arising in 1844 at the time of the publication of *Frei Luís de Sousa*, which Denis claimed was based on his 1835 novel in two volumes, *Luiz de Souza* (José da Silva Terra, "Os emigrados liberais portugueses em França", 1983, pp. 330-335). Even if Castilho supported Denis in his accusations, some of the most authoritative scholars in the 20th century who studied the question relativize the importance of the matter; such is the case of Georges Le Gentil (Henrique de Campos Ferreira Lima, *Cartas dirigidas pelo conde de Raczynski...*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 22 and n. 1). Today the question has been reduced to its proper proportions, especially after the classic reconstitution of Garrett's literary creative processes undertaken by Professor Ofélia Paiva Monteiro in *A Formação de Almeida Garrett. Experiência e Criação* (The Formation of Almeida Garrett. Experience and Creation) (Coimbra, 1971, 2 vols.) Its true significance should be viewed in the light of the cultural habits of the time, forms of inspiration and aesthetic choices, which were especially sensitive when it came to delineating paths of innovation as was clearly the case with Garrett. In addition, the whole affair was not unconnected to the problem of personal relationships and personal solidarity. As is well known, Garrett's references to Castilho's work were far from enthusiastic. In short, such differences of

opinion should not be confused with plagiarism in the meaning that the word has today.

Relations with another Portuguese writer, the exiled Viscount of Santarém, also appear not to have been easy. D. Miguel's former Foreign Minister had dedicated himself wholeheartedly to the study of Portuguese antiquities in Paris. On realising the importance of the manuscript Denis had discovered in 1837 and made public in 1839, Santarém sought to copy the entire text at the end of 1839 and at the beginning of 1840 in collaboration with the official representative of Portugal in France, the Viscount of Carreira. However, neither the Committee for Manuscript Conservation at the Royal Library in Paris nor the French Ministry of Public Instruction were formally asked for their authorisation. Denis naturally did not appreciate this underhand manoeuvre of the Portuguese Viscounts, who even so still managed to carry out their project and published the *Crónica da Conquista da Guiné* in 1841.

The Portuguese-Brazilian historian and geographer Varnhagen, who was living at the time in Lisbon, also did not appreciate the secrecy with which the manuscript had been copied, studied and printed in Paris without the Academy of Sciences (of which he was an enthusiastic and prolific correspondent member) being formally informed. Thus in some of his own texts he directed certain criticisms at the Viscount of Santarém in relation to Zurara and his principal work (*Revista Universal Lisbonense*, nº 3, de 14/10/1841, pp. 34-36).

Santarém and Varnhagen were at the time at different stages of their careers as historians and geographers, which is only natural given the 25-year age difference between them. Since 1839 they had been criticizing each other's works relating to the geography of Brazil and to historical sources and facts about the country, especially with regard to the reliability and veracity of Amerigo Vespucci's voyages. In 1839-1840 both were seeking to break out of relative anonymity and to become more widely known through publishing the complete annotated text of a hitherto unpublished historical document that was central to Portugal's historical culture: this was the most famous of all Zurara's chronicles, which was directly linked to the image and memory of the Infante D. Henrique. By managing to do this, the Viscount of Santarém thereby associated his name with a historical document that was shortly to become intimately linked with the political policy of mobilizing documental and critical resources to safeguard the prestige of the Portuguese Discoveries; and to simultaneously protect historically legitimated territorial rights in West Africa in response to France's pretensions and territorial occupation of the Casamance.

In 1841 Denis once again showed the European world his interest in Portuguese culture when he published *Camoens et ses contemporains*, the preface to a new French edition of the *Lusíadas*. The reading public had already become used to learning more about certain figures of primary importance in Portuguese and Brazilian history by reading the biographical articles Denis published in the collective work *Nouvelle Biographie Générale*.

However, his main and most enduring legacy for Portuguese culture was undoubtedly his 1846 *Le*



Portugal Pictoresque. In a single volume but without dividing the material into chapters (only into unnumbered paragraphs), Denis first analyses the main facts of Portuguese history from the time of Count D. Henrique (Count Henry of Burgundy) up to the Pombaline reform of the University of Coimbra in 1772. Then follow pages dedicated to geography, statistics, nineteenth century art and national monuments, and a conclusion that sums up the most recent historical data from 1807 to 1834 with some interesting comments and bibliographical references to the dramatic political events of 1828 to 1834.

Le Portugal Pictoresque is a compact work written in simple language with a useful index of themes and cited authors as well as engraved illustrations. It was the result of the author's collection and compilation of sources for over two decades and of his continuous creative effort. Originally published in instalments, it was almost immediately translated into Portuguese in five volumes (1846-1848) with the title and subtitle *Portugal Pictoresco ou descrição histórica deste reino* (Picturesque Portugal or the historical description of this kingdom) and it became an instant success and an editorial phenomenon. How was it possible, though, that a work organized in one single volume in French turned into several volumes in Portuguese? The Portuguese edition has the words "Publicada por uma Sociedade" (Published by a Society), that is to say, a group of scholars or men of letters who set out to adapt it to the new liberal Portugal, dividing it up in a more practical way, adding a fourth volume dedicated to artistic and archaeological monuments, places and cultural traditions (in the style of a guidebook or tourist itinerary) and even a fifth volume devoted to the narration of the most tragic episodes of the Portuguese Inquisition. This popular French *feuilletoniste* concept as a way to spread historical and cultural knowledge is in fact present in the original volume which seems to be mainly a collection of historical and literary episodes and narratives taken from various sources, even from earlier texts by the author (for example, the preface about Camões he had published in 1841).

Despite this, it is important to reflect upon the significance of the publication in Paris of a work that, while describing the principal facts and episodes of Portuguese history in a light-hearted picturesque way, also highlighted the theme of the Inquisition, a topic Alexandre Herculano would explore some years later. In point of fact, in both the French and Portuguese editions, various compliments are paid to the young Portuguese writer and some passages are transcribed from his work, which began to be published in the same year.

While Herculano developed the more erudite line of Germanic influence in his methodological orientation, following the steps taken by Schaefer the previous decade, Denis reinforced and pointed to an alternative path - that of a popular, descriptive and non-problematizing history full of unique narrative episodes in the style of Augustin Thierry, or, as had happened in earlier works, using extracts from literary and dramatic sources. This second conception of historical writing was greeted with such enthusiasm that, decades later, Pinheiro Chagas would take a predominant role in the publication of *História de Portugal desde os tempos mais remotos até à actualidade, escrita segundo o plano de F. Denis* (History of Portugal from the most

remote times to the current day, written according to the plan of F. Denis), 1867-74.

For all these reasons, and especially as he was a scholar and an expert user of literary and poetic sources and sources from other cultural areas, Ferdinand Denis does not represent a total break with the mythical historiographical past of the political-institutional traditions of the former regime, as Schaefer and Herculano did. He thus remains silent on the subject of the mythological nature of the 'Miracle of Ourique'; he partially reproduces the *Auto* (Record) of the *Cortes* of Lamego; he considers D. Afonso Henriques the main agent for obtaining independence (and not his nobility, as Herculano does). He lingers over and spends time on a wide-ranging study of the Middle Ages and the Modern Era and on their main political, military and literary facts. He enlarges the concept of history and opens it up "to areas until then despised" as well as to new general perspectives (Sérgio Campos Matos, *Historiografia e memória Nacional...*, 1998, p. 234), thus following Herculano's reading of history in his *Cartas sobre a História de Portugal* (Letters about the History of Portugal), but never ceasing to be a divulgator of culture. He wrote an encyclopaedic history of Portugal, not innovating but instead enriching historical knowledge with passages chosen from the best authors, chronicles and scholars. For a long time he was fascinated by the written expression of what he identified as Portuguese cultural originality and strove to "recover the memory of forgotten heroes" of the Portuguese overseas expansion, emphasizing the importance of the *Crónica da Guiné* and transcribing and commenting on long passages from Zurara's work (Ferdinand Denis, *Portugal pitoresco...* vol. I, 1846, pp. 141-147).

As a result, Ferdinand Denis did not become part of the collective movement that enshrined an actively liberal view of Portuguese history which emerged with the 1820 revolution and which found in José Liberato, Almeida Garrett and Alexandre Herculano its most well-known proponents; this was a movement that even today still defines a certain notion of nation, progress, decadence, a Golden Age in Portugal's past (15th and 16th centuries) and an optimistic vision of Portugal's future, thanks to the veneration of the sciences, letters and history as a means for national reconciliation and regeneration.

Although older than Herculano and Garrett, Denis ends by not only opening up for them the path to a more general, romantic and literary reading of Portuguese history but also he himself follows the path they had both developed. This is particularly so with the Portuguese edition of his work that refers to a *picturesque* Portugal, defined as such by its cultural, moral and political traditions and by the richness of its material and intellectual production, which just begged to be made known and respected in the heart of a Europe of free and cultured nations. The same is also true of his way of narrating this same historical and cultural reality in paragraphs and not in chapters. In short, both the figure and the work of this French author had strong repercussions on Portuguese historical culture among the reading public and the intellectual community in Portugal and Brazil. For several decades, he counted Varnhagen, Castilho, D. Pedro II of Brazil and Count Raczynski among his personal friends and correspondents; Ramalho Ortigão and Júlio de Castilho visited him in Paris in 1868 and 1881; Francisco Freire de Carvalho and Teófilo Braga refer to his

pivotal role as a scholar and a spreader of Portuguese literature (Afonso Arinos de Melo Franco, *Algumas cartas copiadas no arquivo de Ferdinand Denis*, 1943, *passim* and Álvaro Manuel Machado, *Les romantismes au Portugal...*, 1986, pp. 383 and 394). After Garrett's death (1854), the Academy of Sciences welcomed Denis as a foreign member on 10th May 1855.

Ferdinand Denis became an administrator of the Sainte-Geneviève Library in 1865 and left his personal stamp on the institution along with a handwritten diary relating to the years 1830 to 1848, in which he refers ironically to “many men of letters of his time” such as Vigny, Chateaubriand, Hugo and Michelet, but also (naturally) to Garrett and the Viscount of Santarém.

After 1846, Denis became a clearly influential model in Portugal. He revitalized the artistic, literary and historical studies of a new generation of key figures such as D. Fernando II, Herculano, Raczyński, Juromenha and Varnhagen, who was already in Spain at that time. He continued writing and published other titles (among which *Une fête brésilienne célébrée à Rouen en 1550* in 1850) practically until his death, a nonagenarian who had been forced to retire just a short while before from the Sainte-Geneviève Library. For the whole of the 20th century he remained the incontestable patron of Portuguese studies in France, influencing several generations of French Lusophiles such as Georges Le Gentil, Léon Bourdon and Jean du Pins, some of whom had their work published by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in Paris.

The model applied by Denis to the study of sources and to a picturesque and popular view of the History of Portugal was followed in Portugal from the end of the 19th century to the late 1930s by figures like Teófilo Braga, Pinheiro Chagas and Barbosa Colen. They naturally had access to other intellectual tools and were able to draw on other sources, unknown in his time. Denis's chief legacy was the idea of popular history divulged in instalments but with a solid scientific base, open to a more generalist public, focusing on curiosities and anecdotal aspects of Portuguese history but at the same time clarifying obscure points and giving access to an aggregate view of the whole.

Works by the author: *Le Brésil, ou histoire, moeurs, usages et coutumes de ce royaume* (in collaboration with Hippolyte Taunay), 6 vols., Paris, Nepveu, 1821-1822; *Résumé de l'histoire du Brésil*, Paris, 1825; *Résumé de l'histoire littéraire du Portugal, suivi de l'histoire littéraire du Brésil*, Paris, Lecointe et Durey, 1826; *Chefs d'Oeuvres Étrangers... traduits en Français*, Paris, Chez l'Advocat, Libraire, 1833; *Brésil Pictoresque*, Paris, Firmin Didot Frères, Editeurs 1837; *Chroniques chevaleresques de l'Espagne et du Portugal, suivies du Tisserand de Ségovie, drame du XVIIe siècle, publiées par Ferdinand Denis, bibliothécaire de l'Instruction publique*, Paris, Ledoyen, 1839; *Camoens et ses contemporains*, Paris, Librairie de Charles Gosselin, 1841; *Le Portugal Pictoresque*, Paris, Firmin Didot Frères, Editeurs, 1846 (*Portugal pictoresco ou descrição histórica deste reino. Por M. Fernando Denis. Publicada (sic) por uma Sociedade*, Lisboa, Tipografia de L.C. da Cunha, 1846-1848, 5 vols.); FRANCO, Afonso Arinos de Melo,



Algumas cartas copiadas no arquivo de Ferdinand Denis, Coimbra, Coimbra Editora, 1943 (separata in *Brasília*, vol. II); BOURDON, Léon, *Lettres familières et Fragment du Journal intime de Ferdinand Denis à Bahia (1816-1819)*, Coimbra, Coimbra Editora, 1957.

Works with references to the author: GENTIL, Georges Le, “Ferdinand Denis, iniciador dos estudos portugueses e brasileiros”, *Biblos* (Revista da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa), vol. IV, tomos VII e VIII, Coimbra, Oficinas da “Coimbra Editora”, 1928, pp. 293-323; LIMA, Henrique de Campos Ferreira, *Cartas dirigidas pelo conde de Raczynski a Ferdinand Denis. Prefaciadas e anotadas por...*, Lisboa, 1932 (separata in *Revista História*); MACHADO, Álvaro Manuel, *Les romantismes au Portugal. Modeles étrangers et orientations nationales*, Paris, Fondation Calouste Gulbenkian/Centre Culturel Portugais, 1986; MATOS, Sérgio Campos, *Historiografia e Memória Nacional no Portugal do século XIX (1846-1898)*, Lisboa, Edições Colibri, 1998, *passim* (but especially pp. 78, 90-91, 150-151, 214, 234-70, 316 e 409); MELLO, Cristina, “Denis (Ferdinand)”, *Biblos. Enciclopédia Verbo das Literaturas de Língua Portuguesa*, vol.2, Lisboa, Editorial Verbo, 1997, colunas 33-35; OLIVEIRA, A. de, “Denis (Ferdinand)”, *Verbo – Enciclopédia Luso-Brasileira de Cultura* (Edição século XXI), vol. 8, Lisboa/São Paulo, Editorial Verbo, 1999, coluna 1238; TERRA, José da Silva, “Os emigrados liberais portugueses em França”, in *Les Rapports culturels et littéraires entre le Portugal et la France (Actes du Colloque. Paris, 11-16 Octobre 1982)*, Paris, Fondation Calouste Gulbenkian/Centre Culturel Portugais, 1983, pp. 323-338; TORGAL, Luís Reis Torgal, “A história de Portugal vista de fora”, in Luís Reis Torgal, José Maria Amado Mendes e Fernando Catroga, *História da História em Portugal (séculos XIX-XX)*, Lisboa, Círculo de Leitores, 1996, pp. 345-347.

Daniel Estudante Protásio



APOIOS:

