

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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FIGUEIREDO, Fidelino de Sousa (Lisbon, 1888 - Lisbon, 1967)

Fidelino de Sousa Figueiredo, the son of army officer José de Sousa Figueiredo and Rosa Augusta Coelho da Fonseca (de Figueiredo), undertook his secondary education (1899-1906) at the former Liceu Central de Lisboa, and then entered the Curso Superior de Letras (1906-1910) where he completed his Historical Geography course with the submission of his thesis entitled *Educação da Abstracção* [Education of Abstraction]. In 1910, he was hired as a History and Philosophy teacher at the Liceu da Lapa. On February 9, 1911, he married Dulce Elisa Lobo da Costa (Figueiredo). That same year, he was appointed permanent teacher at the Liceu de Faro.

Along with Cristovão Aires, David Lopes and José Leite de Vasconcelos, he created the Sociedade Nacional de História [National History Society] between April and May 1911, later renamed the Sociedade Portuguesa de Estudos Históricos [Portuguese Society of Historical Studies](SPHE). By bringing together various prominent personalities from different political backgrounds on the Portuguese cultural scene, both within the scope of the Society itself and in the *Revista de História*, Fidelino gained visibility in the field of Portuguese historiography.

In 1913 he was transferred to the João de Deus and Gil Vicente Liceus in Lisbon. He worked for the Ministry of Public Instruction on several occasions: drafting a history syllabus for secondary education (1914), in line with the SPEH's aims of renewing national historical studies; Chief of Staff to the Minister of Public Instruction during the Sidonist period (1917-18), and extraordinary examiner at the Escolas Normais Superiores of the Universities of Lisbon and Coimbra. (1926-27).

In recognition of his intellectual work in History, Literature and Literary Criticism, he was elected a corresponding member of the Lisbon Academy of Sciences in 1915. In 1917, he ran as candidate for the Lisbon City Council on the Unionist Party ticket and began his active political life. In 1918, he was appointed Director of the National Library, the most important position of this period, resuming this post in 1927, during the military dictatorship.

Most of his intense political activity was seen during Sidónio's "New Republic", of which he was a staunch supporter, having been elected assemblyman for Silves (Jul. 1918-Fev. 1919).

In 1919, by now a figure of academic renown, his appointment at the Faculty of Letters in Porto was



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unanimously approved. This was also the case in 1922, when he was appointed professor at the Escola Normal Superior in Lisbon. In 1920, he made his first trip to Brazil as a speaker, taking up his position as honorary professor at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters in Rio de Janeiro and as a corresponding member of the Brazilian Historical and Geographical Institute.

Between 1921 and 1925, he ran as candidate for assemblyman for the Monarchist Cause in the Lisbon constituency on three occasions. In open opposition to the republican regime, he defended political solutions from the nationalist right, in particular the establishment of a strong regime, with a charismatic leadership, taking Sidonism as a model. It was also in this context that he assumed direction of the journals *Portugália - Revista de Tradição, Cultura e Renovação Nacional* [Portugália-Journal of Tradition, Culture and National Renewal] (1925-1926), agency of the Conservative Monarchist Youth, and *Vasco da Gama* (1925-1927).

After May 28, 1926, and in view of the military's inability to resolve the political situation, on August 12, 1927, Fidelino took part in the "Fifis" coup and was subsequently arrested and deported to Angola. That was the end of his active participation in politics. Having managed to escape during the journey, he took refuge in Spain until 1929-30. He taught at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters at the University of Madrid, wrote for the newspaper *El Debate* and was a correspondent for the *Diário de Pernambuco*.

On the strength of his international prestige as an intellectual he gave a conference at the Ibero-American Institute in Prague in 1929 by invitation of the government, and taught at the National Autonomous University of Mexico in 1931, at the University of Berkeley - California (1931-32 and 1936-37) and at the Universities of São Paulo (1938-39 and 1941-51) and Rio de Janeiro - University of Brazil (1939-41). In recognition of his Hispanophilia, he was elected Honorary Member of the American Association of Teachers of Spanish in 1953.

As a speaker and essayist, his life was spent in Portugal, Spain, the United States, Mexico, Argentina and particularly Brazil, where he lived a considerable part of his life. These experiences are reflected in his works, especially in the variety of subjects covered, ranging from History to Literature, Literary Criticism to Cinema, Music and Journalism.

In 1951 he was diagnosed with a neurovascular health problem, forcing him to return to Portugal where he died in 1967.

His official public recognition came in 1957 with the award of the *Grã-Cruz do Cruzeiro do Sul* [Grand Cross of the Order of the Southern Cross] (Brazil) and the *Grande Oficialato de Santiago da Espada* [Grand Officer of the Order of Saint James of the Sword] (Portugal). He received an award from the *Diário de Notícias* for his literary oeuvre, and his book *Um Homem na sua Humanidade* [A Man in His Humanity] was launched.

Fidelino de Figueiredo was in constant dialogue with the intellectual elite of his time, as attested by his extensive correspondence. He was also a regular contributor to national and foreign newspapers and journals, with articles published in over 120 periodicals.

Fidelino's political involvement only lasted until 1927, when he took part in an attempted military coup (the "Fifis" coup), which led to his imprisonment and exile. He was a politician of secondary importance in the 1st



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Republic. Seen as a man of culture, his speeches focused on defending an attitude of ethical and ideological coherence. He was an outspoken conservative and nationalist and in 1915, as well as being a member of Brito Camacho's Republican Union, he also joined the National League. In 1918, he left the party when the Unionists stopped supporting Sidónio Pais. He ran for the Lisbon City Council elections (November 4, 1917), was an assemblyman (1918-19) and a candidate for parliament (1921, 1922 and 1925). Following the path of Sidonism, he joined the Conservative Republican Party in 1919. In the events of October 19, 1921 ("Bloody Night"), Fidelino was on the list of personalities to be arrested and possibly murdered, which did not occur owing to the fact that he was not at home. It was from then on that his political stance became more radical, more "out of protest against the Republic", and he became more aligned with the Monarchist Cause, where he collaborated as an independent on the electoral lists (1921 and 1922) and as a fully-fledged candidate in this political area in 1925.

As an opponent of parliamentarianism, he saw in the military dictatorship the possibility of overcoming the political crisis that was dragging down the liberal regime. However, he soon became disillusioned with its lack of direction and, above all, the lack of strong political leadership on the part of the new rulers. It was on this basis that he took part in the unsuccessful coup attempt (12-08-1927) which would mark the end of his active political involvement.

Fidelino de Figueiredo gained prominence on the Portuguese historiographical scene when, at the age of 22, he published the essay *O Espírito Histórico* [The Historical Spirit] (1910). This was followed by the foundation of the Sociedade Nacional de História, and then the Sociedade Portuguesa de Estudos Históricos (1911), the aim of which was to renew historical studies in Portugal. Shaped by the historiographical influence of Alexandre Herculano, Fidelino's work was developed on two fronts: combating the dominant positivist conception by rejecting objective and timeless truth and, on the other hand, creating a methodological corpus based on the relativity of historical knowledge and the relationship between the past and the present. Influenced by H. Berr's ideas in this regard, he encouraged the production of works that would synthesize the knowledge acquired based on this perspective.

With the role of subjectivity in history firmly established (B. Croce), Fidelino prioritized the historian's intervention in the process backed by solid documentation and the use of a specific methodology, moving away from the predefined models of historical analysis. This method created a new conceptual framework based on the theory of evolution (H. Spencer), considering "temporal variations" and "causal successions" (diachronic vision). Since the historical fact is unique and unrepeatable (there are no laws but causal links), the role of chance or non-prediction takes on particular importance (influence of Oliveira Martins). Thus, criticism is assumed as an epistemological element, particularly as a method ("criticism as science") in which analysis and synthesis are noteworthy. The latter confers durability and permanence to the memory of the past, thus preventing oblivion.

Fidelino also established a connection between History and Life (Paul Bourget), making History utilitarian,



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i.e. History became the "science of life", the common denominator for all knowledge, with Literature playing the role of the final synthesis of this theory, bringing together the knowledge of Man in his context, with the experience of Life itself. Therefore, "historical truths" would only be approximate, mere aspirations relative to the time in which they are produced, since facts cannot be gauged by repetition.

As for applying methodology to History and Literary Criticism, Fidelino pursued the causes of the phenomena that explain their evolution, determining the essential characteristics of what he considered to be "higher art": firstly, aesthetic beauty, particularly in form; secondly, truth, in terms of content; and finally, usefulness, in terms of society (for what?).

As far as historical time is concerned, Fidelino presented an integrated periodization structure, organized in a descending hierarchy or, in other words, in concentric circles. The first level (or circle) consisted of the "Eras", namely extended periods of time. The "Epochs" were on the second level, which formed part of the "Eras". These were then followed by the "Periods", which were gradations within the "Epochs" and, finally, the "Cycles", which were short variations of time. Fidelino used this temporal structure especially in his works of synthesis, such as his *História Literária de Portugal* [Literary History of Portugal] (12th to 20th centuries).

Towards the end of his life, Fidelino resumed his reflection on the concept of history. At that time he referred to history as "integral history", in which two planes or levels coexist: one is superficial, related to the episodic facts that occur, collected sensorially, while the other, respecting a deeper reality, and referred to by him as "infra-history", effectively determines superficial history.

Fidelino advocated the conservation and enhancement of national and local libraries and collections, especially those belonging to the Church, ensuring that the application of the Law on the Separation of the State from Churches would not lead to the destruction of these document collections. He thus appealed to the instillment of a historical spirit as a means of safeguarding national memory and identity, in the face of the wave of neophilia ("anti-historicism") following 5 October 1910 (*O Espírito Histórico*, 1910). It was also with this spirit that the Sociedade Portuguesa de Estudos Históricos was born (1911-1928), following the creation of Historical Societies in other countries as part of the European nationalist movement that had emerged since the mid-19th century. The SPEH's periodical, *Revista de História* [History Journal], was a way of publicising the studies that were being conducted on national and local history, highlighting the problems of Portuguese society from a historical perspective and, thus, providing grounds for the political choices made by the government. The SPEH also established itself as a centre for the convergence of national and foreign personalities connected to Portuguese history, from different political backgrounds but united on a nationalist and conservative basis. The work accomplished, through the publication of the *Revista de História* and the organisation of a Library of National Historical Studies, was unparalleled during this period and in the periods to come - the Military Dictatorship and the Estado Novo [New State]. As Secretary of the SPEH and Director of the Journal, Fidelino de Figueiredo played a major role in implementing this project.

Finally, as far as Fidelino was concerned, Portugal's affirmation could only be achieved through a

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connection and comparison with other countries and other cultures. In his view, greater freedom of thought and a broader vision of culture and humanity would be fostered by adopting this approach. It was with these ideas in mind that he promoted and conducted comparative studies, making it possible to gauge the level of national literary and historiographical production. Furthermore, these studies also aimed to strengthen the nationalist spirit in a cosmopolitan sense, integrating Portuguese culture into European cultural trends, thus moving away from the emerging exclusivist and xenophobic nationalisms during that period.

In short, Fidelino was a conservative figure, a "dynamic traditionalist", as he called himself, whose goal was to pursue and recover national historical memory. He was not an erudite historian. He was mainly an organiser and coordinator of activities that facilitated and fostered the emergence of historical and literary studies. He produced important work in the field of historical methodology and literary criticism. His role in the renewal of these studies, as an alternative to the positivist vision of Teófilo Braga, is a clear example of his intellectual endeavour throughout the 1910s. A strong opponent of political instability and government corruption during the First Republic, he saw Sidónio Pais and Sidonism as a striking example of what he considered to be the essence of power - order, discipline, leadership and renewal. These were the concepts that structured his thinking, built on a governmental model typified by the "New Republic". Fidelino was an intellectual who played a pivotal role in the inter-secular shift. Marked by the legacy of the 70s Generation in terms of aesthetics, history and politics, he became a man of thought and culture.

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