

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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



MARTINS, Francisco José Rocha (Lisbon, 1879 – Sintra, 1952)

Born into a humble family, Rocha Martins was self-taught and went on to become one of the most widely published Portuguese writers of all time. He attended the *Curso Superior de Letras* [a higher education institution focused on History, Philosophy and Literary Studies], but did not complete his studies. A journalist and novelist, his works often featured historical themes (*Maria da Fonte*, *Madre Paula*, *Bocage*, *Gomes Freire*, among others). He was also a promoter of historical subjects, which he referred to as historical evocations. These appeared in books, in the newspapers *ABC* and *National Archive* — both of which he founded and directed — and in numerous pamphlets, forming collections that reached large print runs. A corresponding member of the *Academia das Ciências de Lisboa* (Lisbon Academy of Sciences), he also had a deep interest in literature, dedicating some noteworthy works to Camilo Castelo Branco and Eça de Queirós. In all of his writings, a distinctly romantic perspective is evident — he seemed particularly fond of drama. However, a few titles stand out from his vast bibliography, in which he genuinely sought to write what is considered contemporary history. He was always engaged in politics, especially in causes that benefited a liberal monarchist perspective. Despite being a staunch supporter of João Franco, he defended the dictator Pimenta de Castro and later aligned himself with Sidónio Paes, even serving as a member of parliament during Paes' administration. As a councillor in the Lisbon municipality in 1924, he initially collaborated in the propaganda of the *Estado Novo* [New State]. However, he later became a prominent opponent of Salazarism, particularly in the 1940s, through articles in the newspaper *República*, which caused a significant stir. His relationship with the newspaper's director, Carvalhão Duarte, was likely linked to their shared Freemasonry ties. As a monarchist, it is unsurprising that he claimed to be a liberal, though he always placed his country above the broad freedoms he advocated. As a liberal, he was an "open and firm opponent of red and white Jacobinisms..." (*O governo* [The government]..., 1945, 9). It was therefore natural for him to collaborate with Lopes d'Oliveira (a liberal, radical republican, and patriot) on the writing of the "Cadernos Históricos" [Historical Notebooks], which were published in Lisbon in 1946 for the purpose of popular education. This cultural dissemination effort gathered contributions from Aquilino Ribeiro, João de Barros, and Bourbon e Meneses. In many ways, it revived the intentions behind the so-called democratic propaganda publications of the late 19th century (1887–1888) by Zófimo Consiglieri Pedroso. Written in a simple style to be accessible to



DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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

the general public, the *Cadernos* aimed to show the history of the humble and their rise, made possible by democracy. This was how the *Cadernos* presented themselves from the very first issue, which focused on *Democracia, sua origem, sua eclosão e seu triunfo* [The Origin, Outbreak and Triumph of Democracy], by RM. It was an ambitious programme, like many others that arose from the euphoria following the war and the triumph of the democracies, which many believed would extend to Portugal. The ambitious plan of the *Cadernos Históricos* [Historical Notebooks], however, remained unfinished, ending at its 15th edition. RM (Rocha Martins) had increasingly aligned himself ideologically with the republicans, as his democratic liberalism naturally led him in that direction — especially after the death of the last constitutional monarch, King Manuel II, in 1932, which freed him from any obligation of loyalty to the monarchy.

The *Cadernos* were not the end of his work, however, as he also edited *Vermelhos, brancos e azuis: homens de Estado, homens de armas, homens de letras* [Red, White, and Blue: Statesmen, Soldiers, and Writers] and other works. These were biographies of prominent figures, briefly presented as interconnected, from the perspective of both a historian and a journalist. The bulk of Rocha Martins' historical work can be seen as part of a significant 19th-century journalistic and chronicling tradition of memorialising the past, particularly contemporary events. Notable examples include Manuel Pinheiro Chagas, Joaquim Martins de Carvalho, Barbosa Colen, and Alfredo Galis. However, after 1939, he wrote no more monographic works, except on the *Governo Provisório da República (1910-1911)* [Provisional Government of the Republic (1910-1911)]. This was, after all, a calm reckoning with the Republic, which he had not initially supported.

He frequently sought to document his historical writings, collecting archival materials so that the reader could verify the many judgements he made — often in great number. In particular, he favoured private correspondence, which enabled him to depict historical figures more directly, delving into their personal lives and evoking their presence more vividly. His writing — best described as neo-romantic — is full of metaphors, aiming to bring the characters in his narratives to life. As a narrator, he did not hesitate to express his opinions and judgements, guiding the reader and shaping the direction of the plot. He often sought stylistic effects and was not shy about exaggerating them. His approach to writing history centred on conveying what he called the "ambience of the moment" or the "atmosphere" experienced by the protagonists — a sort of epic quality that he aimed to achieve, perhaps inspired by superficial and hurried readings of Michelet. Thus, if it was not always history, it was almost always literature: "Hatred lurked in the guise of respect; anger watched him, smiling flatteringly; subservience, which had turned into ingratitude, was ever-present at his side; but he, overwhelmed by the colossal task, devoted himself to it in that room, where massive notebooks piled high." This is how he described the Marquis of Pombal and his tireless governance on the eve of King José's death (*O marquês de Pombal...*, 1939, 13). His search for emotion and dramatic effect was evident in the themes he chose and the titles he gave to his writings. For example, "Processos célebres da História de Portugal" [Well-known Processes in the History of Portugal] (announced collection), where the work he proposed to begin, *O marquês de Pombal desterrado* [The banishment of Marquis of Pombal] as a prime example. Rocha Martins did not seem to master the period of monarchical constitutionalism — or at least he did not focus on



DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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

describing or explaining it in depth. He was more inclined to major political upheavals than to the minutiae of "normality," which did not suit his temperament as a writer excited by the dramas and conflicts of society. At the same time, he sought to indulge his passion for dramatic descriptions, conflict, and his deep love for the nation, which he consistently endeavoured to highlight — most notably in 1929 and later in 1933 with *História de Portugal* [History of Portugal] and *História das Colónias Portuguesas* [History of the Portuguese Colonies]. Both works were considered "patriotic work," putting history at the service of the nation, much like *Os Lusíadas* [The Lusiads] served as spiritual nourishment for patriotic sentiment. RM noted that "History is the reflection of the past, the mirror of the present, the guide to the future." This sentiment is reflected in his *História de Portugal*, which he dedicated to "the scholars of Portugal, to the the humble at home and abroad, to the exiled labourers, outcasts from the classroom, entering the school of the struggle for bread." His concern for the humble, who needed to acquire knowledge and education, is evident throughout his work. In *História de Portugal*, he unleashed his conception of history as a narrative of exciting episodes: "It will not be a eulogy to all the deeds of our ancestors, but rather a reflection on the past — at times sentimental, then painful, then triumphant, sometimes tormented, strong in moments, and at others woven with sadness — depending on the victories and catastrophes." In this blessed land, the author felt like "a believer in the future, under the protection of the old days" (*História de Portugal*, 1929, p. 7). This would attract the attention of the curious. Rocha Martins' *História de Portugal* sponsored by the newspaper *Diário de Notícias* was widely noted for its extensive illustrations, though the quality of these was not always the highest. RM clearly aimed to present environments, monuments, and key personalities in a way that helped readers better understand the past, while maintaining a fairly impartial perspective. His monarchist leanings do not come through in the sections he dedicates to the Republic in *História de Portugal*. Here, he limits himself to presenting the facts he considers relevant, without embellishing them with adjectives or inserting evaluative commentary. As for the Military Dictatorship that followed the 1926 coup, he merely labels it as "National Ephemeris," with the second edition covering the years 1919 to 1930. These are topics that he may have intended to explore further, but they never materialised. In contrast, *O governo provisório da República Portuguesa 1910-1911* [The Provisional Government of the Portuguese Republic 1910-1911], which he refers to as *Crónica e Memórias Políticas* [Chronicle and Political Memoirs], is a much more thorough work. This continues from where *João Franco e o seu tempo* [João Franco and His Time], *D. Carlos* [King Carlos], *D. Manuel II* [King Manuel II], *Pimenta de Castro*, *Memórias sobre Sidónio Pais* [Memoirs on Sidónio Pais], *Monarquia do Norte* [Northern Monarchy] and *A República: memórias para a história do novo regime* [The Republic: memoirs for the history of the new regime] left off. However, he refrained from writing a book on the 28th of May and the Military Dictatorship, and there is no indication that he ever sought to chronicle the *Estado Novo*.

Some of his works include reproductions of photographs, lending a journalistic reportage quality to his historical accounts. This is particularly evident in his biographies of King Carlos, King Manuel, and the Northern Monarchy, which were published soon after the monarchy's defeat. The inclusion of documentation and illustrations is accentuated by his often vehement prose. Though his writing can sometimes become



DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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

tiresome due to his overzealous attempts to bring stories to life, it often achieves notable effects: "Palmela was always aware of what brewed in Lisbon and to a certain extent directed the conspiracy, such was the malleability of his talent, the certainty of his valour, the resolve of his will." (*Palmela na imigração* [Palmela on immigration], [1915], 70). RM was a naturally gifted writer, with a rich vocabulary that he used to great effect, although given his prolific output, some lapses in proofreading are evident. His method remained consistent throughout his career. Between his first historical work, *A Côte de Junot em Portugal* [Junot's Court in Portugal] (1910), and one of his later works, *O Marquês de Pombal Desterrado* (1939), there are no significant differences in his approach. He offered descriptive accounts of political events, some presented with remarkable detail, though explanations were rarely provided. His works are essentially stories, embellished with his expressive prose, which does not seek to interpret events but rather to point them out. RM's journalistic technique of reporting and chronicling carries over into his historical writing. His works resemble memoirs or chronicles more than conventional history, though the material he presents is undoubtedly valuable for historical research. The author himself believed his works could "aid in the formation of definitive contemporary history" because they are grounded in "impartial testimonies." He emphasised that, above all, it was vital to tell the truth and not shy away from it (*O governo...*, 9). This is evident in his embellished prose, as seen in his portrayal of Lisbon on 5 October: "She resembled a young girl, suddenly emancipated, simultaneously embodying madness, silliness, generosity, childish cries, and sudden seriousness." (*Idem*, 11) RM could not ignore the reception of the Republic by the people of Lisbon: "The Republic was, in fact, at that time, something ideal, something perfect, something heart-warming, with people in the streets, flags hanging from windows, and the brightness of a sunny autumn day" (*O governo...*, 40). Such vivid descriptions continue throughout his work, often including meticulous details such as the quantities of meat, bread, and fish consumed at the camp in the Rotunda, where food was prepared on nine stoves (*O governo...*, 44). RM sought to counter monarchist criticisms of the Republic, particularly concerning legislation related to religious congregations. He does not hesitate to remind readers that the monarchy's laws against the Jesuits were the same ones drafted and published by Pombal, and that Joaquim António de Aguiar had abolished monastic orders in 1834 (*Idem*, 58). He highlights the fair treatment of nuns and Jesuits during their detention before their expulsion, almost commending the moderation of Afonso Costa's actions. It should be noted that RM's writing on the Provisional Government of the Republic dates from 1945, by which time he had distanced himself from the monarchy. As a result, this period is depicted with a calmness absent from his earlier writings, which were part of a series. The aggressiveness of the 1915 and 1920s has softened, replaced by frustration and disillusionment with the oppressive nature of the Military Dictatorship and the Estado Novo, which RM, as a committed liberal, strongly opposed. This shift may explain his growing acceptance, even understanding, of the Republican policies he had once condemned.

Despite certain limitations, RM's writings remain essential sources for historians, particularly those studying the period from the end of the monarchy (the reign of King Carlos) to the collapse of the Northern Monarchy in Porto in 1919. He paid particular attention to the dictatorial regimes of João Franco, Pimenta de

Castro, and Sidónio Pais, documenting these periods with a meticulousness that continues to offer valuable insights for historical scholarship.

Active bibliography: *Bastidores da História. O drama liberal. Palmella na imigração*, Lisbon, Casa Ventura Abrantes, [1915]; *Pimenta de Castro, dictador*, Lisbon, Rocha Martins, 1920; *Memórias sobre Sidónio Paes*, Lisbon, Sociedade Editorial ABC, 1921; *A independência do Brasil*, Lisbon – Porto – Coimbra, Lvmen – Empresa Internacional Editora, 1922; *Monarquia do Norte*, [Lisbon], composto e impresso nas Oficinas Gráficas do “ABC”, 1922-1923; *A República: memórias para a história do novo regime*, Lisbon, Sociedade Typographica Editora Lamas, Motta & C^a, [19??]; *D. Carlos: História do seu reinado*, Estoril, Oficina do ABC, 1926; *História de Portugal*. Lisbon: Empresa Nacional de Publicidade, 1929; *D. Manuel II: memórias para a História do seu reinado*, Lisbon, Sociedade Editora “José Bastos”, 1930; *O marquês de Pombal desterrado 1777-1782*, Lisbon, Empresa Nacional de Publicidade, 1939; *O governo provisório da República Portuguesa (crónica e memórias políticas) 1910-1911*, Lisbon, Editorial Inquérito, 1945; Coleção “Cadernos Históricos”, Lisbon, Edições Excelsior, [1946]; *Vermelhos Brancos e Azuis: homens de Estado, homens de armas, homens de letras*. Lisbon: Vida Mundial, 1948-1951.

Passive bibliography: “Análise ao livro *O Governo Provisório da República Portuguesa (1910-1911)* de Rocha Martins – Seminário de História II (April 2008)”. In *Civilizacionices...* <http://civilizacionices.blogspot.com>; “Rocha Martins, Francisco José”, *Grande Enciclopédia Portuguesa e Brasileira*, vol. XXV, Lisbon, Editorial Enciclopédia, [n.d.], pp. 854-855; Victor de Sá, “Fascismo e contradições em Rocha Martins”, in *Vértice*. 2nd series, no. 21, December 1989; *Rocha Martins: jornalista e historiador*, Lisbon, Lisbon City Council – Toponymy Committee, 1993; VALDEMAR, António, “Rocha Martins. Contra o poder, escrever, escrever”, in *Revista do Expresso* (“100 anos 100 Portugueses”), Lisbon, 1 June 2013.

Joaquim Romero Magalhães

This work is financed by national funds through FCT - Foundation for Science and Technology, I.P, in the scope of the projects UIDB/04311/2020 and UIDP/04311/2020.