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MATTOS, Gastão de Mello de

(Aveiro, 11 December 1890 – Lisbon, 29 December 1971)

In contrast to his work, Gastão de Mello de Mattos's life reflects an almost complete silence, one that can only be filled by piecing together scattered details that do not always directly pertain to his academic *persona* that led him to pursue the field of History. António da Silva Rêgo regarded him as one of the "most active, though least known" members of the *Academia Portuguesa da História* (A. Rêgo, *History in times of fascism...*, 2015, p. 27), and indeed, he remained so. Born in Aveiro on 11 December 1890 to José Maria de Mello de Mattos and Hostilina Gomes Teixeira de Mattos, Gastão Mattos passed away in Lisbon at the age of 81. His father, born in Porto, worked as an engineer in the Ministry of Public Works from 1886 and later transitioned into banking as a director of the bank Montepio Geral. His father too published an extensive body of work and served as director of the magazine *Construção Moderna*.

He trained at the *Escola do Exército* [Army School] and later became an artillery officer, serving in the First World War as part of the 1917 expedition to Mozambique (*Processo Político do Capitão de Artilharia Gastão de Mattos* [Political Case of Artillery Captain Gastão de Mattos], Military Historical Archive, *Direcção de Justiça e Disciplina*). His service earned him a promotion to the rank of captain (C. Ferreira, "Aveirenses Ilustres...", 2020). However, in 1919, he was dismissed from the army, accused of being, as he would later acknowledge himself, "the known monarchist that he is" (B. Maia, *As minhas entrevistas... [My interviews...]*, 1928). At the age of 35, when questioned about his profession after the events later known as the "Bloody Night," he simply replied that he was a "landlord in Porto" (Idem, *ibidem*), offering no further details. Shortly after, in 1932, Mello de Mattos followed in his father's footsteps by entering the banking sector, taking on the role of government commissioner at the *Banco Português e Brasileiro* [Portuguese and Brazilian Bank]. This was just one of many roles connecting him to the government from early on; he also served as a member of the *Comissão de Censura dos Espetáculos* [Entertainment Censorship Commission] (C. Ferreira, "Illustrious people from Aveiro...", 2020) and as a member of the *Centro de Acção Popular* (Popular Action Centre], a group formed in 1948 within the *União Nacional* [National Union] that brought together scholars, military personnel, and politicians aligned with Marcello Caetano ("Centro de Acção Popular", *Polítipedia*). Alfredo Pimenta even suggested Mello de Mattos as director of the Military Historical Archive, a role he ultimately did not take on due to not meeting the legal requirements (Letter from Santos Costa to Alfredo Pimenta, 24



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August 1949, Alfredo Pimenta Municipal Archive). Alongside this vote of confidence, Pimenta openly expressed his admiration for Mattos, his close friend, even stating publicly that he regarded him as intellectually superior to names such as António Sardinha (A. Ventura, "António Sardinha Republicano", 2003).

A military reservist, Gastão de Mello de Mattos began to engage in intellectual pursuits around the age of 40, taking part in significant scientific events both internationally and nationally, such as the International Congresses of Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences, held in Lisbon (1932), Oslo (1937), and Porto (1942), as well as the Congress for the Progress of Sciences in Spain (Córdoba (1944) and San Sebastián (1947)). Perfectly aligned with the ideological and cultural programme of the Estado Novo regime — which emphasised the glorification of foundational dynastic events like the Battle of Aljubarrota (1385) or the Restoration (1640) — his works on military and political history were also featured in the Congress of Portuguese Expansion in the World (1938) and in the celebrations for the Centenary of the Restoration and the Congress of the Portuguese World (1940). His patriotism turned him into a figure particularly liked by the nationalism promoted by the Estado Novo (E. Dias, "História Militar" [Military History]). Mattos collaborated actively with many periodicals, including *Acção Realista*, *Brotéria*, *Arqueologia e História*, *Diário da Manhã*, *Diário Popular*, the Journal of the *Associação dos Arqueólogos Portugueses* [Portuguese Archaeologists Association], *Feira da Ladra*, *Ilustração Portuguesa* and the *Guimarães* Journal. His scientific maturity, however, was evident in his contributions to significant collective works such as the *Enciclopédia Luso-Brasileira de Cultura* [Luso-Brazilian Encyclopaedia of Culture] (1963), *Heráldica* (1969), and the *Dicionário de História de Portugal* [Dictionary of the History of Portugal] (1971). He authored nearly two dozen entries that remain fundamental to military historiography today, with special recognition given to those he wrote on "weaponry", "artillery", "battle", "crossbowmen", "captain", "colonel", "army", "infantry", "fortification", and "military ranks", etc. These collaborations reflect the intense and multifaceted nature of his work, centred on his primary areas of interest. These interests, evident in the first two decades of his scientific output, focused on military, political, and diplomatic history, with occasional forays into cultural, religious, and heraldic topics, primarily within the Modern period. Works such as "Notícia de alguns memorialistas portugueses no princípio do século XVIII" [News of some Portuguese memorialists at the beginning of the 18th century] (1929), "Nota sobre os postos no exército português..." [Note on ranks in the Portuguese army...] (1930), and "O significado político da Restauração" [The political meaning of the Restoration] (1943) are just a few examples of topics he covered. *Nicolau Langres e a sua obra em Portugal* [Nicolau Langres and his body of work in Portugal] (1941) was his first major work, a publication showcasing for the first time the collection of plans and projects for 17th-century fortifications by French engineer Nicolau de Langres, who arrived in Lisbon in 1644, held at the National Library of Portugal, a study that was pioneering in Portugal when it comes to research on the "science of fortifications" (G. M. Mattos, *Nicolau Langres...*, 1941, p. 11).

The diverse body of work produced by Gastão de Mello de Mattos highlights his advocacy for interdisciplinarity and collaborative efforts, rejecting the insularity of historians and narrow thematic



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specialization. He supported the development of joint projects integrating multiple methodologies, ideally led, in his view, by a "technician of general ideas" to harness the collective knowledge of the group (Idem, "Resposta do académico..." [Scholar response...], 1956, pp. 39-41). He believed that, in Portugal, only Virgínia Rau shared the same view — as he expressed in a brief biographical note he wrote in 1954 upon her admission to the *Academia Portuguesa da História* [Portuguese Academy of History] (Idem, *ibidem*, p. 38). Considering Mello de Mattos's approach to history-making, it becomes clear how he established a connection between it and military archaeology, a field that has been relatively underexplored in Portugal. His name became closely associated with the excavations at the military camp of São Jorge, the supposed location where the Battle of Aljubarrota took place, as part of a project conducted between 1958 and 1960 in collaboration with the Military History Commission. Led by archaeologist Afonso do Paço, the project also included Lieutenant-Colonel Augusto Botelho da Costa Veiga, who, alongside Mattos, was one of the "great enthusiasts of the study of the battle" (J. G. Monteiro, *Aljubarrota Revisitada* [Aljubarrota Revisited], 2001, p. 7). The preliminary results of these excavations were published in *Aljubarrota - Trabalhos em execução de arqueologia militar* [Aljubarrota — Military archaeology work in progress] (1958). Despite being naturally dated and supplemented by conclusions from more recent field interventions, this work continues to be revisited by military historians and has inspired many hypothetical reconstructive (re)interpretations of the Battle of Aljubarrota. Mello de Mattos continued to work on the project even after its official completion, leading guided tours of the battlefield.

Gastão de Mello de Mattos's historiographical career aligns with what José Amado Mendes termed "history from the inside", blending his professional background with his intellectual pursuits: a military man dedicated to military history (J. Mendes, "Caminhos e problemas..." [Paths and problems...], 1996, p. 393). His work stood out for its innovative and broad-ranging ideas, spanning from the Middle Ages to the contemporary period, with a particular focus on recruitment practices in the Portuguese army, military career paths and organisational structure. He often approached these topics from a micro perspective, emphasising "small war" tactics over major milestones and large military campaigns (G. M. Mattos, *Um soldado...* [A soldier...], 1939, p. 5). In addition to military history, political history was another of his key interests, particularly his study of the Restoration of 1640 and the events that followed, including the war with Castile (1640-1668) and the impact of internal crises within the Portuguese court during this period. From his perspective, this was an almost inexhaustible subject. However, Mello de Mattos's motivation for studying it was also tied to a personal pursuit of the "historical truth" and a desire to demystify "the lie accumulated over more than a century" (G. M. Mattos, *Nos bastidores...* [Behind the scenes...], 1941, p. 7). Although Mattos regarded History as a blend of science and art, he believed that the finite and limited time nature of this discipline allowed only for a provisional attainment of "scientific truth." António da Silva Rêgo highlighted this perspective, noting that Mattos's article "Probabilidade Histórica" [Historical Probability] (1944) was the only theoretically and historiographically focused text ever published by the *Academia Portuguesa da História* (A. S. Rêgo, *History in times of fascism...*, 2015, p. 27). He placed key historical figures at the centre of his



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studies on the Restoration to deepen the understanding of 17th-century Portuguese politics and government, focusing on political factions led by figures such as Sebastião de César de Meneses (G. M. Mattos, *Nos bastidores...*, 1941) and the Count of Castelo Melhor. As Vinícius Dantas noted in his analysis of Mattos's work, the Count's deposition held even greater significance than that of King Afonso VI, as it revealed the various parties and their distinct agendas within the Portuguese court (V. Dantas, "A Privaça..." [The Inner Circle...], 2013). He also employed prosopography and short biographies as part of his model of general observation, along with the analysis of secondary agents whose actions could help justify the roles of other primary actors in political intrigue (Idem, *O Sentido...* [The meaning...], 1944, p. 338). With this in mind, Nuno Gonçalo Monteiro also highlighted Gastão de Mello de Mattos's innovative vision emphasising the "opposition between the corporative model and the individualist model," an idea that would later be further developed by António Manuel Hespanha (N. G. Monteiro, "Identificação da política setecentista..." [Identification of 18th-century politics...], 2001, p. 963). In addition to this innovative perspective, he emphasised an endemic characteristic that helped explain the Restoration phenomenon and Portugal's struggle for independence from its neighbouring kingdom. He argued for the existence of a deep-rooted "political sense of Portuguese life", which organically inclined the nation toward a return to medieval systems and "traditional forms of government". This justification, Mattos asserted, took precedence over any sense of national nostalgia or external influences — a phenomenon often misunderstood by "foreign observers" and largely "obscured for most of our historians" (G. M. Mattos, *O Sentido...*, 1944, p. 339). In his work we can see an undeniable influence from the English historian Edgar Prestage, with whom he corresponded. This affinity is evident through the chronological and thematic focus they shared, especially regarding figures such as the Count of Castelo Melhor and Francisco Manuel de Melo. In a 1943 letter, Prestage admitted he no longer had "enough energy to write another book on Francisco Manuel" (G. M. Mattos, "Documentos inéditos..." [Previously unpublished documents...], 1955, p. 170), appearing to subtly encourage Mattos to take on this task. Mattos indeed fulfilled this implicit suggestion, producing a preliminary study published in 1955 (Idem, "Documentos inéditos...", 1955). Expanding his focus from 17th-century Portugal, Mattos ventured into the 18th century, focusing primarily on military, political, and diplomatic history — a field to which he made significant contributions. Notably, he prefaced and edited the *Memórias da paz de Utreque* [Memoirs of the peace of Utrecht] (1931) and continued with further works on Portuguese involvement in the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-1714).

The publication and transcription of sources became a hallmark of Mello de Mattos's work, aligning with the practices prevalent in Portuguese historiography during the first half of the 20th century. Although seemingly conservative in his approach to historical practice, he managed to stand out from some of his contemporaries. The exhaustive research he conducted in national archives did not prevent him from acknowledging the risks of an excessive attachment to documentation or the danger of overvaluing the novelty of the sources (Idem, "As notas do licenciado..." [The graduate notes...], 1942, p. 95; Idem, *Um soldado* [A soldier], 1939, pp. 5 and 6), namely stemming from literal interpretations of official documents



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(Idem, *O Sentido...*, 1944, p. 344), showing a critical distance from the rigid methodological approach still dominant in Portugal at the time. He was particularly enthusiastic about comparing documents and correcting errors made by previous analysis, especially regarding dating, provenance, and (re)interpretation of manuscripts. Frequently, he aimed to challenge the theories of other researchers, as he did in works such as *Regimento de Guerra Quinhentista* [16th-Century War Regiment] (1953) or "Considerações tácticas sobre a batalha de Aljubarrota" [Tactical considerations on the battle of Aljubarrota] (1962). Although he assured readers that he had "no intention of generating controversies" (Idem, "Considerações" [Considerations...], 1962, p. 11), the proposal of this last article, however, openly contradicted Cordeiro de Sousa's study by arguing — based on new archaeological evidence from the battlefield — that the Portuguese attack tactic was conducted on foot rather than on horseback. This debate remains alive today, with historians still revisiting and (re)examining these contrasting positions (J. G. Monteiro, *Aljubarrota Revisitada*, 2001, p. 239). Mello de Mattos's most significant works stemmed from contradictions and revisionist perspectives. Notably, his entries on the significance, origin, and purpose of the Lines of Torres Vedras (G. M. Mattos, "Torres Vedras, Linhas de" [Lines of Torres Vedras], 1971, pp. 180-182); his interpretation of the Battle of Alcácer Quibir, where he argued that the expedition's goal was to establish a protectorate in Morocco for defence against the Turks, rather than to conquer the city (Idem, "Alcácer Quibir, Batalha de" [Battle of Alcácer Quibir], 1963, pp. 919-923); and his study asserting that naval "terços" [military unit] and organised troops had been stationed permanently in Portugal since the 16th century (Idem, *Notícias do terço...* [News from the terço], 1932, p. 5).

Even before his initial works in historiography, Gastão de Mello de Mattos was fervently active in support of the regime deposed on 5 October 1910. This led to his alleged indirect involvement in the military conspiracy that culminated in the "Bloody Night" on 19 October 1921, when radical sailors and arsenal workers committed crimes resulting in the massacre and death of key Republican figures, including Prime Minister António Granjo, Lieutenant Freitas da Silva, as well as Machado dos Santos and Carlos da Maia — the two most prominent architects of the implantation of the Republic in Portugal (R. Brandão, *A Noite Sangrenta...* [The Bloody Night...], 1991, p. 19). Berta da Maia, widow of Carlos da Maia, undertook an exhaustive personal investigation to uncover those responsible for this crime. She published her findings in a memoir, which included confessions from the primary suspect, Abel Olímpio, known as "the Golden Tooth". Indeed, it was Olímpio who suggested a potential connection between the events of the night of 19 October and the Monsanto revolt, known as the Monarchy of the North (1919) — which stemmed from the desire of certain individuals to avenge the death of King Carlos — by providing the names of several monarchists who took part in the conspiracy, including Gastão de Mello de Mattos (B. Maia, *As minhas entrevistas...* [My interviews...], 1928, p. 25). Questioned on 4 November 1926 at the Criminal Investigation Department, Mattos's report includes a statement in which he admits to having been part of the leadership of "a revolutionary organisation of a conservative and nationalist nature," whose ultimate goal was the restoration of monarchical rule in Portugal (Idem, *ibidem*). However, the case brought against him by the *Direcção de*



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Justiça e Disciplina [Directorate for Justice and Disciplinary Action], which led to his dismissal from the army in 1919, alleges that Gastão de Mello de Mattos had declared to the deputy chief and chief of staff at the 5th Division headquarters — where only republican officers were supposed to serve — that "he was a monarchist and that he should leave, this happened during the monarchist insurrection in northern Portugal in 1919". He appealed this accusation, at least until 1938, asserting that he had never made statements linking him to "any revolutionary movement or support for its leaders" (*Processo Político...* [Political Case...], Military Historical Archive, *Direcção de Justiça e Disciplina*. Thus, we are confronted with two contradictory testimonies, though Mattos's connection to the monarchist uprising in Monsanto appears indisputable. Mattos, however, ended up cooperating by revealing some of the names of those responsible for payments made to the sailors involved in the events of the "Bloody Night", even suggesting the involvement of Spanish monarchist politicians. However, according to Berta Maia, none of the individuals he named were questioned following this confession (R. Brandão, *A Noite Sangrenta...*, 1991, p. 217). This case never reached a definitive conclusion, and many historians have attempted to identify and name the instigators of these crimes, drawing on evidence that suggests both radical republican and conservative monarchist motivations.

The name of Gastão de Mello de Mattos thus appears to have been distanced from these events. However, revisiting this period in his life is essential to highlight that his political orientation was reflected not only in his friendships at the academy — with figures such as Count Tovar, the Count of São Paio, and Caetano Beirão — but also in the numerous opinion pieces he contributed to nationalist and monarchist periodicals, such as *Feira da Ladra* and *Acção Realista*. The latter served as a critical voice against the Republic and Liberalism, evolving into a kind of patriotic, doctrinaire, traditionalist, and integralist manifesto, featuring contributions from figures such as Caetano Beirão, Castelo Branco-Chaves, and Rolão Preto. Mello de Mattos contributed to several issues in a column dedicated to the "Military Tradition" (G. M. Mattos, "Tradição..." [Tradition...], 1924). In line with Lusitanian Integralism, he highlighted the decline of the present compared to the past, praising the monarchy's accomplishments, particularly in military matters. He argued that peace had led to complacency within the army, a condition he saw as potentially dangerous for Portugal. He also addressed conflicting political concepts, aligning himself in defence of one side: "Liberalism and Nationalism" (Idem, "Liberalismo..." [Liberalism...], 1924) and "Reactionaries and Conservatives" (Idem, "Reaccionários..." [Reactionaries...], 1925), among others. Luís Reis Torgal noted that the influence of Lusitanian Integralism remained evident in Mello de Mattos's scientific studies, particularly in his analysis of historical processes such as the Restoration (L. R. Torgal, *Ideologia política...* [Political ideology...], 1981, pp. 97 and 98). In contrast, Fernando Dores da Costa observed that, in the works Mello de Mattos published in 1940 for the centenary celebrations of the Restoration, he managed to restrain the exaltationist and nationalist tone present in those works, unlike others (F. D. Costa, "Interpreting the Portuguese...", 2005, p. 2). Aligned with this movement, his anti-Iberianism is also evident in his public and scientific activities. He was a member of the 1st December Commission of the *Sociedade Histórica da Independência* [Historical Society of Independence], an organization that included military personnel, intellectuals, professors, and historians



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such as Eduardo Brazão, Fidelino de Figueiredo, and António Ferrão, all of whom contributed significantly to patriotic and anti-Spanish rhetoric (S. C. Matos, *Iberismos...*, 2017, pp. 120-124).

Gastão de Mello de Mattos pursued his scientific and intellectual activities closely aligned with the Portuguese academic circles, regularly attending sessions of the Portuguese Academy of History. He was appointed a supernumerary member in 1938, became a full member in 1944, and, the following year, assumed chair no. 19 as vice-secretary general — a position previously held by the archaeologist José Leite de Vasconcelos. He was also a full member of the *Associação dos Arqueólogos Portugueses* [Association of Portuguese Archaeologists] and a founding member of the *Gabinete de Estudos Heráldicos e Genealógicos* [Office of Heraldry and Genealogical Studies].

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