

# DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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**Nunes, Eduardo Alexandre Borges** (Vinhais, 1924 - Lisbon, 2008)

A professor at the Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa [School of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon] between 1958 and 1994, Eduardo Borges Nunes left behind a historiographical work on the society, culture and mentality of the Portuguese and European Quattrocento, but it was as a historian of writing, especially in Portuguese, a paleographer and editor of texts that he stood out most.

He was born in September 1924 in Vilar Seco da Lomba, in the Trás-os-Montes municipality of Vinhais. As a boy and young man, he had fond memories of walks through the hills and valleys during his holidays, when he was studying philosophy, theology and humanities in Braga with the Society of Jesus. Many years later, at the end of an academic meeting where he had once again demonstrated his proverbial unwavering determination, he was rebuked by a colleague who complained about his “peasant stubbornness”. He replied: “A peasant with great pride. A citizen, I am also pleased to be. A villain, no.”

He combined his solid knowledge of classical cultures and civilisations, anchored in an unusual mastery of Latin, in its classical, medieval and Renaissance subtleties, with skills as a draughtsman and organist, and a musical talent known to few. In the late 1950s, the Faculdade de Letras [School of Arts and Humanities], where he had completed his higher education, invited him to join its teaching staff through Virgínia Rau, who also challenged him to choose a topic for his future doctoral dissertation. An example of his training, which was shaped by both the seminary and the university, “Paulo Orósio e a irrupção bárbara” (Paulo Orósio and the barbarian invasion), a work presented in Braga on the occasion of the 13th Centenary of São Frutuoso (1968), illustrates his earliest thematic preference for the classics.

He decided to focus his doctorate on 15th-century chronology, a period tailored to his preference for cultural revivals of a classical nature. His taste for the Age of Expansion and Discovery soon became apparent – “O parecer do Infante D. João sobre a ida a Tânger” (The opinion of Prince John on the trip to Tangier) (Brotéria, 1958). As a member of the Centre for Archaeological Studies, under the supervision of Manuel Hellen, he spent two years as a scholarship holder in Florence, Rome and the Vatican between 1960 and 1962, a happy time when he crossed paths with friends who would remain his lifelong companions, especially Manuel Mendes Atanázio and Ruy de Albuquerque.

In 1963, his doctoral dissertation in History was published, entitled Dom Frey Gomez, Abbot of Florence

(1420-1440) (1963). The documentation and bibliography he collected for his doctoral research, especially the former (he could not conceive of scientific work without first “getting his hands dirty” in the sources), immersed him deeply in the turbulent clerical world of the Italian peninsula after Constance-Basel, especially in the themes of Church reform, an immersion that would explain his interest in the “ “ reinforced by the reign of King Duarte and the figures of the Eloquent King and his brother Pedro, patron of Abbot Gomes. Works such as “Nótulas de história do século XV português” (Notes on the history of the 15th century in Portugal) (Do Tempo e da História, 1965), “Guerra Santa – Santa ‘Pirataria’” (Holy War – Holy ‘Piracy’) (Brotéria, Vol. XC [1970]), “Política hospitalar de D. Duarte. Achegas Vaticanas” (1973) and “Parecer do Doutor ‘Velasco di Portogallo’ sobre o Beneplácito Régio (Florença, 1454)” (Do Tempo e da História, II, 1968) reflect how much he learned and later matured and published.

This last work marked his first publication with Martim de Albuquerque, a friend he made during his university days, together with his brother, Ruy de Albuquerque. In addition to his friendship with the brothers, he was also close to their father, Mário de Albuquerque, a professor at the Faculdade de Letras [School of Arts and Humanities], who provided invaluable support during his doctorate and later encouraged him in the new path he embarked on in 1964 when he took up teaching palaeography at the school, which became his guiding light from then on. The last text published by Eduardo Borges Nunes, after his death in November 2008, was an article for the book in honour of Mário de Albuquerque, “Algumas amostras da minha Paleografia” (Some samples of my Palaeography) (Studies in memory of Professor Mário de Albuquerque, Lisbon, 2009).

There he recounts the beginning of his palaeographic adventure: “It was on 20 November 1964, at the Faculdade de Letras [School of Arts and Humanities], that Professor Virgínia Rau offered me the chair of Palaeography.” This was a field he would never leave, opening up a scientific area at his school that did not exist in Portuguese universities – since, as in higher education in Portugal in general, palaeography and diplomatics (the latter little practised but much encouraged) were seen as mere aids to the documentary appendices of theses or the publication of sources – which were scarce and, as she always warned, generally of poor quality.

Between 1964 and 1969, his work, combining research and teaching in the new area entrusted to him, focused on the publication of the *Álbum de Paleografia Portuguesa* (Album of Portuguese Palaeography), published by the History Centre of the University of Lisbon, with the sponsorship of the Instituto de Alta Cultura (Institute of High Culture). Reproducing almost two hundred documents, mainly from the 14th to 17th centuries, the Album was characterised by distinctive features: documents always reproduced to scale and with extremely high technical quality, closely supervised by him (and which still deserve admiration today), exemplary diplomatic summaries, a diversity of diplomatic types (with a predominance of notarial and chancery documents), flawless transcriptions and, last but not least, a break with the vicious cycle of linking palaeography to the Middle Ages, a period which, as he used to say, was not even the one most in need of good palaeographers. Only the prevailing mental cantonalisation, yesterday as today, explains why the Album



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is not the basis for generalised learning of Portuguese palaeography, regardless of its quality. In the Introduction to the Album, an exemplary overview of his work, read and reread by his direct and indirect disciples, he mentions the names of the students who, with their high standards, motivated him the most – a large group, refuting the critical levity of some who, confusing the reserve of those incapable of making concessions to popularity with irrelevance, accused him of monotony in his teaching. Confirming the old adage that facts speak for themselves, there are his works, always cited, always relevant, the disciples he left behind and the school he created, the ‘ ‘, refuting those who never read him and failed to grasp his teachings of rigour and perfectionism, without yielding to the pressures of the moment – which he imposed first and foremost on himself.

He did not neglect critical reviews, exclusively of edited works, notably “Observações à última edição do ‘Livro de Cozinha’ da Infanta D. Maria” [1968] (edited by Giacinto Manuppella and Salvador Dias Arnaut, 1967), “Jacques Stiennon, Paléographie du Moyen Age, Paris, A. Colin, 1973” [1973] and, in the final phase of his work, “Há ler e ler. 1. «Amtonio camelo a fez» (Brotéria, 1993 - critique of the Álbum de Paleografia by João José Alves Dias, A.H. de Oliveira Marques and Teresa F. Rodrigues, 1987).

Varia Palaeographica. Maiora ac minora” (Portugaliae Historica, 1st Series) was published, which included, in addition to the critical review of Stiennon’s book mentioned above, two of the most important texts of “Paleografia de Borges Nunes” (Paleography by Borges Nunes), a discipline he understood as either the history of writing centred on graphic trends or a detailed analysis of the graphic case of each individual or document. In the first, O Conceito Novo de Paleografia (The New Concept of Palaeography), we read a brief annotated history of palaeography as a science, highlighting the authors of his choice – among the living, the Frenchman Jean Mallon and the Italian Giorgio Cencetti; in the second, História Portuguesa do Cifão (Portuguese History of the Cifão), he traces the evolution of the cifão in Portuguese documentation, boasting his interpretative skills as a top palaeographer. Still unpublished, a text presented in 1974 to the School for his final academic exams, only defended in 1979, constitutes, together with the History of the Cifão, the other decisive piece of ‘his palaeography’ – An exercise in methodology for the history of writing in Portugal: the origins of the numeral letter b (=5).

Also in 1979, towards the end of his period without teaching duties at the Faculdade de Letras [School of Arts and Humanities] (1974-1981), he was a lecturer in Historical Sciences at the Universidade Livre de Lisboa and second director of the respective department between 1984 and 1985. Between 1985 and 1988, he was the first director of the History Department at the University of Lusíada, which had just been created by professors who had left the Free University, accompanied by other colleagues.

The first version of his dictionary Abreviaturas Paleográficas Portuguesas (Portuguese Paleographic Abbreviations) also dates from 1979 and was written, as always, with his students in mind. An essential tool for any researcher poring over documentation in Portuguese, the dictionary is divided into two main sections. In Part I, which he called Grammar, he explains his interpretation of the abbreviated system of medieval and modern Portuguese. In Part II, the Dictionary itself, the abbreviations collected are grouped into four blocks,



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entitled “Signs”, “Common Names”, “Proper Names” and “Numbers”. Due to its natural requirements, since he had conceived it on a much larger scale, Borges Nunes described it as “very brief”. A later edition of this dictionary was published in a large print run, with his authorisation and on the initiative of António Justino Ribeiro. The work, text and abbreviations, was written entirely by hand by the author, revealing another facet equally unknown to most people: his mastery of the pen and brush, as a draughtsman and artist of writing.

As a text editor, almost a natural role for a professor of palaeography and diplomatics, he left behind a considerable body of work. On the one hand, there are the occasional texts, satisfying the demands of an expert in palaeographic reading: in collaboration with Virgínia Rau (Letter from King Manuel I to King Ferdinand of Aragon on the capture of Goa, 1968; Inventário post-mortem del-rei D. Pedro II, 1969), or Martim de Albuquerque (Regimento quatrocentista da Casa da Suplicação, 1982) or entirely his own, The reconciliation of Abraão Cohen, an incursion into inquisitorial documentation (Portugaliae Historica, 1974) and Diplomatic and paleographic commentary on the bull “Manifestis Probatum” (Academia das Ciências de Lisboa, 1981). On the other hand, his editions include the critical edition of A tragédia da Rua das Flores, by Eça de Queirós (Livros do Brasil, 1981), an opportunity to apply his critical rigour to a text by one of the greatest writers of contemporary Portuguese literature, well outside his usual chronological scope, and the edition of Ordenações d’el-rei Dom Duarte (Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1988), as the person responsible for establishing the text and in collaboration with Martim de Albuquerque. In the field of text editing, mention should also be made of História da vida, milagres e canonização do bem-aventurado S. Hyacintho da Ordem dos Pregadores, by Pedro de Mariz (Centro de Estudos Históricos, 1965) and the introductory notes to the edition, by Mário Júlio de Almeida e Costa, of the Ordenações Afonsinas (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1984), a project for which he had hoped to produce a complete transcription of the text, but which never came to fruition. Martim Martins, first notary of Guimarães (Congresso Histórico de Guimarães e sua Colegiada, 1981), a pioneering study on notaries as agents of writing, paved the way for other works, both within and outside his school.

In 1985, he founded the Master’s Degree in Palaeography and Diplomatics at the School of Arts and Humanities of Lisbon, with postgraduate seminars in Portuguese Palaeography, Diplomatics, Historical Portuguese Linguistics and Codicology. The course ran until 1994, reopening in 2003 under the direction of B. Sá-Nogueira and with the collaboration of Maria Helena da Cruz Coelho and Armando Luís de Carvalho Homem, as well as his disciple Susana Tavares Pedro, who obtained her PhD in 2008.

Borges Nunes participated in the preparatory meetings for the founding of the Portuguese Society for Medieval Studies in 1985 at the Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Coimbra [School of Arts of the University of Coimbra], collaborating with Luís Adão da Fonseca and José Mattoso. After 1989, his involvement in the life of the Department of History and the School, which had been intense between 1983 and 1988, began to wane.

In 1992, the untimely death of his colleague Manuel Mendes Atanázio, one of the few friends he had made in his academic life, along with the Albuquerque brothers, left him shaken and disillusioned. He devoted his

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last two years of activity to supervising the final theses of “his” master’s programme with meticulous care and attention. He continued his scientific work, mainly in the journal “Brotéria”, with paleographic expertise on Columbian themes - “Mais uma assinatura falsa de Cristóvão Colombo” [Another false signature of Christopher Columbus] and “Uma leitura mais ‘verdadeira’ do criptograma colombino” [A more ‘true’ reading of the Columbian cryptogram] (Brotéria, Oct-Nov, 1993).

In 1994, his retirement marked his complete and definitive departure from academic life, interrupted only to participate as a scientific advisor on master’s degree juries until December 1996. , November 1996, he agreed to sit on the doctoral juries of his disciples António Ribeiro Guerra and Bernardo de Sá Nogueira. These were his final steps in academia.

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