

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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RIBEIRO, José Silvestre (Idanha-a-Nova, 1807 – Lisbon, 1891)

José Silvestre Ribeiro occupies a significant place in the context of Portuguese historiography, although he is now almost forgotten. In addition to a fruitful political and administrative career, in which he combined literary writing with historiographical inquiry, he left an indelible mark on the vast tapestry of the history of national scientific and cultural institutions. The son of António Nunes Ribeiro and Josefa Pereira da Silva, he was awarded a bachelor's degree in Canon Law by the University of Coimbra.

His liberal convictions quickly became apparent in the university environment, and he joined the ranks of the famous Academic Battalion in support of the liberal cause, but he was forced to leave the University shortly after the Vilafrancada (27 May 1823) and seek refuge in exile. He took part in the Belfastada (June-July 1828), but when this military operation failed, he joined the defeated contingents who took refuge in Galicia, from where he left for Paris. Here he attempted to resume his academic training, attending, among other classes, the lectures of François Guizot (1787-1874) at the Sorbonne, one of the great European historians of his time. These teachings marked his historiographical writing, contributing to his Europeanist conviction regarding Portugal's historical destiny and making him viscerally critical of the pro-colonial Africanist tendencies then in vogue.

After the arrival of Dom Pedro IV in the Azores, he left for Ponta Delgada, where he joined the expedition led by Admiral George Sartorius (1790-1885), finding himself among the 7,500 brave men who landed in Mindelo on 8 July 1832. During the siege of Porto, he distinguished himself with bravery in the defence of Serra do Pilar, being awarded the Order of the Tower and Sword (1832). In the final stage of the liberal struggles, he joined the expedition led by D. António Severim de Noronha (1792-1860), later 1st Duke of Terceira, leaving Porto and landing in Cacela, in the Algarve. He accompanied the troops to Lisbon and was among the first soldiers to enter the capital on 24 July 1833. After the signing of the Évora-Monte Convention (23 May 1834), he resumed his studies in Coimbra, graduating with a bachelor's degree (1834), benefiting from the exemptions granted to liberal combatants. Consequently, José Silvestre Ribeiro continued his upward career, serving as general administrator of several districts, Minister of Justice (1857), judge of the Supreme Administrative Court (1875), culminating in his appointment as Peer of the Realm (1882). At the same time, he was a member of parliament for Angra do Heroísmo (1846; 1858-1859) and for Funchal (1848-



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1851; 1853-1856).

José Silvestre Ribeiro was an energetic civic figure, founding the Animal Protection Society and the Montepio Geral, whose general assembly he chaired, always surrounded by an unfailing aura, as José Germano da Cunha attested: "He knew how to overcome political disturbances, how to dominate them, not escorted by bayonets or cannons, but presenting himself alone, fearless, on the pedestal of the esteem and consideration they had for him, of the fame of an honourable and upright man that illuminated him, of the prestige of his name that blessed him. Without wavering, without slipping for a single moment, he always knew how to maintain the full height of his dignity as a wise man and magistrate, as a distinguished citizen, full of selflessness and disinterest, as an ardent patriot, evangeliser of all the most beautiful achievements of progress." (Extraordinary State Councillor José Silvestre Ribeiro, 1893, p. 36).

As a researcher, he devoted himself mainly to three central scientific areas: administrative studies, literary research and historiographical practice on institutions throughout our history. Thus, still in the field of institutional history, he is unanimously considered a visionary due to his major, albeit incomplete, work, *Historia dos Estabelecimentos Scientificos, Litterarios e Artisticos de Portugal nos successivos reinados da Monarchia* (vols. I-XVIII, 1871-1893), which reveals his relentless pursuit of historical accuracy: "We continue to employ the necessary diligence to gather as much information as possible about each of the institutions and to base our assertions on solid foundations and authoritative evidence. However, although we can guarantee the scrupulousness with which we carry out our work, we do not dare to flatter ourselves that we have fully satisfied our commitment" ("Prologue", vol. II, p. X). This reveals an ambition for the procedures and requirements of a positivist and erudite documentary history, which sought to include all national institutions that revealed unique characteristics in the fields of literature, arts and sciences throughout the reigns, while remaining a useful and reliable study tool according to current standards.

A regular contributor to the *Jornal do Commercio*, *Revolução de Setembro*, *O Panorama*, *Archivo Pittoresco*, *Diario de Noticias*, *Zoophilo*, among other periodicals, he was a full member of the Royal Academy of Sciences of Lisbon, Commander of the Order of the Tower and Sword, Knight of the Order of Our Lady of the Conception of Vila Viçosa, Grand Cross of the Order of St. Stanislaus of Russia and Knight of the Crown of Oak of the Netherlands, among other honours and distinctions. Alongside his professional and academic career, he was an outspoken advocate for social and civic welfare, education and even animal rights, rising to the highest political and administrative positions of his time.

As a historian, he will always be remembered for the monumental nature of his research and documentary work in *Historia dos Estabelecimentos Scientificos, Literários e Artisticos de Portugal nos successivos reinados da Monarchia* (History of Scientific, Literary and Artistic Establishments in Portugal during the successive reigns of the Monarchy), which is essential for understanding not only the institutions but also the history of education and public administration in Portugal.



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