

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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SANTOS, António Ribeiro dos (Porto, 1745 - Lisbon, 1818)

António Ribeiro dos Santos was the son of a mining colonel, grandson and nephew of merchants working in Rio de Janeiro, where he moved in 1756. He accompanied his uncle Gonçalo Ribeiro dos Santos on his return to Portugal in 1764. This relative of his, who settled in Lisbon, in Rua de S. Domingos, was Director of the Board of Administration of the Funds of the Company of Pernambuco and Paraíba. He therefore lived very closely with the Pombaline bourgeoisie and even dedicated his doctoral theses to Joaquim Inácio da Cruz. He studied humanities (Latin, Greek, philosophy and rhetoric) at the Seminary of Nossa Senhora da Lapa in Rio de Janeiro, where his teachers were former Jesuits. He attended the Canon Law Course at the University of Coimbra, taking his Instituta exams in 1763. He obtained his bachelor's degree in 1768 and his master's and doctorate in 1771. An opponent of the Faculdade de Direito Canónico [School of Canon Law] at the University of Coimbra, he was substitute lecturer of the First Synthetic Canon Law between 1779 and 1789, a teaching position to which he returned in 1795. He also held the Second Chair of Synthetic Canon Law (1790-1795). He retired in 1795.

António Ribeiro dos Santos held various positions and dignities throughout his life: University Librarian (1777), Ordinary Judge of the Casa da Suplicação (1789), Commissioner-General for Studies in the Court and Province of Estremadura (1790), Knight of the Order of Christ (1790), Canon of the Cathedral of Viseu (1792), Deputy of the Holy Office (1793), Chronicler of the House of Bragança (1795), Royal Censor (1795), Deputy of the Board of the House of Bragança (1797), Doctoral Canon of the Cathedral of Faro (1800), Deputy of the Board of the General Directorate of Minor Studies (1800), Deputy of the Board of the Organisation of the Military Penal Code (1802), Deputy of the Board of Conscience and Orders (1802), Canon of the Metropolitan Cathedral of Évora (1804), Chief Librarian of the Royal Public Library (1804) and Deputy of the Board of the Bull of the Crusade (1809).

The first printed publication of a historiographical nature by António Ribeiro dos Santos, *Memória da Literatura sagrada dos Judeus portugueses desde o tempo da Monarquia* (Memoir of the Sacred Literature of the Portuguese Jews since the Time of the Monarchy), dates from 1782, although his unpublished historiographical work dates from the early 1770s. Ribeiro dos Santos's estate contains several studies of sacred, ecclesiastical and civil history. The latter includes material of the utmost importance to the history of



law and institutions, such as the . The historiographical work of António Ribeiro dos Santos has two aspects. One relates to his teaching career and the demands placed on him in the context of the Pombaline reforms and the censorship of the New Code of Public Law of Portugal drawn up by Pascoal José de Melo Freire, a circumstance that gave rise to heated controversy in the vicinity of 1789. The other strand, of a more cultural nature, with aesthetic considerations, concerns the canonist's interest in Jewish literature by Portuguese authors, anti-rabbinical literature, biblical translations, the history of mathematics, the history of literature, typography, the discoveries and poetry. With regard to his interest not only in history but also in sacred and ecclesiastical geography, António Ribeiro dos Santos undertook intensive research from 1787 onwards, during the rectorship of Rafael de Castro, the results and difficulties of which can be assessed by reading successive versions and notes. The aim was to comply with what was statutorily established in the sense that lecturers should produce their own compendiums for the subjects they taught. In this regard, the Ecclesiastical History of Portugal was the greatest challenge for the canonist. While the general issue could be resolved through the works of Claude Fleury or Giovanni Lorenzo Berti, the national part required a complete overhaul, which entailed difficulties in finding credible documentary evidence, as he vehemently points out. Another historiographical challenge, related to his activity as censor, stems from the need for argumentation during the intense controversy with his colleague Pascoal de Melo Freire. His interventions in the Review Board of the New Code, that is, his contribution to the reform of part of the still-valid Philippine Ordinances, required particular care in historical invocation, insofar as Ribeiro dos Santos, contrary to Melo Freire's rationalist postulation of enlightened absolutism, called for a reformism that would rescue traditional historical structures. Hence the intense and in-depth recourse to the history of political institutions that transpires in the texts of the censures and which involved many partial essays, such as *Antiguidades de Portugal acerca das diversas classes de Nobreza* (BNP, code 4595, vol. 13, pp. 1-172) or *Da observância dos nossos maiores sobre os artigos que juraram guardar relativamente às coisas do Estado* (BNP, code 4670, vol. 13, pp. 1-172). 4595, vol. 13, pp. 1-172) or *Da observância dos nossos maiores sobre os artigos que juraram guardar relativamente às coisas do Estado* (BNP, cod. 4670, pp. 189-213).

To these two historiographical strands of the canonist's work must be added the cultural texts mentioned above, most of which were published in the *Memórias da Academia das Ciências de Lisboa* (Memoirs of the Lisbon Academy of Sciences). With *Memória da Literatura sagrada dos Judeus portugueses desde o tempo da Monarquia até aos fins do século XV* (Memoir of the Sacred Literature of the Portuguese Jews from the Time of the Monarchy to the End of the 15th Century), the author began a series of studies that continued until the 18th century. This is a valuable and discerning survey, free from religious considerations, despite the clear stance he took in favour of ethnic and religious tolerance, which he always defended. His interest in the work of Portuguese mathematicians, such as Pedro Nunes and Francisco de Melo, and of foreigners in Portugal who devoted themselves to the same science, must be understood in the context of his reformist convictions, in which scientific investment was seen as an essential factor for economic and social improvement. His vast erudition and responsibilities as a librarian since the time he held the position at the



University of Coimbra, but especially later as organiser of the Royal Public Library of the University of Coimbra () in March 1804, partly explain his concern with developing pioneering studies, for the time, on typography and the very special care he devoted to numismatics as an indispensable tool for the most accurate dating possible. Finally, the aesthetic interests of António Ribeiro dos Santos, who wrote poetry under the Arcadian name Elpino Duriense, are documented not only through his valuable theoretical and historical systematisation of the arts and letters, but also in his study *Das origens e progressos da poesia portuguesa* (The origins and progress of Portuguese poetry).

Ribeiro dos Santos, an example of an intellectual of the European Catholic Enlightenment, did not neglect historical theorising. In codex 4583 of the BNP, where we find various plans and notes for the writing of Sacred History, Ecclesiastical History, Universal History, Genealogical-Heraldic History and a definitive original of the *Selecta Historia Ecclesiastica Universalis*, from 1774, we come across *Reflexões sobre o modo de escrever a História Sagrada* (Reflections on how to write Sacred History). Although the study begins with the purpose stated in the title, it is actually a synthetic approach to the writing of history in general, probably from the period when he was commissioned to write the compendiums for Pombal's reform of the University. Starting from an exemplary perspective invoking the authority of Cicero, the testimony of the times and the light of truth, history appears as a broadening of the vision of the limitations of human nature. The problem of historical truth, in any field, requires either the overcoming of religious and political subjectivism (p. 83), or the prevention of merely conjectural discourse due to lack of evidence ("monuments"), or the economy of description and, most especially, the need for investment in chronology (duration of time) and geography (location of places). p. 97. A separate section is devoted to Mythology as the "science of fable that represents the entire Theology of the Pagans" (p. 101) but which is nevertheless necessary for a hermeneutic adequate to the understanding of historical facts, especially in the field of the arts. Mythology also takes on the character of a universal and historical argument of the divine shared by all peoples. This interpretation, inspired by the philological arguments of António Genovesi, had already appeared in his work *Sacerdotio et Imperio* (1770). With remarkable scholarly support, the canonist's historiographical interests are focused on attempts to study historical origins in various subjects, particularly the origin of language. His work also includes the compilation of historiographical corpora of great erudition and research, such as *De Antiquitatibus Hispaniae*, in several volumes, which remained unpublished.

António Ribeiros dos Santos has not been the subject of significant attention to date, in line with what Inocêncio Francisco da Silva noted in the 19th century, except perhaps for the bibliographical use of various studies on the sacred literature of Hispanic Jews or tributes to his memory as a librarian and bibliophile in the tradition of Frei Manuel do Cenáculo, one of his main interlocutors on the subject. On the political front, the historian was involved in the reformist attempt mentioned above, attempted by José de Seabra da Silva at the end of the Old Regime, turning his back definitively on Pombaline jusdivinism and announcing, in some way, proto-liberal ideas. His *Notas ao Plano do Novo Código* (Notes on the New Code) were printed in 1844.



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