

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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SARMENTO, Francisco Martins de Gouveia de Moraes (Guimarães, 1833 – 1899)

He was the only son of five children in a wealthy family from Guimarães, but without any ancient pedigree, although at the age of 21 he received a letter granting him the coat of arms of a Moço Fidalgo da Casa Real (Young Nobleman of the Royal House). His father, Francisco J. de Gouveia Moraes Sarmiento, had been an ensign in the militia in Braga and had married Joaquina Cândida de Araújo Martins, who was proud to be the aunt of a figure of some importance in national politics, who would become the 1st Count of Margaride. Among their various properties, the couple owned Casa da Ponte, in S. Salvador de Briteiros, where the family lived and where the castle of the same name is located, which would play such an important role in Martins Sarmiento's scientific career. His education began at the age of eight with primary school in Guimarães and continued at the Colégio da Lapa in Porto, ending in Coimbra, where he completed his preparatory studies, which allowed him to enter university at an early age. It seems that his life as a university student was not immune to the famous bohemian lifestyle of Coimbra and the ultra-romantic poetic adventures so typical of his generation. Despite this, at the age of twenty he had a bachelor's degree in law. However, his personal life had little to do with his academic training, as he never practised law, living off the income from his substantial estate, in the company of one of his sisters. His late marriage (at the age of 43) to Maria de Freitas Aguiar further improved his financial situation, enabling him to support the considerable costs of his literary and scientific interests, particularly those involved in archaeological research. Émile Cartailhac (*Les âges pré-historiques* 1886, p. 272) said of him: "In the north of Portugal, in Guimarães, there is an educated and wealthy man, enthusiastic and generous, who has devoted himself to the history of his country."

For someone with enormous intellectual curiosity and no financial problems, Martins Sarmiento, for reasons of health or temperament, was not particularly fond of travelling, as his main biographer notes. His only trips outside Portugal consisted of two visits to Galicia, a region quite close to the border, never going beyond the Vigo estuary. The eminent German epigraphist Emílio Hübner, whom he received in a particularly friendly manner at his home in Guimarães, in , invited him to visit Germany. Like all educated men of his time, Sarmiento knew the classical languages, particularly Latin, which was essential in the academic education of his time, having studied at the Colégio da Lapa. Naturally, he also knew the main foreign languages of



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Europe, above all French, the language of culture at the time. However, Sarmiento rarely demonstrated his knowledge explicitly, as his circle of foreign correspondents was quite limited compared to other figures of his time. The main exception was Hübner, who wrote to him in French, but the German epigraphist, who understood Portuguese well, expressly asked him to write to him in his own language. As for other languages, Sarmiento, a compulsive buyer of books on subjects that interested him, acquired an important bibliography in several languages (Spanish, English, Italian, German), demonstrating at least a passive knowledge of them. This is why the words that Hübner addressed to him in a letter are so pertinent: “vous êtes un debateur de premier rang et j’admire la multitude de livres en toutes les langues que vous avez lus” (Cardozo, M., *Correspondência...*, 1947, p. 201).

Sarmiento did not pursue any profession, nor did he join any political institutions or, in fact, any organised movement. However, as a perceptive and free-thinking man, he expressed his political opinions in his work in a highly critical manner, with a markedly liberal tone, denouncing the regime’s mistakes, fighting injustice and promoting popular education. In this way, he was involved in a number of initiatives that were, in a way, part of his conception of what his role as a committed man and citizen should be. One of his first and best-known interventions was in the “case of Judge Seco”, a minor episode in the history of Guimarães that had some repercussions at national level. In 1868, Judge Francisco Henriques de Sousa Seco was appointed to the district, whose arrogant attitudes, which even affected the Mayor, sparked a revolt among the most distinguished local figures. Martins Sarmiento led those who complained about the magistrate’s arbitrariness and expressed his position in a local publication, specifically edited to contest him, “Justiça de Guimarães” (Justice of Guimarães) (1872). Public pressure eventually had its effect and the judge was transferred, which gave rise to widespread celebrations. His commitment to promoting the common good, particularly that of the most vulnerable, was evident in the establishment of the short-lived Farmers’ Association, which Alberto Sampaio defines as “a kind of rural mutual aid society”. His social conscience (political, at least in its etymological sense) led him in particular to establish, while still alive, the Martins Sarmiento Society, to which he (and his wife) left a large part of his estate, a legacy that gave stature to an institution that is still notable today for its cultural promotion and dissemination, particularly in the historical and archaeological fields. Therefore, Martins Sarmiento, deliberately distancing himself from political activity in the strict sense, even nurturing some contempt for it, demonstrated a high level of civic awareness, which is, of course, another form of political participation.

Alberto Sampaio, tracing his profile and analysing his written work, defined “three cycles” in his intellectual career: the first, consisting of poetic compositions, would focus mainly on the year- , 1855; the second, corresponding to his literary and sociological studies, would cover the period between 1856 and 1874; finally, the third phase, undoubtedly the most important, would include his historical and archaeological studies, from the latter date until his death in 1899. With regard to the first aspects, his close friendship with Camilo Castelo Branco is significant, beyond what he wrote, a lesser-known aspect of historians, but often emphasised when analysing his biographical profile and as a man of culture. Sarmiento is, in fact, particularly recognised as an



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archaeologist and readily accepts the title of 'excavator of Citânia'. But, naturally, he reacted with irritation to the derogatory term "digger of mounds" used by a minister of the kingdom, the Duke of Ávila and Bolama, to express his displeasure at the fact that the man from Guimarães had refused the Order of St James, after some controversy surrounding this award (Cardozo, Francisco Martins Sarmiento...1961, pp. 5-6).

As far as his thinking is concerned, if any topic runs through it, it is his full integration into the deeply nationalist cultural framework that had such an influence on the intellectuals of the second half of the 19th century. With regard to his specific intervention, the ethnic and cultural characterisation of the Lusitanians, whom he considered our ancestors, is particularly noteworthy. In line with his contemporaries, the scholar from Guimarães also believed that the main issue at stake was to define the essence of the "Portuguese man", in this case through an analysis of his most distant ancestors, especially the populations that preceded the Romans in this territory. In this particular aspect, Sarmiento distances himself from the perspective of Alexandre Herculano, who contested and rejected, with good arguments, the establishment of a link between pre-Roman realities and the contemporary world. Despite the validity of this position, characteristic of nineteenth-century positivism, it is clear that many of those who devoted themselves to the study of the pre-Roman past of the Iberian Peninsula, including Leite de Vasconcelos, did not share it. Sarmiento's originality, an aspect he always made a point of emphasising and extending to various fields, lay in his unique interpretation of the geography and, especially, the ethnology of the Lusitanians. With regard to the former, his idea was to attribute to them a territory stretching from central Portugal to the extreme north-west, encompassing the Gallaeci and Lusitanians in the same cultural reality, conveniently interpreting a passage from Strabo. Although his interpretation includes some less common aspects (such as linking the Lusitanian world to the castros of the north-west), it does not conflict with other contemporary or even more recent historiographical perspectives. In any case, what stands out in particular is his conviction that "the civilisational unity of the ancient Galicians and Lusitanians" was not for him "a new problem, but an old dogma" (Sarmiento, *Dispersos*, p. 165). This ancient affinity, in his view, would continue throughout the centuries and could still be verified in his own time.

With regard to the fundamental issue, i.e. the ethnological problem, his originality lies in contradicting an idea that dominated the scientific landscape at the time, supported by many of the great contemporary scholars on the subject, according to which the Lusitanian (or Lusitanian-Galician) people had a Celtic origin (see Millán González-Pardo, "El anticeltismo..." 1983 and Guerra, "F. Martins Sarmiento...", 1999). Through his persistence and directness in opposing this theory, Martins Sarmiento affirms the uniqueness of his thinking and, to the same extent, emphasises his isolation, a circumstance of which he is proud and which his personality has always claimed. In his belief, the movements of Celtic populations, so present in the historiography of the time and affecting other regions of Europe to a large extent, never reached the Lusitanian world. One of the strands of his argument is based on the principle that, if such movements had existed, Greek and Latin literary sources would have recorded them. He therefore accepts their presence in the south-west of the Iberian Peninsula, where sources place Celtic populations, and in the Celtiberian area,

as the ethnic name itself indicates, but rejects their presence in the north-west. To do so, he has to skilfully sidestep the issue by considering that the Neri, also known as Celts, inhabitants of the extreme north-west, would not contribute to modifying his theory because, being a small group, they would have been 'absorbed' by the Lusitanians. Thus, when questioning the origin of these populations, he finds the answer in Avienus' poem *Ora maritima*, which he analysed in detail with regard to the western peninsula. Accepting the interpretation of K. Müllenhoff, a renowned editor of the Latin text, Sarmiento maintained that this work, attributed to the 4th century AD, which still arouses considerable controversy today, compiled remote geographical information gathered during a Phoenician voyage, which would allow us to characterise an early picture of the ethnology of Hispania. The passage valued by the archaeologist from Citânia specifically stated that the Cempsos and Sefes inhabited the territory of Ofiussa and that next to them, in the northern part, were the Lígures and Dráganos, which, for him, could only correspond to the north-west of the peninsula, an interpretation that Adolfo Coelho disputes.

Of some epistemological importance is the fact that Martins Sarmiento based his work on literary data gathered from classical sources and did not question their reliability. At a time when positivism had gained considerable weight in classical studies and some had even taken the discrediting of these texts to extremes, he reveals, in this respect, a closeness to the humanist tradition. His reading and interpretation of classical texts is very peculiar, but almost always far from the critical and hypercritical currents that marked his time.

To the arguments gathered from the texts, Sarmiento naturally adds those of an archaeological nature, taking the particularities of the material culture of the castros (revealed in aspects such as the structure of dwellings, ceramic production, sculpture, and Galician warriors) as a clear manifestation of the originality of their culture. While this component of his theory might seem more solid, it conflicted with the prevailing belief at the time that the language spoken in the Hispanic West was Celtic. He therefore had to face opposition from some notable figures in the field of "glótica" (the name then used to refer to what we now call linguistics), in particular Leite de Vasconcelos and Adolfo Coelho, who reminded him of the clearly Celtic nature of a significant set of names unequivocally associated with the Lusitanian world, as he conceived it. Leite de Vasconcelos's differences with his former teacher (with whom relations had irretrievably cooled) were a matter of conflicting ideas within a framework of mutual respect. On the contrary, with Adolfo Coelho, professor of Glottology in the Higher Course of Letters, the discussion took on a much more conflictual aspect, as was typical of the intellectual milieu of the time (A. Coelho, "Questões ethnogenicas. Lusitanos, ligures e celtas" [Ethnogenic issues. Lusitanians, Ligurians and Celts]. *Revista Archeologica*. Lisbon, 3, pp. 129-77; 4, pp. 153-161). This professor, from the height of his "chair", assesses Martins Sarmiento's skills as follows: "he has no clear idea of the methods of criticism applicable to classical texts, of the most elementary principles of the science of language, of the foundations of ethnic sciences; he is an isolated worker in a small provincial town, surrounded by well-meaning people who are unable to discuss his opinions, which they accept unconditionally." This inevitably leads to open controversy, a field in which Martins Sarmiento also feels at home. The direct response is given in a very long text ("Lusitanos, Lígures e Celtas"), published in



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several issues of “his” *Revista de Guimarães* between 1890 and 1894.

Despite the importance of his opponents, Sarmiento’s conviction was unshakeable. The Lusitanian world should consider itself pre-Celtic or, to be more precise, Ligurian. This term, which he used to define a specific ethnic framework, refers to a more complex reality which, in the light of contemporary research, is somewhat ambiguous, controversial and difficult to define. For this reason, this component of his historical interpretation is one of the most problematic aspects in a modern assessment of the methodological rigour of his research. In his view, the Ligurians arrived in this territory through migrations from more northern regions of Europe (from the shores of the Baltic), stimulated by movements of Celtic populations that long preceded the so-called “Celtic invasions”, which he placed in the 7th century BC. They were related to the Albiones and the Hibernians and, like them, had Indo-European origins. For this reason, he classifies them, using the terminology of the time, as “pre-Celtic Aryans”, considering that they had settled in the Hispanic West at an early stage and arguing that they should already be associated with the “dolmen civilisation”.

His anti-Celticism was complemented by his conviction that the populations of western Spain could boast of fairly early and close contact with Greek culture. The arguments supporting this idea were based on literary information and traces of material culture. With regard to the former, the indications given by Pliny were eloquent. He considered that populations of Greek ancestry had settled in a certain area of Galicia, which was evident from the name *Heleni*, but also extended to other indications, such as the existence of another entity, the *Amphiloci*. This onomastic data is supported by archaeological evidence, namely the existence of decorative elements such as a form of swastika, the tetrascellic cross, whose presence in ancient Mycenae suggests that some decorative motifs found on the *Pedra Formosa* and on the doors of houses in *Briteiros* reveal a cultural relationship with the Mycenaean world (“*A Arte Micénica ...*”, 1899).

A significant part of his scientific work was his photography, at a time when it was really rare and expensive. Martins Sarmiento was really open to new things and excited about the visible signs of progress, so he got into taking photos, which also needed a lot of study and money. As the latter aspect did not pose a problem for him, he left us a remarkable collection of photographs and photos that document his scientific interests, not only in the field of archaeology, but also in ethnography (E. Brito ed., *Reimaginar Guimarães...* 2012). With regard to the former, the fundamental role played by the images he captured in epigraphic research should be highlighted. Having become one of the most assiduous correspondents of Emílio Hübner (Guerra, “*Emílio Hübner e os arqueólogos Portugueses*” [*Emílio Hübner and Portuguese archaeologists*]..., 2014, pp. 226-228), who was then working on the *Supplementum* to his vol. II of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, he often provided him with photographs of the inscriptions, a fundamental tool for analysing the documentation, thus overcoming many of the limitations of the more or less accurate tracings provided by other correspondents. If we take into account that Hübner himself did not have access to this expensive resource and that it was only many decades later that photography was defined as an essential component of the study of epigraphic documents, we can say that Sarmiento was a true pioneer in this area of research. Although this aspect is usually overlooked, it has already been duly noted and is certainly one of the most



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prominent components of his scientific and “progressive” spirit.

His reputation in the scientific community was based on his publications and the excavations at Briteiros and Sabroso, as well as three events. The first consisted of a conference and visit to Citânia, organised by Martins Sarmiento and Albano Belino, which took place in 1877. Although some of the relevant figures did not respond positively to the invitation, the event had some impact, especially at national level. Another similar event took place on 8 October 1880, in the context of the 9th Session of the Congress of Prehistoric Anthropology and Archaeology, held in Lisbon, with the participants in this scientific meeting visiting the ruins of Citânia de Briteiros, guided by Sarmiento (Lemos, “A excursão ao Norte de Portugal...” 1988). Considering that he was also chosen as one of the Portuguese speakers at this academic meeting, it can be concluded that, overall, this event was one of the most substantial contributions to his international reputation. Finally, in early August 1881, the Scientific Expedition to Serra da Estrela took place, promoted by the Lisbon Geographical Society. The archaeology section was the responsibility of its member no. 729, Martins Sarmiento, who also wrote the corresponding report (“Ethnology — Os Celtas...”, 1883). Given the prestige of this association, the choice of the archaeologist from Guimarães to take on this responsibility speaks volumes about the prestige he had acquired in this scientific field, which was then in its infancy.

Sarmiento was always a man of “free thought”, who valued the originality of his ideas, which were not always easy to fit into the context of the major trends of his time. However, he demonstrated knowledge of the leading European researchers in the fields of archaeology, ethnology, linguistics and even physical anthropology. The latter field was considered fundamental to the characterisation of ancient populations, following the work of Broca, with whom he was very familiar. Although the influence of French culture in Europe at that time was particularly strong in Portugal, it is not only research from that country that is most reflected in his work. In linguistics, D’Arbois de Jubainville stands out, known especially for his studies of Celtic languages and ethnology (especially *Les premiers habitants de l’Europe*), but there are also references to the Swiss Adolphe Pictet and the Germans Karl Brugmann and Otto Schrader in connection with their works on comparative linguistics, in addition to Humboldt. As questions of ancient ethnology, which are particularly important in his work, references to the works of Baron de Belloguet (Dominique-François-Louis Roget, with the suggestive title *Ethnogénie gauloise, ou Mémoires critiques sur l’origine et la parenté des Cimmériens, des Cimbres, des Ombres, des Belges, des Ligures et des anciens Celtes*) and Dieffenbach (*Celtica; Origines Europae*), but his references are very diverse, extending especially to Amédée Thierry (*Histoire des Gaulois*), John Rhys (*Celtic Britain*), Henri-Guillaume Moke (*La Belgique ancienne et ses origines gauloises, germaniques et franques*) and Adolf Holtzmann (*Kelten und Germanen*), some of whom were probably included by Adolfo Coelho in his list of “writers of secondary importance” on whom the Vimaranes author bases his theories. In the field of archaeology, Alexandre Bertrand (from his extensive work, he draws particularly on a five-volume work published under the title *Nos Origines*), Grabiél de Mortillet (*Musée Préhistorique; Le Préhistorique*) and Émile Cartailhac (*Les âges préhistoriques de l’Espagne et du Portugal*) stand out. Despite this, Sarmiento does not consider himself an academic and even cultivates some

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distance from the scientific community in general, with a few exceptions. As a rule, he places himself in the position of someone who wants the “wise men” to contribute some substantial knowledge that will resolve the main issues that torment him. For this reason, he has sometimes agreed to join the scholarly circle. But these rare occasions do not contradict the image of a scholar who embraces his “provincial” status because he truly feels himself to be the representative of an honest and honourable local culture, which constitutes a kind of counterpoint to the urban world, academicism and the circle of honours and corridors of power.

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