

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

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Simões, Alberto da Veiga (Arganil, 1888 - Paris, 1954)

Alberto da Veiga Simões was born on 16 December, still in the 19th century, in 1888. December would also be the month in which he would leave this world, on the 1st. In the second half of the 20th century, in 1954. Never reaching his 66th birthday. He was the only son of a respected family of large landowners in Arganil. His father, António José Simões, was primarily a notary but also served as secretary of the Santa Casa for several years. His mother, Guilhermina Alves da Veiga, dedicated the best of her time to the family. Here, he saw the first light of day. Here, he will rest forever, in the local cemetery. After more than a decade in self-imposed exile in the French capital. After completing primary school in Arganil, his parents enrolled him at the Liceu Central in Coimbra. His fortune made it possible, and his son's intelligence recommended it. The first five years were especially rewarding for him. Veiga Simões excelled in his grades. However, the academic year 1903-1904 would mark a turning point in his academic life forever. He became interested and disinterested in subjects very different from those in the textbooks, with goals equally distinct from those recommended by the professors. Literature in general, and poetry in particular. Anything that could be published. Although the teachers didn't admire his daydreams and failed him "due to fail grades", his classmates elected him to represent them — both before the high school, the board of the Filantrópica [Philanthropy], and with the national authorities in their opposition to the reform of secondary education at the time. As for his parents, concerned about his scattered focus, they transferred him to another high school in the supposedly quieter town of Viseu. Hoping that the distance would calm him and steer him back towards his studies and the school compendiums. In vain! His drive would never waver, and his diverse interests would always extend beyond any official curriculum. Even so, he never failed again. He even found time to prepare and publish his first historiographical work. A monograph on Arganil, published in *Ilustração Portuguesa* in 1906. He had not yet turned 18. Adulthood brought him back the Lusa-Athens. He began mingling with some of his former colleagues. And grew more distant from others. He also established new friendships. As long as they didn't jeopardise his ability to pass each of the five years of the Law degree in which he had enrolled. His parents would have surely warned him. And so it was that Veiga Simões' eclecticism found its way into a wide range of magazines, both critical and literary in nature, edited by himself, sometimes by others *No Circo* [At the Circus], 1906, *Serões* [Evenings], 2nd series, 1909, *A Farça* [The



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Farce], 1909-1910, *A Águia* [The Eagle], 1st series, 1910-1911 and 2nd series, 1912, e *A Rajada*, 1912 —, or by genres as different as the short stories, essays, memoirs and theatre — *Nitockris*, 1908, *A Nova Geração. Estudo sobre as tendências actuais da literatura portuguesa* [The New Generation. Study on current trends in Portuguese literature], 1911, *Elegia da Lenda. Livro das Saudades* [Elegy of the Legend. Book on Longing], 1912, and *Sombras* [Shadows], 1912. Always with independence. Genius, his admirers would say. Arrogance, critics would argue.

Even before completing his bachelor's degree, he travelled to London, where he worked as an attaché at the Portuguese legation. Between June and September 1911. Through Teófilo Braga. With the consent of Bernardino Machado. The Republic's first foreign minister. The regime he had always fought for. Because, above all, he was a republican. After graduating in November 1911, he established himself as a lawyer in Arganil. More to satisfy his parents than out of personal vocation. Disagreeing with the direction of Afonso Costa's politics, he left the Portuguese Republican Party. Identifying with António José de Almeida's proposals, he aligned himself with the Republican Evolutionist Party. He opposed the former and supported the latter through the press. In his hometown, through opinion pieces in the columns of newspaper *A Comarca de Arganil*, and in 1913, in the *Jornal de Arganil*, which he founded and led between 1913 and 1915, in Coimbra, in the *Diário de Coimbra*, where he was "editor-in-chief" in 1913, and finally, in Lisbon, in the *República*, where he served as "political editor" between 1913 and 1915. Disillusioned with evolutionism, he withdrew from politics. Despite having founded and led another newspaper, *Correio de Arganil*, he had already adopted an independent character. Through the competition for third legation secretaries, third-class consuls, and third officers held in 1915, he managed to join the ranks of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Where he would remain for thirty-one years. With many moments of glory. And no less discomfort. Starting as a third-class consul, he was posted to Manaus. He left in 1916, already married to Maria Antónia de Campos Amaral, the daughter of wealthy merchants in Brazil. His performance earned him a promotion to second-class consul and a subsequent posting to Pará in 1918. Although he did not end up occupying this post, his closest superiors continued to favour him, elevating him to the top of the consular career ladder and posting him to Christiania (Oslo) in 1919. His qualities, particularly in handling economic matters, were under-utilised in purely consular work, and he would have been better suited to a diplomatic career. It was therefore no surprise that he was promoted to Minister Plenipotentiary, 2nd Class, and posted to Vienna in 1921. He was invited by Manuel Maria Coelho, the leader of the infamous 19 October coup, to become Foreign Minister later that same year. That's what those who trusted him believed. And what those who distanced themselves from him lamented. He took on his position with determination. He was committed to fundamentally reforming the Ministry, equipping it with the necessary mechanisms to make it the "stabilising force in the economy". He accomplished this in just fifty-nine days, through the Decree of 12 December 1921. Just before his thirty-third birthday. Although the government that followed suspended the implementation of the reform, it would inspire other occupants of the Palácio das Necessidades [headquarters of the Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs]. Between 1922 and 1924, he was in Berlin. While those who admired him continued to praise his

actions, which were the result of the trade agreements he negotiated and achieved, those who held him in contempt seized every opportunity to undermine his efforts, plotting the first disciplinary actions against him. While he was trying to defend himself, he was seduced by yet another new Republican party proposal. That of the Radical Republican Party, whose Board he chaired in 1925. The disciplinary proceedings against him were revoked, and he permanently withdrew from party activity. The following years were spent between Prague, Vienna and Budapest, from 1926 to 1933. While those who recognised his worth remained loyal to him, those intent on denigrating him once again resorted to every means to bring two more disciplinary proceedings against him. In 1933, the *presidente do Conselho* [Prime Minister], who was more attuned to his diplomatic skills than his political convictions, approved his promotion to Minister of First Class and his subsequent posting to Berlin. Until 1940. That year, in June, the looming threat of invasion by German troops forced him to reconsider his decision. Veiga Simões was placed on reserve. For delaying his departure from the German capital, in addition to another disciplinary procedure, he was sentenced to two years of suspension without pay. In 1946, he was offered a job in China. A poisoned gift. A demotion for a diplomat with an established career in Europe. When he delayed his move to the Orient, he was simply dismissed. A decision he appealed. But the judges of the Supreme Administrative Court didn't do him justice.

Although his stay in Prague, Vienna and Budapest, when the financial and commercial agreements with Austria and Hungary had been finalised, turned into a lengthy waiting period until he was appointed again as a diplomat, it did give him the time he needed to deepen his interest in history. He read a lot. Very much so. The latest in historiographical production at the time. Whether they were Portuguese historians or foreign historians. He selected those with whom he identified, to praise them. And refuted the theses of others from whom he distanced himself. But he didn't neglect his sources. Especially in the European centres where he travelled. Where he had access to a wealth of original documentation. Where he was recognised for his analyses of the present and past. In Lisbon, successive heads of Foreign Affairs received requests for authorisation to respond to invitations addressed to him. In 1929, he gave a lecture at the Sorbonne on France and Portugal during the Hundred Years' War. Unfortunately, however, this is one of his texts that has not been located. In 1931, on the occasion of the International Congress of Historical Sciences in Budapest, as well as being chosen as the Portuguese delegate, he was also appointed vice-president of the "Comissão das Grandes Descobertas" [Great Discoveries Commission]. He would have focussed on the sea voyages to the West before Columbus. Another speech, however, that remains unknown. That same year, at The Hague Academy of International Law, the audience was able to hear him speak about current issues, specifically the new orientations of international economic policy. The result of this course, to the glee of all those who are interested in economics, can still be read — *Les nouvelles orientations de la politique économique internationale*, 1932. A year later, at the Institute of Advanced Diplomatic Studies in Brussels, it was the auditorium's turn to hear him speak in French about relations between Portugal and Flanders at the dawn of the capitalist era. This conference too, to the delight of those who appreciate his writing on history, can still be read, both in its original version and in Portuguese *La Flandre, le Portugal et les débuts du capitalisme*



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moderne, 1933, or "A Flandres, Portugal e os primórdios do capitalismo moderno", 2004 [Flanders, Portugal and the beginnings of modern capitalism]. In this lecture, Veiga Simões sought to emphasise the contribution of Portugal and Flanders in laying the foundations of modernity, as far as the economy was concerned. In the 14th century, the Italian cities, which until then had been supplying Europe with oriental products via the Mediterranean, were forced to turn to the Atlantic, using the routes that had long since been inaugurated by Portuguese merchants in their trade with Flanders. The institutions of commercial and maritime law created and developed by the Portuguese monarchs, particularly King Dinis and King Fernando, were also adopted by other merchants. If "the historical formation of all nationalities is the result of their geography" (*A Flandres...*, 2004, p. 32), Portugal could be no exception. At the mouths of the great rivers, the largest urban agglomerations were born. As for the production of the respective *hinterland*, instead of leaning towards the interior of the Peninsula, it naturally leaned towards the maritime ports. The sea was therefore the Portuguese natural and historical destination. Once here, it was not so much the waters of the Mediterranean that these products traversed, but those of the Atlantic. Towards the north, namely Flanders. It was a regular trade. Products from the land, such as grapes, wine, olive oil, figs, honey and wax, or sea salt, or objects from small domestic industries. First local business. Then national. As this country soon became a political unit, it also soon became an economic unit. A country whose kings sealed the interests of the merchants of their cities, or their own interests, with successive marriages between their descendants and prominent figures from northern Europe. The change of seas or routes that took place in the 14th century was due to various reasons. Because the Hundred Years' War had ruined the great fairs of the old continent, which until then had been distribution centres for oriental products transported by the Italians. Because the Ottomans were no longer satisfied with the territory to which they had initially been confined, but expanded into the Mediterranean. This change took place practically at the same time as the preparations for the conquest of Ceuta. An endeavour carried out by a "king imposed by a bourgeoisie that was the economic expression of the nation" (*Idem*, 2004, p. 53). We were at the dawn of a new era: "The moment when Portugal prepared its fleet for the conquest of Ceuta closed the age that had begun with the definitive destruction of the Roman organisation, and opened to the world the Modern Age of capitalism and economic nationalisms" (*Idem*, 2004, p. 51). Northern European cities will become the new redistribution centres for inland markets. After the respective vessels docked in the national harbours, "Driven initially by the small Portuguese nation, first for its own production, then for that of its new territories, as well as for the transport of valuable goods from the East, the world left the horizons inherited from the Roman Empire and made the Atlantic the *Mare Nostrum* of modern times" (*Idem*, 2004, p. 63). Henri Pirenne, the "glory of historical science" in the '30s, as Veiga Simões regarded him, was the historian he cited most enthusiastically. M. Goris, another Belgian historian, was also mentioned many times. Sharing Jaime Cortesão's perspective, in the "solidarity existing between the action of the Portuguese economy aimed at dominating the strait and the cities of Flanders", he made sure to acknowledge him (*Idem*, 2004, p. 51). Others, cultists of a "short-sighted history", were only implicitly so. Because it distanced itself from them, especially with regard to the effects of the so-called "transport



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policy" on national production.

In 1937, by the time Veiga Simões was already representing Portugal's interests in Berlin, the organisers of the First Congress on the History of Portuguese Expansion in the World decided that he should not be excluded from the initiative. Nor should his reflections. This invitation resulted in two very important studies: "Portugal, o ouro, as descobertas e a criação do Estado capitalista" [Portugal, gold, discoveries and the creation of the capitalist state] and "O Infante D. Henrique – o seu tempo e a sua acção" [Prince Henrique the Navigator — his time and action]. Although the first title was published after the second, it was written before. So, it makes sense that the order presented is this one and not the order in which each one was published. The five years between the conference in Brussels and the current challenge allowed Veiga Simões to refine ideas he had started to embrace, to develop theses that had previously only been touched upon, and to offer new interpretations of old questions. Firstly, with regard to the territorial definition of the Portuguese kingdom. It can no longer be understood within a confined geographical framework, but only when analysed in a broader European context. "Portugal is thus the outcome of two simultaneous factors, one specific to the Iberian Peninsula and the other more general: 1) the break-up of the Leonese empire into the five peninsular kingdoms; 2) the reopening of long-distance trade by the crusades, which gave it a foothold in economic activity and moulded its political guidelines" (*Portugal...*, 2004, p. 87). The last two centuries of the Middle Ages in Europe were marked by the "lust for gold". The Muslim advance had led to a loss of contact with the gold regions of central Africa. European production was short of demand. In the last third of the 14th century, the economic depression that had hit the old continent was spreading to Portugal. Just as the society of Avis was being formed here. "Thus, the Portuguese problem at the beginning of the 15th century had three aspects: lack of income for the nobility due to the narrowness of the lands and the impossibility of making them produce more; lack of territory in which the neo-feudal spirit of this nobility could expand; and, above all, the predominance of the cities in which the king had logically supported the economic and social life of the kingdom; the absence of a monetary instrument for exchange at a distance, capable of revitalising the economy by its influx, alleviating the depression in which it was suffocating, and restoring the economic forces needed to overcome the crisis." (*Idem...*, 2004, pp. 96 e 97). The political and economic actions of King João I's government had been dealt with by highlighting figures. History had to be depersonalised. Our history. We could no longer ignore the "economic and social drama that he had to master". It was in this context that King João I set his sights on Ceuta. Why this city? In no small part at the suggestion of the Genoese merchants who lived in Lisbon. Genoa was probably the king's most determined and discreet ally. "Ceuta was the end of an asphyxiation, the starting point and the instrument of a new route to wealth, if not wealth itself. Everyone rushed messianically into the enterprise, king, infants, merchants, financiers, noblemen; and even the medieval Nun'Álvares" (*Idem...*, 2004, pp. 102 e 103). The progress in the History of Economics during the early 20th century enabled Veiga Simões to reappraise the history of the 14th and 15th centuries. Sombart, Simiand, Mitchell and Kondratiev were just some of the many who helped him with this (re)reading.



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In his study of Prince Henrique, Veiga Simões begins by deconstructing the portrait drawn by Gomes Eanes de Zurara in the *Crónica da Guiné* [Chronicle of Guinea] later reinforced by the Renaissance, both through historiography and epic. To truly get to know the Prince, we had to free him both from the "primitivism of his chronicler" and from the "humanist tinsel that raised him to the head of a century". Starting from the concept of generation, thanks to the work of Wechssler and Pinder, we are explained the cultural melting pot in which Zurara drank and which made the Prince the "supreme coordinator of his time". Essentially, the same "isolated man whom the epic and history of the 1500s would later cast in bronze", turning the 15th century into the "century of the Prince". His much-praised crusading is also brought into question. Just like the nation itself. Or the Peninsula. In short: "To attribute our action in conquests and discoveries to the *crusading spirit* would be to personalise the activity of a people in a posthumous soldier of the faith. If so, it would all be the work of the mysticism of a man whom his country blindly followed. Now the country counted for something. The Prince's action could even be realised because it was a national action, and ultimately encompassed within itself the disparate interests of the classes, those that represented the immovable wealth of land and those that held the movable wealth of money and trade" (*O Infante D. Henrique...* [Prince Henrique], 2004, p. 140). In this work, Veiga Simões endeavoured to expand on his theses to such an extent, profusely accompanied by detailed footnotes, revealing the vast bibliography he had used, both national and foreign, from the most traditional and consensual titles to the most recent and original, that the number of pages far exceeded the space that the Management of the *História da Expansão Portuguesa no Mundo* [History of Portuguese Expansion in the World] had allocated to it. For this reason, the last part, namely the paragraphs dedicated to the role of Prince Pedro in the Discoveries, had to be summarised. When, in September 1428, the Duke of Coimbra returned to Portugal after travelling around Europe, there was another one. He left "a great *medieval lord*" and returned "a *modern man*". Opposed to pursuing the policy of conquering North Africa, he favoured the search for gold and trade. So that the ships, as they advanced towards the coast, would bring the labour that the land needed, the metal that was so coveted by everyone, the spices that the continent offered and, finally, "fulfilling the journey of Africa", they could reach India by sea. In other words, the exact course our caravels took. In comparison: "The regent was the man who had shed the medieval armour with which he had left the kingdom and donned the modern doublet." King Henrique was the knight who, without unbuckling his chain mail and sleeping in it like a sackcloth, had dressed as a merchant and a sailor, ready to let the garment fall when he didn't need it for himself and his people, reappearing dressed in steel, his lance aloft, the chequered horse for the great tournament with the very modern" (*O Infante D. Henrique...*, 2004, p. 164). In conclusion: "The scrutinising magician of the *Autumn of the Middle Ages*, Huizinga formulated this rule: at this time, more than any other, the great historical events are not the result of the will of men, nor are they prepared by them. An old middle-aged man, loving her and envisioning a return to her, Prince Henry was, after all, one of the greatest creators of the modern world" (Ibidem).

In the last years of his life in Paris, Veiga Simões, despite successive health problems that weakened him



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and his wife, aggravated by the ostracism to which he had been condemned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, still found the strength to devote the best of his time to writing history. Particularly in the early days of nationality. To the friends who continued to correspond with him and shared with him his love of studying the past, he was able to handle the various projects he had in hand. The friends who still visited him saw it with their own eyes, they held them in their own hands. Some are still handwritten. But others already in print. Like the volume dedicated to the Infante das Sete Partidas. João Alves das Neves was one of those friends. He was one of those who, after his death, most regretted the disappearance, shrouded in mystery, of all that labour. So painstakingly and patiently built up over decades. Between Europe and Brazil. "Its non-publication irreparably jeopardises the study of four centuries of Portugal and its antecedents." So wrote Vitorino Magalhães Godinho, one of the few historians who has consistently remained faithful to his legacy ("Alberto da Veiga Simões"..., 1990, p. 591). A legacy that needs to be rediscovered because: "Beyond all the metaphors, he was a meteor that tore through the sky of a stagnant and amorphous historiography, as it was in the '20s and '30s, and his essays on history are close to those of António Sérgio, Jaime Cortesão, Duarte Leite and even João Lúcio de Azevedo, which means that some of the most profound and well-structured proposals for reading our collective life came from his pen and his brilliance", wrote another historian, Marques de Almeida, one of his most devoted readers and greatest admirers (*Estudos de História* [Studies on History]..., 2004, p. 14).

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