

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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NEMÉSIO Mendes Pinheiro da Silva, Vitorino (Praia da Vitória, 1901-Lisboa, 1978)

A writer, professor, and journalist from the Azores, as well as the author of numerous historiographical works, he was a native of Terceira Island (Azores). After attending secondary schools in Angra and Horta (Faial), he completed his secondary education in Coimbra, where he began his university studies in 1922. Initially enrolling in Law, he later transitioned to the History and Philosophy course (1924) and subsequently to Romance Philology (1925), completing the latter in 1931 at the University of Lisbon. There, at the Faculty of Arts, he began his academic career (1933–1971) and earned a doctorate with his thesis *A Mocidade de Herculano até à volta do exílio* [The Youth of Herculano until His Return from Exile] (1934).

He worked as a proofreader, editor, and reporter for the Lisbon newspapers *A Pátria*, *A Imprensa de Lisboa*, and *Última Hora* (1920–21), as well as for *Humanidade*, in Coimbra (1925). He contributed to numerous publications, including daily newspapers such as *Diário de Lisboa* and *Diário Popular*, and culturally significant journals like *Seara Nova*. He was particularly associated with publications from the second Modernist movement of the 1920s and 1930s (*Byzancio*, *Tríptico*, *Presença*), as well as with the notable trends of the 1940s (*Cadernos de Poesia*, *Variante*, *Aventura*, *Litoral*). He had his own columns in several outlets, such as the weekly *Observador* (1970–74). He founded the "academic republican newspaper" *Gente Nova* (1927–28), the important *Revista de Portugal* [Portugal Review] (1937–40), and directed the daily *O Dia* (1975–76). From the 1940s onwards, he regularly contributed to radio broadcasts and, in 1969, launched a television programme (*Se bem me lembro* [As Far As I Remember], RTP, until 1975), which brought him unexpected popularity.

After his first trip to Spain (1923)—significant because he met Miguel de Unamuno in Salamanca, with whom he later corresponded, and Ortega y Gasset in Madrid, whom he interviewed for the *Diário de Lisboa* and later befriended in Lisbon (1942–46)—his academic career led him to teach abroad. He taught in France (University of Montpellier, 1934–36, where he would be awarded an honorary doctorate in 1960), Belgium (Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1937–39), and, from 1952 onwards, at various Brazilian universities (Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Bahia, Minas Gerais, Ceará, where he received an honorary doctorate in 1965). These teaching periods, whether short or long, had a significant impact on his work. As a speaker, he toured extensively across Europe, particularly from the 1950s until 1977. He also occasionally travelled to Africa



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(Angola and Mozambique, 1960) and the Americas (Canada, 1971).

He served as director of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Lisbon (1956–58) and its Institute of Brazilian Culture. He was a member of the Lisbon Academy of Sciences, first as a corresponding member (1957) and later as a full member (1963), as well as a member of the Brazilian Academy of Letters and the Historical Institutes of Rio de Janeiro and Brasília. He also presided over the Alliance Française of Lisbon and the National Commission for the Fifth Centenary of Gil Vicente (1965) and participated in many other commissions, such as those for the Fifth Centenary of the Death of Prince Henry the Navigator (1960), the Foundation of São Paulo (1964), and the publication of *Os Lusíadas* (1972), among others. Among the awards he received were the Ricardo Malheiros Prize (1944) and the National Literature Prize (1965), with particular distinction given to the Montaigne International Prize from the F.V.S. Foundation of Hamburg (1974).

Nemésio's literary oeuvre, while spanning nearly all genres, is especially notable for his poetry, which he published with relative consistency between 1915 and 1977. His poetry reveals such profound aesthetic and thematic shifts that it sometimes appears to have been written by entirely different authors. For instance, consider *O bicho harmonioso* [The Harmonious Creature] (1938), *Nem toda a noite a vida* [Not All Night Is Life] (1952), and *Limite de idade* [Age Limit] (1972). His narrative fiction is dominated by the novel *Mau tempo no canal* [Stormy Isles: An Azorean Tale] (1944), though it also includes shorter forms, such as *O mistério do Paço do Milhafre* [The Mystery of the Milhafre Manor] (1949). He also published a wide variety of texts with a somewhat chronicle-like nature (which generally transitioned from the press or radio broadcasts to later being collected in book form). These works range from travel literature and scattered notes to reflections on cultural or social aspects, as well as formal essays and critical approaches to literature and literary history. Additionally, his academic research resulted in significant studies, particularly on 19th-century Portuguese culture and literature. Notable among these is his extensive work on Herculano and Romantic culture, exemplified by *Relações francesas do Romantismo português* [French Relations of Portuguese Romanticism] (1936), as well as his studies on Brazil, particularly *O Campo de São Paulo. A Companhia de Jesus e o plano português do Brasil* [The São Paulo Region: The Society of Jesus and the Portuguese Plan for Brazil] (1954).

Although not strictly a historian, it is undeniable that, both due to the period in which his education took place and the special attention he always paid to the mutual conditioning of synchrony and diachrony, history features prominently in various aspects of Nemésio's highly diverse body of work in terms of genres and themes. One of the most evident examples is the segment of biographies of historical figures, the first of which, *Isabel de Aragão, Rainha Santa* [Isabel of Aragon, the Holy Queen], was published in 1936 and translated into Spanish in 1944. As the author wrote in a letter to Adolfo Casais Monteiro (8 April 1936): "At times, I feel like a biographer, at others, a novelist, or a poet, and I am even a professor and philologist!" This statement encapsulates the hybridity present in this and other works. Equipped with a small bibliography and an appendix of "Documents" taken from the work of António Ribeiro de Vasconcelos—"my teacher of auxiliary sciences of History at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Coimbra [...] whose rare erudition and



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exemplary criticism made possible a certain tone of intimacy between the biographer and a figure from such a distant past”—the work clarifies the author’s approach in a note: “This little book is a ‘life,’ that is, a purely biographical interpretation of the Queen [...] we have not lost our historical footing; we have not invented a single character or event: our invention is purely psychological. A ‘life’ cannot be written solely with scattered records from archives.” (p. 104). In *Vida e obra do Infante D. Henrique* [Life and Work of Prince Henry the Navigator] (1959), Nemésio states: “This little book remains within the natural limits of simple narrative [...] it did not require a scholarly or bibliographic apparatus. The primary sources, especially the chronicles, were consulted [...] but detailed documentation or a discussion of interpretive positions would only burden the text and hinder readability.” (p. IV). In fact, he promises to revisit the subject in another study, more in line with his relationship with History: “In a framework of cultural history directly investigated through the literary texts and documentary sources of the 15th century. There, we will analyse the stratification of classes, ideals of life, the mental structure of the time, and its content.” (p. VI). This perspective aligns with what Nemésio considered the decisive impetus during his time at Coimbra: the search for a “comprehensive history of the world, speculatively invited to analyse the distinctions and ambiguities between nature and culture, necessity and freedom, man and the world—in sum, the ‘historical reason’ that Dilthey and Ortega y Gasset would later articulate for me” (*Última Lição* [Last Lesson], p. XXVI). However, it does not align with “some operations of microhistory I have conducted in my studies” (ibid., p. XXVII), such as his thesis on Herculano. As for *O Campo de São Paulo* [The São Paulo Region], Nemésio clarifies in the “Preface”: “This work does not stem from personal archival research, nor, strictly speaking, from original historical elaboration.” (p. X). Instead, it offers a “global narrative of events” surrounding the city’s foundation as part of a broader project: “to determine the origins and purpose of human settlement in Brazil, from the intermittent coastal landings that followed Pedro Álvares Cabral’s discovery in 1500 to the first stable settlement in the hinterland, on the Vicentine Plateau, in 1553–1554, by the Jesuits under Father Manuel da Nóbrega.” (p. X). To this end, Nemésio sought to “historically recount the interconnected emergence of the Society of Jesus and Brazil in the first half of the 16th century” while acknowledging his limitations: “This book, in everything beyond the scope of Jesuit activity in Brazil, is strictly indebted to the classical bibliography on the subject [...] Given the narrative nature of this book, extensive footnotes were avoided. Essential references to historiographical sources and minor details are included at the end of the volume.” (p. XII).

His approach is based on the *Cartas Jesuíticas* [Jesuit Letters] published by the Brazilian Academy of Letters, which he had read and annotated during his student years: “I tried to work as much as possible directly with the letters of the Fathers and Brothers, preferring to let them speak for themselves about the people and events of their formidable experiences rather than narrate them myself. [...] It is far too easy to be a good writer by relying on commas and italics.” (p. XIII). In the preface to the 3rd edition (1971), he regrets “not having had the time to revise the work,” extending it to cover the foundation of Rio de Janeiro, “whose fourth centenary (1965) I celebrated in *Ode ao Rio*” (p. XV). This sentiment reveals Nemésio’s unique relationship with history: for him, both study and poetry serve the same purpose of celebrating human activity.



The book opens with the biography of the founder: "The life of Saint Ignatius of Loyola has been told a thousand times" (p. 3). This confirms what, for Nemésio, is the primary function of the historical dimension: to understand phenomena, one must first understand people. The biographies of "figures" or "characters" (terms used in some of his archival notes) were his true focus. This is exemplified in his profile of Herculano, where literature, history, and culture converge to explore the relationship between the individual and time:

"If we could portray the flesh-and-blood man as time sculpted him, at least every ten years, we would, through those snapshots, capture his entire inner history." (*A mocidade de Herculano*, p. 54).

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Fátima Freitas Morna

This work is financed by national funds through FCT - Foundation for Science and Technology, I.P, in the scope of the projects UIDB/04311/2020 and UIDP/04311/2020.



SUPPORTED BY:



FUNDAÇÃO
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