

Luís Adão da Fonseca and Iberian Political History

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Abstract

This article offers a brief overview of a part of Prof. Luis Adão da Fonseca's life trajectory: his stay in Spanish universities and archives, and his intense participation in the scientific activity of Spanish institutions, especially the Congresos de Historia de la Corona de Aragón and the Sociedad Española de Estudios Medievales. The result of his Iberian vocation has great visibility in the publication of relevant research works, in the organization of congresses, and in other scientific meetings. Moreover, new understandings of Iberian Medieval History could benefit from one of its most important lines of research, precisely the one we want to emphasize in this paper.

Keywords

Portuguese medievalists, Medieval Iberian relations, Congresos de Historia de la Corona de Aragón, Universidade do Porto

Resumo

Este artigo oferece um breve panorama de uma parte da trajetória de vida do Prof. Luis Adão da Fonseca: sua passagem por universidades e arquivos espanhóis, e sua intensa participação na atividade científica de instituições espanholas, especialmente os Congresos de Historia de la Corona de Aragón e a Sociedad Española de Estudios Medievales. O resultado da sua vocação ibérica tem grande visibilidade na publicação de trabalhos de investigação relevantes, na organização de congressos e outros encontros científicos. Para além disso, novos entendimentos no quadro da História Ibérica Medieval beneficiaram de uma das suas linhas de investigação mais importantes, precisamente aquela que queremos destacar neste artigo.

Palavras-chave

Medievalistas portugueses, Relações Luso-Espanholas, Congressos de História da Coroa de Aragão, Universidade do Porto

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Professor Luís Adão da Fonseca studied history at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Porto between 1962 and 1967. One year later, in November, his bachelor's degree thesis, which was also his first academic work (Fonseca 1968), initiated what was to become one of his most important research themes: the political history of the Iberian kingdoms.

Professor Fonseca's research into the Constable Dom Pedro and his personal and political career in Portugal, Castile, and the Crown of Aragon led him to turn to the Portuguese and Spanish archives where the documentation on that Portuguese prince was kept. These experiences greatly increased the already burgeoning personal, Iberian, and universalist vocation demonstrated in the young graduate's research.

Awarded a scholarship by the Instituto de Alta Cultura, he carried out his research in Madrid and Barcelona at the institutions that would later become the focal points of his investigations throughout his academic career: in Madrid, the National Library, the National Historical Archive, and the Library of the Royal Academy of History; in Barcelona, the Central Library (now the Library of Catalonia), the Barcelona Municipal Archive, and, above all, the Archives of the Crown of Aragon. The immediate result was his PhD dissertation, presented in July 1979 (Fonseca 1982) and other subsequent works on the Constable Dom Pedro (e.g., Fonseca 1970, 1972, and 1974).

At the same time, he began his teaching career at the same faculty in Porto where he had studied as an undergraduate. He taught there as an assistant professor of history from 1969 to 1975, and, in that last year, moved to the University of Navarre, where he worked firstly as a visiting professor, then as an assistant professor during the academic years 1976-1980, and finally as an associate professor in the academic year 1980-1981.

In the first year of his time abroad, he completed his PhD thesis, on which he had been working since completing his first degree,² published a synthesis of his teaching activity (Fonseca 1984),³ and, above all, intensified his contacts with the Spanish academic environment. In particular, his election as the representative for Portugal to the Committee of the *Congress of the History of the Crown of Aragon*, an event that took place during the meeting held in Zaragoza in 1976, was an important addition to the exchange of knowledge. He brought to this Committee his organizational skills and his scholarly output, resulting, above

² Recognized in Portugal by the University of Porto in July 1979.

³ One of the 14 volumes of *Historia Universal*, of which he was one of the coordinators.

all, in his overview of important historical themes, clearly revealed at subsequent editions of the congress.⁴

At the beginning of the next decade (1980), he returned to the University of Porto. Some Portuguese professors drove to Pamplona to persuade him to do so. Already in Porto, and in order to obtain the qualification necessary to be appointed a full professor of medieval history (1981), he presented a public lecture which still remains today as a magnificent testimony to one of his most important research themes: the political history of the Peninsular kingdoms, focusing above all on the relations between Portugal and Castile.

At that time, Luís Adão da Fonseca was an associate professor⁵ (by invitation), and, in 1984, he was appointed a full professor⁶ until his retirement in 2006. Between 1996 and 2003, he also served as a full professor at the Lusíada University in Lisbon. Later, he was appointed vice-rector of that same University in Porto (January 2004 to August 2011). During these years, he developed an important series of international collaborative initiatives in Spain, France, Brazil, and the United States.⁷

After his return to Portugal, and especially at the Institute of Historical Documentation of the Faculty of Letters of the University of Porto, he was determined to increase the number of academic collaborations with Spanish universities. As a result, he established numerous personal contacts, helping to make him a profound connoisseur of Spanish medievalism in its entirety. His participation in the general assemblies of the Spanish Society of Medieval Studies was to have particular outcomes.⁸ He greatly encouraged the presence of Portuguese medievalists at all these meetings, and his attempts to inspire collaborative studies and the exchange of research experiences were among the predominant concerns of his role as a professor. The main outcome of his involvement in this area was the conception and creation of the Portuguese Society of Medieval Studies.

The organization of the second Portuguese-Spanish Conference on Medieval History, fully dedicated to the subject of Iberia (Porto, November 1985), is a good example

⁴ During his time on the committee, congresses were organized in Palermo (1982), Montpellier (1985), Palma de Mallorca (1987), Sassari-Alguero (1990), Jaca (1993), Naples (1997), Barcelona-Lérida (2000), Valencia (2004), and Zaragoza-Caspe-Alcañiz (2012). These were occasions that enabled Professor Fonseca to intensify his links to the study of Italian medievalism, another area of research in which he also demonstrated his universalist vocation.

⁵ *Diário da República*, 2^a série, n° 259, 10 November 1981.

⁶ *Diário da República*, 2^a Série, n° 195, 14 August 1984.

⁷ Namely, the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (1991), the University of São Paulo (1997), and Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland (1998).

⁸ Covadonga (1983), Jarandilla (1984), Sitges (1985), Pamplona (1986), El Escorial (1989), and Santiago de Compostela (2007).

of Adão da Fonseca's encouragement of the transversal study of historiographical themes. When presenting the proceedings of that meeting (a three-volume edition published in 1990), he explained his historiographical views by manifesting his firm conviction that the study of historical phenomena could not be limited by necessarily more restrictive political borders. And he wrote:

based on the belief that there was a close relationship between the various problems that affected the Iberian kingdoms until the 16th century, this congress sought to create the opportunity for such an awareness to be developed as part of a new methodological approach towards historiographical practice. It is obvious that our aim is not to underestimate the individuality of each of the spaces that have evolved as autonomous monarchies [. . .] The aim is to foster historical research in which problems (in the multifaceted range of their various components—social, economic, political, cultural, and religious) can be studied from a Peninsular perspective, which will ultimately enrich their understanding.

With the support of the aforementioned Institute of Historical Documentation, he similarly took responsibility for the organization of the fourth Portuguese-Spanish Conference on Medieval History, dedicated to the study of *As Relações de Fronteira no Século de Alcañices* (Border Relations in the Century of the Treaty of Alcañices), which was again held in Porto, in November 1997, on the occasion of the seventh centenary of the signing of the Alcañices Treaty. The extraordinarily large participation of Portuguese and Spanish researchers, whose contributions resulted in two sizeable volumes of proceedings edited under his supervision, is a good example of the popularity that his projects achieved.⁹

In his own words: “An academic conference . . . is valuable above all for the intellectual contribution of the researchers who participate in it In this case, the number of papers presented and the geographical range of the institutions to which their authors belonged (covering the entire Iberian Peninsula) testify to the value of the material gathered together in this publication. The importance of the meeting within the panorama of medieval

⁹ *Revista da Faculdade de Letras. História*. Porto: Faculdade de Letras, Série II, vol. 15, n^{os} 1 and 2, 1998. Available at <https://ler.letras.up.pt/site/default.aspx?qry=id04id18&sum=sim>.

Peninsular historiography is itself clearly evident, while also underlining the continuity of a scientific collaboration that started almost thirty years ago.”¹⁰

This belief was materialized in the form of a personal and scientific relationship between the Department of Medieval History at the Universidad Autónoma (Madrid) and the Faculty of Letters (Porto), with the mutual exchange of teachers to deliver lectures and organize monographic courses. Among its most important results, we may point to the realization of the *Hispano-Portuguese Culture Meetings* promoted by the Camões Institute (of which Adão da Fonseca was director between 1992 and 1995), the Vice-Rectorate of Culture of the Universidad Autónoma (Madrid), and the Institute of Historical Documentation of the University of Porto, together with the support of several public and private bodies.

Once more, the titles of these meetings show a historiographical line of thought that goes far beyond the political landmarks of medieval monarchies and calls for a study of the events taking place across the whole of the Iberian Peninsula, which were closely related to each other—a truly historiographical unity. The first conference was held in Madrid, in December 1994, under the title *Una Península compartida: perspectivas sobre un mismo territorio*; the second, also held in Madrid, in January 1996, focused on the themes of art and archeology; and the third, under the title *Interrelación cultural en la formación de una mentalidad. Siglos XII al XVI*, took place in Madrid and Porto in November 1997. The contributions of the participants in these sessions were collected together and published in one volume.¹¹

Those years of scientific collaboration favored an even closer relationship between the University of Porto and the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. In January 1999, their respective governing boards approved an agreement under which chairs were created at both institutions: the *Cátedra Alexandre Herculano* of Portuguese Studies in Madrid, and the *Cátedra Claudio Sánchez Albornoz* of Spanish Studies in Porto, this latter one being occupied by Adão da Fonseca. The work that was carried out meant an increase in the exchange of scientific knowledge between both institutions, and the holding of a Spanish-Portuguese colloquium on medieval history, in Porto in November 2001, and a second one, in Madrid in November 2002.

¹⁰ Adão da Fonseca was recalling both the Portuguese-Spanish Conference on Medieval History (Porto, 1968), in which he had participated as a young scholar, and another meeting that had taken place in the following year at the Archivo General de Simancas, with the purpose of founding the two Societies of Medieval Studies (Spanish and Portuguese) in order to intensify the cooperation between medievalists from both countries. Attending the meeting on the Portuguese side were Professors Artur Moreira de Sá and Domingos de Pinho Brandão; while, on the Spanish side, the group was formed by Eloy Benito Ruano, Emilio Sáez, Amando Represa, and Luis María Larrieta. The meeting was organized by Luis Suárez Fernández.

¹¹ *Jornadas de Cultura Hispano-Portuguesa*. Madrid, 1999.

Later, due to the strict demands of the Portuguese cultural policy, history centers were required to house research groups, and it was then that Luís Adão da Fonseca joined CEPESE, the Research Center for the Study of Population, Economy, and Society (*Centro de Estudos de População, Economia e Sociedade*) at the University of Porto. As expected, this institution supported the promotion of internationalization, which offered him an excellent opportunity for expanding his international contacts and research collaborations. As president of the Scientific Council of CEPESE, he enjoyed the cooperation of a *Scientific Advisory Commission*, which brought together researchers from various countries—France, Italy, and Spain—and whose mission was to prepare reports on the different fields of CEPESE’s scientific activity. Its annual meetings were an occasion for the exchange of scientific proposals and initiatives. Professor Fonseca’s concern with achieving an international status for the center was always in his mind, as can be seen from his participation in different European networks and consortia, some of which were directly related to Spain.¹²

His academic career in the study of political history reveals a clearly defined historiographical approach: the use of an extensive group of sources, both chronistic and documentary, with an intensive study of the archives; a detailed exposition of the facts, always followed by the analysis of their causes and by the exposition of the different aspects of their consequences—political, certainly, but also economic and, above all, cultural—while disregarding interpretations that were not supported by the sources, of which he had a profound knowledge.

And all this can be seen in his early research, in his undergraduate these and PhD dissertation, and in the works that he produced at the peak of his research maturity. This was the case, for example, with his book on Dom João II: a biography in the strict sense of the term, as required for editorial reasons, since the work was part of a collection of monographs on all the kings of Portugal (Fonseca 2005). In the introduction to this work, the author sets out these limits, but explains the need to go further in his analysis of the details relating to the biographical subject “when these affected his consciousness, as decisive circumstances of his life experiences.”

While this is, in essence, a biography—an analysis of the person and his family environment—the author shows a full understanding of the whole epoch, both in Portugal and the Iberian Peninsula, and masterfully interprets its influence on the monarch’s

¹² Member of the *Consejo Científico del Instituto de Historia de Europa Mediterránea*, of the *Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche*, Cagliari; member of the *Standing Committee for the Humanities* (2003-2006) and Portuguese delegate to the *European Reference Index for the Humanities*, among many other bodies.

decisions. His analysis of domestic and foreign policy, and, in particular, of overseas policy between the Treaty of Alcáçovas and the Treaty of Tordesillas, subjects on which he is an acclaimed specialist, show the depth of his historiographical thought, in line with other great medievalists whom he has always admired.

This same clarity and precision were also very noticeable in his lectures and presentations of academic papers: a conceptual depth and brilliant oratory were always present. His teaching ability, from which so many students have benefited, just as some others have profited from his scholarly studies, is clearly evident in volume five of the already-mentioned *Historia Medieval*, which its author entitled *La Cristiandad Medieval*: indeed, it is an excellent aid for students of those central centuries of the Middle Ages and an indispensable tool for so many teachers of our discipline.

This is yet another example of his historiographical conception, always attentive to the accurate exposition of events, without abandoning their most complete interpretation. In his prologue to *La Cristiandad Medieval*, written with that enormous capacity for synthesis that he has always shown, after stating that “the history of Europe between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries is likely to constitute an excellent quarry for the formulation of a historical model of growth,” and that “it offers a possibility to reflect on the ultimate, and often unconscious, motivations of modern and contemporary man,” he concludes that “an understanding that aims to be as broad as possible must consider political history in three dimensions: firstly, its material, social and intellectual conditioning factors; secondly, the possible options open to the protagonists at any given moment; and, finally, the decisions actually taken by them In this sense, political history cannot refuse the help of the imagination. In the historian’s mind, this will be the most appropriate way to respect the freedom of the people under study” (Fonseca 1989: 5). This is the outline that structures this work, written by the author in 1982, and which, in my opinion, sums up his conception of history.

This is a brief compilation of Professor Fonseca’s work in what is only one of his lines of research. His work includes at least two others that have been the subject of other academic studies, but other colleagues will also have the chance to write about them: the military orders and the discoveries and Portuguese expansion, to which he has made contributions of an even greater scope. Permit me merely to recall his coordination of the collection *Militarium Ordinum Analecta*, essential for the study of the Military Orders in Portugal in the Middle Ages.

His work, his ability to organize research groups and networks, his hard-working capacity and his way of understanding history have given a huge boost to medievalism in Portugal, stimulating interest in the study of the Middle Ages both in Portugal and in Spain and paving the way for many joint study initiatives, some of which are mentioned above. His coordination of the book *Entre Portugal e a Galiza (Sécs. XI a XVII). Um Olhar Peninsular sobre uma Região Histórica*,¹³ one of the results of an international ESF project, also perhaps confirms his commitment to providing an even greater understanding of Iberian themes, an aim he never abandoned throughout his career.

Professor Fonseca's scholarly output includes the authorship of eighteen books, the editing of a dozen publications of collective books and conference proceedings, and 120 articles published in history journals in different countries. Always tireless in his organization of working groups and the means of disseminating historical research, in 2002, he promoted the creation of this *e-Journal of Portuguese History*, the result of a collaboration between the University of Porto and Brown University, which is now in its eighteenth issue with two volumes published each year.

¹³ Porto: CEPESE/Fronteira do Caos, 2014.

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