

Luís Adão da Fonseca: An Academic Master

José Augusto de Sottomayor-Pizarro¹

Abstract

As an homage and as a memory exercise, the author seeks to trace the academic path of Luís Adão da Fonseca since he returned to Portugal in 1981, after a prolonged stay in Spain since 1973. As his close collaborator, both as an assistant and also associated with various projects that he carried out, especially around the alignment between Portuguese and Spanish medievalists (who for decades almost always ignored each other), it is worth mentioning the process of creating of the Portuguese Society of Medieval Studies, of which the author was a close witness. In this same sense, it is important to mention the impulse given to the organization of the Luso-Spanish Journeys of Medieval History or to the creation of Chairs on Medieval History of Portugal and Spain in several universities in both countries. Luís Adão da Fonseca supported my contact with Spanish universities and historiography, to which I remain very close, while at the same time encouraged the beginning of career as a professor and offered me the example of an ethical posture as a teacher and as a researcher. He was essential in my formation as an academic in its various aspects, reasons that make him, along with José Mattoso, one of my Mentors.

Keywords

Academic career, Luso-Spanish historiography, Mentor-disciple

Resumo

Num misto de homenagem e de exercício de memória, o Autor procura traçar o percurso académico de Luís Adão da Fonseca desde que regressou a Portugal, em 1981, depois de uma prolongada estadia em Espanha, desde 1973. Seu colaborador próximo, quer como seu Assistente mas também associado a vários projectos que levou a cabo, sobretudo em torno da aproximação entre os medievalistas portugueses e espanhóis, que durante décadas se tinham quase sempre ignorado, fui testemunha privilegiada no processo de criação da Sociedade Portuguesa de Estudos Medievais, no impulso dado à realização das Jornadas Luso-Espanholas de História Medieval ou na criação de Cátedras sobre História Medieval de Portugal e de Espanha em várias universidades dos dois países. Ao abrir-me a porta das universidades e da historiografia espanholas, das quais sou muito próximo, por outro lado, o pelo seu apoio permanente no início da minha carreira como professor, e a sua postura ética como docente e como investigador, Luís Fonseca foi essencial na minha formação como académico nas suas diversas vertentes, razões que fazem dele, junto com José Mattoso, um dos meus Mestres.

Palavras-chave

Carreira académica, Historiografia luso-espanhola, Mestre-discípulo

¹ Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto and CEPSE, Porto, Portugal. *E-Mail:* pizarro.jo@gmail.com

At the time of the homage paid to Professor Luís Adão da Fonseca, celebrating two decades since he became a full professor, a set of texts was published by several colleagues and friends, both national and foreign, reflecting Fonseca's tastes as a researcher and historian of the Portuguese Middle Ages. To mark the occasion, the organizers of the homage, myself included, wrote texts entitled "Dados Biográficos" and "Percurso Intelectual/Luís Adão da Fonseca—Trabalhos Publicados (1968-2008)," in which we synthesized most of the available data about his academic career, as well as his written production, focusing on both the historiographical and the cultural dimensions of his work (Homem, Sottomayor-Pizarro, and Costa, 2009).

Having been invited by the editors of *e-JPH* to participate in this latest tribute to Luís Adão da Fonseca (with one of his most important achievements undoubtedly being the promotion of this journal), I did not wish to simply repeat what was said in those 2009 texts. Consequently, I thought it might be interesting to give my own personal testimony about some of the initiatives that he promoted, and which are themselves part of a series of memories that I have accumulated ever since I became one of his close collaborators, from the mid-1980s onwards.

I was not his student while an undergraduate (1978-1982), as my degree course coincided with his stay at the University of Pamplona, where he taught from 1975 to 1981, returning in the latter year to teach at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Porto.

But I remember very clearly attending his public examination for the award of the title of Associate Professor, which took place in March 1980. As I was still in the second year of my undergraduate studies—all dedicated to the Middle Ages, which, by then, had already become my favorite historical period—it was with great curiosity that I, like many other students, attended these two days of exams, made even more attractive at that time by the fact that there was not yet a great tradition in celebrating these events. The fact that the candidate had himself been a student of the first history course (after the faculty reopened), and that he had taught in Spain for some years, made it even more interesting.

I must confess that, even then, I was already impressed by his profound and scholarly knowledge of the most up-to-date bibliography and the confident attitude that he exuded throughout the two days of exams, brilliantly defending both his curriculum vitae, and a program on *Economic and Social History (Third-Fourteenth Centuries)*, as well as giving a most suggestive lecture on *Luso-Castilian Relations in the Fifteenth Century*. As you can imagine, at that time, I was still far from imagining that our paths would cross a few years later.

For my own part, having completed my degree in June 1982, I was quite frustrated by the fact that the long-awaited master's degree course (set to open at the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences of the Nova University of Lisbon) would only start in the academic year 1983-1984, for unknown procedural and administrative reasons. Everything seemed to be quite discouraging in 1982, a year that ended on an even worse note for me with the death of my father. I confess that I even contemplated the possibility of following a career in an area other than teaching and/or research, but my mother's support and encouragement helped me to persevere with my original aim. No less important were my regular visits to the *Arquivo Distrital do Porto* to practice paleographical reading, always in the company of my friend and colleague Luís Miguel Duarte. We even transcribed the royal letters contained in the *Livros de Originaes do Cabido da Sé do Porto*, which have remained forgotten until the present day.

In any case, the truth is that when the exams were held to select the students for the master's degree in September 1983, I was well prepared, and I believe that my selection was a fair one. It was during the interview stage that I spoke with Luís Adão da Fonseca for the first time, although the paleographical reading exam was conducted by the late Professor José Marques, a master, colleague, and friend, whom I also remember here with great and sincere affection. The master's degree program in medieval history started the following month, with ten students and three professors: the aforementioned Luís Adão da Fonseca and José Marques, as well as Humberto Baquero Moreno. All the other teachers of medieval history—Armando Luís de Carvalho Homem, Armindo de Sousa, Henrique David, Fernanda Santos, and Luís Miguel Duarte—were still assistant lecturers.

Today, almost forty years later, when I look back over those times, I am filled with a deep sense of nostalgia and with genuine astonishment at the sheer amount of study that awaited the whole group of students. Back then, we could hardly have suspected so much hard work! The MA involved two years of academic study, followed by an equivalent period spent writing and presenting the final dissertation. In other words, practically the same time as it took to complete a degree course. In addition to the seminars, we had classes, some of which were held in parallel with our colleagues from the MA program in modern and contemporary history, which was also inaugurated at the same time. I remember, with inevitable nostalgia, the lively sessions of Paleographical Training, with José Marques, and Textual Criticism, with Jorge Osório. As expected, the seminars reflected the research interests of their directors, so it is not surprising that Baquero Moreno was responsible for the subject of Medieval Councils, José Marques for Ecclesiastical Institutions, and, finally,

Luís Adão da Fonseca, with a third theme on Medieval Commerce. There was also another class, exclusively for medieval students, on Historical Cartography, which was also taught by the latter.

I believe that, during those two academic years, I worked just as hard as I did during the most demanding moments of my PhD—and the one “to blame” was Luís Adão da Fonseca. With his rather different working habits, acquired during his time in Spain, at the end of each class he would hand out a different book to each of the students, accompanied by his usual line: “For the next session, bring me a report of your reading of this book, with a minimum of three pages.”

For the seminar, I remember that it was my job to write a study card on the “*Cartas de Quitação do Rei D. Manuel*,” by Anselmo Braamcamp Freire, published in several volumes of the *Arquivo Historico Portuguez*. Without any exaggeration, I must say that I wrote thousands of such cards throughout the year, which enabled me to become acquainted with subjects that I was unfamiliar with, especially because I admit that I had little enthusiasm for economic history, despite my fondness for political and social history.

However, in performing these tasks, I revealed certain qualities of methodical work and organization that earned me the approval of Professor Fonseca. Furthermore, and I cannot emphasize this enough, the excellent preparation given to me by the teachers of the history group of the Faculty of Letters of the University of Porto, and my general knowledge of both Portuguese and Spanish history from a very early age (thanks to my father’s influence), meant that I was a compulsive reader of books in these two areas.

I only point out these details because they were fundamental for my future relationship with my academic mentor, as well as for my career. In fact, I often wondered what possibilities might have materialized if, instead of giving a seminar titled *Medieval Commerce*, a subject that did not have any great interest for me—although I acknowledge that I learned a lot in those sessions, which were very useful for my subsequent teaching of *Economic and Social History (Third-Fourteenth Centuries)*—he had, instead, chosen to teach a seminar on military orders, as he did, in fact, do the following year. It is very likely that, under the scope of that general theme, I would have developed my research on the Portuguese medieval nobility within those institutions, as Luís Filipe Oliveira and António Pestana de Vasconcelos did several years later.

However, fate ended up opening other doors for me, since I decided to choose the seminar on ecclesiastical institutions, in which I developed a study on the patron saints of the Monastery of Grijó. And it was Luís Adão da Fonseca, with the immediate approval of

José Marques—the teacher responsible for that seminar—who put me into contact with Professor José Mattoso, so that he could become the supervisor of my master's thesis. Since then, and so far, I have had two great mentors in the true sense of the term: José Mattoso, who always gave me such valuable scientific guidance; and Luís Adão da Fonseca, who shaped me, in the best sense of the word, as an academic scholar and a university lecturer.

From the beginning of my MA in October 1983, there was a mutual empathy and a great understanding between us, largely because we shared several ideas and ways of thinking in common. Perhaps because of this, and because he had no assistant, when my good friend and colleague Amélia de Aguiar Andrade left for the Nova University of Lisbon, Luís Adão da Fonseca encouraged me to apply for that position, which I did, beginning to work with him in April 1984. Without my ever having taught a class, I reaped the benefits of his great scientific and pedagogical accuracy, which was always accompanied by an enormous generosity. He lent me books and worksheets, and shared his erudite views on general and Portuguese history; he was unsurpassable in the support that he gave me.

Our shared fondness for Spanish history, especially the medieval period, was another important bond between us, and certainly lay at the root of two of the projects that he developed, involving me in both of them: the creation of an association that would bring together Portuguese medievalists, and a bilateral agreement that would enhance inter-university relations between Portuguese and Spanish academic institutions.

Benefiting from his multiple professional and personal relationships and inspired by the model of the *Sociedad Española de Estudios Medievales* (SEEM), whose support he enjoyed from the beginning (and I particularly recall the names of Professors Emilio Sáez, Eloy Benito Ruano, Manuel González Jiménez, and Miguel Ángel Ladero Quesada), Luís Adão da Fonseca initiated the first contacts for the creation of the *Sociedade Portuguesa de Estudos Medievales* (SPEM). This idea was very well received by the most senior and prestigious historians of the different universities, such as José Mattoso, A. H. de Oliveira Marques, Eduardo Borges Nunes, Artur Nobre de Gusmão, Torquato de Souza-Soares, Salvador Dias Arnaut, and Avelino de Jesus da Costa, as well as by other medievalists, such as Lindley Cintra, Gama Caeiro, Geraldine Freire, and Aires do Nascimento, in addition to his colleagues from Porto.

The bureaucratic process, the contact with, and the bringing on board of other medievalist colleagues, as well as the organization of the whole structure—which took place throughout 1984 and 1985, and to which both of us dedicated much of our time—materialized in a first general assembly, held in a hotel in Curia in November 1985. I will

always remember the success of that first meeting, which brought together for the first time many Portuguese medievalists in the broadest sense of the term—historians, philologists, philosophers, archaeologists, and historians of art and literature—and united several generations and colleagues who, until then, had had only very remote contact with one another, or no relationship at all, and who then met with great enthusiasm!

For several years afterwards, I had the pleasure of representing SPEM at the annual meetings of SEEM, which brought me into contact with dozens of colleagues from the many universities in the neighboring country, establishing professional and friendly ties that I still consider to be one of my most precious assets. As for the impact of the creation of SPEM, it is enough to recall the organization of several Portuguese-Spanish Conferences on Medieval History, the first of which took place in Porto in 1987, and which still make it possible for medievalists from both countries to meet with some regularity.

Accumulating various areas of responsibility and obtaining support from the Instituto Cervantes and the National Commission for the Commemorations of the Portuguese *Discoveries*, Luís Fonseca was also the tireless promoter of various agreements on inter-university relations—as was the case with the University of Seville in 2001—and the driving force behind the creation of university chairs in medieval history. I also had the opportunity to closely accompany this process, from early 1998 onwards, partly because I had gained my PhD in May of that year. After the signing of the respective protocols in 2001, the “Alexandre Herculano” Chair of Portuguese Medieval History came into operation, based at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid under the guidance and supervision of Vicente Álvarez Palenzuela, while the “Claudio Sánchez Albornoz” Chair of Spanish Medieval History, for which I was responsible, was created at the University of Porto. I believe that it was a very successful initiative, which promoted the circulation of Portuguese and Spanish professors from different schools between the two universities and the enrichment of the bibliographical collections of both institutions.

Finally, as I now recall Fonseca’s performance in the Portuguese academic environment, I would like to underline the extraordinary support that he gave to many generations of young researchers who passed through the Faculty of Letters of the University of Porto, enabling them to develop their research. In the same vein, it is important to highlight the creation of the Institute of Medieval Historical Documentation, based at the same faculty. With limited funds but benefiting from the goodwill of the directors of the Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Luís Adão da Fonseca was able to obtain microfilm reproductions of all the medieval Chancery Books, from King Afonso III to King Manuel I,

the thirteenth and fourteenth-century *Inquirições*, and the books of the *Leitura Nova*, as well as several documents on the military orders, among others.

For my own part, I now conclude this journey with fond memories of my academic and personal life. I can never show enough gratitude for the many things that I owe to my two mentors and for the many things that I have learned from both of them. While I had the privilege of exploring paths that he revealed to me about the Portuguese medieval nobility with José Mattoso, with Luís Adão da Fonseca—in many ways due to the daily contact that we had and our sharing of the same office, firstly as his assistant and then as a colleague—I learned the most important values of an academic career, which I have tried to follow until now, when I am already close to its end. The way he opened the doors of the Spanish academic world to me through my inclusion in several of his scientific initiatives, the responsibility he always gave me, based on his absolute trust, and his uncompromising respect for scientific and pedagogical ethics made me grow and mature, not only as an academic, but also as a man.

Thank you, Professor!

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