

José Leite de Vasconcelos (7th July 1858), the founder and first director of today's National Museum of Archaeology, at the time called Portuguese Ethnographic Museum is an outstanding personality in the Portuguese culture of the 19<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The importance and variety of his work are clearly evident in several books and homage sessions dedicated to him, during his life and after his death, in 1941, at the age of 82 – a work that includes almost every aspect on the approach to the “Portuguese Man's study”, of the past, of the present and especially in its common side: Philology and Linguistics, Literature, Ethnography, Numismatics, Archaeology, etc.

One of his first publications, “Tradições Populares Portuguesas” (“Portuguese Popular Traditions”) still as a high school student in Oporto, in 1881, already pointed out the long and fruitful path he would tread. Shortly afterwards, already a medicine student in the same city (course that he would finish in 1886, with a dissertation on the “Evolution of Language”), he published a pamphlet entitled “Prehistoric Portugal”; to the present he added the past dimension, which would always stay by him, maybe influenced by the discussions at the so-called Lisbon Congress, in 1880.

In these works one finds the basis of the radical originality of Leite's foresight: the past and the present are connected, that is to say, we are relentlessly linked to what we were. Leite de Vasconcelos would stress it later, consecutively. In his “História do Museu Etnográfico Português” (“History of the Portuguese Ethnographic Museum”) (1893-1914), 1915, he states: “We are indissolubly linked to the past. On studying the past we pay homage to the respectable ancestors who left us the heritage we enjoy today”, page 76.

After having finished his studies in Oporto, Leite de Vasconcelos began his practice as Health Care Administrator in the small town of Cadaval, where he would make important findings in the field of archaeology, such as Castro de Pragança. However, his practice as a doctor was brief. In 1887, he was appointed curator of the Lisbon National Library and he founded the “Revista Lusitana” (“The Lusitanian journal”) in 1889, carrying on the studies of Portuguese Culture under better professional conditions. With the foundation of the Lisbon Faculty of Letters, in 1911, he is assigned professor of the subjects: Latin Language and Literature and French Literature (Medieval period, a Comparative Grammar of the Romanic Languages).

In the following years, Leite de Vasconcelos reaches his work's peak of glory: the creation of the Portuguese Ethnographic Museum in 1893, the publication of the journal “O Arqueólogo Português” (“The Portuguese Archaeologist”) in 1895 and he began publishing his main work – “As Religiões da Lusitânia” (“The Religions of Lusitania”) in 1897 (of which the third and last volume was only published in 1913). Leite de Vasconcelos compiled the Ethnographic Department of the museum in the “Boletim de Etnografia” (“Ethnographic Bulletin”) (1920-1937; 5 volumes).

Master Leite (as he was called by his disciples and is still known today by many students of Ethnography and Archaeology) referred to “his Museum” as: “the so-called Ethnographic Museum is useful to instruct the public, instilling in it the knowledge and

love of its homeland, even if it might not be good for anything else’, page 17. As far as Philology is concerned, we stand out “Antroponímia Portuguesa” (“Portuguese Personal Names”), 1928. Regarding the so-called Comparative Ethnography Studies, he published consecutively “*Signum Salomonis*” (“Solomon’s Seal”), “A Barba em Portugal” (“The Beard in Portugal”) and “A Figa” (“The Gesture of Contempt”), respectively in 1918, 1925 and 1926.

Leite de Vasconcelos established a solid communication network and won the respect and affection of hundreds, even thousands of people, from the humble peasants of the Corvo Island to the outstanding personalities of the European *intelligentsia*, through his numerous travels across the country [some of his books’ titles account for this: “De Terra em Terra” (“From Land to Land”) (a collection of already published articles on archaeological and ethnographic excursions throughout the country), “Mês de Sonho” (“Dream Month”) (a visit to the Azores in 1924) or “De Campolide a Melrose” (“From Campolide to Melrose”)] and abroad, in 1909 he attended the famous Cairo Congress, where he was the chairman of the first section (Prehistoric Archaeology). From that journey, he brought in some of the Egyptian antiquities still displayed at the museum. He exchanged correspondence with many respectable personalities, beginning the largest epistolary, ever known, of a Portuguese author, published by the National Museum of Archaeology in 1999: a collection of 24289 epistolary specimens, from 3727 correspondents.

As far as literature is concerned, the “Romanceiro Português” (“Portuguese Collection of Poems and Popular Songs”) (1958-1960) and the “Teatro Popular Português” (“Portuguese Popular Theatre”) (1974-1979) were published after his death.

However, we should not think that Leite de Vasconcelos disregarded or decreased his creative and almost encyclopaedic global perspective of the Portuguese Culture when he was absorbed in the building of the museum and in the related studies of archaeology and ethnography. His major studies on Philology, from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are an evidence of that: his PHD dissertation entitled “Esquisse d’une Dialectologie Portugaise” (“Sketch of a Portuguese Dialectology”), which he discussed in Paris, in 1901, the “Filologia Mirandesa” (“Philology of Miranda do Douro”) (1899) and, later on, the “Filologia Barranquenha” (“Philology of Barrancos”) (1955).

When he retired from the Museum Direction, in 1929, Leite de Vasconcelos finally could start his last great project: “Portuguese Ethnography”, in ten volumes which comprehend the features of the Portuguese People, from the settlement of the territory and the material life to the superstitions and religiosity, an ambitious project, the purpose of which continued to be the Portuguese Man as a Whole, just like it was from the beginning

Reading suggestions (homage works and bibliography):

José Leite de Vasconcelos, book of the centenary (1858-1958), edition (1960), Faculty of Letters, Lisbon University. Imprensa Nacional Lisbon.

Miscellany

Etc.

Some of the main works by José Leite de Vasconcelos:

- Dissertation: A Evolução da Linguagem (The Evolution of Language), 1886.
- Tipografia Ocidental. Oporto.
- Portugal *Pré-histórico* (*Prehistoric Portugal*) (1885) David Corazzi. Lisbon.
- *Religiões da Lusitânia* (*Religions of Lusitania*), 3 vol. (1897, 1905, 1913) Imprensa Nacional Lisbon.
- *História do Museu Etnológico Português* (*History of the Portuguese Ethnological Museum*), 1915 Imprensa Nacional Lisbon.
- *Etnografia Portuguesa* (*Portuguese Ethnography*), 10 vol. (1933 to 1988).