



José LEITE DE VASCONCELOS

(1858-1941)

«Quel que soit le point de vue auquel nous considérons la dialectologie, elle a une grande importance. En premier lieu, elle sert à la glottologie générale, parce que, comme les dialectes ont un développement plus libre et plus spontané que la langue des lettrés [...] on y peut plus facilement surprendre l'action des forces vives du langage.»
(Leite de Vasconcelos 1901, 1987: 169-170)



Selected bio-bibliographical data:¹

1858, July 7th: Born in Ucanha (Viseu), Portugal

– *O presbitério de Vila-Cova*, 1878 (first ethnographic study, published 1890 in *Ensaios Etnográficos*)

– *Estudo Etnográfico dos Jugos e Cangas*, 1881

1881-1886: Entered the Escola Médico-Cirúrgica, Oporto; graduated in Medicine

1882, excursion to Soajo (Viana do Castelo) with archaeologist Martins Sarmiento

1882, linguistic enquiry to Mirandese speaking colleague, Oporto

* Photograph by Mário Novais, 12.05.1935 (Brandão 1959).

¹ For expanded information, the reader is referred to: Ribeiro (1942), Cepeda (1960), Guerreiro (1960), Castro and Rodrigues-Moura (2003) and Fabião (2008), among others. Further updates and online access to Leite de Vasconcelos' legacy to the Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa may be found at: <http://legadovasconcelos.fl.ul.pt>.

- *Tradições populares de Portugal*, 1882
- *O Dialecto Mirandês*, 1882 (Prix Société des Langues Romanes, Montpellier 1883)
- [*A evolução da linguagem*](#), 1886 (dissertation for graduation in Medicine)
- 1887 (6 months): Sanitary representative, Cadaval (Lisbon)
- 1887-1911: Curator of the National Library, Lisbon; taught Numismatics and Philology
 - Founder and director of [*Revista Lusitana*](#), 1887/9-1940/3
- 1893-1929: Founder and Director of the Portuguese Ethnographic Museum (today's National Museum of Archaeology)
 - “O Dialecto Minhoto”, 1894 (article in regional newspaper *Penafidense*)
 - “Mapa Dialectológico do Continente Português”, 1893 (republished 1897, Paris; modified and republished in *Opúsculos*, 1929)
 - Founder and director of *O Arqueólogo Português*, journal of the Ethnographic Museum
- 1899: Studied Romance Philology, Paris; met Bruno Gaston Paris, a.o.
- 1900: Traveled in Europe, visiting universities, libraries and museums (a.o. Vienna, Graz, Prague); met Jules Cornu and Hugo Schuchardt
 - *Estudos de Filologia Mirandesa*, 1900-1901 (2 volumes)
- 1901: *Doctorat*, Université de Paris (supervisor: Antoine Thomas)
 - [*Esquisse d'une dialectologie portugaise*](#), 1901 (dissertation)
- 1911-1929: Professor at Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa; taught Latin language and literature, French language and literature, comparative grammar of Romance languages, archaeology, numismatics, epigraphy
 - *Lições de Filologia Portuguesa*, 1911
 - *Signum Salomonis*, 1918
 - *A barba em Portugal*, 1925
 - *A figa*, 1926
 - *Antroponímia Portuguesa*, 1928
 - [*Opúsculos*](#), 1928, 1929, 1931, 1938 and, posthumous, 1988 (7 volumes)
 - *Etnografia Portuguesa*, 1933 (1st volume; preparation of subsequent volumes, posthumous edition)
- 1938, linguistic excursion to Barrancos (Beja)
 - preparation of *Filologia Barranquenha* (posthumous publication 1955)



José Leite de Vasconcelos has been influential and repeatedly pioneer in different fields of Portuguese sociocultural studies. His legacy to Portuguese archaeology, ethnography, philology and linguistics continues today, beyond his published works, to feed current approaches and modern resources, also through his abundant, original and meticulous hand-written notes posthumously edited by his students and collaborators. Portuguese dialectological studies have their first geographically comprehensive and in-depth expression at the turning of the 19th century, among the effervescence of eclectic and insightful inquiry, collecting labor and thinking of this singular intellectual, who combined thorough field-based knowledge of the Portuguese rural world and a prolific epistolary flow with scientific acquaintances throughout Europe.² According to his words, “la dialectologie sert à l’anthropologie et à l’ethnologie” (Leite de Vasconcelos, 1901, 1987: 173): “De même que la flore, la faune, le climat caractérisent physiquement une région, de même les dialectes, aussi bien que les coutumes, le type anatomique, les aptitudes esthétiques, intellectuelles et morales, les tendances morbides, caractérisent dans une certaine manière les populations qui s’en sèrvent” (*ibid.*). Leite de Vasconcelos’ dialectal studies appear thus inscribed into his more general and incessant program of thorough investigation of the Portuguese people.

These inaugural contributions to Portuguese dialectology include the first synthetic classification of Portuguese dialects, the first cartographic representations of linguistic regions in the Portuguese territory, and comprehensive and regular ethnolinguistic fieldwork resulting in a unique collection of regional materials. Also, Leite de Vasconcelos founded and directed for decades *Revista Lusitana*, an annual scientific journal that promoted, on a regular basis, the publication of articles relating to dialectological issues, among other studies of Portuguese culture.

Before Portuguese dialectology entered a period where data collection became systematically organized and conducted by means of pre-established questionnaires (see Barros Ferreira 1994),³ Leite de Vasconcelos’ ethnolinguistic excursions have been instrumental to assemble an important repository of dialectal information from the end

² Among these, outside Portugal, B. Gaston Paris, R. Menendez Pidal, W. Meyer-Lübke, E. Monaci, A. Morel-Fatio, H. Schuchardt. An important epistolary (24,170 specimens; 3,690 correspondents) has been published by the National Museum of Archaeology (Coito coord., 1999).

³ This period was initiated with the postal questionnaire conceived and implemented by M. Paiva Boléo (1942); subsequently, it evolved through different geolinguistic projects undertaken and/or directed by L.F. Lindley Cintra.

of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. Naturally methodic (Ribeiro 1942), Leite de Vasconcelos led relevant and exhaustive dialectal data collection, often through indirect questioning strategies: “Para se recolherem certos sons e frases característicos de uma língua que se quer estudar da boca do povo, o melhor meio é esperar a ocasião oportuna do acaso e apanhar isso em flagrante: fiz isso sempre que pude; no entanto, muitas vezes tive de proceder a interrogatórios, embora, quando eu o julgava conveniente, dirigidos de tal modo que os interrogados respondessem espontaneamente, sem eu lhes indicar de antemão o som ou a flexão que eu queria saber ou averiguar” (Leite de Vasconcelos 1928, 1985). It is also remarkable that his work as “discoverer” of the Mirandese language (Leite de Vasconcelos 1882), awarded by the Société des Langues Romanes in 1883, has been based on a peculiar complex of non-local interviews that, by the end of the 19th century, anticipated modern sociolinguistic concerns (cf. Martins 2006): the data were collected from different speakers, among which, his first and special informant, a Mirandese-speaking male student at an university school in Oporto, and also a Mirandese-speaking uneducated woman. The crucial source for Leite de Vasconcelos’ dialectological studies is, however, to be found in his regular and numerous ethnolinguistic excursions through all the Portuguese territory, a constant of his life.⁴

Leite de Vasconcelos has been the author of the first maps that draw up the geographical distribution of different Portuguese regional varieties (“dialectos” in his terms): the “Carta Dialectológica do Continente Português” (1893), republished as *Mapa Dialectológico do Continente Português* (1897), and further modified and republished in 1929. In these maps as in *Esquisse d’une dialectologie portugaise* (1901), the first synthetic description of the Portuguese regional variation, appeared the first attempts to a systematic classification of Portuguese continental dialects (cf. Cintra 1971). These were eminently determined by geographical divisions in the Portuguese territory, as Leite de Vasconcelos himself acknowledges: “La distribution que je viens de faire de nos dialectes, fondée sur la géographie, se heurte à quelques difficultés [...], parce que des phénomènes que l’on présente comme caractéristiques du parler d’une région, peuvent aussi appartenir à d’autres [...]. Toutefois, la classification

⁴ Beyond the dialectological materials published by Leite de Vasconcelos, many unpublished documents issued from these excursions and relevant for dialectology continue to be edited today, such as the [Dicionário de Regionalismos e Arcaísmos](#).

géographique, si elle n'est pas absolument parfaite, est du moins commode [...]” (Leite de Vasconcelos, 1901, 1987: 127-128).

More importantly than the dialectal limits drawn up in these early classifications, the work of Leite de Vasconcelos, in his *Esquisse* and beyond, provided rich and accurate insights into the grammatical description of Portuguese dialects, an approach that possibly stems from the proximity of Portuguese dialectology and general linguistics at their beginnings (cf. epigraph above). Also remarkable is the seminal role that Leite de Vasconcelos' dialectological insights had in latter developments of Portuguese dialectology, as acknowledged by L. F. Lindley Cintra in his more recent – *post* ALPI – dialectal classification: “Antes de passar adiante, desejo fazer notar que todos os traços que aponte, menos o último e [...] o 5.º, coincidem com traços já em 1901 apontados por Leite de Vasconcelos como particularmente relevantes para uma classificação dos dialectos portugueses que fosse mais baseada em factos linguísticos do que aquela que ele próprio propunha e que reconhecia como principalmente fundamentada na geografia [...]” (Cintra 1971: 103). Other features already pointed out by Leite de Vasconcelos (1901, 1987: 127-128) further shaped additional isoglosses at the core of Lindley Cintra's dialectal classification – at all levels of dialectal divisions and subdivisions (Cintra 1971: 115-116). Thus the methodological advances of geolinguistics and its empirical outcomes allowed, some seven decades later, the delimitation of the areas corresponding to most dialectal features identified by Leite de Vasconcelos.

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