

António Hespanha and the Journal *Penélope: Fazer e desfazer a História*¹

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Abstract

The founding and editing of the journal *Penélope. Fazer e Desfazer a História* was a notable achievement in António Hespanha's multifaceted, energetic and seemingly limitless career. The title of the journal encapsulated the way in which the younger generation of historians sought to express themselves and, above all, the new directions that were taken in the field of Portuguese historiography following the revolution of April 25, 1974.

Keywords

History, Law, Historiography, Alterity, António Manuel Hespanha.

Resumo

A fundação e edição da revista *Penélope. Fazer e Desfazer a História* foi um feito notável na carreira multifacetada, enérgica e aparentemente sem limites de António Hespanha. O título da revista encerrava a forma como a geração mais jovem de historiadores procurou expressar-se e sobretudo as novas direcções tomadas no campo da historiografia portuguesa após o 25 de Abril de 1974.

Palavras-chave

História, Direito, Historiografia, Alteridade, António Manuel Hespanha.

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Articles on the different aspects of the legacy of this leading author and scholar, just a year after his premature demise, are necessarily profoundly marked by the present and by the memories of those who shared their experiences with him. Hespanha's legacy is characterized as being of a singular nature, at least judging from the views expressed by these writers whose approach therefore diverges from what may be considered strictly analytical and historiographical.

The *Penélope* project represented just one of the many facets of António Manuel Hespanha's wide-ranging intellectual and academic work. The founding of the journal is necessarily bound up with the tide of great intellectual exuberance that swept across the field of history in the 1980s and underlines the role played by Hespanha. Echoing the great impact of French historiography, albeit occurring over a different timescale, as well as that of the historiography of the United Kingdom and some Southern European nations, history became the "foremost discipline," to quote Hespanha in 1991 (*Penélope*, issue no. 5), and, contrary to established ideas on the subject, "the 'constructive' or 'creative' character of historical knowledge" did not seem to dampen the enthusiasm of the journal's devotees.

At the time, Portuguese universities were experiencing a period of expansion, and a new generation of historians who had received their academic training either shortly before or in the wake of the events of April 25, 1974, began to present and publish their works in great numbers. Their attention was increasingly focused on the recent past, but only later did this change come to dominate historical studies. History was still an all-embracing discipline, with strands of specialist study frequently intertwining and overlapping with one another, incorporating a whole host of topics and methodologies from a range of disciplinary fields. As a historian with a background in law, Hespanha's career provides an excellent example of how history has blended with other disciplines. Following the publication of works such as *História das Instituições. Épocas Medieval e Moderna* (Almedina, 1982), an anthology preceded by an introductory study entitled *Poder e Instituições na Europa do Antigo Regime* (Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1984) and numerous articles published in several foreign countries that resonated greatly among historians, along with multiple academic interventions, Hespanha—together with José Mattoso, who had won the *Prémio Pessoa* in 1987—became one of the towering figures in the world of historiography at a moment of important growth and increasing optimism in an era of new-found freedom.

This scenario provided the backdrop to the emergence of *Penélope*. In the first instance, lying at its origin was an irresolvable conflict that pitted most of the editorial staff of the journal *Ler História* against its editor at the time, Miriam Halpern Pereira. The project

quickly took on a new character and the group expanded to include many of the historians of the generation that had been trained, or who had had works published, in the period following the revolution of 25 April. In 1987, they invited António Hespanha, the only PhD among their number, to become the editor of the new publication. The initial team of writers included 18 researchers specializing in a range of chronological areas and in different topics, covering many of the most recent and innovative approaches to the study of History: Álvaro Ferreira da Silva, Amélia Andrade, António Costa Pinto, António Hespanha, Bernardo Vasconcelos e Sousa, Carlos Fabião, Fernando Rosas, Hélder A. Fonseca, José Manuel Sobral, Luís Kruss, Luís Ramalhosa Guerreiro, Mafalda Soares da Cunha, Maria Alexandre Lousada, Nuno Gonçalo Monteiro, Nuno Severiano Teixeira, Rui Ramos, Valentim Alexandre, and Vítor Serrão. These days it would be nigh on impossible to bring together such a diverse group of writers!

José Mattoso and Jorge Pedreira, among others, were contributors to the inaugural issue. While *Penélope's* writers were based in either Lisbon or Évora, other groups of historians and publications, such as those edited by Vitorino Magalhães Godinho and José Sebastião da Silva Dias, were also active in other regions of the country. The defining feature of the editorial policy of the new journal was the fact that it was the writers whose articles were published that chose to work with Hespanha rather than it being the editor who selected authors for the journal. Operations were horizontal and collegial in nature rather than hierarchical (with the editor having the final word). Still fondly remembered are the interminable meetings of the first stage in the life of *Penélope*, such as the one at which the numerous editorial staff met at the home of one of the editors to discuss their plans in a most ardent fashion.

Although the journal operated on a collaborative basis, or—in the words of the editorial that was published anonymously—in accordance with “a collective, egalitarian and decentralized model” (Editorial, issue no. 1, p. 7), the imprint of the editor, and his incredible dynamism and intellectual prowess, was stamped on it from the outset. To begin with, there is the title that he put forward for the journal, which was accepted by his fellow editors, although not without some resistance: *Penélope. Fazer e Desfazer a História*. (Penelope. Making and Unmaking History). As Hespanha stated in the editorial in issue number one, published in 1988, “History (...) is for us worthy of both being made and continually unmade.” And he continued: “This journal seeks to provide a stage for the debating of ideas (...) with no pre-conditions, apart from the requirements of intelligence and civility” (*idem, ibidem*). Certainly, the title suggested some form of postmodern inspiration, but the first editorial immediately

brought some perspective to bear on what might be considered an overly simplistic interpretation. Moreover, the personal hallmark of the editor would become evident, not only in frequent editorials, articles, and numerous critical reviews, but also in many contributions, which were, in fact, often collaborative in nature, a feature that characterized subsequent issues, many of which were dossiers dealing with specific topics. Significantly, the first interview, in the inaugural issue, featured Hespanha himself and Bartolomé Clavero. It set the guidelines for what would constitute the intellectual project that they were in the process of launching. Indeed, these two were the fathers of what came to be known as the “New History of Law,” Southern European historians who highlighted, among other factors, the importance of European “common law”: the legacy of Roman law and its readings and reinterpretations throughout history, as a fundamental basis for providing an understanding of their region and other territories before the advent of the Enlightenment and 19th century political liberalism, with an emphasis on alterity (Cardim, 2017). However, this international perspective never diluted the journal’s editorial integrity, based on diversity, and even featuring some heated public debates. The *Penélope* trademark, widely known and highly respected at certain times, has always been associated with its first editor and his keen intellectual interests.

It was in the 1990s that the journal acquired its characteristic hallmark and began to exert a profound influence on academia. This impact was felt in a number of specific areas that deserve special mention: firstly, pan-Iberian historiography, largely a concept created by the journal and its editor, which was reflected in a number of issues dedicated to the topic, such as issue no. 9-10, published in 1993, on “A Restauração e a sua época” (The Restoration and its Era), and the active collaboration of historians from regions all over the Iberian Peninsula, who produced articles and reviews on various topics and eras. Bearing witness to the journal’s remarkable influence is the fact that today it is still accessible online at the Dialnet repository³ of the Universidad de la Rioja.

Secondly, there were topics associated with versions of the Portuguese colonial empire during different periods in history. This provided the background for the emergence of one of the most important trends in Portuguese historiography at the turn of the century: a marked growth in the exchanges taking place with Brazilian historians. António M. Hespanha played a decisive role in this context, both in historiographical terms and later as president of the *Comissão Nacional para a Comemoração dos Descobrimentos Portugueses*, the CNCDP (National Commission for the Commemoration of the Portuguese Discoveries). Finally, the journal also reflected the trend towards increased academic production in the

³ <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/>

field of contemporary history, above all twentieth-century history, to which many articles and special issues were devoted.

As mentioned earlier, *Penélope* had an enormous influence. It became the hallmark of the renewal of Portuguese historiography during the late twentieth century, and the name of António Hespanha was inextricably linked to it. Even today, although it ceased publication in 2004 (the last issue was printed in 2007), the 31 issues published during its 18-year existence are still often regarded as a national benchmark, despite almost as many years having passed since its disappearance. As the end approached, some contributors left, and Jorge Pedreira, Pedro Cardim, and Pedro Tavares de Almeida joined the editorial staff, but the character of the editorial board remained much the same. In the meantime, an international advisory board was set up and the journal adopted the double-blind refereeing system that is employed by similar international publications.

After publishing issue no. 22 in 2000, António Hespanha, who had meanwhile been appointed head of the CNCDP, resigned as editor of *Penélope*, although he continued to serve as a member of the editorial board. The new editor, António Costa Pinto, renamed it *Penélope. Revista de História e Ciências Sociais*. Times had indeed changed. History had ceased to be the “foremost” discipline and was increasingly diluted, largely due either to its proximity to other fields of the so-called “social sciences” or its submergence within these same fields. Each researcher plowed their own furrow, venturing into different fields, for which history no longer seemed to provide a common denominator. Furthermore, it became increasingly difficult to maintain the independence of the publication, which did not belong to any particular university—although meetings were usually held at the Instituto de Ciências Sociais da Universidade de Lisboa (University of Lisbon Institute of Social Sciences)—and the scant financial support that it received from the Instituto Português do Livro (Portuguese Institute for Books and Libraries) and the Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia (Foundation for Science and Technology) meant that it could no longer survive; indeed, the last issue was paid for out of the pocket of the editors themselves, who coughed up subscription arrears for the purpose! The final nail in its coffin was the belief that internationalization was the way forward and that the journal should be published in English. In the end, *Penélope* folded and the *e-Journal of Portuguese History* was launched.

Like other publications of the 1980s and 1990s, *Penélope* played an important role during the most prolific stage in the development of history as a disciplinary field in Portugal, and the role of António Manuel Hespanha was decisive for all aspects relating to this period of expansion.

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