

Biographies of the Kings of Portugal

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Biographical studies have recently recovered their importance as a relevant historiographic tool for the study of the past. In fact, the role of the individual as a historical agent has acquired a renewed status as researchers and the public at large have accepted that the definition of structures and events, cycles of prices, deaths and births, production, political systems or social architectures are just one perspective for the understanding of history, even though they continue to be necessary for its full knowledge. Structuralism has helped to convey a perception of major historical phenomena, but it has not been able to explain many events or to emphasize the contribution made by so many individuals in bringing about great changes. In other words, it has been unable to highlight the importance of individual determination as an agent of History.

The project known as the “Biographies of the Kings of Portugal”, published in 34 volumes by the *Círculo de Leitores*, with the collaboration of the *Centro de Estudos dos Povos e Culturas de Expressão Portuguesa da Universidade Católica Portuguesa*, has sought, first of all, to fill a major gap in our historiography, since many monarchs had never before been subjected to any form of academic biographical study.

Therefore, this collection aims at providing readers with a journey through time in which they can get to know the men and women that ruled this country throughout eight centuries as well as their families, friends and enemies, their schemes, their visions for the country, their political projects and their government.

At the same time, it has presented a perspective of the national and international events that shaped each monarch’s life – the rhythms of time and the conflicts between nations and civilizations, as well as the role played by Portugal in the history of both Europe and the world. It has provided an understanding of each of these individuals throughout time and, consequently, of the limitations that surrounded their lives, making it possible to perceive how our kings adjusted to these dynamics or how they caused disruptions that were to change the natural course of History. The authors have also tried, whenever they can, to analyze the core of each king and queen, showing their passions, their affections and their conception of royalty; sometimes they have even succeeded in catching a glimpse of their dreams and ambitions.

When they analyze the characteristics of the court and the habits of each sovereign, the authors show the daily life of the Portuguese monarchs from the 12th to the early 20th century.

Thus, each book provides a framework for understanding the time when these monarchs lived. The lives of these kings and queens overlapped with one another in time, so that every book (each of which is intended to be an independent piece) analyzes epochs and events that have also been studied by the authors of other biographies. Each one analyzes the same events from the viewpoint of each character, presenting us with different, as well as complementary, visions of History, based nonetheless on a precise methodology that reveals one single evolutionary line of events.

These books, written by various authors (all of them university professors or researchers) have all followed the same criteria: the public thus finds in all of them the kings' lives, their affections, their family, their government and the national as well as the international events of their time. Each author has his or her own style and each biography has its different problems. Consequently, in these 34 volumes, there is a guiding thread based on the above-mentioned criteria, but the personal style of each author also guarantees a diversity that shows the wealth of the biographical study and the complexity of the human being.

We are certain that Portuguese historiography has been enriched by this new, all-embracing, but nonetheless particular approach to the study of almost 800 years of Portugal's existence. After the summaries produced in recent decades, which have given us an insight into the main strands of the country's evolution, this collection brings a different approach, in which the human side of History can be clearly gleaned from the small details, such as the ambitions and traumas, the palace intrigues, the convictions and the indecisions, the family disagreements, the loves and hates, or the military campaigns. These facts can often be seen to have changed the course of history unexpectedly or even illogically when we look at the general framework of events, but they gain greater clarity when we are able to fit them into the context of the lives and personalities of the monarchs.

While providing us with a new political history of Portugal, the collection "Biographies of the Kings of Portugal" has made our past more understandable to its readers and to all those engaged in research into Portuguese and European History more generally.

"Biographies of the Kings of Portugal"

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