

## ***Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe***

### ***Herculano, Alexandre***

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Alexandre Herculano de Carvalho e Araujo (Lisbon 1810 – nr Santarém 1877), one of the leading and enduring public intellectuals of 19th-century Portugal and still a reference at the intellectual, civic and ethical level, devoted himself to the study of German language and culture (including the translation of works of [Schiller](#)) by attending a circle of the Marquesa de [Alorna](#), a Portuguese equivalent of Mme de Staël. Having fallen afoul of the absolutist rule of King Miguel in 1831, he left Portugal, returning after having joined the ranks of the army of Miguel's brother Pedro (Emperor of Brazil), who invaded the country in 1832 and ensured the restoration of Maria to the throne. In the following years Herculano published poetry, founded the successful periodical *O Panorama* (1837) and established his literary and scholarly position. He became one of the main mentors, along with [Garrett](#), of the romantic-liberal project in Portugal. In a further parallel to Garrett, this affected both his writings and the course of his life, which involved a myriad of complementary activities: pro-liberal revolutionary action, and a public stance on civic and political issues; literary creation and criticism; scholarly research and collection of historical sources; the standing of a moral *maître à penser*. Herculano was one of the prototypical Portuguese public intellectuals, and held up to successive generations the task to “regenerate” the nation, by a nationalizing turn and a historicist return to root the nation's culture in its origins in popular culture, monuments, customs, memory and history.

With his strong humanist and encyclopedic training, Herculano found his literary role-models during his 1821-32 exile in France and England ([Chateaubriand](#), [Lamennais](#), [Klopstock](#) and [Walter Scott](#)) as well as his historiographical examples ([Thierry](#), [Guizot](#) and [Thiers](#), among others). This is the frame of reference that he brought to bear on his activities as journalist, librarian, poet, writer, literary critic, essayist, polemicist and historian. Conversely, Romantic though he was, Herculano condemned what he considered the immorality and irrelegion of [Byron](#) and the French *roman feuilleton*.

He was (and is) considered one of the greatest [Portuguese historians](#). He pioneered the collection, organization and interpretation of primary sources; his work combined theory, critical surveys, and factual detail; he engaged with local and international historians (where he ranks with [Niebuhr](#), [Ranke](#), and [Guizot](#)) on major transnational topics such as slavery, feudalism, the Inquisition, and nationalism; his mode of writing social history presented people as active historical agents. His coverage of the recent past anticipated by more than a century the idea of the *histoire du temps présent*. Herculano's unfinished *História de Portugal* (1846-

53), which earned him an appointment to the Academy of Sciences (1852), relied, controversially, on factualist skepticism; his reluctance to endorse the Miracle of Ourique (when Christ was to have appeared to King Afonso Henriques) incurred the ire of the clergy and conservative readers. Herculano retaliated with an anticlerical choice of topic for his other great work, the *História da origem e estabelecimento da Inquisição em Portugal* ("History of the origin and establishment of the Inquisition in Portugal", 1854-59).

But the recovery of the past went beyond the writing of histories and involved the preservation and presentation of heritage and collective memory. Herculano was actively engaged in heritage protection and the role of buildings, museums, archives, libraries, etc. Witness (besides his editorship of *O Panorama*) his pioneering *Monumentos pátrios* ("Patriotic Monuments", 1838), his role in founding the [Sociedade Propagadora dos Conhecimentos Úteis](#) ("Society for the propagation of useful knowledge"), and his work as a librarian, initially at the *Real Biblioteca Pública da Cidade do Porto* ("Royal Public Library of the City of Porto", 1833-36) and later as director of the [royal libraries](#) of Ajuda and Necessidades, in Lisbon (1839).

The magnum opus in this respect was the *Portugaliae Monumenta Historica* (1856-73), a series of [editions](#) of documents in the country's convent archives; evidently inspired by the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, the project was commissioned in 1853-54 by the Academy of Sciences of Lisbon.

Herculano also led the recovery of the national past by writing of [fiction](#), and earned enduring literary canonicity by introducing the genre of the [historical novel](#) in Portugal. *O monge de Cister* ("The Cistercian monk", 1842, 1848), *O bobo* ("The jester", 1843) and *Eurico, o presbítero* ("Eurico, the priest", 1843-44), are all in the mode of Walter [Scott](#). As early as 1838 he published two short stories in the magazine *Panorama* and staged his play *O Fronteiro de África ou três noites aziagas* in Lisbon; a high point came with *Lendas e narrativas* ("Legends and tales", 1851), a compilation of legends and historical narratives. Herculano had high esteem for the power of fictional literature to interest the public in the past, and ranked Scott, [Hugo](#) and [Vigny](#) alongside historians proper.

It was thanks to his work that the historical novel became a literary fashion in the mid-century, with followers such as Oliveira [Marreca](#), Luis Augusto [Rebelo da Silva](#) and Arnaldo [Gama](#). Herculano sought to reconcile the more fanciful side of the plots and action scenes with historical accuracy in the settings. The novels are critical of clerical dogma and hypocrisy, glorify municipal freedoms against feudal oppression and despotism, using historical arguments to bolster public favour for the emerging liberal constitutionalist regime, weak as it was after a long civil war.

Herculano's reformism sought a harmonization, always precarious, between freedom and inequality; the idea that even democracies could be corrupted by the tyranny of the majority he held in common with Garrett and other liberal Romantics elite endorsing constitutional rule and parliamentarism (which they traced back to medieval municipal self-rule and inter-class communitarianism). Besides political and administrative decentralization, agricultural development was advocated by Herculano on national-communitarian grounds. Having bought a rural farm in the countryside near Santarém (where he settled in the last years of his life), he founded a Farmers Cooperative in 1877.

Herculano also took an active part in politics. He was a parliamentary delegate for the *Cartistas* (conservative Liberals) in 1840-41, participated in public inquiries and co-authored the first Portuguese Civil Code (1860-65), which, with its provision for civil as well as religious marriage, provoked fresh controversy with the clergy. He became Mayor of Belém when that Lisbon district achieved municipal autonomy in 1852, co-founded the Historic Progressive Party in 1856, and founded a pressure group in 1861 to resist Pan-Iberism.

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