

THE LACERDA 120 EXHIBITION

Ferraz de Lacerda, Lda., Porto, Portugal, 28–29 May 2022

Quintino Lopes¹, Paulo Lacerda², Elisabete Pereira¹

¹*Institute of Contemporary History – NOVA University of Lisbon; University of Évora, Portugal*

²*Ferraz de Lacerda, Lda., Porto, Portugal
quintinolopes1@gmail.com*

In 1967 George Basalla argued that a small circle of Western European nations was the cradle of modern science. Italy, France, England, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, and the Scandinavian countries provided “...the scene of the Scientific Revolution which firmly established the philosophical viewpoint, experimental activity, and social institutions we now identify as modern science” [2: 611]. According to Basalla, science spread round the world from this relatively small geographical base.

At the same time, in *The two cultures and the scientific revolution*, C. P. Snow denounced the existence of two cultures as being undesirable and indeed detrimental to the pursuit of interdisciplinarity [9]. These days there is a great deal of support for this idea, and Basalla's thesis has been strongly contested by those who argue that traditional scientific centres and peripheries are both vital for the production, circulation, appropriation and recognition of knowledge [4].

These two influential works, along with recent historiographical production which argues in favour of “scientific excellence on the periphery” and extols the action of technicians and collaborators of scientists who were *geniuses*, provided the impetus for the exhibition entitled “Lacerda 120” [3], [1]. This year being the 120th anniversary of the birth of Armando de Lacerda (1902–1984), we seek to place the renowned Portuguese phonetician in a broader context, among his peers, assistants and other (newly discovered) actors. From the outset, this was one of the main features of the exhibition. Lacerda is portrayed in a number of group photographs taken at the 1st and 3rd International Congresses of Phonetic Sciences held in Amsterdam in 1932 and Ghent in 1938, respectively, which he attended. The exhibition as a whole includes photographs of Giulio Panconcelli-Calzia (1878–1966), Paul Menzerath (1883–1954) and Martin Joos (1907–1978), Lacerda's mentors, as well as images of some of his disciples and collaborators, such as António Almeida (*1946), Göran Hammarström (1922–2019), Maria Josefa Canellada (1912–1995), Francis Millet Rogers (1914–1989), Sue Nogueira (*1930) and Peter Strevens (1922–1989).

Although Armando de Lacerda was a recognized phonetician of global renown, at the Faculty of Arts of Coimbra, where he was head of the Experimental Phonetics Laboratory, he was officially designated as a member of the “technical, auxiliary and ancillary staff” [5]. The photographs of Lacerda on field work, along with collaborators, his driver, and the local people from rural areas in the Alentejo and Algarve regions whose speech he recorded in the early 1950s, illustrate the collective nature of knowledge and indicate as part of the exhibition the recent recognition by historiographers assigned to the role of “invisible technicians” [7], [6].

Lacerda's disciples and collaborators, who came from universities as far away as Harvard in the USA, Uppsala in Sweden, São Salvador da Bahia in Brazil, and Accra in the Gold Coast, for example, sought specialist training under his supervision at the Experimental Phonetics Laboratory in Coimbra, and the exhibition illustrates how Portugal, which was predominantly regarded in the 1930s and 60s as being a backward,

picturesque country, in fact displayed a remarkable degree of scientific centrality in the field of experimental phonetics [5].

In connection with the issue of interdisciplinarity, a feature of the exhibition is a special room at the Coimbra Phonetics Laboratory containing the instruments of the laboratory, most of them designed by Lacerda himself, a philologist by training, and a self-styled experimentalist who, for this reason, would only pronounce on a subject “after the devices have proved their worth”¹. The protocol signed in 2020 for collaboration between the University of Évora and the University of Coimbra was aimed at the recovery of the history of the Coimbra Phonetics Laboratory, and enabled its instruments, held by the University of Coimbra Science Museum, to be transferred to the headquarters of Ferraz de Lacerda, Lda. – and the exhibition curators and authors of this text are grateful to the head of the Science Museum, Dr. Paulo Trincão, and the curator of scientific instruments, Dr. Gilberto Pereira, for their collaboration.

Held in the house lived in by Armando de Lacerda, which has been owned by the family for over 120 years, the exhibition also tells us much about Lacerda’s family life, including a collection of his documents from the family archive, held by his grandson, Paulo de Lacerda, who in recent years has grown the archive with the addition of the António Almeida fund, donated by himself, and the Göran Hammarström fund, donated by his daughter Marika Hammarström. The fact that the exhibition portrays Lacerda’s professional and family life does not preclude the notion of the global responsibility of the project, and the curators decided to invite Irina Kostyuk from Ukraine to bear witness to the importance of the “Sharing European Histories” project (EuroClio; Evens Foundation), which demonstrates to groups of schoolchildren the importance of the “Lacerda polychromograph” as an example of how, even during a period of nationalism and authoritarianism such as the 1930s, when the instrument was invented, it was possible to establish bridges and a dialogue between scientists from a number of countries living under different political regimes [8].

Funding

The Instituto de História Contemporânea (Institute of Contemporary History, University of Évora Unit) receives national funding from the FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia under projects UIDB/04209/2020 and UIDP/04209/2020. This research was also funded by the FCT under projects 2021.00906.CEECIND and 2022.06811.PTDC (Phonetics Laboratory: Coimbra – Harvard. Rethinking 20th-century scientific centres and peripheries, PHONLAB), and by the private company Ferraz de Lacerda, Lda.

References

- [1] ACHIM, M. & PODGORNÝ, I. (eds.) 2013. *Museos al detalle. Colecciones, antigüedades e historia natural, 1790–1870*. Rosario: Prohistoria Ediciones.
- [2] BASALLA, G. 1967. The Spread of Western Science. *Science* 156(3775). 611–622.
- [3] GOOTENBERG, P. 2007. A Forgotten Case of ‘Scientific Excellence on the Periphery’: The Nationalist Cocaine Science of Alfredo Bignon, 1884–1887. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49(1). 202–232. DOI: 10.1017/S001041750700045X.
- [4] HAUSWEDELL, T., KÖRNER, A. & TIEDAU, U. (eds.) 2019. *Re-Mapping Centre and Periphery. Asymmetrical Encounters in European and Global Contexts*. London: University College London.

¹ Armando de Lacerda’s opinion in a letter to Leif Sletsjøe dated 19th December 1949 (Biblioteca do Laboratório de Fónica. Faculdade de Letras de Coimbra).

- [5] LOPES, Q. 2020. *Uma periferia global: Armando de Lacerda e o Laboratório de Fonética Experimental de Coimbra (1936–1979)*. Lisboa: Caleidoscópio.
- [6] PEREIRA, E., LOPES, M. M. & NUNES, M. F. 2020. ‘Collective wisdom’ at the National Archaeological Museum in Portugal. *Museum History Journal* 12(2). 171–191. DOI: 10.1080/19369816.2019.1731148.
- [7] SHAPIN, S. 1989. The Invisible Technician. *American Scientist* 77(6). 554–563.
- [8] <https://www.euroclio.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Sharing-European-Histories-publication.pdf>. Accessed on 12/10/2022.
- [9] SNOW, C. P. 1961. *The two cultures and the scientific revolution*. New York: Cambridge University Press.



Figure 1. Inauguration of the Lacerda 120 – 5th International Workshop on the History of Speech Communication Research at the University of Porto rectorry, during which the exhibition was held. From left to right: Paulo Lacerda, Jürgen Trouvain, Quintino Lopes, Rui Silva, António Candeias and João Veloso. (Photograph: Renato Roque)



Figure 2. Exhibition and Lacerda 120 – 5th International Workshop on the History of Speech Communication Research held at the head office of Ferraz de Lacerda, Lda. in Porto.