One hundred and fifty years ago, more precisely on the 24th of November of 1859, Darwin introduced a new paradigm in natural history with the publication of On the origin of species by means of natural selection, or the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life. As epistemology has already acknowledged, the Darwinian theory of descent with modification or evolutionism was undertaken to respond to a vast array of scientific, philosophical, and cultural questions. Darwin’s work opened the way for a new way of thinking about the natural world and its history, and it quickly became a central point of reference for many different fields of study.

The history of Darwinism and of evolution clearly illustrates the fertility of the theory of natural selection. The theory of natural selection took around twenty years to be formulated, roughly between 1837 and 1859. The meeting “Darwin, Darwinisms and evolution” took place in Coimbra between the 22nd and the 23rd of September 2009. This meeting’s main purpose was to provide a space of open discussion to all of those interested in the issue, both on the national and the international level. The meeting was co-orientated by Pedro Ricardo Fonseca and João Rui Pita, both researchers from the University of Coimbra and respectively from the same research group, the Grupo de História e Sociologia da Ciência do CEIS20. The meeting was part of a project, which explored the ways in which the history of science and the history of ideas continuously interact with each other in the field of the sciences of life and of man, as in the cultural field.

The history of Darwinism and of evolution illustrates the fertility of the theory of natural selection everywhere across the globe. Portugal’s reception of Darwin began in the 1860’s, featuring a debate on the validity of the new theory and its social impacts, especially during the 1860’s and the 1870’s. In 1868, the Portuguese professor of anatomy José Augusto de Menezes, famous for his work on the embryology of the human body, published the book Anatomia comparada do corpo humano, in which he presented a biological interpretation of Darwin’s ideas. In the same decade, other Portuguese authors published books on the theory of natural selection, such as Álvaro de Menezes’s Darwinismo e evolução: um estudo de teoria da vida, published in 1870, and José Augusto de Menezes’s Darwinismo e evolução: um estudo de teoria da vida, published in 1870.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the theory of natural selection was widely discussed in Portugal, both in scientific and in cultural circles. The meeting “Darwin, Darwinisms and evolution” aimed to explore the ways in which the history of science and the history of ideas continuously interact with each other in the field of the sciences of life and of man, as in the cultural field.