

# DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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**BASTO, Artur de Magalhães** (Porto, 1894 – Porto, 1960)

For the extent and quality of his legacy, Magalhães Basto was the undisputed greatest historian devoted to the history of Porto in the twentieth century, the city where he was born on March 5, 1894, in the parish of Bonfim. He was the second son of Antonio José de Magalhães Basto and Joaquina de Magalhães Teixeira Basto, capitalists with commercial businesses in Brazil. Raised in typically bourgeois surroundings, he completed his primary and secondary studies at schools in Porto, and then enrolled at the University of Lisbon. There he earned a BA from the Faculty of Law in 1922. He became the brother-in-law by marriage of Mendes Corrêa, professor in the Faculties of Science and Arts at the University of Porto, who invited him to give up law and start an academic career by the end of that same year. He started by serving as interim assistant to the Geographical Sciences group at the First Faculty of Arts of Porto in early 1923, in recognition of his interdisciplinary focus and interest in historical studies, and he later took on further responsibilities as chair of Political Geography and Economics, as well as those of History of Discoveries and Portuguese Colonization and Palaeography and Diplomacy. That year he published his first study *A fronteira hispano-portuguesa (ensaio de geografia política)* (The Spanish-Portuguese Border, a Political Geography Essay). Revealing updated geographical knowledge on the physical and human domains, he revolted against the determinist doctrine of the linear conception of natural borders by the valorisation of "border zones", which he defined as the transitional space between two distinct political and moral realities resulting from natural anthropological and geographical differences.

In 1925, after an offer from Damião Peres, Magalhães Basto was transferred to interim assistant in the Historical Sciences group, also lecturing in Ancient History, Numismatics, General History of Civilization and Colonial Geography. He then moved up in his academic career to the posts of Interim Assistant (1927) and Interim Assistant Professor (1931) of the same group. He truly inaugurated his historiographical work, however, five years earlier, when he was 35 years old, with the publication of *1809: o Pôrto sob a segunda invasão francesa* (1809: Porto Under the Second French Invasion), which earned him some public recognition as a researcher and scholar in the field of History. Echoes in the press praised the monograph and its author for its extensive documentary research, much of it previously unpublished from the manuscript holdings of the Public Library and Historical Archive of the Municipality of Porto, as well as its intelligent historical scholarship and rigorous scientific impartiality in piecing together the Napoleonic invasions and

their effects on the city and the northern region during the second military campaign. In fact, in 1930, his reputation as a researcher was established with two new milestones: the study *Alguns documentos inéditos sobre Uriel da Costa* (Some unpublished documents about Uriel da Costa) announced new biographical facts about the famous Porto Jewish-convert philosopher, and in the pages of the newspaper *O Primeiro de Janeiro* he started the weekly series *Falam velhos manuscritos...*, (Old manuscripts say...) which he continued until the end of his life, amassing a total of around 1500 historical, cultural and artistic articles about Porto and various aspects of Portuguese history.

The closure of First Faculty of Arts in the summer of 1931 brought a halt to Magalhães Basto's university teaching career, forcing him to work as a secondary school teacher in the city's private schools. His dedication to new themes of historical research, and increasingly centred on Porto, however, grew with his designation as chief registrar and notary of the Santa Casa da Misericórdia do Porto (House of Mercy) registry office (1933) and as head of the department of manuscripts and reserves at the Porto Municipal Public Library (1934-1938). In this last position, preparing the *Catálogo do Fundo Azevedo* (Catalog of Fundo Azevedo) and *Catálogo dos Manuscritos Ultramarinos* (Catalog of Overseas Manuscripts) offered him access to and knowledge of a rich collection of documentation on national and local history, including many previously unpublished medieval chronicles, which constitute much of the support for his future historiographical work. In 1934, he published the *História da Santa Casa da Misericórdia do Porto*, a case study of the local House of Mercy institution, which established his qualities as historian and showed some influences on the maturation of his thought and scientific model. On the one hand, he absorbed a clear encyclopaedic trend in history from perspectives like those of his Lisbon teachers and Damião Peres, as expressed in the chapter on the contextualization of the birth of the Houses of Mercy in Portugal. However, he also showed influences from positivist historiography through prevalence of written documents in his formulation of hypotheses based on scholarship and textual criticism, and the cult of truth, objectivity and impartiality in his writing style, which was described as simple and attractive, or even the primary characteristic of his work as historian, a focus on original and unknown facts about the reality of Porto, which as an active citizen of the city was supplied in promoting the greatness of the city's identity and uniqueness.

Mendes Corrêa's presidency in the Porto city council in the late 1930s meant a return to recognition for Magalhães Basto, who was elected to the leadership of the newly established Cabinet of City History (1937), the current Municipal Historical Archivist of Porto, where he would assert himself as mentor to a new generation of historians in Porto deprived of a Faculty of Arts. This body aimed at organizing and managing the Municipal Archives for the preservation and promotion of historical studies of Porto. Its director planned the beginning of a collection *Documents and memories for the History of Porto*, which premiered with the volume *Vereações: anos 1390-1395* (Municipal Councillors: 1390-1395), a remarkable testimony of his command of Palaeography and historical criticism. While managing the publication of new volumes covering historical studies by other authors, he also sought to rescue past major works on the history of Porto with new revised editions with his own commentary. In less than two years he transitioned to the head of

Municipal Cultural Services, when he also took on the management of the Porto District Archives (keeping this accumulation of roles until his death), was the lecturer in the "Portuguese Studies" extension course and a contributor in Porto's primary cultural associations and the work entitled *História da Expansão Portuguesa no Mundo* (History of the Portuguese Expansion in the World). Also in 1939 he was named a corresponding academic member of the Portuguese Academy of History, taking part in activities included in the Commemoration of the Centennial of 1400, as well as the Portuguese World Congress, becoming part of the political and cultural surroundings of the Estado Novo, while seemingly distanced from active political militancy.

The 1940s seemed to be his greatest decade in terms of public visibility as a historian and communicator. He conducted the biweekly radio program *Figuras do Porto* (Personalities of Porto) on the Northern regional broadcaster Emissor Regional do Norte, with historical notes on individuals and events in the city. This helped him fulfil his long-held personal desire to re-launch the magazine *O Tripeiro*, earlier published between 1908 and 1931. This publication was hailed as a repository of news about Porto on various topics, with greater relevance to historical artistic and cultural matters of the city and the surrounding region. Magalhães Basto acted as director on its V series (1945-1960) and it became a reference for both historians and admirers of historical subjects, combining the rigor of historical research with accessible language, in which both highly acclaimed and new talent from the Portuguese scientific community participated. In the overview of his research, we note his valuable contribution to medieval historiography in his multiple studies on Fernão Lopes and the *Crónica dos Cinco Reis de Portugal* (Chronicle of the Five Kings of Portugal), supported in the analysis and publication of previously unpublished manuscripts in the Porto Public Library, advocating the enlargement of the textual corpus attributed to Fernão Lopes, including him on the *Crónica Geral do Reino* (General Chronicle of the Kingdom). In spite of certain reservations from Costa Pimpão regarding this hypothesis, it received a very significant reception from figures such as former colleagues in the teaching college, Hernâni Cidade and Torquato de Sousa Soares, as well as Jacinto do Prado Coelho and Lindley Cintra. On the death of fellow countryman and friend, Dr. Aarão de Lacerda, in 1947, he received an invitation to replace him as a voting member of the Centre for Humanistic Studies attached to the University of Porto, a scientific research institute and precursor in the resurgence of the present Faculty of Arts.

Magalhães Basto died in the Nevogilde parish of his hometown, on the morning of 3 June 1960, dividing his final years between civil service and the role of historian and promoter of Porto cultural life. At the time he was a Porto voting member of the National Academy of Fine Arts and a member of the Institute of Coimbra, Martins Sarmiento Society, Association of Portuguese Archaeologists, and the Commercial Athenaeum of Porto. He had received the medal of merit from the Municipality of Porto and left a bibliography of about 159 titles, not counting entries in smaller journals, and was a contributor to the *Revista de Estudos Históricos*, *A Águia*, *O Instituto*, *Stvdium Generale*, *O Tripeiro*, *Revista de Guimarães* and the *Grande Enciclopédia Portuguesa e Brasileira*, among others. As for his lifetime project to write a history of the city of Porto, upon

invitation by the municipal council in 1952, due to his health problems he was only able to create a tentative draft of the structure, which Damiao Peres and António Cruz returned to in his memory a decade later. His historiographical legacy on the city of Porto and the medieval chronicles still remain as benchmarks for contemporary studies, for the quality of their scientific scholarship, the receptivity conquered in the general public, and his grasp of the importance of the media, such as the press, radio, and cultural associations in the dissemination and highlight of history. Luís de Pina provided the most deserved tribute in homage to the unequalled Porto historian: "His death to remain irreparable for generations to come, chief chronicler of Porto and high guardian of the Tower of all its tradition ... Magalhães Basto splendidly wrote the biography of his city, Porto, thereby amending or adding many pages to the history of Portugal"(Memor Beneficii, 1961, p. 5). (Memor Beneficii, 1961, p. 5).

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APOIOS:

