

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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SÁ, Joaquim Victor Baptista Gomes de (Cambeses, Barcelos, 1921 – Braga, 2003)

His father, Domingos Gomes de Sá, was a sergeant (later lieutenant) in the Military Secretariat, and had been part of the expeditionary force in Mozambique during the First World War. His mother, Florinda Baptista da Silva André, was a primary school teacher. His childhood was spent in the village where he was born but he completed his primary education in Braga in 1932 with distinction. In October of that year, he decided to enter the Seminary of the Holy Ghost Missions in Godim, Régua, with the idea of becoming a missionary in Africa. In 1934 he returned to Braga, without having finished the first year of secondary school studies in the Seminary. Between 1934 and 1941 he attended the Liceu Nacional de Sá de Miranda in Braga, where he completed his secondary education. Whilst still at high school he was already making a name for himself for his participation in other activities: his first articles were published in the *Correio do Minho* in 1937; he was a student leader and president of the Academia Bracarense, where he promoted various initiatives (for example, starting a small lending library); and he became an opponent of the climate of hatred towards the Republicans which he witnessed in Braga at the end of the Spanish Civil War. When he finished his secondary school course he decided to interrupt his studies – “disenchanted with the nature of secondary education” as he later declared – and invest his time in other interests: books, reading, reflective thought, and cultural and civic education.

He became an employee of the Livraria Gualdino, a local bookshop, and used some of the money he managed to save to buy books which, after having read them, he made available to others to read at home. This is how the ‘Mobile Library’ appeared, an experience he recalled in a small work of 1954. He continued to collaborate regularly with the local and regional press and went ahead with publication of his first books – one on the thought of Antero Quental (1942) and the other on the bibliography of Eça de Queirós (1945).

Aware of what was happening in his country and in the world (the time being the middle of the Second World War), he set up a “centre of resistance and ideological education” in Braga in which Armando Bacelar, Francisco Salgado Zenha and Flávio Martins, among others, took part. By this time he was already married and had changed his job and was now working at the Livraria Cruz. In 1944-1945 he devoted his time to trade union activities, took part in the agitation following World War Two and joined the Movement of Democratic Unity (MUD). Henrique Barreto Nunes, one of the researchers who knew Victor de Sá best, mentions that “his first contact with members of the Communist Party must date from this period”.



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In 1947 he founded the Livraria Victor in Braga (in Rua dos Capelistas), but this is also the year when he was first arrested. He was detained by the PIDE [Political Police] in Porto for about a month along with Salgado Zenha and José Gabriel Bacelar. Further detentions occurred in 1949 and 1950, and he was forbidden to publish anything. However, this did not prevent his bookshop from becoming a centre for political and civic intervention. Curiously, in the “CV and Report of Activities” which he later presented to the Faculty as part of his application for some academic posts, he called this period a “Cultural Animation Phase”.

Antagonised by his fellow countrymen who were followers of the regime, with three children to care for, and a target for and closely watched by the Political Police, he decided to enrol in the Historical-Philosophical Sciences course at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Coimbra in 1952 as a voluntary student. The 1950s is a good example of his life: involved in trying to understand the epistemology of historical knowledge and the multifaceted perspectives of historical becoming; writing as much as possible to make his thoughts known – *Vértice*, *Seara Nova*, *Correio do Minho*; concerning himself with problems of reading and books – he launched an inquiry into the situation of libraries in Braga which later spread to the rest of the country (with his book *As bibliotecas o público e a cultura: um inquérito necessário* [Libraries, public and culture: a necessary inquiry, 1956] being a result of this); persecuted for his civic and political intervention with periods of imprisonment in 1955 and 1958. He was sent to prison in 1958 when he was finishing his bachelor's degree (*licenciatura*), thereby delaying completion to the following year when he defended his thesis entitled *Amorim Viana, a Vida e a Obra* (Amorim Viana, his Life and Work). This degree allowed him to apply for a place as a secondary school teacher and he was appointed to the Escola Comercial de Braga, but he never took up the post as he was denounced by a local representative of the National Union [*União Nacional*]. Prevented from teaching (under Decree nº 25317, of 13 May 1935), he turned to his work as a bookseller but continued to write and to intervene, revealing a high degree of non-conformity and a great fighting spirit. This stance earned him two further periods in jail in 1960 and the closing of his bookshop. In 1961 he stood as a candidate to become a deputy for Braga in the legislative elections. In 1962 he was detained for seven months and then tried in the Plenary Tribunal [*Tribunal Plenário*], but he was acquitted.

In April 1962, his intellectual and academic marginalisation led him to apply for a scholarship from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation to continue his studies in Paris at the Sorbonne. His study plan related to the “cultural activity of the Portuguese in France in the 19th century” and being awarded the grant allowed him to leave for Paris on 15 September 1963. There he met various historians but above all Léon Bourdon who supported his application to do a doctorate. For three years (1964-1967) he took part in the seminars given by Albert Silbert at the École des Hautes Études on the subject of “Recherche sur l'Histoire du Portugal au XIXe. siècle”. Between 1966 and 1968 he also attended the seminars run by Pierre Vilar on “Théorie et pratique de la recherche historique”. He also followed but just as a listener the courses: “Proudhon et Charles Marx” taught by Georges Gurvitch; “Histoire et statistique économiques” by Ernest



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Labrousse; “Littérature et sociologie” by Lucien Goldmann; and “Sociological Interpretation of the Mineira School and Arcadism” by António Cândido de Mello e Sousa, a professor from the University of São Paulo.

The atmosphere he experienced for five years in Paris, and where he was privileged to witness the events of May 1968, allowed him to break away from the historical training he had received – as shown in his work *A História em Discussão* (History under Discussion) – and guaranteed him contact with new methodological procedures, new readings in well-stocked libraries and socialising and discussion with outstanding intellectuals. Then, being an exemplary scholarship holder, he finished and submitted his doctoral thesis in September 1968, with the public defence being held on 6 January 1969. After some changes made during his research, the title of his work became *A crise do liberalismo e as primeiras manifestações do pensamento socialista em Portugal* (The crisis of liberalism and the first manifestations of socialist thought in Portugal). The jury, presided over by Léon Bourdon, awarded him the highest grade – “very good” – and his thesis was given equivalence to a complementary thesis for the higher degree of “doctorat d’État”. The same month, on 14 January, he returned to Portugal. Later that year he published *A Revolução de Setembro de 1836* (The September Revolution of 1836).

On his return to Portugal he was constantly watched, he was prevented from working in any public position, his doctorate was not recognised and he was refused a scholarship by the Institute for High Culture (IAC) to continue his research on Portuguese Contemporary History – all of which led him to write *Regressar para quê?* (Why return?) in 1970, a work that was seized by the PIDE in the very same week it went on sale. He therefore threw himself into his work as a bookseller and turned his bookshop into a meeting place for intellectuals, democrats and those opposed to the regime. He took part in the Republican Congresses in Aveiro and stood in the 1973 elections, from which the Opposition had once again to withdraw.

Only in 1974, after Decree nº 25317, of 13 May 1935, was revoked and nº 173/7, which ensured the reintegration of State employees in public services from which they had been removed for political reasons, was promulgated on 26 April, did it become possible for him to devote himself to university teaching once his application to the Faculty of Letters of Porto had been approved unanimously in July 1974. In the same year he was invited by both the Faculty of Letters in Lisbon and the Faculty of Economics in Porto to join them, but he declined both invitations. Having been reintegrated into the staff of the 10th Group A of the Escola Técnica Alberto Sampaio, a secondary school in Braga, he was then requisitioned as an Auxiliary Professor and put in charge of the following courses: “Contemporary History of Portugal and the Iberian Peninsula”, “Economy and Society”, “History of Colonialism and Decolonisation” and the “Seminar of Contemporary History”. He also took on another job, collaborating with the University of Minho between 1975/76 and 1979 where he coordinated the courses “Portuguese Culture I and II” and “Portuguese Society and Culture I and II”. In 1979 he became the first Portuguese Communist Party deputy to be elected in the electoral circuit of Braga. He was present in the National Assembly as a deputy between 3 January and 12 November 1980. In the legislative elections of 1980 he was elected again (and he is recorded as being in the National Assembly between 13 November 1980 and 30 May 1983). Having taken up residence in Rio de Mouro, he became a



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candidate in the local municipal elections in Sintra held in 1985 and was elected President of the Municipal Assembly.

These positive facts should not let us forget two important events that marked his personal and professional life: first, the climate of open anti-communism that he had to face in the 'Summer of 1975' in Braga, instigated by the more reactionary sectors of society and by the Braga Church hierarchy itself; and secondly, his failure to pass the *provas de agregação* (a university exam to move up the academic ladder), which he applied to take in 1978, for reasons that were never totally clarified and for which the composition of the jury appointed did not help. This event was referred to as "barbaric intellectual aggression" and "another act of terrorism", and he later wrote in his university Activity Report (1979) that "wounded in his intellectual, scientific and academic brilliance, he waited unforgiving but serenely for the opportunity to submit himself to a new examination". He never did this though because the process used by the jury to arrive at their decision, "through white and black balls with no written justification", was not changed, this being a condition he said was essential. The topic chosen for the "*lição de síntese*" (model lesson) given on 7 April 1978 – "Formation of the Portuguese Workers' Movement" – and the fact that the vote was taken by simply choosing white or black balls with no justification helps us to understand this outcome, which was more political than academic. Despite having undertaken an exhaustive search in the human resources department at the University of Porto and in the University's Archives, the minutes of this academic event could not be found. In May 1978 he published with Editora Centelha, *Formação do Movimento Operário Português – Memória de uma reprovação* (*Formation of the Portuguese Workers' Movement - Memoir of a failure*), with a dedication that reveals his intellectual dignity – "To all young workers and students, especially to my students, who deserve to see transparently the qualities and the human limitations of one who seeks to transmit to you what he knows".

The feeling that history is useful from a comparative perspective and the possibility it gives us to understand the present is one of the strands that is most present in his work. Opting for Contemporary History also allowed him to express his concern to relativise incidents and, using the methodologies his training in Paris had provided him with, to identify mechanisms of change from a long-term point of view. The approach he takes, without neglecting the short time needed to understand major alterations, as illustrated for example in the detail with which he tackled the introduction of liberalism in Portugal, favours the understanding of sequences and the global view.

After his initial concern with the democratisation of culture and access to an up-to-date and diversified bibliography – a concern that can be seen in the 1940s and 1950s and especially in his Mobile Library initiative and a series of short works in a collection entitled *Cultura e Acção* (Culture and Action) – from 1961 on, he devoted himself to historical reflection which he later exteriorised in his essay *História e actualidade* (History and Actuality). Victor de Sá also contributed to the *Annales School*, so becoming part of our contemporary historiography. As José Tengarrinha said in a talk in a colloquium in homage to Victor de Sá in 2001, "contrary to official historiography that sought to defend the chastity of Clio and kept the object of study



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as far removed as possible from present time, thus reducing the historian to a pure erudite ... Victor de Sá and the historians of his generation sought to fill this vacuum, this silence of Portuguese historiography". Thus his focus on the 19th century and Liberalism arose naturally, showing the ability the country had to gain freedom even when faced with the internal and external conditionalities that were moving in a different direction. This focus could already be seen in 1964 when he published *Perspectivas do século XIX* (*Perspectives of the 19th Century*) in the Portugália Collection edited by Augusto da Costa Dias. In fact this collection became a cultural reference, not only because of the time when it appeared but especially for the authors whose voices were heard: Alexandre Cabral, Alberto Ferreira, Joel Serrão, César Nogueira, António Borges Coelho and J. S. Silva Dias, in addition to that of the collection's editor. His work is a reference for the way in which it deals with the first Socialist press in Portugal and how it calls attention to the "1852 Generation" (Amorim Viana, António Pedro Lopes de Mendonça, Sousa Brandão, Custódio José Vieira, among others). In fact, the timeless thoughts of some protagonists always merited his special attention: from Mouzinho da Silveira to António Sérgio, from Ribeiro Sanches to Antero de Quental, he always sought to uncover the role played by principles, ideas and values in historical change. This transversal, evolutionary and cyclical feeling that there are ideas that have been sown and are just waiting for time and space to help fertilise them is well expressed in his work *Liberais e Republicanos* (*Liberals and Republicans*) published in 1986. His outstanding *A Crise do Liberalismo e as primeiras manifestações das ideias socialistas em Portugal (1820-1852)* [*The Crisis of Liberalism and the first manifestations of socialist ideas in Portugal (1820-1852)*] is the best summary of a whole epistemological and scientific position that he sought to bring to his teaching.

As a teacher he was one of those responsible for the emancipation of Contemporary History from Modern History, guaranteeing its inclusion in the course programme of the undergraduate degree in History as an autonomous course. His pedagogic and didactic sensitivity could be seen in many initiatives that set a trend: the creation of study guides for Portuguese contemporary history – for example his work *Época Contemporânea Portuguesa. Onde o Portugal velho acaba* (*The Portuguese Contemporary Age. Where the old Portugal ends*, 1981); assessment tests with consultation ensuring that the students' reading of works and their respective reading notes could be used when answering the questions he set and which naturally favoured criticism and the construction by students of an autonomous and well-founded text; the encouragement to do research works, which could increase the value of the final grade by adding marks to the grade obtained in the test; a concern with preparing his successors, attending classes given by his assistant and later analysing them, commenting, suggesting other paths or other readings until he felt he could "kill the father" (an expression he used to indicate the end of this preparation phase or traineeship).

His constant preoccupation with understanding the meaning of History and the place we occupy in it led him to introduce some innovations into the university context whenever he was allowed to, especially in his Seminars of Contemporary History (where undergraduates' final dissertations were prepared) in which he gave time to recent topics, for example decolonisation, or lent scientific and methodological consistency to



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topics which were not given much space in the taught courses of a more general nature, for example the workers' movement. With his permanent leaning towards didactics and sharing, he sought to systematise some of these collective reflections in works he has left us – *A História em Discussão* (History in Discussion, 1975), *Repensar Portugal. Reflexões sobre o colonialismo e descolonização* (*Rethinking Portugal. Reflections on Colonialism and Decolonisation*, 1977) or *Roteiro da Imprensa Operária e Sindical 1836-1986* (Guide to the Workers' and Trade Union Press 1836-1986, 1991). However, one of the best examples of his sense of sharing is the work he prepared with Fernanda Ribeiro – *O Liberalismo Português (1820-1852). Recolha bibliográfica* (*Portuguese Liberalism (1820-1852). A bibliographic collection*) – published in 1994 in which he left us 2,220 references, the fruit of his scientific and thematic data collection.

These aspects show the importance he gave to research in academia and made him responsible for setting up a Centre for Historical Research – the Centre for History at the University of Porto (1976) – where he collected a specialist library and which supported many works, in particular doctoral theses, and masters and undergraduate dissertations. Here he set up a Line of Action for the Contemporary Era where, as he stated, “not in the shadow of traditional historiography, but in the light of new problematics and new sources” he sought to encourage and lead research in five axes: “triumph of capitalism and bourgeois society in Portugal”; “importance of the colonial factor in the conditioning of the economic, political, social and cultural evolution of Portuguese society”; “intensification of Portuguese colonial exploitation in Africa, industrialisation in the metropole and worker concentration”; “Portugal and the Spanish Civil War, the Second World War and the Cold War”; “the 25th April as a break point in the Portuguese historical process”.

He adopted a Marxist line of analysis bringing to interpretation, in particular of Contemporary History, a conceptual framework that was rooted both in the perspectives of the utopian socialists who he studied in great depth and in the views of Marx and particularly Engels when applied to the becoming of our contemporaneity. In his explanation for the introduction of liberalism in Portugal, for example, he claimed that “it was not only a political, economic and military struggle against the aristocracy of the Old Regime; there were also social struggles and it is precisely these that form the backdrop to the age”. In fact, both thematically and analytically, such an interpretative perspective of history was in tune with his own ideas which had been cemented in his academic exchange with the historians who had consolidated his education in France.

In the same period (1976 to 1978) he was a member of the Consultative Council for the Social Sciences and Humanities at the National Institute for Scientific Research (INIC) where, in addition to an important role in awarding scholarships for researchers in the area of Contemporary History, he managed to obtain the conditions and terms needed to publish the “Revista de História” (History Review) associated to the Centre he had set up and whose first issue came out in 1979. This sense of sharing, incentive and generosity was clearly expressed when on 12 July 1991 (the year he became Emeritus Professor) he formalised his gift to the University of Minho and the Braga Public Library of a series of documents of a political nature, his literary correspondence and documents relating to his personal and academic life as well as study and research



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materials referring to the 19th and 20th centuries. At the same time, the University of Minho agreed to award through its Cultural Council an annual Contemporary History Prize aimed at encouraging academic research among young historians. Meanwhile, on 10 June 1990, he had been decorated with the Ordem da Liberdade (Order of Liberty) which he received in Braga during the commemorations for the Day of Portugal, Camões and the Portuguese Communities from the hands of the President of the Republic, Mário Soares. Finally, a word about some of the national and international meetings and conferences he participated in. Among these were: Meeting of European Historians promoted by the Hungarian-Italian Forum (Budapest, 1976); Third Meeting of Portuguese and Soviet Historians (Leningrad, 1988); International Symposium of Historians (Vienna, 1988); 26th International Conference of Historians of the Workers' Movement (Linz, 1989 and 1990). In Portugal we can see from his university Activity Reports that he gave dozens of papers sponsored by the most diverse entities. Among the most important societies he was a member of were the Portuguese Society for 18th Century Studies, the Association for the Defence, Study and Divulgateion of Cultural Heritage (ASPA, Braga), the Association of Journalists and Men of Letters of Porto (with positions on the Literary Board), the Société Française des Lusitanistes de l'Enseignement Supérieur (Poitiers), the Portuguese Writers' Association, the Portuguese Philosophy Association and the Association of History Teachers.

From 1991 on, he was also a professor at the Lusófona University in Lisbon and Director of the General Library, demonstrating a tenacity to continue working despite the various strokes (CVA) he suffered. In addition to duties in the area of Contemporary History of Portugal as part of the Political Science degree (and also as Director of the Study Centre), he was responsible for setting up the Library (initially in the Santa Helena Palace and later in the former Campo Grande Barracks) which became known as the Vitor de Sá University Library in 1997 in homage to him and in recognition of his services. He also donated his own personal library of around 3000 monographs to it. He saw this task as being, in his own words, "the last one on my journey as a living being". Lisbon and Braga have thus become places of reference for the work of Victor de Sá: if his handwritten archives can mostly be found in the Braga Public Library, in the Lusófona University Library his own journey and his bibliographic interests can be followed, both of which bear witness to his generous legacy and the consistency and coherence of his academic path.

Works by the author: *As Bibliotecas, o público e a cultura: um inquérito necessário*. Braga, V. Sá, 1956 ([2^a ed. aum.], Lisboa, Livros Horizonte, 1983); *Amorim Viana e Proudhon*. Lisboa, Seara Nova, 1960; *Perspectivas do século XIX*. Lisboa, Portugália, 1964 (2^a edição, Porto, Lumiar, 1975); *A Crise do liberalismo e as primeiras manifestações das ideias socialistas em Portugal: 1820-1852*. Lisboa, Seara Nova, 1969 (2^a ed. 1970; 3^a ed., Lisboa, Livros Horizonte, 1979); *A Revolução de Setembro de 1836*. Lisboa, D.Quixote, 1969 (2^a ed. 1970; 3^a ed., Lisboa, Livros Horizonte, 1978); *Ribeiro Sanches: Dificuldades que tem um velho reino para emendar-se e outros textos*. Porto, Inova, 1971 (2^a ed., Lisboa, Livros Horizonte, 1980); *Formação do movimento operário português: memória de uma reprovação*. Coimbra, Centelha, 1978; *No Mar do Futuro*. Lisboa, Livros Horizonte, 1980; *Época contemporânea portuguesa I:*



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Note: An excellent systematisation of the bibliography of Victor Sá may be found in: NUNES, Manuela Barreto, "Bibliografia de Victor de Sá". AAVV, *Estudos de História Contemporânea Portuguesa*. Lisboa, Livros Horizonte, 1991, pp. 21-51.

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APOIOS:

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