

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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SARDINHA, António (Monforte do Alentejo, 1887 - Elvas, 1925)

Even though not a professional historian, António Sardinha's work inspired a counter-revolutionary historiographical view which, with a few slight differences mainly in his idea of the "peninsular alliance" and related empirical research, would remain in effect throughout the *Estado Novo*. He was a poet, pamphleteer, publicist and editor of the most important doctrinal organ (the review, *Nação Portuguesa*, 1914-1938) of *Integralismo Lusitano* (Lusitanian Integralism), monarchic radicalism and the anti-modern, anti-republican reaction during the long critical years of the crisis caused by Liberalism and the representative systems it presaged in a certain way after the void of the First World War.

Thus, history and historiography were pretexts for the doctrinal fight and argumentative energy in which António Sardinha opened up and in part explored mythematic surfaces which nationalist historiography, as a rule later aligned by the *Estado Novo* dictatorship, would cultivate for over half a century. It is therefore in this sense, that of the announcer of a traditionalist and Catholic order which proclaimed the need for a radical revision of history and in the light of its dogmatic interpretation as a *nationalist science*, that its critical digression is supported by its characteristic historicism and the historiographical conception that structures it.

In line with aesthetic *fin-de-siècle* currents, notably literary symbolism and psychologism (P. Bourget, the uncommon spread of the Russian novel, G. Le Bon and the *Psychologie des Foules* [The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind] showing the irrationality of the masses), which in the neurosis of the late 19th century proclaimed the end of rationalism and, arguing for the secularisation of the Republic of Letters, nurtured a nostalgic longing for the divine and for rationalist apostasy and in particular for the historiographical essayism, organicism and decadentist diagnosis of an Oliveira Martins, Sardinha claimed that the original integralist thesis was a kind of pan-psychological view of history (an "internal view", cf. 'Questões de História', *Nação Portuguesa*, II, n.º 5; 230-40; *À sombra dos pórticos*, 2ª 1961, 85) as opposed to the materialist and secular spirit of the 19th century, whose hegemonic historiography was, in one reading of it, "entirely perverted by the Jacobin mentality", redeeming itself in a "party history in which the secular vision of the *Patria* appears diminished and sullied by the revolutionary preconceptions of a whole century of ruin and death" (*Na feira dos mitos*, 2ª, 1942; 37).

Sardinha's theses triggered a violent intellectual reaction against the liberal university spirit and the growing de-Christianisation and laicisation of Portuguese society itself, and as a result university institutions



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soon opposed any idea he might have entertained of teaching. This radicalised even more the writer's anathema to the humanitarian, pacifist and rationalist ideal which thrived in the universities.

However, the originality of these theses was hotly contested, first by Raul Proença in the pages of *Seara Nova*. The decisive influence in the embryonic phase, which converged with counter-revolutionary thought (De Bonald, J. de Maistre, Gama e Castro, Marquis of Penalva, Viscount of Santarém), might well have been found in *Action Française*, the movement led by Charles Maurras, and its programme for a *Retour à la terre* (Jules Méline), which felt, in its radical Barresian mistrust of the city which perverts the ancestral virtues of the common rural "people", a fundamentalist anathema to "decadent", "pornographic" urban and cosmopolitan literature, fruit of the educational institutions and the liberal and representative politics of the Third French Republic of which it was the correlative aesthetic and artistic expression. As an antidote he launched the theme of the regeneration of the "race", a topic Social Darwinism was exploring so effectively and which was so dear to the nationalist racism that denounces in the anonymity of a society of "artificial" men the rupture with the divine pact and with their Catholic and Ultramontanist roots. He revealed an obsessive pet hatred of Semitism and of all those groups which filled him with fear such as Protestantism and Free Masonry, which he held up as the all-powerful architect of the constitutional system - "Yesterday Liberalism, today Democracy, are nothing but the façades of a hidden power that, in the political underground, manoeuvres it at its pleasure" (*Ao ritmo da ampulheta*, 1925; 50).

Following this path, Sardinha became one of the most read and commented on authors in the forums of the anti-liberal and anti-Jacobin right: "the history of Portugal, at the beginning of the last century, the 19th, cannot be understood in so many of its contradictory aspects without knowing in detail the history of the secret societies, its inspiration" (*ib.*, 208).

If his racist message (*ius sanguinis*) did not pass into the discourse of the official historiography (A. Pimenta, C. Beirão, J. Ameal), it was because not only did it affront the imperial and colonialist view (the *ius soli*) of the *Estado Novo*, but because Sardinha himself in the final phase, after 1921-22, re-evaluated and limited its assertions, in particular about Judaism and the alleged Masonic alliance, which were always considered in any case to be promoters of the modern, utilitarian, Faustian civilisation of the capitalism of usury and interest – the *ideal of the Pharisees* in the language of Sardinha ("Occidentalism and Christianity"; *NP*, IV, t. I, n.º 4; 243-45) - which subverts the "spiritual", for which read theological and scholastic, fundamentals of 'western civilization': "Lords of Oil and Bituminous Coal, your imperialism – the imperialism of the Anglo-Saxons - blackens and depresses the breeding ground of those admirable energies, which issued forth from the Peninsula with its navigators and missionaries."

Sardinha thus brings together the old monastic providentialism of the chronicles and the thaumaturgical creed of the epics, updating traditional metaphysical categories (infinity, time, fatality, teleology) with the modern concepts of environment and evolution and even of racial determinism and sociological fixism, an "indispensable method of work and of criticism", which he believes he reads in Teófilo Braga, "master of the counter-revolution" and the much lauded theoriser of *ordeirista* (order-loving) and hierarchical, Comtian



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positivism, but he blames the author of the *História da Literatura Portuguesa* (History of Portuguese Literature) for his “inferior Jacobin acrimony towards the Braganza dynasty” and his “dogmatic republican convictions” (*Glossário dos tempos*, 1942; 124). Nevertheless, the appeal to any historical determinism scuttled the heteronymic and providentialist theses and their materialistic basis disagreed with the theosophical and messianic foundation that Sardinha, the integralist, advocated. The theses of the ‘eternal return’ merge within a system of radical beliefs which, in the name of a mythified past, seek to be updated to an ‘ought to be’: the becoming is therefore the overcoming, in its historical course, of the hiatus in the providential plan which Modernity and the revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries had corrupted.

One can understand that it was necessary to remake the genealogy of reactionism in the light of the “sacraments of Tradition”, the persistence and recurrence of habits, ancestral practices and customs, a type of deposit of the unconscious experience of the centuries, which would delineate a national soul, the *Volksggeist* of Romantic historiography (the “your genealogical tree, the titles of your majorat, the rights of your people, the *Portugalia*, the *Portugalia: bona regio*”, *De vita et moribus*, 1931, 141). But in this ideological programme the invocation of history and the apologue of patriotic exemplarity, in the very ultra-romantic spring of nationalism, would be used as an empirical and normative support for a practical demonstration of the nation, held as an undeniable fact *a fortiori*, and a theoretical deduction of the inevitability of the anti-liberal, anti-republican and anti-communist counter-revolution, as from the moment when the first echoes of the Soviet revolution of 1917 reached the *Cais das colunas* in the centre of Lisbon. As a Ciceronian *magistra vitae*, history would be the experimental (and deductive) stage which would permit the study and observation of authoritarian ontogeny, if not even an authentic ontology, as Sardinha writes in the early days, “I will demonstrate (...) from within our history, this complex identification of the population factor as the Authority element” (*Glossário dos tempos*, 147).

From this the providentialist view of history elected, as a last resort, what was denominated an authentic *epistemology of reactionism*, instituting it as a practical fundament (*the energy principle*) that sought to reconnect past and future separated in the present by the republican apostrophe and by the hiatus of free-thought, a “heresy” that had triumphed with the bourgeois revolutions and the material civilisation of capitalism. Thus, the traditionalist reconstitution aimed, through a symbolic inventory, to rebuild the bridges of organic and corporative fusion between nation and state, a primary integralist requisite in the wish for a national identity and conscience (Archer, *Nação e nacionalismo...*, 66-70). However, the study of history, as a nationalist praxis confined to the “lesson of fact” in search of the “chastity of history” of which Fustel de Coulanges spoke, that of the “intimate unity of the Patria” or that of a *positive idealism* using Grasset’s expression, aimed to ensure the symbolic resurrection of a collective past more imagined than studied: “They are the spiritual treasures of the Past which guard within themselves the powerful germ of redemption. Therefore, in uncertain tempestuous periods, historians always prepared the assault for any fallen patrias sure of redemption”.

In the undertaking to achieve “national salvation”, it was necessary to correct and combat romantic and



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liberal historiography; the *new order* demanded, also in the chapter on the production and reproduction of memories, the cast that would justify and illustrate *politique d'abord* [politics first], the submission of historical knowledge to the solicitations of political struggle.

Despite recognising Herculano as one of the great Portuguese historians, Sardinha did not find him innocent of culpable research, “so quickly did he let his sectarian mentality manifest itself that immediately a conflict was established between the historian and the facts, of which the *História da Inquisição* (History of the Inquisition) is an obvious witness assembled in order to beat the *reaction*, as Herculano himself so sincerely confesses”. The problem is that “scientific or objective methods of History do not marry, by their very nature, the puffed up panegyrics of the old days” and from there to “patriotic hyperbolism” if it had followed a phase in which “a systematic principle of free-criticism was substituted which made History a reason for permanent civil war” (*De Vita et Moribus*, 152-53). This was a conflict from which he did not exonerate either Herculano or Oliveira Martins, who he applauded in other areas (municipalism, organicism). In fact, if the theoretical programme was based on the Sorelian deconstruction of democratic *mythography* and on the Comtian belief of the perfectibility of the future in the name of sociocracy and the limited scientification of social know-how, the positive method, or rather the methodology of the French school of Langlois and Seignobos, would be contaminated by “stiff and sterile objectivity”, fruit of the “narrow materialism into which Intelligence descended and buried itself in the last century” (*Questões de história*, cit., 230-31).

Positivist methodology would thus not succeed in reaching the *intimate meaning* of history, a subjectivism that prognosticates and retrospects. Only the interpreter of nationalist science could achieve this, clothed in the garments of the priest of a philosophical *anamnesis*, not only to recover the possible memories of facticity but in order to scrutinise the transpersonal *eternal truths*. Integralist historiography, of which Sardinha is the most prominent theoriser, is thus situated on the threshold of a mystic gnosis in which heaven and earth communicate, following the well-worn Thomistic lesson, in the participation of the largest unit of divine creation in whose reading the sacralisation of the intellectual *munus* tries to justify itself (Archer, 1993:75). This meant that the epistemic status of the *nationalist historian* had to be granted the status of legatee of an interpretative tradition which did not merely exclude all others but claimed the place of univocal truth for a heteronymic view of history. And from there, for example, came the effort to rehabilitate the Holy Office and the Tribunal of the Inquisition as courts whose purpose was to guarantee both the preservation of the nation from modern *estrangeirismo* (foreignisation) and the chaste world view of the old social order.

In other words, there would be no hermeneutic erasures while heuristic support was present, and the *absolutely real* of the historical fact would be placed once more against the wise hermeneutic preventions of rationalism – apodicticity that would inaugurate authoritarian discourse in the historiographical field too, alongside scientific and positivist historicism, which in the name of another teleology rendered the anthropological promise of justice and peace in the earthly world immanent, commuting the Final Judgement by a procedural appeal to Jurors, meaning those now invested with the role of historians, the new judges of



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time and of human existence in time. The difficult epistemic division of subject / object, the basis of the complex investigation of the validity of historical knowledge, would be discarded in the name of the dogmatic efficacy of the belief in and the claim for a lack of temporality, let us say it like this, that takes root in an ahistorical view of the very thing it wanted to study: history.

Similar to and converging with *literary nationalisation*, as Sardinha had read in Afonso Lopes Vieira, he also sought to *reaportuguesar Portugal* (make Portugal Portuguese again) in terms of historiographical production, but following the Comtian maxim that it is the dead who rule the living, or rather, “it is the discipline of the Dead, it is their second life within us” (*Ao ritmo da ampulheta*, 155). This explains better the revisionist programme that Sardinha launched that targeted re-Christianisation and the fight against historiographical laicism in an attempt to demonstrate that the “unity of the race is more than evidenced in the unity of the Language and in the unity of Faith” (*À sombra dos pórticos*, cit., 47).

In an unedited extract later published in 1924, he recorded that “the history of Portugal in all its plenitude is nothing but a chapter in the history of the Church (...) our missionaries created Brazil – they reached the gates of Japan ... But Faith was extinguished – and with the extinction of Faith, the Empire was lost. The history that remains afterwards is simply the history of its decline” (F. Campos, *Os nossos mestres ou breviário da contra-revolução*, 1924; 110-111). “In the renewal of Portuguese intelligence”, he wrote in that same year in his most important work, “history is today understood as the most decisive element of our nationalism. Like unfounded lies flow the calumnies randomly spread by the *Dedução Cronológica-Analítica* (Chronological-Analytical Deduction) when Pombal decided to discredit the moralising and cultural activity of the Company of Jesus through the most underhand means possible. This is when sectarian history begins amongst us (...). The manner in which the *homens de 34* (men of 1834) unscrupulously denigrated their defeated brothers can be clearly seen by the rancour with which the republic maligns everything that represents a reflection of our Catholic and monarchical past” (*Ao princípio era o Verbo*, 1924; 240-41).

The volume of this self-proclaimed *renewal of history* was thus announced as “a necessary work of revision” which “is simultaneously imposed – a type of breviary of *corrections and errata*, in which the process of the various *black legends* which demoralize the august face of our Past is instructed. With the objective to show us Portugal above all as a moral personality, prolonging itself undivided and continuous, such a *History*, when it is made without falling into excessive detail, should also not forget the corresponding revision of preconceived judgements and concepts” (*À sombra dos pórticos*, cit., 90). This passed by the refutation of liberal theses, since only through counter-revolutionary mediations of history “can we in this way understand what Liberalism was in Portugal and how the Republic, its bastard or legitimate daughter – little does it matter! – slots directly into it”. And hence the choice of a historiography that would favour the biographies of *great men* as being longer summaries of each age (and in this way Sardinha clearly increased his predilection for genealogy and *Livros de Linhagens* (Books of Nobility) which married well with his monarchical and anticonstitutional profession of faith). A further example - the rehabilitation of D. Miguel - brought with it “the legitimacy of dynastic right and the legitimacy of national choice”, a paradigm of the



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reaction against the “series of muddles, armed robberies and effrontery” of the “imported constitutionalism” of 1820 (*Ao ritmo da ampulheta*, pp. 209-210), the source of a procession of innumerable “errata in the history” of Portugal which swarmed over the *Estado Novo* and made historical science the ideological must of nationalism.

The ambitious programme for a never-written *História de Portugal* (History of Portugal), of which only the outline posthumously published by Rodrigues Cavalheiro (1928) is known, gives the clear idea that it would be the integral prospectus of the historiographical revision by the hand of Sardinha, based on political study and with the deliberate purpose of analysing the nation as a living organism endowed with *animus*, will and soul, appropriating the old metaphor of Romanticism to which sociologism and organicism had lent a scientific tonality since the last quarter of the 19th century, mating them with the *ordeirista* ideas of sociability and hierarchy (family, corporation, municipality, Church and unitarian State).

Making use of the Thomist concept of mystical body and the ecumenical view of the Church, Sardinha re-examined these materials in order to give substance to an organic corporative historical view against conflictualist views and democratic-liberal atomism. The traditionalist and holistic conception of “people”, “populace”, ends up being at the core of this teleological view of national history, removing it to a space of totality which finalised ideological discourse itself as the most important constitutive moment.

If not, he considers the plan to correct the history of Portugal and the method which had served it: it became imperative to invalidate the two historiographical conceptions that had undermined the traditionalist and Catholic view of history, “that which makes history dependent on the action of a restricted minority (kings, nobles, priests) and that which makes it the spontaneous product of an instinctive headless mass. Unless we practise eclecticism, for a comfortable intellectual solution, it must be said, at least in relation to Portuguese history, that kings, bishops, nobles and the very people themselves constitute a homogenous block from which history flows, driven by directives that reside in the common soul although it falls to the leaders to specify these and ensure they are carried out. Thus we end, irrevocably, both the *democratic* concept and the *aristocratic* concept of history. (...) Since the People hand us the key to the problem. Since there were not really two distinct races in Portugal – one the winner and the other the defeated – the unity of our history is as transparent as pure water. This unity results from the mould in which the collective soul adapted and stabilised itself. Without any doubt, it was a religious mould” (posthumous, “Os Gamas”, *NP*, V, t. I, n.º 1, pp. 12-13).

“Collective subject”, the people, is therefore the *entification* of a national conscience. And from here the “demonstration”, so dear to the historiographical discourse of the dictatorship, of the collaboration of both interests and classes to carry out major national projects was seen and it was “clearly proved and well established that in the Afonso dynasty as well as in the Aviz dynasty, the people, the nobility and the king collaborated as a single whole in the historical running of Portugal. On the day when the formation and development of the family in Portugal, with all its meanderings and intimate dynamic, is acknowledged, the intellectual poisoning of those of sincere faith and clear perception and with which our Jacobinocracy



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perverts the understanding of our past will no longer be possible, thus breaking those links and those roots without respect for which there is no national conscience" (*ibid.*, p. 17).

However, this discourse sacrificed the *people* to the "direction" of the "social authorities" and subjected them to a rigid corporative hierarchy which in effect relegated to the shadows a whole mass of anonymous dwarves who had to make a pact with the "giants" of the nation. The idea that the sanctification of national virtue would create an axiology of the hero, and that history is the successive exemplification of practical virtue, thus gained all the terrain where it held sway. Exposed to the ideological tension between totalitarianism and corporativism, Sardinha's doctrination gained greater importance in the Hispanic thesis of the *Peninsular Alliance* (1924) for which he had to call upon major empirical argumentation in the historiographical field and which he ideated as the intentional affinity and historical analogy of the Iberian supremacy of the "creators of civilizations".

History intentionally leapt over the boundaries of mythography, merging with fantastic "legends of the centuries". The glorification of the past, a comparativist exercise of pure apogetics through an impossible confrontation and analogy of the diverse temporal planes, was an attempt to rehabilitate *ab origine* the historic cosmos of nationality to which the myth of origins contributed, as a founding myth, to bring the epic narrative up to date. And if Sardinha did not devote himself to the historical novel, without doubt his essayism pointed to a novelistic, homological and allodoxic view of history by seeking to demonstrate the historic parallelism of the great cycles in an *adequatio* which, having lost transcendence, would be by itself and in itself inexplicable.

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