

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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SALAZAR, Abel de Lima (Guimarães, 1889 - Lisbon, 1946)

Abel Salazar (AS) was born on 19 July 1889 in the city of Guimarães, the son of Adelaide da Luz Silva Lima and Adolfo Barroso Pereira Salazar. His father studied medicine in Coimbra, organised the library of the Martins Sarmiento Society and wrote for the *Revista de Guimarães*, showing great interest in the arts and public affairs. He taught French at industrial schools in Guimarães and Porto. The young AS attended the Guimarães Seminary-High School before leaving for Porto in the autumn of 1903; this initial experience in a Portuguese town where ecclesiastical ritualisation often went hand in hand with hypocrisy and dissimulation awakened in Abel Salazar an anti-clerical attitude, sensitive as he was to genuine religious sentiment.

In 1909, he enrolled at the Porto Medical-Surgical School, brilliantly completing his medical degree (1915) with a dissertation entitled *Ensaio de Psicologia Filosófica* (Essay on Philosophical Psychology). Living in Matosinhos, he remained somewhat distant from the leaders of the Portuguese Renaissance movement, the nostalgia of Teixeira Pascoais and the creationist Bergsonism of the philosopher Leonardo Coimbra. Between 1916 and 1935, he taught and conducted research (which earned him international prestige, particularly for his tano-ferric method) at the Faculdade de Medicina da Universidade do Porto [School of Medicine of the University of Porto], and in 1918 he was appointed professor of Histology and Embryology. From 1932 onwards, realising the harmful constraints imposed on scientific research by the Estado Novo regime, he committed himself, as a publicist, on a crusade to change mentalities, inspired by a positivist republican ideal, publishing articles in newspapers and giving lectures at associations associated with the opposition. In these activities, he had the support of the Freemasons, one of the main opponents of the regime, of which he became a member. His civic and political stance and the intrigues of some of his colleagues led to his expulsion from the University (1935); he returned to research in 1941 at the Faculdade de Farmácia [School of Pharmacy] in Porto. Removed from academic life, his vocation as a polymath became more evident, and he became widely active as a publicist, artist and essayist, developing a theoretical thinking on topics ranging from art to science, from Viennese logical positivism to the philosophy of history. Many of these writings appeared in periodicals, generally linked to sectors opposed to the Estado Novo (*Seara Nova*, *Sol Nascente*, of which he was a central figure, *O Diabo*, etc.).

In March 1934, Abel Salazar left for Paris to work with Professor Christian Champy (1885-1962) at the



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Paris Faculdade de Medicina [School of Medicine], a pioneer in histophysiology and sexual endocrinology. This six-month exile in Paris was important for his intellectual and civic development. There he became interested in Viennese neopositivism; it was in Comte's country that the International Congress of Scientific Philosophy was held in 1935, and AS eagerly read the French translations of texts from this movement. AS went on to promote it, writing some fifty articles on "Contemporary positive thinking" in a somewhat chaotic and dogmatic style. António Sérgio would say that this was a poor dissemination of ideas, omitting the difficulties and criticisms of the philosophical problems, of which only the conclusions were presented, which would generate a short controversy. AS would also become interested in the activities of the Centre de Synthèse, directed by Henri Berr, which brought together scholars from all areas of knowledge in a perspective that sought unity. In fact, in his book *The Crisis of Europe* (1942), AS quotes extensively from books in the collection, begun in 1920, Bibliothèque de Synthèse historique, L'évolution de l'humanité. AS, in Paris, collaborated with various associations, such as the Union Rationaliste, and witnessed political and economic tensions first-hand. Germany, Italy and the USSR were then under totalitarian regimes. In 1934, as a result of the Great Depression, unemployment was high in France. On 6 February, the anti-parliamentary far right demonstrated in Paris; the repression of the riot resulted in dozens of deaths and thousands of injuries and the fall of the Daladier government; the Left interpreted the riot as proof of the fascist threat and organised counter-demonstrations; On 6 March, the Committee for the Vigilance of Anti-Fascist Intellectuals is created; the regrouping of the Left leads to the Popular Front government in 1936. AS's book *Paris in 1934* reflects this situation.

Although AS fought alongside communist militants against fascism, his thinking favoured a more relativist, conformist stance, contrary to optimistic voluntarism; in accordance with his biological paradigm, the European crisis was the result of a deterministic and inexorable process of evolution of a civilisation – every organism, upon reaching its limit of growth and differentiation, declines and dies. AS wrote a series of articles on the European crisis (1936-1938), in which he proposed a "biomechanical theory of history". In it, he extrapolates Kretschmer's biotypology to the interpretation of social psychology. Since his 1915 dissertation, AS had been concerned with the status of knowledge involving human variables and/or whose deterministic laws were unknown. Taking advantage of the criterion of verifiability, which gave meaning to a proposition for neopositivists, AS distinguished between science and proto-science; history and sociology are proto-sciences because they depend on "psychological thinking", as distinct from "logical thinking"; the former is exemplified in primitive thinking in the sense of Lévy-Bruhl, in literature, in metaphysical thinking, etc.

This positivist stance is reflected in his concept of "Tyndall's irreducibility", a perennial element in his thinking; the choice of name recalls the profound cultural impact of the speech given to the British Association for the Advancement of Science (Belfast, 1874) by John Tyndall, professor of natural philosophy at the Royal Institution; in discussing the relationship between science and materialism, he stated that scientific knowledge translates into the requirement of "absolute reliance upon law in nature". Tyndall described his position as ' ' or 'higher materialism', attributing to matter 'the promise and potency of all terrestrial life'. Discussing the



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boundaries between science and religion, he stated that if the latter added 'inward completeness and dignity to man', it was restricted to 'the region of poetry and emotion'. Objective knowledge was the exclusive domain of science. Everything that fell "upon the domain of science" (including the cosmological question) should be "submit to its control" (Tyndall, *Fragments of Science* 1892, 2. pp. 191-197). The idea of total scientificity, as far as human variables are concerned, implies knowing the mechanics of psychophysical parallelism, that is, the functional dependence between mental phenomena and the (physical-chemical) processes that occur in the brain: if the psychic plane corresponds univocally to physiological structures and processes whose laws derive from physics and chemistry, then determinism and mechanism in these domains must characterise the psychic plane.

Now, AS tends to believe that determinism is a reasonable horizon, and he leaves signs of this by illuminating history with the light of Kretschmer's biotypology (thus indirectly circumventing Tyndall's irreducibility). The predominance of a scientific mentality, reconciling the real and the ideal, corresponded to the cyclothymic type, while the schizothymic type tended to impose the ideal on the real, tending towards absolute, metaphysical and ethically categorical theories. In the case of the European crisis, he would say in *O Diabo* (1936) that "the fascist-democratic conflict that defines the social moment is clearly a schizothymic-cyclothymic conflict" and that "what happens is that social accentuation is sometimes cyclothymic and sometimes schizothymic: in other words, in the flow of time, the schizothymic and cyclothymic masses are in constant action and reaction. But this action and reaction takes place within a complex that evolves according to a biological curve – the curve of all civilisations – whereby, at the moments of ascent, peak and decline of these curves, this action-reaction will inevitably experience crises and spasmodic schizothymic movements. It is clear that in the current crisis in Europe (...) the Great War caused a great schizothymic oscillation from which fascism, Nazism and communism emerged" (Salazar, in *O pensamento de Abel Salazar* 1971, pp. 90-92), three ideologies characterised by the predominance of Mysticism.

In his 1942 book, *The Crisis of Europe*, in which little importance is given to biotypology, AS quotes an author who favoured his organicist belief in the laws of evolution of civilisational systems. The psychiatrist, philosopher and educator, professor at the University of Leipzig, Hermann Schneider (1874-1953), in his works on the cultural achievements of humanity (1912-1931), stated that these achievements were the result not of racial purity but of miscegenation; as an adherent of a "universal history" that allows for the conception of a philosophy of history, it was his conviction that humanity stores the artistic and intellectual products of the experience assimilated by its best children; given the inaccessibility of the soul of these creators to observation, the historian is obliged to rediscover the spirit of their culture through the monuments they have left behind. Such progress is not linear; it has setbacks and pauses. If this is within the historical sense, his speculative bent leads him to believe that the philosopher of history, scrutinising space and time, can find a pattern to this evolution. In fact, Schneider proposed a three-stage model of civilisational evolution: in the first stage, various human groups which, due to geographical and other constraints, remained ethnically pure, meet and mix, followed by phases, the duration of which he indicates in centuries, designated as 'childhood',



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“youth” (during which a new system of ideas is developed through a process of differentiation), “maturity” (in which cultural progress due to the expansion of the new system of ideas is accompanied by critical reflection and in which a popular culture adapted to the needs and capacities of the masses is generated) and “old age” (with the decline of creativity); a new civilisation may emerge, building on what was acquired by the previous one, provided that there is a new racial mixture. The general theory was presented in the work *Philosophie der Geschichte* (1923), which was translated into Spanish by Labor, cited in *A Crise da Europa*. The systematic application of the model to various past superior civilisations (Greece, Rome, India, Persia, China) led the reviewer in the British journal *History* (1933) to criticise the author for his inappropriate generalisation, placing him among the prophets rather than among the “critical historians”. For his part, but in the same general vein, Abel Salazar speaks of “curves of historical systems” marked from “points defined by objective coordinates” which are associated with “quantifiable elements, albeit in a crude form”, noting that a well-known law of history is used for their initial tracing; Schneider is explicitly quoted for the statement of the law: “any new culture arises from a mixture of blood (...)”; Salazar continues by quoting the German philosopher when he states the law regarding the duration of each of the phases of the said curve (*A Crise da Europa*, pp. 35-36); while maintaining the overall shape of the curve suggested by Schneider, he adds some criticisms, for example emphasising that architecture “is the most complete and definite expression of a civilisation” and speaking of “coordinates defined by the energetic manifestations of the System” (*Idem*, p. 40); the plausibility of the model, with a three-phase curve (like a Portuguese roof tile seen in profile), is no greater than that of Schneider’s model and results from the vital analogy (since it does not present concretely determined quantified variables); Further on, he will speak of chains of curves, that is, of the articulation of civilisations, giving as an example the succession of Aegean-Greece-Rome-Europe (*Idem*, p. 45).

AS believes that scientific development, then marked by the revolutions of relativity and quantum theory (and by the new Viennese scientific philosophy of logical empiricism), is a clear sign that, above the life cycles of civilisations, there is a clear technological and scientific progress, which he integrates into what he calls the ‘totalisation of experience’, that is, the entire positive accumulation of humanity throughout its long history. Curious is the characterisation of the phase of decline, illustrated by the fall of Rome, described in deterministic terms: “The mechanistic processes of decay are clearly visible here; forces at play act blindly in action and reaction, and in such a way that, whatever the will of men, everything will happen according to fatal laws, even giving rise to the apparent paradox that the very action of men, directed in a certain direction, contributes precisely to making things move in the opposite direction. For this action, independent of its ideal, is only a force that is integrated into a system of forces at play and enters into conflict with them” (*Idem*, p. 65); Among the characteristics that are signs of this third period, he highlights: “the mystical dissolution of thought, the weakening of the scientific spirit and the hegemony of religious emotionality”, noting that they are “currently in the prelude to the decline of Europe” (*Idem*, p. 67).

This insistence on the need for positivity in all knowledge, in an attitude of deterministic reductionism, led Silva Dias, shortly after the book’s publication, in *O Problema da Europa*, to denounce the a priori

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schematism resulting from the application of a physicalist paradigm to historical and social reality, which can lead to the historical subject's abdication of responsibility. Norberto Cunha, in his profound studies on the entirety of our polymath's work, shows how the paradoxes and contradictions found in Abel Salazar's creative and genuine thinking reflect an incessant search for intelligibility, for Forms, whose horizon perhaps goes beyond the positivism he claimed was necessary for the progress of mentalities, moving in the direction of democracy.

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