

# DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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**COSTA, Avelino de Jesus da** (Ponte da Barca, 1908 – Braga, 2000)

Avelino de Jesus da Costa was born on 4 January 1908, in Barral, in the parish of Vila-Chã (São João), in the municipality of Ponte da Barca, and passed away in Braga on 17 October 2000. He was the son of José António da Costa and Antónia Maria Gonçalves. Due to his father's job as an employee of the Railway Company, he moved with his family (he was the youngest of three siblings) to Lisbon, where he attended primary school in the old parish of Madalena (now part of the parish of Santa Maria Maior).

Early on, he became known for his dedication to literature and showed a strong inclination toward ecclesiastical life. His primary school teacher, along with a benefactor from Moledo do Minho, offered to cover the costs of his entry into the seminary. He returned to his native Minho to attend the Braga Minor Seminary, enrolling there on 7 January 1920. In 1928, he completed his studies in Humanities with "Distinction" and earned his Philosophy degree with "Distinction with Honours." He then continued his education at the Theological Seminary in Braga. The following year, under the orders of the Prelate of the diocese, Manuel Vieira de Matos, he went to Rome to study at the Gregorian University, enrolling in Philosophy. In 1930, he graduated with a bachelor's degree, receiving the classification "Cum laude probatus." However, due to a serious illness, he was forced to return to Portugal, where he re-entered the Theological Seminary in Braga and completed his studies in 1933 with a grade of 19 points. He was ordained a priest on August 15 of the same year and, on 5 December 1972, was appointed Canon of the Chapter of the Primate Cathedral of Braga. Among his priestly duties, he supported the Teresian Sisters in Braga, and later, in keeping with his Marian and Fatimist devotion, he actively promoted and strengthened the works at the *Santuário de Nossa Senhora da Paz* [Shrine of Our Lady of Peace] in his home village. He also founded and directed the bimonthly newsletter *Mensagem de Paz* [Message of Peace] (1970–1977), serving as both its director and editor-in-chief, positioning it as the voice of the institution.

Yet, the call of letters and intellectual pursuits was strong, as seen in the articles he contributed to *Diário do Minho* [Minho Daily] and the diocesan bulletin *Acção Católica* [Catholic Action]. In 1944, he enrolled in the degree course in Historical and Philosophical Sciences at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Coimbra. He completed this phase of his academic journey in 1951, presenting his dissertation *Calendários Portugueses*



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*Medievais* [Medieval Portuguese Calendars], for which he received a grade of 18 points. Despite its scholarly value and frequent use, this work remains unpublished to this day. Simultaneously, between 1944 and 1952, he demonstrated his exceptional research skills. As a fellow of the *Instituto de Alta Cultura* [Institute of High Culture], he undertook pioneering and exhaustive work in various libraries and archives, searching for ancient liturgical codices. These parchments, which had fallen into disuse in the 16th and 17th centuries, were often repurposed as document or book covers. His efforts culminated in an extensive nine-volume inventory, which he typed himself. During this period, he became acquainted with one of the key figures who would deeply influence his development as a researcher and historian: the French scholar Pierre David. David had arrived in Portugal on a university mission in 1941 at the request of the French Institute in Portugal, and he quickly became involved with the Faculty's recently founded Institute of Historical Studies under Dr António de Vasconcelos.

In 1952, on 16 February, Avelino de Jesus da Costa — commonly referred to as Father Avelino de Jesus da Costa — began a new chapter in his life. He was hired as a second assistant at the *Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Coimbra* [Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Coimbra], a position he held until February 1958. He received his doctorate from the same faculty on 16 December 1960, with a thesis titled *O Bispo D. Pedro e a organização da Diocese de Braga* [Bishop Pedro and the Organisation of the Diocese of Braga], which obtained a grade of 19 points, and for which he was awarded the Alexandre Herculano Prize for History in 1962. When invited on 28 January 1961, he accepted the position of First Assistant, and in 1971, after a competitive process for Extraordinary Professor in 1965, he was promoted to Full Professor. In January 1965, in a joint ceremony with Dr Salvador Dias Arnaut, he received his doctoral insignia. He graduated in the 1977-1978 academic year. He remained in Coimbra for about two years, attending the Faculty regularly, after which he retired to Braga, to the *Seminário de Nossa Senhora da Conceição* [Seminary of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception], before moving to the *Casa Sacerdotal da Diocese de Braga* [Priests' House of the Diocese of Braga], where he passed away. It was to that same diocese, to the *Seminário Conciliar de S. Pedro e S. Paulo* [Conciliar Seminary of Saints Peter and Paul], that he donated his precious library. The Archdiocese of Braga made this collection available at its own facilities to mark the centenary of AJC's birth on 4 January 2008.

AJC's academic career was characterised by great dedication to the *Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Coimbra*, particularly in teaching and research, which will be discussed shortly. From an administrative standpoint, he held several positions, including Director of the *Curso de Bibliotecário-Arquivista* [Librarian-Archivist Course], a role he held from October 1963 until his retirement. He was also Director of the *Instituto de Estudos Históricos Doutor António de Vasconcelos* [Institute of Historical Studies of Doctor António de Vasconcelos] at the same Faculty (1966-1975), where he oversaw its scientific journal, the *Revista Portuguesa de História* [Portuguese Journal of History]. Known for his extremely discreet personality — so much so that, during the turbulent days of the April Revolution in 1975, he never claimed the prerogatives of his position as



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Dean of the Faculty — his greatest achievement, as well as his greatest joy, was the creation of the *Instituto de Paleografia e Diplomática* [Institute of Palaeography and Diplomatics] at the *Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Coimbra* in 1974, which he directed until his retirement. In another area of university life, on 20 March 1966, he was responsible for giving praise to Doctors Alexandre Fradique Morujão, Sebastião José da Silva Dias, Vítor Raul da Costa Matos, and Walter de Sousa Medeiros at their solemn doctorates.

He was a member of the Portuguese Subcommittee of the *Commission Internationale d'Histoire Ecclésiastique Comparée*, part of the *Comité International des Sciences Historiques*. Additionally, he served on the 3rd Section of the *Junta Nacional da Educação* [National Board of Education] (1966-1977). Alongside Bishop Miguel de Oliveira, Rev. Dr. A. da Silva Rego, and Fr. António Brásio, he was part of the organising committee that founded the *Centro de Estudos de História Eclesiástica* [Centre for Studies in Ecclesiastical History] in 1956 and its journal, *Lusitania Sacra*, of which he was a long-standing member of the editorial committee. He was also a member of the *Academia Portuguesa da História* [Portuguese Academy of History], the *Associação dos Arqueólogos Portugueses* [Association of Portuguese Archaeologists], an emeritus member of the *Sociedade Portuguesa de Estudos Medievais* [Portuguese Society for Medieval Studies], and abroad, a member of the *Comité International de Paléographie Latine* (elected emeritus in 1979) and the *Commission Internationale de Diplomatie*. His brilliant career was recognised in 1971 when he was awarded the insignia of Commander of the Order of Prince Henry the Navigator.

A master of several national archives, including the *Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo* [National Archive of the Tower of Tombo], the Public Library and District Archive of Braga, and the Archive of the University of Coimbra, his prolific research activity also took him abroad to archives and libraries in Paris, Barcelona (Archivo de la Corona de Aragón), Rome (Archivio Segreto Vaticano), Madrid (Archivo Histórico Nacional), and other locations across Spain. His scientific reputation led him to conferences in Boston and New York (VI International Colloquium of Luso-Brazilian Studies, 1966), Barcelona (V International Congress of Christian Archaeology, 1970), Budapest (IVe *Congrès International de Diplomatie*, 1973), Rome (XIV International Marian Congress, 1976), and Paris (Ve *Congrès International de Diplomatie*, 1977). His scholarly work, beginning with his doctoral thesis, gained recognition in some of the most prestigious foreign intellectual circles of his time, such as *Analecta Bollandiana* (LXXX, Brussels, 1962), *Analecta Sacra Tarraconensia* (XXXIV, Barcelona, 1961), *Antonianum* (XL, Rome, 1965), *Bulletin des Études Portugaises* (24, Lisbon, 1963), *Compostellanum* (VII, Santiago, 1962), *Gregorianum* (XLIII, Rome, 1962), *Hispania. Revista Española de Historia* (LXXXVII, Madrid, 1962), *Hispania Sacra* (XIV, Madrid, 1961), *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* (LVII, Louvain, 1962). His work was also featured in notable Portuguese journals such as *Brotéria* (LXXII, 1961), *Itinerarium* (VII, 1961), *Lumen* (XXV, 1961), and *Lusitania Sacra* (V, 1960/61).

AJC began teaching early in his career. After completing his theology degree, he taught at the *Seminário de Nossa Senhora da Conceição* in Braga and at the *Seminário Conciliar de São Pedro e São Paulo*, where he remained until 1943 and was remembered as a dedicated teacher. There, he taught a diverse range of



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subjects, including Geographical and Natural Sciences, Portuguese Literature (SNSC), Experimental Psychology, and History of the Church (SCSPSP). However, due to the circumstances of his life, the *Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Coimbra* became the institution where he served most as a lecturer. Having started by teaching practical classes in Palaeography and Diplomatics, Epigraphy, and the History of the Middle Ages within the History degree course, as well as Palaeography Training in the *Curso de Bibliotecário-Arquivista*, he soon took on full responsibility for these subjects. He later added Archivology and Archiveconomics to his teaching load, and occasionally taught History of Christianity and Numismatics in the History degree programme. In 1966, in the absence of Dr Torquato Brochado de Sousa Soares, he assumed the chair of History of the Middle Ages and took over the direction of the Seminar in Medieval History of Portugal, followed by the Seminars in Specialisation Courses I and II in Economic and Social History. Particularly in the latter, he expanded his studies on the history of ecclesiastical institutions, aligning with the focus of his academic training. This interest continued with his work at the *Centro de Estudos Históricos da Universidade de Coimbra* and later at the *Centro de História da Sociedade e da Cultura* [Centre for the History of Society and Culture], where he directed *Linha 3: Publicação de fontes* [Line 3: Publication of Sources.] His efforts resulted in works that significantly enriched the institution and led to discussions of a "Coimbra school" regarding its teaching methodologies. In 1992, the *Sociedade Portuguesa de Estudos Medievais* honoured him by reissuing a collection of six works, previously out of print or difficult to access, in its own volume titled *Estudos de Cronologia, Diplomática, Paleografia e Histórico-Linguísticos* [Chronology, Diplomatic, Palaeographical and Historical-Linguistic Studies]. This collection exemplified his extensive experience as a researcher.

AJC's intellectual biography is closely linked to his origins and his status as a priest in the Church in Braga. At the end of the 1930s, after writing several articles in the *Diário do Minho* about the controversial naturalisation of the brothers Diogo Bernardes and Frei Agostinho da Cruz, he published his first study. In the *Boletim Diocesano Acção Católica* [Catholic Action Diocesan Bulletin] (1938-1940), AJC argued and demonstrated that these important 16th-century poets in Portuguese literature were born in Ponte da Barca, not Ponte de Lima.

From this early phase of scientific research, it is clear that the young author was searching for the truth, giving voice to original documents and choosing the path of historical criticism to support his beliefs. However, it should be noted that these early works did not foreshadow the chronological focus that AJC would embrace during nearly six decades of tireless didactic, pedagogical, and scientific labour. In fact, it was the Middle Ages, spanning the ninth to the fifteenth century, that Fr Avelino chose to study — editing palaeographic sources, writing monographs, organising congresses, and delivering lectures and "lessons in wisdom."

To date, many detailed reviews and honours have been published regarding AJC's life and work, as evidenced by the extensive Passive Bibliography. We will therefore select, from the three or four major lines of research and scientific-pedagogical production, those that, as medievalists and lifelong disciples of the



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Master, we consider to be pivotal in national and international historiography. As is well known, between 1940 and 2000, Fr Avelino produced 367 monographs and studies across various works, along with a substantial number of contributions to dictionaries and encyclopaedias—almost a hundred (Maria Alegria Marques, "Professor Doutor Cónego Avelino de Jesus da Costa (1908-2000)", 2007, pp. 53-92). Additionally, we must not overlook his frequent participation in the regional press, where he demonstrated the scientific authority for which he was known. Notably, the *Diário do Minho* celebrated him with two significant publications: *Canon Avelino de Jesus da Costa in Diário do Minho* (2008) and *Canon Avelino de Jesus da Costa in Imprensa Barquense* (2009).

Fr Avelino's life as a researcher has been long, especially when compared to that of the average university lecturer, whose tenure rarely exceeds 23 years. However, his contributions to the study and advancement of disciplines such as palaeography, diplomatics, epigraphy, codicology, numismatics, chronology, and ecclesiastical archives are both remarkable and pioneering. In *Vida e obra do Prof. Doutor Cónego Avelino de Jesus da Costa* [Life and works of Professor Doctor Canon Avelino de Jesus da Costa], *Catálogo da Exposição* [Exhibition Catalogue] (2001), Maria Helena da Cruz Coelho, Maria José Azevedo Santos, Saul Gomes, and Maria do Rosário Morujão provide a heartfelt posthumous tribute, showcasing Fr Avelino's status as an eminent specialist in these fields.

His unpublished degree thesis, *Calendários Medievais Portugueses* (1950), which served as a model for Saul Gomes (2001), represents the culmination of a brilliant career as both a pedagogue and a researcher. In 1956, he published the first manual on epigraphy for FLUC students. José d'Encarnação, who later succeeded him in the chair after 1975, noted with unrivalled competence and national and international renown that for AJC, epigraphy was his second "love" (the first being palaeography), a passion reflected in his deep knowledge of Roman and Christian epigraphy, which his status as a priest greatly facilitated (Encarnação, 2011, pp. 111-113). In 1966, following in the footsteps of Torquato Sousa Soares and António Cruz, he dedicated the *Álbum de Paleografia e de Diplomática* to palaeography and to diplomatics. (*Colecção Provisória*). [Album of Palaeography and Diplomatics (Provisional Collection).] Undoubtedly, a didactic and scientific masterpiece was born that AJC would enhance, revise, and expand with additional images across five editions, which were published consecutively from 1972 (the year we studied) until 1997. The sixth edition, currently used for teaching this subject at FLUC, is an essential title and a source of pride for students who, despite their familiarity with new technologies for reproducing and reading documents, still feel compelled to acquire and work with the *Álbum do Padre Avelino* [Album of Father Avelino], as it is known. Through it, they learn the "first letters" of palaeography, become acquainted with the most renowned national and foreign archives and libraries, and are captivated by the graphic "portraits" of kings, queens, navigators, chroniclers, and others who keep their memories alive through their autograph signatures. This work, we assert, is more than enough to justify AJC's place in the historiographical landscape of his time. Fr Avelino was admired, even if sometimes unfairly criticised, by colleagues and friends throughout Europe, including Manuel Díaz y Díaz, Manuel Mundó,



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António García y García from Spain, Giulio Battelli from Italy, António Domingues de Sousa Costa — a Portuguese Franciscan who spent his life in Rome, where he served as a professor (and Vice-Rector) at the Athenaeum Antonianum and the Urbaniana University — Peter Rück from Switzerland, Father Leonard Boyle from Ireland, Jean Vezin from France, among many other illustrious names in palaeography, diplomatics, codicology and philology. Reading and transcribing were both a wise and demanding task for the Master that was AJC. Therefore, it is no surprise that he translated and adapted the *Normas gerais de transcrição e publicação de documentos e textos medievais e modernos* [General Rules for the Transcription and Publication of Medieval and Modern Documents and Texts] from the framework established by the *Commission Internationale de Diplomatique*. Three editions of these rules were published and are still followed at the *Escola de Coimbra* [Coimbra School], among others.

An accomplished palaeographer and diplomatist, he also dedicated himself to the critical editing of cartularies, censuses, chancery books, records, and obituaries, as well as many hundreds of loose Latin documents from the High Middle Ages. In this context, we must mention the *Liber Fidei*, the emblematic cartulary of the Cathedral of Braga, whose advanced but incomplete edition was finalised by Professor José Marques, in collaboration with Maria Teresa Nobre Veloso and Joaquim Tomás da Silva Pereira, in 2017. Another monumental and invaluable contribution to medieval Portuguese historiography is the edition of the *Livro Preto da Sé de Coimbra* [Black Book of the Cathedral of Coimbra], which he took on with Leontina Ventura and Maria Teresa Nobre Veloso, but which he concluded as scientific director under Manuel Augusto Rodrigues in 1999.

In co-authorship with Maria Alegria Marques, he initiated what would become one of his most challenging lines of critical editions: that of medieval records. Unfortunately, only those of Innocent III (1198-1216) have been published, totalling 228 bulls and other documents, with indexes by Marcellin Pereira. As Maria Helena da Cruz Coelho emphasises, from 1959 to 1962, he undertook an "insane task" by "going through the main Portuguese archives and the ecclesiastical archives of Astorga, Compostela, Lugo, Mondonhedo, Orense, Samora, Tui, and the Vatican Secret Archive, in order to inventory the 13th-century pontifical documents relating to Portugal" (Maria Helena da Cruz, "Doutor Cónego Avelino de Jesus da Costa. O Professor, o Mestre", 1990, p. 314). The excellent study on the beginnings of the Portuguese royal chancellery, *La Chancellerie Royale portugaise jusqu'au milieu du XIIIème siècle* (1975), is indispensable and exemplary in its methodology. It is an area that many of his disciples have chosen as the subject of conferences or major works, which he has accompanied and guided with wise and rare dedication.

In this regard, it is worth noting that in 1979, together with Rui de Azevedo and Marcelino Pereira, he published *Documentos de D. Sancho I (1174-1211)*, while the following year, still collaborating with the esteemed researcher Rui de Azevedo, he initiated, unfortunately without continuity, the publication of *Documentos Medievais Portugueses - Documentos Particulares (1116-1123)*, under the auspices of the *Academia Portuguesa da História*.



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What can we say about the significant contribution he made to the understanding of the ecclesiastical culture of the Kingdom of Portugal in the Middle Ages, through the publication and study of inventories of libraries and treasures such as those of Braga and Coimbra — works that are essential reading for any medievalist — as well as diocesan legislation, including constitutions and synods?

The sometimes exhaustive task of editing Latin and Portuguese documents, whether loose or part of medieval collections, is based on the conviction that, as our biographer wrote in 1973: "It is not enough to have documents. Researchers need to be able to use them reliably in order to write history scientifically based on them, rather than reconstructing it through conjecture." He reinforced this timeless line of thought, adding: "But the document, like a diamond, has to be properly worked on, because it can be useless to the researcher if it is inaccessible or unintelligible to him."

In AJC's scientific career, it is abundantly clear that he drew upon a multitude of disciplines, which we have already mentioned, as well as others such as medallistics and linguistics. Fundamentally associated with philology, he sought to determine the historical and cultural contexts necessary for the study of literature, history, and philosophy, among others. A paradigm of this approach is the magnificent work *Os mais antigos documentos escritos em Português. Revisão de um problema histórico-linguístico* [The Oldest Documents Written in Portuguese: Revision of a Historical-Linguistic Problem], published in 1979. It was then unanimously recognised, both inside and outside Portugal, as an exemplary piece of research, argumentation, and critical dating.

In fact, AJC conclusively proved that the oldest dated non-literary document written in Portuguese is the first will of King Afonso II, drawn up in Coimbra on 27 June 1214, of which two copies are known (one in Braga and the other in Toledo), out of the original thirteen. Let us now return to 1959-1960 to revisit the aforementioned doctoral thesis. The sheer scale of the work's scientific research has led to both praise and criticism, as well as some inelegant assessments and encouraging comments. José Marques notes: "Fr Avelino de Jesus da Costa therefore had to contend with various national and foreign critics, and it was precisely during these challenging times that his profile as a proverbial researcher and a man who was both combative and humble — qualities I am pleased to emphasise — came to the fore." The future confirmed this. After his jubilation, Fr Avelino decided to undertake, like Jean Mabillon, a veritable "war of documents and their hermeneutics." In 1997, at the age of 89, he published the first volume of this significant work (2nd edition reworked and expanded), now entitled *O Bispo D. Pedro e a organização da Arquidiocese de Braga* [The Bishop of Braga and the Organisation of the Archdiocese of Braga]. Just a few days before his passing, he published the second volume (2000), an event that symbolically seemed to many to represent the anointing or consecration of a man (priest, professor, teacher) who made culture, science, "his" university, and "his" church — especially the Church of Braga — great.

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