

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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BEIRÃO, Caetano Maria de Abreu (Lisbon, 1892 – Lisbon, 1968)

Best known as Caetano Beirão, he lived in Lisbon for most of his life. The only son of Caetano Maria Ferreira da Silva Beirão and Rosa Isabel Burke de Abreu Beirão, he belonged to a line that included illustrious names in the fields of justice, medicine, politics, and the humanities. On the paternal side, he descended from a common branch that went back to Francisco António Ferreira da Silva Beirão and included his father, grandfather, uncles and cousins, supporters of the traditional monarchy as the political regime par excellence. It would have been primarily his ancestry that informed his way of thinking in this field, as well as the activism that, according to him, he showed throughout his life since, as far as we know, it did not stand out in terms of his academic or professional career.

Considering his time at the School of Law of the University of Coimbra, it could be said that this fact alone linked him to the family tradition of highly prestigious jurisconsults, bearing in mind that the information about his literary merit at the end of the degree did not go beyond what was sufficient and that in his professional career, he was only a sub-delegate of the public prosecutor's office in the 1st Court of Lisbon. While Oliveira Salazar, his fellow classmate in 1913-1914, achieved 19 points out of 20 in all his subjects and Helena Quintanilha, the only woman to attend the course, was classified with 16 points, the 12 awarded to Caetano Beirão placed him among the weakest students.

One could speculate on the possibility of the ideological influence of the future President of the Council on his fellow classmates, particularly on the one we are dealing with now. But the results, for the time being, would be mere conjecture, although today, there are those who consider him 'one of the greatest supporters of Salazarism'. However, be as it may, it would have found favourable ground in the mind of the young Law student, not least because of his family roots. As far as we know, Caetano Beirão once referred explicitly to one of his ancestors. It was his grandfather's half-brother, João José Ferreira da Silva Amaral, whose works attested to 'his love of the Church, tradition and the throne' (*Uma Campanha Tradicionalista* [A traditionalist campaign], p. 178) and characterised the author as an unconditional supporter of the cause of legitimacy.

The last – a comment on the Marquis of Alorna's booklet on the Junqueira prisoners – is a libel against Pombalism, *Vintismo*, Chartism and the Republic, as well as against Freemasonry and Jacobinism and their roots and supporters. The content of these comments signalled, in Caetano Beirão's opinion, the counter-



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revolutionary and uncompromising spirit of the author and his allies against changing the traditional order and principles that had always identified Portugal. Aware of what he had always heard being advocated, he made it his own, encouraging its adoption: 'Take the side of our greatest, against the side of our fathers' (*Idem*, p. 183).

An avowed monarchist in heart and soul, he dedicated his life to the defence of the monarchy with unwavering loyalty. A beloved disciple of Alfredo Pimenta, he accompanied him as a militant of Lusitanian Integralism, known for its anti-liberal, anti-parliamentary, nationalist, and monarchist orientation. The same ideology led him to accept the position of director of the Juventude Monárquica de Lisboa [Monarchist Youth of Lisbon] and to join the Board of Directors of Acção realista Portuguesa [Portuguese Realist Action]. His desire to take a direct and active part in political life led him to the National Assembly, where he was a member of parliament between 1949 and 1957. He was present at the sessions of the 5th and 6th legislatures, elected respectively for the Lisbon and Beja constituencies, having been chosen in one and the other for the Committee on National Education, Popular Culture, and Spiritual Interests. His parliamentary speeches were few and not very relevant, although they were significant in terms of his mindset and the environment within which he was ideologically integrated. He paid tribute to D. Carlos, Alfredo Pimenta, and António Cabral on the occasion of his 90th birthday and when he died. He expressed his displeasure at the fact that 8 December was not a public holiday, given the significance of the event, and took the opportunity to express his opinion on the criteria to be followed for choosing it. In his view, public holidays were exponents of national unity and, as such, should enshrine it, removing dates representing fratricidal struggles from the calendar of the state committed to safeguarding it. Thus, it was justified that 24 August and 8 May should be celebrated, but not 5 October and 31 January (*Diário das Sessões* [Diary of sessions], 10.12.1949, pp 34-36).

Two other interventions took on a different flavour. One was social in nature, concerning the professional card for office workers. The other, of a political nature, concerned constitutional reform. In the first case, the issue was the security of this card, which Caetano Beirão harshly criticised because, as it had been presented, it 'created distance and unease between employer and employee, contrary to the corporate spirit' whose aim was to 'coordinate production and protect those who produce' (*Idem*, 1.4.1949, p. 686 and p. 685). In both respects, the regulation of 14 February 1950, which was under discussion, was notable for containing 'certain incongruous provisions' (*Idem*, p. 686). It would, therefore, have to be reformulated.

In the second case, which involved constitutional reform, Caetano Beirão's intervention was centred on two aspects: its necessity and its content, which, after all, stemmed from a common basis, the only one that would give them meaning – adaptation to the real country, removing theoretical principles that were alien to it because they ignored the national context. By ignoring them, the institutions became politically unsuitable and paved the way for political disaster. These had been the consequences of the constitutions of 1822 and 1838 and, to a certain extent, of the Charter of 1826. And this would also be the result of the constitutional reform underway if it failed to take into account these two assumptions. In Caetano Beirão's view, the permanence of societies, regardless of what they were, depended on the unity of the power that presided over their destiny.

As such, this requirement also applied to political societies. These would be all the more cohesive if the political power was also cohesive.

In this case, the fact that it had been maintained for decades under the unchanged and superior presence of a single president, General Óscar Carmona, guaranteed the desired stability. Moreover, he had not come to power by election and had not remained in power by an actual election. In addition, History had shown that the unity of supreme power had been a factor in national unity for 800 years of hereditary monarchy. In this sense, Caetano Beirão was not formally advocating a change of regime, and he said so verbatim. 'It is a fact,' he said, that 'the issue of the regime has not been raised' and that the monarchists do not wish to raise it 'can be inferred from their attitude of collaboration with Salazar's government, from the attitude with which they have contributed to the successive reappointments of President Carmona and, above all, can be inferred from the statements made publicly by His Majesty Duarte's lieutenant' (*Idem*, 4.4.1931, p. 730).

However, he pointed to it, not immediately, but in the long term. Only the monarchy corresponded to the natural demands of political society, and only it corresponded to the demands he attached to supreme political power. Why? Because he felt that 'Portugal's political problem remained unsolved' (*Idem, ibidem*), because it lacked the dome of the building that the Estado Novo had intended to erect. This dome would be built through the 'permanence and continuity' of the supreme judiciary of the state, and this would only be achieved with the approval of its 'lifelong and hereditary' character (*Idem*, p. 731). This approach pointed irrefutably to the superiority of royalty since it alone corresponded to the nature of society and, in this case, to the History of Portugal.

In short, although Caetano Beirão never disregarded the benefits of the Estado Novo and although his position as a Member of Parliament did not depend on his monarchical affiliation, he was still a loyal supporter of the monarchy. In fact, over the years, he showed consistency of thought and unconditional support for the principles and doctrines he upheld. He believed that the monarchy was the only political regime suitable for Portugal and that the republic, in both its moderate and radical forms, was 'unnatural' for the Portuguese nation, which only found the indisputable roots of Portugueseness in identity and tradition. Passionate about these ideals, which he considered fundamental for the resurgence of the homeland, he championed them with his pen in countless texts published in the periodical and non-periodical press and never stopped fighting those that were adverse or contrary to him. Among the titles he published were *A Nação* [The Nation] and *A Monarquia* [The Monarchy] in 1917, *A Acção Realista* [The Realistic Action] in the 1920s and *A Voz* [The voice] in the 1940s.

Although he focussed almost exclusively on the Portuguese reality, the ideology he transmitted was part of the European context where names such as Maritain, Maurras, Renan, and Bordeaux, whom he cited, were prominent, and as such placed him among the emerging group of the so-called right. To a certain extent following this line of thought, a few months after leaving university, he put together political texts published between 1910 and 1919, first in *A Nação* [The Nation] and then in *A Monarquia* [The Monarchy], which he published in 1919 under the title *Uma Campanha Tradicionalista* [A Traditionalist Campaign], accompanied



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by a study/preface signed by António Sardinha.

In it, he successively presented the central aspects of his political thought, which is legitimate to recognise as his canon. It should be noted that the idea of the monarchy takes centre stage. However, his thinking was not guided by an abstract or theoretical defence of the monarchical regime as the best of all regimes. Based on what actually happened, he used History to legitimise it. In the specific case of Portugal, he found in Ourique and Afonso Henriques the seed of the legitimacy of the Portuguese monarchy. It had its origins in the will of God conveyed by those who, after the military victory in Lamego, had consecrated the Portuguese leader as the sole holder of political power and, as such, had submitted to his authority. Its organic, traditionalist and anti-parliamentary character had its roots here, and, as such, the constitutional liberal monarchy corresponded neither ideologically nor historically to the parameters of Portuguese reality.

It was closer to a republic because of the 'potentially' elective nature of the head of state, the shared exercise of sovereignty, and the principle of equality that transcended hierarchies and differences. Consequently, because it did not place the king at the apex of the pyramid, it could not be considered legitimate, nor could it fail to outright reject parliamentarianism and democracy in any of their formulations. In his view, only a return to pure monarchy was appropriate for the identity of the Portuguese nation and with it for national restoration. Any breach in the enunciated fundamental principles he defended would not only contradict national identity but would also destroy it in time unless a salutary reaction prevented it. This is what happened in 1820, 1836 and 1910. If the 1826 *Charter* had been preserved for some seventy years, it was because it had safeguarded some of those principles, and, to a certain extent, the same was true of the Estado Novo at the time. However, in his view, only a pure monarchy suited the identity of the Portuguese nation and, with it, its national restoration.

Clearly, this approach did not win unanimous applause, even among the monarchy's supporters. The (radical) liberals, imbued with the abstract rationalism of *jusnaturalism*, formulated a political doctrine that dispensed with History as a founding value, although they invoked it as an example of the historical meaning of the changes they wanted to effect.

The moderate liberals (Chartists) sought to reconcile the past (History) with the present (modernity), trying to reconcile tradition with revolution. The monarchists of the Causa Monárquica [Monarchist Cause] were only committed to replacing political power without analysing what this entailed. The complexity of the issues raised and the different sensitivities towards them affected the intellectuals, creating space for polemics. This is what happened with Caetano Beirão.

One of these was marked by his opposition to Luís de Magalhães. In an article published in the journal *Portugália*, Luís de Magalhães defended the *Charter* as a traditional constitution. Caetano Beirão vehemently contested it. They were opposed by different conceptions of royal sovereignty and society. The former raised the question of Pedro's legitimacy as sovereign and hence the illegitimacy of the *Charter*, aspects defended by the latter. In turn, the question of the individualism inherent in the notion of society proposed by the latter contradicted the organicist sense of society inherent in the Portuguese tradition and

supported by the former. From this perspective, traditionalism and individualism were mutually exclusive, and it was impossible to argue in favour of combining them in a single text such as the *Charter*.

Two conceptions of the world and of life were clashing, with inevitable repercussions on human life, namely in politics, where the question of sovereignty was particularly acute. Having been raised in Portugal since the 1820s, it remained somewhat unsolved throughout the 19th century until the proclamation of the Republic, then until the outbreak of the dictatorship and the Estado Novo. Caetano Beirão was no stranger to this. Legitimist by family tradition and personal choice, he criticised Fortunato de Almeida for the way he had dealt with the problem of the succession of D. João VI in volume XIII of *História de Portugal* [History of Portugal]. In his opinion, he had defended the legitimacy of Pedro as king of Portugal, the abdication of his daughter Maria da Glória, and the donation of the Constitutional Charter to the Portuguese with questionable arguments. Now, according to the principles set out in the Cortes de Lamego and, moreover, due to the reprehensible and offensive acts carried out by the Prince against his father and Portugal, having even declared himself a foreigner, only Miguel had the right to the throne of Portugal.

There was also no doubt that the *Charter*, given by a usurper, lacked legitimacy. There was no doubt that legitimacy and usurpation divided the Portuguese, created insurmountable barriers between them, and were leading them towards civil war. It should be noted that a little over a hundred years had passed since this confrontation and the ideological assumptions that had shaped it were still very much present in the author's way of thinking, which underpinned his choice to support royalty as the only sovereign power.

He also expressed the same convictions and ideas when he responded, shortly afterwards, in *A Voz* [The Voice] to the criticism published anonymously in the newspaper *Novidades* [Novelties] of an article of his entitled 'Politique d'abord' [Politics first]. Defending the primacy of political restoration over social reforms, he complemented this with a manifest exaltation of pure monarchy in order to realise it. To achieve this, he returned to his discourse on sovereign power. He followed the doctrine of St Thomas regarding the divine origin of power and its mediated 'communication' to the ruler, and hence the superiority of the monarchical regime, considered not only 'the best and best organised' but also the most enduring ('Resposta à letra' [Literal answer], pp. 35 and 31, resp.). For this reason, he said, 'outside the monarchy, there is no salvation' (*Idem*, p. 17) since only the single power and the dynasty, synonymous with continuity, guaranteed political stability and peace. The same was not true of the republic. Based on the principle of popular sovereignty, it was at the mercy of suffrage and, consequently, of party manoeuvres that weakened it, curtailing the guarantee of freedoms and, with it, the possibility of social transformation. Hence, the 'republic was instability by definition' (*Idem*, p. 70), prepared, moreover, by the constitutional monarchy that had first enshrined it in Portugal, and which was, therefore, no more than a transitional regime. The same was true of the Estado Novo [New State] at the time due to the ambiguity and vagueness of the sovereignty issue.

It follows from the above that the two fundamental cornerstones of Caetano Beirão's thought were, from a theoretical point of view, the teachings of St Thomas Aquinas on the origin of sovereignty, accepted and defended by the French 'right', namely Maurras, understood not in its abstraction, but in its materialisation in



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In other words, abstraction and materialisation are intertwined in a single whole for the understanding of historical development and, of course, in the assessment of the political situation at the time. Despite his support for Salazar and Salazarism, he believed that the latter's mission would only be complete with the restoration of a pure monarchy, i.e., one detached from the ideas and ideals of the French Revolution and Freemasonry that had found an echo in liberalism, since only this corresponded, as has been emphasised, to the national identity that had been affirmed over the centuries.

However, alongside the praise of the past, he adopted ideas that were typical of contemporary times. He considered History to be a science, belonging to the framework of moral sciences, like Sociology and Politics, admitting the existence of its own laws, with a character of permanence, objectivity and truth. The notion of historical truth stemmed from the concept of society as an organism governed by laws that were considered as true as those governing the stars, animal life, the reaction of components or market supply and demand. As 'great verified hypotheses' (*Uma campanha tradicionalista* [A traditionalist Campaign], p. 120), permanent, universal and irrefutable, they 'framed' the facts, which were indeed changeable and ephemeral. Thus, History, corresponding to the life of society, reported the facts without ignoring the laws that governed it. The historian would, therefore, necessarily assume a critical and non-neutral attitude towards what happened, rejecting arbitrariness when analysing it. Reversing this way of thinking to what he had said about the miracle of Ourique and the Cortes de Lamego, coherence led him to repudiate its mythical character in favour of accepting it as a real fact. This would be Caetano Beirão's understanding, once again linking tradition and modernity.

Thus, the historian would never be confused with the journalist, just as History would be distinguished from journalistic reporting and even from 'pamphleteering narratives' from the pen of 'suspect historians' for being either sectarian or passionate or for romanticising events or for submitting to the dictates of parties. In this sense, he observed: 'We are living in a time. A time when we should not play with History' ('*Prefácio*' [Preface], Amador Patrício, *Grandes reportagens* [Great Reports]).

Making history meant going directly to the sources and letting the documents speak. Only documented statements and hypotheses formulated with the necessary reservations would be legitimate. Making history also meant knowing the principles that, formulated scientifically, gave a sense of permanence to the complex evolution of reality. The positivist conception of making history was thus combined with a possible understanding of what happened. It could, therefore, legitimately involve revision and innovation. Revision in the light of scientific criteria, revision as the enunciation of new perspectives on already known data and the discovery of others.

Consequently, since History was one of the cornerstones of Caetano Beirão's thinking, he used it to rehabilitate characters and eras, challenge prejudices, clarify situations, undo preconceived ideas and, finally, defend his own convictions. The work he wrote about D. Maria I and her reign is an example of this multiple character. Underappreciated as a queen, her political action had been ignored, limited to the Pombaline consulate and the advent of liberal constitutionalism. It was important to undo the double ideological impact that delimited her in order to highlight her reality. Caetano Beirão undertook this task in search of the indispensable elements for a rigorously objective approach.

The same thoroughness, now accompanied by an obvious ideological purpose, was evident in his analysis of the rights of D. Pedro and D. Miguel to succeed D. João VI. And also, in his refutation of the Constitutional Charter of 1826 as a legitimately granted traditionalist constitution. Perhaps because he engaged in political intervention as a champion of pure monarchy and, as such, as an extreme defender of the kingship of D. Miguel, the *História breve de Portugal* [Brief History of Portugal], published in 1941, i.e., around seven years after the study on D. Maria I, is far from corresponding to the characteristics he had demanded of a historical text. Beginning with an account of the battle of Ourique and the Cortes de Lamego, founding episodes for their significance for the monarchy and royalty, as he understood them, he described the events that followed until 1817. From then on, the account took on an avowedly ideological flavour, in which Freemasonry and liberal ideas – 'the Masonic-liberal cabal' (p. 131) – played an important role in the way he presented Portugal's path until the establishment of the republic.

This journey was marked by the restoration of the pure monarchy, the only legitimate one, in the person of D. Miguel, which ended with the Convention of Évora Monte. This was the end of the 1st Bragança dynasty and the beginning of the 2nd, with the reign of D. Pedro, the constitutional king, which would be marked by well-known instability and deserved the historian's sharpest criticism. It should be noted that he distinguished between the 1st and 2nd dynasties based on purely ideological criteria. And it was undoubtedly these that led him to present the Estado Novo with favour due to its anti-liberal and anti-democratic principles, as well as its organic conception of society, valuing the family as a factor and expression of continuity, and in which a strong, if not sole, power guaranteed the peace and prosperity of the social whole. Whilst he accepted that the principles enunciated by the constitutional monarchy had reached their apogee in the republic, he also admitted that in their moderate form, they had not yet made the monarchy viable in his day and age, either in its pure form or in its constitutional parliamentary form. And *História breve de Portugal* [Brief History of Portugal], by bringing this 'committed' perspective to the attention of its readers, conveyed to them a conception of History far removed from the criteria of objectivity and documentary substantiation once enunciated by its author. In any case, he was recognised as a historian of merit. Elected a member (chair 28) of the recently re-established Academia Portuguesa da História and awarded the Alexandre Herculano prize, he was pleased to see his commitment as a historian honoured.

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