

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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CHICÓ, Mário Tavares (Beja, 1905 – Lisbon, 1966)

An art historian who was particularly noted for his study of Portuguese Gothic architecture and the architecture of the Portuguese overseas world in the 16th and 17th centuries, particularly in India. Although he was born to parents from Alentejo, his mother was the adopted daughter of Rufina da Conceição Guimarães and Manuel Rodrigues Chicó, an agronomist of Goan descent. His admiration for this grandfather led him to take on the surname Chicó when he reached adulthood, as his parents registered him only as Mário de Sousa Tavares. His high school studies were conducted in Beja, Évora and Coimbra and it was in the latter city that he enrolled at the Escola Agrícola [Agricultural School], before moving on to the Faculdade de Direito e para a Faculdade de Letras [School of Law and the School of Arts and Humanities] in Lisbon, where he graduated in 1935 with a degree in Historical and Philosophical Sciences. His intention to pursue his studies in the agricultural world, which was thankfully thwarted, was probably the result of some imposition or guidance from his father and Goan grandfather, while his shift towards the arts must have had the blessing of his mother, a painting student at the Escola Superior de Belas Artes [School of Fine Arts], and his uncle, José de Sousa Tavares, a professor of Art History in Beja. He attended the Institute of Art and Archaeology at the University of Paris in the academic years 1937-38 and 1938-39, under the guidance of the prestigious professors Élie Lambert and Henri Focillon, thanks to a scholarship from the Instituto de Alta Cultura [Institute of High Culture].

This stay abroad allowed him to specialise in the archaeology of medieval architecture and to get to know French architecture in depth, especially Romanesque and Gothic architecture. He also travelled to other European countries, such as Germany, Belgium and England, studying the major medieval monuments there and visiting the largest art and antiquities museums in those countries. His study of Évora Cathedral, published in 1935 when he was only thirty years old, was instrumental in obtaining this grant. In his first study, we can already see the importance that architectural photography would have in his working method and in illustrating his arguments, substantially improved during his time in France. Mário Tavares Chicó was also one of the few art historians who valued the authorial role of the photographers he worked with, highlighting them as co-authors of some of his published studies.

On his return to Portugal, in 1940, he completed an internship at the national museums in Lisbon, which



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qualified him as an assistant museum curator. Between 1940 and 1943, he was involved in the design of the Lisbon City Museum as its curator. In 1943 he won the competition to become director of the Évora Regional Museum and in 1946 he was appointed professor of Aesthetics and Art History at the Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa [School of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon], holding these two positions until his death in 1966. He was also a member of the Academia Nacional de Belas Artes [National Academy of Fine Arts] and organised numerous exhibitions in Portugal and abroad, especially in Brazil. At the University he taught subjects dedicated to the Art of the Middle Ages in the West, Gothic Art in Portugal, Portuguese Art in Brazil and India and Hindu Art. He was probably the first art history lecturer at the Faculdade de Letras [School of Arts and Humanities] to use slide shows in his regular teaching activities and was part of the committee overseeing the new school building, built in the Cidade Universitária, working closely with the architects Porfírio and António Pardal Monteiro.

In the field of Art History, Mário Tavares Chicó was one of the main promoters of the new historiographical perspectives that began to emerge in the mid-20th century, generating a historiographical movement that ran parallel to the official historiography of the Estado Novo and often contradicted its ideals. Mário Chicó had realised the epistemic limitations of historiography in Portugal, whose evolution had reached a point of stagnation. In need of a methodological and qualitative leap forward, his research anticipated a new historiographical direction, relying on the diversification of sources and multidisciplinary contributions (Sociology, Anthropology, Economics, Ethnography, Philosophy, etc.). From a theoretical point of view, his main influences are to be found in the studies of the two French masters mentioned above, along with Heinrich Wölfflin, Alois Riegl and Wilhelm Worringer, while part of his methodology derives from the works of Portuguese researchers, namely Joaquim de Vasconcelos, Vergílio Correia, Manuel Monteiro, Reinaldo dos Santos and Aguiar Barreiros. During his academic career he taught at the universities of Poitiers, La Laguna (Tenerife), Milan, Baía, Rio de Janeiro and Recife, where he received an Honorary Doctorate and was awarded the Order of the Southern Cross in Brazil.

Mário Chicó was also a pioneer in the study of Portuguese-influenced architecture built outside Europe. Studies into “colonial art” – a simplistic term, but an appropriate one in this case – had begun a few decades earlier, focussing on the Latin American world, including Brazil. These studies were developed by researchers from the New World with the aim of studying their own artistic history, but several European scholars also took part in this movement. In fact, researchers’ interest in European artistic productions in Asian and African geographical spaces only began to emerge in the mid-20th century. Mário Chicó’s proposal to the Director General of Higher Education and Fine Arts at the beginning of 1951 to set up a brigade to study the monuments of the State of India – the homeland of his adoptive grandfather – is therefore not surprising. This was an important moment in the change in his academic interests, leaving Portuguese Gothic a little behind in order to study colonial Renaissance, Mannerist, and Baroque architecture in greater depth.

Mário Tavares Chicó thus triggered the expansion of the geographical scope of Portuguese historiographical research to include the artistic productions resulting from overseas exploration, especially in



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the territories that had been under Portuguese rule. The study mission was supported by the Junta das Missões Geográficas e de Investigações Coloniais [Board of Geographical Missions and Colonial Investigations], which was also joined by the General Government of the State of India and the Instituto para a Alta Cultura [Institute for High Culture]. Mário Chicó was also accompanied by art historian Carlos de Azevedo, architect Martinho Humberto dos Reis (a technician from the Monuments Service of the Directorate-General for National Buildings and Monuments) and photographer José Carvalho Henriques. This made up the Study Mission to the Monuments of Goa, Daman and Diu, which spent two months surveying and studying the main historical monuments built in Portuguese India.

The journey began on 3 April 1951 and they returned on 3 June, exactly two months later. During their stay in India, the mission initially spent almost a month in Goa, between 11 April and 6 May, during which time the group did fieldwork in Panaji, Old Goa, Margao, Ponda, Rachol, Bandra, Queula, Verna, Sanquelim and Reis Magos, among other places; Sometimes they were accompanied by the architect Baltazar Castro, former head of the Directorate-General for National Monuments and Buildings (DGEMN) who was in Goa on a commission to coordinate the restoration of the monuments in Old Goa. The mission then continued to Daman (from 14 to 17 May) and Diu (from 22 to 25 May), with time to visit Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Vasai and Aurangabad (where the Ajanta and Ellora caves are located).

The study brigade led by Mário Chicó managed to do a remarkable job, producing extensive photographic documentation of buildings (religious, military and civil architecture of Portuguese influence, but also of local cultures) and works of artistic interest (retables, paintings, and sculptures), along with a rigorous survey of the built monuments and an analysis of some documentation held in the archives of the State of India. All this, coupled with the detailed study of the artistic works, made it possible to bring to light a formidable body of art that had hitherto lain almost incognito. The results of this mission were widely publicised in Portugal and abroad, through photographic exhibitions held in Lisbon, Évora and London, but also through articles published in scientific journals such as *The connoisseur*, *Marg - A Magazine of the Arts*, *Garcia da Orta*, *Belas Artes*, *Boletim Geral do Ultramar* and *Colóquio*.

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