

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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DIAS, Augusto da Costa (Trouxemil, 1919 – Lisbon, 1976)

Augusto Palhinha da Costa Dias was a historian who, like others, encountered great difficulties in the exercise of his profession. From the end of the 19th century and especially during the First Republic, the practice of historiography – in the etymological sense of the process of writing history – as the matrix of what defines a historian, was joined by the teaching of historical science, both in seminars and in classes at the then newly founded faculties of arts and other higher education courses. However, the authoritarian dynamics of the Military Dictatorship and the period that followed the Estado Novo brought about a rupture. In fact, ideological reasons made it impossible for opponents to pursue any academic career. On the contrary, researchers who accepted or did not express opposition to the ideology of the conservative regime were able to continue their activities. Teaching was denied to people who wrote history, both in faculties and, sometimes, in secondary schools. Augusto da Costa da Dias is an example of this.

Costa Dias was born on 12 February 1919 in the village of Trouxemil, near Coimbra, into a middle-class family involved in small-scale farming and later in small trade. He was the second youngest of nine siblings, who spent their childhood in Arganil and then moved to Coimbra for their secondary education. His health was fragile due to a bone disease, which was aggravated by a fall in the Old Cathedral of Coimbra that left him almost disabled in one leg. As a result, his schooling, which was quite turbulent even when his family moved to Lisbon, was interrupted by prolonged stays in various sanatoriums, such as the one in Parede, near Lisbon. He began his secondary education in Coimbra and completed it in Lisbon. Alongside his studies, he worked in various fields: as an advertising agent, a salesman in his brothers' company, Irmãos Costa Dias, Lda (which he left at the end of the Second World War, when he completed his higher education), and an advertising executive at the company Êxito, where he worked with Alves Redol and Alberto Ferreira. Costa Dias enrolled in Historical and Philosophical Sciences at the Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa [School of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon], graduating in 1954 at the age of 35. Soon after, he applied for a career as a secondary school teacher. However, he was prevented from obtaining a position, as he was already being monitored by the PIDE (the Portuguese secret police) due to his activities linked to the Portuguese Communist Party, in which he had begun his militancy at around the age of 20. Costa Dias remained a member of this party until the end of his life. He was responsible for promoting the membership of



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writers such as José Saramago and António Modesto Navarro in the PCP. One of his rare teaching experiences was evident in the creation of a study room for adults called “André de Resende”, which he promoted with Alberto Ferreira and José Marinho; but, to avoid any suspicion that could have prevented the establishment from opening, it was founded by their wives, using their maiden names. This meant that other aspiring teachers in similar situations, such as António Borges Coelho and others, were able to teach in this study room, doing something they weren’t allowed to do in official education.

With teaching prohibited, Augusto da Costa Dias was left with research and writing. But even these activities were often restricted due to the political repression to which the cultural milieu was subjected. Costa Dias then decided to focus on professional activities that encompassed all aspects of cultural promotion: he became, as Alexandre Cabral described him in a tribute article in *Seara Nova*, a prominent “cultural promoter” in the mid-20th century. This role can be seen in various records. The first is linked to the publishing world. In the 1950s, he set up a publishing and distribution company called “Guilda do Livro e do Disco” with António José Saraiva, under the cover of which works banned in Portugal were circulated. After Jorge de Sena left for Brazil, Costa Dias took up the position of literary director at Portugália Editora in 1959, which he held until 1968. There he created the “Coleção Portugália” [Portugália Collection], which published historians who had difficulty getting their works published, including Borges Coelho, José Tengarrinha, Oliveira Marques, Joel Serrão and Victor de Sá, among others. He also launched other literary collections for poets and novelists such as Mário Dionísio, José Gomes Ferreira, Vergílio Ferreira, Alves Redol and José Régio. Also at this publishing house, traditionally dedicated to the publication of anthologies or reissues, some works stand out where Costa Dias presented reissues, mainly focused on the 19th century. Titles by Trindade Coelho, such as *O Senhor Sete* [Mister Seven], by Basílio Teles, *Do Ultimatum ao 31 de Janeiro and Memórias políticas* [From Ultimatum to 31 January and Political Memories], or by Almeida Garrett, such as *O Roubo das Sabinas* [The Rape of the Sabine Women] and *Viagens na Minha Terra* [Travels in my Homeland], within the scope of the literary works of the romantic writer. For this last book, Costa Dias was prohibited from consulting the original edition of the work in the General Library of the University of Coimbra (it was Maria Helena da Costa Dias, his wife, who consulted the work, using her maiden name). However, he was unable to publish a multi-volume edition of Almeida Garrett’s *Obra Política* [Political Work], after announcing the table of contents of the collection in a pamphlet, due to the prior dissuasion of the censors. He did, however, publish a collection of *Discursos sobre a Liberdade de Imprensa no Primeiro Parlamento* [Speeches on Freedom of the Press in the First Parliament], in which we can glimpse a criticism of Salazar’s censorship, thus acquiring value as a political weapon. Many of these historiographical editions, whether written by him or by other authors, were introduced by Augusto da Costa Dias and included valuable onomastic and thematic indexes, which was unusual in the Portuguese publishing world.

His work as a cultural promoter also focused on the translation of books, including *A Vida Quotidiana no tempo da Revolução Francesa* [Daily Life in the Time of the French Revolution] by Jean Robiquet (1962), *A Vida Quotidiana no Tempo de Luís XIV* [Daily Life in the Time of Louis XIV] by Georges Mongrédien (1963)



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and *Palestina, Liberdade ou Morte* [Palestine, Freedom or Death] by Ania Francos (1970). The first two works were published by Editora Livros do Brasil and the last by Seara Nova. The themes of the first two books are linked to history, addressing the historical and cultural contexts of the French Revolution and the time of Louis XIV. Ania Francos' work refers to the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and its contemporary relevance. In addition to these translations, we would add his columns in the Portuguese press in the periodicals *Diário de Lisboa*, *República*, *Vértice* and *Seara Nova*. Augusto da Costa Dias used pseudonyms such as Ângelo Bravo and João da Ega in the latter. He also wrote several columns dedicated to young people, published in the "DL juvenil" section of *Diário de Lisboa* and "República Juvenil" in *República*. Writing these columns, which were of vital importance to him, was a way of communicating with the public, since he was unable to work as a teacher.

His historical work, which began in the 1960s, should be highlighted for its originality. Firstly, because of his connection to the *Annales* school – his library consisted of historical, political and partisan works linked to communism – and secondly because of his choice of themes. Costa Dias paid particular attention to the 19th century, a period little studied by historiography because it was too close chronologically to the contemporary world and therefore considered a threat to the political sphere. From his main work, *A Crise de Consciência Pequeno-Burguesa* [The Crisis of Petty Bourgeois Consciousness], a first volume entitled *O nacionalismo literário da geração de 90* [The Literary Nationalism of the Generation of 90] was published in 1962, which he began writing while imprisoned in the Aljube political prison. The title of this book immediately reveals a Marxist perspective with its reference to petty bourgeois ideology. He valued the role of culture in the ideological field, seeking to show how cultural manifestations were subject to structural, social and economic constraints. In this book, Costa Dias highlights the "still unprecedented nature of in-depth and systematic research into ideologies among us", saying that he was "much more interested in stirring up problems, raising hypotheses and discussing ideas, certain that, in a first approach, in a first contact with a subject that was new in so many respects, this should be the most fruitful path". In this first volume, the author sought to highlight the study of authors of the so-called *90s generation*, or *neo-Garretian* generation, such as Alberto de Oliveira, António Nobre and Trindade Coelho, emphasising their role in the construction of a "petty bourgeois" ideology, in a vision that he characterised as being turned towards the values of the past, attached to tradition and ruralism, and influenced by decadence and symbolism; but it cannot be ignored that this ideology had its origins in the nationalist culture of the Estado Novo. However, a more extensive study of bourgeois ideology did not go beyond this volume, as the author intended, following a regressive method so dear to the Marxist historical perspective, to cover the analysis of a century of bourgeois ideology in Portugal since *Garrettism*, or rather since Garrett's nationalist ideas since their expression in defence of the 1820 revolution. *A Crise de Consciência Pequeno-Burguesa* [The Crisis of Petty Bourgeois Consciousness] was translated into Spanish in the "Ibérica" collection by Península publishers in 1966, revealing (there were not many Portuguese historiographical works to be translated abroad).

Costa Dias, after serving as literary director at Portugália Editoria, took up the position of advertising

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director at Latina-Thompson, as did several other intellectuals with links to the left who ended up working in advertising, such as the aforementioned Modesto Navarro, but also Alexandre Cabral and Urbano Tavares Rodrigues. This may seem paradoxical, but it was justified by his skill in using words and their meaning and the resulting alienation of the consumer. At this company, he contributed to the creation of the Portuguese section of the International Advertising Association. When the 25 April 1974 revolution took place, Costa Dias was proposed as a professor at a general assembly at the Faculdade de Letras de Lisboa [School of Arts and Humanities of Lisbon], an honour that left him deeply moved. However, due to health problems, he never entered the University, dying of a prolonged illness at the age of 57 at his home in Lisbon on 9 March 1976. Despite the end of the dictatorship, he never had the opportunity to embrace teaching, but his importance to Portuguese culture was evident. He managed to complete and see the publication of his last essay on one of the leading authors of 20th-century Portuguese literature: *Literatura e Luta de Classes. Soeiro Pereira Gomes* [Literature and Class Struggle. Soeiro Pereira Gomes] (1975), in which he once again highlighted the role of ideology in the literary movement known as Neorealism.

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