

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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COSTA, Mário Júlio Brito de Almeida (Vagos, 1927)

Born in 1927 in the municipality of Vagos, Mário Júlio Brito de Almeida Costa attended D. João III High School in Coimbra. After completing his degree and the Complementary Course in Legal Sciences at the *Faculdade de Direito de Coimbra* [University of Coimbra Faculty of Law], he was invited to become an assistant there. He passed successive doctoral exams in 1958 and achieved the position of Extraordinary Professor in 1961, becoming a full professor in 1962. His academic formation was influenced by prominent professors from Coimbra and internationally, particularly from Germany, Italy, and France.

He specialised in the fields of the History of Law and the Law of Obligations. He served as Minister of Justice for more than six years (1967–1973) and subsequently became President of the *Câmara Corporativa* [Corporative Chamber] and a member of the *Conselho de Estado* [Council of State]. He was also Deputy Governor of the *Banco de Portugal* [Bank of Portugal] (Central Bank). In January 2002, he was elected President of the *Assembleia Municipal de Vagos* [Vagos Municipal Assembly].

He has lectured at universities in Portugal and abroad, particularly in Brazil, where he is an honorary professor at the Faculty of Law of the *Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul* [Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul] (Brazil). He also served on the Board of Governors of the European University Institute in Florence. He played a key role in the establishment of the Faculty of Law at the University of Porto, which awarded him the title of Doctor Honoris Causa. He contributes to scientific journals within his field, both in Portugal and internationally, and serves on the editorial boards of several publications, including the *Boletim da Faculdade de Direito da Universidade de Coimbra* [Bulletin of the Faculty of Law of the University of Coimbra], the *Revista de Legislação e de Jurisprudência* [Journal of Legislation and Jurisprudence] (Coimbra), and the *Rivista Internazionale di Diritto Comune* [International Journal of Common Law] (Rome/Erice).

He is a member of numerous prestigious institutions, including the *Academia das Ciências de Lisboa* [Lisbon Academy of Sciences], the *Academia Portuguesa da História* [Portuguese Academy of History], the *Real Academia de la Historia* [Royal Academy of History] (Madrid), the *Real Academia de Jurisprudencia y Legislación* [Royal Academy of Jurisprudence and Legislation] (Madrid), the *Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa* [Lisbon Geographic Society], the *Instituto de Coimbra* [Coimbra Institute], the *Instituto Histórico e*



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Geográfico Brasileiro [Brazilian Historic and Geographical Institute] (Rio de Janeiro), the *Academia Nacional de la Historia de Venezuela* [National Academy of History of Venezuela], the *Sociedade Científica da UCP* [UCP Scientific Society], the *Instituto Hispano-Luso-Americano de Direito Internacional* [Hispano-Luso-American Institute of International Law], the *Comissão de Direito Marítimo Internacional* [International Maritime Law Commission], the *Comissão do Domínio Público Marítimo* [Maritime Public Domain Commission], the *Ordem dos Advogados* [Portuguese Bar Association], and the *Instituto dos Advogados Brasileiros* [Institute for Brazilian Lawyers] (Rio de Janeiro).

He was a member of the *Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses* [National Commission for the Commemoration of the Portuguese Discoveries] until it was disbanded.

Mário Júlio de Almeida Costa also donned the robes of a legislator. As Minister of Justice, he led work across a range of areas, including administrative reform, prison labour laws, criminal law and procedure (notably with the 1972 reform), legal assistance, criminology institutes, regional prisons, the civil liability of the state and public entities, civil and land registries, notaries, judicial statutes, and commercial and corporate law, with a particular focus on strengthening the regulation of public limited companies. Later, as a Master of Laws, he contributed to numerous legislative reforms, most notably those on promissory contracts, the introduction of general contractual clauses into the Portuguese legal system, and chairing a commission within the Ministry of Justice to review Portuguese maritime commercial law. He is a legal expert.

Almeida Costa's academic passion was the History of Portuguese Law. Following in the footsteps of his mentor, Guilherme Braga da Cruz, he continued to revitalise historical-legal studies at the *Escola de Coimbra* [Coimbra School], advancing both teaching and research. He began by exploring the intricate history of medieval legal institutions, with the dissertations that elevated him to the pinnacle of his academic career exemplifying his dedication. In 1957, he published his first significant study, *Origem da Enfiteuse no Direito Português* [The Origin of the Enfiteuse in Portuguese Law], followed in 1961 by *Raízes do Censo Consignativo* [Roots of the Consignative Census], which contains insightful chapters on the history of medieval Portuguese credit.

Almeida Costa's scholarship extended into the development of modern Portuguese law, and his research on critical aspects of Portuguese legal thought is noteworthy. He advocated for an integrated view of law within history, rejecting the notion that legal history is merely a series of legal doctrines in gradual formation. For him, legal history is not solely about laws crystallised in dogmatic form; however, it does require independent examination without simply merging into general history. For Almeida Costa, law both influences and is influenced by historical conditions. Unlike scholars who rely solely on textual interpretation, he examined cultural contexts alongside legal sources, employing a method that placed equal emphasis on values and historical circumstances.

His meticulous work brought the history of Portuguese law into the 21st century, making it more accessible to students and practitioners. More than 25 years have passed since the first edition of *História do Direito Português* [History of Portuguese Law], which culminated in a fifth edition prepared with his disciple Rui de

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Figueiredo Marcos. This foundational text, with its elegant style, conceptual depth, and clear synthesis, revitalised the field with a fresh quality that it had not known in the past. As he believed, a work reflects its creator's spirit; *História do Direito Português* is very much an embodiment of Almeida Costa's personality—an exceptional teacher who inspires not only knowledge but the pursuit of understanding.

His bibliography is extensive, including numerous governmental speeches (see *Boletim do Ministério da Justiça* [Bulletin of the Ministry of Justice], from issue 169 to issue 230), doctrinal studies, and case law annotations (see *Revista de Legislação e de Jurisprudência*, from Year 116). His articles also appear in national and international journals, with key contributions summarised in *Dicionário de História de Portugal* [Dictionary of the History of Portugal], *Dictionnaire de l'Histoire du Portugal*, *Verbo – Enciclopédia Luso-Brasileira de Cultura* [Verbo – Luso-Brazilian Encyclopaedia of Culture], and *Polis – Enciclopédia Verbo da Sociedade e do Estado* [Polis – Verbo Encyclopaedia of Society and the State].

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Rui Manuel de Figueiredo Marcos

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