

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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DAVID, Joseph-Pierre Louis (Serre-Nerpol, França, 1882 - Vinay, 1955)

Joseph-Pierre Louis David was the son of Joseph Pierre David and Euphanie de la Combe but the various biographical accounts tell us nothing about the socio-economic status of his family. After completing his secondary studies at the La Côte (Saint-André) Seminary, he enrolled in 1899 in the University of Grenoble, the capital of the department where he was born. There he studied Medieval History and Provençal Literature, later transferring to the Sorbonne where he graduated in Letters in 1900. He was a student of the great masters, Paul Fournier and Ulysses Chevalier. In 1903 he entered the Grenoble Theological Seminary, but this was closed in 1905 as a result of the Law on the Separation of Church and State. As he was the librarian, Pierre David managed to save some notable works from being pillaged. In 1905 he went to the Gregorian University of Rome, where he completed his ecclesiastical training, taking courses in Philosophy, Theology, Canon Law and Holy Scripture.

After having been ordained to the priesthood (1908, St. John Lateran), he continued his education in the *École Française* of Rome, run at that time by the famous linguist and historian Monseigneur Louis Duchesne, whose student he was. He also attended the University of Rome, where he was a student of Ignazio Guidi, the renowned orientalist and Hebraist. He frequented the libraries of Rome, in particular the Vatican Library, while at the same time furthering his education in ecclesiastical history, liturgy, medieval Latin and literature, Christian archaeology and oriental languages, especially Arabic, Coptic and Hebrew. He finished his doctorate at the Sorbonne in 1912. In the meantime, he had been appointed Chaplain of St. Louis of the French (Rome) in 1908.

The final years of his training with Duchesne and Guidi, as well as with Wladimir de Grüneisen, Christien Huelsen and Vincenzo Federici, were also ones when he collaborated on their works and projects. His abilities in liturgy and religious archaeology quickly became known and recognised, and so he was asked to be part of the first commission charged by Pope Pius X to reform the Breviary. He also collaborated on the important monograph on the Church of Santa Maria Antiqua, built in the Roman Forum (*Sainte-Marie Antique*, edited by Christian Huelsen and Vincenzo Federici, Roma, 1911). His collaboration, entitled “*Étude liturgique et hagiographique*”, was his first work of a historical nature with an exact date, although the publication of Coptic texts in the *Revue Biblique* (founded by Father Lagrange and edited by the *École Pratique d'Études Bibliques* in Jerusalem) and in the *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* could have been earlier.



The First World War took him away from Rome. In 1914 he returned to Grenoble where he was mobilized and he served until 1918 as a captain in the *Chasseurs Alpins* (Alpine Hunters), receiving various medals and decorations. Then he remained in Grenoble as a teacher until 1920.

At this time France was engaged in promoting its political, economic and cultural role through so-called “university missions” in Europe and in the New World, under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The intellectuals who were part of these missions were like ambassadors for their country. Pierre David left for Poland on one of these missions having been appointed professor in the Faculty of Philosophy at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, where he arrived in March 1920. For almost twenty years, he taught Coptic, Ancient History of the East and Mediterranean Civilizations, and Medieval French and Provençal language and literature. He remained in Poland until the invasion of September 1939. He did much important pedagogic and academic work there especially in terms of reviving medieval Polish history, thereby contributing to a new awakening of the country’s national conscience.

Taking advantage of his sojourns in France during the holidays, and parallel to his studies on Rome and Poland mentioned above, he published various monographs in the 1930s on the history and hagiography of the Dauphiné.

Pierre David was in France at the time of the invasion of Poland in September 1939. He did not return to Krakow, and so left behind the whole of his library which he tried to recover in 1947. However, despite authorization from the Polish government, he could not undertake the journey. Such a loss made it impractical for him to continue his work on Poland and Egypt, as stated in a letter (dated 8 January 1948) sent to him by one of the editors of the *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* of Louvain. Nothing is known of the fate of these books, unpublished works and documentation.

Mobilized once again, he was appointed by the Vichy Government to be the head of censorship of the oriental press on account of his vast knowledge of languages (about seventeen) among which were some oriental languages. However, as his patriotism and his favourable attitude towards the Allies became known, he ran the danger of being sent to a concentration camp in Germany. Marshal Pétain himself advised him to leave France for America or for a Portuguese university. As he recounts in the preface to the work *Études historiques sur la Galice et le Portugal*, his choice was dictated by the prestige of the University of Coimbra and the peace that reigned there.

Pierre David arrived in Coimbra on 30 March 1941, officially at the request of the *Institut Français* [French Institute] in Portugal and on a “university mission”, to teach Provençal Literature in the Faculty of Letters. It was therefore in the University of Coimbra’s Faculty of Letters and in the recently founded Doutor António de Vasconcelos Institute of Historical Studies that he would centralize the new stage of his academic career. He taught courses of Archaic French, Provençal Language and Literature, Medieval Latin, History of Medieval Institutions, History of Education in the Middle Ages and Sources for Portuguese and Spanish Medieval History.

Soon afterwards, he once again began his historiographical production, but now about Portugal. The



topics he chose were in the area of ecclesiastical history insofar as this intersects with the early days of Portugal. He had works published in various journals: *Biblos*, *Boletim do Instituto de Estudos Franceses*, *Bulletin des Études Portugaises* (of the *Institut Français* of Portugal), *Bulletin Hispanique* (of the Bordeaux Faculty of Letters), *Humanitas*, *Liturgia*, *Revista Portuguesa de História*, *Revista Portuguesa de Filologia*, etc. Father Avelino de Jesus da Costa, his disciple and friend, systematized his published and unpublished works related to Portugal into three genres: i) historical works, ii) historical-liturgical, canonical and hagiographical works, and iii) literary works and works on religious culture. The majority of these studies have been published, but some remain unpublished or only in draft form.

Pierre Hourcade tells us that every summer Pierre David left Coimbra for Lisbon in order to be on the jury for the oral exams of the bachelor's degree run by the *Institut Français*. Also in the summer, when he went back to France, he lectured on courses at the *École Normale* (Paris).

Thus the whole of his life was devoted to research and to teaching, belonging to that rare group of scholars who, in true medieval fashion, could teach in any part of the world. We know very little though about his pastoral activities: we only have the testimony of Pierre Hourcade in Coimbra who allows us to glimpse some of his apostolic and charitable actions.

It is obvious that his role as an ecclesiastic allowed him to have a certain amount of itinerancy, which was also the result of the vicissitudes of the two world conflicts which he lived through. According to his own words at the investiture ceremony when he became Doctor *honoris causa* (see below), he thought of Portugal as his second homeland. The fourteen years he spent in Coimbra were spent teaching and researching the most complex issues of the Portuguese Middle Ages. According to what Manuel Lopes de Almeida proclaimed in the habitual eulogy and presentation at the investiture ceremony, Pierre David's studies allow us to establish the importance of "the Portucalense people" in the formation of the "political conscience" of what would become Portugal, downplaying geographical inevitability and the desire of one chieftain.

He became fully integrated into the intellectual life of Coimbra, as his doctorate *honoris causa* in Historical Sciences proves. The ceremony took place on 15 April 1951 in the *Sala Grande dos Actos* [Great Ceremonial Hall] where Pierre David was presented by the Primate, Archbishop D. António Bento Martins Jr., who in the doctoral candidate's name requested his investiture, which was conferred by the Chancellor-Rector. It is of no lesser importance that in the same ceremony the same honour was conferred on two other notable foreign intellectuals working at the same University: Joseph M. Piel and Émile Planchard.

His contribution to fostering closer intellectual and academic relations between his country of origin and his adopted country must be noted - through his contribution to the *Bulletin des Études Portugaises* (on which he collaborated between 1942 and 1952 and to which he gave a new direction) and also through his encouragement of numerous French *leitores*, or language teachers, to come to Coimbra.

He was appointed Commander of the Order of Santiago, an Honorary Citizen of Braga receiving the city's gold medal and an Honorary Canon of Braga Cathedral (1948). He also won an award from the *Académie*



des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres.

Pierre David was the disciple and collaborator of the most eminent historians, linguists, canonists and scholars who revolutionized oriental history of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. He applied and developed topics and methodologies, cross-referencing knowledge and know-how, first in Rome, then in Poland and finally in Portugal. As he himself wrote (in *A Sé Velha de Coimbra...*), “the method and the tools of the historian are the same whether on the banks of the Mondego, the Rhône, the Tiber or the Vistula”: history lives by comparisons and parallels.

In the studies he worked on during the many years he lived in Portugal, Pierre David took advantage (as he had done in Poland) of his extensive educational background (historical, archaeological, linguistic, liturgical...) using all these areas in pioneering studies which renewed Portuguese historiography, especially in relation to the process for affirming Portuguese national identity, the first years of the monarchy and the establishment of the ecclesiastical network in the peninsula north-east and in the north and centre of the country. Torcato de Sousa Soares writes that it was Pierre David’s studies which gave Braga its properly deserved place as a great western metropolis. Also worth highlighting is Lopes de Almeida’s opinion mentioned above: that his studies enable us to claim that the Portuguese are heirs to the “political conscience” and ethical values of the inhabitants of Portucale from the end of the 9th century.

He was responsible for encouraging young historians (like Avelino de Jesus da Costa) to undertake extensive archive work, which was carried out with the aid of study grants that the *Instituto de Alta Cultura* [Institute of High Culture] provided at his request. His integration into various Portuguese scientific societies and the honorary distinctions he received all speak to us of the public projection of his studies. The information, theses and hypotheses contained in his works remain intact but were continued by his friends, his disciples (Avelino de Jesus da Costa and Torcato de Sousa Soares among others) and their followers. This is perhaps because, as he himself wrote, he brought a critical sense to historical research “since the best critic will be the best informed historian, in both openness and depth” (*A Sé Velha de Coimbra...*).

He does not seem to have become involved in any scientific controversies, even though there is evidence that the cordial “abbot”(as he was called in Coimbra) did not spare his words when the honourability of historical research (among some other topics) was at stake. This would have been the case of António Nogueira Gonçalves’s attack on his study on the Sé Velha [Old Cathedral] of Coimbra, or the position he adopted towards some of Rodrigues Lapa’s theses in *Lições de Literatura Portuguesa. Época Medieval* [Lessons on Portuguese Literature. The Medieval Period], re-edited at the time.

More is guessed than proven about Pierre David’s political profile, but he was without any doubt much more than an erudite ecclesiastic living apart from the world and the complexity of life’s options. Pierre Hourcade claims he had two allegiances: the Church and France. Based on this, the little we do know comes from the years following 1939. Despite the post Pierre David received from the Vichy government mentioned above, Pierre Hourcade tells us that from June 1940 on his position as a patriot and an Allied sympathizer, which he never abdicated from, was well known. In fact, the periodical *Le Dauphiné Libéré* calls him “one of



the most noble figures of the Resistance". As said above, Pierre David was therefore a strong candidate for being sent to a concentration camp and so he came to Portugal as if seeking political asylum. Here, and until the end of the war, he used all his prudence and good sense to manage the precarious balance of antagonistic disputes, giving good advice to those members of the French community who asked him for it, avoiding conflicts and respecting the hospitality of the Portuguese government. Even though maintaining a certain discretion, he seems to have been part of the Coimbra elites connected to the *Estado Novo*, becoming part of this institution's scientific renewal in the post-war years. In the PIDE/DGS [Secret Police] Archive in the Torre do Tombo there is no file on Pierre David.

He belonged to various cultural and academic associations: Member of the Polish Academy of Sciences and Letters (1934); Knight and Officer of the Order of Polonia Restituta (*Order Odrodzenie Polski*, 1932); Member of the Academy of the Dauphiné (*Académie du Dauphiné*) and the Humbert II Society for the History of the Dauphiné (*Société Humbert II pour l'histoire du Dauphiné*); Knight and Officer of the *Légion d'honneur* (1934 and 1951 respectively); *Officier de l'Instruction Publique* (*Golden Palms*) (France, January 1927); Correspondent Member of the Institute of Coimbra (1946). He was elected as an Academic of Merit to the Portuguese Academy of History on 29 July 1949, proposed by the first vice-president, José Maria de Queiroz Veloso. He was the first, and for many years the only, foreigner to be elected.

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APOIOS:

