

# DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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**Dias, António Jorge** (Porto, 1907 - Lisbon, 1973)

Jorge Dias was born into a prosperous middle-class family from Porto, with landholdings in the Minho region. From an early age, he displayed a keen interest in rural life, travelling with friends around the north of the country, spending time in villages, and even working in a circus for fun and out of a sense of solidarity with the performers. Having completed his studies relatively late, he graduated in Germanic Philology from the University of Coimbra and earned a doctorate in Ethnology (*Volkskunde*) from the University of Munich in 1944, with the thesis *Vilarinho da Furna, Um Povo Autárquico da Serra Amarela*. [Vilarinho da Furna, Communal People of the *Serra Amarela*]. He met his wife, Margot, in Munich and she became his research companion throughout his life. He later obtained another doctorate in Ethnology in 1965 from the Faculty of Arts of the University of Lisbon, with the dissertation *Os Macondes de Moçambique* [The Makonde of Mozambique].

He was a Portuguese lecturer at the universities of Rostock, Munich, Berlin, Santiago de Compostela, and Madrid between 1938 and 1947. His academic trajectory led him to teaching positions at the Faculties of Arts of the Universities of Coimbra and Lisbon. He was also part of the teaching staff at the Higher Institute of Overseas Studies—formerly the Colonial Higher School and the predecessor of today's ISCSP—where he was full professor and taught cultural anthropology for several years before passing away.

His academic trajectory was accompanied by a research career that began in 1947 when he took over the Ethnography section of the Centre for Peninsular Ethnology Studies and formed what would become his team, consisting of his wife Margot, Fernando Galhano, Ernesto Veiga de Oliveira, and later Benjamim Pereira. This group committed themselves to the exhaustive study of Portuguese ethnography, focusing particularly—but not exclusively—on material culture in rural areas and technologies related to agricultural activities (Ernesto Veiga de Oliveira, "António Jorge Dias").

Jorge Dias' social background and education provided him with significant cultural and social capital. As a polyglot, he mastered the most important scientific languages: French, English, and German. This not only allowed him access to international bibliography, but also made him a figure with whom self-taught ethnographers in Portugal or colonial administrators with an interest in colonial ethnography could not compete. These facts must be considered in order to understand the ease with which he moved within the



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European ethnology circles of the post-war period, which were focused on the preservation of popular arts and traditions. He was part of the International Commission on Popular Arts and Traditions (CIAP), the future SIEF (International Society for Ethnology and Folklore), and the first editorial board of the journal *Ethnologia Europaea* (Ernesto Veiga de Oliveira, Preface to *Os Arados Portugueses...*[Portuguese Ploughs...]). These details are essential to understand his upward trajectory in the scientific field.

Almost all of Jorge Dias' research, dispersed across several books and over a hundred articles, unfolded in Portugal, but the most significant exception was the study he spearheaded in Mozambique in the second half of the 1950s. For the sake of organisation, his work can be grouped into five main sets. The first consists of essays dedicated to material culture, notably on housing, ploughs, granaries, and, in general, the technology used in agriculture and the processing of agricultural products. There are then the studies aimed at systematising the relationships and differences between disciplines such as ethnography, ethnology, folklore, and cultural anthropology, as well as those addressing methodology, along with textbooks (course books) intended for teaching and a small number of texts on Portuguese ethnographical themes and authors. The third group contains various syntheses on what he referred to as the Portuguese "national character." In the fourth, there are articles on various themes, ranging from sexuality to the cult of the dead. Finally, the last set includes the studies in which he sought to characterise populations confined to specific areas—"communities"—which are quite distinct.

The first two sets, dedicated to two villages in Northern Portugal, each with a small population confined to a limited area, were based on personal observation. The last is a team effort, seeking to study a society with over 100,000 individuals—the Makonde in Northern Mozambique—spread across a vast territory, whose language was unknown and with whom a close cultural understanding was not possible, unlike the first monographs. However, there are connections in terms of content between his earlier studies and this latter research, detectable both in the role given to the environment and history, as well as in the concern with material culture, social organisation, beliefs, and popular culture, and, in general, with a tradition that the anthropologist felt was under threat.

To understand Jorge Dias' positions and trajectory, it is necessary to learn more about his personal journey beyond the advantages provided by the class into which he was born and the education he received. His subjectivity needs to be considered and his personal development positioned within the historical context of his time. Although little is known about his youth, it is still possible to perceive his non-conformist attitude towards what would have been the most likely fate for a member of the affluent middle class, destined for business, like his father, or a lucrative profession. As a young man, he felt drawn to the rural world and the mountain villages, to vagrancy, as he called it, connected to a profound sense of freedom, in contrast with the life the city could offer him. He even considered living in the countryside with friends, some of whom would remain his closest intellectual companions throughout his life. This passion for the rural world translated into an ethnographic vocation that led him to study the peasantry, particularly that which appeared most distant



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from the urban life of his time and environment. In fact, as he explained in a letter to Ernesto Veiga de Oliveira, ethnography would allow them to live the life they dreamed of, accompanied by the comfort of a salary (João Leal, *A energia da antropologia...*[The Energy of Anthropology...], 2008).

The peasantry had been Portuguese ethnography's object of study since the last decades of the 19th century. While for members of the educated urban classes, who observed others from their own vantage point, the peasantry was regarded as a group characterised by archaism and distance from literate culture, for others, touched by the nationalism born out of Romanticism, it was seen as the faithful guardian of the most authentic national traditions, due to its lack of exposure to foreign influences. Ethnography and ethnology, like philology, history, archaeology, and geography—sometimes cultivated by the same individual, as in the case of Leite de Vasconcelos—were all animated by nationalist sentiment and had developed in the last decades of the 19th century. Jorge Dias was an heir to this tradition, which included figures such as Adolfo Coelho, Rocha Peixoto, Consiglieri Pedroso, Teófilo Braga, and José Leite de Vasconcelos (J. Leal, *Etnografias Portuguesas...*[Portuguese Ethnographies...], 2000, pp. 27-61). With a background in the humanities, he did not practise physical anthropology, a discipline introduced into university teaching in the 19th century.

The time in which Jorge Dias embarked on his academic career was far removed from the golden days of the early Portuguese ethnologists. The ethnography produced in Portugal, with little echo in university teaching, had been transformed into a field geared towards regional peculiarities, stripped of the cosmopolitanism and systematic ambitions of the past.

Jorge Dias' education was eclectic, a combination of the legacy of Portuguese ethnology with other contributions acquired throughout his career. Among them, German anthropology, with its historicist and geographic traditions, played a prominent role from the beginning to the end of his work. The greatest influence he acknowledged in this regard was that of Thurnwald, a moderate diffusionist and functionalist who recognised the importance of history. Furthermore, this anthropologist, who was familiar with the North American and British anthropology of the 1920s and 1930s, may have been the source of Dias' initial knowledge of both. Other disciplines such as human geography, philology, archaeology, and the "psychology of peoples" were also part of his learning. His education was crucially enriched by contact with North American cultural anthropology, which, through the eminent figure of Franz Boas, maintained connections with the German tradition.

In addition to Boas, Dias was familiar with the work of other major authors such as Kroeber, Herskovits—a staunch advocate of African independence—Margaret Mead, and most notably, Ruth Benedict, whose influence is noteworthy in his monograph on Rio de Onor and his inquiries into the "national character." These individuals were key figures in the school known as "culture and personality," whose formulations had their roots in the German "psychology of peoples."

His relationship with British anthropology was less significant, despite his early acquaintance with the classic works of Tylor and Frazer and the founders of the functionalist school. However, in the 1950s, he



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expressed significant reservations regarding what he perceived to be the goals of British functionalism. He was far more interested in cultural and psychological dimensions than in the study of social systems, which he associated with the same anthropological school. In his view, it was insufficient to merely understand how a society organised itself to meet its material and spiritual needs; it was also essential to understand how people thought and felt. He criticised Durkheim's influence on functionalism, believing that by focusing on social facts external to the individual, the French sociologist had distanced himself from the concerns of analysing how individuals think and feel, as well as the cultural patterns in which their actions are embedded. And although he advocated collaboration between anthropology and sociology, he viewed the latter as being focused on studying structural problems and sociodemographic patterns, while anthropology was more suited to addressing what he called the "subtle problems": religion, magic, emotions (J. M. Sobral, *O Outro aqui tão Próximo*. [The Other So Close], 2007, pp. 498-500).

He gained in-depth knowledge of British anthropology, especially through his study in Mozambique, where several contemporary authors—Evans-Pritchard, Meyer Fortes, Audrey Richards, J. Clyde Mitchell, and Max Gluckman—particularly those involved in African anthropology, are referenced. In fact, figures as important as Meyer Fortes, Max Gluckman—founder of the so-called Manchester School, interested in conflict and inequality—and Max Marwick contributed to the volumes of studies published in his honour (*In Memoriam António Jorge Dias*, 1974).

However, Jorge Dias was distant from the themes and concepts of Anglo-American production, which, since the 1950s, had focused on Mediterranean Europe, a field within which José Cutileiro (1971) would conduct research in the 1960s. The latter, with its emphasis on the structural economic and social inequality of the Alentejo society, presented an image of rural Portugal entirely in contrast with his own, centred on the north, where the asymmetry in land ownership did not take on the extreme form observed in the southern parts of the country. His knowledge of French anthropology also stemmed primarily from ethnologists and folklore scholars who had established themselves before World War II, and also from a number of Africanists whose writings emerged later, however structuralism had almost no impact on his work.

Dias' reputation did not develop around his writings on the theory or methodology of anthropology, which were subsidiary texts to his main productions or associated with his teaching activities and did not involve elaborate discussions on the authors or theories addressed. However, it should be noted that in a country where the teaching of the social sciences was practically non-existent, and where research, when it existed, was entirely disconnected from contemporary international scientific debate, his reference to some international scientific production was in itself an asset and a sign of highly rare cosmopolitanism.

His fame stemmed primarily from the monographs he authored or co-authored, as well as his reflections on the Portuguese "national character"—without disregarding other works produced individually or as part of a team. His first published monograph, *Vilarinho da Furna* (1948), is an extension of the thesis he defended in Munich in 1944. Although he was supervised by a Nazi professor, there are no traces of the racial determinism



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at the core of National Socialism in his writing. This community's forms of economic and social life—a collectivist and communal way of life—and its beliefs are presented as the result of environmental influence and the type of predominant activity.

Vilarinho da Furna, a mountainous agro-pastoral village, was an isolated communal settlement where pastoral activities were organised collectively, and social life was governed by decisions made by elected leaders. This organisation was praised as being a veritable example of "representative democracy." Communalism was also regarded as a positive factor, since it was detached from 'individualism' – a term referring to capitalistic attitudes, such as self-interest and the pursuit of profit – which prevailed in urban environments. This representation of a village, guided by fraternity, was also linked to the celebration of its inhabitants' skills. While, from an evolutionary perspective, these people were seen as being bound to cognitive practices such as magic and superstition, deemed false in the light of modern science, the positive manner in which he viewed them was evident. He praised their intelligence, independence of thought, capacity for reflecting on life and fate, and for expatiating on international politics far more skilfully than the 'middle-class bourgeois' city dwellers.

This approach of exalting these rural populations, which stood in stark contrast to their representation as "ignorant," "backward," or "bumpkins"—a term frequently used by the middle class at the time—was reproduced in his second, much larger monograph, dedicated to the village of Rio de Onor in Trás-os-Montes. Although Dias' intellectual development had evolved in the meantime—with a greater contribution from Peninsular ethnology and history, and the noticeable impact of North American cultural anthropology—the same type of view was reproduced. Local life was praised, with the coexistence of private property and various forms of collective ownership, where its organisation was based on the election of leaders by the villagers—another example of "representative democracy"—and its pre-capitalist outlook on life. It was both an empathetic and appreciative portrayal of these populations, but also an idealised, pastoral, and nostalgic one, of a life that was exceedingly difficult and, for many, entirely miserable (J. Leal, *Antropologia em Portugal* [Anthropology in Portugal], pp. 149-166). This image is in line with his admiration for the bucolic and idealised representations of the rural world of Júlio Dinis (José M. Sobral, *O Outro aqui tão Próximo...*, 2007, p. 516).

Dias established a connection between the characterisations of the Portuguese national character, his community studies, and his conception of Portuguese overseas expansion. His interest in material culture was focused on traditional dimensions which, like social organisation or ethos, were thought to be on the verge of disappearance. His research in Portugal was concentrated in the north of the country, and it was primarily in this region that he sought the basic elements of national identity (João Leal, *Antropologia em Portugal...*, pp. 149-166). Interested in the ethno-genealogy of the Portuguese, he traced it back to the castro peoples, linking them to the villages he studied. He identified signs of an enduring—if not timeless—essence of the Portuguese people in their institutions and present-day attitudes.

Although he expressed reservations about the possibility of studying the Portuguese "national character"



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in great detail, arguing that he was not in possession of the basic studies for such an endeavour, he still advanced some representations. In short, it may be said that these representations point to a historically based interpretation of Portuguese society, where the relationship of the Portuguese people with the sea is enhanced, along with the fusion of ethnic heritages from Northern Europe and other regions, including Africa. He emphasised the importance of the patriarchal and communal organisation—generalising that which he defined as a characteristic of the north—which, he argued, even allowed for the integration of enslaved servants into the family. The Portuguese, as Catholics, were distinguished from the Protestant colonisers, for their expansion was not driven by the ethics of the latter, tied to the development of capitalism. While utilitarian and lucrative motives were not absent from the Portuguese expansion, they were secondary to the religious motivations. Moreover, the Portuguese were not racist; they recognised the equality of humankind and had a specific mission in human history: to bring various populations of the world into ecumenical contact and to spread a belief that was presented as being superior—Christianity. As can be seen, the author conceived Portuguese colonisation as a fundamental part of the national character (José Manuel Sobral, *O Outro aqui tão Próximo...*, pp. 491-497).

According to Dias, there are "three fundamental phases in the life of humanity": an initial phase of expansion, where man needed extensive areas to satisfy his hunger, thus dispersing across the Earth; the next phase, in the Neolithic age, began with agriculture, sedentarism, social stratification, the pursuit of wealth, and conflict, leading to the emergence of a culture—Greek—that brought with it higher forms of knowledge. This culture was disseminated by the Romans, who spread a superior civilisation. Finally, emerging from the ruins of the Roman Empire and the clashes with the Germanic peoples, the imposition of Christianity, serving to soften customs and bearing a human fraternity ideal. The Portuguese, as the continuators of Neolithic dynamics, which led them to expand their Empire—like the Romans—are portrayed as playing the most important role in the third, spiritual phase: the expansion of faith (J. Dias, *A expansão ultramarina portuguesa à luz da moderna antropologia* [Portuguese Overseas Expansion in the Light of Modern Anthropology], 1956, pp. 150-153; J. Dias, *Antropologia Cultural* [Cultural Anthropology], 1965-66, pp. 163-175).

It is not possible here to offer more than a brief presentation of some key points of the anthropologist's discourse, leaving aside important elements of this intellectual construction. Indeed, these considerations should be examined in light of both what they reveal about his personal ideology and the historical context in which his actions unfolded. In the intellectual domain, the context in which the author operated was dominated by a slow discrediting of racial explanations of social behaviour, due to their association with Nazism and other extreme forms of racism. It was a time when Mendes Correia, the physical anthropologist hostile to miscegenation, was losing prominence in Portugal, and the relatively young and anti-racist Jorge Dias—who largely identified with American cultural anthropology, distinguished by its opposition to racism—was progressively gaining recognition. But this was also a time marked by international decolonisation and by colonial wars triggered by the *Estado Novo's* opposition to the independence of the colonies. It became urgent



for the Portuguese state to establish its colonisation as being radically different from others in order to justify the continuity of the Empire.

The Luso-tropicalist ideas of Gilberto Freyre were thus promoted in Portugal, and Dias selectively drew inspiration from them, exalting miscegenation, although without emphasising the Moorish and Jewish legacies among the Portuguese. But that is not all. The views of Sérgio Buarque de Hollanda, influenced by Weber, that the Portuguese, as Catholics, did not give their colonisation a capitalist character, were also employed by Dias (J.M. Sobral, *O Outro aqui tão Próximo...*, 2007, p. 495). The contributions of cultural anthropology, with its relativist tendencies, coexisted in the author's discourse with a nationalist, ethnocentric attitude that insisted on the civilisational superiority of Christianity and on the providential mission of the Portuguese, which fully aligned with the official political rhetoric of the *Estado Novo*.

This identification was crucial in explaining the radical shift brought about by Dias' rise to prominence in the field of anthropology. Anthropobiology was the dominant knowledge in Portugal in the preceding period, which saw the passing of the last representative of the 19th-century ethnological tradition, Leite de Vasconcelos. Its main figure was Mendes Correia, a doctor by training, a defender of "white" superiority and hostile to miscegenation. However, racist and nationalist approaches had become discredited due to their association with the Nazis and their allies. In the post-war era, which was also dominated by decolonisation following the independence of the Indian Union, race lost its value as an explanatory factor, with other factors, such as culture, being affirmed instead. It was within this political and intellectual context that cultural anthropology asserted itself with Dias, who would come to replace Mendes Correia as the leading figure, the man who gave him his first research position after his doctorate (J. M. Sobral, *Representações Portuguesas e Brasileiras da Identidade Nacional...*[Portuguese and Brazilian Representations of National Identity] ).

This identification is most likely the condition that made possible the research mission in northern Mozambique, dedicated to studying the Makonde people, where Dias drew inspiration from Thurnwald, who had studied the Makonde living in Tanganyika, a former German colony. The result was a four-volume publication, dominated by his contributions, a work of unique scope in Portuguese colonial anthropology.

This approach emerged as being somewhat disconnected from the contemporary development of anthropology in Africa, which was interested in the processes of transformation taking place at that time, practised in Mozambique's neighbouring countries—such as the impact of colonialism, social change, migrant labour, and economic development (H. West, *Inverting the Camel's Hump...*, p. 56). Dias consciously offered a portrait of the Makonde as a traditional, static society (J. Dias, pref. to *Os Macondes de Moçambique*, p. 11), excluding the dynamics of change that he knew were occurring intensely at that very time and in that very place (J. Dias and M. V. Guerreiro, *Relatório da Campanha de 1957* [1957 Campaign Report], 1958).

The treatment of these latter issues was explicitly relegated to confidential reports for the authorities. The content of these reports shows that the interest in studying the Makonde was closely linked to an acute concern with attitudes towards the Portuguese presence. It was thought that the Makonde of Mozambique could serve



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as a buffer against Islam, as Muslims were viewed as hostile to the Portuguese presence. Significant anxiety can also be denoted regarding the presence of communities from the Indian subcontinent that still possessed the so-called "State of India", and were viewed as being hostile to the Portuguese. There was also concern about what was happening in particular African societies, especially in neighbouring Tanganyika, a country to which the Makonde from northern Mozambique emigrated, as it was considered materially superior, and a place where "black people" were becoming emancipated. The text of the reports also reveals a colonial reality entirely at odds with both the *Estado Novo's* propaganda and Dias' own essays praising the exemplary uniqueness of the Portuguese colonisation. There is an awareness of hostility towards the colonisers, of the racism of the colonisers, manifested in the protection of the "white" man's arbitrariness, in physical abuse, in economic exploitation, in a "racial" interrelationship entirely contrary to the official discourse.

Yet although these texts openly and critically reveal dimensions of colonial reality that were usually concealed, they also show that Dias, like his wife, left the Makonde with the memory of a "white man" who was radically different from those they were accustomed to in terms of treatment and empathy (H. West, *Inverting the Camel's Hump...*, p. 64). Nevertheless, he did not call into question the legitimacy of Portuguese domination. Even in the reports, which precede the onset of the armed anti-colonial conflict by only a few years, he calls for changes that would foster the continuity of the pluricontinental nation (R. Pereira, *Introdução à Reedição de 1958* [Introduction to the 1958 Reissue], XXVIII-LII).

Jorge Dias' impact on the university sphere between the 1950s and 1970s allowed him to open up some space for the development of teaching and studies in Ethnology, as evidenced by the works he directed, as well as those of the team he formed. But his influence was also felt beyond the boundaries of Anthropology. He had a close connection with Portugal's leading geographer of the time, Orlando Ribeiro (Ribeiro, "Nota Preliminar" ["Preliminary Note"]), and his work and that of his team was taken into account by José Mattoso, in his book *Identificação de um País* [Identification of a Country] (1985), which also highlighted Dias' considerations on national character, as did the sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos, for example (J. Leal, *Etnografias Portuguesas...*, [Portuguese Ethnographies...]pp. 94-104). He directed the Centre for Ethnology Studies—formerly the Centre for Peninsular Ethnology Studies—dedicated to Portugal, and the Centre for Cultural Anthropology Studies, dedicated to research abroad. He is credited with creating the Museum of Ethnology, founded in 1965 as the Overseas Museum of Ethnology, equipped with a purpose-built building in 1976. It housed an extremely rich collection, consisting of materials from Portugal, many of which were linked to his team's research, collections from the colonies, and other origins, as he refused from the outset to limit it to the "Overseas"—the project, with a universalist character, was to make it a "veritable Museum of Man", according to his closest collaborator and friend (E. V. de Oliveira, "António Jorge Dias", 1974, p. 13).

Having passed away in 1973, a considerable part of his intellectual legacy was well received by the generations that followed, despite his official role in the *Estado Novo*. The themes of the essays on the "national character" and even on expansion continued to find acceptance, with emphasis placed on the encounter





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between peoples and cultures represented by the latter, while downplaying its significance as an enterprise of imperial power and exploitation. The richness of the works on traditional rural life, particularly on material culture, was recognised. The studies on Vilarinho da Furna and Rio de Onor, the first and for a long time the only monographs on Portuguese rural society held great appeal for anthropologists and sociologists of the peasantry after 1974, when the social sciences were able to develop in Portugal—although the image they conveyed of communalism was subject to criticism for not sufficiently accounting for the existing inequality. The very establishment of democracy in 1974, with its revaluation of the "people", also contributed to this. But this appeal went beyond conventional academic circles to become the subject of films—*Vilarinho da Furna* in 1971 and *Falamos de Rio de Onor*, both by António Campos which premiered in 1974—in which their traditional way of life is portrayed in a highly favourable light. Communalism appealed to the critics of a modern, increasingly urban society, especially those who emerged from the anti-capitalist and anti-consumerist backlash, as well as the nostalgia for community life that intensified from the late 1960s onwards (Sobral, *O Outro aqui tão Próximo...*, pp. 512-517). They too were young rebels with many positions akin to those that had once led the anthropologist to the rural world.

As for the monograph on the Makonde people, who played a key role in the anti-colonial struggle, it remains an unparalleled repository of information about an African people under Portuguese rule, despite the analytical limitations acknowledged by the study's leader. It was well-received by the people themselves, and among members of their elite, the work has gained the status of a monument to their culture (West, *Inverting the Camel's Hump...*, pp. 57-58).

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