

# DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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**DURAND, Robert** (Saint - Mesmin, 1936)

Robert Durand is a French scholar whose research has centred extensively on Portuguese history. Before delving into his academic contributions, we shall first explore his personal journey, drawing on testimonials from colleagues and friends. After retiring in 1998 as Professor of Mediaeval History at the University of Nantes, he was honoured with the book *Chemins d'historien*. In 1999, a tribute event was held at the *Centro Cultural Calouste Gulbenkian* [Calouste Gulbenkian Cultural Centre], which I had the pleasure of attending, and which resulted in the book *L'espace rural au Moyen Âge*. The biographical essays in these works provide key insights into Durand's life and career.

Born to a family of farmers and with several uncles in the clergy, Durand attended school in his village, growing up without the modern amenities of electricity or running water. As was common in rural communities, he later went to a seminary for further education, following in the footsteps of his brother Henrique, who became a priest. Durand then completed two years of military service during the Algerian War, which ended for him on 13 May 1958. He subsequently enrolled at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities in Poitiers, where he was an outstanding student, as noted by his professor Bernard Chevalier. In 1963, he received his *Diplôme d'Études Supérieures*, followed by his *Agrégation* in History the next year. Following his teaching role at the *Lycée Henri IV* in Poitiers, Robert Durand embarked on research for his doctoral thesis. Initially supervised by Yves Renouard, he continued his work under Michel Mollat's guidance after Renouard's death in 1965. Focused on Portuguese rural history, Durand frequently visited Portugal during his holidays, exploring the archives and libraries of Lisbon and Coimbra. Often accompanied by his family—he married in 1962 and had three children, born in 1963, 1967, and 1971—they became familiar with the Portuguese landscape. In November 1967, Robert Durand was appointed assistant professor at the Faculty of Letters in Nantes, which had been established only six years earlier. In May 1970, he defended his 3rd cycle thesis on the Cartulary of Baio Ferrado de Grijó, and in 1980, he presented his doctoral thesis titled *Les campagnes portugaises Entre Douro et Tâge aux Xlle et Xllle siècles*. Alongside his academic work, he developed an interest in the local history and culture of Saint-Sébastien-sur-Loire, publishing a book about the commune and founding the Nantes-Histoire Association, which promotes regional history, particularly that of Saint-Sébastien-sur-Loire. At his university, he held prominent roles from 1990 until his retirement, including Director of the History and Sociology Training and Research Unit and Director of the History Department until 1996. Initially, his research explored the activities of the second pope of Avignon, John XXII, in the diocese of Poitou. However, his focus soon shifted to Portuguese historiography, which remains underrepresented in France. His 1971 publication



of the 12th-century cartulary of the Monastery of São Salvador de Grijó, containing over 300 documents accompanied by codicological and palaeographic analysis as well as an institutional study, became a highly valuable resource for researchers of mediaeval social, economic, and religious history. This foundational work anticipated his deep interest in rural economies and peasant societies, culminating in his doctoral thesis. *Les campagnes portugaises* offers a comprehensive view of rural life, settlement patterns, and the structures of secular and religious power in the extensive regions of Beira and Estremadura between the Douro and Tagus Rivers during the 12th and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. The composition of noble and church estates, along with allodial land, is well documented, including its agricultural uses, cultivation methods, and exploitation. However, Durand brings a fresh perspective by examining the genesis of village communities through the lens of the family unit. He highlights how these communities were both shaped by and ultimately fragmented by manorial powers, as well as exploring the social hierarchy and lifestyles of the agricultural workers. His in-depth analysis of the solidarity within peasant communities— anchored in agrarian, judicial, fiscal, and religious unity— left a lasting impact on Portuguese historiography. His work influenced numerous future studies focused on the associative, communal, parish-based, and social spirit within rural communities. Durand also investigated the broader context of feudalism and manorial structures in Portugal, often engaging with the research of José Mattoso, and placed this within a comparative framework with the broader contexts of the Iberian Peninsula and France. His studies extended to the complex organisation of power in fortified border towns. Portuguese records led him to study anthroponymy and family structures among men during the Middle Ages, shedding light on this historical period. In a bid to dispel the perception of Portugal as a "blank rectangle" on the map of Iberian history in many studies, Durand introduced the French-speaking world to Portugal's rich past with his *História de Portugal* [History of Portugal], published in 1992. With a keen sensitivity to the historical evolution of Portugal, Durand emphasises the Roman, Visigothic, and Islamic civilisational influences, tracing Portuguese history through the medieval and expansionist periods, the Enlightenment and Regeneration eras, up to the Republic. He considers the impact of the Estado Novo, the advent of democracy, and finally, Portugal's "European hour."

As a medievalist, Robert Durand brought a distinctive perspective to Portuguese rural history, shaped by the French school, highlighting manorial structures and village communities during Portugal's formation. His work left a lasting impact on Portuguese historiography, especially as rural studies gained traction in the 1980s.

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