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FRANÇA, Eduardo d'OLIVEIRA (Queluz, São Paulo 1915 - São Paulo, 2003)

He was born in Queluz, in the state of São Paulo, in 1915 and died in São Paulo, the state capital, in 2003. His parents were teachers and his grandparents, on both sides, were farmers in Guaratinguetá (São Paulo) and Barra Mansa (state of Rio de Janeiro), which made him deeply identified with the region of the Paraíba do Sul River, an important coffee-growing area during the Empire. He attended primary school in several towns in the valley and secondary school at a traditional school in Guaratinguetá. In 1932, he enrolled at the Faculdade de Direito do Largo de São Francisco [Largo de São Francisco Law School] ("Arcadas") in São Paulo and, in 1934, in the History and Geography course at the Faculdade de Filosofia [School of Philosophy] of the then newly created University of São Paulo. At the former, he was a student of great jurists of the time, such as Waldemar Ferreira, a commercial lawyer and historian of law, and Almeida Junior. At the Faculdade de Filosofia [School of Philosophy], his teachers included Plínio Ayrosa, Afonso Taunay and the Frenchmen Pierre Monbeig and Fernand Braudel. Having also attended the Escola de Professores do Instituto de Educação [Teachers' School of the Institute of Education], he became a tenured education professor at the Normal School through competitive examination. He later taught at other secondary schools in the capital and at the Faculdade de Filosofia da USP [School of Philosophy] of the Catholic University of São Paulo. He then joined the Faculdade de Filosofia [School of Philosophy] at USP, appointed as assistant professor by Fernand Braudel. After a brief period as a professor of Ancient and Medieval History, he settled on Modern and Contemporary History, where he was also assistant to the specialist in the Reformation, Émile Leonard. In 1946, he completed his doctorate, consolidating his academic position at USP, and in 1951, he was promoted to professor of Modern and Contemporary History.

From then on, his professional life was entirely dedicated to the University of São Paulo, with short stays to teach courses in Bahia and Ceará and, in 1955, at the University of Coimbra. He was an active member of the Faculdade de Filosofia [School of Philosophy] and the University Council and headed the Department of History, the Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas [School of Philosophy, Arts and Human Sciences] from 1972 to 1974, and the Escola de Comunicação e Artes [School of Communication and Arts] from 1980 to 1984. He was a renowned and sought-after professor and thesis advisor for over half a century, even after his mandatory retirement at the age of seventy. He contributed to the USP History Journal and, in its early years, to the Associação Nacional de Professores Universitários de História [National Association of



University History Professors] (ANPUH), of which he was one of the founders and where he worked closely with Eurípedes Simões de Paula, professor of Ancient and Medieval History.

A great reader and researcher, he had a keen critical mind, which perhaps explains his historiographical output, which was rich and stimulating, although relatively limited. His first work was his doctoral thesis, *O poder real em Portugal e as origens do absolutismo* [Royal Power in Portugal and the Origins of Absolutism], which he defended at the age of 31. Five years later, he wrote his professorial thesis, *Portugal na época da Restauração* [Portugal at the Time of the Restoration]. His later works, published in conference proceedings and specialised journals, dealt with both methodological issues and topics in Brazilian history.

The main lines of his historical thinking include reflections on historical knowledge, including the use of concepts and sources and interpretations of the history of Portugal and Brazil, or rather, Luso-Brazilian history, since he was interested in the aspects common to the formation of both societies and the subsequent development of the tropical variant.

History, according to Eduardo d'Oliveira França, was a science of man, seeking to situate him in different historical ages, as he states in the introduction to his doctoral thesis. Historical thinking – and this gave it a psychological dimension that differed from other scientific fields – brought facts to life, which occurred because historians worked with insights, not limiting themselves to being mere spectators. But facts would only produce a convincing explanation if considered within the overall framework of the political, economic and religious phenomena of the period in question. This concern for context led him to always reject monocausalities, understanding man as a sum of characters, without exclusive “economic” (economic history was in vogue in the post-war period when he wrote these words), “political” or other characteristics. More than twenty years later, in 1974, he returned to the theme, defending historical totality, understood as the history of the sum of a people’s experiences, including their mentalities.

The goal was to recognise the “man of his time”, who resembles other ‘men of his time’; in his case, it was the search for an understanding of who that ‘baroque man’ of the Restoration era was, who was simultaneously colonising Brazil.

His interest in context may recall the historicist *Zeitgeist*, and he was certainly familiar with Huizinga’s work, as well as referring to Herder on the question of the mental attitudes of an era. But the dominant influence was that of the *Annales*, in the inflection of Lucien Febvre, with his taste for social psychology, and Marc Bloch, with his sociological inclination.

França advocates “understanding” as the historian’s main interpretative endeavour, but despite a brief mention of Simmel in a 1951 text on the “cultural function of history”, he had little contact with German sociology or hermeneutics. His conception is that of Bloch, as presented in the famous chapter “To judge or to understand?” in *Métier d’Historien*. It is an intuitively grasped psychological function, which is not – as França emphasises – advice to passivity or complicity and has nothing to do with the methodological steps defined in different hermeneutic procedures.

But how does one arrive at this result? França asks successively: what is the historian? What does he do? How does he do it? Why does he do it? Starting from the idea that the historian acts within the realm of



a science of man and “of men in time,” in the formula of the *Annales* that he repeated, the how began with an “anticipated explanation – a hypothesis – that is hungry for facts in order to survive.” Rebelling against the path pointed out by Langlois-Seignobos and still endorsed by Louis Halphen, where the primacy of the document dominated, the historian affirms that, based on the hypothesis formulated and the state of the historiographical question confronted with the available information, the researcher may or may not prove his ideas. As for the *what for*, France’s response is decidedly non-pragmatic, referring to a category that is, if not ontological, at least transcultural: “What is the purpose of history? Perhaps it serves no purpose. I do not know what the purpose of history is. Just as I do not know the purpose of beauty, the purpose of the feeling of love, and all our effective equipment that seems to serve no purpose. I know that history will continue, that man will continue to make history, to think about history, to feel history. (...) With greater or lesser intensity, it does not matter. There has been no great civilisation that has not in some way taken care of its history, whether recent or remote.” (Eduardo d’Oliveira França, *Conversa em torno de nosso ofício* [Conversation about our craft], *Anais de História*, no. 6, 1974, p. 13). These statements appear in texts from 1951 and 1974, but they were a constant theme throughout Eduardo França’s intellectual life. Clearly inspired by Febvre against the idea of extracting lessons, let alone recipes for action, from history, he explicitly rejected Goethe’s conception that it was useful for freeing the present from the past, preferring the simplicity of Ortega’s formula: one studies history to know man. “And man is the historian’s food. (...) Human, in order to understand humanity.” (Eduardo d’Oliveira França, *Considerações sobre a função cultural da História* [Considerations on the cultural function of history], *Revista de História*, no. 8, 1951).

Historical explanation is the finished product of the historian’s craft. Declaring himself opposed to theories, which he often associated with the philosophy of history, he also emphasised the distinction between the work of the historian and that of the sociologist, ironically commenting on disputes over space. Guided by an honest concern for truth, despite his sensitivity to different interpretations, the historian contributed as a man of his time, simultaneously attentive to pitfalls such as the myth of origins, the artificiality of causalities and uchronia. Equally rejecting the relativist attitude he associated with historicism, he did not fall back on erudite factuality, identifying historical interpretation, due to its psychological basis, primarily with imagination. Distinct from pure fiction by its commitment to truth and its ability to problematise, it was not the hallmark of the movement to which he belonged, that of the *Annales*, but corresponded to the work of great historians such as Michelet, Fustel de Coulanges and Henri Pirenne – and these examples, although all from the French tradition, are clearly very different from each other in terms of intellectual affiliations.

It was through imagination that the historian not only constructed hypotheses, articulated the conclusions of his predecessors and broadened his horizons through the contribution of new techniques, but also identified new relationships between already known “facts” or with new documentary contributions. França clearly valued these, but did not elevate them to a *conditio sine qua non* of historiography, faithful to Lucien Febvre’s maxim that history is made with documents... when they exist. The influence of the Romanist Jean Gagé was decisive in this regard, reminding him that for more remote periods, the importance of new



documents was decreasing and that of the discovery of new relationships was increasing. This should not lead us to conclude, however, that he disregarded sources. On the contrary, Eduardo d'Oliveira França considered them carefully, never produced anything that was not based on them, and even constructed a typology of sources, which he classified as written, oral and material, with subclassifications for urban history. Both of his theses benefit from the intelligent use of sources, which not only illustrate the issues and confirm the author's points of view, but also effectively support the relationships that the historian establishes and unfolds throughout his interpretation.

Although the concept was not a significant concern in his generation, in Brazil as in other countries, in his 1951 study on Marc Bloch, Eduardo França addressed the issue, without however naming it: "Analysis requires a language capable of providing the true contours of an institution or fact, without misunderstandings. Another major problem is that of nomenclature. History lacks the necessary terminological precision. This is the purgatory of the historian. (...) The entire French translation of the word Reich is a distortion. The bilingualism of certain eras: the language of the elites and the language of the people, one that is written and the other that is only spoken. And words from one era borrowed by another, because man does not take care to change his vocabulary when he changes institutions." ("The Testament of a Historian: Marc Bloch", *Revista de História*, no. 8, 1951, p. 440). In 1974, he returned to the subject, recalling Febvre's concern with changes in the meaning of words and the frequency of their use, reminding himself that they were not merely a passive reflection of things, but "signs of reflection," mediators of communication between men and expressions of social relations.

The concepts he most frequently employs in his theses and other works concern social categories – the popular classes, the mercantile bourgeoisie, the legists, the New Christians, the privileged classes, the aristocracy – institutional categories – centralisation, royalty, lordship, feudalism, absolutism, restoration – or cultural categories – the Renaissance, the Baroque. He is in tune with the classics of nineteenth-century historiography, such as Michelet, Burckhardt, Guizot and Fustel de Coulanges, as well as with the Portuguese texts of Gama Barros, Paulo Merêa, Hernâni Cidade and Vitorino Magalhães Godinho.

The author's interpretations of history in general are based on a premise, set out in the epigraph of his first thesis in 1946: knowing man only through his material dimension is insufficient, for he is also made up of a rich spiritual fabric, composed of instincts, feelings and emotions. At a time when economic history was beginning to be highly valued and Brazil was discovering economic science and investing in development, Eduardo França was not only working on a topic of political history, Portuguese royal power, but also affirming his interest in the integral dimension of man, demonstrating to Lucien Febvre a psychological empathy with his behaviour. Just as he considered history from a cognitive point of view to be a whole that could not be fragmented into subspecialties, he also saw the historical process as something integrated, in which a particular section defined on the basis of a problem would only be fruitful if it recovered the set of relationships it raised. This conviction runs through his work and can be found in both his theses and in his study on the "betrayal" of the New Christians in 1624 (1970), in relation to the Dutch invasion of Bahia.

The way he approaches historical phenomena is evident in both theses. In *O poder real em Portugal e as*



origens do absolutismo [Royal Power in Portugal and the Origins of Absolutism], the context is that of royalty over three centuries, including its attributes, conception and evolution, and the problem to be addressed is that of centralisation, especially in the 15th century. In Portugal na época da Restauração, the subject is that “man of his time,” marked by a historical “that is unique to him, living in a century in which the Baroque characterises all elements and manifestations; a Baroque that is in turn set in Portugal and marked by the circumstances of the Restoration. Men, ideas and beliefs move in this context, which appears in all manifestations of the “restorers” of 1640. In both cases, the dynamic par excellence lies in the “problems” – centralisation, the “revolution” of independence – which move within the limits imposed by the broader framework. Everything is precociously structural, before the concept and the word became fashionable.

In *O poder real em Portugal e as origens do absolutismo* [Royal Power in Portugal and the Origins of Absolutism] (1946), the central character is the monarchy between the 12th and 15th centuries, considered in its transformations throughout the period, in its institutional features (defence, justice, administration, political action) and in the political ideas that legitimised it. It appears at the centre of conflicts, whose common thread is “a constant tendency towards centralisation through the continuous repression of the privileged classes”. The monarchy thus appears in successive centralising avatars even with the Burgundy dynasty, accentuated with the Aviz dynasty, “of democratic and bourgeois origin”, as emphasised by Portuguese historiography at the time, until it reached absolutism proper with King João II, an admirer and emulator of his contemporary Louis XI. Portugal at the time of the Restoration (1951) already had the cultural focus that had always interested the author. Its central character is the 17th-century Portuguese man, a choice justified by his being the predecessor of the Brazilian man who would come to be formed in the following centuries. The work has three parts, the Baroque century, the man of the Restoration and the revolution of 1640, which at first glance could evoke Braudel’s tripartite division of his then recently published thesis on The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II. This association is only formal, because the subject matter of Eduardo França’s book brings it closer to the social psychology of Lucien Febvre, with its characterisation of the “baroque man”, strongly marked by what the author calls the “aristocratism and anti-bourgeois mentality” of 17th-century Portuguese society. The revolution of 1640 was thus not similar to that of England in 1688, but rather a “happy Fronde,” with a weak bourgeoisie and an exhausted people. The theme of the absence of a strong bourgeoisie in Portugal is not only found in this thesis, but is recurrent in his analyses of Portugal and Brazil, reflecting itself in the guidelines given to his students for over forty years.

Other topics deserved his attention in smaller works. One problem: the betrayal of the New Christians in 1624 is a study in which the main character, the New Christian, appears as the modern social agent, capitalist par excellence, flexible, transnational and supra-religious, based on “business strategy” rather than on the Iberian, Catholic or Calvinist ties that were dominant in colonial Bahia at the time of the Dutch invasion. An analysis of the sources for the study of urban history is a pretext for highlighting the importance of the city for different civilisations, considering the variation in city models, the “man vs. nature” duel to explain it, Spanish and Portuguese urbanism in the peninsula and in America and, in the Brazilian case, the “fiction” of rural vs. urban antagonism. At a time (the 1970s) when the importation of the concept of



plantation to explain large rural properties was successful in Brazil, França opposed it with that of fazenda, based not only on a view of history and sources, but also on his personal experience as a former member of one of these communities.

The intellectual influences on Eduardo d'Oliveira França's historical production were twofold. Methodologically, he was the Brazilian disciple of the first two generations of the *Annales*, that of Bloch-Febvre and that of Braudel, more of the former than the latter. To this can be added some Weberian influence, more indirect than direct, and that of Simmel. His doubts about what he considered sociological generalisations, expressed in his study on the cultural function of history, explain a certain distance from sociology and sociologists, which is evident in his contact with the works of Gilberto Freire and Oliveira Viana, from whom he draws on the theory of miscegenation in Brazilian culture and the role of the 'capitão-mor regente' in colonial municipalities, respectively. Historiographically, his pillars rested on the Portuguese historiographical tradition, due to the very theme of his main works, and on French historiography, not only that of the *Annales*, but also that of the representatives of the previous generation, whose synthesis was expressed in the three great university collections, *L'Évolution de l'Humanité*, *Peuples et Civilisations* and *Clio*.

France's presence was marked in different fields. At the University, without prejudice to his administrative work, he was above all a professor of popular classes and a sought-after thesis advisor, a task in which he particularly enjoyed himself. In the field of historiography, contributing to bringing to Brazil the problematising view of the *Annales* group, he played an important role in affirming history as a science of man and in rejecting deterministic and schematic views. As a researcher primarily concerned with Brazil, he was interested in understanding the unique characteristics of Brazilian society, rather than simply reproducing imported models. This is why he valued the historical situations mentioned above, such as the fazenda, which he refused to reduce to the American plantation or the Castilian hacienda, and the institutional figure of the capitão-mor regente, which he did not see occurring in Portugal.

His repeated assertion that history was the "science of man" embedded a humanistic and democratic perspective. His deep identification with the University of São Paulo reflected not only a scientific, cultural and educational ideal, but also a political one, which mobilised the elites and intellectuals of São Paulo after the defeat of the Constitutionalist Revolution of 1932, in which the young França participated as a soldier, to found the University as a reaction to the status quo in the country.

Eduardo d'Oliveira França participated in scientific institutions such as the Instituto de Estudos Valeparaibanos [Institute of Valeparaibanos Studies], the Sociedade Brasileira de Pesquisa História [Brazilian Society for Historical Research], the Associação Nacional de Professores Universitários de História [National Association of University Professors of History], the Instituto Histórico e Geográfico de São Paulo [Historical and Geographical Institute of São Paulo], the Academia Paulista de História [Paulista Academy of History], the Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro [Brazilian Historical and Geographical Institute], and the Academia Portuguesa da História [Portuguese Academy of History].



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