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RODRIGUES, José Maria (Gondim, Valença, 27-6-1857- Lisbon, 20-1-1942)

Born in Gondim, in Minho, the son of farmers, José Maria Rodrigues began his studies late. It was only in 1866, thanks to an inheritance from Brazil, that he had his first teacher, in Valença – Canon Vaz, whose lessons prepared him for the primary school exam (12 May 1870) and for admission to secondary school (2 July 1870). JMR took all these exams in Braga, the city where he would enter the seminary and where, in 1880, he was ordained a priest. He immediately became chaplain at the University of Coimbra, where he had begun studying law in 1878. The reason why he abandoned it in 1881 to study theology is a matter of speculation. What is certain is that he was an award-winning student, with texts readily published in *Civilização Católica* (1881-1882); a polemicist with Camilo Castelo Branco in 1882-1883; author of a dissertation on “Positivism and Morality”, published in *O Instituto* between 1884 and 1885, as well as a bold intervention with regal connotations, which was censored by the Roman Congregation of the Holy Office but refined by influential figures from his alma mater and soon – with sponsorship? – published (*A Faculdade de Theologia e As Doutrinas que Ella Ensina*, 1886); doctorate on 5 February 1888, JMR thus auspiciously completed the first stage of his life’s journey, which later extended to Lisbon.

In Coimbra, after obtaining his doctorate, JMR became a substitute lecturer and secretary of the *Faculdade de Teologia* [School of Theology]. He was also librarian at the University. Teaching at a higher level was not his first experience in education, nor would it prevent him from gaining further experience. Enjoying the trust of Jaime Moniz, JMR not only collaborated in defining the plan for the reform of secondary education (1895), but, at the invitation of the Minister of the Kingdom, João Franco, he was called upon to play a key role in its implementation. Between 1895 and 1902, JMR was headmaster of the Carmo secondary school, and the impression he made in this role led to another appeal, which he accepted: to be tutor in Latin and Portuguese to Prince Luís Filipe and his brother, the future Manuel II.

Publications from this period include “A Universidade Lisboa-Coimbra. Capítulo de uma Obra Alemã Traduzido e anotado” [The University of Lisbon-Coimbra. Chapter from a German Work, Translated and Annotated] and “Nota sobre o ensino do hebreu em Portugal na actualidade” [Note on the Teaching of Hebrew in Portugal Today] (Congresso Pedagógico Hispano-Portuguez-Americano. Portuguese Section, 1892). In his reports on the work he had carried out or his reflections on what he considered important, JMR

often emphasised the importance of history. We see him lamenting, in contrast to “more advanced countries”, the absence of Portuguese scholars in the Vatican archives, open for consultation since 1880 (“Note on the need for research concerning the history of Portugal to be carried out in the Vatican Archives”, 1892). In addition to a patriotism perhaps wounded and exacerbated by the crisis of 1890 (“And what have we Portuguese done? Nothing – sad to say” – p. 9), concrete arguments support his discourse: “Among the publications subsidised by the Portuguese government, there are mainly two that will remain incomplete if no research is carried out in the Vatican archives. I refer to *Portugaliae Monumenta historica* and *Corpo diplomatico portuguez*.” (p. 10). Perhaps for this reason, and perhaps because he did not allow such care to be forgotten, JMR was chosen in 1914 to explore the famous archives during the 1915-1916 academic year, looking for documentation involving Portugal’s relations with the Holy See. The Great War, however, ruined this project.

At the turn of the 20th century, JMR was more optimistic when it came to education. In “L’Instruction Secondaire en [sic] Portugal” (1900), backed by French and German authorities, he was proud to follow “les principes de la pédagogie moderne” (p. 16), and emphasised, in particular, the programme and methodology of history: “L’enseignement de l’histoire doit être donné de façon à développer chez les élèves l’intelligence, l’imagination et la volonté morale, le sentiment artistique, le sens historique et l’amour de la patrie et de l’humanité.” (p. 14). In 1903, in a “propaganda” conference given at the Centro Regenerador Liberal (founded by João Franco), he insisted on the idea that “the material prosperity and political preponderance of a people depend essentially on their instruction and education.” “Without popular instruction and education, there can be no public opinion, and without public opinion, liberal institutions are fatally condemned to remain mere fiction.” He warned, advocating as decisive “an intellectually complete, easily accessible and morally vigorous secondary education system.” (“National education and instruction. [...]”. *Diário Illustrado. Regenerador-Liberal*, 21-6-1903, f. 1).

After completing his mission as rector of the Carmo secondary school in 1902, JMR chose to settle in Lisbon, where he devoted himself to teaching Latin philology at the Higher School of Letters. The ties that continued to bind him to the Faculdade de Teologia [School of Theology] were severed on 19 April 1911, under the Republic, when the school was closed and the Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Coimbra [School of Arts of the University of Coimbra], then newly created, sought to absorb its teaching staff. JMR preferred to follow the metamorphosis of the Higher Course in Arts and Humanities, becoming, in June 1911, a professor at the also new Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa [School of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon]. He would retire there as a professor in October 1927. The relationships he established and the recognition he received are evidenced by the title of Doctor Honoris Causa, awarded by the University of Coimbra, and the decoration as Grand Officer of the Order of Instruction, both in 1922. No less eloquent is his connection to guilds and academies: for example, the Barbosa Machado Society of Bibliophiles and the Academy of Sciences, where he was a full member of the History section and, between 1925 and 1927, president of the Literature class. During these decades, his bibliographical output was

copious, in which three areas of interest stand out, often intertwined: History, Philology and Camonology.

With *Os Lusíadas* – JMR liked to recall – “one does not only learn to love one’s country and, as a consequence, to make every effort to make it worthy of the consideration of other countries. Through them, we also learn how a nation sinks and perishes.” (“Inaugural Lecture of the Chair of Camonian Studies”, 1927, p. 80). In honouring the memory of Prince Luís Filipe, JMR emphasised that he had undertaken “his Camonian studies” (“*Camões e a Infanta D. Maria*”, 1910). Without lying, he could add that this would be the predominant direction of his work. In 1905, *Fontes dos Lusíadas* was published – the result of a positivist effort, based on the conviction that comparing the poet’s text with its hypothetical or actual sources would allow for a better understanding and, eventually, the correction of errors that affected it. Petrarca, Boccaccio, Ariosto and Marcantonio Sabellico are brought into the discussion, as well as national authors and a variety of genres. In the epic, JMR emphasised, Camões wanted to preserve, “as in a museum, many particularities of grammatical construction, phonetics, metre, spelling, etc., which he found in the Portuguese books that served as his sources.” (“Pontos de contacto entre A linguagem do «D. Quixote» e a de «Os Lusíadas»”, 1931, p. 14). All details were therefore worthy of attention. Hence contributions such as “Two verses from *Os Lusíadas*” (1911), “Some observations on an annotated edition of *Os Lusíadas*” (1915) and “Notes for a critical and annotated edition of *Os Lusíadas*” (1920). Animated, in some respects, by a spirit of controversy, these articles are examples of micro-reading or of a scholastic practice that JMR extended to his editions of Camões’ epic: the 1921 facsimile edition and the 1928 edition with modernised spelling. Produced “for the love of Portugal and the poem”, this “National Edition” was the result of a partnership with Afonso Lopes Vieira.

A symbolic award, JMR had already had the privilege, in 1925, of inaugurating the chair of Camonian Studies at the Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa [School of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon] (and would retain this position after his retirement). It was like the conversion and consecration of the free courses he had been offering. And although he asserted that the chair seemed destined for Carolina Michaëlis de Vasconcelos, he sought to emphasise the distance that separated him from the “Master”. In his preface to *A intercultura de Portugal e Espanha no passado e no futuro. Conferência plenária []* (1921), the “illustrious professor” applauded those who, in establishing “facts, replace fanciful legends and arbitrary interpretations with documented history” (p. XV); “Hispanophile” (p. XIV), she repudiated the “timid distrust with which many would wish to close the borders to prevent foreign infiltration, for fear that it might denationalise literature” (p. XXXIV). Was he merely targeting Teófilo Braga? At the other end of the spectrum, the “Inaugural Lecture of the Chair of Camonian Studies” was an affirmation by a determined JMR to “investigate” Camões’ love affairs (p. 90) and to protest: “Camões is, from the first to the last stanza of his poem, the singer of the Portuguese homeland, the singer of the *Lusíadas*, and not of the Iberians or the Hispanics. The *Lusíadas* are solely and exclusively the Portuguese political Bible.” (1927, p. 79).

JMR does not usually offer extensive praise to his peers. Yes, he takes pleasure in saluting figures such as Afrânio Peixoto and Francisco Rodríguez Marín. In his “Inaugural Lecture”, he pays “tribute to [his]



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boundless admiration” for Carolina Michaëlis and, without glossing over their differences, evokes Teófilo Braga and Epifânio Dias as “two notable masters” (1927, p. 68). In articles in memoriam, he praises Luciano Pereira da Silva (1927) and once again praises Carolina Michaëlis, but the orientation of this text is symptomatic (“D. Carolina Michaëlis e os Estudos Camonianos”, 1927). JMR is torn, on the one hand, between the desire to have the authority of the highly prestigious philologist on his side and, on the other hand, a tension that he cannot or does not want to hide in his references to “foreign Camonists” (especially Wilhelm Storck) who, “to our shame”, point out in Camões’ work “crass errors” (p. 47) committed in its transmission: “It was from Germany – it is not very flattering for us to have to admit it, but justice demands it – it was from Germany that the reaction against this incredible lack of critical sense came” (p. 53). Had it happened earlier, perhaps the arrival on the scene of Afonso Lopes Vieira might have mitigated divisions and brought JMR and Carolina Michaëlis closer together. In this supporter of Lusitanian Integralism, JMR gained a “valuable collaborator” from the mid-1920s onwards. It was a turbulent period, with no shortage of critics – some eager for controversy, such as A. Sousa Gomes, who was adamant that *Ilha dos Amores* was set in the Azores (Hernâni Cidade, “Estudos Camonianos. A última polémica do Prof. José Maria Rodrigues” [Camões Studies. The latest controversy involving Prof. José Maria Rodrigues]).

JMR did not shy away from controversy. Nor did he renounce his “sacred right of defence” (*A Faculdade de Theologia* [...], 1886, p. 9) or dispense with “being the last to speak”, knowing that this could be the “definitive criterion of victory” (“Episódios da «Questão da Sebenta»”, 1934, p. 9). In Coimbra, in 1882-1883, he dared to engage in a verbal duel with Camilo, who (counterattacking Dr. Avelino César Calisto for the remarks that his *Sebenta de Direito Eclesiástico Português* [Portuguese Ecclesiastical Law Textbook] addressed to the *Perfil do Marquês de Pombal* [Profile of the Marquis of Pombal]) had questioned the notion of papal infallibility. Newly qualified as a doctor in 1889, he persevered in his challenge in *A Faculdade de Theologia e As Doutrinas que Ella Ensina: além d’ A Sagrada Congregação do Concílio* [The School of Theology and the Doctrines it Teaches: beyond the Sacred Congregation of the Council] (a work condemned by the Roman Holy Office), and published *A Verdade* [The Truth]. This was a periodical publication of which he was the sole editor and which, in its two short-lived issues, attacked the alleged interference of the Bishop-Count, D. Manuel de Bastos Pina, in the Academy. JMR argued that this supervision was the responsibility of the State.

After decades of relative peace, his combative streak resurfaced (mere coincidence?) with his retirement. It is likely that it was on the author’s initiative that the investigation reports requested by the Most Reverend Dr. José Maria Rodrigues were published. (1928) – a twenty-two-page pamphlet clearing the stain spread by António Cabreira, who had raised suspicions in the newspaper *Os Ridículos* that “a certain priest, well known for his erudition and very solemn demeanour” (p. 4), was a Freemason. Almost Quierosian – almost another episode in romantic life – the case reveals the contradictory nature of a society that so quickly displays tensions but, in the face of the Church or a disciplinary authority, regains the appearance of harmony. In fact, everything is cleared up with retractions: it was a misunderstanding, in the aftermath of debates about the



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Miracle of Ourique; it was the remnants of “academic quarrels that caused a certain bitterness” (Autos..., p. 13).

Among the discussions held in the public arena, echoed in newspapers and journals, two stand out. In response to the challenge posed by Gago Coutinho, who, at a session of the Academy of Sciences, refuted interpretations published in the “National Edition” of *Os Lusíadas* (1928), JMR countered with “The double route of Vasco da Gama in *Os Lusíadas*, V, 4-13, and the objections of Mr Almirante Gago Coutinho” (1929). Then, in successive replies over a period of five years, a tug-of-war ensued. Without changing his arguments, JMR grew impatient and, defending “For the fourth time, Vasco da Gama’s double route in *Os Lusíadas*” (1932), he ironically remarked: “When I write my pamphlet For the fifteenth time, Vasco da Gama’s double route in *Os Lusíadas*, I will still be obliged to repeat to the Admiral what I am now saying for the third time” (p. 18). His calculation was excessive, but the dispute grew until “For the sixth time, Vasco da Gama’s double route in *Os Lusíadas*, V, 4-13” (1934).

According to JMR, a process of contamination can be detected in *Os Lusíadas*: when narrating the beginning of Gama’s journey, Camões sometimes suggests the route indicated in 16th-century historiography (Lisbon, east of the Canary Islands, Santiago), and sometimes an alternative based on what he had empirically witnessed (Lisbon, Madeira, Cape Verde). To the question “How does the Poet attribute to Vasco da Gama what happened to himself?” (“The double route of Vasco da Gama in *Os Lusíadas*, V, 4-13 [...]”, 1929, p. 15), JMR, supported by both chronicles and itineraries and by his analysis of the epic verses, replies: “What would not be permitted to a historian, Camões was able to do as a poet.” (p. 20). This Aristotelian distinction between the fields and codes of the poet and the historian, which was peremptory with regard to epic poetry, was erased by JMR when he turned his attention to lyric poetry, whose “reality” he firmly believed in. Based on this belief, shared, incidentally, by contemporaries such as Teófilo Braga and Wilhelm Storck, poetry was synonymous with “autobiographical document,” and “to have the key to Camões’ love life” was to have “the key to the exegesis of most of his rhymes” (“D. Carolina Michaëlis e os Estudos Camonianos”, 1927, p. 56). With this interpretation in mind, JMR constructed an obsessive “thesis”, which he proclaimed in “Camões e a Infanta D. Maria” (“The ardent passion of the mad poet for the beautiful, educated and serious daughter of the fortunate king constitutes, as one might assume a priori, the culminating point of his tormented life.” – 1910, p. 5); a “thesis” reiterated even when new elements, gleaned from old manuscripts, disturbed it. How to reconcile the Camões of high love with the Camões of letters that revealed him to be a “chronicler of beatings” and “historian of the deeds of creatures whom he himself calls ‘freshwater nymphs’ and ‘ladies for hire’”? (“Commentary on the unpublished letter”, 1925, p. 151). Fabricating falls and redemptions, crimes and punishments, JMR refuses to give up on the “Infanta thesis”, which pervades everything he writes, whether it be the text sent to the Portuguese Exhibition in Seville () (1929), the chapter in Albino Forjaz Sampaio’s *História da Literatura Portuguesa Ilustrada* (1930), or short articles that promise, auspiciously, the unfolding of a novel: “Camões. The love crisis in Ceuta and its consequences” (1930), “Camões’ exile to the Moluccas” (1934) or “Camões: His declarations of love to the Infanta D. Maria and the



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consequences that ensued” (1938).

JMR was well aware that, within the context of classicising poetics, imitation and emulation of models would be crucial. He sporadically recalls Petrarch or Sannazzaro. However, he superimposed this awareness with a fascination for *imitatio vitae*. And because, in his eyes, lyric poetry mirrors life and Camões sings nothing but “pure truths”, he subordinated the architecture of *Lírica* to the “Infanta thesis” – an edition he vainly dubbed “critical” and which once again enjoyed the cooperation of Afonso Lopes Vieira (1932). If the ambition to reconstruct “a kind of vivid diary” required the elimination of apocrypha accumulated over centuries, the vague and impressionistic nature of the selection process (“we subjected each composition to the triple criterion of quality of language, psychological meaning and intrinsic value” – p. XXX) creates a vicious circle: underlying the selection and validating it, the “Infanta thesis”... António Sérgio, Alfredo Pimenta and Domingos Maurício, S.I., spoke out against this biographism. JMR reacted in “A tese da Infanta nas *Líricas* de Camões. With a letter from Afonso Lopes Vieira” (1933). True to form, he remained unshaken, without questioning the subjective arbitrariness of the conjectures that led him to play with the texts as if they were pieces of a puzzle or evidence of a conspiracy.

JMR was not a historian. We can also see this in the works that most directly fit into this genre: an edition, in which he intervened as a philologist (*Registos Paroquiais da Sé de Tânger*, 1922); occasional interventions, where his desire to highlight Portugal shines through, such as “A propósito do Descobrimento da Austrália pelos Portugueses” (1931). JMR is someone who does not dismiss history as a discipline and noble knowledge, on a par with philology or geography, and an aid to understanding literature. However, his own historicity can blind him, as in “On the interpretation of a passage from ‘Os Lusíadas’ (I, 6-7)” (1930). That, in the dedication of the epic, D. Sebastião is the “fatal wonder of our age, / Given to the world by God, who commands all” (I, 6), seems to him an editorial error. Locked in his worldview; oblivious to what, in the panegyric rhetoric of the proem, infringed on his *doxa*; despising the historical dimension of the idea of the Fifth Empire, JMR classifies as “nonsense” (p. 19) a reading that attributed to Camões “what simple common sense would not allow him to write, that is, that Dom Sebastião was given to the world by God to rule the whole world” (p. 18).

It was the measurement of the past by present criteria that led JMR to draw erroneous conclusions, and paradoxically it was his commitment to considering literature as a historical phenomenon, rooted in an “biographical reality, that led him to the greatest of mistakes. The weaknesses of his work serve as a warning to all, including historians.

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