

# DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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**Aubin, Jean** (Ligugé, 1927 – Jumelles, 1998)

Born into a family of printers and publishers (Aigle, “L’oeuvre de Jean Aubin (1927-1998) et l’histoire globale”, 2018:11), Jean Aubin was born in 1927 in the town of Ligugé – Nouvelle Aquitaine, in central France. After studying languages such as Dutch, Hungarian and Swedish during his adolescence, he graduated from the École Nationale des Langues Orientales in Paris (1945-1948) where he learned Turkish, Arabic and Persian, eventually specialising in Iranian history and culture.

A scholarship holder at the University of Tehran in 1948-1949, Aubin joined the Institut franco-iranien d’Iranologie (1950-1955) the following year as an associate researcher. During this first long stay in Iran, the young historian focused his research on the country’s medieval history and the Turkish-Mongol invasions, consulting a large number of chronicles and archives. He also examined the position of medieval Iran as a civilisation situated “at the crossroads of the Mediterranean world, Asia and the Indian world” (Jean Aubin, “Liminaire”, in: *Le Monde iranien et l’Islam*, 1971: p. VIII). Between the late 1940s and the early 1950s, Aubin thus laid the theoretical foundations for a historiographical method “based both on a broad geopolitical vision and on the critical study of sources” (Geneviève Bouchon, “Introduction”, in: *Le Latin et l’Astrolabe*, 2000: p.10). Ultimately, before becoming one of the leading international researchers on the Portuguese empire in India, Aubin established himself as a pioneer of historical studies on medieval Iran in France.

Particularly concerned with examining and publishing unpublished primary sources related to the period of Aq Qoyunlu rule or the expansion of the Safavid empire, Jean Aubin published, in his first two decades of research, reference works such as *Note sur quelques documents Aq Qoyunlu* (1956), *Note préliminaire sur les archives du Takya du Tchîma-rûd* (1955), and *Matériaux pour la biographie de Shâh Ni’matullah Walî Kermânî* (1956). Gradually broadening the scope of his research to encompass the entire Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean region in the late Middle Ages, Aubin also studied the formation of a diaspora of Iranian merchants and diplomats in the region. In this way, in addition to being the leading researcher in Persian studies in France, Aubin became, as historian Denise Aigle points out, one of the French representatives of “connected history” (Aigle, “L’oeuvre de Jean Aubin (1927-1998) et l’histoire globale,” 2018:13). It was this characteristic that gradually led him to take an interest in the Portuguese presence in India.

However, after returning from his first long stay in Iran (1948-1955), Jean Aubin joined the Oriental Languages and Civilisations section of the prestigious Centre National de Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) in



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1956. In parallel with new research conducted in Tehran, the young researcher's connection to the CRNS allowed him to spend time in other countries. This was the case in Portugal, which he visited for the first time in 1959 to consult archives related to the city of Ormuz, about which he had written a first article in 1953. Aubin thus began to visit the Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo [National Archives of the Torre do Tombo] (ANTT) on a regular and lengthy basis, where he became acquainted with the director at the time, José Pereira da Costa, and also with the historians Luís de Albuquerque and Avelino Teixeira Mota.

Alongside these numerous trips to Lisbon and his position as a researcher at the CNRS, Aubin was elected director of research at the École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE) in 1963, where he taught the history of Iran and the Portuguese empire in Asia until the end of his career in 1994. He also became one of the leading speakers at the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's Cultural Centre in Paris. There, alongside numerous lectures given at Portuguese universities, he consolidated the advent of a "young school of Portuguese orientalists" (Aubin, *Le Latin et L'Astrolabe.I*, 1996: 9). Notable figures in this "school" included Dejanirah Couto and Jacques Paviot in France and, later in Portugal, Jorge Flores, Jorge Manuel dos Santos Alves and José Alberto Tavim, among other researchers trained directly or indirectly by Aubin. In their own way, they all shared the French historian's conception and methodology based on "a broad geopolitical vision and the use of primary sources, which he subjected to particularly rigorous scrutiny" (Couto, "Jean Aubin, *Le latin et l'astrolabe*, 2001: p. 728), made possible by his perfect knowledge of the various working languages.

Finally, Aubin's institutional and teaching career was marked by his participation, alongside Teodoro de Matos, in the creation of the Centre for Overseas History (CHAM) at the New University of Lisbon (UNL), and by his appointment in 1986, and without prejudice to his duties at the CNRS and EPHE, as director of research at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS), where he created the Centre d'Études Portugaises in 1992. On the other hand, he never ceased to maintain his privileged relationship with the Portuguese Cultural Centre of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in Paris, where he also established ties of friendship with Vitorino de Pina Martins, José Augusto França and Maria de Lourdes Belchior, three historical directors of the Centre. At the Foundation in Paris, in addition to his numerous lectures and conferences, the historian organised several international colloquiums dedicated to Portugal's maritime expansion.

Regarding this Lusophile facet of Aubin's work, it should be noted that, after having "entered the Portuguese world through Ormuz" (Aubin, *Le Latin et L'Astrolabe.I*, 1996: 9) and having explored countless diplomatic archives written in Eastern languages that he could decipher at the Torre do Tombo, being at the time the only researcher able to do so, Aubin established himself in the 1960s as one of the leading scholars of the "mare luso-inducum" (Ibid.). His purpose was, as he explained in 1996, "to clarify knowledge of the countries of the Indian Ocean in the dual light of Islamic sources and the dormant mass of Portuguese archives" (Ibid.). For Aubin, it was also a question of studying Portuguese society and "Portugal's place in Europe around the 1500s" (Ibid.) because, also in his words, "conventional historiography had led to the neglect of the study of [Portuguese] political society at the time of the Discoveries" (Ibid.).



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This line of research, combined with his method of “systematically comparing the chronicles with data from different archive documents” (Geneviève Bouchon, “Introduction”, in: *Le Latin et l’Astrolabe*, 2000: p.10), enabled Aubin to make an important contribution to political and social studies of the reign of King Manuel I through articles that broadened and renewed knowledge about historical figures such as Duarte Galvão, Vasco da Gama and Damião de Góis. All these figures from 15th and 16th century Portugal thus appeared in our historiography “from a new perspective, with their families, possessions, prestige for services rendered or secrets of their past” (Ibid.). The book *Le Latin et L’Astrolabe* (1996-2006), published on the initiative of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the National Commission for the Commemoration of the Discoveries, is fundamental in this regard for gauging the exhaustive work carried out by Aubin in the archives of the Portuguese court and nobility.

The first two volumes of the work bring together all the articles written by the historian since 1959 on the history of Portugal in India, while the third volume, published posthumously in 2006 and organised by Luís Filipe Tomaz, brings together Aubin’s studies dedicated to King João II, as well as the opening chapters of the biography of King Manuel I, which the scholar was unable to finish as he passed away in 1998. Finally, *Le Latin et L’Astrolabe* also illustrates Aubin’s constant interest in the comparative history of the Persian Empire and the Luso-Indian world, an interest that led him to create the journals *Mare Luso-Indicum* (1971-1980) and *Le Monde Iranien et l’Islam* (1971-1974). In this way, in addition to his decisive contribution to studies on the Portuguese presence in India, Aubin explored and demonstrated the undeniable capacity of Portuguese archives and chronicles to account for social and economic realities that escape Eastern sources and, in doing so, “provide a more accurate picture of the religious and political expansion of Islam in the Indian Ocean countries, of which the Portuguese were prolific witnesses” (Ibid.).

More specifically, regarding Aubin’s studies related to Portuguese India, we should emphasise that they revealed, from the perspective of “the journey of men, the history of events and ideals” (Couto, “Jean Aubin”, 2001: p. 728), the conditions that led to the formation of the first European empire in Asia in the decisive years of 1505-1520. We refer, for example, to the study of the ideological influence of Duarte Galvão at the court of King Manuel and the awakening of Manueline imperial messianism (Aubin, “Duarte Galvão”, in: *Le Latin et L’Astrolabe.I*, 1996: pp.11-48). Or the defeat of Afonso de Albuquerque in Aden in Yemen, after the conquest of Ormuz, Goa and Malacca, and also the influence exerted on the governor by his Castilian Jewish secretaries, Francisco de Albuquerque and Alexandre de Ataíde. (Id., “Albuquerque et les négociations de Cambaye” and “Francisco de Albuquerque”, in: *Le Latin et L’Astrolabe.II*, 2000: pp.197-250 and pp.251-279). We should also highlight Aubin’s decisive contribution to our knowledge of the history of the Portuguese settlement (1503-1504) on the Malabar Coast, based in Cochin, and the decisive role played in this process by the navigator, military man and “wise cosmographer” (Id., “Les frustrations de Duarte Pacheco Pereira”, in: *Revista de História da Universidade de Coimbra*, no. XXXVI, 1991, pp. 181-204), Duarte Pacheco Pereira.

Furthermore, Aubin’s interest in Duarte Pacheco, author of the famous treatise *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis* (1508), “a compendium of mathematical erudition and the art of navigation, but also an apologetic work on



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the royal policy of Portuguese expansion” (Couto, “Jean Aubin”, 2001: p. 728), would lead him to attach great importance to the presence of the Christian crusade ideology in the construction of the Portuguese State of India, as well as to the unavoidable connections between the history of Portuguese cities in India and that of Luso-Ethiopian relations. Aubin thus published innovative works on the Portuguese alliance with the Christian kingdom of Prester John in Ethiopia and the Portuguese ambition to dispute control of the Red Sea with the Ottoman Empire (Aubin, “L’ambassade de Prêtre Jean à D. Manuel” and “Le Prêtre Jean devant la Censure Portugaise”, in: *Le Latin et L’Astrolabe.I*, 1996: pp.133- 182 and pp.183-210).

Finally, we would like to highlight once again Jean Aubin’s unique ability to research Portuguese, Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Indian sources (Id., “Les documents arabes, persans et turcs de la Torre do Tombo”, in: *ibid.*, pp.417-454), which allowed the historian to demonstrate how the Portuguese history of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries is a singularly “connected” history, not only with Renaissance Europe, but also with the State of Gujarat (India) and the Persian Empire of the time.

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