

# DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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**LIMA, Sílvio Vieira Mendes** (Coimbra, 5 November 1904 – 6 January 1993)

Sílvio Lima was born into a minimally literate household, though his father, João Vieira Mendes Lima, had a good head for figures, and had had some success in trade and in the rice industry. This allowed the young Sílvio, unlike the older brothers in his extensive family, to undergo a rigorous education in the Colégio São Pedro, Coimbra, where he successfully prepared for entry into the university medical school. An incipient poet, he soon transferred to Philosophy, but at the ancient university he quickly distinguished himself as a student leader, as a republican and supporter of *Seara Nova*, active in the strike of 1926 and in the production of the periodicals *Humanidade* and *Gente Nova*. In philosophy and history of philosophy, he was an exceptional pupil of Joaquim de Carvalho (qv), the outstanding educator and historian of ideas in the first half of the twentieth century at the new Faculty of Letters, which was much affected, from 1932–34, by the rising climate of intellectual repression and extinction of freedom of thought. Sílvio Lima learned his master's lessons well, on himself being removed from the university for '*perturbing* the life of the nation', on 16 May 1935, under the terms of decree no. 25.317, which expelled thirty-three senior state and university functionaries, amongst them Aurélio Quintanilha, Abel Salazar, Rodrigues Lapa, and Norton de Matos. After his readmission, in 1942, he was also obstructed politically, by Salazar in person, despite the notable texts and theses he had produced and the remarkable teacher he proved to be, as a disciple of the Franco-Swiss 'new school', which brought him a teacher-training post in the Escola Normal Superior de Coimbra. He took premature retirement, in 1965, suffering from depression, practically giving up writing, apart from one text, which laid out his ethical testament, the *Carta aberta às universidades portuguesas* (1968). The text was censored, and was first published, along with a few other short commentaries, a few days after the revolution of 25 April 1974.

The remarkable position Sílvio Lemos occupies in the Portuguese historiography is not due only to his being a 'method' historian, as at the time was understood of the followers of positivism and neo-positivism methodologies of the French school of Langlois and Seignobos, or to his professional devotion to researches based on documents and archival material — he was primarily an essayist, philosopher, psychologist and epistemologist. His main contribution was the great innovation he brought into these areas in a Portuguese cultural context. After his pioneering study in Experimental Psychology, it was critical, speculative and hermeneutic enquiry that motivated him, that is, in his own words, to go from '*história de um pensamento que se procura*' for which he would engage with a) the great cultural and epistemological debates in Europe



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and wide areas of the history of philosophy (*Ensaio sobre a ética de Guyau*), exploring b) the historicity of concepts (*O problema da reconhecimento*, 1928), not specifically historiographical, but philosophical and psychological, in the heated contest between physiologism on the one hand and the tricky ahistorical psychologism of Bergson on the other. Furthermore, we owe to Sílvio Lima c) the first rigorous outline of the *História da Psicologia em Portugal* (1949) and d) the well-grounded critical survey of the reception (and position) of positivism in Portugal. His desire to explore the intrinsic novelty of the epistemological gaps that the return to the *philosophy of the subject* made possible would lead him to e) complex essays of the kind characteristic of António Sérgio and the *Seara Nova*, especially in the anthropology and sociology of sport (*Ensaio sobre o Desporto*, 1937; *Desporto, Jogo e Arte*, 1938; *Desportismo profissional. Desporto, trabalho e profissão*, 1939) and later to theorizing essayism itself (*Serão luxos a Ciência e a Arte?*, 1940), about which he would write a work of reference that surely remained the most important in the Iberian languages until the 1980s (*Ensaio sobre a essência do ensaio*, 1944; 2nd edn 1964). And one of the best texts of that time also came from his pen, f) making an evaluation of the wholesale laicization of the arts of philosophy and history, in their confrontation with the Freudian *sexualmonismus*, creating an ample historical, theoretical and empirical basis for building an Anthropology and Psychology of religions (*O Amor místico*, 1935) and for an understanding of the difficult secularization and laicization of the intelligentsia in the face of the growing and ubiquitous re clericalization of society and university, under the repressive and anti-modern cloak of the dictatorship and its pragmatic confessionism (*Notas críticas*, 1930; 2nd edn 1931). It is not surprising, therefore, that, on the civic level of the democratic opposition, he should attack the autotelic and autistic vision of the Estado Novo (in his courageous confrontation with the fascist advance in Europe), and with Raul Proença deconstruct the political panlogism, the *politique d'abord* conjugated in the most disparate idioms, as a private and totalizing dialect (*Quatro cartas sobre o idealism*, 1936). Finally, we should note in more detail g) his contribution to combatting various types of necessitarian and providentialist theories of history, along with teleological philosophies of history in the field of *historiology* (see 'A Historiologia de Sílvio Lima', in *Estudos em homenagem a João Francisco Marques*, 2003) in his *Determinismo, Acaso e Previsão na História* (1943) and in his *Lições in Theory of History* (1957–64) from Coimbra, promoting a comprehensivist paradigm and a historic hermeneutic that took time to triumph, let it be said, because the very postulates of the public *libertas philosophandi* and the essential civic requirement for democratic dialogue, starting on the university campus, were proscribed as the last circle of hell.

Let us follow Sílvio Lima's career in an attempt to appreciate the great coherence in his trajectory: a) as early as 1927, in his discussion of the *Ethics* of J.-M. Guyau and the 'contemporary moral crisis' he proposes an itinerary through neo-criticism and a return to the philosophies of the subject, particularly those of a neo-Kantian type followed by German idealism of Marburgo and Baden, and in the manner of Brunschwig (via J. de Carvalho and António Sérgio) he seeks the rational *conscience of oneself* (relational and dialogic, from the Fichtean dialectic of the *I / not-I*). This would be the gnosiological foundation for an appreciation of the movement of the world and of existence, taking as its corollary Cartesian rationalism, constructive, relational and epistemic, against the grain of popular and abbreviated versions of Aristotelic rationalism, taxonomic (or



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categorical) and ontological, which, by the theological hand of the neo-Tomist summa (particularly in the version of the *perennial philosophy*) and the empirical parallax of realism was washing over the university benches. And of course he rose up against the redemptory and messianic irrationalisms that in the 1920s and 30s were ploughing devastating chasms in Europe. In summary, the epistemic rule becomes normative over the course of his work: in calling the individual to the mobilizing space of the spirit, he is given a universalizing dimension that makes him communicate with the place of otherness, already his own, since the Socratic *kromenon*, the common utility or *common good* is 'to know in common'. For this reason he developed his ethics in the wider referential framework of the philosophy of history, of the effort to secularize knowledge, from the Greeks to Spinoza, from idealist rationalism to the recent discussions then going on in academic *fora*. The historicity of the *spiritus*, the correlated and diachronic cultural awareness, lead to the *superbiological* that the human is (if the bio-sociological determinism does not extend to the self-determination of the Being), an *emotional animal* who nevertheless dominates the Nature where he is created and revealed. As the only *historical animal*, Man *makes himself man*, he is an *automaton* of the *res publica* he inhabits and makes his own and from which he constructs his norms, within a free adherence to a *Lebensphilosophie*, a 'metaphysical hypothesis' (in Guyau's sense), upon whom only liberty confers the fullness of meaning and the only true moral criterion, in the optic of a secularizing world-view.

b) However, the clarification of his epistemic position was linked to his refutation of experimental psychology of a positivist character in the framework of the dominant scientism, of which the major proponent in Coimbra was the former theologian Alves dos Santos, director (from 1912) of the Laboratory of Experimental Psychology and a believer in methodologies inscribed within the horizon of psycho-physiology, associated functionally with pedagogy, in an unsustainable position that needed to harmonize idealism and empiro-criticism in an eclecticism of a positivist character. In a long study of recognition ('the affective stain of memory'), the doctoral thesis supervised by in Geneva (1928) by Édouard Claparède and H. Antipoff, he gives an account of the narrowness of naturalism and warns of the inadequacy of the sociological and positivist tenor of psychologism, that *attends* more to the metaphysical and monist root of the *species* or *human nature* than it *understands* the profound experimental novelty and individualizing epilogues (in 1946 he published a text that is a radical innovation in the psycho-sociological bibliography, *Normal, anormal e patológico*). He would conclude that it was inappropriate to quantify the *unquantifiable*, the freedom of the spirit, the Anterian *fact of conscience*, and so decided to devote more of his teaching efforts to the phenomenological investigation of the intentionality of conscious acts (Max Scheler), just as later, with a clearly *comprehensivist* seal, proximate to Jung and Jaspers, he would tackle perceptive theories of learning and the structuralist globalistic methods of *Gestalt* (Wertheimer, Köhler, Koffka). As he put it, 'the recognition of the categorical heterogeneity of the mechanical, the physical-chemical, the biological, the psychic, animic or the spiritual, for me is not the fruit of speculations upon the sphinx-like face of experience; I shall always remain unaware (because I am relative, human) of what are, ontologically, material, life, psyche, spirit' (OC II, 2002, p. 1508). The *esse* is metahistorical. By way of epistemic sequel: it is unthinkable to treat the



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historiographical object as a *thing*, if it is a *construct*, hence the need to refute the *ontologization* or ontological regionalization of Portuguese culture, of any culture, since only its historicity is graspable.

c) His position can be better understood when he traces the *História da Psicologia em Portugal* (1949), concluding that ‘today it can almost be affirmed, without humorous insights, that Portuguese psychology as pure psychology *starts ... by not existing*’, given over to amateurs, ‘doctors, psychiatrists, sociologists, philologists, pedagogues, and not properly to *professional* psychologists’, since ‘it will never be the “Diários do Governo” of any hue, party or sect that will produce by miraculous decrees the professionals of psychology’ (*idem*, pp. 1491–92). The poor research and scientific work in Portugal reflects the insufficiency of the means, and, above all, the feeble methodological support for the practice of psychology. The pedagogical advantage of this approach becomes clear, on denouncing the lack of an educational strategy: it is the school that must adapt itself to the individual, and not the contrary, as occurs in official, normative systems of public instruction, ‘stateocratic’ as he calls them. The concrete singularity of the individual — at the point, between the two craters of War, when the historic imposition of holism and of organic ‘totalities’ most belittles or suppresses the individual — persists at the kernel of the problem, not giving in to reassuring abstractions, at the same time that diachronic excursions, mostly in conceptual historiography or the history of ideas, frame ‘pure theory’. In summary, it is the capture of temporality as the milestone of the *humanus* that he treats in most detail: the epistemic *vis* followed validates both the *historical animal* as Subject and the *historic* hue of the transdisciplinary complex — which Sílvio Lima practises in a pioneering way — of humanistic studies. In other words, only History (and especially the History of ideas) as an explicative essay and a scientific discipline, in close dialogue with Philosophy, can confederate the plurilateral and multiple dialogue of the different social sciences. *Magister vitae*.

d) In all of this, Sílvio Lima demonstrates how the admission of the criteria of *positivity* (the attention to quantitative data obtained from real life, elaborated qualitatively according to the interpretative method of J. de Carvalho) is distinguishable from positivist prejudices. While admiring him as one of the theoretical constructors of Modernity, the cutting criticism that he employs, in following the historical reception in Portugal of the author of *Course in Positivist Philosophy*, of his absurd negation of the psychological dimension to the gnosiological problem, his denial of the introspective moment, accusing him of physiological reductionism and a rejection of the subjective dimension of knowledge (offspring of ‘dogmatic *psychological objectification*’, *idem*, p. 1529 ff), illuminates Sílvio Lima’s own historiography, and his way of thinking about the historical being, expelling also the *sociological objectification* where the *endo-structure* of the Being is nullified ‘as a scholastic-metaphysical nothing’, fruit of the ‘dictatorial annulation of “interiority”’ (*idem*, p. 1531). This is of some relevance, as the admission of such suppositions would lead to the naturalist *objectification* of the fact (including the historical fact), without acknowledging that this is already a product of earlier theoretical elaboration that expresses, frames, describes, analyses and interprets it.

e) In historicizing the idea of the ‘essay’ and the *praxis* of the essay, not as a literary ‘genre’ but as a way of philosophizing, Sílvio Lima establishes the diachronism of critical rationalism and the real genealogy of the concept of liberty, since *it is thinking that makes the being free* (*idem*, p. 1308). It could be said he rewrote



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an ample chapter of the history of ideas that he had researched with clear results in 1927 and 1928. By exploring the Cartesian principle of uncertainty, the accidental and the contingent, and the gnosiological assumption of doubt, in debating the normative logic in the critical analysis of historiography, he invalidates the systematic panlogism (*dogmapatia*) and the 'hidden circularities' (*normapatia*) of the *end of History*, restoring the relativist indifference towards prognostic logic (and ensuing ideological syntaxes) that in speculative nexuses of causality or sequence deduce logical links that the logicity of a historiographical episteme does not support. He summarizes this in 1943, writing that 'the *physis* of Newton and Laplace is not ... human nature; the brute masses gravitating in space are not ... the men on the stage of Life and History'. An important lesson that he will theorize in the 1950s.

f) The secularization of the functioning of critical historiography and of all intellectual and scientific labour, drawing on the exemplary work of Herculano, is solidly endorsed by Sílvio Lima in *Notas críticas ao Livro do Sr. Cardeal Gonçalves Cerejeira 'A Igreja e o Pensamento Contemporâneo'* — generating the last religious polemic before the 25 April — by supporting a very close documentary examination of the sources that reveals a historical analysis of the inter- and intra-confessional conflicts, when, within a single religion, sects and orthodoxies oppose one another. Even today, they are brilliant pages for those concerned with the history of religious ideas and of *civil intolerance*, or with those cults and manifestations of heterodoxy within a society in which 'the Inquisition, burning [at the stake], religious censorship, in a word, the Counter-reformation was sacrificing its expression'. Refuting arguments that take dogma and subjective faith as *facts*, and religious belief as scientific *authority*, Sílvio Lima, following in the footsteps of Herculano, dismisses their retrospective and omniscient illusion, staking out History according to internal and external criteria of logic and rationalism, through heuristic and hermeneutic dialogue, as a knowledge based on verifiable presuppositions and methodologies, but not on unequivocal and indisputable results (*idem*, pp. 411–25). So, while he does not follow Spinoza (and rational pantheism) in recognizing some heteronymic source for logic, made outside itself, as an extrinsic limit, since *liberty demands liberty* (in the rereading of Hegel), Sílvio Lima clears the Kantian pathway to critical reason to achieve historical knowledge, rescuing it from finalist prisons and relativizing its evasive conclusions (*Sílvio Lima, um místico da razão crítica (da incondicionalidade do amor intellectualis)*, 2009, pp. 285–86). Antero de Quental had taught him that Man and Nature participate in the 'ontic community'. So the job of the historian and of historiographical knowledge, the *knowledge of mediations*, cannot avoid, against routine, the double theoretical construction of time and history, at peril of annulling itself. To the ignorant and arcane *anthropological* mythification of Nature, scientism can no longer counterpose the omniscient *naturalization* of the Human, by annihilating the *qualitative* historicity of Being. It would have to attempt responses.

g) *A theory of time*: in his polemic with J. de Carvalho about the psychological content of *saudade* (1955), against the master's perspective, based on the ordinary and reproductive dualism (in Husserl's terms), *intense* (intentional) and *retrotense*, of the phenomenon of *saudade*, Sílvio Lima, while confirming them adds a third term, *protense*, a projective moment that aims to overcome the negative aspect of *saudade* as *present* experience, and reintegrate it within the ontological limit of time (not in the past, *not at all ontological*,



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nor in the present, stricken by insufficiency or absence, but in the near future, a moment when the present already sees itself as future). In this way, protension indicates future temporality: R. Koselleck will speak of the *horizon of expectations*, a temporal topos in which, in part, *heritage* is weighed up and projected (Paul Ricœur would add) and so represent a utopic segment (an escape to the emotionally possible or perfectible non-place), by analogy with a 'reconstruction of the unrepeatable', sketched out in the last writings of Raul Proença. So this theoretical syntax of time reinscribes itself in the clear reading of Augustine's Confessions (II and XI), grasping the triadic message of *present-past*, *present-present*, and *present-future*, and the dispute between heritages an expectations that existence generates and potentiates, as self-consciousness made present, i.e. that attempts to make present (*re-present*) the absent and the becoming. In this construction, two pivotal aspects are noted. *First*, it is the instance of history as discourse of memory/memories in the *heraclitic* and irreversible *river* of time, a reading that more remote theorizations (mainly P. Ricœur, 1983–85; 2000) clearly follow; *second*, the link in the exegesis that Eduardo Lourenço promotes in *Labirinto da saudade* (1978), based on Pascoais, advancing with his master Sílvio Lima's own exertions in using the tension futurity/*saudade* as the particular language of the mythification process of the fatherland, point of departure for the *imagology* that he developed.

*A theory of history:* In his diagnosis of contemporary historiographical production, Sílvio Lima was confronted by an epistemological panorama blocked by meta-historical finalism of three kinds: providentialism, philosophies of history, and sociologism. The first, 'dogmatic backcloth' of an unverifiable heteronymic anthropology, transcends historicity in nationalist and isolationist versions of national *mitogonia*; the second, originating in the 'shipwreck or nullification of confessional faiths', tends to manifest itself in theodicy or a lay religion, in the Hegelian version even opposed to *Naturphilosophie*, a mere logical game developed as 'a syllogism or an equation' (OC, II, pp. 1257–59). Finally, in subverting Durkheim's aphorism (which reduces history to a simple microcosm of sociology) by instead subsuming sociology to a *microcosm of History*, the master of the Theory of History, not neglecting the analogical lesson but against the grain of unfounded comparativist, theological theses, in vogue in historiographical and anthropological discourse from 1880 until the Second World War (from the supporters of 'modes of production', to Marx's dialectical philosophies of history, to the Tylor's concept of 'primitivism'; to the apostles of Oliveira Martins' and Toynbee's typology of 'civilizations') — he clings to an affirmation of the evanescent singularity of the *res gestae*, the historical events (of which, like Marc Bloch, he had a very wide understanding) and of their unrepeatable singularity which dismisses a reading of some *monotonous finality* (*idem*, p. 1245). When looked at properly, historical reality (although absent) still constitutes a sociological reality, but sociologism postulates a radically abusive logic of history, achronic and exogenous, that it does not admit, whether it is seen as abstract forms without content (in the relativist mediation of Simmel), or in the social metaphysics that R. Aron denounces in Durkheim's sacralization of the Whole (*Sílvio Lima, um místico da razão crítica (da incondicionalidade do amor intellectualis)*, 2009, p. 555). The task of historiography, based on a particular mode of knowledge, in awakening historical awareness, the autonomous grasping of the historicity of beings, is thus conditioned (and guaranteed) by the historical horizon that every epoch and every historian



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embraces; but that horizon (Ortega y Gasset) is resting on a mobile topography: it is constantly shifting and expanding, in area (culture, science, information) and depth (diachronic perspective), admitting the study of resistances, mutations and variations (what Sílvio Lima calls *metamorphoses*) and attempting to grasp the temporality in the *becoming* of the human condition. So to historicize, given the scarcity of undeniably proven material (*what really happened*, says Ranke, is an absurd entreaty which degrades the onticity of the hermeneutic subject, closing with a *declamation* any open inquiry), allows the choice of discursive strategies to the detriment of others, since its epistemologies are established on solid bases in a philosophical debate that, in order to take place, cannot exclude its terms. This is why, in rejecting aprioristic *philosophies of history*, it legitimates *historiology* as a reflection of a rational and philosophical kind, based *a posteriori* on a history read through problems, clarifying the imprecise analytic distinction in the field of the social sciences (Human Geography, Economics, Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology) and the multidisciplinary failure of the study, converging here in the primordial theses of the first generation of the *Annales*, but without subsuming it in the primacy of socio-economic studies, as an illusory under-determination of the 'superstructure'. To summarize, 'if the epistemic distance between the knowing subject and the object is no more than an epistemological illusion, even in the domain of the Natural Sciences, the separation would be even less in the work of the historian, a field in which, through his internal experience (*Erlebnis*), the *other* (*object*) could be understood by *Endopatia*' ('A Historiologia de Sílvio Lima', in *Estudos em homenagem a João Francisco Marques*, 2000, pp. 344–45), a situation that would be more in keeping with his psychological position. But the past, contrary to the hegemonic requirement of the objectivist schools (positivism and methodologism), if it is an object, is an *absent object* whose authenticity one tries to certify by opening the hermeneutic field to the unfinished reinterpretative plurality. So, as History is not a *good pretext* for Philosophy, Sílvio Lima (against Sérgio) dealt with historiography as one of the *possible texts of thinking*, furnished with non-fictional imagination and comprehensive competency. Without rejecting at the outset the mediation of Dilthey's *historic reason*, or the so-called *méthys* of methodologism (Monod, Barnheim, Langlois and Seignobos, Harsin, Halphen), based on Vico's *verum-factum*, he nevertheless elucidates them from critical mediations (Halkin, Marrou, R. Aron, Hours, M. Bloch), qualitatively extending the heuristic notion of sources and moving — via the sieve of the productions of science, the arts and culture (in the wake of J. de Carvalho) — into the warnings of Halphen and Hours, requiring greater space for the so-called *auxiliary sciences* and appealing to transdisciplinarity. If the epistemic status of Science embraces History, the latter can only advocate it *not as a science with general laws* but as a *relational and connectional knowledge*, attempting in its syntax and combinations of polyhedral imbrications (hence the opening to the plurality of cultures and mentalities, to a comparative sociology of religions, particularly in *O Amor Místico*) from hypotheses, inferred (or rejected) by the labour of analytic-deductive logic from a documentary base. He thereby refutes the 'miopic and ingenuous *empiricism* of the *empiricists*', the historicist and 'factualist' siege which, by blocking access and even the *possibility* of criticism of historical reason, distant from definitive solutions, denies the understanding of new problems. It is not surprising that, following B. Croce (and R. G. Collingwood, whose *The Idea of History* would be welcomed by his assistants Ferrand de Almeida and



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António de Oliveira), Sílvio Lima, weighing up the historiographical method, 'an interpretative construction, in a word, *theory*', should point to the fertile history of ideas (also historiographical, as suggested in the lessons of *Teoria da História*) and vouch for the strategic lesson of Epistemology (and within it, that of gnosiology), without which any theory of History would be sterile.

A late lesson in an intellectual environment — particularly amongst historians (for the most part state guardians of memory) who most accentuated the state-centred vision — that was hostile to the theorization of history and its decisive departure from the altars and infallible dogmas of the past, where it had been officially closed up as a war chant or a redemptory psalm. An attitude also ostracized by those projected into the future the totalizing 'demonstration' of their subjective convictions. In the post-Newtonian universe whose epistle was literally transfigured by relativity and *quanta* (ironically, Niels Bohr declared that at the *micro-* and the *macro-cosmic* scale it was *very difficult to make predictions, particularly of the future*), Sílvio Lima agreed to the hypothesis of 'discrete probabilism' allowed by the reflection *upon* and *through* historiographical studies, nosological and social science. The condemnation of history to the determinist (or positivist) galley of the human deck he thought metahistorical, an unfounded apriorism: mutability could not be transformed into a new and predictable, immutable substantialist rule, finalistic and metaphysical (or transcendental). If the weak prognosis exonerates the oracles of the *teleological epoch*, it only ascertains (and authorizes) historiography as a form of the incessant theoretical *representation* and *reactualization* of temporality, that is to say, in its encounter with the Hermeneutic lesson. In this step, Sílvio Lima saw in historiography the *sagesse* of pathways (in time) and hence the elucidative contribution of philosophy, particularly in ethics, to make a knowledge — *knowing (the) Being* — as deflated as obsolete banality or ontological junk, by the functional and technocratic know-how. Also historiographical.

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