

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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ROCHA PEREIRA, Maria Helena da (Porto, 1925-2017)

Maria Helena Monteiro da Rocha Pereira was born in Porto on 3 September 1925, into an upper-middle-class family. The daughter of Alfredo da Rocha Pereira, a Full Professor at the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Porto, Maria Helena da Rocha Pereira found in her father a guiding figure who greatly influenced her future as an expert in Classical Philology. This influence is apparent, for instance, in her admiration for figures linked to the history of medicine, such as Pedro Hispano, a 13th-century author who left an important legacy of medical works and who became the first and, to date, the only Portuguese Pope, namely John XXI. In Porto, M. H. da Rocha Pereira studied at the D. Carolina Michaëlis Secondary School, near her family's home and not far from where she would pass away 91 years later, on 10 April 2017, after a lifetime dedicated to scholarship. Throughout her life, her affection for the city of Porto never waned, and she dedicated some of her studies to the city and notable figures associated with it, such as *As imagens e os sons na lírica de Guerra Junqueiro* [The Images and Sounds in the Poetry of Guerra Junqueiro] and *O Porto na obra de Ramalho Ortigão* [Porto in the Works of Ramalho Ortigão], both published in 1950 when the author was just 25 years of age.

In 1942, she enrolled in the Classical Philology course at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Coimbra, where she not only deepened her knowledge of Greek and Latin but also began studying Classical Hebrew. Her mastery of ancient languages was complemented by her exceptional command of several modern languages, including German, Spanish, French, English, and Italian. She graduated in Coimbra in 1947, studying under Professors such as Francisco Rebelo Gonçalves and Carlos Simões Ventura. After earning her degree, she returned to Porto and joined the Centre for Humanistic Studies associated with the University of the Invicta City. There, she delivered a series of lectures in 1948 on "Latin Literature," which were later published. Until 1950, M. H. da Rocha Pereira engaged in teaching activities in Porto. That same year, she was awarded a scholarship by the *Instituto de Alta Cultura* [Institute of High Culture], enabling her to travel to the United Kingdom and enrol at the University of Oxford. Alongside the cities of Porto and Coimbra, Oxford would complete the trio of places that M. H. da Rocha Pereira would remain enchanted by throughout her life. Between 1950 and 1959, during three separate stays, Oxford offered the philologist and expert in Cultural History the opportunity to engage with and benefit from the mentorship of eminent classicists, such as E. R. Dodds, J. Beazley, E. Fraenkel, W. S. Barrett, and R. Pfeiffer, whom she always referred to as her mentors.



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With Dodds, in particular, she studied Greek Literature and Religion; with Beazley, she was introduced to the study of Greek vases, which allowed her to inaugurate a field of study that had been almost entirely unexplored in Portugal until then. To this day, in Portugal, M. H. da Rocha Pereira's name remains synonymous with the highest authority not only in Greek ceramics but also in Greek art more broadly.

It was following the work undertaken with J. Beazley that M. H. da Rocha Pereira published the seminal work *Greek Vases in Portugal* (Rocha Pereira, 1962 = Rocha Pereira, 2016: 127–310), with new "Supplements" released in 1967 and 2008 (= Rocha Pereira, 2016: 311–319 and 321–329, respectively). Until the end of her life, the classicist never abandoned her interest and passion for Greek ceramics, remaining consistently updated on the subject and contributing to various publications in the field. Her study of Greek vases is particularly revealing of her extensive national and international connections, at a time when academic mobility was far from enjoying the ease it does today. Among her contributions, for instance, is the identification of the "Lisbon Painter," a name suggested to her by a New Zealand colleague and expert on the subject, A. D. Trendall, due to her identification of the anonymous Greek painter.

When she returned from Oxford after her first stay in 1951, M. H. da Rocha Pereira was hired as an Assistant by the University of Coimbra. Five years later, in 1956, and following an extended eighteen-month wait for the scheduling of her public examinations, M. H. da Rocha Pereira became the first woman to earn a doctoral degree from that university. In 1962, she underwent public examinations for the rank of Extraordinary Professor, and in 1964, for Full Professor. Among the positions she held at her university were those of Vice-Rector, President of the Faculty of Arts' Scientific Council, and Director of the Institutes of Classical Studies and Archaeology within the same Faculty. Professor Maria Helena da Rocha Pereira retired in 1995, at the age of seventy, as required by law. However, this only marked the end of her official teaching duties, as her dedication to scholarship, particularly to Classical Studies, continued almost until her death in 2017, during which she shared her knowledge and expertise with colleagues and students alike. M. H. da Rocha Pereira was responsible for the creation of a "school of Classical Studies" that extended beyond the University of Coimbra, in the purest and most rigorous sense of the term. This was evident primarily in Greek studies (history, culture, literature, and art), which were her chief passion, but also in Latin and Neo-Latin studies (medieval and Renaissance), as well as in the fertile field of identifying and analysing the enduring presence of classical culture in Portuguese literature.

The methodology of this classicist was characterised above all by a meticulous and attentive analysis of the literary and archaeological sources she studied, supported by the most comprehensive and up-to-date bibliography available at the time of publication, as well as by the careful discussion of various interpretative theories and hypotheses. These features make reading M. H. da Rocha Pereira's works a reliable guide to the state of the art and emerging trends in each subject she tackled. Her bibliographic output was also distinguished by its clear international scope.

The contribution of Rocha Pereira to Cultural History is undeniable, starting with her work as a philologist. Among her accomplishments is the critical edition of *Pausanias. Graeciae Descriptio*, published in the



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prestigious *Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana* in 1973, 1977, and 1981. Pausanias, a significant Greek author from the second century AD, provides a detailed and descriptive account of mainland Greece in his time. This work includes references and descriptions of cities, buildings, artworks (many of which are now lost), as well as allusions to myths, religious traditions, political events, and notable figures. Pausanias thus serves as a vital resource for our understanding of Ancient Greece, and one of the key lessons from this work is owed to M. H. da Rocha Pereira. This critical edition is widely regarded as the most important achievement of her career, solidifying her international recognition. However, her significance for the study of Cultural History goes even further. She also produced numerous translations of various Greco-Latin authors, which she compiled as teaching materials for her students of Classical Cultural History at the University of Coimbra. These were brought together in two anthologies: *Hélade: antologia da Cultura Grega* [Hellas: Anthology of Greek Culture] (latest edition by Guimarães Editores, published in 2009) and *Romana: antologia da Cultura Latina* [Romana: Anthology of Latin Culture] (latest edition by Guimarães Editores, 2010). These anthologies were expanded over her years of teaching. Within them, we find authors previously untranslated into Portuguese, as well as others presented in new and carefully revised versions, such as Homer, Hesiod, Theognis, Sappho, Simonides, Herodotus, Thucydides, Hippocrates, Plutarch, Cicero, Ovid, Virgil, and Livy. These translations represent only a fraction of Rocha Pereira's meticulous philological work. She also produced translations of complete works, such as Plato's *The Republic* (currently with 15 editions, the latest by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in 2017) and tragedies by Sophocles (*Antigone* and *Ajax*) and Euripides (*Medea*, *Trojan Women*, and *Bacchae*), which were collected and republished in the third volume of her *Complete Works*, released by the University of Coimbra Press and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation as of 2013. Her contribution to Cultural History also includes two essential volumes for any student beginning their studies in Classical Culture: *Estudos de História da Cultura Clássica, Volume I – Cultura Grega* [Studies in the History of Classical Culture, Volume I – Greek Culture] and *Volume II – Cultura Romana* [Roman Culture]. These two volumes, also published by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation have been reissued in multiple editions (the most recent being the 12th edition of Vol. I in 2017 and the 5th edition of Vol. II in 2013). It is worth noting that during the author's lifetime, each new edition underwent rigorous revision, with updated bibliographies and the incorporation of the latest scientific interpretations—an example being the inclusion of developments in the study of the Etruscans in the volume on Rome. These books, originally intended as supplementary material for her students in Coimbra, have since become foundational textbooks for Classical Culture students throughout the Lusophone world. In the first volume, spanning over seven hundred pages, the author presents readers with the most complex problems of Greek antiquity, with rigorous and crystal-clear analysis. Topics range from the Homeric Question (one of her favoured themes, which she revisited and updated with pleasure in each edition) to the establishment of scientific and literary studies in the Hellenistic Period. Sublime chapters are devoted to literature, art, philosophy, religion, and the historical dynamics of cultural transmission. In the second volume, covering nearly six hundred pages, Rocha Pereira uses the same methodology and precision to examine



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fundamental milestones of Roman culture and literature, from the legends of Rome's foundation to the pivotal figure of Augustus. A lengthy section is also dedicated to Roman moral and political ideas, which are essential for understanding their civilisational legacy.

A significant part of M. H. da Rocha Pereira's scholarly output can be divided into two major categories: one dedicated to the history, culture, and literature—essentially, the cultural history—of the classical world, and the other focused on the reception of Classical Antiquity, particularly in Portuguese culture. From the first category, in addition to the works already mentioned, notable studies include those devoted to religion and myth in Ancient Greece, such as *Concepções helénicas de felicidade no Além, de Homero a Platão* [Hellenic Conceptions of Happiness in the Afterlife, from Homer to Plato] (1956) and *No rasto das Amazonas* [In the Trail of the Amazons] (1998); to archaic Greek poetry, such as *Sobre a autenticidade do fragmento 44 Diehl de Anacreonte* [On the Authenticity of Fragment 44 Diehl of Anacreon] (1962); to classical art, including *Para a compreensão da arte grega* [Towards an Understanding of Greek Art] (1985), *O palácio, do mundo minóico ao helénico: mito e realidade* [The Palace, from the Minoan to the Hellenic World: Myth and Reality] (1993–94), and *O Zeus de Olímpia* [The Zeus of Olympia] (2009); and to the history and literature of Ancient Rome, such as *Entre a História e a Lenda: a figura de Viriato* [Between History and Legend: The Figure of Viriathus] (2004) and *Virgílio, poeta da paz e da missão de Roma* [Virgil, Poet of Peace and Rome's Mission] (1992). From the second category, noteworthy publications include *Temas Clássicos na Poesia Portuguesa* [Classical Themes in Portuguese Poetry] (1972), *Novos Ensaios sobre Temas Clássicos na Poesia Portuguesa* [New Essays on Classical Themes in Portuguese Poetry] (1988), and *Portugal e a herança clássica e outros* [Portugal and the Classical Heritage and Others] (2003). Her studies on medieval and modern culture should also be noted, such as *Vida de S. Teotónio* [Life of St. Teotonius] (1988), *Nomes de ninfas em Camões* [Names of Nymphs in Camões] (1980), and *Vida e Milagres de São Rosendo e Vida de Santa Senhorinha* [Life and Miracles of Saint Rosendo and Life of Saint Senhorinha] (1970). She was, moreover, an exceptional scholar of Camões. In all these works, M. H. da Rocha Pereira reveals a constant desire to understand and integrate cultural phenomena within their historical context, taking into account mental, geographical, and social structures, as well as the circumstances that inspired and explain cultural and political expressions. She sought to grasp the motivations of other eras and authors who repurposed classical heritage, rewriting or retransmitting it for their contemporaries. Her contributions extend to dictionary and encyclopaedia entries, including those for *Verbo* (404 entries), *Logos* (42 entries), and *Biblos* (18 entries); articles prepared for the *Grande Dicionário de Literatura Portuguesa e Teoria Literária* [Great Dictionary of Portuguese Literature and Literary Theory] by José João Cochofel (10 entries); as well as for the *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* (Basel–Paris) and the *Dicionário Luís de Camões* [Luís de Camões Dictionary].

M. H. da Rocha Pereira is thus an indispensable figure in contemporary Portuguese culture. She stood out for her contributions to the study of Classical Antiquity in the Portuguese language (and beyond), the reception of Antiquity in Portuguese culture, and the training of classicists, including philologists, historians,



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archaeologists, and art historians. She was awarded the Grand Cross of the Order of Saint James of the Sword (2004) and received an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Lisbon (2009). She was a member of the Lisbon Academy of Sciences and served on the scientific committee of the prestigious *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* based in Zurich. Among her many accolades were the Portuguese PEN Club Essay Prize (1989), the Latin Trophy of the Latin Union (2006), the University of Coimbra Prize (2006), the Father Manuel Antunes Prize for Culture (2008), and the APE/CGD Literary Life Prize (2010).

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