

# DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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**PRAÇA, José Joaquim Lopes** (Alijó, 1844 – Montemor-o-Novo, 1920)

He was born in what was then the civil parish of Castedo, in the municipality of Alijó, in the district of Vila Real. This is a small civil parish where the primary economic activity is agriculture, particularly the production of Port wine (*Dicionário Enciclopédico das Freguesias* [Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Civil Parishes], vol. 3, [1998], pp. 437-438). According to information from the civil parish council, his parents — Joaquim Lopes Praça and Lucrecia Lopes — were farmers, likely with some financial means. Today, a plaque can be found on the house where he was born, designating him as a "historian of philosophy and jurist," while the place names reflect the family's historical presence in the area, as evidenced by Captain Lopes Praça Square, located next to the old school in Castedo do Douro.

Steered toward an ecclesiastical life by his father's wishes, he began his studies at the seminary in Braga before enrolling at the University of Coimbra in 1863. He initially studied theology and law, but from the fourth year onwards, he chose to focus solely on law, seemingly due to conflicting schedules, indicating his greater interest in a field where significant debates were occurring. During this period, there was bustling academic activity at the University of Coimbra, evident in the challenge to established norms, the pursuit of new forms of artistic expression, renewed philosophical and political inspiration, and a greater dialogue and openness to other cultural realities.

The autobiographical letter from Antero de Quental (who, like Lopes Praça, was a law student in Coimbra) to Wilhelm Storck clearly reflects this atmosphere. Additionally, one of the primary sources of inspiration for these scholars stems from Germanic thinkers or those linked to this cultural sphere. For his part, Eça de Queiroz, who was also a law student at the time, in his *Prosas Bárbaras* (1866- 1867), suggests that Germany could provide the "enlightenment" we require, as it is "full of idealism", in contrast to Italy, which he views as governed by passion (i.e.: representative of the Latin nations). Queiroz advocates for the fusion of these two figures through a rapprochement that enables Portugal to "extend a brotherly hand" to Germany.

The discussions concerning the nature of law were particularly intense at the end of the 60s, as illustrated by the controversy between Rodrigues de Brito and Vicente Ferrer, which primarily revolved around a philosophical issue. It was precisely in 1868, when he was just 24 years old, that Lopes Praça published



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*História da Filosofia em Portugal nas suas relações com o movimento geral da filosofia* [History of Philosophy in Portugal in its relationship with the general movement of philosophy], a book that inherited this issue by aiming to extensively promote philosophical thought in Portugal, which entailed a thorough examination of philosophy by our author. This is, on one hand, the author's first work of a historical nature and, on the other, the one that has had the most significant impact to this day, as evidenced by its various re-editions. Despite this, he was more renowned during his lifetime for his studies in law and State theory. The two volumes originally intended for this work on the history of philosophy have been reduced to one, and he did not pursue this line of study further, although we can still find an article in *A Renascença*, around 1878, concerning the history of science and philosophy in Portugal, addressing positivist philosophy.

The jurist would dedicate his entire life to teaching. As a professor, his tone was neither controversial nor disruptive. As a law professor at the University of Coimbra, he began to gather material for the history of the Portuguese state and Portuguese law. In addition to its *Coleção de Leis e Subsídios para o Estudo do Direito Constitucional Português* [Collection of Laws and Elements for the Study of Portuguese Constitutional Law] (1893-1894), there are also reports of an unsuccessful plan to write *História do Direito Pátrio* [History of National Law] when he was appointed as a professor to the court (Mexia de Mendia, *José Joaquim Lopes Praça (1844-1920)* 1999, pp. 65-71). As his writings seemed to be more neutral and sought to be scientific, they attracted acceptance from moderate monarchists.

We can still observe his political positions aligned with the liberal constitutional monarchy in *Direito Constitucional Português: Estudos sobre a carta constitucional de 1826 e acto Constitucional de 1832* [Portuguese Constitutional Law: Studies on the Constitutional Charter of 1826 and the Constitutional Act of 1832] (1878). He appreciates both the doctrinal and democratic tendencies of the liberal constitutionalists, yet regards himself as independent. He also criticises the aspirations of the socialists while acknowledging the injustices they highlight. He is not a republican, but considers this form of government a viable solution in contexts other than the Portuguese situation. However, he criticises the absolutists and subtly critiques those who waver between the old regime and liberal constitutionalism, as exemplified by Chateaubriand.

The pedagogical framework permeates nearly all of his works, reflecting his role as a disseminator of ideas that were resonating across Europe. He will employ key concepts such as nation, homeland, democracy, and citizenship. In his very first book, he felt compelled to define what "the people" meant to him, using the term "collective individual" and the notion of a collective "consciousness", "reason", "feeling", and "will" as stages that need their own development until they are fully realised, imbuing it with anthropological dimensions or representing a transition from youth to adulthood.

*História da Filosofia em Portugal* [History of Philosophy in Portugal] will be organised to first capture the philosophical reflections of significant figures within the Portuguese context, then to explore the influences of this philosophical thought at the institutional level (schools, universities), and finally to provide an overview of



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philosophical thought in Europe, dividing these phases into three respective sections. This structure is subsequently applied to three parts or historical periods selected by the author: one part goes from the 11th century to 1521, another from the latter date to 1706, and lastly from 1706 to 1846. His conception of the constitution of philosophy as a system will closely align with Victor Cousin's frameworks in this work. In critiquing the latter's eclectic philosophy, however, he does not stray from its central tenets, suggesting that this was one of the foundations for his interpretation of European philosophy (particularly the later ones). Also noteworthy is his generous admiration for Kant, despite the obscurities he highlights, from which he gradually distances himself in favour of Krause. He attempts to summarise the modern philosophical schools and trends in Europe, categorising them by country, with the German school occupying twice the space of the other two (French and Scottish). On one hand, he criticises the irreligiosity of the French, claiming it has harmed "the cause of the French nation", while on the other, he commends the contributions of Scottish philosophy in countering the speculative excesses of metaphysics, which he largely associates with religion.

The influence of German philosophy is noted by Pinharanda Gomes, the Portuguese philosopher who showed the most interest in his work. According to him, contact with Krause was established through the French-speaking world via Ahrens and Tiberghien, as well as through Vicente Ferrer Neto Paiva (*Dicionário dos mais ilustres...* [Dictionary of the most illustrious...], 2001, pp. 291-292), an advocate of Krausist-influenced *jusnaturalism* with significant organicist elements, in contrast to Rodrigues de Brito, who supported a subjective right aligned with Kant, in accordance with a moral imperative and thus more formal in nature. Despite the influences of Kant in his first work, Lopes Praça would gravitate towards Krausist spiritualism, which aligned more closely with his Catholic beliefs, where Vicente Ferrer would have made his contribution. What will be appreciated in his philosophical thought, which aligns well with the atmosphere surrounding "Portuguese philosophy" in the 20th century and has drawn the interest of figures like Pinharanda Gomes, is Lopes Praça's exploration of Portuguese philosophy — from the origins of medieval philosophy and the *Conimbricenses* through to the era of the liberal revolutions.

After completing his studies in 1869 with a thesis on Portuguese patronage, he attempted to pursue a teaching career at the University of Coimbra following a competition in 1870, but this aspiration was repeatedly postponed. From one competition to the next, he sought a position within the academy, consulting individuals such as Teófilo Braga regarding vacancies in Portuguese universities, until he was appointed as a substitute lecturer at Coimbra in 1881. He started teaching *Portuguese Civil Law* in 1882, becoming a full lecturer for the same course from 1888 until 1903, and later also becoming a lecturer in *General Principles of Civil Law* (1904-1905) and *Civil Law* (1904-1906) (*Memoria Professorum Universitatis Conimbrigensis*, 1992, p. 167)

Those years marked the beginning of Portugal's prolonged economic crisis, which would impact the late 1880s and culminate in the bankruptcy of 1891-1893. Opposition gave way to pessimism, and the more



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radical changes sought by the generation of the 70s diminished into a reformism aligned with the State and the existing system. The *Vencidos da Vida* [Life's Vanquished] who emerged in the late 80s and early 90s reflected this climate, seeking reform through legal means and institutions (Oliveira Martins had attempted, albeit unsuccessfully, to revitalise *Vida Nova* [New Life]). The wear and tear on the political system and the monarchy is evident; the most radical opposition and persistence in criticising the regime will come from the gradually emerging republicans, while the main figures of the 70s generation are integrating into the political system, abandoning the revolutionary, Proudhonian, and socialist-inspired direction of their evolutionary programme for transforming public consciousness, as well as the path of opposition. It is within this context that Lopes Praça is esteemed for his reputation for moderation. The conservatism reflected in his writings also advocates for openness to new ideas that are able to support the monarchical regime. It should be noted, however, that some of his social and political ideas can be said to be ahead of their time. These ideas can be more effectively understood by revisiting the journey of the young Lopes Praça, a recent law graduate and high school teacher.

Montemor-o-Novo was the focal point of his narrative, where he was appointed as a permanent teacher of Portuguese, Latin, French, and rural administration and economics. His appreciation for the land is still evident today. There, he met his wife, Elisária Eugénia da Mata e Costa, who came from a noble family, and in her honour, he wrote *A Mulher e a vida ou a Mulher Considerada debaixo dos seus Principais Aspectos* [Women and Life or Women and their Defining Aspects] (1872). In this work, we naturally observe the influence of Catholicism and traditional education; however, he transcends these values by contemplating the role of women in society, striving to elevate them from their subservient status and asserting their equality to men in cognitive abilities and the freedoms they should possess, emphasising the importance of women's education.

We can contrast this position, which aligns with the English women's suffragette movement, with that of J. P. Oliveira Martins, a proponent of socialism, who sought a solution to the social wounds of modern society. In the articles since *A Província* his negative interpretation of women's political freedom, opposing women's suffrage, is very different from that of Lopes Praça, who in his work supports women's suffrage (this interesting aspect has already given rise to a master's thesis by Helena de Fátima Gonçalves de Castro, entitled *Emancipação da Mulher e Regeneração Social...* [Women's Emancipation and Social Regeneration...], 2000).

The law student was involved in student organisations and, at that time, he contributed to several academic publications such as *A Academia* [The Academy] or *A Revista de Legislação e Jurisprudência* [The Journal of Legislation and Jurisprudence]. This regular collaboration continued in the Porto newspaper *A Harpa* with an article on Krause and, as we already explored, *A Renascença* also published one of his articles. Thus, he did not distance himself from society as he charted his course, and by criticising the retreat from public life of Alexandre Herculano, one of his influences, he reveals the characteristics of his own highly active youth.



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After the regicide in 1908, his life followed a path similar to that of Herculano. He returned to Montemor-o-Novo, seldom leaving his home, and spent his time between his family and readings. He corresponded with figures such as Ferreira Deusdado or Tiago Sinibaldi, and his writings from that period remained within his private circle; all we know is the repulsion that society caused in him. Since 1904, driven by a sense of mission, he had served as a philosophy teacher at the Prince Royal. His teachings were thus aligned with Catholic religiosity, influenced by the neo-Thomism of Sinibaldi, whose manual served as the guide for the prince's education. His dedication to his teaching career, coupled with the prudence of a humanities scholar regarding the challenges facing Portugal, along with his loyalty to the monarchy, brought him to this position.

Understanding who José Joaquim Lopes Praça was requires a journey that takes us back to an era when he was acutely aware of his time, as evidenced by his repeated assertions in *História da Filosofia em Portugal* and *A Mulher e a Vida* that what is "is what could have been". It is this condition of possibility, rooted in his understanding of himself, that prompted him to critique what he deemed political utopias, such as those proposed by the socialists, to interpret history in a broader context, and to envision new horizons of possibility in his own way.

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Bruno Gonçalves

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