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SILBERT, Albert (Paris, 1915 – Paris, 30-12-1996)

Born in Paris in 1915 to a Jewish family, Albert Silbert completed his secondary and higher education in the city, attending the Sorbonne and the École des Hautes Études [School of Advanced Studies] (VI section) in the late 1930s, before the outbreak of the Second World War. This was the period during which his intellectual development took shape. His teachers included such influential figures in French and international historiography as Marc Bloch and Georges Lefebvre at the Sorbonne and Fernand Braudel at the École des Hautes Études. Among his colleagues were future historians who would also excel in their profession and share his interest in the Iberian countries and their empires, such as Frédéric Mauro. In an interview with *Ler História* [Studying History] magazine in 1985, Silbert explained that his interest in the Iberian world was first sparked during his time as a candidate for the *agrégation* under Braudel's guidance. This interest was further deepened by both historical and contemporary political events, particularly the Spanish Civil War, which he acknowledged as "a shock" for him, as it was for many young people of his generation. In the same interview, Silbert made explicit the connection between his historical studies and contemporary politics, saying, "As I had a degree in history, I wanted to understand the relationships between political and social phenomena, and particularly the influence of large landholdings on the origins of that conflict." (Albert Silbert, Interview with *Ler História*, Issue 5 (1985), conducted by Magda Pinheiro, p. 121).

While these political and social questions informed his later studies of agrarian history, particularly in his landmark doctoral thesis *Le Portugal Méditerranéen à la fin de l'Ancien Régime - XVIIIe – début du XIXe siècle. Contribution à l'histoire agraire comparée* [Mediterranean Portugal at the end of the Ancien Régime - 18th and early 19th centuries. A contribution to comparative agrarian history], Silbert also attributed his fascination with agrarian history to the influence of Marc Bloch and Georges Lefebvre. In the introduction to that work, he acknowledged their impact, as well as the inseparability of this interest from his training in geography—a discipline that, at the time, was deeply intertwined with history in the French university system. In the same interview, Silbert noted, "I must not forget the role of geographers. Before the war, French historians were even more grounded in geography than they are today (...) but the agrarian geography of the time employed historical explanation. There was much discussion of 'collectivism' and 'individualism'." (*Le Portugal Méditerranéen...*, p. 122).



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The outbreak of World War II interrupted the young Silbert's studies and academic projects for more than half a decade, as it did for millions of others. He spent much of this dark period in a prisoner-of-war camp in East Prussia, *Stalag I A* in Stablack. This camp, which housed students and aspiring army officers, was the subject of negotiations by the Vichy regime to transform it into a "university." A "university" *sui generis* that Vichy aimed to transform into a place for training cadres for his *Revolução Nacional* [National Revolution] met with limited success, despite the camp's proximity to the German University of Königsberg, which supplied books and even sent lecturers. Albert Silbert wrote two articles about this peculiar experience, published in the *Revue d'Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale* entitled *Le camp des aspirants* [The midshipmen's camp]. These were later republished in 1991 in the work *Le camp des aspirants pendant la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale: 1939-1945* [The midshipmen's camp during the Second World War: 1939-1945], published by the *Amicale du camp des aspirants*. This was likely one of his few forays into 20th-century history, as in these texts he presents himself more as a historian than as a protagonist, attempting to distance himself from his personal experience and adopt a more detached perspective on that painful period. He would later recall some of the more personal aspects of his time there, noting that it was in that prison camp and its "university" that he first taught, with languages being one of the main subjects. It was also in the camp that he first encountered the Portuguese language and learnt about Portugal through a comrade from the same regiment, the son of emigrants, who taught Portuguese using Otto Sawer's German method. Silbert considered this encounter to be a significant moment in shaping his future.

After returning to Paris at the end of the war, Silbert reached out to Fernand Braudel for advice on choosing a thesis topic. Braudel immediately suggested Portugal, a subject of great interest to him. Around this time, through Braudel, Silbert met Vitorino Magalhães Godinho, who had recently arrived in the French capital. Through him, Silbert was introduced to other Portuguese historians, particularly Joaquim Barradas de Carvalho, with whom he formed a strong friendship that he would continue to emphasise throughout his life. The decision to study the landowning structures of the Mediterranean world through the lens of Portugal became Albert Silbert's guiding objective. To analyse this topic, he drew on the teachings of Ernest Labrousse, from whom he learnt, in his own words, "like so many generations of French historians, what an economic history that refuses to forget men should be" (*Le Portugal Méditerranéen...*, p. 9).

Entirely dedicated to his thesis, he was able to spend 14 months in Portugal between 1948 and 1950, marking his first encounter with the country's national archives and enabling closer engagement with Portuguese researchers. In addition to historians, Silbert also established connections with geographers, aligning with his own academic background. Among them was Orlando Ribeiro, with whom he shared a vibrant friendship and intellectual dialogue. Some of the issues raised by Ribeiro, particularly those linked to agrarian collectivism, such as the open fields in Beira Baixa, resonated with the lessons Silbert had absorbed from Marc Bloch and Georges Lefebvre in the realm of agrarian history. In the aforementioned interview reflecting on his early explorations of Portugal, Silbert highlighted the importance of field visits to his studies. These included trips with Orlando Ribeiro to central Portugal and with geomorphologist and farmer Mariano

Feio to the Alentejo and Algarve, where he believed Feio had taught him everything there was to know about farming in the Alentejo. He also interacted with ethnologists like Jorge Dias, whom he met through Feio. Through these connections, Silbert explored the northern region of Portugal, particularly Minho, where he observed the *agras*—the *mini-open fields* previously studied by Alberto Sampaio (Interview with *Ler História* no. 5 (1985), p. 123).

Albert Silbert's explorations of Portugal's central archives, particularly the Torre do Tombo, were less successful than he had hoped. He found the archive inaccessible and unaccustomed to the presence of historians. In contrast, his experience with the National Assembly (now the Assembly of the Republic) was more fruitful. There, he studied the documents of the agricultural commission of the first Portuguese liberal Cortes, leading to his complementary thesis, later published as *Le problème agraire portugais au temps des premières Cortès libérales* [The Portuguese agrarian problem at the time of the first liberal Cortes]. Silbert developed a marked preference for regional and local archives, which he found less restrictive, even if poorly organised. This preference is evident in the acknowledgements in the preface to *Le Portugal Méditerranéen*, where he meticulously credits numerous individuals for guiding him through these archives. His gratitude is extended person by person and locality by locality, reflecting his characteristic thoroughness and precision.

The knowledge of the terrain gained through consulting regional and local archives, combined with the most comprehensive understanding he could achieve of central archives, provided a firm foundation for his work. This was further enriched by his solid historiographical training under some of the most eminent figures in contemporary French historiography and his close collaboration with Portuguese historians, geographers, and anthropologists. Sociology, viewed with suspicion in Salazar's Portugal, was not yet practised at the time. This combination of broad and deep perspectives enabled Silbert to approach his work with great ambition.

However, he later expressed regret over the disparity between his ambitions and the resources available to him. The limitations of historical research in Portugal at the time—whose backwardness he found surprising even in comparison with Spain—were a source of frustration but did not discourage him. Instead, they motivated him to embrace the role of a *défricheur*, a "pathfinder," breaking new ground in the field. This was the path that seemed safest given that, in his own words, "The documentary base we dreamed of turned out to be impossible to find. We found no statistical source that could be used for a comprehensive study of ownership and exploitation, none that led to a scientific analysis of the movement of production, incomes, or even prices, and none that allowed for a precise examination of the rural landscape and its details. This means that applying the rigorous methods of economic, social, and geographical history, as they are currently conceived and practised, has proved impossible for us." (Albert Silbert, *Le Portugal Méditerranéen...*, p. 10). Faced with this scarcity of resources consistent with what had begun to shape the economic and social history of the rural world in France, exemplified by works such as Georges Lefebvre's *La Révolution Française et les paysans* [The French Revolution and the peasants] or Ernest Labrousse's *Esquisse du mouvement des prix et des revenus en France au 18^{ème} siècle* [Sketch of price and income movements in France in the 18th century], Albert Silbert based his study on detailed reconstructions of the agrarian reality of



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southern Portugal at the end of the Ancien Régime (Beira-Baixa and Alentejo). He sometimes worked village by village, relying, according to his own testimony, on isolated documents and even fragments. This approach made him not only a "pathfinder" but also, in a sense, a "decipherer"—a solver of enigmas, one might say, who at times prefigured the methods of microhistory more than 20 years ahead of its formal emergence. This similarity was partly due to the same challenges in organising archives that led to the development of that methodology. It should also be noted that the institutional architecture of the late Ancien Régime was first "deciphered" by Albert Silbert.

Best known in Portugal for his two landmark works, to which he devoted more than 16 years of research, Silbert's main thesis—the future *Le Portugal Méditerranéen*—was only presented at the Sorbonne in 1964. There, it was debated and assessed by a jury that included Fernand Braudel, Ernest Labrousse, and Pierre Vilar (Interview with Carlos Veiga Pereira, *Letras e Artes* [Letters and Arts], 7/9/1966). However, Albert Silbert's contributions extended far beyond these major works. In fact, several smaller studies accompanied Albert Silbert's main research and have been published in French and sometimes also in Portuguese since 1950, in journals such as the *Bulletin des Études Portugaises* or in *Revista de Economia* [Journal of Economics]. The first of these, "*Autour de Francisco Solano Constâncio*" [About Francisco Solano Constâncio], appeared in 1950, followed two years later by "*Chartisme et Septembrisme. La vie politique à Porto de 1836 à 1839 d'après les consuls français.*" [Chartism and Septembrism. Political life in Porto from 1836 to 1839 according to the French consuls]. In 1953, he published *Contribuição para o estudo do movimento dos preços dos cereais em Lisboa (do meio do século XVIII ao meio do século XIX)* [Contribution to the study of the movement of cereal prices in Lisbon (from the middle of the 18th century to the middle of the 19th century.)] While the last of these articles was an essay on economic history clearly influenced by Ernest Labrousse, the first two were rooted in political history and its potential connections with social history. These studies drew upon French archival sources, particularly the Foreign Affairs Archive, which Silbert continued to explore throughout his life. Through this work, he deepened his study of the political and diplomatic history of 19th-century Portugal. These and other works from the 1960s were published in Portuguese by *Livros Horizonte* [Horizon Books] in 1972, in a volume entitled *Do Portugal do Antigo Regime ao Portugal Oitocentista* [From the Portugal of the Ancien Régime to 19th-Century Portugal]. The collection achieved notable success following the renewal of history courses that occurred after the 25 April 1974 revolution. Texts such as *O Feudalismo Português e a sua Abolição* [Portuguese Feudalism and Its Abolition] and the aforementioned *Chartismo e Setembrismo* [Chartism and Setembrism] became compulsory reading for several generations of students. This development, however, had the unintended consequence of turning works that were never meant to be canonical into a standard reference. In the same year that "Chartisme et Septembrisme" was published in the *Bulletin des Études Portugaises*, Jorge Borges de Macedo highlighted the growing interest in Silbert's work in Portugal. Although this interest was initially limited to a small circle of researchers, Macedo's short yet highly praised critical review underscored its importance. In it, he noted that Albert Silbert was "no stranger to research into the history of Portugal," as he had long been dedicated to

"Portuguese rural history, a field deserted by our historiography to which he courageously devoted himself" (Jorge de Macedo, "Chartisme et Septembrisme...", by Albert Silbert, Read: *Jornal de Letras, Artes e Ciências*, Issue 19, October 1953, p. 3).

The 1950s also saw the publication of a historiographical essay on the island of Madeira that remains unique in its approach. This important essay examines Madeiran trade over the long term, from 1640 to 1822, analysing its role in Atlantic commerce by tracing the routes and traffic linked to its production cycles—from sugarcane to wine. It also explores Madeira's unstable economic relationship with the Portuguese mainland. Originally published in French in 1954 by *Império* [Empire], the essay was reprinted twice after Silbert's death in the 1990s (*Uma encruzilhada do Atlântico, Madeira* [A crossroads of the Atlantic, Madeira] (1640-1820), 1997). Without a doubt, however, the visibility of Albert Silbert's work in Portugal grew significantly after the publication of *Le Portugal Méditerranéen* and *Le problème Agraire Portugais*, respectively, in 1966 and 1968. These two major works, particularly the former—a monumental thesis of some 1,200 pages to which he devoted many years of his life—became essential references in Portuguese historiography. While their impact in Portugal has been widely recognised, their reception in France also merits attention. The first academic response to *Le Portugal Méditerranéen* came from outside Portugal, in the form of a critical review by Frédéric Mauro, published in the *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* (Review of Albert Silbert, *Le Portugal Méditerranéen*. *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, 1967, vol. 45, Issue 2, pp. 551–555). Mauro's review reflects a careful reading by a scholar well-versed in Portuguese history, recognising the innovative nature of Silbert's work and situating it within the context of post-war French historiographical trends. Mauro's opening remarks are particularly illuminating: "After the war, each of the great theses published in France is valuable both for the knowledge it adds to our understanding of the past and for the renewal it brings to research methods. Albert Silbert's book is no exception" (*Idem*, p. 551). Mauro proceeds to analyse the book in detail, praising its maturity, the exhaustive and "deeply considered" bibliography, and the deliberate nature of its methodology. He notes that while Silbert's approach parallels those of historians like Braudel and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, it remains distinct. Mauro also draws comparisons to Marc Bloch's *Caractères originaux de l'histoire rurale française*, highlighting the comparatively "more geographical" character of Silbert's work. This geographical emphasis leads Mauro to evoke the influence of Orlando Ribeiro, whose geographical studies informed many of Silbert's analyses. Silbert's sensitivity to economic conditions and his ability to assess their impact on structural changes in the economy and society—particularly evident in his analysis of the Alentejo—reflect the depth of his historical approach. Mauro also discusses the challenges posed by the scarcity of statistical sources in Portuguese archives. He notes that while quantitative economic history is relatively absent from Silbert's book, his qualitative exploration, inspired by geography and supported by fragmented "partial information, incomplete tables, and scattered figures," nonetheless provides "an approximate, serious idea of the quantities."

In 1969, Jean Roche, a historian with an interest in the Luso-Brazilian world, wrote a brief review of *Le problème agraire...* in the *Bulletin Hispanique*. Roche had previously defended a thesis on 19th-century Rio



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Grande do Sul, which was also reviewed by Frédéric Mauro. In his analysis of the rigorous and scholarly publication of petitions sent to the Agriculture Committee of the first liberal Cortes (1821–22 and 1822–23), one of the most valuable aspects of Silbert's work, Roche emphasised their significance for understanding the main challenges facing the Portuguese rural world in the early 1820s. Roche also highlighted the comparative potential of these documents, situating the "Portuguese crisis" within the broader context of the "European revolution of 1820 and the peasant counter-revolution of the 19th century." Demonstrating notable insight, he further stressed the importance of the work for researchers in historical semantics and lexicography, writing: "We therefore have documents here that allow us to delimit semantic fields, to understand the relationship of words to each other and of words to institutions, structures, or mentalities" (review of Albert Silbert, *Le problème agraire portugais...*, *Bulletin Hispanique*, 1969, v. 71, Issue 1, p.416).

In terms of Portuguese reactions, the earliest text we identified dates from 1966. It is a lengthy interview with Albert Silbert conducted by journalist Carlos Veiga Pereira, who was exiled in Paris at the time. The interview was published in the *Jornal de Letras e Artes* [Journal of Letters and Arts] under the subtitle *Dois teses na Sorbonne sobre História de Portugal* [Two Theses at the Sorbonne on the History of Portugal.] In the piece, the journalist situates Silbert's two theses alongside other significant studies by foreign scholars on Portugal and its empire, such as those by Marcel Bataillon, Léon Bourdon, Frédéric Mauro, and, in England, Charles Boxer. He also draws attention to the novelty of Silbert's work within the Portuguese historiographical landscape. This novelty lay in Silbert's focus on the problems of the rural world during a period largely neglected by contemporary historiography, which was "predominantly dominated by the discoveries and overseas expansion, almost always limited to (...) political events" (Interview with the *Jornal de Letras e Artes*, 7/9/1966). There was evident interest in the potential of these studies to support new approaches to the 1820 Revolution and the origins of liberalism—an indication of the fascination these themes and periods held, especially as they had been unequivocally excluded from university curricula under the *Estado Novo* [New State] regime. In the same interview, Albert Silbert once again spoke about the challenges he faced in Portuguese archives. He attributed these difficulties not only to poor organisation but also to the damage caused by the invasions and wars of the 19th century, as well as to what he described as "negligence or lamentable ignorance." Silbert also referred to the renewal of historical studies that he observed taking place in Portugal, which he linked directly or indirectly to Vitorino Magalhães Godinho and a small group of Portuguese historians influenced by his work: Borges de Macedo, Barradas de Carvalho, Joel Serrão, and Piteira Santos. Several of these historians contributed essential texts to the renowned *Dicionário de História de Portugal* [Dictionary of Portuguese History], coordinated by Joel Serrão (1963–71). This landmark publication, which for the first time brought together key contributions that reflected the renovation of Portuguese historiography mentioned by Silbert, is notable for Silbert's absence as a collaborator.

In 1970, Orlando Ribeiro published a critical review of *Le Portugal Méditerranéen*, an unusual review in that it took the form of a book exceeding 200 pages. Titled *A Evolução Agrária no Portugal Mediterrâneo, segundo Albert Silbert* [The Agrarian Evolution in Mediterranean Portugal], According to Albert Silbert, it



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summarised Silbert's arguments in a more concise format than the original 1,200 pages while offering a detailed discussion of his proposals by one of his most respected interlocutors. The book inaugurated a new series within the *Chorographia* [Chorography] collection, the *Série histórica* [Historical Series], and it is reasonable to assume that it was more widely read in Portugal than Silbert's original 1,200-page thesis published in French. Orlando Ribeiro's book thus serves as a long and thoughtful dialogue with Silbert's magnum opus, examining the two regions central to his study—Beira-Baixa and Alentejo—and offering a detailed discussion of his theses. Ribeiro explores Silbert's analysis of land ownership and exploitation in these provinces, their legal frameworks, crop cultivation, livestock farming, integration into regional markets, trade routes, methods of marketing products, and the social structure of these areas during the pivotal period at the end of the Ancien Régime. Particularly noteworthy are the themes of agrarian collectivism and its ambiguous role in regions deeply influenced by agriculture and, above all, commercial cattle breeding, especially regarding the use of common pastures. Ribeiro highlights one of the most original aspects of Silbert's work: the "discovery" of the significance of agrarian collectivism in the Alentejo. This is especially true in the northern Portalegre area and the southern Campo de Ourique region. The dialogue between geographer and historian extends and deepens the collaboration initiated in *Le Portugal de Méditerranéen* expresso, as reflected in the title of Ribeiro's work. The geographical area chosen by Silbert for his thesis was part of what Orlando Ribeiro had termed "Mediterranean Portugal," one of three regions into which he divided the Portuguese mainland in his seminal work, *Portugal, o Mediterrâneo e o Atlântico* [Portugal, the Mediterranean and the Atlantic], published in 1945.

While working on his thesis, Albert Silbert was a high school teacher, a role that was common in France at the time. Even today, there is greater fluidity between secondary and higher education in France than in Portugal. The same year he submitted his thesis at the Sorbonne, in 1964, Braudel invited him to lead a seminar at the École des Hautes Études. He later joined the University of Clermont-Ferrand, where he taught from 1967 until his retirement in 1977. In Paris, Silbert encountered a new generation of exiled Portuguese scholars, including Victor de Sá and Miriam Halpern Pereira, who were pursuing their doctoral studies in France. He developed a particular connection with the latter, serving on her thesis jury and maintaining a highly productive intellectual and academic relationship with her in the post-25 April 1974 period.

Reflecting on the effects of Salazarism on Portuguese historiography—which, among other consequences, barred historians such as Vitorino Magalhães Godinho and Joel Serrão from university positions—Silbert also recalled others who had been forced to leave the country. In France alone, he mentioned José-Augusto França, Manuel Villaverde Cabral, and Fernando Medeiros, while noting those who had gone to England, such as Vasco Pulido Valente and Jaime Reis. His conclusion was unequivocal, as he expressed in an interview with *Ler História*: "I think that Salazarism from an intellectual point of view was a disaster" (interview with *Ler História* Issue 5, 1985, p.125).

After the revolution of 25 April 1974, Silbert—previously overlooked by Portuguese universities—began to engage regularly with them, and his work became a cornerstone of the renewed historiography and historical



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studies that experienced a remarkable surge during this period. He was first invited to Portugal in 1981 by ISCTE's Centre for the Study of Contemporary Portuguese History (CEHCP), which was founded and directed by Miriam Halpern Pereira. In this context, Silbert participated in a renowned colloquium on *Liberalismo na Península Ibérica na primeira metade do século XIX* [Liberalism in the Iberian Peninsula in the First Half of the 19th Century], which, alongside another organised by the *Gabinete de Investigações Sociais* [Office of Social Investigations] in 1979 on *O século XIX em Portugal* [The 19th Century in Portugal], demonstrated the burgeoning interest in studies of the 19th century at the time. Miriam Halpern Pereira aptly described this trend as a "sign of the great cultural change underway" ("Homenagem a Albert Silbert", *Público*, 3 January 1997). Silbert was subsequently invited to several Portuguese universities, including Évora, Porto, and Coimbra. In 1991, the University of Coimbra awarded him the honorary title of *Doctor Honoris Causa*. On the same occasion, he was also honoured by APHES (the Portuguese Association of Economic and Social History) at a meeting held in Coimbra. During his *Doctor Honoris Causa* ceremony, Silbert was sponsored by António de Oliveira, with Luís Reis Torgal and Irene Vaquinhas delivering the eulogy. Torgal later published a brief article on the event in the *Revista de História das Ideias* [Journal of the History of Ideas] ("Doctoramento Honoris Causa do Professor Albert Silbert," *Revista de História das Ideias*, pp. 513–514), noting the attendance of the then-President of the Republic, Mário Soares. Beyond Silbert's intellectual renown, this distinguished presence also reflected the pivotal material and symbolic role he had played among Portuguese exiles in France.

Following the 25 April Revolution, Silbert's work exerted a profound influence on the programmes and bibliographies of history courses created or restructured in Portugal after this transformative period. His analysis of Portuguese feudalism, including his exploration of the issue of charters, left a lasting mark on generations of young scholars studying Portuguese rural society at the end of the Ancien Régime and during the first half of the 19th century. This influence, it can be assumed, extended beyond history into geography, sociology, and anthropology courses, where interest in the evolution of agrarian structures and rural Portuguese society flourished, particularly from the late 1970s into the following decade. In the meantime, Albert Silbert had attempted to study another region that had intrigued him from an early age: Trás-os-Montes. This area offered fertile ground for exploring one of his most cherished topics—agrarian collectivism. However, lacking sufficient resources to continue his research there, he turned his attention to French agrarian history, focusing on the study of tithes in the Beaune region from the 16th to the 18th centuries. This work culminated in a contribution to a collective volume edited by Joseph Goy and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie on the fluctuations of tithe production from the late Middle Ages to the 18th century, published in 1972. ("Les relations franco-portugaises à la fin du XIXe siècle" [Franco-Portuguese relations at the end of the 19th century]. *Histoire du Portugal, Histoire Européenne* [Portuguese History, European History], 1987, pp. 237–252). Later, after taking up a position at the University of Clermont-Ferrand, Silbert felt compelled to specialise in contemporary Auvergne. This sense of obligation resulted in "La région Auvergne pendant le gouvernement Daladier" [The Auvergne region during the Daladier government], published in 1978, marking

his second venture into 20th-century history. Despite these diversions, Silbert's interest in Portugal remained steadfast. He continued to publish studies on its 19th-century history, increasingly focusing on foreign relations—particularly with France—and extending his scope to the latter half of the century. This shift is evidenced by works such as *Les relations franco-portugaises à la fin du XIXe siècle* and *A crise portuguesa de 1890-91 vista de França* [The Portuguese Crisis of 1890-91 as Seen from France]. These were respectively published in the volume *Histoire du Portugal, Histoire Européenne*, and in the journal *Análise Social* ("A crise portuguesa de 1890-91 vista de França," *Análise Social*, Issues 123-124, (1994) pp. 1093-1115). This broader focus on diplomatic and foreign relations, which began in the 1950s, gained traction with earlier texts such as *La France et la politique portugaise de 1825 à 1830* [France and Portuguese politics from 1825 to 1830] and *Révolution française et tradition nationale: le cas portugais* [The French Revolution and national tradition: the Portuguese case]. These works were published in *O Liberalismo na Península Ibérica...* (1982, vol. 1, pp. 41–61). Shortly after Silbert's death, a significant portion of his work—including these texts and others on a variety of topics—was compiled and published by Miriam Halpern Pereira in the volume *Portugal na Europa Oitocentista* [Portugal in 19th Century Europe]. The materials for this volume had already been prepared by the author and delivered to the publisher prior to his passing. This volume includes, in Portuguese translation, the vast majority of Albert Silbert's shorter works, making it an essential resource for younger generations seeking a deeper understanding of his contributions.

Following his death in Paris on 30 December 1996, numerous tributes were published in various Portuguese academic journals. *Ler História* dedicated a small *dossier* to him, featuring contributions from two historians, Miriam Halpern Pereira and Fátima Sá e Melo Ferreira, and two geographers, Susanne Daveau and Denise de Brum Ferreira ("Homenagem a Albert Silbert 1915-1996," *Ler História*, Issue 32, 1997, pp. 163–177). *Finisterra* published tributes by Carlos Alberto Medeiros and Mariano Feio: ("Albert Silbert 1915–1996," *Finisterra*, XXXII, 1997, pp. 103–104, and "Um historiador no campo," *Idem*, pp. 105–107). Additionally, *Pénélope* featured an *in memoriam* article by Nuno Gonçalo Monteiro ("Albert Silbert: In Memoriam," *Penélope*, no. 17, 1997), and the journal *História* [History] included a piece by Vitorino Magalhães Godinho ("Os novos caminhos para conhecer Portugal," *História*, 29 (March, 1997) pp. 28-37). These tributes attest to the recognition, appreciation, and esteem in which Albert Silbert and his work have been held in Portugal. However, they do not invalidate the pertinence of a remark he made, tinged with a certain sorrow, during his 1985 interview with *Ler História* when reflecting on his studies of the Auvergne to support the work of his students: "A university professor in the provinces must encourage regional research. We need to find subjects for *maitrise* students and doctoral candidates working in the region. I had many and became a specialist in the contemporary history of Auvergne. I have had fewer chances to train Portuguese historians" (Interview with *Ler História* Issue 5 (1985), p. 123). The fact that Albert Silbert, with his vast knowledge of Portuguese history, had limited opportunities to directly train Portuguese historians after the fall of the dictatorial regime—which had forced so many researchers into exile—is certainly cause for reflection. The constraints of university teaching and research at a time when national borders imposed far greater



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limitations—both in terms of research areas and the organisation of teaching—undoubtedly contributed to this. Today, the possibilities for establishing international university partnerships and research networks are significantly greater than they were in the 1970s and 1980s. However, this brief outburst by the great French historian can be interpreted in another way. Despite the profound influence his studies have had on Portuguese historiography and the broader social sciences in Portugal, Albert Silbert was never a *maître à penser* for Portuguese researchers who read his work or interacted with him. In truth, he never sought to play such a role, nor did he appear to have the inclination for it. His analytical, meticulous, and modest nature made him unsuited to such a position. Otherwise, he would not have embarked on the type of studies he devoted most of his life to: two poor rural regions in a peripheral country. This choice carried significant consequences, including the lack of public recognition he deserved in his own country. His decision to adopt a discreet theoretical and ideological stance further hindered him from assuming a role in Portuguese historiography akin to that of Pierre Vilar in Spanish historiography. Nevertheless, Silbert possessed a remarkable theoretical foundation and a well-informed historiographical perspective, which enabled him to develop original approaches and insights. These qualities are evident in texts such as "Modernité et archaïsme en histoire: quelques réflexions" [Modernity and archaism in history: some thoughts] (*Estudos e Ensaios: Homenagem a Vitorino Magalhães Godinho* [Studies and Essays: Homage to Vitorino Magalhães Godinho], 1988, pp. 61-78) or *La recherche française en histoire contemporaine: deux instituts parisiens spécialisés* [French research into contemporary history: two specialist Parisian institutes] (*Arquivo e Historiografia* [Archives and Historiography], 1985), as well as the oldest: "Oliveira Martins et l'Histoire" [Oliveira Martins and History] (*Regards sur la Génération Portugaise de 1870* [Perspectives on the Portuguese Generation of 1870] 1971, pp. 85-100). What remains less comprehensible is that in a country he studied so thoroughly, where his work garnered admirers and followers across multiple generations, the two principal fruits of his research—*Le Portugal Méditerranéen* and *Le problème agraire portugais*—have never been translated. A historian of peripheral regions in a peripheral country, Albert Silbert suffered the consequences of this condition, which has now been exacerbated by the peripheral status that the French language has come to hold among younger generations.

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