

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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Rego, António da Silva (Joane, Famalicão, 13 June 1905 - Lisbon, 8 July 1986)

At the age of just eleven, António da Silva Rego, one of the fourteen children of Joaquim da Silva Rego and Bernardina de Freitas, travelled to Macau to join the St Joseph's Seminary, invited by his cousin and the rector of the institution, António José Gomes. At the age of twenty-two, he completed his studies, taught at the same seminary, and was ordained by Bishop José da Costa Nunes, Bishop of Macau and Patriarch of the Indies (R. Gulbenkian, "Elogio... [Eulogy...]", 1991, p. 148; A. Corral, "A Sociedade... [Society...]", p. 105.). In 1928, he was assigned by the latter on a mission to Singapore, where he remained for about ten years, serving as the civil parish priest of St Joseph's Church and director of *St. Anthony's Boys School*. It was no coincidence that Roberto Gulbenkian referred to António da Silva Rego as the "Father Master of the Orient" (Idem, p. 163). The first years of his youth spent in the East would prove decisive in shaping the primary focus of study that Silva Rego would pursue for the rest of his life: the history of Portuguese missionisation and patronage in Asia (Idem, p. 149; J. Mendes de Almeida, "A minha homenagem..." [My Tribute...], 1991, p. 16). He travelled to Europe, again at the behest of the Bishop of Macau, to attend the Catholic University of Louvain, where he completed a degree in History (*Sciences Historiques*). As noted by a member of his team later, with the outbreak of the Second World War and during the German invasion of Belgium, Silva Rego was accused of espionage and temporarily detained while attempting to escape (E. Trigo de Sousa *et al*, "Prof. António da Silva Rego...", 1991, pp. 252 and 251). In 1942, he returned to Portugal, settling in Lisbon in a flat so small that he had to convert the coffee shop *Brasileira* into a sort of living room to receive guests (R. Gulbenkian, *ibidem*, p. 151). In 1946, at the age of 41, he was appointed as a regular professor in the *Curso de Altos Estudos Coloniais* [Advanced Course in Colonial Studies] at the invitation of Marcelo Caetano. He became responsible for the subjects of Modern Colonisation and Missionology at the *Escola Superior Colonial* [Higher Colonial School], which later became the *Instituto Superior de Estudos Ultramarinos* [Higher Institute of Overseas Studies] (ISEU - 1954-1961), followed by the *Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Política Ultramarina* (Higher Institute of Overseas Social Sciences and Politics) (ISCSPU - 1962 and 1976), and currently the *Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Políticas* (Higher Institute of Social and Political Sciences) (ISCSP) (Idem, p. 151). Silva Rego served on the management and eventually became the full professor, remaining at the institution until 1975, when he retired. Overseas, he was appointed, in 1957,



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Visiting *Luís de Camões of Portuguese Studies Professor* at the Ernest Oppenheimer Institute of Portuguese Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand (Johannesburg). However, his stay in the Portuguese capital was short-lived. He complemented his teaching activities with numerous trips to Europe, Africa, and Asia, where he combined his research with the missionary spirit he never abandoned. Additionally, his "love" for Macau compelled him to return each year to the place where he had completed his studies (J. Mendes de Almeida, *ibidem*, p. 18). Adriano Moreira recalled that in 1959 alone, Silva Rego travelled through Nigeria, Cameroon, French Equatorial Africa, Angola, the Belgian Congo, Uganda, Kenya, Tanganyika, Rhodesia, and South Africa (A. Moreira, "O Padroado..." [The Patronage...], 1991, p. 232). Fluent in English and French, he gave lectures during many of his travels, particularly in Cambridge, Colombo, Johannesburg, Luanda, Lourenço Marques, Goa, Singapore, and Stockholm, many of which led to publications. Over time, in addition to gaining national recognition, he attained a significant level of international prominence, frequently participating in major scientific events both as an organiser and as a speaker. His CV includes, for instance, participation in the 1st International Seminar on Indo-Portuguese History, organising the 2nd Seminar years later in Lisbon (1980), representing Portugal on the International Commission on Maritime History (1960), attending the Luso-Spanish Congresses for the Progress of Sciences (in Coimbra in 1956 and Porto in 1962), the Tenth and Eleventh International Congresses of Historical Sciences (Rome, 1955/Stockholm, 1960), the First National Conference of Southeast Asian Historians (Singapore, 1961), and presiding over the Second Congress of the International Indian Ocean Historical Association (Lourenço Marques, 1962), among others. (F. Castelo Branco, "Correspondência..." [Correspondence...], 1991, p. 89; R. Gulbenkian, *ibidem*, p. 162).

António da Silva Rego's mission to the Goa Historical Archives in 1951 resulted in a series of microfilms of documents pertaining to the missionary work of the Portuguese in the Orient. The necessity for preservation and dissemination of these materials led to the establishment of the *Filmoteca Ultramarina Portuguesa* [Portuguese Overseas Film Library] in 1952 (E. Trigo de Sousa *et al*, *ibidem*, p. 248). This endeavour was inspired by the extensive discussions he had years earlier with his colleague at the Colonial College and future Minister for Overseas Territories, General Sarmento Rodrigues, who supported Rego's missions to Goa and encouraged his ambition to preserve that and other documentary collections related to the history of missionary work and Portuguese patronage dispersed in this and other foreign archives (R. Gulbenkian, *ibidem*, p. 156). Three years later, the Film Library was incorporated into the *Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos* [Centre for Overseas Historical Studies], which was also established in 1955 by António da Silva Rego. This project was a response to his aspiration to assign critical editions of overseas classics to distinguished specialists and to establish an international journal. Indeed, Silva Rego's name was indelibly linked to the establishment of periodicals and bulletins at the institutions he founded or with which he collaborated. The *Boletim da Filmoteca Ultramarina Portuguesa* [Bulletin of the Portuguese Overseas Film Library] (1954) or the *Studia* (1958), the journal of the *Centro de Estudos Históricos e Ultramarinos* stand out. Inaugurated with a text of his own titled "Do tempo, do homem e da história" [Of time, man and history], he oversaw the publication of thirty-nine volumes, compiling works by numerous Portuguese and foreign



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historians. Volume 53 (1994) was dedicated to him posthumously, which provides us with insights not only into the historian but also into the shared qualities that defined the man who was Silva Rego. He also contributed to and supported other periodicals such as the Journals *Estudos Ultramarinos*, *Comunidades Portuguesas*, *Ultramar*, *Portugal em África*, *Lusitania Sacra*, the *Boletim da Sociedade de Geografia*, *Boletim Geral das Colónias*, *Boletim Geral do Ultramar* and the *Anais da Academia Portuguesa da História*.

In addition to his ability to initiate and coordinate projects, Silva Rego was the author of an extensive body of historiographical work. His initial contributions to the *Boletim Eclesiástico de Macau* [Macau Ecclesiastical Bulletin], in the 30s, he produced over one hundred and fifty publications. At the age of 35, during the commemorations of the 200th anniversary of the foundation and restoration of Portugal, he authored his first reference work: "O padroado português do Oriente: esboço histórico" [The Portuguese patronage of the Orient: historical outline] (1940). In the 1940s, he published several other important texts such as *Dialecto português em Malaca. Apontamentos para o seu estudo* [Portuguese dialect in Malacca. *Apontamentos para o seu estudo*] (1942), the "Sombras da Epopeia portuguesa do Oriente" [Shadows of the Portuguese Epic of the Orient] (1945) and *A presença de Portugal em Macau* [Portugal's presence in Macau] (1946). It was precisely during this period, while he was conducting research, that he encountered the disorganisation of the collection at the Colonial Historical Archive in Lisbon. Assuming that the condition of the latter would likely be indicative of the situation in many other archives, this sparked his desire to engage in the systematisation and preservation of both national and foreign archives (Idem, p. 150). He collaborated with and, in some instances, assisted in the establishment of African archives such as those in Luanda, Mozambique, and São Tomé, as well as Asian archives like those in Macao. He also took an active role in organising the bibliographical collections of the Geographical Society. His connection to the archival environment led to another facet related to his publications. As he himself confessed, it was his "mission" to make as much documentation as possible available and publicise it, ensuring that other researchers could conduct studies on the missionary and social actions of the Portuguese in the Orient "without leaving their lands" (A. Silva Rego, *Documentação para a História...* [Documentation for History], 1947, p. VII). It was within this context that his most significant work, and perhaps his greatest legacy, came to fruition. With the support of the *Agência Geral das Colónias* [General Agency for the Colonies] and the *Instituto da Alta Cultura* [Institute of High Culture], he published, in 1947, the first of twelve volumes of the *Documentação para a História das missões do Padroado Português do Oriente* [Documentation for the History of the Missions of the Portuguese Patronage of the Orient] (12 volumes, 1947-1958). Following this collection, he wrote *A História das Missões do Padroado português no Oriente* [The History of the Portuguese Patronage Missions in the Orient] (1949), a historiographical context that aimed to be comprehensive regarding that collection of documents. However, the Herculean effort required for this ambitious project meant that the author was only able to focus on summarising the first two volumes of the *Documentação*. In this context, he also participated in and coordinated several collective works, including the compilation of *Documentos sobre os portugueses em Moçambique e na África Central 1497-1840* [Documents on the Portuguese in Mozambique and Central



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Africa 1497-1840]. This publication relied on Silva Rego's diplomatic skills to expedite collaboration with African institutions and on the support of the newly established Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (E. Axelson, *ibidem* pp. 56 and 57).

Silva Rego's work can be categorised into four areas: historical, historical-missionological, pedagogical-missionological, and theory of history studies. The first two categories serve as methods of analysis, explored, applied, and aimed to redefine concepts such as "colonisation", "missionisation", "Catholic mission", "acculturation", "encounter of cultures", "nationalism", "expansion-conquest", and "expansion-discovery". He focused his primary area of study on historical-missionological texts: the history of Portuguese expansion and patronage in the East and Africa during the modern era, occasionally extending to contemporary times. Many of these texts incorporated missionary theory, reflecting his own priestly experiences in the East. Pedagogical texts include the one he authored, for instance, for the Missionology course for ISEU students. In the final category — theory of history — he was particularly interested in the phenomena of time and action, exploring concepts such as "history-apprehension and knowledge of reality", "history-construction of the spirit", "history-the explanation of facts", and "history-life" (A. Silva Rego, *ibidem* pp. 11 and 12). He also advocated for the place of History within the social sciences and its autonomy from other disciplines such as philosophy (A. Silva Rego, "Da imparcialidade...", 1962, p. 140). He was also concerned with defining the historian's role and addressing the question of "impartiality in history", a theoretical framework to which he devoted an article with the same name (Idem, pp. 137-150). In his view, the historian was tasked with uncovering the historical truth that was attainable, even if not absolute, by employing a questionnaire that he believed should be nearly inexhaustible (A. Silva Rego, "Do tempo...", 1991, p. 13).

As Judite Freitas has observed, Silva Rego's work can be regarded as part of the Methodical School (J. Freitas, "Perspectivas Históricas..." [Historical Perspectives...], 2006, p. 87). Heuristics played a central role in his work, emphasising that the historian should leave "nothing uninvestigated" (A. Silva Rego, "Da imparcialidade...", 1962, p. 150). He thus dedicated himself to the production of documentary collections, editing sources, and analysing documents. In addition to the aforementioned work, he also coordinated several sourcebooks such as *As Gavetas da Torre do Tombo* [The Drawers of the Torre do Tombo] (1960-1977), *A documentação ultramarina portuguesa* [Portuguese overseas documentation] (1960-1967) or *Manuscritos da Ajuda: Guia* (1966-1973). The attention he devoted to sources resulted in the pioneering need to establish palaeographic rules for transcribing documents, employing international European standards as a model, as he himself noted (A. Silva Rego, *Documentação para a História...*, 1947, p. VIII).

Silva Rego collaborated closely with the major Portuguese academic and cultural institutions, including the Overseas Historical Archive, the Centre for Political and Social Studies at the ISCSPU, the Portuguese Academy of History, the Geographical Society, and government bodies such as the Overseas Scientific Research Board, which later became the now-extinct *Investigação Científica Tropical* [Tropical Scientific Research Institute] (1979-2015). Renowned historians were drawn to his figure, becoming part of networks of international specialists in the history of Portuguese expansion and presence in the world during modern



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times, who acknowledged his prestige. Notably, Charles Boxer, with whom he made several trips, including one to India (C. Boxer, "Uma carta..." [A letter...], 1991, p. 81). It also facilitated the internationalisation of Portuguese historiography and fostered cooperation between its external contacts and national institutions. The audience at the inauguration of the Centre for Overseas Historical Studies, which included notable figures such as Eric Axelson, Charles Boxer, Elaine Sanceau, Damião Peres, Armando and Jaime Cortesão, and General Teixeira Botelho, illustrates this fact (E. Axelson, *ibidem*, p. 55). In Portugal, he is associated with a circle of authors that included Jorge Moser, Adriano Moreira, Virgínia Rau, Torquato de Sousa Soares, António Brásio, and others.

According to the testimony of his close friend Eric Axelson, Silva Rego regarded himself as "apolitical", "neither pro-salazar nor anti-salazar" (E. Axelson, *ibidem*, p. 56). However, as noted earlier (J. Madeira, "Subsídios..." [Elements...], 2008, p. 252), his discourse and historiographical output are shaped by the ideological orientation promoted by the Estado Novo, which praised Portuguese expansion and justified the maintenance of Portuguese overseas territories. Some have identified Luso-Tropicalist traits in his writings (Idem, p. 241). In fact, Silva Rego's connections to the government during the Estado Novo period are undeniable. He even held political office as a member of the Overseas Council and, for over twenty years, from 1953 until the Revolution of '74, served as the Prosecutor of the Corporate Chamber for overseas missionary and episcopal matters concerning the Orient. In the 1960s, he was even assigned by the government to undertake missions in Africa, specifically to study missionology in African territories (A. Moreira *ibidem* pp. 231-232). He thus transposed his research focus, applying it to "contemporary colonial missionary ideology" (J. Madeira, "A Construção...", 2006, p. 114). The legitimisation of Portuguese expansion in the 16th century, missionary issues, and the colonisation of Africa and the Orient were among the topics he studied, on which he aimed to establish the theory of the "good Portuguese coloniser". He argued that through mission and religious identification, the colonised were transformed into willing converts, which, from his perspective, resulted in a mutually beneficial convergence of cultures. For Silva Rego, Portuguese expansion was a manifestation of divine providence, which designated Portugal as "the first ambassador sent by Christendom and Renaissance Europe to the cult of the Orient" (A. Silva Rego, *Curso de Missionologia* [Missionology course] 1956, p. XXIII). For this reason, he sought to diminish the negative connotations that the concept of "colonisation" had acquired. In his view, it should be interpreted through the lens of the evangelising phenomenon and the true essence of missionary work, rejecting the political pretensions that some had associated with it. Silva Rego emphasised that the historian should "be stripped of his prejudices, not only personal, but also social" (A. Silva Rego, "Do tempo... [On time...]", p. 13). However, he also acknowledged the complexity of this task, noting that "man can hardly escape the powerful influence of his personality and other external factors" (A. Silva Rego, "Da imparcialidade..." [On impartiality...], p. 148). While it is true that Silva Rego's works were not co-opted for political purposes, or that he considered himself non-partisan, reading his texts reveals a devoted historian as well as a historian-devotee. At times, his historical thinking intertwines with that of the religious man, the priest, shaped by his missionary training and motivated

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by the cause of defending the actions of the Catholic Church throughout history, particularly within the context of Portuguese expansion. With this, he aimed to achieve a full restoration, also attaining "a reconnection in the academic sense of the term between the Portuguese State and theology." (J. Madeira, *ibidem*, 2006, p. 133).

António da Silva Rego was a member and president of the leading Portuguese scientific and cultural societies of his time. He became a member of the *Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa* [Lisbon Geographical Society] in 1937, a full member and part of the History section in 1946, and later joined and chaired the Indian, Asian, and Macanese subcommittees. He also served as the director of the institution's library (1966) and later as its vice-president (1974 and 1983). He became a member of the *Academia Portuguesa da História* [Portuguese Academy of History] in 1951, and in 1955, he was awarded chair no. 18. He subsequently held the vice-presidency twice (1963-1972 and 1975-1983) and served as the president of the Academic Council from 1972 to 1975. In 1983, he was appointed president of honour. As a corresponding member of the *Academia das Ciências de Lisboa* [Lisbon Academy of Sciences] since 1962, he also played a role in founding the *Academia Internacional da Cultura Portuguesa e da União das Comunidades de Cultura Portuguesa* [International Academy of Portuguese Culture and the Union of Portuguese Cultural Communities] (1965). The Portuguese State honoured him with the title of Grand Officer of the Order of Prince Henry the Navigator on 24 March 1962, and the *Universidade Técnica de Lisboa* [Technical University of Lisbon] awarded him an *Honoris Causa* doctorate in 1966.

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