

DICIONÁRIO DE HISTORIADORES PORTUGUESES

DA ACADEMIA REAL DAS CIÊNCIAS AO FINAL DO ESTADO NOVO

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Vértice, revista de cultura e arte (Coimbra, 1942-)

Published uninterruptedly between 1942 and 1986 (the new series only resumed two years later, continuing to the present day), *Vértice* occupied a prominent place in 20th-century Portuguese culture. In addition to its remarkable longevity for a journal of its kind, perhaps only comparable in this respect to *Seara Nova*, its relevance is also justified by the fact that it established itself as one of the main spaces of cultural resistance to the Estado Novo, where sometimes diverse and conflicting paths developed, expressing above all Marxist-inspired worldviews and a general impetus for renewal in the cultural field. Its importance also lies in the different fields of knowledge covered in its pages: literature, film and theatre criticism, visual arts, music, economics and history, among other subjects discussed by some of the most prominent intellectuals of the time.

The early years of the Coimbra journal did not foreshadow the longevity and importance it would come to have. Between 1942 and 1944, only three issues were published in a context of extreme financial difficulties and uncertainty about the immediate future of the publication. And while it is true that these difficulties persisted throughout its existence, from 1945 onwards, *Vértice* took a new direction. It had been acquired by a group of young intellectuals linked to neo-realism (Arquimedes Silva Santos, Carlos de Oliveira, João José Cochofel, Rui Feijó and Joaquim Namorado), who injected it with new vitality, immediately evident in the first editorials that defined the new guidelines. Following the suspension of several cultural journals with a significant Marxist presence in the early 1940s, this group's initiative responded to the concerns of the intellectual sector of the Portuguese Communist Party in Coimbra, which noted the absence of a platform where they could convey their ideas (Luís Andrade, *Intelectuais, Utopia e Comunismo*, 2010, pp. 160-1).

With the end of the Second World War, *Vértice* embarked on a project of cultural renewal that aimed to contribute to the identification, study and transformation of the concrete problems of the country and its people. Hence, more than an art and culture journal, *Vértice* sought to establish itself as a journal of "useful culture", in which theory should be combined with practice and study with action. It was with this aim in mind that intellectuals of a "progressive spirit" were invited to contribute to the pages of the journal. From the outset, there was an attempt to distance itself from other understandings of culture, namely a strictly bookish culture, and from an "office complacency", a culture of abstraction and alienation from social problems (nos. 17-

21, Nov. 1945, 69-71).

In one of the first editorials of the “new” *Vértice*, history was evoked in order to substantiate and legitimise this cultural project. It conveyed the image of a national past fractured by a fundamental contradiction between “progressive” and “obscurantist” Portugal. These two traditions were associated not only with certain figures in Portuguese history but also with different historical periods. The theory of decline outlined in the 19th century was readapted, according to which, after the golden age of the Discoveries, Portugal had entered a long period of obscurantism from the second half of the 16th century, only countered by the recovery in the ‘heroic phase of liberalism’. Still in the 19th century, a new cycle of “stagnation” had set in, which even the Republic had been unable to change (nos. 30-35, May 1946, 81-85).

Through a history of pedagogical and civic aims, *Vértice* took on the mission of recovering the progressive “glorious tradition”, as Piteira Santos reiterated a few years later: “we, who discovered our homeland in its historical and popular authenticity, have a duty to resurrect the noble and progressive traditions of the flock” (nos. 56-57, Apr. – May 1948, 372). As in the present at that time, the national past was presented as the result of a choice that had to be made between progress and obscurantism. On the centenary of 1848 in France, Borges de Macedo reflected precisely on the construction of historical memory, recognising that “it is in the atmosphere of a certain ‘present’ that a certain ‘past’ is chosen to commemorate” (nos. 56-57, Apr. – May 1948, 326-7). At a time when historical commemorations were used to celebrate the regime itself, a response to this hegemonic historical memory began to take shape in the opposition press. In the words of Borges de Macedo, “there is no single tradition, the past is not the same for everyone, just as the present is not”.

Throughout the pages of *Vértice*, several articles expressed this pedagogical and civic use of history, in which the “progressive” and “popular” elements of national history were articulated. Despite recurring criticism of the role attributed to “great men” in history, they continued to be presented as examples or personifications of the collective aspirations of the Portuguese people. Luís de Albuquerque, who was very interested in the history of education at the time, dedicated two articles in 1947 to Verney and José Anastácio da Cunha, examples of cultural resistance and progressive spirit in a Portugal dominated by conservatism and retrograde ideas in its educational institutions. By evoking great figures from Portugal’s cultural past, often in commemorative contexts, the aim was to retrospectively legitimise the image of the interventionist and progressive intellectual, dedicated to solving the problems of the Portuguese people. This heroic image of the intellectual is also presented to us, for example, in an article that Armando Bacelar, under the pseudonym Inês Gouveia, dedicated to Leonor da Fonseca Pimentel. Born in Rome but never losing “her interest in the things of her homeland”, she had frequented the court of Naples and was a staunch defender of the need to invest in popular education. Caught up in the troubled political situation of that kingdom at the end of the 18th century, she was sentenced to death by hanging for treason against the Bourbon monarchy. Before she died, “her last salute was to the people” (no. 141, June 1955, 348-52).

Nevertheless, this did not mean that the great cultural figures of the past were given special relevance in

the national historical destiny. This role was often assigned to the people as collective heroes. Several articles spread the idea that “in the great crises of nationality, it was always the people who showed the greatest national consciousness” (nos. 22-26, Feb. 1946, 1). The nation and its independence were presented as the work of the Portuguese people, while the nobility and the clergy were often accused of betraying national consciousness and independence in favour of their own class interests, an idea espoused by Fernando Pinto Loureiro, Rui Feijó, Joaquim Namorado, among others. This explains the choice of certain key moments in Portuguese history (1383-85, 1640, the Napoleonic invasions, among others) where the resistance of the people, liberation from foreign domination and the betrayal of the privileged classes were central to the nationalist and popular narrative they sought to spread.

This concept of the collective hero represents, more than a break with the past, the persistence of a voluntaristic idea of historical development. Mário Braga adopted it to understand the reasons for the different outcomes in 1383 and 1580. This difference did not lie in the idea of nationality, the role of the nobility, economic causes, or even the different balance of military forces on those two dates: “only an analysis of the actions of the people at one moment or the other will enable us to formulate an answer” (no. 80, Apr. 1950, 197-205).

In another sense, Vértice’s cultural project contributed to the affirmation of conceptions of history that were assumed to be scientific and associated with the ideas of rigour, truth and objectivity in the study of the past. As a result of the influence of Marxist ideas and the Annales, contingency and human initiative tended to be relativised or, from a more deterministic perspective, suppressed in historiographical interpretations. This was the case with António José Saraiva who, in a critique of António Sérgio’s idealism, definitively questioned any voluntarist idea in the study of the past: “The subject is determined to the extent that we know the object. Everything is therefore reduced to knowing the object”. The emphasis on the materialist nature of historical becoming sought to bring history closer to scientific methods and objectives: as long as ‘our subjective consciousness’ was removed from historiographical construction, man could be attributed ‘predictable behaviour, reducible to statistics’. (No. 81, May 1950, 279-288).

In another article, significantly entitled “Determinism and history”, António José Saraiva explored this idea further, stating that “explaining social phenomena, introducing the assumption of predictability into them, is ultimately reducing them to the laws of material determinism”. In this sense, historical knowledge not only enabled the diachronic identification of structural problems in societies, but also their future transformation, through the ability of historians to uncover the “laws” that conditioned human action, thus constituting “an instrument for accelerating progress” (nos. 99-101, Nov.-Jan. 1951-2, 572-3). In this theoretical framework, adopted in a more or less orthodox manner (depending on the historian), the concept of “historical laws” played a structuring role in historiographical interpretation, with its use in the pages of Vértice by several historians standing out.

Not everyone orthodoxly accepted the economic monism of history disseminated by Marxist-Leninist-inspired theses. Piteira Santos, for example, stated that “the ideas of men are also a force”, ironically



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questioning whether “it is necessary for a narrow materialist to discreetly remind the flock of this concrete value of ideas” (no. 55, Mar. 1948, 237). Borges de Macedo also questioned the need to “purge” the ideological prejudices of an “idealistic” historiography. For if history was a science, it was also testimony, insofar as the historian brought his present condition, his problems and the environment of his time into historiography. Although this idea was commonly accepted, Borges de Macedo did not consider that the presence of the historian was an obstacle to obtaining “historical truth”. Beyond historical psychology, which would act as a “corrective element”, truth was rather the result of “objective partialities” and the accumulation of historiographical interpretations that give a broader view of human experience (no. 123, Nov.-Dec. 1953, 655-7).

These various theoretical reflections were not the only means of affirming the scientific value of history; the importance of critical reviews in *Vértice* should also be highlighted. These often served as a tool for bringing theory closer to historiographical practice, as an exercise in organising discourse. This intention was present in two reviews that António José Saraiva wrote of books by his friend Óscar Lopes, lamenting a certain propensity for psychological interpretation that “clashed” with the sociological perspective, thus giving one of these books an “incongruous eclecticism” (no. 48, July 1947, 235). In another sense, in Augusto da Costa Dias’ analysis of António José Saraiva’s *Inquisição Portuguesa*, this total conformity between theory and practice was praised, to the point of stating that accurate knowledge of the “laws of social development” gave a definitive character to this history, which subsequent studies “will only confirm and enrich in detail” (no. 151, Apr. 1956, 169-73).

The reviews were also a means of distinguishing this work from other forms of writing history, particularly scholarly history – a “good archive of facts”, as Alberto Ferreira characterised a work by Fr. Mário Martins (no. 172, Jan. 1958, 64) – or the “amateurs of Clio” who did not meet a series of prerequisites that characterised the “profession of historian”, as Joel Serrão lamented in one of these reviews (no. 95, July 1951, 383-4). This demarcation resulted in the creation of a more or less precise notion of historiographical identity, of a “scientific community” of historians. In fact, many of the critical reviews in *Vértice* were of works by other contributors. In a review by Armando Castro of *Situação Económica no Tempo de Pombal* by Borges de Macedo – a work also analysed in *Vértice* by Joel Serrão – conveys the idea of “a scant half-dozen authors” who, “without the support of academies or universities”, were working to reduce the gap between concrete achievements and “recognition of the true scientific orientation “ (no. 107, July 1952, 378). This identity construction would be further developed three years later in a lecture given by Magalhães Godinho in São Paulo (Essays, vol. III, 241-2) and highlighted by Rui Feijó in *Vértice* in a series of reviews on the *Revista de História de São Paulo* and the *Annales* (no. 86, Oct. 1950, 263-4). As has been pointed out, there was a close affinity between the Marxist ideas and those of the *Annales* among several contributors to *Vértice*, but there was also some distance, as Armando de Castro (no. 220, Jan. 1962, 59-62) and Vital Moreira pointed out in relation to “a certain tendency [in the *Annales*] to treat prices as an independent variable with its own logic” (nos. 334-5, Nov.-Dec. 1971, 912).



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Unlike what happened in Seara Nova, there were very few controversies dealing with historical issues in *Vértice*. Nevertheless, one that occurred in the early 1950s between Joel Serrão and Piteira Santos about Antero de Quental is worth mentioning, as it continued the controversies that had begun in Seara and involved several contributors. In a way, this controversy between Piteira Santos and Joel Serrão pitted the two historical conceptions mentioned above against each other, one with more civic and pedagogical aims and the other with a scientific orientation.

With regard to the central issue raised, the divergence had been latent since 1947, although care was taken not to specifically mention the names of those who held the different opinions. This caution ceased to make sense a few years later, in a context of open controversy between contributors to *Vértice*, particularly between João José Cochofel and António José Saraiva in the first half of the 1950s, known as the internal controversy of neo-realism.

In 1947, a number of articles denounced the rhetorical spirit that was present among young progressive intellectuals. Rui Feijó, supporting the ideas of an article published in Seara Nova by Rui Grácio, criticised this “rhetoric of the concrete”, which repeated “the need for concrete study, but only talking about it as a necessity without actually putting it into practice” (no. 43, Jan. 1947, 230). In the same vein, a few months later, Joel Serrão also expressed the same concern when he asked: “Are we really going to study our problems? Or will we rather believe that the national reality will be transformed by the magic touch of our good or bad rhetoric?” (no. 50, Sept. 1947, 353-5). In response to these positions, in an article entitled precisely “The rhetoric of the concrete and other rhetorics”, Piteira Santos valued “the attitude as an attitude”, that is, even if ideas did not materialise into deeper knowledge and effective reform of society, they were still real and consequential: “the ideas of men win men for ideas” (no. 55, March 1948, 236-7).

This divergence took on a historiographical dimension in the controversy of 1951-1952. In an article published in Seara Nova (nos. 1226-7) on “the understanding of Antero”, Joel Serrão continued his research project on Portuguese 19th-centuryism, which was strongly influenced by the history of mentalities of the *Annales*, which argued, above all Lucien Febvre, that it was necessary to view a particular era as a totality in itself, with its own mentality, different from that of the present. Joel Serrão intended to apply this principle to the study of contemporary Portugal, frequently warning his readers of the dangers of anachronism, especially regarding a period so close to the present. He warned of the risk of considering Antero “our contemporary”, thereby disregarding all scientific studies of the mentality of 19th-century man, which differed in many ways from the mentality of men in 1950. Although he did not mention it, Joel Serrão was referring to some interpretations made by Piteira Santos and Manuel Mendes precisely about Antero. In his scathing response, Piteira Santos rejected any accusation of anachronism in his interpretation, since “the notion of seriousness, the notion of coherence, the notion of honour were not significantly different from those of our time. And even then it was customary, and a duty, to honour political commitments” (no. 98, Oct. 1951, 516). He sought, “without distorting historical science”, to distance himself from Joel Serrão’s “scientifically driven” perspective. Instead, it was Antero’s example and current relevance that interested him, accusing Joel Serrão of failing to



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understand “the true meaning of the debate in which, out of mere civic duty, we are engaged”. This civic duty involved affirming the model of the interventionist intellectual, as the following condemnation of two prominent figures of 19th-century Portuguese culture reveals: “neither olive oil producers in Vale de Lobos, nor suicides on a misty island: neither fugitives nor defeated; the things and people of this Lusitanian land deserve better”. Piteira Santos was reviving an idea of Raul Proença who, using the same images, noted the absence among us of a “hero”, of “a great master of moral action” (quoted by Joel Serrão, “Aproximação do pensamento de Raul Proença” [Approach to the thought of Raul Proença], 1971, 26).

In any case, this separation between the civic and scientific strands should not be overemphasised. In the pages of *Vértice*, Piteira Santos also associated his time with the emergence of history as a science, surpassing the artistic and ethical history of the past (no. 50, Sept. 1947, 356-66). In the 1990s, in response to an article in which Borges de Macedo criticised Marxist historiography (*Jornal de Letras*, 9 and 12 June 1992), he emphasised, without denying his ideological commitment, the task of ‘constructing a history of scientific rigour’ (JL, no. 524, 21-27 June 1992, 6-7). Joel Serrão also insistently recalled the civic condition of the historian, his irreducible condition as a man of the present time (“Brevíssima reflexão preambular sobre historiografia...” [Very brief preliminary reflection on historiography...], 1982, 9-23). They were also united by the same experience of time, of a prospective nature, in which the present and the future were central to historical construction. Hence, both distanced themselves from a scholarship without interpretation or problematisation that linked it to the present, as well as from a revisionism that seemed to them to be the restoration of the past in the present.

This controversy took place, as mentioned above, during a period of serious controversy and divisions among some of *Vértice*’s contributors. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, some of the journal’s most prominent contributors suspended or significantly reduced their presence, often in political and party break with Marxist-Leninist ideology. Among the historians, the cases of Borges de Macedo (who abandoned his collaboration in 1955), Joel Serrão and Piteira Santos (both in 1957, only returning sporadically many years later) and António José Saraiva (in 1965) stand out. Even so, others continued to contribute more or less frequently, such as Armando Castro, Óscar Lopes and Luís de Albuquerque. The latter’s contribution should be highlighted for his dedication to *Vértice*, where he published dozens of articles, not only on the history of education and the Discoveries, but also on other subjects that demonstrated the breadth of his scientific, cultural and civic interests. Between 1948 and 1953, he held the position of editorial secretary of the journal, contributing under various pseudonyms to the regular functioning of the publication.

The departure of the aforementioned historians was offset by the arrival of new contributors. This change resulted in greater attention being paid to 19th-century Portuguese history, particularly through articles published by Flausino Torres and Victor de Sá. Continuing the interest in 19th-century Portugal that had begun in the 1940s, a significant group of scholars began to form who, according to Flausino Torres, should come together to produce an indispensable collective work on the contemporary Portuguese period (no. 209, Feb. 1961, 110). This renewed interest in contemporary history occurred in a context of significant changes in



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Portuguese society, a fact that was not overlooked by Victor de Sá, who saw it in the light of the “imperative derived from the crisis of civic consciousness that we are becoming aware of” (nos. 234-6, Mar.-May 1963, 238). It was therefore important to understand the social structure in which communist intellectuals intended to intervene (José Neves, *Comunismo e Nacionalismo...*, 2010, 329).

In conclusion, the historiographical importance of *Vértice* should be highlighted in a context in which historians linked to the opposition to the Estado Novo were, as a rule, excluded from state educational and research institutions. Alongside other journals and publishing projects, *Vértice* became one of the privileged spaces for the presentation of the ideas and works of many of these historians who contributed to the emergence and consolidation of new theoretical, methodological and conceptual proposals, many of which were later rejected, sometimes by the authors themselves. Nevertheless, it is significant that many of the historians who contributed to *Vértice* went on to take up teaching positions in higher education, particularly after the 25 April revolution, including Joel Serrão, António José Saraiva, Borges de Macedo, Luís de Albuquerque, Victor de Sá, João Medina and António Hespanha, among others.

It should also be noted that the analysis of the history texts in *Vértice* raises questions about the sometimes uncritical or unexplained use of the analytical category ‘Marxist historiography’. While it is true that there are some common ideas that make its use relevant, it cannot be based solely on the political affiliation of the historians in question, nor on the set of general ideas they adopted. From a historiographical point of view, differences can be noted in the interpretation of certain key moments in the history of Portugal and also in the conceptions and uses of history, as we have seen. And while historiographical controversies and debates were not a privileged means of discussing these differences, they were nevertheless present, sometimes implicitly. As can be seen in the debate on the different artistic conceptions of the intellectuals who opposed the Estado Novo, there was also no theoretical and interpretative unanimity in historiography.

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