

# “Tribute To A Portuguese Historian: A Foreign Historian’s Perspective On Oliveira Marques’ Principal Historical Studies In English”

Douglas L. Wheeler  
University of New Hampshire  
Durham

As a brief retrospective on and tribute to the pioneering contributions to the study of Portuguese history of the late Professor Antonio Henrique de Oliveira Marques(1933-2007), this is one historian’s perspective on the significance to our field of Oliveira Marques’ principal historical studies in English. For the purposes of this short study, I will discuss a selection only of two books and two articles, all published in English. In order of publication, they consist of the following: A.H. De Oliveira Marques, “Revolution and Counterrevolution in Portugal-Problems of Portuguese History, 1900-1930,” in *Studien uber die Revolution* (offprint, Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1969), pp. 402-418; *Daily Life In Portugal In The Late Middle Ages* (transl. by S.S. Wyatt (Madison, WI: Univ.of Wisconsin Press, 1971); *History Of Portugal* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1972, 1st ed. in two volumes, 1976, 2<sup>nd</sup>.rev. ed. in one volume; “The Portuguese 1920s: a general survey,” in *Iberian Studies* (University of Keele, UK; vol. 2, Spring, 1973), pp. 32-40.

On the eve of Oliveira Marques publishing these studies over a period of four years, what from the purview of the foreign historian abroad was the state of the field of the general history of Portugal? And of the study of contemporary Portuguese History after 1890? Besides the barrier of language, several daunting difficulties, first of all, confronted novice students in this subject: the sheer scale of the long history of a former world power (more than 800 years of nationality; 2000+ years of civilization); the bewildering list of many dynasties and monarchs since 1140; for many American students, the lack of reference to a familiar comparator country, known to Americans, such as England, France or Germany; not one but several vast overseas empires stretching from Madeira to the Moluccas or from Cape Verdes to Macau; the invasion of many different ethnic groups since before Greek and Phoenician traders arrived; the availability in the English language of relatively few historical studies of any value, compared, say, to the case in Spanish studies, where Spanish history was better known outside Iberia and where more Spanish classics had been translated to English; the prevalence of censorship, either official or unofficial (self-censorship), in key periods of Portuguese History, and obscure and obscurantist hidden agendas of the published ideologues as well as the influence of conflicting ideological perspectives on these periods, especially during the Inquisition

(1536-1820) or during various dictatorial regimes, especially but not exclusively, the New State, 1926-1974. And the list could go on.

From my personal experience as a History student in North America during my graduate studies between 1959-63, Portuguese history was seemingly secondary to a history of southern Africa, namely, of Angola, the subject of my doctoral dissertation. And it was more than challenging for the novice to find useable, useful historical studies of Portugal's past in any language; further, if a few such volumes were available - and only the best research libraries would have a few - being able to understand fully Portuguese society and its seemingly labyrinthine history was difficult. This struggle came in several stages in my life: first as a graduate student preparing Portuguese History (included in southern European history, as a distinct field) for my doctoral oral examinations in 1961; then spending much of an academic year and a summer in Lisbon doing the research in libraries and archives on my dissertation on the history of 19<sup>th</sup> century Angola and Portuguese colonial rule between 1961-62; completing the dissertation, which referred frequently to Portuguese history, too, between 1962-63; preparing a book on the history of Angola up to 1970-71; preparing a study on the history of Portugal's First Republic(1910-26) during 1969-1978.

Some works in English were useful for the beginner: the books of H.V. Livermore(1947;1966 and later eds.) and of Charles Nowell (1952) were well-written, in lively styles, but I was baffled when I learned that Livermore had based much of his basic survey on a Portuguese classic which seemed inaccessible to me: the massive, forbidding, eight volume reference work of Damião Peres, *História de Portugal*, which had first appeared between 1928-35.

I was anxious to find brief, one-volume surveys which were both readable yet could unlock the many secrets of Portugal's storied past. A few books in French, published in the 1960s, seemed to fit this bill, but on closer examination, these handbooks had exciting interpretations but rarely discussed those subjects I was most interested in, such as colonial rule and the first Republic. And they lacked discussion in any depth.

The appearance of Oliveira Marques' new survey of Portugal's history, in English, in 1972, was fortunate for a semi-novice student of first Republic. *History Of Portugal*, for my research on the period, 1910-1926, was not only useful as a guide to various approaches to Portugal's contemporary history but as a concise set of interpretations of key issues and problems. Among the appealing features of the work was a learned but no-nonsense, iconoclastic approach to the geography of Portugal, one of the keys to the history of Portugal. Oliveira Marques wasted no time in puncturing a recent 'trial balloon' in geography, the American geographer Dan Stanislawski's theory that a distinct geography of Portugal's corner of the Iberian Peninsula was at the heart of the 'individuality' of Portugal.<sup>1</sup> With the exception of one unimportant geographic feature, wide coastal plains, by and large Portugal's geographic features, were the same as those of the comparable region of Spain. *Location*, Oliveira Marques declared, not topography was the greater key to the Portuguese historical enigma.

Similarly appealing to me as a historian, was Oliveira Marques' approach to the history of the first Republic. While more material on politics would have been helpful, for the politics of the Republic was the main focus of my 1978 book, the Portuguese historian's anatomy of society, culture and economic trends was invaluable; based on a mastery of a lot of material, his approach did not assign great importance to the roles of personalities, psychological history, and moral questions. In presenting a rationalist's approach to the study of the decline of Portugal and of its overseas empire after 1550 and taking into account the influential studies of C.R. Boxer, for example, Oliveira

Marques was critical of scholars who favored analysis involving moral judgements. He described them as “historian-moralists” or “moralist-politicians.”<sup>ii</sup>

In composing a volume on some sixteen years of Portuguese history, 1910 to 1926, this Historian longed for survey books and articles which could study concisely a problem or period or era, cite the bibliography available and present clear hypotheses. I discovered some assistance in two articles of 1969 and 1973, cited above. The 1969 piece published in a German scholarly periodical and the 1973 article published in a British journal were useful to me, since they discussed the critical generation of 1900-1930, when Portugal experienced three different political regimes (monarchy, republic, dictatorship), and the ‘in-between’ decade of the 1920s, an understudied period in Portugal’s turbulent Republic’s history, and a time of transition from the first Republic to the Military Dictatorship.

The more specialized and very different study, *Daily Life In Portugal In The Late Middle Ages*, was published a year before his general history appeared. This is ‘everyman’s history,’ a record of the medieval daily life of ordinary people and of some of the elite. As in the case of his work on the first Republic, Oliveira Marques’ approach to medieval Portugal was to focus in a new way on Portugal: not on political or administrative history or the history of the voyages of discovery, but to analyze Portuguese daily life from the 12<sup>th</sup> through the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. The list of chapters with simple titles speaks for itself: The Table, Dress, The House; Hygiene and Health; Affection; Work, Faith; Culture; Amusements and Death. This book is made all the more useful as it contains key elements of a reference work; after the chapter-essays on the topics cited above, there are genealogical charts; notes; a critical bibliography; sources of illustrations and an index. The work is handsomely illustrated, too, with reproductions of engravings from manuscripts and books.

In conclusion, these works in English of Oliveira Marques performed an essential service for a foreign historian who was beginning to focus more exclusively on a new field: Portuguese History. Given the fact that so much of previous Portuguese historiography was so often super-loaded with ideologies and odd presumptions or dominated by myths or half-legends, it was refreshing to read the scholarly, rational and logical approach of a career historian who published in English, and a master of Portugal’s past. Of course, the cited works I have drawn from here form only a small part of Oliveira Marques’ vast output of published work in Portuguese. For the sake of posterity, including future historians of this corner of Iberia and of its overseas empire, an accessible, definitive, and complete Bibliography of his works would be an overdue and invaluable service to the field.

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<sup>i</sup> Dan Stanislawski, *The Individuality of Portugal*(Austin,TX: Univ.of Texas, 1959).

<sup>ii</sup> A.H.de Oliveira Marques, *History Of Portugal*(New York: Columbia Univ.Press, 1972), vol.1, p. 266.