

# The Portuguese Inquisition in the Historical Writing of J. Romero Magalhães<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This article seeks to identify the contributions made by the historiographical works of J. Romero Magalhães to the field of the History of the Inquisition, showing what marks they have left in the historiography and what impasses they have created. The conclusion is that one of the essential features of the author's work was the way in which he wrote; it was also important for its discussion of the impacts of the Inquisition in the territory, as well as its periodization of the presence of the tribunal in Portugal.

## Keywords

Historiography; Portuguese Inquisition: periodization; Inquisition and territory; New Christians; Social and Economic History.

## Resumo

Este artigo tem como objetivo identificar os contributos dos trabalhos historiográficos de J. Romero Magalhães no campo da História da Inquisição: que marcas deixa na historiografia; que impasses criou. Conclui-se que uma das notas essenciais do trabalho do Autor foi o modo como escreveu. Foi também relevante no plano dos impactos da Inquisição no território e na periodização da presença do tribunal em Portugal.

## Palavras-chave

Historiografia; Inquisição Portuguesa: periodização; Inquisição e território; Cristãos-novos; História Económica e Social.

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Since Alexandre Herculano (1810-1877), Pedro de Azevedo (1869-1923), and António Baião (1878-1961), the Inquisition has been a theme that is sometimes discussed in both the Portuguese and international historiography about Portugal. For a long period in the twentieth century, the subject seemed to be lying dormant, appearing only irregularly and almost completely disappearing from historiographical analyses. Since the 1980s, studies have sought to accompany the international debates taking place about the Iberian Inquisitions, step by step, further consolidating the knowledge already acquired about the Portuguese institution. Joaquim Romero Magalhães (1942-2018) (henceforth referred to as JRM) was part of this movement, although he only published five texts on the topic. These were written between 1981 and 1997, with all of them being reprinted: one in 1993, and the others between 2012 and 2017 (together with bibliographical updates). This is a clear sign that these papers still continue to be read in the academic community. They are:

- Magalhães, J. Romero (1981). E assim se abriu judaísmo no Algarve. *Revista da Universidade de Coimbra*. (29): 1-73 [Reprinted in Magalhães, J. R. (2012). *O Algarve na Época Moderna*. Col. Miunças – 2. Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade; Universidade do Algarve, 141-255].<sup>3</sup>
- Magalhães, J. Romero (1987). Em busca dos 'tempos' da Inquisição (1573-1615). *Revista de História das Ideias*. IX (t. 2): 191-228 [Reprinted in Magalhães, J. R. (2017). *Avulsos de História Moderna: instituições, pessoas e conflitos*. Col. Miunças – 4. Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade, 185-233].<sup>4</sup>
- Magalhães, J. Romero (1988). Dos mercadores portugueses aos mercadores ingleses (com a Inquisição pelo meio). In Magalhães, J. R. *O Algarve Económico (1600-1773)*. Lisbon: Estampa, 363-89 [Reprinted in 1993].<sup>5</sup>
- Magalhães, J. Romero (1992). La Inquisición portuguesa: intento de periodización. *Revista de la Inquisición* (2): 71-93 [Reprinted in Magalhães, J. R. (2017). In *Avulsos de História Moderna: instituições, pessoas e conflitos*. Col. Miunças – 4. Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade, 235-59].<sup>6</sup>
- Magalhães, J. Romero (1997). A Universidade e a Inquisição. In *História da Universidade em Portugal*. Vol. I (t. 2). Coimbra: Universidade de Coimbra – F. C. Gulbenkian, 971-88 [Reprinted in Magalhães, J. R. (2017). *Avulsos de História Moderna: instituições, pessoas e conflitos*. Col. Miunças – 4. Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade, 261-82].<sup>7</sup>

In his presentation of *Miunças-4*, JRM explains that the Inquisition was a topic in which he was interested, although he did not “invest in continued studies” (M4, p. 8).

<sup>3</sup> In this article, this collection will be referred to as: M2 (from its Portuguese name of “Miunças”).

<sup>4</sup> This paper will be referred to as: M4a.

<sup>5</sup> All citations referring only to the page numbers are taken from this book chapter, 1988 edition.

<sup>6</sup> This paper will be referred to as: M4b.

<sup>7</sup> This paper will be referred to as: M4c.

This article seeks to identify the relevant marks, impasses and contributions of JRM (1942-2018) to the global historiography about the Portuguese Inquisition. This is a first attempt to study his historical discourse and practice.

### **1. In the beginning was the writing.**

What makes JRM's work so different and special is, first of all, the way in which he wrote, despite his fondness for "global explanations" (p. 23). The impact of his writing is such that it is difficult to translate his prose into other languages. His texts take the form of a narrative discourse, but one in which trend lines and numbers appear quite regularly. They are a mixture of rigor and irony, combined with the heartbeat of the time and its distinctive language, as much when he writes about woodland and cattle as when he writes about the Inquisition. Let us consider a passage from *O Algarve Económico*, one of the works in which his writing was at its most refined:

The Inquisition did not inflict wounds indiscriminately. Ever. It launched a raid on Vila Nova de Portimão, one of the most active ports along the Algarve coast. And it wreaked great havoc. Among the women who were caught was one whose husband was in Peru. As has been said, Vila Nova de Portimão was one of the ports with the closest (and therefore illegal) links with the Indies. The number of women hunted down there (86, as opposed to 13 men) is far too unbalanced for us not to think about adventurous emigrations, seafarers spreading across the Peninsular empires. And that is how it was.

The fact that, during these years in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, there were changes of residence, with people actively upping and "moving home", is not surprising. The silver empire opened up to the enterprise of the Portuguese in 1580. And they certainly took advantage. (p. 365)

These are short sentences, sometimes extremely short, and straight to the point. There are some cases where a sentence consists of just one word. It is enough in itself and gives greater emphasis to what he is trying to state or express. This is the case, for example, with the word "ever" in the above quotation.

The measured reasoning that dictates the flow of his discourse is marked by his erudition as a historian, frequently expressed in the first person singular and even using the exclamation mark (p. 366). When he writes in the first person, this brings the historian within him to the fore, indicating the parameters of his analysis and the limits to his possible interpretations: “I managed to go further in my knowledge of the groups from Loulé and Faro” (p. 369); “I found no traces of two of them” (p. 369); “I was only unable to discover the identity of 11 of the 73 people enlisted” (p. 370); “one graduate – I did not discover what his subject was” (p. 370). “I insist that (...)” (p. 370); “to which I added women who were married to noblemen” (p. 371); “of 16 people taxed in 1631, I am sure that they went to Castile” (p. 372); “which does not seem to me to be any less” (p. 373); “so far, I have been unable to follow their tracks” (p. 375). Similarly brought into play through his use of the first person singular is the knowledge accumulated by the historian in his appreciation of a given reality, the fruit of a great deal of research in the archives: “Not even in the Cathedral Chapter do I sense any collective militancy in these actions” (p. 378). The verb “sense”, used as a synonym for intuiting from the stored evidence, clearly describes his personal intervention in the establishment of highly probable knowledge. The reader can never forget the role played by this agent in pointing out hesitations and uncertainties or in underlining trends. The text is fed by sources and data, but the links between all of these are the result of the interpretive work done by the historian.

Here and there, JRM uses language that is close to what was spoken in the period that he is analyzing, employing almost popular or spontaneous expressions (for example, “*bufô*” (“grass” or “squealer”) to refer to an informer or denouncer – M2, p. 169) in order to better express the reality that he is describing and the way of life at that time. On the one hand, this writing strategy emphasizes the sense of otherness – it is another time that he is referring to and whoever is reading should not forget this. In the passage quoted earlier, he referred to the “great havoc”, the “women who were caught”, “hunted down” or “the great hunt in the Algarve in 1631-1633” (M4b, p. 245). The whole family of words deriving from the root word “hunt” is frequently found in his texts about the Inquisition to translate the idea of people who are being persecuted with great intentionality and violence (M2, p.148, 149, *passim*). We also notice clear signs of a more popular spoken language, such as: “The hunt for New Christians began big-time in the South when the commercial movement was already drastically declining” (p. 368); “If things were already pretty bad, they got even worse” (p. 373); “A humungous leap in quality” (M4a, p. 193); “University that remained tight-lipped” (M4c, p. 273).

On the other hand, his search for empathy – with the reader – sometimes leads him to use here and there a sprinkling of adjectives that are hyperbolic or relatively judgmental in their description, in order to catch the reader’s attention: “to swell the murky spectacles of Evora” (p. 372); and “to scorch the earth” (p. 379), a literary figure of speech that associates the Holy Office with the fire (“the starting point was the fire, and the more [the defendants] spoke, the further they moved away from it” – M2, pp. 172-3). The same can be said about the use of certain verbs (M2, p. 144) or expressions (M4c, 261) or even: “The machine was beginning to be stoked” (M2, p. 155) and “the fire was extinguished after the Auto da Fé of 1761” (M4b, p. 249). JRM intentionally used this type of vocabulary and figures of speech, taking the part for the whole, as a rhetorical device.

The result of all this is a captivating style of writing, which easily wins over whoever reads it, thanks to this use of past and present colloquial language. JRM reminds us that History is, first and foremost, a written text, even for those who are permanently concerned about the “central problem”, the “state of the art”, the methods or the theoretical framework. For him, all the questions relating to epistemic justification should be below the surface of the text and not necessarily in the visible space, since he wrote in order to be read, as he frequently told his students. Anyone perusing the documentary appendixes to some of his articles or the appendix of tables, maps and graphs in his *O Algarve Económico*, understands that the statements that he makes are supported by excellent archive-based research and good statistical treatment, which also included correlation matrices. There, and in his brief notes (never occupying more than 25% of the print area), were the foundations for the analysis that he developed. He ceaselessly repeated that what was important should be stated in the body of the text and not be used to swell the notes. It upset him to see History texts where pages and pages were filled with just a few lines, with lengthy digressions padding out the footnotes.

Together with the uniqueness of JRM’s writing style, we can also note some less positive marks, which are particularly evident in *O Algarve Económico*, dating from 1988. Like others historians of his generation, he was not bothered by the use of expressions such as “national” (pp. 366, 385, 386) or “bourgeoisie” (applying these terms to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) and even referred to the “national mercantile bourgeoisie” (p. 381). The same can be said of his use of the terms “bureaucracy” or the “blocked society” (an expression that he borrowed from V. Magalhães Godinho).

## 2. From the impact of the Holy Office to the institutional apparatus

As Francisco Bethencourt and Marcocci have already stressed, JRM was particularly skilled at highlighting the local and regional impacts of the Inquisition (Bethencourt 2012: 152, 155; Marcocci 2013). We should also add to this his ability to draw attention to institutional mechanisms. Viewed on a finer scale, JRM's work has become a major reference in relation to three great topics: the notion of opening up Judaism; the confirmation of the direct economic consequences of the actions of the Inquisition at the local and regional level; the periodization relating to the Holy Office.

According to JRM, the Inquisition knew that it was not easy for it to act outside the cities where its tribunals were located (M4b, p. 248). "Opening up Judaism" was equivalent to the Inquisition's consistent entry into a territory. It corresponded to a "large-scale" operation (p. 370) resulting from a coming together of various factors. As far as the territory was concerned, the tribunal did "a first-class job" (p. 371) to use JRM's description. In *O Algarve Económico*, he provides us with a very clear description of the operation about the Inquisition's entry into Lagos: "Once again, there is yet further evidence of what I already said in relation to Faro, in 1633: the Inquisition would prepare a "casting of the net", it would tip off an authority about this, and any attempt made to escape would be taken as yet further evidence of guilt. If there were just one denunciation, then the problem of an arrest with just one set of testimonies would be resolved, as the person's flight would be equivalent to a second testimony" (p. 377). Previously, the Inquisitor-General, Dom Fernão Martins Mascarenhas (1616-1628), would have protected the Algarve (M2, p. 169). Local assistance was fundamental for the success of the intervention (p. 378). JRM considered that this support would not come from the local councils, or from the agents of the Crown's peripheral administration, or even from the cathedral chapter. The same could be said for 'familiaris' and 'commissioners' (local residential officers) of the Holy Office. For the intervention to be effective, the Inquisition would have to enjoy the support of a leading figure, such as the bishop and possibly the governor, too. It should be noted that this local impact of a prelate with previous inquisitorial experience, as was the case with Dom Francisco de Meneses (Bishop of the Algarve from 1627 to 1634), deserves greater attention than it has been afforded so far (Paiva 2011: 156-79, 213-60). JRM considers him to have been a "fundamental piece" in the Algarve puzzle (M2, p. 160). It would be interesting to see if the same thing happened in the rest of the Iberian Peninsula.

As JRM says, “[t]he Holy Office had succeeded in doing what was termed in its clean-cut language as *opening up Judaism and entering into the Algarve*” (p. 371). This was how he summarized the operation undertaken in the Kingdom of the Algarve. “Opening up Judaism” and the equivalent “entering into” were expressions that came from that time and were used by the Inquisition itself. All of this is explained in the text “*E assim se abriu Judaísmo no Algarve*” (And, in this way, Judaism was opened up in the Algarve) (M2, p. 155, 191), which was his first text on the Inquisition. In fact, in 1632, when discussing a statement made by a woman from Faro, a member of the Évora Inquisition had mentioned that the Algarve city was a place that “is being discovered anew, and where there are so many *gente de nação* (“people of the nation”, i.e. New Christians)”; at the same time and in the same context, the Inquisitors from Évora considered that, with the denunciations made by the aforementioned woman (who had, in fact, denounced her own mother-in-law), the conditions had been created for “opening up Judaism in the Algarve.” In other words, they planned to order the arrest of this woman from Faro and, because her aforementioned daughter-in-law and a granddaughter were already imprisoned, she would suppose that they had denounced her. Due to these circumstances, she would therefore confess and certainly denounce more New Christians. It was this multiplying effect, based on the importance of guessing who had been the denouncer, as a defense strategy, which set the process in motion. JRM was highly attentive to the terminology of the time. It was as if these words summed up the contemporary picture better than any description that the historian might make.

In the context that has just been presented, another pivotal notion to be found in JRM’s text is that of the “*redada*” (the casting of the net) (p. 376, *maxime* p. 380). Or, in other words, arrests would be more effective if people were caught in a net and not just one by one in isolation. The tactics of denunciation and defense were conditioned by this circumstance. Knowing whether A or B were Judaizers, based on the statements gathered from the sources of the Holy Office, did not guarantee any certainty. For JRM, there were Judaizers who were created as a result of the inquisitorial context. On this subject, he quoted Saraiva, Kamen, Bennisar, Novinsky and Salomon (p. 380, n. 65). “It is this aspect of the defense tactics that makes me highly skeptical about the Judaism of the New Christians. When many of them were arrested at the same time, they were all Judaizers. When the arrests were isolated, they were all very good Catholics... Perhaps, for this reason, the Holy Office preferred to cast the net all at once” (p. 380). In keeping with this logic of action, as described in his analysis, there was also a refining of the sieve in order to target the merchants and the rich, since these were considered to be attributes of the New Christians.

The economic impact of the action of the Holy Office is a classical subject of debate. In a wide range of literature on this theme, beginning with the political practice of “arbitrism” and other reformist authors of the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, and since then, too, the Inquisition has been regarded as one of the factors justifying the Portuguese (and Iberian) economic backwardness in the European context. It was closely linked to the Peninsular “black legend”, which has been steadily fueled since the eighteenth century. However, it should be stressed that few authors directly confirmed this claim. JRM did so in 1988. Because he mastered the structural data so well, he was able to demonstrate that the Inquisition’s action in the Algarve from 1633 onwards had deepened the depression that had already existed for some time (p. 373). He showed that there began to exist conflicts between the commoners and the punished merchants; that many merchants disappeared; that they lost the lands that they had; that the entry of the Holy Office led to an increase in the emigration to Castile and the Indies. In JRM’s well-grounded reading, the persecution undertaken by the Inquisition denoted the end of a stage in the economic life of the Algarve. It intervened in the richest area of the region (Faro-Loulé-Albufeira), where it benefited from the assistance of a cooperative prelate (M2, p. 175).

How did JRM characterize the Holy Office? As a “Tribunal linked both to the State and to the Church, finding itself at the intersection between the two, it served them both and was served by them both”; it was an entity that fought for the values arising from this “close connection” (M4a, p. 185). He characterized it as a polychronic institution<sup>8</sup>, essential in the affirmation of the Church’s power (M4a, 201). He also saw the Inquisition as a machine (M2, pp. 155, 160), an “all-powerful, bureaucratic” organization that “never slept” (p. 387) in the defense of its values, but did not understand the world; he considered that it regarded the New Christians who fled as Judaizers (p. 369). The basis for its “firm and constant” support would always be found among the more popular sections of the population (M4b, p. 255). It was an institution that, in his opinion, knew how it was acting because it had data such as the 1631 tax or the royal survey on tax debts of 1632-1633, in the case of the Algarve (p. 370); and which, outside the urban centers where it had a tribunal, did not have the “resources corresponding to its fearsome image, nor its legendary reputation for efficiency” (p. 370). This was an institution whose actions were dictated by its interest in confiscations, depriving people of their property rights. In JRM’s words: “Faro could be attacked and reduced: as it was the one that most mattered to the

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<sup>8</sup> He considered it to be polychronic, because it had various times (M4a, p. 186), and not polymorphous, as Jean-Pierre Dedieu had considered it – M4b, pp. 235, 465.



confiscation (“*fisco*”) authorities, and also because, in that city, it enjoyed the dedication and know-how of Dom Francisco de Meneses” (p. 373). As already explained, this bishop had previous experience of the Holy Office (he had been a deputy of the Coimbra Inquisition since 1607 and was an inquisitor at this same tribunal, in 1611-1617, moving from there to the Lisbon tribunal in 1617), and, in that context, had audited the accounts of the confiscation authorities<sup>9</sup>. It was for that reason that he considered that the Holy Office “knew how to choose and only accepted what was convenient to it” (p. 380); and that it did not intervene at random. In the Algarve, once the city of Faro had been exhausted, the Inquisition turned its attention “to the good fruit-producing estates of the region of Albufeira” (p. 375). With the destructive persecution unleashed against the mercantile community, the tribunal behaved, in JRM’s sometimes deterministic view, as it was meant to do: “The Holy Office fulfilled its role” (p. 375).

In keeping with Bartolomé Bennassar, whom he quoted, the Tribunal of Faith was also regarded by JRM as an entity that instilled fear in people. In fact, the Holy Office became a synonym for this very word: “In the rest of the territory, the effective presence of this fearful dread was not felt uniformly (...) the informative material was already dealt with, the fear was internalized in those who would potentially be condemned” (M4a, p. 198). When, in the time of Dom Pedro de Castilho, the sermons of the *Autos da Fé* began to be printed, JRM stressed that “at the time, this would have been a fundamental element in the spread of fear into inquisitorial procedures, without which the desired outcome would not be successfully achieved” (M4a, p. 203). JRM also considered that “fear and terror are nouns that were used by the inquisitors without any shame or compunction” (M4b, p. 238) and this same fear was also aroused by the *sambenitos* (M4b, p. 247). In the final stage of the Inquisition’s lifetime in Portugal, he pointed out that the institution lost power “because it ceased to strike fear into people” (M4b, p. 244). This was the very core of its power.

Although JRM characterized the Holy Office as a crystallized entity, he stressed that it changed over time. JRM drew inspiration from Jean-Pierre Dedieu (Dedieu 1979), Francisco Bethencourt (Bethencourt 1984) and José Veiga Torres (Torres 1978; 1986) to identify various phases in the life of the institution, which were to become fully established features of subsequent historiography: 1536-1547 (establishment/the struggle for recognition); 1548-1572 (organization); 1573-1604 (expansion); 1605-1615 (reorganization); 1616-1673 (autonomy); 1674-1681 (paralysis); 1682-1765 (stability – subordination); 1766-

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<sup>9</sup> M2, p. 150.

1821 (decline-end) – M4a and M4b. The two articles that JRM wrote on the subject must be read sequentially, since the more recent text (M4b) complements, corrects and enlarges upon the first one. In the 1987 article, he stated that, from 1616-1617 onwards, the Inquisition embarked upon a period of a great manifestation of power that would reach its peak in 1620-1649 (M4a, p. 205) and, in 1992, he stated that it was regarded as “all-powerful” between 1616 and 1673, seeking to show “that it was indispensable” (M4b, pp. 239, 249). It should be noted that he did not give any reasons justifying why he considered that the tribunal was “entirely subordinate to the royal power (1682-1765)” (M4b, p. 239). He did not comment on this.

He framed the above-mentioned phases under four structural headings (the institutional organization; the agents and the spaces covered; the rhythm of repression and the type of crimes; the relationship with other powers), which gave a certain substance to the divisions that he suggested. Or, in other words, he did not confine himself to marking out periods by identifying milestones in which there was a clean break or a change in direction. There is a complete crossover of data shaping each period that he considered. For this reason, each of them has a certain density in his analysis. They are genuine political and institutional complexes. In this regard, mention should be made of the fact that he drew attention to the impact of the general pardon of 1605: the Portuguese Inquisition passed “from a period of ostentatious behavior to a period of prudent activity” (M4a, pp. 196-7), which led it to reorganize itself; its full coverage of the territory and the generalized spread of the Tribunal dated from the years immediately following this (1605-1615) (M4a, p.204; M4b, p. 248).

In short, JRM avoided any form of anodyne academic writing and wrote with genuine concerns about style and with the clear intention of capturing the reader’s attention. This option led him to use a language that gave greater value to the expressions of the time that he wrote about and to spontaneous colloquialisms from the present. JRM’s historiographical texts are unmistakable. There is no monotony in his writing. He did not only do this in relation to the Inquisition, however, although it should be said that the image and global memory of this tribunal particularly lent itself to these possibilities and enabled JRM to immediately interest his readers. This was achieved both through the way in which he appealed to their emotions and through the intricacy of his language, which, at first sight, appears to be quite simple. At the same time, the texts that he produced reveal an elaborate erudition and careful attention to the institutional contexts, and even to the

dominant prosopographic traits. In this field, he strove to shed some light on the General Council (M4a, pp. 197-198; M4b, pp. 244-245), something that was very rarely attempted at the time when he was writing about the Holy Office (1981-1997).

Attention is drawn, in particular, to his contributions about the impacts of the Holy Office (economically, socially, and in the territory as a whole), the notion of “opening up Judaism” and the periodization of the tribunal in Portugal, which was done almost completely in the form of political and institutional complexes (reminiscent of his mentor, V. Magalhães Godinho). JRM was very much concerned with showing the relationship between this power that was the Inquisition and other powers from that time, such as Royalty, the Church’s agents and structures, the University and the Papacy. The Holy Office was unable to act and survive without the support and connivance of other powers and these relationships varied over time. Even the entry into a territory required the contribution of these elevated powers, such as the bishop, in order to have the desired efficiency. JRM highlights the importance of a prelate who had previous inquisitorial experience. Yet, he was not concerned with seeing whether the same thing happened in other regions.

This is, however, only a first incursion into the texts of JRM, undertaken just a very short time after his death. Certainly, the great richness of their contents still has a great deal more to offer.

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