

# Joaquim Romero Magalhães: A Testimony

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## Abstract

Testimony of friendship and intellectual exchange with Joaquim Romero Magalhães; conditions of archival work; conditions of academic production within a collegial atmosphere.

## Keywords

Archives; collaboration; collegiality; friendship

## Resumo

Testemunho da criação de amizade e troca intelectual com Joaquim Romero Magalhães; condições de trabalho em arquivo; condições de produção académica num espírito colegial.

## Palavras-chave

Arquivos; colaboração; colegialidade; amizade

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The Portuguese National Archive of the Torre do Tombo was a meeting place when I was a student in the late 1970s and 1980s. I was living at Travessa do Possolo at the time, near the headquarters of the Parliament in the old monastery of São Bento, where the archives occupied a wing. The reading room was small, perhaps 100 m<sup>2</sup>. It was furnished with large, austere chairs and oak tables—ideal to avoid napping. There were twenty seats supervised by an archivist, whose desk was perched on a platform. It had not only the configuration of an old classroom, but also the practice: when the students, and even accomplished researchers, could not decipher a difficult abbreviation or enchainéd late sixteenth century handwriting, they would ask the archivist for help, which was always competently provided. Next to it was the catalogue room—much smaller, perhaps 30 m<sup>2</sup>—overseen by an extraordinary member of staff, probably with elementary education, who knew everything. These public areas were completed by a tiny cafeteria, without a place for tables, accessed through a two-meter-long counter opened to the corridor.

This small universe was magical: the relation with the archivists and even with the director was direct, the information flew naturally without formal appointments, the access to the manuscripts, despite scarce catalogues, was relatively easy. I could not have done my doctoral thesis without the (then) manuscript catalogue of the Inquisition elaborated during many years of work by Maria do Carmo Dias Farinha, who generously lent it to me. All readers ended up knowing each other. New encounters were consolidated at lunch time with conversations in the restaurants around the Parliament. On the menu was the discussion of sources, research projects, and findings of the day.

The Torre do Tombo was a much more exciting place than the Department of History of the Faculty of Letters, then in a difficult transition process from a largely forgotten past and a future that was difficult to define, due to scarcity of knowledgeable and leading scholars, except for Isabel Castro Henriques, Piteira Santos, Joel Serrão, and Barradas de Carvalho. In many cases, the students brought new books and new ideas unknown to many of the academic staff. I preferred the autodidactic life at Torre do Tombo, where I prepared my essays and explored different types of sources, while I read everything I could to build up a theoretical and methodological basis of work.

It was there that I met Joaquim Romero Magalhães in 1978 or 1979, when he left the Ministry of Education, where he had been secretary of state. Joaquim had decided to complete his PhD and engage with the new academic life opened up by the revolution. He had previously written a superb BA final thesis, at the level of a typical British PhD, on the economy of the Algarve in the sixteenth century. He decided to widen the study to the

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It was the first systematic study of a region during the Portuguese Ancient Regime. He developed comprehensive research on the economic and social relations of the Algarve with the other regions of Portugal, but particularly with Andalusia and North Africa. He broke away from the compartmentalised and nationalist approach that prevailed in Portuguese historiography.

The conversation between the two of us started at lunch time one day and never finished until, sadly, he passed away. We shared the same passion for the past and also for the present; the issue, for both of us, was how to establish the links that could be helpful in understanding the main lines of continuity and discontinuity. Our friendship developed because Joaquim had enormous curiosity, not only concerning my research, but also the new lifestyle of my generation. At that time, an age difference of 13 to 17 years was significant, but I never noticed that gap with Joaquim, whom I considered as an older brother.

Curiosity is a rare gift. In Lisbon, it was normal to find amusing characters, who livened dinners, telling stories or enchaining jokes (I remember Mário Vaz, who died very young), while writers and artists played a charismatic role in nightlife, such as Baptista Bastos, Manuel da Fonseca, Luís Pacheco, and Vitorino. Intergenerational mixture was healthy, but two-way communication and a real exchange of ideas were not so frequent. The discussion progressed within generational groups around shared interests or political ideas. Although the political scene was quite compartmentalised, new types of sexual behaviour and new social problems helped to create bridges. Feminism was already in those days a powerful alternative to the dominant male chauvinism of the left.

When I settled much later in Cambridge, I remember the shock provoked by my partner Ulinka, who systematically would ask anybody what did they do, or what were they working on, expecting reciprocity. I discovered that reciprocity is rare—people do not ask much, either because they believe they know everything through gossip, or because they are encapsulated in their own small world. Friendship is based on reciprocity, but human relations should be much more about discovering and reaching out to the others.

Joaquim certainly had curiosity and gladly engaged with reciprocity—he was not isolated in his research or in his cogitations. He asked questions about my work and contributed to equal exchange without prejudices of age. It was with him that I better discussed Braudel and Wallerstein as well as the crucial work of Magalhães Godinho, who was his PhD supervisor and would also be mine at Universidade Nova. I still possess a copy of *Ensaios II* offered to me by Joaquim. At that time, I was interested in Max Weber

and Pierre Bourdieu, and these conversations allowed for a solid reflexion that created a long-lasting theoretical base.

I benefited a lot from hearing the developments, in real time, of Joaquim's thesis, with new issues he was facing and new methods with which he was experimenting. At that time, I was involved in the seminars on the Inquisition created by Isaías da Rosa Pereira at the Faculty of Letters. A shared interest raised from the work on these trials: I was eager to discuss the ways to interrogate those sources, while Joaquim understood their importance for the study of social and economic history of the Algarve. He also engaged with the Inquisition in a more systematic way: he identified specific periods of inquisitorial activity, which remains useful nowadays.

Joaquim became a very good friend. He stayed in the guest room of my flat on his frequent visits to Torre do Tombo, before the archive moved to the splendid new facilities at the Cidade Universitária (although communication and conversation were lost in the process). In 1979 or 1980, I contacted Magalhães Godinho, who involved me in the crucial meetings of the Associação de História Económica e Social. In 1981, when I completed my degree, I found a research position at the Gulbenkian Institute of Science, where Robert Rowland had opened an area of Sociological History. There, I presented a data-based project related to the trials of the Inquisition. The next year I went to the Universidade Nova, where Magalhães Godinho had opened a series of jobs in the Department of Sociology: I was selected along with Diogo Ramada Curto, Pedro Tavares de Almeida, Jorge Pedreira, and Rui Santos; David Justino and Margarida Marques were already there. It was a very dynamic period in which we developed our theoretical knowledge in Sociology, Anthropology, and Political Sciences. In those intensive years of learning, Joaquim played a very important role at the meetings of the Associação de História Económica e Social.

When Joaquim discussed his PhD in the famous Sala dos Capelos, in Coimbra, I attended the event with Diogo and Pedro. I have a fantastic photo of the four of us at the door of the room; each of our expressions could not be better defined. I was then preparing my MA thesis—the research had become more focused. Although previous dispersion had been extremely useful, the search for new sources left seeds that fructified in other periods of life. I spent ten years going to the Torre do Tombo two to three times a week, which gave me a formidable basis for what would come next.

We had then a collegial vision of academic life as a collective enterprise of knowledge that should be nurtured. Joaquim contributed significantly to this vision. I shifted my interest in magic and religion to the Inquisition. It was then that I decided to do

my PhD at the European University Institute, in Florence, where Robert Rowland had become a member of the academic staff. I needed an international experience and I already had a good knowledge, through temporary attendance, of the seminars in Paris conducted by Jean Delumeau, Roger Chartier, and Pierre Bourdieu. My period in Italy was crucial in developing a comparative vision that stayed with me, structuring my work. I definitively broke away from the nationalist framework of traditional historiography. I enlarged my interest in global history and visual culture, consolidated then by a fellowship at the Warburg Institute in London.

Joaquim participated in the discussion of my thesis in Florence. At that time, in the early 1990s, he was editing the sixteenth-century volume for the *História de Portugal* coordinated by José Mattoso. He gently insisted that I publish a chapter on the Church and another on Cardinal Henry for the section on biographies of kings. I managed to write these chapters after completing my thesis. It was an excellent experience, since I could synthesise my research on the church that had been buried in my first book on magic while I underlined the importance of chapels and of what I called the sociability of death, i.e. the burial places of noblemen and wealthy people. The volume is the most balanced and stimulating of the *História de Portugal*, a testimony to Joaquim's excellent background, at ease with economic, social, political, and cultural history.

This experience was also important because it provided me contact with Círculo de Leitores and Guilhermina Gomes, who invited me to participate in other initiatives with an unsurpassable competence and gentleness. In the meantime, I went to Brown University for a temporary position as a Visiting Scholar, where I met Onésimo Teotónio Almeida, an excellent scholar who became a friend. There I consolidated standards of work and teaching that were crucial for my future life. Joaquim participated in the committee for my *agregação*—it was the last formal situation in which we were together. In the following years, I would become the director of the National Library, while Joaquim became the president of the Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses, where he left his mark as an outstanding historian engaged with public impact.

The collaboration with Joaquim was kept under those circumstances, but I would like to underline his important input later, in 2003, when I organized a conference on the work of Magalhães Godinho at the Gulbenkian Cultural Centre in Paris, with Luiz Felipe de Alencastro, then at the Sorbonne, which inspired a thematic issue of *Arquivos do Centro Cultural*. Joaquim presented in Paris an excellent paper on the correspondence between Magalhães Godinho and Charles Boxer, studying their parallel lives, which clarified much

of the crucial historiography on the Portuguese expansion. The presence of Immanuel Wallerstein at the conference inspired the thematic issue of *Review* around the work of Magalhães Godinho, who had been awarded the Balzan Prize in 1991. I naturally kept in contact with Godinho when I moved to the United Kingdom; he wrote me a moving letter a few months before he died.

Life tends to separate people because we move to other places, we change areas of activity, and we develop different centres of interest, mainly when we create a family. We are pulled by divergent threads. Friends from high school or the university disappear because the framework changed, we discover incompatibilities, or we simply cease to find common ground. We change throughout life; therefore the opposite can also happen, we may re-encounter people that were meaningless to us in high school and revealed to be much more interesting later. My itinerary through different countries could have dissolved the friendship with Joaquim. It did not happen. We kept in contact, collaborated, and maintained curiosity for reciprocal activities. I followed his work until his last and always stimulating books on the origins of the First Portuguese Republic, João Chagas, and early modern Portugal.

The period of doctoral research, preceded by an MA, means an enchantment for research and an exchange of ideas unique to a university career. It is possible to experience a similar feeling when one is lucky enough to obtain a two or three-year sabbatical, but it is not the same thing because one is not learning and preparing for a first crucial exam. The discussion of a PhD is a defining moment of the career, with all the nuances that one can introduce in this peremptory statement. The fact that the friendship between Joaquim and me survived that specific period—having been only interrupted, sadly, by death—proves a depth and reciprocity of feelings that survived divergent and distant lives, built around new interests and new perspectives.

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