

# Vitorino Magalhães Godinho<sup>1</sup>

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Vitorino Magalhães Godinho was born in Lisbon, in June 1918, into a family with republican traditions, and he died in April 2011. Early in his life, he made frequent contact in Lisbon with leading figures from the Portuguese culture of that time, such as Newton de Macedo, Delfim Santos, António Sérgio and the staff of the journal *Seara Nova* (Magalhães, 1988: 2).

As a student, he attended the Faculty of Letters of the University of Lisbon, although he did not really fit in there, such that, intellectually speaking, he can be considered to have been largely self-taught, as has already been noted (Magalhães, 1988: 2). This author considered this circumstance to be the starting point for Godinho's own self-education, which (and I quote) obliged him to read the “great masters - Henri Pirenne, Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre, Vidal de la Blanche, Gordon Childe, Léon Brunschvicg, Edmond Goblot, Pierre Janet, Jean Piaget, Paul Guillaume, [and the Portuguese] Jaime Cortesão, António Sérgio, Duarte Leite and Veiga Simões” (Magalhães, 1988: 2).

Having graduated in Philosophy and History, his first work of major importance was entitled *Reason and History* [*Razão e história (introdução a um problema)*] (1940). Years later, shortly before he died, he spoke about this first book in an interview, saying, “I still think that history is a science, or a scientifically conducted activity, but it is important that it should be further complemented by philosophical reflection, and indeed by the study of all the humanities. Philosophical reflection enlightens us and guides us; it shows us the deeper meaning of things” (GODINHO, 2011).

Vitorino Magalhães Godinho then became a teacher at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Lisbon, where he lectured from 1942 to 1944. Although he was required to teach a wide variety of different subjects (as was the common practice at that time) (Magalhães, 1988: 3; Sousa, 2012: 155), in 1943, he published the first volume of *Documents on the Portuguese Expansion* (*Documentos sobre a expansão portuguesa*), which was followed by two further volumes in 1945 and 1956. This work is remarkable for its selection of sources and the critical comments which accompany these, and it is still considered today to be an

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indispensable tool for study, being widely used by both scholars and students alike. It is the text of a youthful author, but nonetheless reveals a surprising maturity, expressing two major concerns that were to accompany the author throughout his life: the topic of the discoveries and the importance given to historical sources. As he wrote in another text published in the same year (1943), “history should, if possible, be based predominantly on published sources, and ideally it should use these exclusively, so that everyone can check the interpretations made (in science, it is essential to be able to verify all claims that are made).<sup>3</sup>

However, he soon left the University of Lisbon to give free lessons at the Ateneu Comercial de Lisboa (1944-1946), where his courses were attended by many leading figures who later became important names in Portuguese historiography: Jorge de Macedo, Joaquim Barradas de Carvalho, and Joel Serrão, among others (Magalhães, 1988: 4).

He published *The Crisis of History and its New Guidelines* (*A crise da história e as suas novas directrizes* [1946]), which is a very critical text, although it was largely conditioned by the characteristics of that time, so that it is now rather dated (Magalhães, 1988: 4-6). Godinho does, however, raise some fundamental issues in this book, such as the social function of science. And he once again asks the same question that had been raised a few years earlier by Marc Bloch: *What is the Use of History?* (Magalhães, 1988: 6). The authors he referred to in those years were major figures in that field: Henri Pirenne, Afonso Dopsch, Marc Bloch, and Gordon Childe (Magalhães, 1988: 5). He attached great importance to economic history and the history of technology (the influence of Gordon Childe perhaps?), as well as to the study of a cultural history that already pointed to the future history of mentalities. He was fascinated by Lucien Febvre’s *Religion of Rabelais*, according to Braudel (Magalhães, 1988: 5; Braudel, 1949: 197).

To make ends meet, Godinho worked at a private publishing company, where he was responsible for the publication of important texts, such as the collection known as “The March of Humanity,” published in Portugal by Cosmos. At that time, there was great interest in the dissemination of major historical texts in Portugal. In general, these texts were the ones that had accompanied him since his days at the University. On the back cover of one of these, *The World We Have Lost* by Peter Laslett, published in this collection in 1975, there is a list of other authors, including Gustav Glotz, Vidal de la Blanche, Gordon Childe, Paul Hazard, and E. J. Hobsbawm. But there were also other authors of works that today have become major references in Portuguese historiography (A. H. de

<sup>3</sup> Stated for the first time in *Dívidas e problemas acerca de algumas teses da História da Expansão*, Lisbon, Edições da Gazeta de Filosofia, 1943, p. 4, this was later reproduced in GODINHO (1962), p. 9.

Oliveira Marques, Romero de Magalhães, Miriam Halpern Pereira). This collection was advertised as tackling *History envisaged sociologically*. At the time when the series was created (in the 1940s), the most obvious influence was that of the French collection *L'évolution de l'Humanité*, founded by Henri Berr in the 1920s. The feeling one gets is that, in the mid-1940s, Godinho was very close to the universe of historians who worked with the *Revue de Synthèse Historique*. It is interesting to note that, in what was later to become a fundamental work in his intellectual process (*The Economy of the Discoveries with Prince Henry the Navigator [A Economia dos Descobrimentos Henriquinos* [1962]), the non-Portuguese authors that are quoted in the introduction to the book are Henri Berr, Henri Focillon, Fernand Braudel and Lucien Febvre (Godinho, 1962: XII-XIII).

In 1947, he moved to Paris to work as a researcher with the CNRS. There, in 1955, he published his first work on economic history (*Prices and money in Portugal. 1750-1850 [Prix et monnaies au Portugal, 1750-1850]*), with a foreword by Lucien Febvre, and came into direct contact with the *Annales School*. Starting with prices, he moved on to money and from there to the commercial network (Magalhães, 1988: 7-9). At the same time, he began to prepare his doctoral thesis. As he himself said, he became acquainted with figures such as Fernand Braudel, Marcel Bataillon and Georges Gurvitch (Godinho, 2011). Braudel himself recognizes this when, in a text entitled *Au Portugal: avant et après les grandes découvertes*, he wrote:

All these problems of the Portuguese fate have not escaped the imperialism of our young friend and colleague [...]. He takes them up, transforms them and enlightens us with a taste that his predecessors have almost never applied to economic and social realities. From now on, we can see the vastness and novelty of his work. For this tireless researcher, Portugal is a wonderful tool for understanding more about the history of the world between the so-called Middle Ages and modern times. (Braudel, 1949: 196)

I believe that here we can define the universe in which, in historiographical terms, Vitorino Magalhães Godinho lived his cultural and scientific life. There is an interesting statement, made at the end of his life, that explains this very clearly: “The key is to have a good bibliography, and, in that respect, I have no fear of being ‘out of date’. The latest is not necessarily the best. It is important to understand that some works from the 1960s and 1970s are insurmountable” (Godinho, 2011).

He received his PhD in Paris, in 1969, with a dissertation entitled *The Economy of the Portuguese Empire, 15th and 16th Centuries (L'Économie de l'empire portugais aux XV<sup>e</sup>-XVI<sup>e</sup> siècles. L'or et le poivre. Route de Guinée et Route du Cap)*, published in Portuguese, with later additions in 1963-1971 (*The Discoveries and the World Economy*). It is a text with a Braudelian inspiration, which should, in my view, be placed alongside many other texts written in those middle years of the twentieth century in the wake of Braudel's *The Mediterranean*: I am thinking, for example, of Pierre Chaunu (Chaunu, 1955-1960; Chaunu, 1960-1966), Frédéric Mauro (Mauro, 1960), and later, K. N. Chaudhuri (Chaudhuri, 1990), a book whose introduction is significantly entitled: *Fernand Braudel and 'Asia Before Europe': a tribute, recollections and a dialogue*.

Godinho returned to Portugal for a short time, but again encountered political problems and was obliged to give up teaching (1962). In those years, he published a book (*The Economy of the Discoveries with Prince Henry the Navigator [A economia dos Descobrimentos Henriquinos, 1962]*, already quoted), which, in my view, is fundamental for understanding his intellectual trajectory. Written in the context of the 1960 celebrations (Sousa, 2012: 72-79), he seizes upon an old text, *The Fifteenth-century Portuguese Expansion (A expansão quatrocentista portuguesa: problemas das origens e da linha de evolução [1945])*, and the three volumes of the *Documents*, mentioned earlier. It was an editorial failure - if I may use this expression (the publication of the text was rejected by the committee that had commissioned it) - but it constituted both a scientific and a personal success. After the publication of this work, it was difficult to write any study of the origins of the Portuguese expansion without taking into account what Vitorino Magalhães Godinho had written in that book.

He had, however, also published (in 1956) a significant reconstruction of the African civilizations before the arrival of the Portuguese (the "*Mediterranean Sahara*" and the *caravans of gold - from the eleventh century to the sixteenth century [O 'Mediterrâneo Saariano' e as Caravanas do Ouro. Geografia económica e social do Sáara Ocidental e Central do XI ao XVI século]*). This is an offprint from the *Revista de História* of São Paulo, and it is a fundamental text, in which we can see the author's conviction that only through the combination of two levels of research (European and local) can we correctly understand the true dimension of the Portuguese expansion.

In the meantime, he returned to his work with private publishers, and he prepared the Portuguese edition of his doctoral thesis, mentioned earlier. At the same time, he apparently began to consider writing a History of Portugal. Romero de Magalhães has

looked at other texts by the author and has tried to work out what the main lines of this book's argument would have been:

Portugal, first of all, is a port, where the men came down from the mountains and then began to spread throughout the world. By analyzing the structure, conjuncture and periodization of this country's activity, from the historical and geographical complex, he will conclude that there was not just one Portuguese empire, but several, enlivening our history through colonizations and decolonizations, while, as a result of the persistence of internal diversities, the country lost its balance. And the State, installed in the macrocephalous city of Lisbon, full of towns and villages, looked outwards, from where it received the bulk of its revenues. Modernization – achieved through improved technology – always came late, or else did not come at all, failing without utilization of outbreaks industrializers, settled by commercial recoveries. The weakness of our bourgeoisie, competing with the commodified Church and peerage, prevented them from becoming the driving force for growth that would enable the land to cease to act as a stepmother and make it possible for the Portuguese to achieve their desires. This took place in a world where they were spread far and wide, to which they had adapted, and that they would help to transform and mold to their way of feeling and being. And, through these contacts, the Portuguese themselves would also be transformed. (Magalhães, 1988: 13–14)

After a fairly lengthy stay in Clermont-Ferrand (1970-1974), Vitorino Magalhães Godinho returned to Portugal.

Taking advantage of the change in regime in 1974, he tried to introduce a new educational policy in the country. He was appointed Minister of Education and Culture, and, in this capacity, he published a book with his vision of what he considered should be the reform of the Portuguese education system (*A direction for education [Um rumo para a educação]*, 1974). The results of his activity were fairly reduced (having taken office in July, he resigned in November) (Godinho, 2009). And he only returned to public office ten years later, in 1984, as the Director of the National Library in Lisbon.

He himself stated - with some disappointment - that he had always believed in the gestation of a *new* man and a *new* Portugal (Godinho, 2004; Godinho, 2011). To some

extent, it was these two convictions that dictated the positions of citizenship that he adopted throughout his life, and led him to hold various public offices. He was the founder of the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences of the New University of Lisbon, the school where he spent the last phase of his academic life with a large group of his disciples gathered around him (Magalhães, 1988: 15), and where he was able to offer some very important teachings in the cultural and historiographical field.

In this sense, he remained faithful to his youthful belief that the solution to the problems of the contemporary Portuguese reality were to be found in the study of the country's historical process. In other words, it was essential to understand the circumstances that lay behind the formation of these problems, in this way linking historical analysis to the affirmation of citizenship (Sousa, 2012), and thus, simultaneously, illustrating the prospective dimension of his historical thinking. As he wrote: "today [...] the perspective deriving from the historical problems that are imposed on us is an indispensable analytical tool, particularly when we are looking, as we should be, for foresight" (Godinho, [1969]: 9).

The limited success of some of these experiences left him with clear signs of bitterness. It was a personal feeling, but it was also an experience that, in general, many Braudeliens felt. In 1984, Braudel himself had confessed, in an interview with the journal *Magazine Littéraire*, that he felt intellectually alone (Ribeiro, 2010: 132). It would be interesting to compare some of these assertions with others, for example those made by David Romano (Romano, 1997). The aim would be to assess to what extent that bitterness is, deep down, an expression of the failure of the direct disciples of Braudel to adjust to the *third phase* of the *Annales school*. There is, indeed, on the part of Godinho, a clear connection to this moment of the *Annales School*, a connection that has been widely emphasized by all who have studied his work (Cardoso, 2011).

In 1978, he founded, a regular publication, the *Journal of Social and Economic History* [*Revista de História Económica e Social*], where, over the years, he published a number of relevant papers. This journal quickly became a benchmark for high-quality research, while he himself continued to publish a number of other important studies. For example: *Myth and merchandise, the utopia and practice of navigating, 13th-18th centuries* (*Mito e Mercadoria, utopia e arte de navegar. Séculos XIII a XVIII*, 1990); *The opening up of the world: from the plurality of spaces to the global space of humanity (15th-16th centuries)* (*Le devisement du monde: de la pluralité des espaces à l'espace global de l'humanité. XVème-XVIème siècles*, 2000).

What, in short, are the fundamental issues in the work of Vitorino Magalhães Godinho? I think there is one basic belief: the idea of global spaces, differentiated typologically and chronologically. This is clearly visible, for example, in the article entitled *Historical-Geographical Complex (Complexo histórico-geográfico)*, published in the *Dictionary of the History of Portugal* (1963). I think the perspective developed in this text plays a foundational role in the future evolution of the thought of this author. Indeed, the concepts of Global Space and Maritime Empire can be considered to be two of the central ideas of his historical production (Munteal, 1999).

Linked to the concept of the Maritime Empire and his contributions to the understanding of the evolution of the world-economy, based on other concepts used by Godinho and directly derived from his Braudelian influences, are the geographical dimension of history, the articulation of the multidimensionality and uniqueness of the historical process, and the close links between the past and the present. Clearly, what was said has theoretical implications and related methodological considerations, which are also not far removed from his reflections on the contemporary crisis of the Humanities. Rui Santos, a teacher at the New University of Lisbon, has produced an excellent paper on this topic (entitled *With a Mind to Science: Theoretical Underpinnings of Vitorino Magalhães Godinho's Historical Work*) (Santos, 2005)<sup>4</sup>. Meanwhile, there are several titles that are devoted to the analysis of the problems of the present era from the perspective of the humanities. For example: *Scientific Humanism and philosophical reflection: essays (Humanismo Científico e Reflexão Filosófica* [1971b]; *Humanities and the changing world: non-current reflections (Les sciences humaines et la mutation du monde: réflexions inactuelles* [1998]).

In short, I believe that we can say that the space of geography and its relationship (or not) with different temporal rhythms, the importance given to certain conceptual categories (capitalism, civilization, global/total), which are typical of Braudelian historiography, are also directly related to the central themes of the historical thought of Vitorino Magalhães Godinho. When, in a paper published in the *e-Journal of Portuguese History*, José Luís Cardoso draws attention to this influence, he highlights the following aspects: 1] The interdisciplinarity and total unified history; 2] History as a conceptual elaboration (historical-geographical complex, Portugal as a “blocked society”, 3] History as a reading of the present and the future, in the light of the past (Cardoso, 2011). I believe

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<sup>4</sup> There are also some particularly interesting issues of journals devoted to Vitorino Magalhães Godinho in 2005: *Review of the Fernand Braudel Center* (Binghamton University) (XXVIII, 4), which, besides the text quoted from Rui Santos, also includes papers by Dale Tomich and Immanuel Wallerstein, and *Arquivos do Centro Cultural Calouste Gulbenkian* (papers by Immanuel Wallerstein, Rita Costa Gomes, João Fragoso and Maria de Fátima Silva Gouvêa, Leonor Freire Costa, and Nuno Valério).

that, despite an apparent difference in the formulation of ideas, the aspects selected by this author are not far behind those that I have pointed out.

In conclusion, therefore, I believe that the work of Vitorino Magalhães Godinho still continues to be of major interest to historians. Certainly, with the evolution of our knowledge, there is much to reflect upon and much that needs to be reformulated. This is only natural. But his reflections, firstly because they are intelligent and secondly because they are stimulating, still remain very much alive and, as such, represent a constant challenge. As he wrote in the third volume of his *Essays*, “we are contemporaries of all ages, living in all countries. History is essentially a continuation - although it contains so many breaks - and a form of solidarity, which is sometimes desperately denied” (Godinho, 1971a: 152).



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