

## Amorim Girão's 'The descriptions of the voyages of 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and Human geography'. A note on The History of Portuguese Geography

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Aristides de Amorim Girão (1895-1960) –the first Portuguese geographer to submit a doctoral thesis to the University– presented 'As descrições das viagens dos séculos XVI e XVII e a Geografia humana' [Descriptions of 16th and 17th century travel and Human Geography] to the XVI International Congress of Geography, held in Lisbon in 1949. The character of the international audience is certainly not unrelated to the general tone of the lecture – markedly anti-determinist and with some hints of organic humanism and national-catholicist spiritualism–, nor to the chosen theme: the geographical descriptions of missionary travellers in the 16th and 17th centuries.

### Social topography

Among Girão's 'travellers' we find especially missionaries (and, above all, 'Jesuit priests'), who ensure "successfully their missions" by launching "true 'regional inquiries" among the communities they get related to. Some fine examples of these 'forerunners' are provided: Gaspar Barreiros, who travelled through Spain, France, Italy, and wrote *Chorography of Some Places...* [Barreiros, G. (1561)], where he "claims to deal with the true 'scientia geographica'" and where, with "remarkable lucidity", he discusses issues such as the "evolution of the earth's surface", the "underground water circulation", the "modification of rivers'", or the "'effects of man's action' on the land"; but also João de Barros (1496-1570, *Decades...*, 1552 onwards [Barros, J. (1552)]), Fernão Cardim (1549-1625, *Epistolary narrative...*, c. 1580s [Cardim, F. (1585-1590)]), Fernão Mendes Pinto (1510?-1583, *Pilgrimage*, 1569-1578 [Pinto, F. M. (1614)]), Sebastião Manrique (c. 1590-1669, *Itinerary...*, 1653 [Manrique, S. (1649)]), Pedro Pais (1564-1622, *History of Ethiopia*, c.1620 [Pais, P. (c. 1620)]), Baltazar Teles (1596-1675, *General*

*History...*, 1660 [Teles, B. (1660)]), Fr. José Acosta (1540-1600, *The Natural and Moral History...*, 1590 [Acosta, J. (1590)]).

Amorim Girão's study mainly is the presentation of the thesis that the Jesuit priest (and geographer) François de Dainville (1909-1971) had presented in his book *Geographie des Humanistes* [Dainville, F. (1940)], but, despite the generic nature of the title, it deals in fact with the geographical science of the Jesuit missionaries. That is the reason why Lucien Febvre titled its review in the *Annales* as 'Geography of the priests' [Febvre, L. (1950)]– and especially of Jean François' (1582-1668) *Science de la Géographie...* (1652) [François, J. (1652)]: this book, "the first geography essay in France" (Dainville, *ap.* Girão), "should be placed next to Varenus' (1622-1650) *Geographia Generalis*" [Varenus, B. (1650)].

### Moral geographies

Amorim Girão's religious inclinations are well known (in 1958, he published *Fátima, Land of Miracle* [Girão, A. A. (1958)]), and are due not only to the academic environment in which he studied and worked –to which belonged António de Oliveira Salazar (1889-1970) and Manuel Gonçalves Cerejeira (1888-1977), who, outside academic life, would respectively be head of the Government of Portugal and Cardinal Patriarch of Lisbon for many decades– but to the cultural environment of the final years of the Republic (1910-1926), marked by a strong anti-positivist-spiritualist turn associated with the rehabilitation of the period of the Counter-Reformation in the 'history of the nation'. This movement would come to know full expansion in the initial years of the Estado Novo dictatorship.

In the strictest ambit of the Geographical thought and its evolution, Amorim Girão, despite emphasizing the importance of the contributions by naturalists to Geography, establishes a firm opposition between a Geography based on humanism –a Human



geography “worthy of the name” (Girão uses this expression twice)— and Ratzel’s ‘*Anthropogeographie*’ [Ratzel, F. (1882-1891)], which he accuses of only being “the geographical study of Man, that is, the geographical method applied to the noblest of primates”, in which, “sacrificing to the false philosophical spirit of an epoch” [the 19<sup>th</sup> century] “laid the foundations of a human geography’ based on ‘the dehumanization of the King of Creation”.

Spiritualist arguments were not uncommon in anti-determinist moves inside Geography, and Boutroux [Boutroux, E (1874)], an important name among the philosophical references of, for instance, Vidal de La Blache [Vidal de La Blache, P. (1917)], is also cited by Girão, in support of his refusal of biologism in Geography:

As Boutroux wrote, the more science progresses, the more difficult it is to establish its concept and object [so it is necessary] to go back to its origins and deal with its fundamental problems: it is evident that problems of the Geography of Man should impose within more balanced conceptions before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that is, before the human spirit was oriented towards the natural sciences.

This study follows as a statement—a manifesto—of regional Geography and its anticipation in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, “freeing Geography from the uncertain paths of the 19<sup>th</sup> century”:

To “understand Geography it is necessary to go back beyond the 19<sup>th</sup> century” and study the observations made by humanists throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, a moment in which Europeans’ direct knowledge of “other regions of the world is deepened and extended”.

In the context of Portuguese tropical geography, Girão’s ‘Descriptions of the voyages of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and Human geograp’ has the value of a symbol. Not only a late academic affirmation of Regional geography in the face of the determinist excesses of Portuguese ‘Republican Anthropogeography’, but above all the affirmation of the privileged view of the *homo sapiens*’s species humanism — ‘Man was not made for the world but the world for Man’—, and, within it, of a supposed special position of the Christianity in the geographical knowledge of the world. In this, Girão is somehow distant from another ‘grand’ name in Portuguese

Geography, Orlando Ribeiro (1911-1997), who saw the clairvoyance of the State and the common people’s desire for adventure as the driving forces of Portuguese expansion in the Tropics [Ribeiro, O. (1962)].

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