

Ancient Near Eastern Studies and Portuguese Academia: A Love Affair Under Construction

Isabel Gomes de Almeida

FOR MODERN WESTERN SOCIETIES, the ancient world comprised between the banks of the Mediterranean Sea, the Nilotic territory, and the Near East always stood as a fascinating place where some of the roots of present-day civilization are found. Though the allure for antiquity was always felt within Western societies and academia, the nineteenth century stands as a special period where this appeal increased, due largely to the Orientalism movement.¹ In fact, as is well-known, the profound interest for everything that was “Oriental” and, at the same time, “ancient” impelled the development of archaeology and philology, among other disciplines, which in turn allowed for an academic rediscovery of ancient civilizations and cultures. Consequently, history gained a new vigor, widening its subject matter both in time and space. A new era for humanities and social sciences began, where interdisciplinary work and critical reflection within different and new fields were cultivated.

Throughout the twentieth century, this tendency deepened with the development of multiple schools of thought that still influence the craft of the historian to this day. During this time, Near Eastern studies, along with other fields, gradually claimed their vital place within Western academia. The twentieth century saw the rise of multiple schools and research units focused on the specialized analysis of the linguistic, archaeological, and iconographic data left by the historical actors that once dwelt in the ancient Near East.

Portuguese society and academia also felt the attraction for this ancient Orient. However, due to its own historical context and historiographical development, throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries most Portuguese scholars did not focus their research on Near Eastern studies, leading to a rather small academic production on that subject when compared to the research outputs of other countries. Yet, due to the efforts of some Portuguese biblical scholars, who from the 1970s onward drew their attention to the east Semitic world, the Near East slowly began to appeal to more researchers and students. A timid love affair came to light during the next decades, fueled in recent years by the members of the research group Antiquity

Author’s note: This paper had the support of CHAM (FCSH/NOVA-UAc) through the strategic project sponsored by FCT (UID/HIS/04666/2013). The author is a researcher of CHAM & DH, FCSH, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa.

1. Note that I am referring to the movement itself, and not the historiographical concept and/or trend. About interpretations on the latter, see for instance Said 1978 or Spivak 1988.

and its Reception, which integrates CHAM—Centre for the Humanities of FCSH, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa, and University of the Azores.²

In the following pages, I propose to stress three fundamental aspects. First, I present the motives that led Portuguese historiography to somehow resist the intense magnetism of the ancient Near East. Second, I highlight the work of the Portuguese predecessors in the field from the 1970s onward. And finally, I bring forward the work currently being developed that opens the possibility for a new chapter on the romance between Portuguese academia and the Near East.

An Outlook of the Portuguese Historical and Historiographical Contexts

The Academic Necessity to Revisit Portuguese History

On 28 May 1926 there was a military *coup d'état* that led to the establishment of a dictatorial regime in Portugal, which was consummated with the formulation and approval of a new constitution in 1933. This new regime, *Estado Novo*, lasted until the 25th of April Revolution, also known as “Carnation Revolution,” in 1974. The long period of *Estado Novo*, a fascist regime, had a profound impact in many spheres, including academia.³

The discipline of history, as others, was used to legitimate the dictatorial agenda, namely by highlighting certain episodes of the Portuguese history, while casting a shadow over other periods. To give just a few examples, the medieval “birth of the nation,” the construction of the overseas empire, and the “heroes” of the so-called Portuguese *gesta* were eulogized, while nineteenth-century liberalism and the First Portuguese Republic were neglected. An episodic and propagandistic history was thus promoted, which considerably incapacitated Portuguese historians from following the new critical approaches developed during those decades. The scholars who tried to resist were removed from universities, and many were forced into exile to continue their unrestricted academic work.⁴

Unsurprisingly, when *Estado Novo* was deposed there was a renewal within Portuguese humanities and social sciences, recognizing the need to revisit what was produced in the previous decades. Concerning the discipline of history, from the 1980s onward there was a profound historiographical shift regarding medieval, early modern, and contemporary studies, which aimed to fill the existing theoretical and methodological gaps.⁵ The academic impact was remarkable, leading to the creation or reformulation of schools (like the School of Social Sciences and Humanities of UNL—NOVA FCSH, founded in 1977), undergraduate courses, masters and doctorate programs, and, consequently, research units. The academic independence that was

2. CHAM is an inter-university research unit that connects scholars from the Universidade NOVA de Lisboa (UNL) and from the University of the Azores (UAç). See <http://www.cham.fsh.unl.pt/> (accessed 15 September 2017).

3. About the events that led to the formation of this new regime and its different aspects, see Rosas 1994.

4. On Portuguese historiographical development and its context, see Torgal, Mendes, and Catroga 1998.

5. Mattoso 2011, 12.

gained after 1974 finally allowed for the much-needed intense debate among scholars from different theoretical backgrounds.⁶ These sometimes rather tenacious discussions were (and still are) extremely fruitful, contributing to the creation of international networks and interdisciplinary projects. A high level of academic productivity was thus achieved, originating solid and state-of-the-art schools of thought regarding Portuguese history.

Given this context, it comes as no surprise that the research and teaching focus of the latest generations of historians, archaeologists, and other humanists and social scientists was not the Near East. Nevertheless, antiquity was appealing, especially as it concerns the ancient Mediterranean world.

Portuguese Academia and Classical Studies

As already mentioned, from the nineteenth century onward, the ancient world, namely the Oriental one, attracted numerous scholars from a wide range of disciplines. However, most Portuguese scholars who focused on antiquity were focused on the classical heritage. This circumstance can be explained by two main reasons. On the one hand, the scholastic tradition in European universities impelled the development of classical studies. Hence, Portuguese universities integrated this trend by displaying an intense scholarly interest in ancient Greek and Latin cultures, literatures, and languages. On the other hand, the strong Roman presence on the Portuguese territory prompted archaeological work to focus on that ancient period, and consequently the development of linguistic and historical research about it. A quick overview of the Portuguese humanities panorama in Lisbon and Coimbra highlights this tendency.⁷

In Lisbon, the Department of Classical Studies (DEC), which belongs today to the School of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon (FLUL), is one of the direct heirs of the first nineteenth-century efforts to increasing the academic interest in the ancient Greek and Roman worlds. In 1859, D. Pedro V, Portuguese monarch at the time, supported the creation of a graduate course in humanities at the Royal Academy of Sciences where Latin and Greek literatures were taught from the very beginning. Later on, Latin philology and a course on Greek language were added to its *curricula*, stimulating the increase of students in the field.

After the Portuguese Republican Revolution occurred on 5 October 1910, the government proceeded to enact several educational reforms, which brought about the creation of the first schools of humanities in Portugal.⁸ In 1911, the aforementioned FLUL was founded, integrating the classical scholars and the classical courses previously taught at the Royal Academy of Sciences. Decades later, in 1966, the Centre for Classical Studies (CEC) was created with the aim of developing research work in the

6. Regarding the motives underneath the beginnings of the Portuguese overseas expansion, João Paulo Oliveira e Costa evokes the strong dispute between scholars who looked for political and religious causes and the ones “who argued for the primacy of economic” ones; see Costa 2011, 593.

7. I am not disregarding the contributions of other Portuguese universities to classical studies. There are several researchers affiliated with other institutions that profoundly contribute to the development of this field. However, since the present paper does not intend to detail this specific field, I choose to highlight these two universities given their long and specialized academic tradition.

8. On the evolution of the educational system in Portugal, see the different contributions in Proença 1998.

field. From then onwards, the department and the research unit joined efforts, intertwining teaching and research. At present, DEC offers three undergraduate courses, a masters degree, and a doctorate program in classical studies. As for CEC, it has four main lines of research: “(Con)textual approaches to Classical Antiquity,” “Texts and Culture from Late Antiquity to Humanism,” “Asian Wisdom,” and “Classical roots and European Identity.” The combined activities of the two made FLUL an academic reference on the subject both nationally and internationally.

The School of Arts and Humanities of the University of Coimbra (FLUC) took a similar path.⁹ Also created in 1911, it soon became eminent within the fields of literature, philosophy, and history, among others. Some of the most important figures of the twentieth-century Portuguese culture panorama are among its *alumni*. Concerns antiquity, FLUC saw the birth of the Institute of Classical Studies in 1944, a scientific and pedagogic department that aims to establish a link between teaching and research regarding Greek and Latin languages, literatures, and cultures and their permanencies throughout time. Since 1947, this institute is responsible for the edition and publication of the journal *Humanitas* and since 1984, of the journal *Boletim de Estudos Clássicos*.

The Institute of Classical Studies works closely with the Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures of FLUC, which at the present time offers an undergraduate course, a masters degree, and a doctorate program in classical studies. At the same time, the institute crosses the bridge with the Centre of Classical and Humanistic Studies (CECH), a research unit founded in 1967.¹⁰ CECH has had a vital importance within the field of philology, actively contributing to the development of linguistic, literary, and cultural knowledge on ancient Greece and Rome as well as neo-Latin studies. Nowadays, CECH is structured in five different research groups: “Greek Studies,” “Latin Studies,” and “Renaissance Studies,” “Rational Hermeneutics,” and “Semantics and Pragmatics of Art,” which emphasizes the hermeneutic dialogue between antiquity and modernity with a laboratorial dimension.

This rather prosperous panorama on classical studies within the Portuguese universities is enriched with the plentiful archaeological work focused on the Roman period beginning in the nineteenth century. Hundreds of sites displaying Roman material have been identified throughout the Portuguese territory,¹¹ which impelled the creation of several archaeological nucleuses, enhancing museum collections pertaining to this ancient period. The amount of Roman data (epigraphic, iconographic, ceramic, etc.) allowed for academic specialization in the field, currently attracting more students and researchers every year.

From this general overview, it is fair to say that both the recent Portuguese historical context and the significant tradition of in classical studies coalesced to overshadow Near Eastern studies. Yet, the strong appeal of the Orient remained irresistible to some of us.

9. About the history of FLUL, see http://www.uc.pt/en/fluc/apresentacao/history_faculty (accessed 15 September 2017).

10. About CECH, see http://www.uc.pt/en/iii/research_centers/CECH/apresentacao (accessed 15 September 2017).

11. There are currently over 9,300 Roman archaeological sites of different typologies identified by the Direcção Geral do Património Cultural (DGPC), the Portuguese institute that has the custody for the cultural patrimony in Portugal. For an index of the Roman archaeological sites in Portugal, see <http://arqueologia.patrimoniocultural.pt/index.php?sid=sitios> (accessed 15 September 2017).

Portuguese Predecessors in Near Eastern Studies

The Birth of a Specialized Field

The Portuguese presence in Asia, from the sixteenth century onward could have prompted an early modern academic interest in Near Eastern antiquity. In fact, many court officials and clerical scholars of the time, who were en route from or to the Portuguese State of India, passed through this area, writing about the ancient ruins they came across with in their travel journals. These were frequently published, and they circulated in the cultural and academic Portuguese scene of the time. For instance, the Franciscan friar Gaspar de São Bernardino, who travelled through Persia, Mesopotamia, and Palestine between 1605 and 1607, published his travel journal in 1611.¹² His book contains several references to the ancient city of Babylon and its famous tower, which he mistakes with another ancient ruin located 8 leagues from Bagdad (probably the Birs Nimrud ziggurat ruins).¹³

Yet, these accounts did not endure or raise a great deal of interest in the academic sphere apart from the teaching of Hebrew, Syriac, and Arabic at the University of Coimbra during the eighteenth century. As Nunes Carreira stated, the Portuguese contribution to ancient Near East philology and archaeological during the early modern and modern periods was rather scarce, despite the long-lasting presence in the Orient.¹⁴

Indeed, it was only in the last quarter of the twentieth century that Near Eastern studies started out to be systematically promoted, due primarily to the intensive work of some Portuguese biblical scholars. The teaching and research efforts of António Augusto Tavares (1929–2016),¹⁵ José Nunes Carreira, José Augusto Ramos, and Francolino Gonçalves (1943–2017)¹⁶ prompted the first specialized courses on ancient Semitic languages, literature, and culture within Portuguese universities. Their place as the precursors of the field in Portugal should thus be recognized.

It is fair to say that the late António Augusto Tavares was the pioneer who established and developed Near Eastern studies in Portugal. Having studied at the École Biblique et Archéologique Française (EBAF) in Jerusalem during the late 1950s, Tavares was among the first Portuguese scholars to attend specialized classes on Near Eastern archaeology. Given that EBAF promoted field trips for their students, Tavares gained a profound knowledge about the archaeological sites dated to antiquity and located in Israel, Jordan, Syria, and Iraq. Later on, after finishing his degree, Tavares was invited by Jean Perrot to work as his assistant at the Beersheba excavations. In an interview given by Tavares to *Res Antiquitatis—Journal of Ancient History*, he stated that his experiences at EBAF made him “comprendre que je devrais me laisser tomber amoureux de l’histoire de l’antiquité orientale qui aller marquer ma destinée d’un goût qui n’allait pas disparaître et qui serait irrépressible.”¹⁷

12. This account has been published in a modern edition (Bernardino 1953). On the life of this friar, see Carreira 1985.

13. Carreira 1983.

14. Carreira 1983, 181.

15. See <http://www.fesh.unl.pt/media/noticias/falecimento-de-antonio-augusto-aguiar> (accessed 15 September 2017).

16. See <http://www.agencia.ecclesia.pt/noticias/nacional/igreja-faleceu-frei-francolino-goncalves-bibliista-portugues/> (accessed 15 September 2017).

17. Caramelo and Sales 2010, 223.

After completing his doctorate in Rome,¹⁸ Tavares returned to Portugal in the 1970s where he began a brilliant teaching career, first at Universidade Católica Portuguesa (UCP) and later at FLUL. In 1977, the recently founded NOVA FCSH invited him to join the history department where he actively participated in the organization of the history undergraduate course, creating a curricular unit about the societies, cultures, and civilizations of the pre-classical world. This was a complete novelty in Portuguese universities, leading to the creation of the first chair in Oriental antiquity, which he occupied. Two years later, in 1979, Tavares founded the Institute of Oriental Studies, the first Portuguese research unit focused on this field. From the start, the goals of the Institute were ambitious: to create a specialized research library, to organize colloquiums and conferences on specific themes regarding the Orient and the ancient world, to publish the proceedings of these academic meetings (which came to light in the series *Estudos Orientais*, coordinated by Tavares), and to provide courses on oriental languages (such as modern and ancient Hebrew, Arabic, ancient hieroglyphic Egyptian, Akkadian, and also Korean, Japanese, and Mandarin). Gradually, all these goals were achieved, forever changing the Portuguese academic landscape on ancient and oriental history.

It should be noted that the aforementioned institute was renamed in 1982 as Oriental Institute of UNL, and recently, in 2014, it was integrated into CHAM-Centre for the Humanities. The work inaugurated by Tavares in the late 1970s is being continued by his direct heirs in this interdisciplinary research unit.

During the 1980s, Tavares sought the collaboration of French scholars like Jean Perrot, Pierre Amiet, Paul Garelli, Francis Joannés, Pierre Villard, and Pascal Vernus, inviting them to participate in conferences held at NOVA FCSH and in other Portuguese research and teaching institutions. This fruitful collaboration allowed for the creation of the first Portuguese masters program focused on the pre-classical world in 1989.

Besides his work at NOVA FCSH, Tavares also collaborated with Universidade Aberta (UAb), the only public distance education university in Portugal founded in 1988. He wrote a study guide about pre-classical civilizations, which was widely well received by the public.¹⁹ His intense academic productivity engaged themes relevant to Hebrew studies (1976), ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia (1998), and even the Hittite world (1990).

Tavares' remarkable teaching and research efforts encouraged a whole new generation of students to choose ancient Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt as a postgraduate area within the field of history. This seminal work was paralleled by José Nunes Carreira, who developed a similar career at FLUL.

Having graduated in theology at the Pontificia Università Gregoriana (PUG) Rome in 1960, Nunes Carreira continued his studies in Italy, receiving another graduate degree in Oriental and biblical sciences from the Pontificio Istituto Biblico (1963). The following year he went to Jerusalem where he specialized in Semitic languages

18. Tavares received his PhD at the Pontificia Università San Tommaso d'Aquino, Rome, with a thesis on the modern exegesis of the patristics, with a special focus on Matt 1:5, under supervision of J. Salguero (Tavares 1972).

19. Tavares 1995.

at the EBAF. Returning to PUG, Nunes Carreira completed his doctorate in 1968 with a thesis that analyzed the philological development of the book of Isaiah and its interpretation by Francisco Foreiro, a sixteenth century Portuguese Dominican friar.²⁰

During the 1970s, Nunes Carreira consolidated his research work in biblical studies with intense academic attention to exegetical themes. Back in Portugal, his teaching activity started at the UCP (1974–1978), continuing at UAc (1978–1984). In this institution he began to teach courses related to ancient Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt, a path he would continue from 1984 until his retirement in 2004 as a full professor at FLUL. In 1986, he created the Oriental Institute of FLUL, a research unit focused on ancient history. In the same year, Nunes Carreira established a close collaboration with Emanuel Bouzon from the Pontificia Universidade Católica in Rio de Janeiro, creating a masters program on history and culture of the pre-classical world, which would begin in 1990.²¹

In the following years, he published a book on the theme “History before Herodotus,” in order to highlight the Sumerian, Semitic, Egyptian, and Hittite contributors to historiographical notions in antiquity.²² Then, he again returned to the early modern period, publishing several books and papers on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Portuguese travelers who crossed the Near and Middle East. Undoubtedly, these works emphasized reception studies regarding the ancient Near and Middle East.²³

At the same institution (FLUL) another Portuguese biblical scholar developed a comparable work to the ones detailed above. José Augusto Ramos, having graduated in theology at the Institut Catholique de Toulouse (1969), continued his studies at the Pontificio Istituto Biblico in Rome, where he graduated in oriental and biblical sciences (1972). Back in Portugal, he received his doctorate in ancient history at FLUL, with a thesis focused on philological aspects of the ancient Hebrew language.²⁴

One can say that the learning and teaching of ancient oriental languages is one of his great academic passions, having taught courses on Hebrew, Akkadian, Aramaic, Phoenician, Ugaritic, and Syriac. It should be noted how singular his contribution to the linguistic field is, given that some of these courses were first (and sometimes only) taught by him in Portugal.

Another of his strong academic interest relates to the history of religions, namely the ancient Semitic religious systems.²⁵ Responsible for a Portuguese translation of the Bible,²⁶ Ramos’ research focus goes beyond the monotheistic world. One of the lines of research he has been following concerns the divine figure of Baal, and through him the identification and analysis of the alterity frontier between the Hebrew and the Canaanite cultures.²⁷

20. Carreira 1974.

21. Later, he also wrote a guide for the students of the field (Carreira 1992a).

22. Carreira 1993. Later on, Carreira published a volume dedicated to the literary tradition of Mesopotamia (2002), helping to further spread the knowledge on the contribution of this civilization to cultural history.

23. For instance, Carreira 1992b, 1996.

24. Ramos 1989.

25. Ramos 2001

26. Ramos 1993.

27. For instance, Ramos 2000.

Full professor at FLUL, Ramos also collaborated with UCP, where he taught courses and seminars related to the ancient Semitic world. At present, though an emeritus professor, he continues his work as an advisor and researcher devoted to the development of ancient Near Eastern studies in Portugal.

The work developed within the Portuguese academic scene by these eminent figures was frequently aided by the late Francolino Gonçalves. A Dominican friar ordained in 1968, Gonçalves received his doctorate in oriental philology and history at the Université Catholique de Louvain in 1986. Professor at EBAF from 1975 on, his research revolved around the literary and political dimensions of ancient Near Eastern prophetic traditions.²⁸ On numerous occasions, Gonçalves collaborated with his colleagues and friends, including teaching seminars at the postgraduate courses on the ancient Near East and participating in the postgraduate juris both in FLUL and NOVA FCSH. Moreover, he was always available to help and guide researchers who visited EBAF, sharing with them its profound knowledge on the ancient world.

These four scholars were, thus, the forerunners of a new school of thought in Portugal, focused on the Near East and with a strong Orientalist inclination. Their immense contribution to Portuguese academia was soon consolidated with the specialized work of their students.

A New Generation of Specialized Scholars

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the first solid academic fruits of the intense labor of the aforementioned scholars flourished, as new researchers presented their research in the field. At FLUL, António Ramos dos Santos presented a doctoral dissertation about the first millennium BCE economy of ancient Babylon in 1999, supervised by Bouzon.²⁹ Later, Ramos dos Santos became a professor at the same institution, continuing his line of research on socioeconomic themes.³⁰ His activities at FLUL are a strong contribution that continues the work promoted in the previous decades.

Also in 1999, another of Nunes Carreira's students, Maria de Lurdes Palma, received her masters degree with a dissertation on Assyrian royal ideology.³¹ Continuing this line of research, Palma received her doctorate in 2004 with a thesis focused on the reign of Tiglath-pileser I.³² Presently, she persists on her research path, focusing on the history of Assyria.³³ It should be noted that she is also a member of the editorial committee of *Cadmo Journal* (FLUL).

As for NOVA FCSH, under the guidance of Tavares, a new generation of researchers bloomed, having the pre-classical world as their main focus. For instance, in 1993 José das Candeias Sales received his masters degree in the history of pre-classical civilizations at this institution, with a dissertation supervised by Tavares that compared Akkadian and Egyptian royal ideologies.³⁴ Later on, Candeias Sales specialized in

28. See, for instance, Gonçalves 2003, 2006–2007, and 2008.

29. Santos 1999.

30. Santos 2003.

31. Palma 1999.

32. Palma 2004.

33. For instance, see Palma 2007, 2010.

34. Sales 1997.

Egyptology, having received his doctorate at the UAb in 2002. Nowadays, he teaches ancient history courses at this university where he is also pro-rector for lifelong learning and cultural extension.

The contacts Tavares established with French academia enriched these results, given that some scholars from this country supervised doctoral thesis. This was the case of Maria Helena Trindade Lopes, who focused on the importance of the name in the New Kingdom of Egypt and received her doctorate in Egyptology in 1995, with a dissertation supervised by Tavares and Pascal Vernus.³⁵ Trindade Lopes continues her research and teaching career at NOVA FCSH, where at the moment she is a full professor. Responsible for the supervision of several doctoral dissertations in Egyptology, Trindade Lopes continues to promote a specialized path inaugurated by Tavares.

Concerning Near Eastern studies, Francisco Caramelo, the present dean of NOVA FCSH and a full professor at the same institution, can be considered the direct heir of Tavares. Caramelo received his doctorate in 2001, presenting a thesis focused on the translation and interpretation of the Mesopotamian prophetic *corpora*, which was also supervised by Pierre Villard.³⁶ Having learned ancient Semitic languages, first with the already mentioned Portuguese scholars, and later at Oxford, London, and Lyon, Caramelo's work on the philological, literary, and cultural fields regarding ancient Mesopotamia established him as the successor of all the efforts detailed above.³⁷

In the early 2000s, Caramelo began a fruitful collaboration with Juan Luis Montero Fenollós, among other Spanish scholars. This relationship resulted in the creation of the first Portuguese–Spanish archaeological project in the Near East, focusing on the region of Deir ez-Zor, Syria. The “Proyecto Arqueológico Medio Éufrates Sirio” (PAMES 2005–2011), co-directed by the two, opened the opportunity for postgraduate students to participate in its expeditions and in the subsequent laboratory work.³⁸ The results of PAMES were presented in several national and international conferences and published in several books.³⁹

In close connection with PAMES, Caramelo also coordinated a research project (2008–2011) funded by Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia (FCT), the national agency which funds scientific projects in Portugal, entitled “Border and Territory in the Middle Euphrates during the Middle Assyrian period (13th century BC).”⁴⁰ Within its research outputs should be stressed the masters dissertation of Diogo Paiva, supervised by Caramelo, about the Middle Assyrian expansion in the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta (2012).⁴¹

Unfortunately, given the political and military crisis that struck Syria in the spring of 2011, PAMES, like so many others archaeological projects, ended abruptly. Yet, it was an experience that profoundly fueled the love-affair between Portuguese academia and this field of studies.

35. Lopes 1995.

36. Caramelo 2002.

37. See for instance Caramelo 2004, 2007, 2010, and 2011.

38. Valério 2011.

39. On the works published about PAMES, see for instance Montero Fenollós and Al-Shbib 2008, Caramelo, Montero Fenollós, and Masó 2011, and Montero Fenollós 2015.

40. See, for instance Caramelo 2012; and Caramelo, Montero Fenollós, and Tenu 2012.

41. Paiva 2012.

Current Lines of Research

Since 2010, NOVA FCSH has been occupying a more relevant place regarding research on the Near East, a situation directly connected with the dynamism of its doctorate program, the research unit CHAM, and the work of the research group “Antiquity and its Reception.”

In the academic year of 2009–2010, the doctorate program of history in this institution went through a reformulation, which created a more intertwined path for PhD candidates in the area. By having mandatory specialized seminars with colleagues who focus on different chronological and spatial contexts in the first year of their research, history PhD candidates are impelled to discuss theoretical and methodological approaches diachronically. This new doctoral program configuration enriches the historiographical debate among junior scholars and prompts new lines of research. In 2009–2010, there were four PhD candidates in ancient history on this program who closely connected and worked with fellow candidates in medieval, early modern, and modern history.

The members of this group, Luís Duque, Marcel Paiva do Monte, Maria de Fátima Rosa, and myself, were supervised by Caramelo, who had already supervised their masters dissertations on themes related to the history of ancient Mesopotamia. They all intended to follow subjects matters related to the cultural and religious spheres, having all received a scholarship from the FCT.

Duque graduated in Archaeology at NOVA FCSH and later received his masters degree at the same institution in the history of religions (2009), with a dissertation on the religious and symbolic themes and concepts on some examples of Neo-Assyrian glyptic.⁴² For his doctorate, Duque deepened this topic by widening the scope of its *corpora*. He is currently finishing his dissertation, having participated in several national conferences and scientific meetings.

Graduating in history at NOVA FCSH, Paiva do Monte received his masters degree in ancient history from FLUL (2010), with a dissertation about the *adê* treaties as political and juridical instruments in Assyrian imperial construction.⁴³ He was supervised by Ramos dos Santos and Caramelo. In 2017 he received his doctorate from NOVA FCSH, with a thesis entitled “Idea and Presence: The Image of the King and the Symbolic Construction of Neo-Assyrian Imperial Space (10th–7th centuries BCE).”⁴⁴

Rosa also graduated in Archaeology at NOVA FCSH, with a final report on Mesopotamian glyptic. She then pursued her studies at FLUL, receiving her masters degree (2010) under the supervision of Ramos dos Santos and Caramelo. Her dissertation focused on the political project of Zimri-Lim in Mari (1775–1762 BCE).⁴⁵ The Mariotic context was, likewise, in the horizon of her doctorate, which she received in 2015 from NOVA FCSH, completing a dissertation on the perception of order and the conscience of time in Mari in the Old Babylonian period (nineteenth and eighteenth centuries BCE).⁴⁶

42. Duque 2009.

43. Monte 2010.

44. Monte 2017.

45. Rosa 2010.

46. Rosa 2015.

In the past few years, Rosa has been developing her postdoctoral project on the reception of ancient Near East by early modern and modern Western societies. Having learned ancient languages with Ramos and Caramelo, she has been teaching Akkadian courses for undergraduate students at NOVA FCSH. Rosa and I worked in close collaboration, which had already resulted in the creation of an optional course about the perceptions of antiquity in early modern narratives and in the elaboration of an interdisciplinary project, RAR—Reception, Appropriation, Representation—Western Rhetorical Discourses on the Ancient Orient (1799–1939), which is now taking its first steps.

As for me, I graduated in history with a minor in Asian history at NOVA FCSH, where I also received my masters and doctoral degrees in ancient history, both supervised by Caramelo. I have tried to connect both the history of religions and history of women by analyzing the feminine stereotypical images displayed by Inanna/Ištar in the *Epic of Gilgameš* and *The Descent of Inanna/Ištar to the Netherworld* in my masters dissertation (2009).⁴⁷ For the doctorate, I widened this topic, presenting in 2015 a dissertation on the construction of the divine figure of Inanna/Ištar between the end of the fourth millennium and the beginning of the second millennium BCE.⁴⁸

Since 2009, I have been teaching undergraduate and postgraduate courses on ancient Mesopotamian history, culture, and religion, as well as courses related to ancient Asia (namely the Silk Road in antiquity and the development of the ancient Chinese civilization) at NOVA FCSH. In the past few years, Caramelo, Rosa, and I have been teaching and supervising postgraduate students of the masters program in History—civilizations of the Middle East and ancient Asia.

In 2017, Rosa and I joined efforts with fellow postdoctoral colleagues at CHAM, Maria Dávila and Carla Alferes Pinto, who are working on late medieval and early modern Portuguese contexts, on a common research interest: the history of women.⁴⁹ We created a summer course at NOVA FCSH on the historiographical, theoretical, and methodological aspects of this topic, presenting new diachronic approaches to it. In the fall of 2017, another course was taught by us at the same institution, aiming to develop the interdisciplinary debate among students and fellow colleagues on feminine governance throughout time. We also prepared a cycle of conferences for the doctorate program in history, which was held during the first semester of 2018. The close connection with Alferes Pinto and Dávila opens up new research possibilities also on receptions studies related to the ancient Near East. At the same time, and given that we were all integrated into the reformulated doctoral program at NOVA FCSH, this team work actively displays the benefit of encouraging dialogue between historians from different contexts. At the end of 2017, we proposed the creation of a new thematic line, “History of Women and Gender” within CHAM, aiming to impel a wider discussion among scholars of this research unit.⁵⁰

47. Almeida 2009.

48. Almeida 2015. See also Almeida 2012.

49. Davila’s postdoctoral project is entitled “Gender, Space, and Power: Representations of Female Authority at the Portuguese Court (1438–1521).” As for Alferes Pinto, she is working on a postdoctoral project entitled “The Allure of Things. The Consumption of Artistic Objects by the Infantas and Queens Avis-Beja (1430–1577).”

50. See http://www.cham.fcsch.unl.pt/lintem_show.aspx?lintem=9 (accessed 15 January 2018).

On another level, and since the abrupt end of PAMES, Caramelo and Fenollós have been joining efforts to develop a new archaeological project in the Near East. In 2015, they started a fruitful dialogue with the Directorate of Excavation and Museum of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities of Palestine, which led to some first prospective expeditions at Khirbet Rabud in 2016, and later at Tell el Far'ah. A Portuguese–Spanish team, led by Caramelo and Fenollós, prepared the first campaign at Tell el Far'ah (October 2017), which included archaeologists of CHAM and of NOVA FCSH.⁵¹ This project reopened the possibility for Portuguese presence in international archaeological projects on the Near East, prompting further academic work in the field.

The multi and interdisciplinary character of CHAM promotes both critical debate and the projects mentioned above. With more than 400 researchers at present, CHAM assembles junior and senior scholars within the fields of history, archaeology, art history, philosophy, literary studies, and philology, with a timeline that goes from antiquity to the nineteenth century. CHAM is divided into different research groups connected by several thematic lines. This configuration was achieved in 2014, when CHAM merged with the Oriental Institute and with another NOVA FCSH research unit, the Centre for the History of Culture (CHC).

Between 2010 and 2014, there was a first moment in the life of the research group that focused on ancient Mesopotamia and its reception through time. The previously mentioned PhD candidates were among its initial members. One of the more important results achieved during this period was the creation of *Res Antiquitatis—Journal of Ancient History*, due largely to the editorial efforts of Caramelo and Marcel Paiva do Monte.

After the 2014 merge, the group was reconfigured with the integration of scholars who were previously affiliated with the Oriental Institute, namely the Egyptologists and those who were affiliated with CHC, especially researchers focused on classical studies. From then on, the group “Antiquity and its Reception” assembled junior and senior scholars to work on different ancient historical and cultural contexts (Mesopotamia, Egypt, biblical, Mediterranean, Greek, Roman, and Hellenistic). Together, we aim to strongly develop research in reception studies of antiquity in Portugal, from a multidisciplinary perspective.

In 2017 NOVA FCSH held the first section of a colloquium in this field, organized by Caramelo, Rosa, and me. It brought together national and international scholars, stimulating a rich debate.⁵² The proceedings of this colloquium were published in a thematic dossier of *Res Antiquitatis* in 2020.

Interestingly, the coordination of this research group is now in the hands of Trindade Lopes, who, like Caramelo, initiated her path in ancient history due to the combined actions of Tavares, Nunes Carreira, Ramos, and Gonçalves. Their one-time pupils are now the cornerstone of ancient history in Portugal, driving a new generation of scholars into the next step of the love-affair between antiquity and Portuguese academia.

51. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XQQ4kU7BUiA> (accessed 15 February 2018)].

52. See http://www.cham.fcsh.unl.pt/ac_actividade.aspx?ActId=515 (accessed 15 September 2017).

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