

New Selection 1

Oliveira Martins, Joaquim de

Cultural Current: Historical background and context, History

Cultural Community: Portuguese

Author: Martins Gomes, António

Oliveira Martins, Joaquim de

Oliveira Martins was born in Lisbon in 1845. At 15, because of his father's untimely death, he gave up his studies and started to work in trading. In 1870, he made his début in the press, and began to spread Socialist and republican ideas as editor of the newspaper *A República*. In 1872, while managing mining companies in Spain, Oliveira Martins published an influential essay on Camões's "The Lusiads" and its historical and social context. Between 1874 and 1888, this "philosopher" (as he came to be designated by his closest friends) took refuge in Oporto, where he produced a great part of his work, which evinces his multifaceted erudition, and encompasses politics, history, jurisprudence, sociology, economy, anthropology, philosophy and literature.

In this intense intellectual and educational activity, Oliveira Martins sought to support a Portuguese regeneration. For this purpose, he planned a "Social Sciences Library", a collection of general reference books that would be advertised to the general readership. The collection started in 1879 with a "History of Iberian civilization" and a "History of Portugal", and was followed by "Contemporary Portugal" (1881) and a "History of the Roman Republic" (1885). Oliveira Martins sat in parliament from 1883 to 1893, supporting rural development policies and the idea of a customs tariff, in order to protect national economy, and to stimulate its industry.

Portugal contemporâneo ("Contemporary Portugal") is his most representative book as regards his reflections on the nation's degeneration and regeneration.

The preface to its second edition (1883) states that this book, in which the "filthy plague" of the monarchy is extremely desiccated, "is neither sectarian, nor controversial or revolutionary: it is a history book, as I understand history must be written – as you write a drama". His way of presenting facts and characters in an enraptured style, and his tragic and deterministic view of the past, make Oliveira Martins a dramatist of history. His historical novels *Febo Moniz* (1867) and "John I's Sons" (1891) are replete with scenes displaying historical episodes from Portuguese history.

In 1888, Oliveira Martins founded the group known as "Those defeated by life"



*Joaquim de Oliveira
Martins (1885)*

(Vencidos da vida), among whose eleven members were Eça de Queirós, Guerra Junqueiro and Ramalho Ortigão, all of whom were disenchanted with their failed dreams for Portugal. His notions of decadence, and his political pessimism, were inspired by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, and amplified by imperial apprehensions following the proclamation of the First Brazilian Republic and, in Southern Africa, the British Ultimatum of 1890. His final texts condemn the republican ideology and its violent proceedings. With his monarchical “New Life” programme, he argued instead for a “revolution from above”, to be achieved through a peaceful implementation of social and economic reforms. Considered one of the greatest intellectuals of the century, Oliveira Martins died of tuberculosis in 1894.

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