A.H. de Oliveira Marques: medieval views

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In a passage taken from a well-known interview, A. H. de Oliveira Marques considered that his work was always based on sources and that it reflects an interpretive view of historical realities (Ferro, 1994: 169). This is, in fact, completely true, but his modesty prevented him from adding some of the consequences that his work had among the community of historians, in this case the medievalists. Fortunately, the importance of his legacy has been strongly recognized, and it is very rewarding to see that some of the latest comments on the significance of Oliveira Marques’ many assets draw our attention to his capacity for synthesis, his facility for leading group projects and his propensity for “creating a School,” for leaving a historiographical legacy (Homem, 2007: 3).

In my view, and in total accordance with this approach, it is very easy to justify such compliments by taking some features of his work into account. In fact, in 1956, he completed his university degree with a dissertation on A Sociedade Medieval Portuguesa (aspectos da vida quotidiana), while he also adopted among his topics of study, themes like an important law issued by the Portuguese king Afonso IV in 1340; the Portuguese population in the thirteenth century or the medieval currency and navigation between Prussia and Portugal in the fourteenth century (Marques, 1959). This was undoubtedly innovative, and certainly quite daring. As far as medieval studies are concerned, the historiographical profile of that epoch may be defined by mentioning Oliveira Marques’ major contributions on those themes, as they were all relevant and full of novelty. So, it is not surprising that the author continued to choose other striking themes, as in the case of his PhD thesis, Hansa e Portugal na Idade Média (Marques, 1959) or Introdução à História da Agricultura em Portugal (1962). In less than ten years, this historian firmly established one of the directions of his research, doing justice to his methodological proximity to Virginia Rau, and, of course, in the case of the economic dimension, also to the influence of Magalhães Godinho’s ideals. Nevertheless, these works reveal, at the same time, a particular concern with enhancing...