

LATE ANTIQUITY STUDIES IN BRAZIL: INTERVIEW WITH MARGARIDA MARIA DE CARVALHO¹



Interview conducted by the Google Meet platform, on November 9, 2021²

Link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AjkV-JMohYs&feature=youtu.be>

Heródoto (Prof. Glaydson José da Silva): Hello, everyone. My name is Glaydson José da Silva, I am an Ancient History professor at the Department of History of the *Escola de Filosofia, Letras e Ciência Humanas of the Universidade Federal de São Paulo (DH-EPCH-UNIFESP)* and one of the editors of the journal *Heródoto*. Today, we will interview professor Margarida Maria de Carvalho, organizer of the dossier about Late Antiquity of the second issue of the journal from the year 2021, and who is one of the most prominent specialists in this subject in Brazil.

Margarida Maria de Carvalho is a professor of Ancient History in the department of History and from the program of postgraduate studies in History at the *Universidade Estadual Paulista Júlio de Mesquita Filho (Unesp)*, campus of Franca. She is graduated in History by the *Universidade Federal*

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do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), and has a masters degree and doctorate in History by the *Universidade de São Paulo (USP)*, with post-doctorate internships in the *Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Unicamp)*, the *Universidad de Barcelona* and the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales*, in Paris. She did research internships at the Oxford University, and at the *Università Degli Studi di Perugia*. Furthermore, she works at the post-graduate programs at the *Universidade Federal de Alfnas*, in Brazil, and in the area of Classical Studies at the *Universidade de Coimbra*, in Portugal. She is a *CNPq-2* (Brazilian National Council for Scientific and Technological Development) research productivity fellow.

It is a great pleasure and a great honor to welcome you for this interview. I would like to thank you on behalf of the journal *Heródoto*. Personally, it is also a great pleasure because I was oriented by professor Margarida in my Scientific Initiation from 1993 to 1996. This interview also has a double satisfaction because we have a specialist in such an important theme, that will be discussed in today's interview, but also for having the pleasure of interviewing a friend and colleague. Welcome, Margarida!

Profa. Margarida Maria de Carvalho: Glaydson, thank you for this wonderful invitation. It is a great pleasure to be here with you. You were already my student in graduation, and also my mentee in your scientific initiation. It is interesting to note that we made our first post-doctorate together, at *Unicamp*, under the supervision of Professor Pedro Paulo Abreu Funari. It is a great pleasure to be here. Thank you so much for the invitation to organize this *Heródoto's* dossier. I am very happy.

Heródoto: I would like to begin this interview with a simple question: how did you choose the Late Antiquity area for your specialization, and how did you begin to work on it?

Carvalho: Before I decided to specialize myself in Ancient History and then in Late Antiquity, I went through a long way inside the graduation in History. Indeed, I joined the course of History, in 1984, at *Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ)*. I had the intention to work with diplomatic relations, but, at that time, there was no International Relations course. The field of diplomacy was composed of people from many areas, and I remember that, at the time of the entrance exam, I talked with a History professor, who would later become my professor at *UFRJ*. I asked him: "I want so much to work with diplomacy. Do you think that, if I graduate in History, it would be possible to become a diplomat?"; and he said: "of course!".

I joined the course of History, at *UFRJ*, at the time of political opening of the New Republic of Brazil³. Then, new historiographical readings were being made, and the curriculum of the History course became more dynamic, as it is today: the student himself chooses his own program, he chooses the disciplines; and I began by the disciplines of Contemporary History. I did History of the Contemporary World, of Latin America in the contemporary context.

I graduated in five years. It was in the third year that I took Ancient History (the disciplines of Ancient History): Ancient History I (Greece) and Ancient History II (Rome). That is when I really fell in love with Ancient History. However, in the year of 1986, I was a monitor of the discipline of Colonial Brazil and, at the same time, I started to dedicate myself to the disciplines of Ancient History. When 1987 came, I became monitor of History of Ancient Rome and, at the same time, I got accepted as first to work as an intern in History of Public Health at the *Casa de Oswaldo Cruz*, at the *Fundação Instituto Oswaldo Cruz*.

In other words, I have come a long way in many areas, but what made me choose the area of Late Antiquity was my attraction to Ancient and Medieval History. At that time, I thought it would be interesting to work in a period that was characterized as a transitional period. I joined the study group *Estudos de AntiguidadeTardia*(Studies in Late Antiquity) of the former sector of Ancient and Medieval History at the *UFRJ* - it was the first group in Brazil that was called "*AntiguidadeTardia do Terceiro ao Sétimo Século depois de Cristo*" (Late Antiquity from the 3th to 7th Century after Christ). It was then that I began to dedicate myself to the studies of Late Antiquity, and I chose to work specifically with the documentation on the emperor Julian.

I think that there were many motives that led me to choose Late Antiquity. The political context of the time (we were in a period of transition, leaving the military dictatorship to a new opening, that meant a transition) and the fact that I have come all this way, of coursing the disciplines of Contemporary History, monitor of Colonial Brazil, internship at *Fiocruz* in Public Health History, monitor in Ancient History II, I had no doubts that I wanted to pick Ancient History and that Late Antiquity would fulfill my desire.

Then, when I began to take the disciplines of Ancient History, I gave up on diplomacy and I have no regrets. Despite the difficulties of a career as

³ The professor refers to the final period of military dictatorship in Brazil (1964-1985).

historians, I am fulfilled. I am very fulfilled in this area of research. I like very much to mentor and to teach. We know that it is a difficult career. The academic life is complicated, but I have no regrets choosing this path.

Heródoto: You are an extremely active professional in the area of Ancient History in Brazil. I ask you, what are the challenges of research in the area of Late Antiquity in Brazil?

Carvalho: It is hard to dedicate to Ancient History in Brazil, despite the improvement of the area. Currently, we are watching a rise of production in the areas of Greek History, Rome History and Oriental Ancient History. Ancient History grew a lot in Brazil. There are many research groups on Ancient History, there is the *Grupo de Trabalho de História Antiga* (GTHA - Work Group on Ancient History) of ANPUH (National Association of Historians of Brazil), that we established in 2001, with professors Gilvan Ventura da Silva, Fábio Faversoni, Ana Teresa and Marcos Gonçalves. We took the work group to the streets! There is also the *Sociedade Brasileira de Estudos Clássicos* (SBEC - Brazilian Society of Classical Studies), which has been functioning for many years already.

So, there was a lot of growth, but there are still many challenges. For example, in the specific case of Late Antiquity, it is impossible for a student to research this area without any knowledge in other languages. Fortunately, the production about Late Antiquity has grown. However, it is still small if we compare it to the productions, in Brazil, about the Roman Principate, for example. Thus, we have to deal all the time with a foreigner historiography, besides the need to learn Greek, Latin and other ancient languages.

Those interested in Late Antiquity still face challenges like overcoming the idea of the fall of the decline of the Roman Empire. The student, in the first year of the History course, unfortunately, still brings these ideas. The student has no idea what Late Antiquity is. Therefore, I think these are the main challenges.

There is still a small production. I think we must create more collections, more authorial books, more dossiers on Late Antiquity, so this area may be more disclosed in our country. The growth of Ancient History in Brazil is big when compared to Europe, for example, where it is practically stagnated. In the United States, there are colleagues that also perceived this, as well as in Australia. Here, in Brazil, we are favored by this - Ancient History is still growing.

What impresses many foreigners colleagues, I believe, is that Brazil, inside Latin America, may become an exponent in the production about Ancient History, as a whole, and about Late Antiquity, specifically. Therefore, these are the challenges that we have to win. Despite our political difficulties, it is necessary to think in a collective effort, to think a bit more about the collective, so that, when we work on a dossier or a collection about Late Antiquity, as we are now, you, me and professor Maria Aparecida de Oliveira Silva⁴. In other words, this is another challenge that we have to face: favoring the collective.

Heródoto: Most of the textual tradition of the Greek and Roman worlds is available in a bilingual format and on-line: in Latin and English, Latin and French, Latin and Portuguese, Latin and Spanish, and the same with Greek. There are multiple of databases, such as *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum*, with a vast collection of images of Greek vases that is updated systematically. There are also databases of Latin inscriptions that are frequently updated. All of this contributes to those interested in studying Ancient History in Brazil, today, having access more easily to sources, even if they still need to know both ancient and modern languages. What do you think about it?

Carvalho: This is fundamental. My generation made their masters and parts of their doctorates without the internet. Everything was more difficult. We had to appeal to the COMUT⁵ of the universities we worked at to get the texts.

Besides, my generation began to work as professors in the universities very early as assistants and the career has changed a lot after this. Everything was much more difficult. Today, bibliography, textual documentation, and material culture are much more accessible than they were in the end of the 1980s and the 1990s. Everything has improved, but I still think it is necessary to make more efforts in the disclosure of this availability, especially in regard to the Late Antiquity.

I speak in terms of collective efforts - to create collections, authorial books, dossiers like this one from the journal *Heródoto*. These opportunities are very important. Besides, I consider significant the concern, such as the one from *Heródoto*, to present texts with its

⁴CARVALHO, Margarida Maria de; SILVA, Glaydson José da; SILVA, Maria Aparecida de Oliveira. *A ideia de História na Antiguidade Tardia*. Curitiba: Editora CRV, 2021.

⁵ COMUT is a Brazilian program of sharing books and journals between public universities libraries.

translations, versions of the Portuguese texts in English and other languages. This helps even more to disclose the area of Ancient History as a whole.

Heródoto: Could you talk some more about the projects that you already developed and are still developing in the area of Late Antiquity?

Carvalho: Since my graduation, I study the emperor Julian. Which may seem strange to some colleagues in Brazil; to colleagues abroad, this specialization is very positive because this is such a vast subject. Many authors speak about Julian, both Christian and non-Christians. There also is a vast material culture associated to Julian - numismatic, epigraphic, legislation...

I did my final coursework about the textual documentation on emperor Julian - I had a scholarship for Scientific Initiation from CNPq. Then, I did my masters and doctorate at USP, still working with emperor Julian. In my masters, I worked on emperor Julian's legislation in favor of the *curiae* and the *decuriones* - research that I still think about returning to some parts and publishing them, since it is still unprecedented both in Brazil and abroad. In my doctoral thesis, I studied the *inventio* of Gregory of Nazianzus against emperor Julian. And I continued to research themes about emperor Julian in my post-doctoral studies.

In this area, I was also invited to do, in France, one *Habilitation à Diriger des Recherches (HDR)*, under supervision of professor Jean-Michel Carrié, from the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS)*. Unfortunately, despite it being a terrific project, it was impossible for me to dedicate myself to a thesis of this magnitude with the workload we have here in Brazil (mentoring students, teaching at both graduation and post-graduation courses, writing articles, organizing collections, events, traveling, etc). However, it was a great honor for me to have received this invitation, that I consider a recognition of the work I have been doing for so many years.

Besides my personal projects, I oriented more than fifty final courseworks, scientific initiations, many of them financed by *FAPESP*. It has always been difficult to obtain scholarships from *FAPESP*, and today it is even more difficult. However, seven or eight students that I oriented in scientific initiation had scholarships from *FAPESP*, two from *PIBIC* and *CNPq*, in addition to masters and doctorates.

About the themes, I have oriented researches related to many areas of Antiquity, except themes about Oriental Antiquity (Egypt and Mesopotamia). And, of course, many researches on Late Antiquity, as final courseworks, as scientific initiations, as well as masters and thesis. I oriented researches on the areas of Late Antiquity, but also on the Roman Principate, and the uses of the past, which I find very interesting.

It was an enormous pleasure to mentor all those works and to contribute to the boost of Ancient History, especially Late Antiquity. Nowadays, I have four mentees in Late Antiquity, one in the Roman Republic, and I also oriented a masters research in Ancient Greece; and soon I will have a mentee defend her thesis on history of Ancient Greece. As I am the only doctor in Ancient History at *UNESP/Franca*, I had to be versatile. In other words, there was a lot of work.

Heródoto: For a long time, the *Universidade de São Paulo (USP)* was the main training center of historians of Antiquity in Brazil. This spot was shared with the *Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ)*, *Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF)* and *Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Unicamp)*. Your performance as a professor shows how, currently, there is a greater capillarity integrating *UNESP*, at Franca, as an important training center as well as the other centers where your former students work.

Carvalho: I am glad about this recognition. I am very honored. Well, it only consolidated itself with a lot of work, and many sacrifices. You, who are in the university for many years, know how difficult it is to train students, to publish books... There are many years of dedication. On the 4th of April 2022, I will complete thirty-two years of *UNESP*. It is a really long time. My work had to be multifaceted, since, as I said, I am the only doctor in Ancient History at *UNESP*, in Franca. I had to orientate many themes, observe various types of textual documentation and I even dared to orientate in the field of Classical Archeology.

I am very curious, I love to study, to research. It is what moves me. So, I plan on doing a specialization in numismatics. Currently, at *UNESP*, in Franca, we have the *Laboratório de Arqueologia* (Laboratory of Archaeology), created by a post-doctorate student, financed by *FAPESP (The São Paulo Research Foundation)*, that I supervise, professor Viviana Lo Monaco. She is an archeologist, formed by the *Museu de Arqueologia e Etnologia* of the *Universidade de São Paulo (MAE-USP)*. Participating in this laboratory sparked my interest in the area even more, and I am always exchanging ideas with fellow experts in the theme.

In my trajectory, I also had people who inspired me, professors that were very important in my life, for example, professor Norberto Luiz Guarinello, who was my doctoral mentor, and professor Pedro Paulo Funari, who was my first supervisor on the post-doctorate. Both trained many researchers that are spread throughout the whole Brazil today. Besides, I was also inspired by the work of former professors, such as Maria Beatriz Florenzano and Haiganuch Sarian. I consider them wonderful examples.

Heródoto: It is noticeable your preoccupation with the international insertion of your mentees. Could you comment a little about it?

Carvalho: I consider this question fundamental. Currently, despite having access to bibliography online, what gives better conditions than my generation had, however, it is fundamental to the research experience abroad, making post-doctorates and specializations. I consider dealing with another culture essential, as well as other kinds of supervision and libraries. Besides the internet being very important and providing a lot of material, it is not the same as researching in specialized libraries and dialogues with other professionals, it is fundamental.

I think that the antiquist scholar must be open to the study of foreign languages, without prejudices. There are many colleagues willing to welcome our students in Europe - in France, in the United Kingdom, in Italy, in Spain, in Portugal -, and in the United States of America and even in Australia. I think that this dialogue is very important, it amplifies the researcher's horizon.

I am very sorry that some Brazilian researchers, who had the opportunity to go abroad, did not go. Therefore, they lost a big opportunity, because to dialogue in another language is a challenge, which is amazing. To deal with those specialized shelves as the Sackler library, in Oxford, is something awesome; as the library of Sorbonne or the libraries of *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociale*, of the University of Barcelona, or whatever. It is also important to have contact with colleagues, other colleagues in Latin America, Argentina, Chile. It is very critical to exchange those ideas, it is fundamental.

The majority of the students that did their masters and doctorates with me had abroad experiences in many countries, such as England, France, Spain and the United States. It was very important to them, as it was for me. It is also a way to amplify the contacts. I think that we have to be open to this. Our way of doing Ancient History cannot be accepted only

in Brazil, but worldwide. Maybe it is a dream of mine, but I think that it may come true.

It is awesome that the French, British, Spanish, Portuguese, North-Americans value our way of doing Ancient History; thus, I think it is fundamental to establish such contacts. I am very proud of the students I trained; from the doctorates and masters mentees, almost everyone went abroad. Some did not go because they did not want to and did not continue in the area.

Another challenge is the difficulty of acquiring scholarships nowadays. The former governments made this path easier. It is a challenge to fight for the maintenance of public funds to projects in Human Science. In other words, I think that we should not only worry about the development of Ancient History or the field of Late Antiquity, since they are dependent on Brazilian policies and, thus, on the development of the Human Sciences as a whole. I insist the collective effort must be preeminent and, sometimes, I get very sad to see that many people don't think this way.

Heródoto: Lastly, could you comment on how was your first experience in the organization of the dossier for the *Heródoto*?

Carvalho: I enjoy organizing dossiers. This is the second dossier on Late Antiquity that I organize, besides many other dossiers on Ancient History. The first was published in the *Revista História da UNESP*, in 2016, to which I also invited colleagues from Brazil and abroad. And it was a great pleasure to organize this *Heródoto's* dossier. I invited colleagues from Brazil, specialists in the area, and colleagues from Spain, Argentina, Portugal and France. I consider these contacts very enriching. They are dear colleagues, whom I respect much and also admire their productions.

It was a very grateful experience, because the majority of the colleagues I invited accepted our invitation due to their willingness to boost the area, to share their works, and they thought amazing to publish in *Heródoto*, because it is the only journal that I know, in Brazil, that is concerned to translate the articles to other languages. It has to be pointed out, and I congratulate you for continuing this wonderful work, winning over the adversities.

It is necessary to note that there is already a network, that is what I meant. It is with great pleasure that I say that I have a network of colleagues in the area of Late Antiquity in Brazil, in Late America, in

Europe, and in the United States. I am very proud to say this, because everything was conquered with hard work and sacrifices. It has to be valued. Then, my pleasure in organizing this dossier was great, and you can count on me for future projects. The mean you offered was essential: a journal specific for Ancient History, worried about the disclosure of the articles and the translation.

Heródoto: Well, thank you very much. This interview also has a personal character, that is the great pleasure of meeting one more time my former mentor and my current colleague and friend.

Carvalho: I thank you very much. And I put myself at your disposal to collaborate with you, always! Thank you, and I say that the affection and respect that you have for me is reciprocal.