

## C 5.1. COMMUNICATION – ABSTRACT

# A Feminine Voice in Medical History and Deontology: The Legacy of Maria Olívia Rúber de Meneses

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**ABSTRACT:** Maria Olívia Rúber de Meneses (1932–1990) was a pioneering physician, historian, academic, and bioethicist whose work profoundly shaped the development of the History of Medicine and Medical Deontology in Portugal. As the first woman to obtain a Ph.D. at the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Porto, she established a scholarly trajectory grounded in rigorous historical inquiry, ethical reflection, and a sustained commitment to bridging scientific practice with humanistic sensibility.<sup>[1]</sup>

Her intellectual journey began well before her university years. From her adolescent years, she distinguished herself by exceptional academic performance and a deep engagement with literature and poetry, a sensibility that later informed both her historical writing and pedagogical practice. During her medical studies (1949–1955), she consistently ranked among the most outstanding students of her cohort, receiving academic distinctions, and cultivated a parallel literary activity, authoring poems for academic publications and commemorative volumes.<sup>[2]</sup>

Her scholarly career was inaugurated with the innovative 1956 dissertation, *Duas Figuras Femininas da Medicina Medieval*, in which Professor Olívia examined the intellectual legacy of Trota of Salerno and Hildegard of Bingen to challenge long-standing assumptions regarding women's intellectual inferiority, anticipating later feminist historiography.<sup>[3]</sup>

Following the institutional lineage of her mentor, Luís de Pina, Professor Olívia was closely associated with the Maximiano Lemos Museum from the outset of her career. She played a decisive role in its reorganization during the institutional transition of 1959–1960 and later became its director in 1976, having previously transformed the institution into a center for interdisciplinary research and pedagogical innovation.<sup>[4]</sup> In parallel, she succeeded her mentor as head of the disciplines of History of Medicine and Medical Deontology, consolidating their academic structure.

Her historiographical production encompassed medieval medicine, public health, tropical medicine, institutional history, and medical biography. Her studies on the evolution of Anatomy and Surgery in Porto constitute landmark contributions to Portuguese medical historiography.<sup>[5,6]</sup> In the field of Tropical Medicine, her doctoral thesis resulted from extensive archival research in Portugal, France, and Germany and remains a major reference.<sup>[7]</sup>

In Medical Deontology, Professor Olívia emerged as a precursor of modern bioethics in Portugal. Motivated by concerns regarding professional indifference and ethical decline, she emphasized the moral centrality of the doctor–patient relationship and professional secrecy, particularly in *Segredo Médico*.<sup>[8,9]</sup>

Her pedagogical legacy is highlighted by her leadership in the creation of the first pedagogy course for medical teachers in 1983, advocating that exemplary conduct was as essential as scientific competence.<sup>[10]</sup> Widely regarded as a mentor, she combined intellectual rigor with attentive personal guidance.

Until the end of her career, she remained intellectually active, leaving a final testament in the preface to the reedition of Maximiano Lemos's *História da Medicina em Portugal: Doutrinas e Instituições*.<sup>[11]</sup> Her death in 1990 marked the loss of a central figure in Portuguese medical humanism.<sup>[12]</sup>

By integrating historical consciousness, ethical reflection, literary sensibility, and institutional leadership, Maria Olívia Rúber de Meneses forged a lasting model of scholarly and professional excellence. Her work remains a definitive touchstone for understanding the intersections of history and ethics, while contributing to a sustained reappraisal of women's intellectual and professional legitimacy within Portuguese medical academia.

**KEYWORDS:** History of Medicine; Medical Deontology; Bioethics; Women in Science; Pedagogy; Portugal.

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