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The Pioneers of Urology in Porto

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ABSTRACT: This article explores the emergence and consolidation of urology as a distinct medical specialty in the city of Porto, within the broader institutional development of hospital care and medical education in northern Portugal. Beginning with the historical context of the Hospital de Santo António and the Medical-Surgical School of Porto, the study highlights the progressive differentiation of urological practice from general surgery during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Particular attention is given to the contributions of key figures who shaped the discipline locally. Carlos José de Azevedo Albuquerque is identified as a pioneering surgeon whose early work on urinary tract endoscopy demonstrated a level of technical and scientific advancement comparable to contemporary European practice. The article also examines the institutional role of Roberto Frias, the first professor responsible for the teaching of Clinical Urology after the creation of the Faculty of Medicine of Porto in 1911, despite not being a specialist in the field. The subsequent development of the specialty is analyzed through the career of Óscar Moreno, who received specialized training in Paris and later established dedicated urology services at the Hospital de Santo António, significantly improving clinical practice and teaching conditions. By tracing these trajectories, the study illustrates how the institutionalization of urology in Porto resulted from the interaction between individual initiative, international influences, and local healthcare structures, contributing to the modernization of Portuguese medical practice in the early twentieth century.

KEYWORDS: Urology, History of Medicine, Porto, Medical Education, Portugal

HISTORICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND

The care of the sick and the needy in the city of Porto dates back to the beginnings of the Portuguese nation and of the town itself, which was granted a Royal Charter in 1123. Since the Middle Ages, the city had dozens of hostels and charitable care centres, but the first major hospital only emerged in 1605, when the *Albergaria de Roque Amador* was replaced by the *D. Lopo de Almeida Hospital* ^[1,2].

With the growth of the city, this new hospital quickly proved insufficient to treat the expanding pop-

ulation, which led to the creation of the Santo António Hospital. Its first stone was laid on 15 July 1770, and it received its first patients on 18 August 1799. The construction of the hospital faced major financial difficulties and, by 1824, only about half of the original project had been completed ^[1,2,3].

On 25 June 1825, by decrees of Costa Cabral, the Royal School of Surgery of Porto was created, leading to the integration of the surgeons of the Santo António Hospital into the staff of this institution, which operated in the north wing of the hospital. Owing to inadequate teaching conditions, it was always the ambition of the



Medical-Surgical School to have its own facilities, which was achieved in October 1883, when the school moved to a building located opposite, on the grounds of the former Convento do Carmo. Despite this, it continued to occupy some wards of the Santo António Hospital, a situation that persisted until the inauguration of the São João Hospital on 24 June 1959 [1,2].

In Portugal, the specialty of Urology was only recognised after the establishment of the Republic in 1910, being officially instituted by the Decree-Law of 22 February 1911, which reorganised higher education and transformed the Medical-Surgical Schools of Lisbon and Porto into Faculties of Medicine. This decree already included the existence of a chair of Clinical Urology. The new Faculty of Medicine of Porto continued to operate in the facilities of the former Medical-Surgical School [4,5].

Thus, although formal teaching of Urology in Porto was only established in 1911, with the creation of the Faculty of Medicine and the corresponding chair, urological pathology had received considerable attention from its physicians since the beginning of the Medical-Surgical School. Numerous surgical interventions were performed and described, and urological topics were frequently addressed in doctoral dissertations.

THE EMERGENCE OF UROLOGY IN PORTO

Several names stood out during this period, with publications mainly dedicated to hypogastric lithotomy [6]. However, the surgeon who definitively demarcated Urology from General Surgery in Porto was Carlos José de Azevedo Albuquerque, with the publication in 1903 of a remarkable treatise of around six hundred pages on endoscopy of the urinary tract. In this work, he described with great clarity urinary pathology, diagnostic methods and several personal studies, demonstrating that, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, what was best known at European level was already being practised in Porto [6].

Azevedo Albuquerque was born on 7 August 1874, on Fogueteiros street, in the heraldic house of his parents, currently the headquarters of the Cooperativa Artística Árvore. He graduated from the Medical-Surgical School of Porto on 14 January 1903 [7]. In his inaugural dissertation, entitled *Endoscopia do Aparelho Urinário: Urethroscopia, Cystoscopia, Catheterismo Cystoscópico dos Ureteres*, he defended the value of clinical observation and the importance of the modern endoscopic method in the study of diseases of the urinary tract, recognising that "...such an exploration may be carried out

through the natural passages, by manoeuvres relatively harmless to the patient... but the endoscopic method is not limited to simple visual inspection of the state of the urethra and bladder; it allows the exploration to be taken further and provides better conditions for the study of diseases of the ureters and kidneys... Initiating and testing an absolutely new method, which includes different instruments, of more or less delicate construction and technique, I did not spare detailed descriptions, even if tedious, so that the manoeuvres might be properly performed, which from the outset must be conducted rationally" [8].

Among the many relevant aspects of his work, particular note should be made of the 15 cases of study and treatment of the kidney and ureters carried out up to 1901, the publication of which is remarkable at a time when ureterorenoscopy was not yet developed [6].

This surgeon achieved great national renown and was appointed Head of Clinic of the chair of Clinical Surgery of the Medical-Surgical School in a session of the School Council on 12 March 1907. He unofficially began teaching Urology to fifth-year medical students, a role he maintained until 1911 [7].

The creation of the Faculty of Medicine of Porto in 1911 led to the establishment of the chair of Clinical Urology. The School Council entrusted its teaching to Professor Roberto Frias, in accumulation, as he was already the holder of the chair of Clinical Surgery. It should be noted that this professor had already been providing theoretical and practical teaching on diseases of the kidneys and urinary tract for several years at the former Medical-Surgical School.

It is observed that the chair of Urology remained vacant due to the absence of a specialist, with teaching ensured by Roberto Frias and his assistants Carlos Fortes, Sebastião Lopes and João Couto Nobre. Strangely, the most notable surgeon in the field, Azevedo Albuquerque, was not invited to assume the chair of Urology, which constituted a significant gap in securing a qualified lecturer.

This fact becomes even more enigmatic given that, in 1910, Azevedo Albuquerque had been invited by Roberto Frias to operate on urological patients at the Ordem da Lapa. However, with the implementation of the Faculty of Medicine in 1911, Azevedo Albuquerque abandoned teaching and subsequently his medical career itself, retiring to Condeixa-a-Nova. There he married the great-granddaughter of the Count of Podentes and came to reside in the Palace of the Counts of Podentes, which

remains the property of the family to this day. According to some colleagues, these decisions may have resulted from the diagnosis of a renal tumour.

CONSOLIDATION OF THE SPECIALTY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Roberto Belarmino de Rosário Frias (1853–1918), a native of Goa, where he completed his secondary education in 1870 and attended the course in Theology at the Diocesan Seminary, returned to Portugal to continue theological studies at the University of Coimbra. However, he chose to study Law and later Medicine. Faced with family disapproval, the allowance that financed his studies was suspended, leading him to settle in Porto, where he graduated from the Medical-Surgical School of Porto. He completed his degree with the inaugural dissertation *O Crime: Apontamentos para a Sistematização da Criminalidade* (1880)^[7,9].

He continued his training in the hospitals of Paris, London and India, a country where he lived between 1882 and 1887 and where he taught for two years at the Goa Medical School. He was appointed demonstrator lecturer of the surgical section by decree of 26 May 1887, taking office on 15 July of the same year. In 1895 he was promoted to substitute lecturer and, in 1898, to full lecturer of the 5th chair, Operative Medicine, transferring in the same year to the 9th chair of Clinical Surgery. In 1890 he was also appointed auxiliary lecturer of the Physical-Chemical Sciences at the Industrial and Commercial Institute of Porto, becoming full lecturer of the 8th chair, Mineralogy and Geology, in 1905^[7].

He went down in history as the first professor of the clinical chair of Urology, which he taught between 1911 and 1916, despite not being a urologist.

In 1916, due to illness – having contracted typhus during his clinical practice – Roberto Frias requested his replacement from the Council of the Faculty of Medicine of Porto, suggesting the name of Óscar Moreno.

Óscar Moreno (1878–1971), a native of the parish of Vitória in Porto, attended the Medical-Surgical School and, in 1906, left for Paris, where he worked at the Hospital Necker and in the Venereology services of the hospitals of Saint-Louis, Ricord and Saint-Lazare, obtaining his specialisation in Urology there. It was during this period that he prepared, with Léon Ambard, his thesis *Exploração Funcional dos Rins*, presented in 1911 and approved with the grade of 20 values^[10,11,12].

Óscar Moreno repeatedly complained about the deficiencies of facilities and equipment, stating that “...

the teaching of Urology was for many years carried out within the Hospital de Santo António, in cramped premises belonging to other services and without dedicated equipment, obliging me to make daily use of the most basic urological material from my own private arsenal...”. In 1925, the Mesa da Santa Casa created special Urology services within the hospital grounds, allowing for the proper installation of outpatient specialty services and better teaching conditions^[13].

Thus, contracted by the Board of the Santa Casa da Misericórdia, Óscar Moreno created, in 1925, at the Santo António Hospital, a consultation service for special Urology services, of which he became director. He served as director of the Urology and Venereology Service for 29 years, retiring in 1948 after 32 years as a professor at the Faculty of Medicine. He died in Porto on 16 April 1971, remaining in history as the first director of the Urology Service and as a central figure in the progress of Urology in the city of Porto.

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