



Antonio de Almeida



Sezures, Penalva do Castelo, Viseu, Portugal, 21 Aug. 1900 -
Lisbon, Portugal, 17 Nov. 1984

Title Professor of Anthropology, University of Lisbon, Portugal

Nomination 3 May 1961

After graduating in medicine, he practiced medicine and was a Professor at the Normal School (Pedro Nunes). After post-graduate studies at the School of Tropical Medicine and the Colonial School he won a scholarship from the National Council for Education in 1934. In 1935 he began teaching Ethnology and Colonial Ethnography at the Colonial School (the present Institute of Political and Social Sciences). His anthropological investigations began in 1934, in Angola, where he also returned between 1948 and 1950, when he became the Head of the Anthropology Mission. He then carried out two more campaigns in 1952 and 1955. His anthropological studies also involved other former Portuguese colonies such as Guinea (1959 and 1962), Cape Verde (1962), S. Tomé and Príncipe (1954), Mozambique (1959), the Portuguese India (1960 and 1961), Macao (1966) and Timor. He was a member of the Board of Missions and Overseas Geographical Research and Director of the Center for Studies in Ethnology. Between 1938 and 1957 he was a Member of Parliament of the National Assembly. He taught Ethnology of the Portuguese overseas colonies and Antropobiology at the Higher Institute of Social Sciences and Overseas Politics until 1970.

Commemoration – Antonio de Almeida was an eminent anthropologist and ethnologist, born in 1900 in Vizeu, Portugal. Graduated from the Faculty of Medicine in Lisbon, he became very early an anatomist, studying under Professor Mendes Correia, who was to precede him as a member of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. From anatomy Almeida drifted to anthropology. As Professor of Anthropology and Ethnology, Antonio de Almeida refused to remain secluded in the rigid walls of his study and classroom, and extended his zeal and vision to the field where he spent part of his life.

Overcoming the difficult conditions of living in the hinterlands of Africa, he mixed with the natives, living their lives and winning their confidence, which allowed him to undertake experiments and grasp the dominant traits of their culture. From 1934 to 1975 he travelled extensively throughout the Portuguese colonies in Africa and Asia, Angola, Timor, Goa and Macau among others. Mozambique and the islands of Cabo Verde were also visited in his scientific travels. In Angola, he studied the yellow and red bushmen, the Hottentots and Kwadis, together with 55 tribes of the Bantus. The biometric data accumulated by him surpasses 50,000 in number, and blood sampling corresponds to over 10,000 blood group typings and more than 7,000 Rh factor determinations.

In Timor, de Almeida, following the work done in Angola, and using the same methods, obtained biometric data on thousands of natives of various ethno-linguistic groups. He also studied the blood groups and the Rh factor of about 9,000 individuals. The conclusions of his work put him in the first line of those who occupy themselves with human geographic biology.

During his voyages, Almeida, a tremendous worker, also obtained cultural data, enabling him to establish the specificity of the different tribal cultures. His work destroyed many taboos established by less diligent researchers. He thus showed, for instance, that many corporal deformations considered to be of genetic origin were in fact due to cultural tradition.

His work was also extended to the discovery of more than 600 archeological sites, and most of his scientific data and thousands of photographs were documented by black and white movie films.

All this is presented in more than 200 scientific papers, plus many articles in daily newspapers and scientific books. Almeida was a pioneer in his country, but in the field of physical anthropology he brought to it the contribution of other disciplines, showing that biometric measures should be complemented by biological data.

Carlos Chagas