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**António Plácido da Costa (1849—1916):  
Physician, University Teacher and the  
Timelessness of the Invention**

António Plácido da Costa was born in Covilhã, an inland village in Portugal. Of humble origins, young Plácido was taken to live the coastal city of Porto, due to his father's job. During his school years, he was trained for the priesthood, and even attended a seminary in Cambrai (France), where he obtained a vast humanistic education and learnt rhetoric. At the time of the Franco—German War (1870—71), he returned to Portugal, where he enrolled in the Porto Medical Surgical School (1874—75), which would later become the Medical Faculty of the University of Porto (FMUP). As a medical student, he was particularly interested in medical microbiology, a field on which he later became a pioneering teacher. He completed his medical studies in 1879 and for the next two years worked as an assistant to Pedro Adriano Van der Laan, a prestigious ophthalmologist and undisputed authority in that field. During that time, Plácido showed his high intellectual standing and creative power, especially through his research on clinical cases of corneal pathologies. He designed and built a new diagnostic instrument — the astigmatoscope or keratoscope. This instrument, as well as others of his conception and design, was introduced through the journal *Periódico de Oftalmologia Prática* (1880, 1881). Julius Hirschberg (1843—1925), ophthalmology professor of Berlin, was the first to recognise the originality and worth of Plácido da Costa's invention. Plácido's disk was then manufactured and began to be used in clinical practice, and it was mentioned in every medical treaty. Though adapted by means of modern technologies, the keratoscope or Plácido's disk, continues to be the staple instrument to diagnose corneal conditions.

Back in Porto, Plácido opened his own eye clinic and became a faculty member on the Porto Medical Surgical School (1883), where he lectured on histology and ophthalmology at a time before the institutional recognition of these fields and in the first years of their official inclusion in the curricula. He was a tenured professor in the physiology department (1894—1916), designing and developing several instruments which complemented his teaching activity as well as his research.

Plácido's intelligence, eloquence, creativity and ingenuity, together with his scientific method, his contribution to medicine through the design and development of medical instruments, and his mastery of scientific photography may be confirmed through the artefacts and documents making up the collection of the „Maximiliano Lemos“ Museum of Medical History of FMUP. In fact, there is no eye clinic today that does not use Plácido's disk on a daily basis. It is therefore essential to remember the contemporary relevance of some pages in the history of Portuguese Medicine, which are true landmarks in the world History of Medicine and of all Science.

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