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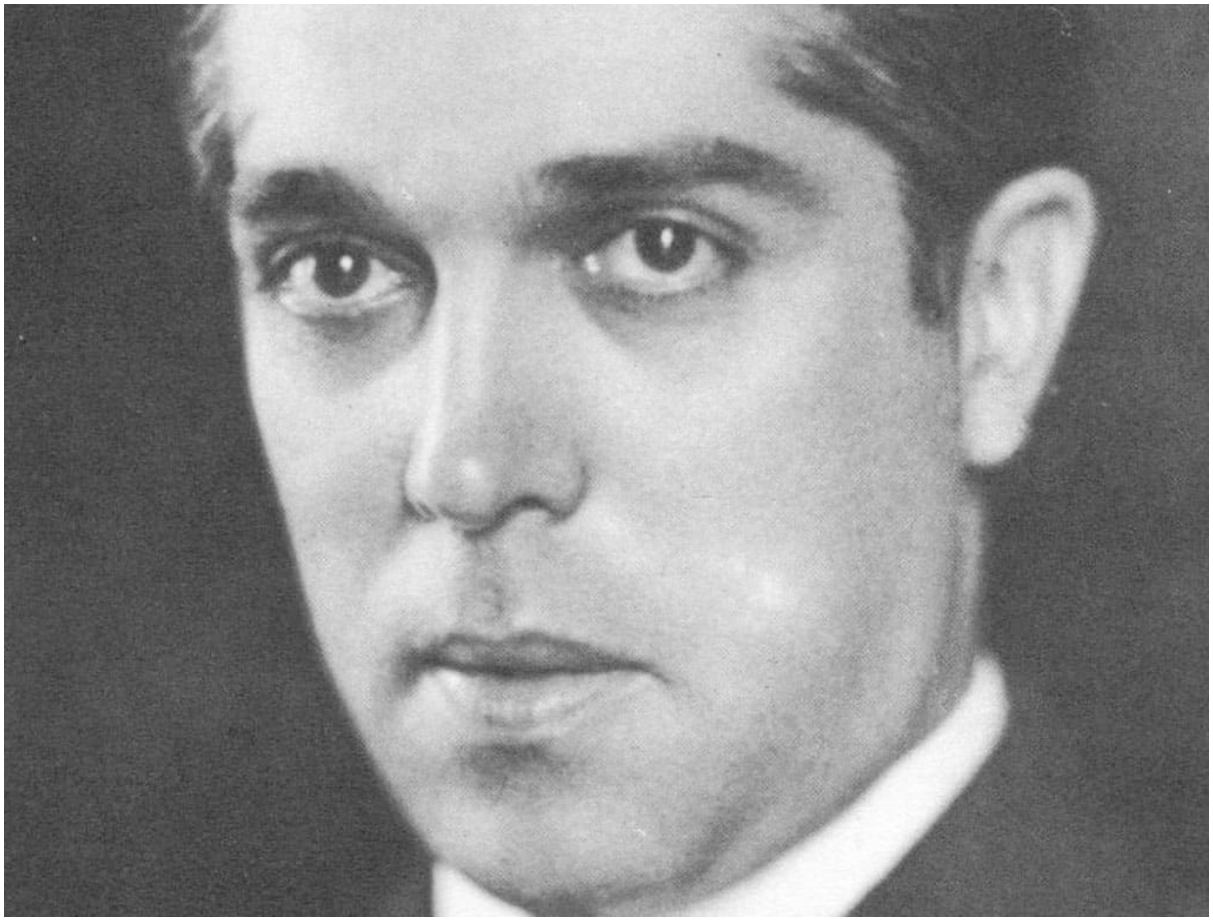
Duarte Pacheco – An Algarvian Hero – Part 2



Duarte José Pacheco

Duarte Pacheco is most notable for his work as Minister for Public Works and Communications, the post he occupied from July 1932 in Salazar's first government to January 1936, when Salazar sacked him.

The reason for his dismissal was that in Lisbon there were too many powerful opponents of Pacheco's changes. Salazar reinstated him in the same post 30 months later in May 1938, and he held it until his death in November 1943.

These two years in the wilderness were a significant slice of Pacheco's short life and represent a major missed opportunity in the creation of the nation's built environment. When he came back into government in May 1938 as Minister for Public Works and

Communications, he also held concurrently the post of President of Lisbon Câmara. He was thus able to carry on his work with greatly strengthened authority.

Pacheco is on record as saying on May 25, 1938, on his reappointment to the Ministry of Public Works: “A man in public life, truly worthy of such a description, truly loving his country, can and should have only one aim, to serve it. To serve it always, everywhere and at all times.” There is no doubt that he lived up to his own standard.

Pacheco also asserted his full support for the regime he served: “My actions will consist in fulfilling and enforcing to the letter the orders of Dr Salazar … that monk dedicated to his country.”

In general, it is difficult to approach a government minister, but Pacheco mingled with his workers and personally gave them his appreciation of their efforts. He had overall responsibility for the Exhibition of the Portuguese World, and when it opened in June 1940, he sent his chauffeur to pick up the children of his friend to see the ceremony. One of the children asked him why he had never married. “I never had time, my girl,” he replied.

The list of Pacheco’s works while he was simultaneously Minister for Public Works and Communications and President of Lisbon Câmara is so extensive that the impact on the environment might be compared with that of Pombal after the earthquake of 1755.

Pacheco had no compunction in treading on legitimate interests and railroaded his projects through bureaucracy and red tape. Landowners and property developers in and around Lisbon must have feared this man because it was he who introduced the practice of expropriation (compulsory purchase) of rural property.

Having bought land for the price he wished to pay, he sold it to developers at a vast profit, together with planning permission; the developers then built properties for their own profit. The Câmara could guarantee a uniform building style and the profit accruing paid for the further urbanisation of the city of Lisbon.



Duarte Pacheco viaduct, Alcântara

The building style in Lisbon became the new Portuguese tradition, a national or even empire-wide style of architecture, and since the state was the exclusive originator of work, any architect refusing to use this style soon found himself sidelined.

In a democratic state, such an urban programme would guarantee the loss of the next election, but for this authoritarian regime, Pacheco provided the façade which made people proud to belong to a state which was able to make such improvements to their lives. Pacheco was not a politician but a man of action.

From 1932 to 1946, a major part of the state budget – sometimes as much as a quarter – went to the Ministry of Public Works. Engineers, architects (who until 1932 were grossly underutilised), artists (painters and sculptors to decorate buildings), musicians (he was founder of the Emissora Nacional and of its Grand National Symphony Orchestra), provincial building contractors and their teams, and finally workmen all benefited from a major expansion in urbanisation and nationwide road building.

Changes to the capital under his direction include the National Stadium, IST, the Cascais Marginal, the Lisbon-Caxias motorway, Portela airport, Fonte Luminosa, Monsanto Park (Pacheco's passion, now the green lung of Lisbon); social housing at Alvalade, Encarnação, Madredeus and Caselas; the Lisbon-Vila Franca de Xira motorway (now the A1).

Early in his ministry, he greatly improved the water supply to the capital, crucial in a city that grew by 62% in the years 1920-50. His was the plan in 1934 for a bridge over the Tagus which became the Ponte Salazar in 1966, and he was the originator of the practice of town planning in Portugal in 1934.

Reconstructions of historic monuments under his direction include Palácio de São Bento, Castelo de São Jorge, Sé de Lisboa, Teatro Nacional de São Carlos, Palácio de Queluz and Paço Ducal de Guimarães.

In the country at large, Pacheco's ministry was responsible for thousands of petty works concerning local roads, fountains, drains and cemeteries. It resolved the question of shanty towns by rehousing their populations in prefabs; created parks for infants; remodelled parks and gardens in Lisbon; constructed 10,000 primary schools over the country; added to existing grammar schools; completed the Faculties of Engineering and Pharmacy in Oporto University, and the Maternity Unit Júlio Diniz; promoted the construction of a new marginal road along the Douro; insisted on better road signage; abolished tolls on bridges; contributed to the new Pousadas de Turismo (founded in 1942); promoted the acquisition of modern metal railway carriages; regulated heavy road transport and created the Road Transport Industry Association; revolutionised the postal and telecommunication services; and modernised the country's deep water port facilities.

He initiated important hydrographic studies of the rivers Zêzere, Lis, Vouga, Mira, Mondego and Guadiana, and the project for the dam at Castelo de Bode.

Pacheco died, as he had lived, at speed. On November 15, 1943, not wanting to miss a meeting of the council of ministers in Lisbon, and having left too little time for the journey, he urged his chauffeur for more and more speed on his journey back from Vila Viçosa, where he had visited the work on a new square with gardens and the new statue of D João IV.

His famous black Buick crashed near Vendas Novas, killing outright his friend and travelling companion Jorge de Amorim. Pacheco himself died the following day in Setúbal hospital. One of the saddest letters in the archives in Loulé is the response from Salazar to the President of Loulé Câmara refusing the request for Pacheco's remains to be interred at Loulé. Salazar maintained that Pacheco had spent his life of public service in Lisbon, and it was deemed fitting that his remains should rest there.

The similarities between Duarte José Pacheco and António de Oliveira Salazar are quite remarkable. Each was of obscure provincial origin, academic, unmarried, workaholic, perfectionist, scrupulously honest in private life and devoted to public service, and each sacrificed his life to the service of his country.

While Salazar left an indelible mark on Portugal's history, there is no town in metropolitan Portugal whose face does not bear some mark attributable to Duarte Pacheco, and neither Lisbon nor Portugal itself was the same after his life of service. The inscription in St Paul's Cathedral for Sir Christopher Wren, a famous architect from another country and from another age, might serve as a second apt memorial for this remarkable man: *Si monumentum requiris, circumspice* – If you seek his memorial, look around you.

Peter Booker

Peter Booker co-founded with his wife Lynne the Algarve History Association.
www.algarvehistoryassociation.com