

**Martins, Fernando. *Pedro Theotónio Pereira, o Outro Delfim de Salazar*. Lisboa: Dom Quixote, 2020, 1197 pp.
ISBN 978-972-20-7029-4**

Tom Gallagher¹

Pedro Theotónio Pereira never had any doubts about placing his abundant energy and political skills at the service of the *Estado Novo* for a great part of its existence. He was always skeptical about the effectiveness of multi-party politics and was usually as unapologetic as Salazar was about maintaining its authoritarian features. Ironically it was in the Anglo-American world that he spent long periods as a state official. Beforehand, in Spain he would work tirelessly to ensure that the Franco regime ended up closer to the Allied powers than to the Axis ones. His years in foreign service at challenging times in international affairs provide a store of experiences that make his biography an absorbing one. And in Fernando Martins this significant Portuguese figure from the last century has found a biographer who rises to the occasion in illuminating his story. The professor of history at the University of Évora brings to the task qualities that will likely ensure his book possesses enduring interest and avoids being a book on the *Estado Novo* and its main figures that takes refuge in clichés and generalities.

Sensational or superficial this book most certainly isn't. It is detached and balanced. It soon becomes clear that the author's aim is to provide a composite profile of this noteworthy figure from all the materials available. The book has 1197 pages, nearly three hundred of which are notes (often containing fascinating information). A high level of accuracy seems to have been aimed for. There is an attempt to look at controversial elements in Pereira's career from different perspectives and not rush to easy judgments. The author stays in the background but his clearly democratic orientation does not result in a peevish approach to his subject. He seeks to understand the Pereira who was ready to censor plays and novels as a young Catholic conservative in the Lisbon of the early 1920s and be ruthless in challenging rebellious challenges to both Iberian nationalist regimes. His balance seems to have convinced surviving family members to share memories and private documents about their illustrious relative. The scale of the work involved has also resulted in years of research in Portugal, Spain, Britain, and the USA.

¹ University of Bradford, School of Social Sciences, United Kingdom. *E-Mail*: t.g.gallagher@bradford.ac.uk

Some readers may be daunted by the length and by the care taken with filling in the historical context for each of the stages where the author's subject performed his role as a troubleshooter for, or advocate of, the Estado Novo. But the book manages to be a fascinating voyage through the intellectual, emotional, recreational professional, and political aspects of a life that was lived to the full until a debilitating illness cut short Pereira's career in 1963.

He was a young right-wing militant who helped run a major family business and be the architect of the regime's showpiece political project, the corporative state, while still in his thirties, a key actor in the Spanish drama of 1936-45, an active spectator in the early stages of the Cold War, a tireless exponent of Portuguese state interests in his foreign roles, and a defender of Portugal's colonial presence in Africa. Above all, he was an occasionally critical but ultimately highly loyal adjutant to António de Oliveira Salazar, the enigmatic and tenacious figure who became indistinguishable from the political order that he had constructed in the 1930s. Professor Martins examines these dimensions of his subject's life with balance and precision. He has been well-served by his publisher Dom Quixote which has turned this bulky volume into a stylish and robust biography with numerous illustrations.

This book is a much-needed boost for the profession of history at a time when influential cultural voices are arguing that knowledge of the past can and must be discarded unless it aids a radical present full of experiment and clamor.

Theotónio Pereira's prominence coincided with an usual period in history when Portugal strove with some success to be an independent actor on the world stage. The means was a defiant and often-skillfully deployed nationalism. This weapon was wielded with dexterity by Pereira in a dangerous epoch when numerous small countries, seemingly stronger and more secure than Portugal, were consumed by war. As a well-qualified technocrat with expertise in life and accident insurance he was enlisted by Salazar to erect the foundations of a corporative order which in theory was supposed to be guided by principles of social justice. His two years as sub-secretary of corporations in 1934-36 were frustrating ones. He soon realized that his chief wished to proceed rather more slowly in constructing this "third way" than he did. It seemed to be very much a political project designed to consolidate the regime. There was no hesitation for Salazar to say a clear "no" to ideas presented by Pereira several times in 1935, at the end of which he presented his request to quit. There would have been a clear cost for the regime if someone who was rated by many of its supporters was allowed to walk out. Instead, Salazar offered him a full place in the government as minister of industry and commerce, a position that he held for two

years. His main role was to set up a national oil industry. He also used this power-base to advance the corporative project. But he came around to Salazar's view that that in a world of ideological confrontation and territorial conflict, ensuring the survival of the Estado Novo must increasingly be the priority.

Towards that end, at the start of 1938, he accepted an assignment that would determine what was to be his role in public life for the next two decades. He was sent to Spain to be unofficial representative with Franco's forces, and soon to be ambassador as the Nationalists headed for victory in the civil war. Avoiding the triumph of the left had been seen as imperative if the Estado Novo was to survive. Keeping the peninsula at peace by persuading the Spanish caudillo not to align with the fascist powers soon became an even more pressing objective. Pereira was diligent and resourceful in carrying out this mission. He proved to be a loyal and hard-working aide to whom Salazar granted considerable freedom of action in such perilous times. He trusted in the leader's "star" as he wrote to Marcello Caetano. Let God continue to help and protect Salazar because he will be "our certain salvation," he stated in May 1940.

The painstaking investigations that Martins has carried out into ambassador Pereira's mission in Spain greatly adds to knowledge of Portugal's role in World War II. As his time in Madrid was ending, Britain's Lisbon embassy saw him as the most influential of Salazar's counselors and the figure who had the greatest chance of succeeding him. He was still only 44 when he returned to Portugal. His background and career were far more varied than those of the provincial lawyers, Coimbra academics, and military officers who normally helped Salazar rule.

He sprang from a family which had cultivated prudence and a long-term outlook during a time of turbulence and uncertainty in Portugal. An insurance firm had been painstakingly constructed and Pedro's technical education (including periods in Switzerland) was meant to guarantee its future. He married into the Palhas, a wealthy Ribatejan family strongly connected with bull-fighting, horse breeding, and fado. He was a lifelong Catholic who sought to uphold a society that respected the moral principles of his faith. He enjoyed many of the pleasures of life and was by no means an ascetic. But he was disciplined in his behavior despite mixing in the high society of several countries where brief romantic liaisons were not frowned upon. No breath of scandal emerges in this volume, and he seems to have been devoted to his wife whose health became precarious while still young.

He was a monarchist who believed that it was more important to save the country from liberalism, democracy, and anti-clericalism through a program of nationalism than to

restore the monarchy. He worked for a restoration of the monarchy in Spain but not in Portugal. Years in Spain made him ready for a closer approximation with the rest of the Western world. Up until 1942 when the outcome of the world conflict was uncertain, it made sense to actively cultivate Spain. But from then on, Pereira felt Salazar ought to have distanced himself from Franco and quietly buried the Iberian Bloc which then shaped foreign policy.

By doing so, Portugal could have strengthened its position in the eyes of the Western Allies. It would probably have meant the nature of the regime undergoing some (perhaps considerable) modification. Exercising diplomacy in high-pressure conditions and striking up enduring ties with senior Anglo-American diplomats might have enabled him to carry out the necessary political adaptation in post-war Portugal. But Salazar had no intention of going down this road. He had not sought to turn Portugal into a small-scale version of the fascist powers. Nor was he willing to turn it into a pluralist democracy with Iberian plumage.

Pereira was at home in Madrid society and visited the country periodically through his life. But close proximity to Spanish officialdom had generated neither affection nor trust. He feared that the Estado Novo would be contaminated by the widespread dislike for Francoism in the rest of post-war Western Europe. Such an outlook may be the main reason why he did not become foreign minister in 1944, the point when his influence within the regime was probably at its zenith.

What divergences there were with Salazar over tactical matters were overlain by common ground between the two on the fragility of the West arising from the resilience of the doctrines emanating from the French Revolution which they both despised and feared.

When his calls for a closer approximation with the Western victors of the war fell on deaf ears, he took up a different diplomatic assignment as ambassador to Brazil. Portugal's interests there had been clearly neglected and he complained of the inefficiency of António Ferro's propaganda bureau which led to Portugal and its regime acquiring a very poor image. He also had disdain for the slow-moving foreign ministry. He complained to Salazar about its unresponsiveness to requests for back-up and for being openly obstructive towards his mission at times. He nevertheless flew into action, forging ties with immigrant communities, creating an information bureau, and designing and furnishing a proper embassy building. But he was disillusioned by Brazil. In a letter to Marcello Caetano he wrote:

Aqui não há nunca questão de princípios, nem de ideologias puras. Tudo é pequenismo e rasteiro. Personalismo e interesses, nada mais. Sobretudo

personalismos. A própria maçonaria só vive destes compadrios. É realmente curioso ver este espetáculo.

He complained of “the pandemonium of democracy,” perhaps seeing in post-authoritarian Brazil the fate of Portugal if the tenure of the Estado Novo was cut short, and the old politicians were allowed to return. He was relieved to leave after two years. But there were no openings for him at home. There were signs that a newly-assertive military was ready to block his chances of becoming Salazar’s designated successor.

Pereira took being passed over for major state positions in Lisbon more calmly than his friend Caetano had done. He had far wider interests. He was less bound up with political affairs. He seems also to have been a more stoical individual. If the chance had come to be a national ruler, what this biography reveals about Pereira suggests that he would have made a more determined effort to institutionalize the regime and enable it to adapt to fresh challenges.

His thirty months as ambassador to the United States in the late 1940s was another opportunity for him to widen his horizons. He was strongly media-focused envoy. He was keen to switch the emphasis from the image of dictatorial Portugal and assert that historically the government had been combating the communist threat in its political, social and civilizational guises for a long time.

But he fumed at amateurism in Lisbon which prevented Portugal benefiting materially from post-war realignment. Salazar’s initial rejection of Marshall Aid and belated acceptance when little concrete help was available disheartened Pereira. His biographer views it as one of his chief’s biggest errors. He quotes letters from Pereira in which he vigorously argued for the need to embrace the Atlantic Pact which gave rise to NATO in 1949 instead of waiting until the last minute in order not to alienate Franco (still a pariah for most NATO members). He almost came to blows with António Leite de Faria of the foreign ministry for usurping him in his own embassy. Several months elapsed before regular contacts with Salazar resumed again. After his predecessor had dwelled in a hotel for fourteen years, Pereira flung his energies into creating a showcase embassy. But although impressed by the USA he did not modify any of his core principles as a result of being exposed to its culture.

For three years at the start of the 1950s, Pereira largely stayed out of public affairs. He tended to his family’s business affairs and paid an extended visit to Angola, his first to any of the Portuguese colonies. The author speculates that he was not interested in

ministerial posts which would only depreciate his political capital and diminish any chance of being able to emerge as a successor.

Eventually in 1953 he agreed to serve as ambassador to Britain. Interestingly, he was not Salazar's first choice, and an ambassadorial position was less important than previously. Nevertheless, in an unusual gesture Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden was on hand when he presented his credentials to the Queen. Pereira was impressed by the young monarch Elizabeth II, and she by him. In a lighter moment, Martins mentions that Pereira's sister-in-law, with whom the Queen Mother chatted at the Embassy in London, left with the opinion that the widow of King George VI was charmed by, and had a weakness for, the ambassador.

In 1958, when the regime was assailed at home by the Delgado challenge, he was twice a private guest of the Queen and the closest members of the royal family. In a letter to Salazar, he described how on one of his days at their Highland castle, Balmoral, a picnic took place at which the Queen and her children (accompanied by her mother and sister) happily barbecued pork chops. He went on:

Eu sei bem como é raro que isto aconteça a embaixadores estrangeiros nos tempos que vão correndo. Fiquei profundamente agradecido e graças a essa generosidade real não saio de cá diminuído. E [a] imprensa - tenho respondido com um encolher de ombros bem-humorado.

The year before he had worked behind-the-scenes arranging what had proved to be a highly successful state visit to Portugal by the British monarch. But he was alarmed by the fact that some family members of President Craveiro Lopes (and later Foreign ministry staff) were lobbying for British decorations. He believed this egregious behavior highlighted the contrast between a republic lacking decorum and a monarchy where protocol underlay restraint and good manners.

He departed from London in August 1958 well-integrated into the upper reaches of English society and one of the most popular members of the diplomatic corps. He had acceded to Salazar's request to rejoin the government, as Minister to the Presidency. His return to frontline politics coincided with a serious breach with sections of the military and the Catholic Church. Pereira was also well aware that offspring of the regime were distancing themselves from it. His only son Pedro van Zeller Palha Pereira was not one of them (unlike his nephew the architect Nuno Theotónio Pereira), but he never settled to any firm occupation.

His three years working closely with Salazar were perhaps the most feverish period of conspiracy in the life of the regime. There is no evidence that he was involved. He opted for neutrality, much of his time being spent tackling crises on the international stage. In January 1960 he paid an official visit to Goa (threatened, and eventually seized, by India). He also had a very effective role in ending the hijacking of the *Santa Maria* cruise ship and limiting the damage caused to the regime's prestige.

The foreign ministry position fell vacant in the spring of 1961. But instead of coordinating resistance to Portugal's mounting anti-colonial foes from Lisbon, he accepted the challenge of returning to Washington as President John F. Kennedy was pressing Portugal to rapidly quit Africa. He was instrumental in gradually repairing ties with the USA while Franco Nogueira strongly resisted the Kennedy administration's decolonization stance. He was the last ambassador to see Kennedy before his assassination. They talked of their mutual passion for yachting and the role of Spain in World War II in an interview which extended beyond the normal length. By now Pereira's physical powers were fading and he had to suspend his public duties. It took some further time before doctors diagnosed that he was suffering from Parkinson's disease.

He tried to remain active behind-the-scenes and published two volumes of memoirs which were reticent about many things. It is perhaps only with the appearance of Professor Fernando Martins's monumental and careful assessment of his life that Pedro Theotónio Pereira's true importance emerges. He played vital roles, over an extended period, in consolidating an autocratic state that was more efficient and purposeful than previous monarchical and republican regimes and enabled Portugal to enjoy an unusual degree of autonomy in world affairs. It is hard to see in the Portugal of today, one imbued with his gifts, playing an equivalent role except as a technician in a new corporate world order.

A balanced personality enabled him to maintain lasting respect for Salazar even when their stances on certain major issues diverged. Similarly, he maintained intact his personal relations with Caetano, right up until his death from a heart attack in November 1972.

President Américo Thomaz has stated that but for his illness, he would have been his first choice to become President of the Council when the vacancy arose in 1968. He would have combined a strong nationalist outlook with a deep understanding of some of the main forces shaping the world and would (in my view) have sought to strongly resist those forces seeking to deprive Portugal of much of its individuality as well as the overseas territories which he believed were an integral part of the homeland. His ties with the armed forces had been poor for many years and he might not have been able to avoid the

destruction of the regime at their hands. But it is quite possible that a late spurt of political creativity might have resulted if he had been in a fit state to succeed Salazar.

It is of course impossible to judge if Portugal could have emulated in major respects the political journey undertaken by Spain after Franco's death. But one thing is clear after putting down this impressive work of mammoth length: for much of his life, Pereira was far more than "O Outro Delfim de Salazar."