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Engenheiro Duarte Pacheco 1900-1943

Engenheiro Duarte Pacheco is the only senior figure from the dictatorship of Estado Novo who continues in widespread national esteem. He is perhaps the most engaging of the half dozen figures of early 20th century Portugal whose names are used nationwide as toponyms.



Inscription on Pacheco's birthplace, opposite Loulé Câmara building

Following his tragically early death, a national subscription fund was opened for a monument to his memory in Loulé, the town of his birth. The monument, bearing the combined and voluntary work of 10 contemporary sculptors, appears unfinished in an allegory of Pacheco's life's work.

The monument was formally inaugurated by Dr Salazar on November 16, 1953, the 10th anniversary of Pacheco's death. The inscription in bas-relief on the surrounding wall is taken from Salazar's eulogy: *Uma vida velozmente vivida e inteiramente consagrada ao progresso*

pátrio (A life lived at speed and entirely dedicated to the advancement of his country). It is scarcely possible to imagine a more apt description of Pacheco's life.

Duarte José Pacheco was one of 11 children whose mother died when he was six and who were orphaned when he was 14. His father was a leader of the Regenerador Party in Faro and, in 1907, was seconded by his political opponents to Faial in the Azores.

Most sources give the year of his birth as 1899 as it mistakenly appears on his baptismal record of 1903, but Pacheco himself later insisted that it was 1900. He maintained that he had not troubled to correct the record, when he was important enough to do so, because many people thought that he was even then too young for office.



Duarte Pacheco

Pacheco was by nature a joker, and his ready smile was a part of his personal magnetism, although contemporaries said it sometimes appeared to be mocking.

As a boy, he was full of pranks, some of which might nowadays seem reprehensible or even delinquent. For example, a favourite for him and his friends was *o dragão* in which they would form a line, each holding the belt of his friend in front, and they would run in and out of shops and bars throwing to the floor anything fragile or that might cause a noise.

More responsible after his father's death, at grammar school he became serious and was eventually a brilliant student who had time for nothing but work.

At 17, Duarte graduated from the Liceu in Faro with 90% and, in 1923, graduated from Instituto Superior Técnico (IST) in electrotechnology with 95%, both marks showing his high standard of scholarship. In the meantime, he proved his republican credentials in the Batalhão Acadêmico at Monsanto during the 1919 monarchist uprising.

Already supporting himself by giving private tutorials, he became lecturer, professor of mathematics and director of the IST within the space of four years. As soon as he was appointed director at age 27, he set about designing and building a new home for the institute, planning to use the quickest, cheapest and most modern means, reinforced concrete. His new IST became the first purpose-built university campus in Portugal.

As professor of mathematics in the lecture hall, he was always spectacularly well dressed, sometimes with a bowler hat. He would greet his pupils with a beaming *Bom dia* and pull out of his waistcoat pocket his fobwatch and a tram ticket with the resumé of the lesson written on the back and then write copiously and with impeccable logic on the blackboard.



His monument in Loulé

He hated the practice of making booklets out of lecture notes, and so he used to change the sequence of lectures every year. A great effort for him, but it also required students to be present at all his lectures. Able students tended to like him; the less able chose another professor.

Appointed Minister for Public Education on his 28th birthday, he was dispatched to Coimbra by the President of the Council of Ministers in late April to invite Dr António de Oliveira Salazar to become Finance Minister in the government of General José Vicente de Freitas. Salazar stayed in government for the next 40 years.

During his first ministry of only seven months in 1928, Pacheco had plans for the rebuilding of all secondary schools in Portugal. The evidence of his private secretary during that short period is eloquent: Pacheco was always one of the first to arrive at work every day and the last to leave, usually in the early hours of the morning; although he never had fixed meal times, he was always punctual when visiting the building of the new institute; sometimes he spent whole nights on a job, which astonished his officials.

To the professionals who worked with him, Pacheco was a man of action who had the energy of a hurricane and the enthusiasm of an adolescent. He was respected for his capacity for work, for leadership, for creativity, for attention to detail, for clarity of expression and boldness and rapidity in making decisions.

He was a workaholic, sleeping little, eating rapidly and irregularly despite his duodenal ulcer.

His colleagues feared his sudden and powerful temper when faced by poor work, which he might discover during one of his surprise lightning inspections to projects around the country. He quarrelled with Loulé Câmara because, against his express wish, they opened a new street in Loulé; ironically, that street is now known as *Rua Engenheiro Duarte Pacheco*.



Instituto Superior Técnico

Pacheco scarcely ever used pen and paper – he was in such a hurry that he preferred the spoken word either face to face, by radio or by telephone. Because he left few written records, unverifiable stories abound; for example, he is reputed to have asked for samples of glass windows for the new IST, and used them in the building without paying for them.

Architects who worked closely with Pacheco tell that, when speaking with him, they were often overcome by his sheer speed and energy of speech. One of his earliest friends, Lopes Raymundo, said that he dared not go closer than three metres when Pacheco wanted to convince him of something because he was afraid of being hypnotised.

“He seemed to be a fanatic, a poet of daydreams, but he was also a practical man, positive, incurably an engineer who had astonished us with so many works already completed, I had no idea that an engineer could be such a crazy and frenetic poet,” said Diogo de Macedo. António Ferro classified Pacheco as “the imaginative and creative force who made possible the impossible”.

Salazar formed his first government in 1932 from both his own generation and younger men, and he appointed Pacheco as his Minister of Public Works and Communications.

At the age of 32, Pacheco followed Salazar’s example and surrounded himself with the most able technicians of his generation and “revolutionised public works in a country which, in other areas, such as culture, either slept or was suffocated”.

Although he had been educated in electrotechnology, Pacheco’s fame rests on his skill in managing professionals in other disciplines – architects, civil engineers and builders.

Read more from [Peter Booker](#) about [Salazar’s rise to power](#) or [O Salto – Portuguese emigration in the 1960s](#).

Peter Booker

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