

A. H. de Oliveira Marques and the First Republic¹

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I was invited to contribute to this special edition of the *e-Journal of Portuguese History* with a short piece on the late Professor Oliveira Marques and his contribution to Portuguese historiography, more specifically his contribution to our understanding of the First Republic (1910-1926). As someone who began his graduate studies in 1992 having completed an undergraduate degree outside Portugal, and having set out to write a thesis about Portugal's intervention in World War One, I owe—like all other scholars of the period—an immense debt of gratitude to Oliveira Marques, who over the course of some forty years of febrile activity contributed enormously to our understanding of the period. But this is a debt of gratitude qualified by the realization that there were certain limitations to Oliveira Marques' writings on the subject of the First Republic, and that these ought to be borne in mind.

An initial consultation of the catalogue at the Biblioteca Nacional in Lisbon as an Erasmus student naturally led me naturally to Oliveira Marques' work. More than anyone else, it seemed, Oliveira Marques had taken a systematic approach to understanding the First Republic; his publications were unavoidable. I had already acquired, and devoured, his *Guia de História da I República*,³ an invaluable guide to the sources of the period; and I had already read, in the first months of graduate study, the relevant chapters of his *History of Portugal*,⁴ which had raised as many questions as it answered. Now I was delighted to find some of those answers in works written or edited by Oliveira Marques: his *A Primeira República Portuguesa: Alguns Aspectos Estruturais*⁵ (first published in 1971 and the basis of much of his later work, notably in the relevant volume of the *Nova História de Portugal* which he helped to coordinate);⁶ the collection of primary sources brought together under the title

¹ E-jph Conference – *Portuguese History in a Global Context*. Round-table on Contemporary Portuguese Historiography. Brown University, 12 October 2012.

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³ A. H. de Oliveira Marques, *Guia de História da 1ª República Portuguesa* (Lisbon: Estampa, 1981).

⁴ A. H. de Oliveira Marques, *History of Portugal* Vol. 2, *From Empire to Corporate State* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972).

⁵ A. H. de Oliveira Marques, *A Primeira República Portuguesa: Alguns Aspectos Estruturais* 3rd Edition (Lisbon: Livros Horizonte, 1980).

⁶ Joel Serrão & A. H. de Oliveira Marques (eds), *Nova História de Portugal* Vol. 11, *Portugal da Monarquia para a República* (Lisbon: Editorial Presença, 1991).

Afonso Costa (1972);⁷ Afonso Costa's collected speeches⁸ and a first volume of his "political correspondence"⁹ (although I was puzzled by the lack of a corresponding second volume, since the first one ended in 1910); and, most importantly for me—a real treasure trove, which I never tire of reading and rereading—the minutes of the Councils of Ministers of the second and third Afonso Costa governments, in 1915-16, just before Portugal entered the Great War, and 1917, when the myriad problems occasioned by the conflict threatened to overwhelm—as they eventually did—the still fragile Republic.¹⁰

The pace at which I requested and consulted these works led one librarian to suggest that I look out for Oliveira Marques, a regular reader in the Library he had headed in a singularly difficult moment of its existence, in the wake of the 1974 Revolution. I was expected to know what he looked like; everyone did. I didn't approach Oliveira Marques at that point and put off meeting him in person until I had a set of specific questions to ask of him. I soon found one that intrigued me: in his collection of Afonso Costa's speeches, he had included Costa's contributions to the July 1917 secret sessions of parliament. Having studied France and World War One under John Horne—later my dissertation supervisor—as a senior sophister in Trinity College Dublin, I knew just how crucial secret sessions of parliament could be when plotting the political landscape of a country at war: where might I find the corresponding minutes for the Portuguese secret sessions? In my innocence, when I went to the Universidade Nova de Lisboa to arrange a meeting, I called into the History Department. I found him, of course, in another department; he took the time to welcome me, to discuss my still incipient work, to complain about the inordinate length of Portuguese dissertations, and to point me in the direction of the safe in the library of the Assembleia da República, Portugal's parliament, where the minutes I wanted to consult were to be found (only many years later would they be published).¹¹ His enthusiasm for the topic was clear, as was his eagerness to help a young scholar just setting out on his career. Knowing what I would find, however, he also admitted in advance that he had left out

⁷ A. H. de Oliveira Marques (ed.), *Afonso Costa* (Lisbon: Arcádia, 1972).

⁸ A. H. de Oliveira Marques (ed.), *Discursos parlamentares/Afonso Costa* (Mem Martins: Europa-América, 1973); see also A. H. de Oliveira Marques (ed.), *Afonso Costa. Discursos Parlamentares 1914-1926* (Amadora: Bertrand, 1977).

⁹ A. H. de Oliveira Marques (ed.), *Correspondência Política de Afonso Costa: 1896-1910* (Lisbon: Estampa, 1982).

¹⁰ A. H. de Oliveira Marques (ed.), *O Segundo Governo de Afonso Costa (1915-1916)* (Mem Martins: Europa-América, 1974); A. H. de Oliveira Marques (ed.), *O Terceiro Governo de Afonso Costa (1917)* (Lisbon: Livros Horizonte, 1977).

¹¹ Ana Mira (ed.), *Actas das Sessões Secretas da Câmara dos Deputados e do Senado da República Sobre a Participação de Portugal na I Grande Guerra* (Lisbon: Assembleia da República/Afrontamento, 2002).

passages of Afonso Costa's speech—passages which referred to Africa and which, he said, might have created problems when the book was first published.

This was a strange admission, I thought at the time, but, looking back, it was an important one. The passages in question referred to one of the central issues of the secret sessions, the minutes of which I duly consulted at the Assembleia da República: the behaviour of the military column which, under General Pereira d'Eça, had operated in southern Angola in 1915. Its task had been to restore Portuguese rule after its collapse in the wake of the defeat at Naulila, during a major German incursion into Portuguese territory; this it did with great ruthlessness. Pereira d'Eça was, in July 1917, military governor of Lisbon, a city which, during the secret sessions of parliament, was under martial law—that is, its population's constitutional guarantees had been suspended—as a result of a construction workers' strike. In other words, Afonso Costa was speaking in defence of a senior officer being accused, in a series of signed affidavits, of having ordered, or at least tolerated, gruesome atrocities, but who now had the power of life and death over the population of Lisbon. In so doing, Costa did not deny that atrocities had been committed, but castigated those who both raised the issue in wartime and expressed exaggerated humanitarian concern for the indigenous population of the African colonies, on whom such concerns were, he argued, lost. I wondered—and still do—what exactly Oliveira Marques had decided to protect when censoring those passages in a work published in 1977: Portuguese-Angolan relations (it is worth remembering, in this respect, that the following year René Pélissier would publish his *Les Guerres Grises*,¹² in which devastating conclusions were reached about Portugal's continued campaigns of pacification during World War One)? Or Afonso Costa's reputation? The material was so extraordinary that it wrote itself into an article—one of my first—published in 1998 in the *Journal of Contemporary History*.¹³

On the occasion of Oliveira Marques' death, António Costa Pinto wrote, in *Diário de Notícias*,

Marques was a historian who believed in the historian's objectivity, carrying out his research on the basis of the documents bequeathed by the past. I do not mean by this that he did not have avowed sympathies when it came to

¹² René Pélissier, *Les Guerres Grises : Résistance et Révoltes en Angola (1845-1941)* (Orgeval: R. Pélissier, 1978).

¹³ Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses, 'Too Serious a Matter to be Left to the Generals? Parliament and the Army in Wartime Portugal, 1914-1918', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 33, no. 1 (January 1998), 85-96.

contemporary history, namely in relation to Afonso Costa, that ‘tyrannical father’ of the First Republic, but he was far from the more common ideological manipulations of many of his colleagues.¹⁴

We know that Oliveira Marques turned to contemporary history in part because of the physical distance that separated him, in exile, from the documentation he needed to continue his investigations into the medieval period; but the timing of the publication, in Portuguese, of his initial works on the First Republic, notably the material collected in the *Afonso Costa* volume (for which he had been granted access to the material held by the Costa family) also carried a powerful political message. With the New State in a cul-de-sac occasioned by three unwinnable wars in Africa, Marques wished his countrymen to look in sober, dispassionate manner at the Republic. Oliveira Marques portrayed this regime not as the lunatic asylum or ante-chamber of red revolution of Salazar’s propagandists, but rather as Portugal’s first democratic experiment, capable of correcting its mistakes but felled by the army in 1926 before it could do so. One can and should discuss this vision (I personally don’t agree with it), but it told the Portuguese, as the dictatorship agonized, that they could look forward to a democratic future with confidence, since they already had a democratic past; and in men like Afonso Costa and Bernadino Machado, twice President of the Republic, and twice deposed by the force of arms, they had statesmen whose words and deeds might inspire them in the trials to come.

What Oliveira Marques never wrote, however, was a political history of the Republic; what he never really did—and he had the means at his disposal, given his enormous knowledge of the period—was breathe life into the regime whose social structures and economic underpinnings he had unearthed. In the pages of the journal whose tenth anniversary we are today celebrating, Douglas Wheeler wrote,

Similarly appealing to me as a historian, was Oliveira Marques’ approach to the history of the first Republic. While more material on politics would have been helpful, for the politics of the Republic was the main focus of my 1978 book, the Portuguese historian’s anatomy of society, culture and economic trends was invaluable; based on a mastery of a lot of material, his

¹⁴ *Diário de Notícias* (Lisbon), 27 January 2007.

approach did not assign great importance to the roles of personalities, psychological history, and moral questions.¹⁵

Douglas Wheeler is undoubtedly correct, but the picture of he painted of Oliveira Marques' account of the Republic strikes me—perhaps unfairly—as an incomplete history. The men of 1910, having toppled an 800-year-old monarchy, had before them huge questions to resolve, and as if these were not enough, the World War, the Russian Revolution, and the refashioning of the world order at Versailles would soon be upon them. How politicians, intellectuals, business leaders and trade unionists, men and women, civilians and officers, tried to make sense of this changing world, and Portugal's place within it, must surely have been a tempting field for someone who knew so much about the period. But with the exception of some minor essays, or a summary published in the relevant volume of his *Nova História de Portugal*, Oliveira Marques balked at the challenge.

Also on occasion of Oliveira Marques's death, José Medeiros Ferreira wrote,

Oliveira Marques' pioneering work shakes the apathy present in the academic and political worlds. The facts of the Republic's existence had been exploited by anti-parliamentary propaganda, which revealed only their negative side. And it was seen by Marxists as a period of bourgeois domination over the working class. The most evolved Churchmen preferred to prolong the silence regarding the First Republic. There were many sorts of resistance to overcome. And the criticisms made of A. H. de Oliveira Marques' work concentrate on the positivist way in which he approached the study of the Portuguese twentieth century.¹⁶

My own criticism, however, is of a different nature—and it is this: that Oliveira Marques' work in relation to the Republic was in fact incomplete, that he never really moved beyond laying the foundations for others' research. When we read the works currently being produced on the subject of the First Republic, which undoubtedly build on foundations he laid down, we see that he barely figures as a reference: he is twice, or three-times removed

¹⁵ 'Tribute To a Portuguese Historian: A Foreign Historian's Perspective On Oliveira Marques' Principal Historical Studies in English' *e-JPH*, Vol. 5, number 2, Winter 2007.

¹⁶ *Diário de Notícias* (Lisbon) 30 January 2007.

from current authors and their preoccupations. And this, in turn, brings me back to the question of the self-censorship he practiced when collecting Afonso Costa's speeches, which he readily acknowledged when speaking to me all those years ago: was it out of concern for Luso-Angolan relations, or concern for Afonso Costa's reputation, that led him to cut out passages in the speech? Broadening out this question, then, as a suggestion for further debate: Did Oliveira Marques fail to produce a political history of the First Republic because of the many constraints that limit academics' research and writing time, and because he had spread himself too thinly, or because he suspected—or, better, knew—that it would conflict with the positive idea he had struggled to create of the Republic? Were there simply too many negative aspects to the Republic, and to its principal figures, beginning with Afonso Costa himself, to countenance writing about?

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