

A CRITICAL REVIEW OF EDUARDO PIRES DE OLIVEIRA'S *O PALÁCIO DE D. JOSÉ DE BRAGANÇA*

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DOI: 10.37935/iha.oan2024.019



ABOUT EDUARDO PIRES DE OLIVEIRA

Eduardo P. de Oliveira (b. Braga, 1950) holds a PhD in Art History from the University of Porto. His dissertation, entitled *André Soares e o Rococó do Minho* (André Soares and the Rococo in Minho), reflects his expertise in this field. He is an Integrated Researcher at ARTIS, the Art History Institute of the University of Lisbon, and has authored approximately 250 studies. A specialist in the Baroque and Rococo styles of Minho and Northern Portugal, his research extends to regions influenced by Minho natives, particularly Minas Gerais and Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, as well as Peru and Galicia in Spain.

A SURVEY OF BRAGA'S FORMER ARCHIEPISCOPAL PALACE

In 2018, Maria Manuel Oliveira began the requalification project entitled *Abrir o Paço à Cidade* (Opening the Palace to the City), a meaningful initiative reflecting both the history of the building and its future potential as a multifunctional space, a characteristic it has always maintained. This project laid the foundation for the revitalisation of the main buildings of the University of Minho, located in the old Archiepiscopal Palace of Braga.

The project was complex, addressing various historical phases of the palace's construction, including its mediaeval origins (14th-15th centuries), the modern elements (16th-17th centuries), and features from the Baroque period (18th century). It also considered the transfer of rural assets following the dissolution of monasteries and other religious institutions in 1834, the devastating fire of 1866, and the palace's varied uses over time. These included its roles under Minho Regional Council, the Civil Government, military headquarters, the fire brigade, the postal and telecommunications department, as well as modifications made "by individuals who remodelled the interior spaces solely for their own functional needs" (M.M. Oliveira, *Abrir "o Paço" à cidade*, 2018: 42). The intervention of the Estado Novo (New State) regime also left its mark.

As a result, over the course of centuries, the palace's true noble function was often neglected – a situation eventually corrected when the University of Minho, founded in 1973, took over the palace buildings. The initial goal was to establish the Braga Public Library (BPB) and the university's Rectory, along with offices for the university council and board of trustees. Additional extensions were built, and the entire complex was landscaped, significantly improving the building's image and its relationship with external entities (M.M. Oliveira, *Abrir "o Paço" à cidade*, 2018).

This transformation reflected a shift "from defensive isolation to urban assertiveness" (M.M. Oliveira, *Abrir "o Paço" à cidade*, 2018: 29). The research supporting this project, including bibliographic and archaeological studies, was led by Maria Manuel Oliveira. Our work primarily draws on the writings of Eduardo Pires de Oliveira and Paula Bessa (2013), Jorge Pamplona (undated), and Henrique Manuel Nunes and Manuel Mendes Atanázio (1980), among others.

Of particular importance are the series of interventions carried out by the Directorate-General of National Buildings and Monuments (DGEMN) in the 1930s and 1950s, which had a profound impact on the palace (M.M. Oliveira, *Abrir "o Paço" à cidade*, 2018: p.31).

In general, this review traces the evolution of the palace and the foundational elements of the requalification project for the main campus of the University of Minho at the former Archiepiscopal Palace of Braga. The aim is to highlight the close relationship the palace has always maintained with the city and the institutional motivations driving the project.

DOM JOSÉ DE BRAGANÇA, ARCHBISHOP OF BRAGA: HIS JESUIT EDUCATION

Dom José de Bragança attended the University of Évora, and in 1725, he moved into the College of the Company of Jesus, where he occupied a wing on the second floor with interconnecting rooms and a private chapel. He completed his studies in Philosophy and earned a doctorate in Theology in 1733. Upon his return to Évora in 1739, he celebrated his first mass in the private oratory of his half-brother, King John V. He was appointed Archbishop and Lord of Braga and took up the post in 1741. His journey is detailed in one of our sources (A.F. Conde, *O espaço do lúdico na sociedade*, 2013: 7-8).

Dom José was known for his playful nature, both in his youth and as an adult. He believed in providing novices with time for recreation during their training, a practice likely rooted in his own education at the Jesuit College in Évora. Francisco Rodrigues, a Jesuit chronicler, notes that the Jesuit College and the University of Évora thrived due to the intervention of Cardinal Dom Henrique in the mid-1500s (A.F. Conde, *O espaço do lúdico na sociedade*, 2013: 8).

Conde describes several games from this period, including one similar to the French game of billiards, played with a short cue. There was even a room dedicated to this game in the palace of Dom José de Bragança. Other games included throwing stones or coins into a conca and playing with a spinning top. The Jesuits assigned symbolic significance to these games, using them to motivate novices in their training by drawing comparisons with earlier recreational practices, whether from classical antiquity or the French court. The game of conca, for example, was considered the least prestigious, as it involved stones, was painful to the hands, and was seen as the most tiring and crude of the games mentioned (A. F. Conde, *O espaço do lúdico na sociedade*, 2013: 5-7).

These insights help paint a picture of Dom José de Bragança, Archbishop of Braga. His title as Lord of Braga was soon revoked by his brother, King John V, due to the power amassed by the cathedral chapter at court and its influence over the king during the thirteen years the archbishopric had been vacant. When Dom José returned to Braga in 1750 – the year of John V's death – it marked the beginning of his influential role in the city, significantly raising its national profile.

FROM ÉVORA TO BRAGA BY WAY OF GUIMARÃES

Eduardo Pires de Oliveira describes the arrival of Dom José de Bragança following his appointment as Archbishop at Braga Cathedral and the resulting impact on both the Chapter and Dom José himself. The office had been vacant for thirteen years (1728-1741), leading to widespread mismanagement at the cathedral, especially regarding the duties of the canons. This was most evident in the financial chaos that followed. Acting more like a prince than an archbishop, Dom José posed a threat to the canons. However, he was warmly received by the common people, likely because of his royal lineage, which elevated Braga to the status of the second seat of the court in Portugal (pp. 99-103).

When Dom José took up his post at Braga Cathedral, the Chapter was in financial ruin, despite the Church owning about 64% of the city's houses (p.99). Some key issues he encountered included:

- the organs in the upper choir and the new choir stalls had been installed without a formal contract with the suppliers, resulting in exorbitant costs
- during the period during which his post was vacant, the cathedral chapter had managed the Church's revenues, prompting Dom José to demand that the canons account for their financial management
- these and other concerns led to the imprisonment of 17 canons for 40 days in 1742.

As tensions in Braga remained high, John V sent Dom José to Guimarães, where he was welcomed and made important contributions during his 18-month exile there.

Following John V's death in 1750, Dom José returned to Braga (pp.100-101). He supported the city council's work and pursued his personal ambition to construct a palace, which notably included a games room, as mentioned earlier.

Eduardo Pires de Oliveira highlights two observations in this chapter (p.103):

- Dom José rejected Marceliano de Araújo's retablo for the palace chapel's altarpiece
- he also refused a change in the carving design for the Church of the Monastery of Carmo in Guimarães.

These decisions likely stem from his artistic training at the University of Évora. Oliveira (2001, p.29) also references the 18th-century Braga commissioner, who was largely under the Archbishop's authority. This lends further weight to Dom José's interventions and aligns with the comprehensive research conducted by Eduardo P. de Oliveira.

Curiously, Dom José did not focus on renovating the cathedral but instead concentrated on most of the convents in the archdiocese, raising their surrounding walls to isolate them from the city while also improving living conditions for the nuns (E.P. Oliveira, *André Soares e o Rococó do Minho*, 2011: I, 24).

In conclusion, Eduardo Pires de Oliveira documents what he deems essential about Dom José de Bragança's contributions during his time in Braga and Guimarães. He cautiously attributes the emergence of the Rococo in Minho to Dom José's influence (E. P. Oliveira, *Os alvares do Rococó em Guimarães*, 2003, p.21). Oliveira suggests that "[...] one of the first manifestations of the Rococo in Minho can likely be found in Guimarães, in the details [...] of the portal of the Convent of Santa Clara Rosa Lima and the lintel of one of the main portals of the Casa dos Coutos (1747-1748); in Braga, traces of the Rococo style can be seen on the façade of the palace commissioned by Dom José de Bragança and completed in mid-1751 [...]".

The engravings in King John V's library, "[...] perhaps the largest such library in Europe [...] (p.103)," were instrumental in the use of the Rococo in Minho. These works were likely developed by the extraordinary artist André Soares, the subject of Eduardo Pires de Oliveira's doctoral thesis. Soares "created the most spectacular example" of Rococo style in 18th-century Braga, seemingly "out of nothing." His family came from a modest background of merchants, only a generation removed from obscurity. At that time, Braga's architectural style was just beginning to escape the heavy, pervasive influence of late Mannerism, which had dominated for two and a half decades under Dom Rodrigo Moura Teles (E.P. Oliveira, *Os alvares do Rococó em Guimarães*, 2003: 34).

Interestingly, two archbishops from the Bragança family were linked to Minho's Rococo: Dom José, brother of John V (1741-1756), and Dom Gaspar, his nephew and brother of King Joseph (1758-1789) (E.P. Oliveira, *André Soares e o Rococó do Minho*, 2011: 1, 24).

We commend Eduardo Pires de Oliveira for the way, as an art historian and expert researcher, he draws connections between the 18th century, the time of Dom José de Bragança, and the Rococo period. In doing so, he celebrates the progression of Braga's art through the late Baroque, Baroque, and Rococo movements.

THE PURPOSE OF THE PUBLICATION

Eduardo Pires de Oliveira presents one of Braga's most iconic buildings: the former Archbishops' Palace, which began construction in the 14th century and underwent significant alterations, particularly during the 16th and 18th centuries (p.5). Today, the palace houses the rectory of the University of Minho and the Braga Public Library, forming part of the emblematic Largo do Paço square, one of the most notable areas in the city.

This publication results from an extensive documentary compilation, incorporating the author's idiosyncratic perspectives, shaped by his deep expertise in Art History. A key focus of the work is André Soares, the subject of Oliveira's doctoral thesis. Also notable are the contributions of Paula Bessa, particularly in her work, *O «paço»: os paços arcebispaes de Braga desde o período tardo-medieval e até finais do século XVI* (2013), in which she expresses her enthusiasm for the Archbishops' Palace of Braga and the studies conducted by Oliveira and others. Bessa's hope for a collaborative publication, featuring various contributors and edited by Oliveira, is also voiced in her text (P. Bessa, *O «paço»: Os paços arcebispaes de Braga*, 2013: 3).

However, Oliveira ultimately chose to continue his work individually, and while a collaborative effort could have enriched the subject, his solo contribution remains significant and valuable.

When discussing Dom José de Bragança's palace, it might have been more effective to begin with a profile of the man, followed by a broader exploration of Rococo architecture in Portugal, where Braga's architectural contributions shine as notable examples. In this context, the architecture deserves special attention. Points covering the palace's exterior, interior spaces, chapel, garden, vegetable garden, and its state during Archbishop Gaspar de Bragança's time are thoroughly examined in subsequent chapters.

The text also delves into the architectural complex of the former Archbishops' Palace of Braga, tracing its evolution from the effects of the amortisation laws to the present. This includes coverage of the fire of 15 April 1866, and the various restoration efforts undertaken by the Directorate-General for National Buildings and Monuments (DGEMN). These restorations applied multiple, often inconsistent, methodologies, leading to incoherent results.

The author also discusses the Mediaeval Hall and plans for creating a space dedicated to safeguarding valuable assets, reiterating his opposition to the final outcome of the work.

This publication holds substantial relevance not only for the city of Braga but also for the broader academic community and the general public. It enriches the historical narrative of the city, particularly in areas of social and religious history, as well as local governance. The work sheds light on the multi-secular significance of this space, where religious power frequently eclipsed secular authority, with the archbishop's jurisdiction often overlapping with that of the city council.

EDUARDO PIRES DE OLIVEIRA'S CRITICAL APPROACH

One of the most important topics in Eduardo Pires de Oliveira's work is the devastating fire of 15 April 1866, which destroyed the north wing of the palace (pp. 159-180). Oliveira provides a detailed account of the tragedy, including news reports, images, a recovery project, and the fate of the *Casa de Fresco*, a Rococo work now located at Bom Jesus do Monte. He also emphasises the shortage of firefighters and the immense solidarity shown in both Braga and Lisbon. However, the financial burden of such an extensive restoration was a significant challenge for a country as financially strained as Portugal.

This tragedy marked the beginning of decades of mostly ineffective interventions by the former Directorate-General of National Buildings and Monuments (DGEMN). The 1970s saw the creation of bodies that proved invaluable in later efforts. In 1936, Salazar praised the restoration efforts made in support of the *Estado Novo*: "[...] today, the Public Library and Archive of Braga, [...] which had endured neglect under two different regimes, [...] is now finally being restored: let us recapture the purity of its noble architecture, restore the tranquillity of its spaces, and safeguard the greatest manifestations of the spirit of Portugal and the ancient documents that bear witness to its birth" (p. 187). His statement, like those of modern politicians – though more speciously worded – reveals a profound lack of understanding of heritage preservation. Salazar even claimed that "[...] the safeguarding of our artistic heritage is one of the greatest achievements of the dictatorship. The meticulous, almost religious-like reconstitution of what we had and was in danger of being lost (...) continues without respite" (p. 187).

Oliveira critiques the fact that the recovered section of the building was not the most symbolic part, having been added in the 18th century. Additionally, Salazar's distaste for the Baroque became an opportunity for him to praise the mediaeval period, further politicising the architectural recovery.

In Oliveira's view, the DGEMN exploited the fire-damaged section to create something new, ignoring surviving architectural features and disregarding the results of pre-intervention photographic surveys (pp. 195-196). While Oliveira's critique is valid, Paula Bessa offers a different perspective: she argues that judging restorations from the 1930s by late 20th-century standards is anachronistic and sometimes demagogic (P. Bessa, *O «paço»: Os paços arcebispaes de Braga*, 2013:51-52). She stresses that every restoration is shaped by its technical, financial, and cultural context and suggests that criticism should avoid a destructive attitude that assumes present-day knowledge is absolute.

We agree with Bessa's more balanced approach, though Oliveira's specific focus on the use of images by the DGEMN highlights the need for rigour. For instance, the DGEMN labelled the building as a "pavilion" rather than a palace, demonstrating a lack of precision (p. 197).

The first phase of the restoration focused on building the Public Library, whose collection was previously housed at the Congregados convent. The library's grand inauguration on 1 December 1934 became an occasion to extol the Estado Novo and the role of Braga in the *Movement of 28 May 1926*. Gratitude was expressed in the following terms: "[...] we owe so much to Braga and despite all we have done for it there is nothing we can do to fully repay our debt (p.233) [...]". Oliveira notes that, strangely, no commemorative plaque was added to the restored building, which was typical of that era but does not reflect modern practices (p.234).

Oliveira is also critical of the disparity between the restorations of the mediaeval and Baroque sections. The Baroque part, unoccupied and despised by the *Estado Novo*, allowed for free intervention. In contrast, the mediaeval section, highly valued and treated with great respect, saw less urgency in its restoration (p.236). Oliveira also highlights that, in both Braga and Guimarães (where works were carried out on the Palace of the Dukes of Bragança from 1936 to 1940), restorers made bold changes, creating rooms of different sizes that departed from the original structures (p.238). He also highlights the extent of alterations to the mediaeval elements in Braga and the fact that in Guimarães the existing section did not extend above the ground floor while the nature of the intervention was more complex.

Bessa also criticises the closure of the DGEMN in the late 1990s, arguing that destructive criticism contributed to its demise. She believes that applying modern restoration criteria to works from the 1930s can be anachronistic and misleading (P. Bessa, *O «paço»: Os paços arcebispais de Braga*, 2013: 52). We share this opinion, especially considering that even today, despite advances in knowledge and legislation, heritage preservation is still often mishandled.

Oliveira also reflects on the work done on the Medieval Hall, a space cherished by the city for its aesthetic and architectural importance. Despite Braga having other concert venues, such as the Circus Theatre, the Mediaeval Hall was seen as a more fitting space for religious music (p.250). However, Oliveira does not fully account for the many factors, such as architectural and economic constraints, among others, that shaped the final decisions.

Lastly, the publication discusses the creation of a secure space for storing important documents, an initiative first proposed during World War II. Gonçalo Pereira, an inspector of libraries and archives, examined the old 1336 tower, part of the original archbishop's palace, as a potential site for this secure space, but the project did not progress further.

CONCLUSION

The Palace of Dom José de Bragança holds great significance for both the academic community and the general public, independently of preservation and safeguarding concerns. These issues were explored in this review, with particular attention to the writings of Eduardo Pires de Oliveira, who deserves recognition for his extensive contributions to the study of Minho, Portugal, and other parts of the world, particularly Brazil.

Oliveira presents Dom José de Bragança more as an entrepreneur than a traditional archbishop, and this characteristic strongly influenced his tenure in Braga (and Guimarães). His impact can be seen in the numerous architectural and artistic projects he initiated, including improvements to convents and his interest in the arts. Notably, he vetoed works by artists such as Marceliano de Araújo, signalling that despite their widespread acclaim, there was at least one individual who was critical of their designs and chose not to commission them.

In discussing the palace, the chapters highlight the exhaustive, original, and distinct research conducted by Eduardo P. de Oliveira. His work resulted in a publication that not only showcases his scholarship but also honours the city of Braga. Moreover, he successfully associates the name of Archbishop Dom José de Bragança with the early appearance of the Rococo style in both Guimarães and Braga – a style the archbishop appreciated, having access to the engravings housed in his brother King John V's library.

O Palácio de D. José de Bragança



Eduardo Pires de Oliveira