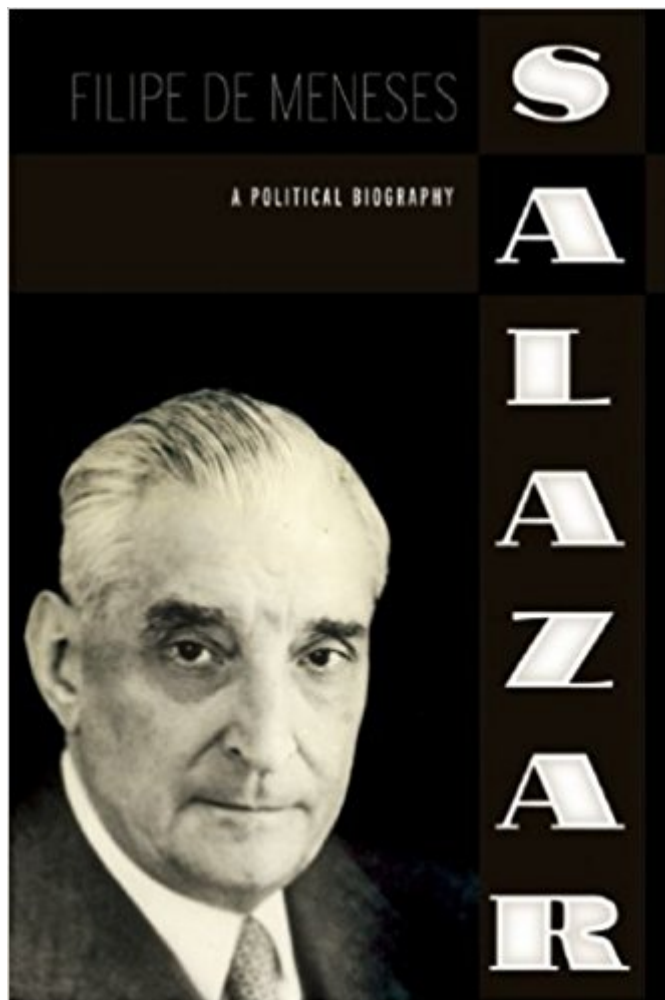


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Salazar: A Political Biography



Synopsis

Antonio de Oliveira Salazar entered the government of Portugal when Herbert Hoover was president and ended his political career at the end of the Johnson administration; he remained in power for forty years (1928–1968), one of the longest tenures in modern history. As a young man he planned to enter the priesthood and attended the seminary until he decided to become a political economist and an academic. Unlike the other "great dictators" of the twentieth century, including Franco, Mussolini, and Hitler, Salazar immersed himself in the minutiae of government and administration, maintaining a prodigious work rate throughout his forty years in power. He managed his country's finances and economy—one of the poorest in Western Europe—successfully during the Great Depression. He became a seasoned diplomat who spared Portugal from the horrors of World War II by remaining strictly neutral, ultimately favoring Great Britain and the United States. But Salazar would always remain an extremely conservative, even reactionary statesman who relied on secrecy and a police state, appearing to favor fascism, fearing modernity, and ultimately rejecting the anti-colonialist movements in Asia and Africa. He saw the universal granting of independence to the colonies as a sign that the West was abdicating its civilizing mission. This is the first full-length English-language scholarly biography of a key Portuguese political leader and an icon of twentieth-century politics.

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Customer Reviews

Anyone who has tried to find a book (in English) on Portuguese history, let alone Portugal in the

20th Century, will be well aware of the fact that there are very few to be found. It is for this reason that anyone interested in the subject will welcome the publication of Dr. Filipe De Meneses' excellent political biography of Antonio Salazar. In fact, I am willing to bet that this book would be widely appreciated even if it were half as good as it turned out to be. This meticulously detailed study covers Salazar's rise to prominence and subsequent control of Portugal, a nation he essentially led for 40 years, until illness forced him to step down in 1968. The four decades of Salazar's rule were far from tranquil, and he was forced to navigate Portugal through the tumultuous events that were occurring just beyond its borders. Salazar had a role to play in the Spanish Civil War, World War 2, and the Cold War. The final years of Salazar's rule were devoted to fighting for retention of Portugal's overseas possessions in Africa. The chapters on Salazar's diplomatic activity during World War 2 are particularly strong, and should be of interest to anyone who wants to study the history of the war from a new angle. Most studies of World War 2 devote little more than a page or two to Portugal's role in the war, and this book does much to illustrate why this lack of coverage is unjust (while Portugal did stay neutral in the conflict, Salazar played an important diplomatic role, dealing with the leaders of both the Axis and Allied powers). The section of the book devoted to the colonial wars Portugal participated in are also quite strong (though by necessity the coverage largely ends with Salazar's death; the wars continued for another several years). Portugal's colonial conflicts in the 1960s and 1970s is another topic that is unjustly overlooked by academics (again, at least those that write in English). This book's contribution to the subject will be enjoyed by anyone who has tried to search for material on the subject. I commend Dr. De Meneses for his magisterial work, and I hope that he continues to publish excellent English-language studies on Portuguese history (he seems to be the only one doing so at this time).

I had heard about this book and was happy to have found it at a quite enticing price. I bought it and I must state that I was not by any means disappointed. The biography of a controversial political figure such as Salazar's is often judged by the political sympathies and passions of the reader. But I had not set out to prove or disprove anything I believed or disbelieved or anything I agreed or disagreed with. My sole purpose was to get the point of view of the biographer, a respected professor at the University of Dublin. As I said, I loved reading this book and fully appreciated the dispassionate approach the author applied to going through the life of such an overwhelming figure in the Portuguese political scene of the mid 20th century (1928-1968). The aftermath of the turbulence that characterized the sixteen years of the First Republic (1910-1926 following the revolt that deposed the monarchy; the terrible years of the Great Depression in the United States and its

shock waves across the world; the civil war in Spain (1936-1939) the II World War (1939-1945) and the shaky neutral position undertaken by Portugal; and the Portuguese colonial war during the sixties (1961-1974), all those were events that profoundly affected the regime Salazar tried to implement as a means to recover the country's economy and finances from the errors inherited from an inept monarchy and a chaotic First Republic. It's a quite interesting story, not only for the figure involved but also (and especially) for the picture the author succeeds in depicting for us of all the most relevant facts of such an important historical period of the past century. I would not hesitate for a moment recommending it to all my friends who may have an interest in the history of both Portugal and the World during that period of time.

This is helping me learn about my other country. I am not finished, but I have already learned so much from this book...

Very objective, very thorough, a great analysis of Salazar. Filipe de Meneses did a good job portraying Salazar's political life.

Fantastic well written book. Very accurate. After I read so many biographies of Salazar I found this one the best and not biased. I highly recommend it.

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