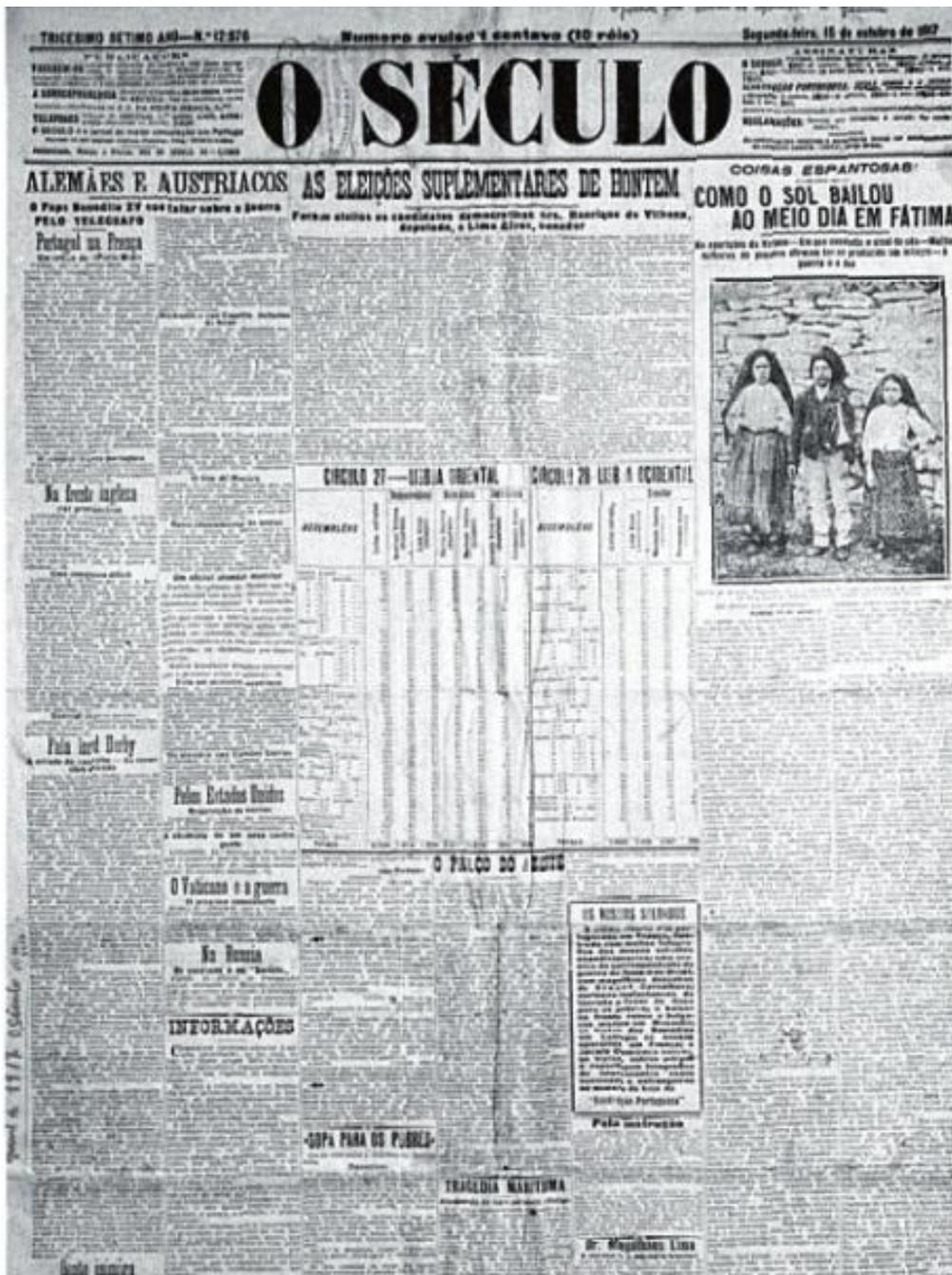


A translation of Avelino de Almeida's firsthand account of the Miracle of the Sun, published on October 15th, 1917, in *O Século's* daily edition¹

by John Nahrgang



¹ *O Século* (Portuguese for “The Century”) was founded in 1881 as an organ for the anticlerical Republican Party. By 1917, Avelino de Almeida was an editor and star reporter for *O Século*, and was sent on special assignment to cover the anticipated Miracle of the Sun. *O Século* was shut down in 1977. The original article in Portuguese was reproduced by the Shrine of Fatima in Portugal as part of its 653-page *Documentação Crítica de Fátima: Seleção de documentos* (2013), available online at www.fatima.pt/documentacao.

ASTOUNDING THINGS!

HOW THE MIDDAY SUN DANCED AT FATIMA

The apparitions of the Virgin – What the sign from heaven consisted of – Many thousands of people affirm a miracle occurred – War and peace



Lucia, ten; Francisco, nine, and Jacinta, seven, who claim to have spoken with the Virgin Mary in the shrubland of Fátima, a town of the region of Ourém's Vila Nova.

OURÉM (PORTUGAL), October 13th

Upon disembarking, after a delayed trip, at around four o'clock in the afternoon at Chão de Maçãs station in Ourém, where religious people coming in from faraway lands were also exiting carriages in order to be present at the "miracle", I asked a boy from a charabanc² by the road if he had already seen the Lady. With a sardonic smile and a crooked look, he didn't hesitate in his response:

- Here I've only seen rocks, carriages, cars, horses and people!

² A charabanc is a type of open-topped horse-drawn carriage that was popular in Britain in the early 20th-century and commonly used for sightseeing.

Because of a simple mistake, the train that should have taken Judah Ruah³ and me to the village did not appear, and we decided to courageously hoof it for almost seven miles⁴ on account of not having the diligence to sign up for passenger carriages.

On the road, we come across the first groups of wanderers that continue in the direction of the holy site, for more than twelve well-measured miles.

Men and women go almost entirely barefoot – the latter with sacks on their heads surmounted by shoes; the former upholding themselves on thick canes and cautiously armed with umbrellas. It might be said, in general, that they move along undistracted by what passes around them, greatly disinterested in the countryside and other travelers, as if to be immersed in a dream, praying a sad melody or a mystery of the Rosary. A woman breaks off of the first part of the Hail Mary, the greeting [of the angel Gabriel]; the companions, in chorus, continue with the second part, the supplication. At a sure and measured pace, they tread along the dusty road, between pines and olive groves, in order to arrive before night's end at the apparition site, where, amidst the moisture and the cold light of the stars, they intend to sleep, guarding the first spots next to the blessed holly oak tree – so that today they might see things better.

At the entrance of the town, peasant women, half of whom have already become infected with the virus of skepticism, comment upon, in a mocking tone, the event of the day:

- Are you going to see the saint tomorrow?

- Am I? No. As if she has even seen this place!

And they laugh loudly, while the devout proceed with indifference towards all that is not the object of their pilgrimage. In Ourém it is only through an extreme courtesy that we are able to retire for the evening. During the night, the most diverse vehicles assemble in the village square, driving the believers and the curious, with no lack of old women darkly dressed, now stooped with the burden of years, but with the spark of burning faith in their eyes that drove them to the courageous act of abandoning for a day the inseparable nook of their homes. At daybreak, new groups of intrepid wanderers appear and move through the village, not stopping for an instant, and their silence breaks apart the harmony of the hymns that well-endowed feminine voices sing in great contrast to their brusqueness...

The sun comes out, but the sky signals the threat of a storm. Black clouds build up precisely around the area of Fatima. Nothing yet deters those who converge there from all roads and avail themselves of all types of locomotion. The luxury automobiles glide along precariously, honking their horns; the animal carts slowly drag themselves off to a side of the road; the large wagons, the Victorian carriages, the closed carriages, the two-wheeled horse-drawn wagons in which seats are improvised two-by-two until one can improvise no more. Almost everyone carries food provisions (more or less modest) for Christian mouths, and the fruit ration is for the irrational animals which the *Poverello* of Assisi⁵ called our brothers and sisters, and they courageously earn their wages... Little bells chime on a two-wheeled wagon adorned with a bush; despite this festive and discrete air, everything is composed and conducted with absolute order... Donkeys trot along the edge of the road and the numerous cyclists work miracles not to collide with cars.

³ Judah Ruah was the *O Século* photographer who accompanied Almeida to Fatima.

⁴ Translator's note: leagues and kilometers have been converted into miles.

⁵ A reference to St. Francis of Assisi (c.1181-1226). *Poverello* is a term for poor person and is a nickname endearingly applied to St. Francis in light of his famous spiritual poverty and simplicity of life.

By ten o'clock, the sky becomes completely cloudy and without delay it begins to rain, and rain hard. Sheets of rain batted around by a rough wind punish faces, soaking the road and drenching to the bone travelers deprived of head coverings or any other protection. But nobody becomes impatient or stops, and, if someone takes shelter under a canopy of trees next to the walls of the farm buildings or the distant houses that bend over the road, others continue the march with an impressive persistence, like some ladies whose clothes are pasted to their bodies from the effect of the force and pertinacity of the rain, resembling people who had come straight out of a bath!

The shrubland around Fatima, where it is said that the Virgin appears to shepherd children of the hamlet of Aljustrel, is dominated to a great extent by the road that runs to Leiria, and along it are affixed the vehicles that drove pilgrims and spectators there. More than one hundred automobiles, someone said, and more than one hundred bicycles, and it would be impossible to count the diverse cars that block the road, one of them the public transport bus from Torres Novas, inside of which mingle people of all social conditions.

In addition to the body of pilgrims, thousands of people from many miles around, faithful who have come from various [Portuguese] provinces, natives of Alentejo and Algarve, of the Minho and Beira regions, congregate in the vicinity of the small holly oak tree which, according to the little shepherds, the supernatural vision chose as her pedestal and which could be considered the center of an ample circle inside of which other spectators and faithful accommodate themselves. Seen from the road, the sight is simply fantastic. The prudent country-dwellers, enclosed within their head coverings as within tents, observe, many of them, the thinning out of economical bags of rations along with the spiritual conduct of sacred hymns and decades of the rosary.

There is no one who fears burying his or her feet in the drenched soil, in order to see up close the holly oak above which they raise a coarse portico with two wobbly lanterns... The groups alternate singing praises to the Virgin, and a terrified hare, leaping out of the tall brush and away, scarcely diverts the attention of a half dozen children who catch it and leave it prostrate with blows from sticks...

And the little shepherds? Lucia, ten years old, a visionary, and her little companions, Francisco, nine, and Jacinta, seven, still have not arrived. Their presence is signaled maybe a half-hour before the time that was indicated as coming from the apparition. The girls, crowned with flowers, head to the site in which the portico is erected. The rain falls incessantly but nobody loses patience. Cars arriving late reach the main road. Groups of monks kneel in the mud and Lucia asks, or orders, that hats be brought to them. The order is passed along and obeyed promptly and without reluctance. There are people, many people, as if in ecstasy; people deeply moved, on whose dry lips prayer is paralyzed; astonished people, with immobile hands and watery eyes; people who seem to feel, to touch the supernatural...

The child affirms that the Lady spoke to them more than once, and the sky, still menacing, begins, suddenly, to clear up overhead; the rain stops and it is affirmed that the sun is going to inundate the countryside, the sun that the cold morning sadly took away...

The hour advances and oversees this multitude, which dispassionate calculations of educated persons immune to mystical influences compute to be thirty or forty thousand people... The miraculous manifestation, the announced visible sign is about to produce itself – many pilgrims assert... And then a spectacle makes itself present, unique and unbelievable to anyone not a witness to it. From the summit of the road, where cars congregate and many hundreds of people remain whose valor became scarce in venturing upon muddy earth, the entire immense multitude is seen turning towards the sun, which presents itself free from the clouds, in its zenith. The star resembles a plate of opaque silver and it is possible to stare at the disc without the most minimal effort. It doesn't burn; it doesn't blind. It may be said to be an eclipse in progress. But a colossal uproar suddenly arises, and the spectators that are closest are heard to yell:

- Miracle, miracle! A marvel! A marvel!

To the amazed eyes of those people, whose attitude transports us to biblical times and who, pale with astonishment and with heads uncovered, face the blue sky, the sun trembled, the sun had never-before-seen brusque movements beyond all cosmic laws – the sun “danced”, according to the typical expression of the peasants. Perched on the step of the public bus from Torres Novas, an elderly man whose stature and physiognomy, at the same time sweet and strong-willed, reminiscent of Paul Déroulède,⁶ facing the sun, recites the Creed in a clamorous voice from beginning to end. I ask who he is and they tell me he is Mr. João Maria Amado de Melo Ramalho da Cunha Vasconcelos.

Later, I see him address those around him who keep their hats on, vehemently begging them to remove them in the face of such an extraordinary demonstration of the existence of God. Identical scenes play out elsewhere and a lady cries out, deep in affliction, indeed almost in a fit of suffocation:

- What a shame! There are still men who don't take off their caps before such an incredible miracle!

And, later on, some ask others if they saw it, or what they saw. The majority confesses to have seen a trembling or dancing of the sun, but others declare to have seen the smiling face of the Virgin herself, and swear that the sun spun around like a wheel of fireworks, that it descended almost to the point of burning the earth with its rays... There are those who say that they saw it successively change color...

It's close to three o'clock in the afternoon.

The sky is swept of clouds and the sun continues its course with the habitual splendor that nobody dares to face directly. And the little shepherds? Lucia, the one who speaks with the Virgin, announces in dramatic fashion and with manly bearing while being transported from group to group that the war will end and that our soldiers were going to return... Even such news does not increase the jubilation of those who listen. The celestial sign was everything. There is an intense curiosity to see the two girls with their garlands of roses, and there are those who try to kiss the hands of the “little saints”, one of whom, Jacinta, is more inclined to faint than to dance, but the reason everybody was yearning to touch her — the sign from heaven— was sufficient to satisfy them, to root them in their simple and naive faith.⁷ Walking vendors offer portraits of the children on postcards and other cards that display a soldier of the Portuguese Expeditionary Corps⁸ “thinking about the help of his protectress for the salvation of the Fatherland” and even an image of the Virgin as being the figure of the vision...

⁶ Paul Déroulède (d. 1914), pictured below, was a French author, politician and veteran of the Franco-Prussian war.



⁷ The colorful and slightly condescending Portuguese employed here by Almeida is *na sua fé do carvoeiro* (literally, “in their coal vendor’s faith”). According to Arnaldo Schüller’s *Dicionário Enciclopédico de Teologia* (Porto Alegre, Brazil: Editora da Ulbra, 2002), this expression denotes “firm and blind conviction” (265).

⁸ The Portuguese Expeditionary Corps, consisting of about 55,000 soldiers, was the principal military force sent by Portugal to fight on the Western Front during World War I.

That was a good business and certainly more coins entered the pockets of vendors and not the trunk of alms for the shepherd children towards whom were opened and extended the hands of the lepers and the blind who, jostling with pilgrims, emitting their heart-rending cries into the air...

The crowd disperses rapidly, without difficulty, without a shadow of disorder, without there being the work that characterizes that of any police detail. The pilgrims depart most rapidly, travelling the roads leading away; they are the ones who arrived first, barefoot with shoes around their neck or suspended from their walking sticks. They depart with souls in perpetual adoration⁹, ready to bring the good news to the hamlets not completely depopulated. And the priests? Some attend to the locals, smiling and mingling more with curious spectators than with pilgrims eager for celestial favors. Perhaps one or another of them did not manage to disguise the satisfaction that so often manifests itself in the look of the triumphant...

It still remains for the competent ones to apply judgment to the macabre dance of the sun that, today in Fatima, made hosannas explode from the chests of the faithful and left people naturally moved – this is what reliable people assure me, freethinkers and other people without concerns for religious nature, about those who flocked to this already celebrated shrubland.

Avelino de Almeida

⁹ The original Portuguese employed here by Almeida is noteworthy: *com a alma em lausperene* (“with the soul in *lausperene*”). Some English translations render this phrase as “with souls satisfied,” but there is a much deeper Catholic meaning. Schüller (*Dicionário Enciclopédico de Teologia*, 270) defines the Portuguese meaning: “In Catholicism, *perpetual adoration*, in the churches of a city, of the consecrated host” (emphasis added). *Lausperene* derives from the Latin *laus perennis*. with *laus* signifying “praise” and *perene* signifying “lasting through the whole year.”

A Translation of Avelino de Almeida's reflection on the Miracle of the Sun, published on October 29th, 1917, in *Ilustração Portuguesa*¹⁰

by John Nahrgang

O MILAGRE DE FÁTIMA



Varios aspectos do povo ajoelhado e orando no momento de descobrir o sol e de se dar o fenomeno que tanto impressionou a multidão.

no vagalhão colossal d'aqu'le povo que ali se juntou a 15 de outubro. O teu racionalismo só'ra um fúrdavel embate e quer's estabelecer uma opinião segura socorrendo-te ds depoimentos insuspeitos com o meu, pois que estive lá apenas no desempenho de uma missão bem difficil, tal a de relatar imparcialmente para um grande diario, *O Seculo*, os factos que diante de mim se desenrolassem e tudo quanto de curioso e de elucidativo a elles se prendesse. Não ficará por satisfazer o teu desejo, mas decerto que os nossos olhos e os nossos ouvidos não viram nem ouviram coisas diversas, e que raros foram os que ficaram insensíveis á grandeza de semelhante espectáculo, unico entre nós e de todo o ponto digno de meditação e de estado ..

(Carta a alguem que pede um testemunho insuspeito).

Quebrando um silencio de mais de vinte anos e com a invocação dos longinquos e saudosos tempos em que convivemos n'uma fraternal camaradagem, iluminada então p'la fé comum e fortalecida por identicos propositos, creves-me para que te diga, sincera e minuciosamente, o que vi e ouvi na ch'ruca de Fátima, quando a terna de celestes anjinhos congregou n'aqu'le desolado ermo dezenas de milhares de pessoas mais sedentas, segundo creio, de sobrenatural do que impelidas por mera curiosidade ou recessos de um logro... Estão os catholicos em desacordo sobre a importancia e a significação do que presenciaram. Uns convenceram-se de que se tinham cumprido promettimentos do Alto; outros acham-se ainda longe de acreditar na inconfroversa realidade de um milagre. Foste um crente na tua juventude e deixaste de sel-o. Pessoas de familia arrastaram-te a Fátima,

O que ouvi e me levou a Fátima? Que a Virgem Maria, depois da festa da Ascenção, apparecera a tres criancas que apascentavam gado, duas mocinhas e um zagaleto, recomendando-lhes que orassem e prometendo-lhes apparecer ali, sobre uma azinheira, no dia 15 de cada mez, até que em outubro lhes daria qualquer sinal do poder de Deus e faria revelações. Espalhou-se a nova por muitas leguas e m

redondez de 4000, de terra em terra, até os confins de Portugal, e a roma-

¹⁰ In 1884, *O Seculo* initiated the publication *Ilustração Portuguesa*, an illustrated weekly supplement to its daily edition. *Ilustração Portuguesa* published malicious propaganda about the Church (especially the Jesuits) prior to the events at Fatima. By October 29th, the entire country was abuzz with discussion about the solar phenomenon that had occurred on October 13th. The images are taken directly from the original article, which can be accessed and navigated at the digital archives of the Municipal Libraries of Lisbon at http://hemerotecadigital.cm-lisboa.pt/OBRAS/IlustracaoPort/1917/N610/N610_item1/P15.html.

THE MIRACLE OF FATIMA



Various aspects of people kneeling and praying in the moment of discovering the sun and the occurrence of the phenomenon that so impressed the multitude.

(Letter to someone who asks for an unsuspecting testimony)

Breaking a silence of more than twenty years and with the invocation of remote and fond remembrance of the times in which we coexisted in fraternal camaraderie, and illuminated by common faith and strengthened by identical purposes, you write to me so that I might tell you, sincerely and in detail, about what I saw and heard in the shrubland of Fatima, when the news of celestial apparitions brought together in that desolate wilderness dozens of thousands of people impelled more by a thirst for the supernatural, I believe, than by a mere curiosity or fear of fraud... There are Catholics who disagree about the importance and significance of what they witnessed. Some convinced themselves that promises from on high were fulfilled; others find themselves still far from believing in the incontestable reality of a miracle. You were a believer in your youth and you ceased to be one. Family members dragged you to Fatima, to the colossal open space where that colossal crowd of people congregated on the 13th of October. Or your rationalism suffered a formidable ordeal and you want to establish a sure opinion which preserves you from unsuspecting declarations such as mine. Therefore, I was merely there carrying out a very difficult mission, which was to report impartially for a large daily newspaper, *O Século*, the facts that unfolded (along with everything curious and elucidating that was connected to them). It will not suffice to satisfy your desire, but certainly our eyes and our ears did not see nor hear diverse things, and rare were those who found themselves insensitive to the greatness of such a spectacle, unique among us and above all worthy of meditation and study...



People taking shelter under their umbrellas, surrounding the site of the miracle

What did I hear and what drew me to Fatima? That the Virgin Mary, after the feast of the Ascension, appeared to three children who were herding sheep, two girls and a boy, imploring them to pray and promising to appear to them there, on a holly oak tree, on the 13th day of every month, until in October at which time she would show them a kind of sign of the power of God and would share revelations. The news spread all around for many miles; it went, from place to place, to the edges of Portugal, and the pilgrimages of believers grew month by month, to the point where they gathered in the shrubland of Fatima, on the 13th of October, some fifty thousand people according to the calculations of dispassionate individuals. In the preceding gatherings of the faithful, there was no lack of those who supposedly saw astronomically and atmospherically unique events, which were taken as indicative of immediate divine intervention. There were those who spoke of sudden drops in temperature, of stars sparkling in broad daylight, or of beautiful, never-before-seen clouds surrounding the sun. There were those who repeated and movingly divulged that the Lady recommended penitence, that she intended the erection of a chapel in that place, that on the 13th of October, by means of a proof perceptible to all, the infinite goodness and omnipotence of God would be made manifest...



Facing the sky, awaiting the marvel



A group in which an old blind man is perhaps hoping to regain his sight

And so, on that famous and ardently-awaited day, people flowed into Fatima from near and far, putting up with all of the burdens and difficulties of the trip, thousands and thousands of people, treading for miles on foot through sun and rain, others riding in the greatest assortment of vehicles, from the almost prehistoric to the most recent and marvelous models, even many that carry uncomfortable ones from the third-class convoys, inside of which, in order to cover relatively short distances today, one can lose many hours and even days and nights! I saw groups of men and of women, patiently, as if carried along in a dream or at vespers, proceed along towards the famous site, walking barefoot to the rhythm of the singing of sacred hymns and of the cadenced recitation of the mysteries of the Rosary, without being inconvenienced, dissuaded or disillusioned by the almost sudden change in weather, when buckets of rain had transformed the earthy roads into deep mud and the delights of autumn become, for a day, the rudest rigors of winter...



The multitude, compressing itself around the site of the miracle where a rustic portico is visible, begins to look at the sky, awaiting the sign from God

I saw the crowd praying compressed around the area of the small miraculous tree and stripping it of branches to keep as relics, praying scattered about the vast shrubland that the road from Leiria crosses and dominates and upon which the most picturesque and heterogeneous confluence of cars and people jammed together on that memorable day, awaiting supernatural manifestations with the greatest tranquility, without fearing that the rigorous winter might render them without effect, diminishing their splendor and grandiosity...



The people pray kneeling and gazing above

I saw that discouragement did not invade souls, that faith was kept alive and ardent, in spite of the obstacles, that the composure of the multitude in which the peasants superabounded was perfect and that the children, in their privileged understanding, were obliged to welcome with demonstrations of the kindest affection those who knelt down, took off their hats and prayed at their command as the hour of the “miracle” approached, the hour of the “perceptible sign,” the longed-for and mystical hour of contact between heaven and earth...



The three children with whom the Virgin is said to have spoken

And, when I no longer imagined that I was seeing anything more impressive than that noisy but peaceful multitude animated by the same obsessive idea and moved by the same powerful yearning, what did I see on that occasion in the shrubland of Fatima that was truly extraordinary? I saw the rain cease to fall at the predicted time; I saw the dense mass of clouds break up and the Sun—a disc of opaque silver—appear at full zenith and begin a violent and convulsive dance, which a great number of people imagined to be a serpentine dance, so beautiful and resplendent were the colors successively adorning the solar surface...



People seeking to approach the blessed oak tree

Miracle, as the people shouted; natural phenomenon, as the wise say? I don't profess to know right now, but only to affirm to you what *I saw*... The rest is with Science and with the Church... (emphasis in original).

Avelino de Almeida.