

THE CONQUEST, COLONISATION, AND FIRST GOVERNORS OF THE *ESTADO DO MARANHÃO* DURING THE SPANISH MONARCHY (1580–1640)

by SERGIO MORETA PEDRAZ
(Pontifical University of Salamanca)

Abstract

The aim of this article is to analyse the importance of the conquest, colonisation, and installation of the first governors of the *Estado do Maranhão* in the context of Portugal's annexation to the Spanish Monarchy. The conquest, colonisation, and creation of a new territory in Maranhão was one of the main milestones of the six decades during which Portuguese America belonged to the Spanish Monarchy. It was an enterprise previously planned on a political stage, in which the indigenous people played an important role, and it took shape in America through a political process that defined how the space in question would be organised, colonised, and occupied.

Keywords: Brazil; Spanish Monarchy; conquest; Maranhão; governors.

Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo es analizar la importancia de la conquista, colonización e instalación de los primeros gobernadores del *Estado do Maranhão* en el contexto de la anexión de Portugal a la Monarquía Hispánica. Es posible afirmar que la conquista, colonización y creación de un nuevo territorio en el Maranhão fue uno de los principales hitos de los 60 años de pertenencia de la América portuguesa a la Monarquía Hispánica. Fue una idea previamente elaborada desde el centro político, donde los indígenas desempeñaron un papel importante, y que tomó forma en el territorio americano a través de un proceso político que definió la forma de organizar, colonizar y ocupar el espacio.

Palabras clave: Brasil; Monarquía Hispánica; Conquista; Maranhão, Gobernadores.

Introduction: The Union of Crowns between Spain and Portugal

The death of King Dom Sebastião in the 'battle of three kings' at Alcácer Quibir in 1578 led in Portugal to a succession crisis which culminated in a factual incorporation of the Portuguese kingdom and its colonies into the dominions of the Spanish Crown under the rule of Philip II.

Between 1581 and 1640, Portugal joined the Spanish Monarchy through a personal union, that is, the two states were ruled by one single monarch. This development took place due to certain historical developments such as squabbles among potential heirs, grandchildren of Manuel I of Portugal, to the Portuguese crown. Eventually, Portugal came to be ruled by a viceroy appointed by the Philip II of

Spain and Lisbon's loss of status of capital city.¹ On the other hand, the Portuguese nobles who supported the Castilian monarch, Philip II, in his aspiration to the Portuguese throne, established a pact with the Spanish Crown: in exchange for supporting Philip's claim, their status and position would be maintained, which led to a level of a certain stability and balance. In return, Portugal and its overseas territories continued to be treated as separate units.² During the period of the union of crowns, the Spanish monarch thus guaranteed the unity of the whole while protecting the distinctness of its components.³

The first consequence of this union was the incorporation of Portugal into a large group of territories that formed the 'Catholic Monarchy' united by a Christian identity. Another effect of the union, however, was that the Portuguese kingdom found itself drawn into the wars which the Habsburgs were waging against the Protestant world⁴.

The dynastic union of Portugal and Spain was finalised by commitments made at the Cortes (assembly of representatives of the estates) held in Tomar in 1581, where Philip II of Spain was crowned Philip I of Portugal.⁵ At this occasion, it was guaranteed that Portugal would be integrated into the Spanish Monarchy by dynastic aggregation, in other words, that it would retain its distinct characteristics.⁶ The king thus ruled over both Spain and Portugal but maintained their distinct customs, laws, and administration.⁷ Jurisdiction, too, was delimited at this assembly; in particular, it was agreed that the political and judicial functions would only be granted only to the natives of the Portuguese kingdom, so the government, positions in state administration, and the administration of Portuguese colonies could not be handed over to foreigners.⁸ It was then within the framework of this union of crowns that global networks were established which transformed the Modern Era by a circulation of goods, knowledge, and political agendas.⁹

The integration of Portugal into the Spanish Monarchy meant that the Portuguese overseas possessions, including the territory we know today as Brazil, became

¹ John ELLIOT, *España, Europa y el mundo de ultramar (1500–1800)*, Madrid 2010, p. 37.

² *Ibidem*, p. 37.

³ Francisco Carlos COSENTINO, *Governadores gerais do Estado do Brasil (séculos XVI–XVII). Ofício, regimentos, governação e trajetórias*, São Paulo 2009, p. 107.

⁴ Pedro CARDIM, *Portugal y la Monarquía Hispánica (ca. 1550 – ca. 1715)*, Madrid 2017, p. 50.

⁵ Philip II of Spain was crowned Philip I of Portugal, which also meant that Philip III of Spain became Philip II of Portugal and Philip IV of Spain was Philip III of Portugal. In this article, I use the Castilian nomenclature of monarchs.

⁶ Fernando BOUZA, *Portugal no tempo dos Filipes: política, cultura, representações (1580–1640)*, Lisboa 2000, p. 113.

⁷ Stuart SCHWARTZ, *Sovereignty and society in colonial Brazil: the High Court of Bahia and its judges, 1609–1751*, Berkeley 1973, p. 48.

⁸ Wilmar da Silva VIANNA JÚNIOR, "O Governo-geral no tempo dos Filipes", *Dimensões* 20, 2008, p. 48.

⁹ José Manuel SANTOS PÉREZ, "La América portuguesa en la encrucijada. Circulación de personas entre Brasil, la América Hispana y la Corte de los Habsburgo en los años de unión de coronas", in: José Manuel Santos Pérez – Ana Paula Megiani – José Luis Ruiz-Peinado Alonso (eds.), *Redes y Circulación en Brasil durante la Monarquía Hispánica*, Madrid 2021, p. 39.

part of the Castilian Crown.¹⁰ Portugal thus gained certain advantages but also inherited the disputes in which the Spanish were engaged and their adversaries and competitors.

This was the context in which the annexation of Portuguese America to the Spanish Crown took place. During the period of the union of crowns, in 1581–1640, this region grew both in size and in significance. The importance of these overseas territories was mainly due to their strategic position. The territory now known as Brazil was important for Habsburg possessions in South America, functioning as a buffer zone to defend the mineral wealth of Spanish America but also making sure that Spanish ships could sail unmolested to India around the south of the continent. This helped the Spanish increase their global commercial influence.¹¹

During its rule of the territory, the Spanish Crown had introduced in the *Estado do Brasil* various measures aimed at an institutional consolidation of the territory, which attests to the importance which the Habsburgs ascribed to this region. This institutional reform took place in three main areas: finances, where changes aimed at obtaining more revenue, justice, where a new court of appeals (*Tribunal da Relação*) was established with jurisdiction over the entire territory, and finally military, where the reform aimed at a better protection of the main settlements against foreign attacks. The territory was also to be defended by a new defensive line along the coast. The importance of coastal defences is readily apparent when we look at the 1581 map below, where the *Estado do Brasil* is still basically just a strip of land facing the Atlantic.

1. The conquest and colonisation of Maranhão

The growing significance of Portuguese America in the late 16th and early 17th century went hand in hand with its territorial expansion. At this time, under Spanish Habsburg rule, one can also observe the creation and establishment of colonial bureaucracy which aimed at a further expansion of the rule of the Crown.¹² One of the territories that became the focus of these efforts was Maranhão, whose conquest and colonisation was accomplished during the first years of the reign of Philip III.¹³ It began with defensive operations against the foreign powers which were trying to colonise this territory. These operations were successful and led to the foundation of the *Estado do Maranhão* as a unit separate from the *Estado do Brasil*. The *Estado do Maranhão* covered a vast territory stretching over large parts of what are

¹⁰ Oscar MAZÍN, “Architect of the New World: Juan de Solórzano Pereyra and the Status of the Americas”, in: Pedro Cardim – Tamar Herzog et al., *Polycentric Monarchies. How did Early Modern Spain and Portugal Achieve and Maintain a Global Hegemony?*, Sussex 2012, p. 28.

¹¹ VIANNA JÚNIOR, “O governo”, p. 51.

¹² Pilar PONCE LEIVA – Alexander PONSEN, “Administration and government of the Iberian empires”, in: Fernando Bouza – Pedro Cardim – Antonio Feros (eds.), *The Iberian World, 1450–1820*, London 2020, p. 312.

¹³ José Manuel SANTOS PÉREZ, “La conquista y colonización de Maranhão-Grão Pará, el gran proyecto de la Monarquía Hispánica para la Amazonia brasileña (1580–1640)”, *Revista de Estudios Brasileños* 6/11, 2009, p. 34.



Figure 1. Approximate situation in Portuguese America in 1581.¹⁴

nowadays the Amazon states of Brazil: Amazonas, Amapá, Pará, and Tocantins, as well as Maranhão, Ceará, and Piauí.¹⁵

As mentioned above, in early 17th century several foreign powers started to show interest in this territory: mostly the French but also the English, Dutch, Italians, and the Irish, who established settlements near the mouth of the Amazon River and in the territory of Maranhão. It was the French, however, who formed the most formidable competition to Spanish colonial aims. They managed to create so-called Equinoctial France, the most dangerous French attempt to colonise Portuguese America. It centred around a fort on the island of São Luis, at the mouth of Maranhão River¹⁶ (as seen in map 2, which depicts the situation in 1613).

This French colonising attempt was led by Daniel de la Touche, a Protestant nobleman who was after initial successes appointed by the French king Henry IV appointed ‘lieutenant general of all the lands between the Amazon and the Orinoco’.

¹⁴ All maps have been taken from: Geacron [accessed on 20 February 2025], accessible at <https://geacron.com>.

¹⁵ Alirio CARDOSO, “Amazônia e a carreira das Índias: navegação para o norte da América portuguesa na época da Monarquia Hispânica”, *Revista de Índias* 264, p. 390.

¹⁶ SANTOS PÉREZ, “La Conquista”, p. 36.



Figure 2. Approximate situation in Portuguese America in 1613.

eventually captured and taken to Portugal, where he was imprisoned in the Belém tower until 1620.

The Crown, or rather Diego de Meneses, the governor-general of *Estado do Brasil* at the time,¹⁷ became aware of the French presence in the area and started to gather information on how these territories could be conquered and secured for the Habsburg Crown:

By letter of your majesty dated 19 January 1611, you have ordered me to report on the conquest of Maranhão, to assist you in resolving on a suitable course of action [...] I have sent the captain and sergeant major Diogo de Campos Moreno to Rio Grande to find out more about the state of things [...] It seems to me since the day I arrived that this was a highly important and necessary journey. It had to be done both because of the usefulness for Your Majesty's treasury when that area is colonised, and because it would be the last bastion to prevent the attacks of corsairs of this coast and thwart their interests which they further by continuing to come to that coast every year [...]. After making the aforementioned conquest, the lands should be divided in captaincies; the coast is extensive, so it would benefit their development and

¹⁷ Diego de Meneses was governor-general of the *Estado do Brasil* between 1608 and 1612.

maintenance, and the captaincies could help each other and defend against enemies [...]. And regarding how journey and the conquest should be made, it always seemed to me that it should not be done at great costs or with armies of people, because the people who are to be conquered cannot be subdued by force but by inventiveness and skill. The less people come there, the more the locals will trust what we tell them, and they will be easily subjected because those people defend themselves not by force but by fleeing [...].¹⁸

The conquest of the territory was planned during the administration of Diego de Meneses (1608–1612) and concluded by Gaspar de Sousa (1612–1617), both governors of the *Estado do Brasil*. Expeditions were organised by the Portuguese authorities in Pernambuco in an attempt to conquer the region held by the French. The first two expeditions, led by Pero Coelho de Sousa¹⁹ and the Pernambucan Captain Alexandre de Moura,²⁰ have failed.²¹ Eventually, however, the French fort was

¹⁸ *Per carta de V. M. de 19 de janro de 611 me manda o informe e de meu parecer sobre a conquista do maranhão pera se poder resolver no q conuem a mesma conquista [...] mandei ao Capitão e sargto mor diogo de Campos ao Rio grande a saber o estado em q de presente estuão as cousas [...] me parece e pareço sempre do dia q aqui cheguei, q era a tornada importantissima e de necessidade deuia faser sse tanto pella utillidade q a faz(end)a de V.M. recebe e recebera quando aquella parte se pouoasse, quanto por ser a derradeira pedra de euitar os Cossarios desta Costa q só oie tem aquella acolheita e pollos intereses q dali leuão continuação todos os annos em grande numero a uir áquella costa [...] de se auer de repartir as terras fasendo sse a dita conquista forçado he q seia porq como a costa he tão estendida, para o sustento e augmento do mesmo sitio, em capitánias, e lugares q se possão socorrer hus aos outros e com isso se ficão conservando sem os inimigos lhe poder faser noio nem ter lugar onde parem [...] he a forma em q se deue faser a iornada e conquista a qual me pareço sempre, se não deuia faser com grandes custos nem exercitos de gente porque como a gente q se uai conquistar se não pôde sugeitar per força senão per invenção, e manha, quanto menos poder uir o gentío em nós, e nos q'o uão conquistar, tanto mais se fiarão do q lhe disseremos, e assi se redusirão facillissimamente por que não ha gente q se deffende per força, senão por fugir [...].* Rodolfo GARCIA, “Correspondência do Governador D. Diogo de Meneses (1608–1612)”, *Anais da Biblioteca Nacional do Rio de Janeiro* LVII, pp. 76–80. Translated by Sergio Moreta Pedraz.

¹⁹ Pero Coelho de Sousa was made captain-Major (*capitão-mor*) and played an important role in the conquest of the captaincy of Ceará. *Pero Coelho de Sousa* [on-line], BRASILHIS Database, [consulted on 20 February 2025], accessible at: <https://brasilhis.usal.es/es/personaje/pero-coelho-de-souza-souza>.

²⁰ Alexandre de Moura, a captain and head of the captaincy of Pernambuco, participated in a commission of experts created by Philip III to deal with issues concerning Maranhão. He also cooperated with the fleet sent from Olinda to take the fort of São Luis do Maranhão from the French. In the end, he was appointed the captain of Maranhão. *Alexandre de Moura* [on-line], BRASILHIS Database, [consulted on 20 February 2025], accessible at: <https://brasilhis.usal.es/es/personaje/alexandre-de-moura>.

²¹ Guida MARQUES, “En los confines del imperio hispano-portugués. La conquista del Marañón y del Gran Pará durante la unión ibérica”, in: Carlos Martínez Shaw – José Antonio Martínez Torres (eds.), *España y Portugal en el mundo (1581–1668)*, Madrid 2014, p. 252. The first expeditions are described in sources kept at Archivo General de Indias (en adelante solo AGI), Patronato, 272, Ramo 2, fols. 1–39.

conquered in 1614–1615 thanks to several military expeditions led by Alexandre de Moura, Diogo de Campos Moreno,²² and Jerónimo de Albuquerque.²³

In early 1615, the governor general sent reinforcements in the form of a fleet of seven ships and about 600 soldiers that left Olinda and arrived in São Luís in November, captained by Alexandre de Moura. The governor-general of the *Estado do Brasil*, Gaspar de Sousa,²⁴ had asked for and received a permission to temporarily move the main city from Salvador de Bahia to Pernambuco so as to be in a better position to coordinate the conquest from a location closer to Maranhão,²⁵ although Philip III had actually expected de Sousa to travel to Maranhão to direct the military actions in person, as he told him on several occasions²⁶.

Eventually, a peace agreement that included a surrender of Fort of São Luís to the Portuguese was signed on 2 November 1615.²⁷ Daniel de la Touche, the Protestant nobleman who had founded the fort, had surrendered and was taken to Portugal, where he was imprisoned in the Belém tower until 1620.

Some Creole families were crucial in carrying out this conquest of Maranhão, mainly families from the captaincy of Pernambuco who were able to gain access to the highest positions.²⁸ But the indigenous people were also crucial: the Portuguese knew that they would not be able to expel the French without native warriors from the northern Brazilian captaincies who had the necessary knowledge of the terrain. The army that left Pernambuco in October 1615 numbered a total of 900 men, whereby most of them were indigenous warriors.²⁹ Even in more general terms, the cooperation of the indigenous peoples was vital. In this context, it is important to note that in Portuguese America, the indigenous peoples and their contribution was

²² Diogo de Campos Moreno held the post of sergeant-major (*sargento-mor*) of the *Estado do Brasil* during the government of Diogo Botelho. Philip III reappointed him to the same post in 1613, when he was sent to help with the conquest of Maranhão. Alongside Alexandre de Moura, he took part in the campaigns of 1614–1615 whose goal was to take the fort of São Luís from the French. He is believed to be the author of *Livro da Razão do Estado do Brasil* (1612), *Diogo de Campos Moreno* [on-line], BRASILHIS Database, [accessed 20 February 2025], accessible at: <https://brasilhis.usal.es/es/personaje/diogo-de-campos-moreno>.

²³ Jerónimo de Albuquerque held the post of captain of the captaincy of Rio Grande in 1603–1610. During the campaign to conquer the Maranhão, in 1614–1616, he was reappointed to the same position. *Jerónimo de Albuquerque* [on-line], BRASILHIS Database, [consulted on 20 February 2025], accessible at: <https://brasilhis.usal.es/es/personaje/jeronimo-de-albuquerque-maranhao-o-moco-o-sardo>.

²⁴ Gaspar de Sousa was governor-general of the *Estado do Brasil* in 1612–1616. In 1613–1615, he made the necessary arrangements for the operation to conquer the fort of São Luís de Maranhão and the rest of the region. He also received a permission from Philip III to administer revenues from brazilwood and thus pay for part of the expedition. *Gaspar de Sousa* [on-line], BRASILHIS Database, [accessed 20 February 2025], accessible at: <https://brasilhis.usal.es/es/personaje/gaspar-de-sousa>.

²⁵ CARDOSO, *Maranhão na Monarquia*, p. 143.

²⁶ These requests are documented in a collection of recapitulated letters between Gaspar de Sousa and Philip III, where the king urges de Sousa to take personal command of the conquest. João Paulo SALVADO – Susana MÜNCH MIRANDA, *Cartas para Álvaro de Sousa e Gaspar de Sousa (1540–1627)*, Lisboa 2001.

²⁷ CARDOSO, *Maranhão na Monarquia*, p. 134.

²⁸ SANTOS PÉREZ, “La Conquista”, p. 43.

²⁹ CARDOSO, *Maranhão na Monarquia*, p. 158.

formally recognised since the 1550s. The Portuguese, like the Castilians, formally treated the indigenous peoples of America as ‘foreigners’; if, however, they abandoned their cultural forms and accepted Christian conversion, they could legally become ‘vassals’, that is liege subjects of the king.³⁰

Maranhão was important due to several factors. First of all, it was part of the defences of the northern coast of the *Estado do Brasil* and, secondly, the Habsburg monarchs were worried that the Dutch could establish their foothold in this territory, of which little was previously known.³¹ Immediately after the conquest, a colonisation plan was therefore implemented through a series of measures aimed at an effective occupation of the territory.³² These measures included official advertising aimed at repopulating the region (colonisation by families), the building of sugar mills, a military plan, a religious action to convert indigenous people, and an administrative reform of the region.³³ Aware of the possible return of enemies and of the Crown’s conviction that the Amazon could be the gateway to Potosí, an expedition was sent to complete an effective conquest of the territory and in 1616, this small army managed to reach the mouth of the Pará and Amazon rivers, which resulted in the founding of the city of Belem do Pará.

As can be seen in Map 3, forces of the Spanish Crown have by 1618 managed to occupy the entire northern coast of the Portuguese American territory.

But the most interesting notion that emerged from the Iberian Peninsula in 1618 had to do with creating a government of Maranhão that would be separate from the government of the *Estado do Brasil*, naturally after the territory was under control. On 1 February 1618, Luis de Sousa³⁴ was still in Pernambuco organising the conquest as ordered by the king:

[...] and that was the main reason why I ordered Don Luis de Sousa to reside for some time in Pernambuco, so that from there he could send the necessary supplies and provisions to the captains and soldiers who assist in those conquests [...].³⁵

At the same time, Philip III created a sort of consultative council in Lisbon, consisting of Gaspar de Sousa, Diego de Meneses, and Alexandre de Moura. They were asked to see whether it was necessary to appoint a separate governor for the *Estado do Brasil*:

³⁰ Pedro CARDIM, “Os povos indígenas, a dominação colonial e as instancias de justiça na América portuguesa e espanhola”, in: Ângela Domingues – Maria Leônia Chaves de Resende – Pedro Cardim (orgs.), *Os indígenas e as justiças no mundo ibero-americano (Sécs. XVI–XIX)*, Lisboa 2019, p. 40.

³¹ CARDOSO, *Maranhão na Monarquia*, p. 141.

³² MARQUES, “En los confines”, p. 255.

³³ SANTOS PÉREZ, “La Conquista”, p. 43.

³⁴ Luis de Sousa was governor-general of the *Estado do Brasil* between 1617 and 1621.

³⁵ [...] *E essa foi a principal rezaõ por que ordenei a Dom Luis de Sousa fosse residir algum tempo em Pernambuco, para que dalli pudesse mandar os socorros e provisoes necessarias aos capitais e soldados que assistem naquelas conquistas [...]*. Archivo General de Simancas (en adelante solo AGS), Secretarías Provinciales, 1516, 11v–12v. Translated by Sergio Moreta Pedraz.



Figure 3. Approximate situation in Portuguese America in 1618.

[...] in the city of Lisbon, there are some people who can give good advice on this, such as Gaspar de Sousa, Don Diego de Menezes, and Alexandre de Moura [...] if it is convenient to appoint a separate governor in Maranhão so that with his assistance the conquest of those provinces may be better pursued [...] and in case it seems convenient to appoint a separate governor, what jurisdiction he should have, and what the costs would be, and what other necessary expenses it would mean for the government, seeing that in the present state these expenses cannot be covered by income [...].³⁶

Traditionally, that is, in historiography based on the work of Francisco Adolfo de Varnhagen, the author of *Historia Geral do Brasil* (1854–1857), it has been

³⁶ [...] em essa cidade de Lisboa estam algumas pessoas que poderao dar boa informação disso, como sao Gaspar de Sousa, dom Diº de Menezes e Alexandre de Moura [...]. Se convira por se logo governador separado no maranhao ha pa q com sua assistencia se prosigua melhor a conquistas daquelas provincias [...] e em caso que pareça conveniente por se logo ali Governador separado, que districto ha de ter, e donde se podem tirar a despesa que se ha de fazer com ele, e os mais gastos necessarios para aquelle governo, visto que no estado presente nao pode haver ali o rendimento necessario para estas despesas [...]. AGS, Secretarías Provinciales, Libro 1516, fls. 11v–12v. Translated by Sergio Moreta Pedraz.

believed that the separation of Maranhão from the *Estado do Brasil* was decided later, because Varnhagen claimed that it ‘was only effectively decreed by royal charter on June 1621’.³⁷ Documentation found in the Archivo General of Simancas nevertheless tells us that the decision to create a separate government of Maranhão was taken on 20 June 1618:

[...] I consider it good that the government of Maranhão should be separate from that of Brazil, and the governor there ought to be a person who has experience of the people and of those lands; I encourage you to look to the opinion of Gaspar de Sousa [...]. And considering how important it is for the service of the said lands, members of religious orders will be sent to those parts so that they may deal with the increase of our Holy Faith and the preservation of the people there, and we will celebrate holy masses [...].³⁸

As noted above, the decision to separate the administration of this region was driven by the aforementioned threat of foreign invasions and local instability. But it also had geographical reasons, because the winds and sea currents made sailing between Maranhão and the *Estado do Brasil* difficult,³⁹ while the new state’s connection with Lisbon was easier.

The native peoples played a key role in the process of conquest and colonisation of Maranhão. It was thanks to the indigenous people, especially the Tupinambá, that the Castilian and Portuguese colonisers were able to explore Portuguese America. They adopted their language, customs, and their expansion routes. When conquering the territory, they followed in the footsteps of a Tupinambá group, which facilitated the conquest and subsequent religious conversion of the natives.⁴⁰ This region, including its main population centres, São Luis and Belém, long remained characterised by small settlements dependent on indigenous labour, with a strong presence of missionaries, and the Tupi language was the main means of communication.⁴¹

2. The first governors of Maranhão

The new *Estado do Maranhão* had the same powers as the *Estado do Brasil*. In practice, the exercise of power continued to be based on pacts and negotiations aimed at accommodating the interests of both the Crown and the power centres in

³⁷ Francisco VARNHAGEN, *História Geral do Brasil*, São Paulo 1981, p. 456.

³⁸ [...] e tei por bem q o governo do Maranhão se separe do Brasil, e porque convem q o governador q ali ha de haver seja pessoa que tenha experiencia de gentio e daquelas terras, vos encomendo q vejais o parecer de Gaspar de Sousa [...]. E considerado quam importante he ao servicio de ditas e meu envianrense desse santos religiosos aquelas partis para tratarem do agmento de nossa sancta fee, e da conservação do gentio de las, e celebraremos officios divinos [...]. AGS, Secretarias Provinciales, Libro 1516, fls. 78–78v. Translated by Sergio Moreta Pedraz.

³⁹ CARDOSO, “Amazônia”, p. 392.

⁴⁰ Pablo IBÁÑEZ BONILLO, “Procesos de guerra justa en la amazonía portuguesa (siglo XVII). La influencia indígena en la construcción de las fronteras coloniales”, in: Domingues – Chaves de Resende – Cardim (orgs.), *Os indígenas*, p. 257.

⁴¹ Stuart SCHWARTZ, “Patterns of conquest and settlement of the Iberian Americas”, in: Bouza – Cardim – Feros (eds.), *The Iberian World*, p. 335.

the territory, including royal officials and local authorities.⁴² The capital of Maranhão was located in São Luis, which is also where the first governor appointed for the newly created territory, Diego de Cárcamo,⁴³ a man of Spanish origin, was expected to arrive. In fact, however, he never assumed his post.

Diego de Cárcamo had been an official of António, the Prior of Crato, who was a rival of Philip II in his fight for the Portuguese throne. Cárcamo played a significant role in the negotiations that led to the instalment of the Castilian monarch to the throne in August 1580.⁴⁴ As a native of Córdoba, son of Pedro de Tovar and married to Antonia de Vilhena, he also had important links with the Portuguese bureaucracy.⁴⁵

In February 1620, he was appointed to the post of governor of Maranhão. From this title, he made a series of requests⁴⁶ including that slaves from Angola be sent to him. This shows his familiarity with local situation, since at that time the numbers of slaves imported to Portuguese America had significantly increased thanks functioning connections with Africa. The growing Brazilian economy demanded slave labour and supported slave trade. The slaves came from military operations in Africa, which produced large numbers of war captives who were subsequently sent as slaves to Brazil. It is estimated that in 1580–1640, their number rose to about 250,000.⁴⁷

Diego de Cárcamo also made petitions for his family, requesting an *encomienda* of the Order of Avis for himself, his children and grandchildren:

[...] he intends to grant him the right to testament the *encomienda* de las Galveas of the order of Avis, which your majesty has now ordered him to nominate, in his son João de Cárcamo or in one of his grandsons, and that Your Majesty orders his grandson Diego to receive the habit of the order of Avis with a pension of twenty thousand reais in the same *encomienda* [...].⁴⁸

In October 1620, several months after he was appointed to the post of governor, we still find Cárcamo making requests, this time asking for lands in Maranhão:

[...] He asks His Majesty to grant him the mercy of sending him a provision to take twenty leagues of land for himself [...].⁴⁹

⁴² PONCE LEIVA – PONSEN, *Administration*, p. 313.

⁴³ Diego de Cárcamo, although appointed governor of Maranhão by Philip III, eventually died in Lisbon before taking office. *Diego de Cárcamo* [on-line], BRASILHIS Database, [accessed 20 February 2025], accessible at: <https://brasilhis.usal.es/es/personaje/diogo-de-carcamo-carcome>.

⁴⁴ AGS, Estado, 425, Letters of 8, 14, and 23 August 1580.

⁴⁵ CARDOSO, *Maranhão*, p. 153.

⁴⁶ AGS, Secretarías Provinciales, 1474, fls. 84v–85v.

⁴⁷ Roquinaldo FERREIRA – Pablo Miguel SIERRA SILVA, “Portugal, Spain, and the transatlantic slave trade”, in: Bouza – Cardim – Feros, *The Iberian World*, p. 384.

⁴⁸ [...] *pretende lhe faça merce que possa testar da comenda das Galveas da orden de Avis q VMgd lhe mandou ora nomear, em seu filho dom João de Carcamo ou em hu de seus nettos, e que a seu netto dom Diogo mande VMgd lançar o habito da orden de Avis com vinte mil rs de pensão na mesma comenda [...]*. AGS, Secretarías Provinciales, 1552, fls. 213–213v. Translated by Sergio Moreta Pedraz.

⁴⁹ [...] *Pede a Vmagne lhe faça merce mandar passar provisão para elle poder tomar perasy vinte legoas de terra [...]*. AGS, Secretarías Provinciales, 1473, fl. 323. Translated by Sergio Moreta Pedraz.

The lands would be handed over to him as long as this step did not hurt the interests of any third party (meaning a European colonist with rights).

In the end, Diego de Cárcamo never assumed his post in the Maranhão. The reasons are not quite clear but it is well possible it was due to his advanced age and his previous connections with the prior of Crato. The importance of his involvement lies in the fact that the first person to be appointed to this post was Spanish, which shows that the Crown viewed the issue of colonising the Amazonian territory as its own agenda. In these early stages, the political and military initiative and colonisation of this region were taken away from the Portuguese, among other things because of doubts as to whether this region was within the line agreed in the Treaty of Tordesillas of 1494.⁵⁰

From the 1620s onwards, one can thus follow the administrative formation of a new state in the northern regions of Brazil. Its main centres were São Luís, the capital, Belém do Pará, and the fort of Santo Antônio de Gurupá. From these points, the Portuguese and Spanish colonisers fought the indigenous peoples and competing European forces in an attempt to maintain their dominance in this territory. The conflicts were of a lasting nature and compounded by conflicts with the native population in the interior. According to a letter from the secular council of Cartagena de Indias dated 14 December 1623, the colonists continued to enslave the native population:

[...] Around the river of the Marañon and the great river of the Amazons, there lives an infinite multitude of Carib Indians who eat human flesh, wage continual wars against each other, and those who are taken captive are eaten or sold for the same purpose, and those who are rescued by the Portuguese and Castilians are given to them as their perpetual slaves. In these conquests and discoveries, there are also wars between these Indians and the Castilian and Portuguese Spaniards [...].⁵¹

Rather eloquent are requests for further native slaves, justified as follows:

[...] This city of Cartagena and its province is in great need of Indian service because of the large number of Indians who have died of labour, smallpox, and other diseases. [...].⁵²

⁵⁰ SANTOS PÉREZ, “La Conquista”, p. 42.

⁵¹ [...] *En el Rio del Marañon y en el gran Rio de las Amazonas ay infinita multitud de yndios carives que comen carne humana los quales traen continuas guerras unos contra otros y los que se cautivan se comen y venden entre si para el mismo efecto, y los que deste genero rescatan los portugueses y castellanos que dan por sus esclavos perpetuos. En estas conquistas y descubrimiento ansimismo ay guerras entre esos yndios y los spañoles castellanos y portugueses [...]*. AGI, Santa Fe, fl. 63. 14 December 1623. Translated by Sergio Moreta Pedraz.

⁵² [...] *esta ciudad de Cartagena y su provincia esta muy necessitada de servicio de yndios por la grande suma de ellos que an muerto con trabajos, viruelas y otras enfermedades*. AGI, Santa Fe, fl. 63. 14 December 1623. Translated by Sergio Moreta Pedraz.

Interactions between the colonial society and the native population were tense. The indigenous people of the Maranhão-Pará territory resisted enslavement with special tenacity.⁵³ Contacts between colonial intermediaries and the indigenous population took place in the frontier zones where settlements, such as hamlets (*aldeias*), villas, and sugar mills, were maintained. That is where agreements were made and goods exchanged, although the general level of violence was high. These frontier posts also served as places of illegal captivity of the indigenous people⁵⁴.

In 1624, the Crown appointed the second governor of the northeastern territory, Francisco Coelho de Carvalho, who belonged to an important family network of the Albuquerque Coelhos, who were the donatary (i.e., Crown-appointed) captains of Pernambuco, which thus belonged to them. Networks such as those created by the families of donatary captains kept expanding their influence and locals relied on them for facilitating settlement and the expansion of Crown's jurisdiction in the territory. In this process, such families, which came to form the local elite, made use of indigenous workers, who remained the source of prosperity but also to some conflicts with the Crown.⁵⁵

The first member of this family to hold an important post in this territory was Feliciano Albuquerque de Carvalho, who was appointed captain of Paraíba in 1595. His son Francisco Coelho de Carvalho was appointed to the same position in 1608, but later rose even higher when he served in 1624–1636 as the first governor general of the *Estado do Maranhão*. By this time, the family's position in this region was fully consolidated, as attested by the fact that several of Francisco Coelho's descendants rose to top posts.

The years that followed the conquest of Maranhão were filled with petitions from soldiers and persons close to the Albuquerque family who participated in the campaign and asked for royal grants from the Crown.⁵⁶ Moreover, Francisco Coelho de Carvalho was authorised by royal charter to favour his own family: he granted the lordship of Cumá (in the bay of São Luis) to his brother Antonio, while the lordship of Caeté (located between São Luis and Belém do Pará) went to his son Feliciano. That, however, did not sit well with Álvaro de Sousa, son of the previous governor general Gaspar de Sousa, who had the privilege of choosing a lordship since 1622 and likewise chose the captaincy of Caeté.⁵⁷

The usual length of appointment to the post of governor was three years⁵⁸ but one can see that Francisco Coelho held the post for 12 years (1624–1636), thus far exceeding the usual length of appointment several times. Nevertheless, we can see that by 1635 there were attempts to replace him. In a letter of June 1636 with

⁵³ CARDIM, "Os povos", p. 40.

⁵⁴ IBÁÑEZ BONILLO, "Procesos", p. 250.

⁵⁵ SCHWARTZ, "Patterns", p. 331.

⁵⁶ SANTOS PÉREZ, "La conquista", p. 43.

⁵⁷ Alberto GALLO, "Aventuras y desventuras del gobierno señorial en Brasil", in: Alicia Hernández Chávez – Ruggiero Romano – Marcello Carmagnani (coords.), *Para una historia de América II. Los nudos*, Ciudad de México, 1991, pp. 230–231.

⁵⁸ Roberta STUMPF, "Os provimentos de ofícios: a questão da propriedade no Antigo Regime português", *Topoi (Rio J.)* 15/29, 2014, p. 631.

a heading ‘the appointment of persons for the governorship of Marañon’ the vice-reine of Portugal drew attention to the fact that Coelho’s time in the post had ended long ago and a new governor should be appointed:

Princess Margaret notes in her letter of 13 October 1635 that His Majesty had ordered in another letter of the 6th of last month that since the Governor of the Marañon has served in that position for nine years, and the time for which he was appointed has ended six years ago, he should immediately be proposed to His Majesty as a subject [...].⁵⁹

Francisco Coelho de Carvalho was succeeded by Jácome Raimundo de Noronha, who had served as a provider major (*provedor-mor da Fazenda*; in effect a minister of finance) of Maranhão from 1620, as governor of the captaincy of Pará from 1630, and in 1636–1638 as a self-proclaimed governor of Maranhão. He had proclaimed himself acting governor with the support of the chambers of São Luis and Belém after the death of Francisco Coelho in 1636.⁶⁰ In fact, Jácome Raimundo de Noronha engaged in a struggle with Francisco Coelho de Carvalho already in 1634, when he wrote to the Court accusing him of excesses including fraud involving the Majesty’s treasury, but also more generally of ‘insults, aggravations, and threats’.⁶¹

The last governor during this period was Bento Maciel Parente, who served as a war captain-at-sea (*capitão de mar e guerra*) in the campaign for the conquest of Maranhão in 1615–1616, captain major (*capitão-mor*) of the captaincy of Pará in 1621–1637, and finally as the governor of Maranhão from 1638 until his death in 1642. When the Dutch took over the territory of Maranhão, Bento was banished first to Pernambuco and later to the fort of Rio Grande, where he died in 1642.⁶² Portuguese defeat at this occasion was not due lack of troops or weapons. The blame falls squarely on the shoulders of Maciel Parente, who neglected the defence of the Fort of São Felipe, because he was more concerned with protecting his sugar mills and factories in the captaincy of Cabo do Norte.⁶³

3. Conclusion

The conquest and colonisation of the territories in the north of what is now known as Brazil, which formed the *Estado do Maranhão* was highly valuable, mainly because it boosted the defensive potential of Portuguese America with respect to protecting the territories of Spanish America against an attack by foreign powers from the north. Moreover, the colonisation of this new territory led to the creation of a new administration, and thus also new administrative positions and grants to

⁵⁹ *La señora Princesa Margaritta refiere en una carta suya de 13 de outubro de 635, que Vmd lo mando por otra de 6 del passado, que por quanto el Gov^r del Marañon ha nueve años que sirve aquel cargo, y seis que tiene acavado el tiempo por que fue proveydo, y que le proponga luego a Vmd sugettos [...]*. AGS, 1478, fls. 353–353v. Translated by Sergio Moreta Pedraz.

⁶⁰ SANTOS PÉREZ, “La conquista”, p. 43.

⁶¹ AGS, Secretarías Provinciales, 1478, fls. 109r–110r.

⁶² CARDOSO, “Maranhão”, p. 267.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, p. 267.

important people who acted as the agents of administration in this region, including, as we have seen, the post of governor.

In terms of jurisdiction, the conquest and colonisation of the new territory were decided by the Spanish Crown but, although planned in Madrid and Lisbon, they were implemented by officials sent to the area: hence the importance of the governors, first of the *Estado do Brasil* and then of the *Estado do Maranhão*. Above all, though, the process was carried out by inhabitants of the territory themselves, especially the indigenous population, which gave the ‘new’ *Estado do Maranhão* its distinctive identity.

By sending a governor separate from the governor of the *Estado do Brasil*, the Crown wanted to spread its power by creating a new level of administration that would make the territory directly dependent on Madrid, and not on Bahia. This was done by creating an increasingly solid hierarchical bureaucracy with the figure of the governor of the *Estado do Maranhão* at its head.

In this way, the Crown created two separate political units, the *Estado do Maranhão*, to the north and the *Estado do Brasil*, to the south. This administrative division was then preserved in Brazil well into the eighteenth century (1770).⁶⁴

(Written in English by the author)

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⁶⁴ Rafael CHAMBOULEYRON, “Conquista y colonización de la Amazonia portuguesa (siglo XVII)”, in: José Manuel Santos Pérez – Pere Petit, *La amazonia brasileña en perspectiva histórica*, Salamanca 2006, p. 12

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Brief information about the author

E-mail: smoretape@upsa.es

Sergio Moreta Pedraz holds a PhD in History from the Universidad de Salamanca (USAL, Spain). He is member of the research group: “BRASILHIS: Historia de Brasil y el Mundo Hispánico en Perspectiva Comparada”. He has been a visiting researcher at the CHAM-Centro de Humanidades of the Universidade Nova de Lisboa (Portugal) and at the Universidade Federal de São Paulo (UNIFESP, Brazil). He is currently working on political and social History, specifically on power, politics and institutions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He is currently a professor at the Pontifical University of Salamanca (UPSA).