

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-36837-7 - Brazil Empire and Republic 1822-1930

Edited by Leslie Bethell

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Introduction

FROM COLONY TO EMPIRE

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THE INDEPENDENCE OF BRAZIL

Portugal at the end of the eighteenth century was a small, economically backward, culturally isolated country on the edge of western Europe, with limited natural resources and only modest military and naval strength, but, at least on the face of it, with one great asset: a world-wide empire stretching across three continents which included the vast and potentially rich colony of Brazil. Portugal's overseas territories in Asia, Africa and America, and above all Brazil, were an important source of crown revenue; income over and above what was necessary to administer and maintain the empire was drawn from taxes on production, consumption and internal trade, from crown monopolies, from voluntary donations (some more voluntary than others) and from duties on imports and exports. Portugal maintained as far as possible a monopoly of trade within its empire and, as well as being the hubs of the trade in Portuguese goods, Lisbon and Oporto were the entrepôts for non-Portuguese goods exported to the colonies and colonial produce imported and re-exported to the rest of Europe. Brazilian re-exports in particular – in the late eighteenth century primarily sugar and cotton – were essential for Portugal's balance of trade. England was Portugal's principal trading partner, supplying Portugal and, indirectly, Brazil with manufactured goods (mainly textiles) in return for wine, olive oil and Brazilian cotton. (During the first three-quarters of the eighteenth century Brazilian gold had also been a major item in Anglo-Portuguese trade, legal and illegal.) Under treaties going back to the end of the fourteenth century England was also the guarantor of Portugal's independence and the territorial integrity of the Portuguese empire.

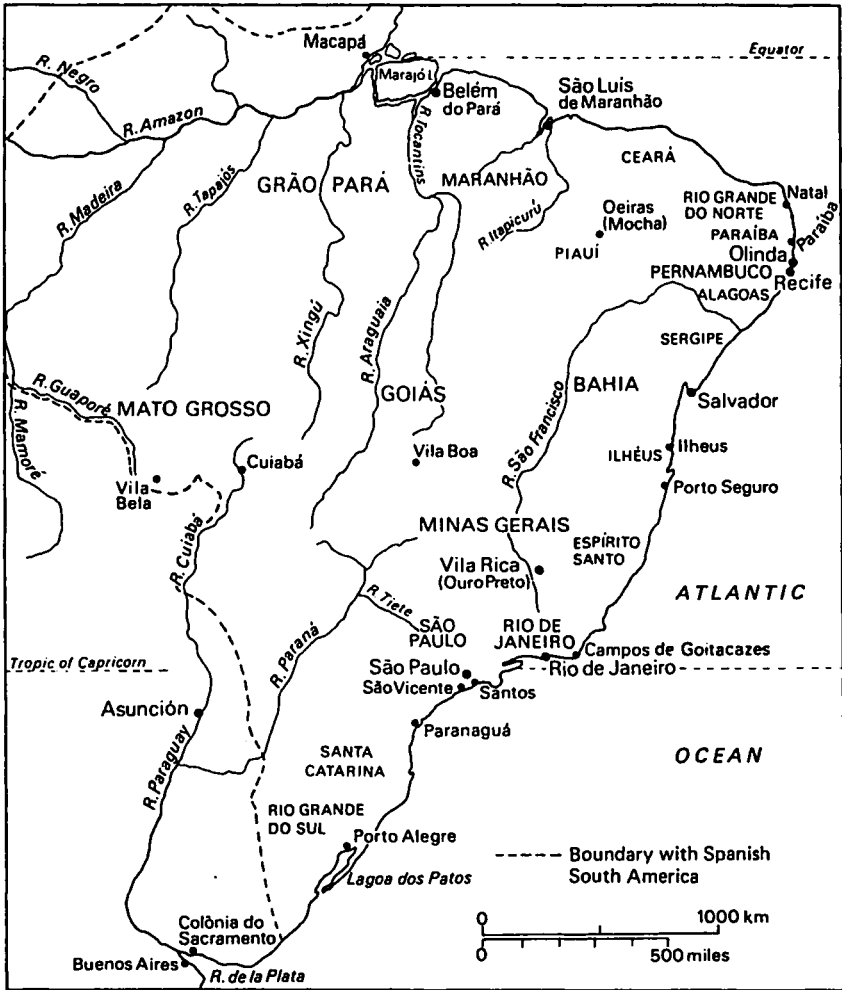
During the second half of the eighteenth century, that is to say, during the reigns of José I (1750–77), Maria I (1777–92) and from 1792, when Dona Maria was declared mentally incapable, the Prince Regent João,

the future João VI, Portugal, like Spain under the late Bourbons, had taken stock of itself and its empire. Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo, the Marquês de Pombal, who was in effect prime minister, virtually dictator, throughout the reign of Dom José I, and his successors, notably Martinho de Melo e Castro, Secretary of State for the Navy and Overseas Territories (1770–95), and Rodrigo de Sousa Coutinho, later Conde de Linhares, Secretary of State for the Navy and Overseas Territories (1796–1801) and President of the Royal Treasury (1801–3), were influenced by the ‘enlightened’ ideas of the time as well as by political and economic realities. They initiated and implemented a series of administrative and economic measures aimed at overcoming Portugal’s economic and cultural backwardness and lessening her economic and political dependence on England. Portuguese agriculture was to be modernized; manufacturing, especially the textile industry, developed; education improved; colonial trade expanded; a greater proportion of the profits of empire retained; the balance of trade deficit reduced; and, above all, in a period of rising government expenditure, especially on defence, both in Portugal and in the empire, state revenues increased.

As far as Brazil was concerned this meant in the first place a tightening up, and to some extent a centralization, of administration. The Estado do Grão Pará e Maranhão, a separate state since 1621, was integrated into an enlarged Estado do Brasil in 1774 under a single viceroy (whose seat had been transferred in 1763 from Salvador to Rio de Janeiro). In practice, however, the viceroy had only limited powers outside the captaincy-general of Rio de Janeiro and its subordinate captaincies of Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul. The governors-general and governors of the eight other captaincies-general – Grão Pará (which included the subordinate captaincy of Rio Negro), Maranhão (including Piauí), Pernambuco (including Ceará, Rio Grande do Norte and Paraíba) Bahia (including Sergipe and Espírito Santo), Minas Gerais, São Paulo, Mato Grosso, and Goiás – were for the most part directly responsible to Lisbon. The authority of the district (*comarca*) and county (*município*) crown judges (*ouvidores* and *juizes de fora*), who had administrative as well as judicial duties, was strengthened at the expense, for example, of the elected *senados da câmara* (town councils). And methods of tax collection in particular were improved. But there was nothing like the intendency system introduced into Spanish America. Secondly, strictly within the framework of the mercantilist monopoly, colonial trade was somewhat liberalized. The *frota* (fleet) system between Portugal, Bahia and Rio de

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Map 1 Colonial Brazil, c. 1800

Janeiro was ended in 1766; the privileged companies created to trade with Grão Pará and Maranhão and with Pernambuco and Paraíba in 1755 and 1759 (and replacing the fleets to São Luís and Recife) were themselves wound up in 1778–9; some of the state monopolies were abolished. Thirdly, great efforts were made to stimulate production for export, which it was hoped would at the same time widen the market for Portuguese manufactures. (The restrictions on local manufacturing, particularly textiles, were considerably reinforced in, for example, 1785.)

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This was a matter of some urgency since after more than a century and a half of growth and prosperity based primarily on plantation agriculture and, during the first half of the eighteenth century, gold and diamond mining, the third quarter of the eighteenth century was for Brazil a period of prolonged economic crisis. The North-East (Pernambuco and Bahia) had lost its virtual monopoly of world sugar production in the middle of the seventeenth century and, though sugar remained Brazil's major cash crop, exports had stagnated somewhat since the 1680s. The production and export of gold and diamonds from Minas Gerais, Goiás and Mato Grosso declined steeply after 1755.

Pombal and his successors failed to regenerate the mining industry of the interior, but by the 1780s, partly as a result of their efforts, coastal Brazil was beginning to experience an agricultural renaissance.¹ This was reinforced in the late eighteenth century by the steady expansion of the market for foodstuffs, including sugar, and raw materials, especially cotton, as a result of population growth, urbanization and the beginnings of industrialization in Western Europe. The French Revolution and its consequences, not least the bloody slave uprising in the French sugar island of Saint Domingue, crippled many of Brazil's competitors and raised world prices for primary produce. Moreover, unlike Spain, which from 1796 until the crisis of 1808 was virtually cut off from its colonies, Portugal until 1807 remained neutral in the wars which followed the French Revolution and the rise of Napoleon, and trade between Portugal and its colonies was not seriously disrupted. The main sugar producing captaincies-general, Bahia and Pernambuco, recovered, albeit temporarily, something like their former prosperity. Increasing quantities of sugar were also exported from the captaincy-general of Rio de Janeiro, where Campos de Goitacazes and the rural hinterland of the capital itself were the centres of production (exports of sugar from Rio doubled between 1790 and 1807), and from São Paulo. Cotton, which was primarily produced in the North (Maranhão and Ceará) and in Pernambuco but now also in Rio de Janeiro, strengthened its position as Brazil's second major export crop. Bahia continued to export tobacco as well as sugar. And in different parts of Brazil new exports emerged; for example, cacao in Pará, rice in Maranhão, Pará and Rio de Janeiro, wheat in Rio Grande do Sul. At the end of the 1790s significant quantities of coffee were for the first time exported from Rio de Janeiro. (Coffee

¹ For a discussion of the Brazilian economy in the second half of the eighteenth century, and especially the 'agricultural renaissance', see Dauril Alden, *CHLA* II, ch. 15.

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exports from Rio were to increase sevenfold between 1798 and 1807, signalling the modest beginning of the Brazilian economy's coffee cycle which was to last for more than a century.)

The growth of Brazil's agricultural exports in volume and in value during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, and most dramatically from the mid-1790s, was the biggest single factor behind Portugal's apparent prosperity in the early years of the nineteenth century. J. B. von Spix and C. F. P. von Martius, the German naturalists, described Lisbon as a scene of 'activity and opulence'; it was 'after London . . . the first commercial place in the world'.² Portugal's trade with the rest of the world was in surplus in all but two years during the period 1791-1807 and, even more remarkably, with England alone from 1798. Brazilian produce, mainly sugar and cotton, accounted for 80 per cent of the imports from Portugal's colonies and 60 per cent of Portugal's exports and re-exports.³ As early as 1779 Martinho de Melo e Castro had recognized that 'without Brazil Portugal is an insignificant power'. Twenty-five years later Portugal's dependence on Brazil's resources was greater still. Brazil's economic growth 1780-1800, however, coincided with, and was partly the result of, the Industrial Revolution in Britain and, especially, the unprecedented growth of the British textile and iron and steel industries. The expanding Brazilian market was supplied not with Portuguese but with British manufactures, either as before through the British factory, the community of British merchants in Lisbon, or else on an increasing scale directly smuggled through Brazilian ports, especially Rio de Janeiro, despite all Portugal's efforts, supported by the British merchants resident in Portugal, to prevent unauthorized ships trading with Brazil. From the 1790s Portugal, an underdeveloped dependent metropolis, had an adverse balance of trade with its most important overseas territory. It might be added here that demographic as well as economic forces were also moving against Portugal. At the end of the eighteenth century the population of Brazil (not counting the Indians outside Portuguese control) was more than two million, albeit only 30 per cent white, and growing faster than that of Portugal. Some estimates put it as high as 3-3½ million which was in fact the population of Portugal at the time. Clearly the population of Brazil would soon surpass, if it had

² Quoted in Kenneth R. Maxwell, *Conflicts and conspiracies. Brazil and Portugal 1750-1808* (Cambridge, 1973), 234.

³ For a discussion of Portugal's (and Brazil's) trade in the late eighteenth century, see André Mansuy-Diniz Silva, *CHLA I*, ch. 13, Dauril Alden, *CHLA*, II ch. 15, and Fernando A. Novais, *Portugal e Brasil na crise do antigo sistema colonial (1777-1808)* (São Paulo, 1979).

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not already surpassed, that of Portugal. 'So heavy a branch', wrote Robert Southey in his *Journal of a Residence in Portugal 1800-1*, 'cannot long remain upon so rotten a trunk.'⁴

Some historians have argued that the roots of Brazilian national self-consciousness are to be found in the middle of the seventeenth century in the victory in 1654 over the Dutch, who occupied the North-East for a quarter of a century, or even before, in the exploration of the interior of Brazil by the *bandeirantes* of São Paulo and the early conflicts with Spain in the Río de la Plata. It was, however, during the second half of the eighteenth century that there emerged in Brazil, as in the English and Spanish colonies in the New World, a more acute and more generalized sense of their separate identity among some sectors of the white, American-born colonial oligarchy, which in Brazil consisted primarily of *senhores de engenho* (sugar planters and millowners), cattle barons and other *poderosos da terra*, and, to a lesser extent, mine-owners, merchants, judges and bureaucrats. A minority, though a sizeable minority, of Brazilians now travelled to Europe and were influenced, however indirectly, by the new intellectual climate they encountered there; more Brazilians were educated at Coimbra and other European universities like Montpellier, Edinburgh and Paris; despite the efforts of the Board of Censorship in Lisbon more books were imported into Brazil from Europe (and from North America) and found their way to private libraries; some may even have been read. As a result of the economic, demographic – and intellectual – growth of Brazil in the late eighteenth century voices could be heard for the first time on a significant scale criticizing, first, the mercantilist system and the restrictions it imposed on colonial trade and therefore on agricultural production, secondly, excessive taxation and, thirdly, the limited availability and high price of imported manufactured goods. And the demand for liberalization beyond the limited measures implemented by Pombal and his successors was not confined to the economic sphere. A few liberals – mostly intellectuals, lawyers, bureaucrats and priests, but some landowners and merchants – were prepared to challenge Portuguese absolutism and demand at least a greater degree of political autonomy and Brazilian participation in government.

There was thus in Brazil a growing awareness of conflicts of interest, economic and political, real and potential, with the metropolis, and at the

⁴ Robert Southey, *Journal of a residence in Portugal 1800-1 and a visit to France 1839*, ed. Adolfo Cabral (Oxford, 1960), 137-9.

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same time not only of Portugal's relative economic backwardness *vis-à-vis* its most important colony but also its political and military weakness. The Portuguese crown had a monopoly of political legitimacy and had an important bureaucratic function; it provided, above all, political and social stability. It had, however, little military power. As late as 1800 there were in Brazil only around 2,000 regular troops, *tropas da linha* or *tropa paga*, compared with more than 6,000 in New Spain, for example. Moreover, many of the officers were Brazilian-born, from prominent colonial landed or military families, and the rank and file were mostly recruited in the colony. No wholly European units were stationed in Rio until the 1760s and there were none in Bahia until 1818. Officers in the *milícia*, the reserve army in case of external attack or slave uprising, were mostly landowners and the rank and file theoretically were all the free men in a particular geographic area, except in the major towns where the organization of the militia was based on colour and occupation. The third line *corpos de ordenanças* (territorial units) responsible for internal order and recruitment for the regular army were also dominated by the Brazilian landed class.

Discontent with the economic and political control exercised from Lisbon and hostility between native-born Brazilians and the Portuguese in Brazil, who monopolized so many of the higher offices of state and who dominated the Atlantic trade, was undoubtedly becoming both more extensive and more intensive in the late eighteenth century. But it should not be exaggerated. Brazilians had much closer ties with the metropolis, and much less cause for dissatisfaction, than had the creoles in Spain's American colonies and for many different reasons.

In the first place, the Brazilian oligarchy was for the most part less firmly rooted; Portuguese settlement of Brazil had been a slow, gradual process (the population of the settled areas as late as 1700 was less than half a million) and although there were, of course, particularly in Bahia and Pernambuco, landed families which could trace their origins back to the *donatários* of the sixteenth century, many prominent Brazilian landowners were only first generation Brazilians (or even Portuguese-born but already identifying with Brazil). Secondly, Portuguese colonial rule was by no means as oppressive or as exclusive as Spanish rule; Portugal was a weaker power with more limited financial, military – and human – resources; the Brazilian-born were to be found throughout the middle and lower ranks of the bureaucracy and they even penetrated the ranks of the crown magistrates and governors, not only in Brazil but in other

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parts of the Portuguese empire such as Goa and Angola and held senior administrative posts in Portugal itself. Much more than Spain, Portugal governed through the local dominant class which was directly involved in at least the implementation if not the formation of policy; entrenched colonial interests were rarely challenged. Thirdly, the family and personal ties which existed between members of the Brazilian and Portuguese elites were sustained and reinforced by their common intellectual formation – predominantly at the university of Coimbra. Unlike Spanish America, Brazil itself had no universities – nor even a printing press – in the colonial period. Fourthly, unlike colonial Spanish America (except Cuba) where native American Indians formed the bulk of the labour force, Brazil was a slave society. Slaves constituted a third or more of the total population and were a characteristic feature of both rural and urban society throughout Brazil. A further 30 per cent of the population was free mulatto or free black. In areas given over to single-crop, export oriented, plantation agriculture like the Mata of Pernambuco, the Recôncavo of Bahia, the coastal region of Maranhão and, increasingly towards the end of the eighteenth century, parts of Rio de Janeiro slaves probably formed the majority of the population. The white minority lived with the fear of social and racial upheaval and was prepared to compromise with the metropolis and accept colonial rule in the interests of social control. Fifthly, the economy of Brazil in the late eighteenth century was, as we have seen, overwhelmingly agricultural and pastoral and, moreover, export oriented. Unlike most Spanish American *hacendados*, *senhores de engenho* and other plantation owners in Brazil had close links with metropolitan merchants, the Atlantic trade and through the metropolitan entrepôts, Lisbon and Oporto, European markets. And the export economy based on agriculture was growing during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, booming even in the 1790s. The planter class was at the same time dependent on the transatlantic slave trade, a predominantly Portuguese enterprise, for their labour supply. And the producers of meat, cereals, hides, oxen and mules in the *sertão* of the North East or in Rio Grande do Sul were in turn heavily dependent on the plantation sector. Compared with colonial Spanish America the domestic economy and internal trade were modest in scale. And Brazil had few, and small, cities; in 1800 only Rio de Janeiro and Salvador had populations of 50,000. Sixthly, Portugal's commercial monopoly was less jealously guarded than Spain's; British manufactures made up the bulk of Portuguese exports to Brazil through Lisbon and, on an increasing scale, directly as well.

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Finally, Portugal's reappraisal of its political and economic relations with its colonies and the imperial reorganization which occurred in the second half of the eighteenth century was less far-reaching than Spain's and amounted to less of a direct threat to the colonial status quo and the interests of the colonial elite. On the contrary, many Brazilians profited from the 'agricultural renaissance', the confiscation of Jesuit properties after the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1759 and the expansion of trade, and the growth of the bureaucracy – and the militia – opened up new opportunities for participation in public affairs. The fact is that although Portugal and Brazil did not entirely avoid the 'Democratic Revolution' and the 'crisis of the old colonial system' in the Atlantic world in the second half of the eighteenth century there were only two significant conspiracies (they hardly had time to develop into rebellions) against Portuguese rule in Brazil – the first in Minas Gerais in 1788–9 and the second in Bahia in 1798. (Two other conspiracies – in Rio de Janeiro (1794) and in Pernambuco (1801) – were stifled at birth.)

The *Inconfidência mineira* was by far the most serious of the anti-Portuguese movements of the late eighteenth century. Minas Gerais in the 1780s was one of Brazil's most important and populous captaincies, but one which was undergoing a serious recession as it adjusted to the decline of the mining industry since the mid-1750s and the transition to a mixed agricultural and pastoral economy. It was also a captaincy with a rich intellectual and cultural life. Some of the wealthiest and most influential men in the region – crown judges, *fazendeiros*, merchants, tax farmers, lawyers, priests, regular army officers – were involved in the conspiracy. Most were Brazilian-born, a few were Portuguese. The ideological justification for rebellion was provided by a brilliant generation of intellectuals and poets, many of whom had studied at Coimbra and in France. (An unusually high proportion of the Brazilians educated at Coimbra in the 1770s and 1780s were *mineiros*.) It began as a protest against increasingly oppressive, and clumsily imposed, taxation, especially the collection of arrears in the payment of the royal fifth on gold, the *derrama* (head tax), and a more efficient and less corrupt system of tax collection, but it soon became anti-colonial in character, aiming to end Portuguese rule in Minas Gerais – and Brazil. Its leaders, inspired by the American Revolution, dreamed of a 'republic as free and as prosperous as English America'. The conspiracy, however, failed; it was discovered and the principal conspirators were arrested, tried, banished and, in the case of Joaquim José da Silva Xavier (known as 'Tiradentes', the Toothpuller), hanged. And it is important to remember that the