

The Gold Question in Goiás under the Government of D. Marcos de Noronha (1749–1755): the Royal Fifths, the Foundry Houses, and Gold Quotas

A questão aurífera em Goiás sob o governo de D. Marcos de Noronha (1749-1755): os Quintos Reais, as casas de fundição e as cotas sobre o ouro

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Abstract

Following the gold discoveries in the Goiás region in the first quarter of the 18th century, it was promoted to the status of a captaincy, with D. Marcos de Noronha as its first governor, in office between 1749 and 1755. The purpose of this article was, in essence, to contribute to the clarification of a problem faced by the governor of that extensive territory: mining and the most effective ways to prevent the smuggling of gold in the collection of the royal fifths, namely through the creation of foundries and the attempt to establish a fixed quota in gold to be paid by the populations of the captaincy. The intention was to understand how D. Marcos de Noronha acted in this matter and to ascertain that the governors and institutions present in the overseas territories [Brazil] functioned as a space for negotiating royal interests and those of local groups.

Keywords: Captaincy of Goiás; D. Marcos de Noronha; Colonial government; Royal Fifth Tax; Gold Quotas.

Resumo

Na sequência das descobertas auríferas na região de Goiás, no 1.º quartel do século XVIII, a mesma foi promovida à condição de capitania, tendo como 1.º governador D. Marcos de Noronha, no cargo entre 1749 e 1755. O propósito deste artigo foi, na sua essência, contribuir para o esclarecimento de um problema com que se deparou o governador daquele extenso território, o da mineração e das formas mais eficazes de evitar os descaminhos do ouro na

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cobrança dos quintos reais, nomeadamente através da criação das casas de fundição e da tentativa de estabelecimento de uma cota fixa em ouro a pagar pelas populações da capitania. A intenção foi perceber a forma como D. Marcos de Noronha atuou nessa matéria e constatar que os governadores e as instituições presentes no ultramar [Brasil] funcionavam como um espaço de negociação dos interesses régios e dos grupos locais.

Palavras-chave: Capitania de Goiás; D. Marcos de Noronha; Governo colonial; Imposto do Quinto; Cotas do Ouro.

Introduction

In the late seventeenth century, after many persistent searches, the Portuguese Crown received news of the discovery of significant gold deposits in the Brazilian hinterlands, more precisely in Minas Gerais, a situation that was repeated in Mato Grosso and Goiás.

This important discovery brought about far-reaching changes in the physiognomy of colonial Brazil, as a vast portion of Brazilian territory, until then inhabited by Indigenous peoples, came to be occupied by a variety of settlements founded by white colonists. The Portuguese Crown benefited from the substantial revenues generated by the discovery of the mines, in the form of the Royal Fifths, as well as from a considerably expanded territorial domain. New captaincies emerged (Minas Gerais, Goiás, and Mato Grosso), commercial links were established between the coast and the interior, and an economic integration took place, as highlighted by Isnara Pereira Ivo when she states that, through this process, “[...] the movements of the Atlantic waters became connected to the hinterland territories”¹.

This article seeks to contribute new insights into a matter of particular relevance to the Portuguese monarchy in the mining regions in general and in the captaincy of the”² in particular, during the governorship of D. Marcos de Noronha, who held office from 1749 to 1755: the implementation

¹ IVO, Isnara Pereira, *Homens de caminho: trânsitos, comércio e cores nos sertões da América Portuguesa – século XVIII*, Doctoral dissertation, UFMG, Belo Horizonte, 2009, p. 119.

² This is an expression that frequently appears in official documents, particularly before the region was elevated to the status of a captaincy. As stated in the introduction to the book *Novas trajetórias e compartilhamentos sobre a história de Goiás*, MORAES, Cristina, SOUZA, Rildo, RIBEIRO, Danilo (ORG.), Cegrat, UFG, Goiânia, 2023, p. 8, “Born amid the turbulence of the gold discoveries, the captaincy of the Guayazes maintained, during its early years of existence, a culture inspired by the ephemeral nature of life, by the being and feeling of people eager to pursue the ‘dream of El Dorado’ in the Serra Dourada. Wealth and poverty, dream and reality in an inhospitable and cruel region. Until the first decades of the nineteenth century, mining, the principal economic and mental activity, awakened in men the dream of becoming rich overnight. And from one day to the next, dreams, fortunes, and probity were lost.”.

of mechanisms aimed at minimizing the illicit diversion of gold, such as the reestablishment of the Fifth tax, the creation of foundry houses, and the need (from the Crown's perspective) to establish a fixed quota in gold to be paid by the inhabitants of the captaincy, particularly the miners. It also seeks to understand the role played by D. Marcos de Noronha specifically in this matter.

The creation of the captaincy of Goiás and the arrival of Governor Marcos de Noronha

As already stated, the discovery of precious metals and the progressive occupation of the Brazilian hinterlands substantially changed the character of colonial Brazil. Thus, significant administrative adjustments in the mining regions were inevitable. Accordingly, in 1709 the Metropolis ordered the separation of the captaincies of São Paulo and Minas Gerais, and in 1748 it was Goiás's turn to be separated from the captaincy of São Paulo, becoming an autonomous captaincy. Many scholars identify 1744 as the year in which the captaincy of Goiás was created; however, it was only by decree of 26 July 1748 that D. João V appointed D. Marcos de Noronha governor and captain-general of Goiás³. According to Alencastre, this delay was understandable, since it was necessary "... to entrust the office of governor to a suitable person who would safeguard one of the most precious jewels of the Portuguese Crown"⁴.

The creation of the new captaincy was more than justified, since Goiás was too far from São Paulo, and its governor was increasingly unable to administer efficiently such a remote region, which was grappling with a variety of problems whose resolution required swift and effective decisions. The geographical dispersion of the mining lands of the "goiazes," divided between two intendancies (Goiás and Tocantins), itself called for this administrative solution.

Disagreements between the governor of São Paulo and some of the authorities in Goiás were also common, particularly with the superintendent-general of the Mines of Goiás and the ombudsman-general of those Mines. The latter, for example, stated that when the governor of São Paulo was in

³ "Decree of D. João V appointing D. Marcos de Noronha Governor and Captain-General of Goiás," Lisbon, 26 July 1748. AHU, CU, Goiás, Cx. 5, Doc. 374.

⁴ ALENCASTRE, José de, *Anais da Província de Goiás*, Goiás, 1979 edition, p. 85.

Goiás (1742), he acted arbitrarily and imprudently toward several local figures, creating an atmosphere of unease and widespread discontent⁵.

To what extent did this and other disagreements lead to the creation of a new captaincy in Goiás? In our view, its establishment as a separate administrative unit was essentially due to the geographical dispersion and territorial extent of the Goiás region and, consequently, to its enormous distance from the seat of the captaincy, with the resulting consequences in terms of governability. Indeed,

[...] from the captaincy of S. Paulo were separated the two captaincies of Mato Grosso and Goiazes [...], His Majesty having taken into consideration the need to divide the captaincy-general [...], since its vast extent did not allow the necessary measures to be taken in a timely manner in the extremely remote districts it encompassed, the governor residing at a great distance from them, His Majesty was pleased to establish two governments and captaincies-general⁶.

The monarch's choice to govern the captaincy of Goiás fell, as already mentioned, upon D. Marcos de Noronha, by virtue of the "[...] qualities, merits, and services [...]" he had already rendered on behalf of the Nation.⁷ D. Marcos de Noronha e Brito, 6th Count of Arcos, belonged to the Portuguese high nobility. Indeed, as Nuno Monteiro observed, governors in colonial Brazil, including those of Goiás, were generally chosen from among members of the "[...] highest nobility," since "[...] illustrious birth was regarded as a relevant requirement (sometimes the principal one) for the people to acknowledge the authority of the governors"⁸. Roberta Stumpf adds that, since governors were noble by birth, they bore greater responsibilities to live up to the trust placed

⁵ In this regard, he stated the following: "The Municipal Councils and the people, out of justifiable fear, do not approach the august presence of Your Majesty to seek redress, because of the imminent indignation. For four years, since the governor's departure, I have preserved these same people, seeking gentle means to ensure their stability, easing enforcement proceedings and encouraging creditors to grant extensions." Letter from the Ombudsman-General of the Mines of Goiás to the King, Vila Boa de Goiás, 27 April 1746, AHU, CU, Goiás, Cx. 4, Doc. 310.

⁶ ANTT, Lisbon, *Papéis do Brasil*, codex 10, fol. 11/v

⁷ "Decree of D. João V," Lisbon, 26 July 1748, AHU, CU, Goiás, Cx. 5, Doc. 374.

⁸ MONTEIRO, Nuno Gonçalo F., "Brazil at the Eighteenth-Century Portuguese Court," in *Brasil-brasis: cousas notáveis e espantosas (A construção do Brasil: 1500-1825)*..., p. 53. According to the same author, for the smaller or subordinate captaincies, as was the case with Santa Catarina, the recruitment of governors was less socially selective, drawing on second-tier nobility.

in them by the Crown. At the same time, "... the importance of the offices granted also increased the consequences of misconduct by their holders"⁹.

In addition to this [noble] status, other characteristics essential to the exercise of the office of governor were courage, prudence, and military training¹⁰.

It should also be emphasized that there was a reciprocal relationship between the king and the governors chosen to administer the different parts of the Empire. While the monarch sought to reward previously rendered services by granting the office of governor, in return, "the vassals embarked on journeys overseas in order to serve the king there, in the Portuguese dominions, and seek to expand their record of services"¹¹.

The first governor of Goiás also had administrative experience in colonial Brazil, as he had held the same office in the captaincy of Pernambuco and was certainly chosen on the basis of this accumulated experience, although he would encounter a very different reality in the captaincy of Goiás.

Augusto da Silva observed that governors circulated extensively among the different territories of the Empire and that "it was customary for the Portuguese monarchy, after they had completed their terms in one establishment, to reassign them to another, combining policies for the granting of royal favors and the ennoblement of individuals with the specific needs of each territory"¹².

Thus, once the person responsible for the new captaincy of Goiás had been chosen, it was necessary to bring him to his destination. From the outset, the governor faced one of the problems that permeated the entire history of Goiás until the end of the nineteenth century: its inland location, the distances to be traveled (hundreds of leagues), the geographical barriers, and the vast hinterlands to be traversed, what someone termed the "tyranny of distance"¹³. As he was in Pernambuco (also serving as governor), there were

⁹ STUMPF, Roberta, "The Ideal of Good Government and the Instruments of Control over Portuguese Officeholders, Goiás, Second Half of the Eighteenth Century." In *As distâncias no governo dos impérios ibéricos. Concepções, experiências e vínculos*, Madrid, Coleção da Casa de Velázquez (190), 2022, p. 169.

¹⁰ BELLOTO, Heloísa Liberalli, *O Império Luso-Brasileiro (1750-1822)*, Coord. SILVA, Maria Beatriz Nizza da, vol. VIII, Editorial Estampa, 1st edition, 1986, p. 277.

¹¹ PEREIRA, Alan Ricardo Duarte, *O Império de papel: no labirinto das discórdias, denúncias, cartas e representações contra os governadores da Capitania de Goiás c. 1749-c. 1804*, Doctoral dissertation, UFG, Goiânia, 2020, p. 27.

¹² SILVA, Augusto da, *A Ilha de Santa Catarina e Sua Terra Firme, Estudo sobre o governo de uma capitania subalterna (1738-1807)*, São Paulo, 2008, p. 119.

¹³ The expression is used by LEMES, Fernando Lobo, in an interesting article, "Colonial Government,

several possible routes to Goiás, but all were fraught with difficulties and obstacles. Whichever port city he chose as his point of departure (Pernambuco, Bahia, Rio de Janeiro, or Santos), reaching Goiás entailed a lengthy journey, a long and arduous route through “[...] almost uninhabited hinterlands, with countless hardships posed by Indigenous peoples, dense forests, great rivers, and waterless deserts”¹⁴. D. Marcos de Noronha ultimately chose the route between Rio de Janeiro and Goiás but requested from the monarch an allowance “[...] commensurate ... with the distance and hardships of such a long journey”¹⁵.

Thus, any governor chosen to administer the captaincy of Goiás faced this unavoidable obstacle and source of concern: undertaking a lengthy and truly exhausting journey. D. Marcos de Noronha traveled to Rio de Janeiro on 4 March 1749 but did not depart from there for Goiás until 18 August. He also met with Gomes Freire de Andrade¹⁶ at the Arraial de Santa Rita, arriving in Vila Boa on 6 November, almost three months later. He took office on 8 November, at the local Municipal Council: “On the eighth day of the month of November 1749, in this Vila Boa de Goiás, in the council chambers of the said town and in the presence of its people, the royal patent by which His Majesty appoints and names His Excellency D. Marcos de Noronha governor and captain-general of these mines was read”¹⁷.

Even before he reached his destination, King D. João V conveyed to him some pertinent information so that D. Marcos de Noronha could familiarize himself with the reality he would encounter in the new “Country” and with the delicate problems that awaited him, such as the Indigenous question and mining.

According to José de Alencastre, the first governor of Goiás would encounter a variety of problems, in a situation that he described in the following terms:

Distance, and Waiting in the Mines and Captaincy of Goiás,” *Topoi*, vol. 13, no. 25, July/Dec. 2012, pp. 112–129.

¹⁴ ““Consultation of the Overseas Council to King D. João V,” Lisbon, 8 August 1748, AHU, CU, Goiás, Cx. 5, Doc. 377.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ Gomes Freire de Andrade was the governor of Rio de Janeiro who temporarily assumed the administration of the captaincies of Goiás and Mato Grosso when they were created (Fundo Condes dos Arcos, Archive of the University of Coimbra, *Livros das Ordens Reais*, 1651–1754, VI-III-1-1-22).

¹⁷ Written by Ângelo dos Santos Cardoso, secretary of the government, and cited by José Alencastre, *op. cit.*, pp. 87–88.

The settlements, located at great distances from one another and therefore difficult to police; the customary struggle of the people against the authorities, whose actions were generally open to criticism and who were scarcely scrupulous; the frequent illicit diversion of gold, despite the many penal provisions imposed against those responsible for such diversion; the abuses committed by contractors and tithe collectors; the corruption of morals carried to the utmost extreme, made even more reprehensible by the example set by the clergy, the most depraved, licentious, and dissolute ever seen¹⁸.

The reestablishment of the Fifth tax and the creation of the foundry houses

In a captaincy that had developed around mining, it was natural that the foremost concern of the Portuguese monarchy was to find the most effective means of collecting the “Royal Fifths” and preventing or minimizing tax evasion and smuggling, practices referred to in contemporary documents as the “illicit diversion of gold”¹⁹.

Governor D. Marcos de Noronha, as the monarch’s direct representative, was charged with addressing this concern (among others). It should be emphasized that governors were the principal link between the Kingdom and their respective captaincies and sought to implement, in the manner they deemed most appropriate, the directives issued by the Court, which they were entrusted with carrying out, while taking into account the specific circumstances of each captaincy²⁰.

Although Raymundo Faoro argued for the existence of a vertical structure in the administration of colonial Brazil (king, governor-general/viceroy, governors of the captaincies, and municipal authorities), he himself acknowledged the weaknesses of this hierarchy, noting that all could

¹⁸ ALENCASTRE, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

¹⁹ According to Paulo Cavalcante, the illicit diversion of gold presupposed the existence of a legitimate path: that of the Royal Treasury. “Therefore, the act of diversion consisted in withholding or diverting the expected flow of royal revenues, particularly the Fifths.” And even when the gold reached the foundry house, this did not mean that it was free from new forms of diversion. CAVALCANTE, Paulo, *Negócios de Trapaça, Caminhos e Descaminhos na América portuguesa (1700-1750)*, São Paulo, Editora Hucitec, 2006, p. 36.

²⁰ Cf. SILVA, Augusto da, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

address the king and his ministers directly, “bypassing intermediate levels of command”²¹.

In theoretical terms, the governor of Goiás, like the governor of any other captaincy, was formally subordinate to the viceroy of Brazil (based in Bahia)²². In practice, the governors of the captaincies interacted directly with the Crown, reporting on their activities essentially in three areas: “1. Letters on the Political State and matters pertaining thereto; 2. Letters on the Military State; 3. Letters on the State of the Finances, the Royal Revenues, and everything pertaining thereto”²³.

In turn, they were granted broad autonomy in managing the responsibilities entrusted to them by the Crown, thereby aligning themselves more closely with the interests of the population. Thus, in the instructions given by the king to the Count of São Miguel as he prepared to assume office as the second governor of Goiás, the following was stated:

There can be no single fixed rule of government, nor any fixed plan according to which you may be instructed, and circumstances themselves and the variety of events will show you what you should do, adhering as far as possible to the orders you find in the government secretariat, and reporting whatever new developments may occur and whatever you deem conducive to my service [...] You shall be guided by your prudence, having as your foremost objectives the service of God and the public good of my vassals²⁴.

²¹ Cf. ABRIL, Victor Hugo, “The Formation of Government in Colonial Brazil: Regulations, Instructions, and Commissions of Governors in Rio de Janeiro (Eighteenth Century),” XXVII National Symposium on History, *Historical Knowledge and Social Dialogue*. ANPUH, Natal, 22–26 July 2013.

²² For example, in 1723, D. João V informed the governor of the captaincy of São Paulo, D. Rodrigo César Meneses: “You must report on the state of that government to the Viceroy and Captain-General of this entire State of Brazil, even when there is nothing new, for even this you must bring to his attention, since it is appropriate that the governor-general be fully informed of all matters, and you must also carry out the orders that he sends you.” Fundo Conde dos Arcos, *Archive of the University of Coimbra, Livros das Ordens Reais*, 1651–1754, VI-III-1-1-22, Provisões e Ordens Reais que se observam no governo de Goyaz, Doc. 10, Lisbon, 16 January 1723.

²³ BELLOTTI, Heloísa Liberalli, *ibidem*, p. 279.

²⁴ Fundo Conde dos Arcos, *Archive of the University of Coimbra, Livros das Ordens Reais*, 1651–1754, VI-III-1-1-22, Lisbon, 2 August 1754, Doc. 162, fol. 502. The monarch acknowledged the need to give priority to the well-being of the populations [vassals] living in the Brazilian colony. Vassal is part of medieval terminology (feudal-vassal relations) and carried over into the *Ancien Régime*, although in a more general context. The term more commonly used in the *Ancien Régime* is *subjects*.

Thus, contrary to the arguments advanced by traditional historiography, governors did not function merely as transmitters of the political and economic directives of the Metropolis, which they would implement in a more or less inflexible manner. They acted as intermediaries between the Portuguese Crown and local groups, seeking to strike a balance between local and royal interests, which were often antagonistic: “The truly decisive contribution [of the new historiography] was the recognition that the governors and the institutions operating overseas [Brazil] functioned as a locus where royal interests and those of local groups converged”²⁵.

Turning first to the issue of taxation on gold, by royal charter of 3 December 1750, the newly enthroned monarch D. José ordered the abolition of the capitation tax, which had been in force since 1734, the reinstatement of the Fifth tax and, at the same time, the establishment of gold foundry houses in every district seat of the mining regions²⁶. This measure sought to facilitate the transportation of gold, reduce the distances traveled between the mines and their respective foundry houses and, consequently, minimize opportunities for tax evasion. At the foundry houses, the raw metal was converted into gold bars, which were stamped with marks identifying the respective locations or foundry houses. Once the Fifth had been deducted, these bars were returned to their respective owners, accompanied by certificates guaranteeing that they were not counterfeit²⁷.

Still with the aim of curbing the “illicit diversion” of gold and ensuring that it was taken to the foundry houses as efficiently as possible, the monarch resorted to a mechanism/rewarding royal favor for those involved in the process: the granting of an ennobling distinction (the habit of the Order of Christ) to those who fulfilled their tax obligations, that is,

[...] to all persons who, within the space of one year, deliver to any Foundry House eight arrobas of Gold, or more, without

²⁵ PEREIRA, Alan Ricardo Duarte; MORAES, Cristina de Cássia Pereira, “In the Webs of Colonial Administration: The Governors of the Captaincy of Goiás (1749–1822),” *Pol. Hist. Soc.*, Vitória da Conquista, vol. 19, no. 1, Jan.–June 2020, pp. 22–23.

²⁶ The monarch made a point of informing the governor of Goiás of the decision to “... annul, revoke, and abolish the Capitation paid to my Royal Treasury by the inhabitants of these Mines, and to enforce, reestablish, and reinstate the collection of the Fifths.” He further added: “that in the said houses [gold foundry houses], all the orders and resolutions that were observed in those that existed in these Mines before the capitation system shall be fully observed.” *Fundo Conde dos Arcos, Archive of the University of Coimbra, Livros das Ordens Reais*, 1651–1754, VI-III-1-1-22, Lisbon, 5 December 1750, Doc. 54, fol. 211v and Doc. 55, fol. 212.

²⁷ Cf. “Law Establishing a New System for the Collection of the Fifths,” 3 December 1750, in *Colecção da Legislação Portuguesa*, compiled by Judge António Delgado da Silva, Legislation of 1750–1762, pp. 21–23.

any inquiry as to whether the said Gold belonged to those who brought it to be smelted or to others; for all those who, in their own name, have the aforesaid eight arrobas smelted within a single year shall enjoy the aforementioned benefits in reward for their commendable labor and meritorious diligence²⁸.

For example, the merchant Francisco José Barreto considered himself deserving of the royal favor “in reward for his commendable labor,” specifically the work of having gold (more than eight arrobas in a single year) transported to the foundry houses under conditions considered adverse, since “he ventured to travel to that foundry house of S. Felix, more than fifty leagues from the petitioner’s residence, along remote roads beset by Indigenous peoples and across mighty rivers, incurring the considerable expense required for such a journey, in order to travel more safely with such a substantial amount of wealth”²⁹.

Although the foundry houses had their own organizational structure, in which the Intendant was the principal authority, the monarch assigned governors an important responsibility: to oversee the operation of those Houses, report to the Crown any “[...] failings, omissions, or negligence” and, moreover, they were held “[...] responsible for any irregularities occurring in the Intendancies and in the collection of the Fifths”³⁰.

The governor of Goiás fully assumed the responsibility entrusted to him and, after determining from master masons and carpenters that the construction of a gold foundry house in Goiás would cost an estimated 14,000 oitavas of gold, or 52,500 cruzados in current currency, he considered it more advantageous to the Royal Treasury to purchase several houses for that purpose, acquiring them for 6,333 oitavas of gold, a substantially lower amount. Moreover, with minor alterations, these houses could also serve as the governor’s residence, thereby avoiding the payment of rent on a house that had been costing 400,000 réis annually³¹. The governor appeared to show

²⁸ “Law Establishing a New System for the Collection of the Fifths,” *ibidem*, p. 26

²⁹ Petition of Francisco José Barreto,” 14 July 1766, AHU, CU, Goiás, Cx. 22, Doc. 1352. Cf. MENDONÇA, Luís, *Viver à lei da Nobreza. Trajetórias Sociais dos “Cavaleiros do Ouro”, numa capitania de Mineração, (Goiás entre 1750 e 1800)*, Master’s dissertation, FLUL, Lisbon, 2015, p. 72.

³⁰ “Regulations of the Intendancies and Foundry Houses of Brazil,” 4 March 1751, in *Colecção de Legislação Portuguesa...*, pp. 44–45.

³¹ “Official Letter from the Governor of Goiás to the Secretary of State for the Navy and Overseas Affairs,” Vila Boa, 17 January 1752, AHU, CU, Goiás, Cx. 7.

considerable concern with containing expenditure, given what he described as the deplorable state of the Royal Treasury in that captaincy.

Given the vast extent of Goiás and the considerable distance separating the northern mines from the seat of the captaincy, which could reach 150 leagues, the governor suggested to the Crown that one foundry house be established in Vila Boa and another in Tocantins. The aim was to spare the inhabitants of the northern mines of Goiás the burden of having to travel to Vila Boa to have their gold smelted and the Fifth levied on it, thereby subjecting themselves to long journeys along routes where danger was ever present because of the large number of “hostile Indigenous peoples”³² who inhabited those areas. To this could be added another obstacle: the mighty rivers, which during the rainy season created considerable difficulties for “travelers”³³.

After considering the matter, the monarch accepted that, in view of the arguments presented by the governor, two foundry houses could be established in Goiás, one in the seat of the captaincy and the other in the district of Tocantins, in S. Félix or Traíras. This was because the additional costs involved in establishing two foundry houses would be offset by greater convenience for the inhabitants and the presumed reduction in tax evasion, insofar as they would have fewer reasons to “defraud the Fifth”³⁴.

However, the fact was that, in 1753, the establishment of a gold foundry house in Tocantins remained little more than a distant prospect, a situation that, according to D. Marcos de Noronha, represented a major inconvenience for the inhabitants, as well as a serious loss to the Royal Treasury. He explained why:

The absence of such a house causes irreparable loss to Your Majesty's Treasury and equally serious hardship to your vassals who live in the settlements located north of that town [Vila Boa], at a distance of three hundred leagues through hinterlands infested by Indigenous peoples and crossed by a great abundance of mighty rivers [...] The inhabitants of those regions, in order to have their gold smelted, in addition to being exposed to all these

³² A term used to designate Indigenous peoples who had not yet been domesticated and civilized, particularly through their confinement in settlements and the provision of spiritual guidance, with the aim of assimilating the principles of the Catholic religion.

³³ “Official Letter from the Governor of Goiás to the Secretary of State for the Navy and Overseas Affairs,” Vila Boa, 13 April 1751. AHU, CU, Goiás, Cx. 6, Doc. 475.

³⁴ “Consultation of the Overseas Council to King D. José,” Lisbon, 17 April 1752, AHU, CU, Goiás, Cx. 7, Doc. 529.

hardships, must also bear the considerable expenses incurred both on the outward and return journeys; and, in order to avoid this burden, they may be tempted to divert the gold, encouraged by the ample opportunity for doing so afforded by that vast and expansive hinterland, where no measure can be effectively implemented to prevent such diversion³⁵.

In another petition, the inhabitants of the captaincy, particularly the merchants of the Mines of Goiás, expressed the considerable hardship involved in having to

have their gold smelted at the seat of the district, because, although the said mines are in Vila Boa, where the [Foundry] House is located, there are settlements and mining areas at distances ranging from one hundred to one hundred and eighty leagues, such as those of Carmo, Natividade, and São Felix ..., involving great risks to life, both because of Indigenous peoples and fugitives, as well as such considerable expenses that, given their limited capital, it is consumed by them³⁶.

And why this letter from the merchants of Goiás? Precisely because they, particularly the large-scale merchants³⁷, by supplying miners with a wide range of products, particularly “slaves” brought from the coast, and receiving gold dust in exchange, were in the best position to transport and deliver gold to the foundry houses³⁸.

In view of the Crown’s hesitation, the governor even considered relocating the foundry house from Vila Boa de Goiás to a location that could better serve all the mines of the captaincy simultaneously. However, this possibility came to nothing because, in May 1753, the monarch confirmed the establishment of a second foundry house, whose location would be left to the governor’s discretion, with the choice falling on the settlement of São Félix³⁹. Indeed, after receiving the approval of the central authorities, the

³⁵ “Consultation of the Overseas Council to King D. José concerning the Letter from the Governor of Goiás,” Lisbon, 21 April 1753, AHU, CU, Goiás, Cx. 8, Doc. 555.

³⁶ Fundo Conde dos Arcos, *Archive of the University of Coimbra, Livros das Ordens Reais*, 1651–1754, VI-III-1-1-22, Lisbon, 26 August 1752, Doc. 124, fol. 464.

³⁷ A term used to refer to major merchants engaged in large-scale and highly profitable business activities, which fostered legitimate aspirations for social advancement. Cf., in this regard, PEDREIRA, Jorge Miguel de Melo Viana, *Os homens de negócio na praça de Lisboa de Pombal ao vintismo (1755–1822), diferenciação, reprodução e identificação de um grupo social*, p. 80 et seq. Doctoral dissertation, UNL, Lisbon, 1995.

³⁸ Cf. MENDONÇA, Luís, *op. cit.*, pp. 84–85.

³⁹ “Letter from the Governor of Goiás to King D. José,” Vila Boa, 8 September 1753, AHU, CU, Goiás, Cx.

highest authority in the captaincy decided to establish the foundry house in the settlement of São Félix, not because of its importance in terms of mining, but because it benefited from a particularly advantageous strategic location in the district of Tocantins⁴⁰.

The governor, accompanied by the Intendant of Goiás, then traveled to São Félix, purchased some old houses or thatched huts, and had them demolished with the aim of building the foundry house there, which would already be in operation in the second half of 1754.

Meanwhile, the capitation tax⁴¹ was once again replaced by the Royal Fifths, and it was determined, as already noted, that anyone possessing gold dust was to have it smelted at the foundry houses of each district. Since the foundry house of Goiás would only be ready to operate from January 1752 onward, the governor determined that, until that date, the Fifth tax would be collected through capitation, as had been the practice until then⁴². he governor argued that the inland location of the captaincy made it impossible for its foundry houses to begin operating at the same time as those of Minas Gerais, citing the distance from the seaports and, consequently, the greater difficulties in obtaining materials and bringing in the craftsmen required for goldworking⁴³.

It should be emphasized that the period of D. Marcos de Noronha's governorship coincided with the phase of highest gold production in the captaincy of Goiás. To provide an indication of its scale, between 1750 and 1754, gold production in the mines of Goiás approached 6,000 kg, whereas in the subsequent five years (1755-1759) it fell to approximately 3,500 kg, and

9, Doc. 588.

⁴⁰ Cf. "Letter from the Governor of Goiás," Vila Boa, 17 September 1753, AHU, CU, Goiás, Cx. 9, Doc. 611.

⁴¹ The capitation tax was in force in Brazil between 1736 and 1750 and, as its name suggests, was a *per capita* tax, that is, calculated according to the number of slaves owned by each miner, a system that also applied to owners of shops, whether large or small, who owned slaves. By way of example, in 1750 there were 8,130 slaves in the Intendancy of Vila Boa and 6,277 in the Intendancy of Tocantins. "Official Letter from the Governor of Goiás to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs," 16 Jan. 1750, in AHU, Goiás, Cx. 6, Doc. 430. The capitation tax was never peacefully accepted in Minas Gerais and Goiás, hence the reinstatement of the Royal Fifths in 1750. On this subject, see, for Minas Gerais, MAGALHÃES, Joaquim Romero de, "The Collection of the King's Gold in Minas Gerais: The End of Capitation - 1741-1750," *Tempo*, 27, June 2009, pp. 118-132; and, for Goiás, PALACIN, Luís, *O século do Ouro em Goiás*, 4th edition, Goiânia, 1994, pp. 43-51.

⁴² "Official Letter from the Governor of Goiás to the Secretary of State for the Navy and Overseas Affairs concerning the New Method for Collecting the Fifth," Vila Boa, 4 March 1752, AHU, CU, Goiás, Cx. 7, Doc. 514.

⁴⁸ *Idem*, Doc. 513.

⁴³ *Idem*, Doc. 513.

the trend continued downward throughout the second half of the eighteenth century.⁴⁴

The problem of gold “quotas”

With the establishment of several gold foundry houses (there would be two in Goiás), the Portuguese Crown appears to have quickly realized that the Fifth tax, collected by the traditional method, facilitated tax evasion. This was because, along the route between the mines and the foundry houses, gold dust could be “diverted” in various ways. The governor of Goiás himself openly acknowledged this⁴⁵. For this reason, in 1753 the monarch decided to implement a new method of collecting the Fifth: for each district, a fixed quota of gold, calculated in arrobas, would be established for annual delivery to the Crown⁴⁶. Tal método ficou conhecido como o imposto de “encabeçamento”. This method became known as the “encabeçamento” tax. Indeed, fearing an increase in smuggling and a decline in the revenues from the Royal Fifths, the monarch informed the governor of Goiás that the

safest means of collecting the Fifth therefrom accurately and without coercion is to apportion it among the inhabitants, and you have already considered the difficulties and resistance encountered there in applying this method; nevertheless, you are hereby ordered to endeavor to determine whether you can introduce it, examining the revenues yielded by the Mines under your Government and proposing a favorable arrangement for a fixed number of years, in order to ascertain whether it may be accepted ... without burdening the inhabitants and without causing such great loss to the Royal Treasury⁴⁷.

The governor was therefore faced with a dilemma: reconciling royal directives with local geographical and socioeconomic circumstances and, ultimately, with the wishes of the population.

The fact was that reactions to this method were far from favorable, and the governor of Goiás reported this situation. According to him, “the

⁴⁴ Based on data provided by PINTO, Virgílio Noya, *O ouro brasileiro e o comércio anglo-português (uma contribuição aos estudos da economia atlântica no século XVIII)*, São Paulo, 1979, p. 114.

⁴⁵ Cf. PALACIN, Luís, *Op. cit.*, p. 60.

⁴⁶ The aforementioned quota was already in force in Minas Gerais, notwithstanding the expressions of discontent among the inhabitants of the captaincy, amounting to 100 arrobas of gold annually.

⁴⁷ Official Letter from the Governor of Goiás to the Secretary of State for the Navy and Overseas Affairs,” Vila Boa, 16 September 1753, AHU, CU, Goiás, Cx. 9, Doc. 609.

inhabitants were entirely opposed to voluntarily offering a fixed quota.” He added: “[...] I consider it not only difficult, but impossible for the inhabitants voluntarily, without coercion, to agree to a fixed quota⁴⁸. He explained the reasons for such resistance: establishing a fixed quota could be problematic because of the “[...] lack of permanence among the inhabitants of those Mines, since, if any new discovery were made outside the district, such a large number of people would leave it that payment of the same quota would become far more burdensome for those who remained”⁴⁹.

It made sense. If significant gold-mining areas were discovered outside the territory of Goiás and this prompted a substantial proportion of the miners to leave, how could the inhabitants of that captaincy assume responsibility for a fixed quota?

While the governor was in the Mines of Natividade, two hundred leagues from Vila Boa, the Intendant and Superintendent of the Royal Treasury in Goiás received orders from Lisbon to promote the acceptance of a fixed quota. Diogo Mendonça Corte Real, Secretary of State for Overseas Affairs, conveyed to the Intendant of the captaincy of Goiás the urgency of having the inhabitants of the captaincy agree to the “encabeçamento” system and suggested the most appropriate strategy for achieving this purpose:

It appearing that the best means of persuading the inhabitants would be for him [the Intendant], through persons in his confidence, to spread the word that it was being discussed, and that news had reached this Court, that the Fifths would be farmed out by districts, since perhaps the fear of having tax farmers would incline them to offer a fixed sum in lieu of the Fifth; and those same confidants could influence the miners to this effect; and, should they come forward with such a proposal, the said Intendant should be prepared to tell them that he would submit it for consideration⁵⁰.

The idea was for the Intendant to spread a rumor among people in his confidence [confidants] that the Crown intended to farm out the Fifths, as a means of convincing the local population that accepting the fixed quota was the best solution.

⁴⁸ “Ofício do Governador de Goiás ao S. E. da Marinha e Ultramar”, Vila Boa, 16 de Setembro de 1753, AHU, CU, Goiás, Cx. 9, Doc. 609.

⁴⁹ *Idem, ibidem*.

⁵⁰ Fundo Conde dos Arcos, *Archive of the University of Coimbra, Livros das Ordens Reais*, 1651–1754, VI-III-1-1-22, Lisbon, 9 May 1753, Doc. 139, fol. 263.

However, the Intendant does not appear to have followed the suggested strategy with the requisite diplomatic subtlety and caution, instead presenting the plan to the Procurator of the Municipal Council of Goiás in terms that amounted almost to an ultimatum: either they voluntarily accepted a quota, or the Fifths would be farmed out to private individuals, which would be a far more burdensome situation for the inhabitants of the captaincy⁵¹.

The Procurator did not yield to the pressure, arguing that the necessary conditions for a decision to be made were not in place⁵².

Upon learning of what had occurred through the Procurator of the Municipal Council, the governor of Goiás, in a letter to the king, would state:

It is unquestionably certain that the Intendant... did not take the proper measures to achieve the desired effect, for it would have been far more appropriate if, instead of the efforts he made to persuade the Procurator of the Municipal Council of Vila Boa, he had first sought to win over the inhabitants, so that, once convinced of the harm that would result to them from farming out the contract, they would appeal to the same Council, as the representative of the people, to seek a remedy for the harm that threatened them⁵³.

At the governor's initiative, the Municipal Council of Goiás decided to act. It was agreed that a Junta would be convened, attended by procurators representing the various settlements of the district of Goiás. This Junta would determine what would be fairest for the inhabitants without thereby harming the Royal Treasury. The process was not without difficulties. The governor of Goiás acknowledged that, if the Junta convened by the Municipal Council did not reach a favorable decision regarding the establishment of a "fixed quota," his task of negotiating with the inhabitants would become much more difficult, "[...] for, encouraged by whatever was decided by the majority of votes, they would be even more reluctant to change their opinion"⁵⁴.

⁵¹ Cf. PALACIN, *op. cit.*, p. 60. The miners were particularly apprehensive about the farming out of the Fifths to private individuals, who might impose a much higher tax than the Crown would be willing to negotiate.

⁵² The Procurator argued that the Governor was absent from Vila Boa and that the district magistrate was away on an official inspection, adding that the inhabitants of Vila Boa constituted a minority in relation to those of the other settlements in the district, who necessarily had to be present or represented by their respective procurators. Consultation of the Overseas Council to King D. José concerning the response of the Governor of Goiás. Lisbon, 10 July 1754, AHU, CU, Cx. 11, Doc. 665.

⁵³ "Letter from the Governor to the King," Traíras, 28 Jan. 1754, AHU, CU, Goiás, Cx. 10, Doc. 620.

⁵⁴ *Idem, Ibidem.*

After an initial meeting whose representativeness was questioned, a new meeting was convened. Many procurators opposed the proposal to offer a fixed quota. For example, the procurator representing the inhabitants of Vila Boa argued that it was not advisable to offer the Crown a fixed quota of arrobas of gold, since the inhabitants were satisfied with the foundry house and with the collection of the Royal Fifth in the manner in which it had been carried out.

Once the procurators from the various districts had assembled at the Junta of Traíras in December 1753, the overall result of the vote was as follows: twenty individuals, some of whom were of higher social standing, voted in favor of granting the Crown a fixed quota (sixteen arrobas per year). Thirty-six individuals voted against this decision, although most were of “inferior condition,” and some were engaged in trade rather than mining. In view of this division of votes and lack of consensus, the criterion of the “quality” of the votes ultimately prevailed over their number, and the allocation of sixteen arrobas of gold was approved, with the proviso that “[...] this offer should be for ten years and that, according to the movement of the inhabitants to different new discoveries, or to any decline, and for these reasons, they would submit to Your Majesty proposals for improvements or new systems, as circumstances might permit”⁵⁵.

However, the decisions adopted, which lacked legitimacy⁵⁶, were not well received by the population in general or by the miners in particular, who remained reluctant to pay the Royal Fifth in the form of a quota.

When the new governor, D. Álvaro José Xavier Botelho de Távora, 4th Count of S. Miguel, arrived in Goiás in 1755, one of his responsibilities was to continue negotiations with the inhabitants in an effort to persuade them to “[...] subject themselves to a fixed quota”⁵⁷, a task that promised to be far from easy. The monarch emphasized that the Count of Arcos had already been taking measures to this end, but without reaching a definitive solution, given the reluctance of the inhabitants of the captaincy⁵⁸. The monarch made it clear

⁵⁵ ““Letter from the Governor of Goiás to the King,” Traíras, 28 January 1754, AHU, CU, Goiás, Cx. 10, Doc. 620.

⁵⁶ The term is used because, as noted above, the decision had not been unanimous, with the “quality” of the votes prevailing over their number.

⁵⁷ ““Official Letter from the Governor of Goiás to D. José,” Vila Boa, 12 October 1755, AHU, CU, Goiás, Cx. 13, Doc. 769.

⁵⁸ “Royal Letter from D. José I to the Governor of Goiás,” Lisbon, 2 August 1754, AHU, CU, Goiás, Cx. 11, Doc. 662.

to the Count of São Miguel that the negotiations should be conducted “by the gentlest and most conciliatory means, without burdening the inhabitants, without coercing them, and without interfering with their discretion and natural freedom; so that whatever decision they make shall be entirely their own, without external influence”⁵⁹.

It should be emphasized that the monarch maintained an ambiguous position on this matter. He stressed that the negotiation process should necessarily take into account the wishes of the inhabitants, yet, in his view, the only satisfactory solution was to secure a fixed quota or, alternatively, to farm out the Fifths. Indeed, if the new governor was unsuccessful through negotiation, he was to issue public notices for the farming out of the Fifths⁶⁰.

The governor nevertheless managed to negotiate with the local representatives an annual quota of twenty arrobas⁶¹, something that the Crown considered unacceptable: “That the quota should not be accepted is quite evident, because, since the Fifth of this Province, after it began to be collected under the new method, has yielded no less than forty arrobas each year ..., there can be no doubt that there is no reason to accept the quota at a loss of more than half of the actual revenue”⁶².

From then on, the matter appears to have seen no further developments. As Palacin observes, “this time, indeed, the matter of the quota was buried in complete and definitive silence”⁶³.

We can thus summarize the issue surrounding the gold quotas as follows:

- 1) The Portuguese monarchy considered the apportionment of the Fifths to be of the utmost importance for minimizing the illicit diversion of gold, as was already the case in Minas Gerais;
- 2) The representatives of the population of Goiás, invoking the less developed state of the Mines of Goiás (in comparison with Minas Gerais), clearly preferred the collection of the Fifths as established by the law of 3 December 1750;

⁵⁹ “Royal Letter from D. José I to the Governor of Goiás,” Lisbon, 2 August 1754, AHU, CU, Goiás, Cx. 11, Doc. 66.

⁶⁰ *Idem*.

⁶¹ Prior to the proposal to offer a quota of twenty arrobas, the local representatives had also invoked the precarious situation of the mines of Goiás, in comparison with those of Minas Gerais, the decline of mining and, consequently, the difficulty of undertaking a permanent commitment. Cf. PALACIN, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

⁶² “Consultation of the Overseas Council to King D. José concerning the Negotiation of the Fifths Quota,” Lisbon, 1 March 1757, AHU, CU, Cx. 14, Doc. 833.

⁶³ PALACIN, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

- 3) The governor of Goiás was entrusted with the delicate task of negotiating with the local institutions a solution acceptable to all parties, although, from the Crown's perspective, such a solution should involve the establishment of a fixed quota;
- 4) If the inhabitants of the captaincy remained adamantly opposed to accepting a fixed quota, the governor, on the Crown's orders, was to raise the possibility of farming out the Fifths to private individuals as a means of coercion/persuasion;
- 5) In view of this possibility, the local authorities (the Municipal Council) did make proposals regarding the quota to be paid (set in arrobas), but the Crown appears to have considered them insufficient;
- 6) In a context in which resistance among the local population persisted and the decline in the captaincy's gold production was becoming evident, the arrangements ultimately remained as established by the law of 1750, with neither the apportionment nor the farming out of the Fifths.

The episode of the quotas shows us, like so many others, that many of the decisions issued by the central authorities, which the governors of the captaincies were responsible for implementing, had to be negotiated with the local population and municipal authorities in order to find an arrangement that would simultaneously best serve the interests of the Crown and its colonial subjects⁶⁴. Indeed, in the episode of the quotas, a matter of particular importance to the Portuguese monarchy, the governors who oversaw the negotiation process (beginning with D. Marcos de Noronha) never imposed their will or a decision unilaterally determined by the Crown. On the contrary, efforts were made to find a solution that would not arouse the hostility of the subjects of Goiás (particularly the miners), represented here by the local authorities, namely the Municipal Council of Vila Boa. Rather than the exercise of authoritarian power through the imposition of a solution, there was a search for a consensus acceptable to both parties: to the Crown, which would collect an amount of tax considered fair, and to the inhabitants of the captaincy, who would not feel burdened by excessive taxation.

⁶⁴ Those who have most effectively drawn attention to these spaces of negotiation at the colonial level are the scholars associated with the so-called "Rio School," whose leading figures include FRAGOSO, João and BICALHO, Maria Fernanda, and whose most representative work is *O Antigo Regime nos trópicos: a dinâmica imperial portuguesa (sécs. XVI-XVIII)*, Rio de Janeiro, 2001.

As Luís Palacin observes, the process of accepting the quota in Goiás stands as one of the most illustrative examples of the Portuguese Crown's approach:

The balance between coercion and the free acceptance of the inhabitants, the patience to persist, without haste, time and again despite refusals, the pragmatism of not forcing anything beyond what circumstances permitted and, ultimately, the greater leniency with which Goiás was always treated might perhaps be explained by the fact that it was such a remote region, not yet fully settled and situated near a frontier that had yet to be definitively demarcated⁶⁵.

An assessment of the governorship of D. Marcos de Noronha

D. Marcos de Noronha, Count of Arcos, remained governor of Goiás until 1755, when he was succeeded by D. Álvaro José Xavier Botelho de Távora, Count of S. Miguel (1755–59). However, this replacement does not appear to have been due to any shortcomings in his administration. Evidence of this is that he left the government of Goiás to assume the highest administrative office at the colonial level. He was appointed viceroy of Brazil, a fact that may be indicative of his qualities as a governor. The praise bestowed upon him by the secretary of the government of Goiás, Ângelo de Sousa, in 1755 points in this direction: “Endowed with such a gentle disposition that all its inhabitants find him angelic, without ever contradicting this perception since the year 1749, and at the same time endowed with such penetrating and subtle understanding [...] He is a rigorous and literal observer of His Majesty's orders”⁶⁶.

Mônica Ribeiro also emphasizes that D. Marcos de Noronha, within the context of the governing network of colonial Brazil, “played a pivotal role, as he was an experienced administrator and a member of the titled nobility, which afforded him extensive networks of relationships not only in Portuguese America but also at Court”.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Cf. PALACIN, Luís, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

⁶⁶ ““Official Letter from the Secretary of the Government of Goiás to the Secretary of State for the Navy and Overseas Affairs,” Vila Boa, 15 April 1755, AHU, CU, Goiás, Cx. 12, Doc. 740.

⁶⁷ RIBEIRO, Mônica da Silva, “Subordinate, Interim, and Military Governors: Governing Networks in the Second Phase of the Count of Bobadela's Administration in Portuguese America (1748–1763),” *Proceedings of the XXVI National Symposium on History – ANPUH*, São Paulo, July 2011, p. 9.

Luís Palacin also offers a positive assessment of the governor's administration, whose principal virtue appears to have been his sensitivity toward the most vulnerable populations of the captaincy (such as slaves and Indigenous peoples), as he sought to defend the rights of the humblest against the abuses of the powerful.⁶⁸

Likewise, José de Alencastre acknowledges D. Marcos de Noronha's undeniable qualities, particularly his probity, although he considers that, experienced and intelligent as he was, he did not accomplish everything he could have accomplished⁶⁹. In a captaincy geographically situated on the periphery of Brazil (and therefore less attractive), where royal officials were inadequately remunerated for the duties, they performed and, by contrast, had access to alternative (albeit illicit) means of easy enrichment in mining territories, maintaining a reputation for honesty and probity (as Alencastre emphasized) was a rare quality. Governor João Melo himself noted that, as soon as he arrived in Goiás in 1760, he was encouraged to become involved in such illicit practices:

"Some persons suggested to me that, without engaging in the slave trade, governors could derive no financial benefit whatsoever, because the country [Goiás] was extremely expensive, the expenses exorbitant, and their salaries insufficient. They say that when His Majesty sends a governor to these hinterlands, it is with the understanding that he may profit through some business activity, since otherwise no one would be willing to come here"⁷⁰.

The Count of S. Miguel, however, offered a very different assessment of the situation in the captaincy and of his predecessor's administration.

In a letter addressed to the monarch⁷¹, he confessed that he had found the captaincy in a situation very different from what he had envisioned on the basis of the information provided to him by the monarch himself. Thus, instead of a fully established captaincy, a properly divided district, well-established mines, religious missions duly initiated, a methodically

⁶⁸ PEREIRA, Alan Ricardo Duarte and MORAES, Cristina de Cássia Pereira, "In the Webs of Colonial Administration: the Governors of the Captaincy of Goiás (1749-1822)," *Pol. Hist. Soc., Vitória da Conquista*, vol. 19, no. 1, Jan.-June 2020, p. 124.

⁶⁹ ALENCASTRE, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

⁷⁰ Official Letter from Governor João Manuel de Melo to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs," *cited in* STUMPH, Roberta, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

⁷¹ "Letter from the Governor to King D. José I," Vila Boa, 18 Sept. 1756, AHU, CU, Goiás, Cx. 13, Doc. 805.

administered treasury, and gold quotas to be paid by the miners already defined, what he found was a captaincy without structure, a district without boundaries, a treasury without sound management, the voluntary quotas still undefined, and missions without religion. In a word, the governor stated, “[...] this captaincy was handed over to me in a state of ruin.” The disorder was attributed to his predecessor, the Count of Arcos, to his ignorance, his lack of experience in the affairs of the district and in economic matters in particular, or to his lack of knowledge of the captaincy in general. In short, the Count of S. Miguel adopted a highly critical stance toward the legacy left by his predecessor and the overall record of his administration. He even went so far as to accuse him of illicit practices in the conduct of the captaincy’s affairs.

Seeing [the Count of Arcos] ... the poor results of his conduct, he sought to conceal the error rather than correct it, from which arose all the disorder in the captaincy, for he then found it necessary to issue deceitful orders, render misleading accounts, spend vast sums, incur innumerable debts, and disguise the errors of inexcusable ignorance through culpable dissimulation, under the outward guise of elegance⁷².

The Count of Arcos would not merely have been inexperienced, ignorant, and incompetent. He would also have been dishonest, concealing or participating in corrupt practices. What can be said about all this?

It is quite plausible that the Count of S. Miguel had grounds for his assessment of the state of the captaincy. It remains to be determined whether these conditions should be attributed to the Count of Arcos and whether there was a direct correlation between the situation of the captaincy (which he considered deplorable) and the actions of the first governor of Goiás. More difficult to substantiate are the accusations concerning the dishonesty of the Count of Arcos, particularly since they are not corroborated by any other contemporary testimony or source⁷³. What motives might have led the Count

⁷² ““Letter from the Governor of Goiás to King D. José,” Vila Boa, 18 Sept. 1856, AHU, CU, Goiás, Cx. 13, Doc. 805.

⁷³ In the preface to the 1st edition of his work *O Mediterrâneo e o Mundo Mediterrânico na época de Filipe II*, Publicações Dom Quixote, Lisbon, 1983, BRAUDEL, Fernand, specifically cautions historians about the care required when dealing with certain sources, in which they encounter “[...] a world of intense passions, unreflective, agitated, hostile to calm and profound analysis,” pp. 25–26. Marc Bloch, in turn, observed that “for testimony to be recognized as authentic, the method ... requires that it bear a certain similarity to neighboring testimonies.” However, if this precept were taken literally, “... what would become of discovery? [...] The practice of a science confined to verifying that everything always happens as expected would hardly be either useful or entertaining.” BLOCH, Marc, *Introdução à História*, Publicações Europa-América, 5th edition, 1941, p. 107.

of S. Miguel to tarnish the image of his predecessor? It is possible that this was a way of justifying a priori his presumed inability to successfully carry out the delicate mission with which he had been entrusted. He acknowledged that, given the difficult conditions in which he had found the captaincy, it would be unfeasible to implement many of the directives he had received from His Majesty⁷⁴.

The fact is that, in 1759, the new governor of Goiás, João Manuel de Melo, was equally scathing in his criticism of the Count of S. Miguel, who, in addition to having failed to resolve any of the problems of the captaincy that had led him to label his predecessor incompetent, became embroiled in a web of corruption that resulted in his removal from office and the opening of a formal judicial inquiry against him. Alencastre himself corroborates this view, stating that “his love of wealth and his lack of scruples in acquiring it brought him into royal disfavor, prompting the judicial proceedings subsequently instituted against him”⁷⁵.

Final considerations

D. Marcos de Noronha assumed the government of the captaincy of Goiás at a time when the development of mining activity, territorial expansion, and the proliferation of population centers in that territory had come to justify its administrative separation from the captaincy of São Paulo, as had occurred three decades earlier with Minas Gerais.

Chosen, certainly, on the basis of his noble status and the administrative experience he had accumulated as governor of Pernambuco, D. Marcos de Noronha would encounter a very different reality and problems specific to a mining region located deep in the Brazilian hinterlands. The matter that demanded his priority, and which the then monarch D. João V made a point of emphasizing, was mining. In this regard, D. Marcos de Noronha appears to have acted with prudence and assertiveness, seeking to ensure the proper collection of the Royal Fifths, and it was with this aim that he advocated the establishment of a second foundry house in Goiás, in order to make matters easier for the miners while simultaneously minimizing opportunities for tax evasion. While it is true that D. Marcos de Noronha left some issues unresolved, it is equally true that some of them were not resolved by subsequent governors

⁷⁴ “Letter from the Governor of Goiás to D. José,” Vila Boa, 18 Sept. 1756, AHU, CU, Goiás, Cx. 13, Doc. 805.

⁷⁵ ALENCASTRE, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

either. Thus, gold smuggling continued for as long as mining persisted, and negotiations aimed at establishing a fixed quota of gold to be paid by the miners of the captaincy never produced practical results.

One idea that emerges particularly clearly, especially from the episode of the quotas, is that many of the decisions issued by the central authorities, which the governors of the captaincies were responsible for implementing, had to be negotiated with the local populations and municipal authorities in order to find a solution that would simultaneously best serve the interests of the Crown and its colonial subjects. Concessions had to be made by both sides, and the Crown's position did not always ultimately prevail.

As one scholar has observed, given the significant role played by governors and municipal elites, "the simplistic interpretation of a colonial society subjected to the omnipotent and uncontested power of an absolute monarch" is far from corresponding to reality"⁷⁶.

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⁷⁶ LEMES, Fernando Lobo, and BONOME, José Roberto, "Fragile Powers: Governors and Municipal Officials in Goiás in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century," *História Revista*, Goiânia, vol. 21, no. 1, Jan./Apr. 2016, p. 24.

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