

Dom Antonio de Noronha and the secret plan for the Cuieté¹

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Abstract

Filed in the Manuscript Division of the National Library, the work *Livro Segundo das Cartas que o Ilmo. e Exmo. Sr. D. Antonio de Noronha Capitão General da Capitania de Minas Gerais escreveu durante o seu governo que teve princípio em 28 de maio de 1776* (Second Book of the Letters that His Illustrious Excellency Mr. D. Antonio de Noronha, Captain General of the Captaincy of Minas Gerais, wrote during his government that began on May 28, 1776) is a remarkable set of documents not only about the government of Minas Gerais, but also about important administrative authorities of that period. This Codex includes the *Plano secreto para a nova conquista do Cuieté* (Secret plan for the new conquest of the Cuieté) and the letters to the Marquis of Angeja and the minister Martinho de Mello e Castro, which are herein published. Written by the governor D. Antonio de Noronha himself, the documents show instructions and measures to be taken regarding the Cuieté region, in the *sertão* (hinterland) of Minas Gerais, and reflect on critical issues in the context of the colonization of Portuguese America, such as the exercise of power by part of the metropolitan authorities, the specificity of the colonial population, the settlement of border areas, and the expansion of government and bureaucracy.

Keywords: colonial government; hinterland; border; colonization.

Dom Antonio de Noronha e o Plano secreto para o Cuieté

Resumo

Depositado na Divisão de Manuscritos da Biblioteca Nacional, o *Livro Segundo das Cartas que o Ilmo. e Exmo. Sr. D. Antonio de Noronha Capitão General da Capitania de Minas Gerais escreveu durante o seu governo que teve princípio em 28 de maio de 1776* constitui um notável conjunto de documentos acerca não só do governo das Minas Gerais, mas também de importantes autoridades administrativas do período. Nesse códice, estão contidos o *Plano secreto para a nova conquista do Cuieté* e as cartas para o Marquês de Angeja e para o ministro Martinho de Mello e Castro, que ora se publicam. Escritos pelo próprio governador D. Antônio de Noronha, os documentos trazem instruções e medidas a serem tomadas em relação à região do Cuieté, no sertão mineiro, e refletem sobre temas decisivos no contexto da colonização da América portuguesa, tais como o exercício do poder por parte das autoridades metropolitanas, a especificidade da população colonial, o povoamento de áreas fronteiriças e a expansão da administração e da burocracia.

Palavras-chave: governo colonial; sertão; fronteira; colonização.

Don Antonio de Noronha y el plan secreto para el Cuieté

Resumen

Depositada en la División de Manuscritos de la Biblioteca Nacional, la obra *Livro Segundo das Cartas que o Ilmo. e Exmo. Sr. D. Antonio de Noronha Capitão General da Capitania de Minas Gerais escreveu durante o seu governo que teve princípio em 28 de maio de 1776* (Segundo Libro de las cartas que el Ilmo. y Excmo. Sr. D. Antonio de Noronha Capitán General de la Capitania de Minas Gerais escribió durante su gobierno que empezó a 28 de mayo 1776) es una notable colección de documentos no sólo acerca del gobierno de Minas Gerais, sino también de las importantes autoridades administrativas del período. En este códice, figuran el *Plano secreto para a nova conquista do Cuieté* (Plan secreto para la nueva conquista del Cuieté) y las cartas al marqués de Angeja y al ministro Martinho de Mello e Castro, que publicamos ahora. Escritos por el propio gobernador D. Antonio de Noronha, los documentos contienen instrucciones y acciones que deben tomarse con respecto a la región de Cuieté, en el interior de Minas, y reflexionan sobre cuestiones fundamentales en el contexto de la colonización de la América portuguesa, como el ejercicio del poder por las autoridades metropolitanas, la especificidad de la población colonial, la población de las zonas fronterizas y la expansión del gobierno y de la burocracia.

Palabras clave: gobierno colonial; interior; frontera; colonización.

Dom Antonio de Noronha et Le plan secret à la conquête du Cuieté

Résumé

Déposé dans la division de manuscrits à la Bibliothèque Nationale, le *Seconde livre des lettres écrites par D. Antonio de Noronha, le capitaine-major de la capitainerie de Minas Gerais pendant son gouvernement, commençant à 28 de maio de 1776* est une série de documents notable sur le gouvernement de Minas Gerais, mais aussi des autorités administratives de la période considérée. Dans ce codex, sont contenus le *Le plan secret à la conquête du Cuieté* et les lettres au Marquis d'Angeja et au ministre Martinho de Mello e Castro ici publiées. Ecrites par le gouverneur D. Antônio de Noronha, ces documents sont relatifs à les instructions et les mesures à prendre selon le Cuieté, au sauvage de Minas Gerais, et font réfléchir sur sujets décisifs dans le contexte de la colonisation l'Amérique portugaise tels que l'exercice du pouvoir par les autorités métropolitaines, la spécificité de la population coloniale, le peuplement des zones frontalières et l'expansion de l'administration et la bureaucratie.

Mots clés: gouvernement colonial; sauvage; frontière; colonisation.

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¹I thank Daniel Carvalho de Paula, a student of the master's degree in Social History at the Universidade de São Paulo, for kindly typing my handwritten transcription of the documents here published.

Finding the *Plano secreto para a nova conquista do Cuieté*

In the summers of 1989 and 1990, ten years after the end of the research and writing of *Desclassificados do Ouro*, my Masters' dissertation published as a book in 1982, I was once again dedicated to the State of Minas Gerais. After being busy for some time with other matters and other documentary collections (popular religiosity, Inquisition processes), I returned to the subject and to the sources through which I have acquired the necessary skills to the work as a historian, but investigating a collection I was not familiar with: the Manuscript Division of the National Library of Rio de Janeiro. The initial project was to write a book about everyday life in that captaincy, an idea that never materialized. But the research about Minas has continued over the years and turned into articles — some gathered in the work *Norma e Conflito* (published in 1999) — and parts of two books: *O Sol e a Sombra* (published in 2006) and *Cláudio Manuel da Costa* (published in 2011). The historian often — almost always, maybe... — aims at what he sees and finds what he had not foreseen.

It was in one of those remote summers that I found on the National Library the *Plano secreto para a nova conquista do Cuieté* as well as the letters to the Marquis of Angeja and to the minister Martinho de Mello e Castro, which I introduce in this article. In addition to the interest in the documents, to which I will dedicate myself below, I believe that the publication is timely because the Codex in which they are was unavailable for consultation for a long time. At the end of the 1980s, the Codex was in a good condition. Today, although accessible in digital form, it is damaged, and the most affected folios, ironically, are those that include the documents in question.²

Entitled *Livro Segundo das Cartas que o Ilmo. e Exmo. Sr. D. Antonio de Noronha Capitão General da Capitania de Minas Gerais escreveu durante o seu governo que teve princípio em 28 de maio de 1776*, the Codex is a very important set of documents on the administration of Minas and on the government of Viceroy Marquis of Lavradio,³ and that does not have, to the best of my knowledge, copies in the Public Archive of Minas or the National Archive, despite the existent complementarities within the correspondence that is part of some of the codices archived there.⁴ The content of the *Livro Segundo* [Second Book] consists, almost entirely, of letters of Don Antonio de Noronha to administrative authorities of his time. In other words, they are part of his active correspondence and should be confronted with passive correspondence, scattered among Brazilian and Portuguese archives, in the case

²I express my gratitude to Monica Rizzo, director of the Reference and Documentation Centre of the National Library, for giving me access to the digital copy of the Codex.

³Biblioteca Nacional do Rio de Janeiro, Divisão de Manuscritos, 2,2,24, *Livro Segundo das Cartas que o Ilmo. e Exmo. Sr. D. Antonio de Noronha Capitão general da Capitania de Minas Gerais escreveu durante o seu governo que teve princípio em 28 de maio de 1776* [correspondência de D. Antonio de Noronha].

⁴For the National Archive, see Codex 67, vol. 5 and vol. 6; Codex 69, vol. 2, for correspondence referring mainly to the episode known as "Conspiracy of Curvelo". For the Public Archive of Minas, see the Colonial Section, codices 204 ("Registro de patentes, ordens e circulares do Governador — 1773-1777"); 207 ("Registro de cartas, ordens e circulares do Governador a autoridades da Capitania e respectivas respostas — 1775-1776"); 212 ("Troca de cartas entre o governador de Minas e o Vice-Rei e, também, a outros governadores do Brasil").

of an in-depth study of the government of that administrator. Considering the title of the Codex, it appears that there is, or there was, a *Livro Primeiro* (First Book) of active correspondence, with the letters dated before May 1776, but so far I have not found it anywhere.

The set of documents that comprise the *Livro Segundo* is exceptional. First, because of the quality of the letters from Don Antonio, who wrote very well in spite of being a man of military career and not an employee or a literate, with the government of the Captaincy of Minas Gerais being the only detour in a life devoted to the command of fortresses and regiments, including in the “Guerra Fantástica” (“Fantastic War”), or the Campanha do Rossilhão (Roussillon Campaign, 1793–1795). Second, by the range of topics covered, which provide a lucid and well-articulated consideration on the exercise of power in Minas. Very few, indeed, had such clear and well-founded ideas about the government of that captaincy, in particular, and about the administration of the colonies in general, which led me to suggest that Don Antonio was thinking from the perspective of a “government system”.⁵

The historian often — almost always, maybe... — aims at what he sees and finds what he had not foreseen

Among the most common themes in the correspondence, it is the topic of the colonial population specificity that led him to “theorize”, in an extraordinary letter to Lavradio, about the issue of the “usefulness of the vagrants”. To read this letter, dated November 19, 1776, was one of the great joys I have had over many years of archival research, because it allowed me to prove that the considerations of the chief judge Teixeira Coelho in the *Instruções para o Governo da Capitania de Minas Gerais* (Instructions for the Government of Minas Gerais Captaincy) were, word for word, borrowed from one of the passages of the letter.⁶ Target of hatred in all civilized nations, the vagrants could be useful in Minas, a place where the slave labor prevailed in mining and many activities were relegated to the background. The specific situation required some flexibility in the general rules: the laws that came from Lisbon, made by men who had never set foot on American soil, could not always be fulfilled to the letter. With sensitivity, D. Antonio became aware that particular situations should be considered when the intent was to establish general dispositions, and, in the case of the government, norms.

⁵Laura de Mello e Souza, “Os limites da dádiva: Dom Antonio de Noronha”, *In: _____, O Sol e a sombra: política e administração na América Portuguesa do século XVIII*, São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 2006, p. 350-402.

⁶BNRJ, DMs, 2,2,24, fol. 52-53 (for the reference to the vagrants). For the relationship between Teixeira Coelho and the ideas of D. Antonio de Noronha, see Laura de Mello e Souza, *op cit.*, p. 350-402.

The hinterland of Cuieté

Another recurring theme in this set of documents is the hinterland of Cuieté, the process of populating it and its fort.

The Cuieté — a word that in Indian language designated canister or calabash —⁷ was located east of the Captaincy of Minas Gerais, along Doce River, on lands crossed by several small rivers and streams. Evidence points to being the same region that is also known as *Casa da Casca*, famous for the abundance of gold — more fictional than actual — for the dense rainforest coverage, and for the angry Indians.⁸ Visited repeatedly since the 17th century, still in the early days of mining, when the people from São Paulo went there to search more for the “black man from the land (natives)” than the “blonde metal”, the Cuieté populated the mythical horizon of explorers and rulers for decades, perhaps a century.⁹ Distant from the administrative centers and populated by Indians who were not acculturated, the Cuieté resisted successive endeavors of exploitation. The distance and the brave Gentile — two sides of the same coin — were the biggest obstacle to any success.

Even so, men who were simultaneously settlers and explorers ventured in those parts, trying to settle as farmers. Local tradition attributes the first of such efforts, undertaken around 1740, to the Captain Pedro de Camargo and his family, and evidence indicates that many explorers tried similar experiments, paying for the costs themselves and almost never succeeding.¹⁰ Others have spent most of their lives working for successive governors, as was the case of the chief guard Antonio Lopes dos Santos, of captain José Leme da Silva, and of captain José Gonçalves Vieira; even so, they did not have a different fate, as the meager inventories that they left indicate.¹¹ For the latter, the hinterland

⁷Joaquim Ribeiro Costa, *Toponímia de Minas Gerais*, Belo Horizonte, Imprensa Oficial do Estado, 1970, p. 215.

⁸For the location of Cuieté, see, among others, José Joaquim da Rocha, *Geografia histórica da Capitania de Minas Gerais*. Estudo crítico de Maria Efigênia Lage de Resende, Belo Horizonte, Fundação João Pinheiro, 1995, p. 78 *et seq.* (Coleção Mineiriana). I analyzed Cuieté for the first time in *Desclassificados do ouro — a pobreza mineira no século XVIII*, 4. ed. rev. e ampl., Rio de Janeiro, Paz e Terra, 2004[1982], p. 111-114. I returned to the subject in “*Frontière géographique et frontière sociale à Minas Gerais dans la seconde moitié du XVIIIe siècle*”, In: Kátia de Queirós Mattoso; Idelette Muzart Fonseca dos Santos; Denis Rolland (eds.), *Naissance du Brésil Moderne: 1500-1808*, Paris, Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1998, p. 273-288.

⁹When the hunting of Indians for slave work was banned from Sabarabuçu, by the act of Fernão Dias Pais, the settlers started to circulate ostensibly in the Hinterland of Cuieté, or the Casa da Casca, that is, the basin of the Doce river. They would make illegal incursions in the Rio das Velhas basin (Sabarabuçu), which, in an intentional confusion, they called the Hinterland of *Caeté*, intending to place it (for people that knew nothing about it) also in the Doce river basin, when in fact the Caeté is really in Rio das Velhas, as the Cuieté is in Doce river. To make the preying of natives look decent, settlers from São Paulo and Taubaté simulated the search for gold and precious metals, particularly when the hazards of fortune forced them to seek help in other captaincies, where the aid was only guaranteed by royal order in the latter case”. Raimundo José da Cunha Matos, *Corografia histórica da Província de Minas Gerais, 1837*, vol. 1, Belo Horizonte, Itatiaia; São Paulo, EdUSP, 1981, p. 77.

¹⁰The history of Cuieté is extensively discussed throughout the beautiful book of Hal Langfur and in almost every chapter, so it would be exhausting to mention here all the passages referring to the subject. For the beginnings, see especially chapter 2, “Ordered space, disorderly peoples”, In: Hal Langfur, *The forbidden lands: colonial identity, frontier violence, and the persistence of Brazil's eastern Indians, 1750-1830*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2006, p. 68 *et seq.*

¹¹Arquivo Público Mineiro, Secretaria de Governo, caixa 10 - doc. 21; caixa 20 - doc. 04. Museu do Ouro, Casa de Borba Gato, Cartório do Segundo Ofício. 1. (52)5 - *Inventário dos bens que ficaram por falecimento de Antonio Lopes dos Santos casado que foi com Felipa Maria do Espírito Santo, moradora esta na Freguesia da Piranga e aquele falecido no Arraial de Santa Luzia sem testamento em 15 de abril de 1805.* / Órfãos / *Escrivão Lima*. Arquivo Público Mineiro, Seção Colonial, cód.229, fol. 20-v; Arquivo Público Mineiro, Seção Colonial, cx. 20, doc. 29; Arquivo da Casa Setecentista de Mariana, 1º ofício, cód. 84, auto 1795 — *Inventário do Capitão José Leme da Silva*. Arquivo Público Mineiro, Secretaria de Governo, cx. 20, doc. 04 e doc. 16.

could be a way of life, but it was mainly a source of honor, recognition, and social promotion: they did not imagine settling on the places that they contributed to incorporate to the shelter of the government, keeping the families and the assets in the vicinity of their villages of origin. The first ones, on the other hand, entered the forests in search of lands to settle on.

The Cuieté populated the mythical horizon of explorers and rulers for decades, perhaps a century

The Cuieté, as well as other “forbidden lands” of the eastern portion of the captaincy, was part of a hinterland that was tributary to the Mariana municipal council.¹² Much of the explorers who, over the years, headed for that part came from Mariana and the adjacent villages and camps. At the time, each county had “its hinterland”, a space where the residents ventured in service to the Crown or personal adventure. The hinterlands, for the men of São João or São José del-Rei in the county of Rio das Velhas, were the *cerrados*¹³ of the upper São Francisco, the *Picadas*¹⁴ of Goiás, as they were then called. They could also be the escarpments of the Mantiqueira, especially for those living in Venda Nova or in Borda do Campo. For the powerful men of Sabará, hinterland was the middle São Francisco, the area of Paracatu, the bar of Rio das Velhas, and São Romão. The forests crossed by the Doce River further south were therefore the hinterland of the Ouro Preto county, where Mariana was, but because of the connection with the Rio das Velhas county, they attracted some of its men. It was there that the legendary Cuieté was, but also Abre Campo and Arrepiados. Further up, Mata do Peçanha was the hinterland for the inhabitants of Serro and Tijuco; the latter being already in the Demarcação Diamantina (Diamantina demarcation).¹⁵

In the period that followed the death of Gomes Freire de Andrade (1763), when there was an effort to recover the economy of the captaincy, successive governors engaged in opening new fronts, pushing the boundaries of the mining activity in various directions: toward Paracatu, Minas

¹²Cláudia Damasceno Fonseca, *Arraiais e Vilas D'El Rei - espaço e poder nas Minas setecentistas*, Belo Horizonte, Editora da UFMG, 2011, p. 279-282. For the “forbidden lands” of the east of Minas, see Hal Lagfur, *The forbidden lands: colonial identity, frontier violence, and the persistence of Brazil's eastern Indians, 1750-1830*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2006.

¹³T.N.: open pastures with patches of stunted vegetation.

¹⁴T.N.: narrow trails in the woods.

¹⁵According to the maps of José Joaquim da Rocha, *Geografia histórica da Capitania de Minas Gerais*. Estudo crítico de Maria Efigênia Lage de Resende, Belo Horizonte, Fundação João Pinheiro, 1995, anexos. (Coleção Mineiriana); José Ferreira Carrato, *Igreja, iluminismo e escolas mineiras coloniais*, São Paulo, Companhia Editora Nacional; EdUSP, 1968, mapa em anexo, elaborado pelo autor. Waldemar de Almeida Barbosa, *Dicionário histórico-geográfico de Minas Gerais*, Belo Horizonte, [s.n.], 1971; Joaquim Ribeiro Costa, *Toponímia de Minas Gerais*, Belo Horizonte, Imprensa Oficial do Estado, 1970.

Novas, Desemboque, Doce River and so on. Luís Diogo Lobo da Silva, José Luís de Meneses Castelo Branco — the Count of Valadares — and D. Antonio de Noronha were the ones who stood out in this endeavor, and the Cuieté was at the center of their concerns.

The Cuieté was also known as “Conquest”, a current term used to designate regions where “a preexisting population (Indians or *Quilombolas*¹⁶) resisted the colonization advance”. It was Claudia Damasceno Fonseca who better clarified the subject in a now-classic book, justifying the use of the expression with the idea that Cuieté was, in fact, conquered and reconquered many times, always in the hope that the fierce Gentile, as the imbarés of the right bank of the Doce River, would call a truce in the war that they made against the establishment of villages in the region.¹⁷ In the second half of the 18th century, in order to try to control the Indians by conversion and to facilitate the colonizer’s advance, a parish was created in the Cuieté, as it occurred in many other peripheral regions of the captaincy.¹⁸ Even then, there was a fort there and several strategies had been adopted to neutralize the hostility from Indians.¹⁹

The documents

In spite of not showing a date, the *Plano* was certainly written by D. Antonio de Noronha in 1779. In the Codex, it is followed by two letters of the governor addressed to the ministers Marquis of Angeja and Martinho de Mello e Castro in October of that year, both addressing the measures taken in relation to the Cuieté; among them, the inspection done personally by D. Antonio, who had traveled there in September. Dates and topic confirm the certainty about the year that the *Plano* was prepared.

The *Plano secreto para a nova conquista do Cuieté* emerges at a time of rebuilding. Both the individual actions as the ones taken under the support of the governors had failed because of the attacks of Indians and the distance from the villages, increasing the cost of transport, which, on top of that, was done through the difficult Doce River and adjacent streams. D. Antonio opened up a new terrestrial path and paid for its cost: at least that was what he advertised.²⁰ After the access to the region was made easier, it was necessary to impose the rules. The *Plano* is an example of how the bureaucratic machinery sought to extend its reach up to remote regions, with the pragmatic and rational spirit overshadowing the mythical constructions that still lingered on and,

¹⁶T.N.: slaves who took refuge in hiding places of runaway slaves known as *quilombos*.

¹⁷Cláudia Damasceno Fonseca, *Arraiais e Vilas DEl Rei* — espaço e poder nas Minas setecentistas, Belo Horizonte, Editora da UFMG, 2011, p. 76-77. Author’s highlight, p. 76.

¹⁸*Ibidem*, p. 124.

¹⁹*Ibidem*, p. 125-126. For a meticulous study of the conflicts between Indians and settlers, see Maria Leônia Chaves de Resende, *Gentios brasileiros* — índios colonos em Minas Gerais setecentistas, Tese de Doutorado, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Campinas, 2003.

²⁰Hal Langfur, *The Forbidden Lands*: colonial identity, frontier violence, and the persistence of Brazil’s eastern Indians, 1750-1830, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2006, p. 75.

as we know, take a very long time to disappear. In the letter to the Marquis of Angeja, D. Antonio reckons the carats of the metal that was found as of “excellent quality”, marvels with the abundance of rivers, creeks, and streams, adding that the woods are “of the best quality for planting” and concludes: “I think ultimately that all that territory should be called the Tesouro do Cuieté (Treasure of Cuieté) instead of Nova Conquista (New Conquest)”. Those thoughts sound like late outbursts of *edenização*²¹, as Sérgio Buarque de Holanda would say.

The *Plano* also shows that even with the traditions of command the governors thought fit to invoke them at every moment, with the reiteration working as reinforcement. The imposition of rules allowed flexibilities, as I have indicated in previous studies: one of the most significant examples is adopting the current procedures in situations of exile for the Cuieté — as well as for all the other fronts of border settlement.²² In the same manner as the colonies of the Modern Era, which worked as “houses of correction for offenders”, it was necessary to look the other way in regard to the arrival of criminals and offenders in the beginning, otherwise the Cuieté region would not be populated. Evildoers were tolerated, the access of justice officials was blocked, but the government did not relinquish the charging of taxes on the mined gold: the “corrupted” part of society was equal, regarding the tax obligation, to the “sound” one.

Lastly, the *Plano* makes it clear that dense bushes and wild Indians could

*The Plano makes it clear that dense bushes and wild
Indians could serve the interests of the Crown in a
land of continental dimensions*

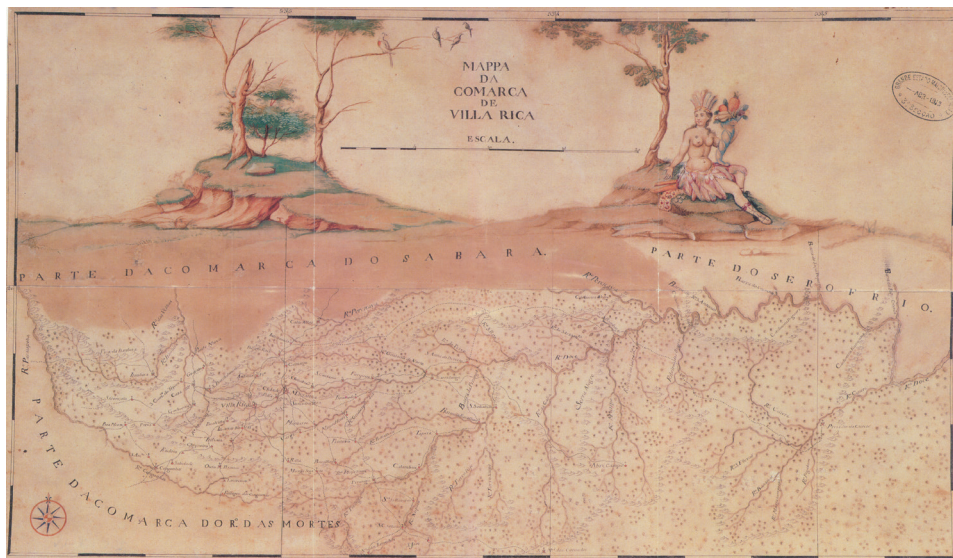
serve the interests of the Crown in a land of continental dimensions. Just like the dense vegetation cover, Botocudos and other warlike groups worked as a barrier and prevented the smuggling of gold. The difficult balance was to keep them alive and, at the same time, stop them from destroying plantations and settlements of colonists. The creation of militias, in its turn, was an attempt that never worked effectively, whether it was because of the extent of the territory and the dense vegetation that covered it, or because the settlers often did not act as expected, coveting the lands in which the Gentiles lived and moving over them.

²¹T.N.: to idealize something, comparing it to the Eden.

²²About the need for temporization in the colonial government, see Laura de Mello e Souza, “Nas redes do poder”, *In: Desclassificados do ouro — a pobreza mineira no século XVIII*, 4. ed. rev. e ampl., Rio de Janeiro, Paz e Terra, 2004 [1982], p. 131-202. See, also, Laura de Mello e Souza, “Os limites da dádiva: Dom Antonio de Noronha”, *In: _____, O Sol e a sombra: política e administração na América Portuguesa do século XVIII*, São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 2006, *passim*. In *Desclassificados do ouro*, I have borrowed from the portuguese historian Costa Lobo the idea of the modern colonies as “houses of correction for offenders” (Laura de Mello e Souza, *op cit*).

After bringing to the public a sample of this remarkable Codex — one of the most fascinating sets of documents that I have read over the course of my career as a historian — I leave the in-depth study of the documents to the interested readers and scholars. It can be noted that in both letters D. Antonio said he wrote a “digression” or “description” of the journey to the Cuieté at that same time, the second half of 1779. I did not find it but others may have better luck with that, and here I present the challenge for them to look for it.

I have the habit of transcribing a large number of documents, most of which will end up not being used in the research. If the *Plano* and the two letters were used at more than one occasion, there was no intention of publishing them, so I apologize to the experts and historians who are more orthodox and accustomed to rules. The documents that I publish here do not meet the standards of scholarly transcription, having been modernized and punctuated with commas to make the reading easier. The sin may deserve forgiveness, or at least a light penalty, when we face a much more serious fact: the dire state to which the documents were turned after 24 summers. My unorthodox transcripts have, at least, preserved the contents of the *Plano* and letters of D. Antonio de Noronha.



Map of the County of Vila Rica. At the eastern end of the county of Ouro Preto (which sometimes is designated as Vila Rica), were the hinterlands of Cuieté (Mappa da Comarca de Vila Rica, José Joaquim da Rocha, 1778. 39 x 68.3 cm. Manuscript and watercolor. AHEX – Historical Archive of the Army, Rio de Janeiro. Photography: Júnia Furtado).

DOCUMENTARY TRANSCRIPTION

“Secret plan for the new conquest of the Cuieté

- §1º – The new village of Cuieté should be built between the two arms that form the river of the same name, in the part that is more convenient, leaning against one of mentioned arms for navigation use.
- §2º – In this new village, there should be a Regent with proportionate wages, which are no less than twenty-five thousand réis per month. This Regent must be a man capable of making himself respectable, and one that has the caution, instruction, and talents [*fol.* 230] necessary for good comprehension and enforcement of orders, and to maintain the new settlers in peace and in mutual union.
- §3º – There should also be one scrivener and one treasurer to organize the revenue and expenditure of the Royal Treasury in that Conquest, and to avoid disturbances like the ones that have happened in the past. The sufficient earnings should be given to these officers, exemplary for the exemplary action, as well as the initialed books; but this method will only last until the conquest is populated and full of inhabitants that defend it without costs to the Royal Treasury.
- §4º – In the Conquest, there must be a squad of pedestrians, for its safety and defense. The guards that are necessary to defend the miners and planters from invasions by the Indians will be taken from this squad. The rest of the squad shall work on a farm belonging to His Majesty, where there will be an overseer that manages, and from its production, the sufficient feeds will be given to the soldiers, and to anyone else I may order.
- §5º – Because the Conquest cannot advance or bloom while its new inhabitants are harassed by the Justices with executions of debts and charges of minor crimes, and the majority of settlers will necessarily be of guilty men, and men oppressed with debts, as it has always happened in all new colonies, a great vigilance is necessary in this matter, by not granting passports to the Conquest to Court officials, nor denying them, if not by an indirect mean, [*fol.* 230v] which is to not accept the petitions that they make in this regard. This was practiced by His Excellency Gomes Freire de Andrade, Count of Bobadela, for matters related to the villages of Antonio Dias below and to the discovery of Peçanha, where Justice officials were not allowed; but royal taxes never failed to be collected there, and in this way those two settlements were constituted. If that had not been done, they would still be uncultivated woods today. But this action shall be temporary and will last only until the Conquest is established, and populated.
- §6º – For the proper implementation of this measure, and for other useful purposes, a guard of paid soldiers and pedestrians will be established on the Doce River bridge. This guard which will stop any person of any position that goes there without my passport, or is not one of the people whose passage I approve; and likewise no one should leave the Conquest

without a passport issued by the Regent, nor should gold powder get out without a guide.

- §7º – So that the absence of Justice officials in the Conquest is not harmful to the People, the Regent will be responsible for measures to avoid this damage.
- §8º – To cease the fear of deviations, which could be done through the Espírito Santo Captaincy, we must warn on the following: that through the woods it is impracticable for gold to be misplaced, given their nature, the distance and the wild Indians inhabiting these woods, making the criminal intention of smuggling through that part impossible. It will be also necessary to guard and rule the navigation in Doce River so that the deviations are not done through it in canoes.
- §9º – The more proportionate means to this end are to set up a guard of paid soldiers [fol. 231] and pedestrians below the bar of Rio Grande, on Esperança Island, or in the place that is more convenient to assign [?] the navigation in Doce River under the guard, and prohibit the communication of residents of the Conquest with those of the Espírito Santo Captaincy.
- §10º – In the event that, despite this measure, the residents of the Espírito Santo Captaincy try to enter the Conquest, through Doce River or by land, they will be arrested by my order to be punished as smugglers, and as transgressors of the Permit that will be mentioned in §11º, with the same procedure being applied to the inhabitants of the Conquest who pass through the mentioned river or by land to the Espírito Santo Captaincy.
- §11º – New paths or *picadas* to the Conquest should not be opened up, and those who do that will be prosecuted in the model of the Permit from October 27, 1733, of the order from April 9, 1745, and of the notice from January 22, 1756.
- §12º – All the gold that is taken from the mines of the Conquest must leave the region in a closed compartment and marked with a Regent's guide to the Intendancy of Vila Rica, as it will be done with the gold from Paracatu, and the people to which the gold belongs to should take it to the respective Intendancy. In order to know if the gold is being taken there, and to punish people in case they do not do that, the Regent will send me every three months an exact list of the gold that is being taken in this manner out of the Conquest; and the same will be done by the commander of the guard of the Doce River, so that, confronting the mentioned lists with the ones that should be done in that [fol. 231v] Intendancy, one can verify if the gold there presented marked as coming from Conquest [?] got deviated or came out of it by another way than the passage of the Doce River. This way, it is possible to avoid the deviation, and the ban on new roads is better accomplished. In addition, one can make an [illegible] account of what is the fifth of gold of that Conquest, so that the costs paid by His Majesty in the process can also be calculated, making it possible to determine whether its preservation is useful to royal and public interests.
- §13º – As it is not fair that the new Conquest is a scandalous asylum [?] for evildoers and debtors and because my protection to the new residents

should be regulated by justice and directed only to the public interest, I command the following:

- §14º – Regarding the criminals who take refuge in the Conquest, the complaining parties should present me their petitions, so that I, ascertaining the nature of the offenses of the refugees, either turn them to Justice, if the offenses are too scandalous, and harmful to the conservation of society, or punish them arbitrarily, making them reimburse the losses of others.
- §15º – And in regard to debtors, they will be constrained by me, at the request of creditors, so that they will pay a part of the debts that is possible according to the gold that each one of them gets annually, and this will be done with such regularity that the debtors will never run out of the gold needed to continue their mineral services, because on their conservation and increase depends [fol. 232] the happiness of the Conquest, the State, and the Kingdom.
- §16º – In the division of land for the extraction of gold, a piece of land will be taken aside for His Majesty; because, although the Conquest is a not a new discovery, considering the work that is being done in it for many years and the fact that chief guards have been in its territory, the mentioned piece of land should be taken to reimburse the Royal Treasury for part of the expenses that it has had to make the mentioned Conquest habitable.
- §17º – After removing the piece of land for His Majesty, Colonel João da Silva Tavares should choose the lands that he wants, according to his necessities, since he has done a great service to His Majesty and the peoples, by opening up the new path, in which he had a steadiness, and a great work because he exposed his life to a continued risk in the course of two years, by leaving his house and the large factory that he has unsheltered with no prize. Then, to the Regent should be given the divisible [?] lands that he chooses; and then to those people who have done, without profit, any useful service to the Conquest. Lastly, the rest of the people will enter. All these measures are based on reason and on the Proclamation of Governor D. Lourenço de Almeida on October 11, 1721.
- §18º – All divisions of mineral lands shall be done by two chief guards, which I choose, one of whom shall be Colonel João Tavares da Silva, not only because he is much instructed in the premises of this nature, and having proved his prudence and truthfulness; but also because it is necessary to remunerate the services that he has done to His Majesty at the time of my [fol. 232v] predecessors, and those made during my time in government, which are declared in the §17º. And all the questions that arise from these divisions will be solved by me, in the manner most convenient to the peoples, and to the establishment of new Conquest, in spite of the Rules of Procedure that, besides being incomplete and impracticable in many parts without damage to the miners, cannot have a strict observance in the new Conquest. And that was even put in practice in various minerals disputes by Governor D. Lourenço de Almeida on the proclamations of September 26 and November 11 of 1721, of June 14,

1722, of March 22, 1728, and of October 2 of that same year. The Count of Galveias did the same with the proclamation of May 9, 1734.

- §19º – In all contracts of pieces of mineral lands shall be put the clause that the people who receive them will start working on them within the time frame stated by the Regiment, and, if they do not do that, the lands will be given to other people who request them as returned property, with the process not dependent on proffer [?], or judgment. This penalty can be imposed on the simple fact of the visual inspection and examination by the chief Guard, and his Scrivener. From those processes shall be written a term, and, in the same letters, it shall be declared that the miners who received the pieces of land did so under the mentioned condition, and that they waive all rights that they may have of trying to reverse such a penalty. And the chief Guard will soon declare the referred [fol. 233] condition in the orders of the style, which are sent to the commissions, and in the documents of possession.
- §20º – All mineral services must be made from the bottom up, so that the streams are not filled with pebbles and sand, and the extraction of gold becomes more difficult, as it has occurred in Ribeirão do Carmo, Rio das Velhas, and other rivers.
- §21º – Throughout the new path of Cuieté, allotments of one side and the other will be given, and so that they multiply and this path becomes more heavily populated they will have a lesser extent in the front, and a higher extent in the back. In the case that people to which the lands are granted do not plant right away, the remaining lands will be given to other people, because, if they are populated, the path is free of burglary from the Indians, and His Majesty avoids the expense of the conservation of the same path, and its vigilance.
- §22º – For the convenience of wayfarers, it is necessary that, in the allocation of allotments, some portion of land is left vacant, in the stoppage that is most convenient for the pasture of Beasts.
- §23º – Allotments on the eastern bank of the Rio Grande shall not be granted, so that the woods that divide this captaincy from the Espírito Santo Captaincy and serve as a protection from deviations are not cut out there. Allotments besides the ones from the new Path shall not be granted beyond the necessary, because the only [fol. 233v] intent of the establishment of the Conquest is the extraction of gold; and it may not be convenient to multiply the lands destined for planting and employ there the slaves that can do the work of mining.
- §24º – Sugar mills will never be allowed in the Conquest, and only Flour, Cassava, and pylon mills shall be permitted.
- §25º – In the case of a discovery of emeralds and other precious stones, except diamonds, the lands shall be divided in the same way as the pieces of land destined for gold mining were. And, as for the precious stones, the fifth is due to His Majesty, and this will be charged through head-tax of the slaves who serve the miners in the extraction of these stones, being regulated by the abundance and quality of the same stones, so that,

through a prudent discretion, the twenty percent of the Royal Fifth are sent to His Majesty.

§26º – To avoid disputes over the boundaries of the Counties of Serro, Sabará, Rio das Mortes, and this village, I will do the interim and provisional division that seems to me more useful to the Royal interests, and more convenient to the use of the Peoples, and this division will be observed until there is a resolution of His Majesty.”

(National Library of Rio de Janeiro, Manuscript Division, Codex 2,2,24 – fol. 229v-233v – s.d. – after document of September 8th, 1779).

“For the Mr. Marquis of Angeja, bringing news of the trip, and of the establishment of the Conquest of the Cuieté, in which the 3 copies that follow were written, and the List of the proofs, of the gold from the samples from rivers in which the tests were made

Illustrious Sir, I should not avoid to put in the presence of Your Excellency my little errands, since I managed to achieve the opening of the road of the new Conquest of the Cuieté, which inspired so much work to my Dear predecessors, the Count of Bobadela, Luís Diogo Lobo da Silva, and the Count of Valadares. Their example encouraged me to continue their initial ideas, putting in practice as soon as I took office the opening of the new Path, with Arraial do Cuieté becoming communicable by land, and the residents free from the work of navigating Doce River, which was so difficult because of the waterfalls that this trip could not be made in less than twenty days in the dry season, and in a month or more in the season of the waters. This time was now reduced in six or seven days.

On the 12th of last September, I entered that new Conquest accompanied of Colonel João Tavares da Silva, the man to whom I had ordered the opening of the new road, and now again I have entrusted him with the regency of the same Conquest, as Your Excellency will see in the included papers, which describe the arrangements that have been done, or better, that should be done according to the State of the country, and to the circumstances that a new establishment demands, and I have done this in the midst of the fiercest Gentile that this Captaincy has.

I hope His Majesty will approve it, and also that my projects deserve Your Excellency’s favoring.

I also send Your Excellency a digression of my journey, and Your Excellency may believe that this Conquest will be the one to lift the people from Minas from the decadence in which they are because of their obligations, since in this captaincy not a single person can be found that could try a difficult service.

I also [fol. 234v] put in the presence of Your Excellency a list of the carats that emerged in the samples of gold taken from the rivers where I had ordered the tests, so that Your Excellency sees their excellent quality:

I have never expected to find a country filled with rivers, streams and creeks so abundant as the ones located in the new Cuieté Conquest. The woods are of the best quality for planting. And finally I think that all that territory should be called Treasury of Cuieté instead of New Conquest. My successor comes to find its door open, and through this little service of mine, he will put to use the people of this captaincy, and the royal interest of His Majesty, in whose service I wish to be until the last moments of my life.

Without a doubt, it would not be possible for me to finish this important work without some expenditure of the Royal Resources as Your Excellency will be informed by the Royal Treasury, despite the people having contributed with the portion informed in the enclosed copy. God save Your Excellency. Vila Rica, 10/18/1779.”

(National Library of Rio de Janeiro, Manuscript Division, Codex 2,2,24 — *fol.* 234v).

“For Mr. Martinho de Mello e Castro, about the one that sends it, to whom were sent the samples of gold

As soon as I took office of this Government, I have examined the strength of each of the miners that compose this Captaincy; the number of slaves that they have and the wealth of each of the mines belonging to the same miners, whom I have found full of obligations, the same motive why they have refrained from trying more difficult services. This is the reason why this country finds itself in an overall decadence, not because it does not have in itself yet very rich treasures [*fol.* 235] underground, but for the motives mentioned above, which I cannot solve unless I promote more discoveries, in order to take these miserable men out of the liabilities in which they are, so that, recovering their strength, they can not only get rid of the obligations that they face, but also, through the same discoveries, may increase the royal incomes, and try the most difficult services after the easiest ones are finished, and so that the rest of the people may not stand still where the gold is known to be, looking without being able to extract by lack of means.

These reasons, and others of the same nature, encouraged me to try the project, which at another time my predecessors, the Count of Bobadela, Luís Diogo Lobo da Silva, and the Count of Valadares, wanted to put into practice. They exhausted themselves defending their ideas for the Conquest of the Cuieté, because of the news that traditionally circulated in this captaincy, that the Conquest was crossed by immense rivers, creeks and streams, all very rich, of which there was no other knowledge except for their Bars. But perhaps the absence experienced by my predecessors of a good practitioner to open a new road to the Conquest, to send someone examining Rivers, Creeks and Streams at their headwaters, which

were hidden in that vast wilderness, was the reason that frustrated their wishes, with the wealth that was hidden in that new Conquest remaining unknown until now.

These news, and others that I came to know, forced me to follow the same method, putting in practice all the steps that occurred to me, so that once and for all this very important work was concluded, so useful to the inhabitants of this Captaincy, as well as to the Royal Treasury of His Majesty.

Finally, the path that I reported to Your Excellency in letters dated from October 12, 75 and September 7, 76 was completed; and on the day [fol. 235v] of September the 12th, I have entered the Conquest along with Colonel João Tavares da Silva, to whom I had entrusted the building of the new road; I have crossed with that same colonel the vast hinterland, where he showed me throughout the path the wealth that the new Conquest kept in itself, whose extraction was prevented by the Gentile. This new road, besides allowing the discovery of new mines, will also avoid the big trip that was formerly done to the same Cuieté, boarding up everything that was needed to guarantee the survival of that village in the district of Antonio Dias below, with the transporters being forced to carry the canoes and loads on their backs when passing the Doce River, because of the immense waterfalls that forced them to do this work. So the main point is that the new Path will have the benefits that I present to Your Excellency.

In a letter dated January 7, [17]77, I said to Your Excellency that I would send the arrangements that I needed to make for the good functioning of that Conquest; which now I am doing and I hope that they all deserve the royal approval of His Majesty.

I also submit to Your Excellency a description of the journey I took to that Conquest; and of the circumstances of the way, and what I have found in it; as well as samples of gold from the rivers and creeks in which the tests were made, with the carats obtained in the tests presented in an included list.

Your Excellency does not ignore that projects of this nature can never be put in practice without some costs to the Royal Treasury, despite the contributions that people gave without the least use of violence. So that Your Excellency is aware of the method that I used to get the mentioned contribution, I send the copy of the letter that I have mailed to the two chief Captains, and with it the response from them, with the sums of what they have remitted to the Royal Treasury. God save Your Excellency. Vila Rica, 10/18/1779."

(National Library of Rio de Janeiro, Manuscript Division, Codex 2,2,24 — fol. 234v - 235v).