



## Royal education expansion in Portuguese America during the 18th century: centralization and singularities<sup>1</sup>

A expansão do ensino régio na América Portuguesa no século XVIII:  
centralização e singularidades

La expansión de la educación real en la América portuguesa en el siglo XVIII:  
centralización y singularidades

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### Abstract

In this article it's intended to analyze the process of expansion of royal education in Portuguese America, highlighting the actions of governors and their connections with the central power, attending to the efforts of centralization and standardization of the Portuguese crown, according to the particularities of each captaincy. The goal is to collect elements for a comparative analysis and contribute to the understanding of the initial processes of implementing public education in Brazil, with emphasis on the clash between the administrative actions of the central power and the experiences lived in the daily management of public education in the colonial period.

**Keywords:** History of Education. Colonial Brazil. Royal Classes. Literary Subsidy.

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## Resumo

Nesse artigo pretende-se analisar o processo de expansão do ensino régio na América portuguesa destacando a atuação dos governadores e suas relações com o poder central, respondendo conforme as especificidades de cada capitania aos esforços de centralização e uniformização da coroa portuguesa. O objetivo é reunir elementos para uma análise comparada e contribuir para a compreensão dos processos iniciais de implantação do ensino público no Brasil, com destaque para o confronto entre as ações administrativas do poder central e as experiências vividas no cotidiano do gerenciamento do ensino público no período colonial.

**Palavras-chave:** História da Educação. Brasil Colônia. Aulas Régias. Subsídio Literário.

## Resumen

Este artículo pretende analizar el proceso de expansión de la educación real en la América portuguesa, destacando la actuación de los gobernadores y sus relaciones con el poder central, respondiendo según las especificidades de cada capitania a los esfuerzos de centralización y uniformización de la corona portuguesa. El objetivo es reunir elementos para un análisis comparativo y contribuir a la comprensión de los procesos iniciais de implementación de la educación pública en Brasil, con énfasis en la confrontación entre las acciones administrativas del poder central y las experiencias vividas en la gestión cotidiana de la educación pública. en el periodo colonial.

**Palabras clave:** Historia de la Educación. Brasil Colonial. Clases Reales. Subsidio Literario.

## Opening notes

The historiography about the colonial period in Brazil has been discussing, in the recent decades, the nature and qualities of Portugal's relations with its realm, a debate that was driven by the possible presence of Old Regime structures in America. The standpoint that considers this possibility relativizes the absolute and centralizing dimension of the Portuguese monarchy in that period, according to the theses defended by the Portuguese law historian, António Manuel Hespanha (1994; 1998). According to this view, elites of the overseas lands would take advantage of relative autonomy in relation to the central power, evidencing relations of mutual dependence between the Crown and the local powers (FRAGOSO, BICALHO & GOUVÊA, 2001). This assertion confronts the consolidated historiography since the middle of the 20th century, which placed Brazil as an integral part of the so-called colonial system, dependent and subordinate to the economic needs of Portugal (NOVAIS, 1979). With a moderate position in this debate, Laura de Mello e Souza (2006), taking a critical tone to the idea of transplanting Old Regime structures to America, draws attention to the complexity of colonial society, where practices brought from Portugal mixed with others, derived from the logic of that society.

This discussion is unquestionably important for the study of education in the colonial period in Brazil, especially when it comes to the early schooling process, from the Pombaline reforms and the implementation of royal education, in the second half of the eighteenth century and first decades of the 19th century. The so-called setback represented by the reforms, as proposed by Fernando de Azevedo (1963), has been challenged by the recent renewal in the historiography of colonial education, not granting to them the condition of a successful project of the Portuguese crown. But there is no doubt about the role of these reforms in the set of events that would make public elementary education a socially recognized institution. Since this is a political-administrative and legal process – as well as, of course, a pedagogical one –, the historiographical perspective proposed by Laura de Mello e Souza provides us with relevant instruments for understanding the mechanisms that regulated the implementation and functioning of the royal education in the different captaincies of Brazil.

The Crown itself acknowledged the diversity and specificities found in its domains, admitting adjustments to the original decisions of the reforms stated in the laws, charters and royal orders. As much as one tried to keep all overseas territories under the same rules, it would not be possible to ignore the differences between America, Africa, China and India. This understanding, even if it was induced by the parts involved in the particular and distinct circumstances in these different parts of the world under Portuguese regulation, ended up making the royal teaching work in some way in the face of problems not always foreseen, even if possible.

These questions incite us to refine a point of view to the history of the Pombaline education reforms that considers, on the one hand, the relations between the central power and the local powers, including the royal teachers and the social groups involved in educational activities, directly or indirectly. On the other hand, from a comparative but also connected perspective, pay due attention to the nuances of those relationships in different parts of the Portuguese empire, as well as the diverse implications caused by the reforms according to local specificities. Thus, it will be possible to take a further step in the study of the reforms, focusing on the actions of their main agents – governors, city councils, ecclesiastical authorities and teachers – in addition to the segments of the population that would be potential and/or effective beneficiaries of that education, placing them in a comparative and connected perspective, through the investigation of different parts of Portuguese America.

Therefore, this article intends to analyze the process of expansion of royal education in Portuguese America, highlighting the actions of governors and their connections with the

central power, attending to the efforts of centralization and standardization of the Portuguese crown, according to the particularities of each captaincy. The goal is to collect elements for a comparative analysis and contribute to the understanding of the initial processes of implementing public education in Brazil, with emphasis on the clash between the administrative actions of the central power and the experiences lived in the daily management of public education in the colonial period.

The availability of documents produced by these instances allows a comparative analysis according to the specificities of each captaincy and, even internally, to the particularities of the different settlements and villages. The results achieved so far with the research carried out in recent years support the hypothesis about the game of confrontation and negotiation, indicating that the profound relationship between Portugal and its realms could not even be intended by the Crown itself in many situations related to the establishment and functioning of royal education. This perspective is implied, for example, in the study of the performance of some governors who carried out their functions in more than one Captaincy, as was the case of Bernardo José de Lorena, governor of São Paulo between 1788 and 1797, and of Minas Gerais between 1797 and 1803. Ruling and controlling royal education were some of his obvious concerns in the administration of two captaincies with different characteristics, which supports the comparative study of their actions, highlighting important elements for understanding a far from homogeneous and predictable process. Hence the significance of pointing out general elements of these perspectives, and specifically analyzing some aspects of the implementation of reforms in some captaincies in the second half of the 18th century.

The Pombaline education reforms consisted of several actions taken during the reign of King D. José (1750-1777), under the direction of his minister Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo, the future Marquis of Pombal: the creation of the School Of Commerce (1759), the creation of the General Board of Studies and the royal classes of Latin Grammar, Greek and Rhetoric (1759), the creation of the Royal School of Nobles (1761), the expansion of royal teaching with the incorporation of first letters classes and the creation of the Literary Subsidy, and the reform of the University of Coimbra (1772). Except for the actions that would be developed exclusively in Portugal and that would indirectly affect its domains – such as the reform of the University, the School Of Commerce and the Royal School of Nobles, for example –, the others also applied overseas. They were, however, far from achieving some uniformity, although this was sometimes intended. Many years after the beginning of the reforms, D. João, already regent<sup>2</sup>, determined that all the royal teachers of Rhetoric in the Kingdom and in the overseas domains should use the compendium of History by Jerônimo Soares Barbosa. In an command especially addressed to the Auditor of Pernambuco, the Prince Regent replicated the same instruction given to other parts of the empire, insisting on the standardization of norms and methods established for royal education (AVISO, 1806). At some level, perhaps it even seemed to the central administration that this objective was being achieved, if one considers responses such as the one given to this order by the Auditor of Vila Rica, reporting that he had summoned the teacher of Rhetoric from the City of Mariana to give lessons with the compendium by Jerônimo Soares Barbosa, according to the instructions (RELAÇÃO, 1806). The teacher promptly replied:

I received the Royal Order written on April 28 of the current year; and I am aware of what is determined therein, ready to carry out what His Royal Highness the Prince Regent Our Lord orders me to do. Mariana, on the 1st of August, 1806. Salvador Peregrino Aarão, Royal Teacher of Rhetoric (RELAÇÃO, 1806).

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<sup>2</sup> The future D. João VI took on the regency in 1799, when his mother, Queen D. Maria I, was declared incompetent. On her death in 1816, he was crowned King of Portugal.

What Salvador Peregrino Aarão actually did, we do not know. We can derive his commitment to the job, which he had since 1788, when he received his appointment letter and showed regularity in his activities and, except for a period of absence due to health problems, he continued active until the early years of the 19th century. But we also noticed the communication protocol between the center and the parties, each one fulfilling its role in the official communication networks, which could ensure good impressions on the conduct of the crown agents in the different levels of the colonial administration and allow some degree of control based on information arriving from overseas.

### **Administrative dynamics of royal education**

The process of implementing royal education in Portuguese America was marked by complex dynamics and tension among the different levels of power, from central to local. The consecutive changes in the management structures of this teaching – General Board of Studies (1759), followed by the Royal Censor Board (1772) and the Royal Board of the General Commission for Examination and Censorship of Books (1787), then to the University of Coimbra (1791) and finally for the General Board of Studies Committee (1794) – affected the local levels of power, that is, captaincy governments and city councils. The hassle in enforcing some of the determinations of the education reforms, such as, for example, carrying out, in Lisbon, the exams to fill the chairs, led the Crown to delegate to the local authorities the attribution of conducting them in America, in conformity with established standards.

The implementation of royal education in Portuguese America, although analyzed from general administrative acts and legislation, was not a uniform process that occurred simultaneously in all parts of the territory. In some captaincies, such as Minas Gerais and Mato Grosso, for example, the first royal classes began to be recorded many years after the beginning of the reforms, contrary to what happened with coastal captaincies, such as Pernambuco and Bahia.

As mentioned, from the beginning, the central administration already reviewed local conditions to instruct its agents on how to apply the norms established by the laws. The issue of royal teachers' salaries, for example, was one of the first elements in which the differences were brought to mind, although this was also related to the Crown's challenge in creating a unified system for the entire empire. There was not even a clear definition of the need for classes maintained by the State in all Portuguese domains because, even with the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1759, there were places where the presence of other religious orders would adequately meet the demands for instruction, such as, for example, in Angola or India.

With regard to salaries, although the Royal Charter of 1759 determined that teachers should take on their positions by holding a letter signed by the Director, King D. José decided that teachers who were assigned overseas should be dispensed from it, until the salary amounts, in those parts of the empire, were defined. The diversity of situations can be attested in a letter addressed to the Governor of Grão Pará and Maranhão, in which the General Director of Studies, D. Tomás de Almeida, informed about the designation of a royal teacher of Latin grammar for the City of Grão Pará, with orders for the governor to rule on the salary that seemed adequate “according to the needs of the Country” (CARTA, 1760). To guide this definition, the General Director informed the governor about the amounts paid in other parts, such as Lisbon, Coimbra, Porto and Pernambuco. It is interesting that other elements appear in this communication, such as the verification of differences paid in some parts of Brazil due to lower living costs, as was the case with the value of housing and, in the Pará region, due to the use of

the service of “ blacks from the land who do not spend neither food nor clothing of the Kingdom” (CARTA, 1760), sparing expenses with servants. In this way, the royal teachers of that captaincy would not need more robust salaries, since their expenses would be lower than their colleagues from other regions.

This discussion lasted for many years, which indicates that, as much as the Crown persisted in its intention to standardize, reality forced the recognition of differences. As early as 1822, on the eve of Brazil's independence, the Provisional Board of the Government of Piauí authorized the creation of new chairs in different locations, but determined salary differences according to the population density of each one. It was assumed that this criterion would influence the attendance of students in each location and that, consequently, it would reflect on more or less work for teachers (OFÍCIOS, 1822). But this authorization perhaps only confirmed a situation that had already been observed in practice two decades earlier, as can be seen in the data in Table 1, especially in relation to the captaincy of Pernambuco, where there was a variation in wages between the different settlements. We will comment further on this issue below.

The intense interaction between local powers and the central administration in Portugal indicates the diversity of situations, motivations and conditions for the functioning of royal education, from its creation until the first decades of the 19th century. It was not unusual for several matters to arrive at the same time, to be considered at once, involving demands from different parts of the empire, usually forwarded to the Overseas Council, sometimes reaching the Secretary of State for the Affairs of the Kingdom, from where they were forwarded to the offices assigned for their solutions. In the case of issues involving royal education and its teachers, this duty, as already mentioned, was assigned to different offices according to the administrative modifications carried out by the crown. A document from 1821 brings indications about this dynamic of conducting the management of that teaching, and which allowed the central administration to perceive its daily life:

The King commands, through the Secretary of State for Affairs of the Kingdom, to send to the General Board of Studies the included requests of Francisco Ramos de Oliveira, who intends to be restored to the Chair from which he was suspended; the Secular Presbyter José Marinho Falcão Padilha, substitute for the Chair of Rhetoric in Recife, Pernambuco, who requests confirmation of his designation; and Francisco de Betencourt Pereira from the city of Angra, Island Third, Public teacher of First letters in the mentioned city, who intends for his son to succeed him in the said chair; for you to arbitrate on each of the said requirements. Queluz Palace on December 3, 1821 (CONSULTAS, 1821).

Different matters, in different parts of the overseas domains, and the search for centralized solutions are evidenced in this distribution of requests from royal teachers. Enclosed were documents proving the situations reported by the teachers to instruct the rulings that the Board would issue on their demands. The teacher of Rhetoric from Pernambuco, for example, sent his request along with a copy of the provision that had appointed him to that chair, in addition to statements from colleagues and from the Chamber of Vila de Recife attesting to his professional attributes and commitment to the service, all with public recognition by a notary. An attempt was made to follow an administrative rite, through which the positions of individuals and their demands would be legitimized before the crown and, if possible, would

help to obtain favorable results. At least with regard to these formal paths, royal teaching showed some uniformity, as did other dimensions of the administration of the empire other than education. We see this quite evidently in compliance with a rule defined in the reign of D. Maria I, reinforcing the obligation for royal teachers to send to the Treasury Boards of their captaincies certificates issued by the municipal councils, in which attendance should be confirmed, as well as their behavior and moral conduct, without which their salaries would not be paid. The study of series of these certificates allows the analysis of the trajectories of these teachers and situations of their daily life in the context of royal education, over many years, contributing to the clarification of important questions about the functioning of this teaching in Brazil.<sup>3</sup>

Administrative centralization was also shown in the management of literary subsidy's collection, at least with regard to the balance sheets made for accountability to the central government.<sup>4</sup> The records of the Board of Administration and Collection of the Literary Subsidy contain the reports sent by the Committees of the captaincies, displaying the amounts of the collection of the tribute, the expenses incurred with the teachers' payroll and the maintenance of the Committees themselves, but also reporting difficulties found in the process, mainly the lack of sufficient personnel for the service. The reports, with detailed spreadsheets, were also sent to the central administration, generally in response to requests for information on the support's income and its uses, made by the Secretary of State for the Affairs of the Navy and Overseas Domains.

In 1798 the Secretary sent a Notice to the governors of the captaincies of America ordering the sending of reports on the income of the literary subsidy, the list of teachers and their salaries, and what was due to them in late payments, relative to the years 1795 to 1797. The analysis of several of these reports sent to the Secretary of State allows us to identify the confrontation between the imposition of standardized procedures for all territories and the particularities that interfered in the progress of administrative processes, with regard to the management of royal education. The reports of five captaincies – Pernambuco, Mato Grosso, Maranhão, Minas Gerais and Goiás – were analysed, all prepared in response to the aforementioned Notice, of September 22, 1798, and sent to the then Secretary of State for the Navy and Overseas, D. Rodrigo de Sousa Coutinho.<sup>5</sup> Not all reports were prepared to meet the demands of the Secretary, some more complete, others omitted in relation to some items that they should contain, and others bringing information that had not been requested. Even so, it is possible to analyze them in comparison, identifying issues of interest for a point of view that seeks to confront the standardizing and controlling intentions of the crown, and the different experiences and problems of each part of Portuguese America.

One of the aspects to stand out is the amounts paid to royal teachers according to the chair they occupied. We know that in the first years of the Pombaline reforms, especially between 1759 and 1772, there were difficulties in establishing unique values for each chair, mainly due to the verification, by the central and local administrations, of the differences observed in economic activities and their income, and in the cost of life in each region, as already mentioned in this article. Problems in managing this issue, including due to complaints from teachers about differences in salaries paid for the same chairs, led to the fixing of values,

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<sup>3</sup> See, with focus on this issue: CARDOSO, 2002; FONSECA, 2009; FONSECA, 2010; FRAGOSO, 1972.

<sup>4</sup> The Literary subsidy and its relationship with royal teaching is a subject that, in Brazil, has been part of several works about the Pombaline education reforms, but it is little targeted as a specific object, as in MORAIS, 2012; MORAIS, 2019; SILVA, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> The reports are part of letters sent by the governors of the aforementioned captaincies and are available in the Overseas Historical Archive/Resgate Project/National Digital Library. The documents are referenced at the end of this article.

although apparently in a non-compulsory way. The hierarchization between the chairs was not only due to the fact that they were divided between the so-called minor and major schools in relation to the level of education, but also because of the different salaries received by the teachers. At the time of preparing the reports in question, these values were already better defined, although some peculiar situations can be observed, as shown in table 1:

**Table 1** - Annual salary rates, according to existing chairs (1795-1797)

Chair/Captaincy	Philosophy	Geometry	Rhetoric	Latin grammar	Grammar school	Greek
Pernambuco	160\$000	480\$000	440\$000	400\$00 (Recife e Olinda)  240\$000 (Igarapu, Serinhaen, Penedo, Itamaracá, Fortaleza, Sobral, Aracati, Iço, Viçosa)  300\$000 (Alagoa do Sul, Cidade da Paraíba, Cidade do Natal do Rio Grande do Norte, São José do Ribamar)	150\$000 (Recife, Olinda, Boa Vista, Cidade da Paraíba, Goiana)  100\$000 (Igarapu, Serinhaen, Penedo, Cidade da Paraíba, Aracati)  120\$000 (Cidade do Natal do Rio Grande do Norte, São José do Ribamar)  80\$000 (on additional places)	440\$000
Mato Grosso	400\$000			400\$000	200\$000	
Maranhão	460\$000		440\$000	400\$000	100\$000	
Minas Gerais	460\$000		440\$000	400\$000	150\$000	
Goiás	460\$000		440\$000	400\$000	150\$000	

**Source:** Overseas Historical Archive, Resgate Project. National Digital Library.

Although some uniformity is evident regarding the values of the salaries of the chairs of philosophy, rhetoric and Latin grammar, there is a variation found in relation to the chair of first letters which, not only presented differences between the captaincies but, in the case of Pernambuco, these differences occurred between locations in the captaincy itself. The same with regard to the chair of Latin grammar. In the most important urban areas – such as Recife and Olinda – the salaries of the two chairs were the same as those practiced in the rest of Portuguese America. But they presented a gradation depending on whether they were smaller and further away from those centers. The report from the captaincy of Pernambuco did not make it clear what the reasons for these differences would be, but it pointed to difficulties related to local economic conditions, an argument that, in fact, had been used since the first years of the reforms, in various parts of the Portuguese domains, even before the creation of the literary subsidy in 1772 (OFÍCIO, 19 Feb. 1799).<sup>6</sup>

The amounts most normally paid to royal teachers – mainly of Latin grammar, philosophy, first letters and rhetoric – were not very far from those paid to occupants of other positions in the colonial administration, such as clerks or foreign judges, who received, on average, between 300\$000 and 400\$000 per year. Payment, however, was not carried out on time, with significant delays in terms of time and amounts, in all captaincies. This is an aspect that allows us to analyze the specific situations of each one, and which impacted the functioning of royal education, blocking uniformization initiatives that, although they could have been in demand by the crown, were not, in fact, expected.

<sup>6</sup> This document was worked on by SILVA, 2008.



The reports of the governors of the captaincies, penned in 1799, showed that there was a clear gap between the collection of the literary subsidy and the maintenance needs of royal education, regarding the payment of teachers' salaries, which indicates that the creation of a specific tribute to this education did not solve its financing problems. Let us remember that, before the establishment of the subsidy, the city councils were responsible for funding classes for children, when there was a demand for this, and with resources from their own income, coming from the collection of various taxes. After 1772, the literary subsidy began to be collected and administered by the captaincy treasury boards, which were already responsible for paying the salaries of the military, clergy and civil servants of the local administration. The chambers remained in charge of attesting to the functioning of the classes and the attendance and behavior of the teachers, conditions for them to receive their salaries, and the Royal Treasury was responsible for overseeing the collection of taxes, their use and control by the councils of the captaincies. This process meant, then, the centralization of the management of royal education, both in its functional and pedagogical aspects, as well as its tributaries. But centralization did not necessarily imply uniformity, and the reports under analysis here provide evidence of situations that are not only diverse, but often conflicting as well.

The imbalance between the amounts of literary subsidy collection and the amounts to be paid to royal teachers is the common point among all the analyzed captaincies, but the explanations given by the governors for the situation are different, and they vary according to local conditions, such as indicated in Table 2:

**Table 2** - Difference between Literary Subsidy income and salaries to be paid to teachers (1795-1797)

	Pernambuco			Mato Grosso			
	1795	1796	1797	1795	1796	1797	
Income of the Subsidy	5:687\$069	5:182\$844	6:337\$348	875\$117	866\$003	891\$858	
Wages due	11:570\$000	11:570\$000	11:570\$000	1:000\$000	1:000\$000	1:000\$000	
Number of teachers in the period	60			03			
	Maranhão			Minas Gerais <sup>7</sup>	Goiás		
	1795	1796	1797		1795	1796	1797
Income of the Subsidy	1:259\$694	1:561\$843	1:224\$795		1:034\$018	1:067\$549	2:101\$567
Wages due	1:800\$000	1:800\$000	1:800\$000	10:250\$000	2:450\$000	2:450\$000	2:450\$000
Number of teachers in the period	05			47	09		

**Source:** Overseas Historical Archive, Resgate Project. National Digital Library.

In Pernambuco, the main issue pointed out by the Governing Board of the captaincy was the severe drought that would have affected the backwoods and devastated the herds, with direct consequences for several years in the collection of the subsidy, which focused on meat. A

<sup>7</sup> The report related to Minas Gerais did not present income data for the years 1795 to 1797 and, therefore, this field in the table was not completed. The question is explained in the text, further ahead.

different situation was experienced, at the time of creating the reports, in the captaincy of Mato Grosso. Not that the collection was enough, since it tended to be less than the amounts owed to the royal teachers, but it was restricted, according to Governor Caetano Pinto de Miranda Montenegro, by two factors: the failure to get bidders to collect the literary subsidy, and the low price of meat, which ended up reducing the value of the tax levied on them. Trying to improve collections, he proposed raising the tax, arguing that, due to the low price of meat in Village of Cuiabá and in the Julgado de São Pedro del Rei, the measure would not burden consumption. The governor asked for approval from his superiors to act:

If this command of mine, by raising the price of a product of the first necessity, is not contrary to the Paternal Providences of His Royal Highness, may Your Excellency forward it to the August presence of the same Lord, to determine for me what is most in accordance with the Public Teaching of such a distant and ignorant Youth of this colony (OFÍCIO, 21 Feb.1801).

One cannot fail to notice, also, the reference in this last note of the governor, emphasizing the distance and, perhaps, some mindlessness of the central authorities towards his captaincy. And by distance it is not only meant what separated Mato Grosso from the capital, Rio de Janeiro, or even from Lisbon, site of the empire. The governor also recalled the considerable distances between the villages in the interior of the captaincy, making it difficult to collect taxes and set up royal classes, aspects evidenced by the lean amounts collected for the literary subsidy and the small number of active teachers at the time of elaboration of the report: only one on Latin grammar in the capital, Vila Bela, and two in Vila de Cuiabá, one on philosophy and the other on Latin grammar.

In the captaincy of Maranhão, some irregularities were identified by the Royal Treasury, which notified the captaincy's Committee of Treasure. According to the notice, the tax was no longer collected in many locations, especially in the city of Oeiras, capital of Piauí; he did not count part of the slaughtered oxen; and it did not extend the taxing for dried meat that got distributed in the market, aware of its high consumption in the region; and finally, the reduced taxing on cane liquor. All these irregularities affected the income from the subsidy, and were pointed out by the Royal Treasury as the causes of the deficit and delays in payments to royal teachers. In order for this problem to be temporarily solved, he ordered that resources be transferred from the Royal Income Safe to the Subsidy Safe, "in order to pay the salaries of teachers in due time" (OFÍCIO, 2 mar. 1799).

It is noteworthy that the income from the subsidy in Maranhão is not much lower than the amounts owed to royal teachers, when compared to other captaincies, mainly Minas Gerais and Goiás, as shown in Table 2. Governor Diogo de Sousa's report informed only five royal teachers were active in the captaincy of Maranhão in 1799, four in the City of Maranhão (philosophy, rhetoric, first letters and two in Latin grammar) and one in Vila de Alcântara (Latin grammar). Salary rates for chairs in major studies were higher, which led to burdening the payroll in relation to the amounts available in the subsidy safe (Table 1).

This notification about the irregularities was sent to Maranhão almost at the same time as the Notice that determined the completion of the report by Governor Diogo de Sousa, which was sent to the Secretary of State dated March 2, 1799, without the answers to the questions about the irregularities. These, in fact, had already been flagged a few months earlier in a letter from the royal teacher of Rhetoric in the City of Maranhão, Father José da Rocha Luiz, in which he complained about the difficulties in receiving his salaries, and made complaints about the misuse of literary subsidy resources by those responsible for their collection and distribution. In addition to pointing out some of the irregularities that were questioned by the Royal Treasury,

the teacher also denounced the favoritism, by the clerk of the Captainty Committee, to some teachers closest to him, failing to pay the salaries of others. Reports of irregularities involving not only failures in tax collection processes, but also personalistic practices, which resulted in personal favoritism within local networks of sociability, to the damage of other people and the Royal Treasury, are not rare.<sup>8</sup>

The report sent by the governor of the captainty of Minas Gerais, Bernardo José de Lorena, presents particularities that make the comparative exercise somewhat difficult (CARTA, 1799). It is detailed in the presentation of the royal chairs existing in the captainty between 1795 and 1797, but it does not bring data on the collection of the literary subsidy corresponding to those years, as requested by the Notice of the Secretary of State, but for the period from 1779 to 1781.<sup>9</sup> In a letter sent to the Secretary of State the following year, in 1800, the governor estimated the collection at 4:800\$000, a value very close, therefore, to that calculated annually in the years indicated in the report (CARTA, 1800). In addition to the observation that, as in other captainties, the payroll of royal teachers exceeded the tax collected for this purpose, it is worth paying attention to the observations made by Governor Lorena on the particularities of the movement of resources and his assessment of how to optimize their use. In the captainty of Minas Gerais, the tribute was collected in the form of powdered gold, and later it was melted into bars, with which teachers were paid. This method caused losses of gold and damage to the captainty's safes, aggravating the situation of imbalance between the resources coming from the literary subsidy and the payroll of the royal education.

Governor Bernardo José de Lorena considered that this situation would remain unresolved, unless the staff of royal teachers was proportional to the subsidy collection, which would be solved, in his view, by reducing the number of chairs. In the already mentioned letter sent to the Secretary of State, in 1800, he proposed a plan that would reduce the number of chairs – and consequently of teachers – to 27, that is, twenty less than the number presented in the previous year's report. In addition to the problem of the loss caused by the form of collection in powdered gold and its casting into bars, the governor also drew attention to the little effort in collecting the tribute, suggested a greater centralization of the process, but his main proposal would be to reduce the supply of chairs, without considering the effects of the measure in a captainty with a large population and many urban centers.

The report sent by the governor of the captainty of Goiás, Tristão da Cunha Meneses, begins with a long letter in which he resumes the chronology of administrative actions related to public education, since the creation of the literary subsidy in 1772 and the norms for its collection and use. Emphasizing the particularities of the captainty, the governor explained that it was necessary to adapt those norms because, being an extensive territory, it was necessary to delegate the collection of the tribute to the judges and notaries of his only district. But he complained about their lack of commitment and their connivance with tax evasion, especially from “the powerful, plantation owners, interested in the same cause, and with such corrupted morals” (OFÍCIO, 2 Aug. 1799). This would be, for him, the main reason for the decline in income from the literary subsidy and the difficulties in making payments on time, leaving the administration of the captainty with a significant debt. Controlling the misappropriations and the abuses committed by those responsible for tax collection would be an obvious measure, but Governor Tristão da Cunha ended up following a position similar to that of the governor of Minas Gerais, understanding that it was

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<sup>8</sup> Favoritism of this nature has also been identified in relation to complaints against teachers, allegedly unworthy of their position, in favor of acquaintances and relatives of agents of city chambers or members of the clergy.

<sup>9</sup> Some data in this report deserve detailed analysis, as they differ from other sources for the same period. See: FONSECA, 2010; FONSECA, 2020.

necessary to adjust the number of chairs to the subsidy income. The solution proposed by him would be, however, different in some points: that first the chairs of first letters were created in all the villages of the captaincy, and then, “according to the forces of the income applied for the subsistence of the Masters, regulate the chairs of major studies, so that all peoples could take advantage of this benefit with as little inconvenience as possible” (OFÍCIO, 2 Aug. 1799). The Governor understood that it was more appropriate that the Philosophy and Rhetoric chairs be left for the future, and that some Latin Grammar chairs be relocated to serve more distant populations.

### **Final notes**

These reports from the governors of the five captaincies indicate possibilities for interpreting part of the process of implementation and operation of royal education in Brazil, in line with the perspective mentioned at the beginning of this article, through which the relations between the levels of power operated the negotiation, adjustments and, eventually, counterpoints. Local administrations could not act independently, even though their representatives – the governors – enjoyed significant decision-making power. But that did not imply autonomy, and consultation with higher positions, in Lisbon, was a requirement and necessity, which they could not escape from. These, although moved by the expectation of more uniform control in the various integrant parts of the Portuguese domains, left room for negotiation, and recognized, to a certain extent, the particularities to ensure the efficiency of management.

This observation, in line with the discussion on the historical dynamics in Portuguese America, by giving relevance to the contrasts between norms and social practices, to movements of adjustment, transgression or negotiation, allows establishing under what conditions the analysis of information coming from the sources will be done, and in which set of scales (REVEL, 1998). This means reconsidering the problem of context beyond being a scenario in which subjects move, but which presents itself as plural and subject to elaboration by the historian, according to the points of observation defined from the investigated historical experiences. These assumptions make sense, in the focused case, when one considers the study of the relations between local and central powers, involved in the complex process of installation and operation of royal education. The dynamics of the analysis scales help to clarify the specificities put in question, to understand the elaboration of the speeches and the forwarding of the actions of the different instances, including comparing them.

Comparison is understood here as a method, implicit in all historical estimations” (PURDY, 2012, p.64), thesis also defended by Carlo Ginzburg, for whom comparison is inherent in the work of historians (GINZBURG, 2015, and 2021). The comparison is based on these assumptions that understand the realities/situations/processes to be compared as mobile and connected, considering at the center of the actions the confrontation between the norms and the social and cultural conditions present in Portuguese America, related to the movement of implementation of the royal teaching, and having the individuals and administrative instances involved in it as the mediating elements in those connections. Despite the fact that everyone, in all parts of the Portuguese domains, was formally submitted to the same authorities and central norms, their movements were also guided by local conditions, by power plays, by interests and circumstances. In a counterpoint both to a history of education in Brazil, and to the fragmentation of the various local and regional histories of education, the purpose of this article was to point out elements that allow confronting occurrences in different places and

circumstances in Portuguese America, in a challenge as proposed by Simona Cerutti, which is comparing specific situations “not based on an external and general definition of the objects to be compared, but based on criteria, as close as possible to the experience of social actors” (CERUTTI, 2021).

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