

THE NEW MAP OF HEREDITARY CAPTAINCIES OF BRAZIL

O Novo Mapa das Capitânicas Hereditárias do Brasil

Jorge Pimentel Cintra

Universidade de São Paulo – USP
Escola Politécnica da USP – Departamento de Engenharia de Transportes
Caixa Postal 61.549 - CEP 05424-970
jpcintra@usp.br

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a new map of the Hereditary Captaincies at the moment of their creation (1534-1536), which differs from the traditional map proposed by Varnhagen in 1854, has remained until now. The new design is based on primary sources, namely, charts of donation and the cartography of the time, particularly the map by Bartolomeu Velho. The main changes refer to boundary lines in northern captaincies, which should follow under meridians and not parallels; they also refer the particular configuration of the southern captaincies, with lines pointing northwestwards; again to the division into portions, named *quinhões*, of the captaincies of Aires da Cunha and Joao de Barros; finally reference is made to the existence of undistributed lands.

Keywords: Hereditary Captaincies, Map of the Hereditary Captaincies, Historical Cartography.

RESUMO

Apresenta-se o novo mapa das Capitânicas Hereditárias no momento de sua criação (1534-1536), que difere do mapa tradicional proposto por Varnhagen em 1854, que permanece vigente até hoje. O novo desenho está baseado em fontes primárias, notadamente as cartas de doação e a cartografia da época, particularmente o mapa de Bartolomeu Velho. A maior mudança ocorre nas fronteiras das capitânicas do norte, que devem seguir os meridianos e não os paralelos; mas também a particular configuração das capitânicas do sul, com linhas seguindo a direção noroeste; a divisão em *quinhões* das capitânicas de Aires da Cunha e João de Barros e finalmente, a existência de terras não distribuídas.

Palavras-chave: Capitânicas Hereditárias, Mapa das Capitânicas Hereditárias, Cartografia Histórica.

1. INTRODUCTION

In theory, the Hereditary Captaincy design process at the time of its creation (1534-1536) is relatively simple: identifying, on the Brazilian coast, the limits points between them and tracing the lines, always in accordance with the data and descriptions provided by the donation letters. In practice, difficulties emerged: the lack of some of these letters and

mistakenly assuming that all the lines run to the west, which is not true.

The first complete map of what this geographical configuration would be was presented by Varnhagen in his *História do Brasil*, in its first edition (1854). Capistrano de Abreu (1954) commented on this design:

“Varnhagen clearly defined our knowledge of the donataries: showed they were twelve in number, provided all their names, discovered the

foraes and the donation letters of most of them, drew the boundaries of the captaincies and calculated their respective areas. The result of all these investigations was set succinctly as follows by the wise G. d’Avezac in *Considérations géographiques sur l’histoire du Brésil*, 30/31,

Paris 1857 [freely translated from Portuguese]”.

And subsequently, Capistrano transcribes the description of the captaincy made by this French historian, coinciding with the classic map (Figure 1).

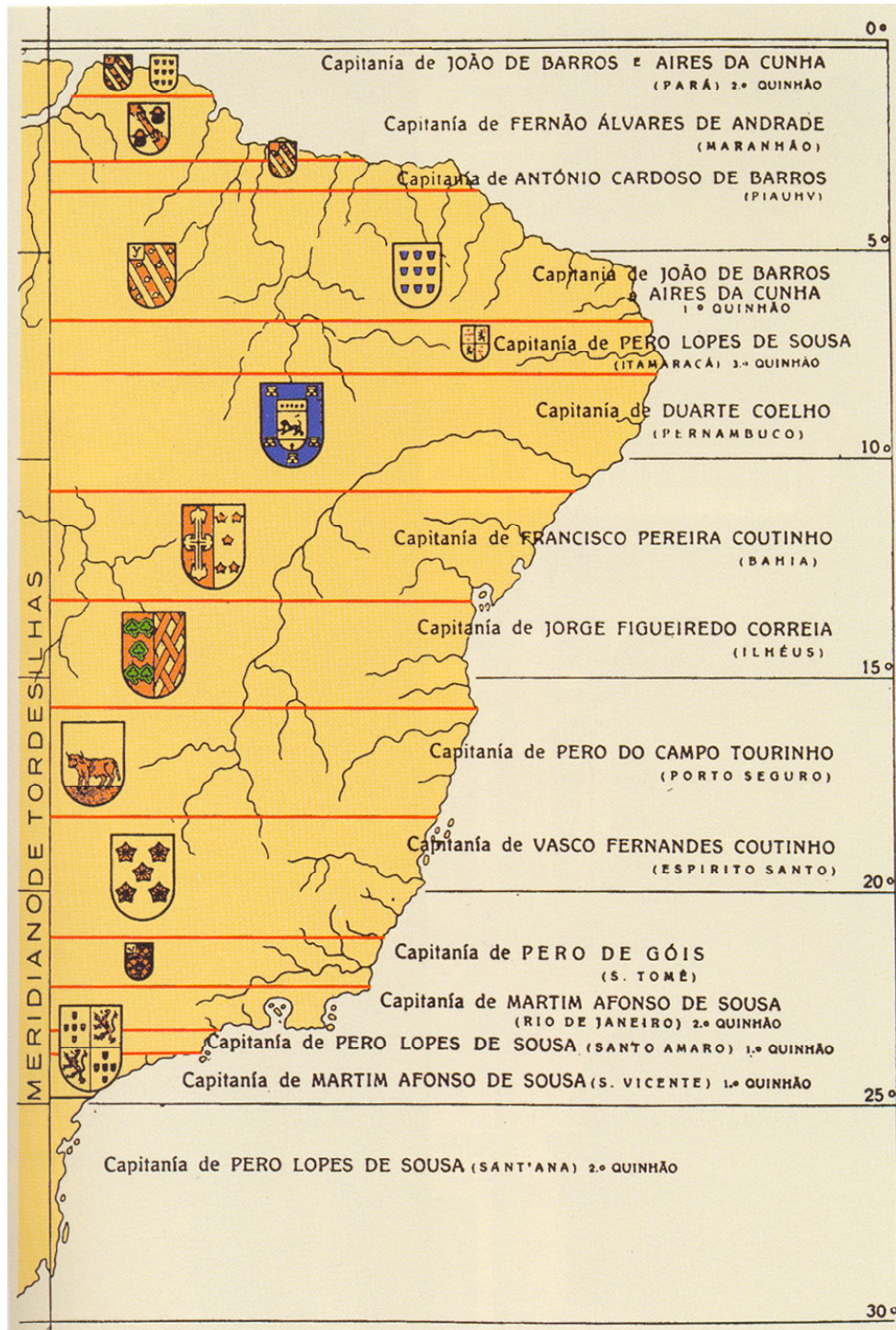


Fig. 1 - Map of the captaincies. Source: Carlos Malheiro Dias (1921).

Yet as will be shown, this reconstruction is wrong, and to advance in the study of the matter, we appealed to a more thorough reading of the primary sources: donation letters, other documents and maps of the time.

2. DONATION LETTERS AND OTHER DOCUMENTS

Table 1 lists the documents that have remained so far with the date each one was executed.

Table 1: Legal documents of the Captaincy and dates of execution

n	Donatory	Donation Letter	Foral	Other documents	Leagues
1	Aires da Cunha	<i>parcial</i>	11/03/1535		50+25
2	João de Barros	8/03/1535	11/03/1535	18/06/1535	50+25
3	Fernando Álvares de Andrade				35
4	António Cardoso de Barros	19/11/1535	20/11/1535	13/09/1535	40
5	Duarte Coelho [Pereira]	10/03/1534	24/09/1534	25/09/1534	60
6	Francisco Pereira Coutinho	5/04/1534	26/08/1534	26/08/1534	50
7	Jorge de Figueiredo Correia		1/04/1535		50
8	Pedro do Campo Tourinho	27/05/1534	23/09/1534	7/10/1534	50
9	Vasco Fernandes Coutinho	1/06/1534	7/10/1534	25/09/1534	50
10	Pero de Góis [da Silveira]	28/01/1536	29/02/1536	10/03/1534	30
11	Martim Afonso de Sousa	20/01/1535	6/10/1534	28/09/1532	100
12	Pero Lopes de Sousa	21/01/1535	6/10/1534	28/09/1532	50+30

From the cartographic point of view, the donation letters are crucial since they indicate the limits and leagues of each territory. The other documents are not as important for drawing the map. The *forais* (legal documents) indicate the total leagues conferred to the donatory, with-out specifying whether the territory is continuous or not. Among other documents, are the so-called memory alvaras that include a promise of donation, and exist for donatories 4 and 10, and a letter from the king to Martin Afonso, promising lands to him and to his brother. Also included are apostils, which are additions, usually rectifying the donation letters of donatories 5, 6, 8 and 9.

There is another very important document, a letter granting the exploration of gold and silver, a joint document issued to the first three grantees (the so-called Letter of mining: Baiao, 1932). As will be seen, this document provides the limits and leagues assigned to those captains, correcting or adding 25 leagues to the first two and indicating 35 for the third. In this table, blank cells indicate that the text or copy of such documents are not available, as occurs for donatories 3 and 7.

To establish this Table we employ the work by Chorão (1999), a re-researcher who carried out the paleographic transcription, a presentation and notes to documents kept in the Torre do Tombo in Lisbon. Some data and texts come from other sources: Martim Afonso de Sousa's and his brother's Letters of donation, come from the classical works by Pedro Taques (1772) and Frei Gaspar; the Letter of mining and the Letter of donation to João de Barros are transcribed, even with small errors or gaps, in the introduction by Antonio Baiao to the known book *Asia* regarding this donatory who was the chronicler of the Indies (Baiao 1932) and also in the classic work by Malheiro Dias.

3. THE LIMITS AND THE DESIGN OF THE CAPTAINCIES

Table 2 shows the donatories; the lots with acronyms that correspond to the current Brazilian states; boundaries with neighboring captaincy to the west or to the south and the current place related to these border points. This table should be read in conjunction with the new design of the captaincies (Figure 2).

Table 2: Donatories, leagues and boundaries with neighboring captaincies

n	Donatories	Acronym	Leagues	West or south Limit	Current Place / Interpretation
1A	Aires da Cunha	MA1	50	Abra de Diogo Leite	Rio Turiaçú
2A	João de Barros	MA2		<i>midpoint</i>	
3	Fernando Álvares de Andrade	PI	35	Cabo de Todos os Santos, east of Maranhao river	Ilha de Santana (west end)
4	António Cardoso de Barros	CE	40	Rio da Cruz	Camocim
1B	Aires da Cunha	RN1	100	Angra dos Negros	Mucuripe
2B	João de Barros	RN2		<i>midpoint</i>	
	Ponto mais ao sul			Baia de Traição	Baia de Traição
5	Duarte Coelho [Pereira]	<i>PE</i>	<i>60</i>	Rio da Santa Cruz	South channel of The Ilha de Itamaracá
6	Francisco Pereira Coutinho	<i>BA</i>	<i>50</i>	Rio de São Francisco	Rio de São Francisco
7	Jorge de Figueiredo Correia	<i>IL</i>	<i>50</i>	Ponta sul da baía de Todos os Santos	South of the baía de Todos os Santos
8	Pedro do Campo Tourinho	<i>PS</i>	<i>50</i>	The end of the precedent plus 50 leagues	Rio Pardo
9	Vasco Fernandes Coutinho	<i>ES</i>	<i>50</i>	The end of the precedent plus 50 leagues	Rio Mucuri
10	Pero de Góis [da Silveira]	<i>ST</i>	<i>30</i>	Baixos dos Pargos	Rio Itapemirim
11A	Martim Afonso de Sousa	<i>SV1</i>	<i>55</i>	13 leagues north of Cabo Frio	Rio Macaé
12B	Pero Lopes de Sousa	<i>SA</i>	<i>10</i>	Rio Curupacé / Curparê	Rio Juquiriquerê
11B	Martim Afonso de Sousa	<i>SV2</i>	<i>45</i>	Rio de São Vicente, north bar	Barra da Bertioga
12C	Pero Lopes de Sousa	<i>ST</i>	<i>40</i>	12 leagues south of Ilha de Cananéia	Barra sul de Parana-guá
*	End of distributed lands			Land of Santa Ana at 28° 1/3	28° 1/3

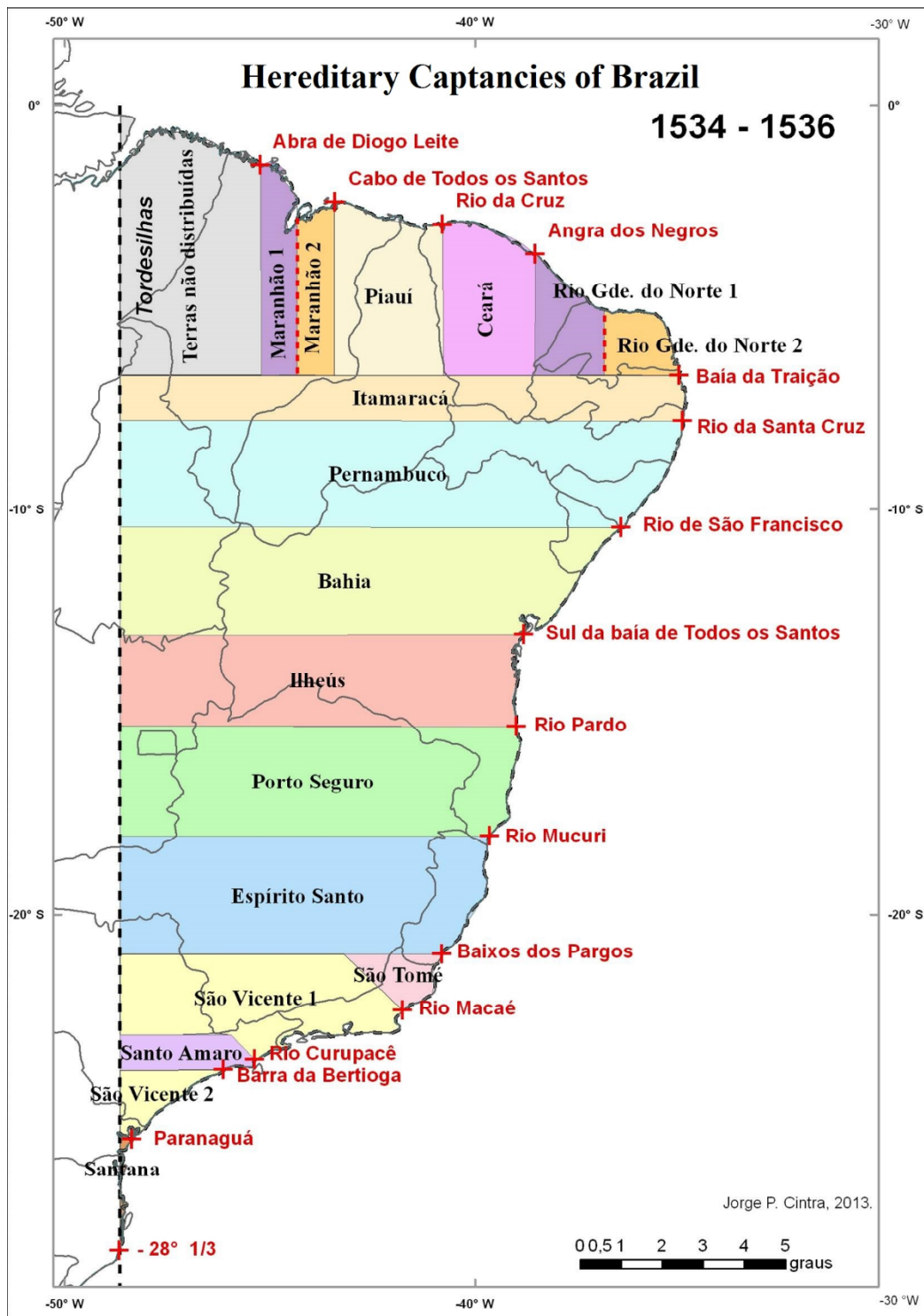


Fig. 2 - New map of the Hereditary Captaincies.

These limits do not differ from those proposed by Varnhagen, but some points should be noted. First, they are included in the Donation letters and in the Letter of mining to the captaincies of the north, among which the the letter of Fernando Alvares de Andrade is not available, and there is only a fragment of the Letter of Aires da Cunha. In the southern captaincies, the absence of the letter of Jorge de Figueiredo Correia does not preclude the

identification of the limits, since they are contained in the Letters of its neighbors.

A second point to highlight is that the distribution of land to the north was only made up to the *abra* (bay or gulf) of Diogo Leite. Thus, there are lands west / north of that point, that were not distributed by the Portuguese crown.

The dashed lines in the captaincies of Maranhao (50 leagues) and Rio Grande do Norte (100 leagues) refer to the fact that the king

granted the donatories, by the Letter of mining, the possibility of making a division between them, provided they respected the total of 75 leagues each, and reported on the division made within 20 years. Due to historical mishaps, this division was not made nor informed and we thus proposed a division in batches going through the midpoint, but in dashed line.

As can be seen, in this figure, not all lines run according to geographic parallels; thus consisting in the main difference with respect to the map by Varnhagen. The north lines run according to meridians and in the south there are northwest lines, creating two captaincies diverting from the band pattern: that of São Tomé, almost triangular in appearance and São Vicente 1, with a *sui generis* form.

Initially examining the south issue, the borders of the first parcel of Martim Afonso de Sousa, who had good cartographic knowledge, run along lines that go northwest until it finds a certain parallel and then westward. This can be read on the Donation letter to Martim Afonso (limits north and south) and in the letter to his brother Pero Lopes de Sousa. But not on the Letter of donation to Pero de Gois, which could theoretically lead to a conflict if some border demarcation attempt had been made on the north line of that parcel.

The original text is clear; for the upper limit one can read: [In the Rio Macaé] “a geographic milestone of my arms will be set, and a line will be drawn *in the northwest direction* up to twenty-one degrees high [latitude], and from this point, another line will be drawn, which directly come to the west”. For the lower limit “and another geographic milestone will be set on the north side of Rio Curupace, and a line will be drawn in the *same northwest direction* to the height of twenty-three degrees, and from this point with will cross the line directly in the west”. That is, the above underlined expressions show that the lines were not going directly to the west, but followed the path shown in Figure 2.

Varnhagen had access, read and cites the aforementioned works by Frei Gaspar da Madre de Deus and the one by Pedro Taques, which transcribe the donation letters; he even cites the captaincy border points, but he does not consider this northwest expression in describing its limits. In fact, the very Frei Gaspar did not give much

importance to this expression. In one of his first works (Frei Gaspar, 1780), he did not carefully consider and transcribed instead of northwest. In the work we are using, he corrects the expression and correctly spells northwest, but this does not annul the consequences of that for the main problem dealt with herein: fixing the borders between the captaincies of Santo Amaro and the northern lot of São Vicente.

The north borders, running according to the meridians are based on donation letters and maps. Thus, the letter of donation to Antonio Cardoso de Barros says: “The forty leagues which will extend and follow along the coast and enter the same width towards the hinterland and into the continent...” and complements adding that the extremes are *Amgra dos Negros* and the *Rio da Cruz*, in latitudes 2° and $2^{\circ} 1/3$, as shown in the scheme of *Figure 3*. This figure shows that if the estate lines ran to the west, the donatory would only have a piece of the sea, which is an absurd. The phrase “enter the hinterland” thus points to lines along meridians.

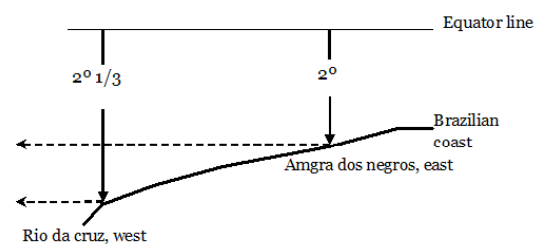


Fig. 3 - Scheme of the captaincy of Antonio Cardoso de Barros.

The second argument comes from the donation letter to Joao de Barros, which reads as follows: “The leagues which will extend, and will follow along the coast and enter the same width as the hinterland and inland as far as possible, and if it is of my conquer, and not by me donated to another captain”. The latter expression, a conflict clause, only will be explained if the borders ran according to the meridians: if the lines borders of all the captaincies were parallel, there would be no possibility of conflict and this statement would be unnecessary. This clause indicates that this, and the other north captancies, should be extended to the south, to the upper border of the Captaincy of Itamaracá, the last to have second

parallel borders.

A third argument is verified in the map by Bartholomeu Velho (1561), reproduced in Figure 4 and a detail in Figure 5. The fact that they are reduced in function of the page width, hinders the reading, but the Itamaraty Library facsimile can be clearly read, from west to east in separate blocks: capitania d aires da cunha / de j de baros

/ de ferman dalvz dandrade / de atº cardoso / de aires da cunha / de johão de Barros / de pº lopes de sousa, etc. The names of the donatories, each in his own land, are limited according to vertical lines, not represented, but which break the texts when reaching these invisible boundaries. For example, the first title is written in 3 lines: capitania / d aires da / cunha.



Fig. 4 - Bartolomeu Velho Map, 1561; original belonging to the Naval Museum of La Spezia, facsimile at the Itamaraty Library.



Fig. 5 - Ibidem, detail: the texts of the names of the donatories limited by geographical limits of their captaincies.

4. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS AND CONCLUSION

In addition to the arguments presented, the new configuration can be seen to make more sense: there are no captaincies with minimum width, as in the classical configuration, which also leads to minimum areas, for example, Martim Afonso, who was the one who received the most leagues along the coast.

Other studies, with the support of digital mapping and in further detail at some points can be found in Cintra (2013).

As shown above, we have been working as a counterpoint to the map proposed by Varnhagen (1956). To take a step further, it was necessary to make a more deep reading of the primary sources, which allowed suggesting several modifications to the current standard. A cartographic proposal was made to replace the model proposed over 150 years ago. More than completing a task, we hope to have contributed to opening new debates on the subject.

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