

Clergy, Society, and Power Relations in Colonial Brazil: On the Vicar Forane (*Vigário da vara*), 1745-1800

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the vicariates forane and the profile of their main official, explaining the process through which the diocesan apparatus penetrated into the territory of Central-Southern Portuguese America (i.e. Minas Gerais and São Paulo, 1745-1800). Firstly, an explanation is provided of the way in which such structures were organized in the diocesan territory, as well as of their role in episcopal government. Secondly, some light is shed on the power relations and social dynamics that controlled access to the office of vicar forane (*vigário da vara*).

Keywords

Church power, Appointments to office, Clergy, Colonial Brazil

Resumo

Através da análise da configuração das vigararias da vara e do perfil de seu principal oficial, este artigo explicita o processo de enraizamento das estruturas diocesanas no Centro-sul da América portuguesa: Minas Gerais e São Paulo, entre 1745 e 1800. Num primeiro momento, esclarece como estes aparelhos estavam organizados no território diocesano e a função que cumpriam no governo episcopal. Em seguida, o texto foca as relações de poder que permeavam o acesso ao posto de vigário da vara.

Palavras-chave

Poder eclesiástico, Provimentos de ofícios, Clero, Brasil colonial

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Introductory Remarks

While studying vicariates forane and the profile of their main official, this paper also analyzes the process through which the diocesan structures were established in Central-Southern Portuguese America: Minas Gerais and São Paulo (1745-1800). I have framed my analysis from two viewpoints. On the one hand, I seek to understand the way in which these apparatuses were organized in the diocesan territory and the role that they played in episcopal government. On the other hand, I take special interest in vicars forane (*vigários da vara*), seeking to clarify the power relations underpinning access to this office, the most important post in an ecclesiastical judicial county (*comarca eclesiástica*). In broader terms, I consider the role played by appointments to this office within the framework of the relationship between the Bishop and the political center of the Portuguese empire, taking the bishopric of Mariana as an example. At the local level, I seek to identify the training and social profile of clergymen who held office as vicars forane in the São Paulo diocese (map attached in appendix). In this way, it becomes possible to explore the social realities that enabled the episcopal apparatus to take root in the colonial territory, thus helping to expand understanding of the power games associated with this process.

The study of vicariates is essential for understanding diocesan organization, and its relationship with the process of colonization in the Portuguese overseas context. In fact, vicariates forane were a component of episcopal power that made it possible to cover a very vast territory, being installed as they were at the seat of all the ecclesiastical judicial counties that formed huge bishoprics. As we will see, the ecclesiastical courts installed at the seat of each ecclesiastical judicial county (ruled by the vicar forane, unlike the ecclesiastical court at the seat of the bishopric *vigaria-geral*, run by the vicar-general) allowed bishops to reach the peripheries of the diocese in a stable and durable manner, which made the system very flexible, territorially speaking. The vicar forane network enabled the central diocesan power to exert control over the parish network governed by each ecclesiastical judicial court, as is explained in more detail below. The episcopal presence in the diocesan periphery was strengthened by the activities developed by pastoral visitors, whose role was to check the status of churches and their records, inspect the behavior of the population, and mainly to correct public sins and scandals. They developed their activity seasonally, and (unlike vicars forane) they could not act as representatives of the ecclesiastical authority; therefore their activities were not as contentious (Carvalho 1988; Paiva 1989; Boschi 1987; Figueiredo 1997).

Using these different levels of analysis and frameworks, we can compensate for the gaps in the ecclesiastical documentation relating to this theme, and simultaneously approach the historical complexity of this phenomenon, by looking at the territorial implantation of the diocesan machinery from different angles.

This study is based on the correspondence of Dom Frei Manuel da Cruz (1745-64), the first Bishop of Mariana; the appointment books (*Provisões*) of the *Arquivo Eclesiástico da Arquidiocese de Mariana* (AEAM); *de genere* qualifications (*Habilitações de genere*, the family information required for a priest to be ordained) and the proceedings of the ecclesiastical courts of the São Paulo bishopric, both of which are kept in the *Arquivo da Cúria Metropolitana de São Paulo* (ACM-SP); registration and examination files at the *Arquivo da Universidade de Coimbra* (AUC); consultations and decisions of the *Mesa de Consciência e Ordens* and the applications and qualifications for membership of the Inquisition (*Santo Ofício*). The last two documentary collections are deposited at the Portuguese National Archives (*Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo* – ANTT) in Lisbon, and the data contained therein will be used mainly for constructing the clergymen’s prosopography.

Episcopal government

Generally speaking, bishops relied mainly on two bodies for governing their dioceses. On the one hand, the Ecclesiastical Chamber or the Bishop’s *Mesa (câmara eclesiástica)* was run by a purveyor (*provisor*), assisted by clerks and bailiffs (Paiva, 2000: 195). On the other hand, the Ecclesiastical Court (*auditório eclesiástico*) ruled on complaints and crimes under ecclesiastical jurisdiction. This apparatus consisted of officials acting under the supervision of the vicar-general, who together with the Bishop and the *purveyor* formed the “key triangle of episcopal administration.” In addition, the “figure of the bishop presided over this entire structure” (Paiva 2000: 199).

Ecclesiastical justice was administered on two levels within the framework of the ecclesiastical courts. The vicar-general acted at the court in the seat of the bishopric, while the vicars forane, the theme of this paper, operated at the courts in the seat of the ecclesiastical judicial counties. Colonial documentation used significantly different terms for referring to the vicariates forane and their courts (for instance: *auditório eclesiástico da comarca*, *juízo eclesiástico da vara*, *juízo da vara*, and *juízo eclesiástico da comarca*).² Central-Southern

² For example: a) Officials of the ecclesiastical court of Paranaguá, 1756: Vicar Forane: “Francisco de Meira Calaça, interim vicar of the parish church of Paranaguá, in it and in all its county, **vicar forane** and judge of marriages, chapels and sundry matters on behalf of Dom Frei da Madre de Deus [*Francisco de Meira Calaça*,

dioceses, hierarchically dependent on the Bahia Archbishopric, appealed to the Bahia Archbishopric Court of Appeals (*Tribunal da Relação Eclesiástica do Arcebispado da Bahia*).

Appointments to ecclesiastical court offices and their appropriation

Appointments to the ecclesiastical offices of the Portuguese overseas territories, the lands of the Order of Christ's patronage, were made by the Tribunal for the General Administration of Ecclesiastical Affairs (*Mesa de Consciência e Ordens*), or directly by the kings until the reign of King João IV. Through a decree of 1646, the king granted a request made by the Cathedral Chapter of Angra (in the Azores) to remove from the bishop's office the right of presentation to chapter prebends and parish benefices (collated vicariates, *vigariarias coladas*), as the "ecclesiastical offices and jobs could not be called benefices, inasmuch as they contained a plain annual (or removable) ministry" and therefore depended upon the "will of the entity granting them."³

As frequently happened in the administration of the Order of Christ by the *Mesa de Consciência e Ordens*, such a measure, taken within the framework of a judgment on a plea from a specific region under the *Mesa's* jurisdiction (i.e., the Azores), constituted a precedent that had an impact on all overseas territories and was even used as the basis for deciding on subsequent pleas and lawsuits. Thus the established practice in Portuguese

vigário encomendado da igreja matriz de Paranaguá, nela e toda sua comarca vigário da vara e juiz dos casamentos, capelas e resíduos por Dom Frei da Madre de Deus]; Prosecutor (*promotor*): José Caetano da Cruz; Clerk (*escrivão*): Anacleto Borges da Silva, auditor and clerk of the ecclesiastical court of this town of Paranaguá and its entire county on behalf of His Most Reverend Excellency the Bishop of the city of São Paulo" ["[Anacleto] Borges da Silva, contador e escrivão do auditório eclesiástico desta vila de Paranaguá e toda sua comarca pelo Excelentíssimo Reverendíssimo Senhor Bispo da cidade de São Paulo"]; Bailiff (*meirinho*): Domingos Cordeiro Matoso. Source: ACM-SP, Processos Gerais Antigos (PGA), Paranaguá, 01-01-04. (my emphasis).

b) Officials of the ecclesiastical court of Guaratinguetá, 1753: "Autos de agravo vindos do juízo eclesiástico da vara de Guaratinguetá entre partes." Vicar Forane: José Alves Vilela, "vigário da vara, juiz dos casamentos, justificações, capelas e resíduos;" Clerk: João Manuel Machado Caldeira. Source: ACM-SP, Guaratinguetá, PGA, 01-01-06. (my emphasis)

c) Officials of the ecclesiastical court of Paranapanema, 1787. Clerk: Padre José Caetano de Miranda, "escrivão do auditório;" Vicar forane: José de Almeida Leme, interim rector of this parish of Our Lady of the Conception of Minas Gerais, vicar forane, judge of weddings, chapels and sundry matters in the said church and its entire district." [Original text in Portuguese: *José de Almeida Leme, pároco encomendado nesta freguesia de Nossa Senhora da Conceição das Minas de Paranapanema, nela e em sua comarca vigário da vara, juiz dos casamentos, capelas e resíduos*]. Source: ACM-SP, Paranapanema, PGA, 01-01-04. (my emphasis).

In turn, the expression "vigário forâneo" could also be used in Portuguese with the meaning of vicar forane, but this term is rarely found.

³ [Original text in Portuguese: "Ofícios e cargos do eclesiástico, que não podiam chamar-se benefícios por conterem somente um nudo ministério anual, ou removível" ficando, por isso, dependentes "do arbítrio de quem os concede."] Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo (ANTI), Mesa de Consciência e Ordens (MCO), Padroados do Brasil, Bispado de São Paulo, mç 10. Grant of the clerkship of the Bishop's mensa of the São Paulo diocese, requested by Manuel Joaquim de Ornelas (01/10/1796). This decree can also be found at *Collecção Chronologica da Legislação Portuguesa*, at http://www.iuslusitaniae.fcsh.unl.pt/verlivro.php?id_parte=99&id_obra=63&pagina=767.

America was for bishops to control the appointments to offices in their dioceses until the late eighteenth century. Appointments to such offices belonged to the bishop's gracious jurisdiction,⁴ as is extensively documented by the books of appointments, one of the most complete series extant at the Ecclesiastical Archive of the Archdiocese of Mariana.

Tithes were the main source of revenue of the bishop's *mensa* in Portugal's diocesan administration (Paiva 2000). In Brazil, however, by virtue of the overseas patronage,⁵ the Crown collected the tithes, which did not allow the bishops to enjoy access to this source of revenue to pay for episcopal government. Bishops actually had no alternative other than to improve their income by way of (i) fees charged at the chancelleries of the bishop's *mensa* and ecclesiastical courts, (ii) pensions collected on offices of the diocesan structure, and (iii) collections of gold and wax obtained in the course of pastoral visits (such as confirmation offers and fees charged for the visit and inspection of the books, chapels, churches, lay brotherhoods, and private oratories, among others).

In Minas Gerais, according to a 1752 estimate made by the magistrate (*ouvidor*) of Vila Rica, Caetano da Costa Matoso, revenue from offices paying pensions (i.e., clerks of the vicariates forane and of the vicariate-general), included in the accounts of the chapels' mastership (*mestrado das capelas*, one in each ecclesiastical judicial county) represented 7.7 percent (1,638,000 *réis*) of the total amount (21,350,000 *réis*) collected by the Bishop of Mariana (see table below) (Figueiredo; Campos (1999) [1752]: 743-764). According to Matoso, "chancellery duties and the stamping of all appointments and orders issued by the Bishop's *mensa* and the six vicariates forane of the six counties, in addition to that of Mariana"⁶ represented the diocese's main source of income, 47.1 percent (10,064,000 *réis*) of the total revenue. In second place came the income from pastoral visits, which represented 40.5 percent (8,648,000 *réis*) of income. Finally, Costa Matoso considered the bishop's stipend (*côngrua*), which was paid by the Crown, as part of the Bishop's income, representing 4.7% (1,000,000 *réis*) of total revenue.

⁴ In other words, it was a matter of government, dependent upon the prelate's free will and grace, not a matter of justice (contentious jurisdiction).

⁵ The Portuguese Overseas Patronage, consolidated in 1551, enabled the Portuguese Crown to exercise spiritual and temporal jurisdiction over the conquered land. It therefore played a key role in legitimizing Portugal's seaborne expansion. This patronage entailed a number of rights and duties for the Portuguese monarchy. Kings had the prerogative of appointing bishops to colonial dioceses, subject to the confirmation of the Holy See, deciding on appointments to the benefices (lifelong offices paid by the Crown) of cathedrals and parish churches, and controlling the collection of tithes. In exchange, the monarch undertook to promote missionary work and the spread of the Catholic Faith, in addition to installing and maintaining ecclesiastical structures. The management of Patronage-related matters, assigned to the *Tribunal da Mesa da Consciência e Ordens* as from 1551, was to be carried out mainly by way of decisions (*consultas*), in which the king was advised by a number of members (*deputados*).

⁶ [Original text in Portuguese: "*chancelarias e selos de todas as provisões e mandados passados na Câmara do bispo e nas seis vigararias da vara das seis comarcas, além da de Mariana*"].

Pensions charged on clerkships varied according to the location of the ecclesiastical county. Clerkships in more important locations yielded a higher value.⁷ At the time of the report under analysis, the Bishop did not have the right to collect a pension from the bailiff general, as such an office had been sold for three years to a surgeon, with a clause permitting the re-sale of the office – which in fact was sold for four thousand *cruzados*. This example clearly shows that the sale of offices was a relatively widespread practice in ecclesiastical circles.

Bishop's Income at the Bishopric of Mariana (1752)

Source of income (according to the Justice's classification)	Amount (<i>réis</i>)	%
Bishop's stipend (<i>côngrua</i>), paid by the Crown	1,000,000	4.7
Chancellery duties (and stamping) ⁸	10,064,000	47.1
Pensions from officials and chapel masterships ⁹	1,638,000	7.7
Revenues from pastoral visits	8,648,000	40.5
Total	21,350,813	100

Source: Figueiredo, Campos 1999 [1752]: 743-764.

In Minas Gerais, the offices of episcopal power not only constituted important sources of financial income, but they also played a key role in replicating the bonds that linked prelates to the networks of clientelism radiating from Mainland Portugal. The correspondence of the first Bishop of Mariana, Dom Frei Manuel da Cruz (1745-64), clearly shows that the key drivers behind the universe of his relations with Portugal impacted on appointments to offices in the ecclesiastical courts located in Minas Gerais. In order to render his project of episcopal government viable, the prelate appointed priests recommended by his protectors in Lisbon to the main offices in the bishopric (namely vicars forane). This method of appointment allowed the bishop to consolidate a network of powerful figures that advanced his interests at the Royal Court.

For example, Padre Manuel Cardoso Frasão Castelo Branco was appointed vicar forane at the ecclesiastical court of the Serro Frio County with the patronage of the Marquis and High-Steward of the Royal House. Later on, in 1751, the prelate undertook to

⁷ For example, the clerks of the Vila Rica and Sabará vicariates forane each paid a pension of 200 octaves of gold (300,000 *réis*). In the counties of Rio das Mortes and Serro Frio, with a more peripheral location in the diocesan space, the amount dropped to a half of this value and, in the vicariate of Pitangui and Rio Verde, it amounted to only 75,000 *réis*.

⁸ Chancellery income corresponded to the entire amount collected from the issue of orders and stamping by the bishop's *mensa*, the six vicariates forane and the vicariate-general.

⁹ Each ecclesiastical judicial county had one chapel master.

appoint him to even better positions within the bishopric and asked the Marquis to continue to promote his interests at the Court:

You honor me greatly, Your Excellency, every time I receive news from you. I was particularly pleased to receive by this fleet a letter from Your Excellency, in which you sponsor the Reverend Doctor Manuel Cardoso Frasão. For this reason, I shall keep him in the office of vicar forane of the Serro Frio county, which he currently holds, and remember to improve his position on the first occasion that arises, always bearing in mind Your Excellency's protection. I beg of you to protect all territories dependent upon this bishopric, which, being *in limine foundationis*, still has many difficulties to overcome until its establishment is properly consolidated. For what I am worth, I shall certainly serve Your Excellency with all my efforts, in everything that I can and is pleasurable to you.¹⁰

Backed by such high-level sponsorship (guaranteed by the highest officer of the Royal House), with a fine education (bachelor in Canon Law), and having provided relevant services to the church, Castelo Branco soon obtained a prebend at the Chapter of Mariana Cathedral, in 1756 (Boschi 2012: 13-19).¹¹

The vicariate forane of the Rio das Mortes county (*vigararia da vara or auditório eclesiástico do Rio das Mortes*, located at São João Del Rei) played a key role in enabling Dom Frei Manuel da Cruz to strengthen his bonds with one of the most outstanding figures of Portugal's Church, the Cardinal Patriarch of Lisbon, as clearly shown by a prelate's letter of 1751:

In this fleet, I had the honor of receiving two letters from Your Eminence, extending your protection to Reverend Doctor José de Sobral e Souza and Father Antônio Soares Freire, both worthy of such illustrious protection in different ways. (...) I shall keep Doctor José Sobral e Souza in the vicariate

¹⁰ (Leoni 2008: 312). [Original text in Portuguese: *Vossa Excelência em todo o tempo, que me participa as suas notícias me honra muito, e tenbo por mui especial obséquio o receber nesta frota carta de Vossa Excelência, em que patrocina ao reverendo doutor Manuel Cardoso Frasão por cujo motivo o conservarei na ocupação de vigário da vara da comarca do Serro Frio, em que se acha, e me lembrarei de o melhorar na primeira ocasião que se oferecer, atendendo sempre à proteção de Vossa Excelência, a quem rogo proteja as dependências, deste bispado, que como está in limine foundationis, não faltam dificuldades que vencer até que se ponha em boa ordem o seu estabelecimento: e para o que eu prestar fico muito certo, e com grande vontade para servir a Vossa Excelência, em tudo o que puder, e for do seu agrado.*]

¹¹ ANTT, HSO, Manuel, 170, doc 1797; AUC, Ficheiros de matrículas e exames (by alphabetical order of the surname).

forane of the county of Rio das Mortes, a place of honor and profit, and shall move him up to another office if I find a better one.¹²

The following year, the Bishop informed the Duke of Lafões that he had appointed one of his protégés to the office of clerk of the Sabará ecclesiastical court, stressing his pleasure in “favoring your protégé Manuel de Morais Cabral, as I promised in the last fleet, taking into account Your Excellency’s protection. I have just appointed him to fulfill the office of clerk of the ecclesiastical bench of the Sabará county.”¹³

Therefore, the right of appointment to offices in the ecclesiastical sphere amounted to an important instrument in the hands of the prelates, insofar as it fed networks of clientelism and patronage headed by the decision-making center of the Portuguese Empire and helped influence other people’s wills. As shown, the episcopal government of Dom Frei Manuel da Cruz and his career heavily relied on such strategies.

In his analysis of the influence of patronage relationships in the nomination of the bishops of Portugal and its empire, José Pedro Paiva emphasized the hierarchical nature of this clientelistic system and its capacity for political subordination (Paiva 2006: 264-265). The author diverges from the interpretation of António Manuel Hespanha and Ângela Barreto Xavier, who consider these networks of clientelism to be mainly a “driver restricting the power of princes” in the Ancien Regime period (Hespanha; Xavier: 392). Unlike the work of these authors, this research highlights the vertical structure of subordination to be found in the networks of clientelism to which Dom Frei Manuel da Cruz was bound, radiating from the political center of the Portuguese Empire to the bishopric of Mariana.

Broadly speaking, it can be claimed that appointments to diocesan offices were not exempt from the dynamics and the rationale of power relations that connected colonial bishoprics to the center of Portuguese monarchical power and subordinated the former to the latter.¹⁴

¹² (Leoni 2008: 309-310). [Original text in Portuguese: *Tenho nesta frota a honra de receber duas cartas de Vossa Eminência protegendo em uma ao reverendo doutor José de Sobral e Souza, e em outra ao padre Antônio Soares Freire cada um em diverso sentido dignos de tão abonada proteção. (...) Ao doutor José Sobral e Souza, conservarei na vigararia da vara da comarca do Rio das Mortes, lugar de honra e proveito, e o adiantarei para outra ocupação, se a houver melhor.*]

¹³ (Leoni 2008: 354). [Original text in Portuguese: *Favorecer ao seu recomendado Manuel de Morais Cabral, como lhe prometi na frota passada em atenção a proteção de Vossa Excelência; agora o provi na serventia de escrvão da banca eclesiástica da comarca de Sabará.*]

¹⁴ I highlight the political drivers that influenced appointments to episcopal offices at the bishopric of Mariana, but this does not mean that all other appointments were made in the same context. For example, as the Minas Gerais Captaincy was busy with the gold rush from the late seventeenth, and mainly the eighteenth, century onwards, when its bishopric was founded in 1748, there was no elite with children that could take its offices. So, people from Portugal (reinóis) found more room for maneuver there. Only a global research into

Vicars forane (*Vigários da vara* or *vigários forâneos*)

The 1704 Rules governing the Ecclesiastical Court of the Bahia Archbishopric (*Regimento do Auditório Eclesiástico*) defined the role played by vicars forane as follows: “In order for Bishops to attend, with the utmost diligence, to those matters that concern their subjects, and to meet the requirements of their pastoral office more vigilantly, they must deputize and constitute Vicars Forane in certain places of their diocese.” As regards the desired profile of such agents, the Rules establish that “whenever possible they shall be literate, or at least people of intelligence, prudence, virtue, and fine example, which they should well have for such office (...).”¹⁵

These officials almost always performed functions as judges of marriages, chapels, and sundry matters, also registering papers in the records of their judicial counties – tasks usually assigned to the central powers of the diocese, namely the ecclesiastical judge (*provisor*) and the vicar-general. In order to develop their activity, vicars forane relied on agents hierarchically reporting to them under the framework of the ecclesiastical court of their county – i.e. the prosecutor (*promotor*), clerk (*escrivão*), and bailiff (*meirinho*).¹⁶

The Rules summarized in 18 paragraphs the attributes of the vicars forane, which can be grouped into three main clusters as regards their level of autonomy vis-à-vis the central diocesan authority.

Firstly, in a number of cases, vicars forane were supposed only to draft the judicial proceedings (including witness depositions) and forward the summaries to the vicariate-general for a sentence to be passed. This applied to crimes of sacrilege (against clergymen or holy places) perpetrated in parishes under their jurisdiction and to incidents in which the ecclesiastical jurisdiction had been usurped, in any way whatsoever, by other powers (regular congregations, justices, etc.), as well as episodes of abuse (spousal violence) or matrimonial nullity. If any inhabitant of his county had been born in another bishopric and

the social profile of the clergymen occupying diocesan offices can shed any light on the impact of the networks of sponsorship on the phenomenon under analysis.

¹⁵ Title IX, paragraph 399, of the 1704 Rules governing the Ecclesiastical Court of the Bahia Archbishopric. [Original text in Portuguese: Para que os Bispos possam executar com maior diligência aquelas coisas que devem com seus súditos e mais diligentemente satisfazer as obrigações de seu pastoral ofício, é necessário que deputem, e constituam Vigários da Vara em alguns lugares de sua diocese. (...) Sendo possível serão letrados, ou pelo menos pessoas de bom entendimento, prudência, virtude, e bom exemplo, como é bem que tenham para o tal cargo (...).”

¹⁶ Rules of the Ecclesiastical Court, Title 18, no. 591.

wished to get married, the vicar forane could also draw up a summary and send it to the judge of marriages, for him to ratify the proceedings in the form of a sentence.

Secondly, under certain circumstances, vicars forane had more autonomy, but the Rules imposed restrictions. They could only issue admonishments and pass sentences on summary 10-day proceedings, or the taking of an oath, if the value of debts being collected did not exceed 10 thousand *réis*. They could condemn a defendant to work on Sundays or holy days up to the amount of one *pataca*, as long as both default and scandal were proven.

Thirdly, in other situations, vicars forane could exercise their authority more independently from the diocese's central jurisdiction. They could (i) lodge legal proceedings against people who disrespected officials of the bishop's court, (ii) execute testaments of people who died in the months pertaining to ecclesiastical jurisdiction (January, March, May, July, September, and November), (iii) compel married people living away from their spouses for more than three years to resume marital life, (iv) lodge legal proceedings against those who, without the bishop's permission, begged for alms, celebrated mass, preached, and erected altars. In addition, vicars forane were obliged to (i) clear doubts raised about precedence in processions and inside the church, (ii) give permission for burials in holy places, in cases that raised doubts about the place of interment, (iii) order their parishioners to pay their debts (such as mass alms and other gifts) to the priests. Should any person pursued by lay justice seek refuge in churches, or in their churchyards, vicars forane had to make sure that such individuals were removed from the sacred place only after ecclesiastical immunity had been granted.¹⁷

Clearly, activities developed by vicars forane in the context of the ecclesiastical courts of diocesan judicial counties were not restricted to litigious or judicial activity. Jaime Gouveia (2010: 11), who studied the ecclesiastical court of Coimbra based mainly on its Rules, has already explained the organic structure of the ecclesiastical court, organized into sections, i.e. judicial, bureaucratic, logistic, and financial.

In all the cases mentioned above, decisions taken in ecclesiastical districts were subject to a second appraisal by the established authorities at the seat of the bishopric, such as the bishop, the *provisor* or the vicar-general.¹⁸

Colonial bishoprics were extremely vast and vicars forane therefore performed an important role in the diocese's communication system, a key point in circuit functioning. Correspondence was sent from the seat of the bishopric to the seats of the ecclesiastical

¹⁷ All this information can be found in Title IX of the 1704 Rules governing the Ecclesiastical Court.

¹⁸ Title IX of the 1704 Rules governing the Ecclesiastical Court.

judicial counties, where vicars forane were responsible for resending the papers to every parish rector under their jurisdiction. As a rule, letters were moved in large batches from parish to parish, until they reached the hands of their addressee.

Vicars forane could initial both the books on which parish registers would be recorded (baptism, confirmations, marriages, and deaths) and the books of lay brotherhoods. They were also responsible for sending to the seat of the bishopric the lists of confessed believers in each parish under their jurisdiction.

In short, vicars forane, insofar as they exerted control over all the parishes of their county, were a key link connecting the seat of the bishopric to its network of parishes and chapels.

Vicariates forane in the Bishopric of Mariana

An examination was made of 46 books of appointments deposited at the Ecclesiastical Archive of the Archdiocese of Mariana in order to study the Minas Gerais vicariates forane, and in particular their agents. Information concerning the offices of the ecclesiastical court dates from after the foundation of the Bishopric of Mariana (1745) and provides the name of the cleric holding the office, including specific data on the position, place of work, and expiry date of the appointment.

While the captaincy of Minas Gerais had a civil government divided into four counties (Vila Rica, Rio das Mortes, Sabará, and Serro Frio), for the purposes of episcopal government the territory was organized into six ecclesiastical counties, i.e., Vila Rica, Rio das Mortes, Rio Verde (belonging to the civil jurisdiction of Rio das Mortes), Sabará, Pitangui (part of the Sabará civil county), and Serro Frio. A bench of the ecclesiastical court operated at the seat of each judicial county, whose main official was the vicar forane. Clearly, in terms of territorial coverage, the bureaucratic mesh of ecclesiastical administration was tighter than that of civil administration.

In addition to the six diocesan counties, in regions where the borders were rather ill-defined, the prelates allowed parish rectors to act as vicars forane in their parishes even though they did not have the status of ecclesiastical county seats. Their appointments did not even mention the territory under their jurisdiction, because they were still unstable and involved in the process of formation. In 1752, the bishopric of Mariana appointed Father Marcos Freire de Carvalho to perform functions as acting vicar forane in the region of “newly discovered territories of Piauí,” Rio das Velhas, at Cabeceira do Rio São Francisco,

“and all other lands that may be discovered in that region.”¹⁹ Thus, as shown by the above example from Minas Gerais, the periphery of the diocesan network tended to be quite strongly empowered in the context of Portuguese colonization. In this process, the functioning of vicariates forane became quite malleable, particularly in those regions where the colony’s borders were expanding.

In the bishopric of Mariana, the two peaks of appointments to the office of vicar forane, chronologically speaking, occurred in 1748 – the year when Dom Frei Manuel da Cruz (1745-64) arrived in the diocese – and later in 1779, when Dom Frei Domingos da Encarnação Pontével (1779-93) took over the episcopal seat, which had been administered since 1772 by proxies of bishops who were never present in person – i.e. Dom Joaquim Borges de Figueiroa (1771-73) and Dom Bartolomeu Manuel Mendes dos Reis (1773-77) (Paiva 2006: 593). Between the two peaks, appointments also increased in January 1764, immediately after the death of Dom Frei Manuel da Cruz, when the diocesan government was assigned to the capitular vicar elected by the chapter. Generally speaking, vicariate title holders did not change significantly in circumstances where there was a peak in appointments – which, in most cases, consisted of a renewal of possession. This suggests an attempt by the central diocesan power to exert stronger control over appointments to these offices whenever the governing conjuncture changed.²⁰

Vicariates forane in the São Paulo diocese

The main source of data for forming a picture of the vicariates forane in São Paulo is the report on the diocese drawn up by Dom Frei Manuel da Ressurreição (1771-1789) in 1777, at the request of the *Mesa de Consciência e Ordens*.²¹ Based on this document, we find that the São Paulo bishopric was divided into 14 ecclesiastical judicial counties, one of which was the See, under the jurisdiction of the vicar-general.²² We can determine the number of parishes in each district, though the above source provides no data on the

¹⁹ [Original text in Portuguese: *novos descobertos do Piauí, Rio das Velhas, Cabeceira do Rio São Francisco e todas as mais que por aquela parte se descobrirem*. AEAM, Livros de Provisões, 1750-1752, fl. 155. Other examples can be found in: AEAM, Livro de Provisões 1761-1764, f. 72. AEAM, Livro de Provisões 1764-1765, f. 15v. In these cases, the secretariat of the ecclesiastical court operated, as a rule, from the sacristy of the church. In the bishopric of Mariana, clergymen worked as acting vicars forane in the following parishes: Aiuroca, Caeté, Jacuí, Rio Claro, Rio Grande, Santana de Sapucaí, Tamanduá, and the three border regions listed below.

²⁰ AEAM, Livros de Provisões, 1748-1800. I cannot provide here all of the figures from the 46 books consulted.

²¹ [Galvão, D. Frei Manuel] (1898-1899) [1777]. *Relação Geral da Dioceze de São Paulo, suas Comarcas, Freguesias, Congruas, Uzos e Costumes*. *Revista do Instituto Histórico e Geográfico de São Paulo*, São Paulo, 4: 351-418.

²² *Relação Geral da Dioceze de São Paulo...*, 351-418.

population inhabiting each of them. In order to fill this gap, we can use a report on the São Paulo parishes drafted by the governor of the Santos fortress in 1756, at the request of the *Mesa de Consciência e Ordens*.²³ This report lists the number of parishioners who had received confession and communion in each parish, and so, despite the time gap, we can use these figures to check on the general trends of the ratio between the number of inhabitants (1756) and the mesh of ecclesiastical administration (1777).

The São Paulo ecclesiastical judicial counties (1777)

Ecclesiastical judicial county	Number of parishes (1777)	People receiving confession and communion (1756)	%
Sé	13	12,800	21.6
Guaratinguetá	9	14,700	24.9
Itu	5	8,000	13.5
Paranapanema	3	800	1.3
Mogi-Mirim	2	2,600	4.4
Curitiba	4	1,800	3
Santana de Sapucaí	3	-	-
Ubatuba	2	700	1.1
Santos ²⁴	4	11,000	18.6
Paranaguá ²⁵	8	6,600	11.1
Rio Pardo	-	-	-
Vila Nova das Lages	-	-	-
Jacuí e Desemboque	-	-	-
Praça de Iguatemi	-	-	-
Total		59,000	100

Source: Galvão, Dom Frei Manuel] (1898-1899) [1777]. *Relação Geral da Diocese de São Paulo, suas Comarcas, Freguesias, Congruas, Uzos e Costumes*. *Revista do Instituto Histórico e Geográfico de São Paulo*, São Paulo, 4: 351-418; AHU, Avulsos da Capitania de São Paulo, cx 4, doc 37, 1756.

In the demographic history of São Paulo, we find no global data on the distribution of its population by parish. According to the data systematically processed by Vidal Luna and Hebert S. Klein (2005), the captaincy of São Paulo had 83,880 inhabitants in the period between 1765 and 1768. With the territory being divided into four regions, it was clear that the area formed by the capital city and its surroundings was the most heavily populated, with 28,307 people, followed by the “Southern roads,” with 18,235 inhabitants and the Paraíba valley, with 14,912 inhabitants. Lagging slightly behind was the coastal area, with

²³ Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino-AHU, Avulsos da Capitania de São Paulo, cx 4, doc 37, 1756.

²⁴ Collated, though in 1777 it had a commended (i.e. interim) vicar due to impediments experienced by the holder.

²⁵ Collated, though in 1777 it had an interim vicar due to impediments experienced by the holder.

13,692 inhabitants, and finally the western border, with only 8,734 people (Luna; Klein 2005: 53).

The analysis of the number of parishes in each ecclesiastical judicial county of the São Paulo bishopric and their relationship with the number of inhabitants shows that the territorial configuration of the diocesan districts was defined more by the geographical extension of their area than by the density of the population or the parishioners. For example, in 1756, the vicar forane of Paranaguá governed the ecclesiastical court with eight parishes under his jurisdiction, but with only 6,600 people receiving confession and communion, while the vicar forane of Guaratinguetá, with only one more parish, had under his power a population cohort of 14,700 people – the second largest in the diocese. Ubatuba is a case in point; in fact this county's ecclesiastical court had been set up with only two parishes (the head parish and São Luís de Piratininga), and only 700 people received confession and communion in its territory. In other words, it was the need to cover that large tract of land in the northern coastal area of the São Paulo bishopric, controlling its border with the Rio de Janeiro bishopric (whose first ecclesiastical judicial county was Parati), that caused the episcopal power to found this district and set up an ecclesiastical court with a vicar forane in it. Therefore the number of people that were to be served by the diocesan administration and justice had less impact on the creation of these institutional mechanisms. Bringing the episcopal apparatus geographically closer to the inhabitants was the priority. This geographical organization of the diocesan power also played a role in guiding the routes followed by episcopal visitors, whose appointments were usually made in accordance with the judicial counties.

The profile of vicars forane in São Paulo and Mariana: their social characterization and education

Out of a universe of 98 clerics who took office as vicars forane in São Paulo, we found data relating to the geographical origin of 46 officials.²⁶ Of these 46, 42 had been

²⁶ For the São Paulo bishopric, no books of appointments were found that could help to reconstruct the list of diocesan office holders. In order to identify the clergymen who held the office of vicar forane, I therefore decided to browse through the 45 boxes of the Metropolitan Ecclesiastical Court Archives, which contain the diocese's cases of ecclesiastical justice (eighteenth century), searching for the names of the officials active at the court. Once a consolidated list of priests had been obtained, with the areas and time frame in which they were active, the second step, using the prosopographic method, was to focus the research efforts on finding data for characterizing these agents in terms of their geographical origin, the identification of their parents, their social background, education and career. At the São Paulo Ecclesiastical Court Archives, the chapter documentation (*Colações do Cabido*) and the *de genere* report files were preferred. At the Arquivo da Torre do Tombo, priority was given to the applications to the *Mesa de Consciência e Ordens* and the Inquisition

born in the bishopric, one on the island of Madeira and three in mainland Portugal. Almost as a rule, the latter had migrated to the colony after competing for a benefice (permanent position as vicar) and obtaining it from the *Mesa de Consciência e Ordens*, in Lisbon. The case of Minas Gerais is quite different, however, as most of the secular clergy there were from Portugal.²⁷

The geographical origins of the ancestors of the vicars forane in São Paulo are similar to the typical profile of the colony's middle-class and elites. Most couples consisted of husbands born in mainland Portugal – 14 out of 19 cases providing this kind of data – and wives born in the diocese (all of them). The latter, in turn, descended from Portuguese men married to women born in Brazil. The same trend is found in the highest ranks of the Bahia Ecclesiastical Appeals Court (*Tribunal da Relação Eclesiástica da Bahia*) during the eighteenth century. Eight of its officials (chancellors and judges) who submitted applications to become Inquisition commissaries were born in Brazil and graduated from the University of Coimbra. Of these eight, seven were the sons of colonists born in mainland Portugal, most of them merchants who had married wives born in Brazil.²⁸

Let us now return to the vicars forane of São Paulo. In addition to their place of birth, it was possible to identify the occupational profile of the fathers of 12 of them. Of this universe, five were merchants, five lived from farming and two combined the two occupations.

Also based on *de genere* qualifications, it was found that 11 clerics were the sons of individuals whose social status was locally important, i.e. three had held “offices of the republic,” one was a member (*familiar*) of the Inquisition and the others were captains-major (*capitão-mór*) and sergeants-major (*sargento-mór*) of the Military Companies.

These 11 cases, although representing a small sample, and requiring in-depth research into these different aspects, point to an important trend. The bench of the ecclesiastical court operating in the judicial counties was another organ of local power vied for by the families with relevant positions in the “offices of the republic” (i.e. the bodies of local civil power). Local elites did not yield the key positions of ecclesiastical power in their process of social upgrading and in their search for power. The Church used offices such as the position of vicar forane to actively participate in the structuring of the colony's social

qualifications. The huge volume of documents consulted cannot be listed here, but, in the course of this paper, an indication will be given of the sources mentioning clergymen by their name in the footnotes.

²⁷ Arquivo da Cúria Metropolitana de São Paulo – ACM-SP, Processos Gerais Antigos; ACM-SP, Habilitações *De Genere* (século XVIII); ANTT, Mesa de Consciência e Ordens – MCO, Padroados do Brasil, Bispo de São Paulo, mç 10 e mç 11.

²⁸ Cf. ANTT, HSO, Antônio, mç 61, doc 1254; José, mç 146, doc 2859; José, mç 145, doc 2844; mç 56, doc 1112; João, mç 32, doc 740; João, mç 168, doc 1456.

hierarchies. As far as social aspects are concerned, the most important office of vicariates forane tended to be suitable as a power position that helped in the formation and structuring of local elites.

A paradigmatic example for illustrating this point is the relationship between the ecclesiastical court of the Curitiba judicial county, in the southern region of the São Paulo bishopric, and the family of Miguel Gonçalves Lima. Born in Minho, this merchant established himself in the region of Paraná and became the owner of vast tracts of land, including areas that were suitable for farming and cattle-raising. Two sons from his marriage to Maria Pais dos Santos, both born in the region, were destined for ecclesiastical careers. The first son to become a priest was Manuel da Cruz Lima, who after having been a curate in his parish of birth and a rector in several churches of the bishopric, obtained a canon's prebend at the Cathedral of São Paulo. On one of his journeys from his home town to the episcopal city, he brought with him his still underage brother, Francisco das Chagas Lima, who was also destined to become a priest. After being ordained, Francisco returned to his home town and became a vicar forane, performing these functions between 1786 and 1793, as can be seen from the ecclesiastical judicial cases in which he was involved. This office of the diocesan power was one among other local power positions already controlled by his family, as his father was described by the witnesses in the *de genere* reports as "a republican man," having worked as the treasurer of several lay brotherhoods, including the Third Order of Saint Francis, and as a "judge and councilor" of the town council. His paternal grandfather, also an inhabitant of Curitiba, had been a judge of orphans and a judge of the lay brotherhoods.²⁹

For the São Paulo vicars forane of humbler descent – not influenced, unlike the 11 individuals mentioned above, by the paramount social status of their parents – access to the ecclesiastical career could represent an important strategy of social mobility, marked by the search for prestige and social assertiveness by way of the priesthood.

Generally speaking, the (*de genere*) qualifications show that the social reproduction strategy developed by the São Paulo families primarily consisted in endowing and marrying

²⁹ ANTT, HSO, Manuel, mç 254, doc 1662. ANTT, MCO, Padroados do Brasil, Bispado de São Paulo, mç 10. Report on two vacant canon positions at the See of São Paulo, 05/05/1787; ACM-SP, Habilitações *De Genere*, Manuel da Cruz Lima, 1-39-326 (1758-1763); Francisco das Chagas Lima, 3-7-1901 (1779). Data from the *de genere* report on Francisco das Chagas Lima are more imprecise than those collected from the report on Manuel da Cruz Lima at the Inquisition regarding the functions performed by his father in local organs of power, only stating that he "has been holding honorable offices of the Republic;" ACM-SP, Processos Gerais Antigos, Curitiba, 05-01-02; 05-01-03.

More examples of this same trend can be found in other regions of the bishopric; ACM-SP, Processos Gerais Antigos; Habilitações *De Genere*, Francisco de Meira Calaça, 1-8-122 (1728-1731); Processos Gerais Antigos, Paranaguá, 06-01-08; 06-01-09; 06-02-01; 06-02-02; 06-02-03.

their female offspring. Unlike their sisters, the brothers of the candidates were usually single at the evidence-collecting stage that preceded their ordainment as priests. In this context, the ecclesiastical career was therefore perceived as a means for settling the life trajectory of the male offspring, after the future of the daughters had been decided.³⁰

Captain Gaspar Gonçalves de Morais and his wife Catarina de Sena, inhabitants of Paranaguá, had nine children, “five boys and four girls.” Two daughters were already married, and all sons were single when steps were taken to check on the assets of one son, Bento Gonçalves Cordeiro, who was seeking to be ordained, and who obtained ecclesiastical status in 1762. Later on, Bento returned to his home town and obtained the office of vicar forane, a position that he held in 1776-1777.³¹ Thus this family, whose father was already captain – holding a position in the military – also extended its tentacles into the realms of ecclesiastical power, controlling the ecclesiastical court (*Auditório Eclesiástico*) that operated in that judicial county by securing its main office.

Bento’s predecessor in the office of vicar forane had been Francisco de Meira Calaça, active from 1753 to 1775. Born in São Vicente, the son and grandson of farmers from the same county, he had been attracted to the ecclesiastical career under circumstances similar to those of Bento Gonçalves Cordeiro. In fact Calaça’s parents had four more children in addition to him, “one of whom is a female, married and endowed, while the others have not been endowed and are all [males] and single; they gave their daughter a dowry of 12 thousand *cruzados*.”³²

In her study of the merchant elite of the city of São Paulo, which held the offices of local power (town councils, military companies and prestigious lay brotherhoods) from 1711 to 1765, Maria Aparecida Borrego discovered that access to the clergy was an important strategy for a group’s social reproduction. She identified this phenomenon while analyzing the inbred matrimonial alliances that connected several families involved in trade through their daughters. As to the destiny of their sons, emphasis was placed on an ecclesiastical career: some joined the Order of Saint Benedict or the secular clergy, while others left for Coimbra to study, or married daughters from the local elite (Borrego 2010: 235-294).

³⁰ For example, ACM-SP, *Habilitações De Genere*, Bento Gonçalves Cordeiro, 1-42-354 (1762); Francisco de Meira Calaça, 1-8-122 (1728-1731).

³¹ ACM-SP, *Processos Gerais Antigos*, Paranaguá, 06-01-08; 06-01-09; 06-02-01; 06-02-02; 06-02-03; *Habilitações De Genere*, Bento Gonçalves Cordeiro, 1-42-354 (1762).

³² ACM-SP, *Processos Gerais Antigos*; *Habilitações De Genere*, Francisco de Meira Calaça, 1-8-122 (1728-1731); *Processos Gerais Antigos*, Paranaguá, 06-01-08; 06-01-09; 06-02-01; 06-02-02; 06-02-03.

From a social perspective, the ecclesiastical career offered a different role for a quite distinct social group in the colonial elites, the Portuguese nobility. In his study of the social reproduction patterns of the Portuguese aristocracy during the Bragança dynasty, Nuno Monteiro discovered that, until the third quarter of the eighteenth century, the first-born sons inherited the assets and titles of noble houses and the second-born sons were generally channeled into a Church career (Monteiro 2003: 146-149).

For lower social ranks in Portugal, the ecclesiastical career tended to perform a role that was more akin to the one found in the São Paulo bishopric. In her study of the social reproduction strategies and stratification criteria among the low-ranking clientele of the House of Bragança, Mafalda Soares da Cunha discovered that access to the secular clergy represented a means for the placement of second-born sons in an acceptable career. These in turn subsequently helped their collateral relatives (Cunha 2000: 506-507).

In social terms, therefore, the place of the ecclesiastical career in the strategies adopted by families depended upon their rank in the social hierarchy of the Portuguese Ancien Regime. At the same time, the offices of ecclesiastical power played a major role in the structuring and definition of social strata, insofar as they helped to structure and define the local elite, as observed in the bishopric of São Paulo. Even though this theme still needs much more research in order to be properly understood in all of its different strands, this paper suggests that the social rooting of the ecclesiastical apparatus was a similar process to the one found in other contemporary organs of power that have been studied in some depth by historiography, namely town councils (*câmaras*), military companies (*ordenanças*) and brotherhoods of mercy (*Misericórdias*). According to the most eminent historians in this field, namely Charles Boxer (2002), Russel-Wood (1981), Evaldo Cabral de Mello (2003), João Fragoso, Maria Fernanda Bicalho and Maria de Fátima Gouveia (2001), these apparatuses of local power played a key role in the structuring of social rank in the Portuguese colonial geography, mainly in the formation of local elites based on their offices.

Education

The Rules (*Regimento*) governing the Ecclesiastical Court of the Bahia Archbishopric suggest that the office of vicar forane was held by educated and scholarly people, without providing further details on the education levels required of candidates to the position. Special importance is attributed to vicars forane who were knowledgeable about Morals in

the memorandum on the situation of the São Paulo diocese in 1777 mentioned above. For example, Manuel de Barros, the vicar forane in Paranapanema, “lives moderately and is quite knowledgeable in Morals.”³³ As far as university education was concerned, in São Paulo there were only four officials (out of a set of 98) who had attended classes at the University of Coimbra and obtained a bachelor’s degree in Canon Law.³⁴

This situation, existing in ecclesiastical judicial counties, tends to compare with the trend observed at the vicariate-general (located in the seat of the bishopric), where a very small number of university-trained officials were found. Out of ten vicars-general identified in São Paulo, only three had an education in Canon Law. It was difficult for the diocese to comply with the 1704 Rules of the Ecclesiastical Court of the Bahia Archbishopric, which required the vicar-general to “have a Doctor’s or Bachelor’s degree from the School of Holy Canons.”³⁵ Overall, only 27 percent (12 out of 44) of the clergymen of São Paulo Cathedral had attended university.³⁶ This reality was rather different in the cases of Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais, two bishoprics where approximately half of the members of the cathedral’s clergy had bachelor’s degrees from Coimbra University.³⁷

We found only four university-educated vicars forane in the bishopric of São Paulo, as noted above. But, in Minas Gerais, this number was much higher: of the 44 vicars forane found in the bishopric of Mariana, 14 (32%) had been educated in Canons at the University of Coimbra. All this shows that, comparatively speaking, the prosperity of the gold mining area, and consequently the high income of the diocesan apparatus, managed to attract a higher number of jurist priests (in particular priests born in mainland Portugal) to perform functions in its institutional apparatus.³⁸

³³ *Relação Geral da Dioceze de S. Paulo...*, pp. 337-338.

³⁴ ANTT, MCO, Padroados do Brasil, Bispado de São Paulo, mç 10 e mç 11; AUC, Fichero de matrículas e exames (by alphabetical order of the surname); ACM-SP, Processos Gerais Antigos (século XVIII); *Relação Geral da Dioceze de S. Paulo...*, pp. 351-418.

³⁵ RAE, Título II, Do Vigário geral e do que a seu ofício pertence, §1, n. 52.

³⁶ Source: ACM-SP, Processos Gerais Antigos, São Paulo, 03-02-07; 03-02-08; 03-01-08; 03-02-06; 03-02-05; 03-02-04; 03-02-03; 03-02-02; 03-02-01; 03-01-09; 03-01-06; 03-01-07; ACM-SP, Colações do Cabido; ANTT, MCO, Padroados do Brasil, Bispado de São Paulo, mç 10 e mç 11; ANTT, HSO, Geraldo, mç 1, doc 11; Manuel, mç 202, doc 1143; IL, Provisões de nomeação e termos de juramentos, livro 114, fl. 59.

³⁷ About the bishopric of Mariana: ANTT, MCO, Padroados do Brasil, Bispado de Mariana, mç 5 e mç 6; ANTT, HSO, Geraldo, mç 01, doc 11; Inácio, mç 06, doc 95; João, mç 130, doc 2025; Manuel, mç 170, doc 1797; Teodoro, mç 01, doc 18; Boschi 2011: 241-327; Trindade 1953: 299-364. About Rio de Janeiro: ANTT, HSO, Antônio, mç 125, doc 2119; Antônio, mç 108, doc 1885; Francisco, mç 65, doc 1237; Gaspar, mç 08, doc 171; Inácio, mç 06, doc 100; João, mç 162, doc 1350; João, mç 54, doc 1039; José, mç 155, doc 3005; José, mç 43, doc 0685; Lourenço, mç 04, doc 67; Manuel, mç 98, doc 1820; AMCM-RJ, Livro de Tombo (1722-1840), Cx 95, unidade 1, fl. 92v; ANTT, Padroados do Brasil, Bispado do Rio de Janeiro, maços 15, 16 e 17; Araújo; Santos, 1914; AUC, Ficheiros de matrículas e exames (by alphabetical order of the surname).

³⁸ AEAM, Livros de Provisões; AUC, Ficheiros de matrículas e exames (by alphabetical order of the surname); ANTT, HSO, Lourenço, mç 07, doc 114; ANTT, HSO, José, mç 85, doc 1252; ANTT, HSO, Manuel, mç 170, doc 1797; ANTT, HSO, Inácio, mç 6, doc 95; ANTT, MCO, Padroados do Brasil, Bispado

The income from *pés-de-altar* (fees charged for administering the sacraments) of the São Paulo churches, as well as the emoluments of their ecclesiastical courts, was not attractive enough for the secular clergy with a university degree (Rodrigues 2014: 27-76). Minas Gerais had the largest population in the captaincy of the colony; in 1772-1782, it had 319,769 inhabitants, while Rio had 215,678 and São Paulo 116,975, in the same period (Maxwell 2005: 299). Income from diocesan power structures was related with the economic dynamics and the number of inhabitants, as emoluments were charged per head. Thus, the educational background of clergymen operating in the organs of diocesan power reflected the geography and the conjunctures of colonization. The most dynamic regions, in social, economic, and demographic terms, were the most capable of attracting clergymen that had a university degree.

Conclusion

Among the mechanisms of diocesan power, Portuguese-speaking historiography has paid special attention to pastoral visits, revealing their importance for controlling and inspecting the territory, and mainly the behavior of the faithful – with special emphasis being placed on the role played within the framework of the Counter-Reformation, or the Catholic Reformation (Boschi 1987; Carvalho 1988; Paiva 1991; Figueiredo 1997; Paiva 2000; Palomo 2003; Palomo 2006; Carvalho 2011).

The emphasis laid on the action of visitors has hidden the importance of other diocesan apparatuses, namely ecclesiastical courts, for the exercise of episcopal power. Not much has been published on these diocesan institutions. The few studies on the theme have mainly been based on the theoretical-methodological framework used by historians who researched into pastoral visits, focusing on the institutional organization of ecclesiastical courts and their role in the functioning of Tridentine dioceses. Such publications have made a decisive contribution to improving our knowledge on the enforcement of ecclesiastical justice and the complex process of ensuring the discipline of populations and individual consciences in the Early Modern period (Paiva 2000; Palomo 2003; Palomo 2006; Gouveia 2010, 2013, 2014, 2015; Mendonça 2011).

This article has pursued a new approach, shedding light into the organization of ecclesiastical courts (emphasizing the presence of their jurisdiction in separate counties)

de Mariana, mç 5 e mç 6. As regards church income in Minas Gerais, for example in the mid-eighteenth century, the main church of São João Del Rei yielded an annual income of 200 hundred thousand *cruzados*. Cf. Leoni 2008: 228-231 (Document 113).

and the role played by their head and chief authority (the vicar forane, *vigário da vara*). Furthermore, I chose to focus on the power relations that paved the way for accessing such positions (by studying the appointment procedure in the bishopric of Mariana) and the penetration of their apparatus into colonial society (by identifying the profile of vicars forane in São Paulo).

In the context of the Portuguese overseas territories, given the huge geographical extension of diocesan areas, the jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical courts located in the seat of the ecclesiastical judicial counties (the place where vicars forane operated) played an important role in the dynamics of the functioning of the bishop's apparatus. In this sense, this research displays similar trends to those found by Pollyanna Mendonça in her work about the peripheral dimension of the Maranhão diocese (Mendonça 2011).

The installation of ecclesiastical courts ruled by vicars forane on a satisfactory scale, in huge diocesan peripheries, gave them a critical dimension in the colonial world. Dividing bishoprics into districts and setting up a court in each of their county seats made the diocesan body quite adaptable with a view to rendering its territorial implantation viable around the community of the faithful. Vicars forane became a key channel for connecting the inhabitants of the most distant lands of the colony to their prelates and for mediating such a relationship, whether in terms of ecclesiastical justice, or as regards key institutional practices impacting on diocesan life – namely, obtaining a wide variety of licenses, appointments, etc., supplied by the ecclesiastical court.

The role played by vicars forane in the colonization process and their importance in the bishopric's periphery, in the efforts made to control the territory of both diocese and colony, became even more relevant when it came to issuing letters appointing as vicars forane in their parish the rectors of churches located in distant areas, as seen in examples found in the bishopric of Mariana. Areas under the jurisdiction of rectors-vicars forane were not defined by the borders of an ecclesiastical judicial county, contrary to standard practice, but by unstable frontier regions with no defined boundaries, which were called “newly discovered territories,” “territories yet to be discovered,” “wildernesses,” etc.

If we look at the structuring process of ecclesiastical judicial counties in São Paulo from a global point of view, we find that such a process was mainly in line with the bishops' concern with installing ecclesiastical courts as close as possible to the entire population of their diocese, regardless either of the number of parishes under the jurisdiction of the vicar forane or the population density within their limits. In the case of

the diocese of Mariana, comparing the size of its ecclesiastical judicial counties with that of the civil judicial counties, it was found that the diocesan mesh was tighter.

Socially speaking, both the local dynamics influencing access to the position of vicar forane and the profile of its holders (identified for the São Paulo bishopric) indicate that the ecclesiastical power positions fitted a rationale similar to that which guided the occupation of offices in the town councils (*câmaras*) and the lay brotherhoods of mercy (*misericórdias*). The relationship between the latter and the formation of local elites has been exhaustively analyzed by Portuguese-speaking historians, while the diocesan power positions, on the contrary, are almost always ignored by studies on social groups and the structuring process of social hierarchies in Portugal's Ancien Regime.

This is not consistent with the importance attributed by colonial society to such positions, as, for example, to the office of the vicar forane, who developed his activity in ecclesiastical courts located in the seats of ecclesiastical judicial counties. In the most important regions of the São Paulo bishopric, families who usually controlled the town councils, the captains' positions and the offices of the judge of the lay brotherhoods or the judge of the orphans, were the same families that controlled the most important position in the local diocesan rank, i.e. the vicar forane. They vied for the position, by way of their sons, not only because of the income that it provided, but mainly because it was an office of prestige and power. This position at the ecclesiastical court helped these groups to assert themselves and to be represented as local elites.

In exchange, while controlling these structures, they indirectly lent their already consolidated reputation and ruling capability to the episcopal government. It was easier for the diocesan power to assert itself in the diocesan peripheries through the mediation of groups who already enjoyed power and had social and symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1989).

The bishopric of Mariana, which was one of relatively more recent colonization, had more space for the penetration of clerics from Portugal, and its first bishop used this opportunity as a means of feeding a network of patronage and clientelism. The positions granted in the ecclesiastical court located in the judicial counties were important for repaying the support and protection he received from key political figures in Lisbon. In exchange for favors at the Royal Court, he appointed nephews and protégés of powerful courtiers to the diocesan offices. Future research may shed light on the scope of such practices, by way of a global study on the social profile of the episcopal officials of Mariana and the process of appointment to different positions in diocesan counties.

Dioceses built a significant part of their social foundations on the social dynamics and power games identified in this article. Such social dynamics enabled the church structures to settle in the most distant regions of the bishoprics, reaching their borders and rather poorly defined areas. This situation was relatively common in a colonial territory with the size of a continent; i.e., Central-Southern Brazil in the eighteenth century.

This article offers new perspectives for studying ecclesiastical history and the social history of local powers. A better understanding of the institutional mechanisms and the agents of the bishops may uncover new dimensions of Portuguese colonization and contribute to a more global history of the Church.

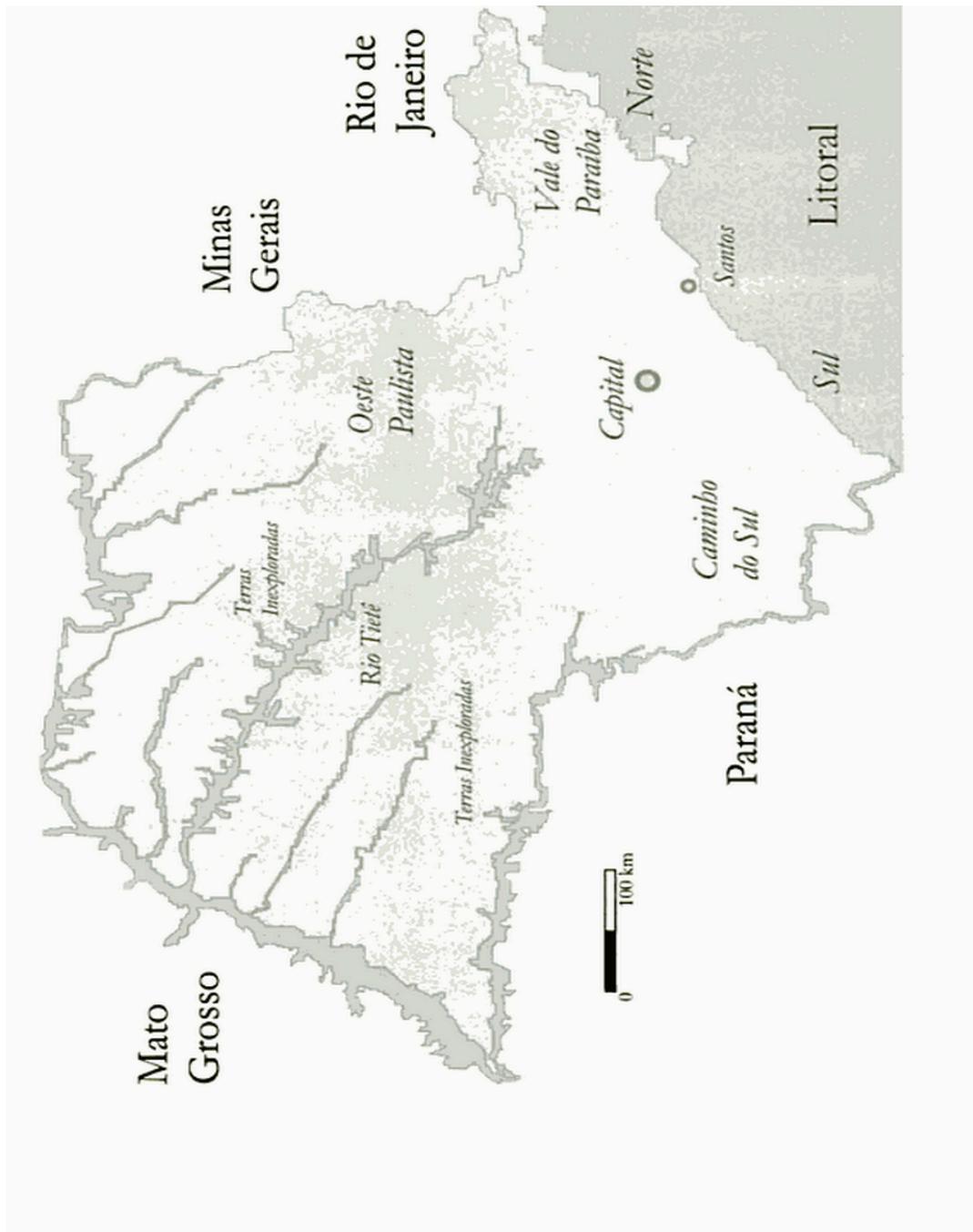
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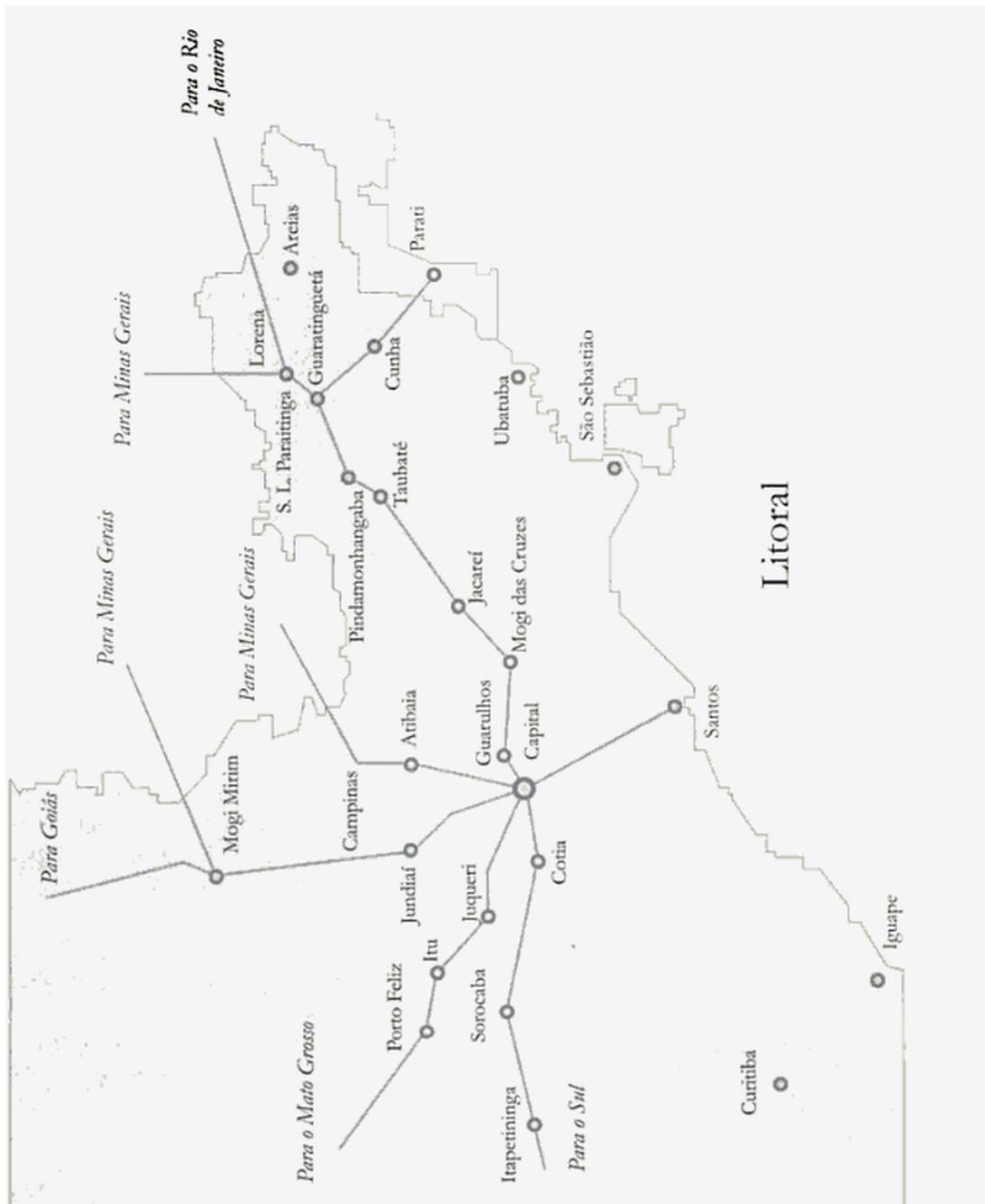
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São Paulo – Eighteenth Century



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Main towns in São Paulo – Eighteenth century



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