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THE GUARANI WAR (1753-1756) AND THE ROLE PLAYED BY THE COMBINED PORTUGUESE AND SPANISH FORCES

Miguel Corrêa MONTEIRO (Portugal)

In the 17th century, Portugal intended to extend its possessions to the mouth of the River Plate so that Brazil would have its natural borders to the south. Thus, in 1678, a colony was founded in the region to assert its rights. In 1679, the governor of the captaincy of Rio de Janeiro, Manuel de Lobo, accompanied a group of traders interested in expanding their businesses with the aim of founding the first European settlement in the territory that would later become Uruguay.

The colony was located opposite the Argentine city of Buenos Aires, on the opposite bank of the River Plate, and became a centre for smuggling sugar, tobacco and cotton for English and Portuguese traders. Upon learning of the Portuguese occupation, the Spanish governor mobilized his troops and ordered Manuel de Lobo to be arrested.

Subsequent protests from Portugal led to the intervention of Pope Innocent XI and the colony was returned to its owners in 1683, which was ratified by the treaties of Lisbon in 1701 and Utrecht in 1715. For the Spanish, control of the Prata estuary and the transport of silver from Peru was of vital importance.

The end of the dispute between Spain and Portugal over the limits of their South American colonies was imperative for both powers, who renegotiated the borders imposed by the Treaty of Tordesillas. This mission distinguished Alexandre de Gusmão, a Portuguese born in Brazil who understood the importance of securing for Portugal the fertile plains of Rio Grande do Sul and exchanging them for the colony of Sacramento, on the left bank of the River Plate, which was difficult to defend and maintain, which is

why he advocated on several occasions that we abandon it, thus ensuring that Portugal would maintain the lands of Mato Grosso and the river route that leads to the Amazon.

Through cartographic studies presented to the Spanish Court, Gusmão demonstrated that, if on the one hand Portugal had surpassed the Tordesillas Line, with the Portuguese occupation of part of the Amazon basin and the Central-West of South America, Spain had, on the other hand, , surpassing the so-called Line of Zaragoza (drawn with the signing of the Treaty of Zaragoza, signed on April 2, 1529, expanding its possessions in Asia, with the Philippines, the Marianas and the Moluccas, which had been Portuguese colonies. He also argued that the losses of a kingdom in one region had been compensated by gains in another and that the principle of territorial division should be the effective occupation of the land (*uti possidetis*). Thus, through extensive documentation and skilful negotiations, he managed to secure the majority of current Brazilian territory for Portugal.

As a consequence of this new demarcation, the regions where the Oriental Missions were established, which included seven villages of the Guarani Jesuit missions or Guarani Jesuit reductions, and which were located on the left bank of the Uruguay River, became part of Portugal. Contrary to the Pope's determinations that the indigenous people should be evangelized and converted into good subjects, the Guarani war allowed the enslavement of the Indians, while in Spanish territories the indigenous people enjoyed the protection of the Crown.

This change in legal status meant that the indigenous population refused to pass into the hands of the Portuguese (this change also made them the object of the greed of the *bandeirantes*, groups of expeditionary who left Portuguese Brazil to provide Portuguese owners with cheaper slaves than black Africans). Thus, between 1752 and 1756, the Guarani war broke out, in which the Guarani leader, chief José Tiarajú, played an important role.

Tiarajú died shortly before the Battle of Caibaté, in which more than 1,500 Indians died in combat against the Spanish and Portuguese armies that defended the imposition of new borders. Finally, in 1761, with the signing of the Treaty of El Pardo, the Treaty of Madrid was abolished for the missions and they could continue to be part of Spain, while Portugal remained with the colony of Sacramento.

When we ask ourselves about the true reasons that led the Marquis of Pombal to persecute the Jesuits in the way he did, as this seemed to be the most important mission of his life, we have to start from existing documents, such as the proscription law, among others, and where six important accusations are mentioned. The first has to do with the famous issue surrounding the Treaty of Limits, signed in Madrid by the monarchs Fernando VI of Spain and João V of Portugal on January 13, 1750, and which handed over southern Brazil to Portugal. This fact forced the transfer of seven indigenous villages missioned by Spanish Jesuits to the left bank of the Paraguay River. In exchange,

Portugal handed over Colonia del Sacramento, located near Buenos Aires, to Spain. The treaty defined the limits between the respective colonies, and Portugal, based on the Roman law *uti possidetis ita possideatis* (whoever possesses in fact, must possess in law), considerably expanded its domains, especially in the territory of current Brazil.

As far as the South zone was concerned, Portugal ceded the Colony of Sacramento, located on the banks of the River Plate, to Spain, receiving in exchange the Seven Peoples of the Missions, north of the Ibicuí River. This last territory included the jesuit missions of São Francisco Borja, São Nicolau, São Luís Gonzaga and São Miguel Arcanjo. Regarding the territory to the West, the limits to be respected would have the rivers as the main landmarks, through a straight line that would start from the bar of the Jauru River (a tributary of the Paraguay River).

The Treaty of Madrid brought immediate consequences: the revocation of the Treaty of Tordesillas; the consecration of the principle of *uti possidetis*; the change of Colonia do Sacramento to the territory of the Seven Peoples of the Missions; and the definition of the Uruguay River as Brazil's western border with Argentina. The division of the world by the Treaty of Tordesillas was abolished and Portugal gained the right to occupy the lands on the eastern bank of the Uruguay River and to possess Rio Grande do Sul, while renouncing possession of the Philippine islands.

The resistance of the indigenous people to abandon the places where they lived was attributed to the Jesuits with accusations published in Lisbon in the Abbreviated List of the Republic, which the religious jesuits from the Provinces of Portugal and Spain established in the Overseas Domains of the two Monarchies; and of the war, which they have moved and sustained against the Spanish and Portuguese armies. Formed by the records of the Secretariats of the two respective Main Commissioners, and Plenipotentiaries; and other authentic documents, and also in the *Chronological and Analytical Deduction* published in Lisbon in 1765. Regarding this subject, the jesuit priest António Leite states, «The Indians refused to leave their homes and lands, despite the requests of missionaries to carry out the orders of the Spanish monarch. But, even if the jesuits, especially at the beginning, presented the difficulties of such a measure, or even some resistance, as did the authorities and Bishops of Spanish territory, their Portuguese confreres would not be responsible for this fact». ⁽¹⁾

However, the fight waged by the indigenous people against the allied troops of Portugal and Spain, despite being courageous, was unequal, and ended with the slaughter of thousands. The force of arms violently ended utopia, the dream of the Ignatian priests. For Lúcio de Azevedo, «The execution of the boundary treaty in Brazil, the establishment of the Grão-Pará company, the declaration of freedom of the indigenous

1. António Leite SJ, "A Ideologia Pombalina - Despotismo Esclarecido e Regalismo", in *Como Interpretar Pombal?*, Lisboa, Ed. Brotéria, 1983, pp. 27-54. Veja-se igualmente Miguel C. Monteiro, *Inácio Monteiro (1724-1812) um jesuíta português na dispersão*, Lisboa, Centro de História da Universidade de Lisboa, 2004, pp. 177-213.

people of America, belong to this period of the Pombaline Government, preceding the earthquake, and constitute in its connection the culminating event of the entire reign. In effect, these acts led Carvalho to fight with the Jesuits, and from then on, the entire administration was guided by the idea, superimposed on everything else, of defeating and annihilating them»⁽²⁾

In the 17th and 18th centuries, the Jesuit Province of Paraguay meant an alliance between Jesuits and indigenous people, a social commitment and an alternative to the Portuguese-Spanish colonial model then used in America. In 1750 the provisions of the Treaty of Madrid were challenged by chiefs and Jesuits, alarming the Iberian courts who saw this challenge as the beginning of rebellion and the creation of an independent “state”. The military confrontation that became known as the Guaranitic War (1753-1756) was moving towards the rebel indigenous people who opposed, especially in two cases, the Reductions of S. Carlos and São Miguel de los Angeles, against the demarcators envoys and related forces from Spain and Portugal.

The following are pointed out as indirect consequences of this treaty: the concession to Spain of exclusive navigation of the River Plate; the creation of the Captancy D’El Rey de São Pedro do Rio Grande do Sul; the increase in Portuguese military power in southern Brazil; the concession of part of the Amazon to the Portuguese; the construction of Fort Príncipe da Beira, Fort Macapá and Fort Tabatinga, among others. It is also partially responsible for moving the capital of the Viceroyalty from Salvador (BA) to Rio de Janeiro. The border demarcations imposed by the Treaty of Madrid were resisted, particularly by the Guarani Indians, inspired by the Jesuits. The indigenous Guarani reaction of chief José (Sepé) Tiaraju started the Guarani War (1752-1756). Sepé was killed three days before the last battle, that of Caibaté, where more than 1,500 Indians died fighting.

The Guarani War represented the most tragic episode in missionary history, both due to the warlike actions and their consequences, which determined the end of a new experience, ending the properties of the people, contrary to papal determinations in relation to the indigenous people. On the Portuguese side, it would have heavy consequences, as the violent reaction against the Sovereign's determinations meant a crime of lese majesty, and was at the origin of the serious accusation against the Society of Jesus in Pombal's time.

The war was limited between 1753-1756 on the southeastern border of the province, in the territory occupied by the Seven Peoples, currently located in the Brazilian territory of Rio Grande do Sul. Military operations took place in 1753, 1754 and 1756, resulting in complete defeat of the rebel Guarani, especially after the death of Sepé Tiaraju and the battle of Caiboaté. The combined troops executed two war plans, one incomplete in

2. Lúcio de Azevedo, in *O Marquês de Pombal e a sua época*, Lisboa, Clássica Edit., 1990, p. 95.

1754 and the other in 1756, with the victory of the Iberian troops. Militarily, the Seven Peoples, even aided by Indians from other reductions, did not have an organized army and was therefore unable to unify all their militias. The Jesuit-Guarani and Iberian alliances themselves had internal contradictions, in many cases insoluble. As Brazilian historian Luiz Carlos Golin argues, «At the time of the war, the non-existence of this unit was motivated by internal conflicts. Guarani impotence was substantiated by the disarticulation between the hitherto harmonious bodies of the people: priests, cabildos and chiefs. Even if the Indians had a formal and hierarchical army, it would be very difficult to militarily defeat the Iberian troops moved from Europe and colonial America to fight them». ⁽³⁾

The Seven Peoples had several weaknesses resulting from the often contradictory positions of priests, chiefs and Indians regarding the determinations of the Treaty of Madrid, of January 13, 1750, signed between kings D. Fernando VI (Spain) and D. João V (Portugal). This Treaty, in its breadth, abolished the meridian line of Tordesillas, of July 7, 1497, the deed of Zaragoza, of April 22, 1599, and the Treaty of Utrecht, of February 6, 1715. The decision negotiated in Madrid sought peace between the Iberian crowns, and at the same time also sought to redefine colonial rights in America, establishing new border limits.

From the first moment, even in the conversations between the kingdoms, the Society of Jesus was openly against the signing of the Treaty in aspects relating to indigenous territories. The death of the Portuguese king, D. João V, still in 1750, delayed the preparations for his execution, mainly due to the political dispute in the formation of the new cabinet. Crowned D. José I, he replaced minister Alexandre de Gusmão, the coordinator of the Treaty, with Sebastião José de Carvalho e Mello, Count of Oeiras and who would later receive the title of Marquis of Pombal. The new minister had condemned the actions of the old diplomacy, especially with regard to the handover of the Colony of Sacramento and, most seriously, the exclusive franchise of navigation on the River Plate to Spain.

Between 1754 and 1756 the Guarani Republic maintained an unequal fight, bows and arrows against firearms and even some artillery. In this struggle, an indigenous leader called Sepé Tiaraju stood out, a magistrate in the town of São Miguel, responsible for organizing an indigenous contingent capable of confronting the invaders, having served as a negotiator. In 1754, the first joint offensive by the Spanish and Portuguese failed. However, two years later, the combined colonial forces returned to the charge, fighting on February 7, 1756, in which Sepé was captured and executed. Three days later, in the battle of Caiboaté, more than 1,200 Guarani warriors died in just over an hour of

3. Cf. Luís Carlos Golin, GOLIN, Tau. *A guerra guaranítica*. Porto Alegre: Editora da Universidade; Passo Fundo: UPF Editora, 1998.

fighting. That was where indigenous resistance ended. In 1768, by order of Pombal, the Jesuits would be expelled from the entire territory of the Missions.

In 1754, after the arrival of the allied troops, the figure of Sepé Tiaraju stands out, a Christianized Guarani who, in addition to being an experienced warrior, had a reputation for being a skilled negotiator. As magistrate of the Jesuit-Guarani reduction of São Miguel Arcanjo, he frequently visited all the missionary communities, which is why he managed to prepare forces capable of confronting the invaders.

To understand the process that led to the Guarani War, it is necessary to go back to the beginnings of colonization. In 1494, the Treaty of Tordesillas divided South America between Portugal and Spain, leaving the Lusitanians with a strip of coast that ended where the city of Laguna exists today. Beginning in 1500, mainly with Tomé de Sousa's armada, Portuguese colonization and Jesuit evangelization began with José de Anchieta and Manuel da Nóbrega. In the 17th century, the Catholic Church, which operated both in territories under Portuguese and Spanish rule, highlighted the Society of Jesus to promote religious missions. The missions, or "reductions", established in territory submitted to the Spanish crown, were villages located in the middle of the forest, which grew to become cities. For Tau Golin, they emerged as a geopolitical project of the Spanish crown, with the function of establishing a broad Spanish border barrier to contain southern Portuguese expansion in South America. The "reduction", a colonial structure planned for the Indians, brought together several chiefdoms. It was an adaptation of the urbanized colonial space to the Spanish way.

The Reductions had representatives from the Spanish colonial administration, who were mainly responsible for programming Christian and political life, with evangelization provided by Spanish Jesuits. These reductions had a certain autonomy and defended the indigenous people against the "captains of the bush" who wanted to enslave them, even if they were Spanish. The Seven Peoples of the Missions were part of the Jesuit Province of Paraguay, extending across regions that are now part of four countries: Paraguay, Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil. 30 reductions were organized in the region: 23 on the right bank of the Uruguay River (in lands where today Paraguay and Argentina are located) and seven on the left bank of the river, currently territories of Rio Grande do Sul and the Republic of Uruguay.

The Jesuits' experience with the Guarani, which began in 1609, lasted until 1768 and was classified by Voltaire, an Enlightenment scholar notorious for his anti-clerical stance, as a "triumph of humanity". During the period of the Iberian Union (1580-1640), when the Spanish crown took control of Portugal and its colonies in the New World, the Portuguese of São Paulo decided to advance into the interior of the continent. Through predatory expeditions that would become known as *Bandeiras*, they began to attack the reductions of Guairá, currently the State of Paraná, and Tape, in current Rio Grande do Sul, with the purpose of capturing and enslaving indigenous people.

In the vast missionary region, the chiefs were Christianized by the religious, becoming great defenders and promoters among the indigenous people and being the cause of the creation of new reductions. The development of reductions worried the colonizers, as that new organizational model meant that the tools and means of production belonged to everyone. It meant a new utopia in which social Orders and the State would have been abolished, with free association of industrial and agricultural workers, and a fully planned economy.

The Guarani showed great ease in learning and assimilating new technologies, which resulted in the great development of reductions, particularly in terms of livestock farming. Each reduction formed a small independent republic, subordinate only to the confederation, in matters of civil, criminal and military legislation. Foreign trade was also the responsibility of the confederation. Industry also flourished. In the beginning they produced articles of clothing, housing, agricultural tools, and forges. All the craft professions introduced were successful and prospered. They manufactured several musical instruments that rivaled what was produced in Europe.

None of this mattered to the *bandeirantes*. They used to move from São Paulo to the south, burning missions and capturing “savages”. With the regaining of independence from Portugal in 1640, the continuous Portuguese advance into the interior began to represent a threat to Spain. Thus, the fight against the *bandeirantes* became a common interest for Spanish authorities and Guarani leaders. After decades of attacks, the chiefs managed to defeat the *bandeirantes* in the Battle of Mbororé, between March 11 and 18, 1641, probably in the current municipality of Porto Vera Cruz in Rio Grande do Sul.

This event led to indigenous militias being authorized to use gunpowder, having received military training from jesuit priests. The new techniques, combined with the Guarani tradition of naval battles and ambushes in the coastal forest, in addition to the use of bows and arrows, transformed the defense into authentic guerrilla warfare. The retreat of the invaders had the immediate effect of militarizing the indigenous people of the missions who began to patrol their territory, especially the limits of the Hispanic domains with Portugal. The Portuguese undermined the progress of their rivals through *bandeirantes* attacks on missions in the Uruguay and Jacuí river basins. And in 1680, with the establishment of the Colony of Sacramento, on the left bank of the River Plate, opposite Buenos Aires, on the Spanish side. There followed almost a century of permanent tension that would lead, as we have already seen, to negotiations and the signing of the Treaty of Madrid, in 1750, determining that Portugal handed over the Colony of Sacramento to Spain, to receive, in exchange, the Seven Peoples of the Missions, on the east bank of the Uruguay River, under Spanish rule.

All efforts by the Society of Jesus to annul the transfers of reductions provided for in the Treaty of Madrid were failed, so the indigenous people were left with only the

alternative of war. Therefore, when the demarcators arrived in the disputed area in 1752, the Guarani began a war against the colonizing military forces.

The most determined opposition came from the residents of São Miguel and São Nicolau, reductions that were part of those communities that were requested to be relocated. Resistance spread throughout the villages and destabilized the Treaty negotiations, posing a serious challenge to royal authority and implying strong suspicions about the Jesuits' participation in the revolt. The Jesuits were accused of resisting the orders received, through letters and reports, to move the authorities from the decision to force the withdrawal of the "Seven Peoples".

The violent resistance led the governors of Buenos Aires, José de Andonegui, and Rio de Janeiro, Gomes Freire de Andrada, to join forces and prepare two powerful armies to invade the Seven Peoples, fulfilling the orders of the respective Courts that were of hand over the missionary-free territory to Portugal. The operations were articulated through two war plans, says Golin. The first, in which the military contingents acted separately, failed in 1754, forcing them to withdraw to Rio Grande, Buenos Aires, Arraial de Veras and Montevideo. However, the following year, the combined forces marched again against the Missions: The two armies went directly to the seven centers of power of the Peoples. Organized by Sepé Tiaraju, the militias resisted, razing the land and burning the fields so that the animals of the combined forces could not feed themselves, and waging a guerrilla war against the invaders.

On the afternoon of February 7, 1756, the Portuguese-Spanish troops suffered several skirmishes, with the rebels being pursued. Faced with the response to the attack, the Indians retreated to a forested area, where their other militiamen, ambushed, awaited the time of the attack. However, Sepé's horse stumbled and fell and the leader was struck by a spear. According to Luiz Carlos Golin, all commanders and chroniclers of the expedition recorded that the Guarani leader was injured by a pedestrian and killed by a pistol shot by the commander of the operation, the governor of Montevideo, José Joaquim de Viana. Reports say that, after being injured, Sepé was tortured. "The Ephemerides of La Guerra de los Guaranies", by Father Tadeu Henis, who accompanied the Guaranis, record that his body was burned with gunpowder and martyred.

On the morning of February 10, 1756, the Guarani Nicolau Neenguiru, chief ensign of the missionary forces, arrived at the fields of Caiboaté, an area through which the "Caminho das Missões" passed, and decided to deploy his forces in a completely open location, contrary to the instructions from Sepé, and ordered a long crescent-shaped trench to be dug on the highest level. His plan was to halt the enemy advance with a fixed defense, contrary to the Guarani tradition of mobile warfare, perhaps to wait for more combatants from the Missions. It was a serious mistake, as the Guaranis did not have heavy artillery.

The combined forces began the battle with intense artillery fire, attacking the indigenous trench. The infantry waited in the rear, and the cavalry had positions on the flanks. Taking advantage of the enormous confusion caused by the artillery, the infantry advanced directly towards the Guarani militia trenches, causing carnage.

Golin reports that the missionaries were decimated in just one hour and fifteen minutes of fighting. Witnesses left conflicting numbers: General José de Andonegui recorded in his "Manifiesto de las operaciones" 1,511 deaths. José Joaquim Viana reports in his "Diário de La Segunda Expedicion y Derrota" that the deaths exceeded 1,200, while Gomes Freire's records are conflicting. First he records more than 1,200 deaths, but in his "Departure Diary" the number rises to 1,723.

On February 12, 1761, the first Treaty of Pardo was signed between Portugal and Spain, which annulled that of Madrid, establishing that the Colony of Sacramento would once again belong to Portugal and the Seven Peoples of the Missions to Spain. The Jesuits were blamed for the revolt, being expelled from America in 1767, so the old reductions began to be administered by bureaucrats from the Buenos Aires government.

The defeat of the missionary project meant the end of the dream and utopia, the creation of an alternative society, based on the collective property of the people. The European colonial model, based on the concentration of private land ownership, preferred multitudes of natives deprived of rights and once again enslaved.

The Treaty of Madrid brought immediate consequences as we have already mentioned. However, the treaty soon made enemies: the Spanish Jesuits, expelled from the Missions, and traders prevented from smuggling in the River Plate. Their protests found unexpected support in Portugal's new strongman: the Marquis of Pombal. The new agreement of 1761 annulled the one in Madrid, as we mentioned, but the geographical bases and legal foundations for which Alexandre had fought so hard in 1750 ended up prevailing and, in 1777, those principles annulled in El Pardo resurfaced in the Treaty of Santo Ildefonso. The issue was also the subject of a new Pardo treaty, on March 11, 1778, for the Spanish to withdraw from Santa Catarina, with Portugal having definitively lost the Colony of Sacramento.

The end result of the Treaty of Madrid and the other treaties that followed was the Portuguese colonization of the region until the 19th century. For Brazilian historiography, the Treaty of Madrid represents the historical-legal basis of the country's territorial formation, as it was the first document to define with real precision the natural borders of the future State of Brazil.

Author's short CV

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