

ARTIGO

SAINT JOAQUIM'S FORT: FROM THE MILESTONE OF THE PORTUGUESE OCCUPATION ON THE RIO BRANCO VALLEY TO THE BATTLES OF MEMORY - XVIII TO XX CENTURIES

Abstract

This article talks about the role of Saint Joaquim's Fort in the consolidation of the border and of the occupation of the Rio Branco valley, located in the current State of Roraima. It strives to comprehend the process of occupation of the region in the end of the XVIII and XIX centuries, describe the colonial policies of the Portuguese and the Brazilian Empire alike, to discuss questions related to the memory of Saint Joaquim's Fort, trying to emphasize the subjects who participated in this process. Moreover, there is a discussion about the dispute over Saint Joaquim's Fort, a question that involves several segments of Roraima's society, a memory that was appropriated by the so called "pioneer" families because some of them had their origins bound to ex-participants of the fortification and utilized them to justify their possessions and to consolidate their social place.

Keywords: Roraima; Saint Joaquim's Fort; Memory.

Resumo

Este artigo trata do papel do Forte São Joaquim na consolidação da fronteira e da ocupação do vale do rio Branco, localizado no atual estado de Roraima. Busca compreender o processo de ocupação da região no final do século XVIII e XIX, descrever a política colonial portuguesa e imperial brasileira. Discutir questões relacionadas à memória do Forte São Joaquim, procurando dar maior ênfase aos sujeitos participantes desse processo. Além da discussão sobre a disputa pela memória do Forte São Joaquim, questão que envolve diversos segmentos da sociedade roraimense, memória que foi apropriada pelas chamadas famílias "pioneiras", em que algumas delas têm suas origens ligadas a ex-integrantes da fortificação, e a utilizam para justificar suas posses e consolidar seu lugar social.

Palavras-Chave: Roraima; Forte de São Joaquim; Memória.

* Graduated in History from the Federal University of Santa Catarina (1988), Masters in History from the Federal University of Santa Catarina (1994). Doctor in History from the Federal University of Pernambuco (2003). Post doctorate from the Federal University of Pará (2015). He is currently associate professor at the Federal University of Roraima.

** Graduated in Bachelor in History from the Federal University of Pará (2007), graduated in Full Degree in History from the Federal University of Pará (2006) and Masters in History from the Federal University of Santa Maria (2013).

Introduction

In the mid-XIX century, although it was little attractive for the settlers, the Rio Branco valley was already a reality as a non-indigenous occupation area. However, without an action from the Portuguese State, on the second half of the XVIII century, by means of the construction of Saint Joaquim's Fort and of other occupation policies, it would have its realization postponed.

In this region, some European nations acknowledged the geographical area and of their people before the Portuguese did, therefore they had already planned strategies with geopolitical purposes, what originated some conflicts between Spanish and Dutch, even though they were indirect, for the control of the influence over the indigenous and for the border zone¹.

The Rio Branco valley, as it was so with all Amazon, was already populated, at the time the Portuguese arrived, by several indigenous ethnicities, which already had strong social, political and cultural structure. Thus, by the time the Portuguese arrived in the Branco River, they came to conquer and occupy it (the term "occupy" means here that the non-Indian people negotiated, appropriated and, in many cases, expelled the autochthonous from their lands, from a region already populated by many ethnicities and, in addition to this, they compulsorily and violently appropriated their workforce).

According to Betha Becker², to the colonial Amazon, geopolitics functioned as to justify the occupation, because,

(...) por mais que quisesse a Coroa, não tinha recursos econômicos e população para povoar e ocupar um território de tal extensão. Portugal conseguiu manter a Amazônia e expandi-la para além dos limites previstos no tratado de Tordesilhas, graças a estratégias de controle do território. Embora os interesses econômicos prevalecessem, não foram bem-sucedidos, e a geopolítica foi mais importante do que a economia no sentido de garantir a soberania sobre a Amazônia, cuja ocupação se fez, como se sabe, em surtos ligados a demandas externas seguidos de grandes períodos de estagnação e de decadência³.

¹ FARAGE, Nádia. *As Muralhas dos Sertões: os povos indígenas no rio Branco e a Rio de Janeiro*: Paz e Terra; ANPOCS, 1991.

² BECKER, Bertha K. *Geopolítica da Amazônia. Estudos Avançados*, São Paulo, v. 19, n. 53, 2005. Disponível em: <<http://www.scielo.br>>. Acesso em: 21 Mar 2007.

³ "Even though the Crown wanted to, it did not have the economic resources and population to populate and occupy a territory with such extension. Portugal could keep the Amazon and expand it further than the limits predicted in the Treaty of Tordesillas, thanks to the strategies of territory control. Although the economic interests prevailed, they were not very successful, and geopolitics was more important than economy regarding guaranteeing the supremacy upon the Amazon, whose occupation was done, as it is known, by outbreaks related to external demands followed by long periods of stagnation and decadency".

It is important to highlight that we will utilize the concept of geopolitics as a methodological mark of this article, even though the one we should use to interpret the Portuguese arguments for the possession of the region is the concept of *Uti Possidetis*, according to which, the rights to the territory should go to who populated it; which was conquered by the first inhabitants⁴.

Thus, in the search for the consolidation of the Portuguese possession, several conflicts would take place during the colonial Amazon's history, as much internal as external conflicts, and if the first has not been marked by great confrontations (at least if it is compared to the internal conflicts), these sure have. They were marked by a significant violence, especially towards the former inhabitants of America, who, thanks to an ethnocentric thought and an inconsequential search for the enrichment of the non-indians, were slaughtered with the progress of the colonial conquest, since the first days of the occupation by the European.

Colonial Amazon: an area in permanent dispute

If Brazil's coast started to receive attention from the Portuguese Crown only from the mid-XVI century, Amazon would still have to wait more than one century after the first European's arrival to Bahia to be inserted in the Portuguese colonial conquest's map. Only when there was a threat concerning the loss of territory, Portugal draws its attention to the vast region of the Amazon River Basin.

As stated by Cardoso⁵ (p.38), at the beginning of the XVII century, Dutch, Irish, English and French knew the region even better than the Portuguese and Spanish, the "owners" of the territory since the Treaty of Tordesillas, but they were focused on other problems at this time. One of the main reasons that attracted attention from these European nations was the proximity from Amazon to the Caribbean market.

The fact that Spanish and Portuguese initially abandoned Maranhão's and Pará's coasts has offered an opportunity for pirates and French corsairs, for example, to explore them, as did Daniel de La Touche, lord of La Ravardière, who was a commander in the expedition of São Luís' foundation in 1612. He declared, when he articulated with the Luso-Brazilians in Maranhão in 1615, that he had made recognitions in the region.

⁴ ANDRADE, Manuel Correia de. *Geopolítica do Brasil*. São Paulo: Ática, 1989, p. 30.

⁵ 4 CARDOSO, Alirio Carvalho. *Belém na conquista da Amazônia: antecedentes à fundação e os primeiros anos*. In: FONTES, Edilza (org.). *Coleção Contando a História do Pará: da Conquista à Sociedade da Borracha* (séc. XVI – XIX). Belém: Editora E. Motion, 2003, pp. 32 – 58.

The impossibility of defending Amazon from the North of Brazil and the necessity to occupy it, besides the natural difficulty in navigation, which made it easier to travel from Belém to Lisboa than to Salvador, made it possible for another Portuguese colonial area to show up in South America, directly subordinated to the metropolis⁶.

In the Amazon, with the foundation in 1616 of the Presépio's Fort by Francisco Caldeira Castelo Branco, the Portuguese leave a mark in the region. From this Fort would emerge the city of Belém, a place that would serve as a logistic base both for the Portuguese to spread their actions and missions in the Amazon River and for them to cast out the foreigners⁷.

Conforming to Cardoso⁸, the Portuguese Crown did not have a clear project of occupation of the Amazon lands at first; they had to occupy it only due to the presence of other European nations. Besides lacking a project, they lacked also financial resources, problem that was initially fixed by the Luso-Brazilian who lived in Pernambuco and their interest in ensuring the conquest.

The Portuguese were worried about occupying the region with a non-indian population. This concern happened at first mainly at a context of defense of the territory. To Carvalho⁹ "reasons of war" motivated the Portuguese to settle investments in the region, because they were not aware of Amazon's economical potential, only that its main River was an exceptional means of communication, of penetration into the enemy's territory and of defense against foreigners. Thus, defense became the main strategy-organizing power for the occupation of the Amazon.

Nevertheless, although it was strategically planned to defend the territory from foreigners, the conquest of the Amazon, according to Reis¹⁰, was spurred by economic reasons when searching by the drugs of the backlands, *drogas do sertão*, and motivated by the European mercantile greed from XVII and XVIII centuries.

At first, to make the region economically productive and attractive, the plantation system was put to trial. When it ran down, they turned their attention to the great workforce available (the indians) and to the large amount of natural products that could be sold, offered by the forest¹¹.

⁶ CARDOSO, Alirio Carvalho. Op. cit. p. 39.

⁷ DIAS, Maria das Graças Santos. Fundamentos da ocupação da Amazônia Colonial. *Textos & Debates: Revista de Filosofia e Ciências Sociais da Universidade Federal de Roraima*, n. 5, [19--?], pp. 33 – 39.

⁸ CARDOSO, Alirio Carvalho. Op. cit. p. 42.

⁹ CARVALHO, João Renôr Ferreira de. Op. cit. pp. 35 – 36.

¹⁰ REIS, Arthur César Ferreira. *A Amazônia e a Cobiça Internacional*. 5. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira; Manaus: Superintendência da Zona Franca de Manaus, 1982, pp. 17 – 18.

¹¹ SANTOS, Francisco Jorge dos. *Além da Conquista: guerras e rebeliões indígenas na Amazônia pombalina*. 2. ed. Manaus: Editora da Universidade do Amazonas, 2002, p. 17

The most important among the factors that contributed for sugar and tobacco production in the Amazon not to go into the Portuguese exportation market were: the lack of capital, bearing in mind that the mercantile bourgeoisie was more interested in the assured profit from the sugar production in the Northeast of Brazil, and also the high prices for Negro slave workforce, which was inaccessible to the growers in the Amazon¹².

According to Santos¹³, the extraction of the drugs of the backlands also came to substitute, partially, the Portuguese losses within the Eastern market of spices. Without this economic basis, it would be impossible to occupy the Amazon valley. When an adequate economic activity was found, the use of indigenous workforce into this activity provoked a cultural gap between European and indigenous. Hence, the internal conflicts in this region were launched and spurred by greed for workforce and the drugs of the backlands¹⁴.

The dispute over the access and control about this workforce marked the region's colonial history involving majorly settlers and missionaries¹⁵. Indeed, affirms Chambouleyron¹⁶ (p.103), in the XVII century's Belem, every inhabitant, either they were "(...) militares, senhores, estrangeiros, religiosos, oficiais e em alguns casos até os chamados 'pobres', tinham índios para seu serviço"¹⁷.

Santos¹⁸ highlights that the Portuguese advancement in the Amazon, which provoked the confrontation against the indigenous, was realized by several agents, who quarreled also among themselves, in such a way that almost these confrontations revolved around one objective only: controlling the indigenous workforce.

Among the most important laws in the colonial period in the Amazon one can find the Missions Regiment, in 1686, which, according to Vieira¹⁹, among its most significant aspects, it brought with it, for the control of the religious orders, the temporal and political administration over the indigenous workforce, along with the spiritual control they already had, what represented an exceptional victory to the missionaries over the settlers with the endorsement of the Portuguese crown.

¹² FARAGE, Nádia. Op. cit. p. 24.

¹³ SANTOS, Francisco Jorge dos. Op. cit. pp. 18 – 19.

¹⁴ DIAS, Maria das Graças Santos. Op. cit. p. 34.

¹⁵ Id.Ibid. p. 35.

¹⁶ CHAMBOULEYRON, Rafael. Belém e seus moradores no século XVII. In: FONTES, Edilza (org.). *Coleção Contando a História do Pará: da Conquista à Sociedade da Borracha (séc. XVI – XIX)*. Belém: Editora E. Motion, 2003, pp. 84 – 110.

¹⁷ (...) military, landholders, foreigners, religious people, officers and, in some cases, even the so-called 'poor' had gone to their service".

¹⁸ SANTOS, Francisco Jorge dos. Op. cit. pp. 33 – 34.

¹⁹ VIEIRA, Jaci Guilherme. *Missionários, fazendeiros e índios em Roraima: a disputa pela terra – 1777 a 1980*. Boa Vista: Editora da UFRR, 2007, p. 11.

The missionaries' action was marked by ambiguity, as states Chambouleyron²⁰, because, at the same time they denounced the excesses made by the settlers, getting in conflict against them, they participated in the commercial world, for they needed to keep alliances with the colonial authorities or powerful settlers in order to survive. This practice has been repeated throughout centuries in the Amazon, and it keeps happening at a great part of the conservative churches, either they are Catholic or not.

Through Pombal's administration of the Portuguese government, the Amazon starts to be a privileged area when he names his half-brother Francisco Xavier de Mendonça Furtado to rule it. This attention, as says Dias²¹, was provided by the recent signature of the Treaty of Madrid, in 1750, between Portugal and Spain, through which Portugal acquired the possession of a vast extension in the North of its colonial area, its administration now thinking about economic alternatives that could promote development to the Amazon.

Pombal's policies found that the Amazon represented great economic possibilities to Portugal, and that the frequent conflicts between settlers and missionaries should be solved so that it could be realized, because this question influenced directly over the colony's production and its capacity as a provider of spices and raw material²².

The most significant actions taken by Pombal concerning the Amazon were: the drastic modifications that happened in the policies related to indigenous workforce; the implementation of a commerce company that functioned during more than twenty-two years (1755-1778) having as goals to introduce African slaves by credit, to spur agriculture and to develop commerce in the region; to redistribute (among military and individuals) the properties that had been confiscated from the Jesuits, by donating or selling them, to reformulate and broaden the Portuguese local administrative machine; and to transform old missions into villages and communities with new Portuguese names²³.

The Law called Directory that one must observe within the Indian peoples of Pará and Maranhão while His Majesty did not tell the contrary, was signed by the king D. José I in August 17, 1757, and first applied only to the States of Grão-Pará and Maranhão, being applied in the next year into every Portuguese conquest in

²⁰ CHAMBOULEYRON, Rafael. Em torno das Missões Jesuíticas na Amazônia (século XVII). *Lusi-tânia Sacra*, Volume 15, Segunda Série, 2003, pp. 19 – 20.

²¹ DIAS, Maria das Graças Santos. Op. cit. p. 36.

²² CARVALHO, João Renôr Ferreira de. Op. cit. p. 108.

²³ SANTOS, Francisco Jorge dos. Op. cit. pp. 46 – 47.

America, and prevailing until May 12, 1798, when it was struck down by D. Maria I²⁴.

Pombal and Mendonça have planned to elevate indigenous to the condition of Crown subordinates, to guarantee the “precarious possession of the colony”; since the Treaty of Madrid was signed, it was necessary to populate all the territory with Portuguese people, in that case inserting Indians into the Portuguese colonial society and creating villages and settlements with Portuguese names²⁵.

Brandão²⁶ emphasizes that the “(...) orientações e determinações para redefinir e pôr em prática a nova política de integração social para os índios do Brasil (...)”²⁷ parted from Pombal and Mendonça Furtado’s stubbornness, but mainly the second’s, knowing that when he was named Commissary to the demarcation of borders and was in expedition through the region of the Arraial de Maruá (Barcelos), where he faced the diseases and setbacks of the forest, his eagerness against religious orders increased, especially against the Society of Jesus, because of the control they had over the indigenous workforce, blaming them for all lack of success in the task they should be realizing, for the lack of food and oarsmen and for the Spanish commissary’s absence.

Over and above, there was also the conflict between settlers and missionaries, which was promoted by plots from the settlers who could not obtain indigenous slave workforce so easily to work on the ploughing or on the gathering of spices, and, besides, did not tolerate wealth superiority from the religious orders²⁸.

The Directory has proposed deep modifications on the indigenous policies there were in the Amazon. Thus, in the settlements, the temporal government would be done by the Principals, the main indigenous leaders, over their people. There was also a Director (civil administrator) to lead the processes of settlement and a missionary for the spiritual part of it. People were compelled to speak Portuguese, as well as having a Portuguese surname. Moreover, the Directors (who substituted the missionary administration) got a sixth part from everything the indigenous produced, and took care of their salaries²⁹.

²⁴ SANTOS, Francisco Jorge dos. Op. cit. pp. 46 – 47.

²⁵ DIAS, Maria das Graças Santos. Op. cit. p. 38.

²⁶ BRANDÃO, Sylvana. Op. cit. pp. 261 – 262. Id.Ibid. p. 265.

²⁷ “(...) guidelines and instructions to redefine and put in practice the new policy of social integration to the Indians of Brasil (...)”.

²⁸ Id.Ibid. p. 265.

²⁹ SANTOS, Francisco Jorge dos. Op. cit. Pp. 49-52.

Speaking of the Indian Directory, Almeida³⁰ shows that there was a necessity to fortify the State; if Church was in an inferior position concerning administration. Because the Society of Jesus did not want to undergo the State's authority, it was expelled from Portuguese territories on September 3, 1759, ending the State's conflicts with the Ignatians. The substitution of Jesuits, as well as missionaries from other religious orders, was gradual, though³¹.

Pombal's Directory did not achieve the immediate results the Portuguese administration waited for. Thus, even to the colonial authorities, the Director of the Indians was mainly responsible for the Directory to have failed. According to Santos³², this administrator, in Ribeiro de Sampaio's concept, was bearer to two almost unbeatable obstacles: "ignorance and greed". The result is that thirty years later the colony still stood on the starting spot, led by Directors with the same profile Ribeiro de Sampaio has shown in his analysis.

It seems to Santos³³ that the Director of the Indians was directly responsible for the fail of the Directory. However, another part of this fail was represented by the Principals' capacity for articulation inside the settlements, what created a false obedience, run-aways, desertions, rebellions and indigenous wars, as a result of the antagonist political conflicts, an Indigenous and an Indigenist.

A great example of indigenous resistance to the Portuguese conquest were the Manaos in the year of 1720. Farage³⁴ believes that the confrontation between Manaos and Portuguese has happened by virtue of economic factors, because besides extinguishing mediators from the slave market with the Dutch, this war would serve also to expand the slave supplying area onto the colonial area. With the fall of these Indians, in 1730, the routes to Negro and Branco Rivers would be opened to the seizure of indigenous. Those regions would then have their population reduced in a short time³⁵.

Thus, in the mid-XVIII century, the Branco River starts to integrate the systematic slave supplying market to Belém and São Luis. It was not a seizure from time to time anymore, but a business that was funded by the State to supply Maranhão and Grão-Pará, places that always needed workers for the ploughing³⁶.

³⁰ ALMEIDA, Rita Heloisa de. O Diretório dos índios: um projeto de "civilização" no Brasil no século XVIII. Brasília: Editora UNB, 1995, p. 115.

³¹ Id.Ibid. pp. 121 – 123.

³² SANTOS, Francisco Jorge dos. Op. cit. pp. 57 – 58.

³³ Id.Ibid. pp. 61 – 62.

³⁴ FARAGE, Nádia. Op. cit. p. 65.

³⁵ Id.Ibid. p. 67.

³⁶ Id.Ibid. p. 68.

With the appliance of Pombal's Directory, from the high number of indigenous that populated Grão-Pará and Maranhão, few were taken as Crown subordinates. Some have gone back to the forest, returning to the lifestyle they had before the Portuguese settlements, but the great part of them was wiped out, so the Amazon started to suffer "(...) um intenso processo de despovoamento, a partir de 1750"³⁷.³⁸

To Farage³⁹, in the fights for the Branco River territory, from the decade of 1770, the indigenous - those who were settled by Portuguese or trading with the Dutch in Essequibo - participated actively on the construction of the colonial borders, looking for advantages; for the colonizers, the indigenous political submission meant a warranty for the possession of the territory.

It is important to see that with either the Portuguese advancement into the Amazon, or even of other nations in other areas of America, the indigenous were not passive, they have been an active agent that forged alliances and found ways to satisfy some of their own interests.

Portugueses in the Branco River

The Portuguese reports about the Branco River were extremely vague concerning their discovery, which was guessed (without any real proof) by Francisco Xavier Ribeiro de Sampaio and Joaquim Nabuco - the first wrote in the XVIII century, and the second in the XX, about Pedro Teixeira's trip from Belém to Quito, between 1673 and 1639. It appeared also in the Jesuit Christobal de Acuña's chronicles, who accompanied Teixeira⁴⁰.

To Farage⁴¹, the documents about the Branco River date from the XVIII century, but increase their volume from the decade of 1730, since an official expansion to the region was taking place at this time, by means of the rescue troops that start to search for Indians in this area.

The existence of this not-documented period does not mean that the region had not been visited by Portuguese, but that the exploitation activities that had taken place there (the extraction of the drugs of the backlands and the indigenous seizure by individuals) were commonly illegal.

³⁷ "(...) an intense process of depopulation, from 1750".

³⁸ BRANDÃO, Sylvania. Op. cit. p. 274.

³⁹ FARAGE, Nádia. Op. cit. pp. 18 - 19.

⁴⁰ VIEIRA, Jaci Guilherme. Op. cit. p. 10.

⁴¹ FARAGE, Nádia. Op. cit. p. 56.

In accordance with Farage⁴², to understand the Portuguese expansion on the Negro River and afterwards in the Branco River, it is necessary to comprehend that in the end of the XVII century the areas that were closer to Belém have been gradually decreasing their capacity to supply indigenous slave workforce, culminating with a sentence against the Manaos for being allied to the Dutch that lived in Guyana, helping on their trade network between manufactured products and indigenous slaves. The first rescue troops (official or not) have already been well described in Farage's book, which is cited here, as well as in Vieira's.

What has surprised the Portuguese most was the fact that Spanish had gone through the mountain range that separated the Orinoco River's basin from the Branco River's basin, what they believed would be a natural defense. This fact put all the Portuguese defense system in the Amazon at stake, for the fortresses they built at other spots of the frontier would not matter if the access to the Negro River was free when crossing Branco River. That was not about a regular meeting, as happened in the case of the Dutch, but as an initiative from the Spanish State in order to attach the region to the Castela domination.

The situation showed up to be more complicated to Portugal due to the political moment of their relations with Spain regarding their colonial borders, bearing in mind the 1750's Treaty of Madrid had been struck down and gave place to El Pardo in 1761, and that the two nations would only make peace about this subject in 1777. That is to say that, at that moment, the colonial borders were uncertain, and that the areas that had already been occupied would be important for future negotiations⁴³.

The complex conjuncture that there was in the Branco River made from that issue a central priority for the Portuguese⁴⁴, and to avoid threats about losing their territory they decided to build up a fortification and to invest in indigenous settlements as a strategy to effectively occupy the Branco River⁴⁵.

We realize by seeing the Royal Provision of November 14 in 1752, that the primal reasons for the construction of Saint Joaquim's Fort were the Dutch incursions in the region of the Rio Branco valley⁴⁶, an order that was not executed by Mendonça Furtado. Thus, this order would only be obeyed in 1775, due to the exposed reasons, the necessity of a military base to the region⁴⁷.

⁴² Id.Ibid. pp. 61 – 62.

⁴³ Id.Ibid. pp. 122 – 123.

⁴⁴ Id. Ibid. p. 123.

⁴⁵ VIEIRA, Jaci Guilherme. Op. cit. p. 18.

⁴⁶ ALMADA, Manuel da Gama Lobo de. Op. cit. pp. 657 – 658.

⁴⁷ VIEIRA, Jaci Guilherme. Op. cit. p. 18.

When Leclerc arrived to Barcelos in 1775, on October 3, an expedition commanded by Captain Phelippe Sturm, who was a German official engineer who served the Portuguese Crown, parted from the captaincy towards the Branco River – it was enhanced with military sent from Belém. They went after the Spanish without finding any resistance as soon as they got to the region, and conquered São João Batista in the margins of the Tacutu River. The Spanish fugitives who were refugees in the Santa Rosa's Fort, in Uraricoera, fled again when they heard about the approach of the Portuguese war troops⁴⁸.

Between the years of 1775 and 1776, the building of Saint Joaquim's Fort was initiated on the right coast of the Tacutu River, at where the River meets the Uraricoera and forms the Branco River. It was a strategic position because it would stop Spanish and Dutch to go further towards Branco River, preventing any foreign incursion into the Negro River⁴⁹.

The importance of the Branco River to the Portuguese Crown was in the fact that at this point the barrier was the limiting area between the Portuguese territory and those dominated by Spanish and Dutch. This was the first advantage the Portuguese could have in this region⁵⁰ (SAMPAIO, 1850: 266 - 267).

Saint Joaquim's Fort was part of the many Portuguese fortifications that surrounded the Amazonian domains in the XVIII century, closing the main accesses to the inner region of the Amazon. These were the accesses: the Branco River (Saint Joaquim's Fort), Negro River (Saint José de Marabitanas' Fort - Cucuí and Saint Gabriel's Fort), Solimões River (Tabatinga's Fort) and Guaporé River (Príncipe da Beira's Fort). This arch completed what there already had been in the estuary of the Amazonas' River, besides those that deepened the defenses⁵¹ (BENTO, 1975:51 - 52).

We can see in the picture below the ground plan of Saint Joaquim's Fort, drawn in the XVIII century, as a result of Alexandre Rodrigues Ferreira's passage through the Rio Branco valley in 1786. Rodrigues Ferreira's drawing was the only such map we have always had access to in our researches, outlining all the others to the ground plans that were copied from the one team Viagem Filosófica de Ferreira.

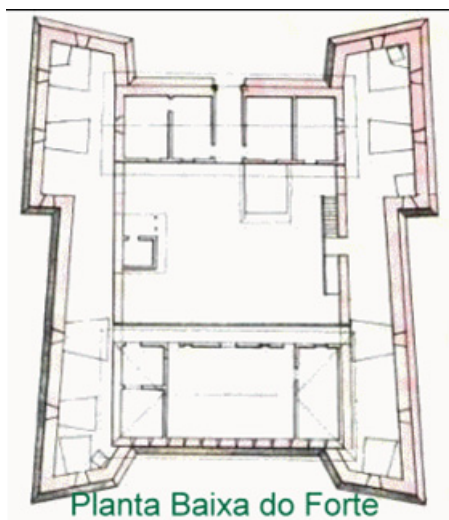
⁴⁸ Índios de Roraima. Boa Vista: Centro de Informação Diocese de Roraima, 1989, pp. 14 – 15.

⁴⁹ FARAGE, Nádia. Op. cit. p. 123.

⁵⁰ SAMPAIO, Francisco Xavier Ribeiro de. Relação Geographica Histórica do Rio Branco da América Portuguesa (1777). In: SAMPAIO, Francisco Ribeiro de. Relação Geographica Histórica do rio Branco da América Portuguesa (1777). In: Revista do Instituto Histórico e Geographico Brasileiro - Tomo XIII. Rio de Janeiro, n° 18, 1850, pp. 200 – 273.

⁵¹ BENTO, Cláudio Moreira Maj. Op. cit. p. 53.

Ground Plan from Saint Joaquim's Fort⁵²



During its existence, Saint Joaquim's Fort was charged with the task to conduct the region's administration to the Portuguese Crown and then to the Brazilian Imperial Crown. Its first task within this purpose was the constitution of indigenous settlements in the region, which, believed Farage, was also triggered quickly and effectively, since when the work to build the Fort took place, indigenous workforce was already used, brought for this purpose, besides that kind one could find in the Spanish settlements in the Uraricoera⁵³.

The fortification became a State administrative hand in the Branco River, leading and applying the Portuguese geopolitics to the region, what resulted in several conflicts against the local indigenous population since the first moments, what meant in effect the difficulty to accomplish part of their administrative tasks.

Around the Fort the first non-Indian habitation nucleus in the Branco River and its thereabouts; In 1777, the indigenous settlements, "(...) Nossa Senhora do Carmo, Santa Isabel, Santo Antônio e Santa Bárbara no próprio rio Branco; São Felipe, no Tacutu; Nossa Senhora da Conceição no Uraricoera"⁵⁴ have been formed.

The investment made in the indigenous settlements system of the region got to the point in which there were 1019 individuals: settled indigenous, most of them

⁵² Available in <www.cfr7bis.eb.mil.br>. Acesso em: 10 de março de 2008.

⁵³ FARAGE, Nádia. Op. cit. p. 123.

⁵⁴ VIEIRA, Jaci Guilherme. Op. cit. p. 22

were men, what demonstrates the great efforts of the Portuguese Crown in assuring the occupation of the territory from the settlement system⁵⁵. However, the first tentative to settle along the Branco River fell in 1781 and the system was almost completely destroyed by the indigenous insurrection against the Portuguese soldiers that used to rule⁵⁶.

The trigger of the series of revolts seems to have been the visit that Friar José de Santo Antonio paid to the settlement of São Felipe in April, 1870, when he tried to pressure Roque, an Indian, to break up with the woman he lived with, since he had been already married in the Carvoeiro people, in the Negro River. After this attempt of coercion, the indigenous' discontent exploded and the rumors of an escape started to spread over São Felipe⁵⁷. Several prisons, escapes and acts of violence happened again during 1780 in all settlements, even though only Nossa Senhora do Carmo was not abandoned⁵⁸.

As an evidence to the importance of the indigenous in the occupation of the territory, to be utilized as the "outbreak walls", and the lack of resources to invest in a strategy that could count on the movement of non-Indians to the region, the Crown starts a second attempt to create settlements, by means of the institution of four settlements as of 1784, in place of those that were abandoned by the indigenous, which were: Nossa Senhora da Conceição, São Felipe, São Martinho and Santa Maria⁵⁹.

On the contrary to what the Portuguese waited for, this second attempt to create settlements suffered a huge failure, since it has never outnumbered the first settlements, then the Portuguese could not transform them into stable population nucleus and, consequently, in autonomous units of production⁶⁰.

As to prove the importance of a strategy for the occupation of the Rio Branco valley by means of settling there even though they had to deal with difficulties and unproductivity, the Portuguese have maintained the settlements for many years and, as believes Farage⁶¹, they would have maintained them for a longer time if the Portuguese occupation politics had not suffered another modification with 1970's revolt.

The second cycle of revolts within the settlements of the Branco River is set up due to the rising deterioration of the people's life conditions, having no perspective

⁵⁵ Id. Ibid. p. 24.

⁵⁶ Id. Ibid. p. 26.

⁵⁷ FARAGE, Nádia. Op. cit. P. 131.

⁵⁸ VIEIRA, Jaci Guilherme. Op. cit. P. 26.

⁵⁹ Id. Ibid. pp. 132 - 134.

⁶⁰ FARAGE, Nádia. Op. cit. pp. 136 - 137.

⁶¹ Id. Ibid. p. 140.

of solving their problems, as hunger was only mitigated by the distribution of manioc flour that came from the Negro River. On the other hand, there was the burden created by Portuguese over the civil administrators, charging from them the maintenance of the number of settled indigenous, what made the relations more tense⁶².

Facing the uprising, even Lobo D'Almada, who used to defend a humanist discourse that involved a gentle treatment towards Indians, decides to punish the rebels because, in his opinion, without that it would be impossible to keep a garrison in the region, as well as to keep control over the settled population that was still there⁶³. Now, they depreciated the Indians, who did not serve for their purposes anymore, calling them "aqueles comedores de farinha"⁶⁴.

In spite of the problems faced on this last cycle of revolts, the Portuguese did not give up on their project of occupation of the Rio Branco valley with the indigenous population. From this moment on, it was recommended to the Fort's commander that the settled people should be treated more gently. The only, and very significant, change that happened in this occasion was that from this period the settlements in the Branco River would be administrated by married civilians, and then the military would go to the military garrisons. It made clear that the results of the uprising had left back some doubts about the military performance on the Portuguese project of occupation in the Branco River by means of settlements⁶⁵.

In the end of the XVIII century, considering that the settlements had failed in the Branco River, a new project of occupation would be adopted, showing the Portuguese eagerness about keeping the possession of the territory. Thus, due to a lack of mercantile activity that would please not only the non-Indian, a livestock culture was introduced with the creation of the "royal farms" and the first try of raising cattle, in order to intensify the Portuguese State's presence in the upper Branco River⁶⁶.

The commander of Saint Joaquim's Fort himself, by this time Captain Nicolau Sá Sarmiento, has founded the São Marcos farm, in a region next to the fortress, while the São José farm has been founded by captain José Antonio Évora, who owned and lived in many possessions along the Negro River, and the São Bento farm by Lobo D'Almada, as a "royal" farm. These farms have become the first nuclei for introduction of the livestock in the Branco River⁶⁷.

⁶² Id. Ibid. p. 134.

⁶³ Id. Ibid. pp. 164 – 165.

⁶⁴ "Those manioc flour eaters".

⁶⁵ Id. Ibid. p. 167.

⁶⁶ VIEIRA, Jaci Guilherme. Op. cit. p. 33.

⁶⁷ Índios de Roraima. Op. cit. p. 20.

According to Farage and Santilli⁶⁸ (p. 272), these two farms which were in hands of individuals at the turn of the XVIII and XIX centuries, with the death of captain Sá Sarmiento, who did not leave heirs, São Marcos starts to be property of the Crown, and after the bankruptcy of Évora family in the Negro River, their assets, including São José farm in the Branco River, were auctioned, and as they have not been leased, they were taken by the Portuguese State.

As state Farage and Santilli, it is important to perceive that the three farms have been created to compensate the lack of civil colonization. Their area covered all the region of the upper Branco River, which was property of the Portuguese State, and all of them were administered by the commander of Saint Joaquim's Fort, whose administrative actions were reported directly to the governor of the captaincy of São José do Rio Negro and to the Treasury Department. This commander was placed as a State Representative in the region for a long time.

In the end of the XVIII century, the experience of Portuguese Colonization in the Rio Branco valley, the only option for economic exploitation in the region was livestock activity. Its goal was to integrate the area to the Portuguese America's internal market and make it attractive to the establishment of non-Indian settlers.

Livestock, though, seemed at first a doubtful investment, since extractivism in other areas of the Amazon was a more profitable and secure activity. However, some non-Indian got attracted by the large amount of natural pasture existing in the Rio Branco valley, the indigenous workforce that abundant and cheap, and by the possibility to easily initiate the activity by just capturing some cattle and establishing onto a specific area⁶⁹.

We should consider the economic landscape of the Amazon from the mid-XIX century, when the main activity had turned to vegetal extractivism; livestock that took place in the Rio Branco valley was then a side activity, even more so because of the difficulties in transportation, so it lingered for a long time, up to the end of the XIX century, as an activity for subsistence and that sponsored vegetal extractivism⁷⁰.

Nevertheless, from this initiative, private farms started to multiply, as much as in the areas that had been occupied by royal farms as in areas outside them, which means that, at the exception of São Marcos, farms like São José and São Bento have been occupied by landholders in the beginning of XIX century or have been usur-

⁶⁸ FARAGE, Nádia; SANTILLI, Paulo. Estado de sítio: territórios e identidades no vale do Rio Branco. In: CUNHA, Manuela Carneiro da. (Org.). História dos Índios no Brasil. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras/Secretaria Municipal de Cultura/FAPESP, 1992, pp. 267 – 278.

⁶⁹ VIEIRA, Jaci Guilherme. Op. cit. p. 34.

⁷⁰ FARAGE, Nádia; SANTILLI, Paulo. Op. cit. p. 273

ped by their former administrators and tenants that would become then great rural owners by appropriating illegally from public patrimony⁷¹, advancing also towards the indigenous lands, what has been generating a series of agrarian conflicts reflected until nowadays.

On the contrary to what happened in other areas of livestock development, as in Piauí and Mato Grosso, where indigenous populations were either expelled or wiped out, in the Branco River the appropriation of lands to raise cattle was followed by the inclusion of indigenous to the lowest layers of society that was being formed, for in the process of occupation it was necessary to find a social place for the Indian⁷².

Livestock activity in the Rio Branco valley was an idea of the Portuguese State; it was pushed ahead by individuals, and created a series of disputes that still reflect themselves on Roraima's society. The first field for disputes was between the first farmers over the indigenous workforce. Then this dispute started to be over the lands of the Indians, who were expelled from their own initial occupation area before the non-Indian arrived. The results of this conjuncture was the showing up of great farmers in the region and finally of a basis for economic sustainment to the Branco River, between the end of the XIX century and the beginning of the XX⁷³.

Thus, as the border issues between Brazil and the English Guyana were moved to the diplomatic field since 1842, Saint Joaquim's Fort was not anymore a decisive factor to the Brazilian occupation of the Branco River by military means⁷⁴. However, there still was its contribution as a proof to Portuguese presence in the region, a point that was explored by Joaquim Nabuco very well.

An important fact is that the Freguesia de Nossa Senhora do Carmo was established as an administrative Head Office of the region of Branco River⁷⁵ through the Provincial Law of 1858 (Law n° 92, from November 9, 1958), which set the borders of the Province of Amazonas. This change attended to the administrative reformations of the Empire, making a parish from the populational agglomeration that occupied the thereabouts of Fazenda de Boa Vista, founded in 1830 by Inácio Lopes de Magalhães, by means of the edification of a parish church⁷⁶ (OLIVEIRA, 2003, p. 94).

⁷¹ VIEIRA, Jaci Guilherme. Op. cit. p. 35

⁷² FARAGE, Nádia; SANTILLI, Paulo. Op. cit. p. 268.

⁷³ VIEIRA, Jaci Guilherme. Op. cit. p. 36.

⁷⁴ FARAGE, Nádia; SANTILLI, Paulo. Op. cit. p. 271.

⁷⁵ VIEIRA, Jaci Guilherme. Op. cit. p. 37.

⁷⁶ OLIVEIRA, Reginaldo Gomes de. Roraima: um olhar histórico e sócio-político do século XVI ao XIX. In: A herança dos descaminhos na formação do Estado de Roraima. Tese de Doutorado – Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, 2003, pp. 17 – 99.

Thus, with the foundation of Saint Joaquim's Fort and the creation of the "royal farms", with the introduction of cattle onto the farmlands of the upper Branco River, a small group of European culture settled in the region and stood against the autochthony, and originated a social and political sector. Military have got married to the Indian women and formed families, what was encouraged by colonial authorities, while the highest-levelled militaries have brought their families with them, commonly from Northeast. The descendants of these militaries became farmers by appropriating from public lands and incorporating elements that arrived late. At the turn of XIX century to the XX century a society typically patrimonial was formed, then⁷⁷.

With the transformation of the Branco River into a municipality based in Boa Vista, in 1890, after the advent of the Republic in Brazil, the Fort was deactivated by 1900, when it started to be materially abandoned. In 1944, the stones that had been used on the foundations and walls of the facilities of the Posto do Serviço de Proteção aos Índios (SPI), located at the São Marcos farm, along the Uraricoera River, were taken off their former seawall⁷⁸.

Saint Joaquim's Fort is found into this society on the second half of the XX century as an object for dispute, since each family that has been formed and consolidated in the region tries to present itself as more traditional than the others, using the Fort, the most expressive element of the definite Portuguese conquest of the Branco River, as a starting point to prove their rights to specific areas or public offices.

Final considerations

Saint Joaquim's Fort represented, until the second half of the XIX century, the core of the political activity in the Rio Branco valley. It served as a hand, first to the Portuguese State and afterwards to the Branco River, since it had the competence of administering the region, managing geopolitics of non-indigenous occupation on the frontiers of the far North of Brazil, concerning its political and economic aspects.

Many men have come out from the Fort to become land owners, almost always appropriating themselves from lands of the State that were part of the old royal

⁷⁷ ANTOS, Nelvio Paulo Dutra. O Estado Nacional Brasileiro e a Amazônia. Políticas públicas, economia e poder: o estado de Roraima entre 1970 e 2000. 2004. Tese (Doutorado em Desenvolvimento Sustentável do Trópico Úmido) – Universidade Federal do Pará, Belém, 2004, p. 84.

⁷⁸ BENTO, Cláudio Moreira Maj. Op. cit. p. 53.

farms, then national farms. Thus, Saint Joaquim's Fort had a considerable period of great importance in this moment of Portuguese occupation on the Branco River since the time it was first built (in 1775). It has contributed even to the field of diplomatic decisions about the border limits with the neighbor countries, because it served as an alibi to the presence of the government in the Branco River region.

Its importance to the period is emphasized at the moment we realize that even though the nucleus of non-indigenous occupation was moved to Boa Vista (decade of 30 in the XIX century), its role is undeniable, for it continues up to the first part of the XX century and without its presence as a hand of the State in all the spheres we pointed out, it would be hard to consolidate the occupation of the region.

Notwithstanding the loss of its central role to Boa Vista, where many members of the Fort lived, livestock started in the end of the XVIII century would not have developed without this support from the State, because in the case of the occupation of the Rio Branco valley, the State had to act out the role of the individuals, by means of fortification, in the first years, due to the difficulty of creating an economic activity that would attract great private investments and offer support to the occupation.

In fact, it is (or was) discussed a lot about Saint Joaquim's Fort in Roraima, and we believe we make a new approach that can effectively contribute to the historical studies about the Rio Branco valley at the colonial period, or even at the Empire period. Moreover, in several occasions, social groups and segments related to the governmental sector have mobilized to try to restore the site where Saint Joaquim's Fort was located without clearing up to Roraima's society their real role in the Portuguese establishing in the Branco River, a spot of great relevance, as well as doing a real archeological work on the place, restoring it.

When it was deactivated by 1900, stones were taken from the walls and foundations of the facilities of the Posto do Serviço de Proteção aos Índios (SPI), located in the São Marcos Farm, in the Uraricoera River, in 1944. Over the years, there were several attempts and projects to restore the historical value of Saint Joaquim's Fort, initiated, according to our research, with an article made by the military major Cláudio Moreira Bento in 1975⁷⁹.

If the memory from those who were excluded from society can be pointed out, as it has already been done with the objective of turning Roraima's history into a more democratic history, to which every historical subject could have the place they indeed occupied in the realization of the conquest of the lands in the upper Branco

⁷⁹ BENTO, Cláudio Moreira Maj. Op. cit.

River in the XVIII and XIX centuries, after all it was not only the Fort's commanders and their relatives this society was made by, there were many more conflicts and confrontations than the old local bibliography is capable of showing us.

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