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D João V

After our [last article on the Methuen Treaties](#), it seemed appropriate to consider the next half century, and to judge what effect these treaties exercised on the kingdom of Portugal.

D Pedro II (1648-1683-1706)

The two treaties were signed in 1703, and D Pedro II died three years later, before the war of Spanish Succession had been decided. D Pedro had been married twice. His first wife was his ex-sister-in-law, but their generative efforts produced only one sickly princess, Isabel Luísa, Princess of Beira (1669-1690). His second wife was Maria Sophia of Neuburg from Heidelberg, whose main attraction was that she came from a family of 23 children. She would, therefore, have no trouble conceiving. In her short life (she died aged 32 in 1699), she produced seven children, of whom only two died in childhood. She had achieved what was required of her.



D João V

D João ascends the throne

D Pedro was succeeded on the throne of Portugal by his second son, D João Prince of Brazil (the Portuguese equivalent title of the Prince of Wales in Britain). His title on accession was By the Grace of God, John the Fifth, king of Portugal and of the Algarves, on the hither and further side of the sea in Africa, Lord of Guiné, and of the Conquest, Navigation and Commerce of Ethiopia, Arabia, Persia and India, et cetera.

The Magnificent is one of his sobriquets – the others are Magnanimous, Portuguese Sun King, The Visitor of Convents and the Most Faithful.

D João was their second child, born in 1689, and he was acclaimed king on January 1, 1707. He had all the attributes to be a great monarch. Well educated, he spoke French, Spanish and Italian, and had interest in music and mathematics.



Águas Livres Aqueduct, Lisbon

As king, D João never called his parliament (The Cortes) because he never needed new tax money, since the wealth flowing from Brazil was enough. He did not even bother with advice from his Council of State. He had only one or two trusted ministers – essentially, he was a despot, an absolutist monarch. His first Secretary of State was Tavira-born Diogo de Mendonça Corte Real (1658-1736). Corte Real was one of the many officials in 18th century Portugal who could leave office only when they left this life. His portrait is not endued with happiness.

Brazilian gold

D João had the luck to be at the helm as the gold rush in Brazil was taking place. The crown owned some mines, and he also enjoyed a tax on all other mines (the royal fifth meant that they were taxed at 20%). For the second time in its history, Portugal had become the wealthiest country in Europe. The discovery and mining of gold created a tremendous gold-rush and, every year, up to 6,000 Portuguese emigrated to Brazil – mainly from the overcrowded north of the country. There were laws in 1709, 1711 and 1720 seeking to control this movement, but the very fact that they were repeated shows that they had little effect.

It was said at Villa Rica de Ouro Preto in 1733, “Viu-se em breve tempo transplantado meio Portugal a este empório” (In a short time, we see half of Portugal transplanted to this centre of trade). This massive population movement supported the rapid development of Brazil and its economy, and had the reverse effect on Portugal. It also ensured that the weight of population in Brazil was Portuguese, and that Brazil remained in character a Portuguese country.



Diogo Mendonça Corte Real

In 1732, D João prohibited the immigration into Portugal of Brazilian women, where they usually entered nunneries. He preferred them to remain in Brazil, where they should marry and contribute to the increase in population.

It is very difficult to produce accurate figures concerning the movement of gold and diamonds. Smuggling was easy and unquantifiable, and even the tax figures are not accurate, since there was always friction between the authorities in Portugal and those in Brazil.

It would be true to say that Brazilian imports contributed to the wealth of the few, while most of the population remained in poverty. In those years, there was no notion that the acquisition of money without the corresponding increase in wealth is inflationary and destabilising (and the same truth holds even today).



Maria Ana of Austria

The annual average tax (which should have been 20% but probably closer to 5%) received in Portugal was as follows, expressed in tonnes of gold:
1700-13. 0.5125; 1714-25 4.464; 1735-49 1.798; 1750-on. 0.357.

During the first half of the century, imports from England were always roughly equal to the value of gold and diamonds imported from Brazil.

From about 1700 onwards, there was more than a tonne of gold arriving in Portugal every year. Much of this money passed straight through Portugal on its way to Northern Europe, mainly to England and the Netherlands.



Joanine Library, Coimbra

Family matters

D João's father had needed two wives in order to produce an heir, and it was felt that D João should marry as soon as practicable. His choice fell on Maria Ana of Austria (1683-1754), the daughter of Leopold I, Emperor of Austria. They were first cousins (their mothers were sisters) and such consanguinity is inherently risky for the offspring.

They were married in 1708 and, when she arrived in Lisbon at Terreiro do Paço, there were great festivities, modelled on those of the Sun King in France.

The couple eventually had six children, of whom three survived into adulthood. The eldest, Maria Bárbara, became Queen of Spain; D José became King of Portugal; and D Pedro also became King of Portugal *jure uxoris* when he married his niece, his brother's daughter. She became D Maria I in 1777.

Queen Maria Ana soon realised that her accustomed Austrian learning was out of place in Lisbon, where the priority was conspicuous consumption of luxury, as the king continued his amorous liaisons.

In a document dated 1742 (but published only in 1752), he acknowledged three illegitimate sons, fathered on girls who were nuns, asserting that their mothers were all of noble blood. These three boys were known as the *Meninos de Palhavã* since they lived at the Palace of Palhavã. Today, that building in Lisbon is the Spanish Embassy. The king also had three other illegitimate children.



Palace and Friary of Mafra

Colonial matters

The War of the Spanish Succession ended at the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713; the relations between Spain and Portugal returned to the status quo ante; but one niggling problem remained. That was the status of Colônia de Sacramento on the northern shore of the River Plate. British naval support ensured that Portugal held its way. In India, Portugal lost many northern possessions to the Marattas, but the Marquês of Castelo Novo expanded Portugal's holding around Goa with the New Conquests.

Relations with the Vatican

The king's relations with the Pope were always fragile. He was determined that the status of Portugal should be equal to those of France, Spain and Austria. The Papal nuncio from each of these countries was always promoted to Cardinal on his return to Rome, and D João was determined to have equivalent treatment. After he broke off relations with the Vatican, he achieved his point in 1730.



Palácio de Pádua

In retrospect, one of his greatest follies was to purchase a title from the Pope. The French king had the title of Most Christian Majesty; in Spain, the monarch was Most Catholic Majesty; even England's monarch was Defender of the Faith. What about Portugal? After a liberal gift of gold, Pope Benedict finally relented in 1748, and the king and his successors were permitted to call themselves Most Faithful Majesty.

Portuguese society

D João was jealous of his status, and Portuguese society ossified during his reign. While other monarchs were awarding noble titles by the dozen, Portugal awarded practically none – the king was just stingy. For social advancement, men joined the Inquisition as familiares, seeking a knighthood in one of the three military orders through service with the Inquisition. Important men were either exiled or executed in this reign, and the Inquisition also conducted the state censorship under the Index Librorum Prohibitorum, and banned books which challenged the Catholic faith.

The built environment

This king never enjoyed robust health, suffering a stroke in 1742. After this, he often took the waters at Caldas. While travelling to Caldas, he noticed a church being built on the site of a supposed miracle. He made huge donations to this project, and the Santuário do Senhor Jesus da Pedra near Óbidos was inaugurated in 1747. This church is marooned in the middle of nowhere, and as it has no natural supporting congregation, it is slowly degrading.

D João V is well known for his investment in the sumptuous built environment of Portugal. One of his first projects was Igreja do Menino Jesus in Lisbon, one of the few Lisbon projects to survive the Great Earthquake. It has an octagonal plan, which was copied later in Tavira in the Church of São José. But his major project was the Palácio Nacional de Mafra, built in fulfilment of a promise made in 1711, should the Queen be delivered of a healthy baby.



Santuário do Senhor Jesus da Pedra

Begun in 1717, the basilica of this huge building was inaugurated in 1730, with the 98 bells from Liege and Antwerp. The Palace at Mafra is the biggest baroque building in Portugal and is larger than El Escorial outside Madrid.

In 1729, there were 15,500 workers on the site, and 6,000 soldiers to keep them there. “...three quarters of the royal treasury and nearly all the gold brought on the fleets from Brazil were here at Mafra turned to stone”, as the king showed the reverse of the Midas touch. It was also a colossal waste of money, since the royal family never lived there.

Other projects include the Joanine Library at the University of Coimbra. Sumptuously decorated and inaugurated in 1728, it also had royal money for buying books. And the aqueduct of Águas Livres in Lisbon brought water from Sintra, 14km distant. Some of its arches are over 60m tall, and this magnificent structure survived the earthquake.

In the Igreja São Roque in Lisbon, the rich Chapel of São João Baptista was built in Rome, dismantled and re-erected in Lisbon. The king also added the chapel to the ducal palace at Vila Viçosa in 1729.



The New Conquests, Goa

Conclusion

During the first half of his reign until 1730, Portugal exercised a certain influence in European affairs; after 1730, the English alliance became more and more important and, economically, Britain became the dominant force in Portuguese life.

D João V, The Magnificent (1689-1706-1750)

This king spent widely, but not wisely. He is remembered for his massive building projects; for the stagnation of society and the activities of the powerful Inquisition; the neglect of the armed forces, intensifying dependence on Great Britain; and a lack of investment in industry and agriculture.

In truth, merchants and industrialists, the wealth creators in Portugal, were sneered at.

D João V is important in the history of Portugal because he was king for 43 years at a time when enormous wealth entered the country, and he essentially spent it with no appreciable advancement in Portuguese economic life. These were nearly 50 years of missed opportunity.

It was not the Methuen Treaties which condemned Portugal to a backward status. It was the rich, absolutist, spendthrift king who found a way to convert his gold into stone; it was the vindictive Inquisition, which persecuted successful businessmen.

In our next article, we shall consider the [English presence in Lisbon, Porto and Faro](#) and the advantage that English merchants took of this monarch's laissez-faire attitude to business.

Read more from [Peter Booker](#) and [Lynne Booker](#).



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