

## Article

# The Bishopric of Maranhão and the Indian Directory: Diocesan Government and the Assimilation of Indigenous Peoples in Amazonia (1677–1798)

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**Abstract:** The second half of the eighteenth century is crucial to understanding the significant role of the Catholic Church in the many transformations experienced by indigenous peoples due to the policies of the Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo (Marquis of Pombal) administration in Portuguese America. No study has yet to examine in depth the collaboration of the episcopate and its agents in this indigenist policy. Here, therefore, I analyse the case of the diocese of Maranhão, in the Portuguese Amazon, from its creation in 1677 until the end of the eighteenth century, demonstrating the jurisdictional dispute between the bishops and the regular clergy over the guardianship of indigenous peoples. I also examine how the appointment of clergy in former indigenous villages took place and how the diocesan structure was expanded to ensure the consolidation of Pombal's policy amid disputes between diverse actors and interests, including those of the Portuguese state, the bishops and the indigenous population. By analysing a variety of documents using research methodologies that involve varying the scale of observation and pursuing a connected history perspective, I show how the episcopate behaved, despite its limitations and vacancies, in the process of assimilating indigenous peoples.

**Keywords:** episcopate; Indian Directory; Amazonia



**Citation:** Muniz, Pollyanna

Mendonça. 2023. The Bishopric of Maranhão and the Indian Directory: Diocesan Government and the Assimilation of Indigenous Peoples in Amazonia (1677–1798). *Religions* 14: 1515. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14121515>

Academic Editor: José Pedro Paiva

Received: 26 September 2023

Revised: 29 November 2023

Accepted: 2 December 2023

Published: 8 December 2023



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## 1. Introduction

In 1761, Bishop António de São José appointed João Batista, an indigenous man from the village of São José de Ribamar, as the ecclesiastical bailiff. In his appointment, we learn that he was expected to provide “good satisfaction, diligence and discretion”, as stipulated in the regulations for this type of position. The detail that draws attention is the insistence that everyone in the village should “obey, honour and esteem” him. The Amerindian would thus be entitled to “all the honours, liberties and exemptions that belong to him by right and style” (Arquivo Público do Estado do Maranhão, Livro de Provisões, 189, folio 30). The provision was registered in the diocesan books and the vicar received his new officer after he was sworn into office on August 28 the same year. The bailiffs had the tasks of arresting the guilty and accompanying the vicars and could also submit complaints to the ecclesiastical court (Regimento do Auditório Eclesiástico, tit XVIII, 2010, pp. 879–83). They played an important role in the government of the diocese and its communities.

Cases such as these can be observed after the publication of the “Directorio que se deve observar nas povoações de índios do Pará e Maranhão” in 1758.<sup>1</sup> The reforms implemented by Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo, known as the Marquis of Pombal, had been initiated a few years earlier with the three laws of 1755: the charter encouraging mixed marriages (April 4); the law decreeing full freedom for the Indians, guaranteeing them their property and trade (June 6); and finally, the charter (June 7) abolishing the temporal rule of the missionaries over the Indians, ordering that the now free Indians, when deemed suitable, should be preferred to occupy positions in the governance of their towns and villages. Their spiritual governance passed to episcopal jurisdiction (Moreira 2023, p. 7).

The area covered by this research is Maranhão in the Portuguese Amazon. The study spans from the creation of the diocese in 1677 to the final milestone of the Pombaline Directory in 1798. Historiography has made considerable progress in investigating colonial policies towards indigenous peoples (Farage and Cunha 1987; Cunha 1992; Monteiro 1994; de Almeida 2003; Coelho 2005, 2007; Garcia 2009; Moreira 2019; Dornelles 2021). Yet, little is known about the role of the episcopate in this process. The only study addressing the issue is a work by Francisco Cancela, which focuses on the installation and administration of indigenous parishes as a reinforcement of the territorialisation process experienced by Amerindian peoples in the captaincy of Porto Seguro, without extending his analysis to the rest of the archdiocese of Bahia (Cancela 2021).

The creation of an urban network with the transformation of indigenous missions into villages was assisted by the diocese. This process was primarily achieved by replacing the missionaries with secular priests but also involved the assimilation of these peoples in line with Pombal policy. First, though, we need to comprehend the issue from a long-term perspective. Following the creation of the diocese of Maranhão, the first in the Portuguese Amazon, the bishops and their agents played a significant role in the attempt to extend episcopal power to include the temporal governance of the Amerindian population. This is what we shall examine below.

## 2. Bishops and Jurisdiction over Amerindians: A Long-Standing Problem in Amazonia

The indigenous question has always been central to the Portuguese Amazon. Various disputes between the regular clergy and settlers over the guardianship of indigenous peoples reached the attention of the Crown (Chambouleyron 2006). Historiography has made some progress in studying the subject. The presence of the Jesuit Antônio Vieira in Maranhão from 1653 to 1661 and the increasing strength of the Society of Jesus in the region have acquired a prominent place in the history of the Catholic Church in Brazil, but this was still a period without any specific diocese in the region. The diocese of Maranhão was created in 1677 and is a good example of how the Crown was primarily responsible for structuring the episcopal network, since the State of Maranhão and Grão-Pará lacked sufficient income to cover the expenses of the newly created diocese. The motivations that led to the creation of this diocese were markedly political: expansion of the borders of its domains and better management of the tensions that existed between missionaries and settlers over the indigenous labour force (Souza 2014, pp. 183–84). The introduction of the jurisdiction of an official bishop in the territory is highly significant; therefore, since it illustrates the tense setting faced by Fr. Gregório dos Anjos, the first bishop appointed.

In Portuguese America, the regular clergy obtained jubilees, licences, pontifical diplomas, and so on, which gave them a wide range of powers—albeit variable through time—over the indigenous populations and the spiritual administration of the villages. This often led to jurisdictional conflicts with the bishops and other agents, especially after the bishop's authority was strengthened in the wake of the Council of Trent (1545–1563) (Palomo 2011).

Testimony to these conflicts is the set of letters exchanged between the Jesuits and the first bishop of Amazonia between August 1680 and April 1681. In this correspondence, we can observe the impasse over important issues of ecclesiastical administration in Amazonia, such as licences to hear confessions and preach, the briefs and privileges granted by the Pope to the Jesuits, the administration of churches and the spiritual governance of the indigenous population. Gregório dos Anjos published a pastoral in which he ordered that no secular or regular cleric should hear confessions or preach without his authorisation, revoking all previously issued licences (IHGB n.d., Rio de Janeiro, Évora, 1.2.27, folios 79-79v). Although regular clergy could not oppose the bishop on the matter, the Jesuits objected since without confession there was no evangelisation or missionary project. The bishop then asked whether the Jesuits were missionaries or parish priests. They replied: “We declare to Your Excellency that our office and our profession is that of missionaries, that we concern ourselves with the conversion of the Gentiles and also with the reformation of Christians; but because for the most part they live among themselves, we do not reject the

office of parish priests in terms of work but only in terms of honour and the emoluments, incomes and benefits that these parishes receive" (IHGB, Rio de Janeiro, Évora, 1.2.27, folios 84–84v).

Analysing the role of the Jesuits as healers of souls in Portuguese America at the time when the First Constitutions of the Archbishopric of Bahia were being drafted in 1707, Federico Palomo states, however, that the main focus of these missions "found particular justification in the doctrinal and moral remedy of the slaves—indigenous or African, Christian and Gentile—who assured the supply of labour on the properties of the Portuguese" (Palomo 2011, pp. 235–36). Rather than spiritually caring for the enslaved or free Amerindians who were working for the Europeans, the Jesuits in Amazonia penetrated the interior, something that the bishop's parish network had thus far been unable to accomplish.

Gregório dos Anjos complained that the Jesuits were "uniting and disuniting the parishes" without his permission and, having published "a pastoral so that no parish priest can be legitimately so without being approved by the ordinary", the Ignatians continued to "baptise a few brutish Indians" without "asking permission for this purpose" (IHGB, Rio de Janeiro, Évora, 1.2.27, folios 85v). The bishop then proceeded to discuss the matter of spiritual jurisdiction over indigenous peoples, explaining to the Jesuit mission's superior, Fr. Pedro Pedrosa, that he was "as much bishop of the whites as of the Indians, and that episcopal jurisdiction is one of his ultimate aims" (IHGB, Rio de Janeiro, Évora, 1.2.27, folio 93).

The region of Maranhão thus represented a quite singular context for the enactment of the Indian Freedom Law of 1680. The Society of Jesus gained even more prominence, since the provision assured that Jesuits could penetrate the Amazonian hinterland "by erecting churches to cultivate the said Indians in the faith and keep them in it" (*Anais da Biblioteca Nacional* 53–54). After successive conflicts between the bishop and the Society of Jesus, the king of Portugal intervened in the dispute. The large number of complaints about the bishop's interference in indigenous matters, as well as his constant attempts to influence the missionary action that was so important in the region, must have weighed heavily on Pedro II's ruling in favour of the Society of Jesus (*Anais da Biblioteca Nacional* 62). On 2 September 1684, the monarch sent a letter to the bishop emphatically stating that although episcopal jurisdiction was "founded on law", it could not be "diminished, altered or removed by any means other than an order of the Supreme Pontiff". Moreover, the "usefulness of the said villages being governed with full jurisdiction by the said priests" could not be denied, since it was "so notorious and so proper, essential and united with the conservation and freedom of the Indians". The king decided that it should continue (*Anais da Biblioteca Nacional* 66). Finally, he asked the bishop not only to consent, but to assist in implementing the decision. It was clear that, in practice, the Tridentine directives would come up against the specific reality of the spaces in which the episcopate was being introduced. The bishop's authority was gradually becoming visible and clashed with the long-standing and already deep-rooted presence of the regular clergy, notably the Society of Jesus.

In mid-1684, the Jesuits faced a new wave of disturbances in the Amazon, including the so-called "Beckman Revolt", which led to yet another expulsion of the Jesuits from the region (MacNicoll 1978; Chambouleyron 2006). What is irrefutable is that the king granted the bishop a decisive function after the Indian Freedom Law of 1680. On 30 March 1680, the monarch instructed bishop Gregório on how the distribution of the natives would be undertaken and informed him that he would play a key role in the process (*Anais da Biblioteca Nacional* 50–51). Many complaints about how the bishop went about distributing the native population would reach the Crown. In 1681, the governor of Maranhão, Inácio Coelho da Silva, warned about the "grievance among some of the people concerning the unequal distribution, with the bishop acting absolutely". The governor complained that D. Gregório dos Anjos was speaking out "in a most discomposed fashion" against the monopoly (*estanco*) ordered by His Majesty (*Anais da Biblioteca Nacional* 61–62). In 1683,

the Board of Missions (*Junta das Missões*) was created, introducing further changes to how indigenous labour was administrated. Conflicts over the distribution of labour persisted and the Board's establishment was an important element in the strategy to mediate the demands of residents and missionaries (Mello 2007, p. 251; Ferreira 2017). At the top of the Board of Missions hierarchy, alongside the governor of the State of Maranhão and Grão-Pará, was the bishop of São Luís who, although maintained in office, saw his role diminished.

The complaints against the bishop did not cease and in 1685 the governor was even more emphatic in his criticisms to the king, stating that bishop Gregório dos Anjos was supposed to be a "loving pastor", but that "due to his ambition" he was becoming a "tyrannical wolf" (AHU, Lisboa, Capitania do Pará, doc. 241).

The bishop died in 1689, but the difficulty of fully asserting ecclesiastical jurisdiction in the Amazon territory continued under the diocesan government of his successor, Fr. Timóteo do Sacramento (Muniz 2020). Little can be said about his actions in relation to the native peoples of Brazil, save that, like the first bishop, he wished to have an indigenous village in his possession (AHU, Lisboa, Capitania do Maranhão, doc. 941). The bishops remained on the Board of Missions, but it was the vicars-general who came to represent them at the Board's meetings. What is undeniable is that the establishment of the diocese in the Amazon region attributed the bishop functions that went beyond the spiritual domain. The strong presence of indigenous peoples required the Crown to take specific measures that also involved the Church. A new configuration of the diocese illustrates this point. In 1720, the diocese of Pará was created, while the diocese of Maranhão was compensated by annexing the captaincy of Piauí to its territory. With two dioceses in the region, the bishops' intervention in various issues, including the assimilation of the indigenous population, became more evident still.

In the eighteenth century, the expansion of the diocese of Maranhão towards Piauí illustrates how the spiritual conquest of the territory involved the adhesion of the indigenous population to the colonisation process (Muniz and Araujo 2022). As soon as he arrived on 15 June 1739, bishop Fr. Manuel da Cruz expressed concern "about erecting parishes in the Piauí hinterland", as they had arrived from Portugal with these orders (Copiador de Cartas 2008, p. 3). The expansion of the conquest of the territory to the east of Amazonian America was mainly consolidated during the reign of Pedro II (1683–1706) as part of the strategies of the Portuguese Crown after 1640 (Chambouleyron 2008, p. 191). The indigenous population obviously played an essential role in this process (Chambouleyron et al. 2021). Until the second half of the seventeenth century, Piauí was a strip of land with few colonial centres, but with the arrival of the bishop, various actions were implemented to turn the monarchy's projects into a reality.

On a visit to the captaincy of Piauí in 1742, Fr. Manuel da Cruz drew up two documents essential for us to understand the indigenous question in the region: the "Statute for the missions to the hinterland with regard to the spiritual" and the "Statute concerning the temporal government for the missions of the hinterland". The first was addressed to the missionaries in the villages and dealt with the spiritual nature and teaching of Christian doctrine to the native peoples. In the report on the *ad Sacra Limina* visit sent to Rome in 1746, the bishop explained that he had three 'Indian' missions under his jurisdiction and ordered the missionaries, among other things, to hold Mass, celebrate holy days and pay attention to the importance of confession, warning that those who failed to do so would be punished (Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo n.d.; Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Congregazione Concilio, Relationes Dioecesium n.d., vol. 486, unnumbered folios, published in <https://www.uc.pt/fluc/religionAJE/fontes/maranhao>, accessed on 7 August 2022). He also ordered the missionaries to ban the indigenous population from leaving the mission; to promote marriages in order to avoid committing sin; to appoint literate indigenous persons as sacristans and clerks of the vicar; and to inform the vicars forane (*vigário da vara*) of all the information and difficulties of the missionary work (Paiva et al. 2022). This information would be useful for the bishop to discover how missionary

activities and the conversion of the indigenous peoples were going ([Copiador de Cartas 2008](#), pp. 101–2).

The second statute, also addressed to the missionaries, concerned the temporal government of the natives. Episcopal jurisdiction over the native populations would become even clearer in a letter sent to the governor in 1744. The document details how the bishop intervened directly in matters concerning the indigenous peoples of the Piauí hinterlands. He settled disputes in the villages of Magu and Anapurus; in Mocha, with the Jaico peoples; in Piracuruca and Surubim; and in Pastos Bons, for example ([Copiador de Cartas 2008](#), pp. 123–25). Manuel da Cruz also informed the monarch that the Catholic Church was of paramount importance in this conquered region and that he himself had witnessed “more than two thousand souls of the Gueguês nation who had voluntarily sought peace” reduced to the “society of the Church” and become baptised ([Copiador de Cartas 2008](#), p. 106).

In 1747, still in the context of the bishop’s presence in the Piauí region, the “Description of the Bishopric of Maranhão” was drafted. Of unknown authorship, this document comprised a detailed exposition of the religious, economic and geographical situation of the diocese. This was the preparatory context for the Treaty of Madrid, which aimed to establish territorial limits between the colonial possessions of Spain and Portugal in south America ([Maxwell 1996](#)). There is a well-established tendency in historiography to associate Pombal’s new indigenist policy with Portugal’s ambitions during the treaty negotiations, arguing that the reforms sanctioned by the Marquis of Pombal were intended to win over the indigenous people to Portuguese sovereignty at a moment of heightened tension and disputes between Portugal and Spain ([Moreira 2023](#); [Farage 1991](#)). What is certain is that the “Description of the Bishopric of Maranhão” provides important details about the state of affairs in the diocese’s hinterlands and about the characteristics of its mixed-race and indigenous population ([Código Costa Matoso 1999](#), vol. I, pp. 917–42).

Even before bishop Manuel da Cruz arrived in Maranhão, the Holy See had demonstrated a sharper change in its discourse on the protection of indigenous peoples with the Apostolic Brief of 20 December 1741. This text contains the determinations of Pope Benedict XIV clamouring against the enslavement of indigenous peoples. He appealed to the piety of King João V (1707–1750) to curb this violence, “especially in those regions of Brazil” where they live “so entirely forgotten of charity . . . that they reduce them to captivity; sell them as slaves; and deprive them of all their goods, not only the miserable Indians on whom the light of the Gospel has yet to shine” but also those who had been “baptised and dwell in the hinterlands of Brazil itself, and in the western and southern lands, and other parts of that continent” (ANTT, AJCJ, AJ1A, 09).

The Holy See had already tried to intervene without success on other occasions, under Pope Paul III (1534–1549) and Pope Urban VIII (1623–1644). Finally, Benedict XIV ordered that public edicts be issued, on pain of excommunication, prohibiting the enslavement of the indigenous population. The message was specifically addressed to the bishops for them to “provide effective protection to all Indians” (*ibid* 9v). Conscious of the imminent complaints and wishing to avoid criticism of the publication of the law of 7 June 1755—which abolished the temporal governance of the indigenous people by regular clerics—the State Governor Francisco Xavier de Mendonça Furtado, brother of Carvalho e Melo, ordered that “the bull of the reigning pontiff, in which he condemns any opinion that in any way favours slavery, be published the following day”. The bishop of Pará, Miguel de Bulhões, received an order from the king to publish and enforce the papal bull in his diocese ([Mendonça 2005b](#), tome III, vol. 49 C, p. 294). In Portuguese America, the law on the freedom of the indigenous population, issued by royal decree, arrived in 1755, 14 years after this brief papal order, which would combine with the impacts of the Pombaline Directory from 1758 onwards. How did the diocese receive these decisions and what role did it play in the assimilation of the newly freed indigenous peoples? This is the topic we shall examine next.



*The Diocese of Maranhão in the Era of the Indian Directory: Historiographical Tensions and the Appointment of Secular Clergy*

In a recently published study on urban experiences and Pombaline reformism, Vânia Moreira states that the Pombal Directory “instituted in the new towns built on former villages the tutelary power of the Indian Directors and regulated the laws of 1755, making it absolutely clear that the freedom of the indigenous population was not the freedom not to work” (Moreira 2023, p. 241). Over the course of its 95 paragraphs, we learn about the rights, obligations and methods of governing the indigenous people. The desire was for them to be useful to the Crown, the residents, themselves and their families through their labour, regulating the distribution of indigenous people to work for the residents and the Crown and detailing topics such as working hours, economic activities and wages (Moreira 2023, p. 241). From that moment on, the regular clergy lost their missionary control over the indigenous population.

The Decision of the Pará Board of Missions of 10 February 1757 reveals how the discussion unfolded on the transition from the spiritual jurisdiction of the former villages to the jurisdiction of the bishop, another sensitive matter that came with the decrees of the minister of King José I in 1755. Based on the previously mentioned apostolic brief of 1741 and the laws of 1755, Governor Mendonça Furtado ordered the bishop of Pará, Miguel de Bulhões, to exercise “the aforementioned jurisdiction” in the towns that would be created from the villages “in which regular clergy should not exercise the ministry of parish priests”. In these villages, the bishop was to “assign clerics as parish priests, who were to live in the missionary priests’ houses of residence” (APEM, Junta das Missões, Livro 1, folio 72, and Paiva 2021).

The responses were immediate. Still, in 1757, the Mercedarians and Carmelites accepted submission to the bishop. Francisco de Toledo, of the Society of Jesus, on the other hand, replied to the governor that “in no way would he consent to his subjects exercising the ministry of parish priests under episcopal jurisdiction”. He asserted that he would only allow them to remain “in those villages exercising only the work of missionaries as coadjutors of the parish priests” (APEM, Junta das Missões, Livro 1, folio 72v).

The situation led to a lengthy protest from the Society of Jesus. José da Rocha, vice-provincial superior in Maranhão, claimed that the Jesuits had built churches in the villages with the prerogative of the Pontiff in 1549 and a licence from King John IV in 1652. He added, however, that these were not simple parishes but “churches of our residences that we founded in the villages”. He stated that the clergy he sent there “were not going to set up parish churches, but merely exercise the ministries of the Society of Jesus” (APEM, Junta das Missões, Livro 1, folio 73). José da Rocha added that he would not oppose the bishop building churches “as long as they were not the same ones that the Company has erected” (APEM, Junta das Missões, Livro 1, folio 73). He concluded his protest by asserting that the Jesuits were under the authority of the Holy See and that they would not allow bishops to visit their churches as had been the tradition thus far. In response, on 5 March 1757, a Board published its decision confirming that the missionaries no longer had temporal jurisdiction in their villages and could not act as parish priests (APEM, Junta das Missões, Livro 1, folio 74).

In 1758, when the “Diretório que se deve observar nas povoações de índios do Pará e Maranhão, enquanto Sua Majestade não mandar o contrário” was first published,<sup>2</sup> Article 4, early on in the document, confirms the spiritual submission of the indigenous population, freed by the law of 1755, to episcopal jurisdiction. Temporal submission was the responsibility of the Indian Directors. The document states that this matter, “being merely spiritual”, would fall “under the exemplary supervision of the prelate of this diocese”. It went on to recommend “that the Directors, for their part, should grant every favour and assistance so that the determinations of the said prelate concerning the direction of souls may be duly executed”. The Directory stipulates that the indigenous people must “treat their parish priests with that veneration and respect which is due to their noble character” (Diretório ...).

The document also regulates the collection of tithes. Article 27 states that the inhabitants of these new towns were obliged thereafter “to pay the tithes, which consist of the tenth part of all the fruits that they cultivate, and of all the foodstuffs that they acquire, without exception” and for this they should observe “the pastoral, which the most dignified prelate of this Diocese ordered to be published throughout the Bishopric, concerning this very important matter” (Diretório . . .). This discussion had been going on for at least a year. When he erected the town of Borba, in Grão-Pará, Governor Mendonça Furtado wrote to his brother, the king’s minister, informing him that it was time to implement “the collection of tithes, especially on those goods in which there was a large trade”, since collection of the same was “expressed in the Constitution of the Bishopric” (Mendonça, tome III, vol. 49 C, p. 125). He also added that, accounting what the residents of the new town were due to pay, it was clear that the king “has enough to pay the Vicar”, which showed “that the pretexts claiming that the king could not support so many parish priests in these towns” were untrue (Mendonça, tome III, vol. 49 C, p. 126).

The diocese of Maranhão had been vacant since the death of bishop Fr. Francisco de São Tiago, a Franciscan trained in theology, in 1752 (Silva 1922, p. 122). When the Pombal measures became known in 1755, since it was without a resident bishop, an impasse emerged over how the diocese was going to meet the new decrees, especially the stipulation concerning the change in jurisdiction of the indigenous population, now under the care of the secular clergy.

João Rodrigues Covete, canon of the cathedral of São Luís, an important cleric in the history of the Church of Maranhão for almost 34 years, during which time he held the positions of vicar-general, provisor and governor of the bishopric, was in charge of the institution at this moment of transition. On 18 June 1757, the governor Gonçalo Pereira Lobato e Sousa and the other deputies of the Board discussed how to put many of the law’s guidelines into practice. As governor of the bishopric and deputy on the Board of Missions, Covete would play a key role in the process of consolidating and implementing the law at that time. The governor, who was the president of the Board, “explained to the most reverend governor of the bishopric that, in the execution of the orders he had received from the most reverend bishop of Grão-Pará, he should make parish priests ready for all the towns and places of this captaincy” (APEM n.d.a, Junta das Missões, Livro 1 (1738–1777), folio 76 v). Covete would thus be assigned this important role in the project to transfer the indigenous people from the jurisdiction of the regular clergy to the jurisdiction of the bishopric.

His work with indigenous populations has already been examined using quantitative data on the repression of moral deviations and sexual behaviour. While João Rodrigues Covete was head of the ecclesiastical court in Maranhão, he adopted a conciliatory approach in cases against indigenous people and their descendants. It is important to stress, however, that the work of the diocese’s ecclesiastical court with indigenous populations long predated Pombal’s measures and the transfer of their spiritual guardianship to the secular clergy. The indigenous population and a wide variety of mixed-race people who lived in small urban centres, villages, towns and the seat of the bishopric of Maranhão were, like all baptised lay folk, under the jurisdiction of the bishops. It is a common misconception to believe that all indigenous people lived in villages and missions exclusively under the jurisdiction of the regular clergy. Even so, outside the spaces occupied by the regular orders, at parish level, the indigenous population was equally monitored and denounced in the event of deviancy, just like any other Christian laypeople. A recent study has shown the *modus operandi* of the bishops and their vicars-general in criminal cases brought against indigenous people in eighteenth century Maranhão (Muniz 2022a).

The diocesan documentation shows that these indigenous and *mestizo* people, as they were called, of diverse ethnic groups were effectively included in the community’s Christian life and were even denounced by their own relatives and neighbours, receiving punishment in cases of deviancy. The repression of the ecclesiastical justice system and the proceedings related to marriages that passed through the ecclesiastical chamber (*Câmara Eclesiástica*),

for example, prove that the Church did not make any insurmountable distinction between indigenous people, people of mixed race and other lay Christians. If they were baptised and integrated into the “mystical body of the faithful”, then they had to follow Catholic dictates like any other Christian. The indigenous people shown in the documentation were denounced, gave evidence and demonstrated knowledge of the rules and behaviour required of them as members of the Church. They became or claimed to be Christians so as to participate in the new order offered to them by colonial society. This is evidence that indigenous people were not, as was believed for a long time, passive subjects who merely suffered the impositions of the colonisers (Muniz 2022b, pp. 192–93).

Our direct interest here is to investigate the role of the diocese in the process of transition from the spiritual guardianship of the indigenous people to the administration of the secular clergy during the period after the Directory promulgated by Pombal came into force in 1758. To this end, the construction of the former villages and hamlets needs to be analysed in detail. This process began in 1757, while the diocese was vacant, and lasted until 1767, when bishop António de São José had already taken over. The aforementioned João Rodrigues Covete, vicar-general at the time, personally accompanied the governor in the foundation of two towns in Maranhão, as documented in the “Registro das fundações, ereções e posses das vilas e lugares, nas Aldeias das Missões”<sup>3</sup> (Arquivo Público do Estado do Maranhão, Book 28). As Soraia Dornelles remarks, this book was created on 24 July 1757 to document the foundations, constructions, appointments of justices, inventories and possessions of the goods of the towns and places erected in the mission villages removed from the religious control of the Society of Jesus and Saint Anthony and subsequently handed over to the towns and places in the form of their directors and principles (Dornelles 2021, p. 309). In the letters exchanged between Mendonça Furtado and the then governor Gonçalo Pereira Lobato de Sousa, we learn about the dynamics used after the installation of the villages. The Indian Directors and the parish priests were entitled to “two fishermen and a hunter” each in the larger settlements and “only one fisherman and one hunter” in the smaller ones to provide for them (Mendonça, tome III, vol. 49 C, p. 346).

The population of these missionary villages was not negligible. Quite the opposite: estimating the number of indigenous people incorporated into colonial society as free labourers and slaves in the State of Maranhão and Grão-Pará between the end of 1680 and 1750, Dias, Bombardi and Costa deduce a population of around 60,000 indigenous people in the state’s missionary villages in 1750. The same authors point out that between 100,000 and 265,000 indigenous people lived in the state of Maranhão and Grão-Pará between the end of the seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth century (Dias et al. 2020, p. 24). All this data were estimated and it is very possible, therefore, that the numbers were even higher; after all, most of the indigenous population of the region would have been under the control of private individuals, not missionaries (Dias et al. 2020, p. 26). This finding alone helps refute the commonplace idea that indigenous peoples were only or almost exclusively under the jurisdiction of the missionaries.

In Piauí, lands that became part of the bishopric of Maranhão from 1724, the interventions of the minister of King José I did not take long to arrive. The captaincy of São José do Piauí, named after the Portuguese king, was created in 1761. Its capital was established in the already existing Vila da Mocha, which was elevated to the category of city and renamed Oeiras in honour of the minister Sebastião José Carvalho e Melo, who bore the title of the Count of Oeiras at that time (Costa pp. 149–50). Between 1761 and 1762, the parishes already existing in the region were transformed into towns: Gurguéia became the town of Jerumenha; Parnaguá kept the same name as a town; Aruazes became the town of Valença; Surubim was renamed Campo Maior; Rancho dos Patos became Marvão village; and, finally, Parnaíba became São João da Parnaíba (Costa 1974, pp. 110–11).

Unlike in Maranhão, where direct references exist to the names of the villages that became towns, in Piauí it is only possible to determine that the town of Jerumenha was formed from a hamlet of indigenous migrants from Bahia; the village of the Aroazes people was first named Catinguinha and later became the town of Valença, in 1762; and the town



of Parnaguá was formed in the territory populated by the Pimenteira, Xerente and Acroá peoples, who were subjugated in the wars of conquest of the territory (Costa 1974, pp. 108, 150). Settlement in this area was very sparse, basically made up of farm estates located far apart. The more organised nuclei were formed into parishes during the pastoral visit of Manuel da Cruz in the 1740s, as already mentioned earlier.

The Piauí hinterlands contained many small indigenous conglomerations that could not be elevated to towns because they failed to meet the required conditions (Mendonça 2005b, vol. III, vol. 49 C, pp. 411–15). In addition to the towns, three hamlets were created: São João de Sende for the Gueguês people; Cajueiro for the Jaicó people; and São Gonçalo for the Acoroás people (Biblioteca Nacional, [Mappa das cidades, vilas, lugares e freguesias das capitanias do Maranhão e Piauí 1787](#)). All these areas gradually came to be served by secular priests appointed by the bishop.

The presence of the Jesuits in the Piauí region, for example, was reported in detail by the governor and captain-general, Francisco Xavier de Mendonça, to the future Marquis of Pombal, his own brother. He recorded that in the lands of Piauí there were “powerful farm owners who are the priests of the Company” who possessed around forty properties. (Mendonça 2005a, vol. 49 B, pp. 190–91). Mendonça Furtado advised the governor of the captaincy of Piauí, João Pereira Caldas, at length that it was important to “persuade the parish priests of the great interest they will have in founding the said towns, because of the many benefits they will receive in them, without the labour of wandering around with so much work and danger” (Costa p. 148).). The need for the diocesan Church to occupy the spaces being left by the regular clergy was evident.

In the captaincy of Maranhão, where the seat of the bishopric was located, eleven former indigenous villages or missions and one private farm were converted into towns and hamlets between July 1757 and August 1758, and their indigenous names were replaced by Portuguese ones. The village of Maracu became the town of Viana; Carará became the town of Monção; Doutrina became the town of Vinhais; Tutóia became the town of Viçosa de Tutóia; and, finally, the Fazenda Guaramiranga village became the town of Guimarães. The villages of Gamelas, Aldeias Altas, São José de Ribamar, São João, São Miguel, Aldeia Pequena and Aldeia Adega Grande de São Lourenço de Barbados, on the other hand, were elevated to the places henceforth known as Lapela, Trizidela, São José de Ribamar, São João de Cortes, Nossa Senhora da Lapa and São Miguel, São Mamede and São Pedro (APEM, Registro de Ereções . . . , book 28 and Biblioteca Nacional, [Mappa das cidades, vilas, lugares e freguesias das capitanias do Maranhão e Piauí 1787](#)).

On 8 July 1757, João Rodrigues Covete, governor of the bishopric and vicar-general, accompanied the entourage composed of governor Gonçalo Pereira Lobato, the superior crown magistrate (Ouvidor Geral) of the district Diogo da Costa e Silva, as well as other military officers, for the founding of the village of Maracu in Vila de Viana. The Jesuit missionary Manuel das Neves was responsible for the settlement and submitted an inventory of everything it contained (APEM, Registro das Fundações . . . (1757–1767), n 28, folio 9). From there, they set out for the village of Carará, which was elevated into the township of Monção on 16 July. The Jesuit João Nepomuceno Seluza also delivered the inventory of the site’s goods. Vicar-general Covette participated personally in both these erections. In the former village of Doutrina, later Vila de Vinhais, he was represented by Bernardo Beckman, the ecclesiastical clerk.

In Viana, for example, the new parish priest would confront a major challenge in dealing with the Gamelas people, where he was tasked with “Christianizing the immensity of the people”. According to the same governor, the bishop, by then already in the diocese, was to implement the orders. While he was “founding the villages”, the bishop was told “to appoint the parish priests . . . because without the foundations being set first, the parish priests could not be appointed” (Mendonça, tome III, vol. 49 C, p. 346). After the founding of Vinhais, the entourage would no longer include members of the ecclesiastical body. The governor himself did not personally attend all the other sites where settlements were founded and erected, but he was generally represented by the superior crown magistrate

(Ouvidor Geral) at some of them. The exclusion of members of the ecclesiastical body may be related to the presence of bishop Fr. António de São José, regarding his relationship with the governor, and his stance concerning the Pombaline measures.

Carvalho e Melo had ordered the expulsion of the Jesuits from Portugal in 1759, a measure that was extended to the Portuguese overseas possessions. It is a virtual consensus in the historiography of the Catholic Church in Maranhão that the bishop was an obstacle to the execution of these orders issued by the minister of King José I. However, this case deserves a deeper discussion in light of new sources. The historiography in question has identified bishop Fr. António de São José as a defender of the Jesuits at the time of their expulsion by order of the Marquis of Pombal in 1759. Bishop Francisco de Paula e Silva describes the bishop of Maranhão as “a fine example of resoluteness” for disapproving of the support given by the bishop of Pará, Miguel de Bulhões, to the expulsion of the Society of Jesus (Silva 1922, pp. 131–35). Mário Meireles claims that relations between the bishop and the governors were always conflictual, the result of disputes over jurisdiction (Meireles 1977, pp. 147–53). Regarding the expulsion of the Jesuits, he states that the bishop of Maranhão “opposed it, which led him to clash not only with the holders of temporal power in the state and in the captaincy, but also with his colleague in Grão-Pará”, referring here to Bishop Miguel de Bulhões. The latter had been appointed visitor and reformer of the Society of Jesus (Meireles 1977, p. 156).

Cândido Mendes went so far as to state that the bishop of Maranhão, “feeling deauthorised”, left for the interior of the diocese “fed up with the demoralisation” (quoted in Meireles 1977, p. 156). The historiography of Piauí, however, shows that bishop Fr. António de São José was on a lengthy pastoral visit to the hinterlands of the diocese at the time, a trip that lasted until 1760, traveling “along deserted roads, full of privations and his life constantly threatened by the gentiles who infested those places” (Costa 1974, p. 135). Relations between the bishop and the secular authorities were forever tense, marked by conflicts over the defence of episcopal jurisdiction (Meireles 1977, pp. 147–53; Silva 1922, pp. 125–37; Marques 2008, pp. 215–20). Several episodes were documented and prompted complaints to Lisbon. What matters here, though, is how the bishop acted in response to the measures prepared by Pombal. Evidence from the diocesan documentation refutes the interpretations crystallised in the historiography about a bishop who defended the Society of Jesus.

In extracts from the letters sent to Portugal in 1759, it is notable that although the historiography describes Fr. António de São José as an obstacle to the Marquis of Pombal’s measures, he informed the king that he was carrying out “new descriptions of the parishes of that bishopric with the names to which the farms belonged, and the number of inhabitants administered by certain clerics”. The bishop was aware of the seditious actions perpetrated by the Jesuits against the Boundary Treaties, a clear allusion to what happened in the demarcation of the Treaty of Madrid (AHU doc 3811). In a letter dated 27 February the same year, the bishop wrote to the king expressing his “gratitude for the incomparable providence of giving those poor Indians secular priests” and adding that he would appoint them in the parishes. Fr. António de São José declared his satisfaction with the promise that “secular priests, of which there is a great lack in Maranhão, would come from Portugal” and remarked that he would place them “in the churches, signing their stipends according to the royal decrees”. Later he adds that “the royal providence of His Majesty has helped release the Indians from their miserable captivity”, especially “with the separation of the spiritual and temporal jurisdictions, [dispelling] the confusion of the spiritual and temporal governance that the regular orders possessed”. He was satisfied with “the new establishment of parishes to the detriment that the episcopal jurisdiction previously had with the erection of new towns and places”. Thus, according to the bishop, “more than a few roots were torn out of the decadence of Maranhão caused by unjust captivity, the confusion of jurisdictions, the reduction of the Episcopal jurisdiction, and royal revenues”. He concluded the letter by “once and many times thanking Your Majesty

for the aforementioned bounties” and imploring “the rebuilding of the See and churches of this bishopric” (AHU, doc. 3809).

In 1760, the bishop once again demonstrated that he was in line with the rulings coming from Portugal and reported on the “appointment of the most suitable persons to take charge of the churches, the buildings adjoining them, ornaments, altar furnishings and sacristies of the same churches that belonged to the regular clergy of the Society”. The procedure had been carried out, he said, “with meticulous care while Your Majesty appeals to the Holy Father” to decide what they would do with the Jesuit possessions. The school of Our Lady of Light was handed over to the bishop, as well as other assets that became part of the estate of the diocese of Maranhão. The bishop also reported that he had placed “capable people in this city and neighbouring parts who received the said assets by inventory” (AHU doc. 3889). In the more remote parts of the region, this work would still take time due to the distances involved and difficulties in access.

Another document that further refutes the established idea that the bishop failed to collaborate with the measures for expelling the Jesuits is the letter sent on 3 December 1760. This states that the bishop respected “the very just reasons for the expulsion, proscription and extermination of the regular clergy of the Society carried out after such a mature agreement”. He emphasised the “most pious and religious attention to the Apostolic See” and claimed that any complaints against the king could only be the result of the “ingratitude and perfidy” of people hostile to “the Royal life and fame”. The Jesuits were accused of attempting to take the king’s life. Fr. António de São José clarified in the same letter that he had spoken out in public “but also by edicts” prohibiting “by virtue of obedience and under greater excommunication to all ecclesiastics all communication or verbal or written correspondence with the said regulars”, referring to the expulsion of the Society of Jesus (AHU doc. 3894).

Not only have these documents been ignored by the historiography of Maranhão, the silence has helped perpetuate the idea that Fr. António de São José played a minor role in implementing the measures of the Pombal Directory. The diocese’s Book of Provisions (appointments) records the pastoral care mentioned in the letter sent to Portugal. Once again, the bishop emphasises “the very just reasons” for the extermination and denaturalisation of the Jesuit clergy, prohibiting any communication and collaboration with them. The provision is detailed and demonstrates the bishop’s support for the expulsion of the Society of Jesus (APEM, Livro de Provisões, n 189, folios 160–61).

The bishop’s disagreements with secular authorities are also recorded in correspondence (AHU doc 3902, doc. 4076 and doc 4178). In a letter from 1766, for example, Governor Melo e Póvoas, nephew of the Marquis of Pombal, clarifies that “I refuse to have dealings with this prelate after the insult I received from him” (AHU, Capitania do Maranhão, doc 4157). As a result of these conflicts, which primarily involved a jurisdictional dispute between the episcopal power and the governor, the bishop was recalled to Portugal in 1767 and remained there until his death in 1779.

The discussion over the expulsion of the Jesuits only reappears in a letter sent to Queen Maria I (1777–1816). The bishop was in forced confinement in Portugal and the letter reports that he had been prosecuted, among other things, “for evading [certain dictates] as far as he could”. In an accusatory tone towards the Marquis of Pombal and his relatives occupying the government of Maranhão, the bishop defended the Jesuits, pleading their importance, but emphasised that the causes of their expulsion from the bishopric were the disrespect for episcopal jurisdiction shown by Joaquim de Melo e Póvoas (AHU doc. 3904). The change in tone and the accusations against the Marquis coincided with the ascension of José I’s daughter to the throne in 1777 and the progressive erosion of the Marquis of Pombal’s reputation. However, the information is insufficient to demonstrate that the diocese and its then bishop created obstacles to the execution of the freedom of the indigenous population and, above all, to the provision of the secular clergy that would replace the regular clergy.

In the diocese's provision books, the earliest appointment of this bishop to take care of indigenous settlements dates from 1759. That same year, the bishop appointed the Mercedarian Francisco Tavares as parish priest to the indigenous people of the Jaicó nation, in the captaincy of Piauí. We should not ignore the fact that all the regular clergy provided between 1759 and 1760 were among the regular orders that in 1757 accepted subjection to episcopal jurisdiction in a deed signed at the Board of Missions. Examining the appointments from the first replacement of the regular clergy at the time of bishop Antônio de São José, we obtain the following numbers: 30 provisions (appointments) for churches were passed between 1758 and 1763. Of these, 16 were secular clergy, 3 were Mercedarians, 4 were Carmelites and 7 were Franciscans. Comparatively, therefore, the total number of secular and regular clergy appointed was almost even.

The balance between regular and secular clergy is also observed in the chapels. During the same period (1758–1763), eleven chapels received priests, five of whom were secular and six were regular. The former Jesuit chapels were occupied by regular clergy who swore allegiance to the bishop. It is important to highlight in particular the chapels of Anindiba, Manyuhi, São Brás and Moniassu, which were located on farms owned by the Society of Jesus and had a high turnover of chaplains during this period (APEM, Livro de Provisões, n. 189. fl 75–98). Appointments to hear confession, in turn, were all for the secular clergy, sixteen in total, and covered all areas of the diocese. In terms of appointments to preach, three out of a total of fourteen were transferred to the regular clergy. The picture changes in the second half of the century.

Another Book of Provisions contains documents from 1762 to 1782 and a total of 209 provisions. Fifteen of these are illegible. Of the other 194 provisions, we are interested in 117, which concern provisions in parishes, licences to celebrate mass at portable altars and licences to hear confession. Regarding provisions in parishes, we find thirty-two provisions for members of the secular clergy and only seven for the regular clergy. Licences to use a portable altar were issued to thirty-nine secular priests and only three members of the regular clergy. There were a total of 36 licences to hear confession, all of which were issued to secular clerics (APEM n.d.b, Livro de Provisões, n. 83). These figures demonstrate the undeniable increased penetration of the secular clergy in the diocese, especially in the hinterlands, previously occupied predominantly by the regular clergy. This figure indicates 91.4% of the secular clergy's members were working in the parishes of the diocese or at portable altars, but were mainly working in confession, which was the cornerstone of the mission. The expansion of the bishop's power with the progressive replacement of the regular clergy in the parishes was visible in the second half of the eighteenth century in the diocese of Maranhão.

### 3. Conclusions

The presence of indigenous peoples has always been marked in the Portuguese Amazon, and one of the missions established with the creation of the diocese of Maranhão in 1677 was to resolve conflicts between settlers and the regular clergy regarding the indigenous question. Analysis of the diocese of Maranhão and the role of its bishops at two key moments in the history of indigenous peoples in the region—namely, the Indian Freedom Laws of 1680 and 1755—and an exploration of the deepening of the issue with the publication of the Indian Directory in 1758 are essential to understanding the role of the episcopate and its importance in the penetration and complexification of structures involving parishes and hamlets. Between setbacks and advances, episcopal jurisdiction gradually began to occupy spaces previously exclusive to the regular clergy, notably the Society of Jesus.

Observed over the long term, the dispute over indigenous jurisdiction is more a permanent feature than a historical rupture. This issue is not limited to the removal of the regular clergy from temporal governance over the indigenous population with the law of 1755, nor to the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1759. The first bishop, D. Gregório dos Anjos, claimed jurisdiction over white and indigenous populations for himself, although he was

defeated in the matter by the Jesuits. The fourth bishop, Manuel da Cruz already had three villages under his jurisdiction in the lands of Piauí in 1747 and drew up directives for the missionaries long before the suppression of the regular clergy's jurisdiction. The sixth bishop, Fr. Antônio de São José, was responsible for replacing the regular clergy with secular clergy in the old villages and was active in expanding his jurisdiction. It should be emphasised, however, that during that same century the diocese of Maranhão was left vacant for 63 long years. When the bishopric had a resident bishop, his actions demonstrated the insistence of the episcopate of Maranhão in interfering with the indigenous peoples. The question of the governance of the indigenous population was always a problem that interested the bishops.

The importance of the diocese during the period when towns and villages were erected from the old indigenous settlements should not be overlooked. The Portuguese monarchy needed to replace the large number of regular clergy that had long occupied the Amazon region. The only solution possible was to rely on the collaboration of the episcopate, which in turn saw its power grow. Those areas that had been familiar with missionary work in the villages came under episcopal tutelage with the support of the Directory prepared by the Marquis of Pombal. However, the process proceeded neither smoothly nor quickly. The regular clergy protested and tried to protect their jurisdiction and the continued occupation of areas where the majority of the population was indigenous. Clearly, the collection of tithes, as established in the diocesan Constitutions, would guarantee the support of the parish priests and increase the income of the Crown, which was also unfamiliar with the production of these places previously controlled by the Society of Jesus.

Evidently, the lack of secular clergy made it easier for regular clergy to remain in some localities, but gradually, as shown here through the appointments, the diocese grew and occupied these spaces. Bishop Antnio de São José, a figure crystallised by historiography as a defender of the Society of Jesus, appears in new sources as an enthusiast for increasing episcopal jurisdiction. This bishop not only provided secular clergy in the old villages but even appointed an indigenous man as the ecclesiastical bailiff in one of the new towns built at the behest of the Marquis of Pombal. However, his disagreements with the governor and his insistence on accusing him of disrespecting ecclesiastical jurisdiction eventually led to his confinement in Portugal until his death. Before he departed, though, he took care to leave secular clergy in these parishes, a policy that was continued by his successors. Despite all the limitations, including vacancies, both in the captaincy of Maranhão and in the hinterlands of the captaincy of Piauí where the diocese of Maranhão ended, episcopal power gradually became consolidated as a major protagonist.

**Funding:** This research was funded by CNPq Productivity Fellow—311159/2022-2, (CNPq-Universal)—“Indigenous Villages in the Pombaline Amazon in a connected perspective (1757–1798)” —406961/2021-2 and CAPES 001.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** The documents used in this research are in the public domain and are located in the Public Archive of the State of Maranhão <http://apem.cultura.ma.gov.br/siapem/index.php>.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> “Directory to be observed in the Indian settlements of Pará and Maranhão”. Historically, a ‘directory’ was a book containing instructions for public or private worship.
- <sup>2</sup> TN: In English: “Directory to be observed in the Indian settlements of Pará and Maranhão, until His Majesty commands otherwise”.
- <sup>3</sup> TN: In English: “Register of the foundations, buildings and holdings of the towns and settlements in Mission Villages”.



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