

**Rafael Chambouleyron. *Povoamento, Ocupação e Agricultura na Amazônia Colonial (1640-1706)*. Belém: Editora Açai, 2010. 172 pp. Summary, Abbreviations, Introduction, Maps, Figures, Pictures, and Bibliography. ISBN: 978-85-61586-16-4.**

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In his article on the production of Brazilian colonial historiography, the late historian A.J.R. Russell-Wood lauded “Brazilian scholars [who] have developed a historiography that reflects ... broader changes in historical studies, while pursuing them within a Brazilian context.”<sup>2</sup> Rafael Chambouleyron’s *Povoamento, Ocupação e Agricultura na Amazônia Colonial (1640-1706)* exemplifies this statement. His work is based on extensive archival research carried out over many years in a wide range of both Brazilian and Portuguese archives. The crux of Chambouleyron’s book entails revised research from his 2005 doctoral dissertation, *Portuguese Colonization of the Amazon region, 1640-1706*, written while at Cambridge University.<sup>3</sup> Chambouleyron’s book is a valuable contribution, offering new perspectives for scholars working on both colonial Amazonia and colonial history at large.

Colonial Amazonia—which roughly corresponds to the State of Maranhão and Pará after Filipe II partitioned Brazil into two separate polities in 1521—has often been depicted within both history and literature as “geographically isolated,” a backward area that “suffered the crown’s neglect and remained economically underdeveloped,” and an area that “stood at the periphery of colonial Brazil.”<sup>4</sup> Recent work by the American historian Walter Hawthorne maintains that the Marquis of Pombal “put great effort into bolstering Portugal’s economy ... [and that] part of his plan involved developing Amazonia” during his time as Prime Minister from 1750 to 1777.<sup>5</sup> Brazilian scholars like Ciro Flamarion Cardoso and Luiz Felipe de Alencastro have similarly characterized the State of Maranhão as one marked by poverty and abandonment until the reforms of the

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<sup>2</sup> Russell-Wood, A.J.R., “Brazilian Archives and Recent Historiography on Colonial Brazil,” *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (2001), 75–105.

<sup>3</sup> Chambouleyron, Rafael, *Portuguese Colonization of the Amazon region, 1640-1706*. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Cambridge (Cambridge, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Patai, Daphne and Aluísio Azevedo, *Mulatto* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1990), 12.

<sup>5</sup> Hawthorne, Walter, *From Africa to Brazil: Culture, Identity, and an Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 45.

Marquis of Pombal in the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>6</sup> *Povoamento, Ocupação e Agricultura na Amazônia Colonial (1640-1706)* can be situated within a broader historiographical debate about whether or not the Marquis of Pombal's tenure marked the beginning of Amazonian colonization. Chambouleyron disputes the interpretation that a clear colonial policy in Amazonia only existed with the advent of Pombal's administration.

Chambouleyron's work is driven by two issues within contemporary scholarship that he finds problematic: first, the notion of abandonment, which overseas counselors tended to use in their descriptions of colonial Amazonia; and second, the neglect of the State of Maranhão in explanatory models about the formation of colonial Brazil within Brazilian and Brazilianist historiography. Chambouleyron suggests that such studies emphasizing the region as "peripheral," "isolated," and marked by "imaginary dominion" (15) are not conducive to an understanding of its economy and society. Instead, he argues, we should approach the history of the State of Maranhão and Pará "from within" via an internal logic of occupation and colonization. According to Chambouleyron, using such a "history-from-within" approach allows us to more productively frame the social and economic history of the State of Maranhão and Pará—which was administratively separate from the State of Brazil at the time—in terms of its independent connections and relations with the rest of the Portuguese empire, both in the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean.

The author proposes an argument that accounts for the complexity of Portuguese occupation in the region and the diversity of the State of Maranhão and Pará. There are some key assumptions in the author's conceptual framework. First, rather than dismissing Amazonia as a "peripheral area" in comparison to the colonial "dynamic areas" that were rich in sugar production and mining activity, Chambouleyron suggests that we should instead seek to understand the internal dynamics of colonial Amazonia. Second, the author warns against projecting the same logic of occupation onto the State of Maranhão used to characterize the State of Brazil. Despite this, he argues that the histories of the two states are interconnected and that the earlier conquests in the State of Brazil helped to shape the conquest of the State of Maranhão. Third, the author asserts that his conceptual framework seeks to undermine the *sertão/litoral* dichotomy, which masks the unique diversity and spatiality of Maranhão and Pará. Instead, Chambouleyron argues that it is crucial to contextualize the State of Maranhão and Pará within a general framework marked by (i) the decline of Portugal's power in India and the displacement of the central axis of the

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<sup>6</sup> See: Cardoso, Ciro Flamarion S., *Economia e sociedade em áreas coloniais periféricas, Guiana Francesa e Pará, 1750-1817* (Rio de Janeiro: Graal, 1984); Alencastro, Luiz Filipe de, *O trato dos viventes. Formação do Brasil no Atlântico Sul. Séculos XVI e XVII* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2000).

Portuguese empire to the Atlantic, and (ii) the consolidation of the Bragança dynasty, characterized by relative political stability and a return to a well-defined process of political decision-making.

The first premise of this argument is that the importance of the State of Maranhão to the Crown stemmed not from its production, but rather (i) from its status as a frontier region marked by intermittent conflict between European powers, thus causing the Portuguese Crown to maintain its influence in the area, and, paradoxically, (ii) from its poverty, leading to greater government intervention in order to control and reorder social and economic life. The second premise is that the economic depression from the sugar, tobacco, silver, and slave trade crisis in Brazil led to increased efforts on the part of the Crown to revitalize the “periphery.” In the case of Amazonia, this meant the development of spice crops. The third premise is that the Portuguese Overseas Council described the State of Maranhão as little more than an “imaginary dominion” in 1673 because discussions concerning the economy and settlement of the region were dominated by these very worries. The author argues that this is understandable given the extent of the territory, the nature of its frontiers, and the constant threats that plagued the State of Maranhão and Pará. Specifically, Chamboleyron sets out to discuss the role of the Portuguese Crown in the development of Amazonia in three key areas: population, land occupation, and agriculture. *Povoamento, Ocupação e Agricultura na Amazônia Colonial (1640-1706)* is thus divided into three chapters, each focusing on these respective issues in greater depth.

Chapter 1, *Povoadores, degredados e soldados*, argues that the Portuguese Crown played an active role in populating Maranhão and Pará. The population increase was linked to a greater number of economically productive subjects, and therefore a more robust economy. Chamboleyron explores the different types of migration to the region in detail, as well as the different groups of incomers. His analysis covers voluntary Portuguese migration, the forced migration of soldiers and convicts, mass migration from the Azores, and the influx of Irish settlers. The chapter offers a thorough analysis of the Crown’s role in populating the region, and is careful to distinguish between different spatialities, temporalities, and migrant characteristics.

Chapter 2, *Capitanias, sesmarias e vilas*, links the issue of population from the previous chapter to territorial occupation. The basis for this is that populating the State of Maranhão and Pará also implied exploiting the territory for both the Portuguese Crown and the residents of towns and cities. The author argues that historiography has traditionally favored a narrative whereby military forces, religious missions, and the search

for spice and slaves determined the conquest of Amazonia. Yet, for Chambouleyron, the territorial domination of the region cannot only be analyzed from the narrow viewpoint of military troops, missionaries, and frontiersmen. He contends that other elements were equally important in the territorial occupation of colonial Amazonia. The author draws our attention to the role played by private captaincies, systematic cultivation of the region, the distribution of land grants among settlers, and the establishment of villages.

Chapter 3, *Açúcar, tabaco e o cultivo das drogas*, focuses on the role of agriculture and mining practices in the economic occupation of Amazonia. The chapter discusses the incentives for sugar production granted by the Crown, such as tax exemption, imported African slaves, judicial privileges, and an administration for indigenous people (127). Sugar production, in particular, was seen as vital for the economic fertility of the region. The chapter also describes the tobacco privileges awarded by the Crown, which maintained an active interest in developing tobacco farming in the region (145). Lastly, the author deals with the growing of cocoa, which mostly began in the 1670s and was promoted by the Crown. However, Chambouleyron also emphasizes that cocoa only became a key export of Maranhão and Pará in the 1730s, and in particular after 1755, when the Marquis of Pombal established the General Trading Company of Grão-Pará and Maranhão (168). Despite this caveat, the author tries to establish clear links between the “civilizing process” and the region’s economic development. The chapter provides rich analysis of the economy and the Crown’s active role in encouraging mining practices.

Chambouleyron’s work offers an important contribution to the study of colonial Amazonia. Rather than simply accepting previous interpretations of Maranhão and Pará as a “peripheral” state, Chambouleyron challenges scholars to understand lived experience within the state through an “internal logic of occupation.” Chambouleyron also makes impressive use of archival documentation to show how one cannot take this notion of abandonment as a *prima facie* condition, and how contrary to what one might expect, the Portuguese Crown systematically intervened in the area. The author’s work is empirically rooted in social and economic history. In this respect, *Povoamento, Ocupação e Agricultura na Amazônia Colonial (1640-1706)* also provides an excellent synthesis of how questions of population, land and economy are linked to one another.

Conceptually, the author’s premise that Maranhão’s status as a frontier region and its poverty were conditions that led to valorization of the area by the Portuguese Crown could be better argued. It seems debatable that the main value of the region derived from external threats and a desire to revitalize the region, as opposed to any intrinsic value that

the area had in and of itself. This interpretation seems to conflict the author's later proposition that the value of the region also arose from the *drogas do sertão* and the slave trade.

Having said this, *Povoamento, Ocupação e Agricultura na Amazônia Colonial (1640-1706)* is an admirable book. Chambouleyron offers a fresh perspective and important methodological insight, by showing how we should understand the State of Maranhão and Pará, and indeed other regional areas when conducting our own research, in light of their internal dynamics.