

EXPIRING EMPIRES: THE *ABBÉ* CORREIA DA SERRA AND THE PERNAMBUCO REVOLT OF 1817

Imperios en extinción. El Abade Correia da Serra y la revuelta de Pernambuco de 1817

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This paper examines Portuguese-American diplomacy in the context of the Pernambuco Revolt of 1817 from the perspective of the *Abbé* Correia da Serra (1751-1823), Minister Plenipotentiary of the United Kingdom of Portugal, Brazil and the Algarves to the United States of America between 1816 and 1820. Based on his extant correspondence, it is argued that despite Correia da Serra's high level connections to American political and intellectual circles, his diplomatic activity in Washington on behalf of the Portuguese monarchy was largely ineffectual. Following the declaration of an independent republic in Pernambuco, Recife, on March 6, 1817, the *Abbé* was unable to deflect criticism from his diplomatic activity in the US given the amount of support that existed in the country for the independence movements then burgeoning in Central and South America, not just among American government officials, but also within its public opinion and the more radical press. The US government opposed the designs of Old World monarchies to maintain the colonial status of their territories in the New World, aiming to transform itself into the guardian of the Americas in line with what was to become known from 1823 onwards as the Monroe Doctrine.

Este ensayo examina la diplomacia luso-americana en el ámbito de la revuelta de Pernambuco de 1817 en el prisma del Abade Correia da Serra (1751-1823), ministro plenipotenciario del Reino Unido de Portugal, Brasil y de los Algarves en los Estados Unidos de América entre 1816 y 1820. Con base en la correspondencia conocida de este, se argumenta que, a pesar de las conexiones de Correia da Serra con los más altos círculos de poder y de intelectualidad de estos países, su actividad diplomática en Washington como representante de la monarquía portuguesa fue, en gran medida, poco eficaz. Después de la proclamación de una república independiente en Pernambuco, Recife, el 6 de marzo de 1817, el Abade no consiguió con su actividad diplomática evitar las críticas, a causa del gran apoyo que había en el país hacia los movimientos independentistas emergentes en América Central y América del Sur no solo en el seno de la administración americana, sino también entre la opinión pública, en general, y en la prensa más radical, en particular. El Gobierno de Estados Unidos se oponía a los propósitos de las monarquías del Viejo Mundo de mantener el estatus de sus colonias en los territorios del Nuevo Mundo, con el objetivo de convertirse en guardián de las Américas, según los principios de la que, a partir de 1823, vendría a ser denominada Doctrina Monroe.

Palabras clave

American Privateering, Brazilian Independence, Monroe Doctrine, Pernambuco Revolt, Portuguese-American Diplomacy

Keywords

Corsarios americanos, diplomacia luso-americana, Doctrina Monroe, independencia de Brasil, revuelta de Pernambuco

Introducción

Jose Francisco Correia da Serra (1751-1823) was a true representative of the Portuguese Enlightenment, a man of varied scientific interests which included geology, natural philosophy, history, and politics, as his writings attest¹.



Domenico Pellegrini, the Abbé Correia da Serra, n/d, Collection of the Lisbon Academy of Sciences. Public domain.

He was the driving force behind the founding of the Lisbon Academy of Sciences in 1779, of which he was Permanent Secretary, together with the Duke of Lafões, D. João de Bragança (1719-1806), before being forced to leave Portugal in 1795 for reasons which remain unclear to this day, but thought to have been related to his political views

and possible association with free-masonry².

Carrying with him letters of introduction from well-known European and American intellectuals, he arrived in Norfolk, Virginia, on February 21, 1812, from there proceeding to Washington and then Philadelphia, where he set up residence. Here, Correia da Serra was



The Abbé Correia da Serra at the Lisbon Academy of Sciences, 1780s. Public domain.

¹For this paper, I have relied on two major sources of primary materials: the correspondence exchanged between Correia da Serra and Portuguese and American government officials while he held his diplomatic post in Washington, as well as his personal letters to prominent Americans, compiled by Léon Bourdon in his book (1975): *José Corrêa da Serra – Ambassadeur du Royaume-Uni de Portugal et Brésil a Washington, 1816-1820* (Paris: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian); and also the compilation of documents made by Richard Beale Davis in his book (1993 [1955]): *The Abbé Corrêa in America, 1812-1820 – The Contributions of the Diplomat and Natural Philosopher to the Foundations of Our National Life* (Providence, Rhode Island: Gávea-Brown).

²Correia da Serra was born in Serpa, Portugal, but educated in Italy, where his parents had moved when he was six years old. He returned to his country of birth in 1777, two years after having obtained his holy orders. This means that when he died, aged seventy-two, he had only lived in Portugal twenty-six years. With little or no religious vocation, it has been suggested that he may have been a member of a free-masonry lodge set up in Portugal in 1794, named Virtute I, together with the Duque de Lafões, David Humphreys, the American minister in Portugal at the time, Thomas Hickling, the American vice-consul in the Azores. (Cf. Michael Teague (1977): *Abade José Correia da Serra – Documentos do seu Arquivo*, trad. Manuela Rocha. Lisboa: Fundação Luso-Americana para o Desenvolvimento, p. 63).

actively involved in the work of the American Philosophical Society and the American Academy of Natural Sciences, before being appointed, in 1816, Minister Plenipotentiary of Portugal, Brazil and the Algarves by King D. João VI, at the suggestion of the Conde da Barca, Antonio de Araujo e Azevedo (1754-1817), Minister of War and Foreign Affairs. His appointment, during the administration of James Madison, came directly from Rio de Janeiro, the country's seat of government since 1808, where the Portuguese Crown and court had been forced to relocate following the French invasions so as to guarantee the kingdom's political independence³. Correia da Serra held his diplomatic post until 1820.

Correia da Serra and Thomas Jefferson

During his American sojourn, Correia da Serra was to develop a close relationship with Thomas Jefferson, whom he visited for the first time at Monticello in the summer of 1813. A frequent visitor to his Virginia plantation, he clearly shared with Jefferson political and scientific interests, having impressed immediately the former American President in the most obvious manner. The correspondence between the two, spanning approximately eight years, covers a wide range of subjects, from the political situation in Europe and the US to the Lewis and Clarke expedition to the northwest territories, to the choice of plant seeds and the finest varieties of chestnut trees (*marrons*), to the making of cisterns impermeable with porcelain, including the appointment of university faculty, something which was of particular to Jefferson as he went about his plans to found a public institution of higher education in his native Virginia (the future University of Virginia). They were also able to discuss relations between Portugal and the United States, including



The Abbé's Room at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, Virginia. Photo taken by the author.

³Between 1815 and 1821 Portugal and Brazil formed a United Kingdom, a Luso-Brazilian empire. On November 29th, 1807, with the French invasion in progress, the Portuguese royal family and court left for Rio on board twenty-five merchant ships escorted by eighteen Portuguese warships and another thirteen vessels that had been supplied by the British. A total of fifteen thousand members of the aristocracy embarked with the Portuguese sovereigns, who left behind a Regency Junta quickly disbanded by Napoleon's General Junot upon his arrival in the nation's capital.

a grand plan whereby both countries would divide the New World into two areas of influence, one under the control of the US and the other of Portugal, a reborn nation, now with its capital in Rio de Janeiro, following the transfer of the Portuguese monarchy to its South American colony⁴. Correia da Serra's presence at Monticello became a regular occurrence, so much so that Jefferson set aside a room on the lower floor of his residence for his distinguished guest, known to this day as the *Abbé's Room*. In a letter written to Caspar Wistar, physician and anatomist, as well as professor at the University of Pennsylvania, dated August 17, 1813, Jefferson writes: "I found him [Correia da Serra] what you had described in every respect; certainly the greatest collection, and best digest of science in books, men, and things that I have ever met with; and with these the most amiable and engaging character"⁵.

Portuguese-American Diplomacy: Privateering and the Pernambuco Revolt

Two issues dominated Correia da Serra's diplomatic activity in the US: the never-ending problem of privateers, vessels which were being fitted out with crews in American ports to prey on Portuguese sea commerce and the Pernambuco Revolt of 1817, one of the first instances of the desire for political separation between Brazil and its motherland (more details below). Privateering, the practice of governments commissioning private armed vessels to attack enemy warships or else to seize or plunder merchant ships belonging to unfriendly nations, was common in times of war or conflict⁶. Regarded by the states affected by the activity as an organized form of piracy, during the wars of independence in South America the insurgents recruited ships in the US and other countries to disrupt trade and capture merchant vessels belonging to their European colonial powers, namely Portugal and Spain. The years 1816 to 1819 had been financially harsh for the shi-

pping industry of Baltimore, one of the busiest US ports at the time, due to a drop in the value of vessels, freights rates and commodity prices. To offset this, Baltimore sea captains accepted privateering commissions from the Spanish colonies already in revolt, Mexico, New Granada and Venezuela, often with the



Nicolau Delerive (1755-1818), *Departure of the Royal Family for Brazil*, Collection of the National Coach Museum.

complacency of American authorities. The majority of the Baltimore privateers sailed for the United Provinces of La Plata, commissioned by Buenos Aires, or the Banda Oriental (modern Uruguay), under the leadership of the revolutionary leader Jose Artigas. The letters of marque issued by this revolutionary hero meant that the privateers could attack the vessels of both Portugal and Spain and harass their sea trade (Hopkins, p. 93). John Daniels Danels was one of the most famous privateering captains from the city of Baltimore. He sailed up and down the Atlantic Coast of South America in 1818 and 1819 with commission letters signed by Artigas, blocking the coasts of Venezuela and Colombia to Spanish ships. His activity, however, was not limited to Spanish vessels: with *La Irresistible*, Danels captured the *Globo*, Bombay to Lisbon, netting \$30,000 in specie and a cargo valued at \$90,000 as well as the *Gran Para*, Rio de Janeiro to Lisbon, with \$300,000 in specie, his biggest prize (Hopkins, p. 98-99)⁷.

The activity of privateers, lasting an entire decade (1815 to 1825), proved difficult for American government officials to stem. On several occasions, Correia da Serra, Portugal's recently nominated diplomatic representative in Washington, sent dispatches to James Madison's Secretary of State, James Monroe, claiming that their activity represented a violation of international law. Engaging in a sort of preemptive diplomacy he sent Monroe, on December 20, 1816, a letter pointing out the existence of insufficiencies in American law to deal with the problem of privateering, contrary to the law of nations, in his view, remarking that "only the promulgation of laws to the effect can justify this nation to the civilized world" (Bourdon, p. 348). The terms of the letter were particularly strong, in particular when Correia

⁴ Jefferson's "American system", as the plan was called, involved the separation of the Americas from European influence, described by the *Abbé* in a letter sent to President Madison, dated 10 July 1816, in these terms: "Our nations are now in fact both American powers, and will always be the two paramount ones, each in his part of the new continent" (Davis, p. 202). John Quincy Adams, who headed the State Department in the administration of Monroe at the time, though, was not convinced of the benefits of the plan, and nothing came of it.

⁵ Retrieved from https://archive.li/http://wiki.monticello.org/mediawiki/index.php/Jose_Correia_da_Serra (accessed on August 13, 2018).

⁶ During the War of 1812, commissions of letters of marque and reprisal had been issued by the Secretary of State at the time, James Monroe, to private armed vessels, allowing them to cruise against enemies of the US.

⁷ In April 1819, Joaquim Jose Vasques, Consul General of Portugal, filed a suit in Baltimore to get the booty taken by Danels from the *Gran Para*, based on the Neutrality legislation. The case reached the Supreme Court and Danels had to pay back \$300,000 in 1822 (Hopkins, p. 100).

da Serra suggests that the American Congress enact effective legislation against the privateers, reminding Monroe that during the War of 1812 the Portuguese king had declared his neutrality even though his oldest ally was involved. In an attempt to control their actions, and perhaps to give foreign nations an indication that it disapproved of it, Congress approved in 1817 "An Act more effectually to preserve the neutral relations of the United States", better known as the "Neutrality Act", prohibiting "cruising under commission of any colony, district, or people" (Davis, p. 57)⁸. Richard Beale Davis argues in his book *The Abbé Corrêa in America, 1812-1820* (1993 [1955]) that through his political contacts in Washington the *Abbé* had a significant input into the discussion and adoption of this legislation, maintaining that Correia da Serra played a determining part in its definition due to his close association with John Quincy Adams (1767-1848), the US Secretary of State at the time (56)⁹. In the realm of international relations, there was a legal difference between civil war and revolution or revolt: in a civil war it was legally permissible to issue privateering commissions, as a neutral party can give aid to both sides in such cases, the same not being true in the case of revolution or revolt.

Nevertheless, it was the Pernambuco Revolt alluded to above, aimed at setting up an independent state in Northern Brazil modeled on the American republic, that was to pose the most serious diplomatic challenge to Correia da Serra. On March 6, 1817, a republic was proclaimed in Recife, Pernambuco, which threatened the integrity of the Luso-Brazilian empire. Lasting seventy-four days, it was a regional separatist movement – the only separatist conspiracy that reached the level of open rebellion prior to Brazil's independence – comprised of large landowners and slave holders opposed to the central government in Rio, displeased as they were with the political and economic circumstances they were facing. Since the arrival of the Portuguese royal family and its entourage in Rio, more funds had to be sent by Pernambucans to pay for the salaries, food, clothing and entertainment of court officials and administrators there. Coupled with a drought

⁸ It is interesting to note that the American government had faced similar difficulties during the War of 1812. It filed its own complaints against the British government, whose navy had impressed American sailors and used private vessels in its military activities in a similar way.

⁹ Neutrality legislation: Neutrality Act of March 3, 1817 made it an offense to fit out a vessel of war in the USA for service under a foreign flag; Neutrality Act of April 20, 1818, made it an offense to add armament to a vessel (Hopkins, p. 102). Other Neutrality Acts, June 5, 1794 and June 14, 1796, essentially made privateering an offense against friendly nations and citizens of the US (Hopkins, p. 103).

that had occurred in Pernambuco the year before, there had also been a significant drop in the price of sugar and cotton following the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Pernambucan cotton was now under stiff competition from that produced in the US and exporters were unhappy, blaming the central authorities in Rio, including the Portuguese merchants involved in the trade of this commodity, for this very situation. Imbued with enlightenment ideas, anti-absolutist feeling and free-masonry beliefs, not to mention the arrears in soldiers' pay, the insurgents set up a provisional government in Recife and sent envoys abroad to seek international recognition for the independent republic as well as to buy weapons and ammunition¹⁰. Inspired in the US Constitution, its Bill of Rights and the motto of the French Revolution – *Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite* –, an "Organic Law", or draft Constitution, was drawn up, establishing, among others, equality of rights and religious freedom. The municipal councils of the interior of Recife found the latter principles somewhat radical in the sense that they entailed too much equality among landowners, small proprietors and the common people (Maxwell, p. 15).

Pernambucan Emissaries

Antonio Gonçalves da Cruz (1775-1833), nicknamed Cabuga, was chosen by the provisional government of Pernambuco to get US support for the rebel state¹¹. He left for Washington in late March 1817 with a small number of associates to try to legitimize the

¹⁰ The provisional government, set up on March 7, 1817, was headed by Padre Joao Ribeiro Pessoa de Melo Negromonte, Domingos Jose Martins, in charge of commercial affairs, Jose Luis de Mendonça, responsible for the judiciary, Manuel Correa de Araujo, in charge of agriculture, and Domingos Teotonio Jorge Martins Pessoa, responsible for military affairs. The post of finance was held by Gervasio Pires, one of the most important businessmen in Brazil (Verardi and Nogueira, 2017).

¹¹ Gonçalves da Cruz was a mulatto tradesman who had travelled in Europe and France as a young man, where he became acquainted with the republican ideals of the French Revolution and with free-masonry. Upon his return, in 1797, he set a mason *loggia* in his own home named "Pernambuco do Oriente". Cf. Cruz Cabuga, o primeiro embaixador brasileiro (<http://blogs.diariodepernambuco.com.br/historiape/index.php/2016/08/01/cruz-cabuga-o-primeiro-embaixador-brasileiro/>). The nickname "Cabuga" derives from "buga", a shortened mispronunciation of the Portuguese word "esburger", meaning, "to polish", usually gold. He left for the US on March 24 or 25, 1817, on board *Gipsy*, carrying US\$ 800,00, and arrived on May 14, in Boston, Massachusetts. Cabuga obtained two ships in Boston, the *Parangon* and the *Pinguim*, to carry ammunition as well as American and Bonapartist soldiers to Recife. (Cf. F. Cabral and G. Ribeiro (2011). "A missão Cabuga nos EUA: uma página da revolução pernambucana de 1817", *V Colóquio de História: Perspectivas Históricas, Historiografia, Pesquisa e Patrimônio*. Unicamp, 16-18 de novembro, pp. 191-200).

independence aspirations of Pernambucans, for which it was essential to be received and acknowledged by American government officials.

His mission entailed, therefore, recognition of the new republic of Pernambuco by the US government, buying weapons in Baltimore for the revolutionaries, securing funds for the independence movement itself, and recruiting Americans and Frenchmen to fight for the revolution. The last aspect was especially significant as it involved establishing contact with French officials from Napoleon Bonaparte's disbanded army who might be residing in the US and still hoped to restore the forty-eight-year-old emperor to rule (at the time Napoleon had already been banished to the island of Saint Helena by the British). Gonçalves da Cruz was also empowered to issue letters of marque to those American privateering captains who wished to gain financially from the independence of Pernambuco in the seas off the coast of Rio Grande do Norte, Paraíba and Pernambuco (Ribeiro and Cabral, p. 197)¹².

In reality, Brazil had become virtually independent from the mainland in 1808 with the arrival of the Portuguese court and the governmental structure in Rio. Its quasi-independent status was further reinforced in 1815 when it became a kingdom on an equal footing with Portugal and the Algarves, consolidating its political and economic importance as well as geostrategic position. With Brazil raised to the status of kingdom, a monarchical state spanning both sides of the Atlantic and several continents came into being. As Kenneth Maxwell rightly points out in his article "Why Was Brazil Different? The Contexts of Independence" (2000), John Quincy Adams, Secretary of State in the administration of James Monroe, did not quite understand the geopolitical impact of this decision, which, in effect, shifted the balance of power of Portugal's domestic and foreign affairs from the European continent to a colony in the Southern Hemisphere.



Antonio Gonçalves da Cruz (1755-1833). Public domain.

One of the first decisions of the Portuguese government upon arrival in Rio had been to declare the ports of Brazil open to trade with "all friendly nations". The idea that countries should keep their markets open to trade with all nations, rather than closed or protected, was in line with the precepts of free trade advocated at the time, meaning that nations benefit the most when they can import/export products with the largest possible number of countries in a kind of "informal empire" governed by trade (Maxwell, p. 5). Free trade, with little or no protectionism, was then the order of the day, rather than the old mercantilist barriers which had been the cause of war in previous decades. In this respect, it should not be forgotten that the transfer of the Portuguese court to Rio had been the result of Portugal's unwillingness to adhere to the Continental Blockade against the British decreed by Napoleon Bonaparte. In those days, British economic interests in Portugal were significant, as Maxwell rightly notes when he observes that they were divided into two (lobbying) groups: the wine merchants and the woolen textile exporters, both of whom wanted to maintain the old protective

tariff regime in place, and the cotton textile manufacturers from Lancashire, who favored free trade, because they received raw materials (cotton) from Northeast Brazil, namely Per-

nambuco (p. 4). The Lancashire manufacturers, thus, looked upon the possibility of an independent Brazil with benign eyes as it opened up for them commercial possibilities. For mainland Portugal cotton producers, the same was not true, given that with the old mercantilist trade barriers they would continue to have in Brazil an exclusive, off limits market for their own production.

The *Abbé* Correia da Serra worked hard in Washington to prevent the recognition of the Pernambuco republic by the US government and to foil the plan of its leaders to gather support for their cause in American territory. He sent two notes to the State Department (May 13 and May 20, 1817), addressed to Acting Secretary Richard Rush, on the issue of the Pernambuco republic. In the first of these, Correia da Serra expressed his fear that the insurgents might receive support from "the greedy and immoral part of your commercial citizens, particularly in Baltimore and New York [...]", asserting that the law



Map of Pernambuco, Recife, c. 1640. Public domain

¹²In a letter dated March 12, 1817, the provisional government of Pernambuco requested the recognition of the independence of the state by the US government, assuring American officials that the ports of the newly independent nation were open to trade. The missive was carried by Charles Bowen, an English businessman who left Recife on March 13, on board the ship "Rowen" (Verardi and Nogueira, 2017). On July 16, Gonçalves da Cruz wrote to President Monroe, asking for US recognition of the Republic of Pernambuco (Verardi and Nogueira, 2017).

passed by Congress in its last session might not be sufficient to stop the unlawful activity of these citizens due to “the lukewarm acts of some of the US officers in the seaports [...]” (Bourdon, p. 269). In the second of these diplomatic notes, Correia da Serra uses a stronger language to describe the rebellion, which he characterizes as follows:

These conspirators, without being capable of alledging [*sic*] in their publications any particular griefs [*sic*], being even obliged by force of truth to praise the Sovereign against whose authority they revolt, have corrupted the garrison of the city and put themselves in the exercise of sovereignty, compelling the unarmed population (amongst whom thousands I am sure remain in their hearts attached to their Sovereign) to the necessity of silently submitting to these self-created masters as every inhabitant of Algiers is forced by the soldier to submit to a new dey [*sic*]. (Bourdon, p. 277).

Though admitting that he possessed little information, the *Abbé* still felt that “greater perfidies” were sure to emerge in the future, conjecturing, namely, what would have happened if Shay’s rebellion had succeeded. Rush’s replies to both of these notes were polite, but short. Essentially, he informed Correia da Serra that he had forwarded this information to the President. There is evidence to suggest that both President Monroe and his Secretary of State, John Quincy Adams, were unsympathetic to Correia da Serra’s diplomatic plight. In one of his letters to Madison (May 16, 1817), Monroe stated his views on the *Abbé* in very clear terms: “He partakes strongly of the anti-revolutionary feeling on the subject, more than is strictly consistent with his liberal and philanthropical character” (Bourdon, p. 270). John Quincy Adams, on the other hand, in a letter to Jefferson a few months later, refers to the envoy from the seceding region of Brazil as “the Pernambuco ambassador”, adding that he “could not but sympathize with him” (Bourdon, p. 285)¹³. It should

¹³ Cabuga’s posts within the provisional government were Treasury Chairman (*Presidente do Erário*) and Colonel of the Army, but he was introduced in the State Department as *Chargé d’Affairs*. He met with Caesar Rodney, special envoy of the President, and William Jones, Chairman of the US Bank, on June 5 or 6, in Philadelphia. On the same day, he was handed a letter by Rodney, written by the US President Monroe, giving him permission to visit Secretary of State Rush, in Washington, to buy armament and to hire soldiers (Cabral and Ribeiro, 2011, p. 193). It is interesting to note that Pernambuco was the first Brazilian province to declare its independence from Portugal on August 29, 1821, which marks the beginning of the armed rebellion against the governor of Pernambuco, Captain General Luis do Rego Barreto – the so-called executioner (*algoz*) of the Pernambuco Revolt. The Portuguese troops stationed there surrendered on October 5, 1821, under the terms of the Beberibe Convention, which cleared the way for the expulsion of the royal army from Pernambucan territory.

be noted that it was under Monroe and his Secretary of State that the US recognized the independence of Mexico, Chile, the United Provinces of Rio de la Plata and the Brazilian Empire¹⁴.

Elsewhere, the *Abbé* characterizes the activities of the Pernambuco emissaries on US soil as “intrigues”¹⁵. Calling them “the conspirators of Pernambuco” (Bourdon, p. 277), he adds that the revolt had been put down by Portuguese authorities in seventy-seven days¹⁶. It is at this particular point in time that Correia da Serra’s predicament as an Old World diplomat becomes evident, failing to understand the aspirations of those fighting for independence in Latin America. Despite being a man of liberal ideas, there is no evidence to suggest that he supported a republican form of government. Quite the contrary, in effect, as the following excerpt, where he expresses his monarchist sympathies, seems to indicate:

... and now I have proof, besides all the other evidence I had already collected, that the Guardian Angel of our Monarchy is a most powerful and vigilant one, and it is certainly ingratitude on our part not to recognize that. (Bourdon, p. 539; author’s translation).

On another occasion, while discussing the activity of the well-known revolutionaries Jose Artigas and Simon Bolivar, Correia da Serra remarks that he wishes he could see “Brazil surrounded by monarchical governments that could keep a close eye on all the malicious activity that exists here” (Bourdon, p. 544-545; author’s translation). The truth is that the excesses of the French Revolution had remained alive in the minds of Europeans (and Americans as well) and the *Abbé* was no exception.

American Press

America’s more radical press, newspapers such as the *Georgetown Messenger*, the *National Intelligencer*, as well as the *Boston Patriot*, welcomed the emergence of the liberation movements in Central and South America, criticizing not only the activity of Portuguese and Spanish diplomats on behalf of their governments, but also American papers less

¹⁴ J. Q. Adams was pivotal in drawing up US foreign policy for Central and South America first as Secretary of State (1817-1825) and later on as President (1825-1829).

¹⁵ Letter to Francis Walker Gilmer (1790-1826), friend to both Jefferson and Correia da Serra, dated August 21, 1817. Held the chair of law at the University of Virginia from 1823 to 1825.

¹⁶ Seventy-four days, according to Verardi and Nogueira (2017).

favorable to the independence movements. Aiming to appeal to the sentiment of American readers, in colorful political language the editors of these papers invariably describe Europe's colonial powers as despotic and tyrannical. The editor of the *Aurora*, for instance, familiar as he says he is with "the Lusitanian abbe's tricks" (Bourdon, p. 343), wrote in the pages of one of its issues: "... it is a most embarrassing situation to see the presses of the country every where engaged in the palliation or vindication of Spain, or, which is worse, in corrupt array against a people struggling against the most degrading despotism..." (Bourdon, p. 343).

Clearly, the editor of the *Aurora* was deeply hostile to the Portuguese diplomat. In its January 15, 1818 edition, it printed a translation of a letter which Correia da Serra had sent to James Monroe two years before complaining about the activity of privateers and suggesting that the Portuguese minister should be expelled for overstepping his functions¹⁷. In its January 16, 1818 edition, the *Aurora* continued to attack the *Abbé*, unquestionably a man of great scientific qualities and privileged access to "polished society", as its editor observed, accusing him of acting in a dual function, that of priest and politician (Bourdon, p. 350). For the editor of the *Aurora*, it was inconceivable that a man of liberal ideas, a philosopher as well as a scientist, should oppose the emancipation of the peoples of South America. In his view, Correia da Serra was the agent of a despotic system, maybe even a spy, clearly a defender of the feudal institutions of Europe, none of which existed in America. As he puts it, in America there are no lords or barons and citizens enjoy freedom, "excepting the unfortunate African race" (Bourdon, p. 352). Neither *The Baltimore Patriot* nor *The Democratic Press*, two other radical papers, were as critical of the *Abbé*. In fact, the editor of *The Democratic Press* came out in defense of Correia da Serra saying that there were inaccuracies in the translation of the *Abbé's* letter to Monroe.

Monroe Doctrine

Without even realizing it, the *Abbé* Correia da Serra had been on a collision course with what became one of the underlying principles of American foreign policy in the years and decades that followed: the often labelled Monroe Doctrine. First clearly expounded in the 1820s, it was a response of the US government to Metternich's reactionary Holy Allian-

ce, afraid that it would succeed in bringing Spain's rebellious colonies back into its domination. Delivered to Congress by President James Monroe in his Annual Message of December 2, 1823 (although it bears the name of James Monroe, the doctrine had been formulated to a large extent by John Quincy Adams, his Secretary of State), it also aimed to protect American republics from further European colonization and to establish for the United States an area of political influence on this side of the Atlantic. In it, President Monroe had stated:

We owe it, therefore, to candor and to the amicable relations existing between the United States and those [European] Powers, to declare, that we should consider any attempt on their part to extend their system to any portion of this hemisphere, as dangerous to our peace and safety¹⁸.

The Doctrine was thus designed to exclude European powers from the New World at a time when they were attempting to reassert control over their New World possessions, following the end of the Congress of Vienna, in June 1815, and its ensuing reactionary politics. In Henry Adams's multi-volume *History of the United States during the Administrations of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison* (1889-1891), grandchild of John Quincy Adams, we find what was at stake geopolitically for the US in the earlier part of the nineteenth century, as the crumbling of the Spanish empire in the Americas had made room for the United States and Britain to get a hold of some of its territories: "England and the United States, like two vultures, hovered over the expiring empire, snatching at the morsels they most coveted..." (p. 213). Given their extensive colonial possessions in the New World, Catholic Spain and Portugal were the two nations particularly targeted by the United States, their continuing presence in the New World running counter to its desire to bring Central and South America under its sphere of influence. It is in this context that we must assess the diplomatic efforts of the *Abbé* Correia da Serra to convince the administrations of Madison and later on Monroe to put an end to the activity of the New York and Baltimore privateers and not to lend its support to rebel movements and their emissaries. Clearly, Correia da Serra failed to understand the pragmatic reach of US policy when it came to defining the country's strategic interests in the New World, for, as far as the projection of America's power in South America was

¹⁷He wrote this in the December 13, 1817 issue, where he criticizes the *Abbé* and a certain Mr. Walsh, also well known for his anti-republican writings.

¹⁸*Annals of Congress*. Senate, 18th Congress, 1st Session, p. 22. Retrieved from <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llac&fileName=041/llac041.db&recNum=7> (accessed on August 13, 2018).

concerned, even former President Jefferson agreed with his successors when he stated in a letter to the *Abbé* quite near his departure:

nothing [*sic*] is so important as that America shall separate herself from the systems of Europe, & establish one of her own. our [*sic*] circumstances, our pursuits, our interests are distinct. the [*sic*] principles of our policy should be so also. All entanglements with that quarter of the globe should be avoided if we mean that peace & justice shall be the polar stars of the american [*sic*] societies. (Davis, p. 298-299).

Conclusion

Gonçalves da Cruz's mission on US soil met only with relative success: American officials did not formally recognize the independence of Pernambuco, the support the leaders of the revolt were expecting for the independent nation and its provisional government never having materialized. All that American authorities could promise was to allow Pernambucan ships to enter US waters while the revolution lasted and to receive exiles should it fail (Gomes, 2007). They also agreed to name Joseph Ray as US General Consul in Recife, believed to be a supporter of the rebellion from the first moment (Cabral and Ribeiro, p. 198)¹⁹. Gonçalves da Cruz did succeed, however, in gaining important allies for his cause, namely John Adams, former President of the US, who had first received him in Quincy, Boston, as well the American public, in general, who could not but sympathize with the desire for self-determination of Pernambucans²⁰. The revolt itself collapsed due to internal factionalism, as is often the case, to the effectiveness of the sea blockade carried out by the Portuguese naval forces and to the armed reinforcements sent from Bahia to put down the insurgents. The leaders of the revolt were either arrested or executed, their bodies quartered, while others died in prison. Gonçalves da Cruz was declared a traitor and sentenced to death *in absentia*, remaining in the US a while longer²¹. As to the *Abbé* Correia

da Serra, despite his political and intellectual clout, the times were not easy for his diplomacy. American public opinion was not sympathetic to Old World monarchies, as we have stated, because these revolutionary movements embodied the type of aspirations colonial America had felt, too. Thus, it was particularly difficult to enforce the neutrality legislation approved by Congress and to prevent Latin American revolutionaries from gathering support in the US for their independence movements. Richard Beale Davis' closing words, therefore, sum up the diplomatic conundrum faced by *the Abbé* most aptly: "It is safe to say that whatever he might have done as minister, his cause would have been lost. Right in itself, it stood athwart the destiny of the hemisphere – and man's greed" (p. 62).

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¹⁹Joseph Ray of Pennsylvania. US Consul in Pernambuco, 1816-1820 and 1836-1842.

²⁰As confirmed by his letter to Thomas Jefferson, dated May 26, 1817, where he mentions that he had been visited by "the Pernambucan Ambassador" (qtd. in Cabral and Ribeiro, p. 195).

²¹His death sentence was lifted by royal pardon of D. Pedro I, Emperor of Brazil, in 1823, one year after the country's independence. Indeed, he was Brazil's first diplomatic representative in Washington, also appointed by the same ruler. Afterwards, Gonçalves da Cruz was able to return to Brazil, retake possession of his confiscated assets and resume his business activities. He was chosen General Consul of Bolivia in 1831, where he died in 1833 (Verardi and Nogueira, 2017).

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