

French and Dutch Incursions

In addition to dealing with labor supply, Mem de S, who was the consolidator of Portuguese Brazil, dealt successfully with the French threat. The French had continued to attack Portuguese shipping and to maintain interest in a permanent colony. Noting that Rio de Janeiro's Guanabara Bay had not been occupied, Vice Admiral Nicolas Durand de Villegaignon, a French navigator, led a mix of Huguenots and Catholics there in 1555 to establish a colony, France Antarctique, on Ilha de Sergipe. After a decade, his utopian dream of finding a religious refuge for Protestants and Catholics failed. Despite their good relations with the Indians, the French could not withstand the Portuguese assaults that began in 1565. That year, to ensure future control of the bay, Mem de S founded the city of Rio de Janeiro, which became the second royal captaincy. Expelled from Guanabara Bay in 1567, the French turned their efforts to the northern coast. They made alliances with the Indians and settled themselves on Ilha So Lus do Maranhão in 1612, where fierce fighting led to their expulsion in 1615. They kept active north of the Amazon delta, maintaining claims to Amapá.

By 1580 the Portuguese had overcome French threats and most indigenous resistance to their command of key ports. At this point, a more profound Spanish threat appeared with the passing of the crown of Portugal to King Philip II of Spain. This event had immediate and long-range consequences. Now Europe's two greatest empires were united under a single ruler and could well have been joined permanently, save for the determination of the Portuguese to maintain their identity. The Iberian union gave the Portuguese easier access to the Spanish domains. For Brazil, however, the most important result was that it made enemies of Portugal's former business associates, the Dutch. Portugal's commerce was more open than Spain's and perhaps more practical. Portugal recognized its need for shipping and for access to markets, both of which the Dutch provided for Brazilian sugar. The spirit of cooperation faded with the union of the crowns as the Dutch, long struggling for independence from the Spanish Habsburgs, were shut out officially from the Portuguese domains. This exclusion led to the formation of the Dutch West India Company in 1621 and the seizure of Brazilian sugar lands. After being unsuccessful in holding Salvador in 1624-25, the Dutch captured Pernambuco in 1630 and eventually extended their sway from the Rio So Francisco to So Lus do Maranhão until finally being forced out in 1654.

The Dutch incursion was the longest and most serious challenge to Portuguese control by a major maritime power. The struggle to drive out the Dutch had devastating effects on the sugar plantations and sugar mills. The Dutch, particularly Governor Johan Maurits, Count of Nassau, had worked to build good relations with the Portuguese planters in the interior, supplying them with credit, slaves, merchandise, and European markets. Nassau encouraged religious tolerance, constructed buildings and canals in the style of Amsterdam, and brought in artists, engineers, and scientists to embellish, record, and study the local flora, fauna, and peoples.

Portugal and its Brazilian subjects had divergent interests in responding to the Dutch. When the Duke of Bragana took the throne as Joo IV in 1640, his government faced the determination of Philip IV to reconquer Portugal, and he therefore needed to maintain peace with the rest of Europe. As much as the Portuguese economy needed the revenues from the sugar trade, the court had to face the reality that in Europe the Dutch dominated a good portion of that trade. Thus, if Portugal attacked Dutch-held Pernambuco, it would earn an enemy in Europe and lose access to the market. At the same time, the king understood the importance of Brazil when he called it his milk cow (*vaca de leite*). Indeed, historian Charles Boxer asserted that Portugal's independence depended chiefly on the Brazil trade, which centered on sugar and slavery.

The Dutch did not show the same hesitation. In 1641 they seized Luanda, an important source of African slaves, in violation of a truce with Portugal. Holland now held sugar and slave ports in the South Atlantic and the distribution system in Europe. Although Lisbon could not merely abandon its subjects in Brazil, it realized that it would be foolhardy to fight for the sugar area without also regaining the source of African slaves.

The colonists in the Dutch-occupied area played their own game of deception. They borrowed Dutch money to restore their war-torn plantations and *engenhos* and to buy slaves, but they realized that their long-term interests lay in expelling the Dutch and with them their indebtedness. After 1645, together with the governor general in Bahia, they conspired, rebelled, and fought against the Dutch. Their victories of 1648 and 1649 at the Battle of Guararapes in the Recife area of Pernambuco are commemorated today. However, after nine years of war the scorched-earth tactics had ravaged the region. Although sugar prices rose in Europe, Brazilian planters could not respond and permanently lost their leading market position. The Dutch and English set up plantations in Suriname and Barbados, taking advantage of the techniques developed in Brazil and their better access to capital, merchant fleets, and the northern European market. Although there were years of recovery (1665-80, 1698-1710), sugar was no longer the foundation of the Brazilian economy. Northeastern Brazil entered into a long stagnation, and Portugal, which now depended heavily on Brazil after its losses to the Dutch in the East Indies, watched its economy deteriorate.