

# The Mercantile Forest: timber exploration in the captaincy of Ilhéus in the eighteenth century<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the timber trade and its extraction and processing in the territory of the captaincy of Ilhéus, especially from when the Portuguese Crown started to operate this business directly. Its scale, administrative mechanisms, the destination of the trade

and its importance to the regional economy will be focused on. Also covered are aspects of political and regional relations that involved the agents of that forest based economy.

Keywords: hardwood timber; captaincy of Ilhéus; forest-based economy.

The territory of the captaincy of Ilhéus corresponded to a coastal space – now belonging to the state of Bahia – bordered to the north by the Jequiriçá River and to the south by the Jequitinhonha River. The hereditary captaincy, which ceased to exist in 1761 when it was incorporated to the royal captaincy of Bahia, was replaced by a *comarca* (roughly equivalent to a shire or county), though it kept the same territorial limits until the middle of the nineteenth century.

The economic foundation of the populations who lived in that territory during the colonial period consisted of the production of foods and activities involving the extraction and processing of forestry resources, such as the extraction of Brazil wood and timber production aimed at navel and civil construction. The latter, the objective of this study, was a branch of the colonial economy that was widespread and often connected with other sectors, such as agriculture for export and internal supply, mining and livestock raising.<sup>2</sup> In the territory in question timber based activities were directly overseen and administered by the Crown, guaranteeing a flow of income of the Royal Treasury during a one

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hundred year period (1715-1822), which not only influenced productive methods, but also the actual culture of that society.

Nevertheless, for a long time the few historians who dealt with this colonial space saw the dense forests as just one more hindrance to the country's colonization and economy.<sup>3</sup> I intend here to demonstrate the opposite: that the vigorous forests of the captaincy and later the *comarca* of Ilhéus allowed timber activities to become a profitable business for the inhabitants directly involved in the administration of felling and the in the production and transportation of finished or semi-processed planks for use in the shipyards of Lisbon and Salvador.

The analysis will focus on the dimension, mechanisms and destination of the hardwood trade carried out within the captaincy and its importance for the regional economy. Since the state played a leading role in the mismanagement of the exploitation and trade of timber, especially from the beginning of the eighteenth century onwards, it is important to understand state policies and to comprehend the various contexts in which the interests of the crown or private individuals were more emphasized.

The Historical Documents of the National Library collection (DHBN) includes various documents produced in the first half of the eighteenth century about the exploitation of hardwood in Cairu and Jequiçá districts. Based on this documentation, I intend to discuss the characteristics of exports, the rhythm and system of transport which brought the timber to the captaincy's ports for shipping to their destinations, as well as the agents involved in this business. For the second half of the eighteenth century there is a wide range of documents produced by authorities linked to the cutting of timber in the then *comarca* of Ilhéus, which provide details about various aspects of official policy, the administration of *cortes* (places where timber was cut) and the selling of timber.

## THE NAVAL INDUSTRY AND TIMBER ACTIVITIES IN BAHIA

In José Roberto do Amaral Lapa's classic study of the port of Bahia, the author highlights the intense activities involving the repair of *naus* (carracks) used in the Atlantic crossings and naval construction which had begun to expand vigorously in the sixteenth century. Lapa was impressed with the frequency that ships headed to Salvador for careening, which increased requisitions for

timber and naval carpentry, thus allowing the rise of “the prosperous extraction activity, with a complex of alternative economic relations for that newly born colonial society”.<sup>4</sup>

Use of the Atlantic Rainforest as a source of natural resources for this incipient industry has already been well demonstrated by the US historian Shawn Miller, in a pioneering work on Portuguese policy towards the economic exploitation and conservation of Brazilian forests in the colonial period (Miller, 2000). Since it was a tropical forest, the Brazilian Atlantic rainforest was an immense reserve of wood with many different properties. From early on the colonists discovered that an average of one hundred different species of trees, none found in Europe, could be found in a single hectare there. Unlike North America where the wood was similar to Europe, in Portuguese America knowledge of the properties of different species depended on the cooperation of the natives, reflected in the names given to the species encountered. Colonists knew how to take advantage of indigenous knowledge about the different properties of the timber that the natives themselves used when building their rustic vessels.

Sucupira, plathymenia, red and yellow angelim, laurel, jequitibá, oiti, pindaíba, genipa, putumuju, pau-d’arco (ipê) and tapinhoã were some of the types of wood preferred by the shipyards. All of these were abundant in the Bahian forests. However, since the administration of the first Governor General, the Crown had reserved for itself a monopoly over the so-called ‘royal wood’, although this did not prevent the wide scale exploitation of these resources by individuals in their own *sesmarias* (allotments) or in unoccupied areas.

The increased demand for timber accompanied the rate of economic expansion of the port of Salvador. In the sixteenth century not only were ships that could cross the Atlantic repaired, but some strong steps were taken in an incipient naval industry aimed at the production of private boats – such as launches and brigs – to be used as pilot vessels. In relation to the construction in Bahia of galleons and *naus* (or carracks) for the royal navy, the first budget provisions only appear at the beginning of the eighteenth century. During this century Lapa estimates one galleon per year must have been produced in Salvador (Lapa, 1968, pp.52-54).

Also sent by the colony to Portugal were large quantities of timber from Bahia, especially to meet the needs of the crown. Despite exporting less timber than the captaincies of Rio de Janeiro and Pernambuco, the port of Bahia was

probably the main supplier of the royal docks in Lisbon from the second half of the eighteenth century, according to Miller (2000, p.79).

At this time most of the timber used on the Salvador dockside and exported to the capital came from the forests of the Recôncavo region. The increased activities of the shipyards encouraged by the Crown, in parallel to the growth of royal requisitions of timber in Bahia, meant that the owners of sugar plantations in the Recôncavo region were opposed to the development of this industry.<sup>5</sup> They said that the timber from the region, such as *sucupira*, should be used to replace the wagons and vessels used to transport sugar, the colony's principal product. Similarly they were afraid of the limitations that could be imposed on the indiscriminate use of vegetal resources for firewood, as well as the creation of obstacles to the expansion of sugarcane plantations, which depended on the burning of parts of the forest for the opening of clearings. As a result, this elite, with its power to influence the decisions of the administration, strongly opposed the development of timber and naval construction activities in Salvador and the Recôncavo.

Until the second decade of the eighteenth century the Crown sent its orders to the governors, who made the acquisitions from private manufacturers without any official control over the processes of extracting, processing and transporting the timber. Then the Crown began to administer this activity directly and due to the pressure of sugarcane plantation owners moved operations involved the extraction and processing of timber to the captaincy of Ilhéus.

Nevertheless, since the sixteenth century, the extraction of timber for construction was carried out as an economic activity on Jesuit lands in the captaincy of Ilhéus, especially in the so-called *Fundo das Doze Léguas*, or the lands of Camamu. Serafim Leite cites documents that reveal judicial discussions between the Jesuits and some of their tenants about making the latter extract timber, extrapolating from this the prerogatives of lease contracts. In 1643, discussing whether or not land needed to be sold, a priest declared that the lands of Camamu were indispensable due to their manioc and timber for the construction of houses and churches, since the timber that existed in the *sertão* could not be used due to the difficulty of reaching it. In 1643 Fr. Francisco Pais, who was the superior for eight years of Camamu, Boipeba and Rio das Contas, stated that "Timber was the principal wealth of Camamu." The lands were too poor for cultivation, he said, but full of groves, good timber and good ports. In 1701 the area was important for the extraction of timber, used in the fine work of carving and carpentry in general in Bahia and in Portugal, as well as

for urban and naval construction. Priests trained as carpenters were sent to Camamu, where a hydraulic saw had been operating since 1727, and a return of 15,000 cruzados per year was expected from cutting timber. The priests had three boats for the transport of timber.<sup>6</sup>

It is important to highlight the nature of the timber industry that was created in the captaincy of Ilhéus. It was not simply an extraction based or primary processing activity, limited to the extraction of timber and the transformation of this into planks, but a more sophisticated timber activity, which in addition to primary activities – such as extraction and rough-hew – included the processing producing the final parts used in naval construction. The references that appeared in the documentation inform use about the existence of many private shipyards, which produced ribs, *chanfrões*, oars, planks for hulls, tenons, masts, supports for masts, keels, skegs, spans, *coices* for the bow and stern, topmasts, curves, rigging, interior columns, capstan bars, etc. for mid-sized and large vessels to be mounted in shipyards in Salvador and Lisbon. Also produced were small sized vessels for regional and local commercial circuits.

The size of this industry is very difficult to evaluate. Since there was no control and inspection – due to the general belief that the forest was inexhaustible –, registers of private activities in this sector were not required or produced. Furthermore, the official accounts are very confusing and much information is omitted. According to one authority from the end of the eighteenth century:

The accounting used by the Inspection of the *Cortes* and by its Clerk, by the Arsenal of Bahia, and even in the Inspector General's Office of the Royal Treasury, was very irregular and unformed. With any of these, and even using them all, it was difficult for the most able Clerk to make an exact calculation, or even know for certain the cost of each piece constructed, and even when they wanted to check the reports that accompanied the shipments of timber, not even a shadow of precision could be obtained, without letting many doubtful things pass by and letting others pass with the greatest indulgence.<sup>7</sup>

Shawn Miller also noted that the shipments of timber to the navy arsenal were not registered in of accounting of imports by the customs of Portugal. This distorted the proportion of Brazilian timber in the total imports of this kind made in Portugal.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, for both private individuals and the official administration shipyards represented the economic sector that generated the most income for a part of the population of the captaincy, and later the *comarca* of Ilhéus, involved directly or indirectly in this business.

When the Crown decided to directly administer the felling of timber to meet official orders, the form adopted was that of *feitorias* (trading posts), with the first being located in the forests around the town of Cairu. As well as being close to the port of Salvador, it was outside the Jesuit lands and had numerous rivers and sandbars that allowed the movement of timber throughout the year, and was not dependent on favorable monsoons.

### CAIRU TRADING POST

In Cairu the exploitation of timber also began in the seventeenth century. In 1651, for example, the governor acknowledged the receipt of *chanfrões* that had been ordered from the then *capitão-mor* Antônio de Couros Carneiro. The same person was responsible for supplying more than one hundred oars to the governor in 1653.<sup>9</sup>

Until 1715 timber activities in Bahia and in the captaincies in the south of the country were an exclusively private business. In this year the trading post system was created to fulfill the orders of the Navy with the appointment of the first master carpenter. In 1716 Cairu Trading Post was set up, with its administrator being Manuel Teixeira de Souza. The trading post initially consisted of two cutting units – simply called *cortes* (cuts) –, one at a place called Maricoabo and the other in Taperoá.

The presence of large reserves of forest rich in construction timber and the ease of transporting this timber by river were determining factors in the choice of these sites. Later, as the forests closest to the best ports were devastated, and also when new areas rich in timber such as mahogany, potumuju, sucupira and angelim – widely used in shipyards – were discovered, other *cortes* would be opened, such as in Mapendipe, Una and Jequié.<sup>10</sup> On the navigable limit of the rivers a shipyard/port was built where the processed or semi-processed timber was transported in small vessels to the port in Salvador. After this it was transported in larger boats, such as *charruas* (a type of cargo vessel).

While official timber activities concentrated within the boundaries of Cairu, in the first half of the seventeenth century the administration was the

responsibility of four government employees: the administrator of the trading post – nominated by the governor –, a clerk, a master carpenter and a treasurer. According to Domingos Alves Branco Muniz Barreto, in subsequent years the inspection of the *cortes* was carried out by the commanders of the Morro de São Paulo prison, until the ending of the hereditary captaincy in 1761. From then on this position was the task of the magistrates of the *comarca* of Ilhéus (Memória sobre os cortes..., f.5).

Part of the local elite participated directly in the timber business, such as through the direct nomination of officials of the Cairu municipal council. The position of treasurer, for example, was rotational and was held by a resident nominated by the council. This nomination was obligatory, as indicated by correspondence in which the governor ordered the officials of that chamber to send a second name, in accordance with the regulations which limited the holding of the position to a term of three years (DHBN, vol. 43, p.346).<sup>11</sup>

The money administered by the treasurer was no small sum. In May 1724 10,000 cruzados was received to pay the forty officials (carpenters) employed in the *cortes* and another 400\$000 to pay for meat for the workers – who were threatening to leave their posts due to lack of provisions (DHBN, vol. 44, p.277 and 328). In April 1725 the expenses were greater, and the treasurer was sent 26,000 cruzados to pay for transport and workers (DHBN, vol. 72, p.95). When the cutting was made numbers of carpenters were hired depending on the volume ordered. The labor used in the felling and dragging of timber to shipment ports varied, including settlement Indians, rented slaves and soldiers from Morro de São Paulo. Activities related to the felling of timber were seasonal and obeyed not only a sequential logic of extracting, processing and transporting, but also the demands of the Royal Navy, as will be shown below. The funds provided to the treasurer circulated throughout the Captaincy.

Cairu trading post faced many administrative problems. The official correspondence highlights various situations in which the governor gave instructions to the administrator to avoid or reduce waste of all kinds, starting with the hiring of labor on a daily basis. In September 1724, for example, the governor Vasco F. C. de Meneses told the administrator that when the timber was ready it should be shipped on the *charruas*, and that it was not necessary to keep so many workers in the *corte*, “within which only leave forty, and dismiss the rest” (DHBN, vol. 44, p.328). Waste also resulted from the bad preservation of the cut and processed timber, which was left in the shipping port awaiting the arrival of the *charruas*. To prevent the wear and tear resulting

from being left in the open, the governor, Marques de Angeja, had to intervene in the administration to have the order to build shelters to store the timber fulfilled, “because the Master was saying there was a difficulty with this and with moving the timber, it is much less damaging to spend some money than for it to become rotten ... as has happened to much that has been cut for the Royal Treasury, and has been lost” (DHBN, vol. 42, p.358).

In addition to wastage, another reason for the criticisms made of the administration of Cairu trading post was the constant resort to the use of force to move timber through the forest and the water. The dragging of timber – or logs, the word more commonly used –, which could be a source of income for the local owner of a small herd of oxen, became a motive of oppression practiced in the interests of the state. Often the need to take advantage of the voyage of certain fleet that was sailing from Salvador to Lisbon meant that the movement of timber had to be hurried. When the money necessary to pay for the hiring of the oxen and harnesses used in the dragging was not available, owners were often made cede their animals and the equipment for this transport, with the promise of future payment. As well as the low value paid and the long wait to receive the money determined by the arbitration of the administrators, there was the further inconvenience that the owners had to go to the place chosen by the treasurers for the payment to be made, which could signify the loss of days of work. Some tried to free themselves of this loss by getting rid of their oxen and in this case the order was that those who had bought these oxen had to be compelled to provide them (DHBN, vol. 44, p.328).

Arbitrary attitudes were also used to transport timber by canal and by sea between the trading post ports and Salvador when the governor did not have the vessels available at the time of shipment. Faced with this situation in August 1719 Conde de Vimieiro gave this instruction to the trading post administrator:

in relation to the boats that Your Mercy asks for, they are not here and so Your Mercy can take them there from those that are sailing to the ports of Jequiriçá, Boipeba and Camamu, which are the ones of use, because the barges cannot be sent as they are necessary here for another expedition. (DHBN, vol. 73, p.102)

On another occasion the governor emphasized that the administrator should send as many dozens of pieces as possible “without harming in any way the



transport of sugar and tobacco...” (DHBN, vol. 42, p.273). What was most common though was the sending by the government of mid-sized vessels – such as *charruas*, barges and *batelões* (another type of cargo vessel) – to transport the pieces from the trading post to Salvador.

From the nearby rivers which provided access to the shipyards, the circulation of the timber extracted and processed in the trading post followed the same path used in the flour trade, with the exception of an alternative route to the Recôncavo along the Jaguaripe River, since the sole destination of the timber was Salvador. As the privileged port for the inspection of the vessels coming from the south and heading to the capital, the prison and fortress of Morro de São Paulo became even more strategic, as pointed out by the Marquês de Angeja to the Overseas Council in April 1717. According to the governor the trading post was not to be treated with contempt,

since it defends the bar of Cairu, whose security is very important for the fruits that are produced to be sent in great abundance to that city [Salvador], not only those that leave by that bar from the same lands, island and rivers of Cairu, but all those from Camamu, Ilhéus and Boipeba, which enter by the bar of Boipeba seeking the shelter and security of the Reconcave of Cairu, which is now most important, due to the large amounts of timber that has been discovered in those districts. (DHBN, vol. 96, p.258)

In relation to the regularity of the shipments, from what be found in an examination of the correspondence between the governors and the administrators of the trading post they occurred once a year. After reaching Salvador the pieces destined for Lisbon were marked with an R under a crown and stored in ships for the Atlantic crossing heading for the imperial capital (DHBN, vol. 63, pp.23-41).

Official timber activity, which started with the Cairu trading post, definitely placed the captaincy of Ilhéus on the route of imperial trade. The money from the Royal Treasury for the expenses in the *cortes*, in addition to propelling a greater monetarization of the Captaincy’s economy, fed the economic and social ascension of a small group of privileged locals under the *mercês* (graces) system. This situation was prolonged in the second half of the seventeenth century, when Cairu trading post became part of the Inspectorate of Royal Timber *Cortes* in the Comarca of Ilhéus.

## ROYAL INTERESTS AND PRIVATE TIMBER INDUSTRY IN THE COMARCA OF ILHÉUS

Reports on timber activities between the end of the 1720s and the 1770s are rare. According to Domingos A. B. Muniz Barreto the administration of the *cortes* was made the responsibility of the captains – also called governors – of the fortress and prison of Morro de São Paulo (Memória sobre os cortes..., f.2).

With the end of the hereditary captaincy and the creation of the *comarca* of Ilhéus, the administration of royal orders became the responsibility of the *ouvidores* (magistrates). According to Baltazar da Silva Lisboa, the Royal Treasury ordered the opening of *cortes* of timber in accordance with the orders made by Lisbon to meet the needs of the Royal Naval Arsenal. When these orders were filled these *cortes* were to be closed down. A sum of money was advanced to the magistrate, who then passed it on to the administrators of each *corte*. In turn, the latter used a determined number of manufacturers, *estradeiros* and *arrastadores* depending on the quantity required. According to Lisboa, all the administrators had interests in selling the timber that they produced themselves with their slaves and their tenants, since they did not receive salaries, but only ‘praise and distinction’. The administrators, mostly local farmers, also made money from the sale of the provisions necessary to support the workers in the *cortes*.<sup>12</sup>

The decentralization of timber activities corresponded to a complete privatization of the transport system. In the place of the *charruas* and barges sent from Salvador to bring the material from the shipyards to the capital, smaller private vessels took over the freight. After being examined and measured, the timber was evaluated and the terms were drawn up with the *mestres*, who receive ‘*conhecimentos*’ (bills) to receive their payments from the *Casa da Real Fazenda* (Royal Treasury) in Salvador. According to Lisboa, many shipments of construction timber and planks were sent to Portugal in this way, while “in the shipyard of this place [Salvador], also constructed were some warships and various vessels from the Merchant Navy, which merchants use, ordered from the ship builders” (ibidem).

In the 1770s, the *Junta* (Council) of the Royal Treasury began to administer the timber *cortes*. The first inspector nominated by the *Junta*, Lourenço Antonio de Gouvêa, also held the position of magistrate of the *comarca* of Ilhéus. Since the *cortes* were concentrated in the north of the territory of the former captaincy, the residency of the magistrate was fixed in Cairu, although

did not signify the formal transfer of the capital of the *Comarca*, which continued to be the town of São Jorge dos Ilhéus. The second inspector – Luis Caetano Simões – was the *Sargento-mor* of the Auxiliary Cavalry and did not hesitate to use force to get the necessary oxen for moving the timber from the place of felling to the port-shipyard. According to Domingos A. B. Muniz Barreto, the effect of this arbitrariness was the disorganization of the manioc crop, since the inspector only took into consideration the deadlines for the shipments of timber, and not the agricultural system being used which had its own calendar, (*Memória sobre os cortes...*, f.3-6). The inspector received a subsidy of 200\$000 réis per annum and was accompanied by a clerk and a stockman, who received salaries of 60\$000 réis per annum (*Memória sobre as matas...*, f.5-6).

In November 1776 during the governorship of Marquês de Valença, Inspector Simões was dismissed, with responsibility for the *cortes* being given to private administrators. In 1780, the *Junta* of the Royal Treasury ordered the opening of new *cortes*, recommending, however, that the diligences for this be undertaken in a ‘soft’ manner,

without vexation in the manner practiced by the merchants, purchasing in a mercantile form the timber parts, and paying in a timely manner without the heavy handed practices of taking by force the oxen for drives, and nor shall anything be taken from the merchants who are building their ships, and without any other type of violence... (ibidem, f.10)

Francisco Nunes da Costa, a magistrate, was nominated inspector for the *comarca* of Ilhéus. His official appointment, drafted on 27 March 1781, established a salary of 200\$000 réis per year until August 1785, when it would be increased by a further 40\$000. The secretary would also receive 200\$000 réis as a salary, due to the “many orders for Lisbon and samples of timber requested...”. According to Baltazar da Silva Lisboa, who had access to the Inspectorate’s books, the Royal Treasury spent the sum of 500\$000 réis on the royal *cortes* every year. What he meant was just on wages, since on a single order in 1782 the Royal Treasury paid 1727\$000 réis, for the shipment of 142 pieces of construction timber (ibidem).

At this time, in addition to the districts of Cairu, the forests adjacent to the Jequiriçá river also appear as important areas for the extraction and processing of timber.<sup>13</sup> Towards the south of the *comarca* of Ilhéus, along the banks of the

Jequié, Jordão, Igrapiúna and Pinaré rivers, in the lands belonging to the Jesuits, timber was obtained by private individuals under official control. In this areas manioc growing also expanded, in the same areas where there occurred abundances of the arboreal species most important for naval and civil construction, contributing to the destruction of a natural asset considered strategic by the Crown. The new inspector soon became aware of the need for emergency measures to save the forests in the aforementioned areas from the iron and fire of the farmers and timber manufacturers operating there. In July 1784, Francisco Nunes da Costa sent a petition to the queen, in which he lamented the lack of legislation aimed at the preservation of forests and called attention to the urgent need to seek “by royal authority the competent medicine for the damage by which the admirable forests... are being ruined”. Due to the prodigious abundance of timber, which had seemed inexhaustible at the beginning of the Colony, “no competent method or legislation was established to regulate the extraction and preservation of this continent...”. The inspector, and also the magistrate of the *comarca* of Ilhéus, made reference to Portuguese legislation about the subject, especially the various regulations for the pine forest of Leiria and the wide-ranging measures incorporated into the regulations for the park of Monteiro-Mor, including the provisions to notify the owners of private forests from which the Crown wished to take wood.<sup>14</sup>

The warning was justified by the rapid destruction that the Jequiriçá forests suffered, as did, to a lesser extent, all the forests located between Cairu and the Contas River. According to the author of the petition,

The damage caused by the so-called *roceiros* (peasants) of Nazaré is so serious. In less than six years they have advanced more than twelve leagues and are currently occupying the headwaters of the Jequiriçá River, where ignoring continual warnings and even judicial notifications, they have reduced to ash precious forests as old as the world, resulting in a loss that cannot be calculated. (ibidem, p.172)

It was thus proposed to demarcate the virgin forests that still remained, while the *roceiros* being obliged to plant their crops “in the immense forest that have already been used and are commonly called *capoeiras*”. The forests located in unoccupied or unclaimed areas needed to be protected. In response the governor ordered an imaginary line to be drawn up to demarcate the forests best suited to obtaining timber and prohibited the expansion of agriculture in these areas under the penalty of prison, etc. Also nominated were a master and

guard of the royal forests from Mapendipe to the forests of Santarém (currently the municipality of Ituberá) and Igrapiúna, from which no one could extract timber without a license from the Inspectorate. These measures were largely taken at a moment at which the demand for timber for the Crown and for private shipyards was expanding.

Judge Lisboa, in turn, noted that the orders were made through various official letters issued by the governor, D. Fernando José de Portugal, which asked for pieces in accordance with the quantities and specifications determined by the Arsenal of the Royal Navy. Royal orders prioritized planks and boards to the detriment of ready-made pieces, certainly because the master carpenters were working in Salvador. Also specified were the types of timber and uses it would be put to:

timber from jequitibá, paraíba, oiticica, amargosa, cedar, yellow pine, jacarandá, flamboyant, mataúba, oil-tree, laurel and other types of trees for planks for coverage and for interior works on *naus* and frigates and jequitibá especially for masts, with it being ordered that planks with a width of six palms be sent, counting their length and with a thickness of at least four inches.<sup>15</sup>

In the annotations made by Baltazar da Silva Lisboa about the shipments made at the time of the inspection of Francisco Nunes da Costa, there is reference to the opening of a new *corte* close to the Contas River, from where Brazil wood and timber for construction were obtained. The latter was used for the building of a new frigate, but also for new works that were being carried out in the *paço* (the royal palace) and for the rebuilding of other buildings owned by the Crown. As can be seen official civil construction, stimulated by the need to reconstruct public buildings in Lisbon after the earthquake, also contributed to the increased demand for timber from the *comarca* of Ilhéus.

Nevertheless, the principal demand came from the economic region of which the former captaincy of Ilhéus was a part. Sugar boxes were exported to the Recôncavo, boards, planks and readymade pieces for official and private naval production were sent to the capital. Possibly most of the timber extracted was consumed within the *comarca* itself. The local naval industry grew, propelled by the agricultural boom of the final decades of the seventeenth century.<sup>16</sup> In this context when the Crown began to take responsibility for a more rational use of forest resources, private local interests had already become sufficiently strong to put up strong resistance to official conservational measures.

Morton demonstrated that an association had been formed by the landholders involved directly in the *cortes*. The manufacturers – generally owning or possessing land, crops and cattle – joined with the owners of boats in the common practice of making transport to Salvador easier, since freight was one of the factors with highest costs in timber enterprises. This practice contributed to make the groups which dominated this sector of the economy even more closed (Morton, 1978).

Paradoxically, it was the Royal Treasury that sponsored the ascension of these manufacturers. According to Domingos A. B. Muniz Barreto, the illnesses suffered by the inspector Francisco Nunes da Costa reduced his zeal. As a result he spent most of his time in Salvador, looking after his health.<sup>17</sup> The money advanced to him by the Royal Treasury to pay for orders, was passed on by the magistrate to ‘his’ administrators,

who did not repay the trust that the Minister had in them, and only made payments to those timber manufacturers who were sponsored and specialized by the aforesaid administrators, paying them considerable sums for a future service they would do, with the result that many timber manufacturers were left unpaid, but who were nevertheless obliged to continue working in the cut by a blind and violent obedience.

The work shifts of those newly established [manufacturers] were as arbitrary as those established by Inspector Luis Cateno Simões for the manufacturers, since they were very reduced, and also later due to the notable excess of the administrators of his successors, with serious harm to the Royal Treasury.

Those administrators also took the liberty (without any superior order) to ship mahogany and potumuju planks and no one was authorized to negotiate this type of timber but, as I have said, those administrators made a monopoly of their license, in such a way that all the orders of this type, as well as the manufacture of canoes, were filled by them, once they were made from mahogany or potumuju. (Memória sobre os cortes..., f.4)

Through the hands of the colonial administration a group of manufacturers came to control not just production for official orders, but also the private timber trade for small vessels – such as canoes – used in the transport of passengers and in local and regional commerce.

After the death of Francisco Nunes da Costa in 1794, the same administrators nominated by the magistrate remained in charge of the *cortes*, being directly

responsible to the *Junta*. The Crown did not nominate either a new inspector nor new administrators, with the *cortes* being the responsibility of only three men. According to Domingos A. B. Muniz Barreto,

These three administrators, since they had been raised with and were used to the abuses of the previous administration, followed not only the same vices as before, but put things in a worse condition, as was very natural to happen in a brainless administration. Each of them sought to achieve their own private desires and joining hands advantageously achieved their project: They bought many black slaves coming from Africa, and even savages, and without the minimum idea of how to cut wood they earned the daily pay of expert rough-hewers.

The dragging of the logs with harnessed oxen was even more onerous to the Royal Treasury than when carried out by the former Inspectorate of that minister. The agreement made by the three Administrators gave rise to the order that the payments for this dragging be preceded by an evaluation. This decision meant that when these evaluations should have been based on distance and the place from where the dragging started, and equally taking into account the length of the logs, and whether or not they were to return, to the contrary they were based on the number of yokes of oxen used, which being the property of the same administrators, who had joined together, or agreed with each other, all being in agreement, and thus they did not calculate the pairs of oxen, which were necessary for any log, and with hands joined they evaluated each other's dragging, and they did well with serious harm to the Royal Treasury; on another occasion they were equally rewarded and favored their companions, (*ibidem*, f.17).<sup>18</sup>

Some of the manufacturers who benefitted from the scheme are highlighted in the petitions of the time. This is the case of José Roiz de Oliveira, who according to Barreto, supplied timber to both the navy and the merchant marine, "from which he acquired fortune, credit and wealth". The merchant navy was highlighted by Judge Lisboa as being most responsible for the great demand for timber at that time. Supply was the responsibility of the administrators of the royal *cortes* and Fr. Francisco Malta, "from where came the source of so much wealth, since half a dozen men could satisfy the merchant market". In relation to the orders of the Royal Navy, the judge argued that if at times they were filled by individuals, this was not the result of the impossibility of the royal *cortes* providing the supply, but because since the death of Francisco Nunes da Costa, "the *cortes* had been halted for a long time,

because the orders were not made in advance, as well as that administration being irregular” (ibidem). Private individuals were getting stronger and taking over the spaces left by the weak official administration.

The formula that favored a small group of local manufacturers was well crystallized when the Crown resolved to impose broader measures aiming to preserve the best forests for its own use, as Francisco Nunes da Costa had proposed more than ten years previously. To implement this it counted on the effective participation of the recently appointed magistrate to the *comarca* of Ilhéus, Baltazar da Silva Lisboa. In March 1797 a royal letter decreed that all the forests and groves found along the coast or navigable rivers that emptied directly into the sea were the exclusive property of the Crown, in addition to “wherever rafts can lead the cut timber to the beaches” (ibidem). Owners, as proven by *sesmaria* (allotment) or purchase records, would be indemnified with equivalent land in unspecified places. A Timber Conservatory was created and Judge Lisboa was nominated the first Magistrate for the Preservation of the Forests of the *Comarca* of Ilhéus. The same judge was given responsibility for carrying out a new inspection in the areas of the *Comarca* that had potential for extraction. All these actions, aimed at the preservation of the forests for the exclusive use of the royal service, were designed and implemented in the form of a ‘plan,’ as it was known by society at the time. The greatest impact they had on the functioning of the timber and manufactured parts market was due to the paragraph that stipulated that even those private individuals owning land could not take and sell their timber without a license from the preservation judge. Mahogany, potumuju, tapinhoã and oiti became royal reserves and could only be obtained to fulfill orders from the Royal Navy, with their prices being determined by the judge.<sup>19</sup>

As noted by Morton, these measures created a royal monopsony (1978, p.40). According to the testimony of Domingos A. B. Muniz Barreto, the preservation magistrate was responsible for filling all royal orders. To pay for the expenses he received the quantity of two *contos* of réis per month from the Royal Treasury. He had at his disposal a clerk, a general administrator, five assistants and a stockman, “all these salaries being due annually” (Memória sobre os cortes..., f.31).<sup>20</sup>

The preservation magistrate appears to have found an interesting formula to keep the prices that the Royal Treasury paid to manufacturers down. One of the greatest critics of the plan, Captain Muniz Barreto, accused the judge of favoring four manufacturers from the Jequié River, who were given a monopoly



over the so-called softwoods – camaçari and laurel, amongst others – as compensation for the prices at which they were obliged to sell mahogany and potumaju planks to the Royal Treasury, “leaving out numerous men who subsisted from the felling and cutting of other hardwoods and who supported their families from the profits of this trade, and who afterwards fell into the most onerous indigence” (ibidem, f.23).

I will not spend much time on the presentation and detailed analysis of the plan for the preservation of timber and the conflicts between a group of interested local individuals and the public authorities – represented by Judge Lisboa – because this has already been done in a convincing manner by Morton. It is sufficient to note that the resistance came from a group of more or less sixty individuals directly involved with the extraction, processing and transport of timber and pieces for shipbuilding, principally led by José de Sá Accioli Bitencourt.<sup>21</sup> This man was one of the new investors who had established themselves in the *Comarca* and had soon purchased the old Jesuit lands and invested in machinery for the extraction and processing of timber.<sup>22</sup>

In this tussle private interests prevailed. From then on the exploitation of timber would be free and production would only be subject to the taxes occasionally determined by the Crown. The arguments of Judge Lisboa against “the numerous evils arising out of the unrestricted liberty of each person to cut the logs they wanted on the lands they held” (*Ofícios de Baltazar...*, f.18) did not prevail in a context more welcoming to the principals of political economy of Adam Smith. Economic liberty and the unlimited right to private property were highlighted by local leaders – such as José de Sá Accioli Bitencourt, Manoel Ferreira da Câmara and Domingos A. B. Muniz Barreto – as the panacea to the principal problems that involved the *comarca* of Ilhéus from the turn to the seventeenth century to the nineteenth: in first place, the production of flour had to be expanded to guarantee an offer capable of responding to the growing internal and external markets; second, the *sertão* had to be occupied to integrate the indigenous peoples and to open roads to allow the movement of cattle from the livestock camps in the Ressaca mountains; finally, less intervention of the state in the production of timber and the total freedom of the manufacturers was highlighted as a good, as it was believed that competition would be the greatest stimulation of a more rational, economic and less predatory exploitation of the forests in the *comarca* of Ilhéus and other part of the Atlantic rainforest.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

It can be concluded that, in addition to giving greater vigor to the regional commercial circuit around Salvador, timber activities for shipbuilding and civil construction involved the captaincy and *comarca* of Ilhéus in the imperial market, permitting the obtaining of resources directly from the Royal Treasury. The Atlantic Rainforest thus provided a flow of income capable of promoting the economic occupation of various spaces along the coastline and the economic and social ascension of a local group of timber manufacturers and transporters.

The capital generated in these activities circulated through the territory of the former Captaincy as salaries and daily wages. Various farmers who provided food to the *cortes* were paid and employment and income were created for various cattle drivers, *estradeiros* and masters of vessels involved in the different stages of transporting the timber. Furthermore, it stimulated the acquisition of slaves by local landholders, considering the constant requisition of leased groups of slaves for seasonal labor in the royal trading posts.

Pointing to the forest as an obstacle to the occupation and economic development of the captaincy and *comarca* of Ilhéus is based on the assumption that its immensity of natural resources would have passed unperceived by the colonists who lived there. Since practically everywhere along the coast there was some sort of timber activity, the opposite is more correct. The forest was actually a further port of entry for Portuguese mercantilism.

The economic exploitation of the Atlantic rainforest also caused the transformation of the landscape and the dynamics of forestry ecosystems, since it promoted the devastation of various points of riparian forests. The occurrence of species there with a high mercantile value – such as mahogany, sucupira and potomuju – located in parts of the forest where they could be moved along waterways, guided the establishment of productive units that became the nuclei of future towns and cities, but also determined the precocious reduction of the populations of the most valorized species.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This article is a modified version of part of the fourth chapter of my doctoral dissertation: Dias, Marcelo Henrique. *Economia, sociedade e paisagens da capitania e comarca de Ilhéus no período colonial*. Niterói, PPGH-UFF, 2007. I would like to thank Uesc for the support

provided to write this paper and the Postgraduate Program in History of UFF, especially Prof. Sheila Faria, for her supervision and friendship.

<sup>2</sup> Cabral, Diogo de C. Madeireiros do Brasil colonial. *Ciência Hoje*, v.212, n.36, pp.16-19, 2005; Miller, Shawn. *Fruitless Trees: Portuguese conservation and Brazil's colonial timber*. Stanford University Press, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Freitas, Antonio F. G. De; Paraíso, Maria H. *Caminhos ao encontro do mundo: a capitania, os frutos de ouro e a Princesa do Sul*. Ilhéus (BA): Editus, 2001, p.21.

<sup>4</sup> Lapa, José Roberto do Amaral. *A Bahia e a carreira da Índia*. São Paulo: Cia. Ed. Nacional; Edusp, 1968, p.25.

<sup>5</sup> Morton, F. W. O. The royal timber in late colonial Bahia. *Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 58, no. 1, Feb. 1978, p.42.

<sup>6</sup> Leite, Serafim. *História da Companhia de Jesus no Brasil*. Lisboa: Livraria Portuguesa, 1938. t.5, p.203.

<sup>7</sup> Memória sobre os cortes de construction timber estabelecidos na comarca de São Jorge dos Ilhéus (Authorship attributed to Domingos Alves Branco Munis Barreto; probable year, 1800). Biblioteca Nacional do Rio de Janeiro (hereafter BN), Ms 512 (47, doc. 2). Hereafter references to this document will be made in the body of the text.

<sup>8</sup> “Many timber exports were not systematically recorded for the simple reason that they belonged to the king and were thus of a different category. Likewise, brazilwood, whale oil, and diamonds, all royal monopolies, only occasionally made up part of regular export statistics” (Miller, 2000, p.94).

<sup>9</sup> Coleção Documentos Históricos da Biblioteca Nacional do Rio de Janeiro, vol. III of series E 1, p.135. From now on references to this collection will be made in the body of the text, with the abbreviation DHBN.

<sup>10</sup> These *cortes* gave rise to settlements that still exist. Maricoabo and Mapendipe are districts in the municipality of Valença, which emerged out of the *corte* of Una. The old village of Jequié grew into the current city of Nilo Peçanha.

<sup>11</sup> In another letter, this one from 1719, the governor Conde de Vimieiro requested the officials of Cairu Council to hasten the nomination of the first name chosen “to make him responsible for the duties of the said office, or to get the second, whatever is necessary to make Lucas de Afonseca, the current Treasurer to presents his accounts, since he has completed his three years (in office)” (DHBN, vol. 73, p.215).

<sup>12</sup> *Estradeiros*, or pathbreakers, were the men responsible for opening the roads along which the timber would be pulled by the oxen. The *arrastadores*, or conductors, were the owners of oxen and the equipment – *juntas* or harnesses –, who normally hired the *carroceiros*, or wagoners, to conduct the animals. The unit value of the hire was based on the number of harnesses used in the drive. According to Baltazar da Silva Lisboa, each harness was hired for the sum of 16 to 18 réis per day (Memória sobre as matas da comarca de Ilhéus, cortes de madeiras, regulamento dos cortes e estado atual ... por Baltazar da Silva

Lisboa, 1803, f.8. BN, ms. 512 – 56, doc. 24, f.3-4). References to this document will be made in the body of the text from now on.

<sup>13</sup> Although the Jequiriçá river valley was within the boundaries of the town of Jaguaripe, and thus outside the limits of the *comarca* of Ilhéus, it was under the jurisdiction of the magistrate of the latter town, since it was part of the timber production circuit that had expanded from Cairu trading post.

<sup>14</sup> *Revista do Instituto Histórico e Geográfico do Brasil*, vol. 12, pp.170-173.

<sup>15</sup> In the sequence of the annotations: "...jequitibá, oil or laurel logs for the masts. The potumuju planks sent were of excellent quality and preferred by constructors to the mahogany in some works and even better for masts than northern pine. There are also many orders that ask that timber or readymade pieces be sent directly, such as keel planks, sleepers, trusses, planks, spans, *cadouças* and some transoms, *capelas*, all for the bow, curves, ribs and waddings... Another report, from 1792, requested mahogany curves and planks for sides, mahogany and potumuju planks with different gauges, oars, three masts and a large jequitibá beam [for which] the amount 1200\$000 réis is sent". The largest orders, however, were for mahogany planks and boards. In a single order from 1795, 227 mahogany planks were requested, with lengths of between 15 and 25 palms. The timber now lacking in the *comarca* of Ilhéus was requisitioned from the *cortes* of Alagoas (*Ofícios de Baltazar da Silva Lisboa sobre cortes de madeira na Bahia, 1800-1808*, f.17. BN, ms. 512. 55 doc. 36, f.59-69).

<sup>16</sup> "The volume of shipbuilding, especially in the private yards, increased so greatly that by 1795 the Bahian shipyards could be described as having built the greater part of the Portuguese marine. Such private shipbuilding pushed up costs by competing with the crown for the limited supply of skilled labor and raw materials. Competition for timber in particular became more acute as the value of more Brazilian species was recognized; and the huge timbers needed for warships all too often were sawed into easily transportable sizes suitable for merchantmen" (Miller, 2000, p.47). The author's sources are: Letter from Luis Pinto de Souza to D. Fernando José de Portugal. Queluz, 22 October 1795. BN I-1,4,8, f.231, and Letter from José Francisco de Perné, Intendent of the Navy, to D. Fernando J. de Portugal. Bahia, 30 August 1800. BN II-34, 5, 103, no.4.

<sup>17</sup> To the contrary of the opinion of Domingos Muniz Barreto in relation to the administration of Judge Francisco Nunes da Costa, Judge Lisboa said that he could not omit "the respective representations made in favor of that Minister found in the letterbooks of that archive, who with his presidency, activity and zeal knew how to combine public and private interests with those of the Royal Treasury" (*Memória sobre as matas...*, f.14).

<sup>18</sup> Even considering the truthfulness of the witnesses who report the maladministration of the funding of the *cortes*, Morton, who analyzed a larger number of documents produced at the time on this subject, considered that the system was advantageous for the Crown due to the flexibility of not having a fixed cost (1978, p.46).

<sup>19</sup> "The canoes made from the same type of timber [mahogany and potumuju], since they were then the best and most durable for the service of famers to travel on rivers, were

equally embargoed and no one dared make them without the license of the preservation judge for which protection was always necessary” (Memória sobre os cortes..., f.23).

<sup>20</sup> Baltazar da Silva Lisboa declared that the annual salaries of the Conservatory staff in 1800 were: preservation magistrate, 1.000\$000; administrator, 500\$000; his assistant, 200\$000; clerk, 300\$000; his assistant, 150\$000; stockman, 200\$000. The total was 2350\$000 réis per year. (Memória sobre as matas..., f.31).

<sup>21</sup> About José Sá, see MORTON, 1978, p.55. José de Sá was the author of the petition to the monarch in which he highlighted various reasons to refute the plan defended by Baltazar da Silva Lisboa. The judge, in turn, responded in the form of another petition, in which he questioned the legitimacy of the refutation presented by his adversary, whose support in local society was said to be the fruit of ‘sinister machinations’ (*Ofícios de Baltazar...*, f.6).

<sup>22</sup> According to Judge Lisboa, his adversary, José de Sá Bitencourt, had purchased some land in the headwaters of the Pinaré River and intended to remove sucupira timber from there without using the methods stipulated in the plan (*Documentos relativos ao corte de madeiras na Comarca de Ilhéus do Ouvidor Baltazar da Silva Lisboa. Queluz, Valença, 1791-1806*. BN ms 512. 47, doc. 8, fs. 05-06).