



Erste europäische Internetzeitschrift für Rechtsgeschichte

<https://www.forhistiur.de>

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11. 05. 2021

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Erstveröffentlichung

Zitiervorschlag

<https://forhistiur.net/2021-05-pedrosa-costa/>

ISSN 1860-5605

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Nicolau de Souza: the trajectory of a slave-owning slave, Brazil, 1812-1835¹

Abstract

This article discusses the history of Nicolau, a slave belonging to the Order of St. Benedict in Pernambuco (Brazil). This work aims at discussing the slave-owning condition achieved by several captives of this institution. Some cases which were found in the documents show that captives owned several slaves, leaving them as inheritance to their heirs or using them to free themselves or their loved ones. Among the most emblematic cases in Brazil, Nicolau, who possessed at least nine slaves at the same time, will be the focus on this article.

Benedictine monks arrived in Brazil when this region was part of the Portuguese domain, in a context of expansion of sugar production, mainly in the captaincies of São Vicente, Bahia and Pernambuco. The first monasteries were founded in the 16th century in the cities of Salvador, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Olinda.² The Benedictine Order of Brazil, like so many other orders, owned a large number of slaves, who were acquired - over the centuries - through donations, bequests and purchases.

However, from the 19th century onwards, the acquisition of captives to supply the internal needs of their various properties diminished dramatically. Since then, the order relied mainly on the reproduction of their own slaves. Buying captives was no longer a recurring practice, used only as a last resort. Legacies and donations were also no longer present in the 19th century.³

The monks then had to develop new strategies to supply captive labour. Therefore, monks encouraged the formation of slave families, granting benefits to women who procreated, besides facilitating manumission for those with many children. All these measures contributed to the stable number of slaves in the order throughout the 1800s. Such strategies were improved after the discussions held at the triennial meetings (*Capítulo Geral*/General Chapter), which ensured the stability of Benedictine slave labour until at least 1850. From that date,⁴ the number of slaves

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¹ A version of this article was published in Portuguese. See: COSTA, Robson Pedrosa, “Um senhor de escravo em cativo: a trajetória de Nicolau de Souza, Pernambuco, 1812-1835”, *Revista Territórios & Fronteiras* 10, n° 01 (Jan-Jul 2017), pp. 47-66, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22228/rt-f.v10i1.627>

² KAPSTER, Oliver, “The Benedictines in Brazil”, *The American Benedictine Review* 28, no. 2 (June 1977), pp. 123-132.

³ Conclusions taken from the analysis of the following documents: “Livro de Tombo do Mosteiro de Olinda”, *Revista do Instituto Arqueológico, Histórico e Geográfico Pernambucano*, V. XLI, 1946-1947 (Recife: Imprensa Oficial, 1948); “Estados do Mosteiro de São Bento de Olinda” (Books/Livros: 1700-1769, 211, n.2; 1778-1780, Livro 212; 1784-1786, Livro 213; 1789-1793, Livro 214; “Estados do Mosteiro de São Bento de Olinda desde o ano de 1828 até 1893”, in “Manuscritos do Arquivo do Mosteiro de São Bento”, *Revista do Instituto Arqueológico, Histórico e Geográfico Pernambucano*, Vol. XLII, 1948-1949 (1952).

⁴ In 1850, the government enacted a new law that definitively abolished the slave trade from Africa to Brazil. Several farmers suffered from a lack of labor. One of the consequences was the identification of inter-provincial trafficking, due to the expansion of coffee production in the central-southeast provinces (Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Minas Gerais). Many producers in Northeastern Brazil (including Pernambuco) started selling their slaves to the South. CONRAD, Robert, *The Destruction of Brazilian Slavery 1850–1888* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), Chapter 4: “The Inter-provincial slave trade”.

began to gradually fall, until the total liberation in 1871,⁵ when the Benedictines anticipated the Imperial Government and released all their enslaved people.⁶ Until the mid-19th century, they did not regularly buy slaves, mainly relying on encouraging internal procreation.

In Pernambuco (province located in the Northeast),⁷ at the end of the 18th century, 408 people were still enslaved in their sugar mills.⁸ In 1865, this number fell to a total of 298⁹, due to increased manumission, a consequence of the decrease in the number of religious members over the nineteenth century (1794)¹⁰ – which decreased to just four in the 1860s.¹¹ This small number of monks had a direct impact direct on slave management, hindering the task of managing so many goods and so many slaves spread across four rural estates.

In order to favour obedience to the rules of Saint Benedictine, the monks built a complex mechanism of slave relations, allegedly based on encouraging freedom, though under very specific conditions. Monks apparently encouraged their captives to offer “one slave for another” (a substitute slave), which may have contributed to the formation of a group of slaves who owned the property over other captives. We found eighteen cases of substitution, out of a total of 77 requests for manumission, which represents 23.4% of the total.¹²

In this article, we will highlight the most emblematic case of our research. It depicts the life of a slave who came to have nine captives and other possessions. His name became known in historiography for being mentioned by English traveller Henry Koster, who lived in an *engenho* (sugar mill) near the property where this Benedictine slave lived. The manorial power Nicolau achieved caught the attention of several historians,¹³ who cited this case in their studies.¹⁴

⁵ On 28 September 1871, the government enacted the Free Womb Law, which instituted the release of children born to slave women after that date.

⁶ Capítulos Gerais (General Chapters) analyzed: 1780, 1783, 1829, 1866. Arquivo do Mosteiro de São Bento de Olinda (AMSBO).

⁷ Pernambuco was one of the most important captaincies in Brazil, one of the largest producers of sugarcane. In 1821, all the Captaincies became known as Provinces.

⁸ Book/Livro 214 (1795-1799), AMSBO.

⁹ Information extracted from expense books: AMSBO, São Bernardo - Mussurepe, 1862-1873, Book 140; Mussurepe: 1863-1874, Book 143; Goitá: 1817-1835, Book 146; Jaguaribe: 1854-1870, Book 151.

¹⁰ In addition to eight priests and two lay people. From this total, 21 inhabited the Monastery and nine inhabited chapels of the sugar mill. “Copy of the list sent by M.R. Br. D. Abbot of the Monastery of Paraíba”, in “Manuscritos do Mosteiro de São Bento”, cit. Original: “Cópia da relação que mandou o M.R. Pe. D. Abade do Mosteiro da Paraíba”. This document is part of a set of transcripts published in 1952 in the Revista do Instituto Arqueológico, Histórico e Geográfico Pernambucano (Journal of the Archaeological, Historical and Geographic Institute of Pernambuco). From this moment on, this volume be referred as “Manuscritos, 1952” (The Manuscripts). There are more than 400 pages that include, among other separate documents, the following series: “Book of Councils of the Monastery of Saint Benedict of Olinda” (1793-1875); “States of the Monastery of Saint Benedict of Olinda” (1828 to 1893); “Council resolutions”. “Manuscritos do Mosteiro de São Bento de Olinda”, *Revista do Instituto Arqueológico, Histórico e Geográfico Pernambucano*, vol. XLII, 1948-1949 (1952), p. 107.

¹¹ In eleven monasteries located in Brazil, the Congregation had, in 1870, 41 monks. In Rio de Janeiro, 15 monks and in Bahia, 11. LUNA, Dom Joaquim G. de, O.S.B. *Os monges beneditinos no Brasil – Esboço Histórico*. Rio de Janeiro: Lumen Christi, 1947, pp. 36-37.

¹² COSTA, Robson Pedrosa, *Os Escravos do Santo: uma história sobre paternalismo e transgressão nas propriedades beneditinas, nos séculos XVIII e XIX* (Recife: Editora da UFPE, 2020), p. 77.

¹³ CARVALHO, Marcus J. M. de, *Liberdade: rotinas e rupturas do escravismo no Recife, 1822-1850*. (Recife: Ed. Universitária da UFPE, 2001), p. 250; CUNHA, Manuela Carneiro da. *Negros, estrangeiros: os escravos libertos*

Slave-overseers

Slave Nicolau was part of a very emblematic category in the world of slavery: he was responsible for the management and control of other captives in one of the Benedictine estates in Pernambuco - the Jaguaribe farm. In other words, he was a slave-overseer. Therefore, before entering into his private universe, some pages will be dedicated to this existing category, not only in Benedictine properties, but in many others spread throughout America. Hopefully, we will be able to better understand their world and the power they achieved. Despite being an activity also carried out by captives of lay masters, these slaves played a particularly important role in the estates of the Order of Saint Benedict. This is because, due to the lack of monks who could be permanently present in the lands, the slave-overseers were presented as a necessary alternative to the proper functioning of Benedictine possessions.

However, the overseer's role was very important in all American regions with a large slave population, notably in Brazil, the United States and Cuba. The overseer's work (*feitor*, in Brazil; *mayoral*, in Cuba) was essential especially on farms where the owners were most absent, making it essential to hire a supervisor to manage the property and the slaves. Ira Berlin says that in the southern United States, planters were forced to hand over part of their authority to "stewards and overseers - almost always white".¹⁵

Although these subordinates "were the primary beneficiaries of this downward spiral of command, slaves also gained some advantages". Sometimes planters allowed "a slave man to rise to the rank of a foreman or driver". Despite officially occupying a position subordinate to the white overseer, "these young white men generally served for only a few years before striking off on their own and they rarely gained the planters' confidence". In the daily life of slavery, drivers and foreman enjoyed considerable authority, "balancing the contradictory interests of the owner, overseer, and the mass of field hand from whence they had emerged".¹⁶

However, despite the possibility of employing a slave as a foreman, in much of the enslaving United States, the presence of white supervisors predominated. According to Eugene Genovese, "overseers were either the sons or close kin of the planters, who were learning to be planters in their own right; or floaters who usually lived up to the reputation of their class", the poor "white trash".¹⁷ Nevertheless, Brenda E. Stevenson, in her study on Loudoun County (Virginia, USA), states that "absentee owners also persistently employed black overseers, while most local slaveholders did not".

e sua volta à África (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1985), p. 40; GORENDER, Jacob. *A escravidão reabilitada* (São Paulo: Ática, 1991), p. 242; MIEKO, Nishida, "As alforrias e o papel da etnia na escravidão urbana: Salvador, Brasil, 1808-1888", *Estudos Econômicos*, vol. 23, n. 2 (1993), p. 260; SCHWARTZ, Stuart B. Schwartz, Stuart, "The plantations of St. Benedict: the Benedictine sugar mills of colonial Brazil". *The Americas* 39 (1982), pp. 1-22.

¹⁴ Expression also used by: SOARES, Carlos Eugênio Libano, "Sacramento ao pé do mar: batismo de africanos na freguesia da Conceição da Praia, Bahia, 1700-1751", *Revista de História Comparada*, Rio de Janeiro, 7, 2 (2013), pp. 47-74.

¹⁵ BERLIN, Ira, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 77.

¹⁶ BERLIN, *Generations of Captivity*, p. 77.

¹⁷ GENOVESSE, Eugene D., *Roll, Jordan, roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), p. 13.

In her research she found “five farms belonging to three absentee owners with a collective slave population of more than 50 persons all had black overseers”.¹⁸

Gloria García Rodríguez, in her study of Cuba, pointed out that the hierarchy and authority on plantations was marked by three figures: “the administrator, whose presence was required only if the operation was substantial enough to merit it; the *mayoral* (overseer), a key hired man who attended to the day-to-day productive operations and management of the work force; and, lastly, the *boyero* (ox herd or drover), who substituted for the mayoral as needed”.¹⁹

In this study, it will be possible to identify similarities, but also particularities when compared with the research mentioned above. The table below shows some captives who played the role of an overseer and their respective estates. This information was extracted from extensive documentation about slaves on the Benedictine estates of Pernambuco.

Table 1 : Overseer-slaves (Pernambuco, 1755-1870)

Name	Estate	Year
Gonçalo	São Bernardo	1755
Cosme	Mussurepe	1755
Lourenço	Mussurepe	1798
José Nereu	Non identified	1809
Nicolau	Jaguaribe	1812
José Pereira	São Bernardo	1848
Raimundo	Jaguaribe	1857
Thomaz	São Bernardo	1859
Antônio Carneiro	São Bernardo	1859
Anselmo	Jaguaribe	1862
Quirino	São Bernardo	1866
Policarpo	Jaguaribe	1866
Quirino	Mussurepe	1866
Genuíno	Mussurepe	1867

Sources: “Rol dos escravos que o mosteiro possuía em 1755” conforme o “livro de provimentos”, 1755. Arquivo do Mosteiro de São Bento de Olinda, Processos escravos – 1788.²⁰

¹⁸ STEVENSON, Brenda E., *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (New York/Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 173.

¹⁹ RODRIGUEZ, Gloria García, *Voices of the Enslaved in Nineteenth-century Cuba: A Documentary History* (Chapel Hill, University North Carolina Press, 2011), p. 23.

²⁰ Translation: “List of slaves that the monastery had in 1755” according to the “book of provisions”, 1755. Archives of the Monastery of Saint Benedict of Olinda, Slave Processes – 1788. These series do not have

Evidently, the fourteen overseers listed above do not represent the totality of slaves who played such a role in the Benedictine estates, as they only symbolize the captives mentioned in the documentation. Among the four main *engenhos* (sugar mills) and farms belonging to Benedictines, three show regularity in the use of slaves as managers. Only the Goitá mill was left out, although it does not mean that it did not use the same practice. In 1798, the Council of the Monastery of Olinda (Pernambuco, Brazil) decided to look for an overseer (*feitor*) for said mill, due to the absence of monks for this role.²¹ The issue of the lack of prelates to carry out this activity appears in other meetings. As it was the case in 1809, when the Council determined that slave José Nereu would be instituted as the *feitor* of an unidentified mill.²²

The power achieved by these slaves within the estates is difficult to measure. However, based on the data accessed, it is possible to understand some of its aspects. Out of the fourteen slave laborers listed above, five are related to the manumission process. Lourenço had asked the Council for Feliciana's freedom (his daughter), having paid 140 *mil-reis* ²³ for her freedom.²⁴ Raimundo was luckier than Lourenço. For his “good and valuable services as an overseer, carpenter and master of works (constructor)”, he obtained his freedom free of charge. However, he was already 70 years old.²⁵ Nevertheless, like most Benedictine slaves, the overseers also had to pay for their freedom, like Thomaz and Galdino. Antônio Carneiro, despite not having to pay for it in cash, received his freedom “for free”, having to render other six years of service to the Order.²⁶

Nevertheless, there were also other advantages for slaves who gained the privilege of becoming overseers. In the 1780s, Br. Antônio da Encarnação Pena, former administrator of the Mussurepe mill, recorded the various issues that disturbed him during his administration. Among the various problems encountered, he highlighted that the mill was in the hands of a “mulatto slave”, who took advantage of his position “to raise enough money to buy a slave and to obtain his own freedom”.²⁷

The overseers, even consecrated as part of a cog that intended to keep “slavery” under strict control, ended up sharing the same “vices” as their companions in misfortunes, exercising powers

page numbers and not all documents are dated; “Livro dos Conselhos do Mosteiro de São Bento de Olinda (1793-1875)”, 3 de março de 1809 (p. 154), 23 de junho de 1857 (p. 193), 3 de março 1859 (p. 196-197), 23 set. 1867 (p. 217), 1 de julho de 1801 (p. 243), in *Manuscritos*, 1952; “Resoluções do Conselho do Mosteiro de Olinda”, 1 de julho de 1801, in *Manuscritos*, 1952, p. 243; “Citação de Testemunhas, Comarca de Paudalho, 1848”. Denúncia contra os escravos José Pereira e José Maria, Memorial da Justiça de Pernambuco; “Processo Crime”: Autora: Rufina Maria Manoela. Réu: D. Abade do Mosteiro de Olinda Fr. Manoel d Conceição Monte (1862), Museu de Igarassu, seção de Manuscritos. Série: Irmandades Religiosas, Cx.4: São Bento de Jaguaribe; “Lista de escravos atuais pertencentes a este Mosteiro de S. Bento de Olinda no presente triênio de 3 de maio de 1866 até 3 de abril de 1869”, *Processos escravos, 1831-1871*, AMSBO.

²¹ “Livro dos Conselhos”, in *Manuscritos*, 1952, 28 de setembro 1798.

²² “Livro dos Conselhos”, in *Manuscritos*, 1952, 3 de março de 1809, p. 154.

²³ *Mil-reis*: main currency used during Brazil Empire. The “Real” was the official currency in the country. However, as the banknotes at the time were multiples of one thousand, the currency was typically referred to as “Mil réis” (one thousand reais), and represented as follows: 1\$000.

²⁴ “Resoluções do Conselho”, in *Manuscritos*, 1952, 1 de julho de 1801, p. 243.

²⁵ “Livro dos Conselhos”, in *Manuscritos*, 1952, 23 junho 1857, pp. 195-196.

²⁶ “Livro dos Conselhos”, in *Manuscritos*, 1952, 3 de março 1859, p. 196-197.

²⁷ Cited by Schwartz, “The plantations”, p. 17.

and practices not always desired by the monks-masters. We now shall see how the slave-overseer Nicolau de Souza, an integral part of this complex manorial universe, behaved.

A master in captivity

In 1812, Englishman Henry Koster witnessed the daily life and slave relations of one of the most important rural properties of the Benedictines in Pernambuco. The traveller rented a mill near the Jaguaribe farm and had direct contact with the routine of the slaves belonging to the monks. It also helps us to better understand the landscape of the region and the way of life of the free and enslaved population that lived nearby. According Koster, the journey from Olinda (where the monks lived)²⁸ to the given location should not have been an easy task. However, there were several rivers that gave access to the city, such as the Doce and Tapado rivers.²⁹ But the most common means of transport was still the horse.

Along the way, it was possible to see several cottages, “half concealed among the trees and the brushwood”. The cottages were built of mud and covered with coconut leaves. It was often common to see residents laying in their hammocks, hung in front of their humble homes, “with its dark-coloured owner, idly swinging backwards and forwards, raising his head as he heard the horses’ footsteps”.³⁰

When moving to the mill in May of that year, the Englishman encountered a region covered by closed forests and several hills, which required crossing in order to reach his property. Nearby (“on the other side of the nearest of these mangroves”), “the high peak of St. Bento” rose, where cassava and corn crops were produced.³¹ The “peak” was the property called by the Benedictines as *Fazenda Jaguaribe*. According to him, the lands surrounding the north, belonging to the monks, were in perfect order. In Koster’s words, the Benedictine Order was rich, with great properties. In that farm, “mandioc, maize, rice, and other food products were cultivated, supplying the convent”, with the enslaved reaching up to one hundred men and women of “all ages”.³²

However, we are not sure how many slaves in fact lived in the lands of Saint Benedict at the time Koster had arrived in the mill. Nevertheless, it is certain that all of his slaves (who could actually amount to as many as a hundred) were under the administration of a “mulatto slave”. The first contact between the two took place when Nicolau, the overseer of the property, invited the Englishman to the feast of Our Lady of Rosario (“the patroness of negroes”). The invitation had a purpose that went beyond hospitality: to prevent the fight between slaves from the two properties, which could be indicative of an old rivalry. In Koster’s own words: “on the occasion of the festival

²⁸ The city of Olinda was built on a hill overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. It was considered the capital of Pernambuco until 1827, when the neighboring city, Recife, more developed and more important politically, took its place.

²⁹ KOSTER, Henry. *Travels in Brazil*. London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme And Brown, Paternoster-row, 1816, pp. 212-213.

³⁰ KOSTER, *Travels in Brazil*, p. 193.

³¹ KOSTER, *Travels in Brazil*, p. 214.

³² KOSTER, *Travels in Brazil*, p. 226.

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came to invite me to the novena and to the *feira* [...], or rather he came to request that I would not fail to go, as he feared that my people and his might quarrel.”³³

Henry Koster stated that along with him he followed a large number of men and women to celebrate the Rosary festival. When going up the hill, he was received by a black woman who immediately invited him into her home. The chapel was built at the highest point of that elevation, which, together with the monks' house and the “row of negro huts”, formed “a semi-circle around it”. These dwellings (possibly referring to the houses of the free and liberated) were off the Maria Farinha river, “winding below among the mangroves”.³⁴

According to the chronicler, the crowd that had gathered for the festival was quite considerable. The costs and administration of the party were borne by the negroes themselves. The monks would have only been responsible for the altar services, but “the lights, the fireworks, as well as all other necessary articles were provided for by a slave committee”. Before beginning the chants and prayers in the Chapel, “the negroes spread mats in the open air” and all those who were part of their procession sat down to talk or eat cakes and sweets, of all kinds, that on sale in huge quantities.³⁵

For three nights, everything went smoothly, as the “mulatto manager” had prohibited the sale of rum. However, on the fourth night, “some liquor unfortunately found its way up the hill, and Nicolau, the manager, came in haste to” warn the traveller that several indigenous people under his command were at the point of discussion with the men in the farm. The situation was soon overcome with the energetic intervention of the Englishman.³⁶

Despite the incident, Koster showed a certain admiration not only for the efficient administration exercised by Nicolau, but also for the power he had and the contradictions that marked his life. The Englishman reported that the slave-overseer (or manager) was married to a “person of his own colour, and she also belonged to the convent”. However, she, along with her children, obtained their freedom paid by her husband. The author reported that the slave would have offered two Africans he owned in exchange for his freedom, which was denied.

The traveller tells us that the monks did not accept the offer because the overseer was crucial in the service of the Monastery, the “property would not be properly managed without his assistance”. Thus, the traveller continued his chronicle, “though much against his inclination, he continues in slavery”.³⁷

Amid the desire for freedom and submission, there was autonomy and power. These four elements were mixed and set the tone of the slave administrator's entire life. He had held this office since at least 1812 and there is evidence that it was only replaced when he died. Thus, still in 1832,

³³ KOSTER, *Travels in Brazil*, p. 226.

³⁴ KOSTER, *Travels in Brazil*, p. 227

³⁵ KOSTER, *Travels in Brazil*, p. 226.

³⁶ KOSTER, *Travels in Brazil*, p. 227.

³⁷ KOSTER, *Travels in Brazil*, p. 427.

he appeared as the overseer in the same property. A whole life dedicated to monks, but not without any return.

According to Koster, the Benedictine farm was under his complete control. Adding this autonomy to the manorial power he had achieved, Nicolau enjoyed the “comfort that any man of his description” could only “possibly wish for”. When he left the farm, he was always “well mounted as the generality of the rich planters”. He sat “in the presence of his masters”, being “allowed all the privileges of a free man”. Koster also tells us that, despite all these privileges, his desire was to become free, because “the consciousness of being under the control of another always” dominated “his mind”. Therefore, Nicolau wished “the possession of those privileges as a right, with heat present only” enjoyed “by sufferance”.³⁸

Nicolau had goods that would certainly provide him with the bargain for freedom. He could offer two slaves in return or even more, since he had at least nine captives under his power. Furthermore, other goods also made up his material universe. It is impossible to determine whether the negotiation of his freedom with the monks was as reported by the traveller. But our ideas converge on the desire to any slave in becoming free, even enjoying so many privileges as this “mulatto overseer”. In addition, at least five slave-overseers achieved freedom throughout the 19th century. As many liberated men remained in Benedictine lands, there would have been no reason for the monks to fear their manumission, as it was likely that the continuity of their services would have maintained the prestige and power achieved during captivity.³⁹

Since Nicolau had his own “*roça*”⁴⁰ and slaves, as well as a house in Jaguaribe, it is unlikely that he would have abandoned this life to enter a journey far beyond that world that he knew and enjoyed with great prominence. However, the reasons for his stay in captivity are a problem that could not have been solved, so far. In several parts of America, slaveholders granted land for the enslaved to produce for their own livelihood.⁴¹ But everything indicates that Nicolau went beyond production for subsistence.

Regarding his social condition, we believe that Nicolau would have reached the most advanced position within the limits of slavery in that rural society because, besides being a *feitor*, he was also the master of his own possessions. He would be (in the words of Luiz Geraldo Silva, referring to the liberated men), at the top of the “prestige ranking”, that is, “the respect with which they are

³⁸ KOSTER, *Travels in Brazil*, p. 427.

³⁹ As an example, we have the case of slave Clara, belonging to the Monastery of Paraíba. The 50-year-old captive received her freedom free of charge, on the condition that she “continued to be a manager [*feitora*]” at the Marauí mill. Her “good services” were recognised by the monk-masters, but the continuity of her role would remain after captivity, exercising the same position of trust and power as before. Cited by Maria da Vitória Barbosa Lima, “Liberdade interdita, liberdade reavida: escravos e libertos na Paraíba escravista (século XIX)” (PhD diss., Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, Recife, 2010), 166.

⁴⁰ In Brazil, this was the name of the small plot of land used for agriculture.

⁴¹ BERLIN, Ira and MORGAN, Philip D., *Cultivation and Culture: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas* (Charlottesville; London: University Press of Virginia, 1993): pp. 23-25.

seen by other people of their social figuration, especially the free”.⁴² However, the reasons for his stay in captivity is a problem that remains so far unsolved.

Let us now look at some aspects of this slave-overseer’s life which had not been reported by the traveller, entering a little more into the daily relationships that marked his trajectory. We do not know for sure whether Henry Koster’s information about Nicolau’s wife and children is completely untrue, since much of what he reported was passed on by others. What is certain is that Nicolau was married to a free woman, Luíza Patrícia, who took up residence with him in Jaguaribe lands. When she married the slave-overseer, Luíza Patrícia took with her a son from another relationship, named João Pacheco das Neves. Luíza died in the late 1820s, starting a legal dispute between her son and her husband Nicolau de Souza, as mentioned in the lawsuit.⁴³

This lawsuit was instituted because the two parties were unable to amicably resolve the division of goods belonging to Luíza. As the deceased’s only son, João Pacheco would have had the right to half of his mother’s goods, while the other would remain with his stepfather and executor, Nicolau. Although Perdigão Malheiros claimed that slaves had no right to inherit, Nicolau was recognised by the courts as a husband and heir to his wife. However, the Abbot of the Monastery of Olinda was appointed as his legal representative.

At this point, we face again the question of the right of slaves to the goods that they had been able to accumulate. The case is even more complex because it involves a free woman, married to a slave, and a direct heir, who enjoyed the prerogative of a free man. It is possible that Nicolau already possessed a certain estate before marrying Luíza, taking into account the information provided by Henry Koster. Other objects, mainly for personal use, were certainly in his wife’s possession, such as earrings, necklaces, cords, among others, besides, of course, other goods that he took with him into captivity, when she went to live with her slave husband.

The relationship between these spouses seemed unusual to many, and it should have evidently been avoided by many free women, especially if they had had some possessions. Nonetheless, as in this case, it was not uncommon in Brazilian slave society to unite people of different social conditions, so this did not necessarily mean a “product of lack of options”. Such a practice could “be inserted in a trajectory that would ensure survival and even social mobility”. These were strategies which in many cases can be considered successful, as in the case of Luiza and Nicolau.⁴⁴

However, considering the study carried out by Carlos Lima, this couple followed a different trend from people in a similar social condition, who tended to make marriage bonds through *upward* marriages, while men (liberated men and “free non-whites”) were more likely “egalitarian or descending marriages”, when compared to women with the same social status.⁴⁵

⁴² SILVA, Luiz Geraldo, “Free and liberated Afro-descendants and political equality in Portuguese America. Change of status, slavery and Atlantic perspective (1750-1840)”, *Almanack* [online], n.11 (2015), p. 575.

⁴³ “Sentença Formal de Partilha”, Códice “Processos Escravos, 1831-1871”, Livro 160, AMSBO.

⁴⁴ LIMA, Carlos A. M., “Além da hierarquia: famílias negras e casamento em duas freguesias do Rio de Janeiro (1765-1844)”, *Afro-Ásia* 24 (2000), pp. 132 – 134.

⁴⁵ LIMA, “Além da hierarquia”, p. 149.

Another important point concerns the enslaved spouse's right to property left by a free (or liberated) wife. No law in Brazil recognised this type of right. There was, as in other parts of America, legitimation based on Christian precepts, since marriage was, in everyone's perspective, a sacred bond. Terri Snyder, in her study on "free wives, enslaved husbands, and the Law in Early Virginia" (United States), highlights the dangers and insecurity of marriage between people of different social status. In various parts of America, codes and laws recommended or prohibited unions between enslaved and free people, unions considered "irregular marriages".⁴⁶

Nevertheless, Snyder states that these unions were tolerated and even had legal or sectoral protection in various regions of Latin America. Thus, with the help of legislation or ecclesiastical courts, it was often possible to prevent landowners from separating families or couples, in addition to condemning excessive violence and defending couples' property rights. However, in general, "as legal systems, marriage and slavery often existed in tension with one another".⁴⁷

The Abbot, representing Nicolau agreed to the reconciliation in 1830, but asked Luiza's son to inform which of the deceased's goods he held. An impasse occurred because Pacheco had disagreed on the description of the estate presented by the monk, stating that there were goods missing in that list, including two slaves: Florêncio and Josefa. Joining the lists presented by those involved to conclude the sharing process, the following goods were found.

Table II - List of goods cited in the Process⁴⁸

Object	Value
One small oratory with its "splendour" in silver ⁴⁹	4\$000
One gold crucifix with 4 "oitavas" of cord with the weight of 27 "oitavas" ⁵⁰	27\$000
One bell jar with a golden cord (measuring "três voltas" / three "loops") weighing 13 "oitavas"	13\$000
One golden image of <i>Nossa Senhora da Conceição</i> (Our Lady of Conception) weighing one "oitava"	1\$000
One pair of golden buttons weighing three and a half "oitavas"	3\$000

⁴⁶ SNYDER, Terri L., "Marriage on the Margins: Free Wives, Enslaved Husbands, and the Law in Early Virginia", *Law and History Review*, vol. 30, no. 1 (February 2012), p. 143.

⁴⁷ SNYDER, "Marriage on the Margins", p. 144.

⁴⁸ Regarding the prices in the table, it is used the format at the time: Mil réis (one thousand reais) = 1\$000.

⁴⁹ Small closet with images of saints, very popular in the homes of Catholic Brazilians.

⁵⁰ 3.56g.

One thick gold ring [□] with a stone weighing half “ <i>oitava</i> ”	1\$000
One worthless English gold ring, all broken	-
One pair of stone earrings	1\$000
Three silver spoons and one broken one, all weighing thirty “ <i>oitavas</i> ”	1\$800
Two forks weighing 14 “ <i>oitavas</i> ” each	\$8000
One large table	1\$000
One large box	1\$920
One small box	\$640
One old broken “ <i>estrado</i> ” ⁵¹	worthless
One old [□] already patched	\$800
One gold reliquary with two cord “ <i>voltas</i> ” (loops)*	-
One large hand rosary	-
One large rosary necklace	-
Two cords of arms	-
one pair of earrings	-
One comb of stones with a cord with ornaments	-
One “ <i>partido de roça</i> ” (small plot of land used for agriculture”	-
One “ <i>tacho</i> ” ⁵²	-
Subtotal	54\$260

* Objects with no values just mentioned in the process.

Estate in Possession of João Pacheco	
	Value
The value of slave Ignez	85\$000

⁵¹ Wooden structure used for breeding horses, similar to a pallet.

⁵² A large copper or iron vessel used in the mills for cooking and transforming sugarcane juice into sugar.

<i>Metade de uma morada de casas com frente de pedra e cal, e o resto de taipa, situado na cidade de Olinda a rua do Aljube</i> Some houses ⁵³ made of stone and lime, and the rest of mud (<i>Taipa</i>), located in the city of Olinda, Aljube Street	30\$000
Two stools	\$480
Money used to buy boots, rent, etc.	4\$940
Subtotal	116\$420

Source: AMSBO, "Sentença de formal de Partilha", book "Processos escravos, 1831-1871".

The objects described above bring us some important information. We find, for example, objects that reveal the presence of Catholicism inside Nicolau's and his wife's house, such as: a crucifix, an image of Our Lady of Conception, a hand rosary and another rosary necklace. As anticipated, in a property belonging to Benedictine monks, religiosity was focused on the worship of Catholic symbols.

Objects for personal use also reveal much of the family's life, who shared the daily life of slave relationships, even though she and her son were free. Golden buttons, a thick golden ring, earrings and necklaces were objects that could have numerous meanings. These jewels were common among women of African roots, even free women, such as in the case of Luíza. They could demonstrate protection or power, fertility and sexuality. "Make-up signs" (*Sinais Maquiados*), in the words of Eduardo Paiva. There are at least nine objects of adornment or devotion (even if they were Catholic) - "Penduricalhos"⁵⁴, denominates Paiva, that could reach particular meanings for their owners.⁵⁵

It is possible to think that, despite marrying a captive, Luíza had socially favoured herself superior to many men and to many women born free at that time, considering the goods owned by the couple. Many of the objects listed were not always present in most of the homes of free poor people, such as silver spoons, forks (even in small numbers) and a large table, in addition to large animals, their own gardens, slaves, houses, etc.

Many of the objects were used to support the family, used in agriculture and livestock. Besides, of course, a horse and a cow. They still possibly earned some money from renting the popular houses they owned in the city of Olinda, built of stone and lime or simply made of mud. But without a doubt, the couple's most valuable goods were slaves.

⁵³ "Metade de uma morada de casas". Possibly, small popular buildings (rooms or houses) rented to families.

⁵⁴ Ornaments/adornments hanging from the arms.

⁵⁵ PAIVA, Eduardo França, "Sociabilidade, magia e relações de poder no universo cultural afro-brasileiro", *Anales de Desclasificación* 1, no.2 (2006), p. 864.

Table III : Slaves belonging to Nicolau and Luíza

Name	Race/ Colour	Age	Role	Value	Observation
Leandra	Creole	15 years	<i>Serviço de casa</i> (Domestic Service)	200\$000	Healthy
Alberto	Creole	16 years	<i>Serviço de enxada</i> (Hoe service)	200\$000	Healthy
Domingos	Congo	30 years	Hoe service	50\$000	Sick with “gota coral” (epilepsy) ⁵⁶
Caetano	Congo	40 years	Hoe service	100\$000	Healthy
M ^a do Rosário	Congo	50 years	Hoe service	100\$000	Healthy
Maria Rita	Angola	50 years		70\$000	Sick with a lump in the breasts
Ignez*				85\$000	
Florêncio	Creole				
Josefa	Creole				
Subtotal				805\$000	

Source: AMSBO, “Sentença de formal de Partilha”, book “Processos escravos, 1831-1871”. * There is no detailed information on the last three slaves.

⁵⁶ “This is what doctors popularly called epilepsy; because it is commonly imagined that the *Gota Coral* is a drop [gota], which falls on the heart [...]”. Original: “Assim chama o vulgo, ao que os médicos chamam de epilepsia; porque imagina o vulgo, que a gota coral he uma gota, que cahe sobre o coração [...]”. MARQUES, Joseph, *Novo dicionario das linguas portugueza, e franceza, com os termos latinos. Tirado dos melhores authores, e do Vocabulario Portuguez, e Latino do P. D. Rafael Bluteau, dos Diccionarios da Academia Franceza, Universal de Trevoux, de Furetiere, de Tachard, de Richelet, de Danet, de Boyer, &c.* (Lisboa: Na Officina Patriarcal de Francisco Luiz Ameno, v.2, 1764), 325.

The couple owned at least nine slaves, at a time when being the master of more than one captive was the privilege experienced by only a handful of free men. Several studies on different regions of the country (such as in São Paulo, Vila Rica, Sorocaba, Recife) highlighted that the vast majority of slave owners fell into the category of smallholders, that is, from one to five captives. 43

Déborah Oliveira Martins dos Reis, in her study on slave ownership in Araxá (Minas Gerais, between 1816 to 1888), also noted the remarkable presence of the masters of small possessions. According to the author, the owners of up to 5 slaves represented about 58.3% of the masters in the period between 1856 and 1888.⁵⁷ Antônio Pessoa Nunes Neto found similar results in his study on “Aspects of small slavery in Recife [Pernambuco, Brazil] in the 19th century”. When analysing *post-mortem* inventories, he found that smallholders accounted for 55% of the total number of masters. According to the author, the possession of slaves, due to the high unit value of the captive, had always been restricted to a group of individuals with material conditions which could not be afforded by the vast majority of the population. Among those owners who were registered as having only one captive, “it was not uncommon for *its* value to exceed all other family goods, including monetary and non-monetary goods”.⁵⁸ 44

Francisco Luna and Iraci Costa, in their study on the liberated men as slave owners (Vila Rica, Brazil, 1738-1811), found that only 3.7% of the liberated men owned more than seven captives. Among the “not liberated”, the number reached 22.3% of slave owners.⁵⁹ 45

Flávio Versiani and José Vergolino, when analysing the pattern of slave ownership in inventories of the *agreste* and *sertão*⁶⁰ regions of Pernambuco (between 1770 and 1887), found the following data: in the *agreste* region, out of the 323 slave inventories, 54.8% included between 1 and 5 captives. Considering all the inventories consulted referring to this region (totalling 444), 27.2% of the individuals did not possess any slaves. In the *sertão* region, 52.7% of the masters boasted between 1 and 5 slaves, while 16.7% of those recorded in the inventory did not have one single slave.⁶¹ 46

According to João José Reis, a census carried out in 1849 in the city of Salvador (Bahia, Brazil) shows a list of 304 liberated men and women, revealing that only 22% (67 people) of these had slaves. Most owned only one or two slaves, while only four liberated men owned between six and eight captives. Domingos Sodré (a liberated man), object of the author’s investigation, possibly had four captives at the same time, despite having bought others later.⁶² The author also highlighted the trajectory of another released man, named Manoel Ricardo, who, while still in captivity, enjoyed all 47

⁵⁷ REIS, Déborah Oliveira Martins dos, “Araxá, 1816-1888: posse de escravos, atividades produtivas, riqueza”, XXXIV Encontro Nacional de Economia (APEC), 2006.

⁵⁸ NUNES NETO, Antonio Pessoa, “Aspectos da Escravidão de Pequeno Porte no Recife no século XIX”. *Revista do Instituto Arqueológico Histórico e Geográfico Pernambucano*. Recife, n° 61 (Jul. 2005), pp. 222- 223.

⁵⁹ LUNA, Francisco Vidal Luna and COSTA, Iraci del Nero da, “A presença do elemento forro no conjunto de proprietários de escravos em Minas”, *Ciência e Cultura*, São Paulo 32, no.7 (1980).

⁶⁰ *Agreste*: region located in the Northeast of Brazil, transition between Zona da Mata (coastal stretch) and Sertão (inland, semi-arid region). *Sertão* was a vast region located in the interior of the province, with a semi-arid climate dominated by livestock production.

⁶¹ VERSIANI and VERGOLINDO, *Preços de Escravos*, p. 14.

⁶² JREIS, João José, *Domingos Sodré, um sacerdote africano: escravidão, liberdade e candomblé na Bahia do século XIX* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2008), p. 298.

the prerogatives of a free man. In addition to having his master's permission to negotiate and live out of his control, the captive owned an African slave. According to Reis, "it is possible that another slave, named Feliciano, from Nagô descent, was also his when he purchased his manumission".⁶³

Nelson Henrique Moreira de Oliveira analysed 37 inventories (24 from freemen and 13 from liners) from the end of the 18th century. Among these, only one liberated man had more than six slaves and, among the freemen, only four.⁶⁴

Similar results were highlighted by Joseph P. Reidy, in his study on cotton plantation in Georgia (United States), between 1800 and 1880. The author claims that about two-thirds of smallholders did not have slaves. Half of the small planters who owned slaves, had a maximum of five captives. In analysing the inventories of these smallholders, he found that they "indicate equally modest holdings of work stock and implements: horses or oxen generally provided animal traction, and ploughs were of a non-descript variety".⁶⁵

Regarding the profile of Nicolau's slaves, we can say that five of them were women: two Creoles,⁶⁶ two Africans and one without identification. Of the four men, two were Creoles and two were Africans. Of the six slaves that had some value, only two had negative evaluations, as they had some type of disease. The other four were considered healthy - all of them suitable for "hoe service". Moreover, all of them were aged between 15 and 50 years old, at a full productive age. Two of them were highly valued in the slave market, as, besides being young (15 and 16 years old), they were Creoles, recognised by the slave society as more capable of working and, consequently, more expensive.

Leandra, 15 years old, was described as a "domestic servant", which indicates that her work could have been rented out to others in the neighbourhood or even in the Monastery. But it would be interesting to think about the possibility of exercising her activity inside Nicolau's own house, helping with domestic services together with Luíza. Especially because possessions like theirs could express some power for the mass of slaves in the farm.

We must keep in mind that slave ownership went beyond economic power. According to Roberto Guedes, "one of the greatest expressions of social mobility (if not the greatest) is the transition from the condition of a released man or egress from captivity to that of slave owners - and the slave property often 'whitened'".⁶⁷ The feeling should not be so different for those who remained in captivity than for those who became slaveholders. Henry Koster stated that when Nicolau left the farm, he was "well mounted as the generality of the rich

⁶³ REIS, *Domingos Sodré*, p. 228.

⁶⁴ OLIVEIRA, Nelson Henrique Moreira de, *Forros Senhores da Freguesia de Nossa Senhora da Piedade do Iguaçu – Fins do Século XVIII*, (Master's thesis, Universidade Federal Rural do Rio de Janeiro, 2010), p. 55.

⁶⁵ REIDY, Joseph P., *From Slavery to Agrarian Capitalism in the Cotton Plantation South: Central Georgia, 1800–1880* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), pp. 21-22.

⁶⁶ Creole (*Crionlo*) was an expression used to designate slaves born in Brazil. But, in the sense used in the document, it seems to indicate the colour of the skin – i.e. black. On this topic, see: Mattos, "Black Troops' and Hierarchies of Color in the Portuguese Atlantic World: The Case of Henrique Dias and His Black Regiment", *Luso-Brazilian Rev.* 45 (June 2008): 6-29, 49.

⁶⁷ GUEDES, Roberto, *Egressos do cativo: trabalho, família, aliança e mobilidade social – Porto Feliz, São Paulo, c. 1798-1850* (Rio de Janeiro: Mauad X: FAPERJ, 2008), p. 242.

planters”.⁶⁸ Certainly, Luíza Patrícia’s situation was more complicated, since she should have used several strategies to highlight her condition as a free woman.

With the exception of Leandra, the other slaves belonging to the couple were registered as hoe workers, carrying out activities that were supposed to bring good financial returns to that family. This becomes more evident when analysing the information revealed by Br. Antônio da Rainha dos Anjos, Steward⁶⁹ of the Monastery in 1822. The monk reportedly presented to the Council the situation of maladministration in which the Jaguaribe farm was found at, being then handed over to the “custody and jurisdiction” of a captive, having himself 6 or 8 slaves, who planted “great land for his profits with great detriment” to the other captives of the estate, who were “mostly married”. According to him, the so-called manager (overseer/*feitor*) gave them “little or nothing to plant to support their children”.⁷⁰

When hearing those words, the Council determined that the prelate “should watch this business very seriously and send a priest every Sunday and holy day”, both to say Mass to “those people, and to inspect the service”, as well as “to supervise the black administrator”. However, the question of slave ownership by *feitor* Nicolau does not seem to have bothered the monk-masters. What concerned them was the personal benefit enjoyed by the overseer when distributing the land across the fields. Thus, the Council established only up to two of his slaves should be assigned to that service, “in his plantation, giving the others a fate considered by him as being him off the farm”.⁷¹

With these words, we perceive the great autonomous and free power that Nicolau had achieved. The monks’ concern with his excesses and the lack of stricter action from the Council showed the Order’s dependence on slave managers. Stuart Schwartz had already pointed out that, “the larger the estate and the more distant and less intimate the relation with the master, the more freedom the slaves enjoyed in making their own arrangements and decisions”.⁷²

Carlos Lima and Katia Melo pointed out that, in absentee farms⁷³, the control and surveillance of captives was less intense, “which contributed to expanding the forms of autonomy” of the enslaved.⁷⁴ Similar conclusions were pointed out by Ira Berlin and Brenda E. Stevenson, about the absentee farms in the United States.⁷⁵

⁶⁸ KOSTER, *Travels in Brazil*, p. 427.

⁶⁹ “According to the law, this position was assigned to the buyer and spender, both of the kitchen and of everything else, that belonged to the *engenbos*, farms, etc. “Livro dos Conselhos”, in *Manuscritos*, 1952, março de 1822, p. 169.

⁷⁰ “Livro dos Conselhos”, in *Manuscritos*, 1952, 14 de maio de 1822, p. 169-170.

⁷¹ “Livro dos Conselhos”, in *Manuscritos*, 1952, 14 de maio de 1822, p. 169-170.

⁷² SCHWARTZ, Stuart, *Sugar plantations in the formation of Brazilian society: Bahia, 1550-1835* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 390.

⁷³ Farms where the owner did not live on the property, where the captives were under the responsibility of a supervisor or administrator.

⁷⁴ LIMA, Carlos A. M. and MELO, Kátia A. V. de, “A distante voz do dono: a família escrava em fazendas de absenteeistas de Curitiba (1797) e Castro (1835)”, *Afro-Ásia* 31 (2004), p. 143. See also: STEVENSON, *Life in Black*, cit.

⁷⁵ BERLIN, *Generations of Captivity*, p. 77; STEVENSON, *Life in Black and White*, p. 173.

It is important to point out that the number of monks gradually decreased in the course of the 19th century. Besides, the difficulty in delegating brethren to carry out administrative tasks, especially outside the Monastery, became increasingly difficult. The solution was to leave the management of their properties in the hands of the slave-administrators, which increased the personal power of these individuals, while allowing other members of the black community to expand their actions. **57**

This happened because Nicolau was not the only slave who owned goods within the Benedictine estates. Two other cases involving heritage and inheritance illustrate this discussion well. The first case concerns slave Micaela, who died in early June 1811. The captive had left a considerable estate to be shared among her heirs, and there were slaves as part of her estate. One of them, João Vieira, 50 years old, had rendered good services to “Religion until the end of that year”, so the Council decided to grant him freedom. The Benedictines pledged to give the value of João Vieira to his respective heirs, “children of the deceased”, excluding the third party from the suffrage.⁷⁶ One month later, slave Maria das Candeias, a captive belonging to the “defunct” Micaela, ended up being incorporated into the the Benedictine estate, who decided to stay with her by paying her value to the respective heirs.⁷⁷ Therefore, we realised that monks also used the these captives’ work, possibly paying their slave-masters the respective values for the activities performed. **58**

The second case concerns slave José Vieira, who had died in January 1817, leaving a debt of 33\$000 (*mil-reis*) to several people. Nevertheless, as he had left “a black woman”, valued at 70 *mil-reis*, “which was of no use to Religion, since she was not of service”, it was agreed that a brother of the deceased would pay the said amount for the slave. The Council voted in favour of the sale, claiming that with the money the respective debts could be paid, and any remaining money should be distributed to the children of the deceased, forcing them to say “some masses” in memory of the deceased.⁷⁸ **59**

It is important to highlight that, legally, slaves did not have any ownership rights (until 1871) over goods that they might have managed to accumulate. Therefore, they were left as inheritance to other people after their death. However, masters could allow such practices. According to Stuart Schwartz, “the possession of goods was widely recognised because it provided tranquillity for the administration of the slave system”.⁷⁹ **60**

This happened in the Benedictine estates. The monks could freely dispose of the goods left by the dying captives, but they preferred, possibly by religious principles and even as part of their slave peace policy, to grant such rights to slaves. One must remember that the Benedictine slave management model was strongly influenced by religious precepts, mainly based on the Rules of the Glorious Patriarch. Therefore, supporting their servants was not only a manorial, but also a **61**

⁷⁶ “Livro dos Conselhos”, in *Manuscritos*, 1952, junho de 1811, p. 156.

⁷⁷ “Livro dos Conselhos”, in *Manuscritos*, 1952, 05 de julho de 1811, pp. 156-157.

⁷⁸ “Livro dos Conselhos”, in *Manuscritos*, 1952, 17 de janeiro de 1817, p. 164.

⁷⁹ SCHWARTZ, *Sugar plantations*, p. 101.

Christian duty.⁸⁰ Even when there was some interest in a certain slave left by the “deceased”, there was a certain level of concern to grant the heirs their share, as in the cases of Micaela and José Vieira. Cases like these help us understand (or at least reflect upon) the complexity of the slavery relations among Benedictines.

Let us look at the outcome of our history. At the end of the process, the judge grouped the family’s goods as follows:

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Table IV - “Auto de Partilha” (Division of Goods)

Assets	Appraisal
Gold pieces	45\$500
White stone objects	3\$670
Furniture	8\$360
An old horse	12\$000
Cattle	28\$000
Patrimony held by the heir	128\$520
The slaves described in this inventory	780\$000*
Total	1:006\$050

Source: AMSBO, “Sentença de formal de Partilha”, book “Processos escravos, 1831-1871”. * We do not know why the value differs from that mentioned during the Process.

Comparing the fortune⁸¹ in Nicolau’s possession before the partition, we can conclude that this slave was much better off than countless other free and liberated men who lived in different regions at that time. Alex Andrade Costa, upon analysing the inventories from the coast of Bahia in the first decades of the 19th century, found that 25% of individuals who declared “small fortunes” had up to 500 *mil-reis*. For a region made up mostly of poor farmers, the overall average fortune did not exceed 1:000\$000 (*um conto de reis*)⁸². According to the author, few added up to a greater wealth than this average. On the other hand, several people “left amounts that did not exceed 100 mil-reis”,

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⁸⁰ For example: “Let him make no distinction of persons in the monastery. Let him not love one more than another, unless it be one whom he findeth more exemplary in good works and obedience. Let not a free-born be preferred to a liberated man, unless there be some other reasonable cause. But if from a just reason the Abbot deemeth it proper to make such a distinction, he may do so in regard to the rank of anyone whomsoever; otherwise let everyone keep his own place; for whether bond or free, we are all one in Christ (cf Gal 3:28; Eph 6:8), and we all bear an equal burden of servitude under one Lord, ‘for there is no respect of persons with God’ (Rom 2:11). We are distinguished with Him in this respect alone, if we are found to excel others in good works and in humility. Therefore, let him have equal charity for all, and impose a uniform discipline for all according to merit”. “Holy Rule of Saint Benedict”, Chapter 2: “What Kind of Man the Abbot Ought to Be”. URL: <https://www.ecatholic2000.com/benedict/rule3.shtml>

⁸¹ This concept is widely used by historiography as “a term representative of the possession of any good used”. COSTA, Alex Andrade. *Entre (d)vidas: escravos, lavradores pobres e a luta pela sobrevivência*. 7º Encontro Escravidão e Liberdade no Brasil Meridional, Curitiba-PR (Maio 2015).

⁸² *Um Conto de Reis* corresponded to a thousand times the amount of a thousand *reis* (R\$ 1,000).

revealing extreme poverty in this region. However, Nicolau's estate was valued in ten times more than that of many poor men in the region. Despite losing half of his estate to his stepson, the slave remained in a superior condition, even for individuals who enjoyed the much-desired freedom.

On 21 July 1831, the parties involved in the process signed an agreement finalising the share of goods belonging to the couple Luíza Patrícia and Nicolau de Souza. João Pacheco das Neves declared that he had received from his stepfather, through the then Abbot of the Monastery, all the goods contained in the share ("partilha"), receiving the amount of 300\$000 for slaves Alberto and Maria, in addition to 60\$000 for the calf and the cow. As it turns out, Nicolau preferred to stay with the slaves, in addition to staying with the animals. As João Pacheco lived from his craft as a shoemaker, a resident in the city of Recife⁸³, he preferred to inherit the amounts resulting from the evaluations. On the other hand, his stepfather preferred to keep goods that were directly linked to life in the country.

In the end, despite possible losses, Nicolau remained with a large part of the goods he had managed to accumulate together with Luíza Patrícia. But the trajectory of that slave-master did not end there. After the death of his wife (perhaps the second), Nicolau remarried, this time to the brown (*parda*) Ana Maria Soares. She is mentioned in another lawsuit in 1862. At the time, Nicolau had already died and Ana was 60 years old. As she testified as a witness, she was certainly a free or released woman, as the legislation did not allow slaves to testify as witnesses. They could only participate in trials as defendants or informants.⁸⁴ It is important to note that, after her husband's death, she was practically expelled from the house where she lived with him, who was not recognised by the monks as part of the large Benedictine family.

By also taking into account the role of the Monastery as an intermediary in that 1830 inheritance share (*Partilha*), we found two records that demonstrate the settlement made between Nicolau and his masters, who did not forget to collect the debt made from the costs of the lawsuit. In the end, a long process like this requires a considerable amount of money and the corporation could not be in any type of loss. In the *Estados*⁸⁵ of 1832, the first payment registered in the amount of 113\$540,

⁸³ Located approximately 24 km from the region where Nicolau lived. Recife would officially become the capital of Pernambuco in 1827. However, in practice, it had already been the most important city in the captaincy / province since the 18th century.

⁸⁴ MALHEIRO, Perdígão Malheiro, *A escravidão no Brasil: ensaio histórico-jurídico-social* (Rio de Janeiro: Typographia Nacional, 1866), v.1. Chapter II. "O escravo ante a Lei Criminal (Penal e de Processo)", Part 1, p. 22. MALHEIRO, Perdígão Malheiro, *A escravidão no Brasil: ensaio histórico-jurídico-social* (Rio de Janeiro: Typographia Nacional, 1866), v.1. Chapter II. "O escravo ante a Lei Criminal (Penal e de Processo)", Part 1, p. 22. According to Vogt and Radünz, "Portuguese law, echoing common law, accepted, in procedural terms, that slaves could only testify in three situations: if the testimonial was taken for free; if there was no disagreement on the testimonial, and if the slave acted as an informant". In 1821, the first Code of Criminal Procedure was instituted in the Brazilian Empire. Article 89 reads: "Descendants, husbands, wives, second degree relatives, slaves and children under fourteen years of age cannot act as witnesses; but the Judge may inform them about the object of their complaint, or refuse the testimonial given by the the informants, to whom an oath will not be granted". VOGT, Olgário Paulo and RADÜNZ, Roberto, respectively, "Condenados à força: a escravidão e os processos judiciais no Brasil", *MÉTIS: história & cultura*, v. 11, no. 21 (Jan./Jun. 2012), p. 209-228; "Lei de 29 de novembro de 1832", *Código de Processo Criminal*. Translated by Lucas Montenegro.

⁸⁵ Estados: Name of the reports produced by the abbots at the end of his three-year term.

supposedly in the Monastery's account for "expenditures made to his [judicial] demand".⁸⁶ The second and last instalment was of 23\$045, referring to the "rest that owed for what the Monastery spent on his [judicial] demand".⁸⁷

Conclusions

An important point for us to reflect on this case can start from the "ideal" of freedom that each slave built throughout their life.⁸⁸ Nicolau took many steps towards freedom, but he did not enjoy the "fat prize", as pointed out by Robert Slenes.⁸⁹ 67

For Henry Koster, referring to the enslaved, "everyone wishes to be a free agent". But, although Nicolau did not reach the highest point of a captive's longings, he enjoyed multiple privileges not experienced by a large part of the population, whether free or liberated. He was, in fact, "almost free". This could actually represent a freedom not enjoyed by many, even for those who received their letter of manumission. Perhaps it was not in the plans of this slave-master to be either free or liberated, but dispossessed. 68

In several places of America, in fact, slaves managed to occupy positions of power, rising in the hierarchy of the slave quarters, but always below the free white people who occupied the position of supervisors and administrators. Although, in practice, many enslaved people shared authority with overseers, they sometimes kept their power for longer, gaining prestige and respect from masters and captive partners, as Ira Berlin tells us.⁹⁰ 69

However, when analysing the case of Nicolau and other captives who occupied the same post in other Benedictine estates, we find that they achieved a higher position, as they were considered "overseers" under the command of a monk-administrator who visited the farm irregularly. The documentation always refers to them as *feitores*. No one on the property controlled, watched or inspected the overseers. Traveller Henry Koster, who met Nicolau personally, refers to him several times as "manager", not as a "driver" or "foreman".⁹¹ 70

Nevertheless, this case, which could be understood as unique or peculiar, provides important insights to think about slavery and its different faces. For, as Orlando Patterson repeatedly emphasised, "slavery was not a static institution".⁹² Nicolau's trajectory is not centred only around himself. It reveals a range of possibilities for movement, action, resistance strategies built by people 71

⁸⁶ "Recibos de depósito" (Deposit receipts), "Estados", Br. José de S. Bento Damásio (1830-1832), in *Manuscritos*, 1952, p. 257.

⁸⁷ "Recibos de depósito" (Deposit receipts), "Estados", Br. José de S. Bento Damásio (1830-1832), in *Manuscritos*, 1952, p. 261.

⁸⁸ Carvalho, *Liberdade*, pp. 213-214.

⁸⁹ SLENES, Robert W., "Senhores e subalternos no Oeste Paulista", in *História da Vida Privada no Brasil. Vol. 2: Império: a corte e a modernidade nacional*, ed. Luiz Felipe Alencastro (São Paulo: Cia das Letras, 1997), p. 274.

⁹⁰ BERLIN, *Generations of Captivity*, p. 77.

⁹¹ KOSTER, *Travels in Brazil*, pp. 214, 226, 227, 427.

⁹² PATTERSON, Orlando, *Slavery and Social Death: a comparative study* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 248.

who were subjected to the harsh routine of slavery. After all, as Paul Lovejoy taught us, “slavery was one form of exploitation”, marked by violence, coercion, and restriction of rights and wishes.⁹³

However, in spite of all the energies directed at exploiting the maximum of their labour, the enslaved people were able to appropriate the manorial strategies. Nicolau used his “roça” to accumulate goods and slaves, surpassing the manorial expectation that he simply intended for him to produce for his livelihood. He went against the standard of marriage of his time, relating to women of higher social status. He also appropriated the status of “free man”, dressing and behaving like someone who wanted to go beyond the condition imposed by a slave society, achieving respect from his peers and all those who knew him personally or through historical records produced by the Benedictines. 72

Nevertheless, in the end, he died like so many others who failed to leave captivity, perhaps bitter at not having achieved the longed-for freedom. Perhaps, Nicolau’s freedom was expected by those who did not fully understand his achievements, considering the limits of his condition as a slave. We can only speculate about his power, his prestige, his autonomy. 73

⁹³ LOVEJOY Paul E., *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 01.