

AGENTS OF EMPIRE AND FAMILY:
THE MASCARENHAS FAMILY
AND THE *ESTADO DA ÍNDIA* IN THE SIXTEENTH
AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES

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A decade or so ago, Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Luís Filipe Tomaz pointed out that five families accounted for roughly a half of the governors and viceroys of the *Estado da Índia* between 1550 and 1671. Among these five families were the Mascarenhas.¹ During this period the Mascarenhas provided four governors and viceroys of India – two in the sixteenth century and two in the seventeenth.² There would have been two more if Pero Mascarenhas, the appointed successor to D(om) Henrique de Meneses, had not been excluded from office in 1526,³ and D. Francisco Mascarenhas had not been arrested (for a brutal killing) before embarking to take up his appointment as viceroy in 1628.⁴ Some of the minor posts in the *Estado* (the captaincies and captaincy-generals of the forts and towns) also circulated among the Mascarenhas,⁵ as the table of Mascarenhas

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¹ S. Subrahmanyam and L. F. Thomaz, "Evolution of empire: the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean during the 16th century", in J. D. Tracy (ed.), *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires. State Power and World Trade 1350-1750*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 298-331, at 325.

² In chronological order these were D. Pedro Mascarenhas, Viceroy (VR) 1555-1555 (died in office); D. Francisco Mascarenhas, VR 1581-1584; D. Filipe Mascarenhas, VR 1645-1651; and D. Vasco Mascarenhas, 1st Conde de Óbidos, VR 1652-1653 (deposed from office).

³ He was passed over in favour of Lopo Vaz de Sampaio. See S. Subrahmanyam, *The Career and Legend of Vasco da Gama*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 348.

⁴ See M. J. da Costa Felgueiras Gayo, *Nobilário de Famílias de Portugal*, Braga, Carvalhos de Basto, 1989-90, 12 vols., vol. VI, p. 586, § 16.

⁵ S. Subrahmanyam and L. F. Thomaz, "Evolution of empire...", p. 325.

descendants shows. In Brazil the Mascarenhas also distinguished themselves as governors and viceroys: D. Fernando Mascarenhas, I Conde da Torre was the last governor of the Habsburg period (1638-1640), while his first cousin once removed, D. Jorge Mascarenhas, I Marquês de Montalvão, became the first ever viceroy of Brazil (1640-1641, appointed by Philip IV); D. Vasco Mascarenhas, I Conde de Óbidos, was viceroy between 1663 and 1667 (having previously served as viceroy of India), and his half-brother, D. Pedro Mascarenhas de Lancastre, was Governor of Rio de Janeiro (1666-1670). Finally, several members of the Mascarenhas family held office as ambassadors to the most important foreign courts such as Castile, the Holy Roman Empire and Rome. As the table of Mascarenhas descendants shows, before becoming Viceroy of India in 1554, D. Pedro Mascarenhas was ambassador to Rome and to Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, while his nephew D. Fernando Martins Mascarenhas was Ambassador to Rome, to the Council of Trent, and to Castile.

From this distinguished record, it would seem that in the early modern period the Mascarenhas were committed agents of the Portuguese empire, and of the *Estado da Índia* in particular. However, we cannot just list their service, or that of any other family associated with the *Estado*, and take it at face value. Using the example of the Mascarenhas family (one cadet branch of which – that of the marquês de Montalvão – is of particular interest to the writer⁶), this paper aims to show that the service of these and other individuals depended on a very complex pattern of interests – family and kinship, family tradition and the prior service of family members, and family alliances, loyalties and connections (for example, marriage alliances, attachment to a royal household, or adherence to a court faction). In an effort to better understand the Mascarenhas as agents of empire, this paper will explore them as agents of family. It is not possible here to give a full account of (at this stage) the preliminary findings on this family; there is only space to provide a few examples to illustrate these findings, and most of these will focus on the early generations of the Mascarenhas family.

This line of thinking about family and kinship in relation to the court and service to the Portuguese monarchy and the empire was pioneered by Jean Aubin, in particular in his seminal article on the nobility during the reign of João III.⁷ It has also been pursued by Sanjay Subrahmanyam in his study of the career and legend of Vasco da Gama, and by the two collections edited by Oliveira

⁶ See L. White, "Dom Jorge Mascarenhas: family tradition and power politics in Habsburg Portugal", *Portuguese Studies* 14 (1998), pp. 65-83; "The Marquês de Montalvão (1579?-1652) and changing traditions of service in Portugal and the Portuguese empire", *Portuguese Studies Review* 12 (2) (2004-5), pp. 63-83; and "Serviços ao Estado Português da Índia pela família do Marquês de Montalvão, primeiro Presidente do Conselho Ultramarino", *Oriente* 12 (2005), pp. 42-54.

⁷ J. Aubin, "La noblesse titrée sous D. João III. Inflation ou fermeture?", *Arquivos do Centro Cultural Português*, XXVI (1989), pp. 417-432.

e Costa (and Gaspar Rodrigues).⁸ Aubin, Subrahmanyam and Oliveira e Costa revealed how family interests both influenced, and were influenced by, domestic politics, national and international events, and the existence and operation of court factions.⁹

Access to posts and positions was crucial to promoting the family's wealth and an increase in its social standing. This was entirely dependent on positioning the family and inserting one or more of its members into a successful network that exercised influence – in other words, joining a faction led by a powerful individual, or group of individuals. Primarily, these factions were based at court, at the centre of power, but they also operated further down the hierarchy and were certainly present on the ground in the empire, as Subrahmanyam indicates, for example, in relation to government in the *Estado* in the mid-1520s.¹⁰ It is important to try and understand the structure and dynamics of these factions, and the part played by families such as the Mascarenhas. In terms of service to empire, it is clear that noble family interests were a driving force in the evolution of the empire. In most cases, a family tried to align the service of its members in the empire to promote the family's interests. For the most part, the interests of the empire and family could find common ground, but sometimes they did not, and when this happened it will come as no surprise that the interests of the family took priority. Once we take into consideration these complex, multilayered elements associated with family dynamics and court politics, we can get a more realistic idea of the processes by which the agents of empire served – and influenced developments in – the Portuguese empire, and the *Estado da Índia* in particular.

The Mascarenhas family provide an extremely rich source for the study of the development of family and empire. In terms of its origins, it was a *fidalgos* family that had settled in the Alentejo region at the time of the campaigns of King Sancho I.¹¹ The start of its rise to prominence in the fifteenth century can be attributed to three key elements: its participation in the military campaigns in North Africa in the fifteenth century, its attachment to a royal household, and its association with the military orders, notably that of Santiago. These same elements feature in the continued rise of the Mascarenhas family in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, though participation in military campaigns in North Africa was gradually superceded by engagement in Asia (and later in Brazil).

⁸ S. Subrahmanyam, *Career and Legend...*; J. Aubin, "La noblesse titrée..."; J. P. Oliveira e Costa (ed.), *A Nobreza e a Expansão. Estudos biográficos*, Cascais, Patrimónia Histórica, 2000; and J. P. Oliveira e Costa and V. L. Gaspar Rodrigues (eds.), *A Alta Nobreza e a Fundação do Estado da Índia*, Lisboa, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2004.

⁹ J. P. Oliveira e Costa provides a succinct analysis of the complex social elements in his opening chapter "A nobreza e a expansão. Particularidades de um fenómeno social complexo", in *A Nobreza e a Expansão...*, pp. 11-51.

¹⁰ S. Subrahmanyam, *Career and Legend...*, pp. 334-35, and elsewhere.

¹¹ See Felgueiras Gayo, *Nobiliário...*, VI, p. 575.

In addition, separate branches of the Mascarenhas family became associated with the order of Christ that emerged early in the sixteenth century as the most dominant military order.¹² Though not complete, the table of Mascarenhas descendants indicates some of the *comendas* that family members held in the two orders of Santiago and Christ.

The Mascarenhas family participated in the first overseas expedition to conquer Ceuta in 1415. Here, Alvaro Mascarenhas, son of Martim Vaz Mascarenhas and younger brother of Fernão Martins Mascarenhas (“homem honrado, e nobre natural de Évora”), is reputed to have been one of four *cavaleiros* who bravely defended one of the gates of Ceuta alongside the Infante D. Henrique.¹³ For much of the fifteenth century, the eldest sons of the Mascarenhas family were attached to the household of a number of royal princes. Significantly, these princes were the masters of the military Order of Santiago: first, the Infante D. João, fourth son of João I (and Master of Santiago from 1418 to 1442), then D. Fernando, II Duke of Viseu and I Duke of Beja (Master from 1444 to 1470).¹⁴ The Mascarenhas family was also closely associated with this same military order: Fernão Martins Mascarenhas, the *criado* of the Infante D. João, Master of Santiago, had held a *comenda* during the reign of João I, and in the reign of Afonso V he was made *Comendador-mor* of Santiago.¹⁵

With these lofty connections, members of the Mascarenhas were granted several of the thirteen most wealthy *comendas* of the Order of Santiago: Fernão Martins' son, Nuno Vaz Mascarenhas, was granted one of the richest of the Santiago *comendas*, that of Almodóvar, together with three others (Moguelas, Rorica and Montel).¹⁶ Nuno Vaz's heir, Fernão Martins Mascarenhas, held two of the thirteen most valuable *comendas* of Santiago, Mértola (granted in the 1470s) and Almodóvar.¹⁷ The first of these *comendas* was to pass down in succession to all of the heirs of the main Mascarenhas family until the middle of the eighteenth century. By 1443, during the regency of the Infante D. Pedro, Fernão Martins Mascarenhas was a member of Afonso V's council (and he continued as a member of João II's council). After the establishment of the household of Prince João (the future King João II), a realignment took place in the loyalties

¹² On this Order, see F. A. Dutra, “Membership in the Order of Christ in the seventeenth century: its rights, privileges, and obligations”, *The Americas* 27 (1970), pp. 3-25, and “Evolution of the Portuguese Order of Santiago, 1492-1600”, *Mediterranean Studies* 4 (1994), 63-72.

¹³ Felgueiras Gayo, *Nobiliário...*, vol. VI, p. 575.

¹⁴ See F. A. Dutra, “The Portuguese military orders in the time of Vasco da Gama”, in F. A. Dutra, *Military Orders in the Early Modern Portuguese World*, Aldershot, Variorum, 2006, chapter I, pp. 1-16, esp. p. 2.

¹⁵ Felgueiras Gayo, *Nobiliário...*, vol. VI, p. 575.

¹⁶ F. A. Dutra, “Portuguese military orders in the time of Vasco da Gama”, p. 4.

¹⁷ The list of the top thirteen *comendas* is in F. A. Dutra, “Evolution...”.

of Mascarenhas family after Fernão Martins Mascarenhas became the prince's *capitão dos ginetes*. From this point on, as one of the prince's companions on his nocturnal adventures, he emerges as an “homen de sua confiança”. He continued as João II's *capitão dos ginetes*, and was one of the twelve nobles appointed to assist the judges at the 1483 trial of the Duke of Bragança, accompanying the king right up to his death. At some as yet unknown date, Fernão Martins Mascarenhas was granted the *senhorio* of Lavre e Estepa, near to his family's ‘home city’ of Évora.¹⁸ The Mascarenhas family's close association with both João II and the order of Santiago also identifies it as firm supporters and followers of the king's illegitimate son, Dom Jorge, later Duke of Coimbra, who was Master of Santiago from 1491 to 1550.

Returning to the Mascarenhas family's service to empire, we have already noted that it was involved in the North African campaigns. Through its family alliances (see below), in the early sixteenth century it became particularly associated with the fortress of Arzila, though there were also Mascarenhas captains of Safim (1518) of Azamor (1530-34).

From the family's close association with North Africa, until firm evidence emerges we might hazard a guess that, coupled with its alliance with families known to belong to the ‘territorial’ or ‘war’ faction, the Mascarenhas were opposed to those who supported the mercantile form of empire. Nevertheless, having started out favouring the ‘war’ faction, the abandonment in the 1540s of five of the remaining eight fortresses in Morocco, including Arzila with which the family was most closely associated, the trickle of Mascarenhas who, it seems, had started from about 1505 to sail to the *Estado* to seek their fortunes, soon became more of a deluge. The most well-known of these early Mascarenhas agents in the *Estado* was Pero Mascarenhas (younger brother of Fernão Martins Mascarenhas, 1st *senhor de Lavre e Estepa*, and thwarted appointee as replacement governor in 1526), who seems to have first sailed to India in 1511. His nephew, D. Pedro Mascarenhas, son of Fernão Martins, who began his career fighting in North Africa, was to crown his distinguished career (and life) as Viceroy of India in 1554-1555.¹⁹

How, though, did the Mascarenhas family position itself to further its own interests in Portugal and the empire? The access of the Mascarenhas to posts and

¹⁸ Felgueiras Gayo, *Nobiliário...*, vol. VI, p. 575; F. A. Dutra, “Evolution...”, p. 70; J. J. Alves Dias, *Portugal do Renascimento à crise dinástica*, vol. 5, of J. Serrão and A. H. Oliveira Marques (eds.), *Nova História de Portugal*, Lisbon, Editorial Presença, 1998, p. 704; F. A. Dutra, “As ordens militares”, in D. Ramada Curto (ed.), *O tempo de Vasco da Gama*, Lisbon, Difel, 1998, pp. 229-241, at 232. It is not clear when Fernão Martins first became a member of the king's council.

¹⁹ For an outline of the family's service, see L. White, “Dom Jorge Mascarenhas: family tradition...”.

positions depended far less on the ability of the individuals than on the family's capacity to promote its interests and those of its family members. One of the principal mechanisms used to promote family interests were marriage alliances. An alliance with a family that already exercised influence at court was highly desirable, as was marriage to a wealthy heiress in order to increase the family's wealth and prestige. As can be seen from the genealogical table, the Mascarenhas successfully negotiated a series of strategically beneficial marriages for their eldest sons and daughters. The early generations of the Mascarenhas were able to do this for second or even third sons, though usually after they had returned from a successful career in the empire. Even second daughters in the earlier generations made strategically beneficial marriages. Among the Mascarenhas of later generations, however, with rising dowry payments, younger daughters, and often younger sons, tended to remain unmarried.

There was, however, a 'chicken and egg'-type situation, for the ability to negotiate favourable marriage alliances that would help to promote (or at least maintain a family's position) depended in turn on the family's membership of a noble network. The greater the status of a noble network – through the granting of the title of count, for example – the greater its influence and ability to secure access to the most prestigious posts and positions. There is clear evidence that the Mascarenhas belonged to particular 'noble networks' – that is, a network of families that intermarried repeatedly, either through the marriage of a brother and sister with the sister and brother of another family (in what could be termed a 'double sibling marriage'), or intermarriage with the same family over several generations. There were two double sibling marriages among the children of D. Fernão Martins Mascarenhas, 1st *senhor de Lavre e Estepa*. His heir, D. João Mascarenhas, married the eldest daughter of D. Vasco Coutinho, I Count of Redondo (and Captain of Arzila), while the eldest daughter, D. Isabel Henriques married D. João Coutinho (later II Count of Redondo, and also Captain of Arzila). The other double sibling marriage was between D. Fernão Martins's second son, D. Nuno Mascarenhas, 4th *senhor de Bobadela* (Captain of Safim) and D. Brites da Silva, eldest daughter of Nuno Furtado de Mendonça (who was the uncle of D. Jorge, illegitimate son of João II), and between D. Fernão Martin's youngest daughter, D. Leonor Henriques, and Simão Freire de Andrade, Nuno Furtado's heir (see the table of Mascarenhas descendants). These marriages strengthened the ties of the Mascarenhas family with north Africa, and with the household of the Master of Santiago (and also of Avis), D. Jorge de Lancastre, II Duke of Coimbra (the illegitimate son of King João II).

The other principal mechanism used to promote family interests was adherence to a court faction. Though the succession from one monarch to another was usually an important juncture that saw a switch in factional interests in the royal court, Thomaz reminded us some time ago that conflicts between groups

and changes of ruling influences within the same reign also took place.²⁰ In a key article on court factions in early modern England, Robert Shepard identified three broad groups that formed around the factional leader, a great figure at court. These were friends, followers and servants.²¹ Unfortunately, research into court factions in early modern Portugal is still at a relatively early stage. Further research is needed before it becomes possible to determine the wider membership of the Mascarenhas family in these court factions. Until then, we can say relatively little about its involvement in them. Though D. Fernão Martins Mascarenhas, 1st *Senhor de Lavre* was described as "a very great favourite of King João II (*muito valido do Rey*)" and held two of the thirteen richest *comendas* in the Order of Santiago,²² he is more likely to have been a 'friend' rather than a leader of a faction. In terms of adherence to particular factions, because of its association with the Order of Santiago, it seems likely that the family supported the cause of its master, D. Jorge de Lancastre. Also, in view of the family's association with the conquest and defence of North Africa, it seems likely that early generations of the Mascarenhas were aligned with the faction that opposed – ultimately unsuccessfully – all proposals to abandon any of the North African fortresses. Could this perhaps explain the marriage of the eldest daughter of D. João, 2nd *senhor* of Lavre e Estepa, to D. João Lopo da Silveira, heir of the III Barão de Alvito (and later IV Barão de Alvito – see the genealogical table)?

It appears that the adherence of the early Mascarenhas to a particular noble network was more durable than any attempts to 'go with the flow' and endeavour to negotiate a marriage alliance within the membership of a new court faction that might have a much shorter life-span. Either staying in the long-term noble network was more important, or perhaps it was just easier and in the family's long-term interests to maintain membership of a noble network than to risk a new alliance with a faction that might prove to be ephemeral. What still has to be determined is just how the Mascarenhas reacted to the impact of changes in court politics brought about by the change in kings, and competition between Africa and Asia. In view of the fact that the family continued its rise, in what way was the family able to align its own interests with those of the empire and service to the empire? Did the Mascarenhas maintain or change its affiliation to a particular court faction?

²⁰ L. F. Thomaz, "Factions, interests and messianism: the politics of Portuguese expansion in the east, 1500-1521", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 28-1 (1991), pp. 97-109, at p. 98.

²¹ R. Shepard, "Court factions in early modern England", *Journal of Modern History* 64 (1992), pp. 721-745.

²² Felgueiras Gayo, *Nobiliário...*, VI, p. 575; F. A. Dutra, "Portuguese military orders in the time of Vasco da Gama".

This last question will be perhaps the most difficult to answer, for as the table of Mascarenhas descendants shows, the Mascarenhas was a prolific family.²³ Partly thanks to its service in the empire, a number of important collateral branches emerged that acquired several aristocratic titles in the sixteenth century, and still more in the seventeenth century. Significantly, involvement in India opened up further opportunities for service and reward. In particular it facilitated the promotion of younger sons, both improving their status and increasing their wealth, which provided the opportunity for them to make favourable marriage alliances that could be expected to further promote their interests. This led to the development of successful collateral branches that in turn raised the status of their respective families and resulted in the acquisition of several more aristocratic titles, many of which were negotiated as a reward (in effect, a condition) for accepting an appointment as governor or viceroy in the empire.

Nevertheless, the success of these collateral branches did have its drawbacks, as it was inevitable that some of these families should join competing networks and factions. As they put their own interests and survival first, these now separate branches of the family often clashed with each other. There was tension, for example, between D. Fernando, I Conde da Torre and D. Jorge, I Marquês de Montalvão (particularly after D. Jorge arrested his second cousin and sent him home in disgrace from Brazil in 1640!).

Over time, it was only natural that some of the branches of the Mascarenhas family prospered and flourished, while others did not. Sometimes, quite simply, the male primogeniture line of a particular branch failed. When this seemed likely, everything possible was done to protect the inheritance so that it could remain within the family. This was done by consolidating any remaining direct female line with that of the closest male relative, usually through the marriage of a Mascarenhas heiress to her first cousin. In an example taken from the table of Mascarenhas descendants, the marriage of Pero Mascarenhas's daughter, D. Elena Mascarenhas, to her first cousin once removed (the third son of Pero's uncle, the 1st *Senhor de Lavre e Estepa*). On occasion even niece and uncle married, and though the marriage was positively incestuous, papal dispensations were relatively easy to obtain. The widowed Filipe Mascarenhas (Viceroy of India 1645-1651) was reputed to be returning to Portugal to marry his niece, a daughter of his brother D. Fernando Mascarenhas, I Conde da Torre.²⁴ In an example taken from the genealogical table, the widowed D. Vasco Mascarenhas, I Count of Óbidos (Viceroy of India and of Brazil) married his niece D. Joana Francisca Mascarenhas. This same strategy of uncle-niece marriage was practised by other members of the Iberian nobility. More rarely, a branch might fail if it

²³ See, for eg, Felgueiras Gayo, *Nobiliário*...., vol. VI, pp. 575-590.

²⁴ See C. Alão da Morais, *Pedatura Lusitana-hispânica em que contém várias famílias*, Braga, Carvalhos de Basto, 1997, 6 vols., Tomo III, vol. I, p. 119.

aligned itself with a losing faction. The main branch of the Mascarenhas family, that of the 'Santiago' Mascarenhas-Gouveia-Aveiro, for example, was implicated in the alleged plot to assassinate King José I in 1758. The head of the family, D. José Mascarenhas da Silva de Lancastre, VIII Duke of Aveiro, was executed in January 1759, and all the titles, estates and privileges that had been passed down to him over the generations were confiscated.²⁵

This paper has merely outlined how family interests shaped and influenced service to empire by members of a single family, the Mascarenhas. Some of the suggested relationships and dynamics are speculative, and further research is needed to confirm whether the evidence gleaned here through the mapping of genealogies and alliances can be supported by other sources. The way in which family alliances, membership of factions, etc., influenced the development of empire is an important area of research that is only now beginning to receive the attention it most certainly deserves. It is to be hoped that the studies contained in João Paulo Oliveira e Costa's edited collections on nobility and empire (see note 8) are the first of many more studies to come! In addition, the project organized by the *Centro de História de Além Mar* to build up a prosopography of the governors of the *Estado* is to be congratulated. A more developed picture of the evolution of empire will emerge as further studies such as those undertaken by Aubin, Subrahmanyam and Anthony Disney,²⁶ are completed. It is an important and rewarding field that cries out for further study, and one that more researchers should be encouraged to move into.

²⁵ See F. A. Dutra, "The wounding of King José I. Accident or assassination attempt?", *Mediterranean Studies* 7 (1998), pp. 221-229.

²⁶ See the studies of A. R. Disney on the Count of Linhares, e.g. "From Viceroy of India to Viceroy of Brazil? The Count of Linhares at court (1636-39)", *Portuguese Studies* 17 (2001), pp. 114-129.

