

# Colonial Latin American Historical Review

---

Volume 12

Issue 3 *Volume 12, Issue 3 (Summer 2003)*

Article 7

---

6-1-2003

## César Braga-Pinto, *As promessas da história: discursos proféticos e assimilação no Brasil colonial, 1500-1700*

Tarcisio Beal

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/clahr>

---

### Recommended Citation

Beal, Tarcisio. "César Braga-Pinto, *As promessas da história: discursos proféticos e assimilação no Brasil colonial, 1500-1700*." *Colonial Latin American Historical Review* 12, 3 (2003): 350. <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/clahr/vol12/iss3/7>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Colonial Latin American Historical Review by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [disc@unm.edu](mailto:disc@unm.edu).

the Steins write, *comercio libre*, when it finally came to New Spain (1789), a year after the death of Charles III, was no great change.

The authors conclude that because of the many inhibitory factors described, the Bourbons "could at best initiate cosmetic change when more radical change was made imperative by the rapidly developing English and French economies of the time" (p. 351). A most important book, a difficult read packed with new research and intricate analysis, this work should become a necessary prelude to the intense debates over Spain's nineteenth-century failure to industrialize, and has much to tell about the onset and delays of capitalism and industrialization in Western Europe.

Murdo J. MacLeod  
*Department of History*  
*University of Florida*

*As promessas da história: discursos proféticos e assimilação no Brasil colonial, 1500-1700.* By César Braga-Pinto. (São Paulo: Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 2003. 221 pp. Notes, chart, bibliography. Price not available).

This work is a philosophy of history and an epistemology that conveys a fascinating picture of how the late-fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century voyages of navigation and the encounter with the new world of Brazil impacted Portuguese and French travelers, as well as Jesuit missionaries. César Braga-Pinto has provided the reader with innumerable insights into a body of literature connected with Brazil's colonial history that is seldom fully understood and properly gauged.

The Portuguese have for many centuries viewed their history as much more glorious and blessed than that of the rest of the world, and have even viewed themselves as God's chosen people. The Portuguese mission was defined by its duty to spread Christianity and reunite it, and it would persist as long as the world was not fully Christian, that is, forever, even if loaded with inconsistencies and contradictions. This belief that the Portuguese were God's instruments in uniting the world in Christ is an essential ingredient in, for example, Caminha's chronicle, the missionary activity of Anchieta, and Antonio Vieira's *History of the Future*. "However," writes Braga-Pinto, "this ideology of expansion reveals a paradox: although Portuguese sovereignty was assured by the national mission to teach Christianity to other peoples, this sovereignty would lose its foundation if this teaching were ever completed. In other words, the essence of the mission that defined Portuguese nationality was that it remained a mission" (p. 211, English translation by reviewer).

From this relatively small, yet very dense, volume, we learn that Cabral's voyage, of which Caminha's chronicle is a most revealing account,



inaugurated the modern Eurovision, gave birth to the concept of a unified world, and set up the discoverer as an inspiration and a model to bring all continents and all lands together under the aegis of Portugal. We also learn that the Jesuit missionary, José de Anchieta—the "Apostle of Brazil"—played a central role, as did the Jesuits everywhere in the Portuguese empire, in their effort to bridge the gap between Europeans and Brazilindians. He authored religious dramas, a *History of the Jesuits in Brazil*, a couple of catechisms, a manual of instructions for the sacrament of Confession/Reconciliation in the Tupi language, and a Tupi grammar. Anchieta's great innovation was a translation of Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, which aimed at individual conversion and then at strategies for the collective conversion of both Brazilindians and colonists.

Braga-Pinto contrasts the narratives of French travelers with those of the Portuguese. Jean de Léry's *Voyage to the Land of Brazil* (1578) is a very personal diatribe against the Franciscan friar André Thevet's writings (*Singularities of Antarctic France*, 1550s; *Cosmography*, 1577) and Catholicism, to the point of comparing the Catholic rite of Communion to cannibalism. Yves d'Évreux (*Travel to the North of Brazil in 1613 and 1614*) employs the strategy of self-transformation to manipulate the desires of the natives and more easily control them. Binot Paulmier de Gonneville's account of his travels to the South of Brazil tells of a young Brazilian native who ended up in France, married into the aristocracy, and had a relative who became a Benedictine abbot intent on taking Christianity to the Brazilindians.

Much more complex to gauge is the Luso-Brazilian Jesuit Antonio Vieira (d. 1697), one of the true giants of Portuguese literature, missionary and protector of the Indians. Here is a person who, more than any other Portuguese intellectual, believed in and praised the unique Christian missionary vocation and greatness of Portugal. In Vieira's conception, the known world was made of three parts (Africa, Asia, and Europe) until the Portuguese discovered the New World. Now these four parts had to be united under Portuguese leadership so that the restoration of global unity would merge time and eternity to inaugurate the 5th Empire, that is, the Millennium.

All in all, Braga-Pinto gives a solid analysis of the literature in question and provides an excellent guide for a historical and epistemological journey through a body of literature that says much more than most students of history ever suspected. This is a work that clarifies and highlights important aspects of the European-New World encounter, and it deserves a special place within the bibliography of the history of Brazil.

Tarcisio Beal  
*Department of History*  
*University of the Incarnate Word*