

DUARTE COELHO (1517–1570)
LETTER TO KING JOHN III (DECEMBER 20, 1546)

I have already written to Your Majesty and explained in earlier letters that one matter that is most prejudicial to the wellbeing and development of this territory is the cutting of brazilwood. This cutting occurs at as much as twenty leagues away from the settlements that are springing up, particularly here in New Lusitânia. That is because the brazilwood, Sire, lies deep within the remote interior. Obtaining it is very troublesome, dangerous, and expensive, and the Indians work on it very unwillingly

Sire, it is not simply that they supply the Indians with tools, as is the custom. Rather, to persuade them to gather brazilwood, they give them beads from Bahia, as well as feather headdresses and colored garments that cannot be obtained here. Worse, they give them swords and muskets.

I have to tell you, Sire, that in the last three years, the cutting of brazilwood has been abused, and that the territory is in a consequent state of confusion. Having to deal with so much turmoil and having to put right so much malpractice are matters that have caused me great toil and upset. The cutting of brazilwood holds back the development of our estates, particularly the sugar plantations. The explanation is that [formerly], when the Indians were hungry and needed tools, they would come to clear the land and do all the other heavy work in exchange for what we gave them, and they would sell us supplies that we greatly needed. But now, as they have plenty of tools, they have become worse than ever: they get all excited, swaggering around and behaving rebelliously.

Likewise, Sire, I . . . have indicated how it is not in God's interest, nor in that of Your Majesty, nor suitable for the wellbeing and development of this land of Nova Lusitânia, that such criminals be sent here (as has been the case in the past three years). I swear and confirm to Your Majesty, on my soul, that they bring no good or benefit to this land. Rather, they cause harm and damage, and crimes are committed daily owing to their presence. We have lost any credit that we had till now with the Indians, since God and nature have not put right what I alone can do by daily ordering these criminals to be hanged. The situation causes the Indians greatly to belittle and disparage us. Moreover, such criminals are no good for any other work, they arrive here poor and naked, are unable to abandon their old tricks and are always plotting ways to escape.

Similarly, I would remind Your Majesty of what I have already asked in writing, namely to command all those to whom, Sire, you have given territory in Brazil to come and live on their territories and populate them.

Your Majesty's servant
Duarte Coelho

Duarte Coelho, "Three Letters from Duarte Coelho to King John III," in Stuart B. Schwartz, ed. *Early Brazil: A Documentary Collection to 1700*, trans. Clive Willis and Stuart B. Schwartz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 20–21, 23.