

**MANOEL DA NÓBREGA (1517–1570)**

**LETTER TO LUÍS GONÇALVES DA CÂMARA (AUGUST 31, 1553)**

I write to your Reverence from the *sertão* [hinterland] of this captaincy of São Vicente . . . I came to the village [*aldeia*] where those who are converted have been gathered and where I have placed two Jesuit Brothers to indoctrinate them. I solemnly made fifty catechumens and I have much hope that they will be good Christians and will merit baptism, and this will be shown by the works of faith they now undertake.

I use every means that seems to us the best way to win the goodwill of the gentiles. The youth are the principal ones who come to us from everywhere.

In this country, there is a certain João Ramalho, the oldest man in these parts. He has many children and is related throughout the *sertão*, and I am bringing the eldest with me throughout the interior to give more authority to our ministry. Because he is very well known and venerated among the gentiles and he has daughters married to the principal [Portuguese] men of the captaincy, and all of these sons and daughters are the children of one Indian woman, daughter of the greatest and most important [chief] of this land. Thus, in him and her and in their children we hope to have a great tool for the conversion of the gentiles. This man, for even more help, is a relative of Father Paiva and here they have gotten to know each other.

In this land are many men living in sin [*amancebados*] and who wish to marry the women, and this would be a great service to Our Lord. . . . And what we have said for the gentiles should also be applied to the Christians of these parts, or at least until the Pope offers a general pardon. If the nuncio had the power, he should make a special dispensation for this João Ramalho so he can marry this Indian woman, despite the fact that he may have known her sister or some other relative of hers. And the same should apply to two or three *mestiços* [people of mixed racial background] who wish to marry Indian women who have born them children, despite any affinity there might be between them.

This would be a great service to Our Lord and if this costs anything, he [João Ramalho] will send sugar from here to pay for it. Perhaps there is some virtuous soul there who can loan the amount. Because I find this very necessary and because of my great desire to see so many souls rescued, I write to Your reverence so that in the first returning ship you can send an answer to this captaincy of São Vicente.

Vale Pater. From this far *sertão*, the last day of August, 1553

The worthless son of Your Reverence

Nóbrega

Manoel da Nóbrega, “Letter from Father Manoel da Nóbrega to Father Luís Gonçalves da Câmara (31 August 1553),” in Stuart B. Schwartz, ed. *Early Brazil: A Documentary Collection to 1700*, trans. Clive Willis and Stuart B. Schwartz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 140–142.