The previous chapter provided a brief background for the period immediately preceding the time frame of this study. This chapter will start out exploring the general political setting and apparatus of Portugal in the early Baroque period. In terms of the Overseas Council, its developments (especially in 1707–57), make-up and administrative functions will be discussed. The Crown maintained channels outside the Overseas Council to make its wishes known. In this regard, the context and importance of the instructions given to the viceroy will be studied. Finally, the appointees to the East, their prospects and their stakes in the overseas assignments will be examined. In this way, the development at the centre will be linked to the fight for survival at the periphery.

Royal Court of João V

The study of the early modern political history of Portugal since around the 1990s has increasingly been moving away from the ‘absolutist’ studies of João V, as shown by state-of-studies surveys. However, as Hespanha admits in a volume of História de Portugal that he edited, the study of Portuguese history is still rather skewed towards ‘traditional’ areas. In relation to the early Baroque polity, there is a tendency to subsume the politics of the Bragança period under the

1 For example, A.M. Hespanha, As Vésperas do Leviathan: Instituições e Poder Político em Portugal Século XVII (Coimbra: Livraria Almedina, 1994), who coordinated História de Portugal: O Antigo Regime (general editor: José Mattoso) (Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores, 1993) which as Hespanha prefaced, was essentially a history of powers. A survey of the bibliography in História de Portugal Moderno: Político e Institucional (Lisbon: Universidade Aberta, 1995) by the same author reveals a further listing of works. At the same time, writings such as P. Cardim, “Centralização e Estado na Historiografia”, Nação e Defesa 87 (1998), 129–58, highlighted a possible dichotomy between research on ‘centralisation’ and “other groups in society”, even as the latter blossomed.

2 See re-edition of História de Portugal IV (Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores, 1998) coordinated by A.M. Hespanha (general editor: José Mattoso), introduction.
category of the seventeenth century or (second-half) of the eighteenth century discussions.\textsuperscript{3} Outside Portugal, works on early modern politics have begun to take a fresh look at ‘traditional’ areas, critically re-examining the associated issues in absolute monarchy, court society, factionalism and office-holding. In this direction, works from specific local geographical areas, rather than ‘centre-initiated’ studies, are filling gaps on the early Baroque period.\textsuperscript{4}

In a re-evaluative study, Adamson gives three defining criteria for an early modern European court. The early Baroque court of João V was an emulation of the grandeur of the Versailles of Louis XIV.\textsuperscript{5} It was first and foremost, the “constant regular dwelling of the ruler”; secondly, it was both the actual seat of the court and departments of government; finally, it was the “venue where the ceremonial and ritual surrounding the prince could be observed”.\textsuperscript{6} In terms of the system of patronage, the court was the “nerve centre of brokerage”.\textsuperscript{7}

\textsuperscript{3} Works by A.M. Hespanha, most notably As Vésperas do Leviathan. For the eighteenth century, see the authoritative work by Nuno G.F. Monteiro, O Crepúsculo dos Grandes: A casa e o património da aristocracia em Portugal, 1750–1832 (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 1998).

\textsuperscript{4} From more generalised studies such as N. Henshall, The Myth of Absolutism (New York: Longman, 1992), it is acknowledged that the historiography of absolutism is small, although there is an “immense amount of materials on rulers or regimes recognised as absolutist”. Works on eighteenth century France is still relatively neglected, except “in the area relating to the origins of the French Revolution”. Notably, see also P.R. Campbell’s Power and Politics in Old Regime France, 1720–45 (London: Routledge, 1996). It is also worth noting that ‘absolutism’ is as complicated a term as ‘liberalism’; different groups conceive the appellation differently—for instance, the French distinguished themselves from Turkish and Russian despotism. Good comparative works are few. In terms of the first half of the eighteenth century, the polity of Portugal may be contrasted with Spain for the reason that both entities saw many cross influences and parallel developments—for instance, despite the transition to the ‘more efficient’ intendant system, how many people are aware that the Bourbon Spanish government continued to rely on non-traditional avenues analogous to João V’s more personalised structure? How many are aware that the Bourbons (or for that matter, any other Baroque monarchy?) were probably as expensive to maintain internally and externally as the Braganças? How many are aware that there was a tendency to rely on the ‘aristocracy of merit’ both in Spain and Portugal? On a more trivial level, how many are aware that both João V and Philip V were both afflicted by a ‘mental illness’? For eighteenth century Spain, J. Lynch’s Bourbon Spain (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989) provides a rather comprehensive view of colonial Spain as well as developments at home.


\textsuperscript{6} J. Adamson ed., The Princely Courts of Europe (London: Sterling, 2000), 10. Earlier works such as A.G. Dickens’ Courts of Europe and H.D. Molesworth’s Princes are still timeless.

\textsuperscript{7} Campbell, Power and Politics in Old Regime France, 24.