On 6 September 1730 Manuel García Araos signed the contract that gave him legal possession of the dowry of his wife, María Rosalía Ricaurte Terreros, daughter of one of the most influential, rich and well-connected Creoles of New Granada: José Ricaurte León, treasurer of the mint, member of the municipal council of Santa Fe and a powerful landowner. Just a month after his wedding, García Araos, a Peninsula-born Spaniard who had been living in Santa Fe since 1719 but had not previously held any official post, used 2,500 pesos of the 8,000 included on his wife's dowry to purchase the office of alcalde provincial, one of the most coveted in the municipal corporation of Santa Fe. Although the boom in Araos' finances propitiated by his marriage had been crucial to his buying the post, the most important benefit he got out of his marriage was his inclusion within the sphere of influence of the powerful Ricaurtes. Though the alliance may seem to have been favorable only to the Spaniard, the well-connected and influential Ricaurtes also had something to gain by it because García Araos was in possession of something perhaps much more useful to José Ricaurte than wealth: he had belonged to the entourage of Jorge de Villalonga i Fortuny, former first viceroy of the viceroyalty of the New Kingdom of Granada created in 1717.

Vicerroys, as alter egos of the king, enjoyed similar ceremonies and privileges as the monarch. As one of the most important manifestations of their stature they made the long and perilous journey from Spain—or any...
other part of the Spanish domains—surrounded by a retinue of people. These entourages were generally quite large and diverse in their composition and tended to mirror the royal court in the Peninsula. Once the viceroy had taken possession of his office and was established in the capital of his demarcation, this group of followers tended to evolve into a more sophisticated collective comprising not only the original entourage that had traveled with him, but also new groups of people from the upper layers of colonial society. In these new spheres of power—the vice-regal courts—the elites and their clientage interacted with the most powerful officials of the Americas: the viceroys.

Following—and in most cases surpassing—Norbert Elias’ classic work dedicated to court society, historians have studied royal courts not only as actual places (in the topographic sense) but also—and more importantly for the purposes of my analysis—as socio-cultural spaces that constituted a fundamental part of the political structure of the Modern European monarchies. In keeping with this line of work, the main aim of this chapter is to place Villalonga’s entourage within the wider background of the American vice-regal courts and to offer a first analysis of the roster of the viceroy’s retinue and the different patronage networks that tied his followers, not only to the viceroy, but also to the elites of Santa Fe. Understanding how these networks were formed and worked is crucial for comprehending the process through which new administrative structures were put into place. The viceroy needed to secure the collaboration of local groups in order to be able to fulfill his orders and introduce changes in the territory. This study, thus, aims at shedding light on how the new dynasty attempted to expand its authority in Spanish America.

**Vice-regal Courts**

Elias applied his theory of the civilizing process to the court environment in his book *The Court Society*. He conceived of the court as a space of interaction for the monarch and his subjects and also as a place in which

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6 Büschges, “La corte virreinal”, p. 132.