

# Diálogos

Faculdade de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas  
Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e

Diálogos  
ISSN online 2789-2182  
ISSN printed 2520-5927  
dialogosuntl.com

Volume 05  
2020

<https://doi.org/10.53930/27892182.dialogos.5.57>

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SOBRE O ENIGMA DO DIAMANTE PORTUGUÊS

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Submitted: 30 May 2020  
Accepted: 14 October 2020  
Published: 17 November 2020

# ON THE ENIGMA OF THE PORTUGUESE DIAMOND

José Pinto Casquilho<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The Portuguese Diamond is the largest faceted diamond in the National Gem Collection of the National Museum of Natural History, Washington DC; with an emerald cut at 127.01 carats is almost a perfect octagonal gem. Its name was given by the last private owner, Harry Winston, on the basis that once it had belonged to the Portuguese crown jewels. Yet, the mystery follows in that several authors say, with greater emphasis nowadays, that the name “The Portuguese Diamond” came from a mistaken legend. The first goal of this paper is to show that there is strong iconic evidence that the diamond belonged to King José I of Portugal in the eighteenth century and, presumably, with a lesser degree of certainty, to other following sovereigns of the house of Bragança (Braganza). Subsidiary goals are the disambiguation with some other Brazilian precious stones mentioned in news or other sources. One will also look for establishing a plausible documented origin of the Portuguese Diamond, then giving some possible clues on the fate and oblivion of the diamond for about a century, until its resurgence in the USA. Last, it is sketched a framework of its semiotic convolution as an object of desire and an index of power, from the Portuguese royalty into the veil of secrecy, and then to the American capitalist democracy.

**Keywords:** Portuguese Diamond; King José I of Portugal; Brazilian Gems; Braganza Diamond; Veil of Secrecy; American Ownership; Semiotic Convolution.

## SOBRE O ENIGMA DO DIAMANTE PORTUGUÊS

**Resumo:** O Diamante Português é o maior diamante facetado da Coleção Nacional de Gemas do Museu Nacional de História Natural, Washington DC; com um corte de esmeralda de 127,01 quilates é quase uma gema octogonal perfeita. Seu nome foi atribuído pelo último proprietário privado, Harry Winston, com base no facto de ter pertencido às joias da coroa portuguesa. No entanto, segue-se o mistério de que vários autores dizem, com maior ênfase hoje em dia, que o nome de “O Diamante Português” veio de uma lenda equivocada. O primeiro objectivo deste artigo é mostrar que há fortes evidências icónicas de que o diamante pertenceu ao rei José I de Portugal no século XVIII e, presumivelmente, com menor grau de certeza, a outros soberanos seguintes da dinastia de Bragança. Ainda, metas subsidiárias são a desambiguação com algumas outras pedras preciosas brasileiras mencionadas em notícias ou outras fontes. Procurar-se-á também estabelecer uma origem plausível documentada do

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Diamante Português, fornecendo algumas pistas possíveis sobre o destino e o esquecimento do diamante por cerca de um século, até ao seu ressurgimento nos EUA. Por fim, é esboçado um quadro de sua convolução semiótica como objeto de desejo e índice de poder, da realeza portuguesa ao véu do segredo e, depois, à democracia capitalista americana.

**Palavras-chave:** Diamante Português; Rei José I de Portugal; Gemas Brasileiras; Diamante Bragança; Véu do Segredo; Propriedade Americana; Convolução Semiótica.

## INTRODUCTION

Famous diamonds, besides being exceedingly valuable, bear proper names and a history linked to their trajectory of ownership, even if concealed, since they appear as indices of wealth and status or, more generally, of power. In fact, to get possession of such a stone and preserve it can summon large resources, not only financial, but, as history shows, also political and military. More frequently a combination of those operates resulting in a capacity to hold, or retrieve, a remarkable gem. Garcia de Orta, a Portuguese physician employed by the viceroy of Goa, was the first to describe diamonds (Crider, 1924, p. 177).

As Pole (1861, p. 3) said, commenting on diamonds in the nineteenth century: “The highest potentates of the earth esteem them as their choicest treasures, and kingdoms have been at war for their possession”, still remarking “light was the first and fairest gift of heaven to man; the diamond is fairer than light itself; it is light, only seven times beautified and refined”. From objects of desire diamonds became symbols of power and, throughout successive centuries, the crown jewels of European nations have furnished the chief outlet for gems of abnormal size and value (Phillips, 1887, p. 438). By the middle of the nineteenth century, before the Koh-i-Noor enters in possession of the British crown in 1849, quite large diamonds were rare in Europe; Cattelle (1911, p. 20) stated that concerning stones over 100 carats, there were two each in the crown jewels of Russia and Portugal, besides the Austrian “Florentine” and also the “Regent” of the French crown.

As such, a famous diamond behaves as a noticeable semiotic resource, a symbol whose name becomes an attribute of identification and property,

even when related with some particular physical quality like the colour, and an index of potency: its possession and exhibition transforms into a salient object attached to a ‘pregnance’ (e.g. Thom, 1994, p. 164), which could be interpreted as the capacity of the realm to maintain its possession or the strength of the attractor’s domain in a dynamic system’s terminology. The same diamond can change its name as it changes ownership and thus, along history, can hold different names: for example, the Hope diamond is the ancient Bleu-de-France and before that it was called the Tavernier Bleu; the Florentine was also known as the Grand Duke of Tuscany and, later, the Austrian Yellow; much more examples could be given (e. g. Balfour, 2000). When changing its ownership it is not only the name of the stone that can be modified, but frequently the gem is also recut, reducing the weight and modifying the shape so that the new owner makes its proper mark, also allowing for obscuring the previous origin, because famous diamonds are typically object of greed and so often they change hands through secret transactions.

The secrecy attribute is related with the fact that transactions of famous diamonds are often illicit or dishonourable mainly for those who sell or pawn them – whom are dropping out ancient legacies – and also inconvenient or even illegal for the new owners. Thus it happens that most stories concerning notable diamonds are obscure or falsified, since the true history is just to be known by few – and secrecy, either related to exclusiveness of singular information or to the particular dimension of the veridictory square concerning what is [true] but does not seem to be, becomes a valuable resource, an added value. An exemplification is seen in *Popular Mechanics Magazine*, 1924, (v. 41, n. 5, p. 686) where there is a news item entitled “Biggest diamonds of history are hidden from sight”, showing the sketch of the Portuguese Diamond, which didn’t bear yet that name, and stating:

Weighing 127 carats, what is said to be the world’s largest blue diamond has been offered for sale for \$300,000 by an American firm. Appearance of the gem, larger than the Koh-i-noor of England, in a public market, emphasized the fact that most of the large diamonds of history are now seldom seen, but are hoarded among the prized crown jewels of European monarchies.

The first goal of this paper is to show that there is strong iconic evidence that the diamond belonged to King José I of Portugal in the second half of the eighteenth century and, presumably, with a lesser degree of certainty, to other following sovereigns of the house of Bragança (Braganza). Subsidiary goals are the disambiguation with some other Brazilian precious gems or stones mentioned in news or other sources. One will also look for establishing a plausible documented origin of the Portuguese Diamond, then giving some possible clues on the fate and oblivion of the diamond for about a century, until its resurgence in the USA. Last, it is sketched a framework of its semiotic convolution as an object of desire and an index of power, from the Portuguese royalty into the veil of secrecy, and then to the American capitalist democracy.



Figure 1 – Sketch of the Portuguese Diamond in 1924, mentioned like the world's largest blue diamond.

## TOPICS IN THE HISTORY OF DIAMONDS IN BRAZIL AND PORTUGAL

In general it was said that diamonds were discovered in the commencement of eighteenth century, during the reign of King João V (John V) of Portugal and that the first man who sent diamonds into Portugal was Sebastião Leme do Prado in 1725, though they found no sale and the same happened to Bernardo da Fonseca Lobo in 1727, who hit upon a large specimen amongst others in Cerro do Frio (Jones, 1880, pp. 252-253). But Svisero, Shigley and Weldom (2017) state that as far as the last quarter of 16<sup>th</sup> century there were already reports mentioning stones identified as possible diamonds, and following that clue one can find that at least since 1714 was acknowledged the existence of diamonds in Tijuco (Pires, 1903, p. 99) even if only in 1729 the news were officially communicated to the king of Portugal by the Governor Lourenço de Almeida (Rabello, 1997, p. 23); the king, in a letter dated from 1730, instruc-

ted to be paid “the fifth” that was accountable to the crown. Alfred Phillips (1887, p. 441) says that the discovery of diamonds in Brazil about 1720 was followed in 1721 by the export of 173,000 carats to the European markets.

We would note that large diamonds in Brazil should be considered rare, Brazil being mentioned to have produced few large stones (Cattelle, 1911, p. 99) and, like Burton (1869, p. 135) specifies, 1000 octaves hardly produce a single gem of one octave (about seventeen and a half carats); also it was established that those which weigh more than one octave would belong to the crown treasury and the slaves who found and delivered them would be free (Rabello, 1997, p. 38). In August 11, 1753, it was enforced the law establishing a monopoly on diamonds in Brazil: *Ley do Contrato dos Diamantes do Brasil*.

Jeffries (1751, p. 69) tells that about 1733-34, when he was staying in Lisbon, the production of Brazil was so high that the traders were “so apprehensive of the Brazil mines producing an inexhaustible store, judging from thence the world would scarcely think diamonds worth any consideration (...)”. Boxer (1964, p. 224) reports that the Brazil fleet of 1732 had brought to Lisbon 300,000 carats of diamonds worth five millions cruzados, and the next year about the same quantity, which was about four times the amount that usually come from India. The naturalist Domingos Vandelli (1899, p. 281) clarified that the most common colouring of the diamonds from Brazil is a yellowish green relative to the presence of iron and Andrada (1797, p. 25) said that the figure of the diamonds of Brazil varied, some being octahedral formed by the union of two tetrahedral pyramids, others are nearly round and lastly some are oblong, those being found in the beds of rivers.

Even with the huge amount of losses in the earthquake of 1755 (e.g. Goudar, 1756, p. 212), when King José I died in 1777, the Marquis de Pombal reported that in the treasury existed seventy eight millions of cruzados and a vast amount of diamonds in the king’s cabinet (Vidal, 1877, p. 295), what is also mentioned in a news item of *The Public Advertiser* from London, May 13, 1777 (page 3). But, by the end of eighteenth century the *Gazette of the United States* and *Philadelphia Daily Advertiser* of April 16 1798, tells in a news article that the diamonds of the Queen of Portugal [Maria I] sent to England for sale to the value of £35,000 sterling, are now at Amsterdam for sale.

Then, there is a long history concerning diamond production in Brazil, trade and smuggling, which is not to be told here, except to remember the brief episode of the War of the Oranges, between the alliance of Spain and France on one side, and Portugal on the other, where further negotiations led to the Treaty of Madrid signed on 29<sup>th</sup> September 1801 and, for Portugal, the price of peace included keeping her ports closed to British ships until a final settlement in Europe was negotiated, and the payment to France of a war levy of ten million cruzados, the equivalent of more than 11 million guilders (Buist, 1974, p. 384); one of the dealers, Labouchère, made the payments conditional upon the handing over of the diamonds: 4 ½ million guilders following the signing of the contract and the depositing of 114,000 carats, and 2 million guilders upon the arrival and transfer of the Brazilian portion of the security, which was estimated at about 100,000 carats (*idem*, p. 391).

Even so, John Mawe (1812, p. 259) said that the collection of diamonds in the possession of the Prince Regent [future king João VI of Portugal] was unequalled in number, size and quality, by that of any potentate in the world; and claimed being credibly informed that it exceeds in value three million sterling. Also, Batchelor (1840, p. 31) pointed out that the Royal Family of Portugal are immensely rich in diamonds, and those in the treasury of the Brazils are beyond doubt the most superb of any crown possessions. Still, Hamlin (1891, p. 221) said that Portugal, by virtue of its inheritance, was recorded to own immense numbers of the gem, and only a certain quantity are to be sold from time to time according to the demands of the market – and in corroboration of this report he said that the Banco de Lisboa sold, in 1863, rough diamonds to the value of 1,800,000 francs out of the collection brought from Brazil by João VI in 1821, also stating that the value of the remainder was estimated at 35,000,000 francs at the time.

## THE MYSTERY OF THE PORTUGUESE DIAMOND

The Portuguese Diamond is the largest faceted diamond in the National Gem Collection in the National Museum of Natural History, Washington

DC, with an emerald cut at 127.01 carats, almost a perfect octagonal gem. The diamond measures 32.75 x 29.65 mm and is 16.01 mm deep (Fryer and Koivula, 1986). Concerning optical properties it is stated that: the Portuguese diamond, though very slightly yellow, is famous for its strong blue fluorescence, which can be seen easily in ambient light and it is the combined effect of its large size with its fluorescence is what makes this diamond so notable (Eaton-Magaña et al, 2007).

It was acquired by the Smithsonian Institution in 1963 from Harry Winston, who gave the actual name of the diamond; from the U.S. National Museum Annual Report, one can read, relative to Accessions (Taylor, 1964, p. 43): “Received from an anonymous donor was the Portuguese diamond, a very fine step-cut stone weighing 127.01 carats. The Portuguese diamond is the largest cut diamond from Brazil and the 13<sup>th</sup> largest in the world. In the 1920’s it was recut to its present shape from a 150 carat cushion-shaped stone. Details of its early history are unknown, but it is said that it was once owned by the royal family of Portugal”; and then, in the end of the Report concerning the Donors (p. 159) one reads: “Harry Winston, Inc. New York: Octagon emerald-cut diamond known as the Portuguese diamond”.

Harry Winston acquired the diamond from Peggy Hopkins Joyce in 1951, who owned it since 1928, having bought it from New York jewellers Black, Starr and Frost – a news item in the *New Britain Herald*, of March 13, 1928 (p. 15) says that Peggy Hopkins Joyce has bought a 127-carat diamond, described as “the largest blue diamond in the world, more than an inch square (...)”; a previous news of *The Republican Journal*, September 07, 1926 (page 8) stated that “the largest perfect blue diamond in world is now in New York and for sale; it weighs 127 carats. Price: \$300,000.”

Also, from news published in 1947, April 17 (p. 3) in *Fort Covington Sun*, one can see that a 127-carat emerald-cut gem in a necklace of small diamonds presented in the American Gem society meeting in Chicago was valued at \$650,000. On June 20, 1956, in *The Pittsburgh Press* (page 27), we see news reporting that the “Great Brazilian Diamond”, valued at \$1,250,000, is for sale – a necklace with the centre stone of approximately 130 carats in weight in a chain set with baguettes. Also, in a news article on *Sponsor*, December

28, 1957 (p. 59), it is said that Harry Winston, famous New York jeweller, is offering to Texas oilmen a product only millionaires can buy, “It’s the 127 carat, blue Portuguese Diamond, largest emerald cut diamond in the world. Price quoted in the copy: \$1 million.” Here one can see that as far about 1957 the gem was already mentioned as the Portuguese diamond. In the periodical *Broadcasting Telecasting* (1958, January 13, p. 38) there is a news feature referring to a diamond of 127 carats that Harry Winston Inc., would have for sale for \$1 million, which had been dug up in Brazil and once owned by the Portuguese royal family.

The mystery follows in that several authors say, with greater emphasis nowadays, that the name ‘Portuguese Diamond’ came from a mistaken legend that the gem would had belonged to the crown jewels of Portugal (e.g. Proddow and Fasel, 1996, p. 66). In the same sense Balfour (2000, p. 216) states that no information has been uncovered to substantiate its ownership by the Portuguese kings, and that it has been asserted that it was recut to its present shape from a cushion shape that had weighed 150 carats, obtained from a rough gem unearthed in South Africa in 1910 or 1912.

In fact, even the Gemological Institute of America (GIA) states<sup>2</sup>: “Of South African origin, the Portuguese Diamond weighs 127.01 ct. (...)”; or, quoting another GIA statement<sup>3</sup>:

Strangely enough, the 127.01-carat famous diamond called The Portuguese seems to have no connection to its namesake country. At one point, legend claimed that the diamond was found in Brazil in the mid-18th century and became part of the Portuguese crown jewels. However, with no known substantiation to this story, the legend has been discredited.

A more explicit account is given in the National Gem Collection, where more detailed information is presented, from which I transcribe excerpts (Post, 1997, pp. 36-37):

The Portuguese Diamond at 127.01 carats is the largest faceted diamond in the National Gem Collection. Its near flawless clarity and unusual octagonal emerald-cut make it one of the world’s most magnificent gems. It is perhaps more than a little

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gia.edu/famous-diamonds>

<sup>3</sup> <http://4cs.gia.edu/en-us/blog/famous-diamonds-portuguese/>

surprising, then, that so little documented information exists about its origin and early history. (...) The diamond owes its current name to one such legend according to which the diamond was found in Brazil in the mid-eighteenth century and became part of the Portuguese Crown Jewels. There is no documentation, however, that substantiates a Brazilian origin or connection to Portuguese royalty, nor it is clear where or from whom this story originated. As is discussed below, the diamond most likely was found at the Premier mine in Kimberley, South Africa, early in the twentieth century.

Interestingly the extensive media coverage that followed exhibitions of the diamond around the country during 1946-47 made no reference to the diamond by its current name or to a Portuguese or Brazilian connection. (...) Most accounts indicate that the diamond, which was owned at the time by a syndicate of American diamond dealers, had mysteriously appeared in Amsterdam some years earlier as a rough cut, cushion-shaped stone weighing 187 carats, which was recut into its present form. They also state that diamond dealers all over the world were puzzled by the diamond's lack of history and had tried to trace its origin without success. (...)

One part of the diamond's history that is well documented is that in February 1928 Peggy Hopkins Joyce acquired the diamond from Black, Starr & Frost. She traded a \$350,000 pearl necklace for the diamond and \$23,000 in cash. (...) The jewelry firm's spokesperson at the time indicated that the diamond was found at the Premier mine, Kimberley, South Africa, in 1910, and that the firm had obtained it shortly after its discovery. (...)

Harry Winston acquired the Portuguese Diamond from Miss Joyce in 1951, and for the next several years it traveled around the country as part of his "Court of Jewels" exhibition. In 1957, Winston sold the diamond to an international industrialist, who then traded it back in 1962. In 1963, the Smithsonian acquired the Portuguese Diamond from Mr. Winston in exchange for 2,400 carats of small diamonds. The Portuguese Diamond strongly fluoresces blue under ultraviolet light. A soft fluorescence is visible even in daylight or artificial light and gives the stone a slight bluish haze, enough so that it was once advertised as the "largest blue diamond in the world". In fact, if not for the fluorescence, the diamond would appear slightly yellowish.

Also, Feather II (2014) says: "The diamond's name comes from a claim

that it once was believed to have been from Brazil and had been in the possession of Portuguese royalty. That claim proved untrue, and we now know that the diamond originated in South Africa.”

Is it so?

## ICONIC EVIDENCE THAT THE DIAMOND BELONGED TO KING JOSÉ I OF PORTUGAL

After 1640, Portuguese sovereigns were enthroned in what was known as an acclamation act (*Auto de Levantamento e Juramento*). In Figure 2 it is partially represented the portrait of the “*Alegoria à Aclamação do Rei D. José I de Portugal*” (allegory to the acclamation of King José I of Portugal), which was painted ca. 1750, attributed to Joana do Salitre (Gonçalves, 2013, pp. 410-416)<sup>4</sup> of the school of Vieira Lusitano.

It is a quite large painting (248cm x 320cm) and is not on public display, staying in one of the noble rooms of the ancient Royal Palace of Necessidades, which serves nowadays as headquarters of the Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Being an allegory, the painting is an elaborated iconic metaphor and contains real and imaginary features – some we can check because the detailed report of the acclamation act itself – which happened on the 7<sup>th</sup> of September 1750, is available



Figure 2 – Excerpt of the Allegory of the Acclamation of King José I of Portugal, with his wife Queen Mariana Victoria de Bourbon (ca. 1750)

<sup>4</sup> Other state that it was authored by Vieira Lusitano or co-authored by both.

(e.g. Azevedo, 1954); for instance, relative to the clothing of the king, it is stated he was wearing a grey silk suit with diamond buttons and also the badge of the Cross of Christ with remarkable diamonds – like the painting shows – and other jewellery. That suit of diamond buttons was famous even eighty years later, as Murray (1831, p. 55) points out: “The buttons on the silken stole of King José I of Portugal, worn as a court dress, are twenty in all, each a brilliant; the aggregate value of these amount to £100,000 (...)”.

But we should focus on the clasp-brooch of the mantle depicted in Figure 3. I believe that there is no doubt that there appears as central a quite large bluish octagonal stone, compatible with what would be the case for a cushion cut gem with rounded corners – surrounded by several white diamonds. It is like an enhanced version of the Mirror of Portugal – the brooch that contained the homonymous diamond (e.g. Casquilho, 2005).

Comparing dimensions, in Figure 4 it is shown the parallel of the stone in the clasp of the mantle of the king and the Portuguese Diamond itself worn by Peggy Joyce; one can check that the size of the stones seems quite compatible, though in the clasp-brooch of the king the main axis of the stone is horizontal, while as a pendent in the platinum choke in the photograph it appears vertical.

We can proceed a little further using the interpupillary distance (ID), which is considered to be a proper metric for horizontal measures (Deza and Deza, 2013, p. 595) for an average estimation; if we consider that the ID of the king is the mean value for men, ca. 65 mm

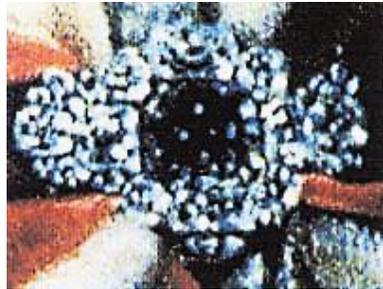


Figure 3 – Above: clasp-brooch of the mantle of King José I of Portugal; Below: The Portuguese Diamond (photo: <https://museumofdiamonds.org/products/portuguese-diamond>)

(Dodgson, 2004), and measure the horizontal and vertical axis of the gem proportionally, one gets the estimated results: 32.50 mm for the horizontal axis and 29.25 mm for the vertical axis, which are very close to the actual dimensions of the diamond.



Figure 4 – Comparing the dimensions of the clasp-brooch of José of Portugal with the diamond acquired by Peggy Joyce (photo: <http://blackstarrfrost.com/timeline-2/>); below at right: the Portuguese Diamond (<http://geogallery.si.edu/index.php/10002688/portuguese-diamond>)

Yet, there is another iconic sign showing that the king owned a large octagonal stone in the eighteenth century. The equestrian statue of King José I of Portugal located in Praça do Comércio (previously known as Terreiro do Paço) was unveiled on the king’s birthday in 1775, twenty years after the devastation of Lisbon by the huge earthquake in 1755, casted by Joaquim Machado de Castro after drawings prepared by Eugénio dos Santos.

A closer look to the head and shoulders of the statue as it is shown

in Figure 6, provides no doubt that the clasp of the mantle that appears in the right shoulder – behind the Sceptre with the Eye of Providence – mimics an octagonal large stone surrounded by other comparatively smaller; I am claiming that the central stone can be no other than (a replica of) the Portuguese Diamond.



Figure 5 – Equestrian statue of King José of Portugal, 1775

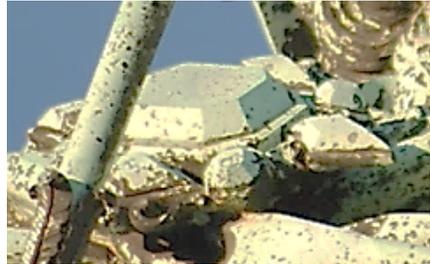


Figure 6 – The brooch-clasp on the right shoulder in the equestrian statue of king José of Portugal, 1775; The Portuguese Diamond (photo: Chip Clark - <http://geogallery.si.edu/index.php/10002688/portuguese-diamond>)

## QUEEN MARIA I OF PORTUGAL

Queen Maria I was daughter of King José I and became the first undisputed queen regnant of Portugal in 1777. We also have the report concerning the Acclamation Act (Auto de Levantamento e Juramento) of Queen Maria I and his husband and uncle Pedro III (Peter III) written by António Pedro Vergollino (1780) and the description of the diamonds that the queen and his husband the king consort Pedro III were using is overwhelming, though one can't find an explicit mention relative to a specific big diamond. For instance it is told there: "The headdress pretended to mimic an imperial crown woven of innumerable diamonds (...) which appeared to be made of one stone without a similar in preciousness".

In Figure 7, the queen is shown with regalia in a portrait of unknown author, dated from the second half of eighteenth century – but previous to 1789, when the ribbon became tricolored – on display in Museu da Inconfidência Mineira (Brazil) and one can see that on her right shoulder there is a clasp with three "Barroco" pearls attached to a stone that could be the Portuguese Diamond; using the ID technique, assuming that the interpupillary distance of queen Maria Francisca



Figure 7 – Portrait of Queen Maria I of Portugal, late eighteenth century (presumably before 1789) from an unknown author, in Museu da Inconfidência Mineira (Ouro Preto, Brazil)

Isabel is the average value for women which is 62 mm (Dodgson, 2004), the estimated dimensions of the shoulder diamond are ca. 29mm x 26mm, which seems smaller than those estimated relative to the stone previously discussed (Figure 4). I consider this approach inconclusive.

There are at least two other portraits of the queen that should be investigated, namely the one in Bemposta, authored by Giuseppe Trono, ca. 1791 (e.g. Raggi and Degortes, 2018).

Queen Maria I died in Brazil (Rio de Janeiro) in March 20, 1816. Since May 13, 1777, she had been Queen of Portugal and the Algarves and, from December 16, 1815, until her death, she was Queen of the United Kingdom of Portugal, Brazil and the Algarves. She was succeeded by her son João, Prince Regent de facto since 1792 and de jure since 1799.

## KING JOÃO VI OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF PORTUGAL, BRAZIL AND THE ALGARVES

After about two years of mourning the death of his mother, King João VI was enthroned in February 6, 1818, at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The painting of Jean Baptiste Debret is dated from 1817, and shows the king in court dress with regalia (Figure 8). The mantle is closed by a clasp-brooch with a noticeable big stone, although it doesn't appear clearly defined with a crisp boundary; yet, the engraving done by Pradier after the painting of Debret, shows a remarkable gem with a global size compatible with the Portuguese Diamond, except that it seems rectangular and not almost quadrangular as it was supposed. Also, in the inventory of the jewels made after the death of the king in Portugal, and then in the judicial sentence for sharing the legacy assets (Soriano, 1887, pp. 698-711), there is no record relative to such a singular stone – contrary to what happens with the stone which is explicitly mentioned as the rough diamond of 135 ct. – but for the item named “prezilha rica” is said to have three diamonds, two encircled by rings and a major central one “muito rico” what is also stated to be a crown jewel – could that be the clasp of the in Figure 8? I believe, from the painting of Debret, it would be so.



Figure 8 – King João VI, painted by Debret in 1817, Museu Nacional de Belas Artes, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (left); right: a detail of the painting; centre, a detail of the engraving done by Charles Pradier (ca. 1820) after the painting of Debret – the clasp in the mantle shows a large octagonal stone.

Still, from the painting of Debret, and using the interpupillary distance of the king to be the average value for men, I estimate the dimensions of the central stone, though perceived with fuzzy limits, to be around 27 x 23 mm, what is smaller than the size of the Portuguese Diamond. With the ambiguity emerging from the engraving of Pradier, I also find this approach inconclusive.

## IS THERE ANY NEWS CONCERNING BRAZILIAN GEMS THAT COULD BE COMPATIBLE WITH THE PORTUGUESE DIAMOND?

From the evidence previously pointed out, was claimed that the Portuguese Diamond is the gem appearing in the brooch of the Allegory of the Acclamation of King José, ca. 1750, is. So, one must look to (documented) news concerning Brazilian diamonds, relative to a compatible stone, before that date. It should be recalled that an octave was a Mexican-Brazilian measure of weight for diamonds equivalent of ca. 17 ½ carats (Mawe, 1812, p. 224; Manutchehr-Danai, 2009, p. 612).

*A diamond of nineteen octaves (ca. 1732)*

Rabello (1997, p. 77) tells that a beautiful Brazilian diamond of nineteen octaves (so, weighing ca. 333 carats) appeared clandestinely in Europe, from what resulted the arrest of Manoel Alvares de Matos who had received the stone from Manoel Mendes de Vasconcelos in 1732. In the same book, from the table with the names of known smugglers, we can see it is the only case relative to a large stone mentioned before 1750. Since the history is well documented it can be presumed that the diamond was recovered by the king.

*The stolen diamond of an original stone of twenty-six octaves (ca. 1736)*

There is also a report published by Veiga (1897, pp. 286-287), relative to an official petition addressed to the King João V of Portugal and signed by Manoel Caetano Lopes do Lavre, concerning a diamond “as big as an egg”, that was stolen from Manoel Rodrigues Nunes, living in Rio de Janeiro; it was in 1730 that it came to him a rough diamond weighting twenty-six octaves – as such, the diamond would weigh about 455 carats – that was cleaved into two stones by the jeweller Francisco Payva, as a result of an experiment to test whether it was a proper diamond, one part being considerably larger than the other – and then he found that it had disappeared from his house in 1735 and subsequently, in 1736, he made a complaint to the king promising to give the stone to the sovereign as, he said “the stone was the biggest and the better ever found and there will be no other comparable in Europe” – if he could retrieve it from the robber, whom he accused to be António José de Banhos Motta, saying also that he had brought it into the reign (Portugal). We don’t know the exact rough weight of the bigger stone but is acceptable to think of something like more than 300 carats (2/3 of the total).

So, in any of those two cases above reported, there are stones likely to become what would be an octagonal cushion gem of ca. 150 carats, or even a little more, as it is known the general rule that when cutting the rough stone in general it loses about half, or more, of its original weight. We should emphasize that in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a diamond like that – an octagonal cushion shape of ca. 150 ct. or more – would in fact be the greatest in Western Europe, greater than the Regent of France and the newly cut Koh-

i-Noor of Great Britain, just being surpassed by the Orlov diamond with ca. 190 carats which adorned, since 1774, the sceptre of the Emperor of Russia.

## OTHER BRAZILIAN GEMS THAT SHOULD NOT BE CONFUSED WITH THE PORTUGUESE DIAMOND

There are several other famous Brazilian gems that should not be confused with the Portuguese Diamond, from what follows some short remarks on the subject.

### *The Braganza stone*

The Braganza (Bragança) stone, a name that began being used in late 1800's, previously known as the great diamond of the King/Queen of Portugal (e.g. Bomare, 1791, p. 127) or the great Brazilian diamond (Jameson, 1816, p. 13), and also called the large uncut Diamond of Portugal (Murray, 1831, p. 43), is reported to have been found in 1741, and in fact one can find a memoir in *Journal Oeconomique* of July 1751 (pp. 143-144), mentioning the diamond found in Brazil and its weight of 1680 carats, including a sketch; that stone was referred to be instead a white topaz, even since the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Romé de l'Isle (1783, p. 208), and then many other. Bensaúde (1893) gives an interesting and developed account on the subject. The Braganza stone was recently claimed to being probably an aquamarine by Galopim de Carvalho (2006), an hypothesis that was already presented previously (Bruton, 1986, p. 193) since there is such a gem still present in the royal collections of Ajuda Palace weighing 342 gr. – and, before standardization, Portuguese/Brazilian carat weighted ca. 205 mg (e.g. Streeter, 1882, p. 42; Valladares and Valladares, 1868, p. 118) what makes the weight convertible to about 1670 old carats which is very close to the more common reported figure. Yet, Manutchehr-Danai (2009, pp. 56-57) makes a distinction that may become relevant: he distinguishes the Braganza stone (mentioned with 1640 carat), which he calls the Braganza topaz, from the Braganza diamond (which he also names the “Portugal diamond”) with ca. 144 ct.

*The Regent of Portugal*

Another issue at stake is that gemmologists Fryer and Koivula (1986) report the Portuguese Diamond as being the Regent of Portugal diamond, saying it nearly weighted 1 ounce troy (ca. 156 ct.). In fact, one can retrieve a report published in the late XIX century (Veiga, 1897, pp. 41-44) of the diamond found in the headwaters of river Abaeté, relative to a stone weighting  $7 \frac{3}{4}$  octaves, thus ca. 135 ct. – also mentioned as having  $138 \frac{1}{2}$  ct concerning the difference in carats weight; in fact, from the inventory of the crown jewels made after 1910 one can see the report of a rough diamond weighing 27.7 grams, what would become  $138 \frac{1}{2}$  standard carats – delivered to the crown treasury by a military company which found it, from what, by the order of Queen Maria I, they were rewarded: a set of 43 men received a total amount of 10,400\$000 distributed according the ranking, which included the payment for the freedom of 14 black slave men. That report is signed on the 6th of July 1797. That diamond was later designated “the great diamond of the crown of Portugal” (Lima, 1843, p. 243; Valladares and Valladares, 1868, p. 119). Also, Pereira and Rodrigues (1912, p. 149) mention the “Regente” as the name of the great diamond of the Portuguese crown. One of the Crown Jewels of Portugal stolen in the mysterious and suspicious robbery of The Hague Museum, 2002, was a rough diamond with 135 ct - thus the Regente de Portugal (or Abaeté) diamond.

*The Portugal diamond*

One can read in the memories of Laura Junot – whom was also entitled Duchesse of Abrantes – the following (Junot, 1833, p. 115): “But the cabinet of Natural History at Lisbon was furnished with a fac-simile of the famous Portugal diamond, as large as an apricot, cut in white wood and inscribed with the exact weight of the original stone”; and, in a letter written by Junot to his wife, transcribed in the same book, it is said by him (Junot, 1833, p. 194): “(...) you may remember to have seen in the cabinet of Natural History at Lisbon, the exact imitation of the famous Portugal diamond, which, but for one discolored speck, would be the finest jewel in the world.” Also, we can go further in the description of the fac-simile by Laura Junot (1837, p. 819):

“(..) cut like a half-cone like it, and having the same spherical and conical shape as the diamond. It was as big as an apricot”. In fact Roset (1856, p. 16) refers to a stone which seems compatible, saying that that: “the sixth diamond of note belongs to the King of Portugal. It weighs ninety-three and three-quarters carats. It is about an inch and a quarter long, by an inch in width and in thickness.” It could be the diamond mentioned by Rebello (1829, p. 249), saying that in 1786 it was found a whole large diamond which by its weight was evaluated in many millions of cruzados and sent into the museum in Lisboa at that time. I think that the diamond mentioned by Rosas Júnior (1954, p. 15) like “grande brilhante torrado” with ca. 32 ct. is the remnant of the Portugal diamond recut, and, compatibly, Mawe (1823, p. 46) mentioned a diamond from Brazil weighing above 90 carats, which, when cut into brilliant weighed nearly 32 ct.

### *Star of the South*

Last, there is another famous Brazilian diamond, discovered after independence of Brazil at Bagagem in 1853, which later would become known as the Estrela do Sul (Star of the South) cut into a dodecahedral oval cushion of 128.5 ct. with 35 mm long and 29 mm wide (e.g. Farrington, 1929, pp. 25-26) also known as the “Great Brazilian diamond”, which is a misleading name because it was also applied to the Braganza stone (e.g. Jameson, 1816, p. 13) and to the Portuguese Diamond as well. Though its main dimensions and weight are similar to the Portuguese Diamond the main differences are that it has not an octahedral emerald cut, instead being dodecahedral oval, and bears a pinkish-brown hue.

## POSSIBLE HINTS ON THE FATE OF THE PORTUGUESE DIAMOND

As Smith (2003) points out, famous diamonds often have complex and even controversial histories, because of the secrecy and legend associated with them. On the June 21, 1956, The Pittsburgh Press (p. 18) reports a comment of Joan Herkold saying:

Around my neck was the sky blue Great Brazilian diamond, 130 carats and \$1,250,000 worth; (...) True origin of the Brazilian is lost in antiquity. First record of it is 150 years ago when it left the ancestral crown of the Portuguese emperor for sale in Brazil. From there it traveled to many crown heads, people of fortune and outstanding families (...). Like all other famous stones, the emerald-cut Brazilian has become a part of world gem history.

The “sky blue” and the “emerald-cut” mentions leave no doubt it is the Portuguese Diamond, before bearing that name, and in fact we can see in Manutchehr-Danai (2009, pp. 213-539) that he refers to the Great Brazilian diamond as a stone of ca. 130 ct. weight cut, that belonged to the Crown Jewels of Portugal. Also, Copeland and Martin (1974, p. 188) say that the Great Brazilian diamond is a 130-carat diamond which was once part of the Crown Jewels of Portugal, and in 1956 it was claimed to have been set in a \$1,250,000 diamond necklace and exhibited at Sears Roebuck stores.

The comment of Joan Herkold has some historic imprecisions – for instance, the only kings of Portugal whom were officially named Emperor of Brazil are João VI from 1825 until his death in 1826 (e. g. Soriano, 1887, pp. 668-673) and his son Pedro from March to the beginning of May, 1826 – but gives the most probable clue on the subject: the diamond would have travelled with the royal family in 1807/08 from Portugal into Brazil and from there it went away, being pawned or sold. Also, Elsa Maxwell in a book first published in 1957 states she wore once, in a party, the Portuguese Diamond then saying (Maxwell, 1957, p. 25): “(...) at Mr. Winston’s suggestion, I also wore the Portuguese diamond which one of the Kings of Portugal had sent into Brazil, and which finally reached New York.”

José Rosas Júnior (1954: ix) says that in 1801 the Portuguese crown took out a loan of 12 million florins with the companies Hope in the Netherlands and Baring in London, giving Brazil’s diamonds as the main guarantee. It is also known that around 1807 the Marquis of Marialva was sent to Paris provided with full powers and a large portion of diamonds, to deal directly with Napoleon (Soriano, 1867, p. 661). In the judicial sentence for sharing the legacy assets of King João VI it is said that in the years 1809 and 1813 (thus, the Portuguese royal family was in Brazil) the Prince Regent sent to London

the amount of 27,000 carats of cut diamonds to pay for the debts of the crown. Also, it is known that when King João VI returned into Portugal in 1821, he had left diamonds of the royal treasury, and also crown jewels, in the Bank of Brazil, as mentioned by Pereira da Silva (1877, p. 320).

Even so, one can point other possibilities. It is written there was a huge treasure of diamonds in the Palace of Queluz, hidden at the orders of the queen consort Carlota Joaquina de Bourbon whom, when dying, told its location to his son Miguel – at the time, the king of Portugal – and that he could have and use it if extremely needed, what he proceeded (Berardo, 1840, p. 249); that subject is also confirmed by the Baron de Saint-Pardoux (1836, pp. 63-64) whom further states that the treasure, valued in many million, was delivered to captain Elliot in order to get an armada from England what, after all, didn't happen; about the same is stated by Soriano (1885, p. 139) and the story of a hidden treasure in Queluz is mentioned too by John Latouche (1875, pp. 68-69). If the Portuguese Diamond would have been in that treasure, then it would have escaped from the official inventories of crown jewels. Also, it is said that the Infanta Regente D. Isabel Maria gave to his brother king Miguel, five or six bags of brilliants, the property of the state and not that of the sovereign (Murray, 1839, p. 78).

I could not find any reference relative to a gem compatible with the Portuguese Diamond in different inventories of Portugal crown jewels. In a memory published in *Archivo Pittoresco* (1860, p. 22) there is a list of the crown jewels at the time with the corresponding monetary valuations, and one can't identify a gem that could be the diamond.

Yet, there are several news that can give some hints on the subject: in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 21, 1863 it is said that the King of Portugal [Luís I at that time] was making continual sales of crown diamonds; in the *Daily National Republican*, April 09, 1864, it is stated that a great number of precious stones have been purchased by the French government from that of Portugal; in a news item of *The Sun*, July 8, 1892 (p. 4), it is said that King Carlos (Charles) of Portugal possesses a fine diamond of 205 carats.

Portugal was declared bankrupt by international news in the 1840's going on intermittently until the 1890's; one can read in a news article of New-

York Daily Tribune, May 23, 1842 (p. 2) a mention saying “poor, bankrupt Portugal”; in the same newspaper of August 4, 1843 (p. 2), reads that the finances of Portugal appear to be utterly bankrupt; yet, in The Daily Phoenix, January 19, 1873 (p. 3) a news report states that Spain, Portugal and Mexico are virtually bankrupt; a similar utterance is stated in The Sun, May 10, 1891 (p. 19); also in the Mohave County Miner, February 27, 1897 (p. 2) one can read that “Portugal is bankrupt; she has repudiated 50 per cent of her public debt, and now her ministry has retired after trying in vain to provide the treasury with a revenue adequate to its needs”;

In another account of The Chicago Eagle, January 04, 1896 (p. 7) it is said that one of the objects of the visit of the King of Portugal [Carlos I] to London was to consult a jeweller as to the proper maintenance of the crown jewels; but, in The Hope Pioneer, December 6, 1895 one can read that king brought the royal crown with him:

It was officially announced that he wished to consult London jewelers concerning repairs to be made to the crown, but the truth is that he is desirous of realizing a considerable sum of ready money on the bauble (...). The crown of Portugal is the most valuable in Europe, although little has been heard about it. It's valued at \$8,000,000. (...) The jewels in the crown consist of diamonds, rubies, pearls, sapphires and emeralds, set in solid gold. Its weight is three pounds five ounces troy.

On the news of New Ulm Review, September 8, 1896 one can find:

Portugal's national debt is about \$750,000,000, payable in gold in accordance with the refunding laws of October 30, 1893. The principal holder of the debt is the house of Rothschild, acting as trustee for British investors. The original debt dates from 1850 and the national bond issues were on a silver basis. About twenty-three years ago Portugal was placed on a gold basis at a meeting of the national creditors held in the bank of England. (...) In January, 1892, the King of Portugal was forced to relinquish a fifth of his civil list to cut down expenses and avert a revolution. His pawning of the crown jewels in London attracted worldwide attention a year or more ago.

Then, many newspapers report about the same king having pledged the crown jewels in London; the Evening Star, May 11, 1901 (page 20) mentions he received the amount \$4,000,000 or 20,000,000 francs; another news from

the Minneapolis Journal, September 3, 1902 (page 13), says that the jewels pawned included the diamond encrusted sceptre valued at \$5,000,000, and that the gems embedded in the royal crown are said to be taken out and paste substituted, what is also stated in The Washington Times, September 3, 1903 (page 1); in The Pacific Commercial Advertiser, October 25, 1902 (page 11), says that the crown of Portugal has been in the keeping of Rothschild London branch since 1894, when the king borrowed 5,000,000 francs for it, about 1/8 of its value; in The Seattle Star, August 25, 1902, it is said that the crown jewels of Portugal were recently sold to cover a big royal debt, the money being due to a foreign banking firm, and the jewels had been replaced by imitations; in The River Press, October 22, 1902 (page 3) it is said that King Carlos I of Portugal, has pawned the crown jewels, including the sceptre of Dom Pedro IV, valued at millions of dollars, and the Braganza diamond; also, in the New-York Daily Tribune, September 20, 1907 (page 7) it is said that for some years ago it was found necessary to sell the whole of the crown jewels of Portugal, some of which are now in America.

In fact, at least some of the crown jewels were sold by King Carlos I with the tacit consent of the Government of Portugal, but not of the Parliament. After the death of King Carlos in the regicide (1908), he was succeeded by his son Manuel II, the last king of Portugal. In a news item of The Sun, April 25, 1908 (page 3) it is said that King Manuel II ordered an inventory to be made and it was discovered that a magnificent belt studded with diamonds and rubies, several bracelets and a pearl necklace worth \$750,000 were missing; The Evening World, April 24, 1908 (page 11) reports the same amount, based on the Portuguese Republican press, saying that the jewels were secretly sold by King Carlos to meet debts, and having charged that absolute proof existed of the fact that a large portion of these jewels had been sold without the consent of Parliament.

## THE SEMIOTIC CONVOLUTION OF THE PORTUGUESE DIAMOND

From what was accounted in this paper, it is claimed there is sufficient iconic evidence that the Portuguese Diamond belonged to King José I of

Portugal and, presumably, though with a lesser degree of probability, also to his successors, Queen Maria I and King João VI. Still, it should be noted that the stone being rough-cut in a cushion is quite compatible with a Brazilian origin: Shipley et al. (1948, p. 31) say that “Brazilian cut brilliant” is a cushion-shaped diamond, also known as “old mine cut”.

I couldn’t find any documented evidence relative to when the diamond left Portuguese royalty, and where it went and to whom. Maybe, as other have said, and was previously reported in this paper, the diamond was in Brazil and from there went to England, then Holland to be recut, and at last New York.

Could it be the diamond of 205 (or 215) carats mentioned in possession of King Carlos, then pawned and/or sold among other crown jewels? A news item in *Mohawk Sentinel*, March 17, 1825 (p. 4) reports the Brazilian diamond belonging to the King of Portugal [João VI at the time] weighing 215 carats. That diamond, which I couldn’t find mentioned in the inventories of crown jewels, seemed to be consistently documented since one can read in Jannettaz et al. (1881, p. 225) that the King of Portugal has a large diamond which Petzholdt assessed the weight as 205 carats; and Barbot (1858, p. 256) also mentions it with the weight of 215 ct., a figure that was already stated previously by Romé de l’Isle (1783, p. 209) and then Batchelor (1840, p. 33); yet, that diamond is mentioned by Murray (1839, p. 70) as the round brilliant of Portugal – and the author claimed he had a model – also, presumably, was kept in the Brazilian treasury after independence (*idem*, p. 73).

In fact I don’t know, but that reveals another vertex of this work which is the veil of secrecy, so common when crown jewels change ownership in a mysterious gizmo.

The fact that the diamond was initially described as the “unknown” in the Smithsonian collection as told by Balfour (2000, p. 216) can be a meaningful ellipsis, when it is known that Harry Winston named it the Portuguese Diamond. Winston amassed a gem collection that ranked second only to that of the British Crown, and of some 300 major diamonds ranked by the Gemological Institute, at one time he had owned 60 (Gerber, 1995, p. 848). Another meaningful curiosity: a condition of his insurance policy with Lloyds of London, the largest gem policy ever issued in Lloyds’s 275-year history, was

that he never be photographed (Bruton, 1986, p. 223).

Balfour (2000, p. 216) also says that the February 1924 issue of *Vogue* carried an advertisement for the New York jewellers, Black, Starr & Frost, which stated the following:

Another historic jewel is the Black, Starr and Frost diamond. It is a blue diamond, of particular intensity of color, and weighs 127 carats – larger than the Koh-i-noor. More than that, it is the largest blue diamond ever discovered. It is absolutely perfect in every way, and it is the largest diamond of any kind which is offered for sale. Price \$300,000.

So, the jewellers Black, Starr & Frost claimed at that time it was a “historic jewel” then informing later it was mined in South Africa about 1910 or 1912? Those can be curious dates too, since in 1910 the Portuguese monarchy was destitute, replaced by the republic, and in 1912 there was the public sale of the jewels of Queen Maria Pia of Portugal. Concerning that subject, a news story in *The Daily Evening Telegraph – Philadelphia* of August 19, 1867 (p. 8) reported the dress and the jewels of Queen Maria Pia of Portugal at a prom in Paris, saying “(...) but the immense number of diamonds on her neck and shoulders must have been somewhat heavy. A large diamond square in particular, a snap, called in French ‘ferret’ was more like a dazzling star.” In fact some newspapers at the time, like *The San Francisco Call*, January 28, 1912 (p. 22), claimed that it was the sale of crown jewels of Portugal, and from the catalogue issued by Banco de Portugal at the time, one can see mentioned some major pieces of jewellery.

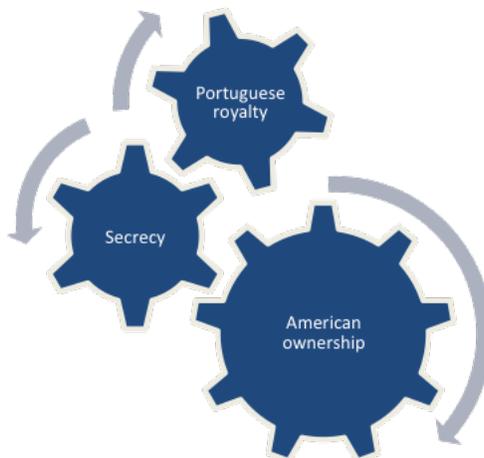


Figure 9 - The gizmo of the Portuguese Diamond

Anyway, what seems certain is that there is a secrecy pending on the transaction of the Portuguese Diamond, and then it appears in the twenties in New York for sale and is bought by Peggy Hopkins Joyce. Concerning this last transaction Jeffrey Post (1997, p. 37) clarified:

Miss Joyce was a dazzling blonde who performed in the Ziegfeld Follies, a true glamour girl of the 1920s. She had six husbands, at least five of whom were men of wealth, and claimed to have been engaged fifty times. She was said to be almost as fond of jewels as of men. Sometime prior to 1946 Miss Joyce placed the diamond on consignment to the group of jewelers mentioned above, in an unsuccessful attempt to sell it.

Josephy and McBride (1931, p. 176) said at the time: “Peggy Hopkins Joyce got her 127 carat diamond from Black, Starr and Frost and paid \$300,000 for the huge, square thing, hung on a flexible diamond necklace which fitted into the hollow of Peggy’s white expensive throat.” One could say: an epiphany of the American Dream.

So, the diamond goes from a legacy of the Portuguese royalty, then, and through the veil of secrecy, some decades later became a commodity that is to be sold and bought, though, curiously, either in the case of Peggy Joyce or later of Harry Winston, the transaction is mainly made in exchange of other gems, not cash.

It is also known that Winston was fascinated by the history of ownership, as well as the intrinsic value of the gems, and he used these histories to enhance interest in the stones (Gerber, 1995, p. 848). Fortunately, then, we owe to Harry Winston that the



Figure 10 – Excerpt of the painting of Peggy Hopkins Joyce with the Portuguese Diamond (by Raymond Perry Rogers Neilson)

diamond did not lose its historic root, after all kept with the proper name. It is possible that previously the name was the “Braganza diamond” – not the Braganza stone as discussed – but that would be a somehow critical issue, or an unlucky name, since there were news at the time like the one in *The Washington Herald*, December 11, 1910, mentioning the “Braganza curse”. Yet, the diamond in its singularity as perceived by humans, found its own way to become an institutional symbol again: now the largest faceted diamond in the National Gem Collection of the National Museum of Natural History in the United States of America. The Portuguese Diamond is a proper, suitable name, for the gem. Names are identity signs (Danesi, 2018, p. 38) and, at least for some, *nomen est omen*.

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