SE MÄNNISKAN

DEMOGRAFI, RÄTT OCH HÄLSA
—EN VÄNBOK TILL JAN SUNDIN

SEEING PEOPLE

RED. ANNIKA SANDÉN

INNEHÅLL

THE CROWN AND POOR RELEIF POLICIES: STRUCTURING LOCAL ELITES (EARLY MODERN PORTUGAL)

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The Misericórdias are lay confraternities created by royal initiative at the end of the 15th century. One hundred years later they dominated the institutionalized assistance, marginalizing the other confraternities and even the Church. Appearing at the moment of the poor relief reform and the rise of the Early Modern State, the Misericórdias will be the framework for the study of the problematic of the social mobility in Early Modern Portugal. My starting point is that the organization of the poor relief field was used by the crown to consolidate its power and mold the local elites, while these ones used it for social promotion. A process with mutual benefits, organized under very specific rules.

The beginning of the process: the new confraternal movement

The first Portuguese confraternity of Misericórdia was founded in Lisbon in the 15th of August of 1498 by the *old queen* D Leonor - the king's sister and kingdom regent while D. Manuel I was away from the country - and it marks the beginning of a systematic and direct intervention of the crown on the poor relief arena.[278] Among the crown's purposes was the wish to revitalize the medieval "spirituality of charity" and to stimulate a more active participation from the faithful in a moment when some sectors of society intended to reform the piety, criticizing the Popes for the crisis that the Church was going through,[279] and also to impose more efficient poor relief practices. Bearers of an extremely ambitious social project inscribed in the fourteen mercy works registered in it regiment, the Lisbon Misericórdia benefited from the immediate royal protection made into alms, tax exemptions and various privileges that made it appealing from a social point of view. Six months after its creation, when its institutional framework was already outlined, the king sent his representatives to the main cities and towns convincing them to establish their own confraternity of Misericórdia according to the Regiment of the Lisbon one. The wish to attract the local elites for this new project was clearly assumed by the monarch. He showed it by offering the future administrators of the new confraternities the same benefits, honors and distinctions attributed to the patrician elites already represented in the muni-

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278 The royal letter of the 14th of March of 1499 expresses the king's wish to have Misericórdias "in all the cities, villages and main places", administered according to the Lisbon Misericórdia's statutes. Cf. Artur de Magalhães Basto, *História da Santa Casa da Misericórdia do Porto*, Porto, 1934, vol. I, pp. 164-165.
279 Some historians believe it was a sort of pre-reform of the church driven by the Iberian Kings that avoided in Portugal and Spain the rupture that occurred in other parts of Europe. In this interpretation the foundation of Misericórdias can be integrated in the pre-reform movement. Cf. António de Oliveira, "A Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Coimbra no contexto das instituições congéneres", *Memórias da Misericórdia de Coimbra – Documentação e Arte*, Coimbra, 2000 p. 20.

cipalities as well as the possibility of a direct contact with the crown. The exemption of the control of the crown officials, unless the king allowed it, was also among the privileges foreseen. A specific situation that the king resumed under the words: "the Misericórdias are under my protection".

While the king was investing in the foundation of new Misericórdias (77 were created in 1521, when he died), the central courts, by order of the king, were developing a deep legislative work so as to endow the confraternities with juridical personality, institutional conditions and economic resources (based on alms) that allowed them to start their charitable activity. Two important restrictions were imposed by the king in the foundling documents: the ownership of properties (because their administration corrupted the exercise of charity, wrote the King D Manuel I), and the non accumulation of the Misericórdias' administrative positions with the municipal ones: two different orientations that had different treatments.

The first one led the Misericórdias in an economic fragility that was not compatible with their social ambitions, as it was immediately assumed by the king and the Misericórdias' governors. Even if, among the fourteen mercy workers inscribed in their regiments, they started their activity focus on the prisoners and the poor, the occasional alms they received weren't enough neither to take care of the local poor nor to face the prisoners' expenses (subsistence, medical help and judicial processes). The reason why the same king that had forbidden the Misericórdias to have properties, a couple of year later allowed the transfer of small institutions and their incomes to some Misericórdias' administrations, opening the door for the patrimonialization of these confraternities. A situation that was also incented by the Popes since 1530's when they appealed to the faithful to prefer the Misericórdias in their wiles.[280]

The royal orientation concerning the non accumulation of functions between the Misericórdias and the Municipalities was more respected because the people involved were interested in it. Considered a public and honorific service, the management of both institutions, chosen by indirect elections, had no salaries or official income. However, not only the benefits and the tax exemptions could have a very important economical expression as these positions freed the people from the most hated municipal services. The only existing restriction was that all those benefits were limited in time to the exercise of the administrative functions. The reason why the managers of the Misericórdias and the Municipalities preferred not to overlap the same benefits but to make them last longer passing from one institution to another.

After this first moment the crown political options related to the Misericórdias throughout the 16th century followed the same path drawn at the beginning of the century, and even reinforced it. Three main moments can be highlighted in this process. The first one was the recognization that the Mise-

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280 Laurinda Abreu, "Misericórdias: patrimonialização e controle régio (éculos XVI e XVII)", *Ler História*, nº 44, Lisboa, 2003, pp. 5-24.

ricórdias were confraternities under regal protection done by the Pope at the end of the Council of Trent. A very important event that took place in the precise moment that the Church affirmed its intention to recuperate the power on the poor relief questions, specially on the hospitals administration, calling the bishops to assume that role. The second moment immediately followed the Pope decision: as soon as the Council ended, the Portuguese crown started the systematic transfer of the municipal and royal hospitals to the Misericórdias' administrations (and with them the foundlings care in many cases), and also introduced the Pope privilege in the nation law. The last moment of this process come up as a sort of final "happening" when, in 1593, a crown diploma excluded all the other confraternities from the institutionalized poor relief and health care, creating a quasi monopoly situation for the Misericórdias.[281]

In European terms, these interventions occurred when the individual charity was being re-oriented to the institutions and Rome was investing in the Purgatory cult, promising to free people from their sins if they gave properties to the Church for the celebration of messes. In Portugal, the kings, with the Popes support, tried to drive both movements towards the Misericórdias allowing them to use the money given for the celebration of the masses for the souls of Purgatory, into the hospital budgets. The principle that supported this process was quiet simple: to cure the sick had the same benefits for the dead' souls than to celebrate messes and the alive needed those incomes more than the dead.

The increase of the Misericórdias' poor relief responsibilities and their patrimonial reinforcement would exert a strong attractive power on the elites or on who wanted to belong to them. In spite of all the laws forbidding it, early in the 17th century, the extraordinary patrimony of these confraternities (real estates as well as money for loan applications) was already taken by the people who were in charge of them. Consolidated as social and economic centers, the Misericórdias were transformed, in a short period, into spaces of local power. A movement legitimized by the crown, interested in the political use of these spaces, namely by the visibility that they gave to the regal policies and by the reproduction of a specific model of poor relief, social policies and political power, that has to be integrated in the process of construction of the Early Modern State.

Structuring local elites: the role of the crown

The Regiment of the Lisbon Misericórdia, matrix of more than 300 hundred Misericórdias created in Portugal and its colonies until 1640 (there are 364 Misericórdias in Portugal nowadays), determined that the new confraternities should be composed by an equal number of nobles and representatives of the higher levels of the population as long as they did not exert any manual work. This numerical parity should be reflected in terms of the number of members of the con-

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281 Cf. Laurinda Abreu0 & José Pedro Paiva, "Reforço e interferência régia e elitização: durante o governo dos Filipes", *Portugaliae Monumenta Misericordiarum*, vol. V, Lisboa, 2006, pp. 6-35.

fraternity as well as in its different management bodies. And even if this parity really didn't exist (for instance, in the most important body – the *Table* – the president (provedor) was a noble and did not count in this sum: which means, in the 13 people that composed the *tables*, 7 were nobles and 6 not) - and the folk elites only occupied secondary positions, to be enrolled in a confraternity with such characteristics already meant social distinction. As a consequence, in a few decades, a charitable institution would be assumed as a political instrument for the crown and an instrument of social capital for its members.

The importance of the Misericórdias would come, among other factors, from the deep social reorganization they protagonized. And this for two main reasons: firstly, because, under the auspices of the crown, the new institutions officially recognized some groups as local elites. Secondly, because the new Misericórdias' Regiment, from 1577, stipulated that in case a community had not enough nobles to abide with the social balance, some specific people could be registered as such. In practical terms those who, among the bourgeoisies, had economic power, university training or military service. An administration exclusively composed by non nobles wasn't foreseen at all. In conclusion, these confraternities were a powerful instrument of social mobility, at least of social differentiation, as the communities immediately realized and tried to profit from.

To these specificities, another one was added. As the national law determined that only the local elites could access to the municipal positions, new opportunities for political participation were opened for the Misericórdias' members. Thus, for some people, to reach the Misericórdias was an objective in itself, the platform that preceded their entrance into the municipal power. A path that, in many cases, started in less important confraternities, going up to the most important ones, in an obvious cursus honorum, that was also of social promotion.

Figure 1. Example of a typical *cursus honorum* for the common people
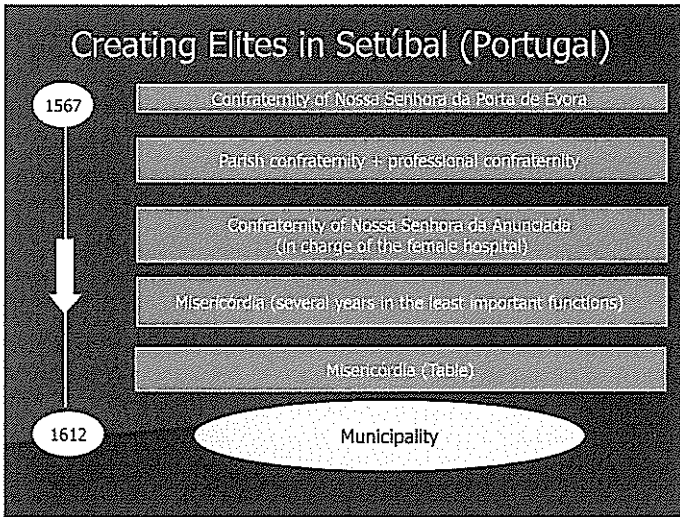
Source: From Laurinda Abreu, *Memórias da Alma e do Corpo. A Misericórdia de Setúbal na Modernidade*, Viseu, 1999.

In the case above, the trajectory started by the entrance in a female confraternity that was opened to everybody (Confraternity of Nossa Senhora da Porta de Évora), continuing through the parish confraternity (Confraternity of Santíssimo Sacramento), entering in the professional one more or less at the same time. The registration in those confraternities was dependent on the death of the father or the beginning of a new household, in the first case (once only a member per family was expected to be enrolled), and from the entrance in the professional life, in the second one. After some years in the administrative functions of those confraternities, if they were successful, they would go to the Confraternity of Nossa Senhora da Anunciada (one of the few examples of a confraternity in charge of a hospital that was able to resist to the Misericórdia domination until the 19th century). Once they reached the hospital administration they jumped to the Misericórdias. They started in the least important functions until they were able to be elected for the *tables*, frequently administrating both confraternities, the Nossa Senhora da Anunciada and the Misercórdia. Once there, the municipality was the objective.[282]

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282 Figure 1 is created from the data presented in Laurinda Abreu, *Memórias da Alma e do Corpo: A Misericórdia de Setúbal na Modernidade*, Viseu, 1999. For the theoretical framework of the theme, see Juan Luis Castellano & Jean-Pierre Dedieu, *Réseaux, familles et pouvois dans le monde ibérique à la fin de l' Ancien Régime*, Paris, 1998.

To sum up, with the creation of the Misericórdias, the crown not only redefined the conditions of access to the local power as it also created the conditions for the development of new elites, reorganizing the local social space around the crown values.

On the other hand, on giving the bourgeois the possibility to socialize with the traditional elites, the Misericórdias also functioned as spaces of civility, education and culture. And, in this way, they can be integrated into the process that Norbert Elias speaks about. A process from which the crown also benefit.

The results of these measures did not take long to come out: 50 years after being established, the Misericórdias had already conquered their place in society and were ready for new challenges. It was precisely by then that the crown handed them the civil hospitals, at the same time the king was trying to make Rome accept the Misericórdias as the main recipients of the pious donations for the Purgatory souls. Simultaneously, the permission to use these resources in the hospitals was negotiated between the Portuguese crown and the Popes.

Structuring local elites: how the new elites consolidate their social climb

The control of the main part of the institutionalized poor relief and health care and of their economic resources was responsible for the enormous local prestige acquired by the Misericórdias, imposing them as spaces of power and influence, simultaneously formal and informal[283]. In formal terms, their power was based on the social capital conferred by the capacity to distribute resources and to select their beneficiaries. Informally, the Misericórdias' administrators increased their power through the incorrect appropriation of the confraternities' patrimony, for their own benefit or for their clienteles.

In a short period of time, the Misericórdias and the municipalities were under the control of the same groups, linked by complex nets of complicities that joined nobles with those who wanted to go to the higher levels of society. Due to the institutional restrictions imposed by the king D Manuel I to the accumulation of the municipalities and of the Misericórdias administrative positions, the local elites preferred to circulate between the Misericórdias and the Municipalities, and again from these to the Misericórdias, creating powerful dynasties that spread their power to several other important local positions and economic resources.[284]

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283 On this subject, see Sandra Cavallo, *Charity and power in early modern Italy. Benefactors and their motives in Turin, 1541-1789*, Cambridge 1995, and, from the same author, "The motivations of benefactors. An overview of approaches to the study of charity", Jonathan Barry & Colin Jones, (eds.) *Medicine and charity before the welfare state*, London and New York, 1994, pp. 46-62.

284 Table created from the data included in *Memórias da Alma e do Corpo. A Misericórdia de Setúbal na Mod ernidade*.

Figure 2. The circulation of the local elites which economic and social power was based on the salt trade and the royal and Military Order of Santiago local positions.
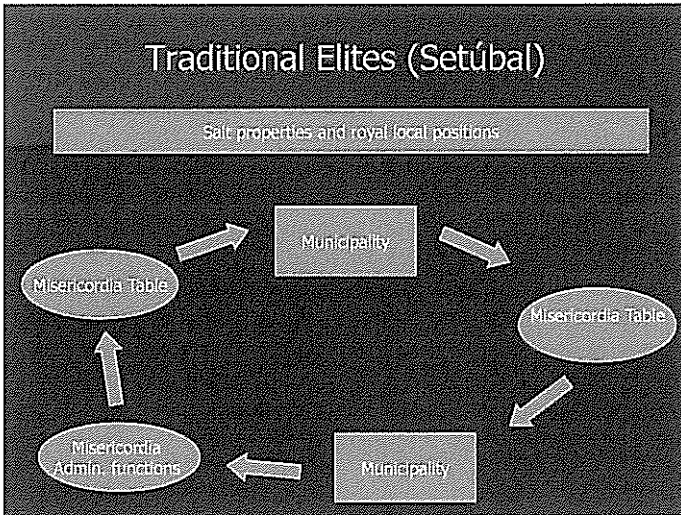
Source: From *Memórias da Alma e do Corpo. A Misericórdia de Setúbal na Modernidade*, Viseu, 1999.

The passivity of the crown can be explained, among other reasons, because such behaviors not only reproduced the way the central power functioned, as they also assured it a reduced number of contacts at local level, allowing it to be infiltrated more easily in the existing nets. A process with benefits for both: on the local elites' side because they were able to keep their interests and guaranty their power without big pressure. On the side of the crown because it not only prevented the reinforcement of intermediary bodies as it also contributed for a better control of the country.

The results of this articulation of interests become visible once more when the crown lunched the foundations of a net of health professionals, in 1575, under compulsory financial support imposed on 74 municipalities that paid the training of doctors, surgeons and apothecaries in the Coimbra University. Concluded the academic training, the taxed municipalities as well as the Misericórdias, apart from other public bodies, recruited the new health professionals. Once again, under the royal impulse, some new economic and social chances were created. Probably the most important was the guaranty of profes-

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sional positions with a secure income and social prestige for a group that was emerging as a profession and with social capital. The sons of the recent elites formed by the Misericórdias' prestige and money were among the beneficiaries of this process: for several families it was possible to change their social condition and consolidate the social mobility in one generation - the father was registered in the Misericórdia as a common person but his son, a doctor, was already registered as a "noble": a "noble" member of the confraternity that, in many cases, had a professional position there (even if it was forbidden by the Misericórdias' Regiment), and also one in the municipality. The last element of the social path of these new elites was the process of the construction of memory, whether through the creation of false genealogies or through funerary monuments, looking for the eternity: another side of the local elites' history, essential elements in order to consolidate their position in society.

At the beginning of the 17th century the social, economic and political process around the poor relief and health care policies was almost concluded. It was by then that the crown tried to control the local elites more efficiently as well as the way they were creating their own clienteles and they were using the municipal and Misericórdias' resources. The power confrontation, long latent, becomes real. However neither the local elites were interested in the rupture that could put their power at stake nor could the crown assume the risk to seriously confront people and institutions, that beyond political power, supported by economic and jurisdictional powers, were responsible for most of the institutionalized assistance.[285]

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285 For other perspective on the Portuguese elites, see Nuno Gonçalo Monteiro, "Elites locais e mobilidade social em Portugal nos finais do Antigo Regime", *Análise Social, vol. XXXII(141)*, 1997 (2º), p. 335-368; and, from the same author, *Elites e poder. Entre o Antigo Regime e o liberalismo*, Lisboa, 2003.

Summary:
The crown and poor relief policies: structuring local elites
(Early Modern Portugal)

Laurinda Abreu

Created under the Crown auspices at the end of the 15th century, the confraternities of Misericórdia took less than a century to dominate, almost in a monopolist way, several forms of institutionalized assistance. Appearing in a context of reform of the poor relief mechanisms and in a very specific political moment - the one of the rise of the Early Modern State -, the Misericórdias will be the framework for the study of the problematic of the structuralization of the local elites. My starting point is that the organization of this social field was used by the Crown to consolidate its power and mold the local elites, while these ones used the poor relief as a vehicle of social promotion and patrimonial enrichment. This does not mean to defend that this policy of construction-reorganization of the local elites had been programmed at the beginning of the Early Modern Period or had obeyed a predefined plan. The course of the events, where the political-institutional alterations (Spanish domination) had a main impact, determined some accidental positions that ended up as a specific governmental policy with proper rules. In my paper I'll try to present the guidelines of this long process.