


Manuel Botelho, a musician in 17th century Évora

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Summary

A large number of musicians that worked in the cathedrals and main churches throughout the Portuguese Empire have remain almost anonymously to this day. This is the case of the musicians that worked in Évora during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. One such case is that of Manuel Botelho, an instrumentalist at the Cathedral during the first half of the seventeenth century. Recent evidence and research have provided new details on the life of this musician which presented here in the form of a short biographical note.

Most of what we read regarding the musical activity in Évora Cathedral from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries is frequently focused on the careers and compositions of the institution's most distinguished chapel masters. Indeed, this happens in many cases as a result of the amount and availability of documental sources regarding their activity. By contrast, when speaking about the numerous singers and instrumentalists that worked in the music chapel throughout the centuries, the lack of documentations often relegates them to a secondary role.

Unfortunately, this situation still persists in many cases, although the gradually knowledge of some of these musicians have brought some new light to what I would call a new historical soundscape of Évora in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

That seems to be the case of Manuel Botelho, a musician that lived in Évora throughout the first half of the seventeenth century. Not much is known about Botelho's early life besides that he was born in Moura, a village Southeast of Évora (Liv. 1574, f. 41r). Considering his date of death, it is probable that Botelho was born sometime in the first two decades of the seventeenth century.

By 1648 he was already at the service of the music chapel of Évora Cathedral, and the first payment record appears in the musicians payment sheet from 1651. Here, he received an annual payment of 55.000 reis for playing cornetto, bassoon, and shawm in the music chapel (Alegria, 1973: 75).¹



Image 1
Manuel Botelho's signature.

From this payment sheet we see that he was the second best-paid musician of the chapel, only earning 5.000 reis less than the first organist Diogo de Salazar who received 60.000 reis. (Alegria, 1973: 75). For instance, the third best-paid musician in the sheet was a sackbut player, Nicolau de Molina (probably of Spanish origin), which earned 50.000 reis. The other multi-instrumentalist of the chapel, Bartolomeu Jorge, who played *baixão*

¹ Each year in these payment books of Évora Cathedral began and end on the feast of St John, the Baptist on June 24th. The annual payment was divided in quarters the first one paid on April, the second by the Feast of St John the Baptist, the third on October and the last on by Christmas.

and shawm only earned 38.000 reis, less than the second organist João Gomes (who earned 40.000 reis), a shawm player, Gaspar da Fonseca (who earned 40.000 reis), and two of the singers, António Ribeiro de Resende and Manuel Monteiro, who received 40.000 reis each. This means that Botelho was very well paid for his service when compared to other instrumentalists of the chapel. For example, the singer José de Lemos only earned 15.000 reis, the shawm player Luís da Silva Bravo 16.000 reis, and even the harpist Luís Mendes only received 15.000 reis each year. In 1660 Manuel Botelho's annual salary was raised to 60.000 reis.

As these numbers seem to indicate an order of importance of each musician in the music chapel, one has to have in account other factors that may point towards a significantly different view of how the music chapel worked and the part each musician played in its dynamics. First, we must acknowledge that high or low salary may be directly associated with the workload each musician had in the chapel. For instance, in the case of the multi instrumentalists Manuel Botelho (cornett, bassoon, and shawm) and Bartolomeu Jorge (*baixão*, and shawm), they would certainly have a higher workload than, i.e., the shawm player Luís da Silva Bravo, who only earned 16.000 reis. The exception here seems to be the sackbut player Nicolau de Molina (50.000 reis) that must have been an excellent player or maybe was only paid that amount simply because he wasn't Portuguese.



Diogo Dias Melgaz, *Malos male perdet*, 4vv. (instrumental)
(Oniria, dir. Daniel Anarte)

In the case of Botelho, he was to play three instruments, so a higher salary doesn't seem surprising. If we divide the 55.000 reis as individual payments for each instrument the result would be, to follow the pattern of the payments sheet, a sum of 38.000 reis for playing the bassoon and the shawm,² and further 17.000 reis for playing the cornett. This meant Botelho was receiving the salary of two or three musicians and would possibly have the equivalent workload.

The first instrument identified in the payment sheet is the cornett which, looking at the instrumental configuration of the chapel, seems to have been his primary instrument. The usual wind instrumental ensemble would have been a cornett (Botelho), two shawms (Bravo, Fonseca), two sackbuts (Molina, Peres), and a *baixão* (Jorge), oscillating between more or less shawms according to the current needs. This seems to be very close to the configuration we find in the 1616 Flemish painter Denis Alsloot's painting of the 1615 *Ommegang* in Brussels, where a group of musicians (1 cornett, 3 shawms, 1 sackbut, and a *bajón*) are present in the procession.



Image 2

Drawing detail based on Denis Alsloot painting *The Ommegang in Brussels on 31st May 1615: Procession of Notre Dame de Sablon* (1616).

² This amount is based on what Bartolomeu Jorge received for playing shawm and *baixão*, assuming that the bassoon would have a similar musical function such as the *baixão* in the music chapel, and the salaries that the other shawm players received.

As mentioned above, he is referred in 1648 as a musician in the Cathedral. This note appears in an inventory of the movable property of the judge Doctor Francisco Barreto, *desembargador da Relação Ecclesiástica* of the Archdiocese of Évora. Botelho signed the document as a witness together with the book seller Baltazar de Gouveia, the notary João Batista de Carvalho, who made the document, and Francisco Gago, *porteiro* of the city's *Corregedor*. In this document from a private collection transcribed by the local historian Túlio Espanca, Manuel Botelho is referred as living in front of the *Casas Pintadas* (Espanca, 1962-63: 318).³



Image 3

The Vasco da Gama Street and the probable location of Botelho's house (GoogleMaps).

The street corresponding to the description provided in the inventory is nowadays the Vasco da Gama Street. This used to be known during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries simply as the street of the *Casas Pintadas*. In his study of the Évora toponyms, Claudino de Almeida states that the name of Vasco da Gama was given to this street in 1869 in an homage to importance of the achievements of this Portuguese sailor and the assumption that developed throughout the nineteenth century that Gama lived in the *Casas Pintadas* (Almeida, 1934: 74). Almeida also traced the designation of the *Casas Pintadas* Street, next to the Inquisition Palace, back to 1591. He also mentions the *Casas Pintadas* bystreet, on the rear side of the property (Almeida, 1934: 25).

Based on these descriptions we have located what might have been the house of Manuel Botelho in front of the mentioned “painted houses” in the nowadays Vasco da Gama Street. The set of buildings shown on Image 4 stand as the probable location of his house since they are the modest houses in that side of the street. To the left of these houses at the East end of the street we find a large building that was part of the Inquisition headquarters and to the right, at the West side, there is a large palace with a noble coat of arms.

³ *Casas Pintadas* means literally “painted houses”, referring to the frescoes that decorate a section of a noble house next to the Inquisition Palace of Évora, near the Cathedral. It was thought that the house belonged to Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama, but further research identified it as belonging to D. Francisco da Silveira, the third *coudel-mor* of King D Manuel and King D. João III. The property was annexed to the Inquisition Palace as a residency for the court's judges.



Image 4

Probable location of Manuel Botelho's house. (Author's photo)

The last payment to Botelho as a musician in the Cathedral chapel appears in the payments book of 1676/77 in which he was paid an extra 5.000 reis to the regular annual payment of 60.000 reis. Manuel Botelho died on 9 June 1678 and was by the *Misericórdia* brotherhood in the Dominican convent of S. Domingos being João Pereira de Valadares *mordomo* (Espanca, 1948: 149).



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