


# Some notes on the Spanish composer Hernando Franco's activity in Portugal

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## Summary

This text explores the passage of sixteenth-century Spanish composer and chapel master Hernando Franco in Portugal, prior to his moving to the Spanish colonies of the New World. We depart from the research work of Spanish musicologist María Gembero-Ustárriz, who mentions the presence of Franco in Lisbon, adding some contextual notes to what might have been his duties there and the surrounding soundscape.

Hernando Franco is nowadays a fairly well-known composer, mostly associated with the flourishing music activity at Mexico City Cathedral in the last decades of the sixteenth century. Most of what we know about him has come to us from notable scholarship contributions on both sides of the Atlantic: from his home country of Spain and from several regions of Latin America. It is in one of the Spanish contributions that I found an interesting detail on the composer's life that is not often mentioned in the Portuguese Music Historiography and that I had no prior knowledge about.

In 2005 Spanish musicologist María Gembero Ustárriz (2005) published an article in the *Latin American Music Review* where the author follows Hernando Franco's career before his arrival in Mexico, detailing four places where the composer worked: Portugal, Santo Domingo, Cuba, and Guatemala. My attention was immediately focused on Portugal since I hadn't found this reference anywhere else.

Gembero Ustárriz found two important documents regarding the life of Franco in the Arquivo General de Indias in Seville. These were, as the researcher points, *informaciones de oficio y parte* gathered in Guatemala about Franco and his cousin Alonso de Trujillo (Gembero Ustárriz, 2005, p. 273). In these documents Franco was associated to Portugal in a testimony of Pedro de Liévana, precentor of Santiago de Guatemala Cathedral, dating from 20 February 1571 which states that "the said Hernando Franco chapel master of a Hospital that the King of Portugal has in the city of Lisbon". This testimony placed the Spanish composer in Lisbon, and his association to the Hospital of Todos-os-Santos (the only royal hospital in Lisbon at the time) by Gembero-Ustárriz seems to be accurate.

The Royal Hospital of Todos-os-Santos (Royal Hospital of All-Saints) was one of the significant improvements regarding health in Lisbon at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Build during the reign of King D. João II inspired by the Renaissance hospitals of Florence and Siena, construction took place from 1492 to 1504. The building was deeply ruined by the 1755 Lisbon Earthquake followed by a great fire, with the services later being transferred to the Hospital of São José, installed in the College of Santo Antão, confiscated to the Jesuits in 1759. The construction of the Renaissance hospital combined the services and funds of 43 smaller hospitals of Lisbon which was obtained by a Papal bull on 13 August 1479. The work was concluded during the reign of King D. Manuel who published the institution's first *Regimento* in 1504.

The Hospital was located in central place of down-town Lisbon at the Rossio Square, the building occupied what is now the Figueira Square. It was a three-story building with arches. At the centre was located the church with its magnificent Manueline-style

facade that can be seen in most of the surviving pre-earthquake iconography which was access by an imponent staircase.

The institution was managed by a *provedor* appointed by the King until 1530. Afterwards the management was passed down to the Congregation of St. John the Evangelist, commonly known as the *Lóios*. In 1564 the *Misericórdia* of Lisbon took charge of the Hospital.



Image 1

Detail of the Hospital of Todos os Santos in the 1570s (Braun, 1572, p. 1).

Regarding the music activity at the chapel of the Hospital of Todos-os-Santos, as a royal institution, there was an important musical-liturgical ceremonial to follow. As Isabel Monteiro (2021) points out in her study, there is not a continuous or clear timeline of the musical activity at Todos-os-Santos, being able to gather sparse references from different time periods.

The first 1504 Manueline *Regimento* is vague in terms of the musical activity in the chapel only mentioning that the divine worship should be done in the church with the highest solemnity, devotion and honour (Monteiro, 2021, p. 541).



#### Reconstruction of the Royal Hospital of Todos-os-Santos

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5WVZ8JWKIDs>

In 1555 Cristóvão Rodrigues d'Oliveira, who worked for the Archbishop of Lisbon, provided a *Summario* of the city's most notable features, in which he included the Royal Hospital. Oliveira provides a view on the "order of the divine worship" in the Hospital, stating that in the *Regimento* King D. Manuel ordered that the Divine Office was to be celebrated in the church and the mass was to be in *canto dorgão*, which means that it would have been sung in polyphony (Oliveira, 1554, f. 22v). The church, he describes, was very large and sumptuous with altarpieces and the main door was very impressive. There were nine chaplains that were obliged to the service in the choir, which certainly implied the daily singing of the Hours of the Divine Office. There was also a treasurer. The nine chaplains were also engaged in confessing and giving the Sacraments to the sick in the Hospital. Besides the choir service they were also to celebrate daily masses. at the church chapels (Oliveira, 1554, f. 22v). They were also engaged in celebrating other instituted chapels by pious donors of the Hospital, as well as caring for the *officia defunctorum*. Although receiving extra payments for these services, from the listing provided by Oliveira we see that they were very busy with the liturgical services, receiving an estimated annual payment of 400 *cruzados*, besides being lodged at the Hospital building. There were four choirboys each receiving 70 *cruzados* and lodging at the Hospital. There was also in the church a *tangedor dorgãos* (organist) with a salary of 25 *cruzados* (Oliveira, 1554, f. 23r). Curiously, Oliveira does not mention the presence of any chapel master at the church.

This might have happened because the post of chapel master was possibly part of the duties inherent to one of the nine chaplaincies and thus not subject, as i.e. the organist, to a differentiation from the remaining posts.

In 1571 Francisco de Monção provides another description of the Hospital of Todos-os-Santos which brings new references to the musical activity in the chapel. Besides describing the sumptuousness of the building and the quality of the services provided there, a view of the impression that the monumentality of the church strikes to the author is also significant. He compares it to the major churches of the Spanish world, a vast building of one nave with a main altar where “se descubre de todas partes para ver a Dios d todas quatro regiones”. He proceeds stating that there were chaplains that sung all the hours and celebrated with solemnity the Divine Office, also having the care of confessing the sick, to administrate the Sacraments, and bury the dead. On Sundays and Feast day there was music of *canto de organo* (polyphony) “porque tiene salariados” (certainly contracted musicians) chapel master, singers, and organist these posts occupied by the most distinguished musicians of the city (Mozón, 1571, f. 226). From Mozón’s account we understand that that a group of singers and the organist were under the direction of a chapel master and all of them were among the most accomplished musicians that had activity in Lisbon. Although only the organist (*tangedor dos orgaos*) is mentioned throughout the second half of the sixteenth century, Monteiro refers the presence of other instrumentalists in a 1584 account (Monteiro, 2021, p. 542). What is significant in Mozón’s account is the explicit mention of the post of chapel master.

References to individuals that worked at the chapel are scarce. However several figures have been referenced following the period that Hernando Franco worked there. The first was another composer and theorist of Spanish origin Pedro Thalesio that was appointed as chapel master on the recommendation of Cardinal Albert, viceroy of Portugal, 30 June 1593 with an annual salary of 16,000 réis and another 4,000 of gratification (Stevenson, 1982, p. XVI). He later claimed to have introduced polychoral singing while at Lisbon, probably at Todos-os-Santos, although this reference hasn’t been confirmed. When D. Afonso Furtado de Mendonça was appointed as Bishop of Guarda in 1610, Thalesio followed him to this city to serve as chapel master of the cathedral (Stevenson, 1982, p. XVI). He was succeeded at Todos-os-Santos by Fr. Simão dos Anjos around 1600 (Stevenson, 1982, p. XVII). He was a friar of the Secular Canons of St. John the Evangelist (a Portuguese religious order locally known as *Lóios*) which first administrated the Hospital of Todos-os-Santos until the *Misericórdia* took over its management. Not much is known about Simão dos Anjos’ life besides a brief biographical note by Robert Stevenson which was mostly based on Ernesto Vieira’s *Diccionario Biographico de Muzicos Portuguezes* published in 1900.

One important figure that is thought to have been chapel master at Todos-os-Santos at the turn of the century was the Portuguese composer Duarte Lobo. He was associated with that institution by Diogo Barbosa Machado in his *Bibliotheca Lusitana* stating that he had worked there before being appointed as chapel master of Lisbon Cathedral (Barbosa Machado, 1741, p. 733). However, this statement by Barbosa Machado hasn’t been so far corroborated by any documental information locating Lobo there. Barbosa Machado also mentioned that, already by mid-seventeenth century, António Rodrigues Vilalva worked as chapel master at Todos-os-Santos before being appointed as chapel master of Évora Cathedral (Barbosa Machado, 1741, p. 377). Vilalva, who was a choirboy at Évora, followed an ecclesiastical career working almost all his lifetime at this city.

What we gathered from all these references, whether accurate or not, is that the chapel of the Hospital of Todos-os-Santos was a place where relevant music masters briefly passed before heading to develop longer careers in other religious institutions. This seems to have been the case of Hernando Franco before moving to the New World.

Hernando Franco was born in Garrovillas, near Alcántara in Extremadura in 1532 and died in Mexico City on 28 November 1585. As many Spanish composers and chapel

masters, he travelled throughout the Spanish world ending his career in Mexico. Franco was raised as a choirboy of Segovia Cathedral from 1542 to 1549 (Catalyne & Brill, 2001). The authors of the Grove article on Franco state that during this period as choirboy in Segovia he met Matheo de Arévalo Sedeña, a wealthy nobleman and later provisor of Mexico City Cathedral. They also state that “there are indications that Franco accompanied Arévalo Sedeña to Nueva España in 1554, but his name does not appear there until 1573” (Catalyne & Brill, 2001). It is this gap that the study of Gembero-Ustároz seems to have filled and it is the period before his arrival in the Americas that we will focus on. As the researcher points out in her study, until recently the trajectory of this musician between 1549 and 1570 was unknown. That meant that nothing was known of him after leaving Segovia until his documented status as *maestro de capilla* in Guatemala Cathedral (1570-1574), and Mexico City Cathedral (1575-1585) (Gembero-Ustároz, 2005, p. 274).

Regarding the period the composer spent in Portugal, as mentioned above, in the testimony of Pedro de Liévana (dating from 1571) he states that, although he hadn't met the composer in Portugal, he knew that his activity there was “a public and notorious fact” (Gembero-Ustároz, 2005, p. 277). He only mentioned Franco's activity as chapel master of a Hospital that the King of Portugal had in the city of Lisbon which (also mentioned above) was associated with the Royal Hospital of Todos-os-Santos. Liévana gave no specific dates for the presence of Franco in Portugal, but Gembero-Ustároz traces his period in Lisbon before travelling to the New World from around 1549, after leaving Segovia Cathedral (Gembero-Ustároz, 2005, p. 277). This meant that the Franco would have arrived in Lisboa as a young man of 17 years old, an age which seems somewhat unlikely but that he worked in Lisbon at a young age it is certain.

Following the chronology proposed by Gembero-Ustároz, Franco was a choirboy at Segovia from the age of 10 to 17 years old (1542-1549). Afterwards she places him in Lisbon, from an age of 17 to 29 years old (*ca.1549-ca.1561*). At the same time (between 18 and 29 years old, *ca.1550-ca.1561*) he travelled with his cousin Alonso de Trujillo, also a musician, to Santo Domingo, after 29 years old being referred as chapel master at the Cathedral of Santo Domingo (Gembero-Ustároz, 2005, p. 289). This suggests several scenarios: that he arrived at Lisbon at a young age (17) and developed a 12-year musical and ecclesiastical career at Todos-os-Santos prior to his journey to the New World (29), a long period of employment that must have produced some surviving documentation; that he arrived in Lisbon at an early age (17) and soon left for the New World, or that he arrived in Lisbon later (already in his 20s) and didn't spend much time at the city before leaving to the New World around 1561 as proposed by Gembero-Ustároz. From what we were able to explore, his time working at Todos-os-Santos must have been short, otherwise some documentation on his employment and respective payments would have been produced during all the years before his known presence in the Americas.

In all, the reference of Hernando Franco's presence in Portugal at the prestigious Royal Hospital of Todos-os-Santos is another interesting testimony of how interconnected the Iberian music world was during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Not only Portuguese musicians worked in Spanish institutions but also Spanish musicians worked in Portuguese institutions making a numerous list of musicians and composers that has been gradually augmented through recent research findings such as the one examined in this text.



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