

Reinterpreting Indian Ocean Worlds:
Essays in Honour of Kirti N. Chaudhuri

Edited by

Stefan C. A. Halikowski Smith

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P U B L I S H I N G

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This book first published 2011

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-2931-5, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-2931-1

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CHAPTER TWELVE

PORTUGUESE COLONIAL CHARITY: THE MISERICÓRDIAS OF GOA, BAHIA AND MACAO

ISABEL DOS GUIMARÃES SA

Charles Boxer was the first historian to describe the *Misericórdias* (lay confraternities under royal protection) and the *Câmaras* (municipal councils) as the twin pillars of the Portuguese colonial administration.¹ This chapter deals with the *Misericórdias* as key elements in the political economy of colonial elites. These confraternities extended support to the poor converted populations or to the impoverished colonists, fulfilling an important role in the social, political and economic reproduction of the colonial elites. Highly selective, they helped to design social frontiers between the ruling and the less powerful. Also, as holders of large sums of money, the *misericórdias* engaged in credit activities. Whether they helped the owners of sugar cane estates in Bahia to invest in sugar production, provided funds to defend the Estado da Índia against the enemies of the Portuguese in Goa, or financed maritime commerce in Macao, the *Misericórdias* were crucial in the local dynamics of power.

The price to pay for the hegemony of the colonial elites was the giving of charity by the members of the *misericórdias*. In order to understand the diversity of the services and resources provided to the ‘poor’, there is no point in concentrating on administrative or institutional similarities across the empire. The differences between *misericórdias* relate to specific economic and social contexts. This paper compares the *Misericórdias* of

¹ Charles Boxer, *Portuguese Society in the Tropics. The Municipal Councils of Goa, Macao, Bahia and Luanda, 1510-1800*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1965.

three colonial cities of the Portuguese Empire during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. I will try to explore the different forms of charity the *Misericórdias* of Goa, Macao and Bahia engaged in, and relate them to the specific social contexts of each setting and particularly to the political agendas of each *Misericórdia*. I will elaborate on some of the findings of previous research about colonial *Misericórdias* and also on fresh, recently gathered information on the *Misericórdia* of Macao.²

The first assumption I will elaborate upon is that the so-called Portuguese communities in Goa, Bahia or Macao cannot be equalled to the metropolitan urban setting as such. In all of these colonial cities, there were a reduced number of Portuguese-born persons. A mixed population originating in Portuguese men (emigration to the empire was a male phenomenon) or of their “mixed-race” descendants formed the large majority of the colonial population. Macao and Goa had an urban population, which consisted of a Christian minority, within which the Portuguese-born accounted for a small percentage. Colonial Bahia was inhabited by a majority of imported Africans, either African or Brazilian-born, whom we suppose to have been superficially Christianised. Colonial elites spoke Portuguese, were Catholic, but they were mostly multi-ethnic, the product of successive generations of inter-racial crossbreeding and related to other local or imported populations with different levels of integration. In Goa, for instance, there was a Luso-Goan elite, formed by the descendants of the Portuguese male immigrants and local Asian women, and the same can be said about Macao, even if the populations the Portuguese mixed with were from different Asian ethnicities. In Bahia, the Portuguese had children with African imported or Amerindian women, creating a kaleidoscopic variety of mulattoes. In all the three cases studied, we have different colonial societies, where the elites were formed by families of male Portuguese origin that were able to reach a dominant position in such cities, either by wealth or social status. The practices of charity that were performed concerned the reproduction of these elites through money-lending or marriage, or, when directed to the other social and ethnic groups, benefited the fringe population that had to be

² Isabel Sá, *Quando o rico se faz pobre: Misericórdias, caridade e poder no império português, 1500-1800*, Lisboa: Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses, 1997; *Ibid.*, ‘Ganhos da terra e ganhos do mar: caridade e comércio na Misericórdia de Macau (séculos XVII-XVIII)’, in *Ler História*, XLIV, 2003, 45-57. See also, for a general overview of the history of the Portuguese *misericórdias*, Isabel Sá, *As Misericórdias Portuguesas de D. Manuel I a Pombal*, Lisboa: Livros Horizonte, 2001.

“included” in order to facilitate cooperation with these colonial elites, or at least make dominance viable. In either case, charity performed a self-help role to the hegemonic groups, as it contributed to keep them in dominating positions as well as to placate social tensions that might emerge between them and the less privileged, or less integrated groups.

Before comparing these three colonial cities in what concerns their practices of charity, a brief overview of the *misericórdias* is given, in order to explain their leading role. Of course, there were other institutions that gave charity to the poor in the Portuguese empire; nevertheless, the *misericórdias* performed a crucial role in institutional charity.

The *Misericórdias* in the Portuguese world

The *Misericórdias* were omnipresent in Portuguese urban life, either in the kingdom or overseas, and it is significant that they existed in places that were never under Portuguese administration, such as the *misericórdia* of Manila, the ones in Japan, or that of Salvador do Congo.³ Also, some *misericórdias* not only survived under new non-Portuguese rule, but also kept their key features long after the Portuguese were gone. This was the case of Ceuta and Olivença, lost to the Spanish in 1668 and 1801.⁴

Three main reasons explain the hegemony of the *misericórdias* (not necessarily in this order): Catholic culture, royal protection and their role in local administration.

Catholic charity

As confraternities, the *misericórdias* based their action on the practice of the fourteen works of mercy, which were well known in Portugal already in the first half of the fifteenth century.⁵ The first printed work in vernacular, a manual of confession designed to guide ecclesiastics, *O*

³ Salvador do Congo was the first experience of Portuguese evangelisation in Africa, begun during the last years of the fifteenth century. Its *misericórdia* was awarded the privileges of the *misericórdia* of Lisbon in 1617 (Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, *Chancelaria de Filipe II. Privilégios*, Livro 5, fls. 121-121 v).

⁴ Manuel Cámara del Rio, *La Santa y Real Hermandad, Hospital y Casa de Misericordia de Ceuta*, Ceuta: Instituto de Estudios Ceutíes, 1996; Miguel Vallecillo Teodoro, *Historia de la Santa Casa de Misericordia de Olivenza: 1501-1970*, Badajoz: Santa Casa de la Misericordia de Olivenza, 1993.

⁵ Ivo Carneiro de Sousa, *Da Descoberta da Misericórdia à Fundação das Misericórdias (1498-1525)*, Porto: Granito, 1998, 12.

Tratado de Confissom, published in 1489, referred to them.⁶ Their enunciation became particularly incisive during the reign of Manuel I (1495-1521). Manuals of confession and guides for Christian living, synod constitutions, and catechisms all included one or two chapters referring to the works of mercy. It is also the case of the first printed Portuguese catechism, which was included in the constitutions of the synod celebrated in Porto by Bishop D. Diogo de Sousa in 1496.⁷ The fourteen works of mercy were always listed, and sometimes annotated, in doctrinal texts from the foundation of the first *Misericórdia* in 1498 to the end of the Council of Trent.⁸ This demonstrates that the emphasis on good works as agents of salvation was well rooted in Portugal before the Council reaffirmed their importance. Together with prayers (*Credo, Ave Maria, Salve Regina, Pater Noster*), the seven mortal sins, the Ten Commandments, the virtues and the five senses, the fourteen works of mercy were basic indispensable knowledge not only for the Portuguese, but also for the indoctrinated populations across its empire. D. Manuel I is known to have sent to India and Ethiopia several thousand copies of a *Cartinha* or *Cartilha* (manuals designed to teach children how to read and write), which included a brief catechism. That edition or editions (in case there were several of them), did not survive except for a brief extract, which, interestingly, includes the works of mercy.⁹

The renovated emphasis on the importance of practices of charity in the obtaining of eternal salvation in Tridentine reform reaffirmed the

⁶ *Tratado de Confissom* [1489], ed. by José V. de Pina Martins, Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional, 1973, 232.

⁷ Antonio García y García et al eds., *Synodicon Hispanum II. Portugal*, Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos: 1982, 412-413.

⁸ Among others, cf. Diogo Ortiz de Vilhegas, *Catecismo pequeno*, Lisboa: Valentim Fernandes e João Pedro de Cremona, 1504, 44-48; Garcia de Resende, *Breve Memorial dos pecados* [1521], ed. Joaquim Bragança, Lisboa: Gráfica de Coimbra, 1980, 32-33; *Cartinha pera esinar leer. Cõ as doutrinas da prudência. E regra de viver em paz...* [1534], facs. edition, Lisboa: Biblioteca Nacional, 1981, n.n.; João de Barros, *Gramática da Língua Portuguesa. Cartinha, Gramática, diálogo em Louvor da Nossa Linguagem e diálogo da Viciosa Vergonha* [1539], ed. Maria Leonor Buescu, Lisboa: Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa, 1971, 23-24, Martim de Azpilcueta Navarro, *Manual de confessores e penitents (...)*, Coimbra: Ioannes Barrerius et Ioannes Aluarez excudebāt, 1552, 411-417; Fr. Luís de Granada, *Compêndio de doutrina christã (...)*, Lisboa: em casa de Joannes Blavio de Agripina Colonia, 1559, 127-130.

⁹ Isabel Cepeda, 'Uma "cartinha" em língua portuguesa desconhecida dos bibliógrafos', *Colóquio sobre o Livro Antigo. Lisboa, 1988: Actas*, Lisboa, Biblioteca Nacional, 1992, 79-92.

centrality of the works of mercy in the Catholic world. In the specific case of the Portuguese empire, the Jesuits were to be of fundamental importance, especially during the first decades of the Society. One of the structuring issues at the origin of this religious order was the systematic practice of the works of mercy.¹⁰ This explains not only the attention that St. Francis Xavier dedicated to them in his letters, as well as the Jesuit priests' willingness to help in hospitals and other institutions of assistance in the Estado da Índia. In Brazil, the founding of the *Misericórdia* of Rio de Janeiro was attributed to José de Anchieta, S.J., albeit erroneously.¹¹

The works of mercy covered practically all grounds of charitable action. One of the basic differences of the *Misericórdias*, when compared to most of the other confraternities, is their focus on all fourteen works, instead of specialising on one or two of them. In consequence, they cared for people in almost every possible situation of need: the sick poor, beggars, widows, orphans, prisoners and shamefaced poor. The persons to be helped were either institutionalised or were visited in their homes by the brothers of the confraternity.

The *misericórdias* of the empire shared this wide range of charitable practices with their counterparts in continental Portugal. Their members visited jails and provided for the survival of poor prisoners, helped them through their trial in court; ransomed captives of religious war; awarded marriage dowries to poor orphaned girls; and gave free burials to the very poor. All these practices were expensive, either in financial or human terms. They implied high costs (especially hospitals) and diversified tasks. The *misericórdias* hired personnel to perform low status work and kept the "nobler" activities to the brothers themselves. The latter made a point in not being remunerated and sometimes could spend out of their own pockets, mainly when they took charge of expenses, which were inherent either to their office or social status. The logic of the *misericórdias* obeyed thus to elementary religious principles that every believer acknowledged; and to rules of voluntary work, which prohibited brothers to work for a salary within the confraternity.

In the empire as well as in metropolitan Portugal, the cure of souls was indissociable from the cure of bodies, and the former prevailed over the latter. Any charitable service had a spiritual element. Recipients of charity should live according to the precepts of religion and receive the

¹⁰ John O'Malley, *The First Jesuits*, Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1993, 165-199.

¹¹ A.J.R. Russell-Wood, *Fidalgos and Philanthropists. The Santa Casa da Misericórdia of Bahia, 1550-1755*, London: Macmillan, 1968, 40.

sacraments. Foundlings were baptized, patients who refused confession were not accepted in hospitals, mass was an obligation for inmates of charitable institutions, and the dying received extreme unction. Care of souls extended to the dead, for whom a variable quantity of masses was celebrated according to their wills. The spiritual component is thus one of the main features of this common culture of Catholic charity.

Royal protection

The reason why the *Misericórdias* were so important institutionally lies in the protection they were awarded by the Portuguese kings from their beginning in 1498. In all the Portuguese territories, we find the will to promote them to the official confraternities of the empire, superior both in prerogatives and competencies to the other local confraternities. The construction process of the *misericórdias* is closely related to the building of the Portuguese early modern state. At least during the sixteenth century, the strength of the Crown relied heavily on its enrichment through its participation in the profits of the empire.¹² The structuring of the *misericórdias* took place during the height of the wellbeing of the Portuguese crown, during the reign of D. Manuel I (1495-1521).

The financial autonomy that the revenues of maritime commerce ensured the Portuguese Crown made possible the patronage of new institutions and the restructuring of old ones. Although the use of the word “reform” can be questionable, it is a fact that during the reign of D. Manuel I significant juridical, administrative, devotional and ritual changes took place.¹³ On the other hand, the *misericórdias* benefited from the colonial economy. D. Manuel I gave numerous donations of sugar from Madeira to the ecclesiastical institutions and the *misericórdias*, and D. João III, to a lesser extent, continued this practice.

Due to the accumulation of inheritances, the *misericórdias* often participated directly in colonial economy. The *misericórdia* of Lisbon, for instance, was one of the main sugar cane producers in the islands of São Tomé during the seventeenth century, as the owner of several estates.¹⁴

¹² Vitorino Magalhães Godinho, ‘Finanças públicas e estrutura do estado’, *Ensaaios II*, Lisboa: Sá da Costa, 1978, 29-74.

¹³ For a survey of these and other issues relating to the reign of D. Manuel I, see Diogo Ramada Curto (ed.), *O Tempo de Vasco da Gama*, Lisboa: CNCDP, 1998.

¹⁴ Cristina Serafim, *As Ilhas de S. Tomé no século XVII*, Lisboa: Centro de História de Além-mar, 2000, 203-204, 212-213, 277.

The spread of *misericórdias* was also due to the fact that there was a significant effort on the part of the Crown to publicize the *compromissos* of the *Misericórdia* of Lisbon, which were to be the main set of rules to be observed in all these confraternities, albeit locally adapted. The Lisbon *Misericórdia* elaborated its *compromisso* in its very first years, and this text was improved until publication in 1516. In 1577 a significant reform took place, but did not last long. The published version of this *compromisso*, printed in 1600, was replaced nineteen years later with a text that was to last until the nineteenth century, the *compromisso* of 1618, published in the following year.¹⁵ Although the evolution of times required exceptional legislation, both royal and local, all the *misericórdias* shared these texts of reference, even when they elaborated their own, specific *compromissos*, as was the case in several metropolitan and overseas confraternities. A flexible combination of central and local directives enabled *misericórdias* to run themselves autonomously. The latter could also take the form of decisions made by the *mesa* concerning specific internal affairs, which were not covered by the *compromissos*.

Royal protection did not imply administrative centralisation or close control from the crown, and in general terms, *misericórdias* were left to themselves. With two exceptions: in situations of crisis the Crown had the right to withdraw money from its coffers, as happened with other institutions that could provide money in emergencies, such as war or a marriage dowry for a princess. Another was when there was information of administrative or financial fraud, which could imply a direct intervention from crown institutions, but significantly not from the Lisbon *Misericórdia*. The Lisbon *Misericórdia* - the first to be founded and always considered the most important - was to serve as a reference, but never enjoyed any administrative supremacy over the others. Also, royal officers were instructed not to interfere in the internal affairs of the *misericórdias* unless they received orders to do so, a rule that provided obvious advantages to the individuals who ran them. Neither electoral procedures nor account registers were systematically supervised.

¹⁵ Ivo Carneiro de Sousa edited the first manuscript version of the *compromisso* of the *Misericórdia* of Lisbon: 'O Compromisso primitivo das *Misericórdias* Portuguesas: 1498-1500', in *Revista da Faculdade de Letras* [Porto], vol. II, Issue 13, 1996, 259-306; *O compromisso da confraria de Misericórdia*. Lisboa: Valentym Fernandez e Harmam de Câpos, 1516; *Compromisso da Irmandade da Sancta Casa da Misericórdia da cidade de Lisboa*, Lisboa: Antonio Alvarez, 1600; *Compromisso da Misericórdia de Lisboa*, Lisboa: Pedro Craesbeeck, 1619.

The symbiotic relationship between *misericórdias*, Crown and Empire shared nevertheless the fragmented nature of the early modern state. The *misericórdias* were not created downwards; the reasons why they multiplied are not exclusively related with royal instructions, or advantages awarded by the crown. The intention of the centre to favour the *misericórdias* is a fact, but it is also true that local elites agreed with the Crown the conditions of settlement of the confraternity. The advantages were mutual to both sides, since the *misericórdias* tended to finance themselves through legacies and donations, keeping capital in deposit that could be used, as we shall see, for diversified purposes.

The king ensured a paternal benevolent image at minimum expense, whilst local elites negotiated their hegemony, offering resources and charitable services, while keeping discretionary control over them. More than centralisation from the crown, we are in the presence of a chain of negotiation between local and central powers, which in the case of the *misericórdias* gave rise to a very “successful” and long-lasting institution.

Câmaras and Misericórdias

The history of municipal councils shares common ground with the *misericórdias*, both in Portugal and in its empire. Francisco Bethencourt has affirmed that the extension of municipal councils to all the territories in the empire was the result of an almost spontaneous process that the king only intervened to legitimise.¹⁶ The same can be said about the *misericórdias*; the institutional lexicon seems to have been homogenous in all Portuguese-speaking communities. Both institutions related to the king on a direct basis, and both were crucial in the financing of the crown in case of military need. Both were involved in the same process of eradication of New-Christian membership. It is also acknowledged that there was a predominance of lawyers in the Portuguese municipal councils from 1572 onwards that was not copied in colonial ones.¹⁷ The *misericórdias* seem to follow a similar pattern: some confraternities in Portugal created a special quota for their admission into the confraternity, but this did not happen either in Goa or Macao.

In spite of the parallels that can be drawn between the ‘câmaras’ and the ‘misericórdias’, it must be noted that the former existed from the

¹⁶ Francisco Bethencourt, ‘Câmaras’ in Francisco Bethencourt & Kirti Chaudhuri eds., *História da Expansão Portuguesa*, Lisboa: Círculo de Leitores, 1998, vol. 2, 345.

¹⁷ Boxer, *Portuguese Society*, 15.

medieval period, long before the *misericórdias*, which were created from 1498 onwards. From the hierarchical point of view, the municipal councils obviously stood above the *misericórdias*. Some of them, like Goa and Bahia, kept agents in Lisbon and sent representatives to the *Cortes* (Parliament).¹⁸ The *misericórdias* were never as crucial in local administration as the municipal councils, but they represented control of public charity and could mean access to the confraternity's money or property to be rented. No doubt the *Misericórdias* in metropolitan Portugal allowed for the creation of a surplus of possibilities in the exercise of local power. Offices such as that of *provedor*, *escrivão*, *tesoureiro*, or even *mesário* could rotate or be held alongside municipal ones, and the *mamposteiros* (official alms collectors) could also benefit from a range of privileges and exemptions.¹⁹

Câmaras and *misericórdias* represented power arenas of the Portuguese who had settled in the colonies and who were often in conflict with royal officials. At the same time, the administration of empire was based upon networks of counteracting information, since most local institutions could write to the king and complain about one another. It is generally acknowledged, though, that the crown recognised the importance of the municipal councils for the stability of colonial administration. Colonial governors rarely dared to maintain open conflicts with the *câmaras*.²⁰

Although Charles Boxer traced local administration as a dual framework - *câmara* and *misericórdia* - local specificities not always conformed to this picture. For instance, on the East African coast during the eighteenth century, the *Misericórdias* seem to have absorbed until very late the running of the municipalities. In Macao, the creation of the local *misericórdia* preceded that of the municipal council.²¹ There were no municipal councils in Japan, but the *misericórdias* founded by the Jesuits owed their existence to the strategies concerning the evangelisation of the Japanese population, which included the creation of social circles where modes of Christian living could be enacted. The *misericórdia* of Funai, founded in 1559, had a reduced number of members, recruited among the Christians who lived in the Jesuit mission. Its leading members

¹⁸ Bethencourt, *Câmaras*, vol. 2, 344.

¹⁹ The ruling board of the *Misericórdia* was the *mesa*. It was formed by thirteen *mesários*, among which the *provedor* (president), the secretary (*escrivão*) and treasurer (*tesoureiro*).

²⁰ Boxer, *Portuguese Society*, 145.

²¹ Boxer, *Portuguese Society*, 59.

(*mordomos*) did not rotate in office, as was the rule in most *misericórdias* (because there were few members), and kept charge in consecutive years, taking care of the hospital and providing Christian burials to poor catechumen.²²

The *Misericórdias* of Goa, Macao and Bahia

Most of the Portuguese territories in the East were obtained through military conquest, undertaken under royal initiative. Portuguese soldiers, when wounded or sick, were attended to in campaign hospitals financed by the king. In India, such hospitals antedated the *misericórdias*, and were connected mostly to the military action of Afonso de Albuquerque.²³ With the settlement of colonists, the *misericórdias* started to be created in the second decade of the sixteenth century. The *misericórdias* in Asia maintained a close relationship with the crown that was not to be repeated in any other area of the Portuguese empire.

In the first place, the Estado da Índia regularly financed Asian *misericórdias*. The budgets of the royal treasury of the 'state' included payments to be converted into alms for the poor by the local *misericórdias*, or into the regular financing of hospitals. Analysis of the weight of the financial subventions to the *misericórdias* in these budgets has not been extensive, but evidence points to a figure of one percent. The amount spent on hospital maintenance was higher (could go up to 10-15 percent). Hospitals could be in charge of the *misericórdias*, but, as happened in metropolitan Portugal, were financially independent.²⁴

The financing of the *misericórdias* of the Estado da Índia by the Crown (we should note that direct financing was absent in Brazil, where the *misericórdias* benefited from a percentage of taxes upon consumption) was, in large part, an obligation of the *padroado régio* (Crown Patronage). Although the *misericórdias* were lay confraternities under royal

²² Léon Bourdon, *La Compagnie de Jésus et le Japon: la fondation de la mission japonaise par François Xavier, 1547-155 et les premiers résultats de la prédication chrétienne sous le supériorat de Cosme de Torres, 1551-1570*, Lisboa-Paris: FCG-CNCDP, 1993, 372-373.

²³ José de Vasconcellos Menezes, *Armadas portuguesas. Hospitais no Além Mar. Época dos Descobrimentos*, Lisboa: Academia da Marinha, 1993.

²⁴ Among other published budgets, cfr. Artur Teodoro de Matos, *O Estado da Índia nos anos de 1581-1588. Estrutura administrativa e económica. Alguns elementos para o seu estudo*, Ponta Delgada: Universidade dos Açores, 1982 and, edited by the same author, *O Orçamento do Estado da Índia de 1571*, Lisboa: CNCDP, 1999.

protection, and did not depend on the supervision of the Roman Church, in opposition to bishoprics, religious orders, and ecclesiastic confraternities, the crown seems to have included their financing among its obligations towards the ecclesiastic institutions of the State. Thus the budgets and the *tombos gerais* of the fortresses of the Estado da Índia considered the expenses devoted to *misericórdias* together with the costs of the maintenance of parishes (ecclesiastic revenues, sacristy expenses, etc.), royal hospitals, and other confraternities.

We must also consider the hierarchical supremacy of the Goan *Misericórdia*, which was named "the universal mother of the poor" and "head" of the other *misericórdias* in the Estado da Índia. It was supposed to supervise all the other *misericórdias* in the Estado, a situation which did not occur in any other area of the empire. It is also clear that this supervision was not so tight as not to allow the autonomy of other *misericórdias* in Asia. Here the *misericórdia* of Goa performed paternal tasks as, for example, sending samples of its *compromisso*, giving legal advice or distributing banners, bier covers, and other liturgical objects. The king included in his letters to the viceroys very precise instructions about action to be taken concerning the *misericórdia* of Goa. It was placed under the authority of the viceroy, as any reading of the 'Livros das Monções' can demonstrate.²⁵ The fact that the viceroy lived in the city provided the opportunity for closer royal control. He could legislate on his own, or implement new rules originating from the Lisbon *misericórdia*. Many of the *alvarás* or decrees issued by the viceroys have survived in the archives of the *Misericórdia* of Macao.²⁶

The Lisbon *misericórdia* was invoked when it was necessary to proceed to readjustments in the Goan one.²⁷ The *misericórdia* of Goa was framed within a network of subordinate relationships, topped by the central powers held in Lisbon, that it in turn enforced on other *misericórdias* of the Estado da Índia.

The centralism of the Goan *misericórdia* is confirmed in the seventeenth century during the retraction of the Portuguese empire in the Indian Ocean. When many fortresses changed hands with the enemies of

²⁵ Raymundo Bulhão Pato & António Rêgo, *Documentos Remettidos da Índia ou Livros das Monções (...)*, Lisboa: Academia Real das Ciências-Imprensa Nacional, 10 vols., 1880-1982.

²⁶ *Livro de Registo de Alvarás, Cartas e Provisões Régias, Lisboa, Goa, Malaca, Macau* (Historical Archives of Macau, Santa Casa da Misericórdia, cod. 300).

²⁷ Sá, *Quando o rico*, 174-175, 182.

Portugal and Spain, the *misericórdia* of Goa collected the remains of the *misericórdias* that were being suppressed, and took care of refugees.

In spite of the intention to place the Goan *misericórdia* at the centre of all others in the 'Estado da Índia', the limits of centralisation in such a discontinuous territory were obvious. Colonial cities and *presídios* were often very distant from Goa; the rhythms of departure and arrival of ships, which sometimes made only annual visits, gave any existing institution a great deal of autonomy. The *Misericórdia* of Macao is a striking example.

The municipal council of Macao - the *Leal Senado* - was to rule over the destinies of the local Portuguese community, with a very tenuous presence of crown directives.²⁸ Its *misericórdia* was in theory (though not in practice as we shall see) entirely financed by a percentage of the council's customhouse duties. Although the Macanese *misericórdia* responded to the authority of the viceroy of the Estado da Índia, and thus to Goa, it possessed its own *compromisso*, elaborated in 1627, and seems to have had an influence upon other *misericórdias* in the Far East.²⁹ Nagasaki, for instance, adopted its *compromisso* instead of the ones from Goa or Lisbon.

The oriental *misericórdias* performed supplementary tasks when compared to those of metropolitan Portugal, namely in what concerned transmission of property working, to a certain extent, in an administrative partnership with the crown institutions.

The *misericórdia* of Goa absorbed some of the roles that were traditionally ascribed to royal officers, such as the *provedoria dos defuntos*. It received from all over the Estado the inheritances of those Portuguese, who wanted to leave their property to heirs in Portugal. It thus accumulated large sums in deposit, which were transferred to Portugal when reliable information about the legitimacy and whereabouts of the heirs was obtained. This was a reliable service until the second decade of the seventeenth century, when the *misericórdias* in Portugal started to complain about the long waiting periods before the delivery of capital.

Such functions in the transmission of property gave origin to an important correspondence with metropolitan *misericórdias*. The *Misericórdia* of Goa centralized correspondence from all the others in the Estado, and then sent it to Lisbon, who would then write to other *misericórdias*. A similar chain was to be run back to Goa, when the heirs

²⁸ George Bryan Souza, *A Sobrevivência do Império: os Portugueses na China (1630-1754)*, Lisboa: Dom Quixote, 1991, 41.

²⁹ Biblioteca da Ajuda, Série da Província da China (24) - 'Compromisso da Misericórdia de Macau, 1627'.

were discovered and checked up on. It is important to note that the *misericórdias* in the Atlantic world did not operate in the field of the *provedoria dos defuntos*, although Portuguese colonists benefited metropolitan *misericórdias* in their bequests as much as they did in the *Estado da Índia*.

One of the specific features of the Oriental *misericórdias* was the importance of the ransoming of religious war captives. In Portugal, such ransoms took place in a context of religious war with North Africa and their main goal was to prevent prisoners from apostatizing. They obeyed to the purpose of tracing clear cultural frontiers between Christians and Muslims, and this explains why some ransoms over sacred images were paid. There were some hesitations over the role of the *misericórdias* concerning such prisoners, but since D. Sebastião the law ascribed the Trinitarians the logistic part of the ransoming.³⁰ The friars travelled to North Africa and negotiated the price for the Portuguese prisoners they held. In Asia, where Trinitarians were absent, the Goan *misericórdia* negotiated religious war captives' ransoms directly, gathering the money and hiring agents to negotiate *in loco*. The *compromisso* of the Macanese *misericórdia* also included a similar chapter about this function, and it is interesting to point out that, in the Far East, the Portuguese prisoners at the hands of the Dutch were also entitled to help.³¹

The third specificity of the *misericórdias* in the East was the vulnerability of their property. In general, both institutions and private

³⁰ From the beginning of D. Sebastião's reign onwards, the *misericórdias* were confined to raising funds for general ransoms whenever the king gave orders to do so. Sporadically (at the rhythm with which such general ransoms were organized) the metropolitan *misericórdias* were asked to give or raise money to contribute to a ransom trip that the Trinitarians were about to undertake. In spite of such laws, nothing prevented the *misericórdias* from accepting legacies to accomplish this work of mercy. The Lisbon *misericórdia*, for instance, still spent in 1756 almost six percent of the total money received through pious donations (Marta Oliveira, *Justiça e caridade: a produção social dos infratores pobres em Portugal, séculos XIV ao XVIII*, Ph. D., Niterói, Universidade Federal Fluminense, 2000, 292). Analysis of some of its annual budgets has revealed that in the seventeenth century the institution still awarded ransoms to war captives autonomously, whilst this practice disappeared from book-keeping in the following century (Isabel Sá, 'Estatuto social e discriminação: formas de selecção de agentes e receptores de caridade nas *misericórdias* portuguesas ao longo do Antigo Regime', in *Actas do Colóquio Internacional Saúde e Discriminação Social*, Braga: Instituto de Ciências Sociais, 2002, 303-334).

³¹ Biblioteca Pública de Évora, *Compromisso da Misericórdia de Goa, 1634*, chapter 28; *Compromisso da Misericórdia de Macau de 1627*, Chapter 27.

persons tended to amass their fortunes in money and commodities. The *misericórdias* in the East obtained their revenues from several sources, but rarely from landed property. We can include among such revenues the payments of the royal treasury, financial help from the local councils (in the case of Macao) and the deposit of property from the deceased, which, while waiting for the news of certified heirs, could be invested in commerce.

The absence of landed revenues was a major difficulty to the *misericórdias* - and indirectly to the king - since the allowances from the Royal Treasury were not always paid in time. Money-lending became ubiquitous in the *misericórdias*, even if they shared this feature with many other ecclesiastic institutions. Nevertheless, the law condemned this practice, considering it equivalent to usury. Although frequent and very profitable, money-lending was not backed up by any legal protection. The lack of payment of debts could not easily be solved in court.³² Cases of fraud and insolvency were frequent.³³ In the Estado da Índia, the *misericórdias'* funds circulated in the financing of trade, and maritime commerce involved travel and considerable risks, worsened by the recession of the empire in the first half of the seventeenth century.

The funds of the Asian *misericórdias* were under constant pressure and proved to be more volatile than those of the *misericórdias* that possessed landed property. As an example, we can quote the case of Salvador. Although its *misericórdia* also gave out its capital on loan, many times without recovering it, the truth is that it owned numerous rents of urban property and a sugar cane estate which allowed, albeit partially, to dispose of a safe flux of capital.

The general evolution of the *misericórdias* in the East follows closely the decline of the Portuguese empire in the Indian Ocean, not only because of the fall of the Portuguese fortresses from 1610 onwards, but also for the progressive erasing of the *misericórdia* of Goa. It lost its capacities to assist and staff; its hospitals grew poorer and emptier. In the eighteenth century, the *misericórdia* of Goa mirrored the decline of the city itself.

Although we have lost the archival material that might document the number and types of charitable services performed in the *misericórdia* of Goa, non-serial sources demonstrate that, as elsewhere in the Portuguese empire, Portuguese-born were preferred over other local groups, and that

³² Bartolomé Clavero, *La grâce du don. Anthropologie catholique de l'économie moderne*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1996, 169 and 177.

³³ Among other examples, cf. Pato & Rêgo, *Documentos Remettidos*, t. III, 1885, 66-67, 313-313, 337-338; t. IV, 61, 95-96.

among the latter, being Catholic was a prerequisite to be entitled to help. Charity became thus, for those who were not born Catholic, a consequence of converting to Christianity. Macao offers a good example.

Maritime trade was the only economic activity of Macao. Of the entire Portuguese empire, the city's economy was the most dependent from trade, to the point that no other economic activity was relevant to the city's survival.

All the existing Portuguese institutions in the city, lay as well as ecclesiastic, were involved in commerce. Among the former, we include the *Senado* (municipal council), which survived from the taxes paid in its customhouse. Among the latter were the religious orders of the city, of which the best-known example is the Society of Jesus, which financed its missionary activity in China and Japan with profits from trade.

The organization of commerce seems to have been in the hands of a small group of traders that undertook business at an individual level. Historians have detected the existence of a mercantile elite, which sat in the *Misericórdia* and the *Senado*, hand in hand with other secondary and subaltern merchants. In spite of the considerable number of studies about Macao, these elites have not yet been studied in terms of a network of political and economic relations, and other historians have felt the lack of prosopographical studies.³⁴ Most studies, from Boxer to Bryan Souza, have underlined the centrality of the local *misericórdia* to the circulation of capital placed in maritime trade, but no study regarding the sources that document this financial activity has been undertaken.³⁵ The recent analysis of an account book which covers a period of circa seventeen years during the second half of the eighteenth century - the economic years between 1757-58 and 1774-75- has allowed this gap to be filled, albeit partially. It is the only survivor of the institution's accountancy before 1800, and it uncovers the nature of the activities of the *Misericórdia*, as well as its inclusion in the peninsula's market economy through the financing of maritime trade.³⁶

The economic and demographic framework of the city during those years must be traced. Two major groups formed the population: the

³⁴ Jorge Flores, 'China e Macau', in António H. de Oliveira Marques ed., *História dos Portugueses no Extremo Oriente*, vol. I, tome II, Lisboa: Fundação Oriente, 2000, 247-248.

³⁵ Except for António Vale, who studied Macau in the second half of the eighteenth century (*Os Portugueses em Macau (1750-1800)*. Macau: Instituto Português do Oriente, 1997).

³⁶ Historical Archives of Macao, Santa Casa da Misericórdia, cod. 277, *Livro da Conta do Risco do Mar e Risco da Terra, 1755-1775*.

Christian and the Chinese. Christians were divided into distinct groups, the Portuguese-born and the *filhos da terra* (sons of the land), the product of crossbreeding between the Portuguese and a wide range of Asian ethnic groups. Between 1750 and 1780, this group numbered between four and six thousand persons.³⁷ The common denominator between its heterogeneous elements was Christianity. Women outnumbered men, as the widows and orphans were particularly numerous. The city was also home to a large immigrant Chinese population: between 1750 and 1780, this population ranged from sixteen to twenty thousand.³⁸ From the economic point of view, there was a slow recovery of commerce in this period, now driven to the eastern coast of India, Bengal, Malay islands and Timor. The trip to Cochinchina, which had been interrupted in 1750, was recommenced in 1773. Between 1771 and 1774 there were fourteen ships dedicated to maritime trade in Macao, rising to twenty-four by the end of the century.³⁹

The most striking feature of the Macao *misericórdia* was its involvement in credit activities, to the point where the part of the budget actually employed in charitable activities was substantially inferior to the money invested in maritime trade. The overwhelming circulation of capital in credit suggests the proto-banking nature of the institution and documents the symbiotic relationship between charity and the money market.

Officially, the *misericórdia* was financed by the local council, which gave one per cent of its customhouse revenues to the former. Thanks to this financing, the *misericórdia* took care of foundlings, which under Portuguese law were at the municipal councils' charge.⁴⁰ The *Senado* made

³⁷ In 1834, the Christian population of Macao's three parishes – that of the cathedral, St. Lawrence and St. Anthony - totalled 5093 persons, among which were 3793 “whites” (1487 men, 2306 women). The remaining 1300 were slaves (469 men and 831 women). See Anders Ljungstedt, *An Historical Sketch of the Portuguese Settlements in China and of the Roman Catholic Church and Mission in China & Description of the City of Canton*, Hong Kong: Viking Hong Kong Publications, 1992, 161-164.

³⁸ Susana Miranda & Cristina Serafim, ‘População e Sociedade’ in A. H. de Oliveira Marques ed., *História dos Portugueses no Extremo Oriente*, vol. II, Lisboa, Fundação Oriente, 2001, 231-242.

³⁹ Susana Miranda, ‘Os circuitos Económicos’, in A. H. de Oliveira Marques (ed.), *História dos Portugueses no Extremo Oriente*, vol. II, Lisboa: Fundação Oriente, 2001, 276-277.

⁴⁰ In the case of Macao, though, we must note that there was no contract between the Council and the *Misericórdia* concerning the rearing of abandoned children. In

regular payments to the *misericórdia*, although the sums varied according to the irregular profits of maritime trade. In spite of this, the higher sums of money circulated among traders. There is no doubt that the Santa Casa owed the major portion of its wealth to credit activities.

There was a peculiar relationship between regular charity to persons who were in charge of the *misericórdia*, often as patients in its two hospitals, and the general almsgiving during some moments of the liturgical calendar. The *misericórdia* organised at least one such occasion during the year, during the Holy Week, and would eventually repeat the event during the feast of the *Misericórdia* on the Visitation (July 2). These feasts were important to give visibility to the Portuguese community, and affirmed cultural identity by the repetition of the annual rites of the Catholic Church.

At first sight, the scale of the services provided by the Macao *Misericórdia* to the poor is smaller than in other cities of the empire, namely Salvador. Nevertheless, this picture changes if we take into account population figures: Macao counted less than thirty thousand souls, whereas Bahia had more than four times this number of inhabitants. Among the poor needing continuous assistance, foundlings were the most numerous, an average of ninety per month, whilst the Hospital dos Pobres (Hospital of the Poor), and Hospital of S. Lázaro (for lepers) seem to have admitted only a monthly average of thirty patients each.⁴¹ The low capacity of these two hospitals seems to have given origin to a relatively stable number of inmates. A word must be said here about lepers, whose existence among the poor helped by the *misericórdia* is a specificity of Macao. In Portugal, the illness disappeared by the end of the Middle Ages. There is no register that any other *misericórdia* either in Brazil or in the Estado da Índia ran a specific institution for lepers, although the possibility that they were helped on an individual basis cannot be discarded.

Lisbon and Oporto, on the other hand, the *misericórdias* signed contracts with the Councils in which they assumed the responsibilities over foundlings in exchange for their regular financial support by the Council. These contracts gave origin to the creation of separate budgets for the upbringing of foundlings, which was not the case in Macao.

⁴¹ The source studied, due to its financial nature, does not give information about the identity of the poor helped as foundlings, sick poor or lepers. According to available information, the first historical reference to the *Hospital dos Pobres* is from 1591 and the *Hospital de S. Lázaro* is referred to in the *compromisso* of the *Misericórdia* of Macau of 1627. See José Caetano Soares, *Macau e a Assistência (Panorama médico-social)*, Lisboa: Agência Geral das Colónias, 1950, 13,141.

The *misericórdia* also gave assistance to prisoners (a few of them, rarely a dozen a year); some were convicted to exile in Timor, and the confraternity financed their trip and provided for their clothing. The number of burials provided for the poor was very low, and most of the deceased died in the institution's hospitals. It comes as a surprise that there were a very low number of marriage dowries amongst the officially registered *legados pios*, in spite of their omnipresence in the wills and pious legacies of the Christian inhabitants of Macao, but cross-references point to a separate registration of marriages sponsored by the *misericórdia*.⁴² There was also a small number of poor regularly assisted with alms, which rarely surpassed a hundred a year.

The institution also had the obligation to celebrate masses on behalf of the eternal salvation of its donors. Their number in Macao totalled circa three thousand masses a year (actually, between 1750-3000), which is a low one when compared to other *misericórdias*. In Goa, more than a hundred years earlier, in 1624, the number of masses said was superior to 6500. In Bahia, at the time the *misericórdia* obtained a reduction bull in 1739, the masses were over thirteen thousand.⁴³ It should be noted that the chaplains of the Santa Casa of Macao were responsible for only a small proportion of these masses. The majority were celebrated by the religious orders of the city, thus creating the occasion for the sharing of the revenue of the house with other local institutions. Inter-institutional outsourcing might also have been useful in order to avoid potential conflicts between the *Misericórdia* and the regular clergy.

The population that received alms during the Visitation and the Holy Week was incomparably higher than the monthly average of 100 to 120 poor assisted on a regular basis, including foundlings, hospital patients and lepers. The intention of the *misericórdia* seems to have been that of raising the visibility of events that included the larger Christian population. This did not mean that the confraternity did not operate on a discriminative basis. A hierarchy between the recipients of alms was established, expressed in the sums of money awarded to people in different situations.

The main divide was between the members of the Portuguese community and the wider Christian population. The former, in smaller numbers than the latter, received higher sums, but there was also an internal gradation among them. Its hierarchy was the following: the widows of the ruling members of the institution; the widows and daughters

⁴² Historical Archives of Macao, Santa Casa da Misericórdia, cod. 302, *Legados pios 1592-1840*.

⁴³ Sá, *Quando o rico*, 185; Russell-Wood, *Fidalgos and Philanthropists*, 103-104.

of other members; the widows of other men and those persons who were regularly assisted by the *misericórdia*; the widows of expelled members (the *irmãos riscados*). Lower sums were allocated to the remaining Luso-Asiatic population. It is even possible that almsgiving extended to the non-Christian Chinese residents, as we have no evidence that the Chinese immigrant population was excluded from almsgiving. Registers mention the “daughters of the land”, and the persons who showed up at the institution’s door on the day alms were handed out (*os pobres da porta*). Their number, in contrast, ranged from two to three thousand at each event.

These huge charitable events represent the spectacular display of generosity typical of the Baroque. Both the *misericórdias* of big cities such as Lisbon and Bahia, and provincial towns performed them. The amounts involved in such events are difficult to calculate, since they could be financed by the *provedores* themselves, and not be inscribed in official accounts, as is the case of Macao. In this specific case, this seems to be the most important feature of the charity practiced by its *misericórdia*. The conspicuous nature of such general distributions of alms outshines the regular charitable services to the poor. Although meaningful in the context of the city, the number of foundlings, sick patients, prisoners and the like, falls behind the scale of the assistance that was practiced in the cities of the Portuguese world.

The effects of conspicuous almsgiving are difficult to establish, but it would not be exaggerated to suggest that they referred to legitimating strategies of the Macanese *misericórdia* itself, which sought to encompass the whole Christian population of the city. The scale of the sums involved in maritime trade focused the activities of the *misericórdia* on proto-banking activities. The importance of general almsgiving during the Holy Week must have been largely for the sake of ritual. It had little impact on the wellbeing of the individuals who benefited from them, due to the alms’ insignificant value and to their discontinuity, alms-giving taking place only a few times a year.

Two features strike one about the *Misericórdia* of Bahia, when compared to the *misericórdias* of Macao and Goa: the scale of the charitable services provided, and its involvement with the plantation economy. These differences are especially relevant during the eighteenth century, probably because sources have been better preserved for this period than for the preceding century. The fact that clear data exists for the period from 1765 to 1799 gives this institution a direct comparability with

the *misericórdia* of Macao.⁴⁴ It must be noted at the outset that the population of the city in 1755 was as high as 130,000 persons.⁴⁵ In opposition to Macao, where there was an imbalance in favour of women (most of them widowed or orphaned), the city of Salvador was inhabited by a majority of men, especially among its white population.

The Santa Casa ran only one hospital for the poor (instead of two like Macao), the *Hospital de S. Cristóvão*, which, in opposition to the Goan hospitals, did not discriminate between its patients according to race, admitting blacks and whites in equal standing. According to Russell-Wood, the Bahian *misericórdia* jealously safeguarded its position as the home for the city's main hospital, preventing other institutions from creating other large hospitals.⁴⁶ By the end of the seventeenth century, the hospital had 168 beds and admitted more than eight thousand patients in the last twenty years of the eighteenth century, of which nearly 80 percent were men. Besides, the *Misericórdia* of Bahia ran a retirement house (*recolhimento*), provided marriage dowries, buried more than seven hundred persons a year, and catered for foundlings. In one respect however, the *Misericórdia* of Bahia failed to satisfy its members. Until 1775, the cloisters of the confraternity buried brothers, non-brothers and the poor in the same ground. The failure to ensure dignified burial sites seems to have had severe consequences for the confraternity. The members of the *Misericórdia* preferred to be buried as Dominican, Carmelites and especially Franciscan Tertiaries, because the Third Orders kept suitable funerary sites.

The involvement of the Santa Casa with the plantation economy can be observed in relation to the African-Brazilian population. The hospital of Saint Christopher assisted circa forty per cent of non-whites, and the institution buried a mean of nearly six hundred slaves a year during the period between 1765 and 1787. Besides, the house possessed a sugar estate in the Recôncavo⁴⁷ and used slaves as its labor force. Also, sugar planters, who needed huge investments of capital for processing the crop and then the shipment of sugar, owed corresponding sums that the *misericórdia* provided on loan.

⁴⁴ Hospital patients were surveyed from 1788 to 1799 and buried persons from 1765-1799 (Sá, *Quando o rico*, chap. 6).

⁴⁵ Russell-Wood, *Fidalgos and Philanthropists*, 260.

⁴⁶ Russell-Wood, *Fidalgos and Philanthropists*, 270-271.

⁴⁷ Stuart Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations in the Formation of Brazilian Society. Bahia, 1550-1835*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

There is no doubt that the difficulty in recovering the sums provided on loan was felt since the seventeenth century, but the situation was recognized as particularly damaging to the institution during the eighteenth century. The king was to order a general inspection of its accounts in 1754. Some of the documents that were produced in consequence testify to the centrality of charity in the accumulation of capital. If the institution were to lose importance, people would borrow the money elsewhere. Credit may have harmed the efficiency of charitable action, but it was nevertheless indispensable for the survival of the institution and its hegemonic role among the institutions of the city.⁴⁸

Conclusions

From the doctrinal point of view, the Portuguese *misericórdias* were rooted in late medieval piety. The fourteen works of mercy were already incorporated in doctrine when D. Manuel I ascended to the throne in 1495. Nevertheless, these confraternities were to institutionalize a coherent programme of charity based on their practice.

The *misericórdias* were convenient to the king and to the local elites. The initiative of their foundation could come from both, but it was always welcome. The king obtained the patronage of charity at a relative low cost, and the local elites benefited from a set of advantages not always related to charitable action. The resources of the *misericórdias* were an important factor in the reproduction of the social status of their members. In exchange, those elites gave alms and administered charitable institutions, performing voluntary work. The *misericórdias* thus represented an increased possibility for dialogue and negotiation between local elites and the king. At the same time, the *misericórdias* took care of the poor, a relatively neutral element in this triple relationship, which, as we have seen, held central power and local elites as its two main poles.

The history of the *misericórdias* in Asia is thus that of the Estado da Índia: once rich and including a core of dynamic fortresses, which related to its capital; in recession after the seventeenth century, when military and economic decline reduced their number and motivated the ruin of Goa itself. Its *misericórdia* mirrors this recession: from being at the centre in relation to the other *misericórdias*, it turned into a peripheral institution itself in the eighteenth century. In Brazil, during the same period, the situation of the *misericórdias* was very different. There were problems,

⁴⁸ Russell-Wood, *Fidalgos and Philanthropists*, 339-345 and Sá, *Quando o rico*, 218-221.

frauds, and misuse of capital, but the huge sums of capital in circulation allowed these confraternities to keep their local importance, as well as to give relevant assistance to the poor, as was the case of the *misericórdia* of Salvador da Bahia.

As for the *misericórdia* of Macao, its localization in a unique economic and social context in the Far East brought its pre-banking nature into the open. Compared to Goa, the city was not in decline during the eighteenth century. In spite of the fluctuations of the markets and the political alliances indispensable to the survival of the Portuguese presence in the peninsula, the city managed to count on its *misericórdia* as a support system both for its poor and for its commercial activities.

The study of the *misericórdias* demonstrates a permanent tension between the interests of the elites and the need to create social consensus through charity; there was an implicit commitment to run assistance institutions and to help the poor, because the *misericórdias* were created to perform the fourteen works of mercy.

The fact that the *misericórdias* were based not on legal obligation of the well-to-do towards the poor, but on their good will and on the benevolent image they wanted to give of themselves, was both advantageous and negative to them. The elites could run them with a great degree of independence from central authorities and manage resources freely. On the other hand, the negative impact of poor behaviour was to harm institutions like the *misericórdias*, which relied on the confidence of the population and which could be transformed into pious legacies, which in turn generated wealth. The awareness of the misuse of money, especially on loan, could result in a drop in donations and divert capital to other institutions. It would be exaggerated to state that charity played a secondary role in the *misericórdias*, because its role was vital for the legitimacy of the institution. No doubt *misericórdias* can also be seen as agents of imperialism, although we risk ignoring that their behaviour was not substantially different from their metropolitan counterparts. Imperialism is not a specificity of charitable action, but it would be unwise to state that charity did not contribute to political and social domination, whether at home or overseas.