

# Raising an Empire

Children in  
Early Modern Iberia  
and Colonial Latin America



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CHAPTER ONE

**Up and Out**

Children in Portugal and the Empire  
(1500–1800)

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† ONE OF THE FEW REPRESENTATIONS OF CHILDREN IN PORTUGUESE art of the sixteenth century is seen in the work of Gregório Lopes. In his painting of Salomé presenting the head of John the Baptist to Herod and his wife, the artist depicts four children in the foreground. Three of the boys are colorfully dressed, and at least two of them wear daggers. They are playing together on the floor, and one of them spins a top while another adolescent dressed in black stands in attendance. It is likely that this group at play depicts the prince and some of the youths with whom he was educated and raised. The standing boy, perhaps a page, is clearly not part of this select group.

This painting tells us a great deal about childhood and social status in early modern Portugal. One of the first things we notice about the painting is that it reflects the “childhood” of only a select group of youths. There are no girls playing with the boys. We also notice that most of the boys are roughly the same age and size and therefore probably not members of the same family. Most of the boys are portrayed at play rather than at work, indicating that they could be noble children sent to court to be



1.1. Gregório Lopes, *Apresentação da Cabeça de S. João Baptista*  
 (The presentation of the head of St. John the Baptist), Igreja de S. João Baptista,  
 Tomar (1539–41[?]). Source: Photo by José Pessoa in *Gregório Lopes*, comp.  
 José Alberto Seabra Carvalho (Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores, 1999), 69.

educated. The presence of the boy who is attending the table and does not belong among the prince's companions only further underscores the manner in which childhood experience might vary by social status. Yet these court children most likely also shared experiences that, broadly speaking, were similar. Like other early modern Portuguese children, they often moved among different households and into the care of adults to whom they were not related by blood. The servant as well as the noble child could leave their natal homes at young ages—the objects of what historians call “child circulation.”

Child circulation took many forms. Irrespective of class or gender, children frequently were placed with wet nurses, entrusted to other households, or sent to institutions at very early ages. Boys could be shipped off to become sailors, soldiers, or missionaries to the colonies at the beginning of their adolescence; they might be apprenticed to a master artisan's household in another town; or they might be sent to boarding school. The lives of poor or marginalized children, especially foundlings, were often dark caricatures of this seemingly benign circulation system. Unless they were very lucky, foundlings would be brought up by a succession of wet nurses and passed on to several employers during their adolescence.

There were several reasons for the high prevalence of child circulation in early modern Portugal. First, there were no serious nutritional alternatives to breast milk for infants, and physical conditions or social conventions prevented many mothers from nursing their own children, so they hired other women to perform the task. In addition, family poverty often dictated that parents place their children on the labor market to ease the economic pressure experienced by the household group, or in some cases to place a child in a foundling home. If a child was to learn a work skill, this often meant he had to be professionally trained away from a parent's home, as learning a skill often required that he move into the artisan's home. Receiving an education, too, might imply migration to larger towns where boarding schools were located. Last but not least, the search for new opportunities in distant colonies in America, Africa, or Asia often started at early ages and led children to faraway lands.

In a world in which labor was not yet confined to adults and societal definitions of appropriate separation between parent and child were fairly broad, life on one's own (away from one's natal home) could start early. Social mobility or mere survival often depended on the ability to move children to foster families or to travel to other regions with better

prospects for making a living. Although in early modern Portugal the experience of childhood varied according to social class and gender, children from a broad spectrum of social classes and both genders shared one common experience: they frequently grew up around adults who were not their parents. Whether the children were prosperous or poor, male or female, urban or rural, their parents or other adults responsible for them frequently chose to send them to be reared, trained, or supervised by others.

My conclusions are based, in part, on the existing state of knowledge on children and childhood in early modern Portugal, but I also hope to do more than simply review current scholarship, especially given that knowledge of the history of childhood in Portugal is still fragmentary and incomplete. Instead, I revisit old sources, examining in particular texts from the era such as iconography, the chronicles of Portuguese kings, and laws. These sources have been well used in other fields of Portuguese history, but here I examine them with the intention of studying childhood.

Before proceeding to my analysis, it may be fruitful to explore the limitations of the sources—in other words, to acknowledge what we do not or cannot know. Chronicles, synod constitutions, confraternity regulations, and canon and civil law are the kinds of historical records that historians have turned to since Ariès first pioneered this field, and these sources can teach us a great deal about the ways in which adults dealt with children in Portugal's past. Nevertheless, we must bear in mind that, with the exception of chronicles, most of this material is prescriptive in nature; these texts are normative literature that might not correspond to the actual practices of either parents or children. Although prescriptive sources abound, more intimate glimpses into children's lives are rare. Diaries detailing a specific individual's childhood years or descriptions that directly address Portuguese attitudes toward children remain difficult to find. Further complicating matters, childhood games and play, which must have occupied the thoughts if not the time of youngsters, are difficult to analyze since thus far most of what we know was gathered as part of ethnographic studies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>1</sup>

It will also be difficult to trace change over time, particularly before the eighteenth century. For a long time, Portuguese laws concerning children remained relatively static, with most following the tradition of Roman law. Likewise, other sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sources pertaining to children, such as chronicles or manuals for children's education, indicate a relative level of stability that would only begin to shift in the eighteenth

century, at which point we can observe undeniable change in a variety of areas. It was in this century that child abandonment rose to a massive scale, serious medical concern for children emerged, and programs for basic schooling were implemented.

Finally, within these centuries-long patterns, the civic, natal status (legitimate or illegitimate), and religious boundaries that set the parameters of childhood were fluid even while the laws or prescriptions that set these boundaries were not. I have tried to remain faithful to my sources' fluid notions of what constituted the different stages of childhood, as there is little point in tracing boundaries between phases such as infancy, childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood when no such sharp demarcations were made in everyday practice.

What can be known about childhood and what is detailed in this chapter concern two seemingly contradictory phenomena. On the one hand, we learn something expected from the printed sources of early modern Portugal: not all children were viewed in the same way or were afforded the same experiences. Indeed, the life of a child was marked by strong distinctions based on age, natal status, social class status, and gender. Thus the essay begins with an examination of the vertical hierarchies into which children were born—the “up” in the title of this essay. But focusing on hierarchies and distinctions within definitions of childhood alone would mask the common, “horizontal” experiences that many youths shared during the era. Compared to modern children, early modern Portuguese children often were raised out of their natal homes and even moved around a great deal during their early years to work, to be trained, to be schooled, or due to abandonment. Therefore, after exploring the effects of age, natal status, gender, and social class on childhood as a category and as a lived experience, the essay turns to the topics of education, child circulation, and labor—the “out” in the title.

### Up: The Hierarchies of Childhood

In early modern Portugal, age and social position—most notably class and gender—together created cleavages among children. These divisions provided the structures that affected childhood experiences as well as the lives of adults. As Gregório Lopes's painting reminds us, although most children could spin tops, not all of them sat on Oriental rugs while they played.

One source for the creation of these hierarchies, and particularly for circumscribing individuals' actions according to age, was the law. From a legal point of view, children became adults in their early twenties: males at twenty-five and females at twenty. Prior to reaching adulthood, children were subject to all manner of control by the *paterfamilias*, or male head of household, who had the legal right (*patria potestad*) to constrain and punish members of his household, including children, wife, and servants. Upon reaching majority age, individuals were guaranteed a level of personal freedom that allowed them to marry without paternal consent, and, in the case of male children, to assume an administrative post or to be ordained a priest.<sup>2</sup> Once orphans reached adulthood, they became legally entitled to take full control of any wealth they might have inherited. But prior to gaining such liberties, an individual—still in his or her legal minority—had to go through many stages of childhood, from infancy to adolescence.

As with civil law, synod constitutions are also a rich source of information about the various stages of childhood. These written texts articulated religious legislation, such as the definition of the moments at which children could receive the sacraments and the ages at which children would be held responsible for their actions.<sup>3</sup> For instance, baptism was to be administered within eight days of birth. The sacrament of confirmation could take place anytime after baptism. After the Council of Trent (1545–63), however, seven was set as the age of confirmation, although some synod constitutions prescribed the age of five.<sup>4</sup> At seven, children were considered old enough to lie and thus could sin, and, as a result, they were deemed to be of an appropriate age to confess and perform penitence.

Adolescence was believed to begin between twelve and fourteen. By age fourteen, children were required to take the Eucharist at least once a year and were deemed capable of marrying “by words in the present,” although many synod constitutions still differentiated between the age of marriage for boys and girls (ages fourteen and twelve, respectively).<sup>5</sup> Adolescents were also free to take vows of chastity—but not final ones—or undertake religious pilgrimages.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the Catholic Church deemed individuals who were at least fourteen years old to be of sufficient maturity to assume the responsibilities associated with godparentage.<sup>7</sup>

Funeral rites are also sound indicators of the boundaries between childhood and adolescence. For example, the 1639 synod constitutions of Braga, in northwestern Portugal, stated that any person could choose his or her burial site after the ages of fourteen (for boys) and twelve (for

girls), without the permission of their fathers.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the manner in which religious brotherhoods (confraternities) regulated the rites surrounding the deaths of their members and families clearly indicate that there was an age-related complexity to the ritual. For instance, in some artisan guild confraternities of the city of Porto, the number of candles lit in a child's funeral increased from eight to twelve if the child was older than twelve.<sup>9</sup>

During the period 1500–1800 there were no significant changes in the legal ramifications of natal status (meaning whether an individual was considered legitimate or illegitimate). The label “legitimate” was reserved for the offspring of married parents or, in other words, when the father of the child was the mother's husband at the time of the birth. Illegitimacy was divided into a variety of different categories determined by the degree of sin attached to children's conception. Children could be “natural” (when their parents were legally and canonically able to marry each other but had not), or “spurious” (born of damned coitus, in other words, born to parents could not marry each other). Among the latter category of offspring were incestuous, adulterous, and sacrilegious children (children born to a parent who had a religious vocation). These latter categories were considered so heinous that only the king had the power to legitimize anyone born with such a “stain.”

Although historians have still not uncovered the extent to which illegitimate children were subject to discrimination by their contemporaries in Portugal, some signs do indicate that they were held in disrepute. For example, after the Council of Trent the marital and sexual relationships of priests were more severely punished; therefore, they were less likely to acknowledge their children and did not publicly assume their paternity as had been common in the late Middle Ages.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, by the time of the Council of Trent there were several discriminative devices used to distinguish legitimate children from illegitimate ones. Illegitimate children could not be registered in baptismal records in the same manner as legitimate children; that is, the name of the father could not be mentioned. In situations in which the social standing of the mother required secrecy, her identity could also be withheld from the baptismal record.<sup>11</sup> Such discriminatory efforts did not, however, result in a decrease in the number of illegitimate births. In fact, the high volume of illegitimate births in urban northwestern Portugal indicates that it must have been an accepted fact of life for many of the country's inhabitants. In areas such as northwestern

Portugal, illegitimate births could represent between 10 and 15 percent of the total birth registers in a given parish.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to age and natal status, gender exerted an influence on most of the issues related to children: it dictated play and social life, education, occupation, and life expectations. Although we know little about children's play, it is likely that the popular games that anthropologists and other academics observed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries existed well before they were cataloged.<sup>13</sup> In rural areas, climbing trees, picking fruit, or stealing birds' nests were common activities among boys. There also were collective games played outside of churches on Sundays and feast days in which young men also participated.

The fact that these games were practiced in the open air may have discouraged girls from taking part since social rules favored their domestic seclusion. One of the first Portuguese books dedicated to the education of children, authored by Alexandre de Gusmão, advised that girls should not leave the house after being weaned and also advised parents to keep an eye on visitors to their homes since the actions of these men might damage their daughters' honor.<sup>14</sup> Instead of the open-air pastimes of boys, girls' play included an array of toys and games that were gender-specific, encouraging them to imitate feminine domestic life (small kitchen tools), to mimic motherhood tasks (dolls), or to dress as a woman (flower necklaces). There were also collective games normally enjoyed exclusively by girls, such as skipping rope or playing hopscotch.<sup>15</sup> However, in spite of all the precautions prescribed in parental literature, we can hardly imagine that girls actually lived such highly gender-segregated childhoods, especially in rural areas, where even girls must have played outside the perimeters of houses and gardens.

Life in the royal court was highly segregated by sex, as is evident in the spatial layout of the palace, where women were kept completely separate from men. A foreign visitor to the Portuguese court remarked that men could only present themselves at the threshold of the women's apartments in which daughters of the royal family were expected to keep to the company of their mothers and sisters, as well as their very young brothers.<sup>16</sup> As we might assume had already occurred in the life of the young prince in our painting, there was a moment in a prince's life when he was expected to depart from the company of women. This ideally would take place anywhere from the age of twelve to sixteen when his staff and attendants would form a new household.<sup>17</sup> But this was an

expensive undertaking, and thus the establishment of a princely household often was delayed.

For a prince, the act of establishing a separate residence represented a coming of age and the possibility of exerting authority over his own servants. For a princess, the crucial moment of separation from her family was marriage, which generally meant leaving Portugal for another European court accompanied by her own set of courtiers and with her dowry.<sup>18</sup> Although puberty, or the onset of menstruation, was considered a clear sign that girls were ready for marriage, most of the Portuguese princesses did not marry until their late teens or early twenties.<sup>19</sup> For example, Isabel (1503–39) married emperor Charles V at the age of twenty-two, and Catherine of Braganza (1638–1706) married Charles II of England at twenty-three.

In the sixteenth century, royal children, especially male, lived and were brought up in the company of other children who resided in court. These boys even slept in the prince's quarters, where their social status was measured by their proximity to the prince's own bed.<sup>20</sup> Some of the prince's companions slept in contiguous rooms, but others slept on the prince's bedroom floor. These children were often also educated alongside the prince. By the eighteenth century, however, formal princely education seems to have been more secluded. Young Dom João III (1502–57) shared a teacher with court children other than his own brothers and sisters. Yet by 1768, an essay on the education of the heir to the throne advised the prince not to engage in conversations with servants and workers who entered in the palace and to restrict verbal contact to court gentlemen.<sup>21</sup>

It is worth noting that the sisters of Dom João III received their elementary education together with the heir to the throne. Much as with play, education among girls of the upper classes reflected idealized gender roles. Instruction in reading and writing for girls of high social status was generally limited to those lessons deemed necessary for a solid domestic and devotional life.<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, many, especially of the highest class, learned enough reading and writing to be able to send and receive letters. In fact, it was rare to find total illiteracy among the women of the high nobility.

Most ordinary girls were taught skills associated with home management and their role as future mothers.<sup>23</sup> Literacy and basic counting were only minor parts of their education, and they learned to count just enough to avoid wasteful spending. No schools for lower-ranking girls existed until the second half of the eighteenth century; before then, only

a minority of girls received education, and that was either at home or in Portugal's convents and *recolhimentos* (lay religious houses). Although the latter were designed for boarding orphaned girls, they admitted other girls upon payment. The paying students could attend the school either on a daily basis or as boarding students, an arrangement that was more convenient for girls living in distant rural areas.<sup>24</sup>

Since learning religious doctrine and maintaining a devotional life were seen as the goals of female education, most girls were taught the rudiments of reading alone, and writing was considered an unnecessary skill. The early modern Portuguese also considered imparting some manual skills to girls as essential to maintaining the household economy. These abilities included sewing and knitting, particularly for making socks. Girls were also taught some "refined" skills such as embroidery, tatting, and other crafts in order to make sophisticated textiles and objects.

Until at least the early eighteenth century, the primary purpose of literacy for the majority of children in the lower strata of Portuguese society was instruction in basic religious precepts. Most synod constitutions focused on the need to give religious education to children and make them good observant Catholics. At the end of the sixteenth century, a well-known Portuguese catechism, addressed to all parents, stated that their obligation toward their children was not only to support their physical growth but also to educate them in the love and fear of God. Although this catechism made no reference to teaching children how to read and write, becoming literate was inseparable from the teaching of religious doctrine.<sup>25</sup>

The first known printed alphabets were included in catechisms published in the first quarter of the sixteenth century.<sup>26</sup> Such catechisms, some of which included the rudiments of reading music, were designed for children who sang in the choir and who might follow an ecclesiastical career. Later, catechisms became one of the most frequent works printed for the use of missionaries. In Brazil and in the Portuguese colonies in Asia, they would be published in Portuguese as well as in local languages, and most of them were designed for children, who were viewed as the ideal subjects of indoctrination and missionary efforts.<sup>27</sup> It appears, however, that non-clerical teachers did not have primers or materials specifically designed to teach children to read; rather, they used manuscripts and sometimes transcriptions of judicial documents as teaching tools.<sup>28</sup>

### Out: Schools, Circulation, and Work

The circulation of children crossed many of the hierarchical statuses of children that we have explored so far. Poverty, illegitimacy, breast-feeding, education, or work could take children away from their natal home, either temporarily or for long periods of time, and thus the practice affected individuals from a broad array of social groups. As is obvious from the discussion of the hierarchies of education in early modern Portugal, for some youths, instruction meant leaving home for the royal court or religious institutions. And, of course, many male youths went to school or entered training in crafts and trades. Boys' secondary education in *colégios*, institutions between elementary school and the university, was entrusted primarily to the Jesuits, and youths were expected to be able to read and write before they were admitted into a *colégio*. At the time that the Jesuits were expelled from the kingdom in 1759, they were running the University of Évora and twenty *colégios* dedicated to secondary studies—which required prior knowledge of reading and writing—in addition to a handful of other educational institutions. Yet the number of schools dedicated to the teaching of rudimentary academic skills totaled only twelve in the entire kingdom, which raises questions about where children were receiving their basic education.<sup>29</sup> The absence of information about elementary schools suggests that boys were educated at home, entrusted to freelance teachers dwelling in the cities, or instructed by priests in cathedral chapters as the use of catechisms suggests.

Ironically, it was when the Jesuits were expelled from Portugal and its colonies and the empire's inhabitants were left without teaching institutions that royal officials began to emphasize the importance of primary education. Elementary and middle-level education was reorganized under the direct supervision of the state in 1772—one of the first attempts to organize an official elementary educational system in Europe. The newly created schools taught students reading, writing, and counting, together with religious doctrine and rules of civility.<sup>30</sup>

As part of the post-Jesuit reforms, the state invested in the public schooling of the court aristocracy through the creation of the *Colégio dos Nobres* (College of the Nobility), which operated between 1766 and 1838. The school was designed to control and discipline the children of the court nobility while preparing them for their future roles in leading positions in the administration and the army. The *Colégio* was planned as

a boarding high school for boys, admitted between the ages of seven and thirteen, who already knew how to read and write. Its curriculum included literary studies (Latin, Greek, history, languages), scientific fields (mathematics, physics, architecture), and physical development (horseback riding, fencing). Good pupils were ready to move on to the university when they finished this curriculum. The aristocracy, however, showed little interest in the college, which indicates that domestic education continued to predominate in this powerful class.

Who among the nobility went to school and where they went were influenced by birth order and inheritance practices. The oldest son inherited the title of the family and the family's main estate, which was indivisible. The practice of entailment, therefore, meant that the destiny of second-born sons was radically different from that of the main heir; usually it was the younger sons who went on to colleges or to the university.<sup>31</sup> The significance of birth order was even evident in the regulations of the Colégio dos Nobres, which prescribed different dress codes for first-born and second-born sons.<sup>32</sup>

Ultimately the Colégio dos Nobres was rather unsuccessful. The enrollment of few students (only twenty-four pupils to begin with), the low investment of the aristocracy in the college, and a chronic lack of discipline and bad management forced the state to reduce the scientific studies offered in the school to basic arithmetic and geometry. The college lingered on the verge of collapse until the 1830s, when it was absorbed into the Colégio Militar, which was the main educating facility for careers in the military.<sup>33</sup>

Who were the children who went to school, then, since the nobility did not seem interested in the Colégio dos Nobres, a school designed with them in mind? It is possible that the middle strata of society became the main clientele of public schools. There is also reason to believe that in some areas many boys attended colleges that had been originally founded for orphaned males. A scarcity of other schools might explain why the orphanage schools became popular and accepted nonorphaned boys on a fee-paying basis. For families living in isolated rural areas, such colleges might have been the only opportunity to give a middle-level education to their sons without having them pursue an ecclesiastical career.

Often, being educated outside of the home conferred on a child the status of *criado*, a term that literally means "brought up." *Criado* was applied to all children—male or female—who were either entrusted to the courts

or to masters. (In fact, the term ultimately became a synonym of "servant.") The name implied that children who were *criados* were not simply lodged, fed, and dressed, but also received training of some sort and, in the meantime, performed various duties and tasks. For a young page at court, these duties included helping the master to mount a horse or mule, waiting on him, accompanying him on his sojourns, joining him during hunting, and other such activities. Damião de Góis, the famous humanist, and his brother Frutos grew up in the royal court. Born in the same year as the Prince João, Damião was sent to court at the age of eleven after the death of his father in 1513. There he and his brother were educated alongside the prince, much as the boys in Lopes's painting might have been.<sup>34</sup> The brothers continued to serve the royal court as adults, and Damião eventually wrote the chronicle of King Dom Manuel in the 1560s.

But not all *criados* were placed with such illustrious patrons. When Lazarillo de Tormes, one of the most important fictive characters in picaresque literature, was eight years old, his father left home after being accused of fraud and eventually died in a war. After being widowed, Lazarillo's mother moved with her son to town. There she had another son by a man who, unfortunately, proved to be a thief. As a result, he was convicted and Lazarillo's mother was punished along with her lover. At this point, the mother entrusted Lazarillo, who must have been younger than twelve, to a blind beggar. He claimed to be taking Lazarillo as a son, not as a servant.

Like Damião, Lazarillo would have occupied a precarious status in the household, which points to the ambiguity of *criados*. For Lazarillo, his "adoption" by the beggar began a life in which he lived with six other masters before marrying and settling in Toledo.<sup>35</sup> Other youths grew up as *criados* of peasants, and their tasks could consist of feeding domestic animals, looking after cattle, or simply joining workers in the fields. Apprenticed boys living in the cities often ran errands for adults or performed menial tasks that were deemed suitable for their age and status. Many of the *criados* experienced total separation from their birth homes, though not all children who were circulated lost touch with their biological families. Lazarillo never saw his mother again, but Damião stayed in touch with various relatives who also resided in court, including his brother.

Circulation could, however, start long before adolescence, even in infancy. Royal or aristocratic families could afford wet nurses who resided with them while other families often sent their children to rural areas to



be breast-fed. In fact, officials in many countries throughout Europe even monitored this common practice. In France, for instance, the Bureau des Nourrices (Board of Wet Nurses) exerted control over parents and wet nurses.<sup>36</sup> Since there was no such agency in early modern Portugal, institutional sources are silent about wet nursing except when it comes to foundlings. In their case, information is overwhelming in hospital records, often enabling the historian to map the geography of breast-feeding, which could extend in a perimeter as far as forty miles around large cities such as Lisbon and Porto.<sup>37</sup>

Beyond the records of foundling hospitals, there is a wealth of information that attests to the prevalence of wet nursing throughout Portugal. Literature written in French as well as in other European languages concerning how to choose a good wet nurse was translated into Portuguese. Portuguese doctors themselves authored several texts on what to look for and what to avoid when selecting a woman to nurse one's child.<sup>38</sup> The widespread presence of such literature indicates that wet nursing crossed all social strata, and that children—even those from the “best” homes—routinely were raised away from their parents at least until weaning, which could take place from twelve months to two years of age.

Some children abandoned by their parents tended to experience what we might call “extreme circulation.” These children were often passed from one family or household to another several times during their childhood—and probably eventually from employer to employer—until we lose track of them in the sources. Other foundlings would be cared for by a wet nurse hired by the institution; she might then continue to rear the child after weaning and might even incorporate him or her into her household after the child was no longer under the care of the foundling hospital.

It must be noted that, even in the case of foundlings, members of biological families could find ways to track down the whereabouts of circulated children and might even keep some contact with them. Occasionally, birth mothers hid the fact that they were the mothers of abandoned children and managed to get themselves hired by the foundling homes as wet nurses to their own children. In doing so, they saved themselves the public disrepute of having an illegitimate child or simply found a creative way to get paid for breast-feeding their own offspring.

Within the upper echelons of society, noble children could be entrusted to other noble households whose social ranking was even higher. Of these, the highest household was, of course, the king's court. At the beginning

of the seventeenth century, an author commented that “the custom of the kings of Portugal is not only to support their criados, but to take their [the criados'] children as servants as soon as they are twelve years old.” Later in the same text the author asserted that this habit of taking subsequent generations of criados from the same families was extensive among the nobility. In fact, it was considered an offense if a man ceased giving his sons to the same family in which he and his ancestors had been criados.<sup>39</sup> Simply stated, circulation was a device to ensure upward social mobility or social reproduction of status for the upper tiers of society. For those at the bottom, circulation of children was a matter of basic survival.

Some historians have argued that few European children were workers during the early modern period.<sup>40</sup> In Portugal, however, there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that children in the lower classes were put to work as soon as they were able to make a contribution, direct or indirect, to the household economy. Although not strictly waged workers, children could tend to their younger siblings, run errands, or take care of domestic tasks, thus leaving their parents free to work outside of the house.

Although urban children most certainly worked in early modern Portugal, it appears that child workers were more commonly found in rural areas, where the obligation to perform agricultural tasks (shepherding, herding, feeding cattle, and so on) was universal among children. Sixteenth-century records attest to the presence of children and adolescents among seasonal workers. For example, records from the general hospital in Évora in southwestern Portugal reveal that young adolescents emigrated from the northwest in seasonal harvest journeys in the late sixteenth century, although it is impossible to know if children and young adolescents worked in the fields together with their parents or alone.<sup>41</sup>

What is more, the calendar of schooling adapted to the rhythm of agricultural work. In the minds of both educators and parents, it was clear that children should use their time outside school to participate in the family economy. Many testimonies refer to the reluctance of parents to let their children go to school because their work was required at home. Some parents also thought that literacy was useless to the future of their children, because as peasants, fishermen, or shepherds they would not need it.<sup>42</sup>

Until the nineteenth century, long-distance emigration began in early adolescence, and it was even common for some youths to depart for Brazil

or other parts of the empire at twelve or thirteen years of age. This was the case among the first Jesuits sent to Brazil: nine orphans from Lisbon went to Bahia in 1550 with the friars. Five years later, another eighteen arrived in the colony to work with the Jesuits. These children helped the missionaries who taught Catholic doctrine; they also sang during and assisted with mass.<sup>43</sup> Emigration to the colonies during early age could even result in financial success: João Pais, born in Viana in northern Portugal to a family of the local nobility, was one of the many second sons for whom the Iberian practice of entailing property for first-born sons meant being left without inheritance. He went to Pernambuco, Brazil, when he was only thirteen and eventually became the owner of several sugar mills.<sup>44</sup> His case was not unique. Until the nineteenth century it was not uncommon for Portuguese boys to leave for Brazil at age seven, often serving as cabin boys aboard ship. Likewise, young boys also worked on ships sailing for India. Most of the young male emigrants—either to Brazil or to India—were between twelve and seventeen years of age.<sup>45</sup>

Within Portugal, child labor before adolescence tends to be invisible in historical sources due to its informal and nonremunerated nature. In fact, by law no wages were due before fourteen years of age for boys, and no labor contracts could be signed before that age. Yet, in the royal household, children of court nobles were listed in the king's payrolls at age twelve.<sup>46</sup> Child labor patterns become only slightly more visible when boys at age fourteen could be apprenticed to master craftsmen, but only for cases in which formal contracts were drawn up by notaries. While apprenticeship contracts from the region of Coimbra, for instance, represent only 1 percent of all existing notary records, they do suggest that the most common age at which boys began learning a craft was fourteen years old.<sup>47</sup>

The evidence that does exist for child labor, other than apprenticeship, suggests that children worked well before the age at which they would have formalized their working status or received wages. Orphans and foundlings often worked for their foster families—who were also their overseers—long before the age at which they could sign formal contracts. By law children younger than seven were not to receive wages since their upbringing was deemed sufficient payment for whatever service they might render.<sup>48</sup> It seems that any economically useful activity performed before adolescence was viewed as a type of *antidora* (counterdonation; that is, the reciprocation of a gift) on the part of the child, akin to a repayment for child support and upbringing.<sup>49</sup>

### Conclusions

A review of "traditional" sources in the history of childhood for the case of early modern Portugal reveals that children grew up in a society replete with hierarchies based on birth status, gender, and social and economic position. In the higher ranks of society, unequal ranking within the family created an important divide between sons according to birth order. High-status girls, deprived of such careers, were raised for marriage or convent life, in either case developing the skills to survive in the feminine world.

Any history of childhood in early modern Portugal must take into account not only the differences between childhood experiences but also the mobility of children and the fact that few of them remained with their birth parents from infancy to adulthood. Some were left with foster parents or charitable institutions such as foundling homes or orphanages. Many children were given to wet nurses, and formal education often meant boarding at schools far from home. Being entrusted to master craftsmen implied moving from the village to the city, while working as domestic servants conferred parental rights on the children's patrons, thus severing legal control by parents over children. Learning to be a missionary often meant a one-way trip at an early age to a distant land such as Portuguese America or Asia; emigrating overseas or even enrolling in the army was a fact of early adolescence for many male youths.

While the specific circumstances that led to child circulation may have varied from family to family, there are some basic underlying causes. For children from families without significant property, the struggle for survival dominated life, which sometimes led to drastic actions on the part of the parents. In families where there was something to inherit, sons who were not the first to be born had to strive for a career outside the family's home, and thus they too tended to be displaced. Circulation of children was mainly masculine. Many girls had to wait until marriage to leave their parents' homes. If there was not a possibility for a suitable match, these girls entered convents. Only when the family was too poor to ensure a daughter a dowry would she enter the labor market as a worker in the fields or as a domestic servant.

The world of children changed gradually in the time period 1500–1800. Not until the second half of the eighteenth century would medical scientists and government officials turn their attention to the unique problems of childhood and adolescence. Then, an enlightened royal state, having expelled the Jesuits from the empire, set an official public school

system in motion from the 1760s onward. Yet, even with this increased pace of change, much remained the same, particularly in education: girls continued to be instructed separately, and their education was still directed to expectations of marriage and domestic management. Children of the lower classes were seldom educated, even in fundamentals. And only religious indoctrination was considered necessary for all children, regardless of gender, social status, or wealth.

What remains clear is that children of early modern Portugal were affected by many of the same divisions that formed their parents' world, divisions caused not so much by the individuals but rather by the circumstances of their birth. Nevertheless, even while the experiences of childhood in early modern Portugal may have varied, many infants and young people performed an act that, to them, must have been commonplace—leaving home.

✦ NOTES ✦

1. The intention of the surveys of games was to record behavior that the authors very rightly perceived were at risk of disappearing. Many of them did, especially in the second half of the twentieth century with the urbanization of the country and an increase in consumer society, which resulted in toys being industrially produced rather than handcrafted. The main ethnographers associated with this tradition are Adolfo Coelho (1847–1919) and J. Leite de Vasconcellos (1858–1941). The former compiled traditional games and nursery rhymes (*Jogos e rimas infantis*, 1883) and popular tales (*Contos populares portugueses*, 1879). Vasconcellos is the compiler of *Etnografia portuguesa*, a corpus of ethnographic notes that were later organized by his students.
2. Isabel dos Guimarães Sá, "Child Abandonment in Portugal: Legislation and Institutional Care," *Continuity and Change* 9, no. 1 (1994): 72.
3. I surveyed a number of synod constitutions and list them here in chronological order in order to avoid repetition. Future references will only mention "S. C." (Synod Constitution) followed by the name of the diocese and date: Valença (1444); Braga (1477); Valença (1486); Porto (1496); Guarda (1500); Braga (1505) published in Garcia y Garcia, *Synodicon Hispanum II. Portugal*, (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1982). Lisbon (1537): *Constituições do Arcebispado de Lixboa* (Lisbon: Germão Galharde, 1537). Porto (1541): *Cônstituições Sinodales do Bispado do Porto ordenadas pelo muito Reverendo e magnifico Senbor dom Baltasar Limpo bispo do dicto bispado* (Porto: Vasco Diaz Tanquo do Frexenal, 1541). Coimbra (1548): *Constituições Synodales do Bispado de Coimbra* (Coimbra, 1548). Algarve (1554): *Constituições do Bispado do Algarve* (Lisbon: Germão Galharde, 1554). Viseu (1556): *Constituições Synodales do Bispado de Viseu* (Coimbra: Ioam Alvares, 1556). Angra (1560): *Constituições Sinodales do Bispado d'Angra* (Lisbon: João Blavio de Colonia, 1560). Lamego (1563): *Constituições Synodales do Bispado de Lamego* (Coimbra: Ioam de Barreyra, 1563). Miranda (1565): *Constituições Synodales do Bispado de Miranda* (Lisbon: em casa de Francisco Correa impressor do Cardeal Iffante, 1565). Portalegre (1589): *Constituições Sinodales de D. Frei Amador Arrais bispo de Portalegre* (1589), ed. Tarcisio Fernandes Alves (Portalegre: Cabido da Sé de Portalegre, 1999). Viseu (1617): *Constituições sinodales do bispado de Viseu feitas, e ordenadas em Synodo pelo illustrissimo, e reverendissimo Senbor Dom João Manuel* (Coimbra: Nicolau Carvalho, 1617). Braga (1639): *Constituições synodales do Arcebispado de Braga ordenadas no anno de 1639. pelo . . . Arcebispo D. Sebastião de Matos e Noronha, e mandadas imprimir a primeira vez pelo . . . Senhor D. João de Sousa*

- ... (Lisbon: Oficina de Miguel Deslandes, 1697). Porto (1687): *Constituições synodais do bispado do Porto, novamente feitas, e ordenadas pelo illustrissimo, e reverendissimo senhor Dom João de Sousa, bispo do dito bispado [?] propostas e aceitas em o synodo Diocesano que o ditto Senhor celebrou em 18 de Mayo de Anno de 1687* (Coimbra: No Real Colégio das Artes da Companhia de Jesu, 1735).
4. Among them, the synod constitutions of Lisbon (1537), Coimbra (1548), Lamego (1563), Miranda (1565), Braga (1639), and Lisbon (1640). On Trent and the age for confirmation, see Matheus Soares, *Pratica e ordem para os visitadores dos bispados* (1569; reprint, Lisbon: Jorge Rodriguez, 1602), 6.
  5. The expression *por palavras de presente* was used to distinguish from the promises of marriage (*por palavras de futuro*) that could take place at age seven. The marriages of twelve- and fourteen-year-old children were a matter of some friction between the Catholic Church and the laity, especially in aristocratic families and civil law, which considered the father's consent desirable to protect the family's interests, while the church favored the complete freedom of the betrothed. See António Manuel Hespanha, "A Família," in *História de Portugal*, ed. José Mattoso, vol. 4, 275–76; and António Manuel Hespanha, "Carne de uma só carne: Para uma compreensão dos fundamentos antropológicos da família na época moderna," *Análise Social* XXVIII, nos. 123–24 (1993): 951–73.
  6. Martim de Azpilcueta Navarro, *Manual de confesores e penitentes*... (Coimbra, 1552), 90–91.
  7. Synod constitutions were unanimous on the age of godparents. As to court testimonies, there was no differentiation between boys and girls, who could both testify at age fourteen. See *Ordenações manuelinas*, bk. 3, tit. XLII, §15; *Ordenações filipinas*, bk. 3, tit. LVI, §6.
  8. S. C., Braga (1639), 295.
  9. "Estatutos da Confraria de Nossa Senhora da Silva e Compromisso dos Offícios de Ferreiro, Serralheiro e Anzoleiro—1593" and "Estatutos da Irmandade e Confraria do Bem-aventurado Santo António e do Officio do Tanoeiros—1621," in Ana Ladeira Simão, *Introdução ao estudo das confrarias corporativas do Porto (Época Moderna)*, vol. 2 (master's thesis, University of Porto, 1996), 26, 95.
  10. S. C., Porto (1687), 522–23.
  11. S. C., Porto (1687), 36. On mothers' rights over illegitimate children, also see *Tratado de confissom, chaves 1489*, ed. José V. de Pina Martins (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1973), 233. As to lifelong discrimination, persons of illegitimate birth could not legally accede to public office, be priests, or become members of high-status confraternities. The logic behind these discriminative devices

- is the same that was practiced against New Christians, people of African descent, or the children of criminals (namely, those charged with *lese-majesty*), because they all had "tainted" blood.
12. Maria Norberta Amorim, "A diversidade de comportamentos demográficos no Portugal de Antigo Regime," *População e Sociedade*, no. 3 (1997): 146–47; António Augusto Amaro das Neves, *A ilegitimidade no norte de Guimarães (séculos XVI–XVIII)* (master's thesis, Braga, Universidade do Minho, 1996), 118–24.
  13. See Adolfo Coelho, *Jogos e rimas infantis* (1st ed., 1883; reprint, Lisbon: Edições Asa, 1994); António Cabral, *Jogos populares portugueses* (Porto: Editorial Domingos Barreira, 1985); Manuela Hasse and João da Silva Amado, *Jogos e brinquedos tradicionais* (Lisbon: Instituto de Apoio à Criança, 1993); and J. Leite de Vasconcellos, *Etnografia portuguesa*, vol. V (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1967), 99–107. It bears noting, however, that these works do not consider the history of games.
  14. Alexandre de Gusmão, *Arte de crear bem os filhos na idade da puericia* (Lisbon: Oficina de Miguel Deslandes, 1685), 377ff.
  15. J. Leite de Vasconcellos, *Etnografia portuguesa*, vol. V (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1967), 100.
  16. Giuseppe Bertini, "The Marriage of Alessandro Farnese and D. Maria of Portugal in 1565: Court Life in Lisbon and Parma," in *Cultural Links Between Portugal and Italy in the Renaissance*, ed. K. J. Lowe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 56.
  17. By the age of twelve, João III's son, also named João, was taken from the company of women, and a separate household was formed for him (Andrada, *Crónica de D. João III*, 987–88, 1102).
  18. Andrada, *Crónica de D. João III*, 7–8.
  19. The upper nobility modeled its practices on those of the court. But the average age of marriage for common girls was very low (younger than eighteen). In addition, like women in the royal family, noble mothers did not breast-feed but entrusted their children to wet nurses. See Nuno Gonçalo Monteiro, "Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Portuguese Nobilities in the European Context: A Historiographical Overview," *E-Journal of Portuguese History* 1, no. 1 (summer 2003).
  20. Andrada, *Crónica de D. João III*, 1102.
  21. Maria Beatriz Nizza da Silva, "A educação de um príncipe no período pombalino," *Revista de História das Ideias* IV, vol. I (1982–83): 377–83.

22. Rogério Fernandes, "Ensino elementar e suas técnicas no Portugal de quinhentos," in *A abertura do mundo. Estudos de história dos descobrimentos europeus. Em homenagem a Luís de Albuquerque*, ed. Francisco Contente Domingues and Luís Filipe Barreto, orgs., vol. I (Lisbon: Editorial Presença, 1986), 57.
23. Francisco Ribeiro Sanches, "Educação de hua menina até à idade de tomar estado, no reyno de Portugal. Escrita a meu amigo o Dr. Barbosa a Elvas (1754)," in Luís de Pina, "Plano para a educação de uma menina portuguesa no século XVIII (no II centenário da publicação do Método de Ribeiro Sanches)," *Revista da Faculdade de Letras do Porto* 1 (1966): 9–50.
24. One of these institutions, the Recolhimento de Nossa Senhora da Esperança in Oporto, opened in 1734. Its statutes of 24 May 1725 document the existence of one female teacher who taught everything from religious doctrine to crafts (in J. A. Pinto Ferreira, *Recolhimento de Órfãos de Nossa Senhora da Esperança: Fundado na cidade do Porto no século XVIII* [Porto: Câmara Municipal, n.d.]).
25. D. Frei Bartolomeu dos Mártires, *Catecismo ou doutrina cristã, e practicas spirituaes* (Lisbon: António Alvarez, 1594), 67; Fernando Castelo-Branco, "Cartilhas quinhentistas para ensinar a ler," *Boletim Bibliográfico e Informativo* 14 (1971): 109–52; Rogério Fernandes, "Ensino elementar e suas técnicas no Portugal de quinhentos," in *A abertura do mundo. Estudos de história dos descobrimentos europeus. Em homenagem a Luís de Albuquerque*, org., Francisco Contente Domingues and Luís Filipe Barreto, vol. I (Lisbon: Editorial Presença, 1986), 53–67.
26. Francisco da Silva Cristóvão, "Catequese e catecismos," in *Dicionário de história religiosa de Portugal*, ed. Carlos Moreira Azevedo (Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores, 2000), 304–5.
27. See, for instance, *Cartilha em tamul e português impressa em 1554 por ordem do Rei* (Lisbon: ed. facsimile of Museu Nacional de Arqueologia e Etnologia, 1970); António de Araújo, S.J., *Catecismo brasilico da doutrina Christã, com o ceremonial dos sacramentos, e mais actos paroquiais. Composto por Padres Doutos da Companhia de Jesus, aperfeiçoado, e dado à luz pelo padre . . . da mesma companhia. Emendado nesta segunda impressão pelo padre Bertolomeu de Leam, da mesma companhia* (1st ed., 1618; reprint, Lisbon: Oficina de Miguel Deslandes, 1686); Luís Vicencio Mamiani, *Catecismo da doutrina Christã na lingua brasilica composto pelo . . . da Companhia de Jesus, Missionario da Provincia do Brasil* (Lisbon: Oficina de Miguel Deslandes, 1698).
28. Áurea Adão, *Estado absoluto e ensino das primeiras letras. As escolas régias (1772–1794)* (Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1997), 227.
29. Adão, *Estado absoluto e ensino*, 20.

30. *Ibid.*, 50–51. See also Rogério Fernandes, *Os caminhos do ABC. Sociedade portuguesa e ensino das primeiras letras* (Porto: Porto Editora, 1994), 68–76.
31. Monteiro, *O crepúsculo dos grandes*, 141–53 and 521–22. Ecclesiastic careers were an option for the second-born son, and daughters entered convents if unmarried. Only in the second half of the eighteenth century was there a decrease in the number of sons and daughters of the nobility who took holy vows. On entailment and the Portuguese aristocratic family, see Monteiro, "Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Portuguese."
32. *Estatutos do Collegio Real dos Nobres da Corte, e Cidade de Lisboa* (Lisbon: Oficina de Miguel Rodrigues, 1761), 11–12.
33. Rómulo de Carvalho, *História da fundação do Colégio Real dos Nobres de Lisboa, 1761–1792* (Coimbra: Atlântida, 1959).
34. On the childhood and education of the prince and his mates, see Ana Isabel Buescu, *D. João III* (Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores, 2005), 23–61, especially 48.
35. Anónimo, *Lazarillo de Tormes* (Madrid: Castalia, 1984).
36. George D. Sussman, *Selling Mothers' Milk: The Wet-Nursing Business in France, 1715–1914* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982).
37. Maria Teresa Ferreira da Costa, *O abandono e a roda—A Real Casa dos Expostos de Lisboa—1780–84* (postgraduation course monograph, Lisbon, University of Lisbon, 1998), 63; Isabel dos Guimarães Sá, *The Circulation of Children in Eighteenth-Century Southern Europe: The Case of the Founding Hospital of Porto* (PhD diss., European University Institute, 1992), 302–13.
38. Among others, see the international best seller of self-help medicine by Madame Fouquet, originally published in Lyon in 1674, with six Portuguese editions until 1749 (*Recopilaçam de remedios escolhidos de Madame Fouquet, faceis, domesticos, experimentados, e aprovados para toda a sorte de males internos, e externos, inveterados, e difíceis de curar, para alivio dos pobres, sexta impressam augmentada* [Lisbon: Oficina de Domingos Gonsalves, 1749]); Francisco Morato Roma, *Luz da medicina, pratica racional, e methodica, guia de enfermeyros. Directorio de principiantes, e sumario de remedios para poder acudir, e remediar os achaques do corpo humano, começando no mais alto da cabeça, e descendo atbe o mais baixo das plantas dos pés; obra muito util, e necessaria, não só para os professores da arte de medicina, e cirurgia, mas também para todo o pay de familias; de que se poderão aproveitar pobres, e ricos na falta de medicos doutos. Composto pelo Doutor Francisco Morato Roma, medico da Camara de Sua Magestade, e do Santo Officio da Inquisição, Cavaleiro Professor da Ordem de Cristo: Acrescentado nesta ultima impressão com o tractado unico das tersans perniciozas e malignas, e compendio de varios remedios de cirurgia* (recopilado do Thesouro de Pobres, e outros autores, por Gonçalo Rodrigues de Cabreyra, Coimbra, na Oficina de Francisco de

- Oliveira, Impressor da Universidade, e do Santo Ofício, Anno de 1753). This work had at least five editions between 1664 and 1753.
39. Duarte Nunes de Leão, *Descrição do reino de Portugal* (Lisbon: Jorge Rodriguez, 1610), 304-10.
  40. Hugh Cunningham, "The Employment and Unemployment of Children in England c. 1680-1851," *Past and Present* 126 (1990): 115-50.
  41. Arquivo Distrital de Évora, *Fundo da Misericórdia*, Hospital do Espírito Santo, books 276 and 277.
  42. Joaquim Ferreira Gomes, *Para a história da educação em Portugal* (Porto: Porto Editora, 1995), 79-80.
  43. *La mission jésuite du Brésil. Lettres et autres documents (1549-1570)*, ed. Jean-Claude Laborie and Anne Lima (Paris: Chandeigne, 1998), 110, 189-90, 223.
  44. Evaldo Cabral de Mello, *O nome e o sangue. Uma parábola familiar no Pernambuco colonial* (Rio de Janeiro: Topbooks, 2000), 23.
  45. Henrique Rodrigues, *Emigração e alfabetização. O alto minho e a miragem do Brasil* (Viana do Castelo: Governo Civil, 1995), 59-60. Francisco Contente Domingues and Inácio Guerreiro, "A vida a bordo na Carreira da Índia (século XVI)," *Revista da Universidade de Coimbra* XXXIV (1988): 201.
  46. See Note 29 above.
  47. Vítor Fernando da Silva Simões Alves, "Os contratos de aprendizagem e a regulamentação do artesanato em Coimbra e sua região de 1560 a 1670," *Munda* 10 (1985): 61-63; António de Oliveira, *A vida económica e social de Coimbra de 1537 a 1640*, vol. 1 (1971): 443-48. Even though the modal age for beginning an apprenticeship was fourteen, the records also reveal that some apprentices were as old as eighteen when they began learning their craft.
  48. *Ordenações filipinas*, bk. IV, tit. 31, §8.
  49. On the concept of *antidora*, see Bartolomé Clavero, *La grâce du don. Anthropologie catholique de l'économie moderne* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1996), 79.