



MEMÓRIAS DA
MISERICÓRDIA
DE BRAGA

CENTRO INTERPRETATIVO

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THE PROVIDERS:
MEN WHO
SHAPED THE
MISERICÓRDIA

BOARD MEMBERS' STAFFS 54
19th century
polychrome wood

Maria Marta Lobo de Araújo



Chosen from the ranks of the most illustrious, the men who occupied the *provedoria* (providership) of the *Santa Casa* were among the most influential people in the city and region, and had to meet the requirements set out in the *compromissos* (commitments). From 1630, the brotherhood's own commitments, drawing upon those established by the *Santa Casa* of Lisbon in 1618, stated that the Provider must be an "aristocrat or nobleman of quality, authority, prudence, virtue and good reputation", and could not be elected before the age of 40. He was the head of the institution, who must be obeyed by all brothers. He needed free time to dedicate to the role and, theoretically, could not be elected in the year in which he joined the institution.

The *Misericórdias* acted as a backdrop and platform for the local elites, and attracted the most important men in the country, all the more so as they limited the number of brothers. Admittance to an institution founded by the Monarchy and

generously funded by the Crown was, in itself, a powerful thing. What's more, caring for the poor, helping them by performing the 14 works of mercy, proved the worthiness of these men, who would surely reap the rewards at the Final Judgement. It was, therefore, in a spirit of selflessness and love for their neighbour that the brothers embraced service in the *Misericórdias*, a fact which would bring them both spiritual and temporal rewards.

Like all similar institutions, the *Misericórdia* of Braga was made up of noble and official brothers, designations which would later disappear. Throughout the Modern Era, it became increasingly elitist, closing its doors to certain social groups and promoting only the most influential local personalities. The Provider was chosen at the meeting of the *Mesa* (Board) each year on the second and third of July. During these elections, the management team was chosen. In Braga, those who took the helm of the *Misericórdia* not only steered it

down new paths, but also became benefactors, bringing it donations, legacies and their own personal prestige. Some of these men provided the impetus for major projects, blazed new trails, made internal transformations, and took great care in their management of the institution. However, at times, some paid it too little attention, failing to deal with urgent situations. The Providers, like the Boards, had a one-year mandate, and could not be re-elected within two years. However, in Braga, as in several other cities, this rule was not always obeyed. Various reasons were cited for extending mandates and governing regimes, meaning that certain Boards remained in power for more than one consecutive term. This was only permitted with the consent of the Crown, which had greater involvement in the institution from the 18th century onwards.

Throughout the Modern Era, the brothers who occupied the role of Provider in the *Santa Casa* of Braga had links to the local clergy: canons, ecclesiastical magistrates, archdeacons, vicars, deans and even an Archbishop fulfilled the most important role within the confraternity. However, from the mid 17th century, lay noblemen became increasingly influential, alternating and working in close collaboration with illustrious figures from the Church. We must not forget that many clergymen were also members of the upper classes.

Some *desembargadores* (appeal court judges) of the city also occupied the position, but it was the aristocracy that continued to gain ground from ecclesiastical dignitaries and other clergymen.

Many Providers from an ecclesiastical background had close links to the Archbishops of the city. Whilst it is true that Rodrigo de Moura Teles was the only Archbishop to act as

Provider, between 1709 and 1712, various bishops took the helm of the Confraternity throughout its history, as did other men belonging to the inner circle, such as vicar generals, curates, ecclesiastical magistrates and secretaries.

From the mid 18th century, the providership was opened up to the wider lay aristocracy and educated members of the middle classes, though the title remained in the hands of a small pool of families. Dominance of the Providership meant dominance of the *Misericórdia*, although at times it was necessary to mediate between factions and maintain consensus.

In order to be appointed, it was necessary to go through an indirect election, in which the role of voters was paramount. Therefore, candidates for Provider usually manipulated the electors. Many interests were involved and elections were not always free from fraud and corruption. Influence peddling, vote buying, and pressure from certain groups became commonplace in many *Misericórdias*, especially during certain periods of its history. This almost always led to royal intervention in order to establish order, and elections were often repeated in the presence of a royal emissary. It was important that these institutions respected the commitments and gave off an image of correctness and integrity.

Despite the hard work which came with the role, governance of the *Misericórdia* was a position of great power, making it a desirable job. It is therefore unsurprising that several Providers occupied this role more than once. The brothers entrusted them with the most important job as they were certain of their administrative capacity and moral soundness.

Unlike many *Misericórdias*, where the providership remained in the hands of the same families for long periods of time, par-



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DAS ELEICOES
DA SANTA MISERI
CORDIA

ticularly during the Modern Era, this was less common in Braga, as the position was often held by members of the clergy. However, in the 19th century, a significant trend emerged. From the eighteen-hundreds until the Republic, the extension of mandates became commonplace – a phenomenon which requires further study to truly understand. For example, Manuel Inácio de Matos Sousa Cardoso, a professed brother of the *Ordem de Cristo* and head treasurer of the Cathedral, occupied the post of Provider for 12 years, seven of which were consecutive, between 1844 and 1851. It should be noted, however, that this was the century which saw the lowest turnover, a fact not unrelated to the political instability of the time and the allegiances formed between the brothers and certain political forces.

With the advent of Liberalism, the profile of the Providers changed. Nobles of the Royal House and members of the clergy were still present, but were joined by men from the emerging middle classes. It was also during the 19th century that the Board was dissolved for the first time by order of the *Governo Civil* – a body representing the central government within the District – and Administrative Committees were appointed.

Men of law in particular climbed the ranks of power within the confraternity, though eccle-



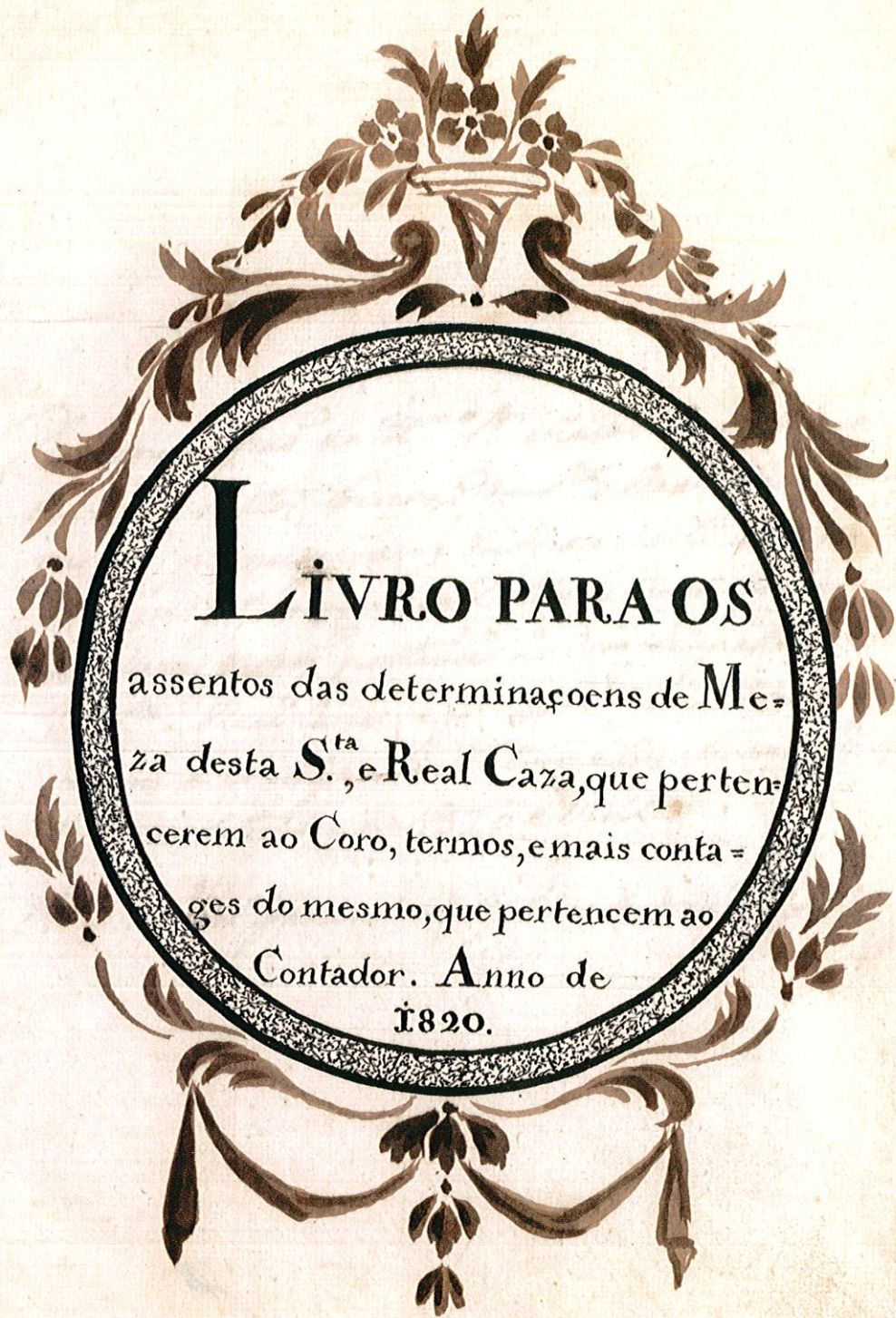
siastical dignitaries remained very powerful. It was only from the Republic that the role of provider took on a markedly secular nature, with a decrease in ecclesiastic influence. The *Misericórdia* maintained a very close relationship with the Cathedral and Episcopal Palace between the 16th and 19th centuries, reflected in the Providership, though its influence decreased somewhat from the eighteen-hundreds. However, in the 20th century a closer relationship was forged with the Council and the *Governo Civil*.

While a special relationship with the Town Council was established, several brothers awarded the title of provider were also Presidents of the local Council and Civil Governors. New statutes approved in 1983 meant that from that year on, in line with the Administrative Code, three year terms were established, putting an end to the annual Board mandates. It was also during the 20th century that the role of Provider came to be occupied by men from a wide range of professions, with liberal professionals and civil servants gaining prestige. Although all of the providers were great men, some enjoyed more prestige, authority and influence. Certain providers stand out for having overseen important works to the *Misericórdia* and hospital, giving alms, implementing reforms, and realising great plans.

56 DETAIL OF A BOARD
MEMBER'S STAFF
19th century
polychrome wood

57 DESPATCH BOX
18th century
polychrome wood





LIVRO PARA OS

assentos das determinações de Meza desta S.^{ta} e Real Caza, que pertencerem ao Coro, termos, e mais contas do mesmo, que pertencem ao Contador. Anno de 1820.

Many brothers were called upon to shape the destiny of the *Misericórdia* of Braga over the course of its 500 year history. However, they had differing level of success. For their uniqueness, and for the decisive mark they made, I dedicate my closing paragraphs to those who I consider to be the archetypal Providers, men who governed with heart, dignity and great wisdom. From the early days of the institution, I choose Dr. Baltasar Álvares, *provisor* to Archbishop Fray Baltasar Limpo, as a man who worked in perfect harmony with the Archbishop to open new horizons for the *Misericórdia*. He was also Provider of the *S. Marcos Hospital*. During his time as Provider, the decision was taken to build the new *Santa Casa* complex, the church and its annexes, giving the confraternity a huge boost. This milestone, which occurred at the same time as the transfer of responsibility for the hospital from the Town Council to the *Misericórdia*, was part of the masterplan for the expansion of the *Santa Casa*, from a small confraternity to an institution of growing size and importance.

Another of the great figures was Rodrigo de Moura Teles. He had recently arrived in Braga when he took the reins of the *Santa Casa*. Highly committed to the poor, he ordered the Archbishop's Palace to provide generous alms, which he delivered in person on certain days of the year. He was Provider of the *Santa Casa* and benefactor of the hospital, an institution which he visited frequently. More than anyone else, D. Rodrigo understood the demands placed on the hospital, supported its growth and made it sustainable.

D. Rodrigo retained the role of Provider from 1709, when he was already 55 years old, until 1712. His work was crucial at a time when the hospital needed a fresh approach, both due to

its own extremely low income and the increased demand for its services. Creating new ward space, providing new sources of income, alleviating the strain created by patients, by employing a doctor and a surgeon to care for the poor and infirm at home, and paying it regular visits, the Archbishop developed a rational and forward-looking vision for the hospital.

The impact of Braga Court of Appeal judge Inácio José Peixoto during his time as Provider of the *Santa Casa* deserves to be mentioned as it represents a real period of change.

He occupied the role between 1806 and 1808, and over the course of these two mandates he oversaw a profound administrative transformation. Although he was already approaching the end of his life, the judge made a palpable difference to the day-to-day running of the institution and the way in which the confraternity dealt with poverty. Sensing that times were changing, Inácio José Peixoto modernised procedures, ended old practices and rationalised management systems, putting an end to the antiquated practices of the Old Regime and replacing them with the more streamlined procedures befitting of the era.

We must also give recognition to the excellent service provided by Dr. João Eulálio Peixoto de Almeida, who was Provider between 1976 and 1978, a difficult time for Portugal and for all institutions. During this time that the hospital fully felt the impact of state intervention, struggled against the lack of funds, and explored alternative paths, which would enable the *Santa Casa* to continue supporting the poor in the way that had come to be expected. This three-year period was also marked by internal reforms carried out by the provider. Responding to the demands of the time, Dr. João Eulálio

Peixoto de Almeida implemented the necessary changes, creating the conditions needed for the *Misericórdia* to continue its social work.

Engineer Alberto Lago Cruz was Provider of the *Santa Casa* between 1992 and 2003, a period of greater economic and political stability in Portugal, the effect of which was felt by the *Santa Casa*. He was responsible for leading a governing body which brought in a programme of measures to make the institution sustainable, essential in order to secure the respect and continued collaboration of its partners.

Having re-established this trust, the *Santa Casa* was ready to respond calmly and efficiently to future challenges. We must, therefore, express our great appreciation for the work done by Alberto Lago Cruz.

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At the beginning of the new millennium, another notable figure emerged as Vice-Provider of the *Misericórdia*: Dr. Bernardo Reis. In 2003, he was promoted to Provider, a position which he holds to this day. A resolutely modern figure, the current Provider brought to the *Misericórdia* an uncommon dynamism and a degree of influence unparalleled in recent times.

He elevated it to the level where it can stand shoulder to shoulder with its more powerful counterparts throughout Portugal. The *Misericórdia* of Braga came to occupy a prominent position within the body which represents such confraternities – the *União das Misericórdias*. Under the direction of Dr. Bernardo Reis and his Board, the *Santa Casa* regained much of its previous power and prestige, as one of the city's most dynamic welfare and cultural institutions. Dr. Bernardo Reis rapidly reformed all departments of the *Santa Casa*: social welfare, mobile and immobile heritage, and culture in its

various guises. He created new services, capable of responding effectively to the needs of the most disadvantaged. The various books published about the history of the *Santa Casa*, the launch of a regular magazine and other publications about the work of the confraternity, namely the biannual *Boletim Semestral da Misericórdia*, demonstrate a new vision for the institution, as well as the importance it places on culture. He was also the mastermind behind the great modernising works at the dawn of the new millennium, preparing the institution in administrative and technical terms for the demands it faced. Understanding the times, perceiving needs, opening new horizons, leading with vision and honour, honesty and approachability; these are the defining characteristics of the Providership of Dr. Bernardo Reis.

Dr. Bernardo Reis brings to the *Misericórdia* great knowledge and experience, gained during a life spent travelling, and connections within the worlds of business and culture. He offers his experience, knowledge, prestige and ability to this institution so it can continue in its work to support noble causes. The struggle to help the most helpless and create conditions which enable them to face the harshness of life is never-ending. However, he carries on undeterred, both in the *União das Misericórdias* and as Provider of the *Santa Casa*. He makes his plans a reality, for example with the opening of the *Centro Interpretativo das Memórias da Misericórdia de Braga* (Memories of the *Misericórdia* of Braga Interpretation Centre). With the completion of this project, the *Santa Casa* once again puts itself in the spotlight, remembering its history and making part of its heritage available to the citizens of Braga, and the world.

We are profoundly grateful to Dr. Bernardo Reis for the skill, altruism and grace with which he directs this noble institution – the *Santa Casa da Misericórdia* of Braga. For these reasons and many others, we must recognise him as a truly excellent Provider.

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Title

Misericórdia de Braga.
Historical Notes

Publisher

Santa Casa da Misericórdia of Braga

Conception and Editorial Design

Providência design

Photographic Credits

Arquivo Arcelino/Fototeca do Museu Nogueira
da Silva/ ASPA, pp. 58–59
Arquivo Distrital de Braga, pp. 12–15; p. 19; pp. 50–51; p. 79; p.82
José Mesquita, p. 21
Luis Ferreira Alves

Translation

Língua Franca, Lda.

Print Run

250 copies

Printing

Tecniforma – Oficinas Gráficas, S.A.

Legal Deposit

402038/15

ISBN

978-972-96038-6-0

Publication Date

2015

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