

MEMÓRIAS DA  
MISERICÓRDIA  
DE BRAGA

CENTRO INTERPRETATIVO

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THE BENEFACTORS  
OF THE *SANTA CASA*:  
MEN AND WOMEN  
WORTHY OF PRAISE

Maria Marta Lobo de Araújo

59 ISABEL MARIA CORREIA  
LOPES DOS SANTOS  
19<sup>th</sup> century  
oil on canvas

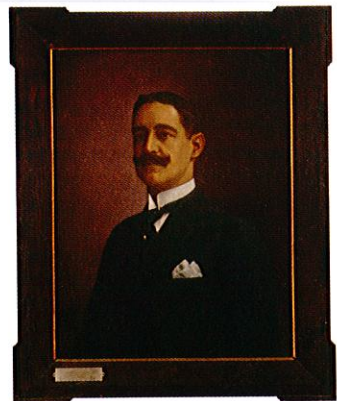
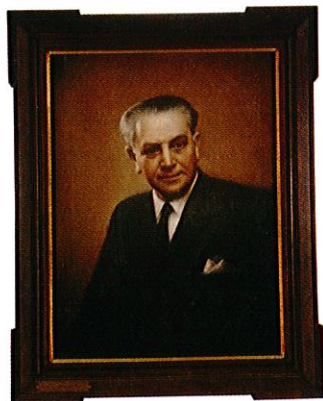
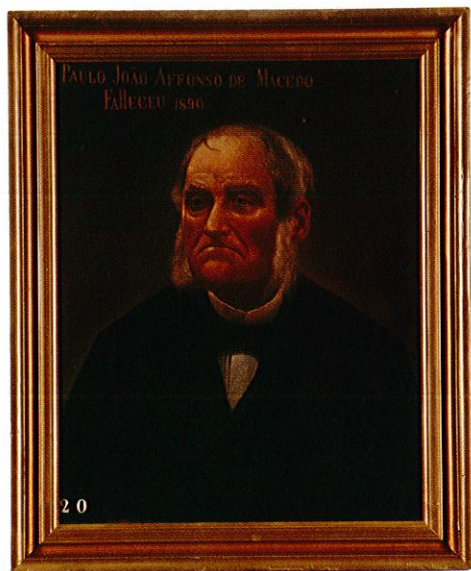
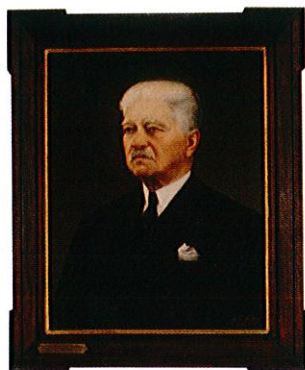
When the *Misericórdia* was founded, it had limited funds, but attempts to improve this financial situation soon began, with appeals to various sources. In the first decades of the *Misericórdia's* existence, collections, donations, penalties, earnings from indulgences, burials, donations from Archbishops and those close to them, goods left in wills and income from property, provided financial support for the institution. The *Santa Casa* was a small institution, but was already showing signs of its desire to expand and assert itself locally. As time went by, the Confraternity cemented its position within the city. It was thanks to legacies received that the institution was able to grow throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. This growth was reflected not only in the number of paupers receiving alms, the grandiose ceremonies performed in its two churches, the festivals they promoted but also in greater healthcare responsibilities.

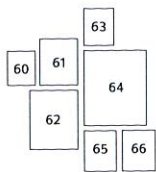
The process of expansion was closely linked to the esta-



blishment of legacies, and to benefactors. As a result of such efforts, the *Santa Casa* came into possession of rural and urban property, money and other goods. However, these gifts almost never came with no strings attached. The act of donating to charity often involved ulterior motives and conditions. Acts of charity not only brought the earthly rewards of recognition and social prestige, but also the promise of a smoother path to salvation. With the Counter-Reformation and the greater priority given to charity work, the number of benefactors grew, causing an increase in the amount of legacies and alms for the poor.

This phenomenon boosted donations not only from the living, but also at the time of death. Benefactors prepared to die a good death and ensure that their names lived on, by leaving money to charitable institutions, in the hope of gaining prestige, power within the country and an easier path to salvation. Executors also often had a duty to perform charitable works,





60 GEORGINA ERNESTINA  
SOUTTO MAYOR  
PIZARRO CAMPOS  
1959  
oil on canvas

61 ANTÓNIO BENTO  
MARTINS JÚNIOR  
1964  
oil on canvas

62 PAULO JOÃO AFONSO  
DE MACEDO  
19<sup>th</sup> century  
oil on canvas

63 COMMANDER PAULO  
FELISBERTO DA  
FONSECA  
1934  
oil on canvas

64 D. GILDA DE SOUSA  
GUIMARÃES  
FERNANDES  
1962  
oil on canvas

65 DR. ALBERTO CRUZ  
1952  
oil on canvas

66 JOÃO CAETANO DE  
FONSECA LIMA  
1938  
oil on canvas

and it was acknowledged that other agents as well as welfare institutions were also active in the "economy of salvation".

The most powerful individuals left larger legacies, establishing themselves as benefactors who would go down in history. However, as the sacred texts state, all were called to help, even those who had little to give.

The *Santa Casa* of Braga received several legacies throughout the Modern Era. These ranged from anonymous individuals who received only a brief mention in the records, stating their name and the amount received, to names which have lived on, gaining a reputation as great benefactors.

We highlight the role played by João de Meira Carrilho, and the couple, Pedro de Aguiar and Maria Vieira who, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, left large legacies to the institution, but many more followed their lead.

Until the early seventeen-hundreds, the main beneficiary was the soul, but during this century, increasing sums were

left for the purpose of healing the body, with *S. Marcos Hospital* attracting many legacies. With demand increasing, patients travelling greater and greater distances and costs rising, the institution established itself as a cause to donate to, both in recognition of the services provided, and also the possibility of needing them in the future.

As well as many Braga locals, the hospital and *Misericórdia* began to attract donors from all over the diocese, and as far away as Brazil. Money from the South American colony paid for building work, purchase of vestments for the church and food for the sick. The strong influence of the Braga-based confraternity in Brazil was, in part, natural, as it was remembered by a great number of individuals from the city and region, who had departed for the colony. However, it was also the result of direct action by the *Misericórdia*. Well-known brothers from the confraternity appealed to their compatriots in Rio de Janeiro and sent an image of Saint Mark as a symbol of the hospital's work in healing the sick, a cause in great need of support. Concerted efforts were clearly made to appeal to wealthy individuals, in order to raise money and attract new legacies.

Having received so many donations, the *Santa Casa* decided to thank some of its greatest benefactors by having their portraits painted in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Initially, the title of benefactor did not require the donation of a set sum of money. Each Board used its own judgement to decide whether it considered a gift or services to be worthy of a reward. Therefore, as was the case for many of their counterparts, confraternities and Third Orders, they began to commission portraits of benefactors. However, having a

portrait painted and hung in the gallery was not something which all benefactors could afford. Only those who had provided a service considered significant, or made substantial donations, saw their likeness join this visual record of the institution. At the same time, the concept of a "benefactor-brother", was introduced. Often those awarded this honour also had their portrait painted, but not always. It was only in the 1890s that the Board decided that this title should be reserved for those who had provided an important service or a sum of money of at least 200,000 réis, thus formalising the criteria for this honour, financially and in terms of merit. When admitted, new benefactors of the *Misericórdia* of Braga received a diploma approved by the *Definitório* (Decision-making Council), whether they lived in Portugal or Brazil. After this body disappeared, the Board assumed responsibility for issuing these certificates.

It was also the managing body which made decisions on commissioning portraits of benefactors, which, at this time, made them patrons of the arts. They usually used painters from the city or surrounding region. These portraits were exhibited in extremely grand surroundings, paying homage and conferring visibility to the benefactors. Such ostentation also set an example. By showing compassion for the poor and donating, benefactors were able to live on in the public conscience and gain prestige.

The first record we have of the painting of portraits dates from 1744. At this time, the Board decided to commission an artist to paint the benefactors of the hospital and hang their portraits in the "hall and new corridor in order to commemorate their work for said Hospital and serve as a stimulus so that others

wish to imitate them". This innovation was made following works carried out to the hospital during the 1720s and 30s. From the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the number of benefactor-brothers increased significantly. The title became almost commonplace, such was the number of people who, alone or with their wives, gained this status and with it a place in the "gallery of brothers". In exchange for the many donations and services received, the *Misericórdia* also decided, in 1969, to offer free treatment in *S. Marcos Hospital* to those who held the status of Benefactor-brother, as a means of recognising their contribution to this healthcare facility.

Although the majority of those considered to be benefactors came from outside the institution, several brothers were also awarded this distinction for the donations and services they provided to the *Santa Casa*.

As the number of benefactor-brothers increased in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the painting of portraits also gained pace. Financial donations and inclusion in wills continued to be rewarded with the celebration of masses or other religious services associated with salvation of the soul. However, this was far less common than in previous centuries.

Although most portraits in the *Santa Casa* which survive to this day depict men, women were also painted. Generally, they were painted when they were recognised as benefactors alongside their husbands, as very few were granted this honour independently.

Not all donations received by the *Santa Casa* of Braga came from wills. Several people became benefactors while still alive and earned the right to have their portrait painted. For the rest, portraits were produced posthumously, with artists

67 A BARROSA  
18<sup>th</sup> century  
oil on canvas

working from memory of the individual or their imagination in order to create the painting. They also sometimes referred to photographs, or even etchings produced for this purpose. From 1878, due to its financial situation, the *Santa Casa* decided to raise funds by offering certificates of brotherhood to, "people with considerable assets and influence in the Empire of Brazil". The Board hoped this would bring great sums of money to the hospital, its main priority at the time. During this period, the hospital was a cause for concern, as it was too small to meet demand and changes were needed to stay abreast of scientific advances. It therefore needed more money to keep up with the times and provide better care.

As we mentioned, in order to attract rich Portuguese citizens living in Brazil, the *Santa Casa* of Braga sent local emissaries to act on their behalf. These individuals were also awarded the distinction of benefactor-brother. As the movement of Portuguese citizens increased substantially over the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Brazilian benefactors emerged as a strong force. Almost all came from the city or region, and some had links with the *Misericórdia*, either as brothers, patients or family members of patients.

Substantial sums of money arrived from the regions of Minas Gerais, Mato Grosso, Goiás and Rio de Janeiro in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and from all over Brazil in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, almost all of which was earmarked for the hospital. This illustrates the areas where Portuguese emigrants had settled, and demonstrates that some of them were living very well.

On the other hand throughout almost all of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the *Misericórdia*'s financial dependence on State subsidies made it closer to its agents, to whom it offered thanks, con-





68 REVEREND AUGUSTO  
DIAS DA SILVA  
(ABBOT OF LOUREIRA)  
1952  
oil on canvas

gratulations and condolences. The institution used all means available to demonstrate its gratitude to central government and nurture this relationship. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the *Misericórdia* rewarded presidents of the Republic, ministers, secretaries of State and director generals with the title of benefactor-brother, in recognition of support received.

In 1957, this policy of inviting the most influential figures from the worlds of Portuguese politics and culture to the *Misericórdia* to participate in their projects saw an invitation extended to Dr. José Azeredo Perdigão, president of the Board of Directors of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. The investment made by the Foundation was recognised at the time with the building of the "Nevarte Gulbenkian" residence for students at the School of Nursing, operated by the *Misericórdia*.

But while the hospital received many gifts from outside of Braga, local society also worked to support the institution, offering generous donations, such as the considerable legacy of father Augusto Dias da Silva, abbot of Loureira, and the patronage of António Augusto Nogueira da Silva and Commander António Maria Santos da Cunha, as well as various Archbishops and Portuguese and international institutions, who were awarded the title of benefactor-brother. This distinction was not reserved for individuals, having also been bestowed upon certain institutions.

Following the April 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution, the number of benefactors dropped considerably and the custom of painting their portraits practically ceased, continuing only in circumstances considered exceptional.

The existence of such a rich and well-preserved archive of iconographic material, composed of a great number of por-

traits, and sources held in the archive, gives us the means to study the benefactors of the *Santa Casa*. Such a research project, which is long overdue, would enable us not only to learn more about those who have supported the institution over the centuries, but also to understand the strategies used by the institution to attract individuals with the means to donate. Central to this tangled web of interlinking questions is death, and the search for salvation. However, charity and beneficence also brought earthly gains to those who acted, in a variety of ways, to support the poor.

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