

Tradition and innovation in assistance in Portugal; Funchal's Misericórdia in 16th century

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ABSTRACT: The traditional charity in Western Europe, which was a common practice in the Classical Period, but without an official support structure and hardly organized in a formal way, will have in the Modern Period, an extraordinary development and spiritual power (Christianity) combined with political power (modern states). Now, the charity innovates, in assisting the most vulnerable, in an organized, structured, and legally established form. In Portugal, at the end of the 15th century, Lisbon's Mercy House was created, and, in the new spaces of Portuguese's maritime expansion, we can see others Mercy's House such as Funchal's Misericórdia (Madeira Island). Here, we have an unknown territory, where everything must be started from scratch and what is traditional - the practice of charity - raises here challenges of adapting to a new reality - we highlight the words of Siza Vieira that can serve as a motto for this congress: "Tradition is a challenge to innovation [...], and it is important when it contains moments of change" - and we are now trying to innovate in the way assistance is structured and how the population is supported, with a socio-economic, and even professional composition, distinct from that which existed in Lisbon.

Keywords: Charity, Innovation, Funchal, Misericórdia, Christianity

1 TRADITION: CHARITY IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE AND ASSISTANCE IN MEDIEVAL PORTUGAL

Charity and assistance to the underprivileged was something that we could find from ancient times in Europe, but it was not organized formally. From the 12th and 13th centuries, Assistance was presented with a new force that was related to the influence of Christian doctrine and the advent of the modern state. Christianity has, in its very essence, a very strong connection to the practice of charity; see what Saint Paul wrote:

4 Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, 5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; 6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; 7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

Read the Acts of Apostles, the Epistles and, above all, the Gospel of St. Matthew, which make concrete recommendations and Christianity, showing the treasures of goodness that are hidden in the human soul, sought to «humanize,» paradoxically, humanity (Correia, 1944, p. 153).

The Christian West discovers the utility of poverty, now seen as a spiritual value that allows the

practice of charity and facilitates eternal salvation and makes it possible to flaunt the wealth of those who reach out. The concept of poverty involves a multiplicity of meanings and considers the ambiguity and ambivalence with which poverty and indigence are faced.

Michel Mollat (1973, p. 11-29) understands poverty as the deprivation of a good, which can be a permanent or temporary situation, voluntary or not, placing the person in a situation of weakness, dependence, and humiliation, deprived of the minimum means of subsistence, which change according to times and societies, with emphasis on health, money, and freedom.

The tradition of feeding the hungry is as old as humanity, and in the Iberian Peninsula we find traces of this virtuous practice in the distribution of bread by the Romans on festive days, and from there came the supplies offered to the poor for the remission of sins and the salvation of souls. Brotherhoods, Confraternities, and Corporations, religious and secular, are the institutions that come closest to the intervention and social assistance that will be the mission of the various Mercy's Houses (Misericórdias) that will emerge in the national territory. They closely follow the daily lives of those they intend to serve and are the result of associations of pious people who establish kinship

ties (artificial) and constitute what Tavares (1989, p. 101) calls the horizontal solidarities of prayer and charity between the living and the dead.

They act almost always in a new space - the city - because the cities, which are illusory and initially attractive, quickly reveal fewer positive aspects such as increased mendicity, almost non-existent hygiene, lack of work, social exclusion, which is urgent to fight and European crowns were aware that intervention was needed. It was up to them to create, organize, and guide assistance to those in need, which could so guarantee its sovereign power over institutions that have become true centers of power.

Portugal, born as a unified kingdom at the end of the XII century, will practice Christian charity, distinguishing its action according to the public - target and the specific needs of each community, and thus we find multiple forms of assistance. At the end of the 15th century, the kingdom witnessed the emergence of emblematic assistance structures: The Hospital Termal, in Caldas da Rainha (Caldas da Rainha's Thermal Hospital), the Hospital de Todos-os-Santos (All Saints Hospital), in Lisbon, and Misericórdia de Lisboa (Lisbon's Mercy House)¹, all of them of royal initiative and clearly explain the will of the Crown to respond in an organized way to the assistance needs of the time, leveraging the existing resources and calling for the involvement of the faithful in this process. (Abreu, 2001, p. 591)

2 INNOVATION: THE WORKS OF MISERICORDIA - THE CASE OF FUNCHAL²

Endowed with an entrepreneurial spirit, the first settlers of Madeira had the Christian ideal in mind, looking for, in parallel with the discovery of the new territory, solutions to minimize needs.

In this insular world, the first interventions were private, later appearing, by royal interventions the Misericórdias of Funchal, Calheta, Machico, and Porto Santo, all respecting the rules of the Motherhouse in Lisbon.

The embryo of the future city of Funchal appeared very early, in the early days of colonization, on the

east side of the bay, in Nossa Senhora do Calhau (today Largo do Corpo Santo), which became a village in 1452.

The second half of the 15th century already showed a clear distinction between two areas: one centralized in Nossa Senhora do Calhau, the first nucleus of the settlement, with the humblest; and the other, in the west, focused on Santa Catarina, the base of the future sugar city, with the businessmen, highlighting Rua dos Mercadores.

The sugar city was officially born in the summer of 1508, and the prosperity from the sugar trade marked the differences, with more native population, more slaves, and more foreigners.

The gap between the privileged and the poor emerged quickly, the result of an economy based on the exploitation of sugar cane, and organized assistance was needed to assist the most disadvantaged.

Hunger and malnutrition are, traditionally, two evils to combat and that are aggravated in specific situations, such as during the cereal crises (always a recurring problem), with the return of the plague to the island in the 20s and with the attack of French privateers in 1566.

1.

Funchal's first hospital was Saint Paul's hospital, which took its first steps in 1454³, by the discoverer himself, João Gonçalves Zarco, and later managed by the Confraria de Nossa Senhora do Calhau (Nossa Senhora do Calhau's Confraternity), which will also superintend a second hospital in the same location. This brotherhood appeared from the initiative of some people from Funchal and is fundamental to understand the structure and functioning of the future Mercy since it maintained the same objectives and the same functions.

On August 21, 1477, Pedro Afonso, a shoemaker, and his wife, Constança Vaz, donated a floor on Rua do Boa Viagem to build a hospital to shelter the poor and assist the miserable, whose administration would oversee the Confraria de Nossa Senhora do Calhau, whose organization and functioning are now regulated.

The document that settled the rules and operation had foreseen the construction of a house with capacity for six beds to assist the poor (two in each bed) and sick (one per bed)⁴. In the early days, that Institution relied on the statutory body of the Confraria de Nossa Senhora do Calhau, which was markedly insular, and which helped to establish the foundations of Mercy's House⁵.

1. We chose not to translate the names of Portuguese institutions/positions/ streets and we give, in parentheses, in the first reference, the designation in English, when it's possible.

2. This article has as its main source manuscript documentation from Arquivo da Misericórdia do Funchal (Funchal's Mercy House Archive), especially the only two Livros de Receita e de Despesa (Books of Income and Expense) that we know for the 16th century (1571-72 and 1598-99). In this paper, we use ARM to designate Arquivo Regional da Madeira (Madeira's Regional Archive), and AMF, Arquivo da Misericórdia do Funchal (Funchal's Mercy Archive). All translations from non-English sources are the author's free translations.

3. ARM, AMF, book 420, p.19. The Chapel of St. Paul was also the invocation of St. Peters and, despite having established the seat of the parish of St. Peters, it was the first designation that has endured through the ages.

4. ARM, AMF, book 710, I, pp. 12vº-14vº.

5. The first Commitment of the Funchal's Misericórdia, that we are aware of, arises only in the 17th century (1631).

D. Manuel's interest in providing the island with organized and structured assistance was evident in the various pecuniary favors he offered to the Confraternity, which gradually widened its field of action and coordinated the Saint's Paul Hospital and Church and also the so-called Hospital Velho (the Old Hospital), in Rua do Boa Viagem.

2.

Costa (1964-66, p.16) states that, in the council session of 9 November 1508, the royal request for the foundation of a Mercy House similar to that of Lisbon was presented, a request that had no practical results and, in 1511, the king instructed João Fernandes D' Amil, Juiz dos Resíduos e Provedor (Judge of Residues and Provider) of Madeira's Hospitals and Chapels, to form the institution and recommended that judges, councilors, prosecutors, officers and *homens bons* (good men) provided all the assistance.

It was, in fact, at this moment that Funchal's Misericórdia appeared and started its functions, in a regular basis, probably circa 1515, receiving the church of Nossa Senhora do Calhau and the Confraternity itself - in the '70s, at Mateus Fernandes's plant, we found the first correct location of the Misericórdia and the Hospital, occupying the entire north side of the church of Nossa Senhora do Calhau - and it was only moved to the Terreiro da Sé around 1685.

The institution was described by Gaspar Frutuoso (1926, p. 109), at the end of the 16th century, as having rich workshops, alms, and charitable works, curing many sick and remedying many poor people: he stated that it was a wealthy, and a pious stop and a refuge for all.

3.

The organic structure and the way it worked follow the example of Lisbon's Misericórdia⁶ with the necessary adaptations: the superintendence in the administration of the Mercy House was entrusted to the *Mesa* (Bureau), chaired by the *Provedor* (Ombudsman or Provider), who was assisted by twelve officers, the *escrivão* (register), nine advisers and two *mordomos* (*majordomos*).

The positions were annual (except for *mordomos de fora* - majordomos from outside - and *mordomos da Capela* - majordomos from the chapel), and the assembly met on Sunday afternoons and, if necessary, Wednesdays as well.

The most important day of Misericórdia's Funchal was Visitation Day, on the 2nd of July, with the election of the new Bureau, the entity responsible for the proper performance of the House.

The initial number of Brothers - one hundred - (the same as in the Lisbon's House), was quickly overcome. The reformation of 1618 and the Commitment of Funchal's House, in 1631, imposed two hundred brothers as the maximum, divided into two numerically equal groups: one hundred nobles (it does not mean blood nobility, but those who did not live on manual labor) and one hundred officers (those who lived on manual labor)⁷.

We found some women in the brotherhood due mainly to the fact that they were widows of Brothers, possibly not being considered as confreres in the true sense of the word.

It was a reality that the city had a much higher number of women in need. For example, in 1571-1572, in the list of almost a hundred assisted, we detected only nine men, a situation that was understandable since women lose their independence more easily and quicker, through widowhood, the death of the father or children, and there were little chances for them: admission into a convent, second marriage or alms from the Holy House.

All members of the Confraternity were entitled to medical assistance, financial assistance, and a solemn funeral ceremony, vowing to serve the House, owing obedience to the Bureau and carrying out the tasks assigned by it.

4.

The socio-professional category of the confreres has not suffered significant variations during the 16th century, and we found, on the one hand, those of "greater condition," elements of the notable families of the city, local administration, and business. "The other condition," the mechanical officers, were on the other side, standing out the shoemakers, *caixeiros* (the woodworkers) and *tanoeiros* (the cooperers).

We emphasize that, traditionally, in the Misericórdias of the mainland, we also found the importance of the shoemaker highlighted. Here, on Madeira, the role of the *caixeiro* had particular relevance, and that was a novelty; there was even a Rua dos Caixeiros, which ran parallel to the sea, close the church of Nossa Senhora do Calhau.

The performance of this profession was linked to the trade of sugar and derivatives, which required several containers for storage and transport: boxes and barrels, above all, come out of the hands of *caixeiros* to store sugar, honey, candied fruits, preserves, and marmalade.

7. Costa (1964-66, pp.94-239) presents an extensive analysis of the various reforms that Funchal's Misericórdia Commitment had, since 1516 (1564, 1577, 1582, 1618, 1631), which did not imply major changes in the organic structure, but rather increased the rigor in the admission of the Brothers, with very specific conditions that went far beyond the general determinations of the first documents.

6. Lisbon's Misericórdia Commitment is published in several works. See a fac-simile edition in Serrão (1992).

On an island, for obvious reasons, the group holding power was much more restricted. It alternates between them holding positions, and, especially after 1515, it was possible to find individuals who occupied the position of Misericórdia's Provider several times: João Correia and Francisco Vieira, for example. In the 1530-40s, names were repeated more frequently, and we found elements of the Esmeraldo, Acciaioli, Mondragão, Correias, and Câmara families, among others.

We recall that Funchal in the 16th century - and later in the 17th century - was a city with many rural brands, visible by the socio-professional groups that appeared on the institution's lists. In the city of wine and sugar, we found, without great surprise, that the renowned family names, that emerged in politics and administration, also occupied prominent places in the organization of the House and were still important benefactors. This interaction of politics, economy, and religion contributed to a social structure of great flexibility.

In the last decades of the 16th century (1589 and 1599), the Misericórdia's Provider was D. Luís de Figueiredo de Lemos, Bishop of Funchal (in 1585 and 1608), who stood out for his concern for the organization of the House, seeking for greater rigor in the registration of donations, for example.

Since the Provider was the leading figure of the House, the right functioning of the institution and the maintenance of the privileges and prerogatives granted by the Crown depended on him, benefits that rarely escaped the greed and envy of civil and ecclesiastical authorities.

As Misericórdia has become a true center of power, conflicts between representatives of the Catholic Church and local civil authorities, and of these with representatives of the royal power, which has always tried to guarantee its sovereign power over these institutions, were natural.

5.

The hospital work was one of the most critical activities of Misericórdias, and that deserved special attention, recommending the Bureau that one should never neglected the provision of hospital patients. According to the Commitment: of everything necessary with plenty, although in other expenses there was moderation, in this, it should always be the opposite (*Compromisso*, 1942, p. 24).

Thus, we found Misericórdia's Funchal superintending the old hospital (Rua do Boa Viagem) and the new one, next to Nossa Senhora do Calhau, institutions that provided medical assistance and care to the island's inhabitants and especially to the most disadvantaged and, for example, Vieira (1996) calls attention to the care of slaves, one of the groups with less rights but essential for the island economy.

To ensure the fulfillment of the various works of mercy and assistance, the House also had, in addition to the Bureau, a body of employees and collaborators

who, whether they were Brothers, whether they received a salary, help to achieve the objectives of the Brotherhood.

For example, some employees performed more specific tasks in the field of physical health: nurses, cleaners, barbers, physicists, and surgeons, among others, whose work was essential not only for the institution but for the entire island. An example of its importance: the physicist Daniel da Costa assisted the patients of the House from the 70s until almost the end of the 16th century when he revealed his desire to leave for Lisbon and the Funchal's City Council itself had made several efforts to persuade him to stay on the island, due to the great need that its residents had for him and his knowledge⁸.

We know that he was still in office until 1598 (because he appeared on the payment lists) and in July of that year a contract was signed with a new physicist, Jorge de Castro, who seems not to have shown efficiency and, in the same year, he was replaced by Miguel Fernandes, born in Castelo Branco⁹.

6.

In the early days, the House's revenues depended almost exclusively on alms from private individuals and the Crown.

The legacies and inheritances that it started to receive and manage were the source of earnings of the House, which had a considerable material patrimony, allowing leases, savings, and sales of properties.

In the middle of the 16th century, the rents for the properties of Misericórdia's Hospital were around 70,000 réis a year, and we do not know the value of the other sources of revenue; in 1571-1572, they approached 220,000 and, in the last years of the century, they reached almost 800,000, mainly due to the existence of more leased and rented properties.

In the '70s, *foros* (rents) corresponded to about 26% of total revenues, and, in 1598-1599, they exceeded half of them (64%)¹⁰.

This rise resulted from population growth which, together with an increase in population density, in the city of Funchal and its term, contributed to an increase in the number of poor people and, according to the 1598's census, we found almost a thousand poor people assisted by the Misericórdia in about 2,000 houses and 8,000 "souls of confession." In contrast, previously, according to Carita (1991:235), in 1571-1572, they were around 800.

8. The initial contract was signed in July 1571. See ARM, AMF, book 161, p. 145.

9. Information about Jorge de Castro, see ARM, AMF, book 492, p. 125-125v^o; the contract with Miguel Fernandes appears in p. 151.

10. According to data from Livros de Receita e Despesa (1571-72; 1598-99), ARM, AMF.

Funchal's Misericórdia survived by solidarity and by the Christian spirit of traditional mutual aid, collecting most of its revenue from the various properties left to the poor, the real owners and heirs of these assets, and with whom the House spent most of its earnings.

The various catastrophes, natural and human that hit the city in this period influenced the behavior of its inhabitants, and the fear of the Last Judgment and God's punishment were reflected in many of the donations that were made to the poor.

While it is true that, in theory, charity should be uninterested, in practice -and traditionally - one always expects reciprocity from the offer that is made, and this is a complex behavior, difficult to know and apprehend in all its extent.

3 CLOSING REMARKS

The time of the Portuguese Discoveries was one of the most significant challenges to Tradition, leading to Change and Innovation, revealing to the world — quoting the Portuguese mathematician Pedro Nunes - new islands, new lands, new seas, new peoples, and what is more, new sky and new stars.

The overseas expansion showed Portuguese courage and entrepreneurship, but also led to finding new answers to old problems and, using a structure that already existed in Portugal's Mainland, here in Madeira, the past was articulated with the present, thinking about the future.

The old and traditional problems of humanity - hunger, misery, poverty - are now viewed innovatively, according to an organized structure, and responsibility lies with both the Church and the temporal power.

Funchal's Misericórdia was simultaneously inheriting a tradition (assistance and charity in the western world) and innovation (the Lisbon's Misericórdia and the adaptation to the island space).

Tradition and innovation were thus two vectors in constant dialectics on the island of Madeira, establishing a dynamic that led to transformations and adaptations, which generated imbalances and conflicts, but also allowed for positive evolution, taking advantage of what Tradition could contribute to a more just society, in a new time and a new space.

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