

Sá, Isabel dos Guimarães. *O Regresso dos Mortos: Os Doadores da Misericórdia do Porto e a Expansão Oceânica (Séculos XVI-XVIII)*. Lisbon: Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, Universidade de Lisboa, 2018, 331 pp. ISBN 978-972-671-485-9.

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Scholars of confraternity studies are well acquainted with the work of Isabel dos Guimarães Sá, one of the most prolific researchers in recent times on the history of the Portuguese *Casas da Misericórdia*, the lay welfare societies of a pious nature that were ubiquitous in Portuguese territories throughout the period of early modern history. Sá revisits her favorite research field in order to study the multifaceted wealth of knowledge that she extracted from the wills entrusted to the Misericórdia of the city of Porto in northwest Portugal. To a large extent, her work draws upon the long tradition of French historians, such as Michel Vovelle, Georges Duby, Pierre Chaunu, and many others, who combed through testamentary documentation to learn more about the spiritual devotions and material economies of the people they studied.

After delving deep into the rich archives of the Porto Misericórdia, Sá succeeded in producing *O Regresso dos Mortos*, the return to life of the dead, or what I would rephrase as a way of “conversing with the dead.” The title of her book aptly encapsulates what she has managed to do with the testaments. Readers will enjoy the ideal blending of her serious scholarship with descriptions of characters whose humanity and environments she has brought to life in a very familiar manner.

Casas da Misericórdia played a crucial role in Portuguese territories during the modern era. They formed an informal extensive network of male lay societies devoted mostly to pious philanthropic endeavors. Aside from the usual devotional activities, their members engaged

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in the dispensation of alms to various kinds of poor and needy people, and in the running of hospitals or hospices. Practically all the cities and towns in Portugal, as well as in Portuguese America, Africa, or Asia, hosted a Misericórdia.

Another important task that corporations of this type performed was the execution of wills. Due to the stable internal organization of Misericórdias and their informal associations with other Misericórdias elsewhere, many testators entrusted the implementation of their legacies to them. This was especially true of those who died far away from their homes and their families or relatives. To introduce the reader into this specialized world, Sá devotes the first chapter of her book to a detailed explanation of the complex procedures involved in the handling of testamentary wills by the management of the Misericórdias.

In the second chapter, readers are taken on a historical tour of the city of Porto during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The city experienced considerable economic and political development during those years, mostly by becoming an important entry point for Brazilian sugar. Later on, towards the end of the seventeenth century, Porto began to export to England the now world-famous wine that bears its name. As the city grew in importance, so too did its Misericórdia.

Chapter three delves deep into the different forms of gift-giving and the types of conditions stipulated by donors for their pious bequests. It explains the different forms of treatment that were given to donations and testamentary gifts. Sá devotes much of the chapter to a detailed classification of the many different types of testators that were to be found among the 257 wills that she studied. Donors are classified by gender, social status, and, whenever possible, profession. Taken together as a whole, this group of donors paints a vivid picture of the Porto society of that time, many of whose members lived and died abroad. Sá pays special attention to the female donors and the rich insights of gender history that the documents portray. The chapter ends by describing how the Porto Misericórdia

benefited financially from the process of handling gifts and legacies, enabling the institution to upgrade its facilities.

Those donations and bequests that were made through the *Misericórdias* or similar corporations acquired a sacralized character. Whether the donor explicitly said so or not, it was understood that pious gift-giving belonged to the realm of strategies for ensuring a blissful afterlife. Chapter four briefly explains to the reader the mechanisms that connected gift-giving with religious rituals, in order to understand the expression of their sacredness while also describing the more material or earthly consequences of processing the money or providing alms.

Following a short description in chapter five of the sources that Sá consulted in the archives of the Porto *Misericórdia*, the next five chapters occupy two thirds of the book and are devoted to discussing the stories of different donors. It is not difficult to imagine that the documentation she chooses to include was guided by what might yield the most color and texture to the history of Portugal in Europe and the colonies, relating, above all, to the Portuguese scattered around the world and the many aspects of social, economic, and cultural history contained in those manuscripts.

Sá begins with the testaments of Diogo and Pantaleão Ferreira, a son and his father. By reading what the documents do and do not say, she manages to unravel a complex family history. Diogo was an illegitimate son who had done well trading in Spanish America while managing to conceal the condition of his birth. His father was a respectable citizen of Porto who ignored the existence of Diogo and bequeathed most of his inheritance to a legitimate son who had been expelled from the Jesuits for inappropriate behavior.

It took twenty-five books to complete the testamentary will of Lopo de Almeida, a cleric from a prominent aristocratic Portuguese family who spent most of his life in Spain serving the Spanish monarch, Philip II. Despite his clerical status, his inheritance reveals more concern with finances than with religion. The detailed itemization of his clothes,

jewelry, and household goods and furnishings, which included their market value, is a trove of material culture during the sixteenth century. Almeida was one of the largest donors of the Porto Misericórdia, to which he bequeathed most of his goods. The reasons why he chose the Misericórdia are unclear, as nothing linked him to the city, but Sá advances an insightful probability based on Almeida's delicate defense of the Spanish monarchy.

Two very different donors were traders who had made their fortunes in Malacca. Belchior Pais was unmarried and bequeathed most of his goods to the Porto Misericórdia. This allowed the Misericórdia to build its church and facilities. The choice of beneficiary had much to do with the close connections of his family and their trading relations with the management of the Misericórdia. His will affords a wealth of documentation for studying the social history of his own case: an illegitimate son who had lived with his legitimate siblings, and who owned large numbers of slaves. The second testator, Bernardim Ribeiro de Barros, had a stable family life in Malacca. He also took responsibility for supporting an illegitimate daughter of his deceased brother. As was often the case of those intending their legacy to travel across continents, he donated small amounts to all the Misericórdias involved in sending the bequeathed money to their beneficiaries living overseas, in order to guarantee their cooperation.

Using the stories and the high degree of detail contained in the wills from East Asia that are kept at the Porto Misericórdia, Sá has written a collection of vignettes with an almost cinematographic quality. One of the first Portuguese traders with Japan, António de Faria, left twenty-nine slaves in his will, all of whom are individually listed, to be sold in order to pay his debts. Similarly, António Monteiro, a trader based in Macao, had twenty-six slaves. His story is particularly intriguing as he left provisions for the education and marriage of two young girls, whom he did not recognize as his daughters, but for whom he showed great concern. His nephew, Domingos Monteiro, also left a testament with the Misericórdia. For several years in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, he had been the commander-in-chief

of the Japanese fleet from Goa, passing through Malacca and Macau. In addition to illustrating how Portuguese commercial networks operated, his will offers a very vivid case-study of the bureaucracy and transactions involved in the executions of wills requiring the transfer of goods across continents and through various *Misericórdias*. This group of wills contains the only case of a donor who bequeathed income from Portugal to someone in Asia. Unfortunately for the beneficiary, an unexpected heir in Portugal complicated the execution of the inheritance. There is also the case of a priest, André Coutinho, whose religious calling had come late in life, following his activity as a trader for many years, and who had returned to Portugal, although not to Porto but to Vidigueira, where some of his patrons or social relations lived. Last in this group is Manuel Tomé, from Macao, stipulating in his will that financial support be provided for nine women and orphan girls, mostly relatives of his friends. He wished some of his revenue to be invested in maritime loans to support them.

Most of the wills studied in chapter ten come from Portuguese citizens based in Brazil or with relatives there. Sá has managed to disentangle some often complicated routes and legal procedures and disputes in the execution of wills. A large part of this section is devoted to the life of some women. One of them, Isabel Duarte, was married to a member of a family from the wealthy shoemaking class of Porto who had acquired his wealth trading in Angola. But surprisingly, she did not get much from him and made her own wealth by means of moneylending in Porto. Another interesting case is that of the wealthy trader, Filipe Correia, whose inheritance mostly consisted of a series of loans and who entrusted the *Misericórdias* of Salvador de Bahia and Porto with his fortune. He trusted that the confraternities would effectively recover his loans. Much more transpires in the chapter, such as stories of social ascent as well as disputes between the patricians within the Porto *Misericórdia* and those who were excluded, just to name a few.

As Sá concludes in the epilogue, the institutional setup and the social and political influence of the Misericórdias, in Porto and elsewhere, made them highly sought-after executors of testamentary wills. This was especially true for single males who died in the colonies. *O Regresso dos Mortos* has become a requisite reference for scholars studying the history of bequests and all the related legal intricacies related to the tradition of Catholic Europe and Christianized territories in other continents during the early modern era. The work will arouse similar interest among those researching Misericórdias and confraternities in general. Isabel Sá has also written a rich piece of social history in which she has demonstrated her acute skills of analysis and interpretation, acquired through her many years of excellent work. It comes as no surprise that *O Regresso dos Mortos* won the prestigious award of the Academia de Marinha “Fundação Oriente—Embaixador João de Deus Ramos” in 2019, an award that promotes research into the Portuguese maritime presence in Asia.