ENFANCE ABANDONNÉE
ET SOCIÉTÉ EN EUROPE
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EXTRAIT

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THE "CASA DA RODA DO PORTO":
RECEPTION AND RESTITUTION OF FOUNDLINGS
DURING THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

PORTO'S CASA DA RODA IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT OF FOUNDLING HOSPITALS

It is generally assumed that during the eighteenth century there was a legalization of child abandonment, if there was no evidence of deliberate intention of leaving the child to die. Accordingly, if the child was left in a place where he was most likely to be promptly assisted, those who abandoned him were not liable to be prosecuted. The foundation, all over Europe, of institution specialized in receiving such abandoned children enabled authorities to centralize assistance, and thus to reduce the possibilities of finding children in public places. During the last years of the seventeenth century, foundling hospitals were established in many European cities. Foundling hospitals were not new in western Europe, some of these institutions existing since the Middle Ages. What was new, however, was that they coincided with a general reform of assistance in such institutions which led to a closer liaison with general hospitals.¹

¹ This reform is parallel to changes in laws concerned with abandoned children as local authorities tended to be discharged of responsibilities towards them. In fact, both parishes and "hauts justiciers", the latter in northern France, were always eager to charge parents in order to diminish expenses. In the eighteenth century, authorities tend to take those children in charge. See N. ARNAUD-DEUC, L'entretien des enfants abandonnés en Provence sous l'Ancien Régime, in Revue historique de droit français et étranger, ser. 4, a. 47, 1969, p. 62: "L'histoire de l'entretien des enfants naturels sous l'Ancien Régime se résout donc dans le passage de l'aléatoire recherche d'un débiteur particulier à l'adoption d'un principe de solidarité publique"; among examples of General Hospitals concerned directly or indirectly with assistance to foundlings, we can quote the cases of Paris J. CHARPENTIER, Le droit de l'enfance abandonnée. Son évolution sous l'influence de
Since most of those foundling hospitals were located in urban areas, cities with foundling hospitals became poles of attraction for abandoned children, who would often come from the city itself, its immediate surrounding parishes or from distant areas in the country. As for the infants born in the cities, one should note the widespread practice of unmarried mothers from rural areas of giving birth to their children in large towns, where they could be delivered by midwives or surgeons in great secrecy. As for infants who arrived from rural areas, the phenomenon has been studied primarily for Paris, where evidence shows there were professional conductors of children, who brought them to hospitals from distant regions and even from abroad. Adverse transport conditions led to an extremely high mortality rate among those children, which has led some historians to maintain that the phenomenon of abandonment must have had wider proportions than those shown by hospital admission figures.

A society’s attitude towards child abandonment has a very direct influence on the way Foundling Hospitals were organised. Where there was a wheel system, one can see that anonymity was ensured and that limitation of entrances was almost impossible.

If one surveys the bibliography, concerning the admission system, standout at Oporto, as it seemed to provide more anonymity than other institutions across Europe. Significant differences can be noted, although the problem remains far from being solved.

In France, except for a few cases in the southern areas, “wheels”


did not exist until the first years of the nineteenth century. Hospitals admitted children on the basis of presentation, transfer from another hospital, or abandonment in public places. As hospitals tended to make "procès verbaux," the registers often state the name of the mother and even the father of children in the first two cases. We can also note that the well-known "déclarations de grossesse," constituted another system that prevented parents of illegitimate children from remaining totally unknown.

In London's Foundling Hospital, only from 1741 to 1760 was anonymity provided, and, except for a brief period of four years (the period of the so-called "General Admission" between 1756 and 1760) admissions were restricted by its administrators. Needless to say, a "wheel" never existed.

In Spain, although hospitals such as the "Inclusa" of Madrid or the "Santa Cruz" of Toledo did not possess wheels, children were invariably left in specific places, which provided a similar degree of secrecy to those who abandoned them.

In Italy, "wheels" seem to have existed from the Middle Ages, following the example of the "Santo Spirito" hospital of Rome.

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4 A. DEPOUX, Sur les pas de Monsieur Vincent. Trois cent ans d'histoire d'enfance abandonnée, Paris, 1958. This author states that, except for a few cases such as Marseille, Bordeaux and Lyon, wheels were in use in France before 1811, when it was decreed (19th January 1811) that each hospital concerned with foundlings should have a "tour." (see pages 189 and 184); Mollard states that in southern France there was a wheel in Besançon, whereas in Annecy and Montpellier it did not exist (see A. MOLLARD, Enfants records, enfants abandonnés et enfants illicites en Languedoc aux XVIII et XVIIIP siècles, in Hommage à Marcel Reinhard, Paris, Société de démographie historique, 1973, p. 469); see also H. BERGES, La prévention des naissances dans la famille. Ses origines dans les temps modernes, Paris, 1960, p. 163-190.


7 See Brevetto in the Enciclopedia italiana di scienze, lettere ed arti, Milano-Roma, vol. VII, 1930, p. 789-790. See also espositos in Enciclopedia universal ilustrada europea americana, Madrid-Barcelona, 1924, t. XXII, p. 1551, according to which the wheel was adopted in Florence in 1414 and also existed early on in Milan: Laura Vigni states that in Siena there was a marble basin substituted by a wheel in 1775 (in La demografia storica delle città italiane, Bologna, 1982, p. 683 and 694). O. Busini writes that there was a

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8 "tour" in the eighteenth century in Camerino (idem, p. 597); and one seems to have existed in Turin by the last years of that century (E. DORIOZZI, Quaderni storici, 53, 1983, p. 447); in Padova, the existing wheel seems to have been closed in 1733-5 to reduce the number and costs of children (C. POUZOLO, in La demografia storica delle città italiane, Bologna, 1982, p. 648).

9 The bibliography consulted shows no coherence between the estimates made and sources used; data given is nevertheless based on these authors. See V. DE MAGALHÃES GONÇALO, Estrutura de antiga sociedade portuguesa, 3a ed. Lisboa, 1977, p. 42; S. SCHMIDT, O marquês de Pombal e o vínculo do Porto. Dependência e subdesenvolvimento de Portugal no século XVIII, Lisboa, 1980; C. DE SANTOS, A população do Porto de 1700 a 1820, in Revista de história, 1, Porto, 1978, p. 287-289; J. SERRANO, A população de Portugal em 1798. O censo de Pina Manique, Paris, 1970, p. XXIX.
Like other towns all over Europe, the city attracted from the surrounding areas peasants in search of work or boats to emigrate. While the city’s population continued to expand, there were still many who considered it more a temporary passing point than a place to live.

The countryside surrounding Oporto, apart from the portwine production areas, was mainly characterized by smallholding properties in the hills, with extreme fragmentation: the same owner might have his land dispersed over a relatively wide area. The peasant or “lavrador” either cultivated his own land or rented it from a nobleman or religious order: the day labourers or “jornaleiros”, mainly crowded the vineyards of Douro.

THE "CASA DA RODA" DO PORTO IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CITY’S CHARITABLE INSTITUTIONS

In the eighteenth century, most of the city’s more than twenty institutions seem to have practised restrictive measures over admissions:

1 – There were six hospitals belonging to religious male orders which were specifically designed to care for their own needy members, either in old-age or sickness;

2 – Of the two institutions which specialized in receiving adult women, the so-called "Recolhimentos", one of them, the "Recolhimento do Anjo", was restricted to noble women, both maiden and married, whose admission was subject to the king’s permission. As for the other institution, the "Recolhimento do Patrícios do Mar de Deus", although we know very little about it, we do know it had a limited capacity (36 women) and seems to have had limited economic possibilities. One needs to note that the institution relied on its members’ work to survive.

3 – For children, a clear distinction was made between legitimate and illegitimate, the status of the orphans being wholly differentiated from that of the illegitimate foundlings. The “Colégio de Nossa Senhora da Graça”, received only legitimate boys, admitting even those who still had a living mother. In the case of girls, the “Recolhimento de Nossa Senhora da Esperança”, although administered by the same institution of the Foundling’s Hospital, gave little support to illegitimate girls, its rules of admission being very severe upon legitimacy.

4 – There were also hospitals which belonged to religious confraternities, open exclusively to their members.

5 – Mention may also be made of a hospital conceived to cater for Oporto’s English population.

The role of providing large scale assistance, taking charge of the poor and sick, belonged to the “Misericórdia”, a confraternity formed in the late fifteenth century by royal privilège on a national basis, every important town possessing its own branch.

The first “Misericórdia” was founded in 1498 in Lisbon, whilst Oporto’s Misericórdia was established the following year. The foundation of these “Misericórdia” follows a tendency which arose in the last quarter of the fifteenth century to group the multitude of minute charitable institutions into “general hospitals”. These institutions, or “Albergarias”, were at one and the same time pilgrim hospices, asylums for invalids and hospitals to care for sick persons. The first such amalgamation of institutions occurred in Lisbon with the foundation of All Saints Hospital.

Oporto’s “Misericórdia” ran eight institutions and, in the late eighteenth century, had almost two thousand members; its ruling committee, the “Mesa”, included members of the wealthiest families in town. Even to be an ordinary member of the institution, a person had to possess a “healthy conscience” and show evidence of an honest life. The Misericórdia provided money for all, these institutions ex-

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9 This “Recolhimento do Anjo” seems to have been basically aimed at safeguarding female honour, because it received married women while their husbands were absent and was organized as a convent, its members even having to wear habits.

10 Girls had to be more than seven years old; the institution was specifically concerned with girls’ education, and accordingly received external pensions.

11 We can cite among these hospitals “S. Cristino”, belonging to the confraternity of shoe-makers, and “Senhora da Silva”, of the metal-workers confraternity.


13 Id., p. 43-6.

14 The “citizen” of this “Mesa” is suggested by Padre Agostino Rebelo da Costa, Descrição topográfica e histórica da cidade do Porto, ed. por A. de Magalhães Baxo, 2ª ed., Porto, s/d (the first edition is in 1788-9).

cept the foundling’s hospital, as we shall see. The funds of the Misericôrdia came from pious legacies, including several huge fortunes left by wills of noblemen in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The latter guaranteed a good economic basis for the institution, enabling it to build a general hospital at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

The moral principles on which the institution was based seem to confirm this purpose to assist society’s most deprived members. Its activities were supposed to accomplish the fourteen works of mercy, of which seven concerned the spirit and the remaining ones the body. The spiritual rules comprised teaching the ignorant, giving good advice to those who ask for it, punishing those who make mistakes, comforting the sad, forgiving offences, suffering patiently ills done by others and praying for the live and sick. We shall pay particular attention to the works concerned with the body, insofar as they are directly related to the institution’s practices: to treat the ill, clothe the naked, feed the hungry, shelter pilgrims, assist prisoners and give burial to the dead.

These eight institutions covered most of assistance, from medical treatment (at the “Hospital Real” or General Hospital) to the aged, invalids, lepers and foundlings. The most important was the so-called “Hospital de D. Lopo” with a pharmacy of its own, sixteen doctors and over fifty surgeons, as well as a medical school. In fact, the Misericôrdia’s medical staff was concentrated there and was supposed to assist all the other hospitals and the prison.

Further attention will be paid to the second outstanding institution, the “Casa da Roda”, which was financed from its creation by the king and the town council.

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18 In 1785, 20,000 annual masses were celebrated by its church, in order to meet donors’ wills. See Padre Agostinho Rebelo da Costa, op. cit., p. 133.
20 A. de Magalhães Basto, Breve história da Misericórdia do Porto e seu hospital geral, VII centenário de Santo António, 1934, p. 5.
21 A. de Magalhães Basto, Poetria dos Arquivos, p. 20 and História da Santa Casa da Misericórdia do Porto, p. 29. Estimated to have possessed eighty beds at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the General Hospital had to raise this figure substantially in the next century, given the fact that thousands of people annually were receiving treatment in its premises (ibid., p. 9). The fact is that it in 1766 a project of an English architect for a huge hospital was approved, whose construction started shortly afterwards but which was only ready for use in the first years of the nineteenth century and is still today one of the main hospitals of the city (ib., p. 9-11).

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22 Once again we note a tendency to follow monastic models of behaviour, as girls obeyed convent rules.
23 By king Manuel I in 1521. See A. de Magalhães Basto, Poetria dos Arquivos, p. 20 and História da Santa Casa da Misericórdia, p. 293.
24 The town’s main prison, the “Cadeia de Relação”, received both men and women, even from country areas, and had an average population of three to four hundred persons, which sometimes reached the thousand, as in January 1765. See Padre Agostinho Rebelo da Costa, op. cit., p. 166.
25 Rebelo da Costa states that over four hundred persons were annually buried, but does not specify their ages. See Padre Agostinho Rebelo da Costa, op. cit., p. 113.
attempt to reorganize assistance, a reform in which the monarchy took great interest. The restructuring grouped several institutions under the same administration and made possible the creation of more centralized structures, such as the General and the Foundling hospitals.

2. Except for the Misericórdia’s establishments, these charitable institutions were quite restrictive over admissions. In consequence, it seems that the poor were the overwhelming concern of the Misericórdia, although even in this case we find evidence of discriminating criteria.

3. A survival of the medieval concept of poverty can be noticed since the confraternity still based its activities on the observance of the works of mercy, albeit adapted to contemporary needs.

**THE FUNCTIONING OF THE CASA DA RODA**

**Finances.**

Since its foundation in 1689 the Casa da Roda was financed entirely by the council, although the Misericórdia was responsible for its administration. 24

The situation followed a tradition developed since the fifteenth century. Before the law that established the incorporation of the existing hospitals into the city’s Misericórdia in 1521, it was the council who ran the administration of the existing hospitals. The surplus of its funds provided money to assist abandoned children. This practice followed the existing law, which established that illegitimate children – and foundlings were, as we shall see, assimilated to this category – were to be supported according to the following hierarchical order:

1. their fathers;
2. their mothers;
3. other kin;
4. funds of the existing town hospitals or “albergarias”;
5. council’s money;

24 The first contract between the two institutions took place in 1685, although several adjustments were made until its final version in 1688. See A.A.D.P., Libro 1 do Registo, fls. 231v.
The fact that entrance and expenses curves are not parallel could be explained either by inflation or by costs of treatments of venereal diseases, as we shall see.

Reception of children and anonymity (including typology of wetnurses).

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries abandoned children would be found in the mornings in particular areas where they would be promptly taken care of: porches, churches (even in baptismal fonts) and street merchants' stalls. As there was a council member in charge of abandoned children, the "pai dos enfeitados"11, the infants would be brought to his presence and properly cared for. In later periods, there was an increasing tendency to place children on the entrance door of the "mother of foundlings". This "mãe dos enfeitados" was primarily the father of foundlings' wife, but gradually replaced him until his total disappearance from the sources12. But despite the increase of this custom, children were still being left in various places throughout the city13.

This habit still prevailed in the first years of the Casa da Roda, but was soon to disappear almost completely, since there was a wheel which provided similar anonymity to outdoor exposure14. It is very important to note that there was such a "tour" from the very moment of the foundation of the institution.

Generally, the children were left at the "wheel" in the evening or in the early hours of the morning. Once left at the "tour" the child was assigned to one of different wet-nurses, according to the different stages at which these women took care of children. The typology used applies logically only to nurses who took care of foundlings and not to those who worked privately; we have divided them into three categories as follows:

1 - The "internal" wet-nurses, that is to say those who formed part of the hospital's attendance staff and thus lived within its walls.

2 - The "borrowing" breastfeeder; those wet-nurses who nourished children when no other nurses were available.

3 - Finally, the country wet-nurses, whom we shall call "definitive", who were supposed to take care of the foundlings until they reached the age of seven.

The "internal" wet-nurses.

These women earned the highest wages of all wet-nurses: in 1768, besides a yearly income of four thousand reis, they were paid 120 reis a day. They could thus receive 47,800 reis a year, which is a very high sum compared to other nurses, as we shall see15.

There was a bell which enabled the institution's staff, composed of between three to five "internal" wet-nurses, to take care of the infant immediately. They would undress the child, give him a bath and dressing, put all the things the child brought with him into safe keeping. This procedure could not be directly supervised by the Misericórdia's administrators, since the Casa da Roda was only inhabited by women16. For such an important task, upon which depended the possibility of identifying the child later, nurses had to be controlled by a general surveillant, usually a senior woman. This "governess" or "directora", as she is referred to in the registers, played a decisive role because she was meant to be the link between the male administration and the house's internal functioning17. Every morning she would give orders to the wet-nurses to take the infants to the Cathedral for baptism. We can note that in the registers we have consulted the practice was to

11 In English: "father of foundlings".
12 A.A.D.P., Livro 42 das Veracelas, fl. 190; Livro 44 das Veracelas, fl. 288 v.
13 A.A.D.P., Livro das Entradas e Saídas da Roda, 1683-1693.
14 A.A.D.P., Livro 1 das Entradas.
15 A.A.D.P., Livro 1 a 5 da Despesa Miód.
16 The administrators could enter in the day, but there was a clerk who locked the nurses inside the house each evening and came to open the doors in the morning (A.A.D.P., Livro do Registo, p. 140 verso).
17 We note in the internal rules of the institution a tendency to follow monastic models. The nurses were supposed to stay indoors, unless they had a permit to go out (A.A.D.P., Livro 1 do Registo, fls. 82v-83). This created major problems, as often they were married, their husbands living in town. Forced to charity by their employers, they frequently disregarded these rules. In order to counteract the disadvantages of not having a permanent surveillance, in 1768 the administrators created an official surveillant, in order to coordinate the wet-nurses work and prevent current misfunctionings (A.A.D.P., Livro 1 do Registo, fl. 83).
The nurses were supposed to keep the child until he completed his seventh birthday; the institution was very strict about this rule and rarely made exceptions. If a particular child had to be kept by the Misericórdia to the age of twelve, this usually meant that he was physically or mentally disabled. From the age of twelve, he was to be kept in Misericórdia’s other hospitals for invalids.

As for the healthy children, two possible destinies awaited them: either they would remain with their wet-nurses’ families or be given away to other persons. In the latter case, apprenticeship and domestic service were the main options, and a very informal procedure of adoption took place. As the number of foundlings grew during the century, the institution’s policy was to reduce charges and to create less difficulties for those who wanted to adopt a child under the age of seven. Some families availed themselves of such provision, since there were laws that exempted their husbands or children from military service if they had kept a foundling since early age without receiving wages. These laws, which were specially designed to encourage foundling adoption, allowed the administration to give children away without having to pay for their upbringing.

One of the institution’s major characteristics was its attachment to anonymity, which can be demonstrated when we look closely at the regulations whether issued by the town hall, internally by the institution itself or by the royal office.

The presence of a wheel from the outset of the foundling hospital’s life is itself, as we have seen, an indicator of the secrecy guaranteed to those abandoning the infant. This was even reinforced by a minute issued by the council, forbidding policemen to remain in the surrounding streets of the Casa da Roda, “lest they frighten or prevent people from abandoning children”, as the “Judge of crime” confirmed from previous complaints.

The internal wet-nurses, including the surveillant, when admitted to work, had to state on oath that they would keep secret everything.

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39 The only exception to this rule was when the child brought a baptism certificate issued by a priest whose handwriting was well known.
41 A.A.D.P., Livro 70 a 75 de Saídas.
42 A.A.D.P., Livro 1 do Registo, II, 77 (1st May 1767).
that happened inside the house\textsuperscript{43}. This rule was very important to administrators, as it was to prevent all possible contacts between parents and "definitive" wet-nurses. They were not supposed to disclose any information concerning children's parents or the particular wet-nurse who had taken care of them. The institution placed particular stress on the second point, because it was known that parents would often trace their children in the hospital and afterwards, when children went to their nurses in the countryside. This could not be accomplished without the complicity of the internal nurses. The administration was strongly against such practices, because parents interfered with the administration's procedures.

In 1783, when the ruling Queen Mary I ordered the establishment of wheels in all the cities of the kingdom, it was stated that they should be located in such places where people could abandon children without being seen and recognised. The law prohibited any research for the identity of the foundling's conductor, and abandonment could thus take place at any hours of the day, since there was no danger of prosecution\textsuperscript{44}.

Keeping abandonment of infants anonymous and having a wheel meant that there was no means to reduce the entries of children. What is more, there was no efficient way to reduce costs significantly. The only means were to save in specific cases, as for example by ensuring that no child was paid for after the age of seven (except for invalids, as we have seen).

\textit{Admission procedures: "engeitados" and temporary breastfeeding allowances.}

As we have seen, there were no attempts made by the administrators to limit the number of abandoned children. The existence of a wheel would have made such control almost impossible. Making sure that child abandonment was kept anonymous meant that the institution had to accept all the foundlings left to its charge. There was no check on those who abandoned them; the institution made no attempt to dis-cover whether the child had been left by the mother, the father, relatives, midwives, surgeons, etc. This meant that every child deposited in the "roda" fell under the same category. The name given to all those who were left in the wheel was "engeitados", or "rejected"; this was in fact meaningful, since it designated children as "refused", and included both legitimate and illegitimate foundlings.

The foundling hospital also provided another form of assistance to breastfeed children. When a legitimate couple could not afford a private wet-nurse, the institution financed breastfeeding and allowed the family even to opt for a previously chosen wet-nurse. This service was established in the first years of the house's functioning, in 1698, "...because the city should provide care for unsupported children, even if their parents are known..., although its responsibilities ended after the weaning, which was to take place when the child was two years old\textsuperscript{45}.

This was of course a limited service: those who sought it had to provide proof of their poverty and the mothers' inability to breastfeed. There could be several acceptable reasons for this incapacity:

1. absence of milk;
2. birth of twins;
3. illness followed by stay at the General Hospital;
4. death after child delivery, the support being thus given to the widowed husband.

These children were differentiated from the "engeitados", and received the designation of "not-rejected" or "legitimate". For the greater part of the century they were registered in the entry books along with other children\textsuperscript{46}. The entrance curve previously shown does not take account of this difference. In order to measure the proportion of "não-engeitados" in the general admission, I adopted a rather simple procedure. Since these legitimate children had for the most part received baptism before their parents applied to the Casa da Roda and since the overwhelming majority of children deposited at the wheel were baptized or re-baptized, I subtracted the number of found-

\textsuperscript{43} A.A.D.P., Livro 1 das Entradas e Termos das Amas, fl. 41 verso; Livro 1 do Registo, fls 81-85 v.
\textsuperscript{44} J. de Gouveia Pereira, op. cit., p. 7-8.
\textsuperscript{45} A.A.D.P., Livro 1 do Registo, fls. 47-49.
\textsuperscript{46} These breastfeeding allowances were registered in separate books only from 1796 onwards.
ling baptisms registered in the cathedral's parish from the hospital admission totals. The results seem to suggest that the number of the legitimate did not vary significantly over six decades, which once again might mean that restrictive policies were practiced, leading to many requests being refused (see graph 2).

The welfare system: intentions and practices.

A point which became clear during data compilation was the fact that mortality within the walls of the hospital assumed terrifying proportions. Looking more closely at the house's functioning, it can be observed that the presence of the "nourishing staff" was very irregular, with wet-nurses frequently dismissed and substituted (see graph 3). This instability increased through the century and had its peak in the seventies. Besides all the irregularities concerning quantity and quality of milk (here we have to note that, even if there was supposed to be medical control, nurses managed to "hide" defective milk for several weeks or months), a number of other causes implied defective assistance for foundlings. At first there were three permanent women to
take care of two to three daily arrivals; by the second half of the century there were five "internal" wet-nurses, but the number of foundlings was then considerably higher. If we consider that children tended to stay in the house more than one day, this implied that each nurse had more than two children at a time. To make matters worse, the administrators had few means of controlling their efficiency. Despite their efforts, a number of children died under the body of a sleeping nurse, some were even battered by them and others were bitten by rats. Judging from the statements concerning the hygiene of women, they seemed to have probably lacked elementary hygienic conditions. It is thus hardly surprising that these weeks were often fatal, especially when one considers the common occurrence of venereal diseases, such as syphilis (see table 1). The fear of contamination was always present in the minds of the administrators, as both wet-nurses and the newly arrived children could always suffer from it, and a certain time was needed to establish that they were contaminated. In most cases we find both the wet-nurse and her husband receiving treatment in the hospital, because the institution took them in charge and paid very high sums for these people to be treated. If we look at the table, the expenses with health tend to grow in the two last samples studied (1749-51 and 1774-76), precisely because of the expenses made with syphilis treatments.

Furthermore, there seems to have been a shortage of "definitive" wet-nurses, given that children were kept in hospital or with the "borrowing" nurse sometimes more than four weeks. It seems that no particular selection was made by the hospital in order to choose from those women who offered themselves. Although the administrators stated their preference for married women, in the second half of the century more and more unmarried wet-nurses were engaged to breastfeed.


table 1

Evolution of Expenses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Salaries</th>
<th>Clothing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1699-1701</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1724-1725</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1749-1751</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1774-1776</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Livros 1 a 5 da Despesa Milão (A.A.D.P.).

Reclaimed children and their parents

Secrecy and child identification.

Commonly anyone who even briefly considers the question of abandoned children is likely to ask who their parents were and why they exposed them. Recent historiography on the subject has largely followed this track and has isolated two major motives for abandon-
ment: illegitimacy and extreme poverty. In the case of the latter, children were presumed to be legitimate, while, in the case of the former, they might have come from the upper and middle as well as the lower classes. Thus for A. Chamoux (Reims) and Alvarez Santalo (Seville), foundlings were clearly attributable to illegitimacy, the first author focussed his attention on unmarried girls, while the second concentrated on cases involving both single women and adultery.

Researchers who assume that poverty was the main cause for abandonment have on the other hand studied the relationship between wheat prices and the registration figures in the foundling hospitals; one can quote for example Peyronnet or Delasselle. This latter author was much more aware of the unreliability of such premises, noting in his 1975 article that the historiography on the subject had neglected the fact that illegitimacy, that is to say "depravity" was the consequence of poverty and hence that it is not justified to assume that a mother would automatically and willingly get rid of a child just because he is illegitimate.

The sources available from the Oporto’s foundling hospital cannot possibly establish the proportion of legitimate children among foundlings. The fact that anonymity was ensured to parents excludes regular information about their identity. It seems clear, even though our research is not yet complete, that children were born both from illegitimate and legitimate unions: the proportion of each category is however unobtainable from the sources.

If we rely on contemporary writings, information on illegitimacy is obtainable. An anonymous English author, reporting on what were for him very exotic habits, recounts several anecdotes about women delivering their babies in the open air, completely alone: "A Portuguese gentleman, returning one night from Lisbon to Sacavém, heard, as he was passing a vineyard, the moans of a female on apparent suf-

fering. He immediately proceeded to the spot, where he found a young and apparently lovely female in labor, who prompted his assistance, which he unsparingly afforded to the best of his power. She afterwards conjured him by everything that was sacred to carry the new born to the Roda in the city. The man who served as a midwife was later to marry her, without being recognised as her saviour, and the story ended tragically because she died during a second child delivery, when he confessed that he was one who had helped her."

The testimony of this anonymous author is very interesting about two points:

1 - He states that, although wheels were justifiable as a means to prevent infanticide, such a practice had not completely disappeared. He writes: "To the foundling hospital are brought all the fruits of illicit amours, and silently deposited at the Roda wheels. The recepice thus humeantly provided has, in some measure, the effect of checking infanticide, although I have myself, at three several times in Portugal, seen dead infants lying on dunghills, where they had apparently been concealed and had been scratched by dogs.";

2 - He observes that the female article piece of clothing most used, the 'capote', a large cloak used by women of all social backgrounds, was very convenient in certain situations because "...in spite of the Argus like precautions of vigilant parents, many a little 'faux pas' is committed, the consequences of which are veiled from observation by the happy invention of the capote, the lady protesting, (and with reason), that she is indisposed, until the critical moment is passed."

These testimonies, full of criticism about Portuguese life, are mere anecdotes, and should be taken as such. Returning to our main sources, the data available are far from satisfactory.

In terms of the law, as we have seen, all facilities were given to allow illegitimate children to be abandoned: every quest for paternity or other information on foundlings’ origins was prohibited to charita-

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47 A. Chamoux, op. cit., p. 269.
50 J. Delasselle, op. cit., p. 207-208.
51 Ibid., p. 214; see also Alvarez Santalo, op. cit., p. 192, who also recognises that illegitimacy and extreme poverty do not exclude each other.
53 Ibid., p. 200-201.
54 Ibid., p. 198.
55 Ibid., p. 196.
ble institutions; a law which might have lead to a source similar to the French 'déclarations de grossesse' was never applied on any substantial scale. The institution's vocation to widespread acceptance of illegitimate children is even confirmed by the practice of providing assistance to legitimate couples, when mothers were unable to breastfeed, a service that must have stopped many of them from abandoning their children. On the other hand, it suggests that the mother of an illegitimate child unable to breastfeed would have to abandon him, unless she could pay a private wet-nurse.

Yet, despite the secrecy, there were two occasions in which the curtain that hid parents from indiscreet observations was unveiled:

1 - The first concerns the moment when the foundling was exposed at the "wheel": objects brought with him and especially notes can supply very interesting information on circumstances that preceded abandonment. This information was very carefully registered in the "Livros de Entradas", as upon it depended the subsequent identification of a child. These notes will not be discussed here, as their content analysis has not been undertaken substantially.

2 - The second occasion, even more rare, was when parents decided to come and reclaim the child. The numbers constitute a very small percentage – although it may be that not all the parents were registered, since we do not know if the clerk took notice of the searches made for all dead children – but the data available still throw some light on the subject.

Reclaimed children as a proportion in annual entries.

Analysis of parent reclamations has been based on four periods of three years, as follows: 1699-1700, 1724-1726, 1749-1751 and 1774-1776. As the administration's care in registering such cases varied through the century, the quantity and quality of the information reflect such changes. In fact, information gets more detailed during the last two periods, whereas it tends to be more laconic in the first two.

The first step was to determine how many children had been reclaimed by their families. Results show that the proportion of reclaimed children was never over 15% for the years considered, which could suggest that the foundling hospital was not used by parents as a temporary shelter for their progeny to any significant degree (see Table 2). On the other hand, we will never know how many parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>N. of entries</th>
<th>N. of children</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N. of dead chil.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1699</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1700</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1701</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>455</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1724</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1725</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1726</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1047</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1749</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1750</td>
<td>603</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1751</td>
<td>611</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1814</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1774</td>
<td>910</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>28.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1775</td>
<td>841</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1776</td>
<td>872</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2623</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* This table does not take account of children who were searched for by parents more than once in a year. This was possible if they were re-abandoned after the first occurrence.

54 This law, which might have obliged unmarried pregnant women to show proof of their child delivery, seems to have had little application (Ordensções Filipinas, Livro 1, tit. 73, parag. 4). The counter-proof is that was reinforced in 1806, probably to reduce child abandonment. See A.J. de Gouveia Pinto, op. cit., p. 16.

55 These could be possibly grouped into a few typical sets, but only for a certain proportion of the abandoned children. Only half of them had such notes and these were of a very mixed nature; we find some that are extremely laconic, while others depict in vivid details what at times were dramatic circumstances.

56 As parents could search for their children either when they were at the hospital or when they were in the country with their nurses, both "Livros de Entradas" and "Livros de Saídas" had to be consulted.
took steps to keep a check on their child’s upbringing by keeping contact with their wet-nurses and subsequently breaking the secrecy rules.

We can also note that clerks tended to register searches made for dead children, especially in the fourth period considered. This can be explained by the administration’s concern to make parents pay for the expenses of a child, even if he was already dead. Unfortunately this does not seem to have been an uniform procedure throughout the century, as the proportion of dead infants is significant only between 1774-76. It is not unlikely that a larger proportion could be found for the other years analysed.

As regards the age at which these children were removed from the hospital’s responsibility, it seems that searches clearly preferred to reclaim children in their early years, either very shortly after abandonment or within two years, the period which coincided broadly with breastfeeding. It should be interesting to determine the children’s exact age at the time of the search in order to see whether weaning had already taken place. When the age is unknown, this was usually for dead children, as the clerks did not mention when search had occurred (see Table 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 3</th>
<th>YEAR OF SEARCH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1699-01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abandonment year</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>87.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following two years</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of upbringing*</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After upbringing</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The period considered here is when the child was under the hospital’s responsibility, until his seventh birthday.

The parents.

The primary question to ask about parents is whether secrecy was a major concern, playing a role as important as over the reception of children. In fact, the institution ensured anonymity for individuals searching for their children and unwilling to be identified, in order to avoid public knowledge of their sins. This concern could even be reinforced by the presence of a priest as the representative of parents heard in confession and thus totally protected from the curiosity of hospital administrators. Surprisingly, the proportion of parents unidentified through choice of deliberate secrecy is low: 16.9% between 1724-26, 18.6% between 1749-51 and 8.1% in 1774-76. These results suggest that the maintenance of a public image of anonymity was not a general concern, at least for the parents.

In terms of the relationship of searchers with foundlings, the majority of those who reclaimed children were undoubtedly the mothers, with a very low percentage of fathers and a significantly variable proportion of couples, including both the father and mother of a particular child (see Table 4). In fact, this rises from 9.8% between 1724-26 to 17.4% in 1749-51 and finally 24.6% in 1774-76. The increase could be explained by the population’s experience in using the institution to further its own interests or could infer that the number of legitimate children among foundlings had also risen.

Marital status: the majority of single women.

From the data available, it seems that many single women came to reclaim their children. Single women are understood to include unmarried girls, widows and even married women who did not live with their husbands, because the latter had emigrated.

Table 5 shows that in the last three periods (1724-26, 1749-51 and 1774-76), the proportion of unmarried of married mothers rose from 14% up to 34% for the same periods. As for widows, the proportion...
remained low throughout the period. Nevertheless, one should not assume that all married women had conceived their reclaimed children in wedlock: many claimed such children independently of their hus-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KINSHIP BETWEEN SEARCHER AND FOUNDLING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1699-01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>both par.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MARITAL STATUS OF MOTHERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1699-01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mothers who appear twice in the registers (either reclaiming children or coming twice to search for the same child) have been subtracted from the totals.

bands; some of these women had "absent" husbands who had emigrated, others were "separated" and some even confessed that child was born "outside marriage". Between 1724-26 such cases represent 12.5% of the total of married women, 18.8% in 1749-51 and 21.2% between 1774-76. If we add to those figures the proportions of unmarried and widowed women, we end up with a significantly higher proportion of single women.

Many of the unmarried women came from country areas, in which case, lacking the husband's name and profession, the clerk took note of their parents. This evidence suggests that many unmarried mothers were the children of "incomplete" families. Some were orphans, others had themselves been abandoned, but most of them had only one live parent (either a widowed mother or father or an unmarried mother). If one considers that in the 'Ancien Régime' it was very difficult to establish oneself without parental economic support, one should not be surprised if in fact the parents of these unmarried mothers had little to offer to their daughters. In this sense illegitimacy can be considered a consequence of poverty. Many of the situations described are related to emigration: we must not forget that Oporto was a seaport keenly involved in trade with Brazil and from which most emigrant departures were made, and that most emigrants were males. But then, as poverty is one of the major reasons for emigration, one returns to the initial problem. Why did women give birth to illegitimate children? Is it because they were poor or should we presume that certain social forms of control on sexual relationships had lost strength and efficiency?

Social backgrounds: the very poor and the less poor.

When parents came to reclaim their children, the administrators always tried to find out whether they could reimburse expenses incurred in connection with the child. Nevertheless, if parents could prove their poverty, they would be excused from payment. This could occur

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39 1724-26: 29.2%; 1749-1751: 32.3%; and 1774-76: 31.4%.
40 Between 1724-26, 10.5% of unmarried mothers had both parents still alive, whereas 31.6% of them came from incomplete families; between 1749-51 the figures are respectively 49% and 32.8%; 32.1% and 55% between 1774-76.
in two ways: either the clerks themselves recognised their poverty, or the parents brought a “poverty” certificate issued by their parish priest. Towards the end of the century, as the population tended to become more experienced in using the facilities provided by the hospital, parents brought this certificate automatically when they came to search for children. This certificate was especially important when the child had already spent a long time in the institution, as the debt had obviously become substantial. The fact that many parents did not pay expenses because of alleged poverty provides an indicator of their social backgrounds, although not a completely reliable one, as we know that priests often wrote these certificates for persons who were not in absolute need for them (see Table 6). At the same time, we need to note that the amounts of money raised through reimbursements were insignificant in the total annual expenses and thus could not weigh in the annual budget of the hospital (see graph 1).

Among parents who identified themselves, not a single case was found of a child reclaimed by noble or rich bourgeois families. The number of children coming from illicit relationships of priests is also low, such case being exceptional. From the information available, artisans appear as the most numerous category of parents, followed by domestic servants and farmers in smaller proportions. Women, even unmarried mothers, rarely declared their occupations: when they did, we find mostly servants, wet-nurses, either working privately or the Casa da Roda, and to a smaller extent, beggars and slaves.

The residence of parents is not markedly urban, in the sense that parents living in country areas are equally numerous (see Table 7). The proportion of parents from the city rose only between 1749-51 to 1774-76, from 39% to 52.1%, whereas the percentage of parents living in the city’s suburbs remained low for the three periods.

There is little direct evidence on the motives that lead parents to abandon their children. Poverty remains one possible explanation, if

---

**Table 6**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1699-01</th>
<th>1724-26</th>
<th>1749-51</th>
<th>1774-76</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exp. paid</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not paid</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>58.4</td>
<td>70.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>82.5</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1699-01</th>
<th>1724-26</th>
<th>1749-51</th>
<th>1774-76</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Porto</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>159</td>
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<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>33</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suburbs</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
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<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
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<td>28.6</td>
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<tr>
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<td>51</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>72.5</td>
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<td>32.1</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Parents appearing more than once in the registers have been substracted from the totals, as in Table 5.

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Our sources provide little information on parents’ occupations: only a small proportion of men (either fathers of children or mothers’ husbands) declared their professions: 14.3% of all children searched between 1724-26, 17.3% in 1749-51 and 36.9% between 1774-76. Such small figures do not allow a consistent quantitative treatment, although they show that half of these men worked in industry (1724-26: 50%; 1749-51: 53.8% and 45.1% between 1774-76). Agricultural laborers represent 12.5% of the professions between 1724-26; 10.7% in 1749-51 and 9.7% in 1774-76. As for domestic servants, percentages are as follows: 1749-51: 12.4 and 1774-76: 12.4. In this last period men working on the river or at sea are also significant (9.7%).

Only 86 mothers in all the sample declared their occupations: 27.9% were wet-nurses, 25.6% domestic servants, 10.5% beggars, 13.9% slaves, 5.8% weavers and 5.8% with other professions.
we consider that it has a direct influence on illegitimacy. On the other hand, if charity is seen as a service subject to the law of supply and demand, and thus limited by the high level of demand, the indiscriminatory acceptance of all children as foundlings may have opened the door to a fraudulent use of the institution by parents, providing non formal support to families. In fact, cases in which there is a fraudulent use of the institution are relatively frequent. These frauds are mainly of two types: either the mother was nursing her own child or undue contacts between wet-nurses and parents took place. Probably these occurrences were more numerous that what is shown in the sources, because administrators may not always have known such facts. In the first case, as wet-nurses were paid by the institution, they were forced to reimburse expenses of the child from the wages they had received and were also immediately dismissed. In the second case, there was little to do, and the administration did nothing to prevent this type of fraud, merely dismissing wet-nurses who did not respect the "secrets" of the house.

Oporto's slave population had a very reasonable motive for abandoning its infants, as the law allowed foundlings to gain impunity from slave status. Hence this may well have been one possible means for a mother to free her children from the condition of slavery. Several cases were found of masters searching for their slaves' children;

they were entitled to take them away, provided that they respected the freedom the child had gained through deposit in the Casa da Roda.

Other parents seem to have waited for their own marriage before coming to the institution and searching for their children. In some cases, either they came after their wedding took place or while their engagement was publicly announced. Premarital pregnancies could thus have been another motive leading to abandonment.

But, in spite of such glimpses of why parents should have abandoned their children, information remains too fragmentary to permit any definite answers.

Isabel dos Guimarães Sá
SOURCES

ARQUIVO HISTÓRICO MUNICIPAL DO PORTO:

Livro Cópia do 5 das Sentenças, tomo 1.
Livro Próprias, Cofre 161 a 163.
Livros 2, 3, 13 e 22 das Próprias.
Livro do Registo do Cofre.
Livro do Registo e Despesas do Cofre de 1738.
Livro 4 do Registo Geral.

ARQUIVO DA ASSEMBLEIA DISTRITAL DO PORTO:

Livros das Entradas e Saídas da Roda, 1683-1693.
Livros de Entradas corresponding to 1699, 1700, 1701, 1724, 1725, 1726, 1749, 1750, 1751, 1774, 1775 and 1776.
Livro 1 das Entradas e Termos das Amas, 1710-1780.
Livro 1 do Registo.
Livros 1 a 5 da Despesa Miúda.
Livros de Saídas corresponding to 1699, 1700, 1701, 1724, 1725, 1726, 1749, 1750, 1751, 1774, 1775 and 1776.

Abbreviations used: