06 Preface
Bernardo Reis

08 Over 500 years of the Misericórdia of Braga
Maria Marta Lobo de Araújo

20 From origins to the present day — a brief history of S. Marcos Hospital
Maria Marta Lobo de Araújo

36 The Vestments of the Santa Casa da Misericórdia of Braga: a history in threads and stitches
Maria José Meireles & Patricia Moscoso

42 The liturgical artefacts of the Misericórdia of Braga as works of art
Manuela Curilha & Manuela Machado

52 The Holy week and Processions throughout the history of the Misericórdia of Braga
Rui Manuel Ferreira

62 The Centro Interpretativo das Memórias da Misericórdia de Braga (Memories of the Misericórdia of Braga Interpretation Centre) painting and sculpture collection
Manuela Curilha & Manuela Machado

66 History and Architecture of Misericórdia Church
Canon António da Silva Macedo

76 The Providers: men who shaped the Misericórdia
Maria Marta Lobo de Araújo

86 The benefactors of the Santa Casa: men and women to be honoured
Maria Marta Lobo de Araújo

94 Credits
FROM ORIGINS TO THE PRESENT DAY
- A BRIEF HISTORY OF S. MARCOS HOSPITAL

Maria Marta Lobo de Araújo
ORIGINS TO PRESENT DAY OF HISTORY

S. MARCOS HOSPITAL

S. Marcos Hospital was founded in 1508 by Archbishop Diogo de Sousa, who, in the same year, set out the regulations which governed its operation. It opened during a period of significant healthcare reform in Europe, implemented in Braga by the Archbishop, who shut down smaller institutions and replaced them with one larger one. The hospital was placed under the administration of the Town Council, and so it remained until 1559, the date on which Archbishop Fray Bartolomeu dos Martires transferred authority to the city’s Misericordia. Throughout his lifetime, Diogo de Sousa paid regular visits to this healthcare facility, nurturing it with his presence. This set an example followed by other Archbishops, including Rodrigo de Moraes Tello and Fray Caetano Brandão, who made regular donations and visits. The latter also established a school of Surgery and Anatomy within the hospital in the late-18th century.

This important institution, the only one of its kind in Braga for many centuries, closed its doors in 2011, having been active for 503 years. Utterly devoted to fulfilling its purpose, it has left an indelible mark on the city.

Studying the hospital over its long life enables us to understand what changed and what stayed the same, and witness the emergence of the modern hospital in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Furthermore, it allows us to track its progress against a backdrop of rapid change, until 1974, when it came under State control. At this time, S. Marcos was a large district hospital, receiving patients from a very wide geographic area, and at the forefront of new developments in the field of medicine. It occupied a large area in the city centre and is unusual because it grew in the same place that it was founded, adapting to meet the needs of the times. This was a rare quality among Portuguese hospitals.

As a result of its history, the hospital had its own management, separate from that of the Santo Cosa, from the time when it became integrated into the latter. During the Mo-
modern Era, it was managed by a provider elected from the board, who was advised by a treasurer and two administrators. From the mid 18th century, two board members visited the hospital every day to assist at mealtimes, and, while there, they helped with its day-to-day running. In the 20th century, it came to be managed by a director, advised by a team, which became increasingly sophisticated as the institution grew and began to specialise in more fields of medicine.

As science continued to develop, transforming Medicine and Surgery, the hospital also benefitted from improvements in hygiene, thus becoming more efficient in its healthcare provision. Progress was felt not only in terms of equipment, but also in the quality of the treatment offered to patients and in the medical and surgical training of its team of doctors and nurses. In short, the hospital took a gigantic leap forward, transformed from a shelter into a centre for the diagnosis and treatment of disease.
...
moral support to inpatients.

There was always a strong religious presence at S. Marcos. From the very early days, there were altars, enabling patients to attend mass, a chapel, so they could worship Saint Benedict, and a church. The veneration of Saint Benedict increased greatly over the 19th and 20th centuries, and the hospital became a place of pilgrimage not only for the sick, but also for many other believers who flocked to seek, and give thanks for lessings.

Although S. Marcos had its own income, this was, at times, exceeded by its expenditure, with the Miserkórdia having to bail the hospital out so that it could continue to function. As well as having to rescue the hospital whenever extraordinary expenditures arose, such as treatments for syphilis, Miserkórdia funds had to be transferred to the hospital on several other occasions. This situation arose at the time due to ground rent and fees overdue to the hospital, sometimes by decades. Another constant problem throughout the history of S. Marcos Hospital was the enormous volume of patients and their precarious financial situations. In the final years of the 17th century and beginning of the 18th, the financial situation of the hospital improved significantly, thanks to the growing number of legacies which they began to receive for the purpose of healing the sick, many of which came from Brazil. Under the providentship of Rodrigo de Moura Teles, a request was also made for a papal brief to secure the handover of unclaimed legacies from the diocese to S. Marcos, which arrived the following year. This request was made on the basis of the knowledge of events in hospitals in Lisbon and Évora.

As the 18th century dawned, the hospital stopped asking the Miserkórdia for money to cover its deficit, as it found itself in a healthier financial position, despite the increasing number of patients. Even so, the treasurers occasionally had to contribute from their own pocket to cover expenses, due to late
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payment of rent and ground rent and high spending.
At the end of the seventeen-hundreds, activity at the hos-
pital increased due to political events and the mobilisation of
troops. While demand for hospital services was on the rise,
difficulties collecting rent, ground rent and payment from the
state for the treatment of soldiers were worsening, as was
poverty in the city. Poor harvests, price increases and crisis
in the agricultural sector did nothing to help rent payments.
In 1794, the Misericórdia decided to ask the Queen for per-
mission to establish a lottery in support of the hospital, the
income from which would be invested in its work and other
necessities. At the same time, it also asked that income from
the real d'água tax, levied on certain foods and drinks, be di-
rected to the hospital. Coordinated efforts were made, using
all means available to ensure that S. Marcos was able to cover
the costs it was faced with.
Times were hard and only became harder with the enormous
volume of soldiers treated in the hospital itself, as well as
other hospitals set up around the city by S. Marcos in order to
respond to the needs of the military. This situation began be-
fore the French invasions and continued long after their end.
Political events overseas followed by the Civil War in Portugal
proved very costly for the hospital.
This led successive administrations to attempt to cut costs,
reducing the volume of admissions and giving each district
hospital responsibility for the care of own patients, especially
from the 20th century onwards. From 1778, those who had the
means to do so paid for their hospital stay, and free healthcare
was reserved only for the poorest. Paying for treatment be-
came increasingly common over the course of the eighteenth-
hundreds and became the norm in the following century.
Coming largely from the working classes, many hospital
users did not have the means to pay the fees calculated at
a daily rate on the basis of their patient "category". The hos-
hospital employed a set list of charges for different categories of user, but the fees of the poorest patients had to be covered by the local councils. These price lists were occasionally updated, usually at times of financial hardship. 

Whilst this was commonplace in the contemporary era, during the Modern Era, the inpatients of S. Marcos were mainly paupers – people who received free treatment as they had no possessions. The patient profile also changed over the course of time. In the 16th and 17th centuries most of those admitted to the infirmaries of S. Marcos came from Braga and the surrounding area, although a few patients came from further afield. However, in the 18th century, geographic boundaries were torn down and patients travelled to the hospital from increasingly distant locations.

During the 19th and 20th centuries, the hospital received patients from all over the Minho province. As it improved and modernised, more serious cases were admitted from areas which already had local hospitals.

During the first and second world wars, financial crisis once again took hold. Out of funds, the hospital was running on donations and, in 1943, the Santa Casa decided to make an appeal to the parishes of the municipality, known as a cor-tejo de oferendas, or “courting of offerings”. At the same time, stronger appeals were made to central government for subsidies. These types of appeal were also made on several other occasions.

From the 18th century, in order to respond to growing and increasingly complex patient demand, S. Marcos Hospital used the momentum of the era to carry out much needed refurbishment work. In 1720 the Board held a meeting on the urgent need for work, and commissioned Manuel Pinto de Vilalobos to produce a floorplan. Work carried on throughout this decade and into the next, but now to plans drawn up by Italian artist Carlos António Leoni. At the end of the century, Carlos
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Amarante was responsible for major work on the church and hospital. The building grew, but a century later, despite the acquisition of Palácio do Raio increasing the floorspace dedicated to treatment and healing, the need for a new hospital became evident.

This dream was postponed until the idea once again emerged under the Republic, and work began to build a new hospital complex in the Infias neighbourhood. Although started, this project was never completed, and with it the possibility of building a new hospital from scratch also died. Nevertheless, S. Marcos continued to grow in the second half of the 20th century, with the construction of a new building located to the South, which significantly increased the size of the hospital, and the construction of a new surgical block in 1998. However, these additional treatment spaces, which altered the layout of S. Marcos and enabled it to respond to the increasing demand for its services, all formed part of the same, original site.

In order to offer its patients the best treatment and reduce costs, the hospital had its own apothecary from the 17th century. However, this closed for unknown reasons, before re-opening in 1733, “just as it had been”, due to high expenditure with the city’s apothecaries, its suppliers. During the period when it did not have its own apothecary, the institution drew up contracts with other apothecaries in the city for the supply of the necessary remedies.

Scientific advances also had an impact on this service. Little by little, the apothecary was transformed, gaining not only books, but also many tools and drugs purchased in Lisbon by the head pharmacist. The apothecary not only provided for the needs of the hospital, but also sold to the public. It was therefore located in an easy to reach area with an external door, making it accessible to those wishing to purchase medications. These changes led to the creation of the Pharmacy, a service which played an increasingly important role in the Misericórdia. Providing medication to the hospital was an important part of this, but it also distributed remedies free of charge to the poor of the city and many of its institutions. In the 20th century, the confreres also had the right to purchase medicines at a reduced price.

Despite giving rise to expenditure, the Pharmacy always generated an income. This balance ensured that it has lasted over time and remains in service today. Playing a crucial role in the treatment of disease, S. Marcos Hospital played a unique role in the history of the city and region for over 500 years. It was born in the same place it died, despite undergoing many transformations over the course of its existence. It witnessed many changes which aimed to improve efficiency and respond to constantly increasing patient numbers. It grew in terms of size, number and qualification of healthcare professionals, and hygiene and public health practices, and developed specialisations in line with the changing needs of the times. It did all of this in order to more effectively treat illness and promote public health.
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