Mounted Coconuts, Bezoars, Slaves, and Chinese Porcelain: The Material Culture of the Donors of the Misericórdia of Porto (1500–1640)

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This study focuses on a peripheral port city, Porto, during the sixteenth and early seventeenth century, and examines its connections to the territories of the Portuguese expansion through the consumption of exotic commodities. It covers a period where their diffusion has been mostly observed within court circles and when most European countries did not have contact with such areas. The main sources used are the donations of benefactors to the local Misericórdia, a confraternity that connected city dwellers with their deceased relatives in Asia and Brazil, and also received donations from persons who had never travelled overseas. Provincial elites and nonprivileged intermediate groups could acquire exotic commodities, demonstrating that not only the idea of a top-down diffusion must be revised, but also attention must be drawn to the use of those commodities in the self-fashioning of the identities of the less rich and powerful.

By the middle of the sixteenth century, the city of Porto had left some of its medieval features behind: the bishops were no longer its seignorial authority; visiting aristocrats could stay in the city more than three consecutive days; as elsewhere in the kingdom, kings tried to exert a tighter authority over the city; its mercantile families had already initiated their transformation into a new group of local nobles, often through genealogical fraud.¹ In any case, the city's population is a good indicator of its small size, with 13,000 inhabitants in 1527 and 16,000 in 1623.² Although the city did not participate in maritime expansion in the same scale as Lisbon, many elite fathers sent their sons overseas, to India, where their ability to read and write would ensure posts in the royal administration or in the military, and no less important opportunities for maritime trade. Poorer boys also departed, engaged as soldiers or mariners. Few returned to their

²Silva, “Tempos modernos,” 265.
hometown; however, some of them chose the local confraternity of the Santa Casa da Misericórdia as their main inheritor.³

This article examines the benefactors of the Misericórdia of Porto who were related in some way to the Portuguese overseas expansion, either as return emigrants, as distant testators, or simply as consumers of exotic substances and objects from the East and Brazil, although the economic exploitation of the latter started only from 1530 onwards, at least where sugar is concerned. They are part of the wider group of individuals whose last wills donated assets to the Misericórdia of Porto, which also includes people that never left mainland Portugal. So far, 158 testators have been retrieved from the beginning of the confraternity until the end of the Dynastic Union in 1640, from all backgrounds of society, except the very poor that did not own anything to bequeath. Among those testators, we find humble as well as not so modest craftsmen, farmers, and small landowners; tradespeople and merchants; upwards in the social scale, we have nobles, fidalgos, or citizens (cidadãos, a local category of noblemen), categories that though they might overlap in the same person, meant membership to the elites of the city.⁴

Only a few donors shall be examined in this article, because information about mobile wealth is available either in their testaments themselves or in additional documents required by the administration of their assets, such as inventories, public auctions, and partitions, which are not always present in the documentation. In the overwhelming majority of cases, we have only the last will, followed by the registers of the administration of the assets by the confraternity. In any case, testaments are fascinating documents on their own; although the influence of mediators cannot be underestimated (such as notaries, priests and confessors, etc.), testaments often are the only document in the first person that the individual leaves for posterity during his or her lifetime. On the other hand, the Misericórdia rarely appropriated the mobile assets of donors; the common procedure was to auction them in its courtyard after proceeding with their inventorying and evaluation, and the profits of the sale were often invested in convertible bonds. Several of these auction records have survived, listing both the sums collected per item and the identification of the buyer.


⁴It should be also remarked that notaries, lawyers, doctors, and officers in the royal administration were generally men belonging to one or more of these categories that also dominated the civil institutions of the city. For an excellent survey of the social map of the city, see Francisco Ribeiro da Silva, O Porto e o seu termo (1580–1640): Os homens, as instituições e o poder (Porto: Arquivo Histórico-Câmara Municipal do Porto, 1988), 1:233–352. For an extensive study of seventy elite families of Porto between 1500 and 1580, see Brito, Patriciado urbano.
It is now clear that European peoples were not the only ones to expand and create long distance trade routes that had an impact in empire building and migration, among other key issues such as biological exchanges and evangelization. In what concerns Europe, most studies have stressed imported commodities that often arrived in Italy via the Mediterranean and the Ottoman world, from where they could reach northern Europe. Although the same thirst for exotic commodities can be observed in most European areas, it is a fact that most studies approach the possessions of kings and princes, some of them being collectors. The Dutch are another case in point. Although the spread of Asian exotic commodities touched upon the intermediate groups, as Timothy Brook’s *Vermeer’s Hat* demonstrated so well, their diffusion occurred in a period after the one dealt with here, as the first voyage to Asia through the Cape route occurred in 1595–97. Before this voyage, however, the inhabitants of Porto were well acquainted with Asian exotica, as we shall see in a moment.

The persons studied in this article have almost all been mentioned by other scholars, or even studied in detail by them. The purpose, however, is to analyze the impact of exotic goods from overseas on the elites of the city, as well as its intermediate groups in a town that was not central to the Portuguese empire, and whose elite families were important only at the local level, as Porto was far from the normal itineraries of the court; there were few titled nobles and most of them were not connected to the royal court. As such, this case study offers a good example of the influence of overseas trade in early globalization of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It also demonstrates that exotic goods, in spite of their high market value, were not confined to the higher strata of the population, but could be owned by nonprivileged groups.

**The Misericórdias, a Global Confraternity**

Last wills and ensuing documents studied in this article do not reflect the whole universe of testators, but only those related to the Misericórdias. Founded from 1498 onwards, these confraternities were present in most Portuguese cities and towns, also overseas, recruiting members among the local elites and dispensing

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charity on a large scale, covering most situations of poverty and need.\textsuperscript{10} The beginnings of the local Misericórdia of Porto, however, were marked by the reluctance of the local gentry who dominated the municipal council to give up the administration of the medieval hospitals in favor of the confraternity, in the aftermath of a royal order of 1521 that was intended to merge those small institutions into a larger structure.\textsuperscript{11} By 1550, the local elites were already controlling the municipal council and the Misericórdia, the two main civic institutions in the city, and circulated between the vereação (the municipal board) and the mesa (the thirteen men who ruled the Misericórdia, headed by one of them, the provedor).\textsuperscript{12} The confraternity, however, in spite of its numerous donors (although generally of modest means), would find relative financial stability by the end of the sixteenth century through the substantial bequests of several very rich donors. In 1605, it began the construction of a general hospital, a large structure in comparison with the surviving scattered medieval hospitals. The city of Porto engaged in the usual palette of charitable services of a Misericórdia in an urban setting of considerable size: help to the deserving poor in their homes, gathering funds for the ransoming of captives in North Africa, donations of food and used clothes to the poor, assistance to poor prisoners, and the allocation of marriage dowries to poor girls.\textsuperscript{13} All these practices grew in proportion with the preferences stated in the donators’ last wills. One of those preferences, increasingly after 1550, was the granting of dowries to marriageable women, generally orphaned: several benefactors stipulated in their wills that the rents of the property bequeathed and even interests in loans to the monarchy (padrões de juro) would be employed in the financing of a fixed number of dowries per year.

\textsuperscript{10} On the presence of this confraternity in the Portuguese territories see C. R. Boxer, Portuguese Society in the Tropics: The Municipal Councils of Goa, Macao, Bahia, and Luanda, 1510-1800 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), and Isabel dos Guimarães Sá, Quando o Rico se faz Pobre: Misericórdias, Caridade e Poder no Império Português, 1500-1800 (Lisboa: Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses, 1997).

\textsuperscript{11} For a discussion on the conflicts between the king, the municipality, and the Misericórdia, see Basto, História da Santa Casa, 1:221-27.

\textsuperscript{12} The municipal council included a judge, four vereadores (town councillors), and one procurator. The teams also included two representatives of the guilds, a treasurer, and a scribe. Two almotóceis (price-fixers) were in charge of purveyance. Silva, “Tempos modernos,” 341-59. Lists of the ruling boards of both institutions can be found in Basto, História da Santa Casa, 1:416-20 (provedores from 1514-15 until 1583-84); Brito, Patriciado urbano, 421-39 (municipal offices between 1500 and 1580); Silva, O Porto e o seu termo, 2:1087-130 (municipal and royal offices, 1580-1640); and Freitas, História da Santa Casa, 123-47 (provedores and scribes of the Misericórdia, 1592-1642).

\textsuperscript{13} The logistics of the organization of ransoms in North Africa was an exclusive of the Trinitarians since 1561, when a contract was signed with King Sebastião. However, money was to be collected by the king’s institutions and the Misericórdias contributed to fund raising. Edite Alberto, “Um Negócio Piedoso: O Resgate de Cativos em Portugal na Época Moderna” (PhD diss., Universidade do Minho, 2011), 85, 192. See also António Álvares, Compromisso da Irmandade da Casa da Santa Misericórdia da cidade de Lisboa (Lisbon, 1600), chap. 33.
There is also an important reason that attracted donations to the Misericórdias, as they were officially in charge of transmitting the inheritances of those who died far from home to their heirs. A flow of letters circulated between the various Portuguese factories in India to Goa or Cochin, and then to Lisbon, who in turn sent them to the rest of the kingdom. Such letters between Misericórdias, now mostly lost, connected people from all parts of the Portuguese empire.\textsuperscript{14} Inheriting from an overseas testator took a long time: heirs had to be searched for and contacted in all Portugal, and certified; then the local Misericórdia wrote back and the process of transferring the inheritance itself started. To the long distances travelled by letters, which in itself could take many years back and forwards, sometimes getting lost on the way; administrative malfunctioning or corruption could cause extra difficulties. Many testators, knowing how capricious and time consuming the transmission of inheritances might be, hoped to accelerate the process by also including the Misericórdias in their wills. The surprise is that some heirs actually received their inheritances, as the case of Porto illustrates; others did not, especially when the kings levied funds from the Asian Misericórdias, in the context of the downfall of the Portuguese empire in Asia under the pressure of the English and the Dutch.\textsuperscript{15}

The Portuguese inheritance system also needs some explanation: sons and daughters were in theory expected to inherit equally, although the third part of the estate, the terça de alma, was allowed to be bequeathed freely to whomever the testator chose. It was especially designed to cover funeral expenses and provide for the transit of the soul from purgatory to paradise through the saying of masses or practices of charity. However, this portion could be used to favor an heir above the others, thus transforming the system into one of unequal partibility, also enhanced by the existence of indentured property, the morgadio, in which a chosen heir received the most valued part of family property, both in symbolic and economic terms. As to illegitimate offspring, they could receive the terça in case their father was a noble and wished to leave it to them, provided that he validated it in his last will; in the case of nonnobles, all children were to inherit


\textsuperscript{15} Sá, \textit{Quando o Rico}, 204–11.
equally, legitimate and illegitimate.\textsuperscript{16} Also, the number of mandatory heirs was limited: the condition of herdeiro forçado (mandatory heir) only applied to sons and daughters or parents, thus ensuring that only immediate vertical lines benefited from the estate, meaning that brothers and sisters, together with cousins, were left out of inheritances, although the law was very clear about the terça, which the testator might dispose of freely.\textsuperscript{17} The fortune of confraternities and other institutions that received inheritances lay in those who did not have mandatory heirs, who could leave everything they owned to an institution: childless couples, single men, widowed women with no children, and secular priests. They ultimately became the main resource of the Misericórdias, whose patrimonial growth depended upon them.

\textbf{SEVEN BENEFACIORS OF THE MISERICÓRDIA OF PORTO}

Our small group of benefactors includes seven main individuals: Lopo de Almeida (ca. 1525–84), a confessor of Philip II, accused of Lutheranism by the Portuguese Inquisition in his young years; another secular priest, André Coutinho (d. 1597), who lived as a merchant in Macao for thirty-eight years; Diogo Ferreira (d. 1581), a captain and merchant doing business in Quito and Seville; Luísa Pessoa (d. 1596), the widow of an important fidalgo of the city; Afonso Pires Borreco (d. 1578), a scribe to the judge of orphans whose wife was mentally disabled; Álvaro Vieira Dinis, a rural nobleman who bequeathed his estate orally to the Misericórdia, infuriating his kin; and Domingos Monteiro (d. 1591), captain-major of the Japan voyage, who died on the way from Melaka to Macao.\textsuperscript{18} We shall proceed to a brief analysis of their social backgrounds, trajectories, and material contexts.

\textbf{Lopo de Almeida}

Lopo de Almeida was the fifth son of one of the most prominent aristocratic families in Lisbon, his father being related to D. Francisco de Almeida, the first viceroy of India, and his mother coming from a family of rich merchants of Flemish origin.\textsuperscript{19} In his youth, he attended several universities; his stay in France and

\textsuperscript{16}Ordenações de D. Afonso V, bk. 4, título 98; Ordenações Manuelinas, bk. 4, título 71, Ordenações Filipinas, bk. 4, título 92, available at http://www.bnportugal.pt.

\textsuperscript{17}Ordenações de D. Afonso V, bk. 4, título 102; Ordenações Manuelinas e Filipinas, bk. 4, título 91, available at http://www.bnportugal.pt.

\textsuperscript{18}The captain-general was awarded the captaincy of the annual carrack that made the voyage to China and Japan, and he acted as governor of Macao during his ships’ ten or eleven month stay in that port. He was considered as the senior Portuguese authority both by the Japanese and Chinese he came in contact with. C. R. Boxer, \textit{The Christian Century in Japan 1549–1650} (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1993), 144–45, 160.

\textsuperscript{19}There is an extensive bibliography on D. Lopo de Almeida, as he is considered the most important benefactor of the Misericórdia of Porto. Artur de Magalhães Basto dedicates to him the second volume of his history of the institution. See Basto, \textit{História da Santa Casa}. 
travels in Flanders brought him into contact with the new religious ideas. In the beginning of the 1550s, upon his return to Portugal, he was to be incarcerated by the Inquisition, imprisoned under the accusation of heresy, released through the intercession of Cardinal D. Henrique, and later restored to his clerical dignity, in what seems to be a consequence of his high social status. We then lose track of his life, to find him again in the late 1570s, as a political agent to Philip II in the pursuit of the Portuguese crown. He was to live his last years in his house in Madrid, enormously rich, lending money to numerous debtors (including Empress Maria, who had got back to Spain in widowhood), and dictating a Livro Manual where he inventoried all his assets. His last will enabled the Misericórdia to leave difficult years behind, financing the construction of the main chapel of the church of the confraternity, which was to receive D. Lopo’s mortal remains. Not long after the confraternity started the building of a new large hospital that would be given his name. The reasons why he chose the Misericórdia do Porto are not clear, because D. Lopo did not have any significant ties with the city; his family was from Lisbon, and the only link to the city seems to be his position as secular priest in a distant rural parish of its bishopric in his obscure years as an ex-prisoner under the Inquisition.

The man suspected of Lutheranism, however, appears to have survived until old age: strangely enough, D. Lopo did not possess any books, religious or other, except for his ledgers; in order to be buried decently as a priest, some vestments had to be bought, because he did not own liturgical attire, only a canopy (surprising for a secular priest of his rank). His inventory lists jewels, two guitars, the usual table silver, several pieces of Indian cloth, probably kept as an investment or as loan insurance, and exotic objects and substances. Among those was a Maldives coconut mounted in gilt silver, and a small bezoar stone.\(^{20}\)

André Coutinho

André Coutinho was a fidalgo da casa real born in Porto; the name of his father is never given, but the testament declares the name of his mother, and states that she was buried in Lisbon.\(^{21}\) Coutinho declared in his will that he had neither inher-


\(^{21}\)His testament refers only to the name of the mother, Margarida (sometimes also named Maria) Rodrigues de Magalhães, buried in the church of Chagas in Lisbon. Despite our efforts, neither André Coutinho nor his mother has been found in any genealogy so far. Obviously, the fact that the name of the father is never mentioned leaves room for speculation. The Coutinhos are not among the families studied by Brito. Documents pertaining to his will can be found in Arquivo
ited from his family, nor obtained any rents from an ecclesiastical post; although he had been in minor orders for thirty years, he had not received the major ones until ca. 1578–79 when he was made a secular priest by D. Fr. Leonardo de Sá, bishop of Macau. Until then, he had spent thirty-eight years of his life trading in the China seas. His fortune was the product of nearly forty years in maritime trade. In his last years in China as a priest, he seems to have served as an intermediary in the endless disputes between the Mendicants and the Jesuits. He then returned to Portugal, although not to his birth city of Porto, as he lived his last years as a secular priest in a small town of the Alentejo, Vidigueira, where he was close to some descendants of Vasco da Gama, who was the first count of the title, bestowed on him upon his successful exploits in the first maritime voyages from Europe to India. André Coutinho mentions one of Vasco da Gama’s grandsons, D. Miguel da Gama, and D. Francisco da Gama, fourth count of Vidigueira and twenty-second viceroy of India, his great-grandson, who received the first of his two nominations to the viceroyalty in 1597.

Although Coutinho did not mention any relative in his last will to whom he wished to leave property, his testament testifies to the intention of not forgetting anyone from his social relations, or the institutions he wanted to favor. Starting with the lay recipients, we have the descendants of Vasco da Gama, Miguel da Gama and D. Francisco da Gama; Rui Pires da Veiga, inquisitor in Évora, Cecília de Matos, widow of Pêro de Cabral, and her daughter Beatriz Cabral; and Antónia de Guimarães from Évora, possibly the daughter of Rui Pires da Veiga. All these people lived in south Alentejo and seem to be from the same family network. Coutinho also included in his will the daughters of two companions who had died in China, one from Vila Boim and the other from Alenquer, mentioning the members of their families back in Portugal that should be contacted in order to receive the money he bequeathed to them. It is surprising that he does not mention any relative in Porto, suggesting that he either did not have them, or

Histórico da Santa Casa da Misericórdia do Porto (hereafter AHSCMP), série H, banco 6, livro 17, 156r onwards and série H, banco 6, livro 3, 76r onwards.

22 Ordination included four minor orders, but it took another three major ones to become a mass priest. Dates forwarded by Luísa Penalva, “André Coutinho and the Vidigueira Treasure,” in Voyages: The Vidigueira Treasure, ed. Ana de Castro Henriques (Lisbon: Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, 2011), 6. Fr. Leonardo was bishop of Macao from 1578 to 1597; Fortunato de Almeida states that he remained in Goa until 1585. He then travelled to Macao and fell prisoner on the coast of Aceh until 1594, sojourning in his diocese only between that year and his death in 1597. Fortunato de Almeida, História da Igreja em Portugal (Porto: Livraria Civilização, 1968), 2:705.


24 D. Francisco da Gama was married to Leonor Coutinho, who has the same surname as our benefactor; however, her possible kinship with André Coutinho is yet unknown. On her lineage, see António Caetano de Sousa, História Genealógica da Casa Real Portuguesa (Coimbra: Atlântida, 1953), 10:336 and 11:51.

25 André Coutinho’s testament can be read in AHSCMP, série H, banco 2, livro 2, 7r–23r. There is also a full transcription published in Freitas, História da Santa Casa, 57–72.
had cut ties with them over time. He benefited both the Misericórdia of Porto and Vidigueira in equal parts, but mostly the Carmelite convent of Nossa Senhora das Relíquias, also in Vidigueira, where a chapel was to be built in order to host his mortal remains.

There is no inventory of his assets, but his last will, dated from 24 March 1595, is very detailed as to his possessions: Chinese porcelains, Asian slaves, liturgical cloths made in China, quilts from Bengal, devotional objects such as reliquaries, a missal lectern, an altar card lined with silver, a pax, thuribles, an incense boat, etc. Of these, three rather precious liturgical and devotional silver objects, of Asian production, survive as the “treasure of Vidigueira” and are on display in Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga in Lisbon.\(^{26}\) Also, his testament makes abundant mention of his many liturgical vestments, which were distributed to churches in Vidigueira and also to its Misericórdia, the Misericórdia of Porto, and to a set of six shrines (ermidas) in the perimeter of this city. Of course, all were made of embroidered Chinese silk.\(^{27}\) The numerous porcelains he bequeathed generously to his relations were also from China, and some were destined to the “casa de vidros” of the count of Vidigueira himself; however, André Coutinho stated in his will that the count, as Estado da India’s new viceroy, would bring better samples from India.\(^{28}\) Slaves brought back from the East were also important in André Coutinho’s estate: nine persons, both black and Chinese, who must have caused a sensation in the small rural town of Vidigueira.\(^{29}\) They were predominantly male, except for an old black cook. Some of them were bequeathed to the local Carmelite convent of Nossa Senhora das Relíquias, where Coutinho founded a rich chapel for his mortal remains, and also to his friends in Vidigueira. As to the Misericórdias he benefited, those of Porto and Vidigueira, the money was destined to the dowering of girls.

\(^{26}\) The treasure includes a reliquary, the pax, and the missal lectern. An exhibition took place in 2011, accompanied by the publication of a series of articles. See Castro Henriques, *Voyages. The life and legacy of André Coutinho are also explored in detail by Silva, “E muy rica prata fina,” 305–37.

\(^{27}\) On the consumption of Chinese textiles in Portugal during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see Maria João Pacheco Ferreira, “Chinese Textiles for Portuguese Tastes,” in *Interwoven Globe: The Worldwide Textile Trade, 1500–1800*, ed. Amelia Peck (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013), 46–55. The author states that such textiles have been linked to members of nearly all social classes in the kingdom (54).

\(^{28}\) “Casas de vidro” probably referred to rooms in which walls or ceilings were decorated with fragments or whole pieces of Chinese porcelain, as can still be seen today in some palaces in Portugal. As an example, compare the picture of the seventeenth-century ceiling of the palace of the marquis of Abrantes (now the French Embassy), in Hélder Carita and António Homem, *Oriente e Ocidente nos Interiores em Portugal* (Porto: Civilização, 1983), 100–101. Other extant examples can be seen in Palácio da Ega (Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Lisbon) and Palácio do Vimeiro (Centro Interdisciplinar de História, Culturas e Sociedades—CIDEHUS, Évora).

\(^{29}\) As testaments can refer several times to the same slave by naming their attributes—i.e., z “o meu china” (my china); “a minha negra” (my black woman)—in other occasions their names, it is possible to commit mistakes when counting them.
At the time he wrote his testament, he possessed numerous ornaments: besides separate vestments, he mentions at least three complete sets (including a chasuble, two dalmatics, an altar frontal, and capes), and five to six minor ensembles, also complete, for the lesser days of the religious calendar. Besides, he owned all other textile garments used in church, such as altar linens, amices, albs, corporals, surplices, purificators, etc. All his liturgical equipment, including metal ware, was owned in two versions: the more valuable sets, for holy days, and the lesser ones, for everyday religious ceremonies.

André Coutinho was very specific about the destiny to be given his slaves after his passing. He bequeathed Francisco, a tailor, to the convent of Nossa Senhora das Reliquias, with the condition that he should never be freed or sold, so that he could sweep Coutinho's chapel and also the convent's church in order to do penance for his sins. Juliana, his old black cook (“a minha negra velha”) and his Chinese barber would be given to Miguel da Gama; the boys Estêvão e Apolinário would go to Rui Pires da Veiga, declaring that if they behaved badly they should never be freed; Zacarias would be expelled from the convent in the same day of Coutinho's death, in order to gain his living; Helena, a Chinese slave, would be given to Cecília de Matos; while Marta, the daughter of the black cook Juliana, would be given to Beatriz Cabral, who was Cecília's daughter; two other blacks should be sold.

Diogo Ferreira

Our next donor, Diogo Ferreira, was the illegitimate offspring of an elite family in Porto, with numerous connections to the municipal council and the Misericórdia. Like D. Lopo de Almeida, he was a second son, but unlike Almeida, he followed a military career, as he served the Spanish empire as captain in Peru, where he also did business. In his later years he resided in Seville, where he

30 A purificator is a white linen cloth that is used to wipe the chalice after each communicant partakes (in Portuguese sanguinho).

31 “para os servir e ter cuidado de varrer a minha capela e igreja e não poderão os padres alienar nem vender nem mudar para outro convento que nele quero faça penitência de seus pecados” (in order to serve them and sweep my chapel and the church and the priests shall not be allowed to sell or transfer him to another convent because I want him to do penance for his sins in it). AHISCMP, série H, banco 2, livro 2, 14v.

32 “tanto que eu falecer no mesmo dia o botem pela porta fora que vá buscar sua vida” (shall be thrown out the door on the same day I die so that he will earn his living). AHISCMP, série H, banco 2, livro 2, 18r.

33 His father was Pantaleão Ferreira, scribe of the municipal council and also member of the Misericórdia. Brito, Patriciado urbano, 156–58, 260, 374, 402. See also Cristóvão Alão de Morais, Pedatura Lusitana (Braga: Carvalhos de Basto, 1997–98), 4:103–13, and Manuel José da Costa Pellegras Gayo, Nobiliário de Famílias de Portugal (Braga: Carvalhos de Basto, 1989), 14:41–42.

34 On Quito and its whereabouts, as well as on the existing economic activities, see Isabel Araújo Branco, Margarita Eva Rodríguez García, and Teresa Lacerda, eds., Descrição geral do Reino de Peru, em particular de Lima (Lisbon: Universidade Nova de Lisboa, CHAM, 2013), 105–6.
drew his testament on the eve of his death on 29 July 1581. He lived in someone else’s house, and thus no domestic wares were listed in the inventory. In turn, he possessed an extensive personal wardrobe, including many pairs of leather shoes and boots, which were to be given partially to Diego, the son of a Diogo Ferreira’s former Indian (Peruvian?) servant, who claimed to be his illegitimate child and contested his testament. Diogo Ferreira’s assets included a set of devotional books, all related to a post-Tridentine penitential spirituality. However, the inventory lists their titles only, which allow for a limited identification. We can affirm that there were four unspecified books by fray Luis de Granada, and the first two parts of *Espejo de Consolación de Tristes* by the Franciscan Juan de Dueñas, whose first edition was in 1543 in Seville. It is somewhat surprising that the two other donors we have examined so far, both secular priests (Lopo de Almeida and André Coutinho), are not reported to have owned any books, devotional or otherwise.

As a single man whose parents had died some years before, Diogo Ferreira could bequeath his property freely, bequeathing Diego 1,400 ducats, stating that he would lose this if he put himself forward as his son. Obviously, he did not acknowledge paternity, although Diego negotiated an extra one hundred ducats worth of clothes out of his estate as a result of his claim. He did not continue his suit, apparently being satisfied by the garments he received from his late “father.” As to Diogo Ferreira’s charitable preferences, he also benefited marriageable girls, and the deserving poor.

It is also significant that Diogo’s inventory did not list any Asian objects, a feature he shared with other inhabitants of Seville, who preferred to abide by the traditional Moorish taste or import European goods.

**Luísa Pessoa**

Luísa Pessoa is the only woman in our sample, although female donors were not rare in the Misericórdia of Porto, as 90 women in the total number of 257 donors between 1500 and 1699 bequeathed property to the Misericórdia on their own. She was the widow of an important local fidalgo, Bernardo Figueiroa, and did not have mandatory heirs; she bequeathed property to her nephews and to the Misericórdia of Porto. Luísa is said to have had intermittent bouts of madness, which caused the Misericórdia to worry in a meeting that took place in 1595

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35 AHSCMP, série H, banco 5, livro 1, 164r–94r.
37 On Bernardo Figueiroa and his lineage, see Morais, *Pedatura Lusitana*, 3:30. He was vereador in the municipal council in 1575 and 1579. On the Pessoas from Porto, see Morais, *Pedatura Lusitana*, 3:30.
38 On her and her husband’s family, see Brito, *Patriciado urbano*, 118–19.
about the possibility of being disinherit in a testament she was pressured to elaborate. It was subsequently invalidated, as Luísa confessed to have drawn it in a period of insanity, and she left all her assets to the Misericórdia in a new testament dated 23 February 1596.39

Her last will, followed by an extensive inventory of her assets, consisting of both rural property and housewares, does not include a significant number of objects from the Portuguese seaborne empire. However, seven items of Chinese porcelain can be found, a cot from India, and a wooden box from Brazil. She also possessed two slaves, both women. Her dowry contract, made in 1565, thirty years before, included three slaves, an eight-year-old boy, a thirty-five-year-old man, and a twenty-four-year-old woman. We do not know if the woman slave mentioned in her last will corresponds to the one mentioned in her dowry, but this group of three slaves deserves special mention for one reason: they are the only slaves in our documentation identified as white.40

Afonso Pires Borreco

Afonso Pires Borreco had started his life in a lesser background (his parents were from Sardal, a town near Santarém), ascending to the office of scribe of the judge of orphans, living a very influential life as member of several confraternities in the city of Porto, including the Misericórdia. He made his fortune through continuous investment in the acquisition of urban houses and also lent money on credit sometimes through pawning.41 He did not have any heirs to leave his assets to, however. His wife, the daughter of a shoemaker from Porto, was mentally disabled, and so was legally regarded in the same category as the orphaned children over whom he had charge. Because of this, the Misericórdia took particular care in inventorizing all his property, although the confraternity was entitled only to half of it by Borreco’s testament, the other half belonging to his wife’s heirs.

His main mobile property consisted of his house equipment; the objects he had accepted as pawns; the rents to be paid by the tenants to his houses; and the debts owed to him (which went mostly unpaid). As far as we know, Afonso Pires

39AHSCMP, série D, banco 8, livro 3, 90v [29 January 1595], and série H, banco 6, livro 17, 57v.
40Arquivo Distrital do Porto, Notariais, 4.º Cartório Notarial do Porto, livro 20, 44v–49r. Although there are no specific studies on white slaves in Portugal for this period, many references to them have been found in fifteenth-century sources. See Arquivos Nacionais/Torre do Tombo, Fragmentos, cx. 3, m. g. 1, n.º 84. Anselmo Braamcamp Frêre, “Inventário da infanta D. Beatriz 1507,” Arquivo Histórico Português 9 (1914): 64–110. Saul António Gomes, As cidades têm uma história: Caldas da Rainha das origens ao século XVIII (Caldas da Rainha: Património Histórico, 1994), 45; António Gomes da Rocha Madahil, ed., Crónica da Fundação do Mosteiro de Jesus de Aveiro, e Memorial da Infanta Santa Joana Filha Del Rei Dom Afonso V (códice quinhentista) (Aveiro: F. Ferreira Neves, 1939), 119.
Borreco did not have any connections to the empire, although the inventory of his assets lists various objects of Asian provenance such as Indian cots and textiles. A common feature with every testament in our sample is the presence of slaves; his four slaves and a horse were sold together for the price of 94,000 reais.

Álvaro Vieira Dinis

Our next donor seems to have been a rural nobleman, although many of his family members were based in the city of Porto.\(^{42}\) He lived in his Quinta da Conca, a day away from the city of Porto, and left all his property to the Misericórdias of Porto and Mesão Frio, dying with a nuncupative testament that was to infuriate his kin, and caused the confraternity to wait until 1615 to take possession of his assets. Genealogies ascribe him an illegitimate son, Gaspar. At least eight first cousins,\(^{43}\) from both Álvaro’s mother and father lines, allied themselves to reject his last will. In the case of three female members of this group, their husbands showed up to apply for a piece of the inheritance. It is interesting to note that his illegitimate son, although married and with children, did not form part of this large group of objectors, probably because, as the bastard of a nobleman, he had no legal rights to claim his father’s inheritance. Two women who were supposed illegitimate daughters of the deceased still claimed a thousand cruzados as dowry, however, but the matter did not go further than this, which indicated that they gave up their claim.\(^{44}\)

The final sentence of the court of appeal states several interesting things, such as Álvaro’s proclaimed refusal to marry, and his dislike for his relatives, as he was heard to affirm that only the Misericórdia would take care of his soul and property. The contestants, as can be expected, alleged that the Misericórdia had bought the testimony of some witnesses. In any case, it is a fact that inheritances devoted to pious causes such as this were privileged under the eyes of the law, and the Misericórdia won the case, probably against the interests of some of Porto’s outstanding authorities of the time, who were relatives of the deceased and claimants to his inheritance.\(^{45}\) When finally the Misericórdia took hold of his mobile possessions, an inventory was drawn shortly afterwards, and the things were auctioned in the yard of the confraternity’s building. His belongings can be

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\(^{42}\)Álvaro Vieira Dinis was the first son of Dinis Vieira, owner of Quinta da Conca, and his wife, Isabel Leme. He was the grandson of Álvaro Vieira, who lived in the Rua Nova in the times of King Manuel I and João III, and was vereador for several years; he was the great grandson of Álvaro Vieira Dinis, who died in 1510. Gayo, Nobiliário de Famílias, 10:183.

\(^{43}\)One of them, Grácia Vieira, was dead and represented by her daughter Maria Vieira, married to Francisco Baião de Magalhães.

\(^{44}\)AHSCMP, série D, banco 8, livro 4, 264v [13 February 1619].

\(^{45}\)This sentence can be read in AHSCMP, série H, banco 1, livro 46, 1r onwards. One of the claimants to his inheritance was the scribe of the municipality, married to Maria Vieira Dinis, a second cousin of Álvaro, Francisco Baião de Magalhães. On this person, see the numerous references included in Silva, O Porto e o seu termo.
identified as those of a rural landowner (several agricultural instruments, horse trappings, raw wool, flax, cereal that his cottiers were to deliver to the Misericórdia, etc.). The fact is that he was to inherit not only his Quinta da Conca, but also several parcels that both his father and mother had acquired during the 1550s and beyond, to which Álvaro had added his own acquisitions.46 This attests to the prosperity of the family itself during these years, although we do not know where it derived from. As we shall see, Álvaro’s mobile possessions suggest that either he, or someone in his family, might have been to India.

His wardrobe equaled his noble condition (although not as luxurious as that of Diogo Ferreira), with several doublets and capes kept in a box from India. But the surprise lies in his jewelry: two earrings with six pearls and two seed pearls (aljófar); an ambergris pear with a pearl, a bezemar stone mounted in gold filigree; another two little pears in filigree, one empty and the other filled with amber.47 There were also fifteen rings (only two in gold; four with rubies from Ceylon, two with uncut diamonds and four with turquoise, three with other stones). He also possessed two chaplets made of Indian red stones, with five main beads in amber clothed with gold filigree, each with its cross. Lesser Indian textiles, such as canequim (cotton cloth), were also present in his belongings.

**Domingos Monteiro**

Domingos Monteiro was a merchant and captain-major of the voyage to Japan, which linked Goa to this archipelago via the straight of Melaka and Macao, and he probably traded in the usual commodities of that trade route, such as slaves from various Asian provenances, musk, and Chinese porcelain. In order to supervise business, the Portuguese crown awarded the post of captain-general of such voyages to a given merchant, who was also to perform the duties of governor of Macao. Domingos felt sick along the way, making his testament in Melaka, adding to this a codicil written while he was still sojourning in the city, and a second one while he was dying on board.48 This last document needed certification upon the arrival in Macao, as he had not signed it, but only wrote a signal that his travel mates had to recognize in the presence of the local ouvidor.49

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46 By 1562, his mother, Isabel Leme, was already a widow, but appears in several notarial contracts, AHSCMP, série H, banco I, livro 46, 171r onwards.

47 Nuno Vassallo e Silva considers that the oldest works in filigree from India have their origin in Portuguese commissions. See Silva, “E muy rica prata fina,” 579. On bezemars mounted in filigree, see 589–92.

48 Domingos Monteiro is included in the lists of captain-generals of the voyage to Japan and governors of Macao, drawn up by Charles Boxer, as having made the trip during 1576, 1577, 1578, and 1586. He also appears as governor of Macao during the same years. He is referred to as governor in 1592, which is not possible since he died in 1591. His cousin, Gaspar Pinto da Rocha, to whom he left his position in the voyage, however, appears as captain-general and governor in 1593. See C. R. Boxer, Fidalgos no Extremo Oriente (Macao: Fundação Oriente, Museu e Centro de Estudos Marítimos de Macau, 1990), 273–79.

Domingos Monteiro did not claim noble status in his testament, although he could have certainly done so, as he belonged to an old family of *fidalgos*. Domingo's testament mentions eight men with the same surname, albeit without stating any kin relationship (although three are declared to be his nephews and were in Asia at the time). His last will illustrates the networks of cooperation among Portuguese merchants in Asia. At least two persons named in his testament and codicils, living in Asia at the time, were testators to the Misericórdia of Porto: Brás de Araújo, who wrote his testament in Chaul in 1582 and António Rebelo Bravo (the latter would later leave an indentured property [*morgado*] in northern Portugal to his daughter living in Goa). Like André Coutinho, Domingos Monteiro provided for the families of other Portuguese deceased in the East, making arrangements that implied knowledge of the whereabouts of their heirs back in Portugal. Another striking feature is the mobility of all these men: Monteiro's mother-in-law resided in Cochin; the two other men from Porto, António Rebelo Bravo and Brás de Araújo, lived in Goa, although they testified in Macao in order to validate his last codicil, made on board. No doubt, all three men were involved in the maritime trade between Goa, Melaka, Macao, and Japan. Domingos Monteiro declared he was married although he did not acknowledge any legitimate or illegitimate children; he provided for several nephews both in Portugal and in Asia; he left his position as captain of the voyage to Japan, which he presaged would not finish, to a cousin, Gaspar Pinto da Rocha.

Domingos Monteiro mentioned some merchandise left somewhere along his trade routes: a flask with musk, silk, and *louça fina* (fine earthenware), probably Chinese porcelain. In addition, he mentions three *boticas* (shops?) left to the care of his mother-in-law in Cochin. He states in his testament, however, that he owned *many* slaves, designated as *moças e moços japoas e japões*, that is, Japanese girls and boys (it is significant that he did not mention the exact number of slaves he owned). The girls were to be freed from slavery upon his death and received fifty *pardaus* each. They were scattered along his trade routes: some were with him, some in Goa with an unnamed sister-in-law, and others with his cousin Gaspar Pinto da Rocha. The latter would be responsible for them until they were old enough to marry. The boys were also in different regions of Asia; he freed them all and left them ten *pardaus* (forty *pardaus* less than the girls). Other slaves would be sold after his death: a kaffir named Alexandre (a surgeon), an unnamed barber, and a *comprador* (man in charge of buying food supplies) who

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50 Accurate information about his siblings can be found in Morais, *Pedatura Lusitana*, 4:100.
52 *Botica* is generally the Portuguese word for apothecary, but in this case is more likely to mean an ordinary shop.
53 The *pardau* was used as the equivalent of the cruzado (400 réis) or the Spanish rial-of-eight.
had tried to escape in Cochin, and a Chinese tailor that the bishop (unnamed) had given him as a captive in Melaka.\textsuperscript{54}

**Conclusion**

For the people who bequeathed their assets, in total or in part, to the Misericórdia of Porto, several issues might be at stake. In the first place, the majority of these material goods were to be converted into spiritual ones, either through the organization of funeral ceremonies that ensured a privileged transit to the afterlife, through the saying of perpetual masses, sometimes accompanied by the founding of a chantry, or other ritual practices such as the burning of candles for all eternity. All these acts benefited the soul of the deceased while at the same time served to remind the living of them. For those who had left long ago, sometimes decades earlier, to a faraway place, they served to reestablish a link with home that was long gone, a sort of posthumous return. Making the Misericórdia a mediator between them and their communities of origin (family, neighborhood, and city) was an insurance that whatever they had achieved in life would not go unnoticed. By the time news of their deaths arrived in Porto, they would certainly be remembered as cases of success by old acquaintances or their descendants who had heard of them. The religious purposes of the Misericórdia placed it above suspicion, being both a civic and a religious institution. A highly visible institution at the local level, it gathered the most prestigious men in the city, who were sometimes its aldermen, members of the clergy, or just the descendants of the noble elites.

The objects included in the testaments we have analyzed deserve some comments. First of all, some of the benefactors in our sample had not been to India, but possessed objects of Asian provenance: Chinese porcelain, textiles, Indian cots, bezoar stones, gems, and the like, which means that there was a local market for such commodities. This market is especially noteworthy because Porto was in a relative periphery of the Portuguese empire when compared to its center, Lisbon. Most of the donors we have analyzed originated from the elites in the city, probably all were citizens, but not all were fidalgos; some can be identified with the middle groups, as Afonso Pires Borreco, or with illegitimate branches of the local elites, such as Diogo Ferreira.

Among the exotic commodities documented in our sources, Chinese porcelain deserves specific mention. By 1596, when the Dutch read about Chinese porcelain for the first time in Jan Huygen van Linschoten's *Itinerario*, several of our donors actually owned some items of porcelain, as in the case of André.

\textsuperscript{54}These documents can be read in AHSCMP, série H, banco 6, livro 17, 280v onwards.
Another object that makes several appearances in our documentation is the Maldive coconut. Also known as sea coconut, it is a particular type of coconut, described in Garcia de Orta’s *Colóquios dos simples* as being found floating in the Indian ocean, originating from an island, which, in spite of its designation, belonged to the Seychelles and not to the Maldives. It was believed that the interior as well as the exterior of this fruit, generally with its two halves undivided, possessed anti-venom properties (a quality that Orta doubted). The author also noted that Queen Catherine of Austria (1507–78), one of the first orientalia collectors in Europe, if not the first, had special care in recommending that the captains of the Indian fleets brought her some from their voyages. However, their use seems to be expanded by the end of the sixteenth century: probably due to shape (in the sculptural form of female hips) the coconuts were cut in halves and mounted in silver, some used as chalices. It was believed that simply by drinking from them one was protected from poison, although coconut was used in Asia as an aphrodisiac.

Bezoar stones are also among the Asian objects ascribed with magic properties; they originated in the stomach and intestines of animals, especially ruminants. According to Orta, bezoars were used against poison or to protect from the plague, and they originated in a Persian wild goat that could also be found in India. Peter Borschberg, who has done extensive research on them, affirms that Lisbon was their distributing market and that they represent one of the major frauds in European medical history for two reasons: they did not have any curative properties, and most of the traded bezoars were fakes. Bezoars possessed the status of jewels, as they were expensive and valued; as we have seen in the case of Álvaro Vieira Dinis, they were encased in gold filigree. The provenance of the silver and gold of so many objects included in these testaments is difficult to assert, but this is not the case with precious gems. Most of the latter originated

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55Brook, Vermeer’s Hat, 62–63. Linschoten lived in Goa for several years during the 1580s; the information he disclosed in his work about the Portuguese in Asia paved the way for Dutch trade in the area.


in India, and even those that had formed part of medieval treasures arrived in Western Europe through the same trade route, as did Indian gems, even if some came from Persia or Egypt. Álvaro Vieira Dinis, and also Lopo de Almeida possessed bezoars, and the latter a mounted coconut, objects that have been found in other inventories and that were not as exceptional as might be expected, at least in the inventories of the wealthy, or the merchants who had easy access to such commodities. A common trait of objects such as mounted coconuts and bezoars is their connection with European fantasies of invulnerability, because they were both believed to grant protection against poison or the plague to their holders. In both cases, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries would readily unmask those protective qualities as frauds. In other cases, fantasies might have been more successful, as in the case of Diego, the servant who claimed to be Captain Diogo Ferreira’s son, and who managed to take hold of some of the latter’s best clothes, thus operating a change of social status from servant to gentleman.

Slaves were one of the most common possessions in our donors’ inventories. They come from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds including African and a myriad of Asian origins, such as Japanese, Chinese, Javanese, etc. In any angle that we consider them, they have to be thought of as exotic commodities. According to Patrick Geary, like relics, slaves belong to a category, unusual in Western society, of objects that are both persons and things. Igor Kopytoff discussed the process of commoditization during enslavement, arguing that slavery is a process of transformation that involves a succession of phases and changes in status. However, in several such changes, slaves are things. Our testators, as we have seen, exhibit a wide range of attitudes towards their slaves, from indifference to a real concern for their future, depending on their relationship with them. They ascribed different status to their slaves: the four slaves of Afonso Pires Borreco were sold and registered together with the sale of his horse when his assets were sold; some were freed upon his death, while others were bequeathed to legatees. In some cases, testators punished their slaves for bad behavior: André Coutinho ordered his slave Francisco to purge his sins by sweeping the floor of his funerary chamber, and António Monteiro stipulated that the slaves who had tried to escape him were to be sold after his death, while he worried about getting his Japanese slave girls married when they came of age.

59Karl-Heinz Spieß, “Asian Objects and Western European Court Culture in the Middle Ages,” in North, Artistic and Cultural Exchanges Between Europe and Asia, 1400–1900, 11.

60Although the word is not fully legible, Álvaro Vieira Dinis’s inventory also seems to list a small piece of unicorn, which has been left out of the analysis due to lack of certainty. On bezoars and mounted coconuts among the possessions of merchants, see James Nelson Novoa, “Unicorns and Bezoars in a Portuguese House in Rome: António da Fonseca’s Portuguese Inventories,” Agora: Estudos Clássicos em Debate 14 (2012): 99.


What can be said about the tastes of these benefactors? First of all, we should note how their choice of objects is not entirely determined by their social background or even their trajectory in life. We have seen two secular priests with no books (Lopo de Almeida and André Coutinho) while Diogo Ferreira, a captain, possessed penitential books that he could have used to examine his conscience. The same Diogo Ferreira died in someone else’s house but possessed a lavish wardrobe, including various pairs of shoes and boots; a scribe of the judge of orphans (Afonso Pires Borreco) kept pawned objects in his house, apparently without any attachment to them. The mobile property of Álvaro Vieira Dinis included precious Indian jewelry, although it is not known whether he ever left northern Portugal. André Coutinho, who was a secular priest in the last decades of his life, invested in liturgical attire made of precious Chinese cloths; he claimed to be a *fidalgo* born in Porto although his family cannot be traced in the genealogies of its elites.

At this point, and as a way of conclusion, it is better to quote the anthropologist Daniel Miller. “So people are not fully determined culturally, or parentally; but neither are they free agents who choose freely what they become. Through the reinforcement of various influences at particular times, certain traits and styles develop which come to characterise them, not as individuals but as networks of relationships.”

These seven inventories point to the early presence of objects from the Portuguese empire among the possessions of men that were not connected to court circles, with the probable exceptions of André Coutinho, who lived near the aristocracy of the empire, and Lopo de Almeida, who fought for the accession of Philip II to the Portuguese throne and moved to Madrid as a reward. It would be expected to find such objects among people who traded in them, such as our donors who had lived in the East, but evidence points to their presence in households that were not directly concerned with overseas trade. Attention to early consumers of exotica must now include common people. Porto was not the administrative or economic capital of the kingdom, since this role pertained to Lisbon; we might think of the city as a second rate seaport, modestly concerned with overseas trade. Long before the consumer revolution of the eighteenth century, people from small elites and intermediate groups in a provincial town could use exotic commodities to fashion their individual identities. Their involvement with a global world cannot be denied.

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