

# At the table in the shelter of St. Mary Magdalene of Braga (18<sup>th</sup> century)

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## Abstract:

It was at the table that the shelter of St. Mary Magdalene came together to feed the body and the spirit, involving physical sustenance to prayer. The meals were made with all the women present (except for the patients), ritualizing important moments of everyday life marked by isolation

Here, we studied the eating habits of this institution, analyzing the meals served in day-to-day and the existing changes on feast days. Characterized by some monotony, the power of isolation suffered changes in the Lenten period, when it imposed days of fasting and abstinence as well as in the moments of celebration. We will give particular attention to the acquisition of consumer products, as well as the composition of meals in an attempt to know the diet provided to these women.

Keywords: shelter of St. Mary Magdalene, food, meals.

## Introduction

The shelter of St. Mary Magdalene of Braga founded in 1720 by Archbishop D. Rodrigo de Moura Teles (1704-1728), opened its doors two years later. The institution was housed in a building built from scratch having need to wait two years until the works paid by Mitra were fully ready.

When doors opened, the institution housed twelve repentant women, one regent and a doorwoman, so fourteen, but it was already expected the possibility of collecting others that wanted to be away from the temptations of the world, having these *porcionistas* to pay for their stay. All who came to convert, also the regent and doorwoman were supported by Mitra<sup>1</sup>.

All the shelter receiving support from the Mitra were women marked by a dissolute life and who sought through relocation in this "house of God" to change life, to regenerate spiritually and give a new direction to your body.

These homes had greater disclosure in the post-Trent, seeking to control women by meeting strict standards, the cloister, prayer and work.

The first statutes of St. Mary Magdalene show a fully filled daily schedule. The women dedicated mainly to prayer and work, so that they would not have free time, which would only lead to idleness and bad thoughts. Therefore, all their lives were normalized, watched and cloistered.

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<sup>1</sup> Check M. M. L., Araújo, "The archbishops of Braga and Their assistance to the poor in early modern Portugal", in *Mediterranean Studies*, vol. XVII, 2008, p. 103.

The food was also part of the life-changing program that these women were undergoing as they had to fast in the days "of the Church's precept" and, in its absence, on all Fridays of the year in honor of Christ and every Saturday in honor of Our Lady. From the rigor of fasting were only exempt those that had impediment considered legitimate because its practice contributed to the salvation of the soul<sup>2</sup>.

Fasting was seen as a punishment for sins committed and mortification of the appetites. The Braga's church established a monthly calendar of fasting, predicting only one meal during the day and a small snack at night. Exempted, however, from this rigor the sick, the old people, and the pregnant women<sup>3</sup>.

The mortification of the body was completed with the disciplines that they inflicted on themselves every Friday of the year and in Advent Wednesday and Lent, in the evening after mental prayer.

The meals were prepared in the kitchen, on a rotating basis by the own *women sheltered*, weekly assuming this task. It was intended for them to gain skills in a key area for the domestic economy. Every day in the evening, the one responsible for the next day meals, would talk to the regent to know what she should cook. Despite having to pay for their food, the *porcionistas* ate from the same "pot" as determined by the statutes<sup>4</sup>. This requirement meant the absence of privileges among the *women sheltered*.

### **Eating habits**

As the day began early in the institution, the main meals were also served early. Between October and the end of March, the first meal was served after 10 am and the remainder of the year at 11 am.

At the touch of the interior bell, all the women were heading to the refectory to in a community feed the body and the spirit. Standing they watched the prayers that the regent was doing in the middle of the room, asking God's blessing for the foods that were on the table and wishing that they would feed the body and virtue the spirit and would not reveal against the soul<sup>5</sup>. After this moment of imploring the divine on the foods that should favor the body and the soul, all in high voice prayed and afterwards would receive order from the regent to sit. This ritual would always happen when they were at the table, serving the occasion once again to pray for divine intercession.

As they ate they listened to readings of spirituality books or of lives of saints, made by one of the women sheltered that out loud would make known these texts. When none were able to do these readings they remained silent, taking the meals with courtesy and cleanliness.

The prayers and spiritual readings were combined to feed the spirit, while giving sustenance the body. The function of the prayers and the referred readings were associated

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<sup>2</sup> See R. Loreto Lopez, *Los convents femeninos y el urban world of la Puebla de los Ángeles del siglo XVIII*, Mexico, Colegio de Mexico; Historical Studies Centre, 2000, p. 146.

<sup>3</sup> *Constituições Sinodais do Arcebispado de Braga ordenadas pello Illustrissimo Senhor Arcebispo D. Sebastião de Matos Noronha no anno de 1639 E mandadas exprimir a primeira vez pelo Illustrissimo Senhor D. João de Sousa Arcebispo e Senhor de Braga Primas das Espanhas*, (1697), Lisboa, Officina de Miguel Deslandes, pages 162-164; F. Quellier, *La table des Français. Une Histoire culturelle (XVIe- début du XIXe siècles*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2007, pp. 126-132.

<sup>4</sup> Museum D. Diogo de Sousa (hereinafter MDDS), Fund of the shelter of St. Mary Magdalene, *Book of the old statutes*, folder No. 36, unpagged.

<sup>5</sup> MDDS, Fundo of the shelter of St. Mary Magdalene, *Book of the old statutes*, folder No. 36, unpagged.

with worldly pleasures that women could have on tasting food, modeled style of the monastic life where the sisters met the same rituals<sup>6</sup>.

The admitted could only get up from the table after the regent signal, to again listen to the superior standing once again in the middle of the refectory, thanking God for the gift of food and compassion with the sinners. In the end, all loudly chanted the same initial prayers and one more Our Father for the souls in Purgatory. As in convents, the ceremonial at the table was ruled by the silence and thanks, with no place for any word beyond the reading that was made<sup>7</sup>. The allusion to Purgatory would remember the sinful souls who suffered the penalties of that place between Heaven and Hell, where the souls could be rescued with the help of the living.

In the afternoon, after work, they would return to the refectory for dinner.

Products that served to cook meals were packed in the pantry, a place of restricted access to the pantry lady, who was to deliver them to the partner responsible for the meal. All fresh products consumed and that came from the garden were also collected by the "campeira".

The bread was made in the oven that was installed in the kitchen and made by the women sheltered also on a rotating basis. The statutes determined the monthly production of bread, but we believe it was necessary to cook it more regularly, especially when the shelter had more people. It was used the flour that came from Micho, but the house took on white bread probably intended for the *porcionistas*.

With the exception of the wages paid to those who provided services, the monthly discriminated expenses made possible to conclude that the food industry was the heaviest for the shelter.

The broth was made in iron pots and meals served in tin dishes, although there were crockery in the kitchen, which had to be renewed on a regular basis because it was easily broken. The pots in which they cooked were made from copper, a more robust material and with properties to maintain the food warmer for a longer period of time<sup>8</sup>. Copper was also more hygienic than clay.

The document collection of the shelter of St. Mary Magdalene only integrates the period between 1769 and 1774 spending notebooks with the products purchased, which prevents us from knowing further the feeding of the women sheltered.

The biggest expense made in the indicated period refers to the purchase of beef, representing 38% of the total expenditures made in food. This was acquired in the city's butchers every month and in considerable quantity. The pork meat was also consumed fresh and salted, but the pigs were raised in the institution and subsequently killed<sup>9</sup>. The pork meat was heavily consumed by less high social groups and when salted could be consumed throughout the year. Apart from the meat to eat, from the pig they could still take advantage from the bowels and even fat to make grease<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> In convents, the meals were also accompanied by prayers and readings from spiritual books. Read up R. Silva, "Alimentar o corpo e o espírito no convento de Nossa Senhora dos Remédios de Braga no século XVII," in M. M. L. Araújo, et al, *O tempo dos alimentos e os alimentos no tempo*, Braga, CITCEM, 2012, p. 74.

<sup>7</sup> About the ceremonial at the table in Tibães convent check A. Ramos; S. Claro, *Alimentar o corpo e saciar a alma. Ritmos alimentares dos monges de Tibães, século XVII*, Porto, Cultura Norte; Afrontamento, 2013, p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> F. Pignonier, "Do lume à mesa: arqueologia do equipamento alimentar no fim da Idade Média", in J. L. Flandrin; M. Montari (dir.), *História da Alimentação. Da Idade Média aos tempos actuais*, Lisboa, Terramar, 2001, p. 126.

<sup>9</sup> Only in one month is register the purchase of pork.

<sup>10</sup> J. L. Flandrin, "A distinção pelo gosto", in F. Ariès; G. Duby (dir.), *História da vida privada. Do Renascimento ao século das Luzes*, Porto, Afrontamento, 1990, p. 227.

The institution had a henhouse and the grain that was acquired was intended to feed the chickens. However, the eggs were purchased throughout every month. In addition to the fact that the hen's eggs were not enough for all the women, we are certain that the chicken meat was being served at the table, but it was mainly for the women sheltered who were sick. It was in February that more money was spent on the purchase of eggs. The amount draws attention because it constitutes double the money spent with eggs in the remaining months. It is true that March was the month closer to the amount spent in February and Lent can help us understand this amount with this product. Would they be more expensive at this time? We have some doubts about the amounts of money spent in February. It is known, however, that its nutritional value and the fact that they are cheaper than meat and fish can also help to understand the monthly purchase of this product. Despite being low cost, eggs accounted for 4% of total expenditure on food, such as grease.

How the women sheltered did cook the eggs? These foods could be consumed in various forms as is well known, and are important because of their nutritional properties<sup>11</sup>.

The second largest expenditure was carried out with the purchase of fish. They ate up various types of fish, but cod deserved greater prominence<sup>12</sup>. Cod was very popular at the table of the women sheltered, as well as sardines. However, cod was more prevalent in women's meals, and especially in Lent. During this period the purchase of beef decayed, but not disappeared completely.

Sardines were also purchased regularly<sup>13</sup>, but curiously its acquisition decayed in Lent, when the cod acquisition increased and this was not acquired from May to August. Was there a lack of this product in the city? Or the *women sheltered* preferred other flavors?

There were also expenses incurred with other fish, but apart from hake and octopus, bought very timely, it makes us think of a situation of lack of appetite or disease, and we are unaware of other fish that were consumed. However, the purchase of "fish" is carried out in almost every month<sup>14</sup>.

The purchase of rice was made on a monthly basis, which proves their intake. So were the beans. It seems that the rice was consumed abundantly, probably with meat and beans. It also makes mention to the purchase of grain. We think that this is chickpea, used in food.

Understand what came from the garden, what they bought and how much they spent was not always easy. The sources consulted do not always discriminate, appearing often just the mention of "edible". But on other occasions, the clerk was more specific and decriminalized in greater detail the expenditures made. It is unknown the vegetables that were consumed beyond the cabbages, because the records only mention "vegetable". However, it represented 9% of total expenditure on food, "ex-aequo" with olive oil. The highest amounts with the purchase of vegetable refer to the months of December, January and February, when it would be rare and therefore more expensive. The product's prices rose when these were rare or was at the start of their season. It should be noted also that

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<sup>11</sup> On the importance of the eggs and their use in food see I. M. R. M. D. Braga, "Ovos, ovos e mais ovos. Cultura, Economia, Dietética e Gastronomia", in *Revista de História da Sociedade e da Cultura*, 13, 2013, pp. 405, 408.

<sup>12</sup> Cod was much appreciated, gaining great prominence in the table of the Portuguese. C. Veloso, *A alimentação em Portugal no século XVIII nos relatos dos viajantes*, Lisboa, Minerva histórica, 1992, pp. 61-64.

<sup>13</sup> Sardine was consumed a lot by the people, but it was often find in the records of expenditure in the religious houses. Check I. M. R. M. D. Braga, *Do primeiro almoço à ceia. Estudo de História da Alimentação*, Sintra, Colares Editores, 2004, pp. 74-49.

<sup>14</sup> Fish was not only bought in March.

the institution also bought onions in almost every month of the year, as if produced in the garden were not enough, particularly in May and June<sup>15</sup>.

Although the gardener planted and sowed some vegetables, the vegetables were not always enough, being necessary to buy them outside. The statutes of 1722 mention the concern of the garden to have "*borragas*" but not specify the quality of these herbs. It was likely that the existing vegetable in the garden was not enough for so many people. Feeding every day more than 20 women in the eighteenth century and more than 40 or 50 in the early nineteenth required a lot of products.

To flavor the food spices were acquired, but salt was the main flavoring used. Sporadically they also used pepper, but very rarely. Cinnamon was purchased only once, in July, probably to be used in the delicacies of the patron feast.

The wine purchased throughout the year would have several uses. Besides being used in the religious celebrations, served at the table, it could also be used as a spice in some fish and meat. It is known that some meats and fish were seasoned with this nectar<sup>16</sup>. Also vinegar, bought almost every month, could be applied in the seasoning of the food.

Salt was the most used and bought every month, although in November and December the spending raised on this product. The pig slaughter and the salting of the meat can help us understand this higher spending.

The fats used were the bacon, butter, olive oil and grease, although the latter was the most common<sup>17</sup>. The olive oil in addition to being used in the kitchen as fat, also served to illuminate the spaces of the shelter and the chapel. This product was bought every month, but especially in February, March and October.

### **The food of the parties**

The festive days served to break with the food routine and making food dishes and other delicacies for the occasion. It was time to spend more time in the kitchen, to enhance recipes and vary menus.

Shelters and convents celebrated religious festivals, transforming these occasions in days of some abundance and the break of the food routine<sup>18</sup>.

St. Mary Magdalene celebrated some religious parties, with special focus on ceremonies that happened in the chapel, but also with meals. The Christmas feast (December 25), the Carnival (moveable feast) and St. Mary Magdalene (July 22) were celebrated in the institution, but would not be the only ones. In the corresponding months: December, February and July the pending was higher because the food was more elaborate on feast days. The acquisition of certain products emphasizes the importance of the moment. Based on some spending sterols that are still preserved it is possible to see that milk, eggs, sugar and cinnamon were bought in July, probably for the milk-cream confection, delicacy much appreciated at this time<sup>19</sup>. The milk for example, was only

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<sup>15</sup> ADB, Monastic convent Fund, *Livro dos assentos dos depósitos da Arca 1722-1829*, F566A, fls. 3-26.

<sup>16</sup> See X. Castro, "Cada viño reclama o seu sacramento". *Cultura do viño e gastronomía en Galicia*, in *Semata*, 21, 2009, pp. 108-112.

<sup>17</sup> J. L. Flandrin, "Le goût et la nécessité: sur l'usage des graisses alimentaires dans les cuisines d'Europe Occidentale (XIV-XVIIIe siècles)", in *Annales ESC*, n° 3, 1983, pages 369-401.

<sup>18</sup> See M. L. Pérez Samper, "Fiesta y Alimentación en la España Moderna: El Banquete como Imagem Festiva de Abundância y Refinamiento", in *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma*, História Moderna, série IV, n° 10, 1997, p. 54.

<sup>19</sup> Read the work of A. S. Gonçalves, *A alimentação na Idade Moderna. O recolhimento de Santa Maria Madalena e de S. Gonçalo (século XVIII)*, work carried out under the CU Historical Research, of the Master

bought in July, suggesting it was an ingredient for food parties. However, it is likely that the *convertidas* would expand the range of cooking sweets and other delicacies, for example, rice pudding, since this cereal was bought in large quantities.

Besides the feast of St. Mary Magdalene in July were celebrated other festive days of relevance to the Catholic Church: St. Elizabeth (2nd); Santiago (25th); Santa Ana (26th) and Santa Marta (29th).

The Christmas party took particular relevance in culinary terms. The dishes served varied from region to region, but in all the houses they wanted to celebrate with some abundance<sup>20</sup>. For the occasion, the institution bought dried figs, so popular in this season, and *moletes*.

Figs are very nutritious, have caloric content, being relevant to the treatment of some diseases<sup>21</sup>. Were gifts that were offered to the women sheltered in a particular religious significance period. It is also noted the poor acquisition of sweets, which can be understood as a measure of restraint, these should not be consumed in abundance only in proportion of frugality that a house with these features was subjected to, or being made in the shelter. The purchase of eggs and sugar and honey indicates the manufacturing itself.

The eggs are part of the public food and were regularly acquired by the institution<sup>22</sup>.

The Carnival was celebrated with meat dishes. In the shelter of St. Mary Magdalene was bought in this season a lot of beef, but sometimes pork. Although less exuberant, the day was festive at the table. After this feast Catholics would refrain from eating meat during Lent, being time of penance and greater food rigor.

In November and December the institution spent some money on buying chestnuts, making believe that they also celebrated St. Martin. The *magustos* were very popular and took place either in private homes or in imprisonment institutions, like jailhouses, convents and shelters. The nutritional value of the chestnut advised its eating, celebrating a saint with the particularities of St. Martin was also very worthwhile.

## Final considerations

Entering St. Mary Magdalene refectory and attending the women sheltered meals is to witness a very little varied diet, consisting on bread, meat, fish and rice. The vegetables were also present, but not only in the soup. We believe them to be enjoyed in salads, but the fruit did not fit in the daily menus.

The party days were naturally marked with more refined meals and sweets appeared more frequently.

To improve the flavor, conserve and also ease the taste of certain foods was used certain products such as salt, wine and vinegar as well as some spices. Wine was served with meals, although we do not know if other liquids were also consumed.

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in Teaching of History and Geography of the 3rd Cycle and Secondary, Braga, University of Minho, 2013, p. 10. *policopiado*.

<sup>20</sup> Even in the poorest homes, attempts were made to mark the day with a better meal. See M. A. Pérez Samper, "La alimentación cotidiana en el España del siglo XVIII", in M. R. García Hurtado, (ed.), *La vida cotidiana en el España del siglo XVIII*, Madrid, Silex, 2009, pp. 41-44.

<sup>21</sup> F. F. Henriques, *Âncora medicinal para conservar a vida com saúde*, 2ª edição, Lisboa, Officina de Miguel Rodrigues, 1731, p. 318.

<sup>22</sup> The importance of eggs in food can also be found in F. Braudel, *Civilização Material, Economia e Capitalismo. Séculos XV-XVIII, As Estruturas do Quotidiano*, Lisboa, Teorema, 1992, p. 180.

But the table was also a place of prayer, thanksgiving, silence and civility practices. The women sheltered should comply with rules at the table, ritualizing important moments of their daily lives, where in addition to feeding the body, they also took care of the spirit.

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